



Edited by Vladislav Rjéoutski and Willem Frijhoff

# Language Choice in Enlightenment Europe

## Education, Sociability, and Governance

## Language Choice in Enlightenment Europe

# Languages and Culture in History

This series studies the role foreign languages have played in the creation of the linguistic and cultural heritage of Europe, both western and eastern, and at the individual, community, national or transnational level.

At the heart of this series is the historical evolution of linguistic and cultural policies, internal as well as external, and their relationship with linguistic and cultural identities.

The series takes an interdisciplinary approach to a variety of historical issues: the diffusion, the supply and the demand for foreign languages, the history of pedagogical practices, the historical relationship between languages in a given cultural context, the public and private use of foreign languages – in short, every way foreign languages intersect with local languages in the cultural realm.

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# Introduction

*Vladislav Rjéoutski and Willem Frijhoff*

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The eighteenth century was a period of intense economic and cultural exchange and a time during which new forms of sociability and corporate culture were emerging everywhere in Europe. The rampant nationalism of the past three centuries has made the nations of Europe to our minds much more monolingual than they used to be in real life. In fact, the linguistic situation in many countries was characterized by multilingualism, various languages being used in different contexts and having different functions. The same holds more specifically for many social and professional *milieux*. The linguistic needs of social, religious, and professional groups also had an impact on education, and on its provisions and institutions. Language learning underwent serious changes throughout the century, and different didactic traditions often clashed. In northern Europe, the need to speak the vernacular language(s), particularly for trade purposes, often contrasted with the tradition of studying Latin in the field of learning and scholarship. While in the course of the eighteenth century French had become a lingua franca in social life for most of the European elites, German, English, Italian, and a few other languages were also used extensively by non-native speakers in different parts of Europe and in various contexts. In some cases, the choice of a language was the sign of an emerging economic interest, or of a changing political preference; in others it could be explained by the circulation of knowledge, by a desire for innovation, or by existing networks. Multilingual states such as the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Empire, or the short-lived Napoleonic Empire, or countries without a strong unitary policy in matters of language and culture, such as the Netherlands, are particularly interesting from the point of view of language choice.



This broad, multinational collection of essays challenges the traditional image of the monolingual character of the world of the Ancien Régime by showing the unexpected riches of multi- and plurilingualism, the competition between languages and the impact of languages on national consciousness and vice versa. It insists on the important role played by selective language use in the social life of the prenationalist world; it also considers the educational provisions made during the preparation and early constitution of modern society in the Enlightenment. It presents a broad range of case studies showing how language was viewed and used, in social practice as well as on a symbolic level, by ethnic, political, and social groups in order to develop, express, and mark their identity in the rising national communities of northern Europe (east and west). The period concerned is the early modern era, more specifically the age of the Enlightenment. The social strata covered range from the nobility, the patriciate, and the royal servants to the urban population, the clergy, and the peasantry.

Andrea Bruschi (Verona) insists on the importance of learning vernaculars and learning in vernaculars, for the French nobility from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Modern languages were by and large considered as tools of cultural transmission. They served the acquisition of disciplines that were not found in the colleges and universities. Contrary to the still Latin-based universities, noble academies, such as the short-lived one founded by Nicolas Le Gras in 1640, were the hotbeds of such forms of innovation, adaptation, and social prestige. Both Willem Frijhoff (Rotterdam) and Madeleine van Strien-Chardonneau (Leiden) argue that multilingualism was a distinguishing mark of the Republic of the United Provinces. Though Dutch was the rising national language, French imposed itself as the language of international commerce, and of the Republic of Letters, as well as the cultural means of expression of the political and intellectual elites, in rivalry with academic Latin and, of course, Dutch itself. Next to the Latin (grammar) schools, a broad network of French schools developed in the Dutch Republic. During the eighteenth century, the so-called 'francization' of the elites was denounced by liberal intellectuals as detrimental to the development of national culture and consciousness and a major cause of national decline. Simultaneously, a profound innovation of linguistic education was proposed, both in method and in the choice of foreign languages, such as German or English. As Madeleine van Strien-Chardonneau shows, the rich archives of the patrician family Van Hogendorp give us a more precise view of the position of French in the multilingual spectrum of the northern Netherlands. She notes the gradual transition from bilingualism to plurilingualism, but insists also on the

political dimension and the gendered role of language choice among the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dutch elites.

While French became the language of culture and politics of large social sectors in western Europe, German confirmed its political preeminence in central Europe. Focusing on the multilingual Austrian Empire with its polyglot elites, Olga Khavanova (Moscow) analyses the language proficiency of royal servants in the Kingdom of Hungary in the late eighteenth century. She discusses the attempts of the court of Vienna, as early as in the 1760s and 1770s, to introduce German as the only language of correspondence of the administrative elites and as that used for the circulation of documents all over the Austrian Monarchy; she also examines the reactions this measure provoked among different branches of the executive power in the polyglot Kingdom of Hungary. She notes the varying degrees of proficiency in the same language for different purposes, and examines some early results of this policy at the end of Joseph II's reign. Michel Rocher (Halle) insists also on the linguistic diversification in late eighteenth-century central Europe, comparing the introduction of the teaching of foreign languages in grammar schools of the Holy Roman Empire and the Governorate of Estland (Estonia). By then, Latin schools in Germany had started to recruit from a broader social base, attracting pupils from noble and rich bourgeois families. Hence, they began to absorb elements of noble education and to include 'modern' foreign languages such as French, Italian, and English, at the same time weakening the formerly dominant position of Latin. In the Governorate of Estonia, however, Latin continued to dominate the curricula beyond the turn of the eighteenth century, with the exception of some modern language courses in French and Russian.

Ivana Horbec and Maja Matasović (Zagreb) examine the complex situation in eighteenth-century Croatia, a country divided between several separate political entities: the Kingdom of Hungary pertaining to the Habsburg Monarchy, the Ottoman Empire, and the borderlands in between, governed directly by the Imperial Court of Vienna. Moreover, Dubrovnik was an autonomous republic and Dalmatia and Istria remained under the rule of Venice. In spite of these political divisions, and the repartition of the Croatian language into three rather distinct dialects, Croats managed to preserve their national identity and created a standard language at the time of national revival in the nineteenth century. The authors scrutinize in particular the role of multilingualism with respect to Croatian: Latin, as the language of education, literature, and communication, helping to unify the divided nation, but also German, Italian, and French. Latin is also central to the interrogations of Vladislav Rjéoutski and Ekaterina Kislova

(Moscow). Rjéoutski explores the interest shown in Latin in the education of the Russian elites. Not being part of a long-lasting, secular cultural tradition in Russia, Latin offered the nobility a possibility to enhance their cultural capital. However, the status of Latin in Europe was changing rapidly at the end of the seventeenth century, when Russia started to open up to Europe and the Russian nobility were able to see what Latin could bring them, compared with other languages such as German and French. The result was what the author calls 'a defeat'. The Russian nobility remained reluctant to learn Latin. They opted for modern languages and particularly for French, also as a means to access classical literature. Beyond economic reasons, this reflected the choice of a new model of education in which French figured as the language of public and intimate sociability of the nobility.

As Ekaterina Kislova makes clear, this choice contrasts with the status of Latin among the members of the orthodox clergy in eighteenth-century Russia. They were the main focus of the most radical measures of the top-down Europeanization in post-Petrine Russia. Each of the languages in use – Church Slavonic, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and a little later French and German – was symbolic of a certain sociocultural type or lifestyle, a marker of the education received (or not), a sign of the family, career, and personal aspirations of the individual clergyman. Confronted with the underdevelopment of theological and philosophical styles in Russian literary language, and a lack of adequate terminology to express essential ideas and thoughts, Latin gradually became a language of theory and a model; it reflected the influence of Western theology and developed during the eighteenth century into the 'professional' and 'corporate' language of the educated clergy.

In spite of abundant linguistic differences, several common traits characterized the European space, either across the continent or at least in the major multi-ethnic states such as the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Empire. As is well known, French enjoyed a high cultural and social status in the eighteenth century. It was able to serve as a unifying language among the elites of several countries of western Europe, for instance in the Netherlands, but also among the higher social classes of France itself. Yet the attitude towards Latin, much less known, is another interesting case in point. In Croatia, Latin was used as a means to achieve ethnic unity. This use of Latin clashed, however, with its role in the Habsburg Monarchy. While Latin was originally one of the two official languages of the Holy Roman Empire, together with German, the Habsburgs finally chose German as their main language for bureaucratic correspondence. German was considered the most suitable means of establishing communication with the various

peoples within the Empire. In Russia, Latin could obviously not play the same unifying role, not least because it was rejected by the Russian nobility. Therefore, the Russian language was given important status and raised to the same level as the two languages that were culturally important in the eyes of the Russian elites: French and German. Interestingly, German, while losing its prominence compared with French during the reign of Catherine II, was proposed by the Russian monarchy as a means of cohesion within the Russian Empire. Indeed, it was the mother tongue of the Baltic elites who had successfully integrated the Russian bureaucracy from the time of the annexation of the Baltic lands into the Russian Empire during the reign of Peter the Great.

Another common trait, which is discussed in several of the articles published in this volume, is a search for cultural legitimacy through language choice. Latin was clearly a tool used by the Croats for this purpose throughout their early modern history. In Russia, Latin was used in the same way by the orthodox clergy. It helped them to destroy their image of being ignorant priests, widespread among the Russian elites. However, the Russian nobles themselves symbolically denigrated Latin and raised another language, French, to be their instrument of cultural supremacy. This was probably one of the reasons why, in turn, French was introduced into the curriculum of the Russian ecclesiastical schools towards the end of the eighteenth century.

In fact, a critical attitude towards Latin was a pan-European trend, of which traces can be found throughout Europe, from France to the Holy Roman Empire and Russia. Such criticism was not only triggered by the nobility's resistance to the study of Latin, but also by ideas of the didactic role of one's native language. It seems that these ideas spread almost at the same time in the Habsburg Monarchy and in Russia (and this is hardly a coincidence). They helped to favour the study of various subjects in the native language of the students which was – and this is not a coincidence either – the national language of the country. This process laid the foundation of a modern educational system in which subjects other than languages themselves would henceforth be studied and discussed in the language of the country where the education occurred. In some regions of Europe, this feature of European education is now giving way to English, as a new 'universal' language of training and scholarship.

The 'fall' of Latin in eighteenth-century Europe was accompanied by the rise of French. This rise concerned not only the field of sociability, but some professional fields as well, diplomacy being a case in point. However, although this also was a European trend, it was not a simultaneous

process in all European countries, as the examples of the Dutch, Russian, and Croatian elites clearly show. While Dutch elites eagerly used French even before the eighteenth century, it was only towards the middle of the eighteenth century that Russian elite francophonie really started. Although the knowledge of modern languages progressed among the Croats over the period, the Croatian elites do not seem to have been very interested in using French, including in the second half of the century when French was at its peak as the main language of the elites elsewhere in Europe. This seems to be a common feature for several countries on the European periphery. In those regions where French obtained a real success as a kind of 'universal' language, it quickly gave rise to a nationalistic reaction often referred to as Gallophobia. Although this question is discussed in more detail only in the articles dealing with the Dutch case, it can easily be compared to what happened, for example, from the second half of the eighteenth century in Russia.

### About the authors

**Vladislav Rjéoutski** graduated from the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* and defended his PhD at the Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences (2003). He taught Russian history and translation in various French universities and worked on a research project on the social history of the French language in Russia at Bristol University. He is currently a research fellow at the German Historical Institute in Moscow (DHI Moskau). His research deals with the history of education, social history of languages, emigration and the press in Russia in the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. He has recently edited/co-edited: *European Francophonie* (with D. Offord and G. Argent, Oxford, 2014); *French and Russian in Imperial Russia* (with D. Offord, L. Ryazanova-Clarke, and G. Argent, Edinburgh, 2015, 2 vols.) and *Quand le français gouvernait la Russie: l'éducation de la noblesse russe, 1750-1880* (Paris, 2016). He is currently working on a book on the social, political, and literary history of French in Russia, co-authored with Derek Offord and Gesine Argent (to be published by AUP).

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