

Appendix E

**Assessment of Mr Kupka's proposal
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Confidential

Report on DPhil thesis proposal: German in New Zealand

My report offers an opinion on the DPhil thesis proposal on German in New Zealand and attempts to answer the queries addressed to me in Mr. Renwick's letter of 30 May. It is based on the following materials sent to me:

1. Thesis proposal (16 pages) and attached questionnaires (6 pages)
2. German-language "chapter" on the academic context and theoretical approach of the thesis (12 pages)
3. German-language "chapter" on methodological preliminaries for the thesis (8 pages) with table of contents of "Chapter" 4: The status of the German language in New Zealand (2 pages). This material is incomplete.

I write in ignorance of just what particular stage of his thesis the candidate has reached or how long he has been working on it. I am assuming that the first phase of "reading around" and contextualising has been completed and that the proposal is the result of this process. Similarly, I write in ignorance of the norms and procedures adopted at Waikato for doctoral supervision and registration etc. I would therefore ask those considering my report to provide the appropriate academic context for my remarks.

I reply first to the questions addressed to me.

1. In my view the thesis as proposed belongs to the disciplines of the sociology of language or applied sociolinguistics as well as to German studies. The proposal offers no evidence that the thesis will contribute something original or new to theoretical or methodological issues in these areas. Rather, the thesis proposes in the first instance to apply a methodology and approach based on other studies with the aim of providing a documentation, description and analysis of the status of German in New Zealand. I consider this to be a legitimate approach for a doctoral thesis.

Such an approach depends inter alia on a thorough understanding of and if need be an appropriate adaptation of the theoretical model chosen to the particular circumstances and topic of the thesis (in this case the New Zealand context). It also imposes absolute requirements of rigorous and accurate data collection and analysis as the worth of such a study rests not least on the "hardness" of the facts it reports on. In both these respects the proposal as it is leaves a great deal to be desired in my judgement. Some of the reasons for this conclusion are as follows:

i. The list of literature researched to date (pp. 5-7) is extraordinarily eclectic and diverse, so that I cannot see how much of it informs the topic as proposed. This is especially true of Sections I and II on page 5, while III on the same page seems to be a totally arbitrary and attenuated list when one considers the mass of pertinent material available. Sections IV and V on page 6 are important, but V needs updating and expanding as an essential basis for the thesis investigation, as does Section VI. Sections VII, VIII and IX are likewise unconvincing in that the selection does not reveal its rationale nor is there any statement indicating how and why such material is to inform the thesis. The List of Relevant Literature on pp. 8-12 offers at best a piecemeal and incomplete remedy in this respect. In short, the literature search has been poor in my opinion and does not represent in any way a firm bibliographical foundation for the proposed thesis. I consider this a serious deficiency and would have

hoped for stronger direction and supervision than appears to have been the case. Nor do the German-language chapters suggest strongly enough to me that the "reading around" phase has directly informed what is to be investigated in the thesis as outlined in the proposal.

ii. The bibliographical referencing in the proposal is similarly deficient. To quote but page 1 as an example. Among the "major studies" on the international situation of German mentioned are Ammon, Thierfelder, Ross, Glück. No dates are mentioned - which Ammon etc. is meant, given that all scholars named have written more than once on this topic, indeed Ammon and Thierfelder many times? Only Ammon is listed in the bibliography: I can find no reference to Thierfelder, Ross or Glück (in contradistinction to much that appears extraneous)? Thierfelder produced e.g. a large number of studies in the 1930s-50s -- that they bear the stamp of their time, to put it as neutrally as possible, is another issue I shall pass over here. Such referencing needs to be more accurate and specific at this stage of a doctoral thesis in my view.

iii. Research Methodology (p. 3): what is the nature, purpose etc. of the "extensive statistical data" to be collected? This again represents for me one of the foundations of "hard facts" that the thesis must build on, and there is too little concrete detail on what and why etc. I note too that there is no reference to such data being worked on in the approximate timetable of study on p. 13?

(I repeat that I do not know what stage the candidate has reached, nor am I familiar with what level of detail is required for a thesis proposal at Waikato. Nonetheless, along with the literature, this data seems to me not only to be important, but to need to be specified and collected at the outset as an essential foundation of the documentation. "Extensive" seems to me too vague).

For these three reasons I have serious doubts about the material or factual basis of the thesis as proposed.

iv. Theoretical framework (pp.3-4). The studies mentioned are important methodologically, especially Ammon = Ammon 1991 and Clyne = Clyne 1981 (the latter is now somewhat dated, but the methods of data collection and analysis retain their validity - and it is but one of a series of studies on the status and situation of German in Europe and overseas that is not referred to in the bibliography?). Let me look more closely at Ammon 1991, a massive tome of more than 630 pages which is marked by a detailed discussion of terms and concepts and methods of data collection and analysis, in short: by a thoroughly worked out theoretical framework. It is similarly marked by an extensive and rigorous collection and analysis of a huge amount of diverse data and an honest and critical assessment of the strengths and weakness of that data and its collection. There is no doubt in my view that the choice of Ammon's study as the "scientific framework" of the proposed thesis is a wise and well-justified choice.

The criteria listed on pp. 3-4 follow broadly the chapters of Ammon's study. They appear also on page 3 of the German-language chapter 1, where Ammon's study is reported on in more detail, or at least parts of it. My comments thus refer to pages 3-5 of this chapter, which reports only on a small portion of Ammon, on the concept of an international language (Ammon Chapter 1), on the notion of a German-speaking area (Ammon Chapters 2-5) and quite particularly on factors that favour German language maintenance. This last emphasis is puzzling: the comparatively extensive list of such factors 1.2.1.4.1. - 9 on pp. 4-5 report on but pp. 105-114 (Chapter 5.3.) in Ammon. In other words, the vast majority of Ammon's study does not seem to be reported on in any concrete detail. If German language maintenance in New Zealand is to be one of the main emphases of the proposed thesis - as indeed it should be in my view and

as is suggested by the reporting of Ammon and even more strongly of Clyne (proposal p. 4) - then this should be stated very much more clearly in the proposal. As far as I can see, this particular issue appears only as 4. d) Immigration on page 2, i.e. as but a small part of the overall thesis structure 1 - 5 presented on pp. 2-3.

A related point: it worries me that in spite of some discussion of German as the language not only of Germans, but also of Austrians, German Swiss and other nationalities, not least as immigrants to New Zealand, there is only a questionnaire for "German immigrant families" or "deutsche Einwandererfamilien"? Surely it should at the very least be addressed to "German-language" or "deutschsprachig(e)" immigrants?

If I attempt to sum up my answer to the first question addressed to me I would have to say as an outsider and on the basis of the material before me that the thesis proposal does not stand up very well at this stage, neither in respect of the literature searched and reviewed, nor in respect of the data to be collected, nor in respect of just how studies such as Ammon 1991 are to provide the main theoretical framework of the investigation. I would have welcomed more hard facts and concrete detail about these essential foundations - or at least a stronger indication that the candidate knows the issues and how to tackle them - than the proposal as such reveals: Just what are the main research questions and what instruments and methods are to be used to seek an answer to them?

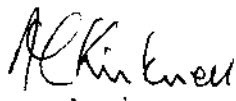
2 and 3. Questionnaires and (follow-up) interviews, aimed inter alia at eliciting information and opinion on attitudes towards language, the German language (in relation to other languages in New Zealand, notably English, (German) language maintenance and the like, seem to me to be central to the task of gathering data and describing the status of German in New Zealand, quite particularly if there is to be an emphasis (as suggested above) on German language maintenance here. I am not a social scientist, but it would seem to me that the questionnaires need to be much more "demanding" and to need social science assistance in drafting: Answering yes or no e.g. to a question such as "do your children speak German" is not informative: when, where, to whom, how often (always/sometimes/rarely) etc.? Write, speak, read, understand? Etc. In short, the decision to add questionnaires to the data gathering instruments is a correct and necessary one in my opinion. But the questionnaires need to be more specific and demanding. Just how informative they will be is difficult to predict: it will depend not only on their makeup, but also on the perennial difficulties of return and response rate. This makes it all the more important that the "extensive statistical data" mentioned previously be specified, collected and analysed. It also makes it all the more important to have a raft of interviews with different groups of informants which relate to the different chapters/topics of the proposed thesis. Organising and completing such interviews would be a daunting task, but I think it would be far more worthwhile than say the "study and evaluation of critical literature" that dominates the study timetable on p. 13, especially in view of my doubts as to the relevance and worth of much of the literature listed.

Indeed, through a raft of questionnaires and interviews, the candidate could potentially make a significant contribution to general methodological issues in (language) attitudes research in the area of the sociology of language, especially attitudes towards questions of (German) language status (in New Zealand). It needs to be said, however, that the material already available to me does not suggest that the candidate is (yet?) in a position to realise this potential.

The title is very general, but I think this is in order as a working title -- on condition that the proposal gives concrete detail on how the topic is to be addressed, perhaps by breaking the general topic down into a series of concrete research questions and a strong indication of the instruments and approach to be used in seeking an answer those questions. This the proposal fails to do. Nor does the accompanying German-language material answer questions or doubts.

4. I personally do not accept that the arguments given on page 16 for writing the thesis in German are persuasive. In terms of a contribution to the sociology of language English would in fact be an advantage. In terms of German studies there are arguments both ways. I concur fully with the views expressed in Mr Renwick's letter of 30 May, which suggest a sensible way of publicising any findings of the thesis.

In general terms I think that the topic is a worthwhile one and that the thesis could represent a valuable contribution. However, I also have to say that I have doubts about the viability of the project as proposed. On the basis of the material submitted to me, I would say that considerable tightening up, sharper focus and stronger direction are needed if the potential of the topic is to be realised. Ammon's 1991 work -- as supplemented by Clyne 1981 -- is an admirable model to follow in all respects, but a very demanding one. I do wonder if the candidate is up to those demands or fully realises the extent of what might be required to meet them? In saying this, I repeat my caveat that I am ignorant of the length of time the candidate has already put into his thesis and of the sort of proposal that could be expected at this stage at Waikato. My comments have been critical, but I hope they might prove constructive and helpful: I believe that it is important for both doctoral student and supervisor to know as thoroughly as possible just what they are embarking on when a PhD thesis proposal is formally accepted for registration. This does not seem to me to be the case in the present instance.



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