HISTORICAL SOCIOCLINGUISTICS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN

NILS LANGER

ABSTRACT

Schleswig-Holstein has always been famous as a multilingual region where up to five different languages peacefully co-exist in the same community. However, during the nineteenth century, language became a political means to suppress particular groups of people and promote others. In particular, intellectual struggle and military warfare were often followed by political reforms aimed at bringing about a change in the official and private use of language in Schleswig-Holstein. This article provides evidence from school and church inspection reports in the nineteenth century which shows how the German-speaking authorities were determined to permit only High German to be used in official domains. The use of other languages would not be allowed even though, as the inspection reports testify, both pupils and teachers frequently struggled with their competence in High German. This article thus provides a new and direct view of the multilingual situation at the lowest level of education and hence contributes to our understanding of the effectiveness of language planning measures from ‘above’.


1 I am very grateful to Silke Götsch-Elten and Nils Hansen, both from the Seminar für Europäische Ethnologie/Volkskunde at the Christian-Albrecht-Universität Kiel, for the valuable comments, guidance, and patience with my at times embarrassingly sketchy knowledge of the history of Schleswig-Holstein. Dr Hansen deserves particular mention for his very generous permission to let me mine his extraordinary corpus of school and church inspection reports and I am greatly in his debt. Thanks also to Anna Carrudus, Martin Durrell, Stephan Elspaß, Joseph Salmons, Chris Wells and Wim Vandenbussche for valuable comments, and Roz Thomson and Svenja Weyh for editorial help.

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9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.
INTRODUCTION

The linguistic situation in northern Germany is characterised by the co-existence of several languages in different areas and language-contact scenarios. High German, Low German, Danish, Frisian, Polish, Dutch and Romani are used by native speakers living in the lowlands north of Osnabrück in the west and of Cottbus in the east. The core language contact areas are at the geographical fringes, thus Polish / German in the east, Dutch / Frisian / German in the west, and Danish / Frisian / German in the north, though in all geographical areas we find a Low German – High German diglossia. It is well known that, for example, in North Frisia five languages or discrete language varieties can still occur within the same family. However, there is a general decline of multilingualism in northern Germany. Numbers of native speakers of any language apart from High German are declining, as is the range of domains where such languages are used. Danish and Frisian enjoy a degree of protection by official means, including, for instance, their recognition as minority languages in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Low German – according to many scholars a separate language distinct from High German – is also protected and promoted by the Charter as a ‘regional language’. There are political parties, academic institutes and professorial chairs dedicated to the protection and promotion of these languages in northern Germany, as well as amateur and semi-professional dramatic societies, cultural societies and the occasional use of these languages in schools and on regional radio and TV.\(^2\) However, there is little optimism that such enterprises can reverse the general language decline.

Sociolinguists are interested in the conditions and situations in which the various languages are used, what prestige they command, and what recent development they have undergone. Historical sociolinguists are concerned with similar questions but with respect to the linguistic landscape in the past,\(^3\) and when studying issues of language planning in multilingual societies, nineteenth century Schleswig-Holstein provides a particularly fertile ground. Political and territorial changes had, though not always directly, an impact on the sociolinguistic conditions of the area, first and foremost through the establishment of standard German as the primary but not sole language of written or formal communication. Yet to truly understand which languages were used for which purposes and what the relationship was between, say, standard German and the German dialects but also Frisian or Danish, we still need to unearth more primary sources. This paper will present evidence from a type of source as yet not

\(^2\) Frisian enjoys much greater financial and logistical support in the Netherlands. 
\(^3\) Cf. Roland Willemyns and Wim Vandenbussche, ‘Historical Sociolinguistics: Coming of Age?’, \textit{Sociolinguistica}, 20 (2006), 146–65, for a recent overview of the scope of topics in historical sociolinguistics.
sufficiently mined for metalinguistic evidence: reports from school and parish inspections. Its key findings rest on a large corpus of such inspection reports from 1830–1910 from schools in all areas in Schleswig-Holstein\(^4\) and this is the first time that they have been analysed from a linguistic and sociolinguistic perspective.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

By the nineteenth century, High German had virtually completely replaced all others as the language of writing, printing, and official discourse. Low German, at one time the preferred language of the Hanseatic League, had suffered a complete decline as a written language and, by the seventeenth century, we only find it in comic drama where only peasants or fools use it, as compared to the High German of the more respected characters.\(^5\)

Politically-historically, we witness a number of territorial changes and redrawings of borders and boundaries affecting Schleswig-Holstein, the northernmost German-speaking area, which changed from being ruled by the Danish King to becoming a province of the Second German Empire under the leadership of Prussia. Until 1866, the political status of Schleswig-Holstein had been complicated; the Duchies of Schleswig and of Holstein had been the property of the King of Denmark, yet the Duchy of Holstein was part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, whilst the Duchy of Schleswig was part of the Kingdom of Denmark. Thus the united Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein was both part of the Kingdom of Denmark yet also a part of the German Empire, and, after the dissolution of the latter in 1806, a member of the ‘Deutscher Bund’. With the rise of nationalism and the drive towards constitutional government, conflicts arose between German and Danish factions in the Duchy which ultimately led to two wars: 1848–51 which was won by the Danes and which led to an active Danisation and restoration of previous conditions, and 1864–66 with the defeat of the Danes by Prussia and Austria and the annexation of the Duchy by the victorious forces. National identity – until then of little significance in a multinational kingdom – had become a point of controversy not just in intellectual and political debates but also in the everyday life of citizens. This was also felt with regard to language planning and language policy, with the removal of teachers, vicars, and civil servants who did not speak the language of political power, the change in school curricula and in the language of instruction, and sanctions against singing in the wrong language or displaying the wrong national symbols. In determining


one’s national identity, language has always played a major part and this was no different in nineteenth-century Schleswig-Holstein, where speaking German, Frisian or Danish could indicate nationhood, but also where speaking or writing High German, rather than Low German, was a clear marker of social class. We do not yet know enough about these issues apart from anecdotal evidence and minor studies. A comprehensive account of these issues could contribute substantially to our general understanding of the social and political history of the area.

Historical linguists are naturally interested in evidence of language change, and thus one of the principal research interests will be to what extent we can find evidence for differences between the languages in, say, 1800, and in, say, 1900, especially in areas and domains which are shared by several languages and which allow us to study language contact phenomena. However, sociolinguists are also concerned with metalinguistic developments and it is here where we find at least three major areas of interest, which all feed into each other and which characterise the multilingual and political landscape of Schleswig-Holstein in the nineteenth century:

• Metalinguistic discourse: to what extent were there political and intellectual discussions about the usefulness and need for particular languages?
• Language policy: to what extent did governments and the administration prescribe and proscribe the use of certain languages in particular domains and what effect did this have on their usage?
• Language in education and the church: how did these discussions filter down to practical policies and to what extent were speakers actually affected by metalinguistic discussions and language planning issues?

METALINGUISTIC DEBATES: GERMAN VS. DANISH

Issues of language policy were focused on the Duchy of Schleswig, which had been a multilingual area in which Low German, Danish, and Frisian had co-existed for many centuries, whereas in the Duchy of Holstein, Low

6 This close link between language and identity can best be seen in the emergence of new nations or new nation states, which frequently leads to the postulation of having a separate language. Thus the distinctness of Flemish from Dutch was boosted by the creation of the new nation of Belgium; similarly, the separation of Luxembourghish from German, of Croatian from Serbo-Croat, or Slovakian from Czech-Slovak was always driven by the political desire to demonstrate distinctness, rather than by purely linguistic reasons.

7 That there is still scope for the inclusion of sociolinguistic insights into the historiography of Schleswig-Holstein as conceived of by ‘pure historians’ is indicated by the fact that in the standard Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins edited by Ulrich Lange, which contains some 800 pages, a mere ten to fifteen pages mention linguistic matters. (Cf. Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, ed. Ulrich Lange, Neumünster 2003.)
German remained the only everyday spoken language until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it was joined and later replaced by High German as the language of education, formality and prestige.

The new-found affection for the concept of the *nation*, which according to Herder expressed itself in culture, traditions and language, was also found in the Duchy of Schleswig and in the thoughts and writings of leading intellectuals at the University of Kiel, and caused passionate debates, especially after the key year of 1830 when international waves of unrest were also felt in Schleswig-Holstein. The official language of administration in the early nineteenth century was German in both Schleswig and Holstein, and Danish in the rest of the kingdom of Denmark. In the Duchy of Schleswig therefore, with its majority of Danish speakers, the language of administration did not correspond to the language of the people who lived there:

Das Herzogtum Schleswig, das seit dem Mittelalter ein solches Sprachkontaktgebiet gewesen war, entwickelte sich im 19. Jh. deutlich zu einem Gebiet des Sprachkonflikts, wo Sprache zunehmend [...] zum ideologischen Instrument politischer Auseinandersetzungen gemacht wurde.8

The Danish King issued an official instruction in 1810 whereby in all those areas of Schleswig where Danish was used by the majority in everyday communication, it should also be used in courts, churches and schools. This met with strong resistance from local civil servants, who had been exclusively educated in German and who successfully pointed to the problems which would arise if teachers, vicars and civil servants were now forced to learn Danish. A generation later, the issue was rekindled when Christian Paulsen (1798–1854), who hailed from Flensburg (in the Duchy of Schleswig) and was Professor of Law at Kiel, argued that evidence from history, constitutional law and popular customs demonstrated very clearly that the Duchy of Schleswig was very much a part of Denmark and hence argued against the use of German as the sole language of law and administration.9 He lamented the low status enjoyed by Danish and argued that Danish should be permitted in schools and church services in the Duchy, certainly in those areas where most people spoke Danish as their first language. Paulsen’s suggestion found no direct implementation, but through the support of his fellow academic Christian Flor, Professor of Danish at Kiel, and Nis Lorentzen, an influential farmer and a member of the ‘Ständeversammlung’ in Schleswig, a slight majority

9 The German Language had been a language of prestige throughout Denmark for many centuries, and it was only in the eighteenth century that the court at Copenhagen ceased to use German in official discourse.
voted in favour of the introduction of Danish as a language of law and administration in ‘Nordschleswig’, which was implemented by the Danish King Christian VIII in 1840.\textsuperscript{10} The language debate in Schleswig was part of the general political debate about the representation of interests in the wake of the 1830 and 1848 revolutionary movements in Europe, which like elsewhere faltered in Schleswig-Holstein after the war of 1848–50 and the defeat of the Schleswig-Holstein army by Denmark. As a result of language policy changes undertaken under the supervision of August Regenburg, the language of schooling in ‘Mittelschleswig’ became Danish, with an allowance of four hours in German per week, while church services alternated between Danish and German. However, there was little popular enthusiasm for Regenburg’s reforms, which were an example of ‘übertriebene[...] ideologische[...] Instrumentalisierung von Sprache, die die komplexe Sprachwirklichkeit nicht berücksichtigte’.\textsuperscript{11}

These examples demonstrate the complexities of language and politics in a multilingual area. After the next war from 1864 to 1866, this time between Denmark on the one side and Prussia and Austria on the other, Schleswig-Holstein became a Prussian province and German was re-introduced as the only language of schooling and religion, and, whilst in 1878 German and Danish were afforded equal status in ‘Nordschleswig’, the process of Germanisation was completed in 1888.\textsuperscript{12} Thus after centuries of peaceful multilingualism, the nineteenth-century debate aligning people, nation and state used language as a key identifier, which eventually led to language conflict and ultimately to political division. Certain aspects of these examples can be found in other language conflicts, however. The political support for the spoken language over the written language can also be found in a separate debate about the promotion of Low German over High German, which dates back to at least the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{13}

METALINGUISTIC DEBATES: LOW GERMAN VS. HIGH GERMAN

In the discussions about introducing or preferring either Danish or German in schools, administration or the church it is rather striking that, whenever German is referred to, only High German is meant.\textsuperscript{14} Low German, the spoken language and the indigenous language of Northern Germany, was consistently ignored in these language planning issues.


\textsuperscript{11} Mogens Dyhr, p. 118.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p.119.


\textsuperscript{14} Silke Göttsch, p. 388.
testifying that its sociolinguistic descent from proper language to mere dialect had long been completed. After being an international language in the Middle Ages, from the sixteenth century Low German increasingly lost communicative areas where it was used as a written language and this led to its complete loss as a written language in serious and formal texts from the late seventeenth century. It is not entirely clear why Low German should suffer such a dramatic loss but a crucial factor will have been that the protestant Reformation in Northern Germany was mostly carried out in High German, despite efforts, for instance by Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558) in his translation of the Luther Bible into Low German, to use Low German in church matters.\footnote{This claim is rather overstated: there were still plenty of middle- and upper-class people who had a very active command of Low German, though the use of Low German with each other, rather than with servants or employees, was noticeably declining. Cf. also Ernst Moritz Arnoldi’s descriptions of conversations in polite society which always start in halting and non-fluent High German before settling into the ‘snug socks’ of Low German: “In feiner Gesellschaft gehöre es unerläßlich zum guten Ton, in den ersten Minuten “hochdeutsch zu radebrechen”...[but] danach wieder “die Alltagssocken seines gemütlichen Plattendutsch” (as cited in Renate Herrmann-Winter, ‘Urteile über Niederdeutsch aus dem 18. und 19. Jahrhundert’, Niederdeutsches Jahrbuch, 115 (1992), 123–44 (142). This observation is echoed in literary works such as Thomas Mann’s Buddenbrooks.}

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In his \textit{Deutsche Grammatik}, Jacob Grimm stated that Low German was no longer a written language but only survived as a spoken dialect amongst the lower orders.\footnote{There is considerable disagreement over the extent to which Low German should be classed as a language or a dialect (of German). According to the European Charter for the Protection of Regional or Minority Languages, Low German is a ‘regional language’, though, as always, the linguistic reasons for this are less compelling than the political ones. (See, for example, Menke, who in his article on the history of contact between Low German and many other languages states explicitly (and almost politically) that despite all the ‘extreme Sprachmischung’, the status of Low German as a separate language need not be challenged: Hubertus Menke, ‘Niederdeutsch als Geber-, Nehmer- und Mittlersprache’, in Munske (ed.), 2003, pp. 100–18 (p.114).)}

With the loss of the written domain, the status of Low German declined from that of a language to a lowly dialect.\footnote{There is considerable disagreement over the extent to which Low German should be classed as a language or a dialect (of German). According to the European Charter for the Protection of Regional or Minority Languages, Low German is a ‘regional language’, though, as always, the linguistic reasons for this are less compelling than the political ones. (See, for example, Menke, who in his article on the history of contact between Low German and many other languages states explicitly (and almost politically) that despite all the ‘extreme Sprachmischung’, the status of Low German as a separate language need not be challenged: Hubertus Menke, ‘Niederdeutsch als Geber-, Nehmer- und Mittlersprache’, in Munske (ed.), 2003, pp. 100–18 (p.114).)}

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Die niedersächsische und westphälische oder die sogenannte plattdeutsche Mundart herrschte nur noch unter dem Volk und hat aufgehört, eine gebildete Schriftsprache zu sein.\footnote{There is considerable disagreement over the extent to which Low German should be classed as a language or a dialect (of German). According to the European Charter for the Protection of Regional or Minority Languages, Low German is a ‘regional language’, though, as always, the linguistic reasons for this are less compelling than the political ones. (See, for example, Menke, who in his article on the history of contact between Low German and many other languages states explicitly (and almost politically) that despite all the ‘extreme Sprachmischung’, the status of Low German as a separate language need not be challenged: Hubertus Menke, ‘Niederdeutsch als Geber-, Nehmer- und Mittlersprache’, in Munske (ed.), 2003, pp. 100–18 (p.114).)}

There was some support for Low German in the nineteenth century, in particular in the form of original poetry by writers such as Klaus Groth (1819–99), Professor at Kiel, whose work was also partially translated into Dutch, West Frisian and High German, Fritz Reuter (1810–74) and John Brinckman (1814–70).\footnote{There is considerable disagreement over the extent to which Low German should be classed as a language or a dialect (of German). According to the European Charter for the Protection of Regional or Minority Languages, Low German is a ‘regional language’, though, as always, the linguistic reasons for this are less compelling than the political ones. (See, for example, Menke, who in his article on the history of contact between Low German and many other languages states explicitly (and almost politically) that despite all the ‘extreme Sprachmischung’, the status of Low German as a separate language need not be challenged: Hubertus Menke, ‘Niederdeutsch als Geber-, Nehmer- und Mittlersprache’, in Munske (ed.), 2003, pp. 100–18 (p.114).)} Their poetry, novels and plays were important for the Low German movement in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century and they are still read and performed in schools and amateur theatres today.

\footnote{This claim is rather overstated: there were still plenty of middle- and upper-class people who had a very active command of Low German, though the use of Low German with each other, rather than with servants or employees, was noticeably declining. Cf. also Ernst Moritz Arnoldi’s descriptions of conversations in polite society which always start in halting and non-fluent High German before settling into the ‘snug socks’ of Low German: “In feiner Gesellschaft gehöre es unerläßlich zum guten Ton, in den ersten Minuten “hochdeutsch zu radebrechen”...[but] danach wieder “die Alltagssocken seines gemütlichen Plattendutsch” (as cited in Renate Herrmann-Winter, ‘Urteile über Niederdeutsch aus dem 18. und 19. Jahrhundert’, Niederdeutsches Jahrbuch, 115 (1992), 123–44 (142). This observation is echoed in literary works such as Thomas Mann’s Buddenbrooks.}}

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Not everyone agreed, however, that Low German should continue to survive, even as a spoken language. In the early nineteenth century, Gustav Heinrich Förke, Professor of Natural History at Rostock, desired Low German to be banned, at least in educated society, since it prevented speakers from ever leaving the intellectual constraints imposed by a common, peasant life (‘dem Ideenkreise des gemeinen bäurischen Lebens’, 1824). Ludolf Wienbarg (‘Soll die plattdeutsche Sprache gepflegt oder ausgerottet werden?’, 1834) pleaded for a ‘Verhochdeutschung der Dörfer’ and thus for the extinction of Low German. Jonas Goldschmidt (‘Über das Plattdeutsche als ein großes Hemmniß jeder Bildung’, 1846), too, argued strongly against the use of Low German since its use was a real obstruction to the democratisation of the lower classes. Education and political discourse took place in High German and hence, he argued, monolingual Low German speakers, who were still the majority amongst the lower classes of his area, needed to gain competence in High German in order to be able to participate in political processes: ‘[W]ahre Bildung und Plattdeutsch [gehen] heut zu Tage nicht Hand in Hand!’

We thus see that metalinguistic debates in the nineteenth century were not restricted to the area of national languages such as Danish, Frisian and German, but also dealt with the problem of dialect use as a language barrier for emancipation and democratisation. These debates were led by intellectuals and were well-meant rather than revolutionary in tone. On the other hand, there was a substantial lobby arguing for the protection of Low German, but this on the premise that it was much more than a mere dialect: instead it was seen as the language of Northern Germany, a pillar of North German traditions and culture.

**LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION AND THE CHURCH**

The issue of the language used in schools and church services applies to all the languages and language varieties above. Whilst language planning issues focused on the question of German versus Danish, the real problems teachers and pastors were dealing with concerned not just these languages but also the teaching of the High German written language to pupils who only knew Low German; or, in North Frisia, Frisian, Low German and Danish dialect. One of their principal problems thus focuses on the very basic issue of comprehensibility: to what extent could the congregation or school class follow sermons and teaching conducted in High German? This is an issue that continued to re-emerge in educational debates well into the

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late twentieth century. In our desire to provide an understanding of the historical sociolinguistics of the nineteenth century, we face the difficulty of finding suitable sources to shed light on the actual linguistic situations in multilingual communities. The use of ego-documents, for example diaries, memoirs or private letters, allows us to gain detailed and personal accounts of the situation on the ground and they are thus a valuable, if subjective and very localised, source. Within the framework of a new research programme on ‘Language History from Below’ historical sociolinguists have begun to unearth text types and supporting sources which provide accounts from language users who would normally not be featured in established historiographies, for instance paupers’ letters, sailors’ diaries or amateur plays for private performances. The drawback of such sources, namely their highly subjective nature and the difficulty of verifying such personal information with other sources, is outweighed by the value they provide in reporting descriptions and interpretations of the situation ‘down below’ which would otherwise be completely lost.

A type of source which straddles not just subjectivity and objectivity but also an account from ‘below’ and from ‘above’ is school and church inspections reports. These ‘Visitationsberichte’ are a useful source for gaining an understanding of rural and working-class societies. They are reports from official school inspectors and hence are very much history from ‘above’. However, given the very local nature of the subject matter, as well as the narrow geographical scope of the church pastors, they can also provide a direct angle on the situation on the ground. This is partly noticeable in the often sympathetic tone of the reports towards the fate of the uneducated and poor, even though there is always a clear understanding that such people are of a different class from those who wrote the reports. These reports are often critical of living conditions, in particular with regard to educational matters, and appear genuinely to want to achieve improvement in such concerns, for instance, by providing logistical support for schools where parents are too poor to buy writing materials. In Schleswig-Holstein, major inspections (‘Generalvisitationen’) would be conducted every three years under the chairmanship of the superintendent, a supreme superintendent or a bishop, and would generally last two days. Visits were planned and announced well in advance and teachers were given lists of up to eighty questions which had

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22 This topic found famous intellectual reflection in Basil Bernstein’s concept of working-class language as a ‘language barrier’, which was applied to the dialect/standard language dichotomy in the German context and which resulted in the production of teaching aids that provided explicit guidance on how to deal with pupils who only spoke dialect (Basil Bernstein, Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity, Oxford 2000).


24 There would also be annual inspections (‘Spezialvisitationen’) on a lesser scale and with a less senior figure in the chair.
to be answered in writing and handed in to the inspection committee. The visit would include inspections of the school and church buildings and, crucially, an examination of all subjects taught in the school and a church service, involving cross-examining of the pupils by the Visitor. During lessons, pupils were tested in singing, reading, writing, mathematics and religious knowledge. The inspection would conclude with a public discussion of the problems facing the parish during which all involved had a chance to air their concerns about the state of parish, school and church. An overall report was written by the Visitor and submitted – together with the initial report by the teacher and pastor – to the ‘Konsistorium’ for scrutiny and action. The value of such inspection reports thus lies in their frequently frank account of the state of the parish. Since they were the teachers’ only chance to air their concerns with the hope that appropriate action might be taken, their descriptions of the situation on the ground were probably quite accurate when describing poor conditions. Similarly, school inspectors did not hold back with their criticism where they detected unsatisfactory conditions:

Der Schullehrer Schütze in Wentorf kann durchaus nicht singen. Er versuchte sich mit der Melodie: Wie schön leucht uns der Morgenstern! Doch einen heillosen Gesang habe ich nie vernommen. Wie ich höre, soll er in der Schule nur diese eine Melodie mit den Kindern singen und das ist wahrlich gut; er würde sonst die Kinder für den Kirchengesang ganz verderben.

Reports on rural schooling were, of course, not restricted to Schleswig-Holstein, and some have found attention in sociolinguistic literature. Scheuermann discusses metalinguistic references in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century reports from rural communities around Göttingen – then part of the Kingdom of Hanover – where an official decree required teachers to report on the linguistic situation in schools, in particular on the ability of pupils (and teachers) to speak and write in High German and the degree of their success in exterminating the use of Low German. Some saw Low German as an obstacle for the Enlightenment and for agricultural reform and thus the clear intention was its extermination, yet there are continuing statements that, even amongst the teaching staff,

26 Teachers were paid by their local parish and many reports contain complaints by teachers that the parish council refused to alleviate certain personal or communal hardships. A mention in the inspection reports was thus the only hope for teachers that something might be done about such conditions (Tollkühn, 1989, p. 35).
29 Ibid., p. 164.

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competence in High German was – somewhat unsurprisingly – far from accomplished. Scheuermann’s data thus differ from the Kiel corpus used in this article, in that they consist only of teachers’ accounts of the local situation, rather than being a complete report of an actual inspection. Nonetheless, he uncovers plenty that is of interest, in particular a number of direct references to the linguistic situation in these schools, ranging from comments about the discrepancy between the language at home and that at school, problems in reading and writing High German, functional diglossia whereby the language used by adults in conversation with teachers and pastors would be different from that used with each other, and the effects of trade and commerce, for example that High German posed no problem for local weavers who were in frequent contact with people from outside the village.30

A similarly rich source for our understanding of lower-class history, though not quite ‘from below’, is the ‘Archivalische Quellenkartei’, a corpus of Schleswig-Holstein school and church inspection reports, held at the University of Kiel. This corpus was compiled by Nils Hansen and contains several thousand reports spanning the time from 1830 to 1910, with a focus on the period from 1830 to 1880.31 The reports contain four parts: the general moral state of the parish,32 the quality of schooling, the quality of church services and provision for the poor, with detailed information amongst other things on the number of births out of wedlock, the school attendance of children in both winter and summer, the number of ‘Konkubinate’ (co-habiting non-married couples), the problems caused by superstitions and by stray dogs, the number of people attending church services, the state of education and level of intelligence of parish members. They were thus much less focused on schooling than those used by Scheuermann, but they do contain a number of comments on the linguistic and sociolinguistic situation in the districts.33

The data is of good quality. Even though they do not describe linguistic conditions ‘from below’, the accounts by teachers are very close to ‘below’. Teachers at rural schools were by no means part of the educated classes as we understand them now. They were frequently self-taught or started an apprenticeship at a rural school aged 14 to 16, and ‘qualified’ as teachers

30 Ibid., p. 162.
31 A cultural anthropologist, Hansen compiled the corpus with an eye to the crucial period of industrialisation in Schleswig-Holstein in order to examine to what extent the inspection reports also commented on the changing lives of people due to the effects of industrialisation. The end date of 1880 for his initial corpus was determined by the fact that after then reports no longer survive in manuscript form but only in printed versions, and they have thus undergone another filtering process which may make them less valuable.
32 E.g.: ‘Schilderung der Gemeinde Adelbye in ökonomischer, intellectueller, sittlicher, christlich religiöser und kirchlicher Hinsicht’ (School Inspection Report Adelby in Schleswig, 1842).
33 Throughout this article, sources from this corpus will be identified as School Inspection Report, followed by their place and date (cf. footnote 47).
after three years. Their pay was poor and often below that of most other professions and trades: for instance, in 1900 the pay for a 25-year-old teacher was below that of a railway ticket inspector. Thus in many ways we could consider their views as being ‘from below’; however, given their uncertain social status, this is not without controversy. In the reports there is no noticeable use of formulaic expression and both teachers and inspectors appear to be free and frank in their highlighting of lamentable conditions (see Hansen 1998 for reports by a particularly passionate teacher). There is plenty of detail in the reports, such as often the names of failing pupils or truants, presumably so that their progress can be confirmed at the next inspection:

Jedoch fand ich die Knaben Piel 13 Jahre alt, Koops 14 Jahre alt, Hamester 12 Jahre alt Koops 12 Jahre alt völlig ungeüb. im Lesen. Der Lehrer schob die Schuld auf die enormen Schulabsenzen dieser Kinder.

Further strengths of the ‘Archivalische Quellenkartei’ lie in its wide geographical coverage: all areas of Schleswig-Holstein are covered and for some districts (Kiel, Rendsburg, Lauenburg) all reports from all schools over a fifty-year period are taken into account. The only noticeable technical omission is the exclusion of any reports written in languages other than German, i.e. Danish and Frisian, and future researchers should inspect these for further findings.

In the remainder of this article, I will present some of the findings from the school inspection reports. It should be noted that in relation to the sheer size of the corpus, the number of references to linguistic matters is small and thus has no statistical relevance. This is surprising given the ever-present tension between the use of High German in schools and Low German in everyday rural life. That for an earlier period Scheuermann (2004) obtained richer results from a smaller corpus can be explained by the fact that the teachers in Göttingen were explicitly asked to comment on the use of High German in schools. It can only be conjectured, but with some plausibility, that the linguistic situation in Schleswig-Holstein was similarly problematic but that its importance was reduced given the more

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34 Teacher training colleges (‘Lehrerseminare’) did not come into existence until 1872 and as late as 1904 there were still 71 self-taught teachers in service in Schleswig-Holstein (Tollkühn, 1989, p. 16). In School Inspection Report Grove (22 August 1871), we hear about a teacher – a former tailor – whose own reading skills were not proficient:

Da die Kinder nicht lesen konnten, so gerieth ich sonderbar genug auf die Vermuthung, daß am Ende der Lehrer selbst nicht lesen konnte. Als die Kinder weg gegangen waren, ließ ich den Lehrer lesen u fand, daß er wirklich nicht lesen konnte. Hier ist nun eine durchgreifende Remedur durchaus nothwendig.

35 Tollkühn, 1989, p. 17.
36 School Inspection Report Brunstorf in Lauenburg, 20 August 1835.
pressing needs faced by rural schools and churches, as articulated in the inspection reports.

A number of comments of interest to both social historians and historical sociolinguists relate to the perception of the quality of education in general: the social status of the school teacher in his community, the apparent lack of parents’ interest in their children’s acquisition of skills, the interference of economic poverty in children’s education, especially in school attendance, or the respective attribution of blame on either teachers or parents for the poor educational progress made by pupils. In addition, there are also a number of comments which pertain much more directly to ‘linguistic’ concerns, in particular the conflict of conducting schooling solely in High German when the vast majority of school children had no or only very little knowledge of it, be this because they were native speakers of the minority languages Danish or Frisian or of the regional language Low German. In the remainder of this article, a number of comments in the following three categories will be presented, which will provide us with a view of sociolinguistic conflict ‘from below’:

• competition between German and Frisian or Danish as recognised minority languages;
• teaching ‘correct’ German;
• competition between High German and Low German.

COMPETITION BETWEEN GERMAN AND FRISIAN OR DANISH AS RECOGNISED MINORITY LANGUAGES

Overall there are only very few references to Danish and Frisian, which is partly due to the gap in the corpus for the period of Danisation from 1850–64. The most detailed account of Danish is found in the report on Leck in 1875, where the local vicar describes how in the main village Leck – the economic centre of the area – German is the main language whilst Danish and Frisian are the everyday languages of villages nearby. Writing shortly after the founding of the Wilhelmine Empire, he adds that the recent political changes have yielded no increase in German nationalism but that provincial separatism is on the decrease:

nordschleswigschen Districte theilt. Der provincielle Partikularismus ist noch
nicht überwunden, jedoch im Abnehmen begriffen.\footnote{School Inspection Report Leck in Western Schleswig, 9 August 1875.}

Some nine years later, the same pastor, ‘Erster Compastor’ D. D. Matthissen, reports that in practice everybody in the area has a command of German and that German is increasingly used with children. The only people with difficulty in comprehending German, and who instead use Danish,\footnote{Matthissen calls this ‘Plattdänisch’, which is the Danish dialect more generally referred to as ‘Sønderjysk’. Knowledge of Rigsdansk/Reichsdänisch or Standard Danish would probably not have been very common amongst these speakers, an issue which cannot be explored in this article for lack of space.} are already very old. Matthissen makes no mention of Low German and thus it can only be inferred that he means High German when he speaks of German:

\begin{quote}
In dem Kirchspiel werden im gewöhnlichen Lebensverkehr 3 Sprachen gebraucht: die Deutsche, die Plattdänische und die Friesische, letztere in den Dörfern Klintum und Ost-Schnatebül; die Plattdänische sonst überall bei den kleinen Leuten, wobei jedoch zu bemerken, daß man in nicht wenigen Häusern mit den Kindern deutsch spricht, indem Alle der deutschen Sprache kundig sind und diese Sprache für vornehmer und praktisch für mehr verwerthbar [sic] gehalten wird. Nur einige sehr bejahte Personen haben es schwer, Deutsch zu verstehen und können selbstverständlich auch nicht diese Sprache sprechen, sondern bedienen sich allein der Plattdänischen Sprache. Im Kirchdorf Leck wird mehr deutsch gesprochen als anderswo.\footnote{School Inspection Report Leck, July 1869, report on a school in List.}
\end{quote}

When discussing the use of Danish and Frisian, we need to be vigilant in distinguishing between different geographical areas. The islands of North Frisia continue to be the main strongholds for Frisian even today and it is thus no surprise that the inspection reports confirm this. A particular point of complaint in this respect is the difficulties faced by those children who speak Frisian (or Danish) at home when being exposed to High German and only High German in school lessons. This is mentioned explicitly in the report on a school in List, at the northernmost tip of the island of Sylt, where the only colloquial languages are Danish and Frisian:

\begin{quote}
Zu den besonderen Mängeln und Hindernissen, welche der Wirksamkeit des Lehrers entgegenstehen, gehören u.A. folgende: […]
5, daß die Kinder zu Hause und im täglichen Verkehr unter einander immer Dänisch oder Friesisch sprechen, und daher fast ein ganzes Jahr, bei wenig aufgeweckten und begabten noch längere Zeit, darüberhingehet ehe dieselben die hochdeutsche Sprache auch nur nothdürftig verstehen lernen.\footnote{School Inspection Report Leck in Western Schleswig, 16 September 1884.}
\end{quote}
The pastor in Westerland on the same island – about a generation earlier – recognised the need to learn Frisian if he wanted to communicate with his parish but he is rather dejected by the slow progress he is making. The striking observation is that he could not simply insist on everybody speaking High German to him:

Ein Haupthinderniß meiner Amtswirksamkeit, namentlich der speciellen Seelsorge, ist und bleibt noch immer die mir durchaus nicht geläufig werden wollende friesische Sprache; und leider ist das weibliche Geschlecht durchgehends nicht zu bewegen, sich im Gespräch mit mir der deutschen Sprache zu bedienen. Was ich in dieser Beziehung thun kann, das geschieht, so viel mir die so sehr beschränkte Zeit nur erlaubt; ich gehe oft in die Häuser der Einzelnen, besonders der kleinen Leute, und mache so doch wenigstens einige schwache Fortschritte in einer Sprache, die sich aus Büchern leider nicht erlernen läßt. 41

Poor language competence in German is also observed on the North Frisian island without explicit reference to the Frisian language; but, from statements such as the one below, we can fairly safely infer that the problem is due to the difference between native language and language of schooling:


But despite the pupils’ native competence in Frisian, progress in acquiring High German can be made, as we learn from a report on the tiny island of Gröde in 1845:

Die fresische [sic] Sprache macht für die Erlernung der deutschen Sprache allerdings Schwierigkeit; doch läßt sich hier so gut, wie anderwärts, auch schon weiter mit den Kindern kommen, wie ich die Erfahrung an den beinahe erwachsenen Kindern machte, die ich zu Anfang übernahm. 42

TEACHING ‘CORRECT’ GERMAN

The largest number of comments on linguistic matters deals with problems regarding teaching the standard language to children whose native language is either Low German or whose language has a strong northern tinge. These complaints mostly pertain to pronunciation but also to grammar and it is not always clear from the teachers’ or inspectors’

41 School Inspection Report Westerland on the island of Sylt, 6 August 1847.
42 School Inspection Report Hallig Gröde, 20 July 1845.
comments what the source language of the pupils’ production is, i.e. whether it is Low German or Northern High German. It should be noted that inspectors also single out teachers whose pronunciation is faulty – which is particularly interesting for the Kiel examples from the early twentieth century, when a pronunciation norm had just been published.\footnote{School Inspection Report Kiel-Gaarden, 31 December 1907.}


Many of the linguistic features singled out by the school inspectors are easily recognisable for anyone who has spent any length of time in Schleswig-Holstein today, such as, for example, the loss or absence of word-final /t/ in {ACHT}, which is still very prominent in Northern speech:

Klasse VI b […] Die Kinder rechnen mündlich und schriftlich befriedigend, schreiben die Zahlen gut, sprechen aber mässig: “ach ma vie is swei und dreisig”\footnote{Cf. Theodor Siebs, Deutsche Bühnenauussprache, Berlin/Cologne/Köln/Leipzig 1898.}

That such features were not universally condemned can be seen in the following report, where the inspector laments the fact that younger teachers do not pick up on these ‘errors’ of speech, presumably because to them they did not sound or appear wrong, just as much as they do not seem wrong to modern speakers of Northern German:

\footnote{School Inspection Report Kiel-Gaarden, 31 December 1907.}

It is striking that after 1900 comments are much more focused on the teaching of the ‘correct’ or standard language, and such complaints go beyond pronunciation to more general comments on the use of language. Frustratingly, there is not much detail in the reports, for instance which kind of grammatical constructions or which words are most frowned upon:

Klasse I K: […] Der Muttersprache wird überhaupt fast an der ganzen Anstalt die gebührende Pflege nicht zuteil.48

Auf gutes, richtiges Deutsch muss auch in meiner Gegenwart mit zäher Konsequenz gehalten werden. In dem Punkte hat es besonders in der Klasse IVb Frl. Lipp, eine erst kürzlich angestellte Lehrerin, noch sehr fehlen lassen. Die Kinder sagten: “Pommern wird durch der Oder in 2 Teilen geteilt, Westpreussen durch der Weichsel” etc.49

COMPETITION BETWEEN HIGH GERMAN AND LOW GERMAN

The problems of teaching in a language which is not the native language of the pupils, as encountered in the examples from Frisian and Danish above, are also found with regard to native speakers of Low German:

Die Gemeindemitglieder gehören durchgehend dem Stande der Ackerbautreibenden, der Handwerker und kleinen Kaufleute an. Die Umgangssprache ist bei fast allen die plattdeutsche.50

In dieser mangelhaften Bildung hat es denn auch seinen Grund daß die plattdeutsche Sprache hier viel mehr als an andern Orten, Umgangssprache ist, welches für die Kinder den Nachtheil hat, daß einige bei ihrer Aufnahme in unsere Schule, kein hochdeutsches Wort sprechen können.51

Bei Uebernahme meiner Schule [1858, NL] fand ich dieselbe in höchsten Verhältnissen: Kein Kind war im Stande auch nur ein

47 School Inspection Report Lütjenburg, 1885/86.
50 School Inspection Report Wacken in Steinburg, 7 June 1877.
hochdeutsches Wort hervorzubringen, ja man verstand mich nicht einmal
nothdürftig, wenn ich Hochdeutsch mit den Kindern sprach; Kenntnisse auf
dem Gebiet der Religion und der biblischen Geschichte konnte ich nirgends
denken.\footnote{School Inspection Report Muxall in Plön, 16 July 1859.}

This lack of comprehension was not restricted to children, as the following
quotation about adults shows. Here it is claimed that many cannot
understand even the most basic declarations from the pulpit:

Neben diesem Mangel an Bibel- und Religionskenntniß findet sich auch
bei sehr Vielen dieser Gemeinde eine so große Unbekanntschaft mit der
Deutschen Sprache, daß sie nur wenig oder gar nichts von der Predigt
verstehen. Ich habe schon wiederholt die Erfahrung gemacht, daß die
deutlichsten und einfachsten Anzeigen von der Kanzel durchaus von
Mehreren mißverstanden wurden.\footnote{School Inspection Report Petersdorf on Fehmarn, 31 July 1849.}

And even teachers and pastors were found lacking in the required skills in
High German and were reprimanded for using or teaching Low German
instead. The inspector’s comment on Kiel-Hardenberg Straße with regard
to the lack of Low German knowledge by many children in Kiel hints very
strongly at a clear divide between urban and rural communities since it
is fairly safe to say that even in this comparatively late year (1910), rural
children would grow up as native speakers of Low German:

Klasse V b: Herr Böttcher [...] konnte kaum mit Hilfe seiner Pensen
demnach völlig zu verkkennen, daß es Aufgabe der Schule ist, die Kinder
hochdeutsch zu lehren, was natürlich nicht ausschließt, dass auch einmal
plattdeutsches gelehen und gelernt wird.

Aber auf der Unter- und Mittelstufe kann es such um ganz seltene
Ausnahmen handeln, zumal ja sehr viele Kinder unsere Kieler Schulen gar
kein Plattdeutsch können.\footnote{School Inspection Report Kiel-Hardenberg Straße, 18 March 1910.}

Die Predigt war originell und sehr naiv. Die Originalität und Naivität trat
manchmal nur etwas zu grell hervor. Es kann nicht geleugnet werden, daß
der Pastor Vieth ein Mann von Gaben ist und daß er fälllich, eindringlich und
ergreifend zu reden vermag, wenn er will und den gehörigen Fleiß auf seine
Vorträge wendet. Nur Schade [!], daß er seine Gaben verrosten läßt und daß
er zu oft ins Platte und Gemeine fällt. Die Predigt am Visitationstage hielt
er völlig auf hochdeutsch. Sonst verschmäht er plattdeutsche Redensarten
nicht. Ich habe ihm deshalb Erinnerung gethan.\footnote{School Inspection Report Seedorf in Lauenburg, 24 June 1836.}
CONCLUSIONS

This article has provided an overview of the most important issues in historical sociolinguistics as applied to Schleswig-Holstein. It has shown that three major areas of research deserve our attention: an understanding of official language policies and politics in a country that has seen substantial political turmoil and changes; an investigation into the role and motivation of the intelligentsia for promoting or stigmatising particular languages, namely Danish, Frisian, High German and Low German; and finally the investigation of how multilingualism in Schleswig-Holstein actually worked, in particular by identifying functional domains of language use, including increasing and decreasing trends in the course of the nineteenth century.

As part of the last endeavour, this article has presented primary data from school and church inspection reports from 1830 to 1910 from the ‘Archivalsiche Quellenkartei’ (Kiel) and published for the first time from a linguistic perspective. These reports show that a key common thread through all the reports is the desire to teach High German to pupils in the area, at the expense of all other local languages, and to stigmatise anything else as wrong or uneducated. Ultimately, this enterprise shows itself to have been fairly successful, with minority and regional languages being stigmatised and on the decrease ever since the beginnings of using High German as a written language in Northern Germany. In today’s Schleswig-Holstein, Danish, Frisian and Low German (as well as Romani) are all protected and supported by both state initiative and private enterprise.

That some support for the smaller languages, including the stateless Low German, did exist in schooling in the nineteenth century is shown by a report by a pastor in which he details his plans to employ only teachers with a knowledge of Low German in the elementary classes of his school:


This plan was warmly endorsed by all the teachers present, yet, soberingly, it was rejected by the visiting inspector. Thus state censorship of anything other than the dominant language was both powerful and rigorous.

\^6 School Inspection Report in Tönning in Western Schleswig, 1 July 1860.

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