

‘Visible bilingualism’: how a dual standard language ideology leads to the invisibilization of regional languages

The former Duchy of Schleswig, spanning the modern German-Danish border region, is known for its multilingualism, with seven named languages (Low German, North Frisian, South Jutish, High German, Standard Danish, Dutch, and Romanes). These languages (and their varieties or dialects) were the mother tongues of the majority of this region’s population in the 19th century. However, prevailing standard language ideology meant only Standard (High) German and Standard Danish were used in education and printed media. Because of this, most often the data which remains available today give the impression of a bilingual society, or a ‘visible bilingualism’, which serves to invisibilize the multilingual situation in the region.

An *invisible* language is one neither used in writing nor formal discourse and any language or variety may become *invisibilized* through processes aimed at exclusion (Langer & Havinga 2015: 1). These processes of exclusion, visible in language of text production and metalinguistic commentary, can be active—with the intent of increasing the use or prestige of a language—or passive, the unintentional leaving out of a language or variety. This project focuses on these invisibilizations by showing how languages spoken in the former Duchy of Schleswig in the 19th century are depicted in three contemporary texts. The sources, originally published in 1847, 1848, and 1849, were written by members of three different national or ethnic groups—one German, one Dane, and one Frisian, with the second published originally in Standard Danish (and later in German) and the others published in Standard German.

Data from a preliminary corpus (22,143 words drawn from each text’s foreword or introductory chapter, final chapter, and two random 10-page samples) support the hypothesis that the region’s two majority languages are more present in the discourse than the minority languages. Initial word frequency analysis shows that mentions of “German” and “Danish” appear more than four times more frequently overall than “Frisian” with the other languages appearing infrequently or not at all. When considering the authors individually, the German author uses the terms “German” and “Danish” nearly equally in the sample but mentions Frisian only one quarter as much. The Danish author uses “Danish” slightly more frequently than “German”, and nearly ignores “Frisian” altogether. The Frisian author, however, appears to have a more even split overall, but mentions Frisian/Frisians almost twice as frequently than the others.

Building upon this frequency analysis, this presentation also draws on semantic relationships, featuring collocations, concordance lines and larger text segments. Using these sources from three of the region’s major linguistic, national, or ethnic groups, we present a first look at how the region’s languages are depicted and used and how these vary based on the author’s ideologies of language.

References

- Langer, Nils, & Anna Havinga. 2015. Invisible languages in historical sociolinguistics: A conceptual outline, with examples from the German-Danish borderlands. In Havinga, Anna & Nils Langer (eds.), *Invisible languages in the 19th century*. Bern: Peter Lang. 1-34.