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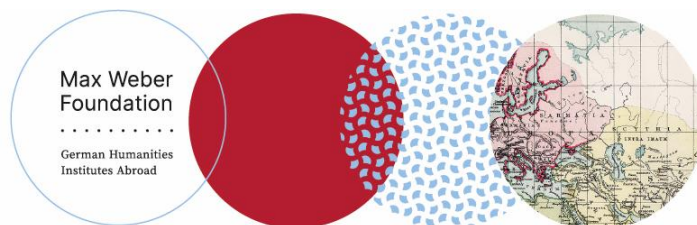
Max Weber Network Eastern Europe
German Historical Institute in Paris
Société internationale pour l'histoire du français langue étrangère ou seconde
with the support of the German Research Foundation

Genesis of professions and language learning

International workshop
Helsinki, 15–17 May, 2025

Programme

Thursday 15 May, 2025

17:00 Welcome

17:15–18:45 Keynote lecture
- Guido Braun, University of Upper Alsace
  Language learning by future diplomats and diplomatic translators in the Early modern period
- Chair: Sophie Holm, Max Weber Network Eastern Europe (Helsinki)

Friday 16 May, 2024

9:15 Session 1: *Language teaching in seminaries and vocational education*

- Chair: Leena Kolehmainen, University of Helsinki
- Andrey Ivanov, University of Wisconsin Platteville
  Theology and language in eighteenth-century Russian Orthodox seminaries: Linguistic turn and functions of German and French
- Martin Reimer, Technische Universität Dresden
  Foreign language teaching and the expansion of (higher) vocational education in the Kingdom of Saxony, 1815-1848

10:15 Small break

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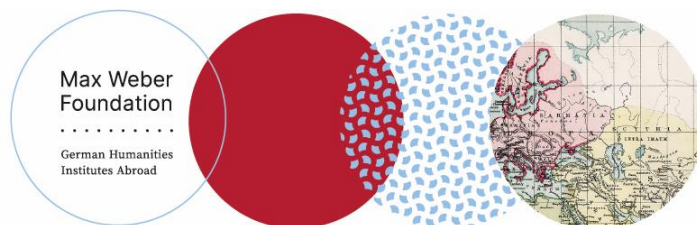
10:30 Keynote lecture

- Harry Lönnroth, University of Jyväskylä
  Town scribes as mediators of literacy in early modern Sweden
- Chair: Mari Välimäki, University of Turku

12:00 Lunch

13:15 Visit to the National Library

- Hosts: Mika Hakkarainen (National Library), Rainer Knapas (University of Helsinki)

14:30 Session 2: *Early-modern language learning manuals*

- Chair: Kirill Levinson, Max Weber Network Eastern Europe (Vilnius)
- Sabina Tsapaeva, University of Hamburg/TU Dresden
  Institutionalised vs. non-institutionalised foreign language instruction: The merchant phrasebook by master George of Nuremberg (1424) in comparison to Ein Rusch Boeck *(anonymous, 16th century)*
- Vladislav Knoll, Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Prague)
  Church Slavonic language learning in the Romanian-speaking lands
- Wei Chen, University of Malta
  The choice of target languages in Chinese language instruction by Western missionaries prior to the mid-19th century

16:00 End of day 2

19:00 Conference dinner

Saturday 17 May, 2025

9:30 Coffee

10:00 Session 3: *Training and careers of diplomatic translators*

- Chair: Vladislav Rjéoutski, DHI Paris / Max Weber Network Eastern Europe
- Oleg Rusakovskiy, Centre for Advanced Study Sofia
  Russian training for foreign-born translators: The case from the 17th-century Moscow
- Müberra Kapusuz, European University Institute
  The rise of the Grand Dragomanate and the Phanariot influence in the 17th century
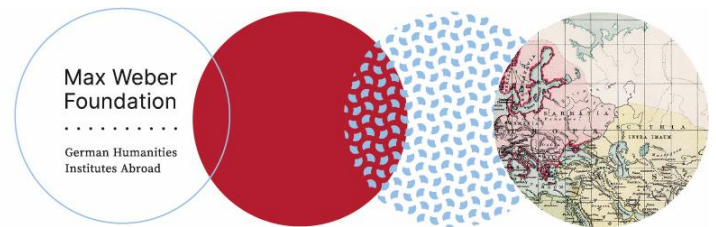
Ottoman diplomacy

- Elisabeth Lobenwein, German Historical Institute in Rome
  The professional practice and self-representation of dragomans in 17th century Habsburg-Ottoman diplomatic relations

11:30 Small break

11:45 Session 4: *Language intermediaries*

- Chair: Anu Lahtinen, University of Helsinki
- Nere Jone Intxaustegi Jauregi, University of Deusto (Bilbao, remote participation)
  Notaries and languages in the early modern Basque country
- Kirill Levinson, Max Weber Network Eastern Europe (Vilnius)
  Between Subjugation and Conjugation: The Russian-American Company and the teaching of Russian to the indigenous population of the Aleutian Islands and Alaska

12:45 Concluding remarks

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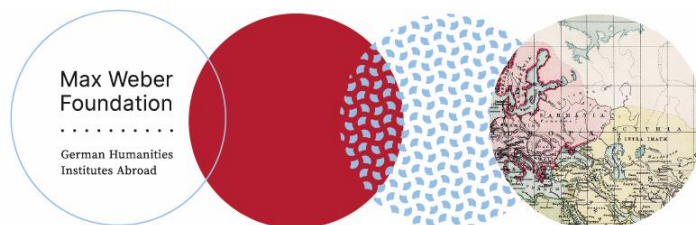
Abstracts

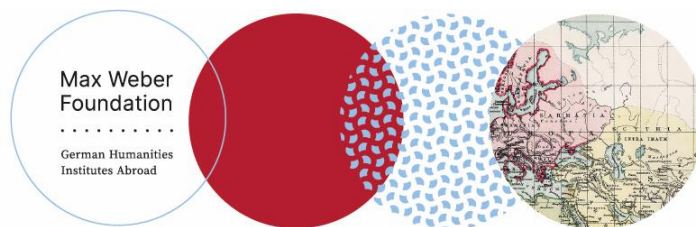Guido Braun, University of Upper Alsace

Language learning by future diplomats and diplomatic translators in the Early modern period

The early modern period was a time of burgeoning diplomatic activity on the European continent characterized by the spread of resident diplomacy and the appearance of peace congresses. Linguistic practices were changing dramatically as well. These developments had a considerable impact on languages and translation in diplomacy, affecting its functioning and role in various ways: translation departments were formed or expanded and redesigned, and the need to train translators in order to increase efficiency of foreign policy began to be felt by major powers. Living and working in a multilingual and multicultural environment, diplomats and translators often were cultural brokers with hybrid cultural identities. By the end of the seventeenth century and in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the first schools and various practices aimed at training future diplomats, secretaries, translators and interpreters. The lecture deals with the problems of language acquisition on the part of diplomatic envoys and the staff of their embassy households as well as the institutions involved in diplomatic relations. The focus will be on corresponding training strategies, which raise the question of a professionalization in the relevant fields of activity.

Wei Chen (University of Malta)

The Choice of Target Language in Chinese Language Manuals by Western Authors Before the Mid-19th Century

This study investigates the selection of target language varieties in representative early Western manuals on the Chinese language produced before the mid-19th century. These works reveal that, while many authors acknowledged the linguistic complexity of Chinese both synchronically and diachronically, their decisions regarding which varieties of Chinese to describe and teach were shaped more by social and historical contexts—such as the intended audiences of the works and the political aims of foreign governments—than by any prescribed linguistic changes in China. This diversity in language selection reflects not only the linguistic complexity of China at the time but also the lack of an officially prescribed, nationwide lingua franca. Furthermore, these works exhibit variation in linguistic features, such as vocabulary selection, to address the needs of different groups of learners, including missionaries, merchants, and diplomats.

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Nere Jone Intxaustegi Jauregi, Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao

Notaries and languages in the early modern Basque Country

The Basque Country can refer to different historical, social and political realities. In this paper, it refers to the seven territories of Alava, Biscay, Gipuzkoa, Labourd, Lower Navarre, Navarre and Soule, located in the present-day states of Spain and France. In pre-modern times, documents in these two kingdoms were usually written in Castilian and French, but the Basque population was mostly monolingual in Basque, so they had to be translated, a task that was usually carried out by public notaries.

For this reason, I will focus on the public notaries, who were usually bilingual, writing documents in one language (Castilian or French) and explaining and translating them into another (Basque). I will analyse how and where they acquired this linguistic knowledge, whether it was in the family, at university or self-taught by learning it in their office as notaries. In order to do this, I will use documents from different archives, as well as literary sources that refer to the different situations in which this linguistic reality was recorded.

Andrey Ivanov, University of Wisconsin Platteville

Theology and language in eighteenth-century Russian Orthodox seminaries: Linguistic turn and functions of German and French

This paper examines a key legacy of Feofan Prokopovych's reforms in the Russian Empire's Orthodox Church: a linguistic turn that accompanied the shift in seminarian education in Ukraine and later Russia from Roman Catholic to Protestant theological models. Prokopovych introduced elements of Protestant theology at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy after returning from Italy and Germany in 1702, but the broader embrace of Protestant learning followed the synodal reform of 1721. He and his allies encouraged Orthodox seminarians to forgo Catholic Europe for Protestant institutions, especially those in Germany's Jena-Leipzig-Halle intellectual triangle, along with universities like Kiel, Koenigsberg, and later Leiden and Oxford.

This Protestant influence brought a linguistic shift toward modern European languages. German and later French appeared in seminarian curricula in Kharkiv and Kyiv by the 1730s, spreading empire-wide by the 1780s. This shift involved translation, theological analysis, and inspiration drawn from German theologians as well as French thinkers. The paper explores the impact of this linguistic turn in the Orthodox theological education and its evolving relationship with Latin, which remained the dominant language of seminaries in the Russian Empire.
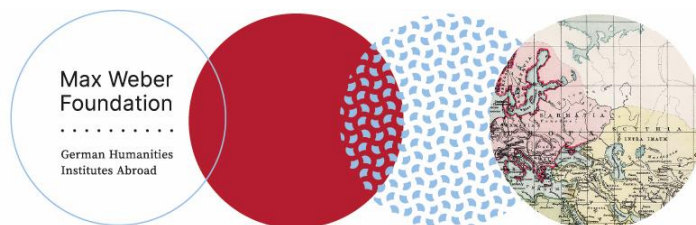
Müberra Kapusuz, European University Institute

The Rise of the Grand Dragomanate and the Phanariot Influence in the 17th Century Ottoman
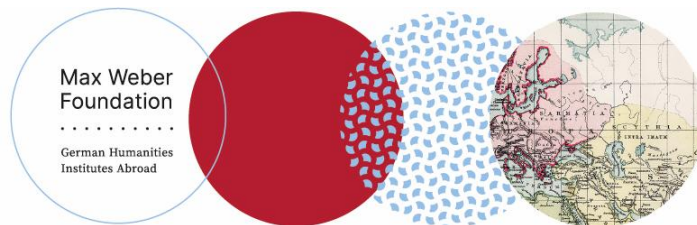
Diplomacy

This paper examines the establishment and evolution of the Grand Dragoman position at the Ottoman Porte, initiated in the 1660s during the lengthy siege of Candia. The first Grand Dragoman, Panagiotis Nicousios, an Orthodox Greek from Chios, effectively negotiated with the Venetians. His successor, Alexandros Mavrocordatos, contributed significantly to the Treaty of Karlowitz, which united various powers. Their careers flourished amidst the Ottoman Empire's wars with European nations, necessitating skilled diplomats. The emerging Orthodox elite aligned with the Patriarchate, known as Phanariots, filled this need, with both Panagiotis and Alexandros being members. Their education in Italian cities provided them with advanced linguistic capabilities, including proficiency in Greek, Turkish, Latin, and likely Italian, along with some knowledge of Persian and Arabic. This study highlights the Phanariots' monopolization of diplomatic roles until the Greek War of Independence, showcasing their linguistic skills as vital in transforming court interpreters into high-ranking diplomats within the Ottoman administration.

Vladislav Knoll, Institute of Slavonic Studies of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Prague)

Learning Church Slavonic in the Romanian-speaking territories of the 17th century

Unlike Latin and Greek, Church Slavonic lacked a grammatical approach to education, and language acquisition was generally based on memorising texts and comparing the cultural language with the vernacular. This method was most challenging in the Romanian environment, where Church Slavonic was the cultural language until the 18th century.

In our paper we will try to reconstruct the traditional way of learning Church Slavonic in the Romanian-speaking environment and to contrast it with the new approaches using modern didactic materials, which came from the East Slavic area in the second third of the 17th century. The paper will also briefly discuss the question of the purpose of teaching Church Slavonic and the social groups involved.

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Kirill Levinson, Max Weber Netwerk Eastern Europe (Vilnius)

Between Subjugation and Conjugation: The Russian-American Company and the teaching of Russian to the indigenous population of the Aleutian Islands and Alaska

During the Russian colonization of Siberia and North Pacific, many indigenous men, women and children were enslaved by the colonists. Children who were born and/or raised in such mixed households often learned more than one language and were used as translators. The situation in the area controlled by the Russian-American Company was different in that schools were established by the RAC where dozens of boys and girls were taught the Russian language, reading and writing, among other subjects. The declared primary goal was to acculturate the children and turn them into transmitters of Christianity and Russian culture. This project's failure notwithstanding, after completing their education, many graduates remained in the service of the RAC as employees. They worked as interpreters, clerks, foremen etc., applying their new skills to make a living. Some of them were paid high salaries and bonuses, until the RAC went into liquidation.

Elisabeth Lobenwein, German Historical Institute Rome

The Professional Practice and Self-Representation of Dragomans in 17th Century Habsburg-Ottoman Diplomatic Relations

This paper explores Habsburg-Ottoman relations in the late 17th century, focusing on the lives and expertise of dragomans, whose roles extended far beyond linguistic mediation. Dragomans served as negotiators, cultural translators, and key figures in political, diplomatic, and economic affairs. The study examines their language acquisition, professional networks, and self-representation, using a micro-biographical approach and diverse sources.

Central figures include Panagiotis Nikousios (1621–1673) and Marc Antonio Mamuca della Torre (1636–1712), whose careers spanned decades at the Sublime Porte. Analysis reveals their pivotal role in information gathering, critical to imperial residents who relied on dragomans due to their limited Turkish proficiency. However, dependence fostered trust issues and rivalries, often influenced by confessional divisions.

Finally, the study highlights the unique 380-page biography of Mamuca della Torre, showcasing his accomplishments in contrast to contemporaries like Giovanni Battista Podestà and Franciscus Meninski, who emphasized linguistic studies.
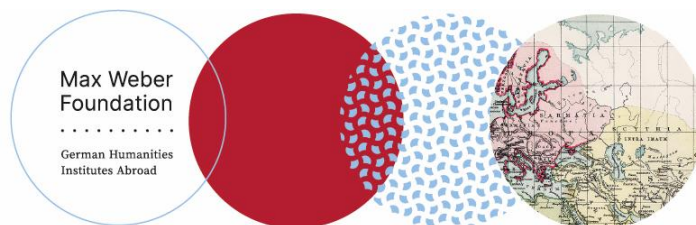
Harry Lönnroth, University of Jyväskylä

Town Scribes as Mediators of Literacy in Early Modern Sweden

The presentation is part of the multidisciplinary research project *Town scribes in the kingdom of Sweden in the Early Modern period (1614–1714): Their profession, agency and use of language*. The project focuses on the period from the foundation of the Svea Court of Appeal in Stockholm to the Great Northern War from the point of view of historical linguistics and history. The focus is the people who drew up the magistrate's court records, a most important source for historians of Sweden and Finland. The century was an important period in the history of Swedish and Swedish state-building. The growing superpower needed a language and scribes; the vernacular enabled more complex government. In my presentation, I will present the main results of the project and discuss town scribes as pivotal, but often invisible, agents in history: as experts in language and recorders of the past.

Martin Reimer, Technische Universität Dresden

Modern language teaching and the expansion of (higher) vocational education in the Kingdom of Saxony, 1815-1848

Using the example of Saxony, the paper focuses on the institutionalization and professionalization of modern language teaching in the higher vocational education system, which experienced a massive expansion in the first half of the 19th century. 1) What relevance was attached to modern language teaching at these new educational institutions – especially under the impression of the transnational condition of trade and industrialization? And what role did the learners' cultural capital play? 2) Which teachers were responsible for modern language teaching in vocational schools? Was language teaching still entrusted to the early modern maîtres de langue, or to an increasing extent to studied teachers? 3) In a final step, I will ask whether and to what extent modern language teaching, its teachers and teaching materials were suitable for the expanding vocational education system and its specific interests.
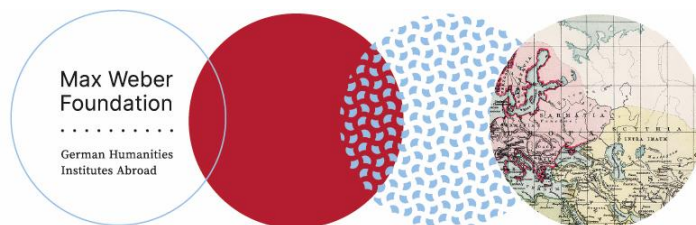
Oleg Rusakovskiy, Centre for Advanced Study, Bulgaria

Russian Training for Foreign-Born Translators: The Case from the 17th-century Moscow

The paper will discuss how foreign-born translators, working on behalf of the Russian government, were trained in Russian in 17th-century Moscow. Many translators active at the Ambassadorial Chancery, responsible for international relations of the Russian Tsardom, were foreign emigrants who came to the country as adults. Despite their foreign origin, they are believed to have achieved nearly perfect proficiency in Russian and their translations are almost free of mistakes. However, the evidence of how they received their linguistic training is very poor, as no state-driven system of language education existed in the Tsardom. This paper collects the existing material on this training, concentrating primarily on three aspects. First, I discuss scattered evidence on the learning process before entering the Chancery service. Second, I present some case studies on translators accused by contemporaries of insufficient knowledge of Russian or expressing a desire to improve their language proficiency. Third, using translation drafts and other documents which the translators wrote with their own hands, I demonstrate that, at least in some instances, they made errors and needed competent proofreaders to adjust their Russian writings.

Sabina Tsapaeva, University of Hamburg/Technische Universität Dresden

Institutionalised vs. non-institutionalised foreign language instruction of target 'professional' audiences: The merchant phrasebook by Master George of Nuremberg (1424) in comparison to Ein Rusch Boeck (anonymous, 16th century)

In recent decades, the partly anonymous language and conversation books of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period have gone in and out of research focus. Especially questions of foreign language didactics, knowledge transfer, lived multilingualism, cultural diversity and related topics play an important role in the research of historical foreign language manuals. However, they remain underexplored as a source for analysing language instruction of target 'professional' audiences. The aim of the planned contribution is therefore, firstly, to examine the similarities and differences between the language manuals mentioned in the title with regard to the (implicit) references to institutionalised vs. non-institutionalised foreign language instruction and the target 'professional' audiences, secondly, to analyse how the authors of these manuals adapt their goals to these audiences and, thirdly, to contextualise these in the corresponding language contact situations and the historical context in general.