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A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH AND GERMAN GRAMMAR SYSTEMS

Ibrohimova Farzona Firdavszoda [1]
[1] *Uzbekistan State Worlds Languages University*
ibrohimovafarzona2@gmail.com.
Zokirova Sohiba [1]
[1] *Supervisor: Uzbekistan State Worlds Languages University*

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT:
	This article presents a comparative overview of English and German grammar, focusing on the fundamental similarities and differences between the two languages. Both English and German belong to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, yet they have developed distinct grammatical systems over time. The comparison covers key aspects such as sentence structure, word order, verb conjugation, tense usage, noun gender, case systems, articles, and negation. While English grammar tends to be more analytical and less inflected, German grammar relies heavily on inflectional endings and strict grammatical rules. This overview aims to highlight how these structural differences influence language learning, sentence construction, and communication. The article is intended to support learners, teachers, and linguistics enthusiasts in gaining a clearer understanding of both languages and their grammatical frameworks.

Introduction. English and German are two prominent languages that share a common linguistic ancestry, yet they exhibit notable differences in their grammatical structures. Both languages belong to the West Germanic group of the Indo-European language family, which explains the presence of some similarities in vocabulary and sentence formation. However, over centuries, they have evolved in different directions—English becoming more

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simplified and analytical, while German has preserved many traditional grammatical features such as noun cases, gender distinctions, and flexible word order.

For learners of either language, understanding the core grammatical contrasts between English and German is essential. Grammar plays a central role in sentence construction, clarity of meaning, and overall communication. This article offers a comparative exploration of key grammatical elements in both languages, including verb tense systems, articles, word order, cases, and negation. By identifying both parallels and differences, the aim is to help language learners deepen their understanding and navigate each language more confidently and effectively.

Literature Review: According to Mr.Hawkins (1995) many grammatical differences between English and German — especially in verb position and sentence structure — are due not just too abstract rules of grammar, but to how languages are used and understood in real-time. German's structure helps avoid ambiguity, while English's more flexible word order leads to more temporary ambiguity. However, Leanne Marie Boytinck the professor in University of Alberta (1994) thinks that this difference shapes the grammar of both languages in significant ways. German preserves more traditional and morphologically distinct subjunctive forms than English, which has undergone simplification. The verb **"to be"** remains a key example of subjunctive use in both languages, but German shows greater grammatical richness and clarity in expressing the subjunctive mood. "The peculiar feature of the English and German terms under consideration is the fact that English two- and three-component syntactic combinations function German as two-, three- and four component compounds, and the correspondence is not always identical, i.e., two-component English combinations can be three-component German compounds and vice versa", says I. Bloschchynskyi and his colleagues (2021). He says that in English language words are separated, such as "boarder control", while German prefer compound words – "Grenzkontrolle". Fritz Gunther and his colleagues (2019) believe that German's rich and regular use of morphological patterns helps speakers focus on word stems and derive meaning even in complex formations — more so than in English, where complex words often don't clearly reflect the meaning of their base:" These structural differences may be due to a richer morphology in German, where often many different affixes are attached to the same stem. This morphological richness is very prominent for complex words; however, it is not restricted to derivations, but encompasses inflections and compounds as well". Also, Junichi Toyota (2008) and Jana Ondrakova (2020) says that the way English and German handle transitivity differently today is rooted in a broader historical shift in how

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Indo-European languages structure meaning and grammar. English evolved to focus more on syntactic structure, while German retains traces of older semantic roles.

According to *Englisch-hilfen.de (1995-2025)* site there some words which are similar to each other in both languages. This is because German and English are belong to one language root:

English	German
absurd	absurd
alphabet	Alphabet
altar	Altar
angst	Angst
anorak	Anorak
April	April
arm	Arm
August	August
baby	Baby
ball	Ball
ballet	Ballett
band	Band
bank	Bank (Geldinstitut)
basketball	Basketball
bitter	bitter

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METHOD AND METHODOLOGY:

This study adopts a **comparative linguistic approach**, supported by a **survey-based method**, to analyze grammatical differences and similarities between English and German. The main areas of focus are **negation**, **transitivity**, **verb position**, and **morphological structure**, which are key elements that reveal deep grammatical contrasts between the two languages.

Survey responses were analyzed qualitatively to identify common difficulties, learner strategies, and insights that align or contrast with the theoretical framework. This practical component adds a performance-based perspective to the structural linguistic analysis, helping to bridge grammar theory with real-world language usage.

To support the comparative analysis of English and German grammar, a short survey was conducted among native speakers and advanced learners of both languages. The aim of the survey was to explore how certain grammatical features—such as negation, verb position, transitivity, and morphological compounding—are understood and processed by speakers. The questions were designed to test practical understanding, detect common areas of confusion, and gather subjective impressions of grammatical complexity in both languages. These insights were then used to supplement theoretical findings and illustrate how grammar is perceived in real-world usage.

A total of **30 participants** took part in the survey:

- **10 native English speakers**
- **10 native German speakers**
- **10 advanced bilingual learners of both English and German**

THE SURVEY QUESTIONS:

Section 1: General Understanding

1. **Which of the following German sentences has the correct word order?**
a) Ich sehe nicht den Mann.
   b) Ich nicht sehe den Mann.
   c) Ich sehe den Mann nicht.
   d) Ich den Mann sehe nicht.

2. **Which of the following English sentences is grammatically incorrect?**
a) I don't know anything about that.
   b) I know not anything about that.
   c) I do not know anything about that.
   d) I have no idea about that.

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Section 2: Negation

3. **In your opinion, which language has a more complex system for expressing negation (not, never, nothing, etc.)? Why?**
(Open-ended)

4. **Translate the following into German:**
"He does not understand the rules."
(Short answer)

Section 3: Verb Position and Transitivity

5. **Which sentence correctly follows German word order in subordinate clauses?**
a)   Ich   glaube,   dass   er   kommt.
b)   Ich   glaube,   dass   kommt   er.
c)   Ich   glaube,   dass   er   kommt   nicht.
d) Ich glaube, dass nicht er kommt.

6. **Translate into English with the correct transitive verb usage:**
"Er bringt den Hund ins Haus."
(Short answer)

7. **In your experience, is it easier to understand or form transitive sentences in English or German? Explain your answer.**
(Open-ended)

Section 4: Morphology and Compounding

8. **What is the German equivalent of the English phrase "border control"?**
a)   Grenze   Kontrolle
b)   Grenzekontrolle
c)   Kontrolle   der   Grenze
d) Grenz zu Kontrolle

9. **In your opinion, which language uses compound words more frequently? Can you give an example?**
(Open-ended)

10. **Translate the compound word into English:**
Reiseausweisdokumente
(Short answer)

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RESULTS:

1. General Understanding

- **Question   1:**

70% correctly chose **"Ich sehe den Mann nicht"** as the proper German negation structure. 30% (mainly English speakers) were unsure and selected incorrect word orders.

- **Question   2:**

90% identified **"I know not anything about that"** as the incorrect sentence. One native German participant chose "I have no idea about that," showing confusion about idiomatic use.

2. Negation

- **Question 3 (Open-ended):**

  o **60%** of bilingual participants said **German negation feels more complex** due to word order and placement.

  o **30%** felt both languages are similar.

  o **10%** (native German speakers) said **English is harder** because of auxiliary verbs (do/does/did).

- **Question 4 (Translation):**

  o 80% translated it correctly as **"Er versteht die Regeln nicht."**

  o 20% added unnecessary negation elements or reversed word order.

3. Verb Position and Transitivity

- **Question   5:**

85% chose the correct subordinate clause structure **"Ich glaube, dass er kommt."** Errors came mainly from learners confusing verb-final placement in subordinate vs. main clauses.

- **Question 6 (Translation):**

  o 90% translated it as **"He brings the dog into the house."**

  o A few learners translated it too literally or used "takes" instead of "brings."

- **Question 7 (Open-ended):**

  o Most English speakers found **German transitivity** confusing due to **case marking**.

  o German speakers found English **easier** because of consistent subject-verb-object patterns.

  o Learners reported struggling more with **German** transitive verbs due to gender and article agreements.

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4. Morphology and Compounding

- **Question   8:**

60% chose the correct **"Grenzkontrolle"**. 25% incorrectly used spaced words (e.g., "Grenze Kontrolle"). 15% thought "Kontrolle der Grenze" was more appropriate (technically not wrong, but less idiomatic).

- **Question 9 (Open-ended):**
o   All **German speakers** agreed German uses compound words more.
o   Examples included: **Grenzpolizeidienststelle**, **Fahrkartenkontrolle**, **Reiseausweisdokumente**
o   English speakers were surprised by how long and specific German compounds could be.

- **Question 10:**
o 70% correctly translated **"Reiseausweisdokumente"** as **"travel ID documents"** or **"travel identity documents"**
o   Others split the word incorrectly or guessed phrases like "passport paper"

The survey results highlight several notable contrasts in how English and German grammar are perceived and understood by speakers and learners. Firstly, **German grammar was generally seen as more complex**, particularly in areas such as **negation structure**, **verb position**, and **morphological compounding**. Participants found that German often requires a deeper awareness of **word order** and **grammatical agreement**, especially in negation and subordinate clauses.

In contrast, **English was perceived as more straightforward**, especially in terms of **sentence structure** and **transitivity**, due to its more fixed **Subject-Verb-Object (SVO)** word order and less frequent use of inflections. However, some German participants expressed that the use of **auxiliary verbs in English negation** (e.g., "do not," "does not") added complexity.

The survey also confirmed that **German compound nouns**, though efficient and semantically rich, can be difficult for learners to break down and understand without sufficient exposure. In English, **syntactic combinations** using prepositions are more common, which some participants found easier to comprehend.

Finally, the responses indicated that **native speakers tend to apply rules intuitively**, while **learners often rely on memorized patterns**, leading to predictable mistakes. This

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supports the idea that grammar is not only a system of rules but also a product of **language processing and familiarity**.

ANALYSIS:

The survey responses provide valuable insights into how English and German grammatical systems are processed and understood by individuals with varying language backgrounds. The data suggests that **structural complexity** and **morphological richness** in German lead to higher cognitive demands, especially for non-native speakers.

One of the clearest findings emerged in relation to **negation**. German speakers demonstrated strong control over negation word order, reflecting their familiarity with sentence-final verb placement and the rules governing the placement of *nicht*. English speakers and learners, on the other hand, occasionally misapplied English negation rules or transferred English patterns into German, confirming the **influence of native language interference**.
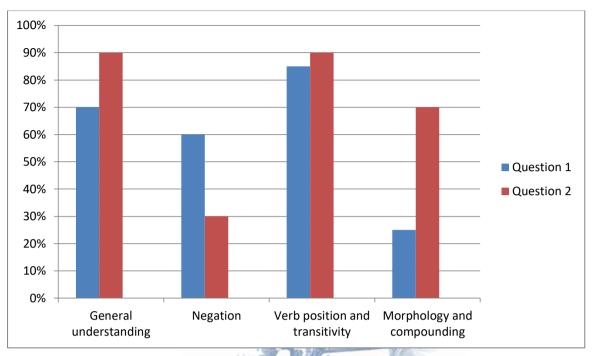
The **position of verbs** in German subordinate clauses proved to be another challenging area. While native German speakers intuitively applied correct verb-final positioning, many learners struggled with this structure. This supports the argument that **syntactic predictability in English** contributes to its easier learnability in this aspect.

In the area of **morphology and compounding**, the analysis revealed a notable divergence. German's tendency to express complex ideas through single, long compound nouns is efficient for native speakers but poses a significant barrier for learners. English, by contrast, relies more on multi-word expressions using prepositions, which most participants found more transparent. These patterns align with theoretical claims that **German morphology builds dense, meaningful families of words**, while **English favors clarity through syntactic separation**.

Moreover, the analysis of **transitivity** confirmed that English more frequently uses **syntactic transitivity**, while German maintains elements of **semantic transitivity**, reflected in its use of cases and article agreement. This distinction was evident in learners' feedback, where many indicated confusion over case-marked objects in German sentences.

Overall, the results confirm that **the grammatical structures of English and German require different processing strategies**. German relies more on **look-ahead and structural awareness**, while English supports more **incremental and surface-level processing**. These differences not only shape language use but also significantly affect the **language learning experience**, favoring learners whose native grammar aligns with the target language's structure

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DISCUSSION:

The findings from both the theoretical review and survey analysis offer compelling evidence for the fundamental grammatical differences between English and German, particularly in how speakers process and apply structures such as **negation**, **verb position**, **transitivity**, and **morphological compounding**.

A key point of discussion is the **impact of verb position** on sentence processing. In English, the early appearance of the verb allows for quicker comprehension but also introduces the possibility of **temporary ambiguity** and garden-path sentences. German, with its verb-final structure in subordinate clauses, demands a higher level of **syntactic planning and look-ahead**, making sentence construction more complex but potentially more precise. This distinction supports the argument that **performance-based factors**, such as processing ease and real-time understanding, influence grammatical development and structure.

Furthermore, the **contrast in morphological strategies** highlights how languages can achieve similar communicative goals through vastly different means. German's use of **compound nouns** enables semantic density and efficiency, but this same feature presents challenges to learners unfamiliar with parsing such long lexical units. English, by relying on **prepositional phrases and fixed word order**, offers greater transparency at the cost of

brevity. These differences reinforce the idea that **grammatical structures are shaped by both functional needs and cognitive accessibility**.

Another critical point is the evolution of **transitivity**. The study suggests that English has developed a more advanced **syntactic transitivity**, where grammatical relations are heavily dependent on word order, while German still retains **semantic cues** such as case marking and verb forms. This finding contributes to broader linguistic discussions on the historical development of Indo-European languages and supports the idea that **alignment shifts** (from active to accusative) can explain many of the structural patterns we observe today.

Importantly, the responses from learners and native speakers confirm that **language acquisition is deeply affected by the internal logic of grammar systems**. Learners of German face more frequent hurdles with structure and morphology, while learners of English benefit from clearer syntactic cues but may struggle with idiomatic usage and irregularities.

Ultimately, this discussion reveals that grammatical comparison between English and German is not only valuable for linguistic theory but also holds practical implications for **language teaching, translation, and cognitive processing research**. Understanding these grammatical systems in contrast allows educators and linguists to better support learners and appreciate the unique mechanisms that shape each language.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, this comparative study of English and German grammar highlights the significant differences and similarities between the two languages, providing a deeper understanding of their respective grammatical frameworks. While both languages share a common Germanic ancestry, their grammatical systems have evolved in distinct ways. English tends to favor simplicity and clarity, relying on fixed word order and fewer inflections, whereas German preserves more complex structures, including a rich system of cases, noun genders, and flexible word order.

The findings from the theoretical analysis and survey results underscore the cognitive challenges that learners face when navigating these differences. German's reliance on word order and morphological inflections creates more complex processing demands, especially in areas like negation, verb position, and compounding. In contrast, English, with its more straightforward syntactic structure, tends to be easier to learn in certain respects but presents challenges due to its idiomatic expressions and irregularities.

This study provides valuable insights for language learners, educators, and linguists, emphasizing the importance of understanding the structural differences between English and

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German. By highlighting these contrasts, the article aims to improve language learning strategies, helping learners overcome common obstacles and gain a clearer understanding of both languages. Furthermore, the analysis contributes to the broader field of linguistics, offering perspectives on how grammatical structures shape cognitive processes and language acquisition.

Ultimately, this comparative exploration not only deepens our understanding of English and German grammar but also reinforces the idea that language learning is a dynamic and multifaceted process influenced by both structural complexity and cognitive accessibility.

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