

GFL



German as a foreign language

25 years of GFL – A review and a look ahead

Silke Mentchen with the current editors

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Our journal for German as a Foreign Language (GFL) was founded in 1999, 25 years ago, at the Institute for Germanic Studies in London, by Dr Reinhard Tenberg, Professor Guido Rings (both from the then Anglia Polytechnic University in Cambridge), Professor Chris Hall (then at the university of Leicester), and Professor Christian Fandrych (then at King's College, London). Since then, our journal has filled a gap in the publishing landscapes in the field of German Studies (which we understand to encompass German as a Foreign Language) with regard to two crucial aspects: First, GFL was if not the first, at least among the first German Studies journals published completely online. Not only that, it was also conceptualised as an open access journal independent of an academic publishing house, while at the same time offering rigorous quality assurance through the work of the editorial team and broader advisory board. Second, GFL offered a truly international outlook.

Regarding the first point, the fact that all articles are available open access without the commercial interface of an academic publisher constitutes a service to the global German Studies academic community. With its first issue published in 2000, GFL has since then published 3 issues every year, each featuring normally between 6 and 10 articles – totalling 560 articles at the time of writing (August 2024). The editorial and reviewing work is done for free by academics who believe in the value of this publication forum and it is sustained by an international editorial team and by our advisory board members who are based in 14 different countries. We also owe huge thanks to GFL's long serving Webmaster, Dr Uwe Richter, who is retiring this year from his GFL duties.

The journal is not sustained by a publisher, and the small income from featuring topical adverts on the landing page is used to pay a company for web hosting. Thanks to a recent grant from the Schröder Fund, from the German Section at the University of Cambridge, we were able to update the architecture of our website which has been moved into a *WordPress* format together with our substantial archive of past issues. We

were keen to update the journal's appearance in accordance with current best practice in inclusive web design (font size and type, contrast, colour options, etc.), making the journal more accessible for a more diverse readership. We are currently working towards updating the appearance of other visual and typographic elements as well, such as our logo and article template.

Alongside well-established researchers in the field, GFL has been a high quality, easily accessible publication space for academics from regions and countries with less or no financial support and for early career academics. The GFL statistics show that it attracts readers from around the world, and it is approached by authors from diverse geographical regions. At a time when the Higher Education Sector, specifically the Humanities, and most specifically the Modern Languages Sector are in need of support to sustain themselves, we think that GFL can help maintain and strengthen German Studies. Recent issues have tackled subjects like, for example, language teaching and AI, teaching beginners' German, diversity in German language teaching (forthcoming).

Founding GFL editor Professor Guido Rings summarises:

As one of the founding editors of GFL, who stayed with the journal for most of the last 25 years, I am very happy to see it further gaining worldwide recognition and excellence. Since its foundation, GFL has – thanks to its free open access – clearly become an important reference source for German as a Foreign Language teachers, lecturers and postgraduate students globally, many of whom bring through their didactic and/or academic contributions unique cultural and educational perspectives to the journal.

The sheer number of applied articles and helpful reviews in key areas related to the field is after 25 years impressive and includes, for example, linguistics, intercultural and transcultural studies, film and media, postcolonial and decolonial studies, literature, history and sociology. However, GFL is in my opinion not just multidisciplinary: through its open design, it has encouraged authors to go beyond the traditional limitations of their own discipline and, as such, facilitated interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary orientations, which seem key for the survival of German as a Foreign Language learning and teaching in schools and universities. I wish GFL and its growing team all the best for the future!

(Email to the current editorial team in July 2024)

Regarding the second point, most of the existing German Studies journals continue to feature mainly Germanophone contributions mostly from researchers based in the German-speaking countries, which obviously form the main hub for German Studies in Higher Education teaching and research. On the other hand, journals that were initiated outside German-speaking countries tended to be mainly sustained by or addressing the

academic community at their ‘home base’, e.g., *Germanistische Mitteilungen* by the Belgian German Studies association, *German Life and Letters* by UK and Irish researchers. GFL was innovative here as well with a thoroughly international reach – encouraging contributions both in German and English, ensuring a broad range of contributions, not being tied to a subject organisation based in a specific country, and maintaining an internationally staffed editorial and advisory board of well-established German Studies researchers, while always ensuring some editorial anchoring in the UK, not least because of the opportunity to publish articles in English. During the first 10 years of its existence, beyond researchers based in Germany and the UK, GFL has published contributions from researchers based in (in alphabetical order): Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan and USA. More recently, GFL managed to extend its global reach and contributions to the journal, in addition to the countries named already above, now include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cameroon, Croatia, Hungary, Iran, Jordan, South Korea, Lithuania, Mongolia, Morocco, North Macedonia, Poland, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden and Turkey.

Founding GFL editor Dr Reinhard Tenberg reflects:

First of all, huge congratulations to all involved in the online *German as a Foreign Language* journal (GFL)! [In 1999], the uptake of German at British universities was in decline. Teachers at Secondary schools and at universities were looking for new ways of teaching and learning in an interactive, multi-media learning environment. Apart from the fairly academic *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* published by the Herder-Institut in Leipzig, there were no journals that were easily accessible to a wider teaching audience.

Thus, we wanted to have a journal that was freely accessible worldwide with peer-reviewed articles in both English and German that were relevant, practical and helpful to teachers of German as a Foreign Language. I am very pleased to see that the initial teething problems of receiving contributions mainly from Britain and Germany have been solved, and that GFL is now an internationally renowned journal [...].

(Email to the current editorial team in July 2024)

While looking through the archive, we found some interesting trends. In terms of the journal’s format, we observed a decline, in numbers, of book or conference reviews and an increase of ‘Special Issues’, i.e. issues dedicated to a specific topic. Topics covered in GFL throughout include articles on all four skills, on study abroad, on lesson plan-

ning covering, for example, grammar, pragmatics, learner motivation, and didactics. The use of digital tools has been a frequent topic, perhaps not surprising for an online journal that started at the onset of Computer-Assisted Language Learning. ‘Blended Learning’ features strongly even before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic triggered the more widespread use of digital platforms, tools, and methods. Other topics mirror wider social debates with an obvious focus on debates in German-speaking societies or relating to issues in German-speaking cultures. German unification, for example, can be found as a topic in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, and 2010. Migration and multilingualism feature frequently from 2008 onwards. Film and literature (including comics and medieval literature) appear equally regularly as well as articles covering the linguistic foundations of GFL-teaching, spanning areas from phonology to pragmatics and text linguistics.

Thanks to the global reach of the journal, GFL is able to record and discuss the state of ‘Germanistik/Deutsch als Fremdsprache’ in individual regions as follows: UK: 2000, 2001, 2002, 2012 and 2013; Asia: 2003; Austria: 2005; Scandinavia and the Baltics: 2005, 2019, 2020 and 2023; Australia: 2011, 2014, 2020 and 2022; USA: 2011 and 2020; Burkina Faso: 2016 and 2019; Italy: 2016, 2020 and 2023; India and Thailand: 2017; China: 2018, 2020 and 2023; Japan: 2019 and 2023; Hong Kong: 2019 and 2023; Cameroon, Senegal: 2019, 2022 and 2023; Mongolia: 2020; Morocco: 2023; Eastern Europe: 2024.

It seems apt that the very first issue looked out onto the future of German as a foreign language in the new millennium.

Professor Dietmar Rösler, also present when GFL was first conceived, writes:

Eine online-Zeitschrift für Deutsch als Fremdsprache [war] damals noch eine innovative, mutige Idee [...]. Ich [...] möchte aus der Ferne den neuen und alten Mitgliedern der Redaktion ganz herzlich zu ihrer Energie und Begeisterung gratulieren, mit der sie diese Zeitschrift produziert und damit ein hervorragendes Internationales Forum für Deutsch als Fremdsprache geschaffen haben.

(Email to the current editorial team in November 2024)

We hope that with this relaunch after 25 years of GFL we will reach ever more academics, either as contributors or as readers, who believe in the same principles as we do: easily accessible publishing at no cost, open access, and inclusive formats. We would like to encourage early career, and not so early career colleagues to send the

editorial team proposals and abstracts on any topic they find relevant. Proposals for special issues are also welcome.

We would like to finish by adding one more statement by one of the founder members of GFL. Professor Christian Fandrych writes:

Congratulations to German as a Foreign Language and all those involved, past and present, on its 25th anniversary! When we embarked on this project in 1999, our aim was to strengthen applied German Studies at both school and university level by creating a scholarly journal that would publish easily accessible, high-quality research in the field of language teaching and learning with a focus on German, but also show how this research can be relevant to the actual teaching and learning of German. We have therefore decided to provide a platform for both academic articles and more practical contributions (in the classroom practice section *Unterrichtspraxis*). The relevance and impact of research on society, the involvement and participation of society in articulating research needs and driving new research paradigms is something that is even more important today than it was at the time. I am therefore delighted that GFL continues to thrive and I am grateful for its outstanding contributions to the scholarly debate in German Studies over the past 25 years. I wish GFL all the best for the next 25 years.

(Email to the current editorial team in September 2024)

The current GFL editors are:

Professor Claus Ehrhardt (Urbino, Italy)

Jun.Prof. Diana Feick (Jena, Germany)

Associate Professor Klaus Geyer (Odense, Denmark)

Professor Chris Hall (Chester, UK)

Dr. Heiko F. Marten (Mannheim, Germany)

Professor Silke Mentchen (Cambridge, UK)

Professor Melani Schroeter (Reading, UK)



Picture taken at the 25-year celebration event in Cambridge in November 2024.