

Can you give ten good reasons for learning German?" I was asked recently in an interview. "You want ten?" I replied, quite shocked, "Does it have to be that many? I'd be happy if I could give you just three!" Mind you, there are more than 100 million people who have grown up with German, if you count those living in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the neighbouring regions. So, we're not exactly a tiny language community. Quite the opposite: within Europe, German is the language with the most native speakers, even more than English or French. But outside Europe things look slightly different. In the list of universal languages German ranks behind English, Chinese and Hindi, but it's still in the first twelve, clearly ahead of Japanese, Korean and Finnish. Sorry, I should say "Finish", because that's the end of my list.

When students in other countries, such as Spain or France, have to choose between German and another foreign language, they often opt for the other one. German is not exactly the most popular language. And when you ask why this is, the response is often that German is not particularly

easy. Too many cases, too many genders, too many rules, too many exceptions. That puts people off! But that should in fact be an especially good reason for learning German. Who wants to do something that's easy? After all, anyone can do easy things. But if you have a command of German, you can do something special, something that not everyone can do – not even every German. Among languages English is the Volkswagen, whereas German is the Rolls Royce.

Another of the commonest preconceptions about German maintains that it doesn't have a very attractive sound. It's by no means as melodious as French, not as soft as English, not as lively as Italian, not as melancholy as Russian and not as aggressive as Japanese. German, they say, sounds more like a cement mixer, or like a gaggle of croaky geese that's just raced into a tree in a stolen cement mixer. But anyone who devotes a little more attention to the German language will perceive a wonderful, powerful beauty in the sonorous interplay of the syllables. And, as with every language, it's a matter of who is speaking it, and how. It's not what you say, but how you say it. That's also a very good reason why German was the leading language of music for a long time. From Johann Sebastian Bach to Johann Strauss: German was, and still is, one of the most important languages

on the world's opera and concert stages. German is unavoidable if you happen to be studying classical singing. But pop music can be just as good a reason for learning German. Music was the reason I learnt French, so it can work the other way round as well.

Good reasons for learning German? The best way to find out is to ask people who have embarked on the hazardous enterprise of doing a German course. And they can be found all around the globe: in France, in Spain, in Russia, in Poland, in the Netherlands, in Denmark, in Chile, in Argentina, in Africa, in China, in Baden-Württemberg ("we're good at everything, except High German").

"Germany is a fantastic country!" enthused an elderly lady recently when I was in Buenos Aires, "You have so much culture, so many interesting cities, so many different landscapes, the best infrastructure!" – "By that I suppose you mean the autobahns?" I asked. She smiled and replied: "I meant the pharmacies! There's a pharmacy every 50 metres. No other country in the world offers that!"

For many young people in other parts of the world Germany is the gateway to a secure future. The number of those applying for scholarships to study in Germany is



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// **Bastian Sick** //

// **Sprachanwalt***

+++ The journalist and language critic Bastian Sick turned German grammar into a bestseller (*Der Dativ ist dem Genitiv sein Tod*) and gave the world's biggest ever German lesson to an audience of 15,000 in Cologne +++

* Language attorney

Bastian Sick's
bestseller has sold over
two million copies



steadily growing. Business studies, mechanical engineering, medicine or the humanities – whatever the subject, Germany is a popular place to study. And for many other people Germany is a vital workplace. My home help comes from Poland and is diligently learning German. One day her German will be as perfect as her ironing skills, then she'll be able to do anything she likes here, and she'll leave me for a more interesting job as the assistant to a talk show presenter, or as press officer to one of the parliamentarians. And I'll plead with her to stay, but she will cast a disparaging look at the ironing board and say: "If you don't mind, you can do that yourself!", and I'll be left behind in a crumpled heap – I'm having nightmares about this already. German opens doors to successful careers, in the German-speaking countries and beyond, in places where there are German companies, or where German tourists romp around the world. When I asked my French friend Suzanne why she had learnt German, she said: "Ze reason I learnt German? Despite ze complicated grammerrrr and ze 'ard pronunciation? I will tell you ze secret: my reason was big and blue-eyed and 'is name was Martin. 'e was 24 and we met on ze beach in Biarritz. Hmmm! Zer was no better reason to learn German in ze 'ole wide world!"

And if anyone still isn't satisfied yet, I've compiled the following list with ten more reasons for learning German:

/ Bastian Sick: Ten Good Reasons for German ///

/1/// So you can understand the lyrics of Tokio Hotel songs and sing along with the right pronunciation.

/2/// So you can write a love letter to Bill Kaulitz (Tokio Hotel singer).

/3/// So you don't have to squint at the subtitles when watching German TV series, such as *Derrick*, *Ein Fall für zwei* and *Sturm der Liebe*.

/4/// So you can impress your friends with words like "Fussballweltmeisterschaftsendrundenteilnehmer" or "Überschallgeschwindigkeitsflugzeug".

/5/// So you can read Goethe in the original. And of course, not just Goethe but all the other classics in German literature, including Heinz Erhardt, Wilhelm Busch and Loriot.

/6/// So you will be able, as a Porsche driver, not only to flaunt it to everyone, but also to tell them that your car isn't called a "Porsch" or a "Porschie".

/7/// So that, if you happen to be a cleaner, you can understand serious warnings on German household substances, for instance "Augenkontakt unbedingt vermeiden!" or "Dämpfe nicht einatmen!"

/8/// So you can say in German at the Bambi awards: "Ich danke meinen Eltern! Und allen Leuten von Sony Music! Und natürlich meinem Publikum! Ihr seid so wundervoll! Ich liebe euch alle!"

/9/// So you can ask questions in German, if you happen to be a foreign journalist at a press conference in Germany.

/10/// So you can get the role of the villain in the next James Bond film.