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Post-Vernacular Language Use in a Low German Linguistic Community

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In a time of rapid shift and loss of smaller, regional and minority languages it becomes apparent that many of them continue to play a role as post-vernacular varieties. As Shandler (2006) points out for Yiddish in the United States, some languages serve the purpose of identity building within a community even after they have ceased to be used as a vernacular for daily communication. This occurs according to Shandler through a number of cultural practices, such as amateur theatre, music and folklore, translation, attempts to learn the language in evening classes, etc. This paper demonstrates that the paradigm developed by Shandler for Yiddish can be applied to other linguistic communities, by comparing the post-vernacular use of Yiddish with Low German in Northern Germany. It focused on the linguistic strategies that individuals or groups of speakers apply in order to participate in a post-vernacular language community.

1. Introduction

Language(s) may be the most important factor in the construction of social identity for an individual and for a community (Joseph 2004). The most striking example is probably the rise of the modern nation state in close connection with the development of overarching, dominant standard languages. But lesser used languages, too, have the potential to contribute to an individual's or a community's sense of identity, either positively as an emblem, or negatively as a stigma (Bourdieu 1992:220–229). This can even be the case when a language is no longer used as a vernacular, a medium for daily communication. The term "post-vernacular language use" was coined by Shandler (2006) and based on observations on Yiddish in the United States after the Second World War. A language no longer used as a vernacular can gain in symbolic value what it has lost in communicative functions. Members of a post-vernacular speech community may not be able to fluently speak or fully understand a language, but they can still engage in a number of activities

which Shandler calls "post-vernacular cultural practices," for example, performing in the language, engaging in discourse about the language, using or doing translations, attempting to learn the language, surrounding themselves with objects related to the language and using certain borrowed words and phrases of the language in their dominant vernacular. It is obvious from this list of practices that belonging to a post-vernacular speech community is a decision made consciously by the individual, who chooses the language and culture in question to be part of the set of elements which together form his or her social identity. Members of a post-vernacular linguistic community might have inherited the variety, which means that parents and/or grandparents used to speak it, or they might have adopted it without any previous connection to the variety or the speech community in question. This paper aims to demonstrate that Shandler's observations do not only apply to Yiddish in the United States. By analyzing the post-vernacular use of Low German in the East Frisian peninsula in Northwest Germany, the paper will endeavour to complement Shandler's set of post-vernacular cultural practices with post-vernacular linguistic strategies. The overall question which arises in this context, however, is whether post-vernacular language use might help to support and maintain a lesser used language.

East Frisia, a peninsula in the most Northwestern part of Germany bordering the Netherlands, belongs to the Low German language area. After a history of language contact and linguistic change from Middle Frisian to Middle Low German, followed by a period when Dutch and the newly emerged German standard language served as written high-varieties alongside spoken Low German, a situation of relatively stable diglossia emerged which lasted well into the second half of the 20th century: Low German served as the spoken variety, Standard German as the written and standard language (Reershemius 2004). This situation of diglossia has been shaken up since the 1960s, when parents stopped speaking Low German with their children because they feared these would be disadvantaged in their education and in their attempts to keep pace with developments in a rapidly modernizing society. As a result, Low German has lost speakers in quite a dramatic way over the last 40 to 50 years. According to the comprehensive GETAS survey conducted in 1984, 35% of the region's population can be considered to be competent speakers of Low German (Wirrer 1998:310). It needs to be taken into account, however, that these 35% cover mainly the older generations,

who mostly have not passed the language on to their children. On the basis of the GETAS survey and of linguistic developments in the area since 1984, when it was conducted, Wirrer (1998) estimates that Low German is still spoken in Northern Germany by approximately two million speakers. In spite of this fairly reassuring number, Low German is threatened by extinction due to the decreasing number of parents who raise their children in Low German.

2. Post-Vernacular Use of Low German in an East Frisian Village.

Low German in East Frisia might be in decline due to a decreasing number of competent speakers, but the general attitude towards the variety has taken a dramatic turn for the better since the 1960s. It is now perceived no longer as a stigma but as an emblem (Reershemius 2004:92–98). Compared with post-war Yiddish in the United States, the same cultural post-vernacular practices can be observed: Low German amateur theatre in East Frisia is booming. The variety, which had been deemed unteachable ("Low German speakers are created in the bedroom, not the classroom"), is now taught in evening classes or via the Internet. Through the Internet, a virtual linguistic community of Low German enthusiasts, and to a certain extent speakers, has been created (Zurowski 2007). Thus far, Low German in East Frisia follows exactly the same patterns as described by Shandler for Yiddish in the United States. But what exactly does the individual speaker do in a post-vernacular Low German speech community?

The following part of this paper look at linguistic post-vernacular strategies and practices, which are based on observations that still need to be followed up by more systematic research.[1] They do, however, even at this stage and based on rather fragmented and unsystematic data, show how individuals and a speech community can live in and with a variety which they do not speak. The following observations were made during linguistic fieldwork conducted in East Frisia between 1998 and 2001.

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[1] A systematic analysis of post-vernacular linguistic practices in Low German is planned in the framework of the research project "Linguistic identity and post-vernacular cultural practices in lesser used varieties: a comparative approach," in which Dr. Urszula Clark (Aston University) and I will compare post-vernacular cultural and linguistic practices in Low German in Northern Germany and in the Black Country variety of the English West Midlands.

While conducting a survey and recording speakers of Low German in the village of Campen, I started to take notes on the linguistic behaviour of a group of younger villagers[2] who did not speak Low German actively any more. In most cases, however, they had a fairly thorough passive knowledge. Through certain linguistic strategies, a considerable number of these Standard German speakers still live in and with Low German, which plays an important role in their individual constructions of personal identity, as will be outlined further below.

2.1. Northern German Vernacular.

What exactly do people speak in Northern Germany? Contrary to general popular perception, a continuum between Low German on the one hand (base dialect) and Standard German on the other hand does exist. Due to processes of social modernization, the traditional regional varieties or dialects throughout the German-speaking areas and beyond are now being reduced in their functions. Accordingly, in Northern Germany too the majority of communicative activities are taking place in varieties of Standard German which are influenced by Low German to a degree varying by region and sociolinguistic domain (Schröder 2004). Dialectologists and linguists are struggling to identify what exactly the continuum between base dialect and standard language consists of. Some use the term *Umgangssprache* "colloquial language," in some cases to signify the spoken form of the standard language, in others to name all the different stages of the continuum between base dialect and standard language.

Neither the hypothesis of *Umgangssprache* nor the perception of different varieties within the continuum, however, has proven to be satisfactory when applied to actual language use (Macha 2004; Elmentaler, Gessinger, Macha, Rosenberg, Schröder and Wirrer 2006). As Durrell (1998:20) points out, it is impossible to distinguish properly between varieties: "Eher haben wir es mit einem heterogenen, komplexen und instabilen Sprachgebilde zu tun, das in jeder Ortschaft bei jedem einzenen Sprachteilnehmer anders gestaltet ist" [We are rather dealing with a heterogeneous, complex, and variable linguistic construct

[2] Over a period of seven months I took notes on 21 speakers, nine women and twelve men, all under 35 years old, who were mostly born into Low German speaking families but are not speakers of Low German themselves.

which differs from place to place and from speaker to speaker]. In order to describe the linguistic situation in post-dialectal German-speaking areas, Durrell (1998:27–28) suggests the term *bipolarity*, based on a study by Tom McArthur on the languages of Scotland:

> Wie McArthur zeigt, hat man es in Schottland wie in Deutschland mit einem echten (und auch relativ neuen) Kontinuum zwischen Grundmundart und Standardsprache zu tun, wobei keine von diesen beiden gemäß den traditionellen Normen gebraucht wird, denn höchstens hört man eine abgeschwächte Form der Grundmundart bzw. eine von schottischem Einschlag mehr oder weniger stark durchsetzte Standardsprache. Kennzeichnend für die sprachlichen Verhältnisse in Schottland ist es aber, daß jeder Sprachteilhaber über zwei sprachliche Erscheinungsformen verfügt, die er als "Schottisch" bzw. "Englisch" bezeichnet und die um je getrennte Pole entlang eines breiten graduellen Variablenkontinuums zwischen „echter" Mundart und „reiner" Hochsprache kreisen. [According to McArthur we are dealing in Scotland and in Germany with a comparatively new continuum between base dialect and standard language, none of which is used according to traditional norms. One rather encounters forms of the base dialect influenced by standard forms and standard language which shows features of Scottish to a varying degree. Significant for the general linguistic set-up in Scotland, all speakers have access to two variants which they would describe as "Scottish" or "English" and which both orbit the two poles of a broad continuum between "original" base dialect and "proper" standard language.]

The concept of bipolarity would certainly describe the linguistic situation in East Frisia, where most individual speakers have access to Low German and Standard German, albeit to different degrees of linguistic competence, and where actual daily communication moves between these two poles, depending on region, sociolinguistic domain and the individual.

In the village observed, roughly a quarter of its population still use Low German as a vernacular. The majority of speakers use a form of Standard German for day-to-day communication with distinct features which originate from language contact with Low German. On the basis of the general concept of bipolarity as outlined above, I use the term *Northern German vernacular influenced by Low German* (NGV) in order

to describe the spoken language of the majority of the villagers observed.[3]

In addition to phonological features,[4] three frequently occurring syntactical features based on Low German could be observed in the villagers' NGV. One of these syntactical borrowings is the construction *an*/*bei* with a noun based on an infinitive to mark an action as durative:

(1) a. NGV: Er war **am Essen**, da kam Heini rein.
Lg: Hee was an't eetn, dår kwam Heini rin.
he was PREP+DET eat.INF there came Heini in
'He was eating when Heini came in.'

b. NGV: Ich bin **beim Abwaschen**!
Lg: Ik bün bii't offwaschn!
I am PREP+DET washing up.INF
'I am doing the washing up!'
(You'll find me in the kitchen.)

Another construction to mark durative action is the auxiliary *haben* 'to have' with an infinitive:

(2) NGV: Er **hat** seinen Kram auf'm Schreibtisch **liegen**.
Lg: Hee het siin krååm up'n schriivdisch lign.
he has his stuff PREP+DET desk lie.INF
'His stuff is sitting on the desk.'

The third prominent syntactical feature in the villagers' NGV was the split of pronominal adverbs:

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[3] I follow Schröder (2004:80) who uses the term *niederdeutsch geprägte norddeutsche Umgangssprache*.

[4] The specific phonological features of this vernacular are listed in detail in Schröder 2004:80.

(3) NGV: **Da** weiß ich nix **von**!
Lg: Dår weet ik nix vun!
there know I nothing of
'I don't know about that!'

Another feature of structural/lexical borrowing was an increased use of modal particles *wohl*, *eben*, *mal*, and *man*, for example, in *erzähl das man eben Oma* 'tell Grandma'.[5]

Lexical borrowing from Low German plays a significant role in the NGV of the speakers observed. This includes not only well established loan words from Low German, like for example *Trecker* 'tractor', but also lexical items which are used frequently in day-to-day NGV in the area but are not well known in Standard German varieties outside the region, for example, *lüntje* 'sparrow, bird' or *kåpmest* 'potato peeler'.

A distinct characteristic of the Low German variety of the region is the elision of the final unstressed vowel [ə] while the preceding stem vowel lengthens or gains [ə]—in the case of medial [b], [m], or [p], causing what are called "overlong" vowels (see Chapman 1993) or diphthongs; for example Middle Low German *duve*—East Frisian Low German *duuf* 'dove'. Bremer (1927) called this a compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel or sonorant. East Frisian speakers of NGV seem to have grasped the underlying pattern: Low German—long stem vowel, no final unstressed vowel—and Standard German—short stem vowel and final unstressed vowel—and apply it in order to adapt Low German words into their NGV by adding an unstressed final [ə] to a Low German word and shortening the stem vowel. Low German nouns thus adapted and used frequently by the speakers observed are provided in 4.

[5] Interestingly, no morphological features based on Low German could be observed in the 21 villagers' NGV. On the basis of the rather fragmented data collected in the village, however, it would not be advisable to draw any conclusions from these findings.

(4)	*Tubbe*	LG tuəb	SG Wanne, Becken	‘tub’
	Jubbe	LG juəb	SG Jauche	‘liquid manure’
	Kumme	LG kuəm	SG Schüssel	‘bowl’
	Schüppe	LG schküəp	SG Schaufel	‘shovel’
	Lohne –	LG Lau:n	SG Dorfstraße	‘lane’
	Dobbe –	LG doəb	SG Teich	‘pond’
	Kante –	LG ka:nt	SG Rand	‘edge’

The verbs and adjectives in 5 were frequently used in the NGV of the observed speakers.

(5)	*strumpeln*	LG strumpeln	SG stolpern	‘to stumble’
	klejen	LG kla:jn	SG kleckern[6]	‘to make a mess’
	pulen	LG puəln	SG bohren	‘to pick’
	bölken	LG bölkn	SG brüllen	‘to roar’
	drock	LG drok	SG beschäftigt	‘busy’
	duhn	LG du:n	SG betrunken	‘drunk’
	düll	LG düll	SG zornig	‘angry’

The features listed here as distinct characteristics of NGV could be found in the language of all the 21 villagers observed. Some of them, however, used a further linguistic technique to fine-tune their NGV in order to make it sound more Low German, or in other words, applying a post-vernacular practice in relation to Low German.

2.2. Token Codeswitching.

Shandler (2006) observed that codeswitching in post-vernacular language use differs from codeswitching in a bilingual speech community which can assume speakers who are competent in both languages and have knowledge of both cultures involved. Since for both Yiddish and Low German, monolingual speakers very rarely exist any more, a typical member of a post-vernacular speech community first and foremost speaks a dominant contact language; for example, English in the case of Yiddish in the United States or German in the case of Low German in East Frisia. To live in and with Yiddish or Low German, one

[6] Compare SG *nähen*, LG *na:jn* ‘to sew’; SG *mähen*, LG *ma:jn* ‘to mow’.

can either be a competent speaker or make do with what linguistic elements one has available.

In the case of the NGV speakers observed, the following post-vernacular codeswitching strategies became apparent: Apart from lexical items, which are continually borrowed from Low German and are part of the region's specific NGV, there are numerous Low German set phrases used frequently in this group's Standard German, for example, *Moin! Wau gajt?* 'Hello! How are you?' Terms to signify kinship are often used in Low German rather than in Standard German, for example, *mauder* instead of *Mutter* 'mother'. Also, terms of endearment tend to be taken from Low German, for example, *Muske* 'little mouse' as a term of endearment for a child. Thus, the Low German lexicon is reduced to a handful of well-known phrases and words which are then frequently applied in NGV speech. This technique has been termed "token code-switching:" A single element from Language B is used—mainly in reported speech—in Language A to evoke certain connotations and stereotypes (Reershemius 2001). The technique is different from bilingual codeswitching since it usually requires only a limited set of words and phrases which tend to be taken from the most frequently used in Language B and which are normally well known even beyond the limits of speech community B. The example in 6 was overheard in a telephone conversation.

(6) Nein, nein, sie war ganz **bliet**, als ich mit ihr gesprochen hab.
no, no, she was quite happy when I with her speak.PART have.FIN

'No, no, she was quite happy when I talked to her.'

In this utterance the Low German word *bliet* 'happy' is used instead of Standard German *froh* or *glücklich*.

In 7, a concept is transferred together with the Low German element in the utterance. While visiting a neighbour I was asked:

(7) Willst du noch'n **Koppke Tej**?
want.FIN you another+DET cup tea

'Would you like another cup of tea?'

In this example the speaker uses the Low German *Koppke Tej* rather than the Standard German equivalent *Tasse Tee*. *Koppke Tej* has acquired almost the status of a regional stereotype: East Frisians drink their tea very strong, from small cups, with particular sweeteners (*Kluntjes*) and with a drop of cream. This custom has been celebrated especially by the regional tourist board as an authentic expression of regional culture. Thus, not only the locals but anybody who ever happened to visit East Frisia will be familiar not only with the words but also the concept. Thus, the speaker in this particular conversation does not need to use Low German in order to imply her belonging to the East Frisian (Low German speaking?) community, although she applies a linguistic technique which involves Low German. The interesting question obviously remains: Do speakers like her apply these Low German elements to their NGV consciously or subconsciously? Codeswitching in the sense that a Low German word or phrase may trigger a complete switch to Low German cannot occur in the group of speakers observed since they do not speak Low German competently. There are, however, indications that linguistic techniques such as token codeswitching are used by specific sets of speakers who thus attempt to create a certain image of themselves.

Among younger monolingual speakers of NGV two groups can be distinguished who fine-tune their spoken language by frequently applying token codeswitching and by emphasising their Low German accent: The first group are younger males in the village, who seem to consider it "unmanly" to speak a more elaborate version of Standard German.[7] This would confirm Labov's (1963) and Trudgill's (1972) theory of "covert prestige:" Whereas women tend to produce more linguistic forms which are closer to the standard norm, men seem to prefer substandard linguistic forms. This does not imply that men are not aware of the standard or unable to use it—they rather choose to use substandard features because these are connotated with masculinity.[8] Low German can look back on a long history of being perceived as a substandard variety, so the choice is not surprising.

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[7] When asked directly about their linguistic preferences, one of the men claimed, more elaborate Standard German to sound *affig* 'pretentious, silly' and another actually said, *So reden Männer nicht* 'men don't speak like that'.

[8] Erdmann (1992) comes to the same conclusions in her analysis of bilingual Standard German and Low German speakers in Northeast Lower Saxony.

The second group are members—male and female—of the "Landjugend", an organisation for teenagers from agricultural backgrounds, most of them farmers' children. The "Landjugend" mainly organizes social events and is conservative in its political orientation. Young people connected with the Landjugend make a considerable effort to distinguish themselves from their peers who either live in a town or orientate their social activities towards urban life. This happens via a certain dress code—as casual as possible and not too trendy—or the language. A high percentage of Landjugend members do not speak Low German any more. Thus, for them, a distinctive language means the use of Low German loanwords, token codeswitching and emphasising a Low German accent. Low German is the natural choice for them, since it is rightly perceived as the spoken language in the traditional East Frisian society which used to be dominated by agriculture until fairly recently. However, for these younger villagers, regional and social identity via Low German does not mean that they try to speak Low German.

The examples show that token codeswitching in spoken language can occur at a conscious, semi-conscious, or subconscious level. What might have started as a conscious effort by an individual can become a habit and even a group habit. This could lead to a distinct regional variety of NGV, but since only a very limited set of Low German elements is needed it is unlikely that it might help to maintain Low German as a vernacular.

The two groups of NGV speakers observed who use Low German elements to make their language distinct from others may or may not participate in the cultural practices of the postvernacular Low German community.

2.3. Emblematic Language Use.

East Frisia is one of the industrially underdeveloped areas of Germany. A Volkswagen factory in Emden is the region's main industrial employer. Most of the shipyards in Emden have been closed over the last few decades. Agriculture is still an important sector in the region, but does not play a significant role in employment any more. Instead, tourism has become one of the most influential economic factors and has left its marks on language and language trends in the region. On the one hand, this means that every year a large number of Standard German speakers come to live in the region with whom the locals cannot

communicate in Low German. On the other hand, it is a significant characteristic of tourists all over the world that they are looking for something they perceive as the authentic, the original, the unspoilt, wherever they visit. In the case of East Frisia this is surely the Low German speaking native, who is preferably a fisherman or a farmer. To meet this desire without risking too much communicative disruption, EMBLEMATIC USE of Low German has increased dramatically over the last couple of years. In emblematic use, a linguistic element, usually a word or a phrase, is used like a fashion accessory, an ornament (see also Matras 2009). In contrast to token codeswitching, it is always applied conscientiously, usually as a result of some deliberation—and to be found in the medium of written language. Emblematic language normally occurs in the communicative practices of naming and advertising. The two sources for the following examples were the regional holiday prospectus (Gemeinde Krummhörn) and the daily local paper "Ostfriesenzeitung" which is published in Leer. In the holiday prospectus it is striking how many holiday cottages have been given Low German names, for example, *Dat Sonnenhuuske* 'the little house of the sun'—a hybrid composite noun consisting of the Standard German element *Sonne* 'sun' and Low German *huus* 'house' with the diminutive suffix *-ke*. Thus, while the relevant information about the houses, for example, the price, the size of the rooms or the facilities, is in Standard German, the houses are named in Low German, often after old aunties or grannies with "original" Frisian names like "Jaapje" or "Heerke". Low German words like *huus*, *huuske* or *tant* are not really challenging for Standard German speakers with a bit of goodwill. Many of the houses are advertised as *Friesenhäuser* 'Frisian houses'—a concept which is fairly new. Only twenty years ago they were simply houses built in a traditional regional style. Since then it has become popular to build modern houses in the area in what is now called the "Frisian style", which means that elements of traditional farmhouse architecture are applied to new buildings.

Leisure activities for tourists and locals are advertised as "Frisian" and, to underline this statement, ornamented with Low German elements. This is especially interesting since Low German and Frisian are two different languages. People living in the region have obviously learned to see themselves as Low German speaking Frisians rather than Low German speaking Germans, as they did some decades ago. Then, the

concept of "Frisians" existed mainly in cattle breeding.[9] But not only tourist accommodation is being ornamented with Low German/Frisian authenticity: leisure activities like cycling are organized for tourists and locals as a "Frisian" event under the Low German motto *Friesen-Route*: *Mit rad up pad* "Frisian Route—To be out and about by bike" (*Ostfriesenzeitung,* August 19, 2000). Cultural events are staged—not entirely in Low German, but under a Low German flag with mainly Low German advertisements. Fun fairs are suddenly called *Döschkefest* 'threshers' festival' or *Sömmerfest* 'summer party'—generating hybrid words, since *Fest* 'party' is Standard German. Two decades ago these events were called *Maakt* 'market'.

But the point has now come where it is not only sufficient to reassure tourists that East Frisians refer to Low German. Traditional East Frisian names like *Trientje*, *Onno, Fenna, Focko*, *Uda* etc. seem to be back in fashion judging by birth announcements in the local paper. Even whole sentences in Low German can be observed in notices to celebrate birthdays or anniversaries, though never in death notices. Low German seems to have become increasingly connected with leisure, pleasure, shopping or celebration, not with serious matters like death. The same has been observed by Shandler (2006) for Yiddish in the post-war United States: It has become a language of celebration and festivals.

Another domain of emblematic Low German is that of advertisement, targeting both tourists and locals, for example, the advert in 8 for a removal company published in the *Ostfriesenzeitung* August 19, 2000.

(8) "**Mit uns löppt dat**!" Spezial Möbeltransport Willi Richter
with us run.FIN that special furniture removal W.R.

"With us it rolls!" Special furniture removal Willi Richter'

[9] It is certainly worthwhile to analyze the ideological implications in more detail. The Low German language and ideas of a "Frisian" or "Nordic" culture used to play a role in nationalistic discourse, which speakers tended to avoid after the end of the Second World War. It seems to be reappearing currently, although not necessarily with the same political or ideological implications (see also Lesle 2004).

As in the holiday house prospectus, the relevant information is in Standard German, while the eye-catcher is in Low German. Low German is spoken by a declining number of speakers, most of them members of the older generations. The use of Low German on a day-to-day basis is therefore connected with old people and still to some extent with backwardness. To use single Low German elements, however, has become fashionable. It serves to construct a concept of regional identity in an ever more globalized world—and, of course, to attract tourists. Low German has become an accessory.

3. Conclusion.

The observations this article is based on were made in one village community in East Frisia. It is fair to assume, however, that similar linguistic settings can be found in rural East Frisia, whereas the situation in the local towns is likely to be different. The observations made in the village of Campen underline that the dominant spoken language in the region is NGV, albeit with certain distinct regional features based on Low German, the former vernacular of the region. NGV can, however, be consciously or subconsciously modified by individual speakers or groups in order to stress the Low German part of a bipolar linguistic set-up consisting of Low German on the one hand and Standard German on the other hand. In a general framework of post-vernacularity, linguistic techniques such as token codeswitching and emblematic language use allow speakers to flag regional identity via language without the ability to speak Low German competently. Initiatives to encourage bilingualism in the area, for example, the *Plattdütskbüro* "Office for Low German," might need to take these developments into account.

Post-vernacular linguistic practices are a form of language alternation used for specific social and psychological reasons. Originally these practices may have been "shift-induced interference," as Thomason (1997:184) defines it: "A type of borrowing, in which changes result from imperfect learning of a target language A by a group of speakers who are shifting to A from language B." But the fact that, within the same age group, mainly young men and members of the "Landjugend" use this code shows that we are dealing here with choice rather than subconscious borrowing. Among bilinguals in the village, Low German and Standard German both have their fixed domains in communication, but they can be used as marked code choices as well (Myers-Scotton

1988). Most of the younger villagers do not have this choice any more. When they want to use language as a marker of regional identity (Maschler 1997), they have to fall back on post-vernacular linguistic practices. They choose to integrate certain Low German elements into their Standard German, although, as a code among peers, this choice may have reached a level of subconscious use.

Thus, awareness of the regional culture and language does not necessarily mean the revitalization of Low German, which is still threatened by a decrease in the number of young speakers. Post-vernacular linguistic practices, even in combination with post-vernacular cultural practices, do not necessarily lead to an improvement of the situation of a lesser-used language. However, they might form the basis of a distinct regional, ethnic or social variety of the dominant language, in this case NGV.

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