

PREFACE

This volume starts our new series of monographs entitled *REAL studies*. REAL is an acronym for “Research in English and Applied Linguistics”, but it also emphasises the importance of “real” empirical studies based on authentic language material and topical linguistic debate. It thus covers a wide spectrum: from corpus-based to cognitive approaches; from pragmatic to theoretical discussions in lexicography or (second) language acquisition, etc.

This volume reflects current issues in linguistic research and the teaching of English in Saxony and the Czech Republic. In an age when English studies adapt to new challenges in the Bologna framework, such a broad and open survey appears particularly appropriate. It reports recent history and current debate, the changes to effective retraining of teachers in the 1990s, and the reorientation towards more business-oriented subjects that comprise not only topics from language, literature and culture, but also from film studies and the media, particularly the new medium of the internet. Our new series offers a forum for discussion, and we hope that experiences from Saxony and the Czech Republic reported will also encourage our colleagues to continue the dialogue in their own fields.

“English for Central Europe: Saxon-Czech Perspectives” was the first meeting of English specialists from Saxony and the Czech Republic, which was made possible through the “Sächsisch-Tschechisches Hochschulzentrum” (STHZ), a project funded by the European Union and the State of Saxony to encourage the academic exchange between Saxon and Czech universities. This meeting brought together teachers and students from both sides of the *Erzgebirge* for the first time to discuss their experience and opinions. This volume cannot render the lively atmosphere and inspiring discussions that we had during the two-day conference, but it does document the breadth of the issues covered. “English for Central Europe” comprises all aspects of English at university level: language, cultural and literary studies and methodology as well as practical language teaching. The contributors also testify to some of the discussions that have taken place within the universities over the fifteen years since the Velvet Revolution and the fall of the Berlin wall. Consequently, we were aware of the similarities (the pressures of effective financial management as well as the adaptation to the Bologna framework) as well as the differences (whereas the training and retraining of English teachers is largely completed in East Germany, it is still the major emphasis of English at Czech universities).

The conference also shows that English studies at Czech universities are once again developing. However, it has been a long time since the Prague linguistic circle influenced linguistic thinking all over the world (although Josef Vachek and Jan Firbas from Brno were struggling to carry on the great tradition until the present day). But the tradition can now be taken up again in functional as well as constructive perspectives and we hope that it can develop a new “communicative dynamism”.

Of course, English has also changed. Saxony in former East Germany and the Czech Republic may have been less hit by American influences after the Second World War and the postcolonial movement from the British Empire back to the centre; but they have caught up by now and embraced the divergent movements in this vast field of study. Above all, they have experienced the arrival of the internet and in particular the world-wide web, which extends English studies to a whole new dimension.

This conference has taken stock of and, we hope, laid new foundations for better understanding in the future. The interdisciplinary discourse between German/Saxon and Czech university departments has been stimulated by the conference and by the numerous on- and off-topic discussions during the days of the conference, but it does not end there. We look forward to more fruitful co-operation and exchange of ideas in the near future.

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