

Faculty of Arts – University of Ostrava



**CENTRE FOR THE RESEARCH
OF PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE**

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CENTRE FOR THE RESEARCH OF PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE

The Centre for the Research of Professional Language was created in response to the transformations that professional language and communication are currently undergoing in our present-day world. These changes are wide-ranging and fundamental. They include the rapid growth of specialist vocabulary, reflecting the accelerated pace of scientific research and technological progress. They also include the emergence of new forms of communication in professional contexts, combined with the development of information technologies, as well as the penetration of specialist subject-matter into public discourse. At the same time, professional and specialist communication is becoming ever more important – not only in speakers' mother tongue, but also in foreign languages – particularly in English, and (especially in the Central European region) in German. The team of researchers at the Centre for the Research of Professional Language – comprising specialists in both the English and German languages – is exploring how these languages and their users are responding to the fundamental transformations outlined above, as well as investigating the specific features of English- and German-language professional communication in comparison with Czech-language discourse.

[#professionaldiscourse](#) [#communication](#)
[#fachsprache](#) [#englishstudies](#) [#germanstudies](#)

RESEARCH AIMS

THE TRANSFORMATION OF PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE

The Centre for the Research of Professional Language was established in 2011 at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ostrava. Its main focus is on English and German professional language and specialist discourse, both from a historical perspective and in the present day. Key areas of research include the specific features of English and German technical, economic, scientific and medical texts and their comparison with Czech texts, as well as the characteristics of English- and German-language professional discourse – again in comparison with discourse practices in the Czech Republic. The Centre's team is able to provide expert guidance on a range of practical communication-related issues – including the creation of new specialist terminology when translating texts or the need to overcome culturally-rooted problems in communication among experts from different cultures.

The team's research includes detailed analysis of the changes currently affecting traditional specialist genres as well as the emergence of new genres in professional discourse. Reflecting the increasingly multimodal nature of professional communication, research also focuses on the mutual interaction of text and image. In addition, the team analyzes historical texts to trace the transformation of professional discourse over the course of the centuries.

The core mission of the Centre's research is to carry out wide-ranging cross-cultural comparisons of parallel genres and discourse practices in English, German and Czech

– thus building up a broad knowledge-base which will inform and assist Czech professionals by creating awareness of cross-cultural differences and ways of overcoming potential problems in intercultural communication.

Specific research areas include:

- New genres and discourse types
- Changes in specialist terminology
- Historical and current developments in professional language

Professional discourse is one of the core research areas at the Faculty of Arts and at the University of Ostrava as a whole.

ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTRE FOR THE RESEARCH OF PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE

INTERNATIONAL LINKS AND CONFERENCES

The Centre for the Research of Professional Language has close links with a number of renowned experts from all over Europe. Among the Centre's key international contacts are the German scholars Professor Norbert Wolf (Würzburg) and Professor Axel Satzger (Dresden), both of whom are noted specialists in professional language, as well as leading English linguists such as Professor Henry Widdowson (Vienna) and Professor Anna Mauranen (Helsinki), a renowned pioneer in the field of English as a Lingua Franca. Recently, the Centre has begun to cultivate close links with Professor Ludwig Eichinger from the Institute for the German Language (Mannheim), who works alongside the research team as part of his activities as a visiting professor at the Department of German Studies in Ostrava. A series of international conferences and linguistic colloquia have welcomed more than a hundred experts from other countries to Ostrava during recent years.

The Centre has organized and hosted two major international conferences which have proved a resounding success. The first, entitled *The Changing Landscape of Professional Discourse / Fachkommunikation im Wandel* (2014), marked the culmination of an EU-funded project. A follow-up conference was held in 2019. Both events provided a valuable platform for experts from all over Europe and beyond to meet and discuss current



issues of relevance to professional communication – including cross-cultural comparisons of professional discourse in a range of different settings. Events such as these represent a valuable opportunity not only for the Centre’s team of scholars, but also for students at the Departments of German and English to become acquainted with some of the latest trends in this area.

Professor Lenka Vaňková, the Centre’s Director, explained the Centre’s focus and activities in more detail:

What makes the activities of the Centre for the Research of Professional Language unique?

Our research is unique in several aspects. We are the only linguistics research centre in the Czech Republic that focuses specifically on professional discourse. Our primary focus is on professional language and discourse in the present day, but some of our research also traces its development in past centuries. Another unique facet of our work is the comparative perspective that we apply in all our research. Our team consists of experts in both German and English linguistics, so we are ideally placed to compare and

contrast various aspects of professional communication in these languages – as well as in the Czech context.

What is the team currently working on?

We are currently working on research in several areas. One is the use of English as a global lingua franca for professional communication; the global reach of English is a salient feature of communication in today’s increasingly interconnected world, and naturally it is reflected in professional and specialist discourse. We are also focusing on various types of online professional communication as well as analyzing the development of specialist vocabulary.



And one of our main projects at the moment is the analysis of a large medieval medical compendium which contains a wide range of texts – from descriptions of diseases and treatments to instructions for herbal remedies and a so-called *regimina sanitatis*, which is essentially a set of guidelines for a healthy lifestyle.

Is a professional language a topic that affects the general public too?

One of the most characteristic features of modern communication is the penetration of specialist vocabulary into the discourse of ever-wider sections of society. In response to this trend, we wanted to find out how well members of the public understood the terminology used in media texts, so we created a team (including students) to analyze specialist terminology in the news media. It is surprising what a broad spectrum of terminology from various fields can be found in newspapers, yet these terms are hardly ever properly explained to readers. Research conducted at German universities indicates that rea-

ders may have problems understanding this terminology. Another issue of relevance to the general public is the analysis of new online genres. Here our research focuses on company websites, blogs providing advice to readers, or online consumer reviews. The findings of our research into historical professional texts may also be of interest, as they show what methods were used in the past to treat various diseases – and they prove that our ancestors possessed a huge range of knowledge about the medicinal effects of plants and herbs.

Where can we find your team's outputs?

The results of our research can be found mainly in specialist journals and monographs, published both in the Czech Republic and abroad. Whenever we publish a new book, we always present it via a book launch. We also hold talks and lectures for the general public, often as part of regular events such as Czech Researchers' Night or Czech-German Culture Days.



SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Lenka Vaňková (eds.). *Das Fachwort in der Tagespresse*. (Forum für Fachsprachenforschung, 159). Berlin: Frank & Timme Verlag, 2019. 152 s.

The penetration of specialist topics into public discourse has brought with it an increased use of specialist terminology in the mass media. The daily news media are no exception. However, these specialist terms may represent a barrier to readers' understanding, as they often require a relatively high degree of specialist knowledge and competence. The authors of this monograph evaluate the use of professional vocabulary in selected German newspapers from a range of perspectives: for example, they consider the function of specialist terms in news media texts, their origin, the process by which they are created, how they are presented by journalists to readers, and how they can be used when learning a foreign language.

- Lenka Vaňková (eds.). *Fachlichkeit und Fachsprachlichkeit in varianten Kontexten* (Forum für Fachsprachenforschung, 147). Berlin: Frank & Timme Verlag, 2018. 266 s.

The authors focus on how the professional (expert, specialist) content of a text is reflected in its linguistic form. Drawing on analyses of a broad spectrum of texts – newspaper articles, administrative texts, legal documents, textbooks, dictionaries, popular scientific texts and texts from online blogs offering advice to readers – the authors trace the specific linguistic features of these texts.

- Tomášková, Renáta / Hopkinson, Christopher / Zapletalová, Gabriela (eds.). *Professional Genres from an Interpersonal Perspective*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016. 277 s.

This monograph presents research findings focusing on two main areas: genre analysis and the interpersonal features of communication. The individual studies analyze the various forms of interplay between genre conventions and the expression of interpersonal meanings. The monograph focuses on four main areas of communication: mass media discourse, academic discourse, institutional discourse, and advertising/promotional discourse. The studies reveal the ubiquity and rich range of interpersonal strategies in these discourse types, showing how they play a significant – indeed crucial – role in a wide spectrum of genres. Genres form an integral part of our social and cultural environment and are conditioned by socio-cultural conventions – flexibly responding to changing conditions, undergoing evolution and transformation.

- Satzger, Axel / Vaňková, Lenka / Wolf, Norbert, Richard (eds.): *Fachkommunikatio im Wandel / The Changing Landscape of Professional Discourse*. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2015. 322 s.

This volume of conference proceedings contains selected papers from the international conference *Fachkommunikation im Wandel / The Changing Landscape of Professional Discourse*, which was organized by the Centre in 2014.

- Vaňková, Lenka (et al). *Fachliches in der Presse*. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2017. 142 s.

In the modern world, when we can be overwhelmed with the sheer volume of new specialist information presented to us, the manner in which such information is conveyed

– and its comprehensibility – plays a crucial role. This book explores how various types of German periodicals handle the communication of specialist information to readers – ranging from women’s magazines to periodicals for young people, specialist periodicals and the news media.

- Vaňková, Lenka (eds.). *Medizinische Texte aus böhmischen und mährischen Archiven und Bibliotheken (14.-16. Jahrhundert)*. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2014. 272 s.

This book offers a general overview of the presence in Czech archives and libraries of German-language manuscripts containing medical texts. It presents selected edited extracts from texts representing important genres of late medieval and early modern German medical literature. These genres include incantations, recipes, herbariums, treatises, and a wide range of text types from what is known as astro-medical literature. The texts were selected from 25 manuscripts held at 12 different archives and libraries in the Czech Republic. They are accompanied by an extensive commentary explaining their position within the historical context of German professional literature and analyzing the features that are typical of each particular genre.

- Mostýn, Martin. *Grammatische Mittel der Informationskondensierung in Wirtschaftstexten*. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2011. 280 s.

This monograph explores the use of grammatical resources for information condensation in economic texts at three levels of abstraction: specialist texts (the highest level), instructions for using various industrial applications (the intermediate level), and popular scientific texts (the lowest level of abstraction). The author focuses particularly on the syntactic and semantic characteristics of individual condensed syntagms and also on the pragmatic and functional factors that affect their use in the texts.



IMPORTANT PROJECTS

- **Strengthening the Development of the Centre for the Research of English and German Professional Discourse at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ostrava**
Period: 7/2012 - 6/2015 (coordinator Prof. Lenka Vaňková)
Funding provider: European Structural Funds, Education for Competitiveness programme
This European Union-funded project provided a platform for the newly formed Centre's research team to collaborate directly with renowned international experts as well as involving doctoral students in research projects; it helped the Centre to establish itself as a new research institution.
- **Medical Compendium of the Jew of Salm: historical context – linguistic analysis – edition**
Period: 1/2018 - 12/2020 (coordinator Prof. Lenka Vaňková)
Funding provider: GAČR (Czech Science Foundation)
- **Genres and New Media**
Period: 1/2016 - 12/2016 (coordinator Dr. Renáta Tomášková)
Funding provider: University of Ostrava internal student grant competition
- **Presentation of Expert Information in Expert and Non-Expert Contexts**
Period: 1/2016 - 12/2017 (coordinator Prof. Lenka Vaňková)
Funding provider: University of Ostrava internal student grant competition
- **Communicating Across Cultures: Local and Translocal Features of Genres in Online and Offline Environments I and II**
Period: 1/2017 - 12/2018 (coordinator Dr. Renáta Tomášková)
Funding provider: University of Ostrava internal student grant competition
- **Specialist Vocabulary in Newspapers**
Period: 1/2018 - 12/2019 (coordinator Prof. Lenka Vaňková)
Funding provider: University of Ostrava internal student grant competition
- **Identity and Interaction: The Changing Landscape of Professional and Academic Discourse in an Increasingly Globalized Society**
Period: 1/2020 - 12/2020 (coordinator Dr. Gabriela Zapletalová)
Funding provider: University of Ostrava internal student grant competition

THE CENTRE'S TEAM

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Centre for the Research of Professional Language

Published by the University of Ostrava
Centre for Marketing and Communication

Editor: Ing. Petra Čubíková
Redactor: Mgr. Andrea Černá
Cover design and layout: Mgr. Štěpánka Zámečnicková
Printing house: K-TISK

1st Edition, Ostrava 2020





UNIVERSITY OF OSTRAVA
FACULTY OF ARTS

ff.osu.eu



EUROPEAN UNION
European Structural and Investment Funds
Operational Programme Research,
Development and Education



The bulletin is financed by the project HR Excellence in Research at the University of Ostrava, project registration number:
CZ.02.2.69/0.0/0.0/16_028/0006225

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