A Rough Guide to German Research on 'Arbeitersprache' during the 19th Century

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Research on the language use of the lower classes during the 19th century is gaining momentum on the international scene of historical sociolinguistics. Be it on English [Fairman 2000; 2002], French in Quebec [Dionne/Martineau 2005], Finnish [Nordlund 2005] or Dutch in Flanders [Vandenbussche 1999], one is struck by the many similarities in the orthographical and stylistic analyses of the ego documents produced by these unschooled writers. As far as methodological problems are concerned, linguists appear to face identical issues across language borders regarding the interpretation of standard language norms, class definitions and writing education.

It is remarkable, however, that many of the international scholars appear to be unfamiliar with the vast scholarly output on 'Arbeitersprache' that has been published in Germany (and mainly in German) over the past 25 years. Yet, research on lower class language use appears as a major topic in Mattheier’s [1998] literature review on 19th century language use in Germany. Arbeitersprache is equally well represented in the three state-of-the-art collections on 'Sprache und das 19. Jahrhundert' [Cherubim/Mattheier 1989; Wimmer 1991; Cherubim/Grosse/Mattheier 1998].

This contribution will therefore highlight a small selection of publications which may both inspire international research on Arbeitersprache and contribute to a better understanding of shared methodological research concerns and problems among the researchers involved.

As far as terminology is concerned, one should note that at the onset 'Arbeitersprache' did literally refer to the written output of members...
the working classes in the 19th century German context. With the expansion of research on 19th century language in other countries, however, it became clear that the features thought to be typical of Arbeitersprache were not class features as such, but rather symptoms of a low level of writing education. Accordingly, nowadays one is inclined to prefer the more general term 'unschooled writing' [FAIRMAN 2000] as it can also refer to the language found in 19th century emigrants' letters or to the written production of paupers in societies where a real proletariat (in the Marxist sense) did not (yet) exist at that time.2

1. One of the first methodological discussions on the analysis of (contemporary) 'Arbeitersprache' is to be found in BIELEFELD/LUNDT [1977]. Their discussion of a number of linguistic research projects on the everyday speech of the working class - carried out at the Freie Universität Berlin from 1970 onwards - in the revolutionary 'new' framework of sociolinguistics is characterised by overt signs of the unease and excitement with which the researchers must have explored this new discipline at the time. Theoretical explanations (of concepts such as 'restricted code' and 'observer's paradox') are combined with meta-scientific discussions about sociolinguistic and sociological theory (how does one define 'Arbeiter', what is working class conscience?). The result is not particularly illuminating to the reader, but does testify to one of the very first attempts to analyse 'Arbeitersprache' in a systematic way, attempts which should be understood as 'the outcome of first and individual attempts at analysis which still have a tentative character' [BIELEFELD/LUNDT 1977, 118].3

2.0. In the early 1980s the 'Zentralinstitut für Sprachwissenschaft' of the 'Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR' published two edited volumes [AKADEMIE 1980; SCHILDT 1981] with a series of articles providing the theoretical foundations for the further study of the German 'Ar-

2 Cf. ELPASS [2005], who points out that the real industrialisation in Germany (and, accordingly, the rise of a real working class) only started around the midst of the 19th century; even at the start of the 20th century only a limited percentage of the population worked in large factories, most people were employed in small scale handwork and industrial firms.

3 „Ergebnisse erster individueller Analyseversuche […] die noch eher tentativen Charakter haben.“
beitersprache' in the 19th century. Notwithstanding Matthieer's [1998, 16] observation on the ideological undertone - „of course these works testify to the ideological framework of the time and place at which they were produced“ 4 - these contributions remain essential reading, both where contents and methodology are concerned.

2.1. Schidl [1981] sketches the outline of a research programme which links a description of the 19th century German language system to the variables of class, region and communicative function in the language community. A series of case studies was set up to clarify the extent to which the language use of the 19th century Arbeiter' had been influenced by the process of urbanisation, the industrial revolution, the rise (and evolution) of the working class and the competition with the petty bourgeoisie. Schildt referred, among other things, to the increased importance of language proficiency in certain lower class occupations. The everyday niedere Umgangssprache' of the lower classes should be considered as a variety of its own governed by specific linguistic norms, opposed to both the Literatursprache' and the gehobene Umgangssprache' of the gentry and the Bürgertum' and to the town dialects. Schildt holds the view that this niedere Umgangssprache' had a considerable though often neglected influence on the further development of the German language.

2.2. Kettrmann [1980, 1981] elaborated the sociolinguistic context within which the 19th century gehobene' and niedere Umgangssprache' should be analysed, based on the crucial observation that the Umgangssprache interfered ever more with the [dialect-literary language] continuum and eventually became a third pole in its own right on that sliding scale. This Umgangssprache was not to be understood as a single isolated variety, but a spectrum of varieties with ample internal (social and regional) variation, subject to the influence of language planning initiatives and the constantly evolving awareness of social language norms. The cities were the most important setting to

4 „Diese Arbeiten bringen natürlich den ideologischen Rahmen ihrer Entstehungszeit und ihres Entstehungsortes zum Ausdruck.“ One of the contributions dealt with „Bemerkungen zum Einfluß von Marx und Engels auf das Französische und Englische' and the vocabulary unter den Bedingungen des proletarischen Klassenkampfes' (Schildt 1981, 204, 228).
be considered in this linguistic study since they were the centres of the class struggle and the industrial revolution. The development of the Umgangssprache of the bourgeoisie had to be discussed against the background of the growing importance of schooling as a status symbol and of language education in particular. Kettman claims that the literary language found in the books that were on the obligatory reading lists at schools should be considered as the norm for the upper classes. Analysing lexical and stylistic features in the upper classes' everyday correspondence, he argues that the language in these letters gradually approached the literary standard. This 'bookish' idiom conveyed an image of learnedness and became a shibboleth and a prerequisite for acquiring the identity of an educated person. The worker, on the other hand, based his Umgangssprache on a dialect. To Kettmann there was a clear opposition between the written literary language of the rich and the spoken everyday language of the poor as far as their respective norms were concerned. The lower class norm, too, was influenced by schooling, be it in an altogether different way: due to the prominence of the Bible as the chief instrument for reading and writing instruction in the schools for the poor, biblical phrases and imagery appeared in the paupers' writing. The language in lower class documents also testified to the language contact between workers from different regions and ranks in the factories; this language contact may have caused limited interference between (and levelling of) regiolects and sociolects.

2.3. All ideological rhetoric put aside, these authors address a number of essential research questions and problems which are still relevant up until today for international research on 19th century language. The most salient points are:

a) The relationship between 'Umgangssprache' and 'Literatursprache'. This controversial issue is still at the centre of the ongoing discussion in Germany between believers and disbelievers of the 'Klassikerthese', the question whether the language of literary icons constituted an overt language norm at the time [ZIEGLER 1998; 1999].

b) The relationship between 'Umgangssprache' and dialect. Contrary

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5 LINKE (1996) elaborated this claim in her dissertation on the function of language use for the German bourgeoisie as an integrated part of their etiquette.
to Mattheier’s [1986] corpus-based finding that there was a strong dialect influence in the language use of the German working class, data from other countries indicate that this relationship was sometimes less explicit elsewhere. The everyday writings of workers from Bruges, for example, do contain occasional reflexes of dialectal pronunciations, but this influence is far too modest to characterize their written language as ‘dialectal’; there is, on the contrary, reason to assume that these scribes had the clear intention to produce a variant of Dutch that could be understood on a supra-regional level [Vandenbussche 1999].

c) The make-up of the Arbeiter’s language continuum and the distinct functions of specific language varieties for various social classes present in the speech community. Mattheier [1985a] later established that the social stratification of writing quality and variety usage in 19th century Germany is not always in line with the generally accepted view, the higher the class, the better the language quality and the broader the continuum. Similar conclusions could be drawn from Flemish research: the language quality and continuum of lower and middle class scribes in Bruges around 1830, for example, was very similar.

d) The problem of ‘bad data’ (as far as the preservation of archive sources is concerned) and the absence of written documents for a number of language varieties. Kettman and his colleagues often referred to quotes from 19th century novels containing mock imitations of the language use from specific social groups, whenever there was no primary material that could be used. Below, reference will be made to a number of organized data collections which contributed to the compilation of corpora with original 19th century sources from Germany.6 Scholarly prepared corpora with texts from the 19th century are currently still lacking (or scarce) for many other languages, however.

6 One example is the BRIEfKastenprojekt of the Institut für Textkritik in Heidelberg which assembles private letters from the period 1750-2000. http://www.textkritik.de/briefkasten/ bkprojekt.htm). Another is the Zürcher Liebesbrief Archiv (ZLA) at the university of Zürich containing some 700 19th century love letters.
e) The importance of 19th century ‘language purification’ strategies for the norm. For an overview of research on the real effect of purism and language planning actions on the evolution and adoption of language norms in 19th century German (and other Germanic languages), see LANGER/DAVIES [2005].

f) The codification of grammar and orthography and the relationship between normative theory and its application in the everyday language use. The sharp contrast between grammatical and orthographical norms (as represented in grammar books and spelling manuals) and everyday written language use is a recurring theme in virtually all international contributions on unschooled writing.

g) The importance of a thorough understanding of the nature and organization of reading and writing instruction at the time. A detailed description of the theoretical and practical aspects of language pedagogy in the 19th century remains one of the most challenging tasks in historical education research all over Europe, especially where lower class schools are concerned [VAN DAELE 2002; VESPER 1989; LUDWIG 1998].

2.4. SCHILDT [1981, 308] concludes his study stating that interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial to the success of any socio-historical linguistic project. A statement which is echoed in WILLEMYNs [2001, 296]: „Cross-university and interdisciplinary collaboration will definitely be necessary if we want to achieve an adequate and scientifically funded history of Dutch in Flanders.” Schildt and Kettmann especially emphasized the need to collaborate with sociologists and social historians in order to obtain a clear insight in the ever-changing social structures during the 19th century. Any researcher involved in research on unschooled 19th century writing will have understood by now that this interdisciplinary collaboration should be pursued across national and linguistic borders.

3.1. In an article on the „bürgerliche Sprache des 19. Jahrhunderts” CHERUBIM [1983] elaborated SCHILDT’s [1981] views. While he agreed that the processes of language change in 19th century Germany could best be reconstructed through a series of case-studies, focussed on the
influence of a specific social and temporal context on written communication, he considered the bourgeoisie (and not the workers) to be the most interesting group of writers. According to Cherubim, the „Bürgertum“ embodied the idea of social development; contrary to the conservative gentry it was characterized by a progressive state of mind and open to the possibilities of the ongoing social change (including industrialization and increasing literacy). The first indications of language change and emerging language norms were, therefore, likely to be encountered in bourgeoisie texts. As such, Cherubim ranked among the first scholars who linked sociological profiles of the 19th century scribes to a well-reasoned and structured analysis of their language varieties: he points out deviations from the orthographical and grammatical norms in upper class texts, dialectal interference and archaic forms in style and vocabulary are analysed in great detail and he provides a thorough discussion of stylistic variation in his corpora.

3.2. Scholars of other languages than German should be aware, however, that Cherubim’s assessment of the social language stratification in Germany starts from certain premises which may not apply to other language communities:

a) Cherubim’s observations are firmly rooted in the conviction that – by the end of the 18th century – Germany had a predominantly written language variety which was considered as a standard language the language community at large [cherubim 1983, 402-403]. Given the highly diverse standardization histories of Germanic languages in Europe, for example, this was not the case for certain other languages at the time [deumert/vandenbussche 2003].

b) Cherubim’s language continuum consists of a series of varieties of one and the same language. In multilingual societies, many of the connotations and functions which Cherubim attributes to the German H-variety, may have been ‚carried‘ by another prestige language (French in Flanders, for example).

7 „Am Ende des Jahrhunderts kommt es [...] zur Festschreibung und Dokumentation der neuen Schriftsprache als Standardsprache [...] Am Ende des Zeitraums ist also mit einer noch vorwiegend schriftsprachlich realisierten und/oder geprägten ‚Varietät‘ des Deutschen zu rechnen, die durch Gebrauch, Kritik und Kodifikation zunehmend Konturen gewinnt.“
c) The industrialization which is at the heart of Cherubim’s class-based analyses was not equally spread over Europe. Certain regions (Bruges in Flanders, for example) missed the industrial revolution as a whole and continued to function with a pre-industrial class structure up until the very end of the 19th century. Contrary to the German modern industrial classes, these societies were still organized along medieval professional distinctions, with other customs, social networks, values and, consequently, a different linguistic behaviour.

d) Cherubim [1983, 407] states that a German Bürger of the 18th century is very different from a 19th century Bürger. Various political, social and psychological factors were causing constant changes in the social field covered by this term, but also changing the very nature of this class over time. Regional differences, both on the national and international level, further complicate the process of defining what exactly constituted a Bürger. As a consequence, the ‘bourgeoisie’ concept – as well as the description of other social classes – will have to be defined in each new context with clear references to the specific social relations in a specific social setting at a specific time.

f) When discussing the importance of writing for one’s social identity (i.e. the construction of ‘schooled identities’), Cherubim frequently refers to a number of social changes that are intrinsically linked to the Enlightenment. Increasing literacy and the growing political participation of a larger part of the population, for example, were responsible for the increased presence of writing in lower class life. The influence from the Enlightenment was hardly felt in many countries outside Germany and France, however. As such, many regions did not have organized literacy programmes, illiteracy rates remained high until the end of the 19th century and a real democratization of political participation only came about around the turn of the 20th century.

3.3. Cherubim’s article once more underlines the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration between sociologists, social historians and archivists. Despite the incontestable merits of this publication, Cherubim’s attempts to define ‘Bürger’ and ‘Bürgerliche Sprache’ were bound to remain unsatisfactory at the time due to the absence of background knowledge from those disciplines. Although he was able to list a number of core elements of the 19th century ‘Bürgerlichkeit’ (possession, education, mentality and the vague ‘Selbstdarstellung’), these factors required additional statistical data, background studies and original ego-documents in order to be interpreted correctly. The application of Cherubim’s description of the bourgeoisie’s communicative competence, for example, entirely depended on the availability of sufficient text material, not considering the question whether it was possible at all to describe the communicative competence of an entire social class.

4. MATTHEIER [1985a; 1985b; 1986; 1989; 1990]

4.1. Contrary to CHERUBIM [1983] Mattheier focussed primarily on the ‘Arbeitersprache’. He discerned three elements which were essential for a definition of this lower class variety, which he considered as a variety in its own right („eigenständige Varietät“).

a) Standard German - in the sense of Cherubim’s Einheitsdeutsch - was first and foremost a spoken variety around 1800; only a very small segment of the population actually mastered the written form of this variety.

b) There was a great tolerance among the language users as far as the norms for this written Standard German are concerned: „Scribes could allow themselves a much larger variability in orthography, grammar and syntax than today, without being submitted to the sanction of a negative evaluation of their background and social position” [MATTHEIER 1986, 225].

c) Literacy had only begun to spread in the lower layers of German society around 1800; at the end of the century, however, virtually the whole German population mastered the written language.

9 „[E]in Schreibender könnte sich eine weit größere Variabilität in Orthographie, Grammatik und Syntax erlauben als heute, ohne der Sanktion einer negativen Bewertung seiner Herkunft und gesellschaftlichen Position ausgesetzt zu sein.”
The opposition between „Arbeiter” and „Bürger” – which Mattheier also considered to be a typical city phenomenon – becomes apparent in the different impact of written language on their respective work lives. Whereas the bourgeoisie is characterized by an explicit writing-oriented work culture from the 18th century onwards, the worker remains hand work-oriented up until the very end of the 19th century. This distinction between „Schriftsprache orientiert” and „Handarbeit orientiert” is also reflected in the educational orientation of upper and lower class schools: writing skills were hardly taught in the pauper school but were a core element of the curriculum in the „Bürgergymnasium”. Mastery of the written standard language therefore remained a typical upper class status symbol throughout the whole 19th century, according to Mattheier [1990].

Research based on a corpus of more than 100 letters from workers in the industrial Ruhr area had further shown that the „Arbeitersprache” should not be interpreted as one single variety, but rather as a spectrum of varieties – Mattheier [1986] uses the term „Sprachstil” to refer to this continuum – which stood in clear contrast with the „bürgerlicher Sprachstil”:

a) The written „Arbeitersprache” was heavily influenced by the spoken dialect, which led to norm deviations in the case and prepositional system. Mattheier considered this „dialektische Geprägtheit” to be of major importance, to the extent that the „Arbeitersprache” could only be defined with clear reference to its regional characteristics [Mattheier 1986, 222-223].

b) Lower class writers considered upper class orthography norms to be of little importance, which led to a great amount of spelling variation.

c) Spelling chaos co-occurred with so-called „Stilzusammenbrüche”. Mattheier [1990, 292] uses this term to refer to the insufficient mastery of the formal writing style for a specific text type: „Es handelt sich dabei um sprachliche Fehlleistungen, die sich daraus ergeben, daß eine bestimmte syntaktische Konstruktion vom Schreiber begonnen wird, es ihm dann jedoch nicht gelingt, sie regelrecht zum Abschluß zu bringen.”

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d) Norms for the 'Arbeitersprache' were derived from, among others, jargon used at the scribe's work place, the religious style of pauper school manuals and the omni-present letter style guides ('Stilmuster') containing examples of frequently used standard letters ('letter to an ill friend', 'New Year's letter to a mother', 'official request for financial support') which could be copied and adjusted to the writer's specific needs.

The constant co-occurrence of these features in Mattheier's letter corpus support his hypothesis that a distinct 'workers' variety' did actually exist at the time. Comparative research based on sources from writers belonging to other social classes remained necessary, however, since there were indications that the industrial bourgeoisie from the Ruhr area displayed a similar loose interpretation of orthography rules ("recht lockeren Rechtschreibungs-Verständniss") in their 19th century letters. Mattheier, therefore, underlined once again the necessity of a detailed history of both the 'writing culture' and the language instruction (going beyond counting the number of German class hours - "das Zählen von Deutschstunden") for the various layers of the contemporary society [Mattheier 1985a, 85].

4.2. In sum, Mattheier's contributions remain extremely relevant for singling out three essential research questions which are central to any project dealing with the relationship between language and class during the 19th century:

- What was the nature and contents of the scribe's writing instruction?
- Was the scribe's work life oriented towards 'Schriftsprache' or 'Sprechsprache'?
- What was the exact role of literacy in the construction of the scribe's class identity and consciousness?

5. Grosse [1989; 1990a; 1990b]

5.1. Siegfried Grosse refined the methodology for the analysis of 'Arbeitersprache'. Contrary to the above-mentioned pilot studies, he included all examples of norm deviation in a specific text instead of the usual random selection and he organized his findings along clear pho-
nological, morphological and syntactical categories. Further praise is due for this author’s contribution to the collection of lower class corpora. Through a massive data collection campaign, his research team assembled, edited and published a substantial collection of both diverse and original sources which spanned the whole 19th century and which comprised letters, diaries, travel chronicles and even a witchcraft book [GROSE 1989].

5.2. Grosse further was among the first to abandon the concept of 'Arbeitersprache' as a class-specific variety in its own right. He refers to the morphological and syntactical similarities between the 'Arbeitersprache' and upper class texts: "Letters from members of the gentry are not very different from workers' letters as far as the individual, uncertain orthography is concerned" [GROSE 1990a, 207]. He repeatedly stresses that he considers 'Arbeitersprache' to be an inappropriate collective term ("untauglicher Kollektivterminus"). Since the differences between the language use of individual workers can be so big, GROSE [1990a] does not even refer to the concept 'Arbeiter' anymore when trying to define the 'Arbeitersprache': this variety is now described as the language use of scribes with an explicitly low educational profile (no professional training) working in major towns.

During the 1990s certain linguists still supported the assumption that the language use in the lower class corpora was typical for one specific social class but over time, however, the concept of a 19th century German 'Arbeitersprache' as a variety in its own right has been abandoned by many of Grosse’s colleagues as well. The standard view became that the orthographical and stylistic features mentioned above are not typical for a specific social class, but rather for a specific (low) level of writing education. While it remained possible that the working classes in, for example, the Ruhr area were the only social group at that time in that region displaying a specific level of language quality – due to the combination of school quality, work requirements and core features of their group identity – it only makes sense to label their written language variety as 'Arbeitersprache' on a micro-level, i.e. when referring

11 "Briefe von Angehörigen des Adels stehen in der individuellen, unsicheren Orthographie den Arbeiterbriefen nicht fern."
to this specific group of scribes in this specific place (the Ruhr area) within clearly limited time borders (the 19th century). The latter point was later clearly illustrated in parallel case studies on lower class language use in 19th century Flanders. The formal features of German 19th century 'Arbeitersprache' also appeared in Flemish lower class texts during that century. It was impossible, however, to label these texts as Flemish 'Arbeitersprache': up until 1850 middle class scribes in Bruges also struggled with orthography and style which resulted in written texts that were hard to distinguish from the lower class texts, as far as quality is concerned. Before 1780, the mix of spelling chaos and 'Stilzusammenbruche' – the typical features of Arbeitersprache – could even be found in texts from the upper classes in Bruges. Not only would it have been nonsensical to claim that both the middle and upper classes once wrote Arbeitersprache, an exclusive Flemish 'Arbeitersprache' would, moreover, only have existed between 1850 and 1900 [VANDENBUSSCHE 1999].

6. The second generation
6.1. Schikorsky's [1990] dissertation „zur Geschichte des alltäglichen Sprachverhaltens >kleiner Leute<“ (written under the direction of Cherubim) is one of the most important contributions yet from the second generation of researchers in the domain of 19th century language history. It concerns a voluminous case study on the basis of a self-collected text corpus with ego-documents from 'ordinary people' (letters, diaries, chronicles). Schikorsky notices – just as Cherubim did – that her scribes (workers, farmers and petty bourgeoisie) wrote quite often and quite a lot, despite their limited writing skills: neither the lacking writing education nor the difficult working circumstances seem to have kept the poorer writers in her corpus from producing thematically and stylistically varied texts. Contrary to Mattheier’s [1986] data, the language use in the corpus seems to be oriented towards the norms of the standard language, be it that an eclectic mixture of varieties, registers and copied text models are introduced in this standard-oriented context [SCHIKORSKY 1990, 311]. Moving further into the 19th century, she notices a clear improvement in writing quality which was
combined with an increasing inclination to the upper class language norms. Elaborate examples of decreasing orthographical, morphological and syntactical variation are listed to support her claims. This change should not be interpreted as the victory of upper over lower class norms, but rather as a 'zeitverschobene Anneigung' - an acquisition process of a certain level of 'language quality' which gradually spread through all layers of society.

According to Schikorsky, this was triggered by changes in the nature of their work activities. The increased introduction of written tasks into their work environment (which used to be based on spoken communication) forced the 'kleine Leute' to improve their writing skills. Consequently, Schikorsky [1990, 314] sees no reasons to believe in the existence of a 'eigenständige, kleinbürgerlich-proletarische Sprachkultur'; as far as the sociolinguistic variation in her 19th century corpus is concerned, the (oral-oriented) 'Alltagsstil' and the (written-oriented) 'Bildungsstil' just got closer.

6.2. In 1997 Klenk published her dissertation on the 'Arbeiterschriftsprache im 19. Jahrhundert', under Mattheier's direction. Her study is well-matched with Schikorsky's work as far as theme and scope are concerned. Klenk's central research question is aimed at testing the hypothesis of the 'Arbeitersprache' as a variety in its own right: 'Do the workers' documents contain linguistic traces which testify to their unique social-historical character?' This author also used a letter corpus for her analyses, be it from a very specific group of scribes: contrary to the diverse group of scribes in Schikorsky's [1990] and Grosse's [ed. 1989] material, Klenk focussed on texts pertaining to mineworkers ('Bergarbeiter') from Preußen. Her comprehensive presentation of the scribes' socio-historical background and communication practices stands out for the constant reference to writing education and the distinct linguistic and communicative skills expected from the separate classes within the mineworker's society. Klenk focussed her linguistic analyses of the corpus data on the correctness of the text structure: in order to verify the extent to which the workers mastered certain text models, she compared her sources with a series of letter models which represented the norm at the time. Her results support the existence of
class-specific writing patterns: members of the most prestigious group within the 'Bergarbeiter' perform strikingly better than the two lower groups up until 1865. With examples of stylistic, morphological and syntactical variation, Klenk is, moreover, able to prove that the differences in writing quality are related to the better education and the more frequent external contacts of the elite group. After the introduction in 1865 of a measure which put the three groups of Bergarbeiter on equal footing – both with respect to prestige and quality of instruction – the writing competence of the former elite group decreases whereas the other scribes show a clear improvement in writing quality. The final result was an average writing level that would have been typical for the 'Bergarbeiter' from then onwards.

Klenk concludes that there effectively was a specific 'Arbeitersprache': "In other occupations, similar language structures will only appear under similar conditions as those which applied for the mine workers." In case this similarity occurs, these results may indicate a common level of language quality for the mineworkers and perhaps even for the workers in general [Klenk 1997, 329]. Referring to Grosse [1989], she suggests, however, that the group of workers may have to be enlarged with other lower class groups: "In the case of certain morpho-syntactic mistakes under the influence of the spoken language it is to be suspected that these may be typical for a larger group than the workers, perhaps even for the whole lower class in the 19th century" [Klenk 1998].

7. MiHM [1998]

MiHM's [1998] review of the 'dynamics' of 15 years of research into 'Arbeitersprache' sums up the evolution from a class-focussed interpretation of Arbeitersprache to the evaluation of writing skills in terms of a scribe's instruction and work-related tasks and requirements. On
the brink of the 21st century, his excellent critical appraisal presents a synthesis of the many methodological and conceptual discussions which haunted the research on 19th century German: „it can hardly be possible to sum up linguistic features which would be shared by all workers“ and „it is impossible to speak of a ‚Sprache des Bürgers‘, neither in a linguistic nor in a sociolinguistic sense“. Mihm comes to the conclusion that both Arbeitersprache and Bürgerliche Sprache belong to a terminology which is difficult to maintain for a century that was characterized by a constant change in class structure. He does believe, however, that the time has come to move on to a new paradigm which distinguishes between labour-oriented and writing-oriented individuals.

8. Coda – from Arbeitersprache to a ‚language history from below‘ [ELSASS 2005]

The constantly evolving requirements in the scribes’ work lives, the requisites of the new industrial era, the emancipation of certain social groups and the democratization of the school system are now all at the heart of many recent studies on 19th century German. As such, all studies mentioned above have paved the way for what ELSASS [2005] aptly calls a true ‚language history from below‘ (Sprachgeschichte von Unten). A language history which does not focus on the written production of a numerically small elite, but on the actual real life language written by the very large segment of the lower ranks of society which has often been neglected or forgotten in many standard language histories, so far. A language history, too, which does not focus on prescriptive norms and idealized grammar models, but rather on living everyday language use as it must have evolved and been practiced at the heart of the language community.

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