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Leselust, Goût de la Lecture, Love of Reading: Patterns in the Discourse on Reading in Europe from the 17th until the 19th Century

Ilkka Mäkinen

School of Information Sciences, University of Tampere, Finland

Introduction

This article is the first step towards a research project on the discursive birth of the western European reading culture. My intention is to tell about the project in general terms and present some of the preliminary results.

Do we know, why people have been reading during the past centuries? What motivates reading? The answer could be sociological, psychological or even neurological. In my research project I try to give a discourse-historical answer. There is in the history of reading a great lack of documented, quantifiable or even indirect information about the real reading behaviour of people, but what is certain is that people have always talked and written about reading. They have observed other people reading, they have had opinions about what is the right way of reading, who has the right to read and what is the legitimate reading material. The discourse on reading has been going on for thousands of years.

In this article I am interested in the history of the Western European discourse on reading after the invention of printing till the early 19th century, with some glances to the Antiquity and the Middle Ages. I shall investigate the words and phrases used to describe the motivation for, or habit of, reading in the discourse on reading in the major West European languages, French, English and German, as well as in a preliminary way try to detect the Latin roots of the discourse. At later stages of the project I shall include even Italian and Spanish, and some minor languages, such as the Scandinavian languages and Finnish. I have gathered the material by searching in the Google Books database.

There seems to be a family of words, phrases and even concepts to describe the reading behaviour and motivation that have been used (as translations) in many languages. These terms probably have various sources, some come from far in history, some have been developed later. The changes in the frequency of use of these phrases and concepts tell about the development of the discourse on reading, but statistics cannot tell the whole story. The long-term goal of this research project is to develop a better historical understanding of the birth and development of the European reading culture by analyzing the discourse on reading.

Literacy as a mechanical ability to read is not enough to make people read voluntarily and regularly. There are many conditions that have to be satisfied before a self-sustaining reading habit can be developed: people must know how to read, they must have access to books either by inheriting, buying, borrowing or stealing them, they must have some free time for reading. But even after these conditions are satisfied, people don't automatically turn into avid readers: they must have *love of reading*, or *Leselust*, or *goût de la lecture*. They must want to read. It is difficult to force people to read, if they do not want to do it of their own free will, especially when we are speaking of reading for personal pleasure, or leisure time reading, or unrequired reading. A personal, even emotional interest in reading is needed. Of course, there were and are numerous motivations for reading, such

as obligation or interest to learn. Work or status often motivated regular reading. What was new in the love of reading was that there seemed not to be a specific goal or legitimation for reading, which aroused suspicions.

Reading has not been the same through history. Changes in the technology of writing and print, as well as changes in the social structures and the ideological climate of the society have affected the ways people read, who is allowed to read, and what kind of literature it is legitimate to read. Historical changes in reading styles have been described and interpreted, e.g., by Rolf Engelsing [10] and Erich Schön [31]. An international overview is presented in the “History of reading in the West” (1999) edited by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier [3] (see also [7bis] and [22bis]). In my doctoral thesis [22] I endeavored to link the changes in the reading styles to the birth of the modern concept of personality in the early modern period with Michel Foucault, Norbert Elias and the Finnish sociologist Pertti Alasuutari as principal theoretical inspirators. The modern person can, among many other features, such as rationality and individuality, be also defined as a reading person possessed by *love of reading*. *The love of reading*¹ is a historically conditioned social construction, not an inherent, universal attribute of man. It has a (not so long) history of its own, it was born, it spread widely in the societies, and nowadays we are afraid that it may vanish.²

The concept of *the love of reading* began to be constructed, when, first in the courts and academic milieus, people began to read voluntarily, for their own individual enjoyment. This phenomenon spread across the European middle-class during the 18th century, and in the late 19th century even to the urban working class and the rural population.

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1. In the English summary of my thesis [22] I used the phrase *desire to read* as a synonym of the German *Leselust*, but *love of reading* might be a better equivalent, whereas *lust zu lesen* is the equivalent of *desire to read*.
 2. The theoretical part of the introduction of this article is based mainly on my dissertation [22]. It was published in Finnish, but it includes rather an extensive English summary. See also [20] and [21].

Crucial for the triumph of the *love of reading* were the new genres, especially the bourgeois novel, that were introduced in the 17th and 18th centuries. Printed theatre pieces, popular poetry (such as Klopstock, Goethe, Byron), newspapers and journals were also important in making reading part of the everyday life of the European educated classes. The protestant reformation, industrialization, urbanization and the extension of the mass school education were, of course, important conditions for the growth of reading in the larger populations. These aspects have been amply treated in the book and reading historical literature (for a general introduction, see [3]).

Good and bad reading

The new self-sustaining, spontaneous and extensive reading habit seemed to be contagious across all boundaries, socially as well as geographically. In some occasions the break-through of the love of reading seemed to be so dramatic that it caused alarm in the authoritative circles of the society. This was especially the case of Germany during the last decades of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. There was a lively debate on the dangers that the unbridled spreading of uncontrolled reading might cause to the society, when totally new groups of people (women, juveniles, lower classes) seemed to start reading actively and daily. At its worst the phenomenon seemed to be like a disease and it was called by many alarming names, such as *Lesewut* (reading rage), *Lesesucht* (reading passion), *Leserei* (profuse reading; for more details see [18] and [11]). There has been a discussion in the historical literature concerning the factual reality of the *Lesewut*. Some believe that the debate at the end of the 18th century was just a plot of the reactionaries to put the lower classes back to their places (see e.g. [30, 59]), but at least the debate was real.

In England the abnormal, malignant aspects of reading were especially attached to the novel. Since the 1780s there are some occasions of laments on the *rage for novels*, but they are not at all so numerous

as in the German literature. In the French literature some concerned writers warned about *la manie de lecture* or *la rage de lire*.

As a rule it was believed that uneducated persons could not control their love of reading, because hitherto they had not read daily and extensively. Regular and active reading, as many other forms of behavior (such as polite conversation, refined manners etc.), presupposed a certain level of self-control and education, as well as a kind of individuality that the uneducated per definition were not supposed to possess. Reading was not one of their normal features as it, towards the end of the 18th century, self-evidently was of the small group of educated persons. The self-evidence was, however, not at all strong at the beginning of the century.

Constructing the love of reading

The new reading habit was described in many ways in the historical sources, but it seems that in the English, French and German languages a set of crystallized phrases or expressions to describe the phenomenon became common towards the end of the 18th century. Today these phrases, such as *habit* or *love of reading*, *goût de la lecture*, *Leselust*, seem so transparent and self-evident that it is difficult to believe that they have a history. Even studies in the history of reading do not see the historical nature of these expressions and they are not analyzed as such. E.g., Altick's "The English common reader" (1957) names the phrase *love of reading* only once in a citation [2, 309]. William St. Clair in his "The reading nation in the romantic period" (2004) apparently does not use the phrase at all [32]. However, Anne-Marie Chartier and Jean Hébrard in their "Discours sur la lecture (1880–1980)" [4] take *le goût de la lecture* seriously as an element in the discourse on reading, but because of the period they are interested in, they do not trace the constructive character of the concept to its early history.

The character as a construction of these terms is easier to see in the Finnish language, where the similar expression (*lukuhalu*)

was gradually constructed during the 1840s in a press debate on the possibility of a love of reading in the common people [22]. We can name the person who coined the term, Wolmar Schildt-Kilpinen, and find the first occurrence of the term in the newspaper Kanawa (no 27, July 12, 1845). The concept was, of course, known even before the exact term appeared, but it was expressed in a more complicated manner. In the Finnish language it was, in the first place, a question of finding a practical, short equivalent expression for the Swedish *läselust*, which again was borrowed from the German *Leselust*. We shall see that in the French, English and German language there were other, more “primitive” expressions that were used before an exact term was constructed for the love of reading, e.g., *désir de lire*, *desire to read* and *lust zu lesen*.

Google Books as a tool

While I was studying for my doctoral thesis, I gained rather an extensive knowledge of the different terms used to describe reading behavior in the Finnish and Swedish languages, but it was difficult to have any general overview of the terms in the English, German or French literatures of the 18th and 19th centuries. Luckily, new technology has come to help. It is now possible to use Google Books in searching for the occurrences of the terms describing reading. Manually this type of search would be impossible. This method of gathering information is, of course, in many ways insufficient, because the contents of the Google Books database are, so far, haphazard and incomplete. There exist many more relevant books, newspapers and journals than today are available in the Google Books. The situation changes all the time, more books are digitized each day. I gathered my material during the spring and autumn of 2011.

On the other hand, Google Books is so far the best technology available for this kind of search. Other services, such as Europeana, Project Gutenberg, Projekt Runeberg and Hathi Trust simply are

not subtle and powerful enough. The Reading Experience Database concentrates on concrete situations or acts of reading, in connection of which the phrases, such as love of reading, seldom appear. With Google Books it is possible to choose the term, period and language, and it conducts the search fast and reliably, and presents the results in a satisfactory manner. There are many more possibilities to use the services, such as Google Books, in the service of history of reading, but this time I have used it merely to illustrate my general case, i.e., the development on the term level of the discourse on reading.

Google Books is plagued by doubles, i.e., many books, even same editions, have been digitized two or more times, and the system cannot automatically identify the redundant items. Google Books is working with this problem in cooperation with the libraries, but it is possible that it can never be as accurate in this sense as, e.g., library catalogs (about Google Books, see [15bis]). To avoid my material being biased by many occurrences of the same works, I printed the search results and manually checked the lists excluding the doubles as far as possible. I have also discarded reprints of articles that have circulated from journal to journal. This is debatable, though, because the fact that an article has been borrowed and reprinted shows that its contents have interested the editors and probably the readers as well. In any case, this time I have been interested in an original, creative use of the phrases I was looking after, as far as this has been possible. The lists include short extracts of the texts containing the words and phrases I was seeking. There were many unclear cases and I cannot make any claim of completeness. This could be a problem, if I was making a real statistical work, but for this experimental phase the results are sufficiently illustrative. The methods and hypotheses will be ameliorated during the later stages of the research project.

The basic units in my analyses are the books, journal volumes or other publications, where the phrases occur. If the phrase occurs even once in a book, it is included in the sample as a single occurrence. This is a different approach than in Google Ngram Viewer (<http://books.google.com/ngrams>), where the units are individual occurrences

of the phrases or, more precisely, ngrams containing the words of the phrases. A book can contain several occurrences of the phrases. I have chosen the former principle, because in Ngram Viewer a single book with lots of occurrences of a phrase can cause a serious bias, especially, in the 16th and 17th centuries, when the publishing activity was not as voluminous as in the subsequent centuries. I have, however, used Google Ngram Viewer parallelly to illustrate a comparison of the occurrences of the phrases with the frequency of their constituent words. Furthermore, it is to be remembered that the results of my analyses of the findings from Google Books are absolute figures, whereas Google Ngram Viewer presents relative figures as percentages of the total amount of ngrams. It is not possible to discard double occurrences of the books in the Google Ngram Viewer analyses. A serious obstacle in the use of the Ngram Viewer is the fact that the results seem to vary frustratingly over time, probably because new material is added in the database all the time.

As I, at this stage, was interested in the early phase in the formation of the European reading culture, I ended the period under investigation at 1830. The debate and discourse on reading continued naturally even after that, but the sheer number of books and the occurrences of utterances in connection with reading grows after that year so much that it would have been too laborious to continue with the same methods. Later the research shall be continued towards our own time.

It would have been important to study the texts and their historical context more carefully, but even this must wait until later. In this article I shall only sketch the more analytical themes that we may find in the discourse on reading. This time we must be satisfied with the rough contours of the history of *love of reading* since the invention of printing until the first decades of the 19th century.

Roots of discourse on reading in Europe

It would be useful to trace the words and phrases used in the discourse on reading to their ancient sources, in the Classical Greek and Latin literature, the religious and lay literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance as well as some important books of the early modern period, but even this line of research must stay on a tentative level in this article. Ancient Latin texts were used as models and ideals still in the 17th till the 19th centuries, both for cultural behaviour and language. Members of the male upper class learned Latin and read Latin authors, and were supposed to apply what they had read in their own lives. They, of course, understood the texts in their own way that perhaps had not much in common with the intentions of the Roman authors. *Love of reading* is one of such phrases. There are in the French and English literatures of the 17th till 18th centuries numerous occurrences of or allusions to a Latin phrase *inexhausta aviditas legendi*. The phrase appears originally in Cicero's text "De finibus bonorum et malorum ad Brutum". Cicero tells about Cato's inexhaustible avidity to read: "Quo quum venissem, M. Catonem, quem ibi esse nescieram, vidi in bibliotheca sedentem, multis circumfusum stoicorum libris. Erat enim, ut scis, in eo inexhausta aviditas legendi, nec satiari poterat." [24, book three, chapter two] Cicero's phrase is used as an example in a number of Latin dictionaries, e.g. in Paul Aler's *Dictionarium germanico-latinum* (1727): "Lust zu lesen. Inexhausta aviditas legendi." [1, 1345]

One of the first occurrences I have met of the English phrase *love of reading* is to be found in the translation of Cicero's book mentioned above. The translation was printed in 1702: "And this was no more than suitable for his Love of Reading, so very vehement and constant..." [7, 158].

The discourse on reading naturally often includes discussion of good and bad reading. The distinction or opposition between "good" and "bad" reading has a long history. Already Cicero in his "De finibus bonorum et malorum" referred to "people of modest social standing

(craftsmen and old people) who were fond of ‘history’”. He stressed “that such people read (or listened to) historical works for pleasure (*voluptas*), not for the *utilitas* to be drawn from reading that was the aim of the better-educated reader”. [3, 67] The first group of readers did not properly control their reading interest and let themselves be carried away by irrational desires. Even Marcus Aurelius complimented himself in his Meditations for not having wasted his time on “writers of histories” [19, 9].

According to Guglielmo Cavallo, “both Catullus and Cicero (the latter more explicitly) refer polemically to cultural contexts and circles of readers who were less skilled than the élites that they themselves represented, but at that time these were circles whose interests were as limited as their size”. It appears that there was a growth and diversification in the reading public in the Graeco-Roman world between the first and the third centuries AD. [3, 67–68] Periods of sudden increase in the number of active readers have even later aroused discussions on the preferred styles and dangers of reading.

So the seeds of the western reading discourse may have come from the Antiquity, but there also are strong roots in the Christian religious discourse. From the late Middle Ages we find Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1380-1471) using the phrase “*amor legendi*”, *love of reading*, in his biography of Geert Groote, a 14th century mystic: “Magnus autem huic venerabili magistro in erat amor legendi scripturas sanctas: & infatigabilis æstus colligendi libros doctorum, plusquam thesauros denariorum.” [34, 904] The chapter 13, where “*amor legendi*” appears, is titled “De magno desiderio eius legendi scripturas sanctas”, which contains another phrase describing the motive for reading, “*desiderium legendi*”, *desire to read*.

Richard de Bury’s (1287–1345) *Philobiblon* naturally contains a number of terms and phrases describing reading. Its Greek title word, which Richard claims to have fashioned in the manner of the ancient Latin authors, already includes love of books, even a passion for books. Closest to *love of reading* Richard comes in Chapter XVIII, where the Bishop tells that he has been accused of “*de voluptatis intemperantia*

circa litteras”, i.e., according to three translations, of “immoderate pleasure of literature” [26, 183] or “intemperateness of our love for letters” [28, 99] or “intemperance of delight in literature” [27].

Reading Richard’s book also reminds us of some important phrases in the Bible about reading. One of the most spectacular metaphors of reading is in Ezekiel (3:1–3), where the prophet is compelled to eat a book scroll, literally to devour a book (also in Revelation 10: 2-10; more on this theme, see [8]). Terms that have a bodily context, such as appetite, hunger, thirst etc. are still often used, when we are speaking of reading.

Both the ancient Latin as well as the medieval and modern religious terminology must be taken into consideration, when we trace the development of the European discourse on reading. On the other hand, the use of terminology and concepts is tied to the worldview of the speaker. The same terms do not necessarily mean the same thing in a new context. During the early modern time, when the modern worldview was under construction, the context of the discourse on reading was radically reconstructed. Copernican revolution in cosmology, Galilean advances in the scientific method and astronomy, Newton’s mechanistic universe, Descartes’ rationalism and Locke’s empiricism chased the animistic notions away both in science, philosophy and psychology.

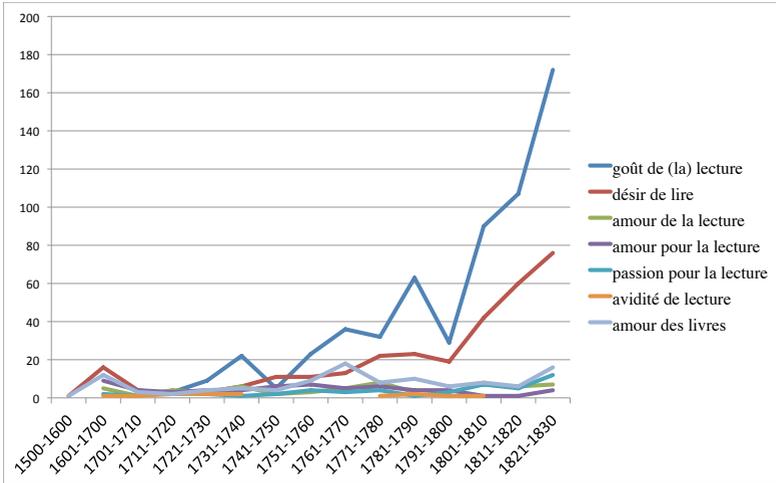
According to Kirkinen (1960), the mechanistic theories of passions and will underwent a great expansion in France since the 1670’s. The birth of passions was easily explained by the fundamental laws of the Newtonian mechanics, where one could integrate the theories of temperaments and the mechanistic union of the soul and the body. As Locke and his followers put it, thoughts are mechanistically produced by action of the outside objects. The principal goal of thoughts and desires is the search for one’s own good or for pleasure. [16, 142, 400, 417–423]

The concept of love of reading as a spontaneous desire that is acquired by an exposure to reading materials at a suitable age and in propitious circumstances fits well into the new view of man’s

psychological composition, but a deeper analysis will be presented in future studies.

French goût de la lecture

Expressions describing motivation for reading in the French research literature are, e.g., *le goût de la lecture* or *goût de lecture* [4; 6; 33], *l'appétit de lecture* [6], *désir de lire*, *goût des livres* [4]. More phrases have been found by browsing the original sources. There may, of course, exist other phrases, which I have not detected, and as soon as they are found, they must be added to the phrases used in the searches.

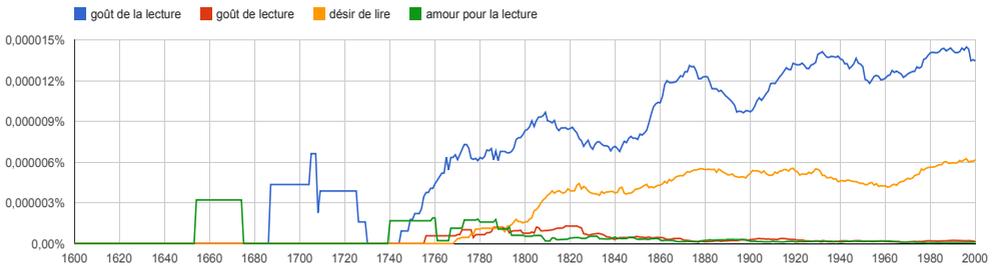


Graph 1. Occurrence of French phrases denoting reading 1500–1830. Data derived from Google Books.

If we compare this graph with a graph that the Google Ngram Viewer produces with the same phrases, we see that the pattern seems rather similar, except the couple of extraordinary peaks in the 1660s and the beginning of the 18th century. The occurrence of the extraordinary

peaks can probably be explained by a concentration of phrases in a single book or the use of the phrases in other contexts than what interest us here.

The curve has been smoothed with a moving average to avoid too abrupt peaks in the curve. In this case the smoothing is on level 10, which means that 21 values will be averaged: 10 on either side, plus the target value in the center of them. Google Ngram Viewer considers ngrams that occur in at least 40 books (<http://books.google.com/ngrams/info>). In the Google Ngram Viewer figures it is question of relative values. The fact that the curves in the Graph 2 behave rather similarly than in the Graph 1, where the values are absolute, shows that there was real growth in the number of the phrases that interest us. One must remember that the number of printed books grew enormously during the last part of the 18th century, and it could very well have happened that the number of occurrences of the phrases would have grown only in direct relation with the growing number of books, but apparently the number of the phrases grew more rapidly than the number of books.



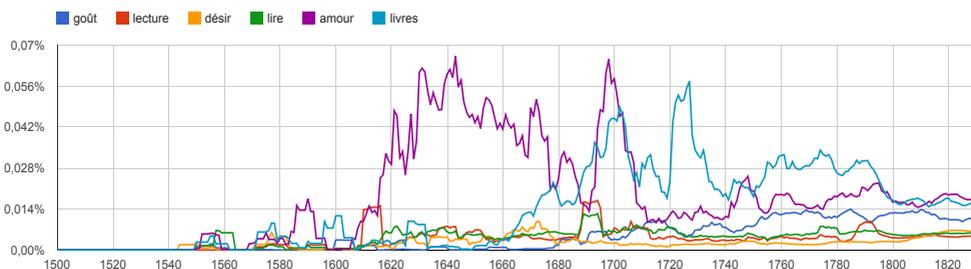
Graph 2. Frequency of the French phrases *goût de la lecture*, *gout de lecture*, *désir de lire* and *amour pour la lecture* in 1600–2000 according to the Google Ngram Viewer (done April 17, 2013).

It seems, so far, that the use in the French-language literature of these terms is concentrated on *goût de la lecture*, whereas the shorter form *goût de lecture* appears less frequently. Rousseau used *goût de lecture* in

his novel *Nouvelle Héloïse* (first published in 1761 [29, 35]). There are tens of editions of this book in the Google Books. The phrase *désir de lire* also is rather common, but it is not as unambiguous as *goût de la lecture*. *Désir de lire* is used in many contexts, such as *désir de lire l'avenir*, desire to foretell, or *désir de lire les pensées*, desire to read someone's thoughts. *Désir de lire* does not refer as clearly to a single concept as *goût de la lecture*. Since the 17th century phrases *amour del pour la lecture*, *passion pour la lecture*, *avidité de lecture* and *l'amour des livres* appear, but their frequency does not grow during the 18th century, whereas there is a clear growth in the frequency of *goût de la lecture*. The revolutionary decade 1790's appears to have been too busy for discussing *goût de la lecture*.

To my knowledge the first occurrence of *goût de la lecture* is in the book by Pierre Joseph d'Orleans, "Histoire Des Revolutions D'Angleterre depuis le commencement de la Monarchie", printed in 1695 [9, 392].

If we look how the individual words in the phrases appear during the same period, we clearly see that their patterns are different. This shows that the increase in the use of the phrases was independent of the frequency of the individual words in them.



Graph 3. The occurrence in 1500-1825 of individual French words *goût*, *lecture*, *désir*, *lire*, *amour* and *livres* according to the Google Ngram Viewer.

English *love of reading* and *habit of reading*

American and British reading historical studies use following formulations to describe reading behaviour or motivation: *reading habit* [17, 20], *relish for reading* [35; 13, 18]; *thirst for reading* [12, 26]. Some of these are theoretical terms, which do not appear in the historical sources. Studies in the history of reading seldom recognize the phrase *love of reading*, but in the English-language literature from the 16th till early 19th century *love of reading* was widely used. The alternative phrase, *love for reading*, appears more seldom.

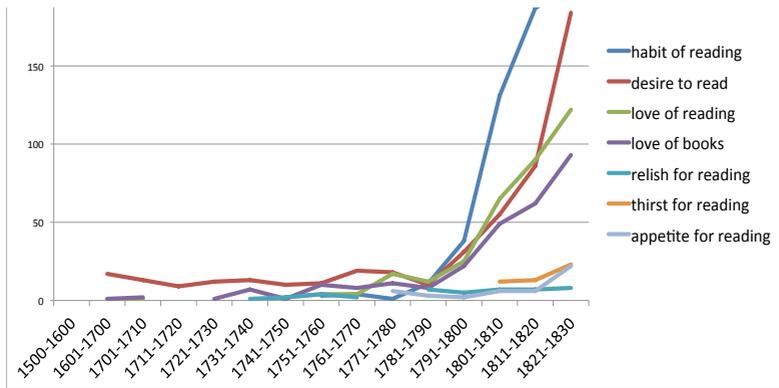
Habit of reading was regularly used to describe active reading. This phrase renders more hits than *love of reading* in the Google Books database (whereas the phrase *reading habit* gives no hits), but many of the examples are of a different character than what interests us here, namely different methods or ways of reading, especially reading aloud or reciting. I have discarded from the sample those occurrences of *habit of reading*, which clearly are out of scope regarding the theme of this article. Many more of the occurrences could be excluded, but I was rather liberal in accepting even dubious cases, because I wanted to be sure I did not miss potential hits.

Habit of reading is a phrase used for many purposes and it is as such not a distinct concept, whereas *love of reading* definitely is one. Many occasions, however, of *habit of reading*, used as a synonym of *love of reading*, are clearly relevant for this study. *Habit of reading*, furthermore, does not so much refer to the motivation of reading, but rather to the observed frequency of reading. The frequency of the phrase *habit of reading* grows dramatically at the beginning of the 19th century. The different characteristics and uses of the phrases *love of reading* and *habit of reading* must be studied more carefully.

Desire to read has the longest history of frequent use, which dates from the 17th century. What has been said about *désir de lire* and *habit of reading* applies also to *desire to read*. It seems not to be a distinct concept, but is used for many purposes.

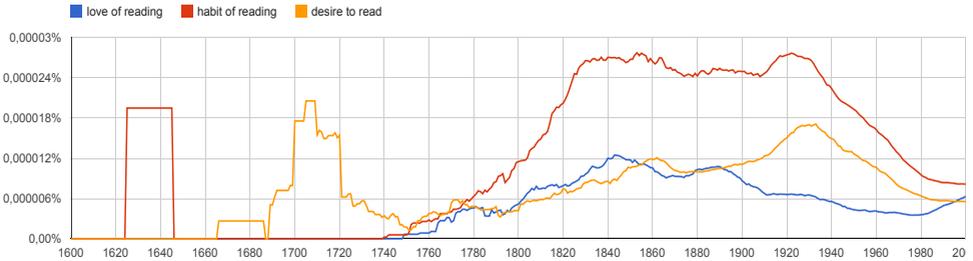
Contrary to the French *amour des livres*, the English occurrences of the phrase *love of books* encounter a clear growth at the end of the period.

The first occurrence of the English *love of reading* that I have found is in a book translated from the French, “Moral essayes, contain’d in several treatises on many important duties” [23, 15] in an essay titled “Of the education of a Prince”. It is probable that the phrase was adopted from the French language.



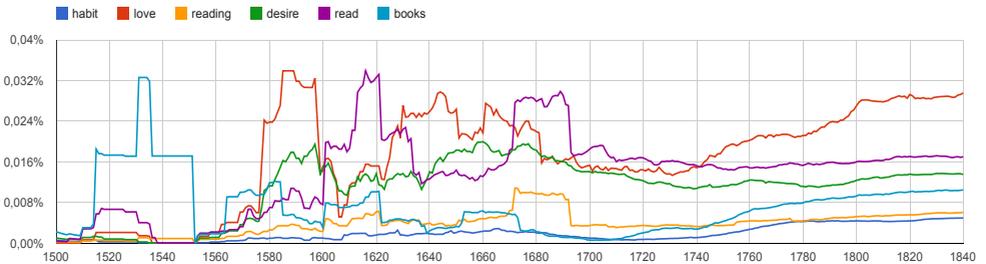
Graph 4. Occurrence of different phrases denoting reading behaviour in the English-language literature published in 1500-1830 (source of data: Google Books).

The Google Ngram Viewer analysis reveals again similar patterns, especially concerning *habit of learning*, but the growth in the frequency of the phrases seems to begin earlier, around the 1750s. There are extraordinary peaks for *habit of reading* at the beginning of the 1630s and for *desire to read* at the beginning of the 18th century.



Graph 5. Frequency of the phrases *love of reading*, *habit of reading* and *desire to read* in 1600–2000 according to the Google Ngram Viewer (done January 28, 2013).

In a Google Ngram Viewer analysis the individual words behave in a different manner than the phrases, but there are certain cases, such as the growth in the frequency of *love* in the second half of the 18th century that must be analyzed more carefully in future studies.



Graph 6. Frequency of the words *habit*, *love*, *reading*, *desire*, *read* and *books* in 1500–1840 according to the Google Books Ngram Viewer (done April 17, 2013).

From *lust zu lesen* to *Leselust* in German

Before a crystallized term, *Leselust*, appeared in the printed texts, the same concept was expressed otherwise in the German language constructions, such as in the sentence in a book printed in 1571: “Wer

aber lust zu seinem Schnudelwerck hat / und kan mit lust solche Calumnias lesen / ...” [25, no page numbers, 44. Fabel und 10. Artick]. The grammatical construction *lust zu lesen* existed, but it was not yet crystallized into a distinct concept.

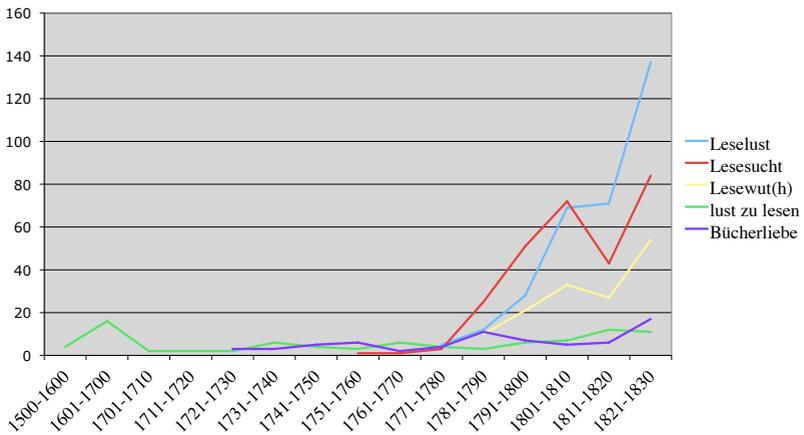
It seems that during the 17th and early 18th century the discourse on the love of reading lacked definite concepts, which gradually were developed during the 18th century. Languages have different mechanisms for crystallizing concepts on the term level. In the German language this process is rather easy to detect: when constructions, such as *lust zu lesen*, are replaced by compound words, e.g., *Leselust*, then we can say that a conceptualization has taken place. In other languages, where compound words are more seldom, such as French and even to an extent English, the same process is not so easy to detect. In the French and English discourse we must make explanations based on the analysis of the context and frequency of terms. The linguistic mechanisms in different languages must be studied further.

In the sample I have been able to gather, the oldest occurrence in a printed German book of a crystallized term denoting love of reading, is an extraordinary praise of reading in Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg’s (1633-1694) book of religious meditations “Betrachtungen von allerheiligster Menschwerdung, Geburt und Jugend, wie auch von Leben, Lehre und Wunderwercken, und dann vom Leiden und Sterben Jesu Christ” published in 1672 [14, 701–706]. There was another edition in 1683. The place, where the term appears, is part of a meditation on Matthew 27:37: “Diese Überschrift lasen viel Juden / dann die stätte war nahe bey der Stadt da JESUS gekreuzigt ist.” The baroque text is rich in content and poetic vocabulary and it deserves a study of its own, but from the point of view of this article, the most interesting part of it is on page 705: “O gekreuzigter JESU! daß du durch dein schmachlesen / uns diese seelige Leselust zu wegen gebracht.” Jesus is considered as “the Book of Life” (“das Buch des Lebens”) that is written both on the outside and the inside (reminding of Revelation 5:1 and Ezekiel 2: 10). The Christian is, thus, reading Jesus, when he is reading any book, but, on the other hand, if Jesus is

not present, then no reading is possible or not desirable. Reading with Jesus brings love of reading, although it seems that for the authoress reading was a very dear occupation in any case: “Ohne GOtt verlange ich auch nicht zu lesen / wiewol es mir sonst das aller verlangbarste ist. Die Allheit muß in allem seyn: sonst halte ich alles vor nichts. Aber in und mitderselben / erwehle ich das lesen / vor allem / was in der Welt zu erkiesen und geniessen ist.” [14, 648-652]

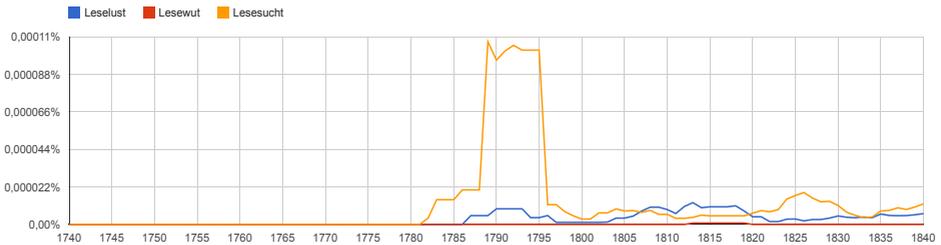
von Greiffenberg was an immensely prolific, individual and amazing poet, and probably not widely read in her time, but still her way of thinking may reflect the angle, from which the early pietists were considering reading. The important thing is that *Leselust* is “zu wegen gebracht” by Jesus, i.e., brought along or begotten by him. It is a latent force that must be awakened or triggered by an outside influence, and it has both a positive and a negative potentiality. It is possible that she used the phrase *seelige Leselust* to remind of the word *Seelenlust*, which was often used in German religious texts.

German phrases denoting reading behaviour 1500-1830



Graph 7. Occurrence of different phrases denoting reading behaviour in the German-language literature published in 1500-1830 (source of material: Google Books).

The next occurrence of *Leselust* in the German-language books in my sample follows almost 90 years after von Greiffenberg, which, of course, makes von Greiffenberg rather an isolated case.

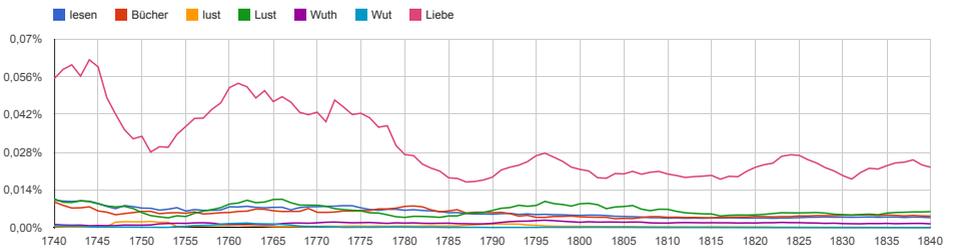


Graph 8. Occurrence of the words *Leselust*, *Lesewut* and *Lesesucht* in the German literature in 1740–1840 according to the Google Ngram Viewer (done April 17, 2013).

The German debate on the malignant forms of reading seems to have been abrupt and intensive. The first *Lesesucht* occurrence in my material is in the book “Das Leben des Herrn von Haller” by Johann Georg Zimmerman printed in 1755 [36, 10], the second in a book “Kritische Wälder” by Johann Gottfried Herder printed in 1769 [15, 252]. The decade 1781–1790 presents already 25 occurrences, and the last decade of the century more than 50. The negative debate has been analyzed in other studies [11; 18]. *Leselust* was a more or less neutral concept, often even used in a positive tone. *Lesesucht* or *Lesewut* were probably never used in a positive sense.

The phrase *lust zu lesen* is comparable with *habit of reading*. It is used for many different purposes, and often in other ways than referring to what we mean by *Leselust*, that is, the motivation, instinct or drive out of which a long-term regular habit of reading arises. *Lust zu lesen* was used rather evenly throughout the investigated period.

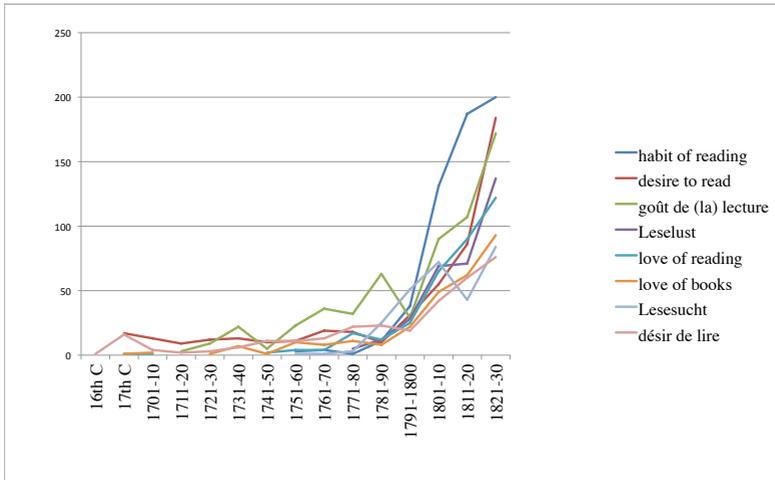
The analysis on the word level presents even in the German case clearly different patterns than on the phrase level.



Graph 9. Frequency of the words lesen, Bücher, lust, Lust, Wuth, Wut and Liebe in the German literature in 1740-1840 according to the Google Ngram Viewer (done May 3, 2103).

The birth of the European reading culture

So far, the seven phrases, *habit of reading*, *desire to read*, *goût de la lecture*, *Leselust*, *love of reading*, *love of books* and *Lesesucht*, seem to be the most numerous in the material. It is natural that the “retrieval figures” are going to change, when the digital book databases grow and the methods of search ameliorate, but still they give us some clues of the popularity of the expressions. The discussion on the love of reading exploded in the major European language areas at the beginning of the 19th century. The reasons must be sought in the future studies. There may have been a general trend, when the more or less separate debates in various countries became into contact with each other and influenced each other. By the end of the 18th century, the discussion on reading in western and northern Europe had attained a sort of uniformity.



Graph 10. Occurrences of different phrases denoting reading behaviour in the French, English and German-language literature published in 1500-1830 (source of data: Google Books).

We have seen that a preliminary statistical analysis shows some promising results. This is, however, only the first step. The books have been counted, now they have to be read. Some qualitative themes spring up from the material already at a superficial glance. Reading in the lives of women and children has been treated often in the reading historical literature, but the concept of love of reading may open new perspectives on the gender issues. One thing that soon becomes clear in the discussion is that love of reading can only be awakened or inspired at a suitable age or in propitious circumstances, but it cannot be imposed, and thus it presupposes a heightened degree of individuality. In many texts since Rousseau's famous remark on the *goût de lecture* of the people of Geneva, love of reading appears as a measure of a nation's, region's or group's level of education and civility. Already during the 18th century, Protestantism was suggested as an explanation for the widespread love of reading in the northern parts of Europe. In France, a serious discussion on the potential existence of the love of reading in the uneducated rural population began during the

Revolution, when abbé Grégoire launched his survey on the cultural habits of peasants. One of the questions in his survey was, whether the peasants possessed *un goût de lecture* [5; 6; see also 20]. Did this type of questions become visible in the European discourse in general towards the end of the 18th century? Was it possible and desirable to awaken the love of reading in the lower, uneducated classes?

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