statusQuaestionis
language text culture

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"Nice Blighty!"
The linguistic representation of the First World War soldier in *The Trench*

Abstract

Trench talk, the slang used by British soldiers during World War One, has numerous complexities and nuances still unexplored. This article seeks to investigate the linguistic representation of this jargon in the film *The Trench* (1999). By analysing the linguistic features attributable to trench talk, the present study enquires into how these contribute to the fictional representation of the British soldier in this film. The use of trench talk in this case study fulfils different filmic functions such as "character revelation" and "adherence to the code of realism" (Kozloff, 2000).

1. *Introduction*

World War One (WWI) was a pivotal moment in modern history, and the image of a soldier lying down in the trenches is etched in the collective memory of many countries (see Fussel 1975). Men fighting in this war have been fictionally represented on screen since the time of the conflict itself, when the audiovisual industry was at its dawn. Studies such as Kelly's (1997) and Copping's (2020) addressed the topic of the First World War as a shared cultural experience, and the subsequent representation of its main protagonists – soldiers – on screen. Nevertheless, issues concerning the fictional representation of their language seem to be scarcely investigated. Various studies (Doyle and Walker 2012; Winkowski 2017; Walker 2017) strived to pinpoint the main characteristics of the historical 'slang' used by anglophone soldiers on the frontline, soldiers pertaining to the British armies (including Irish, Canadian, Indian and

troops from other parts of the Empire) and at a later point the American army. These works show the complex system of nuances and references present in this linguistic phenomenon and highlight the social and psychological context in which it emerged and took shape. Concerning audiovisual studies, several works (see Hall 1997; Kozloff 2000; Ranzato and Zanotti 2018) analysed how the representation of any linguistic variety is not passive, but possesses a transformative role which influences its perception, and ultimately the variety itself. This can be true not only for the representation of regional or social dialects *sensu stricto*, but also for other forms of register (in the sense intended by Agha 2004). The use of WWI soldiers' slang in audiovisual (AV) representations can fall under this definition.

The character of the WWI soldier has received great attention through time, and his representation is loaded with connotations, though in different ways – depending on period and ideology – as noted by Kelly (1997). A form of fictional language – deriving at least partially from historical trench talk – plays an important role in many of these depictions. Lippi-Green (2012) noted how linguistic stereotypes are reinforced by audiovisual products and media; detecting them in WWI soldiers' fictional speech can be useful to outline how collective memory registers and portrays a massive historical event such as the Great War, and how memory itself is reshaped and 'enregistered' by these representations. Ranzato and Zanotti (2018, 1) state that representation is always the result of an act of selection. This selection is usually restricted to a limited number of stereotyped characteristics to make the characters recognizable by the audience (Gross 1991).

Kozloff (2000, 47) states that "adherence to expectations concerning realism" is one of the fundamental elements of fictional dialogue. According to Kozloff, 'realism' is achieved when a text "adheres to a complex code of what a culture at a given time agrees to accept as plausible, everyday, authentic" (Ibid.). Therefore, when this study refers to 'realism', it is always intended as 'realistic for an audience'. Moreover, this sense of realism often relies on stereotypes – defined by Giddens (2006) as preconceived opinions of the members of a group towards the members of another group. In WWI soldiers' speech, this adherence to realism is given by using terms and expressions that are perceived to be historically collocated in that specific period by the audience, and therefore give a sense of plausibility to the fictional text.

> A certain amount of linguistic realism, however, is required to match viewers' expectation of spontaneity and spoken fluency, thus ensuring their suspension of disbelief and immersion in the world represented on screen [...]. Media enjoyment, in fact, is strictly bound to plausibility as audiences become immersed in the fictional representation through realistic characters and settings, but also, we may add, credible dialogues. (Pavesi et al. 2014, 10-11)

Moreover, this (perceived) linguistic precision must be kept in balance with intelligibility for the audience. This process is described by Pavesi (2009) as 'selective mimesis', where linguistic elements with culture-specific pragmatic meanings are used to recreate a sense of realism in fictional dialogues. Therefore, detecting the linguistic elements deriving from trench talk that are used in AV fictional representations and the frequency of their use can outline how big a role language plays in the reconstruction and renegotiation of WWI memory in British culture. These dynamics of cultural memory (see Erll and Rigney 2009) help the modern British cinema audience to deduce the degree of intelligibility of historical trench talk terms.

The aim of this work is to conduct a linguistic analysis of the WWI British soldier's fictional representation in the film *The Trench* (1999). Produced in Britain with the coproduction of French companies, this film was written and directed by the British author and screenwriter William Boyd, at his directing debut (BFI 2012).

The film was chosen as a case study as the plot is entirely set in the trench warfare context, providing an 'all soldiers' context and numerous instances of daily life and communication in the trenches and therefore, offers the possibility to analyse many of the characteristics attached to British WWI soldiers in audiovisual products.

By drawing on the aforementioned studies on trench slang, this article seeks to investigate how big a role language plays in the on-screen characterisation of soldiers, by detecting the use of lexical elements that are historically marked, and therefore contribute towards strengthening the sense of 'realism' of these fictional characters.

2. *Trench talk*

According to Walker, "By the end of 1914 the trench had become a clear locus of terminology" (2017, 204), a fertile ground for a 'trench slang' to develop in various aspects of their daily life in that context. This 'slang' presents a wide

variety of lexical elements, for instance names for technical roles, objects, actions, and states of health (Ibid.: 205). 'Trench talk' is an umbrella term used by some scholars (see Doyle and Walker 2012; Winkowski 2017) to designate these lexical elements of soldiers' language. The present study follows this definition.

For this analysis, trench talk will be considered as a 'register'. The term was first coined by Reid (1956), and further developed by various scholars including Agha (2004) who defines it as: "a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices." The process of how linguistic forms become part of a register, and how they are 'indexical' to the people and the characteristics associated with them (Agha 2003, 2004, 2005), is of paramount importance when observing WWI trench language. This process, called 'enregisterment', makes a set of values and behaviours, which are differentiable from other cultures, linked to a specific community and their linguistic variety (Agha 2003, 2007). In this light, what was termed 'trench society' forms the social ingroup, and trench talk is assumed to be the linguistic register in which this ingroup expresses its perspectives and values. The conscious recognition of a set of values can be shown by 'Indexicality', defined by Silverstein (2003) as the degree of relationship between a linguistic form and its socio-cultural meaning; it is divided into three orders. The first order of indexicality is created by the simple association of a linguistic form and a social category, while in the second order the linguistic form comes to have a social meaning linked to it, and a pragmatic meaning is conveyed. In these first two orders of indexicality, conscious recognition of the association by the speaker/casual listener is not required. The third order indicates the highest level of indexicality, when the linguistic form, linked to a specific social meaning or category, becomes the subject of overt and conscious comment. The association has also become more complex and has acquired additional meanings, linked to subtle aspects of the original association.[1] Even though Walker (2017) does not refer to indexicality directly, his studies show the high level of self-awareness soldiers had of their peculiar talk, together with the fact that it received great interest by the British media in the home front (Ibid.), for instance through the use of 'trench glossaries' (Ibid., see also Laugesen 2020). Therefore,

1 As stated by Joan Beal in her lecture 'Dialect literature as evidence for historical enregisterment', in the conference 'Them and [uz]-accents and dialects in fictional dialogue', 28th February 2019 - Sapienza Università di Roma.

under this point of view, trench talk has reached a third order of indexicality since almost from the beginning of the First World War, as it can be considered a register that received comment both by the ingroup (entrenched soldiers) and an outgroup (civilians at the home front in the UK), and that presented a complex system of associations and nuances.

Strictly speaking, trench talk is primarily a lexical phenomenon, and its vocabulary has heterogeneous semantic roots. Although a significant part of its terms are neologisms invented by soldiers during WWI (see Walker 2017, 47-54), others were already part of the British Army slang since the 19th century: these are mostly calques from colonized languages, such as Hindi, Urdu, and Arabic (Doyle and Walker 2012, 238-49). For instance, the iconic term 'Blighty' is a calque of *biliayati*, the Urdu word for 'foreigner (Walker 2017, 49). Furthermore, the terms of trench slang widely circulated during the conflict (Walker 2017; Walker and Doyle 2012) thanks to the existence of the aforementioned trench glossaries and dictionaries (Laugesen 2020), and trench journals such as the popular 'The Wipers Times' (Walker 2017; this journal has been recently reprinted by Osprey Publishing in 2015).

To provide a brief overview of trench talk terms and their use, a short illustrative list is here presented. The examples included are taken from the aforementioned works by Doyle and Walker (2012) and Walker (2017), and also from a dictionary of WWI slang compiled by Fraser and Gibbons (1925). The terms are divided into categories by the author to facilitate the overview:

- Calques from French (usually puns, wordplays): '*napoo*', from 'il n'y a plus' (there's no more); '*toot the sweet*', from 'tout de suite' (swiftly), and its development in '*the tooter, the sweeter*' (the faster, the better).

- Calques and loans from languages of the different British colonies (most of them entered in the army slang during the 19th century): '*blighty*', from Urdu 'bilati/biliayati' (stranger, foreigner), in trench talk with the meaning of 'England / Britain' or generally 'home'; '*cushy*' from Hindi 'kush' (comfortable); '*pukka*' (true, real).

- Terms for illnesses and health problems: '*trench fever*'; '*trench foot*' (damage by moisture); a '*blighty wound*' or a '*blighty touch*' (a non-lethal wound that allowed a soldier to go back home to receive treatment).

- Terms for weapons (names were given, for example, to various kinds of bombs and grenades, according to their shape, sound, etc...): '*whizz-bang*'; '*flaming onion*'; '*shrapnel*'; '*Wipers express*'; '*Bertha*'; '*Minnie*'.

- Persons, actions, places: '*suicide club*' (a machine-gun or bombing company, whose men had very short life expectancies); '*temporary gentlemen*' (a volunteer promoted to officer for the duration of the war); '*stand to*' (when all troops mounted the guard on the trench parapet twice a day, at dawn and at sunset); '*no-man's-land*' (the land between the two opposite trenches); '*to go over the top*' (to charge the enemy's trench, crossing no-man's-land).

- A particular category of words belonging to trench talk is made of place names, for instance towns and villages, located in the proximity of the front and that were affected by troop movements. The communication necessities were hampered by the fact that these localities had French or Flemish names, which were difficult to pronounce or read for most of the British soldiers. The solution was presented by mangling these names according to their pronunciation or their orthography, and these 'new' names eventually reached a certain level of standardisation among the British troops (Walker, 2017:99-102). The most iconic one was '*Wipers*' (Ypres), but others were present (Ibid.): '*Tee-ay-val*' (Thiepval), '*Primrose Hill*' (Przemysl), '*Mucky Farm*' (Mouquet Ferme), '*Arm In Tears*' (Armentières), '*Eatables*' (Ètaples), '*Plugstreet*' (Ploegsteert), '*Ruin*' (Rouen).

This partial list suggests the widespread use of trench talk in different semantic fields of daily life at the front – in the case of this analysis, the Western Front. Nevertheless, these scholars are at pains to underline that the *raison d'être* of trench talk should not be intended only in its practical daily use, but also in the social and psychological role it played for men in the trenches. In fact, the peculiar positional nature of this conflict created its own rules and rituals, a sort of 'trench society', very distant from civilian life and completely detached from the ordinary psychological constructs. Fussel (1975, 191), called this environment the 'Theater of War': "The most obvious reason why 'theater' and modern war seem so compatible is that modern wars are fought by conscripted armies, whose members know they are only temporarily playing

their ill-learned parts". Under a certain perspective, trench talk can be seen as the linguistic reflection of this change of context. Taking this psychological aspect into consideration is pivotal to understanding the more nuanced aspects of this slang, such as the humorous nature of a substantial part of its terms. Walker specifies how humour helped soldiers to cope with the reality of the conflict, and its paramount importance in the spontaneous creation of trench talk (2017, 102):

> Humour no doubt helped both soldiers and civilians get through, and is an essential part of the record of language; [...] The range of humour recorded is an indicator of people finding, and significantly wanting to record, an experience away from the casualty lists, the squalor and degradation of the Front, the fear, the anger and the hopelessness.

Together with humour, Walker also detects avoidances as another cornerstone of trench talk. By 'avoidances' the scholar means euphemisms and abbreviations used by soldiers to "make things a little less real by not naming them" (Ibid.: 81). Both humour and avoidances share the same function: to ease the stress caused to soldiers by trench warfare. It is arguably not by chance that these avoidances and their euphemistic substitutes are one of the most prolific aspects of trench talk. Through this operation, soldiers lightened the psychological burden evoked by certain words, or the image behind them. This process can be observed for instance by looking at the words identifying German soldiers. The concept of 'enemy' certainly embodied a tremendous emotional load, especially at the front line, where the enemy was a physical presence often at limited distance and also with uncertain lethal proximity. Trench talk coped with the situation by not calling Germans by their proper name, or even not naming them at all. Quite well-known is the creative use of pejorative names the British attached to Germans, like 'Boches', 'Huns', 'Jerries', 'Alleyman', or simply, through a process of depersonalisation, 'Them' (Walker and Doyle 2012; Walker 2017; Winkowski 2017). In addition, vulgar language should be considered an integral part of this language. Swearing, in fact, had a lightening effect, and its use was far more accepted in trenches, compared to the rigid British society of the beginning of the 20th century; various sources attest the widespread use of swear words among all the ranks in the army (Walker 2017, 113-21).

The linguistic aspects of trench talk are therefore closely related to the social and psychological environment that existed in the distinctive situation of

daily life in the trenches, and how this environment was perceived by civilians at that time. It is in the author's opinion, according to the considerations hitherto exposed, that a well-balanced analysis – which takes all these aspects into consideration – can define more precisely the importance of trench language for that specific historical period. Moreover, it can clarify how trench talk is attached to the experience of WWI, as well as to the traces left by this language on the soldiers and on the British collective memory thereafter.

3. The Trench

The Trench tells the story of a platoon composed by young men from different parts of the UK, in the forty-eight hours before the tragic beginning of the Battle of the Somme on July 1st, 1916. This was one of the fiercest moments of the war, in which almost 60,000 British soldiers were killed or wounded in the first day of the attack (Sheffield 2003, 41-69).

In this film, although a certain kind of collective experience is depicted, the plot is centred around a soldier in his teens, Billie MacFarlane (Paul Nicholls), who lies about his age in order to volunteer in the army with his elder brother. The platoon is commanded by the harsh sergeant Telford Winter (Daniel Craig), who becomes a sort of reference point for the young Billie. The film depicts the shared feelings of soldiers, and how they coped with the tension, the fear, and the boredom of being entrenched. As the title suggests, this film is entirely set in the trenches and provides a representation of a 'trench society'. It is interesting, for the purposes of this study, to see how the characters' language is represented in an 'all soldiers' context, namely, to what extent trench slang is part of this representation.

The use of linguistic elements borrowed from trench talk constitute a part of the soldier stereotypisation in this film. For example, when Billie is worried thinking about his brother, who has previously been hit by a sniper and sent to a field hospital behind the lines, another soldier tries to comfort him:

> Sorry about your brother. Think about it: that could be a stroke of luck! Nice Blighty!

He is trying to boost Billie's morale by suggesting him that his brother had a so-called 'Blighty touch' (Doyle and Walker 2012, 195-7), a non-fatal wound

that could allow him to go back home, in a safe environment far from the front line. This line is not central to the plot – the character that utters it is in fact a side character, and it can be considered a representation of a casual conversation occurring in the trench context. It could be remarked that the topic of this conversation – a wounded soldier being lucky to go home – is not uncommon in war films, regardless of the historical period represented. As pre-1999 instances of war films are copious, the influence of a pre-existing cinematographic narrative tradition cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, this additional layer of analysis is beyond the scope of this study, as it focuses on pinpointing the specifics of trench talk and its use in the audiovisual representation. As shown in this instance, the use of terms belonging to trench talk contributes to foregrounding the historical localisation and strengthens the 'adherence to the code of realism' (Kozloff 2000, 47).

In another scene, a haughty colonel – a very high and rare rank to be found on the front line – is about to give the troops an 'uplifting' speech in front of a recording camera. In this speech he focuses on the general prediction that, after days of tactical bombing, the German resistance to the attack would be minimal:

> I want to ensure you men, that after the bombardment you've seen you'll be able to go over the top with a walking stick.

'To go over the top', an idiomatic expression today, was one of the key phrases of trench talk. It means to climb over the trench parapet and attack the enemy on the other side of no-man's-land. This phrase has a symbolic import because the action of climbing over was deeply symbolic for soldiers. Fussel (1975) detected in the boundary of the trench parapet something perceived by soldiers as the end of the 'known' world, while Doyle and Walker state that going over the top "was to be a pivotal experience in the life of a Great War soldier" (2012, 183) and therefore one of the most iconic trench terms of WWI. In fact, the whole plot of *The Trench* is centred around inexperienced fellow soldiers waiting for this event, framed in the historical context of the British aggressive strategy known as 'The Big Push' (Ibid.: 227). The term is used again by sergeant Winter himself when he talks with Billie before the attack and states that "when you go over the top, you're in another world"; with the same meaning, a young soldier uses the term 'going over'.

Among the objects present in the trench context, food was not exempted from having nicknames (Walker and Doyle 2012, 144). In one scene, Winter's superior, and platoon commander Lt. Harte (Julian Rhind-Tutt) asks his aide, Pvt. Bone (Tim Murphy) to make him a sandwich:

Um…I'll have a sandwich please, Bone, and anything you like. Anything you want, except for…except the Bully Beef.

'Bully Beef' was the name troops gave to canned corned beef. Walker and Doyle (2012, 146) note how the origin of the term is obscure, but it likely came from the French term 'bouilli' ('boiled'). Fraser and Gibbons seem to confirm this etymology (1925, 30), adding that the term originated in the Navy slang. The fact that Harte refuses to eat Bully Beef could be a historical reference to its predominance in soldiers' nutrition despite its questionable quality. Harte uses another term belonging to trench talk while informing Winter about the planned attack:

Harte: Seven thirty.

Winter: Seven thirty… but that's broad daylight!

Harte: All to do with the timing of the barrage. Been the same for the past six days. Can't change it.

'Barrage' comes from French with the sense of 'barring the way' (Doyle and Walker 2012, 162), and in the army the term was used to identify a barrier created by a concentrated bombardment on the German lines, in the case of this scene seen as a strategic weakening of German defence.

As underlined in section 2, the 'creative' mangling of French names of geographical places of interest, such as towns and villages was a fertile aspect of trench talk (Walker 2017, 99). For instance, when sergeant Winter reassures Billie that his brother is safe and that he is receiving treatment at the hospital located in Étaples, this was a major nerve centre for French-British troops on the Western Front. The original French pronunciation of the town's name is [e'tapl], while sergeant Winter pronounces it with something closer to 'eatapples' [itæp:əls]. This pronunciation was testified at the time by some observers, as shown by Fraser and Gibbons (1925, 64): "Eatables (also Eat Apples): Army

vernacular for the name of the town of Etaples" [bold type in the original]. The use of this pronunciation by the character is therefore not casual, but rather historically marked. Another noteworthy example of how WWI soldiers named places is shown at the very beginning of the film, when the main protagonist Billie is presented; he asks Bone where his brother is, who replies 'Pettycoat Lane'. The habit of naming trenches with famous street names was partially ironic, but in actuality it served as a way for soldiers to orient themselves (Doyle and Walker 2012, 91). This element is also present visually in the film, as signboards indicating directions are visible in some scenes; these signboards were widely used during the war and some of them even survived the conflict and are now part of war museums (Ibid.: 92).

The words and phrases analysed so far are among the more historically marked. Nevertheless, the representation of WWI soldiers in *The Trench* presents other linguistic elements that have a connection with trench talk, namely the use of euphemisms and avoidances. In one scene Billie is about to stand night guard with a comrade. His curiosity brings him to peep through the trench loophole, only to be immediately stopped by sergeant Winter. The dialogue is reported in its entirety:

Winter: Oi, MacFarlane! Keep your head down. [pause] Right, you two, listen. No smokin'… no sleepin'.

MacFarlane: Sarge? Uhm… How far off are they, like? 'Cos I can't see anything from up there.

Winter: About 400 yards. But they'll be watching you, my friend. Last lot here had nine picked off.

MacFarlane: Picked off?

Winter: Snipers. Why do you think they dug these trenches so fucking deep? They'll have a sniper rifle fixed on that loophole. Every time they see it move, they'll just loose off a shot. Listening's more important. So, don't play silly buggers.

MacFarlane: Alright, sarge.

Winter: You got jocks to the left of you… micks to the right. That's all you need to know for now.

MacFarlane: Sarge? When's uhm… when's the attack, like?

Winter: I'll let you know in plenty of time. [pause] Billy… put one up.

Firstly, it is possible to observe the presence of euphemisms. As previously said, the use of avoidances was one of the main characteristics of trench talk. Walker (2017, 133) points out how this aspect largely occurred when the topic related to being killed (or about death in general) and that different ways to speak of death in an indirect, depersonalized way were used by soldiers. In the scene currently analysed, the phrasal verb 'picked off' is used instead of 'getting killed', and it is so vague for Billie, not accustomed to this language, that he is forced to ask his superior about its meaning. His sergeant only replies with the word 'snipers', which could be considered another avoidance, as the answer is related to the question in an oblique way. Lastly, at the end of the scene, Winter suggests Billie to 'put one up', meaning to keep his rifle loaded. In addition, the phrasal verb 'loose off', meaning 'to shoot a bullet', can be considered a euphemism, and part of trench slang. Other euphemistic terms are used throughout the whole film, for instance verb phrases like 'to cop it' or 'to get it', both relating to getting hit by a bullet. These terms were frequently used by WWI soldiers (Ibid.).

Moving to other elements of soldiers' speech, vulgarity and offensive words played a key role in trench talk. Its use, as previously said, was part of the everyday language at the front, among soldiers of every rank, or geographical and social origins (Walker 2017, 113). An instance of bad speech can be retrieved in the scene analysed, where sergeant Winter asks Billie why he thinks 'they dug these trenches so fuckin' deep'. The use of the term 'silly buggers' fits in a similar way the characterisation. Furthermore, he uses the terms 'micks' and 'jocks' to define Irish and Scottish comrades respectively. The terms are pejoratives, but in this case, they are used to linguistically emphasize the stereotype of team spirit among men. The character of sergeant Winter seems to be accustomed to using vulgar speech, especially when he talks to his subordinates, for instance in a scene where the so-called 'stand to' is represented. Doyle and Walker define 'stand to' as standing on the defensive, armed ready and waiting for an attack. Moreover as "those attacks most commonly came at dawn or dusk, in the trenches, Stand to also came to be associated with these respective times" (2012, 140).

Sergeant Winter wakes up the soldiers at dawn, kicking them and yelling the order to Stand to; he uses some ironic language ("wakey-wakey!") and

calls them "dirty smelly bastards", though the soldiers do not seem to care. His physical presence, steadfastness and rudeness fit the image of the experienced veteran; in fact, he is the only professional soldier in his platoon. The substantial use of swearing in his idiolect contributes to strengthening this stereotype.

The soldiers under Winter's command are not less accustomed than their sergeant to the use of vulgarity, which is shown for instance in a scene where two Irish soldiers, Ambrose (Ciarán McMenamin) and Rookwood (Cillian Murphy), are telling the other men how they survived an attack to their former platoon:

Soldier: No, but what actually happened?

Ambrose: Well… They were marching us over this hill, right? About… fuck, about a mile behind the lines, eh? That right, Rag?

Rookwood: That's right, yeah. About a mile. You could actually see the German lines. We were just… walking along, chatting like. Next thing…

Ambrose: Bang, out of the blue. Boys start screaming, falling over, dying.

Soldier: Jesus wept…

Rookwood: couldn't hear a fucking sound. Bullets just whizzing by.

Ambrose: Boys just… screaming, running everywhere.

MacFarlane: And what was it?

Ambrose: Jerry. Fuckers seen us marching over the hill. Put a Machine gun at high elevation. [makes the gesture of a shell falling] Good night.

Rookwood: Over a mile away, that's why we couldn't hear the shots.

Dell: Fuck me…. What d'you do?

Ambrose: Me and Rag here just ran like hell, isn't that right?

Rookwood: We were lucky. A lot of boys got it that day. Fucking lot of boys.

Ambrose: We were fucking lucky.

Firstly, two terms from trench talk are used. One is 'Jerry', which is a pejorative term used by Britons to name German soldiers (see section 2); while the other one is the verb 'whizzing', an onomatopoeia describing the sound of a stray bullet, as in the synonym word 'whizz-bang' (Doyle and Walker 2012, 167-8). Nevertheless, it is the recurrence of the word 'fuck' with some variations ('fucking', 'fuckers') that constitutes the most linguistically marked element of soldiers' slang in this dialogue. As exemplified by a letter written to *The Athenaeum* in 1919, the word 'fuck' came to be a symbol of the soldier's identity, even though beyond the trenches it was often referred to in hidden terms (*The Athenaeum*, 1st August 1919, p. 695; in Walker 2017, 114):

> But, as you know probably, the one word that won the war was the well-known obscenity containing four letters. From generals downwards everyone used it, and everyone was comforted by saying it. No dialogue pretending to represent military conversation ever rings quite true because this essential word is omitted. Of course, in public writings it can't be very well referred to, but only those who have soldiered out here realized what a companion in adversity that little word has been. (CLAUDE SISLEY, 2nd Lt.)

Swear words, especially the words 'fuck / fucking', were so common in the trenches that they came to have a performative power (as intended by Austin 1962), to the point that "when you were ordered to 'get your fucking rifles' this was considerably less urgent than the order to 'get your rifles'" (Doyle and Walker 2012, 158). It is arguably a case that the scenes in which trench language is mostly used are the ones in which a representation of daily activities is sketched.

Even though the use of humour, euphemisms, and bad speech may appear less marked compared to the use of words and terms historically unique to the trench context – for instance mangled French names – this study has shown that, to a certain extent, their use was considered integral part of trench talk. It is possible to infer that the presence of these terms in the screenplay has the specific purpose of strengthening the sense of realism for the audience, and that they are equally part of a possible linguistic stereotype attached to the figure of the British WWI soldier. Nevertheless, knowledge of historical trench talk is required to fully understand their marked nature.

5. *Conclusions*

Many studies have been carried out on how linguistic elements contribute to the representation of social stereotypes in audiovisual products. This article has sought to contribute to this area of study by analysing the role of language in the reconstruction of the WWI soldier as a fictional character. The war slang that developed in trenches during WWI, primarily of a lexical nature and called trench talk by some scholars, is an important linguistic aspect in the AV characterisation of the WWI soldier, as shown in *The Trench*. This film presents a plot where all the characters are soldiers located in the context of trench warfare, and thus provides numerous elements that are useful to the analysis of WWI soldiers' language in fictional representation. Many of the most specific terms are used to give a stronger 'flavour' of the trench context to the audience. Nevertheless, it seems they appear more sparingly compared to other marked elements – probably for the sake of intelligibility – and are part of the process that Pavesi (2009) calls 'selective mimesis'. Other elements of trench talk, such as avoidances and euphemisms, contribute to the representation of the psychological environment of tension and fear experienced by soldiers. Even though the meaning of these expressions can be inferred without knowledge of trench talk, this knowledge becomes necessary when a linguistic analysis is undertaken to fully grasp their historical markedness. Similarly, while the extensive use of certain offensive and vulgar speech can serve what Kozloff (2000) calls the function of 'character revelation' – for instance in the case of sergeant Winter's idiolect – it also reinforces the function of 'adherence to the code of realism', as it is a use of language that fits the stereotype associated with the historical context which is being represented. In any case, the use of trench talk in fictional dialogue tends to bring the audience closer to a perception of reality, what Guillot (2012, 106) defines as "fabricated discourse and make-believe speech". As some of the linguistic elements of trench talk entered common use after the war (Walker 2017; see also Wilson 2015), anglophone audiences can arguably detect the connotation and link it to WWI.

In conclusion, it should be borne in mind that representation is an act of simplification, and fictional representation is not to be considered completely faithful to real life experience, particularly when an intense historical event such as the Great War is taken into consideration. In other words, fictional representation of soldiers' language and historical – 'real' – trench talk can-

not be considered as two perfectly overlapping lexical fields. Research must be conducted on this topic to better outline this difference. Moreover, through the study of their fictional language, future research can allow to delve deeper into the AV characterisation of WWI soldiers, and possibly outline the stereotype(s) which have inspired these characterisations.

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