

# "KULTURMÜNDIGKEIT UND INTERKULTURELLE KOMPETENZ" LITERATURE IN CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## Abstract

Penelitian ini bertujuan memperkenalkan konsep Bayreuth tentang *Interkulturelle Germanistik* (Germanistik antarBudaya) dan mengkaji implementasinya untuk mata kuliah Germanistik di Indonesia.

Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan mengkaji sekumpulan teks dan menghubungkan unsur-unsur yang terdapat dalam konsep pembacaan tradisional dan konsep Bayreuth tentang *Interkulturelle Germanistik*.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa *Interkulturelle Germanistik* dapat memberikan dorongan baru, tetapi tidak dapat menggantikan sepenuhnya konsep tradisional pada perbaikan dalam pembacaan dan pengertian teks yang kritis pada mahasiswa. Pada *Interkulturelle Germanistik* pembacaan teks yang kritis diabaikan, tetapi sebaiknya tetap menjadi bagian dari kurikulum mata kuliah Germanistik.

**Kata kunci:** *Interkulturelle Germanistik*, pembacaan tradisional, pembacaan kritis

## A. Introduction

The concept of "Interkulturelle Germanistik" (IG) was introduced by Alois Wierlacher and his Followers at the University of Bayreuth. It has developed into one of the most influential approaches for changing traditional university curricula of German into contemporary studies all over the world (for a detailed survey cf. Wierlacher 2003).

Instead of educating philologists the aim is now to educate a new generation of specialists for German culture and the western concept of tolerance in particular (cf. Otto 1995; Otto 1999). The similarity to the concept of "cultural studies", developed in the Anglo-American region, is obvious (cf. Hudson-Wiedenmann 1999; Martin 1996). One of the major differences, however, is the dominating role of literature within IG. "Cultural studies"

regard literature as an elite part of culture not really essential for contemporary understanding of cultures. IG, however, uses a different approach: „In der interkulturellen Germanistik nahm die Literatur von Anfang an eine zentrale Stelle ein.“ (Literature has been of essential importance to intercultural German studies right from the beginning; Esselborn 2003: 480) Literature is considered to be a valid expression of non-literary and non-elit parts of culture, too. It can be used as a starting point to illustrate many topics in more concise way than other media.

A good example for this is in excerpt from Thomas Mann's famous novel "Buddenbrooks" Tony Buddenbrook lives with her husband in the Southern German city of Munich. In a letter to her mother in the Northern city of Lübeck she describe in a mixture of despair and irony the culinary



differences between the two German regions (Wierlacher and Albrecht 1998: 36f). It can illustrate cultural differences still valid within Germany nowadays and therefore be a useful tool in conveying special knowledge on the "Kulturthema Essen" (cultural topic of eating; cf. Hudson-Wiedenmann 2003: 452) as well as shaping the foreign student's feeling for cultural difference.

So literature is useful within IG but no longer seen as a value in itself. A selection of texts is not supposed to lead students towards special knowledge about authors, periods or literary history. All this is considered dispensable. Literature is only relevant if it can be used to illustrate contemporary cultural topics. A fixed selection of classical masterpieces is obsolete, even within German-speaking countries (cf. Esselborn 2003: 483). The learning goal is no longer the abstract "meaning" of a work of art but reading as a dynamic process with open results:

"Entsprechend sollte der 'kommunikations- und produktionsorientierte' Literaturunterricht nicht mehr den festliegenden, monovalenten Sinn eines statischen, zeitlosen, autonomen Kunstwerks herausarbeiten, sondern zu einem freien, kritischen, kreativen Umgang mit literarischen Texten anregen, deren Sinngebung durch den Leser als dynamischer, offener Prozess verstanden wird." (Accordingly a literature instruction that focuses on communication and production should no longer aim to establish the fixed, definite meaning of a static, timeless and autonomous work of art but provide incentives for a free, critical and creative

reading of literary texts. The interpretation of these texts by the reader is considered to be a dynamic, open process; Esselborn 2003:481)

So the first step in selecting literary texts for teaching is an analysis whether they are relevant for cultural science („Relevanzprüfung“; cf. Hudson-Wiedenmann 2003: 448). The aim is to find material that enables students to finally reach "Kultur-mündigkeit und interkulturelle Kompetenz" (cultural and intercultural competence; Hudson-Wiedenmann 2003: 448). Main criteria are the relevance of the texts for the target culture as well as the relevance for the student's own:

„Die Textwahl im Bereich der Fremdkulturvermittlung ist [...] an der Repräsentativität eines Textes für die zu vermittelnde Kultur auszurichten als auch an der Relevanz eines Textes für den lesenden Lerner als Adressaten" (In selecting texts for the study of foreign cultures it must be taken into consideration [...] if these texts are characteristic for the investigated culture and if they are relevant for the learner who reads them as addressee; Hudson-Wiedenmann 2003:448).

Additionally the „Relevanzprüfung“ has to consider the possibility of initiating a "dynamic process" of interpretation. The selected texts should give enough starting points for an interpretation with open results, what is called "disjungierendes Deuten" (disjunctive interpretation) by Dietrich Krusche:

"Das Sichern der vom Text angespielten Bestimmtheiten



einerseits, das Sichern der vom Text *verweigerten Bestimmtheit*, mithin der genuinen literarischen (textsyntaktischen und textsemantischen) Unbestimmtheiten auf der anderen Seite" (To identify where the texts seems to offer fixed meanings on the one hand and to identify the refusal of such fixed meanings and therefore the genuine literary (syntactic and semantic) ambiguities of the text on the other hand; Krusche 1990: 122).

As I will show this important aspect does not always get enough attention within interpretations by Wierlacher and his school.

A selection of texts considered exemplary by members of the IG school is an anthology of texts on the subject of foreignness, "Fremdgänge", edited by Corinna Albrecht and Alois Wierlacher (Wierlacher & Albrecht 1998).

### B. Method - Limitations of IG

One of the canonical texts used to illustrate the technique of IG is "Zum Geburtstag" by Marie Luise Kaschnitz (Wierlacher & Albrecht 1998: 54), a short piece of prose telling the story of a three-year-old boy who stays as a guest at the home of a traditional bourgeois family on the occasion of his birthday. His parents lead separate lives, are political activists and never celebrate traditional festivities. So out of pity the family prepare a birthday party for the boy. They use all the traditional paraphernalia like cake and candy, presents and above all candles in a room where the light from the windows is dimmed by curtains. Instead of showing happiness the boy is deeply disturbed and removes everything "with shaking

hands":

„In einer bürgerlichen Familie wird einem fremden, etwa dreijährigen Buben eine Geburtstagsfeier vorbereitet. Man hat Mitleid mit dem Kind, dessen Eltern nicht zusammen leben, politisch engagiert sind, alle überkommenen Festgebräuche ablehnen und verachten. Darum haben die Gastgeber einen Kuchen gebacken, kleine Kerzen auf den Tisch gestellt, Päckchen mit Süßigkeiten und Spielsachen danebengelegt. Über diese Zurüstungen, besonders über die bei verhangenen Fenstern angezündeten Kerzen schien das Kind zu Tode erschrocken. Es räumte mit zitternden Händen alles vom Tisch, blies die Kerzen aus, stellte sie aus jeder Reichweite, jeder Sehweite, blieb danach noch lange, wie von der Berührung einer fremden, bedrohlichen Sphäre, verstört.“

Alois Wierlacher interpretes this as a typical case of culture shock ("Kulturschock"). Instead of accepting the boy's education and experience as a "culture" of similar value to their own, the family unconsciously consider their own culture as superior and force the boy into a sudden experience of something completely alien and therefore disturbing: "Die Gleichursprünglichkeit kultureller Verstehenspositionen [wird] bagatellisiert und mißachtet" (The common origin of positions of cultural understanding [is] trivialized and disregarded; Wierlacher 1998:127). So instead of introducing the boy carefully and gradually to a better understanding of values different from his own, the family leads him to a complete rejection of this and probably every new cultural



experience, at least for some time. They epitomize a kind of colonialism that will cause recipients to reject and possibly destruct these very values:

“Lesern aus der Dritten Welt fällt es nicht schwer, die dargestellte Erwachsenen-Kind-Beziehung als die 'entwickelter' und sich 'entwickelnder' Kulturen zu konkretisieren. [...] Appliziert man den Text auf die kultursoziologische und hermeneutische Situation des fremdsprachlichen Deutschunterrichts und der Auslandsgermanistik, dann stellt er allen am Fach Interessierten die warnende und dringliche Frage, dafür zu sorgen, daß es ihm nicht eines Tages eben so ergeht wie dem Gabentisch der depravierten Feier des Geburtstages, die man ohne Rücksicht auf Bedürfnisse, Vorverständnisse und Ängste des Adressaten arrangierte: die junge Generation zerstört es zitternd und emphatisch - das Fach wird abgeräumt.“ (Readers from Third World countries have no difficulty in identifying the depicted adult-child relationship as that of developed and developing cultures. [...] If the text is applied to cultural studies and hermeneutics in teaching German as a foreign languages and foreign German studies it can be considered as a warning and inspiration to all those interested in the subject. German studies might share the fate of the presents on the table of the depraved birthday party that were arranged without consideration of the needs, preconceptions and anxieties of

the addressee: the young generation will destroy it trembling and with emphasis the subject will be cleared; Wierlacher 1998: 128

Apart from the obvious mistreatment of the German language (“stellt er ... die ... Frage, dafür zu sorgen ...”) Wierlacher's interpretation is strangely one-dimensional. As far as it goes it is within the range of the intention of the authoress. On the other hand it completely neglects the polemic aspects of the text. The term “Zurüstungen” (setting up, preparation), that is used to describe the family's actions has an obvious military meaning and implies therefore an aggression of the family rather than mere thoughtlessness. Furthermore, the boy's action is much too advanced for a little child. He not only shrinks away, but takes a highly advanced defence action. The text does not just criticise egomania and arrogance in all clashes of cultures but also describes it as a characteristic feature of the bourgeois family. Whether one agrees with this or not, it certainly should not be neglected in any interpretation of the text.

One might say that this is not the learning goal in this case. By using this text in foreign language teaching one wants to lead students towards a better understanding of concepts like tolerance and mutual intercultural understanding. Analysing polemic structures is not part of this and can be achieved in other lessons by using other texts. But how can a better understanding of tolerance be reached by using a text with a highly intolerant subtext, without discussing it at least? Introducing and explaining the (western) concept of tolerance is certainly a very important aim, but it is of similar importance to shape the ability for observing intolerance, especially in a



culture without a thoroughly developed democratic background like Indonesia, where the ability of critical reading may not necessarily be as developed as a western scholar would expect. Tolerance cannot exist without limits of this tolerance, as recent world-wide developments clearly show.

So Krusche's learning goal of "disjungierendes Deuten" is frequently missing in the actual interpretations of IG, because their interpretation often is monodirectional, as shown in Wierlacher's approach.

The critical reading of texts is a skill of high importance nowadays. Important as the education of "specialists for German culture" may be, many graduates have to face a situation where their knowledge may be less important than their abilities. Many Graduates of German in Indonesia will never use the German language in their later jobs and may never need the knowledge they worked so hard for - even if they get a job in a German company (cf. Setiawati 2000). Critical reading, however, is a skill usually expected and presupposed in nearly any higher position at least in western companies.

### C. Result and Discussion

So we may come to the conclusion that the concept of IG can certainly be a very valuable tool for reaching a more contemporary curriculum at universities inside and outside German-speaking countries, but it should not necessarily be the only one. Texts selected for teaching should give a basis for the introduction and deepening of important subjects of German cultural identity and also lead to an intercultural experience and comparison. It should, however, also be possible to use them as

tools for introducing and teaching the basic methods of literary analysis essential for a full understanding of texts of any kind in any context.

So the main criteria for a selection of texts given by IG:

- 1) Providing as many starting-points for information on German culture as possible and
- 2) Giving at least a few starting-points for intercultural comparison should be combined with the rather traditional ones:
- 3) Conveying as many skills for the interpretation of literature as necessary and
- 4) Giving a basis for the first steps towards a critical textual competence

The risks of this highly ambitious task are obvious. Instead of leading the students towards a better understanding of German identity or a skillful approach towards literature, a careless selection of the basic texts may as well confuse the students completely by demanding too much of them in a very limited space of time and frustrate them completely. I nevertheless believe that this transfer of traditional curricula of literature teaching is necessary to justify literature in a university education preparing for a changing world - and I believe that it can be approached successfully!

The selection suggested in the following was used during an introduction to literature (Pengkajian Sastra A) with four hours a week for students in their fourth semester at Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta. This course is the first of two similar courses in two succeeding terms.



	Author	Title	Form	Date
1.	Andreas Gryphius	Tränen des Vaterlandes	Poetry	1636
2.	Matthias Claudius	Kriegslied	Poetry	1778
3.	Theodor Fontane	Die Balinesenfrauen auf Lombok	Prose	1895
4.	August Stramm	Patrouille; Sturmangriff	Poetry	1916
5.	Heimito von Doderer	Tagebuch	Diary	1945
6.	Bertolt Brecht	Die zwei Söhne	Prose	1946
7.	Bertolt Brecht	Rückkehr	Poetry	1948/49
8.	Bertolt Brecht	Maßnahmen gegen die Gewalt (Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner)	Prose	1930/32
9.	Hagen Schulze	Kleine deutsche Geschichte (Ausschnitt über Bombardierung deutscher Städte)	specialised text	1996
10.	Wolfgang Borchert	„Als der Krieg aus war ...“ from „ Lesebuchgeschichten“	Prose	1947
11.	Wolfgang Borchert	Preface to „Draußen vor der Tür“	Prose	1947
12.	Ernst Jandi	Schützengraben	Poetry	1966
13.	Erich Fried	Der Präventivschlag	Prose	1982
14.	Gunter Grass	Die Seeschlacht	Poetry	

This selection was used as a textual basis for about half of the term. It was followed by and therefore preparing a teaching unit on Wolfgang Borchert's drama "Draußen vor der Tür", which mainly used the Indonesian translation of the text. This explains the absence of any excerpts of drama.

A few comments on the selection:

The unifying theme is, of course, war. The texts allow to reactivate the student's knowledge on German history, e.g. the Thirty Years' War (Gryphius) and the two World Wars (Stramm, Brecht, Borchert etc.). It also allowed to refer to domestic German wars during the times before national unity in 1871 (Claudius). The text by Fried could lead towards more recent developments, focusing on the original context of the text - the deployment of American nuclear weapons in Germany during the early eighties as well as encouraging an interpretation aiming on more recent

"preventive wars". The poem by Fontane is usually of special interest to Indonesian learners and was meant to give a text with "Relevanz [...] für den lesenden Lerner als Adressaten" (Relevance for the learner who reads them as address; Hudson-Wiedenmann 2003: 448). It can also lead into a discussion of colonialism. And it can illustrate a further special aim. Not, as seems obvious at first glance, the focus on Dutch policy of the time, but a criticism of colonial ambitions within Germany.

The selection allows also to demonstrate basic poetical principles. The prose works by Brecht (Die beiden Söhne), Borchert (Als der Krieg aus war...) and Fried show the three narrative perspectives in a very clear form that made it possible for the students to detect this themselves without special introduction or instruction. Especially the story by



Brecht can be used to clarify the difference between auctorial and more objective style by letting the students transfer the story into another variety, e.g. a newspaper article.

The poems also show very different formal aspects of literature, from the very strict form of the sonnet to the free form of the poems by Stramm and Jandl. They lead quite naturally towards a discussion of differences between traditional and modern literature. The famous Jandl poem was of course also used during the first lesson within the discussion of the term "literature" itself and the obligatory initial broadening of the terms "text" and "literature". This was also the main reason for including excerpts from a diary and a specialised text which also helped to further clarify the narrative perspectives.

The poem by Fontane, apart from its obvious interest for Indonesian learners of German, is a very suitable vehicle for introducing figures of speech. As a rather "narrative" poem it also helps to illustrate once more the different concepts of poetry and prose. It could also be used for a transfer from one form (poem) to another (prose).

The stories by Brecht (*Maßnahmen gegen die Gewalt*) and Fried were particularly useful because of their religious background. Although this background is Christian, it was useful in class, in the first place because some of the students were Christians who could explain it to the others, in the second place because the relevant biblical narratives (7 plagues, Kain and Abel) are part of the Islamic tradition as well and were therefore also familiar to most of the Muslim students. Both Brecht and Fried use the religious background in a rather polemic way, using religious

tradition to make non- or even anti-religious implications. It was therefore a good opportunity to lead students towards a more critical reading.

The selection can also present some problems of course. Several of the texts are rather difficult for students in their fourth semester and need some kind of previous preparation, either by the students themselves, e.g. in the form papers, or by the teacher. The poem by Gryphius was, even in a modernised form, very difficult and mainly used for the demonstration of structural features. It can probably be replaced by another baroque sonnet with a similar topic. The irony of the Grass poem needs probably too much time for an introductory course and can be abolished.

#### D. Conclusion

Any selection of texts like this one has, of course, to be modified due to the circumstances language ability, cultural background etc. - as well as changing implications of the topic. A further step could be a merger of this literature class and curriculum with thematically orientated language classes, adding mainly contemporary examples of the same topic, using newspaper texts, radio or TV-news, movies etc. The danger of confusing the different aims as well as the students, however, would be even higher than within the (nearly) purely literature class described above. A solution of this problem could be to distribute the most important aims of "literary" education on two classes with different topics to avoid boredom. The selection of the material as well as the planning of two (or even more) classes closely interlinked will be a very ambitious and risky business, but certainly worth trying. It is, however, important that the era of a static



curriculum seems to be over. Any selection and any concept will have to be constantly checked and improved according to changing conditions.

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