Responses to the Decline in *Germanistik* in the UK

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ISSN 1470 – 9570

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The purpose of this paper is to outline and establish the decline in interest in so-called 'traditional' German studies in universities in the UK. The authors discuss the shift in the German studies paradigm in the UK during the last 20 years and set about pegging out the variety of conceptual approaches to studying the topic that exist at present. In addition, they present two new models of German studies that can be seen as direct responses to declining tertiary-level applicants. This paper intends to contribute to the on-going debate on the future of German studies per se by suggesting that there is a need for practitioners of all the varying approaches to the study of Germany to accept, and indeed welcome, other ways of 'doing' German studies.

0. Introduction

The following article introduces two approaches to the study of Germany that can be understood as direct responses to the decline in 'traditional' German Studies in the UK. Before we even begin our discussion, however, even this phrase poses a number of problems. It would seem that all subject designations that contain the word 'studies' suffer from a lack of legitimacy. 'General Studies', for example, is looked upon as an easy 'A' level to take, whilst 'Soviet Studies' or 'Classical Studies and 'Area Studies' are notoriously difficult to define. In order to ascertain whether we are experiencing a decline in German Studies and to outline the responses to this, we need to agree on just what constitutes German Studies. If, for now, we simply focus on the subject taught at 'A' level in schools (that is, 'advanced level' courses traditionally taken at 18 and considered the prerequisite for university entrance) and at degree level in the UK, there is no denying the rapid decline in students' interest in recent years. In line with a decline in language study across the board at these levels (less marked, however, for Spanish), German departments in universities across the country are finding it increasingly hard to recruit good quality students. In the 'European Year of Languages', 2001, the British were officially deemed to possess the worst command of languages in the whole of Europe (*Guardian Newspaper*, February 20th, 2001, p. 6) with 66% of the population admitting to possessing no knowledge of a foreign language whatsoever. Whilst 22% of Britons claim to have some

knowledge of the French language, only 10% claimed the same for German. Moreover, among up-and-coming students the trend for language learning is decidedly downwards, as is reflected in the applications to German degree programmes discussed below.

The decline in student interest in studying degree-level German chimes with the experiences of many western European countries and the USA. Interestingly, there appears to be a bifurcation in Europe between those (western) countries in which German Studies, in particular the 'traditional version' (see below), is dying out and those (east European) countries in which students are breaking down the doors to study the language and country of Goethe. The former countries, including the UK, France, Belgium and the Netherlands are linked by a common affliction: declining numbers of students taking German. The latter are linked by the opposite: flourishing German programmes with eager students. Paradoxically, eastern European (and, incidentally Russian) institutions, with their pent-up demand for learning the language of the European Union's major player, tend to orientate themselves towards a model of German Studies that has gone from the majority to the minority in the west European countries cited (and the USA).[1] The paradox lies in the fact that many of the countries suffering a decline in German student numbers, including Britain, have gradually developed alternatives alongside the traditional *Germanistik* type of German Studies, for a number of intellectual and pragmatic reasons, not least of all with the intention of reversing the declining trend.

This article begins by presenting some statistical data on the decline in interest in German Studies among 'A' level students and degree applications in the UK. This is discussed in relation to other languages, especially French and Spanish. Section 2 outlines the development of approaches to German Studies in higher education in Britain, differentiating three broad paradigms: the first, the so-called 'traditional' paradigm, is derived from the practice of *Germanistik* in Germany; the other two, 'Cultural Studies' and 'Area Studies', have come about due to a number of factors discussed below. An attempt will be made at clarifying the differences between these varieties of German Studies and at

[1] Much of this information has been gleaned from a round of three special workshops on the future of German Studies held in Montreal, Sofia and Bremen respectively and sponsored by the DAAD at which Grix presented drafts of part of this paper. In addition, Grix (2002) highlights some of the arguments put forward in the latter section of this paper.

explaining the shift in paradigm away from the more traditional to the plurality of approaches that now exist.

Section 3 focuses on two specific responses to the decline in German Studies in the UK. These can be seen as injecting new life into the old debate of what constitutes German Studies. First, we outline the model employed by the Institute for German Studies at Birmingham University, which, whilst concentrating solely on postgraduate research, nonetheless offers an alternative model of German Studies for undergraduate programmes that complements the 'traditional' and 'Cultural Studies' models already in existence. Subsequently, Aston University's model of an 'integrative' approach to German Studies is introduced and discussed. All in all, these models can be viewed as adding a new dimension to the debate on the nature and future of German Studies in the UK. It must be stressed that the following debate is intended to enrich the notion and practice of German Studies in the UK and in no way are the models presented here to be put forward as 'superior' to any other type of German Studies currently practiced.

1. The Decline in *Germanistik* in the UK[2]

The alarming decline in the field of German Studies within the UK is not a new problem. Even though the unification of Germany contributed to a rapid increase of interest in German culture and language, 'the wave of euphoria'[3] was soon to give way to a decline in the number of applications to study German at tertiary level and thus a decreasing pool of students for departments to choose from. However, the problem was not only a German-related one. The crisis of German Studies was part of the wider difficulties felt by the whole modern languages sector in recent years,[4] which saw other language departments (for example, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian) also face a drastic decrease in student

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[2] This contribution on the development of German Studies in the UK can seen as part of the ongoing discussion in *GFL*. It follows the articles by N. Reeves (*GFL* 1/2000), N. Pachler (*GFL* 2/2001) and G. Reershemius (*GFL* 3/2001).

[3] Weber (1997).

[4] See the Nuffield Languages Inquiry, http://www.languagelearn.co.uk/nuffield.htm.

numbers and applications for a single honours degree,[5] (that is, a university programme followed by students studying one subject). There appears to be more stability in joint honours however, (that is, where students simultaneously study two subjects at university) although this can also lead to language departments being seen as service teaching departments for English, Law, Politics and so on.

Before turning our attention to the university sector, it is instructive to see the language learning trends at GCSE[6] and 'A' levels, which is, after all, where the vast majority of degree-level students come from. There is no doubt that the root of the decline in language acquisition is to be found here, for, even though 'there is an enthusiasm for languages (…) educational provision [in the UK] is fragmented, achievement poorly measured, [and] continuity not very evident.'[7] Foreign languages are often interpreted as optional subjects by some schools at key stage 4[8], underlining the fact that the UK lacks a coherent national agenda on language provision. If the proposals set out in the recent Government Green Paper were to be implemented, we would witness a massive decline in language students at all levels from GCSE to PhD. The intention is to drop languages from the compulsory curriculum for 14-16-year-olds. As the British Academy correctly suggest

> At present (2002), the numbers taking A level, first degree, postgraduate and teacher training qualifications in languages are insufficient to meet the UK's current need for qualified linguists. These difficulties will become even more extreme if languages cease to be a requirement from 14 to 16.[9]

A lack of qualified teachers and low motivation among those teaching are also contributing factors to the state of language learning in UK schools. As far as studying German is

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5 Plomin (2001).

6 That is, the General Certificate of Secondary Education, which acts as the principal means of assessing pupil attainment at the end of compulsory secondary education at 16.

7 See the Nuffield Languages Inquiry, http://www.languagelearn.co.uk/nuffield.htm.

8 Around the age of 14, children are at 'key stage 4' in their education and are able to make choices regarding the subjects they study.

9 See the official government document 'Language Learning' at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19greenpaper/download/DfES-LanguageLearning.pdf.
Also, for a measured response to the government's proposals see the British Academy's website, http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/ reports/0206languages2.html

concerned, the limited contact with the language and culture has accelerated the decrease in student numbers at degree level, leading Timothy McFarland to suggest that:

> Young British people do not come into enough contact with the subject - they are not encouraged to pursue German Studies as a result of their social milieu and in schools German has lost ground, above all in relation to Spanish.[10]

The downward trend is clearly borne out by the facts and figures. While the National Curriculum made the learning of a foreign language compulsory at GCSE level and thereby contributed to a rise in language learners, at 'A' level pupils have been increasingly allowed to make a choice and choose they do (see diagram 1), underlining the finding that nine out of ten children see learning language as irrelevant and cease pursuing it at 16.[11]

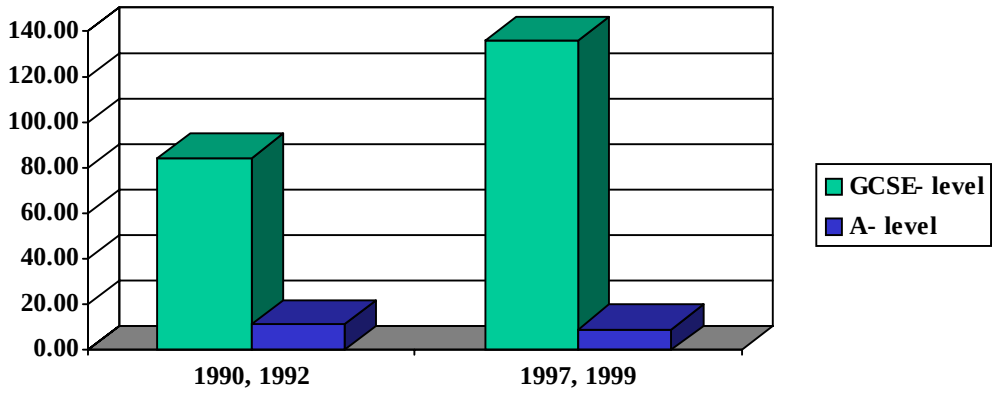

Diagram 1: Entries for GCSE and A Level in German in the UK, 1990 -1999 (1000s)

Source: CILT Yearbook 2000

It would seem that work is needed in persuading pupils of the benefits of learning languages to reverse the huge drop in numbers of those taking GCSE who go on to take A levels, as the leap in numbers of those taking GCSE German between 1990 and 1999, paradoxically, translates into *fewer* students taking 'A' levels.

Applications to study a subject are a fair indication of a subject's health. The diagram below shows the number of total applications to three of the most widely taught languages

[10] McFarland (1998).

[11] Nuffield Languages Inquiry, http://www.languagelearn.co.uk/nuffield.htm,

(both single and joint honours) lodged between 1994 and 2000 in Departments for Modern Languages throughout the UK.[12]

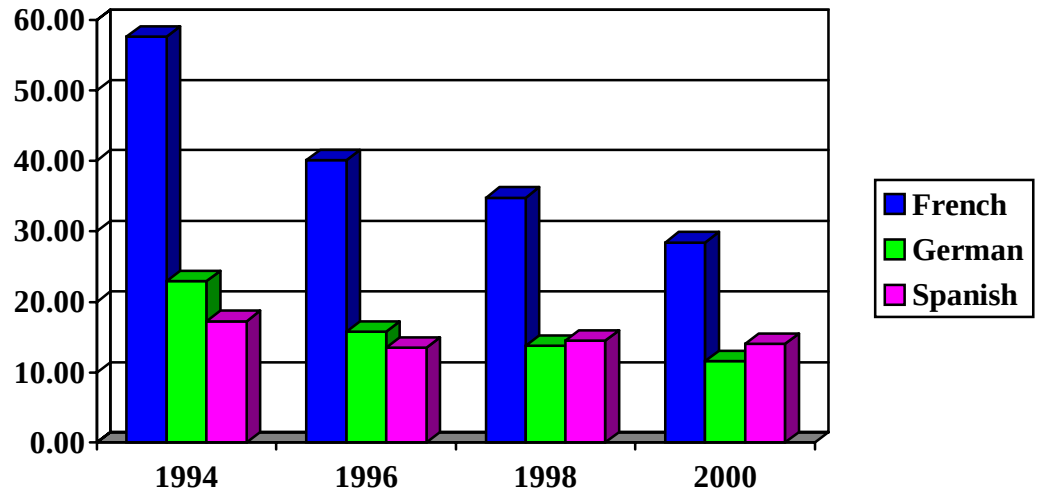

Diagram 2: Applications to study German, French and Spanish, 1994-2000 (1000s)

Source: data obtained from the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the UK central organisation through which applications are processed for entry to higher education. Also available at: http://www.ucas.ac.uk/figures/archive/subject/index.html

The statistics reveal a clear decline in interest in modern languages among would-be undergraduate students. Spanish is the only language that has maintained a consistent level of applications, in part due to its growing importance as a language for business partners in the UK and the attractiveness of the Spanish speaking countries, including South and Central America, as holiday destinations. Furthermore Spanish is perceived as an easy language to learn.[13] What is apparent from the German figures is that even though Germany is considered the second language in the European Union and that Germany is the UK's biggest trading partner, the figures are declining. Applications fell steadily and declined to

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[12] Data were obtained from UCAS. Also available at http://www.ucas.ac.uk/figures/archive/subject/index.html, last updated November 11th, 2000.

[13] McVeigh (2001).

11,617 in 2000 (and 11,198 in 2001) from almost 23,000 in 1994.[14] The diagram illustrates that although French also lost almost 50% of its applications between 1994 and 2000 (57,639 down to 28,441), it still remains the leading second language in Higher Education in the UK, a reflection of its privileged place in UK school curricula. Interestingly, the stark drop in applications for modern language courses has not translated into a stark drop in students accepted onto degree programmes, but rather departments have been forced to take on students with lower grades and those with 'A' levels in subjects other than the target language. In fact, an alarming decline in the language skills of pupils entering university was one of the consequences of this trend, with 1st year students of German unable to fulfil the requirements of traditional German Studies[15]. They were also less and less interested in studying the traditional subjects like literature or Middle High-German. This is one reason why some departments reduced their literature programmes, offered ab initio language tuition and concentrated more on German history, society, institutions and media in the 20th century[16] (see below for a further discussion of this.) The figures below illustrate the percentage of accepted applications between 1994 and 2000, using 1994 as the base year (100%).

Thus, while overall applications to study German is down by over 50% between 1994 and 2001, those accepted onto courses over the same period fell by 30%,[17] meaning that somewhere along the line standards must have dropped. We need to bear in mind also the fact that the majority of students choose German in combination with another subject, with only a minority choosing to study German as a single honours degree option. If, as seems very likely, the trend of declining applications continues in the future, standards will almost certainly have to drop further to sustain remaining German departments. It is against this backdrop of gradual decline that the following discussion takes place.

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[14] 2001 figures from Professor David Robey, www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/ucas_langs_stats_2002.rtf.

[15] Reershemius (2001). http://www.gfl-journal.de/downloads/3-2001/reershemius.html.

[16] Weber (1997).

[17] 2001 figures from Professor David Robey, http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/ucas_langs_stats_2002.rtf.

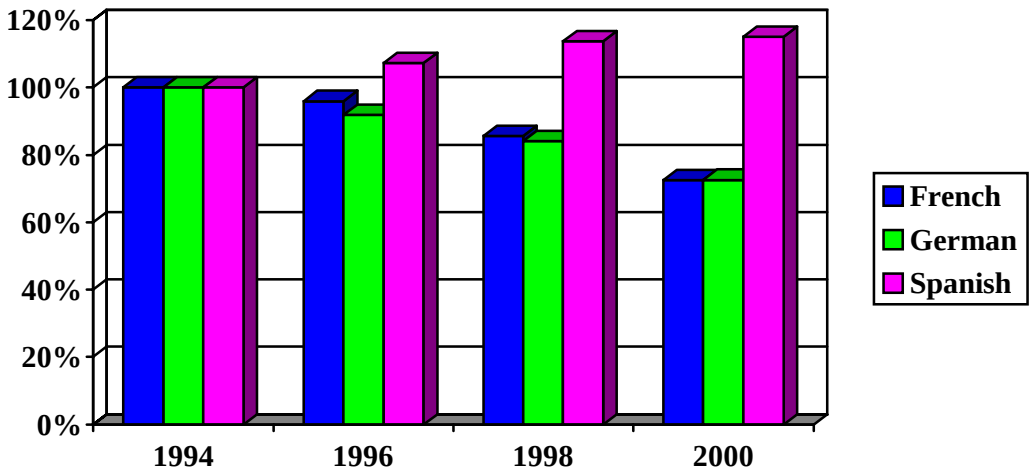

Diagram 3: Applications (in percent) accpeted for modern language courses, 1994-2000
Source: data obtained from UCAS
Also available at http://www.ucas.ac.uk/figures/archive/subject/index.html

2. Approaches to German Studies in the UK

The first thing to clarify before discussing the types of approaches to German Studies in the UK is that we are not talking about a *discipline*. Academic disciplines are based on certain sets of ontological and epistemological assumptions, although within disciplines there is a wide variety of differing views among academics on which methods, theories, practices and concepts are the most suitable.[18] German Studies, or Cultural and Area Studies for that matter, are not glued together by general or specific methodologies in which competing paradigms, consisting of common terminology and theories, coexist. The difficulty in discussing and attempting to define German Studies is made worse by the fact that academic disciplines themselves, even those that see themselves as more 'scientific' like economics, consist of a wide variety of approaches, theories, preferred methods and methodologies. At times it would seem that different disciplines speak a different language

[18] See Grix (2001).

or discourse when describing the same event, so what chance have we of nailing down the elusive concept of German Studies?

One thing is clear, however, that no one agrees on just what constitutes 'German Studies'. For this reason it is useful to unpick the wide variety of ways in which the term is conceived. This in turn will help place the two varieties discussed in this paper within the broader context of German Studies as it is practised in the UK.

The British Context: The Dominant 'Traditional' Paradigm

German Studies in Britain as an area of study has traditionally been the reserve of language and literary studies experts and derives directly from the German field of *Germanistik*. This was particularly reflected in the content of university degrees around the country, which saw a division between Oxbridge (that is, the universities of Oxford and Cambridge), where the focus was mainly on literature and the year abroad was (until recently) optional, and traditional departments in which the study of literature and language as a vehicle of accessing the target country's culture took up the bulk of the curriculum. There was room for the study of historical varieties of the German language, e.g., Middle High-German, and for probing the depths of German verse throughout the preceding centuries. Students studied in depth a wide range of German literary texts, from the medieval 'Minnesang' through to the modern period, which generally meant stopping at the start of the 20th Century. This German Studies paradigm we term 'traditional'. The point of this paradigm was, generally speaking, to submerge students in German literature, culture and, outside Oxbridge, in language. Even though the traditional approach focused on linguistic accuracy and high proficiency in written and spoken language, the methods applied did not always have a positive effect on the improvement of fluency and accuracy. This was due partly to the fact that the foreign language was not used as a means for teaching and transferring knowledge. The language of the classroom was English; students in many cases became familiar with German literature by reading English translations. They also wrote papers and essays in English. Contact and practice of the target language was often only possible in conversation classes. Language acquisition represents the vocational aspect of the degree, as it facilitates employment prospects after graduation (in 2000 only 3.1% of German

graduates were unemployed after one year**,** the lowest of all degree subjects after medicine and education).[19]

The 'traditional' paradigm in the UK is gradually being overtaken by new – and often more vocationally oriented - approaches, as a result of and response to wider structural changes in society (especially employment), requirements of business and student demand and, of course, a less literary society. The mismatch between what was offered in traditional departments, where members of staff had overwhelmingly studied at Oxbridge as undergraduates or postgraduates, and what students wanted was, in particular, a force behind the shift of paradigm.

The Paradigm Shift

During the 1980s in Britain, and increasing in the 1990s, there was a general trend in German Studies to open up the syllabuses to the different areas of study, using, for example, Film Studies, and opening up a previously humanities-based subject to the social sciences. Increasingly departments introduced students to the study of German politics and society, and (occasionally) economics and international relations. A combination of factors is behind the shift away from the traditional form of German Studies towards complementary 'Area Studies' or 'Cultural Studies' approaches. Some, but not all, of them coincide with the reasons behind the subject's slow decline. The following list introduces a selection of the most salient factors behind the paradigm shift:

1. The commercialisation of UK universities has seen the spotlight turned on those departments/subject areas that are unable to attract sufficient students to cover their costs, which, in the case of language departments, are usually high due to the necessity of providing labour intensive language instruction. 'Traditional' German departments have come under immense pressure to change their academic focus to become more attractive to students – including offering a bewildering array of degree combinations (totalling over 10, 000 courses, according to UCAS[20]) - or to merge into either 'modern language departments' or 'European Studies departments'. Language instruction is increasingly carried out by specialist centres in the university, which further undermines the traditional language-led German Studies paradigm.

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[19] Data from HESA, First Destinations of Students leaving Higher Education Institutions 2000/2001.

[20] Information sent to the authors by UCAS.

2. Recruitment to German courses is not helped by the portrayal of Germany in the British media. Large sections of the UK press are hostile to Germany and Europe (see the unfortunate article by Julie Burchill in the *Guardian Weekend*, September 22, p. 5). Reports on Germany or Germans are couched in phrases from the Second World War and Germany is seen as an advocate of closer European integration, which is anathema to the centre-right press. Coverage of Germany on (usually prime-time) television is almost exclusively of the War and exhibits an unusual fascination with the Third Reich and its most famous actors. Furthermore, the contemporary incidents of racial harassment, attacks on foreigners, and the increasing number of right-wing extremists, have helped create a negative image of Germany in Britain.[21]

3. The decline in the teaching of German in schools in the UK. Fewer 'A' level students translate into fewer taking German at degree level. The next decade is likely to see a further decrease in students leaving school with 'A' level German.

4. The change in students' interests has led to a mismatch between what students wish to study and what is on offer. Those departments that have been able to anticipate the change in student interests have been the most successful. The decrease in students reading German at tertiary level and the financial crisis sparked off by the high number of '5s' and '5*' departments in the recent Research Assessment Exercise (RAE, 2001) is likely to lead to a concentration of funding and students to fewer but larger German departments in the next decade.[22]

5. The general decline in interest in learning the German language must be placed within the context of the exponential growth in English as the *lingua franca* throughout the world, especially in business. Many universities, even in Germany, now hold lectures in English, which broadens their appeal to, and increases their intake of, students from around the world.

6. Part of the shift away from the traditional form of German Studies is simply because Germany cannot just be understood from an examination of its past (although courses on the Third Reich remain popular), whatever the medium employed. Germany needs to be studied in its European context, alongside the key developments in her neighbouring countries. For example, the critical junctures of 1989 and 1998 (arguably a turning point in German governance) cannot be studied through 'high culture' alone.

7. For the reasons cited above, German Studies as a subject area needs to adapt and respond to the changing context in which Germany finds herself. The contemporary developments and questions also need to be discussed and answered, especially as these are of the most relevance to students and their lives.

8. Interestingly, in Britain, where the subject of political science is far more plural and open than in the USA, a large group of political scientists, who would not consider themselves as 'area' specialists, contribute a great deal to our understanding of contemporary Germany,

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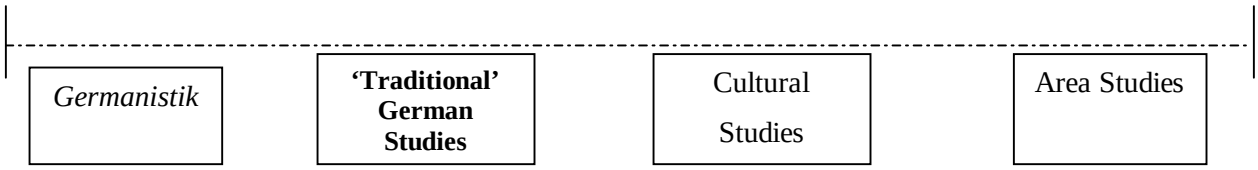
[21] Weber (1997).

[22] In the RAE government resources follow the highest grades. As there were so many high grades, particularly 5 and 5* - incidentally a great number in the beleaguered modern languages departments - the government was unable to cover the costs of departments' overall improvement.

concentrating on factors that place them to the right of the 'Area Studies' category on our continuum (see below).

This paradigm shift is taking place against a background of rapidly changing modes of work (Britain has the most 'flexible' labour market in the world) and universities are responding by offering more vocationally oriented degree packages based on a notion of German Studies as 'Area' or 'Cultural' Studies.

Attempting to plot all the varieties of German Studies in the UK would be impossible, but some very broad characteristics help get a handle on the developments we wish to describe.[23] Imagine a continuum along which the three paradigms of German Studies ('traditional', 'Cultural Studies' and 'Area Studies') are placed, with the traditional German Studies at one end and Area Studies at the other and Cultural Studies between the two.



The left-hand side represents the original German version of German Studies. The further we move to the right on our continuum, the more the focus of study shifts from literature and language towards film, popular culture, contemporary society, politics and even economics. There is, in what is taught in many institutions, a great deal of *overlap* between the simple categories given, represented by the lines between the boxes. In the UK it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between 'German Cultural Studies' and 'Area Studies', although the amount of literature taught is usually a good guide as to how far departments have moved in the direction of Area Studies. The Birmingham 'Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' has had a profound effect on the development of both German Cultural Studies in the UK - for example, see the work of Wilfried van der Will and Rob Burns, in particular their analyses of the working classes in Weimar society (1982) - and the expansion of the field of Media Studies in German departments. The study of German cinema, television, newspapers and radio, and the importance of these organisations within

[23] See Sandford (1998) for a more thorough examination of the problems with distinguishing between different types of German Studies.

German society is becoming increasingly central to an understanding of German culture in Britain and America.[24]

The topics postgraduate students choose to write PhDs on can give a flavour of the training that they have received: from a total of 44 theses completed in 1996 and reported in the annual *Research in Germanic Studies*, 37 dealt with literary topics, three with language and only four with 'history, society, institutions'. Two of the latter also dealt with cultural issues.[25] Two years prior to this list being printed (1994), the German government agreed to support an Institute for German Studies (IGS) in Birmingham, a postgraduate centre with the aim of producing opinion-formers of the future who would produce theses on aspects of contemporary Germany, thereby contributing to British understanding of Germany in an obviously under-researched area. In the seven years since its foundation, the IGS has fundamentally changed the listings in the *Research in Germanic Studies*, as no fewer than 28 theses (of which 25 were doctoral theses) have appeared between 1997 and 2001 under the heading 'history, society, institutions'. Given the new injection of scholars working in a social-science-based German Area Studies into the job market, and given the new parameters within which German departments now have to work (see above), we may see a long-term impact on the way German Studies are conducted in the UK. Until now, the IGS has worked only at postgraduate level. However, the social-science-based model of German Studies offers itself as an *accompaniment* at undergraduate level to the other models that currently exist.

Aston University's development, outlined in section 3 below, is another, different approach to the study of Germany, which introduces pedagogic innovation and focuses on specific areas of German culture, linguistics, and society. This approach could be placed at the interface of the 'traditional' paradigm and the 'cultural studies' paradigm.

The good news is that we believe a plurality of approaches to the study of Germany is healthy for the topic and rivalries between those who would view, for example, the IGS approach as 'German Studies-lite' are barking up the wrong tree. First, there is no single

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[24] This section on German Cultural Studies is taken from Paul Cooke's panoramic contribution (Cooke 2002).

[25] Sandford, ibid.

correct way of studying any social phenomenon. Second, ontological and, in particular, epistemological, differences between advocates of different models of how to study Germany should be celebrated. Dismissing alternatives (like those presented here) as unworthy of the label of German Studies, lends itself less to rigorous scholarship, but more to a profound lack of imagination and lack of understanding of what social research is all about. Therefore, we believe that the discussion about German Studies needs an injection of new and reflexive ideas about *how* Germany and the Germans are, and can be, studied. Finally it would seem that only a mixture of the variety of approaches to teaching German - from the 'traditional' to 'politics' - will ensure the survival of German university departments outside of Cambridge and Oxford in the coming decade.

3. Responses to the Changes in German Studies - Two Examples

The following section introduces two distinct responses to the decline in German Studies in the UK. The examples are by no means typical of the way in which German Studies is practiced in the UK – nor indeed are they to be seen as in any way superior to those more commonly practiced - rather they represent new, and innovative, approaches to the study of Germany that contribute to the debate on the subject's future. Many departments up and down the country have introduced innovative ways of teaching German Studies which differ greatly from the 'traditional' German Studies paradigm introduced above. The following two examples ought to be understood less as an advertisement for the respective departments, but more as an intellectual contribution to the debate on the future of German Studies as we enter a period which can only be described as a *major* crisis in modern language learning in the UK.

The 'Birmingham Model'

The IGS is a multidisciplinary Institute in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Birmingham. The intellectual rationale behind the 'Birmingham Model' is as follows: Germany is central to all work at IGS, however, the aim is to embed analyses of Germany in a European context, especially adopting comparative analyses and, crucially, using *non-*

discipline specific concepts. The latter makes the IGS output appealing to a wider audience by contributing to a number of more general debates on inter-disciplinary topics, for example, social capital; the study of border regions; citizenship and identity; civil-military relations; European policy; multi-level governance (especially federalism and devolution); security policy; Cultural Studies and labour market policies, to name but a few. All of these topics are central to an understanding of Germany, but they also have a wider significance that go beyond the boundaries of Germany.

The IGS has a different conception of German Studies to the traditional paradigm outlined above. The rationale for the creation of the IGS rested on establishing a generation of scholars who could contribute to Britain's understanding of Germany, thereby improving German-British relations. The IGS is structurally very different from other German Studies departments in Britain, as it focuses on the study of contemporary Germany at postgraduate level via the disciplines of political science, sociology, economics, international relations and applied culture. (History is not as central because of the strength of St Antony's College in Oxford, and literature is an area comprehensively covered at Birmingham by the German department.) This choice was deliberate as it represents everything a traditional German department scarcely covers. Equally, it has opened up our doors to students from a wide range of disciplines (increasing possibilities for supply), offered a variety of career trajectories (e.g. consultancy, British-German organisations, academia etc.) and established a research culture beneficial to staff and students alike. Although the current programme concentrates heavily on postgraduates – in addition to which the IGS currently offers service teaching at undergraduate level – the intellectual conception of German Studies at the IGS offers a successful recipe for an undergraduate degree programme more widely.

In an attempt to add rigour to 'Area Studies', which has in the past lacked training in generic research skills and lacked any coherent approach to the study of *social phenomena*, the IGS has developed a programme that delivers skills in *social research*. It is extremely difficult to capture the complexities of contemporary social phenomena by solely analysing 'high culture' to which only a small minority of the population contributes. Simplistically, Area Studies are seen as the combination of generic social research skills and subject-specific skills, in this case the German language and knowledge of the country. The focus of work at the IGS is on Germany, but embedded in political, international relations,

economic and cultural disciplinary approaches. For this reason, the programme is designed to ensure that students are equipped with a thorough grounding in social science research methods, an understanding of the assumptions upon which these methods are based, the ability to differentiate between competing ontological and epistemological positions in research, the rationale behind the choice of methods and methodologies, and for students to have acquired, by the end of the taught elements of the course, the skills with which to implement these theoretical insights in a solid piece of academic work. In short, the focus is on teaching generic social science skills, which can then be applied and adapted to a German-specific context.

In addition to generic social research skills, students are trained in German-specific research skills. The course 'Research methodologies in contemporary German Studies' builds on the work carried out in term one but focuses specifically on disciplinary approaches to the study of Germany and the methods and methodologies employed by Anglo-American and German scholars.[26] The aim is to develop a high degree of awareness and understanding of, and sensitivity towards, the methodological approaches to explanation applied in German research traditions and thus to provide a basis for contrast with the typically Anglo-Saxon traditions discussed in the generic social sciences courses. The IGS believes such a course to be essential, given that students will extensively consult secondary literature by German scholars and will all conduct fieldwork in a German research environment. Most students will not have been exposed to the particularities of the development of disciplinary traditions and intra- and cross-disciplinary debates in Germany in their undergraduate studies. In this course they are exposed to disciplinary surveys (covering political science, International Relations, economic analysis, Cultural Studies and historiography) introduced by in-house and external experts and developed by student-led seminars.

Both generic and German-specific research skills are supplemented by advanced language tuition, which at postgraduate level is very much contingent on the piece of research being undertaken and thus is tailored to each individual. Advanced language tuition is based on

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[26] The IGS produced the first German-specific methodologies book, which also covers such topics as 'Culture' and 'Socio-linguistics' (Grix 2002).

both the students' previous experience and the nature of their project. Obviously, if they intend to interview people, their oral language skills must be very highly developed. In general, it is essential for students to have a good working knowledge of German, if they are to complete a doctorate successfully. The taught components of the MPhil and PhD programme use - as far as possible - original German sources.

In this model of German Studies at undergraduate level, language teaching should be - as far as possible - conducted in the target language. However, the problems outlined in section one above (falling numbers of students taking German and falling standards of German acquisition among those taking German) may mean that soon most departments will have to consider offering *ab initio* German language tuition, which would, of course, impact on the rest of the curriculum.

The Key Characteristics of the 'Birmingham Model'

- It contains a broad conception of German Studies (the study of Germany from a variety of disciplinary angles).
- It is based on the assumption that students *must* understand the principles of social research (methodology) to be able to study social phenomena.
- Emphasis is therefore placed on understanding the assumptions upon which research methodologies and research methods are based.
- It requires an advanced understanding of the German language for research.
- The intellectual focus is on contemporary Germany in its European context.
- The IGS identifies itself as an Area Studies paradigm to the right of the German Cultural Studies paradigm on the continuum above, offering cross-cutting economic, social, political and international analyses of Germany.

In summary, the above model could be integrated into a wider German Studies undergraduate degree, including elements of the 'traditional' model (i.e. literature). The combination of training in generic research skills and exposure to a variety of topic areas (literature, society, politics, film etc.) would make the programme attractive to the declining pool of German undergraduates.

'The Aston Model'

The following gives an overview of an integrative model to teaching and learning German language and culture at undergraduate level, as developed and implemented at Aston University. It does so by focusing on the rationale of the model and its methodological and didactic profile.

The Aston approach arises from the paradigm shift in the late 1980s in the field of German Studies in the UK described above, and can, therefore, be seen as a response to these changes. It is based upon two fundamental assumptions:

1) Learning of the language is the fundamental component of foreign language study abroad and

2) Language is a medium to express and to understand the target culture.

The underlying premise is the incorporation of elements of German culture, literature, linguistics, history and Area Studies (*Landeskunde*) into the process of learning German language. By doing so, it consequently shifts away from the traditional approach to 'Auslandsgermanistik',[27] but should not be mistaken simply for similar models of Anglo-American "Culture Studies". As far as content is concerned, the Aston approach corresponds to some extent with the rationale underlying the model of Intercultural German Studies (Interkulturelle Germanistik, *IG*). In particular, the concept of culture is essentially understood not in a diachronic sense as a culture with capital C, but in a synchronic way "als etwas, das immer hergestellt wird und auch verändert wird".[28] Hence, the Aston approach places the emphasis on language, literature and culture since the Enlightenment, including popular literature and media and analysing it in relation to its role and function in the communication process in society. Furthermore, the didactic concept of *IG* stresses the importance of comparative approaches to analyse the target and one's own culture. In doing so, it emphasises the development of *intercultural competence*, understood as the "Fähigkeit Verschiedenheit zu akzeptieren, mit Hilfe von Sprache eine neue Kultur zu

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[27] The traditional approach to 'Auslandsgermanistik' is derived from the 'Dreiermodell' of German 'Germanistik', which is based on linguistics, classical literature (Ältere deutsche Literatur) and modern literary studies (Neuere deutsche Literatur).

[28] Bausinger (1999).

entdecken und die eigene neu sehen zu lernen".[29] Thus, the Aston approach introduces content areas, which put the accent on intercultural *Landeskunde* and the Anglo-German relationship in the past and present, comparative linguistic studies and intercultural text comparison. However, the concept of Intercultural German Studies is not without its limitations, especially for the context of German Studies abroad. This is because it is mainly based on the study of literature[30] and is, therefore, appropriate for those students who possess a high level of linguistic knowledge. This is, however, rarely the case,[31] because German Studies freshers arrive at tertiary level with inadequate linguistic skills.[32] In addition, the use of such slogans like "intercultural dialogue" or "cultural maturity" in publications of Intercultural German Studies do not foster cultural awareness, when learners are unable to conduct even the simplest of dialogues in the target language, let alone reading and reflecting on literary texts. Hence, language teaching should have great emphasis placed on it in German studies curricula at undergraduate level. It is the essential "Arbeitsinstrument"[33] which enables students to understand and enhance their knowledge of German culture and society. Furthermore, a high level of proficiency, including written and spoken skills, is expected from students with German Studies degree in the world of employment. However, recent trends within the field of German Studies demonstrate clearly that German language has a rather secondary status in curricula [34.] According to HEFCE report in 1996:

> it is rare to find an established policy on the use of the target language in teaching (..) particularly within the content curriculum (…) Teaching entirely in German was the norm in less than 20% of the institutions visited (...) In 23% of cases, the assessors reported that the use of the target language should be extended and made consistent.[35]

With reference to this, teaching content in English, which seems to be a common practice, is rather a loss, as academic subjects of German Studies provide a *natural* content for

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[29] Krumm (1995), p. 159.

[30] See Wierlacher (1987).

[31] Glück (1989), p. 68.

[32] See Kolinsky (1994); Reershemius (2001).

[33] See Saalbach (1999) for a further discussion.

[34] See Kolinsky (1994).

language instruction and language use. In addition, research data provides evidence that language is learned most effectively in meaningful social and academic contexts. Thus, content provides a motivational and cognitive basis for language learning, it stimulates students' interest as it consists of issues related to subject matters and it involves cognitive aspects such as problem solving skills.[36] Hence, a balanced approach, which combines content with language skills, might present future potential for German Studies.[37]

The Aston approach seeks to respond to these challenges by placing the emphasis on language skills and integrating them into content curricula. First of all, students are offered intensive language courses that, in contrast to traditional classes (separate teaching of written and spoken skills), integrate both of these skills into the learning process by simultaneously developing students' listening and reading comprehension skills. In order to improve students' accuracy, grammar lectures and tutorials were introduced. The intention was to equip students with skills that enable them to analyse German literary and journalistic texts as well as to write academic essays in German for language and content classes. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on collaborative forms of work. A task- and project-based approach is practised, whereby intercultural topics are particularly encouraged. Content classes that are part of the German curriculum are taught in German. Hence, the students hear and read German and concurrently gain knowledge and a deeper understanding of German society and culture.[38] In addition, students improve their writing skills by completing essays and course work in German.[39]

To meet the expectations of modern society and thereby to equip students with the competencies required, the Aston model places emphasis on teaching and developing

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[35] HEFCE-Report (1996) can be obtained from: www.hefce.ac.uk.

[36] For a discussion on content-based instruction see Lamsfuss-Schenk & Wolff (1999) (http://www.ualberta.ca/~german/ejournal/) and Short (1993).

[37] This was emphasised by Kolinsky (1994). For her, one of the most important challenges for German Studies is seeking: "die Konvergenz von Sprache und Kultur, von Verstehen und Analyse, auf die Germanistik in allen ihren Schattierungen und Kombinationen im Grunde abhebt" (ibid., 44)

[38] Reershemius (2001).

[39] Resent research studies confirmed that writing is particularly beneficial for learning a foreign language and hence should be encouraged in the classroom, see Schreiter (1998).

'transferable skills, which may have some relevance beyond their programme of study in the world of employment'.[40] On every level and in every class the students are familiarised with the techniques and tools that increase their analytical and presentational skills and enable them to perform the team and project work.

Key Characteristics of the 'Aston Model'

- Its integrative nature which incorporates teaching language skills into academic subject areas; writing, reading, speaking in German while learning about German culture and society is the underlying premise of the model.
- The content ist based on language, literature, history and culture since the Enlightenment, including popular literature and media and its role and function in the communication process in society.
- An emphasis on the acquisition of so-called transferable skills, including various tools and techniques of analysis as well as presentational and organisational skills.

As we can see, this model has certain overlaps with both the 'traditional' and 'social-science-based' models of German Studies.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to outline and establish the decline in interest in German Studies in the UK, discuss a variety of conceptual approaches to studying the topic and present two models to add to the perennial debate on just what German Studies are supposed to be. The latter consisted of a social science-based approach, carried out at the IGS in Birmingham, which combines core social research skills with German area specialist knowledge and language proficiency, thus adding rigour to the vague notion of 'Area Studies'. The Aston model, on the other hand, emphasises the centrality of language and offers a programme tailored to students' needs and interests. This latter point underlies both models: the need to pay attention to *what* students wish to study, for in an increasingly

[40] Ibid.

consumer-led market, there is a need to be flexible enough to attract a range of students without watering down the distinctive epistemological approach of the department. Finally, we firmly believe that a plurality of approaches to the study of Germany is good for the subject as a whole. In times of declining interest in language acquisition in general, and in German and the study of Germany in particular, it may be wiser to pool ideas and resources in order to reverse this trend, rather than to retreat into entrenched paradigms. Thus, departments that offer elements of the 'traditional' German Studies and the 'social science-based' focus on sociology, politics and cultural studies may be in a better position to survive what may well prove to be a very challenging decade for modern languages.

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