

## *Linguistics ante litteram in the Learned Journals of the Enlightenment*

Toon Van Hal, *University of Leuven (KU Leuven) and University of Oslo (UiO)*

*Abstract:* This article examines the role of eighteenth-century learned journals in crystallizing and structuring distinct scholarly disciplines, with a focus on linguistics ante litteram. It offers an overview of research concerning early modern journals, focusing on corpus-based methods, before embarking upon a more comprehensive consideration of early modern journals through a number of case studies. After exploring the information included in the *Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen* project, it examines how journals indexed and labelled linguistic topics and traces the evolution of relevant research terminology. The findings reveal a lack of disciplinary classification in early modern journals, implying that the rapid pace of publishing may have hindered thematic organization; nonetheless, journals may have subtly aided the development of nascent disciplines by acting as arenas for terminological exploration.

### *Introduction and research hypothesis*

By the late eighteenth century, introductory texts were emerging that signalled the tentative beginnings of general linguistics as a standalone discipline. The author of *Versuch einer Einleitung zur Sprachenkunde* (1792), for instance, states that he will consider himself fortunate should he succeed in ‘awakening the study of the much-neglected elementary knowledge of language science from its lethar-

*Keywords:* Journals; Linguistics; Discipline Formation; Terminology; Indexing.

*Recommended citation:* Van Hal, Toon, ‘Linguistics ante litteram in the learned journals of the Enlightenment’, *1700-tal: Nordic Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 22 (2025). 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.7557/4.7993>

*Copyright:* © 2025 The Author. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

gic slumber'.<sup>1</sup> Plener, meanwhile, adopts the term 'Sprach(en)kunde' and speaks highly, in his preface, of the work of Johann Christoph Adelung. Early in the nineteenth century, Adelung would go on to publish his notable *Mithridates oder allgemeine Sprachenkunde*,<sup>2</sup> but already, in a much earlier text, he had pondered the nuances of 'Sprachkunde', 'Sprachkenntnis', 'Sprachkunst', 'Sprachlehre', and 'Sprachwissenschaft'.<sup>3</sup> Another author of the period, Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746–1818), can be found on a quest for the right term to describe this nascent field, after first reviewing the field of anthropology:

Auf eben die Art kann ich mir eine Wissenschaft denken, die zugleich das Werkzeug des Gedankens und den Gedanken selbst in sich fast, [...], gerade wie die weite Anthropologie auch. Ich weiß für diese Wissenschaft keinen Namen, aber vielleicht hat Hr. G[edike] sie sich unter dem Namen der Sprachphilosophie gedacht. Wenn das ist, so sind wir in der Hauptsache einig. Diese Sprachphilosophie halte auch ich der Jugend für sehr zuträglich, ja für unentbehrlich [...]<sup>4</sup>

Campe's concept of 'Sprachphilosophie' is broader than that which we recognize today, a point he makes clear. He includes within it not only traditional grammar, such as the study of the *partes orationis*, as well as etymology, syntax, prosody, and orthography, but also the complex relationship between words and concepts, the richness and poverty of various languages, and comparative language studies. For Campe, these elements are vital to 'Sprachphilosophie' because they address language in its role as an expression of thought.<sup>5</sup>

These few examples suggest that, in the eighteenth century, efforts were made to delineate and define a branch of learning concerned with language issues that extended beyond those of simple grammar. This is noteworthy, given that the establishment of linguistics as an independent academic field took place only in the

<sup>1</sup> "das Studium der so sehr vernachlässigten Elementarkenntnisse der Sprachkunde aus seinem lethargischen Schlummer zu entwinden", in Ignaz Plener, Versuch einer Einleitung zur Sprachenkunde (Wien: Bey Thaddäus, Edl. v. Schmidtbauer, 1792), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Johann Christoph Adelung, *Mithridates oder allgemeine Sprachenkunde mit dem Vater Unser als Sprachprobe in bey nahe fünfhundert Sprachen und Mundarten* (Berlin: In der Vossischen Buchhandlung, 1806), i.

<sup>3</sup> Johann Christoph Adelung, *Über die Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache, über Deutsche Mundarten und Deutsche Sprachlehre* (Leipzig: Joh. Gottl. Immanuel Breitkopf, 1781), p. 92. Adelung's nuanced distinctions among the terms are challenging for modern readers to understand. This difficulty likely applied to his contemporaries as well.

<sup>4</sup> Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Allgemeine Revision des gesammten Schul- und Erziehungswesens: von einer Gesellschaft praktischer Erzieher* (Wolfenbüttel: In der Schulbuchhandlung, 1787), p. 466.

<sup>5</sup> Campe, pp. 464–65.

first quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> We may thus ask, how far did these eighteenth-century trends contribute to that institutionalization? How far was such a development already in the air?

This article seeks to explore the extent to which eighteenth-century learned journals shaped a more centralized approach to language. Previous studies indicate that bibliographies, university theses, and the field of *historia litteraria* fostered thematic treatments of language and languages around this time.<sup>7</sup> Faced with a vast array of scholarly fields and specializations, these emerging journals likely aimed to impose some form of disciplinary structure. Campe, a notable educator who looked after the young Humboldt brothers in Berlin as late as 1775, is known to have engaged in a dialogue on ‘Sprachphilosophie’ with fellow pedagogue Friedrich Gedike, who notably edited the *Berlinische Monatschrift*, in which Kant’s famous ‘Was ist Aufklärung?’ appeared. Such scholarly exchanges might reasonably suggest that ideas about disciplinary alignment would have found resonance in the journals of the period.

The present article is structured as follows. First, I provide a brief introduction to early modern journal studies. I then review the current state of this field, focusing on corpus-based methods of investigation. Subsequently, I explore, through a number of case studies, whether a holistic approach to these journals is feasible. I begin by exploring the *Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen* project, after which I consider how far linguistics was recognized as an independent topic in the indexing and labelling practices of the journals. Finally, I examine the development of specific language research terms and their potential connections to specific journals before ending with general conclusions.

### *Early modern scientific and scholarly journals*

During the eighteenth century, scholarly journals gradually took shape, a development manifested in a broad spectrum of publications. The world’s oldest scientific journal, which until recently remained exclusively print-based, dates back to 1665 and carries the hallmark of the French Sun King. Other journals were modelled

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Anna Morpurgo Davies, ‘Nineteenth-Century Linguistics’, in *History of Linguistics*, ed. by Giulio Lepschy, 4 vols (London & New York: Longman, 1998), iv; Pascale Rabault-Ferhahn, *Archives of Origins: Sanskrit, Philology, Anthropology in 19th Century Germany* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Toon Van Hal, ‘Linguistics Ante Litteram. Compiling and Transmitting Views on the Diversity and Kinship of Languages before the Nineteenth Century’, in *The Making of the Humanities. From Early Modern to Modern Disciplines*, ed. by Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 37–53 <<https://lirias.kuleuven.be/retrieve/219061/>>.

after this *Journal des Savants*.<sup>8</sup> The year of its foundation also saw the birth of the British *Philosophical Transactions*, while two years later, the *Journal des Sçavans* was translated into Latin (as *Ephemerides Eruditorum*) for a German readership.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, for many decades, journal publication remained characterized by an active culture of translation.<sup>10</sup> From 1682 to 1782, the *Acta Eruditorum* was a prominent journal in German-speaking regions. Especially in the German-speaking Holy Roman Empire, Latin long persisted as the primary language,<sup>11</sup> but as mastery of the language declined, the journal became increasingly outdated. To address this, the *Deutsche Acta Eruditorum* was introduced in 1712, providing a German-language counterpart. The satirical *Acta Semi-Eruditorum* also reflected this linguistic transition.<sup>12</sup> Other notable examples include the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* (Amsterdam, 1684), *Giornale de' Letterati* (Ferrara, 1688), *De Boekzaal van Europe* (Rotterdam, 1691–4), *Galeria di Minerva* (Venice, 1691–4), *Nova literaria maris balthici et septentrionis* (Lübeck), and *History of the Works of the Learned* (London).<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Jesuits introduced their own journal, a move Jean-Pierre Vittu interprets as a sign of the format's growing significance.<sup>14</sup> Germany saw the creation of over 1,000 journals in the eighteenth century alone, and in the last quarter of that century, 2,000 journals are said to have been created, many of them with a special interest in history.<sup>15</sup> Periodicals that achieved

<sup>8</sup> Claude H. Potts, 'Journal Des Savants: From the Republic of Letters to the Cloud Library', *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, 43.1 (2011), 68–75 (pp. 68–69) <<https://doi.org/10.3138/jsp.43.1.68>>. The *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* is another publication that still continues today.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Habel, 'Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel As a Precursor of Learned Journalism in Germany: Monatliche Unterredungen and Curieuse Bibliothec', in *Scholars in Action: The Practice of Knowledge and the Figure of the Savant in the 18th Century*, ed. by André Holenstein, Hubert Steinke, and Martin Stuber (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2013), i, 289–317 (p. 290).

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Pierre Vittu, 'Du Journal des savants aux Mémoires pour l'histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts: l'esquisse d'un système européen des périodiques savants', *XVIIIe siècle*, 3, 2005, 527–45 (pp. 531–32).

<sup>11</sup> Vittu, 'Du Journal des savants aux Mémoires pour l'histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts', p. 527.

<sup>12</sup> Guillaume van Gemert, 'Acta Semi-Eruditorum: de lotgevallen van een "anti-tijdschrift"', *TS. Tijdschrift voor Tijdschriftstudies*, 18 (2005), 26–34 <<https://doi.org/10.18352/ts.202>>.

<sup>13</sup> la *Galeria di Minerva* (Venise), les." (Vittu, 2005, p. 528)

<sup>14</sup> Vittu, 'Du Journal des savants aux Mémoires pour l'histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts', p. 527.

<sup>15</sup> Claire Gantet, 'Les périodiques savants de l'époque de l'Aufklärung, mises en réseau du savoir. Un programme de l'Académie des sciences et lettres de Göttingen', *Dix-huitième siècle*, 46.1 (2014), 695–708 (p. 695) <<https://doi.org/10.3917/dhs.046.0695>>; Karl Fink, 'The Rhetoric of the Review: Schlözer and Herder on Universal History', in *The Eighteenth Century German Book Review*, ed. by Herbert Rowland and Karl Fink (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1995), pp. 57–72 (p. 57).

success and longevity were typically connected to key printing hubs such as Paris, London, and Leipzig. The Dutch cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, in particular, played a crucial role, with many journals being republished in the latter.<sup>16</sup>

From as early as the end of the seventeenth century, the emerging form of the academic journal garnered attention from scholars.<sup>17</sup> Voltaire, among others, sought to grasp the underlying dynamics of what Gisbert Cuper (1644–1716) declared the ‘century of the journal’.<sup>18</sup> Cuper himself engaged heavily with this zeitgeist, subscribing to over twenty journals.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, it is clear that the most prominent scholars placed immense value on the format, with journals making up essential parts of their libraries.<sup>20</sup>

In the eighteenth century, scholarship was in transition from the Renaissance ideal of broad, expansive knowledge to the nineteenth century’s focus on specialization. For a long time, however, the journals’ emphasis remained on general rather than specialist knowledge.<sup>21</sup> According to certain experts, moreover, the eighteenth century witnessed a more remarkable change than the trend towards specialization: the popularization and opening-up of scholarly communication. Traditionally, scholars had exchanged ideas through letters, which often took years to be made public, if they were ever published at all. Journals transformed this dynamic, allowing for swift and timely discussions and significantly impacting the dissemination of knowledge.<sup>22</sup> The importance of early modern journals as forerunners of nineteenth-century scientific jour-

<sup>16</sup> Vittu, ‘Du Journal des savants aux Mémoires pour l’histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts’, pp. 530–31.

<sup>17</sup> Vittu, ‘Du Journal des savants aux Mémoires pour l’histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts’, p. 535.

<sup>18</sup> Habel, i, p. 294; Yoann Bazin and Laurent Magne, ‘De la République des Lettres à l’évaluation en double aveugle: une archéologie des revues académiques’, *Revue internationale de psychosociologie et de gestion des comportements organisationnels*, 26.1 (2020), 123–44 (p. 124); Jean-Pierre Vittu, ‘Un système européen d’échanges scientifiques au XVIII e siècle: les journaux savants’, *Le Temps des médias*, 1, 2013, 47–63 (p. 47). See also Stefan Dietzel and Maja Eilhammer, ‘Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen als Netzwerke des Wissens im Zeitalter der Aufklärung. Ein Langzeitprojekt der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen (2011–2025)’, *Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte*, 17 (2015), 167–93 (p. 167).

<sup>19</sup> Ingemar Oscarsson, ‘En Revolution i Offentligheten: Om Lärda Tidskrifter i Europa under Tidigmodern Tid Och Om Hur Svensk Vetenskap Representerades i Dem’, *Sjuttonhundratals*, 8 (2011), 93 (p. 96) <<https://doi.org/10.7557/4.2397>>.

<sup>20</sup> Vittu, ‘Du Journal des savants aux Mémoires pour l’histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts’, p. 533.

<sup>21</sup> Gantet, p. 704.

<sup>22</sup> Dietzel and Eilhammer, pp. 167–69.

nals has recently been questioned, but some scholars believe it excessive to label this view a mere myth.<sup>23</sup>

Eighteenth-century journals pursued multiple objectives: discussing recent and older books, announcing new titles, publishing short independent scholarly articles, and presenting scientific discoveries. The various titles differed in their thematic focus and targeted readership, ranging from vernacular popular science to material for highly specialized international audiences.<sup>24</sup> They also varied in how frequently and how regularly they were published, as well as in their longevity and popularity. We can take the Latin-language journal *Ephemerides litterariae*, established in 1686, as an example. Its creators sought to provide the freshest news by publishing on a weekly basis.<sup>25</sup> Less than half of the periodicals founded between 1665 and 1700 lasted beyond five years. In the 1680s, sixteen journals failed to last longer than one year.<sup>26</sup> The size and composition of editorial boards also differed widely.<sup>27</sup>

### *Early modern journal research: State of the field and research methodology*

Scholars in journal studies face significant hurdles, including limited availability of sources and a fragmented corpus.<sup>28</sup> The fact that many reviews in past journals were anonymous,<sup>29</sup> which drove some of the targeted authors to despair, also torments present-day scholars.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps as a result, the area remains overlooked.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Vera Keller, 'Professionalizing Doubt: Johann Daniel Major's Observation "On the Horn of the Bezoardic Goat", Curiosity Collecting, and Periodical Publication', in *The Institutionalization of Science in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Mordechai Feingold and Giulia Giannini (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 199–235 (p. 199) <[https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004416871\\_009](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004416871_009)>.

<sup>24</sup> Vittu, 'Un système européen d'échanges scientifiques au XVIII e siècle', p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> Habel, i, p. 291.

<sup>26</sup> Vittu, 'Du Journal des savants aux Mémoires pour l'histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts', p. 529; Vittu, 'Un système européen d'échanges scientifiques au XVIII e siècle', p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Habel, „Gelehrte Journale“ der Aufklärung: Zur Entstehung, Entwicklung und Erschließung deutschsprachiger Rezensionenzeitschriften des 18. Jahrhunderts (Bremen: edition lumière, 2007), p. 352; Gantet, p. 695.

<sup>28</sup> Nop Maas, 'Tijdschriftonderzoek: ervaringen, problemen en wensen', *TS. Tijdschrift voor Tijdschriftstudies*, 1 (1997), 4–8; Gantet, p. 697.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymity in journals can sometimes be unraveled through meticulous investigation. A shining example of such detective work is found in Laeven's examinations into *Acta eruditorum*: A. H. Laeven, *De 'Acta eruditorum' onder redactie van Otto Mencke (1644-1707): de geschiedenis van een internationaal geleerdenperiodiek tussen 1682 en 1707* (Amsterdam & Maarssen: APA-Holland University Press, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> Fink.

<sup>31</sup> Habel.

A corpus-based methodology offers fresh perspectives but remains mostly uncharted territory. Tobias Winnerling has pioneered such an approach by analysing the act of forgetting in eighteenth-century European journals through co-citations in the Hathi Trust corpus.<sup>32</sup> His work, however, presents just one possibility. Other promising avenues exist: for instance, one could examine the emergence of terminological choices or analyse translation trends, often mediated by Latin. Textual analysis tools might also enable network analysis.<sup>33</sup>

Despite these promising possibilities, barriers persist in terms of both metadata and textual content.<sup>34</sup> Regarding the texts themselves, optical character recognition (OCR) remains a major stumbling block for many historical research projects.<sup>35</sup> Despite abundant research funding, progress in this area has been slow, especially when compared to advancements in technologies such as generative AI. Indeed, the advanced language models underlying much of this spectacular progress could lead to decisive breakthroughs in solving OCR challenges by improving results through post-processing.<sup>36</sup> In light of this potential remedy, it is, perhaps, puzzling why OCR results are still so lacking in quality. Among the available libraries, the latest version of Google Books appears to exhibit superior OCR quality to that of the Internet Archive. The latter, however, has the advantage of allowing batch downloading, unlike Google Books or the digital library at [digitale-sammlungen.de](http://digitale-sammlungen.de). For metadata quality, the Hathi Trust collection stands out for its curation, although it is not without duplicates. The collection's one-page limit also limits a comprehensive, corpus-based approach.

### *Enlightenment linguistics and the Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen project*

An excellent starting point for our purposes here is the German project *Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen als Netzwerke des Wissens im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*.<sup>37</sup> This remarkable initiative has made a vast number of early modern scholarly and sci-

<sup>32</sup> Tobias Winnerling, 'Moving Around in Narrowing Circles: How Four Scholars Got Forgotten in Eighteenth-Century Learned Journals', *Journal for the History of Knowledge*, 2.1 (2021), 8 <<https://doi.org/10.5334/jhk.36>>.

<sup>33</sup> As to the relevance of networks, see *Periodieken en hun kringen: Een verkenning van tijdschriften en netwerken in de laatste drie eeuwen*, ed. by Hans Bots and Sophie Levie (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> Potts, p. 71.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. Jørgen Burchardt, 'Are Searches in OCR-Generated Archives Trustworthy?: An Analysis of Digital Newspaper Archives', *Jahrbuch Für Wirtschaftsgeschichte / Economic History Yearbook*, 64.1 (2023), 31–54 <<https://doi.org/10.1515/jbwg-2023-0003>>.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., <<https://huggingface.co/PlEIA/OCRonos>>.

<sup>37</sup> <<https://adw-goe.de/gjz18/>>.

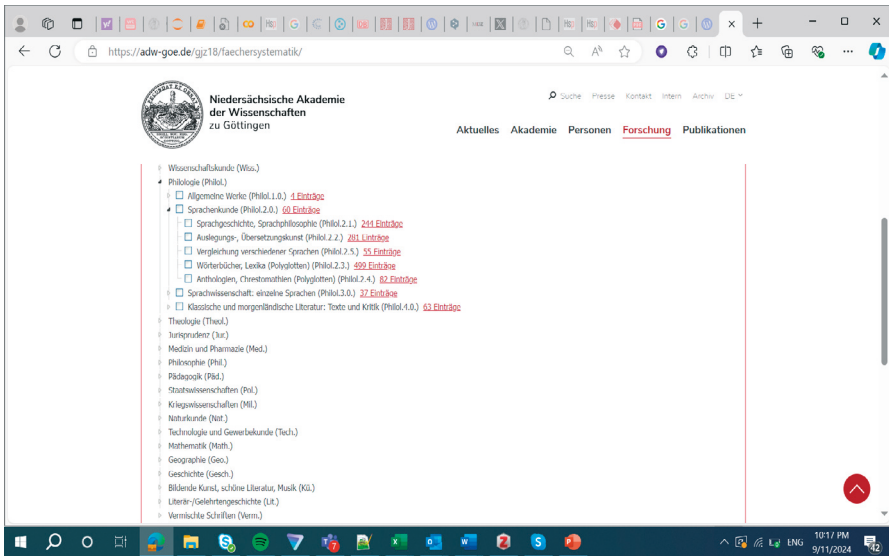


Fig. 1: Screenshot of *Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen als Netzwerke des Wissens im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*.

entific journals accessible both bibliographically and, to a certain degree, in terms of content. Its corpus encompasses over a million pages and more than 300 journals dating from 1688 to 1815, integrating a number of earlier projects.<sup>38</sup> The compilers have employed a scientific ontology contemporary with the material addressed, which is shown in Figure 1. The category of philology encompasses individual languages as well as classical and oriental literature. Of particular interest to our investigation is the subcategory ‘Sprachkunde’, especially the segments dedicated to ‘Sprachgeschichte, Sprachphilosophie’, comparative linguistics, and lexicographical works, such as dictionaries and lexica. While this subdivision is likely to resonate among many early modern scholars, it is critical to acknowledge its lack of canonical status.

Moreover, this classificatory scheme has not always been consistently applied within the project. This inconsistency becomes glaringly apparent when one browses different reviews of a single work in multiple journals. Let us consider the first volume of the *Vergleichungs-Tafeln der Schriftarten verschiedener Völker, in denen vergangenen und gegenwärtigen Zeiten* (1771) by the idiosyncratic Göttingen scholar Christian Wilhelm Büttner (1716–1801). Büttner was an influential unseen figure rather than a prominent author, serving as inspiration for better-known scholars

<sup>38</sup> Dietzel and Eilhammer.

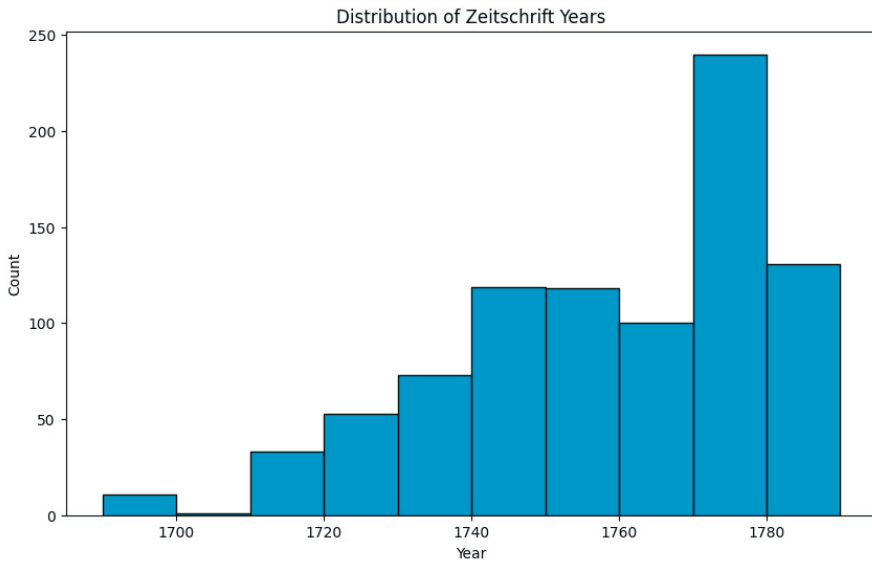


Fig. 2: *Linguistic contributions in the German Enlightenment journals, based on the information of the Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen als Netzwerke des Wissens im Zeitalter der Aufklärung project.*

such as August Ludwig von Schlözer (1735–1809) and Johann Christoph Gatterer (1727–1799). In the project database, reviews discussing this specific work are listed under various headings, including ‘Sprachgeschichte, Sprachphilosophie [2.1]’, ‘Allgemeine Werke, Enzyklopädien und Bibliographien [1.1]’, and ‘Sprachenkunde, Vergleichung verschiedener Sprachen [2.5]’.

Despite these caveats, the project database equips us to track the ebb and flow of interest in linguistic publications over time. Through Python, I extracted the relevant philology-tagged records,<sup>39</sup> with specific focus on publication years and converted them into a structured format for analysis. Visual representation techniques (Python packages matplotlib and seaborn) allow us to highlight diachronic trends within the data.

When we collate the different subsets relating to linguistics, the data reveal an increase, culminating in a significant spike circa 1780 (see Figure 2). This surge cannot, however, be uncritically attributed to an emerging corporatization of linguistics; it might just as well reflect the overall increase in journal publishing by

<sup>39</sup> A basic URL looks as follows: [https://adw-goe.de/gjz18/datenbank/?tx\\_find\\_find\[q\]\[Systematische+Suche\]=\(%22Philol.2.0.%22\)&tx\\_find\\_find\[sort\]=so\\_JahrBandSeite+asc&tx\\_find\\_find\[extended\]=1#tx\\_find](https://adw-goe.de/gjz18/datenbank/?tx_find_find[q][Systematische+Suche]=(%22Philol.2.0.%22)&tx_find_find[sort]=so_JahrBandSeite+asc&tx_find_find[extended]=1#tx_find)

volume. The post-1780 downturn may be attributable, at least in part, to gaps in the existing data processed as part of the project.

A subsequent logical step involves identifying the journals that engage most intensively with linguistic subjects. Here, distinct contrasts surface: many journals entirely bypass discussions on linguistics, whereas a handful stand out as key contributors. In this context, it is crucial to note the lifespan of these various periodicals (see Table 1).

Title	Number
Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen (1715-1784)	211
Wöchentliche Nachrichten von gelehrten Sachen	74
Hallische gelehrte Zeitungen (1766-1792)	62
Jenaische gelehrte Zeitungen (1765-1786)	58
Erlangische gelehrte Anmerkungen und Nachrichten (1770-1787)	48
Gothaische gelehrte Zeitungen (1774-1804)	46
Göttingische Anzeigen / Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen	45
Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen (1772-1790)	32
Hamburgische Berichte von neuen Gelehrten Sachen (1732-1758)	32
Franckfurtische gelehrte Zeitungen (1736-1771)	24
Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und Historie überhaupt	21
Neueste critische Nachrichten (1775-1807)	20
Wöchentliche Nachrichten von neuen Landcharten, geographischen, statistischen und historischen Büchern und Sachen	19
Parnassus boicus oder neu-eröffneter Musen-Berg (1722-1727)	17
Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek	14
Gelehrte Nachrichten (1752-1763)	13
Neue Bibliothec Oder Nachricht und Urtheile von neuen Büchern Und allerhand zur Gelehrsamkeit dienenden Sachen (1709-1721)	12
Die Gelehrte Fama, welche den gegenwärtigen Zustand der gelehrten Welt und sonderlich derer deutschen Universitäten entdeckt (1711-1718)	11
Gelehrte Zeitung	11
Monatliche Unterredungen einiger guten Freunde von allerhand Büchern und andern annehmlichen Geschichten (1689-1798)	11
Allgemeine Bibliothek für das Schul- und Erziehungswesen in Teutschland	10
Strasburgische gelehrte Nachrichten	10
Wienerische Gelehrte Nachrichten (1755-1758)	7

Title	Number
Auserlesene Bibliothek der neuesten deutschen Litteratur (1772-1781)	6
Nachrichten von dem Zustande der Wissenschaften und Künste in den königlich dänischen Reichen und Ländern (1753-1757)	5
Critischer Versuch zur Aufnahme der deutschen Sprache	4
Fortgesetzte Nachrichten von dem Zustande der Wissenschaften und Künste in den Königl. Dänischen Reichen und Ländern (1758-1768)	4
Litterarische Nachrichten von den Werken der besten Schriftsteller unserer Zeit	4
Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste	4
Russische Bibliothek	4
Critische Nachrichten (1750-1754)	3
Das Neueste aus der anmuthigen Gelehrsamkeit	3
Deutsche Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften	3
Freymüthige Nachrichten von neuen Büchern und andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen	3
Neue Berichte von Gelehrten Sachen (1762-1765)	3
Niedersächsische Nachrichten von gelehrten neuen Sachen	3
Physikalisch-ökonomische Bibliothek (1770-1806)	3
Tübingsche Berichte von gelehrten Sachen	3
Betrachtungen über die neuesten historischen Schriften	2
Dänisches Journal (1767-1770)	2
Deutsche Acta eruditorum oder Geschichte der Gelehrten, welche den gegenwärtigen Zustand der Literatur in Europa begreifen	2
Hamburgische Nachrichten aus dem Reiche der Gelehrsamkeit (1758-1771)	2
Erneuerte Berichte von gelehrten Sachen (1766-1773)	1
Jenaische Beyträge zur neuesten gelehrten Geschichte (1757)	1
Neue critische Nachrichten (1775-1807)	1
Neue Litteratur (1771-1772)	1
oder Nachrichten von ihren Schriften und Auszüge	1
Prager gelehrte Nachrichten	1
Revision der teutschen Litteratur	1
Tübingsche gelehrte Anzeigen	1

*Table 1: Number of linguistic contributions in the German Enlightenment journals, based on the information of the Gelehrte Journale und Zeitungen als Netzwerke des Wissens im Zeitalter der Aufklärung project.*

The following section explores one of these journals in greater detail.

*Classifying knowledge in early modern journals and  
the place of linguistics in the Monatliche Unterredungen*

The eagerness and curiosity that drove early modern journal projects risked creating chaos in terms of their content; this issue was noted even before the first volume of the *Journal des Savants* appeared.<sup>40</sup> To better guide readers, journals introduced various measures. It is worth mentioning, however, that from today's perspective, early modern journals seldom attempted to organize their content thematically.<sup>41</sup> Instead, articles were usually arranged geographically by place of publication, and the most obvious method of organization was the index. Journals soon implemented this instrument, though with differing degrees of refinement.<sup>42</sup>

Let us take, for instance, the *Göttingische Anzeigen* of 1769, where the index seems chiefly confined to author names, except for a small selection of unnamed works sorted by subject matter. This approach is echoed in the *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen*, a journal with a special interest in language-related topics. Conversely, the 1706 edition of *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* opts for a singular index, arranged alphabetically by topic. Nonetheless, none of them categorize their content in a way based on or informed by discipline.

For two reasons, it is worth our focusing here on the journal of the renowned polymath Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel (1659–1707). The first is its remarkable success and impact, which is difficult for us to fully understand today. Likely inspired by Thomasius's *Monats-Gespräche*, which first appeared in 1688, Tentzel published the first edition of his *Monatliche Unterredungen* a year later in German. This journal, which would run until 1698 and was mostly written by Tentzel himself, was an extraordinary success in every respect. Interest in the journal endured years after its initial publication.<sup>43</sup> An important factor was likely the discussion format: in the manner of a Platonic dialogue, a fictional conversation set the stage for scholarly reflection. Thomasius initially adopted this approach but soon abandoned it due to its labour-intensive nature; Tentzel also considered dropping the format but

<sup>40</sup> Vittu, 'Du Journal des savants aux Mémoires pour l'histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts', p. 538.

<sup>41</sup> An exception to this was the *Grösste Denkwürdigkeiten der Welt Oder so genannte Relationes Curiosae*. Habel, i, p. 292.

<sup>42</sup> Vittu, 'Du Journal des savants aux Mémoires pour l'histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts', pp. 538–40.

<sup>43</sup> Habel, i, p. 302.

ultimately retained it for its numerous benefits. Such a dialogue not only provided a more engaging and relaxed mode of scholarly reflection but also allowed for the presentation of multiple viewpoints, enabling readers to choose the view they found most credible.<sup>44</sup>

Previous studies confirm the journal's significance as a treasure trove for linguistics, with such matters ranking highly on Tentzel's list of concerns. This is the second reason for our focus on this specific journal. Daniel Droixhe, in particular, has underlined this in several of his contributions.<sup>45</sup> Closer scrutiny of the *Monatliche Unterredungen*, however, uncovers further, crucial findings that have escaped scholarly attention. One issue, for example, contains intriguing hypotheses about the affinities between European and Indian languages, particularly that used in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The journal also teases readers with previews of scholarly efforts that never, unfortunately, saw the light of day. A case in point is Andreas Müller's discursive explorations on etymological tenets, which he ultimately consigned to the flames.<sup>46</sup>

While Tentzel's journal gave space to linguistic discussions, however, these did not hold explicitly separate status within its pages. Turning to the indexes, we find listings of discussed books and featured authors, followed by an exhaustive topical index. There is no disciplinary organization.

### *Enlightenment journals and the search for a name for linguistics*

The journals of the eighteenth century, while not overtly giving way to the fixation on disciplinary nomenclatures found in much science and scholarship, offered a platform where scholars could ponder the naming of their fields. One voice often heard in the *Braunschweigisches Journal* was that of Ernst Christian Trapp (1745–1818), a pioneer in education who was Germany's first professor of pedagogy. Trapp, who had already written extensively on the study of not only ancient but also modern languages, devoted a long reflection in 1791 to the essence of and distinctions within the study of language. In presenting his thoughts, he proceeds systematically:

<sup>44</sup> Habel, i, pp. 308–9.

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Daniel Droixhe, 'Boxhorn's Bad Reputation. A Chapter in Academic Linguistics', in *Speculum Historiographiae Linguisticae. Kurzbeiträge Der IV. Internationalen Konferenz Zur Geschichte Der Sprachwissenschaften*, ed. by Klaus D Dutz (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 1989), pp. 359–84.

<sup>46</sup> I plan to elaborate this elsewhere.

Das Sprachstudium hat also vermöge seines doppelten Begriffs einen doppelten Gegensatz. Seinem Objekte nach, welches die Sprache ist, steht es allen Wissenschaften und Künsten entgegen deren Objekt nicht die Sprache ist. Seiner Form nach steht es der bloßen Erlernung der Sprache entgegen.<sup>47</sup>

As Trapp points out, one can, indeed, learn a language through practice without formally studying it, a process exemplified by children. The object of language study can, moreover, be language in general (1) or specific languages (2), which may, in turn, include one's native language (2a) or foreign languages (2b). All scholars engaged in language study are styled 'Sprachforscher' ('language researcher'), and the scholar dealing with language in general is also called a 'language philosopher':

Wer sich mit der Sprache überhaupt, mit der Methaphisik der Sprache beschäftigt, heißt ein Sprachphilosoph. Dieser treibt eigentlich das Sprachstudium als eine Wissenschaft im strengern Sinne dieses Worts.<sup>48</sup>

After pointing out that the latter term can also apply to someone studying the theory of specific languages, Trapp defines a scholar dealing with foreign languages (2b) as a philologist or 'Sprachgelehrter'.

Trapp's work serves as a straightforward example of metalinguistic reflection. This kind of analysis is, admittedly, not limited to journals; we noted earlier how Adelung engaged in similar reflections in a different written context. Nevertheless, journals may well have played an important role.

By examining the data from the Hathi Trust collection, we can track how various German terms referring to language research emerged over time. I began by examining the occurrence of several relevant terms. To analyse patterns, I grouped the data into decades and calculated cumulative sums of occurrences within those timeframes. This allowed me to visualize the historical trends and growth of each term's usage over time. Interestingly, from the 1770s onward, there seems to have been a marked increase in the use of these terms (see Figure 3).

What stands out in this analysis is how frequently these terms appear in journals. Let us take the term 'Sprachwissenschaft', which has become the default term in the German scholarly world but was far from dominant in the eighteenth century. Within the Hathi Trust corpus, it appears about 160 times during that century, and interestingly, over three-quarters of these instances are in journals. Outside

<sup>47</sup> Ernst Christian Trapp, 'Anmerkungen zu einem Aufsätze im elften Stücke des vorigen Jahrg., der die Ueberschrift führt: Ueber die Erl. der lat. Spr. an Hrn. M. Lenz in Z.', Braunschweigisches Journal, 1 (1791), 57–103 (p. 86).

<sup>48</sup> Trapp, p. 86.

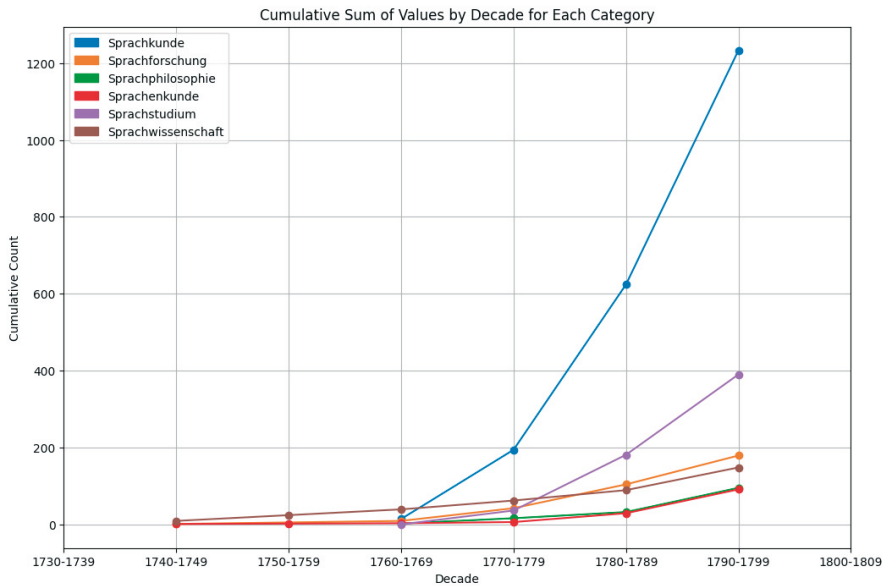


Fig. 3: *The emergence of German equivalents of 'linguistics' in the eighteenth century, based on the Hathi Trust collection.*

of journals, the term mostly features in dictionaries, bibliographies, and other reference works. The term 'Sprachenkunde' follows a similar, albeit slightly less clear, pattern. We should exercise caution with these observations, as the data may contain noise, such as duplicates. Nevertheless, it is worth considering that some journals may have made distinct editorial choices. 'Sprachkunde', for example, is notably prevalent in the *Göttingische Anzeigen*, with 'Sprachenkunde' appearing only in the late 1790s. The *(Neue) allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, meanwhile, adopts 'Sprachwissenschaft'. A consistent editorial strategy seems improbable here, suggesting a need for further investigation to see whether similar patterns recur in other fields.

### *Conclusions and outlook*

Contrary to my own expectations, the system of early modern journals did not directly give way to the crystallization of scholarly disciplines, including linguistics. Within the overarching structure of these journals, there is a noticeable absence of discipline-specific classification. Given the rapid publication of issues, it stands to reason that such thematic organization was not practical: editors had to rely on the eclectic mixture of reviews and contributions at their disposal. In an age in which

we lean so heavily on keywords and tags, it is tempting to speculate as to whether such simple signposts could have been adopted in the information-saturated environment of the eighteenth century. This line of inquiry might, however, be misguided, as the era may not have seen any urgency in the compartmentalization of scholarly knowledge, at least not on the level of journal issues.

The most straightforward way for journals to aid in forming disciplines is by adopting a specialized title; today, we recognize a new discipline when a journal affiliated with a respected publisher is named after it (such as the *Journal of Pragmatics*, published with Elsevier since 1977), granting legitimacy to the field. This was far from the case in the eighteenth century. Our explorations suggest, nonetheless, that journals might have subtly supported the early shaping of disciplines, acting as informal laboratories where relevant terminology took shape. It remains, however, for the tentative evidence presented here to be reinforced by the examination of reliable, ‘clean’ text corpora and accompanying metadata. Without these corpora, indeed, manifestos calling for the large-scale analysis of ‘million book libraries’ are difficult to fulfil.<sup>49</sup>

### *Acknowledgments*

This research was supported by FWO (Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek) through the research project “Languages writing history. The impact of language studies beyond linguistics (1700-1860)” (G083120N). I would like to thank the reviewers and the audience of the 2024 Studienkreis Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft Conference in Regensburg, where I presented a first outline of this research.

---

*TOON VAN HAL (b. 1981), currently professor at the universities of Leuven and Oslo, has undertaken studies related to history and languages at multiple universities in Belgium, Germany, and Scandinavia. As a historian of linguistics, he has a particular interest in the emergence and development of language-related concepts in the early modern world.*

<sup>49</sup> David Armitage, ‘What’s the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the Longue Durée’, *History of European Ideas*, 38.4 (2012), 493–507.