

Like the Chinese 小汉斯, the endearing name in English for a child by the name of Hans would be “little Hans”. In German, that’s Hänschen. The phonetic change from a to ä is a result of fixing the diminutive suffix “chen”.

Now there is a German idiom: Was Hänschen nicht lernt, lernt Hans nimmermehr. A word-by-word translation is: What the little Hans has not learnt, Hans will never learn, pointing out that, when young, people should make good use of their time to learn. But, a better version of the English translation, as accepted by many, reads: You can’t teach an old dog new tricks. It’s really striking when you find that in English a “dog” can be borrowed to mean a human being! This, unavoidably, reminds us of another idiom: Every dog has his day.

Humble and encouraging at the same time.