German Prefixes Explained - "ver" - part 2

by German-is-easy - Friday, November 01, 2013

https://yourdailygerman.com/german-prefix-ver-explained/

Hello e-VER-yone,

and welcome to another episode of "German Prefixes Explained". And today it is time for the second part of the prefix:

ver

In part 1 (here : ver part 1), we've learned a little about the history of *ver-* and we found the über old Indo-European root *per. The basic idea of that was *the going beyond a boundary*.... and it is still very much present in *ver*.

"the essence of ver"

This idea is so vague that it can be interpreted in numerous ways...
Crossing the boundaries of spellyng is *wrong*, crossing the boundary of friendship after a night out is *change* and crossing the boundary to another country or continent means being *away...* at least from the perspective of the ones left behind.
Last time , we already looked at the *wrong-ver* with its weird grammar so today, we'll see what we can do with the other two ideas and if they are helpful in anyway. And to do that we'll basically look at lot of *ver*-verbs... an a-*ver*-lanche of *ver*-bs we could say. Seriously... there are so many *ver*-words in German. If you wrote them one after the other the resulting chain of words would be 10 times the distance between the ea... oh wait, we have a call, hold on... this is "German is Easy", you're on the air.
"Hi my name is Jenny Chopper, great to be on the show..."
Hi Jenny, great to talk to you, what can I do for you...
"So... I am a mother and I made my kid want to learn a language."
That's great. All kids should must want to learn a language...
"Yeah... so... I was thinking German because it sounds like Elves singing..."
That's true...

"Well... the thing is that my son is apparently allergic to ver ... we just had to move away Vermont, because his face would be red all the time, you know. Now that you said, that ver is so common in German I was wondering if it is advisable for him to learn German and also I was wondering what you think of soy-ver? Is that any good?"

Great question Jenny... I get asked that a lot. German is indeed very *ver*-y ... much more than Spanish, although it is maybe more visual there, but as you already suggested you soy-*ver* totally works as an alternative.... you can

order it directly from here: [Amazon](.)·

"Oh awesome... thank you so much."

You're welcome.

I think... I think I drink too much coffee.
Must focus.
Focus.
Focebook.
Oh god, this prefix is killing me. Just a warning.... this won't be a short list today of "*ver* does this this and this". I want to try and give you a feeling for the prefix and we'll look at a lot of words. It'll be very long... but it'll also be boring, so it's okay...

Ver - change

The going beyond a boundary idea can be interpreted as some sort of *change*. Something is in a certain way and then, after it "*ver*"-ed or was "ver"-ed, it is different. And maybe the best examples for this *ver* are the verbs that are based on an nouns... we've already talked a little about those in the comment on part 1.
We can add *ver* to nouns and the result can be a verb that basically means *to turn into that noun*.

- Das Buch wird *verfilmt*.
- The book is *turned into a movie*.

- Das Wasser *verdampft*.
- The water *vaporizes*.

Here, we can see the crossing of a boundary. Book crosses media boundaries, water crosses from liquid to gas. But actually the basic idea is not always to be taken completely literally... we really have to take it as just a very general guideline. The specific interpretations have a wide and random range. Very very wide, and very very random... just take *vergolden* and *versilbern*.... one could think they mean about the same... but they do not.

- Ich *vergolde* mein Fahrrad.
- I turn my bike into gold (basic idea)
- I *gold-plate* my bike. (real meaning)

- Ich *versilbere* mein Fahrrad.

- I turn my bike into silver (basic idea)
- I *sell* my bike ... and when this verb evolved people were paying with silver.

I hope you're not discouraged now :)... I think, most of the time the meaning of such a *ver-*word will be made clear by context.... as abstract as it may be

- Ich habe meine Prüfung *verkackt*.... (this words is used a lot in daily life.)
- I turned my exam into poo. (basic idea)
- I f*ailed* my exam.

- Das Gelände ist *vermint*.
- The area is *mined*.

- Maria *versalzt* die Suppe.
- Maria *puts too much salt* into the soup.

The last example is interesting because it nicely shows how close the idea of change and the idea of wrong can be... all she does is make the soup more like salt. We assume that it is too much salt and so it sounds negative to us. But that is really just convention. The verb happened to mean that and it could have just as well ended up as just *to salt*. Just as *vergolden* could as well mean *to sell*. It doesn't because it just evolved differently. When talking about *ver*,we really have to accept a lot. There is not too much logic involved... we need to go with the flow, you know.... breathe in and all that :).
All right. Now,does any noun with a *ver* mean something like that and can we can add *ver* to any noun and get something like this? Well, no and yes... remember that *change* was only one of 3 ways to interpret the essence of *ver* and for some nouns it is the *away* that explains the meaning.
But the idea of *turning into/making like* is indeed very very strong. So if you take a random (we've done some playing around in the comments on part 1) noun like, say, Apple and you add *ver*, then people will interpret it as *to turn into apple*.

- Microsoft *verapplet* sein Tablet.
- Microsoft *goes Apple (*makes the tablet apple-y) with its tablet.

- Justin Bieber *ver"vanilleice"t* immer mehr.
- Justin Bieber *turns Vanille Ice* more and more.

The second example is a bit extreme... but Germans do invent new words with this method every day. So... not all *ver*-words that have a noun in them do focus on change but the idea is definitely very strong. And it is not limited to nouns. It also works with adjectives.

- Kaffee *versüß*t mir die Arbeit.
- Coffee *sweetens* my working.

- Mein Deutsch *verbessert* sich kaum*.*
- My German is barely *improving ....* (itself...not needed in English)*.*

- Meine Miete hat sich *verdoppelt*, die von meinem Nachbarn *verdreifacht*.

- My rent has doubled, the one of my neighbor has tripled.

- iPhone 3G?? Pfffffff.... das ist doch total *veraltet.*
- iPhone 3G?? Pfffffff... come on, that is totally *out of date*.

And there are many words like that.

- *vergrößern* (enlarge, zoom in,...), *verkleinern* (shrink, scale down, ...) , *verlangsamen* (slow down), *verlängern* (prolong, extend), *verallgemeinern* (generalize), ...

So... can we do that with all adjectives? Unfortunately not. For some, it works but for others it doesn't work at all. And there is no logic to it so no rules. Now some of you are like "Come one Emanuel, here must be a deep underlying system. It can't be just random. You're just too lazy to think "... well, maybe there is. I challenge you to find it. Just let me give you some starting points.... for instance the word for *to make warm* is NOT *verwärmen* but *erwärmen.* To *make high(er)* is NOT *verhöhen* but *erhöhen*. And to make it more confusing, the opposite of that is *vertiefen*. E*rweitern* is to *make wider*, *verbreitern* is to *make broader*.... both can mean *to broaden*. So... I really can't see a system. The prefix just "happened".For some it was *ver* for other it was *er.* And there is another random thing... some adjectives use the basic form... like *ver-dünn-en*. Others however use the more-form... *ver-kleiner-n*. The first one means to thin down, the second to *shrink* or make *smaller*. There is no reason why it is not *verkleinen* or *verdünnern* other than it just happened to be that way.

So... that means that we can't really create new *ver*-words from adjectives and expect them to be correct. But - as long as we know the adjective - we can at least we can understand all such words... even the more abstract ones.

- Ich *vertiefe* mich in das Thema.
- I *make* myself *deepe*r into that subject(lit.)
- I *delve into* that subject.

or the ones that are not bases on an adjective...

- Ich *vernichte* meine Dokumente.
- I *destroy* my documents.

- Ich *verneine* deine Frage.
- I *answe*r your question *in the negative*.

By the way... the opposite of *verneinen* is *bejahen* ... not *verjahen*. And the reason might be that *ver* always has a little tiny small negative touch... I mean... *wrong* and *away*. Both those ideas don't really match up with *ja*.
But anyway...

So... this was the concept of *change*. It is very broad and can mean numerous facets but I hope you got an idea of it. We'll need it again later. When you ask? When we get to the *ver-*verbs based on verbs :).
Yeah... I am totally pushing this to the very end... but I think understanding the concepts first makes it easier later on. And yes, we will talk about *verändern* too :).
So let's now flesh out the idea of *away* a little bit more.

ver - away

We've already seen, that *to "ver-noun-en" something* can mean *to make that into or like that noun.* But for some nouns, it doesn't mean that. It means *away*. We already know *verdampfen* as *to vaporize*... water turns into vapor. But in daily life what matters more is that the water is *gone*. And actually in a lot of instances away is the same as change.... just from the perspective of those left behind. Anyway... not all verbs are as ambiol... ambula... uh... amberva... er... uh... not for all verbs, both ideas shine through....

- Endlich. Ein Bier. Ich bin fast *verdurstet.*

Durst means *thirst*. With the *change* idea in mind this would mean that I turn into thirst.... or I turned thirsty. Hmmm... kind of makes sense. But this is NOT the idea we need this time. We need to think *ver* as *away* .... I am "thirsting away"... can you already guess what it really means :)

- Finally. A beer. I almost *died of thirs*t

Now, what about *verdecken*. A *Decke* is a *cover, a blanket* or a *ceiling.* So *verdecken* could either be something like *to turn into a cover*, or it could mean to *cover away...* and it is... the latter

- Die Wolken *verdecken* den Mond.
- The clouds *cover/hide* the moon*.*

Verdecken basically means *to block the view.* And this is interesting because it is a new aspect to the whole *away*-idea... something can be just a few meters from us.. if we can't see it or get to it, it is still kind of *away*. So maybe we could say the away-*ver* puts things "*out of reach*". And that will be very helpful later when we get to the verbs based on *ver*. Actually.... you know what... let's just cut to the chase now.
No more beating around the bush. I think we got the concepts down, we're ready to deal with all the *verkaufens, verstellens, vergessens, verliebens* and so on... so here we go.

verricane - enough said

There are so god damn *MANY!*!!!
It is driving me INSANE!
So... let's just look at the *away* ones first.

- Ich *verkaufe* mein Auto.

Kaufen means *to buy*. Add the idea of away then you have "*buy away*". If you think of to buy more as to trade then it suddenly is logical that *verkaufen* means *to sell.* Similar to that are

- Ich *verleihe* mein Buch nicht gerne.
- I don't like *lending out* my book.

- Ich *vermiete* meine Wohnung.

- I *rent out* my flat.

- Ich *verschenke* mein Buch.
- I *give away* my book *for free.*

Here's a really prominent one... *vergessen*. It means *forget*. And now what is forgetting? It is a *reverse getting*... like... getting is what goes is, forgetting is what goes out. Goes *away*. The *for* in English adds exactly the same idea to *to get* that *ver* is adding to all those verbs...

- "Did you understand the cases?"
  "Yeah, I got it but then I *forgot* it again."

And since we're at *ver* and *for*.... *vergeben*. That looks an awful lot like *forgive*. But in German it also means just *to give away*.

- Ich *vergebe* dir.
- I *forgive* you.

- Ich *vergebe* einen Preis.
- I *give away* a price.

Or *verteilen*... just *teilen* is *to share*... *verteilen* is *to distribute, to share out.*
But let's stop giving out things.... there are also many *ver*-verbs that focus on yourself.

- Die Blume *verblüht*.
- The flower *withers (blooms away)*.

- Die Zeit *vergeht*. Die Liebe auch.
- Time *passes by.* Love fades*.*

Ohhhh... so negative. By the way... did you know why *past* is called *Vergangenheit* in German? Because it is *vergangen*. It passed.
What else could we take... my god, they are so many... *verreisen*... yeah let's take this one.

- Ich *verreise* im Sommer.

Reisen means *to travel*. So what's the difference between *reisen* and *verreisen*? Well, think of *geben* ... you usually mention someone to give to in your sentence, with *vergeben* you don't because the verb is just a generic *to give away*.And it is the same idea for *verreisen*. It means to *travel away*. *Reisen* often needs a destination.

- Ich *reise* nach Rom/durch die Welt.

Verreisen doesn't need that because it has the destination built in... as a generic *away*. Saying "Ich verreise nach Rom" is a little redundant and sounds wrong to my ears. *Verreisen* is sort of *reisen* from the perspective of home. If you're in a hostel in the Australian outback you cannot say "Ich verreise". What

you are doing is *reisen*. But your secretary (don't we all have one) at home will tell people who are trying to call that you are "*verreist*".
By the way... the exact same logic also explains the difference between *schicken* and *verschicken* ... the latter is *to send away*.
But let's get back to the secretary... if you are lucky and you have a sexycretary, you may want to seduce him or her.... because ...affairs in the company are always a great idea. And what's to seduce in German? *Verführen*. *Führen* means *to guide*... *verführen* means to guide away. It's interesting because *verführen* has a little tiny bit of a negative touch to it because of the wrong-idea of *ver*. *Verlaufen*- *to get lost*, *verführen* - *to seduce*. So different and yet so close :).

What other words are there in the away-corner... ah... I know.. *versagen*. It means *to fail*. But it also means to deny someone something

- Ich *versage* dir deinen Anteil.
- I *deny* you your share.

This is the original meaning and it kind of ties in with the "*restricted access interpretation of the away reading of the going beyond a boundary core*"... uh.... what?... so... I basically block you verbally. You can't get your share and thus, for you, your share is away.... oof I hope that makes sense.
Then,later on *versagen* was generalized and used whenever you wouldn't get what you want... and so it took on the meaning *fail*.

Still ... totally inside the verricane

Another really nice one is *verbringen.*

- Ich *verbringe* den Sommer am Meer... I wish
- I *spend* the summer at the sea.

Bringen means *to manouver*... uh... I mean *to bring.* Hmmmm... "I bring by/away the summer"... I don't know.. to me it makes sense as *to spend*. And while we're at the pass times... do you remember our fictional *verspazieren* from the first part? I told you that it has a second meaning... and here it is...

- Wir haben den Nachmittag *verspaziert. (*here's a link for more examples)
- We "walked away"*the afternoon*.

In fact, you can do that with a lot of words.... you can *vertanzen, vertrinken, verarbeiten* an evening. It is always the same idea.... the bringing away the time.
Now... you can also *vertrinken* your money.. and the next morning you'll *verschlafen* your appointment. It really just depends in context.
The prototype for that is another really confusing looking *ver*-verb.... *verbrauchen*. *Brauchen* is *to need*.. so... *to need away*??? What??? That really doesn't make sense.
But *brauchen* actually used to be more of a "to benefit from, to use"... so back in the day you could only *brauchen* things you already had... that's also why *gebrauchen* means *to use*. So... with that in our minds it suddenly makes total sense that *verbrauchen* means what it means... *to consume, to use up*. You

benefit from it till it is gone. You "*use it away*".

- Ich v*erbrauche* viel Kaffee.
- I *consume* a lot of coffee.

This idea of *using up/consume something* is present in quite a few other words too.

- Thomas *verbrennt* die Briefe von seiner Ex-Freundin.
- Thomas *burns* the letters of his ex.

A letter can just *brennen*. Then I can still pour water over it. But the *ver* with its notion of away changes the meaning and now the letter burns completely. In fact let's remember this completely-idea ... here it is:

Completely.
in bold:
Completely
in teal:
Completely.
German and pink:
Komplett
fragmented:
col*y* ete m lp
and incomple... moving on.

So... all those verbs we've seen have at their core the idea of *away*.... and there are many many more. But let's move on to the other side... the *change* side. A word that is kind of right between change and away for me is *verlieben*. *Lieben* means *to love*. *Verlieben* is to *fall in love*.

- Thomas *verliebt* sich in Jane.
- Thomas *loves* himself *away* into Jane (basic idea)
- Thomas falls in love with Jane.

I used the *away*-idea here but you can just as well see it as a *change*. A person who is *frisch verliebt* ("freshly in love") can be quite anno... uh different. But it doesn't really matter if it is more away or more change. What matters is that it makes sense with the very idea of *ver*... the going beyond a boundary.

But let's look at a verb in which *change* is obvious... for example *verzaubern*. *Zaubern* is t*o do magic*. And *ver* adds the idea of *change*.

- Der Frosch ist ein *verzauberte*r Prinz.
- The frog is a *bewitched* prince.

This is a pretty big change but also small things can make a difference... for instance moving an appointment because you have *verführt* your secretary.

- Ich *verschieb*e meinen Termin.

Schieben is to move something sideways by a pushing... so it can be to push or to shove or some others. Now *schieben* is just the act of doing so, *ver* adds the idea of a new position... similarly to *verreisen*. Only... *verschieben* doesn't sound as far. That's why I filed it under *change* and not under *away*... an appointment that has been *verschoben* is still there... just the time changed. But you can look at it the way that works best for you.

Now... when we speak of change, of course we MUST talk about *ändern* and *verändern*. *Ändern* means *to change*. So what could the *ver* add here? The truth is, that both words *ändern* and *verändern* are incredibly close. The only difference that I can see is that *ändern* feels smaller. This is more obvious for the nouns... *Änderung* is more like *alteration, modification* while *Veränderung* can be *substantial change.* The *ver* makes it sound a bit bigger and more definite. Don't get me wrong though... there are quite a few situations in which you can exchange them.

Now... *ändern* is not the only word to which *ver* doesn't really add much. It is the same for *verschließen.* *Ver* doesn't add much other to *schließen* than the idea of "definiteness". And hey... do you remember? We already had that earlier... the idea of completely. *Ver* doesn't tip toe around... *ver* goes full force beyond the boundary. That's also where the add comes from:

Ver™ by Calvin Kline - for those who go one step beyond

So... while *schließen* is just *to shut* or *to close ,* *verschließen* is *to lock...* (by the way... the English *foreclose* is even more extreme)... And if there is no lock... well, then it is really just the "definiteness"... the thing is not just closed temporarily, it is closed for real.

- Ich *schließe* meine Augen.
- I *close* my eyes.

- Ich *verschließe* meine Augen vor dem Problem.
- I turn a blind eye to the problem.

So the *ver* is always a bit result oriented. And that is true for all *ver*s we have seen. A *ver*-verb always has a result. Something is gone or different or wrong... but it is never just a process like just walking or sleeping. You can *ärgern* (tease) someone, that is a process but if you really do it until the person is pissed off... well.. then you have *verärgert* the person. That is also why *ver*-words are really used a lot as adjectives...like...

- The ver-blahblah thing....

Are we still talking about *change* by the way? I... I don't really know... I guess not.... but it actually doesn't matter... *change* and *away* ... it just depends on the perspective I guess... and they're all just interpretations of the *going beyond a boundary*. *Ver* is just incredibly vague. And it is really important to realize one thing to make peace with that words.

The meaning a ver-word has always makes sense when you think about it.
But another meaning would make sense too.
It has the meaning it has and it is okay like that.

You cannot expect to just look at a ver-verb and be able to deduce what it means. Just play around with the idea *of going beyond a boundary...* away... wrong... change... definiteness... they're all one continuum. It is all good. Whatever ver-word comes...

The eye of the storm

Hahh.... finally it's quiet. Our mind is relaxed. Our mind is light. Like a blossom fairy flies from flower to flower we fly around from concept to concept of *ver*.... it's no problem for us that verbs have multiple meanings.
Verbauen can mean 2 things? Of course... duhhh... who doesn't

- Ich *verbaue* das Holz.
- I use up all wood for my building.

- Ich *verbaue* dir die Sicht.
- I block your view by building my house.

  Verstellen can mean even 3 different things? No problem... they all make sense to us...

- Der Schrank *verstellt* den Eingang.
- The cabinet *blocks* the entrance. (it is out of reach for me)

- Ich *verstelle* meine Uhr.
- I *change the time* of my watch.

- Ich *verstelle* mich.
- I sham. / I fake.

        And *verziehen* means 3 things, too... well ... why not 4...

- Ich *verziehe (pull to different shape)* mein Gesicht.
- I *squinch up* my face/I grimace.

- *Verzieh* (*move away)*dich!
- Get lost!

- Die Eltern *verziehen ("mis-pull"*)ihr Kind.
- The parents *spoil* their kid.

 Verlaufen means multiple things? That's natural... we move like a fish and we get them all....

- Das Meeting *verläuft* gut.
- The meeting *goes* well.

- Maria's Make up *verläuft*.

- Maria's make up *is running*.

- Ich habe mich im Wald *verlaufen*.
- I *got lost* in the forest.

Vertreten means more than one thing? Awesome

- Ich *vertrete* mir den Fuß.
- I hurt my foot by *taking a bad step.*

- Der Student *vertritt* den Professor.
- The student *stands in for* the professor.

- Ich *vertrete* meine Meinung.
- I *stand up* for m.... wait...

wait ... what is that.... *stand in for, stand up for*... that... that doesn't make sense with what we have... that does not make sense... oh god, and ... what is that... *vermissen*... that doesn't fit in either... and *verdienen, verantworten, versorgen, verlangen* oh my god... that... that is incredibly god damn annoying. Back to the drawing board.

ver - for

So it turns out that there is one more aspect or concept *ver* has... and I'll just say it right away... it is *for*. Not surprising at all considering that *ver* and *for* are related and there are couples like *forgive-vergeben* or *forget-vergessen*. But those use a different idea of *ver*... the one we need to clear up the rest of the words is the *for* as in *for you.* ... does that fit in with our essence of ver*?* Well, yeah... it is like crossing the boundaries of a person ...

You're the circle now and you're doing something for something or someone else... I hope that makes sense :)

So... one last time... let's look at examples. Take **vertreten**. We've just seen that it means to *stand in for* or *stand up for*. Literally it is "step for"

- Ich *vertrete* dich.
- I s*tep for* you (concept)
- I can stand in for you (I don't know if stand in is the correct word.)

And that works for many others too. For example *verlangen*. With the for-idea in mind this looks a lot like *to long for*. And that is not to far from the actual meaning *to demand, to ask.*

Another one is *verdienen*... it means to merit and to earn. And why does it mean that? Well, *dienen* alone means *to serve*. Add for and you're there.

- I *serve for* (earn) 10 Euro per hour.

Or *versuchen*... *suchen*, which is related to *to seek*, means to search but when we have to look at the older version of *suchen* then we find meanings like to inquire and to investigate... and that is not so far away from *to try*.

- Ich *versuche* zu schlafen.
- I seek for sleeping (idea)
- I *am trying* to sleep.

Other words are *verantworten* (be responsible for), *verdanken* (to owe something to someone) , *vermissen* (to miss) or *versorgen* (to supply) and I think even *verstehen* fits in here... you *stand for* something... come on... it makes just as much sense as *stand under* something :).
Me personally I starting understand the influence of ver-fatigue. But I think we're done. Yeahhhhhhhhhhh.
This was the German prefix *ver*... or at least an attempt at it :). The very basic idea that of going beyond a boundary.. that can mean to go *wrong*, that can mean a *change*, that can mean to *away* (including a restricted access) and that can mean to go for something *other*.
It is really a question of perspective. Sometimes people used it for this, sometimes for that sometimes for all of the ideas. And often it is really only context that makes it clear.
What all *vers* have in common is that they have some sort of "definiteness" to them. And probably because of all the words that are built with the wrong-meaning, many *ver*s do have a little negative undertone...

- Im Sommer habe ich mich *verliebt.*
  Im Herbst hab' ich gemerkt: ich hatte mich *verliebt*.
- In summer I fell in love. I fall I realized I had chosen the wrong one.

We did by no means talk about all *ver*-words. Many important ones are missing. Some might not even fit in with any of the ideas. But we can just discuss those in the comments.
The goal of all this was to give you a feel for the prefix *ver* and all it's facets. You really can't get a hold of it... it'll always be somewhat of a blur.
It is like a camp fire... you can't really focus on one flame in the middle. You'll loose it and get confused. But you can gaze at the fire as a whole for hours and never be bored. Because although it is and stays just a fire... it is never quite the same... just like *ver* ... ugh... what a cheesy metaphor :).
If you have any questions about the post or if you want to talk about certain *ver*-words in particular then just leave me a comment.
I hope you liked it and see you next time.

Random addition:

I came across the word "to perjure" today... and I can kind of see the German wrong-ver and the away-ver shine through... it is a really random thing, I know, but I was so excited that I just HAD to add it here :)

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