Selling wine and dialect: Creating the authentic Bornholm winery through the use of traditional Bornholmian dialect

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Denmark is one of the most linguistically standardized societies in Europe, and the island of Bornholm is no exception. However, here the dialect is in some local businesses used to mark a product as "authentically Bornholmian".

The tourist industry is an especially interesting area for studies of the production of authenticity in late modernity (e.g. Jaworski and Thurlow 2010), and it may act as an important factor in processes of linguistic change (Heller 2003, Blommaert 2010). The fact that Bornholmian dialect is one of the most distinct Danish dialects, and that Bornholm is the place in Denmark where tourism is most important to the local economy (Østergaard 2010), makes Bornholm the perfect laboratory for investigations of the dynamics of tourism, language change and the commodification of local dialect.

In the paper, we focus on one particular tourist attraction on the island: a local wine producer. We will present the case by drawing on data from ethnographic fieldwork, self-recordings, observations and recordings of guided tours, interviews with both guests and host, questionnaires, and the wine producer’s website.

Wine making has never been a traditional trade on Bornholm, and the winery is the first and only one on the island. Still, as we will show in the paper, the wine producer manages to use his Bornholmian dialect to create a sense of authenticity around the winery and its belonging to traditional Bornholmian culture.

An apparent paradox arises from the fact that intelligibility as well as non-intelligibility of Bornholmian dialect is offered as commodities to visiting tourists. Thus, dialect is at once appreciated as a language of alienation and authenticity. Through detailed analyses of guided tours, the paper will argue that these effects are results of the wine producer’s drawing on intelligibility and non-intelligibility as resources for framing sympathetic interaction with tourists.

Keywords: authenticity, linguistic commodification, tourism.