

Call for papers
Max Weber Network Eastern Europe
German Historical Institute in Paris
Société internationale d'histoire du français langue étrangère ou seconde
In association with the German Research Foundation (DFG)
International workshop

Genesis of professions and language learning

16th – first half 19th c.

MW Network Eastern Europe, Helsinki

15-16 May, 2025

The early modern period saw the emergence of a number of professional groups in Europe that both shared characteristics with modern professions and showed distinct early-modern features. A key aspect of this process was the introduction of specialized education, which often included language learning. This was particularly true for occupations where proficiency in specific languages was essential, such as diplomats, diplomatic translators, secretaries, scribes, scholars, and clerics. Moreover, due to the intensification of transnational contacts and geographical mobility among specialists as well as the circulation of printed books, language proficiency became an integral part of the education for many other professional groups, such as military officers, engineers, and artists.

Although language proficiency was highly valued among many professionals, the acquisition of foreign language skills varied significantly across different professional milieus. For some groups, such as the learned professions, language learning was part of their formal educational path. For others such as nobility, family strategies and personal experiences, such as educational travel, played a more significant role. For example, the linguistic training of aspiring diplomats remained, for a long time, dependent on the latter rather than on targeted professional training. However, signs of change emerged with the establishment of schools for future foreign affairs personnel and practices such as attaching young men to diplomatic missions as *chevaliers d'ambassade* or embassy secretaries.

One question concerns the importance of *linguae francae*, particularly the role of French compared to other languages (both European and non-European) in the curriculum of early modern 'professions'. Over the course of the early modern period, French became the main diplomatic *lingua franca* whose role increased particularly in the second half of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth centuries. However, the importance of French grew as well for many other specialists, such as military officers, engineers, scholars, and more. Social criteria played an important role: while for many diplomats from noble families French was part of their upbringing, for young men from other social strata it was a valuable

addition and, in some cases, the central component of their professional knowledge and expertise.

Another question concerns the relationship between the existing linguistic training and the personnel policy of early modern state administrations. To what extent did the latter influence the choice of languages and the forms of their acquisition within the institutions they supported financially, compared to the influence of other actors, such as school directors and teachers, who often pursued their own agenda?

The objective of the workshop is to contribute to our understanding of the roles played by both state and private actors in the development of linguistic training for early modern professional groups and to assess differences in the emerging professionalisation policies across Europe.

Questions which are of interest for the workshop include but are not limited to:

- Institutions and practices in language learning for aspiring professionals
- (Foreign) language proficiency as a professional skill and/or part of the professional ethic of a group; the role of language training versus training in other disciplines in a growing specialisation
- The place of linguistic training within career structures
- The role of *linguae francae*, for example French, versus other languages in the linguistic training of would-be professionals
- Family strategies for language acquisition
- State and non-state actors providing linguistic training
- The dissemination of models for organizing training, including linguistic instruction

Confirmed keynote speakers: Prof. Guido Braun (University of Upper Alsace); Prof. Harry Lönnroth (Jyväskylä University).

Working language of the workshop: English, with the possibility to present papers in French.

Organizing committee: Vladislav Rjéoutski (German Historical Institute in Paris), Sophie Holm (Max Weber Network Eastern Europe).

Prospective participants are invited to submit their proposals to the following email address: vrjeoutski@dhi-paris.fr

Important dates:

- Submission deadline: 30 November 2024
- Notification of paper acceptance: 15 December 2024

The organisers may cover part of the travel expenses.