Episode 098 – Grammar

Declension of adjectives in a sequence

German adjectives provide more information about something or someone, an occurrence or a condition. They often describe nouns and personal pronouns.

You’ve already learned how to inflect an adjective that precedes a noun. If the adjective comes directly before the noun it modifies, then its ending changes. The adjective is usually placed between the noun and its article.

If several adjectives precede a noun, they all get the same ending. In other words, they all follow the same pattern of declension.

Examples:
Ich hätte gern die großen roten Rosen.
Ich hätte gern 22 große rote Rosen.
Ich möchte einen großen, romantischen Blumenstrauß.

Comma placement

If all the adjectives modify the subsequent noun equally, then they share the same ranking. They’re treated like a string of words and are separated by commas.

Example:
Ich möchte einen großen, romantischen Blumenstrauß.
The word "und" could be inserted between adjectives of equal ranking.

Example:
Ich möchte einen großen und romantischen Blumenstrauß.

If the adjective directly adjacent to the noun forms a unit with the noun, then the adjectives are not equal. In this case they are not separated by a comma because the first adjective modifies the subsequent word group, which comprises a noun and an adjective.

Example:
Ich hätte gern die großen roten Rosen. (I would like the red roses that are big.)

Whether two or more adjectives in a sentence need to be separated by commas usually depends on the intended meaning of that particular sentence.

Example:
Er hat ein neues schnelles Auto. (= Sein altes Auto war auch schnell.)
Er hat ein neues, schnelles Auto. (= Sein altes Auto war vermutlich nicht so schnell.)