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Tondokumente aus dem
Phonogrammarchiv der Österreichischen
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1899–1950

Sound Documents from
the Phonogrammarchiv
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Series 17/6:

Recordings from Prisoner-of-War Camps, World War I

Italian Recordings

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Comments on Karl von Ettmayer's recordings of Italian prisoners of war (April 1918)

1. Preliminary remark

In April 1918, Austrian Romance scholar Karl von Ettmayer (1874–1938) made phonographic recordings of twelve Italian prisoners of war in the prisoner-of-war camps of Mauthausen[1] and Marchtrenk,[2] assisted by the Phonogrammarchiv and according to the technical and situational standards then prevailing. While this information – recently imparted to me by the Phonogrammarchiv – had escaped my attention when preparing a publication of Ettmayer's dissertation data (see Goebl 1995: passim), it did not really surprise me. After all, I had been well aware of his pronounced phonetic interest, which also comprised the phonographic methods, procedures and machines of the day. Of paramount importance in this context is Ettmayer's study on the Ladin of Val Gardena (Ettmayer 1920); the preparatory recording sessions took place as early as August 1918, hence only about four months after those in the prisoner-of-war camps. It can therefore be assumed that the recording procedures described in detail in Ettmayer's report (see especially Ettmayer 1920: 43–44) will largely correspond to those applied during the phonographic field research in the prisoner-of-war camps.

2. Karl von Ettmayer – a biographical sketch[3]

Born in Bohemia in 1874, Karl von Ettmayer was the son of a senior officer in the Austro-Hungarian army. He spent most of his school days in Trento (in today's Trentino), where he came in direct contact with the Italian language and the local Romance dialects. After passing his school-leaving exams likewise in Trento, he studied Romance philology in Graz and in 1899 wrote his dissertation on the dialects of the western Trentino and neighbouring East Lombardy under Hugo Schuchardt (1842–1927). Ettmayer subsequently went to Vienna, where in 1903 he earned his *Habilitation* with a study on the dialects surrounding Bergamo (South-East Lombardy), written under the supervision of Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke (1861–1936). In the following years, he held the chairs of Romance philology (with a focus on linguistics) at the universities of Fribourg (1905–1911), Innsbruck (1911–1915) and Vienna (1915–1938), which latter was vacant after Meyer-Lübke had left for the University of Bonn in 1915. In March 1938, shortly before his 64th birthday, Ettmayer died of a stroke, possibly as a result of the excitement caused by the *Anschluss* (the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany) and Nazi *Gleichschaltung* of the University of Vienna.

Ettmayer's phonetic interest initially arose in connection with historical grammar, subsequently covering a methodologically wide and diverse spectrum, no doubt as a result of

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[1] A market town in Upper Austria (Mühlviertel), opposite the confluence of the river Traun with the Danube.
[2] A municipality in Upper Austria (Hausruckviertel), immediately east of Wels.
[3] See further Ettmayer's biography in Goebl (1995: 199–238).

his numerous field researches and his attempts at 'precise' and 'correct' transcriptions. His first experiences with instrumental phonetics seem to date back to his appointment to the chair at the University of Innsbruck in 1911, where he already had his own phonograph at his disposal (cf. Goebl 1995: 272–273 and Ettmayer 1920: 9).

3. On the situational and pragmatic modalities of *Phonogramm* recordings around 1918

3.1. The historical context

Towards the end of the 19th century a rich tradition of dialectological field research unfolded, which, from the very beginning, particularly flourished in German-speaking (notably German Swiss) Romance studies. Ultimately, this was a consequence of comparative philology (arising in the 18th century) and the *Lautgesetz* (sound law) debates, which had spread from Indo-European studies to modern philologies.

In this scientific context, Ettmayer's northern Italian field researches were typical. Methodologically, it was important to cover an area – interesting in terms of history or historical linguistics and 'sufficiently' large – with a close-mesh net of 'survey points' as equidistant as possible. Subsequently, direct interviews were to be held at each of these points, after the same fashion and on the basis of predetermined questionnaires devised according to certain linguistic criteria, before finally transcribing the replies received as best as possible.[4]

Needless to say, the phonographic machines that were available towards the end of the 19th century met with great interest among researchers in this field; their aim was to capture the fleeting sound in order to preserve it and, subsequently, to listen to the recordings as often as necessary in order to make their phonetic analyses (and transcriptions) more detailed and precise.

In view of the associated logistical and technical problems, only few researchers were at first willing to integrate the new phonographs as a respectable and sustainable element into their professional work. Even though Ettmayer was one of them, it must be stressed that his genuinely phonographic interest remained rather marginal in his complete *oeuvre*.

It is particularly important to realise that the use of modern recording devices like the magnetophone, cassette recorders or – more recently – digital media in no way compares with that of machines available shortly after 1900, which were far more complex to handle and acoustically much inferior. Consequently, both the recording and the replay were subject to certain limitations, which shall briefly be outlined below.

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[4] At least as far as Romance philology is concerned, the resulting corpora of data can be regarded as direct precursors of later linguistic atlases: they already possess the formal structure of a two-dimensional matrix (*N* survey points times *p* feature levels) and were collected in accordance with the demand for constant comparability (commensurability) of data. In Romance philology, the tradition of linguistic atlases proper (*atlas linguistiques*) begins with the publication of the first fascicle of the *Atlas linguistique de la France* by Jules Gilliéron and Edmond Edmont in 1902.

3.2. On the modalities of the recording

The machine used for the recordings under discussion was presumably the Phonogrammarchiv's *Archiv-Phonograph Type IV*, which was in use between 1912 and 1931.[5] Since in those days recording time was limited to a few minutes and since, moreover, informants were confronted with intimidating equipment (especially the huge horns), the actual recording had to be intensively practised with them. This preparation comprised the texts (to be spoken in dialect) as well as general linguistic parameters like tempo, articulation and volume. For this purpose, the philologists asked the informants to repeat short word lists, sentences and text segments, or to translate them from standard language into dialect.[6] As a rule, the philologist in charge of the recording would also prepare a written version of both the standard-language questions (stimuli) and the phonetic transcription of the (dialect) responses received in reply to his questions; above all, he would also several times check and correct the transcriptions made prior to the actual recording.[7]

Associated with this procedure was the hope (as e.g. expressed in Schürr 1917: 8) that informants would produce their dialect speech samples in front of the horn by simply reading the drafts made in advance – which, however, did not materialise. Consequently, the recording process itself involved informants who, though mentally well prepared, in actual fact acted more or less spontaneously in front of the machine.[8]

It is important to remember that in the early days of phonography the written documentation and transcriptions were made *before* the actual recording took place or on the basis of the conversations *previously* conducted between the informant and the researcher. Note, though, that this in fact does not exclude individual corrections made when first listening to the wax disc after recording.

In technical respects, however, listening (once or repeatedly) to recordings was problematic, for the following reasons (see Herzog 1912: 2, note 1):

1. The actual recording resulted in an 'original' wax disc; it was possible to briefly listen to this disc, but it was not to be played to the end in order to avoid damage to the fragile wax grooves.

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[5] See Franz Lechleitner (2014: 43). Its development ultimately goes back to Fritz Hauser (†1910), the Phonogrammarchiv's technician, and Rudolf Pöch (1870–1921), the Vienna anthropologist and ethnologist.

[6] Content-wise, these samples had a very wide range. Ettmayer and Schürr used elaborate questionnaires and word lists for their respective field researches in East Lombardy (1895–1897; see Goebl 1995: 2) and Romagna (cf. Schürr 1917: 6, 78–80): 215 'paradigms' (Ettmayer) as well as 320 'normal words' and 57 'normal sentences' (Schürr). In contrast, the stimuli employed in the prisoner-of-war camps were decidedly rudimentary.

[7] See the evidence in Ettmayer (1920: 43–44) and Groeger (1914: 2). As far as the history of the discipline is concerned, it is important to note that when checking the transcriptions, numerous linguists discovered what had empirically been confirmed time and again: when repeating the same word or sentence, the informant would produce distinctly different realisations. This, of course, clearly contradicted basic linguistic theories of the time and led to numerous discussions going on for decades (for Romance philology, see the substantial 1927 contribution by Karl Jaberg and Jakob Jud, both writing for the linguistic atlas).

[8] The German term then commonly used for the phonograph was *Apparat*; cf. Seemüller (1908: 2–3), Herzog (1913: 3) or Ettmayer (1920: 14).

2. This wax disc subsequently underwent a galvanoplastic process in the course of which it was transformed into a copper negative; the wax disc itself was destroyed during this procedure.

3. From this copper negative, larger quantities of wax positives were produced for listening purposes; while each of them could be listened to more than once, every time the sound quality would deteriorate a bit more.

In the course of listening, it was possible to increase or reduce the speed in order to better notice certain phonetic features; in addition, a special repeating device, which had been developed at the Phonogrammarchiv and allowed repeated listening of shorter passages, was employed as of 1913 (see Pöch 1913).

4. On the quality of the recordings made in April 1918 by Karl von Ettmayer, with the assistance of Leo Hajek and Hans Pollak (Ph 2940–2956)

As a result of the inferior sound quality of these recordings, all that can reasonably be done is to identify them and subsequently assign them to the corresponding protocols and their transcriptions. A verification of Ettmayer's transcriptions is, however, completely impossible and illusionary.

As already noticed by a Phonogrammarchiv member of staff in 1932 (witness the red and blue notes on the protocols), there is occasionally some confusion and no clear correspondence between the numbers of the protocols and those of the recordings. The free text section of the protocols, completed mostly in Ettmayer's own hand, usually consists of three columns:

1. the actual transcription (far left)

2. a corresponding Italian paraphrase, with the dialect component of varying intensity (centre)

3. its German translation (far right)

There can be no doubt whatsoever that these three columns are all in the same hand; moreover, in view of the small number of corrections, they must have been written in a very relaxed atmosphere.[9]

The transcriptions were made according to the "Böhmer-Ascoli" system then prevalent in German Romance philology. Their character is highly professional, and they were undoubtedly

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[9] This triple preparation of a prospective text prior to actual recording was also common at the Berlin *Lautbibliothek* founded in 1909. As a rule, no recording was to be made before the existence of a transliteration (in the standard language common in the country of origin) together with a phonetic transcription and a German translation; since speakers and singers did not always follow the prepared texts, new transcriptions frequently had to be made after completion of the discs (see Mahrenholz 2003: 5). For further evidence on the modalities observed by the Phonogrammarchiv in its prisoner-of-war recordings see Lange (2013: e.g. 333, 348, 412–413, 423–424, 444–445).

made by Ettmayer himself while listening to his informant rather than copying from a draft made previously.

Moreover, in view of the technical limitations of the recordings it seems quite impossible that the majority of Ettmayer's transcriptions could have come into existence in the course of re-listening to the *Phonogramme* made at Mauthausen or Marchtrenk. This, however, does not exclude the possibility that a small number of corrections or additions might indeed have been made when listening to them after the recording session.

As for the paraphrases in Italian dialect in the centre of the page, they were written in the same hand as the transcriptions and translations, hence by Ettmayer himself. The paraphrase itself will however have been copied from a draft in the genesis of which Ettmayer's informants were involved on varying scales.[10]

The following textual characteristics are striking: deviations from the transcriptions to significantly varying degrees (both in terms of contents and linguistic form) as well as deviations from Standard Italian, again to varying degrees, including the comparatively frequent occurrence of dialectal features (also due to the use of special regional spellings, e.g. Genoese *cuxina* for Italian *cucina* 'kitchen' in protocol no. 2953). What seems to be missing here in contrast to the transcriptions is a consistent "master plan" – hence my assumption that the informants participated to varying degrees in the composition of the draft which was subsequently copied by Ettmayer.

As for the translations, they were made by Ettmayer on the basis of the paraphrase, presumably in one go.

Moreover, each of the informants is characterised in terms of his biography and linguistic competence. Since these assessment notes are quite professional, Ettmayer will very probably have contributed to their contents, even though the large handwriting is clearly not his own. Perhaps they were written by L. Hajek or H. Pollak, who assisted Ettmayer with the recording process and also filled in the personal data of the informants.

The linguistic samples are presented in the form of continuously numbered sentences (usually from 1 to 35). The three main texts chosen after consultation with the informants all deal with the topic of fraud committed in a rural setting. In addition, there are several popular proverbs. As far as I can see, none of these texts is mentioned as elicitation stimulus in the dialectological

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[10] See Britta Lange (2013: 423–424), who focuses on the preparatory cooperation of the prisoners of war while at the same time stressing that today it can hardly be determined which parts of the hand-written "transliterations" in the protocols are to be assigned to the prisoners of war and which to the researchers.
In this connection attention must be drawn to recordings made by Wilhelm Doegen (1877–1967) – the founding director of the above-mentioned *Lautbibliothek* in Berlin – and Grisons linguist Andrea Schorta (1905–1990) among some two dozen speakers of Romansh in Chur in 1926. According to the accompanying documentation (published in 2013; see Valär 2013, 1: 21–25), the respective speakers had to write down the texts to be recited – prior to the recording and with the assistance of A. Schorta – before reading/reciting them several times during rehearsal. The acoustic quality of the resulting recordings on shellac discs produced by Doegen was of course clearly superior to Ettmayer's recordings.

literature. Consequently, they must have been popular stories which the informants themselves suggested to Ettmayer.

Of the twelve prisoners of war, eight came from Southern Italy (including Sicily and Sardinia), two from Central Italy (Tuscany) and two from Northern Italy (Lombardy, Liguria).

In contemporary literature, there are occasional references that transcriptions should not only make visibly accessible what was preserved on the recordings, but also help listeners to better understand them. In 1908, Seemüller (1908: 1) noted that transcriptions still constituted a very welcome supplement to *Phonogramme*, since the reduction of clarity caused by the procedure of making durable discs as well as other chance occurrences during the phonographic recording process would make listening and understanding difficult, both for those unfamiliar and those familiar with dialect speech; such difficulties would be considerably reduced if it were possible to read the contents before or while listening to the recording.

Indeed, the deteriorating effect which repeated listening had on the quality of the original wax discs seems to have been well known. This, however, did not prevent some researchers from regularly replaying the original discs in their entirety immediately after recording; cf. e.g. Ettmayer (1920: 44), who – with reference to his *Phonogramme* made in Val Gardena in August 1918 – explicitly points out that he listened to each of them once after recording, with the draft protocol in his hand. This fact may at least partly account for the inferior acoustic quality of these recordings.

5. Conclusions

The scholarly value of the present *Phonogramme* is limited, representing as they do nothing more than chance recordings. In view of Ettmayer's established empirical interests, they were presumably made above all in order to practise the phonographic recording procedure. Indeed, it may well be that in April 1918 he already had in mind the phonographic field research to be conducted in Val Gardena in August, which he later reported on in a very detailed publication (Ettmayer 1920).

English translation: Christian Liebl

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VERLAG DER ÖSTERREICHISCHEN AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN

OEAW PHA CD 46

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Recordings from Prisoner-of-War Camps, World War I

Italian Recordings

Audio CD	1– 7	Recordings from Mauthausen (dialects from Calabria, Sardinia, Sicily, Tuscany)
	8–15	Recordings from Marchtrenk (dialects from Tuscany, Sicily, Apulia, Trentino, Genoa, Sardinia, Lombardy)
Data Disc	1	Introductory notes, transcriptions and comments
	2	Protocols
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