Cross-Cultural Communication and the Experiences of Australian Soldiers During the First World War

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Sergeant Cyril Lawrence, a New Zealander serving in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), wrote in a letter home to his sister in June 1916 that he was about to enjoy a period of leave in England. In the boats heading from France to England, he wrote, were men from 'almost every unit in France.' 'Golly, the lingo,' he observed, 'Welshmen trying to talk to Scots, Maoris to Ghurkas and so on.'[1] Lawrence's observations remind us of the multilingual nature of the First World War.

War brings together people, both civilian and military, of different nationalities. How they communicate with each other can be of critical importance in the successful prosecution of war, but communication is also an integral element of the experience of war for individuals. As Julian Walker writes in his book *Words and the First World War*, 'Multilingualism during the war provided the potential for bonds between people, the opportunity to learn, and the environment for chaos.'[2] Hilary

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Footitt additionally observes that 'any war will create its own languages landscape.'[3]

This chapter examines the question of how Australian soldiers experienced cross-cultural communication in the First World War and also looks at how their depictions of such communication reflected their own sense of identity and their cultural understandings. It therefore seeks to contribute to the reconstruction of the 'languages landscape' of the First World War, while also investigating how soldiers experienced and made sense of that landscape. It further aims to engage with work currently being done around 'experiential cosmopolitanism,' work that looks at cosmopolitanism as lived reality and explores moments of encounter between people, including in conflict zones.[4]

Recent scholarship has begun to consider the importance of language and communication in the context of war.[5] The First World War has received some attention within this growing area of research. For example, Krista Cowman's work on how British soldiers learned and used 'trench French' on the Western Front provides an important perspective on questions of language in this theatre of war.[6] And the experiences of interpreters and language mediators, although remaining largely invisible in the context of the First World War, have begun to be reconstructed, however partially.[7] Recent histories of the First World War have also begun to incorporate experiences of language and communication into larger accounts of aspects of the war, notably Craig Gibson's study of the complex relationships between British soldiers and French civilians.[8]

Yet few histories of the Australian experience of the First World War have been concerned with the challenges of communication and language, or what they might reveal about the experience of war. In the Australian First World War context, little attention has been paid to date as to how Australian soldiers might have experienced moments of cross-cultural communication. This chapter therefore seeks to address this gap in what we know of the experiences of Australian soldiers, and in particular to pay attention to how Australian soldiers sought to depict and make sense of such encounters.

Language Learning

As Julian Walker points out, the First World War was a war fought in a multilingual environment.[9] Yet it is impossible to estimate how many soldiers spoke a second language. Craig Gibson estimates that no more than 1% of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was conversant in French, although exact numbers are difficult to estimate.[10] Similar numbers for the First AIF do not exist. One figure we do have is the number of French-Australian AIF members. This number was fairly small, less than 150 soldiers, and we can only assume that these men spoke French.[11] More Australian soldiers spoke German, as in 1914 Germans were the largest non-British immigrant group in Australia.[12] Sir John Monash, who would go on to be one of the most renowned Australian military commanders of the war, spoke, read, and wrote German.[13] Overall, however, numbers of Australians who spoke a second language at the beginning of the war can be estimated as being small.

A lack of language skills posed a challenge for soldiers who wished to communicate with locals once they were abroad, as one soldier quickly realised on his arrival in Egypt. Harry Cadwallader excitedly wrote home from Egypt to tell his family that he had just seen his first Charlie Chaplin film. However, with all the intertitles being presented in French, he was unable to understand much. He observed in his letter home that: 'I wish I had paid more attention to language when at school.'[14] Cadwallader's experience of being confronted with a language he did not understand was typical of the experiences of many, and so language learning became something that some soldiers actively pursued.

Language learning took various forms during the war, but much of it took place in incidental ways.[15] One important means of gaining a few rudimentary words and phrases that could have some functional value was through the use of dictionaries, guides, and phrasebooks. We can trace some of the ways such print material connected with soldiers: for example, the British Expeditionary Force distributed 1000 copies of pocket-sized English-French dictionaries among units at the Western Front in Spring of 1915, and Australian officers en route to the Western Front in summer 1916 were all given French primers.[16] The personal

effects listings of Australian soldiers who were killed during the war also reveal that dictionaries (along with New Testaments, prayer books, and other devotional texts) were sometimes in their personal possession.[17]

Soldiers near the front could spend time in YMCA, Red Cross, and Salvation Army huts and tents. Such venues offered important spaces for soldiers to read, write, listen to music, and engage in other pursuits separate from war and military life. These organisations also offered language classes to soldiers.[18] Sapper Edward L. Moore wrote in his diary in January 1915 that while in Egypt he was learning 'a bit of French at the YMCA.'[19] In April 1916, a month after his arrival in France, he noted in his diary that 'I am beginning to pick up a few words of French now but I think it would take a few years for me to learn.'[20] Reg Telfer also wrote in his diary that he spent some time taking French classes at the YMCA in 1917.[21] But language learning could be laborious, as Gunner W. J. Duffell observed in a letter home: 'I am trying to pick up some French but it is slow work & not easy.'[22]

Percy Smythe's story provides insight into how soldiers undertook language learning in a variety of ways and as an ongoing process. The first mention Percy made in his diary about studying French was on his way to the Middle East in August 1915.[23] Textbooks and dictionaries were essential to his learning process: in April 1916 he noted that he had 'bought a little textbook on French for the purpose of studying the language.'[24] A few days later, he went into Hazebrouck, and while there bought a French-English dictionary.[25] In June, he purchased yet another book to help teach himself French, and a week later he wrote that he was trying to obtain French newspapers in order 'to get the latest news.'[26]

As might be expected, Percy's language skills improved as time went on. In July 1916, he was billeted in a house in Saint-Omer where he was able to talk to the family in French; Percy noted in his diary that: 'It is much easier to understand French spoken by a girl than by a man, as they seem to speak more distinctly.'[27] A few days later, he spoke to a French soldier 'and his girl'; the latter, he wrote in his diary, 'knew about as much English as I knew of French, and between us we managed to carry on the conversation all right.'[28] Percy was under no illusions about his French skills, although he clearly was keen to try and communicate as best he could. In October, Percy wrote in his diary (after having fought at the Somme only months before) that he 'could not sleep' and so had gone up to the local village, where he had, in his own words, 'jabbered pigeon-French to a couple of froggies who looked in at our billets.'[29] Percy bought another French textbook in February 1917 while on leave in London.[30] He then wrote his diary entries in French for a period in April 1917, although by June he had returned to writing in English. In October 1917 he noted listening to 'several of our boys … who could speak French well,' observing that 'its about as easy as learning to read morse from a telegraph instrument. Am improving, however.'[31]

Percy Smythe's story is insightful of the continuing process by which someone who was keen to learn and speak French managed to acquire something of the language. It suggests the importance of access to books and dictionaries, as well as the necessity for everyday interaction with native speakers, although difficulties in communication and comprehension continued to be a source of frustration. After the Armistice, Percy continued his language learning, turning to German. In November 1918, he noted in his diary that he had bought a copy of Hugo's *German Simplified* 'to learn a smattering of German for when we go up to the Rhine.'[32] How his acquisition of German went is not revealed in his diaries. Percy headed home to Australia in August 1919.

Soldiers' magazines, produced by the soldiers on the front, also provided some basic instruction in language, although these magazines tended more often than not to make their language guides more humorous than educational (see below). However, there were some exceptions to this. In an October 1918 edition of the Middle Eastern soldier magazine for Australians and New Zealanders serving in Egypt and Palestine, *The Kia Ora Coo-ee*, an article entitled 'Arabic made easy' was included. An editor's note explained that this article had been written by the author of an Arabic dictionary and was being published in response to requests from readers 'that Arabic words and phrases that appear frequently in the Magazine should be translated for the benefit of Home readers.'[33] This suggests that while the soldier-readers of the *Kia Ora Coo-ee* could understand some Arabic, those at home (to whom these publications were often sent) could not. Here language instruction was not just something that was about practical value for soldiers; it was also something that could be used as a means for soldiers to find common cultural ground

with those at home. Language also fed into the development of a degree of cosmopolitanism brought into Australian culture through the influence of the war (and more particularly through the letters, newspaper reports, and war-related publications that circulated during the war years).

The article in *The Kia Ora Coo-ee* also provides insight into the views that some soldiers had towards foreign languages, especially one as unfamiliar to them as Arabic. The introduction to the article stated that Australians and New Zealanders found Arabic to be 'as strange to them as Chinese.' Yet the article acknowledged that few knew how to properly pronounce the words, and so gave clear instructions on how they should sound, as well as providing clear information as to the pragmatics of speaking Arabic.[34] Guides such as these were by necessity brief, but nevertheless sought to make a foreign language more understandable for those who wanted more instruction, and not just make language a source of soldier humour.

Overall, language skills had very real benefits for soldiers. As we saw with Percy Smythe, interaction with the local population and with French soldiers could be more effective with some basic language skills. For prisoners of war, language skills could also be of great benefit. In letters written to Mary Chomley, an Australian woman who worked with the Red Cross in London during the war, Australian prisoners of war in Europe requested various books from the organisation to make their time in captivity more tolerable, and their requests included language texts. Private C. R. Armstrong, a POW in what was then East Prussia, requested French, German, and Russian dictionaries, commenting in his letter to Chomley that he wished 'to learn a little of these three language And I think the present time will be the best to learn Because I am daily in touch with the people who speak the languages which I mention.'[35] Two other Australian POWs, Private J. T. Wright and Private A. L. R. Hanton, both requested German grammars.[36] Wright, who also requested a German dictionary in his letter, wrote to Chomley that he had 'some slight smattering of German, and would like to perfect it.'[37] Presumably these languages could be useful for conversing with captors (and locals, if a soldier was able to escape), but language study also had an essential value in staving off boredom and keeping the mind alive.[38]

Language Mediators

As discussed earlier, the First AIF included soldiers from European backgrounds, including French-Australians and German-Australians. Most of these men would have brought their language background into the AIF. Many German-Australians enlisted in the AIF, not least to assert their loyalty to Australia (anti-German sentiment in Australia was very strong), and German language skills could be extremely useful on active service. A number of German-Australians acted as interpreters in the interrogations of German POWs.[39]

There is limited evidence relating to the experiences of AIF language mediators during the First World War. But there were numerous individual language mediators who played a role within units, and we catch occasional glimpses of these men. Cyril Lawrence noted that his company included a fluent French-speaking interpreter he described as a 'Russian count.'[40] In Bert Smythe's company, a former schoolteacher acted as interpreter.[41] C. E. W. Bean, war correspondent at Gallipoli and later official historian of the First AIF, also comments in passing in his diary on the presence of a divisional interpreter at Gallipoli. He describes the interpreter speaking to some Turkish prisoners of war and helping them obtain some food and water.[42]

Albert E. Coates, who went on to become a notable Australian medical doctor and Second World War POW in the Pacific, had a passion and skill for languages. Born into poverty, Coates left school at age eleven, but thanks to a mentor was able to matriculate through night-school study, with languages being one of his areas of study. He enlisted in the AIF in 1914 and became a medical orderly, first being sent to Gallipoli and then France. While in Egypt, he continued with his French studies as well as learning Arabic.[43] For Coates, studying language was a way to occupy himself, but he also realised the practical value of language skills. He wrote in his diary in 1915 that: 'The Arabic is very useful for conversing with the natives, asking for what you want, etc., and they have a great deal more respect for one who speaks a little of their own tongue.'[44]

In March 1916, Coates was transferred to the Western Front and his battalion fought at the Somme. His language skills saw him attached to

an intelligence unit from February 1917.[45] Coates spent time on the Western Front improving his French and German, studying with fellow soldiers, and taking any opportunity he could get to read French- and German-language publications.[46] As a member of the intelligence section, he played an important role during the war in interrogating German prisoners and translating German documents.[47]

French-Australians who served in the AIF also became interpreters. The Comte Gontran de Tournouer, who after the war wrote articles, verse, and cartoons for the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) periodical *The Queensland Digger*, worked as an interpreter during the war. He arrived in Australia in 1903, and matriculated from the University of Queensland, as well as studying at the Sorbonne. De Tournouer then built up pastoral and sugar interests in Queensland. He enlisted in the AIF in 1914, and was appointed Assistant Censor and Interpreter to the Anzac Mounted Division, serving in the Middle East. According to *The Queensland Digger*, his censoring and interpreting work made use of his skills in eight different languages.[48]

Another French-Australian who served as an interpreter in the First World War was Jacques Playoust. Playoust was born in France, but grew up in Australia. When war broke out, he joined the French army, fighting at Verdun and the Somme.[49] He was attached to the 13th Australian Field Artillery Brigade, 5th Australian Division, from January 1918. Playoust had knowledge of both French and German, making him a particularly valuable language mediator.[50] His knowledge of signals was also very useful for the brigade.[51] In October 1918, Playoust saved the lives of French civilians while under heavy shellfire.[52] He was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.[53] One of his roles as interpreter was 'informing the senior staff of the condition of the liberated villages.'[54]

Playoust was popular with his Australian comrades, who called him 'Turps.'[55] But his popularity appears to have been largely based on his 'Australianness.' His biographers note that the Australian soldiers were keen to get a rise out of their French interpreter, playing tricks on him, including at one point making a horse bolt with him on it. 'Fortunately Jacques was an experienced horseman,' writes his family biographer Jacqueline Dwyer, 'and not only brought it under control, but returned

to hurl a string of good Aussie oaths at the soldiers. This certainly won their respect and formed the basis of future friendships.'[56]

Encountering the 'Other' Through Language and the Construction of Australian Identity

Australian soldiers encountered speakers of other languages as soon as they reached countries beyond the shores of Australia. For some of them, the experience of encountering the people of other countries was one of culture shock, and speakers of other languages could elicit responses as varied as horror, disgust, or excitement. Soldiers' accounts of language encounters provide insight into how Australians viewed the (to them) 'exotic other,' as well as how language came to play a role in the construction of Australian identity.

Egypt was undoubtedly confronting to Australians. T. E. Drane, who came from the small Australian town of Forbes, New South Wales, visited the markets in Cairo soon after his arrival. 'There were French Arabs, Turks, Indians, Dagoes,' he wrote in his diary, 'every nation under the sun represented here.'[57] He and his mates then went to a French bar, where he observed that the people speaking French sounded 'just like a lot of monkeys in a zoo.'[58] Racism clearly shaped the attitudes of many Australian soldiers towards those they encountered abroad, especially in the Middle East.[59] AIF soldier John Baensch, for example, called Egyptians 'niggers,' and while he learnt some Arabic in order to communicate with them, he described their language as 'blabber.'[60] This way of describing the sound of foreign languages is not unusual. For Jim McConnell, the Germans ('Fritz') 'yabbered,'[61] and as we saw above, Percy Smythe called his own speaking of French 'blabbering.'

When Australian soldiers went on leave to England, they often expressed relief at returning to the cultural security of an English-speaking environment. Arthur Davison, on leave in England in June 1916, wrote home to say that '[you h]ave no idea what it felt like after arriving at Folkestone, after thirteen months practically in foreign countries, to see English on the stations and hear it spoken. It was next best to going

home.'[62] Alfred Morison Stewart, who was wounded on the Western Front and sent to England to recuperate, wrote in his diary: 'It is indeed a treat to be back to real civilization, seeing everybody English, instead of foreigners.'[63] And Stanley Thomas Tuck similarly expressed that on going to England with a 'blighty' wound, he welcomed being somewhere 'clean, tidy, and sweet smelling, *and* a Christian language.' He went on to observe, 'It's wonderful to hear a civvy speak intelligibly.'[64]

After the war, an incident of miscommunication could be turned into a source of humour. In an edition of *The Reveille*, a magazine for the RSSILA (New South Wales branch), 'F O'M.,' who had served with the 9th Field Ambulance in France, described his efforts to try and buy a frying pan to make some eggs and potatoes:

> Frying pan was one of the words not in our French vocabulary, so we tried to explain our wants to the shopkeeper by signs, while emphasizing our liking for ouefs and pommedeterres. Still puzzled, the woman shook her head. My mate then had a brain wave. Grabbing a piece of paper, he drew a picture of a frying pan. 'Oui,' said madam, nodding and smiling, and she buzzed out of the shop and returned 20 minutes later with two nicely-cooked omelettes.[65]

Another account of 'diggers' French' written by a French-Australian after the war for a returned-servicemen magazine, also turned Australian soldiers' limited facility with the language into a source of humour. A long anecdote about an Australian soldier trying to tell a French woman about some cows in her garden had the Australian saying 'There, you compre le lait beaucoup promenade your lettuce. No jolly bon for you?' which the author wrote could be translated as 'you understand the milk much walk your lettuce.' This was, he observed, a 'heroic version' of saying 'Polly, your cows are in the garden.'[66] It is not always easy to understand the humour of these kinds of stories one hundred years on, but the fact of miscommunication was an important and common source of nostalgic humour in magazines such as these. This no doubt reflected very real experiences soldiers had during the war of trying to communicate effectively.

As is clear from these brief descriptions of encounters with the 'other,' communication and language played a critical role in the construction of Australian identity for soldiers. The First World War is often cited as a critical moment in the development of Australian nationalism. The sacrifice that Australia made in sending so many of its men to fight and die, especially at Gallipoli in 1915, became the basis for the forging of a sense of Australian nationalism. Typically, slang has been seen as one of the ways Australian soldiers asserted their sense of national identity,[67] but the use of language in the evolution of Australian identity can be expanded to thinking about foreign languages, as well as the assertion of an 'Australian language' against other varieties of English.

If many Australian soldiers would have identified as British, and seen Britain as 'home,' the experience of war created some interesting complexities to this sense of identification as Australian nationalism evolved. Australian soldiers quickly sought to portray themselves as superior to British troops, and their own cultural productions, such as soldier magazines, often included jokes and humorous anecdotes that poked fun at the British. An example of this is the following humorous piece published in the soldier periodical *Honk*, which illustrates the way language was deployed in a deliberate and self-conscious way to reinforce Australian identity within soldier culture, against British identity:

> Two English privates were sitting in an estaminet t'other evening conversing loudly in French. A couple of Australians at an adjoining table decided that they were not going to allow themselves to be out-swanked. So one, who came from NSW, remarked excitedly to his companion: 'Wagga Wagga Walgett Woolloomooloo wee waa Wallerawang Woolgoolga yarramalang.' 'Woollongabba,' replied his comrade who came from Queensland, 'Cunnamulla toowoomba toowong thorgomindah indooroopilly camooweal goondinwindi.' 'Bondi coogee maroubra,' said the other with great determination. It made the Englishmen slew round and take notice. 'Excuse me,' said one, 'but what language is that you're speaking?' 'Oh, that's our Australian language,' he was told. 'We learnt English before we came away, but we always prefer to speak our own language among ourselves.[68]

This anecdote makes deliberate use of Indigenous Australian (Aboriginal) place names to construct the soldiers' fictional language. This kind of use of Aboriginal languages was not unique to soldier culture, and drew on a longer Australian cultural-nationalist tradition and appropriation of Indigenous culture promoted by Australian popular magazines such as *The Bulletin* (which was widely read by soldiers). But what this kind of anecdote (which formed part of a broader culture that mocked the British soldiers) clearly did was to demonstrate that Australians were seeking to promote their identity as something quite separate from other nations. Such representations of the British were underpinned by real attitudes that individual Australian soldiers held towards the British. Instead of discovering that the British were just like Australians (or New Zealanders), they found that they were decidedly different. Various aspects of the British soldier, including their accent, came in for criticism. For example, Cyril Lawrence, who we met earlier, described the British accent as 'peculiar' and 'aggravating.'[69]

Language of course also distinguished Australians from their enemy. This was obvious insofar as different languages were spoken, but it was also implied that even Germans who could speak English failed to grasp the distinctiveness of Australian English. An Australian newspaper related an apocryphal story about the way in which Australian slang had revealed a German spy in the Australian soldiers' midst at Gallipoli. A suspicious Australian officer asked the 'traitor,' 'Is that fair dinkum?' to which the traitor innocently replied, 'Yes, that's my name.' He was immediately killed. The article was headlined 'German Treachery Discovered by Use of Slang.'[70] Here again we see the mythologising of Australian English during the war, and the way this process shaped attitudes towards the 'other.'

Borrowings from Other Languages

Many words were borrowed from other languages into English during the war, and these borrowings attest to the nature of communication between speakers of different languages during the war, as well as the ways Australians made use of languages such as French and Arabic.

Australian soldiers also adopted words used in the British Army from before the war, a number of which had their origins in British imperial rule in places such as India.

While in Egypt and the Middle East, Australian soldiers borrowed a number of words from Arabic, including the terms *aiwa*, *feloosh*, *igri*, *imshi*, and *saeeda*. *Aiwa*, meaning 'yes,' was a rendering of the Arabic *aywah*. *Feloosh* (from the Arabic *fulūs*) was in general use to refer to 'money.' *Igri* (also *igaree*, from the Arabic *ijri*) used as an exclamation, 'hurry up,' was in widespread use, along with *imshi* 'go away' and *maleesh* 'never mind.' The adoption of terms such as these suggest the importance of orders and imperatives in communication with local people. Some of these Arabic words were already in British English, through the British army's presence in Egypt. They include *baksheesh* 'free of charge; something for nothing' (and sometimes rendered as *buckshee*), *bukra* (from Arabic *bukratan*, 'tomorrow'), and *mafeesh* 'finished, done with.'

Australian soldiers also borrowed numerous words from French, words often shared among the Anglophone troops in France. Some were a crude rendering of the pronunciation of French words, such as *compree* (from the French *compris* 'understand?'), and some were Anglicisations of French words or phrases, such as *sanfairyann* (from *ça ne fait rien*, 'it does not matter') and *napoo* (from *il n'y en a plus*, 'finished, gone'). Some of these words were very much in popular use during the war: slang lexicographers and First World War veterans John Brophy and Eric Partridge in their *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier: 1914–1918* noted *compree* as being 'in constant use' during the war. They also glossed the popular *napoo* with the comment: 'the word came to be used for all the destructions, obliterations and disappointments of war.'[71]

Australian soldiers clearly adopted these words into their everyday vocabulary as evidenced in letters home and in their diaries. William Slater, who served in France as a stretcher bearer, noted at one point in his diary in 1917 that his 'chances are napoo.' Jim McConnell in a letter home described himself rushing 'toot sweet' into a cellar when he heard a shell coming. Private Hubert Demasson wrote home to his son in 1917 and mentioned the expression *très bon*, translating it into vernacular Australian: '"Tray Bon" as the Frenchies say, that means very good or what you would say you young scamp "Bonzer." "No bon" means no

good, a lot of the men are able to speak a good lot of French.'[72] The use of foreign-language borrowings in the language of the Australian soldiers meant that such words also were communicated to those at home. Although few borrowed words remained in Australian English beyond the war years, some words lingered. The word *napoo*, for example, continued in Australian English usage through the interwar period, only dropping out of usage around the time of the Second World War.

Borrowings were also often highlighted in humorous glossaries during the war. While such glossaries often included a relatively accurate definition of how a word was used, there was usually some element of humour that often spoke to the wartime experience, or the construction of a soldier's (national) identity. One such glossary, included in a 1917 edition of the soldier periodical *The Kookaburra*, reveals some of the multiple meanings conveyed in these glossaries. For the entry *alley, toot sweet* (*allez tout suite*), a regular definition was provided—'In regimental parlance "at the double"'—but so was a humorous one: 'In the language of the Anzac "spring off your tail you Roo."' This second definition both aimed to convey humour, but also asserted a strong sense of 'Australianness.' Another entry, *tray bong* (*très bon*) was glossed as 'Not as supposed by some blokes to be a bonbon costing a tray. It's the expression you use when consuming strawberries and cream at the front—in your dreams.'[73] This gloss captured something of a typical lament of the soldier periodical—a lack of tasty food.

In the case of both Arabic and French borrowings, such borrowings indicated a basic desire to communicate with local populations, often to achieve basic transactions such as purchasing something. But little about these borrowings indicates more than a superficial engagement across cultures and languages. Indeed, the mutilation of words and phrases from other languages was more often used as a celebration of the wit of the Australian soldier, as we see with the humorous glossaries discussed above, and in discussions of such language after the war. In 1922, a newspaper article commenting on the slang of the Australian soldiers noted that the phrase *come a tallez plonk* was used much in the same way as the Australian expression *come a gutser*, and was described by the author of the article as both 'ingenious' and a mark of the soldiers' 'gay disrespect' for the French language.[74] Comte de Tournouer similarly observed in his discussion of 'digger's French' after the war that the Australians had 'quickly adapted themselves to the "pidgin" or trench French of the back areas.' Most French words, he observed, underwent a process of being 'diggerised.' For example, he claimed that *tout de suite* evolved to *toot sweet* and then to *chooks feet*. *Bonsoir* became *Bonzer war* and *comment allez vous?* evolved beyond the well-attested anglicisation *come and tally plonk* to the diggerised *come on tell el Kebir*.[75]

Conclusion

These brief investigations of cross-cultural communication and experiences of language during the First World War have helped to bring into focus some aspects of the 'languages landscape' of the war. Language learning and attempts to communicate in foreign languages were an important aspect of Australian soldiers' experiences of the war, but they were also strongly impacted on and shaped by the challenges of learning languages, the sense of racial superiority that some Australians had towards non-English speakers, and the increasing celebration of Australian English and Australian slang as integral to Australian national identity. Language mediators are also increasingly being investigated as an important group within the story of the First World War. Some of their stories have been told here, but much more work needs to be done on tracing their stories and bringing their work and experiences into focus. Language and cross-cultural communication need to be more central features of the story of Australians at war, and this chapter offers a contribution towards making this happen.

Notes

1. Cyril Lawrence, letter, 21 June, 1916, in Peter Yule (ed.) (1987), *Sergeant Lawrence Goes to France* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press), p. 1.
2. Julian Walker (2017), *Words and the First World War: Language, Memory, Vocabulary* (London: Bloomsbury), p. 44.

3. Hilary Footitt (2012), 'Introduction', in Hilary Footitt and Michael Kelly (eds), *Languages and the Military: Alliances, Occupation and Peace Building* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 1–11, here p. 4.

4. Santanu Das (2018), 'Entangled Emotions: Race, Encounters and Anti-colonial Cosmopolitanism', in Santanu Das and Kate McLoughlin (eds), *The First World War: Literature, Culture, Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 240–61, here pp. 242–43.

5. Notably a number of works in the Palgrave Studies in Languages at War series, such as Hilary Footitt and Michael Kelly (2012), *Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict*, Hilary Footitt and Simona Tobia (2013), *'Wartalk': Foreign and the British War Effort in Europe, 1940–47*, and Julian Walker and Christophe Declerq (eds) (2016), *Languages and the First World War: Communicating in a Transnational War*.

6. Krista Cowman (2016), 'The ... "parlez" Is Not Going Very Well "avec moi": Learning and Using "Trench French" on the Western Front', in Walker and Declerq (eds), *Languages and the First World War: Communicating in a Transnational War* (Houndmills: Palgrave), pp. 25–43, here p. 25.

7. Sandrijn Van Den Noortgate (2016), 'Caught in the Crossfire: Interpreters During the First World War', in Walker and Declerq (eds), *Languages and the First World War: Communicating in a Transnational War* (Houndmills: Palgrave), pp. 98–112, here p. 100.

8. Craig Gibson (2014), *Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

9. Julian Walker, *Words and the First World War*, p. 28.

10. Craig Gibson, *Behind the Front*, p. 147.

11. Pauline Georgelin is currently completing a thesis looking at the experiences of French-Australians during the First World War, *'For Noble and Valiant France'*: French-Australian identities during the First World War' (University of Melbourne).

12. John F. Williams (2003), *German Anzacs and the First World War* (Sydney: UNSW Press), p. xv.

13. John F. Williams, *German Anzacs and the First World War*, p. 5.

14. Harry Cadwallader, Letter, 15 Feb 1916, 'Letters from the Great War 1914–1918: Private Henry (Harry) Thomas Cadwallader No 4160, 7th Battalion', AWM PR01199.

15. Julian Walker, *Words and the First World War*, p. 31.

16. Craig Gibson, *Behind the Front*, p. 149.

17. See AWM 250, Personal Effects Cards. For a longer discussion of this, see Amanda Laugesen (2012), *Boredom Is the Enemy: The Intellectual and Imaginative Lives of Australian Soldiers in the Great War and Beyond* (Abingdon: Ashgate), pp. 39–40.

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Unfamiliar Allies: Australian Cross-Cultural Communication in Afghanistan and Iraq During the War on Terror

Richard Gehrmann

Former Australian soldier Shane Bryant quickly found transition to war in Afghanistan as a contractor had its cross-cultural challenges. 'The other dog handlers and I were travelling on what the Americans call Space-A – space available transport. I was starting to learn a whole new language and Space-A, translated, meant low priority. Uniformed American personnel got top billing, arranged by rank, and coalition soldiers and airmen were next. At the bottom of the heap were the civilian contractors like me.'[1]

Australian military[2] language, like any other, has adopted lexical components over time as Australians have engaged in cross-cultural communication with a wide variety of military partners.[3] Adoption of various expressions can arise because of exposure over time, a practical desire to use commonly understood terms to simplify communication, or it can relate to a value placed on specialist language. Before the First World War, British military language and style were valued. The phrase

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