



Translating Berlin #1

Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität

- 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 Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität.**
 - a) Where was the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität located?
 - b) Which role did it play in the 1920s in Berlin?
 - c) Who used to meet there, and why?
 - 3. Present the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität to your neighbour or group. Your presentation should contain the answers to 2a), b), and c).**
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In 1810, Wilhelm von Humboldt and his colleagues founded the university based on the notion of integrating research and teaching, the humanities and the natural sciences, and allowing research to be conducted independent of political, religious, or any other interference. After the German Reich was unified in 1871, the university soon rose to become the model for many national and international universities. Among its famous professors were Georg Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Carl von Savigny, Max Planck, and Robert Koch. Heinrich Heine, Otto von Bismarck, and Karl Marx were among its students. Arthur Symons' friend Josiah Flynt, an American with whom he explored decadent Berlin in the late 19th century, also enrolled as a student. Christopher Isherwood's friend William Robson-Scott, who translated Freud's letters, worked as an English lecturer at the university in the 1930s. When the National Socialists rose to power, students and faculty got involved in the burning of books by Jewish, homosexual, Communist, or other authors opposed to National Socialism. The left-wing journalist Elizabeth Wiskemann comments scathingly on the changed leadership of the university:

'This spring the University of Berlin was compelled to accept as its Rector a vet of about thirty-five, because none of the ordinary professors were sufficiently tough to please the régime. This man ordered the students to a pseudo-military parade. He gave them a Nazi harangue, at the end of which he said they could now go back to their intellectual studies since he had no objection! Those who failed to parade were, I am told, sent down.'



Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität. Lithograph c. 1900, unknown artist. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Photocrom Prints Collection, LC-DIG-ppmsca-00342. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

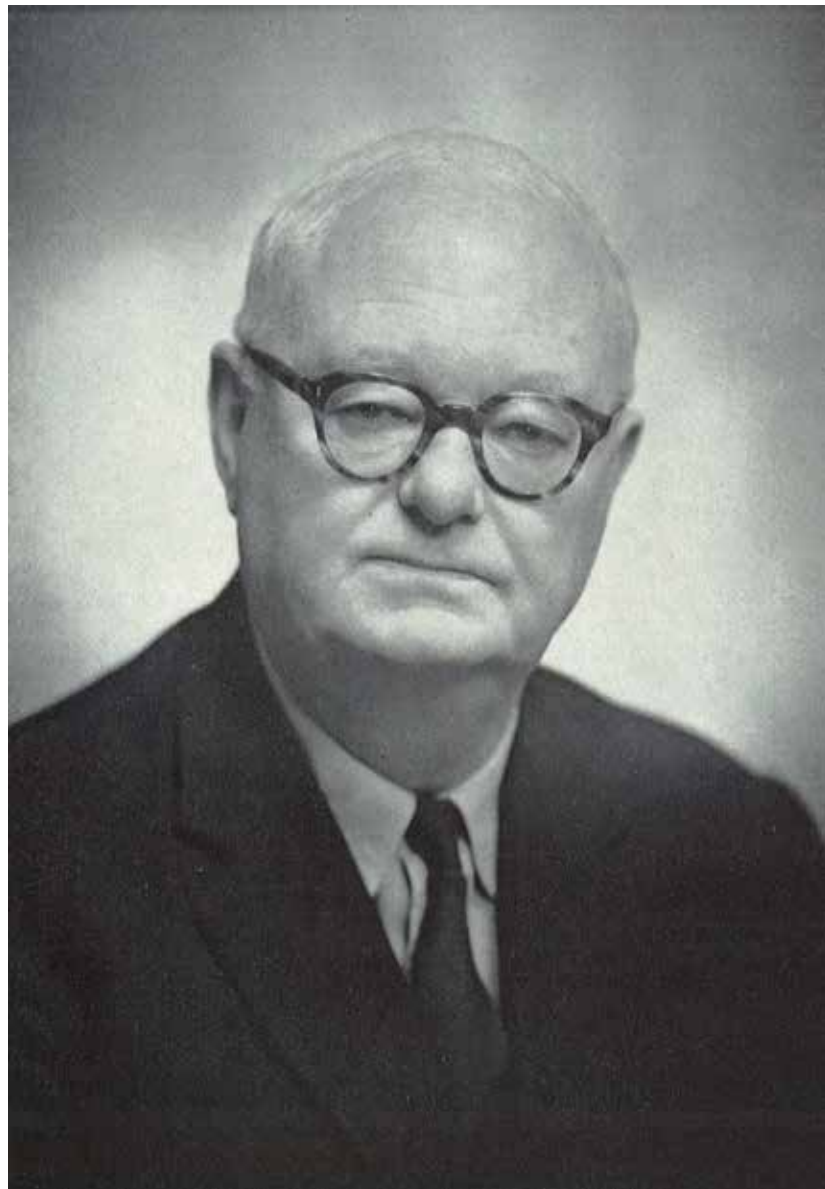
While William Robson-Scott's stance against the fascist political leaders earned him an entry in his university personnel file, the Australian-born Irish writer Francis Stuart accepted the position of lecturer shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. He defended his anti-British position and would always claim that this had not led him to endorse National Socialism, although this has been severely questioned by scholars. A fictional account of his time in Berlin can be found in his controversial novel *Blacklist Section H*, published in 1971. Gesa Stedman.



William Robson-Scott

4. Who was William Robson-Scott? Scan the QR code to find out.

William Robson-Scott (1901–1980), academic, translator, secret agent, who was friends with Christopher Isherwood and taught at Friedrich-Wilhelm-Universität in the late 1930s. He features both in Isherwood's work of auto-fiction *Christopher and His Kind*, and in his Berlin novels. Gesa Stedman.



Photograph of William Robson-Scott as a young lecturer, aged about 34, at Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, © 1935

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.

September 1930

7. Read the German text 'September 1930'.

- a) What happened in the Reichstag elections of September 1930?
- b) How did the array of political parties change?

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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Mit den Reichstagswahlen vom September 1930 nahm die politische Polarisierung in Deutschland weiter zu. Die Nationalsozialistische Partei konnte die Zahl ihrer Parlamentssitze mit einem Schlag von 12 auf 107 erhöhen. Die KPD verbesserte ihr Ergebnis um 40 Prozent, und die Zentrumspartei versank in Bedeutungslosigkeit. Das Vertrauen der Bevölkerung in die Republik war zerstört. In den darauffolgenden Jahren erlebten die Nationalsozialisten bei mehreren Wahlen Erfolge und Rückschläge. Annabel Williams.

Article in the New Statesman and Nation

9. Read the excerpt from Wiskemann's article for the *New Statesman and Nation* (1935) 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 general line in England to-day is, it seems, to feel that Germany is settling down quite nicely—a few little un-Englishness, but then foreigners will be foreign. One's first superficial impression of Berlin, round about the glorious anniversary of June 30th, 1934, seems to tell the same tale; there are so few Brown Shirts and so many Jews that one might almost be back in Weimar Germany. Nothing could be more disastrously deceptive than this impression.

Elizabeth Wiskemann, article in the 'New Statesman and Nation', 1935.

Glossary

to settle down	here: sich normalisieren, sich einpendeln
superficial	oberflächlich
round about	rund herum, um (...) herum
tale	Geschichte (f.), Fabel (f.)
disastrously	unheilvoll, katastrophal
deceptive	trügerisch

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?