UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages

Low German in Scandinavia

A study of language contact in Hanseatic Bergen

Year Abroad Project 2013
Dissertation

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

Dan.	Danish	NHG	New High German
DN	*Diplomatarium Norvegicum*	OE	Old English
Goth.	Gothic	OHG	Old High German
Ice.	Icelandic	ON	Old Norse
LG	Low German	OWN	Old West Norse
MLG	Middle Low German	PGmc.	Proto-Germanic
NorwBk.	Norwegian Bokmål	Swe.	Swedish

Introduction

'Wir sind so intensiv beeinflusst worden, dass ein Skandinave heute wohl kaum einen Satz sagen kann, ohne ein niederdeutsches Wort zu verwenden.' These were the words of the Norwegian linguist Olav Brattegard on the enduring legacy of contact between Low German and the Scandinavian languages which arose through the Hanseatic League (Brattegard, 1963:10, as quoted in Braunmüller, 1989:9). The League was an alliance between North German towns and trade outposts abroad to promote diplomatic and economic interests. What is significant for our purposes is that the nature of Hansa activity brought LG-speaking merchants to settlements across Northern Europe and into contact with other peoples. At the time, Middle Low German enjoyed what could be regarded as its Golden Age; it soon became the *Verkehrssprache* amongst participating members of the League, enabling supraregional communication. Indeed, the period has often been referred to as a 'niederdeutsche Blütezeit'[1] and LG enjoyed two to three centuries of prestige across the North Sea and Baltic regions. Even following the decline of the Hansa in the 16th century, and the resulting fall of the LG Verkehrssprache, its lasting influence on the Scandinavian languages has remained evident and, as Brattegard indicated, can still be seen in the languages today.[2] For instance, both the common verbs 'to teach' and 'to learn' are semantically covered by *lære* in Modern Norwegian and Danish, and *lära* in Modern Swedish, each from MLG *lēren.* The MLG verb replaced the original semantically distinct Old Norse items *kenna* 'to teach' and *nema '*to learn'[3] (Haugen, 1976:220).

Let us now turn to examine the situation in Norway and specifically in Bergen, as this will be the focus of study. Bergen is significant for it was the only Scandinavian town in which a Hanseatic *kontor* was established, alongside other overseas offices in London, Bruges and Novgorod. The Bergen kontor was opened in 1343, although German merchants had already been afforded some privileges by 1250, and a long-standing connection with Northern Germany remained for over five hundred years, until 1754 when the kontor was handed over to Norwegian administration. As well as being a major centre of Hanseatic activity, the situation in Bergen was singular in many respects. Firstly, the number of German merchants present was considerably greater than in other Norwegian towns. Trudgill (2011:57), quoting Nesse (2001) and Rambø (2008), estimates the proportion of Germans in 15th century Bergen to be approximately 2,000 of a total population of 7,000, rising to 4,000 of 9,000 in the summer months. Compared to other German communities in Denmark and Sweden, visiting merchants in Bergen remained relatively unintegrated in Norwegian society. They lived in their own quarter, the *Tyske Brygge* or 'Deutsche Brücke', rather than amongst the town's native inhabitants, as was the case in Stockholm for example. Forbidden from marrying Norwegian women, they were predominantly single men, although some had no doubt left family behind in Germany. All told, the German merchants in Bergen have traditionally been viewed as a transient population, whose members were unlikely to settle permanently (Jahr 1995:130) and had little to do

[1] See for example Brattegard (1945-46:22).

[2] The effects of LG contact were later reinforced by a second period of German influence from High German during and following the Reformation.

[3] In Modern Icelandic, a language with a relatively isolated history of little contact, the ON verbs remain in distinct use: Ice. *kenna* 'to teach' and *nema* 'to learn.'

with the native inhabitants. This oft-assumed sociological profile will be later reviewed however, as its accuracy is significant in any examination of the contact situation and resulting linguistic phenomena.

Following Brattegard's early works on the situation in Hanseatic Bergen[4] (1932, 1934, 1945-46), language contact between LG and the Scandinavian languages continued to attract scholarly attention. The last two decades of the 20th century in particular saw an explosion of research, two huge contributions being the symposium series *Niederdeutsch in Skandinavien* and its six resulting volumes[5], and Kurt Braunmüller and Willy Diercks' project *Niederdeutsch und die Skandinavischen Sprachen*[6]. The timing of this explosion was no coincidence but followed theoretical advances made in the latter half of the 20th century. Jahr points to the 'prevailing Neogrammarian paradigm of Scandinavian linguistics' resulting in a standstill in this research field in earlier decades (1997:326). Two relatively modern sub-disciplines have since come to the fore, however, and both are highly relevant for our subject matter: contact linguistics and sociolinguistics. The former emerged following Uriel Weinreich's seminal *Languages in Contact* (1953) along with work from the likes of Sarah Thomason & Terrence Kaufman (1988) and the latter from proponents such as William Labov and notably Peter Trudgill, who has discussed aspects of Norwegian (1986, 2000, 2011). A recent significant contribution specifically concerning Bergen has been made by Agnete Nesse (2002). Yet most importantly, as Jahr also indicates (1997:327), recent developments in sociolinguistics and language contact offer new theoretical approaches and raise questions which, despite an immense background of research, have by no means yet been exhausted by scholars.

Types of linguistic transference

It is clear that certain parameters are necessary when investigating such a vast phenomenon as presented by contact situation in Bergen. Firstly, a universal distinction must be made between two different types of linguistic borrowing. Thomason & Kaufman define *borrowing* as 'the incorporation of foreign elements into the speaker's native language' (1988:21). Within this umbrella term, two further sub-types can be defined; loan vocabulary (the transference of lexical items) and structural borrowing (the transference of grammatical features of language structure). It is generally acknowledged that structural borrowing is the more unusual of the two, requiring a more 'intense'[7] level of contact to occur. Concerning the Bergen case, it is well-documented that both loan words and structural features were transferred from LG into Norwegian during the Hanseatic period. Heavy lexical transference is found in specific semantic domains, notably in the field of trade, where the native verb *handla* took on a new meaning of 'trade' following the MLG item *handelen*, and newly

[4] An even earlier treatment of the subject is Didrik Arup Seip's *Låneordstudier (1915, 1919.)*

[5] *Niederdeutsch in Skandinavien.* Vol.I (1987); Vol.II (1989); Vol.III (1992); Vol.IV (1993); Vol.V & VI (2005)

[6] *Niederdeutsch und die Skandinavischen Sprachen,* Vol.I (1993); Vol.II (1995)

[7] The level of 'intensity' in a given contact situation is determined by a range of factors, later given full examination.

imported goods prompted loans such as *kanel* <MLG *kanēl,* 'cinnamon' and *sukkær* <MLG *sucker,* 'sugar' (Haugen, 1976:220). Whilst lexical borrowings are generally expected alongside such cultural innovations, the structural borrowings which occurred are perhaps more surprising. Grammatical changes in the Bergen dialect which arose from MLG contact include the use of *te* as an infinitive marker*,* the development of a new periphrastic genitive construction using 'sin' (the so-called *garpegenetiv*) and past tense formation using the suffix *–et* (Nesse, 2003:73). Yet structural transference took place on its vastest scale with the adoption of LG word-formation elements. Many affixes, such as the prefixes *an-, be-, for-* and the suffixes *–else* and *-het* not only entered Norwegian but subsequently became productive, and as a result exerted a considerable and lasting effect of change on the native linguistic system. This particular aspect shall be our focus.

I shall first consider the background factors, both linguistic and extra-linguistic, which enabled structural borrowings to take place, before examining affixal transference in closer detail, using the prefix *for-* and its occurrence in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* (DN) as a case study. The *DN* is a vast collection of over 19,000 documents connected to Norway from the period 1050-1590. The collection is particularly useful for research purposes in a number of ways. Though the earliest manuscripts are rarely dated or located, after 1290 it was common practice to mention the exact time and place of composition (Rindal, 2002:803), two crucial details in any historical linguistic study. Similarly, there are often lists of those who have attached their seals to the document, and sometimes even the scribe himself is named. Furthermore, there are a number of traits which mean that the manuscripts have been relatively well-preserved to the modern day; most represent important legal documents and were often produced in duplication, as well as afforded good care in later years. Yet perhaps the most attractive feature of the collection is its recent digitalisation at the University of Oslo, enabling quick effective searches for single items within the whole corpus, or equally within a section limited by chosen parameters. Finally and crucially, concerning Bergen as a site of text production, the corpus offers a myriad of relevant documents owing to the town's position as a trading and administrative centre in the period.

Classifying the contact situation in Bergen

In light of the transference phenomena listed above, it is perhaps possible to classify the situation in Hanseatic Bergen using a universal scale of language contact. One such scale, which shall be employed here, is that proposed by Thomason & Kaufman (1988:74-95) and later reviewed by Thomason with additional comments on levels of bilingualism and sociological factors (2001:70-74). The scale as reviewed by Thomason ranges from levels 1-4, level 1 defined as 'casual contact: only non basic vocabulary borrowed' and level 4 as 'intense contact: continuing heavy lexical borrowing in all sections of the lexicon, heavy structural borrowing.' The linguistic criteria listed for levels 1 and 2, including the borrowing of content and function words and minor structural borrowings without typological change, are fulfilled in the Bergen situation. Furthermore, it could perhaps be deemed a level 3 case, 'more intense contact: basic as well as non-basic vocabulary borrowed, moderate structural borrowing', for this is where the borrowing of derivational affixes first comes into play. Indeed, Braunmüller (2005:1229-1230) suggests that the wider LG-Scandinavian case represents an example of level 3 contact, citing the borrowing of functional verbs such as *blive,* 'become' <MLG *blîwen,* conjunctions such as *men,* 'but' and particles such as *jo,* 'however' as justifications. Yet closer examination of Thomason's level 3 criteria reveals that a number are in fact unfulfilled in the Bergen

case. Whilst derivational affixes were indeed borrowed on a large scale, this is perhaps the only level 3 criterion which is sufficiently satisfied; basic vocabulary such as pronouns and low numerals remain unaffected in the recipient language, as do the phonemic system, word order patterns and inflectional morphology.[8] Thus it would perhaps be better to propose that the contact largely represents level 2 on Thomason's scale, with a further unexpected trait more akin to level 3 situations demonstrated by the transference of several derivational affixes.[9] So how can this apparently unexpected case of structural borrowing be explained? So far our examination has addressed purely linguistic aspects. As with any contact situation though, this merely represents half of the equation; rather it is a complex interplay of a range of factors, both linguistic and extra-linguistic, which must be fully taken into account. To these extra-linguistic factors we shall now turn.

Contact intensity

It has already been noted that structural borrowings often require a more 'intense' level of contact to occur. Indeed, the typological correlation between contact intensity and transference levels constitutes the universal scale featured above; as contact intensity increases, so do the possibilities for different borrowing types. The property of 'intensity' is itself worthy of further consideration, for this is determined by several extra-linguistic factors. Thomason & Kaufman (1988) note among these: the number of speakers of each the source language and the recipient language, the duration of the contact period and the level of 'intimate' contact in mixed households and other social settings.

Let us first consider the role of speaker numbers. It is generally assumed that if one of two groups of speakers is significantly larger than the other, the smaller group's language is more likely to acquire features from the larger group's language (Thomason, 2001:66), thus representing a more 'intense' contact situation. The results of LG- Scandinavian contact in Bergen seem to conflict with this principle, however. As noted above, the number of German migrants was significant (2,000 out of a total population of 7,000 during the 15th century, rising to 4,000 out of 9,000 in summer) but never greater than the number of native inhabitants. Perhaps though, it is not the quantity of speakers but the level of bilingualism amongst them which is most important.[10] It was Weinreich who stated that

[8] The only other level 3 criterion which arguably matches is the borrowing of prosodic features, specifically stress placement. The adopted unstressed MLG prefixes remain unstressed in Norwegian, thus inflicting a change in native Scandinavian stress patterns by introducing items with second syllable rather than word-initial stress.

[9] Keith Boden (1993:304) seems to have acknowledged this in categorising the broader LG-Scandinavian contact situation between levels 2 and 3.

[10] Trudgill himself believes that despite the proportion of German-speaking residents being less than half, this did not hinder structural transference; 'My suggestion is that when the proportion of non-native speakers becomes as close to 50% as this- the proportion of non-native speakers of Norwegian in Bergen was certainly very high (4,000 out of 9,000)- the number of face to face dialect-contact type interactions, and therefore potential instances of accommodation would have reached a threshold level at which some aspects of the non-native variety could transfer to the native' (2011:57-58).

bilingual speakers form 'the locus of language contact' (1953:1) and Thomason & Kaufman cite bilingualism as a strong factor in the likelihood of structural transference occurring;

> 'If few speakers of the borrowing language are bilingual in the potential source language, then normally only words will be borrowed. However, if there is extensive bilingualism on the part of borrowing-language speakers, and if this bilingualism persists over a long period of time, then substantial structural borrowing is a probability' (1988:47-48).

Structural borrowings ultimately require more linguistic manipulation from speakers and thus a higher level of bilingual competence. Therefore, owing to the level of structural transference that did occur, we would expect extensive levels of LG competence amongst the native Bergen population. But was this the reality? Nesse (2003:72) notes that any levels of Norwegian-LG bilingualism in Bergen were limited to a small social elite and that 'there is no evidence that common people had an active competence in "the other" language of the city.' Similarly, Roberge (2010:422) indicates the existence of 'widespread bilingualism' in the region, but this is strictly restricted to the Scandinavian merchant classes and civil bureaucrats. Yet whilst there may not have been widespread active bilingualism in Hanseatic Bergen, Nesse does highlight the existence of 'passive bilingualism' based on mutual intelligibility; 'The Norwegians understood Low German, but most of them did not speak it, and the Germans understood Norwegian, but most of them did not speak it' (2003:72). This 'passive bilingualism' was crucially enabled by the fact that MLG and Middle Norwegian shared a common ancestor and many structural similarities. We shall return to the full consequences of this genetic relationship and typological proximity later in the discussion.

So whilst numbers of source-language (LG) speakers were not overwhelmingly high in Bergen, there were widespread levels of passive bilingualism amongst both speaker groups. What then of the duration of the contact? Thomason & Kaufman remark that all known cases of extensive structural borrowing are those which represent 'several hundred years of intimate contact' (1988:41). From a theoretical point of view, the longer the contact period, the more time there is for bilingualism to develop amongst speakers, and thus for structural features to be borrowed. It can certainly be said that the LG–Scandinavian contact in Bergen did last for several centuries. There is strong reason to believe that Germans were already present by the 12th century and archaeological finds of pottery from the lower Rhine and North Sea continental regions dated to the late 1100s support this (Helle, 2005:24). A significant detail is that although German presence in Bergen was at first limited to the summer season, the merchants soon became year-round residents. The first written evidence of so-called *Vintersittere,* merchants remaining over the winter months, is found in a document of 1309[11], although there is reason to believe that some were already doing this from 1250 onwards (Ersland, 2005:42, quoting Helle, 1982:379). From then on, the waves of LG-speaking migrants continued for over 300 years until the decline of the Hansa and the shift to High German dominance. Typically, the majority would remain in Bergen for at least six years and stays of ten years or more were not unusual (Nesse, 2002:138).

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[11] *DN* Vol.I.122

Yet the fact that contact levels were particularly intense during the Hanseatic Age does not change the reality that Bergen had already played host to foreign newcomers long before this period. The Viking Age had seen a great amount of movement within the North Sea region and, due to its coastal location, Bergen held a central trading position even before the first Germans arrived. Furthermore, Christian missionaries from continental Europe had already paid visits to the Nordic region, and there is evidence of early Latin loan vocabulary channelled via Old Saxon (Simensen, 2002:955). As a consequence, the inhabitants were surely accustomed to the presence of 'outsiders' and exposure to non-native spoken varieties. Braunmüller goes further to characterise the whole Medieval period as one of strong dialectal variation;

> 'Since the vernacular languages were not standardised in those days, migrating merchants as well as their Scandinavian trading partners in the coastal towns were used to understanding many dialectal variants of their native language and often the neighbouring dialects, too' (2002:1036).

He also names 'ein Offensein für Varietäten' and 'ein hohes Maß an sprachlicher Toleranz' as qualities of the well-travelled Medieval Scandinavian (1989:11). So not only was the LG contact period considerably long, over several centuries, it also followed a pre-existing backdrop of cultural and linguistic contact. Perhaps therefore, the population of Bergen was more accustomed to linguistic accommodation in situations of contact, thus having a greater aptitude for the type of transference-enabling passive bilingualism discussed above.

A potential counterargument to the contact period spanning several centuries is that the German population in Bergen was in a constant state of renewal, with different merchants coming and going each year. However, the prevailing route of transference was from LG into Norwegian and therefore it is the properties of the native Norwegian speakers, the main transference agents[12], which are of primary importance. Whilst the LG population was characterised by transiency and continuous turnover, the Norwegian community remained by comparison relatively stable. This leads Nesse to dismiss the constant demographical change in the German population as irrelevant, instead highlighting a long-term linguistic accommodation which developed through centuries of generations of native Norwegians;

> 'I løpet av de 400 årene hadde generasjon etter generasjon av bergensere tyskerne som en del av livet sitt. Når to folkegrupper lever i samme by så lenge som det var tilfellet her, er det langtidstilpassing mellom gruppene. Denne tilpassingen går over generasjoner, hver generasjon overfører det de har lært om språkkontakten og hvordan de skal takle den, til nye generasjoner'[13] (2002:138).

[12] Frans van Coestem claims the need for a more specific description of contact phenomena than the ambiguous terms 'borrowing' and 'transference' afford, highlighting the importance of transference agency. This leads him to distinguish between two transfer types: 'recipient language agentivity and borrowing' and 'source language agentivity and imposition' (1988:1). Our case represents the former, for it is the native Norwegians, the recipient language speakers, who are borrowing agents, as the prevailing direction of transference suggests.

[13] Translation: 'Over the course of 400 years, generation after generation of Bergeners had Germans as a part of their life. When two groups of people live in the same town as long as was the case here, it is long-term accommodation between the groups. This accommodation lasts over generations,

We must now turn to our remaining extra-linguistic factor; the level of so-called 'intimate contact'. It goes without saying that levels of transference depend upon the frequency and nature of individual verbal interactions occurring between members of each group. The traditional assumption that LG merchants lived in segregation from the native Bergen population has already been highlighted. If this is correct, we can presume the level of intimate contact to have been relatively low; the situation would be regarded as less intense and the structural transference would appear even more surprising. But just how accurate is this assumption? The LG community in Bergen was not only exclusively male; its members were actively forbidden from marrying Norwegian women. Enforced celibacy was a fact of life in all Hanseatic kontors and any merchant who defied this was threatened with the loss of rights or privileges and potentially even loss of citizenship (Hemmie, 2007:182). Economic motivations lay chiefly behind this imposition; the marriage ban was enforced to ensure that any accumulated wealth was channelled back to Germany and not passed on to potential Norwegian wives. There is also evidence to believe that the Germans not only lived in their own town quarter, *Bryggen,* but that they also worshipped in segregation. Although practising essentially the same religion as the Norwegians, the Germans had their own churches (Nesse, 2002:83), leading us to eliminate religious worship as a potential point of contact.

The unintegrated picture painted above has often been emphasised by linguists in studies of the Bergen contact situation. But there are a number of historiographical works which indicate a somewhat different reality. Hemmie, for example, indicates that despite enforced celibacy, some 'Schlupflöcher' must have existed in the attempted prevention of male-female contact (2007:183). She highlights the street of *Øvrestretet* as a red light district, in close proximity to *Bryggen* and inevitably popular with merchants of every nationality. According to tax registers from 1521, there were approximately 150 *fattige kvinner* or 'poor women' resident on *Øvrestretet*, the majority of whom were most likely prostitutes (2007:124). Furthermore, the street provided a recreational area not only popular with the merchants, but also with native Norwegians, and was thus a crucial site of contact:

> 'Die Straße war mit ihren zahlreichen Wirtshäusern und Bierbuden ein Vergnügungszentrum für die ganze Stadtbevölkerung. Hier kamen sich Deutsche und Norweger, Repräsentanten für die zweigeteilte Stadt, sozial am nächsten...' (2007:142).

Ersland (2005) and Müller-Boysen (1999) also point out the thriving prostitution scene near *Bryggen.* Yet perhaps even more significant is the evidence that some marriage-like relationships did seemingly develop between German men and Norwegian women. Proof has been found in the preserved wills of the so-called *Bergenfahrer,* those German merchants primarily concerned with trade in Bergen. Several dedications are found to Bergen women and illegitimate children, and as Hemmie remarks; 'In den allermeisten Fällen muss es sich um längere, enge, herzliche Beziehungen gehandelt haben. Die Frauen treten aus der Anonymität heraus und werden beim Namen genannt...' (2007:191). It can therefore be assumed that despite enforced celibacy, German merchants came into frequent contact with female Bergen residents, both through prostitution and in the form of

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each generation passes on what they have learnt about language contact and how to tackle it to new generations.'

long-term meaningful relationships. Thus comes to light a radically different situation to the one so often described in linguistic research in the field.

Similarly, there is also evidence that the local taverns and bathhouses were sites of contact for the two speaker groups (Hemmie, 2007:186) and that the Germans were not so confined to *Bryggen* as traditionally thought. According to Ersland, the majority of German merchants did indeed live in the *Bryggen* area, but sometimes rented additional property elsewhere in Bergen (2005:53). Equally, some properties within a predominantly merchant-occupied quarter belonged not to the kontor itself but to local residents and even the town hall was located 'right in the heart of the *Bryggen* area' (2005:52). In light of this, Ersland puts forward the case that *Bryggen* was not, in reality, a 'topographically closed entity' as is often claimed.

A final extra-linguistic factor which is no less significant in contact situations is prestige. Prestige is often held as a prime motivation for linguistic borrowing; the more prestige a speaker group carries, be it in cultural, political or economic terms, the more likely another group of speakers is to adopt features from the prestigious group's language. Attitudinal aspects play a crucial role here; speakers are more likely to accommodate or to imitate, consciously or subconsciously, patterns from a language of a more 'superior' group. Although there were certainly other nationalities of merchants active in Bergen, most notably Dutch and English, as Burckhardt states, 'their numbers were never big enough to challenge the dominant position of the Hansards' (2009:385). As the German merchants represented the only coherent, organised body of foreign traders, they were undoubtedly very prominent in the eyes of the native community and came to be associated with economic prosperity and success. Returning to the loan vocabulary examples above, we see that it is not only the need to linguistically designate newly imported goods such as sugar and cinnamon which motivates borrowing, but also perceptions of prestige. Such perceptions, for instance, could account for the semantic change in the verb *handla.* This presupposes that Norwegian speakers associated the LG-speaking merchants with trade in a very clear-cut way; they were viewed as a body of prominent and successful traders, coming to define the semantic notion of trade itself. Additionally, the strong notion of prestige attached to the Germans clearly helped determine the main route of transference; despite the LG-speaker group representing a minority in Bergen, economic prestige ensured that it was their variety which emerged as the dominant donor.

Genetic relationship and typological similarity

Returning to the notion of linguistic similarity, it must not be forgotten that languages can appear alike for two different reasons; both external contact-induced change and common genetic heritage can result in typological parallels between two varieties. It is often difficult, perhaps sometimes even impossible, to distinguish these two factors from one another in the resulting synchronic product. Thus it is also appropriate to consider the genetic relationship and structural parallels that existed between our two varieties in contact. First and foremost, both MLG and Middle Norwegian were Germanic varieties, the former belonging to the West Germanic branch, the latter to North Germanic. Although various innovations had since led to a degree of divergence, they had essentially come from the same egg. Both Braunmüller (2005:1224) and Haugen (1976:183) note that of all the Germanic varieties, MLG was genetically closest and most similar in structural terms to the Scandinavian languages; in addition to sharing a core basis of Germanic vocabulary (MLG *ik,* OWN

ek. <PGmc. **ek*, 'I': MLG *vāren*, OWN *fara* >PGmc.**faranǫ*, 'to travel') both had undergone morphological simplification of case and gender in the inflectional system, and equally in the verbal paradigm.

So what role did this typological proximity play in the contact situation? Crucially, it resulted in a level of mutual intelligibility between MLG and Middle Norwegian, enabling the phenomenon of passive bilingualism to operate in Bergen as noted above.[14] There is indeed evidence indicating successful mutual intelligibility between the two speaker groups. For instance, whilst Latin texts were often translated for the understanding of the general public, no accounts have been found of LG texts requiring similar interpretation (Braunmüller, 2005:1227-1228). In addition, Hansa traders stationed in Russia were sometimes provided with Russian language teaching materials, but no such Scandinavian versions have been discovered (Jahr, 1995:139). This would seem to suggest that the possibility of successful communication via passive bilingualism deemed efforts at language teaching and translation unnecessary. Moreover, another indication of successful mutual intelligibility is raised in Leonard Forster's discussion of the *Thridrekssaga* (1987), a prose collection with the German figure Dietrich von Bern at its centre. The saga's earliest known manuscript dates from Bergen in the second half of the 13th century and is generally acknowledged as an interpretation of LG tales. Most significantly, Forster argues that the translation from LG was produced by a native Norwegian or perhaps a German resident in Bergen (1987:44). Either way, this suggests that mutual intelligibility was possible between the two varieties, even at this early stage of the Hanseatic period.

Our central concern still needs to be addressed however; what did typological proximity mean for structural transference, and more specifically, for the transference of word formation elements such as the unstressed prefixes? And crucially, could the large amount of structural similarities account for the unusually strong case of structural borrowing? Thomason & Kaufman propose that, universally, the structural features most likely to be transferred are those which fit well with corresponding features in the recipient language (1988:54). Indeed, both Weinreich (1953) and Haugen (1956) had already highlighted the process of interlingual identification some decades earlier. According to them, the process involves the identification and (false) equation of two similar elements between languages in contact by bilingual speakers of both varieties;

> 'Inasmuch as a language is a system of oppositions, a partial identification of the systems is to the bilingual a reduction of his linguistic burden. And it is these identifications which are at the root of many forms of interference' (Weinreich, 1953:8, quoted in Wilkins 1997:110).

In sum; the more structural similarities present between two contact varieties, the more corresponding features they share, thus the greater the opportunity for interlingual identification and the stronger the likelihood of structural transference.

[14] This has led some scholars to label the LG-Scandinavian contact as an example of 'semicommunication' (Braunmüller, 2005). 'Semicommunication', first employed in reference to the situation in modern-day Scandinavia (Haugen, 1966), is a special type of receptive mutual intelligibility, or passive bilingualism. Prerequisites include mutual political or economic interests and a strong common motivation to communicate between the speaker groups. The trading situation in Bergen would thus qualify as such.

Reviewing the level of structural transference

Thus an explanation to our original problem, the unwarranted levels of structural transference from MLG to Middle Norwegian, begins to emerge. At an extra-linguistic level, we have shown that there existed a relatively intense level of contact owing to the presence of widespread passive bilingualism, the development of long-term linguistic accommodation over several centuries, 'hidden' sites of intimate contact in social settings and strong levels of socioeconomic prestige in the Norwegian perception of the merchants. Also crucial is that the structural features shared by the two Germanic varieties enabled the necessary mechanisms behind structural transference to occur. This leads to the conclusion that a near-optimal constellation of sociological factors heightened the likelihood of strong structural transference between MLG and Middle Norwegian, but that it was the common heritage and similar typological systems which ultimately enabled the phenomenon to occur to such an extensive degree. Finally, returning to our earlier remarks on the dichotomy of external contact and genetic relationship, we have seen that the two factors do not necessarily operate in separate spheres but can in fact work in combination, particularly when typological similarities are present.

A case study of the prefix for- *in the Diplomatarium Norvegicum*

Let us now turn to consider the transference of the prefix *for-* in closer detail. Speakers with even a limited knowledge of both New High German and Modern Norwegian are often surprised to find many cognate verbs which share this prefix; NHG *verstehen,* NorwBk. *forstå;* NHG *verlassen,* NorwBk. *forlate;* NHG *verwechseln,* NorwBk. *forveksle*, to name but a mere few. It is often claimed that this originates in transference of MLG word formation elements during the Age of Hanseatic contact; the LG prefix *vor-* was borrowed into Norwegian, where it subsequently became productive. This, however, presents a rather simplified view and it is only upon closer examination that the full complexity of the phenomenon can be appreciated. There are in fact three different categories of verb featuring the prefix *for-* which occur in the *DN*: 1) Native Nordic *fyrir-* verbs, in which the original prefix ultimately develops into *for-*; 2) Loan verbs from LG, in which the prefix *for- (*MLG *vor-)* and stem are borrowed as a complete unit; 3) Cases where the prefix *for-* is added to native Nordic stems, producing new 'hybrid' creations. This study will illustrate some of the issues by considering the verb 'forbid', which falls under the first of the above categories. As we will see, the diachronic development of this verb is highly complex and various suggestions will be outlined to account for its modern form.

Several useful and indeed unrivalled qualities of the *DN* as a textual source have been noted, yet certain additional parameters must also be clarified. The spatial limitation is obvious; only texts issued in Bergen will be considered. Temporally, the *DN* offers Bergen diplomas spanning a period of almost three hundred years, between 1273 and 1569. However, a special set of circumstances found in Norway towards the end of this period must be taken into account, namely two seismic cases of language shift; from Norwegian to Danish and from LG to High German. These shifts were each connected with a multitude of political and cultural changes primarily brought on by the loss of Norway's political independence and the Protestant Reformation, and both chiefly occurred in the first decades of the 16th century. Crucially for this study, once the transitions to High German and Danish were in full swing, new loci of contact and fresh transfer routes emerged. In examining a

historical situation of contact, it is notoriously difficult to isolate these different strands in the explanation of contact-induced change. It is predominantly for this reason that diplomas produced later than the year 1500 will not feature, thus avoiding such problematic methodological issues. Finally, a significant number of the diplomas, particularly those produced earlier, are in Latin. Latin remained in use as a *lingua franca* across the Hanseatic region for some time, although it was gradually supplanted in this role by LG. Clearly, the Latin diplomas will also be discounted from study.

It is often stated that the transference of LG unstressed prefixes merely replaced a similar set which once existed in Proto-Scandinavian and had been lost in the Nordic syncope period c. 500-700 AD (Dalen, 1994:35). As Hyldgaard-Jensen notes (1983:672-673):

> 'Durch die Synkopierung und allgemeine Reduktion der unbetonten Silben, die die Akzentverlagerung bewirkte, waren die anord. Prä- und Suffixe lautlich so reduziert worden, dass sie ihre Produktivität z.T. verloren hatten. Als Ersatz boten sich jetzt die nd. Elemente an...'

However, there exists significant evidence that the unstressed prefixes were not completely lost and that a select few were maintained in certain contexts, surviving into the Old and Middle Nordic varieties. Simensen (2002:960) for instance notes that *fyrbanna* and *fyrbjóða,* both 'to forbid', feature in the poetic Edda of the 13th century where, crucially, metre indicates that the prefix was unstressed. Furthermore, it is widely understood that the retained prefixes were those which bore a transparent semantic meaning. It is this factor which offers the best explanation for the preservation of *fyrbjóða* for here the prefix carries a clear negative sense, in common with other Germanic varieties.[15] The prefix is contrasted with the simple verb *bjóða* and is thus morphologically and semantically transparent in speaker analysis; just as ON *fyrir- (fyr)* adds a negative meaning to the stem *bjóða,* 'to command', the equivalent formations OE *forbéodan*, on *firbiotan* and Goth. *faúrbiudan* operate in the same way, all with the literal meaning 'einen Befehl gegen etwas erlassen'(Falk & Torp 1960:252)[16].

Returning to the verb as exemplified in the Scandinavian languages today, whilst ON *fyrirbjóða* is preserved in Modern Icelandic[17], in the Mainland languages the prefix has since reduced; NorwBk. *forby*, Dan. *forbyde* and Swe. *förbjuda.* Indeed, neither in Modern Bokmål nor Nynorsk do we find any verbs featuring the prefix *fyrir-* in common usage. External contact can perhaps offer an explanation for this development and it is here that, at least in the case of Norwegian, the *DN* diplomas can shed some light. As one would expect, the earliest instances of the verb 'forbid' feature *fyrir-/firir-* or their reduced forms *fyrer-/firer*; a very early example is *firerbodet* in 1276, alongside seven other known cases before the year 1300. We can presume that during the infancy of LG-Norwegian contact, the original native form was subject to little external influence and was thus

[15] Unlike *fyrir-,* other PSc. unstressed prefixes such as **ga-* and **bi-,* being semantically opaque, had already vanished by the time of the earliest runic inscriptions c.100/200 AD (Schulte, 2005:242).

[16] Additionally, whilst ON *fyrir-* could be negative, it could also bear the sense of 'forwardness' both in time (before) and space (in front of); ON *fyrirhugsa,* 'to premeditate' and *fyrirsegja,* 'to predict' are examples of the former (Simensen, 2002:960).

[17] Alongside its synonym *fyrirbanna.*

well-maintained. At the turn of the new century, however, the situation as displayed in the *DN* appears to change. Whilst regular cases of *fyrir-/firir-* forms continue throughout the 14th century, and are even found as late as the 15th, from 1303 there are also forms using *for-* occuring. This dual usage seemingly persists throughout the 1300s and into the 1400s, the last known bisyllabic *firir-* case being in 1435, and indeed some diplomas feature both competing prefixes in use with 'forbid'. The data is best represented in the following table:

Year	**firir-/fyrir-?**	**fir-/fyr-?**	**for-?**	**vor-?**
1276	firerbodet			
1283	firirboðom			
1293	firir bioðandi			
1295	firir biodum (x2) firirbodet			
1297	firir bioðom			
	firirbioðom			
1301	firirbiodande	firbioðom		
1303	firir biodom		forbiudhande	
1304	firir bioðom firirbiodom			
1305	firirbiod firirbioðande			
1306			forbodada forbod	
1308/9 (Date unclear)			forbyder	
1309	firirbioðanðe *firirbioðom** *firirbioðande (x3)**		forbod *forboð** *forboðe (x2)** *forboðaðum**	
1311			forboð (x2)	
1312	firirbiodom firirbioðom			
1313	firirbiodande			
1316	firirbiodande			
1320	firirbio om (x3) firirbioðom *firerbio (x2)***		forbiude forbodadum *forbo (x3)***	
1328	firirbiodande firir bioda		forbiudhom	
1329		fyrbioda	forbode	
1331	firirbiodum firirbidom (x3) firirbodet			
1332	*firirbudhit****		*forbudhit****	
1337	fyrirbiodaszt			
1338	firirbiodande			
1339	firirbiodom firirbiodande			
1341	firirbioda		fornt b/oe/ta	
1350				vorbod

				vor ghe boden
1361	firirbiodom firirbiudhom firir biodom			
1365	firirbiodom			
1371			forbiud-hom	
1373			forbiude	
1382	firirbiodhom (x2)			
1384	firirbiodhom			
1390	*fyrer biodhum*****		*forbiodum*****	
1410			forbiudhom (x2)	
1411	firirbaud			
1424				vorbodet
1435	firirbiodom		forbudit	
1450			forbiodhom (x3) forbiude	vorboden vorbat
1459		*fyrbiode†*	*forbod (x2)†* *forbodi (x2)†*	
1486				vorbeden

Items marked * all appear in *DN* Vol.II.97, 1309.
Those marked ** in *DN* Vol.VII.89, 1320.
Those marked *** in *DN* Vol.XII.80, 1332.
Those marked **** in *DN* Vol.III.487, 1390.
Those marked † in *DN* Vol.V.821, 1459.

So how and why did these new *for-* formations come to dominate? And more significantly, can this development be explained excusively by LG influence? It is important to note that the MLG verb 'forbid' was *vorbēden,* featuring the prolific LG unstressed prefix *vor-* (Falk & Torp, 1960:252). Returning to the *DN* data*,* it is interesting that forms of 'forbid' featuring the exact LG replica *vor-,* rather than *for-,* appear relatively infrequently and much later, only after 1350. Indeed, the date of the first known usage of *vor-* (*vorbod*, *vor ghe boden* 1350) is worthy of further discussion, especially considering the historical context. As noted, it was only in 1343 that the Bergen kontor was established, lending the German community a nature of formal organisation and a heightened status within the town. Thus perhaps it is only in the latter half of the fourteenth century that LG influence becomes strong enough to facilitate direct loans and the transference of *vor-.* Certainly Nesse (2002:63) seems to suggest the significance of this historical milestone claiming: ‚De spesielle forutsetningene for språkkontakten i Bergen får vi ikke før kontoret blir opprettet og et større antall menn slår seg ned på Bryggen på mer permanent basis[18].' If this were the case, it would hint at another potential factor, aside from transference, which launched the transition to *for-* before LG influence was truly felt.

[18] Translation: 'We do not get the special prerequisites for language contact in Bergen before the *Kontor* is opened and a greater proportion of men take up residence at *Bryggen* on a more permanent basis.'

Equally of course, it may be that <f> and <v> were used interchangeably and a mere coincidence that the *for-* forms occur much earlier than their *vor-* counterparts. Yet whilst *for-* and *vor-* are in dual usage with verbs such as 'forbid', <v> does not appear to represent /f/ anywhere else; they are thus likely perceived as distinct graphemes in this period. In the context of *vor-,* Norwegians perceive <v> as foreign, that is to say LG, and authorship and readership can offer some helpful clues here. Notably all six instances of *vor-* forms of 'forbid' occur in documents addressing Germans. It is sensible to presume that the authors of such diplomas had a particularly close involvement with Germans and were relatively more exposed to LG than authors of texts concerning matters of sole Norwegian consequence. Possibly, they even had motive and means to consciously adapt their mother tongue to ease comprehension for the Germans and a substitution of *for-* with *–vor* could represent such an effort. Accordingly, the two cases of 1350 (*vorbod*, *vor ghe boden*) are found in a diploma by King Magnus VII addressing the German community.[19] Examining other diplomas by King Magnus which exclusively address Norwegians, it is apparent that he also uses native *fyrir-* forms of 'forbid' in such correspondence[20] and occassionaly *for-*[21]*,* but crucially never *vor-.* Perhaps then, we can conclude that such *vor-* forms do represent a concious choice by the author to 'germanise' his writing.

Nonetheless, returning to the instances of *for-* forms found in 1303 and shortly after, they seem rather early cases to assign purely to LG influence in light of the wider historical context. Whilst German merchants were present before this, it is only during the 14th century that they begin arriving in large numbers one would think significant enough to facilitate such transference. Bearing this in mind, and given the time lag which typically exists between contact-induced change and its representation in written documents, LG influence as a sole explanation does seem less likely. So what other factors, aside from LG contact, could explain such early usage of *for-*? One problem which arises here is the complex and ambiguous relationship between *firir-* and *for-.* According to Wessén for instance (1965:111), the two prefixes had already crossed paths in early Germanic times when the negative *fra-* was associated in its weakened form with the preposition *for,* before both were replaced in OWN by *fyrir-.* Crucially, the fact that both *fra-* and *for-* came to be replaced by *fyrir-* suggests that it was possible for Norse speakers to analyse and equate these forms with each other before LG contact. It is thus not unthinkable that *fyrir-* could once again be equated with *for-* and indeed supplanted by it, particularly if the latter came into new prevalence through LG influence. Moreover, the relatively high level of typological similarity between MLG and Middle Norwegian would play a vital role in enabling such interlingual identification processes. By way of evidence, there are ON loan creations which feature *fyrir-* modelled on MLG formations with *vor-,* such as *fyrirstanda,* 'to understand' (Simensen, 2002:960), suggesting that speakers are indeed equating MLG *vor-* with Nordic *fyrir-.*

Two important aspects, however, remain in need of further discussion. The first concerns phonological reduction, a natural universal process which occurs very commonly in diachronic change. What is significant in this context is that reductive tendencies seem to be underway at a very early stage concerning ON *fyrir-.* Indeed, it is unlikely that a bisyllabic prefix, containing a

[19] *DN* Vol.III.272, 1350.
[20] 3 uses of *firirbio* in *DN* Vol.VII. 91, 1320.
[21] 1 use of *forbiudhom* in *DN* Vol.XII.71, 1328.

relatively large amount of phonological substance, would be immune to reduction and the examples above from the 13th century Edda, *fyrbanna* and *fyrbjóða,* accordingly demonstrate such a phenomenon. In the *DN* data itself, the first known form (*firerbodet,* 1276) also displays reduction in the second syllable of the prefix, and by the turn of the next century there is a form where the second syllable has fully reduced to the point of loss (*firbioðom,* 1301). Furthermore, phonological reduction is a change that can happen in relatively isolated circumstances, and does not necessarily require external contact as a condition. Whether the reduction of *fyrir-* was dependent on external contact or not[22], the resulting forms *fyr-/fir* were likely easier to equate with both *for-* and *vor-* and thus presumably eased the substitution process.

Turning to the second factor left so far unexplored, one must note that just as *fyrir-* survived in ON after the syncope period, so too did *for-* in certain nominal contexts. By means of proof, early usage of *for-*, although stressed in such instances, is found in Classical ON nouns such as *foreldri,* 'parents' and in nominally-derived verbs (Simensen, 2002:960). An early example of the former can be found in a Bergen diploma of 1290[23]. Similarly, Syrett (2002:726) notes that nominal prefixes were 'moderately well maintained into ON elements' and claims that from there they could subsequently re-enter the verbal system. Thus we find a theoretical possibility that a wholly native set of circumstances, independent from LG contact, could have led to the reinstatement of *for-* as a verbal prefix. Whether this is the case or not, the maintenance of *for-* in nominal contexts must also have aided the analysis, equation and substitution applied by speakers to *fyrir-* and *for-* and thus represents another crucial factor at any rate.

Conclusion

In sum, the examination of the prefix *for-* in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* has painted a more complex picture of affixal transference in the Hanseatic Age than is often acknowledged; the standard explanation that word-formation elements were transferred from Low German to Norwegian has been highlighted as an over-simplified conclusion. Additionally, the case study has allowed us to examine some of the conjectures concerning language change in Norwegian during this period. Charting the development from *fyrir-* to *for-* forms of 'forbid' has demonstrated that there exist a multitude of relevant factors, some arising from Low German contact, others independent; the retention of Nordic prefixes in certain contexts, tendencies in phonological reduction, conscious linguistic accommodation by Norwegian speakers and processes of analysis, interlingual identification and substitution. Consequently, the role of Low German influence as a sole cause in the transition from *fyrir-* to *for-* now seems unlikely, given the existence of such potential factors. What is certain, however, is that contact arising during the Hanseatic Age was highly significant in cementing this transition and in provoking the subsequent productivity of *for-*, even if the initial catalyst possibly lay elsewhere.

[22] The fact that *fyrir-* has been maintained without reduction into Modern Ice. perhaps suggests that LG contact was the crucial factor in its phonological reduction in the mainland Scandinavian languages. Equally, however, the Ice. anomaly could be a result of the country's tradition of extreme purism concerning matters of language change.

[23] *forældre* in *DN* Vol.XII.12, 1290.

On a broader note, the overall occurrence of structural transference phenomena in Hanseatic Bergen has also been accounted for. An optimal constellation of extra-linguistic factors, namely high levels of passive bilingualism, a developing aptitude for accommodation from Norwegians over several centuries and the forgotten existence of intimate contact sites led to the degree of intensity required for widespread structural borrowing. Furthermore, at a linguistic level, the crucial importance of the close typological proximity which existed between Middle Low German and Middle Norwegian has been highlighted. Yet even faced with the most intense contact situation imaginable, transference still requires a driving force, an initial catalyst to be explained. It is here that prestige, a widely-acknowledged motivation for borrowing, plays as strong a role as ever. The Middle Low German influence exerted on language usage in Bergen and indeed throughout Mainland Scandinavia stands as a testament to the power of prestige in linguistic transference. The reality that a relatively small group of newcomers could exert such forces of lexical and structural change on a whole region of speakers outside their homeland is sure enough proof. Finally, considering the fate of Low German itself, whilst the language may have suffered a steady demise since the Hanseatic period, traces of a Golden Age when it once held a commanding linguistic position in Northern Europe are, in its Scandinavian legacy, still within reach today.

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DN= Diplomatarium Norvegicum, digitalised under the *Dokumentasjonsprosjektet* and availaible online: http://www.dokpro.uio.no/engelsk/about_dn.html

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