

Rules for thee, but not for me? Multilingualism and language policy in the Duchy of Schleswig Estates Assembly

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The former Duchy of Schleswig straddled what is now the border between Denmark and Germany, once occupying a territory approximately bordered by the Kongeå river in the north and the Eider in the south. This region is characterized even today by its multilingualism and has been referred to as a “quintolingual” region, with Standard German and Standard Danish (*Rigsdansk*) functioning as written mediums and North Frisian, Low German, and South Jutish serving as the spoken vernaculars of the majority of the region’s inhabitants in the 19th century (cf. Langer 2011: 169).

In the mid- to late-19th century, the region was plagued by national conflicts between the Duchy of Schleswig and Duchy of Holstein and their relationships to the Kingdom of Denmark and the German Confederation. A major component of these conflicts was known as the “Schleswig-Holstein question” (*Danish: Spørgsmålet om Sønderjylland og Holsten*; German: *Schleswig-Holstein Frage*), in which language use and (perceived) dominance were utilized for political reasons (Dyhr 1998). Following the July Revolution (1830) and the Duchy of Holstein joining the German Confederation, Frederick VI, King of Denmark and Duke of Schleswig and of Holstein, decreed that both the Duchy of Schleswig and the Duchy of Holstein would have a *Ständeversammlung* ‘Estates Constitution’ and a parliamentary-like body, the *Ständerversammlung* ‘Estates Assembly’, which would take up an advisory role regarding policy matters in the respective duchies (Law 1831).

As the national conflicts grew, the question of which language (German or Danish) was dominant (spoken and written) and in which domains (e.g., in church and schools), was leveraged by various political agencies (advisory and governing bodies, individual politicians, nation-states, etc.), some of whom had the power to influence policy creation or enact language policies. These language policies were present in many aspects of life, from required language of church services or language of instruction at schools to policies surrounding hiring doctors at psychiatric institutions (Thomsen 2022).

In this talk, I showcase language policies which were used (implicitly) or enacted (explicitly) among the policy advisors in the Schleswig Estates Assembly. The Estates Assembly was in session biennially from 1836–1846 and 1852–1864, with the gap in the middle due to the First Schleswig War. This talk focuses on the first period and the mounting tensions between the ‘German-minded’ and ‘Danish-minded’ members of the Estates Assembly. Data are drawn primarily from the published records of the Estates Assembly, i.e., newspapers which published their meeting minutes. This is supported by archival materials from the *Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein*.

References

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