

Norwegian and German in Bergen

Agnete Nesse, University of Bergen

Bergen was a bilingual city for more than four hundred years due to the large number of Germans who lived there from the 13th century onwards. This bilingualism can be explored from many different angles. My aim in this article is to illustrate some of these possible approaches and the results of different studies. The research fields involved include dialectology, textual work, social history and language contact studies, all within a sociolinguistic frame.

Dialectology

When studying the local vernacular of Bergen, one point always springs to mind, namely that in a Norwegian context, this dialect is an exception. Its combination of dialect features that are regarded as typically West Norwegian (WN) with others that are regarded as typically East Norwegian (EN) is interesting; even more interesting are the different simplifications found only in this dialect. For the sociolinguistically very salient words 'I' and 'not', Bergen has the WN forms /e:g/ and /i:çe/, whereas EN has /je/ or /jei/ and /ike/ or /ite/; the written standard used in Bergen (Bokmål) has <jeg> and <ikke>. The tendency to have a short vowel and long consonant in syllables that were short in Old Norwegian is regarded as an EN and northern feature: Bergen has /spik:eçø:t/ whereas WN /has spe:keçø:t/ ('dried and salted mutton'). The fact that the short vowel is higher in Bergen (/i/ vs /e/) is also seen in the now obsolete dialect form /vik:e/ for WN /ve:ka/ ('week'). In this case, the Bergen dialect now uses the EN form /u:ke/.

The loss of the feminine gender in the Bergen vernacular represents a simplification. For example, 'cow' (fem. in all other varieties of Norwegian) and 'ox' (masc.) are treated the same grammatically: *en ku – kuen* 'a cow – the cow' and *en okse – oksen* 'an ox – the ox'. Another simplification is the use of the singular adjectival form for plural predicate adjectives: whereas other Norwegian dialects use plural *-e*, as in *di e store* 'they are big', the Bergen vernacular has the singular form, *di e stor*.

In Nesse (2002), five Bergen dialect features were chosen for closer scrutiny. The questions asked were: how can these features be traced in the written sources over time, and could language contact with Low German account for the development of these features?

Loss of the feminine gender

Both Standard Danish and Standard Swedish merge the masculine and feminine gender, and since Norwegian Bokmål is based partly on Standard Danish and partly on (east) Norwegian dialects, the use of only two genders is also frequent in written Norwegian. Therefore this Bergen dialect feature is often regarded as standard, and its sociolinguistic associations are very different from other dialect features. There is an important difference between the Danish/Bokmål and Bergen mergers, however, if, like Corbett (1991), we choose to look not only at phrase-internal but also phrase-external matters concerning gender.

In both Danish and Bokmål, the merger has resulted in a common gender, and inanimate¹ nouns are referred to by the common pronoun *den*, as opposed to the normal Norwegian dialect system where feminine nouns take *ho* ('she') and masculine nouns *han* ('he'). In Bergen, however, all inanimate nouns that are non-neuter are referred to by *han*. Only when the pronoun is stressed is *den* obligatory. Therefore, the best way to analyse the merger between masculine and feminine gender in the different varieties is to say that the Bergen system has neuter and masculine gender, whereas the Danish/Bokmål system has neuter and common gender (Nesse 2005 gives a broader view of the different Norwegian gender systems). The differences between Bergen and Danish have to do with the dialect situation at the time of the merger. In Zealand, *den* was already replacing *ho/han* as the pronoun of reference (Pedersen 1999), while in West Norwegian the system using *ho* and *han* was still common when the merger took place. In other WN dialects, that still has three grammatical genders, *ho* and *han* are still used, even though *den* has become more frequent during the 20th century.

The loss of the feminine gender in Scandinavian varieties involves several factors. One is that masculine is the default gender, another is that neuter is the most marked gender, so it is less likely that the neuter would be merged with the masculine. Today, it is held that the best explanation for the loss of the feminine gender is that even if language-internal factors explain the form the merger took, the fact that a merger took place in certain Scandinavian varieties is due to language contact with Low German from the Late Middle Ages onwards (Pedersen 1999; Jahr 1999; Nesse 2002, 2005, Enger 2011).

Language contact situations where one or more of the varieties involved has grammatical gender will in most cases lead to changes in the gender systems – or at least in the realisation of the gender system (Weinreich 1953; Unterbeck et al. 2000). The reason behind this is obvious: gender is to a large extent redundant, and in most cases communication will not be hampered if a speaker uses the wrong gender for a noun. In an adult language learning situation, energy will be spent on other, less redundant language features.

The different situations where a Scandinavian variety has been in contact

¹ Most animals also belong to the inanimate group in these varieties.

with another language or languages – with the immigrant languages in the USA, the Finno-Ugric languages in Norway, Sweden and Finland, or with German – have all led to alterations in the gender system (Haugen 1953; Jahr 1984; Bull et al. 1986; Sandström 2000). The actual outcome depends on the varieties in contact, but the fact that these changes happen is a result of contact as such. The Low German that was used in Bergen from the 14th until the 18th century had three grammatical genders, but the realisations were not as distinct from one another as was the case with Middle Low German in the 13th century. For example, the masculine definite article *der* and the feminine definite article *die* had merged to *de*, and the masculine and neuter case endings were practically identical, which was also the situation in the Middle Low German described by Lasch (1914).

In non-nominative cases, *-en* was a frequent ending in Low German, and the fact that *-en* was also frequent in Norwegian and used for definite singular masculines may also have contributed to the loss of the feminine gender in the Bergen vernacular. In the contact situation in Bergen, where mutual accommodation was a dominant feature, any surface structure that was the same in the two varieties in contact was favoured (see also the periphrastic genitive).

Past tense of weak verbs in *-et*

Weak verbs of the first declension, like *kaste* ('throw') and *hoppe* ('jump'), take *-et* in the past tense in the Bergen vernacular, both in the preterite and in participle: *kastet* and *hoppet*. This dialect feature is sociolinguistically marked, like the merger between feminine and masculine gender. Most Norwegian dialects have the ending *-a* in the past for first declension verbs, but *-et* is the most common ending in Bokmål (*-a* is possible but not frequently used), and thus *-et* is regarded as 'standard' and not 'dialect'. As Jahr (1999, p. 127) has shown, the fact that Bokmål and the Bergen dialect have identical endings for this class of verbs is the result of two separate processes that accidentally led to the same result: in Bergen because of contact between Norwegian and Low German, and in Bokmål because of contact between Norwegian and Danish.

There is no variety of Norwegian in which the preterite and past participle endings for this verb group are different, in contrast to in Danish, where the preterite is *-ede* and the past participle is *-et*. During the period when Danish was used in writing in Norway, failing to master this distinction was one of the most frequent mistakes made by Norwegian writers. Low German had a system identical to the Danish one, with different endings for the preterite and past participle. There are exceptions to this, since dialects of Low German both on the Danish and the German side of the border have apocope, and in some of these varieties *-ede* is reduced to *-ed* or *-et* as a result of "Auslautverhärtung" (Braunmüller 2003, p. 211). In the latter case, the Low German system was identical to the one emerging in Bergen.

The important factor is that while Norwegian has had a system where the

two forms are identical, most Danish and Low German dialects have had a system with two different endings. It can be questioned, however, whether the Norwegian system with one ending had come into use during the Hansa contact period in Bergen; earlier, Norwegian had a system similar to that in Germany and Denmark, with *-aði* and *-it* as frequent realisations of the preterite and the past participle, respectively. The fact still remains that the only two varieties of Norwegian where the endings *-et* evolved are the only ones that are the result of contact between Norwegian and Danish/Low German.

In the matter of verbs, it might be expected that language contact in Bergen would lead to an increase in regular verbs at the expense of irregular verbs. As will be shown in the section on the social conditions in Bergen, this contact was not very intense, even though it lasted for a long time. A more intense contact situation might have led to more changes to the verb system. One feature can be mentioned, even though it only concerns very few verbs. These are verbs that have two syntactic forms: one that takes a direct object and one that does not. Other Norwegian varieties distinguish between *sitte* (without an object) and *sette* (with an object), and between *ligge* (without an object) and *legge* (with an object): *Jeg sitter* ('I sit') / *Jeg setter meg ned* ('I sit down', literally 'I sit myself down'). In the Bergen vernacular, the system is simplified: *sitte* and *ligge* are used in both functions – *eg sittar meg ner* ('I sit down'), *eg liggjar ongene klokken syv* ('I put the children to bed at seven'). Whether this simplification in the system of the vernacular is due to contact with Low German or whether it is due to dialect contact between different Norwegian varieties in the city has not yet been examined, but both explanations are theoretically possible.

Periphrastic genitive

The periphrastic genitive, which uses the reflexive pronouns *sin* (masc.), *sitt* (neutr.) and *sine* (plural), is, as far as I know, the only feature from the Bergen vernacular that has spread to most of Norway. In contrast to the features discussed above, it has not been considered proper in writing, but today we see an increased use of it in Nynorsk as well as in Bokmål, probably due to the fact that during the 20th century this feature spread to the prestigious East Norwegian dialects. Before that, this genitive was mostly used in West and North Norwegian, areas where Bergen – and the Bergen dialect – had an influence. Its origin in Bergen has not been disputed, nor has the fact that the construction was influenced by Low German. But what recent research has discovered is that the Norwegian periphrastic genitive is not a loan translation, but rather can be seen as a regrammaticalisation based on homophony, and that during the first centuries of its existence in the Bergen dialect, this variant had to compete with a loan translation which is now obsolete in Norwegian.

The German periphrastic genitive construction often includes a dative, but this will not be discussed here, since it is of less importance to the Norwegian development, and since the written sources from Bergen show that this was not

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obligatory in Bergen German. What is important is the fact that the Low German variant uses the personal pronouns *sin* (masc.), *ehr* (fem.) and *ehr* (plural). It is also important that the choice of pronoun is dependent on the possessor, and the pronoun ending is dependent on the possessed noun: *Jochum is Clamer sin borge* ('Jochum is Clamer's witness). Here, the masculine *sin* is used because Jochum is a man.

When this construction was translated into Norwegian, the result was expressions like *de theydske derris fremgann*² ('the Germans' prosperity'), where the personal pronoun *deres* (plural) agrees with the plural possessor. This construction was also used in Danish, and we can regard its occurrence in Norwegian texts as an influence from the Danish written language.

The construction that survived in spoken Norwegian however, is less often found in the written sources. An early example is from a diary from 1562: *Jacob Christierson sine vidnesbyrd* ('Jacob Christierson's confessions') (Iversen 1963, p. 16). Here we see that instead of the personal pronoun *hans*, the author used the reflexive pronoun *sin*. In the Norwegian construction, the choice of pronoun is dependent on the possessed noun, yielding sentences like 1–3.

- 1) *Jacob Christierson* (masc.) *sin* (masc.) *bror* (masc.) ('J. C.'s brother')
- 2) *Jacob Christierson* (masc.) *sitt* (neutr.) *hus* (neutr.) ('J. C.'s house')
- 3) *Jacob Christierson* (masc.) *sine* (plural) *brødre* (plural) ('J. C.'s brothers').

When trying to explain why this construction survived instead of the "correct" translated construction, we must look at the sociolinguistic conditions in Bergen at the time when both constructions were in use. The vast majority of those speaking German in Bergen were men, and when they talked about who owned what and who backed whom, they were talking about men (Nesse 1998, 2002). The Low German construction was therefore usually used in its masculine form, involving the personal pronoun *sin*. This pronoun was homophonous with the Norwegian reflexive (masc.) pronoun *sin*. It is therefore likely that the people of Bergen, who heard Low German more often than they read Danish (since very few of them could read), adapted the word *sin* to form a new genitive pattern. This construction provides good evidence of how a "change from below" (Elspass et al. 2007) can succeed at the expense of a "change from above" (the loan translation).

Declension of names

In Norwegian dialects in most parts of the country, there is a way of signalling whether a person is known or unknown to the interlocutors. The most common

² From *Bergen Fundas* (unknown author), written during the second half of the 16th century in Bergen (Sørli 1957, p. 47).

way is to do this by placing a personal pronoun in front of the name. In example 4, at least one of the interlocutors is not familiar with who Grete is, whereas in example 5, Grete is known to all:

- 4) *en som heter Grete blir med* ('one called Grete comes along').
 5) *a Grete blir med* (East Norwegian) / *ho Grete blir med* (North Norwegian) ('she Grete comes along').

The form *a* which is used in EN stems from an older accusative form *hana* ('her'), while the North Norwegian *ho* ('she') stems from an older nominative form *hon* which is now used in all syntactic functions.

In Bergen, however, the second sentence would be realised as 6:

- 6) *Greten blir med.*

The name *Grete* (fem.) is declined here in the same way as all masculine nouns and takes the ending *-(e)n* in the definite singular: *bil – bilen* ('car' – 'the car'), *flaske – flasken* ('bottle' – 'the bottle'). Both female and male first names can be declined in this way, but when it comes to surnames, usually only men are referred to with their surname in its definite form. Thus for siblings called *Grete Friele* and *Hans Friele*, both *Greten* and *Hansen* would be used, but only Hans would be called *Frielen*.³ This may have changed, however, with women being more likely to keep the same surname throughout their lives. On the other hand, surnames are used less than was common some generations ago. An investigation into the sociolinguistic distribution of the current use of declined names in Bergen is called for, concerning both who is more likely to use this feature and who is more likely to be referred to in this way.

Names are also usually declined in German, as in most Norwegian dialects, by placing a pronoun in front of the name: *die Grete, der Hans*. So the exceptional way of declining names in Bergen is not due to direct influence from Low German and must be explained differently.

The Low German diminutive suffix *-ken* has been investigated as an explanation, and if it had not been for the sociolinguistic circumstances in bilingual Bergen, this might have proved fruitful. But since German-speaking families were not common in Bergen (Nesse 2007), there were neither children nor wives to address with the diminutive. One could say that the idea that the diminutive form of first names was used among the Hanseatic merchants at Bryggen is as strange as the thought that these forms were common at a military camp.

Therefore, it seems more likely that the way names are declined in the Bergen vernacular must be seen as an example of linguistic simplification. Instead of dividing singular nouns into two groups as is done in other Norwegian

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dialects, distinguishing between *bil* – *bilen* and *Grete* – *ho Grete*, the system in Bergen contains only one noun group: *bil* – *bilen* and *Grete* – *Greten*. This result is very typical of language contact situations.

However, this is not a language feature that is often found in the written sources, so it is not easy to discover when forms like *Greten* and *Hansen* were first used in Bergen. There are, however, many examples of occupational titles used instead of a person's name, and these nouns are of course used in the definite as well as in the indefinite form. There is a possibility that the habit of calling a man *Glassmakeren* ('the glass maker') and *Snekkeren* ('the carpenter') instead of or in addition to their actual names eased the transfer to forms like *Hansen*, and later also *Greten*.

The infinitive marker *te*

The dialect features discussed above are all still in everyday use in the Bergen dialect, even though, as mentioned above, not all Bergen speakers will use the definite form of names. The last feature discussed in this section, however, is on the verge of becoming obsolete, but its use in earlier stages of the dialect is known from the very thorough description of the dialect of Bergen from 1911–1912 (Larsen & Stoltz).

In several Germanic languages, the infinitive marker is homophonous with a preposition: English has *to*, German has *zu* and the Low German used in Bergen had *to*. In the Scandinavian languages, the system was different: the preposition *til* (often pronounced /te/) is distinct from the infinitive marker *at/å*.

In Bergen, however, a system used to exist that was identical to that in the West Germanic languages, with *te* used both as the infinitive marker and a preposition. This can be analysed in a similar way to the past tense verb system above: the system in the dialect comes from one of the varieties in contact, while the form used comes from the other. In this case, the system of having a homophonous infinitive marker and preposition came from Low German, whereas the realisation – *te* – comes from Norwegian.

The sociolinguistic conditions

The written sources that were used to find examples of the different dialect features through time have also been studied for their content in order to see what they can tell us about the society and the linguistic situation in Bergen. The external factors that serve as a frame for the linguistic situation can be very briefly summed up as follows (Nesse 2000a, 2002, 2003): From the 13th century onwards, Bergen became increasingly important to German merchants, and by 1360 a German settlement was established by the Hanseatic League in the area

called Bryggen in the centre of Bergen. The Norwegian king granted the merchants privileges, but their way of organising their lives in the city was to a large degree monitored not by Norwegian but by Hanseatic authorities. The policy was that of non-integration: Hanseatic merchants were not citizens of Bergen and could not take part in the administration of the city, nor would the local court handle Hanseatic matters. Only if there was a conflict between a Norwegian and a German merchant would the local court be involved; otherwise, the Hanseatic court at Bryggen dealt with internal conflicts, and also some trade-related conflicts involving Germans and Norwegians (Ersland 2011, pp. 47–56). From 1408 until 1766, there were one to three German churches in Bergen, paid for by the German merchants, and sermons were delivered in German. Last but not least: the Hanseatic merchants in Bergen were required to be bachelors. Only after returning to Germany were they allowed to marry, so Bryggen in Bergen was a society of single men, the youngest of them only 14 years old.

The Hanseatic settlement declined from the 17th century onwards, and by about 1750 it was no longer a reality. But the sociolinguistic patterns that developed during the height of the Hanseatic League lasted as long as there were German immigrants in Bergen. Only after 1800 did their numbers fall rapidly, with German apprentices being outnumbered by Norwegian at Bryggen. The increase in the Norwegian population after 1800 meant that immigration no longer was necessary, and for both Norwegian and German fortune seekers, new possibilities opened up in the USA.

Due to the relative isolation of the Hanseatic merchants, primarily imposed by the Hanseatic League but also confirmed through the privileges granted by the Norwegian king, language contact in Bergen was never very intense. The effect that Low German had on the local vernacular must be due to the fact that contact lasted so long, and because there was contact between the groups in informal spheres.

It seems clear that there was no need for the Germans to learn to speak or write Norwegian – all their matters were conducted in German. It also seems clear that the Norwegians did not have to speak German, since they never were forced to have anything to do with the Germans. Still, we know that need is not the sole reason for people adopting the language of another group. Power and prestige are key concepts here; if one group is far more powerful and/or prestigious than the other, the weaker group may have an interest in learning to use the stronger groups' language in order to achieve the same power and prestige.

In Bergen, for the most of the Hanseatic period the Germans had the strongest economy. On the other hand, they had no political power apart from what automatically comes with money. More importantly, they had no access to marrying into the local elite, which at times was very strong both economically and culturally, and was limited to a certain number of families. The few Hanseatic merchants who broke the rules of the Hanseatic League and got involved

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in the local society were quick to start to use Norwegian in some domains, even if they continued using German as their working language.

I have called this situation one of power balance in order to explain why we do not find sources written in the “other” language: those Norwegians who could write used Norwegian (later Danish), and the Germans, by far the most literate group, wrote in Low German (later in High German). But there is evidence that the members of both groups could read the other language. Correspondence between the Germans and Norwegians was bilingual, in that each wrote his own language. It is also striking to see that in “neighbours’ books” from Bryggen (presented below), the different authors wrote in the language they felt most comfortable with, obviously in the knowledge that choice of language did not matter, since both languages were understood by all and regarded as equal within this specific context.

The sociolinguistic system in Bergen thus involved receptive bilingualism, where both Norwegian and German were understood by all people in the city. One might wonder if a mixed code developed; the answer to this is more a matter of definition than of linguistic facts. There were great numbers of loanwords in each direction (Nesse 2011; Brattegard 1934), and there were lexical items that must be regarded as hybrids. In translations at the time, we see that the similarity of the two languages is made use of extensively in order to render the translation as accurately as possible. I have not wished to call the language ‘mixed’, however, first of all because there are no instances where there is any doubt whether the author is writing Norwegian/Danish or a variety of German. Second, I have found no instances of code switching in the stricter sense of the word; that is, there are no instances where we see a change of language during a text or during a sentence. Within Meyer Scottons’ (2006) framework, however, where the term ‘code switching’ is also used when a loan word is “embedded” in the dominant language, it would be possible to argue that code switching is found in the written material from Bergen.

If we look at the relationship between Norwegian and Danish on the one hand and between Low and High German on the other, the situation is very different. The Danish written in Norway was always to some extent marked by the Norwegian dialect of the writer, and Low German interference is common in the sources written in High German. So one could certainly find examples of mixed code from Bergen, which is not peculiar. Whereas our sources tell us that the inhabitants of Bergen indeed viewed Norwegian and German as two separate languages, and that which language you used determined which group you belonged to and thus which privileges you held, the differences between varieties of Norwegian and Danish, and between Low and High German, were not considered important. The term ‘Danish’ was used for both Norwegian and Danish, and the different German varieties were simply called ‘German’ (see Nesse 2002, pp. 96–104 for examples of what the different varieties were called).

The textual approach

Introduction

The texts in Norwegian, Danish, Low German and High German from the period 1350–1936 that I have been working with are not only valuable sources for linguistic examples and an understanding of the society where these languages were used. They are also historical documents that give insights into text types, literacy and writing skills for the period in question. Most of these texts are unpublished. In addition, most of them only exist in one copy, either as an original or a copy. Most of the texts are dated, and the author is known. The authors are, with extremely few exceptions, men, and most of them are merchants, though texts by priests and other scholars also do occur.

Today these manuscripts are situated in four different archives: the city archive of Lübeck, the Royal Danish Library, the library of the University of Bergen, and the city archive of Bergen. Those that have been published were for the most part published between 1850 and 1900 by Norwegian historians. This means that attention must be paid not only to the texts themselves, but also to the way they were edited and published.

Translations

Unsurprisingly, since Bergen was a bilingual city, not many translations between Norwegian/Danish and German were carried out. There were, of course, numerous translations from German into Danish made in Denmark, and these were also disseminated in Norway, but it is not known whether these translations were used in Bergen, and they will therefore not be discussed here. I will concentrate on the two major works of translation that were carried out in Bergen. Why were these translations made, and what can they tell us about the languages in contact?

The first is a group of real estate documents that were translated from Norwegian into Low German in the 1550s (Nesse 2008, 2009, 2010). The original papers have been lost, so what we have are copies of the Norwegian documents, written by the same hand as the translations. From the handwriting it is possible to suggest that the writer (and translator?) was the secretary of the Hanseatic settlement in Bergen (Bruns 1939, pp. 54–55 gives handwriting samples for all the secretaries). At the time, there was a threat of increased payments for property that the Germans rented in Bergen. There may thus be two reasons why the translations were needed under these circumstances. One is that some of the original documents were written in an older form of Norwegian, and we have evidence from other sources that this was difficult for the Germans to read. More important was the fact that the increased payment might have led to a major conflict, and the Hanseatic authorities in Lübeck, who did not necessarily read Norwegian, might have become involved. Thus there were juridical reasons to have these translations.

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We suppose, then, that the translator was German. One interesting fact is that the Norwegian documents have many more abbreviations than the German. The translator may have felt uncertain about Norwegian grammar, especially if it was an older stage of the language than the one he knew from the streets of Bergen and contemporary writing, and this may be why he chose to leave out parts of the Norwegian words. Even more extraordinary is the likeness in syntax between the two versions. In two of the documents, the word order has not been changed at all! This was possible since both languages had more flexible syntax than their modern versions have, especially when it comes to the position of the auxiliary. Still, it is very clear that the translations were kept as close to the original as possible to avoid any dispute due to deviant formulations.

In contrast to this is the other major translation, which was of *Bergen Fundas*, the first historical record of Bergen. It was written in Dano-Norwegian in the 1550s in Bergen, and the first translations were made before 1600. *Bergen Fundas* exists in 22 different manuscripts, half in Dano-Norwegian and half in German. There are two Dano-Norwegian editions (Nicolaysen 1858 and Sørli 1958) and one edition of the German translation (appendix to Nesse 2002). The aim of the German translation was not to ensure legal accuracy, and the differences between the language of the Dano-Norwegian and German versions are much greater than in the translated real estate documents discussed above. All but one of the German manuscripts are now in Denmark, and that may not be a coincidence: the translations may have been made not for the Hanseatic merchants in Bergen but for the German-speaking elite of Denmark.

All the Dano-Norwegian manuscripts of *Bergen Fundas* end with the dispute between the Hanseatic merchants and Christoffer Valckendorff, the King's representative in Bergen between 1556–1560. The German manuscripts, however, continued to be updated after this; the last copy must have been made as late as 1670, because the history continues up to that date. It was quite common for scribes to feel free to add important facts up until their own time, but it is not easy to explain why only the German scribes did this. As we shall see below, this has led to quite curious editing of *Bergen Fundas*.

Texts in German

My studies of Norwegian and German in Bergen have all been carried out within the frame of Norwegian language history. That is to say, the German language as such was not investigated apart from what it could say about the language contact situation (loanwords, translations, some grammatical constructions). The two German texts presented here, are very different from one another, and the way they have been edited and published show us how differently they have been regarded as historical documents.

A dialogue from the 15th century

A dialogue often referred to as "*de dudesche unde de norman*" is structured as a conversation between a German merchant and a Norwegian in Bergen. The text is based on a charter issued by King Kristoffer in 1444 (Taranger 1912, p. 251), but where the charter simply states what the Germans may and may not do, the dialogue is constructed so that the Norwegian makes accusations against the merchant, and the merchant defends himself. The background for the charter lies in several letters of complaint by both German merchants and Norwegians regarding their co-existence in Bergen.

The dialogue is believed to have been written in Lübeck between 1512 and 1538 (Bruns 1901, p. 142). It stands in a long tradition of using dialogues as didactic and exemplar texts. But in spite of what has been claimed, for example by Nielsen (1877, p. 34), this text is more balanced than other such texts: it is not evident whether it is the merchant or the Norwegian who deserves the sympathy of the reader. Linguistically, it is interesting to see which Norwegian loan words are used. There are quite a few of them, and all are of legal importance in this specific context, like *oltap* ('beer tap'). There was, of course, a German word corresponding to this,⁴ but since the selling of beer was regulated in Bergen and there was a dispute surrounding it, the Norwegian technical term was chosen.

This text exists in only one manuscript, but it was published three times between 1877 and 1912. The editions are quite similar to one another, and for the most part are accurate. A thorough comparison between the charter and the dialogue could probably shed new light not only on the conflicts in Bergen at the time, but also on the accommodation between Norwegian and Low German. A Norwegian translation has been carried out, but is not yet published. In time it will provide interesting information, especially to historians.

Politics, religion and astronomy

The other German text worth mentioning here is about one hundred years younger than the dialogue, written at the end of the 16th century in Bergen. It exists in several manuscripts, but has not yet been published in full. An abbreviated version translated into Danish was published by Nicolaysen (1868), but it fails to give a full picture of this very remarkable text. It is called *Die norske saw* ('the Norwegian sow'), even though the pig is not central in the book. But the sow serves to depict the decadence that, according to the unknown author, was typical of Bergen at the time. In addition, a Norwegian poem from 1583 about a monster pig born in Akershus near Oslo is quoted in the text.

Politically, the text is interesting in its harsh criticism of the exploitation of Norwegian fishermen and farmers. Because of this treatment, it is claimed,

⁴ In fact, King Kristoffer's charter uses the term *bior tapp*. This means that the author of the dialogue either had more sources than this charter for the dialogue, or that he knew the Bergen German variety well and knew that *oltap* was the word commonly used in the city.

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they will never become free to use their potential, and the country will remain poor. As well as Norwegian and Danish officials, the German merchants are criticised. There is not much religious tolerance evident in the text; it expresses an intense hatred towards non-Lutherans, especially Catholics and anabaptists. The decadence of Bergen society is criticised, and the immoral behaviour of several "good" citizens is mentioned, but their names are written in code. As was quite common at the time, astronomy was closely tied to religious beliefs. Sky formations and the like were interpreted as God's signs to men, and many pages of the text are filled with such speculations.

Dialogue is also used in this text to make certain issues clearer. But the didactical form that dominates the text is one often used in religious texts, namely a parable followed by an explanation. A more suitable title for the text would be "the Norwegian hen-basket", since the Norwegians are compared to hens trapped in a basket instead of being free-range. The author used different breeds of chicken to illustrate the different social classes of the society.

Linguistically, the text is interesting mainly because of the type of German it employs, which can be described as High German with many Low German elements in it. For a study of the history of Norwegian, the most interesting aspect is the poem about the monster pig, which is quoted in Norwegian and not translated into German. Thus the author must have written the book for bilingual readers. This poem is, as far as I know, the only example we have of written Norwegian with heavy German interference. The writer must have known the poem orally and wrote it down using his – German – spelling rules, varied as they were. Furthermore, the different scribes who copied the text chose different solutions when spelling the Norwegian words of the poem, giving us an idea of how they perceived spoken Norwegian (Nesse 2009, pp. 124–126).

Finally, one can ask why a text that is so critical of the Hanseatic League came to be written by a German in Bergen. Wouldn't the Germans stick together? Probably not. Only those belonging to the Hanseatic League had the special privileges – and limitations – of Bryggen society bestowed on them. Germans who were not part of this were treated as other foreigners were, Englishmen, the Dutch, etc. Furthermore, Hanseatic merchants who chose to leave the League were punished severely, and this of course might create bad feelings towards Hanseatic society. This means that in this mixed city, it was possible to be a Norwegian patriot in the German language.

Texts in Norwegian

Most of the texts that form the basis for the different studies of Norwegian and German in Bergen are written in Norwegian or Danish, or any conceivable mixture of the two varieties. From the oldest period we have mostly charters, while later on we find letters, laws, books, book keeping accounts and other kinds of texts. There are four texts that should be mentioned here, since they have been used more extensively than the others.

History

Bergen Fundas, mentioned above, is the first history of a city that was written in Norway. It has been seen as a product of the so-called Bergen humanists, who were a group gathered around the king's representative at the castle of Bergen. But it might also be seen as evidence that a self-conscious bourgeoisie was evolving in Bergen, a group of people who had their identity tied to their trade and to their city, as much as to their king and their church.

It is written in the Dano-Norwegian so typical of the 16th century, a variety that is as Norwegian as it is Danish, and marked by an extensive variation in spelling. The history of Bergen is described from the time when the area that later became the city was pasture land, and starts with a magic tale: One day the shepherds heard strange sounds, as if many people were speaking, and when they told their master of this, he prophesised that a rich and mighty city would arise on the pasture land. It is not mentioned that this was a message from God, but there is a clear resemblance to texts like *die norsche saw* and Absalon's diary.

Absalon's diary

The diary of the priest and teacher Absalon Pederssøn is one of the best-known Norwegian texts from the 16th century. The language resembles that of *Bergen Fundas*, but large parts of the diary are written in Latin, whereas *Bergen Fundas* does not contain Latin. The use of Latin in Bergen during the Hanseatic era has not been investigated, apart from some observations of code shifting in letters written by Absalon's mentor, the bishop Geble Pederssøn (Nesse 2009). Analysing the entries in order to find out why Absalon chose which language would probably yield insights about how Latin was perceived. It would be interesting to see how the bilingual priest used the two languages, if his bilingualism was complementary in that some of the expressions related to religion only existed for him in Latin.

Since the diary to some degree is concentrated around Absalon's life, it is a very valuable source of knowledge about social patterns in informal life in Bergen. He lists the different people who were invited to baptisms and weddings, and he is the most cited source when it comes to contact between the Hanseatic merchants and the Norwegians, at least for the upper social layers of both groups.

Court protocols from the 1590s and the 1660s

The two oldest court protocols from Norwegian Bergen were written in the 1590s and 1660s. When reading them, the separation between Norwegian and German society in Bergen really springs to mind. The pages are as good as empty of German merchants; if one read only these books, one would think this was a pure Norwegian city. The reverse case holds for the court protocols from Bryggen, which will not be mentioned here.

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The content of the two Norwegian protocols is similar, apart from the great number of witch trials in the older protocol, which is absent from the younger one. Linguistically, we can see how much the written language changed from the 16th to the 17th century. In the latter, there is still much variation, but it is within a narrower range, is less influenced by Norwegian dialect, and is more in line with written Danish; it is still not codified as a fixed norm, but it is on its way.

In these protocols, all kinds of people appear, with their names, occupations and their disputes listed. Women are present to a much larger degree than in other sources; they dominate the witch trials, both as the accused and as witnesses, but also in other cases they stand up as witnesses, bypassers or accusers. And since it was important to state exactly what people said in court, the protocols have many quotations that, even though they are not written in anything like pure dialect, at least when it comes to vocabulary and partly when it comes to syntax, give an idea of what the spoken language of the people was like.

Texts in both languages

When studying language contact, texts that display examples of the different varieties in context are of great importance for understanding the kind of bi- or multilingualism in the community in question. From Bryggen in Bergen we have a large corpus of “neighbours’ books” (Nesse 2012a), consisting of about 20 books from 10 different housing complexes. In these books, everything related to life in the housing complex was recorded – from the very practical division of payment for the upkeep of the buildings, fire protection and taxes, to rules for behaviour (when and where smoking was allowed, church duties), and last but not least records of employment. The oldest of these books starts in 1529, and the last ends in 1936. During this period, the language of the books changes first from Low German to High German, then from High German to Danish, and finally from Danish to Norwegian. All the writers are merchants with varying levels of education, and the writing skills range from very basic to rather elaborate.

The three language shifts that these books display show us that the gradual shift from one variety to another took place in different ways. The first shift, from Low to High German, occurred during the 17th century, and can be described as a gradual process where more and more High German elements were introduced, until around 1700 we find that there are few Low German elements left in the written language. The secretaries of the Hanseatic settlement in Bergen, most of whom held a law degree from a German university, wrote High German in all external correspondence from 1580 onward. However, in texts meant for internal use the same secretaries wrote Low German long after that and they distinguished between the two written varieties. The common merchants did not seem to have this awareness. Instead, they mixed the two: Low German lexical items like *ik* and *dat* are replaced by High German forms

ich and *dass*, but the grammar remains Low German. For example, the Low German merger of *der* (masc. nom.) and *die* (fem. nom.) to *de* results in the writing *der* (nom.) in front of feminine nouns.

The change from High German to Danish took place around 1800. The first Danish entries in the neighbours' books dates from the 1770s, and the last German entry is from 1820. This language shift does not involve a mixing of the two varieties; rather, it came about because an increasing number of merchants – after 1750 they were no longer subjects of the Hanseatic League but of Bergen – had Norwegian as their first language and Danish as their written code. The immigrants from Germany, however, continued to write in German – at least in some domains – because of the tradition at Bryggen. They were not themselves responsible for Bergen bilingualism, but they came to a city where this bilingualism was well established and profited from it. This established pattern may, of course, have been one of the reasons immigration lasted so long after the Hanseatic League faded away, since it made the move easier for both young apprentices and adult merchants.

But even though the German immigrants of the 18th and 19th centuries wrote in German in the neighbours' books and in their private diaries, they must have learned Norwegian/Danish in order to join the various social and formal organisations of the city. In these settings, all writing was in Danish only. An example is provided in the minutes from the shooting association of Bergen, which had many German merchants as members, where everything was written in Danish.

The final change from Danish to Norwegian occurred around 1900. Like the switch from Low to High German, it happened through mixing, but with one large difference: while those who altered their written code from Low to High German still spoke Low German and thus started writing in a variety different from their spoken dialect, those who switched their written code from Danish to Norwegian all spoke Norwegian and thus began writing in a variety more similar to the one they spoke.

The neighbours' books can be regarded as semi-private writing; they were not written for publication or archives, but rather were intended to be read by a group of ordinary people who shared responsibility for a group of buildings. Whether these people were subjects of the Hanseatic League or the Danish, Swedish or Norwegian king did not really make a difference to the way this material was written. The texts remained remarkably stable through the centuries, which makes them excellent sources for diachronic research, whether on linguistics or history. The reason why the books ceased to be produced in the 1930s is partly due to the invention of the typewriter, but most of all because of a change in the way the ownership of such buildings was organised. If only one man owned the whole housing complex, the need for a book that each owner wrote in and signed no longer existed.

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Editorial practices

The texts that form the basis for all the different studies, apart from one, were not printed in their time. Those that have been edited and published were worked on several centuries after they were written. The others remain as hand-written manuscripts. This has significance, of course, for the choice of methodology, and most likely for the outcome of the studies. Working with hand-written material is time-consuming, but on the other hand, what you read is what was written, and not the interpretation of an editor.

Both during attempts to edit hand-written material (Nesse 2002, 2008, 2009) and while working with editions produced by others, the question of how editing should be done has arisen. There is a large literature on this (Nesse 2012b), and different scholars have different views. Linguists have different needs from those of historians, even though historians may also end up reading a document in the wrong way if a comma is put in the wrong place. Ersland (2011, p. 18) shows, for example, that an editor's insertion of a comma has led to a false understanding of where the market place in Bergen was situated in the 1500s.

When the language of the original text, as in the case of Low German, is not known to the potential readers – Norwegian historians and linguists – the challenge is of a different type than questions concerning punctuation and capital letters. The issue of translation comes up, and whether the translation should be published on its own or along with the original version. A change in research questions leads to different requirements from the editing process. Solutions that seemed correct 150 years ago can now create more misunderstandings than the editor could imagine. The editions of *Bergen Fundas* by Nicolaysen (1858, 1868) can serve as a brief example.

The Norwegian version of *Bergen Fundas* was published in 1858. As mentioned above, all the Norwegian manuscripts end in the 1550s, and so does the edited version. The German translation was not considered important enough to publish at the time, apart from the expansions from 1550–1670. These existed only in the German versions, and since they contained information about Bergen society that could be found only in these German texts, they needed to be published. But how? The solution was to translate them into Danish and give them a separate name: *Mikjel Hofnagels optegnelser* ('the records of Mikjel Hofnagel'). Modern readers who do not pay special attention to the footnotes will believe that this was a text written in Danish by a man called Mikjel Hofnagel, and indeed, many writing about the history of Bergen have done so, and quoted the imaginary Hofnagel in pure Danish. This is unfortunate, but the choice made in 1868 can be understood in light of the importance of keeping the original *Bergen Fundas* "clean" – only the core text deserved to go by that name. Still, the editions from the 1800s are valuable to us in many ways, even if they need to be used with care.

Concluding remarks

Applying theoretical and methodological tools from different disciplines has been fruitful in investigating the bilingual language history of Bergen. At the same time, it will be evident that the wide scope that has given a very good overall view of the linguistic situation is not the only possible approach. To choose one specific corpus and have it digitalised in order to carry out quantitative analyses is a possibility that clearly would make important data accessible to further interpretation. I have done this only to a very limited degree (Nesse 2002, pp. 206–210), and more of this kind of work would be welcomed. At the other end of the methodological scale, it is clear that more editions of the existing material are needed in order to involve other researchers in the field of the linguistic and textual history of Norway. The texts from Bergen influenced other places in Norway, especially in the west and the north, and these texts should be made available to those who do not have the time or the skills to work with the handwritten manuscripts in the different language varieties used in the city.

The research field of language contact in Bergen over the ages is wide, and there are many tasks still to attend to. Most critical in my view is to reopen the investigations of German that were started in the works of Olav Brattegard in the 1930s and 1940s. A sociolinguistic approach to the German language of Bergen, compared to the language in the northern part of Germany, could give further insights not only into the Bergen German language as such, but also into language contact between Norwegian and German.

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Contact between Low German and
Scandinavian in the Late Middle Ages

25 Years of Research

Lennart Elmevik and Ernst Håkon Jahr (editors)



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