Simple Guidelines to Find Correct German Articles

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Since many studies have been conducted already on articles and gender in German, it is suggested that this paper form an insight into contrastive aspects of Sinhalese and German gender. Thus, this paper presents a novel set of guidelines which help Sinhalese native speakers to use German articles correctly.

According to several studies, Language is the most important part in the life of all beings. We use language to express inner thoughts and emotions, make sense of complex and intellectual thought, to learn to communicate with others, to fulfill our wants and needs, as well as to establish rules and maintain our culture. Language can be defined as verbal, physical, biologically innate and a basic form of communication. Behaviorists often define language as a learned behavior involving a stimulus and a response. Often times they will refer to language as verbal behavior, which is language that includes gestures and body movements as well as spoken word.

Through the main languages of the world German is a most important language. German is a West Germanic language that is mainly spoken in Central Europe. It is the most widely spoken and official language in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Liechtenstein. It is also an official, but not majority language of Luxembourg and Belgium. Major languages, which are most similar to German, include other member of the West Germanic language branch, such as Afrikaans, Dutch and English.

German is the first language of about 95 million people worldwide and the most widely spoken native language in European Union. It is also the third most widely taught foreign language.

German is a fissional language with a moderate degree of inflection with three grammatical genders. For an example, there can be a large number of words derived from the same root. German nouns inflect by case, gender and number.
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When learning German as a foreign language, Sri Lankan learners find certain areas of difficulty that are common to many language learners all over the world. Since there are two categories of language learners – monolingual (competent in the mother tongue) and bilingual (competent in the mother tongue and one or more language/s). The teachers or the lecturers need to identify the areas of difficulty for learners of both categories. As it is the case of any foreign language, the largest areas of difficulty come in grammatical structures.

The German nouns have a grammatical gender unlike in the Sinhalese language or English where the three genders masculine, feminine and neuter are logically placed as masculine and feminine for humans and neuter for non-humans and objects.

In German all nouns are divided into the three genders and it appears very confusing to a learner, whose first language does not have grammatical gender.

They find it extremely difficult to understand why a table and chair are masculine, while a child is neuter. As well as abstract ideas are always written with a capital letter in German and the gender is shown by the article in front of the noun.

Ex: Gender with definite article (bestimmter Artikel)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>masculine</th>
<th>der Tisch</th>
<th>table</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td>die Tür</td>
<td>door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neuter</td>
<td>das Buch</td>
<td>book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And also there are four German cases, nominative, accusative, dative and genitive. Although Sri Lankan learners are familiar with case in their own mother tongue or in English, students of German have to be mindful of the changes that occur in the article der, die, das according to each case.
As already mentioned, the choice of grammatical gender for a noun does not follow a logical set of rules. It is advisable; therefore always have to learn nouns together with the correct article. Luckily there are few simple rules that apply to certain kinds of nouns that can help German language learners remember.

**Masculine (der):**

1) Males (humans, animals), male jobs/ occupations

Ex: der Onkel, der Vater  **uncle, father**  
der Ingenieur, der Grafiker  **engineer, designer**  
der Löwe, der Hund  **lion, dog**

2) Days of the week, months, seasons

Ex: der Montag, der Dienstag  **Monday, Tuesday**  
der Januar, der Februar  **January, February**  
der Frühling, der Sommer  **spring, summer**

3) Most loan words with the following endings:

- *and/- ant*  der Doktor**and**  **Doctoral candidate**  
der Elefant  **elephant**

- *ent*  der Student  **student**  
der Patient  **patient**

- *er*  der Computer  **computer**  
der Besucher  **visiter**

- *ig*  der Ess**ig**  **vinegar**  
der Honig  **honey**

- *mus*  der Tourism**mus**  **tourism**  
der Terrorism**mus**  **terrorism**
Simple Guidelines to Find Correct German Articles

-ist  
der Spezialist  specialist  
der Polizist  policeman

-ling  
der Frühling  spring  
der Lehrling  apprentice

-or  
der Motor  motor  
der Reaktor  reactor

Feminine (die): ²

1) Females (humans, animals), female jobs/occupations

Ex:  
die Tante, die Kollegin  aunt, colleague  
die Anwältin, die Architektin  Lawyer, architect  
die Kuh, die Katze  cow, cat

2) Many flowers and trees

Ex:  
die Rose, die Tanne  rose, fir tree

3) Most nouns with the following endings:

-ei  
die Bücherei  library  
die Partei  party

-enz  
die Konferenz  conference  
die Existenzen  existence

-heit  
die Freiheit  freedom  
die Gesundheit  health

-keit  
die Möglichkeit  possibility  
die Geschwindigkeit  speed

-ie  
die Industrie  industry  
die Demokratie  democrac
-ik
die Fabrik  factory
die Politik  politics

-in
die Chefin  (female) boss
die Trainerin  (female) trainer

-ion
die Region  region
die Nation  nation

-schaft
die Wirtschaft  economy
die Wissenschaft  science

-tät
die Qualität  quality
die Produktivität  productivity

-ung
die Einladung  invitation
die Vertretung  stand-in

**Neuter (das):**

1) Many nouns with the prefix “Ge” at the beginning

Ex:  das Gemüse, das Gebirge  *vegetable, mountains*

2) The infinitive forms of verbs acting as nouns

Ex:  das Essen, das Rauchen  *eating, smoking*

3) All nouns ending in

-chen  das Mädchen  girl
das Brötchen  bread roll

-lein  das Büchlein  *little book*
das Ringlein  *little ring*
Simple Guidelines to Find Correct German Articles

4) A lot of nouns ending in

-nis    das Verzeichnis     register
         das Geheimnis     secret
-ment   das Medikament     medicine
         das Instrument    instrument
-o      das Büro           office
         das Auto          car
-(r)um  das Wachstum       growth
         das Stadtzentrum  town center

As already mentioned before, the students of German language are often advised to learn German nouns with their accompanying definite article, as the definite article of a German noun resembles to the gender of the noun. However, the meaning or form, especially the ending, of a noun can be used to recognise 80% of noun genders.

Through these guidelines for specific groups of nouns, the German language learners may have noticed, that according to the ending of noun change the article each time. This is the simple way to memorise German articles.

End Notes

Reference List


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