

/fr̩ŋkfo(r)d̩eri:f/

A Quick Guide to the Language of Frankfurt

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To Gisela and Volker, who decided to leave Frankfurt¹

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/ɛs wil mɛr nɛt in də kop ɛnai - wi: kan ɛn mɛnʃ nɛt von fraŋkfo(r)d sai/

1 To Start With...

... one of the most famous poems in /fraŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/. It has a lot of the distinctive features of this language. For training purposes, non-native speakers of /fraŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/, the so-called *Herlaufene* (/hɛ:ɛrgələfənə/) or *Aingeplackte* (/aigəblakdə/), should read it loudly at least once a day.

Uffem Termsche	/ufm tɛ(r)mʃə/	on a little tower
sitzt e Wermsche	/sitsd ɛ wɛ(r)mʃə/	sits a little worm
mit em Schermsche	/mid ɛ ʃɛ(r)mʃə/	with a little umbrella
unnern Ermsche	/unɛrn ɛ:rmʃə/	under its little arm
kimmt e Schdermsche	/kimd ɛ ʃdɛ(r)mʃə/	there comes a storm
werft des Wermsche	/wɛrfd dɛs wɛ(r)mʃə/	throws the little worm
mit em Schermsche	/mid ɛ ʃɛ(r)mʃə/	with a little umbrella
unnern Ermsche	/unɛrn ɛ:rmʃə/	under its little arm
vom Termsche.	/fom tɛ(r)mʃə/	of the little tower.
Ach,	/ax/	Oh,
des aam Wermsche.	/dɛs a:rm wɛ(r)mʃə/	the poor little worm.

In Hessen two different dialects are spoken. In the North, Ost/Niederhessisch, in the South, Hessisch. The first is spoken in the wastelands around Fulda and Kassel. It has some oddities that make it quite different to Hessisch. The most striking example is the shift of inner word *t* /t/ to *r* /r/ as in *Wetterau* to *Wer'ra'a* /wɛrə:ra:/ (compared to *Weteraa* /wɛtə:ra:/ in Hessisch). Hessisch, then is made up from the three sub-dialects, Südhessisch, Zentralhessisch and Mittelhessisch. /fraŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/ is a prominent version of Zentralhessisch. This text is a short introduction to marvellous /fraŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/. Fluency in /fraŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/ is a must for getting around in Frankfurt. This Grammar of Hessisch provides a rule by rule introduction into Goethe's mother tongue. To help non-German speakers the phonetic IPA transcription is given (for a short overview, see 8.1).

2 Useful Expressions

This section provides a selection of /fraŋkfodɛ(r)i:f/ terms to master everyday business situations. They show the high efficiency of this language for conveying messages².

1. Hä?
/hɛ:/
I beg your pardon. Would you please repeat what you just have said?
2. So isses aach widder net.
/so isɛs a:ɪ wɪdɛ(r) nɛt/
The issue is much more complex than we initially thought.

²Inspired by BUS and GRUNH.

3. Des krieje mer heut net mer gebacke.
/des grijə mɛr hoit nɛt mɛr gɛbagə/
Despite all our efforts we won't be able to finish the tasks today as planned.
4. Geed net! Gibds net! Maache mer net!
/gɛ:d nɛt! gibs nɛt! ma:ɰche mɛr nɛt!/
I fell very sorry, but it does not seem not be possible for us to fulfil your requirements.
5. Des aane sach isch dir.
/dɛs a:nə sax ɪf dir/
Listen, Sir, I would like to emphasize this very particular issue.
6. Du kannst den ganze Krembel schon eweil ferdischmache.
/du kanst dɛn gansə grɛmbl ʃon ewail fɛ(r)dɪfmaxə/
In meantime, would you please pack the entire stuff together?
7. Des krieje mer schon hie.
/dɛs grijə mɛr ʃon hi:/
Don't be concerned. We get that sorted for you.
8. Haach, isch waas net. Kammer so mache, awer isch deet eher...
/ha:x, ɪf wa:s nɛt. kame(r) so maxə, awɛ(r) ɪf dɛ:t e:jɛ(r)/
I see what you say and i fully appreciate your input. But in this very particular case i would rather propose to...
9. Heer mer uff!
/hɛ:r mɛr uf/
Really? I don't believe it!
10. Feierawend! Hip, Hop, Schoppe in de Kopp!
/faɪɛ'aw(n)d! hip, hɒp, ʃɒbə in də kɒp!/
After such a challenging, successful and pleasant working day: Let's have a drink!

3 Phonology

Phonology describes the 'sound' (accent) of a language. Thus, it is possible, to speak with High German grammar, but use the sound of /fr̩aŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/.

3.1 Consonants

One of the most distinctive features of /fr̩aŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/ is the softening of consonants. This gives the language its very pleasant, fluent and relaxed sound.

Rule 1: Soften the consonants :				
t	/t/	→	d	/d/
p	/p/	→	b	/b/
k	/k/	→	g	/g/
b	/b/	→	w	/w/
g	/g/	→	sch	/ʃ/
		→	ch	/x/
ch	/ç/	→	sch	/ʃ/
				Mid, end word.
				Mid word between vowels.
				Mid, end word; after <i>e, i, ei, ie</i> .
				Mid, end word; after <i>a, o, u</i> .

to lumber	tapsen	→	dabbse	/dabsə/
weather	Wetter	→	Wedder	/wedε(r)/
paper	Papier	→	Babier	/ba'bi:ε(r)/
lid	Deckel	→	Deggel	/degəl/
evening	Abend	→	Aawend	/a:wənd/
rain	Regen	→	Reesche	/re:fə/
stomach	Magen	→	Maache	/ma:xə/
bow	Bogen	→	Booche	/bo:xə/
really	wirklich	→	werklisch	/wε(r)glif/

3.2 Vowels

The language of /fr̩aŋkfo(r)d̩eri:f/ exhibits a considerably complex vowel shift. The complexity arises from the near absence of any rule as to where the shift is to be applied, and where not. The pattern has to be memorized, and the use of a dictionary is recommended.

Rule 2: For some words, shift the vowels :

a	/a/	→	aa	/a: /
au	/au/	→	aa	/a: /
ei	/ei/	→	aa	/a: /
e	/e/	→	ee	/e: /
ü	/y/	→	i	/i/
		→	e	/ε/

old	alt	→	aal	/a:l/	
ape	Affe	→	aff	/af/	no shift!
as well	auch	→	aach	/a:x/	
blue	blau	→	blau	/blau/	no shift!
meat	Fleisch	→	Flaasch	/fla:f/	
nice	fein	→	fein	/fain/	no shift!
to read	lesen	→	leese	/le:sə/	
leather	Leder	→	ledger	/ledε(r)/	no shift!
kitchen	Küche	→	kich	/kiχ/	
little worm	Würmchen	→	Wermsche	/wε(r)mʃə/	

3.3 Lost Endings

/fr̩aŋkfo(r)d̩eri:f/ is a very efficient language. For that reason the words are shortened and endings are dropped.

Rule 3: Drop endings:

-e	→	-
-en	→	-e -/ə/

one card	eine Karte	→	aa Kart	/a: ka(r)t/
two cards	zwei Karten	→	zwo Karde	/tswɔ ka(r)də/
to read	lesen	→	lese	/le:sə/

4 Vocabulary

4.1 /was gɛb ɪf fo(r) mai dum gɛbəl/

/fr̩ɒŋkfo(r)d̩ɛri:f/ is a very productive language. The vocabulary for describing people, especially, grows year by year. There are a vast number of dictionaries, but the Frankfurter Wörterbuch remains the standard. Sadly the 6 tome edition is extremely high priced, but there exist cut down versions and most of the books on Hessisch come with a small dictionary. Check the list on p. 9.

Rule 4: Use local terms wherever possible :

High German term → /fr̩ɒŋkfo(r)d̩ɛri:f/ term

Derabbel	/dɛ(r)abəl/	underweight person
Dunsel	/dunsəl/	intellectually challenged female person
Hinnedruffhibber	/hinədru:fhipɛ(r)/	free rider
Knierutscher	/kni:rutʃɛ/	obsequious person
Narrisch Hinkel	/nariʃ hiŋkəl/	moody female person
Schlabbekicker	/ʃlabɛkigɛ/	not the best football player
Simpel	/simbəl/	stupid person
Schisser	/ʃisɛ(r)/	intimidated person
Quadratsimpel	/kwa'drɑ:tsimbəl/	very stupid person
Zorngickel	/tso(r)ŋgikəl/	hot-tempered person
Hib de Bach	/hib də bax/	Old Frankfurt side of the Main river
Dribb de Bach	/drib də bax/	Sachsenhausen side of the Main river

As a side note: *De Bach* /də bax/ means *the* Main river. *Die Bach* /di: bax/ means *a* (specific) river (but, ergh, not the Main).

4.2 The /maxə/ Paraphrases

/fr̩ɒŋkfo(r)d̩ɛri:f/ makes is very easy to create new verbs using the verb *machen* (to do) *mache* /maxə/. This 'replicates' (i.e. paraphrases) High German verbs without the necessity to 'translate' them. The resulting /maxə/ paraphrase is usually much simpler and warmer in sound.

Rule 5: Use frequently :

verb → /maxə/ paraphrase

sich aufmache	/sɪʃ ufmaxə/	to set out
aufmache	/ufmaxə/	to open (a shop)

Kaffee mache	/kafe: maxə/	to prepare coffee
runnermache	/runɛrmaxə/	to climb down
draamache	/dra: maxə/	to fit
sich rübermache	/sɪf rybɛ(r)maxə/	to come over
Nacht durchmache	/naxd durxmaxq/	to dance and drink through the entire night
rummache	/rumaxə/	to be (local)
sich ins Bett mache	/sɪf ins bed maxə/	to go to bed
ins Bett mache	/ins bed maxə/	to urinate into the bed
zumache	/tsumaxə/	to close (a shop)

5 Morphology

Grammatical constructions, be they morphological or syntactical, are more 'solid' than phonetic features. Thus, one will find speakers with a High German 'sound' (i.e. avoiding the accent as described on p. 3), but using the grammar of /fɾaŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/.

5.1 The Plural

Usually the plural form follows the German standards. Obviously the plural form is then subject to the phonetic rules (p. 3). Especially the drop of the endings and vowel shifts apply here. Thus, here only the grammatical differences to High German are listed.

Rule 6: Create specific plural forms by:

vowel mutation	a	/a/	→	ä	/ɛ:/
<i>n</i> plural		-e	→	-n	
<i>er</i> plural		-en	→	-er	
<i>le</i> plural		-ln	→	-le	

arms	Arm	Arme	→	Arm	Ärm	/a:(r)m/	/ɛ:rɪm/
hair	Haar	Haare	→	Haar	Haarn	/ha:(r)/	/ha:(r)n
shirt	Hemd	Hemden	→	Hemd	Hemder	/hemd/	/hemdɛ(r)/
potato	Kartoffel	Kartoffeln	→	Kartoffel	Kartoffele	/ka'dofəl/	/ka'dofələ/

5.2 The Diminutive

In /fɾaŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/ the diminutive is widely used. It finds wide application to convey the message 'small' or 'cute'.

Rule 7: Construct the diminutive by adding the suffix to the stem:

Singular: -sche -/ʃə/ Plural: -scher -/ʃɛr/

worm	Worm	Wermsche	Wermscher	/wo(r)m/	/wɛ(r)mʃə/	/wɛ(r)mʃɛr/
sausage	Worscht	Werschtsche	Werschtscher	/wo(r)ʃd/	/wɛ(r)ʃdʃə/	/wɛ(r)ʃdʃɛr/

shirt Hemd Hemdsche Hemdscher /hemd/ /hemdfə/ /hemdfɛr/

It is interesting to note that the usage of /f/ in the diminutive is of quite recent nature. The same applies to the softening of /χ/ and /g/ to /f/ (p. 3). Publications as late as of the 1970s still show /χ/ (*Wermche* /wɛ(r)mχə/ instead of *Wermche* /wɛ(r)mʃə/)³. From the 1990s onwards, then, /f/ is used⁴. Originally /f/ softening was limited to Südhessisch only⁵. Thus, one may conclude that the very original /fraŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/ usage of /χ/ is being replaced by /f/ ⁶.

5.3 The /du:n/ Infinitive

/fraŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/ makes heavy use of infinitive constructions with *tun* (to do) *duun* /du:n/. That's to avoid the tedious and overcomplex High German verbal flections: The infinitive is easier. Due to the relevance of /du:n/ the important flections are shown.

Rule 8: In indicative (Ind.) and conjunctive I and II (con.), use frequently :

	Ind.	Con.	
(conjugated) verb →	(1S) /isch du:/	/dɛ:t/	+ verb (infinitive)
	(2S) /du: du:st/	/dɛ:dst/	
	(3S) /er du:d/	/dɛ:t/	
	(1P) /mer du:n/	/dɛ:də/	
	(2P) /iɛ: du:t/	/dɛ:t/	
	(3P) /sə du:n/	/dɛ:də/	

he works	er arbeitet	er duud schaffe	/ɛr du:t ʃafə/
he sleeps	er schläft	er duud schlafe	/ɛr du:t ʃla:fə/
he says...	er sagt...	er saacht...	/ɛr sa:xt.../
...he comes	...er komme	...er deet komme	/...ɛr dɛ:t komə/
...they come	...sie kommen	...se deede komme	/...sə dɛ:də komə/
...he might come	...er käme	...er deet komme	/...ɛr dɛ:t komə/
...they might come	...sie kämen	...se deede komme	/...sə dɛ:də komə/

6 Syntax

Syntactical features are the most solid - and the most hidden. Therefore there are a lot of speakers who avoid, both the accent (p. 3) and the morphological patterns (p. 6) of /fraŋkfo(r)dɛri:f/, but still apply its syntax. To make this point, this section gives the examples in High German only.

³e.g. (ca. 1900:) ASKENASY, p. 198; (ca. 1940:) KÖNIG, p. 157; FWB, p. 3594, (ca. 1970:) MÜLLER, p. 5; WEGERA (B), p. 50

⁴e.g. (ca. 2000:) BELCHEN, p.48; GRUHN, p. 26; LEBER, p. 5;

⁵FRIEBERTSHÄUSER, 1987, p. 75

⁶For the dual usage of /f/ and /χ/ in the 1920s, see e.g. *Knollen* in SHWB, p. 1514. In WITTE, p. 7, (1981) on softening from /χ/ to /f/.

6.1 The Genitive

As in all German dialects, (a morphic) genitive does not exist. Thus, the genitive is transformed in /fr̩ŋkfo(r)d̩eri:f/ into a (syntactic) dative construct.

Rule 9: Use dative instead of genitive :

genitive	→	von/vom + dative	(general)
	→	possessive pronoun + dative	(genetivus possessivus)

Die Farbe der Häuser	→	Die Farbe von den Häusern	
Wolfgangs Haus	→	Das Haus vom Wolfgang	
	→	Dem Wolfgang sein Haus	(alternatively)

6.2 The Conjunctions

/fr̩ŋkfo(r)d̩eri:f/ is optimized and has less conjunctions than High German.

Rule 10: Use the following conjunctions :

(relative)	der, die, das	→	(der, die, das) wo
(comparative)	als	→	(als) wie
(conditional)	wenn	→	dann
(temporal)	als	→	wie
(locative)	zu	→	bei

Wolfgang, der dort steht	→	Der Wolfgang, (der) wo da steht
Wolfgang ist älter als Werther	→	Der Wolfgang ist älter (als) wie der Werther
Wolfgang ist so alt wie Werther	→	Der Wolfgang ist so alt (als) wie der Werther
Wenn Wolfgang kommt	→	Wann der Wolfgang kommt
Als Wolfgang im Urlaub war	→	Wie der Wolfgang im Urlaub war
Wolfgang geht zu Gretchen	→	Der Wolfgang geht bei das Gretchen

7 Goethe and /fr̩ŋkfo(r)d̩eri:f/

Johann Wolfgang Goethe is usually considered as one of the high priests of High German literature. But he could not always hide his native tongue. So, if one reads very carefully, one finds some oddities. And, as it turns out, there are some real /fr̩ŋkfo(r)d̩eri:f/ relicts.

(Faust 1) Da steh ich nun, ich armer Tor!
Und bin so klug als wie zuvor;

(Faust 1) Ach neige,
Du Schmerzenreiche,
Dein Antlitz gnädig meiner Not!

8 Appendix

8.1 Short Overview of the IPA Annotation

/ɛ/	open-mid front unrounded vowel	French	après	/apʁɛ/
/ə/	mid central vowel	English	father	/fa:ðə/
/ŋ/	velar nasal	English	sing	/sɪŋ/
/(r)/	faint /r/			
/ʃ/	voiceless postalveolar fricative	English	she	/ʃi:/
/x/	voiceless velar fricative	German	ach	/a:x/
/χ/	voiceless uvular fricative	German	ich	/ix/
/:/	lengthend vowel	English	she	/ʃi:/

8.2 References

Standard Dictionaries

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