

Rückblicke und Reflexionen –
A History of German Studies in Ireland

Gisela Holfter (ed.)

IRISH-GERMAN STUDIES
DEUTSCH-IRISCHE STUDIEN
LÉANN NA GEARMÁINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN

16

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Gisela Holfter

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E-mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

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This book is dedicated to all colleagues in German in Ireland, past and present.

Introduction: Towards a History of German Studies in Ireland

Gisela Holfter

German Studies in Ireland have a long and distinguished history. In fact, thanks to the establishment of a chair in Trinity College Dublin (TCD) in 1776, Ireland has the distinction of having the oldest established German Studies programme at university level in the world.¹ This means that in 2026 we can celebrate 250 years of German at third level. Comparable positions in Germany were established considerably later. The experience of German in Ireland is inseparable from other modern languages from the beginning, as there were two positions founded, one in German and French, one in Spanish and Italian. But only the French and German positions continued to exist since then without interruption. In the mid-nineteenth century it was again in the form of a Professorship of Modern Languages, and in the combination of French and German, that German was brought to newly founded Queen's Colleges in Belfast, Galway and Cork, and, a few years later, to the Catholic University in Dublin (which subsequently developed into University College Dublin).

There has been considerable interest in the history of German as a Foreign Language in Britain, notably from the early 1990s,² and there has also already been some research done on the topic of German Studies in Ireland, including by a number of contributors to this volume.³ However, these publi-

1 Maurice M. Raraty, The Chair of German at Trinity College, Dublin, 1775-1866. In: *Hermathena* (Dublin), 102 (1966), pp. 53-72.

2 For a comprehensive overview see Nicola McLelland, *German through English Eyes*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015.

3 See, for example, Eda Sagarra, The German Language in Ireland. *Teangeolas*, 26 (1989), pp. 12-19; Hugh Ridley, German in Ireland. In: Joachim Fischer, Gisela Holfter and Eoin Bourke (eds), *Deutsch-irische Verbindungen*. Trier: WVT, 1998, pp. 33-43; Rosaleen O'Neill, Modern Languages. In: Thomas A. Boylan and Tadhg Foley (eds), *From Queen's College to National University: Essays Towards an Academic History of QUC/UCG/NUI, Galway*. Dublin: Four Courts, 1999, pp. 360-83; Eda Sagarra, German Studies in Ireland – History and Reminiscence. In: Rüdiger Görner and Helen Kelly-Holmes (eds), *Vermittlungen*. Munich: iudicium, 1999, pp. 117-30; Joachim Fischer, *Das Deutschlandbild der Iren*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 2000; Eda Sagarra, Formen und Funktionen des Fremdsprachenunterrichts in Irland. In: Elmar Lechner (ed.), *Formen und Funktionen des Fremdsprachenunterrichts im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 469-89; Joachim

cations are often linked to specific institutions or time periods, or they provide general overviews of the contemporary situation. There has been no attempt at an in-depth account of developments at all institutions on the island of Ireland in the last decades. This volume is intended as a building block towards a more comprehensive and inclusive project to explore the history of the discipline at all third-level institutions.⁴

It is envisaged that the current collection of reflections by colleagues will provide the stimulus to undertake such a project. Here some thirty colleagues in German Studies provide reflections and overviews, covering nineteen third-level institutions in Ireland where German is – or was – taught. Many of these colleagues were at the forefront of changes, often providing leadership in the discipline of modern languages in their institutions, some at professorial level,

Fischer, The eagle that never landed: a history uses and abuses of the German language in Ireland. In: Michael Cronin and Cormac Ó Cuilleain (eds), *The Languages of Ireland*. Dublin: Four Courts, 2003, pp. 93-111; Pól Ó Dochartaigh and Miriam Broderick, *Languages and Language Planning in Ireland*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy 2007; Joachim Fischer and Manfred Schewe, *Deutschunterricht und Germanistikstudium in der Republik Irland*. In: Gerhard Helbig, Lutz Götze, Gert Henrici and Hans-Jürgen Krumm (eds), *Deutsch als Fremdsprache. Ein internationales Handbuch*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter Mouton, 2010, pp. 1471-80; Arnd Witte, Gardening in a Gale: German Language Teaching in the Republic of Ireland since 1961. In: Joachim Fischer and Rolf Stehle (eds), *Contemporary German-Irish Cultural Relations in a European Perspective*. Trier: WVT, 2012, pp. 209-28; Gisela Holfter, Eine kontextualisierte Bestandsaufnahme der German Studies in Irland. In: N. Colin et al. (eds), *Germanistik – eine interkulturelle Wissenschaft?* Heidelberg: Synchron 2020, pp. 99-112; Marieke Krajenbrink, German Studies in the Republic of Ireland. In: Paul Carmichael and Gisela Holfter (eds), *Unions, Break-Ups and Special Relationships*. Trier: WVT, 2022, pp. 29-38; Pól Ó Dochartaigh, German at the Northern Irish Universities. In: *Ibid*, pp. 39-44.

There have also been studies on individual scholars in German, for example J.J. Hogan, Mary M. Macken: An Appreciation. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 39/155 (1950), pp. 315-18; Colin Walker, Robert Weil. In: Gisela Holfter (ed.), *German-speaking Exiles in Ireland 1933-1945*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006, pp. 133-47; Gisela Holfter, Ernst Scheyer. In: *Ibid*, pp. 149-69 and (though not mainly focusing on Anderson's academic years) Jackie Uí Chionna, *Queen of Codes: The Secret Life of Emily Anderson, Britain's Greatest Female Code Breaker*. London: Headline, 2023.

- 4 A forthcoming study by Phyllis Gaffney on “Language Learning and Victorian Ireland: A Cultural History” (draft title) will also add considerably to our understanding of the role and importance of languages in Ireland in the nineteenth century and beyond.