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## **FALSE FRIENDS IN CONVERTING A TEXT FROM ONE SCRIPT INTO ANOTHER**

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The article deals with the fact that *false friends* can cause difficulty for students learning a foreign language, particularly one that is related to their native language, because students are likely to identify the words wrongly due to linguistic interference. From the etymological point of view, false friends can be created in several ways: shared etymology, homonyms, homoglyphs, pseudo-anglicisms.

*False friends* are pairs of words or phrases in two languages or dialects (or letters in two alphabets) that look or sound similar, but differ in meaning. The term should be distinguished from "false cognates", which are similar words in different languages that appear to have a common historical linguistic origin (whatever their current meaning) but actually do not. As well as complete false friends, use of loanwords often results in the use of a word in a restricted context, which may then develop new meanings not found in the original language. Both false friends and false cognates can cause difficulty for students learning a foreign language, particularly one that is related to their native language, because students are likely to identify the words wrongly due to linguistic interference. For this reason, teachers sometimes compile lists of false friends as an aid for their students.

One kind of false friend can occur when two speakers speak different varieties of the same language. Speakers of British English and American English sometimes have this problem, which was alluded to in George Bernard Shaw's statement "England and America are two countries separated by a common language". For example, in the UK, to "table" a motion means to place it on the agenda (to bring it to the table for consideration), while in the US it means exactly the opposite — "to remove it from consideration" (to lay it aside on the table rather than hold it up for consideration). From the etymological point of view, false friends can be created in several ways: shared etymology, homonyms, homoglyphs, pseudo-anglicisms.

**1. Shared etymology.** If Language A borrowed a word from Language B, or

both borrowed the word from a third language or inherited it from a common ancestor, and later the word shifted in meaning or acquired additional meanings in at least one of these languages, a native speaker of one language will face a false friend when learning the other. Sometimes, presumably both senses were present in the common ancestor language, but the cognate words got different restricted senses in Language A and Language B.

For example, the words *preservative* (English), *prűservatif* (French), *Prűservativ* (German), *prezervativ* (Romanian, Czech, Croatian), *preservativ* (Slovenian), *preservativo* (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese), *prezerwatywa* (Polish), презерватив "*prezervativ*" (Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian), *prezervatif* (Turkish), *prűservativ* (Danish), *prezervatyvo* (Lithuanian), *Prezervatīvs* (Latvian) and *preservatiu* (Catalan) are all derived from the Latin word *praeservativum*. But in all of these languages except English, the predominant meaning of the word is now *condom*.

*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".

*Demand* in English and *demande* in French or *domanda* in Italian are representative of a particularly treacherous sort of false friend, in which – despite a common origin – the words have differently shaded meanings. The French and Italian homologues simply mean "request", not a forceful requirement. This led to several historic misunderstandings, such as in Canada, the failing of the *Meech Lake Accord* where Quebec constitutional *requests* were interpreted as *demands*. In Spanish *demandar* may mean "to request", but its normal meaning is "to sue".

The word *friend* itself has cognates in the other Germanic languages, but the Scandinavian ones (like Swedish *frűnde*, Danish *frűende*) predominately mean "relative" (but may also mean *soulmate*). The original word had both the meanings "friend" and "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" still but rarely may be used for "kinsfolk", as in the Scottish proverb *Friends agree best at a distance*, quoted in 1721.)

The Italian word *magazzino*, French *magasin*, Dutch *magazijn*, and Russian магазин (*magazin*), is used for a depot, store, or warehouse. In English the word *magazine* has also the meaning of "periodic publication". The word "magazine" has the same meaning in French. In Serbian, there are two similar words *magacin*, representing the former, and *magazin* representing the latter meaning. To add confusion, there is an extra meaning of *magazine* (*firearms*) in several languages (with accordingly different spellings). (Note, however, that the term "powder magazine", a store for gunpowder, as e.g. in the town of Williamsburg, Virginia, restored to its colonial form, would be well understood by current English speakers, though recognized as an archaicism.)

*Gift* originally had the same meaning in English and German. In Old High German and Middle High German *Gift* was the term for an "object that is given".

Although it had always included a euphemistic meaning for "poison" ("being given"), over the following centuries it gradually suffered a full semantic change to the sole present German meaning "poison". It is still reflected in the German term for the English word dowry = *Mitgift, das Mitgegebene*, "that which is given" (with the wedding)

In Swedish, Norwegian and Danish, *gift* means "poison" but also "married". In Dutch, "gift" means a gift, but "gif" and "giftig" mean poison and poisonous respectively. The latter two meanings also apply for the Afrikaans language, spoken in Southern Africa, which originated from Old Dutch amongst others.

*Cafeteria* means "dining hall" in English, but *cafeterna* means "coffeehouse" in Spanish and Portuguese, whereas *cafetăria* means "fringe benefit" in Hungarian and *cofetărie* means "sweetshop" in Romanian.

*Normal* in French implies *technical* conformance (to technical standards), it means "It is as it's supposed to be", while *normal* in English implies *social* conformance (to social norms). This is why the now-archaic normal school (from the French *école normale*) is so confusing to present-day English speakers, it was a place where people received standardized training in how to teach children, *not* an institution where social deviants learned how to behave normally. The same divergence also presented a problem for the International Organization for Standardization (*Organisation internationale de normalisation*) at its founding in 1947, it settled on the short name ISO as a compromise between IOS and OIN.

**2. Homonyms.** In certain cases, false friends evolved separately in the different languages. Words usually change by small shifts in pronunciation accumulated over long periods and sometimes converge by chance on the same pronunciation or look despite having come from different roots.

For example, German *Rat* (pronounced with a long "a") (= "council") is cognate with English "read" and German and Dutch *Rede* (= "speech", often religious in nature) (hence Æthelred the 'Unready' would not heed the speech of his advisors, and the word 'unready' is cognate with the Dutch word "onraad" meaning trouble, danger), while English and Dutch "rat" for the rodent has its German cognate *Ratte*.

In another example, the word *bra* in the Swedish language means "good", as in "a good song". *Bra* has the same meaning in Norwegian, where *Ha det bra* (Good bye) and *Bare bra* (response to "How are you?") are extremely common. In English, *bra* is short for the French *brassiere*, which is an undergarment that supports the breasts. The full English spelling, *brassiere*, is now a false friend in and of itself (the modern French term for brassiere is *soutien-gorge*).

**3. Homoglyphs.** For example, Latin P came to be written like Greek rho (written P but pronounced [r]), so the Roman letter equivalent to rho was modified to R to keep it distinct.

An Old and Middle English letter has become a false friend in modern English: the letters thorn (þ) and eth (ð) were used interchangeably to represent voiced and voiceless dental fricatives now written in English as *th* (as in "thick" and "the").

Though the thorn character (whose appearance was usually similar to the modern "p") was most common, the eth could equally be used. Due to its similarity to an oblique minuscule "y", an actual "Y" is substituted in modern pseudo-old-fashioned usage as in "Ye Olde Curiositie Shoppe", the first word means and should be pronounced "the", not "ye" (archaic form of "you")

Homoglyphs occur also by coincidence. For example, Finnish *tie* means "road", the pronunciation is [tie], unlike English [tai], which in turn means "or" in Finnish

**4. Pseudo-anglicisms** Pseudo-anglicisms are new words formed from English morphemes independently from an analogous English construct and with a different intended meaning. For example, in German *Oldtimer* refers to an old car (or antique aircraft) rather than an old person, while *Handy* refers to a mobile phone. Japanese is replete with pseudo-anglicisms, known as *wasei-eigo* ("Japan-made English")

In the SeSotho group of languages spoken in South Africa *pushback* refers to a combed back hair style, commonly worn by black women with chemically straightened hair, and *stop-nonsense* refers to pre-fabricated concrete slabs used as *fencing*

In bilingual situations, false friends often result in a semantic change—a real new meaning that is then commonly used in a language. For example, the Portuguese *humoroso* ("capricious") changed its referent in American Portuguese to "humorous", owing to the English surface-cognate "humorous". "Corn" was originally the dominant type of grain in a region (indeed "corn" and "grain" are themselves cognates from the same Indo-European root). It came to mean usually wheat in the British Isles, but maize in North America. The American Italian *fattoria* lost its original meaning "farm" in favour of "factory" owing to the phonetically similar surface-cognate English "factory" (cf. Standard Italian *fabbrica* "factory"). Instead of the original *fattoria*, the phonetic adaptation American Italian *farma* became the new signifier for "farm" – see "one-to-one correlation between signifiers and referents"

Discussing the false friends in English we should remember that a competent translator should have the following qualities: a very good knowledge of the language, written and spoken, from which he is translating (the source language), familiarity with the subject matter of the text being translated, a profound understanding of the etymological and idiomatic correlates between the languages, and a finely tuned sense of when to paraphrase ("translate literally") and when to paraphrase, so as to assure true rather than spurious equivalents between the source- and target-language texts

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