The Nordic Languages

HSK 22.1
Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft

Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science

Manuels de linguistique et des sciences de communication

Mitbegründet von Gerold Ungeheuer (†)
Mitherausgegeben 1985–2001 von Hugo Steger

Herausgegeben von / Edited by / Edités par
Herbert Ernst Wiegand

Band 22.1

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
2002
The Nordic Languages

An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages

Edited by
Oskar Bandle (main editor) · Kurt Braunmüller
Ernst Håkon Jahr · Allan Karker
Hans-Peter Naumann · Ulf Teleman

Consulting Editors:
Lennart Elmevik · Gun Widmark

Volume 1

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
2002

In recent years and decades, interest in language history has increased in general and also within the field of Nordic studies. Therefore, it seems appropriate to investigate the current state of Nordic language history and, where applicable, to attempt to rewrite it. For this reason, the series editors of HSK expressed a desire to the publisher and the undersigned to publish a new handbook on the history of Nordic languages – an idea which was well-received and the results of which are presented to the public here in this work. Whereas a synopsis of Nordic language history was previously lacking to a great extent (with the exception of both descriptions by Einar Haugen), the aim of this new handbook is to provide an extensive overall picture of linguistic developments in Scandinavian languages, embedded in a broad culture-historical context under consideration of all modern methods available today. In 230 articles written by renowned specialists and divided into 21 chapters, the Nordic language history is expanded in comparative descriptions vis-à-vis previous studies on the subject and enriched through new methodical approaches.

A glance at the Nordic language histories available today reveals different possibilities for describing language history. Despite their titles, most previous works (i.a. Wessen’s standard work *Svensk språkhistoria*) are actually historical grammars which provide a one-sided list of facts about the phonetic, morphological and, in some cases, syntactic developments. These works neglect important linguistic categories such as the lexicon and fail to touch upon the culture-historical context, i.e. external language history at all, and do not include any summarizing standpoints.

The concept of the current handbook naturally rules out such a limited method of description as well as the stringing together of language history in an isolated observation of individual language levels (as is the concept of Haugen’s *Scandinavian language structures*), or the division of isolated observations in the individual national language histories (as in Wessén’s *De nordiska språken*). Despite the problems in practice, the most suitable principle seems to be that of a division into periods, each being dealt with under various different viewpoints such as level of description, methodical approach, external linguistic aspects and culture-historical embedding. This also calls into question the relationship between the conveyance of individual data and the weighing of systematic viewpoints, in other words, the question of to what degree language history can be conceptualized as a systematic history. In this regard, a handbook such as the current one must strive for a compromise in which it combines the conveyance of a large amount of individual data with an accentuation of systematic viewpoints, i.e., diachrony with synchrony, longitudinal sections with cross-sections (with cross-sections especially in more or less clearly defined periods such as Early Nordic, Old Nordic and present-day languages), so that the description of single historical facts continually flows into systematic-structural discussions, just as systematic aspects must also be considered within the discussion of diachronic developments. Such correlations also contribute significantly to the explanation of language-historical processes.
In a Nordic language history, the division into periods, which each attempt to combine diachronic and synchronic viewpoints, is complicated further by the fact that a comparative description of six languages (including Nynorsk) must be managed, and the conventional but also factually justified division of each language into periods deviates from that of the others at different points. For example, the period called Olddansk precedes the remaining Old Nordic, so that the period temporally corresponding with the rest of Old Nordic is often termed (Ældre) Middeldansk; the beginning of the 19th century is a much more drastic boundary for Norwegian than for the remaining Nordic languages, etc. Here, a middle course for all Nordic languages must be found by carefully weighing all relevant factors. In this, if possible, the special interests of individual readers must be taken into account by providing as consistent divisions as possible between individual languages, levels of description, etc., whereas more general, summarizing viewpoints will be discussed at the beginning and at the end of the handbook.

2. Method

The consideration of the various different aspects of the course of language history means that the linguistic facts are not only included in a culture-historical, but also in a broad scientific and science-historical context reaching from the positivist-comparative to sociolinguistics and text-type linguistics, even to modern discourse analysis. The handbook is not committed to a certain method. The principle is method pluralism, in which the most important rule is simply to consider the most current state of research and which consists of an extensive search of methodical possibilities. This methodical approach results in an overall structure which is relatively loose, but at the same time, it also produces an overall picture which is illuminated from all sides, consciously taking certain overlaps between the articles into account. In addition to language-historical facts, this approach also necessitates a prominent meta-area which covers the relationship of Nordic language history to different linguistic theories in Chapters III–V, and which discusses the relationships to the various neighbouring disciplines ranging from archaeology to literary and translation history and to text edition in Chapter VI. It is an unavoidable fact that a language-historical description is traditional to a certain degree (a regressive language history, for example, might be original, but it would not lead to any substantial new realizations). In the current handbook, however, more modern approaches are also considered, which are partly integrated into the historical description (not only structuralistic, but especially also language typological, sociolinguistic, contact-linguistic or text-type-linguistic approaches), and partly into theoretical discussions about the relationship to language history (i.e., with regards to generative transformational grammar, pragmatics, phraseology, contrastive linguistics or computer linguistics).

The basis of data of the present language history is also very extensive and stretches from all kinds of written records (incl. poetic works) to present-day spoken languages (incl. dialects, sociolects, etc.). Since the time allotted for preparing the articles was proportionally limited, the description had to support itself to a great extent on the scientific literature which was already available. Nonetheless, the articles in this handbook present their own research results in several areas which had not been carefully examined until now (i.e., translation history). Another important task of the current handbook is to point out existing gaps in research.

As the exclusive use of English shows, this handbook is directed with regards to theory, method and terminology at an international readership with a scientific interest in the
topic. However, care has also been taken to ensure that the content of the handbook is also accessible to interested laypersons and scholars from other disciplines.

3. Contentual Concept

In accordance with the fundamental humane-scientific concept mentioned above, the contentual structure of the handbook is characterized by the attempt to combine internal and external language history as well as factual knowledge with theoretical considerations: in a general sense, to understand language history as part of an extensively understood cultural history. It seems sensible to divide such a structure into three parts: the central part of the individual language-historical description with the respective culture-historical references is flanked by a meta-area in Chapters II–VI and a description of general topics with regard to period and region in Chapters XVII–XXI. An introduction providing initial information about the Nordic language area, the genetic relationship of the Nordic languages to other Germanic languages, the relationship between diachrony and synchrony, the problems of the division into periods, and the basis of data on Nordic language history is followed by critical discussions of the research history until ca. 1950. The research history of the individual Nordic languages and the contributions of Scandinavian researchers to the international development of linguistics are dealt with in separate articles; in article 14 the contributions of non-Nordic researchers to Nordic language history are treated. The relationship of Nordic language history to the methods available today (since ca. 1950) is examined in Chapter IV with regard to theoretical possibilities as well as to currently available research results. Chapter V discusses the relationship between language history and dialectology, which is very intense in the Nordic language region. In the meta-area, the links between Nordic language history and the various aspects of political, social and cultural history (archaeology, history of realia, legal history, history of ideas, religious history, literary and translation history) are then discussed systematically (Chapter VI).

Chapters VII–XVI comprise the central part of the handbook, in which language-historical facts are described and analysed according to period and classified with respect to their historical and systematic contexts. This central part begins (Chapter VII) with a discussion of the relationship of the (Old) Nordic languages to the other Germanic languages and to other neighbouring languages, in which language contact plays an important role. The next chapter (Chapter VIII) presents an overview of Proto-Nordic, in which, in addition to the language system, lexicon, personal and place-names, special attention is paid to the question of its sources – hence also touching upon the origin and development of runic writing. As the use of the common term “Late Proto-Nordic” is avoided here, the period from the 6th century to Old Nordic (ca. 1100), which is so important from a language-historical viewpoint, is dealt with summarily and is associated with historic and culture-historical relationships and developments from the Vendel/Merovingian and Viking Ages, whereas special attention is paid to the sociolinguistic aspect already here (Chapter IX). In view of its long tradition, literary importance and its position as the starting point of all other language developments, three chapters are devoted to the period of Old Nordic (ca. 1100–1350). Chapter X begins with introductory descriptions of the cultural and historical conditions, as well as the distinction and structure of the term Old Nordic, followed by a discussion of its tradition with regards to the history of handwritten texts and the development of the Latin script. Chapter XI
covers various aspects of Old Nordic, from the phonological and grammatical system to the lexicon, text type structure and problems in translation. Chapter XII, entitled “The ecology of language”, describes the most important problems of the general living conditions of Nordic languages during the Old Nordic period, from the relationship between written language and dialects to various language contact situations and the development of Nordic languages outside of what is known today as Scandinavia.

The second part of the handbook begins in Chapter XIII with the transitional period between Old Nordic and Early Modern Nordic (ca. 1350–ca. 1550), a complex and problematic topic of discussion which must be divided up into several individual aspects. The central part is a detailed description of language changes, especially those which greatly influenced the structure of mainland Scandinavian languages. This central part is preceded by a few sections covering historic and culture-historical aspects (i.a., on the relationship between handwritten texts and letterpress printing) and followed by a few sections dealing with special aspects such as text type inventory, the language of translations, development of oral and written styles, language contact, language loss and the loss of standard language (in Norwegian).

Classifying those language developments which took place after the early modern period is problematic insofar that, with the exception of isolated cases such as 19th century Norwegian, no clear boundaries can be detected, at least not with respect to all Nordic languages. However, a cut-off in or at the end of the 18th century is justifiable, not only due to internal linguistic criteria (i.a., the emergence of logical syntax), but also because of the general living conditions of language (firm establishment of standard languages, increasing language cultivation and the efforts of gramarians). Chapter XIV, which covers this period, focuses on comprehensive descriptions of individual languages, which are supplemented by descriptions of sociolinguistic and dialectic variations with reference to a growing national standard language tradition. In contrast to the previous chapters, new findings are presented here in special sections about education and language cultivation and their importance for language development (i.e., grammarians).

As a period with a character of its own, including such crucial developments as the establishment of the middle class, urbanization and (the beginnings of) industrialization, the 19th century receives special treatment in Chapter XV with a focus on specific occurrences and problems which characterize the 19th century: to some extent contradictory ideologies such as nationalism and Scandinavianism and their effects on language (the establishment of the independence of Norwegian, the beginnings of Finland-Swedish as an independent language, Icelandic purism, the establishment of Faroese as a written language / the interrelations between Scandinavian languages, i.a., in the exchange of loanwords between Danish and Swedish), expansion of the spectrum of text types, relationships between standard language and forms from colloquial speech, stylistic developments in poetry and literary prose, and development of a middle-class conversational culture.

In Chapter XVI, which covers the 20th century, three events are in the forefront:
- a detailed description of the systems of modern standard languages in cross-sections, but taking into account the changes during the 20th century;
problems in linguistic layering: written language vs. spoken language in a survey of their main characteristics, their interrelations, and their development during the 20th century: interrelation and development of dialects and regional languages in Sweden, Norway and Denmark during the 20th century; social stratification in individual Nordic languages, language of the media such as radio and television;
- tendencies since World War II, including future prospects for the history of Nordic languages.

In Chapters XVII–XXI, certain special aspects of historical development are discussed in summary within the scope of the entire Nordic language history. Chapter XVII describes the typological development, which led to the contrast between Mainland Nordic and Island Nordic and which affects phonology on the one hand, morphology and syntax on the other. In Chapter XVIII, the social stratification of the Nordic languages is analysed once again, this time from an overall perspective with regard to time and region. Chapter XIX describes the special languages which otherwise only receive brief mention in the previous sections:
- languages of socially correlating groups, such as students’, soldiers’, sailors’, thieves’ slang, etc.,
- technical languages and jargons, such as craftsmen’s language, miners’ language, scientific language, sports language, etc.,
- slang.

With regard to more recent language history, Chapter XX describes language cultivation and language planning in Scandinavian countries, also from an overall perspective. Chapter XXI discusses the various aspects of language contact again in summary and in consideration of internal Nordic correlations, and according to minority languages in Scandinavia and Nordic emigrant languages, especially those which spread to America.

4. General Comments

The overall concept of the current handbook is modelled after the volume *Historical Linguistics (Sprachgeschichte)* to a certain extent. It differs, however, insofar that the research-historical and theoretical-methodical parts are more strictly separated from the main empirical-historical part. The 230 articles were distributed among the editors as evenly as possible. Each of the editors focused on the approx. 40 articles which were allocated to them, whereas O. Bandle, as the main editor, reviewed all articles. The supervision of each article was allocated to one of the six editors such that the topics corresponded, where possible, to the individual linguistic-geographic affiliation and/or special area of interest and research of the editor. Finding enough authors with a certain interest in historical linguistics among the relatively small number of Nordic language experts seemed doubtful at first, especially since the editors were instructed not to allocate more than three articles to one author. Surprisingly, contributors were able to cover the entire work plan after all. Only later would some articles have to be omitted, partly due to failure to deliver promised manuscripts but also due to overlapping in content with other articles.

Although the search for authors led for the most part to satisfactory results, it was not altogether unproblematic. Since linguistic research in Scandinavian countries is tradi-
tionally carried out within national boundaries, it was difficult in some cases to find authors for the articles on the entire Nordic region. It was therefore partly necessary to divide these articles up according to individual Scandinavian countries or language areas. In this sense, the article originally planned to cross-linguistically discuss the translation language of the 19th century for the Nordic region was divided up into five parts, namely 168–172.

Allocating those articles dealing with internal and external language history, i.e., articles covering interdisciplinary topics (e.g., language and history, archaeology, etc.) also proved to be difficult. Finding suitable authors interested in working on the theoretical-methodical articles was also not always easy. Following the death of the contributor Kristian Ringgaard, it was decided to print Article 33 in its unfinished state, partly in honour of the deserving author, but also because it would have been impossible to find another author on such short notice for such a large field as Nordic dialectology.

It remains for the editors to thank several persons and institutions which have supported this work by active collaboration. Apart from the publishers’ staff and the series editors this is above all Mrs Jean Hannah (Lausanne) who has carried out the control of the English language with unequalled perspicacity and in this way made the handbook easily readable for an English-speaking public. It remains also to thank the assistants of the Scandinavian department of the University of Zurich: lic. phil. Christof Reiber and lic. phil. Sonja Gisler for their unselfish work in connection with the production and control of the handbook which essentially lightened the chief editor’s burden, and last but not least the editors would like to thank the editor of the “Thurgauer Namenbuch”, Dr. Eugen Nyffenegger, for good advice in computer problems.

The editors hope to have accomplished a comprehensive work which for a pretty long time to come may serve as a substantial aid for linguistic research.

Oskar Bandle
Kurt Braunmüller
Ernst Håkon Jahr
Allan Karker
Hans-Peter Naumann
Ulf Teleman
with the consulting editors Lennart Elmevik and Gun Widmark