

Bayreuth University

Concept for a cross-faculty graduate programme for the Faculties of Cultural
Science, Linguistics and Literature

PhD Programme
'The Communicative Construction of Knowledge'

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November 2010

[English Version: September 2011]

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1 OBJECTIVE AND CONTENT

As a cross-departmental institute, the graduate cluster ‘The Communicative Construction of Knowledge’ is part both of the ‘Culture and Society’ graduate school in the Cultural Science Department and of the graduate school in the Language and Literature Department of Bayreuth University. This close interweaving enables the undertaking of joint cross-disciplinary research into a field of eminent theoretical significance, especially insofar as it examines a highly topical field of problems in late-modern societies: the genres, forms, patterns, and modalities of knowledge communication.

Numerous diagnoses of the present seek to emphasize that ‘knowledge’ has become the decisive factor of current societal, economic and technological development, and that it has replaced industrial production as the main driver of progress. Macro-analyses thus often overlook the fact that qualifying our societies as ‘knowledge societies’ is at best imprecise, since all societies require knowledge. In general, knowledge emerges from a relationship between subjective cognitive processes and intersubjective communication. Accordingly, socially relevant forms of knowledge, their modes of emergence and their acceptance – e.g. in the case of experiential knowledge – as well as the ways in which they are disseminated, all differ considerably from era to era, and from one type of society to another. The question is thus which forms of knowledge will take central significance and how can they be produced, distributed and acquired, as well as (de)legitimized, in interactively designed processes of the ‘documentation of understanding’.

Any answer to this question requires substantial empirical research for the purpose of generating theory. First, forms of knowledge have to be examined: what forms of knowledge are presently indispensable for central sectors and functions of society, and as such are the most prominent? How are they produced, disseminated and acquired? By which means are they legitimized or delegitimized? Which transformations do stocks of knowledge undergo in being communicatively processed, and what are the resultant changes in societal and individual pools of knowledge? Using the combined tools of linguistics, literature, cultural science and societal studies, the graduate cluster ‘The

Communicative Construction of Knowledge' seeks to examine precisely these questions.

The term 'knowledge' can refer to a broad spectrum of various forms of knowledge. This can range from capabilities and skills, to 'special bodies of knowledge' – including experiential knowledge, occupational competence and habitualized 'cultural technologies' – which are usually explicitly identified as such and which, as a rule, go hand-in-hand with specific social positions. Taken in this broad sense, knowledge thus encompasses both the 'self-evidences' of a given culture insofar as they are part of 'general knowledge' and thus are often less distinguished as such, and the bodies of knowledge that are more clearly labeled 'knowledge' and are taught in institutions and potentially validated through diplomas. As 'sedimented experience' – in the sense of an 'incorporated' stock of knowledge – skills and abilities form part of the subjective stock of knowledge. They are masterable and can be partly regarded as shared with other societal groups, but they do not necessarily have to be meta-reflexive or available in verbalizable form.

Regardless of the form of knowledge in question, knowledge is only empirically available in communication. The second central axis thus comprises the *analysis of communicative action and interaction*. The processes involved in the communicative construction of knowledge comprise many 'elementary forms' of instruction, teaching and guidance, on the one hand, as well as different activities of cognitive documentation, on the other. These can occur as parts of more complex aggregates and social events, such as presentations, seminars, conferences, and problem-solving discussions. In such cases, the agents of action may adopt different roles and functions, and work on situation- or problem-specific communicative tasks. In so doing, in media societies communication conveyed via technological means is assigned an increasingly significant role relative to written and oral communication. Finally, institutional and societal facilities that are, in a more or less explicit way, devoted to the dissemination of knowledge are also to be taken into consideration.

Genre analysis is an important part of the research on both the conceptual and methodological levels. Using an integrative approach, genre analysis combines the specific competences of the analytic tools of linguistics, literary and cultur-

al studies with those of the social sciences. Joint linguistic, sociological as well as ethnographical and cultural research has as its central aim an empirical investigation into the fundamentals of natural linguistic and multimodal data. By ‘natural’ data is meant the survey, analysis and interpretation of material that does not have to be produced as such for research, but instead stems from already existing everyday or institutional contexts. To the extent that the media have increasingly, and in more differentiated forms, become an integral part of present societies, this mainly includes media data.

Communication, as a sign-appropriating social activity, requires a twofold, mutually complementary investigative focus: analyses are to be made both of processes in which the participants understand one another, and of the ‘materials’ by means of which understanding is achieved. For the reconstruction of the communicative construction of knowledge, analyses is thus to be undertaken of: (a) the concrete processes of interaction as well as their structure, course and performative order; and (b) the role of material signs, sign vehicles and media, including their changing cultural meanings.

The composition of this graduate cluster thus enables the provision of a complementary supervision of doctoral theses whose shared aim is to address concrete problems in a defined research field that stretches beyond disciplinary restrictions. The cluster is offered notably to doctoral students in linguistics and the cultural and social sciences who want to realize research projects in the fields of interaction and communications research.

2 STRUCTURE AND FOCUS

‘The Communicative Construction of Knowledge’ graduate cluster offers students of linguistics and the social and cultural sciences the opportunity to complete a structured PhD programme, to be completed in six semesters, in a specialized academic institution with international recognition. The languages of instruction are German, English and Spanish. Research is divided into three foci, all of which serve as points of connection between the various doctoral students’ PhD projects. These three foci are connected through a continuous, process-oriented approach. At stake is the reconstruction of processes that are crucially involved in the communicative construction of knowledge. The anal-

ysis of these processes can, however, possess various scopes in accordance with the respective interest. Accordingly, research projects will require graduations in scope, ranging from the analysis of knowledge construction processes on the face-to-face level to a reconstruction of processes of cultural and media change in the sense of the *longue durée*, which requires a broad observation and analysis, up to and including large-scale investigations of these processes in different societal sectors, fields and milieus. As a consequence, the graduate cluster is divided into three sections: ‘Interactions’, ‘Transformations’ and ‘Ruptures’.

A: Interactions

Knowledge communication is here analyzed as an interactive achievement, focusing on knowledge stocks in various contexts from an interactive perspective. It can be related to everyday world activities, such as dinner table conversations, instruction, and biographical narratives. However, it can also take place in institutional contexts such as university, the media, the arts, medicine, or consulting. Knowledge communication often occurs in relatively solidified communicative genres (e.g. interviews, doctor-patient communication, and question-driven teaching conversations), it can also transpire in media contexts (e.g. religious TV programmes, chats, forums) or in the most varied face-to-face constellations. At issue here are thus not only the practices of knowledge demonstration and display of understanding, but also the description and reflection of the contextual conditions under which knowledge communication takes place. Consideration is thus to be taken of rhetorical devices, recipient design, clarification and display of understanding, questions of epistemic authority and their negotiation, and the didactic processing of knowledge content. Within the latter perspective, primary attention is placed on the knowledge construction of learners, notably in educational institutions like school and university, as well as on issues to do with adequate support. Thus, in addition to forms and procedures of knowledge transformation in conversation, the functions of knowledge transfer and transmission also comprises a central research focus.

B: Transformations

(1) Classifying knowledge transmission relative to the economy, whether in the family, or in institutional education formats, enables statements to be made about what is perceived in a society as relevant for problems regarding living together and careers, and about the historically variable roles that participants play in it. Due to the challenges of globalization, one increasingly important aspect is the transmission of experiences of foreign cultures. Analyses of processes of cultural exchange, in the sense of relaying facts and experiences from culturally foreign contexts, not only make it possible to draw conclusions about the adaption potential of societies and individuals, but also provide access to the organization of inter-human understanding, since in their recipient design the tellers have to ensure that prior knowledge and stages of understanding are safeguarded.

(2) Knowledge and collective memory: a great deal of research in the social and cultural sciences is being done on memory and commemoration. The graduate school wants to take these objects into account, but from a perspective grounded in communications and knowledge sociology. Individual and collective memory is established through participation in communicative processes. Collective memory is grounded in conscious remembering, which is, however, characterized by the fact that the remembered content is objectivized in a communicative way. The graduate school wants to stimulate theory-driven empirical research on this broad field: first, in the area of vernacular memory, which is day-to-day, short-term, private, communicative, and based on personal interaction; and, second, into cultural memory aiming at permanent determination, or the public, institutionalized commemorative culture of the media, monuments, rituals, and so on. In so doing, an especially fruitful approach is suggested by an empirical and conceptual analysis located at the intersection between communicative and cultural memory, one that aims at analyzing the formative processes of cultural forms of memory in communicative acts.

C: Ruptures

On a third level, the focus can be placed on the ruptures in knowledge construction. The focus point of this subarea of the graduate school is historical knowledge. Research projects taking a media-historical approach tend to grasp the history of knowledge as a correlate of media history; however, often they do not take sufficient account of the current transformations in knowledge society. Indeed, scholars are increasingly starting to work in an interdisciplinary way, in changing locations, and in globally scattered contexts. Integrated networks with highly efficient, scattered resources will bring ever quicker and durable changes to scientific work. In this context, it is important to examine the foundations of the innovative information technology that structures these processes. In so doing, the internet can be seen neither as a technological *a priori*, nor as a fate that has to be accepted by the knowledge community. Instead, it ought to be viewed as a malleable opportunity structure, in which technological innovation and user demand are mutually determining. The reconstruction of this mutual condition, however, only makes sense by taking an historical approach to media, ideas and knowledge concerning the parallels and asynchronicities of media evolution, not to mention models of knowledge formation and transfer. Are electronic network-structures accompanied by new text forms of alinearity, interactivity, virtuality, multimediality, or is at issue here a medium of written-ness that is secondary? Is electronic reading to be understood as innovation, or is it continuous with general processes of reception of categorization and synthesis? The answers are only to be found in knowledge about, and a productive confrontation with, other historical media revolutions, such as those around 1800 and 1900.

Summary: all analyses of interpersonal processes that deal with knowledge open up perspectives on processes of negotiating meaning and importance, on their evaluation regarding personal and societal relevance, and thus on basic questions of (self-)understanding. The results of research areas A – C thus promise to yield new insights into the interpersonal and societal processes of understanding and consensus formation.

3 CONDITIONS OF ADMISSION

To gain admission to the graduate cluster, the applicant must have completed a degree in linguistics, literature, social sciences or the humanities, which, with a minimum grade of 'distinction'/B, qualifies him/her for doctoral studies. Furthermore, doctoral candidates must provide an outline of their PhD projects, detailing the goals, questions, materials and data to be analyzed, as well as the procedures and methods to be used in the analysis, and the timeframe of the intended research. At the start of their doctoral research, each student chooses two supervisors in accordance with their main disciplinary orientation, one of whom will be in charge of the coordination and continuous supervision of the doctoral project. On the basis of the research outline and the structure of the graduate cluster, each student will have drawn up an individual timeframe which sets down the most important work phases in their proper sequence, and serves as a guide for the successful completion of the research. Admission to the graduate cluster is possible at the start of every semester.

4 STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF DOCTORAL STUDY

The doctoral programme of the graduate school is divided into several phases. These phases serve to ensure the required balance between autonomy and structure, indispensable for any PhD in the social sciences or humanities. In so doing, the PhD students can also benefit from a framework that serves to interlink the research projects being undertaken by the graduate school's participating scholars. The PhD students are involved in this research and receive specialized instruction, which is designed to ensure a speedy completion of the PhD project while maintaining established standards. To this end, regular discussions about milestones are held in a bid to ensure the ongoing supervision of the PhD project.

Phase I

In the first two semesters of the three-year graduate programme, the primary concern is to focus the PhD project. In this phase, empirically oriented research essentially involves establishing the data set, or material, to be analyzed,

which in turn presupposes that questions of access, applicability and analyzability of the data and materials are clarified.

In this phase, PhD students are required to attend graduate seminars on subjects relevant to broadening their knowledge with regard to their PhD projects.

Phase II

In the second year, emphasis is placed on work with the material. At this time it is possible to undertake research abroad. In this phase PhD students are mostly exempt from participating in seminars in order to have the required time to undertake their research. However, they must still participate in the ongoing research workshop (see below). If studying abroad, corresponding course offers should be sought out at the local institution.

Phase III

The third year is dedicated to completing the PhD thesis and increased participation in conferences. This is meant to serve as a platform for the discussion of research results in outside specialist circles and is of particular relevance for those planning to pursue post-doctoral research. The thesis defence is also undertaken in the third phase, followed by the publication of the thesis. After successful completion graduates are entitled and requested to present their research results to a further specialized public as part of the ‘Bayreuther Kolloquium Kommunikation und Wissen’.

Research Workshop

The research workshop is a central element of the graduate cluster. It plays an important role in the ongoing work on data and materials, a requisite of successful empirical research. Sessions take place regularly, once a week as a rule. This provides PhD students of the graduate cluster with an opportunity to present their work-in-progress and submit it to discussion. The research workshop is designed to ensure steady progress on the PhD projects and their ongoing supervision. In addition, it provides a space in which knowledge can take root that exceeds individual research.

Overview

This results in the following overall schema for doctoral studies in the framework of the graduate cluster:

Phase I: Semester 1+ 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctoral seminar • Data and material survey or collection 	data session / research workshop
Phase II: Semester 3+ 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation and analysis of the material • Writing up of the PhD 	
Phase III: Semester 5+ 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing up and finalizing of the PhD • Thesis defence 	

We are working on building connections with existing master programmes to provide a short-track for sufficiently gifted students, enabling them to progress directly from an excellent BA to a PhD.

5 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The bodies responsible for ‘The Communicative construction of knowledge’ graduate cluster include the Department of the Sociology of Culture and Religion, the Department of German Linguistics, the Department of Modern German Literature, the Department of Didactics for German Language and Literature, and the Department of Intercultural German Studies (German as a foreign language). In addition, the Department of the Sociology of Culture and Religion has a video analysis laboratory that can be used for data analysis.

The graduate cluster maintains close cooperation with the Bayrischen Forschungsverbund Migration und Wissen (ForMig), which, as for it, pursues questions with a similar focus in the field of migration.

The comparative approach adopted by the Bayreuther Forschung zu Kommunikation und Wissen is strongly tied to its international orientation. Graduate cluster members can benefit from existing research cooperation with scholars and institutions in various African countries, as well as in Turkey, Spain, Nor-

way, Great Britain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Austria, Scandinavia, Mexico and the United States. PhD students are encouraged to use the opportunity to conduct parts of their research at one of the various partner institutions.

Cooperation Partners of the Graduate School

(As of November 2010)

Prof. Dr. Johannes Wagner, University of Southern Denmark, IFKI Kolding, University of Southern Denmark, Campusvej 55, DK-5230 Odense M

Prof. Dr. Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, Modern Languages, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton, SO17 1BJ

Prof. Dr. Hubert Knoblauch, Allgemeine Soziologie und Theorie Moderner Gesellschaften, TU Berlin [expert on the Sociology of Knowledge and the Sociology of Communication]

Prof. Dr. Christian Heath, Professor in Work, Interaction and Technology, King's College, London [expert in qualitative video analysis]

Prof. Dr. Francisco Ferrándiz, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid [expert on the role the media in collective memory forms]

Prof. Dr. Giampietro Gobo, Università Degli Studi di Milano [expert on qualitative research methods, in particular in ethnography]

Prof. Dr. José Carmelo Lisón Arcal, Universidad Complutense Madrid and Euro-Mediterranean University Institute · EMUI [social anthropologist, expert in visual ethnography]