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Using German Synonyms

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Abbreviations

adj. decl.	adjectival declension
attrib.	attribute
AU	Austrian usage
CH	Swiss usage
comp.	comparative
DAT	dative case
esp.	especially
etw	*etwas*
fig.	figurative(ly)
hum.	humorous
INF	infinitive
jdm	*jemandem*
jdn	*jemanden*
jds	*jemandes*
lit.	literally
N	North German usage
NE	Northeast German usage
NW	Northwest German usage
occ.	occasionally
o.s.	oneself
part.	participle
pej.	pejorative(ly)
pl.	plural
pred.	predicate(-ively)
R1	colloquial spoken register
R2	register neutral
R3	formal written register
R3a	literary register
R3b	non-literary register
S	South German usage
sb	somebody
SE	Southeast German usage
sth	something
superl.	superlative
SW	Southwest German usage
swh	somewhere

Introduction

1 The purpose of this book

Mastering vocabulary tends to be an underestimated skill in learning a foreign language. From the first stages in learning a new language we are aware that it has unfamiliar sounds which we have to pronounce reasonably accurately if we are to make ourselves understood, and the grammatical structures can immediately present us with quite unfamiliar concepts – like noun gender, which is found in nearly all European and many non-European languages, but not in English. However, especially at the outset, we often think of vocabulary mainly in terms of simply learning the foreign equivalents for familiar terms like *clock*, *cook*, *live* or *street*, because we tend to assume that there is a one-to-one correspondence in terms of meaning between the words of the foreign language and the words of our own.

However, just as each language has its own individual set of sounds, and its own individual grammar, so the structure of its vocabulary, too, is unique. It is not just that the words are different, but they reflect a different perspective on the world. Each language gives meaning to the world by dividing up the things, events and ideas in it in different ways through its vocabulary, categorizing them in other terms and drawing different distinctions. This means, first, that another language may have words which have no precise equivalent in our own – English, notoriously, has no word which corresponds precisely to German *gemütlich*, and German lacks a straightforward equivalent for the English noun *mind*. Secondly, though, and more importantly, it means that there are very few simple one-to-one correspondences between the words of the foreign language and the words of our own. Learning the vocabulary of a foreign language is not just a matter of learning individual words; we have to learn how to operate with a completely different set of meanings and concepts.

It is common, for example, for one language to make distinctions which another does not have, and it is quite natural for the learner to fail to pick these up initially. Germans learning English who simply learn that the English word for *Uhr* is *clock* can quite easily come out with a sentence like *I regret that I cannot tell you the time because I am not wearing a clock*, as German, unlike English, does not differentiate between

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'timepieces worn on the person' (i.e. *watches*) and 'other timepieces' (i.e. *clocks*). And if English learners are told that the German for *live* is *leben*, they may well then say *Ich lebe in der Frankfurter Straße*, which will sound odd, since German, unlike everyday English, normally distinguishes between *leben* (i.e. 'be alive, exist') and *wohnen* (i.e. 'dwell') – for details see the entry **leben**.

In all languages most words, especially the most frequent ones, cover a wide range of possible related senses (this is known as **polysemy**), and it is very rare for apparently equivalent words in different languages to cover exactly the same range. German *kochen*, for example, can be used to refer to 'boiling' (in general, of liquids, e.g. *das Wasser kocht*), to 'cooking by boiling' (e.g. *Ich habe ein Ei gekocht*), or to 'cooking' in general (e.g. *Mein Bruder kocht gern*). This covers at least the range of senses of the two English words *cook* and *boil* (with the result that unwary Germans may say something like *Do not cook this shirt* in English), but other equivalents (e.g. *simmer*) may be used in other contexts (for details see the entry **kochen**).

Given this, learners of a foreign language need to learn not just the individual words of the language, but the semantic distinctions between words of related meaning so that they can use the appropriate one for effective communication. Conventional bilingual dictionaries are often little help here, as they frequently give a fairly undifferentiated list of possible German equivalents for a particular English word without providing much detail on how those German equivalents are actually used or the types of context where one might be preferred to another. Considerations of space are, of course, a factor here, and larger dictionaries are able to give more information than smaller ones. Nevertheless, it is never the prime purpose of a bilingual dictionary to provide detailed information on semantic distinctions, and the conventional organization of such dictionaries, with words listed alphabetically, militates against this.

Dictionaries of synonyms, on the other hand, aim to group words of related meanings together so that the user can select an appropriate word for a context. If they are designed for native speakers, they often simply provide lists of words under various headings from which native speakers can select what they consider to be the right word using their intuition and knowledge of the language. This is the case with the familiar *Roget's Thesaurus* for English or the *DUDEN: Sinn- und sachverwandte Wörter* (1986) for German. But a dictionary of synonyms for foreign learners will need to explain in more detail, preferably with examples, the semantic distinctions between the words in each group. This is an essential tool in learning a foreign language. Such a dictionary enables learners to see quickly what words are available to express particular ideas and helps them more efficiently than any other kind of reference work to choose the one which best expresses what they want to say. It also assists the actual process of learning the foreign language, since it has been shown that vocabulary is very effectively acquired and retained in semantically related sets. This also has the advantage that if

you have learnt the words together, the semantic distinctions between
them are easier to recall.

This book, then, aims to provide detailed information on a large
number of sets of semantically related German words for more advanced
learners whose first language is English, in order to help them extend
and improve their command of the vocabulary of German. Naturally,
the vocabulary is huge and diffuse and no such work could hope to
cover all such sets. Ultimately, too, each word in German has its
individual characteristics, although we shall see some of the general
principles on which the vocabulary is structured later in this
introduction. A choice was made of those more frequent sets of words
which experience in teaching German at all levels has shown to present
most differences from English, i.e. where the range of meanings of the
German words does not correspond to that of the nearest English
equivalents. However, unlike in other dictionaries of German synonyms
for English learners (Beaton 1996 and Farrell 1977), each entry here
consists of groups of words which are semantically related in German
(and thus given under a German head-word) rather than consisting
primarily of sets of German translation equivalents for specific English
words. This follows the principle established in the earlier books in this
series, *Using French Synonyms* (Batchelor and Offord 1993) and *Using
Spanish Synonyms* (Batchelor 1994). It also reflects the diminishing
importance of translation in modern foreign language teaching and seeks
to stress the importance for foreign learners of understanding how the
vocabulary of German is structured in its own individual way and
thereby to help them to acquire those distinctions in meaning which are
relevant for German.

2 Understanding the organization of the vocabulary

2.1 Semantic fields

It has long been accepted that the vocabulary (often referred to as the
lexis) of each language does not just consist of many thousands of
isolated unrelated elements (words), but that it has a coherent, if
complex structure. In particular, the meaning of an individual word is
determined in part by other words of similar meaning which exist in the
language. If the English word *street* does not mean quite the same as
German *Straße*, this is because we make a difference, which does not
exist in the same way in German, between *street* and *road*, so that what
we call a *road* is usually different from what we call a *street*. There is a
close semantic relationship between these words, they are used in similar
contexts and refer to similar things, but they are distinct, in that *street*
usually refers to a thoroughfare between buildings in a built-up area but
a *road* to a highway between built-up areas. We can extend this set by
more words with similar meanings, such as *alley*, *lane*, *avenue*, *highway*,
thoroughfare, all of which have slight semantic distinctions in their turn

from *street* and *road*. And we can establish a similar set for German,
which will include (at least) *Allee*, *Autobahn*, *Fahrbahn*, *Gasse*, *Pfad*, *Straße*
and *Weg*, all of which are semantically distinct from one another – and
these distinctions are in most cases quite different from the ones which
apply in English (for details see the entry **Straße**).

Such sets of words with relatively slight semantic distinctions
between them which refer to similar things and are used in similar
contexts are known as **semantic fields** or **lexical fields**.
Characteristically, if not always, they are words between which the
speaker has a choice at a particular point in the chain of speech, so that,
for instance, many of the German words given in the last paragraph
could be used in a sentence like *Sie ist auf diesem/dieser . . . gefahren* or
Wir gingen langsam den/die . . . entlang. In this way, each of the entries in
this book is a semantic field, and what we aim to do is explain those
slight differences of meaning which distinguish the words in each field
from each other.

Semantic fields, however, are not closed sets. Except in some special
cases (like colour adjectives), their boundaries are rarely clear-cut and
one semantic field will often overlap with another or shade into it. In
such cases a decision often had to be taken as to what could be
considered the core words in a particular semantic field and to exclude
others which seemed less central in order not to overburden the number
of words grouped under a particular headword. In general, a maximum
of twenty words is dealt with in any individual entry. In many instances,
cross-references are then given to the relevant entries for closely related
semantic fields, e.g. from **sehen** to **ansehen** and vice-versa. Also, the
range of meaning of some words is such that they participate in more
than one semantic field; *treffen*, for example, is to be found here under
schlagen as well as **treffen**.

2.2   Words, lexemes and lexical items

Up to now, we have been referring to the 'words' of a language.
However, this term is notoriously ambiguous. In a certain sense, *machte*,
machst and *gemacht* are all 'words' of German. But, equally, these are all
forms of the 'word' *machen*, in another sense of 'word', i.e. the basic
form which is listed in a dictionary. In German, conventionally, this is
the infinitive form for verbs, though we could equally well think of it in
terms of a root form like *MACH*. To avoid this ambiguity, the term
word-form is often used to refer to this first sense of 'word', and
lexeme, or **lexical item**, for the second sense, and it is these latter
which we are dealing with in this book. In practice, 'lexical item' is
perhaps the preferable term, because the entries in this book do not only
consist of individual words, but very often also of phrases and idioms
which have the function of single entities, like *in Ordnung bringen* (under
ordnen) or *sich in die Haare kriegen* (under **kämpfen**). For convenience
and simplicity, we shall continue to use the term 'word', but it should
always be understood in the sense of 'lexical item'.

2.3   Synonymy

The title of this book, like that of all 'dictionaries of synonyms' is rather misleading. In the strictest sense of the term **synonymy** (or **absolute synonymy**) synonyms are words which could be exchanged for each other in any context without any distinction in meaning whatsoever. In practice, it is very rare to find sets of words in any language which are absolute synonyms by this definition. As is clear from the above paragraph on semantic fields, the entries in this book consist not of absolute synonyms, but of words whose meanings are so closely related that we can consider them to belong to the same semantic field, like German *schmal* and *eng* (see under **breit/schmal**). Nevertheless, their meanings are distinct in most contexts, and they are thus not absolute synonyms, but **near-synonyms**.

A single semantic field, though, typically contains many words whose range of meaning overlaps to a certain extent. In such cases, we often find that one word can be substituted for the other in some contexts without producing an appreciable difference in meaning, whereas there will be other contexts where the distinction in meaning between them is clear, or where one can be used and not the other. Thus, although the distinction between *leben* and *wohnen* mentioned above (see under **leben**) is quite clear in most contexts, and we must say *Ich wohne in der Frankfurter Straße* and NOT *Ich lebe in der Frankfurter Straße*, there are some contexts where the distinction between 'be alive' and 'dwell' is unimportant or irrelevant, and either can be used without a clear difference in meaning. This is, for example, the case with *leben* and *wohnen* when a general area rather than a particular location is referred to, as, for instance, in *Wir wohnen/leben auf dem Lande*. Such instances of overlap are very common between words of similar meaning; this is known as **partial synonymy**.

Many words which appear to have identical meanings are not absolute synonyms because their usage is different, in that they are typical of more colloquial or more formal language, or of one part of the German-speaking world rather than another. Such cases are explained in section **3** below, under **register** and **regionalism**.

2.4   Sense relations

Although the semantic distinctions between words in a semantic field can often be individual and specific to the particular words involved, there are a number of more general sense relations which are of immense importance in the organization of the lexis as a whole and which can be found within many semantic fields.

antonymy

It may appear paradoxical, but one of the closest relationships holding between words within a semantic field is that of oppositeness of meaning, or **antonymy**. This aspect of semantic structure is familiar to

everyone through pairs of adjectives like *groß/klein* or *lang/kurz*. A
few entries in this book deal specifically with fields consisting
primarily of such pairs, because the meanings of the German words
involved differ from their nearest English equivalents and are best
understood specifically through the relationship of antonymy. This is
particularly the case with the pairs *breit/schmal* and *weit/eng*, which are
treated under **breit/schmal**. But the relationship is important in
many entries, e.g. under **schlecht**, where the difference between
schlecht and *schlimm* in German becomes clear when it is realised that
only *schlecht*, but not *schlimm*, is an antonym of *gut*. This means that
things which are *schlecht* could be good under the right conditions –
so that we can talk about *ein schlechter Aufsatz*. Things that are *schlimm*
are inherently bad and cannot be good under any circumstances, so
that we must talk about *ein schlimmer Unfall* or *ein schlimmer Fehler*, not
★*ein schlechter Unfall*.

A further type of antonymy is **converseness**. This is a kind of
'mirror-image' relationship and can best be illustrated by pairs of verbs
like *kaufen* and *verkaufen*, where one, e.g. *Johann verkaufte das Mofa an
Marie* is the converse of the other, e.g. *Marie kaufte das Mofa von Johann*
(see **kaufen** and **verkaufen**). In a number of cases English and German
differ in how they express converseness, with one of the languages
having separate verbs for each side of the action whereas the other uses
the same verb for both sides. Thus, German uses *leihen* for both *lend* and
borrow, as in *Er hat mir das Geld geliehen* and *Ich habe das Buch von ihm
geliehen* (see **leihen**), whilst English uses *rent* for both *mieten* and
vermieten, *Sie hat Erich die Wohnung vermietet* but *Erich hat die Wohnung
von ihr gemietet* (see **mieten**).

hyponymy
Many semantic fields contain a word (or words) with a more general
meaning and a number of words whose meaning is more specific. Thus,
sterben is the general word in German for 'die', whilst other words, such
as *erfrieren*, *verdursten* and *verhungern* denote various ways of dying, i.e.
'die of cold', 'die of thirst', 'die of hunger' (see **sterben**). These more
specific words are known as 'hyponyms' of the more general word and
are said to stand in a relationship of **hyponymy** to it – typically a 'kind
of' or 'sort of' relationship.

It is quite common for two languages to differ quite markedly in how
they structure their vocabulary in this way. In English, we have a general
word (usually called a **superordinate term**) *put*, and a number of words
which express various ways of putting things in places, i.e. *hang*, *lay*,
stand, *stick*, etc. In German, though, there is no superordinate term in
this semantic field, and we always have to make a choice of the
appropriate one from the specific terms *hängen*, *setzen*, *stecken*, *stellen*, etc.
(see **stellen**). English learners thus need to be aware that there is no
direct equivalent for the English verb *put*, and that they need to make
clear in every context how something is being 'put' somewhere. On the
other hand, languages may lack specific hyponyms for a superordinate

term. English lacks single words to express specific ways of dying, and
instead uses phrases, like *die of cold*, *die of thirst*, etc. The result is that
English users frequently fail to use the specific hyponyms in German
where they are appropriate and overuse the superordinate term.

It is well known that compound words are a characteristic feature of
German, but it is important to be aware that most compound words are
hyponyms of the head-word, i.e. the word which forms the last element
of the compound. Thus, *Aktentasche*, *Brieftasche*, *Einkaufstasche*,
Handtasche, *Reisetasche*, etc. are all types (i.e. hyponyms) of *Tasche* (see
Tasche). Realising this semantic aspect of German word-formation and
being able to use it effectively is a vital way of extending command of
the lexis of German, and many entries in this book show examples of
how English learners can express themselves more precisely in German
by using compounds.

collocation
Many words can be used in almost any appropriate context – the
adjective *gut*, for example, can be used with many nouns. Typically,
though, there are also many words whose use is limited to certain
contexts, i.e. verbs which can only be used with certain classes of nouns
(or even an individual noun) as subject or object, or adjectives which
can only be used with a certain restricted class or group of nouns. In
English, for example, we can usually only talk about a *nugget* of gold, or
a *clot* of blood. In such instances we say that these words are only used in
collocation with certain other words, or that they have **collocation
restrictions**.

Collocation restrictions can vary significantly between languages. In
some cases, the foreign language lacks a restriction which is present in
one's own. German, for example, does not have restricted words like
nugget and *clot*, but uses the more general word *Klumpen* 'lump' and talks
about *ein Klumpen Gold* just as it talks about *ein Klumpen Kohle* or *ein
Klumpen Butter*. On the other hand, the foreign language may have
restrictions which are unknown in English. In German, for instance,
essen is used only of human beings, and *fressen* of animals, whereas both
eat in English (see **essen**). In English we can *pour* both liquids and
granular materials (like sand), whereas in German we can use *gießen* only
for liquids, and other words, such as *streuen*, have to be used for sand,
etc. (see **gießen**). And whereas the most usual equivalent for *spread (out)*
is *ausbreiten*, *spreizen* is used of legs, fingers and toes (see **ausbreiten**).

Learning about collocation restrictions is an essential part of learning
how to use a foreign language effectively, especially at more advanced
levels. At the most general level, it is always important to find the right
word for the context in order to be able to say what we mean efficiently,
and a major aim of this book is to help the English-speaking learner do
this in German. But although collocation restrictions can seem
frustratingly arbitrary at times, they can be of immense help to foreign
learners when they realise that it means that the choice of one word in
the chain of speech very often determines the next one – in other words

that words always tend to keep the same company. For this reason, all
the entries in this book give full details about collocation restrictions and
care has been taken to select examples of usage which illustrate typical
contexts and collocations.

valency
Different verbs need different elements to make a grammatical
sentence. The verb *geben*, for example, needs three: a subject (in the
nominative), a direct object (in the accusative) and an indirect object
(in the dative), e.g. *Gestern hat **sie ihrem Bruder das Buch** gegeben*.
Other verbs, like *telefonieren*, only need one element, i.e. a subject, e.g.
Ich *habe eben telefoniert*. Very many verbs, though, like *schlagen*, need
two, i.e. a subject and a direct object, e.g. **Sie** *hat **den Ball** geschlagen*,
and a large number, like *warten*, have a subject and a phrase with a
particular preposition, e.g. **Sie** *hat nicht **auf mich** gewartet*, where *warten*
auf corresponds to English *wait **for***. The elements a verb needs to form
a grammatical sentence are called the **complements** of the verb, and
the type and number of complements required by a particular verb so
that a grammatical sentence can be constructed with it is known as the
valency of the verb.

Verb valency can involve significant differences between English and
German. First of all, German shows the link between the complements
and the verb (e.g. what is the subject or direct object of the verb)
through the use of the various cases. In English, nouns do not inflect to
show case, and the relationship of the complements to the verb is
indicated by their position, with the subject, for instance, always coming
immediately before the main verb. This means that it is vital for English
learners of German to learn the valency of each verb, i.e. the
construction used with it, in order to be able to use the verb in context.
In practice this means that the learner should always learn German verbs
in typical sentences containing them, and for this reason all verbs dealt
with in this book are given with an indication of their valency.

Secondly, German verbs tend to be more restricted in their valency
than English ones, so that a particular German verb may correspond to a
particular English verb in certain constructions only. For instance, many
English verbs, like *leave* or *change*, can be used as **transitive** verbs (i.e.
with a subject and a direct object) or as **intransitive** verbs (i.e. with
only a subject and no direct object). Thus, we can say, in English, *She
left the village* and *She has changed her appearance* (using *leave* or *change*
transitively), as well as *She left* and *She has changed* (using *leave* or *change*
intransitively). This is often not possible in German, and we have to use
different verbs or different constructions to reflect the transitive and
intransitive uses of these English verbs. For *leave*, *verlassen* is the usual
equivalent for the transitive use, e.g. *Sie hat das Dorf verlassen*, but
abfahren or *weggehen* is needed for the intransitive, e.g. *Sie ist abgefahren* or
Sie ist weggegangen (see **verlassen** and **weggehen**). For *change*, and
similarly with many other verbs, a transitive verb (in this case *verändern*)
corresponds to the English transitive use, e.g. *Sie hat ihr Aussehen*

verändert, but the related reflexive verb (here *sich verändern*) is used for the intransitive, e.g. *Sie hat sich verändert* (see **ändern**). In practice, it will be found that a large number of the differences in usage between the German verbs treated in this book are, strictly speaking, due less to differences in meaning than to differences in valency.

Finally, a number of verbs are used in different constructions (i.e. with a different valency) with different meanings. For example, *halten*, used intransitively, means 'stop', e.g. *Der Zug hält* (see **halten**). Used transitively, though, it means 'hold' or 'keep', e.g. *Er hielt sein Wort* (see **behalten**). In such cases, each different valency with a distinct meaning is listed separately in this book, sometimes, as in the case of *halten*, under different head-words (with cross-references as appropriate) because the distinct meanings belong to different semantic fields.

3   Variation and the vocabulary of German

No language is completely uniform and unvarying. There is immense variation in German depending on the individual speaker and the situation in which the language is being used. Choice of vocabulary can be influenced by what the language is being used for and where in the German-speaking countries the speaker comes from. This kind of variation can be initially confusing and frustrating for the foreign learner, who may find using a particular word in the wrong situation (what Germans call a *Stilbruch*) makes people smile, or is told that a particular expression is not said 'here', possibly with the implication that it is not very good German. One of the aims of this book is to inform English-speaking learners about such variation in German so that they can find the appropriate word for the particular situation. We can usefully distinguish two kinds of variation: that which depends on the *use* to which the language is being put, and that which depends on the *users*, i.e. the area they come from or the social group to which they belong.

3.1   Register: variation according to use

People express themselves in different ways, using different vocabulary when they use language for different purposes. The choice of word can depend, for example, on whether the context is formal or informal, whether one is writing or speaking, and on who one is addressing. Such differences are known as differences of **register**, and the vocabulary of German is rich in these. For example, to express the notion of 'receive', one might use *kriegen* in everyday informal speech, but one would avoid this word in writing. A more neutral term is *bekommen*, which can be used in almost any context. On the other hand, *empfangen* or *erhalten* are normally only employed in rather formal written language and can sound very stilted or affected (or at best out of place) in speech (see **bekommen**).

In this book we are only concerned with register variation as it affects

the lexis. In order to communicate effectively in a foreign language the learner has to learn which words are appropriate in which situations, not least because using the wrong ones in the wrong place can sound comical, pompous, or even rude. It is a major aim of this book to make English-speaking learners aware of register variation in German so that they can use vocabulary appropriate to the situation, and most of the semantic fields treated here have examples of words which are restricted in their usage to particular registers.

Following the model established in *Using German* (Durrell 1992), the register of the words dealt with in the entries in this book is indicated where necessary by using a set of labels which divide the scale of register in German into three broad headings as follows:

R1: The register of casual colloquial speech. It is used between equals who know each other quite well to discuss everyday topics, and it is the natural mode of speech for most Germans in informal situations. A large number of words, like *kriegen*, are characteristic of this register, but most Germans will avoid them in writing as too colloquial or 'slangy'. There is also a fondness for exaggeration, as shown by the many words corresponding to English *terribly* or *awfully* listed under **schrecklich**, and often a lack of precision in the vocabulary, with words of more general meaning being used rather than more specific terms, for example *denken* or *wissen* for *remember* (see **sich erinnern**). A simple word may be also used rather than a more specific compound, for example *Laden* rather than *Rollladen* or *Fensterladen* (see **Vorhang**).

This register has a wide range, from a socially perfectly acceptable conversational language to gross vulgarisms, which are indicated here by the label **R1★**. Words designated by this are generally thought of as offensive and the foreign learner is best advised simply to note them and to avoid using them.

R2: Essentially, this is a label for words which are relatively neutral in terms of register and can be used equally well in colloquial spoken language as in formal writing. In practice, most words in German, and most words treated in this book, fall under this heading, so that any word not given a marking for register here should be taken as belonging to this category as it is not specific to a particular register.

R3: This is the most formal register of German. It is characteristic, first and foremost, of the written language, and many words specific to it are rarely used in speech, especially in casual everyday usage. Typically, when we are writing we have time to be more careful in our choice of words and observe fine distinctions of meaning than when we are speaking. This means that many semantic fields treated in this book have a good number of words specific to this register which exhibit distinctions of meaning which are ignored in casual speech. It is useful to note two major types within this register, differentiated as follows:

R3a: The literary language as established and codified over the last

two centuries and still typical of creative writing, even
popular fiction. It can have a rather archaic or scholarly ring
to it, but it has very high prestige, and mastering it is
considered the mark of a good education. Indeed, many
Germans still think of it as the 'best', and possibly the only
'correct' form of German.

R3b: The register of modern non-literary prose of all kinds, as
found in the serious press, business letters, official
documents, instruction manuals and general writing on
science, history, economics, etc. At its worst, especially in
official documents, this register can be wooden and heavy,
with much use of long compound words (like *Erwerbstätigkeit*
or *Berufstätigkeit* for 'employment', see **Beruf**) and a
preference for noun constructions over verb constructions
(like *einen Entschluss fassen* for *sich entschließen*, see
beschließen). It has been much criticized, especially by
proponents of **R3a**, as *Beamtendeutsch* or *Papierdeutsch*, but at
its best it can be very precise in expression and show
remarkable conciseness, and most Germans consider it
appropriate for all kinds of non-literary writing.

Of course, these labels can only be a rough guide to usage. The scale
of register is continuous; there are no natural divisions and language
users are not always consistent. However, the labels have proved easy to
operate with, and they are useful in giving an initial indication of the
restrictions on the use of particular words. Much speech or writing
cannot be assigned as a whole to one of the above categories, and more
than anything it is a question of the greater or lesser use of words
characteristic of one register or another. Many words also cover a wider
span than these categories, i.e. they are typically used in all registers
except colloquial speech, or in all registers *except* formal writing. Such
usage is indicated here by the labels **R2/3** or **R1/2** respectively. Other
words are not absolutely restricted in their usage to a single register, but
they are particularly common in **R1** or **R3**; these are indicated as 'esp.
R1' or 'esp. **R3**'.

3.2 Regionalism: variation according to user

It is a characteristic feature of language in use that people, normally quite
subconsciously, use forms and expressions which indicate their
membership of particular social groups. This may relate to social class
(this is very typical of language use in England), or to the region where
the speaker comes from. A standard form of German emerged relatively
late, reflecting the long political fragmentation of the German-speaking
lands, and such regional variation is an important feature of German, so
that the learner will encounter it at a much earlier stage and to a much
greater degree than, say, in French. It is particularly pervasive in the
vocabulary, where, unlike in pronunciation and grammar, there is no

recognized authority. Regional variation can affect very frequent items of vocabulary, as in the case of southern *Samstag* and northern *Sonnabend* for *Saturday*, and in many semantic fields, but especially in relation to areas of everyday life, such as food and drink, and traditional trades, there are instances where no single word has ever gained full acceptance over the whole of the German speech area. And it is particularly the case that there is considerable variation between the various German-speaking countries, with different words being in common use in Austria and Switzerland from those which are most widespread in Germany.

Such variation can be confusing for foreign learners, who naturally want to know what the 'real' German equivalent is for a particular English word, but are confronted with a number of words for, say, *butcher* (see **Fleischer**) or *pavement/sidewalk* (see **Bürgersteig** – in this instance we find comparable variation between British and American usage). As often as not, they will be unaware that they are dealing with regional variants. In the main, they need to know which words are regionally restricted and which, if any, are used most widely and most generally accepted. In this book, we aim to provide information about the existence and distribution of such regional synonyms within a large number of semantic fields, and they are signalled by a rough indication of the area in which they are used, i.e.:

N: North of the river Main. Where necessary, this area is split into *NW* and *NE* along the border of the new (post-1990) federal *Länder*.
S: South of the river Main. Where necessary, this area is split into *SW* and *SE* along the western borders of Bavaria and Austria.
CH: German-speaking Switzerland
AU: Austria

As a general rule, words marked as used in *S*, *SW* or *SE* are also current in Switzerland and/or Austria unless a separate form is given.

It must be stressed that the above are very broad indicators; it would be impossible to give absolutely precise information about the regional distribution of many words without overburdening the user with detail. It is also the case, in this age of mass communication, that words which have been typical of a particular area become more widely known and often become fashionable in other areas. Over the last twenty or thirty years, for instance, northern *tschüss* 'goodbye' has been spreading rapidly into southern Germany, displacing traditional regional alternatives like *SW ade*, especially among the younger generation in towns and cities.

There is a close link between regional and register variation, in that regional variants tend to be more frequent in more colloquial registers (i.e. **R1**). Formal **R3**, on the other hand, is typically much less regionally marked. However, although a majority of the regional variants given in this book are used predominantly in **R1**, this is not universally the case.

Austrian and Swiss variants, in particular, are commonly found in all registers of standard German in those countries. And there are a few words, like *schauen* (see **sehen**), which most German speakers use mainly in more formal registers (**R3**), but which are used commonly in all registers in some regions (in this case, *S*).

4 Consulting this book

4.1 The entries

As explained in **2.1** above, each entry in this book consists of a semantic field, i.e. a group of German words of related meaning. Each field is given under a head-word which was felt best to represent the core meaning of the field. In most cases it is that word in the field which has the most general meaning or the widest range of usage, or which is used most frequently. In many instances, it will be a **superordinate term** as explained in **2.4** under **hyponymy**, but that is by no means always the case, as many fields lack such a word. These head-words are arranged in the book in alphabetical order.

Obviously, if a book of this nature were to cover the bulk of the vocabulary of German it would be too huge and unwieldy to use, and a selection had to be made of those semantic fields which were felt to be most useful for the advanced English-speaking learner of German. As explained in **1** above, this choice was typically determined by considering which fields experience has shown to present most differences to English in terms of their meaning structure, i.e. where most semantic distinctions are present which are unfamiliar to the English learner. In some cases, though, an entry was felt to be justified because of the large number of register or regional variants which it contained (see **3.1** and **3.2** above).

4.2 The layout of the entries

Each field treated is presented in the same way. The German head-word is given at the top left, with an English equivalent at the top right which is intended to indicate the general concept covered by the field. The head-words are ordered alphabetically throughout the book. The individual German words which make up the semantic field are listed in alphabetical order in the left-hand column below the head-word, together with any relevant grammatical information (see **4.3** below) and, if necessary, an indication of whether it is specific to a particular register or region (see **3**). English glosses are given underneath each German word together with any relevant comments on the usage of the word, in particular any collocation restrictions (see **2.4**). The primary purpose of these English glosses is to bring out the distinctive meaning of the German word as clearly as possible, and to show how its meaning differs

from that of the other words in the field; they are not simply the most usual translation equivalents of the German word such as would be found in a bilingual dictionary. Examples of usage are given opposite each German word, in the right hand column. These examples have been carefully selected, in most cases from actual usage in modern speech or writing, in order to illustrate typical contexts in which the word in question is used.

As explained in **1**, many of the most frequent words have a wide range of meaning, i.e. they exhibit **polysemy**. In many instances this means that not all possible senses of a particular word are treated under a single head-word, but only those meanings which fall into the relevant semantic field. Thus, *laufen* appears under **fließen** in the sense 'run (of liquids)' and also under **gehen** in the sense 'run (of people and animals)' or 'walk (**R1**)'. In potentially confusing cases, or in cases of overlap, cross-references are given to other senses treated in this way in the book; they can also always be found through the indexes. A few German words have such a wide range of senses that it seemed appropriate (and more manageable for the user) to use them as the head-word for two distinct semantic fields. The noun **Essen**, for example, is the head-word for two fields: one containing the words denoting 'food' and another with the words which denote 'meal'.

In the vast majority of fields treated the words naturally all consist of the same parts of speech, i.e. they are all nouns, verbs or adjectives. There are some exceptions, though, where German commonly expresses a particular area of meaning within a specific field using a different part of speech. Thus, under **gern haben**, we also list the combination of the adverb *gern* with a verb (i.e. *gern* + VERB), because a characteristic way of expressing the notion 'like' in German is to use *gern* with an appropriate verb, e.g. *Ich tanze gern*, 'I like dancing'.

4.3   Grammatical information

Using words is not simply a matter of knowing the meanings of words but also knowing how to use them in context. In order to do this we need to know about their grammatical features, and for this reason basic grammatical information is provided about all the German words given in this book. This varies depending on whether we are dealing with adjectives, nouns or verbs.

It should be noted that this grammatical information relates only to the word as used in the sense relevant to the semantic field being treated. The verb *feuern*, for example, is transitive in common usage only in the **R1** meaning *jdn feuern*, i.e. 'fire sb (from a job)' given under **entlassen**. In other main senses, e.g. 'heat (with oil, gas, etc.)', it is intransitive.

The grammatical features of a number of words vary according to register or region. For example, *Balg* 'kid, brat' has the plural form (¨er) in *N*, but the form (¨e) in *S* (see **Kind**). Any such variation is indicated by the same markers as are used for lexical variants.

adjectives

It is a characteristic of German that there is no formal distinction
between adjectives and adverbs. Many German adjectives can be used
adjectivally or adverbially without alteration, whereas in English we
typically add *–ly* to an adjective to make it into an adverb. German
schnell, for example, can correspond to English *quick* or *quickly*.
Problematic instances where this is not so, i.e. where a particular word is
unexpectedly only used as an adverb, or only used as an adjective, are
indicated by marking the relevant word as (not adv.) or (only adv.).

Some German adjectives are only used predicatively, i.e. after the
verb *sein*. This is the case, for example, of the **R1** adjective *spitze*
('super', see **ausgezeichnet**); we can say *Sein neues Auto ist spitze*, but
NOT *ein spitzes Auto*. This is indicated by marking the adjective as (only
pred.). On the other hand, a small number of adjectives, usually marked
(not pred.), are never used predicatively.

nouns

The gender of German nouns is indicated by putting *der*, *die* or *das* after
the noun. The way they form the plural is shown by putting the plural
suffix in brackets after the definite article, together with an umlaut if the
plural noun has one, or a dash if it does not. If there is no change in the
plural this is indicated by a dash alone. Nouns may thus appear as in the
following examples:

> **Vertrag**, der (¨e)
> **Wiese**, die (-n)
> **Viertel**, das (-)

Some masculine nouns take a different ending in the accusative, dative
and genitive singular cases. For these nouns the genitive ending is given
before the plural ending, e.g.:

> **Pfaffe**, der (-n, -n) (i.e. der Pfaffe, den/dem/des Pfaffen, die Pfaffen)
> **Gedanke**, der (-ns, -n) (i.e. der Gedanke, den/dem Gedanken, des
>   Gedankens, die Gedanken)

German very commonly uses adjectives as nouns. These have an initial
capital letter, as they are nouns, but they keep their adjective endings.
They are shown as follows:

> **Reisende(r)**, die/der (adj. decl.)

Some nouns, notably those which denote a mass or a collective idea, do
not have a plural form (or the plural form, if it exists, is used very rarely),
e.g. *Rindvieh* 'cattle' (see **Kuh**). Such nouns are marked '(no pl.)'. Other
nouns, like *Lebensmittel* (see **Essen**[1]) are almost always used in the plural
and are marked '(pl.)'.

verbs

For the reasons explained in **2.4**, all the German verbs listed in this book
are given with an indication of their valency. The following examples,

taken from various entries in the book, illustrate how some of the most
common valency models in German are presented here. Others follow a
similar pattern of presentation.

sterben *die*	Intransitive verb, used with a subject in the nominative case, e.g. *Sie stirbt.*
etw **annehmen** *accept sth*	Transitive verb, used with a direct (accusative) object denoting a thing, e.g. *Sie nahm das Angebot an.*
jdn **wundern** *surprise sb*	Transitive verb, used with a direct (accusative) object denoting a person, e.g. *Dieser Vorfall hat mich gewundert.*
jdn/etw **verbessern** *correct sb/sth*	Transitive verb, used with a direct (accusative) object denoting a person or a thing, e.g. *Sie hat mich verbessert.*
(etw) **essen** *eat (sth)*	Verb which can be used transitively with a direct object denoting a thing, e.g.: *Sie isst die Wurst*, or without an object, e.g. *Ich habe schon gegessen.*
sich **beeilen** *hurry*	Reflexive verb, used with a reflexive pronoun and no other objects, e.g. *Wir müssen uns beeilen.*
sich/jdn/etw **ändern** *alter (sb/sth)*	Verb which is used with a reflexive pronoun corresponding to an English intransitive verb, e.g. *Hier hat sich viel geändert*; or with a direct (accusative) object denoting a person or a thing, e.g. *Sie hat ihre Meinung geändert.*
jdm/etw **misstrauen** *mistrust sb/sth*	Verb used with a dative object denoting a person or a thing, e.g. *Warum soll er mir misstrauen?*
jdm etw **geben** *give sb sth*	Verb used with a direct (accusative) object denoting a thing and a dative object denoting a person, e.g. *Sie hat ihrem Freund Geld gegeben.*
sich jds/einer Sache **bedienen** *make use of sb/sth*	Reflexive verb, used with a reflexive pronoun and an object in the genitive case denoting a person or a thing, e.g. *Er bediente sich versteckter Methoden.*
(auf jdn/etw) **warten** *wait (for sb/sth)*	Verb which can be used with no object, e.g. *Ich habe dort gewartet*, or with a prepositional object introduced by *auf* followed by the accusative case, e.g. *Ich habe dort auf dich gewartet.*
sich um jdn/etw **kümmern** *look after sb/sth*	Reflexive verb, used with a reflexive pronoun and a prepositional object introduced by *um*, e.g. *Ich werde mich um das Essen kümmern.*

jdn/etw wohin **stellen** *put sb/sth swh*	Transitive verb which is used with a direct (accusative) object denoting a person or a thing, and a phrase indicating direction, e.g. *Er stellt den Besen in die Ecke.*

Most verb prefixes are either separable, like *ab-*, *an-* and *auf-*, or inseparable, like *be-*, *er-* and *ver-*. Separable verbs always have the stress on the prefix, e.g. ´*abgeben*, whilst inseparable verbs have the stress on the verb root, e.g. *be´deuten*. A few prefixes, however, notably *durch-*, *über-*, *um-* and *unter-* are sometimes separable and sometimes inseparable, and the stress is marked on all such verbs in this book to show whether the prefix is separable or inseparable, e.g. ´*übergießen* or *über´gießen* (see **gießen**).

4.3 Indexes

There are two indexes. The German word index lists all the German words dealt with in the entries, and the English word index contains all the English words used in the definitions of the German words treated. Both the German and English words are indexed to the head-words of the entries for the various semantic fields. In this way the user can access the material starting from either language. All main words within a phrasal expression are indexed separately, so that *nicht alle Tassen im Schrank haben* (see **verrückt**) can be found both under *Tasse* and under *Schrank*.

4.4 Spelling

We have adopted for this book the revised spelling which was introduced in schools in the German-speaking countries in 1998 and which will be the only officially recognized alternative from 2005. All words are thus spelled according to the principles laid out in the recognized authoritative works, i.e. *Bertelsmann. Die neue deutsche Rechtschreibung* (Gütersloh 1996) and the 21st edition of *DUDEN: Rechtschreibung der deutschen Sprache* (Mannheim 1996).