



Translating Berlin #9

British Embassy

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 text below about the British Embassy.

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

3. Present the British Embassy to your neighbour or group.

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

The British Embassy on Wilhelmstraße was close to the boulevard Unter den Linden, the Brandenburg Gate, Pariser Platz, and the Hotel Adlon. It was housed in an impressive palais – the Palais Strousberg, which the British government had bought in the late 19th century. During the First World War it had stood empty, but was restored to its former glory after the war. Its interior was even more impressive than its façade. In the interwar period the British Embassy soon became a hub of political meetings and cultural exchange. Depending on the interests of the ambassador in residence, his wife, and the political climate, these meetings and exchanges took on a different character.

Lady Helen D'Abernon, society hostess and wife of the first ambassador after the war, was intent on showing Berlin that pre-war splendour and parties were still possible. Harold Nicolson, *chargé d'affaires* before the arrival of Sir Horace Rumbold in the late 1920s, was more interested in inviting important authors such as Virginia Woolf and H. G. Wells. Wells addressed the Reichstag in 1929, an event which was widely reported in Berlin. Nicolson's friends from England such as the writers and critics Maurice Bowra, Cyril Connolly, Raymond Mortimer, and Edward Sackville-West enjoyed the combination of intellectual debate and entertainment.



The British Embassy (Palais Strousberg), 1896.
Photograph by August Orth, Public domain,
via Wikimedia Commons

During the Nazi regime, diplomacy, parties, and receptions had to continue but became even more politically fraught. Britons who fell foul of the regime had to be rescued and the Embassy turned into a refuge, not least for the left-wing historian and political journalist Elizabeth Wiskemann, who only escaped lasting Gestapo imprisonment with the help of Embassy staff, as well as her own intellect. Gesa Stedman.



Elizabeth Wiskemann

4. Who was Elizabeth Wiskemann? Scan the QR code to find out.

Elizabeth Wiskemann (1899–1971) was an English journalist, historian, and spy of Anglo-German descent, whose frank articles for the left-wing *New Statesman and Nation* led to her being imprisoned by the Gestapo and narrowly escaping to England in 1936. Gesa Stedman.



Elizabeth Wiskemann.
Photographer and date unknown. Reprinted by
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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.

Die Welt auf der anderen Seite des Fensters

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- 7. Read the German text 'Die Welt auf der anderen Seite des Fensters'.**
- a) Who was Helen D'Abernon?
 - b) What does the text say about the German economy after the First World War?
- 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

vornehmlich	primarily
Begleitung (f.)	companion, convoy
Botschafter (m.)	ambassador (male)
am Boden liegen	here: to be economically depressed
sich gezwungen sehen	to find oneself forced
Nachkriegsjahre (Pl.)	postwar years

Eine weitere englische Autorin, die die Ereignisse vornehmlich von ihrem Fenster aus beobachtete und die Stadt selbst nie ohne Begleitung besuchte, war Lady Helen D'Abernon, die Ehefrau des ersten britischen Botschafters in Deutschland nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Berlins Wirtschaft lag nach dem Krieg und dem Vertrag von Versailles am Boden. Viele Menschen sahen sich zu einem Leben auf der Straße und in die Prostitution gezwungen. In den ersten Nachkriegsjahren war Hunger weit verbreitet. Gesa Stedman.

The Europe I saw

9. Read the excerpt from Wiskemann's memoir *The Europe I saw* (1968) and highlight all the words you know how to translate already.

10. Translate the text into German. Choose:

- a) Translate the text directly.
- b) Rewrite the text in simpler English.

Next, translate your simpler version into German.

The commercial and financial attachés at the British Embassy in those days were able men, and extremely well-informed. Ernest Rowe-Dutton, the financial attaché lent by the Treasury, was unusually brilliant. I came to know him well. When the *Creditanstalt* in Vienna failed in May 1931 the financial position of Germany rocked too—ever since the autumn of 1929 large amounts of American capital had been withdrawn and the collapse in Vienna seemed to spell the end of confidence. [...] It was all very chilling. As 1931 proceeded more and more people, feeling that desperate situations called for desperate remedies, wished the Nazis to be harnessed to the German Government.

Elizabeth Wiskemann, 'The Europe I saw', pp. 13–14.

Glossary

attaché	Attaché (m.)
able	fähig, kompetent
Treasury	Finanzministerium (n.)
to withdraw	zurückziehen
to spell	here: bedeuten
remedy	Mittel (n.), Lösung (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?