

# German Newsletter

März 2026 / March 2026

*Herzlich Willkommen! In dieser Ausgabe des German Newsletters können Sie über die Erfahrungen unserer Studierenden bei uns in Newcastle und im Ausland lesen und zwei Artikel des Kollegiums finden. Viel Spaß beim Lesen!*

*Welcome to the German Newsletter! In this issue you can read about our students' experiences here in Newcastle and abroad, as well as two articles by our lecturers. Enjoy the read!*

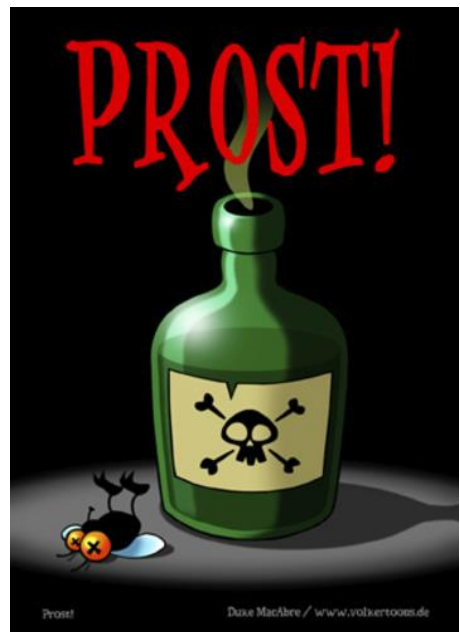
## From Gift to Poison: Understanding Language Change through False Friends

*by Dr Carol Fehringer (Senior Lecturer in Germanic Linguistics)*

Anyone who is learning a foreign language will have come across word pairs commonly referred to as “false friends”. At first glance, they look reassuringly similar, and yet they turn out to mean something quite different: e.g. German Mist (“dung/manure”) does not mean the same as English mist.

However, we shouldn't simply see such words as annoying pitfalls for language learners. In fact, false friends are fascinating linguistic time capsules, and when we study historical linguistics (how languages change over time), we come to appreciate their importance for the study of semantic change.

English and German both developed from a shared Germanic ancestor, spoken over 2,000 years ago, and many everyday words still bear the marks of that common origin. Over the centuries, however, many meanings have changed. Some words have narrowed their meaning over time while others have broadened theirs. Take the pair Gift and gift. Nowadays, Gift means “poison” and gift means “present”. However, both words go back to an older meaning closer to “something given”. In German, this developed into “a dose” (of medicine or poison), and eventually narrowed further to mean “poison”, whereas in English it kept the original sense of giving, and became more positive. On the other hand, in the pair Brand (“fire”) and brand, it is the English word which has changed its meaning. The original meaning in Germanic was “fire, burning”, which then narrowed in English to



*Here's a **gift** for you!*

“burning a mark onto livestock for identification”. Later, this idea became generalised to mean any type of identifying mark, then a trademark, and then came to signal corporate identity.

These sorts of changes in meaning include semantic specialisation (a narrowing of meaning over time) and semantic expansion (a generalisation of meaning over time). These are very common in all languages, and sometimes they go hand-in-hand with a change in positive or negative connotation. For instance, in the pairs Lust - lust, and stark – stark, the German words have retained the original meanings (“pleasure”, “desire”, “enjoyment” for Lust and “strong” for stark) whereas the English equivalents have developed negative connotations in addition to a narrowing of meaning: lust is associated (often negatively) with a strong sexual craving, while stark is used to mean “harsh” or “grim” (e.g. a stark reality). By contrast, in frech – fresh, English has kept the original positive meaning whereas frech in German now means “cheeky”, “insolent”.

Studying historical linguistics allows us to trace the journey of these words through the centuries. In doing so, we not only uncover fascinating stories about how meanings shift but also gain insight into the shared history of languages and cultures. False friends remind us that words carry traces of the past and that paying attention to them can deepen our understanding of how language works.

## Spending Five Months in Graz

*by Bibi Shanks-Davison, final year student studying BA Modern Languages*

When I first found out that I would be spending half of my Year Abroad in Graz, I could hardly contain my excitement. I always knew that I wanted to go to Austria, even though I do love Germany very much. Spending the summer before the Year Abroad in Berlin nearly made me change my mind!! Having Austrian heritage myself and spending many summers as a child in Carinthia, I knew I just had to go back to my Austrian roots, and Graz did not disappoint.

Arriving in Graz completely alone was terrifying, but it was an adventure I couldn't wait to embark on. To say I developed as a person within the 5 months that I spent there would be an understatement. It's situations like these where it feels like you're starting all over again, including making friends with strangers and putting yourself out there, not even in your mother tongue! As the only person from my cohort going to Austria, I had to



rely on my new-found independence to spark up conversations with strangers and get over my fear of making mistakes and saying the wrong thing. Thank god that I did! I met some of my best friends by simply making eye contact and asking the cliché ‘where are you from?’ at Erasmus Student Network events. My friendship group in Graz was made up of two girls from Finland and a girl and a boy from Denmark, and I still keep in contact with all of them on a daily basis. This doesn’t even scratch the surface of all the friendships you will encounter on your year abroad – I met people from Ireland, Australia, Poland, Italy, France... just to name a few!

Nearly every weekend I had in Graz was spent travelling, whether that be with friends or a quick solo trip to a nearby city. Graz’s perfect location means you can travel with ease all around Europe – I like to say it is the heart of Europe, as it is so central and well-connected. A personal highlight would be a trip organised by ESN to Ljubljana and Lake Bled during the first couple of weeks, where I got to meet people from all over the world and explore a brand-new place. Other notable trips were a trip to München for Oktoberfest, a weekend in Budapest, day trips to Trieste, Zagreb, and even Kraków, which was only a 15-hour Flixbus journey away! Even travelling within Austria itself was incredible. I took full advantage of the Jugend-Vorteilskarte, which gives a 50% discount



on all rail travel for only 19 euro. Day trips to Vienna, Salzburg and Linz were always on the cards, as well as trips to smaller towns such as Hallstatt and Leoben. Styria (or Steiermark) also had its own Top-Ticket (similar to a Semesterticket), covering the whole of the region for 6 months. This meant I could travel as much as I wanted in Graz and the surrounding areas – and travelling to Hallstatt only cost me 1 euro. Given that Styria is known as ‘Das Gruene Herz Österreichs’ it goes without saying that the scenery when travelling by train was breathtaking.

Speaking German was quite intimidating, as the famous Austrian accent presented a barrier at the beginning. Slowly, I became accustomed to it, though it was a deeply humbling experience. Hearing words such as Oida, Bim, Schwammerl, Marille, Paradeiser and Heuer made me question everything I have ever known about the German language. I still remember one of my first encounters with a local at a bus stop, and I understood absolutely nothing he asked me – it may as well have been Greek! This experience reminded me of the diversity of accents and dialects that exist within languages, and how they are something to be celebrated!

I still remember my last day in Graz as if it were yesterday – I had an exam, and straight after I had to quickly say my goodbyes to friends who had become like family to me over the past few months, and catch the coach to Vienna airport, ready for the next chapter of my year abroad in Spain....

## Learning German from scratch... and then moving to Germany!

*By Lauren Miller, final year student studying BA Modern Languages, Translation and Interpreting*



I think the best part of doing a languages degree is the opportunity to pick up a new language in your first year. It's quite exciting going back to square one and starting from the beginning. Having studied French at A-level and a bit of Spanish in school, I wanted to try something entirely new, which is what led me to German. I can't say I wasn't intimidated: three genders, four cases and a never-ending stream of *Frankenwörter*... it seemed unfathomable that in just two years' time, I'd actually be moving to Germany!

In first year, Level A German is worth double credits. Essentially, it counts as two modules, which means that you have twice as many class hours and twice as much independent study than for post-A-Level languages. While this might sound intense, I found the course well-paced, and I had a little bit to do every day between classes. I literally never had to cram. In turn, I developed healthy, consistent study habits whilst naturally improving my language skills. Another benefit to German is that the class sizes tend to be smaller than for other languages. Our seminar group is where I made the most friends, and as a result, I was less self-conscious practicing my speaking. It's a lot easier to just give something a go when it feels like you're all in it together.

Since we had already covered all the essential grammar in first year, I felt well prepared to join the first-year students (who had studied A-Level German) in second year. While they had grammar to revisit, most of it was fresh in my head. My German was also strong enough to take a culture module taught monolingually, and most importantly, keep up! Yes, there was certainly an adjustment period, but it gave me the foundation to push myself further and further. Before I knew it, I was applying to become an English Language Assistant in Germany for my Year Abroad.

On the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 2024, I was sitting alone in the window seat of a (delayed) Ryanair flight to Dortmund, North-Rhine Westphalia. We were twenty minutes to landing, looking down over the Ruhr Valley, population five million, condensed into a sprawling, shimmering spider web. How on earth did I get here?



First year me probably couldn't comprehend the confidence I had to move to a country where I didn't fully speak the language, never mind the person I'd become while I was there. The immersion you get from living in your host country is undeniable: I made so much progress, in fact, that I started to pick up bits of the local dialect. Every morning car-share with my supervisor, I'd get my pronunciation corrected from *abba* back to *aber* and *Vatta* back to *Vater*. But beyond improving my speaking, living in Germany let me



explore its culture, too. I got to visit countless Christmas markets, experience Oktoberfest and Karneval, and appreciate its breathtaking countryside. And though I'd like to joke that a midnight döner plate is the pinnacle of German culture, it really is the little things, too, like going to the bakery for fresh, local bread or sitting down for a board games night with your family.

Yes, studying German has given me another language to speak. But it has also helped me to open up, explore the world, and make lifelong, life-changing connections. German has taught me to push myself in ways I never knew possible, and for that I am so incredibly grateful.

## Auf den Spuren Nietzsches im schweizerischen Engadin

von Dr Rich McClelland (Head of German)



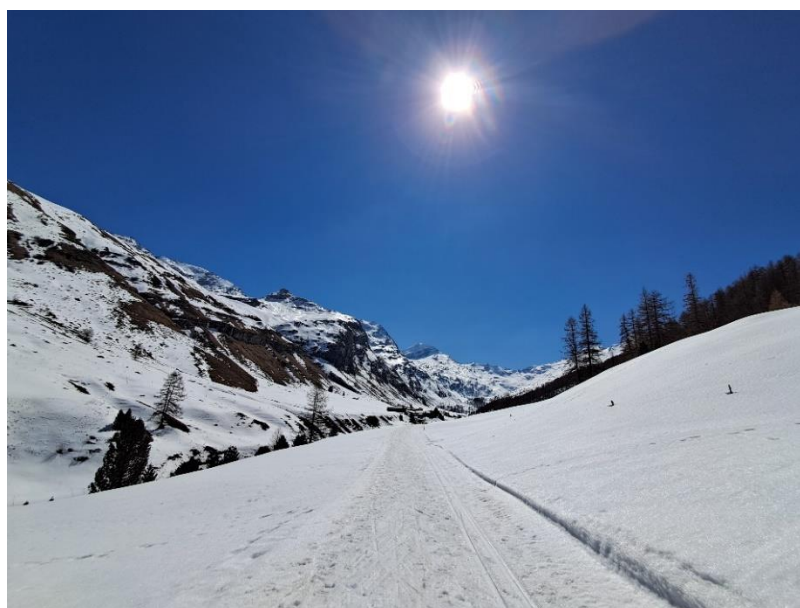
*Das Nietzsche-Haus im tiefen Schnee*

Hohe Berge mit weissen Gipfeln, gefrorene Seen, schneebedeckte Tannen und ein kristallklarer blauer Himmel. Auch im Winter ist das Engadin ein wirklicher Sehnsuchtsort...

Ich schreibe im Moment ein Buch zum Thema Mehrsprachigkeit in der schweizerischen Gegenwartsliteratur. Ich interessiere mich vor allem für die Deutsch-Rätoromanische Mehrsprachigkeit, wie Autor\*innen diese Sprachen in ihren Texten mischen und was das ästhetisch bedeutet.

Ich fahre deswegen so oft wie möglich in die Schweiz, um vor Ort meine Forschung zu erweitern. Im März 2025 war ich im Engadin, einem alpinischen Tal im schweizerischen Südosten, um in der *Biblioteca Engadinaisa* (Engadiner Bibliothek) zu schaffen. Die Bibliothek liegt in Sils Maria, einem Dorf im Oberengadin am Ufer des Silsersees. Das Dorf ist wegen einem berühmten Philosophen weltweit bekannt: Friedrich Nietzsche, der 1881 und 1883-88 in einer Pension im Dorf übersommerte. Während Nietzsche in Sils-Maria war, unternahm er viele Wanderungen in der Nähe des Dorfes: Auf der Halbinsel Chastè, im Val Fex und dem Silser See entlang. Man kann heute seine Spuren durch die Umgebung nachverfolgen und die Orte besuchen, wo er einige seiner bedeutendsten philosophischen Ideen formulierte, darunter die Gestalt des Zarathustras und die Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen.

Das Haus, in dem Nietzsche damals übernachtete, ist heute ein Museum. Im Parterre gibt es Ausstellungen zu seinem Leben und Werk und man kann mit dem Kurator, Herrn Doktor Villwock, Gespräche zum Haus und Philosophen führen. Im März gab es in Sils Maria noch tiefen Schnee und man durfte noch über die gefrorenen Seen laufen. Das Haus sah märchenhaft aus. Im ersten



*Eine Wanderung im Val Fex*

Stockwerk ist sein Schlafzimmer besuchbar, welches mit Nietzsches Bett, einem Lavabo

und Holzboden wie am Ende des 19. Jahrhundert ausgestattet ist. In einem anderen Zimmer sind Nietzsches Möbel zu besichtigen, welche er in seiner Basler Wohnung besass. Neben diesen Zimmern gibt es auch Gästezimmer für Akademiker\*innen, Studierende, Künstler\*innen und andere, die sich ein bisschen Ruhe gönnen möchten. Von meinem Zimmer konnte man den Silser Kirchturm sehen und hinter ihm die eisigen Wände des Piz Lagrevs.

Im Haus gab es manchmal eine seltsame Stimmung, als ob der alte Nietzsche hinter einer Tür hockte, um Besucher\*innen und Gäste zu erschrecken. Unten in der Küche konnte man das Gespenst leicht vergessen. Ein heisses Feuer brannte im Kamin, man kochte mit den anderen Gästen ein gemeinsames Abendessen und teilte einen Kaffee oder ein paar Biere. Nach einer Woche im wunderbaren Dorf musste ich wieder ins "Flachland" reisen, um weiter in Zürich zu forschen. Das war ja keine Strafe, aber ich



*Der gefrorene Silsersee mit menschlichen Fussspuren*

musste am letzten Morgen darüber nachdenken, wie und wann ich zum nächsten Mal im Dorf sein würde. Obwohl ich wohl älter als Zarathustra bin, musste ich auch an die ersten Zeilen von *Also Sprach Zarathustra* denken:

*Als Zarathustra dreissig Jahr alt war, verliess er seine Heimat und den See seiner Heimat und ging in das Gebirge. Hier genoss er seines Geistes und seiner Einsamkeit und wurde dessen zehn Jahr nicht müde....*