

## The Hidden Curriculum of Whiteness in Introductory German Language Textbooks

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According to research published in the *ADFL Bulletin*, German is the whitest modern language discipline in the United States, with roughly 85% of BA degrees in the subject awarded to non-Hispanic white students.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this fact, race remains an under-studied subject in language disciplines.<sup>2</sup> Due to the post-WWII tabooization of the concept of race, Germany does not track the racial background of its population, a fact cited by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent as contributing to the rampant racism in the country.<sup>3</sup> Even though roughly a quarter of Germany's population consists of immigrants or those with immigrant backgrounds, German textbooks still demonstrate what Silja Weber terms a "whiteness bias."<sup>4</sup> In this paper, part of an ongoing research project, I examine five introductory German textbooks (*Deutsch: Na Klar!*, *Kontakte*, *Netzwerk*, *Neue Horizonte*, and *Welten*) to show the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) strategies in play in these books that reinforce the whiteness of the German language classroom not only in the representation of the German-speaking world but also in the representation of the imagined learners of German. Using Tema Okun's theorization of "white supremacy culture,"<sup>5</sup> I reveal the persistent whiteness of German, highlighting the need to rethink not only how we represent the German-speaking world in curricular materials, but also how we conceptualize the diversity of the German learner in our classrooms.

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<sup>1</sup> Murphy, Dianna, and Seo Young Lee. "The Gender and Race or Ethnicity of Majors in Languages and Literatures Other Than English in the United States, 2010–14." *ADFL Bulletin*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2019, pp. 43-89.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Von Esch, Kerry Soo, et al. "Race and Language Teaching." *Language Teaching*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2020, pp. 391–421., doi:10.1017/S0261444820000269. This review article focuses almost exclusively on publications about English-language learning, due to the relative lack of research on other languages. The experience of racial minorities in study abroad is one of the few [non-English] language fields in which there is a growing canon of research from scholars such as Uju Anya, Wenhao Diao, and Tracy Quan.

<sup>3</sup> In their report they note the widespread racial profiling, racism, and disparate access to education, work, housing, and healthcare faced by People of Color in Germany, and they note, "People of African descent remain structurally invisible. As long as a person is discriminated against, whatever the reason, a State is not free from structural racism. Official statistics are only available for foreign-born people or those with parents born abroad and for African refugees and migrants. People of African descent are collectively grouped under the all-embracing concept of 'people from a migrant background,' thereby rendering invisible German citizens of African descent beyond the second generation. This approach does not specifically address the challenges faced by people of African descent in Germany, and indeed reflects the general lack of attention paid to their socioeconomic and political welfare." United Nations, Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its mission to Germany, A/HRC/36/60/Add.2 (September 2017), available from [undocs.org/en/A/HRC/36/60/Add.2](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/36/60/Add.2)

<sup>4</sup> Weber, Silja. "Visual Representation of Whiteness in Beginning Level German Textbooks," *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1-12.

<sup>5</sup> Okun, Tema, "White Supremacy Culture – Still Here." <http://www.whitesupremacyculture.info>