



LUDWIG-  
MAXIMILIANS-  
UNIVERSITÄT  
MÜNCHEN

**LANGUAGETALKS | 2012**

3. GRADUIERTENKONFERENZ DER PROMOTIONSSTUDIENGÄNGE  
PROLIT/LIPP



**Languagetalks 2012: Graduate Conference at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, 8-10 November 2012**

Languagetalks is an interdisciplinary conference series, organized at regular intervals by members of the structured Ph.D. programs ProLit (Promotionsstudiengang Literaturwissenschaft) and LIPP (Linguistisches internationales Promotionsprogramm), both affiliated with LMU Munich's Faculty for Language and Literary Studies.

**Alles Mögliche. Sprechen, Denken und Schreiben des  
(Un)Möglichen / The Works. Of the (Im)Possible: Speaking,  
Thinking and Writing the (Im)Possible**

While politics seems to be less and less concerned with visions and utopias and unceasingly emphasizes the "Alternativlosigkeit" ('lack of alternatives' - faux pas term par excellence of 2010) of its decisions, economics attempts to present the world to the consumer as a realm of infinite consuming possibilities: "Impossible is Nothing." Despite, or perhaps due to, this discrepancy, current political and economic models are taking new soundings on the boundaries of their possibilities and of the possible. Consequently, the question arises of which role the humanities can and want to adopt when social possibilities regarding political and economic crises are newly gauged. How do the humanities negotiate these potentialities, which ultimately also affect the (im)possibilities of research and development as such? Couldn't and shouldn't linguistic and literary studies use their expertise to make a contribution to the sphere of (un)limited and (un)limiting possibilities? With this discourse as a backdrop, the conference will set a goal of debating the possibilities of the possible from a linguistic and literary perspective. Questions of speaking, thinking and writing of the im(possible) should be newly posed, as well as the potentialities, assets and liabilities of language and literature discussed.

**Panel 1: Das Mögliche denken / Thinking the Possible**

Literature is hardly imaginable without Musil's *Möglichkeitssinn* or the participation in Campe's "Game of Probabilities". Literature negotiates the possible from the horizon of probability, determinism and contingency. Epistemological as well as mathematical methods designed to grasp the possible - such as abduction, combinatorics, statistics, probabilistics or prognostics - play a prominent role in the current academic discourse on knowledge, nescience, and literature. Contributions to this panel could be dedicated to, for example, the following questions: Where do linguistic and literary representations of possibility stand in relation to philosophical concepts of the factual, the probable, the necessary or the coincidental? How does possibility relate to knowledge and nescience in (or also of) literature? Which role does the possible play for narratological categories such as space, time, and *Ereignis* - and vice versa? To what extent does the experience of a contingent world shape narration?

**Panel 2: Von möglichen Welten sprechen / Speaking of Possible Worlds**

Fictional texts compose and describe possible, however, not (yet) realized, or rather, unrealizable worlds. The panel approaches a poetological terminology of the possible: What can be said for example about the emergence of such genres, the possible worlds of which differ acutely from each other (fantasticism, utopia, dystopia, science fiction)? On the other hand, how is the possible and the conceivable, but also the physically and/or logically impossible (re)negotiated? Which importance can be assigned to the special set of vocabulary of the possible world,

when for instance the specific regulations of the clandestine Hogwarts world in *Harry Potter* advance with an armada of neologisms, or the beautiful new world from Orwell's *1984* is clearly only realized via state interference in the population's vocabulary? In this respect, the panel is interested in the discourse in and about possible worlds, not only from a literary studies perspective, but also from a linguistic point of view. Adjacent to literary texts, films and other communicative situations, for example colloquial speech, online communications, politics, economics, etc. are encouraged as platforms for exploration.

### **Panel 3: Grammatiken des Möglichen / Grammar(s) of the Possible**

This panel will pursue the questions of how (im)possibility can be expressed in and with the structures of grammar; moreover, the question of how literature uses, explodes, contaminates or disclaims these structures will be foregrounded. For linguistics, the modality of a statement thereby plays a central role, reflecting the attitude of the speaker towards the sentence content. At the same time, the appraisal of modalities of predicates renders possible on the one hand the epistemic valuation of expressed thoughts, as well as the comprehension of its relation to reality; contrariwise, predicates furnish information about the sources of knowledge (evidentiality) and approaches. How do such semantic categories of possibility allow themselves to be expressed grammatically: Which type(s) of modality/-ies/evidentiality are mediated through verbal denominations such as grammatical tense (future, inferential past conjugations) and mood (imperative, operative, etc.)? Which role do modal verbs or sentence adverbs play, or kinds of sentences such as statement, question, etc.?

### **Panel 4: Jenseits des Möglichen / Beyond the Possible**

If the impossible has already been parenthetically implied in the previous panels, the territory 'beyond the possible' allows itself to here be more radically conceptualized. This panel comprises that which is not discursively representable, yet which nevertheless strives for existence and representation. In this vein, the question shall be pursued of the possibility to grasp something that by definition exceeds everything determinable. Are language and literature at all capable of tackling this challenge, or do they perhaps exploit precisely the conceptually unrepresentable here annotated in order to productively process this void or gap? Which dynamic interrelationship exists between linguistic-literary and socio-political confrontations with the margins of the possible, such as for instance political or aesthetic revolutions? How do allegedly impossible linguistic phenomena (such as passive voice systems) that are brought to light through systemic comparison allow themselves to be typologically conceived?

### **Organizational Matters**

Abstracts may be submitted by Ph.D. candidates as well as postdoctoral researchers until the deadline of June 29, 2012 and should not exceed 400 words (including a short biographical sketch). Decisions will be made by the beginning of August. Presentations should be restricted to 20 minutes in anticipation of the subsequent discussion and may be held in either German or English. A selection of the contributions will be published in an edited volume of our conference series *linguagetalks*.

Attendance fee: 30 Euro, free entry for students. In well-founded cases, it is possible to be exempt from paying the participation fee.

Please send your abstract to [linguagetalks12@lrz.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:linguagetalks12@lrz.uni-muenchen.de) by June 29, 2012 at the latest.

Additional information available on our homepage:  
<http://www.linguagetalks.fak13.uni-muenchen.de>.