

“Tha’s awight” is(t) “n’Ordnung”: Dubbing African-American English into German
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As a recent volume on style and sociolinguistic variation has shown, the investigation of style remains central to sociolinguistic inquiry (Eckert and Rickford 2002). Yet, the place of linguistic style in the mass media has received little attention despite findings that have shown the importance of the mass media for representing and sustaining ideologies about language and its connections to sociocultural life (cf. Lippi-Green 1996, Bell 1999, Bucholz 1999, Rickford and Rickford 2000). Based on a corpus of sixteen mainstream American film dramas and comedies that involve African-American English-speaking characters, this paper addresses the place of stylistic variation in the mass media by examining how African-American English is dubbed into German.

Film dubbing offers an interesting opportunity for examining stylistic variation in the mass media because it is intended to "naturalize" a film for a target audience (Delabatissta 1989). Although there have been several studies of German dubbing practices (Whitman-Linsen 1992, Pisek 1994, Herbst 1994, Pruys 1997), most have focused on the ways in which dubbing “fails” and little attention has been given to the ways in which the dubbed texts themselves offer insights into variable language use. Generally speaking, most linguistic variation, particularly regionally-based variation, is leveled through the dubbing process so that most characters speak a relatively unmarked form of standard High German. This is true as well for AAE-speaking characters. The primary exception to this trend occurs with young male characters who are represented in the original as being highly involved in local, urban street-culture. In the original versions, these characters are represented using high frequencies of salient and accessible features of AAE such as invariant *be*, final consonant deletion, multiple negation, lexical items such as *ho* or *dog*, and discursive forms such as snaps. These characters are dubbed in a style of German characteristic of industrial areas in central and northern Germany, a style that indexes local, urban youth culture. The salient features of this style include final consonant deletion, cliticization of pronouns, palatalization of /g/ to /y/ in the lexical items *gut*, *genug* and *genau*, and the use of the discourse marker *man*.

Although the relative frequencies of features of this style of German are far lower than the frequencies of the AAE features found in the originals, the local, urban, street orientation of the characters is maintained despite the erasure of the indexical link to ethnicity (e.g. Irvine and Gal 2000). Similarly, the variability in the dubbed version reflects a gender-based index that is largely absent in the originals. Although dubbed films do not directly mirror the ideas about stylistic variation that are found in original versions, they nonetheless represent linguistic distinctiveness when that distinctiveness can be tied to variation that is salient, accessible and of a similar indexical value for the targeted German-speaking audience. The examination of dubbed films offers one particular view of stylistic variation as it occurs in the mass media and at the same time opens a window into cross-cultural ideologies about variation and about the mechanisms of adapting socially salient categories and stances from one culture into another.

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