

# German at Leeds – Then and Now

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## Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, language teaching can provide an individual with their first impression of another culture. Thus, the power of language teaching is immense. It can fight prejudices, stereotypes and misconceptions. The answer to a world without xenophobia: we need to decolonize language teaching. This research project concerns the history of the German department at the University of Leeds and informs a wider discussion regarding the decolonisation of our curriculum and how universities deal with international crises. The project addresses how German language teaching and learning has been affected by significant world crises of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, such as WWI and WWII, and how these are reflected in the project's case study, the University of Leeds Furthermore, it analyses the perceptions of different languages cultivated within the British education system and how this has cultivated an image of the German language within Britain that serves a political function. This project is founded upon the principle that it is imperative to analyse how images of other cultures are constructed, and what purpose they serve for the country perpetuating such ideas.

**The German Army is Responsible for Crimes which it did not Check.**



Figure 1: Postcard 'Souvenir of the European War 1914' depicting the strangulation of a German soldier by France, Russia, Japan and England, demonstrating the widespread anti-German sentiment from the earliest stages of WWI. Reproduced with the permission of Special Collections, Leeds University Library, Liddle Collection, LIDDLE/WW1/POW/068.



Figure 2: The Michael Sadler Building. Reproduced with the permission of Special Collections, Leeds University Library, Item, Arts Block/New Arts Block, LUA/PHC/003/5.

**The Taking and Murder of Hostages.**

**Murder in the Villages.**

Figure 3: Excerpts of the war pamphlet 'The Truth about German Atrocities' published in 1915 by the Parliamentary Recruitment Committee, illustrating anti German headlines. Reproduced with the permission of Special Collections, Leeds University Library, Liddle Collection, War Pamphlets 1914/18/TRU.

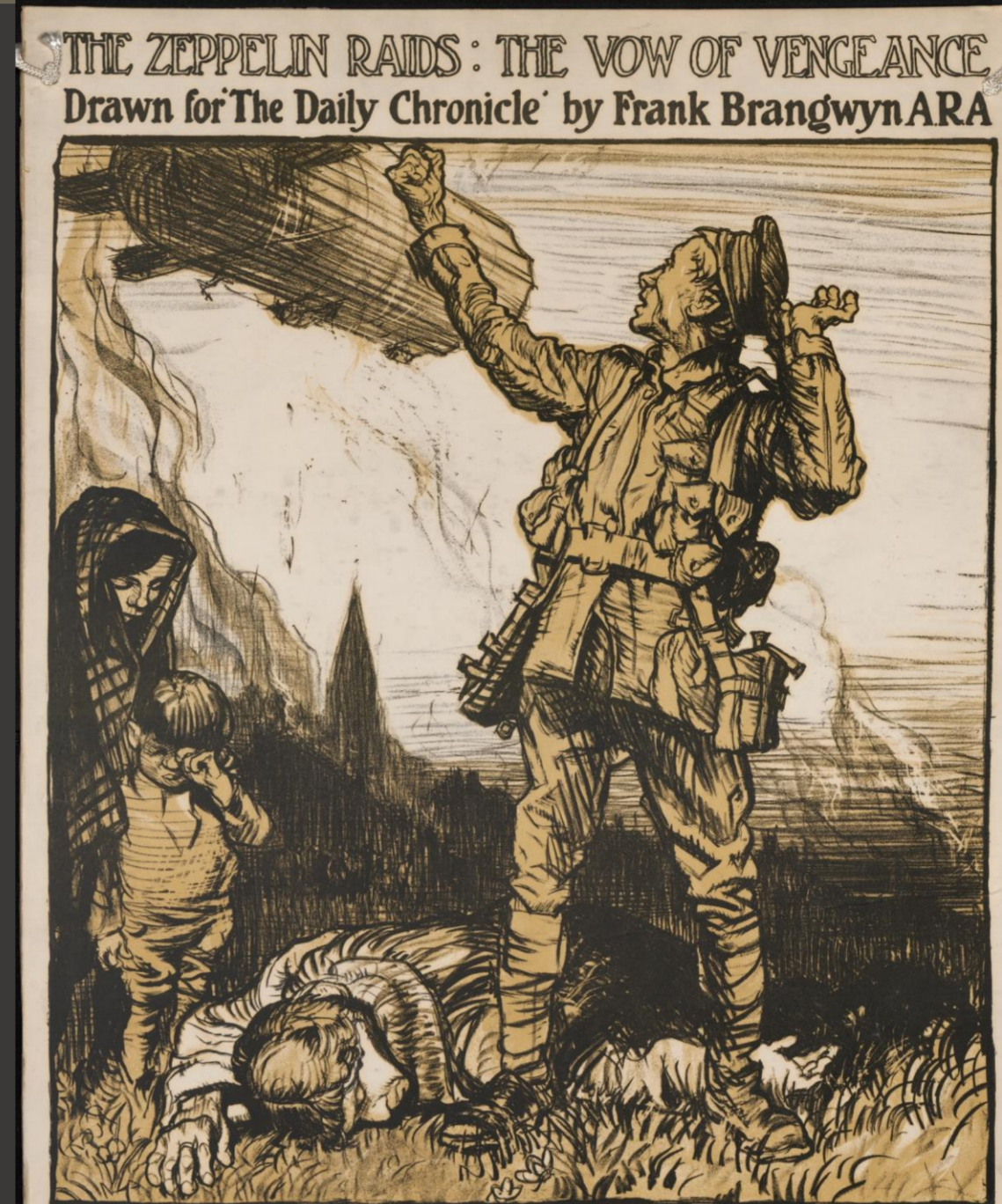


Figure 4: 'The Zeppelin Raids: the Vow of Vengeance' anti-German propaganda poster drawn by Frank Brangwyn for the *Daily Chronicle*, printed by The Avenue Press Ltd. In 1915. Reproduced with the permission of Special Collections, Leeds University Library, Liddle Collection, LIDDLE/MUS/AW/31.



Figure 5: 'The Empire Needs Men', parliamentary recruiting committee poster no. 58 printed by Straker Bros. London in 1915, artist Arith Wardle, illustrating the glorification of Empire during WWI. Reproduced with the permission of Special Collections, Leeds University Library, Liddle Collection, LIDDLE/MUS/AW/80.

## Aims

- To develop understanding of how German teaching and learning within Britain has changed over time
- To gain an understanding of how universities deal with international crises
- To emphasise the role of language teaching and learning within the decolonisation of the British curriculum

## Methods

This project has been supported by archival material from the University of Leeds. At the core of the project stand two archival collections, the Liddle Collection and the Department of German collection, which have been analysed in dialogue to develop an understanding of how German language teaching and learning has been politicised by changing relations between Britain and Germany throughout history.

## Results

The portrayal of Germany and the German language within British education has been constructed by changing international relations between Britain and Germany across the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to perform a political function. This is most notable during WWI and WWII in which the pedagogy, curriculum and examination of German Studies at the University of Leeds was transformed to to promote anti-German sentiment. The portrayal of the German language and its decreasing popularity among students within the UK demonstrates how economic jealousies and tensions between the two countries have engrained biases within the British education system that we continue to use to inform students of the wider world. Moreover, the project demonstrates that universities have never existed within a vacuum isolated from current affairs and global tensions, but rather should be perceived to engage with a wider dialogue regarding international crises.

## Moving Forward: Next Steps

This project will be used to inform a wider discussion regarding how we can address engrained biases towards other cultures that continue to be perpetuated within the British education system at undergraduate level. Workshops with students will continue to encourage students to be critical of the presentation of other cultures within language teaching and language learning in order to avoid the proliferation of prejudice and discrimination. Additionally, the striking correlation between moments of international tension and changes to the pedagogy of German language learning and teaching at the University of Leeds will contribute to a wider discussion of how universities can meaningfully engage with international crises without falling victim to politicised images of other cultures intended to mobilise public opinion.



Figure 6: Photograph from the University Archive of the University of Leeds depicting the forefront of Parkinson Building. Reproduced with the permission of Special Collections, Leeds University Library, University of Leeds Archive Collection, LUA/PHC/003/5.