

## The Need for Corpora of Spoken German in Academic and Business Settings

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### I. Introduction

In Europe, German is the most widely spoken mother tongue (18%), followed by English (13 %), Italian (13 %) and French (12 %), but English is clearly the most commonly used foreign language (38 %), followed by German and French, both 14 % (European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer*, 4). Despite the importance of English as the lingua franca in contemporary academic and business contexts, we claim that there is a need for other languages than English (LOTE). It is, for example, a well-established fact that multilingual expertise is a much needed competence in academic exchange and international trade. In a recent survey of 2,000 firms, 11% of respondents found that a significant amount of business was being lost, and 195 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) confirmed having missed out on an important export contract because of insufficient language skills (CiLT, *Shortages of Foreign Language Skills*, 17f). Also for any academic exchange to be successful, a sound competence in spoken and written academic language of the respective country is, undoubtedly, a major advantage, and may give future academics the decisive edge.

In academic context, Germany is the most popular host country for foreign students in Europe (European Commission, *Key facts and figures*), and also for Finnish students (Korkala, *International mobility*, 22). For studying in a German-speaking country, exchange students are expected to possess mature German language skills, and especially oral skills are needed for mastering informal conversations with students and staff of the host university as well as to attend lectures, seminars and other interac-

tive teaching and learning settings (Ylönen, *Training mündlicher Kommunikation*, 381, Ylönen & Vainio, *Akateemisen saksan kielen rooli*, 221). In business context, Germany is one of the leading exporters and importers in world merchandise trade (WTO, *International Trade Statistics*, 12), and the most important trade partner for Finland (Dransfeld, *30 Jahre DFHK*, 3). Although it cannot be denied that native speakers of German may sometimes prefer to speak English (Clyne, *Braucht Deutschland eine bewusstere Sprachenpolitik*, 20), there is evidence that most German-speaking business people prefer to use German with business partners in Eastern European countries, such as Poland, Czechia and Hungary, and in the Netherlands<sup>1</sup> (Vandermeeren, *Fremdsprachen in europäischen Unternehmen*, 241f).

Despite of these obvious needs for multilingual expertise and, in our example, German as a foreign language skills in academic and business contexts, other languages than English are learned less and less in schools. In Finland, for example, LOTE learning in school has decreased from the 1960s onwards. Especially the number of learners of German has dramatically decreased. Whereas in 1962 still 42 % of the pupils in secondary school (oppikoulu) studied German as their first foreign language, in 1974 the percentage was only 8,4 (*Kieliohjelmakomitean mientintö*, 47). This development continues until today: In 1996, 4 % and in 2008 only 1,2 % chose German as their first foreign language (A1). Although the numbers of learners of German as a second (A2) or third (B2) foreign language are somewhat higher, the same tendency can be observed: A2: 16,9 %/1996 – 6,4 %/2008 and B2 6,9 %/2001 – 6,6 %/2008 (Kumpulainen & Saari, *Koulutuksen määrälliset indikaattorit 2006*; Kumpulainen, *Koulutuksen määrälliset indikaattorit 2009*).

One reason for the decline in learners of German (and LOTE in general) at Finnish schools may lie in conservative language teaching pedagogies that fail to keep up with current societal developments. Especially the training of oral skills and a mean-

1 In these countries the active use of GVL ranges between 58-80 %.

ingful integration of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in language education are, for example, still rather neglected areas (Kara, *Rohkaise minua puhumaan saksaa*; Ylönen et al., *Entwicklung kritischer Medienkompetenz*). Current language education is still very much based on textbooks with emphasis on grammar, vocabulary and *correct* language use, based on the *rules* of written language (Taalas et al. *Media landscapes*, 248; Kauppinen et al., *Kielten oppikirjat*). However, a prerequisite for task-based and action-oriented learning of foreign languages is a shift in attention toward language in *use*, away from traditional *normative* language teaching. The question of what is considered as appropriate communication can only be examined and studied with the help of situated authentic communication. This is why we developed, for example, material based on authentic video recordings and conversation analysis to prepare exchange students for their studies abroad (EUROMOBIL). This authentic material, however, had to be restricted to only a few examples and as such can only illuminate small samples of academic discourse. As for corpus-informed educational material, there are, indeed, various publications on corpus-based analyses of oral academic and business discourse in German, conducted from different perspectives; but the analysed corpora are relatively small compared to today's digital corpora. In addition, they are restricted to certain disciplines and/or genres and, above all, they are not publicly available<sup>2</sup>.

However, the role of German as an academic language should not only be considered normatively from the native perspective of German-speaking countries. If the goal is to further multilingualism and cultural diversity in the educational system (Europarat,

2. See for example: Auer and Basler, *Reden und Schreiben in der Wissenschaft*; Debes, *Mündlicher Wissenschaftsdiskurs*; Grütz, *Strategien zur Rezeption von Vorlesungen*; Kotthoff, *Vortragsstile im Kulturvergleich*; Meer, *Der Prüfer ist nicht der König*; Munsberg, *Mündliche Fachkommunikation*; Reuter, *Interkulturalität oder Professionalität*; Schlabach, *Deutschsprachige Wirtschaftsvorlesungen*; Steuble, *Integrative Konversationsanalyse*; Tiittula, *Professionelle Bearbeitung von Zurückweisungen in Messegesprächen*; Wiesmann, *Mündliche Kommunikation im Studium*.

*Vertrag zur Gründung der Europäischen Gemeinschaft* Art. 149), German as an academic language has to be observed also in non-German speaking countries, and the “native speaker conceit“ has to be discarded (Krumm, *Bedingungen für eine wirkungsvolle Förderung der deutschen Sprache*, 27). It can be assumed that academic German abroad is shaped more strongly by local discursive practices. These local varieties of academic German should not be stigmatised as inferior but should be seen as a resource for the development of multilingual and multicultural identities (Krumm, 26f). Nevertheless, until now there have been no studies on academic and business German as a *vehicular language* (GVL).

In the following, we will first introduce the planned FinGer project (German as a vehicular language in academic and business settings in Finland) and then discuss the possibilities that corpora and the related pedagogical concept of data-driven learning offer for foreign language learning and teaching. Finally, we will make some suggestions for the development of more pedagogically oriented corpus design.

## II. The FinGer project

The aim of the FinGer project is to explore the role of GVL in Finland in a radically transforming European context. Special focus is on oral communicative practices in academic and business environments. The key objectives are 1) to explore the attitudes of students, university staff and business professionals in Finland towards multilingual higher education, science and business contexts and the role of GVL, 2) to collect empirical evidence on the role and diversity of academic and business discourse in German, and 3) to provide empirically verified insights into the variety of oral academic and business discourse practices in different countries, disciplines and genres. With this study, we hope to promote multilingualism, new political solutions and pedagogical strategies for effective and motivating language training in Finland. To

achieve the first objective, we conducted online-surveys among students (in 2008) and university staff (in 2009) in Finland with 3,500 and 3,600 respondents respectively; a third survey among business professionals will be conducted in spring 2010. Thorough analysis of this off-site data will inform the design and compilation of corpora for oral academic and business German in Finland. The empirical on-site data, consisting of recordings of authentic audio-visual speech events in academic and business sessions, will in turn be analysed by means of conversation analysis. It is hoped that the comparison of on-site and off-site data analyses will help explain possible attitudes towards GVL and perceptions of culture-bound communicative characteristics. Already now first results of the survey amongst students indicate that the discussion behaviour in German-speaking countries is perceived as more aggressive than in Finland (Ylönen and Vainio, *Akateemisen saksan kielen rooli*). Analyses of the recordings of spoken interaction in academic and business settings are expected to present possible explanations of such perceptions.

The concept of the FinGer project is rather broad and can be divided into two sub-projects: the first one focuses on communicative practices in academic contexts and the second on business domains. The sub-project on academic communicative practices FinAG (Academic German as a Vehicular Language in Finland: German in comparison to Finnish) has progressed furthest so far, not only in terms of off-site data collection but also in terms of preliminary on-site data collection. However, the corpus compilation is still dependent on receiving funding. After two unsuccessful attempts to receive funding for a European project to study the role of GVL in academic and business settings (Schneider & Ylönen, *Plädoyer für ein Korpus*), we decided to approach national foundations to proceed with the corpus idea. Our German partner at the University of Leipzig recently received funding for a comparative research project on spoken academic German, Polish and English (Herder Institut, *Gesprochene Wissenschaftssprache*). The parallel corpora for academic German and Polish in Poland, German and English in the UK and German

in Germany will constitute the Leipzig corpus of spoken academic discourse. If our application for the compilation of parallel corpora of spoken academic German and Finnish will be successful, these corpora will be implemented into the Leipzig corpus. The parallel corpora, the first of their kind, will allow the study of the extent to which local discursive practices influence the use of GVL in the respective countries. They will be freely accessible on the internet for research purposes as well as for language learning and teaching. While the use of corpora is not yet a very common pedagogical approach in learning and teaching German, they are more widely used for English language learning and teaching purposes. One reason is that there are more and user-friendlier corpora available for different domains of English. In the following, the state of the art in corpora and data-driven learning will be discussed.

### III. Corpora and data driven learning

Today, corpus linguistics is no longer concerned with corpus analysis and theory application only, but also with corpus evaluation, self-reflection, and a new concern with theory in the light of experience. According to Tognini-Bonelli (*Corpus Linguistics at Work*, 17), corpus-driven language analysis can lead to a rethinking of traditional linguistic categories such as the division between grammar and lexis in language education. After almost three decades of continuous development in corpus linguistics, teachers and students can nowadays enjoy free online access to huge collections of spoken and written texts, and more recently also to specialised and multi-dimensional corpora. In 1991, Johns (*Should you be persuaded*, 2) first formulated the data-driven learning approach to language teaching and suggested that the language learner is “essentially, a research worker whose learning needs to be driven by access to linguistic data – hence the term ‘data-driven learning’ (DDL) to describe the approach”. Since then, a large and growing body of literature has shown

that language corpora allow a holistic study of speech sequences, patterns and contexts when successfully integrated in the modern ICT-informed language classroom. (Biber et al., *Corpus linguistics*; Biber, *University language*; Botley et al., *Multilingual corpora*; Lemnitzer and Zinsmeister, *Korpuslinguistik*).

One example of a state-of-the art corpus of spoken academic language is the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English* (Simpson et al., MICASE), a specialized corpus of academic spoken American English which reflects authentic language use in academic genres such as lectures, seminars, advising sessions and other academic speech events. In Finland, MICASE has gained increasing popularity thanks to Mauranen and her detailed studies of scientific discourse practices in the English language (*Speech corpora in the classroom; A Rich Domain of ELF*). Mauranen analysed feedback from teachers and learners who had participated in MICASE corpus training sessions. While teachers were simultaneously enthused and overwhelmed by the possibilities that corpus consultations offered for classroom language teaching, feedback from learners varied considerably, depending on how well-acquainted they were with the target language, and how skilled they were in the use of ICTs.

In addition, Finland is home to the only academic lingua franca corpus so far, *English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings (ELFA)*, a corpus designed to describe and formulate standards for English used as an international language in Finnish academic settings. The corpus consists of one million words of recorded and transcribed spoken academic English as a lingua franca; however, the collection is only available to researchers on request. In contrast, the *Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English Online (VOICE)* contains over one million words and is the first publicly available corpus of English as a lingua franca that is not restricted to a specific register such as academic discourse.

As for German, the compilation of large language corpora has traditionally been limited to the field of lexicography, dialectology and variation studies, and so far there have not been any large scale projects to document and investigate contemporary

oral academic discourse in German. A recent survey of 48 corpora of German, (Lemmnitzer und Zinsmeister, *Korpuslinguistik*) identified only 11 corpora of spoken German, for example, the *Deutsches Spracharchiv (DSAv)* and *Datenbank Gesprochenes Deutsch (DGD)*, created by the Institut für Deutsche Sprache (IDS) in Mannheim, *SACODEYL*, a corpus of youth language collected in seven European countries, or the *Kiel Corpus* of spoken German, a collection of read and spontaneous German, to name but a few.

More recent research on pedagogic issues regarding the integration of corpus-driven materials in language learning environments investigates the advantages of direct corpus consultations as opposed to lower-level corpus-based activities (e.g. moving from ready-made frequency academic word lists and text-based exploitation of language phenomena with manual concordances to using ready made concordances for learning activities) (Chambers, *Integrating Corpus Consultation*). A data-driven, or in this context, a concordance-driven approach is primarily inductive and focuses more on learning than on teaching: learners are instructed to look for patterns in sometimes huge electronic collections of authentic data, and asked to reflect on and make decisions about actual language use based on what they find in the data.

However, not all learners or teachers like such an approach and the reason for this is that most of the currently available online corpora are linguistic tools, designed and annotated for linguistic research. Indeed, due to their complex search interfaces and highly textual nature, they require quite advanced technological and literacy skills from both the learners and teachers. To overcome this gap between linguistic and pedagogical exploitations of corpora, a tutorial was developed at the Jyväskylä University Language Centre in 2004, which focuses on the integration of corpus-driven activities for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classrooms. Taking into account the richness of corpora in terms of genre and discourse practices, speech acts, and pragmatics, the Corpus Library tutorial (Laakkonen et al.), which is freely avail-

able online, proposes a series of meaningful exercises to gradually exploit the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English and the British National Corpus for advanced language learning and teaching purposes.

A notable exception to the linguistic-oriented design of corpora is the aforementioned SACODEYL corpus, a pedagogically annotated and enriched tool for language learning and teaching purposes. It consists of interviews with young people from seven European countries on a variety of topics allowing teachers and learners to annotate and highlight the language according to a list of available annotation categories, such as topic, grammar, lexicon, text style, or communicative function. This approach goes well beyond the traditional concordance-driven materials and quantitative practices often associated with corpus consultations. When working with and analysing textual records such as concordances, teachers have to ensure that they are re-contextualised, otherwise they are useless for the learner and the acquisition process.

To reach a wider community of teachers and learners we need not only to further adapt existing corpora to different learning and teaching contexts and learner needs (Braun, *Integrating corpus work*) but also increase the number of pedagogically annotated corpora such as SACODEYL. In the next chapter, we will therefore make suggestions for design and annotation of the planned pedagogical corpora for the teaching and learning of GVL.

#### IV. Pedagogical corpora annotation

When applying corpus resources to the context of language learning and teaching, it is extremely important that the corpus contains annotations that enable its users to exploit it for their immediate learning needs. These annotations help to mediate corpus information and filter its rich data for pedagogical purposes. This is why the FinAG project will focus on conversation analytical studies of holistic speech events, the results of which

will inform the pedagogical annotation categories of the corpora. It is hoped that the analysis of the language data will give answers to questions such as 1) What conventions and patterns for academic genres can be identified in different disciplines? 2) What are the similarities and differences regarding those conventions in German and Finnish? 3) Are differences in communicative strategies based on the speakers' socialisation in different academic communities? 4) What routine formulae and collocations dominate in German and Finnish oral academic discourse? 5) By what linguistic means do speakers construct interactive academic speech acts, such as disagreeing or giving feedback?

So far, a number of pilot recordings of (monologic) conference presentations in GVL have been collected in Finland. The following excerpts of a conference paper held in German by a native speaker of Finnish will be briefly discussed to demonstrate the scope of possible annotations of learner language phenomena, such as code switching, code mixing, and interferences.<sup>3</sup> These annotations would not only increase our understanding of the dynamic multilingual learner lexicon but also illustrate idiosyncracies associated with local varieties of a vehicular language.

1. *von turku die eben für (.) die sosiaaliturvun sanasto<sup>4</sup> für de(n) deutschen teil verantwortlich ist;*
2. *DAnn hab=ich die erfahrung gemacht die das die MEps also die member für european parlament*
3. *also die übersetzerinnen können noch irgendwie einen erklärenden satz da immer hinstellen<sup>5</sup>*

While the first two examples of code mixing illustrate competent language use of a highly proficient L2 speaker, who pos-

3 Instances of code switching and L1-L2 interferences are shown in bold for quick identification.

4 sosiaaliturvun sanasto = social security vocabulary

5 In Finnish, you would use *laittaa*, i. e. *to put*, in German, however, *hinzufügen* would be the more appropriate verb choice.

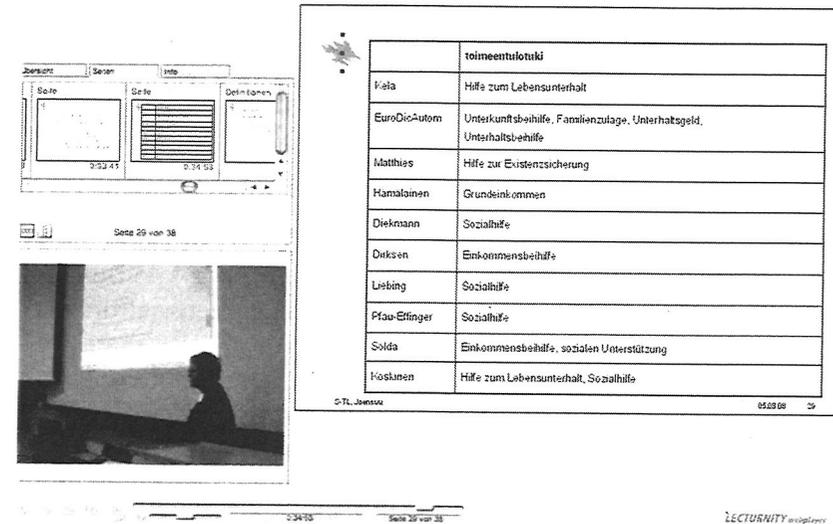


Figure 1. Incorporating visual aids in a multi-modal corpus (LECTURNITY software)

sibly seeks to offer further options to native equivalents, the third example resembles more a strategy to compensate for a gap in L2 vocabulary. A pedagogical corpus would provide such a learner with authentic data and annotations to explain and reflect on these kinds of language behaviour and thus facilitate the acquisition process. Additional support for the acquisition process could be achieved by a combination of sound, video and transcripts, including visual aids such as PowerPoint presentations that are constitutive of many current scientific presentations (cf. Figure 1).

The above examples only hint at the multitude of opportunities for learning and teaching GVL: Academics and professionals will be able to study culture-bound discursive practices in different local, institutional, and disciplinary settings. In addition, the cor-

pora will greatly benefit the design and development of educational material. In the conclusion of our paper we will summarize our main arguments in favour of corpora of spoken German in academic and business contexts and highlight the need for teacher training in DDL-language learning methodology.

## V. Conclusion

The declared long-term objective for all EU citizens is to speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue. Recent developments, however, clearly show a trend towards monolingualism, not only in the academic world but also in many other fields of life, such as business or leisure activities. English has become the most commonly used language in the EU, even though there are more L1 speakers of German than English in Europe. Higher education reforms in Europe have led to an increase in the delivery of academic content through English, a development which may have devastating effects on the vitality of other European national languages (Redder and Ehlich, *Mehrsprachigkeit für Europa*). With the responsibility for promoting societal and individual multilingualism being shifted to higher education institutions, university language policies should be proactive in promoting multilingual competencies in academic and professional settings. The FinGer project aims at such a promotion of GVL in Finland.

It is essential that we provide learners of languages other than English with equally modern tools that respond to their immediate needs. Twenty-five years of corpus linguistics have changed profoundly the way we look at language. Today, the majority of materials and resources for language learning are corpus-informed and also teachers become increasingly aware of corpus resources and their applications in- and outside classroom settings. However, our experience in the classroom shows that more teacher training in hands-on use of ICTs in the classrooms is needed to make language teachers and educators feel empowered in the effective integration of technology. Allowing corpora into

the language classroom means moving away from the traditional role of the teacher as *controller* in the classroom. This shift in the roles of teachers and learners will lead to a more flexible pattern of classroom distribution and hence a different kind of classroom behaviour.

Above survey of existing German corpora indicates a clear need for corpora of spoken interaction in the domains of academic and business because existing corpora of spoken German interaction are neither very recent nor learner-friendly. Such corpora would greatly benefit the development of spoken interaction skills in business and university settings. Pedagogical corpora for spoken discourse based on conversation analytic studies will open up new annotation possibilities regarding interactive practices of academic communication, such as expression of opinions, image cultivation, and argumentative strategies. It is time to expand the pedagogical repertoire of data-driven learning towards more holistic task-based and action-oriented approaches. Not only to encourage new pedagogical solutions for language learning and teaching but also to strengthen the learning of LOTE we need the corpus revolution to also conquer classrooms and language learning settings of other languages than English.

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