

Mastering



German

Second edition

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Founding Editor



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First edition 1982

Second edition 1995

Published by MACMILLAN PRESS LTD

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS and London

Companies and representatives throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-61432-7 ISBN 978-1-349-24111-8 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-24111-8

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
04 03 02 01 00 99 98 97 96 95

Acknowledgements

The author and publishers would like to thank the following for the use of photographs: J. Allan Cash Ltd, pages 154, 175; Photobank, pages 165, 184, 185, 197; Helen Tyler, pages 2, 14, 37, 49, 59, 68, 70, 132; Zefa, pages 25, 93, 94, 143.

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Introduction: how to use this book

Learning aim

The aim of *Mastering German* is to enable you to acquire the ability to take part in everyday communication with native speakers of German. This means being able to take part in the following two sorts of language exchange:

- You need to be able to ‘survive’ in the language, and that means being able to take part in transactions which are necessary for your health and comfort. This includes such things as shopping, ordering meals, reserving rooms in hotels and finding your way around by public transport.
- The other sort of language which you need is the language for making social contact with speakers of German. The social language is particularly important if you are likely to meet German speakers at home or abroad and spend some time with them in a social setting. Businessmen and women, in particular, may find this sort of language of great use for helping to create a suitable social atmosphere in which business can be done.

The materials

Mastering German consists of a book and accompanying recordings. If you are beginning the study of German, you will find the recordings of particular use in helping you to acquire good pronunciation, intonation and stress. A guide to pronunciation is included in the book. If you already have some mastery of the pronunciation of German you will still find that the dialogues, using native speakers, will help you to speak not only with clarity, but with a good range of expression.

How to find your way about the book

Each chapter aims to help you with certain topics; these are listed on the contents page. If you wish to 'cash in' your study as soon as possible you should concentrate first on mastering these topics. The most important parts of the book for you are the dialogues, the notes on the dialogues, the vocabulary and the structures to learn, Section A of the exercises and the 'spontaneous' dialogues – the last exercise in each chapter. These are the communicative parts of the book, and will help you learn how to make an arrangement or meet somebody, how to request a service, how to make a suggestion or proposal, etc.

If you wish to acquire a grasp of German grammar, you should pay particular attention to the second section of the structural explanations in each chapter. This takes points of grammar arising in the dialogues, and explains them fully, so you are not left wondering how a structure works. A list of what grammar is explained in each chapter appears in the Grammatical summary at the back of the book, where you can also expand your grammatical knowledge.

Language for speaking and language for understanding

The main emphasis in this book is on the skills of speaking and understanding. Some parts of the language presented will consist of things you will want to say, and others will consist of things you want to *understand*. You will have a good idea of those things you are most likely to want to say, and should consequently concentrate on practising these parts of the language aloud. Do remember, however, that the better you become at speaking the language, the freer natives will feel in replying to you!

In choosing the topics to include in this book, the proposals of the Threshold Level for Language Learning, published by the Council of Europe, have provided a most useful point of reference.

How to get the best out of Mastering German

- 1 The following procedure is recommended for studying the dialogues
 - (a) Look at the Contents list and study the *topic* of a chapter to see how it sets out to teach you to use German. This will inform you of what you should be able to do by the time you have got to the end of the chapter, and this in turn will help you to evaluate your own progress.
 - (b) Read through the German text of the dialogue and listen to it simultaneously on the recording. Try to work out the meaning of each sentence as it occurs. Very often the common linguistic ancestry of

English and German will help you to find out the meaning. These similarities between English and German will sometimes be more apparent when looking at the spelling of words, and sometimes when listening to the way they are spoken. When you have predicted the meaning as far as you can, refer to the translation at the back of the book, so as to be quite sure that you understand the dialogue thoroughly before proceeding.

- (c) If you are working with the book alone, work out the pronunciation of the sentences in the dialogue, using the pronunciation guide. If you are working with the recordings, speak the dialogue quietly while listening. By degrees increase the volume of your own voice, and decrease the volume of the recording. After two or three times, it should be possible to pronounce the dialogue accurately and with good expression. When you are beginning to establish a correct pronunciation of the sentences, it will probably help to stop the recording after each sentence, and to repeat it aloud several times before continuing to the next sentence.

2 For students with little language learning experience

- (a) Having worked through the dialogues in the way described above, go on to the section labelled Structures to learn. With the help of the pronunciation guide, speak the sentences aloud, noting carefully which uses of the language they help you to master.
- (b) It is probably best at this stage to omit the study of the grammatical section, and go straight to Section A of the exercises. Do the exercises as best you can without referring to the answers at the back of the book. Only when you have really thought about what you want to say, and tried hard to get it right, should you check with the answers.
- (c) 'Spontaneous' dialogues are included at the end of every chapter. These are an introduction to German spoken at a natural pace and without a script. The intention is to practise understanding the *gist* of a conversation without concentrating on individual structures. This is very much like the situation you will find yourself in abroad, when understanding the sense of a conversation is the key to survival. Read the questions *first* to get an idea of the situation and then listen to the dialogue as many times as you like. There are answers at the back of the book.
- (d) When you have worked through the whole book in this way, return to Chapter 1, and go through the book again as indicated below.

3 Intermediate students

If you have already mastered the rudiments of German, perhaps at school, but you have now become a bit 'rusty' on a lot of it, you should work first through the dialogues as indicated above, and run through the Structures to learn and the communicative exercises as indicated for beginners. In this way, you will be able to put to practical use elements of the language which you may previously have learned more formally and which was not based on immediately relevant situations.

You should then proceed directly to the grammar section, in order to consolidate what you have learned.

Then go carefully through the structural exercises (Section B) based on the grammar section, checking answers with the answer key at the back of the book. You will sometimes need to refer to the Grammatical Summary at the back of the book as well as the section in the chapter.

Vocabulary learning

Each chapter contains lists of the most important words which occur in the chapter. It is not a complete list of all the new words which occur, since these are given by the translation of the dialogues. The word list gives a basic vocabulary which you should be able to use actively.

Here are some suggestions, intended to help you learn new vocabulary items:

- 1 Cover up the English translation, and try to use your knowledge of German to guess the meaning of the German word. Then check whether you are right or wrong by uncovering the English version. Continue in this way until you can recognise all the new words.
- 2 Then go on to the more difficult way of learning vocabulary, and cover up the German version and try to remember the equivalent for each word. You should try to remember whether nouns are masculine, feminine or neuter, and how they make their plurals. If possible, work with a friend who can ask you the English words and check whether you have succeeded in remembering the German equivalent.

Revision tests

Chapter 10 and Chapter 20 consist of tests on the earlier chapters in the book and are intended to help you gauge your own progress.

The German alphabet

The German alphabet coincides with the English alphabet, except in one case. The symbol 'ß' is the equivalent of 'ss'. The rule concerning the use of 'ß' and 'ss' is a complicated one, and may safely be left until a more advanced stage in learning German. You simply need to know that the two symbols are pronounced identically. If you wish to learn the rule for using 'ß', you should consult *Hammer's German Grammar and Usage* (see Bibliography).

Alles Gute!!
All the best!!