

7th AUSTRIAN UAS LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS' CONFERENCE

Location: University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien, Vienna, Austria from 23-24 May 2014.

Hosted by Dr. Otto Maderdonner, Head of the Humanities Department.

Theme: Integrating Language, Culture and Purpose in ESP

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1. DESCRIPTION

As the reasons to learn English have become more specific, the challenges of making content and methods relevant for ESP students have become even greater. This conference focused on the three components of English for Specific Purposes: language, specificity and purpose.

The questions that the talks and workshops addressed were: How can we inspire and motivate our students to reach both their personal and professional potential? In which ways can technology serve as an ESP teacher's tool to help achieve this? How can we most effectively meet students' specific needs for English in multicultural societies?

2. KEYNOTE SPEECHES

The keynote speakers were Dr. Barbara Seidlhofer and Dr. Henry Widdowson.

Barbara Seidlhofer is Professor of English and Applied Linguistics at the University of Vienna and currently Head of the English Department. Her teaching and research focus is on English as an international language and on intercultural communication and the implications of both for language teacher education. Her publications include the books *Controversies in Applied Linguistics* and *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca* (both OUP). She was editor of the *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* from 2004 to 2008 and has recently founded the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, which is the first journal devoted to this topic area.

Henry Widdowson is an authority in the field of applied linguistics and language teaching. He is Emeritus Professor of Education, University of London, and has also been Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Essex and Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Vienna. He was the Applied Linguistics adviser to Oxford University Press for many years. He is co-editor of *Language Teaching: A Scheme for Teacher Education* and the series editor of *Oxford Introductions to Language Study* and the author of *Linguistics and Discourse Analysis* in the same series. He is now honorary professor at the University of Vienna.

Their talk was titled, **ELF and EFL: Changing the Subject**. First Dr. Seidlhofer spoke about aspects of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), followed by Dr. Widdowson discussing what the implications are for English teaching..

3. KEYNOTE TOPIC

Although English has changed radically over recent years as both a cause and consequence of globalization to become a lingua franca for international communication, this change has generally speaking not been reflected in the way English is represented in education as a subject on the curriculum.

In the first part of this presentation, Dr. Seidlhofer discussed the nature of English as a lingua franca (ELF), which has frequently been misunderstood and misrepresented. It argued the case for considering ELF as a natural and inevitable development, an appropriate use of language in its own right and not, as is often supposed, a deficient version of proper English, and will point to some of the features of this use of the language as they have emerged from its description.

Dr. Widdowson, in the second part, then took up the educational question of what implications arise from this study of ELF for the way English could, or should, be designed as a subject, how far it might lead to a reconsideration of what aspects of the language need to be focused on as providing the best incentive and investment for learning.

What was particularly interesting is that they presented together. Both were on stage as each one presented, adding comments to the other's talk. Their collaboration and easy camaraderie made the presentation extremely lively.

The comments that followed the keynote speech indicated that the participants found the ideas both interesting and thought-provoking. One participant said that she felt "relieved" to be told that a focus on English for communication could be more important in the classroom than a focus on "correct" English.

Dr. Seidlhofer was the Project Director of VOICE, the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English, which provided the data and examples for her presentation.

VOICE: <http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/>

VOICE provides a sizeable, computer-readable corpus of English as it is spoken by the non-native speaking majority of users in different contexts. These speakers use English successfully on a daily basis all over the world, in their personal, professional or academic lives. It is therefore clearly worth finding out just how they use the language, and this is what VOICE provides.

4. PRESENTATIONS

In total, there were 25 Talks and Workshops, led by presenters from a wide variety of cultures. Aside from Austria, the countries that presenters came from included Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Kazakhstan, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia.

There were 13 Poster Presentations expected, but unfortunately only three were at the conference. Most of the intended presenters had problems finalizing financial support from their home institutions. The Posters that were displayed at the conference were by presenters from Croatia, Kazakhstan and Serbia.

5. SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

After the conference on Friday evening, participants were invited to dinner at an authentic Viennese Heurigen (or wine tavern), which is a particularly Austrian establishment.

It is a tavern where a wine grower can serve his own wines, along with a variety of food and local specialties. Such establishments are located close to the owner's vineyard.

The gathering at the Heurigen allowed participants to get to know each other socially, and to relax after the focus of the first day of the conference. Of course, it was also an excellent opportunity to enjoy a bountiful buffet dinner and sample some of Vienna's best wines.

On Saturday, after the conference ended at 13:30, lunch was offered at a restaurant close to the conference venue. Fortunately, conference participants were able to enjoy lovely weather to further explore Vienna afterward.

In addition to the opportunity to network and socialize, participants heard interesting presentations with useful information, learned new ideas, and developed different approaches to their teaching skills.

It is hoped that the next Austrian UAS conference will be in 2016, possibly in Graz. The UAS Technikum Wien is already planning to host a conference again in 2018. To be put on the mailing list for the conference announcements, write to: nazarenko@technikum-wien.at.