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Investigating Interviews with Jewish Emigrants

A Collection of Explorations into the Emotional and Narrative Dimension of Texts from the Israel Corpus

Simona Leonardi / Eva-Maria Thüne / Anne Betten (Eds.): *Emotionsausdruck und Erzählstrategien in narrativen Interviews. Analysen zu Gesprächsaufnahmen mit jüdischen Emigranten*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2016. 388 pp. EUR 49,80. ISBN: 978-3-8260-5722-9

Introduction: Aims and Focus

The volume *Emotionsausdruck und Erzählstrategien in narrativen Interviews. Analysen zu Gesprächsaufnahmen mit jüdischen Emigranten* [*The Expression of Emotions and Narrative Strategies in Narrative Interviews. Analyses of Recordings of Conversations with Jewish Emigrants*], edited by Simona Leonardi (University of Naples, Italy), Eva-Maria Thüne (University of Bologna, Italy), and Anne Betten (formerly University of Salzburg, Austria), compiles twelve papers, written in German, that deal with the linguistic expression of emotions and with narrative strategies that speakers employ in interviews in order to structure the course of a narration, to set the focal point of a narrated content, to mark dramatic climaxes in a narration etc.

The studies presented in the individual chapters are focused on the analysis of narrative interviews from an oral history corpus which was compiled by Anne Betten and her collaborators in the period between 1989 to 1994, in 1998, and between 1999 and 2007. The so-called Israel corpus¹ comprises autobiographic interviews with German-speaking Jewish emigrants who escaped to Palestine / Israel in the 1930s, as well as interviews with the descendants of some of them. In this volume, the material is approached from a variety of perspectives, mainly linguistic and conversational linguistic ones, whereby the authors of the individual contributions pursue a number of hitherto unexplored research questions (cf. p. VII).

The Israel Corpus

Anne Betten and her collaborators conducted several sets of interviews with Jewish emigrants to Palestine / Israel. From 1989 to 1994 altogether 150 interviews with 170 interviewees from Germany, Austria, and other German-speaking regions in Central Europe were conducted, collected, and later transcribed and digitalized on the basis of transcription guidelines of the Institute of the German language (IDS) in Mannheim, Germany, where the material is digitally stored within the IDS database of spoken German (Datenbank Gesprochenes Deutsch = DGD). The corpus was extended in 1998 by 22 interviews with Jewish interviewees of Austrian origin, and between 1999 and 2007 by interviews with members of the second generation of Jewish emigrants, mostly children of the previously interviewed members of generation 1.

In the interviews, the Jewish emigrants speak about biographic, linguistic, and cultural implications of their mainly traumatic and forced migration experiences, with numerous accounts of their linguistic biographies, and, among other topics, the maintenance, significance, and attitude towards their mother tongue German in their new context of living. Further interview topics include issues of language acquisition (of Modern Hebrew) and language loss (of German), and the implications of all these processes for the construction of identity. Whereas the first phase of research into the data compiled in the Israel corpus was mainly focused on language documentation as well as sociolinguistic, stylistic, and grammatical aspects of language use (cf. Betten 1995, Betten / du-nour 2000), dialogue-linguistic and narratological approaches became more prominent in the second phase of investigations into this corpus (cf. e.g. Thüne 2009, Thüne / Leonardi 2011, Leonardi 2014; cf. p. X). The volume discussed here belongs to this second phase.

Structure, Topics and Contributions of the Volume

The twelve chapters contained in this volume are preceded by the editors' introduction in which an overview of the aims of the volume, its main features, topics, and the genesis of the analyzed interviews is given. Furthermore, the editors offer a brief introduction to the development of research into the Israel corpus as well as a short summary of each chapter.

The contributions can be grouped into three different thematic categories. Whereas the first four contributions, written by Leonardi, Thüne, Betten, and Koesters Gensini, concentrate on the role and expression of emotions, the following six chapters, written by Schwitalla, Hasslauer, Behr, Larrory-Wunder, and Antonioli, focus on narratological or dialogue-linguistic (Larrory-Wunder, Antonioli) aspects in the analyzed interviews, partially also touching upon issues related to the expression of emotions. The last two contributions by Farges and Betten address issues connected to the identity of the narrators, includ-

ing the personal, social, and cultural dimension of identity construction (cf. p. XI).

In the following, one contribution from each of these three thematic strands will be discussed in more detail. Simona Leonardi in her contribution discusses “Erinnerte Emotionen in autobiographischen Erzählungen” [“Remembered Emotions in Autobiographic Narratives”] by first referring to relevant theoretical standpoints from the field of memory research and then analyzing examples of conversations with Jews who have survived the Holocaust and who are remembering or commenting on these traumatic experiences. The notion of the *double time dimension of narrations* (cf. Mishler 2006, Ricœur 1980), the *constructive and dynamic concept of memory* (cf. Bartlett 1932, Assmann 2003), and the concept of *chronotopos* (Bachtin 2008) serve as a basis to explain the relation between the remembering of traumatic experiences and emotions that are connected to these. Passages from interviews that are charged with emotions are shown to be examples of viewing memory as a selective, constructive, and dynamic process which sometimes is accompanied by meta-comments on these memories. The passages reveal that remembering (a) can be ‘overdone’, (b) is a process that can comprise various stages, thereby opening up various chronotopoi, i.e. memories in different spatial and time contexts, (c) can be triggered by associations, (d) can occur in the form of ‘memories about memories’ (cf. pp. 25-28), and (e) can be connected to specific ‘objects of memory’, such as letters or diaries. All analyzed interview extracts show how memory work helps individuals to deal with traumatic biographic experiences and how these memory episodes are anchored in space and time, as well as in specific emotions, and how readers on a meta-level comment on the respective processes. The author reveals how these instances of memory work can be read as verbal traces of complex cognitive processes of remembering.

Behr’s contribution is particularly interesting from a narratological point of view, insofar as it sheds light upon formal linguistic means that are used by speakers in the analyzed interviews in order to situate the narration in the temporal, personal, and modal dimension, and to perform the narrating of dramatic scenes or events in an emotionally restrained way. On the basis of the analysis of a number of extracts from the Israel corpus, the author shows that this is achieved in particular by the use of complex nominal constructions, i.e. constructions lacking a verb while possessing sentence or utterance status, such as the phrase contained in the title of this chapter: “Kontrolle. Gendarmen” [Inspection. Gendarmes]. It is argued that these messages can only be deciphered by the hearer on the basis of his / her knowledge of the context and of the world. A whole array of narratological functions are shown to be fulfilled by constructions lacking a verb: the description of situations, the characterization of people, actions or situations, the zooming of certain aspects of a narration, the performance of concise narrating etc. Many of these linguistic strategies are discussed as narrating in terms of granularity, i.e. the resolution of the representation of a state of affairs which is constructed through a particular sentence or text passage. As Bundgaard (2010, 26) explains, “[g]ranularity and

density capture the fineness / coarseness of a description and its richness with respect to elements mentioned within it.”

The second contribution by Betten² entitled “Zusammenhänge von Sprachkompetenz, Spracheinstellung und kultureller Identität – am Beispiel der 2. Generation deutschsprachiger Migranten in Israel” [Relations between language competence, language attitude and cultural identity – the example of the 2nd generation of German-speaking migrants in Israel] (pp. 353-378) discusses issues connected to language competence, language maintenance, and identity construction among the second generation of Jewish emigrants with a German-speaking background in Israel, on the basis of interviews with 62 children of the first generation of interviewees, all of which were conducted under her guidance. In the chapter discussed here, Betten presents eleven case studies, i.e. exemplary analyses of interview extracts which, in the sense of language biographies (e.g. Franceschini 2010) and narrative autobiographic interviews (Lucius-Hoene / Deppermann 2004), serve to shed light on the development of language competence and identity construction among these informants. One of the main findings is that, in the analyzed cases, German plays a role as a mediator language for the transmission of German cultural and literary heritage, while a generally decreasing (active) German language competence and a reserved attitude towards Germany and Austria is evident. In the interview material, there are many instances of code-switching, which, in addition to being a linguistic strategy in cases of lacking access to the respective lexical items, in German also has a symbolic function and occurs depending on factors related to the situation and addressee. However, language-mixing as a feature typical of hybrid identities can only be traced in the first generation of Jewish emigrants, whereas the second generation, after partially having spoken German as a mother tongue or family language, mostly switched to Modern Hebrew as their dominant language. The author concludes that after a phase of assimilating to contemporary Israeli society and the Hebrew language, there is a tendency among the children and grand-children of the first Jewish emigrants in Israel to value the German cultural heritage of their parents, some of them even learning their ancestors’ language as a foreign language.

Conclusion

The volume *Emotionsausdruck und Erzählstrategien in narrativen Interviews. Analysen zu Gesprächsaufnahmen mit jüdischen Emigranten*, with its unique collection of papers, represents a valuable and novel contribution to three lines of research: (1) studies on the Israel corpus, collected by Anne Betten and her collaborators, (2) dialogue-linguistic research on narrative autobiographic interviews, (3) studies of autobiographic interviews and narratives in the field of narratology. Besides, the last two chapters also offer precious insights into issues of hybrid and changing identity constructs and language competences in migration con-

texts. All in all, the contributions show the implications and the function of specific linguistic means and strategies for the process of narrating and for the expression of emotions, as well as for the narrative construction of identity, some of them thereby applying the method outlined by Lucius-Hoene / Deppermann (2004), e.g. Leonardi, Thüne, Koesters Gensini, and Betten.

As Betten herself points out (p. 353), the migration experience of the Jews fleeing from Germany and Austria to Palestine in the 1930s is in so many ways specific, that it is not directly comparable to many other emigrants' experiences. The mostly violent and forced eviction, accompanied by a traumatic loss of family members in the case of many Jews from the German-speaking countries, was a strong motor for processes such as the dissociation of identities connected to the German culture and the loss of the German language. In spite of this particularity concerning the analyzed material and the lives of the informants, the narrative strategies and the linguistic means used to account for their specific experiences have been analyzed and presented by the authors of the contributions in this volume in an innovative and clear way that will allow other researchers, especially narratologists and linguists, to apply their methods to other materials and / or to continue exploring the aforementioned three lines of research.

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¹ Online accessible in the frame of the database of spoken German (DGD), compiled by the Institute of the German language (IDS)/Mannheim, URL: <http://dgd.ids-mannheim.de> (Korpus IS) (accessed on June 30, 2017).

² This contribution, as well as Schwitalla’s chapter *Narrative Formen von Fluchterzählungen deutschsprachiger emigrierter Juden in der Nazizeit* (pp. 171-199), are slightly altered reprints of chapters from the volume Thüne / Betten (2011).