

UNIVERSITÄT ERFURT

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Sprachenzentrum

< sprachbote >

Issue 5 | Summer Semester 2026

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1 Greeting

Dear readers,

With the fifth edition of our newsletter, we once again bring you a vibrant showcase of what defines the Language Centre: the dedicated collaboration of many colleagues who, with ingenuity, energy, and professional expertise, enrich and help shape academic life on our campus and beyond.

One important development in this regard is the Language Centre's integration into a new, shared, and fair course allocation system. Together with a pilot team comprising members from various departments and faculties, we have already achieved some initial successes. This project is a prime example of constructive cooperation across different areas of the university.

This summer semester, the directors of the Language Centres at TU Ilmenau, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, and the University of Erfurt engaged in intensive discussions. Against the backdrop of cross-institutional developments concerning the target and performance agreements with the Free State of Thuringia, the talks focused on opportunities for closer collaboration and the development of synergies, while preserving the unique profiles of each institution.

We would especially like to highlight the support of the English Section in selecting qualified applicants for the integrated teacher training programme (*duales Regelschullehramt*). To this end, the dedicated team conducted a thorough assessment over two afternoons, evaluating the English language proficiency of around 60 applicants through a digital placement test (DPT), an individual writing task, and an interview.

Within the Language Centre itself, there was also reason to celebrate: a long-held wish has finally come true. Our staff room in C03 | 344 has been completely redesigned and has quickly become a popular gathering place. The adjacent modernised classroom, with its flexible seating arrangements, has likewise already proven to be an excellent space not only for teaching but also for social gatherings and celebrations.

The 'Projects and Events' section features a range of activities through which the Language Centre engages with the wider community. For instance, we report on a book presentation by the renowned Cameroonian author Hemley Boum, held in cooperation with the Institut français and other partners. We also introduce new networks, including the DGSS network 'Vocal Health in the Teaching Profession' and the DSH Network OST.

Within the university, we also contributed with great dedication to interdisciplinary projects, such as the GeKos and the action week 'Science Against Fascism'. Particularly noteworthy is the commitment of Sara Campi, who, together with students from her A1 to B2 Italian courses, explored current debates surrounding fascism and anti-fascism in Italy.

There is much more to discover in this issue. You will also get to know the new colleagues who will be joining our team in the coming semester. We hope you enjoy exploring this issue and wish you an inspiring and enjoyable read.

On behalf of the Language Centre
Dr. Susanne Hoppe

2 News and Novelties

University Language Centres in Dialogue: Developing Perspectives Together

This year, several meetings were held to strengthen networking and collaboration among the university language centres in Thuringia. The process was prompted in part by a short-notice request from the University Executive Board, in April, to compile a comparative overview of the language-learning programmes offered by the University of Erfurt, the Technische Universität Ilmenau, and the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. The overview also provided an opportunity to take a closer look at the structures and key areas of work of each institution.

The directors of the participating language centres subsequently met online to discuss their initial observations and to consider ways of deepening their collaboration. The meeting also revealed a strong interest in an ongoing exchange of ideas and experiences regarding shared challenges and future developments.

A follow-up meeting, held in person in Weimar in July, built on these discussions and explored, among other things, the contribution that language teaching makes to students, higher education, and society as a whole. The opportunities and risks of inter-university collaboration were also considered. The discussion covered organisational requirements, potential synergies, and the importance of maintaining each centre's distinctive profile.

Another key priority was identifying possible joint projects and exploring ways to strengthen co-operation. The aim is to pool existing resources effectively, learn from one another, and further enhance the quality of language teaching.

New Course Allocation System Successfully Introduced

The university has introduced the new course allocation system, MOSES, which is designed to ensure a fair allocation of places, taking into account the diverse and sometimes complex needs of students and their individual study programmes.

In the summer semester 2026, the platform was initially piloted in the Speech Training and English Sections. The pilot phase was successful and confirmed the system's overall suitability for course organisation.

In the coming winter semester, this new tool will be used for the first time across all sections of the Language Centre with permanent teaching staff. The German as a Foreign Language (DaF) Section is currently the only exception. The wider implementation of MOSES marks another step towards a more transparent course allocation process that better reflects students' needs.

Finally, a Place to Meet Again

As mentioned in Issue 4 of our *Sprachboote*, the SPZ team has been spread across the entire campus since 2023 due to renovation work. As a result, quick hallway chats, spontaneous encounters, and informal exchanges between classes have become less frequent, something many colleagues have sorely missed.

We are all the more delighted to have a new place where the team can come together. The former lecturers' room, C03-344, has been transformed into a cozy staff room that has quickly become a popular place to meet and connect. The lounge corner, complete with a sofa, a coffee machine, and a lovingly designed interior, creates a welcoming atmosphere where colleagues can relax and chat.

A special treat: when the room opened, each team member received their own little basket containing a selection of tea bags and coffee capsules. That way, everyone has their favourite tea or coffee ready whenever they want to take a break. As Uta Wallraff noted: "Hello, dear managing team, today I was in the staff room for the first time. It has turned out quite nice. THANKS."

We are delighted with this wonderful new meeting place and look forward to many more enjoyable conversations over a cup of coffee or tea.



Language Requirements for the Integrated Teacher Training Programme

With the introduction of the Integrated Teacher Training Programme in Thuringia, it has become increasingly important to ensure that prospective teachers meet the required subject-specific and language standards. This also applies to English, where candidates must demonstrate the required language proficiency before beginning their studies.

In close cooperation with local education authorities in Thuringia and Dr Semper from the Erfurt School of Education (ESE), the English Section of the Language Centre conducted placement tests for more than 60 prospective students at the beginning of the summer semester. To gain as comprehensive a picture as possible of their existing language skills, the assessment consisted of several components. In addition to a standardised placement test, participants completed a short writing task and took part in an individual interview.

For the English team, managing this process was a considerable challenge, both logistically and in terms of time. Planning, administering the tests, conducting the interviews, and evaluating the results all had to be fitted into two Friday afternoons—at a particularly busy point in the semester. Thanks to the commitment of everyone involved, the testing process was, nevertheless, carried out successfully, and the results were provided to the education authorities.

Through this initiative, the English Section strengthens quality assurance in teacher training and brings its language assessment expertise into the collaboration with local education authorities.

Picnic with Plan B, Same Great Spirits

From the beginning, our picnic, planned for June this year, faced an uphill battle. Just like last year, the date coincided with the city's Corporate Fun Run, a detail that had somehow been overlooked during planning. The consequences were familiar, too: road closures and cancelled tram services. Moreover, June was showing more of its rainy than its summery side. Yet, neither the weather nor the logistics could dampen our spirits. We quickly moved the picnic indoors, which also gave us the perfect opportunity to celebrate the opening of our new seminar room in C03, 343. The adjustable desks were pushed together to form one long table, creating the perfect setting for a wonderful evening.

In a relaxed atmosphere, lively conversations quickly took off. Topics ranged from our latest experiences with AI in our courses to amusing stories about bicycle thefts. Of course, there was plenty of excellent food to go around: a generous buffet filled with a wide variety of homemade delicacies left nothing to be desired. Sara's tiramisu was particularly popular and certainly deserves a permanent spot in our international cookbook.

Once again, the evening proved that even when the weather refuses to co-operate and the Corporate Fun Run lands on the very same day, good spirits, interesting conversations, and the pleasures of a shared meal cannot be stopped. We are already looking forward to our next picnic and are curious to see what surprises the stars have in store for us next time.

Substituting Two Roles

Our team is about to see a few changes: Sophie Laufer is expecting her second child and will be taking parental leave. With her practical, well-organised, and highly efficient approach to work, she leaves a gap that will certainly be felt in our day-to-day operations.

At the same time, we have made excellent arrangements for her cover. A new colleague will be joining the Speech Training Section. With the recruitment process complete, we look forward to fresh insights and a wonderful working relationship (see Personnel).

Sophie's role as deputy head will also be in good hands: Tracy Biedermann has kindly agreed to take on this responsibility. Her experience and familiarity with the processes and routines at our Language Centre will help ensure a smooth transition. Her main duties will include overseeing matters relating to our student assistants and managing our courses in the new course allocation system, MOSES.

We wish Sophie all the very best for the months ahead and look forward to working together as our team takes on its new shape.

3 Projects and Events

Reading by Author Hemley Boum



In cooperation with the Institut français and the Romance Studies Department, the Language Centre had the pleasure of welcoming the Cameroonian author Hemley Boum to the University of Erfurt. At a reading event, she presented her multi-award-winning novel *Le Rêve du pêcheur* (*The Fisherman's Dream*, published in German by Peter Hammer Verlag). In it, she weaves together the life story of the fisherman Zacharias from a village in southern Cameroon with that of his grandson Zack, who grew up in a slum in Douala and fled to Paris at the age of 18.

Leading up to the event, students in their language and cultural studies courses had engaged with the characters and also explored the role of geographical spaces as factors that shape identity and enable the passing on of experiences and memories. Right before the reading, the students had the opportunity to interview the author about her books, her journey to becoming a writer, and her work and life. They were very impressed by Hemley Boum's open and approachable manner as she shared her thoughts and emotions.

Le Rêve du pêcheur as well as another similarly moving and enriching book by the author, *Les jours viennent et passent*, are available in both French and German at the University Library.

Voice Training and GeKo: An Interdisciplinary Project

The Voice Training Section participated in an exciting project with Master's students of Health Communication (GeKo), facilitated by the university's Health Management programme, during the summer semester. Working closely with their lecturer, Dr Kristin Köhler, the students developed nature-based guided visualisations that can be listened to via QR codes at various locations across the campus, offering a moment to pause during everyday university life.

The role of the Voice Training Section was to train the Master's students in speech, voice control, and text reading for the subsequent audio recordings. To achieve this, Sophie Laufer introduced the students to the recording equipment and the software *Audacity*, while guiding the participants through practical exercises on the core elements of posture, breathing, voice, and articulation. In two subsequent sessions, Marie Seeliger and Sophie Laufer coached the students on reading their texts, focusing particularly on pacing, emphasis, and articulation. The texts were then recorded in the podcast room.

Our colleagues thoroughly enjoyed working on this project, especially since the final results make a valuable contribution to student health and offer a wonderful opportunity to relax and recharge on campus.

Connecting Across Germany for Vocal Health in Education

Since March 2025, the Voice Training Section of the Language Centre at the University of Erfurt has been actively involved in the nationwide network "Vocal Health in the Teaching Profession" (*Stimmgesundheits im Lehrberuf*), organised by the German Society for Speech and Voice Training (DGSS).

With the aim of bringing together colleagues from across Germany, the network focuses on:

- Sharing insights from research and teaching in higher education
- Online networking four times a year, featuring specialist lectures and professional development sessions
- Organising regular conferences on current topics in vocal health
- Forming working groups focused on research, publications, and teacher training
- Developing joint information and position papers
- Expanding inter-university collaborations



These sessions are hosted by a different network partner each time. The next lecture will take place on 11 September 2026: *"KOMPASS Sprache – A Glimpse into the Teaching and Research Lab at the University of Erfurt"* with Dr Stephanie Kurtenbach.

The Voice Training Section actively contributes its expertise in voice, speech, communication, and prevention to the network's activities. The goal is to sustainably strengthen the vocal health and communication skills of future teachers and to firmly anchor these elements in teacher training nationwide. More information can be found at: <https://www.dgss.de/kooperationen/netzwerk-stimmgesundheits>

3rd Regional Meeting of the DSH Network OST

"She can actually do better..." – Bias in Oral Examinations

It is a situation that almost every instructor has experienced: A student known to be engaged and high-performing in class is sitting in an exam. During the examination itself, her answers are solid, but she falls short of her potential. The impression arises that "she can actually do better." What now?

With this case study, Kataryna Lazitskaya opened her workshop on bias in oral examinations at the recent regional meeting of the DSH Network OST in Jena on April 24, 2026. The workshop began with an overview of typical cognitive and evaluation biases, before participants split into small groups to discuss several case studies, along with a checklist designed to ensure oral examinations are as fair as possible. The exchange about personal "favourite biases" not only triggered a few laughs but also prompted a critical reflection on one's own testing habits.

It became clear just how differently biases can manifest in everyday exam situations: A particularly confident manner can tempt examiners to rate answers higher than their actual content warrants (halo effect). Conversely, knowing about personal circumstances or the potential consequences of an exam (such as failing) can lead to a more lenient assessment. The same applies to the justified desire to avoid discrimination—whether it is an exhausted, pregnant candidate or a student with a limited formal educational background.



As for the opening example, this is a classic case of confirmation bias, where new observations are unconsciously interpreted to confirm already existing expectations.

While biases cannot be completely avoided, they can at least be minimised by recognising them and maintaining a critical approach to one's grading criteria. A shift in perspective can also help: What kind of examiners would I want for myself in an oral exam?

If you have any questions or would like to share your thoughts on the topic, please feel free to contact Katharina Kraut-Stuber (katharina.kraut-stuber@uni-erfurt.de) and Theres Werner (theres.werner@uni-erfurt.de).

Science against Fascism – Settimana antifascista

From June 1 to 5, 2026, German universities took part in the nationwide action week "Science Against Fascism". Its goal was to address the societal responsibility of academia in light of the current dangers of fascism. This topic was taken up in lectures, seminars, and Italian language courses at the University of Erfurt.

In Dr Sara Campi's Italian courses, students of various language levels examined the impacts of fascism and anti-fascism in Italy. Fittingly, the 80th anniversary of the *Repubblica Italiana* on June 2, 1946, fell within this week. The students became deeply aware of how important it is to protect the values of our democracy.

During the action week "Science Against Fascism," our Italian class closely examined the historical foundation of the modern Italian Republic, starting with the Italian drama *C'è ancora domani*. Although the film highlights the oppression of women in the post-fascist era, painful parallels to the present are obvious. For instance, globally speaking, there is still no universal right to vote for women.

In the following presentations, the course participants gave insights into the deep divisions within 20th-century Italy, ranging from the Vatican's stance during the Nazi regime and cinematic classics like *La vita è bella* to the resistance song *Bella Ciao* and the *Resistenza*, the courageous partisan resistance. Key figures were also analysed, such as the later President Sandro Pertini and the great Italian writer, historian, and philosopher Umberto Eco with his concept of *eternal fascism*. It became clear that today's Italian understanding of democracy is a direct result of the anti-fascist liberation struggle.

Given the current right-wing shift in Italian and, to some extent, global politics, confronting these issues takes on acute urgency. Italy's history clearly demonstrated to us the importance of democracy, and we realised: only those who know the past can protect freedom.

Tolstoy in the Russian B2 language classroom

In the B2 language course of the past academic year (WiSe 2025/26 and SoSe 2026), the topic of *Art and Literature* was once again enriched by reading a Russian classic. This time, Leo Tolstoy's world-famous novel *Anna Karenina* took centre stage.

Because the novel is quite extensive and demanding, the students worked with an adapted language version. This made the work more accessible while still including numerous passages from Tolstoy's original text. In addition, the famous 1967 Soviet film adaptation was integrated into the course, helping the students gain a deeper understanding of the novel.

The main focus was on working through the novel step-by-step. Gradually, the students read the text, expanded their vocabulary, discussed central themes, characterised the protagonists, and justified their own opinions. In doing so, they not only gained insights into 19th-century Russian society but also discovered many topics that remain relevant today.

It was particularly gratifying to see how the students were able to speak confidently, express their opinions, and write about the novel during their level exam. Their positive feedback confirmed once again that literature at B2 level can serve not only as a means of language acquisition but also as a gateway to culture reflection. Thus, *Anna Karenina* became an important and multifaceted component of the course.



4 Further Training

More Than Language Teaching: Impressions from the 34th AKS Conference in Nuremberg

Tracy Biedermann (English Section) and María del Rocío del Río Miguel (Spanish Section) attended the 34th AKS Conference, *Languages 'R' Us – Core Competencies and Fields of Action at Language Centres*, held at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg from 17 to 19 March 2026. In ten sections, lecturers from language centres across Germany discussed current developments in university-level foreign language learning and teaching. The conference provided an opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss shared challenges.

Nuremberg's history as the birthplace of modern simultaneous interpreting was also reflected in the conference programme. AKS Chair Dr Maike Engelhardt opened the conference by highlighting the role of language teaching in democratic education. The keynote lectures by Titus Müller and Julian Nida-Rümelin built on this theme, emphasising the importance of language, dialogue and respect for a vibrant democracy. These contributions served as a reminder that language teaching not only develops communicative competences but also enables and promotes the exchange of different perspectives.

Tracy particularly enjoyed the session *Foreign Language Teaching and Global Responsibility*, which explored how language teaching can combine communicative competence with political reflection, intercultural learning and global responsibility. Rocío especially appreciated the session *Internationalisation as a Field of Action – New Tasks and Target Groups for Language Centres*, where she learned about opportunities for cooperation and mobility. Both are already looking forward to the next AKS conference.



María Rocío del Río Miguel and Tracy Biedermann in the Historic Town Hall in Nuremberg (photo)

51st Annual DaF/DaZ Conference with the theme "mit.Deutsch.machen"

"Where on earth have we landed?" "This is literally in the middle of the woods!" – Conversations on the first day of the 51st Annual DaF/DaZ Conference started with something like this. Organized by the German Association for German as a Foreign and Second Language (FaDaF), the event took place in Schmalkalden from 19 to 21 March 2026. Schmalkalden is a small university town (just under 3,000 students) in southwestern Thuringia that many of the over 200 participants had never heard of before.

The motto "mit.Deutsch.machen" (making a difference with/through German) was a perfect fit for the venue: Given the high percentage of international students at Schmalkalden University of Applied Sciences (around 1,600 from approximately 90 countries), German plays a vital role in both academic success and integration.

Due to the growing number of English-taught degree programmes at German universities, this year's conference once again emphasised the importance of mandatory German language support up to the B2/C1 level. After all, sound German language skills are a key prerequisite for easing international graduates' transition into the German labour market and improving their career prospects. This discussion is highly relevant for the University of Erfurt as well: like many other institutions, it currently lacks a systematic framework for integrating German language acquisition into English-taught degree programmes.

Furthermore, the FaDaF General Assembly adopted a position paper that sharply criticises the massive restrictions on access to integration courses. Without these educational opportunities, the central message stated, social and professional integration becomes significantly more difficult.

And so, after three days, one thing was clear: Being "in the middle of the woods" is far from being detached from the core issues currently driving the field.



Katharina Kraut-Stuber and Viktoria Markov at the selfie-point-station in Schmalkalden

5 Personnel

Speech Training Section

We are delighted to have found a suitable substitute for Sophie Laufer during her parental leave. For the next year and a half, Lena Mühl will support the Voice Training team, taking on a total of eight courses. Lena taught at the Teacher Training Centre in Halle (Saale) before working in Nantes as a German instructor for the DAAD Programme. We look forward to working with her and wish her harmonious voices in all her classes.

There is also some wonderful news for Marie Seeliger for the winter semester 2026/27. From October on, she will permanently support the Voice Training team in a 40% position. Marie demonstrated her capabilities throughout the application process, standing out among the other candidates, and we can now officially welcome her as a permanent member of the team. We are absolutely delighted, as she has developed into a steady and dependable pillar of the Voice Training team over the past few semesters.

Spanish Section

We are pleased to welcome Alba Delgado Aguilar to the Spanish team. She will be joining us for one year, bringing experience from the Institute of Romance Studies and the Language Centre at the University of Leipzig. She is currently working on her dissertation on academic text types and AI-assisted writing in university foreign language instruction. We thank her for taking on this substitute teaching role and look forward to working with her.

SPZ Service Team

In the summer semester, we once again bid farewell to a few of our student assistants who will either be preparing for their exchange programmes abroad or graduating from our university. Our special thanks goes to Justin, Jasper, Emilia F., Karla, Luis, Ani und Riley. With great dedication, exceptional commitment, and a genuine readiness to help, they actively supported us as lecturers and were always on hand to assist the students with advice and practical support. Through their excellent performance and reliable assistance, they have truly enriched the Language Centre. We wish them all the very best for their future academic paths.

At the beginning of the winter semester 2026/27, we would like to welcome:

- Amelie Arlandt Global History/Romance Studies
 Languages: German, English, French, Czech, Swedish
- Leticia Sampaio Social Sciences/Romance Studies
 Languages: German, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian
- Ceara Saure Primary Education/English Studies
 Languages: German, English, French

- Ella Thölker International Relations/English Studies
 Languages: German, English, French, Spanish

 - Havin Ceri Economics/Law/Social Sciences and Teaching, Training and
 Learning Psychology
 Languages: German, English, French

 - Julian Merten German Studies/English Studies
 Languages: German, English, Spanish, Chinese

 - Martha Wolf Primary Education/English Studies
 Languages: German, English
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Personnel

Voice Training Section
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Sophie Laufer
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