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Ambassador Count Nikolaus Esterházy: Languages and Network-Building in St Petersburg, 1753–1761* **

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This article scrutinizes the patterns of written and oral communication of the imperial and Austrian ambassador to St Petersburg, Count Nikolaus (Miklós) Esterházy. He was the first Hungarian aristocrat to secure a diplomatic career, representing the House of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire at several European courts, including Saxony, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Spain, and Russia. Only a few of his autographs in German and French survive. Esterházy's biography, however, proves that he was fluent in these languages and additionally mastered the basics of written Latin and (at least) spoken Hungarian. Furthermore, the article illustrates how the Austrian mission in St Petersburg functioned in the middle of the eighteenth century and what languages were used in correspondence with the imperial vice chancellor and state chancellor. It also shows what languages diplomats needed to be proficient in to manage incoming and outgoing correspondence and how present-day historians use the private archives of the diplomat, which preserve most documents processed by the mission in their completeness and variety. Attention is paid to the diplomat's principal counterparts at the Russian court – Empress Elizabeth, Grand Duchess Ekaterina Alekseevna, Alexei P. Bestuzhev-Riumin, Mikhail I. Vorontsov, and Petr I. Shuvalov. During his stay in Russia, Esterházy followed the existing practices of writing dispatches to Vienna and communicating with the College of International Affairs in St Peterburg in German. Although it is not always clear if he used German or French at the Russian court, he was flexible enough to use both for acquiring information and gaining favors.

Keywords: oral and written languages, French language, German language, court society, skills of a diplomat, Russia in the middle of the eighteenth century

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Статья посвящена анализу языков письменной и устной коммуникации римско-императорского посла в Санкт-Петербурге графа Николауса (Миклоша) Эстерхази (1711–1764). Он был первым венгерским аристократом, сделавшим карьеру на дипломатическом поприще, представляя Австрийский дом и (или) Священную Римскую империю в ряде европейских стран, в том числе Речи Посполитой, Испании и России. На сегодняшний день сохранилось лишь несколько автографов на немецком и французском языках. Биография Эстерхази свидетельствует, что он в совершенстве владел этими языками, должен был усвоить азы письменной латыни и (как минимум) устного венгерского. В статье показано, как функционировала австрийская миссия в Санкт-Петербурге в середине XVIII в., какие языки использовались в переписке с имперским вице-канцлером и государственным канцлером, знание каких языков требовалось для ведения входящей и исходящей корреспонденции, как современные историки используют личный архив дипломата, где сохранился основной массив документов миссии в их полноте и разнообразии. За восемь лет пребывания в России он сумел установить доверительные отношения с императрицей Елизаветой Петровной, великой княгиней Екатериной Алексеевной, ключевыми фигурами елизаветинского правления, прежде всего А. П. Бестужевым-Рюминым, М. И. Воронцовым и П. И. Шуваловым. Во время своего пребывания в России Эстерхази следовал сложившейся практике написания реляций в Вену и общения с Коллегией международных дел в Санкт-Петербурге на немецком языке. Хотя не всегда можно точно сказать, немецким или французским языком он пользовался при русском дворе, он гибко использовал оба языка для получения информации и завоевания благосклонности.

Ключевые слова: устные и письменные языки, французский язык, немецкий язык, придворное общество, навыки дипломата, Россия в середине XVIII в.

The omitted diplomat

The cultural turn in the history of diplomacy [Linguistic and Cultural Foreign Policies; McDonald] has drawn attention to previously less studied or neglected aspects of international relations, such as actors in diplomatic communication, the language of written and oral communication, and the symbolism of diplomatic ceremonies and protocol. Biographical research on the careers of diplomats now allows for not only the analysis of negotiations, dispatches, and treaties, but also reconstruction of the diplomat's educational and linguistic background, his informants' network-building, and languages used with the foreign monarch, at the host court, and with key figures determining foreign policy.

In this regard, the Hungarian aristocrat and Austrian diplomat Count Nikolaus (Miklós) Esterházy (1711–1764) is an interesting and rarely investigated case. (The coincidence of having the same name as Prince Nikolaus Esterházy (1714–1790), who was patron of Josef Haydn

P. Rotari. Portrait of N. Esterházy. 18th century. State Museum Pavlovsk

and known as Nikolaus the Magnificent, led to the misidentification and confusion of two historical personages in the past.) Count Nikolaus (Miklós) Esterházy was one of the first Hungarian aristocrats to establish a diplomatic career in the Habsburg Monarchy. In this respect, he was a predecessor of several Hungarian aristocrats in the diplomatic service in the nineteenth century (Prince Paul Anton Esterházy, Counts Julius Apponyi, Emmerich Széchenyi, Stephen Burian, and others). For twenty years, he represented the House of Austria on short- and long-term missions to The Hague, London, Lisbon, Warsaw, Dresden, Madrid, and St Petersburg. He spent eight years in the Russian capital during the time of the Renversement of Alliances (1756) and the crucial years of Russian–Austrian cooperation on the battlefield during the Seven Years War (1756–1763). The archives of the Esterházy family, to which the diplomat belonged, perished in the wars and revolutions of the twentieth century. Historians have endeavored to reconstruct Nikolaus Esterházy's biography from random mentions of his name in previously published documents or sources that were subsequently discovered in different archives [Eszterházy; Berényi, 2004; Berényi, 2014; Хаванова, 2014].

Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century, Count Nikolaus Esterházy remains a political figure without a complete biography. This article strives to show how research into the languages a diplomat used can contribute to better understanding the broader languages of diplomacy. It scrutinizes Esterházy's language proficiency and his choice of language in written and oral communication. Studying the languages officially used at the Austrian mission in St Petersburg allow us to estimate his involvement in routine diplomacy and understand what room for maneuver he had – while building his personal networks of informants and influencers – at the Russian court, where he resided from 1753 to 1761.

The Russian historian, Kazimeř Waliszevski, who is of Polish origin, notes that much judgment is placed upon Esterházy in the Russian historiography, which has never treated him with sympathy. When studying the dispatches of Austrian ambassadors, Waliszevski noted that they were written (and maybe even composed) in German by the minor personnel of the mission.

The ambassadors themselves could write a short letter, a separate dispatch, or just a margin note in French. The historian therefore concluded that the ambassadors spoke no German (Marquis Botta d'Adorno was Italian, Count Esterházy Hungarian, and Count Mercy d'Argenteau Flemish). Regarding Ambassador Esterházy, Waliszevski claimed that he spoke neither German nor French [Валишевский, с. 315–316]. The historian was correct in acknowledging that the language of diplomatic correspondence was not the same as the lingua franca of the ethnically mixed Habsburg aristocracy of the Theresian reign: French [Wagner]. However, because the correspondence was in German, he came to false conclusions about the language proficiency of the ambassadors. Historians are puzzled as to why, throughout most of the eighteenth century, the Austrian mission at St Petersburg corresponded with Vienna in German. No plausible explanation has been offered so far. In an article published in 2016, I suggested that since ambassadors did not bother themselves with the daily routine of diplomatic missions, the language of the mission was determined by the junior personnel's language competences [Хаванова, 2016].

Despite this reliance on junior personnel, Esterházy was fluent in both German and French. Currently, historians have just a few letters written by Esterházy himself. His dispatches – even if written by his secretaries and only signed by him – contain valuable information about his oral communication with monarchs, statesmen, and fellow diplomats at different courts. It would have been impossible to spend eight years in Russia without talking to Empress Elisabeth, her ministers, and foreign diplomats directly, in public or private. Although his dispatches, as a rule, contain no information on the language(s) he used, the consistency of indirect evidence allows us to address this subject at least hypothetically.

Family background and the early years

Esterházy belonged to the category of early-modern diplomats whose career choice was determined by their wealth and aristocratic descent. They were first and foremost courtiers, impressing the foreign court with their grandeur. Therefore, it is important to consider how Esterházy's education contributed to his future career. Little is known about his elementary schooling. As the descendant of the two powerful aristocratic Hungarian families, the Esterházys and the Pálffys, he initially received a home education. Between 1725 and 1728, at the age of 14 to 17, he attended the Jesuit high school (*Gymnasium*) in Pressburg (now Bratislava in Slovakia), where he learned Latin and German [Fazekas, Kádár, Kökényesi, No. 10123]. His father Francis (Ferenc) was a high-ranking official of the Kingdom of Hungary. He was a military officer who fought for the House of Austria in the wars of succession and was respected at the Vienna court. His correspondence with Hungarian fellow aristocrats testifies that he spoke and wrote Hungarian [HU-MNL-OL. P 1314. Nos 72498, 72509, 72511, 72514, 72516 et al.], and there is little doubt that his children heard it at home and spoke and understood this language.

The aristocratic educational ideal at the time included a grand tour, attending an elite educational institution that was appropriate to one's social status, while getting acquainted with the rich and diverse cultural legacy of Europe. The brothers Nikolaus and Francis were sent in 1731 to the knight academy in Luneville in Lorrain [Conrads, S. 227–236; Kalmár, pp. 364–372], where they spent half a year together with their cousin Prince Anton (Antal) Esterházy, the future field marshal and minister in Naples in 1751–1752. Following this, they made a long journey through the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, and Italy [Khavanova, 2019, pp. 1124–1125]. As Nikolaus spent months in Luneville, one would assume that he could speak the same dialect of the French language as the spouse of Archduchess Maria Theresa – Prince Francis of Lorrain, the future Emperor Francis I [Fazekas, p. 6].

Having returned to Vienna in 1734, Nikolaus entered the inner circle of Prince Francis of Lorrain and joined his regiment, but soon quit and preferred the carefree life of a courtier in Vienna. Meanwhile, his father was intent on securing employment for his elder son and wrote numerous letters to influential officials asking for assistance. As late as 1738, Nikolaus was admitted to the Hungarian Royal Lieutenancy Council.

Linguistic skills

Today, copies of Esterházy's (autographic) manuscripts exist in three languages: Hungarian, German, and French. One letter from the period of his service at the Lieutenancy Council is written in *Hungarian* and dated June 9, 1739. This letter was written by a secretary but signed by the young Esterházy himself. The letter is addressed to his father's good friend and patron, Chancellor Luis (Lajos) Batthyány [HU-MNL-OL. P 1314. No. 72995]. This is a typical letter from a client seeking a salaried appointment. Presumably, Nikolaus did not write it but only signed it, and his choice of Hungarian was a gesture of respect for the chancellor. Although Count Esterházy was listed on the staff of the Council until 1744, he spent little time fulfilling his duties. In 1741, he started his diplomatic career, first as an emissary of the Vienna court to The Hague, London, and Lisbon, with the notification of the birth of the male heir Archduke Joseph (the future Joseph II), then, in 1742–1747, as a minister to Dresden and Warsaw. There is not currently enough evidence to suggest that he fluently spoke Hungarian and regularly used it, but he had to have had good command of colloquial Hungarian.

In *German*, there are two handwritten letters to Nikolaus's father which accidentally survived in the family archives (maybe due to the exceptional circumstances when they were written). They are dated 11 and 15 February 1753, which means they were written on both the day of his official appointment to the ambassadorial post in St Petersburg and shortly afterwards [HU-MNL-OL. P 197. 20. cs. 67. fasc.]. The content of the epistles implies that correspondence between Nikolaus and his father was fairly regular. The issues discussed concern recent events and Nikolaus's feelings

regarding his new appointment, his agenda before departure, and pragmatic matters related to his income and expenditures. The German language used in this letter underlines the fact that the letter is not merely a part of family correspondence; rather, this is communication of a young diplomat with a high-ranking official of the kingdom, of one courtier with another.

Esterházy's proficiency in *French* should not be in question, because of his education in francophone Luneville. Yet, few (autographic) letters are written by Esterházy in this language, such as those dating from 1741–1743 that are addressed to the Austrian minister in Prussia, Heinrich Richecourt [AT-OeSTA/HHStA. LHA 201-9]. The earliest epistle is dated 16 May 1741 and was written in Falmouth (Great Britain), a seaport from which he departed on his journey to Lisbon. As he was a newly appointed diplomat, he had no secretary to accompany him, which is why he evidently wrote the letter himself. His subsequent letters from Dresden were written – in German or French – by one of his secretaries, and some have the diplomat's autographic French post scripta. From his stay in Russia, there are two autographic and informal letters preserved among the official dispatches to State Chancellor Count Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz. The first was dated 10 June 1754 and – as follows from its content – was sent to the addressee by Captain Johann (János) Kempelen from Esterházy's suite in Russia. The brief epistle served as proof of Esterházy diplomatic credentials, seeking to reassure the state chancellor that the messenger would orally pass on relevant information that the diplomat hesitated to trust to paper [AT-OeSTA/HHStA. StAbt. Russland II. Kt. 37]. The second letter was written on 15 July 1759 and was sent together with the official dispatch via a regular courier. It contained comments on how Esterházy spent the sums forwarded to him for encouraging Russian officials who were supportive of the Vienna court [Ibid. Kt. 41]. On special occasions, the diplomat also wrote short remarks in the margins, as, for instance, on 1 April 1759, when he wrote several lines supporting the supplication of Capitan Kempelen to let him return home [Ibid.]. These examples testify that, if Esterházy wrote to the state chancellor, the language used was French.

Regarding the Russian language, however, Esterházy hardly acquired this unnecessary competence. Unlike the Saxon minister, Johann Funk, or the secretary of the Austrian mission, Philipp Bösler von Eichenfeld, who had spent many years in Russia and functioned as intermediaries between the diplomatic corps and Russian top officials, the ambassador rarely needed this language. Occasional Russian words in his dispatches, such as "Podoroschna" (travel permit), "Doklat" (report), or "Maslaniza" (Shrovetide), were borrowed from the vocabulary of the mission personnel.

Austrian mission in St Petersburg

Correspondence. Michael Hochedlinger notes that while French had established itself as the lingua franca in international intercourse and in personal correspondence between sovereigns, the monarch, state chancellor, and Austrian diplomats also conducted most of their unofficial

correspondence in French. Meanwhile German – unlike in Prussia – remained the language of Austrian diplomacy: of rescripts, instructions, and dispatches [Hochedlinger, S. 71–72]. In accordance with this rule, Esterházy's official dispatches from St Petersburg are written exclusively in German.

Yet, when analyzing the epistolary heritage of Esterházy, historians may add nuance to the picture drawn by Hochedlinger. Based on Austrian diplomatic practice, we can presume that a more flexible approach dominated, based on a language comprehensible for both the ambassador/minister and more minor personnel. In 1740–1741, for instance, Baron Johann Franz von Ostein wrote dispatches from London in German; later, however, the francophone Count Heinrich de Richecourt reported from Britain in French. The same Richecourt corresponded in French during his stay at the Sardinian court in Turin (1742–1749), but his successor Florimond Mercy d'Argenteau switched to German and kept writing dispatches in German from St Petersburg in 1761–1763. The Austrian minister at the Prussian court, Marquis Anton de Puebla, also wrote from Berlin (1749–1756) in French [HU-MNL-OL. P 218. Vol. 2].

The question of who Esterházy's addresses in Vienna were needs specific. Inasmuch as he – and also his predecessors – represented both the Holy Roman Empire and the House of Austria, he wrote dispatches, on the one hand, to Emperor Francis via the Imperial Vice Chancellor, Count Rudolf von Colloredo, and, on the other hand, to Empress Maria Theresa via the State Chancellor Kaunitz. Some information concerning court life or events in the diplomatic corps was duplicated in both. The issues of the imperial Diet, the Holstein question, and the new emperor's elections were discussed primarily in correspondence with and via the imperial vice chancellor, while, for instance, the joint actions in the Seven Years War were discussed with and via the state chancellor. Such seemingly private issues as the health condition of the ambassador, his physical sufferings, or medical diagnoses were considered worthy of detailed descriptions in official dispatches. Paper type, layout, margins, and other formal features were identical in both groups of dispatches.

Copies of the official correspondence preserved in the diplomat's private archive accumulated all the incoming and outgoing documents (the originals are dispersed between different fonds, archives, and countries). In these volumes, where the documents are arranged by their type and origin (such as the incoming rescripts and instructions, the outgoing reports with the post-scripta and attachments, and so forth), the bulk of the German-language correspondence is complemented by copies of documents in French and Latin. These are, for example, dispatches of Austrian and foreign diplomats who corresponded with their respective courts in French or copies of relevant documents adduced in French or Latin translations.

A separate "chapter" in the history of communication between Vienna and St Petersburg is preserved in the exchange of letters between their rulers. This exchange was strictly determined by more general rules of writing in Latin in the name of the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire

[Hochedlinger, S. 72]. The same was true for the empress queen, whose letters to the Russian monarchs were written almost exclusively in Latin. The letters of Francis and Maria Theresa to Grand Duke Petr Fedorovich and Grand Duchess Ekaterina Alekseevna were composed in German. These were not only letters of credence and recall for the arriving and departing diplomats but also notifications on the occasion of births, deaths, and marriages and, in exceptional cases, important events on the international stage or battlefield. During Esterházy's stay in Russia, the letter exchange was practiced regularly, and the only linguistic "deviations" were Maria Theresa's letters to Empress Elizabeth that were written in German instead of Latin on the occasion of joint military operations and victories. This is not explicitly explained, or commented on, but a plausible explanation for Maria Theresa's use of German in these instances might be her desire to stress her supremacy over her rival, another German ruler, Friedrich of Prussia. She symbolically juxtaposed her linguistically manifested Germanness to the Enlightenment-inspired Francophilia of the Prussian king who wanted to be the first prince of the German-speaking world.

People. Count Esterházy arrived in Russia in October 1753 with a suite that included Croatian-Hungarian nobleman Count Joseph von Keglevich, Capitan János von Kempelen, and secretary Anton von Arbesser. He took with him three valets, a cook with an assistant, a confectioner, and six lackeys, whose names and nationalities are unknown [АВПРИ. Ф. 2. Оп. 2/1. 1753. Л. 109]. On the eve of his departure, he explicitly rejected the possibility of recruiting people of Serbian origin, because he was afraid that they might betray him in favor of their Russian co-believers instead of remaining loyal to him as their master. An international team of German and French grooms, coachmen, cooks, confectioners, valets, and hairdressers lived in his house in Millionnaya Street in St Petersburg. At least one of his pages was also a Frenchman. Seemingly, like other diplomats in St Petersburg, Esterházy preferred not to recruit his staff from among the locals [АВПРИ. Ф. 6. Оп. 2. 1743–1762. Д. 1. Л. 80 об.].

As stated above, neither Eichenfeld nor Seddeler, who copied most of the outgoing dispatches, were fluent in French. However, they were skilled enough to copy the documents in French or Latin for the ambassador's needs. The personalities of the mission staff and members of Esterházy's suite are reflected in their letters copied by the Russian postal censorship. One of these occasionally copied letters of Eichenfeld to Baron Heinrich von Peckler in Constantinople shows that the secretary eloquently used Latin (maybe with the intention of making his epistle more elegant). Complaining about his never-ending mission to Russia and describing his nostalgia and stoic readiness to fulfill his duties, he concluded with the Latin: *dulcis amor patriae quamvis non recuso laborem!* [АВПРИ. Ф. 6. Оп. 2. Д. 1. Л. 77].

The young Count Keglevich had first accompanied his patron to Madrid in 1751, then joined him in Russia. His father believed that the status of chevalier of the embassy suited the young aristocrat and provided him with sociability in foreign languages as well as indispensable experience

and acquaintances at foreign courts [Khavanova, 2019]. Among the letters censored by the Russian postal service, there is one in German, presumably written by Count Keglevich. The addressee is an unnamed friend in Vienna with whom Keglevich emotionally shared the news of the Prussians' recent defeats. Keglevich used the French expression "*plus poliment tranquil<le>*", translated into Russian as "лутче сказать? безпечным быть" ("better to say, being careless") [АВПРИ. Ф. 6. Оп. 2. 1743–1762. Д. 1. Л. 189, 192]. This is one more piece of evidence supporting the hypotheses that Esterházy and his suite used both German and French as colloquial and written languages.

Esterházy and Empress Elizabeth

The diplomat was evidently proud of Empress Elizabeth's attention and sympathy. However, from his first month in office and throughout the subsequent years, he was annoyed with the scant attention paid to him as the only plenipotent ambassador at her court. In his dispatches, he repeatedly related negative opinions and rumors about the Russian sovereign [AT-OeStA/HHStA StAbt. Russland II. Kt. 36]. His extensive report from 10 July 1754 (in German), with its characterization of Elizabeth as a lazy and capricious female ruler, drew the attention of German historians in the late nineteenth century to such an extent that they published this dispatch in a volume on the Seven Years War [Preußische und Österreichische Acten, S. 673–677]. However, Esterházy soon realized that her favor was his asset and did his best distinguish himself in her eyes. As early as 1756, Esterházy emphasized the empress's confidence and extraordinary benevolence. On 25 February, he wrote: "Just as I was sitting at the table of the Russian empress on the right side, and the English ambassador [Guy Dickens] had to go home because of a sickness that had befallen him, so that there was no one around who could hear anything, it was most agreeable to her, to enter into a very long conversation with me" [AT-OeStA/HHStA. StAbt. Russland II. Kt. 37].

What language did Esterházy speak to the empress? As adventurer Charles d'Éon de Beaumont wrote in his notes, "She is very familiar with German and hesitates to speak much French for fear of making mistakes. She also speaks to ambassadors, especially the Austrian one, taking him to a window niche" [Мезин, с. 116]. These long talks amazed the court. In her memoirs, Grand Duchess Ekaterina Alekseevna wrote about an episode she observed: the empress was speaking at length to Esterházy, and the courtiers were all standing there dead tired [Записки императрицы Екатерины Второй, с. 458]. Francine-Dominique Liechtenhan suggested that the empress was attracted to tall and handsome men such as Esterházy, or his predecessors, Pretlack and Bernes [Лиштенан, с. 410]. At the end of his eight-year mission in Russia, together with Chancellor Vorontsov, Esterházy felt confident enough to visit the empress in her private rooms to discuss urgent matters, as the diplomat reported to Kaunitz on 3 November 1758 [AT-OeStA/HHStA. StAbt. Russland II. Kt. 41].

Language skills at the Russian court

The foreign languages spoken at the Russian court during the reign of Empress Elizabeth were, apparently, as illustrated below, German and French. Chancellor Mikhail Vorontsov, in a letter to his nephew Aleksandr giving him a piece of good advice, virtually confirmed the use of these languages and revealed the way he himself was acting: "You should find a skilful man in Vienna and employ him as your secretary, who can compose and write well in French and German, and when you do not wish to write yourself, he can copy out your concepts from scratch" [Архив князя Воронцова, с. 112]. The clerks of the College of Foreign Affairs translated the documentation to be handed out to foreign diplomats both into German and French. In the report of the accountant Brown, dated 17 August 1759, notes about the victory over Prussia (at Kunersdorf) were written in German and French, and the ambassadors Esterházy and l'Hôpital received two of each, and other ministers one copy in each language [АВПРИ. Ф. 2. 1759. Д. 1465. Л. 244].

In his dispatches, Esterházy spoke about his meetings and talks with the empress, the grand-ducal couple, her courtiers, and top officials but made no comments on the languages he used in oral communication. Ivan Shuvalov in his letter to Chancellor Vorontsov from 2 March 1760 (Julian style) quoted his talk to Esterházy in French. The diplomat – encouraging the Russian court to fight against Frederick II – said: "Il faut, Monsieur, prendre pour principe, on doit premièrement abaisser le Roy de Prusse et après songer à se dédommager de ses états" [Русский архив, стб 1404]. Indirect evidence from other sources also helps to reconstruct (possible) languages used by Esterházy and his counterparts.

Esterházy's regular interlocutor was Grand Chancellor Count Aleksei Bestuzhev-Riumin. It took time to win, if not his cordiality, then at least his confidence. Most likely, the chief of the foreign political office was informed by his brother Mikhail, the former Russian minister in Dresden, that the Austrian diplomat had a bad temper and an inclination to scandals [Щепкин, с. 195]). Bestuzhev's French was inadequate, and his preferred language of communication with foreign diplomats was German. He was regarded as a principal supporter of the House of Austria at the St Petersburg court [Анисимов]. In 1748, Emperor Francis sent him a letter in German (preserved in a copy) with the most gracious recognition of his merits [АВПРИ. Ф. 32. Оп. 1. 1748. Д. 3. Л. 2]. Esterházy, in his dispatches, regularly mentioned that he was handing original documents in German to the grand chancellor and letting the clerks of the College of Foreign Affairs make copies of non-classified materials [Там же. 1755. Д. 5. Л. 18]. On occasion, minor clerks of the College visited Esterházy with circular letters (presumably in German) addressed to all foreign diplomats. The College employee Kron mentioned extensive conversations with Esterházy, emotions and opinions the diplomats expressed, and questions asked [Там же. 1754. Д. 7. Л. 23, 25, 29]. Esterházy's request to order a German-speaking guardsman to his house clearly favors the German language, because the

diplomat wanted to share a common language with them [АВПРИ. Ф. 32. Оп. 1. 1755. Д. 5. Л. 19].

In the absence of relevant information in Esterházy's correspondence, one may find interesting details in the letters and reports of Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who came to Russia in the spring of 1755 with the official congratulations of Maria Theresa and Francis I on the birth of Grand Duke Paul [Khavanova, 2022]. He understood his subordinate status perfectly well and did not write official dispatches, delegating this function to the ambassador. Perhaps exactly for this reason, all his letters and exposés are written in French – the usual language Kaunitz used in correspondence with his trainees and trustees. However, he spent much time talking to the great chancellor, vice chancellor, and others because he was assigned to the official ceremonial mission. Furthermore, he was also entrusted with the secret task of exploring the depth of pro-Prussian sentiments at the Russian court and binding Russia tighter to Austria by promising pensions and subventions to key figures connected to Russian foreign policy. Finding himself in a foreign – and, in a way, alien – milieu, Zinzendorf was judging his counterparts based on their language proficiency, ability to formulate their thoughts, and sociability in French and German. Although it is difficult to come to an unequivocal conclusion about whether French, German, or both were used in each particular case, the envoy's observations shed light on the peculiarities of linguistic communication.

Thus, Zinzendorf wrote about Dmitry Volkov [Киселев], who, along with the Saxon minister Funk, was one of the closest confidants of the grand chancellor: "A young man of 28, almost without knowledge, with even less genius, having some talent for intrigue, perverse morals, a lot of presumption, adorning himself with the minimal French and German that he writes without knowing the value of any term" [Preußische und Österreichische Acten, S. 683]. In contrast, Ivan I. Shuvalov amazed Zinzendorf with, among other qualities, his proficiency in languages: "He has received a more careful education than that which is commonly given in this country, which would, however, pass for very bad anywhere else; his tutor was a French comedian. From him he acquired a certain taste for French letters, which gives him a sort of jargon" [Ibid., p. 689]. Language proficiency as a marker of intellectuality and smartness is especially evident in the lines dedicated to Adam Olsufiev: "I consider Mr. Olsufiev to be the most witty and knowledgeable man in office today. He writes German, Latin, and French with equal facility; brought up to work, having spent several years at the courts of Berlin and Dresden, he enunciates himself wonderfully, in the prime of his life, with admirable health and all the flexibility of a courtier to achieve" [Ibid., p. 698].

In June 1755, when Russia was at the closing stage of the negotiations on the subsidy convention with Great Britain, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams arrived in St Petersburg. As the ministers of allied courts, Zinzendorf and Williams were acting together, persuading Bestuzhev that the hostile dominating party at court might be "bought," or neutralized, by generous subventions.

The language of communication was central to the deal: Williams spoke no German, and Bestuzhev hardly communicated in French. For this reason, as Zinzendorf wrote in his comprehensive memoir from July 1755, Saxon minister Funk was used as an interpreter, translating the words of Williams into German, and repeating once again in French what Bestuzhev intended to say [Preussische und Österreichische Acten, pp. 713–714, 723].

It is not known which language (German or French) Esterházy used to speak to people in private. On several occasions, he mentioned his talks with Grand Duchess Ekaterina Alekseeva, but from these short accounts, it is unclear if they spoke French as the language of European courts and aristocracies or German as the mother tongue of the German princess. The same is true for his principal supporters and informants, such as Count Petr Shuvalov or Mikhail Vorontsov, respectively. Remarkably, in all these cases, Esterházy found ways to be useful to his counterparts: the Grand Duchess intervened on behalf of her brother Friedrich August, the chief of a cuirassier regiment in the imperial army. Shuvalov promoted his canons "Yedinorog" ("Unicorn") to the imperial army and did not forget to ask graces for his only son, and Vorontsov assisted his brother Roman to gain the title of count of the Holy Roman Empire.

The diplomat's public compliments (or harangues) during public audiences, however, were determined by the virtues of tradition. Austrian and Russian ambassadors (both plenipotentiary and extraordinary) in St Petersburg and Vienna addressed their speeches to the sovereigns in German and to the archdukes/archduchesses or grand dukes/grand duchesses in French. This rule, which had not been fixed in the ceremonial practice of foreign ambassadors (1744), went back to the dawn of bilateral relations, and deviations from the rule, if any, can be explained by a lack of language skills. As for Esterházy, he acted in exact accordance with this rule, which established the official language of the Habsburg monarchy (German) as the language of oral communication between the ruling houses and reserved the language of European court societies (French) for the junior court.

* * *

A comprehensive analysis of diplomatic correspondence conducted during the eight years that Esterházy spent in Russia testifies that, like the practices of his predecessor Pretlack and his successor Mercy d'Argenteau, the working language was German. This continuity was the merit of the minor personnel responsible for the daily routine. They drafted dispatches and copied and made excerpts of the incoming correspondence in German, French, or Latin. Insofar as there is no special research on the language policies of the Austrian diplomacy in the age of Maria Theresa, we can only assume that the language choice in each country was determined by the linguistic skills of the mission personnel, languages preferred by the ambassador, and languages spoken at the host court.

Esterházy's biography, education, and career show that he had sufficient language skills to fulfill the duties of an ambassador at European courts, be they in Dresden, Madrid, or St Petersburg. The combination of German and French enabled him to control the diplomatic correspondence, live in a linguistically mixed milieu in his office and household, and establish confident relations with the Russian empress and her statesmen. He entered his office at a time when a diplomat had to be, first and foremost, a courier, and he spectacularly fulfilled this function in Russia. Although the professionalization of the diplomatic corps is often mentioned in comprehensive works on the eighteenth century [Do Paço], this non-evident shift has not yet been thoroughly reconsidered. Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, cited in this article as one of the chancellor's trainees, demonstrated a more analytical approach, which Esterházy lacked. Concerned with his personal grandeur at the foreign court, Esterházy stayed egocentrically indifferent to the Russian society he lived in. This was probably the reason why our knowledge of his linguistic use at the Russian court remains insufficiently detailed and complete.

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