

English in the GDR and GDR English

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Without doubt, Russian was given more emphasis in the educational system of the former GDR. However, there is sufficient evidence that English still played a very prominent role in everyday life. As language of international culture and communication, English influenced the linguistic ecology of the GDR as it did elsewhere. This influence, for instance, resulted in a large set of English-based loanwords. Various studies have analysed the English-derived lexicon of GDR German (e.g. Kristensson 1977 or Lehnert 1986) and it even seems that the loanwords from English can be characterised as 'GDR-specific' or 'GDR-based', a refined typology of the more general 'GDR-related' (cf. Schröder & Fix 1997).

One of the questions that arise from the above is whether it is also possible to discern a foreign-language variety of English peculiar to the former GDR? If so, a more interesting question seems to be how GDR English – if this nomenclature is permitted – can be accessed almost three decades after the collapse of that country?

Therefore, the paper will show that authentic, i.e. unaltered, GDR English can be found. It is, for instance, conserved in the songs of the late 1980s alternative music scene of the former GDR. Presenting a selection of (web-derived) sample texts and analyses that relate to phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical features in them, this paper is able to demonstrate

- 1) that GDR English, unsurprisingly, shows interference from German;
- 2) that GDR English exhibits features that may be described as *ambiguous*; and
- 3) that this language-internal ambiguity appears to reflect the equivocal relationship between the GDR and the English language (cf. Jarausch 2006 or Berger & LaPorte 2010).

Although it is presently unclear whether other material of GDR English is available or accessible, the paper argues in favour of a corpus of GDR English because further studies will provide an insight into the mechanisms that made English penetrate a linguistic system in which, by political fiat, the language was accepted, but not desired.

References

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