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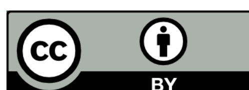

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The History of German as a Foreign Language in Europe

(translated and with additional notes by Nicola McLelland)[1]

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This article provides the first overview in English of how German has been taught and learned in Europe up to about 1800: who were the learners of German, where in Europe was German learnt, for what purposes was it learnt, and what do we know about how it was learnt? It also gives a brief overview of the current state of research, and gives three case studies of the history of German as a Foreign Language (GFL) in three different language areas: Italy, Bohemia, and Russia.

KEYWORDS German language, German as a foreign language, history of education, language learning, language teaching, history of language learning and teaching (HoLLT)

Introduction

This overview of the history of teaching and learning German in Europe is a sketch, no more. It deals with the period from the Middle Ages to about 1800, and is necessarily quite incomplete. After an introduction to the first beginnings of learning German, my contribution considers what we know about who learned German, and how German was learned, before turning to the current state of research, and brief case studies of German as a foreign language in three different language areas.

First beginnings

The history of the teaching and learning German as a foreign language in neighbouring areas and in the Baltic region reaches back to the Middle Ages. In the Mediterranean countries, it can be traced in some language areas to the early modern period,

[1] Translator's note: Footnotes below, which provide page references to the two monographs by Glück on the history of German as a foreign language (Glück 2002; 2013) and occasional additional references, are the translator's.

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as in the British Isles. In the German-speaking world itself, the earliest evidence for the use of German as a foreign language comes from the early ninth century, from the beginning of the Old High German period, the start of the history of the German language. The so-called Kassel glosses are a Romance-Old High German vocabulary list compiled by a West Frankish traveller in order to make himself understood in Bavaria (Figure 1). Another text of this kind is the 'Paris Conversations' (*Pariser Gespräche*).[2]

However, it is problematic to call the medieval German languages *Deutsch* 'German'. Only in the sixteenth century did Early New High German become established as a written language in most language areas. From this written language a New High German reading pronunciation later developed. As part of this process, Low German

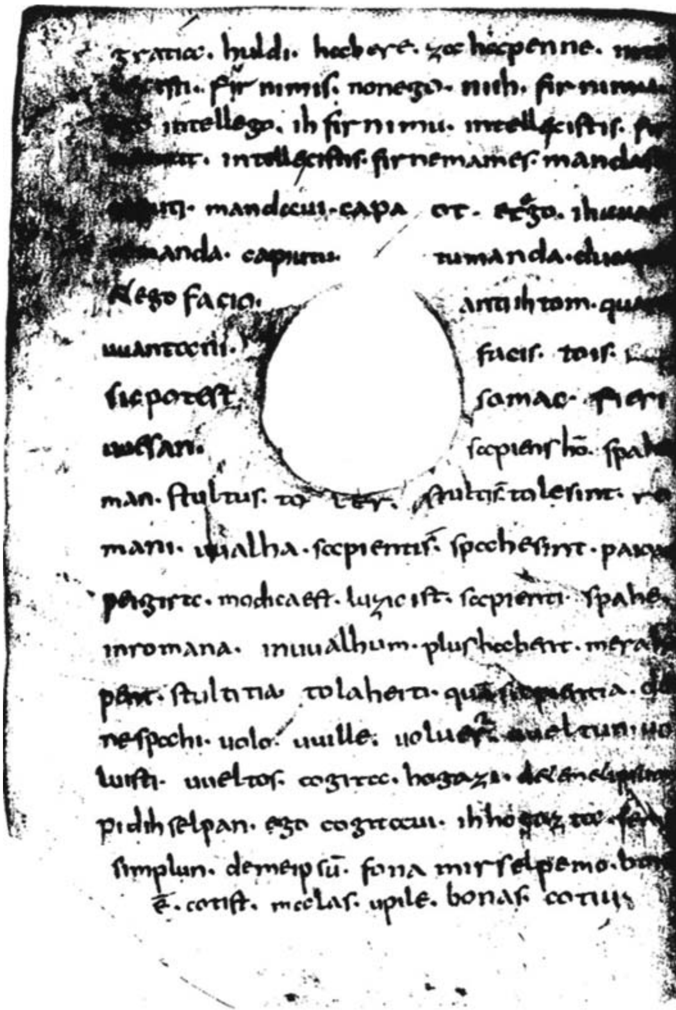

FIGURE 1 The Kassel Glosses (Kassel, Gesamthochschulbibliothek, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek 4°. Ms theol. 24, f. 17v).

[2] See Jolles (1968), Penzl (1984), as well as the discussion in Glück (2002: 68–69).

disappeared as a written language and became a mere dialect. Dutch, meanwhile, became an independent literary language on the basis of Low Saxon and Low Franconian. The permeable linguistic boundary between the Middle Low German language and the Scandinavian languages became impermeable: since the seventeenth century, German and these languages are foreign languages to each other. The Swiss, however, have maintained German as a written language up to the present day. It should also be recalled that German is — after Russian — the language in Europe with the most linguistic borders to other languages: about fifteen. All this is important to remember when talking about the history of the German language in Europe. Indeed, the history of the German language was from the beginning associated with the history of German as a foreign language. The formation of the linguistic borders of the German language was the result of language contact and language levelling, but also of migration and linguistic assimilation. Sometimes the German language became first a second language, then the mother tongue. In the west and south, this applied to Romance speakers, in the East to Slavs and Hungarians, in the North to Saxons, Frisians, and Danes. There were also such assimilation processes in the reverse direction.[3]

Who learned German?

The historical contacts of German with other languages took place amongst different social groups, and the foreign language German was learned for varying reasons. The term 'learning' here refers to a wide range of language proficiency, from makeshift elementary communication in broken German to confident use of German as a second, later acquired language. Who were these groups? They included (at least) merchants, soldiers, diplomats, scientists, noblemen and -women, but also migrants and refugees.

Merchants[4]

Traders travelled throughout Europe in the eleventh century and, where they could, they founded ethnic colonies. The North German Hanseatic merchants had a range in the late Middle Ages from Bordeaux and Lisbon to Russia and Norway.[5] Italian and Portuguese merchants settled — sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently — in German trading cities such as Nuremberg, Frankfurt, and Cologne. In the seventeenth century, there was a Greek merchant colony in Chemnitz. There were English colonies in Stade, Hamburg, and Gdansk. Polish and Czech merchants traded with Silesia, Saxony, Bavaria, and Austria. 'Business German' is not an invention of the twentieth century, but has been learnt since the Middle Ages.

Merchants and specialized craftsmen sent their sons abroad from the late Middle Ages onwards. There was in some industries a veritable exchange of children, who

[3] See Glück (2002: 51–66).

[4] See Glück (2002: 84–98).

[5] See Glück (2002: 84–86, 263–91).

learnt a foreign language alongside acquiring the skills of their trade. This exchange of children was particularly intense in Silesia (with Poland), in Bohemia, in northern Italy (with Tyrol), and in France (Alsace and Württemberg). About the linguistic side of such pre-modern child exchange programmes we know little, however.

Soldiers[6]

From the advent of mercenary armies in the fifteenth century, soldiers exercised their profession throughout Europe. They were highly mobile. Until the emergence of the nation-state national armies around 1800, polyglot mercenary armies were common. Germans and Swiss numbered among the troops valued by both sides in the French religious wars of the late sixteenth century, for example. Since simple soldiers were generally not multilingual, communication relied on linguistically proficient staff officers. The first known German textbooks for soldiers date from the time of the Thirty Years War (1618–48).[7] German, Spanish, Italian, and Croatian regiments devastated the country in the war on the side of the Holy Roman Empire; for the kings of Sweden and France, Swedes, Germans, Finns, Danes, Estonians, Latvians, and Frenchmen did the same. Some of them learned German. Almost all the states of Europe had linguistically mixed mercenary armies until the end of the eighteenth century. Around 1700, Brandenburg's army had French-speaking troops, consisting of Huguenots and Waldensians. The linguistic mix of the imperial army was much more colourful. Some countries, such as Austria-Hungary and Russia, had plurilingual armies up to the First World War.

Noblewomen[8]

Women from the nobility and the patrician class were sometimes married for dynastic reasons across language barriers, and they, and those accompanying them, were in effect obliged to acquire the language. In earlier times this was done without the help of written materials. One such example is the Polish princess Hedwig, whose marriage in 1475 took her to Bavaria-Landshut and who could speak no German at her wedding. About the stony path of language acquisition of such 'sold daughters' (Leitner, 1994), almost nothing is known.

Young noblemen and patricians[9]

From the sixteenth century onwards, the nobility sent their sons to travel in order to acquire an education, languages, and manners. They were often accompanied by multilingual tutors. The German *Kavaliersreisen* (Grand Tours) usually went to France and Italy, while Germany was in turn a destination for young noblemen from Scandinavia, the Baltic, and Central Eastern Europe — they had to learn German. In Finland, already in the seventeenth century there were manuals intended to prepare

[6] See Glück (2002: 121–22, 234–35; 2013: 152–58, 224–26).

[7] These were Swedish German manuals. See Glück (2002: 308–09).

[8] See Glück (2002: 104–08; 2013: 139–45).

[9] See Glück (2002: 132–40; 2013: 145–52).

young Swedish noblemen for study in Germany (e.g. Gezelius, 1667; reprinted in Keinästö, 1991). From the time of Peter the Great onwards, many education-hungry young Russians came to Germany to study, often out of necessity, and not all of them subsequently returned.

Diplomats[10]

The language of diplomacy in the Middle Ages was Latin. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the king of France required foreign powers to communicate with him in French (Moser, 1750). While the Holy Roman German Empire kept Latin as the language of external relations (Stark, 1995), the language of diplomacy within the polyglot empire was German. There were foreign ambassadors at German courts who could speak German. One such case is that of the Russian emissaries at the Prussian court in the early eighteenth century (Koch, 2002). In the eighteenth century the courts in London, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Warsaw maintained German chancelleries, because their kings were also princes of the German empire.

Scientists and academics[11]

The language of science was Latin until the eighteenth century (Fuhrmann, 2001). However, students attending universities in the German-speaking world usually learned German. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries some of them worked as translators of German when they returned home. These were often Lutheran theologians, who translated the creeds, catechisms, hymns, and theological literature. About their language learning, which usually took place orally, little is known. In the eighteenth century the language of lectures at German universities switched gradually from Latin to German. Christian Wolff, Immanuel Kant, and Georg Christoph Lichtenberg lectured in German, for example. Prominent foreign students included the Russian Michajl Lomonosov, later the author of a Russian grammar (1755; see 'Russia' below), who studied at Marburg, and Benjamin Franklin, who studied in Göttingen.

Immigrants[12]

There are many attestations of migration for economic reasons. From the late Middle Ages onwards, there is evidence of Italian chimney sweeps, pedlars (known as *Pomeranzenkrämer*, from medieval Latin *pomarancia*, 'orange', composed of *arancia* + *pomum*), construction workers and artisans, innkeepers, artists, and clergy in southern Germany. In the seventeenth century, there were large Spanish and Italian colonies at the courts in Vienna and Munich, carrying out trades servicing the courts. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Western Pomerania had a significant Swedish-speaking population. After the Thirty Years War, many German princes operated a policy of *Peuplierung* or (re-)population of their devastated lands with immigrants from other language areas.

[10] See Glück (2013: 47–52); Koch (2002: 47–56).

[11] See Glück (2002: 124–132; 2013: 114–16); Koch (2002: 65–81).

[12] See Glück (2002: 146–60; 2013: 43–45).

Refugees[13]

The largest group of German learners were refugees who had sought refuge in Germany for religious reasons and who learned German, albeit often reluctantly. Best known are the Huguenots and the Waldensians from France and Savoy. In the sixteenth century there were Protestant Englishmen who sought refuge in Germany and Switzerland. In the seventeenth century, tens of thousands came from Bohemia to Saxony, Brandenburg, and Poland. Groups of religious refugees from Italy, Spain, Poland, and Austria also came to the Protestant areas of Germany and the Netherlands from the sixteenth century onwards. About their language loss much is known, about their language learning, little.

Itinerants (das Fahrende Volk)[14]

Another social group among whom knowledge of foreign languages was sometimes present, was the 'travelling people'. The medieval *spilman* (lit. 'playman') did not stop at language barriers, and the term *spilfrouwe* (lit. 'playwoman') referred not only to female musicians, but also to itinerant prostitutes. There were many kinds of trade and seasonal work at the lower end of the social ladder: bear-handlers from Romania, governesses, officers, and craftsmen from France, teamsters and cooks from Bohemia, harvest labourers from Poland, and theatre troops from England (see Figure 2) all came to Germany. They all had to communicate — somehow. Often this was done in German.

How was German learned?

In the early modern period, the vast majority of Europeans were illiterate. Besides the clergy, only narrow urban strata were able to read and write competently. In the eighteenth century, the first attempts at compulsory education were implemented, especially in the Protestant countries of Central and Northern Europe, where the Pietists played an important role in the spread of lay education, which is a key factor. For, in exploring the question of who learnt German as a foreign language, we rely on written and printed language learning aids as a key source. It should not be forgotten, however, that the use of these aids requires literacy. The groups amongst whom such literacy was present and who also had the opportunity to learn foreign languages were small and privileged. Studies that rely on teaching materials as evidence for pre-modern language learning work are, therefore, the tip of the iceberg. The mass of the iceberg that is not visible is the language acquisition that took place without a teacher, instruction, or educational materials, but through listening and repetition, by trial, error, and renewed trial. This must not be forgotten, even as we enumerate the teaching aids that helped the privileged minority in their language acquisition. It must also be borne in mind that such teaching materials ran to only small editions.

[13] See Glück (2002: 159–201). On a seventeenth-century grammar that seems to have been written for Protestant refugees living near Frankfurt, see also McLelland (2005).

[14] See Glück (2002: 140–46). On English theatre troops, see Glück (2002: 330–31).

FIGURE 2 An eighteenth-century bill announcing a performance by English artistes in Nuremberg.

The oldest resources of this type are thematically arranged vocabulary lists, so-called *nomenclators*,[15] and model conversations in which key communicative events are modelled, from gossip about the weather or the latest Sunday sermon, to a sales negotiation in a cloth shop.[16] In the sixteenth century multilingual dictionaries came into use, where German was usually represented. From the late sixteenth century bilingual dictionaries of German and another language also began to emerge, but the polyglot dictionaries remained the dominant genre until the late seventeenth century. There are textbooks of German as a foreign language, often with the word *Grammatica* in the title, in the various language areas from the early seventeenth century onwards. At first, they were written in Latin, and then, from about 1680, written in the local languages. They often contained, besides the textbook part, vocabularies, collections of dialogues, and epistolaries. Such letter-writing guides

[15] See Glück (2013: 115).

[16] On an example of a manual for negotiating over cloth, see McLelland (2004).

were in the eighteenth century an independent textbook genre, from which it was supposed to be possible to teach writing in a foreign language. Also in the eighteenth century, specialist technical glossaries and phraseological dictionaries came into use as aids for teaching languages. Specialized dictionaries were printed, for example, for merchants, pharmacists, and chemists, or for soldiers.

The state of research into the history of German as a foreign language

The history of teaching materials for German as a foreign language is variously well studied. For the historic kingdom of Bohemia and the language areas of the Polish, Russian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Hungarian bibliographies from the beginnings in each case to the twentieth century have been produced in Bamberg. The bibliography for Bohemia is a joint venture with the department of German Studies at Olomouc (Glück et al., 2002), while the bibliography for Poland was produced in collaboration with Konrad Schröder (Augsburg) (Glück & Schroeder, 2007). The bio-bibliographical guide to linguistics of the eighteenth century by Herbert Brekle (Brekle, 1992–2005) and Konrad Schröder's biographical and bibliographical dictionary of foreign language teachers in German-speaking areas from the late Middle Ages up to 1800 (Schroeder, 1987–99) are goldmines, but German as a foreign language is not prominent in them. For **France**, we have the work of Paul Lévy (1950), which covers the history of learning German in France from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. The first volume of a German translation of this work by Barbara Kaltz, also bringing the bibliography up to date, appeared in 2013 (Lévy & Kaltz, 2013). For other language areas (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, English, Dutch and Nordic, and South Slavonic languages), there are thus far no specialized bibliographies.[17] In the **British Isles,** textbooks and dictionaries of German were printed from the late seventeenth century. The earliest of these is the *High Dutch Minerva* of Martin Aedler (1680), described by Fredericka van der Lubbe in her thesis (2007). A comprehensive bibliography on the history of the German language in the UK is likely to be relatively easy to write, because a great deal of the preparatory work has already been done.[18] In the **Netherlands**, High German really only gained the status of a foreign language in the eighteenth century. The oldest textbook dates from 1716, the oldest bilingual dictionary from 1719, both written by Matthias Kramer.[19] In **Denmark and Sweden**, the first tools for learning German were printed in the seventeenth century.[20] For the Nordic languages, a bibliography by Lund Haugen covers historical lexicography, including items with the German language as a reference language, although it is incomplete (Haugen, 1984). The written language German came into contact with Norwegian via Danish, with Finnish via Swedish. Only in the

[17] See also Glück (2002: 233–44; 2013: 353–98).

[18] On German as a foreign language in Britain, see Ortmanns (1993), Glück (2002: 323–36; 2013: 484–516); and see now also McLelland's monograph (2014, forthcoming).

[19] On German learning in the Netherlands, see Glück (2002: 311–22; 2013: 430–35).

[20] On German as a foreign language in Scandinavia, see Glück (2002: 290–310; 2013: 436–83).

nineteenth century did these contacts become direct. In the **Iberian Peninsula**, German was learned only late, and only sporadically. A Catalan-German vocabulary of 1502 remained a solitaire (Morcinek, 2006). The first German textbook for Spanish dates from the end of the eighteenth century, so that the task of producing a bibliography can be limited to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; a project to do this, led by Marizzi Bernd (Madrid), together with Maria Teresa Cortez (Aveiro), is underway.[21] In the language areas of **Slovenian**, **Croatian**, and **Serbian**, the first textbooks for German as a foreign language originated in the late eighteenth century. For Croatian we have the dissertation of Maja Häusler (1998).[22] Prior to the eighteenth century, the German language was learned in these language areas orally, without textbooks. The establishment of Slovenian (*Windisch*) as a foreign language took place in the sixteenth century in connection with the Lutheran Reformation. Then came the first lexicographical work, but these first signs of a Slovenian literary language were lost in the Counter-Reformation. Croatia and Serbia were under Ottoman rule until well into the eighteenth century. Competence in German was needed only along the Austrian military border. Renewed efforts to establish South Slavonic languages as written languages are found from the end of the eighteenth century. During the school reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, textbooks of German for so-called *Trivialschulen* ('trivial schools', schools teaching the Trivium, consisting of elementary studies in grammar, dialectics [i.e. logic], and rhetoric) were based on the 1772 edition of Gottsched's *Sprachkunst* ('German Grammar').[23] The bibliographical documentation of German language learning materials is here too largely restricted to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The German language in three different language areas

Given the limited scope of this paper, I shall conclude by examining the development of German by means of textbooks in just three language areas: Italy, the country with the oldest tradition; the kingdom of Bohemia, as the country where German was until 1918 a second national language; and Russia, as the country where German as a Foreign Language had the strongest position in the eighteenth century. It was here, in the Age of Enlightenment, that the largest number of textbooks and dictionaries were produced.

Italy[24]

The oldest aids for the acquisition of the German language come from Italy, and it was here, too, that the first schools teaching German as a foreign language were set up. A number of manuscripts from the fifteenth century contain thematically

[21] On the history of German as a foreign language in the Iberian peninsula, see Glück (2002: 337–34; 2013: 502–16).

[22] See also Glück (2013: 333–52).

[23] See Glück (2013: 222).

[24] See Glück (2002: 245–62; 2013: 399–429).

arranged German-Italian vocabulary lists and bilingual dialogues. One of these manuscripts also contains Latin and Czech (Kresálková, 1984). They have precursors in to the fourteenth century, which have not survived. The oldest print based on these manuscripts dates from 1477 (Adam of Rottweil).[25] During the sixteenth century, the *Solenissimo vocabolista* was edited for many other languages (Rossebastiano Bart, 1983; 1984a; 1984b; Glück & Morcinek, 2006).

A school in which young Venetians could learn German was run by a certain George of Nuremberg around 1424 in Venice. His students had a clear career in view: they wanted to become *Sensali* or official brokers, in German *Unterkäuffel*. A *Sensal*'s role was to act as an agent, advising merchants from Germany at the same time as ensuring that the appropriate sales taxes were paid to the Venetian state. German merchants had been required since the thirteenth century to live and store their goods in the *Fondaco di tedeschi* or German Foundation (the building can still be seen today at the Rialto Bridge), both for their safety and in order to facilitate their monitoring by the official brokers.

Links to Italy remained of central importance for the Upper German trading cities after the discovery of America, too. Accordingly, German as a foreign language maintained a certain significance in northern Italy until the end of the Old Empire (1806). The demand was sustained in part by the fact that the House of Habsburg had control of certain Italian territories from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. (However, more Italian was learnt in Germany than German was learnt in Italy.) The production of textbooks and dictionaries remained fairly modest. In the eighteenth century, four textbooks of German and six conversation manuals were published, as well as about twenty bilingual German-Italian dictionaries.

Bohemia[26]

The kingdom of Bohemia had belonged to the Holy Roman Empire from the thirteenth century, and the Habsburgs were on the royal throne from 1526 onwards. Bohemia had a German-speaking minority from the Middle Ages to 1945. In long periods of its history it was, in its major cities and along its linguistic borders in the south, west, and north, a bilingual country. The oldest vocabularies that link German with Czech date from the fifteenth century.

One of these vocabularies was already noted above (Kresálková, 1984); another is the trilingual vocabulary of Jan Holubar (around 1430–1500), produced in 1454 for the Bohemian King Ladislaus Postumus (1440–57) (see Figure 3). A copy was later also made for the later Emperor Maximilian (1459–1519) (Pausch, 2004) — already the magnificent initials in this copy indicate that the work is dedicated to a king. The first printed vocabulary that connected the two languages was published in 1513 in Vienna. The bibliography of Glück et al. (2002) lists five handwritten vocabularies from the fifteenth century. For the sixteenth century they recorded 35 titles, for the 'dark' seventeenth century 15 titles, and for the eighteenth century 43 items, of which

[25] See Blusch (1992); also McLelland (2004).

[26] See Glück (2002: 245–364; 2013: 235–55).

19 appeared between 1775 and 1799. For the years 1800 to 1815 there were a further 15 titles. Of the 15 titles of the seventeenth century, eight appeared before 1620, seven between 1620 and 1700. One can interpret these data as follows: until the Battle of White Mountain, which brought with it both the end of the rule of the Bohemian nobility (*Ständeherrschaft*) in Bohemia and the Counter-Reformation, there was a reading public interested in materials for learning German. After the expulsions of 1620 and 1627 this readership no longer existed. The school system was taken over by the Jesuits and operated in Latin; the development of literacy in the vernaculars was halted, and the level of literacy that had been achieved was lost. Once again, German was chiefly learned orally during those decades in Bohemia, especially among the lower classes. When, in Jaroslav Hašek's novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*, published in 1921 and 1923 and set during World War I in Austria-Hungary, Švejk is asked by his lieutenant how and where he had learned German, Švejk's reply characterizes this form of language learning well: *Tak, sám sebe od* ('Well, just like that, it just happened'). In the late eighteenth century, the situation changed once again. The reforms in primary education, begun in 1772 by Maria Theresa and continued under Joseph II, re-established a literate middle class to whom printed aids for learning German as a foreign language could be of use. The majority of the population nevertheless still learned German in the kitchen, from neighbours, on the job, in the army, in the pub . . . 'well, it just happened'.

Russia[27]

The situation is quite different in Russia, where the earliest documented beginnings of learning German date to the fifteenth century. Contacts with Germans are older, going back to the thirteenth century, in the Novgorod office of the Hanseatic League. The Hanseatic merchants, however, did not expect Russians to learn Middle Low German. Rather, they had their own people learn Russian, in order to have a monopoly on the job of interpreting. Russian-German relations intensified under Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible, 1530–84), as he recruited specialists with military and technical knowledge from Germany. In the First Nordic War (1558–93) German prisoners-of-war from Livonia and Estonia were deported to Moscow, where they were settled in the German quarter located outside the city. There, High German became the language of communication, and in the Lutheran parish school there, teaching was in German.

New demand for German language skills was promoted by the 'opening' of Russia to Europe by Peter I (Peter the Great). He sent young Russians to study in Germany and recruited specialists from all over Western Europe. He also introduced secondary education on the Western model to Russia. The first school of this kind was founded by Ernst Glueck (1654–1705), a pastor deported from Livonia (Glück & Polanska, 2005). Peter's wife and successor Catherine I (1684–1727, reigned from 1725) promoted the Petersburg Academy, which was largely staffed by foreign scholars up to the end of the eighteenth century. In these schools, and in the Academy, German

[27] See Glück (2002: 276–89; 2013: 292–326); for fuller details, see Koch (2002).

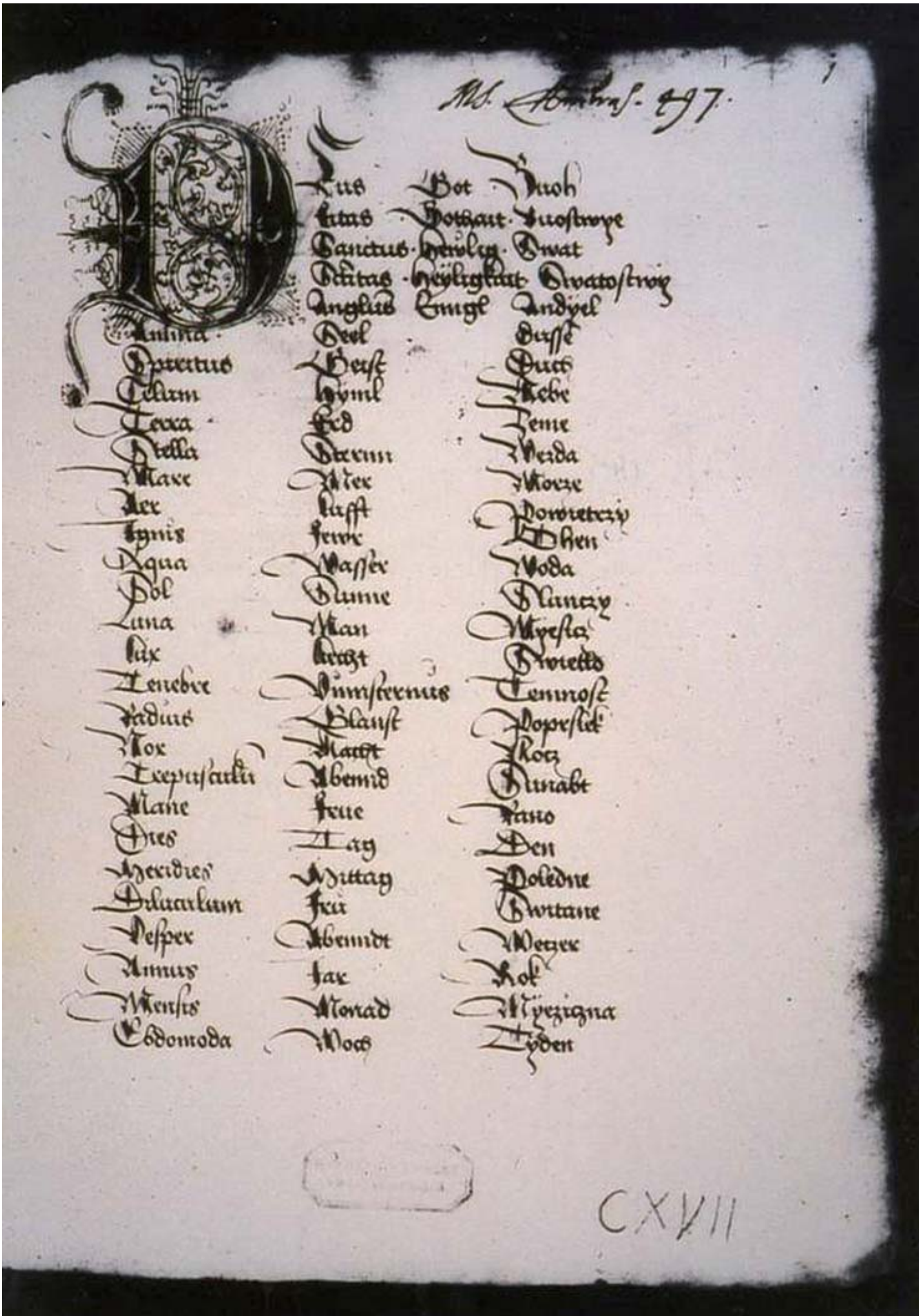

FIGURE 3 Latin-German-Czech glossary by Jan Holubar for Ladislaus Postumus, 1454.

was the language of instruction and work well into the reign of Catherine II (1729–96, ruled from 1762). Only after the appearance of a Russian grammar (1757) by Michajl Lomonosov (1711–65) did usable textbooks written in Russian become possible, and these were gradually written, printed, and used. From 1700 onwards, there are printed dictionaries that link Russian and West European languages. Between 1700 and 1815 in Russia 14 textbooks were published, 10 conversation manuals, and 14 bilingual primers — a total of 38 titles. In addition, (at least) 25 dictionaries were printed. In the years 1799 to 1815 over 40 phrasebook for soldiers containing German and Russian also appeared (Bauman, 1969: I, 75). The production of textbooks of German and bi- or multi-lingual dictionaries including German was higher in Russia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than in any other language area. Russian borrowed heavily from German — and from other European languages via German — especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. For details, see the work of Kristine Koch (2002).

Concluding remarks

The focus of the demand for proficiency in German from the Middle Ages onwards was in the countries of Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe, but German was also always learnt to a significant extent in France and the Netherlands. In South-Eastern Europe, German was primarily learned in those areas that belonged until 1918 to the Habsburg monarchy. In the UK, in Italy, and in the Iberian peninsula, German was less in demand. This is still true today.

Research into this history is at differing stages. For the language areas of Hungarian, the West and East Slavonic and the Baltic languages, and for France, there are bibliographies of printed sources. For all other language areas, our knowledge is still very incomplete. There were different social groups who needed or wanted to learn German. The spectrum ranged from the high nobility of both sexes to the social outcasts of the itinerant *Fahrendes Volk*. The written and printed resources on the basis of which we investigate the history of language learning reveal only a part of the picture: acquisition by privileged groups who were literate. German and other foreign languages, besides Latin and, perhaps, French were, however, mainly learned orally up to the nineteenth century.

This has been no more than a rough overview, as promised at the outset. I will be content, however, if I have aroused readers' curiosity about the history of my language across borders.

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