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# Voices heard. Autobiographical accounts of language learning after forced migration

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## ABSTRACT

Learning a new language after forced migration has hardly ever been studied from the perspective of children. Their viewpoint, however, gets even more important, if we want to understand the lifelong consequences of their early experiences. With this aim, we use autobiographical accounts of persons who were rescued from Nazi Germany and brought to Great Britain in 1938 by an operation known as Kindertransport. The Kindertransportees' memories of learning English are precious also with regard to the 21st century, where the share of minors in forced migration is steadily increasing, and where language teachers are struggling with the task of successfully teaching the newly arrived students. Our contribution aims to inform teacher education by building on the sociolinguistic concept of Voice, and exemplifying what a favourable context for language learning might look like in times of increasing forced migration.

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## 1. Introduction

In the early 21st century, almost half of the world's forced migrants<sup>1</sup> are below the age of 18 (Plener et al. 2017: 733; UNHCR 2014). This is also true for Europe, with Germany and Austria having become the main destination of forced migration (Konle-Seidl 2018: 11). In these countries, around 40 per cent of asylum seekers are minors, with 30 per cent of them being younger than 14 years (Konle-Seidl 2018: 16). An increasing number come alone—i.e. not accompanied by parents or other adults (for detailed developments and figures, see Plener et al. 2017: 733).

After extreme experiences of forced migration, the absence of adult caregivers makes the teachers' role all the more crucial. Language teachers—German teachers in the case of Germany and Austria—are of particular importance at this stage. However, the minors' lack of skills in the new language can restrict the ability to share their experiences, competences, and needs with their teachers. It is hardly surprising that quite a number of teachers, too, struggle with the task (Becker-Mrotzek et al. 2012: 3). One may ask, how do newly arrived students express themselves at all? Or, viewed from the teachers' perspective: What

do teachers perceive and understand from what their students might want to express? And what does this entail for the students' school-language acquisition and overall school success?

A recent Austrian survey on a sample of 160 primary school students and their teachers documented how difficult it can be for German teachers to make sense of their students' language-learning performance (Brizić et al. 2021). All in all, the teachers tend to perceive the young language beginners as either *totally over-ambitious* or *totally uninterested*. Moreover, the teachers' perception seems to be strongly directed towards the students' physical voice. Girls, for instance, are often evaluated as having a particularly *loud voice*, while boys are perceived as *speechless* or even *mute*, yet all of a sudden *blurting out terrifyingly loud when they finally know something*—to name but two examples (Brizić forthcoming: 279–284). In sum, the teachers evaluate these students' performance as either *far too much* or *far too little*—with a striking focus on the physical features of voice (*too loud/too silent*), and largely independent of the students' progress in German (Brizić forthcoming; see also Glock & Kleen 2020 on teacher stereotypes).

However, the students' perspective and voice—i.e. their own evaluation of what it means to be a newly arrived language learner—is missing from prior research. Only a few studies have been conducted with unaccompanied adolescents (e.g. Dausien et al. 2020 on Austria), while the experiences of primary-school children have hardly ever been included. This is the point of departure for our study. By better understanding the perspectives of young learners after forced migration, we intend to gain a better sense of what a favourable context for language learning and teaching might look like for these students.

## 2. Central terms, aims and questions

Extreme experiences, such as forced migration, among newly arrived students are commonly reported as posing a particular challenge to language teachers (e.g. SVR 2018: 32). In the Austrian survey by Brizić (forthcoming, cf. above), this was mirrored in the teachers' focus on the children's physical voice, even to the point of losing sight of their language learning progress. This in turn led to poor grades in German for almost all students who had undergone extreme experiences<sup>2</sup>—even when they performed similarly or better than others (Brizić et al. 2021: 54). Therefore, the described problem is an issue of equity, as it further contributes to already highly unequal opportunities in the German and Austrian education systems (cf. OECD 2019a: 15–16, 2019b, 2019c).

Our investigation aims at tackling this issue by enhancing our understanding of the complex interrelationship between language and voice after forced migration. Given the critical role language teachers play for newly arrived students, we see teacher education as pivotal. Enhancing teachers' understanding, however, also entails a shift in focus: away from the teachers' difficulties with interpreting their students' physical voices, and towards the students' own voicing of their experiences, needs, and emotions. The latter embraces, but goes far beyond, physical voice. We will therefore apply the more comprehensive concept of *sociolinguistic Voice*, defined as *the ability to make oneself heard, understood, and considered worth hearing* (cf. Blommaert 2005: 4; Hymes 1996: 64). For newly arrived students after forced migration, it can make all the difference whether they are heard or not, let alone recognised and understood. In this sense, the concept of sociolinguistic Voice (hereafter

‘Voice’) also highlights the importance of a student’s subject position and active part in learning a new language (Dausien et al. 2020: 8).

Yet, it has also been argued in research that interviewing children right after forced migration may provoke re-traumatisation (e.g. Dausien et al. 2020: 20). And there is another crucial aspect: only later in life are people able to reflect on their experiences of being (un) heard, and to evaluate lifelong consequences with regard to their overall biography (Rosenthal 1995: 99 ff.; cf. also the term ‘biographische Gesamtsicht’ in Rosenthal 2010).

For this reason, we use retrospective accounts of elderly persons who had to undergo forced migration in their childhood. In doing so, we expand the perspective from the present to the past in European history—i.e. to the early 20th century, when Germany and Austria were not the destination, but the source of forced migration: the period under Nazi dictatorship and the outbreak of World War II. We focus on a unique effort to rescue children, mainly Jewish,<sup>3</sup> from Germany, Austria, and other countries under Nazi rule. The operation, known as *Kindertransport to Great Britain* (Baumel-Schwartz 2012), was organised under the umbrella of the Refugee Children’s Movement in 1938, shortly before the outbreak of World War II. The rescued children later referred to themselves as *Kindertransportees* (cf., e.g. Thüne 2020).

To address this period and these particular students’ experiences, we ask: What did it mean for a *Kindertransportee* to have escaped Nazi annihilation yet without parents; to be a newly arrived student in England; and to be taught a language never used, or heard, before?<sup>4</sup> How do *Kindertransportees* remember themselves as learners? Do they recall having raised their Voice and being understood, as they were not yet speaking English, and hardly anyone around them spoke German? After that, we return to present-time teacher education, and to the implications of the concept of Voice. We consider the *Kindertransportees*’ autobiographical retrospectives to provide precious insight to what a favourable context for language learning and teaching might look like in the 21st century.

### 3. Historical context, methods and data

The *Kindertransport* was an extraordinary rescue mission initiated shortly after the pogroms in November 1938, when Jews and their property had been attacked in concerted assaults. Discrimination and social exclusion, however, had been omnipresent long before, affecting Jewish children also in school (cf., e.g. Thüne 2019a: 73–83). Outside school, the children witnessed as their parents lost their jobs and were less and less able to shelter their children. In other words, many of the children lost the safety of their homes long before the *Kindertransport*.

Leaving home soon became unavoidable. Starting in November 1938, *Kindertransportes* were the only way for Jewish children to be evacuated,<sup>5</sup> with scarce time for preparation. When the children left, many of them were overwhelmed with the experience (e.g. Barnett 2003: 168). In contemporary reports, the subsequent arrival in Britain was often presented as the last step of a successful endeavour: ‘Children rescued—matter resolved’ (Barnett 2003: 157). But from the children’s perspective, the matter was all but resolved. Their lives were about to change forever: many of the children later turned out to be the only survivors of their families. ‘It was the end of my childhood’, as one of the *Kindertransportees* put it (cf. Thüne 2019a: 70).

At the time of the Kindertransport program (i.e. 1938–1939), most Kindertransportees were between 4 and 15 years of age; they came to Great Britain from Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich, and Vienna, amongst other places. When they were contacted for the study presented here (i.e. 2017–2018), almost 80 years had passed, with the former children now being between 82 and 93 years old. Aside from personal contacts in Britain, Germany, and Austria, an ad was posted in the newsletters of both the Kindertransportees and the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) to reach out to them. Those interested in participating in the study received a brief questionnaire for basic biographical information. For the main data collection, a language-biographical approach was pursued, based on Franceschini's (2010) and Betten's (e.g. Betten & Du-nour 1995) groundbreaking work and their aim to understand not only how language competences come about but how language learning is inseparably intertwined with memories and experiences: experiences of power and powerlessness, of self-definition, home, and loss through migration.

In line with this approach, we chose *language-biographical, narrative face-to-face interviews* as our data collection method (detailed in Thüne 2019a: 19–22; cf. Rosenthal 1995; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2002). The interviews were conducted in Britain, mostly at the homes of the 42 interviewees, in 2017. Almost all Kindertransportees decided to talk in German, although this had only been the language of their childhood. The resulting data is, to the best of our knowledge, the most recent corpus of Kindertransportee accounts in German (Thüne 2019a: 19–20, 175–178).

The individual interviews varied in length between 45 and 170 minutes, and were opened by addressing the interviewees' languages of past and present times. In their answers, however, the Kindertransportees also recalled their childhood and parents, their farewell from home, and their arrival and life in Britain up to the present day, repeatedly connecting all of this to their languages (Thüne 2019a: 21). Both the interviews and additional information were complemented by another brief questionnaire, inviting the interviewees to reflect on their languages and competences after the interview (Thüne 2019a: 19).

For the analysis of data which our contribution is based on, we applied the method of *reconstructing narrative identity* (cf. Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2002). This meant reconstructing individual biographical perspectives along with their narrative characteristics, mainly in terms of self-definition, migration, and experiences as language learners. Their relationship to English and German, often fraught with tension in the case of the latter, and their approaches to coping with the past were central to the analysis. This also included the interviewees' memories of their English teachers after arriving in Britain, together with their self-perception as weak or proficient learners, as mono- or multilinguals, and as having successfully mastered (or not) to grow into the new society as a Kindertransportee.

The original data was published under the title *Gerettet: Berichte von Kindertransport und Auswanderung nach Großbritannien* (Thüne 2019a),<sup>6</sup> where all interviews are presented in the original language; we provide only the English translation in our discussion.<sup>7</sup> Our choice of data examples (see part 4) is designed to address topics of relevance for the analysis presented here. This refers, above all, to our aim of analysing sociolinguistic Voice as expressed by the Kindertransportees (part 5), and looking at it, for the very first time, from the perspective of today's language teacher education (part 6).

## 4. Exemplary accounts

### 4.1. Remembering the time before the Kindertransport

Being multilingual was not uncommon among Jewish families in Germany and Austria at the time of the Kindertransportes. In the case of the Kindertransportees interviewed by Thüne (2019a), at least one third were born into multilingual households, with parents speaking not only German but also Polish, Russian, Czech and/or Yiddish (cf. Thüne 2019a: 84–86, 174, 179, 180). In the course of the generations, however, German had become more and more dominant, and often remained the only language in the Kindertransportees' generation; the Slavic languages and Yiddish were mostly lost. This was widely accepted within the families as part of a necessary assimilation into the dominant German language and society (cf. Richarz 1979–1982).

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, linguistic, religious and social assimilation were no longer enough to shelter Jewish life. Particularly after the pogroms in November 1938, it became riskier to walk in the streets and use public transport or even the telephone, as phone calls were likely to be wiretapped (cf. Thüne 2019a: 61). The interviewed Kindertransportees recall it as a time of having to hide and speak only *with a low voice* (Thüne 2019a: 15, 66–67). Even listening became a sensitive issue:

**Example 01:** KT:<sup>8</sup> We children had to leave the room. We were not allowed to hear this. (Ruth L. David in Thüne 2019a: 67)<sup>9</sup>

Together with not being allowed to hear, *Don't ask questions* became another formative principle:

**Example 02:** KT: My mother just told me: 'When your teacher one day says, 'Get your stuff and go home!', don't ask questions, just take your stuff and go home'. (Ursula Beyrodt in Thüne 2019a: 73)

This was extended to *Don't speak at all* whenever being in public:

**Example 03:** KT: My mother told us not to talk, not at all, and to not do anything that could attract attention. (Günter Treitel in Thüne 2019a: 62)

*They protected us* is the conclusion in almost all accounts when the Kindertransportees recall their parents' efforts to not let their children speak or hear about the looming danger (cf. Thüne 2019a: 63).

And yet:

**Example 04:** KT: Of course I heard everything. (Bea Green in Thüne 2019a: 63)

The children's secret complicity, however, also implied a reversal of the generational order. The parents' wish to protect the young generation was now adopted by the children wishing to protect their parents:

**Example 05:** KT :We children quickly learned not to complain. Our parents were so worried already. We were fully aware of that. (Ruth L. David in Thüne 2019a: 94)

**Example 06:** KT: As I said, they tried to protect us, and we tried to protect them. (Margarete von Rabenau in Thüne 2019a: 65)

Planning their escape to safer countries soon became the only remaining option. Once again, the Kindertransportees recall how this was done either in silence (*Not a word!*, cf. Thüne 2019a: 69) or by whispering and using secret codes (Thüne 2019a: 15, 70). When the children were finally leaving with the Kindertransport, one parental advice seems to have been predominant as the children departed: *Don't look back, look ahead!* (Thüne 2019a: 193)—or, in a Kindertransportee's instruction to himself:

**Example 07:** KT: I always said to myself: 'Listen, we are moving forward now'. (Keith Lawson in Thüne 2019a: 193)

#### 4.2. Remembering the time after the Kindertransport

When the Kindertransportees arrived in Britain, *looking ahead* was translated into a tremendous will to become part of and fully belong to British society:

**Example 08:** KT: We simply wanted to identify completely and utterly. We didn't want to end up being different all over again. (Margarete von Rabenau in Thüne 2019a: 187)

**Example 09:** INT: Did you also like the school uniform?

KT: Oh yes, the school uniform was wonderful. I was just like everyone else. I had never experienced that before. It was a huge relief. [...] What was more, you didn't want to be German [in Great Britain]. Meaning, you really didn't want to speak German in public. (Margarete von Rabenau in Thüne 2019a: 158)

This approach corresponded to the advice given to the children by European Jews who had migrated to Britain much earlier. In a brochure published by the German Jewish Aid Committee in London, for example, recommendations include to 'refrain from speaking German in the streets, in public transport and in public places', to avoid 'speaking loudly', and to learn 'the English language and its correct pronunciation' as soon as possible (German Jewish Aid Committee with Jewish Board of Deputies, 1938: 13). This approach was reinforced by the British public's serious suspicions of anyone speaking German during World War II (Abbey 1995:10).

In fact, learning English as quickly as possible did not seem to have posed a problem for most of the children (Thüne 2019a: 165, 175, 177, 182). But even if serious language-learning difficulties were rare and the teachers were mostly perceived as friendly and kind (Thüne

2019a: 162, 175), difficulties of a different sort recur in the autobiographical accounts. Among the Kindertransportees' most painful experiences, for example, was being laughed at by other students for their 'foreign' German accent (Thüne 2019a: 17, 19, 144). A closer look, however, reveals even more profound concerns. Before the children had even said a word, their classmates spotted them as 'being German':

**Example 10:** KT: [...] they knew it because I had German clothes. [...] But they were not right for England. And the other children would ask me: 'Why are you wearing those funny clothes?' It was very difficult to explain why. (Vernon Reynolds in Thüne 2019a:155)

The lapidary *they knew it* highlights the Kindertransportees' vulnerability to their new environment's perception and evaluation (e.g. as wearing *funny clothes*). As they were still overwhelmed and hardly knew enough English to raise their own Voice, a shift occurs in many Kindertransportee accounts: from voicing *what I felt and wanted* (examples 08 and 09 above) to focusing on *what the teachers understood of it (or not)*:

**Example 11:** KT: And all of a sudden, I recognise my dad [in the newspapers]. And I think I started crying. I hadn't yet heard of my parents [...]. Mrs. C, the headmistress, looks at the picture post, then at me and says, 'This is not your dad, this is propaganda.' I did not say anything to her. I think that was the moment when I realised that the Brits had no clue what it meant to be Jewish in Germany. [...]. (Bea Green in Thüne 2019a: 188)

Together with the teachers' lack of understanding, many Kindertransportees perceived another shortcoming in their environment: the absence of interest—or the reluctance—to ask questions about the children's families and past:

**Example 12:** KT: But they never asked: 'Was he [i.e. your father] Jewish?' [...] Nobody asked me. They understood that my father had died in Germany, and that was enough. (Vernon Reynolds in Thüne 2019a: 205)

**Example 13:** KT: But no one asked. They didn't know anything about my life. You could not talk about that back then. (Ruth L. David in Thüne 2019a: 164)

*But no one asked/they never asked* clearly indicates that this is not about the children's English skills anymore. The focus has now shifted to the teachers and to what *they* knew, or didn't want to know. *You could not talk about that back then* is the disenchanted conclusion: you were neither asked nor welcome to express your personal experiences as a child from Germany. In consequence, quite a few Kindertransportees recall *remaining silent* more and more often (Thüne 2019a: 171); *not trying to make oneself understood anymore* (Thüne 2019a: 188); *talking to animals* rather than to human beings (Thüne 2019a: 177); or, in case of very young children, *stopping to speak altogether* for a while (Thüne 2019a: 167).



Their helplessness when withdrawing from speaking and interacting becomes explicit in the following example (*I couldn't do anything about it*), while the active part rests solely with *the others*—i.e. the classmates (*they* did it) and the teacher (*she* decides):

**Example 14:** KT: I am wearing my dirndl<sup>10</sup> and am stared at.

The headmistress baulks at my name: Beate	<i>[The original German pronunciation as applied here comprises three clearly distinct syllables. The first is short, the second emphasised and long, and the third short again:</i> be – ?a: – tə]
Did I have another one? I suggest the other two <sup>11</sup> , but she decides on 'Bay-ar-tar'.	<i>[All syllables are now spoken with equal length, merged closely together by adding the postalveolar English r:</i> beɪ_ɑ:r_tɑ:r]

(Bea Green; comments on pronunciation added in [...] by the authors of this contribution. Example cited from Leverson and Lowensohn (1990: 130) to provide context for Bea Green's other quote below.)

Beate reported that other pronunciations of her name followed, and she finally stuck to the resulting English version: Bea. In a later interview with Beate (Thüne 2019a),<sup>12</sup> the interviewer tried to understand the feelings connected to the 'new' English name:

**Example 15:** INT: [...] why did you change your name from Maria Beate to Bea?  
 KT: I didn't do anything; they did it.  
 INT: They?  
 KT: The others. All of a sudden, I was called Bea. [...]  
 INT: So do you like it?  
 KT: Well, there's not really anything I can do about it, I simply accepted it. If you skip the 'a', it sounds funny—like 'be green' [bi: gri:n]. I mean, today, we all have to 'be green'. (Bea Green; previously unpublished excerpt from the author's data corpus<sup>13</sup>)

Even in retrospect, figuring out what *they* might have been thinking often becomes dominant over voicing one's own thoughts, as in the following example:

**Example 16:** KT: [...] They must have thought who the hell have they put here, you know, somebody who has a foreign accent [and] doesn't know anything about anything. (John Rupp in Thüne 2019a: 144. Interview conducted in English)

The next example indicates similar helplessness in making oneself heard to *them*, even in later school years:

**Example 17:** INT: Did you learn reading and writing later in school?  
 KT: Very little. I had to pick it up myself. And for that I didn't pick it up the right way [...]. I had no private help or—nothing. But at Eleven-plus,<sup>14</sup> they sat me down and put the paper in front [of] me for the Eleven-plus. When it all was finished, the paper was exactly as they gave it to me: empty. [...] I was the outsider. I was German and they have a war. (Margot Showman in Thüne 2019a: 171. Interview conducted in English)

Being heard was also what the next narrator longs for in retrospect. He remembers his Maths competences having been disregarded and graded low, despite completing all the tasks correctly; and his account, too, implies that he could not do anything to restore his reputation:

**Example 18:** KT: The only problem was Maths. I am still convinced that I was treated badly. We had to do divisions, and I used a shortcut to complete them—the way you do them in Germany [...] so all my calculations were simply dismissed as wrong, although in fact the results were correct because here [in Great Britain] they do long division [...]. That there is also a shortcut for doing these wasn't mentioned in class. (Francis Deutsch in Thüne 2019a: 157)

Did the Kindertransportees at least talk among themselves, as they shared not only experiences but also the language of their home? *Only whispering*, is the answer, since right from the beginning the order was to speak no other language than English (Thüne 2019a: 151, 178). The adults even used fear as a means of enforcing the predominant language regime:

**Example 19:** KT: [...] and if I didn't want to do what she asked, she said: 'If you don't come here immediately, I will speak German'. And then I was frozen in fear. (Michael Trede in Thüne 2019a: 160. Michael is citing his mother here; she was one of the very few parents who had managed to make it to Britain.)

Many of the Kindertransportees internalised the fear of being heard if ever speaking in German:

**Example 20:** KT: It was not allowed to speak German. Not even with my brother Martin. And when I asked him: 'Why can't we speak [it] among ourselves?' [...], Martin answered: 'Look around. There are soldiers, and they are English. As soon as they hear German, they will shoot'. I believed him and didn't want to speak German anymore. (Ruth Barnett in Thüne 2019a: 176)

The Kindertransportees struggled with anxiety well into adulthood—not only when *speaking* German but already when *sounding* German:

**Example 21:** KT: [...] I avoided speaking to more than a handful of Englishmen, as I didn't want to be identified as a German refugee and maybe face hostility. [...] Only when my elder son got married, I finally gave a speech at his wedding, and this was the first time that I spoke to more than a handful of Englishmen. (Fritz Lustig in Thüne 2019a: 183)

In this respect, however, some of the Kindertransportees took different directions. Anxiety was, in the following cases, countered with intentional perfectionism:

**Example 22:** KT: But I still know how I said to myself: 'I will master this language.' The sentence stayed in my head. (Bea Green in Thüne 2019a: 165)

**Example 23:** KT: I wanted to pronounce it correctly; the others just kept talking and picked the pronunciation up somehow. I wanted to know *why* you said it a certain way. (Ruth L. David in Thüne 2019a: 162)

One of the teaching methods involved was advising the children to hold a mirror in front of their face to control lips and mouth when articulating English words. A former Kindertransportee gives insight into her initial scepticism, yet acknowledging the result:

**Example 24:** KT: At the time, I thought it was nonsense. But in hindsight, it's like that, we have no accent. And that protected us. (Ruth Barnett in Thüne 2019a: 176)<sup>15</sup>

Being protected by accentless speech, however, highlights the vulnerability of learners who still had an accent in the new language. The consequence was, in many cases, the silencing of the German language of childhood; the burning of letters written in German (Thüne 2019a: 147); and silence even between close relatives because they did not share the same language anymore (Thüne 2019a: 135, 169, 170).

Even eight decades later, when interviewed in 2017, most of the Kindertransportees still did not consider themselves bi- or multilingual (Thüne 2021: 69), often emphasising this in the following or similar ways: 'We English are not talented at learning foreign languages!'<sup>16</sup> (Thüne, personal communication, 2017; cf. also Barnett 2003: 168).

## 5. Language learning and voice after forced migration

It may not come as a surprise that almost 80 years after leaving their homes, the Kindertransportees were doubting their competence in German. And yet the vast majority still wished to conduct the interview in German and had little difficulty to recount their experiences in great detail. For that matter, 'We English...' may not only refer to competences but, even more so, to aspirations from back in the 1930s, when it was essential to identify with the new home (examples 08, 09 above). The desperate wish to belong is, in fact, also known to be common among unaccompanied minors who have undergone forced migration in the 21st century (Scholaske & Kronenbitter 2021: 2, 36, 38, 41; similarly, cf. Riegel 2004 for migrants in general; however, see already Baumeister & Leary 1995 on belonging as a fundamental human need).

Closely linked to this wish are high aspirations to learn the new language; and again this goes both for the Kindertransportees (examples 22, 23) as well as for today's unaccompanied minors (Scholaske & Kronenbitter 2021: 2, 36, 41). The same is true for the fear of being mistrusted—e.g. being treated as an 'enemy', an 'outsider' or a 'liar' (examples 10, 11)—as a serious threat to belonging (Scholaske & Kronenbitter 2021: 49, 80). The Kindertransportees, however, added a new perspective with particular relevance for language learning and Voice: they translated their fear—e.g. of being seen as an 'outsider' or 'liar'—into the ubiquitous desire for an accentless English pronunciation (examples 23, 24). And although accentless speech is known to be of little relevance for language learning (cf., e.g. Nejjari et al. 2020), an accent can play a detrimental role as soon as it triggers shame, fear, and subsequent *self-silencing in the new language*, in this case: English (example 21; cf. also Sonnert & Holton 2006; for an overview, see Pulinx et al. 2017: 545–546).

What is more, the children had already experienced silencing before the Kindertransport in one way or the other: from their life in Germany, many of them recall details attached to speaking, hearing, and listening, such as having to speak at a low voice, not being allowed to hear/listen or talk/ask, and protecting the parents by not complaining—i.e. never raising one's Voice (examples 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06). After the Kindertransport, the children were silenced again, as speaking the language of their childhood was now stigmatised altogether. And with falsely pronounced names (examples 14, 15), false clothes (examples 10, 14), and a childhood no one asked about (examples 12, 13), many of the children abstained completely from making themselves heard or understood (e.g. example 15). Even in retrospective, what *others* thought about them became more important, with little or no chance of being heard, let alone showing one's competences, or restoring one's poor reputation (examples 11, 16, 17, 18). An empty paper may represent one of the most radical consequences of silencing (example 17). Once again, we gained an important new insight from the Kindertransportees' accounts which adds to previous studies on silencing (e.g. Pulinx et al. 2017): it may be precisely this *double silencing*—i.e. in German *and* in English; before *and* after forced migration—that made it inevitable for many children to internalise that their home language *and* their Voice had to be silent (examples 19, 20).

Not particularly new, however, is the importance of the home language and its use with siblings, above all, after forced migration (Scholaske & Kronenbitter 2021: 30, 42–45, 64). And yet, not only in WWII Great Britain but also in today's countries of immigration, such as Germany and Austria, there is an increasing tendency to forbid the use of home languages at school (cf., e.g. Wiese et al. 2020). The 21st century and its forced migrations are still too young to assess any lifelong consequences; therefore, it is once again the Kindertransportees' accounts that are of immeasurable value. Their autobiographical retrospectives enable us to see that *silencing the language of childhood*—here: German—did not support the use of English (example 21), nor did it result in leaving behind German (cf. the fact that almost all interviews were conducted in German). Rather, one of the most momentous consequences was that the Kindertransport generation found their collective self-expression—i.e. Voice—only in the late 1980s (Leverson & Lowensohn 1990), full five decades after the Kindertransport. This long path to self-expression is also seen, amongst others, as an aftermath of the host society's denying attitude towards the children's Voice—i.e. towards their own expression of experiences, needs, and emotions (Barnett 2003: 168; Thüne 2021: 68).

## 6. Language teaching and voice in times of forced migrations

A better understanding of the perspectives of very young learners after forced migration helps us to gain a clearer sense of what a favourable context for language learning and teaching might look like. And whilst past and present forced migrations differ greatly in many respects, the tasks faced by the teachers then and now display important commonalities.

First, language learning and, therefore, teaching have much to do with both the sociolinguistic concept of Voice and the physical features of human voice. In the case of very young language learners, all the more after forced migration, Voice is not separable from the vocal expression of intense, often extreme experiences and feelings. The Kindertransportees bear witness, for example, to the desperate desire of visible and audible identification with their new society. Similarly intense, however, was their wish to remain unheard when speaking their language of childhood or their new language with an accent. This provides fertile soil for reflection in teacher education: When perceiving young migrants' physical voices as too loud, too quiet, or too unpredictably alternating between these extremes, then the teachers should never mistake this for evidence (or lack) of the students' *language competences* (cf. already Wortham 2005 on teachers attaching more importance to behaviour than competence). Rather, it highlights the need to enhance the teachers' reflection and sensitivity for *sociolinguistic Voice*—i.e. for the students' desire to express themselves and to be heard. Teacher education should provide the necessary skillset to clearly distinguish between the two, and to support future teachers in evaluating whether they hear, and assess, language—or Voice.

Second, it is impossible for young learners to keep their Voice and languages apart. Therefore, when a Voice is silenced, its language is silenced, too—and the other way around. In the case of many Kindertransportees, this resulted in the multiple silencing of language *and* Voice. Especially with regard to forced migration where silencing may have already occurred in the home country, we should keep this potential for multiple silencing in mind. Teacher education needs to adopt approaches that take this potential seriously, as silencing a Voice (e.g. by evaluating it as 'inappropriately loud' or 'with an accent' etc.) may cause lasting damage—e.g. to self-confidence in language learning (for the pressure to 'lose' one's accent, cf. Du Bois 2019). This also includes a teacher's responsibility to monitor the classmates of newly arrived students. In order to involve both 'old' and 'new' students at eye level, tasks may include learning to pronounce *all* children's names correctly, and to playfully detect (and appreciate) the accents of *all* students in various languages. Silencing, however, be it of languages or Voices, should be closely monitored and prevented from the very beginning, as it is prone to being a particularly sensitive issue after forced migration.

Third, children usually identify with their new society and language at a high level. Nevertheless, they also need to communicate and reconnect with memories and their family back home. For this reason, taking a multilingual perspective is essential if we are to keep the languages of childhood from being silenced, devalued, or even forbidden in education (cf. also recent approaches e.g. in Dlugaj & Fürstenau 2019). As we have seen above, silencing the family language is an obstacle to the new language learning process. 'Not silencing' is not enough, though. Voices and languages are able to strengthen each other both in the 'old' and 'new' languages, meaning that children's Voices and languages of childhood require ample space in any language learning process. The value of voicing one's competences in

*all* languages, and the consequences of not being allowed to do so, can hardly be portrayed more impressively than in the Kindertransportees' accounts. Many of them, for example, still remembered it as a source of exceptional joy and pride when, in rare cases, they were asked in school to use languages other than English (e.g. Thüne 2019a: 169, 173). The languages and Voices of children, all the more so after forced migration, can never be 'too loud' for language learning. Quite to the contrary, it serves language learning most, if they can be loud and widely heard.

The implications brought up here may best be summarised in the words of Keith when leaving his parents: 'Listen, we are moving forward now' (example 07). If we focus on the situation of saying farewell back in Germany in 1938, Keith was likely voicing a parent—of course in German—who comforted and encouraged him, the child. Many decades later in the interview, however, English has become Keith's strongest language. And yet, he decides to raise his Voice in the language of childhood again. Along with his own memory, he now voices collective memory, which has—only after repeated collective voicing—also become an integral part of European historiography. In our times of forced migration, taking a multilingual perspective in teacher education is of utmost importance for letting languages and experiences be widely audible already in the classroom, turning them into Voices heard, understood, and considered worth hearing also in wider society.

## Notes

1. We prefer the term *forced migrants* over the term *refugees*, as the latter is all too often used in the sense of 'victim' and/or 'threat' in public discourses (see, for a discussion, e.g., Gray & Franck 2019).
2. i.e., experiences of poverty, discrimination, illness, and others.
3. The term *Jewish* here refers, above all, to being threatened by the antisemitic and racist Nuremberg Laws.
4. Only very few children already knew some English.
5. While at the same time the Youth Aliyah to Palestine became increasingly difficult (cf. Baumel-Schwartz 2012: 138-152).
6. The publisher, Hentrich & Hentrich, has granted free-of-charge permission to reprint some excerpts from Thüne (2019a); others are original excerpts drawn from the corpus.
7. Translated for this paper with kind permission of Hentrich & Hentrich. The full data corpus (cf. [www.gerettet2019.wordpress.com](http://www.gerettet2019.wordpress.com)) is available in the original language at the Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache (<https://dgd.ids-mannheim.de/DGD2Web/jsp/Welcome.jsp>), database DGD, acronym FEGB.
8. KT stands for the interviewee (i.e., the Kindertransportee), INT stands for the interviewer (i.e., Eva-Maria Thüne).
9. All interviewees gave their consent to have their names included in Thüne's (2019a) publication. When we include some of the names here, we do so only and exclusively when quoting persons whose names were already published in Thüne (2019a).
10. *Dirndl* is a traditional female dress typical of southern Germany and Austria.
11. Apart from the name Beate, her additional names were Maria and Sara, the latter having been added by the Nazi administration.
12. Bea Green told her story at least twice, first in Leverton and Lowensohn (1990) and later in Thüne's (2019a) interview with her.
13. Example 15 can be found in the original data corpus (cf. footnote 7), section FEGB\_E\_00002\_SE\_01\_T\_01, lines 0586–0593.
14. In England, Eleven-plus is an examination necessary to pass to grammar school (which qualifies for academic education).

15. For a different contextualisation and discussion of examples 02, 08-10, 17, 20 and 22-24, see Thüne (2019b: 65; 70; 2020: 175-178; 2021: 79; 92-93; 98; 193).
16. The quote also indicates a shift in national identity; however, linguistic identity was much more important in most accounts (e.g., Thüne 2019a: 268).

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