

/fr̩ŋkfo̩d̩ɛrɪʃ/

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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¹Original revision 1.01, 17/11/2004; this is decently updated revision 2.02 as of 18/02/2017.
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/ɛs vil mɛ nɛt in də kop ənai, vi: kan ən menʃ nɛt fon fraŋkfoəd sai/

In front of you you have short introduction² to marvellous /fraŋkfoədɛrif/: The *Frankfurter Stadtmundart* or *Der Frankfurter Dialekt* — the dialect of Frankfurt — or simply: *Frankfurterisch*. Fluency in /fraŋkfoədɛrif/ is a must for getting around in Frankfurt. This Grammar of /fraŋkfoədɛrif/ provides a rule by rule introduction into Goethe's mother tongue. To help non-German speakers the phonetic IPA transcription is given³.

1 To Start With...

... one of the most famous poems in /fraŋkfoədɛrif/. It shows a lot of the distinctive features of this language, ehm, dialect. For training purposes, non-native speakers of /fraŋkfoədɛrif/, the so-called *Herlaufene*, /hɛʁgələ:fənə/, should read it loudly at least once a day.

Uffem Termsche	/uffm tɛəmʃə/	on a little tower
sitz e Wermsche	/sitsd ɛ wɛəmʃə/	sits a little worm
mit em Schermsche	/mid ɛ ʃɛəmʃə/	with a little umbrella
unnerm Ermsche	/unɛəm ɛəmʃə/	under its little arm
kimmt e Schdermsche	/kimd ɛ ʃdɛəmʃə/	there comes a storm
werft des Wermsche	/vɛɛfd dəs wɛəmʃə/	throws the little worm
mit em Schermsche	/mid ɛ ʃɛəmʃə/	with a little umbrella
unnerm Ermsche	/unɛəm ɛəmʃə/	under its little arm
vom Termsche.	/fom tɛəmʃə/	of the little tower.
Ach,	/ax/	Oh,
des aam Wermsche.	/dəs aəm wɛəmʃə/	the poor little worm.

Now, technically, we have some four dialects in the Bundesland of Hessen⁴. Around Kassel, Northern Hessian (Nordhessisch) is spoken; the Fulda region shows Eastern Hessian (Osthessisch); then we have Central Hessian (Zentralhessisch) near Gießen down to the Taunus and, finally, Rhenish Franconian (Südhessisch or Rheinfränkisch) close-by Darmstadt. /fraŋkfoədɛrif/, actually, is a variant of Rhenish Franconian. That's important: /fraŋkfoədɛrif/ ist *not* Hessisch. There are quite significant differences. One striking example is the Hessian shift of a T between two vowels to an R as e.g. in *Wetterau*, which becomes *Werra'a*, /vɛrɛ'a:/, what linguists call *rhotacism*. /fraŋkfoədɛrif/ on the other side has *Wedder'aa*, /vɛdɛ'a:/. The Hessian guys, and not long ago those Hessians lived in Sachsenhausen, Bornheim, Oberrad and even Bockenheim, actually twist nearly every vowel. If you ask a true Hessian, say, around Butzbach, to utter *Im Winter fliegen die trockenen Blätter in der Luft herum*,

²For more thorough and actually scientific solid stuff, check out the literature list in general on pp. 11 and maybe my PHD thesis (Keil:2016, *Der VokalJäger. Eine phonetisch-algorithmische Methode zur Vokaluntersuchung. Exemplarisch angewendet auf historische Tondokumente der Frankfurter Stadtmundart*, Marburg/Frankfurt, print: tbd.) or the website FraDiRep.org.

³For a short overview, see p. 11.

⁴Wiesinger:1980: map 24.

she would bring up: *Em Wentä flaije de truckne Blärrer in de Loft errum*, /əm vɛntɛ flaijə də truknə blɛrɛ in də loft erum/. Hey. All vowels shifted! The /fraŋkfoɛdɛriʃ/ version is not *that* strange: *Im Wintä flie'i'e de trockne Blädder in de Luft errum*, /im vintɛ flii:ə də troknə blɛdɛ in də luft erum/.

2 Useful Expressions

This section provides a selection of /fraŋkfodɛvi:ʃ/ terms to master everyday business situations. They show the high efficiency of this language for conveying messages⁵.

1. Hä?
/hɛ:/
I beg your pardon. Would you please repeat what you just have said?
2. So isses aach widder net.
/so: isəs a:x vidɛ nɛt/
The issue is much more complex than we initially thought.
3. Des krie'i'e mer heut net mer gebacke.
/dɛs kri:iə mɛ hoit nɛt mɛ 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!
/ge:d nɛt! gibz nɛt! maxə mɛ 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 ā:nə sɛʃ ɪʃ dɛ/
Listen, Sir, I would like to emphasize this very particular issue.
6. Du kannst den ganze Krembel schon eweil ferdischmache.
/du: kʌnst dɛ:n gʌntsə krembl ʃɔn ɛvail fɛdiʃmaxə/
In meantime, would you please pack the entire stuff together?
7. Des krie'i'e mer schon hie.
/dɛs gri:iə mɛ ʃɔn hi:/
Don't be concerned. We get that sorted for you.
8. Hach, isch waas net. Kammer so mache, awwer isch deet eher...
/hax, ɪʃ vʌs nɛt. kʌmɛ so: maxə, ʌwɛ ɪʃ dɛ:t ɛ:ʒɛ/
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:rɛ mɛ uf/
Really? I don't believe it!
10. Feierawend! Hip, Hop, Schoppe in de Kopp!
/faijɛ'ɑ:wnd! hip, hɔp, ʃɔbə in də kɔp!/
After such a challenging, successful and pleasant working day: Let's have a drink!

⁵Inspired by Bus and Grunh.

3 Phonetics and Phonology

Phonetics describes the 'sound' (accent) of a language, and phonology tells you why it's like that. Thus, it is possible, to speak with High German grammar, but use the sound of /fraŋkfoɛdɛrif/.

3.1 Consonants

One of the most distinctive features of /fraŋkfoɛdɛrif/ 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	/vɛdɛ/
paper	Papier	→	Babier	/ba'biɛ/
lid	Deckel	→	Deggel	/dɛgl/
evening	Abend	→	Aawend	/a:vnd/
rain	Regen	→	Rääsche	/rɛ:ʃə/
stomach	Magen	→	Maache	/ma:xə/
bow	Bogen	→	Booche	/bo:xə/
really	wirklich	→	werklisch	/wɛglif/

3.2 Vowels

The language of /fraŋkfoɛdɛrif/ 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. Okay. That's not entirely true. But in order to know where to twist what vowel, you have to have studied Germanistics or, ehm, be fluent in Middle High German. Hence, the pattern has to be memorized, and the use of a dictionary is recommended.

Rule 2: For some words, shift the vowels:

aa	/a:/	→	a dark long O-like A	/ɑ:/
a	/a/	→	a dark short O-like A	/ɑ/
au	/au/	→	a bright long A	/a:/
ei	/ei/	→	same bright long A	/a:/
ei+n	/ein/	→	nasalized dark A	/ɑ̃:/
ee	/e:/	→	a long Ä	/ɛ:/
ü	/y/	→	an I	/i/
ö	/œ/	→	an E	/e/

to say	sagen	→	saache	/sɑ:xə/	long dark A
you have	du hast	→	du hast	/hɑst/	short dark A
sheet	Blatt	→	plat	/plat/	short dark A
ape	Affe	→	aff	/af/	no shift!
as well	auch	→	aach	/ɑx/	long bright A
house	Haus	→	Haus	/haus/	no shift!
blue	blau	→	ploo	/plo:/	very weird shift to O!
joy	Freude	→	fraat	/fra:t/	long bright A
devil	Teufel	→	daiwl	/daiwl/	AI, not OI!
meat	Fleisch	→	Flaasch	/fla:f/	long bright A
leg	Bein	→	Baan	/bā:/	long dark nasalized A
nice	fein	→	fein	/fain/	no shift!
rain	Regen	→	Rääsche	/rɛ:ʃə/	Hey. That's an Ä.
kitchen	Küche	→	kich	/kiç/	a short I
oil	Öl	→	Eel	/e:l/	a long E

To pick the correct vowel can become a very nasty business. Consider the willow tree. In German that's a *Weide*. Then consider the meadow. In German that's *Weide* again. In /frɑŋkfoɛdɛrif/ the tree is a *Waid* /vaɪd/ too. But the grassland is a *Waad*, /va:d/ (same actually for the heathlands: the German *Heide* is *Haad*, /ha:d/, in Frankfurt — the *Bornheimer Heide*, existing until around 1850, was the *Bernemer Haad*). Why is that? That's because the tree — once upon a time — had a long I, *wide*, and the grasslands had an old EI, *weide*. And old long I are EI in /frɑŋkfoɛdɛrif/ and old EI became A! Ehm. Okay. Complex. Remember this observation from around 1850: *Da warn Kieh uff der Waad, unner dene Bapplweide*. Anyway.

Now, this vowel-shifting was even too complex for the old native speakers of /frɑŋkfoɛdɛrif/. They got confused over the last 200 years (a quite common pattern actually, called *Sprachwandel* — and, fair point, today not all Frankfurter are *that* rock-solid in original /frɑŋkfoɛdɛrif/ vowels). So, examples: Once there was an AI for certain words with OI: *Deutsch* once was pronounced *daitsch*, /daitʃ/. That became an OI around 1820, hence: *doitsch* /doitʃ/. The last to die was the devil. He held his AI in *Daiwl*, /daiwl/, until 1920. Next to go were the short dark A-s, like in *Blatt* with dark A, /plat/, around 1820. In 1850 it was gone and became bright A as in High German, /plat/. The old Frankfurter had as well some *long* dark A for example in *Garten* with *Gaarde*, /ga:rɛdə/. By 1940 those were gone and became *short* bright A: *Garde*, /gadə/. Some old other OI once had been A as well. *Freude* once was *Fraat*, /fra:t/. That was

already dying around 1900 and dead soon later. One researcher stated in 1939: *Heute fraat sich der Frankfurter nicht mehr, er freut sich*⁶. Where does that strange O come from in *blau*, where around 1850 there always was *ploo*, /plo:/? That's because some thousand years ago that, what's now an AU, once was a long A — Middle High German for *blau* was *blâ* — and all long A in Frankfurt are dark long /a: / and this particular A got even darker. And now comes a really interesting story: Today you hear in Frankfurt *aal*, /a:l/, for *alt* and *kaal*, /ka:l/, for *kalt*. But that's *not* original old-school /fr̩aŋkfo̩ɛɾɪf/! Around 1850 it was *ald* and *kald*! It seems the Frankfurter got so confused that they even nicked some Hessian tunes around 1900 (those forms are pure Central Hessian. The guys beyond the Taunus have long-A as well in *Falte* with *Faald* or *Wald* with *Waald*).

The vowel twisters are considerably complex, so if you want to know the full story, check the books in the literature list. And start practicing!

3.3 Drop Endings

/fr̩aŋkfo̩ɛɾɪf/ 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	→	a Kaart	/ə kart/
two cards	zwei Karten	→	zwo Kaarde	/tswɔ kɑ:ɾə/
to read	lesen	→	lese	/le:sə/

4 Vocabulary

4.1 /was gɛ:b ɪf fo̩ɛ maɪ dum gəbabl/

/fr̩aŋkfo̩ɛɾɪf/ 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 pp. 11.

Rule 4: Use local terms wherever possible :

High German term	→	/fr̩aŋkfo̩ɛɾɪf/ term
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Derabbel	/dɛrəbəl/	underweight person
Schaddebembel	/ʃadəbɛmbl/	underweight person, again
Dunsel	/dʊnsl/	intellectually challenged female person

⁶ Rauh:1939.

Hinnedruffhibber	/hinədruʃhibɐ/	free rider
Knierutscher	/kni:rutʃɛ/	obsequious person
Narrisch Hinkel	/nariʃ hiŋkl/	moody female person
Schlabbekicker	/ʃlabəkigɛ/	not the best football player
Simpel	/simbl/	stupid person
Schisser	/ʃisɛ/	intimidated person
Quadratsimpel	/kwa'drɑ:tʃimbl/	very stupid person
Zorngickel	/tʃœŋgikl/	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/ Paraphrase

/ʃraŋkfoədɛriʃ/ makes it very easy to create new verbs by applying the verb *machen* (to do): so, use *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	/siʃ ufmaxə/	to set out
aufmache	/ufmaxə/	to open (a shop)
Kaffee mache	/kafe: maxə/	to prepare coffee
runnermache	/runɛmaxə/	to climb down
draamache	/drɑ: maxə/	to fit
sich rübermache	/siʃ rivɛmaxə/	to come over
Nacht durchmache	/nɑxd dœʃmaxə/	to dance and drink through the entire night
rummache	/rummaxə/	to be (local)
sich ins Bett mache	/siʃ ins bed maxə/	to go to bed
ins Bett mache	/ins bed maxə/	to urinate into the bed
zumache	/tsu:maxə/	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. 4), but using the grammar of /ʃraŋkfoədɛriʃ/.

5.1 The Plural

Usually the plural form follows the German standards. Obviously the plural form is then subject to the phonetic rules (p. 4). 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	/aɐ̯m/	/ɛɐ̯m/
hair	Haar	Haare	→	Haar	Haarn	/haː/	/haɐ̯n
shirt	Hemd	Hemden	→	Hemd	Hemder	/hemd/	/hemdɛ/
potato	Kartoffel	Kartoffeln	→	Kartoffel	Kartoffele	/kaˈdofəl/	/kaˈdofələ/

5.2 The Diminutive

In /fr̩aŋkfo̩ɐ̯d̩ɛrɪʃ/ 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	Wormsche	Wormscher	/wɔ̯ɐ̯m/	/wɛɐ̯mʃə/	/wɛɐ̯mʃɛ/
sausage	Worscht	Worschtsche	Worschtscher	/wɔ̯ɛʃd/	/wɛɐ̯ʃdʃə/	/wɛɐ̯ʃdʃɛ/
shirt	Hemd	Hemdsche	Hemdscher	/hemd/	/hemdʃə/	/hemdʃɛ/

It is interesting to note that the usage of /ʃ/ for softened G or in above diminutive is of quite recent nature. Before the war it was limited to Southern Hessian and then invaded, say, latest by 1970, Frankfurt. In Frankfurt a litte worm originally was a *Wermje* /vɛɐ̯mjə/ and then later became a *Wormsche*, /vɛɐ̯mʃə/. So to be a *real* Frankfurter say for *Morgen* always *moije*, /mɔ̯ijə/ — note, a R somehow between two vowels became an J plus an I; same actually in *Aquarium*, here *aquajium*. Don't say *morsche*, /mɔ̯ɛʃə/, and, never ever say *moin*! That's Northern German and Frankfurt was invaded by Prussia in 1866, so pick your sides!

5.3 The /du:n/ Infinitive

/fraŋkfoɛdɛriʃ/ 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) /ɪʃ du:/	/dɛ:t/	+ verb (infinitive)
		(2S) /du: du:st/	/dɛ:dst/	
		(3S) /ɛ:rɐ du:d/	/dɛ:t/	
		(1P) /mɛ du:n/	/dɛ:də/	
		(2P) /i:rɐ du:t/	/dɛ:t/	
		(3P) /sə du:n/	/dɛ:də/	

he works	er arbeitet	er duud schaffe	/ɛ:rɐ du:t ʃafə/
he sleeps	er schläft	er duud schlafe	/ɛ:rɐ du:t ʃlɑ:fə/
he says...	er sagt...	er säscht...	/ɛ:rɐ sɛʃt.../
...he comes	...er komme	...er deet komme	/...ɛ:rɐ dɛ:t komə/
...they come	...sie kommen	...se deede komme	/...sə dɛ:də komə/
...he might come	...er käme	...er deet komme	/...ɛ:rɐ 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. 4) and the morphological patterns (p. 7) of /fraŋkfoɛdɛriʃ/, but still apply its syntax. To make this point, this section gives the examples in High German only.

6.1 The Genitive

As in all German dialects, (a morphic) genitive does not exist. Thus, the genitive is transformed in /fraŋkfoɛdɛriʃ/ 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

/fr̥aŋkfo̥ðəriʃ/ 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 /fr̥aŋkfo̥ðəriʃ/

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 a few oddities. And, as it turns out, there are some real /fr̥aŋkfo̥ðəriʃ/ relicts.

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

(Faust 1) Ach *neige*,
Du Schmerzen*reiche*,
Dein Antlitz gnädig meiner Not!

Now, ask yourself the question how you would have to pronounce *neige* and *reiche* that those two rhyme. Hint: it ain't no High German.

8 Appendix

8.1 Short Overview of the IPA Annotation

This is really a short one and the text uses a simplified version. For a full blown narrow phonetic description of the sounds of Frankfurt, check the literature below.

/ɛ/	open-mid front unrounded vowel, the Ä	French	après	/apʁɛ/
/ə/	mid central vowel, the faint E	English	father	/fa:θə/
/ŋ/	velar nasal	English	sing	/sɪŋ/
/ʃ/	voiceless postalveolar fricative	English	she	/ʃi:/
/x/	voiceless velar fricative	German	ach	/a:x/
/:/	lengthend vowel	English	she	/ʃi:/
/ɑ/	a dark O-like A			
/ɐ/	the faint A, usually for a 'vocalized' R			

8.2 Literature

Abbreviated List. A more exhaustive list can be found e.g. in Keil:2016.

Standard Dictionaries

FWB 1971–1985: *Frankfurter Wörterbuch (FWB)*. Verlag Waldemar Kramer, Frankfurt. Sechsbändige Gesamtausgabe, 1988.

HNWB 1911ff.: *Hessen-Nassauisches Volkswörterbuch*. Edit. Ferdinand Wrede, Luise Berthold, Hans Friebertshäuser and Heinrich Dingeldein. Elwert, Marburg.

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