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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the problems faced by teachers of business German, the possible goals of business German courses, and the design of an effective textbook to integrate business content and language skills. Special reference is made to the two-semester business German course offered by the University of Southern California (USC). The major goal of the USC course is to convey the basic background about the business world in German-speaking countries to students, focusing on culture and the presentation of specific contextualized content with immediate applicability in the target culture. The textbook designed for the course is, except for footnotes, entirely in German, and features chapters organized around topics. The chapter contents facilitate an interactive, communication-orientated approach by means of authentic text materials and coordinated activities. The vocabulary presented in the texts is cross-referenced with an encyclopedic listing of business terms in German. (MDM)

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**A New Look at Contextualization and Application:
A Comprehensive Pedagogical Strategy
for Business German**

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I Introduction: Problems and existing solutions

For language educators it has become increasingly important to bridge the gap between teaching a language according to a specific theory of language acquisition or some kind of informed methodological eclecticism on the one hand, and the content so inseparably connected with a specialized language, on the other. The need for content-based language instruction is widely accepted, yet in the area of Business German, the aspect of content has long been neglected. Often the instructor assigned to these courses by a German department is not a person with a business background and thus at a loss when it comes to teaching Business German to business-oriented students from Business Schools. These students usually consider German a tool for their future operations in the business world, and they feel entitled to a thorough study and informed instruction on the relevant aspects of business life.¹ A textbook in the area of Business German Studies needs to address this problem and not only provide material for the students, but also be

¹Henderson emphasizes the necessity of "TA-Training im Fachbereich Wirtschaftsdeutsch." As she points out, the lack of qualified instructors poses a serious problem and impedes the build-up of a strong program in this field.

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comprehensive in its presentation as it needs to instruct the instructor in an increasingly complex subject matter.

However, considering the limited resources available to German Departments, Business German Studies should also be open to non-business-oriented students who consider the economic activities of a people as one of several aspects of their multifaceted culture. This student group would like to study Business German to enhance their understanding of Germany and its people in general.

The problem of catering to both of these segments as the potential clientele for Business German Studies is quite a demanding task for a teacher, and it causes quite a bit of frustration among teaching assistants and professors in the language departments as well as among their clientele. How can a textbook dedicated to Business German Studies encompass the needs of such a heterogeneous clientele and be at the same time comprehensive with regard to the instructor's abilities and student needs as we have just outlined them?²

The structure of a course in this area and consequently of a textbook to fuel it, necessarily depend on what the

²See Christa W. Britt for a discussion of the problems of formulating instructional goals with regard to the heterogeneity of the clientele. She puts special emphasis on the heterogeneity of the student pool and points out the differences that exist with regard to the vocabulary knowledge shared by the users of a variety of second year textbooks (56). She then reiterates the process of creating a comprehensive word frequency list and shows from how wide a variety of sources such a list needs to be compiled in order to be comprehensive. As a side effect, however, she also highlights the problems involved in preparing students specifically for the tasks to be solved in the *Internationale Wirtschaftsprüfung Deutsch*, and at the same time striving to provide the students with the tools to cope independently with new material on their own.

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specific goals of a course in Business German Studies would be, keeping in mind the aforementioned heterogeneity of our clientele.

A few questions as to the goals of such a course need to be addressed first: Do we believe in the memorization of business-related vocabulary in order to read and eventually comprehend a number of artificial or authentic texts in class? Is it important to teach the students how to write a CV and cover letter in German and how to write proper business letters in the target language? Is it the very specific preparation for the *Prüfung Wirtschaftsdeutsch International*, the passing of which usually represents an asset in a future job hunt? From the point of view of the majority of German Departments in the US the question arises, whether Business German Studies are just another means of content-based instruction designed to maintain student interest in the language, or should Business German Studies actually provide the students with a tool that would facilitate their integration into an increasingly internationalized job market.

II Course goals

All of the interests listed above are justified and need to be met by either supplying the skills needed or laying a solid foundation for the students to pursue these goals in more advanced courses. It is the goal of this textbook and

the two-semester course for which it is designed to convey the basic background about the business world in the German speaking countries--with an emphasis on the nature of economic interaction as a process which unfolds determined by a variety of social, political, and other cultural parameters.³ The focus of the facilitating efforts of the instructor is thus the introduction of materials exposing these complex and oftentimes contradictory processes.

For several years now we have class-tested and refined materials and developed a methodology to integrate subject matter and textual understanding along with the acquisition of a "Fachsprache" in integrated modules adaptable to individual and group learning. Our method of instruction has been defined by the goals we have just sketched and was motivated by learning theory rather than by a philosophy of language and its structure.

It is a major course goal to convey the basic background about the business world in the German speaking countries-- settings, processes, and their contexts. Our project is geared towards providing the students with an insight into the world of business as being interrelated with politics and other cultural activities, a dynamic process in which a variety of players act as individuals and in interest groups.

³These goals can be achieved on different levels provided for in a variety of settings. Based on statistic material, Keck points out that these "range from a single course on the fourth semester college German level to, more frequently, a single course on the fifth or sixth semester level. In addition to German majors, business, computer science, political science and engineering majors most often populate the Business German courses." (4)

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This approach does not include the regurgitation of business vocabulary, as it is suggested by some of the textbooks available today.⁴ Instead, our project focuses on culture and the presentation of specific contextualized content with immediate and future applicability to historical, contemporary, and future materials in the target culture. All materials employed are authentic and, due to the particular goals of the special interest group that generated the materials, these texts are usually biased and pursue a specific agenda. Activities are designed to provide access to these materials and to critically discuss the function of the special interest group or government agency behind the publications and to investigate their role in the economy.

This includes teaching comprehension and interpretation of authentic business-related texts and genres, such as statistics available through the German Federal Agencies or private institutions, statements by players in the economy, reports from various special interest groups, and political and economic analysis and forecasts from various independent and incorporated specialists. This project also extends to the understanding of radio and television broadcasts, as they pose challenging questions with regard to the current economic life.

⁴Assembling a list of most frequently used business terminology is a useful tool for a teacher and helpful in regard to selecting texts for readings in class (see Britt). These word lists should, however, not determine the curriculum of a two-semester course and create some kind of overly rigid course layout that could impede free communication in class.

III Methodological innovations

An agenda of this complexity requires an equally sophisticated teaching approach. Our concept of Business German Studies necessitates an emphasis on class interaction; only cautiously is the instructor to interfere with the students' attempts to solve problems by themselves.

In order to teach oral and written expression to lay a foundation which will eventually allow the students to function within a German business environment, it is essential to acquaint the students with general and specific vocabularies and styles through task involvement rather than the regurgitation of facts. These tasks are designed to mirror natural activities as they are performed by members of the German business community, not as exercises for American college students. The students can assume the role of a player in the economy and produce intelligible input to be discussed and even judged by their peers, who represent the business community. These manipulations of the data will be especially facilitated by the sections entitled "Situation" and "Der Sachverständige," the 'expert.'

The inclusion of ample reference material, extensive encyclopedic listings in the target language, and a large bibliography will serve the students beyond the course. Instead of presenting a specific area of business of which a various number of relevant aspects would have to be memorized and stored, the class acquires, by challenging applications

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of their abilities, a set of useful tools to access the target culture. The ultimate course goal is thus to develop each student's ability to cope with whatever source they think is relevant for their future dealings with the German speaking environment, in this case, its business segment. The necessity of such an open approach to the subject of Business German Studies is highlighted by the fact that it is increasingly difficult for language teachers to define what is 'relevant' in a increasingly complex business world.

IV Implementation

Please allow me to walk you through some of the materials we used in class and to present some of the results of our field studies. We had the following objectives when we started our redesigned courses at the University of Southern California. It was our intent

- a. to enhance the student's ability to understand the presented authentic material
- b. to enable the students to integrate the material into the general context established by their previously acquired knowledge of the Business world and the survey text in each chapter
- c. to evaluate and to use the information they gather to inform others
- d. to argue upon the foundation laid by his or her own findings

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- e. to convince a listener/reader of the relevance of the material gathered as well as the point of view developed by the "Sachverständiger," the 'expert.'

The Format

These basic objectives led us to the following layout for the textbook:

1. Chapters are organized around topics, featuring a communication-oriented approach. A variety of short related texts, illustrations, and realia are accompanied by activities that involve the students in the topic and stimulate active participation. All texts presented are authentic, and grow in complexity as each chapter and the student's involvement with the topic develops. A special case are the survey texts in each chapter which summarize and give an outlook on the scope of the topic, and were written by the authors, who are native speakers.
2. The description of features of business life in the first three chapters constitutes a basic introduction to business life and terminology. Sketching the three sectors of the business life, agriculture, heavy industries, and the service industry, this section also contains a wide variety of data and related activities more open to organization and structuring by the student. Presenting relatively simple authentic texts prevents the blocking of communication among students by what Keck has already

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- pointed out to be the most difficult feature of the available exams in the field, namely that it is "the most difficult part of the exam for the non-specialist to master the specialized business German vocabulary (*Fachlexik*)."(6)
3. Stylistic notes and activities facilitate further language acquisition, as a sense of written and oral business style is developed. Stylistic notes are incorporated as needed to facilitate the acquisition of both spoken and written German business styles, especially in regard to the tools of persuasive communication in business. The stress is on task involvement rather than on the regurgitation of facts; along those lines, writing basic compositions on business topics is encouraged. Grammar and style hints are interspersed as appropriate, yet do not govern the selection nor the style of the presented authentic material. Except for some English footnotes, the entire book including explanations is in German.
 4. The chapter contents facilitate an interactive, communication-oriented approach by means of authentic text materials and coordinated activities for oral and written work (data gathering, library research, presentations in class, individual compositions), allowing particular students to assume the status of an expert for a topic of their choice.
 5. The vocabulary presented in the texts is cross-referenced with an encyclopedic listing of business terms in German. Their explanations in the target language encourage

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independent research and make the students aware of the connections between the acquisition of factual knowledge and the observation of business processes. The encyclopedic listings in the compendium reinforce basic vocabulary knowledge as well as present technical terms in a broader variety of contexts.

6. Extensive cross-listings also give the instructor an opportunity to read ahead and prepare to answer even tricky questions on the subject matter.
7. Class discussion of the material can be based both on group knowledge of the assigned readings as well as on the students own insights gained by working with the compendium. They will acquire a sense for how the special topics are related to the basic features of the economy as presented in the three introductory chapters.
8. Reports assigned at least once a semester are aided by chapter contents, the compendium, the textbook's encyclopedic layout, and additional data to be gathered outside the classroom. If a student chooses to give a report on a chapter or chapter portion not covered in class, he or she will be able to use the materials independently, by drawing from the explanatory notes, the vocabulary notes, the encyclopedic cross-references, and the dictionary in the back of the book. This is to support a level of knowledge and attitude sufficient to deal with new critical input.

9. A student can assume the role of the "Sachverständiger" for one of the special sections of a chapter. He or she can introduce the encyclopedic function of the book to the classmates by simply using this feature. By encouraging students to independently select data from a variety of authentic materials in preparing reports or assignments, the materials guide them toward future independent use of these sources, which on a small scale represent the information pool available to them after the course is over.
10. Becoming a "Sachverständiger" usually stimulates interest in writing compositions and opens up an opportunity for the instructor to design exams that do not yield a reproduction of facts, but rather a productive discourse with the material from the German business environment.
11. Cultural notes provide the social and psychological background for understanding business interaction in the German speaking countries.
12. A final section "Probleme und Lösungen" in each chapter enables the students to reevaluate, now from an informed and individualized point of view, previous texts, other chapters in the book, the introductory chapters, the introductions to the chapters and the small authentic texts which start the chapters.
13. The materials provided by the book constitute a source of reference which will also serve the student beyond this course. Enough materials are provided for two semesters

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of work. Instructors teaching a one-semester course may teach the first three chapters and then choose topics from the special topics section more liberally.

V Outlook

It is the goal of our efforts to convey the basic background about the business world in the German speaking countries--settings, processes, and contexts. In addition to facilitating the student's acquisition of basic German business practices, principles, and terminology, this textbook⁵ will distinguish itself by presenting facts and figures juxtaposed with challenging and sometimes controversial authentic materials. This volume will introduce students to structural shifts and economic developments as they unfold in culturally and economically heterogeneous Europe, giving them guided access to understanding a vivid and challenging economic context. In an increasingly complex world economy, which some people rather prematurely call a "global economy," the functioning interaction of the individual players on a national and international level is essential.⁶ Successful participation requires the ability of

⁵Gerhard Clausing and Thomas Strack, Wirtschaftsstudien Deutsch. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, Fall 1994.

⁶We do not believe it to be necessary to resort to polemics to encourage students to learn German; Keck for example suggests that "European corporate leaders rightfully expect to be able to negotiate business in their own languages, or at least not to be told that the negotiations must be in English merely to accommodate one American who might be in the group." (Keck 1) This might be true for a very specific arrangement, but if you have a variety of nationals at the table, you will have to resort to the undebated lingua franca for transatlantic and European-

the players, and even of those who are interested in Business German Studies as the investigation of an important area of civilization, to tap into existing bodies of knowledge. This puts the focus on the cultural parameters of business conduct and it is this hard core of information that gives the participants the cutting edge in an increasingly competitive international economy. Supporting both the instructor's acquisition of business knowledge and the students' ability to access materials on their own, this project will fuel Business German Studies as a branch of cultural studies as well as a source of encouragement to put acquired abilities and factual knowledge to work in a business environment.

Consulted Works

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Asian business negotiations. What is needed on the level that we are aiming for with this text book are cultural skills and the ability to prepare for such negotiations through familiarity with the relevant German sources and by successfully accessing them. It is on those terms that we try to prepare students to cope with the available examinations, that is, to display "the ability to function competently in German in a business setting." (96) This is where we think the development of negotiating skills should pick up.

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- PLEASE NOTE: A handout of sample materials from the forthcoming textbook will be distributed in the session.