

German Word Pronunciation

The pronunciation of German words is consistent. Unlike the pronunciation of American vowels, the vowels in German are always pronounced the same. The vowels sounds are as follows:

- 'a' as in law
- 'e' as in hey
- 'i' as in ski
- 'o' as in toe
- 'u' as in tune

These vowel pronunciations are common throughout the world in many different languages (Spanish, Latin, Japanese, etc.). Whenever in doubt about pronouncing the name of a person (or city) from another country, apply these vowel pronunciations and you will be right most of the time.

In German, there are some additional vowel combinations that have unique vowel pronunciations. They are:

- 'ei' as in eye
- 'ie' as in ski
- 'ö' (oe) ... shape the lips for saying the word 'oh' but say 'e' as in hey
- 'ü' (ue) ... shape the lips for saying the word 'oh' but say 'i' as in ski

Most of the consonants are pronounced as we pronounce them in American English. Some of the most notable exceptions are:

- 'ch' in German has no English similarity. The closest is the composer Bach.
- 'd' in German is often pronounced as a 't' when at the end of a word.
- 'j' in German is pronounced as an 'y' ('Ja' is pronounced 'ya').
- 'r' in German is usually rolled ... the front of the tongue vibrates.
- 's' in German is pronounced as an 's' at the end of a word, as a 'z' when in the front or middle of word, and as an 'sh' when before a 'p' or 't'.
- 'v' in German is pronounced as an 'f' ('Vater' is pronounced 'fater').
- 'w' in German is pronounced as an 'v' ('Wind' is pronounced 'vind').

Folks who grew up speaking German pronounce the letters

- 'th' as a 'd' ... for the word 'that' would say 'dat'
- 'j' as a 'ch' ... for the word 'just' would say 'chust'

The dialect called Schwäbisch is common for folks who lived in an area west of Stuttgart, Germany. Schwäbisch traveled from Germany to Russia to North Dakota and South Dakota.

There are differences between Hoch Deutsch and Schwäbisch. For example, ist = ish, gehts = gesh, nicht = net. A Schwäbisch response to "wie gehts" (how are you) is "zimlich gut" (fairly good).

Also, some consonants are different. For example "kraut" is pronounced "graut".

There is one specific difference that makes Schwäbisch very unique. Words that end in "le" or "la" means small. Words such as Hutchle = small horse ... Mädle = small girl ... Hundle = small dog ... Voegle = small bird.

The food Knöpfle (Knoepfla) is also interesting. Knopf means button. Knöpfe means buttons. Knöpfle can be thought of as small buttons of flour. Although I don't think of Fleischküchle (Fleischkuechle) as being small. :-)

I have also found that people with a last name ending in "le" have ancestors originating from the area west of Stuttgart, Germany.

There are many in Mercer County who still speak Schwäbisch.