Hello everyone,

and welcome to our German Word of the Day. This time we'll have a look at the meaning of

**nämlich**

Nämlich (spelled backward it would be heilmän) is one of those small little words that are both - used and confusing. Sure, it ain't no *doch*, but still *nämlich* is giving many learners a hard on... erm... I mean hard time, hard time.

And it's not so much the meaning, it's more the way it is used that is throwing people off.

Today we'll take a look at it and see that it's actually quite easy if you see it for what it is.

Sounds good? Cool.

You might have suspected it already - *nämlich* comes from *der Name* and it's the German version of *namely*. And the original use of the word was to introduce the names of things that you have only referred to before.

- In meiner Familie gibt es zwei Veganer, *nämlich* meine Schwester und meinen Vater.
- In my family, there are two vegans, *namely* my sister and my dad.

- There's a very common misconception about language learning - *namely* that it's possible to do it quickly and without effort.
- Es gibt einen sehr weit verbreiteten Irrglauben im Bezug auf Sprachlernen - *nämlich*, dass man es schnell und ohne Mühe machen kann.

- Dafür, dass ich nicht zur Party komme, gibt es zwei Gründe, *nämlich* a) dass ich müde bin und b), dass Maria auch da ist, und die will ich nicht sehen.
- There are two reasons why I am not coming to the party, *namely* a) I am tired and b) Maria is gonna be there as well and I do not want to see her.
As we can see, in contexts like these, *nämlich* and *namely* are pretty similar. But there is a little difference in tone. It's hard to put into words and maybe I'm wrong but at least to me, *namely* can be pretty neutral and dry. *Nämlich* on the other hand always has a bit of "Tadaah!" in it.

- Yesterday, I went for a few drinks with a colleague, *namely* Maria.
- Gestern bin ich mit einer Kollegin was trinken gegangen, *nämlich* mit Maria.

To me, the English versions sounds very much like pure information. Her name is Maria, that's the message. The German version sounds a bit more like the fact that it is Maria is somewhat of a reveal. It makes it sound special. Like... maybe I have had a crush on Maria for a while now but I never did anything and now I tell my friend that I finally did it.

Also (as some of you have pointed out in the comments) *namely* isn't used all that much in English and I think the German *nämlich* is way common in statements like the ones above. As a matter of fact, you can even use it as a sort of question word to prompt the other person to go on already.

- "Ich hab' gestern was super super leckeres gekocht." (speaker pauses)
  "Nämlich?"
- "I cooked something uber tasty yesterday." (pause)
  "Being?/Which was?"

This does sound a bit impatient and reserved though. Like... "come on, you want to say it so say it". So if you're really genuinely intrigued you'd say "Oh , was denn?".

Now, so far there was nothing confusing about the word. It has a different tone and it's more common - no big deal.

The reason we're talking about *nämlich* is its other use.... the use as a hashtag.

**nämlich - #reason**

I mean... not literally, of course :).

The thing is, *nämlich* has kind of detached from the whole *name*-origin. I'd actually say many Germans aren't even aware that there's a connection. And that's no surprise because probably two thirds of the *nämlichs* in everyday speech nowadays are used to express... a reason.

- "Ich weiß, ich bin dran, aber kannst du ausnahmsweise heute mal die Küche aufräumen. Ich muss *nämlich* noch echt viel für die Prüfung morgen lernen."
  "Naa guuuut."
- "I know it's my turn but could you clean the kitchen just this once? *Because* I really have to study a lot for the exam tomorrow."
  "Ugh... fine."
Instead of using *weil* or *deshalb*, the speaker uses *nämlich* to mark the second half as a reason for the first one. And that way of using nämlich isn't too far fetched, actually.

The more "traditional", *namely-nämlich* basically introduces a closer look at the *what* or the *who*. I say "*a colleague*" and then I use *nämlich* to give some more precise info.

The new *nämlich* does the same. It also introduces more detail. Just that it's about the *why* this time. Imagine there being a "*for reasons*" in the first part...

- I'm drinking the beer for reasons ... *namely*, I am thirsty and football is on.

All you have to do here is take out *for reasons* and boom, you pretty much have the German *nämlich*... well except one really important feature.

Let's look at some more examples and see if you know what I'm getting at. I'll give you a hint... it's about word order.

- Können wir bei der nächsten Raststätte mal anhalten? Ich muss *nämlich* mal.
- Could we maybe stop at the next service area? *Because* I have to pee.

- Heute wird's bei mir nix mit Kino. Ich hab' die Kackpräsentation *nämlich* immer noch nicht fertig.
- Going to the movies is not going to happen for me today. *Because* I still have not finished that stupid ass presentation.

- Du kommst zu spät? Gar kein Problem, ich *nämlich* auch.
- You'll be late?? No problem at all *because* so will I.

Did you catch it? *Nämlich* is NOT at the beginning of the phrase. *Weil* and *denn* are ALWAYS at the beginning of their section. And deshalb and darum can be. *Nämlich* CAN'T be used in the beginning. And that means even though it kind of is a translation for because, you can NOT just replace a *weil* or a *denn* with it.

- Ich gehe schlafen, *denn* ich bin müde.... correct
- Ich gehe schlafen, *nämlich* ich bin müde.... *WRONG*

- Ich gehe schlafen, *weil* ich müde bin... correct
- Ich gehe schlafen, *nämlich* ich müde bin... *SUPER HYPER WRONG* (not sure if I would even understand)
The difference between *weil* or *denn* is that *nämlich* is not actually a functional word. It doesn't know how to do grammatical tasks like conjoining to phrases. And it doesn't only have no grammar job, it also can't answer the question "why " by itself, like *deshalb* can for example. That's why *nämlich* is not in position one and it can't stand alone. It cannot fill up a box by itself.

- "Why are you crying."
  "Because of this/Here's why."(shows Whatsapp message from crush)
- "Warum weinst du?"
  "Deshalb."
- "Warum weinst du?"
  "Nämlich"...

*Deshalb* can answer the question *why* alone as long as there is context. *Nämlich* can never do that. It doesn't have enough substance for it. So it's really more like a quick tag that is slapped onto whatever the reason is.

- Ich muss *um 9 zu Hause sein*. Ich will *nämlich The walking dead gucken*.
- I've got *be home by 9*. I want to *#reason watch The Walking Dead*.

I hope that makes sense :).
So... you'll always find *nämlich* somewhere in the middle of the sentence, right before the part that's the reason for what has been said before. And yes, *nämlich* can be at different positions.

- Morgen habe ich keine Zeit. Ich habe [*nämlich*] meiner Freundin [*nämlich*] gestern [*nämlich*] versprochen, mit zu ihrer Firmenfeier zu kommen.
- Tomorrow I won't have time, *because* I've promised my girlfriend to go to the office party with her.

All three positions work but the differences are nuances and it would lead us down the rabbit hole of sentence structure, so let's not go there today. What matters is that *nämlich* is NOT in position one.
Cool.
So since we already have weil and denn and deshalb to express reason, you might be wondering why to even bother with nämlich and why Germans use it so much.
Well, the fact that it's not at the beginning makes it kind of an understated, cool marking. It doesn't scream reason like because does, for example.

- Den Film kann ich dir echt empfehlen. Ich hab' den nämlich gestern gesehen und er ist super.
- I can recommend the movie. Because... I saw it yesterday and it was great.

- Kannst du mich mal anrufen? Ich finde nämlich mein Telefon nicht.
- Can you call me real quick? Because I can't find my phone.

In both these examples, the second part has interesting news in it that we ALSO mark as reason for what we said before. But reason is not the ONLY purpose it's there.
This probably sounds quite complicated though. And I'm not sure if that even really does the word justice. People use it a LOT, and in all kinds of "environments" - short sentences, long sentences, super colloquial speech, newspapers, in masters theses... you "näm" it.. haha.
And actually, in spoken German they even combine it with weil sometimes.

- Der Film interessiert mich nicht, weil ich nämlich überhaupt kein Tarantino-Fan bin.
- I don't care about the movie, because I'm actually no Tarantino fan at all.

I translated it as actually here because I think that kind of captures that Tadah-vibe of nämlich I mentioned earlier.
But there's no deeper intention behind using weil and nämlich together. It might be simply because "weil ich nämlich" has a nice flow.
So yeah... I can't really tell you something like "Use nämlich if these conditions apply." You'll just have to build a feel for it over time.
But at least I hope you now understand what the word does. It's like a #reason you can casually slap onto something.

And I think that's it for today. That was our German Word of the Day nämlich. If you want to check how much you remember and understood from the article, you can take the little quiz I have prepared for you... erm.... once I'm done. It's January 26th 2020, Emanuel is grinding quizzes. Seriously, I'll add it soon.
And of course, if you have any questions or suggestions just leave me a comment. And if you have no questions you can leave a comment, too. I nämlich like to read them :) I hope you liked it and see you next time.