

Communication Problems and the Language of the Camp

It was difficult for the prisoners to communicate amongst themselves. Most of them could only talk to fellow prisoners who spoke the same native language. The beatings they received from the guards, however, forced them to quickly learn how to pronounce their prisoners' numbers in German and to understand the orders they were given. The prisoners also had to sing German military songs when they were marched in and out of the camp. Over time, a camp vernacular developed, which was made up of German prison jargon, SS military jargon and terms from other languages, especially Russian – a simplified system of communication born of necessity. Prisoners who spoke foreign languages were sometimes used as interpreters.