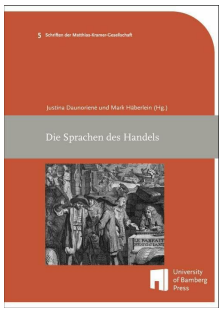
ARO
Annali
Recensioni / Reviews / Rezensionen
Online

IX, 2026/1

Justina Daunorienė, Mark Häberlein (eds.)

Die Sprachen des Handels

Review by: Stefania Gialdroni



Editors: Justina Daunorienė, Mark Häberlein
Title: Die Sprachen des Handels
Place: Bamberg
Publisher: University of Bamberg Press
Year: 2024
ISBN: 9783989890343
URL: link to the title

REVIEWER Stefania Gialdroni - Università degli Studi di Padova

Citation
S. Gialdroni, review of Justina Daunorienė, Mark Häberlein (eds.), Die Sprachen des Handels, Bamberg, University of Bamberg Press, 2024, in: ARO, IX, 2026, 1, URL https://aro-isig.fbk.eu/issues/2026/1/die-sprachen-des-handels-stefania-gialdroni/

The relationship between commerce and multilingualism is as old as long-distance trade itself. Yet, despite the centrality of communication to mercantile activity, the «languages of commerce» have rarely been the primary focus of collective, interdisciplinary inquiry. *Die Sprachen des Handels*, edited by Justina Daunorienė and Mark Häberlein, stands out as one of the very few volumes to address this subject explicitly and systematically. Emerging from a conference organized by the Matthias-Kramer-Gesellschaft in Vilnius (28-29 September 2023), the volume brings together historians, philologists, historical linguists and scholars of language pedagogy, to explore the acquisition, mediation, and codification of commercial languages from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century, from the Baltic and Central European urban centers to the transalpine routes and the Mediterranean world.

Placed in historiographical perspective, the volume enters into dialogue with a significant body of scholarship that has already begun to foreground communication within commercial history. An important precedent in this respect is *Merchants of Innovation. The Languages of Traders* (ed. by E.-M. Wagner *et al.*, Berlin, De Gruyter Mouton, 2017), which explicitly addresses the role of linguistic mediation, translation practices, and the circulation of commercial terminology within transregional trading networks. *Die Sprachen des Handels* builds upon and deepens this insight by shifting the analytical focus from networks to registers. While *Merchants of Innovation* highlights linguistic exchange within broader processes of economic and institutional transfer, placing the languages of commerce within a wider sociolinguistic context, the present volume systematically interrogates the internal structure of mercantile language: its pedagogical codification, its lexicographical stabilization, and its role in shaping language change. Another comparable precedent is the collective volume *Migrating Words, Migrating Merchants, Migrating Law* (ed. by S. Gialdroni *et al.*, Leiden, Brill, 2020), which explicitly

places language at the center of the analysis of commercial law. Unlike many broader works on trade networks, this collection foregrounds the migration of technical vocabulary as a key to understanding the circulation of legal institutions across Mediterranean, European and Atlantic spaces. This step toward a genuinely transdisciplinary approach to the history of commerce is further developed by *Die Sprachen des Handels* by giving linguistic analysis a much more systematic and central role.

The contrast becomes even clearer when compared to large-scale collective works on trade, such as the *Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade around Europe 1300–1600* (ed. by W. Blockmans *et al.*, London, Routledge, 2019). In that volume, Agnete Nesse's chapter – significantly titled *Trade and Language: How did Traders Communicate across Language Borders?* – poses the fundamental question of cross-linguistic interaction. Yet within the architecture of the handbook, language remains one thematic strand among others (ships, finance, urban history, maritime law). By contrast, *Die Sprachen des Handels* places linguistic practice at the center of the investigation and treats it as a constitutive infrastructure of commerce rather than as a complementary dimension. At the same time, the book intersects with traditions of historical linguistics such as Lorenzo Tomasin's *Europa romanza* (Torino, Einaudi, 2021), where commercial exchange appears one of the many roots of European vernaculars. The present volume reverses the perspective: instead of treating trade as a contributing factor in language history, it treats language as a primary tool of economic agency.

M. Häberlein's opening essay, *Kaufmannsbildung und Verständigung unter Kaufleuten in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, functions as a conceptual frame. He situates multilingual competence within the broader context of merchant education, mobility, and apprenticeship. Rather than presenting merchants as accidental polyglots, Häberlein convincingly demonstrates that language acquisition was a structural component of professional formation. His introduction establishes a key premise of the volume: communication was not ancillary to commerce, but constitutive of it. J. Daunorienė's contribution on the *Marienburger Tresslerbuch* (1399-1409) shifts the focus to a late medieval administrative source. By analyzing this account book as a repository of historical trade terminology, the essay illustrates how institutional accounting practices stabilized terminology and embedded linguistic forms (*Fachsprache*) in administrative and commercial routine. H. Glück examines the early modern *Kaufmannssprache* through four language manuals (*Sprachbücher*). His analysis foregrounds the didactic codification of commercial idioms, revealing how phrasebooks and grammars shaped expectations about appropriate mercantile communication. S.M. Newerkla's study of Christoph Warmer's ten-language *Gazophylacium* (1691) further develops this pedagogical dimension. However, this work, while highly relevant for mercantile practice, was conceived for a broader audience that included soldiers and travelers, thus testifying to the pervasive need for linguistic versatility in early modern Europe. A. Flurschütz da Cruz turns to eighteenth-century multilingual letter manuals for merchants. His contribution underscores the performative and rhetorical dimensions of commercial correspondence. M. Ressel's contribution adds a crucial diachronic dimension to the discussion of German-Italian commercial interaction. He shows how the linguistic balance between the two communities shifted over time: while Italian long retained considerable cultural prestige, by the late seventeenth century an increasing number of Italians were learning German rather than the other way around. This development reflects changing economic realities: prestige and utility no longer coincided. Focusing on the Greek Orthodox merchant diaspora in eighteenth century Vienna, S. Saracino's essay argues that Greek and German served as strategic languages within these communities. The deliberate preservation of Greek as the sole second communal language was closely linked to legal and economic autonomy, demonstrating that linguistic control was as much a commercial matter as a question of identity. M. Rocher's essay explores language teaching for future merchants in the eighteenth century, illustrating how linguistic skills were incorporated into educational frameworks for commercial training. Rather than being acquired solely through practice, language competence was progressively shaped within structured pedagogical settings. B. Marizzi moves the narrative into the early twentieth century, analyzing the transfer of German as a language of trade in Spain. His chapter situates commercial language within geopolitical and cultural transfer processes, demonstrating how economic ambition and linguistic expansion intersected in modern Europe. Finally, D. Jarmalavičius and V.J. Pukėvičiūtė explore Lithuanian commercial language in the first half of the twentieth century through the example of the 1918 *Sieben-Sprachen-Wörterbuch*. Their analysis of nominal formation processes illustrates how lexicographical efforts participated in nation-building while simultaneously responding to international trade demands.

If one desideratum may be formulated, it concerns the absence of a synthetic concluding chapter that would draw together the case studies. Nevertheless, the strength of the book lies precisely in its empirical density and methodological plurality. In sum, *Die Sprachen des Handels* will serve as an indispensable reference for historians of trade, scholars of multilingualism, and researchers interested in the entanglement of language, economy, and cultural transfer.

* The original research underpinning this review was funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the ERC CoG MICOLL, Grant Agreement N. 101002084.