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The German Language and the Real World

Sociolinguistic, Cultural, and Pragmatic Perspectives on Contemporary German

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2 To What Extent is German an International Language?

ULRICH AMMON

I INTRODUCTION

If a language can be used widely in international communication, its speakers have numerous advantages: they can use their native language (mother tongue) for negotiating international business contracts or political treaties, for lecturing and publishing internationally as scientists or scholars, or as tourists, while others have to resort to a foreign language for these activities. The use of a foreign language not only requires considerable additional learning but, as a rule, remains a more strenuous and less effective means of communication than the use of one's native language. In extreme cases, the non-native user of a language may resemble a baby, with respect to his/her verbal skills, as compared to the 'adult' native speaker. Given these practical advantages it is not surprising that most language communities try to spread their language internationally if they see any chance of success, and national pride in their own language further stimulates such endeavours. In this chapter, I shall concentrate on the question of the degree to which the German language actually is international. However, before this question can be assessed systematically, a few remarks on definitions and methods are necessary.

Though the term *international language* occurs quite often in sociolinguistic literature there is no consensus about its meaning. Furthermore, the term is quite uncommon in works of reference for linguists. Where it does occur, it tends to be defined in a way that would not be useful for the present investigation, namely as a language specifically intended for international communication ('created or suggested for adoption for purposes of international communication': Pei 1966: 128, 131). In contrast, I would like to specify the meaning of the term as 'a language actually used in international communication'. Further consideration of *international communication* so defined will help to avoid misunderstanding and illuminate the method by which I intend

to assess the degree of internationality of the German language in comparison to other languages.

A language may be considered international if it is used for communication between different nations, or rather their citizens. The term *nation* is, however, commonly used with two different meanings (see Ammon 1990*a*: 136):

1. in the sense of a political unit, held together by a common government, currency, legal system, etc.: roughly synonymous with country or state;
2. in the sense of a cultural and linguistic unit, held together by a common history, culture, and language: roughly synonymous with nationality.

On the one hand therefore one can define communication as international in relation to (1), if it occurs between citizens of different countries or states. On the other hand communication can be considered international in relation to (2), if it occurs between members of different nationalities, that is, different language communities. A third possibility is to consider communication international if both conditions coincide. Such a combination of conditions could be termed *international communication in the narrower sense*. Accordingly, I shall call communication between citizens of different countries *international (only) in the wider sense*, and communication between members of different nationalities or language communities *interlingual* (that is, bridging two different languages). Only if a language is used for international communication in the narrower sense can it, in my opinion, seriously be considered an *international language*.

Thus if on the one hand, for instance, a German and an Austrian (whose native language is in both cases German) communicate in German, they communicate internationally only in a wider sense, which is of limited interest for our topic. If on the other hand a German-speaking and a French-speaking Swiss (their native language being German and French respectively) communicate in one of their languages, their communication is only interlingual, since both are citizens of the same country. If, however, a French-speaking Swiss and a German (their native language being French and German respectively) communicate in one of their languages, it is an instance of international communication in the narrower sense. These conceptual distinctions are illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 contains the further distinction between *asymmetric* use of a language, in which case the language used for communication is native for one (or some) of the communicators but not the other(s), and *lingua franca* use, in which case the language used is native for

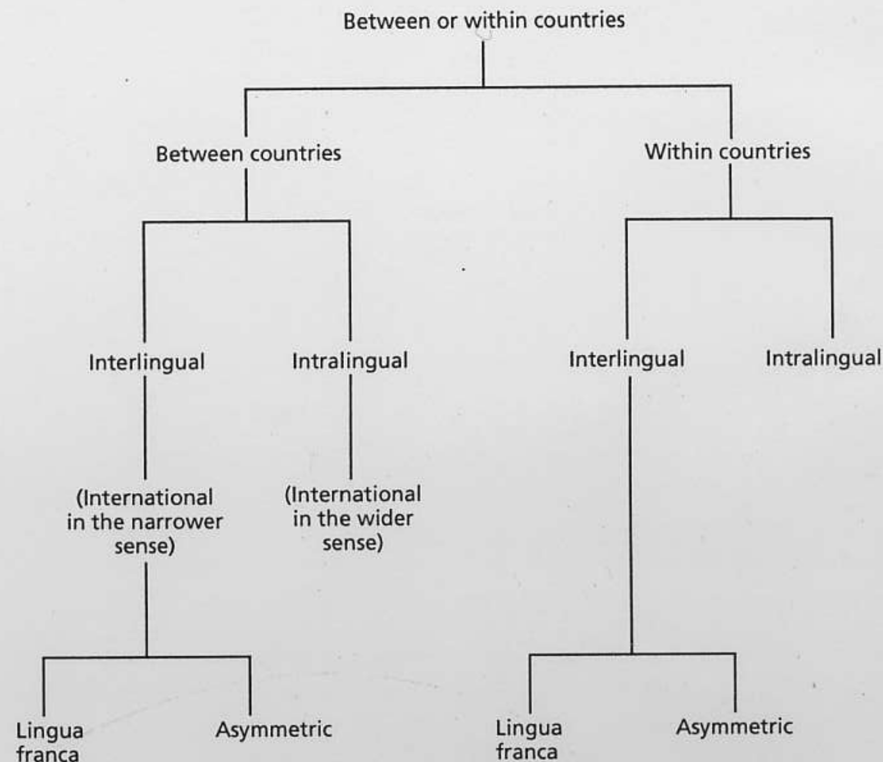

Fig. 2.1. Language choice in communication between speakers from different countries and different nationalities or language communities

none of the communicators. This distinction is important for a precise analysis of international languages; a real international language, one could postulate, has to be used as a lingua franca, not only asymmetrically. For the delimitation of borderline cases, it may be important to specify that 'native language' (or 'mother tongue') should be defined in terms of skills and ontogenetic period of learning (childhood), that is, as really native, in contrast to a language that is merely claimed as a 'mother tongue'. Thus, for an Irishman who grew up with English and speaks it fluently, English is his native language, in spite of the fact that he claims Irish (Gaelic) as his only 'mother tongue'; Irish may, of course, be his second native language if he also learned it in childhood and has a full command of it.

We can now specify that a language is 'more international' the more it is used for international communication in the narrower sense, either asymmetrically or, *a fortiori*, as a lingua franca. Following this line of thought, we can in principle rank languages according to their

degree of internationality or even compare them metrically, that is, on the basis of an interval scale, and not only classify them as either international or non-international, as is sometimes done (e.g. Braga 1979).

It should perhaps be pointed out that these remarks do not yet imply precise scales for ranking or for measuring languages according to their degree of internationality. For a precise procedure, one would, among other considerations, have to specify what counts as a single as opposed to two international communicative events. This is obviously a prerequisite for counting such events reliably, in order to rank or compare languages. However, I shall not attempt this here, not only for want of space, but also because of the limited practical use of such an attempt at the present stage of research. Lacking virtually any data on international communicative events, or at least lacking representative data, we have to rely on mere indicators of them, which have so far not been validated and which cannot in fact be validated in the absence of adequate data for what they supposedly indicate (international communicative events). Their value as indicators can at present only be assessed by bits and pieces of evidence or on an intuitive basis by plausibility arguments. An example of such an indicator is the number of scientific publications in a given language. If they are more numerous in language L*a* than in L*b*, we may then assume that in the domain of science more international written communication occurs in L*a* than in L*b*—that is, if we do not have any reason to believe that publications in L*a* are, on average, less widely read than those in L*b*. Though such reasoning may appear questionable at times, we have no alternative for the time being but to base a good deal of our evidence on it. It should, however, be noted that I shall present data not just on a single but a whole number of such hypothetical indicators. One could, therefore, argue that the inadequacy of one indicator might, to some degree, be compensated for by the others.

2 SOME BASIC FACTORS DETERMINING THE INTERNATIONALITY OF A LANGUAGE

2.1 *Numerical Strength*

It seems plausible to assume that all else being equal the language of a large community has a better chance of becoming an international language than does that of a small community. A large community's language is more likely to be studied as a foreign language, because it opens up more opportunities for contacts than the language of a small

community. Even a superficial consideration reveals that practically all international languages have, or—as for instance in the case of Latin—once had, large communities of native speakers. This is reinforced by the fact that there are several thousand languages in the world (Grimes (1984: p. xvii), for instance, counts 5,781), most of which have very few native speakers and are not used internationally at all.

Table 2.1 gives an overview of how German compares to other languages in this respect, according to different counts or estimates. The divergencies are in part due to difficulties in defining precisely what a 'native speaker' of a language is, and in part to lack of reliable data (for instance up-to-date censuses).

According to Table 2.1, German ranges between rank 7 and rank 11. The difference between Grimes and the two other estimates is partly due to the time span between them (1984—1987—1990), although this is by no means the only reason. A somewhat earlier estimate (Muller 1964) ranks German sixth (above Japanese, Arabic, Bengali, and Portuguese), and if we step back further in history German rises to still higher ranks in numerical strength among the languages of the world. Thus, around 1920 German ranks on a par with Russian, and around 1800 even exceeds all the other European languages including English (Jespersen 1926: 229). Therefore the factor 'numerical strength' must once have worked more in favour of German as an international language than it does today. It is, incidentally, not very difficult to find some of the reasons why German declined in relative (as opposed to absolute) numerical strength in

Table 2.1. *Number of native speakers of German in comparison to other languages* (millions)

	Grimes (1984)		Comrie (1987)		Finkenstaedt and Schröder (1990)	
1.	Chinese	700	Chinese	1,000	Chinese	770
2.	English	391	English	300	English	415
3.	Spanish	211	Spanish	280	Hindi	290
4.	Hindi–Urdu	194	Russian	215	Spanish	285
5.	Russian	154	Hindi–Urdu	200	Arabic	170
6.	Portuguese	120	Indonesian	200	Bengali	165
7.	**German**	**119**	Arabic	150	Portuguese	160
8.	Arabic	117	Portuguese	150	Indonesian	125
9.	Japanese	117	Bengali	145	Japanese	120
10.	Indonesian	110	Japanese	115	Russian	115
11.	Bengali	102	**German**	**103**	**German**	**92**
12.	French	63	French	68	French	55

recent times. German declined vis-à-vis the languages of some developing countries because the population growth of developed countries is generally slower, and it declined vis-à-vis the languages of some European countries because the German-speaking countries did not spread their language beyond Europe by way of conquest and colonialism (with the exception of Namibia).

2.2 *Economic Strength*

The language of an economically strong community spreads internationally to a greater extent than an economically weak community's language. Economic strength of a language (or rather of a language community) seems to carry even more weight than numerical strength, as may for instance be concluded from the noticeable spread of Japanese in recent times (see Coulmas 1989) as compared to Chinese. Japanese, whose language community is numerically much weaker but economically stronger than the Chinese language community, has recently spread more than Chinese. The language of an economically strong community is attractive to learn because of its business potential. Knowledge of the language potentially opens up the market of that community: it is easier for producers to penetrate a market if they know the language of the potential customer.

Table 2.2 shows how German compares to other languages in economic strength. The figures were calculated on the basis of the two sources indicated (Grimes 1984; Haefs 1989). First, for each country in the world which contains any speakers of the language in question (according to Grimes 1984), the GNP of these speakers was calculated, assuming the same GNP, on average, for each citizen of the country. Then, these figures were added together for all the countries in the world. While it may be assumed that the first ten languages or so are really the ten economically strongest languages in the world, the others were included because they count among the numerically strongest languages in the world. This therefore shows the discrepancy between numerical and economic strength in these cases.

As can be seen from the table, German ranks third among all the languages in the world, behind English and Japanese. Its relative economic strength is therefore considerably higher than its relative numerical strength. Only English is far stronger economically (about four times as strong), while most of the numerically stronger languages are economically weaker, often even considerably weaker. It may, therefore, be assumed that economic strength is among the factors which work in favour of the status of German as an international language.

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Table 2.2. *Economic strength of German in comparison to other languages, after Grimes 1984 and Haefs 1989 (US$ bn)*

	Language	US$ bn
1.	English	4,271
2.	Japanese	1,277
3.	**German**	**1,090**
4.	Russian	801
5.	Spanish	738
6.	French	669
7.	Chinese	448
8.	Arabic	359
9.	Italian	302
10.	Portuguese	234
11.	Dutch	203
12.	Hindi–Urdu	102
13.	Indonesian	65
14.	Danish	60
15.	Greek	49

2.3 *Number of Countries in which a Language has Official Status on a National or Regional Level ('Political Strength')*

If a language has official status in several countries, either on a national or on a regional level, it will – other circumstances being equal – be more likely to be studied as a foreign language than if it has official status in only very few or no countries. It seems more worth while studying such a language, since its potential for communication with different countries is greater. As a consequence, it also tends to be used more in international communication. One could call the number of countries in which a language has official status the language's 'political strength'.

German has official status in the following seven countries (see map, Figure 2.2):

- Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein (sole official language on the national level);
- Switzerland, Luxembourg (co-official on the national level);
- Italy (South Tyrol), Belgium (German-speaking community) (regional level).

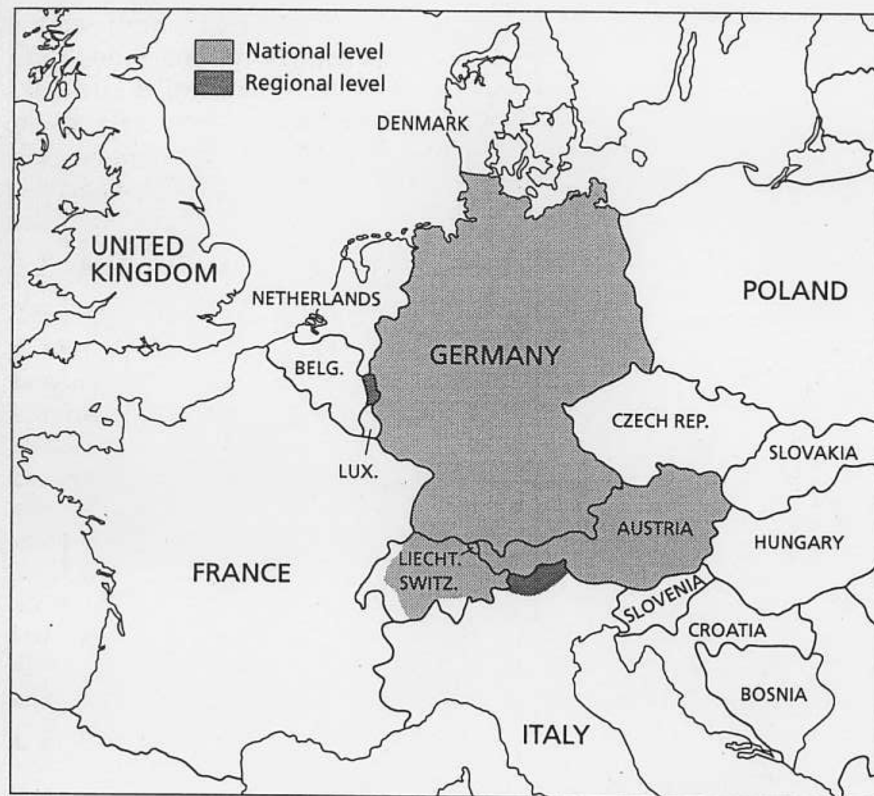

FIG. 2.2. Countries with German as an official language

Until 1990 German had official status in two more countries, namely in the German Democratic Republic on the national level (before the unification of the two Germanies on 3 October 1990), and in Namibia on a regional level (before the country won its independence on 21 March 1990). These are still included in Table 2.3 which compares German to other languages with respect to number of countries where the languages have official status, since more recent comparative data were not available to me; however, for German the revised new figures are added. While German formerly ranked fifth among all the languages in the world with respect to countries in which it had official status, it now shares rank five with Portuguese. If one weights sole official status on the national level (first figure given in parentheses) more heavily than co-official or regional status (second figure in parentheses), Portuguese even ranks above German, which then takes sixth place. Since for the year 1991 no comparative data with other languages were available, the former rank order is still given in Table

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2.3. The rank of German is not affected by the differences between the sources, which are quite considerable for some of the other languages. It would have been useful to distinguish further between national and regional official status for the comparison between the languages; however, this distinction is not made consistently in the sources.

Table 2.3. *The six most widespread national official languages according to numbers of countries*

	Banks (1987)	Haefs (1989)	1991
1. English	63 (19+44)	59 (30+29)	
2. French	34 (11+23)	27 (15+12)	
3. Spanish	23 (15+ 8)	21 (17+ 4)	
4. Arabic	22 (14+ 8)	23 (18+ 5)	
5. **German**	**8 (4+ 4)**	**9 (4+ 5)**	**7 (3+4)**
6. Portuguese	7 (6+ 1)	7 (7+ 0)	

2.4 *Number of Learners of the Language as a Foreign Language ('Study Strength')*

The extent to which a language is studied as a foreign language could be called its 'study strength'. German is among the most widely studied foreign languages in the world. It is studied in the schools of about half the countries in the world, though sometimes only in a small proportion of the country's schools. In 1982/3, for example, it was studied in 83 of the then 172 countries of the world (cf. *Bericht* 1985, Ammon 1991: 433). During the twentieth century German has probably always ranked behind English and French as a foreign language in schools, with respect to the total number of students as well as with respect to the number of countries in which it has been a school subject. Today it may even rank behind Spanish in numbers of students, mainly as a consequence of the vast number of students of Spanish in North America; overall comparative figures are, however, not currently available. There is no doubt that German is outnumbered by French, and even more so by English. Drawing on various sources, I found or calculated the following numbers of foreign-language students for these three languages in primary and secondary schools for 1974 (English), 1985 (French), and 1982/3 (German): English: 117.7 million; French: 50.9 million; German: 15.1 million (see Ammon 1991: 437ff.). It may be assumed that the numbers for English were even greater in the 1980s, the years to which the figures for German and French relate.

The proportions on the tertiary level are probably roughly comparable. Instead of comprehensive figures, which were not available to me, I shall present figures for the number of foreign students from countries of other languages in the mother-tongue countries of the languages in question. These figures were taken from the *Statistical Yearbook*, published by Unesco. In this context, a country is considered to be a 'mother-tongue country' of a given language only if a substantial proportion of the country's population are native speakers of that language. For German, for instance, this means the following countries (only those with tertiary institutions were included): the Federal Republic, GDR (as the figures used refer to the situation before the unification of Germany in 1990), Austria, and Switzerland (75 per cent), or for French: France, Canada (29 per cent), Belgium (33 per cent), Switzerland (21 per cent). As the student figures were only available for the entire countries they were scaled down in proportion to percentages of native speakers in each case. In the Unesco *Yearbooks*, the numbers of foreign students in each country are broken down according to countries of origin; only students coming from countries with other mother tongues (other than the mother tongue of the countries where they studied) were included in our calculation.

Relatively few such learners of a foreign language actually study it in one of the mother-tongue countries for the language in question. They are, however, among those who acquire a particularly solid command of the language; otherwise as a rule, they would not be able to study successfully at the tertiary institutions of the mother-tongue countries. To some extent at least, this justifies focusing on them in our attempt to compare languages according to the degree to which they are studied as foreign languages on the tertiary level. Table 2.4 gives the numbers of these students for various languages. As can be seen, German ranks third among all the languages, following English which is way ahead, and French. The proportion for Spanish may be lower in Table 2.4 than it would be for the entirety of students who study it as a foreign language on the tertiary level, since the numbers of foreign students in some Spanish-speaking countries are missing altogether in the Unesco *Yearbooks*.

In fact, figures from private language schools, which are mainly attended by adult learners, show a higher proportion of students of Spanish, as compared to German, than we have in Table 2.4. Table 2.5 gives the percentage of classes per language for various languages studied at the Berlitz schools, which operate in all parts of the world. As can be seen, the overall difference between French, Spanish, and German has become quite small in recent times (1989), in contrast

Table 2.4. *The 'study strength' of German in relation to other major languages*

Language	1967	1977	1986	Total	Growth rate
1. English	156,403	283,859	409,920	850,182	2.62
2. French	44,079	111,181	142,480	297,739	3.23
3. **German**	**39,178**	**68,979**	**96,172**	**204,329**	**2.45**
4. Spanish	25,161	22,492	10,821	58,474	0.43
5. Italian	16,957	31,283	34,720	82,960	2.04
6. Russian	16,100	?	?	?	?
7. Japanese	10,086	14,737	14,960	39,783	1.48

Notes: The figures in the table refer to the number of students from countries of other languages studying the seven given languages in countries where these languages are the mother tongue ('mother-tongue countries').
Growth rate = number for 1986 : number for 1967.

Table 2.5. *Percentage of classes per language at the Berlitz language schools*

	Total		Distribution by region of 1989 totals			
	Early 1970s	1989	Europe	North America	Latin America	Far East
1. English	42	63	37	12	21	30
2. French	25	11	54	34	5	7
3. Spanish	12	9	24	62	12	2
4. **German**	**12**	**8**	**64**	**23**	**6**	**7**
5. Italian	—	3	58	36	3	3
6. Japanese	—	2	9	53	—	38
7. Dutch	—	1	96	4	—	—
8. Portuguese	—	1	28	36	30	6
9. Others	9	2	25	36	25	14

to earlier years, where French had a greater share (1970); the leading position of English has, however, increased significantly (from 42 per cent in 1970 to 63 per cent in 1989).

The columns on the right side of Table 2.5 show how the various languages are distributed over four regions; the percentages for these regions are based on the figures for 1989 (second column on the left, = 100 per cent). It is quite obvious from these figures that German and French are predominantly studied in Europe (64 and 54 per cent respectively), while for Spanish the emphasis is in North America (62

per cent). (Remember that these figures only relate to teaching as a *foreign* language.) English, by contrast, is spread more evenly world-wide, with a low figure only in North America, which is due to the fact that English is the dominant native language there and consequently not studied so much as a foreign language. This observation can be taken as an indication that English is a world international language while German, French, and Spanish are only regional international languages.

A closer look at Europe reveals an interesting regional distribution of German and French there: as can be seen from Table 2.6, French is clearly a more important foreign language in western Europe, represented here by the EC countries, which are all western European except Greece. It is studied by over three times as many students as German, while German itself is still studied in western Europe by more than twice as many students as Spanish.

This relationship between German and French is reversed in eastern Europe. With the exception perhaps of Romania, German is studied by more students than is French everywhere in eastern Europe, often, indeed, by very many more. Thus, for instance, in Czechoslovakia German was chosen by 30–50 per cent of the secondary-level students in 1990, depending on type of school (French 1–3 per cent, English 40 per cent). In Poland, 44 per cent of students at secondary level chose German in the same year (French 16 per cent, English 53 per cent). In Hungary, German was chosen by about as many students as was English, way above the figures for French. In Bulgaria, a choice between English, French, or German was introduced in 1991 for pupils of the 5th grade: about 30–35 per cent chose German, 15–20 per cent French, and 50 per cent English.

Table 2.6. Number of foreign-language students in schools in the EC countries (Eurydice 1989: 2–13)

	Language	Students	Countries
1.	English	18,133,320	(10 countries: all non-mother-tongue countries)
2.	French	9,088,163	(11 countries: all non-mother-tongue countries)
3.	**German**	**2,888,011**	(11 countries: all non-mother-tongue countries)
4.	Spanish	1,385,801	(9 countries: all non-mother-tongue countries except Greece, Portugal)
5.	Italian	215,840	(8 countries: all non-mother-tongue countries except Greece, Netherlands, Portugal)
6.	Dutch	212,214	(4 countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg)
7.	Portuguese	13,708	(3 countries: France, Germany, Spain)
8.	Modern Greek	80	(1 country: France)
9.	Danish	0	

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In the USSR German was studied by 34 per cent of secondary-level students in 1989, English by 55 per cent; the figures for French were much lower (see Ammon 1991: 143–6). German is also studied more than French in all the Scandinavian countries and in the Netherlands. Generally speaking, it is studied more than French in all the countries with Slavic and Finno-Ugric languages and all countries with Germanic languages with the exception of the British Isles, while French is studied more in all the other European countries. English is practically always the leading foreign language, with the exception of a few special cases like Luxembourg or Switzerland (German and French more than English), and perhaps the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary (German on about the same level as English).

It may be assumed that the extent to which a language is studied (its study strength) has consequences for the extent to which it is used. Though the formal study of a language is not a strict prerequisite for its use, since a language can also be acquired informally by mere contact with its speakers, it does as a rule enhance its use. As we shall see, German is also used more often as an international language in those regions where it is a preferred subject of study. There are, however, notable exceptions to this rule: German is also studied by a considerable number of students in some East Asian countries, particularly Japan (see Bauer 1989, Ammon 1992*b*), South Korea, and also Indonesia, but it is hardly used there as an international language. One of the reasons is that the knowledge of German acquired in these countries is mostly quite limited due to the enormous linguistic distance of the L1s (Japanese, etc.) from L2 (German), which makes the language very difficult to learn. German is studied more for traditional reasons in these countries than for the purpose of actual international communication, in the same way as Latin is still studied in a number of countries. One of the reasons for this tradition is that German was once a great language of science, as will be shown in Section 3.2.

3 THE USE OF GERMAN FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

3.1 *Trade*

For the investigation of language choice it makes sense to distinguish between different sectors, or perhaps 'domains', of society. It has been observed for a long time that international languages can be used to different degrees in different domains. Thus there was once a not entirely unjustified view that German was the international language

of science, English of trade, and French of diplomacy. It seems useful for investigations of international languages to follow this rough distinction, though others would be possible; it should be pointed out, though, that these domains can on the one hand show considerable overlap, and on the other hand provide quite incomplete coverage of the various segments of society depending on how they are defined. In addition, these domains are so vast that only small sections of them can actually be investigated empirically and these sections simply have to be taken as more or less representative of the whole domain for the time being. Such problems would, however, occur with any other segmentation of society.

A first overview of the international languages of trade, and particularly the role of German, is provided by the German chambers of commerce, which regularly issue recommendations on which languages should be used for trade with each country in the world. These recommendations are based on the experience of the chambers' members, that is, practically all the German firms engaged in international business, as well as the consulates abroad supporting them in their endeavours. These recommendations are made for sellers of goods, who have to be cautious and polite with their language choice, rather than for buyers, to whose language the foreign sellers will tend to adjust if possible. Therefore, it may be assumed that the chambers' recommendations for using German tend to be rather restrictive: German could be used more extensively for buying goods. Table 2.7 lists the languages recommended by the German chambers of commerce together with the number of countries for which they can be used. It should be noted that German is always only a co-language (with one exception, namely in Austria), which means German firms can in no case count on the possibility of using German for selling goods but have to decide from case to case depending on the circumstances.

Let us now have a look at the individual countries for which German can be used. They are listed in Table 2.8. As can be seen, German can be used practically everywhere in Europe except in some western European countries (Britain, Ireland, France, Spain, Portugal), though – as has been pointed out above – German firms cannot rely on the possibility of using German. Outside Europe, however, there is very little scope for using German. Namibia, Chile, and Israel have substantial German-speaking minorities; in Afghanistan and Mongolia German has been taught extensively by the former GDR, in connection with business relations and transfer of technology. It need hardly be pointed out that in Israel the use of German is a highly sensitive issue, as a consequence of the Holocaust. Some readers may therefore

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Table 2.7. *Number of countries for which particular languages are recommended for West German trade (Handelskammer Hamburg 1989)*

	Total	Sole language	Co-language
1. English	122	64	58
2. French	57	25	32
3. Spanish	26	17	9
4. **German**	**26**	**1**	**25**
5. Arabic	12	–	12
6. Portuguese	8	–	8
7. Italian	4	–	4
8. Dutch	4	–	4
9. Indonesian	1	–	1
Czech			
Danish			
Finnish			
Norwegian			
Polish			
Russian			
Slovene			
Swedish			

be surprised that Israel even appears in the list; not all German-speaking Israelis, however, identify the German language with Nazi Germany. In view of the countries included in the list, it is surprising that some others are missing, like Brazil, Argentina, or Paraguay, which have substantial German-speaking minorities (see Born and Dickgießer 1989). Especially in the case of Brazil, it is widely known in Germany that many business contacts with the southern states (Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paranà, Espirito Santo) are maintained in German. It may reflect an overly cautious stance of the German chambers of commerce not to recommend the use of German even in such cases.

Another way of assessing the international use of German in trade is via job advertisements in non-German-speaking countries. As far as the available data are concerned, this approach is quite unspecific, since they do not distinguish between jobs in trade and others. Nevertheless, they seem to provide rough indicators of what we are looking for. In a research project at the University of Duisburg, newspaper job advertisements in 1991 were analysed for six European countries. The results are given in Table 2.9. Only job advertisements with

Table 2.8. *Countries for which German is recommended for West German trade (Handelskammer Hamburg 1989)*

Western and northern Europe	Eastern and southern Europe	Other regions
Austria	Albania	Afghanistan
Belgium	Bulgaria	Chile
Denmark	Czechoslovakia	Israel
Finland	Greece	Mongolia
Iceland	Hungary	Namibia
Luxembourg	Italy	
Netherlands	Poland	
Norway	Romania	
Sweden	Soviet Union	
Switzerland	Turkey	
	Yugoslavia	

foreign-language requirements were included in the calculation of percentages. The results confirm the strong position of German in eastern as compared to western Europe, where French ranks before German.

As to the actual use of German or other languages in international trade, only bits and pieces of information are available so far. The results of one of the more representative investigations, which however is limited to a single country, are presented in Table 2.10. The data were collected by means of questionnaires from forty-four Dutch business negotiators. Other data are available on the use of foreign languages at the workplace, although these are obviously not identical with their use in trade. Thus in England, France, Denmark, and Sweden German has been found to rank second as a foreign language used at the workplace, following French (in England) or English (in

Table 2.9. *Foreign-language requirements in job advertisements in newspapers in six European countries, according to Glück 1992* (% per language)

	German	English	French	Spanish
Hungary	40	37	3	<1
Poland	26	46	7	<1
France	11	71	–	5
Britain	7	–	15	6
Spain	7	60	21	–
Italy	6	69	9	<1

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Table 2.10. *Percentages of language use by Dutch managers in business negotiations (Ulijn and Gorter 1989: 495)*

	One of the two most important languages of negotiation	One of the three most important languages of negotiation
English	95	98
German	**74**	**95**
French	25	82
Spanish	–	16

the other three countries); it ranks third in Belgium (following French and English) and probably also in Finland (following English and Swedish), though the data can be interpreted differently there (see Ammon 1991: 182–95).

3.2 *Science*

The importance of German as 'an international language of science' (Ostrower 1965: 148) has often been pointed out – in older literature, one has to say. In more recent times, however, the decline of German in this function has been the topic of publications (e.g. Skudlik 1990) and even of a special conference (see Kalverkämper and Weinrich 1986). If one assumes that the mere number of scientific publications in a given language is a reasonably valid indicator of its role in international scientific communication, at least in written communication, then Tables 2.11 and 2.12 and Figures 2.3 and 2.4 reveal the present standing of German as an international language of science as well as its development in the course of this century.

Natural sciences and social sciences are kept apart in Tables 2.11 and 2.12, because there are reasons to believe that the relative importance of the languages differs between the two groups of sciences; in the social sciences the traditional languages of publication seem to retain some of their importance, while in the natural sciences they have been replaced to a greater extent by English as the modern world language of science. These differences are apparent in the comparison between Tables 2.11 and 2.12, though the evidence is somewhat weakened by the time span between the data; during the five years between 1976 and 1981 English may well have gained a still greater share of publications even in the social sciences. There are various reasons why international communication may not be reduced to a single language to the same degree in the social as in the natural sciences.

Table 2.11. *Languages of publication in five natural sciences in 1981, according to Baldauf and Jernudd 1983: 99* (%)

	Chemistry	Biology	Physics	Medicine	Mathematics
1. English	66.9	85.7	84.6	73.1	69.3
2. Russian	12.7	3.9	3.8	5.9	18.1
3. **German**	**5.5**	**2.5**	**3.9**	**5.5**	**3.6**
4. Japanese	9.9	1.9	1.5	3.0	0.3
5. French	1.9	2.1	2.0	4.0	4.8
6. Chinese	0.9	0.2	0.6	0.7	0.5
Others	2.2	3.6	3.6	7.8	3.0

For example, some findings in the social sciences may be of only regional interest and therefore do not have to be published in the world language; the technical registers of the social sciences are less formalized than in the natural sciences, so that individual social scientists may find it harder to operate in a different language; and the degree of specialization is not as great in the social sciences, which is why there are still enough experts within the more limited languages, like French or German, with whom communication seems relevant for the individual researcher.

The rank order in Tables 2.11 and 2.12 follows the arithmetical means of all the sciences listed in each table. German still ranks third in the natural as well as in the social sciences, if we assume that the sciences selected here adequately represent the whole group in both cases. In some sciences, however, German clearly ranks lower. Particularly striking examples are chemistry, but also medicine, since German was once a very important language of publication in these fields. As late as in the 1930s textbooks in German were, for instance, used at

Table 2.12. *Languages of publication in four social sciences in 1976, according to Thogmartin 1980* (%)

	Sociology	Economics	Political science	Anthropology
1. English	46.3	38.5	51.3	46.9
2. French	14.3	16.6	16.3	26.0
3. **German**	**5.7**	**9.6**	**12.4**	**10.1**
4. Russian	11.3	8.0	2.8	7.8
5. Japanese	7.1	—	—	—
Others	15.3	27.3	17.2	9.2

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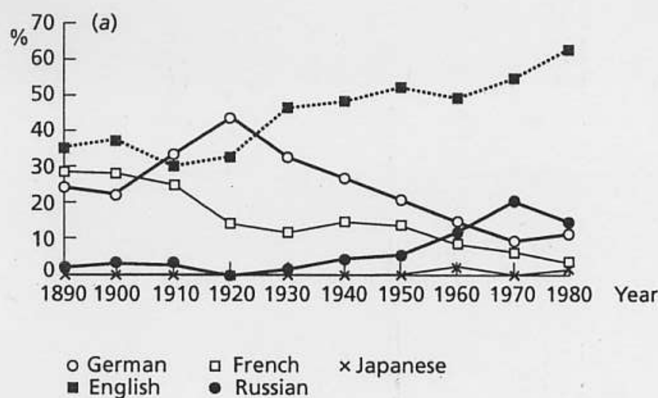
American universities, since they contained the most advanced information. The distance of German, but not only of German, from English in number of publications today is striking in all the fields covered by Tables 2.11 and 2.12. In view of this enormous distance, it has been suggested that scientific publications in languages other than English serve international communication only to a very limited degree, even more limited than the figures suggest, and in fact are mainly produced for the 'home market', that is, for 'consumption' (communication) within that particular language community. However, the extent to which this is true has, to my knowledge, not been investigated.

Figures 2.3 and 2.4 show how the relative quantities of scientific publications in particular languages have changed in the course of the last hundred years. The figures are averages of publications in biology, chemistry, physics, medicine, and mathematics which have been calculated on the basis of a study by Tsunoda (1983). Whereas the numbers of scientific publications in German, French and English were about the same around the turn of the century, English more or less steadily increased its share of the 'market' in the years following the First World War, while the shares of German and French declined, in the case of French even earlier than in the case of German.

The two graphs in Figure 2.3 also show an interesting difference which should be a warning against too uncritical an interpretation of data of that sort. According to the American bibliographies and databases (Figure 2.3*b*), English has been the predominant language of science (in terms of number of publications) throughout the last hundred years. However, if one averages the bibliographies and databases from various countries, in this case Germany, France, Russia or the Soviet Union, and the USA (Figure 2.3*a*), one finds that German overtook English in the period shortly before and after the First World War. There are reasons to assume that the bibliographies and databases of each country are at least to some extent biased towards their own language, even if they try to be internationally as representative as possible, for the simple reason that publications in the language of the country are more readily available as well as easier to read. Therefore it seems likely that data which are drawn from bibliographies and databases of different countries are more objective than those from a single country. On the other hand, the US bibliographies have the reputation of being more comprehensive than those of any other country – an assumption which, however, appears to be more justified in recent than in former times. It seems to be impossible, without additional evidence, to decide which of the two versions in Figure 2.3 is closer to reality, that is, to know whether German actually

overtook English as the leading language of science (in terms of number of publications) at the beginning of this century or not.

When I specified the turning-point after which English started to outstrip the other two European languages, German and French, as the period after the First World War, I introduced a clue to an explanation, at least a partial explanation, of this development. The countries of both languages, Germany together with Austria, and France together with Belgium, were virtually ruined by the First World War; Britain was not much better off either. The USA, however, emerged from the war practically unscathed to become the leading economic power in the world, which enabled it also to develop into the leading power in science. Germany, which before the First World War was probably the leading country in the world in terms of scientific research, had no resources left to continue research on a similar level



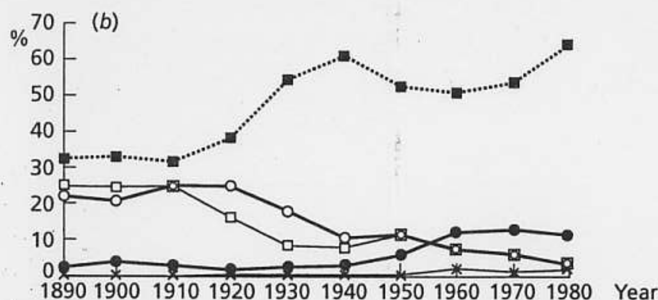


Fig. 2.3. Languages of publication in the natural sciences between 1890 and 1980 (percentages). (*a*) Averages from French, German, Russian, and US bibliographies and databases. (*b*) According to US bibliographies and databases

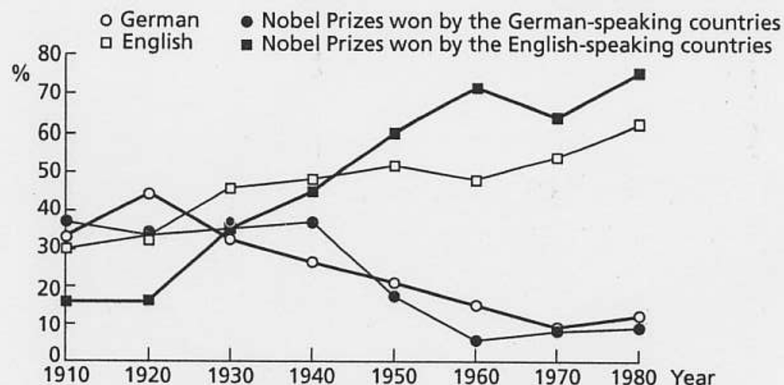


Fig. 2.4. Percentages of Nobel Prizes in the natural sciences won by the German-speaking and the English-speaking countries in relation to percentages of publications in German and in English in the natural sciences

as before, though of course some of the old skills and knowledge were carried over. In addition, Germany's political choice of Nazism in the aftermath of the First World War resulted, among other atrocities, in the expulsion and mass murder of many of her best scientists, and most of those who were able to escape went to the USA.

These events are mirrored in a very abstract way in Figure 2.4, which shows, if one interprets it in a straightforward and simplified way, how the decline of the German language vis-à-vis English accompanied the decline of German science vis-à-vis science in the English-speaking world, particularly the USA. The Nobel Prizes are taken here as an indicator of the standing of the sciences in the German-speaking and the English-speaking countries. It seems hardly necessary to point out that this indicator is very rough indeed. It should, in particular, be noted that the Nobel Prizes are often given belatedly, that is, a considerable time after the scientific achievement. This might be one of the reasons why the decline of German as a language of science seems to start earlier, according to Figure 2.4, than does the decline of science in the German-speaking countries. In reality, the decline of science there, as compared to the English-speaking world, might also have started earlier than the share of Nobel Prizes for the German-speaking countries indicates.

Even today, German scientists have not yet fully adjusted to the change in international status of their language. Particularly scientists of the older generation often have only a quite inadequate command of the modern world language of science, namely English. In a questionnaire investigation among scientists at the University of Duisburg

and researchers in industry in that city, 25 per cent confessed to having difficulty in reading English texts, 38 per cent in understanding spoken English, and 57 per cent in writing in English. Furthermore, 19 per cent stated that they sometimes do not participate in conferences, 25 per cent would not engage in contacts with colleagues, and 33 per cent would not accept offers of publication if the use of the English language were required (Ammon 1990*b*). This problem is recognized by many German publishers and German research foundations. However, they offer very little or no help to scientists with inadequate English language skills. The research foundations even seem to refuse help intentionally, either in order not to accelerate the changeover from German to English as the language of publication of German scientists or not to 'waste' resources on what is not considered to be an intrinsic part of scientific research.

3.3 *Diplomacy and International Organizations*

German has never been a very important language in diplomacy, as it has been in science, a fact noted by Ostrower, who deals with a whole number of languages which have played an important role in diplomacy at some time in history. 'The main reason for the failure of German as a language of political importance was the international organization of the Holy Roman Empire, which strove to create the appearance of political continuity with the ancient empire of Rome. The official language of the Empire was Latin, and German linguistic advancement in international relations consequently suffered' (Ostrower 1965: 145–6). Only in the second half of the nineteenth century was German promoted by its 'home countries' as a language of diplomacy, indeed only after German unification in 1871. The peace treaty concluded in that year with France to end the Franco-Prussian War was still written only in French, in spite of the fact that Prussia, in alliance with other German-speaking countries, had been victorious. Thereafter, however, the newly created Germany tried to introduce its language into the world of diplomacy, for instance through persistently corresponding in German with France, in spite of the fact that French was then still the generally acknowledged language of diplomacy. The change in attitudes can also be seen from the regular use of German in international treaties towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, whenever Germany was among the signatory countries (see Ammon 1992*a*).

The further rise of German as a language of diplomacy was, however, stopped short by the First World War, or rather the defeat of Germany and also Austria, the other power which promoted the

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German language. In particular, German did not become one of the official languages of the League of Nations, which was founded after the First World War. Ostrower (1965: 360) sees Germany's defeat in the war as one of the reasons for the exclusion of German from the League of Nations' official languages, and also accounts for the exclusion of Russian, another potential candidate for the status of an official language: 'Russia was in a state of revolutionary turmoil and the Germans were defeated in the field of battle, thus the Russian and German languages were out of contest.' It should be added that Germany was only granted membership of the League as late as 1926 and that it withdrew again under Nazi rule as early as 1933. The First World War also had a long-lasting impact on the status of German as a language of diplomacy for another reason, namely Germany's loss of its colonies. As a consequence, German as an official language was practically reduced to its European homelands, in contrast to other European languages, which were spread world-wide through persistent colonialism (see Section 2.3 above). Finally, Nazism and the Second World War contributed decisively to discrediting the German language even further as a language of diplomacy.

In particular, it was out of the question after the Nazi atrocities and the defeat in the Second World War for German to become one of the official languages of the United Nations. Only the rather limited status of a 'documentary language' was granted to German in 1974, one year after the two Germanies, the Federal Republic and the GDR, were admitted as member states. This status implies that the more important documents of the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council are translated into German. These translations are, however, funded by the German-speaking member countries of the UN, which are presently Germany, Austria, and Liechtenstein—Switzerland is still not a member even today. It seems unlikely that German will ever become an official language of the UN, since the official languages of the organization surpass German either in number of countries in which they are official languages (French) or in numerical strength (Chinese, Russian) or in both (English, Spanish, Arabic). Only in economic strength and in size of the financial contribution to the UN do the German-speaking members surpass the member states of most of the official languages of the UN, namely of Chinese, French, Spanish, Arabic, and in future perhaps also Russian. Economic considerations have, however, never been a decisive argument of the UN in the choice of an official language; otherwise Japanese would now rank before German as a candidate.

The role which German as compared to other languages plays in international organizations can be inferred to some degree from Table

2.13. It shows that German ranks seventh among all the languages with respect to the number of international organizations in which it either has official status or is a working language. Table 2.13 contains figures from two different sources, which show, among other things, the extent to which counts of international organizations can diverge. It seems less problematic to follow Banks's (1987) rank order of the languages, since the *Bericht* (1985) was prepared under the auspices of the government of the Federal Republic and might, therefore, be biased towards the German language. Following Banks, it is interesting to note that precisely the six official languages of the UN precede German in number of international organizations in which they have a privileged status (official or working language). This is presumably not only due to the fact that the UN adds to the number of international organizations in which these languages have a privileged status but also to the fact that official status in the UN enhances a language's chances of acquiring official status in other international organizations.

The only institution in which German, according to Banks, has the status of a working language is the Council of Europe. It should be pointed out, though, that the terminology of the Council is confusing. Normally, the status of a working language is higher than that of a (merely) official language – if this distinction is made in an organization. In the case of the Council of Europe, however, it is the other way round: English and French are the 'official languages', in which in this case all the proceedings can be conducted without limitation, while German, Italian, and Spanish are (only!) the Council's 'working languages', whose use is limited to certain functions within the organization. Thus, for instance, interpreting of speeches is only granted *from* the 'working languages', not *into* them, while for the 'official languages' interpreting is guaranteed in both directions.

Table 2.13. *Working or official languages in international organizations (no. of organizations)*

	Banks 1987		*Bericht* 1985: 83–90	
	Working	Official	Full status	Partial status
1. English	16	35	61	3
2. French	12	37	59	2
3. Spanish	9	19	23	5
4. Russian	5	10	18	7
5. Arabic	2	5	10	7
6. Chinese	1	4	8	11
7. **German**	**1**	**3**	**12**	**18**[a]
8. Italian	1	2	2	3
9. Portuguese	0	3	–	–
10. Danish	0	2	2	0
Dutch	0	2	2	4

[a] Five of these funded by German-speaking countries.

The most important international organization in which German has an official status is probably the European Union (EU), as the former 'European Community' (EC) has been referred to since the implementation of the Treaty of Maastricht in November 1993. German is one of the nine official languages of this organization of twelve member states (in 1993). According to its statutes, all its official languages are equal. It is, however, generally known that this is not the case in reality. The possibility of differences among the official languages is, in fact, in a subtle way permitted by regulations which recommend 'pragmatic' solutions to problems of language choice in certain situations if necessary, for instance in the choice of interpreters (see Hoof-Haferkamp 1991). It has often been observed informally, and has now also been corroborated in more systematic investigations, that in reality French and English are the dominant working languages of the political bodies of the organization. German ranks third, followed by Spanish and Italian, but the difference in extent of use between the first two and the other languages is enormous. Table 2.14 shows the proportions. Haselhuber (1991) investigated how many of the young practitioners (not yet firmly employed officials) in the EC Commission, perhaps the most important political body of the organization, use the various languages regularly; Gehnen (1991) found out which proportions of the communications in the EC (in its General Directorates) were carried out in the various languages.

The German government has stressed repeatedly that it is not content with the role which the German language currently plays in the political bodies of the EU. Its arguments were stimulated and supported by German business organizations, which contended that German companies are linguistically disadvantaged in the competition for EU business opportunities, since EU calls for tenders usually appear later in German than they do in French or English, and in bad translations at that; in addition it is often even expected that offers be made in French or English. Other language communities could, of course, raise complaints of the same sort. However, the German government has pointed out that Germany's financial contribution to the EU is by far the greatest of all the member states and that the German language community is the numerically strongest within the EU.

Table 2.14. *Frequency of use of languages in the General Directorates of the EC Commission* (%)

	In writing		In speaking	
	Haselhuber 1991	Gehnen 1991	Haselhuber 1991	Gehnen 1991
1. French	92.5	64.0	90.1	62.0
2. English	73.3	35.0	60.8	31.0
3. **German**	**18.3**	**1.0**	**15.0**	**6.0**
4. Spanish	6.7	—	9.2	—
5. Italian	8.3	—	6.7	—

It seems impossible to foresee at the present moment whether German will eventually play a more prominent role in the procedures of the EU. The non-German-speaking member countries do not seem to be very interested in the upgrading of German; they would have to handle yet another language, and for some the advance of the German language would even imply a decline in status for their own language. An example of British feelings can be found in a 1992 press campaign in the United Kingdom, in which attempts at strengthening the position of German were answered by some newspapers by calling German a 'horrid, guttural language', alluding to Chancellor Kohl as the new German 'Führer' and maintaining that the Germans were 'cracking the whip' on the rest of Europe (cf. the report in the *New York Times* of 24 February 1992: 'Thus Spake Helmut Kohl: Auf Deutsch'). Incidentally, the entire press campaign was started on the basis of a hoax. The British newspapers claimed that Kohl had written a letter to EC Commission President Delors demanding that the German language be 'elevated' within the EC. There had, however, been no such letter from Kohl around that time; the only letter Kohl ever wrote to Delors about the German language dates back to 1988.

In spite of such adverse feelings on the part of some other member countries, it seems likely that German will play a more important role in the political bodies of the EU in the future. The economic importance of Germany and the size of its population will probably have an effect in that direction, particularly since the German government has become aware of the language question and actually tries to promote German where possible. The role of German will most likely also be strengthened vis-à-vis French, though not necessarily vis-à-vis English, when eastern European countries including Austria enter the EU.

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4 CONCLUSIONS

The data presented here show clearly that German ranks among the world's more important international languages, though different parameters reveal various ranks of internationality for it in different domains (ranging from rank three to rank ten). The data also reveal that German has lost ground in the course of the twentieth century vis-à-vis other international languages, especially English. While German was formerly an international language particularly in the domain of science, its present international standing seems to be based mainly on the economic strength of the German-speaking countries. It may be assumed that on this basis it will play a more prominent role than today in future international communication in Europe, which in turn will help to stabilize its international standing elsewhere.

The bulk of the data presented is, as I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, only indicative of international communication and is not based on the direct observation of actual communicative behaviour, which remains one of the desiderata of future investigations. Such empirical data would permit a better assessment of the internationality of the various languages than merely using indicators.

Moreover, my presentation is largely restricted to description, and offers only occasional hints towards explanations as to why German, or the other languages involved, are international to their respective degree. It will be an enormously complex research task for the future to isolate and to weigh factors which determine the degree of internationality of a language, that is, to explain the actual degree of internationality of various languages (for an attempt in that direction focusing on the English language see Fishman, Cooper, and Conrad 1977).

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Ammon and Haarmann (1991)
Born and Dickgießer(1989)
Coulmas (1991)
Skudlik (1990)
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