Rezension: Historische Mündlichkeit. Beiträge zur Geschichte der gesprochenen Sprache (Kieler Forschungen zur Sprachwissenschaft 7)

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Book Review

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It seems to have gone rather quiet around the issue of orality and spoken language in older stages of language. After the seminal work by Lord (1960) and Parry (1971) and the succeeding theoretical discussions and empirical investigations (see, among others, Ong 1982; Koch and Oesterreicher 1985; Fleischman 1990), one could get the impression that the debate has reached a preliminary endpoint. What has remained is a silent consensus on the "commonly accepted fact that the European Middle Ages were 'oral', as writing was dictated and literature was transmitted by reading aloud" (Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007: 19, in repetition of Fleischman 1990: 29). In addition, the theoretical models have been developed into methodological frameworks that allow for analysis of oral features in historical texts and determining their degree of orality (see e. g. Ágel and Hennig 2006).

So is there something left to say about 'historical orality'? I think there is, and the volume *Historische Mündlichkeit. Beiträge zur Geschichte der gesprochenen Sprache* [Historical orality. Contributions to the history of spoken language], edited by Elmar Eggert and Jörg Kilian, supports this assumption. The volume comprises twelve contributions that focus on different aspects of historical orality in different languages, i. e. Latin, Romanic languages (in particular Old Spanish and seventeenth/eighteenth century American Spanish), Old Luxembourgish, Old Swedish, Old English, Middle Low German, older Dialects of North Frisia, and Old Slavic languages (i. e. Czech, Russian, Serbo-Croatian) and in different text genres (i. e. narrative and fictional prose texts, prose drama, prayer books, linguistic studies, account books, grammar books, historiographic studies, riddles etc.), and discuss different theoretical and methodological problems. The multitude of aspects covered by the volume makes it obvious that the present review cannot be comprehensive by acknowledging the detailed analyses of the individual chapters. Rather, it aims at a look behind the particular perspectives by looking for an answer to the main question of what can be said about the

status of historical orality from a methodological and theoretical point of view as well as with respect to its status in future linguistic research.

The volume is opened by the editors' introduction, which emphasizes the well-known empirical problems linked to investigations of orality in older (written) languages. Based on the assumption that the conceptual aspects of spoken language in ancient times are not fundamentally different from the present ones (p. 9), to show how historical orality can nevertheless be subject to scientific scrutiny is formulated as one of the volume's main goals.

In this respect, the first contribution by Thorsten Burkard provides an analysis of Sallust's historiographical writings and argues that many linguistic features which have been traditionally attributed to his idiosyncratic style can be explained as markers of conceptual orality. Relying on the framework by Ágel and Hennig (2006), features like monotonic repetitions (p. 29), missing markers of cohesion (p. 30), anacolutha pp. (33–34) etc. lead him to the conclusion that Sallust's writing should not be seen as an extremely elaborated work since it contains passages of stylistic negligence. From a methodological point of view, his analysis thus shows that also the investigation of written literary texts can offer insights in the mechanisms of oral text production.

Ulrich Hoinkes revises the theoretical premises underlying the historical development of the Romanic languages. Based on a discussion of four axioms of Romance philology – i. e. the origin of Romanic languages (i) lies not in classical (written) Latin but (spoken) Vulgar Latin, (ii) is polygenetic, (iii) is subject to areal variety and (iv) their formation is a complex process of standardization – he argues that an account of standardization has to take into account the primacy of oral language. While he leaves open what exactly the specific role of orality in this model should be, the contribution makes clear that the development of a standard language has to be seen as a complex balance mechanism between different intralinguistic varieties.

In her contribution, Angela Schrott analyses riddles in an Old Spanish text with respect to the interface between language and cultural change. As such, the chapter addresses the interplay between universal patterns of linguistic interaction and the specific historical traditions of dialogue. Her analysis is based on the distinction by Coseriu between the universal, the historical and the individual level of language and on the premise that historical texts cannot transmit the actual speech production but fragmentarily contain knowledge about discourse traditions, which can be partially reconstructed (p. 79). This is demonstrated in particular for the cooperation principle of Grice as a universal pattern and its specific maxims of quantity, quality, relevance and manner, which are shown to be historical variable.

Fausto Ravida carries out an analysis of historical graphemics in order to reconstruct the phonological orality of Old Luxembourgish (1388–1500). His analysis of account books shows that the phonological system integrates features both of Middle High German and New High German. Based on his results, he argues that the written language of the account books is oriented towards the West Middle German centres of writing (Cologne, Mainz, Trier) (p. 116), whereas the base dialects do not represent the reference system for the written language (p. 114). Against this background, dialectal variants with low frequency can be identified as precursors of a later Luxembourgish literacy.

Steffen Höder addresses the problem of reconstructing the spoken language of the Old Swedish period (thirteenth to sixteenth century) on the basis of written corpora. He argues for a combination of an operational approach, via identifying specifically written features, and an indirect one, via fictional orality. With respect to the latter, it is hypothesized that similarities between fictional orality and written language are irrelevant for the reconstruction of orality, whereas differences can be interpreted as evidence for spoken language (p. 129). Based on an analysis of relative clauses he shows that this assumption is valid if the degree of authenticity of texts is taken into account.

The contribution by Anja Becker focuses on vernacular and bilingual prayer books and addresses the question whether they can be used for reconstructing traces of Low German spoken language around 1500. Based on the theoretical framework of Koch and Oesterreicher (1985) and the methodological approach by Ágel and Hennig (2006), her analysis leads to the conclusion that the prayer books contain features both of 'language of distance' and 'language of immediacy'. The latter are however particularly preserved in the prayers that are not based on Latin texts (p. 158).

Merja Kytö draws attention to methodological aspects for studying oral communication in early English and to possible sources of data. Based on a distinction between speech-based (e. g. trial proceedings), speech-purposed (e. g. plays, fictive speech) and speech-like genres (e. g. personal correspondence) (p. 165), the author argues that witness depositions as an example of a speech-based genre with speech-like components are an important source for investigating orality in different aspects such as patterns of speech representation, dialogue analysis, and sociolinguistic and regional variation, as shown for examples from the seventeenth century.

The contribution by Martina Schrader-Kniffki examines the scenic representation of everyday conversations in seventeenth to eighteenth century Spanish notarial texts which are partially translated from Zapotec into Spanish. Aiming at a sociolinguistic analysis in the sense of Elspaß's (2005) *Sprachgeschichte von unten*, she shows that the examined texts are non-fictional but nevertheless enact a certain 'fictional orality' (p. 182). She concludes that the analysed

features of orality are instances of a colloquial variety and can be seen as historical evidence for an ethnic dialect influenced by language contact.

Uwe Vosberg deals with the question of "whether and to what extent the development of spoken language can be traced back with the help of fictional (written) data from former centuries" (p. 205). With this in mind, he compares the frequency curves of the development of syntactic phenomena in English from the sixteenth to the twentieth century in different register types (i. e. written novels, newspapers, spoken language; the data for the latter is taken from the British National Corpus and restricted to the twentieth century) with the development of the same phenomena in prose drama. The comparison shows that the developments in prose drama are more similar to the development of spoken language than to the frequency curve in prose texts.

Jarich Hoekstra examines the spoken language of Theodor Heinrich Fürchtegott Hansen (1837–1923) as a historical "semi-speaker", i. e. a polylingual speaker who has not yet acquired all of the languages completely. The speaker's semi-competence of the North Frisian dialect of the Halligen offers insights into compensation strategies, which partly go hand in hand with tendencies in language change, partly deviate from these developments in a significant manner.

The contribution by Alastair Walker analyses statistical investigations into multilingualism that were conducted in North Frisia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Based on a distinction between 'social' and 'individual orality', their results indicate that social orality at this time is multilingual despite the fact that in families and households only one language is spoken. Furthermore, the investigations allow for the reconstruction of the expansion of certain dialects by pushing back other varieties.

Norbert Nübler investigates standardization processes with respect to the maxim "write as you speak" propagated by Adelung. His comparison of the developments in Czech, Russian, and former Serbo-Croatian shows that the guideline has been implemented in a different manner in the different languages. While the formation of a Serbo-Croation standard variety (as the base for the later Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian) can be seen as an implementation of Adelung's maxim, the standardization process in Czech relies on the reverse principle "speak as you write". Also in Russian, the written language is the actual reference point for developing a standard language since a 'cultivated colloquial language' ("gepflegte Umgangssprache"), which could serve as a basis for a standard language, is missing.

So what does the volume have to say about historical orality? With respect to the theoretical and methodological implications as well as its meaning for future research the volume calls in particular for two conclusions.

(i)   Historical orality cannot be seen as a single factor in the history of language but is a heterogeneous concept that comprises a variety of different aspects. Whereas all contributions of the volume are concerned with orality in a broad sense, they are concerned with a variety of different aspects, i. e. 'medial orality' like phonological reconstruction (Ravida), 'conceptual orality' in terms of 'language of immediacy' /'Nähesprache' (Becker, Burkard, Schrader-Kniffki) and 'fictional orality' (Höder, Schrader-Kniffki, Vosberg), 'fossilized' pieces of spoken language (Kytö), conversation maxims as the conditions of dialogues (Schrott), and the cultural condition with respect to the oral–written dichotomy (Nübler). What is yet left open is the question of how their interaction could be modelled in a systematic manner. Schrott takes an important step in this direction by differentiating between the universal, historical, and individual level of orality. In a similar way, Walker addresses the relationship between 'social' and 'individual' orality. With respect to the relationship between spoken language and fictional orality, the contributions by Höder, Schrader-Kniffki, Vosberg offer promising methodological approaches.

(ii) Historical orality is not the only factor shaping the structure of older languages. All contributions in the volume do not focus on spoken language per se but, to a larger or smaller extent, address also diaphasic factors like ethnolects (Schrader-Kniffki) and dialects (Hoekstra, Ravida, Walker), literary language (Burkard) and mechanisms of standardization processes (Hoinkes, Nübler) as well as multilingualism and language contact (Hoekstra, Schrader-Kniffki, Walker). This can be seen as a consequence of the fact that historical orality cannot be seen as *the* factor shaping the structure of language, but only as one factor next to other contextual parameters. So what is left open for future research is a model that integrates the different dimensions of orality in a broader framework of historical pragmatics as explicitly called for by Hoinkes and Schrott (see, for the same claim, also Zeman 2016).

The volume makes thus obvious that the issue of orality in historical linguistics is still a matter of debate both with regard to the systematization of its different aspects as well as with respect to their relationship to each other. In the endeavour to advance a systematic approach of historical pragmatics, there are thus still important things left to say about historical orality.

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