

Editors' Foreword

The articles in this volume were written to mark the tenth anniversary of the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Bergen. Since its formation as a new administrative unit in 2007, the department has provided the institutional framework for teaching and research conducted in nine different languages, as well as within (and often across) four different disciplines. The articles we present in this collection reflect some of that diversity, bringing together the perspectives of researchers in English, French, Italian, Russian, and Spanish literature, linguistics, cultural studies, and didactics in an enquiry centred on the topical issue of “relevance.”

Across the humanities, similar queries about the continued validity of established areas, paradigms, and practices of research have been raised with increasing frequency for some time now. In many cases, such questioning arises in direct consequence of institutional pressures, as the policies of European as well as national research councils and other funding bodies place growing emphasis on the public engagement, reach and impact of research. In an increasingly complex geopolitical context, humanities subjects along with other academic fields are asked to address and help resolve social, cultural and economic issues that cut across geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders. The aim of the present volume is to explore such challenges with particular reference to the academic study of languages, literatures and cultures currently being conducted within the institutional framework of a department of foreign languages. We ask what our research contributes to the preservation, production, and distribution of knowledge in present-day society, and demonstrate

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how scholars in foreign language studies are in many cases particularly well placed to conduct comparative, multi-disciplinary, and cross-national research that may help us answer some of the most demanding questions facing societies today.

Preparing this volume has involved the work of several people to whom the editors would like to express their gratitude. First, we thank the contributors, who have shown remarkable patience and forbearance through drafts, submissions, revisions, and deadlines. We also gratefully acknowledge the detailed and attentive reports submitted by our outside readers, whose comments were invariably constructive as well as instructive. Further, we deeply appreciate the expert editorial assistance provided first by Barbara Blair and, in the final stages, by Stehn Aztlan Mortensen. Thanks are also due to the general editors of the Bergen Language and Linguistics Series for their enthusiastic reception of the initial book proposal, and last, but not least, to the Head of the Department of Foreign Languages, Åse Johnsen, whose generous support made the publication of this volume possible.

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