

GRAMMAR A1 EINHEIT 3

The first point of grammar you will deal with in this unit are the articles ó definite and indefinite (*bestimmter und unbestimmter Artikel*). This goes right to the heart of what is probably the biggest difference between German and English. This difference is ultimately connected to many, if not most, mistakes.

In English, it is easy to differentiate between masculine, feminine, and neuter. In German, it is not so simple. Take your face for example. Whether you are a boy or a girl and no matter what you look like, your ear is neuter, your nose is feminine, and your mouth is masculine. As you learn more German, you will come to see all the different changes you have to make to the modifiers of nouns based partly on the gender of the noun. When you learn a noun, you must also learn its gender. You do this by memorizing the definite article associated with the noun. That tells us if the noun is masculine, feminine, or neuter. The definite articles (which, by the way, mean ötheö) are *der* (masculine), *die* (feminine), and *das* (neuter). If we go back to the öfaceö words mentioned above, the German equivalents are: *das Ohr* (ear), *die Nase* (nose), and *der Mund* (mouth). The vocabulary lists also show you how to form the plural of the noun. This will be covered in the next unit. For now, it is worth noting that the plural of all nouns is *die*.

If you want to say something is nice or pretty, you would say, “... *ist schön*.” In order to say it correctly, you would have to know the definite article or gender of the noun.

Consider:

The evening is nice.	<i>Der Abend ist schön.</i>
The picture is nice.	<i>Das Bild ist schön.</i>
The language is nice.	<i>Die Sprache ist schön.</i>

This leads right to the next point of grammar. It's one in which you could easily make a mistake if you don't know the gender of the noun you are using. The indefinite article öoneö in English is *ein* in German. However, when the noun *ein* modifies a *die* word (or feminine), you must add an *e* to *ein*. For example,

<i>das Bild</i>	<i>Ein Bild hängt an der Wand.</i>	A picture is hanging on the wall.
<i>der Herr</i>	<i>Ein Herr liest.</i>	A (gentle)man is reading.
<i>die Frau</i>	<i>Eine Frau mag Tennis.</i>	A (one) woman likes tennis.

In all the examples above the noun modified by the indefinite article *ein* is the subject of the sentence. In other words, it is in the nominative (*Nominativ*) case. Different cases require different endings. You will have no idea what ending to choose if you don't know the gender (*der*, *die*, or *das*) of the word.

The next point of grammar discussed in this unit is the negation using a form of *kein*.

Any time you want to negate just a noun in a sentence you do so by preceding the noun with the correct form of *kein* (no, not any). Whatever ending *ein* would get in any given situation *kein* takes the same ending. If you wanted to say, "There is no picture hanging on the wall," you would say, *Kein Bild hängt an der Wand*. If you wanted to say, "No woman likes tennis," you would say, *Keine Frau mag Tennis*. Please keep in mind that you would often translate *kein* as "not any" as opposed to "no". *Ich kenne keine Lieder* translates much better as, "I don't know any songs" instead of "I know no songs."

In English, we ask yes/no questions by starting the sentence or question with a verb, e.g.,

Are you fifteen? Do you collect pencils? Does she live in Switzerland?

In German, we do the same thing. We ask a yes/no question by beginning the sentence with the verb. The important thing to remember, however, is the fact that there are no helping verbs in the present tense in German. Consequently, the above sentences are:

Bist du fünfzehn? Sammelst du Bleistifte? Wohnt sie in der Schweiz?

The final point of grammar covered in this unit is really just a vocabulary word "was" (what). For the most part it is used exactly like its English equivalent.

<i>Was lernst du?</i>	What are you studying?
<i>Was macht er?</i>	What is he doing?
<i>Was sucht sie?</i>	What is she looking for?

Please remember that *was* is a pronoun and should never precede a noun. Unfortunately, we do that quite frequently in English, e.g., "What film do you want to see?" or "What time is it?" That never happens in German. *Was* can never be followed by a noun. When it is used as a question word it is always followed by a verb. (Except *Was für ein* which means, "what kind of".)

