

In memoriam: Professor Anka Bergmann (1965–2025)



Photo: <https://www.slawistik.hu-berlin.de/de/member/abergmann>

The end of March 2025 was marked by a very sad news for the whole German community of Slavic Studies: Anka Bergmann passed away after a prolonged struggle with illness. Anka Bergmann held professorship at the Department of Slavic and Hungarian Studies at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin (HUB) (since 2007) and headed there the Department of Language Teaching Methods.

Professor Bergmann was an influential Slavic scholar and expert in the field of language education, with the focus for teaching Russian as a foreign and heritage language in Germany. After completing her university studies, she began working as a researcher at the Ernst Moritz Arndt University of Greifswald, where she defended her PhD (1994) and completed her *Habilitation* (2005).

During Anka Bergmann's time in Greifswald, significant events took place that significantly contributed to the development of Ukrainian studies in Germany. In 1995, the Greifswald University introduced a Ukrainian studies program and launched the annual Summer School *Ukrainicum*. There is no doubt that Dr. Bergmann, along with her husband, Dr. habil. Alexander Kratochvil – a renowned translator of Ukrainian literature into German – played a pivotal role in establishing Ukrainian studies in Greifswald and integrating it into the curriculum of its Institute of Slavic Studies.

One of Anka Bergmann's earliest works, which also focused on the Ukrainian language, was a co-authored with Alexander Kratochvil monograph in the series "*Greifswalder Beiträge zur Slawistik*" entitled "*Verfall oder neuer Standard? Betrachtungen zur aktuellen Sprachsituation in Russland, Tschechien und der Ukraine*" / Decline or new standard? Reflections on the current language situation in Russia, the Czech Republic and Ukraine (2002), which deals with important issues of language policy in Ukraine at the time, the history of "Ukrainianization", the sociolinguistic basis of the Surzhyk phenomenon, etc.

A new impetus for the development of Ukrainian studies in Anka Bergmann's research and teaching activities was the announcement of the academic year 2017/2018 as the Year of the Ukrainian language in Germany and the Year of German language in Ukraine, thanks to bilateral negotiations between then Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and Germany, Pavlo Klimkin and Frank-Walter Steinmeier. At the time, both countries began to organize various cultural events aimed at presenting their languages to foreign audiences and thus spreading knowledge about them. Professor Bergmann actively supported this idea and, together with her colleagues from the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, organized a series of academic events at the HUB in October 2017: an intensive Ukrainian language course, a certification exam in Ukrainian for the B1-level, and a workshop "Ukrainian as a foreign language: how to learn and how to teach" (*Ukrainisch als Fremdsprache lernen und lehren*) for teachers of Ukrainian at German universities. Thanks to her efforts, Ukrainian scholars from Oldenburg,

Bochum, Frankfurt an der Oder and other German cities came to Berlin to share their teaching experience (more details [here](#)). The workshop was also attended by students from the Department of Applied Linguistics of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, who were at the time carrying out their teachers' practical training under the supervision of Dr. Oleksandra Antoniv.

These were the first steps towards the formation of a community of teachers of Ukrainian as a foreign language in Germany, which were also strongly supported by the German-Ukrainian Academic Society (*Die Deutsch-Ukrainische Akademische Gesellschaft e.V., DUAG*). Professor Bergmann actively participated in the organization of an academic workshop "[Ukrainian as a Foreign and Heritage Language in Germany](#)" in November 2017, supported by the Embassy of Ukraine in the Federal Republic of Germany. A very important outcome of Professor Bergmann's research in the field of German Ukrainian studies was the now classic article "*Ukrainisch lernen in Deutschland: eine Einschätzung der Rahmenbedingungen, Möglichkeiten und Perspektiven*" / Learning Ukrainian in Germany: an assessment of the framework conditions, opportunities and prospects, co-authored with A. Kratochvil (Lviv 2017) published in the collection "[Theory and Practice of Teaching Ukrainian as a Foreign Language](#)". This work clearly confirmed the dynamics of the establishment of the discipline "Ukrainian as a foreign and heritage language" in the German-speaking countries.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Professor Bergmann did not stand aside, and her first step in supporting Ukraine and Ukrainian people she knew was to officially condemn the war on behalf of the Association "Russian Language and Multilingualism" (now renamed as "Slavic Languages and Multilingualism"):

NO WAR!

We condemn Russia's attack on Ukraine!

This situation concerns us all and makes us all deeply concerned.

This is a black day for the idea of understanding through language learning. The members of our association research and teach Russian language, culture and literature in schools and universities. We strive to help the younger generation find a common language across national borders and to feel the value of exchange and cooperation.

War is not the answer!

Source: personal correspondence with Anka Bergmann of 24.02.2022, 22:42

Since then, Professor Bergmann actively supported various Ukrainian studies projects, including "Flipped classroom in Teaching Ukrainian on the Base of Student's Competence in other Slavic Language(s)" in collaboration with Dr. Natalya Tsisar (08-12.2022, funded by the Faculty of Ukrainian Language and Literature, HUB). The following projects in collaboration with Dr. Oksana Turkevych, MSCA4Ukraine fellow at the HUB, focused on the study of the Ukrainian as a heritage language in Germany, for example, "[Ukrainisch im Mehrsprachigkeitskontext \(UkriM\): Theorie und Didaktik](#)". In addition to a series of seminars and workshops, one of the outstanding events within the framework of this project was a conference that brought together colleagues from different parts of Germany to discuss important issues of functioning of the Ukrainian language in Germany within both school and university curricula – "*Ukrainische Sprache im Kontext der Mehrsprachigkeit in Deutschland: Aspekte des Unterricht(en)s*" (28 April 2023).

The next project was "*Between the Languages: Linguistic Basics, Institutional forms and Didactic concepts of Teaching Ukrainian as a Heritage Language in Berlin and beyond*"

(supported by the MSCA4Ukraine fellowship awarded to Dr. Oksana Turkevych). The practical aspect of which was cooperation with the Senate of Berlin to support the development of Ukrainian as a heritage language teaching at Berlin schools. With the support of Professor Bergmann, the first textbook containing the lexical minimum for learning Ukrainian as a foreign language at A1 level by Ksenia Borodin and Oksana Turkevych “1000 and 1 word” was published in the Slavic Language Education series (2024).

It is also worth mentioning how Anka Bergmann, together with Alexander Kratochvil, invited in 2022 the Ukrainian writer Oleksandr Irvanets to Berlin from the town of Irpin’, which was already under the threat of Russian occupation, and created all conditions necessary for his life and work. A new novel by Irvanets, written during his stay in Berlin, is expected to be published in the near future.

In one of her recent publications entitled “*Russland führt Krieg. Wie geht es dem Russischunterricht?*”/ Russia conducts war. What is happening with Russian-language classes? (*Die New Sprachen: Jahrbuch des Gesamtverbandes Moderne Fremdsprachen*, 11/12 (for 2020/2021), 2023, pp. 15-30), Professor Bergmann raised the question of the impact of Russia’s military attack on Ukraine on the course of German-Russian relations not only on the political or cultural level, but also on the academic and didactic level – in particular in the teaching of Russian in Germany: “*Since 24 February 2022, we have been concerned with the question of how we as a European society, but also specifically as foreign language teachers, will deal with Russia, Russian culture and the Russian language in the future*”. The author proposed several important and fundamental changes in didactic approaches to teaching the language of the aggressor country, and the most fundamental is to get rid of the deeply rooted patterns in the perception of Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire, which Timothy Snyder calls colonial.

Anka’s many plans, her countless ideas, her unwavering faith and hope, and her deep love for life were tragically interrupted by her illness and her passing. Yet, the seeds she planted – even amid her suffering – will, we believe, take root, flourish, and continue to inspire. Her legacy will forever remain in our hearts, cherished by deep respect and gratitude.

We are profoundly saddened by this loss. On behalf of all Ukrainian colleagues who had the privilege of working with Professor Anka Bergmann, we extend our heartfelt condolences to her family and friends during this difficult time. With deepest respect and fondest memories...

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