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## **How much Artistic Freedom is permitted when it comes to Language? - Analysis of a Crime Novel**

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### **Abstract**

In this article a closer look will be taken at the issue of inaccurately using a foreign language, i.e. German in this particular case, in a crime novel or thriller. Of course, in fiction the author has complete artistic freedom to invent and present things as he/she intends and it doesn't necessarily have to be realistic or legitimate. But what happens when it comes to an existing language being quoted in fiction? For this purpose David Thomas' thriller "Blood Relative – How well do you know the one you love?" is analysed regarding parts in which German quotes are used. As the plot is located partly in England and partly in former East Germany (GDR) and the protagonist's wife is of German origin, direct speech, titles and names are used in German. Subsequently, they are translated into English by the author in order to be understood by the English reader. However, there are many grammar, spelling and semantic mistakes in these German expressions and common small talk quotes. This begs the question, is it justified to disregard linguistic correctness with regards to artistic freedom given the fact that we are dealing with a fictional thriller, or is it nevertheless necessary to be precise concerning foreign language usage? How far may one "test" their artistic freedom in this particular case? In order to answer these questions a detailed analysis of the thriller is performed, concerning artistic freedom and modern

literature/light fiction as well as the German language used in quotes and direct speech.

**Keywords:** artistic freedom, thriller, language quotes, linguistic correctness, fact and fiction

## **Introduction - Artistic freedom and Freedom of Expression or Speech**

Artistic freedom is defined as “Vorrecht des Künstlers (insbesondere des Schriftstellers), vom üblichen Sprachgebrauch oder auch von der historischen, psychologischen oder dinglichen Wirklichkeit abzuweichen, wenn Geschlossenheit und künstlerische Wirkung seines Werkes dies erfordern.“ (wissen.de). The quote says that an artist (especially an author) may deviate from usual language usage, or historical, psychological or material reality, if coherence and artistic effect of his work requires it. Generally, artistic freedom belongs to Freedom of Speech, which is a right, inter alia, guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, to express beliefs and ideas without unwarranted government restriction (cf. Legal dictionary).

However, this doesn't solely apply to the USA but, in fact, to all other democratic countries. Among others, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart from information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.

Freedom of expression or speech is even considered the most important freedom of all. Without it, one could not spread new ideas or express themselves fully. Still, there are limitations to freedom of expression, as stated in the European Convention on Human Right, Article 10:

1. “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.”

Yet, it is very difficult to limit freedom of speech in a democratic country as it, when rashly executed, may undermine the entire democratic idea and structure. As a matter

of fact, authors especially have the most artistic freedom. As they write fiction, they are allowed a certain freedom per se to invent things, characters, places and even languages, e.g. Klingon language in the Star Wars films. Still, is there a limit to artistic freedom? Where are boundaries to be set? Could we not argue that if it is fiction, it is not real and anything goes?

Authors surely DO have the freedom to invent their own characters, plots, languages etc., but what happens when it comes to a bona fide, existing language being incorrectly used in a fictional novel? Is this allowed or should the author be concerned about using the language appropriately?

In order to probe this subject further, the novel "Blood Relative" by David Thomas is been examined closer. Considering that this is not a famous book or bestseller and belongs to the category of light fiction, a brief explanation of why this thriller has been chosen for analysis should be given at this point: Let me put it this way: Never give a linguist a book to read just for fun, as they always find something to examine and analyse. You might also simply call it an occupational hazard. As a matter of fact, this book, bought at a local bookshop, was intended to serve as a diversion while waiting for a flight at the Frankfurt airport. However, upon reading the thriller and discussing it with my colleague from literary studies, who, just like me, also works in the field of translational studies, we came up with a joint idea for a new research article and which we bring forth to you.

### **Artistic freedom in modern literature and light fiction**

"Certainly, light fiction exists and encompasses mysteries or second-class romance novels, books that are read on the beach, whose only aim is to entertain. These books are not concerned with style or creativity - instead they are successful because they are repetitive and follow a template that readers enjoy." (The Guardian)

For the purpose of making books more enjoyable to read, the author is allowed to use his/her imagination and to create fictional plots, settings and events, all the while disregarding facts and/or reality. The specific difference between (classical) literature and light fiction is its function in society, i.e. in its sociological dimension and the development of literature, light fiction is closely connected to the development of bourgeois society. (cf. Geiger et al. 1977: 23)

To start off, nowadays modern literature as opposed to (classical) literature fails to present us with a hero. Instead of an individual who stands up to everything and everyone, the "hero" in modern novels is an average person complete with their share of weaknesses and shortcomings. Modern literature narration is not chronologically organised and the plot isn't causally linked as it is/was in the traditional novel. In modern novels, incoherence and randomness prevail. Events are narrated from the characters' point of view and their own perception of it. There is also no longer an omniscient narrator. Narration has become more complex. For instance, there are

flashbacks, recollections and associations involved and past events are often incorporated into the plot. (cf. Kurz 1979: 17)

Thomas' thriller, of course, belongs to modern literature or, more precisely, to the genre of crime fiction which developed from detective novels emerging in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and becoming very popular owing to characters such as Doyle's Sherlock Holmes or Christie's Hercule Poirot in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (cf. Szendi 2006: 92f.)

Crime fiction, similar to other fiction and (classical) literature, definitely encompasses literary formulas in order to distinguish it from other genres, for instance romantic novels. Although crime novels have fixed plots, characters and settings that are recognizable to readers, the author is able to enjoy artistic freedom to the fullest as he narrates from the characters' perspective, characters who he himself has created with all their individual traits, experiences and memories. Furthermore, in modern literature it is also important to adapt narration to the recipient, especially when it comes to light fiction, Consequently, the author has to consider who he is writing for, what they expect and what they would be inclined to read. In the end, light fiction primarily serves the purpose to entertain the audience and not to present hard facts or scientifically proven evidence of what the author is writing about. I am confident that David Thomas had all this in mind when writing *Blood Relative*.

### **Short introduction of David Thomas aka Tom Cain**

David Thomas is a journalist and writer, who already has an ongoing thriller franchise under the alias Tom Cain, published in the United Kingdom. "Blood Relative" is the first book under his real name David Thomas. (cf. Thomas 2011: 1). He was born on January 17, 1959 in Moscow, Russia and was educated at Cambridge. He lived in Moscow, London (being his hometown), Washington D.C. and Havana. Among others, he worked for the Daily Mail and The Mail on Sunday. He is an award-winning journalist with twenty-five years of experience working at Fleet Street newspapers, as well as for major magazines in Britain and the United States. (cf. goodreads)

When asked in an interview why he decided to write thrillers, Tom Cain answered: "As for thrillers, the truth is I love them, read them constantly and am far more interested in and admire professionally the best thriller-writers than 99.9 per cent of the authors who create supposedly highbrow, literary fiction. Anyone can waffle on pretentiously. But all the things that the literary elite (elite in their own minds only, I might add) profess to disdain -- plot, action, structure and so forth -- are actually the elements that are toughest to get right. So the writer in me admired the craft that goes into a thriller and wanted to see if I could do it. Turned out to be by far the hardest thing I'd ever done in my working life -- but worth it in the end." (Moore 2008)

This interview was about his novel *The Accident Man* which fictionalized Lady Diana's death in the Alma tunnel in Paris. Thus, this thriller, as well as the thriller *Blood Relative*, was created around an actual date in history. Hence, it seems to be Cain's specialty to take a real event and to build a story around it. He claims that for a

journalist it is not difficult to create a book around a single, real date in history, as “it was incredibly reassuring to have a kernel of fact with which to work. It made me feel a lot more secure as I was starting out. I was heading into really unfamiliar territory. But at least there was something within my professional experience that I could hang onto as I took my baby-steps. And the other massive benefit -- which I’m really only understanding now I’m working on a sequel -- is that the universal awareness of the significance of that Paris car-crash had an amazing short-cut effect for the reader. I didn’t have to explain, or play up, or invent the jeopardy that Carver finds himself in, immediately after the crash. Everybody gets it...” (Moore 2008)

Interestingly, he really uses his journalist background to closely investigate all locations and settings in order to portray them realistically in his thrillers, even though they are fictional:

“London is my hometown, so I didn’t need to research that. But you’re right, it was handy having Paris and Geneva relatively close at hand, and many of the locations I use in both cities are directly based on reality. For example, there’s a big fight-sequence in *Les Egouts* -- the sewer-museum of Paris. Well, you can go to that museum and walk through the whole route of the fight, because that’s what I did, taking hundreds of pictures to make sure that every single detail was accurate. Again, it really reassured the reporter in me to have all those factual supports. On the other hand, the Internet is so mind-bogglingly comprehensive these days that you can find pretty much anything you want without leaving your desk. For example, the Paris apartment and mansion that are the scenes of two big sequences were lifted directly from Internet real-estate ads. The hotel in Geneva where a seduction scene takes place is a real place, described thanks to the incredibly detailed panoramic picture-tours on its website.” (Moore: 2008).

### **Brief summary of David Thomas’ thriller “Blood Relative”**

To begin with, this is what the back cover of David Thomas’ thriller says:

“How well do we know our loved ones? In the wake of a brutal murder, architect Peter Crookham is forced to confront this question, launching him on a dangerous quest to uncover the truth. When Peter arrives home late for a dinner engagement with his beautiful wife, Mariana, and his journalist brother, Andy, he encounters a bloodbath: Andy has been brutally stabbed to death, and a nearly catatonic Mariana is bathed in his blood. Convinced Mariana is incapable of murder, Peter vows to clear her name. But when he discovers that Andy had been secretly investigating Mariana’s past, Peter can no longer trust his instincts. Desperate for answers, he travels to Mariana’s childhood home in East Berlin--and finds himself caught in a web of intrigue involving the notorious Stasi...and a terrible secret that someone will kill for in order to keep hidden.” (Thomas 2011)

The protagonist in this thriller is Peter Crookham, an architect, who married a girl from East Germany called Mariana. It is interesting that the protagonist in this book introduces himself by giving his own personal description:

“My name’s Peter Crookham. I’m an architect and I’m forty-two years old. If I have a distinguishing feature, it’s my height. I’m tall, six-three in my stockinged feet. I played rugby at school and did a bit of rowing at university; nothing serious, just my college eight. These days I’m like every other middle-aged guy in the world, trying to get his act together to go to the gym or to stagger off to a run, wondering why his trousers keep getting tighter. Those love-handles, where did they come from? I have pale-blue eyes and mousey-brown hair, just starting to thin. [...] As for my face, well, when women wanted to say nice things about me they never used to describe me as hunky or handsome. They told me I had a kind smile, I was never anyone’s dirty weekend. I was the nice, reliable, unthreatening type of guy that a woman didn’t feel embarrassed to be seen with at a party. [...] Basically, I’m Mr Average.” (Thomas 2011: 8, 9)

The reader gets a pretty good vision of Peter Crookham’s appearance and personality. It is evident that he is madly in love with Mariana and all the way up to the bloody deed, he is not suspicious about her in any way. In fact, he is very happy that a girl of her stature even wanted to marry him:

“My wife Mariana was the most beautiful woman I’d ever laid eyes on and yet she was so bright, so complex, so constantly capable of surprising me that her beauty was almost the least interesting thing about her. Six years we’d been together and I still couldn’t believe my luck.” (Thomas 2011: 7)

Although he finds her covered in blood standing in their kitchen next to his murdered brother, he still cannot reconcile the fact that she was the one who killed him. He decides to investigate the murder himself and sets off to East Berlin to finally uncover facts about Mariana’s past, as she herself never revealed anything. There he meets a private detective called Haller who leads him around East and West Berlin, shows him the terrible places where the Stasi tortured and killed people until Haller himself gets killed, seeing that he revealed too much to Crookham.

During his stay in Germany, Crookham manoeuvres himself out of several dangerous situations, finds Mariana’s parents who abandoned her and discovers that Mariana lived in a children’s home in which two boys were murdered by the cruel home director Tretow and buried in the garden. This Tretow, also known as Mr Stinky, smelled of a distinctive after shave which was the only one available in Eastern Germany at that time. In the end, the reason for Mariana killing Peter Crookham’s brother Andy becomes clear and in light of her mental condition she should bear no blame:

“But the secret shame had been planted deep inside her, covered by layer upon layer of self-protection until, one evening in Yorkshire, a man had come to her house, smelling like Tretow, like Mr Stinky, and then the whole cycle of death and blood had

been played out once again. Now I realized why Mariana had said she was guilty, why it was all her fault, why she was a *böses Mädchen*. She hadn't been referring to Andy's death at all. She had no consciousness of that. It was the little girl in her talking and the two boys' deaths for which she blamed herself." (Thomas 2011: 384)

### **Fact or fiction in David Thomas' thriller "Blood Relative"**

The plot of the thriller "Blood Relatives" is set in York, Frankfurt and Berlin (East and West). The author is well acquainted with all locations and describes them in much detail. In the authors notice at the end of the novel he states:

"Not surprisingly, this book could not have been written without the unfailing kindness, generosity and assistance of Germans: three in particular. The London-based consultant psychotherapist Bernd Leygraf, was invaluable in explaining the mechanisms by which buried childhood pain can explode into adult violence, and the passing of the burden of sin of suffering from one generation to another. In Berlin, Matthias Willenbrink, director of the AXOM group of detective agencies, was a superb guide to the city and its recent history, a fount of great stories about detective work and an insightful observer of the way in which ex-Stasi operatives have transitioned into private detectives. Further thanks go to Jochen Meismann of the Condor detective agency, in particular for his description of German bureaucracy as it applies to birth certificates" (Thomas 2011: 394)

Hence, Thomas makes a true effort to research everything in detail: locations, history and facts. His descriptions of the horrible place Hohenschönhausen, where people were imprisoned during Stasi rule and events that happened there are based on archived real testimonies of former prisoners. In addition, he read Anna Funder's book *Stasiland* to become familiar with the mind-set of the East German state at that particular time. (cf. Thomas 2011: 395)

One can preliminarily conclude that Thomas does a lot of research and bases his fictional thrillers on real events and locations which he tries to present as candidly as possible in his books. He makes use of his background in journalism which, by the way, is included in the thriller in the form of the protagonist's brother, a journalist, who is on the right track to revealing Mariana's background and secret. Moreover, as the author states in the author's note:

"It turned out that the Moscow apartment block in which we lived between 1959-61 during my father's posting to the British Embassy had been bugged by the KGB. The various international diplomats who lived there were forbidden from going into the attic on the grounds, they presumed, that the agents listening to them were working there. Perhaps all fiction turns out to be autobiography in the end." (Thomas 2011: 396)

As stated earlier, he recruited the assistance of a number of consultants in dealing with social structures, historic events, detective work and mental conditions. By

verifying locations, medical conditions and historical facts, being taught at school (as I was born and raised in West Germany and made several trips to East Germany and Berlin) everything Thomas has written in his book is accurate, but it begs the question: Why did he fail to verify the German language he uses in his thriller?

### **German language used in Blood Relative**

As the protagonist's wife Mariana is a native German, the author incorporates German expressions into the thriller in the form of quotations, names and titles, e.g. what Mariana expresses to her husband in German. Crookham, the protagonist, says he understands what she says and is able to say a few words in German himself, but still Mariana chooses English over German:

"Apart from the odd dirty joke, we'd always spoken English. Mariana used to say she preferred it to German, which she only half-jokingly called 'Hitler's language'. But out of embarrassment at my own incompetence and just wanting to do something for her I'd spent a few months playing a Speak German course in the car. I'd picked up enough to get the gist of what she was saying." (Thomas 2011: 15)

While using certain German expressions, the author produces two distinct categories of mistakes: Grammatical and semantic fails as well as spelling mistakes. The latter are less severe, as this could happen to anyone and the word remains understandable, but the former are quite serious and in some cases completely incomprehensible, at least for a German speaking person. Another concern is the name of the protagonist's wife. The author named her *Mariana*. To start off, this is not a name Germans would normally bestow on a daughter. *Marianne* is more common in Germany, or if ending with an "a", the name should be spelled *Marianna*, with double 'n'. As is mentioned later on in the thriller, Mariana is of Eastern Europe origin. If so, Mariana would usually be spelled *Marijana* or *Marjana*. It is evident that the author chose an unordinary name for his female character, most likely to enhance the fact that neither she nor her character are common.

### **Grammar and semantic fails**

Seemingly the most annoying expression that we came across in this thriller is the following:

"She just said, 'Hereingekommen', the German for 'Come in', turned and walked back into the house" (Thomas 2011: 13)

Is it really necessary to make this banal mistake when it comes to such an easy word? Nowadays, when nearly everything and anything is available on the internet and the assistance of Germans is capitalized on (as stated in the author's notice), why does one not scrutinize this?

*Hereingekommen* is the past participle of the word *hereinkommen* (engl. *to come in*). Therefore, it cannot be used as the imperative. The correct form would simply be



*Herein.* One doesn't even have to use *kommen*. There are a few more possibilities, like: *komm herein, kommt herein, kommen Sie herein, or hereinspaziert*. The first three forms depend on whether it is one person whom we refer to with *du* or one person whom we refer to with the polite form *Sie*, or if there are more people waiting to enter the room. The latter is more of a colloquial expression.

The next bizarre expression follows a few pages later:

"Ich muss die Nudeln retten bevor sie überkochen", she said. (Thomas 2011: 15)

Why on earth does she have to rescue the pasta? The German sentence means: I have to rescue the pasta before it boils over. Not only is the wrong word used, but there is also a punctuation mistake: as the second part of the sentence is a subordinate time clause there has to be a comma after *retten*. Therefore, the correct form would be something to the effect of: *Ich muss die Nudeln abgießen, bevor sie überkochen*.

It does not take long to notice the next fail:

"Viel von Nudeln für jeder", she said in a cheery, almost sing-song voice: plenty of pasta for everyone. And then, more to herself, "Die Männer haben Hunger. Sie müssen genug haben, zum zu essen": the men will be hungry; they must have enough to eat." (Thomas 2011: 17)

Luckily, the English translation directly follows the German sentences allowing for comprehensibility. Let us start off with the first sentence *Viel von Nudeln für jeder*. Even Google translate does a better job, as it states *viel Pasta für alle*.

First of all, the English phrase *plenty of* cannot be translated word for word to German as *viel von*, because a preposition after *viel* is not required. It is just *viel* + accusative. But there is one more mistake in this tiny sentence: *für jeder*. *Jeder* is in the wrong case. Stated correctly it should be *jeden*, again the accusative. The correct German version would be: *(Es gibt) viele Nudeln für jeden*.

The sentence *Die Männer haben Hunger* is grammatically correct, but as it is followed by the original English sentence, it becomes clear that it is presented in the wrong tense. In English, it is shown in the future tense *the men WILL be hungry*, but in German it is implied in the present tense *Die Männer HABEN Hunger*. Described correctly it should be: *Die Männer WERDEN Hunger haben*.

The next sentence *Sie müssen genug haben, zum zu essen* is a complete mess considering that it should be: *Sie müssen genug zum Essen haben* or *Sie müssen genug zu essen haben*. It would have been better had the author translated the English sentence word for word instead of attempting to construct a German final clause with *um zu*, which then was disfigured to *zum zu* by an additional spelling mistake (hopefully).

The next page reveals another interesting sentence in German:

“Wo setzte ich der carbonara Soße?” She was wondering what she had done with the carbonara sauce. (Thomas 2011: 18)

As a matter of fact, the German-speaking reader might also wonder what Mariana had done with the carbonara sauce, as *setzen* means *to seat*. Literally translated to English it means *where have I seated the carbonara sauce?*

Still this is not the only mistake: Once more there is an issue with the accusative, as *setzen* requires the accusative and therefore it should be *die Carbonara-Soße*, as *Soße* is a female noun. Another observation is the spelling of *carbonara Soße*. It is either *Carbonara-Soße* or *Carbonara-Sauce*, i.e. capital C and a hyphen.

In the following, the attempt is made to use English swear words in German:

“I heard him mutter a curse: “*Fick mich!*” which was followed immediately by a deafening sharp crack that reverberated round the stairwell.” (Thomas 2011: 311)

In a German-speakers view, this expression is more likely to be used in a porn movie rather than being applied as a curse phrase because it literally means *fuck me*. Supposedly, the author wanted to convey something to the effect of *fuck* or *fuck you* in this situation, which would be translated as *fick dich*. Although this is not an original German swear word, the Germans seem to be fond of the English expression *fuck you*, so they simply adopted it and now apply it in German translation.

### Spelling mistakes

At the very beginning, Mariana utters a German word while talking to her husband:

“I will stay home and cook, like a good little hausfrau.” (Thomas 2011: 8)

*Hausfrau* means *housewife* in English, i.e. it is correctly used in this context, but there is a problem with the German spelling, as all nouns have to be spelled with a capital letter. Hence, *Hausfrau* should be spelled with a capital H, if used accurately.

Later on in the thriller other German nouns are placed in English sentences, lacking capital letters:

“It was surely to much of a coincidence that such a *doppelgänger* could possibly be employed at the carpet factory where, thanks to Stasi influence he has worked as a sales executive (...)” (Thomas 2011: 130)

“He pondered this as he wandered from the apartment block, one of the prefabricated *plattenbau* projects that had sprung up all over Berlin.” (Thomas 2011: 131)

Both *Doppelgänger* and *Plattenbau* are written with capital letters in German.

“He was coming back from the meeting on the A9, the autobahn.” (Thomas 2011: 302)

Here again, the German noun *Autobahn* is used with English spelling, i.e. no capital letter. Yet, as the author incorporates these words into the English text, it is justified

to adjust these nouns to English spelling rules, as it would stick out when written with capital letters.

Additionally, the author's inconsistency comes to light when he writes the following:

"Then he will be at the Kneipe with all his cronies, like he always is, getting drunk and talking about the good old days." (Thomas 2011: 260)

Here the German word *Kneipe*, meaning *pub* or *bar*, is portrayed with an initial capital letter. One might suppose that the author assumed this was the actual name of the pub and thus wrote it as such, but later in the text he explains:

"OK... and a *Kneipe*?" – "It's the Berlin term for a bar..." (Thomas 2011: 261)

Therefore, he apparently didn't consider it the actual name and writes it with a capital letter for reasons only he himself is familiar with.

The next spelling mistake is to be found here:

"Markus Wolf was director of the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung, or HVA, the foreign intelligence directorate of the Ministry of State Security." (Thomas 2011: 97)

*Hauptverwaltung* is spelled correctly but *Aufklärung* is not. The German umlaute ä, ö and ü can be spelled as *ae*, *oe* or *ue*, when using block letters, but where an *ä* in *Aufklärung* is present there is no need for an additional *e*. Accordingly, the correct spelling would be *Aufklärung*.

When considering the German school system, the author makes an interesting mistake:

"It stated that Mariana Slavik had attended a gymnasium (the German equivalent to a British grammar school) in the Bavarian city of Augsburg. She took her *Arbitur* exams, entitling her to attend university, in 1998. There was a photocopy of her *Arbitur* certificate attached to prove the fact." (Thomas 2011: 167)

As mentioned before, he uses the German expression for grammar school *Gymnasium* but fails to use a capital letter. However, he then writes about the certificate which students obtain upon completing the *Gymnasium*, which is termed *Abitur* rather than *Arbitur*. As he repeats this twice it is evident that this isn't merely a spelling mistake but instead his own incorrect memorisation of the term or inaccurate copy/paste from another source. Again, in these digital times one could have at least googled it.

The name of *Hohenschönhausen* (a prison for Stasi enemies) is used frequently in the book, but in some parts of the novel is spelled inaccurately, e.g.:

"As I walked back through the gates of Hohenschönhausen..." (Thomas 2011: 300)

When swearing again in German a spelling mistake also occurs:

"Scheisse!" (Thomas 2011: 309)

German spelling rules affirm that the letter *s* is spelled *ß* when following a long vowel or a diphthong, a gliding vowel rather (a combination of two adjacent vowel sounds within the same syllable), e.g. *ei*, *au*, *äu*, *ie*, *eu* etc., thus, it has to be spelled *Scheiße*, meaning *shit* in English.

Only when written in block letters it can be spelled *ss*. There is also one more exception: because the Swiss do not have the letter *ß*, they use *ss* instead.

### **German titles, proper names and specific terms**

An interesting occurrence is the author's usage of German titles for persons the protagonist comes across in Germany. For instance, he does not write *Mr* Tretow, but instead *Herr* Tretow. This can be found throughout the whole book as is shown in these examples:

"On these occasions Frau Tretow cried, promised to better in the future (...)" (Thomas 2011: 129f.)

"Fräulein Schinckel did not simper coyly, or fain outrage (...)" (Thomas 2011: 132)

"So when you parade your criminality in front of Herr Direktor Wolf, this is the action of a man who is fully in control of his mind (...)" (Thomas 2011: 177)

The spelling in these examples is correct as *Herr*, *Frau*, *Fräulein* is written with capital letters which opposes the German expressions mentioned in the previous chapter that the author incorporated into the English text and did not write with capital letters. The reason might be that these are also titles (*Mr*, *Mrs*, and *Miss*) which are written with capital letters in the English language.

Elsewhere in the text the same title is used in its English form:

"You must speak to our director, *Mr* Haller", said the girl (...)" (Thomas 2011: 225)

The author is not consistent in utilizing the German titles seeing as in some parts he uses the English ones such as in this portion of text regarding *Mrs* König, where it is the English *Mrs*:

"Anyway", said Janice, "this *Mrs* König had seen the story and wanted to find out what had happened to Mariana." (Thomas 2011: 218)

But then again:

"Now, *Frau* König, may I ask you something?" (Thomas 2011: 220)

He definitely doesn't use the German titles consistently throughout the entire book and the reasoning for usage or non-usage is not evident. It is, in fact, completely random. In our mind, there is no significant reasoning for or against and serves no intended or specific purpose but rather represents a random choice. Nevertheless, our initial thought was that it might depend on the speaker, whether a German person

or an English person was referring to these characters, but this is not the case. The title *Direktor* and *director*, for instance, are both uttered by Germans in direct speech.

Through the course of the text we find another title, which is used in its German form:

“I work with Agent Gerber”, he said. (Thomas 2011: 307)

He now uses a German word which means exactly the same in English and could have just as well been written as *agent*. Instead, the author decides to spell the word with a capital letter, thus identifying it as a German noun. Again he is inconsistent, as he wrote all the other German nouns in lowercase. Presumably, he does it precisely because it is the same word in English and in German and at this point he would like to emphasize the fact that it is a German agent who was called *Agent Gerber* by the others.

The author also uses German titles for institutions and places, e.g. for a bank, an elementary school, or a real estate agency:

“The DZ Bank building, by Frank Gehry!” (Thomas 2011: 230)

“We spent an hour or so in a nearby café while Haller’s staff tracked down the address of an old state-run children’s home near the Grundschule Rudower.” (Thomas 2011: 256)

“At the bottom of the poster was a company name: Tretow Immobilien GmbH.” (Thomas 2011: 259)

Interestingly, he does not clarify in this passage what *Immobilien GmbH* means or what *DZ Bank* stands for, although he has given explanations for every German word before, e.g. when quoting what Mariana says and when introducing the term *Grundschule Rudower*:

“...dedicated to a Berlin primary school called Grundschule Rudower”. (Thomas 2011: 142)

Throughout the book there are also specific terms used concerning East and West Germany, which are simply untranslatable:

“There is something we call *Ostalgie*, which means nostalgia for the East.” (Thomas 2011: 249)

“It just seemed crazy, the idea of the Wessis, of all people, selling us shredding equipment.” (Thomas 2011: 280)

Germans refer to people from East Germany as *Ossis* and people from West Germany as *Wessis*. Those terms have to be used as such because it is not possible to translate them in any other language. The same goes for the term *Ostalgie*. As explained in the book, people tend to forget bad things from the past and simply remember what was good in the former GDR and thus reminisce with nostalgia, the so-called *Ostalgie*.

Apropos GDR, throughout the book the author does not use the English abbreviation GDR for German Democratic Republic, but the German abbreviation DDR for Deutsche Demokratische Republik:

“In the DDR was very little crime.” (Thomas 2011: 225)

“That is why no one gives a shit about what happened here during the years of the DDR.” (Thomas 2011: 362)

## Discussion

The author consistently makes spelling and grammar mistakes when using the German language. It is to be criticized that even the easiest expressions one could have checked by googling or using a dictionary are wrong. Throughout the thriller Thomas does not quote complex sentences or scientific details but everyday expressions like *come in* etc., so the mistakes could have been easily avoided. Even the spelling of German nouns isn't consistent, since the author at times writes them with capital letters and sometimes lowercase with no apparent reason. Another questionable custom is the usage of the German *Frau*, *Herr* and *Fräulein* in some cases, while in others he uses the English *Mr*, *Mrs* and *Miss*. In addition, there are parts where a German word is spelled incorrectly, while it is spelled correctly in other parts of the thriller. As authors have the privilege of randomly doing certain things or, more importantly, doing them on purpose, with the goal of boosting drama and making their narration more interesting for the reader, all of the above may fall in the category of artistic freedom. However, the above mentioned mistakes clearly do not fall into the category of artistic freedom.

It is confusing that Thomas himself describes in the author's notice how detailed the research he has done has been due to his background in journalism, all for the purpose of presenting a realistic setting in his fictional novel, so in this context he should have also researched the German language properly to give a true and realistic picture of it as well. One cannot discriminate language in favour of locations and settings. The wrong usage of the language is definitely an issue if certain readers memorize the German words and consider using them when visiting Germany or meeting German people.

All things considered, the German language serves primarily in order to make the plot more vivid, although it could have been left out without doing damage to the storyline. In using German expressions, the reader can probably better identify with the protagonist and is more deeply immersed in the action. Even if the reader has never heard a word of German and has never been to the country, it is possible to empathize and familiarize with the protagonist when reading those incomprehensible German words and hearing about places in East Germany with exotic names such as *Hohenschönhausen*. As the author translates and gives explanations for all of the German words and expressions, the reader has no trouble following the plot. On the other hand, if the author hadn't used German expressions he would have spared

himself the translations and additional explanations as well as all the serious mistakes.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, David Thomas ascribes great importance to background checks and historical facts, while there is surely a great lack of research concerning the German language used in this book. Although he writes fiction and takes liberties to modify the storyline, the scenes and locations are pictured truthfully and realistically. For no obvious reason, the author definitely neglects and violates the language aspect in favour of the setting and atmosphere. If there was a purpose or reason for misspelling and misusing the German language this could have, in fact, been categorized as artistic freedom, but analysis has not shown any pattern or conscious use of language tools in order to make an impact on the reader. Quite the contrary, they do not seem to be executed on purpose but rather out of neglect and ignorance, so from a linguistic point of view it is impossible to accept the mentioned and analysed linguistic fails as artistic freedom. It is all about incompetent translations from English into German language. This impression is confirmed by the fact that the German sentences and expressions are followed by an explanation in English which makes it very easy to compare and to precisely evaluate what went awry. The spelling mistakes in particular lead to the conclusion that the author apparently does not know a word of German. What is indisputably lacking is an expert in the German language or at least an assistant to review or proof-read the text and detect the mistakes.

In our opinion, artistic freedom for authors is not limited to fictional plots, settings, characters etc. Indeed, when it comes to inventing new languages in science fiction stories, or adapting and modifying languages in order to provoke or to present things from the author's perspective, artistic freedom definitely applies. For instance, there are authors who decide to write a whole book without commas or periods or spaces, like the German author Thomas Lehr in his novel *September*. But in this case the language use, or rather abuse, is consistent and pursuing a purpose. The author's intention is to create a piece of art in which he expresses himself and his ideology, his philosophy, his worldview and nobody objects to that. However, when it comes to an existing language being used in fiction it definitely IS necessary to pay more attention to correct language usage, if it serves the purpose to introduce the reader to the world of Germans (in this particular case) or to make the life and history of this country more understandable and vivid to readers from other countries. To disparage a language out of lack of knowledge, neglect and ignorance is definitely impermissible, regardless of the genre. Therefore, the lousy German language used in David Thomas' *Blood Relative* is to be categorized as a huge fail and not as artistic freedom.

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