

Sabbatical Report

Juergen Bulach

This is a brief report of the research activities I conducted while a visiting scholar at the University of Leipzig in Germany from March 25, 2012 to March 26, 2013. The purpose of my research was to examine how the English and German languages are used by people in both academic and non-academic environments in Germany and to identify some of the unique points dual-language usage. Accordingly, I divided my research focus into the following sub-categories: how English and German are used at German universities, how both languages are used by German academics, how native-English speaking instructors use English and German at primary and secondary schools in Germany, and how both languages are utilized by foreign expats and their family members who live in Germany. I intend to publish my research in future papers.

A growing number of German universities offer full-degree programs with complete instruction in the English language for both their native-German and foreign students. The reason behind the move to English-language instruction by some universities is to enable them to compete with academic institutions in other countries for students and researchers. While in Germany, I visited several of these universities and evaluated how they provided English-based education to their students. German universities are becoming increasingly popular among foreign students who wish to study abroad, mainly because of the free or very low tuition rates (500 Euros per semester). In a survey conducted by the British Council in 2011, Germany was “named as the most supportive country for overseas students.” German universities can increase their attractiveness by offering English-based curricula, but I found that the quality of the instruction varies from institution to institution and that the role of German differs based on the institution. For example, some universities require that students enroll in German-language courses while others do not, but most students do learn German to different degrees of success.

English is the lingua franca of the academic world and nowhere is this more evident than in Germany. English has replaced German as the dominant language at

many major academic conferences held in Germany and has become the preferred language of many German academic journals. I interviewed German academics who expressed their concern with this linguistic dominance and found that many of them are not entirely comfortable with their level of English-language skills. Some think that the use of an English-only policy limits their research. The majority of interviewees said they would like to improve their use of academic English but also revealed their opinions that German should be maintained as a language of research.

I also conducted interviews and held discussions throughout the year with several native-English language instructors from Canada, New Zealand and Australia on how English was instructed at the local schools to which they were assigned. The foreign instructors were on one-year contracts to teach English at schools which represented a variety of types: primary, secondary and vocational. The data from these interviews revealed that there is a wide disparity in the way English is taught in the German school system and that the approach is not always as communicative as advertised. All instructors received German language instruction at the beginning of their stays, and most became very proficient. Indeed, some relied on their German language skills in teaching and understanding their students.

I conducted interviews with foreign expatriates who had been posted to their subsidiaries in Germany and asked them about the use of English and German at their workplaces in Germany and the specific challenges they encountered in adapting to their new language environment. The answers I obtained from my questions revealed that the English and German language training provided by their companies did not necessarily correspond to the realities of what their employees usually encountered in their postings in Germany. In addition, I found that family members also faced a dual-language environment in the way they were expected to use English in specific everyday situations, such as communicating with school officials and teachers at their children's international schools, while having to use German at supermarkets, clinics, real estate agencies, and with their neighbors. They characterized their experiences as both rewarding and stressful.