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# Internationalization in German Academic Libraries: Moving beyond North American Perspectives

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**Karen Bordonaro and Sabine Rauchmann**

**abstract:** This paper explores how internationalization is understood and experienced in German academic libraries. Its main purpose is to move the discussion of internationalization in academic libraries beyond the boundaries of English-speaking North America by investigating a European perspective. Its secondary purpose is to investigate the role of English in German academic libraries. An online survey and a series of in-person interviews conducted in Germany in April 2015 provided the data for this study. What emerged are a series of stated differences and similarities between North America and Germany informed by the two overarching themes of implicit internationalization and plurilingualism, the ability to switch from one language to another as required.

## Introduction

Internationalization is a contemporary theme of great interest in higher education in North America. In the United States and Canada, it is a topic of intense discussion in both the literature of higher education<sup>1</sup> and increasingly in the literature of librarianship.<sup>2</sup> The primary purpose of this research study is to shed some light on how German academic libraries perceive and practice internationalization, as a means to gauge similarities and differences between North American and European perspectives. The secondary purpose of this study is to explore what role, if any, the English language plays in internationalization in this German setting. For language reasons, North America in this study refers to the United States and Canada, not Mexico, as a point of comparison. This exploratory study originates from a North American perspective, but it cannot be construed as the only perspective on international students,

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English language use, and academic libraries. Researchers in both Australia and the United Kingdom, for example, have also contributed valuable perspectives.<sup>3</sup> Instead, this study is an initial attempt to move the discussion of internationalization and English language use from North America to Germany in an effort to add another piece to the puzzle of internationalization in academic libraries.

### Literature Review

The literature of higher education in North America defines *internationalization* in multiple ways. One definition emphasizes “the process of integrating an international perspective into a college or university system” through curriculum development.<sup>4</sup> A second encourages “the development of interculturally competent students.”<sup>5</sup> A third highlights the importance of universities in educating “globally competent citizens, no matter what their studies or careers; people who can exercise responsible leadership to promote positive change and build a sustainable

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world.”<sup>6</sup> A fourth definition sees “the academic faculty through their roles as teachers and researchers play[ing] a central role in the process or processes of internationalizing U.S. higher education.”<sup>7</sup> A fifth points to “prestige in the form of reputational impact” as a significant form of internationalization.<sup>8</sup> And a sixth views internationalization as inextricably tied to financial rationales: “While internationalization is often touted as one of the major benefits for countries hosting overseas students, the true motivations may be largely economic.”<sup>9</sup>

All of these different definitions and perceptions of what internationalization means to higher education in North America can be connected to academic libraries. Academic libraries can and do use internationalization as a way to support and extend teaching and research in all the various ways just described. In the realm of teaching, for example, academic libraries often provide orientation and library workshops to international students.<sup>10</sup> Academic libraries also support the internationalization of the curriculum by collecting and making available material that offers diverse perspectives to both faculty and students.<sup>11</sup> In addition, academic libraries support international research by faculty through acquiring, making available, or providing access to needed material to meet their research needs.<sup>12</sup> Finally, academic libraries additionally aid internationalization by educating international students on the conventions of scholarship as practiced in higher education in North America.<sup>13</sup>

### Methodology

#### Online Survey

A short ten-question online survey in English (Appendix A) was distributed in April 2015 to a German e-mail list, InetBib: Hochschulbibliotheken und Internationale Studierende (Internet in libraries: University libraries and international students). This e-mail list is hosted at the University of Dortmund and reaches over 8,000 participants who



are interested in the use of the Internet in German academic libraries; its URL is <http://www.inetbib.de/was-ist-inetbib/>. The respondents were asked to complete the survey within a two-week time frame. Questions included both multiple choice and open-ended questions. The information collected provided both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis in this study. Responses from seventy-eight librarians throughout Germany were collected. The purpose of the survey was to explore what German academic librarians understand by *internationalization* and to further discover in what ways they work with international students on their campuses. Results will be discussed later.

### Personal Interviews

While the online survey was running, a short series of personal interviews (Appendix B) also took place at several academic libraries in northern Germany, principally in the cities of Berlin and Hamburg, the two largest in Germany. The authors found participants for the interviews through personal e-mail contacts among themselves, an American librarian working in Canada, and a German academic librarian. Another American librarian working in Canada who had extensive personal connections in Germany suggested further potential interviewees. The interviews were conducted mainly in English, although informal discussions preceding and following them occurred mostly in German. These interviews were not meant to provide a complete representation of how all German academic librarians thought about and engaged in internationalization. Instead, their purpose was to provide a glimpse of what some librarians thought. This glimpse is intended to open a window into a potentially wider discussion in the future.

The academic librarians who participated in the personal interviews worked at six different libraries. Five total interviews were conducted, with two librarians from two different institutions participating together in one interview. The sessions usually ran one to two hours, and one lasted three hours. Each interview provided a wealth of qualitative data from which to draw upon in searching for common themes and patterns.

The institutions at which the interviewees worked included a technical university with strong programs in science and engineering, an economics and business departmental library, a liberal arts university known for new and emerging programs in areas such as sustainability, a social sciences and Eastern European studies departmental library, a foreign languages departmental library, and the main central library of a city university system that supports a broad array of subject areas.

The librarians interviewed were generally mid-career librarians working as subject specialists in reference assistance, library instruction, and collection development. Two were men; four were women. All of the participants also had administrative duties in overseeing and running daily library operations, and three were directors of their libraries. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a full explanation of the differences between North American and German academic library positions and working conditions, which could potentially account for different views of internationalization, other than to mention that differences do exist. These differences seem to come mainly from different entry points into the profession of librarianship and varying expectations of professional work (for example, German academic librarians do not have faculty status).

The number of students served by the German academic libraries in this study ranged from approximately 3,000 students to over 30,000 students in all major areas of



study. The universities ranged from major historical centers (one founded in 1810) to newer establishments built in the early 1990s. The diversity of library sizes and subject scopes lent itself to a wider discussion of internationalization, but again, these interviews cannot be considered representative of librarians working in all academic libraries across Germany. They can only offer a snapshot of views as a way to open further conversations concerning internationalization.

The personal interviews consisted of five open-ended questions. There were no “right” or “wrong” answers to any of the questions. Instead, their semi-structured format was meant to elicit further details, examples, experiences, thoughts, and opinions from the participants. These interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the general qualitative method of identifying and comparing patterns of responses to discover common themes. Results will be discussed later.

### Online Survey Results

The majority of the respondents who took the online survey worked at a university library (49.3 percent) as opposed to a college library (40.3 percent) or other type of academic library (11.9 percent), which included special interest libraries, other institutional libraries, and research institutes.

Respondents worked across a spectrum of variably sized libraries in terms of student population. These included institutions that had fewer than 5,000 students (33.3 percent), those with between 5,000 and 10,000 students (25.6 percent), those that had between 10,000 and 25,000 students (21.8 percent), and those with over 25,000 students (17.9 percent). Respondents who worked with international students in their libraries reported that those students came from Asia (73.7 percent), Eastern Europe (71.1 percent), Western Europe (69.7 percent), America (63.2 percent), and Africa (48.7 percent).

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a designated librarian to work specifically with international students, with a further 2.6 percent reporting that they did not know. Only 6.4 percent said that yes, they did have such a designated librarian, followed by a description of who it was. The descriptions included a note about all subject specialists working with international students, the identification of a library director as the point

person, and the comment that the international student office was the designated place on campus to work with international students.

A small number of respondents reported that they did not work directly with any international students at any level (14.5 percent). About equal percentages of respondents reported that they worked with bachelor’s degree students (18.4 percent) and with master’s degree students (19.7 percent), while a smaller percentage worked with doctoral students (11.8 percent). A further 35.5 percent of the respondents added that they worked with all of these levels. One comment noted, “International students at every level are ‘normal’ library users.”



The types of activities the respondents engaged in at their libraries with international students included library tours (67.2 percent), library workshops or classes (41 percent), individual meetings or consultations with international students (34.4 percent), meetings with administrators of international services (8 percent), and other individual examples (9.8 percent), such as providing informational material in English, engaging in e-mail communications, advising on open-access publishing of doctoral theses, and teaching a course on learning German in a library context.

Most respondents noted that they did personally use English to communicate with international students in their libraries, either often (42.9 percent), sometimes (29.9 percent), or rarely (16.9 percent). A few answered that they did not use English at all (1.3 percent). Further comments about which languages were used included: "A whole range of languages is being used"; "Sie sprechen alle Deutsch" ("They all speak German"); "I rarely use English. Not all students speak English and most of them speak a little German"; "Most of our students speak a Romance language and/or German, so I rarely need to use English to communicate with them"; and "Only sometimes—most of our international students speak French way better than English, and none of us speak French."

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Library services offered to international students in languages other than German included web pages (76.7 percent); the library catalog or online public access catalog (OPAC, 61.6 percent); desk services, such as reference or circulation desks (50.7 percent); library classes or workshops (43.8 percent); e-mail or instant chat messages (34.2 percent); video tours (24.7 percent); and other services such as "library leaflet," "information sheet," "explanatory flyers," and "partial English classification subject headings" (11.8 percent).

A large majority of respondents identified the major role that the library should play in internationalization as collecting and making available research information (85.7 percent), followed by supporting the internationalization of the curriculum (57.1 percent), fostering intercultural awareness (41.4 percent), and promoting global citizenship (32.9 percent). Additional comments included "to offer services and library courses" and "to handle international students." One respondent said, "Our university, being privately run, has a very strong focus on internationalization. The Library has no role that goes beyond or is more specific than that of other departments as to that topic."

Many respondents indicated that they could not offer a personal definition of *internationalization* (47.9 percent), although a slight majority said that they could (52.1 percent). The respondents who could were given a choice to answer this question in either English or German, and replies were in both languages.

From the majority of respondents who answered in English, the personal definitions that were offered can be grouped into four general categories. The first category comprises the idea of people coming together to learn from one another. Responses included "students from all over the world coming together and working together," "the world as a village," and "all is one." One respondent answered, "Internationalization describes a situation in which people of all nations are living and working in all parts of the world. I think especially for students, it's a chance to learn [about] other parts of the world and draw the parts nearer together."




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The second category of responses revolves around internationalization as an idea that supersedes national, political, cultural, or disciplinary borders. Responses included “the process of gaining a global perspective on political and cultural affairs and of embedding oneself into a global community of people”; “the concept that rationality and truth are independent of cultural or religious beliefs”; and “learning without borders.” One response said, “Internationality starts where nationality doesn’t matter anymore: the field of study, the science or subject should be in the center of things.”

Others remarked, “Social, cultural, physical and engineering sciences are international by demand, and so internationalization is characteristic also of higher education”; “the process of gaining a global perspective on political and cultural affairs and of embedding oneself into a global community of people”; “the concept that rationality and truth are independent of cultural or religious beliefs”; “learning without borders”; and “Internationalization means transcending boundaries in any way.”

The third category displays a view of internationalization as the development of understanding of others beyond our own personal perspectives or comfort zones through expanded opportunities for interaction. In this category were such responses as “intercultural awareness, based on mutual tolerance rather than on global citizenship”; “having opportunities abroad that may also threaten to displace regional specifications, e.g. language”; and “including international students and faculty in the university and international exchange programs.” A particularly full response said:

One important aspect not mentioned above is the mobility of the students/faculty members. Our students are encouraged to go abroad, which then means that they are exposed to new perspectives and bring those back when they return to complete their degree. Additionally, many of our lecturers are from abroad. This a key component in “the embedding of international perspectives into the curriculum.”

The fourth category offers definitions that illustrate the idea of accommodating different viewpoints: “adapting expectations and procedures to different cultural backgrounds”; “dealing with people and institutions in other countries on a professional level”; and “Be open and try to engage with other cultures and nationalities. Respect others even if you don’t understand them completely. At least try to understand others.”

German responses to this question about offering a personal definition of *internationalization* yielded an equally broad array of answers, although they seem to fall into the same general categories as the English responses. The German answers included reflecting on political, economic, and cultural education; developing mutual respect; experiencing other cultures away from home; cultivating self-awareness; learning how others live; cooperating with other international institutions; expanding university culture; working toward internationalization as a group goal; learning to better understand your own culture; starting the process in childhood; contributing to an atmosphere of openness and support; promoting intercultural exchange; supporting research beyond one’s own borders; and helping international students be comfortable and feel welcome.



## Results from Interviews

Data from the personal interviews yielded an interesting set of thoughts, opinions, ideas, and beliefs about internationalization. The open-ended questions of the personal interviews echoed many of the questions asked on the survey. These questions included “What does internationalization mean to you?” “Do you think the library has a role to play in internationalization?” “In Germany, do you think internationalization also means the use of English?” and “Do you think internationalization is a high priority at this university?” Follow-up examples were provided to the participants to solicit further reactions or to give them some examples of what might be meant by the questions.

The first interview question, on what *internationalization* meant, included affirmative responses to most of the follow-up examples: bringing more international students to their campuses, encouraging more Germans to study abroad, educating students

about intercultural awareness, and supporting international research done by the faculty. In terms of bringing more international students to their campuses, the participants stated, “We notice more international students coming” as well as “They are here already.” Several participants described the Erasmus program (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), which promotes—and in some degree programs even requires—student mobility throughout

Europe.<sup>14</sup> In terms of educating students about intercultural awareness, the participants noted that it was important and that small things seem to be happening (“We have a small summer festival”), but there was “still a lot of need to improve this.” Supporting international research was also seen as “something we have to do” because “Research should be international.” Global citizenship and embedding international perspectives into the curriculum were the two examples that the participants did not uniformly affirm as being part of what internationalization meant to them.

The phrase “global citizenship” seems not well known among German academic librarians. A definition of it was embedded in the survey instrument, as follows:

the idea that a person identifies with a worldwide community beyond their national citizenship and becomes a global citizen “with attributes such as openness to and understanding of other worldviews, empathy for people with different backgrounds and experience to one’s own, the capacity to value diversity, and respect for indigenous peoples and knowledge” (Ricketts and Humphries, 2015).<sup>15</sup>

Several comments on the survey underscored agreement with this definition through remarks such as “I fully agree with the views outlined by Ricketts & Humphries and couldn’t describe it any better” and “I totally agree with Ricketts & Humphries, 2015.” In person, however, the participants indicated that “global citizenship” was not a phrase with which they were familiar: “I have not heard this phrase before” and “This is new to me.” Other participants offered further comments on global citizenship that seemed

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to indicate the phrase was not in common use in German academic libraries, such as “It might not be as big here as in the U.S.” and “Global citizenship is probably more an issue of the European Union here.” One participant thought that “global citizenship” probably was most relevant to political science students. Two participants said that it was not nearly as important as intercultural awareness. A further comment showed how this phrase might be understood by Germans in general: “In some respects, Germans are already global citizens used to crossing borders for holidays because even though it does not result in much contact with natives of those countries, it does help us learn what it means to be a foreigner.”

As to embedding international perspectives into the curriculum, the participants offered discernibly stronger negative reactions to this suggestion as an example of what internationalization might mean to them than the survey respondents did. The majority of participants felt that this particular goal was beyond the realm of library responsibility by offering such comments as “The library has nothing to do with the curriculum,” “I cannot comment on this,” and “This is not expected from us.”

The second interview question, about the role of the library in internationalization, offered examples that the participants affirmed: through collections, through instruction, and through assistance. Study space was not understood well as an example of a role for the library to play in internationalization, probably because it was not sufficiently explained as a physical place where diverse students could work together and learn from one another on class projects. One participant said, “I do not know what you mean by

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this.” Collections, on the other hand, received strong emphasis from all of the participants as a primary role for the library to play in internationalization: “This is a traditional library strength,” “I collect many resources in my subject areas in English and other languages,” and “This is the largest part the library plays.” Instruction and assistance were also seen as ways in which the library could play a role in

internationalization on campus, although not to the same degree as building strong collections. Instruction was seen as a way of working with international students (“Being able to communicate is most important”), and personal assistance was regarded as another form of communication (“We need to work with all students this way”).

The third interview question, about using English as a way to focus on internationalization, yielded further interesting responses. The majority of participants provided information about the many different courses and programs at their institutions that teach in English: “International study courses are all in English” and “Many courses are in English here.” It might be important to note that by *course*, the interview participants meant program of study or degree program, for example, an MBA in technology management.

The proliferation of English is also apparent in many German academic libraries through their “signs, websites, and courses.” Some of the participants occasionally taught library instruction classes in English (“I taught a class last week in English” and “I teach library seminars in English”), used English as the medium of communication in indi-



vidual consultations (“Book a librarian was offered in English for this specific class”), or offered assistance on the reference desk in English (“Questions in English are becoming more common at the desk”). One participant noted, “Seminars are encouraged in English,” and another participant even taught a library school class all in English to international librarians. Interestingly also, the majority of participants noted that their libraries encourage desk staff at both the reference desk and the circulation desk to take English classes: “It is now part of the new job descriptions,” “Library staff need to know English,” and “If you want to be international, you need to be able to speak and understand English.” Two participants explained that their libraries hired trainers to come in and teach English to the library staff, and two others sent staff out to campus classes to learn English.

A common phrase used by the participants was that English is now the “lingua franca” of higher education. This was generally understood to mean that libraries must collect research materials in English for their students and faculty, and that if librarians or faculty want to reach an audience outside of Germany, “Writing in English is a requirement.” It is beyond the scope of this current study to offer a definitive reason why this is so, but perhaps the impact of English-language publications in international university-ranking systems could offer one explanation.<sup>16</sup> As to whether or not this perceived need to publish in English was a good thing, the common refrains were that this is just “the way it is; it is not good or bad” and “It doesn’t make sense to complain about it; it is just normal.” One participant even added a personal comment: “Everything sounds more modern in English.”

The participants answered the fourth interview question, about internationalization being a high priority at their university, strongly in the affirmative. They made such comments as “The administration thinks that it is essential,” “It has become very important in the rhetoric of universities,” and “It is a strategic priority for our university.”

Soliciting any final thoughts on internationalization was the fifth interview question, and it yielded two common thoughts voiced by all of the participants. The first was that although internationalization is a high priority for the university, it is not articulated as such specifically for academic libraries. “We don’t have an explicit library strategy” is how one participant put it, with another remarking, “It is scarcely the mission of any library to focus on internationalization.” Another participant noted, “There is no special thing for the library,” and yet another participant remarked, “It is not a specific aim for us.”

The second final thought was that the English language is everywhere, but its presence is not necessarily a manifestation of internationalization. Indeed, one participant even remarked that the signs in their library were “not international because they were only in German and English.” The most commonly used word to describe the preva-

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lence of English in their libraries was *normal*, as in, “It is not a special thing here—it is normal,” “It is a normal part of everyday life,” “It is just normal,” and “It is normal for us.” Another participant stated definitively that the prevalence of English is simply “part of our everyday.”

### Differences and Similarities

Both the online survey and the in-person interviews gave rise to stated differences and similarities between North American and German academic libraries regarding the topic

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of internationalization. One stated difference concerns the library’s place regarding the academic curriculum of the university. The notion surfacing in this study, particularly from the strong opinions offered through the in-person interviews, is that German academic librarians do not necessarily see it as the library’s responsibility to be involved with the curriculum. In North American academic libraries, in contrast, there

is generally a strong emphasis on participating actively in curriculum development.<sup>17</sup>

A second stated difference is the view of international university students. North American educational institutions often see international students as revenue generators.<sup>18</sup> The financial motivation to enroll international students is considerably different in Germany, because German university students do not pay tuition.<sup>19</sup> International students must sometimes pay international fees in Germany, but these costs are often covered by grants and scholarships. In addition, the idea that international students are academically deficient because of their status as nonnative speakers of English likewise does not seem as prevalent in Germany as it is in North America.<sup>20</sup>

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A third stated difference is the emphasis in Germany on “student mobility,” rather than simply on “study abroad” as in North America. Student mobility comes from strong efforts by the European Union to ensure that university students across Europe have many opportunities to move among European universities, to receive similar education at all places, and to have credentials equally recognized across universities. Student mobility includes German students coming from and going to various locations, along with students from all the other European countries

as well. The Bologna Process, a series of agreements between European countries to

ensure comparable standards in higher education, is the backdrop for student mobility in Germany.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the North American emphasis on “study abroad” tends to see the benefits of domestic students studying far from home as a separate category of students than international students arriving at North American universities. Rarely are those two facets considered as two different sides of the same coin, as appears to be the case in Germany.

A fourth stated difference is the “newness” of offices of international student services in German universities. Participants noted that these offices were new services introduced generally in the last two to three years on their campuses. This contrasts with many universities in the United States and Canada, where these offices began to emerge much earlier and are now a commonly accepted presence in North American higher education.<sup>22</sup>

A fifth stated difference is the use of English as a second language in German universities as opposed to its place as a first language in North American universities. Seeing English as a lingua franca in Germany, the participants in this study used English in the same way that international students in Germany seem to use English: They are generally fluent English speakers accustomed to communicating with other nonnative speakers of English. As such, they focus more on communicative fluency than on grammatical perfection.

In addition to stated differences concerning internationalization, stated similarities between German and North American academic libraries also emerged from this study. The first similarity was a strong commitment to service. Just as North American libraries offer a slate of services to all students, including international students, so too do German libraries.<sup>23</sup> These services include circulation desks, reference desks, individual consultations, library instruction, website help, informational brochures, and so on. Innovative programs such as book crossings (take a book, leave a book) are offered just as often in a German academic library as at a university library in the United States or Canada. Technology services are also equally available. These include digital scanning stations for students, self-checkout machines, book-sorting machines, and so on. The types of services, then, are similar in both contexts.

A second stated similarity is the amount of time and effort put into library instruction for all students, including international students. Just as in North America, German academic libraries are trying to make sense of the new Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. A move from an emphasis on skills to concepts seems to carry equal resonance in both contexts. An added level of complexity in German academic libraries is the terminology used to describe information literacy, *Information Kompetenz*, which literally places the emphasis on the competencies or mechanics of skill development. One thoughtful participant even suggested that Germans might better think of the new Framework as a

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“culture” since that would translate more readily into German as *Kultur*, which would invoke a wider frame of understanding.

A third stated similarity is the overriding importance of university leadership

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regarding internationalization. In Germany, just as in North America, if internationalization is a stated goal of the university’s senior administration, then academic libraries see it as part of their mission as well. The German academic library, whether under the purview of a particular academic department or the central university library system, still takes its cues from the higher university administration. This top-down view of university strategic goals is

parallel to that in North American settings.

A fourth stated similarity is professional development for librarians and staff regarding internationalization. The forms of staff development may differ, but their intent is the same: to help employees work effectively with others from different cultures. In Germany, this may take the form of encouraging staff to attend English classes. In North America, it may take the form of intercultural workshops offered by offices of international services. In both cases, however, the goal is to raise awareness levels and ability to function well with university members from different countries.

### Overarching Themes

The results of the online survey, the in-person interviews, and the consideration of stated differences and similarities concerning internationalization all combine to offer a rich trove of data from which to identify themes. Based on these data, the following two themes emerged most strongly from this study: that of the implicitness of internationalization, and that of plurilingualism—that is, competence in multiple languages and the ability to switch from one to another as required—in German academic libraries.

#### Implicit Internationalization

Internationalization is not an explicit goal of German academic libraries, as noted by the

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**German academic libraries engage in internationalization, even if they do not explicitly name it as such.**

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participants themselves. Nevertheless, it is present. Where it differs from North American academic libraries is in its lack of a stated presence. In other words, this study shows that German academic libraries engage in internationalization, even if they do not explicitly name it as such. Rather than implying that German academic libraries simply do not recognize its presence, this study suggests instead

that they might not perceive it in the same way that North American libraries often do.

A North American academic librarian, for example, would most likely see displaying library signs in any language other than English as a form of internationalization.

Yet to a German academic librarian, hanging a sign only in German and English, but not in Chinese or French, is not a form of internationalization. In another example, a North American librarian might view the addition of research books in foreign languages to its collection as a form of internationalization. In contrast, the collections of most German academic libraries are already multilingual and particularly full of titles in English, so this would less likely be viewed as a form of internationalization. In a final example, library tours offered in a language other than English would most likely to be seen as a strong example of internationalization in a North American library. In contrast, offering library tours in English in a German academic library would be more likely seen as a necessary way to communicate with students in a particular program, rather than as a form of internationalization designed to make students feel more interculturally connected to a German university.

Explicitly stating internationalization as a university goal does appear in German contexts, but not generally at the library level. For example, the Freie Universität Berlin (Free University of Berlin) devotes an entire web page in English to a description of how it is involved in internationalization through the building of partnerships and research contact with other universities around the world; the URL is <http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/universitaet/entwicklung/internationalisierung/>. In North America, on the other hand, academic libraries not only explicitly state their involvement in internationalization efforts on campus but also offer distinct programs of their own. One such example can be seen at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, which runs a set of international programs coordinated from within the library; see <http://libraries.uky.edu/IP>.

As to why internationalization appears more implicit than explicit in German academic libraries, it could be for any number of reasons. One participant noted that if explicit actions related to internationalization are mandated instead of encouraged in the workplace, “The union representative would say that if you expect that, you must pay more.” Other reasons could include the library’s designated role in the university (“We have certain restrictions”), the library’s autonomy in the organizational structure, the lack of a formal channel in which to instigate more overt measures, the historical nature of librarians’ work in German academic libraries, or perhaps differing cultural beliefs or expectations. This study cannot answer this question definitively, but it can offer some clues.

In purely linguistic terms, participants provided some intriguing clues as to why or why not academic libraries may exhibit one facet of internationalization, that of welcoming international students. For example, one participant remarked that the English teacher working with library staff suggested that the German staff use “less direct” words in English for library users to come across as more polite.

She apparently suggested that instead of *Kein Essen* (no food), it would be more polite to say, “You must kindly refrain from eating” in the library. Another participant, a native German speaker, admitted that she thought German

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**Another participant, a native German speaker, admitted that she thought German sounded “too harsh” sometimes and that English could be perceived as more welcoming.**

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sounded “too harsh” sometimes and that English could be perceived as more welcoming.



However, many signs in English in North American libraries convey the same bureaucratic sense that expected behavior (“no eating or drinking”) is a higher priority than welcoming students, so the full explanation cannot rest on language considerations alone.

Another possibility could arise from potentially unique German conceptual understandings. For example, the unique historical German concept of *Bildung* in higher education was mentioned by one of the participants in relation to information literacy. This concept has been defined as “moral and intellectual improvement implying character development of the individual achieved through scholarship [with] an inward-looking . . . orientation.”<sup>24</sup> Another potentially unique German concept could also be *Binsenweisheit*, the idea that something is such a “trivially obvious insight” that it might not be worthy of explicit mention.<sup>25</sup> Whether the German concept of *Bildung* applies to information literacy or *Binsenweisheit* can explain internationalization as inward-looking or too trivial to mention in German academic libraries is up for debate, but these terms do hint at an intriguing possibilities potentially worthy of further study.

Perhaps the best way to understand why German academic librarians might perceive and practice internationalization implicitly was summarized by Hans de Wit, a well-known scholar in the field of internationalization and a native of the Netherlands. De Wit said, “Today, more than ever before, it is important to remember that internationalisation is not a goal in itself but a means to enhance the quality of the education, research and service functions of higher education.”<sup>26</sup>

### Plurilingualism

Plurilingualism, the second major theme to emerge from this study, is a concept born in the European Union that is virtually unknown in North America. The Council of Europe defines plurilingualism in its Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a language teaching and learning approach that

emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands . . . He or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact.<sup>27</sup>

Plurilingualism is evident in the appearance and use of English in German academic libraries. For example, the continuous switching between German and English at circulation

and reference desks in German libraries shows evidence of languages interrelating and interacting. Similarly, the ability of survey respondents and interview participants to ask and answer questions in both languages simultaneously presents a second example of plurilingualism. A third example is the use of English words such as *support* instead of the German *Unterstützung* on signs in academic

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**Plurilingualism, the second major theme to emerge from this study, is a concept born in the European Union that is virtually unknown in North America.**

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libraries, a process called *Anglizismen* or *Amerikanismen* in Germany.<sup>28</sup> In a fourth example,

the ability of German academic libraries to make up new English words to describe new user spaces such as “Home Zone” is further evidence of plurilingualism. The ability to communicate interactively and simultaneously in both English and German is highly visible in German academic libraries, and it attests to the role of English as a form of plurilingualism in this setting.

In North America, multilingualism rather than plurilingualism is present in academic library settings. Multilingualism in North America is most generally understood to simply mean “the ability to speak more than one language”<sup>29</sup> with no particular emphasis given to cultural exchanges or simultaneous interplay between languages. It is used in academic libraries to present information to different sets of users, one language at a time. For example, library video tours offered in different languages serve a multilingual purpose. They relay information all in one language (in this case, Chinese) to one set of library users at a time: <http://media.uoregon.edu/channel/2013/10/21/knight-library-video-tour-chinese-language/>. Another example of multilingualism is the service provided by Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, that offers international users opportunities to speak individually with librarians in many different languages, presumably in one language at a time: <http://library.duke.edu/services/international>.

Multilingualism in North American academic libraries does not completely encompass the idea of multiple cultural contexts to the extent that plurilingualism does. Instead, *multiculturalism* is the term often used in North America to refer to these separate cultural concerns. The North American distinction between multilingualism and multiculturalism can perhaps be best seen in the ACRL Diversity Standards, which define cultural competence not predominantly in language terms, but mainly in terms of ethnicity, race, and religion.<sup>30</sup> Multilingualism and multiculturalism, then, are not equivalent to plurilingualism because they are generally seen as two separate concepts in North America.

Reasons that account for the presence of plurilingualism in Germany and its absence in North America may also vary. Once again, this study cannot offer a full explanation but can only offer clues. One clue could be the participants’ numerous descriptions of English as “part of everyday life.” This sentiment suggests how interwoven English is in the daily routines of academic German librarians. The perceived “nonspecial” nature of English underscores its interrelatedness to German in this setting, which could be interpreted as a marker for plurilingualism.

Another clue for the presence of plurilingualism in Germany could be geography. As one participant put it, “We are in the middle.” Germany stands in the center of Europe, surrounded by many other countries that have different languages and national cultures. North America, on the other hand, is strongly monolingual with geographically wide national borders. This is not to say that languages or cultures other than predominant mainstream English are not spoken or experienced in North America, especially in Canada, where French is an obvious additional cultural influence and one of the country’s two official languages. Rather, it means that English is dominant in

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**The continuous switching between German and English at circulation and reference desks in German libraries shows evidence of languages interrelating and interacting.**

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terms of being the mode of communication most often used throughout most of North America, a physically large land mass. Fewer academic librarians in North American settings, therefore, have the same opportunities to hear or speak another language or experience many different national cultures on a day-to-day basis that their German academic librarian counterparts have.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The two major limitations to this study are the small research project size and the important consideration that Germany does not equal the totality of Europe. The small survey, its nonrandom nature, and the small number of interviewees should underscore the exploratory nature of this study. It was conducted to offer a glimpse at what German academic librarians think about internationalization, and as such, cannot be construed to be representative. Instead, it offers a small snapshot of thoughts and perceptions regarding the topic that need to be researched in greater depth. In opening a door to future research, however, it has served its purpose.

The use of Germany as representative of Europe must be viewed as debatable. Germany is obviously one country of many in Europe. Its central position, however, may offer some advantages to using it as a basis to begin a study of European perspectives. Its location, history, and current position of economic strength in the European Union all add credence to the idea that it is an important center of higher education in contemporary Europe.

As an exploratory investigation, this research study raised more questions than it can answer. The major question that needs to be examined in more depth would be: What accounts for the implicit nature of internationalization in German academic libraries? This could potentially be explored from historical, cultural, and perhaps even psychological or other sociolinguistic perspectives. Likewise, the seemingly more explicit nature of internationalization in North American libraries could also be potentially studied through a deeper investigation of North American cultural perspectives. Research conducted from a non-North American perspective exploring assumptions and practices on that side of the equation could prove fascinating. In terms of language use seen in this current study, further research exploring how plurilingualism arose and how it appears in other European contexts could also add to our understanding of its role in German academic libraries. Finally, larger questions about the emergence and predominance of world English in higher education could also shed light on its use in German academic libraries as well as in many other contexts.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

The biggest implications to come from this study are that academic librarians in the United States and Canada need to be aware that internationalization manifests itself differently in different settings, and that it is important to study internationalization beyond the boundaries of North America. In particular, North American librarians should realize that the explicit calls for internationalization so common here might not have exact parallels in other locations. In Europe, specifically, different linguistic and



geographical realities should inform our understanding of how internationalization is perceived and practiced.

A further implication from this study is that German and North American academic librarians have much to learn from one another. German academic librarians could learn how libraries in the United States and Canada explicitly view and articulate internationalization. North American academic librarians could learn how internationalization is practiced implicitly in Germany. Further, North American academic librarians could learn about plurilingualism to potentially better understand and more actively participate in interactions with international library users. It would also serve North American librarians well to remember that more people in the world speak English as a second language than as their mother tongue.<sup>31</sup>

Internationalization remains a topic of much interest in higher education. The exploration of it continues to fascinate many academic librarians. This research study has attempted, in one small way, to investigate the topic by considering how North American and German academic librarians may understand and engage in it in different and similar ways. Whether perceived or practiced explicitly or implicitly, or whether viewed through a lens of plurilingualism or multilingualism, internationalization lends itself to many interpretations. Perhaps the parting words of one participant in this study best sum up the importance of studying how internationalization is understood in different contexts: "If you globalize everything the same way, it all becomes the same thing and is boring. Differences are okay. Being able to see differences and then work together is best. There is still so much to learn."

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**German and North American academic librarians have much to learn from one another.**

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## Appendix A

### Online Survey

1. What type of an academic library do you work at?
  - a. Universitätsbibliothek (university library)
  - b. Fachhochschul-/Hochschulbibliothek (polytechnic/ college library)
  - c. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your approximate total student population?
  - a. Under 5,000 students
  - b. Between 5,000 – 10,000 students
  - c. Between 10,000 – 25,000 students
  - d. Over 25,000 students
  - e. I don't know
3. If you have contact with international students at your university, where do they come from? Please choose all that apply.
  - a. Osteuropa (Eastern Europe)
  - b. Westeuropa (Western Europe)
  - c. Amerika
  - d. Afrika
  - e. Asien
  - f. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Is there a designated librarian at your library whose specific job involves working with international students? If so, what is this person's job title?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I don't know
  - d. Job title/ Comments:
5. Do you work with international students, and if so, with which students?
  - a. Yes, with bachelor's degree students
  - b. Yes, with master's degree students
  - c. Yes, with doctoral degree students
  - d. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. I don't work with international students.
6. Do you engage in specific activities for international students, and if so, what kinds of activities? Please check all that apply and describe any other activities.
  - a. Library tours
  - b. Library workshops or classes
  - c. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you personally use English to communicate with international students in your library? If so, how often, and if not, why not? Please describe reasons below.
  - a. Yes, often
  - b. Yes, but only sometimes
  - c. Yes, but rarely
  - d. No, for the reasons listed below

Comments:

8. Does your library offer any services in languages other than German? Please check below all that apply and use the comment box to describe any other services you offer that are not listed.
  - a. Library catalog or online public access catalog (OPAC)
  - b. Web pages
  - c. Video tours
  - d. Desk services (reference desk, circulation desk)
  - e. E-mail or instant chat messaging services
  - f. Library classes or workshops
  - g. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
9. What do you think the university library's role in internationalization should be? Please check all that apply.
  - a. To collect and make available international research information
  - b. To foster intercultural awareness
  - c. To promote global citizenship, the idea that a person identifies with a worldwide community beyond their national citizenship and becomes a global citizen "with attributes such as openness to and understanding of other worldviews, empathy for people with different backgrounds and experience to one's own, the capacity to value diversity, and respect for indigenous peoples and knowledge" (Peter Ricketts and Jennifer Humphries, "Taking an Ethical Approach to Internationalization," *University Affairs*, February 3, 2015, <http://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/in-my-opinion/taking-ethical-approach-internationalization/>).
  - d. To support the internationalization of the curriculum
  - e. To help internationalize higher education
  - f. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Higher education has often defined *internationalization* in one of the ways mentioned above (as the fostering of intercultural awareness, the promotion of global citizenship, or the embedding of international perspectives into the curriculum). How would you personally define "internationalization"?
  - a. I can't define it
  - b. I can offer a definition below
  - c. Personal definition / Comments:

## Appendix B

### In-Person Interview Questions

1. What does "internationalization" mean to you? (all, some, none of the below, or other?)
  - a. Bringing more international students to your campus?
  - b. Encouraging more German students to study abroad?
  - c. Educating students about global citizenship?
  - d. Embedding international perspectives into the curriculum?
  - e. Supporting international research done by your faculty?



2. Do you think that the library has a role to play in internationalization through any of the choices below at this institution? (all, some, none of the below, or other?)
  - a. Through collections? (online or print)
  - b. Through instruction? (information literacy)
  - c. Through assistance? (reference desk, individual research consultations)
  - d. Through study spaces?
3. In Germany, do you think a focus on internationalization also means a focus on the use of the English language? If so, where do you think the use of English is appropriate?
4. Do you think internationalization is a high priority for this university? Should it be? Why or why not?
5. Do you have any further thoughts about internationalization and German academic libraries that you would like to share?

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