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## Multilingual Robinson: Imagining Modern Communities for Middle-Class Children

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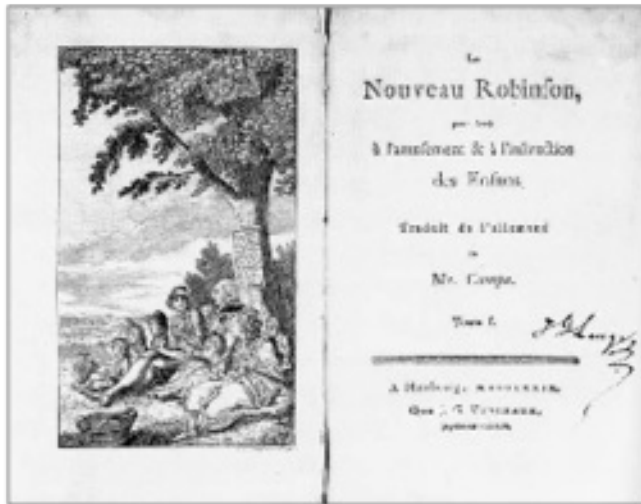
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ARTICLE

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### Abstract

Drawing on sociocultural approaches to language learning, this article investigates how the new linguistic practices of the European Enlightenment shaped the identity of the emerging middle-class. Using the example of Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Robinson the Younger* (1779), I will show how this archetypal tale of the self-made man helped imagine new communities and linguistic identities for German middle-class children at the beginning of the modern era.



*Drawing on sociocultural approaches to language learning, this article investigates how the new linguistic practices of the European Enlightenment shaped the identity of the emerging middle-class. Using the example of Joachim Heinrich Campe's Robinson the Younger (1779), I will show how this archetypal tale of the self-made man helped imagine new communities and linguistic identities for German middle-class children at the beginning of the modern era.*

In 2008, both Longman and the Icon Group International republished one of the great classics of world literature: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Longman adapted it to fit into the Penguin Readers series, written by "specialist ELT [English language teaching] authors" who carefully adapt the original's "language, vocabulary, style, and content" to suit the learners' level, be they English foreign-language students or intermediate-level first-language readers. The Icon Group rendered Defoe's novel in an early twentieth-century US-American adaptation with a running English-to-Chinese thesaurus at the bottom of each page. As the subtitle specifies, this "Webster's Chinese Simplified Thesaurus Edition" was designed for "ESL, EFL, ELP, TOEFL®, TOEIC® and AP® test preparation."<sup>2</sup> A downloadable e-document in PDF-format, this edition of *Robinson* offers readers internationally standardized access to the languages of the two superpowers of the twenty-first century.

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# Multilingual Robinson: Imagining Modern Communities for Middle-Class Children

by NIKOLA VON MERVELDT



Nikola von Merveldt is associate professor of German Studies at the Department of Modern Languages of the Université de Montréal, Canada. Her main areas of research are historical children's literature and non-fiction. She is a founding member of the interdisciplinary research group on book history, *Interacting with Print: Cultural Practices of Intermediality (1700-1900)* (<http://interactingwithprint.org/>), and associate fellow of the International Youth Library in Munich.



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