

# Re: English versus German

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*Source:* <http://sci.tech--archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2009-07/msg00144.html>

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- *From:* Nathan Sanders <[nsanders@xxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:nsanders@xxxxxxxxxxxxx)>
  - *Date:* Thu, 02 Jul 2009 17:00:13 -0400
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In article <[7a4q45pm47b2nq4qm0ga2m9fuut0l2778j@xxxxxxx](mailto:7a4q45pm47b2nq4qm0ga2m9fuut0l2778j@xxxxxxx)>, Ruud Harmsen <[zbem@xxxxxxxxxx](mailto:zbem@xxxxxxxxxx)> wrote:

Thu, 02 Jul 2009 13:08:37 -0400: Nathan Sanders <[nsanders@xxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:nsanders@xxxxxxxxxxxxx)>: in sci.lang:

I'm still waitng to hear of something it can do better or easier than Word. (Other than mathematical equations, which are of no concern to me or to 99.9995% of users. That's one in a million.)

As I've already mentioned, ligatures, kerning, and whole-page hyphenation algorithms.

Word (and TrueType in general) does ligatures and kerning too.

I just tested these in Word 2008, out of the box:

No ligatures for fi, fl, ff, ffi, or ffl.

Kerning is terrible. "Table" has the wrong spacing between T and a, and tall italics characters inside parentheses bump into the right-hand parenthesis.

Hunting around the menus, I managed to find something called "kerning for fonts" and turned it on. "Table" and tall italics inside parentheses are still incorrectly kerned.

I haven't yet found how to get ligatures.

Multiple accent marks on the same character (e.g., acute over macron).

## Re: English versus German

Possible in any system that supports Unicode.

TeX was able to handle this easily before Unicode. It still handles it easily: `\=a` puts an acute over a macron over "a". I know how to get an acute accent over "a" in Word, and I've modified my keyboard to allow me to get a macron (this is not an out-of-the-box ability!), but I don't know of a simple way to get both accents on the same character in Word.

I just put an acute accent over an "m" in Word, and it changed the font from Cambria to MS Reference Sans Serif, and now, everything I type after that is in the new font!

If the accented character is not a pre-composed character in the font (as acute-m is not in Cambria), TeX will compose the accented character on the fly. There is no font change for either that character or the following ones.

Language-specific hyphenation and ligatures.

Hyphenation is language-specific in Word too.

Can Word handle multiple languages within the same document? In LaTeX, it's as easy as:

```
\usepackage[french,german,english]{babel}
....
\selectlanguage{german}
....
\selectlanguage{french}
....
\selectlanguage{german}
....
\selectlanguage{english}
```

Cost and portability: (La)TeX is free and the source files are written in plain text, so anyone can read your document without having to buy proprietary software, without cross-platform conversion issues, and without legacy version issues.

Word doesn't have these either.

Since when is Word free?!? Last I checked, the latest version of

## Re: English versus German

Office was on the order of \$300 to buy it new, or about \$200 to upgrade from a previous version.

Can you send a Word file to a colleague who doesn't own the same version of Word as you (or no version at all!), and/or is working on a different OS than you (Mac versus PC... god forbid he's on Linux!), and he'll be able to open your file and it will look the same as on your machine? As recently as last year, that wasn't true for me when I was collaborating with a colleague. Random symbols were missing, pagination was different, and even the fonts weren't consistent.

How about a Word file from 10 years ago? If you open it on a modern machine running the latest version of Word, will it have the same layout as it originally did? Will you even be able to open the file at all?

None of these are problems with TeX, because TeX source files are all plain text files, the most basic text file you can possibly have, free and common to every computer system, every operating system, and every time period.

Handling of large–documents: Word often crashes unpredictably on large, complex documents,

After so many years of using several versions (6, 97, 2007), I can hardly remember such events. Word 2000 was very buggy, yes, that's true.

It's gotten better, but it's still buggy.

ut (La)TeX doesn't; a 1000–page document is just as stable as a 1–page document.

Why not split that into chapters?

I'm counting the entire finished product as a "document". Of course it should consist of multiple individual files if it's large enough. Doing this in TeX is trivial, and the resulting document is just as stable as a 1–page document.

My experience with the "master document" functionality in Word is that it is cumbersome (difficult to initiate, difficult to change, difficult to work on individual pieces) and unreliable (formatting and styles between subparts gets broken, files are prone to corruption, etc.).

Re: English versus German

Perhaps that's changed in the past few years since I worked with it, but this aspect of TeX has always been straightforward and stable.

Nathan

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