

Historical sociolinguistics in the digital age: Methods and approaches for analyzing multilingualism in the Duchy of Schleswig

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Historically multilingual settings are often characterized by a hidden complexity due to the visibility (or lack thereof) of certain varieties (Davies et al. 2012: 9). For example, multiple languages may have been broadly used in daily life, but not all were written, and are therefore *invisible* to the modern researcher looking back. The Duchy of Schleswig once straddled what is now the border between Denmark and Germany, occupying a territory approximately demarcated 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 called a historically “quintolingual” region (Langer 2011), with standard High German (*Hochdeutsch*) and Standard Danish (*Rigsdansk*) functioning as written mediums and the languages of education, 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. Nevertheless, much previous work has emphasized political and historical issues, rather than linguistic factors (there are a few exceptions, e.g., Fredsted 2003, Langer & Havinga 2015). The ViNoRHM project seeks to address this by analyzing historical language use in the Duchy of Schleswig and combining micro-level case studies of language ideology, policy, and practice, using primary texts from official records and hitherto understudied archival data.

In the 19th century, as language is increasingly tied to nationalism, the languages of the duchy played a central role in the “Schleswig-Holstein question”¹; a term used to describe a set of national conflicts between the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein and their relationships to the Kingdom of Denmark and the German Confederation (Dyhr 1998). Which language (*Hochdeutsch* or *Rigsdansk*) was dominant and where, became a political tool leveraged by the various governing bodies, who enacted strict language policies following territorial victories in the First and Second Schleswig Wars (1848-1851, 1864). These language policies permeated many aspects of daily life and even extended to the hiring of doctors at psychiatric institutions (Thomsen 2022).

This talk presents an ongoing study of bi- and multilingualism in the Parliament of the Duchy of Schleswig, which was in session biennially from 1836-1846 and 1852-1864. Data are drawn from parliamentary newspapers, and supplemented by archival materials from the *Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein*, and the *Slesvigske Samling* at the *Dansk Centralbibliothek for Sydslesvig*. First determining the language and structure of the newspaper itself, the analysis then examines the content according to the “language question”, i.e., which topics are brought before parliament, which language is used in parliamentary debates, and which debates lead to political action. This broadens our understanding of the language question in the duchy, with a new focus on the governing body itself.

Additionally, I showcase digital sources and methods used in the ViNoRHM Project, including preparation of hand-written (e.g., via *Transkribus*) or printed texts (e.g., digitized by Google), and pros and cons associated with each. Further focus may be given to data processing tools such as *AntConc*, *AtlasTI*, or using AI (ChatGPT) to supplement analysis.

¹ Danish: *Spørgsmålet om Sønderjylland og Holsten*; German: *Schleswig-Holsteinische Frage*

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