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## LANGUAGE POLICIES IN THE CONTEXT OF GERMAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper analyzes the growing impact of English in German higher education. The analysis addresses the issues of higher education policy and practice, focusing on the discrepancies across these areas with respect to English use. The first part of the paper examines policy initiatives on the European Union (EU), federal, and institutional levels that reveal the lack of an explicit language policy. This is contrasted with an analysis of administrative measures that in fact are paving the way for the expanded functional range for English, such as the establishment of new degree programs specifically designated as *auslandsorientiert* or internationally oriented. The examination includes a closer look at the impact of English at one German institution, the *Freie Universität Berlin* (FUB). Finally, the paper addresses some of the political, financial and educational issues to be considered as a consequence of the expanding role of English in higher education.

**KEY WORDS:** Bologna Process, English as medium of instruction, Englishization, European Union, Germany, higher education, internationalization, language policy

**ABBREVIATIONS:** BMBF – *Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung* (German Federal Ministry for Education and Research); CRIS – Center for Research on Innovation & Society; Erasmus – the European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students; DAAD – *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (German Academic Exchange Service); EU – European Union; DPI – Degree Program Information; ECTS – European Credit Transfer System; EU – European Union; FUB – *Freie Universität Berlin* (Free University of Berlin); HRK – *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz* (German Rectors' Conference); MPE – Master Programs in English

### INTRODUCTION

As part of an effort to encourage greater individual multilingualism in Europe, the European Union (EU) proclaimed the year 2001 as the “European Year of Languages”. As explained in a press release from the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) (2001b), the aim of the EU initiative was not only to encourage a greater appreciation for the continent’s linguistic

diversity, but to promote the concrete goal of people becoming proficient in “*two additional foreign languages*”.<sup>1</sup> While official policy on both the European and national levels remains vague in that it does not specify which two languages people should learn, in the German context, as is likely the case in the rest of Europe, there is a tacit understanding that the first of these two languages, certainly for most people, is English (Hilgendorf, 2005). This social reality of English as the first foreign language in Germany is reflected in federal statistics on student enrollment in language classes at the pre-school, primary, and secondary levels. During the school year 2004/05, ca. 77.7% of all German pupils learned English, whereas only 17.7% learned French, the second most commonly taught language (*Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland*, 2005a, b). The significant role of English as the first foreign language in Germany has even been alluded to by officials in the highest levels of government, such as the former Federal Minister for Education and Research Edelgard Buhlman, who in a Ministry press release from 2001 noted: “*For most of us [Germans] it is almost normal to speak English in addition to German*” (BMBF, 2001b).

This paper considers the ramifications of the status of English as the first foreign language in Germany as well as the societal bilingualism implied by Buhlman’s statement by analyzing the growing impact of English in one particular domain of use: Higher education. In light of the ideology of English as the language of internationalization, globalization, and even Europeanization, the analysis addresses the issues of tertiary education policy and practice, focusing on the discrepancies across these areas with respect to English use. While policy makers notably shy away from articulating an explicit language policy calling for a greater role for English in higher education, in practice English plays an important and expanding role within the domain, as it is being used for a growing number of functions, including, significantly, that of a second language of instruction. In spite of the absence of an explicit language policy, English appears in the discourse of higher education reform, as it is being used by, for example, the BMBF, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK) as one of the primary means for internationalizing higher education and thus enhancing the competitiveness of tertiary education in the global arena. And yet, the problems that arise as a result

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<sup>1</sup> This and all subsequent citations in italics are the authors’ translations of quotes originally in German.

of the increasing use of English are seldom mentioned if acknowledged at all in this discourse. While English is spreading as a medium of instruction, little if any attention is being given to ensure that German university students have adequate academic proficiency in the language, which they increasingly are using for at least part, and in some cases even all, of their studies.

The first part of this paper examines higher education policy initiatives on the EU, federal, and institutional levels that reveal the lack of an explicit language policy. This is contrasted with an analysis of administrative measures that in fact are paving the way for the expanded functional range for English, such as the establishment of new degree programs specifically designated as *ausland-sorientiert* (internationally oriented). The examination includes a closer look at the impact of English at one German institution, the *Freie Universität Berlin* (FUB). Finally, the paper addresses some of the political, financial and educational issues to be considered as a consequence of the expanding role of English in higher education. While this study focuses on the situation in Germany, the results certainly have resonance for other contexts, in Europe and elsewhere, where English is being used increasingly as the *lingua franca* of academia.

#### EUROPEAN LANGUAGE POLICIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION

In light of the establishment of the EU and the further heightened contact between European institutions and corporations as a result, the conditions for a *de facto* *lingua franca* to be used on the continent have never been stronger. And English, with its tremendous status in the world today, is the strongest candidate to fill the role of a language of wider communication (Crystal, 2003; Wright, 2004). This is not to say that everyone embraces such a development. There are those who fear that national languages are becoming endangered and therefore strongly object to any official status for English as the primary language of communication (e.g. Ehlich, 2004; Meyer, 2004). In spite of this opposition, however, research illustrates how English has evolved into the default language of communication between EU member states (see Cenoz & Jessner, 2000; Wright, 2004). What is more, the importance of a common language is expected to grow even more as the EU expands further. As de Swaan (2001: 182) paradoxically notes: “The more languages, the more English”, an observation that has particular relevance for the

EU with its current numbers of 25 member states and 20 official languages. This *de facto* role of English as a key language in the context of the EU is also reflected in the domain of higher education.

With respect to European policy initiatives in higher education, following economic and political unification upon the signing of the Treaty on European Union in 1992, officials responsible for education policy in numerous European countries sought to establish a more uniform system of higher education throughout the continent. This decision led to the signing in 1999 of the Bologna Declaration, originally endorsed by education ministers and officials from 29 European countries, which has as its primary aim the establishment of what has been termed a “European area of higher education” (*Bologna Declaration*, 1999). The Declaration’s basic goal is to ensure greater compatibility among educational institutions across Europe, which in turn it is hoped will enhance the international attractiveness of higher education on the continent, make education more sensitive to the economic needs of European countries, and increase the employability of graduates. To this end, the Declaration (1999) outlines specific objectives to be achieved by 2010. These are

- a system of two main education cycles: undergraduate and (post-)graduate,
- easily readable and comparable degrees, to be facilitated by an explanatory Diploma Supplement,
- a system of credits,
- the promotion of academic mobility for students, researchers, and educators, and
- cooperation in quality assurance.

Noticeably lacking from these five objectives is any reference to language policy, a curious omission considering the linguistic diversity on the continent and the obvious need to address matters of language use if students and scholars are to be hosted at foreign institutions. While the 1999 objectives declare the intention to take “full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy”, in fact no specific reference is made about the protection or promotion of individual languages (*Bologna Declaration*, 1999). In effect, the Declaration begs the question of whether in a mobile Europe individuals are required to be proficient in the language of the host country, or if knowledge of a lingua franca, in most cases more than likely English, is sufficient.

In 2005, the 5-year mid-point of the Bologna process, European Ministers of Education met in Bergen to assess progress on the Declaration's stated reforms and to determine what challenges remain to be met (see further Reichert & Tauch, 2005). At that time again a discussion of language policies did not appear on the agenda, nor does it seem was there any mention of how the process may be strengthening the position of English in Europe (cf. Ljosland, 2005).

This lack of explicit language policy is not unusual in the history of efforts toward European integration. Wright (2000) notes for instance the discrepancy in the large amount of attention given to economic and political matters in laying the foundation for establishing the EU, as opposed to the effort expended on fundamental problems regarding basic communication among delegates from the different member nations. Phillipson (2003) draws further attention to shortcomings in European language policy. Since educators and students on academic exchange must be able to communicate in their new environs in some way, the absence of clear language policy initiatives in effect paves the way for the default use of the language that is already by far the most widely taught and used on the continent. Put more strongly, this lack of a clear and explicit language policy can be interpreted as an indicator of an underlying assumption that English will serve as a lingua franca (cf. Stotz, this issue). Such a development, however, raises significant concerns that warrant serious consideration. When policies on the role of a lingua franca such as English are not specifically addressed, fundamental questions on how English should be taught and issues about whether there is equal access to the language are also not adequately examined.

### *European Academic Mobility and the Increasing Use of English*

One of the primary factors contributing to the growing use of English in higher education in Europe is the increasing mobility of students, faculty, and researchers on the continent, as they participate on short-term exchange programs or in fact choose to study/work outside of their native country. One of the more popular exchange programs currently is Erasmus (the European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), which enables students to study for 6 months to a year at a university in another EU country. With the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), any courses or exams completed at foreign institutions are now recognized by the home university. Although

the Erasmus program was designed to encourage language learning, which it undoubtedly is doing, it also inadvertently supports the use of English in Europe. This can be seen in the fact that exchanges to Europe's English-speaking countries are among the most popular in the program: Nearly three times as many students go from Germany to Europe's English-speaking countries than in the other direction (Erasmus mobility statistics, 2003–04). Given this fact, several British universities have responded to this imbalanced exchange by refusing to take in more students than they send abroad, since these non-fee-paying exchange students take the spots that fee paying students otherwise could have (Wuttig, 2004: 40).

While studying at English-speaking universities is popular among students from the continent, there are additional reasons why European exchanges contribute to the growing use of English. “[M]ore and more universities are beginning to offer programs in English because mobile students are often unable to follow courses in the language of the host institution” (Mackiewicz, 2001: 1). German students who go on an Erasmus exchange to the Netherlands, for example, do not necessarily need to learn Dutch for their studies, as the language of instruction in many cases is English. Moreover, with the limited number of spaces on exchange programs for study in English-speaking countries, students are choosing as an alternative to go to countries where English is more commonly used as an additional language of instruction, for example in Scandinavia and the Benelux countries.

#### RECENT GERMAN LANGUAGE POLICIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

An explicit language policy with respect to the Bologna Declaration initiatives is also lacking in Germany. German policy, however, does refer to a role for English in internationalizing its university system, which in effect suggests the existence of a tacit policy supporting the increasing use of English.

With respect to the Bologna Declaration, the German government has begun implementing the aforementioned European policy measures with a particular emphasis on the concept of internationalization and enhancing the status of its educational institutions. As a press release from the BMBF (2000a) notes, “Germany must become internationally more attractive as a place for academic study.” To this end, concrete goals include increasing foreign student enrollment from ca. 5% to 10% (BMBF, 2000a; DAAD, 2001). Aside from the EU priority to promote mobility, this effort towards

internationalization is also seen as addressing basic national interests. Through educational exchange and cooperation, also with countries beyond European borders, the government hopes to lay the foundation for future global relations in business and politics. As noted by Ammon (2001: 357), “[t]he necessity to make German universities more accessible to foreign students ... is considered important for the country’s economic and political future.”

This emphasis on enhancing the international standing of the higher education system serves not only the purpose of attracting more foreign students and scholars to the country, but it is considered an equally important factor in dissuading highly educated Germans from going overseas, where many seek better professional and/or academic opportunities. In a notable example of English use on the governmental level, the BMBF (2001a, b) coined the motto “*Brain Gain statt Brain Drain*”, or “Brain gain instead of brain drain”, to articulate its primary objective in internationalizing higher education. In the case of Germany, the number of highly qualified scholars and researchers going to the USA, especially in technological fields and the natural sciences, is significant. According to one government-sponsored study, some 14% of all young scholars with a doctorate go to the USA, ranking Germany third in numbers after China and Japan (CRIS, 2000). With respect to foreign lecturers teaching at US universities, Germany ranks fifth following China, India, Taiwan, and Great Britain (CRIS, 2000).

### *Englishization in German Higher Education*

In order to prevent a ‘brain drain’, the government has taken several steps in an effort towards internationalization, which is resulting in what can be termed a simultaneous Englishization of the domain. In effect, German policy uses English in order to help improve the overall standards of universities and to make them more attractive to foreign students. As defined in the *Oxford Companion to the English Language*, Englishization refers to a general “adapt[ation] towards English” (McArthur, 1992: 335). This impact of English within the domain of German higher education can be seen in (a) the modification of existing programs of study in accordance with the Bologna Declaration, (b) the creation of new degree programs specifically designated as *auslandsorientiert* “internationally-oriented” (DAAD, 2002), and (c) the recruitment of international students and faculty.

*Englishization as a Result of the Bologna Process*

With regard to the first point, the modification of existing degree programs, the federal government (BMBF, DAAD, & HRK, 2000) has introduced several measures in accordance with the Bologna Declaration objectives that reflect a simultaneous Englishization. Concerning the two main education cycles, in 2002 the federal government passed a law requiring universities to introduce by 2010 the two-cycle structure stipulated in the Bologna Declaration (Eurydice, 2005: 13). In Germany, these new degrees in fact have the English designations of ‘Bachelor’ and ‘Master’ and eventually will replace the former ‘*Magister*’ and ‘*Diplom*’ programs. By October 2005, 34% of all academic programs in German institutions of higher education had been changed to the new Bachelor and Master degrees (HRK, 2005). Also, the Diploma Supplement noted in the Declaration has been introduced and is now being extended to all higher education qualifications. Although European regulations stipulate only that the supplement be issued in “a widely used European language,” in Germany the document is solely provided in English (Eurydice, 2005: 27). Finally, in order to support students’ language skills, it has been recommended that advanced language courses be offered in conjunction with fields of study, i.e. courses in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), or, as one bulletin notes in a specific example, *Fachenglisch* (English for specific purposes) (DAAD, 2001).

*Englishization as a Result of Internationally-Oriented Degree Programs*

The second aspect of this reform, the creation of new *auslandsorientiert* (internationally-oriented) degree programs, contributes further to the growing use of English. These programs have been inaugurated through annual government-sponsored grant competitions over a 5-year period, from 1997 to 2002. According to a government press release, “*the [targeted] participants of the supported programs of study are approximately half Germans and half foreigners.*” Language barriers are to be addressed “*in the first semesters ... with courses in English,*” the assumption being that foreign students eventually would transition to coursework in German. In addition, supplementary language courses for both English and German were to be offered (BMBF et al., 2000).

During the initial 5-year period, the government awarded funding for creating 62 such internationally-oriented degree programs



offering the new Bachelor and/or Master degrees. The details of curricular design and program implementation were left to the individual academic departments and/or faculty, and as a consequence the government guidelines could not always be implemented. For example, although equal numbers of foreign students and Germans are targeted for enrollment, this goal has not always been reached. Language policy also varies depending on the program and the students enrolled; while some programs offer only initial coursework in English before transitioning to instruction in German, many degree programs in fact are taught completely in English (Hilgendorf, 2005).

While there has been some controversy over the role of English vis-à-vis German in these programs (Ammon & McConnell, 2002: 84), the discourse of the funding agencies continues to stress a significant role for English, which unequivocally is seen as key to efforts towards internationalization: "*The degree programs should contribute to the internationalization [of the curriculum] by offering courses in English*" (DAAD, 2002: 5). Furthermore, teaching in English is viewed as essential for retaining foreign students: "*[The] funding programs would like to see that at least part of the studies be offered in English in order to assure the quick integration of foreign students into major studies*" (DAAD, 2002: 12). In practice a range of English use exists in the programs due to the autonomy individual institutions have in determining academic guidelines. Statistics available for the period from 1997 through 2000 show that in that early phase more than half of the programs surveyed, 58%, conducted the first year of studies completely in English, and in the second year of studies 42% of programs were still conducted entirely in English. "*In only a few exceptional cases are no English-language classes offered,*" such as in studies for German as a foreign language (DAAD, 2002: 12).

The stated admission requirements for a majority of the programs further highlight the important role that English plays. Reports show that 93% of the study programs explicitly require what is characterized as "*good to very good English skills,*" with 97.2% of the programs calling for some form of official assessment of English proficiency, be it the TOEFL exam, similar tests, or evidence of having completed schooling or studies in English (DAAD, 2002: 14).

As can be seen, the use of English in such internationally-oriented study programs is common in Germany. Overall, in terms of percentages there are still significantly fewer English-language programs in Germany (about 3% of all university programs) than

in countries like the Netherlands and Denmark (about 15%). However, with respect to total numbers Germany in fact offered the highest number of such programs in non-English speaking Europe for the year 2002 (Maiworm & Wächter, 2002: 28).

*Englishization as a Result of the Recruitment of International Students and Faculty*

The recruitment and exchange of international students and faculty is another significant contributor to the growing presence of English in German higher education. Germany has been particularly successful in the promotion of academic mobility. In 2003 Germany was the third most popular destination for Erasmus students, following Spain and France. Erasmus teacher mobility has also more than doubled from 1997 to 2003, with Germany being the most popular host country in the academic year 2003–04 (Erasmus mobility statistics, 2003–04). While Erasmus continues to bring European students and scholars to German universities, in general they stay for a limited period of time and are not officially enrolled in degree programs, unlike foreign students enrolled in the internationally-oriented degree programs mentioned above.

In general, the number of foreign students enrolled in German universities has risen rapidly, increasing more than 45% from 1997 to 2003 (Thimme, 2004: 13). The government's aforementioned goal to have 10% of university students be non-German may in fact be reached in 2006. In 2002, Germany, with ca. 206,000 foreign students, was the third most popular country in the world for foreign students, following the US (ca. 583,000 foreign students) and the UK (ca. 224,000 foreign students) (Thimme, 2004: 13). To better accommodate these individuals, in many cases the German-language requirement for admission has been made more flexible, which as a result further contributes to increased English use (Hellmann & Pätzold, 2005: 22).

The presence of non-German faculty in German higher education is also expected to increase as provisions are being made for the regular participation of English-speaking guest lecturers (DAAD, 2002: 12). These individuals may be, for example, native English speakers, Germans who have taught overseas, or speakers of other languages with teaching experience in English. In a study from 2002 (DAAD, 2002: 13) statistics for the faculty currently teaching specifically in the internationally-oriented degree programs underline the importance given to instruction in English. Of all of the degree programs

surveyed, 95.8% have faculty with experience teaching in English and 63.9% of the programs have native English speakers on their staffs. Furthermore, for the academic year 2000–01, 70.8% of the programs employed visiting foreign lecturers (*ibid.*).

#### A PROFILE: THE FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN (FUB)

To demonstrate the effects of federal reforms on individual institutions, the following section presents an analysis of the role of English in one German university, the FUB. The increasing number of courses in English at this university is particularly interesting since its programs are largely in the humanities and social sciences, and not in the natural sciences, where the use of English is more established (Viereck, 1996; Skudlik, 1992; Ammon, 1998, 2001). The FUB is a major university with approximately 39,000 students, where one of the authors of this paper is employed and thus has been able to observe university trends since 1998. Moreover, a qualitative analysis of students' use of English was carried out in 2001–02, for which data was collected in interviews with students of several disciplines. Excerpts from these interviews will be cited below (see also Erling, 2004). The following analysis illustrates how the use of English is increasing both in domains where its use is officially prescribed as well as in areas where no formal requirements to use English exist. The increase in the use of English can be attributed to, among other things, (a) a wide variety of courses with outlined prerequisites for English, (b) courses that assume English proficiency without requiring it explicitly and, finally, (c) the popularity of exchange programs, which have resulted in a constant influx of international students and lecturers.

At the time of writing, the state of affairs at the FUB, as in the entire system of higher education in Germany, is very dynamic and in flux. In accordance with federal requirements to transition to the two-cycle Bachelor/Master structure, the FUB has stopped admitting students into the old degree programs of *Magister* and *Diplom*; these programs will be permanently replaced by the new two-cycle structure by 2008. Currently 40 new Bachelor programs as well as 28 Master programs are offered at the FUB. More Master programs, which will build on the new Bachelor programs, are expected to be introduced in October 2007 (*Studienhandbuch*, 2005: 1). In this discussion, the focus will be on the use of English at the FUB in (a) the former *Magister* programs, (b) the new

Bachelor programs, and (c) the new Master programs. At the FUB, as is likely the case at other universities in Germany and Europe where English is increasingly being used, there are two types of policies on the role of English and its use: The explicit policy outlining the degree of proficiency needed for academic programs, and the unstated policy where proficiency is simply assumed.

### *Courses Explicitly Requiring English*

Until the late 1990s, the only courses at the FUB that explicitly required proficiency in English were *Magister* courses in English Philology and North American Studies. In the last decade, however, there has been a marked increase in the use of English in other disciplines. This development began already with the degree programs now being phased out, i.e. those for the *Magister*. According to the last listing of FUB *Magister* programs, which, it is worth noting, was published for the first time in English in addition to German in 2003, 40 out of 76 degrees (52.6%) listed some level of proficiency in English as an entry requirement (Degree Program Information [DPI], 2004). These programs include subjects in the humanities and social sciences, like Art History, Mass Communication Studies and Psychology. Even language-based courses such as Dutch Language and Literature and Japanese Studies require English, as much of the relevant secondary literature is written in that language. The requirements to pursue a degree in Japanese Studies, for example, stipulate that “[a]part from Japanese, a good knowledge of English as the principal language of the secondary literature in the field, [sic] is absolutely necessary for successful completion of studies, and must be certified on enrolment” (DPI, 2004: 13).

The growing use of English is further reflected in the new Bachelor and Master programs now being introduced. Of the 40 new Bachelor programs, 9 have knowledge of English as part of their entry requirements. These include English Philology, Comparative Literature, and Social & Cultural Anthropology (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 5–8). The use of English is more common in graduate programs, where there is discussion of soon requiring that all programs of study have at least one content module in the core subject area be taught in English (Mackiewicz, 2005). Of the 28 new Master programs, 10 specifically require proficiency in English, while 5 others require proficiency in a modern foreign language with English as one of several options (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 10–11). Three of the Master programs are conducted entirely in English: Polymer Sci-

ence, Veterinary Public Health, and the online program in East European Studies (Master Programs in English [MPE], 2005).

While the publication of such information is obviously an effort to make the use of English in degree programs more transparent, a lack of consistency with respect to proficiency requirements is apparent. For the Bachelor programs, only two have specific regulations requiring students to take an English exam offered by the university's Language Centre: the BA in Comparative Literature and the BA in English Philology (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 5–6). The majority of other programs stipulate that students have level B1 or B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (see Council of Europe, 2005). University regulations (perhaps falsely) equate level B1 with 5 years and B2 with 7 years of English study at primary/secondary school (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 4). For the Master programs, only the MA in North American Studies requires students to pass an English test offered by the university's Language Centre. Other programs require a minimum score of 550 on the TOEFL, such as the MSc in Polymer Science (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 11). Several MA programs, for instance in Intercultural Education and International Relations, require "Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English or the equivalent," but do not state what that equivalent is (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 11). Other requirements are rather vague; for example, the MSc in Bioinformatics requires "good knowledge of English" and the MA in *Osteuropastudien* (East European Studies) stipulates that applicants have "at least four successful years of English at school" (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 10–11). Apart from checking that applicants have had English at school, no efforts seem to have been made to ensure that these students can in fact understand English academic texts or follow lectures given in the language.

### *Courses Implicitly Requiring English*

Thus far only the degree programs at the FUB for which English proficiency is a stated requirement have been addressed. According to university degree program information, 47.4% of the *Magister* programs do not explicitly require English proficiency, including programs in Physics, Computer Science, Economics and Political Science (DPI, 2004). The new Bachelor programs in these fields also do not require English proficiency for admittance<sup>2</sup> (*Studium*

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<sup>2</sup> A BA in Economics is not yet offered.

*an der FUB*, 2005: 5–8). This is especially curious, since the sciences are renowned for having the most observable presence of English (Ammon, 1998, 2001; Viereck, 1996). For instance, the fields of Economics and Political Science have been notably affected by Anglo-American academia and thus also demand at least the passive knowledge of English, as much of the most current reading material is only available in that language (Skudlik, 1990).

Interviews conducted with FUB students about the presence of English in such study programs support the findings of Ammon (1998, 2001), Viereck (1996) and Skudlik (1990). One FUB student of Biology noted in 2002, “Without knowledge of English it is very difficult to survive in the scientific world.” Yet, English is not required for entry into the university’s new BSc in Biology. Another FUB student notes that in Economics, another study program that does not require English proficiency, “Many brilliant books ... are written in English and without reading them I cannot finish my studies successfully.” Supporting this statement is an observation of another Economics student, who noted that one German professor who has spent time abroad has chosen to teach only in English and even encourages students to write their papers in the language. In courses that require such an obvious need for English, it is unclear why the university does not explicitly state that future students need proficiency in the language. Perhaps the need is considered so obvious that it is not seen as necessary to outline it in a stated policy.

Finally, it is unclear from FUB guidelines how much English will be used in the new Bachelor and Master courses and how students are expected to improve their proficiency if they find, upon entry, that their language skills are lacking. For example, the entry requirements for the BA and MA in Prehistoric Archeology require that students have skills in English good enough to understand “academically relevant texts and lectures” (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 11). But students entering such programs from secondary education will in fact have had little experience with academic texts in this field. Their only means of acquiring experience with such texts will be through their studies. And if they should encounter difficulties in reading English academic texts for the first time, they cannot expect support in improving their proficiency. Another question left unanswered by university regulations is whether students will need skills in English for degree programs like the MA in Arts and Media

Administration or the MSc in Scientific Computing. While the names for these programs are listed in English only, and not in German, no skills in the language seem to be required (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 10).

This analysis of the situation at the FUB illustrates how the university in fact is making efforts to recognize the growing role of English in its degree programs and, as a result, is increasingly outlining the language skills needed for admission. Nevertheless, discrepancies between stated policies and practices still exist and should be addressed, as should language proficiency requirements be made uniformly explicit.

### *The Influence of Student and Faculty Exchanges on Language Practices*

Further contributing to the spread of English at the FUB is the increasing popularity of exchange programs, such as Erasmus. FUB students regularly apply for university exchanges and internships that require proof of English skills. The destinations of these students include not only English-speaking countries, but also places where English use is more widespread than in Germany. Students from Berlin, for example, go on exchanges involving working on a medical research project in Malta, reading Scottish Law in Edinburgh, or studying chemistry in Stockholm. Reciprocally, at the FUB there is a constant stream of foreign students who come to Berlin to take part in an English Studies program. As one Erasmus exchange student from Spain noted in a 2002 interview, the FUB was not his first choice for studying English, but it offered an attractive alternative when he was not able to get into a program in one of Europe's English-speaking countries. In 2005, six Erasmus students from France taking part in an English course at the FUB noted that their experience in Berlin had afforded them their first opportunity to really communicate in the language. In an interesting side note, they commented further that although they had spent nearly the same amount of time studying English as their German counterparts, German students are clearly more fluent and comfortable in the language.

Finally, in many departments at the FUB a number of guest lecturers from around the world hold their lectures and require students to write papers in English. For example, in 2002 a course offered by the Institute for Social Anthropology, which at the time did not require students to have proficiency in English, was

“Anthropological Issues in West Africa” and taught by a visiting professor from Nigeria, who gave lectures and expected students to write papers in English. This use of English among foreign students and guest lecturers at the FUB is becoming increasingly common across the spectrum of European higher education as a result of internationalization.

#### ISSUES RESULTING FROM THE INCREASING USE OF ENGLISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

While English is being used at German universities as a means to internationalize and improve the educational system, the introduction of the language as a medium of instruction also creates new problems. This section examines some of the difficulties arising as a result of the use of English as a medium of instruction in degree programs, and highlights the importance of more language instruction in higher education as a means of mitigating such problems. However, the financial constraints of German universities present obstacles for improving language training and academic proficiency in English.

##### *Educational Issues*

The greatest concern over instituting university programs that use English as a medium of instruction is that students and even faculty may lack adequate proficiency in the language. There is apprehension that “students not able to properly understand, speak and write English might be taught by teachers incapable of expressing themselves in English” (Maiworm & Wächter, 2002: 95). Another worry is over the means for ascertaining sufficient competence in English for completing academic studies. “[T]he fact that two thirds of all institutions require evidence of their prospective students’ level of proficiency in English, mostly by means of the TOEFL Test..., does not rule out every problem with the English language” (ibid). The reality is many students find it difficult to communicate in English at the high level of proficiency required in academic settings, especially in theoretical and discipline-specific discussions.

Research has illustrated the difficulties that specifically German academics have in using English. In programs where English is used as a medium of instruction, it has largely been assumed that the teaching staff has sufficient English-language skills based upon



the fact that many of the instructors have spent time abroad in English-speaking countries (Maiworm & Wächter, 2002: 99). Maiworm & Wächter (2002: 100) found that around 80% of instructors in Germany were indeed perceived as having sufficient skills in English. Yet, in spite of this positive assessment, Ammon (2003: 28) notes that German-speaking scholars are underrepresented in international conferences and in international research and publication projects because of a lacking proficiency in English. With specific reference to the publishing of scholarship, Clyne (1987) has illustrated fundamental differences in discourse styles and writing that may put German academics at a disadvantage in dealing with Anglo-American publishers and editors. As Clyne (1987: 81) explains, German-educated scholars are less likely than their English-educated counterparts to lead the reader through the text in an introductory section, to develop the first section from the title, and to begin their paragraphs with a topic sentence. Further developing this idea, Mauranen (1993: 1) points out that when writing in English subtle differences in academic conventions put nonnative academics “at a rhetorical disadvantage in the eyes of Anglo-American readers, and others who have acquired Anglo-American rhetorical preferences in academic writing.” These observations about problems that German scholars have with English academic writing suggest that even faculty need training in developing academic literacy in the language. Given this fact, then certainly every effort should be made to ensure that students are provided with the means to smoothly navigate the transition to an academic curriculum in English in order to guarantee that they can both comprehend and contribute to academic discourse in this language.

However, at least at the FUB, while the presence of English has grown, there has not been a comparable increase in the teaching of language skills for academic proficiency, neither for staff nor for students. The demand that students of all disciplines be proficient in English has not yet been met with opportunities to study the language in order to gain academic proficiency. Although the federal government outlined measures to introduce ESP courses, as was mentioned above, very few of these *Fachenglisch* (ESP) classes have in fact been offered. This lack of courses was recently addressed in a local Berlin newspaper in an article entitled “Do you speak English? *Nicht an der FU*” (Not at the FUB) (2005). The piece highlighted the fact that those students looking to improve

their knowledge of “*the most important world and academic language*” have to do so in private courses at their own expense (Do you speak English 2005).

Many students would like to improve their English, but, in the absence of university courses, do not know where or how to do this. Every semester at the FUB, dozens of students attempt to sign up for English courses at the Language Centre but are turned away, since there are only enough resources to teach students officially enrolled in the English Philology or North American Studies programs. Until recently, few other language courses for students of other disciplines have existed, and very few departments have provided English courses for their students. As a result, students of Political Science, Chemistry, and Law, for instance, who would like to improve their English, who struggle with their readings, or who need help proofreading a paper, have nowhere to go within the university to receive language assistance. Generally, they are left to get by with the English they learned in school. As an alternative, they can turn to private language institutes or go abroad to study in an English-speaking environment. In short, acquiring proficiency in academic English requires students to spend a significant amount of extra time and money outside their normal courses of study.

This situation looks only slightly more promising with respect to the new Bachelor and Master programs at the FUB. In an effort to make the Bachelor programs more career-oriented, so that graduates can better transition into the professional workplace, all degree programs now entail a strand intended as a general preparation for improving employability. The listed options for this requirement include courses in foreign languages, such as Arabic, French, Italian, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. Surprisingly, English is not one of the languages offered. This cannot possibly be because English is not seen as an important skill in the labor market. Instead, this omission suggests a tacit understanding that students are already proficient in English, an assumption administrators may be making based on the fact that students have generally had seven to nine years of English in primary and secondary schooling. However, this decision does not account for the fact that language learning in school does not necessarily prepare students for understanding and writing academic texts in English. There are now efforts at the FUB to support students who lack the necessary skills in English for their studies. These include plans to further

develop the university's self-access language centre and establish a writing centre (Mackiewicz 2005). English courses for non-degree students may eventually be offered as well.

Looking beyond the issue of English proficiency, if German universities are to succeed in their efforts to internationalize, they should not only offer English courses to German students, but also afford the growing number of foreign students the opportunity to take courses to improve their German so they can become academically competent in that language as well. As pointed out by Wahl (2005), the expansion of, for example, the internationally-oriented degree programs offers a chance also to promote the study of German as a foreign language. In a survey of foreign students, 70–90% list language learning as a reason for deciding to study in Germany (BMBF, 2002: 31). These students see the learning of German as an extra benefit of their studies. However, Maiworm & Wächter (2002: 95) found that foreign students in Germany have problems coping with the domestic language far more often than in other European countries. While many universities offer a wider range of German language instruction for foreign students, not all institutions provide the supplementary language courses suggested by the BMBF and DAAD in 2000. In the case of the FUB, the only German language courses offered are for Erasmus students and students who are trying to gain admission into the university system. While these courses foster the development of general language skills, they do not teach students how to write academic papers or give academic presentations in German. Such courses are not incorporated into students' study programs and credit points are often not given for their successful completion, a fact that discourages many students from attending. An exception to this rule can be found in the FUB's MSc in Chemistry, which can be completed either in English or German. Possible electives in the program include Advanced English language and German language classes (*Studienhandbuch der FUB*, 2005: 576). Such programs, where advanced language courses in English and German are made part of the degree programs, present a model of how the university can successfully promote language expertise.

### *Financial Issues*

Such educational initiatives to support universities in their efforts to internationalize, i.e. incorporating more language courses and providing additional student supervision, incur extra costs, and in

Germany there has been much debate about how these costs should be covered. Thus a discussion of university reforms is not complete without mentioning the debate over implementing tuition fees in Germany. Up until 2005, all German public universities, which are the overwhelming majority of institutions, did not charge tuition fees for courses. However, in January 2005, Germany's Constitutional Court overturned a federal law that prohibited universities from charging students fees for courses, and as a result individual federal states can now decide whether or not their institutions of higher education may charge for tuition (Burchard, Funk, & Sirleschtov, 2005: 1). At present, Berlin's universities have resisted instituting fees for Bachelor students; however, many Master programs have already begun charging for tuition. At the FUB, the MA in Public Health, for example, costs students €1,024 for the 2-year program, and the MA in East European Studies costs €5,450 (*Studium an der FUB*, 2005: 11).

Some see the inauguration of fees as a vital means to solve the financial crisis of Germany's universities and as a "*once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to completely modernize the German system of higher education*" (Harmsen & Loke, 2005: 1). On the other hand, others feel that the introduction of fees could stunt efforts to internationalize the higher education system, since it has been the affordability of studying in Germany that has drawn most international students to the country. Surveys show that for as many as one third of the foreign students, Germany was a last resort because they often did not have either the money or the required academic preparation to study in the English-speaking country of their choice (Lack of tuition fees, 2002). The system of higher education now finds itself in a Catch-22 situation: Fees are necessary for university reforms, but students cannot be expected to pay for a product that is not up to standard. Furthermore, the targeted recruitment of foreign students increases the overall enrollment at universities, which in turn, for the moment at least, increases the overall financial burden for institutions since tuition fees have yet to be implemented across the board. And yet, without foreign students, the educational system will not be able to achieve its desired goal of internationalizing the curriculum.

Complicating the matter is the fact that some are criticizing the government for using federal money to finance university reforms that in fact are inadvertently weakening the status of the national language vis-à-vis English (e.g. Gawlitta & Vilmar, 2002).

Such concerns, however, could be mitigated by the introduction of explicit language policies and language courses at universities. As shown above, international students in Germany, if properly integrated, have the potential to promote German learning. Moreover, English-language courses could not only help prevent German academics from being disadvantaged when using English in the international context (see also Erling & Hilgendorf, 2006), but also assist foreign students in learning appropriate language skills for academic and professional uses. However, the problem of university fees and where the money should come from for the much-needed language courses still remains unresolved and promises to provoke much debate in the coming years.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in an effort to internationalize the curriculum and become more competitive in the global market for students, German institutions have chosen the English language as an important strategy for achieving their goals. In fact, English appears to function as a cure-all for the ills in the German education system. At the same time, the impact of the increasing use of English in German higher education is rarely considered. Because the average student receives seven to nine years of English language education in primary and secondary school, academic literacy in the language is largely assumed by university programs. Difficulties that students may have in comprehending and contributing at the high proficiency level of academic discourse remain unaddressed. In courses for which English proficiency is required, there is no consensus on how this competence is measured, assessed or supported. Furthermore, in many cases English is covertly required despite the fact that there are no policies stating that it is a prerequisite for coursework and degree programs. Therefore, language policy and education at the university level need further consideration. Also, consistent and effective policy on the teaching of English, as well as other languages, should be made transparent. If the German system of higher education is to be truly reformed and internationalized, students should be supported in their efforts to learn languages—both English and German—at an academic level. In order for Germany to achieve its so-called ‘brain gain’, language education must be given more serious attention. It appears that institutions such as the FUB, which are starting to give more

attention to language courses and supervision, are heading in this direction. While financial considerations still remain a major obstacle to the successful reform and internationalization of German institutions of higher education, improved quality of European universities and the successful implementation of international programs require clear and honest recommendations in terms of language planning and pedagogy.

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