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Shakespeare and Shareholders

A Business English Theatre Project

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Abstract

This article describes a project that attempts to teach business English to an interdisciplinary group of university students by means of producing a play, the script of which has been specifically prepared to include business-related situations and vocabulary. The project mainly aims at improving students' oral competence by giving them the opportunity to use (business) English in fictional but meaningful situations and by using it as the working language throughout the whole project. The project mainly involves students who major either in business or in modern languages. In the project students who might not have been interested in literature and theatre are introduced to it through a connection with work-related topics whereas students who might not have been interested in business get a glimpse of it by approaching it through drama. Both groups can improve their proficiency in English, their 'everyday English' as well as their business English. The article describes the motivation behind the project, the project's structure and the benefits for the students but also reflects on aspects that could be improved.

1 Introduction

"As the cauldron bubbled an eldritch voice shrieked: 'When shall we three meet again?' There was a pause. Finally another voice said, in far more ordinary tones: 'Well, I can do next Tuesday.'" This exchange, which forms the beginning of the fantasy novel *Wyrd Sisters* by Terry Pratchett, is recognisably a parody of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, however, it is one that gives the eerie scenery of three witches meeting on a deserted heath a "far more ordinary" turn very soon. But Pratchett has a point here – in the first witches' scene in *Macbeth* the protagonists do indeed have the intention of making an appointment – which is one of the standard topics in many business English textbooks. Does Shakespearean or other drama therefore have potential for being used in the teaching of business English?

I have seen, on the other hand, that in business English courses, role-play activities are often viewed with scepticism by the mostly adult learners, which I

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think, might be at least in part due to insufficient preparation of the learners. Being asked to inhabit the skin of a character given, more often than not, only a moment's notice and only little context might come easy to experienced practitioners of improvisational theatre, but not necessarily to learners of business English.

However, I think that business English and drama can be combined successfully and in a way that learners can enjoy – if they are given enough time to familiarise themselves with the character they will play and the situation they are supposed to act out: in a play including business topics and business English. Thoughts like the above led to the formation of a *Business English Theatre Project* at Reutlingen University, whose first production was then indeed a business version of *Macbeth*. In November 2010, the project's innovative approach in regard to vocational preparation of students combined with language teaching on the tertiary level was rewarded with the *European Language Label 2010*, a price which is jointly awarded by the European Commission, the German Academic Exchange Service and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

2 Situation

Reutlingen University is a university of applied sciences with about 4,000 students and a focus on business studies and engineering programmes. Attitudes towards the learning of foreign languages vary greatly between different schools and between different study programmes. However, given the internationalisation of the job market, proficiency in at least one foreign language is perceived as crucial by many students and at least part of the faculty. The study programmes that do include (obligatory) English or other language courses in their curricula – mostly in the form of specialist courses, such as English for business or for engineering, textiles etc. – in some cases have class sizes of 20 and more students and are under the obligation to cover a great number of topics in a relatively short period of time. Time for classroom discussions and practice of oral expression is therefore limited. Moreover, classes are often rather heterogeneous: students in one class might show proficiency levels in English ranging from A2 to C1 or above. This poses the problem that the weaker students might experience problems keeping up, if progression is too fast, or the stronger students might start to feel bored, if progression is too slow. Offering a project in which the participants can improve their English with the help of theatre activities shows an innovative approach to tackle some of these issues.

3 The Project

The project aims at improving students' competences in several areas, both linguistic and non-linguistic. It was offered for the first time in the winter

semester of 2009, as a voluntary language project which was open to students from all departments and organised by the university's International Office[1].

Each semester a new full-length play (or several short plays) is/are rehearsed and presented to an audience on campus. Since initial interest was low and more participants were needed to fill the roles in the first production, the project was also advertised at Tübingen University in Tübingen, which is situated about 20 km from Reutlingen and has a lively student theatre scene. Since the participation of students from two very different universities proved beneficial to the project, the practice of recruiting on two campuses was repeated in the following semesters. In semester one and two, about 60% of the participants were enrolled at Reutlingen University, in semester three, the ratio was about 50:50. Most of the participants from Tübingen were enrolled at the modern languages department there.

3.1 Why Business English Theatre?

The rationale behind devising this project as foreign language theatre with a special focus, namely business English, was the following: the majority of students at Reutlingen University major in business or engineering subjects. Traditionally, teachers and students of these subjects tend to view arts and arts-related activities as rather unimportant or even 'useless'. We therefore hesitated to introduce a conventional theatre project, where the focus would have been on literature, to this student population, assuming that it might not attract enough participants[2].

We hoped, however, that students of business subjects (or engineering) might be more motivated to participate in a theatre project if they could perceive a practical, career-related benefit, such as improving their business English and their presentation skills. On the other hand, we assumed that being introduced to expressions and vocabulary from the world of business would be useful for the humanities students from Tübingen also. In recent years, efforts have been undertaken by Tübingen University to better prepare humanities graduates for the job market, e.g. by offering seminars on key competences, career coaching, etc. Introducing these students to ideas and situations from the corporate world in connection with a drama project is surely in keeping with the idea of gradually opening up the humanities' ivory tower.

Connecting business and drama is not new – in recent years, theatre activities have been established as a tool of human resources and/or organisational

[1] Since the project was purposely designed to include both German and international students it was offered within the framework of the campus-wide integration project SWiTCH^{RT}, funded by the PROFIN programme (Programm zur Förderung der Integration ausländischer Studierender) of the German Academic Exchange Service.

[2] Tübingen University und Trier University, where I have had the opportunity to be active in two (English language) student theatre groups for several years between 1998 and 2010, both offer a wide range of subjects, from natural sciences over arts to business and law. The theatre groups at these universities attract students from almost all departments. Business students, however, rarely, if ever, seem to find their way into a theatre group.

development and a number of so-called *corporate* or *business theatres* (in German *Unternehmenstheater*) have sprung up in Europe and North-America, especially in France, Germany, England, Canada and Scandinavia (Meisiek 2002:3). Here, special forms of theatre, such as Playback Theatre or Forum Theatre are used by trainers working with employees or whole plays are staged for the company by either professional actors or the employees. Business theatre is usually conducted in the employees' mother tongue, its focus being on solving problems or promoting innovation and not on language learning. A related approach to business and drama would be the examination of works of literature for insights useful for human resources development, as for example offered by Norman Augustine and Kenneth Adelman (1999) in *Shakespeare in Charge – The Bard's Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business Stage*, which mainly addresses human resources trainers and managers. However, experiences of teaching a business language with the help of drama activities are also reported, for instance by Böttger and Bührig (2000), who examined the use of a Dürrenmatt text in teaching business German. Moreover, role play and simulation have been used in the teaching of business English for decades.

Our project differed from the above-mentioned examples of combining business, drama and language learning in so far as we decided at the beginning of the project to present our work in front of an audience at the end of the semester. The reasons for a product-oriented approach were on the one hand to raise the stakes for the participants. We assumed that the prospect of showing the result not only to the group but to a wider audience would lead to a higher motivation and better results, an assumption confirmed by Schewe/Scott (2003: 65) and Moody (2002: 143). Moreover, having a performance, public or otherwise, in the end would mean a concrete goal to work towards and even a material take-away (in the form of a video-recording of the performance and photos) for the participants, which we supposed would further increase their motivation.

3.2 Group structure

The project has been in existence for three semesters now, with one theatre production per semester. The project has one main organiser/director who is supported by a business English professor, whose native language is English, and by International Office staff. At the start of each semester, the new production is announced and participants are recruited. It is possible for students to stay on for more than one semester but turnover of participants between productions has been relatively high (only five students have participated in two productions so far). This, however, is not necessarily indicative of the students' dissatisfaction with the project. More often practical reasons such as work placements, semesters abroad, exam phases or (in the case of exchange students) return to the home country prevent students from taking part in more than one production.

Each semester, the project group consisted of about 15 students (from

Reutlingen University and Tübingen University) with very different language competence levels, different national origins, different majors and different motivations to join the project. Language competence ranged from (estimated) A2 to native speaker competence. The students were majoring in business and management (17), languages (10), sciences (chemistry 4, biology 1), law (1), engineering (3) and social sciences (2). Of a total of 37 participants, the different nationalities were represented as follows: German (16), Chinese (7), American (3), French (3), Turkish (2), Italian (1), Indian (1), South Korean (1), Kenyan (1), Peruvian (1), Russian (1).

3.3 Project phases

Normally, during one production, there are five phases:

- Preparation (four to six weeks): the director chooses a literary pre-text or overall theme for a series of short plays and creates original scripts or adapts existing texts for the project.
- Recruiting and introductory phase (three to four weeks): the project is advertised to students, introductory meetings are held. The group plays improvisation games, group members get to know each other, they are introduced to the current semester's topic and script and read the script, group members can express preferences for roles, the script is discussed and, if necessary, changes are made and specific vocabulary is introduced.
- Rehearsal phase (eight to ten weeks): roles are assigned, smaller 'scene teams' (if short plays are being done) emerge. Character work precedes and accompanies rehearsals, ideas for costuming and use of props emerge during the rehearsal process. Students are strongly encouraged to take part in the pronunciation coaching and additional character work offered as small group or one-on-one sessions conducted by a native speaker.
- Performance phase: tech and dress rehearsals take place in the actual performance space. The group meets as a whole. The students do one or two shows on campus.
- Recapitulation phase: the group meets to watch the video of the show, an informal evaluation of the project is carried out through talking about what students liked about the project or what they would change.

3.4 Scripts

The group works with original or adapted texts with a more or less pronounced focus on business English. I will describe two examples from the first and second semester in more detail here.

The first production was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, called *Macbiz*, which set the medieval tragedy in a modern corporate environment,

turning the protagonist into an overly ambitious manager who goes to great lengths to eliminate the present CEO. We chose to start off with a Shakespeare adaptation since we hoped that the most famous English dramatist would attract an audience even on a campus with a traditionally relatively low cultural activity level, an expectation which was mostly fulfilled. Moreover, *Macbeth* is a play frequently taught at German high schools (Gymnasien), so we hoped that at least some of our actors would be familiar with it (an expectation which was only fulfilled to a limited extent). Since the play's central conflict revolves around power and the ways to achieve it, it was relatively easy to transfer its basic outline to a modern business context – 'kingdom' is translated into 'company' (called Scotland Inc.), the king becomes the CEO. Modifications had to be made, though. Since we did not dare to confront the cast and the audience with Elizabethan English, most of the text was modernised – with a few key passages left intact – and the play was shortened to a length of about 60 minutes. A narrator appeared between scenes and provided the necessary background information. Since 14 of 15 actors in this production were female, modifications had to be made to include them all. Some characters, such as Banquo and the princes, were simply turned female. Moreover, a number of well-known female characters from other Shakespeare plays made an appearance as employees of Scotland Inc. Thirdly, the roles of the three witches were considerably enlarged with them becoming a team of unscrupulous human resources consultants, giving dubious career advice to Macbeth. All three scenes that feature the witches in the original play were 'translated' into business situations. The first, which sees the witches conferring about when to meet again, became a telephone conference using a large number of the standard textbook phrases needed for making an appointment. The second, where the witches lie in wait for Macbeth and Banquo was set in an elevator in a corporate building. The third – Macbeth seeking out the witches for more advice – took the form of a business meeting complete with slide presentation and video conferencing sequences to represent the three ghostly apparitions.

For the second production, the director prepared four original short plays, between 5 and 20 minutes in length, based on business vocabulary transferred to completely different contexts, for example a pirate story. The pirate play derives some inspiration from the Monty Python short film *The Crimson Permanent Assurance*, in which a group of elderly employees at an insurance company rebels against a new management, turning the whole insurance building into a pirate ship and sailing off in order to attack the world of high finance. In our version, the pirates are pirates from the beginning, but they are trying to employ modern management strategies and buzzwords in their everyday actions. This created a lot of puns – since expressions such as "killer application" (the ship's canons) or "pull strategy" (a phrase used when a pirate went overboard) or "networking" (needed to repair fishing nets) were taken literally. The intention was to make these expressions more memorable by giving them quite a different meaning than what they normally have. The beginning of the project therefore included a discussion of the real meaning of an expression or phrase and its

new meaning in the pirate context, while the programme given to the audience also included a glossary of terms.

The third production used a common topic for several (mostly original) short plays: airports and vocabulary related to travel. Here we strayed a little from the strict business focus but since travel is an important part of the business world it seemed nevertheless justified to focus on this theme for a business English theatre project.

4 Evaluation

So far, no formal evaluation process has been established, yet, in the feedback gathered so far, a number of our initial assumptions have been confirmed. After the first production, some of the participants gave feedback in informal conversations, stating that the project – even though they had at times experienced it as stressful, especially the rote-learning of their lines – had helped them to gain more confidence for talking in front of groups in a foreign language and that they were glad to have participated.

After the second production, a guideline-based group interview[3] was carried out with four of the participants: a student (who was doing an internship at the International Office) came to the group with a set of questions we had agreed on before and complemented them with more detailed questions as the situation required. The organisers of the project were not present during the interview since we assumed that the students would probably be more honest towards another student and not feel compelled to give only positive answers. The interviewed students, from Germany, China and France and majoring in business, chemistry and pedagogy, had all acted in the business pirate-play. The students agreed that taking part in the project had improved their self-confidence, more specifically their confidence to stand in front of a group and speak English – thus our assumption that students would perceive acting in English as beneficial for (English) presentations and talks was confirmed. Moreover, they stated that by using English as the working language in the project they had improved their "everyday English". They did not mention an improvement in their business English competence but since in this case three of four of the interviewed students were non-business majors, the business aspect might not have been of crucial importance to them. Three of the four interviewed students were exchange students whose proficiency in English was higher than their proficiency in German, and they mentioned that for them this project had been an opportunity to engage in an extracurricular activity without being hindered by their limited command of German. All students moreover stated that "meeting (new) people" had been another motive for them to join

[3] Guideline-based interviews ('Leitfadeninterviews') are characterized by their relatively open structure – in contrast to standardised interviews. The exact formulation of questions and their order is left to the interviewer who can thus adapt to the flow of the discussion (Schnell et al. 1999: 357). Guideline-based interviews are normally documented either by notes the interviewer takes, protocols from memory or audiotaping. We videotaped the interview.

the group.

The sixteen students from the recently finished third production were asked to fill out a short online evaluation questionnaire. Nine students completed the questionnaire[4]. Eight of them mentioned making new friends and interacting with a different set of people as one of the benefits of taking part in the project. Five mentioned having the opportunity to act on stage as a benefit. Gaining confidence, practising English, and "having fun" were mentioned four times each. Three students mentioned learning how to work in a team as a benefit. The results of the questionnaire resemble the results of the group interview in regard to what the students view as their personal 'takeaway'[5] from the project. When asked about their motivation for joining the project, nine out of nine answered that it was an interest in theatre which brought them to the project, only one mentioned "improving my English" as a additional motive. Asked to assess their proficiency in English before and after the project on a five-point scale, three thought they had improved their proficiency "a little", one answered "strongly" and one answered "not at all". Five students did not answer this question at all[6]. Since the students filled out the questionnaire anonymously, it is not known which part of the group they belonged to, that is, if these were students from Reutlingen or from Tübingen. However, it seems likely that the majority of them were students from Tübingen, since their answers reflected a strong interest in theatre in general and only secondly an interest in improving their English language skills. For the future it would be important to ensure that all participants take part in the evaluation in order to find out the whole range of motivations and reactions.

In both the interview and the online questionnaire the students were asked what they would like to improve. Answers here were quite varied, ranging from requests for more directing details over a wish to bring the whole group together more often (a lot of work in semester three was done in smaller teams) to statements like "nothing was missing". In so far as it is possible, the organisers try to implement students' suggestions in the planning and production process. One example: students from semester two had mentioned that they found only one show not enough, therefore we did two performances in the following semester, which seemed to work well.

5 Benefits

[4] At the beginning of February 2011, the evaluation questionnaire, which had been made available to the students on 22 January 2011, was still open for participation, so the figures mentioned here are a provisional result.

[5] A piece of current management jargon which could be translated as: "what they got out of it".

[6] As it turned out, this happened to due a technical problem. Because of browser compatibility issues part of the students could not see this question in the questionnaire.

5.1 Linguistic and non-verbal skills

Students who participate in the project are given ample opportunity to improve their spoken English: first, by practising the lines of their assigned roles and, second, by using English as the working language throughout the whole project. Moreover, in order to perfect their parts, they are offered one-on-one pronunciation coaching sessions with a native speaker, who teaches business English at Reutlingen University. Most students from Reutlingen University took advantage of this offer. In the second semester, most of the Reutlingen students also used the opportunity to do additional role work with the English professor who acted as a co-director of this production. Apart from speaking, students can practise their reading skills, enlarge their (business) vocabulary and practise basic (work-related) writing skills since part of the scheduling is done via e-mail as students are required to inform the director when they cannot come to a rehearsal etc.

A heterogeneous group structure is not an impediment in this project, as roles can be tailored to the abilities of the students by including roles of varying size and language difficulty. Moreover, also students whose language skills are limited can succeed if they are good actors since body language and a sense for timing, comic effects, ability to express emotions etc. constitute a considerable part of a successful performance. On the other hand, students who have so far taken a purely intellectual, 'non-physical' approach to language can learn "to what extent voice pitch, speech tempo, intonation, intermittent silences, facial expressions and body language can intensify and transform the pure semantic of words" (Bourke 1993: 229).

Given the collaborative character of the project, where no grades are awarded, stronger students are encouraged to help weaker students instead of competing with them, for example by explaining unknown words or correcting pronunciation, "for in communication activities [feedback] will come just as appropriately (if not more so) from fellow learners" (Murphy 1986: 146). Moreover, as Glock observes:

Drama offers students opportunities to take risks, secure in the knowledge that they will not be ridiculed or singled out in front of their peers for making the type of syntactical or pronunciation errors that any second language learners makes. Instead, they can try out the language and make their own effort to communicate ideas. Feedback from peers will soon tell them whether or not they have been successful! (1993: 110f)

Having the students give feedback to the others becomes more important the closer a production gets to performance. Whenever there is an opportunity to get several of the scene teams together to show each other their scenes, everyone is encouraged to give feedback on what they have seen and heard. Students will thus learn to take responsibility for not only their own individual learning process but for that of the whole group.

Moreover, since the group has always been mixed in regard to the students' acting experience, students who do have acting experience are often a great help to the 'newbies'– simply by playing their part well and giving the others an

example on which to model their own performances.

5.2 Personal skills / work-related skills

Students who participate in the project can improve their presentation skills by putting their new-found knowledge about body language, voice projection, articulation etc. into practice and by having to live through at least one performance, they will gain confidence for standing in front of an audience, speaking a foreign language. Moreover, behaviour appropriate to specific work situations was practised in the project, so for example making an appointment by telephone formed the central focus of one scene in *Macbiz*. Here, in this *no penalty zone* of a fictional situation (Heathcote 1 991: 130) students could playfully practice a situation which, in real life, might be connected with considerable anxiety.

Moreover, students had to find strategies for memorising their lines. In semester one, we assembled a help sheet, listing different possible strategies for memorisation, which we made also available to the students in the following semesters. If time had allowed it, a more extensive discussion of learning strategies and sharing of experiences would surely have been fruitful for the participants.

Finally, students had – up to a certain extent – the opportunity to acquire project management skills, even though more responsibility could have been transferred to them (e.g. for marketing, costumes, props, etc.). However, this proved difficult because most of the students only had a limited amount of time to spare and therefore we mostly let them concentrate on acting.

5.3 Interdepartmental and intercultural awareness and competences

The project promotes interdepartmental contacts since it involves students from different faculties and universities. Students who participate become more aware of other 'study cultures' and are confronted with their own prejudices and stereotypes – which are common among arts or, respectively, business students who might encounter the other type of student on the bus or in the street but who rarely interact with them. Thus, possibly existing prejudices can be checked against reality.

The project also promotes intercultural awareness since, throughout the three semesters of its existence, the group has always had a multicultural set-up. Intercultural questions are not explicitly addressed by the director, but by working on a common goal in a mixed group, they arise naturally. In an atmosphere characterised by mutual respect and the pursuit of a common goal, intercultural topics are usually addressed in a friendly and often humorous way (for example questions of punctuality). International students have so far been very open and cooperative, adapting to the group without any perceived difficulties. Working in a mixed-nationality group also gives the students the opportunity to encounter and learn to understand different accents, which

should prove of advantage to them in a work context since here they will rarely be confronted with speakers of Received Pronunciation or General American but rather with Chinese, Indian, Russian or other speakers who use English as a lingua franca (cf. for example Ehrenreich 2010).

6 Room for improvement

6.1 Group cohesion

For stronger group cohesion and a longer time period for inter-university contact, it would be desirable for the groups from Reutlingen and Tübingen to meet earlier during a production or even to form mixed rehearsal groups. However, it seems unlikely that participants will agree because the students have limited time and adding travelling time to and from rehearsal in another city would probably lead to a loss of participants. Also, the high turnover rate of participants at the end of each production leaves little room for continuity and long-term skill building – whereas in more traditional student theatre groups, participants mostly stay two to three semesters at least[7]. Often students need a longer period of time in order to 'open up' and develop their acting skills, as Bourke (1993: 230) points out and as my own experience with different student theatre groups confirms.

6.2 Time constraints

Because of the voluntary character of the project, the group consolidation phase is relatively long since there is a high level of fluctuation (in both directions) in the first weeks of each s emester. Since a group size of 10-15 is considered desirable, every interested student is welcome, which is why the policies for joining the group are relatively permissive. On the other hand, the long consolidation phase shortens the time available for actual rehearsal work. Also heterogeneity of the group leads to a great variety of study schedules that have to be taken into account: the rehearsal schedule is therefore hard to organise. Different academic calendars of the students (three different calendars have to be taken into account) also limit the time periods available for doing theatre productions.

Since the project is product-oriented, and the time the students can spend on the project is limited (usually two to three hours a week for each 'scene team'), it is not always possible to work on each aspect in detail, so for example voice training and work on body language could have been more intensive. It would be desirable to spend a whole day with the group to focus on aspects such as breathing techniques, articulation exercises, and to explore the possibilities for

[7] In 2010, I conducted an online-survey among English-language theatre groups in Germany with the aim of comparing group structures and organizational approaches to play production. Results (in German) are summarized here: http://dramagroups.de/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Auswertung-English-Drama-Groups.pdf.

rounding off a character by displaying certain vocal (pitch, volume, accent, pace, etc.) and other bodily characteristics (walks, gestures, tics, etc.) or by doing lengthy exercises that let them explore a character[8] In the past three semesters, however, we usually touched on these issues only briefly – by doing basic exercises for clarity and loudness and by letting the actors tryout different walks until they found one that seemed suitable for their character.

It would be an additional benefit if the students themselves could adapt the script(s) in order to give them the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the text even more strongly and to practice their writing abilities. However, in the period of one semester with weekly meetings there is simply not enough time. Unfortunately, due to the high turnover stated earlier it is also almost impossible to keep a whole group over two semesters, which would be the time needed to prepare a full-length play from script-writing to performance.

6.3 Native speaker input

It has proved difficult to attract students whose native language is English to participate in the project. Maybe the project would have to be marketed differently to this group – the chance to improve their English can hardly be a motivation for them to join the project. Exchange students from non-English-speaking countries, however, show a lively interest in the project, often, as stated above, because they find it easier to interact in English since they have just begun learning German. If exchange students who speak little or no German, are part of the group, this is actually beneficial to the other participants since it provides a natural justification for using only English in class. Moreover, as stated above, the opportunity to listen to different international accents is probably more useful to students who will enter the world of business than being exposed exclusively to British or American English.

6.4 Measuring success

It is hard to assess the language improvement of the participants quantitatively. It would in theory be possible to carry out diagnostic pre- and post-project language tests (cf. Kao and O'Neill 1998:72ff); however, it seems likely that putting a test at the beginning of the activities will scare off the participants, especially weaker students, which is not desirable. It is also hard to assess skill improvement empirically since other factors, such as regular language courses the students take, cannot really be excluded as influences on their language development in a post-project language assessment. We did, however, try to measure the project's success by letting the students evaluate their experiences by means of a group interview after the second semester and an online questionnaire after the third semester. We switched from a group

[8]For example one role-exploration exercise called 'emblem river' takes about 40 minutes alone. Including lengthy exercises such as this one is usually welcomed by students who really want to get to explore their character in detail, as I have learned from my work with other theatre groups, but it is not always feasible.

interview to online questionnaire mainly because of time problems: during the winter semester 2010/2011, the group performed the play shortly before Christmas break, and afterwards it was not possible to find a date for a group interview since their examination period had begun. Moreover, we hoped that the anonymity of an online survey would make it easier for the students to voice criticism. Of the 27 students taking part in the project during semesters two and three, thirteen participated in the evaluation, so our evaluation does not represent the full range of opinions. Summing up the results of both the group interview and online evaluations, it can, however, be said that social and motivational aspects ("meeting new people" and "having fun") are at least as, if not more, important outcomes for the participants as the opportunities to improve language competence and personal skills (most often mentioned: presentation and performance skills, moving and speaking with confidence in front of groups, learning to work in a team). The instruments we have used so far to measure the project's success and students' responses could probably only measure what was on the surface of the students' minds (interview) and what they could put into short and concise answers (questionnaire). It would certainly be interesting to observe students' introspective reflection about their participation, which could be done with the help of learner diaries (cf. Kao and O'Neill 1998) – provided participants are willing to engage in this extra task. Another, and probably more feasible approach would be to either introduce an external observer to the practice sessions or to videotape the practice sessions and let an external observer evaluate them. This might lead to insights about participants' development throughout the project of which they themselves are not aware and of which they can therefore not report in an evaluation interview or questionnaire. For future semesters, using a greater variety of evaluation instruments should therefore become part of the recapitulation phase.

7 Conclusion

Despite organisational limitations and constraints, the project has proved rather successful so far. Students are offered an alternative approach for improving their English. Those who might not have been interested in theatre are introduced to it through a connection with work-related topics and students who might not have been interested in business get a glimpse of it by approaching it through drama. Besides the usual strengths that characterise the use of theatre activities in language learning, such as holistic learning and motivational aspects, the students who participate in the project profit from the group's interdisciplinary and multinational set-up. The project's product-orientation ensures a high motivation and, eventually, the general satisfaction of the participants with a presentable outcome.

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