



**Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers.** *Geschichte der mecklenburgischen Regionalsprache seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Varietätenkontakt zwischen Alteingesessenen und immigrierten Vertriebenen. Teil 1: Sprachgeschichte.* Berlin: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2018. 492 pp. \$101.95, cloth, ISBN 978-3-631-75871-7.

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**Published on** H-TGS (May, 2019)

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After the Second World War, refugees to present-day Germany from the former German eastern territories brought with them a large number of changes and challenges: housing shortages, integration problems, and supply bottlenecks, to name but a few. The population of the two northern German states of Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern almost doubled. Among other things, the influx dramatically increased the contact between speakers of various German dialects and regiolects, causing “eine[m] starken Wandel der Volkssprache und vielleicht teilweise [dem] Aufgeben der Mundart” (a strong change in the vernacular and perhaps partly [the] relinquishing of it).[1]

Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers deals with this linguistic aspect of German postwar migration in the first volume of his study *Geschichte der mecklenburgischen Regionalsprache seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (History of Mecklenburg’s Regional Language since the Second World War) for the Mecklenburg area. His theoretical considerations and the presentation of his methodical approach are convincing and demonstrate the qualitative density of his work.

In his book, Ehlers closes a gap in German linguistics by dealing with the linguistic conse-

quences for Mecklenburg Low German caused by the post-World War Two refugee flows. His empirical approach relies on the survey of a total of ninety informants and their descendants (refugees from the German eastern territories and long-time Mecklenburgers) from five different cities and villages in northern Mecklenburg. Using sociolinguistic interviewing and language tests of his ninety informants, Ehlers created a data corpus that allowed him to trace the linguistic changes according to the principles of historical sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and perceptual linguistics.

In a comprehensive examination of the data Ehlers divides the informants by age (“prewar generation,” born 1920–39 vs. “postwar generation,” born 1950–69), origin (relatives of long-established families vs. relatives of expellee families), and place of residence (city vs. small town vs. village). Ehlers juxtaposes these groups and painstakingly identifies the contact-linguistic phenomena as well as the language change in local Low German, the provenance dialects of the expellees, the Mecklenburgian regional language, and standard High German. They are examined in terms of morphosyntax, phonetics/phonology, and vocabulary, both synchronically (chapter 3) and

diachronically (chapter 5). For his diachronic reflections Ehlers refers to the *Wenkersätze* (a dialectal survey carried out extensively throughout the German Reich by Georg Wenker at the end of the nineteenth century), thus connecting his work to almost 150 years of dialectal studies of Mecklenburg Low German. The analysis of his results takes place in three parts and deals with the structural change of the Mecklenburg regiolect in the variety contact of the postwar decades (chapter 3), the relics of the regiolects of the expellees in Mecklenburgian language contact (chapter 4), and the structural change of the Mecklenburg Low German in the variety contact since the nineteenth century (chapter 5).

Ehler's approach essentially combines three individual linguistic analyses without losing sight of the key question: How did the regiolects, dialects, and standard language spoken in Mecklenburg change in the course of language contact? In this way, Ehlers succeeds in transcending the character of a linguistic case study and achieving a comparative (meta) level. The results show that there is a general tendency to break down exclusive dialectal and regiolectal features. Although the intensity differs individually among the informants, this process nevertheless covers all linguistic levels for all of the informants. This language change process shows a higher permeability in language transfer for the region of Mecklenburg than in comparable regions of northern Germany (pp. 441–442).

The expellees who settled in Mecklenburg adapted to their environment linguistically. It can be stated that the younger the expellees were when they came to Mecklenburg, the fewer characteristics of their origin dialects they used in their present Mecklenburg regiolect. This, of course, is not surprising, since it confirms "normal" tendencies in the approximation of dialectal characteristics to the standard language. However, it also implies the lower language prestige of

the provincial dialects in the new host society (p. 292).

While it has been assumed in German linguistics that the mass immigration of the refugees accelerated the dismantling of the autochthonous dialects and regiolects of the immigration areas, this cannot be confirmed for the Mecklenburg study area. On the contrary, Ehlers shows that, especially for Mecklenburg Low German and the Mecklenburg regiolect, archaisms have been preserved, and indeed they were supported by the hyperfrequent use of the immigrated expellees (pp. 444–445).

With the title for this initial volume, "Teil 1: Sprachsystemgeschichte" (Part 1: History of the language system), Ehlers refers to the work of Klaus Mattheier, according to which language history consists of four dimensions: "Sprachsystemgeschichte" (history of the language system), "Sprachgebrauchsgeschichte" (history of language usage), "Sprachbewusstseinsgeschichte" (history of language awareness), and "Sprachkontaktgeschichte" (history of language contact).[2] One can look forward to the subsequent volumes, in which Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers will deal with the three additional dimensions of language history for the Mecklenburg regional language, which will be based on this impressive first part.

#### Notes

[1]. Friedrich Krauß, "Das Rheinische Wörterbuch," *Muttersprache* 2 (1950): 31–33.

[2]. Klaus J. Mattheier, "Sprachgeschichte des Deutschen: Desiderate und Perspektiven," in *Sprachgeschichte des Neuhochdeutschen. Gegenstände Methoden, Theorien*, ed. Gardt, Andreas et al. (Tübingen: De Gruyter, 1995), 1–18.

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**Citation:** Robert Kleih. Review of Ehlers, Klaas-Hinrich. *Geschichte der mecklenburgischen Regionalsprache seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Varietätenkontakt zwischen Alteingesessenen und immigrierten Vertriebenen. Teil 1: Sprachgeschichte*. H-TGS, H-Net Reviews. May, 2019.

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