

## Bolzano merchants' archive between 17th and 19th century. The emergence of multilingual practices

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**Resum.** *Els arxius dels mercaders de Bolzano entre els segles XVII i XVIII. El sorgiment de pràctiques multilingües*

En la cruïlla entre el món de parla alemanya i el món de parla italiana, els comerciants de Bolzano (Tirol del Sud, Itàlia) van tenir un paper crucial en la promoció del multilingüisme. Aquest treball pretén explorar la gestió lingüística en la vida quotidiana dels comerciants tal com es desprèn dels documents de la seva institució oficial, l'anomenat Magistrat Mercantil (1635-1851). Per a aquesta primera revisió lingüística es va seleccionar un subconjunt de documents des del 1736 fins al 1740/1 per tal d'il·lustrar com s'aplicava el multilingüisme en la gestió diària del Magistrat Mercantil, i com s'utilitzava l'alternança de codis en ocasions concretes i amb finalitats concretes. En particular, es mostrarà com les actes s'escrivien en les quatre llengües utilitzades al Magistrat (italià, alemany, llatí i francès) però com les gloses eren essencialment en una o altra llengua, sense barrejar codis.

**Paraules claus:** multilingüisme; comerciants; italià; gestió lingüística; contacte lingüístic.

### Abstract.

At the crossroad between German and Italian worlds, merchants in Bolzano (South Tyrol, Italy) played a crucial role in promoting multilingualism. This work will explore the language management of merchants' life as emerging from the documents of their official institution, the so-called *Magistrato Mercantile* (1635-1851). For this first linguistic survey, a sub-set of documents has been selected from 1736 to 1740/1, in order to illustrate how multilingualism was applied in the everyday life of the *Magistrato Mercantile*, and how language alternation was used on specific occasions for specific purposes. In particular, it will be shown how acts were written in all four languages used in the *Magistrato* (i.e., Italian, German, Latin, and French), but how glosses were essentially in one language or another, without internal code-mixing.

**Keywords:** multilingualism; merchants; Italian; language management; language contact.

**Abstract.** *Gli archivi dei mercanti di Bolzano tra il 17° e il 19° secolo. L'emergere di pratiche multilingui*

Al crocevia tra mondo tedescofono e mondo italofono, i mercanti di Bolzano (Alto Adige, Italia) hanno giocato un ruolo cruciale nella promozione del multilinguismo. Questo lavoro si propone di esplorare il *language management* nella vita quotidiana dei mercanti così come emerge dai documenti della loro istituzione ufficiale, il cosiddetto Magistrato Mercantile (1635-1851). Per questa prima rassegna linguistica, un sotto insieme di documenti è stato selezionato dal 1736 al 1740/1 al fine di illustrare come il multilinguismo fosse applicato nella gestione quotidiana del Magistrato Mercantile, e come l'alternanza di codice fosse utilizzata in specifiche occasioni e per scopi particolari. Verrà mostrato in particolare come gli atti fossero scritti in tutte e quattro le lingue usate nel Magistrato (italiano, tedesco, latino e francese) ma come le glosse fossero essenzialmente in una o nell'altra lingua, senza commistione di codice.

**Parole chiave:** multilinguismo; esercenti; italiano; gestione linguistica; contatto linguistico.

## 1. Introduction

Traders' documents have attracted the interest of scholars in historical sociolinguistics and related fields since they show instance of everyday language use and also multilingual practices (see Wagner, Beinhoff, & Outhwaite, 2017). Bolzano traders represent an interesting case since they came from two main linguistic areas: the German-speaking and the Italian-speaking one. Traders from both areas were attested in town during four annual fairs and their economic and political power grew during the 16th and 17th century. In 1635 the duchess of Tyrol approved the creation of a sort of chancellery, with the Italian name *Magistrato Mercantile* (henceforth, MM). During about two centuries, the MM produces a huge amounts of documents now preserved at the Provincial Archive in Bolzano: they represent a resource for understanding the multilingual management in Bolzano in historical times. However, these documents haven't been digitalized or transcribed yet, and their classification is also quite lacunose.

In this work the various resources at disposal in the MM's archive will be explored, by emphasizing the multilingual practices of merchants and their role in shaping contact between Italian and German.

## 2. Bolzano: a town at the cross-road

Nowadays, Bolzano is the main town of the Italian region of South Tyrol, which has belonged to Italy since the end of World War I in 1918. Traditionally, this area has been a mainly German speaking one. However, since 1920, and especially under Fascism, a massive migration of Italian speakers has been promoted especially in the main towns (Bolzano, Meran and Brixen).

However, historians have demonstrated that multilingual practices also existed in the past, mostly thanks to Bolzano's role as an international trade centre, at the crossroads between the Italian- and the German-speaking worlds. Since the town was strategically placed on the Adige river, Bolzano linked the Hapsburg kingdom and the Po valley, included the Republic of Venice (Bonoldi, 1999; Bonoldi, Leonardi, & Occhi, 2012). For this reason, Bolzano grew as one of the wealthiest centre for trading goods coming from the Northern kingdoms (e.g., wool, amber) and from the Italian ones (e.g., wine, olive oil, jewellery), and, through Venice, the Eastern area of the known world with silk and spices. Four main fairs are attested during specific moments of the year in association with religious occurrences, all lasting 15 days (Negri 1959: 86).

During the centuries, the town of Bolzano increased its importance as a trading centre capable of attracting merchants from different parts of the

(known) world. In Bibikov's words, it is possible to say that in this period Bolzano, as many other towns in Europe, 'played a special role in the development of economic relations' (Bibikov 2004: 18) by attracting people of different strata, in particular during fairs, which called not only merchants to the town, but also bankers, and credit providers.

The presence of Italian traders is attested in documents dating at least from the XIII-XIV centuries, which explicitly refer to the presence of Venetian merchants in Bolzano. The presence of Venetian merchants was consistent and also important for the economy of the whole area, and this is also testified by a diplomatic incident, which occurred on 20th April 1486: during the Mezza Quaresima fair, all the Venetian merchants were arrested on the Austrian duke Sigismondus's orders because of the political tensions between Tyrol and the Venetian Republic; around 800 merchants and servants were arrested and released only after the payment of a compensation (Negri 1959: 78).

Despite political tensions, Italian traders remained a numerous and stable presence in the town. Many of them had also stable accommodations in Bolzano: according to Negri (1959) and Borgogno (2002), the De Rossi family moved to Bolzano from Florence around the 15th century, and they adopted the name Botsch, by unifying their house with a local Tyrolean family.

Italian merchants started demanding the constitution of a traders' association to give traders more political power within the town and the Tyrol, but also for resolving quarrels among merchants, and drafting multilingual contracts, other than to control fees and tools for the import-export. Duchess Claudia de' Medici (1604-1648) finally signed the permission (or 'Privilege') for the institution of the MM in 1635, also because her deceased husband was deeply indebted to the town of Bolzano of roughly one thousand florins. The MM firstly in a central street in Bolzano, but after less than a century its wealth and power have grown to the point which they paid for a huge palace in the centre of the town, which is still visible today since it hosts the Merchants' Museum. The MM became an essential player in the political life of both Bolzano and the Tyrolean's commercial policy. For instance, the MM was the main sponsor of artists who worked in Bolzano, and specifically, in Bolzano churches (e.g., the Cathedral's altar in 1715, Borgogno 2002: 48), or of particular works for the royal weddings of the dukes of Tyrol (Borgogno 2002: 42). Bonoldi (2012: 43-44) also points out that the MM was composed only of merchants, without any political power, playing for centuries the role of the real economic and cultural mediator between the Italian area and Northern Europe.

Within the MM Italian-speaking and German-speaking traders are equally represented, with two internal law courts balanced by language (see also Negri

1959: 83). The courts were elected every year during the fair of Saint Bartholomeus by traders who enrolled in the MM, thus receiving an enrollment number enlisted in the MM's registers together with other information (e.g., goods traded, but also trials involving him or his assistants). The registers were freely at disposal to all merchants within the MM, and they were a source to obtain information about the reliability of a possible partner in commerce.

The MM was active from 1635 to 1851. However, the institution suffered some hardships from 1806 to 1816 during the Napoleonic domination, which lasted for about seven years, and then during the Bavarian one (Mura 2005/6). After 1815, with the defeat of Napoleon, the former order was restored: the MM was opened again, and continued to be an important organism for the commercial and economic administration of the town, even if it lost part of its juridical powers. The last counsellors of the MM were elected in 1851, when the institution was finally closed, but its main functions and the MM's palace were assigned to the newly created Chamber of Commerce.

### **3. The documents**

Many studies on the MM were conducted during the '30s and the '40s, and they were ideologically-biased by the Fascism regime's wish to demonstrate that Bolzano had been Italian for a long time. Nevertheless, during this period scholars started to catalogue and write about the documents of the MM (cf. Canali, 1948). Nowadays, historians and economists show a particular interest in the MM, especially because its documents help in reconstructing the history of South Tyrol, and in particular the connections between the Tyrolean kingdom and the Republic of Venice (e.g., Andreozzi, Faillo, & Gaffeo, 2012; Negri, 1959; Mura, 2005/6; Canali 1965; Benuzzi, 2012; Bonoldi, 1999; Bonoldi et al., 2012).

The MM documents are now preserved in the Provincial Archive in Bolzano, after having being stored for years in the archive of the MM itself and for a brief period in the city archive. According to the Provincial Archive's records, the documents relating to the MM cover a surface of 90 metres, dating back to 1463, thus before the official foundation of the institution, and up until 1851. The documents consist of 58 record books, and 570 bundles of manuscripts and printed materials.

A classification of the documents belonging to the Magistrato Mercantile was first provided by Kögler in 1898, and then by Canali in 1938 and in 1959. Kögler divided the documents into three main typologies: documents, codices, and a third section including both acts and copy-books. Canali improved this classification by dividing Kögler's third typology into five more categories:

products, commands, complaints and political letters, acts, and trial records. In order to give an idea of the dimension of the Archive, it is useful to note that more than 570 documents fall under the label of “acts”, covering a period between the 17th and the 19th centuries. Moreover, the Archive of the Magistrato Mercantile contains other materials, such as maps, both of the Tyrol and of the (known) world, dated from 1794 to 1873, always with the indication of the author and of the printer. There are also some musical scores and dramas, like the ‘Pace di Mercurio’ [Peace of Mercury], whose composition was sponsored by the MM in 1765, to be performed during the party for archduke Leopold and the infant Maria Luisa’s wedding.

Some documents, however, have been lost through centuries, also because the Archive has been moved twice. More documents also disappeared during the Fascist regime: for instance, Mussolini asked for the original Privilege signed by Claudia de’ Medici and other documents aimed at testifying a supposed Italian native presence in South Tyrol. These documents were sent to Rome, where they disappeared: in 2003 the 1718 Privilege renewal was found and donated back to the Provincial Archive of Bolzano. Yet, so far the act of foundation of this fundamental South Tyrolean institution is still missing, thus representing one the most relevant gap in the MM’s archive. A transcription of 1635 Privilege could be found in Canali (1943: 262-271).

#### 4. Research questions and method

The main purpose of this paper is to offer a first overview of the available data from a linguistic point of view, by emphasizing what were the linguistic repertoires of the merchants of Bolzano. In doing so, the paper will try to answer to three main research questions:

- 1) What was the influence of the context (i.e., style and addressee of the letter) in selecting languages?
- 2) Is there a difference in the languages used related to the typology of the documents (e.g., private letters, acts of trials, and so on)?
- 3) Are there instances of multiple languages used within the same document, and how this language alternation was realized?

A first general survey of the documents from different periods in the history of the MM was conducted, in order to highlight how languages were used in the various typologies of documents. A special focus will be given on a particular institution, the so-called ‘Tontina’, whose documents are collected in three main bundles dating from 1736 to 1740/1. The documents have been digitalized by the author, with permission by the Provincial Archive of Bolzano,

who has also allowed the publication of pictures of such documents with the appropriate reference number.

All documents have been classified in an Excel table reporting: document typology (based on Canali's classification), date, place, name of the writer (if present), and, in case of correspondence, name of the addressee and place of origin and/or destination of the letter. Letters were divided among private correspondence (e.g., trader to trader), semi-official letters (trader to MM, and vice versa), and official or institutional letters (e.g., from the MM to the mayor of Bolzano or the duke of Tyrol). Metadata were also recorded in the same Excel table, and they include indication on the material (i.e., paper), seals, the inventory number, and the archivist identification number. A final column of comments was left open for annotations by the researcher during the annotation procedure.

## 5. Analysis

A major issue with this kind of texts is the difficulty of identifying the writers of certain extracts. This represents a known problem in the field of Historical Sociolinguistics (Craig 2004), and it affects the possibility of conducting a close sociolinguistic investigation on these data. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the subscriber is the same as the writer, even when a signature is present (e.g., at the bottom of a letter). In some cases, the differences in the ink used helps in determining that a second person, maybe a secretary, was responsible for writing the main body of the letter, leaving to the sender, frequently a Chancellor of the MM, the duty to sign it. However, the identity of these secretaries remain unknown: even we have lists of payments for various services and goods of the MM, including the service of secretaries, it is rather impossible to determine which of the many listed was the responsible for a single letter.

By looking again at Canali's classification and by counting the number of documents listed by the previous scholars for the different years, it is possible to highlight how language use changes through the centuries. Indeed, it emerges how since its foundation in 1635 and until the end of 18th century, Italian and German were the two main languages, with some random letters, mainly private correspondence, in French, and with formulaic fixed Latin expressions. Italian documents were also slightly more numerous than German ones, especially in official and private correspondence, thus testifying the important commercial network that the MM has established in the Italian area, from Verona to Venice, but with important contact points also in Milan and Genoa. In the second half of the 18th century, however, German documents appear

to be more numerous than Italian ones, with an increase of official acts and correspondence towards and from areas within the Habsburg kingdom. An increase of French correspondence and official documents is attested at the end of the 18th c. and in the first quarter of the 19th c., probably due to the influence of the French in the whole area, also during the Napoleonic supremacy in Tyrol.

A powerful source of data are the trial records compiled during each fairs by the secretaries (or attorneys) of the MM. Fig. 1 shows an example of the first page of one record for the year 1695: the secretary reported the name of the fair, the names and the matriculation number of the merchants elected as counsellors for that year, and then a summary of the various trials that occurred during that period.

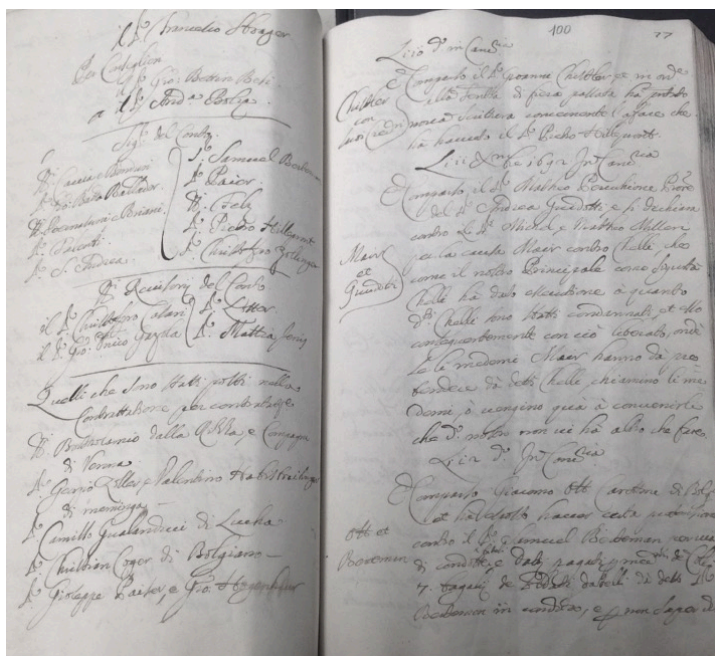


Figure 1. Book of acts of trials - 1695 – Provincial Archive of Bolzano, Magistrato Mercantile, 3.1.19: 100 (authorized reproduction).

It could be assumed that the same notary was present at the different trials, he collected various notes, and he prepared the summaries contained in the books. In order to facilitate the access and use of these records, the names of the merchants involved in the trial were indicated on the left of the page, as showed in Fig. 1. Thus, the left notes have to be intended as a sort of index,



and they were probably used as feedbacks to check if a certain merchant was involved in any contestations in the past (Negri 1959).

Without any further indications, and with a short analysis of the handwriting, it is likely that the same hand which wrote the summary of the processes also wrote the names of the merchants involved on the left of the folio. As for the languages, it is curious to note that around the 90% of these records were written in Italian, whereas the use of German increased during the 18th c., then becoming the dominant language by the end of the century.

The 'Varia' contained various typologies of documents: baptismal and death certificates, and also general correspondence between the MM and other institutions or, albeit rarely, individual merchants. Correspondence was filed in both trial notes and more frequently among the 'Varia', without folders specifically dedicated to the correspondence. The variety of document typology is also reflected in the variety of languages used: baptismal and death certificates were completely or partially handwritten, and in the latter case the printed part was generally, even if not always, in Latin, whereas the other parts were compiled either in Italian or German. French certificates sometimes also contain a German translation, although by the beginning of 18th c. these translations tend to disappear, and French documents are stored among the others. Thus, French was a common language also among merchants.

The correspondence between the MM and its delegates in other towns allow to reconstruct the social and commercial network of the Magistrato itself. Delegates may be found in Switzerland (e.g., Bern, Lausanne, Zurich), Germany (e.g., Freiburg, Lindau), France (e.g., La Rochelle), and in different parts of Italy (e.g., Genoa, Assisi, Rome, Venice, and so on)<sup>1</sup>. This correspondence was basically in Italian, German, or French, according to the towns the letters came from. Sometimes, greetings in Latin are present as part of a formulaic language: these expressions have been found only in official letters towards or from institutions, not when the addressee was the single delegate of the MM. Therefore, Latin use reinforces the formality of the document.

Interesting differences in language use could be observed between the letters and their envelopes: indeed, the covers frequently present not only addresses but also indication of the places the letters passed through before reaching their final recipients. These indications as well as addressees could be in different languages, thus showing a language alternation between the envelope and the main letter. Graphemic alternation of the town names are also included: for

1. Obviously, here the terms "Italy" and "Germany" are used in the sense of Italian-speaking and German-speaking areas.



instance, some official letters by the Magistrato to the Supreme Court of Austria in 1737/40 (reference nr. 3.2.23: 150-151) were written completely in Italian, likewise the address on the envelope sometimes showed the Italian name of the town, i.e. *Bolgiano* (see also *Borgogno 2002*), instead of the German *Bolzano* (sometimes also written as *Botzen*).

However, although we have many instances of letters written to the MM, it is not easy to find copies of letters written by the MM. Some examples of correspondence are provided by the so-called 'libelli' (little books), which collect copies of the letters to and from the MM concerning pending cases to be discussed by the merchants' assembly. Examples of these 'libelli' include the possible financing of artists or public works (*Canali 1965, Borgogno 2002*), the approval of loans to other merchants or nobles (see *Pell's case in 5.1*). These cases are not to be confused with the small trials taking place between two traders, which did not involve directly the MM as an institution, but only its secretaries and attorneys.

When the MM was involved as an institution, a notary collected all the correspondence concerning the case under discussion: in this case a blank space was left on one side of the page in order to allow the discussants to write notes on each specific letters. These notes could also include contextual indicators, e.g., the addressee, when and where the letter was sent, the places where the letter passed through before arriving in Bolzano, and so on. In some cases, other annotations were added in different places to summarize or to comment on the main text. It is not always clear which annotations were provided by the notary that transcribed the letter and which were added by the counsellors or others during the trial. As it will be noted in the case-study below (see 4.1), these side notes are particularly interesting from a linguistic point of view, since they may be written in a language different from the main document. The letters in the 'libelli' were copied in their original language, for instance in French, but the annotations are quite often in Italian or in German. It should be noted that Italian was far more frequent than German in the side notes, at least for the cases examined so far.

### 5.1 The 'Tontina' documents

The Tontina was a special financial institution that provided a sort of life insurance, firstly introduced in 1635 by a Lorenzo de' Tonti, who gave the name to the institution. People bought shares of the 'Tontina', to be paid according to their age: the older you were, the less you paid. Every year the 'Tontina' would provide the subscriber an income proportional to his or her age. This meant that older subscribers, with a shorter life expectancy, would

have received a higher income, but for a shorter amount of time than younger subscribers. The 'Tontina' in Bolzano did not last long, from 1737 to 1740, with some documents dated also in 1741.

The 'Tontina' documents consist of three bundles with different kinds of texts written in different languages: baptismal and death certificates, powers of attorney, various acts, and correspondence, coming from all over Europe (e.g., Genoa, Freiburg, Lausanne, La Salle, Liege). A baptismal certificate was essential to subscribe to the Tontina, since it testified the subscriber's age. These certificates were usually written in different languages, according to where the baptism took place (e.g., French for France, and so on). Many of these certificates are also completely in Latin: among the 76 certificates written only in Latin, 66 came from Italy, mostly from Genoa (61 acts), whereas 5 came from Germany (Freiburg 3, Düsseldorf 1, Clausen 1), 3 from the Netherlands (Ruremond), and 2 from Belgium (Liege). Moreover, 25 baptismal records from Italy (18 Genoa, 6 Ancona, 1 Pesaro) also show instances of code-switching between an initial dedication and invocation to God, written in Latin, and the rest of the text in Italian. The alternation between languages is sometimes related to the alternation in the writing modality: for instance, a standard printed incipit of the record is in Latin, whereas the birth certificate itself is in Italian or German. However, this is not a general rule, since in some cases printed incipits were in the same language as the rest of the certificate. No correspondence between cities and the use of Latin formulaic language has been found: therefore, it is possible that the single church use different modalities to release birth certificates, even within the same town.

At the end of the certificate there was an authentication provided by a notary, often in Latin for Italy and Germany, but still in French for France. A second validation, not attested in every paper, testified that the previous notary was officially recognized by a town institution, thus being able to provide valuable acts. These validations may, likewise, show subsequent language alternation between Latin and the language used in the rest of the certificate. When these acts arrived in Bolzano, they were all catalogued by a notary of the *Magistrato Mercantile*, who wrote the name and the typology of the act on the back of the papers: in this case, the typology was always identified by the Italian expression 'fede battesimale' [baptismal certificate].

As for epistolary correspondence, an example of Italian-German alternation can be found in a petition sent by Giacomo Forster to Augsburg through to MM in 1739: the text of the petition is in Italian, but someone took notes in German on the envelope (Fig. 2): although it cannot be said for sure, it seems that both the letter and the envelope were written by the same hand. Moreover,

in the main text of the letter two different inks were used, and means that someone corrected some portions of the text, since the second type of ink was applied in particular to accents in some Italian words: for instance, in one document, the third person singular of the verb “to have” was originally written ‘à’, and it has been corrected to ‘ha’ with a cancellation of the accent. However, the form ‘hà’ is found some lines later, thus testifying to the absence of a clear norm for writing. The same can be said for the words ‘mi immagino’ [I imagine], where someone has deleted the first <i> and added an apostrophe, resulting in the form ‘m’immagino’. However, it remains unknown who made these corrections and for what purpose: a detailed analysis of more instances might at least establish the criteria followed for these corrections, thus reconstructing the norms of usage of 18th century, and maybe confronting them with grammatical norms and official practices available for Italian at the time (cf. Franceschini 2002).

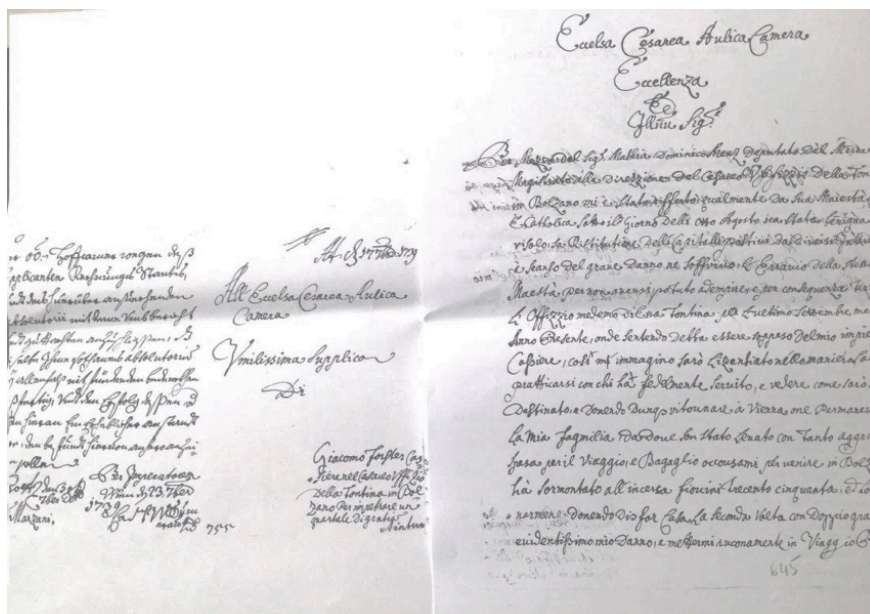


Figure 2. Forster's petition– 1739 – Provincial Archive of Bolzano, Magistrato Mercantile, 3.23: 645 (authorized reproduction).

Language alternation may also occur in the notes on the left margin of the texts. The most interesting case concerns the so-called ‘Libretto Pell’ (Pell’s small book), which collects the letters (both original, also including the envelopes, and copied) concerning the trial of the Englishman George Pell, who bought ten shares of the Tontina but never paid for them. It also contains

the letters of a similar case, involving a Mattia Mansrieder of Munich, who also bought one share and did not pay for it, as attested in an extended title on the cover page of the book<sup>2</sup>. It seems to be a common practice for the MM to have all the letters received but most of all sent outside copied in a book, which is now the only trace left of such correspondence. A similar practice has also been found in the correspondence of big merchants' families.

The correspondence between the MM, Matthias Mansrieder and George Pell passed through a mediator, the so-called 'Collettore di Augusta', the delegate of the Magistrato in Augsburg. This correspondence is not preserved in the original, but only in the copies collected in the 'libello'. Interestingly, the first letter from Augsburg is written in German, whereas other letters from the same delegate collected in the book are in Italian.

Furthermore, the person who transcribed the letters has also added notes in the margins: contextual notes, providing the date and writer of the letter, are in German or in Italian, whereas comments or summaries to the main text are only in Italian. In fig. 3 it is possible to note how the main text is in Italian, the first note on the left is in German and it testifies that the letter came from the delegate in Augsburg on 8th December 1737; the last note is in Italian, and it summarizes and comments the content of the main text.

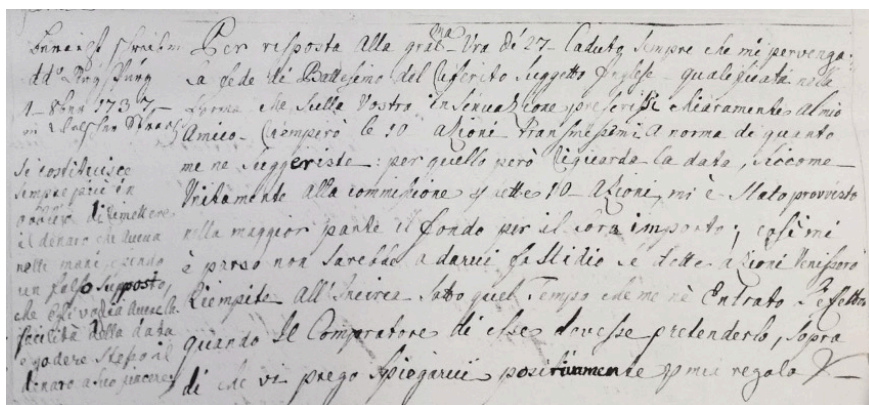


Figure 3. Letter and notes from the Tontina - Provincial Archive of Bolzano, Magistrato Mercantile, 3.23: 753 (authorized reproduction).

2. The original title is: *Libello del Carteggio tenutosi dall'Ufficio della Tontina col Collettore di Augusta sul particolare di dieci azioni di Giorgio Pell Inglese, e di una azione di Mattia Mansrieder di Monaco, per le quali 11 azioni, rispetto alla data che in esse è stata distesa, verta la differenza di f. 214:35 in danno della Tontina* [Little book of the correspondence held between the Office of the Tontina and the Delegate in Augsburg on the case of ten shares of George Pell Englishman, and of one share of Mattia Mansrieder from Munich; whose 11 shares, according to the date described on them, there is a credit of florin 214:35 for the Tontina", my translation].

The letter refers to the payment of ten shares by the Englishman George Pell, who paid the MM through the delegate in Augsburg; the money, however, never reached the MM, and from this letter, it is not clear if the delegate still has the money. The note on the left of the test says: 'si costituisce sempre più in obbligo di rimettere il denaro che aveva nelle mani, essendo fatto supposto che egli voglia avere la facilità della data e godere presto il denaro a suo piacere' ('one feels more and more obliged to send back the money he had in his hands, supposing he wants to have some facilities from the date and soon enjoy the money as he wants', our translation).

A serious linguistic issue for the MM regarding George Pell was that his baptismal record was in English, but apparently no one in Bolzano could read it. Indeed, the Magistrato wrote back to the delegate in Augsburg asking for a translation, by clearly stating that they did not know if Pell's document was written in French, English or Arabic (sic), but that it only appeared to be a notary deed. Through an ambassador in London, the MM finally obtained a French translation of Pell's baptismal record thanks to the royal notary Benjamin Bonnet. The final document that arrived in Bolzano was a copy of the English certificate followed by a French translation, and then by the validation of the translation provided by Benjamin Bonnet, still in French (Fig. 4). The other side of the folio presented the ambassador's authentication of the role of Benjamin Bonnet as royal notary, and it was written in French as well.

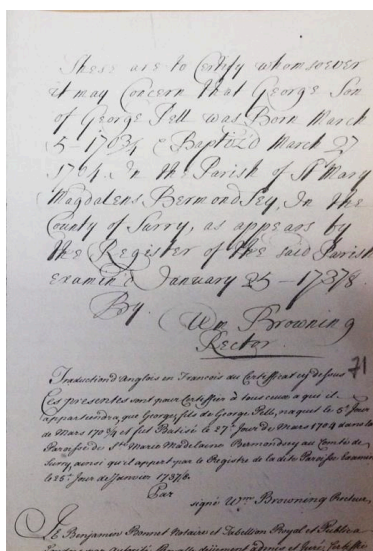


Figure 4. George Pell's baptismal certificate - Provincial Archive of Bolzano, Magistrato Mercantile Archive group, 3.23: 71 (authorized reproduction).

French appears to be one of the most widespread languages during the XVIII century, whereas English was not used in certain areas such as Tyrol. Finally, the Magistrato's request testifies that it was not common to translate documents, especially official ones. However, if a translation was needed, there were official interpreters, whose position must have been validated by authorities.

It should also be noted that no English documents were recorded in Canali's catalogue, again demonstrating the need of a deeper investigation of the MM's archive, since documents in languages other than Italian (French or German) may not have been identified or catalogued yet.

## **6. Discussion: merchants and multilingualism**

The current state of research and the documents concerning the MM of Bolzano prevent a deeper investigation of the linguistic practices in this area during the past three centuries. The observations provided in the previous section are based on a partial and initial exploration of the data, in particular regarding the use of languages in different documents. However, some general main points emerge.

Firstly, we know from historical documents that Bolzano has been an international trading-centre since the 15th century. The names of the merchants attested in Bolzano during the fairs show that there were many Italian traders, in particular from Verona and Venice, but also German traders coming from Austria and the northern regions, coming through the Brenner pass. As for the languages, the documents show that Italian was commonly used among merchants, and for communication with political institutions in Italy as well as within the Tyrolean border, although at the time this area was alternatively under the Duke of Tyrol or the Habsburg kingdom, with German being the official language of the town (cf. Obermair 2005, 2008). The number of German documents increased in the second half of the 18th century. Latin was used only as formulaic language in openings or greetings of documents and letters sent by or addressed to the MM as an institution, thus reinforcing the formality of the document itself. French documents do also appear without a translation, especially from the beginning of 18th century, and in communication with French and Swiss delegates of the MM. Conversely, English does not appear to be a common language for the merchants in Bolzano, since Pell's baptismal record needed a French translation before being accepted as a valid certificate by the MM.

Therefore, it could be said that Bolzano merchants show a multilingual repertoire, which includes Italian, German and French; Latin also appear to be known, but it is impossible to attest from the few samples we have if it was



really part of the linguistic repertoire of every merchant, including less wealthy ones, or if its use was limited to formulaic expressions. It is worth to stress this role of Latin, since the study of formulaic language 'may disclose not only the verbal rituals of a period and changing patterns of textual constitution, but also the extent to which a writer was familiar with the conventions and fashions of formal letter-writing of [the] period' (Elspass 2012: 164).

Secondly, it was possible to appreciate how languages were used differently in various textual typologies: trial records are mostly monolingual, with Italian as the main language, at least until the 19th century, whereas letters and books of correspondence show instances of language alternation between, for instance, the envelope and the text of the letter. Special focus must be placed on the notes in the margins, which could have been written by the same person who copied the letters but also by other people. These notes may contain only contextual references but also summaries and comments to the main text, with cases of code-switching between the main text and the notes.

Finally, there are indications of non-standard varieties of Italian in the analysed documents, which may be related to the Venetian origin of many of those texts. For merchants' documents of the XVIII century as the ones analysed here, it would be better to reconstruct what were the linguistic norms commonly followed at that time, maybe basing on conversational manuals or other texts available to merchants (see also Franceschini 2002, Testa 2014).

## 7. Conclusions and further perspectives

This study presents a survey of a huge amount of unexplored data relating to an important mercantile institution in Bolzano. As for language practice, Italian appears to be the predominant language within the MM's documents, at least until the second half of the 18th century, when German and also French seem to acquire more value in official communications. The importance of Italian is also testified by notes in the margins of the texts. This attests to the central role of Italian as a language for commerce also during the 17th and still in the 18th century. French was also well attested in the documents of MM, and Latin seems to have been restricted to formulaic usage in various official acts.

Therefore, it is possible to say that the formality of the letter seems to influence the presence or absence of Latin formulae, whereas no difference related to the style of the letter emerged with respect to German and Italian. In this respect, the difference in use of these two languages seems to be more diachronically than stylistic, as explained above. However, a difference has also been found between official documents and private letters, not only with respect of the presence of Latin formulae, but also in showing a possible alternation



among different languages. In particular, the envelopes could be written in a language different than the one in the main text, but also presenting marginal notes reflecting the receiver's preferred language.

It is obvious that the research on these documents needs to go further, primarily by conducting a more systematic survey of these data. It would be extremely useful to create an accessible corpus which contains a transcription of these documents, or at least a significant part of them (e.g., correspondence, trial records). It would be equally interesting to provide an annotation of some peculiar linguistic features, both at the level of language usage (e.g., instances of code-switching) and at the level of small linguistic features (e.g., use of personal pronouns or conjunctions), also in a diachronic perspective. This will make accessing the linguistic data easier, allowing for both qualitative and quantitative research.

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