A TRANSLATOR'S FALSE FRIENDS: DEALING WITH ENGLISH-ROMANIAN LANGUAGE COGNATES

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Rezumat: *Prezenta cercetare îşi propune să definească conceptul de „prieteni falşi", să urmărească evoluţia şi să descopere clasificarea existentă a „prietenilor falşi". Cercetarea se concentrează în special asupra cauzelor care duc la apariţia fenomenului în limbile engleză şi română şi pe sursele disponibile pentru studenţii români, pentru a evita erorile cauzate de această problema. Cercetarea concluzionează că înţelegerea fenomenului „prietenilor falşi" este semnificativă pentru traducători şi subliniază importanţa surselor fiabile pentru o traducere calitativă şi adecvată.*
Cuvinte-cheie: *„prieteni falşi", clasificare, traducere, fenomen, sens.*

Introduction

Many learners of English, whose mother tongue is Romanian, state that the process of learning English is not very difficult and there is a reasonable cause for it. The Romanian and English languages share common roots; they are part of the large Indo-European language family. Hence, there is a considerable number of words in both languages that share a common Latin root. However, not all the of these words should be treated as friends, because there are many that seem to be friends while they are actually false ones.

False friends are a common error among learners and translators. The concept dates back to 20th century, while the phenomenon itself is considered to have been existing since the language appeared. This research aims to discover the phenomenon of false friends that frequently occurs in English and Romanian language and not only, to trace the evolution of the concept through history and the main works where the concept appears, to identify the classifications that currently exist and especially to analyze the sources that are presently available for Romanian students.

Defining the concept of *false friends*

According to Dominguez (2008) the concept of false friends "*refers to the specific phenomenon of linguistics interference consisting of two given words in two or more given languages are graphically and/or phonetically the same or very alike; yet, their meanings may be totally or partially different*" [3, p. 1]

From T. Hayward and A. Moulin's point of view, false friends are a problem that foreign learners and translators deal with. They describe the term of false friends as an "error" that implies two different languages. When a learner meets a

word that looks or sounds exactly or almost the same as another word in his mother tongue, confusion occurs. Involuntarily the learner gives to this word an unwarranted equivalent from his mother tongue, based on the graphic and phonetic resemblance. Also, the authors provide a definition of the concept using Saussurean terms, which from their point of view could be the best one:

"In the *learner's mother tongue a particular signifiant is associated with a particular signifié. Once the signifiant appears, even in a foreign-language context, the above mentioned association is so strong that the user automatically thinks of his mother-tongue signifié (in its totality)*" [4, p. 190].

While analyzing the definition above, C. Dominguez explains the following: "*That is particularly the reason why false friends are such tricky terms for translators and for non-native users; [...] they are tempted to suppose that the corresponding term in the other tongue means exactly the same as in their own mother tongue*" [3, p. 2].

It is considered that probably the phenomenon of false friends has been existing since the language appeared. But the term itself appeared in the 20th century in the well-known work written by Maxime Koessler and Jules Derocquigny, *Les faux amis, ou, Les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais: conseils aux traducteurs* [False friends, or, The Treacheries of English Vocabulary: Advice to Translators] (1928). Although the term appeared only 93 years ago, the phenomenon had been studied before. Dominguez mentions that the oldest work about this topic he had heard of dates back to the 17th century. It has been reprinted and studied. The work compiles a lexicon about Swedish and Polish false friends, where Latin is still used as a metalanguage: *Nomina Polonica convenientia cum Sveticis, partim eundem pertim diversum significantia Sensum Ordine Alphabetico collecat atque disposita* [An Alphabetically Provided Collection of Polish Nouns, which Partially Coincide with Partially Diverge from Swedish Nouns] [3, p. 1]

Classification of *False Friends*

One of the classifications of false friends belongs to A.Veisberg. He describes three types:

1. False friends proper;
2. Occasional or accidental false friends;
3. Pseudo false friends

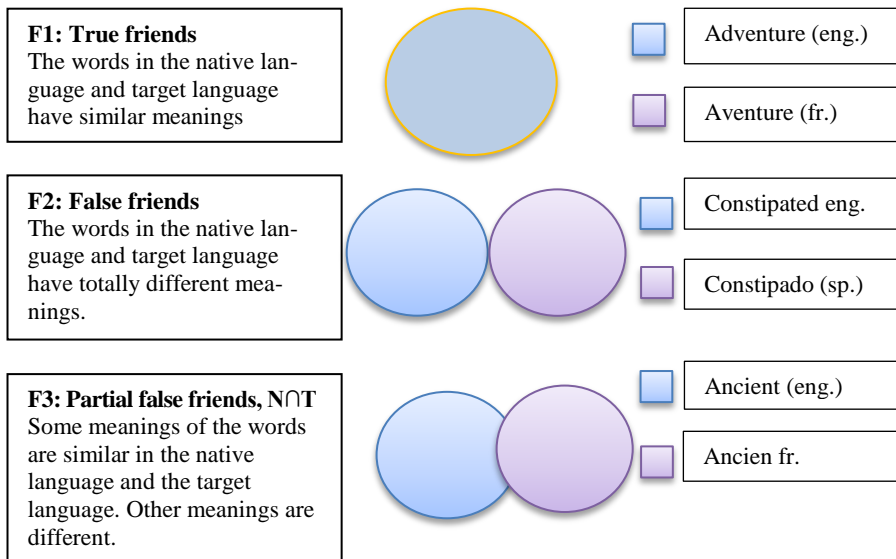False friends proper in turn fall into three categories:

a) The first one is complete or absolute false friends, these are pairs of words that have just one meaning in both languages or in one language and the meaning is not the same as its equivalent.

b) Another category is partial false friends. This includes pairs of words that may have more meanings in the first language but fewer in the second. The way these words can confuse one is that they may have one or more identical meanings but also may have different meanings.

c) The last category of false friends proper are nuance differentiated word pairs that in general have connotative differences. Veisberg mentions a number of reasons and features that lead to these differences. These are: semantic limits,

the word in one language has more general meaning than in the other, register or stylistic differences, the difference between literary, neutral and colloquial type of the words, they can have different usual contexts of usage or certain contextual limits can be imposed in different languages, frequency of use, collocation limitations, diachronic digression, the word in one language is more archaic than in the other.

Occasional or accidental false friends are word pairs that do not have an etymological link and which are part of a different logico-subject that basically helps to make a difference between them.
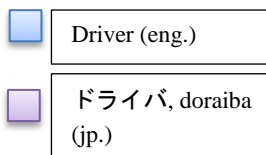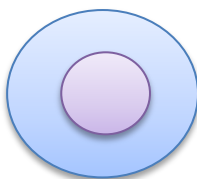
Pseudo false friends are the word pairs that in fact do not exist. The learner and the translator as well make up a new nonexistent word looking for a word that seems similar to his native language and in most cases he believes that the word must identical in the target language. Generally, one cannot find pseudo friends in dictionaries but Veisberg puts emphasis on the fact that in theory the number of pseudo friends is quite large, however in practice it is not so spread. [6, pp. 628-629]

Abou-Khalil, Flanagan and Ogata, in their work "Learning false friends across contexts" propose another classification of false friends. From their point of view, the process of learning false friends can be easy or complex, it depends on the type of false friends whether they are total false friends or partial. The type of friends that they have identified are: true friends, false friends and partial false friends. The authors of the research illustrate the phenomenon of false friends including the words which occur as true friends as well. They also point out a fact about partial false friends. Actually these false friends may be sometimes false or true friends, all depends on the context. Using the following illustration, the classification was represented in a clear and comprehensible way. [1, p. 2]
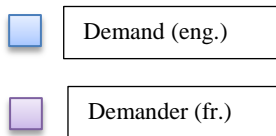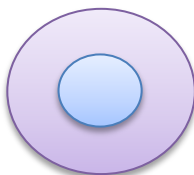
F1: True friends
The words in the native language and target language have similar meanings

Adventure (eng.)

Aventure (fr.)

F2: False friends
The words in the native language and target language have totally different meanings.

Constipated eng.

Constipado (sp.)

F3: Partial false friends, N∩T
Some meanings of the words are similar in the native language and the target language. Other meanings are different.

Ancient (eng.)

Ancien fr.

F4: Partial false friends T⊂N Meanings of the word in the target language are included in the meanings of the word in the native language.		Driver (eng.)
		ドライバ, doraiba (jp.)
F5: Partial false friends N⊂T Meanings of the word in the native language are included in the meanings of the word in the target language.		Demand (eng.)
		Demander (fr.)
The area of the circle represents the breadth of meanings of a word.	Native language	Target language

Causes that lead to the phenomenon of False Friends

I. Horea proves that the causes that lead to confusion might be divided into two categories. The first category comprises sources related to the way the speaker behaves and the other category refers to the linguistic approach.

When describing the first category, I.Horea points out the human element as central. According to the author, the phenomenon of false friends occurs due to people's wrong choice of the words as they tend to use the words that are more familiar and come first to their mind when talking. At first sight it seems to be an advantage for those who want to be fluent and with higher speed in their speech. However, the results are not always the expected ones.

Another feature of the same category is laziness. Sometimes one is conscious that the meaning of the word may be incorrect, but uses the word without checking it up in the dictionary even if time and situation allows doing it.

Etymology is the foundation which reasons the linguistic approach. The words that form a pair of false friends may share a common root. But the issue is that both languages developed differently and in different periods of time. During the years they evolved and there were added more meanings to a word. But of course there could be situations when the words have nothing in common but they seem to be similar in spelling or pronunciation, and then the confusion occurs. [5, p. 971]

Carmen Ardelean provides an explanation as to how Romanian and English languages are connected and why the phenomenon of false friends is liable to take place. In her work she explains that from all Germanic languages, English was the most influenced by Latin. All the Latin words that entered English in Middle Ages underwent changes during the years, and as a consequence they departed from the initial meaning. But as Romanian is a Romance language, it preserved the initial, historic meaning, and as a result the translators who don't master the language may be led to confusion in the process of translation from English into Romanian or vice-versa. [2, p. 64]

The phenomenon takes place frequently in other languages that share common roots as well. For instance, an example of a tricky English-German cognate is the word 'rat'. English speakers tend to translate the German word "Rat" as "rat" in English, but it is a mistake, because "Rat" in German means "advice" whereas in English it refers to "a small animal with a long tail, that looks like a large mouse" (OALD9). For French speakers the translation of the word "terrible" may cause misunderstandings when translating it into English, because they are more likely to translate it as "terrible" (which means something very unpleasant). This is a case of partial false friends that play the role of false but not true friend, because the French word "terrible" may have two different meanings (something very bad or it may mean something great), and if not used according to the context it may cause confusion. At the same time false friends may appear even in American English and British English. For instance, in America one wears pants, which means "trousers", but in Great Britain one wears trousers over "pants" because in British English it means "underwear".

Sources available for Romanian students

In order to get a better understanding of the phenomenon, Romanian students and translators need relevant sources and tools to work with. A better way for them to avoid the errors that may appear is to be guided by reliable sources. This section is particularly focused on paper sources (dictionaries, glossaries) and online sources (blogs, YouTube channels, online dictionaries, glossaries) that are presently available for Romanian students.

A search for existing bilingual English-Romanian dictionaries of false friends identified the existence of Russian (Akulenko, 1969), German (Gottlieb, 1972), French (Labarre Bossuyt, 1989), Spanish (Prado, 1993), Latvian (Veisbergs, 1994) dictionaries of false friends. The search showed there exist limited resources, whether on paper or online, to facilitate the Romanian students to cope with the existing English-Romanian types of cognates. There are few glossaries for students, providing just a limited number of words that may help them to learn and to distinguish easily the false friends in English and Romanian. The only sources for students are a number of videos on YouTube and some blogs with articles that deal with this topic.

One of the sources where Romanian students can find information on false friends is the https://abest.ro/ro/ website. It represents one of the largest language learning centers in Romania. In addition to the language courses, the website provides information on different topics. In order to find the article one should just introduce in the search bar the name of the topic, and the website provides all the articles on this topic. From the six articles on the topic of false friends available on the website, only two relate to English-Romanian false friends. The articles briefly explain the phenomenon and provide a short list of examples.
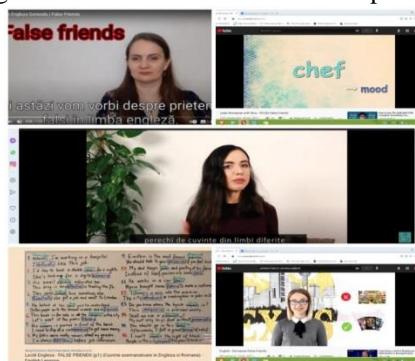
The number of videos to the topic is also modest. There are some language channels on YouTube where students can find basic information supported with examples. The channels, as well as the videos on the topic of false friends were created by persons who are Romanian speakers but well acquainted with English language. The sources that point out the problem of false friends are: English with Juliana (https://youtu.be/5FSs1okw668), Romanian with Gia (https://youtu.be/aVud HsfimHc/ https://youtu.be/ keGAu-cUWLw), Learn Romanian with Nico (https://youtu.be/ KC3O6XcJ WPs), Achord School (https://youtu.be/ fZ5MpX-Xzpg) and EnglishEngleza (https://youtu.be/TnUwUJnIQr0/ https://youtu. be/J9p3_ nfEWdI).

Despite the fact that there are some videos that explain the phenomenon, students do not have a list with more pair of words, all videos are confined to few examples. Analyzing the present sources one can deduce that Romanian students do not have enough support on this topic.

In order to fill in this gap of resources for Romaninan learners of English, there has been created, a blog (https://studentsassistance.wordpress.com/2021/04/ 07/atentie-prieteni-falsi/, aiming to provide Romanian students with explanations on the false friends as well as a comprehensive list of existing cognates. Currently, I contributed with an article where the concept is explained. Also the entry contains a chart with a list of words that may cause confusion to learners and their appropriate translation. The chart is to be completed as I come across new examples of false friends in varied contexts. The first section of the chart contains words in English, the second provides the false friends, and in the last section one can find the correct translation.

Conclusions

Regardless of the type of false friends, either partial or total, they may affect one's piece of translation, and if there are no sources to check them up, the process of learning and translating can turn into one much more difficult and frequently unqualified. The dictionaries, glossaries and the other sources are indispensable for a productive translation.

Another way to avoid the phenomenon is to strive learning the words that may cause confusion. In case one is not certain about one particular word and does not have a dictionary of false friends to check it, a better solution to the problem is to look up for the same word in an explanatory dictionary of the native language and then in the target language. By comparing the meaning in both languages and analyzing the context in which the word is used one can identify whether it is a false friend or not.

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