

Podcast - How to Hochschule



Show transcript

Episode 2 - How to German

00:00:00: Stephan Hanf: Welcome to How to Hochschule - our audio guide about tackling life and work at Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences, one of the most international universities in Germany. So grab a cup of tea, put on your comfy headphones, and join us as we explore the world of Hochschule Rhein-Waal

00:00:38: Stephan Hanf: When we started this program, we searched for people who can help us doing the production, during the interviews. One person we found during the pre-production phase was...

00:00:57: Hari: Hi, everyone! My name is Hari, and I am the special guest of today's episode

00:01:03: Stephan Hanf: And there's a certain reason for it. So in the last episode, we had an interview with Nele. "Nele. We are recording."

00:01:09: Nele: "Perfect".

00:01:10: Stephan Hanf: Hari helped me out last time in the first episode, recording a few interviews

00:01:15: Hari: "and I had no idea what the point of this was, but I thought, okay"

00:01:18: Stephan Hanf: "Nele, what is the point of this?"

00:01:20: Stephan Hanf: During the interview, we find something out about you that's quite interesting. "Really?!" We had a discussion that your German got worse during your studies here.

00:01:33: Nele: "What?"

00:01:34: Hari: Yeah. You say you found out something interesting. It's more like something quite embarrassing, I think, in my opinion. And we decided, "hey let's make an episode about this, like, how to speak German!"

00:01:46: Stephan Hanf: Because it's an important part to...you live in Germany.

00:01:48: Hari: Yeah, I plan to keep living in Germany as well for a while at least.

00:01:53: Stephan Hanf: So you probably need German.

00:01:55: Hari: Probably. It's easy to survive in Germany without actually speaking German, depending on where you are.

00:02:01: Stephan Hanf: Right.

00:02:02: Hari: But there will always be a time when you would need the language. I grew up in Malaysia in a city called Penang. It's on the west coast, it's an island actually. So Penang is a, Malaysia itself is a multicultural nation. Big part of it is because of colonialism. You have generally three big ethnic groups in Malaysia. You have the Malays, which are supposed to be the original people there, and then later on you had the people from China and people from India that came into the country for different reasons. My roots are South Indian. So the way my people came to the country was, when the British were ruling us, Malaysia did provide a lot of rubber for the British Empire, which was a big part of their economy. So they brought a whole bunch of people from the south of India to work in the rubber plantations. And what happened was after independence and after everyone started to get into their own thing, really become more members of the society, the people who started their lives there as, well, I think "slave" would be a bit of an exaggeration, but they were working the plantations. Those people got left behind and that carried on until modern times. So the reason that I decided to leave Malaysia was because growing up as a member of this community, in that society, you face racial discrimination your entire life. So ever since you're a kid, basically. So at some point I thought, okay I would like to live in a place where I am treated like an equal. And at the time, even when you take into consideration the amount of money you're going to spend to leave the country, Germany just seemed to be the best option because other countries, like the nearest would be Australia - that's another popular destination, but it's very expensive. So I decided, okay, I'll give Germany a shot. That was the main reason that I left my country,

00:03:54: Stephan Hanf: What brought you to the next decision to pick Kleve?

00:03:58: Hari: Okay, so the things I knew about Germany were the things that...good things, only good things. It was the healthcare system, the social healthcare, the social systems in Germany, this free education, and you also have so many scientists and philosophers and people who really contribute(d) to Western civilization. So the thing that really attracted me about Germany was how different it was. And that was my perception. And I think to a certain degree, it's still the things that I thought about Germany. It's just that, coming here I was like, "Okay, we have these great social systems and all this stuff", but I didn't know how slow it would be trying to get an appointment at the doctors, for example, and the wheels of bureaucracy in Germany are very slow. That was stuff that I did not expect.

00:04:41: Hari: So I thought I was going to end up doing engineering like every other kid, and I had no idea about engineering. And now I know that I would hate it if I had done that. But I did apply to the mechanical engineering course as well as the mechatronics engineering course. And then I saw something called science communication. Never heard of this term before. And I thought, "okay, I care about people knowing about science. I think I'm a decent writer. I think I can talk", so I thought, "why not give it a shot?" And then I applied for these three courses and I got accepted for all three. And I thought, "okay, I think I would go with science communication". And that's how I ended up in Kleve. And then after five years actually living in Germany, my German got really bad. Like my confidence in speaking German dropped as well, which is weird, I think.

00:05:27: Stephan Hanf: It is.

00:05:28: Hari: Because it's usually the opposite. It's always the opposite, I think. But yeah, that's what happened. There's nothing wrong with learning another language. But I think at this point, I feel like me as a foreigner living in Germany, and this is just my personal belief, but I feel like I have a moral obligation to learn the language because I'm the one who came here. I can't expect people to speak my language because I came here to study because I don't like it in my country. It makes no sense to not speak the language.

00:06:02: Stephan Hanf: Lesson number one: Just ask. And we thought maybe we should just start at the very, very beginning, what normally happens when you come here as a student at the Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences. You do a German course.

00:06:20: Hari: You do a German course,

00:06:21: Stephan Hanf: And that's what we're doing right now. We are visiting a German course.

00:06:23: Hari: Yup. The A1.1 course. Absolute beginner's course.

00:06:28: Carla Bongers (in class): "Was ist an jedem Hafen? Marking sign for the ships entering the harbor. What do you see?"

00:06:40: German student (in class): "Helicopter."

00:06:41: Carla Bongers (in class): "Ne, kein Helikopter. In the darkness. In darkness..."

00:06:44: German student (in class): "Light! Ah, but I don't know how we call..."

00:06:47: Carla Bongers (in class): "Das ist ein Leuchtturm. It's a tower and on the top, you have fire."

00:06:58: Stephan Hanf: So we both went to a German class.

00:07:01: Hari: Yeah.

00:07:02: Stephan Hanf: Which was an A1 class.

00:07:04: Hari: It was the A1.1 class. So it's the first German class you will ever take wherever you go. If you want to do a German course, according to what we call the Common European Framework of Reference or CEFR. So that is the standard as to how your language proficiency is evaluated over here. That's the officially recognized language evaluation system, and the Hochschule Rhein-Waal offers up to B1.2. So in A1, you are learning all the basics: the basic vocabulary, the basic mechanics of grammar and things like that. And once you've made it to A2, once you finish A2, you can have the most basic conversations, but you are still not an independent speaker. So...

00:07:50: Stephan Hanf: What would be like a basic conversation?

00:07:52: Hari: Some stuff like that, like the most basic small talk, you're not going to say anything really deep, in my experience at least. You're probably not going to be able to really express your thoughts completely with just an A2, but you will have a sense of the basic grammar mechanics. But once you go to B1, that's when you're going to start to be more of an autonomous speaker. You're going to be more independent, so once you finish your B1.2, ideally, you should be able to hold a presentation on a topic that you prepared. It could be a cultural topic, things like that. You still would need to do some preparation, but you can hold a presentation and you would be able to have some discussion after the presentation. Maybe you're not able to just come up with the whole thing on the spot, like spontaneously, as you would in your native language, but you can still navigate your way around living in Germany

independently. You can, so to speak, survive in a daily situation in Germany. So the way it's arranged in this university is that the German classes actually can give you credits. But here's a disclaimer: you need to check with your examination board because it's not the same for every course. So you have to see how many credits you can get, but you can get up to five credits. So, if you complete the A2 course, so from A1 until A2.2, if you finish that, you can get up to five credits and if you complete the whole of the B1 course, you can get another five credits. As of 2022. Things have changed because I remember in 2017 there still was a B2 class.

00:09:20: Stephan Hanf: Oh yeah.

00:09:20: Hari: But the 2022 module description only mentions up to B1.2.

00:09:25: Stephan Hanf: So if I'm interested as a student in joining a German class at the Hochschule Rhein-Waal, what do I have to do?

00:09:33: Hari: Sign up on Moodle and sign up soon because there is a maximum capacity of 20 students per class and if you don't make it, you'll be put on a waiting list and you will be given priority for the next intake. But you should go to the language courses Moodle page and sign up over there. And if you need more details about the language courses, you can check out the webpage for the language department on the university website.

00:10:00: Stephan Hanf: What they actually do is they are getting prepared to test, right?

00:10:03: Hari: Ah, yes, they're getting prepared for an exam. For CEFR, the CEFR style exams, in general, you have the spoken test and in the spoken test you may be given certain words. In the A1 level, at least, you may be given certain words and you have to form a sentence or form a question or something like that. So really basic speaking skills. And then you have the written exam, which I believe includes a listening component as well. So you might have a text to listen to, an audio dialogue or something, a monologue to listen to. And then you're given questions usually in the form of multiple choice. And then you answer those questions, and then you have the written part of the exam where you have basic writing tasks. So the four skill areas in language learning are always tested at every level. So listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

00:10:55: Stephan Hanf: Did you find out anything from speaking with the German students who were in the same situation you were?

00:11:01: Hari: I think that the experience of being a language student is quite universal. Most of the time, at least. There were some who definitely had a gift for learning languages and the others had to study like everybody else. But one thing that was interesting is none of them are monolinguals. Every one of them speaks at least two languages. So they are coming into this already with the experience of having learned another language. So maybe that makes it easier for them. But yeah, all of them seem to have some struggles interacting with the local people of Kleve because they don't speak German. For example, going to a restaurant or something like that. Someone mentioned that the cashier or the server/waiter, whoever was a little bit annoyed that they didn't speak German and things like that. I think everyone who had to learn a language as an adult, could relate to that. And the guy sitting next to me was from Portugal originally, but then grew up in Spain and his name's Carlos. And during the break I asked him if he would like to tell me more about his experiences learning German here as an international student.

00:12:10: Carlos: I think, yeah, it's the, it is the language. If you talk the language they feel like you're like a friend and the things can be smoother and you can talk in a better way. But if you come from another country and you try to explain or to ask why things work like that, if they don't have the time to do so they just try to hurry up or shout a bit. So that's, yeah, the

shocking thing of here. That's, the thing with German language and all that stuff. But apart from that, I haven't experienced like other very difficult things. Like, I think all other things were nice until now. So I'm pretty happy about that. I haven't any bad experience here.

00:13:00: Hari: Essentially they were telling me that learning German is going to make your life so much easier, even though none of them actually need it for the university courses. But they need it for living here in Germany.

00:13:14: Stephan Hanf: I think the interesting part about the teacher, Ms. Carla Bongers, was the fact that she's doing it for a quite a long time, so she has quite a range of experience with students from this University of Applied Sciences.

00:13:29: Carla Bongers: I started as a teacher while I was studying at Münster University already. I studied English and Geography, and in 2011, my private life changed. And I thought, "okay, what are you going to do now?" And I thought, "oh, back to the roots". And then I got in contact with the language centre here at the Rhine-Waal University and for almost 11 years, I'm a teacher for German at this university. Now I teach the A1 classes and A2 classes. Some years ago, I also taught the B2 classes, B1 and B2 classes. I enjoy it. We sometimes play some games. We played lotto to learn the numbers and today they played a little bit with some clocks to learn what time we have. Cause many of them have a lot of difficulties learning the German time.

00:14:27: Hari: And so she was able to actually tell me some learning techniques that the students could use to improve their German learning experience and also make it fun.

00:14:36: Carla Bongers: I think the mistake, many of the students make a mistake, and they should start learning the vocabulary. They should start learning five new words a day. That's not too much. They should write five new words on a small card or on five cards. Put them in their pocket and every time they feel the pocket, they take these five cards and they just read the new words. And they can make a game out of it. If they have enough of the cards, they can meet their friends who also learn German, and they can have lunch at the Mensa and they can say, okay, you ask for a word and I'm going to ask, who has got the most right answers is going to pay for today, for example, yes? And I think this is the mistake because five new words a day means 25 new words per week, and these are a hundred per month and 1200 new words per year. And that's not a difficulty for those young people. They are intelligent and they know how to learn, yes? And they are in training.

00:15:37: Hari: And she also gave other tips on maybe some cultural activities that students could take part in to further expose themselves to the language.

00:15:47: Carla Bongers: There is a theatre not very far away from here. The XOX Theatre. A friend of mine was an actor over there just for fun. But this is something you learn the culture because they are not showing Macbeth or Hamlet or anything like this. There's more comedies and you can go to the theatre, Emmerich or to the theatre here in Kleve. There are concerts. You can see stand-up comedy. You just have to keep your eyes open and have a look at it.

00:16:16: Hari: But I think the biggest takeaway from Frau Carla Bongers was she said, you just have to ask. So what she meant by that was to get out of your comfort zone. Don't be shy and just speak to Germans in German.

00:16:29: Carla Bongers: They should meet Germans. They should go to some...whether they're interested in horse riding, they could go to the stable. Ask them, "can I help you for one afternoon? For this I don't want to be paid, but I just want to ride a horse for two hours or once a week". It's possible. Or they can go to a football club here and they can ask, "oh, I'm

coming from Nigeria. I like to play football. Could I play with you?" I think that most Germans would say, "okay, come on, join us." You just have to ask.

00:17:03: Hari: Even if it's the most basic conversations, it's to actually get out there and do it and I agree with her that is the way to go if you want to have lasting improvements in your language learning journey. And she also mentioned, so I am a big music fan, I also play a bit of music, and she mentioned this place called Haldern.

00:17:21: Carla Bongers: For example, you don't have to go to large festivals somewhere in the southern part of Germany. We have our festival over here in Haldern, Haldern Pop. It's famous all over Germany, and from all over the world you see these people coming to Haldern and sometimes you see these guys, they all already experienced Woodstock, and saw Joe Cocker live on stage at the time. And they are still hippie and they come to Haldern and leave the station over there and they go to this festival area and they have a small tent and they sleep over there. And it's crowded with the young people, older people, but the music is very good. Yeah. And you don't have any trouble over there.

00:18:30: Stephan Hanf: You mentioned like your main motivation to go to Haldern is what the German teacher, Carla Bongers told you, that the Haldern Pop Festival is a little bit like Woodstock Festival.

00:18:42: Hari: Yeah. Unfortunately I didn't make it to the Haldern Pop Festival, but I visited the Haldern Pop Bar anyway. So the bar has, there is a reason the festival has the same name as the bar because I think music is a big part of it. So they have live shows quite often. So when I was there, I managed to see two. And yeah, my motivation, like people might think, okay, why not Parookaville? Because it's also nearby. But I think Haldern Pop is more suited to my musical taste. And like I said, she mentioning, she comparing it to Woodstock really sold the idea to me that, okay, that's where I want to go next. And so yeah, that's where I went. Attended some concerts. I met a few people there. People from the Netherlands, there was another band from the Netherlands that came to watch one of the bands in Haldern, and I also discovered their music because I had a conversation with them. And then there was some people from Berlin, who grew up in Haldern but then moved to Berlin and then came back for this time period because the festival is nearby. So people keep coming back. And I think the craziest thing for me about Haldern pop was that a lot of big, successful bands got their start there. And this would be quite counterintuitive because Haldern is a, I don't mean this in a bad way, but a "Kühdorf". But you have massive international acts that got their start playing at this festival like Muse or George Ezra. He actually played in that bar. I have pictures. Not when I was there, but yeah, so this was a lot more interesting to me than anything else. So of course I, I went there. The shows are free and the people are really nice.

00:20:45: Stephan Hanf: Lesson number two, be part of it.

00:20:48: Hari: And then there's this really interesting, this other interesting cultural thing, which I had never heard of previously called, I hope I don't butcher the word, Schützenbruderschaft. Did I say it right?

00:20:58: Stephan Hanf: That's fine. Yeah. How would you translate it?

00:21:03: Hari: So the guy I talked to, his name is Benedikt, Benedikt Brömling. So he said Schützen, one of the meanings is to protect, and it also refers to the people who do the protecting. So like a night watch, there's a famous Rembrandt painting called The Night Watch, which is actually the Schützenbruderschaft of somewhere in the Netherlands. So it's a Germanic thing. Not German in particular, but it's like a Germanic thing. So every year they have a festival called Schützenfest, where they shoot wooden birds and they have a party,

and then they have a competition for someone who's gonna be the king, the Schützenkönig. Who's like a representative for the Schützen Brotherhood, the Bruderschaft, for that year. And it was really interesting. It goes back to middle Ages and I thought that was really cool. Very much more folky than other German festivals that I know of because being a student, you're here for the first few years and you think of German traditions, you think about Karneval, that's the nearest big thing. I went to Karneval once and I never wanted to go back. It was just way too much for me to handle. And then you have Kirmes; but Schutzenfest is different in the sense that you actually can feel the old, the heritage aspect of it. You can still feel the folk aspect of it because people are all dressed in traditional attire. They have traditional activities like the parade, like the actual shooting events and these old timey kind of concepts like the Shooting King and stuff like that. And that was.. It's weird to say a breath of fresh air because it's a very old thing, but it's I like old things and something that's not so modernized as the other big German festivals, which have evolved into more like a party where you'd see a lot more young people, I guess.

00:23:49: Hari: So Benedikt, he's actually a school principal from Haldern, but he's also been part of the Schützenbruderschaft. Schützenbruderschaft is quite a mouthful, but I'll try to keep saying it because I want to try to stay true to what it's actually called, although Benedikt does refer to it as "shooting club". So he is one of the secretaries of the shooting club, so he's one of the higher positions there, and he's been going to this since he was a kid. So yeah, he basically told me what it's all about, how it started, what actually happens. . He also told me about their customs, like with the Schützenkönig, for example.

00:24:22: Benedikt: Well I will try. Shooting festival, shooting clubs are no special thing only here in Haldern. It's a special thing in the lower Rhine area. It's also some special thing in the Netherlands, the western part of Germany, in Luxembourg, in Belgium, in some parts of France, I think in Austria, in Bavaria, but there's a special group - they make it in a very traditional way. I'm now at the age of 42 and I joined my first shooting festival in the 80s. You think in the 80 years there wasn't so many big events in this village. It was a festival in Germany we called Kirmes. It's because of the building up the church in Haldern, you know, and the shooting festival and the Haldern Festival, the Haldern Open Air Festival also this time takes place or took place, but for me as a little child, most interesting was the shooting festival.

00:25:25: Benedikt: So I went with my grandpa to the shooting festival and I have a look to all the people who are standing over there. When I went over there, it was so interesting to see all the people who were standing right over there and having fun, and I was deeply impressed by this event, when I see the persons, when I was a little child, I was so deeply impressed by the people wearing the uniform. Well now I'm wearing the uniform as well, but this isn't something special, it's normal. And right up to now we have got 25 regiments, and altogether there are 780 persons who are members in a shooting club, and we think of the festival itself, there must be a thousand or 1100 people or so. It's one special year, you want to have fun with your regiment, you decide to shoot on this bird just to have fun, to be the king for one year.

00:26:26: Hari (to Stephan): There is a very strong community aspect to this. It really lives up to the name of Brotherhood, Bruderschaft, because they really look after each other. If someone is sick or something like that, his brothers, his shooting brothers have his back. They take care of him and stuff like that. And Benedikt seemed to think, and he made it look like this is the central aspect of it. It's a cornerstone of this tradition, which again, sets it apart from other German traditions that are more popular, where people just get together for that one time to party. But in the Schützenbruderschaft, it's every other day of the year. It stays with you. You're part of this family.

00:27:05: Benedikt: When you think of the youth guys, and we also started this way, we just want to have fun . But now we are a little bit older and we, with our regiment, it was our 22nd shooting festival. You are part of a community and you take care of your community. You can take care of the person who's a part of you community. And when I think of one of the old members, and it was three months ago, one of the old people died and he was living in a special building for old people because he was very ill. And every week, one or two person went in this building and he's lying in his bed, and sometimes he recognized you. Sometimes he's in another world. and they are sitting next to him. They just are with him and they talk. Sometimes they talk to each other. Sometimes they talk with him as they're taking care and they say, this is our friend and we don't want to let him die alone. For me, this is shooting festival where in three days in a year we just have fun. It's okay. But when someone is in trouble, somebody has problems because his marriage get divorced or he's very very ill, there's a special event in his village. It is not dependent if he's fit or not, he's part of it and they take care of it. They put him to this festival, they're drinking a beer or water or whatever with him. But there is a community, and this community is very very important. And this is the thing, when you have good friends in this regiment, they take care of you. And this is, for me, the important thing.

00:29:03: Hari (to Stephan): The reason that Frau Bongers mentioned Haldern was because she talked about cultural activities and relating this to actually learning German. So when you find cultural activities in a place that you like, like you enjoy the activities, you can relate to them, you can actually see yourself being part of this, which is also something that Benedikt mentioned because there was someone from Scotland who moved to Haldern and started being a part of this very traditional village folk festival, and he's not even from there. And they welcomed him.

00:29:37: Hari (to Benedikt): Tell me a little bit about this Scottish guy, because this, so far it's a very German tradition. And the one here, it seems to be very closely tied with the local community of Haldern. So how did an international get involved?

00:29:50: Benedikt: It's very interesting because he moved to Germany because his wife made a year in Great Britain after making her A-Levels or so. And they fell in love with another, and they come to Germany and he went to Haldern and I think he lived there and said "I want to be part of a village community here". So he wants to get into the shooting club. And right up to now, and it's very interesting because we made, sometimes this regiment made a mixture of cultures. When they have a Jubilee, they went with a shooting jacket and a shooting hat on the head. And they wore kilts. This is some kind of mixture from tradition.

00:30:38: Hari: Did they do it specially for him or...?

00:30:40: Benedikt: Yeah, yeah.

00:30:41: Hari: Wow. Wow.

00:30:42: Benedikt: They haven't done it before, I think. They haven't done it before, but he was part of this regiment and they want to make something special and they say "well, we've got a Scottish guy with us. So we wear a skirt, or kilt".

00:30:55: Hari: No, I think that's beautiful. I think it's beautiful. I think, despite it being so traditional, there's still this room for welcoming someone who's from a completely different culture, because now he's part of the brotherhood.

00:31:05: Hari (to Stephan): The way I see it is that once you find this cultural activity that you really enjoy and that you can really relate to, the motivation to learn the language will

come with it. For sure. So yeah, I got to practice my German as well with the local people of Haltern, and that was very much more enjoyable than talking to students in the university.

00:31:41: Stephan Hanf (narrating): Lesson number three: No one ever regrets learning a new language.

00:31:45: Stephan Hanf (to Hari): Someone sitting right next to me in my office here at the Hochschule Rhein-Waal is Brett Ellis, who actually also had the same B1.2 level like you had, right?

00:31:58: Hari: Yeah.

00:31:59: Brett Ellis: I think also what's important is to realize that language and culture are inseparably intertwined. So if you say, "I wanna learn German, but I don't like German culture", that doesn't work, that doesn't compute. You need to say, "I think there's a lot of cool stuff about German culture that I wanna learn about. And I want to improve my language", that computes. That makes sense. And you don't have to, there's, you don't have to be a scholar of Germany and Germans to do that, but you have to be willing to, want to learn more about them, their backgrounds, their culture, their region their country, their history, all of that, because that relates to the language so directly. And language is a result of that. And language evolves through that lens. So you can't say, "I just wanna learn the language like from a book and then not have to do with Germans" because that doesn't make sense. People who are new to Germany need to discover that spark for German culture that interests them. And I think once they find that, the language kind of follows. The motivation to learn the language follows.

00:33:07: Stephan Hanf: But the interesting thing about Brett, is Brett's experience as a student was completely different from yours, right? Because his German got better. And he fell in love with the language. And then he went so far that he's now, I don't know his position, what is his position again?

00:33:24: Brett Ellis: It's typically translated as the deputy head of the language department. In German it's stellvertretende Leitung . So we have a head of the department and I am her backup, so when she's not there, I take over for her. And when she is there, I have a whole range of different other responsibilities mostly to do with language courses, but also to do with English language translations of official documents and marketing stuff for the university as well.

00:33:50: Hari: I think a big difference between my experience and Brett's is that, when Brett came to Germany, he had already majored in German language in his university, in America, in Clemson University. I just studied a crash course up till B1.

00:34:07: Stephan Hanf: But it's quite far actually. The course where we went was A1 level. Quite some time you spent learning German.

00:34:18: Hari: Yeah. I mean, it was very intense, but again, like compared to Brett, I mean studying up to B1 is still not the same as majoring in the language.

00:34:26: Brett Ellis: I'm born and raised in the United States. Monolingually too. So just raised speaking English. I picked up German in particular in, when I went to college. I was majoring in sociology. They had to do two years of languages as well as part of the general education requirements. And most people took Spanish, so I wanted to do something a little different. And I took German and after two semesters, I think I realized I enjoyed German more than I enjoyed sociology. So I switched majors to German and I focused on German language and literature for the rest of my time there.

00:35:01: Hari: But anyway, at the end of the day, learning the language in your own country and actually speaking it in the country where the language comes from is still a very different experience.

00:35:10: Brett Ellis: I came here knowing, I would say about, B1.2, maybe B2 German, very low B2. I had done a simulated semester abroad at Clemson in the summer. It was like four weeks where we would, we stayed on campus, but we spoke only in German. It was like we signed a pledge. We will not speak any English, we will only speak German to each other, and that kind of gave me a good boost. I remember the first day, and I had two years of German under my belt at that point, and that first day we sat down and did a full day of German. And afterwards I went up to my teachers and I said, "I don't think I can do this. I understood like 20% of what was being said here. And I feel scared and I don't think I can manage that". And they said, "don't worry, just stick with it". And it got better. And it got really better. And it was after that, like three weeks, I felt like "holy moly, I can actually speak German and understand what people are saying". I can't do it very well and I can't do it at the highest of levels, but I don't feel out of my element anymore. I feel like I can do this. So I had that. I was fortunate in that I got the worst and scariest part out of the way before I came to Germany. But I still recall the first party I went to, I was talking, it was loud and then we were having beers and I was talking to some German guy and I couldn't understand him. I kept asking what he was saying. It took me a while to figure out his name, like Sebastian was his name. And I thought, "I don't understand it. What does that mean?" Because I know it as Sebastian. So I just, the intonation was so strange to me. And I sat there and I just repeated it until I got it. And so I wasn't ashamed to do stuff like that. And I think that gave me a big boost to my learning because I got that scariest, most uncomfortable part out of the way before I came to Germany. And that's really hard for students, for example, who have to experience that for the first time. It's a really scary experience. I try to remind students whenever I get the chance and whenever it's appropriate that it's a unique opportunity to actually live in Germany and have immediate access to the language. Cause when I was studying in Clemson, I only had access through the courses.

00:37:15: Brett Ellis: Outside of the courses, there was maybe like a handful of Germans or German speaking people in the entire area who I could talk with. We had Stammtisch for example, like once every couple of weeks where we would meet up and speak in German. You could go outside right now to a store and talk with someone in German and you're not gonna have maybe a deep conversation, but you're gonna have an interaction that's going to benefit your language learning in a certain way. And I think that's a really cool opportunity. Even if it's just you go out and buy a magazine or something like that, like a Spiegel. I would always buy a copy of a magazine when I came in through the airport, cause that was like the first time I could get a German magazine. You could sit there and think, "I can't speak German. No one wants to speak with me". Or you could just bite the bullet and try to just put yourself out there and do it. And even if that's just through, you know, Hochschulsport or something like that, through a sports activity or something. You gotta look for the opportunities and you gotta continuously push up against your limits and keep testing your limits and keep trying to drive through plateaus. And I was fortunate in that, I had a couple years of preparation before I came here, but it was still, there were a lot of experiences in university or privately where I was not prepared for anything. It was just, you just gotta survive. You do your best, and you use your language skills as much as you can. And then what I would do is always, I would go home and just replay it in my head again and again what happened.

00:38:51: Hari: I think the big difference between me and Brett was that Brett had the right mindset. He had a lot of conviction, like he didn't give up. He really really wanted to keep pushing through and getting through all the challenges.

00:39:06: Brett Ellis: But it is a mindset and I don't want to sit here and claim that I have the mindset everyone needs to have. It's really an individual thing and it depends on the conditions of where you live. And in a WG, a flat share with other non-native speakers of German, it's a difficult position to be in. You could force yourself and others to simulate a native speaker flat share. How fun that would be, how successful you would be, that's kind of open for debate, I guess. It would be awkward, but you could start with maybe an hour a night or you could watch a German TV show together or something in German together. Things like that. There's steps you can take, you can test them. Maybe they work out, maybe they don't. You gotta want it, I guess. That's the main thing. And it really depends on you as a person and the conditions you're in. And I can certainly appreciate students who are in groups, maybe like their same ethnocultural groups. That's a good support network to have. Especially when you're so far away from home and I can understand Germans who don't want to just stand there and give you a language. Like they don't want to be a language learning tool. They want, friends and they want connections cause they've lived here or in the region for their whole lives and they've grown up here and they're people too. It's easy to think, "I wish they would just teach me German" or something like that, or "I wish I could just learn German from them".

00:40:27: Brett Ellis: It's a constant struggle, I guess, to find the right path. But if you have a mindset, like a learning and growth mindset, it gives you an orientation, it gives you a direction to follow and you just have to keep at it. If there's one thing I could tell students before they get here, it's just that you can't learn a language by osmosis. You have to actively strive for it, and you have to want it, and you have to put the time into it. And if you want it and you put the time in it, it's there. You can take it.

00:40:58: Hari: For me, I sort of gave up a little bit too easily. I got too comfortable. I got too comfortable in the fact that I could actually get around in Kleve without speaking a word of German. And because of that, I just got lazy because I did attempt to go to study B2 in this university as well, but then with everything else happening in my course with all the other, lots of work, lots of coursework, I thought, "yeah, you know what? I have to prioritize. I will pick up German again at some point". But that point never came, at least until working on this episode. But Brett kept going. It's also the career paths that he took really needed a good working knowledge of German. So I think that's also a big difference because my choice in education and my choice in courses really don't require, in fact, it requires English. No German at all. So I think these things all come together because I also, when I started learning German, really fell in love with the language. I also think it's a beautiful language, but yeah, I had to prioritize. I had to prioritize and maybe if I had gotten part-time jobs while I was in Kleve, which a lot of students do, I could have maintained my German level or maybe even improved. But that's something I didn't do. Something Brett mentioned, which I think is really cool, is that no one ever said, "I regret learning that language".

00:42:21: Brett Ellis: I always tell students, no one ever said, "oh, I wish I hadn't learned that language", or something like that. It's a good thing and it's another feather in your cap. Even if you do leave, say, "I learned German for so and so many years". Even if you end up back in your home country, that's a valuable skill to have. It's an individual decision, but it's there for you if you want it, and it's about how you approach it, I think.

00:42:45: Stephan Hanf: But did you manage to improve your German?

00:42:47: Hari: I definitely speak it a little better, and I have the tools to continue improving it. I wouldn't say I'm fluent now after traveling around the Niederrhein, but definitely at least a little bit better from when I started off. What I have recently started doing, this coincided with the production of this podcast, was that I decided for myself, that if I am able to say something in German, I am not going to ask them "Sprechen Sie Englisch?". I'm going to try

to say it in German, even if my grammar is horrible and even if they don't immediately understand me, I'm going to speak in German. And I think this manifested itself with the last time I went to the dentist because she didn't speak English. And then it's not like you talk a lot when you're in the dentist's office, but little things here and there. When she was telling me all the things wrong with my teeth. And making doctor's appointments, for example, when I make a doctor's appointment, I don't speak in English anymore. Although I do ask if the doctor can speak English because when it comes to health, you know. But little things like that. And these are things which Frau Bongers mentioned if you go to Edeka or Aldi or something, a supermarket and you can't find something, you ask the Mitarbeiter, "Wo kann ich das Milch finden?", however you say that.

00:44:07: Stephan Hanf: That was quite good actually.

00:44:08: Hari: Thank you. What is the article? Is it "das Milch", "die Milch"?

00:44:12: Stephan Hanf: Die Milch.

00:44:12: Hari: "Wo kann ich die Milch finden?" Something like that. Little things like this. And that is honestly a change that has happened in these past few months. A lot of times why we don't actually speak the language is cause we are afraid of sounding dumb. But I think a useful tool here is to imagine if someone is speaking your language, are you gonna make fun of them? Probably not. You're probably first of all gonna be, you're gonna appreciate that they're trying and you're gonna be happy to help them. So why, when it's the other way around, the fear sets in? Cause we are, I think we are more harsh on ourselves than we are on other people.

00:44:57: Stephan Hanf: Thank you for listening to the How to Hochschule podcast. We hope you enjoyed the show, and feel free to follow us and recommend us to your friends. If you have any thoughts or suggestions or just want to let us know how you like the episode, please don't hesitate. Take courage and do reach out to us at podcast@hsrw.eu. We are always looking for ways to improve and we appreciate your feedback. Also, be sure to check out our show notes for links and more information on today's topics and guests.

00:45:26: Stephan Hanf: Next time on the How to Hochschule podcast: There's I would say, an urban myth, that there are some exams that are made that you have to fail the first time.

00:45:35: Stephan Hanf: Tune in next time as we discuss the in and outs of how to study at one of the most international universities in Germany. Thank you very much for joining us today. I'm Stephan Hanf. This is the How to Hochschule Podcast. We are looking forward to having you back next time. Tschüß!