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Julian Walker. *Words and the First World War: Language, Memory, Vocabulary.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017. 416 pp. $60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-350-00193-0.

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Julian Walker's *Words and the First World War* provides a rich account of the linguistic world that emerged from the western front during the First World War. The book convincingly demonstrates that for British and Dominion troops, language functioned as a mechanism for coping with the traumatic experiences of war, a means of dealing with separation from home, and a way of mastering and knowing new, unfamiliar environments. Language was, in other words, both a mechanism of playful creativity and emotional survival. Words could often be used to avoid the true horrors of the battlefield.

Men found a multitude of ways, for instance, to mask killing, using jokes, metaphors, simplifications, and nonsense words; those who died were "bounced off," "bumped off," or "huffed," or "copped a packet" (p. 133). Humor and puns, most often recorded in trench journals, could operate as a means of concealing the emotions men felt in the face of death and destruction. Euphemisms and avoidance mechanisms were used in letters home to reassure and protect loved ones or, indeed, at the front to protect the morale of British troops; gas, widely understood to be an "atrocious" weapon, was originally described in coded language as "the accessory," "bottles," "rogers," and "rats" (p. 87). Such linguistic inventiveness also functioned as part of a broader strategy to control the disorientating and unfamiliar environment of the front. It is well known that soldiers in all armies sought to create links with home by naming trenches after familiar places and streets. The emergence of "Trench French"—the transfer of local words and phrases into English idiom—was both a practical response to the need to communicate with locals and a playful attempt to render a confusing situation more knowable (*il n'y a plus*—there is none left—thus became "napoo" and appeared in a host of different contexts). Even the sounds of war were transcribed, with many diarists and letter writers obsessed with rendering the cacophony of the battlefield intelligible in text. The sounds of shellfire were a particular field of invention, with many ordinary memoirists preempting futurism with such descriptions as "Flash—Flash—WOMP—WOMP" or "Zzzzzzuzz—CRASH" (p. 125). All this was a result of the soldiers' deep need to communicate the traumatic experiences of war.

As Walker clearly demonstrates, this intense word play served to simultaneously join the trenches and the home front and to distinguish these two spheres. The words of the front permeated the home front, particularly through advertising. In 1916, Bovril ran a campaign using the heading "Gives Strength to Win," while Burberry began advertising the first "trench-coats" (p. 216).

Glossaries and dictionaries were published from early in the war, in an effort to allow civilians on the home front to identify with the troops and learn the language they were developing at the front. Yet, at the same time, many of the avoidance strategies described above were directed at the home front as a means of shielding families and loved ones from traumatic experiences. Words could thus communicate but also hide experience. The question of whether language did more to join or separate the front from the home front is, however, left unresolved, in part due to the book's focus. Although it purports to be a broad study of the war's impact on the English language, the book's focus is more narrowly on the military and the linguistic world of the front. Chapter 2, "Language at the Front," is by far the longest of the book's six chapters, at one hundred pages. Chapter 4, "The Home Front," is, in contrast, thirty-six pages in length and focuses, in part at least, on how soldiers perceived and described civilians, such as their derision of the elderly women, wealthy do-gooders, and "lady-visitors" who pestered them while in the hospital (p. 238).

Words and the First World War provides a highly detailed discussion of its topic, based on extensive research of soldiers' diaries, letters, postcards, published memoirs, and trench newspapers, as well as newspapers and other materials produced on the home front. It constitutes one of the most authoritative discussions of trench talk and wartime slang, and forms part of a longer tradition of lexicography stretching back to John Brophy and Eric Partridge's *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier, 1914-1918* (1930) and *The Long Trail: Soldiers' Songs and Slang, 1914-1918* (1965). Yet despite the thoroughness of the research, the book lacks a clear analytic focus. Major questions raised by the language of wartime are avoided or are dealt with in a cursory manner. The section "Sex and Gender" focuses primarily on descriptions of prostitution and the attribution of female names to weapons by soldiers, while there is little discussion of the social function of words, and in particular the languages of the wartime "moral economy." The discussion of the terms "shirker," "profiteer," and "hoarder" is descriptive but does not fully account for the powerful new meanings these words accrued in a wartime context defined by shortages and unequal sacrifice. The existing scholarly literature on language in wartime, including Walker's own fine co-edited volume (with Christophe Declercq) *Languages and the First World War* (2016) is rarely mentioned, with the notable exception of Paul Fussell's canonical work on literary language, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). A more detailed discussion of the literature in the field could have benefited both academic and nonacademic readers.

A more fundamental issue lies in Walker's seeming reluctance to draw broad conclusions from the considerable primary source material he has amassed and presented. The book finishes by stating that "the overwhelming impression is of people using language as play, a deadly game in cases of propaganda, but creative nonetheless. Seeing the subject in this light offers no simple resolution, no underlying answer; but a conflicting complexity as people tried to understand a situation that, at anything beyond the simplest level, could not be comprehended" (p. 299). The words of the First World War were confused and muddled, and the sheer depth of soldiers' linguistic inventiveness is difficult to summarize. Yet, despite this, patterns do clearly emerge from Walker's material, in particular the manner in which words offered a path to emotional survival, through both avoidance and play. By making bolder conclusions about the social and emotional function of words for soldiers and civilians, this book could have made a significant contribution to the historiography of the First World War. But despite these limitations, it still provides a comprehensive, colorful, and highly engaging exploration of how the First World War transformed the English language.

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