

Linguistic Thought in the 18th Century as the Last Prenational Age—Social History in the Mirror of Language History

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In 18th century linguistic thought, we often encounter phenomena belonging to 17th century world views based on a class society, and phenomena which predict the national consciousness of the coming 19th century. This dichotomy raises the question of whether the 18th century should be regarded as a single whole regarding linguistic thought.

Johann Christoph Adelung (1732–1803) was influenced by the ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) who insisted that a nation is equal to a linguistic community. This fact makes us believe that Adelung aligned with 19th century democrats and their modern national claims. But in his dictionary he referred to vulgar language as *pöbelhaft* (“of the populace, mob”), showing his contempt for the developing middle classes.

As for Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766), he rather resembled the humanistic intellectuals of the 16th century, with Erasmus of Rotterdam as their representative figure. However, Gottsched shared prerevolutionary and preindustrial values with Adelung.

In the 18th century, there were various linguistic perspectives that were sometimes contradictory to each other; however, it is meaningful to regard this century linguistically as a whole, because we can see there the movements which bridged the premodern to the modern age.