

# Linguistic practices of coal mining communities in the post-industrial era: variation, documentation, representation, regeneration

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The language of miners is rarely valued as a form of cultural heritage in the same way as material assets, such as tools and machinery. With the decline of the coal industry throughout large areas of Europe, miners and their communities are facing considerable societal transformations and their unique linguistic heritage is at severe risk of disappearing. This international project examines coal mining language through a comparative exploration of the Ruhr Area (Germany) and the East Midlands (UK) which are both historically important mining regions. These areas have been selected because they share a common period of coal mining, beginning in the 18th century and ending around the same time (in 2018 and 2015 respectively). As with other post-industrial regions of Europe, they have developed varied strategies to find new senses of identity, community and belonging. While regeneration through local mining heritage has been beneficial, less tangible forms of cultural heritage, notably language, have been chronically overlooked.



Items from the Ruhr Area in the Lancashire Mining Museum



Pleasley Pit Mining Museum



Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex

For the Ruhr Area and the East Midlands, coal mining was the bedrock of the local economy in both regions, providing jobs for thousands of miners. There are also similarities from a linguistic perspective because the conditions underlying the mining languages, both underground and above ground, are similar in terms of their linguistic contact with the respective local dialects. However, there are also interesting differences between these localities which the project will explore. Features from mining language are still in everyday use throughout the Ruhr Area, for example the traditional miners' greeting 'Glück auf [wish you luck]'. As a key marker of local culture and identity, the expression has become highly commodified and can be found on t-shirts, mugs and other souvenirs in the Ruhr Area. Such commodification of mining language is rare in the East Midlands and therefore serves as one of the aforementioned points of contrast between these linguistic varieties in the two regions.

- Investigating linguistic variation of mining language on the levels of the individual and their community and comparatively between the regions using quantitative and qualitative methods
- Systematically documenting salient linguistic features and usage to ensure the preservation of such linguistic varieties
- Ensuring the effective representation of linguistic mining heritage through collaboration with local mining communities and museums
- Analysing the role of mining language in nurturing and supporting regeneration strategies for informing how intangible cultural heritage can support successful place-based regeneration



Board monitoring types of gas and mine ventilation in the German Mining Museum in Bochum



Exhibit on miners' shift tokens in Pleasley Pit Mining Museum

The project embraces a multi-method design, with a particular focus on linguistic data from communicative interactions, lexical usage and visual representation of language. These methods are rooted in sociolinguistics, combining analyses of language variation, language attitudes and linguistic landscapes, to ensure the conservation of these cultural assets. We are conducting recordings of guided visitor tours by former miners in mining museums, interviews with former miners and also group discussions with families that have mining heritage. This will help with pursuing the project objectives in terms of variation and evaluating the vitality of mining language across generations. Our linguistic landscape approach involves crowdsourcing a collection of photographs of signs, graffiti and stickers in public spaces.