CHALLENGES CREATED BY TRANSLATOR'S "FALSE FRIENDS"

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Rezumat: *Acest articol examinează fenomenul „prietenilor falşi ai traducătorului", originile, clasificarea şi problemele existente. În zilele noastre, relaţiile internaţionale şi interculturale au devenit din ce în ce mai frecvente, obişnuite şi intense. Oameni din toată lumea vorbesc diferite limbi şi, prin urmare, conexiunile dintre ele duc inevitabil la anumite dificultăţi care pot fi destul de provocatoare. Singura modalitate de a face faţă acestor divergenţe de structuri gramaticale, sintactice şi lexicale este traducerea.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *prieteni falşi, cuvânt împrumutat, studii de traducere, sincronice, diacronice, lingvistică, traducere.*

I. Introduction

Translation requires a deep knowledge of culture and vocabulary of both *Target* and *Source* languages (TL and SL respectively). A translator meets a significant number of obstacles and problems and, unfortunately, these difficulties may lead to mistakes. Delisle claims that:" *Translation is an arduous job that mortifies you, puts you in a state of despair at times, but also an enriching and indispensable work, that demands honesty and modesty"* [3, p. 291]. One of these obstacles is a special group of words, called «translator's false friends». This group of words is of interest to linguists and teachers of translation since the number of errors made when these words are translated is extremely high. To be able to render the correct meaning of an utterance it is important to know the meaning of false friends (FF). The term "false friends" (tracing from the French *faux amis*) was introduced by Maxime Koessler and Jules Derocquigny in 1928 in their book "Les faux amis ou Les pièges du vocabulaire anglais" ("False Friends or the treacherous pitfalls of the English vocabulary") for designating lexical units that are similar in spelling and pronunciation in the source and target languages, but different in their semantic meaning. Consequentially, they lead to false associations, wrong use, or misunderstanding, or, at best, to distortion of context, imprecision, disregard for the right stylistic coloring. In the Handbook of Linguistics M. Aronoff mentions the following: *"The fact that "false friends" sound alike often leads to the incorrect assumption that they have the same meaning; however, that is sometimes only partially the case, and often not at all"* [1, p. 522].

There are numerous examples of FF in various language pairs, for instance:

I. Russian – English:

Магазин is translated as *shop*, and not *magazine* (журнал)

Артист is translated as *performer*, and not *artist* (художник)

Фамилия is translated as *surname*, and not *family* (семья)

Ноутбук is translated as *laptop*, and not *notebook* (блокнот)

II. Romanian – English:

Bilion is translated as *trillion*, and not *billion* (un milliard)

Concurent is translated as *competitor* / kəmˈpetɪtər/, and not *concurrent* (simultan, concertat)

Îndurare is translated as *mercy*, *clemency*, *grace*, and not *endurance* (rezistență, răbdare, suferință, durată)

FF should be distinguished from internationalisms. Internationalisms are words that have same or very similar pronunciation and spelling in several and more languages as the word from which they came from. The difference between them and FF is that internationalisms have the same meaning. Therefore, these two concepts are opposed to each other and we need to learn to distinguish them. Here are some examples of internationalisms in language sequence German-English-Russian-Romanian (respectively): Sport – Sport – Спорт – Sport; Schokolade – Chocolate – Шоколад – Ciocolată; Radio – Radio – Радио – Radio; Hotel – Hotel – Отель – Hotel. The contrastive analysis of both related and not related languages presents a large corpus of similar or identical lexemes- words similar in spelling, pronunciation and often in meaning. Even in many non-related languages this phenomenon would reach the proportion of 10 to 20 % [16, p.12]. It is much higher in the terminological corpora where there is a high percentage of international (Neoclassical) words. A considerable share of these lexemes are FFs.

II. Classification. Etymological perspective.

From the *etymological* point of view translator's FF can be divided into four categories: (1) loanwords, (2) occasional or accidental false friends, (3) the result of phono-semantic matching.

1. *Loanwords* may be borrowed from the SL into TL or vice versa only in a restricted context and may or may not then develop new meanings not found in the original language. For instance, the word *харассмент* (from the English *harassment*) was borrowed to Russian only in the meaning of sexual harassment, even though in English the meaning of this word is broader, and it denotes «aggressive pressure or intimidation» (according to lexico.com). There is also a possibility for a lexeme to change its meaning after borrowing. There are many words of this kind in Japanese. For example, the English word *rough* in modern Japanese means *casual style of clothing*, or the word *service* means *discount*. These Japanese-based expressions are often referred as Wasei-eigo (meaning *Japanese-made English*). Some of these words are not recognizable as English words in the English-speaking countries; one of such examples is the word *sukinshippu* (skinship), which means physical contact between close friends or loved ones and appears to be a portmanteau of skin and kinship.

2. *Occasional or accidental FF* are word pairs that are similar by coincidence, not by common etymology - these are noncognate interlingual analogues. They lack the etymological link and normally belong to a different logical-subject group. This kind of false friends may exist either in related or in unrelated languages. Sometimes they are referred to as interlingual homonyms. In Swedish, the word *rolig* means 'fun', while in the closely related languages Danish and Norwegian it means 'calm'.

3. *Phono-semantic matching* (PSM) is a camouflaged borrowing in which a foreign lexical item is matched with a phonetically and semantically similar pre-existent native word/root. The neologism resulting from such source of lexical expansion preserves both the meaning and the approximate sound of the reproduced expression in the SL with the help of preexistent TL elements. There are several examples of PSM in English, e.g. the French word *chartreuse* (Carthusian monastery) was translated into the English *charterhouse*. The second part of the word *muskrat* was altered to match *rat*, replacing the original form *musquash*, which derives from an Algonquian (possibly Powhatan) word, *muscascus* (literally "it is red"), or from the Abenaki native word *mòskwas*. Another example can be found in the "English Book of Common Prayer" in Psalm 68, and it is the word *runagates*, which is a corruption of Latin *renegade*, influenced by *run* and *agate* ("on the way, agoing").

Semantical perspective

From the semantical point of view FF can be referred to as *intralingual* and *interlingual*. Since a word may change its meaning in the course of time, this problem cannot be viewed only in the light of the current (*synchronic*) situation. Because the historical (*diachronic*) development must also be taken into consideration, there are altogether three types of false friends in the field of semantics. (1) Synchronic interlingual FF are words that are usually referred to when discussing them. These are words from different languages that interact in one period. For example, *crime* (Eng.) – *crimă* (Rom.), *fabric* (Eng.) – *fabrică* (Rom.) or *lad* (Eng.) – *лад* (Rus.). (2) Diachronic interlingual false friends occur because of the constant change of languages that leads to broadening or narrowing down the meaning of expressions or words. In the course of time words may change their meaning or connotation and start denoting something "better" as well as something "worse". For this reason, the words that were originally true friends in two languages, can develop into FF (and vice versa). Carlo Milan pointed out that the German word *Artist* was derived from the French *artiste*, meaning "artist" in the general sense of "somebody performing an art" [10, pp. 384-404].

However, its meaning was gradually narrowed down in German to *Artist* in the sense of "acrobat," and thus became a FF, because the Italian word *artista* has preserved its original meaning (and can even be modified, such as in *artista di circo* or *artista di varietà*); the correct modern German equivalent of the Italian word *artista* (denoting "somebody performing an art") is *Künstler*. We can see then that a gradual intralingual change in meaning leads to the creation of interlingual false friends.

We can face diachronic intralingual FF while translating texts from one historical and linguistic period into another period and we should consider the

process of shift in meaning. The word *nice* can be a good example. In Old French it meant "simple", "silly" and in turn was based on the Latin *nescius,* which meant "ingnorant". In the fourteenth century, *nice* acquired the meaning of "wanton," "loose-mannered," even "lascivious" in English. This meaning occurs, for instance, in line 1285 of Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Romaunt of the Rose" (year 1366): *"Nyce she was, but she mente Noone harme ne slight in hir entente, But oonely lust & jolyte."* So, translating Chaucer's *nice* with the modern English *nice* (meaning "friendly, agreeable, pleasing") would be incorrect [1].

Some more problems are caused by synchronic intralingual FF, even by native speakers. These are words of one language that appear to mean the same, but have different or unexpected meanings. It would be dangerous, for example, to assume, that *inflammable* is the opposite to *flammable*; in fact, they have the same meaning. However, even in English-speaking countries *inflammable* is often used in the sense of "non-flammable". This is what Merriam-Webster Dictionary says about it: "*Combustible and incombustible are opposites, but flammable and inflammable are synonyms. How can that be? The in- of incombustible is a common prefix meaning "not," but the in- of inflammable is a different prefix. Inflammable, which dates back to 1605, descends from Latin inflammare ("to inflame"), itself from in- (here meaning "in" or "into") plus flammare ("to flame").*"[22]

In Russian there are several words of a kind, for example the Russian word *нелицеприятный,* that means "hard-hitting", is often used interchangeably with a very similar word *неприятный,* that means "unpleasant" or "nasty". These two words are so often confused, that many people do not know the original meaning of *нелицеприятный* and use it only in the meaning of *неприятный.*
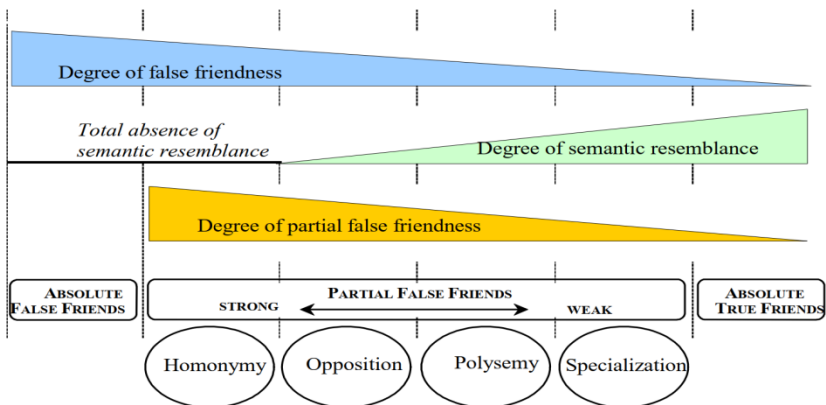
Classification by Rufus, Prinsloo and De Shryver [7].

Another way of classification of false friends from the point of view of semantics was presented by Rufus, Prinsloo and De Shryver in their article "*Friends will be Friends – True or False. Lexicographic Approaches to the Treatment of False Friends*". They divided them into two major categories: (1) Absolute false friends – they represent the "strong version" of FF and include words with similar spelling and a visible difference in meaning. They create real difficulties and if translated wrongly can lead to significant alteration in meaning: e.g. (Eng.) *magazine* – *журнал* (Rus), *магазин* (Rus.) – *shop* (Eng.) or *mark* (Eng.) – *пометка, пятно* (Rus.), *марка* – *stamp* (Eng.). (2) Partial false friends are much more difficult to translate, because their meaning in the TL strongly depends on the context. These words may be true friends i.e., have same or similar meaning in a context but, in another context, they can change their meaning and become false friends. For example, the English word *master* may be translated into Russian either as *мастер* or as *хозяин, победитель* ("*owner*", "*winner*").

`This classification is summarized in Figure 1. The degree of "false friendness" is represented by a blue line and the degree of "partial false friendness" by a yellow one. The degree of "semantic resemblance" is indicated with cyan.

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[22] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inflammable

Figure 1. *A semantic classification of false friends. Adapted version from Rufus, Prinsloo and Gilles-Maurice [2004: 805]*

III. False friends and Psycholinguistic Research

Current research in the field of psychology has shown that the SL vocabulary has got an important role in shaping the organization of the TL lexicon. Some researchers, such as De Groot and Nas, have demonstrated that FF are stored together in our brains under the assumption that similar SL and TL forms have similar meanings. Thus, when learners try to learn a FF, the meaning of the SL is automatically applied to the TL word. The influence of the SL on the TL is especially obvious when the SL word used more often; in this case L1 is quite entrenched in the learners' mental lexicon and its meaning appears to be transferred to the L2 form straight away. The difficulty is that once an inappropriate association is learned, it may become more difficult for the learner to form the correct association. This cognitive mechanism could explain why language learners tend to misuse and misinterpret FF even at advanced levels. In this manner, L1 lexical knowledge holds L2 learning process back and the teachers' interference becomes essential [2, 90-123].

IV. False friends and Translation Studies.

Professionals in the field of translation such as, S. Grander and H. Swallow consider that "*the problem of false friends constitutes a veritable minefield*", which brings significant challenges into the process of translation and to language professionals [8 p. 108]. Translators always try to achieve the full equivalence between the ST and the TT, and sometimes it makes them choose particular words on the basis of their formal resemblance with the original language and not on the basis of their meaning. These words may often not be equivalents, and their interchangeable use may lead to an inappropriate quality of translation.

It should be noticed that some scholars have concluded that FF are common in the scientific fields. Thus, it is essential for translators to be familiar with both the subject matter of the source text and the specific terminology used in the topic before translating. In this case, the usage of dictionaries and different kinds of resources would be helpful for translators and lead to a more accurate translation.

Moreover, not only translators but also interpreters have got problems with FF. A research led by Shlesinger and Malkiel compares the frequency of mistakes made by translators and interpreters because of FF. The experiment demonstrated that FF are even more of a problem in the field of interpretation. In the case of translation, there is more time for a professional for self-correction, while it is much more difficult to avoid FF during the oral interpretation due to time and cognitive constraints. It is essential that the mistakes involving FF are not made exclusively by speakers with a low level of linguistic competence, they affect speakers that have a high level of language proficiency as well. This shows that FF should be paid much attention to. Much research led by translators, linguists and psycholinguists makes us acknowledge the confusion false friends may produce and the importance and usefulness of knowing them [15, pp. 173-193].

V. Conclusion

The phenomenon of false friends and language interference in general create many difficulties not only for language learners or inexperienced translators but also for professional translators and interpreters. Though there are quite a lot of false friends language users should be aware how to cope with them; learning false friends by heart could be an option.

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