

# Teaching German as A Foreign Language After English in A Russian-Speaking Context

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## Abstract

The article considers the features of teaching German as a foreign language after learning English. It is shown that students who have already mastered English as a first foreign language require less effort to learn German as a second foreign language. The difficulties in learning German as a second foreign language are revealed, and the advantages are noted that should serve as an incentive for students to learn German. Examples of the influence of previously studied English on German are given at the level of semantics, spelling, morphology, etc. The article concludes that it is necessary in the process of teaching German as a second foreign language to use knowledge of English productively.

**Keywords:** German, second foreign language, English, motivation, difficulties, advantages.

## Introduction

“German is one of the most frequently studied foreign languages. At the same time, it has a real opportunity to be studied as a second foreign language along with French, Spanish, Russian, as well as Chinese and Arabic.”

After English, German as a foreign language is now more widely spoken throughout the world than German as the first (and only) foreign language. Even in Russian-speaking countries, German is increasingly being studied as a second foreign language after English. According to modern research, in Russia alone the number of people studying German after English is about 4.7 million. German is studied here as a second foreign language by 34.5% of all students.

Those starting to learn a second or subsequent foreign language tend to be a little older, self-confident and have higher intellectual abilities than when learning a first foreign language. At this age, they are more independent, open and have a different level of responsibility than younger students. In most cases, they have acquired sufficient experience, possess certain communication and language skills, and therefore can navigate a new language faster and more effectively. In addition, their motivation for learning a second foreign language is partly different, as are their interests and communication needs.

It should be noted that students have information about cultural differences between different countries. “It is obvious that learning a foreign language does not always prepare for successful intercultural communication. One of the reasons for this may be the problem of intercultural differences” [Chernysheva 2021: 186]. They are familiar with grammatical phenomena and clearly understand that the structure of sentences in different languages is characterized by significant originality and typical features that differ from the structure of sentences in their native language; individual words or expressions in the native language do not have corresponding equivalents in a foreign language. In addition, the characteristics of national culture play a certain role in the use of language. Thus, when they begin to study a second or



other foreign language, they do not start from scratch, but expand their existing language proficiency with the help of a new language.

However, people often experience difficulties when learning German as a second (or additional) foreign language. First of all, this concerns his status. While the first foreign language (most often English) is considered a core school subject and ranks alongside subjects such as the native language and mathematics, the second or other foreign languages are usually allocated only a few hours a week. I would like to note that learning any foreign language must begin with a relatively large number of hours. On the other hand, it is important for motivation to know that they can use this language. With only one or two lessons a week, it is quite difficult to awaken and strengthen interest in the German language and realize its useful value.

As practice shows, some teenagers may have a bad experience of learning their first foreign language. Perhaps they perceived previous foreign language lessons as uninteresting or received bad grades and now view German lessons from the perspective that learning a foreign language does not depend on them. All these factors can have a negative impact on motivation to learn. In addition, it is often observed that students of a second foreign language are more critical of the teaching process and the content of educational materials. When they encounter what they perceive to be topically irrelevant and fairly simple learning material that is not related to their interests, they react boringly and often reject it.

Another difficulty is that English (the first foreign language) is perceived by most young people as easier than German. The rather complex grammar of the German language (which, unfortunately, still dominates practical classes) can have a demotivating effect on them. From their point of view, English has a somewhat “controlled” grammar and is therefore easier to learn.

Attention should be paid to the fact that in most countries English often plays a much more important role in everyday life than German and is present in many media (eg Internet, music, films, advertising, etc.). Of course, this helps motivate young people. Thus, accessing English through everyday culture is usually much easier than accessing German. Therefore, when young people study German after English, many German teachers are faced with the fact that students constantly compare the “difficult and difficult” German language with the “easy and fluent” English. If German is the first foreign language, then this direct comparison is not possible, and students usually focus on learning German without prejudice.

Those who have studied English as a first foreign language have an idea of the structure of language and know a number of grammatical phenomena and terms. By analyzing English grammar, they deepen their existing knowledge of the system of their native language. We should not forget that transferring the grammatical structures of the native language can lead to errors in a foreign language. “Features at the level of vocabulary also pose a certain difficulty for studying” [Chernysheva 2020: 198]. At the same time, German as a second (or additional) foreign language after English also has a number of advantages. Young people whose first language (eg Chinese or Russian) uses a non-Latin alphabet will already have knowledge and experience of using Latin letters in English lessons. A significant advantage for German language teachers is that they do not need to introduce the Latin alphabet in class, since students already have these skills.



German linguist Britta Hufeisen, in a detailed study, revealed the influence of previously learned English as a foreign language on German at almost all language levels (syntax, semantics, spelling, morphology). In her monograph, she puts forward specific proposals on how English should be used productively in the process of teaching German. Most of her ideas have already been included in the new textbooks “German as a Foreign Language after English” (DaFNE) [Hufeisen 1991: 98]. Students who have already mastered their first foreign language have basic knowledge of word formation, that is, they can compare different words, recognize types of words, etc. It is known that different languages have similar words and they can be easily understood. For example, in German these are days of the week, cardinal directions, names of months, food and drinks, countries and nationalities, as well as special vocabulary from the field of sports, music, art, politics, finance, computer and the Internet, etc. To a greater extent These are internationalisms that have a similar sound in English and German. Observations show that these words are remembered much faster than completely unfamiliar ones.

Attention should be paid to the fact that as a result of globalization, the share of internationalisms and Americanisms is constantly growing, including in Russian-speaking countries. In the German language, the mixture of English and German is jokingly called “Denglish”. In German-speaking countries, Denglish is found everywhere: in the media, on store signs, on the Internet and even in the spoken language of native German speakers. It is often difficult to correctly understand some inscriptions without knowledge of English. An example of this would be a store labeled “Boot Store,” which does not sell boats at all, but shoes. Play on words “For you. Vor Ort” (an advertisement for a pharmacy chain) or “Burgermeister - Der Grill” (a sign on a snack bar selling hamburgers and cheeseburgers) can only be understood with adequate knowledge of the English language. In advertising, English is deliberately used to give the greatest prestige to the advertised products.

For example, in the Otto catalog for the summer of 2021, you could see the following clothing items:

- Running-Schuhe,
- Sweatjacke „Prepared“ von ONLY im Collegestil mit Flockprint,
- Hipster aus natural cotton,
- Triple-Gel-Push-up,
- Neckholder-Top mit toller Frontstickerei,
- One-Shoulder-Shirt in legerer Form,
- Multiway-BH,
- stylish Pumphosen,
- Longshirt in trendiger Form,
- Stretch-Jeansrock im 5-Pocket-Style, light blue mit Destroyed-Effekt,
- Must-Havesin je 3 Farben.

In addition to the possible difficulties in understanding that arise here even for Germans without sufficient knowledge of the English language, students of German after English undoubtedly have the question of which components here are English, which are German, and how such mixed constructions are pronounced. German borrowings in the Russian language



are less numerous, but, nevertheless, useful for teaching German as a foreign language. Most of them entered the Russian language several centuries ago and changed their semantic meaning over time. Russian-speaking students may be interested in the fact that the word sandwich was originally a German compound noun (das Butter+Brot), which in German today still means a piece of bread spread with butter, while the Russian sandwich must be correctly translated into German as "belegtes Brot".

In addition to the topic of semantics and the use of loanwords in Russian and German, pronunciation should also be compared. If you say out loud the German and Russian equivalents of the word das Butterbrot/ sandwich, it will become obvious that these words have different stress. While the main stress in German compound nouns usually falls on the modifier (more precisely, on the first syllable of the modifier), in Russian there is a tendency to emphasize the last syllable in compound words. Let's look at a few examples:

das Bʊtterbrot – бутербрѳд;  
 der Gʌstarbeiter – гастарбѳйтер;  
 das Wʊnderkind– вундеркѳнд;  
 der Kʊrort – курѳрт;  
 die Kʊnstkammer – кунсткѳмера;  
 der Schlʌgbaum – шлагбѳум.

If you compare English and German verbs, you can find grammatical similarities in the root forms of strong verbs, for example:

англ. drink – drinks – drank – drunk, нем. trinken – trinkt – trank – getrunken (сравн. также англ. глаголы find, give, hold, spring – нем. finden, geben, halten, springen).

In both German and English - unlike Russian - in a sentence, instead of the missing semantic verb, there must be a linking verb (German sein, Russian to be, English to be), for example:

рус. Я – Михаил., нем. Ich bin Michael, англ. I'm Michael.

Learners of German have difficulty using the impersonal pronoun "es" as a formal subject. In Slavic languages, unlike German and English, verbs do not need a formal subject. They can stand alone in a sentence. Thus, the English impersonal pronoun "it" can facilitate understanding of the phenomenon of parallel grammar in the German language. Here are some examples:

рус. Холодно., нем. Es ist kalt., англ. It is cold.

рус. Идѳт дождь., нем. Es regnet., англ. It is raining.

рус. Утро., нем. Es ist Morgen., англ. It is morning.

рус. Сейчас половина третьего., нем. Es ist halb drei., англ. It is half past two.

There are also examples where Russian provides more assistance in understanding than English. Thus, the difference between the personal pronouns you, you and you in German can be detected using the Russian language:

рус. ты, вы, Вы, нем. du, ihr, Sie, англ. you, you, you.

Summarizing the above, it seems possible to conclude that with the modern formulation of the problem of teaching German as a foreign language after English, it is necessary to productively use knowledge of the English language.



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