

**Representations of the German Language in Relation to Representations of German  
Characters in American Films Released between 1939-1945**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's Degree

**Adela Davies, 2016, Bar-Ilan University**

This work was carried out under the supervision of Dr.Hilla Karas

**Abstract**

This paper examines the manner in which the German language is represented, in affinity with the representation of German characters, in American films released in the United States, which dealt with the crisis in Europe, during the war years of 1939-1945. Specific emphasis examines these representations both before and after the pivotal date of 7<sup>th</sup> December 1941.

Simultaneously, through a selected corpus of films, this paper examines whether there was a connection between how the German language (and the German culture) were represented in the films, and the United States political agenda at the time of their release.

The corpus I have chosen to analyze includes eleven films from a variety of genres (amongst which are comedy, melodrama, thriller, film noire, satire and a cartoon). All chosen films released in the United States in the years 1939-1945. In order to perform my research I will divide the period in context to two parts: The break of WWII on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1939 until December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941, with the attack on Pearl Harbor; and December 8<sup>th</sup> 1941 until May 8<sup>th</sup> 1945, with Germany's surrender and the end of the war in Europe.

I base my analysis on a literature review beginning with a scan of wartime Hollywood (1939-1945) and its relationship with the United States government (Ross, 2002; Schatz, 1999). Continuing, I will present theoretical research from the translation and media translation disciplines. I go to the research on the assumption that language is an integral part in culture, and therefore, I refer to language as means of a representation of culture (Cronin, 2006; Martínez Sierra, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2008; Stojković, 2005). I continue to establish the claim

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that language assists in forming a character, and therefore an identity (Bleichenbacher, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2008; Wenke, 1998). I discuss the term *Multilingualism*, how it is reflected in film, and what the possible solutions are for it (Avila-Cabrera, 2013; Bartoll, 2006; Corrius & Zabalbeascoa, 2011; Şerban, 2012).

I then define what are indirect representations of a language (homogenization), and what direct representations (vehicular matching) are (O'Sullivan, 2008). I discuss the anticipated effects of the cinematic text on its receivers, the cinema audience, when a translation is present or when it is absent (Delabastita & Grutman, 2005; Şerban, 2012). In addition I present the role the cinema audiences play in the making of films and receiving messages they contain (Hatim & Mason, 2000; Şerban, 2012).

At the base of this study I formulated several hypotheses, which I will examine according to the previously mentioned division: At first, considering the isolationist agenda in the political arena in the United States **prior to America's entry to the war**, I assumed that film creators will try to avoid a clear representation of the enemy and thus, there will be no direct representation of the German language, and the German characters will be speaking "German" in English - meaning, German characters that would have probably been speaking in German in real life, would actually be speaking English in the films, although it would sound like they speak German, in the cinematic audiences' imagination.

Furthermore, I assumed that there will be a clear distinction between the "German" spoken by German characters that are represented as "good", and that spoken by German (Nazi) characters, represented as "bad", which will be made by the use of foreign accents. That way the "good" Germans will speak in American accents, and the "bad" Germans will speak in

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foreign (non-American) accents. Accordingly, I assumed that the "bad", Nazi characters, will be portrayed by European actors, who spoke with German or British accents (Wenke, 1998). Equally, I assumed that "Good" German characters or dissidents, will be portrayed by American or British actors. In any event, I assumed that "Good" Germans will not be portrayed by actors of German descendant or actors whose mother tongue is not English.

In films released **after America's entry to the war**, I assumed that there would be a direct representation of the German language (through song, spoken dialogue or written texts). Additionally I assumed that the scenes in which German is represented directly, will be of daunting or generally dramatic character, so to build up the cinematic audience's sense of discomfort towards the foreign language (and culture) (Baumgarten, 2008; Labate, 2012). Furthermore, I assumed that either way, there will be no translation from German to English in the films, neither by asserted subtitles nor diegetic interpretation (provided by a character in the film). Nevertheless, I assumed that if there was a translation provided, it would be inaccurate so to create a sense of distance and fear within the cinematic audience (Şerban, 2012).

In order to answer my hypotheses, I have analyzed my corpus according to the following criteria: 1) "External" - year of release, who was the director, distribution company, and origin of actors portraying the main characters - the "Good" and the "Bad";

(2 "Internal" - location of plot, direct or indirect representation of the German language: was the German language represented through English spoken in a foreign accent; was it represented directly and if so, was a translation provided (yes or no); if a translation was provided, how was it brought to us – either by asserted subtitles or by diegetic interpretation

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(provided by a character in the film). Whatever the case was, I examined how the chosen representation of German language (direct or indirect) assisted to determine the cinematic audience's stance regarding the nature of a characters (good or bad).

After presenting the aim of the research, my hypotheses and the research design I present my corpus and analysis, my final findings and conclusions. Due to the significant difference in the United States political agenda, prior to its entry to the war and afterwards, the analysis will be made accordingly, under sub-chapters which will relate to the relevant period in question.

In the period prior to America's entry to WWII, I present the four faces of the German and the Nazi in American film: The Officer, The Collaborator, The Sympathizer and The Party Member (Dworkin, 1965; Hake, 2012 in Cocks, 2013; Mariani, 1979), and I offer two more characters: The Good German and The Greedy German. Over the discussion I show that after America's entry to WWII – The Sympathizer, The Greedy German and The Good German - all disappear in favor of the characters of The Victim, The Persecuted or The Dissident .

This study has shown that my preliminary assumptions were partially correct. The entire study showed that prior to the United States' entry to the war, films dealing with the European conflict, that were released in the United States, have gone against the isolationists agenda. Film creators produced poignant films in which they were not afraid to show fear, anger and determination, as well as to stand against the Nazi regime and the Pro-Nazi voices around the United States of the time. Although they avoided scenes of brutal violence, the film creators managed to convey a clear message both against the isolationists, and the Nazi regime. Under the watchful eye of the censors, and while using common narratives, they

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managed to portray an image of good German characters, and differentiate them from other characters portrayed as the bad Germans (=Nazis).

After the attack on Pearl Harbor and supported by the US government's new foreign policy, Hollywood now turned interventionist. Hollywood at this stage in the war, enjoyed greater creative (and political) freedom and portrayed the Nazi character as the enemy. Nothing and no one, was holding it back and the Nazi brutality that was previously censored, was then illustrated through wreckage, murder and even the execution of young innocent children; the "good-German" was no longer separated from the "bad-German" (the Nazi) but instead, they converged to a single character - the German-Nazi .

I show that the German language appears at times directly, in writing, in song or in spoken dialogue in a few of the films but in others, it appears indirectly - at times it is a pseudo-language, and at times it is portrayed though English, sometimes spoken in a foreign accent.

The significance and original contribution of this research is in its goal to integrate the fields of history and film, and translation and film, and discuss them as part of a broad field of study that includes history (culture), translation (language) and film (representing culture). The majority of research today comes from fields of research shared by any two of these disciplines: cinematic research, characteristics and characters ( אבישר, תשנ"ה 1995; גיאנטי, ); WWII films and history review (Ross, 2004; זנד, תשס"ו 2006; תשס"א 2000); Film translation (Cronin, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2008; Şerban, 2012).

This papers' aim is to be the missing link between history and art form, language and political identity. In addition, it aims to combine the three disciplines – translation, film and

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history in a way that will give each of these fields of interest, equal relevance in the analysis  
of such an important and influential time in history.