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Universität
Braunschweig

International House
SPRACHENZENTRUM



The Role of Language Centres at Universities

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Overview

- 1) Language Centres in Germany – a brief history
- 2) Seven desiderata for University Language Centres
- 3) Summary: What has been achieved, what needs to be done?

Language Centres in Germany – a brief history



<http://www.pflichtlektuere.com/02/03/2012/die-sache-mit-dem-deutsch-lernen/>



Mass universities in the early 1970s: The „cradle“ of German language centres



<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massenuniversit%C3%A4t#/>; 27.06.2021

For a long time (1980s and 1990s) at German universities: The language centre as „unloved child“



And today?

„The position and perceived role of language centres within their own universities may be considered as an obstacle to having influence on university policy. Whether in the UK or elsewhere, language centres are frequently categorised as service departments whose main aim may be the delivery of academic English to international students for EMI purposes. Alternatively, or additionally, they may deliver teaching in national languages for academic purposes, to support the social and cultural integration of international students, and the delivery of what is often classed as ‘elective’ study of a language other than English.“

Critchley/Wyburd (2021): 4

Language Centres today

Language Centres	University management board
<i>Interests</i>	
Diversity	Homogeneity („abbreviations“)
support of plurilingual and intercultural competences	consideration and balancing of many different interests
financial extension	search for savings
<i>Perspective</i>	
European	primarily university-related
<i>Role</i>	
advisor	decision-maker

Hettiger (2019): 53

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First Desideratum

Language Centres need language policies/ language planning!

Language Planning

<i>Status Planning</i>	<i>Corpus Planning</i>	<i>Acquisition Planning</i>	<i>Prestige Planning</i>
Which languages are being used at IHEs?	Glossaries	Allocation of resources	Which languages are granted the rank of „languages of science“?

Hettiger (2019): 75

Language policy in Germany

“About 125 of the world’s constitutions express some policy about language, and about 100 of them name one or more official or national languages with special privileges of use. Nearly half (78) name a single official or national language” (Spolsky 2004: 11f).

- reluctance of state/ government to engage in language policy
- historical reasons: manipulation through language (National Socialism, GDR)
- Discourse about language policy in Germany is much weaker than in other European countries (e.g. France).
- Some prestige languages dominate society (above all English)
- migrant languages are often being perceived as „problem“ or „threat“ (Marten 2016: 154)

Benefits of a language policy for the development of Language Centres

language police with high likelihood of realisation, including financing	strategic orientation of language centres towards language policy of their university	prioritisation of tasks of language centres	language policy and language centres in the context of a comprehensive university development perspective
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Hettiger (2019): 66

Second Desideratum: Language Centres must align their programmes with needs assessments!

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Needs analysis on macro level

language-related data	combination with other data
<i>Motives for studying in Germany</i>	
acquisition resp. consolidation of linguistic knowledge/ get to know Germany/ get to know other forms of learning/ to get along in a foreign culture/ study programme offered in English	knowledge of German
<i>Evaluation of Germany as study location</i>	
Germany as desired destination /English-speaking country as desired destination	students from developing, threshold or industrialized countries
<i>Linguistic abilities</i>	
English abilities (self-assessment); first or second language	gender; student type (first/ part time/ graduate studies); income situation in country of origin
linguistic skills (German) (self-assessment)	subject group; gender; student type (first/ part time/ graduate studies); income situation in country of origin

Hettiger (2019): 212

Needs analysis on meso level

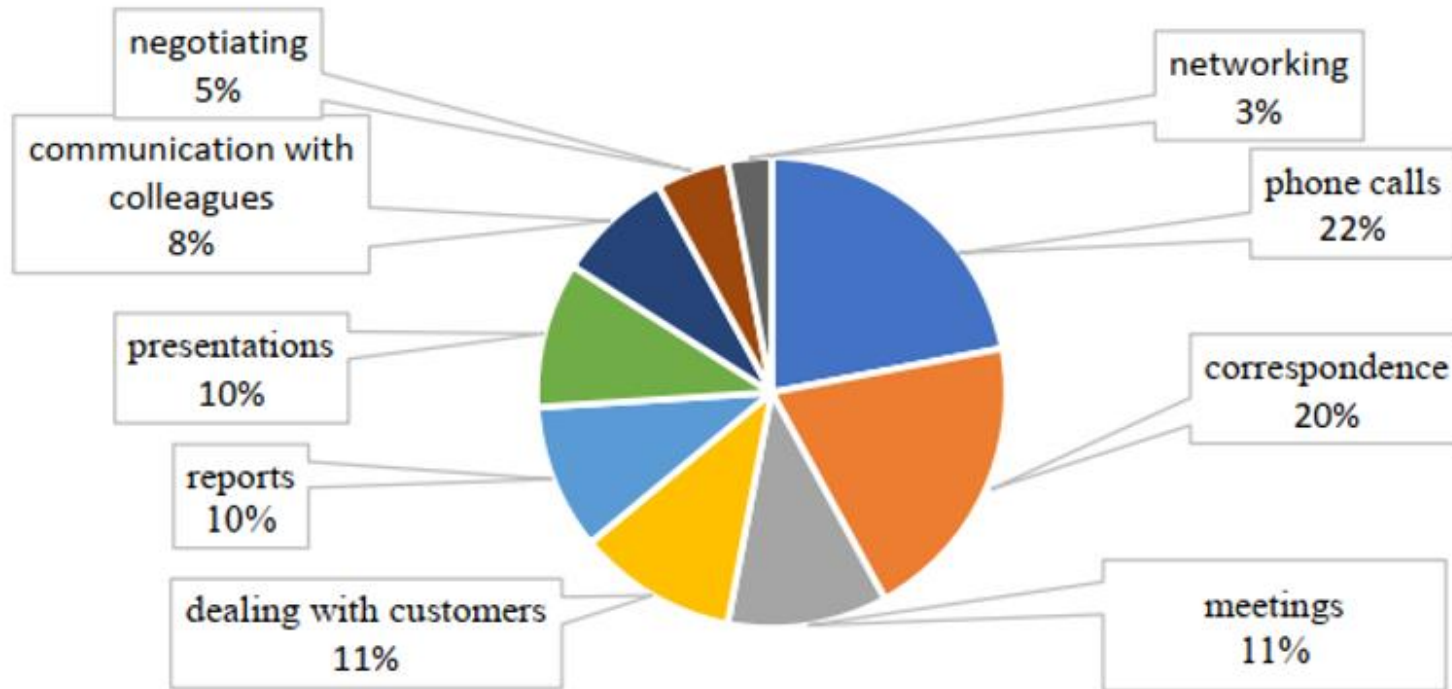
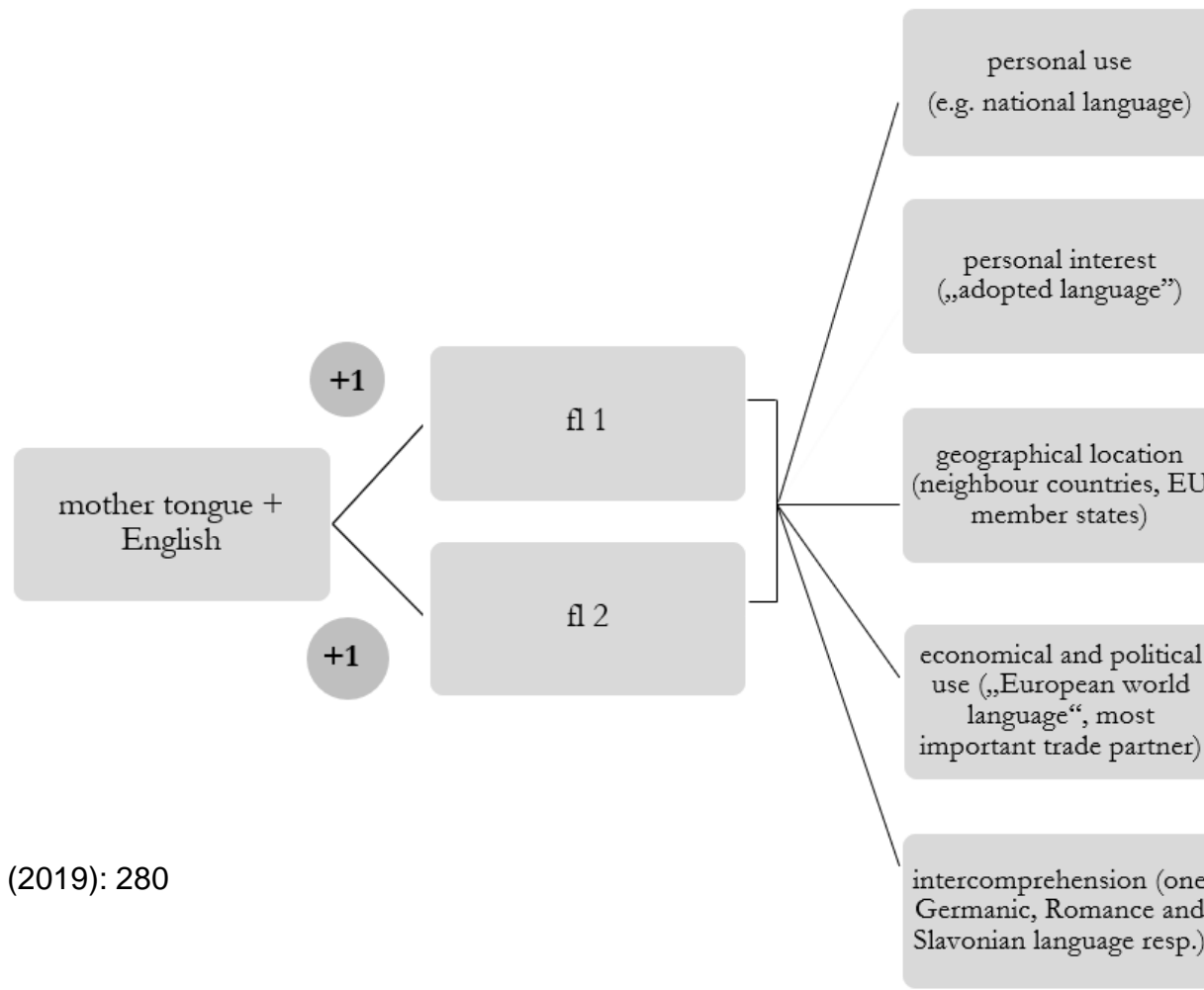


Figure 2: Language needs for future employment: supervisor perspective.

Sieglova/ Stejskalova (2021): 40

Third Desideratum: Language Centres train the national language, English – and more!



Hettiger (2019): 280

Fourth Desideratum: Universities promote the national language!

maintainance of a
collective cultural
capital

maintainance of
typical forms of
argumentation and
perception, and of
typical approaches
(Sapir-Whorf-
hypothesis)

safeguarding
scientific thought
and work of first
language speakers
of German on
the highest
possible level

protection of
humanities and
social sciences,
which have a strong
foundation in
national and
everyday language

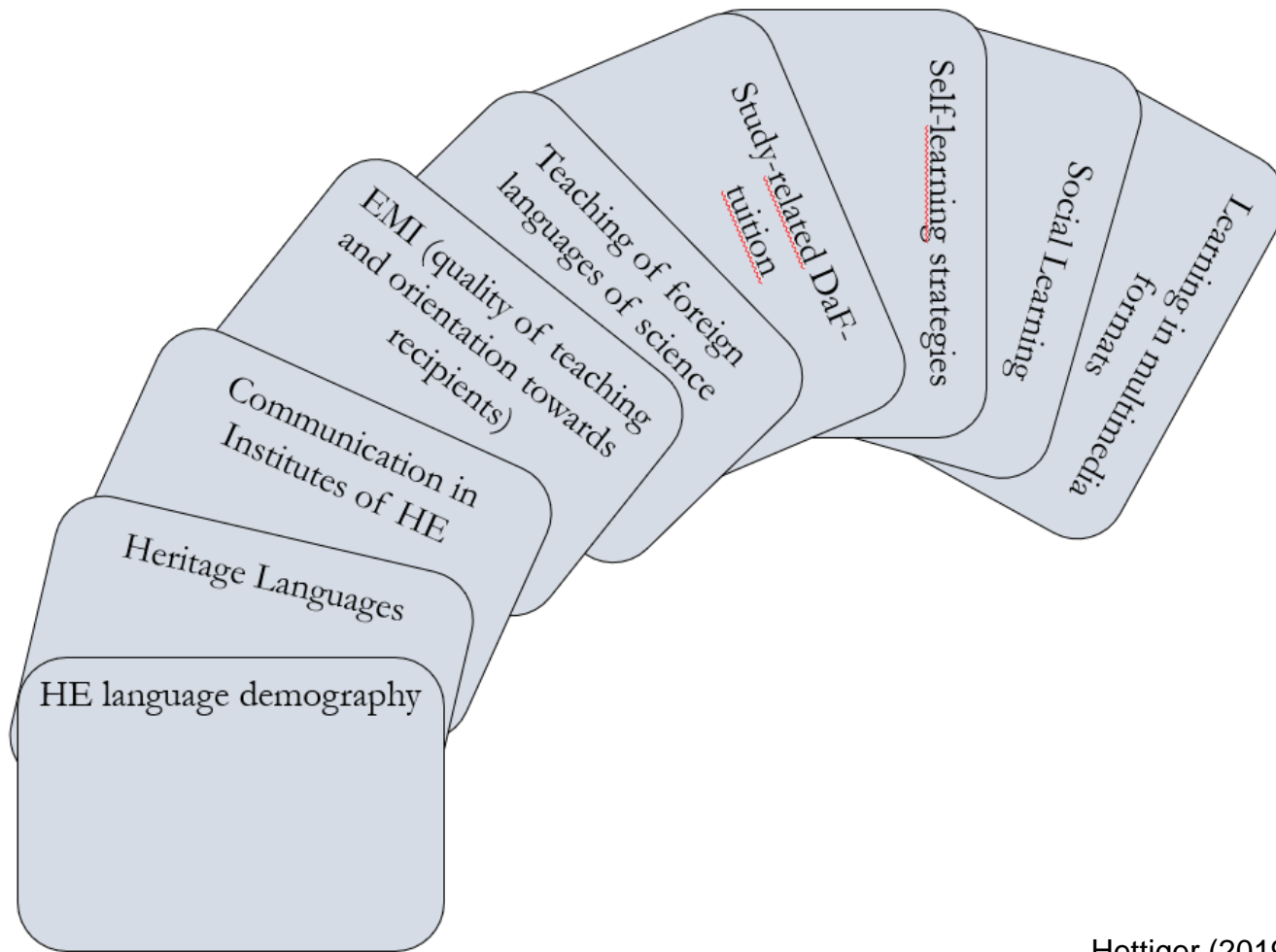
securing knowledge
transfer expert-lay
person

Hettiger (2019): 217



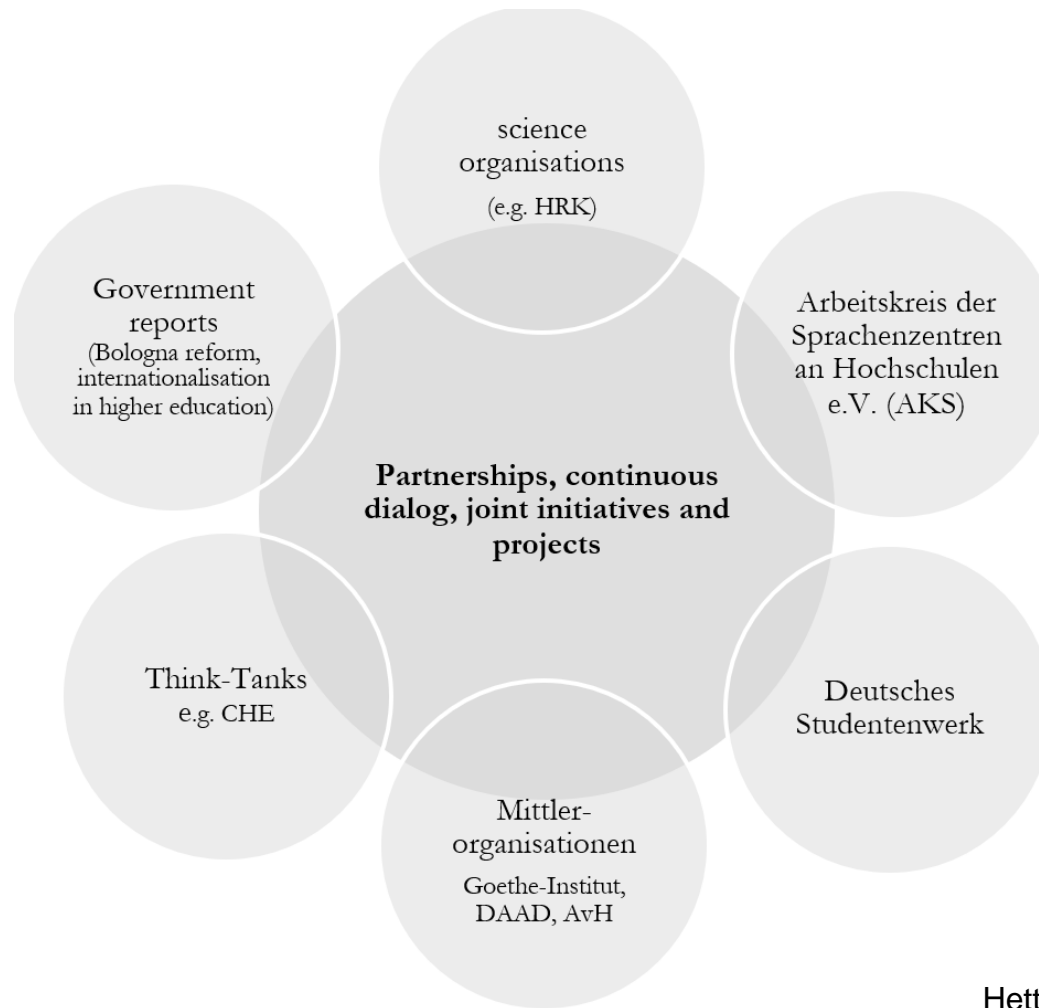
Fifth Desideratum

Language Centres need research!



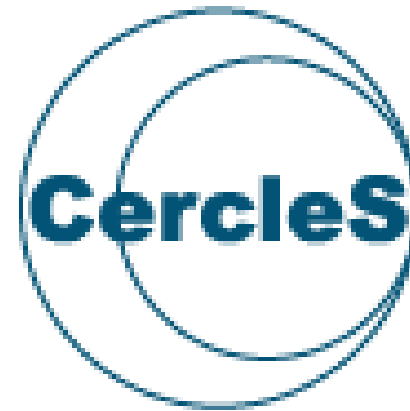
Hettiger (2019): 308

Sixth Desideratum: Language Centres and policy players need to be connected!



Hettiger (2019): 114

Networks on national and European level



Seventh Desideratum: Language Centres need an influential lobby!



HRK Hochschulrektorenkonferenz
Audit „Internationalisierung der Hochschulen“

<https://www.hrk.de/expertise/>; 27.06.2021

The German Science Council (2018)

WR

WISSENSCHAFTSRAT

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Empfehlungen zur Internationalisierung von Hochschulen



Summary: What has been achieved in the last 50 years in Germany?

- Language centres are established at most German universities.
- Their offerings are widely accepted.
- Language centres have established networks.
- The relationship between language teaching and philological education has relaxed.
- The significance of language teaching is increasing alongside the growing significance of „internationalisation“

What has not (yet) been achieved in the last 50 years in Germany? What needs to be done?

- no defined and accepted vocational profile of a „language teacher in higher education“ -> **establishment of a profile of a language teacher in higher education**
- no regulated training/ education for language teachers in higher education -> **structured training / education for language teachers in higher education**
- unclear possibilities for development and promotion of language teachers at universities -> **structured job perspectives for language teachers at universities**
- relatively low status of language teachers at universities -> **recognition of the significant contribution of language centres to internationalisation and tertiary education**
- at most places no commitment to a union of language practice and research -> **establishment and acceptance of practice-oriented research for language education in higher education**

Literature

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