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NUMBERS IN GERMAN AND ENGLISH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract. Numbers are a fundamental aspect of language and communication, thereby taking an important part in the daily life of everyone, all educational settings, and professional areas. German and English, which are two closely related members of the Germanic language family, exhibit certain similarities regarding numbers, but at the same time, they are considerably different concerning number structure and usage. The study intends to draw a parallel between the numerical systems of German and English by analyzing the aspects of number composition, word order, grammatical behavior, and everyday contexts like dates and time expressions. The investigation brings out striking distinctions such as the inverted arrangement of compound figures in German and the relatively effortless numerical expressions in English. Looking through the learner's lens, the research indicates the difference in language learning and cognitive processing caused by these factors. In general, the comparison concludes that numerical systems are indicative of vast linguistic phenomena and reflect the same learning difficulties in both languages.

Key words: German language, English language, numbers, numerical structure, language comparison

Introduction

All human languages are characterized by the use of numbers, which serve to indicate quantity, rank, time, and measurement. Numbers are the very backbone of communication in daily life and without them, it would be hard to communicate effectively. Nevertheless, the ways in which different languages express and apply numerals vary. German and English are members of the same Germanic language family, which is a major reason for their many similarities in vocabulary and grammar. Still, learners notice the differences very often, especially when they have to use numbers in these two languages.

The present paper will look at the role of numbers in German and English and then relate their linguistic properties. The aspects of number formation, compound numbers, ordinal numbers, and grammatical behavior will be dealt with in detail. By probing into these features, the article intends to illustrate why English numbers are typically regarded as easier to master, while German numbers are more challenging to the learners.

1. Basic Number Formation

Both the German and English languages have different terms for their basic numbers ranging from one to twelve:

Numbers	English	German
1	one	eins
2	two	zwei
3	three	drei
4	four	vier
5	five	fünf

6	six	sechs
7	seven	sieben
8	eight	acht
9	nine	neun
10	ten	zehn
11	eleven	elf
12	twelve	zwölf

The numbers from 13 to 19 show a clear pattern in their formation. In English, the suffix -teen is added to the base number (thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen), while German takes the -zehn route (dreizehn, vierzehn, and sechzehn). What is also interesting is that some German numbers have their spelling changed: sechzehn (rather than six plus ten) and siebzehn (rather than seven plus ten), which may perplex the learners.This indicates that even though English becomes predictable at an earlier stage, German still has small irregularities requiring one to memorize and pay attention to details. Besides, the phonetics of German numbers is normally more straightforward, while the numbers in English have irregular stressing patterns, especially in the cases of thirteen and fifteen.

2. Compound Numbers and Word Order

Above twenty, the difference between German and English regarding compound numbers is one of the most striking. English has a plain and simple rule whereby the tens come before the units, for instance, twenty-one or thirty-five. This pattern is logical and easy to follow.

German, on the other hand, goes the opposite way. It first states the unit, then und (and), and finally the ten, for instance, einundzwanzig (one and twenty). This way requires learners to understand the value of the full number only after processing it and might be hard in listening and speaking situations. Thus, the German compound numbers are mentally more demanding.

This inversion causes a load on learners' cognitive processing, primarily in their listening comprehension. Listeners, for instance, have to wait until the last digit to grasp the number completely, and this might even result in misunderstandment if the speech is quick. Conversely, the English system gives instant recognition as soon as the tens are heard.

3. Ordinal Numbers

The use of ordinal numbers emphasizes the contrasts in grammar and syntax.

English: first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth

German: erste, zweite, dritte, vierte, fünfte, sechste, siebte, achte, neunte, zehnte

Green states that English attaches the suffix -th to the cardinal number in order to form ordinals, with the exception of the irregular forms of first, second, and third. German ordinals are grammatically adjectives and agree with the gender, case, and number. For instance:

der erste Tag (masculine, nominative)

die erste Stunde (feminine, nominative)

das erste Buch (neuter, nominative)

The agreement makes the language more complicated and increases the learning difficulty compared to English.

4. Grammatical Behavior of Numbers

The majority of English numerical expressions are fixed forms without a grammatical context that would alter their form, and they are also usually used in front of nouns without 'agreeing' with them.

To illustrate, in German, numbers can change their forms depending on the situation:

for instance, the number one may function as a determiner, modifying the noun according to the case (einen Mann, eine Frau)

Numbered words are written with a capital first letter when they are used as nouns (die Eins, die Zwei)

In some idiomatic expressions, plural forms may occur.

All of these features mean that German learners have to combine their understanding of adjective declension and case, which leads to increased cognitive and grammatical complexity when compared to English.

5. Practical Use: Dates, Time, and Money

Numbers are often present in day-to-day situations, for instance, dates, time intervals, and currency values.

Dates:

English: February 5th, 2024

German: der fünfte Februar zweitausendvierundzwanzig

Time:

English: six-thirty

German: halb sieben (“half to seven”)

Money:

English: $45.50 → forty-five dollars and fifty cents

German: 45,50 € → fünfundvierzig Euro fünfzig

The mentioned instances demonstrate the overlapping of language and culture. German numbering frequently illustrates an old counting method with reversed order, while the English language points out a linear processing.

6. Learning Difficulty and Pedagogical Implications

Considering the second-language learner's viewpoint, the numbers of the English language are mostly easy to access because of their linear order, their being hardly inflected grammatically, and their having predictable patterns . German numbers on the other hand, though systematic, require more effort in terms of the structure, the agreement and the spelling rules.

However, teachers can still use the following strategies:

Introduce numbers in small groups (1-20, 21-50)

Use visual aids (tables, charts) for compound numbers

Practice oral exercises to improve listening comprehension

Emphasize grammatical agreements with ordinals

Incorporate practical examples (dates, money, time)

These strategies can lower the mental effort and at the same time facilitate the learners' mastering of the German number systems.

Conclusion

To sum up, German and English, despite their common historical roots, have different numerical systems in terms of structure and usage. The numbers in English are usually easier because of the fixed word order and little grammatical variation. The situation is quite the opposite with German numbers, as they are constructed in reverse order, involve grammatical agreement, and in addition are contextually dependent, thus making the whole process of learning more complicated. If to take the learner's perspective, these differences are the reason for the higher cognitive load required for German numerical expressions. All in all, the comparison of numbers in German and English languages shows that even the most basic linguistic elements can reveal the underlying structural differences between languages.

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