



THE USAGE OF GERMAN GRAMMAR TENSES IN TEXT

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Abstract:

The article discusses different point of view on the differences between English and German grammar in text, features of two languages,

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Introduction

There are three inherent temporal divisions in reality: present, past, and future. In English, the term time is used, but in German, the term Zeit is used. However, in different languages, the grammatical reflections of the three time dimensions varies, as does the quantity of these grammatical reflections. The grammatical term tense is used in English, Tempus (Aktionszeit) is used in German. The tenses are used to describe not just the past, present, and future time dimensions, but also the progress or completion of an event, the repetition of an event, simultaneity, and the sequence of occurrences. Although the simple past tense (Imperfekt) and the present perfect tense (Perfekt) are used to communicate about past occurrences in both English and German, there are some significant distinctions in how each language employs these tenses. See the links below for more information on the structure and syntax of these tenses. We'll go through when and how to utilize each past tense in German in this section. We'll start with the "simple past" because it's straightforward. It's called "simple" because it's a one-word tense (hatte, ging, sprach, machte) rather than a compound like the present perfect (hat gehabt, ist gegangen, habe gesprochen, haben gemacht). To be precise and technical, the Imperfekt or "narrative past" tense refers to a past event that is not yet entirely accomplished (Latin perfect), but I've never seen how this applies to its practical use in German. However, it's sometimes helpful to think of the "narrative past" as a term for a set of related occurrences in the past, i.e., a story. This is in contrast to the present perfect, which is used to represent individual events in the past (technically). The simple past, narrative past, or imperfect tense, which is seen mostly in books and newspapers, is sometimes described as the more "formal" of the two primary past tenses in German. It is used less in speech and more in print/writing. With a few notable exceptions, it is therefore more vital for the average learner to recognize and read the simple past than it is to utilize it. (Helping





verbs such as *haben*, *sein*, *werden*, the modal verbs, and a few others, whose simple past tense forms are frequently employed in conversation as well as written German, are examples of such exceptions.) There are various English counterparts to the German simple past tense. Depending on the context, a statement like "er spielte Golf" might be translated as "he was playing golf," "he used to play golf," "he played golf," or "he did play golf." In general, the less the simple past is used in conversation the further south you travel in German Europe. "Ich bin in London gewesen," rather than "Ich war in London," is more common in Bavaria and Austria. ("I was in London," says the narrator.) They see the simple past as more distant and frigid than the flawless present, but you shouldn't get too caught up in such subtleties. Both are right, and most Germans are ecstatic when a foreigner can communicate in their language at all. The present perfect is a two-word compound tense made up of an auxiliary (helping) verb and the past participle. It gets its name from the fact that the auxiliary verb is employed in the "present" tense, as well as the term "perfect," which is Latin for "done/completed," as we explained earlier. (The past perfect [pluperfect, Plusquamperfekt] employs the auxiliary verb's simple past tense.) Because of its major use in conversational, spoken German, this German past tense form is sometimes known as the "conversational past."

Because the present perfect, also known as the conversational past, is frequently employed in spoken German, it's crucial to understand how it's constructed and used. The present perfect is not used exclusively in spoken German, just as the simple past is not used exclusively in print/writing. In newspapers and novels, the present perfect (and past perfect) are also used, but not as frequently as the simple past. The German present perfect is used to signify that "something is finished at the time of speaking" or that the results of a completed past event "carry into the present," according to most grammar texts. That's essential to know, but it's more necessary to understand some of the key differences between German and English present perfect usage.

If you wish to say in German, "I used to live in Munich," for example, you can say, "Ich habe in München gewohnt." - a finished event (you no longer live in Munich). On the other hand, because you're talking about a current event, you can't use the perfect tense (or any past tense) when you say, "I've lived/have been living in Munich for ten years" (you are still living in Munich). In this case, German uses the present tense (with *schon seit*): "Ich wohne schon seit zehn Jahren in München," or "I have lived in Munich for 10 years." (This is a common grammatical error made by Germans when translating from German to English.)

English speakers should also know that a German present perfect phrase like "er hat Geige gespielt" can be translated into English as "he has played (the) violin," "he used



to play (the) violin," "he played (the) violin," "he was playing (the) violin," or even "he did play (the) violin," depending on the context. In fact, it would be more accurate to translate a line like "Beethoven hat nur eine Oper komponiert" into the English simple past, "Beethoven composed just one opera," than than the English present perfect, "Beethoven created only one opera." (The latter implies, mistakenly, that Beethoven is still alive and writing.)

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