

# My summer vacation: Watching a German movie on the plane and learning some language history

---

 [devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20191002-01](https://devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20191002-01)

October 2, 2019



Raymond Chen

When I travel on an airplane, I like to watch movies in German because it gives me a chance to practice my aural decoding, which has always been a weak spot of mine.

One movie was *Der Vorname*, which was put in the “Comedy” category, but it’s a comedy like the Alan Alda movie *The Four Seasons* is a comedy. *I.e.*, not actually a comedy.

I tried to redeem my bad choice by watching a German-dubbed *Shrek*. I noticed that Shrek and Princess Fiona address each other as *ihr*, which is the second-person familiar plural. Why is that?

A colleague of mine explained that *ihr* is an archaic form of the second person pronoun. It’s used in fairy tales, so the movie uses it to capture the fairy-tale feeling.

However, Shrek and Donkey address each other as *du* (second person informal), not *ihr*.

My colleague thought about it some more and realized that he had made a mistake. “*Ihr* is the archaic second person *formal*, corresponding to modern *Sie*. And as a general rule, nobody is formal with a donkey.”

[Raymond Chen](#)

**Follow**

