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## □ Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

in a historical perspective the great majority of primers have first been compiled for the hands of young learners. It is therefore not surprising that these prints are often classified as children's books. However, as Britta Juska-Bacher demonstrates in her essay with reference to primers once published in German-speaking Switzerland, the question how adults are addressed in these booklets is well worth a closer examination. In the second article contained in this issue of RPI Juris Cibuļs gives an overview of primers written in Livonian, the language of an indigenous population in Latvia; he focusses on the genesis, content and function of manifestations of this book genre as tools to maintain and revive a critically endangered language.

Readers are invited to send feedback, share with us their knowledge about primers and get involved in the preparation of future issues of RPI.

*September 2024*

*Wendelin Sroka*

## □ Contents

### □ About RPI 19

Contributors to this Issue ..... 2

### □ Essays

Adults as addressees of reading primers. Examples from German-speaking Switzerland from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries (Britta Juska-Bacher) ..... 3

Livonian primers (Juris Cibuļs) ..... 17

### □ Notes

Latvia: Exhibition "Pasaules tautu ābece" in Koknese ..... 22

The Netherlands / Germany: Studies about Cornelis Jetses (1873-1955), illustrator of educational media for early reading instruction ..... 22

South Africa: Tswana primers from the Wits Cullen Africana Collection, Johannesburg ..... 23

Switzerland / worldwide: Primers in the UNESCO IBE Digital Historical Textbook Collection ..... 24

### □ RP-SIG News

New Member ..... 25

Developments and Plans ..... 26

□ About RPI 19

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## □ Essay 1

### Adults as addressees of children's reading primers.

Examples from German-speaking Switzerland from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries

*Britta Juska-Bacher*

The call for the IGSBi conference in Gdansk in 2023 on "Educational Media for Adults" included an invitation from the Reading Primers Special Interest Group for a panel on "Primers for Adults" to show "how and under which conditions materials for beginning reading instruction have addressed or address adults" (IGSBi 2023, 3). One possibility mentioned was to examine "those parts of primers for children which address teachers and/or parents" (ibid.). The present article focuses on precisely this question and uses a corpus of reading primers from the German-speaking part of Switzerland from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century to examine where in the primers adults are addressed and with what content. Primers for illiterate adults are not included (see for example Sroka 2022 on this topic).

#### 1 The two addressees of reading primers

Unlike books for adults, books for children who cannot yet read, such as reading primers (or picture books), require an intermediary who makes the content accessible to the children by reading it, telling it, explaining it to them, etc. This results in a double addressee: on the one hand, the children, who are expected to acquire reading skills and, on the other, the adults who are supposed to teach them. The information in the primer can either be directed to both addressees, or parts of it can only be addressed to the adult. As the teacher or parent takes on the role of mediator, it is not possible for the information in the primer to be addressed exclusively to the child. The genuine part of the primer, which is designed to support the acquisition of reading skills and contains the reading material (letters, syllables, words, sentences and mostly short texts), is intended for both the addressees, the learners and the teachers. It should be noted that until the middle of the eighteenth century, the different views and experiences of children and adults were not taken into account in the content of the primer texts (Pietzko 2020, 23; Sroka 2022, 70). In addition to the main text of the primer, some primers also contain information for adults (e.g. didactic notes), which are not appropriate for children due to their limited reading skills and the intellectual demands of these texts. Looking only at the titles of the historical primers, there are examples which, by their length and the information they contain, clearly indicate that they are intended for adults, i.e. teachers and parents, and not for children. A volume on European catechism primers from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries (Juska-Bacher, Grenby, Laine & Sroka 2023) provides a number of examples of such titles addressed to adults. The longest one mentioned in this volume is from the Netherlands (Exalto 2023, 212):

*Een Nieuwlyks Uitgevonden A.B.C. BOEK. Om de kleine kinderen, op eene gemakkelyke Wyze, De verscheide Soorten van LETTEREN te leeren kennen en noemen: door Middel van Figuuren, by de Kinderen bekend: En welker Naamen de klank der Letteren, zo veel mogelyk, Uitdrukken. Hier by is gevoegd, Een Nieuwe Manier om de kinderen, door Afbeeldingen, te leeren TELLEN: De byzondere Soorten van CYFER-LETTERS te leeren kennen en noemen: Midsgaders de Voornaamste Streeken der WINDEN, op het COMPAS: Benevens eenige Afbeeldingen van Kopere, Zilveren en Goude GELD-MUNTEN, in deze Provintien gangbaar. Alles, ten dienste der Eerste Jeugd, Uitgegeven door K.D.W.*

(Amsterdam 1759)

[A newly invented ABC book. To teach young children to know and name the different types of letters in a simple way: by means of figures, known to the children; and whose names expressed the sound of letters as much

## ▣ Adults as addressees ...

as possible. Attached is a new way to teach the children, by pictures, to learn to count, to know and name the special types of number-letters, as well as the main points of the wind on the compass, together with some pictures of copper, silver, and gold coins, common in these provinces. Everything at the service of the first youth, edited by K.D.W.].  
(Exalto 2023, 212)

As generally stated for book titles up to the eighteenth century (Wulff 1981, 320), such a long title is not an isolated example for reading primers either. Similar, though somewhat shorter, long titles can be found, for example, in Germany (Sroka 2023a, 73-75), France (Chartier 2023, 230-231) and Spain (Angulo 2023, 304-306). The sheer length of such primer titles with detailed information on the content of the primer and the methodological approach was hardly legible for inexperienced readers in the eighteenth century (on the limited reading skills of children, see Juska-Bacher 2023b, 51; Messerli 2001, 257).

### 2 Who are the addressees, why are they being addressed and where can the information for them be placed in the primer?

The adult addressees are primarily the people who are supposed to teach the children to read, i.e. teachers and parents. The title may, for example, already contain information on the learning objectives of the primer or on the target group (for a categorisation of the titles of catechism primers, see Juska-Bacher 2023a, 314). In addition to this information, some titles of Swiss reading primers contain information about the canton for which the primer was intended. This information may also have been addressed to teachers, but possibly also to education policy makers.

The information for these addressees can be assigned to three content categories and functions:

1. Provide **general information** about the reading primer, such as learning objectives or content. Special advantages of the primer can also be highlighted to encourage potential buyers to purchase or use the primer (on primer titles as a marketing tool, see Sroka 2022, 64; Wulff 1981, 319).
2. Give a general explanation of the **primer's methodological approach** or linguistic background to facilitate understanding.
3. Provide **concrete didactic instructions** for working with the primer, thus supporting the teachers' approach and the children's learning success.

Theoretically, there are several possible places in the primer where adults can be addressed:

1. book cover or title page
2. preface
3. primer text (in the main text or in footnotes)
4. afterword
5. table of contents
6. separate accompanying volume

In the following, a corpus of primers from German-speaking Switzerland from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries is analysed in order to find out which of these places were actually used to address adults.

### 3 Data basis

The data basis for the results presented below is a corpus of currently 180 primers from the years 1527 to 1895, printed in 19 different cantons of German-speaking Switzerland and currently available in Swiss libraries or online. Where there were several editions of a primer, the oldest surviving edition was included. Identical titles with different places of printing were recorded as separate entries. The distribution of the primers over the four centuries is shown in Chart 1.

## □ Adults as addressees ...

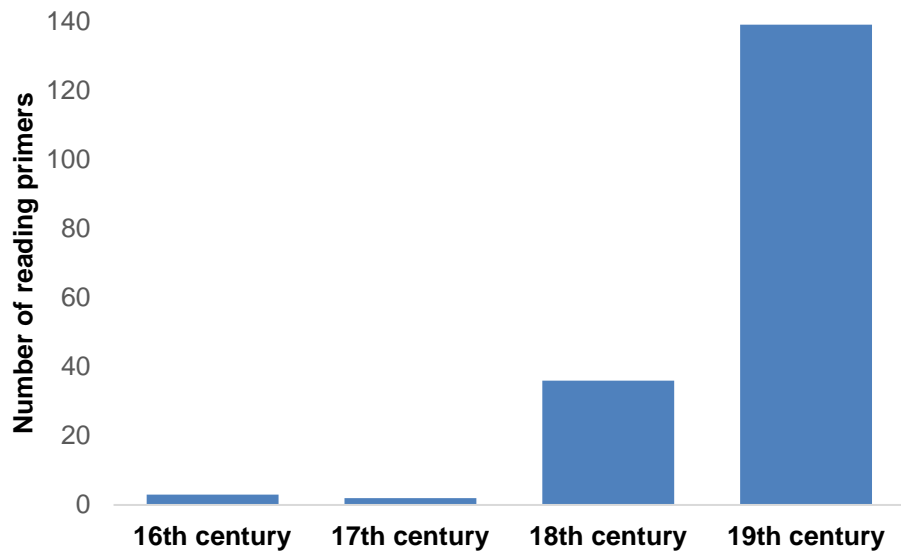


Chart 1: Number of reading primers in the corpus per century

As in other countries (e.g. Appel 2023, 102 for Denmark), the number of surviving primers from the sixteenth, seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century is very limited (only three, two and three respectively). It is only from the second half of the eighteenth century (33 primers) that the number slowly increases, reaching a peak of 139 in the nineteenth century.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Book cover or title page

All primers from German-speaking Switzerland from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries included in the corpus have a title, as was common in Europe from the sixteenth century onwards – except for some countries in northern Europe, where also untitled primers were in use, especially in the case of so-called rooster primers (Sroka 2023b, 324).

Section 1 already quoted a baroque long title from the Netherlands from the eighteenth century. Some of the Swiss primers in the corpus also have such long titles. The longest dates from the end of the eighteenth century:

*Wohl eingerichtetes ABC und Namen-Büchlein, darinnen die Jugend durch Gottes Hülfe grund- und leichtlich zum Buchstabiren und Lesen angewiesen werden kan. Nebst einem Anhang von auserlesenen Sprüchen Heiliger Schrift und einigen Gebähteren; auch mit kurzen und einfältigen Fragen von der Geburt, Leben, Leiden, Creutztes-Tod, Auferständnuß, und Himmelfahrt unsers Herrn Jesu Christi vermehret.*

(Basel 1787)

[Well-organised ABC and booklet of names, to teach young people, with God's help, to spell and read in a basic and simple way. Together with an appendix of selected sayings from the Holy Scriptures and some prayers; also supplemented with short and simple questions about the birth, life, suffering, death on the cross, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.]

If we look at the evolution of the length of titles (measured in the number of characters) over time, we can see that they have, on average, become shorter over the centuries. The average title length decreases from 217 characters in the sixteenth century to 169 characters in the seventeenth century, 131 characters in the eighteenth century and 75 characters in the nineteenth century (see Chart 2). The initially quite extensive information contained in the titles, which was addressed primarily to adults and was intended to encourage them to buy the primer in question (Sroka 2022, 64; Wulff 1981, 319), was thus gradually reduced, especially from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

□ Adults as addressees ...

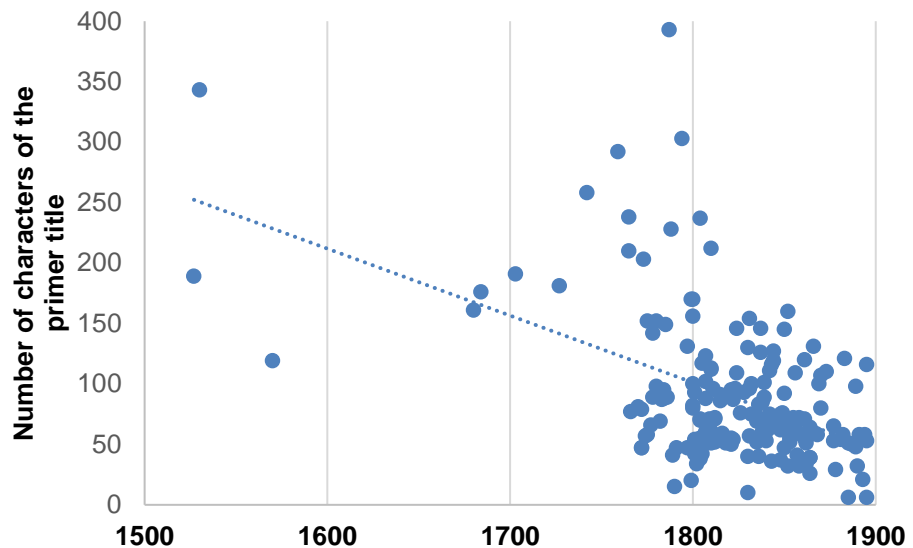


Chart 2: Number of characters of the primer title

The title can contain two of the three content categories or functions mentioned in Section 2: first, it provides general information about the learning objective, the target group and the content of the primer. The title quoted above from Basel, *Wohl eingerichtetes ABC und Namen-Büchlein* [...] (1787), mentions the genre "ABC oder Namenbüchlein" [ABC or booklet of names] and the learning objective "Buchstabieren und Lesen" [spelling and reading], as well as the target group "Jugend" [youth] and provides information on the religious texts contained in the primer. In addition, the title contains qualitative assessments that can be understood as buying arguments. Adjectives play a special role here: the primer itself is "well organized" ("wohl eingerichtet") and enables "simple and basic" ("grund- und leichtlich[es]") instruction. The religious content is "selected" ("auserlesen") and the questions are "short and simple" ("kurz[en] und einfältig[en]"). This covers all the relevant points for the choice of a primer in the eighteenth century: Advantages for teachers and learners as well as the appropriate selection of religious texts. Explanations of the primer's methodological approach (second category/function) must inevitably be kept very brief in the title and can only give first indications. This is the case in these two examples:

[...] *Ein neuer Versuch die Kinder ohne das Buchstabieren selbst ohne die Namenkenntniß der einzelnen Buchstaben lesen zu lehren.*

(Basel 1780)

[A new attempt to teach children to read without reading letter by letter, even without knowing the names of the individual letters]

and

*Deutsches Wortbüchlein als Grundlage eines gleichzeitigen Unterrichts im Lesen und Schreiben*

(Trogen 1828)

[German booklet of words<sup>1</sup> as a basis for simultaneous lessons in reading and writing].

For the third category concrete didactic instructions mentioned in Section 2, there is not enough space in the title.

<sup>1</sup> What is striking about this title is the replacement of the term "Namenbüchlein" [booklet of names], which was in use until the mid-nineteenth century and initially contained names and nouns as first reading exercises, with "Wortbüchlein" [booklet of words]. The "Wortbüchlein" does not contain names, but it does contain nouns and words from other parts of speech.

## ▣ Adults as addressees ...

In addition to the title, in the first centuries of primers in the vernacular an author was only occasionally mentioned on the front cover/title page, this information only became standard from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The place and year of printing and the printer, on the other hand, are mentioned in over 90% of the primers. Apart from the fact that this information may have been relevant to the teacher, its primary function may have been to prove the origin of the primer.

Particularly in the nineteenth century, additions such as "Auf Anordnung des Erziehungsrates" [By order of the Council of Education], e.g. Luzern (1843), also appear on the title page.

### 4.2 Preface

The preface is usually addressed either explicitly to teachers or parents or, not infrequently, to adults in general and may also fulfil one or more of the three categories and functions mentioned in Section 2: providing a general introduction, an explanation of the methodological approach of the primer and/or instructions on how to use it in practice.

#### General introduction

Like the title, the preface of a reading primer can be used as a marketing tool, e.g. to justify the publication of a new primer and to highlight its advantages (for the use of the title as a marketing tool, see Sroka 2022, 64; Wulff 1981, 319). However, the preface provides more space for explanations and other comments. Three primers may serve as examples:

A reading primer from Biel, entitled *Vernunftmässig eingerichteter Unterricht im Lesen und in der Religion [...]* [Reasonably organised lessons in reading and religion] (1810), addresses teachers and parents on the first page, justifying the publication of the primer because of the inadequacy of previous primers:

"Versuchet, ob ihr mit diesem Buche mehr ausrichten möget, als mit so vielen andern, über die man euch täglich klagen hört."

(Biel 1810, [2])

[See if you can do more with this book than with so many others that you hear people complaining about every day.]

A primer from Trogen, *Neues, für die Jugend aller Religionsverwandte, sehr angenehmes und nützliches Bilder Namen Buch [...]* (1788) [New, for the youth of all religions, a very pleasant and useful picture booklet of names], which introduces each letter with an illustration, uses the first page to emphasise the benefits of pictures for learning:

"Die Bemühung der zarten Jugend, durch Bilder die wichtigsten Dinge bekannt zu machen, ist jederzeit von grossem Nutzen gewesen; weil sie sehr begierig danach sind, und ihnen das Lesen, durch diese Ergötzung am leichtesten beigebracht werden kann."

(Trogen 1788, [2])

[The endeavour to make the most important things known to tender youth by means of pictures has always been of great use; for they are very eager for them, and reading can be taught to them most easily by this amusement.]

The author of the Basel primer *Wohl eingerichtetes ABC und Namen-Büchlein* (1787), mentioned above, addressed a relatively extensive preface of 4.5 pages to parents.

However, he does not use the preface to emphasise the quality of his primer directly. Instead, he takes up a complaint from parents that their children are not learning to read sufficiently at school and asks why. His explanation is that parents obviously do not adequately fulfil their duty to send their children to school on a regular basis and to support them at home in their learning and approach to religion. His primer offers help – the purchase argument comes in through the back door.

## ▣ Adults as addressees ...

### Explanation of the methodological approach

As well as a general introduction, the prefaces to the primers contain examples that explain the methodological approach of the primer or the linguistic background and describe the learning process, but do not yet provide any instructions on how to use them in practice.

Two examples from Bern in the nineteenth century may illustrate this. The first example, *Erstes Lese- und Sprachbuch, oder Uebungen* [...] (Bern 1831) [First reading and language book, or exercises], provides some methodological and didactic information on just one page, e.g. that reading and writing are taught together, that reading charts are used and that syllables are introduced before letters.

The second example is the preface to the *Namen-Büchlein zum ersten Unterricht im Lesen und Schreiben* (Bern 1838) [Booklet of names for the first lessons in reading and writing], which runs to a good three pages and is explicitly addressed to teachers. The text gives a didactic justification of the author's approach in relation with his aims. At the same time, it refers to an authority, the German Jakob Raimund Wurst, a primary school teacher and teacher educator in Germany and Switzerland (Bern 1838, III). Rather more general instructions are given – still independent of the practical work with the primer – for example, spelling should be practised thoroughly, word explanations should be given for reading and attention should be paid to correct writing (Bern 1838, II, III).

### Concrete didactic instructions

The didactic instructions directly related to the primer were intended to support the work of the teacher. Such instructions can be very short, as in the above-mentioned Trogen primer *Neues, für die Jugend aller Religionsverwandte, sehr angenehmes und nützliches Bilder Namen Buch* [...] (1788), which is characterised by the use of images. The description of how to use the images is very brief and superficial:

"Man giebt den Kindern die 24. Buchstaben, welche hierinn nacheinander folgen, durch die unter die Ueberschriften gemachte Erklärung, das A, B, C zu erkennen; wann sie es durch die Bilder erlernen, so kan, wie gewöhnlich, das Folgende auch geschehen."

(Trogen 1788, [2])

[The children are given the 24 letters, which are shown here one after the other, to recognise the A, B, C through the explanation given in the captions; once they have learnt them with the help of the images, the following can be done as usual.]

This is followed by simply noting that the usual prayers are missing in this primer.

Much more detailed is a Bernese reading primer published five years earlier under the title *Neu eingerichtetes Deutsches Buchstabier- und Lesebüchlein* [...] (1783) [New booklet on German spelling and reading]. Four pages (out of a total of 32) give teachers detailed instructions on how to work with the primer, e.g. instructions on the pronunciation of graphs (1783, 3) and multi-graphs (such as <ch>) (1783, 4), or definitions of "syllable", "word", "simple word" and "compound word", and notes on syllabification (1783, 5-6).

### 4.3 Primer text

The main text of the primer, which was primarily aimed to children, also contains information for adults, either in the text itself or in footnotes. For positioning in the primer text itself, where information is always assigned to very specific passages in the text, general information is not appropriate, but rather explanations of the methodological structure of the primer and background knowledge or very specific didactic instructions for use in practice.



## ▣ Adults as addressees ...

In most cases, these passages are graphically separated from the main text of the primer, as is stated in the Bernese Fibel *Namen-Büchlein zum ersten Unterricht im Lesen und Schreiben* (1838) mentioned above:

"Die Ueberschriften sind nur für den Lehrer, daher auch die lateinischen Lettern gewählt wurden."

(Bern 1838, III)

[The headings are only for the teacher, which is why the Latin letters were chosen].

### In the text itself

An early example of information for adults integrated into the text of a primer is the reading primer *ABC-Schul/in welcher man lernen kan*: [...] (Zürich 1703) [ABC school where you can learn:]. At various passages in this 16-page primer, a commentary is addressed to the teaching adult. After an introduction to the alphabet and one- and two-syllable root words for the children, there are two pages for the teacher under the heading "N.B. Anmerkung" [N.B. Note] (1703, [5, 6]). These contain linguistic background information on prefixes, root syllables and suffixes, as well as on German syllabification, before the corresponding multisyllabic words are introduced to the pupils. On the penultimate page, under "N.B.", there is another sentence on hyphenation.

In Section 3.2 the primer *Neu eingerichtetes Deutsches Buchstabier- und Lesebüchlein* (Bern 1783) has already been mentioned. In this booklet the multiple addressing is very clearly visible, with the text passages for the two addressees, adult and child, closely interwoven. The font size indicates which text is addressed to which reader (smaller for adults, larger and bold for children). After the relatively detailed preface for the teacher (1783, 3–6), minuscules (larger and bold) and majuscules (smaller than minuscules, also in bold) are introduced on the first third of page seven. The rest of the page divides the letters into vowels and consonants. Only the terms "Selbstlauter (Vocalen)" [vowels], "einfache Selbstlauter" [single vowels], "Doppellauter (Diphthongen)" [diphthongs] and "Mitlauter (Consonanten)" [consonants] are highlighted in larger and bold print, with the explanations in smaller print (see Figure 1). It is reasonable to assume that the children were supposed to "read" the letters, and possibly the letter category names, while the other information was background information for the teacher.

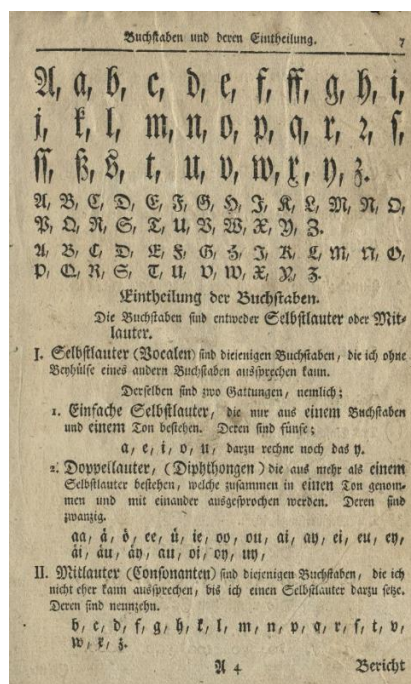


Figure 1 "Neu eingerichtetes Deutsches Buchstabier- und Lesebüchlein, zum Gebrauch der Vorschule" (Bern 1783), p. 7 (GEI-Digital; <https://gei-digital.gei.de/view/resolver?urn=urn:nbn:de:0220-gd-14948110> )

▣ Adults as addressees ...

Page eight contains punctuation marks and numbers. Again, only the terms "Comma", "Semicolon", "Colon" and "Punct" [full stop] are highlighted, not the explanations. The page ends with German and Roman numerals, which are also larger and bold (see Figure 2).

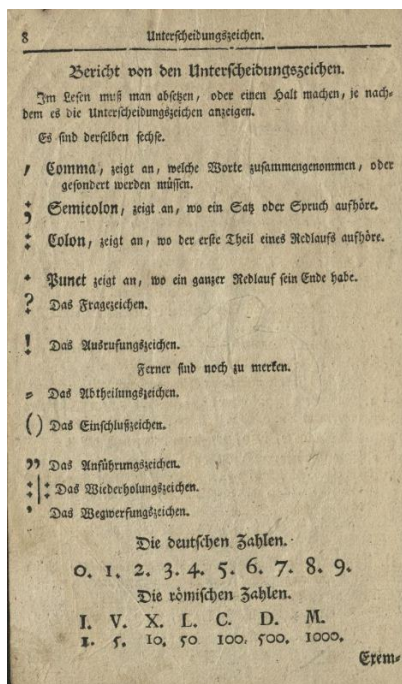


Figure 2 "Neu eingerichtetes Deutsches Buchstabier- und Lesebüchlein, zum Gebrauch der Vorschule" (Bern 1783), p. 8 (GEI-Digital; <https://gei-digital.gei.de/viewer/resolver?urn=urn:nbn:de:0220-gd-14948121> )

The following pages (9-26) are more standardised. Here, the headings are generally smaller than the syllables and words that the children are supposed to read, except for five hyphenation rules that the children are obviously expected to remember, which are highlighted by their size and bold print (see Figure 3).

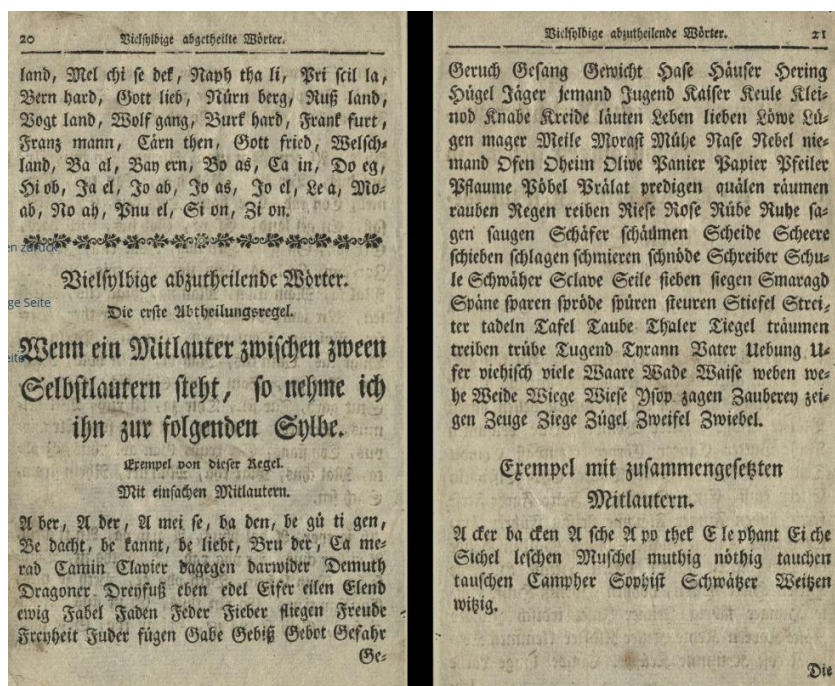


Figure 3 "Neu eingerichtetes Deutsches Buchstabier- und Lesebüchlein, zum Gebrauch der Vorschule" (Bern 1783), pp. 20-21 ((GEI-Digital; <https://gei-digital.gei.de/viewer/resolver?urn=urn:nbn:de:0220-gd-14948243> )

## □ Adults as addressees ...

However, on the last pages (27–32), which contain religious texts, the headings are larger than the texts themselves, although they are the same size as the words that the children had previously read. It can be assumed that these are reading texts for the children.

For the children, this intensive use of space in the primer with interspersed information for the teacher must have been extremely confusing. For the teacher, however, the additional background information was probably very helpful.

### In footnotes

About a decade and a half later, the primer *Neues ABC und Lesebuch für die Schweizerjugend von 5 bis 8 Jahren* [...] [New ABC and reading book for the Swiss youth from 5 to 8 years] was published in Bern (1797). The text, and therefore the pupil, was relieved by placing the teacher's instructions on didactic procedure and background knowledge in the footnotes. For example, after the introduction of the letters, the teacher receives the following very concrete instructions on the didactic approach (see Figure 4):

"Diese Buchstaben werden bald vorwärts bald rückwärts gelesen; man schreibt auch einzelne Buchstaben an die Tafel, spricht den Schülern langsam und oft diese Buchstaben vor, und läßt die Schüler solche nachsprechen. – Eine mehrmalige Uebung ist durchaus notwendig. Notabene: sch, spreche man als sche, nicht eszeha; ch nicht ceha, sondern che. [...]"

(Bern 1797, [4])

[These letters are read forwards and backwards; individual letters are also written on the board, these letters are spoken slowly and often to the pupils, and the pupils are asked to repeat them. – Repeated practice is absolutely necessary. Notabene: sch, speak as sche, not eszeha; ch not ceha, but che.]

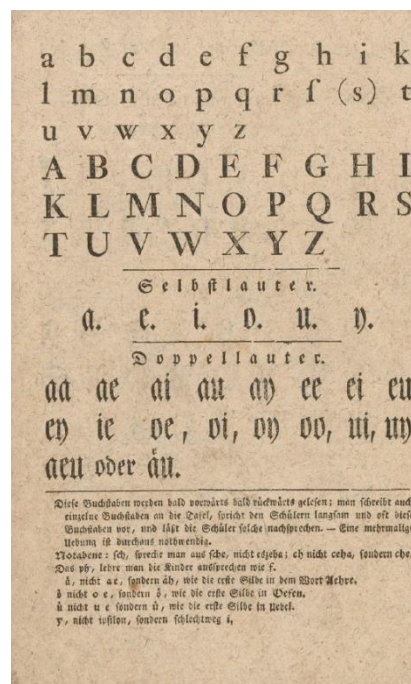


Figure 4 "Neues ABC und Lesebuch für die Schweizerjugend von 5 bis 8 [...]" (Bern 1797), p. [4] (University Library Zürich)

## 4.4 Afterword

The use of the afterword, which follows the main text of the primer, is similar to that of the preface. Due to its position, the afterword is less suitable for promoting the primer, but it can also provide general information for teachers and/or parents, as well as explanations of the methodological approach and concrete didactic instructions.

## □ Adults as address- sees ...

### General information

The 24<sup>th</sup> and last page of the *Namen-büchlein sambt dem Vater Unser / Glauben / Zehen Gebotten / auch undern schönen Gebäthen* [...] (Bern 1727) [Booklet of names with the Lord's Prayer / Creed / Ten Commandments / and other beautiful prayers] offers a kind of pedagogical final word with suggestions for the teacher's behaviour. In the form of a poem addressed to the teacher, it refers to discipline and order in the classroom, but also to restraint in beating pupils. In return for his work, the teacher can expect God's reward (Figure 5).

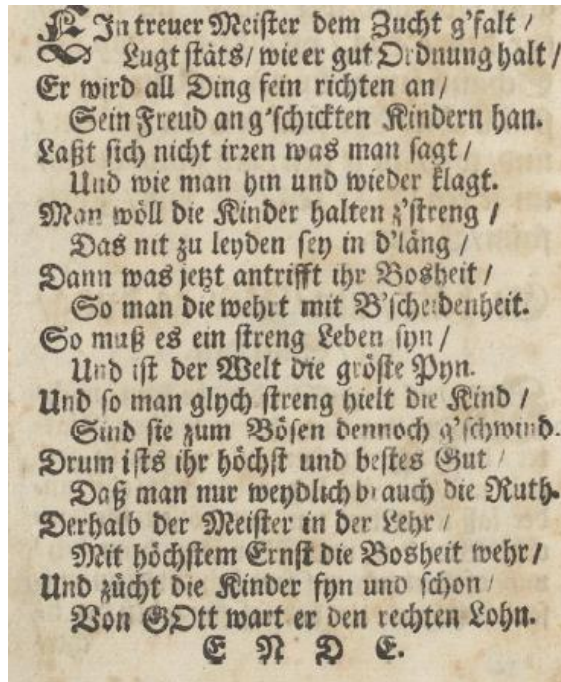


Figure 5 "*Namen-büchlein sambt dem Vater Unser / Glauben / Zehen Gebotten / auch undern schönen Gebäthen* [...]" (Bern 1727), p. [32] (University Library Zürich)

### Explanation of the methodological approach and concrete didactic instructions

An interesting example of combining the explanation of the methodological approach of the primer with instructions on how to use it in practice is the *ABC-Buch für Kinder* (Arau 1799) [ABC book for children]. After the main primer text for the children, in which notes for the teacher are repeatedly interspersed, pages 38 to 44 contain an

"Anweisung für die Schullehrer und diejenigen wohldenkenden Hausväter, welche sich mit dem Unterrichte ihrer Kinder beschäftigen"

(Arau 1799, 38)

[Instruction for school teachers and those well-meaning fathers who are engaged in the teaching of their children]

This afterword is intended to help teachers

"damit der erste Unterricht der Kinder, auf den so vieles ankommt, glücklich und mit Segen von statten gehe"

(Arau 1799, 38)

[so that the children's first lessons, on which so much depends, may be successful and blessed]

After a very brief introduction, background information on the reading process is given. According to the anonymous author, this consists of three stages, each of which is described in detail and accompanied by rules for teaching that have been tested in practice: The first stage is learning the letters. The teacher is given concrete advice on how to support children at this stage and six rules to follow, for example to ensure clear pronunciation (1799, 38-39). The second stage involves learning to spell and also ends with eight rules, such as pronoun-

## □ Adults as address-ees ...

cing long vowels clearly (1799, 39-41). In the third and final stage of learning to read, children learn to synthesise sounds. Instructions and rules are also given for this stage, e.g. for pronunciation and intonation (1999, 42-43). Following this three-stage approach to the reading acquisition process, parents and teachers are advised to follow these instructions:

"Erkläret den Kindern die Gebeter und redet mit ihnen über den Inhalt derselben, – sehet nicht so sehr darauf, wie oft und wie viel sie beten, sondern vielmehr wie und mit welchen Empfindungen sie beten, und ob durch ihr Beten ihr Herz und ihre Aufführung gebessert werde. Lehret sie mit Andacht beten."

(Arau 1799, 43)

[Explain the prayers to the children and talk to them about their content – do not so much look at how often and how much they pray, but rather with what feelings they pray, and whether their prayers improve their hearts and behaviour. Teach them to pray with devotion.]

On the one hand, this short quotation confirms the still important role of religious education in reading lessons. However, in connection with the content of the primer, which begins with word, sentence and text material from the children's everyday life (1799, 4-21) and only then moves on to religious texts (1799, 22-27), and with the didactically elaborate approach (the description of the three stages of reading acquisition), it seems quite modern to call for a discussion of what has been read to ensure that the children also understand what they have read. The following sentence supports this impression:

"Ich bin ein ganz un wis sen des Kind. Wenn ich so blei be, kann ich nie ver stän dig, gut und glück lich werden."

(Arau 1799, 10)

[I am a very unknowing child. If I stay like this, I can never become intelligent, good and happy.]

A sentence like this puts the booklet's categorisation as a pure catechism primer into perspective, and clearly shows the simultaneity of the still-important religious education and the Enlightenment ideas that put "Verstand" (via the derivation "verständlich") [understanding] first.

### 4.5 Table of contents

The usefulness of a table of contents (with page numbers) only comes into play when the primer is of a certain length, in order to make it easier to search for specific content or sections. The first tables of contents in primers in German-speaking Switzerland date from the end of the eighteenth century (e.g. *Neues A B C und Lesebuch für die Schweizerjugend von 6 bis 10 Jahren* [...] Bern & Freyburg 1799 [New ABC and reading book for the Swiss youth aged 6 to 10] with 158 pages)<sup>2</sup>. As the historical primers are linear resources, where students work through the book step by step from front to back, it can be assumed that teachers who may have taught students at different levels, were the main users of this tables. The tables of contents can be placed at the end or the beginning of the primer. An early and rather unusual version of a table of contents can be found in *Enchiridion, das ist, Handbüchlin tütscher Orthography* [...] (Basel 1564) [Enchiridion, that is, handbook of German orthography]. In this primer, there is a sort of precursor to the table of contents at the beginning of the volume, indicating that it is divided into four parts, which are briefly described (in full sentences). No page numbers are given, although the double pages are numbered in the primer.

### 4.6 Separate accompanying volume

Information for adults, placed on the title page, before, after or within the text of the reading primer, was limited to a few pages. From the nineteenth century

<sup>2</sup> The very similar 134-page primer (Bern 1797) by the same author, which is two years older, does not yet have a table of contents.

## ▣ Adults as addressees ...

onwards, separate volumes were published to accompany the primer, containing more comprehensive information.

One such example was written by Hans Rudolf Rüegg to supplement his *Fibel. Erstes Sprachbüchlein für schweizerische Elementarschulen* (Bern 1880) [Reading primer. First language book for Swiss elementary schools] and was published under the title *Die Normalwörtermethode. Ein Begleitwort zur Fibel* (Zürich 1884) [The keyword method. A companion volume to the reading primer].

This 69-page companion volume begins with a section on the historical development and explanation of the keyword method used in the primer, including a critical evaluation, and concludes with very concrete didactic instructions. The volume thus provides teachers with both the explanation of the methodological approach of the primer mentioned in Section 2, including background information, and concrete didactic instructions.

### 5 Adults as addressees of reading primers

The examples from the corpus of primers from German-speaking Switzerland from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries demonstrate that in children's primers all the theoretically possible placements of texts for adults were actually used. These texts had three main categories of content and related functions: firstly, to provide the adult addressees with general information about the primer or to emphasise its qualities as an incentive to buy; secondly, to provide background information for a better understanding of the methodological approach of the primer; and thirdly, to provide very concrete didactic suggestions for its use in the classroom in order to support learning success.

Whereas in the classic 24- or 32-page booklets of names the text for adults was included only in the title due to the very limited space available, the possibilities of including this information before, in or after the main text increased with the length of the primer. However, the amount of information included in the primer rarely exceeded a few pages. More detailed information on the methodological approach and concrete didactic suggestions, as is common today, were only included in separate companion volumes, which were published from the nineteenth century onwards.

While the main text of the primer, which was addressed primarily to children, gives indications of the thematic focus of reading lessons (e.g. religious education) and also the methodological approach through the reading units presented and their sequence, the information addressed to adults can go far beyond this and provide important information about the history of education and the teaching of reading. For example, they can refer to general pedagogical principles and practical teaching (e.g. corporal punishment by the teacher, see Bern 1727). They can also give us an insight into the didactic methods at the time the primer was written, including the didactic knowledge expected of teachers and thus the state of professionalisation (e.g. Arau 1799, which described the three stages of learning to read and placed teachers and fathers on the same level of prior knowledge). Finally, conclusions can also be drawn from educational policy guidelines (e.g. Luzern 1849, which mentions the order of the Education Council). For research on the history of the reading primer, it therefore seems absolutely worthwhile to take a closer look at the information addressed to adults. The results presented in this article are limited to German-speaking Switzerland. At least the titles seem to contain similar information in other language areas (see the Dutch title in Section 1). Whether such a similarity can be found regarding other positions in the primer in other countries remains to be investigated.

▣ Adults as addressees ...

**References – Reading primers (in chronological order)**

*Enchiridion, das ist, Handbüchlin tütscher Orthography, hochtütsche Spraach artlich zeschryben unnd läsen, sampt einem Registerlin über die gantze Bibel, wie man die Allegationes unnd Concordantias, so im Nüwen Testament näbend dem Text und sonst mit halben latinischen Worten verzeichnet : ouch wie man die Zifer und tütsche Zaal verston sol* (1564). Johannes Kolroß. Basel: Wolff. [Online accessible via: [ZB Zürich / Enchiridion, das ist, Handbüchlin tütscher Orthography, hochtütsche Spraach artlich zeschryben unnd läsen, sampt einem Registerlin über die gantze Bibel, \[...\] \(e-rara.ch\)](#)]

*ABC-Schul/in welcher man lernen kan: Die Buchstaben lesen, die Silben aussprechen, die Wörter recht theilen und grundlich lesen. Ausgericht Gott zu Ehren und zu Nutz der lieben Jugend* (1703). Zürich: Jakob Gessner.

*Namen-büchlein sambt dem Vatter Unser / Glauben / Zehen Gebotten / auch andern schönen Gebätten / mit unterschiedenlichen Silben, der Jugend vast nutzlich und fürderlich zu lehrnen* (1727). Bern: Hoch-Obrigkeitliche Druckerey. [Online accessible via: [ZB Zürich / Namen-büchlein/ Sambt dem Vatter Unser/ Glauben/ Zehen Gebotten/ auch anderen schönen Gebätten \(e-rara.ch\)](#)]

*Een Nieuwlyks Uitgevonden A.B.C. BOEK. Om de kleine kinderen, op eene gemakkelyke Wyze, De verscheide Soorten van LETTEREN te leeren kennen en noemen: door Middel van Figuren, by de Kinderen bekend: En welcher Naamen de klank der Letteren, zo veel mogelyk, Uitdrukken. Hier by is gevoegd, Een Nieuwe Manier om de kinderen, door Afbeeldingen, te leeren TELLEN: De byzondere Soorten van CYFER-LETTERS te leeren kennen en noemen: Midsgaders de Voornaamste Streeken der WINDEN, op het COMPAS: Benevens eenige Afbeeldingen van Kopere, Zilveren en Goude GELD-MUNTEN, in deze Provintien gangbaar. Alles, ten dienste der Eerste Jeugd [...]* (1759). Amsterdam: Kornelis de Wit.

*Wieder eine Neue Fiebel oder Ein neuer Versuch die Kinder ohne das Buchstabieren selbst ohne die Namenkenntniß der einzelnen Buchstaben lesen zu lehren* (1780). Simon und Joh. Schweighäuser. Basel: Thurneysen. [Online accessible via: [UB Basel / Wieder eine Neue Fiebel oder Ein neuer Versuch die Kinder ohne das Buchstabieren selbst ohne die Namenkenntniß der einzelnen Buchstaben lesen zu lehre \[...\] \(e-rara.ch\)](#)]

*Neu eingerichtetes Deutsches Buchstabier- und Lesebüchlein* (1783). Bern: Hoch-Obrigkeitliche Buchdruckerei. [Online accessible via: [DFG-Viewer: Neu eingerichtetes Deutsches Buchstabier- und LesebüchleinVorläufige nöthige Beobachtungen für die Lehrer, zu richtiger Unterweisung im Buchstabieren\[ABC und Erstleseunterricht\]Uebung zum Lesen](#)]

*Wohl eingerichtetes ABC und Namen-Büchlein, darinnen die Jugend durch Gottes Hilfe grund- und leichtlich zum Buchstabieren und Lesen angewiesen werden kan. Nebst einem Anhang von auserlesenen Sprüchen Heiliger Schrift und einigen Gebätherten; auch mit kurzen und einfältigen Fragen von der Geburt, Leben, Leiden, Creutzes-Tod, Auferständnuß, und Himmelfahrt unsers Herrn Jesu Christi vermehret* (1787). Basel: Gebrüder von Mechel.

*Neues, für die Jugend aller Religionsverwandte, sehr angenehmes und nützlichs Bilder Namen Buch : worinnen das A, B, C mit Figuren vorgestellt, dardurch den Kindern die Erlehnung, auf eine ergözende Art eingebracht werden kan* (1788). Mathias Sturzenegger. Trogen: Sturzenegger.

*Neues ABC und Lesebuch für die Schweizerjugend von 5 bis 8 Jahren Den Stadt- und Dorfschulen zu einem besseren Leitfaden gewiedmet* (1797). Johann Georg Heinzmann. Bern: Haller. [Online accessible via: [ZB Zürich / Neues ABC und Lesebuch für die Schweizerjugend von 5 bis 8 Jahren \(e-rara.ch\)](#)]

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## □ Adults as addressees ...

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## □ Essay 2

### Livonian Primers

*Juris Cibuļs*

The Livonian language (Livonian: *līvõ kēļ* or *rāndakēļ*) is a Finnic language whose native land is the Livonian coast of the Gulf of Livonia, located in the north of the Kurzeme peninsula in Latvia. Spoken for centuries in Latvia, it gradually declined as a spoken language since the nineteenth century (Ernštreits 2012). Grizelda Kristiņ, said to be its last fluent native speaker, died at the age of 103 in Canada in 2013.

Nevertheless continued efforts are made to keep Livonian alive. The promotion of the Livonian language has been advanced mostly by the Livonian Cultural Centre [*Līvõ Kultūr Sidām*]. Livonian as a lesser used language in Latvia – along with Latgalian – is represented by the Latvian Bureau of Lesser Used Languages (LatBLUL), formerly a national branch of the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL). In addition, the University of Latvia Livonian Institute [*Lībiešu institūts*], founded in 2018, focuses its research on the language, culture and heritage of the Livonians.

The Livonian web portal *livones.net* describes the situation of Livonians and the Livonian language as follows: “The Livonians are a Finnic people indigenous to Latvia and have had great significance in the development of the modern Latvian people. The modern Latvian language (was) formed as a result of the contact between Livonians and several ancient Baltic nations – Latgalian, Semigallians, and Curonians (...). Likewise, the influence of Livonian can be felt throughout Latvian traditional and contemporary culture, from folklore to culinary traditions. For this reason, the Livonians have been included in the Latvian cultural canon ...” (Livones 2018). There are about 40 reported second language speakers and 210 having reported some knowledge of the Livonian language.

One of the long-standing promoters of the Livonian language is the cultural and social worker Zoja Sīle. Born in 1950 and a descendant of the family of Saunaga Nigliņi, she has graduated from the Faculty of Philology of the University of Latvia.

Already during her studies in Riga she got involved in the Livonian ensemble “Līvlist”, where she worked for more than half a century. Since 1992, Zoja Sīle has been teaching the Livonian language in Ventspils, Kolka, Mazirbe and other places.

Zoja Sīle is one of those who brought to life the idea of the Livonian children and youth camps in Mazirbe. For many years, she has researched the history of the Livonian folk costume and published several materials on this topic. For almost ten years, her place of work was the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia (the Livonian homestead).



Figure 1: Zoja Sīle (\* 1950)

On December 12, 2023, I had an opportunity to meet Zoja Sīle who is also author of a new Livonian primer. This primer, entitled *Rāndakēļ nīzōd ābēd. Jūrmalas valodas stāstu ābece* [The Story Primer of the Seaside Language], (Rīga, Ezerrozēs grāmatas 2022, 48 p.) happened to be the 11,002<sup>nd</sup> item in my collection.

## □ Livonian primers

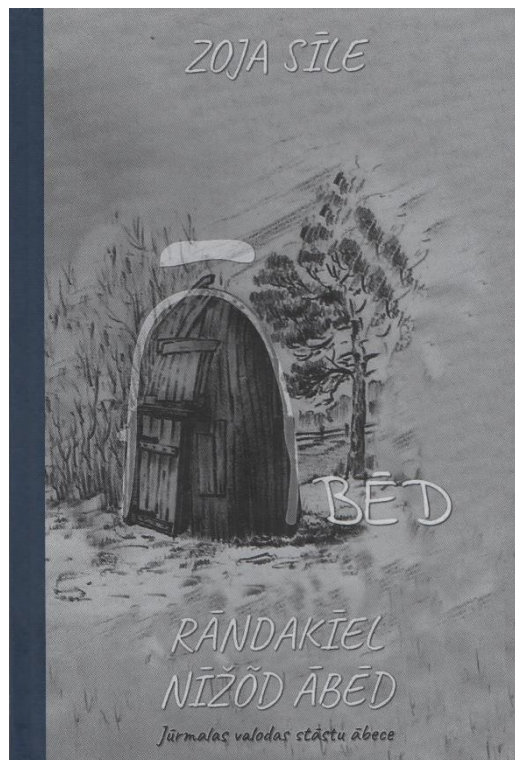


Figure 2: Zoja Sīle: *Rāndakīel nīžōd ābēd*. *Jūrmalas valodas stāstu ābece*. Rīga 2022, front cover

primer, which was in 2005, giving these motifs a new breath of life. The translation into Estonian will make it possible to see the kinship, but the English language will hopefully carry the message about the seaside language to the rest of the world." The primer contains 22 short stories arranged according to the Livonian alphabet. Each letter does not have its own story because long and short vowels have been combined as well as regular and softened consonants.

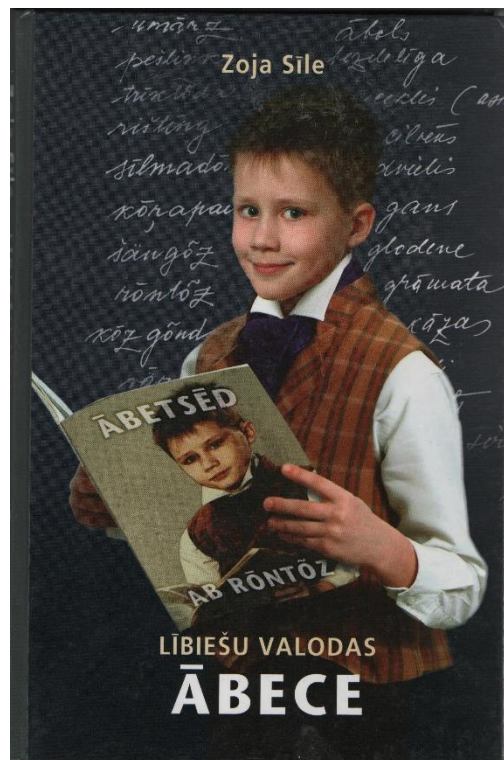


Figure 3: Zoja Sīle: *Lībiešu valodas ābece*. Rīga 2005, front cover

The cover design of the primer has been developed by the author's grandson Roberts Sīlis. He made use of a picture of the smokehouse of Saunaga Nigļiņi drawn by Aleksandrs Belte. Saunags is the native village of Zoja Sīle and Nigļiņi the home of her grandfather Rūdolfs Zandbergs.

In the introduction of *Rāndakīel nīžōd ābēd* Zoja Sīle points out: "Livonians of North Kurzeme, being residents of the seashore – *rānda* – called themselves – *rāndalīzt* – seafarers. They called their language – *rāndakēļ* – the language of the seashore. *Jūrmalas valodas stāstu ābece* is a homecoming. I am returning to my homeland, to memories, sounds, feelings, dreams, and adventures. My world of Livonian tales, fairy tales, stories, songs, and nature – sea, the sun, wind, and sand lives in the stories of the primer, in the world from which I made my way to the big world, but which I have never forgotten. It is also a return to the motifs of the Livonian

primer, which was in 2005, giving these motifs a new breath of life. The translation into Estonian will make it possible to see the kinship, but the English language will hopefully carry the message about the seaside language to the rest of the world." The primer contains 22 short stories arranged according to the Livonian alphabet. Each letter does not have its own story because long and short vowels have been combined as well as regular and softened consonants. Each letter or a set of letters of the alphabet is introduced by some keywords. On the other hand, in the stories, the author has tried to use as many words as possible with the corresponding letter. In terms of content, they incorporate motifs being essential to the Livonian cultural space – folklore, Livonian villages, ancient crafts, seaside nature, etc. The new primer was created thinking about the learners of the Livonian language in different generations in all corners of the world. Therefore, the primer texts have been translated not only into Latvian, but also into Estonian (translated by Rūta Karma) and English (translated by Roberts Sīlis and Lāsma Sīle).

*Rā dakīel nīžōd ābēd* is not Zoja Sīle's first work in this genre. Already in 2005 *Lībiešu valodas ābece* [Primer of the Livonian language] (Rīga: Likteņstāsti 2005, 112 pp.) had been published, followed in 2007 by the tea-

## ▣ Livonian primers

teaching aid *Sõnād ja kērad* [Words and Patterns]. *Lībiešu valodas ābece* has been written for a Livonian whose native language nowadays is Latvian. This primer in a way is a dictionary and an encyclopaedia at the same time. Designed like a family album and memory book, it contains stickers, photos, songs, and proverbs. As Zoja Sīle points out in the introduction: "I say that the language must be stirred, because it is a long time since we do not speak it. Livonians, by the way, never had any primer, the language never had the opportunity to be the language of school and church. The Livonian language has not been an administrative language either."

When creating this primer, the author's goal was not to teach how to read and to pronounce syllables. In the introduction to the book, the author introduces the alphabet of the Livonian language and explains how she has created this primer: "I wanted to say something interesting and meaningful. The primer starts with the letter A, but the sequence of letters is not arranged in the usual order." The primer has been intended to be a helping shoulder for a Latvian, who would wish to know something about the other native people of Latvia – the Livonians. The primer is a greeting and a kind of provisions taken by Livonian children to youth camps. It contains 81 black and white and 12 colour photos, 19 facsimiles, 7 folk songs with notes and 22 colour insets.

Even though prior to Zoja Sīle's works no Livonian primer was available in print, an earlier effort had been made by Kārlis Stalte (1870-1947) already in the interwar period. Born in Mazirbe and educated in Riga at the Gubernia school (1888-1893), Stalte worked as a civil servant in Riga and Liepāja, as a teacher in Dundaga and Mazirbe and, from 1905 to 1940, as a sexton and an organist in the Lutheran parish of Mazirbe (1905-1940). He became an important promoter of the spiritual awakening of the Livonian people in the 1920s and 1930s as one of the founders of the Livonian union "Līvod Īt" (1923) and its president. He initiated the teaching of the Livonian language in schools of Livonian fishermen's villages, organised a Livonian choir, was an editor-in-chief of the monthly "Līvli" (1933-1939), translated the New Testament into Livonian (1937-1942), authored the Livonian anthem "Min izamā" ("My homeland") and was the first Livonian who dealt with issues of standardisation of the Livonian literary language. Finally he helped the Livonian language consultant, the Finnish linguist Lauri Kettunen, when he collected materials for a Livonian-German dictionary (Anon. 2024).

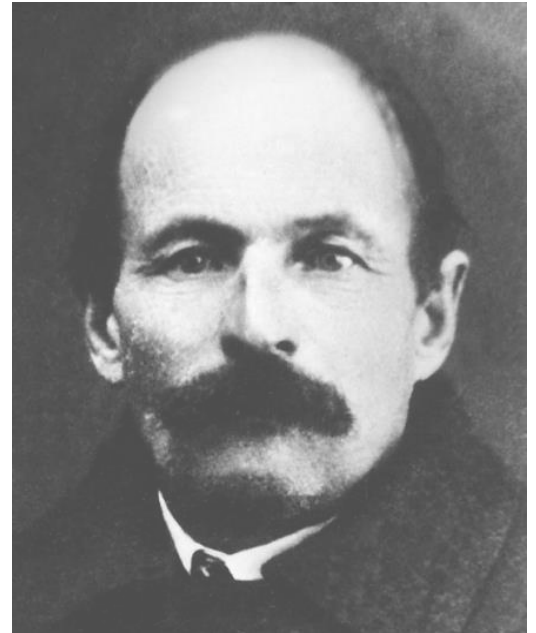


Figure 4: Kārlis Stalte (1870-1947)

In the mid-1930s Kārlis Stalte also started to create a beginner's book in Livonian. He completed the manuscript in 1938, entitled *Jelzi sõna. Abēd ja ȳrgandōks lugdōbrāntōz* [Living Word. Primer and First Reading Book], but this work did not make it to the press at that time. Nevertheless it must be considered the first primer ever written for Livonian children and thus an important work in the cultural history of the Livonian people.

It was only in the summer of 2005, when historian Renāte Blumberga came across Stalte's manuscript of the Livonian primer in the Estonian State Archives in Tallinn by chance, while studying documents of the Estonian Mother Tongue Society. This was an important discovery, because until then there was no information about the existence of such a manuscript not only in Latvia, but also in Estonia.

## □ Livonian primers

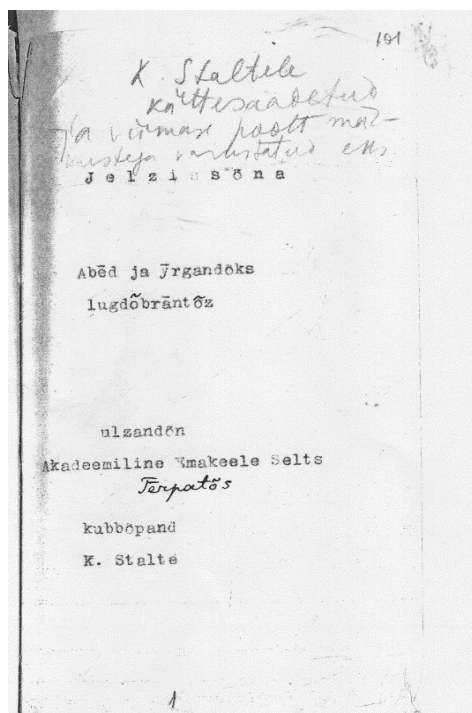


Figure 5: Kārlis Stalte: *Jelzi sõna*. Manuscript n. d. (ca. 1935), title page

the Year of Livonian Language and Culture, it was clear that the right time had come. The Estonian Mother Tongue Society actively supported this idea and financed the printing costs of the book. On the other hand, members of the Livonian Cultural Centre decided to prepare the manuscript for publication without remuneration.

The manuscript had space for illustrations, but there were no illustrations themselves. Since the alphabetical edition was created through the cooperation of organisations from two countries (Estonia and Latvia) the Livonian Cultural Centre wanted the originators of the illustrations to be pupils from both countries. At the beginning of the year of Livonian language and culture, a drawing competition was announced in two schools in Latvia – in the primary school in Pāle, on the territory formerly inhabited by Livonians in Vidzeme, and in the primary school in the Livonian village of Kurzeme in Kolka – and in two schools in Estonia, in Metsapole and Kilingi-Nõmme. Both are located on the Vidzeme border,



Figure 6: Kārlis Stalte: *Jelzi sõna*. Tartu 2011, front cover

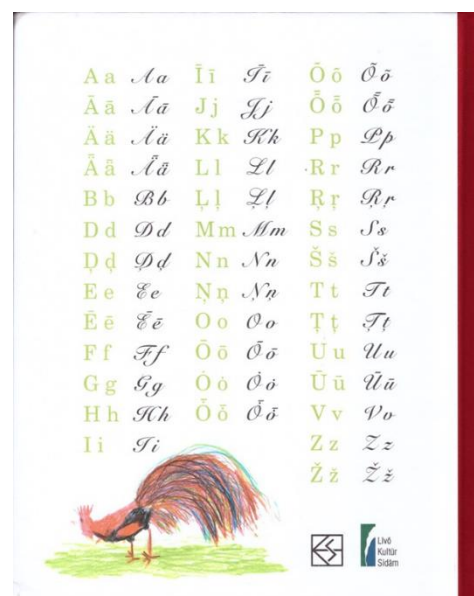


Figure 7: Kārlis Stalte: *Jelzi sõna*. Tartu 2011, back cover

## □ Livonian primers

and it is likely that the Livonian language was also once spoken there. The response was overwhelming, so it was not easy to choose the best ones. That is why the artist of the book, Zane Ernštreite, decided that every participant in the competition deserved to participate in this historic event and that all submitted works should be published in the Livonian primer.

Another feature of the book worth mentioning is the pictorial motive of the rooster on the front and on the back cover: a motive which generations of learners in parts of Northern and Central Europe have once encountered on a prominent place in their primer, in Latvia and Estonia a frequent characteristic of manifestations of this textbook genre until the early twenty-first century.

The primer has been written entirely in one language – Livonian. To make the content accessible also to those who do not know the language, the initiators of the print have prepared supplementary materials in Estonian (translation by Tuuli Tuisk and Valts Ernštreits) and Latvian (translation by Valts Ernštreits), issued by the same publisher. These materials include a preface by Renāte Blumberga “The First Livonian primer and Kārlis Stalte”.

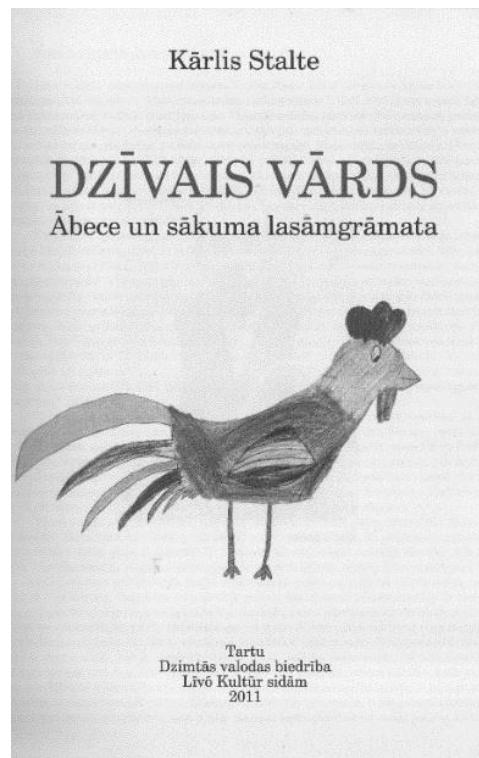


Figure 8: Kārlis Stalte: *Dzīvais vārds*. Tartu 2011, front cover (Latvian version of supplementary materials for Kārlis Stalte's "Jelzi sōna")

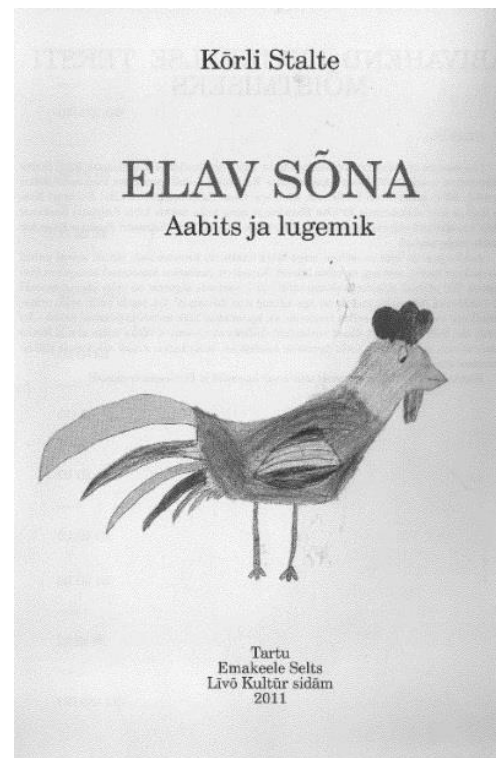


Figure 9: Kōrli Stalte: *Elvav sõna*. Tartu 2011, front cover (Estonian version of supplementary materials for Kārlis Stalte's "Jelzi sōna")

*Jelzi sōna* is not only the first primer of the Livonian language, but also a new and authentic collection of Livonian texts which, thanks to their simple language, are ideal for learning purposes. In addition, this textbook provides interesting information and observations about the life of Livonians in the fishing villages of Northern Kurzeme, about the relations of Livonians with neighbouring nations, about nature and the traditions.

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- Ernštreits, Valts (2012). Livonian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Études finno-ougriennes* 44 / 2012. OpenEdition Journals. URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/efo/675> [accessed 12.02.2024]
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▣ Notes

▣ Latvia

Exhibition "Pasaules tautu ābece" in Koknese



"Primers of the nations of the world" from the collection of Juris Cibujš, Riga, are on display in the meeting house of Liktejdārzs (Garden of Destiny) in Koknese, Aizkraukles region, from September 13 to November 1, 2024. The opening on September 13 included a meeting with the collector.

<https://failiem.lv/u/7xyqv4zswu>

▣ The Netherlands / Germany

Studies about Cornelis Jetses (1873-1955), illustrator of educational media for early reading instruction

*Liane Strauß: Cornelis Jetses (1873-1955). Portrait eines Künstlers und Illustrators auf dem Gebiet der Pädagogik. In: Stefanie Kollmann, Sabine Reh (Hrsg.). Zeigen und Bildung. Das Bild als Medium der Unterrichtung seit der Frühen Neuzeit. Berlin: Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung des DIPF 2021, 123-148.*

*Jacques Dane: Lesenlernen mit Bildern in den Niederlanden. Oder: Die lange Lebensdauer eines Lernmittels zum Lesenlernen in den Niederlanden. In: Ibid., 149-178.*

*Liane Strauss en Jacques Dane: Kunst in dienst van het eerste leesonderwijs. Onderwijsillustrator Cornelis Jetses (1873-1955) en de Bremer Fibel (1906). In: Jaarboek Nederlandse Boekgeschiedenis 20 (2022), 143-178.*

These three articles highlight the role of the Dutch artist Cornelis Jetses as an illustrator of school textbooks, including media for early reading instruction from various perspectives. First, Liane Strauß delivers a detailed analysis of a self-portrait of the artist, aimed not least at demonstrating the value which such analyses can provide for studies in the history of education. Jacques Dane's study deals with the origins, the specific features and the history of *Hoogeveens verbeterde leesmethode* [Hoogeveen's improved reading method], a set of media produced since 1909, well-known by the *leesplankjes* [reading boards] beginning with "aap, noot, mies", with illustrations by Cornelis Jetses, in use for teaching to read until the 1970s. It also demonstrates how the pictorial motifs of *Hoogeveen's verbeterde leesmethode* since the 1980s experience a second life on coffee mugs, bed covers and as embroidery patterns, and how *aap, noot, mies* became part of cultural memory in the Netherlands.



*Hoogeveens leesplankje. Groningen: J. B. Wolters (n. d.), version 1931, cutout (private)*

For the third article Liane Strauß and Jacques Dane have joined forces to study an interesting case of early twentieth-century cross-border cooperation in the field of school textbook production: illustrations created by Cornelis Jetses for *Bremer Fibel*, a German-language primer first published in Bremen in 1905 and reprinted until the 1920s. Jetse's artistic work proved fit here to support the efforts of the City of Bremen's book commission, a highly influential group of teachers in this Hanseatic city, to develop a primer based on principles of *Reformpädagogik* [progressive education].

□ South Africa

**Tswana Primers from the Wits Cullen Africana Collection, Johannesburg**

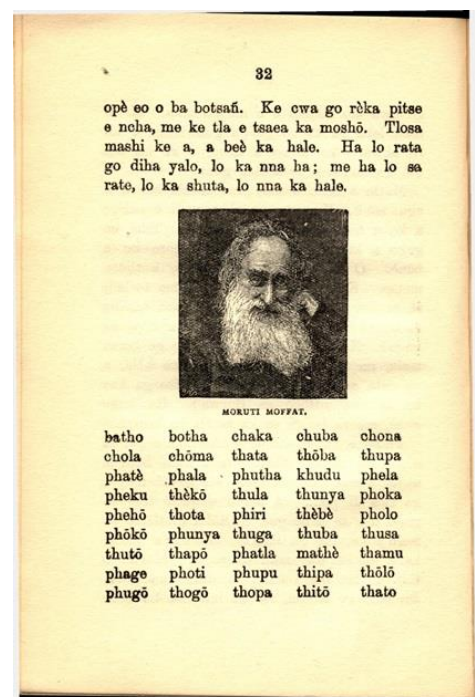
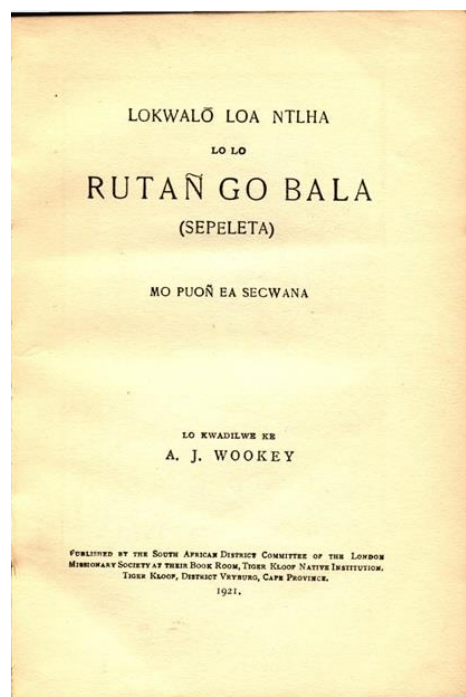
Tswana (Setswana) – ISO 639-3: tsn; Glottocode: tswa1253 – is a Bantu language and an official language today in Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. The history of Tswana reading primers dates to 1826, when the Scottish missionary Robert Moffat (1795-1883) compiled a *Bechuana Spelling-Book*, written in the Tlhaping dialect of Tswana and printed the same year in London for the London Missionary Society (LMS).

Those who nowadays wish to learn more about the history of Tswana primers are faced not least with the challenge to get access to extant primary sources. It is therefore welcome that several primers, published by various organisations between 1920 and 1956, have now been digitised and made available online by the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg, as part of the Tswana Corpus Project (TCP). Books digitised during this project encompass 104 prints; they include Bibles, hymn books, prayer books, novels and school textbooks from the missionary to the current era, held by the university's William Cullen Library:

<https://wiredspace-extra.wits.ac.za/communities/1b57a055-e1a5-4633-bfa3-1e738b7659f8>

Three primers may deserve special attention: The first is *Sepeleta*, a work by Alfred A. Wookey (1847-1917), a Protestant missionary of the LMS, with prints identified so far from 1876 to 1974. TCP offers digital copies of two editions: One was published in 1921 in Tiger Kloof, Cape Province (see pictures below) and the other in 1956 in Lobatsi, Bechuanaland Protectorate (now Botswana).

Two more Tswana primers with quite different design, teaching method and learning content have from the 1930s to the 1950s been issued in parallel in Rustenburg/Transvaal by the Hermannsburg Missionary Society, a Lutheran community with headquarters in Hermannsburg, Germany. One is *Lokwalo lwa ntlha*, and TCP provides a digital copy of the 24<sup>th</sup> edition, published in 1952. It is a non-illustrated booklet without the name of a writer; the teaching approach follows the alphabet method, and the reading exercises are confined to Bible portions, catechetical texts and prayers. The other is an illustrated primer in two volumes, *Mopele* and *Mobedi*, originally written by missionary Ernst Penzhorn (1866-1940). TCP makes available copies of editions of these booklets printed in 1956, based on phonics and with primarily secular content.



*Lokwalo lwa ntlha lo lo Rutañ go Bala (Sepelata) mo puoñ ea Secwana (Cover title: Sepeleta). Lo kwadilwe ke A. J. Wookey. Tiger Kloof, Cape Province: South African District Committee of the London Missionary Society 1921, title page, (left) and p. 32 (right) (Johannesburg, Wits University, William Cullen Library, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12430/549267>).*

▣ Switzerland /  
worldwide

### Primers in the UNESCO IBE Digital Historical Textbook Collection

UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (UNESCO IBE), founded in 1925 and with headquarters today in Le Grand Saconnex, a municipality of the canton of Geneva, aims to promote curriculum development worldwide. The UNESCO IBE Historical Collections include some 25,000 textbooks, teacher manuals, atlases and other learning materials, published between the eighteenth century and the 1960s, spanning 140 countries and 101 languages.

Digitization of the IBE Historical Collection has started in 2016. Today close to 5,000 textbooks have been digitized and are accessible via the TIND database: <https://ibeunesco.tind.io/?ln=e>. It comes as no surprise that these textbooks refer to a great variety of school subjects and learning contents, often with a focus on history and/or geography. Nevertheless reading primers from various countries and continents, mainly published in the 1950s and 1960s, have also made their way to the IBE Textbook Collection and in the meantime also to its Digital Collection (IBE DC).

Tracing the sub-group of reading primers in the IBE DC is not an easy task, mainly because a consistent keyword for this genre of school textbooks is lacking in the electronic catalogue. Instead relevant prints are tagged in the electronic catalogue in remarkably different ways. For example, four copies of Romanian primers (*Abecedar*) and one Latvian primer (*Ābece*) have the keyword "language instruction", while a Lithuanian print (*Elementorius*) is tagged with "mother tongue instruction" and an Estonian print (*Aabits*) with "reading". Searching for equivalents of "primer" in other languages, in case such an equivalent is part of the book title, may be useful. A search for the Spanish "*Cartilla*", for example, yields 19 hits, out of which 13 can be classified as reading primers, next to other textbooks such as *cartillas históricas* [history primers]. In addition, titles of books in languages written in Cyrillic script are also catalogued in this script. In these cases, the search terms "*Букварь*" (transliterated: *Bukvar'*, Russian for "primer") and "*Буквар*" (transliterated: *Bukvar*, "primer" in other East and South Slavonic languages) are of help: They result in three hits each, in the latter case two hits for items in Bulgarian and one for Belarusian.

The three Russian *bukvari*, all of them issued in 1962, are worth a note, as none of them was designed for teaching to read learners in their first language, but as a tool to implement Russian as a "second mother tongue". One of them, a *bukvar'* with the Lithuanian subtitle *Rusu kalbos elementorius* [Russian-language primer], was published in Kaunas/ Lithuania, whereas the others were issued in Leningrad for use in the preparatory grades of schools for the Evenk and Nenets, two of Russia's non-Russian ethnic groups.

Two more works which are difficult to access today demonstrate that the IBE DC may at times turn into a treasure trove for the primerologist: One of these works is *Dongo na Sundu*, a series of three booklets (Primers 1-3) in the Bemba language, compiled by H. Pardoe and published as "Nelson's Bemba Primers" in London by Thomas Nelson and Sons from the 1950s to the early 1960s for use in British Northern Rhodesia and, since 1964, in the Republic of Zambia. IBE DC offers one print each of the complete series, Primers 1 and 2 issued in 1967 and 1966 respectively "in association with The Zambia Publications Bureau", and Primer 3, published in 1959 "in association with The Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Publications Bureau".

The other work is *Karata Guarakitane Naminaki. Cartilla Guarao-Castellano*, a bilingual Warao-Spanish primer for teaching to read adult members of the Warao nation, an Indigenous people in Venezuela's Orinoco Delta region. It was compiled in 1959 by Basilio María de Barral (1901-1992), a Capuchin father, missionary and linguist from Spanish Galicia, and published in 1961 in Caracas by the *Oficina de Educacion de Adultos*, a department of Venezuela's Ministry of Education.



□ RP-SIG

□ New Member

**Velenje Library, Slovenia**

Velenje Library [*Knjižnica Velenje*] is a modern cultural institution that represents the heart of intellectual, educational and social life in the city of Velenje, Slovenia. It was founded in 1949 and has since become an indispensable part of the local community. Velenje Library offers a wide range of services and activities that meet the diverse needs of residents of all ages. One of the central tasks of the library is to provide space for borrowing and reading books. Their book holdings cover a variety of fields, from fiction to professional literature, with an emphasis on satisfying diverse reading tastes. In addition, the library is also responsible for enriching its collection with modern multimedia content, including e-books, audiobooks and other digital resources. Velenje Library is not only a place for borrowing books, but also a cultural center that organizes various events and events. These include literary evenings, lectures, workshops, exhibitions and other activities that contribute to the intellectual and cultural richness of the community. The library also pays special attention to children and young people by organizing numerous creative workshops, reading hours and other educational programs. In addition, the library actively cooperates with other cultural and educational institutions and the local community.

Part of the Velenje library is its **Primer Collection** [*Zbirka prvih beril*], on display as a special permanent collection: <https://www.prvaberila.si/>. At present this collection contains more than 1,700 primers in more than one hundred and sixty languages collected from all continents. The Primer Collection was established in September 2018 when the library received the first large number of books, formerly the private collection of Marjan Marinšek (1941-2011). Now the collection is supplemented through donations from different parts of the world. This collection is so valuable because it shows the child's first steps into the world of written culture. The library invites children from primary schools from all over Slovenia to visit the tours. All items of the collection are catalogued and can be retrieved through COBISS+, the Slovenian library information system:

[https://plus.cobiss.net/cobiss/si/sl/bib/search?q=prva+berila&db=sikvel&mat=all-materials&tyf=0\\_knj](https://plus.cobiss.net/cobiss/si/sl/bib/search?q=prva+berila&db=sikvel&mat=all-materials&tyf=0_knj)



*Public Library in Velenje, Primer Collection*

The Primer Collection is represented by **Lidija Črnko**, adult education specialist and senior librarian [*višja bibliotekarska svetovalka*] of Velenje Public Library. Email: [lidija.crnko\(at\)knjiznica-velenje.si](mailto:lidija.crnko(at)knjiznica-velenje.si).

## □ RP-SIG: Developments and Plans

### Launch of “Learning to Read 2”

Experience gained during the preparation of the edited volume *Learning to Read, Learning Religion. Catechism primers in Europe from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company 2023 (<https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/books/9789027254955>) has encouraged a group of editors and authors to discuss and bring forward ideas of a follow-up project in the field of historical primer research. With a background in a variety of research disciplines Charlotte Appel, Aarhus (DK), Britta Juska-Bacher, Berne (CH), Elisa Marazzi, Milano (IT) and Wendelin Sroka, Essen (DE) have joined forces and developed a plan for a publication aimed at studying the development of reading primers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, with a particular focus on the influence of the Enlightenment on manifestations of this textbook genre. As in “Learning to Read 1”, the main part of the new volume will consist of criteria-led essays on primers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in specific countries and regions. General deadline for the submission of essays by invited authors will be September 2025.

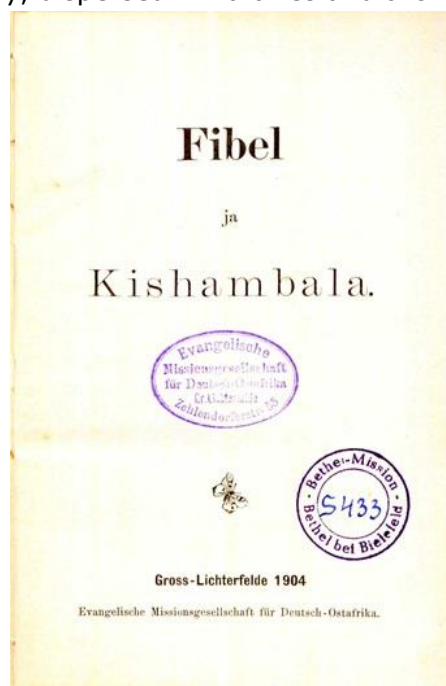
### “African Colonial Reading Primers” – Exploring possibilities of trans-continental historical textbook research

Actors from Africa, Europe and America have been involved in the production of books for users in Africa in colonial times, and this also applies to school textbooks in general and reading primers in particular, the latter often among the first books printed in local languages when missionaries made efforts to evangelize what they considered to be “heathens”. Research has in recent times made great efforts to investigate colonialism especially in history textbooks. In contrast, there are hardly broader historical studies with a focus on school textbooks once published for use by the colonized – textbooks which in a way can be seen today as documents of a shared history.

As regards primers produced for learners in Africa in colonial times, access to relevant sources is undoubtedly a particular challenge, with extant prints, if any, dispersed in libraries and archives across several continents. Yet nowa-

days the provision of full-text digital copies of such textbooks by holding libraries offers new opportunities for researchers from various fields of study, including African (historical) linguistics, colonial history, mission history and not least textbook history.

So far comprehensive bibliographical information about relevant objects, including data about producers (writers, illustrators, publishers and printers) as well as data about the design of relevant prints and about pictorial programs have been collected. Also, first talks with researchers in African and European countries have been initiated to find out if and how the landscape of what is named “African Colonial Reading Primers” can be explored. The plan is to create a network of scholars from Africa, Europe and America with expertise in a relevant discipline. Readers with an interest in the subject matter wishing to discuss the project idea further are invited to write to [wendelin.sroka\(at\)arcor.de](mailto:wendelin.sroka(at)arcor.de).



Title page of a primer in Shambala, published in 1904 by the Evangelical Mission Society for German East Africa, printed in Berlin by C. H. Müller (Braunschweig, GEI Research Library; new acquisition 2024; GEI Digital,

<http://gei-digital.gei.de/cms/ppnresolver/?PPN1892454351>