

Varying spelling techniques in the texts of an adult, inexperienced writer

Anna Hansdatter (born 1660) is one of few Norwegian women of the late 17th and early 18th century whose written language we have the possibility to study. From her hand we have twelve letters that she wrote to the well known scholar Arne Magnussen in Copenhagen. These letters show a writer who, in spite of not following the elaborate letter-writing style of her time, uses writing as an effective means of communication. The intra-writer variation, both in spelling and in other parts of the language, goes beyond the variation found in texts by more affluent writers. By combining theories from historical sociolinguistics and language planning (corpus planning) with pedagogical and cognitive theories about the learning of writing, one can understand the variation in Anna's writing in a way that sheds light on a field within Norwegian language history that has to this day barely been explored. The study also contributes to the debate about "easy" and "difficult" spelling, since Anna's variation seems to have less to do with her dialect than with her having learned some of the principles of spelling – without having reached the level of automation. Even if some of Anna's spellings are based on pronunciation, most of her variation can be seen as experiments. For example: An awareness of so called silent consonants can be traced, and she tries out different strategies: She writes both *jertte* and *hierte* (heart), where the *h* is not pronounced, but spelled – in the 18th century as today, in both Danish and Norwegian. In my presentation, I will discuss how the varied spelling of inexperienced writers can contribute to language history, in this case the history of Norwegian. Since Norwegian spelling has been changed heavily as a case of creating an Ausbau-language in opposition to Danish, it is also interesting to see Anna's variation in this Danish/Norwegian perspective.

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