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A Bibliotecal Heresy -- Response from Walter de Gruyter

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Vendor/Library Relations
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culations worth three or four other books that could be purchased for the cost of one **Benjamins** or **de Gruyter** title? If I used the money differently, I might be purchasing many more potential circulations than I am by sticking with expensive, well-reputed publishers.

On the other hand, I can't stop buying **Benjamins** and **Kluwer** titles without risking faculty ire. If publications of the most prestigious international presses are not available in anticipation of need, I could appear to be either incompetent or contrarian. I may inconvenience the chaired professor or the dissertating grad student who needs the most specialized material. In the long run I risk reducing the quality of the collections for some potential short-term gains in circulation. By favoring **Kluwer** and **Benjamins** titles which are mostly in English, I would be contributing to the decline of German as a language of scholarship in our collection—ironic and sad for a West European bibliographer [sic].


So, I am torn between the need to purchase high-quality but expensive books that will make a richer collection but will rarely circulate and the possibility of favoring less expensive (English-language) titles from less prestigious presses in Europe. It is tempting to buy four or five of these instead of the **de Gruyter** title. And I might actually get more circulation from those than from the **de Gruyter** title.

Now that so many titles cost well over one hundred dollars each, I feel obliged to do some investigation to make a sound decision. (Of course deliberation by bibliographers adds fur-



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ther to the cost of purchasing expensive monographs.) On an experimental basis I am trying to cooperate more with **Duke University's** library on expensive titles from European presses.

Have we reached the point where the traditional model of scholarly publication and distribution of information has broken down for monographs as well as for serials? 

A Bibliotecal Heresy — Response from Walter de Gruyter

by **Dr. Anke Beck** (Editor in Chief, Mouton de Gruyter)

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Senior Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP Library Services) <rnardini@ybp.com>



We at **Walter de Gruyter Publishers** are somewhat surprised by the ongoing debate about the price structure of books published by our company, and gratefully accept the opportunity to respond directly to **John Rutledge's** article "A Bibliotecal Heresy: Cost over Quality?"

The above-mentioned article was written by a librarian operating under financial constraints made even worse by the current exchange rate. We acknowledge, and hope it is clear, that our response is not aimed toward **John Rutledge** personally. Rather, we take our response as a welcome opportunity to introduce our publishing policy and to explain why some books will always be more expensive than others; why it is difficult to compare some publishers with others; and why, in conclusion, we think it is not appropriate to denounce one particular publish-

ing house for pursuing "bibliotecal heresy" when their goals may be totally different from other publishing houses.

There is a puzzling element to articles of this nature, commonly known as the "apple and oranges problem." **Walter de Gruyter** is not just one company, with one program and one price structure. Rather, it consists of many entities, with two primary divisions. The first is **Walter de Gruyter**, the parent company, with its humanities departments including Theology, Classics, Philosophy, Archeology, (German) Literature and (German) Linguistics, and the Natural Sciences and Medicine divisions. All of the aforementioned departments publish mainly in German. Second, there is **Mouton de Gruyter**, which was known as **Mouton Publishers** until acquired by **Walter de Gruyter** in 1976. More than 90 percent of this division's publications

are in English. **Mouton de Gruyter** is therefore the only division that is comparable to **Kluwer** and **Benjamins**, the publishers highlighted by the author of "A Bibliotecal Heresy." Both **Benjamins** and **Mouton** are scholarly publishers with a core program in linguistics.

It is presumptuous to believe that the circulation of a German-language book in an American library would be as high as an English-language book in the same library. Although Germans sometimes choose to ignore this fact, the ability to read in the language of the philosophers is lower than the German writing academia acknowledges. That, however, does not make contents written in that language less important. It is true for a large percentage of **Walter de Gruyter** publications that the subject matter is German original texts (like **Kant**

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and Nietzsche or theological writings) and thus, large parts of the academic findings are discussed in the original language.

But if we compare apples with apples (English-language publications with English-language publications) we can say with some certainty that the Mouton de Gruyter price structure is well below that of the average Kluwer and Benjamins prices. In 2003, Mouton's average book price was Euro 87,08, which converts to \$104.75, compared to the \$128 average price mentioned in the article. Mouton's moderate price structure becomes even more evident when you compare how many pages you get for the price: Mouton's average is 400-500 pp (allowing the authors to outline their empirical findings) whereas others are in the neighborhood of 300 pp.

Although we are using statistical facts about price differences between publishers to argue that "Mouton" or "Walter de Gruyter" are not as expensive as you may think, there are additional issues which lead to higher prices and which should be addressed here.

Both Walter de Gruyter and Mouton de Gruyter have very high standards regarding the quality of the manuscripts published, be it monographs, edited book series, or journals. To guarantee this quality, we pay for a very highly qualified editorial staff, which cooperates closely with outstanding, highly regarded scholars and editors worldwide. Every manuscript we acquire undergoes a rigorous review process. This also includes dissertations and *Habilitationschriften*, which often only vaguely resemble their original form after having been subjected to evaluation by series editors and two outside reviewers, and which are then rewritten and reviewed again. It is also worth-

while to mention that Walter de Gruyter does not have the non-profit status that some university presses enjoy.

Our understanding of publishing is that we do not simply provide textbooks and readers; rather we publish works that will support the scientific community. Furthermore, our publication policy clearly stipulates that we frequently support areas which are explicitly not mainstream, but which advance scientific knowledge. Among these publications are the manuscripts published in the *Mouton Grammar Library*, the series in which the *Grammar of Gaagudju*, by Mark Harvey, 497 pages, was published. Regarding this title, John Rutledge states:

While the quality is certainly there in the case of de Gruyter, sometimes the scope of contribution may be quite narrow. Here's a case in point: Harvey, Mark. *The Grammar of Gaagudju*. (Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002). This monograph is based on the author's 1992 dissertation. Why did it need to cost \$178? Lincom, a linguistics specialty house in Munich, is able to produce grammars from around the world for a lot less money. ... But, Routledge also charges a lot for their "obscure" grammars as well. Perhaps that is a standard price for the topic and Lincom is the exception. ...

The fact that a manuscript is a dissertation is not a criterion per se for a good or bad piece of work. It is clear that the author must have done something to the manuscript as there are about ten years between submission of manuscript and publication. There are piles of correspondence between editors, reviewers and the author, which lie between those ten years.

By comparison, Lincom Europa publishes the so-called *Languages of the World* booklet series for studies on grammatical issues. The books in this series are brief sketches of grammatical problems. The *Mouton Grammar Library*, in contrast, builds an extensive collec-

tion of high quality descriptions of languages around the world. Each volume offers a comprehensive grammatical description of a single language together with fully analyzed sample texts, a comprehensive vocabulary, and all relevant information available on the language in question. The only criterion for acceptance is a high standard of scientific quality.

A look at the numbers tells us that page length in the Lincom series varies between 35 and 150 pages, at a price of \$30 to \$50. For example, the Grammar of Nyulnyul, which is also an Australian language, is 68 pages at a cost of about \$36. Another grammar, for the language of Bar, is 60 pages at a cost of about \$35. If we do the math we see that Lincom charges about 50 cents per page. This figure, multiplied by the number of pages in the Mouton Grammar of Gaagudju (497 pages) suggests that the Lincom price would have been \$248.50. Even though we are comparing actual prices and hypothetical prices, our main point is that a manuscript written for and published in the *Languages of the World* series by Lincom is simply not the same as a manuscript published in the *Mouton Grammar Library*. A scientist using the Mouton Grammar would not be able to switch to the Lincom version and find the same level of detail and knowledge.

Walter de Gruyter is a publishing house that is committed to publishing highly scholarly work, which sometimes may not be mainstream, but which is necessary to bring academia forward — who else would do it if some publishers would not take the risk? Not a single conference attended by a Mouton representative passes without somebody coming to our booth to thank us for publishing our grammars, particularly grammars of endangered languages which may die out very soon. We hope there will be librarians who can agree with us and apply our criteria to their acquisition plans and educational programs. 🐾

Leaving the Books Behind — Preservation Woes

by Stephanie A. Kobezak (University of South Carolina)

Column Editor: Mary E. (Tinker) Massey (University of South Carolina, School of Library and Information Science, Columbia, SC) <MMassey@gwm.sc.edu>

Column Editor's Note: Stephanie is a distance education student at the University of South Carolina. — TM

Many of us participating in a distance education program in library and information science have had experience working in a library setting. Personally, I had the opportunity to work in the Preservation Department at an academic library. While there, I had a variety of interesting experiences including inadvertently hiring klutzy student assistants to handle book repairs, odd patron requests, bindery glitches, wet books, items that at one point in time might have been a book, and interesting book repair tales. One such memorable event was an eruption of glue at my workstation. Now, there are various types of eruptions but this was unique for it shouldn't

have occurred. It happened so quickly, yet so slowly. The immediate event, the spewing forth of PVA, was rapid. Now just in case you are unfamiliar with PVA, it is officially polyvinyl acetate adhesive, which has a pleasant smooth, creamy consistency. As a main component of the preservation supplies, it resides in a good size container generally kept full. Though, that situation was reevaluated. As the process of cleaning the work area came to a close after completing numerous repairs, the lid to the PVA was tossed aside in a violent (okay, maybe violent is too strong but aggressive isn't, for this stuff just shoved the lid off). Anyway, the PVA spewed forth everywhere. Within milliseconds, there was an immense PVA flow engulfing everything in its path. First the brushes, followed by the scalpel, then the scissors, only to swal-

low the desk entirely. Okay, I exaggerate a bit but only about the scalpel. I remember thinking that I should do something, like panic, but I only watched in slow motion in a haze (perhaps PVA fumes?). As time crept by (flowed might be more appropriate), I contemplated my options - hmm, I could just hide in the stacks until the end of the day or simply return to my desk and appear surprised when a co-worker noticed the floor was sticky. As I contemplated my next course of action, I did notice the floor - it was oozing with PVA. Hmm, maybe no one will notice. The trash can, though directly in line with the flow-



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