LEARNING GERMAN AFTER MASTERING ENGLISH: ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: The article discusses the linguistic connection between English and German. The authors analyze how prior knowledge of English facilitates the acquisition of German vocabulary and grammar, focusing on the concept of "positive transfer,, The work includes practical observations from the authors' learning experience at SamSIFL.

Keywords: Linguistics, English, German, second foreign language, cognates, language learning strategies, positive transfer, multilingualism.

Many students believe that learning German is an incredibly difficult task because of its complex grammar and long words. However, for those who already speak English, the path is much smoother. English and German are like "cousins,, in the language world; they share a common history and many structural similarities. As second-year students at SamSIFL, we have noticed that our background in English acts as a powerful foundation for our German classes. In this article, we want to show that mastering English first is not just helpful, but it is a strategic advantage that allows students to progress much faster. Before starting our research, we proposed two main ideas:

1. The Lexical Hypothesis: Students will recognize a large portion of basic German words (cognates) because of their similarity to English.

2. The Structural Hypothesis: Previous experience with English sentence structure helps in grasping German logic faster than starting from zero, despite the differences in word order.

When you start learning German, you quickly notice that many words look and sound almost the same. In linguistics, these are called cognates. During our lessons, we found that we could understand simple German texts almost immediately because our "English brain,, recognized the roots of the words.

Below is a table showing how similar the basic vocabulary is:

English	***German***	***Similarity***
Hand	Hand	Identical
Finger	Finger	Identical
House	Haus	Very high
Water	Wasser	High
Apple	Apfel	High
Brother	Bruder	High

This list shows that an English speaker already knows thousands of German words without even opening a dictionary. This reduces the stress of memorizing new vocabulary from scratch.

Expert Opinions on Language Transfer

Many scientists have studied this connection. For instance, **Soxiba Zakirova (2025)** points out that there is approximately a **60% lexical overlap** between the two languages. This means that an English speaker already has a huge advantage. Another interesting point comes from recent

pedagogical studies which compare learning German after English to “switching from an automatic car to a manual one,, You already know how the road works; you just need to learn how to change the gears, which are the German cases.

During our second year, we participated in various language sessions where we compared the two languages. We noticed that English grammar, while simpler, has many hidden similarities with German. For example, the use of modal verbs like: can/können, must/müssen, follows a very similar logic. Knowledge of English gives us a “safety net,, when we do not know a German word, we can often guess it by "Germanizing" an English one. In most cases, it actually works!

Of course, it is not all easy. German has a system of four cases: Nominative, Accusative, Dative, Genitive and three genders (der, die, das). This is where English speakers often struggle because English has lost most of its case system. Also, there are **“False Friends,,** words that look the same but mean different things. For example: The German word **“Gift,,** means poison not a present. The German word **“Hell,,** means light or bright, not a place of fire. We must be careful not to rely too much on English logic where the two languages diverge.

In conclusion, our experience and research show that English is the best “bridge,, to German. Knowledge of English provides a shortcut through the vocabulary and helps students understand the logic of Germanic grammar. While the German case system requires extra focus, the overall process is much faster for us than for those who do not speak English. We believe that bilingualism gives students a significant “head start,, in their academic journey.

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