Business writing in early sixteenth-century Norway

Ivar Berg (ivar.berg@ntnu.no)
NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology

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Abstract

This article discusses the linguistic make-up of business writing in late medieval / early modern Norway and addresses questions of language choice and language mixing. The most important foreign language was Low German, and the written culture also depended on Latin; these multilingual influences are evident in business records and accounting manuscripts from the early sixteenth century. A case study of language choice in international communication sheds light on the status of Latin as opposed to the vernaculars, as well as the relationship between the various vernaculars. Official documents are normally written in one language; however, in the more informal register of administrative and economical notes we find Latin and Low German words and phrases (code-switching and loanwords) in texts otherwise written in Scandinavian. This language mixing is markedly different from that of more formal writings and provides valuable insights into the general linguistic competence of those involved in trade, either as merchants or scribes. It is suggested that the code-mixed informal texts represent an unmarked, functional code for bilingual scribes.

1 Introduction

The present contribution addresses Norwegian business writing mainly in the first half of the sixteenth century, albeit with some remarks on the earlier situation. For reasons outlined in Section 2 on the source material, there are very few written traces of merchant activities from this period. The title is thus phrased to cover business in a slightly wider sense, including notes and accounts by Norwegians dealing with merchants who were themselves of foreign origin.

Norway entered a union with Denmark in 1380 (Sweden was also intermittently included in a pan-Scandinavian union from 1397 to 1523), with Denmark being the stronger and dominant part. Union matters concerning Norway were written in Norwegian until 1450; from that year onwards official proclamations from the king were only issued in Danish. This initiated a large-scale language shift to Danish starting in high social layers and spreading socially downwards. The language shift was not completed in documents written in remote rural areas until the latter half of the sixteenth century, yet most Norwegian writing after around 1500 adhered to Danish models, i.e. the language of leading Danes and the Danish chancery, although some Norwegian traits usually remained. The differences between Norwegian and Danish were – and more arguably still are – of course dialectal, and in what follows 'Scandinavian' is used as a superordinate term.

The Low German of the Hanseatic League had become the most important language of commerce in the North Sea area during the Late Middle Ages. One of the four main Hanseatic trading stations was the *Kontor* in Bergen, where they maintained a physical presence for several centuries. The long-term language contact with Low German had a profound impact on the Scandinavian languages and especially on the local dialect of Bergen (see e.g. Nesse 2012; Jahr 1999). The old international language Latin remained in use as the language of learning and the church, and was generally used in communication with the British Isles. As will be shown, the vernaculars were by this time replacing Latin in many domains, for instance trade.

This is the general backdrop against which two questions will be addressed in Sections 3 and 4, respectively:

1. What languages did those involved in trade know, and in what situations did they use them?
2. How did different linguistic varieties interact in the written output of mercantile activities?

Section 3 examines the languages used by traders in the North Sea area, mainly through a case study of an incident that brought a number of merchants and mariners of Scots, English, and Dutch origin to Norway. Section 4 looks more closely at the linguistic make-up of manuscripts written by Norwegians in their dealings with merchants, focusing on the relationship between Scandinavian and the important foreign languages Latin and Low German. As both 'code choice and code-switching in multilingual societies are dependent on similar sociolinguistic factors' (Schendl 2012: 523–524), it makes sense to compare code choice in Section 3 with code mixing in Section 4. The two perspectives are brought together in a concluding discussion in Section 5.

2 Sources

Preserved documents from medieval Norway are published in the series *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* (DN), so far in 23 volumes. Most of them deal with legislation and a fairly restricted trade, that of land ownership. These documents were more important as titles to the land than as part of the trade act itself, and are thus connected to the legal language and follow established legal formulae.

Excavations in Norwegian towns, especially Bergen, have unearthed many runic inscriptions on wood dealing with matters of trade, pointing to the development of a merchant literacy (Hagland 2011; Johnsen 1987). Many inscriptions contain names, obviously used as ownership labels, and a large number of tally sticks found in Bergen also point to commercial activities (Hagland 2011: 35). Simple tally sticks used for counting have a long tradition, and the line *skáro á skíði* 'cut in wood' in the Eddic poem *Vǫluspá* (stanza 20) probably refers to it. Johnsen (1987) takes the evidence of runic inscriptions as proof that merchants used runes on wood for their purposes, whereas texts in the Latin alphabet on parchment were restricted to legal matters and the church. On the other hand, the number of inscriptions suggests that literacy – or 'runacy' – was indeed widespread among merchants and city dwellers in general.

As trade became more complex, one would expect that merchant literacy developed beyond the limits of runic writing. There are, however, few traces of written material by merchants in the Norwegian sources. One would for instance expect the larger merchants to make accounts of incomes and expenses. There is no doubt that accounting was of growing importance in official administration, as we have many documents either asking for an account or stating that one has been duly made, although the actual accounting documents have rarely been preserved. The same applies to writing in connection with foreign trade: there is the occasional receipt, but not much more. It is telling of the source situation that most information on Norwegian trade and other connections with the British Isles during the Middle Ages is found in English Patent Rolls and similar sources (published in vols. XIX–XX of DN). Foreign trade increasingly came under the control of the Hanseatic League and to a lesser degree British merchants, leaving Norwegians to conduct only petty domestic trade, where there was probably less need for writing in any case. Norwegian merchants sailing to England mostly disappear from the English records around the mid-fourteenth century, albeit with late exceptions such as Oluf Henriksson from Tønsberg, who sailed to Hull in 1392 (DN XIX, no. 617).

The source situation changes around 1500. Most of the documents printed in DN dealing with trade belong to the Munich Collection, the archives of King Christian II (reigned 1513–23) and Archbishop Olav Engelbrektsson (1523–37). Both fled to the Low Countries due to political conflicts and brought their archives with them; the two archives were merged and later surfaced in Bavaria and hence got their present name. Because of this special situation, drafts, notes, accounts, transcripts etc have been preserved until today, whereas in other cases documents of limited interest for posterity have been lost in the course of time. Archival practices must be at least partly responsible for the lack of written material 'related to the activities carried out by merchants and tradesmen' from the Late Middle Ages (Hagland 2011: 29).

A few medieval cadastres are preserved, registers of land and revenue. This text type, though not necessarily dealing with trade as such, shows similar linguistic traits as other written material serving an administrative or economical purpose: stereotypical form (lists) and elements of language mixing not found in letters or official writing. Such texts will thus be briefly mentioned below.

3 Language choice in international communication

A famous passage from the thirteenth-century *Konungs skuggsjá* [The King's Mirror], an educational book in the European *specula* tradition, states that a merchant should 'learn all languages, and first of all Latin and French, because those tongues are most widely known'.[1] During the High Middle Ages, Latin also served as the administrative language of most European states as well as the language of the Catholic Church.

From the Late Middle Ages the vernaculars rose to prominence as adequate international means of communication, although Latin retained its position in some domains (see Burke 2004, esp. chapters 2 and 3, for a discussion of the relationship between Latin and vernaculars in Early Modern Europe). The Protestant Reformation even had vernaculars replace Latin as the language of the church in Northern Europe. As Latin lost its position as an international lingua franca, those engaged in international trade had to develop some sort of bilingualism to be able to conduct their business.

3.1 Communication and (receptive) bilingualism

It is often assumed that Scandinavians and (Low) Germans communicated through what was essentially a form of receptive bilingualism (or semi-communication): each interlocutor spoke his own language, probably with some accommodation, and the other understood it – much the same way as Scandinavians communicate today (Braunmüller 2007). On the basis of this, it has been argued that Scandinavian and Low German were dialects rather than languages, i.e. mutually intelligible; nonetheless, I have previously (Berg 2016) argued that semi-communication was no automatic process, as there are several written statements from the early sixteenth century pointing to lack of understanding. It is also very hard to keep this phenomenon apart from bilingualism in the written records. Be the exact nature of the language contact as it may, the preserved texts show at least that Low German was read and understood among Scandinavians.

In any case, no such receptive bilingualism was possible with the British. One of the parties would have had to learn the language of the other, or gain access to the language through interpreters. The written sources give evidence of both practices. A charter issued in Marstrand (then southern Norway, present-day Sweden) in 1486 tells of a raiding English ship that had an interpreter who spoke 'both Norwegian and German' (*han talede bode norske och tyske*) in dealings with the townsmen (DN V, no. 930).[2]

A trader who may have been bilingual is *Johnne Crethonne Scotts man serwand to ye archbischop of Noroway*, who is mentioned in 1528 (DN XI, no. 487) and himself issued a letter in Scandinavian at the same time (DN XI, no. 486). The language, either of himself or a secretary, shows both Norwegian

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1 My translation from the original Old Norse: *næmðu allar mallyzkur en alra hælzt latinu oc valsku. þviat þær tungur ganga viðazt* (Holm-Olsen 1970, 19).

2 'German' was used to refer to all varieties of High and Low German, including Dutch, during the Middle Ages. I use 'Low German' as a cover term in the following, including texts with Dutch dialect features.

and Swedish traits, which may be expected of a Scotsman who had learned Scandinavian to do business. He was quite likely the man identified as *Jon Skot* in two charters from 1529 (DN VIII, nos. 589, 600), both issued in Bergen by a merchant from Newcastle, and it is a fair assumption that John had acted as interpreter.

An example of a multilingual German trader is Wilhelm Frank. He is mentioned in at least 23 documents from 1523–1530, first in a pass issued by the Elector of Brandenburg to 'our servant' (*vnsern diener*) Wilhelm Frank in High German (DN XIII, no. 199). During the following years he was in the service of the exiled King Christian II of Denmark–Norway, and issued receipts in Low and High German as well as Danish, and he wrote letters in Danish and High German (e.g. DN IX, no. 559; X, nos. 501, 615). His Danish is peculiar, even considering the possible orthographic variation of the era, which most likely means that it was a second language. However, such cases of attested multilingualism are rare (see Berg 2016).

3.2 Different languages in use

The politically unstable situation of the late 1520s offers a case study of interaction between different languages in Northern Europe. The archbishop of Nidaros (present-day Trondheim), as much concerned with practical and economical matters as with the afterlife, sent out armed ships to protect trade and seafarers in the North Sea in April 1527. He issued a charter in Scandinavian stating their mission and asking people to aid them; there was also a parallel Latin version (DN I, no. 1072). Whether the captains acted independently or on orders, they appear to have been mere privateers and ostensibly attacked the wrong ships. This led to a lengthy quarrel, and several Scottish, English, and Dutch merchants came to Norway to seek compensation for their stolen property. In this connection charters were issued in various languages, both during the negotiations and as proof of the final agreements on economic compensation. In addition to documents in Scandinavian, Low German, and Latin, there is also an interesting example of a trade contract in Scots.

3.2.1 Latin

In late July 1527 King James V of Scotland sent an official complaint concerning the capture of Scottish ships to the Dano-Norwegian king's commander at Bergen castle (DN VIII, no. 561). The letter was written in Latin except for the signature 'James', whereas the king is called 'Jacobus' in the main text. King James sent another complaint as well, but only the one that was forwarded from Bergen to Trondheim is preserved. The commander at Bergen castle returned an apology to Edinburgh in late September, also in Latin, according to a copy sent to Trondheim (DN VIII, no. 565). The official high-level communication was thus conducted in Latin.

In the summer of 1528 two envoys from Scottish merchants in Dysart came to Norway with a letter of introduction in Latin (DN VIII, no. 573) from their superiors. The following year an Englishman, Roger Dischaunt, arrived on behalf of merchants in Newcastle, bringing with him an introductory letter in Latin (DN VIII, no. 590). Both these Latin letters are marked as 'erroneous' (*feilfuldt*) by the editors of *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, indicating that the knowledge of Latin among merchants was not the best. Roger's introductory letter was sent to the archbishop along with a letter in Scandinavian issued by Roger, presumably written on his behalf by a scribe at the archbishop's residence in Bergen. We may also note in passing that ships were assumed to carry some kind of pass or introductory letter; medieval sources tell of foreign ships being asked to produce letters stating their origin and mission upon arrival (see e.g. DN V, no. 930, and IX, no. 415, Marstrand 1486 and 1493).

The merchant David Falkoner of Leith sent a formal letter in Latin (signed *Dauid Falkner / wyt my hand* in the vernacular) about the ongoing negotiations to the archbishop in 1529 (DN VIII, no. 591); Falkoner is also known to have used French in his trade (DN XIII, no. 481, a pass for a ship he sent to Denmark in 1528). The communication across the North Sea is the only known use of Latin in this case. When it actually came down to doing business and documenting it, the vernaculars were used.

3.2.2 Scots

Following up the exchange of letters the previous year, two Scotsmen came to Trondheim in March 1528: the captain of the captured ship *Peter* and a scribe; the ship was owned by said David Falkoner. The arrangement made was that the archbishop bought, or rather paid for what his men had already taken, both the ship and its cargo. This deal is particularly interesting because the statement of the transaction was written down in both Scots (DN VIII, no. 569) and Scandinavian (DN VIII, no. 570), both versions issued 10 March 1528.

The Scots version is signed by Captain Thomas Gardner and Thomas Huchesson, and was surely written by the latter – he is called *Thomas Hughon scriffwer* 'scribe' in another charter from the same year (DN VIII, no. 580; notice the variable spelling of his surname). Both charters have the same content, yet the Scandinavian version follows the usual style for such charters in Norway at the time, whereas the Scots version is slightly different. It thus seems that neither was a translation of the other, but that both were written independently at the same time. The independence of each text is shown by the Norwegianised name *Haakenson* in the Scandinavian version (with a Norwegian intervocalic ‹k› where Danish would have ‹g›; the name is written *Haagenson* in DN VIII, no. 571).

Later in March, the same two Scotsmen issued a receipt (DN VIII, no. 571) for part of the payment for the ship's cargo, including a remark that the archbishop had promised in writing to pay the rest in Bergen. The receipt is in Scandinavian, except for a signature similar to the one in the two previous charters: *Thomes Houchesonn wytht my hand at/on ye pen* (with some minor orthographic variation), all clearly in the same handwriting. This practice of issuing receipts in Scandinavian, possibly with a signature *manu propria*, is the usual one, as we see from subsequent dealings in Bergen.

3.2.3 Scandinavian

During the summer of 1528 several Scotsmen got their business settled in Bergen, and a series of receipts were issued (DN VIII, nos. 574–576, 578, 580–581). All of these were written in Scandinavian, despite being nominally issued by Scotsmen who did not sign, but set their marks on several of them. Most of these texts are on a modern form, where the one issuing the charter states that he has received the agreed amount. Only the closing of this particular case, a charter issued in Bergen in 1529 (DN VIII, no. 611), is written in the traditional Norwegian style with several witnesses attesting that such and such agreements were made and duly carried out. Thus we also see a transition from the older style of witnesses attesting an agreement to the modern style of issuing a personal receipt; the written text becomes the constitutive legal act, rather than just proving a previously reached oral agreement. Although written in Scandinavian, DN VIII 611 has the phrase *myn hand ath pennen* 'my hand at the pen' that is not used in other Scandinavian charters; this is clearly a calque of the Scots expression found in the signatures mentioned above (DN VIII, nos. 569–571) and a witness of foreign influence. This document also states that setting a mark is *køpmens sydhwane* 'merchants' custom'.

Roger Dischaunt from Newcastle, who came to Bergen in 1529, also received the money he wanted and issued a receipt in Scandinavian in Bergen (DN VIII, no. 600), with a Latin signature: *per me Rogerum Dychaunt. / manu mea propria* 'by me, Roger Dischaunt, with my own hand'. He is the only one of the British merchants who actually came to Norway to show any sign of Latin competence. In the other charters discussed, signatures are in the vernacular; even the Scottish king signed as *James*, not *Jacobus*.

3.2.4 Low German

The man sent out by the archbishop in 1527 was named *Paall Jonson* (DN I, no. 1072). In two undated documents (DN X, nos. 540–541, probably from the summer of 1527) he admits to having property belonging to two Dutch merchants and promises to compensate for it. Based on the language of these charters he was probably of Dutch origin.

One of these merchants was Claes Oedszon from Amsterdam, who came to Bergen in 1528 to get his promised compensation. He made an agreement with the archbishop's representative in Bergen. The charter stating the deal (DN VIII, no. 579) was probably written by a scribe there, as it is in Scandinavian. The merchant, however, signed in Dutch: *Jtem een kennys daer waerheyt soe hebbe ic Claes Oedszon van Amsterdam myn eeyghen hant hyer onder gheset myn merck* 'And to witness the truth have I, Claes Oedszon from Amsterdam, with my own hand set my mark here below'. The skipper Allert Tomaszon also signed (similarly phrased) and put his mark on the charter.[3] The deal was settled a few days later, and *Claes Dodessen* issued a charter stating that he was fully satisfied (DN VIII, no. 609; despite the spelling it must

[3] This is a common practice also found in other documents, see e.g. DN XXII, no. 276, Bergen 1535, in Scandinavian with signatures by Dutch merchants.

be the same person as the mark according to the editors is the same as in DN VIII, no. 579). This time he probably did the writing himself, as the text is in Dutch, and this was ostensibly legally valid.

For comparison I shall mention an unrelated deal made in Trondheim in March 1532. A Dutch seafarer promised to take a ship to the Netherlands and back to Trondheim on behalf of the archbishop (DN VII, no. 692), and stated that he had received some goods and money (DN VII, nos. 693–694). The contract is in Low German, the two receipts in Dutch. The hand in 693–694 also signed *Jan Heynryck zon* in 692; this handwriting is markedly different from the hand in 692, which is quite similar to that of Scandinavian texts from the archbishop's chancery during this period. Both linguistic differences and palaeographic analysis suggest that 693–694 were written by the skipper himself, whereas 692 was written by a local scribe (Berg 2013: 183). The most plausible explanation for the language choice here is that the skipper could not understand Scandinavian, and the Norwegians were able to write Low German in dealings with Dutch merchants. The scribe himself may of course have been German; we know for certain of one *Henrick tysk* 'German' working as a scribe in Trondheim a few years later (Seip 1936: 67, 88, 114; cf. DN XII, no. 571). A contemporary note (DN VIII, no. 678) lists the goods given to the skipper; the list was made for internal administrative purposes and written in Scandinavian. It appears that Low German was a marked choice only used in dealings with foreigners.

3.3 Patterns of language choice

As we have seen, only high-level international communication was conducted in Latin. Its use on lower level is restricted to the merchant David Falkoner and the introductory letters some of the merchants brought with them on their mission to Norway. However, according to the editors of the Norwegian diplomatarium, the language of the latter was 'erroneous', pointing to only mediocre knowledge of Latin. Recall also that the archbishop issued a similar letter to his skipper in two versions, Scandinavian and Latin, although the captain himself appears to have used Dutch in two preserved documents. Latin seems to have been the preferred choice for such documents.

However, none of the charters stating the final agreements are in Latin. The contracts between the British and the archbishop (or his representatives), as well as the receipts issued by the former, are mostly in Scandinavian. We must assume that they were written by scribes employed by the archbishop in Bergen. In the 1530s, when we have more information due to preserved salary lists for the archdiocese (published in Seip 1936), it appears that approximately five scribes were stationed there. In these arrangements the interlocutors must either have used some common language or alternatively had interpreters. As the knowledge of Latin among the merchants seems to have been rather basic, it is doubtful whether that was the language used, and I assume that the negotiations were conducted through interpreters. In the single occasion where a charter was issued in Scots, we see that a parallel version in Scandinavian was needed. This is an exception to the usual practice, and we can only speculate about the reasons. It was an important deal, as the item at hand was an entire ship, and it was also the first agreement made in these negotiations, which perhaps made it especially important for the Scotsmen to have a contract in an intelligible language. It was ostensibly no alternative to use Latin as a shared language for this practical purpose.

The overall picture we get is that the importance of Latin was clearly in decline by the sixteenth century. In everyday economical matters Latin does not appear to have been a possible choice, and only the vernaculars are used in that domain. The examples here illustrate the decline of Latin as an international language of communication, being reduced to a language of learning exclusively; for the clergy and in scholarship Latin continued to be the common language. But it was never used for simple business deals, not even when it might have been a neutral choice as an alternative to parallel versions in different vernaculars.

There is a striking contrast between the Scots example of parallel versions and a few contracts and receipts in Low German without translations. Because of the familiarity with that language, Low German could be used in mercantile matters and must thus have been considered valid for legal purposes. As mentioned, the archbishop had a German scribe in his service in the 1530s, and a list of staff at the royal castle in Bergen around 1531 (DN XIII, no. 582) includes both a scribe and specifically a German scribe (*Tysk schriffuere*).

4 Language mixing in business writing

The more official documents, be they letters between merchants or documents closing a transaction, are written within the normal levels of variation in pre-modern texts. There is not much – if any – language mixing. The only significant exceptions are signatures, for reasons easy to understand. We will now look at more informal documents, lists and accounts done only for administrative purposes, which have a much more varied linguistic mix-up. It seems to be a general tendency that code-switching is mainly found in unofficial notes and administrative writings (Schendl 2012: 527).

Because such notes had no lasting value, they have rarely been preserved; in Norway it is also possible that the use of runes on wood for such practical purposes may at least partly explain the absence of such texts (cf. § 2 above). As mentioned initially, cadastres have some of the same characteristics and will also be mentioned here. The main language of these texts is Scandinavian, with substantial amounts of Latin and Low German inserted.

4.1 Merchant notes

One of the oldest known merchant notes in Norwegian sources is a list of imported goods and how they were paid in money and natural goods, written during 1491–96 (DN XXI, no. 671). The scribe is anonymous, but he dealt with a merchant from Lübeck called Bertolt (also mentioned in the contemporary DN IX, no. 428). The text is mainly in Norwegian and differs from Danish in several respects: the use of ‹p, t, k› where Danish had ‹b, d, g›, word forms like *miol* ‘flour’ (Da. *miel* or *meel*), *honom* ‘him’ (Da. *hannem*), *vikunne* ‘the week.DAT’ (Da. *ugen*), diphthongs (e.g. *ein* ‘a/one’ for Da. *en*), unstressed *a* (e.g. *saltad* ‘salted’ for Da. *saltet*). As Danish had an ever increasing influence on the written language in Norway during the Late Middle Ages, the abundance of Norwegian dialect features in this text is noteworthy, although not uncommon in texts of this type (cf. § 4.3).

The scribe uses quite a lot of Latin, mostly in forms of date referring to the closest feast day as was customary, but also more freely in phrases like *hiis annis* ‘in these years’. There are also some Latin entries in the list not connected to time or date, and it all flows freely in the text, as shown in (1), with Latin parts in boldface:[4]

(1) a. **j*tem*** xvi mark*er* lagde ha*n* fra*m* **d*omi*no joh*anni*** for b*re*fue*n*n
‘item 16 *mark* laid he forth on Saint John’s day for the letters’

b. … førde berulf in xv hudelag **tercia die pasce**
‘brought Berulf in 15 hides on the third day of Easter’

c. **dominus naruo commodauit** mek ix marker
‘sir Narve gave me 9 *mark*’

(1a) has correct case endings in the ablative (*domino*) and the genitive (*johanni*), which by most definitions would be considered code-switching. It is, however, possible that such phrases were learnt as lexical units in exactly this form – as they only occur in dating, these are the only relevant case forms. The same goes for (1b). (1c) is particularly interesting, as the Latin is not connected to time or date, but includes the verb with a switch before the indirect object. Although the sentence starts in Latin, the word order (verb second) indicates that Scandinavian is the matrix language; cf. Wright (1999: 109–110) for an example where most lexical items are Latin, but the underlying word order English.

There are also other examples of Latin outside temporal expressions, such as the phrases given in (2):

(2) a. solui ei, reddidi ei, misi ei
‘I paid him’, ‘I repaid him’, ‘I sent him’

b. sic credo, dubito
‘I think that’, ‘I doubt’

The expressions in (2a) were probably technical terms in accounting; nonetheless, it is harder to explain e.g. *dubito* (2b) in that way. Another word which is rare in normal prose, but also occur in the account discussed below, is the Low German *deker* ‘an amount of ten’. The word *vordor* (pl.) used for an amount of

[4] Expanded abbreviations are in italics. The examples are given with fairly verbatim translations as a compromise between glossing and translation; untranslatable units of measurement are in italics.

fish in this document is known from later dialects, yet apparently a hapax legomenon in the medieval sources.

Similar use of Latin technical terms in accounting is also found in some of the other extant business notes (e.g. DN VIII, nos. 582–585, c. 1530). A few other phrases are given as (3).

(3) summa (summarum/lateris), in toto, minus, soluit
'sum' ('of sums/of page'), 'in total', 'less', 'paid.3SG'

All the mentioned words could be labelled loanwords; nevertheless, instances such as number agreement with *facit*.3SG ~ *faciunt*.3PL 'make' (used when adding sums) indicate real Latin knowledge.

The *Narve* mentioned several times in the text, e.g. in (1c), was probably a canon regular in Oslo: either *Narve Thorersson*, canon in Hamar 1487 (DN V, no. 931) and archpriest in Oslo 1498 (DN I, no. 993), or *Narve Jonsson*, canon in Oslo 1489 (DN XVII, no. 751). This may indicate that the scribe was also a cleric or connected to a clerical institution, which fits nicely with the extensive use of Latin. This is no surprise; the church was also concerned with earthly matters. Most of the tithe and taxes that the church collected were in natural goods which had to be traded, and many clerics took advantage of their tax exemption and participated eagerly in trade (Kolsrud 1958: 320). A note from a royal servant in Bergen complains strongly about this, as it deprived the king of tax income (DN XIII, no. 183, undated c. 1520).

4.2 Accounts

The involvement of the church in trade is also evident from Archbishop Olav Engelbrektsson's account books, several manuscripts from 1532–38 published by Seip (1936).[5] They are mostly written in Scandinavian (Danish with Norwegian interference, as was usual at the time), with some Latin. Some of the scribes also use Low German and must have been bilingual, at least to some degree. Salary lists, both for regular employees and Dutch mariners hired 1536–37, make up much of the material, but the most interesting manuscript in our context is the 1536 account of the archbishop's estate in Bergen (NRA dipl. München papir, no. 4297; Seip 1936: 131–152).

Already the heading of this manuscript is bilingual: *Anno Christi mdxxxvj / Jnt jaar xxxvj*. Pages 17–31 in the manuscript (134–40 in the edition) deal specifically with various merchants, sorted into goods in and goods out (not incomes and expenses as we are used to today), and the same names mostly appear in both sections. The miscellany of the following few pages also mentions dealings with merchants. Most of the text is in Scandinavian with the occasional Latin phrase, but there is also some Low German tossed into the linguistic mix. The entry for each merchant ends with a phrase that clearly derives from Low German, yet often shows code-switching. This has been overlooked in previous research on the contact

[5] This is a diplomatic edition where expanded abbreviations are in italics, if expanded at all. References follow manuscript pagination as given in the edition.

between Scandinavian and Low German, and for instance Jahr (1999: 134) claims that 'no examples of code-switching have been found to date'. Consider the forms in (4), with Scandinavian in boldface.

(4) a. Jt*e*m gereckendt all ding dodt m*et* Kleine Pauell dat myn heer blyfft em **skyldiig** xliij bg. g. (pag. 26)
'item accounted all things clear with Kleine Paul that my lord owes him 43 *bergergulden*'

b. alting klar geregn*et* m*et* Hans Køne dett **mi*n* herr*e* bliffu*er* honu*m*** skuldich effwen j[c] **smalt woge fisk** (pag. 19)
'all things clear accounted with Hans Køne that my lord owes him exactly a small hundred *voge* fish'

c. Jt*e*m gerekendt medt Roleff Røwekamp all ding dodtt saa dat he blyfft **mi*nnum* here skyldug viij vog*er* fiisk oc ij st[e] miøll** (pag. 22)
'item accounted with Rolf Røvekamp all things clear so that he owes my lord 8 *voge* fish and 2 *stykke* flour'

(4a) is in Low German except for the spelling *skyldiig* ('indebted'), and the number and currency are inconclusive (this applies throughout). (4b) switches to Scandinavian from *min herre*, except for LG *effwen* and the spelling of *skuldich*, an apparent hybrid of LG *schuldich* and Sc. *skyldug/-ig*. *Skuldich* is this scribe's preferred form with a total of four tokens, although he also has one token each of the normal LG and Sc. forms. The scribe in (4a) has only Scandinavian spellings of this word, also in this example otherwise completely in LG. (4c) has a clear switch to Scandinavian from *minnum*.[6] The form *geregnet* in (4b) is also a hybrid, with Danish ‹g› in *regnet* despite the LG prefix *ge-*. Such intermediate orthographic forms show clearly that the scribes were under influence from conflicting codes.

The regular use of *item* and *noch* 'additionally' is typical of such accounts. This kind of code-switching is usually termed 'tag insertion'. *Item* is found in all kinds of lists, and also as a paragraph marker in letters, whereas Low German *noch* is specifically connected to the manuscripts in Seip (1936) and a few similar documents (e.g. DN XII, no. 570, written by one of the scribes in the account books). The same goes for the Low German *entfangen* 'received', used as a technical term. Many of the Latin terms mentioned in § 4.1 are also found in account manuscripts, e.g. *summa lateris/in toto*, or others in the same vein, e.g. *restat* 'remains'.

Similar texts also have longer stretches of Latin, as shown in (5a), taken from another manuscript in the same edition (Seip 1936: 19), and (5b), taken from a cadastre (Jørgensen 1997: 47), with Latin in boldface.

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[6] The spelling ‹saa› in the subjunction *saa dat* 'so that' must be due to Scandinavian influence, since Low German as far as I am aware only had ‹so›; in Scandinavian ‹aa› was used for /ɔ/.

(5) a. Fic **p*ro* anno p*reterit*o et anno futuro** ein skød om iij lod
‘got for last year and next year a spoon of 3 *lod*’

b. Odals b*re*ffuet fek oss Birgita **vxur *seu* r*e*licta vi*ri* p*re*fa<ti>**[7]
‘the allodial letter gave us Birgita, wife or widow of said man’

The Latin of accounts is usually restricted to temporal expressions and register-specific technical terms, whereas cadastres like the one quoted in (5b) in addition to this also use the language more generally. Comments about ownership such as this one are frequently written in Latin (more examples in Berg 2013: 172–174).

The account manuscript and others that deal with imported goods have many lexical borrowings from Low German, particularly connected to the semantic fields of weapons and naval terms, clothing and fabric, and food and beverages (Berg 2013: 124–125). Many of these have remained in the language as loanwords, whereas others have disappeared. Some of the latter instances may be considered code-switching, depending on how broad one’s notion of the concept is. Since both languages had lost most of their case morphology by this time, inflectional endings cannot serve as a means of identification of single forms as either borrowing or code-switching. Whereas abbreviations made it possible to render a written form in both English and Latin in English mixed-language business writing (Wright 2011: 203–204), this was no issue for the simultaneous use of Scandinavian and Low German lexical items, a fact that probably made borrowing easier.

4.3 Norwegian dialectal forms

As mentioned in the introduction, the written language in Norway was Danish from around 1500. However, many texts that can loosely be described as ‘administrative documents’, including accounts such as those discussed above, have more clearly Norwegian features than what is usually found in more formal texts (Berg 2013: 116–124). The document from Section 4.1 may again serve as an example. It was written in the part of Norway closest to Denmark, where the dialect is most similar to Danish, yet has many unmistakably Norwegian forms. It is also notable that new dialect forms that emerged by language change during the Late Middle Ages were in many cases hidden by the written tradition as long as one existed. After the language shift to Danish, however, such forms may surface as dialectal forms in the written language.

There are several possible explanations for this pattern. Administrative texts use a vocabulary in many respects different from that of official letters and proclamations. This would leave Norwegian scribes with no other model for such words than the pronunciation in their own dialect. However, I also think that less rigid adherence to norms of writing and in general less careful language is a property of administrative writing, and this facilitates code mixing not found in other situations.

[7] <ti> marks the editor’s conjecture.

4.4 Patterns of language mixing

The patterns of code mixing in Norwegian texts closely mirror those described by Kopaczyk (2013) in records of Scottish expatriates living and trading in seventeenth-century Poland. She divides the code-switches to Latin into three types: dates, text cohesion, and register-specific expressions.[8] Latin dating was shown in (1) above, and (5a) showed a more elaborate Latin temporal expression; the category that Kopaczyk terms ‘text cohesion’ is best represented by the ubiquitous *item*, and Low German *noch* also has a similar function in some texts; both (2) and (3) above give examples of register-specific expressions.

The Low German in Norwegian accounts may be compared to the Polish of Kopaczyk’s Scottish merchants. She found code-switching to Polish in names, objects of trade, and currency. The last category may be extended to units of measurement more generally, and so conforms to e.g. *deker* mentioned above (§ 4.1). In the account manuscript (§ 4.2) we find e.g. the Low German *schôf* ‘bundle’. This puts the linguistic practices of Norwegian business writing into a wider European context.

The patterns described here may be compared to the relationship between Latin and the vernacular in official charters and letters (Berg 2013: 164–177). Clerics in particular wrote certain formulaic parts of their vernacular letters in Latin: the name of sender and addressee, the initial greeting (often followed by another greeting in the vernacular), and the concluding information on where and when the document was written. Occurring within the same stretch of text, this may be termed inter-sentential code-switching, yet is very regular and not as interesting to the linguist as the intra-sentential code-switching of the administrative writings discussed above. To the degree that intra-sentential code-switching between Scandinavian and Latin does occur, it is found in letters of a more private character and not in official documents (Berg 2013: 171–172).

The significant difference in text type thus seems to be between official letters and charters on the one hand, and unofficial notes and administrative texts, including accounts and cadastres, on the other. The latter conforms, in all their variety, to some genre-specific norms that allow code mixing not found in more formal texts.

5 Conclusion

The evidence of the scant Norwegian sources does allow some general conclusions. First and foremost it appears that official letters and charters generally stick to one language. These may be in Latin for international communication, both in letters such as the one from the merchant David Falkoner of Leith to the archbishop and between King James V of Scotland and the commander at Bergen castle, and in introductory letters or passes, such as the one of Paal

[8] I believe she uses the term ‘code-switching’ too freely, and for instance *anno* should probably be classified as a borrowing.

Jonson as well as those brought to Norway by British merchants. However, all purely economical matters (contracts, receipts) were written in a vernacular; it was even preferable to make different versions in Scots and Scandinavian rather than using Latin as a common language. And we have seen that financial deals could be concluded by written agreements in Low German, and that Low German receipts were similarly accepted and ostensibly legally valid. There is no code mixing in these cases, except that signatures for obvious reasons may be in a language different from the main text.

On the other hand, in more unofficial texts like administrative notes, accounts and cadastres, we do find extensive code mixing – even if we disregard loanwords, which abound in these texts, as many of the Low German loans were connected to trade and new goods and technologies. The many Latin words can be broadly divided into two categories – expressions of time and date and genre-specific terms in accounting. Nonetheless, there are also phrases that hardly fit under even such broad notions, e.g. *sic credo* and *dubito* as comments to entries in the merchant note discussed in § 4.1. Examples of Latin additions or comments are even more plentiful in cadastres. The account for the archbishop's estate in Bergen discussed in § 4.2 showed similar use of Latin, and also included Low German entries. The phrase used for closing the entry of that year with individual merchants comes in a wide range of mixed linguistic forms, including code-switching between Low German and Scandinavian. A last thing to note concerning the linguistic form of such texts is the occurrence of Norwegian dialectal forms after the language shift to Danish.

Code mixing is usually assumed to be socially meaningful in some sense. However, the administrative texts under discussion have no clear sender or addressee, and it is thus hard to imagine a communicative function of the code mixing. On the contrary, it appears that the scribes avoided code mixing altogether in formal writings, except for the strictly regulated use of Latin formulaic phrases. The explanation must then be that the code-mixed texts represent an unmarked, functional code for bilingual scribes. Laura Wright has discussed the mixed language of business writing in England (see Wright 2011 with references to previous studies) and claims that '[t]his business variety was a functional written code, and nobody's mother tongue' (Wright 1999: 114). In my opinion, we are dealing with the same situation here, and scribes who were accustomed to dealing with texts in several languages exploited their whole linguistic repertoire when there were no restrictions on the output. As such, the written forms may not directly reflect spoken language; nonetheless, a large part of the Low German loanwords that entered Scandinavian during the Middle Ages are related to commerce and trade, and the people dealing with these activities were probably a major inlet for loanwords.

The scribes' multilingualism is evident from their ability to read and write documents in several different languages, and on another level by mixing the same languages in ways that make perfect sense in other documents. Both these manifestations of their linguistic competence were governed by genre-specific expectations, in accordance with more general European patterns.

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