

ON THE LOW SAXON DIALECT CONTINUUM – TERMINOLOGY AND RESEARCH

Abstract (Deutsch)

Im Zentrum des vorliegenden Beitrags steht der Terminus *Nedersaksisch*, der sich auf die niedersächsischen Dialekte der Niederlande bezieht. Seine Geschichte und sein Verhältnis zum Synonym *Oost-Nederlands* werden diskutiert. Mit einer Begriffsanalyse des verwandten Terminus *Niedersächsisch*, der sich auf eine Dialektregion im Nordwesten Deutschlands bezieht, wird der Blick auch über die deutsch-niederländische Staatsgrenze nach Osten gelenkt. Dass die nedersaksischen und niedersächsischen Dialekte im Norden des kontinentalwestgermanischen Kontinuums ein nach wie vor lebendiges Untersuchungslaboratorium darstellen, wird im zweiten Teil des Beitrags gezeigt, in dem ein Überblick über aktuelle Forschung gegeben wird.

Abstract (English)

This contribution focusses on the term *Nedersaksisch* ‘Dutch Low Saxon’. The history of this term is examined and the quality of the synonym *Oost-Nederlands* is discussed. Via the related German term *Niedersächsisch* (i.e. a dialect region of Western Low Germany) the discussion is extended across the state border. In the second part of the article, an overview of current research on Low Saxon dialects in the Netherlands and Germany published in this volume is given.

1 TERMINOLOGY

Borders come in different sorts: those between two federal states are less important than state borders, and not every isogloss has the same importance as the Uerdinger or Benrather Line. A person who makes a journey through Germany from Dresden via Magdeburg to Hannover stays in the North-German area, even though he crosses the border between two provinces a number of times. In this case the German names make sure that there is a connection: *Freistaat Sachsen*, *Sachsen-Anhalt* and *Niedersachsen*. Therefore the southern part of North Germany is made up of what could be called *Sachsen* ‘Saxony’. In Grimm’s dictionary, *Sachsen* is considered the plural dative of *Sachse* ‘ursprünglich name des groszen volksstammes im norden Deutschlands’ [original name of the large tribe in North Germany].

When we continue our journey from East to West, the term is less visible but it is still present after crossing the Dutch border. In the Netherlands, the counterpart of Grimm is the “*Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*” (‘Dictionary of the

Dutch language', WNT), which does not include the term *Saksen* until the most recent supplementary part from 2001 under *Saks I* and provides a historical as well as a contemporary definition (our translation):

1. (Plur.) Name of a group of Germanic tribes, which entered the Eastern part of our country from the German area along the North Sea coast at the time of the migration of the Germanic peoples and of which a part settled in Britannia together with the Anglo-Saxons.

[...] 4. Inhabitant of East Netherlands.

Contrary to *Sachse* in German, a *Saks* does not exist as the name of an inhabitant in present day Dutch. The most important contemporary dictionary of the Dutch language is that of Van Dale. This lexicon did indeed include *Saks* for a long time (from the first edition that was published under this name in 1872–1874, which is actually the second edition) and for some time also the lemma *Sakser*, 'inhabitant of Saxony (*Saksen*)'. This term, *Saksen* 'Saxony', was for a long time defined by means of a circular argument as 'the country where the Saxons live'. But when the seventh edition of Van Dale appeared in 1950, *Saksen* was no longer included, while on the other hand the concept *Saksisch* 'the dialect of the Saxons' could now be found in the dictionary. For a short while Van Dale did not make clear where this dialect was spoken but this changed eleven years later. The eighth edition from 1961 contained a new definition of *Saks* as a 'person belonging to the tribe of the same name, also including inhabitants of the eastern part of the Netherlands'. In the next edition from 1970 – in fact only a supplement to the eighth edition but later considered the ninth edition – most Saxon areas in the Netherlands were for the first time referred to with names, namely Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel and in Gelderland the Veluwe and the Achterhoek. This is in practice the Dutch part of *Niedersachsen* 'Lower Saxony' plus Westphalia.

In the eleventh edition (1984) *Saks* has been split into two parts and provides historical details. The second definition is 'inhabitant of East Netherlands; -inhabitant of the South German Saxony'. In the most recent edition, the thirteenth from 2005, *Saks* as the name of an inhabitant has completely disappeared and has been substituted by the meaning 'liver sausage'. At the same time, the variants *Sas* and *Sassen* have been removed, terms that have accompanied the concepts *Saks* and *Saksen* in Van Dale for a long while.

Next to (but chronologically after) *Saksisch* 'Saxon' the term *Nedersaksisch* 'Low Saxon' is used in Dutch. This word does not enter Van Dale until 1961, but it is limited to Germany in the same way as it is in the latest edition from 2005 (our translation):

1. 'of, from, concerning, as in Lower Saxony, the area of the old duchies *Brunswijk-Wolfenbüttel* and *Brunswijk-Kalenberg*';
2. 'belonging to or spoken in the dialect of the inhabitants in the Lower Saxon areas'.

Those who follow the usage in Van Dale, use *Saksisch* ‘Saxon’ to refer to for example the dialects of Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel and in Gelderland the Veluwe and the Achterhoek but exclude the Stellingwerven in Friesland; however, those following Van Dale in the use of *Nedersaksisch* limit themselves to a meaning which refers to Germany. Both usages contradict the normal usage during the last fifty years in this part of North and East Netherlands.

Immediately after the Second World War, the attempt to establish a chair in *Gronings* (‘the language of the province Groningen’) arises in Groningen and shortly after this it is supported by the provinces bordering to the south. At first, the chair is sometimes referred to as Groningen and sometimes as Lower Saxon and later on only the latter term is used, as if the two were identical. The most important advocate of this ambition is K. ter Laan, editor of “Nieuw Groninger Woordenboek” (‘New Dictionary of the Groningen Language’) from 1929 and leader of what more or less rightfully is called a Groningen Movement.¹

At the end of 1952, the chair “Nedersaksische Taal- en Letterkunde” (‘Low Saxon language and literature’) is indeed established in Groningen and shortly after Dr. K. H. Heeroma is appointed the first professor. A short while after, the department where he is employed is referred to as “Nedersaksisch Instituut” (‘Institute of Dutch Low Saxon’). Heeroma came from WNT, the large dictionary project in Leiden. At that time, a fellow editor, Dr. C. H. A. Kruyskamp, was also chief editor of Van Dale. Between the Van Dale from 1950 and the edition from 1961 it was discovered that the lemma *Nedersaksisch* ‘Low Saxon’ was missing in Van Dale’s “(Nieuw) Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal” (‘[New] Large Dictionary of the Dutch Language’). Due to the promotion of Heeroma to Groningen in 1953 this comes as less of a surprise than the choice of definition for this term. The map in figure 1 shows the contemporary definition of the term Low Saxon. It is part of the map made by DAAN/BLOK (1969), who assigned green colours to this area. To Daan, the sonorant realization of word final *-en* like in *lopen* ‘walk’ i.e. [lo.p̄m] or [lo.ʔm] is an essential characteristic of the Low Saxon as spoken in the Netherlands (p. 33). The most notable difference between Low Saxon and Dutch is therefore the contrast between [lo.p̄m] vs. [lo.pə].

At first, the use of the terms *Saksisch* and *Nedersaksisch* often alternate. When H. T. J. Miedema in de “Driemaandelijks Bladen” (‘Quarterly Magazines’, the institutional magazine of Heeroma) in 1955 writes a contribution about professor J. H. Gallée from Utrecht, he, playing on a word, refers to him as “the first professor of Low Saxon” in the title, but in the second sentence he wonders (without any pun) how this German and Sanskrit scholar from Utrecht could have become a pioneer in the field of *Saksisch*. In 1895 when W. de Vries defended his doctoral dissertation about the dialect of his birth place Noordhorn (west of Groningen) at the University of Groningen, he used the word *Saksisch* in the subtitle.

1 In the medium of this movement, “Het Maandblad Groningen” (‘The Monthly Magazine Groningen’) later “Dörp en Stad” (‘Village and Town’), the adjective *Nedersaksisch* ‘Low Saxon’ appears a few times in connection with the chair; this seems to point to an awareness of the connection with *Niedersachsen* (‘Low Saxony’).

To him this was apparently another word for *Nedersaksisch* with the same meaning, which he also used in the same work, though much less often.

In 2009, *Saksisch* is a concept that is hardly used anymore; if it is used at all, then it refers to a historical matter or to something in the area of eastern Gelderland or Overijssel, such as for example a Saxon farmhouse. As becomes evident from the media, the word *Nedersaksisch* nowadays refers to the dialects that are called *Saksisch* in Van Dale.

When professor Heeroma held the chair, he took his field to be that of *Oost-Nederlands* ‘East Dutch’. To him *Oost-Nederlands* was a synonym for *Nedersaksisch* ‘Low Saxon’ and the linguistic atlas that he initiated could without any objections be called *TONAG*, “Taalatlas van Oost-Nederland en Aangrenzende Gebieden” (‘Linguistic Atlas of East Netherlands and Bordering Areas’). The last part referred especially to the areas in neighbouring Germany, i.e. in the federal state Niedersachsen ‘Low Saxony’.

In his inaugural lecture in 1975 Heeroma’s successor Hendrik Entjes observes that Heeroma for too long looked at *Nedersaksisch* with the eyes of someone from the West: “*Nedersaksisch* was a branch of the Dutch stem” (ENTJES 1975, p. 12). Without quoting a reference, Entjes observes that Heeroma later on to a larger extent took the position of someone who had to look both to the east and to the west and that *Low Saxon* therefore became another word for “East Dutch and West Low German together”. (ENTJES 1975, p.13)

The “Handboek Nedersaksische Taal- en Letterkunde” (‘Handbook of Low Saxon Language and Literature’) agreed explicitly with the latter, see the contribution “Het Oostnederlandse taallandschap tot het begin van de 19^{de} eeuw” (NIEBAUM 2008, p. 52–64). Hermann Niebaum was the successor of Entjes and thus the third chair holder. He came from Osnabrück, somewhat further to the East than Entjes. Actually *East Dutch* should have been called *West Low German*, Niebaum (2008, p. 54, note 4) observes and thereby he agrees with Van Ginneken (1913, p. 62 ff.).

What in Middle Ages was always called *sächsisch* ‘Saxon’ in North-Germany, received the label *Niederdeutsch* ‘Low German’ shortly after 1600. Low German is the dialect spoken in the northern part of Germany, i.e. *Nederduits* in contemporary Dutch.

From a contemporary perspective, it is rather curious for the average language user that the term *Nederduits* ‘Low German’ was used in the Netherlands until the end of the nineteenth century as designation for ‘Dutch’. Currently Van Dale mentions *Low German* as the antonym of *High German*, the ‘northern variety of German’. But this is an inaccurate description for those familiar with for example the “Institut für Niederdeutsche Sprache” (‘Institute of Low German Language’) in Bremen or with the “Niederdeutsche Grammatik” (‘Low German Grammar’): this refers to a dialectological institute and a dialectological publication, respectively. The Low German area can be seen in figure 2.

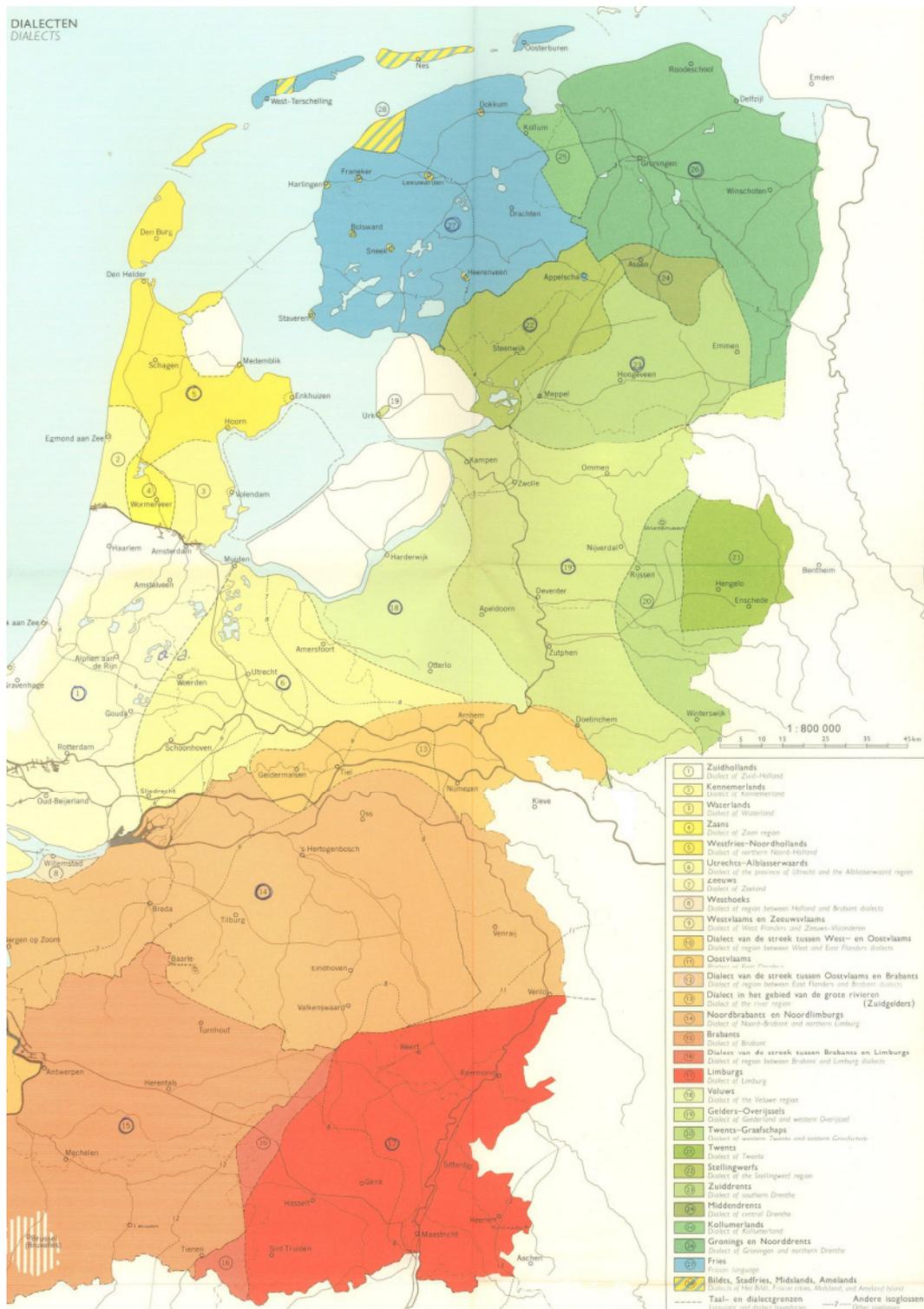


Fig. 1: Part of the Dutch language area (from DAAN/BLOK 1969). The Dutch Low Saxon dialects are indicated by green colours

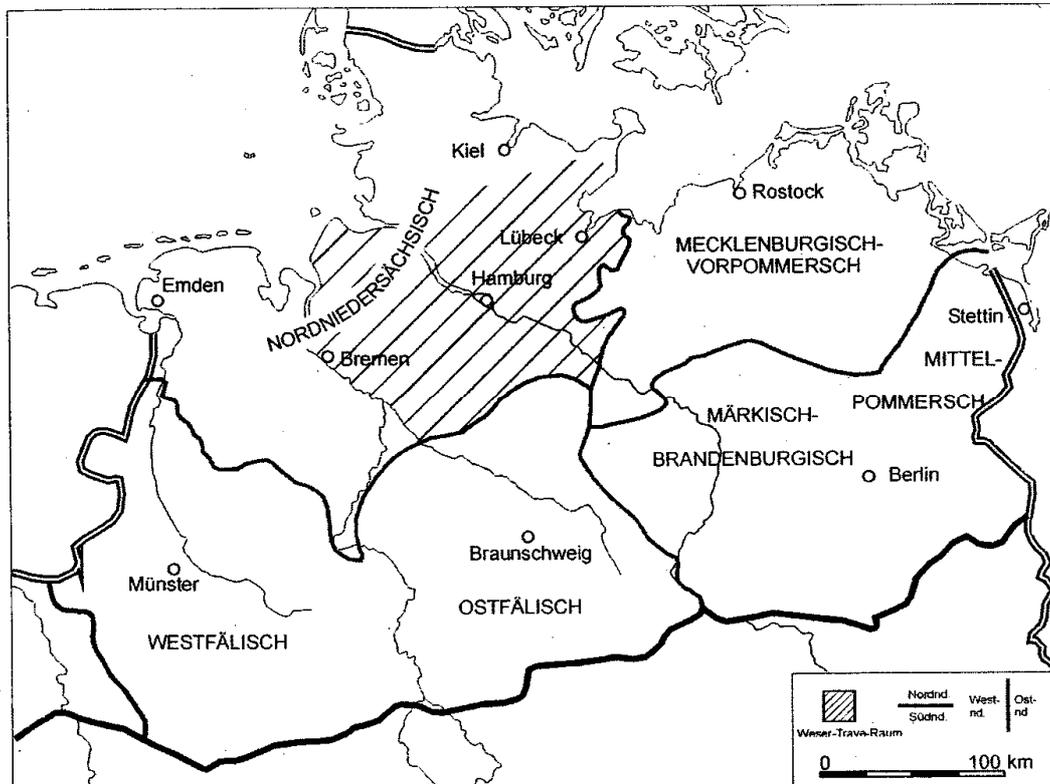


Fig. 2: The Low German area (Niederdeutsche Grammatik 1998, p. 19)

Nederduits is not a regional counterpart of standard German but a synonym of *Plattduits* ‘North German dialect’. The introduction of the geographic designation *Duitsland* ‘Germany’ and the language name *Duits* ‘German’ during the nineteenth century was logically accompanied by the decline of the concept *Nederduits* ‘Low German’, at least as far as matters inside the Netherlands are concerned. The following example demonstrates how much the earlier concept *Nederduits* has disappeared. In the eastern border areas of the Netherlands a word game is nowadays sometimes played with the word *Neder-duits*: now it functions as a blending where the first constituent refers to *Neder-lands* and the second to *Duits*.² If *Neder-duits* is understood in this way, the term *Nedersaksisch* can mean ‘Saxon as spoken in the Netherlands’ to speakers of Dutch.

The “Handboek Nedersaksische Taal- en Letterkunde” (‘Handbook of Low Saxon Linguistics and Literature’) from 2008 focuses primarily on the dialects that in Dutch are normally called *Nedersaksisch*, i.e. the dialects of Groningen,

2 See two quotes from the Dutch newspaper “De Telegraaf”: “[...] since yesterday the police in Twente and the German police across the border have a joint ‘Nederduits’ police office” (27 November 2008), and: “For a few years both villages have had a joint ‘Nederduits’ police office, and also the fire brigades in the two countries work closely together” (1 November 2008).

Drenthe, the Stellingwerven in Friesland, Overijssel and the Veluwe and the major part of the Achterhoek in Gelderland north of the Liemers, i.e. Dutch Low German. Maps in this Handbook show the high degree to which the state border follows the eastern border (see figure 3).

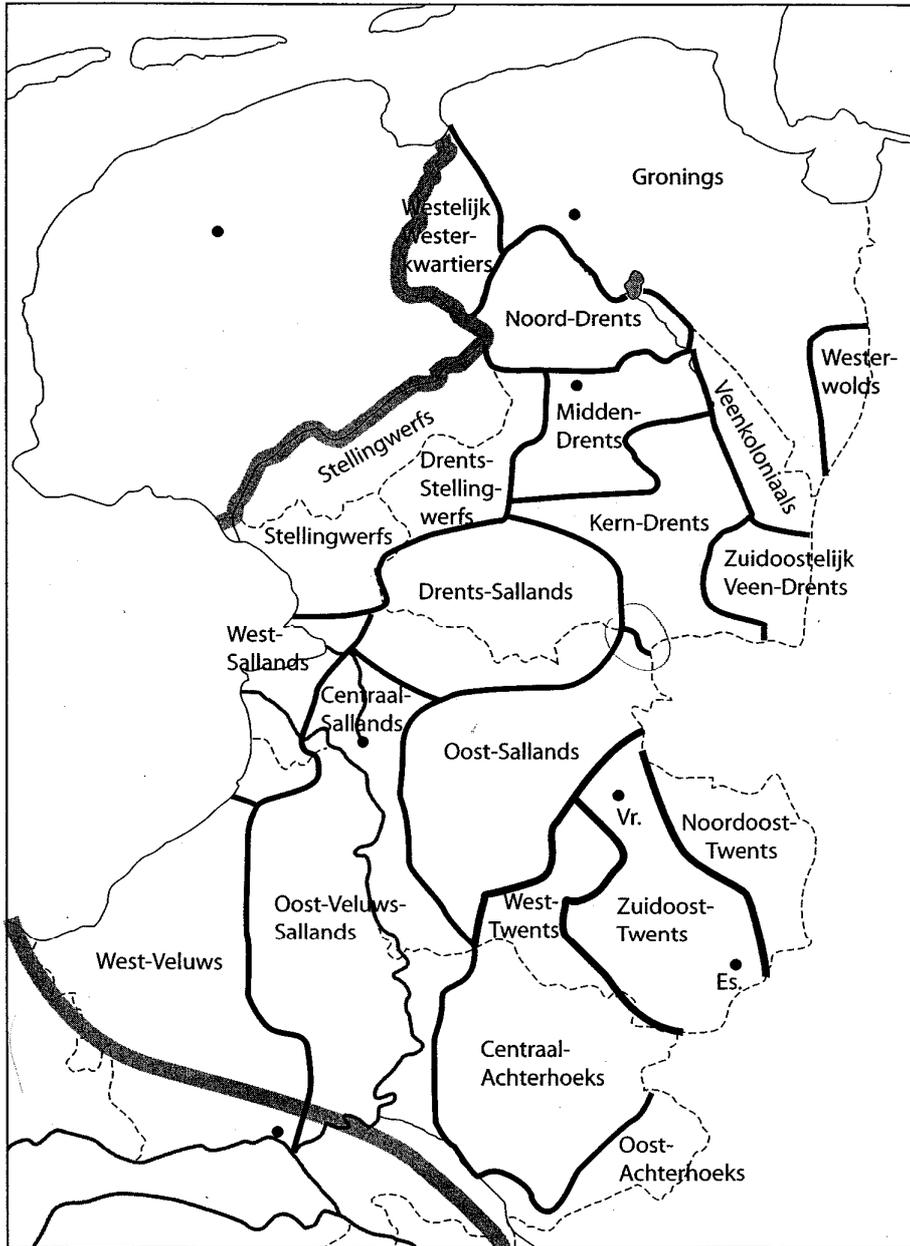


Fig. 3: The Dutch Low Saxon area (Handboek Nedersaksisch 2008, p. 86)

On the other hand, if we have a look at Low German publications, it is often the case that the western border forms the end of the visual field: The more we ap-

proach modern times, the more the state border functions as a dialect border. See for example various illustrations in NIEBAUM (1986a, see figures 4–7).

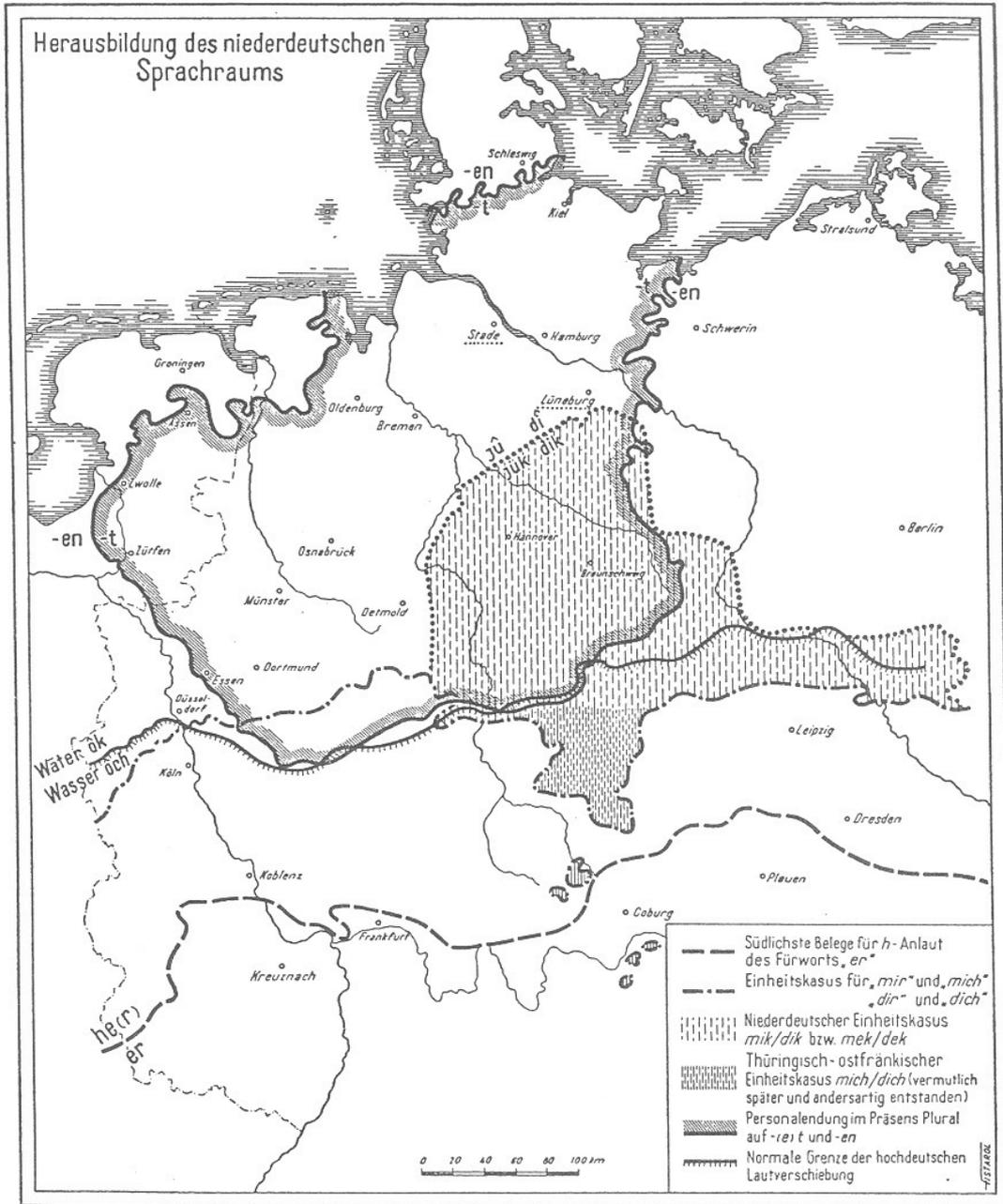


Fig. 4: The Old Low German area (FOERSTE 1960, p. 4)

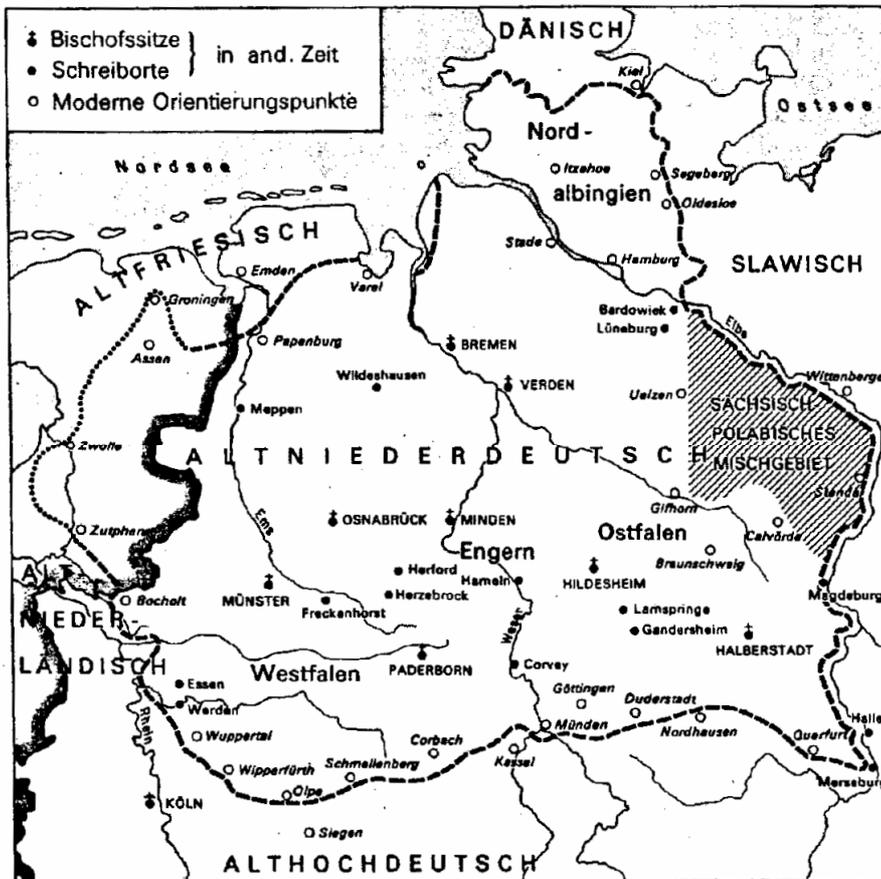


Fig. 5: The Old Low German area (SANDERS 1982, p. 238)

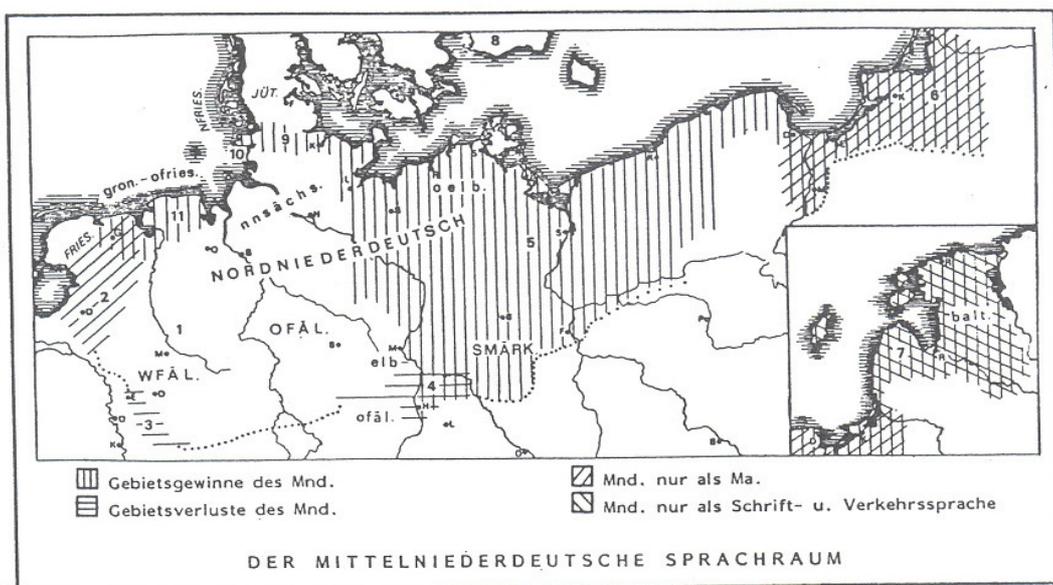


Fig. 6: The Middle Low German area (PETERS 1984, p. 59)

On the other hand Map 4 in FRINGS / LERCHNER (1966) stands out as an example of the opposite (see figure 8). Here the border between the “Franconian” and the “Saxon Territories” is clearly marked: the Low Saxon area in the Netherlands thus belongs to Low German.

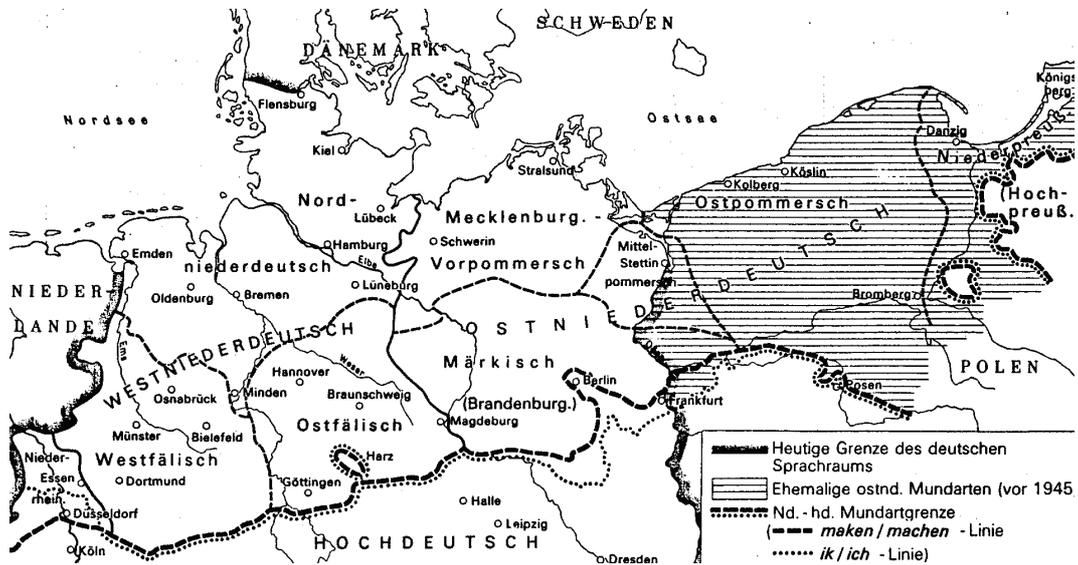


Fig. 7: The Low German dialects (SANDERS 1982, p. 240)

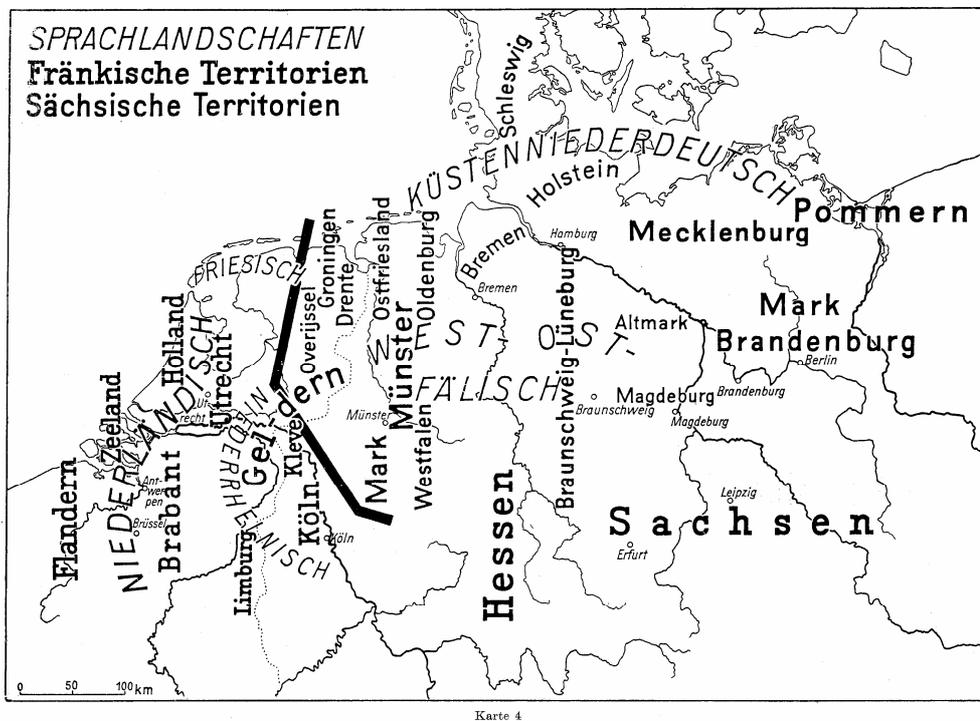


Fig. 8: Franconian and Saxon territories (FRINGS / LERCHNER 1966)

Heeroma's synonym *Oostnederlands* 'East Dutch' for Low Saxon is actually much less widely used than *Nedersaksisch*, and is considered less suitable in Friesland, Groningen and Drenthe for practical reasons: there the provinces Overijssel and Gelderland are regarded as the East. The North is adjoining, but it is an area with its own designation.

Also, the second part of the compound *Oost-Nederlands* Eastern Dutch evokes objections, but this is mainly in connection with the double meaning of the Dutch word *Nederlands*. The fact that in the mid-nineties, the North-Eastern dialects gained recognition within the framework of the relevant charter of the European Council – a government decision that was strongly influenced by the written statements of the dialectologists Berns, Niebaum and Weijnen – this fact has definitely contributed to the popularity of the term *Nedersaksisch* in comparison to *Oost-Nederlands* (see REKER / NIEBAUM 1996). In the discussions concerning this recognition the question was often raised to what degree the Low Saxon dialects of the Netherlands were Dutch dialects and (if so) should therefore be excluded from this recognition. In this discussion the concept *Nederlands* was not always used correctly. On the one hand this is the name of the standard language of the Netherlands and Flanders, but on the other hand it is an adjective referring to the geographic designation *Nederland*. Everything that belongs to the Netherlands is *Nederland+s* and within this approach Frisian is for example a Dutch language variety. Historically and typologically it is also not justifiable that the dialect of Groningen is a Dutch dialect according to this interpretation. Precisely because the difference between *Nederlands I* (noun) and *Nederlands II* (adjective) is not always expressed clearly, the name *Oost-Nederlands* is less fortunate.

Border areas are not always very unambiguous or easy, it is not always uncomplicated to be a visitor to the border. NIEBAUM (1986b) soon after his arrival to Groningen gave a demonstration of this – in this case with regard to the language history – in one of his first contributions to the “Driemaandelijks Bladen” with the following bilingual title: “Noordoostmiddelnederlands-Noordwestmiddelnederduits – (West)middelnedersaksisch. Vorbemerkungen zur Schreibsprachenlandschaft der heutigen östlichen Niederlande im späten Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit”. The complex character becomes clear to anyone who has a look at this publication: the correct title has been glued on top of an incorrect heading.

If we cast a glance at the German speaking research literature, we can find a similar terminological confusion as with regard to Dutch Low Saxon. Like Dutch *Nedersaksisch*, the German term *Niedersächsisch* ('Low' + 'Saxon') is filled with very different semantic contents. As TAUBKEN (1990, p. 228) shows, *Niedersächsisch* is used at least for the following concepts:

1. *Niedersächsisch* = 'Low German'

In this sense, *Niedersächsisch* refers to the dialects of the unshifted part of Continental West Germanic, excluding Low Franconian, and hence to the entire Low German area (e.g., BEHAGHEL 1928, p. 159).

2. *Niedersächsisch* = ‘West Low German’

In this use, *Niedersächsisch* means the dialects between Low Franconian and East Low German, i.e. West Low German. Sometimes, Dutch Low German (*Ostniederländisch*) is included (e.g., BEHAGHEL 1907, p. 37), sometimes not (e.g., SCHIRMUNSKI 1962, p. 31).

3. *Niedersächsisch* = *Nordniedersächsisch* in the narrowest sense

Niedersächsisch is also used to refer to the dialects north of West- and Eastphalian, excluding Dutch Low German, West Frisian and Schleswig-Holsteinian (e.g., GERNENTZ 1980, p. 26).

4. *Niedersächsisch* = ‘dialects of Low Saxony’

In addition, *Niedersächsisch* sometimes refers to the dialects of the federal state Niedersachsen including Bremen (e.g., “Niedersächsisches Wörterbuch”, III, p. 5).

We use *Niedersächsisch* (‘German Low Saxon’) as a synonym for *Westniederdeutsch*³ (‘West Low German’), both referring to the group of Western Low German dialects. Hence, *Niedersächsisch* (‘German Low Saxon’) comprises *Westfälisch* (‘Westphalian’), *Ostfälisch* (‘Eastphalian’) and *Nordniederdeutsch* (‘North Low German’) which sometimes and especially in older research literature is called *Nordniedersächsisch* (‘North’ + ‘Low’ + ‘Saxon’) (see WIESINGER 1983, p. 872–880 and FOERSTE 1957, p. 1831, map 7). In 1957, FOERSTE decided to change this older name into *Nordniederdeutsch*. One reason for this was the fact, that *Nordniederdsächsisch* (‘North Low Saxon’)⁴ was spoken not only in the corresponding federal state *Niedersachsen*, but also the in the neighbouring states Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein, the northern-most federal state of Germany. The areas of the Low German dialects on the one hand, and the federal states of Northern Germany on the other, are contrasted in figure 9 and 10. In order to show the differences, a dialectological map is superimposed over a political map (figure 9). In addition, the two maps are presented side by side in figure 10.

3 Like *Niedersächsisch*, *Westniederdeutsch* is also used in different meanings (cf. TAUBKEN 1990, p. 216).

4 In contrast to GOLTZ / WALKER 1990, we prefer the English terms *North Low Saxon* and *North Low German* in place of *North Saxon* to refer to *Nordniederdeutsch/Nordniedersächsisch*.



Fig. 9: Superimposition of a dialect-geographic map (according to WIESINGER 1983, map 47.4) over a political map (“Nationalatlas” 1999, p. 19) by means of the “Digital Wenker Atlas” (see < <http://www.diwa.info> >)

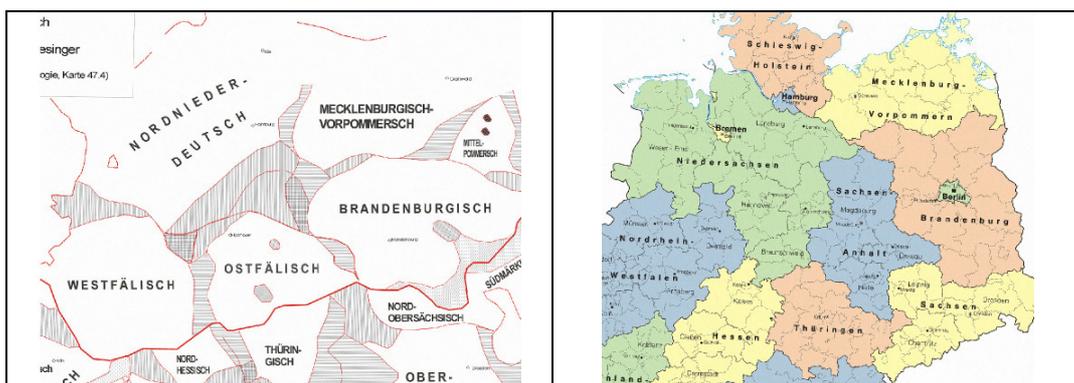


Fig. 10: Low German dialect-geography (according to WIESINGER 1983, map 47.4) and the Northern federal states of Germany (“Nationalatlas” 1999, p. 19) by means of the “Digital Wenker Atlas”

To summarize our terminological decisions, the main concepts and their Dutch and German translations are sketched in figure 11.

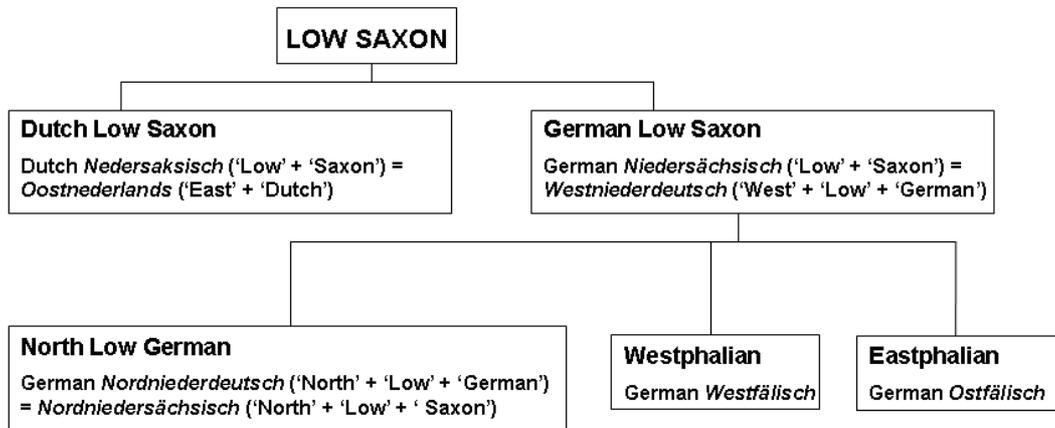


Fig. 11: Subareas of Low Saxon dialects

2 CURRENT RESEARCH ON LOW SAXON DIALECTS

The Low Saxon dialect area can be seen as a research laboratory par excellence. In this area, linguists from very different disciplines – but especially from the fields of language history, dialectology, socio-, contact and variationist linguistics – come together in an endeavor to use the peculiarities of this dialect area for the analysis of various research topics. Last but not least, evidence for the diversity of the linguistic research potential offered by Low Saxon is provided by this present volume and its 16 articles written by researchers from five countries. Whereas some articles focus exclusively on Low Saxon or subareas of Low Saxon in Germany and/or the Netherlands, other contributions also consider larger dialect areas within which Low Saxon is only a central subpart.

In light of the fascinating and highly dynamic past of the Low Saxon area, the Low Saxon language history plays an important role in this volume. Five of the following articles are concerned with questions of diachronic linguistics which are discussed at the beginning of the volume.

The first contribution, from TETTE HOFSTRA, concentrates on the sound change of *ft* to *ht* (*cht*) in Old Low German. The genesis, dynamics and dialect geographical distribution of this consonantal phenomenon are taken into consideration here.

HOFSTRA's analysis is followed by an article by DIETER MÖHN and INGRID SCHRÖDER whose contribution is placed within the field of historical grammar writing. By means of the exemplary word class adjective the authors provide insights into the lexicographic work within historical and especially Middle Low German grammars. In addition, they present the results of frequency analyses of the word class concerned.

The Middle Low German period is also the historical starting point of the analysis by ALEXANDRA N. LENZ who works on the verb *kriegen* in Low German. In order to get comprehensive information about the multifunctionality and polysemy of this very frequent verb in synchrony and diachrony, she draws on Low German dialect dictionaries and on large historical corpora.

Whereas LENZ chooses Low German as research area, SIEMON REKER concentrates on Doede van Amsweer and consequently on the Northern Dutch region around Groningen. REKER's comparison of two obviously differing editions of a play translated by van Amsweer not only offers insights into "Gronings" around 1600, it also provides significant data concerning the emergent transition of the regional language from Middle Low German into Dutch.

The diachronic linguistics section ends with the contribution of GUNTHER DE VOGELAER and MAGDA DEVOS whose article also forms the transition to contemporary Low Saxon. The authors approach the morphological phenomenon *Einheitsplural* by analysing historical and recent data from dialect geography in order to detect explanations for this phenomenon, which is rare from a typological point of view.

The second thematic section of articles is devoted to linguistic phenomena of present Low Saxon:

The thematic section, also with five contributions, starts with the contribution by JACQUES VAN KEYMEULEN and ALBERT OOSTERHOF. In their lexicographic study different principles of arrangement within dictionaries – especially Dutch dictionaries – are contrasted.

The contribution of HENK BLOEMHOFF is also placed within the Dutch language area. His research area is the *Westfälische Brechung* ('Westphalian Breaking', or "lowering") which is analysed in the Low Saxon province of Overijssel and adjacent areas. BLOEMHOFF's geographic analyses account for a larger regional distribution of this vocalic phenomenon than previously thought.

In his article, MARCO SPRUIT introduces an industry-standard knowledge discovery process into the field of language variation research. In addition, he raises several research questions to improve current research strategies with respect to syntactic and morphological variation and the relation between language variation and geography.

Like SPRUIT, a dialectometric approach is used by WILBERT HEERINGA, MARTIJN WIELING, BOUDEWIJN VAN DEN BERG and JOHN NERBONNE. On the basis of the digitalized data of the "Morfologische Atlas van de Nederlandse Dialecten" (MAND) they compare and cluster the Low Saxon dialects of the Netherlands with regard to the morphological variation documented in the atlas.

The morphology of Dutch Low Saxon is also in the focus of the analyses of TON GOEMAN. By means of a comprehensive synchronic corpus from the database of the "Goeman/Taeldeman/Van Reenen project" (also used by HEERINGA et al.) he analyses the variation of suffixes of the past participle form in Dutch dialects.

In the third thematic section of this volume, contributions are assembled where the emphasis is on language contact between Low Saxon and neighbouring languages and varieties:

JARICH HOEKSTRA's study of the construction "AND + infinitive" focusses on a syntactic phenomenon which is found not only in the dialects of North-Friesland and Low German but also in "higher" more colloquial speech levels of North Germany. To what extent language contact with Danish has an impact on this phenomenon, is one of the central questions discussed.

The role of Danish as a contact language of North German varieties also plays a crucial role in the article by MARGRETHE PEDERSEN. She concentrates on the variety South Schleswig Danish at the German-Danish border. In addition to linguistic phenomena her discussion includes attitudinal aspects.

In the third contribution of this thematic section, written by CHARLOTTE GOOSKENS and SEBASTIAN KÜRSCHNER, perception tests shed light on the mutual intelligibility at the German-Danish and German-Dutch border. Their results suggest that at least the German-Dutch border area can still be characterized as a dialect continuum.

The recent language dynamics patterns are the focus of the fourth and last thematic section. The results offer cautious statements about the future of the dialects within the Low Saxon continuum. This thematic block includes two articles:

In the sociolinguistic contribution by TOM F. H. SMITS, the recent dialect change in Winterswijk (NL) and Vreden (D) in the German-Dutch border area is highlighted. By means of comprehensive empirical research SMITS demonstrates different degrees of linguistic variants with regard to their "affinity towards decline" or stability, respectively.

The dynamics of Low German dialects is the starting point in the analyses by MICHAEL ELMENTALER. On the basis of recently surveyed language data, he discusses the acceptability of Low German features from the perspective of competent and less competent dialect speakers.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to a number of people who have contributed to this volume: Special thanks goes to John Nerbonne (Groningen), who was not only one of the main initiators of this volume, but who also supported it financially. Special thanks also goes to the "Stichting Sasland" in Oldeberkoop/Berkoop (the Netherlands) for the financial contribution. This volume was also financially supported by the Centre of Language and Cognition (CLCG) at the University of Groningen, and by the department of Frisian Language and Culture (University of Groningen) in order to honour Hermann Niebaum's long lasting contribution to the Frisian curriculum. For a critical discussion, a number of helpful suggestions and other kinds of support we would like to thank Sjef Barbiers, Anne Bollmann, Alasdair MacDonald, Rudolf Ebeling, Hidde Feenstra, Miralda Meulman, Brigitte Ochs, Jan Posthumus, Julia Rudolph, Harry Scholtmeijer, Elvira Topalovic and Eivind Torgersen. Furthermore, sincere thanks are

given to Jürgen Erich Schmidt and all editors of the “Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik” for the acceptance and publishing of this volume.

This volume is dedicated to our friend and colleague Prof. Dr. Hermann Niebaum, who had great impact on the Low Saxon linguistics during the last decades and contributed to the fact that it is still a vivid research area. The present volume is a proof of this.

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