

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATOR'S FALSE FRIENDS

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Annotation

The article is devoted to the problem of translator's false friends which are considered to be one of the most serious issues in the context of the theory and practice translation. It also observes the reasons of interpretive mistakes concerning these words and gives recommendations how to avoid blunders while translating different texts. The problem is verified by the following fact: many words borrowed by Russian from the source as English from, kept closer to the original meaning. So, a noun 'chef' was borrowed from French into English with the more specific meaning of 'chef cook' while it was borrowed into Russian as 'шеф' with the meaning of 'leader', 'boss'.

Annotatsiya

Maqola o'xshash shakliga ega bo'lgan so'z va iboralarni tarjima qilishda uchraydigan muammolarga bag'ishlangan bo'lib, bu nazariya va amaliyot tarjimasi kontekstida eng jiddiy muammolardan biri hisoblanadi. Shuningdek, ushbu so'zlarning izohli xatolar sabablarini ko'rib chiqadi va turli matnlarni tarjima qilishda qo'pol xatolarga yo'l qo'ymaslik bo'yicha tavsiyalar beradi. Muammo quyidagi fakt bilan tasdiqlangan: rus tilidan ingliz tilidan olingan ko'plab so'zlar asl ma'noga yaqinroq saqlanadi. Shunday qilib, "oshpaz" so'zi frantsuz tilidan ingliz tiliga "oshpaz oshpaz" so'zining aniq ma'nosi bilan, rus tiliga esa "rahbar", "xo'jayin" ma'nolari bilan "oshpaz" sifatida olingan

Аннотация

Статья посвящена проблеме ложных друзей переводчика, которая считается одной из наиболее серьезных проблем в контексте теории и практики перевода. Также рассматриваются причины ошибок интерпретации этих слов и даются рекомендации, как избежать ошибок при переводе различных текстов. Проблема подтверждается следующим фактом: многие слова, заимствованные русским языком из источника, как и английским, сохранились ближе к первоначальному значению. Так, существительное «шеф» было заимствовано из французского языка в английский язык с более конкретным значением «шеф-повар», а в русский язык оно было заимствовано как «шеф» со значением «лидер», «начальник».

A false friend can trick people into thinking it is the correct translation of a word from your first language. Thus, it's crucial to **identify these confusing words** to

prevent awkward situations and shocked reactions from people who are native speakers of the language you are translating into.

In this article, we will look at some **false friends examples** to help you better grasp what they are.

We came up with a **list of false friends** that are present between English and German, English and Spanish, English and Portuguese, English and Italian, and English and French. Each case consists of an English word, its translation to another language, the false friend term, plus its meaning.

What is a false friend?

False friends are word pairings in two different languages that appear to have a similar phonetic form, but in reality have entirely different meanings, origins, and spelling.

For example, the German word “enkel”, although pronounced nearly the same as English word “ankle”, means “grandchild.” So if you roll your ankle in Germany and ask for help with your “enkel,” you may confuse a few people.

This is the concept of a false friend—a word that deceives you into thinking it’s the proper translation of a word from your native language.

The expression “Faux amis du traducteur” was first introduced in a 1928 book by French linguists Maxim Koessler and Jules Derecquigny. The term was translated into English as “false friends of the translator” and later shortened simply to “false friends.”

False friends are also known more technically as bilingual homophones.

Why false friends aren’t so friendly?

As you can imagine, false friends pose numerous problems not only for those who have only just begun learning foreign languages.

Let’s consider the following example:

Picture a couple out on a coffee date. The woman speaks primarily English, the man Spanish. As she gets up from the table to grab a napkin, she spills some coffee on his lap and declares “estoy embarazada!”—intending to say she is embarrassed by the incident. The man’s eyes grow large and they both have a laugh when he explains she mistakenly announced to everyone in the café that she is pregnant! In a social setting like this, the improper use of a word or phrase could result in a laugh or, worse yet, an awkward silence.

Examples of false friends

As you will see in the examples below, there are different types of false friends you need to be aware of:

across different languages

within a single language

non-verbal communication

False friends across languages

These examples highlight the confusion that can arise when you try to use a word in a different language that sounds a lot like the original but means something else entirely:

Polish-English: aktualnie – currently; actually – właściwie

Polish-Czech: czerstwy – stale; čerstvy – fresh

Spanish-English: morbido – soft, delicate; morbid – enfermizo

German-English: gift – poison; gift – Geschenk

Czech-Russian – ovoce (o-vo-tse) – fruit; овощи (o-vo-schi) – vegetables.

Swedish-English: ett barn – a child; barn – ladugård

Dutch-German: slim – smart; schlimm – bad, terrible

French-English: pain – bread; pain – douleur

Spanish-Italian: burro – donkey; burro – butter

False friends within a language

Interestingly, false friends can be found also within one language. To use an English example, for an American person, “pants” means “trousers”, whereas for a British person the same term means “undergarment.”

Non-verbal false friends

To add another layer, false friends can affect non-verbal communication as well. While a thumbs up is widely recognized as a sign of approval or agreement, it's taken as highly offensive thumbs down in some parts of the middle east. The most common mistake made by Poles spending their holidays in Bulgaria, for example, is the wrong interpretation of non-verbal confirmation or negation. In the Black Sea region, a single nod of one's head up means “no” while turning it from the left to the right means “yes”.

Where do they come from?

False friends come about for a few reasons.

1. Shared etymology

Sometimes it's the case where two languages shared common origins, but a word shifted meanings or acquired additional meanings over time. This can lead to the emergence of false friends. Take the word “friend” as an example. The original Germanic term was used to describe someone you care for, leaving that open to include both family ties as well as relationships formed along the way.

Scandinavian facsimiles like Swedish (frände) and Danish (frænde) predominantly mean “relative”—a closer link than what friend has come to be understood in English.

2. Homonyms

Homonyms are words that have the same spelling or pronunciation but different meanings and origins. A fun example is the Swedish word “rolig”, which means “fun”. In Danish and Norwegian, however, “rolig” means calm, generally not the state in which you display you are having fun.

3. Pseudo-Anglicisms

These are words in other languages that are formed with some English elements and may appear to be English but in fact are not. For example, table football or foosball is known in France as “baby-foot”. Made up of two English words, there is no equivalent in the language it resembles.

False friends vs. internationalisms

In any discussion on false friends, you should also be aware of internationalisms. Internationalisms are other words or phrases that sound very similar or even identical in several languages. Unlike false friends, though, they have the same meaning. Internationalisms are particularly apparent within languages of the same group, particularly the Romance and Germanic languages. Common etymologies of a given word are linked to its earliest beginnings. European languages therefore contain a bevy of words of Latin or Greek origin which can serve as excellent examples of internationalisms.

Take, for example, the Polish *cywilizacja*, German *Zivilisation*, Spanish *civilización*, and English *civilization*. As we can see, the word of Latin origin has taken very similar forms (both in graphic and phonetic terms) in several languages while retaining its original meaning.

As you can see, internationalisms often make learning foreign languages easier, whereas false friends can make it much more difficult. Think of it as bumping into an old friend on the street. You’re delighted to see them, and it’s good to catch up and regain that sense of familiarity. That’s an internationalism. False friends, on the other hand, may seem like they’re being helpful, but really, they’re only leading you astray. The recognition of internationalisms should keep you on guard for “false friends” you might come across along the way. In being aware of that spectrum, individual learners will move beyond standard ways of thinking about languages. Additionally, translators will be even more focused on the text to make sure they’re getting the right message across.

How False Friends Impact Translation

When it comes to formal translation projects, a seemingly trivial error caused by a false friend can have serious consequences.

Take for example, these small translation mistakes that had a major impact.

As we have seen, it’s not enough for translators simply know a foreign language. In addition to knowing the grammatical complexities of a language, they must also be aware of common false friends that may trip them up.

Translators must possess strong localization knowledge, meaning an awareness of local customs, traditions, and culture of a given region that may impact how words and phrases are translated. To learn more about what experienced translators can do for your business, check out Summa Linguae’s translation services.

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Actual, which in English is usually a synonym of *real*, has a different meaning in other European languages, in which it means 'current' or 'up-to-date', and has the logical derivative as a verb, meaning 'to make current' or 'to update'. *Actualise* (or 'actualize') in English means 'to make a reality of'.

The Italian word *confetti* "sugared almonds" has acquired a new meaning in English, French and Dutch; in Italian, the corresponding word is *coriandoli*.

English and Spanish, both of which have borrowed from Ancient Greek and Latin, have multiple false friends, such as:

English	Spanish translation	Spanish	English translation
actually	<i>en realidad</i>	actualmente	<i>currently</i>
advertisement	<i>publicidad</i>	advertencia	<i>warning</i>
bizarre	<i>extraño</i>	bizarro	<i>brave</i>

English and Japanese also have diverse false friends, many of them being wasei eigo and gairaigo words

In native wordsedit

The word *friend* itself has cognates in the other Germanic languages; but the Scandinavian ones (like Swedish *frände*, Danish *frænde*) predominantly mean 'relative'. The original Proto-Germanic word meant simply 'someone whom one cares for' and could therefore refer to both a friend and a relative, but lost various degrees of the 'friend' sense in Scandinavian languages, while it mostly lost the sense of 'relative' in English (the plural *friends* is still, rarely, used for "kinsfolk", as in the Scottish proverb *Friends agree best at a distance*, quoted in 1721).

The Estonian and Finnish languages are closely related, which gives rise to false friends such as swapped forms for south and south-west:[4]

Estonian	Finnish	English
<i>lõuna</i>	<i>etelä</i>	south
<i>edel</i>	<i>lounas</i>	south-west

Or Estonian *vaimu* 'spirit; ghost' and Finnish *vaimo* 'wife'; or Estonian *huvitav* 'interesting' and Finnish *huvittava* 'amusing'. [3]

A high level of lexical similarity exists between German and Dutch, [9] but shifts in meaning of words with a shared etymology have in some instances resulted in 'bi-directional false friends': [10][11]

German	Dutch	English
<i>See</i>	<i>meer</i>	mere (lake)
<i>Meer</i>	<i>zee</i>	sea

German	Dutch	English
<i>mögen</i>	<i>houden van</i>	like, love
<i>dürfen</i>	<i>mogen</i>	be allowed to
<i>wagen</i>	<i>durven</i>	dare

Examples

1. Аккорд [akórd]- chord vs **Accord** — согласие [saglásiye].

Ex.: -Ну как ты играешь! Это же неправильный аккорд!

(How are you playing! This is a wrong chord).

2. Артист [artist]- entertainer vs **Artist**- художник [hudozhnik].

Please, note that there are also feminine forms for these words: артистка / художница (feminitives)

Ex.: — Он прекрасный артист и добрый человек! (He is a great entertainer and a kind person).