

## What's with THAT historical pattern?

As somebody who knows German and now knows the history of the language, you're gonna get a lot of questions from now on, some from people learning the language and some from people who happen across something in the language or maybe because people realize how cool you are for knowing this stuff and want to bathe in the sweet light of your coolness. (OK, maybe the last one isn't all that common, but you get the picture.) One thing that can happen is that ordinary human beings sometimes see some bits of historical data and notice that it's not like modern German. Help out the hypothetical historical linguistics novices on the issues below. '\*' after a question is to assure you that I'll actually heard that one!

1. I'm never sure about whether some verbs are strong or weak and then I started noticing that Germans don't seem to be either: I've heard *sandte* and *sendete*, *molk* and *melkte*, and in literary texts I've seen *hieb* for *haute* and *ward* for *wurde*. I've even heard *fragte* und *frug*, and I was pretty sure that *fragen* was weak.
2. Is it true that German and English developed from the Latin? Somebody told me that.\*
3. You told me that over the history of German, endings of words were steadily eroded away. But a professor told us that forms like *sagst* and *nimmst* used to be without a *-t*, *sagis* and *nimis*. If that's right, those endings have gotten longer not shorter. What's up with that?
4. We were reading some Walther von der Vogelweide in a class and he writes "unter den linden an der heide, dâ unser zweier bette was". He's got 'was' like English instead of 'war' like German should have. And he rhymes it with 'gras', so it can't be a typo! What's that about?
5. I was reading Goethe's *Faust* and found a double negative! "Es ist als hätte **niemand nichts** zu treiben und **nichts** zu schaffen." How can the greatest German poet use such bad grammar?
6. You think that's bad, I have been reading a bunch of Schiller's and Goethe's poetry and they makes rhymes with totally hick pronunciations:
  - a. Philosophie ~ **Müh**
  - b. Götter ~ Blätter
  - c. genug ~ Geruch
  - d. Ach neige, du Schmerzenreiche

How can you be talking about philosophy and say *Mühe* as *Mih!*!?!?

7. In German, we say *Haus, aus* and *Zeit, Eis* but I was in Switzerland and people said *Huus, uus* and *Ziit, Iis*. I told a friend from North Germany about this and she said that in Plattdeutsch, they had the same vowels in those words, even though the consonants are way different: *Hus, ut* and *Tiet, Ies*. How can that be?
8. I was in northern Germany and the dialect seems almost like English. For *two*, they say *twee* instead of *zwei*, and *to* is *to* or *tau*, not *zu*. And *up* is *up*, not *auf*. *Make* is *maken* not *machen*. It goes on and on and involves really basic vocabulary. Is this some weird coincidence?
9. I heard Luther created the modern German language from a bunch of really different dialects. Is that true? How do we really know?\*
10. No, somebody actually told me that the chanceries created standard German and even Luther himself said that he spoke the language of the Saxon Chancery. Which story is right?