

Deutsch lernen und unterrichten – Arbeitsmaterialien

Radio D – Teil 1

Episode 12 - Mail from Listeners

If there's something you don't understand, it's always good to ask. The professor answers the questions about past episodes that Radio D listeners have sent in.

The listeners ask and the professor answers, getting to the root of every question. It's a good opportunity for the listeners to review information, expand their knowledge, or just ask something they always wanted to know.

Listen for these question from the listeners -- and the professor's answers to each of them: Which address is suitable for which situation? When can I use "**du**" or "**Sie**"? How do I introduce myself? When do I know when to use **first** or **last names**? What do modal particles like "**denn**," "**doch**," and "**eigentlich**" mean? What is the difference between "**nicht**" and "**nichts**"?

Manuscript of Episode 12

You're listening to Radio D, the radio language course of Redaktion D, a joint project of the Goethe Institut and Deutsche Welle Radio. The author is Herrad Meese.

Moderator

And a warm welcome to Episode Twelve of your German course, *Radio D*. It's special today – we're going to be answering some listeners' letters, that is our professor will be.

Paula

Hallo, liebe Hörerinnen und Hörer.

Philipp

Willkommen...

Paula

... bei Radio D.

Philipp

Radio D...

Paula

... Hörerpost

Moderator

OK, let's go straight to the first question. A woman listener asks about the "you"-form of address in German – when is it DU and when is it SIE?

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Sprecherin

Was machen Sie hier?

Was machst du hier?

Dr. Gudden

Was machen Sie denn?

Josefine

Ayhan, was machst du da?

Paula

Entschuldigung. Entschuldigung: Wer sind Sie?

Schauspieler

König Ludwig.

Paula

Also, Philipp: Das ist Ayhan.

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Professor

Well, that is a very interesting question, that one. And many Germans aren't sure about it, either. Let's have an example so that everyone knows just what we're talking about. Listen for **SIE** and **DU**.

Professor

We'll now play you two bits from scenes in which these two questions are asked. You may even remember who said it to whom. Then you can get a feel for when one says **DU** and when one says **SIE**.

Moderator

Remember, that was the doctor of King Ludwig II.

Professor

And he, of course, addresses the king very politely indeed.

Moderator

Of course.

Professor

Yes, of course. And in German the polite form of you is **SIE**.

Moderator

And that was Josefine, asking Ayhan what he's doing.

Professor

And being young, knowing each other and having a lot to do with each other, Josefine and Ayhan are on **DU** terms. Listen to two more examples and pay attention again to the roles of those conversing.

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Philipp

Wie heißt du? Ayhan? Ayhan?

Moderator

So, if you want to be polite and respectful and you're addressing strangers or people with higher status, you use the "SIE"-form of address.

And among friends and people you know well you use **DU**, is that right?

Professor

No, it's not quite as general as that. You also say **SIE** to many people you know, and many young folks start off right away with **DU** even if they don't know each other – because they don't pay a lot of attention to formalities. I'd recommend to our listeners that it's never wrong to address someone as **SIE**. But if you say **DU** to someone right off, they might consider that impolite and you wouldn't be off to the most brilliant start of a conversation.

Moderator

Right, and people you've addressed with **SIE** but for whom the "**DU**"-form is more usual we'll soon tell you.

Right, the next question from a listener is about how one's supposed to introduce oneself. Do you say only your first name, or your first name and your surname.

Professor

We talked about this in a previous episode and pointed out that it depends on the social context.

I want to our listeners to know that they can't go wrong giving just their surnames – especially on official occasions or when getting to know new people.

Sprecher

Mein Name ist Müller.

Sprecherin

Mein Name ist Meyer.

Moderator

Now, usually we either introduce ourselves to other people or we are introduced to them by someone else. What's the usual response, Professor?

Professor

One says something like "angenehm", which means something like "my pleasure", which is a bit too formal and somewhat old fashioned. Most times one just introduces oneself by saying one's name. One often also hears the question, "Wie geht es Ihnen?", how are you, or just something like "how's it going?" - WIE GEHT'S?

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Dr. Gudden

Majestät, wie geht es Ihnen?

Philipp

Tag, Hanne. Wie geht's?

Moderator

But as a question it's not really meant seriously, though, is it? I mean, do they expect an answer?

Professor

In the context of just meeting someone it's a more or less empty phrase. And it's answered in kind, for example, "good thank you", - "Danke gut" or "Danke, und Ihnen?", "thanks, and how about you?".

So we're not meant to go into detail about what you happen to be experiencing just at that moment.

Moderator

OK, next question coming up – and it's a tough one. A listener asks about the use of the word **DENN**.

Professor

No, that's not a tough question. I wouldn't say that. I'd rather describe it as a smart question, though. I'm getting really excited about this one. The listener is asking about the function of DENN. That's an unchangeable word belonging with the particles – PARTIKEL.

Moderator

Hang on. Before you get too abstract, Professor, let's have a couple of examples for the listeners.

Sprecherin

Wer bist **du** denn?

Sprecher

Was **machen** Sie denn?

Professor

You must have understood the two questions, "Who are you? What are you doing?" Depending on the context these questions are spoken in, they have different accents.

In the question "Wer bist du?", who are you? The stress might be on the **you – DU** – if one wants to know who someone is.

Sprecherin

Wer bist **du**?

Moderator

Also curiosity or amazement is emphasised if you use the particle DENN. For example, when Philipp hears the voice of Compu for the first time.

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Philipp

Wer bist **du** denn?

Compu

Ich bin Compu.

Sprecher

Was **machen** Sie denn?

Dr. Gudden

Was **machen** Sie denn?

Halt! Halt!

Moderator

You use **DENN** to react to something that was said or done earlier. The response can express amazement or perhaps annoyance. Have a listen again to the example in which the accent is on the verb **MACHEN**.

Moderator

Understandably King Ludwig's doctor is pretty annoyed when the king wants to pull him into the water.

Professor

Like all particles, the little word **DENN** does not fundamentally change the meaning of something being said. But it does modify it – that is. It strengthens or weakens it.

Moderator

So the meaning of the utterance stays the same – but why do our listeners have to know that?

Professor

You're right, one understands the sentences without the particles, too, one doesn't have to look long for the meaning. But our listeners should know that there's a lot of these particles in spoken German. And sentences with particles sound much smoother, not so dry.

Moderator

Right.

Professor

Listen to two more examples:

Sissi

Was ist denn das?

König Ludwig

Ein Tisch, liebe Sissi.

Josefine

Hilfe, wer ist das denn?

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Compu
Eulalia.

Moderator
So, have we been hearing any more particles?

Professor
Yes, we have actually. I'd also like to talk about the particle – **DOCH**. You turn to your interlocutor with DOCH to seek their agreement on something.

Sprecher
Das ist doch Philipp.

Professor
One reminds the partner that he wanted to know something – for example, that there's an owl at Radio D.

Philipp
Wie bitte? Wer ist das denn?

Paula
Eine Eule. Das siehst du doch!

Moderator
And especially when something is pretty self-evident DOCH is used a lot to express mild irritation.

Josefine
Hallo, Eule, du bist auch noch da?

Compu
Das ist eine Eule, aber sie heißt Eulalia.
Das weißt du doch.

Professor
And to finish, I'd like to mention my favourite particle; it's – **EIGENTLICH** – that means actually, and it's pretty mean.

Sprecher
Wo ist Philipp?

Sprecherin
Wo ist eigentlich Philipp?

Moderator
How do you mean, mean?

Professor
Because it floats around looking harmless when in fact it can greatly strengthen an accusation. What do you think – is Ayhan asking a harmless question, or does it also carry the accusation that Philipp isn't in the current affairs room?

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Ayhan

Wo ist eigentlich Philipp?

Paula

In München.

Compu

Nein, im Stau. Philipp ist im Stau.

Moderator

Next question. A listener asks when you use NICHT, not, and when NICHTS, nothing.

Professor

I don't want to start with an example this time, but I'd rather give our listeners a tip: the two negation words NICHT and NICHTS sound very alike in German. So there's a real danger of getting them mixed up a bit.

Moderator

So, how do you avoid it?

Professor

It's best to learn the examples in context and imagine the situation. In a situation where one hasn't got a clue about what's being said the obvious thing to say is "I understand nothing", or "I don't understand a thing."

Sprecher

Ich verstehe nichts.

Moderator

Right, that's what happens with Ayhan when Paula returns to the office from her reporting assignment about King Ludwig and Ayhan can't understand why she's so cross.

Ayhan

Paula, ich verstehe nichts.
Ich verstehe überhaupt nichts.

Paula

Du verstehst nichts? Ach!

Professor

So, NICHTS negates something general, for example, when one doesn't understand something at all....and I suppose there's the same difference in every language between not understanding something at all and not knowing about a specific thing. And in German the latter is expressed by the word NICHT. It always relates to something specific.

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Frau Frisch

Mein Name ist Frisch, Hanne Frisch.
Ist Philipp da?

Josefine

Nein, der ist nicht da.

Sprecherin

Du verstehst alles?

Josefine

O, Entschuldigung, du verstehst alles?

Josefine

Eulalia, Eulalia –
woher kommt dein Name?

Eulalia

Ich bin klug und weise,
aber ich weiß nicht alles.

Paula

Liebe Hörerinnen und Hörer, bis zum nächsten Mal.

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Moderator

Or it can simply negate a specific thing. For example, we hear that Philipp is not at the Radio D current affairs office when his mother phones him there.

Professor

Let me make quick reference to the opposite of NICHTS, the word all – ALLES.

Moderator

That was Josefine's stunned reaction when she discovered that Eulalia understands everything.

Professor

ALLES and NICHTS describe positively and negatively something very general. And the middle way between knowing everything and nothing is "nicht alles wissen" – not knowing everything – so now one actually knows it all, right?

Moderator

Well, I'm afraid that's all the time we have today for listeners' mail. Thanks very much, Professor.

Professor

As always it's my pleasure. And I'd like to thank our listeners for their very astute questions.

Moderator

In our next episode reporters Philipp and Paula will be covering a new story.

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Ayhan
Und tschüs.

You've been listening to Radio D, a German course of the Goethe Institut and Deutsche Welle Radio.

Herrad Meese