《外國語文研究》第十六期
2012 年 6 月　　頁 1~25

# 德語作為強制勞役者在二戰期間及後續生活的語言

陶克思*

## 中文摘要

本文檢視受制於德國強制勞役的人們學習德語、以及如何處理這個語言的過程，同時亦針對上述過程在這群人的後續生活裡所發展之狀況提出了進一步的觀察。文中一方面探討被遣送至德國的人們如何學習或者抗拒德語，他們出於什麼原因這麼做，成效又如何。另一方面，對原來就會說德文的人而言（無論是作為母語或是外語），戰時的經驗是否改變了他們在二戰期間以及後續生活中對德語的使用，與看待德國社會與文化的方式。根據國際強制勞役者典藏計畫（International Forced Labourers' Documentation Project，德國哈根大學，2004-2007）中的80位前二戰強制勞役者的生命故事訪談資料，本文將探索勞役及語言學習的關係，析論語言在建立社會角色與身份上的影響，以及語言與暴力的交互作用。

關鍵詞：強制勞役、德語、第二次世界大戰、記憶、語言學習

* 國立政治大學歐洲語文學程助理教授

2011年10月14日到稿　2012年4月11日通過刊登

# German as forced labourers' language during World War II and in the life after

Christoph Thonfeld*

## Abstract

The article examines how people acquired the German language and have dealt with it while being subjected to forced labour under German command. It also follows up how these processes developed over the further courses of the lives of the people concerned. This comprises to explore how people who were deported to Germany acquired the language or how and why or rather to what extent and effect they refused to do so. It will also be taken into consideration if and how people who already knew German as their mother tongue or as a foreign language changed their use of it and their outlook on German society and culture on the whole during World War II and in the life after as a result of their wartime experiences. Based on 80 life story interviews with former World War II forced labourers from the stock of the International Forced Labourers' Documentation Project (Hagen University, Germany, 2004-2007), this article will trace the intersection of forcible exploitation through labour and language acquisition, how language influences the establishment of social roles and identities and the interplay of language and violence.

Key words: Forced labour, German language, World War II, Memories, Language acquisition

* Assistant Professor, European Studies Program, Cheng Chi University

# German as forced labourers' language during World War II and in the life after

Christoph Thonfeld

## 1. Introduction

In this year's August issue of the language learning magazine *Deutsch perfekt* there was a piece of news about a Croatian employee of a municipal swimming bath in Northern Germany, who had sued her employer for damages on charges of discrimination, because he had tried to force her to attend a German language course (Deutsch perfekt, „Arbeitgeber darf Deutschkurs verlangen", 23). Despite her having been at this workplace for more than 20 years, she was subsequently laid off by her employer because of her refusal to take part in the language course. Therefore, she later demanded 15.000 € as indemnity payments. Eventually, the German Federal Labour Court dismissed the claim of the Croatian swimming bath employee, stating that the employer can expect staff to learn German if that is necessary for their work. Whatever one might think of this particular case, it leads right into the field of tension of the forcible acquisition of (the German) language. And – although one perhaps would not expect it in times of multiculturalism and interculturality – this controversy seems to be far away from being a thing of the past; on the contrary, it obviously still possesses quite some topicality. In this article the problem will be assessed in historical perspective.

The overall approach of this article is situated within three areas of investigation. Firstly, it will venture into the study of (foreign) language acquisition. Secondly, it will examine the relationship between language and the creation of social roles and personal identities. Thirdly, the relatively new research area of the relation between language and violence will be investigated. Recent studies have created useful terminological tools for this kind of research and have begun to explore the

theoretical background of the issues at hand. The biographical sources will be closely scrutinised with regard to these three aspects, concentrating on how people dealt with German as a (foreign) language under circumstances of war and forced labour. This comprises all those people who were deported to or captured in Germany as forced labourers and either acquired the language step by step or refused to do so. Forced labourers are understood here as either deported civilians, prisoners of war (POW labourers) or inmates of prisons and concentration camps (prisoner labourers). At some stage of their displacement or internment they were coerced to work for state or public firms and institutions, private companies and organisations or private households in Germany. Furthermore, also those among them who already had a good command of German before the war either as mother tongue or as a school subject come into consideration. It is especially interesting how their relationship with the language was changed by the experience of World War II and forced labour.

This research is based on more than 80 life story interviews with former forced labourers of Nazi Germany, available in German, English or French original language or as translations into German, mostly from the stock of the International Forced Labourers' Documentation Project (IFLDP). They were conducted in the Czech Republic, England, Germany, France, Israel, Ukraine and the USA in 2005 and 2006 under the guidance of the Institute for History and Biography of Hagen University in Germany. However, not all of the interviews provided immediate evidence for this article since the role and importance of the German language for the forced labour experience was sometimes only implicitly mentioned and not always necessarily dealt with in greater depth. There was no question during interviews that explicitly addressed this issue neither were interviewers obliged to ask the interviewees to dwell on this aspect. Nevertheless, the majority of interviewees still brought up the matter by themselves due to its obvious relevance for coming through the everyday life as a forced labourer in wartime Germany.

Three different groups will be traced for the purpose of this article. The first one are former forced labourers who returned to their countries of origin, that is today's Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, and Ukraine, the second are those who had to perform forced labour in Germany and emigrated to another country after the war, in this case England, France, Israel, and the USA, while the third group comprises those people who have stayed on in Germany after World War II. Special attention will also be given to Jewish survivors who today reside in all seven countries

of the sample. The majority of them have had linguistic and/or familial roots within the German speaking societies and cultures, therefore, this group serves as a prime example for the entire range of ways how people first actively acquired the German language before World War II and equally actively have distanced themselves from it after 1945 and how these processes have intermingled with each other during the courses of the respective further biographies. Using the sources of the different national groups, it will be analysed how German as a language influenced forced labourers' experiences, identities and social rules during World War II and whether or not this had any impact on their life after. To begin with, these biographical investigations will be framed by a close look at the discourse of language learning for foreigners in Germany back then when the interviewees had been there as forced labourers and how learning German was supposed to take place. After that the concrete circumstances and practices of how it actually happened will be given a closer look.

## 2. Discourse of foreign language acquisition and language learning for foreigners in Nazi Germany

Most of the research into language acquisition hitherto has focused on children learning their mother tongue or on adolescents or adults learning foreign languages within fixed spatial arrangements (usually a classroom environment) in their home country or as immigrants in foreign countries. As Scollon has pointed out, analysing language acquisition and use needs to take structures of social systems into account in order to be fully understood. At the same time he reminds us that the reduction of language to either a mere system of representation or a merely operational social habitus should be avoided (Scollon, Cross-cultural learning, 130). From ethnographic fieldwork we can learn how social expectations influence language acquisition and that especially foreign language learners' cultural knowledge usually lags behind their attained level of language proficiency (Ochs/ Schieffelin, Language Acquisition and Socialisation, 289f).[1] These aspects were further acuminated in the case of the forced labour experience as social expectations were usually forced upon the people concerned or there was at least coercion looming behind these expectations. Also,

[1] On the aspect of the gap between foreign language learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge see also Gumperz, John J., The conversational analysis of interethnic communication, in: Ross, E.L. (ed.), Interethnic Communication. Proceedings of the Southern Anthropological Society, Athens 1997.

given forced labourers' limited access to everyday cultural encounters, the gap between their linguistic and cultural knowledge was in many cases even bigger than with usual language learners.

The entire German forced labour system was continuously adjusted to the requirements of total warfare on the one hand and the Nazis' racialized vision of the war and the envisaged future European society under German supremacy on the other. The role of the German language was no exception in this respect. The German army [Wehrmacht, CT] and Josef Goebbels' Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda [Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, RMVP, CT] became more and more champions of German language acquisition by Germany's rapidly increasing foreign workforce the longer the war wore on, because they wanted to use their labour more efficiently. But they had to face fierce opposition from the Interior Ministry, especially the Reich Main Security Office [Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) CT], and the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories [Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete (RMO) CT], who opposed teaching the German language to people they perceived as "subhumans" (Schiller, NS-Propaganda, 109f). However, contrary to RMO opposition to language education, in occupied territories e.g. in Slovenia, German courses were explicitly used as a means to further Germanisation efforts (Archive of the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement, Landrat Krainburg, Vol. 947). The RMVP was especially enthusiastic about the use of language courses for their purposes, as they stated in an internal memorandum as late as 1944: "*This course activity should be expanded because of its special potential to exert efficient influence*." (BArch Berlin, R 55, 1232, p. 58, author's translation). Until the end of the war it proved impossible to strike an account between the opposite factions. In August 1944, an internal correspondence between RMVP officials summed up the state of affairs with regard to the question whether foreigners should learn any more German other than immediately necessary for their daily work: "*On this point, disagreement prevails between the various government departments*." (BArch Berlin, R 55, 808, p. 14, author's translation). However, in a balancing account from early 1944, ministry officials could relatively successfully relate under the header "*'Cultural Work': 1. German courses: Courses have been conducted for two years now, registering more than 500.000 foreign workers of mostly Western nationalities. Currently there are more than 1.300 courses running in the individual districts, organised by the Adult*

*Education Scheme* [Deutsches Volksbildungswerk (DVW), CT] *of the DAF* [Deutsche Arbeitsfront (German Labour Front), CT]." (BArch Berlin, R 55, 1232, p. 45: Enclosure 9, author's translation).

As the initial sentence of the quote already suggests, there were also palpable effects of the racial hierarchy when it came to language acquisition of foreign workers. While it was seen as an urgent problem already in 1941 to offer courses to workers from neutral fascist Spain to make their labour effort and the communication with German co-workers and superiors more efficient (BArch Berlin, NS 5 I, 268, Circular of the DAF Central Office - Amt für Arbeitseinsatz [Department for Labour Deployment, CT] on 5.2.1942 under the subject: Sprachkurse für Spanier [Language Courses for Spaniards, CT], not paginated), it was maintained at the same time that "*in consultation with the Party Chancellery we declare the following on this issue: The opening of general German language courses for Polish workers is not allowed. Polish workers should only be taught those German phrases which are strictly necessary to perform their work and to maintain discipline at the workplace*." (BArch Berlin, NS 5 I, 267, Circular of the Main Branch Ausländereinsatz [Deployment of Foreigners, CT] on 20.1.1942 under the subject: Einsatz ausländischer Arbeiter [Deployment of Foreign Workers, CT], not paginated, author's translation). This attitude towards Poles would be subject to change later on, though, as a registration form for language courses in 1944 explicitly included Poles as participants and there had already been earlier reports on their actual participation (BArch Berlin, R 9363, 27). As early as October 1943, also Russian Prisoners of War had become a target group for learning German. The DAF even went as far as to advise German personnel of companies and factories to speak slowly and clearly and in complete sentences when talking to their language learning foreign subordinates. However, the authoritarian language instruction proved to be almost as difficult as the war effort in winter 1944, with one director of a mining company reporting back to the DAF on a course concerning its results: "..., *the German language course for Russian Prisoners of War took place from 24th of May until 29th of July 1944. Roughly 40 Prisoners of War attended the course; 6 of them were very lively and diligent and took an active part in lessons. However, the remaining ones contributed only very little*." (BArch Berlin, R 9363, 27, Letter from Mining company director Dinter on 29th of December 1944, not paginated, author's translation).

As far as teaching methods are concerned, the DVW was principally in charge of German language instruction, apart from small scale efforts for language instruction organised by the German State Railways [Deutsche Reichsbahngesellschaft (DRG), CT] the Reich Labour Service [Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD), CT] and the Todt Organisation [Organisation Todt (OT), CT]. The DVW mentioned in one of its corresponding memos the application of the "Direct Method" (BArch Berlin, R 9363, 27), which comprises inductive derivation of grammatical rules and monolingual teaching in their courses. This approach can be considered state-of-the-art teaching at the time. They also rather unspecifically mentioned a "visualisation method" [Veranschaulichungsmethode, CT], which does not relate to any fixed term within the area of language teaching, but could be a hint to the use of picture dictionaries. These were widely distributed to employers and workers alike by the RMVP, pertaining to the fields of household, mechanical engineering, precision mechanics, aircraft construction, mining, road construction, and agriculture (BArch Berlin, R 55, 1232, Letter of the Director of Propaganda to Goebbels on 10th of February 1944 under the subject: Betreuung der Fremdarbeiter [Support of Foreign Workers, CT], p.25f). None of the IFLDP's interviewees, though, received this kind of formal instruction outlined above or at least nobody explicitly mentioned it in the interviews. Maybe this was a statistical coincidence as language courses reached only less than 5% of the entire foreign workforce if the official number mentioned above is accurate. And there were probably a lot of volunteer workers and Nazi sympathisers among the course participants, who in turn were less likely to provide an interview on the sufferings of forced labourers at the hands of Germans 60 years later.

## 3. Language, identities and social rules

The scientific exploration of the connection between language and the fabric of social groups and how individual people find their places within these structures owes largely to the works of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Not only has he delved deeply into the role of language as an instrument of social action and power, but also raised our awareness to the fact that social circumstances shape symbolic values as well as the meaning of discourses (Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 37f). Thereby language also serves to reflect the measure of values in a given society as well as its structural setup. On a societal level, Bourdieu has pointed out that every social group establishes certain rules and regulations concerning the

legitimacy of the uses and of the users of language. Language is not just there as a neutral common good, freely available for everybody to utilise. On the contrary, social value is objectively accorded to the legitimate use of language, while speakers lacking this legitimate competence are de facto excluded from the corresponding social domains (Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 53ff). The situation of former forced labourers, who were hardly awarded the chance to establish themselves as legitimate speakers of German, but were rather forced to react to guards' and superiors' use of the language, clearly is an extreme example of this constellation, which merits closer consideration.

Bourdieu has also sharpened our understanding of the fierce struggles for legitimate uses of language as a means of contesting the recognition of power relationships. In these contests people rely on their linguistic *habitus*, which represents their acquired speech dispositions for certain situations (Albersmann, Die Bedeutung der Sprache, 2). So the language use of German superiors also reflects how they have positioned themselves towards the forced labourers and towards other members of the majority society, be they officials, colleagues, or neighbours. Research into the relationship between communication and culture has proven the socialising functions of language in general, especially in so far as language acquisition is deeply intertwined with the process of becoming a competent member of society (Ochs/ Schieffelin, Language Acquisition and Socialisation, 263f). For that side of these constellations, research has shown that inference from linguistic exchanges, along with cultural knowledge and conscious observation, is what constitutes our personal perceptions in interactions (Jupp/ Roberts/ Cook-Gumperz, Language and disadvantage, 248). Thus, the meanings of language are not only socially negotiated, but also subjectively construed and are also used to create personal and social identities. This dimension is also everything but a neutral process. It comprises positive effects of recognition by others as well as negative effects of degradation through others. Both influence a person's self-understanding. Discrimination, for example, often takes up the form of speech acts;[2] therefore it has a distinct linguistic dimension (Jupp/ Roberts/ Cook-Gumperz, Language and disadvantage, 234). All these elements can also be found at forced labour workplaces and in camps in Nazi Germany (Hennigfeld, 'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann', 7). It

[2] On the theory of speech acts cf. Austin, John J., How to do things with words, Oxford 1962.

is less clear, though, how language concretely contributed to "socialise" the deported foreigners into becoming forcibly employed foreign workers in Germany.

For many forced labourers, it was their first confrontation with German and often came as a surprise attack, which was already part of the attempted submission. A French former forced labourer, who was used as a factory worker in Germany, but otherwise spent all of his life as a farmer in a small village in France, remembers very vividly his first encounter with the language: "*When we crossed the border, there fell a deep silence. We changed trains, we came to another country, we started to realise that French was no longer spoken; we heard an unknown language, which did not sound too good in our ears and was unutterable*." (IFLDP interview, Gabriel F., France 2006, German transcription, 7, author's translation). Others already had some previous knowledge of German, but probably only very rarely as sophisticated as described in the memoirs of Spanish writer and Buchenwald survivor Jorge Semprun, who wrote about the linguistic field of tension especially the prisoner labourers all of a sudden found themselves thrown into, as being "*between the language of orders and the yelling of the SS*" on the one hand and the still secretly existing possibilities of a more sophisticated use of German as the "*language of subversion (...), and universal affirmation of critical reason*" (Semprun, Schreiben oder Leben, 342, author's translation) on the other. A lot of interviewees said that they received a new name from their employers, usually a nickname based on a germanised version of their first name. That applied mostly to those which were employed in agriculture or who enjoyed more personal relationships with their superiors at industrial workplaces. For most of the others, who worked in groups and/or had to live in camps, it could easily be more like what this Czech former forced labourer, who had to work in a steel factory but was also temporarily interned in a labour education camp, relates: "*But ... I forgot to say, how they called us (...), böhmischer Hund* [Bohemian dog, CT] *and so on and Trottel* [jerk, CT], *or when they shouted abuse at us, then it was Schwein* [pig, CT] *, and it was pretty common, that the numbers were not mentioned, ""You"", ""that one"", or the name. For example, they called me 'Tolezal Miloslaus', because they could not pronounce the name 'Doležal', this 'ž' with a hook and so on, Miroslav Doležal. They just could not get it right. 'Miroslaus Do-, Tolezal...'*." (IFLDP interview, Miroslav D., Czech Republic 2005, German transcription, 14, author's translation). Contrary to the statement on the usage of numbers, most of the former prisoner labourers relate that the numbers which were allocated to them in the camps

were experienced as a particularly humiliating form of identification. As this occurred so frequently, interviewees until today preferably mention them only in German during the interview.[3]

When it comes to the actual circumstances of the initial stages of language learning, accounts are rather contradictory, even among deported civilians who were employed as agricultural forced labourers. For example, a Polish man, who was a trained shoemaker, had to work on two different farms during the war and stayed on in Germany afterwards, reports: "*The farmer was an old man. Nervous. (…). He just explained once and explained twice, then explained a third time and later, when he realised that it simply wouldn't work that way, he would just use the whip. Oh well. In between I somehow made efforts to properly understand what he said. So, practically, to evade the beatings, yes. I literally tried to take the words right out of his mouth*." (IFLDP interview, Josef B., Germany 2005, transcription, 4, author's translation). It sounds a lot more light-hearted and positive, though, what a female Ukrainian former forced labourer, who was deported as a school child and then ended up on a small farm in South-western Germany, had to say: "*And so after three month I could speak German pretty well. And do you know why? They had five children and the youngest was four years old and the oldest twelve and I was fifteen. After three months I could understand German pretty well, because I did not hear any other language and nothing else*." (IFLDP interview, Nadja S., Germany 2005, transcription, 4, author's translation). There were also more practical, though rather unconventional approaches that could eventually prove moderately successful in terms of language acquisition, like in the case of one Polish Prisoner of War who was forcibly employed on various farms during his captivity. In the interview he described very vividly how he tried to escape from his workplace because of homesickness, which earned him three weeks' imprisonment. He presented this experience as very incisive and named two major consequences. Firstly, from that moment on he finally accepted forced labour as his wartime fate and secondly, he started to learn German with a dictionary he had managed to smuggle into prison because he had realised how important the language was to organise his everyday life more actively (FZH/WdE interview, M.U. (anonymised), Germany 1995, transcription, 10). But that was easier said than done,

[3] On this aspect, see also the translated transcription of the IGB interview with Kazimiera B. (Germany 1999), 11, the translated transcription of the IFLDP interview with Arie P. (Israel 2005), 179, and the translated transcription of the IFLDP interview with Joseph P. (Israel 2005), 71.

as one can grasp from the words of the French former forced labourer already mentioned above: "*We also spoke gibberish when we talked to the Germans. We could not build sentences. To build sentences, you have to go to school, learn grammar, don't you? Otherwise it is going to be difficult. We managed pretty well, but it took a lot of time*." (IFLDP interview, Gabriel F., France 2006, German transcription, 9, author's translation).

4. Language practice: work, language and violence

This area of research is relatively new, due to the fact that for quite some time within social science circles it went without saying that there exists a distinct opposition between the use of language which is associated with culture and the use of violence. Supposedly, there was also a static opposition between talking and acting as two separate spheres of human conduct. Recently, these two largely unchallenged assumptions have increasingly come under critical scrutiny (Kraemer, Gewalt der Sprache, 6). Initial research endeavours following these traits of thought have purported that human beings are symbolically vulnerable, i.e. they can be injured by words, because human existence is largely organised in and depending on social groups, which symbolically communicate inclusion and exclusion. Therefore, the relationship between language and violence has come to be investigated together with the question of the inherent violence within the structures of languages and actual words, especially but not only those, which are used in antagonistic verbal exchanges (Herrmann/ Kuch, Verletzende Worte, 13ff). There are examples galore within the source material as to how this has functioned in the exchanges between former forced labourers and their superiors, guards, police and other officials and, last but not least, also among themselves. But there are only a few empirical studies which follow this approach focusing on National Socialist Germany, and also not with reference to forced labourers. Hoffmann has pointed out characteristic utilisations of language, the concomitant changes of social values and certain new ways of linguistically downplaying violence as main features of the language dimension of Nazi German power relations and policies (Hoffmann, Sprache und Gewalt, 2).

Mostly, but not only, in interviews with former 'Eastern workers' ['Ostarbeiter', CT] and with mainly non-Jewish former prisoner labourers, one can hear a distinctly negative connotation of the German language, which for them is represented by the short snappish orders and insults that have become branded on

their minds.[4] Remarkably, though, this is repeatedly mentioned in connection with children as in the words of this Ukrainian interviewee who was deported to Germany as a child together with her mother and lived with her in a forced labour camp: "*But the children made fun of us. One boy was especially bad, he certainly was an SS boy, he used to say* [voice of the interviewee becomes very strong at this moment, CT] *with contempt: ""Russische Schweine""* [Russian pigs, CT]." (IFLDP interview, Alexandra Go., Ukraine 2005, German transcription, 10, author's translation). Apart from the hostility from youths in the street at large, there were also incidents of organised bullying by members of the Hitler Youth, who especially targeted foreigners, Jews, and Romany people, often leaving the victims behind with bodily as well as symbolic injuries (IFLDP interview, Reinhard F., Germany 2006, transcription, 6ff).[5]

Therefore, some prisoners also tried to avoid using German as much as possible like this Czech former prisoner labourer, who had to perform forced labour in industry and road construction while being an inmate of Ravensbrueck concentration camp, illustrates: "*Well, I refused altogether to speak German, there* [in Ravensbrück concentration camp, CT] *you could not speak German properly. There you learned …, you could not even learn German in all these three years, and I tell you why. Because all you got to hear there were insults, or what else from the German language one could use there. I have Fieber* [fever, CT], *huh, Scheisse* [shit, CT], *so they were scolding us, huh, or I have Durchfall* [diarrhoea, CT], *meaning I have diarrhoea, those were the words in the camp, there … something else you could not (…).*" (IFLDP interview, Jaroslava S., Czech Republic 2005, part 2, German transcription, 42, author's translation).[6] In an attempt to invert these degrading experiences interviewees today actively use German words in order to distance themselves from certain depersonalising and humiliating experiences. That way former forced labourers could better keep bad memories at bay since they were only represented in a foreign language which had always been an external phenomenon to them (or had become so as a result of the wartime experience).

---

[4] On this aspect, see also the reformatted translated transcription of the IFLDP interview with Mykola M. (Ukraine 2005), 22, and the transcription of the IFLDP interview with Kornelia B. (Israel 2005), 77f.

[5] On Hitler Youth violence against forced labourers see also Bartuschka, Marc, Unter Zurückstellung aller möglichen Bedenken. Die NS-Betriebsgruppe »Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring« (REIMAHG) und der Zwangsarbeitereinsatz 1944/45, Göttingen (Germany) 2011, 521ff.

[6] The interviewee used the swearwords in German original language.

However, far from experiencing the language solely as overpowering or degrading, forced labourers back then also tried to utilise German to their advantage. Especially Czechs generally seemed to have had a pretty good command of German and could, therefore, develop the ability to understand and make good use of the daily broadcasts of the "Armed forces report" [Wehrmachtbericht, CT] and could, at least, manage to understand the gist of newspaper articles (Schiller, NS-Propaganda, 91f), although they most likely did not believe what they heard and read (BArch Berlin, R 55, 21356, internal memorandum of the department Propaganda V on 15th of February 1945, not paginated). Nevertheless, listening to a radio, at least, provided some interaction with the outside world and it usually also had some practical value in terms of orientation about what was going on there, however limited its actual substance might have been. Some forced labourers would also try and pick up as much German as possible to get better jobs (IWM/ SA interview, Alan W., England 1989, Reel 5) or to be able to improve one's own and one's comrades' general situation. As a French interviewee who was forced labourer in several German factories and went on to become a renowned journalist in France after the war, tells: "*So, after some time I became the delegate of the staff, because I had a small German dictionary, (...) out of the 10 of us, it was just like that, (...), like I said I was the only student ... so my friends told me ... as the boss did not want to talk to anyone. He had said ""there should be one among you who talks for all of you"". He said that in German and he did not make the slightest effort to understand us; he yelled all the time in German; we understood more or less (...). So, I was more or less the interpreter*." (IFLDP interview, Victor L., France 2006, German transcription, 13, author's translation).

Caution prevailed in most exchanges with ordinary Germans, too. Due to regulations and restrictions that accompanied any contacts between the civilian population and forced labourers, suspicion kept being around on both sides (Schiller, NS-Propaganda, 94). This applied also within each of the national groups themselves – including the Germans – mostly for fear of informers. Although any reliable evidence on this is hard to come by, rumours about denunciations from fellow camp inmates or forced co-workers at workplaces were common. But still interview accounts reveal how trust was built occasionally. Thus one can say that, roughly speaking, forced labourers – if at all – rather trusted German co-workers than superiors and among the German guards, older people seemed to have been more

trustworthy than younger ones. When forced labourers were in the street, women appeared more reliable to be approached with any request than men and children and, finally, personal encounters with German soldiers were presented more positive in the interviews than those with policemen or other officials (IFLDP interview, Victor L., France 2006, German transcription, 15). And even after the war, some knowledge of German could still be of help for former forced labourers to make their way through the aftermath of Germany's breakdown and occupation. The Allied armies that first arrived in the country also were in urgent need of German language skills to be able to properly deal with the situation they were confronted with and, therefore, German speaking foreign forced labourers stood a good chance to be hired as interpreters by them (IFLDP interview, Ignacy G., Poland 2005, transcription, 15). That way they were relatively safe from the turmoil of war and did not need to worry about food and shelter any longer.

However, on the whole especially prisoner labourers have adopted a highly ambivalent view of their experiences with the German language. On the one hand, it is shaped by a clear understanding of its practical usefulness particularly under camp circumstances (IFLDP interview, Paul S., France 2006, transcription, 22).[7] On the other, German could just as well prove an inexhaustible source of challenges, impertinences, and humiliations. Until today interviewees sometimes can still get really upset about this aspect, especially the Jewish survivors among them. This refers mainly to those whose cultural background was related to German language and/or culture, whose family has had some German roots or who had learned German at home or at school in their home countries and had acquired a good or even very good command and a very positive image of it (IFLDP interview, Imre G., Israel 2005, transcription, 3).[8] So for some of them the contrast between what they had learned as children and what they experienced as young adults could possibly not be any bigger. Like this Romanian Jewish survivor who was "rented out" to several German industrial companies as inmate of Buchenwald concentration camp, remembers: "*Until we came to Auschwitz, I could not imagine, that human beings are capable of doing such things ... And it even were Germans who were doing it! They are so*

[7] On this aspect, see also the transcription of the IFLDP interview with Jerzy C. (England 2006), 11 as well as the translated transcription of the IFLDP interview with Joseph P. (Israel 2005), 9.

[8] On this aspect, see also the translated transcription of the Institute for History and Biography (IGB) interview – Project „Survivors of the Women concentration camp Ravensbrueck" – with Kazimiera B. (Germany 1999), 4.

*educated people, we were proud to speak their language! We spoke this language. And when we … the intellectuals among us spoke this language, the German language. How could they be capable to do such a thing?! We could not believe it*!" (IFLDP interview, Joseph P., Israel 2005, German transcription, 164, author's translation).[9] In a way this fundamental disbelief towards Germany and Germans as perpetrators of mass murder and forced labour still persists until today, especially among Jewish survivors, like this man from Lithuania who was "rented out" to several German industrial companies as inmate of Dachau concentration camp and now lives in Israel, tells: "*The German language also poses a paradox. To speak German ... There have been many opponents of the German language* [in Israel, CT]. *Even until today. However, to be angry with the German people does not necessarily require also tabooing the German language. We are a part of this culture. Paradoxically entire strata of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe were closer to the German than to the Polish culture*." (IFLDP interview, Uri C., Israel 2006, German transcription, 52, author's translation).[10]

This dilemma is even more pronounced among those of them who grew up with German as mother tongue. Some intentionally tried to give it up completely after the experience of persecution (IFLDP interview, Paul S., France 2006, transcription, 2) and/or tried to prevent it from becoming their children's mother tongue (IFLDP interview, Anita L., England 2006, transcription, 61). Technically, this approach mostly proved pretty successful. Most of the survivors left Germany after World War II or they did not return if they had been deported to camps outside Germany proper. Therefore, their children most likely had not been exposed to a German speaking environment and if their partners were not of German origin or, if they were, but shared their spouses' negative sentiment, the children hardly would have received any German language input. Nevertheless, once the children had grown up themselves, quite some of them still developed an interest towards German speaking cultures and started to get their own idea of it beyond parental protection (IFLDP interview, Josef R., England 2006, transcription, 12).[11] This could go in both directions, with a more positive or even more negative outcome than their parents' impressions had been. More often than not the children became curious after a while what this country the

[9] On this aspect, see also the transcription of the IFLDP interview with Anita L. (England 2006), 19.
[10] On this aspect see also the translated transcription of the IFLDP interview with Joseph P. (Israel 2005), 9.
[11] On this aspect, see also the transcription of the IFLDP interview with Sofia H. (England 2006), 36.

parents had tried to ban from their lives actually was all about. But it could also happen, when irreconcilably acknowledging what Germany and Germans had done to one or both of their parents, that they developed an even stronger aversion against the country and its people than their parents had had (BL/NSA interview, Manfred H., England 1999, Tape 2, Side B).

What is more, in later stages of the survivors' lives some space for a difficult rapprochement with German language and culture could open up.[12] This came about mainly in two ways: Firstly, they have coincidentally or consciously developed professional contacts with Germans, usually starting at some stage during the 1960s or 1970s, after they had overcome a period in which they often actively avoided any contact with Germany or Germans (IFLDP interview, Anita L., England 2006, transcription, 40). Secondly, some of them have engaged in memorial efforts and started cooperation with memorial sites in Germany or they contributed to commemoration events initiated by German government bodies or non-governmental organisations, which mostly began in the mid-1980s or even as late as the 1990s. Talks and discussions the survivors hold in schools with German children have been special and frequent forms of these activities, which they generally describe as a very satisfying and rewarding experience. This applies to both, those who were of non-German origin (IFLDP interview, Uri C., Israel 2006, German transcription, 45f) or were born as Germans but left the country as a result of their experiences or those German Jews who eventually returned to stay on (IFLDP interview, Jutta B., Germany 2006, transcription, 37). Another aspect of memorial activities that brought about contact with German speaking cultures was the writing of memoirs. Especially Jewish survivors of persecution took to autobiographical memoirs as a means to overcome their war experiences, which in turn could renew an affinity to German language and culture. The Austrian-born Jewish Auschwitz survivor, writer and literary scholar Ruth Klüger might be the best known example for these developments which she explains pretty rationally: "… because of the protracted emigration to the United States [after the end of World War II, CT], an increasing attachment to Germany, German language, and German books has grown" (Klüger, Weiter leben, 204f, author's translation). However, especially the relationship with the language

[12] Besides the evidence from interviews, this paragraph also draws on insights gathered at a roundtable discussion ("Holocaust Survivors Reclaiming Their Mother Tongue and Culture of Origin") at the 34th German Studies Association annual conference in Oakland (USA) on 8th of October 2010.

remains a fragile one as the reconciliation process often took a winding road, on which survivors had to overcome fear and anger to eventually reclaim the language. A concrete example of this is the persisting anxiety former forced labourers have been experiencing ever since, as a strict or forceful tone of a German speaker's voice in public or private talks or certain German phrases could trigger flashbacks into the phase of persecution during World War II. Also, if it comes to actively use German again, for example during an interview, it is still accompanied by a degree of unease (IFLDP interview, Paul S., France 2006, transcription, 2).

## 5. Conclusion: Forced labour and language learning

German language could be and actually was a challenge, an opportunity and an imposition for forced labourers, all at once. And, of course, the workplace, co-workers, superiors and the concomitant circumstances, all had an impact on language acquisition. Agriculture, factory workplaces and concentration camps can be named as the most important differentiable sites. In agriculture, it was the relationship to the farmers and their families which determined the course of any possible language acquisition. Here the relationship aspect even overrode professional requirements. In industrial working environments, it depended largely on co-workers or immediate superiors as communication in German was needed for seamless workflow. In these constellations the forced labourers' position in the operational sequence mostly decided over the potential language gains. In concentration camps, it hugely depended on fellow inmates' language competencies. If someone brought already some knowledge of German to the camps, the person could either make good use of it there or started to dislike it or even do both at the same time. But someone without any German language ability had probably the worst chances to develop it properly in the camps. However, even there personal relationships to guards and superiors could make a difference in terms of language acquisition. But for that the person would have needed to possess already a basic command of German to be considered for the kind of functions and work where one would have encountered the possibility to build those relationships. On the other hand, forced labourers' own attitudes towards language learning in general and towards German language and culture in particular, of course, also played a role as it could make the decisive difference in terms of whether somebody was prepared to go beyond the basic stage that was largely required (and effectuated) by circumstances.

Sixty years on, a lot of World War II forced labourers have developed an even-minded or laconic approach to the German language. However, there is no doubt that this has to be seen against the backdrop of a sustained negative impression they got during the war when most of them had their closest contact with the language. It was during this period of time when German, throughout large parts of Europe, was turned from the "language of the enemy", which it had already been as a result of World War I, into a "hostile language", what still represented a new quality as an outcome of World War II.[13] Findings have also very likely been influenced by the bias of the negative selection process of the sample as a whole as outlined above. The interview sample probably to a large degree consists of people who have successfully worked up their experiences and have drawn rather comprehensive conclusions from it and are, therefore, more likely to have a moderate and sober attitude towards German language and culture.

However, an international comparison of the interviews can still yield some distinct characteristics among these attitudes. One can say that British former POW labourers have retained the strongest aversion against everything German, which includes the language. French interviewees showed a wide spectrum of views, ranging from positive interest via indifference to outright rejection. Jewish interviewees have for the greater part first strongly distanced themselves from the language for some time, but have later to some degree reverted to it. Czech interviewees showed a very pragmatic, but more often than not positive attitude towards German language, while Ukrainians showed the least interest in and impact of language on their experiences, memories and biographies in general. However, among Ukrainians there were also the most interviewees, who still showed an interest in re-establishing contact with their former forcible employers or their descendants. For them, the realignment they seek is rather one with a defining period of their adolescence – although it included quite some violence – than with the German language or culture in particular. Last but not least, the nowadays naturalised Germans among the interviewees on average exhibited a surprisingly weak command of the language. Some reasons for that might be derived from the results of a German research project on the language acquisition of Italian and Spanish guest-workers in the mid-1970s that was conducted at

[13] These terms were introduced by British historian Conan Fisher in his commentary on the author's presentation of the paper that served as foundation for this article on 24th of September 2011at the 35th German Studies Association annual conference in Louisville (USA).

Heidelberg University. Findings there name contact with Germans and the conscious intention to stay on in Germany as two of the three most decisive factors for substantial progress in learning the language (Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt "Pidgin-Deutsch", Zur Sprache ausländischer Arbeiter, 102). However, quite some former forced labourers hardly had any meaningful contact with Germans in the initial years or even decades of their post-war lives in Germany. What is more, for many of them their stay in the country was anything but intentional. It was rather due to their refusal to return to their then mostly Communist-governed home countries and the lack of permission to immigrate into a third country, usually because of their poor health after years of internment and forced labour. The age of the language learner at the time of entering Germany is named as the third decisive factor. In this respect younger learners are in a more favourable position. However, this applies rather in the long term, as in the first years of their stay, adult language learners can still make count their usually greater experience in dealing with language and culture. So this factor does not make a significant difference for former forced labourers, who for the vast majority were in Germany less than four years. The Heidelberg project also mentions the determining influence of social circumstances for the level of language acquisition (Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt "Pidgin-Deutsch", Zur Sprache ausländischer Arbeiter, 83), which were mostly rather unfortunate for this particular group of interviewees.

Apart from shifts of perspectives over the decades, the dynamics of forgetting and recovering the language have also impacted on former forced labourers' attitudes towards German. While some interviewees would actively try to come up with German words and phrases during the interview, others were rather taken by – potentially even unpleasant – surprise if all of a sudden a word of German involuntarily surfaced in their narrative. Despite the growing distance through age and all efforts to come to terms with the forced labour experience and its language framework, it actually seemed to have cut even deeper than most of the interviewees would admit. Some bitterness and trauma, therefore, surfaced only in an encapsulated way. These capsules have sometimes enclosed lasting experiences of degradation and are now used to communicate them. One example are frequently recurring German key terms from the camps or workplaces, which pop up during the course of an interview like flashlights to make present once more those past events that had seemed to have been checked off a long time ago. This occurred e.g. in the interview

with a Polish former prisoner labourer, who was forced to do construction work while being interned in Flossenbürg concentration camp: "*So till I retired in 1992 and since then I'm not bored. I haven't got a time for anything (laughs). The only thing is age catching up with you and I still wake up 5 in the morning and I hear: Aufstehen! Alles raus!* [Get up! Get out of here! CT] *That was the dreaded, the dreaded thing, you know. In a main camp that was really dreaded, because there were, everybody was coming up, beaten, kicked and everything.*" (IFLDP interview, Jerzy C., England 2006, transcription, 18).

## Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archive Files:

From the archival records of the Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv), Germany:

BArch (Federal Archives) Berlin, Department R (German Reich) Stock 55 (Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda), File 808

BArch Berlin, R 55, 1232

BArch Berlin, R 55, 21356

BArch Berlin, R 9363 (Princely Plessian Mining Stock Corporation, Katowice), 27

BArch Berlin, NS (National Socialist German Workers' Party) 5 I (German Labour Front – Subordinate Agencies), 267

BArch Berlin, NS 5 I, 268

Archive of the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement, Ljubljana (Slovenia), Stock: Landrat Krainburg, Vol. 947 (2 pages), available online under URL: http://www.karawankengrenze.at/ferenc/index.php?r=documentshow&id=310 (16.04.2012)

Interviews:

Interviews from the International Forced Labourers' Documentation Project (IFLDP), all conducted by and archived at the Institute for History and Biography (IGB), Hagen University (Germany):

IFLDP interview with Jaroslava S. (Czech Republic 2005)

IFLDP interview with Miroslav D. (Czech Republic 2005)

IFLDP interview with Anita L. (England 2006)

IFLDP interview with Jerzy C. (England 2006)

IFLDP interview with Sofia H. (England 2006)

IFLDP interview with Josef R. (England 2006)

IFLDP interview with Gabriel F. (France 2006)

IFLDP interview with Paul S. (France 2006)

IFLDP interview with Victor L. (France 2006)

IFLDP interview with Josef B. (Germany 2005)

IFLDP interview with Reinhard F. (Germany 2005)

IFLDP interview with Nadja S. (Germany 2005)

IFLDP interview with Kornelia B. (Israel 2005)
IFLDP interview with Arie P. (Israel 2005)
IFLDP interview with Imre G. (Israel 2005)
IFLDP interview with Joseph P. (Israel 2005)
IFLDP interview with Uri C. (Israel 2006)
IFLDP interview with Ignacy G. (Poland 2005)
IFLDP interview with Alexandra Go. (Ukraine 2005)
IFLDP interview with Mykola M. (Ukraine 2005)

Other interviews from the stock of the Institute for History and Biography:
IGB interview – Project „Survivors of the Women Concentration Camp Ravensbrück" – with Kazimiera B. (Germany 1999)

Interviews from the stock of the Centre for Contemporary History in Hamburg (Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg, FZH), Hamburg (Germany);
Workshop of Remembrance (Werkstatt der Erinnerung, WdE):
FZH/WdE interview – Project "Displaced Persons and former forced labourers" – with S. Z. (anonymised) (Germany 1995)
FZH/WdE interview – Project "Displaced Persons and former forced labourers " – with M.U. (anonymised) (Germany 1995)

Interviews from the stock of the Imperial War Museum – Sound Archive (IWM/SA):
IWM/SA interview with Alan W. (England 1989)

Interviews from the stock of the British Library – National Sound Archive (BL/NSA):
BL/NSA interview – "Holocaust Survivors' Centre Interviews" Project – with Manfred H. (England 1999)

Secondary Sources

Works Cited:

Albersmann, Valentin, Die Bedeutung der Sprache in der Soziologie bei Pierre Bourdieu. (unpublished manuscript) 02 September 2010 <http://www.berlinfilm.eu/albersmann/dokumente/bourdieu_sprache.pdf>.

"Arbeitgeber darf Deutschkurs verlangen." *Deutsch Perfekt*, 8 (2011): 23.

Austin, John J. *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1962.

Bartuschka, Marc. *Unter Zurückstellung aller möglichen Bedenken. Die NS-Betriebsgruppe »Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring« (REIMAHG) und der Zwangsarbeitereinsatz 1944/45*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*, edited by John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

Dykman, Elizabeth. *Exploring Second Language Acquisition and Acculturation through Autobiographical Texts: A Qualitative Study of Second Language Learners/ Authors*. Ann Arbor: Bell& Howell Information and Learning Company, 2000.

Gumperz, John J. *The conversational analysis of interethnic communication*. In: Ross, E.L. (ed.). *Interethnic Communication. Proceedings of the Southern Anthropological Society*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997, 13-31.

Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt "Pidgin-Deutsch". Zur Sprache ausländischer Arbeiter: Syntaktische Analysen und Aspekte des kommunikativen Verhaltens. *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 18 (1975): 78-121.

Hennigfeld, Ursula. *'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann': Sprache der Macht und Macht der Sprache. Jorge Semprúns Buchenwald-Tetralogie*. In: Saeverin, Peter (ed). *Europäische Geschichtsdarstellungen - Diskussionspapiere. Interdisziplinäre Arbeiten zu Historiographie, Geschichtserzählungen und -konstruktionen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, 4 (2006): 1-17.

Herrmann, Steffen K./ Kuch, Hannes. *Verletzende Worte. Eine Einleitung*. In: Herrmann, Steffen K./ Kuch, Hannes/ Krämer, Sybille (eds.). *Verletzende Worte. Die Grammatik sprachlicher Missachtung*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2007, 7-30.

Hoffmann, Ludger, *Sprache und Gewalt: Nationalsozialismus*, unpublished manuscript, 02 September 2010. <http://home.edo.uni-dortmund.de/~hoffmann/PDF/Sp_u_Gewalt.pdf>.

Jupp, T.C./ Roberts, Celia/ Cook-Gumperz, Jenny. *Language and disadvantage: the hidden process*. In: Gumperz, John J. (ed.). *Language and Social Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 232-256.

Klueger, Ruth. *Weiter leben – Eine Jugend*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 1992.

Kraemer, Sybille. *Gewalt der Sprache – Sprache der Gewalt*. Manuscript of a public lecture on 03 November 2004 in Berlin, 29 October 2010 <http://www.bmfsfj.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschuerenstelle/Pdf-Anlagen/Gewalt-der-Sprache-Sprache-der-Gewalt,property=pdf,bereich=bmfsfj,sprache=de,rwb=true.pdf>.

Ochs, Elinor/ Schieffelin, Bambi B. *Language Acquisition and Socialisation: Three Developmental Stories and Their Implications*. In: Duranti, Alessandro (ed.).

*Linguistic Anthropology. A Reader*. Malden/ Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001, 263-301.

Plato, Alexander von/ Leh, Almut/ Thonfeld, Christoph (eds.). *Hitler's Slaves. Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-Occupied Europe*. Oxford/New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.

Schiller, Thomas, *NS-Propaganda für den „Arbeitseinsatz". Lagerzeitungen für Fremdarbeiter im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Entstehung, Funktion, Rezeption und Bibliographie*. Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1997.

Scollon, Ron. *Cross-cultural learning and other catastrophes*. In: Kramsch, Claire (ed.). *Language Acquisition and Language Socialisation. Ecological perspectives*. London/New York: Continuum, 2002, 121-139.

Semprun, Jorge. *Schreiben oder Leben*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995.