

Translating Berlin #3

Institute of Sexual Science

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 Institute of Sexual Science.**
 - a) Where was the Institute of Sexual Science located?
 - b) Which role did the Institute of Sexual Science play in the 1920s in Berlin?
 - c) Who used to meet there, and why?
3. **Present the Institute of Sexual Science to your neighbour or group. Your presentation should contain the answers to 2a), b), and c).**



The Institute for Sexual Science.
Historical postcard, 1920s. Archiv der Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft e.V.,
Berlin

The pioneering Institute of Sexual Science was an important cultural institution in interwar Berlin and a symbol of the city's progressive attitude towards non-normative sexual identities. Founded by the sexologist and political activist Magnus Hirschfeld in 1919, it was dedicated to the study of sexuality, to providing a support centre for Berlin's LGBTQ+ communities, and to campaigning for legal reform.

Contemporary reports describe it as a welcoming space, which mixed scientific research with social events such as balls. The Institute was known internationally and it welcomed many foreign visitors – not exclusively people who identified as queer – who were interested in touring the premises or attending lectures and events. Among English writers, visitors included W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. The latter lived next door for a period, in an apartment owned by Hirschfeld's sister. Isherwood did not write about the Institute in the Berlin novels, but he left an ambivalent account years later in *Christopher and His Kind* (1976). There, Hirschfeld's scientific approach to sexuality is compared unfavourably to the kind of sexual emancipation that could be experienced in gay bars. Like other parts of Weimar Berlin's queer life, the Institute was attacked by the Nazis, who raided the premises in 1933 and destroyed its collections of books, photographs, and objects. Stefano Evangelista.



Christopher Isherwood

4. Who was Christopher Isherwood? Scan the QR code to find out.

In his world-famous Berlin stories, Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986) described the volatile atmosphere of the last years of the Weimar Republic. Berlin had an enormous impact on Isherwood's life and work; and his writings had an enormous impact on Anglophone readers' perception of Weimar Berlin. *Stefano Evangelista.*



W. H. Auden; Christopher Isherwood (centre); Stephen Spender. Photograph by Howard Coster, half-plate film negative, 1937. NPG x2947 © 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.

Die Faszination der deutschen Sprache

7. Read the German text 'Die Faszination der deutschen Sprache'.

- a) How did Isherwood perceive the German language?
- b) What was Isherwood's connection to the Institute of Sexual Science?

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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Sowohl für Auden als auch für Isherwood ging von der deutschen Sprache eine besondere sexuelle Faszination aus, als könne das Deutsche die erotische Vorstellungskraft in einer Weise stimulieren, die dem Englischen nicht zu eigen war. [...] Isherwood lebte mehrere Monate lang in einem Nebengebäude des Instituts für Sexualwissenschaft und machte sich mit Hilfe des sozialen Netzwerks am Institut mit der Berliner Schwulenkultur vertraut.

Stefano Evangelista, Gesa Stedman.

Glossary

ausgehen von	to emanate from
Vorstellungskraft (f.)	imagination
zu eigen	immanent
Nebengebäude (n.)	annex
sich vertraut machen	to familiarise oneself

Goodbye to Berlin

9. Read the excerpt from Isherwood's book *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) 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.

Glossary

dressed as	angezogen als
grin	grinsen
to drawl	gedehnt sprechen
solemnly	feierlich
lugubrious	schwermütig, düster

'Say,' he asked Fritz, 'what's going on here?'

'Men dressed as women,' Fritz grinned.

The little American simply couldn't believe it.

'Men dressed as women? As women, hey? Do you mean they're queer?'

'Eventually we're all queer,' drawled Fritz solemnly, in lugubrious tones.

The young man looked us over very slowly. [...]

'You queer, too, hey?' demanded the little American, turning suddenly on me.

'Yes,' I said, 'very queer indeed.'

Christopher Isherwood, 'Goodbye to Berlin', p. 472.

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?