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Language diversity and language contact in Northern Europe in the 14th century

NB: *The presentation will be given in German.*

This lecture focuses on several *aspects* of the linguistic situation in Northern Europe in the Late Middle Ages. It touches upon the geographical situation, the internal genetic relationships between the languages of this area and the various forms of contact between the Scandinavian languages and Low German. Special emphasis is laid on the nature of multilingualism (individual, societal, diglossic) and the manifestations of multilingualism (oral, written, the use of *linguae francae*). The conclusion will then shed some light on the linguistic situation in central Europe as well and describe the important role of the (Low) German language for the structural reorganisation and the lexical elaboration of the Mainland Scandinavian languages.

The presentation starts out with a terminological *comparison* between the generally used term ‘Scandinavia’ and the local view, which considers this part of the world globally ‘the North’.

The *main focus* lies, however, on the Scandinavian languages of Germanic origin (mainly Danish, Swedish, Norwegian), which were in intense contact with Latin (the language of book keeping and documentation) and Low German (the prestigious *lingua franca* of the Baltic and beyond) at that time.

The activities of the Hanseatic League and its Low German varieties played an important role for the further development and elaboration of the Mainland Scandinavian languages, especially as far as the typological rapprochement towards the western Germanic languages is concerned.

Crucial for a deeper understanding of the linguistic situation in the Late Middle Ages is *multilingualism*, both in its oral and written forms, and its individual and societal manifestations as well – not to forget media diglossia. Moreover, it will be displayed which role Latin and Low German and other languages played in this scenario.

Language contact between genetically closely related languages leads, amongst other things, to changes of the linguistic norms and particularly to code mixing, which seems to be inevitable in such situations and which gives way to various typological restructurings in the ‘inferior’ languages. A precondition for these developments is, again, multilingualism: Homophone diamorphs, partially identical word order patterns and syntactic reanalyses represent the pivotal links between the languages involved in contact and facilitate gradual changes.

The lecture concludes with some more general statements about the *transfer* of trade and culture during the (Late) Middle Ages between Scandinavia and the continental countries.