

## **The indexical value of mining language and mining symbols for local identity construction in the Ruhr Area (Germany) and the East Midlands (UK)**

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The structural changes occurring in coal-mining regions are complex and highly specific to each location, encompassing political, economic, technical, social, and cultural dimensions. The regional context and its impact make it particularly valuable to compare two former mining regions, focusing on mining language and symbols – intangible forms of cultural heritage that have been largely overlooked (Braber 2022: 19–20). In this context, former mining areas in the UK and Germany's Ruhr Area, one of the largest former mining regions in Europe where underground mining ceased only recently, provide compelling case studies.

The purpose of my presentation is twofold: First, I will offer preliminary insights from a comparative study on the former mining language of speakers from the UK and the German Ruhr Area (Pecht & Ziegler, forthcoming). This study draws on a corpus of audio recordings from various mining museums in both the UK and Germany, as well as sociolinguistic interviews with speakers residing in these regions. A lexical analysis of corresponding terms in German and English reveals a significant number of direct equivalents for technical vocabulary (e.g., tools and machinery), but notable differences in expressions that hold social and cultural significance, such as terms for food, greetings, and personal relationships (e.g., English "mate", "neighbor", "marra" and German "Kumpel"). The analysis also investigates whether, and which linguistic practices are emerging to reconstruct and shape cultural memories of the coal mining past for former miners, local residents, and newcomers to the regions.

Secondly, I will present findings from a semiotic landscape study (Kosatka, Ziegler & Buchstaller, in press) that examines a culturally significant site in the Ruhr Area: the Zollverein Coal Mine in Essen. This analysis focuses on the resemiotization and repurposing of the Winding Tower of Shaft 12 into visual and material artefacts (e.g. art, logos, objects, clothing), exploring what cultural and symbolic values are being activated, for whom, and how, through which indexical displays of language and symbols, in what particular contexts, and in what particular semiotic relationships. The findings provide support for the argument that the local identity entrenched in vital polluting materials formerly pushing Germany's economy (i.e. coal and steel) hinges on the ceaseless narrative of "lost" industry, while the city's "discourse itineraries" (Scollon 2008) of transformation romanticize good old dirty times.

### References

Braber, N. (2022) *Lexical Variation of an East Midlands Mining Community*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

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Scollon, R. (2008) Discourse itineraries: Nine processes of resemiotization. In Vijay Bhatia, John Flowerdew & Rodney Jones (eds.) *Advances in Discourse Studies*: 233-244. London: Routledge.