

Selling a Regional Identity: Creating “Northern Germanness” in Commercial Instagram Posts

In times of highly mobile people and globalised societies, the use and functions of regional and minority languages change. Instead of only serving communicative purposes, they are often also utilised to construct individual or shared group identities, as well as being used as markers for authenticity (Pietikäinen et al., 2016). Markers of identity and authenticity can be used in various ways, both as a means for individuals to position themselves in the respective community and to promote products in a regional way (see e.g. Brennan & O'Rourke, 2019; Pietikäinen et al., 2016). This paper aims at showing how commercial Instagrammers construct a shared Northern German identity by employing the regional language Low German and other (visual) means associated with the language in their posts. Using a multimodal corpus of 1,157 Instagram posts and a mixed methods approach of qualitative and quantitative data analysis, the paper analyses linguistic patterns, the content of the visuals as well as the interplay of different modes in the corpus. The study indicates that regional identity is primarily expressed through single well-known Low German words and phrases and is often linked to visuals showing the seaside. In addition, these markers can also be seen in the advertised products that often have Low German words or maritime motifs printed on them. By purchasing the products, the consumers can further identify as Northern German and associate with a common group identity. The Instagrammers in this paper thus tend towards a rather uniform construction and expression of a common Northern German identity.

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