

# **Helga's Corner**

Musing about German  
Language and Culture

And German Words of Wisdom

By

Helga von Schweinitz

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by  
Helga von Schweinitz

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In June 2020:  
Dedicated to:  
the memory of our Mother  
Helga von Schweinitz

Original Dedication:  
Dedicated to:  
Bettina and Christopher

German or English?  
BAD HOSE WAND KIND NUN  
TAG DIE TELLER NOT HUT GANG  
ANGEL GUT RAT BALD BAGGER GRAB ROMAN  
TOT QUARK WAR BEET ROT GIFT HELL RIND BIN  
SOLE LINEAL BAND HAND FINGER RING SING SEE  
BALL  
STAB MAN WADE MADE TOTE BOOT FALL PAGE

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## SAUERKRAUT

What do you call a mad German? A sour kraut.  
Wash your mouth.

The Chinese developed a way to marinate white cabbage and invented what became popular in Germany as “*Sauerkraut*”. Kraut can mean cabbage but it can also refer to other vegetables and especially to herbs. Kitchen herbs are *Küchenkräuter* or *Suppenkräuter*. Medicinal herbs are healing herbs, *Heilkräuter*.

Plural of *das Kraut* is *die Kräuter*. Many a household has a *Kräutergarten*, a herb garden just like many German pioneers had in America.

A popular part of the German line of beverages are the many types of tea (*Tee*) made of herbs (*Kräutertee*). While traveling in Germany you should try them. The most common *Tees* are *Pfefferminztee* to calm you down, and *Kamillentee* against indigestion. In a *Reformhaus* (a health food store) they have a *Tee* for whatever ails you, and many Germans prefer to cure themselves with a *Tee* rather than *Pillen* (pills).

What do you call a weed? *Ein Unkraut*.

Helga's Corner

Gegen Dummheit ist kein Kraut  
gewachsen.

There's no herb that cures stupidity.



## SCHNAPS

Even if you don't care to drink it, you should know the word: ***der Schnaps***. It is the generic German word for hard liquor distilled from berries, grain, flowers, herbs or other basics. It comes with many names like ***Aquavit, Steinhäger, Enzian, Wacholder, Korn, Ratzeputz...***

To drink a ***Schnaps (einen Schnaps trinken)*** is woven into the fabric of German culture. A host may offer you ***ein Schnäpschen*** (form of endearment) as a welcoming gesture. In a restaurant a new friend might ask you to come to the bar with him to seal the new friendship with a ***Schnaps***. It can be part of the ritual when somebody offers you to call him the familiar ***du*** instead of the formal ***Sie***. You then drink to brotherhood, ***Bruderschaft trinken***.

There are many words with ***Schnaps*** in them, the most common one is die ***Schnapsidee***, which is an idea that is not yet well thought through, or a hare-brained scheme.

My grandmother's ***Schnaps***, which she concocted secretly in our basement right after WW II in Germany, was highly valued by American GIs who had their liquor rationed. They came in the dark of night, loaded with bread, Spry, corned beef and other badly needed food stuff in exchange for "Oma's tea". She had acquired the necessary skills in Milwaukee where she had lived during prohibition. It saved us children from going to bed hungry too often.

Here's to you, Oma! ***Prost!***

Über Geschmack läßt sich streiten.

One can argue about taste.

## DIE HOSE

**Hose** (ho-ze) is the two-syllable German word for an item no American should have to go without: pants, trousers, knickers, panties, briefs, etc..

Bavarians usually use the word in the plural: **Hosen**. All Bavarians, as the world knows, wear a special kind of **Hosen: die Lederhosen** (leatherpants). Underneath they wear (I suspect) **Unterhosen** (underpants).

If you wear undies made of cotton, you are wearing **Baumwollunterhosen**.

What we call "pantyhose" (panty-stockings), Germans call **Strumpfhose** (stocking-pants).

For skiing one sports **die Skihose**, for watersports **die Badehose** and, as sweatpants, **die Trainingshose**.

Some men secure their trousers with **Hosenträger** (suspenders), and when their fly is open, you should avoid looking at their **Hosenschlitz**.

Of the woman who is the real man of the house, it is said: "**Sie hat die Hosen an**."

**Die Hose** - don't leave your home without it.

Wer andern eine Grube gräbt,  
fällt selbst hinein.

He who digs a trap for other  
falls into it himself.

## SKAT

**SKAT** (pronounced skaht) is a game played by many Germans. It is a card game (**Kartenspiel**) for three players (**drei Spieler**). Each game starts with some bidding (**reizen**), and the highest bidder plays against the other two, but just for that hand. On many an evening two guys decide to play *Skat*, and the proverbial search for “The Third Man” (**der dritte Mann**) begins.

Although German is used with a sprinkling of French when playing *Skat*, words take on a different meaning: “**aus dem Schneider**”, “**der mauert**”, “**Grand mit Vieren**”, “**der Alte**” “**Durchmarsch**” are just a small sample of the *Skat* - language. Even behavior seems to be *Skat*-specific: bursts of excited, loud comments, slamming the fist holding a card on the table, playing into the wee hours of the morning, often in a pub, and then consuming a bowl of **Gulaschsuppe** or **Speck und Spiegeleier auf Roggenbrot** (bacon and fried eggs on rye) or some other sobering sustenance before going home.

I know of *Skat* tournaments and regular *Skat* club evenings in **Amerika**, but for a German in the old country his **Skatabend** is almost sacred.

*Skat* requires concentration and a good grasp of numbers. That’s why I have never been good at it. I only play when certain men in my life are so desperately in need of a third man that they ask me - a woman who can barely count the cards in her hand - to be “**der dritte Mann**”.

## Helga's Corner

Rom ist auch nicht an einem  
Tag erbaut worden.

Rome wasn't built in a day.

## BURG VS. BERG

In English you pronounce ...burg just like you do ...berg. That lead a certain Mr. Finkenburg to bark up the family tree of the Finkenberg clan. Relying on sound rather than on correct spelling, he found a great grandmother that wasn't his at all. What confusion!

**Burg** means castle - like in **Hamburg** (pronounced humboork); it can also refer to the community that developed around the castle. **Berg** means mountain - like in **Heidelberg** (pronounced hydelbarek); it can also be the name of the settlement near or on that mountain. There is a town called **Wittenburg** and another one called **Wittenberg**. Which one is the "Luther town"?

For ...**burg** you can remember Fredericksburg in Texas with its oompahh bands. For the ...**berg** sound think of how bare that nearby mountain is, the Enchanted Rock.

So many of you will always get it wrong, because if it can go wrong, it will. After all, isn't that Merphy's law?

## Helga's Corner

Was Hänschen nicht lernt,  
lernt Hans nimmermehr.

You can't teach an old dog new tricks.



## WAS IST DAS?

All too often someone says to me: I know only three German words: “***Ich liebe dich***” (I love you).

That's really nice. But here is an opportunity for these linguists to increase their vocabulary without really trying:

The following words are all preceded by “***das***”, one of the German translations of “the”. Das indicates that the noun (not the thing or person) is of the neuter gender.

<i>das Haus</i>	<i>das Sofa</i>	<i>das Auto</i>	<i>das Glas</i>
<i>das Gras</i>	<i>das Gas</i>	<i>das Radio</i>	<i>das Bier</i>
<i>das Gold</i>	<i>das Fräulein</i>	<i>das Ende</i>	

There are many words that are exactly like English words or close to it. You just have to look for them. Of course, they sound a little different in German.

Now say: „***Ich liebe das Sofa und das Bier.***”  
                  „***Ich liebe das.....und das.....***”  
                  „***Ich liebe das.....und das.....***”

Helga's Corner

Liebe macht erfinderisch.

Love will find a way.

## YOU MUST IT RIGHT GET

You must the word order right get! In 1949, John P. began to translate a paragraph of a German novel. He is still hung up on the first sentence, because he has yet to find the verb.

In German, words of a sentence follow a sequence which can be quite different from the word order of an English sentence.

If the verb of a simple clause consists of two words (as in „He has seen the light“) the second part of the verb moves to the end of the sentence ("He has the light seen" = "***Er hat das Licht gesehen***").

Now, if you have seen the light, you will be able the following words in the right order to put: "***Meyer - Herr - mehr - Wasser - trinken - muss***". (Mr. Meyer must drink more water).

I want you a nice time wish. I hope that you enjoy German to learn.

Helga's Corner

Rache ist süß.

Revenge is sweet.

## WHO IS WHERE?

### *Wer ist wo?*

Most German question words (*Fragewörter*) are easy to learn:

*was* = what?

*wann* = when?

*warum* = why?

*wieviel* = how much?

*wessen* = whose?

*wie* = how?

*wer* = who?

*wo* = where?

"*Wo und wer?*" is easily mistaken to mean "Who and where?", although it means "Where and who?" Imagine your mother's face when you ask her "*Wer ist mein Vater?*", when all you want to know is where your father is at the moment.

Now take your *Kuli* (ballpoint pen) and fill in the blanks:

when= \_\_\_\_\_?      what= \_\_\_\_\_?

how= \_\_\_\_\_?      why = \_\_\_\_\_?

how much = \_\_\_\_\_?      who = \_\_\_\_\_?

whose = \_\_\_\_\_?      where = \_\_\_\_\_?

One question (*Frage*) that should always be asked and answered with accuracy when food poisoning breaks out: „Who ate what?"

In German, the language of philosophers, you should ask:  
"*Wann aß wer wo wessen was - und warum?*"

## Helga's Corner

Man ist, was man ißt.

One is what one eats.

## KNÖDEL ANYTIME

In spite of Pizza Huts and Burger Kings sprouting all over Germany, the country is still offering a great variety of dishes that we rarely find in America. One of the specialties is the dumpling (*der Knödel*, also called *der Kloß*).

Recipes change from region to region, but most *Knödel* are made from one of four basic ingredients: raw or boiled potatoes (*Kartoffelknödel*), yesterday's white bread (*Semmelknödel*), grits (*Griesknödel*) or meat (*Fleischknödel*). The famous *Leberknödelsuppe* is a soup with *Semmelknödel* which have liver (*Leber*) mixed in.

*Kartoffelknödel* and *Semmelknödel* have to be eaten with lots of gravy or saucy meats like *Gulasch*, or with juicy vegetables like a mild *Sauerkraut*. They can be enhanced by mixing in fried onions and bacon, croutons, caraway seeds, etc. *Griesknödel* can be filled with prunes or other fruit and served in hot vanilla pudding (hmmhmmmmhmm!!)

One plump, bacon filled *Semmelknödel* in a bowl of broth at four in the morning when the party is over takes the edge off the hangover (*Kater*).

Just before my last trip to Germany my doctor told me to go on a diet. I picked the *Knödel-Diät* and was very happy with it.

## Helga's Corner

Es ist nicht alles Gold was glänzt.

All that glitters is not gold.



## NOBODY DIES

Nobody dies learning German. The word „*die*“ is one of the many translations of „the“. „*Die*“ rhymes with „she“, not with „shy“.

*Die* indicates that a noun is of the feminine gender - remember: not the thing is necessarily feminine, only the word. the girl is *das Mädchen*.

Do you recognize these German words? (The lonesome *e* at the end of some of the nouns is pronounced like the a in „Have a nice day“.)

*die Rose   die Maus   die Banane   die Bibel*  
*die Hand   die Maschine   die Laus*  
*die Oma   die Katastrophe.*

Most nouns that end with an *e* after a consonant are of the feminine gender. *die Liebe, die Schokolade, die Tasse, die Garage, die Margarine.*

Almost all nouns with the following endings are feminine:

*-ung (die Übung); -tät (die Universität); -ion (die Station);*  
*-ik (die Grammatik); -schaft (die Botschaft)*

*Die Statistik sagt:* when in doubt about *der, die* or *das*, use *die*.

## Helga's Corner

Erst besinn's, dann beginn's!

Look before you leap.

## DARE TO SAY DER

The German word „**der**“ is another one of the many translations of the English „the“. It rhymes somewhat with „dare“ and is said to indicate the masculine gender of a noun. That does not mean that the item is masculine but that the word is “masculine”.

*der Finger    der Film    der Garten*  
*der Mann    der Schuh    der Motor*  
*der Idiot    der Arm    der Opa*

You can guess that a noun might be masculine by considering the ending: *or (der Motor); us (der Kaktus); er (der Lehrer)* - especially if the er is added to the stem of a verb: *(lehren - der Lehrer; sprechen - der Sprecher)*.

Here are a few verbs to practice with:

*schreiben - der.....*

*lesen - der.....*

*hören - der.....*

There are other rules, but they are too unreliable. However, you can always dare to say **der**.

Die Tat wirkt mächtiger als  
das Wort.

Actions speak louder than words.

## SHOULD WE NEUTER THEM ALL?

The language of grammar has a major flaw: it uses the words feminine, masculine and neuter to describe the so-called gender of a noun. The origin of this practice may lie in prehistoric times, but for modern man it creates too much confusion.

Why is *der Tisch* (the table) “masculine” in German and “feminine” (la mesa) in Spanish? Why is there *die See* (the sea) and *der See* (the lake)? Why is *das Fräulein* (the unmarried woman) neuter? Why do you say: *Ich gehe in die Stadt. Ich komme aus der Stadt?*

We should remember that it is not the object that has a gender but the word for it, but who can keep all that in mind? In German you can simplify matters somewhat because you can make all nouns neuter, i. e. *das*-words. You simply add *-chen* or *-lein* or regional variations thereof like *-le* or *-li*. Let's neuter your mother: *die Mutter* - *das Mütterchen* or *das Mütterlein*, then let's neuter my brother etc....*der Bruder* - *das Brüderlein*, *der Tisch* - *das Tischlein*....

Although grammatically always correct, neutralization is not always appropriate. Therefore I challenge you all to come up with new words to be used instead of “masculine”, “feminine”, “neuter” and “gender” in the language of grammar.

Ein Unglück kommt selten allein.

When it rains it pours

## DER - DIE - DAS RAT

Some good advice from Helga: If you don't know when to use *das*, *die* or *der*, don't worry. It's more important to use the right word following the *der*, *die* or *das*.

Our friend Anita travelled through Europe with a German cousin twice removed and admired the beautiful Baroque *Kirschen* (cherries) instead of the *Kirchen* (churches) they were visiting. She also told him that she wanted to spoil her *Koffer* (suitcase) with a hot bath. She meant to spoil her *Körper* (body).

Since *der*, *die* and *das* can change to *dem*, *des*, *den*, *denen*, *dessen* and so forth - depending on their function in the sentence - some not so dumb folks use either always *die* or an unspecified *de*.

As a teacher of German I urge you to study the fine points of grammar, but until you have mastered them, don't hesitate to babble away in German anyhow. But don't neglect to learn lots of vocabulary words so you don't offer your *Körper* to be searched instead of your *Koffer*.

Helga's Corner

Was nicht ist kann noch werden.

Your day will come.



## FANTASTISCH

***Fantastisch!*** The German language is changing rapidly (***rapide***). Many of our English words with "ph" are used with the same meaning in German, but in many cases the "ph" changed to "f" in recent years. The photographer is ***der Fotograf***, the telephone is ***das Telefon***, a phantastic idea is ***eine fantastische Idee***, but a philosopher is still ***ein Philosoph*** - (as of this writing).

So, let's not take it too seriously right now. Let's be filosofical about it and ask ourselves, which words are now ph-words and which are f-words. Is it ***Physik*** or ***Fysik***? Is it just a ***Phase*** or a ***Fase*** the Germans are going through? Is it a temporary ***Phänomen*** or ***Fänomen***? I am a little phlabberghasted about it.

Just for the phun of it, look in the dictionary for words with "ph". Do they all look Greek to you? At the same time you'll be surprised at how much German you know.

## Helga's Corner

Hilf dir selbst, so hilft dir Gott.

God helps those who help themselves.

## DU, IHR, SIE - THOU, YOU

Thou don't have to ask yourself any longer whether to use *du*, *ihr*, or *Sie* for our English thou and you.

God, children, animals, family members, first name friends and any inanimate objects you might talk to are addressed with *du* (singular) or *ihr* (plural). “*Lieber Gott, du musst mir helfen.*” (Dear God, you have to help me.)

Adults whom we call by their last name or whose name we don't even know or whom we address by their titles are *Sie*-persons (singular and plural). “*Herr Pastor, Sie müssen mir helfen.*” (Pastor, you have to help me!)

The singular and plural *Sie*=you is always capitalized. It is actually the pronoun *sie*=they which is used as a polite way to address someone, a courtesy formerly reserved for kings and the likes. That's why *Sie*=you goes with the same verb form as *sie*=they. *Wo sind sie?* (Where are they)? and *Wo sind Sie?* (Where are you?)

*Du* is the old thou which God used when he gave the Ten Commandments to the English speaking world. But nowadays polite society addresses everybody with you (a variation of ye), actually as a plural entity which equals the German *ihr* =you all.

Translate this question: Who are you? (There are at least three answers).

Answers: 1. *Wer bist du?* 2. *Wer seid ihr?* 3. *Wer sind Sie?*

## Helga's Corner

Nach dem Essen sollst du ruh'n  
oder tausend Schritte tun.

After eating rest a while  
or take a walk for half a mile.

## FRESSEN

*Fressen, fraß, gefressen, er frisst.*

Although your pooch has impeccable table manners, his eating is not called „essen" in German, but „fressen".

You don't say „*Der Hund isst*“, you say „*Der Hund frisst*". *Der Mensch isst, das Tier frisst.*

When human animals eat too much or in a sloppy manner, we say „*sie fressen*". *Tante Frieda fraß wie ein Scheunendrescher* (Aunt Frieda ate like a threshing machine in a barn). *Sie war sehr dick.* (She was very fat).

Many Germans try to stick to a diet called „F.d.H." (eff-day-hah), which stands for „*Friss die Hälfte*" and means „eat only half as much as you want to". It works for my sisters.

Some all-you-can-eat restaurants are called „*Fress - Paradiese*". However, I have not seen any in Germany, only in the good old USA.

Remember: *Der Mensch ist was er isst...*(and : *was er frisst*).

Man muß die Feste feiern  
wie sie fallen.

You have to celebrate when you have  
the opportunity.

## IT'S IN

In German you have a great way to indicate that a person is of the feminine gender: you add "in".

***der Professor - die Professorin*** (the professor - the female professor);

***der Lehrer - die Lehrerin*** (the teacher - the female teacher);

***der Bäcker - die B..... ..*** (the baker - the female baker)

This is done mainly with professions, but also with nouns that are not actually an adjective turned into a noun:

***der Nachbar - die Nachbarin*** (the neighbor - the female neighbor )

***der Freund - die Freundin*** (the friend - the female friend, lady friend or not)

A note to genealogists: In some registries the "in" is even added to a woman's name:

***Robert Müller und Luise Müllerin.***

If you were told: "Your neighbor has an affair," wouldn't it be nice to know if it's the he-neighbor who's having an affair or if she is the one?

Sei freundlich gegen jederman,  
dann sieht dich jeder freundlich an.

Be friendly towards everybody;  
then everybody will look friendly at you.



## DONNERWETTER!

The so-called four letter words have more than four letters in German, of course. Take "**Donnerwetter**" which can express anger or surprise. The basic translation is "thunder weather".

Germans in predominantly catholic areas tend to swear in religious terms, from the acceptable "**Himmel**" (heaven) to the Holy Family.

In the more protestant northern regions, references to the digestive system and the animal world are preferred: A mean guy is a "**Schweinehund**" (a swine hound).

Words with a sexual meaning are not as commonly used in German for their shock effect as they are in English.

The first and often only German word some American GIs enjoy learning is what in English is a four letter word beginning with "sh". It is now widely used in Germany and hardly shocks anybody anymore. However, like in English, it is enough to sound out just the first "sh" sound without completing the word, but when you think in German, you have to realize that the "sh" sound has three letters in German: "**Sch**..."

Now, **wasch** your mouth **aus**!

Mann soll den Tag nicht  
vor dem Abend loben.

Don't praise the day before evening.

## A VISIT TO THE *UMLAUT*-GARDEN

“*Umlaut*” means “change in sound”. If an a, o or u are topped by two dots (*ä, ö, ü*) their pronunciation is changed. It's difficult to practice sound in writing, but no matter how you pronounce it, in writing you can always replace the dots by placing an „e" behind the vowel.

*Händel* - *Haendel*, *König* - *Koenig*,  
*Müller* - *Mueller*.

Many German immigrants made the change from an *Umlaut* with dots to adding the e to the vowel when they moved here. However, some dropped the Umlaut altogether, like the Schutze family in Austin, Texas, which used to be the *Schütze* family, although the part of the *Schütze* family that settled in San Antonio is now the Schuetze family.

Other families that immigrated with an *Umlaut*, like the *Pörtner* clan, first changed it to Poertner and then dropped the o, not the e. That spelling kept the sound of the original name, like Pertner. Some members of the present generation don't even know that there was an o involved five generations ago.

Genealogists beware!

Helga's Corner

Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat.

Time will tell.

## A SIGHT AT NIGHT

Is the neighbor's light in sight at night? Many German words with **ch** have a similar word in English with a silent gh or an f-sounding gh.

**acht** = eight; **rechts** and **richtig** = right; **hoch** = high; **lachen** = laugh; **nichts** = naught; **er dachte** = he thought.

Unfortunately, this relationship is not true for every **ch** (no matter how you pronounce it), but you can always give it a try:

**Nacht** =-----.

**Macht** =-----.

**in Sicht** =--- -----.

**Nachbar** =-----.

**Schlachthaus 7** =----- -----.

**Licht** = -----.

**Winter brachte Eis und leichten Schnee** = -----

--

-----

.

Kein Feuer, kine Kohle  
Kann brennen so heiß,  
Als heimliche Liebe,  
Von der niemand nichts weiß.

No fire, no coal  
can burn as hot  
As secret love  
of which no one knows naught.

## LIEBE - IS IT LOVE?

Love --- In English we make it, we fall in it, and we give it the value of zero in a game of tennis when we start scoring with love - fifteen. We can't translate these expressions literally into German. Germans don't say *Wir machen Liebe*. When a German falls in love he says *Ich bin verliebt*. And a game of tennis begins with *null - fünfzehn*.

If you are a man and a lover, you are not a *Lieber*, you are a *Liebhaber*. You use *lieber* when you prefer one thing over another: *Ich esse Butter lieber als Margarine*.

Too often we chirp "I love you!" which is embarrassing to a German who is not used to our culture. The German "*Ich liebe dich!*" is more sincere, rather intimate.

Poets beware: Love rhymes with dove - a peaceful image. *Liebe* rhymes with *Triebe* (driving urges, strong desires): *Die süßesten Triebe beflügeln meine Liebe*. (The sweetest desires give wings to my love).

And Meine *wildesten Triebe sind meine Schokoladen-Liebe*. (The wildest urges make me eat chocolate).

## Helga's Corner

Was man sät, das erntet man.

You reap what you sow.



## PAMPERS

“We pamper Grandma five times a day,” said our young German visitor. We had asked him to practice his English on us, and it soon became clear, that Germans had absorbed many English words, given them a different meaning thinking that they meant the same in both languages.

For us “Pamper” is a brand name of a disposable diaper. In Germany it now stands for any disposable diaper, and it is also a verb meaning to put a disposable diaper on a person (***Wir pampern Oma fünf mal am Tag***).

“Grandma has her own ***handy***,” said our visitor. “Handy what?” I asked. It turns out, that a ***Handy*** is a cell phone.

“Grandma eats a lot of Philadelphia strength cheese since her fall.” “What is strength cheese?” “In Germany we now have a cheese called ***Kraft*** which means “strength” in English.” He was talking about Philadelphia cream cheese from Kraft.

“Grandma won’t let my brother Max into her house since he turned ***Republican***.” Well, I know that a member of the German party of ***Republikaner*** is extremely right wing, a nationalist, so I had to describe American Republicans to him.

All that reminded me of a German ad for a vacuum cleaner (***Staubsauger*** = dust sucker) which appeared in English which is so fashionable in advertising: “Nothing sucks like Electrolux”.

## Helga's Corner

Aller Segen kommt von oben.

All blessings come from above.

## IT'S SO ADVERBIAL!

Some of us handle adverbs real good, others do so really well. In German we don't have a problem with adverbs because we use a basic adjective as an adverb, without adding an ending or switching to another word:

Let's take „*schön*“ (beautiful): ***Zur Weihnachtszeit ist unser Schulhaus schön dekoriert.*** (At Christmas time our school house is beautifully decorated.)

Let's take „*gut*“ (good): ***Ein guter Motor läuft gut.*** (A good motor runs well.)

***Ist diese einfache Regel nicht einfach fantastisch?***  
(Is this simple rule not simply phantastic?)

***Manche von uns sprechen Deutsch sehr gut, andere nicht so gut.*** (Some of us speak German very well, others don't do so good.)

## Helga's Corner

Wer Arbeit kennt und sich nicht drückt,  
der ist verrückt.

If you don't shirk work,  
you are a jerk.

## AMUSINGLY DESCRIPTIVE

Some German words are so descriptive! You'll find a few of them in the left column and the proper English expressions for them on the right, but in the wrong order. Please, match the letters with the numbers:

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. <i>der Staubsauger</i> (dust sucker)         | a. diarrhea       |
| 2. <i>die Glühbirne</i> (glow pear)             | b. alarm clock    |
| 3. <i>der Wecker</i> (waker)                    | c. typewriter     |
| 4. <i>die Hochzeit</i> (high time)              | d. honeymoon      |
| 5. <i>der Durchfall</i> (fall through)          | e. wedding        |
| 6. <i>das Taschenbuch</i> (pocketbook)          | f. secretly       |
| 7. <i>heimlich</i>                              | g. lightbulb      |
| 8. <i>die Flitterwochen</i> (tinsel weeks)      | h. paperback      |
| 9. <i>die Schreibmaschine</i> (writing machine) | i. bra            |
| 10. <i>BH</i> („bay hah“) (bh)                  | j. vacuum cleaner |

A little help: BH stands for *Büstenhalter* (bust holder). Don't tell anybody I used that word in my article.

These words make for delightful underholding (*Unterhaltung*) at a rooster tail party (*auf Deutsch: Cocktail Party*).

Helga's Corner

Jedem das Seine.

To each his own.

## DIE SPINNT JA!

German has many phrases expressing that somebody is nuts, a little crazy, off the rocker.

Here are a few that can be used in polite society. It is also good to know that in casual German personel pronouns like “*er*” and “*sie*” can be replaced by the definite article, like “*der*”, “*dem*”, “*die*” etc., and “*ja*” and “*wohl*” are often added for emphasis.

*Der ist ja verrückt.*

*Die hat einen Vogel.*

*Bei dem piept's ja.*

*Die ist wohl nicht ganz bei Trost.*

*Der hat sie nicht mehr alle.*

*Die hat nicht mehr alle Tassen im Schrank.*

*Bei dem ist wohl eine Schraube locker.*

My favorite, short and to the point: *Die spinnt!*

There is a wordless gesture Germans use: If someone looks at you and tips with his index finger on his forehead, he is telling you that you have a little bird inside your head, that you are a bird brain. Don't give this signal - also called the driver's salute - to a German policeman (*Polizist*). He takes it as “*Beamtenbeleidigung*” which means “insulting an officer of the state” and is punishable by law.

Now underline and learn your favorite phrase and use it when appropriate.

Was man schwarz auf weiß besitzt  
kann man getrost nach Hause tragen.  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

What you have black on white  
you can take home with confidence.



## HEIM - HEIMAT - GEHEIMNIS

*Heim* rhymes with time. Its basic meaning is home. You say: “*Geh heim!* (Go home)” or “*Ich bin daheim.* (I am at home)”.

Related words stir up deep emotions like *Heimweh* (homesickness) and *Heimat* (homeland, including landscape, culture, memories). Millions of Germans lost their *Heimat* in 1945 when they had to flee or were expelled from *Schlesien* (Silesia), *Ostpreussen* (East Prussia), *Pommern* (Pommerania), and other areas east of the *Oder* and *Neisse* rivers which are now in Poland or Russia.

Some of the world's major troubles are rooted in some peoples' fight for their *Heimat*, see *Palestina/Israel*.

Strangely enough, *heim* is also in words like *geheim* (secretly), *das Geheimnis* (the secret), *Geheimdienst* (something like Secret Service or CIA), and *der Geheimagent* (secret agent).

To top it off, there is *heimlich*, which can mean homely as well as secretly, depending on context. But I hope there is nothing *unheimlich* about your *Heim* because *unheimlich* means awful, sinister, spooky. Yet we say *Unsere Lehrerin ist unheimlich nett* (Our teacher is awfully nice).

Glücklich ist, wer vergißt,  
was nicht mehr zu ändern ist.

Happy is who can ignore  
what can't be fixed - not any more.

## VIEL GLÜCK!

Good luck charms bring viel Glück.

If by the end of this year you have not received the good luck you deserved, you should consider starting the coming year with some of the charms that help the Germans in the Old Country:

a pig (*ein Schwein*, like in *Ich habe Schwein gehabt* which means: I was lucky)

a chimneysweep (*ein Schornsteinfeger* who still comes to your house in a black suit, often with a black top hat.

a toadstool (*ein Fliegenpilz*; it has a red top with white dots)

a horseshoe (*ein Hufeisen*, with the open end up so the luck doesn't fall out.

These symbols are used as New Year's party decoration and also worn as jewelry pendants.

The *Fliegenpilz* is so pretty, that a nice painting or photo of one can adorn your wall and nobody will know why you have it there. I have a clay model in my garden und *ich habe immer viel Glück*.

Was du heute kannst besorgen,  
das verschiebe nicht auf morgen.

What you can do today  
do not put off until tomorrow.

## WIE GEHT'S?

The simple German verb "**gehen**" (to go) has so many idiomatic uses and meanings that it is worth learning some of them.

Try to match a number with a letter for the correct translation.

- |                                      |                               |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Das geht nicht.</i>            | a. He cheats on his wife.     |
| 2. <i>Es geht gleich los.</i>        | b. I am doing fine.           |
| 3. <i>Er geht fremd.</i>             | c. How does that work?        |
| 4. <i>Das geht mich nichts an.</i>   | d. That won't work.           |
| 5. <i>Der Kaktus geht ein.</i>       | e. When will the plane leave? |
| 6. <i>Es geht mir gut.</i>           | f. The clock is wrong.        |
| 7. <i>Wie geht das?</i>              | g. How are you?               |
| 8. <i>Wann geht die Maschine ab?</i> | h. It'll begin soon.          |
| 9. <i>Es geht um die Wurst.</i>      | i. That's none of my business |
| 10. <i>Die Uhr geht falsch.</i>      | k. The cactus is dying.       |
| 11. <i>Wie geht's?</i>               | l. Now or never.              |

Lösungen:

a-3; b-6; c-7; d-1; e-8; f-10; g-11; h-2;  
i-4; k-5; l-9

*Geht das nicht einfach?* (Isn't that easy?!)

Helga's Corner

Würden sind Bürden.

Great honors are heavy burdens.

## ZUNGENBRECHER

Let's practice some German tongue-twisters.

***Fischers Fritz fischt frische Fische. Frische Fische  
fischt Fischers Fritz.***

Fisher's Fritz fishes fresh fish. Fresh fish fishes  
Fisher's Fritz.

***Wir Wiener Waschweiber wollen weiße Wäsche  
waschen.***

We Viennese wash women want to wash white  
laundry.

***Wenn Max Wachsmasken mag, dann macht Max  
Wachsmasken.***

When Max likes wax masks, then he makes wax  
masks.

***Wenn mancher Mann wüsste, wer mancher Mann  
wär', gäb' mancher Mann manchem Mann manchmal  
mehr Ehr'.***

If some man knew who some man were, some man  
would give some man sometimes more respect.

The following version of ***Fischers Fritz*** is different  
from the one above. Can you find the difference?

***Fischers Fritz frisst frische Fische. Frische  
Fische frisst Fischers Fritz.***

Besser ein Spatz in der Hand  
als eine Taube auf dem Dach.

A bird in the hand is better  
than two in the bush.



## HERZLICHEN GLÜCKWUNSCH!

Here are the most common ways to express your good wishes in German at different occasions:

Merry Christmas: *Fröhliche Weihnachten!*

Happy New year: *Ein Glückliches Neues Jahr!*

Happy Easter: *Frohe Ostern!*

Have a nice trip: *Gute Reise!*

Have Fun: *Viel Spaß!*

Happy Birthday: *Herzlichen Glückwunsch zum Geburtstag!*

If you want to mention the age of the congratulee, you simply write the number with a period behind it:  
*Herzlichen Glückwunsch zum 29. Geburtstag!*

To wish a sick person a good recovery: *Gute Besserung!*

To sign off on a letter or send greetings on a postcard:  
*Alles Liebe* (Love),

or

*Herzliche Grüße,*

Helga

Wer den Schaden hat,  
braucht für dem Spott nicht zu sorgen.

He who suffers the damage,  
does not have to provide the sneers.

## IS A FRIEND EIN FREUND?

We often translate the word friend with *Freund*. However, they have different meanings within the cultural settings of the United States and Germany. In English I refer to hundreds of people as “my friends”. In German I have few people I call *Freund* (or *Freundin* for a female).

Most of the folks I know are *gute Bekannte* (good acquaintances). To be a *Freund* involves commitment, loyalty, and usually common experiences in the past. “Buddy” might be a good translation in some cases.

German literature has through centuries glorified the virtues of *Freundschaft* (friendship). In Schiller’s “Ode to Joy” (set to music by van Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony), you are invited to join in the jubilation if you are fortunate enough to be a friend’s friend, *eines Freundes Freund zu sein*.

Of course, in the world of German teenagers and love, words take on a different nuance. When I was seventeen I answered *ja* when my aunt Johanna asked me: “*Hast du denn schon einen Freund?*”. She understood my *ja* to mean “Helga is seriously dating”, and she advised me to leave school and learn something useful before entering motherhood - *Freund* as the committed boyfriend.

For 27 years, from the time aunt Johanna’s boyfriend moved in with her, to the day she died, aunt Johanna referred to him as her “*Bekannter*”.

Helga's Corner

Andere Länder, andere Sitten.

Different countries, different customs.

## THE STREET WALKER

Many visitors from abroad are reluctant users of dictionaries. They think they know it all and thus invite countless misunderstandings. My neighbor, for example, told me that his German cousin twice removed had very athletic children because they were all attending a “gymnasium” full time; he did not know that a “*Gymnasium*” in German is a school with college prep classes from grades five to thirteen.

On a visit to Germany, one of Austin’s mayors wanted to cancel a speech on international commerce because in his final itinerary the word “*Hochschule*” (university) as the event’s sponsor was translated as “highschool”. His speech was not suited to that age group.

An elderly couple in our neighborhood invited their visiting German cousin Herbert to go fishing with them. “I go happy with”, he said, “but you have ein angel for me?” After some snickering and whispering they promised him an angel. On the day of the trip a gorgeous blond divorcee joined them. She spoke German and found out that Herbert had not asked for an angel but for a fishing rod which, in German, is *die Angel*.

And then there is Else, who was determined to see a “Street Walker” before returning to Germany. I suggested a discrete stroll on Austin’s South Congress Avenue where ladies of the night were rumored to be seen. Just in time Else’s host figured out that all she wanted to see was a certain bird, the “road runner”.

Helga's Corner

Eile mit Weile!

More haste less speed!

## SCH.....SH

The sh-sound - like in flash - is produced in German by three different combinations of letters:

***sch** (**Busch**)*

***st** (s before **t** at the beginning of a word or syllable: **still**)*

***sp**(s before **p** at the beginning of a word or syllable: **spinnen**)*

*Die Schwester spielt mit dem Bleistift.*

Practice the sh-sound:

*stumm - spielen - Schweden - Spanien - Stiefel*

-

*schwimmen - schreiben - Stammbaum - schlau -  
verstehen - versprechen - bestellen - einsteigen*

And now, let's look at ***die Wurst*** (sausage). In high German you don't pronounce it "woorsht", because the ***st*** is at the end of a word, not at the beginning. Yet, you can speak with a bit of a southern dialect and say „***Das ist doch Wurscht***” which means: It really doesn't matter one way or the other.

## Helga's Corner

Des Menschen Wille ist  
sein Himmelmreich.

Man's will is his heaven.



## **ACH, DU LIEBER HIMMEL!**

The German noun (*der*) *Himmel* has two translations in English: 1. heaven 2. sky. That is an interesting theological and philosophical connection.

An overjoyed person is “*im siebten Himmel*”, wherever or whatever that is.

A warning to the speakers of German among you: When it's your time to go, make sure you go to the right *Himmel*. Otherwise you'll have to say: "*Ach, du lieber Himmel!*", which means „Oh dear heavens!".

Gleich und gleich gesellt sich gern.

Birds of a feather flock together.

## ICH VERGESSE NICHTS

German psychiatrists advise us not to use the negative statement: “Ich kann mich nicht erinnern.” (I can’t remember). We should be more positive like in:

*Es fällt mir gleich wieder ein.* (I’ll think of it in a moment)

*Es liegt mir auf der Zunge* (It’s on the tip of my tongue)

Instead of saying *Ich habe Ihren Namen vergessen* (I forgot your name) we should say:

*Würden Sie bitte Ihren Namen für mich buchstabieren?* (Would you please spell your name for me?)

Friends of mine recently moved to Sun City, a retirement community. Ever since, when they have a temporary lapse of memory, they say: “I am having a Sun City moment”.

There is a very good and honest translation (*Übersetzung*) for that Sun City reference, however, *ich kann mich nicht dran erinnern, es fällt mir gleich wieder ein, es liegt mir auf der Zunge.*

## Helga's Corner

Gut Ding will Weile haben.

A good thing wants to take its time.

## **SHE'LL BE COMING, HOLDRIO!**

We remember a sentence in a foreign language easier when we sing it. The Langenscheidt company has published a book with useful German phrases set to familiar tunes. My favorite is sung to the melody of “She’ll be coming ‘round the mountain when she comes...:

***Ich bin Ausländer und spreche nicht gut Deutsch.***

***Ich bin Ausländer und spreche nicht gut Deutsch.***

***Bitte sprechen Sie doch langsam.***

***Bitte sprechen Sie doch langsam.***

***Ich bin Ausländer und spreche nicht gut Deutsch.***

It means: “I’m a foreigner and don’t speak German well. Please do speak slowly.”

Some of you insert a yippi-eh after when she comes. The German equivalent to this cowboy’s yell is the German hunter’s ***holdrio*** after ***nicht gut Deutsch***:

***Ich bin Ausländer und spreche nicht gut Deutsch, holdrio!....***

After a trip to Germany one of my students reported that he remembered all the phrases he had learned as songs, but he had a hard time not to sing when he used them in a conversation.

Why don’t you try it, ***holdrio***! ?

Helga's Corner

Wer wagt, gewinnt.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

## WHAT IS A GIFT AMONG FRIENDS?

When a German warns you of a "*Gift*", don't take it lightly. "*Gift*" is the German word for "poison". Here is a numbered list of English looking German words and in a different order is a lettered list of their actual English translation.

Your assignment is to match the numbers with the letters.

- |            |                     |
|------------|---------------------|
| 1. BAD     | A. RED              |
| 2. HOSE    | B. GRAVE            |
| 3. WAND    | C. BATH             |
| 4. HELL    | D. NOVEL            |
| 5. NUN     | E. TROUSERS         |
| 6. KIND    | F. COTTAGE CHEESE   |
| 7. TAG     | G. WALL             |
| 8. DIE     | H. BRIGHT           |
| 9. TELLER  | I. CHILD            |
| 10. NOT    | J. (FLOWER) BED     |
| 11. HUT    | K. WAS              |
| 12. GANG   | L. DAY              |
| 13. ANGEL  | M. HAT              |
| 14. GUT    | N. FISHING ROD      |
| 15. RAT    | O. WALKWAY          |
| 16. BALD   | P. PLATE            |
| 17. BAGGER | Q. THE              |
| 18. GRAB   | R. COUNSEL          |
| 19. ROMAN  | S. GOOD             |
| 20. TOTE   | T. SOON             |
| 21. QUARK  | U. DREDGING MACHINE |
| 22. WAR    | V. NEED             |
| 23. BEET   | W. DEAD ONES        |
| 24. ROT    | X. NOW              |

Answers: 1 - C, 2 - E, 3 - G, 4 - H, 5 - X, 6 - I, 7 - L, 8 - Q, 9 - P, 10 - V, 11 - M, 12 - O, 13 - N, 14 - S, 15 - R, 16 - T, 17 - U, 18 - B, 19 - D, 20 - W, 21 - F, 22 - K, 23 - J, 24 - A

Helga's Corner

Wie gewonnen, so zerronnen

Easy come, easy go



## "MADE IN GERMANY"

German merchandise often displays the English words "Made in Germany". Why in English? The practice is based on a law passed in England in 1887 requiring all imports from Germany to be so marked. It was hoped that this would keep would-be purchasers from buying the items.

However, "Made in Germany" was soon regarded world-wide as an indication of superior workmanship and quality and thus was a boost to Germany's export.

I lived in Germany long enough to know that "Made in Germany" does not guarantee good quality, but it still evokes that expectation in many people.

How fortunate that the British required that the phrase had to be used in English, because in German - ***In Deutschland hergestellt*** - it might not have had the universal appeal.

Helga's Corner

Wohltun bringt Zinsen.

Good deeds bring rewards.

## GIVE ME THE SPIEL

The German noun Spiel (*das Spiel*) has many meanings in English. Among them are:

1. play
2. game
3. gamble.

A *Spielbank* is not a bank for children with play money, it is a gambling casino, while a *Spielplatz* is a playground, and a *Fussballspiel* is a soccer game.

The verb "*spielen*" means to play and to gamble. In English we also use the word "spiel" to mean something like pitch. (She gave me the whole spiel on guild membership).

Spiel was probably schlepped into English from German via Yiddish.

Remember: In German the sp part of *Spiel* is pronounced shp, so the whole word is pronounced "shpeel".

Helga's Corner

Morgenstund'  
hat Gold im Mund.

The early bird catches the worm.

## APOSTROPHES FOOL AROUND

One should expect the little apostrophe's function to be identical in English and German. Not so (*Pustekuchen*). "Ludwig's car" in English is "**Ludwigs Auto**" in German. No apostrophe, just an s added to the name. "Helga's corner" is "**Helgas Ecke**".

In old records and books you find several other endings indicating a possessive situation, like in "**Franzens Vater war Bürgermeister**". The son's name is not **Franzen**, but **Franz**.

In some old church records and other documents the Latin genitive endings are added to a German name or word like in **Christi Himmelfahrt** (Ascension of Christ).

German uses the apostrophe only to indicate that the vowel "e" is left out when the spoken language is reflected in writing. "**Wie geht's?**" stands for "**Wie geht es?**" "**Ich hab' die Nase voll**" (I have it up to here) stands for "**Ich habe die Nase voll**".

Of course, English has crawled into German, and now some Germans use the apostrophe like in English, especially in advertising.

Test for doing it correctly:  
Who's corner is this? It is H\_\_\_\_\_ corner.

**Wessen Ecke ist dies? Es ist H\_\_\_\_\_Ecke.**

## Helga's Corner

Frisch gewagt ist halb gewonnen.

A courageous start is half the victory.

## WHAT'S DAT?

What's dat? We know that German and English are linguistically related. Part of dat relationship is de fact dat many English words containing “th” have a “*d*” in German:

thin = *dünn*;      thick = *dick*;      thorn = *Dorn*;  
thunder = *Donner*;      thistle = *Distel*.

north = *Nord*;      leather = *Leder*;  
three = *drei*;      bath = *Bad*;      Heather = *Heide*

Can you find more th = *d* words in your dictionary or your memory?

By the way, what is the translation of “the” ?

Helga's Corner

Papier ist geduldig.

Paper is tolerant.



## INDEX ALERT!

Alphabetized indexes in German publications have changed. The other night I was looking for *München* in my new German road atlas and was startled: *Verflixt nochmal!* had they taken *München* off the map?

The *ü* used to be treated like a simple *u* for alphabetizing, and *München* used to be just below *Mummingen* in the index. After some searching I found *München* on top of the page well above *Muggensturm*. I realized then that the new German practice in indexing is to treat the *ü* as if it were spelled *ue*, although they still print it as *ü*.

This may turn out to be useful knowledge when you look for the name *Schütze* in the phone book on your next trip to the old country.

The same is true for *ä* (ae) and *ö* (oe) in indexes.

As if life and the German language weren't complicated enough without this new *prüctice*!!

Wer den Pfennig nicht ehrt,  
ist des Thalers nicht wert.

If you don't respect the Cent,  
you don't deserve one Euro.

**OI - OI - OI -**

The "Euro" (*der Euro* = 100 Cent) has been the currency (*Währung*) of thirteen European countries since the beginning of 2002. It is important to know that in Germany one pronounces it "Oiro" and not "you row". *Eu* sounds like oi. *Deutschland* is "Doitschlund" and not Ditchland or Dutchland. "*Wieviele you rows kostet der Film?*" may not be understood by every German, neither in most other Euro-countries, because the only one where the natives speak English (sort of) is Ireland. Don't ask me how the Italians or Greeks pronounce the word.

Here are the countries in which you have to pay with Euro: Deutschland, Österreich, Belgien, Spanien, Finnland, Frankreich, Griechenland, Irland, Italien, Luxemburg, die Niederlande, Portugal and der Vatikan.

With all that simplification of currencies I expected all Euro coins (*Münzen*) to look alike, but *Pustekuchen!* (not so!). Each country proudly produces its own. Some coins minted in *Deutschland*, for example, feature the *Brandenburger Tor*. Do *die Griechen* sport *die Akropolis*? *Die Belgier* their *Männeken Piss*? *Was is auf den Münzen von Vatikan - der Papst?*

And how about Liechtenstein - should we expect a coin showing "*Der alte Herr von Liechtenstein*" dancing the polka around a beer barrel, *ja ja ja*?

## Helga's Corner

Morgen ist wieder ein Tag.

Tomorrow is another day.

## RISE AND SCHEIN

If you learn only one word today, you are earning your *Heiligenschein* (halo). As a noun the word is *der Schein*, as a verb it is *scheinen*. Both are homonyms, which means, they have a variety of meanings. There is *der Sonnenschein* (sunshine), *der Mondschein* (moonlight), and that glowing circle over your head, *der Heiligenschein*. Die *Sonne scheint* means The sun is shining. *Die Sterne scheinen hell über Texas* says The stars shine bright over Texas.

However, *ein Schein* can also be a certificate or a bank note. *Ein Führerschein* is a driver's license, *ein Hundertdollarschein* is a hundred dollar bill. Students earn *Scheine* for their courses to accumulate credits. To certify that you have donated all your earthly assets to the German-Texan Heritage Society, you ask for a *Bescheinigung*.

How paradox is it then that *scheinen* can also mean to give the appearance! *Der Ring scheint echtes Gold zu sein* means The ring seems to be real gold. We find the noun *Schein* in that sense in the often used phrase: *Der Schein trügt* (Appearance is deceiving).

By the way, that moonshine that your cousin's grandmother enjoyed was not called *Mondschein* but *schwarzgebrannter Fusel*.

Helga's Corner

Wer zuletzt lacht,  
lacht am besten.

He who laughs last laughs longest.

## IST DAS NORMAL?

Most English words ending in “al” are used in German with the same meaning (normal = *normal*). However, they are pronounced with the emphasis on the *al*, as if it were normahl.

Say the following words in German with the stress on the last syllable and guess what they mean:

*international - formal - maximal - minimal - die Moral. national - Hospital - Ist das nicht optimal?*

Of course, they can have endings, but they keep the emphasis on the “*al*”:

*der internationale Konflikt  
optimales Wetter*

Sometimes the meaning can be a little different in German:  
To total a sum is *zusammenzählen*.

I totaled my car is *Ich habe an meinem Auto Totalschaden angerichtet*. (Considering the language problem, you’d better total your car in an English speaking country.)

Kleine Ursache - Große Wirkung

Big oaks from little acorns grow.



## BIMBOS ARE DEPPEN

The pregnant chad - *das schwangere Papierrund!*  
It's history now, but for years to come we Americans will  
have to explain our presidential election of  
November/December 2000 to inquiring Germans. Here are  
the key words:

bimbos = *Deppen*; butterfly = *Schmetterling*;  
pregnant = *schwanger*; chad = (I could not find  
it in any dictionary, but I heard it is called *Papierrund*);  
ballot = *Wahlzettel*; dimple = *Grübchen*;  
lawyers = *Anwälte*; to count = *zählen*;  
to recount = *nochmal zählen*; election = *Wahl*;  
electoral college = *Wahlmänner*; president =  
*Präsident*;  
vice = *Laster*; vice president = *Vizepräsident*

After I had explained the events in Florida to my  
German brother-in-law, he asked me: "*Wer war  
schwanger?*" (Who was pregnant?) I answered in  
desperation: "*Siebzehn Anwälte, ein Papierrund und  
zweihundert Deppen.*" (seventeen lawyers, one chad and  
two hundred bimbos).

Helga's Corner

Kleider machen Leute.

Clothes make the man.

## **DAS BAD CAN BE BAD**

The English word “bad” is an adjective like in “I’ve bad news for you”. The German word “**Bad**” (pronounced baht) means bath and is used in words like **Badezimmer** (a room with a bathtub). It also means spa like in **Bad Homburg** or **Bad Kissingen**, towns where people spend several weeks taking the “cure”, **die Kur**.

With the **Kur** in most cases paid for by health insurance, **Kurgäste** (guests partaking in cure activities) have to drink evil smelling waters, be packed in mud, walk uphill, endure the sight of naked fellow patients in a sauna, and so on.

Doctors have hundreds of tortures they can prescribe. **Kurgäste** are to relax and recuperate from whatever ails them. Most **Bäder** (spas) offer groomed parks and outdoor concerts, cafes with sinfully tempting cakes, and afternoon teas with dancing. For these you try to win the favors of a **Kurschatten** (cure shadow), a person of the other sex with whom you spend relaxing hours of harmless flirting for the duration of the **Kur**.

Many spas feature a casino, a **Spielbank** with an elegant air, which attracts rich people, money launderers, the jet set and the international nobility. Among them are **Badenbaden** and **Wiesbaden**, with the word ...**bad** in the last part of the name.

I found a relationship between bad and **Bad** when I spent an evening in the **Spielbank** in **Bad Homburg**. I lost twelve Marks. And that was bad news.

Wer nie sein Brot im Bette aß,  
weiß nicht wie Krümel pieken.

Who never ate his bread in bed,  
knows not how crumbs can prick you.

## WILL THE FLESH BE WILLING?

The German „**Peter will fischen**“ does not mean „Peter will fish“; it means „Peter wants to fish“.

The variations of the German „**will**“ (***Ich will! Mein letzter Wille. Ich bin willig***, etc.) express a strong will to do something. Some quirk in the English language lets us use the same word „will“ in ”he is willing ...” as well as in “he will...” (as in “he is going to...”).

So, when a German says: „**Ich will bezahlen**“, don't assume that he will actually foot the bill. His flesh might say „**ich will**“ while his spirit might be whispering: “I will not!” Or the other way around. If he means to say „I'll pay”, he'll say „**Ich werde bezahlen**” or simply „**Ich bezahle**.”

For more information study the **Verben : wollen (ich will, du willst, ... )** and **werden** as it is used to express the future.

Wer sich auf seinen Lorbeeren ausruht,  
trägt sie an der falschen Stelle.

He who rests on his laurels,  
wears them in the wrong place.

## GUTE FREUNDE

Good friends - how do you keep them? Language offers the perfect tool for cultural misunderstandings.

If it is said of a German politician that „*Er ist liberal*“, it means that he believes in free enterprise, relatively free from government interference and support. Your German friend may have a good command of the English language, but he might still misunderstand you when you tell him where you stand concerning “liberals”.

If a German tells you that he is „*evangelisch*“, he is not part of an evangelical church American style. He is simply protestant - maybe Lutheran, maybe Calvinist, maybe a member of any number of Christian religions, but not a catholic.

It is also not wise to discuss taxes. The American income tax rate sounds so low to Germans in comparison to theirs. They get jealous. However, they don't know that we pay a lot of other taxes at a high rate - like property taxes - which they pay hardly worth mentioning.

Whatever you do, don't change the subject to cowboys and Indians. Germans tend to side with the Indians no matter what.

Zu viele Köche verderben den Brei.

Too many cooks spoil the broth.



## LET *VON* BE GONE.

"I should of went fishing" said my neighbor when he saw his mother-in-law pull into his driveway. How can the little word "of" be so badly out of place, I thought.

In most cases the English "of" is *von* in German, but in expressions of quantity it is simply not used:

a glass of milk	=	<i>ein Glas Milch</i>
a liter of gasoline	=	<i>ein Liter Benzin</i>
a bottle of olive oil	=	<i>eine Flasche Olivenöl</i>
a cup of tea	=	<i>eine Tasse Tee</i>
two cups of coffee	=	<i>zwei Tassen Kaffee</i>
a bar of chocolate	=	<i>eine Tafel Schokolade</i>
a bag of fleas	=	<i>ein Sack Flöhe</i>
a barrel of beer	=	<i>ein Fass Bier</i>
a glass of beer	=	_____
a bottle of wine	=	_____ <i>Wein</i>

"That mother-in-law of mine really ain't so bad," continued my neighbor, "she's 220 pounds of love. How would you say that in German?"

"*Sie ist*", I said, "*zweihundert Pfund Liebe*". You couldn't of said anything nicer about her."

"Morgen, morgen und nicht heute,"  
sagen alle faulen Leute.

"T'morrow, t'morrow, not today"  
that's what lazy people say.

## DAS MACHT NIX

The German word "***machen***" is related to the English "make", like in "***Du machst mich glücklich***". (You make me happy.) However, we often have to use other words to translate ***machen***: "***Das macht nix(nichts)***" means "It doesn't matter".

***Macht bitte diese Aufgabe: Welcher Buchstabe gehört zu welcher Zahl?***

Please, do this assignment: Which letter belongs to which number?

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. <b><i>Mach schnell!</i></b>               | a. Shut the door!                  |
| 2. <b><i>Mach die Tür zu!</i></b>            | b. Take a photo of me.             |
| 3. <b><i>Mach die Augen auf!</i></b>         | c. Turn off the light!             |
| 4. <b><i>Mach ein Foto von mir!</i></b>      | d. Fritz is soiling his<br>diapers |
| 5. <b><i>Was macht ihr heute?</i></b>        | e. Hurry up!                       |
| 6. <b><i>Fritz macht in die Windeln.</i></b> | f. The museum closes at<br>noon.   |
| 7. <b><i>Wir machen eine Reise.</i></b>      | g. We're going on a trip.          |
| 8. <b><i>Er macht sich nichts draus.</i></b> | h. What are y'all doing<br>today?  |
| 9. <b><i>Mach das Licht aus!</i></b>         | i. He doesn't care for it.         |
| 10. <b><i>Das Museum macht um</i></b>        | j. Open your eyes!                 |

Die richtigen Antworten: 1-e 2-a 3-j 4-b 5-h 6-d 7-g 8-i  
9-c 10-f

***Habt ihr alles richtig gemacht? Ja? Das macht mich glücklich!***

Helga's Corner

Gottes Mühlen mahlen langsam  
aber sicher.

God's mills grind slowly  
but surely.

## TAKE OUT THE MISSTERY

Is **ß** a mi**ß**tery to you? German has a letter which is always pronounced like the „ss" in Miss or the „c" in nice: „**ß**".

If you don't have the **ß** on your machinery, you can type ss instead: „**Strasse**" instead of „**Straße**".

The German name for the letter sounds like „esstsett". Sorry you asked? Many words with **ß** have a t in their English translation: **Straße** (street); **weiß** (white); **heiß** (hot); **Nuß** (nut); **Fuß** (foot); **Schuß** (shot).

And now comes confusing news: The new spelling rules - once they are accepted by everybody - will suggest that the **ß** is used only after a long vowel like in **Fuß** and after a diphtong like in **weiß**, but not after a short vowel like in **Nuss**.

To write: “I know that one eats the dumpling hot”, one used to write:

***Ich weiß. daß man den Kloß heiß ißt.***

Now you write:

***Ich weiß, dass man den Kloß heiß isst.***

Neverthe**ß**, get a **Bleistift** and practi**ß**: **ßßßßß**

Wer einmal lügt, dem glaubt man nicht,  
und wenn er auch die  
Wahrheit spricht.

Once a liar, always a liar.

## FALSCHE FREUNDE

*Falsche Freunde* are false friends.

Many words are similar in German and English, but beware of false friends: „*Gift*“ means poison (*Opa gab Oma ein Gift* = Grandpa gave Grandma a poison). A „*Kommode*“ is nothing to sit on - it's a chest of drawers.

When you are offered a „*Berliner*“ for breakfast, your host is not suggesting cannibalism - he is offering you a donut of the kind my supermarket calls a “Bismarck”. Kennedy was not a *Bismarck*.

A „*Kittchen*“ is a slammer . *Opa ist im Kittchen* = Opa is in the slammer.

The American traveller with limited command of German really should have a printed list in German of „*falsche Freunde*“ and learn them. Just like he should make a list of all the things he is allergic to and of the food he doesn't like.

Remember: *eine Angel* is not a female angel.

Wie man sich bettet, so liegt man.

You've made your bed,  
now you must lie on it.



## SAND IN MOTOR!

Learning means memorizing, and you and I need all the help we can get. Let's be grateful therefore for all the words that are the same in English and German, including the following:

*Land, Sand, Ball, warm, Wind, West,  
Hotel, Bar, Auto, Restaurant, Start, Motor,  
Bus, Radio, Horn, Situation, Rose, Ring, Gold,  
Baby, Kindergarten, Statue, Vase, Arm, Hand,  
Finger, Pudding, Butter, Margarine, bitter, April,  
August, September, November, Podium, Bank,  
Tenor, Post, Tank, in, Gas, Marinade,  
Hamburger.*

You can find more of the "same-words" in the dictionary.

It's fun to make up meaningful sentences in English using several of these German words in each sentence, like: The *Tenor* put his *Hand* in the *Pudding* and drank the *Marinade*, while the *Pastor*....(well, keep him close to the *Amen* and away from the *Gin*).

## Helga's Corner

Wo man singt,  
da lass dich ruhig nieder.

Where people sing  
you can sit down in peace.

## IST ER BLAU?

You know, of course, that blue is *blau* in German, but that's true only when you talk about color.

When a German says "*Ich bin blau*", he is telling you that he is drunk. However, when he says "*Ich mache Montag blau*", he is telling you that he is not going to work on Monday, which may be related to our "blue Monday".

A very popular destination for a club's annual outing in Germany is "*die Fahrt ins Blaue*", the trip into the blue. This means that nobody - except, it is hoped, for the organizers - knows the destination. Most of these mystery outings take place in June, especially on Ascension Day. Some clubs even hire a horse and a wagon from a brewery for the ride, and heaven only knows what libations the passengers indulge in.

Quite often some of the revelers return from the *Fahrt ins Blaue* "*total blau*".

Jeder kehre vor seiner eignen Tür!

Everybody should sweep in front of  
his own door.

## THE FUSED TOGETHER NOUNS:

There is no legal limit in German to the number of nouns you can string together to make one word. The limit is set by the intellectual capacity of the speaker.

The gender of a word like that is always the same as the gender of the last part of the fused word.

*der Wein* + *die Flasche* = *die Weinflasche* (the wine bottle).

*die Flasche* + *der Wein* = *der Flaschenwein* (wine that comes in a bottle)

*das Leder* + *die Hand* + *die Tasche* + *der Preis* = *der Lederhandtaschenpreis* (the price of a leather handbag).

The last word tells you what it is all about:

The often quoted *Donaudampfschiffahrtskapitän* is a captain (Kapitän). What else do we know about him? He captains a steamboat on the Danube.

Für jeden Topf findet sich  
ein Deckel.

There is a nut for every bolt.

## WHEN YOU'VE GOT TO GO

"For gentle men only" said the sign on the door to the gents' toilet in the lobby of our hotel in Shiraz, Iran. Not everywhere do people try to accommodate the "English only" traveler.

"Toilet" or "Toilette", are words understood internationally, but not often used. If you are in need of public facilities in Germany, you might look for a big "**WC**" sign. It stands for **Wasser Closett** (water toilet).

Other words for women and men are: **Frauen - Männer**; **sie - er** (she-he); **Eva - Adam**; and many more, including pictures and symbols to be interpreted at some risk. Then there is "**Herren**", which does not mean „Hers". but „Gentlemen". It goes with "**Damen**", which means "ladies", dames or not.

In a private home you ask: "**Wo ist das Klosett (die Toilette, das Klo, das WC)?**" Don't ask for the "**Badezimmer**" (bathroom), because that has a bathtub but not always a commode. How would you handle that?

In Portuguese the word is "sanitarios", and I whispered that word to our local tour guide in Brazil. He announced to the entire group: "You stay on the bus while I take Mrs. Helga to the sanitarium."

Kümmere dich nicht um  
ungelegte Eier.

Don't cross your bridges  
until you come to them.



## IN DIE SCHWEIZ?

To complicate life, one has to use the definite article when talking about certain countries in German: Switzerland is **die Schweiz**, Turkey is **die Türkei**, Lebanon is **der Libanon**, and Iraq is **der Irak**.

We all know that **die** and **der** change to **des**, **dem**, **den**, **der**, **denen** and so forth if used in the genitive, dative, plural, or any other case. ***Ich habe kein Bankkonto in der Schweiz. Amerikanische Soldaten sind in der Türkei stationiert. Beirut ist die Hauptstadt des Libanons.***

As far as **der Irak** is concerned, Germans had a problem in early 2003: not only did they have to decide whether or not to send troops there, they would have had to do it grammatically correct, of course. Headlines might then have read: ***Deutsche Truppen marschieren in den (dem, der, des?) Irak*** (German troops march into Iraq).

It's all so complicated (***kompliziert***), and it would be nice if we could just take a vacation in **der Schweiz** and not worry about **der. dem, des, den Irak**.

Helga's Corner

Der Apfel Fält nicht  
weit von Stamm.

Like father like son.

## THE NEW SPELL ON SPELLING

It's hard to believe! Every few years a committee of so-called experts on spelling gets together in Germany and decides what official changes to make to German spelling rules.

Changes are based, it seems, on what mistakes are most often made and should therefore be made by everybody. The experts publish their judgment in a book called "*der Duden*", which is the authority on correct spelling.

The latest *Duden* has so many changes and (even worse) choices, that everybody is now condemned to be a poor and confused speller. The good old "*daß*" is now "*dass*"; the ace of hearts is now "*das Herz Ass*" (previously As); "*die Spagettis*" have lost their h, but the coffee harvest has gained an e: "*Kaffeeernte*".

If you are suffering from rheumatism, you now have the choice between "Rheumatismus" and "Reumatismus". I prefer mine the old fashioned way with *Rh*.

Helga's Corner

Rast' ich, so rost' ich.

When I rest I rust.

## YOU IDIOM!!

When I first set foot on American soil, an immigrant with limited grasp of English, I saw a man with a cart selling little sausages (**Würstchen**) that he advertised as “hot dogs”. Horror! Shock! Nausea! Americans eat dog meat! They were even more uncivilized than their reputation. Had I not been penniless, I would have booked a return passage to Germany on the next boat.

My trouble was caused by misunderstanding an idiom, an expression that can - translated literally - scare a person witless.

Here are some examples. As you read them, imagine how they might be understood by a German:

- 1.virgin forest   2. great grandfather   3.midwife
- 4.German measles   5.horse radish   6.french fries
- 7.chicken fried steak   8. the dog's mistress   9.Excuse my French
- 10.They walk abreast   11.a black eye   12.She's in a jam
- 13.butterfly
- 14.Bottoms up!

***Auf Deutsch: 1.Urwald   2.Urgroßvater   3.Hebamme  
4.Röteln   5.Meerrettich   6.Pommes Frites   7.paniertes  
Rindsfilet in weißer Soße   8.Frauchen   9.Entschuldige  
den Ausdruck   10.Sie gehen nebeneinander   11.ein  
blaues Auge   12.Sie ist in der Klemme   13.Schmetterling  
14. Prost!***

Man soll das eisen schmieden  
solange es heiß ist.

Strike while the iron is hot.

## THE UNDERTAKER AND THE FLYING SAUCER

"Under" is related to the German "*unter*". You can easily understand words like *Untergrundbahn* (underground train), *Unterseeboot* (submarine), *Unterhosen* (panties, briefs) and *Unterrock* (a lady's slip).

Then there is the *Untertasse*, which means "under-cup" and refers to the plate under the drinking cup: the saucer. That leads us to the flying saucers, "*die fliegenden Untertassen*".

"*Unterschreiben Sie bitte*" does not mean „Underwrite please"; it means "Please sign".

That enterprising young German who presents himself as an "*Unternehmer*" (literally translated that would be an "undertaker") is not an undertaker but an entrepreneur in an unspecified field, holding a highly respected place in society.

If one of your ancestors lived in Europe way back, he was most likely an "*Unterthan*", a subject of some king or prince, and therefore he had to be officially released from that relationship before he was given permission to emigrate. With that release he was no longer under the protection (*unter dem Schutz*) of the sovereign, and - on the other hand - your ancestor's foolish or criminal acts were no longer a blemish on the crown.

## Helga's Corner

Alte Liebe rostet nicht.

An old flame never dies.



## WANDERN

*Mein Vater war ein Wandersmann, und mir liegt's auch im Blut....* Who hasn't learned that song as a child or in German class? **Wandern** (to hike) is a favorite and serious pastime of many Germans. Properly dressed for the occasion, often carrying a **Rucksack** (backpack), they cheerfully populate the paths in the mountains and the woods, the moorlands and the flats along the coast.

In the olden days a young man had to go *auf die Wanderschaft* and learn how his trade was carried out in different regions of the country. Only then could he call himself a **Geselle** (journeyman). From that period comes the wealth of *Wanderlieder* like *Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust.....*

You can **wandern** for a day or for weeks at a time, stopping overnight in **Herbergen** (hostels), **Scheunen** (barns) or **Hotels** (hotels).

**Wandern** also means to migrate. **Der Auswanderer** is the emigrant, **der Einwanderer** is the immigrant.

Nursing frozen margaritas in the shade of a Texas Oak in July, my once-German friends and I dream about going on a **Wanderurlaub** (a hiking vacation) *im Schwarzwald* (in the Black Forest). *Auf, du junger Wandersmann, ...*

Helga's Corner

Ohne Fleiß kein Preis.

Without diligence there's no reward

## DELICIOUS AMERICANER

As a child I loved sinking my teeth into an *Amerikaner* (American). More about that later.

We use geographical terms to give names to items. You know of Hamburgers, Wieners and Frankfurters. However, the use of these terms can lead to misunderstandings. When a German offers you an *Engländer* (Englishman), he is talking about an adjustable wrench, an item we all need when travelling.

When it's Greek to you, it is *Böhmische Dörfer* (Bohemian villages) to the German. A *Nassauer* sponges on other people. John takes coal to Newcastle, Hans carries *Eulen nach Athen* (owls to Athens). When Americans say Let's go Dutch, the Germans have no clue to what that means. The very concept does not feel proper to them, and if they agree to it, they might say "*Jeder bezahlt seine eigene Rechnung*".

A *Römer* (Roman) is a long-stem wine *glas*, a *Pariser* is a condom, and a *Berliner* is a certain kind of a doughnut, also known here as Bismarck. Kennedy was no *Bismarck*.

The delicious *Amerikaner* is something between a cookie and a poundcake, but you can't buy it any longer by that name because the name became a victim of political correctness, I was told, along with the word for my beloved *Negerküsse* (negro kisses), which are chocolate covered marshmallows.

Politics in a German pastry shop (*Konditorei*) !

Was man nicht im Kopfe hat,  
muss man in den Beinen haben.

What you didn't do with your head,  
you have to do with your legs.

## **DIE NACHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS**

A German-English Version of Clement C. Moore' s

The Night Before Christmas.

by Helga von Schweinitz

's war die Nacht before Christmas, und all durch das Haus  
Keine creature sich muckste, nicht mal eine Maus.  
Die Socken were hung by the Schornstein mit care  
In der Hoffnung that Nikolaus soon would be there.  
Die Kinder were kuschelt gar snug in their beds  
While Träume von Zuckerplums danced in their heads.  
Und Mama in her Häubchen und ich in my Käppi  
Had g'rad nesteld down für a long Winter's nappy  
Als out auf dem Rasen such Getöse arose,  
Ich sprang aus dem Bett to see: Was ist da los?  
Away an das Fenster ich flog wie ein Blitz,  
Tore offen den Laden, the sash just a Schlitz.  
Der Mond auf der Brust of the new fallen snow  
Gab ein Glitzern of Mittag to the Dinge below.  
Als, was to my staunenden eyes should appear,  
but a Miniatur-Schlitten und acht kleine reindeer,  
Mit 'nem Kutscher so lebhaft, so alt und so klein,  
Ich wusste sofort: das muss Nikolaus sein!  
Und schneller als Adler, his coursers, sie kamen,  
Und er pfiff , und er schrie, und er rief sie bei Namen:  
"Nun, Däscher! Nun Tänzer! Nun Pränzer und Vixen!  
Auf, Komet! Auf Kupid! Auf, Donner und Blitzen!  
To the top of the Vorbau, to the top of the wall!  
Nun eilet euch! Eilt euch! Eilt euch , y' all!"  
Wie trockene Blätter, die vorm hurricane fleuchen,  
Wenn sie meet mit a Hindernis, zum Himmel hoch kreuchen,  
So up auf das Hausdach die Tiere, they flew  
Mit 'nem Schlitten voll Spielzeug und Nikolaus, too.  
Und dann in a twinkling hört' ich auf dem roof  
Das prawning und pawning of each kleinem Huf.  
Als ich drew in my Kopf und was turning herum,  
Down the Schornstein kam Nikolaus mit 'nem Klumbum.  
He was dressed ganz in Pelz von his Kopf to his Fuss,

Und his Kleidung war tarnished mit Asche und Russ.  
Ein Bündel von Spielzeug war flung on his back,  
Er sah aus wie ein Händler , just opening his pack.  
Seine Augen, wie sie glitzerten! Seine Grübchen, wie merry!  
His Bäckchen wie Rosen, sein Näschen wie a cherry!  
His drolliges Mündchen war drawn up wie a bow,  
Und der Bart on his Kinn war so weiss wie der snow.  
Den Stumpf seiner Pfeife hielt er fest in his teeth  
Und der Rauch, der umkreiste den Kopf wie ein wreath.  
He had a breites Gesicht und a rund little belly  
That shook wenn er lachte, wie 'ne Schüssel voll jelly.  
Er war chubby und rundlich, ein recht lustiges Elfchen,  
Und ich lachte, wenn I saw him, in spite of myselfchen.  
Ein Zwinkern des Auges, und a twist of his head  
Bald gab mir zu wissen, ich had gar nichts to dread.  
Er sprach nicht ein Wort, ging direkt to his work  
Und füllte die Socken, then turned mit a jerk,  
And laying his Finger aside of his nose,  
Und giving a Nicken, durch den Schornstein he rose.  
Er sprang auf den Schlitten, to his team gab a whistle,  
Und vondannen sie flogen wie der Flaum einer Distel.  
But ich hörte ihn rufen als er drove out of sight:  
“Eine fröhliche Weihnacht, y'all! Und Good Night!”

**ENDE GUT, ALLES GUT**

All's well that ends well