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## “50 Years of English Linguistics in Germany”: An Introduction

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This year’s linguistics special issue of *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* departs from convention in not offering the usual collection of academic papers focussed on a shared topic, but four interviews with senior colleagues who have shaped the field in important ways. In other words, it is a small step towards an oral history of English linguistics in Germany or – to be precise – the German-speaking academic community in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

It complements the growing body of publications on the history of *Anglistik / Amerikanistik* (English and American Studies),<sup>1</sup> and it adds the personal perspectives of leading participants in the events and activities recorded. This is a kind of subjectivity which I consider permissible even in scholarly and academic discourse and which I have frequently found quite rewarding. For example, even the reader familiar with the research and publications of David Crystal, M. A. K. Halliday, Geoffrey Leech or John Wells will be enlightened by their “personal histories”, which – alongside those of several other prominent British colleagues – were published by the Philological Society (Brown and Law, eds. 2002). For some years now, the form of the interview, rather than the personal history, has been used to great profit for similar purposes by the editors of the *Journal of English Linguistics*, who have recruited William Labov (2006), Elizabeth Traugott (2007), Walt Wolfram (2008), Richard Bailey (2009), Robin Lakoff (2010), Terttu Nevalainen (2011), Geneva Smitherman (2012) and Doug Biber (2013) as interviewees.

It was with such examples in mind that I decided to approach senior German (-speaking) colleagues to invite them to come together for a similar venture. The four people interviewed – Hans-Jürgen Diller, Udo Fries, Manfred Görlach,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., Kohl, ed. (2005), Hausmann (2003), Finkenstaedt (1983) or – for the remoter past – Christmann (1985). Scheler, ed. (1987) focusses on the history of English studies in Berlin.

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Ekkehard König – are an excellent selection, I think, because all four of them can look back on an admirable record of academic achievement and have left their mark on English linguistics. But of course I freely admit that an element of randomness remains even in such a good selection. Limitations of space made it impossible to have more than four interviews. Some colleagues who were approached declined the invitation for various reasons – either definitively or at least for the time being. Some, of course, remain to be asked. My biggest personal regret as editor of this special issue is that none of the female colleagues invited felt able to participate. But if this first experiment has, as I hope, worked out to readers' satisfaction, there may well be a second round of related interviews – either in the pages of ZAA or in another suitable forum.

The texts of the interviews are edited from the transcribed tapes and therefore preserve some of the informal and spontaneous features of the conversations. The final versions were submitted to both interviewers and interviewees for authorisation. It remains for me to thank the four interviewees for making possible this project at short notice. Of course, my thanks also go to the three colleagues who agreed to act as interviewers, Sarah Chevalier (Zürich), Bernd Kortmann (Freiburg), and Hendrik De Smet (Leuven), and to my research assistants Rachel Hill and Mirka Honkanen, who helped with the transcription and editing of the tapes.

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