False Friends and Translation: A Case Study of Iraqi Students of Translation

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الكلمات المشتركة المزيفة (الاصدقاء المزيفون) والترجمة:دراسة حالة الطلبة العراقيين في قسم الترجمة

(الكلمات المفتاحية: الاصدقاء المزيفون,الترجمة,التداخل اللغوي)

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المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في مشكلة (الاصدقاء المزيفين) او الكلمات المشتركة المزيفة وأثرها في الترجمة من الانجليزية الى العربية. وتتمثل نماذج دراسة الحالة للبحث في اوراق الامتحانات النهائية للعام الدراسي لـ 200 طالب (100 طالب من الدراسة الصباحية و 100 طالب من الدراسة المسائية) في قسم الترجمة. وتقدم الدراسة تعريفات الكلمات المشتركة المزيفة وانواعها ومصدر الالتباس الناتج عن التعامل مع هكذا كلمات. وقد بينت النتائج ان 76.5% يعانون من مشاكل ترجمة المشتركات اللفظية المزيفة. اما أنواع هذه الكلمات فيتعلق النوع الاول بالخطأ المعروف والمألوف بتشابه تعبيرين بوجه من الوجوه لكنهما مختلفان كلياً نظراً لاختلاف الثقافتين الانجليزية والعربية. وقد كشفت الدراسة ان 31% تقريباً ممن عانوا من مشاكل الترجمة، كانت مشاكلهم مع النوع الاول. اما النوع الثاني فيتعلق بسوء فهم الطلبة للكلمات الواردة باللغة المصدر نفسها وكانت نسبة ممن عانوا مشاكل هذا النوع 61.25%. وينتج النوع الثالث من الكلمات المشتركة المزيفة في هذه الدراسة من سوء فهم إشتقاق الكلمات الواردة في دراسة الحالة وقد كانت نسبتهم 39.75%. والنوع الرابع والاخير ينتج عن الكلمات المستعارة من اللغة الانجليزية وتستخدم في اللغة الدارجة وكانت نسبتها 8.65%. وتقترح الدراسة العمل على تحسين معرفة الطلبة للمفردات ودلالاتها وإشتقاقاتها سبيلاً لتفادي هكذا التباس في الترجمة.

"You come across false friends more often than you would like to - not only in real life, but also in linguistics, especially when you happen to be doing a translation". (Gutknecht, 2002)

Abstract

This paper investigates the problem of false friends (or false cognates) and its impact on English-Arabic Translation. Samples of final exam sheets are taken as case study. The study covers 200 translation students (100 morning students and 100 evening students). The study finds out that 76.5% of students made mistakes regarding false friends. The paper presents definitions, types and the sources of confusion resulting from dealing with false friends. The first type is related to common mistake that two expressions are similar in some way but they are totally different since they belong to different cultures, English and Arabic are cases in point. The translation mistake regarding this type was the problem of 31% of those who made false friends errors. The second type is related to the students' misunderstanding of the source language words themselves and it covers 61.25% of the students. The third type of false friends found in the case study resulted from the etymological misunderstanding of the expressions in the case study sample texts .This type covers 39.75% of the students. The fourth type of false friends is resulted from borrowed words and it covers 8.65% of the students. It is concluded that the students need to improve their lexical, semantic, and etymological background knowledge as ways of avoiding such confusion.

Introduction

False friends or false cognates are words that may sound similar in two or more languages but in actuality mean different things (Hill 1982; Chamizo Dominguez & Nerlich 2002; and Shlesinger & Malkiel 2005). The concept was born bearing precisely this idea that the English word seems to be "friendly" to the learner. In other word, being very similar to

some notion already known by the speaker from his/her language, the English word helps him/her produce communication in English too, relatively easier than when using totally new and unknown words. So, these words are seen as helping "friends". Still, they turn out to have very different meanings from those believed on the basis of the similarity with the mother tongue, being deceptive and tricky. Thus, they finally prove to be "false", pretended, and very much less friendly than expected.

Though many scholars have dealt with the phenomenon of false friends via books and articles, Chamizo Dominguez*'s Semantics and Pragmatics of False Friends* presents a comprehensive summary of the current research on the phenomenon of false friends across a broad range of languages. Pinazo (2008) reviews Chamizo Dominguez's book and summurised that the author skilfully combines a large selection of examples in context with references to different former works from the same field of study and the theory basis which support his work on false friends and their classification. The researcher spares no effort in compiling different materials either from the lexicographical field or other related disciplines such as Philosophy, Pragmatics, Semantics or Discourse Analysis. A discussion of the examples, which have been mainly excerpted from English, Spanish, French, German, and Catalan, can be found. In addition, although to a much lesser extent, examples are discussed from other languages, such as Polish, Dutch, Latin, Greek, Italian, Norwegian, Arabic, Slovakian, Swedish and Portuguese.

He reviews former research on the subject to find common features among which he highlights those approaches aiming towards pedagogical perspectives which do not pay attention to the reviews evolution of senses in cognates. This is due to the fact that previous works and research on the subject were mainly written by language trainers and translators to provide useful lists of terms focusing on synchronic examples. Therefore, a diachronic point of view is not usually found in those former studies and only a few attempts at theoretical analysis are known. The emergence of false friends connected with the lexicalization of figures of speech has seldom been seriously taken into account by researchers (ibid).

A spectacular case in point is the word nice: In Old French, which gave the word to English in the thirteenth century, it meant "simple," "silly," and in turn was based on Latin nescius, which meant "ignorant." In

the fourteenth century, nice in English acquired the meaning of "wanton," "loosemannered," even "lascivious." This sense occurs, for instance, in line 1285 of Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Romaunt of the Rose" (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 (Gutknecht, 2002).

Linguistic Interference

It is possible to safely say that these false friends are a serious linguistic problem which belongs to the field of interference (sometimes also called negative transfer).

> *Interference is the phenomenon that we experience when linguistic structures that we have already learnt interfere with our learning new structures. Interference between two languages exists in all areas - for example, in pronunciation and spelling.* (Gutknecht, 2002: 522)

There are some clear sources of confusion in what the use of false friends is regarded. Horea (2002:971) has distinguished a category of sources related to behavioural aspects of the speaker and another one concerning the linguistic approach.

Thus, it is first of all a question of wrong choice of words due to directness and spontaneity of conversations. "It occurs because of the normal tendency to use the most familiar words that come to one's mind when talking, as an unconscious and uncontrolled means of producing fluent communication" (Horea,2002:971). Venuti (2013:47) states that when a false cognate occurs in the work of a translator who has already produced a considerable number of translations, when it cannot be attributed to simply to imperfect linguistic knowledge or limited translation experience, "an unconscious motivation" should be sought. Venuti gives examples from his own work as a translator to support his statement that false cognate does not necessarily occur with beginner translators or persons with limited linguistic knowledge (ibid).

Of the same category, laziness is another cause for the production of false friends. Even aware that something may be inappropriate, too easy, or too much alike, the speaker indulges in using that term anyhow as opposed to the more tiresome activity of checking it up, though time and situation (e.g. not conversational but writing – less demanding) would allow.

It is not always that literal translation, or, in particular, using a Target Language (TL) word that looks the same or nearly the same as the Source Language (SL) word. Newmark (1988a:72) states that there are "faithful friends" more than *faux amis*, and we must not hesitate using them since the translation of objects and movements is usually literal than that qualities and ways of moving. He exemplifies that *'theatre'* is *th*é*âter* is *taetro* is *teatr;* only in Czeck is it *divadlo*. However, a translator must never translate any word he has not previously seen without checking it and this where cognate is deceptive. *Elégant* virtually covers the semantic range of 'elegant', but inelegant ranges from 'inelegant' through 'discourteous' to 'dishonest' (Newmark,1988b:170).

Regarding the linguistic issue, etymology is the first responsible. These words may have a common root, from an original language that both languages in question derive from or have borrowed and assimilated the particular word from. Some similar meanings can be still preserved, more or less, in both languages, as main senses or, on the contrary, as figurative or secondary. But new meanings can be developed and there are restricted or enlarged senses that influence the future development of the word in one language as distinct from the other. Distinct alterations of meanings, the development of a polysemy, in certain circumstances, or of a simply different particularization would bring about such confusions with these words. (ibid)

The Case Study

This study is classified as a qualitative study since it deals with opinions of the students and their translation of sample texts. The strength of qualitative approach can summed up in that all qualitative data can be coded quantitatively. Anything that is qualitative can be assigned meaningful numerical values. These values can then be manipulated to help one achieve greater insight into the meaning of the data and to help examine specific hypotheses. Even the simple act of categorizing can be

viewed as a quantitative one as well (Atieno, 2009:16). The study takes the final examination papers of the Translation Department 1st year students as a case study. 200 examination sheets were taken as a sample for this study. To be fair in this sample, the study covers both Morning studies (M) (100 sheets) and Evening studies (E) (100 sheets). The study will focus on those who made these mistakes to categorize them and discuss the reasons behind these mistakes.

 As far as the examples in the case study are concerned, the first type (Type A) is related to famous and familiar mistake which means two expressions that are similar in some way but they are totally different since they belong to different cultures such as English and Arabic.

Some telling example will illustrate the strategy of rendering false friend by students. In the case of:

> **The World Food Programme (WFP) was established in 1961 by the <u>General Assembly</u> and UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Conference as the UN System's food aid organisation.**

The underlined false friend was translated by 19 out 47 students into "الجنرال اسيمبلي". This means about 40 % tend to transliterate this job title instead of translating it. Transliterating is a strategy utilized to render Arabic proper names into Latin as suggested by Sammar and Saadane (2013).

Those students mistakably thought that as this expression is capitalised, so it is a proper noun. The reason behind these mistranslations backs to the student's poor lexical background. The SL words are not "tricky", but students' poor linguistic knowledge leads him/her to transliterate the expression instead of translate it that gives totally wrong translation.

The students in the previous example thought that as this expression is capitalised, so it is a proper noun, but the expression in the next example is not capitalised, however, they transliterated it. The students here mistakably thought that as the word "certain" is adjacent to the word "king", so "certain" is the name of the king.

The thought came to a certain king that he would never fail if he knew three things. These three things were: What is the right time to begin something? Which people should he listen to? What is the most important thing for him to do?

*فكّر الملك **سيرتاين**......

Words (see Appendix)	No. of Students made mistake (out of 47)	The Students' Translation	The Correct Translation
Tons	5	تونس	أطنان
General Assembly	19	الجنرال أسيمبلي	الجمعية العمومية
Donors	9	دونورز	متبرعين
Aid	6	عيد	مساعدات
Certain	5	سيرتاين	محدد

Table (1) Type A False Friends

The mistranslations of 47 students which mean 31% (35.21% M and 26.82% E) of those who made false friends mistakes were in this type.

The second type of the false friends found in the case study is related to the students' misunderstanding to the SL words themselves. The students confused two similar lexical SL expressions and translate them according to his/her poor linguistic knowledge associated to the confusion and the result is again wrong translation. 93 students i.e. 61.25% (67.6% M and 54.9 E) of the students have covered the mistakes relating this type of false friends. 40 of these students have mistranslated "reply" into "إعادة" since they thought it "replay". The following examples and table demonstrate the examples found in the case study.

In reply to the first question, some said the king must prepare a timetable and then follow it strictly. Only in this way, they said, could he do everything at its proper time….

* في **إعادة** السؤال الاول.....

The students in the next example confused between the abbreviation (UN) and (US), so they mistakably and repeatedly translated (UN) into " الولايات المتحدة".

The World Food Programme (WFP) was established in 1961 by the General Assembly and <u>UN</u> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Conference as the UN System's food aid organisation.

*منظمة الغذاء والزراعة في **الولايات المتحدة**.....

Words (see Appendix)	No. of Students made mistake (out of 93)	The Students' Translation	The Correct Translation
Efforts	5	تأثير	جهود
Thought	9	من خلال	فكرة
Reply	40	إعادة	رد
UN	28	الولايات المتحدة	الامم المتحدة
Snakes	9	وجبات خفيفة	أفاعي
Fail	8	يقع	يفشل
Comprise	9	يضغط	يشمل

Table (2) Type B False Friends

The third type of false friends found in the case study resulted from the etymological misunderstanding of the expressions in the case study sample texts. The student here does not differentiate affixes that convert the meaning of words into something totally different. In other words, the students focus on the "common root" and translate the specified word according to this root. 61 students i.e. 39.75% (38% M and 41.5% E) have made mistakes regarding this type of false friends. 31 of these students i.e. 50% mistranslated "throughout" into "خارج" since they focused only on the root "out" regardless the whole word. The following examples and table illustrate this type of false friends.

The king, therefore, sent messengers <u>throughout</u> his kingdom, promising a large sum of money to anyone who would answer these three questions.

أرسل رسلاً خارج مملكته.......

In the same way, the students focused in the next example on the root of the word "agri**culture**", so they mistakably translated it into "الثقافة".

The World Food Programme (WFP) was established in 1961 by the General Assembly and <u>UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)</u> Conference as the UN System's food aid organisation.

* منظمة الامم المتحدة للطعام والثقافة......

Words (see Appendix)	**No. of Students made mistake (out of 61)**	**The Students' Translation**	**The Correct Translation**
Harmless	4	يؤذي	غير مؤذ
Agri**culture**	16	ثقافة	زراعة
Through**out**	31	خارج	في كل الارجاء
Stormed	11	عاصفة	إقتحم

Table (3) Type C False Friends

The fourth type of false friends is resulted from borrowed words. Once a word or expression is borrowed into a language, we cannot predict or control its development or the additional connotations it might or might not take on. The students here concluded their translations according to their experience from social media and TV commercials. Some false friends are easy to spot because the difference in their meanings is so great that only a very inexperienced translator is likely to be unaware of it (Baker, 1992: 33). 14 of students i.e. 8.65% (10% M and 7.3% E) made mistakes regarding this type of false friends. With the pervasion of computers and social media, students linked between the word "messengers" in the text and the social media application. Therefore, they mistranslated the expression into "تطبيق الماسنجر", "مسج","رسائل نصية" or "محادثة". Furthermore, students also linked between the word "delivering" in the text and the action of delivering food or commodity to home. So they

mistranslated the expression into "الطعام الجاهز","جاهز" or "الطلب السريع".The
following example and table demonstrate this type.

The king, therefore, sent messengers throughout his
kingdom, promising a large sum of money to anyone who
would answer these three questions.

* الملك مع ذلك ارسل **ماسنجر**.....

Words (see Appendix)	No. of Students made mistake (out of 14)	The Students' Translation	The Correct Translation
Group	3	كروب	مجموعة
Messenger	10	ماسنجر	رسول
Delivering	5	طعام جاهز-طلب سريع	أرسل

(4)   Table
                                                                      Type D
                              False Friends

The above mentioned exampled stated that students have problems
with lexical and vocabulary knowledge acquisition. Alqahtani (2015:2)
states that vocabulary knowledge is often considered as a critical tool for
second language learners because a limited or poor vocabulary in a second
language impedes successful communication. If learners are not exposed to
systematic vocabulary knowledge learning opportunities, their vocabulary
or lexical size does not expand. Subsequently, learners may have difficulty
in comprehending the target language even if they are equipped with
grammatical competence.

The examples of the four types and their ratios show that the biggest
ratio (Type B) is relating errors resulted from poor lexical knowledge and
the students' confusion in the SL words themselves.

As for the second biggest ratio (Type A), it is a familiar mistake that
two expressions are similar in some way but they are totally different since
they belong to different cultures such as English and Arabic.

Though (Type C) does not cover a big ratio but it does represent a
serious problem during translation since the student here does not
differentiate affixes that convert the meaning of words into something

totally different. In other words, the students focus on the "common root" and translate the specified word according to this root.

The students in (Type D) concluded their translations according to their experience from social media and TV commercials. The borrowed words such as "group", "delivery" and "message" that are frequently used by social medial users are the main leads to such a type of mistranslations.

Conclusion

The study finds out that 76.5% (71% M and 82% E) of the 200 students made translation mistakes regarding false friends. It is obvious that this data is not normal and needs actions and solutions to tackle with. Given the fact that such words are tricky, teachers should raise students' awareness of the danger of words sounding familiar. This is the easiest to be done when the task to do is translation, as then it can be clearly mentioned that there is a certain number of words that are "false friends" and that have to be identified and the mistakes can be thus avoided by the use of synonyms. Least that can be done, the nearest to the best solution, would be teaching the most commonly met false friends during the English classes and translation process. This can be done through many creative ideas and ways such as workshops instead of regular lectures, class games involving false friends, or handouts distributed to explain the effect of false friends on translation. The students with poor linguistic background should overcome the interference problems by hard work and be enrolled in intense programmes aiming at improving their linguistic background. Despite the fact that "faithful friends" are more than *faux amis*, we must not hesitate using them since the translation of objects and movements is usually literal than that qualities and ways of moving.

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Appendix: **The Sample Texts**

1)   Baghdad state of emergency declared after protesters storm parliament

A state of emergency has been declared in Baghdad after protestors stormed the Green Zone and entered the parliament building.

Hundreds of people gathered in protest at the failure of Iraqi Members of Parliament to convene for a vote to approve new ministers. The unrest comes after weeks of political unrest in Baghdad over efforts by the prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, to replace ministers with technocrats. MPs failed to approve the measures on Saturday.

People gathered outside the heavily fortified green zone, comprising government buildings and foreign embassies.

2)

 The World Food Programme (WFP) was established in 1961 by the General Assembly and UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Conference as the UN System's food aid organisation. The WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger worldwide.

In 2008, WFP was transformed from a food aid organisation to a food assistance organistion.

In 2010, donors contributed $3.82 billion. All contributions to the Programme are on a voluntary basis. WFP provided food for 109.2 million people in 75 countries in 2010, delivering 4.6 million tons of food.

3)

The thought came to a certain king that he would never fail if he knew three things. These three things were: What is the right time to begin something? Which people should he listen to? What is the most important thing for him to do?

The king, therefore, sent messengers throughout his kingdom, promising a large sum of money to anyone who would answer these three questions.

Many wise men came to the king, but they all answered his questions differently. In reply to the first question, some said the king must prepare a timetable and then follow it strictly. Only in this way, they said, could he do everything at its proper time….