Hello everyone,

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

And I am glad that we already have a call here because that gives me the chance to sprechen to someone right away... Charles from Edinburgh, how are you today?
„Hello Emanuel, I'm fine thank you...“

What can I do for you Charles?
„Don't get me wrong, this show is really great and I do enjoy it most of the time... but I have to admit that I'd be lying if I said that today's word sounds particularly intriguing. “

Uh... what do you mean exactly?
„Well... the thing is... I think most of us know what it means. “
Oooohhhhhhh... do you?
„Yes, I think we do...“

Oh, very well then, if you know so much it certainly ain't nooooooo problem for you to translate THIS:

- Ich spreche nicht gut Deutsch.

„As a matter of fact, it "ain't" no problem indeed. I said it a lot when I was in Hamburg. I means: I don't speak German very well. “
... (muffled) I bet you don't...
„Hey I heard that, no reason to be mean. “

I know I apologize... it's just... what am I going to do now? Just pick a different word? All my research and preparation would be for nothing...
„You could just slap a prefix at it, maybe...“

Hey, that is actually not a bad idea... let me think... how about ver?
"Sounds good...."

Cool....so... err... ladies and gentlemen, our Word of the Day

versprechen

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We've already established that *sprechen* means to *speak*. It can also mean *to talk* at times but it is not worth it to look at the differences there. As always there are all kinds of words that come from the verb like for example *die Sprache* (the language), *das Sprichwort* (the idiom) or *der Spruch* (the saying).

But now let's get to *versprechen*. Which has the following two meanings: *to promise* and *to make a slip of the tongue* or *to misspeak*. Hmmm... that's quite some irony in that :).

Now, if you've read my article on the prefix *ver-* you might remember that *ver-* actually carries four different ideas, and *versprechen* is a good example for a word where two meanings coexist. So let's look at them one by one.

**versprechen – to promise**

This is really a straight forward translation. The overlap in meaning is as large as can be and the grammatical structure for both words identical, too.

- Ich *verspreche* dir ein Pony.
- *I promise* you a pony.

- „Sorry, aber ich komme heute nicht mit ins Theater.“
  „Aber... aber... du hast es *versprochen*...“
- „Sorry but I won't go to the theater with you tonight.“
  „But ... but... you *promised* ..."

Now, of course you can also make a promise *to yourself.*

- Ich habe *mir versprochen* nie wieder zu rauchen.
- *I promised* myself never to smoke again.

And what's interesting about this phrasing is can have a second meaning. Not entirely different, I mean. But erm... noteworthyly different... gee, is that even a word?! Anyway, when you make a promise you're essentially raising hope or expectations. This view helps to understand the second notion of self-promises.

- Ich *verspreche mir* viel von der neuen Sekretärin.
  "*I promise myself* a lot from the new secretary (lit.)"
• I have high hopes for the new secretary.

• Ich habe mir nicht viel von dem Film versprochen.
• I didn't promise myself much from that movie.
• I didn't expect much of that movie.

The structure for this versprechen... the expecting-one if you will... is always involving a mir, dir or sich and a von.

Cool.

Now, as for related words we have das Versprechen which is the promise.

• Ich habe dir ein Versprechen gegeben.
• I made you a promise.

As you can see, promises are given rather than made in German. But I'd say we prefer to use the verb most of the time anyway.

• I make no promises.
• Ich kann/will nichts versprechen. (I can't / don't want to promise anything. Lit.)

Another word worth knowing in German is promising. But just promising is not enough. Germans are apparently hard to impress so something promising has to be promising a lot in German to be promising... wait, without my mind-map this doesn't make much sense... anyways, the example shall clarify.

• Das sieht vielversprechend aus.
• That looks promising.

• Mark ist ein vielversprechender Fussballer.
• Mark is an up-and-coming soccer player.

If you just said versprechend in such a context people wouldn't even understand what you mean. Alright ... oh and just for completion here is an example with promised.
• Ich bringe dir die versprochenen DVDS mit.
• I'll bring along the promised DVDs.

Now, how does ver change to speak into to promise?
Well, that makes perfect sense as soon as you know that one of the ideas ver- carries is... for. Which is an essential part of a promise... it's my "speaking" for you. And ver- also carries a notion of finishing, completing which gives the whole thing a slight notion of contract. Not sure, if that makes sense.
Anyway, let's move on to the other versprechen I promised.

**verspra.. verpres... versprechen**

And here, we see yet another idea of ver in action. And this one is rather clear cut... it basically adds the notion of wrong. Sprechen is to speak so versprechen is to speak wrong. And that is very close to the actual meaning to make a slip of the tongue.

• Emanuel verspricht sich.
• Emanuel makes a slip of the tongue.

• Entschuldig, ich habe mich versprochen.
• Sorry I misspoke.

You might have noticed in the examples, that this versprechen is self referential. I can't really tell you why it is that way but without the self reference it will sound like the other versprechen. Or just plain wrong, like in this example.

• Ich verspreche 4 mal in einem Satz.... wrong because the promise itself is missing
  • -

• Ich verspreche mich 4 mal in einem Satz.
• I misspeak four times in one sentence.

So the self reference is crucial.

• Ich verspreche mich ..
• Du versprichst dich ...
• Er / sie / es verspricht sich ..
Now, you might remember the abstract meaning of the first *versprechen*... the one that was kind of like *to expect*. This was self referential, too but there, we the self reference is an *indirect object*... *to myself*. The tongue slip one is using a *direct object*. Can we mess around with this? Sure.

- Ich *verspreche mir, mich* nicht mehr zu *versprechen*.
- *I promise myself* to not *misspeak* anymore.

Okay, technically it could also mean that I promise myself to not promise myself (to someone) anymore. So there, we'd need Cpt. Context to clear it up. Anyways, these situations are rather rare and to be honest, the tongue slip *versprechen* is not a word you would need everyday. It is just good to know, that the meaning exists.

So... I think we're pretty much done here. This was our German Word of the Day *versprechen*. It can mean *to promise* and, if the promise is made to oneself, it can also mean *to expect or to hope*. The other, less important meaning is *to make a slip of the tongue*. Each meaning is a good representative for one of the concepts that *ver* can add to a verb... one being something like *for real* or *for good* and the other being *wrong*.

If you have any questions or suggestions just leave me a comment. I hope you liked it and see you next thyme... I mean time ;)

** vocab **

*jemandem etwas versprechen* - promise something to someone
*sich (dative) etwas von X versprechen* - expect something from X /have hope for something from X
*sich (accusative) versprechen* - to misspeak, to make a slip of the tongue

das Versprechen - the promise
*(die Versprechungen (plural) - promises,usually used in context of empty promises)*
der Freudsche Versprecher - the Freudian slip

*versprochen* - promised
*vielversprechend* - promising

die Sprache - the language
das Sprichwort - the proverb