Die größten Unterschiede zwischen deutscher und englischer Grammatik

preliminary note

Even though German and English are quite similar, at least compared to German<->Cebuano (=Cathy's language), there are some significant differences. I want to concentrate on these differences which caused most problems during the first time of Cathy's studies.

No Present Perfect tense in German Grammar

German grammar	English grammar
Ich lebe seit 6 Jahren in Köln.	I **have been living** in Cologne for 6 years.
Er wartet seit 12 Uhr auf dich.	He **has been waiting** for you since 12am.
Wie lange lernst du schon Deutsch?	How long **have you learned** German?

There is no tense in German to describe actions which started in the past and have continued on until now. We just use the present tense (Präsens) instead.

No progressive/continuous form in German Grammar

German grammar	English grammar
Ich lese **gerade** ein Buch.	I **am reading** a book.
Ich arbeite **gerade** an einem neuen Projekt.	I **am working** at a new project.
Als ich gestern ankam, wartete Cathy auf mich.	When I arrived yesterday Cathy **was waiting** for me.

If you want to describe that somebody is doing something just in this moment you use in English the continuous form.
You find the progressive form in 5 tenses in English:

- present continuous: I'm working.

- past continuous: I was working when he entered the room.

- present perfect continuous: I have been working very hard for the last 2 months.

- past perfect continuous: I had been working very hard before we met last year.

- future continuous: I will be working tomorrow afternoon.

Fortunately, there is NO continuous form in German. We put one simple word to express
that we doing something just in this moment: **gerade**.

Often we even leave out "gerade" (especially in past tenses). You can understand the sentence nevertheless.

no negation with "do" in German

German grammar	English grammar
Ich gehe nicht zur Schule.	I **don't** go to school.
Sie mochte die Reise nicht.	She **didn't** like the journey.

The negation is one of the points where German is easier and less complicate than English.
To negate a main verb in German we just use **nicht** (not) instead of using an addtional verb (do).

If i didn't knew anything about English grammar I would negate the following statement like this:

statement: I know you. (Ich kenne dich.)
negation: I know you not. (Ich kenne dich nicht.)

What do we need this "do" for?

no "do" for questions in German

German grammar	English grammar
Kennst du mich?	**Do** you know me?
Woher kommst du?	Where **do** you come from?

Questions is one further point where German is easier and less complicate than English.
To put a question (with a main verb*) you have to use **do** in English but no addtional verb in German
what makes German much easier.

If i didn't knew anything about English grammar I would translate the following questions like this:

German: Willst du ein Eis?
English: You want ice-cream?

I think everybody would understand the sentence without this additional "do".
So, what do we need it for?

* has exceptions too (to be ...)

biological and grammatical gender is not the same in German

German grammar	English grammar
Heute scheint **die** Sonne.	**The** sun is shining today.
Ich liebe **das** Meer.	I love **the** ocean.
Der Tag war sehr schön.	**The** day was very nice.

In English the biological and grammatical <u>gender</u> are the same. "Dead things" like in the examples above are all neutral.

In German, however, a "dead thing" can be male, female or neutral.

I noticed how confusing it is for English native speaker to use person pronouns like er (he) and sie (she) for dead things

because in English you always have to use "it".

- Wo ist **der Schlüssel**? | **Er** liegt auf dem Tisch.

  (Where is the key? It lies on the table.)

- Ich mag **die Geschichte**. | **Sie** ist sehr schön.

  (I like the story. It's very nice.)

- Wir findest du **den Pullover**? | Ich mag **ihn**.

  (How do you find the pullover? I like it.)

dass-sentence vs. dative-construct

German grammar	English grammar
Ich will, dass er jetzt geht.	I want **him** to leave now.
Ich möchte, dass sie meine Freunde kennenlernt.	I'd like **her** to meet my friends.
Möchtest du, dass ich ein paar Bier besorge?	Do you want **me** to organize some beer?

This is one of the strangest English grammar construction for me as a German.

It's one of the rare cases where the German version os more logic than the English one.

In German we use a subordinate clause induced by a "dass" to express what we want other people to do.

In English, however, we use the <u>dative case</u> for the subject of the subordinate although the subject has to be in the <u>nominative case</u>.

A logic translation of the 1st example would be: "I want that he leaves now".

change of <u>word order</u> in subordinate sentences

German grammar	English grammar
Sie **liest** ein Buch.	She **reads** a book.
Weißt du, ob sie ein Buch **liest**?	Do you know if she **reads** a book?

In English there is a strict rule for the word order in statements.

S-P-O (subject - predicate - object).

- subject ~ noun
- predicate ~ verb
- object = object

This order doesn't change in <u>subordinate sentences</u>.

In German, however, the verb goes at the very end in subordinate sentences.

I noticed that it's quite difficult to form correct subordinate sentences

because you have to keep in mind the verb until you said all other parts and that can be quite confusing.

(almost) no Wo-/Da-compounds in English

German grammar	English grammar
Wir sprechen oft **darüber**.	We speak about **it**.
Ich träume **davon**.	I dream about **it**.

<u>Wo-/Da-compounds</u> doesn't excists in English*. That's why I find it quite difficult to find an appropriate translation.

It's best just to translate it with "it".

Da-compounds are a kind of personal pronoun for dead things. They consits of "da" and the preposition which belongs to the verb.

* exceptions are: therefore, thereby, therein, thereout, hereby, herein, here-on-out, whereby, wherein, wherefore

no ly-endings for adverbs in German

German grammar	English grammar
Er ist vorsichtig.	He is **careful**.
Er fährt sehr vorsichtig.	He drives very **carefully**.

<u>short reminder</u>

Adjectives (careful) describe a noun (he).

Adverbs (carefully) describe a verb (drive).

Whereas in English you have to add the additional ending "ly" for adverbs

there is no difference between adjectives and adverbs in German.

illogical negation of must in English

German grammar	English grammar
Du **musst** jetzt gehen.	You **must** go now.
Du **musst nicht** gehen.	You **need not** go.

German grammar	English grammar
Du **darfst** jetzt gehen.	You **may** go now.
Du **darfst nicht** gehen.	You **must not** go.

The verb must (=müssen) belongs to the modal verbs.

Müssen is used to describe that somebody must do someting (=a duty/command).

Must not, however, describes that something is forbidden. You are not allowed to do this.

The translaion of "must not" is thus "nicht dürfen" and NOT "nicht müssen".

German is more logical than English in this case.

to be continued ...

If you have suggestions for further big differences feel to send me an e-mail: thomas_hoefler@gmx.de