

Multilingualism and language policy in the Parliament of the Duchy of Schleswig

Language played a central role in the “Schleswig-Holstein question” (Danish: *Spørgsmålet om Sønderjylland og Holsten*; German: *Schleswig-Holsteinische Frage*), which is 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). The former Duchy of Schleswig straddles 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 historically been called a “quintolingual” region (Fredsted 2004: 32-33; Langer 2011: 169), with standard High German 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. In this period as the national conflicts grew, the question of which language (High German or Standard Danish) was dominant and where, became a political tool leveraged by the various governing bodies, who then enacted strict language policies following their respective territorial victories in the First and Second Schleswig Wars (1848-1851, 1864). 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), but it has not yet been studied which language policies were used or enacted among the policy makers themselves.

This study looks at the question 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 primarily from the published records of the parliament, i.e., parliamentary newspapers. This is supported by archival materials from the *Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein*, and the *Slesvigske Samling* at the *Dansk Centralbibliothek for Sydslesvig* in Flensburg.

The analysis first determines the language and structure of the newspaper itself. Second, the newspaper content is analyzed according to the “language question”, i.e., which topics are brought before parliament and which language is used in discussion. Finally, when questions regarding language use or choice are debated, which debates lead to political action. This study adds to the understanding of the 19th century language question in the Danish-German border region, with a new focus on the policy makers and the governing body itself.

References

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