

# Das Leben der Anderen

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A few weekends ago I finally got around to watching the movie *Das Leben der Anderen*. (English: *The Lives of Others*.) Apparently movies about the former East Germany get screen time in the States. Go figure. I'd been away from conversational German for a long time, but I was rather pleased that I was able to follow some parts without having to consult the subtitles. Though those parts didn't last long. Eventually, they'd use too many words whose meaning I couldn't guess from context, or they'd talk so indistinctly that I couldn't make out the words, or they'd just plain talk too fast and my internal parsing buffer would fill up and reject new input. I could only keep it up for brief stretches. Nevertheless, I was pleased. First, I was still able to understand German *in German*. This is always a major step in learning a language, being able to understand the language on its own terms without first having to translate it into your native language, and I was happy that I hadn't regressed so far that I lost that ability. And second, I found myself talking to myself in German again. This is a language trick that I developed early on: Talk to yourself in the language you're trying to acquire. Whether it's wondering out loud what you should do next, checking the time, commenting on the weather when you look out the window first thing in the morning, being angry at other cars on the road, whatever it is, say it in the language you're trying to learn. On top of that, when I listen to the radio by myself, I try to do simultaneous translation of what the newsreader is saying into my target language. Of course, I do a terrible job, but it forces me to stay nimble and exercises vocabulary recall. For a few months now, I've been trying to shift my target language from Swedish to German, but whenever I started in German, I would keep slipping into Swedish. This movie appears to have kicked me over the fence. Good news for the Germans; bad news for the Swedes. "Raymond, why do you watch so many German movies?" Because it's hard to find Swedish movies in this country. **Sidebar**

Groups of ten or more visiting the Stasi Museum in former East Berlin can request a guided tour in German, English, or, curiously, Swedish.

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