Analyzing the Duchy of Schleswig in the Digital Age

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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 (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.

Although historically multilingual settings are often characterized by a hidden complexity due to the visibility (or lack thereof) of certain varieties, i.e. multiple languages were used in daily life, but not all were written (Davies et al. 2012: 9), previous work in the German-Danish border region 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 has set as its goal researching the languages used historically 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 to arrive at a more cohesive and innovative account of the regional historical multilingualism than has previously been attempted.

In this presentation, I showcase and discuss some of the main digital sources and methods used in the ViNoRHM Project, including preparation of historical texts (both printed and handwritten) which have been digitized by Google (accessed via HathiTrust) or via programs such as Transkribus, and some of the pros and cons associated with each. A focus is given to data processing via software such as AntConc, which assists quantitative analysis according to word frequency, collocations, concordance lines and larger text segments. Additionally, I show how we have begun to supplement our analysis using AI (ChatGPT) to create semantic groupings, which are then used in a broader qualitative analysis; and AtlasTI, software for qualitative data analysis which we are using to analyze historical newspapers.

References

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