

GERMAN AND BUSINESS STUDIES - SETTING THE SCENE

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A certain Mr Goethe - with whom some of the readers will have had an intense working relationship before turning their attention to business studies - defined the Novelle as: eine sich ereignete, unerhörte Begebenheit. I expect that certain members of the honourable tradition of German in Britain might well think that it is unerhört that the Institute of Germanic Studies should be involved in organizing a seminar on something as unphilological as "German and business studies", but it was definitely sich ereignend and we would like to hope that it will not go completely unheard either. How "novel" the topic is, though, depends on what is meant when one says "German and business studies".

In this introduction, I would like to outline three areas in which the combination of German and business studies is no novelty, or, to phrase it more positively, in which experience has been gained and research undertaken from which point further work should depart if reinventing the wheel is to be avoided:

- 1 The existence of courses at academic institutions in the UK which deal with a combination of linguistic and economic or business studies.
- 2 Linguistic and educational research on the learning and teaching of languages for special purposes.
- 3 General and specific research on the function of an academic education and its relationship and relevance to the job market.

ad 1: This volume is the documentation of contributions to a two-part seminar on German and business studies organized jointly by the Institute of Germanic Studies, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Goethe Institute and held at the Goethe Institute in London on 17 October 1987 and 13 February 1988. The subtitle of the first seminar: "Towards a university curriculum" was not meant to indicate that

universities have to be encouraged to introduce new courses as would be the case if this were a seminar on, say, "German and space technology". "German and business studies" does already exist as a possible combination at a number of academic institutions and, judging by the number of A-level results of the students applying for it, it would seem to be a very attractive possibility indeed. Its alleged usefulness in the eyes of prospective students, as far as future job opportunities are concerned, combined with a generally business-orientated Zeitgeist and strong competition between academic institutions for students has led to the setting up of several courses which combine linguistic and economic elements.

Thus, "towards a university curriculum" is not to be seen as a prompting to create something completely new but rather as an invitation to step back, to take stock of what has happened and been developed to date, to compare, to learn from each other and to attempt some form of co-operation and co-ordination of results. By "co-ordination" is not meant that in 10 years time all "German and business studies" courses should be identical. What is meant is that a basic agreement should be reached as to what a university course on this topic should convey in terms of general education and types of skill. On the basis of such an agreement as much diversification and division of labour should be striven for among the universities in order to offer choice, but it should be a choice of options which are based on a general consensus as to what universities can and should be doing in such an area.

During the first seminar the afternoon session was devoted to a kind of stock-taking exercise, providing a forum for different institutions in higher education to introduce their courses and to discuss their similarities and differences.

While collecting and comparing the experiences of different courses in different places, it should not be forgotten that attempts have already been made to discuss questions related to the field of German and business studies and that the results of these discussions must be considered. In November 1984, the

conference: "The Challenge of Business and Technology - The Response of Education" took place in Dublin and in July 1985 a conference was held at Regent's College London with the title: "German in the United Kingdom - Issues and Opportunities", which included papers relevant to the present topic.

ad 2: The second area from which we can draw information is the existing linguistic and educational research on the learning and teaching of languages for special purposes and the expertise that has gone into the development of teaching material. The situation in linguistic and educational research with regard to "Deutsch als Fachsprache" and "Deutsch als Fachsprache Wirtschaft" is a paradoxical one. On the one hand it looks as if it is still dealing with the basics; as soon as one starts discussing the definitions and relationship of "Fachsprache" and "Allgemeinsprache", "fachsprachlicher Unterricht" and "Fachunterricht" and "allgemeinsprachlicher Unterricht" or even the appropriate linguistic level at which "Deutsch als Fachsprache" should enter the curriculum, one is confronted with terminological discrepancies and deadlocks at a fairly basic level. On the other hand it looks as if Rosemarie Buhlmann and Anneliese Fearnls are right when they state at the beginning of their "Handbuch des Fachsprachenunterrichts"¹ "daß weltweit die Zahl der Lerner, die allgemeinsprachlich ausgerichtetes Deutsch lernen, abnimmt" while "in den letzten Jahren die Nachfrage nach Fachsprachenunterricht eindeutig zugenommen hat". And the fact that someone has dared to write a "Handbuch" for a given area of research usually implies that there is at least a certain consolidation in that area. The "Handbuch" can be warmly recommended to anyone who has the task of setting up the language side of a new course. It guides the reader through all aspects which need attention when a new course is being set up or new material is being developed.

1 München: Langenscheidt 1987

Looking at existing material for "Deutsch als Fachsprache", especially "Fachsprache Wirtschaft", the situation, at least at the first glance, doesn't seem too bad. "Arbeitsmittel für den Deutschunterricht an Ausländer" - a very useful documentation published in annually updated versions by the Goethe-Institute - lists 19 courses for "Deutsch als Fachsprache"; most of them consisting of a textbook, a teacher's manual and cassettes; nearly one third of them deals with the area of Commerce and Economics. You will find titles like:

- "Business German Right from the Start"
- "Der Kaufmann"
- "Deutsche Wirtschaftssprache für Ausländer"
- "Der Praktikant"
- "Fachsprache Wirtschaft", or
- "Deutsch - Sprachbereich Industrie".

In addition to the 18 courses there are 21 titles of "Arbeits-texte" for "Deutsch als Fachsprache", among them:

- "Teste Dein Wirtschaftsdeutsch", a collection of multiple-choice tests
- "100 Briefe für Export und Import", described as a collection of "kaufmännische Musterbriefe"
- a reference book with translation exercises: "Deutsche Handelskorrespondenz"
- an audio-course: "Geschäfts- und Verhandlungssprache Deutsch".

But no matter what the variety on offer is, it usually doesn't fit in with the needs one has in a particular situation: it might not tally with the student's linguistic or intellectual background, nor will it present the section of the German language or the section of "Wirtschaft" you actually want to teach; you mightn't like it because of the contents it conveys etc. Thus, instead of using a given textbook, you might find yourself writing and compiling new material all the time. A

lot of work still remains to be done to co-ordinate the activities relating to the development of material and to make this generally available.

ad 3: What seems to be foremost in many students' minds today is: the closer a degree is related to a specific aspect of the "real" world, the more likely their chance of finding a better job. What they do not seem to take into consideration is what Richard Harries, the Bishop of Oxford, referred to in the "Observer" of 4 October 1987, when he wrote:

"What is going to produce innovators and entrepreneurs? One requirement must surely be the imparting of a sense that there is still much to discover. This points to the essential link between teaching and research. One feature that distinguishes a university from a school is the sense a student receives of being involved with the teacher in the pursuit of a truth which is not all fixed and final. This can only be imparted if the teacher is himself involved in research, and as a result is able to convey something of the excitement of working at the frontier, the thrill of discovery (...) The sense that there is still much to find out, intellectual curiosity, imagination and historical senses are most likely to develop when students follow the subject in which they are genuinely interested, rather than be pressured into certain areas that are alleged to be "good for jobs".

Richard Harries criticised a purely utilitarian approach to education. I assume the majority of the readers of this volume would agree with that general point. I also assume the majority agrees that that does not necessarily mean that everything should stay exactly the way it was. The questions as to how to keep everything unchanged or how to teach narrowly defined specific skills have to be replaced by the more challenging one: How do you integrate all the intellectual, social and emotional abilities which we believe should be acquired during the graduation process at university, the ability to structure, to think ahead, to cope with unknown complex situations, to lead, to engage in reasonable, rational discourse; how do we integrate all these abilities with the new realm of themes which German departments now have to deal with?

It would be ridiculous to regard a complete or partial transfer from the study of German literature to the study of German economics, commerce or business relations as a watering-down of standards; both objects - literature and economics - are equally worthy of academic studies. The fear that something could be "watered-down" only arises if one believes that the general educational goals one holds do not apply any more, once the topic has been changed, or if one assumes that someone who was an expert on Rilke yesterday is supposed to know all about EC-subsidies tomorrow. If it is clear that the general educational objectives remain and the expertise on complex business matters is supplied by people who are qualified to deal with them, then there is not reason why German and business studies should not be seen as an academic enterprise on a par with other, more traditional ones. It is easy to state this in general terms; the difficulties arise when we try to translate this general concept into practice. When we try to establish what form teaching and research will take in modern language departments which are predominantly engaged in interacting with business studies.

The organizers of the seminar found it important that these general questions should not be hastily pushed aside in order to move over to purely practical matters and so the morning session of the first seminar was devoted to them. The papers given by Professors Reeves and Murray thus provide a fitting opening to this volume. What follows is a documentation of the second seminar: a survey of the current state of research in "Deutsch als Fachsprache Wirtschaft" and the reports of the working-parties which formed the major part of the second seminar.

As introductions to the documentation of seminars and conferences often have the nasty habit of "stealing" the main points of the contributions by pretending to introduce them, I will not write in detail about the papers presented here. They speak well enough for themselves.

Despite major obstacles like the "Great Hurricane", more than 70 participants gave up their free Saturdays to trek down (and up) to London to join the seminars. It looks now as if

these two seminars are not fated to stand alone. A further seminar is being planned and the participants seem eager to find some form for a regular exchange of ideas and long-term co-operation. German and business studies, it appears, has an active time ahead in Great Britain.