British and German Trench Slang 1914-1918:
A Preliminary Formal and Semantic Comparison

by Henry Daniels

Ninety years ago, German and British troops occupied the sector of the Western Front stretching from the Belgian coast to the Somme. Although they were neighbours, forced to live and die in a mutually created nightmare, the opposing armies came face to face relatively infrequently. Independently, both developed a vigorous, strident and often sinister slang in their attempt to bear what was unbearable and express what could not be expressed.

This piece juxtaposes some 1,103 forms of the German slang corpus and the 1,240 forms of the English one, in a search for common formal and expressive characteristics, despite the conditioning factors of constraints of the two languages and the differing cultural backgrounds of the speakers. The German corpus emerges as being relatively pure, compact and uniform, exploiting a small number of lexico-grammatical matrices, in particular that of nominal compounds. From the point of view of expressiveness, we find a marked tendency towards scatology and dysphemism. The English corpus is more international, exploits a wider range of matrices, and is more prone to humour, euphemism and understatement. The study thus brings to light two different representations of a common experience, yet, unexpectedly, a mutual absence of slang terms directly representing violence, aggressiveness and horror. The aims of this article are: 1) to present the results of a quantitative survey of German and British trench slang; 2) to provide a sample of each, bringing out the formal and semantic similarities and differences between the two corpora and 3) to shed light on the psycholinguistic conditioning of the troops who faced each other across no man's land: were the two armies perceiving and representing their shared hardship in the same way?
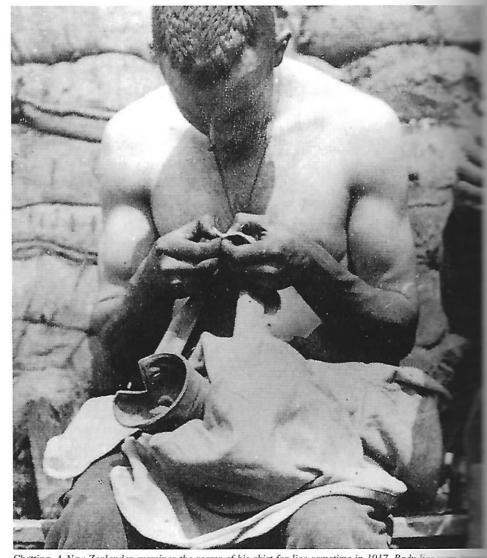
Trench talk

Modern trench warfare meant that enemy soldiers, portrayed in propaganda as monsters and killers, were largely unseen and unheard, manifesting their presence collectively by shelling, machine-gun fire, snipers' bullets, gas and mining. In such frightful conditions, official discourse was at pains to maintain its managerial and justifying role. Fighting men on all fronts developed an unofficial, irreverent, inverted, often euphemistic and humorous parallel discourse in their attempt to survive socially and psychologically amid a situation which was unexplainable and, all too often, indescribable.

The word *slang* traditionally refers to an often metaphorical occult vocabulary used by a particular, usually nefarious, social group. It is both inclusive and exclusive in that it promotes internal cohesion, while preventing outsiders from understanding or infiltrating the group. Strictly speaking, what goes under the name of *trench slang* does not have this occult function. It is rather an example of what Niceforo (1912)

calls a *langage spécial*, ie a repertoire of largely technical and often shorthand expressions relating to a particular profession. Having said that, the trench talk, as it emerges from dictionaries and works such as David Jones (1937) and Frederic Manning (1930), was part technical, part traditional military, part vulgar, part regional, part exotic, part common core slang, and part blasphemy and swearing: an apparently disorderly mix. Given the climate of spy-mania, the need to maintain morale on the home front and the well attested soldier's reluctance – and even inability – to relate in detail his war experiences to anyone who hadn't actually shared them, trench talk came

to assume the characteristics of traditional authentic slang, functioning inclusively and exclusively as a sort of *parados* between those at the front and the rest of society, including transport and service troops, the General Staff and civilians. Thus the label *trench slang* is not inappropriate.

Any slang expression is originally the product of an individual speaker. It is destined either to disappear or to be taken up by the community if it is deemed to be particularly apt or witty and if, most importantly, it is in formal and semantic harmony with forms already in circulation. Accordingly, the repertoire fills up with expressions representative of the common

Chatting. *A New Zealander examines the seams of his shirt for lice sometime in 1917. Body lice were known variously as chats, cooties and even mickies. Laying up to twelve eggs a day - usually in the seams of a man's clothing - they fed on the man's blood and could give rise to serious infections such as trench fever. When out of the line men would gather together to chat – cracking the lice between thumb and first finger or incinerating the eggs by running the naked flame from a candle along the seams of shirts whilst at the same time sharing stories and anecdotes. We exchange stories and chat today but thankfully without the close attentions of the louse. The verb 'chat', a curtailed form of 'chatter', has, however been with us since the 14th century. It may be that chat in the sense of 'louse', comes from the latter's resemblance to a catkin formerly also called a 'chat'. No doubt many of the expressions presented in this article would be used by soldiers chatting in both senses of the word. IWM Q2358*

view. In the case under study, the attested forms, most of which, like the lice and the rats, did not survive the war, provide us with a fresher glimpse of the experience of the front than do more recent reminiscences. They are more authentic than fiction, more immediate than poetry and more eloquent than artefacts. It is a great pity that no 'on-the-spot' audio recordings could be made. We have only the glossaries to help us link up with the soldier-speakers of the trenches. Nonetheless, they can tell us a certain amount.

The corpora and their characteristics

Sources

The principal sources exploited in this study are, for the British corpus: John Brophy, Eric Partridge, (1965), (4th edition). *The Long Trail: What the British Soldier Sang and Said in the Great War of 1914-18*. London: Andre Deutsch. [1931], a glossary compiled by two veterans and lexicographers, containing c. 1,500 entries, of which 1,420 are clearly trench slang and not official military terminology or common core slang or regionalisms. The German corpus consists of 1,103 forms selected from René Delcourt, (1917). *Expressions d'argot allemand et autrichien*. Paris: De Boccard, which clearly relate to life at the front as opposed to time in barracks or training camps. These choices provide us with two corpora of comparable size. Two other works found to be helpful for double-checking entries are Bergmann (1916) and Fraser and Gibbons (1925). Other works consulted appear in the bibliography.

Formal characteristics of the corpora

The results of a statistical analysis of the two corpora are given in tables 1 and 2 below.

The German corpus

Table 1, right and overleaf grammatical codes with German examples, meanings and frequencies

Table 1 enables us to make the following observations:

- 935 forms (84.8% of the corpus) are common nouns. Among these, compound nouns, of which there are 618 (56% of the corpus), are by far the best represented type.
- Verbal forms, of which there are 139 (12.6% of the corpus) are the only other type to be represented significantly. Among them, the 96 verb phrases (verb group + complement(s)), accounting for 8.7% of the corpus, are the most numerous.
- The third most important group is that of proper nouns, of which 67 (6.1% of the corpus). Among these, the best represented are corruptions of French place-names, of which 18 (1.6% of the corpus) and personal names, of which 16 (1.5% of the corpus), usually attributed to artillery pieces.

Globally speaking, the German corpus is thus essentially nominal, with a marked preference for compounds, and, to a much lesser degree, verbal: there are six times more nominal forms than verbal forms. Within the verbal category, verb phrases are more common than simple verbs.

Table 1						
Code	Expanded code	Example	Literal meaning	Pragmatic meaning	Occurrences	% of corpus
1 nominal forms						
N	noun	*die Orgel*	organ	cannon	164	14.6%
NG	noun group	*die russische Biene*	Russian bee	louse	47	4.3%
CN	compound noun	*der Erdratte*	earth rat	tunneler	618	56.0%
AbbrCN	abbreviated compound noun	*der Lanz*	*Landsknecht* (15th century infantryman)	comrade	4	0.4%
FCN	false compound noun	*der Quak-quak*	bang-bang	fusilier	4	0.4%
CoordN	coordinate noun	*Lehm und Stroh*	mud and straw	pickled cabbage with peas	1	0.1%
Nsim	noun simile	nil	-		-	-
AbbrN	abbreviated noun	*der Muschko*	*Musketiere* (musketeer)	fusilier	2	0.2%
PrepC	prepositional compound	*Handgranaten mit Drahtverhau*	grenades with wire entanglement	potatoes and vegetables	10	1.0%
Nblend	noun blend	*die Nicoläuse*	Nicolas-louse	louse (eastern front)	3	0.3%
TOT					853	77.3%
ForN	foreign noun	*die Täte*	tête	head	14	1.3%
ForCN	foreign compound noun	nil	-	-	-	-
ForNG	foreign noun group	nil	-	-	-	-
FForNG	false foreign noun group	*der Furzibus*	fartibus	tobacco	1	0.1%
TOT					15	1.4%
PersN	personal name	*die Grete*	Maggie	Austrian mobile mortar	16	1.5%
ForPersN	foreign personal name	*die Nelsons*	Admiral Nelsons	naval officers	1	0.1%
FPersN	false personal name	*Herr Schnürschuh*	lace-up boots	Austrian soldier	12	1.1%
Appel	appelative	nil	-	-	-	-
NickN	nickname	*die Eskimos*	Eskimos	reservists	15	1.4%
LPN	local place-name	*Neuschrapnell*	Neufchâtel	Neufchâtel	18	1.6%
RPN	remote place-name	*Hotel Hemmerich (Bayr.)*	guardroom	guardroom	5	0.4%
TN	trade-name	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT					67	6.1%
TOT NOMINAL FORMS					935	84.8%
2 verbal forms						
V	verb	*fitzen*	(Garn fitzen) spin	panic	25	2.3%
VG	verb group	nil	-	-	-	-
VP	verb phrase (VG + complement(s))	*Eigentumsurlaub nehmen*	take personal leave	desert	96	8.7%
CV	compound verb	nil	-	-	-	-
FCV	false compound verb	nil	-	-	-	-
CoordV	coordinate verb	nil	-	-	-	-
PhrV	phrasal verb	*nachhauen (cavalry)*	hack after	pursue (cavalry)	13	1.2%
PrepV	prepositional verb	nil	-	-	-	-
Phr-prepV	phrasal-prepositional verb	nil	-	-	-	-
VNsim	verb compared to a noun	nil	-	-	-	-
AbbrV	abbreviated verb	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT					134	12.2%
ForV	foreign verb	*krepieren*	ital. *crepare* 'burst"	die	1	0.1%
ForCV	foreign compound verb	nil	-	-	-	-
ForVG	foreign verb group	*die Parlewuhs*	les parlez-vous ?	the French	4	0.4%
TOT					5	0.5%
TOT VERBAL FORMS					139	12.6%
3 adjectival forms						
Adj	adjective	nil	-	-	-	-
AdjG	adjectival group	nil	-	-	-	-
CAdj	compound adjective	*angeknaxt*	hacked	wounded in the face	1	0.1%
FCAdj	false compound adjective	nil	-	-	-	-
CoordAdj	coordinate adjective	nil	-	-	-	-
AdjNsim	adjective compared to a noun	nil	-	-	-	-
Abbradj	abbreviated adjective	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT					1	0.1%
ForAdj	foreign adjective	nil	-	-	-	-
ForCAdjr	foreign compound adjective	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT		nil	-	-	nil	
TOT ADJECTIVAL FORMS					1	0.1%

The English corpus

Table 2, right below, grammatical codes with English examples, meanings and frequencies

Table 2 enables us to make the following observations:

- Nominal forms, of which there are 866 (61% of the corpus), predominate. Compound nouns, of which 345 (24.3% of the corpus) are the most common type.
- Proper names, of which there are 207 (14.5% of the corpus) form a large group.
- There are some 176 verbal forms (12.3% of the corpus). They are essentially verb phrases (42), phrasal verbs (34) and prepositional verbs (26).
- The 262 miscellaneous forms (18.4% of the corpus) form a group whose size is largely due to the 114 instances of rhyming slang (8% of the corpus) and the 79 catch phrases (5.6% of the corpus).

Thus the British corpus is largely nominal, preferred types being compound nouns and proper nouns. There are five times fewer verbal forms than nominal forms. In total, the miscellaneous forms are more numerous than the verbal forms.

The German and British corpora compared

The two corpora are similar in their preference for nominal forms and verbal forms. Together, these types account for 97% of the German and 73.3% of the British corpus. Adjectives and adverbs are very minor categories, accounting for 1% and 8% of the German and British corpora respectively.

The two corpora diverge by virtue of:

- the striking predominance of compound nouns in the German corpus (56%), compared with only 24.3% in the British;
- the 38 empty boxes (ie unexploited matrices) in the German corpus, compared with the British 14 empty boxes;
- the near-absence of adjectives in German, compared with the 103 British adjectival forms;
- the rarity of foreign forms in the German corpus: 22, compared with 102 – five times as many – in the British;
- the 27 miscellaneous forms (2.5%) in the German corpus compared with The 262 miscellaneous forms (18.6%) in the British.

The foregoing statistical analysis allows us to identify prototypical forms. In the German corpus we find, for example: N *der Sauser* 'yeller': 'bad-tempered officer'; N+N *die Feldhasen* 'field-hares': 'infantry'; N+Ver die *Läusefänger* 'louse-traps': 'under-garments'; VP *Stiefel schmieren* 'oil boots': 'piss on the boots of the man marching in front of one'. The British prototypical forms are exemplified in N *swaddy* 'country lout': 'private soldier'; ForN *rooty* (Urdu *roti*) 'bread'; N+N *blanket drill* 'afternoon nap'; NickN *Shiner* 'inevitable nickname of a man called White'; Sig. *Emma Gee* 'Machine Gun'; Adj. *jammy* 'lucky'; RS *Kate Karney* 'the army'.

The greater degree of variety observed in the British corpus is partly due to the nation's long colonial tradition. The abundance of nicknames is reflected in the naval slang of the same period (Daniels 2005 and 2007). The fact that

Table 1 (continued)

4 adverbial forms						
Adv	adverb	nil	-	-	-	-
AdvG	adverb group	nil	-	-	-	-
CAdv	compound adverb	nil	-	-	-	-
FCAdv	false compound adverb	nil	-	-	-	-
CoordAdv	coordinate adverb	nil	-	-		
AdvNsim	adverb compared to a noun	nil	-	-	-	-
Abbradv	abbreviated adverb	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT					nil	
ForAdv	foreign adverb	buko	beaucoup	a lot	1	0.1%
ForCAdv	foreign comp. adverb	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT					1	0.1%
TOT ADVERBIAL FORMS					1	0.1%
5 miscellaneous forms						
PrepG	prepositional group	zum Klystierkaptein	with captain clyster	in hospital	2	0.2%
RS	rhyming slang	nil	-	-	-	-
Interj	interjection	Oh la la	French soldier (wounded)	French soldier (wounded)	1	0.1%
Init	initials/acronym	nil	-	-	-	-
CatchP	catch phrase	Fettigkeiten naplü	no more treats	no more treats	9	0.8%
Sig	signalese	nil	-	-	-	-
Greet	greeting	nil	-	-	-	-
Repr	reprimand	du bist von einem Affen gelaust	you've caught a monkey's lice	you are crazy	3	0.3%
Ins	insult	Du militärisches Kulturschwein	you learned military swine	don't come the old soldier	12	1.1%
Num	numeral	nil	-	-	-	-
FNum	false numeral	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT					27	2.5%
ForNum	foreign numeral	nil	-	-	-	-
ForPrep	foreign preposition	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT					nil	
TOT MISCELLANEOUS FORMS					27	2.5%
TOTAL FORMS					1103	100%

Table 2

Code	Expanded code	Example	Literal meaning	Pragmatic meaning	Occurrences	% of corpus
1 nominal forms						
N	noun	agony	agony	young, excitable and incompetent subaltern	184	13.0%
NG	noun group	baby's head	baby's head	meat pudding	13	0.9%
CN	compound noun	bosom chums	intimate friends	lice	345	24.3%
AbbrCN	abbreviated compound noun	night ops	night operations	night operations	7	0.5%
FCN	false compound noun	hoo-ha	dispute	artillery fire (possibly for show)	7	0.5%
CoordN	coordinate noun	cup and a wad	cup and a wad (artill.)	tea and a bun	6	0.5%
Nsim	two nouns compared	nil	-	-	-	-
AbbrN	abbreviated noun	civvy	civilian	civilian	15	1.0%
PrepC	prepositional compound	The lady of the limp	the limping lady	the leaning statue of the Madonna at Albert	21	1.5%
Nblend	noun blend	aerodart	aerodart	steel dart dropped from aircraft	3	0.2
TOT					601	42.4%
ForN	foreign noun	dullmajor	idiot major	interpreter < Germ. Dolmetscher	40	2.8%
ForCN	foreign compound noun	plink plonk	vin blanc	white wine	14	0.9%
ForNG	foreign noun group	barrow-wallah	tall man whose duty is ... (Hindi)	tall man	3	0.2%
FForNG	false foreign noun group	biskiwitz	biscuits	prisoners of war	1	0.07%
TOT					58	4.1%
PersN	personal name	Sexton Blake	fictitious detective	provost sergeant	20	1.4%
ForPersN	foreign personal name	nil	-	-	-	-
FPersN	false personal name	Bill Adams	bugger all	nothing	9	0.6%
Appel	appelative	nil	-	-	-	-
NickN	nick-name	burglars	burglars	Bulgarians	137	9.6%
LPN	local place-name	Funky Villas	scared villas	Fonquevillers	24	1.7%
RPN	remote place-name	Casablanca	Moroccan PN	the last cigarette in the packet	3	0.2%
TN	trade name	Tickler's	brand of jam	home-made grenade	14	0.9%
TOT					207	14.5%
TOT NOMINAL FORMS					866	61%
2 verbal forms						
V	verb	cane	punish by caning	shell (V)	47	3.3%

VP	verb phrase (VG + complement(s))	*cop a packet*	receive a packet	be mortally wounded	42	2.9%
CV	compound verb	*half inch* (RS)	pinch	steal	2	0.1%
FCV	false compound verb	nil	-	-	-	-
Coord V	coordoninate verb	*stop and stare* (RS)	chair	chair	1	0.07%
PhrV	phrasal verb	*go up*	go up	go into the line	34	2.4%
PrepV	prepositional verb	*slip it across sb*	fool someone	take advantage of	26	1.8%
Phr-prepV	phrasal-prepositional verb	*come in on one's chinstrap*	return from a march sustained only by one's chinstrap	return exhausted	8	0.6%
VNsim	verb compared to a noun	*go like a bat out of hell*	fly like a bat released from hell	depart in haste	1	0.07%
AbbrV	abbreviated verb	*demob*	demobilise	demobilise	1	0.07%
TOT					**165**	**11.6%**
ForV	foreign verb	*mongey*	*manger* 'eat'/'food'	food	5	0.4%
ForCV	foreign compound verb	nil	-	-	-	-
ForVG	foreign verb group	*San Fairy Ann*	*ça ne fait rien*	no matter	6	0.4%
TOT					**11**	**0.8%**
TOT FORMES VERBALES					**176**	**12.3%**

3 adjectival forms

Adj	adjective	*stripped*	stripped	reduced to the ranks	60	4.0%
AdjG	adjectival group	*beat* [sic] *to a frazzle*	reduced to cinders	exhausted	8	0.6%
CAdj	compound adjective	*dead nuts (on)*	completely crazy (about)	very enthusiastic	9	0.6%
FCAdj	false compound adjective	*jake-a-loo* (Canadian)	good	good	4	0.3%
CoordAdj	coordinate adjective	nil				
AdjNsim	Adjective compared to a noun	*cooty as a cuckoo*	as lousy as a cuckoo	infested with lice	1	0.07%
AbbrAdj	abbreviated adjective	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT					**82**	**5.8%**
ForAdj	foreign adjective	*fanti* (Hindi)	mad	mad	18	1.2%
ForCAdj	foreign compound adjective	*fini kapout*	finished/broken	destroyed/broken/defeated	3	0.2%
TOT					**21**	**1.5%**
TOT ADJECTIVAL FORMS					**103**	**7.3%**

4 adverbial formes

Adv	adverb	*blurry* (< bloody)	bloody	excessively	1	0.07%
AdvG	adverb group	nil	-	-	-	-
CAdv	compound adverb	nil	-	-	-	-
FCAdv	false compound adverb	nil	-	-	-	-
CoordAdv	coordinate adverb	nil	-	-	-	-
AdvNsim	adverb compared to a noun	nil	-	-	-	-
Abbradv	abbreviated adverb	nil	-	-	-	-
TOT					**1**	**0.07%**
ForAdv	foreign adverb	*boko*	*beaucoup* 'a lot'	a lot	4	0.3%
ForCAdv	foreign compound adverb	*toot sweet*	*tout de suite* 'immediately'	immediately	6	0.4%
TOT					**10**	**0.7%**
TOT ADVERBIAL FORMS					**11**	**0.8%**

5 miscellaneous forms

PrepG	prepositional group	*on the tapes*	in position on the tapes	ready to attack	15	1.0%
RS	rhyming slang	*little grey home in the west*	vest	vest	114	8.0%
Interj	interjection	*OK*	all correct	all correct	5	0.4%
Init	initials/acronym	*PBI*	Poor Bloody Infantry	infantry	19	1.3%
CatchP	catch phrase	*one star one stunt*	one star one engagement	young subaltern quickly killed	79	5.6%
Sig	signalese	*toc Emma beer*	T.M.B.	trench mortar battery	18	1.2%
Greet	greeting	*saida*	good day	good day	1	0.07%
Repr	reprimand	*get your ears put back*	get a haircut	get a haircut	3	0.2%
Ins	insult	nil	-	-	-	-
Num	numeral	*legs eleven*	eleven (< housey-housey)	tall, thin man	7	0.5%
FNum	false numeral	*umpteen*	n	n	1	0.07%
TOT					**262**	**18.4%**
ForNum	foreign numeral	*sankey*	five	five franc note	1	0.07%
ForPrep	foreign preposition	*avec*	with	coffee with alcohol added	1	0.07%
TOT					**2**	**0.1%**
TOT MISCELLANEOUS FORMS					**264**	**18.6%**
TOTAL FORMS					**1420**	**100%**

these nicknames are conventional means that they are non-distinctive and are thus part of the standardisation process with a function akin to that of uniform and drill. The high incidence of rhyming slang (which doesn't exist in German) is certainly due to the importance of London as a recruitment area and the covert prestige of Cockney.

Perhaps the most interesting observation we are in a position to make is that German trench slang is compact, often transparent and easy to memorise, largely owing to the high percentage of compound nouns, which are necessarily double or triple entry-forms. It emerges as efficient and uniform in its abundant re-use of matrices and is perhaps a reflection of the essentially peasant origins and accordingly conservative outlook of the majority of conscripts. British trench-slang is much more disparate, more open-ended. Its correct use demands some small knowledge of Arabic and Hindi, of naval terminology and of the sociolinguistic traditions of London, and may be seen as the reflection of the pre-1916 professional and volunteer army recruited from a society more urbanised and centralised than that of the young German state. Thus we already see evidence of two different approaches to expressing the shared realities of trench-life.

Perceptions and attitudes

My purpose in the second part of this article is to attempt to get from the nature of the two corpora to some sort of psycholinguistic portrait of the two armies. The measure of success will necessarily be limited, given that psychology concerns the individual, whereas our data is socialised. Moreover, the relative freshness, frequency, diffusion, popularity and lifespan of the forms are inaccessible to us today. Nonetheless, by looking at the data in terms of the attitudes and emotions for which slang traditionally serves as a vehicle, viz. **aggression, hatred, contempt, humour, irony, tenderness, disgust and resignation**, we shall see that though a minority of expressions are identical on both sides of no man's land, others reveal a divergent perception of reality.

Aggression

Contrary to what one might expect to find, there are very few expressions in either corpus overtly expressing aggression and violence.

German has, for example:

- *Fleischhackmaschine* 'mincing machine': 'machine gun'
- *ihm Saures geben* 'give him a sour time': 'to machine gun the enemy'

English has

- *silent deaths*: 'night patrols armed with daggers'
- *winkle out*: 'force or bluff a small number of German soldiers, during a raid or an attack, to come up out of a dug-out'

These very rare forms, along with a few others, are the nearest we come to overtly expressed aggression in the data

Hatred

Similarly, direct expressions of hatred – (the fuel of war?), are strangely absent from the data.

In German we find

- *der Stinkstiefel* 'stinking boot': 'unpopular NCO'
- *der Kettenhund* 'chained dog': 'military policeman' (possibly so-called because of

their chain-mail gorget)
neither of which refer to the enemy.
English has only:
- *a hate*: 'enemy bombardment'

Contempt
German has, for example:
- *der Spinnhase* 'spinning hare': 'coward'
- *die Fusslappenindianer* 'toe-rag Indians': 'infantry'

English has:
- *gorgeous wrecks*: 'over-age civilians who underwent some military training (brassard GR: *Georgius Rex*)
- *dugout king*: 'officer or NCO who remains below ground during bombardments'

Once again, what is striking is that the contempt is expressed with humour and is directed not against the enemy, but against certain members of one's own side.

Humour
German has, for example:
- *Grüsse aus der Heimat schicken* 'send greetings from home': 'bombard the enemy'
- *das Lausoleum* 'mausoleum for lice': 'disinfector'

English has:
- *Zeppelin in a cloud*: 'sausage and mash'
- *Short arm inspection*: 'venereal disease inspection'

Note here that, just as in common core slang, anything, from bombardment (of the enemy) to food, health and hygiene can be made light of, by both armies.

Irony
German has:
- *die Grossmutter* 'grandmother': 'large German mine'
- *die Knallbonbons* 'bang-sweeties' : 'grenades'

English has:
- *Silent Percy/rubber gun*: 'big gun firing at extremely long range'
- *The game*: 'the war as a whole, the methods and outlook of the army'

Irony usually functions as a euphemism, closely connected with taboo and superstition.

Tenderness
German has:
- *die Liebste/die Braut/die Laura* 'sweetheart'/'bride'/'Laura': 'rifle'
- *der Laus* 'louse': 'comrade'

English has:
- *woolly bear*: 'the burst, especially the resulting (black) smoke, of any big or small German HE shell'
- *long-haired chum* 'girl' (c.1890 tailors' cant) 'girl', cf. *long-eared chum* 'mule/ horse'

Here we find expressions of affection used to designate weapons, while unflattering expressions are used for comrades and girlfriends. The same kind of inversion, presumably a product of the extreme conditions and absence of normal references, values and criteria, can be seen in German *Edamerkäse* 'French round mines'; *Delikatessen*: '(home-made) grenades', cf. *Schrapnellsuppe* 'shrapnel soup': 'pea soup'; *Granatsplitter* 'shell splinters': 'slices of carrot'.

Disgust
German has:
- *die Mopspillen fallen* 'dogshit's falling': 'we are under shellfire'
- *der Negerschweiss* 'nigger-sweat': 'coffee'

English has:
- *chatt/coot/crab*: 'louse'
- *turd-walloper*: 'sanitary-fatigue man' (common core slang)

There is a marked tendency in the German corpus towards scatology and dysphemism. Both are relatively rare in the British corpus. Other examples of German dysphemism are *Stiefelscheisser* 'boot-shitter': 'cavalryman'; *Dreckfresser* 'muck-gobbler': 'infantryman'.

Resignation
German has:
- *die Freikarte zum Massengrab* 'free ticket to the mass grave': 'identity disc'
- *die Totenvögel* 'birds of death': 'medical orderlies'

English has:
- *cold meat ticket/corpse ticket*: 'identity disc'
- *three blue lights:* 'imaginary announcement of the coming of peace: *three dark blue lights* undetectable against a night sky'

Both corpora are rich in irony and what might loosely be termed 'black humour'. Once again, the German tends to be more direct and, to unaccustomed ears, more savage and uncharitable, than the British, which tends, unsurprisingly perhaps, to be more whimsical and more prone to understatement, cf. German *toter Jude* 'dead Jew': 'roast veal'; British *baby's head* 'meat pudding', German *einen Affen haben* 'have a monkey': 'be drunk'; British *be in the sun* 'be drunk'.

A close analysis of the two corpora reveals a distinct absence of forms directly expressing aggression and hatred. When they do occur, they refer to cowards, stay-at-homes, incompetent officers and NCOs, men of other units, in particular medical and supply corps, traditionally suspected of dishonesty. The enemy is more often than not referred to in the singular by first names or nicknames (eg *Fritz; Jerry; Boche; Abdul; Johnny; Buddu; Franz; Tommy; Sammy*), or, on the British side at least, by the ubiquitous *he*. Paradoxically, the pejorative (and historically quite inaccurate) *Hun*, largely an officer's term, gradually fell out of use as the war hardened and conditions worsened. Its replacement by *Jerry* or *Fritz* comes perhaps from a growing recognition, through contact, of the German's humanity and fighting qualities. The enemy's hostile and deadly activities are frequently represented metaphorically in terms of dirt, excrement, foodstuffs and sweets, while his shells and artillery pieces often received ironically affectionate names such as *Asiatic/ Gentle Annie/Jewel of Asia* (a Turkish big gun at Gallipoli), *Big Bertha* (any big German gun - Bertha Krupp); *Silent Susan* (a German high-velocity shell).

Out of the 1,103 German and 1,240 British forms studied, there are only eight cases (7% of a theoretical total) of perfectly parallel usage. They are: *der Kohlenkasten/coal box*: 'burst of a heavy shell'; *der Kartoffelstamper/ potato masher*: 'German stick grenade'; *der Büchsenöffner/tin opener*: 'bayonet'; *das Kanonenfutter/cannon-fodder*: 'infantry'; *der Läusefänger/louse-trap*: 'underclothing';

der Heldenkeller/glory hole: 'shelter'; *der Heimatschuss/a Blighty one*: 'wound sufficiently serious to warrant return to the home-country'; *naplü/napoo*: 'there's no more'. Even partial resemblance, of the type German *die Gasbombe*: 'cigar'; British *canteen stinker*: 'cigarette', German *die Mitesser*: 'table companions': 'lice', British *bosom chums*: 'lice' is found in only 26 cases. The rest of the two corpora are attitudinally divergent.

The most striking common feature of German and British trench slang is the total absence of expressions relating to extremely sinister and horrific aspects of war. There appear, for example, to be no slang expressions designating the sight of mutilated or gassed men, of fearful wounds or disintegrating corpses. There is, it seems, a whole no-go area of horror and suffering where slang itself is taboo: truly horrific sights and sensations are either to be described in clear (slang-free) speech, or not at all.

Conclusion
What emerges principally from this brief study is that although Germans and British shared the same conditions and hardships, they represented very many of them in quite different ways as far as slang is concerned, despite a mutual preference for nominal forms and a common recourse to metaphor, particularly in the case of euphemistic representations of danger and violence. These differences are attributable to the lexico-generative possibilities and preferences of each language, to the differing history and composition of the two armies and very probably to a German tendency to pragmatism and directness contrasted with a British preference for a lighter and more oblique approach. Having said this, common-core slang, straightforward swearing, copious use of vulgarisms, technical terminology and clear speech no doubt also accounted for a great deal of trench talk on both sides of no man's land: unfortunately, we have no means of knowing how much of the slang we have been looking at was in prolonged, daily use.

Further monolingual or comparative studies of the slang repertoires of other armies and other services on other fronts and in other theatres are needed to bring us a little closer to, and help us to understand a little better, the men and women of all nations who talked their way through the Great War.

Let us finish with two close-ups: one of a weary German soldier lucky enough to start the day with some *Wagenschmiere* 'wagon grease': 'jam' and a cup of *Schlamm* 'mud': 'coffee', the other close-up of his British counterpart two hundred yards away having a spot of *Tickler's*: 'plum and apple jam' washed down with his *gunfire*: 'early morning tea'.

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