

Stamps in Love

The Secret Language of Stamps on Pre-WWI Postcards

As the postcard craze spread across the world in the early 1900s, numerous innovative ideas emerged about the design and use of postcards. One of these ideas was to use the stamps on the cards for sending secret messages, and to print postcards with “keys” to such messages. These “stamp language” or “secret of stamps” cards show postage stamps in different positions associated with different messages, usually about love and affection. One can also find postcards with stamps affixed in peculiar positions, suggesting that they have been used for sending such secret messages.

This three-frame exhibit shows early stamp language cards from a range of European countries in order to document the variety of such cards that were in use before WWI. The structure is thematic, with the cards divided into two main groups – multiple stamp cards and single stamp cards. Multiple stamp cards show several stamps in different positions. Single stamp cards were printed in series, in which each card showed only one stamp and its associated message. The exhibit ends with a few examples of cards showing the use of secret (or not so secret) languages.

For most cards, information is provided (if available) on publisher, stamps and date. As messages were supposed to be secret, the keys were often sent under cover and therefore lack postmarks and dates. In these cases – and when cards are unused – the stamps printed on the cards and the layout of the address side (divided vs. undivided) may help to decide approximate date. For single-stamp cards, translations of the messages are often provided, in order to give a sense of their romantic nature.

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The message on this card is a short poem:
*The stamp placed like this
reveals very tender feelings
that will never fade*

The literature on stamp language postcards does not seem to include any comprehensive international study. Yet there are several useful articles with more limited scope, for example:

Baldus, W. 2016. Der Briefmarken-Code und andere Heimlichkeiten. *Philatelie*, no. 472-473.
Heijtz, G. 1989. Vykort med frimärksspråket. *Skillingstrycket*, no. 4.
Spanke, W. 2003. Die Briefmarken-Sprache. Über 100 Jahre alt – Wer kennt sie heute noch? *Philatelie und Postgeschichte*, no. 314-315.
Speirs, D. 2006. Stamp position on covers: From romance to political protest. *Postal History Journal*, no. 133.

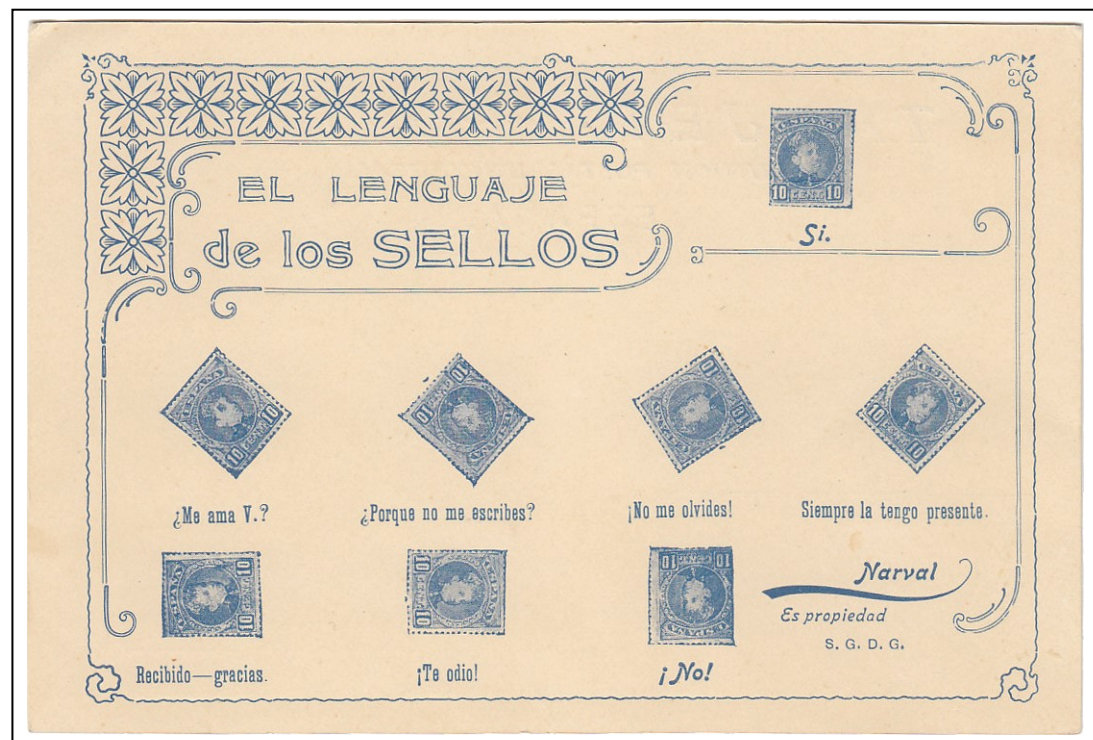


French single stamp card
Publisher: Saint-Just, Paris (AS)
Stamp: 10 centimes Sower
(semeuse) type of 1906
Divided back, used 1910

Swiss multiple stamp card
Publisher: H. Guggenheim & Co., Zürich
Stamps from the Cross and Numeral
and Standing Helvetia issues (1882-1907)
Divided back, unused

“The Language of European Stamps”, text in Dutch
Publisher: Marco Marcovici, Brussels
Stamps from twelve different European countries
Undivided back, unused





Publisher: Narval

Stamps: 10 centimos King Alfonso XIII (1901), originally in red colour

Undivided back, unused

Some countries did not allow reproductions of stamps on postcards, as they were afraid that such stamps would be cut out and used to pay postage. Showing cancelled stamps (below) may have been a way to circumvent such rules.

Unknown publisher

Stamps: 3 kopek Imperial Arms (1889)

Divided back, unused



Just like many other postcard-related innovations in the early 1900s, the idea to use stamps in different positions for sending secret messages quickly spread to many different countries. This page shows keys to stamp languages from Spain, Russia, Finland, Austria and Norway.



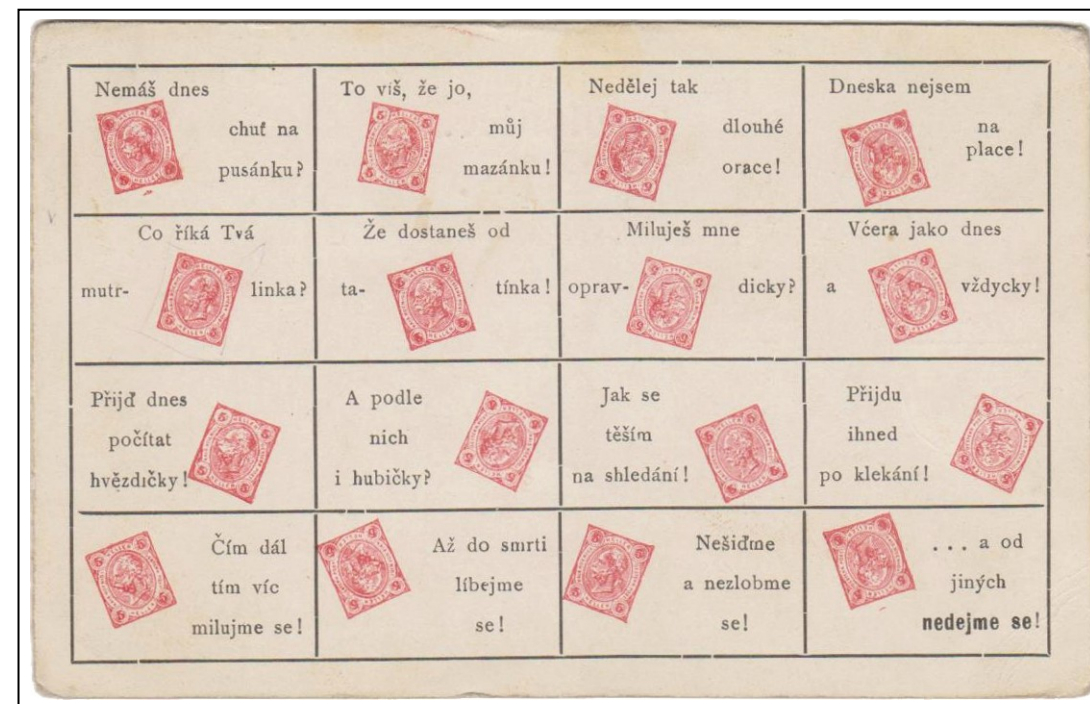
Publisher: O. Y. Launis A. B., Helsinki

Stamps: 10 penni Imperial Arms

(Russian type) of 1901

Divided back, sent under cover, no date

In 1901, the previous Finnish stamps with the Finnish arms were forbidden by the Russian authorities in their attempts to "russify" Finland.



Publisher: O. K. P.

Stamps: Austrian 5 heller Franz Josef I (1899),

although the real colour of this stamp was green

Undivided back, unused

Several different languages were used in the Austrian empire.

The messages on the card above are in Czech.

Publisher: Peter Alstrup, Kristiania

Stamps from the Posthorn issue in use in 1907

Undivided back, unused





Publisher: Le Moine & Malmeström, Gothenburg
Top and middle card: undivided back, unused
Bottom card: Divided back, unused

In Sweden, one specific “language of stamps” became so well established that different publishers used more or less the same key. Here are six different versions of this key, from two different publishers.

Stamps:

The cards to the left show stamps from the King Oscar II copperplate recess issue (1891-1896) and the Bicoloured Numeral type issues (1892).
The cards to the right also include the 1 krona stamp, issued in January 1900.

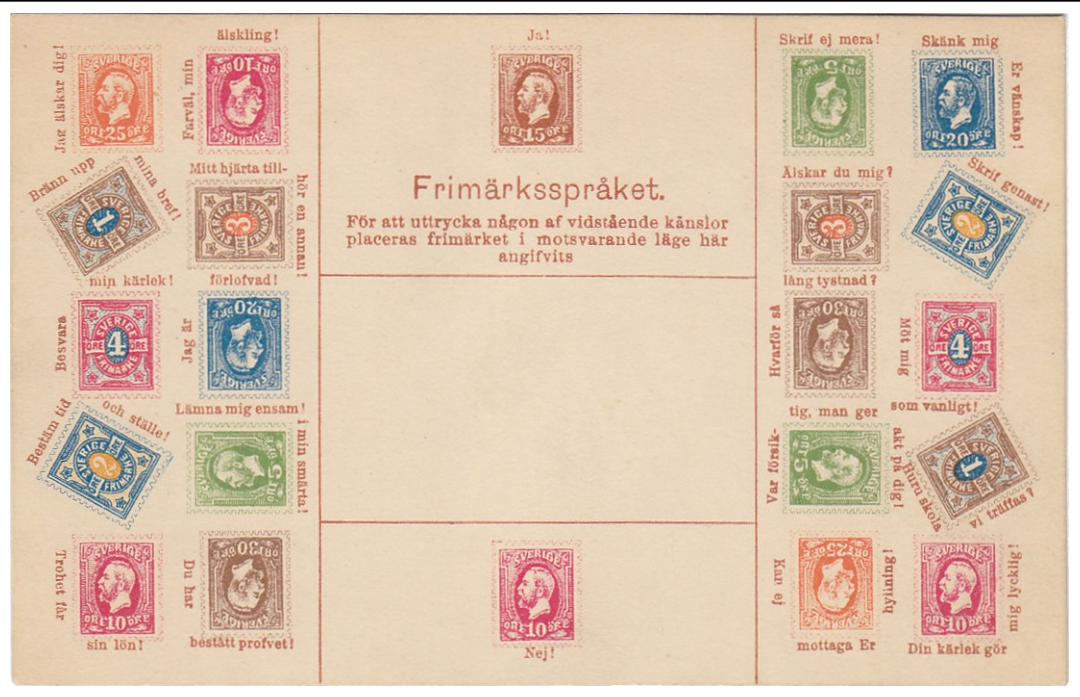


Publisher: Solléns förlag, Stockholm
All three cards with undivided backs
Top card unused, middle card used 1902, bottom card used, no date
Three, four and five lines of text on top



The cards show many different stamps, but the three cards to the right explain that it did not matter what stamp the sender used. What mattered was its position.

On the card to the left, the Oscar II stamps are retouched. Göran Heijtz, in an article about Swedish “stamp language” postcards, suggests that this may have been done after the death of king Oscar II (1907), and that the intention was to make the portrait resemble the new king, Gustaf V. If that was the case, the attempt was highly unsuccessful! Another possible reason is that the Swedish Post Office, in 1905, issued a circular that prohibited realistic pictures of stamps on postcards.



Different Publishers, Same Language • Sweden (and Norway)



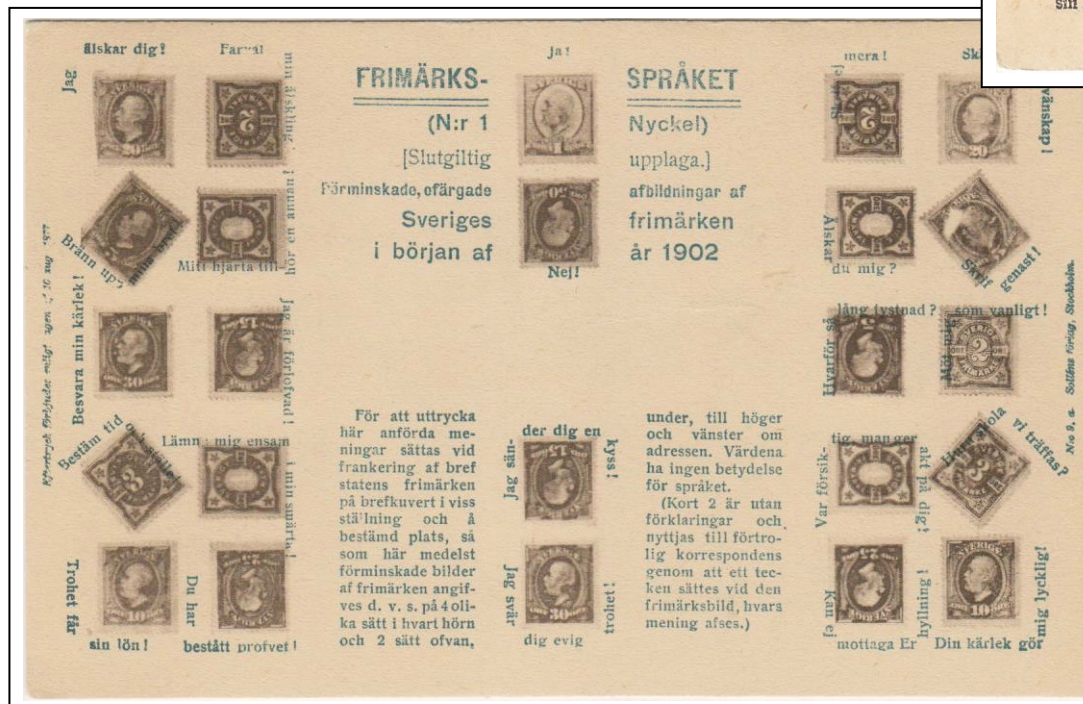
Publisher: Solléns förlag, Stockholm

Undivided back, unused (or possibly sent under cover, no date)

Stamps from the King Oscar II copperplate recess (1891-1900) and Bicoloured Numeral type issues (1892)

Publisher: Solléns förlag/Stockholms Litografiska

Divided back, unused



The cards from Le Moine & Malmeström and Solléns were very popular in the early 1900s. In an article about Swedish “stamp language” cards, Göran Heijtz has identified as many as 15 different versions of the card with the Oscar II stamps.

The left and middle cards on this page are all marked *slutgiltig upplaga* (final edition). Yet even the final edition came in three different variants: with red, black and blue text!

To the right are two other versions, with different sets of stamps.



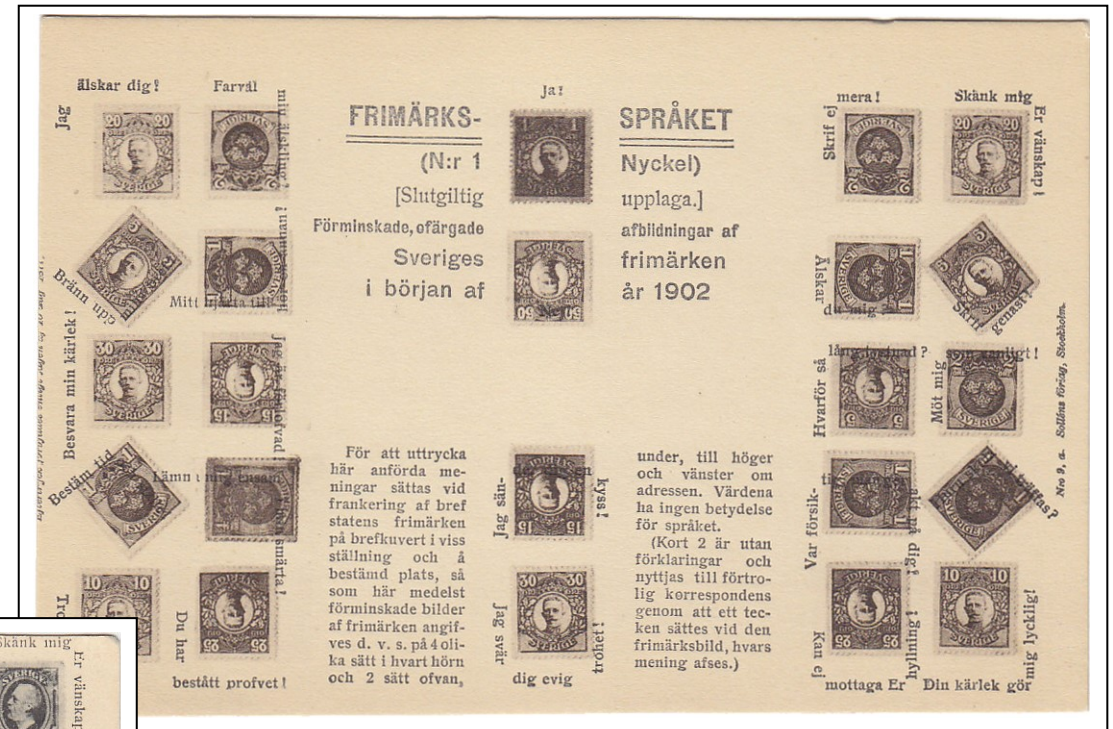
Publisher: Solléns förlag, Stockholm

Undivided back, unused

This is the most widely used version of the card.

Not only is the design of this Norwegian card identical with the Swedish ones. All the text – headings, messages and instructions – is directly translated from Swedish to Norwegian.

The Swedish-Norwegian union was dissolved in 1905, but even before the dissolution Norway had its own postal administration and stamps.



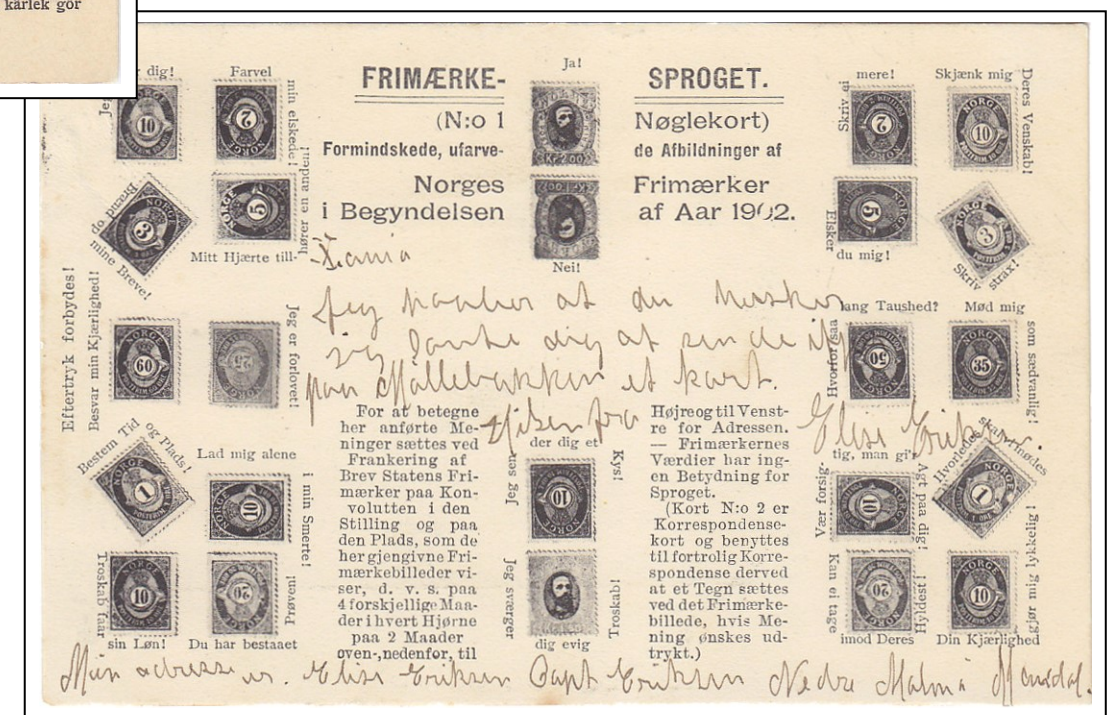
Publisher: Solléns förlag, Stockholm

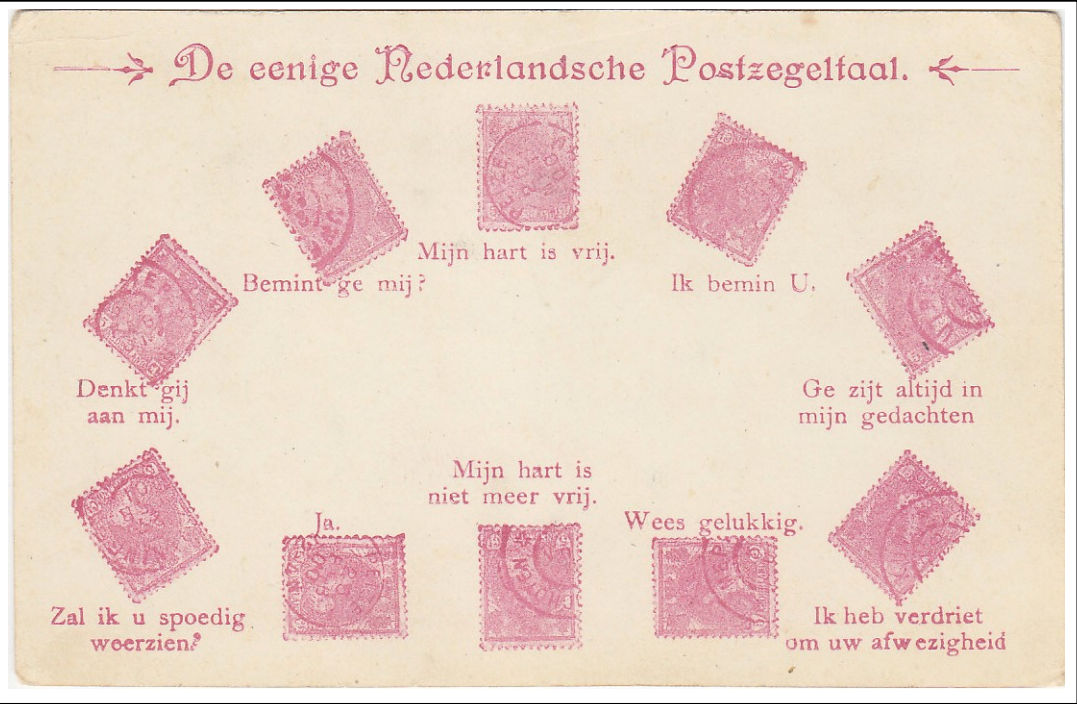
Divided back, unused

Above: Stamps with King Gustaf V and the Small National Coat-of-Arms were issued from 1910 onwards. But when Solléns printed cards with the new stamps, they forgot to change the text – “The stamps of Sweden in the beginning of the year 1902”!

Below: Card from an unknown publisher with the same design as the Swedish cards, but with Norwegian stamps from the Posthorn (1893) and King Oscar II (1878) issues

Undivided back, postally used, no date

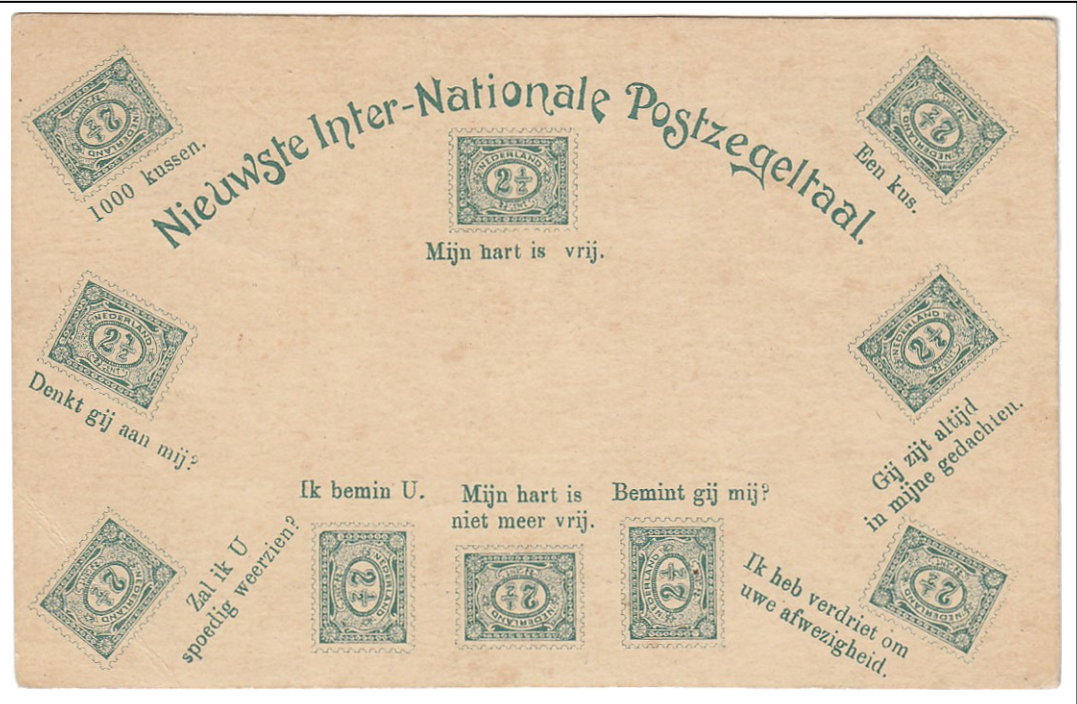




Unknown publisher
Stamps: 5 cent Queen Wilhelmina (1899)
Undivided back, unused

These cards show the competition between different languages.
The card above is *The only Dutch Stamp Language*,
the card to the right is the *New Stamp Language*,
and the card below is the *Newest Inter-National Stamp Language*.

Unknown publisher
Stamps: 2½ cent Figure in White Circle (1899)
Undivided back, unused



In many larger countries, several competing or complementary stamp languages were in use.
One reason for this was the competition between postcard publishers. But another reason probably had to do with the sending of secret messages. If one single key became predominant – and well-known – messages were not so secret anymore. It therefore made sense to change the keys from time to time.



Publisher: J. H. Schaevers, Amsterdam
Stamps from the Figure in White Circle and Queen Wilhelmina issues (1899)
Undivided back, postally used 1910

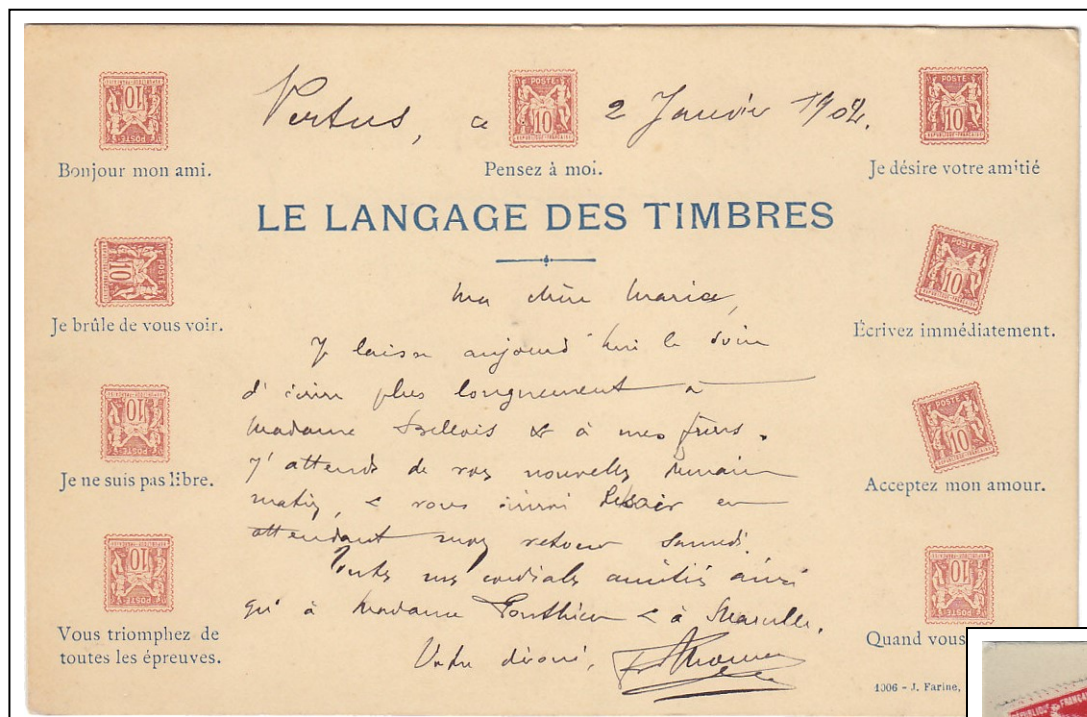


Unknown publisher
Stamps: 2½ cent Figure in White Circle (1899)
Divided back, unused

The two cards on the bottom of the page agree that a 2½ cent stamp placed in the indicated position in the top left corner of a card sends 1000 kisses. On the card above, the same stamp says *I hope for the future*.

Unknown publisher
Stamps from the Figure in White Circle and Queen Wilhelmina issues (1899)
Divided back, sent under cover, no date





Publisher: J. Farine, Locle

Stamps: 10 centimes Sage/Peace and Commerce (1876-1898)

The original colour of the stamp, except for the very first year it was printed, was black

Undivided back, postally used 1902

Unknown publisher

Stamps: 10 centimes Sower (1907)

The original colour of the stamp was red

Divided back, sent under cover, dated 1911



France was probably the country with the largest number of different stamp language postcards in the pre-WWI period.

Numerous publishers produced various types of cards with many different languages. In France, the secret messages conveyed by oddly placed stamps were indeed secret. There was no way for a curious postman or neighbour to know which specific language the correspondents were using!



Publisher: Ernest Le Deley (E.L.D.), Paris

Stamps: 10 centimes Sower (1907)

Divided back, postally used 1909

This “The Stamps and Their Secrets” card seems to have been very popular. Several versions exist, with the same messages but different loving couples depicted in the middle of the card.



Publisher: Vanderauwera & Cie, Brussels

Stamps from the Merson issue (1900)

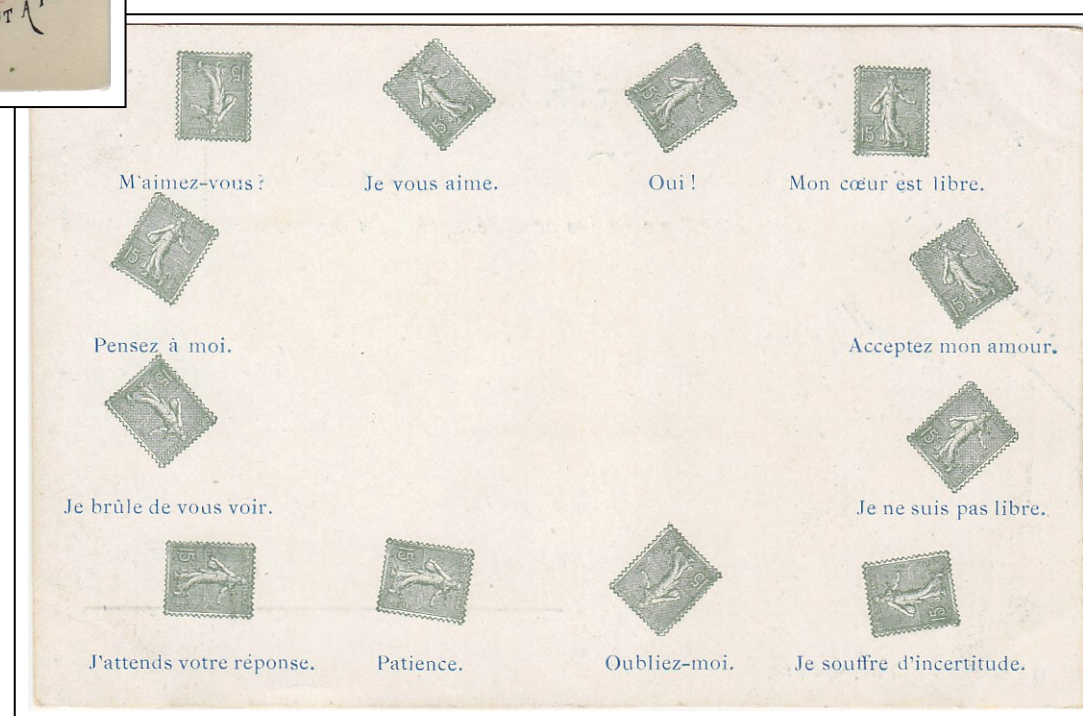
Undivided back, sent under cover, dated 1902

Most secret messages were about love and affection. The above card, on the contrary, asks the question *Why don't you love me?* and suggests a number of replies – *My heart is broken, My heart belongs to another, I can't stand mothers-in-law*, and so forth.

Publisher: Timothée Jacot, Neuchâtel

Stamps: 15 centimes Sower (1903)

Undivided back, unused





Publisher: Victor Gisquière, Brussels
Stamps: 5 centimes Small State Arms (1893) and
10 centimes King Leopold II “fine beard” (1893-1900)
Undivided back, postally used 1901

The *Language of Stamps in 1901* (above) and *The New Language of the Stamp* (below) are from the same publisher. Changing the key may have been a way to keep the language secret.

Publisher: V. G. (Victor Gisquière), Brussels
Stamps: 10 centimes King Leopold II “fine beard” (1893-1900)
Undivided back, postally used 1905



Unknown publisher
Stamps: 5 centimes Small State Arms (1893),
10 and 20 centimes King Leopold II
“coarse beard” (1905)
Undivided back, unused

In Belgium, too, there were a number of competing “stamp languages”. Postcards with several different designs and stamps of different denominations were in use.

This page shows a few examples.



Unknown publisher
Stamps: 5 centimes Small State Arms (1893),
10 and 20 centimes King Leopold II
“coarse beard” (1905)
Undivided back, unused

The two cards to the left and the card to the right show stamps with the peculiar Belgian “Do not deliver on Sunday” tab. Correspondents who wanted their mail delivered on a Sunday had to tear off the tab before posting the letter or postcard!

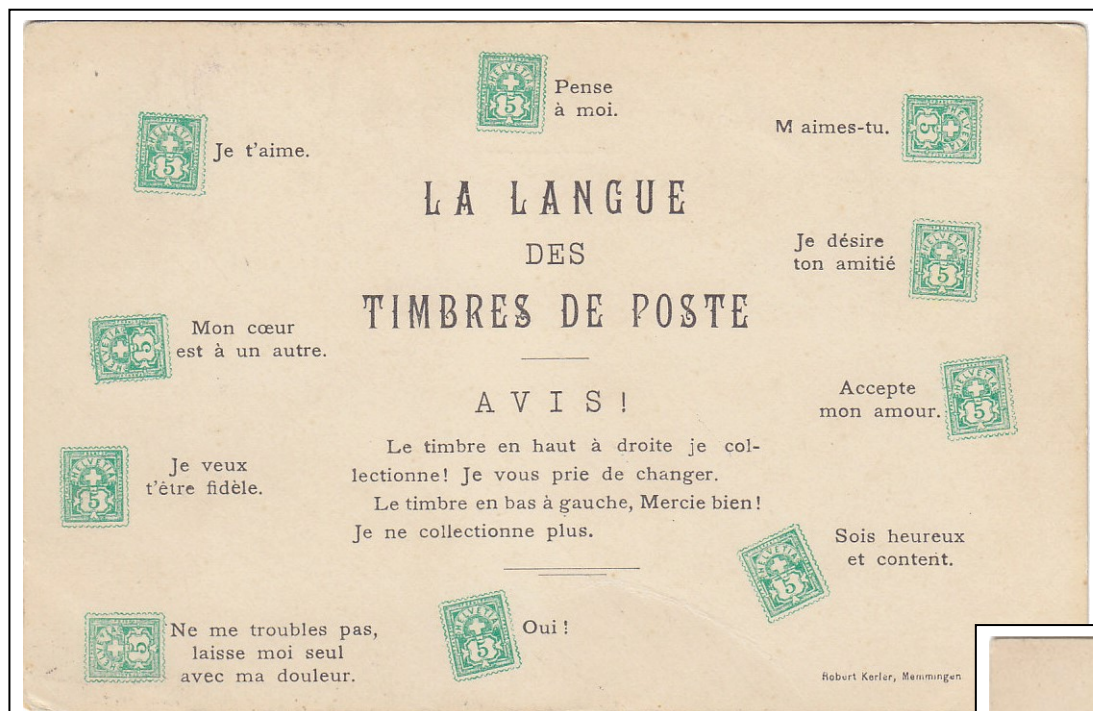


Publisher: Vanderauwera & Cie., Brussels
Stamps: 10 centimes King Leopold II “fine beard” (1893-1900)
Undivided back, unused

Most Belgian stamp language cards had text in French only. The card to the left is an exception, with all text being written in both French and Flemish.

Publisher: H. Guggenheim & Co., Zürich
Stamps from the King Leopold II “coarse beard” issue (1905)
and the Small State Arms issue (1893)
Divided back, unused





Undivided back, postally used 1900

Publisher: Robert Kerler,
Memmingen, Bavaria
(upper left and lower left card)

Undivided back, sent under cover, no date



In multilingual Switzerland, the same stamp could speak more than one language. To the left and right are French and German versions of the same sets of messages. In the middle is a trilingual card, where the stamps speak German, French and Italian – all at the same time!

Stamps (all cards on this page):
5 centimes Cross and Numeral type
(1899/1906)



Publisher: Carl Künzli-Tobler,
Zürich, Switzerland (CKT)
Divided back, unused

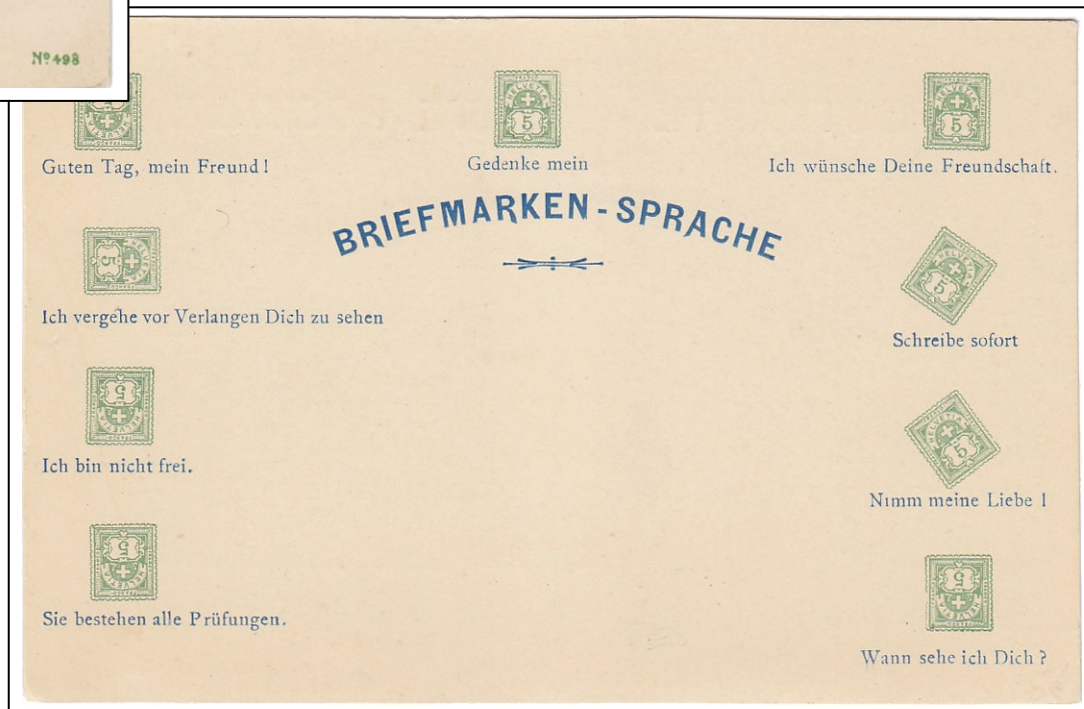
A printed instruction on the card above says that personal correspondence on the address side was only allowed if the card was sent within Switzerland, to France or to Italy. This suggests that the card was printed in 1904 or (not much) later.



Undivided back, unused

Publisher: J. Farine,
Le Locle, Switzerland
(upper right and lower right card)

Undivided back, unused

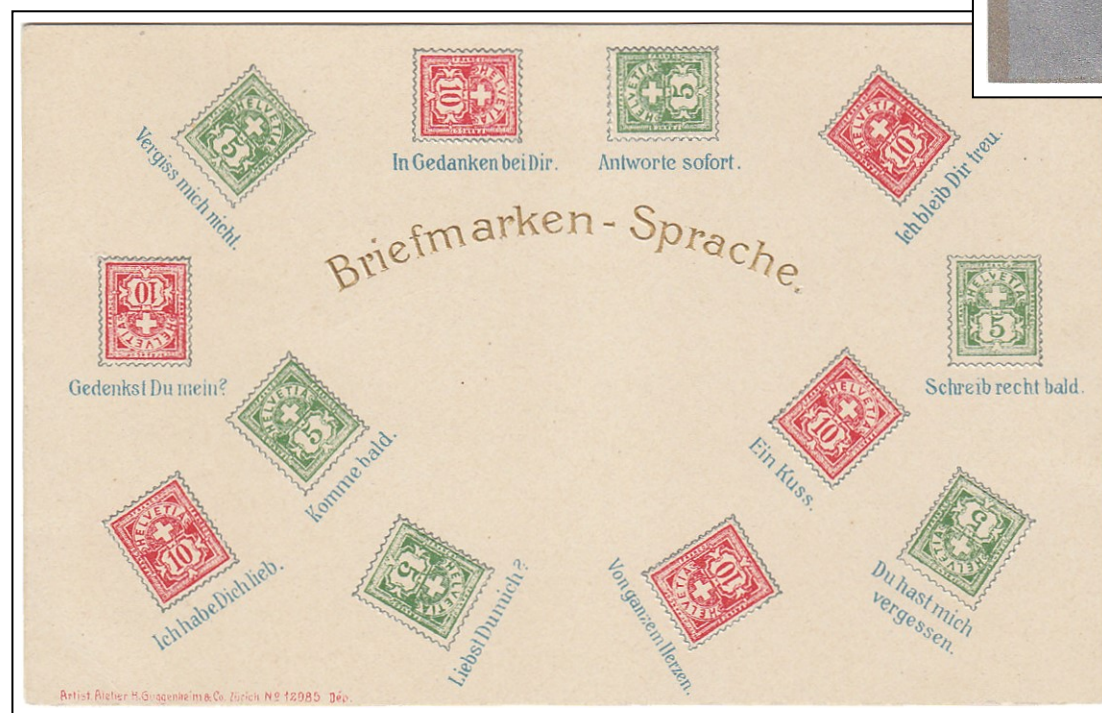




Above and below:
 Publisher: H. Guggenheim & Co., Zürich
 Stamps: Switzerland, 5 and 10 centimes Cross and Numeral type (1899/1882-1906)
 Divided back, unused

The card above with text in French (serial number 12086), the card below with text in German (serial number 12085)

Somewhat surprisingly, the French and German messages are completely different. For example, *I love you* in the French version corresponds to *You have forgotten me* in the German version!



The early postcard craze was an international phenomenon. Various innovations rapidly spread from one country to another and the secret language of stamps was no exception.

The layout of the cards shown here appeared around 1910 all over Europe. Its origin seems to have been H. Guggenheim & Co. in Zürich, but cards with red and green stamps in these positions were soon produced by publishers in many different countries.



Publisher: Alfred Stiebel & Co., London
 Stamps: UK, ½d and 1d King George V (1911)
 Divided back, unused

In most countries, green stamps represented the inland postcard rate and red stamps the foreign postcard rate. That was the case for all countries represented on this page except for France, where green 5 centimes stamps represented the inland and foreign printed matter rate and red 10 centimes stamps were for the inland and foreign postcard rate.



Publisher: H. Guggenheim & Co., Zürich
 Stamps: France, 5 and 10 centimes Sower type (1907)
 Divided back, unused

There were three main versions of these cards:
 1) no national arms and plain white background
 2) national arms, golden border, white background
 3) national arms, golden border, grey/silver background

Publisher: V. Müllers Kunstforlag (Copenhagen)
 Stamps: Denmark, 5 and 10 øre King Frederik VIII (1907)





Publisher: B. B. & O. L. (Bruno Bürger & Otilie, Leipzig)
 Stamps: Germany, 5 and 10 pfennig Germania (1902)
 Divided back, unused

These two cards (above and below) with German stamps are from different publishers and the messages associated with the different stamp positions are also completely different.

Publisher: H. Guggenheim & Co., Zürich
 Stamps from the Germania Deutsches Reich issues (1902-1904)
 Divided back, unused



The design with red and green stamps in this formation existed in several different countries. The position and orientation of the stamps was the same on almost all cards (the bottom right card here is an exception). However, the messages associated with the stamps differed between countries and even within countries. In spite of the standardized design, there was not one unified international language of stamps.



Publisher: Alfred Stiebel & Co., London
 Stamps: Red and green fantasy stamps
 Divided back, postally used 1913

In addition to the cards with red and green stamps, cards with the same design but several different stamps existed in a few countries (see also page 1).

This Swedish card has a minor "error". The two red stamps to the left have different orientations than on the other cards.



Publisher: H G & Co Z (H. Guggenheim & Co., Zürich)
 Stamps: Sweden, 5 and 10 öre King Oscar II (1891)
 Divided back, unused

Two cards (above and below) with Swedish stamps, from different publishers and with different messages.

Publisher: Jolin & Wilkenson, Gothenburg
 Stamps: Sweden, 5 and 10 öre King Gustaf V in medallion (1910)
 Divided back, unused





Undivided back, postally used 1901

Unknown publisher

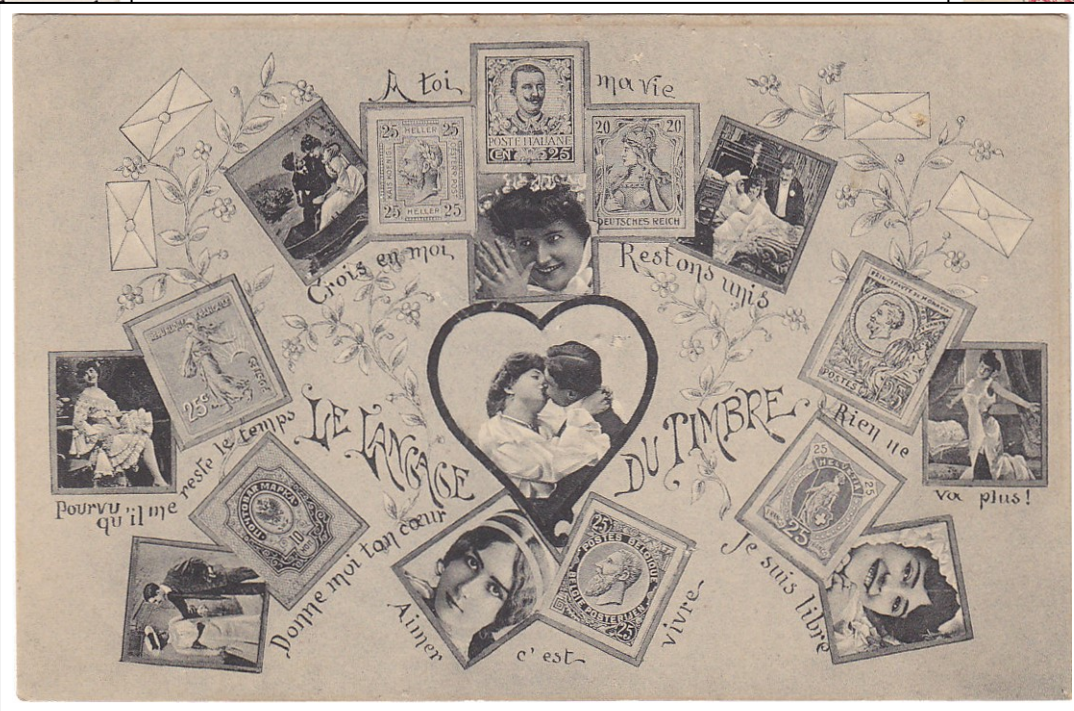
Stamps from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Russia, Switzerland and the United States, in use around 1900

The card above has German text. The card below has French text – and the colours of the British and Danish stamps mixed up!

Undivided back, unused



There were also multinational stamp languages, with stamps from several different countries. The cards to the left and below could be used as keys for secret messages. The two cards to the right, on the contrary, were intended for open messages. An instruction on these two cards tells the sender to “underline” the appropriate message.



Unknown publisher
Stamps from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Monaco, Russia and Switzerland, in use in the early 1900s
Divided back, unused

Each stamp is combined with a romantic picture. These seem mostly to show anonymous persons, but the Belgian stamp depicting King Leopold is accompanied by his favourite dancer Cléo de Mérode.

The cards to the left illustrate the UPU rules about the colour of stamps: Green for international printed matter rate, red for postcard rate and blue for letter rate.



Divided back, unused

Publisher: Marco Marcovici, Brussels (M. M. / Br.)

Each card (above and below) shows stamps from twelve different European countries, most of them in use in the early 1900s

The cards are not quite as cosmopolitan as they pretend to be. Several postmarks are misspelled – Lisabon instead of Lisboa, Copen(hague?) instead of K benhavn, and so forth.

Divided back, postally used 1905





Divided back, unused

This was obviously a popular card, even though it does not seem very useful for secret communication. It seems to be inspired by the Marcovici cards on the previous page, but without the explicit instruction to “underline” the appropriate message.

Divided back, unused



Divided back, unused

The card above differs from the other four in two respects.

- 1) To the bottom left is a 10 centimes Belgian stamp instead of the 1 centime stamp of Monaco.
- 2) Each stamp has a hand-drawn postmark from the country's national capital.

In spite of these differences, the card has the same serial number as the two other cards with French text.



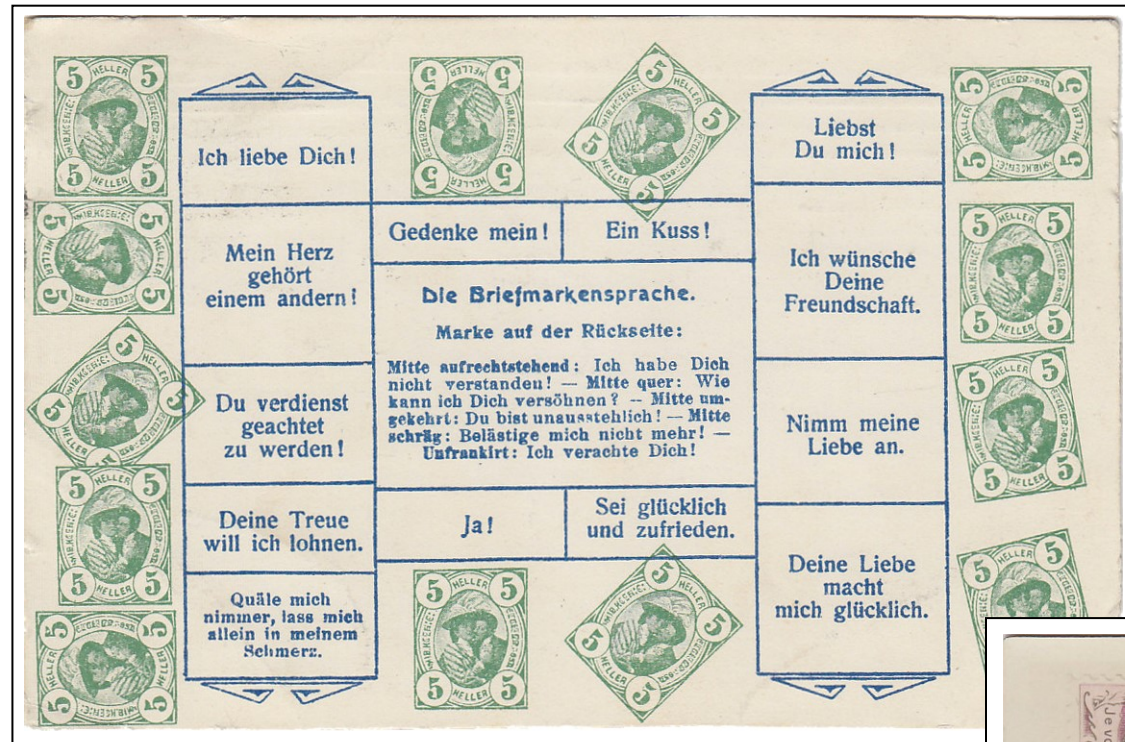
Divided back, unused

The card came in several different printings, with white or grey/silver background, and in both German (left) and French (middle and right). The messages are the same in both languages.

Both cards with German text have serial number 14026 and all three cards with French text has serial number 14024.

Divided back, postally used 1912





Unknown publisher

Stamp: 5 heller Franz Joseph I of Austria (1906), with the head of the emperor replaced with a loving couple
Divided back, postally used 1911

In addition to the messages associated with the 13 fantasy stamps, the text in the middle of the card above describes four messages represented by stamps affixed on the “back”, probably signifying the back of a letter or the image side of a postcard. Also, a card *without* stamp says, according to this text, *I despise you!*

Secret stamp languages were sometimes illustrated by various kinds of fantasy stamps rather than by pictures of existing stamps. In many cases, this probably just reflected the inventiveness of postcard publishers. Yet an additional reason may have been that the postal authorities of some countries did not allow reproductions of existing stamps on postcards.



Unknown publisher

Stamp: A hand-drawn stamp with a burning heart!
Undivided back, unused

Unlike most stamp language postcards, the card above shows not only stamps but entire envelopes with the stamps affixed in different places and orientations.

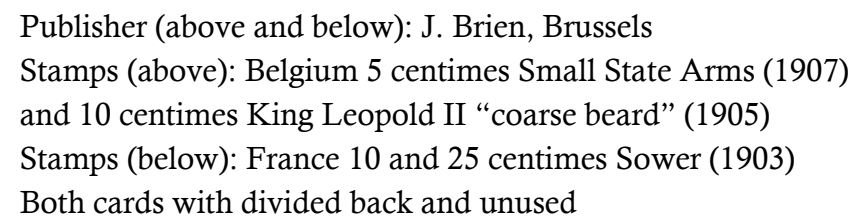


Publisher (left, right and above): Croissant, Paris
Stamps: Fantasy stamps with portraits of elegant women
All three cards with divided back and postally used,
left and right sent under cover, no date;
the card above sent in 1911

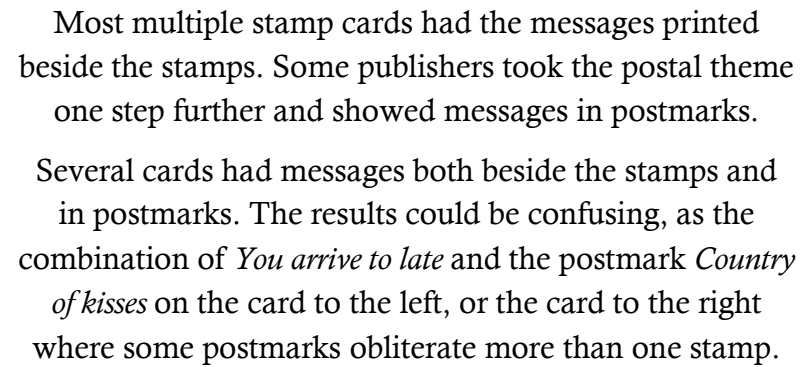
These cards all have the same messages, but different female portraits. For each fantasy stamp there is both a message in the stamp (below the portrait) – *I love you... A little, A lot, Passionately, Not at all* – and a message printed beside the stamp.

The combinations of messages are sometimes confusing, for example *I love you a little / I can no longer live without your love.*





These cards combine messages printed beside the stamps and messages in the postmarks that obliterate the stamps – *United for life / Never-ending love, I only live for you / Country of love*, etc.



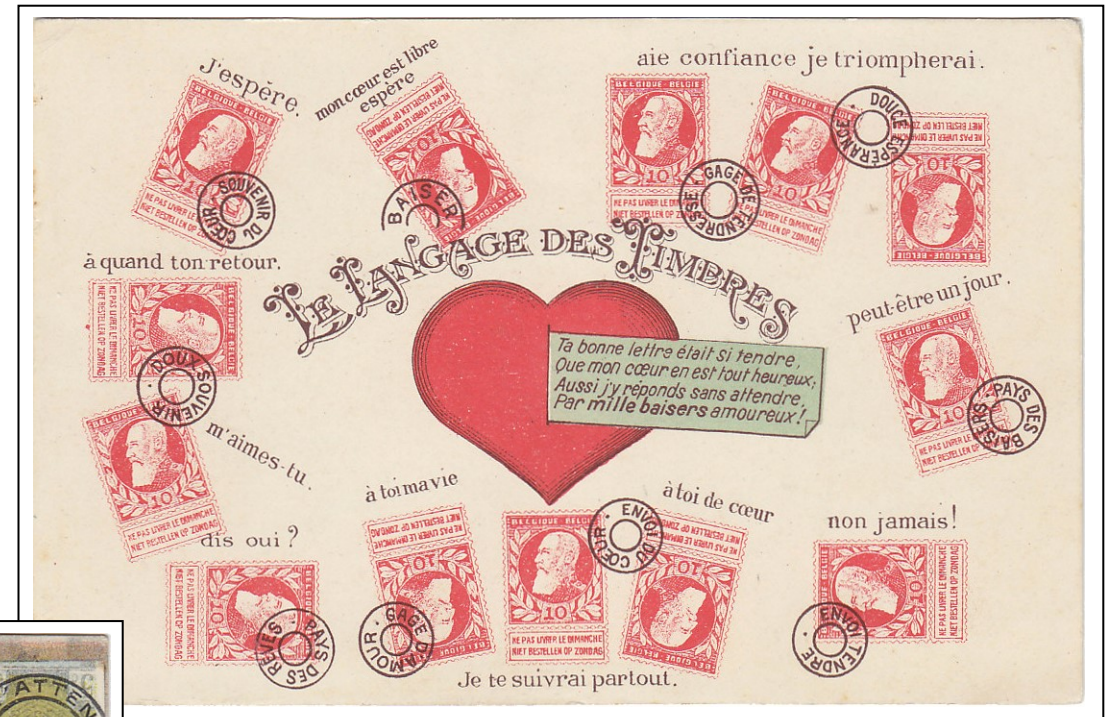
Below is a card where the postmarks alone convey the messages.



Unknown publisher
Stamps: 5 centimes Small State Arms (1893)
Divided back, postally used 1908

On this card, the messages are only shown in the postmarks that obliterate the stamps – *I love you, Are you thinking of me?, A thousand kisses*, and so forth.

The stamps are printed in five different colours/shades, none of them corresponding to the original green colour of the 5 centimes stamp (as shown on the upper left card).

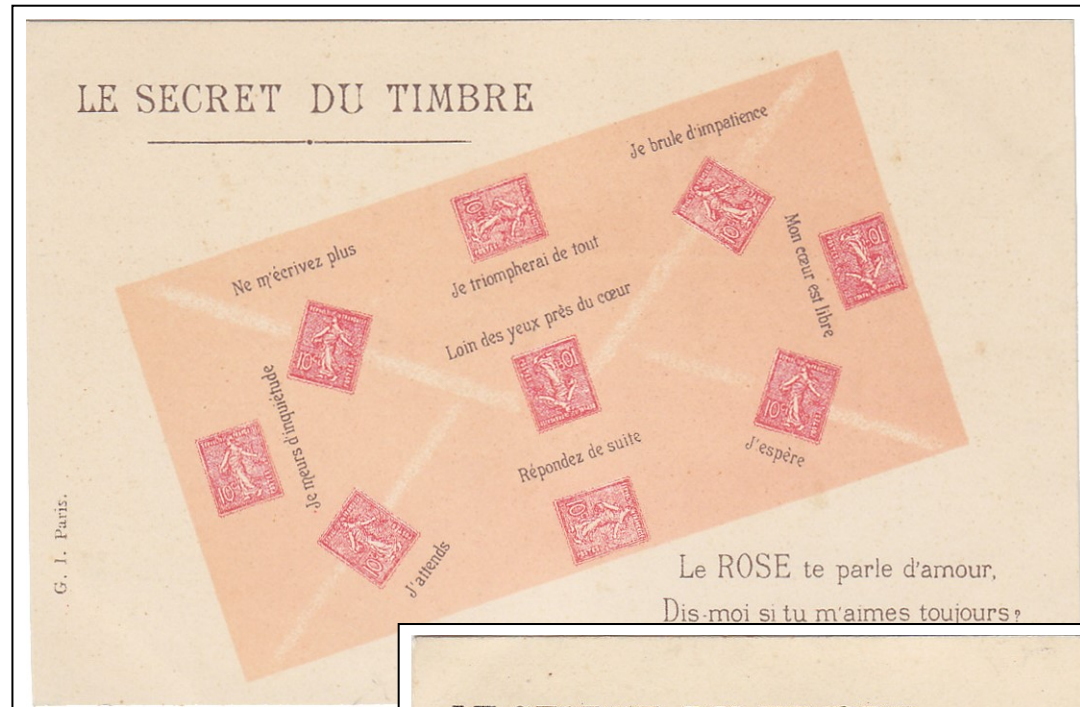


Publisher: Phototypie La Mouche, Braine-L'Alleud (Belgium)
Stamps: 10 centimes King Leopold II "coarse beard"
Divided back, unused

The card above was part of a series of three cards, all combining messages in postmarks with messages printed beside the stamps.

The card below is from the same series, sent by the publisher to a retailer (in 1906) with a printed advertisement and information about purchasing prices: *I have the pleasure of sending you an example of the most recently published stamp language...* The price was 30 francs per 1000 or 6 francs per 100 cards.



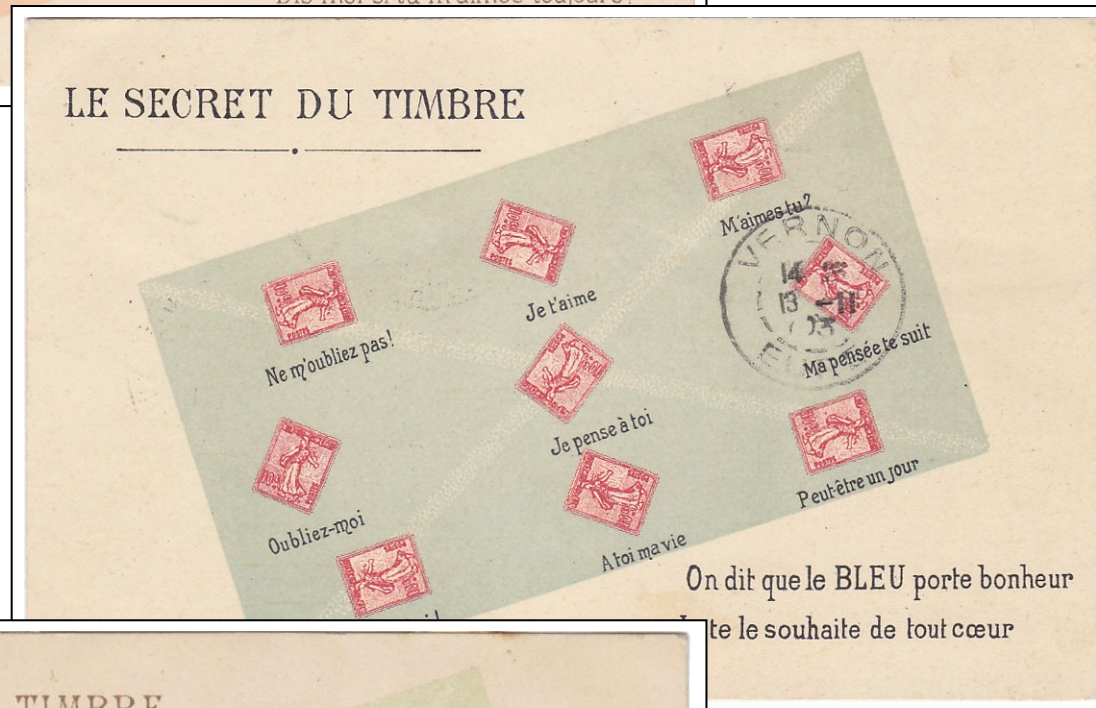


Publishers: G. I. Paris (top and bottom) and G. J. H. A. (right)

All three cards with undivided back

Top card unused

Right and bottom card used 1903 and 1904 respectively



In order to provide a broad range of possible messages – and to sell many postcards! – certain postcard publishers produced series of multiple stamp cards.

Here are two such series, both featuring the French 10 centimes Sower (*semeuse*) stamp of 1903 – *The Secret of the Stamp* and *The New Secret of the Stamp*.

The series to the left contains 27 different messages and the series to the right as many as 36.



Publisher: Jacques Brien, Brussels
Unused, undivided back

All three cards with undivided back

Top and bottom cards sent under cover (no date)

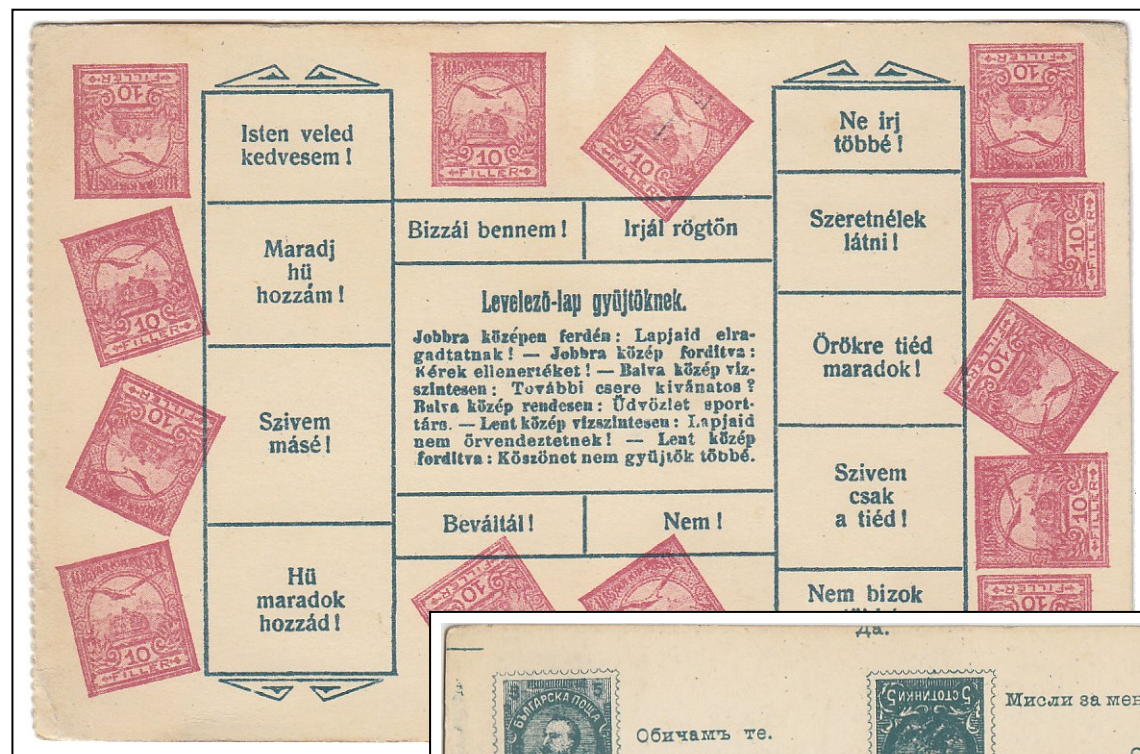
Left card unused



The *Secret of the Stamp* series to the left suggests that the stamps should be placed on the back of an envelope, which is somewhat unusual. The meaning of the different colours (red, blue and green) indicated on the three cards is unclear.



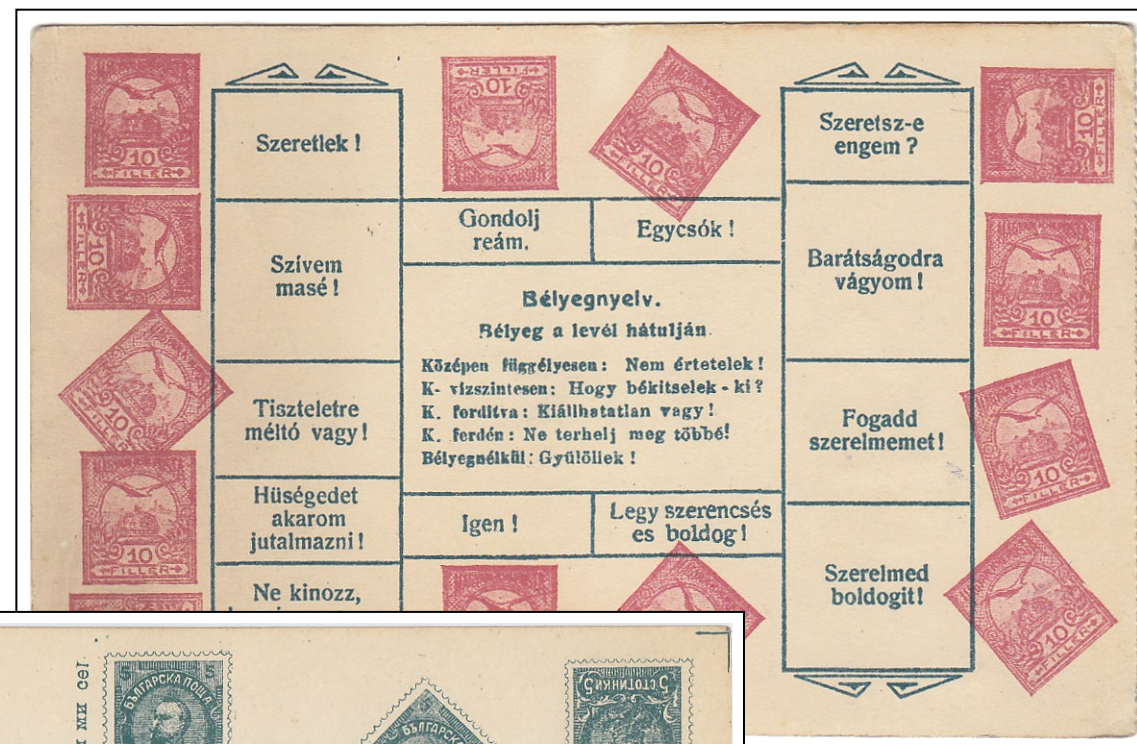
Multiple Stamps in Series • Various Countries



Series of stamp language cards also appeared in other countries than France. Here are examples from Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany.

Two cards with Hungarian stamps and text in Hungarian. Cards with the same stamps and messages also exist with text in German.

Unknown publisher
Stamps: 10 fillér Turul and Saint Stevens Crown (1900)
Divided back, unused



An unusual type of serial card – a double (panorama type) post-card from Bulgaria.



Publisher:
Rozova Dolina bookshop
Stamps: 5 stotinki
Prince Ferdinand I (1901)
Undivided back, unused



A series of two German cards with 10 pfennig stamps of the Eagle issue (1889-1900). The original stamps were red, not blue as the stamps printed on these cards.

Publisher: Fritz Schardt, Nuremberg
Undivided back, unused

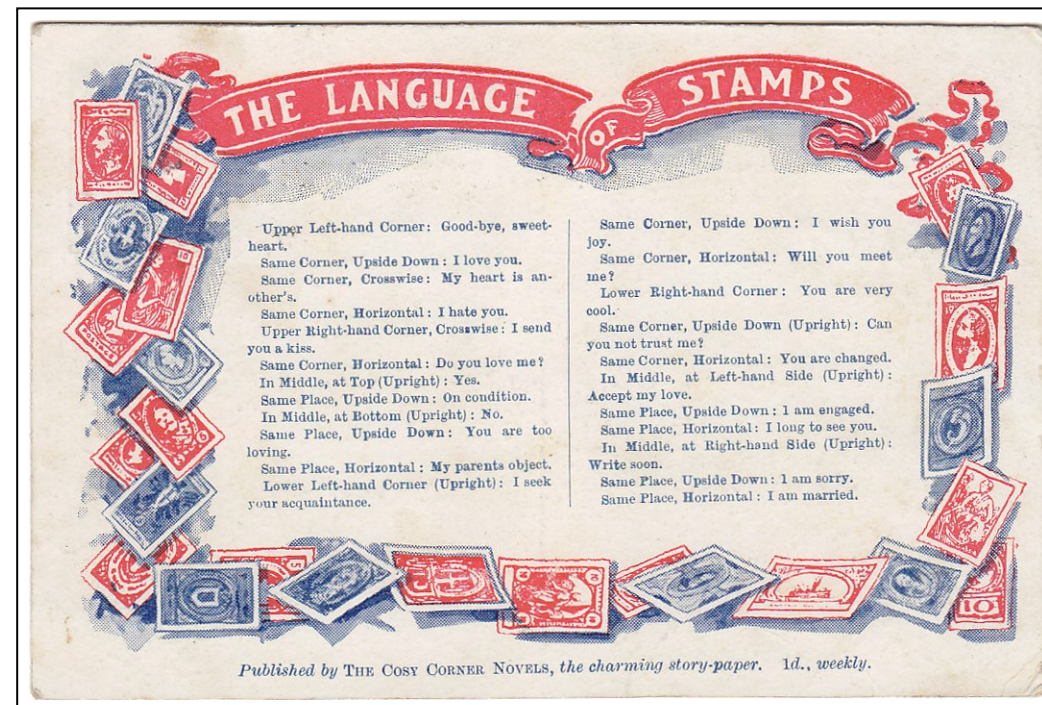
In addition to numerous messages for lovers, the card to the right also contains messages (within the frame) for postcard collectors.





Above: French trade card (forerunner of picture postcards), advertising *Cirage Nubian* shoe polish, with a secret language of stamps on the back
Stamp: 15 centimes Sage (1876-1900) showing orientations, text indicating positions

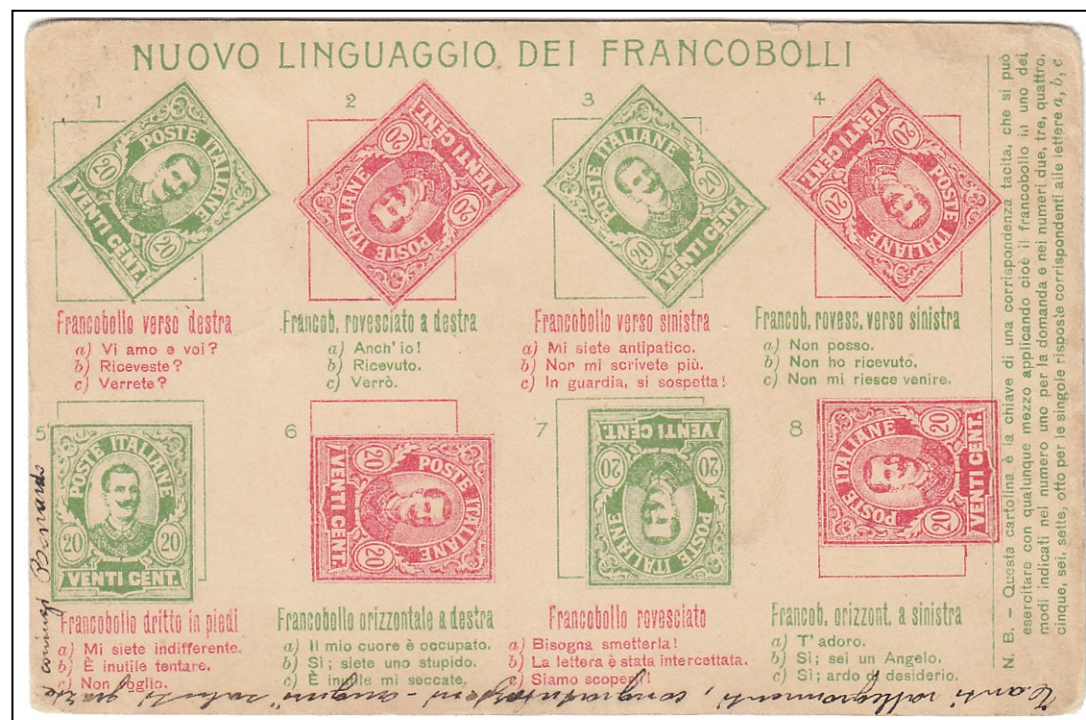
The standard version of stamp language cards was a key showing stamps in different positions (different places on the card) and with different orientations (upright, upside down, crosswise, etc.). But before this standard became established, different types of keys existed.



British postcard with "The Language of Stamps"
Entirely text-based descriptions of both positions and orientations of the stamps
Publisher: The Cosy Corner Novels ("the charming story-paper")!
Undivided back, used 1905



Above: British card with stamps showing orientations and text indicating positions
Stamp: 1d King Edward VII (1902-1911); undivided back, unused; unknown publisher



Two Italian cards with fantasy stamps showing portraits of King Victor Emmanuel III

These are more complicated versions of secret languages. Stamps in eight/six different orientations are shown, and each orientation may have three different meanings, indicated by letters a, b and c.

The idea was probably that the sender should affix a stamp with the appropriate orientation and then add a letter to clarify the meaning of the stamp.

Nothing is said about the position of the stamp.

Publisher: B. G., Bologna

Undivided back

Used, no date

Publisher:

D. Codanti, Milano

Undivided back, unused



Single Stamps, Single Ladies • Germany

In addition to cards with multiple stamps for different messages, there were also series of cards with single stamps – each with only one message. If these cards were to be used for secret communication, the sender had to start by sending the whole series of cards to the recipient. Not very convenient for the correspondents, but good business for postcard publishers!

Here are cards from two German single-stamp series.

Stamps: 10 pfennig Germania (1902)
The stamp's original colour is red.



Write soon!
Divided back,
postally used
1912



I love you endlessly!
Divided back,
postally used
1911

Publisher (upper series):
S. Blueh, Wien/Vienna
(S.B.W. above a Rotophot logo)



Publisher (lower series):
Rotophot/Heinrich Ross,
Berlin (RPH)



I'm longing for you!
Divided back,
sent under cover,
no date

When will we meet again?
Divided back,
postally used
1910



*When and where can
I talk to you?*
Divided back,
postally used
1910





I am waiting.

Publisher: Katz (J.K), Rueil



My heart is free.



If a couple wanted to use single-stamp cards as “keys” to a secret language, they first had to exchange the entire series of cards.

An alternative was to send a single card with an appropriate message. Not so secret, but considerably lower costs for postcards and postage!



Distant from my eyes, close to my heart.

Undivided back.

All five cards were sent on the same day, 5 July 1904, from the same sender in Paris to a lady in St. Georges sur Cher.



I am hoping.

Stamps: 15 centimes French Sower (*semeuse*) type, 1903

I will overcome everything.





Pansies / Memory of a sincere friendship.

Publisher: Fauvette (France)



Marguerite / I love you... a little... a lot...



Marguerite / I love you. Do you love me?

Stamps: 10 centimes King Leopold II “coarse beard” (1905)



Rose / Receive this pledge of my love.



Forget-me-not / Joy and happiness. Do not forget me.

All cards have divided backs.
The card in the centre was postally used
in 1911, the other four in 1912.

Single Stamps in Male and Female Series • France

To further extend the range of postcards for sale, this editor published two series of single-stamp cards with the same messages – but separate series for men and women!

Note that the letters that the persons are about to post have the stamps affixed in the same positions as the secret messages shown on the large envelopes to the right.



Do not forget me.



See you soon.



My life is yours.



Publisher: Ernest Le Delay, Paris (E.L.D.)

Stamps: 10 centimes Sower (semeuse) type of 1907

All cards with divided back; one unused, five sent under cover

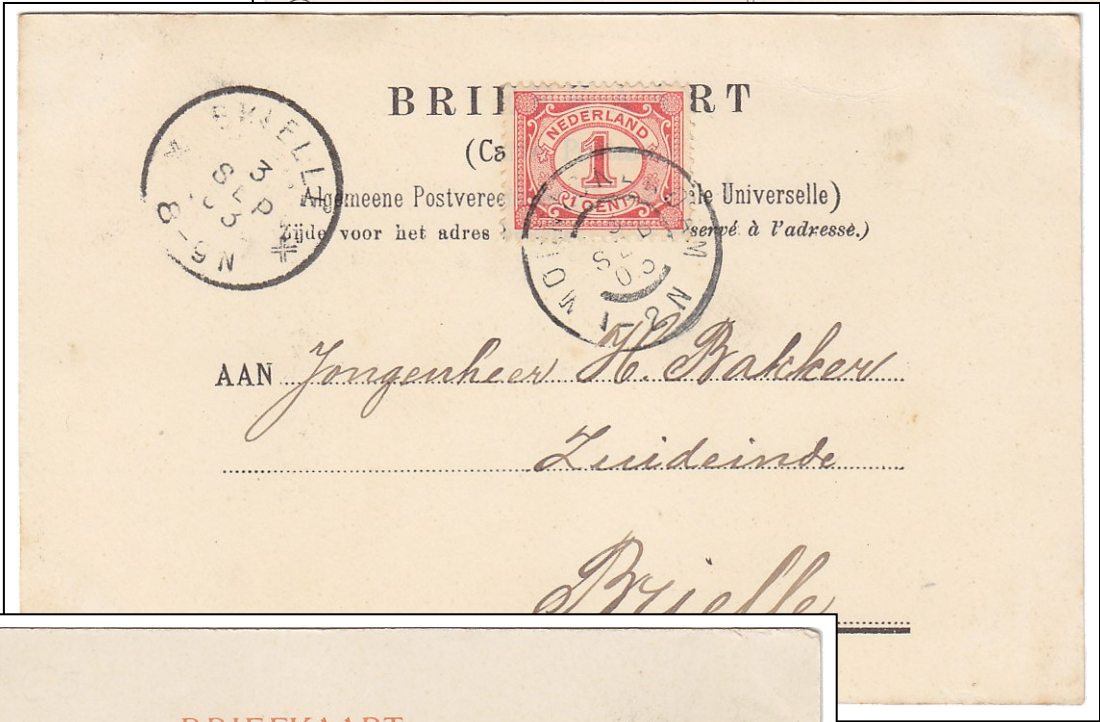
One card dated 1910

Once two correspondents had exchanged the keys to their secret stamp language, the conversation could begin.

In countries with several competing stamp languages, such as the Netherlands, we can only guess what messages oddly placed stamps on postcards such as these conveyed.



Answer immediately?
(card to the right)



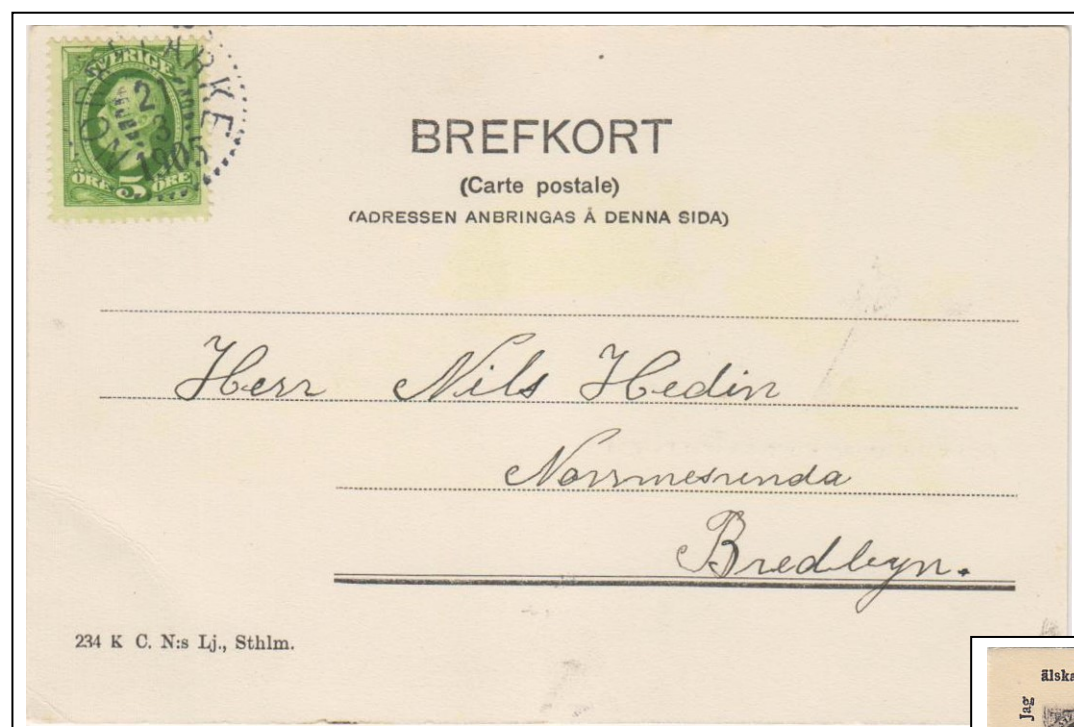
My heart is free?
(card to the right)



I love you?
(card to the right)
...or perhaps
Do not forget me?
(card on top)



Stamps: 1 cent Figure in White Circle (1899), valid for the domestic printed matter rate
All three cards unused and from unknown publishers
Middle card with undivided back, top and bottom card with divided back



I love you!

The messages on this page are interpreted using the most common version of the Swedish stamp language, published by Solléns (Stockholm) and Le Moine & Malmeström (Gothenburg).

Fidelity will have its reward!



Messages could be more or less secret, depending on the local market for stamp language postcards.

In the case of Sweden, where one single stamp language dominated the market, the meaning of the “secret” messages can be interpreted with some certainty.



Publisher: Solléns förlag, Stockholm
Stamps from the King Oscar II copperplate recess and the Bicoloured Numeral type issues (1891-1900)
Undivided back, unused



Write to me at once!

Most cards of this kind brought positive, affectionate messages. After all, who would exchange the key to a secret language with someone just to tell him or her that *I'm already engaged* or *My heart belongs to someone else?*

How should we meet?

