



Translating Berlin #6

Pension Bismarck

1. Starter activity: What do you know about Berlin?

- a) Name five facts about Berlin.
- b) Name one cultural connection between Germany and the UK.
- c) Name three English writers in the 1920s.

2. Read the English text below about the Pension Bismarck.

- a) Where was the Pension Bismarck located?
- b) Which role did the Pension Bismarck play in the 1920s in Berlin?
- c) Who used to stay there, and why?

3. Present the Pension Bismarck to your neighbour or group.

Your presentation should contain the answers to 2a), b), and c).

Alix Strachey, Elizabeth Wiskemann, Christopher Isherwood and many other long-term residents in Berlin stayed in a *Pension*. After the First World War, economic hardship had forced genteel owners to rent out separate rooms in their large private apartments, with residents sharing communal areas such as bathrooms and kitchens, sometimes also sitting and dining rooms. Landladies provided food, washing and cleaning. *Pensions* were a lot cheaper than hotels and did not require the resident to deal with household matters directly. John Chancellor explained the system in his travel guide *How to be Happy in Berlin* (1929):

‘One of the drawbacks of the city is that it’s almost impossible to get small, furnished flats. If you want two or three rooms to yourself, you have to go to a pension, and in most cases that means that there will be other people with you in the flat. For a stay of a week or two, the pension system is good enough, but if continued too long, it nettles the Englishman’s thirst for privacy.’

The Pension Bismarck could be found in leafy Grunewald, on Warmbrunnerstraße. This was an upper-middle class neighbourhood with easy access to both the lakes and the woods, but also close to Halensee, where the new amusement area Lunapark had recently opened. Numerous cinemas, cafés, bars and restaurants as well as the shops on Kurfürstendamm could be reached by tram.



Map from Grieben's Guide Berlin and Potsdam, 1931 © Bodleian Library, Oxford

Alix Strachey describes the typical Wilhelminian furniture, fittings, and food in one of her ironic letters to her husband James:

'You need'nt worry about the food. A vasty 'Deutsches' steak with *mast-kartoffel* all drenched in oil, followed by bread butter & cheese, & washed down with tea – confronted me at 7:30. The meat was quite the most delicious I've had as yet in Berlin. The Klubsessel in which I'm sitting at present is'nt bad & the room is far more tolerable, you'll agree, than Maria Franz [their pension in Vienna]. The light's medium, the personnel charming, don't you think?'

Elizabeth Wiskemann summarises the pension system, prostitution, and the lack of privacy succinctly: 'I managed to find a pleasant bed sitting-room at Bismarckstrasse 82 opposite the opera-house in Charlottenburg; this was in a flat belonging to a middle-aged woman of aristocratic family. [...] *The Baronin* had a son and daughter, both about 20 and both Nazis, and both very willing to sell their bodies for homosexual purposes. She had a sister who loved to ring up to tell her that one of her children was standing at some notorious street corner. Since the sister, like many of her type, always shouted on the telephone, and since the telephone was just outside my door, I could sometimes literally hear what she had to say – it came booming out of the receiver.'

Christopher Isherwood immortalised the stage-like set of his Schöneberg pension, his fellow residents and his landlady, Meta Tharau, in *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939). A further memorable description of this particular setting and some of its characters can be found in Stephen Spender's 1951 memoir *World Within World*. Gesa Stedman.



Rupert Brooke

4. Who was Rupert Brooke? Scan the QR code to find out.

The poet Rupert Brooke (1887–1915) visited Berlin in 1912. His famous poem ‘The Old Vicarage, Grantchester’ uses the Café des Westens as its setting. [...] He initially settled in a pension near his Cambridge friend Dudley Ward, who had taken lodgings at Kantstraße, 14. Stefano Evangelista.



Rupert Brooke by Clara Ewald.
Oil on canvas, 1911. NPG 4911 © National Portrait Gallery, London

Translation Theory

5. Answer the following questions in pairs or in your group:

- a) Can you think of a German or English word or phrase that you cannot translate verbatim (exactly word for word) into the other language? What strategy would you use to translate it?
- b) Would you like to become a professional translator? Why / why not? What do you think would be the most interesting aspects of being a translator?

6. Read and discuss the text on translation theory.

- a) What is the difference between micro- and macro-level translation?
 - b) What is the difference between domestication and foreignisation?
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Translation theory often distinguishes between micro- and macro-level translation. The micro level refers mainly to the accurate translation of single words, terms, or shorter segments of a text from the source language into the target language. In this context, the emphasis is placed on linguistic accuracy. For the sake of precision, decisions on the micro level are often made independently.

The macro level, on the other hand, rather looks at a text in its entirety and takes into account not only linguistic accuracy, but also social and cultural aspects. For the sake of consistency, decisions on a macro level are often made for the entire text. How can local dialects be translated from one language into another? Should personal names be translated in such a way that their meaning can be understood in the target language? And how should certain cultural references be approached, especially those that foreign readers may not understand? All of these questions belong to macro-level translation.

Translation decisions, whether on the micro or macro level, can always be located between the poles of domestication and foreignisation. Domestication means not only translating a text, but also adapting its content to the culture of the target language. Foreignisation, on the other hand, means keeping a translation as close to the original as possible, both in terms of content and style.

Metropole Berlin

7. Read the German text 'Metropole Berlin'.

- a) When and how was Groß-Berlin founded?
- b) To what extent was Berlin perceived as a metropolis (a large and busy city, often the capital)? Explain your answer.

8. Translate the text into English. Choose:

- a) Translate the text directly.
 - b) Rewrite the text in simpler German. Next, translate your simpler version into English.
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Glossary

weitläufig	spacious, extensive
Randlage (f.)	fring area
überführen	here: to transfer
Einschätzung (f.)	estimation
eindrucksvoll	impressive
Glanz (m.)	glance, radiance

Bei der Gründung von Groß-Berlin im Jahr 1920 wurden auch die weitläufigen Außenbezirke und Dörfer in Randlage in das Stadtgebiet überführt. Berlin war nun, so manche Einschätzungen, mit nahezu 4 Millionen Einwohner*innen nach New York und London die drittgrößte Stadt der Welt. [...] Gleichzeitig war in den eindrucksvollen Palästen, Museen, Opernhäusern und auf den breiten, zugigen Prachtstraßen noch der Glanz des alten Preußen zu spüren. Stefano Evangelista, Gesa Stedman.

The Old Vicarage, Grantchester

9. Read the excerpt from Brooke's poem *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester* (1912) and highlight all the words you know how to translate already.

10. Translate the poem into German. Choose:

a) Translate the poem directly.

b) Rewrite the poem as prose without rhymes.

Next, translate your prose version into German.

[...]

Here am I, sweating, sick, and hot,
And there the shadowed waters fresh
Lean up to embrace the naked flesh.
Temperamentvoll German Jews
Drink beer around; — and THERE the dews
Are soft beneath a morn of gold.
Here tulips bloom as they are told;
Unkempt about those hedges blows
An English unofficial rose;
And there the unregulated sun
Slopes down to rest when day is done,
And wakes a vague unpunctual star,
A slippered Hesper; and there are
Meads towards Haslingfield and Coton
Where das Betreten's not verboten.

[...]

Rupert Brooke, 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester',
Café des Westens, Berlin, May 1912.

Glossary

to embrace	umarmen, annehmen
morn	Morgen (m.)
tulip	Tulpe (f.)
unkempt	verwahrlost
to slope town	schräg abfallen
mead	Aue (f.)

Plenary

11. Talk about your translation process.

- a) Did any difficulties or problems arise?
 - b) Which translation strategies did you use ...
 - I. ... to translate from German into English?
 - II. ... to translate from English into German?
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