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The Sophisticated, the Comic and the Nazi: Images of the German and German Language in Three Movies about Occupied France

Abstract: This article explores the various ways in which multilingualism is used to convey or challenge national stereotypes in a corpus made of films about the occupation of France during World War II by Nazi Germany. Based on the results of the analysis of the aesthetic modeling of multilingualism, an answer to how national stereotypes change in a diachronic dimension will be given. At the center of research interests are the representation of the German and the German language and how it is defined by polyglot language use.

1 *The Occupation* and the Arts – A Playground for National Stereotypes

At least since the Franco-Prussian War, Germany has been a target of derision and a source of distrust in the eyes of its neighbor, France; yet the French also often view Germany with a sense of esteem and curiosity.¹ Nevertheless, the image of Germans and their language is subjected to the experience of hostile foreign policy and the impact of two World Wars. Despite the importance of World War I, World War II also plays a significant role in the national memory of France.² It was during this war that Nazi Germany occupied France, and it is this memory that remains present throughout literary works.³ Likewise, this historical experience has contributed onscreen to many masterpieces of French cinema. In the history of French cinema, one may find comedies and tragedies, documentaries

1 Cf. Leiner (1991: 154 f.) See also Fischer (1979: 33).

2 One might think of the 8th of May, the day of Germany's unconditional surrender, as a day of national commemoration.

3 Cf. for instance Tournier, Michel (1970): *Le roi des aulnes*. Paris: Gallimard; Littell, Jonathan (2006): *Les Bienveillantes*. Paris: Gallimard. Both received the renowned *Prix Goncourt*.

and fiction which all use the times of the *Occupation* as a source of artistic creations. The representations and stereotypes of the German and the German language are at the very heart of this type of film.⁴ However, the function and the way Germans and their language are illustrated varies as time goes by, and are subject to synchronous sociopolitical developments just like memory culture on a general level.⁵ My aim is to look for the imagological implications of German language in films about occupied France, putting them into relation with other languages spoken in these films. Therefore, the description of the aesthetic and narrative modeling of multilingualism plays a major role in the analytic part of this contribution.⁶ For this purpose, I suggest that we begin with a short definition and insight into the various concepts of imagology by taking a special look at the language. Afterwards, I will sketch a short introduction of the history of the *Occupation* to clarify the historical basis of the movie adaptations. In the analytic section, I will examine three scenes taken out of movies which deal with the *Occupation*: *Le silence de la mer* (*The Silence of the Sea*, 1949) by Jean-Pierre Melville, *La Grande Vadrouille* (*Don't Look Now... We Are Being Shot At!*, 1966) by Gérard Oury and *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) by Quentin Tarantino. This corpus might seem arbitrary, but the selection will give a clear insight into the possibilities proposed by multilingualism as an aesthetic means, and how these are linked to imagology. Furthermore, the selection offers the possibility to study the development of national stereotypes and thereby the role of language use. Above all, *Inglorious Basterds* doesn't seem to fit very well with two French films. But remember: *Inglorious Basterds* is also a European production and at least

4 Cf. Hewitt (2008: 4), who rightfully suggests the role that media plays in conveying national stereotypes: "For better or for worse, in the contemporary period, the media have frequently taken on the task of transmitting and/or creating collective memories that confirm (but sometimes challenge) national identities."

5 Cf. Leiner (1991: 12).

6 For the social and political implications of language use and attribution see Kroskrity (2000: 1): "They [political implications of language] serve to keep us aware of the status of language as a primary site of political process and of the discursive mediation of those very activities and events we recognize as political."

half of the actors have a European background.⁷ Besides, Tarantino is a profound *aficionado* of European cinema,⁸ who uses a wealth of languages to attain particular objectives in the narration of this movie. Therefore, for an understanding of these procedures of language use, it is necessary to take a closer look at imagology in order to understand how to classify different language practices.

2 What is Imagology?

Imagology refers to a scientific discipline which deals with images of Self (auto-images) and Others (hetero-images) based on the images of nations in literature and literary studies.⁹ Since the 1980s, imagology has aimed to set these images into a specific sociohistorical context.¹⁰ Nowadays, we know that these images have a concrete function in shaping the identity of a group by introducing a coherent selection of hetero-images and auto-images. And as contemporary culture-clash-comedies like *My big fat greek wedding* (2002), *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* (2008) or *Maria ihm schmeckts nicht* (2009) have pointed out, national stereotypes are not just restricted to the literary field. It is not only literature which creates and absorbs these images produced by language. Also, visual arts, especially film, have – literally spoken – an important role to play. Film – due to its specific multichannel possibilities – uses two techniques simultaneously, the visual and the auditive channel, to illustrate national stereotypes. For a better understanding of the use of several languages in movies, I adopt the model by Jean-Pierre Moura, who distinguishes three levels: “le référent, l’imaginaire socio-culturel, les structures d’une œuvre” (“the reference point, the socio-cultural imaginary, the structures of a work”).¹¹ It is in particular this third level that needs to be kept in mind when analyzing the aesthetic modeling of multilingualism in the narrative structure

7 Cf. Seeßlen (2010: 41 ff).

8 Cf. *ibid.*: 13 f. and 20.

9 Cf. *Metzler Lexikon Literatur und Kulturtheorie* (2013: 332 ff.), art. Imagologie, komparatistische. A literary perspective on this topic is offered by Florack (2007).

10 Cf. *ibid.*

11 Moura (1999: 184).

of film. This will furthermore be expanded by a classification made by Lukas Bleichenbacher, who distinguishes “three major functional categories: realism, social criticism, and humour”¹² as far as language use in movies is concerned. A combination of these two models seems to be very promising in relation to the examination and classification of language use in the movie corpus, because it combines research on imagology and multilingualism. Another important aspect is mentioned by Thomas Bleicher, who states that national stereotypes change throughout time.¹³ At any rate, the common ground for the recurrent national images of France and Germany in the above-mentioned films remains the same: the experience of war and occupation suffered by the French population during World War II.

3 The *Occupation* and its Legacy

World War II deeply wounded France and its self-perception as one of the great nations.¹⁴ After the so called *drôle de guerre* – the quick and harsh invasion of France by German troops – from September 1939 to May 1940, France was divided into two zones: one occupied in the North with Paris as the political center and the so-called ‘free’ zone with Vichy as its political center under German control.¹⁵ The *Occupation* ended in 1944 with the landing of Allied troops on Omaha Beach in Normandie and the subsequent liberation of Paris in the same year. The role of France during World War II is still very controversial, especially on a political level. As an example, one can think about the shocking comments by the former leader of the Front National, a right-wing extremist party, Jean-Marie Le Pen, on the deportation of Jews and the Shoah as a “detail of history”.¹⁶ *Occupation* and even more the *Collaboration* of French authorities and parts of the population with the Nazi regime is a chapter of French history that is far away from being closed.¹⁷ When *Libération* began in 1944,

12 Bleichenbacher (2008: 26).

13 Cf. Bleicher (1980: 16).

14 Cf. Sapiro (1999: 11).

15 For a short overview see Muracciole (2002).

16 Cf. Dézé (2012: 98 f).

17 Jacquet (2004: 12).

some also began to ask painful questions: Why has there been the will to help others kill people? Could there be any reason? Possible answers were not only discussed in academies, journals or literature.¹⁸ The cinema also took a major part in interrogating French society on its involvement in Nazi politics. So, each epoch brought up a unique imagination and adaptation of the *Occupation*. By doing so, film was very important as a means of converting an historical event into an aesthetic form.¹⁹ Nevertheless, we should not forget that this wartime was also a time of language contact and multilingualism, as historical documents reveal. Thus, it is not surprising that many films have used this historical multilingualism for their own aesthetic purpose.

4 Spoken Silence: *Le silence de la mer*

A chronological approach to the chosen movies seems to be the best way to get an idea on how the conceptions of the German language changed throughout time. The oldest example chosen, *Le silence de la mer* (1949) by Jean-Pierre Melville, is completely different from the two films discussed below. Melville adapts a famous *Résistance* story to screen and, unlike the other films, this example has a direct connection with the historical setting. It is the story of the German officer Werner von Ebrennac, who is quartered within the house of a French family, which is composed of an uncle and his niece. Ebrennac reveals himself to be very francophile: “J’aimais toujours la France.” (“I always loved France.”; *Le silence de la mer* 1949, 00:18:13) And almost every evening he descends to the living room of the house to speak in fluent French to the silent uncle and niece (cf. *ibid.*,

18 See especially for the literary field Sapiró (1999: 563–685).

19 Hence Hewitt (2008: 5 f.) emphasises the role of cinema as a special media: “Because of film’s accessibility and popularity, it is perhaps the most forceful of art forms in articulating a public sense of the historical and political stakes of the war. It is an effective way to create public (national) identity via a shared story, a communal fiction that can organize recognizable elements of a past – whether as myth or as critical re-evaluation – as totalizing narrative or deconstructive multiplicity.”

00:15:21 ff.).²⁰ The German language is mainly used in flashbacks, when Ebrennac recounts stories of his life (cf. for instance *ibid.*, 00:39:15 ff.). Apart from that, the main language spoken is French, also by the German officer, for one thing because it addresses a French audience. We will see another reason for this language choice later on. The silence of the French persists,²¹ but Ebrennac doesn't give up (cf. *ibid.*, 00:37:06 ff.), even more so as he has obviously fallen in love with the niece (*ibid.*, 00:15:45 ff.).²² During his evening visits, he gives lengthy monologues about the common and too often hostile historical relationship between Germany and France, which he deeply deplores (cf. *ibid.*, 00:18:29 ff.). He seems to be blind towards the crimes the Nazis are committing in France: "Et pourtant, je ne regrette pas cette guerre. Non, je crois que de ceci, il sortira de grandes choses." ("However, I do not regret this war. Actually, I believe that it will bring about grand things."); *ibid.*, 00:19:59 ff). In a first step, I want to analyse the role of the German in one flashback (*ibid.*, 00:40:43 ff.). In a second step, I aim to enlarge the concept of multilingualism by drafting silence as a proper form of language, at least in this movie.

In this flashback, Ebrennac goes for a walk with a German girl with whom he has fallen in love. They talk about the greatness of nature and of creation. The beginning is portrayed in a sublime dignity, which is not too surprising: the German forest is one of the most romantic topics of all and thus also part of German national stereotypes. The language is pathetic, nearly biblical: "Wie heilig sind doch alle Geschöpfe Gottes." ("How sacred all of God's creatures are."); *ibid.*, 00:42:20 ff.) But with a sudden sting the atmosphere, and also the use of German language,

20 Later on, Ebrennac also tells the uncle and his niece about the feelings that he has about France. Previously, he only attempted some small talk (cf. *Le silence de la mer* 1949, 00:16:03 ff.).

21 Though the uncle is not sure whether it is right as he comments from offscreen via voiceover: "C'est peut-être inhumain de lui refuser l'obole d'un seul mot." ("Perhaps it was inhumane not to offer him a single word."); *ibid.*, 00:21:01)

22 Cf. Jacquet (2004: 38), who assumes that it is Ebrennac's aim to unsettle the niece. One might even go further and claim that Ebrennac also wants to conquer the niece like the Germans did with France, as he is saying: "Il faudra vaincre ce silence, il faudra vaincre le silence de la France. Cela me plaît." ("I want to vanquish this silence [of the young lady], one has to vanquish the silence of France. I like this."); *Le silence de la mer* 1949, 00:28:12 ff.)

changes profoundly as the girl says: “So ein elendes Biest.” (“What a wretched beast.”; *ibid.*, 00:42:35 ff.). Afterwards she even proceeds in punishing the insect by tearing off his legs: “Ein Bein nach dem andern werd’ ich ihm ausreißen.” (“I’ll tear out its legs, one after another.”; *ibid.*, 00:42:49 ff.). Moreover, she is punishing it with a kind of delight as we can guess from her physiognomy. We should also take into consideration that, here, a German girl, rather than a man or officer is saying this phrase, as we could guess from the historical background. In an imagological perspective – and as Ebrennac explains afterwards (*ibid.*, 00:43:26 ff.) – here, we have *in nuce* a short characterization of the German psyche that can celebrate nature as God’s gift by using sacred language, yet also is capable of inflicting pain mercilessly, accompanied by and expressed through the German language. The anonymity of the German girl reinforces the general validity of this supposition. Her namelessness makes her stand for ‘just any German’. The flashback provides the spectator with typical images of the German and their language, and the language itself plays its own role in the violent excess. While in his narrative digressions, Ebrennac mostly speaks German²³, on other occasions, he prefers using French, speaking a distinguished and almost accent-free variety. This characterizes him as a representative of *Bildungsbürgertum*, that is, a privileged social class with a membership gained by a profound knowledge in the humanities. He cherishes the Frenchman and his niece, but they prefer to keep silent and ignore their German fellow lodger. Ebrennac tries to become part of the French family, who refuse to take him in. They seem to know that the ideals which the French language stands for (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*) are incompatible with Ebrennac’s actions.²⁴ But as Ebrennac occupies their mother tongue by mastering it, they have no other choice but to maintain their own dignity by keeping silent.²⁵ In this movie, silence evidently has

23 There are but two exceptions: when the uncle meets Ebrennac in the *Kommandantur*, where the latter gives orders in German to a soldier (cf. *ibid.*: 00:54:44 ff.), and at the end, when the niece looks at Ebrennac directly for the first time (cf. *ibid.*: 01:01:21 ff.).

24 For instance, Ebrennac commands to shoot at the cathedral of Chartres (cf. *Le silence de la mer* 1949, 00:39:14 ff.).

25 Jacquet (2004: 39), on the contrary, regards the silence of the French as a sort of submission in the face of the German officer.

a communicative function, which is by the way also acknowledged by Ebrennac, who respects it but also tries to break it – subtly. Here, silence is a form of language and it is part of the multilingual onscreen constellation. Facing the crimes of the Nazi regime and the *Occupation*, one can only remain silent in order to preserve their own humanity.

As it is, silence seems to have a pragmatic function, and therefore we can ask, in the vein of Austin: How to do things *without* words? Some aspects have already been touched on above.

Vernon Jensen (1973) distinguishes five further functions of silence:

- Linkage function: Silence links/isolates.
- Affecting function: Silence heals/hurts.
- Revelational function: Silence reveals/hides.
- Judgmental function: With silence one agrees/disagrees.
- Activating function: Silence means activity/inactivity.

These functions can be either positive or negative. In the film, silence links the uncle to his niece and reinforces their alliance against the German intruder. It excludes and isolates Ebrennac. The silence has a healing effect on the French and their own hurt pride by refusing any word to the German officer who occupies their home. Silence reveals the chasm between Ebrennac and his compelled hosts, which cannot be bridged by his proficiency in French. Even though he often refers to the common history and an imagined common future of the two countries, the silence emphasises that they forever remain on the different sides of that chasm. And above all, silence also has an extradiegetic purpose: It activates the spectators to take sides in this interaction. The silence illustrates that the French see what has been happening in their country, whereas Ebrennac for now remains blind – as long as he speaks French. Only after a visit to Paris, where he meets some of his friends, he becomes aware of the crimes his companions are committing (cf. *ibid.*, 01:02:47 ff.). They are even discussing the destruction of France – this, again, in German (cf. *ibid.*, 01:06:12 ff.). The discussion in German certainly renders a realistic mode of storytelling; however, the German language is connected here with destruction and death – just as much as Nazi politics. Yet Ebrennac's reaction to that is paradoxical (as is the whole character): At the end, he leaves France for the Russian front. But before he leaves, the French

speak to him for the first time: “Entrez, Monsieur!” (“Come in, sir!”; *ibid.*, 00:59:15). Nonetheless, Ebrennac never really had the courage to revolt and disobey the barbarity of the Nazis (*cf. ibid.*, 00:02:49 ff.).

5 Classic and Comic: Dumb German Soldiers in *La Grande Vadrouille*

I have already mentioned comedy as a genre which has also dealt with the theme of *Occupation*. As one can suppose, a comedy set in World War II can be seen as extremely controversial – especially one that deals with the *Occupation* just a few years after the ending of the War. Nevertheless, with *La Grande Vadrouille*, Gérard Oury created one of the most successful films in the history of French cinema, and even nowadays this movie is still enduringly popular in France, which can perhaps be partly explained by the popularity of its protagonists Louis de Funès and Bourvil.²⁶ In this comedy,

26 Jacquet (2004: 44) explains the movie’s success by the favorable conditions of ‘les trente glorieuses’ [the thirty years between 1945 and 1975], a time of economic growth and wealth: “Parvenu en cette année 1966, il serait difficile de passer sous silence le phénoménal succès rencontré par *La Grande Vadrouille*, de Gérard Oury. Cette pochade, aujourd’hui intégrée au patrimoine cinématographique national ne brillait pourtant pas par son audace. Louis de Funès et Bourvil, dont l’association constituait le support et le prétexte du film, y cautionnaient une vision aussi rassurante que convenable de la France occupée. [...] Aussi différents que complémentaires [Stanislas LeFort et Augustin Bouvet], ils surmontent toutes les difficultés et délivrent un message dont l’optimisme s’accordait très bien avec l’euphorie des ‘trente glorieuses’.” (“Speaking of 1966, it would be hard not to mention the phenomenal success of *La Grande Vadrouille* by Gérard Oury. Yet this sketch, nowadays a part of national cinematic heritage, did not shine due to its boldness. Louis de Funès and Bourvil, whose joint performance was the film’s reason and justification for existence, championed in the film a vision of occupied France that was just as reassuring as it was convenient. [...] As different as they [Stanislas LeFort and Augustin Bouvet] were complementary, they overcome all obstacles and deliver a message whose optimism tied in well with the euphoria of the ‘trente glorieuses’.”) Grassin & Sender (2011: 16) see it in the same way: “Mais si le film marche d’emblée, c’est aussi qu’il offre une approche révisée, donc acceptable, des Français sous l’Occupation: pas un collaborateur, un pétainiste ni même un attentiste à l’horizon.” (“But if the film instantly became a hit, it was also because it offered a revised, and thus acceptable, version of the French under the Occupation: not a single collaborator, Petainist, nor even a believer in a wait-and-see policy is anywhere in view there.”)

Oury tells the story of three British pilots who are shot down in an airplane above Paris (cf. *La Grande Vadrouille* 1966, 00:03:50 ff.). They survive but they lose each other and find help in occupied Paris in the person of Augustin Bouvet (Bourvil), a phlegmatic painter, and Stanislas LeFort (Louis de Funès), a choleric orchestra conductor. The five have to make it to the *zone libre*, where the British have a chance to get back to England. On the frontier to this zone one of the Brits (cf. *ibid.*, 01:00:31 ff.) and the two Frenchmen get arrested by German troops (cf. *ibid.*, 01:33:23 ff.) and are brought to a German *Kommandantur*. The British are in the basement of the *Kommandantur* and use a lot of cognac to set the building on fire, in order to free their French friends, who are meanwhile being interrogated by the German officer Achbach (cf. *ibid.*, 01:39:56 ff.).

The scene starts with an exclamation by the British: “Vive Napoléon!” (*ibid.*, 01:42:28). While capitalising on both the name of the cognac brand and an evocation of an historical French political regime, the pun develops its full potential by giving birth to a community based on the opposition to the enemy – the Germans – through the language choice. The cheering exclamation confirms not only the brotherhood with the French friends but also the shared enmity against the Germans.²⁷

However, one should not forget the comedic aspects of the situation. For one thing, the humorous effect is achieved by the cheering officer’s being drunk. For another thing, the incongruity of the exclamation also serves the comic ends. A British officer suddenly hailing Napoleon in French is so unanticipated that it makes the spectator laugh. Furthermore, travesty – here, the Brits disguised as German soldiers – is also a common trope in comedy and it is hyperbolically intensified by the language. Moreover, the British use the German language against their native-speaking enemies by shouting “Feuer! Feuer!” when they are leaving the burning basement of the *Kommandantur* (*ibid.*: 01:43:30 ff.).²⁸ The sudden fire

27 This exclamation conjures up the age-old enmity between France and Britain which now must be overcome in the face of a new common enemy: Hitler and Nazi Germany. In the scene, the spectators assist in the settling of a historical antagonism by the language choice and the concomitant action.

28 In a previous scene, LeFort and Bouvet almost fled out of their holding cell in the *Kommandantur* by using the same strategy (*ibid.*: 01:38:20 ff.). Remembering

and smoke leads to such a mess that the British and the French can leave the building. The knowledge of a little bit of German enables the British to create a diversion and free their French friends from German officer Achbach (cf. *ibid.*: 01:43:40 ff.). The figure of Achbach corresponds to the classic stereotypical image of a German: an utterly ill-tempered and martial person who speaks every language in an imperative and harsh military tone (cf. *ibid.*: 01:37:58 and 01:39:46). Of course, the hyperbolic conception of this German is required by the comedy genre and the context in which he features. He masters foreign languages but imbues his speech with ‘typical German’ attributes like emphasized plosives and roaring. His character lacks in nuances and so does his exaggerated language. Achbach’s grotesque behaviour is a source of laughter because it seeks to menace but in fact does not.²⁹ So, the Germans are depicted as more or less intelligent and less flexible in language questions and thus in this film, they do not seem to be very dangerous but rather comic (unlike Hans Landa in the 2009 movie *Inglorious Basterds*). The conception of the protagonists and their language use obeys the rules of comedy, which generally seek to provide a clear and evident attribution of good and evil, which here offers big entertainment despite the high frequency of foreign languages.

As far as these foreign languages are concerned, we should also concentrate on the acoustic and scripted setting of this scene, especially the tumultuous mass scene in the courtyard, organized by the chaotic shouting of German orders (cf. *La Grande Vadrouille* 1966, 01:44:28 ff.). This

that LeFort is an orchestra conductor, Bouvet asks him if he knows the German word for ‘Enter!’. Bouvet’s argument is surprising and simple at once: his orchestra had most certainly performed Wagner. Considering that Wagner was one of Hitler’s favorite composers (this circumstance casting shade on his legacy for a long time after World War II and relegating it to the stereotypical imagery of Nazi Germany), in this scene, the French turn an important element of Nazi ideology against Nazis. And indeed, the plan works: Bouvet says ‘Herein!’ to the German guard, who enters and is knocked out by the French who escape.

29 We can think of another previous scene in this movie, where Achbach snores deeply like a big cat (cf. *ibid.*: 01:20:44 ff.). While Kremer (2017: 327) believes the scene to be suspenseful, suspense actually disappears because of the hyperbolic depiction of the characters.

use of the German language in a French setting reinforces the authenticity of the scene and emphasises the historical accuracy, according to the classification by Bleichenbacher.³⁰ This goal is maintained by the shots on German signs and guideposts inside the *Kommandantur*: “*Zimmer 3 Hauptverwaltung*” (“Room 3 Main administration”; *ibid.*: 01:39:28), “*Luftschutzkeller*” (“Air-raid shelter”; *ibid.*: 01:45:37), to cite just two examples.³¹ But one can also recognize a deteriorated tell-tale sign in French: “*Entraide sociale*” (“Mutual Social Aid”; *ibid.*: 01:36:36, 01:39:36). This aspect is important because it also shows the German language as an invader.³² The *Kommandantur* is placed in a former school or town hall, as we can gather from a previous scene that shows the arrest room of LeFort and Bouvet in which many symbols of the French Republic are stored. There, one can see a *Marianne* next to a *Drapeau tricolore* (*ibid.*: 01:36:30 ff.).

The functions of multilingualism in this movie might be reconstituted as follows: On an esthetic level, the grotesque, militaristic German language is needed to give birth to a (linguistic) community that is set up against the Nazis. This community emerges through shared laughter directed towards the completely unnatural behavior of the German officer Achbach, who is described as a one-dimensional character or classic caricature of a German. The spectators can laugh at Achbach because his manner of speaking does not create empathy, in contrast to the British who use French to establish a new brotherhood. In addition, the German that is being spoken is an integral component of the simulation of authenticity through its use as an acoustic environment. One could describe the use of German on the walls of the *Kommandantur* as a *mise en abyme* which reflects the occupation of France on a visual and script-based level.

30 Cf. Bleichenbacher (2008: 26).

31 In *Le silence de la mer*, Ebrennac also sees many signs in German during his stay in Paris (cf. *Le silence de la mer*: 01:04:01 ff., 01:04:32).

32 See for instance Chion (2017: 86–90) on how written signs and signposts can structure a ‘mise en scène’.

6 *Inglorious Basterds* or *The Cattivo* as a Perfect Nazi

Inglorius Basterds is the last film I analyse with regard to multilingualism in movies about occupied France. It is important to bear in mind that, unlike the other two examples, this movie was meant to cater to an English-speaking audience. It tells the story of a Jewish-American army troop in five chapters. The sole mission of the group led by Aldo Raine is to hunt down and to kill Nazis. Later on, the group has to make an assault on the Nazi government officials who are staging the premiere of a propaganda film in a Parisian cinema. With the help of Bridget von Hammersmark, a German actress who also serves as a British agent, Raine and two of his companions get into the cinema. There, Hans Landa, an SS-officer and evil counterpart, is already awaiting them. Landa starts an interrogation, disguised as a conversation with Hammersmark. This ruse introduces Landa as a highly intelligent but ruthless and violent detective, who is also revealed to be a polyglot. This particular scene (cf. *Inglorious Basterds* 2009: 01:46:46 ff.) demonstrates how multilingualism can be applied, again, as an aesthetic strategy.

The scene starts with a dialogue in German, which is determined by digesis (cf. *ibid.*). Since both Hammersmark and Landa are native speakers of German, it would have been unnatural if two Germans used a language different from their mother tongue in a non-official conversation. It is also a dramaturgic necessity, because the three ‘basterds’ in tuxedos speak no German and only very little Italian, as we learn in an earlier scene (cf. *ibid.*: 01:38:22 ff.). The use of German makes the scene appear realistic. With Hans Landa, the German language has a narrative function which, at first glance, could be described as ambivalent. On one hand, Landa speaks in a jovial and friendly way (cf. *ibid.*: 01:47:01 ff.). On the other hand, his persistent questioning of Hammersmark makes her feel uncomfortable, because he’s pressuring the actress more and more (cf. *ibid.*: 01:47:59 ff.). When he turns to Hammersmark’s companions, she and the spectator think that the interrogation is over. She presents Hans Landa to Aldo Raine/Enzo Grolomi, Donny Donnowitz/Antonio Marghereti and Omar Ulmer/Dominick Decocco in Italian with a strong German accent (cf. *ibid.*: 01:49:04). The suspense which could be felt during the interrogation seems to be over, until Aldo Raine/Enzo Grolomi

needs to say “Buongiorno” (ibid.: 01:49:11) with a deeply American accent. While the German accent of Hammersmark could be equally attributed to a realistic mode of the production, the American accent of Raine/Gorlomi is only grotesque. Apart from a few words, none of the three American ‘basterds’ really know Italian. The contrast between the show pulled off by Hammersmark and the linguistic blunder committed by Raine/Gorlomi instantly makes the situation comical and alleviates the suspense of just a few moments before. But Landa continues his game and all of a sudden begins a flowing, accent-free conversation in Italian with the four (cf. ibid.: 01:49:13 ff.). The code-switching is quite abrupt. In fact, it marks a divide between two different genres: thriller conjured up by the use of German, and comedy ushered in by the use of Italian. In this scene, Tarantino refers to three major comical devices: disguise, language use and anagnorisis/recognition as we already know it from *La Grande Vadrouille*. Italian language also reminds of the *commedia dell’arte* on whose narrative conventions the scene possibly draws: the “basterds” have to play along if they don’t want to be uncovered. Just like the German language before, now, Italian is used to exert power and the one who manages this is the German officer Hans Landa. This distinguishes Tarantino’s film from that of Oury, in which most of the Germans remain dumb. Also, the different languages perform different functions. German is used to create suspense, whereas Italian is used for comedic purposes. At the same time, humor in this scene is highly ambivalent, because language choice and use make the spectator oscillate between fear and laughter. The scene is comical, undoubtedly, but simultaneously bitter, even evil. Landa, the perfect Nazi, forces the spectator to choose with whom to laugh and whether to laugh at all. If the spectator laughs, he automatically sides with Landa and approves of his cruel game. Thus, the use of different languages is not only based on aesthetic premises but also serves as a device for activating the spectator and making him or her choose their position. Again, with Hans Landa, Christoph Waltz conceives the image of a highly intelligent but ruthless German Nazi officer who unconditionally serves the regime, that is, until it is clear that he will not be on the side of the winner (cf. *Inglorious Basterds* 2009: 02:00:30 ff. and 02:24:01 ff.). He really seems to be a double of the *cattivo* in Sergio Leone’s film *Il buono, il brutto e il cattivo*,

whereas Raine might be regarded as the *brutto*.³³ To sum it up, Tarantino and Waltz don't exclusively draw on the image of an imperative and militaristic German,³⁴ and the German language is only one of many that are used by the Nazis to achieve their goals.

7 Summary

The aim of this study was to ask whether an imagological approach can help us to analyse more deeply the role of multilingualism in movies about occupied France. The imagological approach made clear that the visual stereotyping of Germans (but also of other figures) is often reinforced and doubled by their language use. The polyglottism of the three German figures of Ebrennac, Achbach and Landa seems to be one constant characteristic of Germans as they were imagined on screen during the second half of the 20th century.³⁵ But there is also some variation in this national stereotype concerning the language. Ebrennac mainly speaks French and does it on a very high level. The French language enables him to flee from the cruel reality that he witnesses in Paris while speaking German with his comrades. And as their own language also seems to be occupied by the German officer Ebrennac, the uncle and the niece are constrained to retire in a language that Ebrennac can't claim for his own: silence. Under imagological perspective, one sees the failure of a sophisticated German, one who can deal with abstract culture but not with the cruel reality. Achbach's language use is just unnatural and therefore funny. Imagologically speaking, the comedy genre reanimates, only some twenty years after World War II, the classic and comic national image of a German, who shouts loudly and speaks foreign languages with a typical harsh accent. Landa, by contrast, is more similar to Ebrennac as he is also highly proficient in a foreign

33 Seeßlen (2010: 57 f.).

34 The stereotype of this kind of German exists, but it is only one among many (cf. *Inglorious Basterds* 2009, 01:15:18 ff.).

35 Indeed, in all the discussed movies there are other German figures who master only their mother tongue, i.e. German. Nonetheless, this also serves the realistic setting of diegesis, which is their only narrative function. The polyglot speaker takes a larger part in developing the plot and therefore must speak different languages.

language. But on all occasions Landa speaks German, the narrative situation grows sinister, the language choice underscoring cold calculation and pitilessness as the main attributes of Landa. On screen, mastery of different languages is not unambiguously related to only one type of character. The polyglot Landa is an evil and dangerous character who has nothing of the romantic reveries of Ebrennac, nor does he display any kind of the hyperbolic eccentricities of Achbach, which, in the latter case, are reflected in his behaviour in general and language use in particular. To cite Bleicher once again: national stereotypes change throughout the years.³⁶

As far as the function of language in the creation of national images in works of art is concerned, it could be said that the aesthetic quality of multilingualism is not restricted to a salvation of external reality in the realm of authenticity. In these movies, multilingualism fulfills different functions. The German language can be associated with fear (Landa), or humor (Achbach), or violence (Ebrennac's German girl). Code-switching marks the transition from one genre to another and activates the spectator to join the game – but not without clarifying the role of the spectators as we saw in the example taken from *Inglorious Basterds*. Moreover, the languages themselves sometimes appear like another actor on screen, as silence does, in this case filling up the room where the main characters sit. Different languages do not only convey different national stereotypes, but also different ideas of the world.

Filmography

Le silence de la mer (1949). Dir. Jean-Pierre Melville. Gaumont.

La Grande Vadrouille (1966). Dir. Gérard Oury. Studio Canal.

Inglorious Basterds (2009). Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Universal.

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36 Cf. Bleicher (1980: 16).

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