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Dagmar Wienroeder-Skinner
Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia

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Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia

CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS: DIFFERING CONCEPTS OF SPACE IN GERMANY AND THE USA

In *Kaspar,* one of his early dramas, Peter Handke presents the historical figure of a foundling who is unable to speak. At the age of 17, the speechless *Kaspar* is confronted for the first time in his life with language material. Eventually, he learns, among other structures, the following: "Du kannst dir nichts mehr vorstellen ohne den Satz. Ohne den Satz kannst du keinen Gegenstand sehen" (Handke 115). Willingly or not, this sentence paraphrases what has become known in linguistics as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, i.e. the conclusion that languages do not name extra-linguistic reality in an identical manner. This concept led to the hypothesis of "linguistic relativity."[1]

LEXICAL ANALYSIS OF THE GERMAN WORD "RAUM"
AND THE ENGLISH WORD "SPACE"

An excellent example for this lexical incongruity is the German concept of space, as compared to its American counterpart. "Raum" has a broad spectrum of cultural and historical resonance in the German psyche and appreciation of these is necessary for a complete understanding of the semantics of the word in various contexts. "Raum" is extremely rich in its multiple meanings, especially when it comes to the use of its idioms and very numerous compounds, of which the reference dictionary for modern German lists no fewer than 95 possible combinations! (*Das große Wörterbuch* 2707–09). Most interestingly, however, the German idea of space offers a vast variety of cultural connotations, as will be demonstrated in this article. Their cultural implications may surprise even the otherwise sophisticated traveler. Anybody who does business with Germany or just wishes to understand better cultural varieties should have an awareness of basic differences—and "Raum" is certainly one of them.

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[1]The ethnolinguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf explored native American Indian languages and established what they later called the "Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis."

Table A

Usage of the words "Raum" and "space"

GERMAN (*Das große Wörterbuch* 2707–09)	ENGLISH COUNTERPARTS (*Webster's Deluxe Unabridged Dictionary* 1736)
1. zum Wohnen, als Nutzraum o. ä. verwendeter, von Wänden, Boden und Decke umschlossener Teil eines Gebäudes, z. B. ein heller Raum	
2. Länge, Breite und Höhe, nicht eingegrenzte Ausdehnung, z. B. der unendliche Raum des Universums	1. distance extending without limit in all directions
3. (ohne Plural) in Länge, Breite und Höhe fest eingegrenzte Ausdehung, z. B. zwischen Wand und Regal ist nur wenig Raum	2. distance, interval, or area between or within things
4 (ohne Plural) für jemanden oder für etwas zur Verfügung stehender Platz, z. B. Raum schaffen, Raum finden	3. area or room for some purpose, for example parking space
5. (ohne Plural) kurz für "Weltraum," z. B. der kosmische Raum	4. the universe outside the earth's atmosphere
6. die Menge aller durch drei Koordinaten beschreibbaren Punkte, z. B. der dreidimensionale Raum	5. a set of points or elements assumed to satisfy a given set of postulates, three/four dimensions space/time
7. geographisch und politisch als Einheit verstandenes Gebiet, z. B. im Raum (oder Großraum) Hamburg	
8. Zeitraum (compound)	6. interval or length of time
	7. reserved accommodations, train or ship interval or length of time
	8. in music, the open space between the lines of a staff
	9. in printing, type metal used to separate characters
	10. in telegraphy, an interval during the sending of a message

It is easily possible to compare the German definitions 2, 3, 4, 5, even 6, and 8 with the English counterparts (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6). It is particularly interesting to compare the definitions 1 and 7. While 1 refers to space, as a place where people live, specifying the boundaries of a room, or a living quarter, 7 refers to a larger area, not defined by any visible borders, but described as a shared "political and geographical" entity. Clearly, the underlying idea is a vision of strictly confined space (in 1) and a concept of space that is only defined by territory and time (in 7). On the other hand, the English definitions show neither vagueness nor ambiguity. One definition arose in the transportation industry while the three others can be traced back to writing and printing technology.

Table B
Idiomatic usage of the German word "Raum"

GERMAN		ENGLISH TRANSLATION
1. etwas in den Raum stellen	= zur Diskussion vorstellen	to present a problem for discussion
2. im Raum stehen	= als Problem aufgeworfen sein und nach einer Lösung verlangen	to be tackled as a problem that needs solution
3. im Raum stehenbleiben	= als Problem zunächst ungelöst bleiben	to remain unsolved for the time being
4. einer Sache Raum geben	= sich entfalten, sich entwickeln lassen	to allow a solution to develop

All four idioms present an abstract idea that is proposed to be dealt with intellectually (1, 2, 3), and even receives, eventually, the opportunity to grow in a constructive manner (4).

Table C
Usage of the word "Raum " + compounds

• *"Raum" and dimension:*

GERMAN	ENGLISH
Raumanalyse	volumetric analysis
Raummaß	measure of capacity
Rauminhalt = Raumgehalt = Raumdichte	volume, cubic contents
Raumlehre	geometry
Raumtonne	freight ton
Raumverhältnis	proportion by volume

• *"Raum" and grammar:*

Raumangabe	= Adverbialbestimmung des Ortes	adverb of place

• *"Raum" in every day life:*

Raumangst	= Klaustrophobie	claustrophobia
Raumordnung		1) layout of rooms 2) area planning
Raumordnungsplan	= Plan für Landesplanung	plan for area planning
Raumausstatter, -in	= Innenarchitekt, -in	interior designer
Raumpfleger, -in		cleaning person

• *"Raum" and science:*

Raumgitter	= Ione, Atome oder Moleküle in Kristallen	crystal lattice
Raumtonwirkung		stereophonic effect

In the aftermath of the launching of artificial satellites and manned space vehicles a whole cluster of words has emerged around the concept of outer space in English, such as spaceman, spaceport, space station, to name a few examples. Here is a list (abbreviated) of German compounds in the context of the space age: "Raumfähre," "Raumfahrer, -in," "Raumschiff," "Raumfahrt, -behörde, -industrie, -medizin, -programm, -technik, -techniker, -in; -unternehmen," etc.

Of course, there are additional compounds using any appropriate "word + raum" combinations—all referring to confined or open space(s):

GERMAN	ENGLISH
Aufenthaltsraum	lounge
Freiraum	personal space and time for projects
Großraumbüro	large partitioned office
Lebensraum	lebensraum, living space
Spielraum	1) play room 2) free play, scope
Wirtschaftsraum	market area

It is easy to see that the German language has a certain obsession with the concept and meaning of the word "Raum." In addition to the 95 word compounds of "Raum" mentioned before, there are 6 idiomatic terms using the word "Raum," 16 compounds with the word "Räum -" ("räumen" = Platz schaffen, leer freimachen; verlassen, fortschaffen [to remove, clear away, vacate]) and 7 adjectives—some of which are as unusual (or archaic) as: "raum" = offen (Meer, See), "raum(er)sparend," "raumhoch," "(ge)räumig" (= spacial use only), and "geraum" (= temporal use only) (*Das große Wörterbuch* 2707–09; *Langenscheidt* 1242; *Etymologie* 553).

For classroom use of the lexical analysis, students can work with index cards that bear the German definitions only, as mentioned under Table A: 1–8. They can then proceed with the search of the English counterparts by using an English-English dictionary, matching the definitions, and exploring (with the teacher's help) the meaning of definitions which stand alone (Table A: English 7–10, German 1 and 7).

When the idiomatic usage is discussed, as in Table B: 1–4, students should start by speculating on what is actually put, kept and left in the "Raum" by trying to explore the left column of Table B, then trying to find corresponding terms in English for the expressions in the center column.

As far as "Raum" + compounds in Table C are concerned, students could work in three steps:

  a) use either cards or word lists and find the meaning of the compounds by decomposing and separating them into words they already know (instead of being just panicked by their often incredible lengths);

b) find categories into which they may group these compounds in order to understand better the very broad usage of the word "Raum";

c) use a German-English dictionary to search for more related words, which will eventually lead to a wider vocabulary, such as adjectives surrounding the word "Raum" and the various meanings of "räumen, Räumung" and its compounds.

The word + "Raum" compounds can be handled in a similar manner by taking out those words which are known and working out the meaning of the complete word. The concept of open and confined space as already seen under Table A. may be compared.

THE GERMAN CONCEPT OF "RAUM" IN RELATION TO ITS GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT, AND ECONOMY

"The Federal Republic of Germany is situated in the heart of Europe and is surrounded by nine neighboring states."[2] Many guide books and information booklets on Germany start their introduction to the geographical criteria with these, or comparable words, and (in post 1990 texts) often continue with, ". . . the longest stretch from North to South is about 876 km, the longest from West to East is about 640 km." Indeed, Germany is, geographically speaking, a very small country. It is, however, very densely populated. In fact, its population density is one of the highest in Europe, with an average of 224 Germans per square kilometer.[3]

This may be compared to the average density of population in the USA of 27 Americans per square kilometer. The territorial size of Montana is similar to that of Germany. The population data provide a context to explore intercultural issues (*Encyclopedia Americana* 392–94; 472):

Country	Size	Population	Density
Germany (1990)	357,000 km^2	81,000,000	224 : 1 km^2
Montana	380,850 km^2	799,065	2 : 1 km^2
USA	9,809,431 km^2	248,709,873	27 : 1 km^2

[2]Of course, the same could be said about the location of Austria and Switzerland but it has had different political implications.

[3]Numbers are even higher in the Netherlands (349) and in Belgium (324) (*Politik und Gesellschaft* 112).

A map of Germany shows particularly crowded areas, like North Rhine-Westphalia where the population density is very high with 497 per square kilometer as compared to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern with the lowest density of 83 per square kilometer. Students can try to find out why certain areas are crowded and others are not. Subsequently, they can explore what consequences in every day lifestyle can be seen in densely populated areas (traffic congestion, shortage of living space, affect on leisure activities, limited access to nature, environmental concerns, etc.) as opposed to less populated areas (country life, tourism, ecology, etc.). Finally, a map of the United States compared to that of Europe gives a visual picture of the size of the two continents. It could lead to a comparison of the size, topography, climate, etc. of the two continents.[4]

Comparing population data can produce an illustration of what life in overcrowded areas might be like. Just imagine 36% of all Americans living in the state of Montana! No wonder many Germans are very impressed by the vastness of the American continent, often underestimate distances in traveling, and enjoy the pleasure of driving on seemingly endless roads leading to nowhere— in the German mind.

It is of importance, however, to examine—in the context of "Raum"—the long term quality of life and the possible solution to present and future problems. The question is what has to be done, or what can be done, to protect and preserve the environment in a country with a such a high population density. In addition, in an economic system that depends heavily on exports, as is the case in Germany, production and manufacturing concerns arise. How can the German economy prosper, given the realities of a faltering welfare state? Will Germany be able to continue to produce within its geographical and socio-economic boundaries? Or will Germany, in an attempt to leave German "Raum," concentrate on "Auslagerung" [producing outside Germany] with companies like BMW and Mercedes moving part of their production to North America, and more and more German companies producing in Eastern Europe at relatively low labor costs? It seems that current economic changes have implications on "Raum" such that German territory is being abandoned by companies for more lucrative financial policies. Being forced to pay very high taxes and costly workers' benefits certainly pres-

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[4]A very useful map is included in: *Tatsachen über Deutschland* (76 and 77). For comparison of the North American and European continents, use a commercially available map and indicate scale. Density of population numbers in: "Größe - Bevölkerung" in *Transparente Landeskunde* (3).

ent real problems, while distress is increased by growing unemployment figures within Germany's own boundaries. A total of 4,658,300 people were registered as unemployed at the beginning of 1997 (18.7% in the East and 10.6% in the West).[5] Since unification in 1990, Germany has been the most populous country in (Western) Europe. It has also the largest economy, but on the basis of the *per capita* gross domestic product Germany has been at about the European average since 1990 (*timeline* 3).

"RAUM" AND THE CONCEPT OF MOBILITY

Economic uncertainties have an effect of double irony on German lifestyle. Cars have been at the top of the list of German exports for a couple of years, while these vehicles are, at the same time, the object of an ambivalent consumer attitude in Germany. Despite a generally high concern for the environment and a relatively attractive public transportation system, too many Germans seem to be determined not to give up their car-driving habit. It is estimated that in the year 2010 the number of cars registered in West and East Germany will come close to being almost identical: 1000 West Germans will have 700 vehicles compared to 1000 East Germans who will own 652 (in 1990 the number was 605: 282).[6] These statistical forecasts are somewhat alarming, especially when one looks at the actual driving habits in Germany. Public transportation is mainly used for shopping and to get to schools, while the car is the preferred means of transportation to go to work, to leisure activities, and to vacation. In contrast, the lower American population density makes universal coverage by public transportation very problematic so that often cars are the only viable means of transportation.

Another comparison between German and American lifestyles is the concept of mobility. Americans are highly mobile geographically, economically, and socially speaking and may move several times in their lifetime. Many Germans, on the other hand, have stayed in the same geographic area, and even in the same house, for generations. They will move only if they are convinced that their lifestyle will be at least comparable to, if not better than, the one they already have. In fact, their houses seem to be bastions that need to be defended. Being invited to a

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[5]Numbers released by the President of the Federal Labor Office, Bernhard Jagoda: "Mehr Arbeitslose oder weniger?" *Deutschland-Nachrichten* 7 Feb. 1997: 5.

[6]The 'Globus-Kartendienst' service has a number of relevant statistics. For this particular issue, Nr. 8547 is very useful. 'Globus-Kartendienst' is based in Hamburg and can be reached for information at: Wandsbeker Zollstr. 5, D-22041 Hamburg, Telephone: (040) 652 60 21, Fax: (040) 652 31 41.

German house as a foreigner is more of an honor than a regular gesture of hospitality, as it is in the USA.

Another cultural difference in the German concept of space is the very strong sense of privacy. Fences around personal properties, window shutters, and closed doors to almost every room in the house are the norm. Time in the garden is spent behind the house, i. e., in the backyard, shutters are closed regularly at night, and doors are opened and closed each time one enters a room. Mildred Reed Hall and Edward T. Hall, the authors of *Understanding Cultural Differences,* an excellent introduction to intercultural issues between France, Germany, and the United States, discuss the closed office door in the German business environment in an anthropological context that points to the German sense of orderliness. The door receives the symbolic meaning of a protective shield:

> In offices, Americans keep their doors open; Germans keep doors closed. In Germany, the closed door does not mean that the man behind it wants to be alone or undisturbed, or that he is doing something he doesn't want someone else to see. It's simply that the Germans think that open doors are sloppy and disorderly. To close the door preserves the integrity of the room and provides a protective boundary between people. (41)

THE GERMAN CONCEPT OF "RAUM" FROM A HISTORICAL VIEW

There is no doubt that many Germans are keenly aware of history. When Germans make speeches, they usually introduce their message with at least one historical event because they want to lay a proper foundation before delivering the actual message to the audience.

History has demonstrated a number of times how Germans feel geographically bound. At the end of the fifteenth century, Germany still consisted of fragmented lands, officially called the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation," unofficially the land of "Vielstaaterei," while England and France were already powerful national entities. For most of the next two hundred years, Germany was relatively remote from the events that shaped the established nations of Europe. In the course of time and history, the German peoples in their various tiny states developed attitudes and habits that reflected their situation of living in the "Land der Mitte" while retaining, at the same time, an outsider position in the political and philosophical sense.

After the establishment of the (Second) German Empire in 1871, Bismarck ensured that Germany was protected by a policy of strong political alliances in order to prevent any attack from the outside. This system was very successful until Kaiser Wilhelm II dismissed Bismarck and maneuvered Germany into the first World War. Fewer than thirty years later, the search for ideologically motivated "Lebensraum" in Eastern Europe brought tragedy over the entire European continent—and the world. Thus, the historical perceptions of "Raum" have very serious negative connotations for Germany.

They have also reinforced the wish to be able to explore beyond the borders, at least temporarily. In modern times, this wish to escape is manifest in the national passion for travel. The average annual vacation period in Germany is 31 working days (with additional religious holidays). German tourists make up the second biggest group—after North Americans—in terms of money spent on travel. Available funds may determine the destination, but not necessarily the length of the vacation. The question then arises: where do Germans go? Neighboring Austria and Italy, Spain and France are on top of the list of preferred destinations—rest and climate factors being preponderant over sports and adventure ("Globus-Kartendienst" Nr. 8409). In the year after the fall of the wall, more East Germans than West Germans traveled on vacation, taking on average several trips per year—a clear example of how politics and the suppressed wish for freedom can be reflected in travel patterns ("Globus-Kartendienst" Nr. 8823).

In summary this article compared the usage of the German word "Raum" with the English word "space." The connotations of the various meanings of "Raum" have been placed in their cultural background. Understanding these cultural differences can be considered a "silent" yet fascinating language. Cross-linguistic differences and intercultural information may be profound because they confront us with two complexities: our own cultural system and the system outside. In the age of global communication it is necessary to achieve improvement in international understanding and acceptance of cultural differences, which are reflected in everyday lifestyle. Technically speaking, this process is becoming more and more accessible. Pragmatically speaking, we should all be ready to manifest genuine interest in the 'other' by getting acquainted and tuned in, thus facilitating communication patterns and improving cultural insights.

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