

The afterlife of an infamous gaffe: Wilhelm II's 'Hun speech' of 1900 and the anti-German *Hun* stereotype during World War 1 in British and German popular memory

Andreas Musolff, University of East Anglia

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Abstract

Kaiser Wilhelm II's speech to a German contingent of the international expedition corps, sent to quell the so-called 'Boxer Rebellion' in 1900, is today remembered chiefly as an example of his penchant for boastful, sabre-rattling rhetoric that included a strange comparison of his soldiers with the 'Huns under Attila'. According to some accounts, this comparison was the source for stigmatizing label *Hun(s)* for Germans in British and US war propaganda in WW1 and WW2, which has survived in popular memory and continues to be used, though mainly in ironical senses, by British and German media to this day. This paper charts the history of the *Germans-as-Huns* analogy and argues firstly that the usage data make any 'model' function of Wilhelm's speech for the post-1914 uses highly improbable. Furthermore, present-day uses presuppose an awareness of the WW1 and WW2 meaning on the part of readers, which serves as a platform for echoic allusions. In the British media these allusions often lead to the ironical (including self-ironical) subversion of preceding uses, while in the German public they focus more on historical commemoration and comparison.

Key-words

- analogy
- discourse history
- dysphemism
- echoic use
- Germanism
- Hun
- irony
- war commemoration

1. Introduction: political Germanisms in English

Anyone familiar with popular debates about language in Germany will be aware of campaigns against the supposed ‘Anglicisation’ of German, which reached a first climax more than a century ago with H. Dunger’s polemic, ‘Against the Anglicisation of the German language’, and have continued to this day (Dunger 1989, for present-day examples of anti-English linguistic purism that reiterate Dunger’s warnings, see Keck (n.d.); Schreiber 2006; Sick 2004; Zabel 2001; for linguistic assessment and critique of such campaigns see Kreuz 2014, Niehr 2002 and Pfalzgraf 2011). There is no similarly important movement or tradition in Britain; Germanisms in English are recorded in dictionaries of foreign expressions but are hardly seen as a ‘threat’ to the English language (Ayto 1991; Speake 2005; for scholarly analyses see Ehlert 2013; Eichhoff 2002). For some time after World War II, parts of the political and military vocabulary of the “Third Reich”, such as *Anschluss*, *Blitzkrieg*, *Führer*, *Gauleiter*, *GESTAPO*, *Herrenvolk*, *Panzer*, ‘*Sieg Heil*’, entered the lexis of popular history in English and were used in pseudo-historical analogies, such as the defamation of the Social Democratic/Green government in the late 1990s as the “Gauleiters of Europe” by the *Daily Mail* (27 November 1998). By now, many have ‘faded’ out of British English lexis or are indexed as historical terms (for an excellent overview over these developments, which also raises central methodological issues, see Schröter and Leuschner 2013).

Even less has remained of World War 1-related Germanisms, except perhaps the ‘rigid denominator’ function that the phrase *the Kaiser* has taken on as a unique reference to Emperor Wilhelm II (*SOED*, 1, 1477; Thier 2013, 3), whose reign was finished at the end of that war. What has also remained in use is a discourse-historical

memory of the nickname *Hun(s)* for Germans, which became popular in World War 1 alongside *kraut*, *fritz*, *boche* (Green 1996, 307-310). In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of WW1, the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph*, for instance, gave several explanations for the origin of the *Hun* epithet. One article focused on the war crimes committed by German armies in their initial attack on Belgium, which had “[helped] persuade millions that Germany had descended from being a nation of high culture to one capable of barbarism akin to Attila the Hun” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2014a). In another *Telegraph* article, the same editor, B. Waterfield, pointed out that in a “notorious speech” from 14 years before, Emperor Wilhelm II had “bidden farewell to German soldiers sailing to China to put down the Boxer Uprising - and urged them to be ruthless, and to take no prisoners”, just as the “Huns had made a name for themselves a thousand years before”. Waterfield also mentioned Rudyard Kipling’s poem “For All We Have and Are”, published on 2 September 1914, which begins with the verse, “For all we have and are; For all our children’s fate; Stand up and meet the war. The Hun is at the gate!” (Kipling 1994, 341-342). The *Telegraph* journalist credits the poem with having made the epithet *Hun* “stick” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2014b).

We thus have a multiple motivation for the emergence of the term *Hun* as a nickname for Germans: Wilhelm II’s speech of 1900, the atrocities of the German invasion of Belgium in 1914 and Kipling’s war poem from the same year. Obviously the Kaiser’s speech preceded the outbreak of WW1 and can be seen as a potential ‘precedent’ for later usage of the term *Huns*; however, the sheer chronological pre-occurrence of a particular lexical usage does not necessarily make its object a model for later uses. Even from the brief account of its occurrence in Wilhelm II’s speech in the *Daily Telegraph* article, it is evident that the Kaiser had employed the reference to the

ancient Huns by way of praise for his soldiers' bravery. It is therefore not at all self-evident that his speech could have served as a model for the subsequent derogatory use by British (and later also US) media.

New uses of *Hun*, although not highly frequent, can be found up to the present day, often in contexts where anti-German stereotypes are criticized or ridiculed. In a bilingual English-German research corpus (70.000 lexical tokens) we have recorded 31 uses of this term between 1995 and 2016 (16 in the British, 15 in the German press sample). Some topical contexts, such as football contests, seem to lend themselves to media comments that ironically reference the *Hun*-stigma. In the run-up to the 2014 Football World Championship, for instance, the *Guardian* magazine (31 May 2014) presented the 1990 match against West Germany as an event "in which the beastly Hun went ahead from a deflected free kick", and in 2010 the *Daily Star* praised the "feel-good" World Championship that took place in Germany with the statement "Ze Hun are big on fun!" (quoted in *The Guardian*, 25 June 2010). In such cases, an awareness of the historical usage of *Hun* as a stigmatizing nickname for Germans is presupposed in order for its new usage to signal a ridiculing stance towards such anti-German attitudes.

Should the historical *Hun* stigma for Germans perhaps then be regarded as a case of 'loan translation' from the Kaiser's speech, which went horribly wrong? In which sense can it be said to be part of today's public discourse in Britain and Germany? In order to answer these questions, the following sections reconstruct the conceptual and discursive development of the *German-Hun*-analogy from its apparent beginnings in 1900 to contemporary uses in their pragmatic-historical contexts. Our main hypothesis is that the present-day uses can be interpreted as referencing the WW1/2 meaning

(and its alleged connection to the Kaiser's 1900 speech) as a historical index of the term in order to achieve an "echoic", i.e. ironical, effect.

2. The Kaiser's speech

As retold in several accounts of how the British *Hun* nickname for Germans allegedly originated (Ayto 2006, 43; *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* 1999, 596; Green 1996, 308; Forsyth 2011, 78; Hughes 2006, 243-244; *OED*, 1989, vol. 7, 489), the German Emperor Wilhelm II addressed a contingent of troops embarking in Bremerhaven to join the (mainly Western) Great Powers' invasion of China to quell the so-called "Boxer rebellion" on 27 July 1900 (as one of several such "rousing" farewell speeches). Deviating from the prepared text as he liked to do, the Kaiser exhorted the soldiers to behave 'like the Huns' in order to win historic glory (Klein 2013, 164):

Kommt Ihr vor den Feind, so wird er geschlagen, Pardon wird nicht gegeben; Gefangene nicht gemacht. Wer Euch in die Hände fällt, sei in Eurer Hand. Wie vor tausend Jahren die Hunnen unter ihrem König Etzel sich einen Namen gemacht, der sie noch jetzt in der Überlieferung gewaltig erscheinen lässt, so möge der Name Deutschland in China in einer solchen Weise bekannt werden, dass niemals wieder ein Chinese es wagt, etwa einen Deutschen auch nur scheel anzusehen.

To the dismay of his Foreign Secretary, Bernhard von Bülow, who tried to impose a ban on the spontaneous version, the passage was published by a local newspaper, the *Weser-Zeitung*, on 29 July (Bülow 1930-31, 359-360; MacDonogh, 2000, 244-245). The next day, *The Times* published a slightly shortened but overall faithful translation into English (quoted after *OED* 1989, vol. 7, 489):

No quarter will be given, no prisoners will be taken; Let all who fall into your hands be at your mercy. Just as the Huns a thousand years ago under the leadership of Etzel [= ancient German name of ‘Attila the Hun’] gained a reputation in virtue of which they still live in historical tradition, so may the name of Germany become known in such a manner in China that no Chinaman will ever dare to look askance at a German.

In either language version, the Emperor’s bellicose appeal triggered strong reactions in Germany and abroad, which varied depending on political attitudes towards the Empire’s colonial projects. Within imperial Germany, the discrepancy between the official text and its actual delivery as reported by the *Weser-Zeitung* led to attempts by the government (and by sympathisers of Imperial German rule to this day, see e.g. www.deutsche-schutzgebiete.de 2015) to pretend – against witnesses’ evidence – that the Kaiser’s speech had not been not belligerent overall and had not in fact contained the above-quoted passage, or only in a much ‘softer’ form (Behnen 1977, 244-247; Klein 2013; Matthes 1976, Söseman 1976).

Wilhelm’s grotesque reference to the Huns’ historical “reputation” came to haunt his government emphatically when, in the autumn of 1900, media reports about atrocities against the Chinese population in German-controlled areas and in the ‘punishment

expeditions', which were based on German soldiers' letters and testimonies. Some of the letters were cited by opposition leaders in the *Reichstag* parliament and, in an obvious allusion to Wilhelm's 'Hun speech', they were nicknamed 'Hun letters' (*Hunnenbriefe*) by the Social Democrats' press (*Vorwärts* 1900a, b). In his official response, the War Minister, H. von Goßler, issued a blunt denial; however, even he conceded that "His Majesty's speech might have been open to misunderstandings", not least through establishing the reference to the "Huns" (Ladendorf 1906, 124, for the context of the *Reichstag* debate see Wielandt 2007; Wünsche 2008).

Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that Wilhelm II had intended the original *Hun*-comparison to be an encouragement for his soldiers to be brave, not an order to commit atrocities. After all, the Chinese were, as he made clear in the Bremerhaven speech just before the *Hun*-passage, a "heathen culture" that had "broken down" because "it was not built on Christianity" (Klein 2013, 164). In a previous speech to another army contingent embarking in Wilhelmshaven, he explicitly stated the causes that the German troops were supposed to be fighting for – together with Russians, Englishmen and Frenchmen – namely "civilisation" and the "higher" good of the Christian religion (Behnen 1977, 245). The fight was for him one between Christian civilisation and an enemy that had committed excessively "cruel" crimes "not seen before in world history" (Klein 2013, 164; Behnen 1977, 244, 246). It would have therefore been a complete self-contradiction for Wilhelm to appeal to his soldiers, allegedly representing higher Christian civilisation, to behave barbarically; in fact it would have run against the whole line of colonialist argumentation in Western countries and especially in Germany, which tried to legitimise imperialist aggression as an enterprise to 'civilise' and 'cultivate' allegedly backward, barbaric nations (Klein 2006; Said 2003).

Even Wilhelm's positive reference to the Huns, which to present-day readers sounds idiosyncratic, was in fact in line with their popular image in 19th century Germany as a famous ancient, warlike Asiatic people who had challenged the Roman Empire and were remembered for their braveness and ferocity (see, e.g. Brockhaus 1838, vol. 2, 427). Wilhelm's use of the German literary name *Etzel* for the most famous Hun leader, *Attila*, which originates from the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, further underlines the fact that he was not engaging in a detailed historical comparison in his Bremerhaven speech. Rather, he alluded to a popular stereotype of a famous warrior-king to exhort 'his' soldiers to establish a reputation of Germany as a warrior-nation that was afraid of nobody. He was calling on them to prove themselves equally warlike and brave; this would then guarantee them an honourable mention in the history books and scare off potential enemies in future (Wengeler 2005, 226).

Whilst Wilhelm's sabre-rattling appeal and pseudo-historical analogy may have been an embarrassment to his ministers, there was little disagreement between them and the Kaiser concerning general geo-political perspectives and, specifically, Colonial policy. Members of the German Imperial elite who cringed at the *Germans-as-Huns* comparison such as Foreign Secretary, Bernhard von Bülow, who was to become Imperial Chancellor a few months after the Bremerhaven speech, agreed with the Kaiser that Germany should take its rightful place 'under the sun' and join other world powers in the race for colonies (Bülow 1977, 166). The Kaiser's bullish threats and grand historical analogies expressed aptly, if crudely, his and his government's ambitions for global expansion. It should also be borne in mind that the Bremerhaven speech was by no means the worst rhetorical blunder produced by "William the Impetuous" (MacDonogh 2000); in fact, it was one instance in a long series. Its political significance and fall-out was dwarfed by other gaffes, such as the infamous

Daily Telegraph interview of 1908, which led to national and international protests and the downfall of Bülow's government in the following year (Röhl 2014, 662-695; for materials see Behnen 1977, 412-419)

3. The decline and disappearance of an analogy

In Britain, Imperial German ambitions in China were observed with keen interest and some concern regarding competition with the British Empire's own global interests. The Kaiser's speech was translated and publicised, but it does not appear to have created much of a stir: imperial sabre-rattling by European heads of state was not a particularly contentious issue in itself for the ruling elites (Hevia 2003; Hopkirk 1992, 506-526; Klein 2013; MacDonogh 2000: 244-245; Röhl 2014, 80-84). The Social Democratic 'Hun-letter' campaign was reported and viewed as an embarrassment for the Kaiser's government (*Daily News*, 20 November 1900; *The Times*, 21 November 1900) but not treated as an example of 'typically German' barbaric behaviour.

The only British publicist who used to refer to Germany as *the Hun* before WW1 seems to have been R. Kipling, who as early as 1902 warned against the British Empire leaguening "[w]ith the Goth and the Shameless Hun" in the poem *The Rowers*, occasioned by a proposal that Britain should help Germany in a show of naval power against Venezuela (Kipling 1994, 293-294; Karlin, 2007, 65-66; Kingsbury 2010, 236-237). Together with *Goth* and *Vandal*, *Hun* had been available in 19th century English usage for designating "an uncultured devastator" or anyone "of brutal conduct or character" (*OED* 1989, 489; Green 1996, 307; Radford and Smith 1989, 264), in line with a "manifest Orientalism" that decried all Eastern nations as "degenerate,

uncivilized and retarded” (Said 2003, 206-207). According to Hawes (2014, 130), the newspaper *The Standard* (9 November 1870) had criticised the siege of Paris during the Franco-German war of 1870-71 as leading to “deeds that would have shamed the Huns”, which laid an explicit link between modern Prussian-German warfare and the ancient Huns, but still treated the latter mainly as a general historical reference (and, ironically, compared the ancient Huns favourably to the German ‘modern barbarians’).

Unlike the historic tribe/nation names *Goths* and *Vandals*, which had first been used to refer to ancient Germanic populations that could be construed as ‘forefathers’ of the modern-day Germans, the reference *Huns* could not be based on any cultural or ethnic continuity. Kipling’s 1902 use of *the Hun* as a negative reference to Germany in the *Rowers* is thus remarkable for being German-specific. It is plausible to assume that Kipling, whose views on Germany had become increasingly hostile since the Boer war (in which the German public had supported the Boers), deliberately used the *Hun* reference as an allusion to the ferocity of the ancient Asian invaders of Europe (especially under their 5th century leader Attila, whom ancient chroniclers dubbed ‘the scourge of God’) in order to slight Imperial Germany.

In terms of etymology, both modern English *Huns* and German *Hunnen* can be traced to 3rd-5th century Latin and Greek names for the Asian invaders of the East and West Roman empires, i.e. *hunni* and *hunnoi*, which in turn derived from the ancient Turkic name *Hun-yü*, possibly connected to Chinese *Hiong-nu* (De la Cruz-Cabanillas 2008, 257; Dudenredaktion 2014, 394; Kluge 1995, 388; OED 1989, vol. 7, 489). The entry of this ethnonym into German and English lexis dates back to the early Middle Ages (Kluge 1995, 388; OED 1989, vol. 7, 489). For more than a thousand years, German

and English have thus shared cognates of the Latin ethnonym *hunni* that referred to the ancient Asian peoples.

From a discourse-historical perspective (Wodak 2009, Schröter and Leuschner 2013), the English and German speech communities also seem to have shared (up until WW1) the derogatory application of the term *Hun* to other nations. In the same year when Kipling published *The Rowers*, a German author, W. Vallentin, brought out an anti-British brochure entitled ‘Huns in South Africa: Comments on British politics and war-conduct’ (*Hunnen in Südafrika. Betrachtungen über englische Politik und Kriegsführung*), which exposed “barbaric” war-crimes, allegedly committed by British forces in the Second Boer-war (1899-1902) (Vallentin 1902). And at the beginning of WW1, German newspapers reporting on the Russian invasion of East Prussia, depicted Russian soldiers as *Hunnish* war criminals (Schramm 2007, 420). These examples show that in both German and English, *Hun*-comparisons suggested an inferior, barbaric and degenerate status of its referent vis-à-vis the more highly valued national/cultural Self, regardless of whether the latter was a British, German, European or Western “imagined community” (Anderson 2006) but with a distinct Orientalist bias. Viewed against this background, Wilhelm II’s *Germans-as-Huns* analogy to praise and inspire his own soldiers was eccentric. While everyone else was employing *Hun* to stigmatize a collective ‘Other’ as barbaric, Wilhelm focused on the Huns’ supposed heroic reputation to encourage his soldiers.

To employ such an analogy in the context of an already ethically problematic appeal, i.e. to engage in a fight where no prisoners would be taken (‘no quarter’), as Wilhelm did, invited adverse interpretations that read an encouragement to commit atrocities into his appeal to the soldiers to be brave. The German opposition’s ‘Hun-letter’ campaign and Kipling’s 1902 poem illustrate this early counter-interpretation. It is

thus highly implausible – though not impossible – that the Kaiser’s positive *Germans-as-Huns* analogy served as model for derogatory British uses of that analogy. There is, however, so far no evidence from the period leading up to World War I, or indeed during the war, of explicit British quotations of or allusions to Wilhelm’s speech that reinterpreted his analogy to criticize him or that explicitly turned it against him. In the absence of any such explicit quotative links, the above-cited sources indicate that the pre-WW1 meaning of the term *Hun* in English (as in German) implied, in addition to its historical reference to the ancient “Huns”, a denunciation of any topical targets as ‘barbaric’, ‘brutal’ etc., as it did in Kipling’s poems. It was therefore most probably this general pejorative meaning, which is attested throughout the 19th century, rather than Wilhelm II’s idiosyncratic Bremerhaven speech, that provided the basis for its British and US post-1914 uses.

Significantly and in marked contrast to Wilhelm’s *Germans-as-Huns*-analogy, British World War I references to Germans as *Huns* de-historicized the comparison, so that the reference to the ancient ‘barbarians’ was backgrounded and the German war enemy became the dominant or exclusive *Hun*-referent. At the start of the war, the historical comparison of modern Germans to the ancient Huns was first relativized by reversing its pejorative bias, in a similar way as the one we already observed in the commentary on the Franco-German war 1870/71 quoted above (“deeds that would have shamed the Huns”). Barely one month into WW1, the *Birmingham Post* (31 August 1914), attested “infamy greater than the fiery Hun” to the Germans, and the *Daily Express* (13 January 1915) deemed any comparison to Wilhelm an “Insult to Attila” (Schramm 2007, 420), on account of the brutality of the German onslaught on Belgium, especially the destruction of the historic city centre of Leuven/Louvain, including the famous university library, and mass executions of Belgian civilians as

reprisals for alleged partisan warfare. Kipling's poem "For All We Have and Are", which was published a few days later, required the British Nation-'Self' to oppose and vanquish the German enemy-Other as a "crazed and driven foe" (Kipling 1994, 342), to popular acclaim (Karlin 2007, 64-69; Matin 1999). The topical, barbarian "Huns" were now the contemporary Germans, not the half-forgotten invaders from the Dark Ages.

Such voices drowned out the few British newspapers which, like the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Herald*, warned against demonizing the Germans in July-August 1914 (Schramm 2007, 420-422). During the months and years following the outbreak of the war, the denunciatory characterization of *Germans-as-Huns* was repeated and seemingly backed up by further atrocity reports from Belgium and France and, later, by the U-boat and Zeppelin warfare or the execution of the British nurse Edith Cavell (Bryce 1915; Pickles 2007; Wilson 1979; Zuckerman 2004). In 1917 it featured in a particularly fanciful account – what we would call today "fake-news" –, i.e. the report about a supposed "corpse-factory" of the German army that recycled human remains: its German organisers featured as the "Hun body-boilers" in *Times* and *Daily Mail* articles from April 1917 (quoted in Neander and Marlin 2010: 72; for exposure of the news as fake see *ibid.*, 70-76).

By the end of the war, stigmatization of Germany as *the Hun* (without any positive or negative historical reference to the ancient Huns) had become firmly entrenched in the British national and imperial public as well as in the US public (as part of the propagandistic effort to prepare America's entry into the war). Government appeals, print media, posters and films depicted the German *Hun* as a destroyer of homes and families, a rapist and murderer with blood-stained hands, surrounded by ruins and raped or murdered women and children (Cull, Culbert and Welch 2001, 25; Hölbling

2007; Leab 2007; Messinger 1992, 70-84, 137-139; Musolff 2015; Sanders and Taylor 1982; Schramm 2007, 415-420; Taylor 2003, 178-180, 186; Thacker 2014, 48, 63, 162-163). The *Hun*-stereotype even engendered a word family of derivations that exclusively referred to the WW1-context and had nothing to do with the ancient Huns, e.g. *Hundom*, *Hunland*, *hunless*, *Hun-folk*, *Hun-hater*, *Hun-talk*; *Hun-eating*, *Hun-hunting*, *Hun-pinching*, *Hun-raiding*, *Hun-sticker* ('bayonet') (cf. OED 1989, vol. 7, 489; Dickson 2013, 70). The latter coinages went out of fashion soon after the war, but their temporary popularity during WW1 show that the erstwhile grounding of the *Hun*-epithet for Germans in an analogy with Attila's Huns had largely disappeared. Its post-1914 users did not need anything to know about ancient Huns to interpret *Hun* as a derogatory term for Germans. A pejorative analogy that had been built on the perceived similarity of 'barbaric' warfare between ancient and modern Others had been turned into a dysphemism that expressed a specifically anti-German stereotype and implied a drastic negative ethical/political judgment.

4. The afterlife of a stereotype: ironical uses and historicisation

The *Germans-as-Huns* stereotype was even reinforced by the 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty, whose "War Guilt" article (231) held Germany primarily responsible for the outbreak of the War (Brezina 2006). *Hun/Huns* remained available as a derogatory expression for Germans during the inter-war years and it was, predictably, revived in WW2 (e.g. in speeches by Churchill, see Clarke 2012, 257). It continued to remain in the aftermath of the war (OED 1989, vol. 7, 489), and uses of *Hun(s)* served to indicate, albeit with increasingly distancing overtones, lingering resentments against

(West) Germany as a national ‘Other’ until the end of the 20th century. In 1994, plans of the British government to invite a *Bundeswehr* contingent to participate in the 50-year anniversary commemorations of the end of World War II were scuppered by the tabloid *The Sun*, according to its own version of events: “*The Sun bans the Hun*” (*The Sun*, 24 March 1994). It was also the *Sun* which, on the occasion of a meeting with the German ambassador, Gebhardt von Moltke, which was meant to counteract anti-German stereotypes and prejudices in the British public, reported on the encounter under the title “The Sun meets the Hun” (Beck 2006, 118; Wittlinger 2004, 460).

Similar war-related punning (using *Kraut*, *Fritz*, *Jerry*, *Achtung* as lexical cues) has been regularly in use at the time of sports competitions (especially football) and/or diplomatic tensions, such as those surrounding the Thatcher-government’s sceptical attitude to German unification in 1990 and the stand-off between Britain and the EU Commission and the German government over the ban of BSE-infected beef in 1996 (Beck 2006; Musolff and Townson 1992; Ramsden 2006; Wittlinger 2004). Some uses, such as *the beastly Hun went ahead from a deflected free kick*, *Ze Hun are big on Fun* (quoted in *The Guardian*, 31 May 2014 and 25 June 2010), can only be read as ironical on account of the pragmatic discrepancy between a presupposed pejorative meaning of *Hun* and a politically neutral or even positive context. They are restricted to specific registers, i.e. tabloid-banter, which is often critically commented on by commentators from the quality press, who in their turn re-quote the *Hun*-word in their headlines, e.g. “Stop making fun of the Hun” (*The Observer*, 28 November 2004) or “We’re far too horrid to the Hun” (*New Statesman*, 21 June 1996).

In such uses, an “echoic” quotation of or allusion to a precedent use forms the target of an implicitly distancing stance within the context of an opposing evaluation of its referent in the shared perception of speaker and hearer (e.g. the ironical praise of a

rainy day as “a lovely day for a picnic”; see Sperber and Wilson 1995, 239; also Wilson and Sperber 1992). In our cases, the stigmatizing reference to Germans as *(the) Hun* is ‘echoing’ the derogatory uses by unspecified precedent speakers but the respective headline propositions and article texts explicitly criticize a continuation of any hostile or resentful attitudes towards Germany. The pragmatic implicature from this contradiction of implicit and explicit contexts can only be that the current speaker also (implicitly) criticizes the *Hun* epithet as expressing such resentment.

In some the present-day British uses, the irony is in fact self-targeting. Thus, an editor of the *Daily Mail* (which historically had been at the forefront of *Hun*-bashing during WW1), made the tongue-in-cheek “confession” that he was himself “enough of a Hun to represent Germany at sport” on account of having had a German grandmother, in a report about genetic research confirming Anglo-Saxon ancestry for c. 50% of the modern British population (*Daily Mail*, 22 July 2011). Here, the ironical allusion concerns preceding uses made by the speaker (or his/her we-group of *Daily Mail*-writers and readers) as the relevant discourse community. A notable corollary of the pragmatic explanation of ironical uses of *Hun* is the insight that readers must access some historical knowledge (or at least awareness) that indexes the WW1/2 context of the pejorative *Hun*-stereotype of ‘Germans as barbaric warriors’. Without awareness of its anti-German associations and their war context, ironical references and puns on *Hun* would fall flat or be simply incomprehensible. If no negative stereotype was understood as being alluded to, no critical stance or attitude towards it could be communicated.

German media reactions to historical and contemporary uses of the *Hun*-stereotype also rely on some measure of popular awareness of its WW1 context of origin. Such allusions feature prominently in WW1 commemorating texts, e.g. in headlines such as

‘When we were Huns’, ‘Huns at Liège’, or ‘Uncle Sam against the “Huns” Huns’ (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28/05/2014: „Damals, als wir Hunnen waren“, *K.West. Das Kulturmagazin des Westens*, 01/07, 2014: „Hunnen vor Lüttich“; *Deutsche Welle*, 18/06/2014: „Uncle Sam gegen ‚die Hunnen‘“). While present-day British media, like their predecessors in 1914, make no reference to Wilhelm II’s *Hun*-speech of 1900 in texts commemorating WW1, German media occasionally suggest that his speech inspired British WW1 usage (e.g. *Die Welt*, 05/12/2013; *Deutsche Welle*, 18/06/2014), but without giving any historical sources for the alleged British uptake of the Kaiser’s terminology. In the absence of such evidence, the link remains unproven - in addition to being implausible due to the diametrically opposed pragmatic aims (i.e. praise of German soldiers’ bravery vs. stigmatization of German soldiers’ barbarity), as argued above.

Most German commentators fail to see the supposedly “funny” side of the British tabloids’ obsession with “Hun”-, “Fritz”- or “Kraut”-bashing. They correctly trace the popularity of all these terms back, not to a discourse-crossing from 1900, but to the WW1/2 experience (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 02 May 2005: „Dagegen ist kein ‚Kraut‘ gewachsen“; *Der Spiegel*, 10 December 2002: „Britten testen ihr Deutschlandwissen: ‚We want to beat you Fritz!‘“; *Der Spiegel*, 14 May 2007: „Hunnen, Miele, Hitler“). In addition, articles with titles such as, ‘German Huns’, ‘No laurels for Willy’s Huns’ (*Berliner Zeitung*, 28 August 2007: „Deutsche Hunnen“; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 February 2002: „Kein Ruhmesblatt für Willys Hunnen“) express a growing awareness of the genocidal dimension of German colonialism. One exceptional case of an attempted linkage between Wilhelm’s speech and present-day politics was the far-fetched allegation by the “International Committee of the Fourth International”

that current German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave an anti-Russian speech (which in fact criticised Russia's annexation of the Crimea as a violation of international law) equalling the Kaiser's 1900 rant: 'Merkel's Hun speech against Russia' ("Merkels Hunnenrede gegen Russland", see Stern 2014). In terms of pragmatic and political fallout, however, this outlandish interpretation seems fortunately to have had much less of an impact than either the German and British *Hun*-ascriptions from the first decades of the last century.

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