

## VERB CONJUGATION AND TENSE FORMATION IN GERMAN AND ENGLISH: A STRUCTURAL COMPARISON

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### ABSTRACT

The verb conjugation and tense construction of German and English, two languages with different grammatical systems. It highlights important structural patterns in both languages by analyzing verb inflection according to grammatical person, tense and mood. The study examines how moods like subjunctive and passive are conveyed and compares regular and irregular conjugation and investigates the function of auxiliary verbs in creating future and perfect tenses. Syntactic features like verb location in German main and subordinate sentences are given particular attention. A better grasp of how each language encodes time and modality through its verbal system is made possible by the findings which shows both convergences and divergences in verbal morphology and syntax.

**Keywords:** *verb conjugation, inflection, subjunctive, subordinate tenses, convergences, divergences, tense construction.*

Grammar's foundational elements of verb conjugation and tense construction influence how we communicate time, action and intention in words. Verbs alter according to person, tense and mood in both German and English, reflecting intricate grammatical frameworks. English uses auxiliary verbs and rather easy conjugation patterns, but German has a more inflected system with a greater variety of verb endings and forms. The similarities and significant contrasts between these two language approaches to verb conjugation and tense are examined in this structural comparison. In addition to increasing linguistic awareness, an understanding of these patterns helps language learners become proficient in precise and efficient communication.

According to Swan and Smith (2001), “German verbs inflect more extensively than English verbs, making person and number even in the present tense, whereas English has mostly lost such distinctions except in the third person singular”. German verbs retain a full paradigm of personal endings in the present and past tenses, while English shows significant morphological reduction, maintaining distinct endings only in the third person singular present.

Comrie (1981) points out that English has become increasingly analytic, relying on auxiliary verbs and word order to express tense and aspect, whereas German remains more synthetic, using inflections to convey grammatical meaning.

Whitt (2004) observes that English verbs have undergone a process of simplification in their conjugation, while German continues to use complex inflectional endings and a broader range of irregular verbs. This makes German verb conjugation more demanding for learners in terms of memorization and grammatical agreement.

König and Gast (2012) explain that both languages employ auxiliary verbs to form perfect tenses. However, German requires the selection between *haben* and *sein* based on verb type and transitivity, whereas English consistently uses *have*, indicating a simplification in tense formation.

As Hawkins (1986) notes, English speakers learning German face the challenge of adapting to a morphologically rich conjugation system, whereas German speakers learning English must become accustomed to a more rigid syntactic structure with fewer morphological cues.

### **Verb conjugations in German and English**

Verb conjugation refers to the way a verb changes form to express tense, person, number and mood. Both English and German verbs conjugate, but German has a more complex system, with more inflections for person and number than English

#### **Present Tense Conjugation**

**English example (to play):**

Person	Verb Form
I play	play
You play	play
He/ she/ it plays	Plays
We play	play
You (pl) play	play
They play	play

**Note:** only “he/she/it” changes with the addition of – s.

**German example (spielen = to play)**

Person	Verb form
Ich spiele	spiele
Du spielst	spielst
Er Sie Es spielt	Spielt

Wir spielen	Spielen
Ihr spielt	Spielt
Sie spielen	Spielen

**Note:** Every subject pronoun has its own distinct verb ending, which is more synthetic in structure.

### Comparison of person- endings

*Present tense*

*endings*

<i>Person</i>	English ending
<i>I</i>	-
<i>You</i>	-
<i>He/she/ it</i>	+s
<i>We</i>	-
<i>They</i>	-

Person	German ending
<i>Ich</i>	-e
<i>Du</i>	-st
<i>Er/Sie/Es</i>	-t
<i>Wir</i>	-en
<i>Ihr</i>	-t
<i>Sie</i>	-en

This shows **German verbs change endings** based on the subject, while English verbs remain largely unchanged except in the third person.

### Verb Groups and Irregularities

In **English**, verbs are often regular (walk – walked – walked), but many are irregular (go - went – gone).

In **German**, verbs are classified into:

- **Weak verbs** (regular: spielen – spielte – gespielt)
- **Strong verbs** (irregular verbs: gehen – ging – gegangen)
- **Mixed verbs** (e.g. denken – dachte – gedacht)

This makes **German verb conjugation** more varied and rule-heavy.



Feature	English	German
Past formation	Unique form (e.g. went)	Stem vowel change (ging)
Participle formation	Often ends in – en (gone)	Always starts with <b>ge-</b> , ends in – en (gegangen)
Memorization required	Around 200 irregular verbs	About 150 strong verbs+ mixed verbs
Auxiliary in perfect	Uses <b>have</b> only	Uses <b>haben</b> or <b>sein</b>

English learners of German need to memorize more endings and verb classes. German learners of English benefit from simpler conjugation, but must master auxiliaries and word order.

### Recommendations and conclusions

Based on the comparative analysis of verb conjugation and tense formation in English and German, several recommendations can be made. First, language instructors should place greater emphasis on **explicit structural comparisons** between the two languages to help learners better understand the differences in verb endings, tense makers and irregular forms. Learners should use **visual aids**, **verb charts** and **digital tools** that provide interactive practice, especially for mastering high-frequency irregular verbs in both languages. Finally, educators and curriculum designers should develop materials that include contrastive grammar explanations and exercise to bridge the structural gaps between English and German verb systems.

The structural comparison of verb conjugation and tense formation in English and German reveals both significant differences and interesting similarities. While English

verb conjugation is relatively similar and relies heavily on auxiliary verbs and fixed word order, German presents a more complex system with rich inflectional morphology and a wide variety of irregular forms. The differences in tense formation, particularly in the use of perfect and past tenses, reflect deeper grammatical traditions within each language. Overall, such comparative studies not only deepen our understanding of linguistic systems but also support the development of more informed and targeted approaches to language acquisition.

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