From the outset of the war, a key task for the British authorities was that of persuasion, psychological warfare, arguing to the occupied populations of Western Europe that, despite all appearances to the contrary, the enemy had not definitively won, that the fight would be continuing. Countering the messages which the occupiers themselves were mediating to occupied Europe, promoting alternative Allied interpretations, and ‘speaking to the others’ in an effort to (in twenty-first-century parlance) win hearts and minds, was vital both in morale terms and as a strategic contribution to winning the whole war. Inevitably, this particular battleground, that of propaganda and persuasion, was one in which the major weapon was to be language, a ‘war of words’ (Briggs 1995: 3). This chapter considers the linguistic dimensions of this psychological warfare in two different contexts. Firstly, what were the language implications of broadcasting to occupied Europe from outside the continent, from Britain itself, and secondly, what happened when psychological war was being conducted ‘on the ground’, during military operations to liberate and occupy?

By mid-1945, the BBC was operating in 45 languages, with a grand total of some 850 hours a week (Mansell 1982: 123). To take the case of France as an example, broadcasting rose from 17.5 hours weekly in September 1940 to 28 hours by September 1941, 35.5 hours by September 1942, 39.5 hours by September 1943 and 43.75 hours by September 1944 (Brooks 2007: 53). The introduction of broadcasts in new languages basically followed the cycle of events in north and west Europe, with languages being added as countries came directly into the firing line. Thus, daily bulletins in Dutch were introduced a month before the Low Countries were invaded, and by the end of 1940 the Belgians received broadcasts in Flemish and French on alternate nights,
the Albanians a daily five-minute broadcast and the Icelanders and Maltese a weekly newsletter (Mansell 1982: 104). How was this massive broadcasting exercise in foreign languages conceived, and what role did the languages themselves play in its operation?

During this period, the War of Words was largely conducted from British shores. As continental territory became liberated, however, the policies and directives of psychological warfare were transplanted into the theatre of operations itself, directly encountering the audiences who had been listening to the regular broadcasts of the BBC. This chapter examines a specific case study of psychological warfare ‘on the ground’, during the invasion and liberation of Italy. What would happen when psychological warfare became an integral part of Allied military operations, with a front which was on the move as the Allies slowly inched their way forward towards the north of Italy? Two things were clear from the very first stages of the Italian campaign: psychological warfare was to be a fundamental part of the invasion/liberation experience, and the most powerful media components of operations would be the spoken word, broadcast on the radio, and the written word, in the form of leaflets distributed to the population.

The ‘war of words’ might be conducted from British shores or directly on the front line, but one thing was certain: in both cases it was necessary to discover how to reach the audience effectively. In order to speak to ‘the other’, what language would the authorities choose? Which voices would be selected to translate the voice of Britain? Both with international broadcasters, like the BBC, and locally-organized operations, as on the front line in Italy, the choice of the voices who spoke to European peoples on the continent became central in the operation of persuasion and propaganda.

**Languages and broadcasting**

Broadcasting in foreign languages from London raised a number of highly complex political questions in which issues of power, control and authenticity were all involved. Whose language was to be used, and whose voice was going to be heard through it? In occupied Europe in 1940, the foreign languages themselves had in many ways been appropriated and annexed by the hostile occupying powers, whether German or the puppet administrations the Nazis had established. In this situation, the native languages of the occupied countries had been in some ways deformed, cut off from their own national and cultural roots. As early as August 1940, the French resister, Jean Texcier, was pointing out that