

## The Awful German Language!

Der amerikanische Schriftsteller Mark Twain versuchte in den 1870er Jahren Deutsch zu lernen und wurde fast wahnsinnig dabei. Warum er diese Sprache so hasste, erzählt er am besten selbst (*natürlich auf Englisch*)

Text: Mark Twain, Illustration: Jindrich Novotny

→ I went often to look at the collection of curiosities in Heidelberg Castle, and one day I surprised the keeper of it with my German. I spoke entirely in that language. He was greatly interested; and after I had talked a while he said my German was very rare, possibly a „unique“; and wanted to add it to his museum.

If he had known what it had cost me to acquire my art, he would also have known that it would break any collector to buy it. Harris and I had been hard at work on our German during several weeks at that time, and although we had made good progress, it had been accomplished under great difficulty and annoyance, for three of our teachers had died in the mean time. A person who has not studied German can form no idea of what a perplexing language it is.

Surely there is not another language that is so slipshod and systemless, and so slippery and elusive to the grasp. One is washed about in it, hither and thither, in the most helpless way; and when at last he thinks he has captured a rule which offers firm ground to take a rest on amid the general rage and turmoil of the ten parts of speech, he turns over the page and reads, „Let the pupil make careful note of the following exceptions.“ He runs his eye down and finds that there are more exceptions to the rule than instances of it. So overboard he goes again, to hunt for another Ararat and find another quicksand. Such has been, and continues to be, my experience.

An average sentence, in a German newspaper, is a sublime and impressive curiosity; it occupies a quarter of a column; Ger-



Berlin mochte er besonders gern: Der Schriftsteller Mark Twain (1835 bis 1910) reiste mehrmals nach Europa. Diesen Text veröffentlichte er 1880 in seinem Buch „Bummel durch Europa“

man books are easy enough to read when you hold them before the looking-glass or stand on your head -- so as to reverse the construction -- but I think that to learn to read and understand a German newspaper is a thing which must always remain an impossibility to a foreigner.

My philological studies have satisfied me that a gifted person ought to learn English (barring spelling and pronouncing) in thirty hours, French in thirty days, and German in

thirty years. It seems manifest, then, that the latter tongue ought to be trimmed down and repaired. If it is to remain as it is, it ought to be gently and reverently set aside among the dead languages, for only the dead have time to learn it. ←

Dieser Text wurde von uns gekürzt. In voller Länge könnt ihr ihn zum Beispiel unter [www.kombu.de/twain-2.htm](http://www.kombu.de/twain-2.htm) lesen. Es lohnt sich