

some translation difficulties in the use of false friends in english:

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### ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on some aspects of translation based on blending distinct linguistic domains such as English Language and Portuguese in using false friends in the English class in tertiary level students, reflecting namely on:

1. the choice of a word suitable to the context in L2 ;
2. the difficulties encountered by choice of that word that could be misleading, by relying in a false L1 reality that is going to adulterate reality in the L2 domain;
3. the difficulty in making such type of distinctions due to the lack of linguistic and lexical knowledge.
4. the need to study the cause of these difficulties by working, not only with their peers, but also with their language teacher to develop strategies to diminish and if possible to eradicate this type of linguistic and, above all, translation problem by making an inventory of those types of mistakes.

In relation to the first point it is necessary to know that translation tasks involve much more than literal concepts (Ladmiral, 1975) : furthermore it is necessary and suitable to realise that lexicon relies in significant contexts (Coseriu 1966), which connects both domains, that, at first sight do not seem to be compatible.

In other words, although students have the impression they dominate lexicon due to the fact that they possess at least seven years of foreign language exposure that doesn't mean they master the particularities engaged in such a delicate task as translation is concerned. There are some chromaticisms in the words (false friends), that need to be researched and analysed later on by both students and language teachers. The reason for such state of affairs lies in their academic formation, of a mainly general stream, which

has enabled them only for knowledge of the foreign language, *but* not for the *translation* as a tool as it is required only when they reach the tertiary level.

Besides, for their translations they rely, most of the times, on glossaries, whose dominant language is portuguese of Brazil, which is, obviously, much different from the portuguese mother tongue reality and even more of English. So it seems necessary to use with caution the working tools (glossaries) that work as surpluses, but could bring translation problems as we will see.

Pannel: Translation

Key words; false friends, English-Portuguese, translation difficulties

The purpose of this paper is to present a preliminary study of the use of false friends (ff) – interaction of linguistic systems (Silva et ali, 2003) – words whose meaning seems to be similar both in L1 and L2, in this particular case, English and in Portuguese, but they aren't – by students of tertiary level, namely of ISCAP.

This is a colloquial way used in Linguistics, namely in specific areas of translation (c.f. Larson and Maillot 1989) to refer to cognates with different meaning.

But it can be also seen as a way of acquiring L2 vocabulary (cf. Laufer 1990).

So, there are two research streams about the problematic of ff and false cognates, one related with vocabulary acquisition and another with translation.

It is known problems such as these arise frequently when students are involved in theses two tasks. Students, when learning second language vocabulary or translating, use those words convinced that they are employing the correct concept but, in fact, they aren't, because they rely on a meaning or translation belonging, in our case, to a Portuguese

reality that is going to adulterate the meaning in the L2 context. So the choice of a word is not suitable to the context in L2, in both situations, which is going to lead to ambiguity, incorrect interpretation, that, consequently, can lead to changes, as far as information is concerned (Lerchundi and Moreno1999).

If look up the expression *false friend* in the dictionary we notice that it is non existent. But if we look up the two words separately, the adjective false is “something made so as to deceive or mislead”, and friend “person whose company, interests and attitudes one finds sympathetic and to whom one is not closely related” which is true when referring to false friends in a linguistic and translation domain, i. e., words that seem to be closely related to the native meaning in the L2, but that could be (and are effectively) deceiving or misleading. This is the current explanation, but if we analyse the literature on this subject we find out that there isn’t a lot of consistent research (Franco 1998), although it seems to be an area in which student’s fail frequently (Lerchundi and Moreno1999).

Galisson and Coste (1983) in their dictionary of language didactics mention Koesler and Derocquigny (1928) that were considered the first ones that began to interest themselves for this theme and more recently Vinay and Darbelnay (1963) whose definition of false friends is “ words that have a correspondence, from one language to another, either by its etymology or by its form, but due to the evolution within the two languages, by the fact they come from two different civilizations, they have adopted different meanings”. But they go further and besides this explanation they try to classify them into three types:

- semantic false friends – that can be distinguished by a difference in the meaning;
- stylistic false friends – that keep, to a certain extent, the same meaning, but are separated by semantic differences, i.e. that are related to intellectual or affective

values (being pejorative, a compliment or something neutral) or that have different means, environments or cultures;

- structural false friends – those that not having none of these features, possess either lexical (compound or derived words), or syntactic structures, which don't keep the meaning that the analysis of its constitutive elements seem to indicate, in individual terms.

Silva et ali, (2003) in a study covering Portuguese and Spanish vocabulary (interlexical study, cf. Laufer 1990), also define false friends:

“(...) é aquele signo linguístico que geralmente pelo efeito de partilha de uma mesma etimologia, tem uma estrutura externa muito semelhante, ou equivalente a outro signo numa segunda língua, cujo significado é completamente diferente. Essa comunidade de formas ou aparências leva o falante a estabelecer uma correspondência de significados ou aproveitando essa terminologia a acreditar numa relação de amizade semântica falsa”.

Thus the competence, in factual terms, of a rigorous translation, would have more significantly to do with the exact notion of what, for each of the languages (with the same incidence, in this case, for the L1 and L2) are the cases in which the interference and the transference of prevalent senses contaminate reciprocally, or, on the contrary, reject themselves in terms of comprehension, than more properly with the linguistic-lexical domain of those languages, which is very difficult to measure. So the study of the ff is only feasible from an enlarged analysis of learning and comprehension of L2 and how it is going to influence their own native language,

that means its only possible if we study vocabulary, that has been marginalized from the other aspects of L2 learning such as phonology, syntax and discourse. And, afterwards go to the translation areas or domains to complement the research.

One of the reasons that arise from the study of lexicon is, as Laufer (1990) points out, why certain words are learned more easily than others. The answer in her opinion is due to two factors:

- intralexical, such as phonological, grammatical, and semantic features of each language words;
- interlexical, derived from the relations established between new words and the already acquired ones.

The same researcher states that, in studies made with bilingual or multilingual people it seems that they don't store words/terms from different idioms in independent lexicons, but in one only gathered lexicon, classifying those words in semantic fields. And inside those fields words are subdivided within the language they belong.

Side by side with this semantic classification, there is a phonological one, that functions in a way that the words whose sound is similar are the closer in terms of lexicon. By doing this, each learned word interacts with others from the lexicon following phonological and semantic principles. This explains why students learn more easily the words belonging to a second idiom (L2) that are similar to their mother tongue (L1).

Laufer (1990) also divides ff into different categories:

- cognates – similar words in form and meaning;
- false cognates – words similar in form, but with distinct meaning.

But this division is not consensual, as other researchers (cf. Larson and Maillot, 1989) in other studies devoted to translation provide another explanation.

Larson (1989) defines:

- false cognates – words from the original language (L2) very similar to the receptor language (L1), because they are cognates, but, in reality, they mean something different;

Maillot (1997), states that ff are terms from different languages, whose origin is identical, of similar form or close enough, having in mind the structure of the languages involved, to be seen as equivalent, although they have a different meaning.

Moss (1992) proposes another classification distinguishing between ff and false cognates. This kind of distinction underlies with etymological questions, whereas ff rely on the origin and meaning of the word. For her:

- false cognates are similar words in appearance, but they don't derive from a common root ;
- ff are cognates, i.e. words that derive from the same root, but whose meaning has changed differently in L1 and L2.

I consider the classifications of Laufer (1990) and Moss (1992), as the most complete ones and the ones that sustain the present preliminary study. And having

them in mind, after the students have made a written test I began to classify them as ff and false cognates, and see which were the ones that were prevalent.

I have introduced a subdivision in the classification of ff in three categories:

- FF1 – terms whose meaning in English and Portuguese doesn't coincide whatsoever, i.e. pure ff. A paradigmatic example of this type of ff is using pretend thinking that it means in Portuguese *pretender*, when it never does (c.f. Lerchundi and Moreno 1999 pair actually/*actualmente*).
- FF2 – words whose meaning in English coincides with the Portuguese but only in some of its assumptions, it means partial ff for instance presume whose meaning besides of *presumir* may be, among other things, *pensar*, *supor*, *assumir* (c.f. Lerchundi and Moreno 1999 pair paper/ *papel*, *artículo*, *ponencia*).

So it seems there are difficulties encountered by choice of that word that could be misleading, by relying in a false L1 reality that is going to adulterate reality in the L2 domain;

- FF3 – terms whose meaning is coincident in the two languages but whose translation to the Portuguese cognate, in a certain context, leads to a lack chromaticism (c.f. "falta de propiedad o pérdida de matiz", Lerchundi and Moreno 1999 ). It means that they cannot be seen as ff in strict sense, as it doesn't affect the information, but only the translation quality what is in accordance with the difficulty in making such type of distinctions due to the

lack of linguistic and lexical knowledge. An example of this could be average/media (c.f. Lerchundi and Moreno 1999 pair efficiency/*eficiencia*, *rendimiento*).

This preliminary study involved second year students that were having English classes in ISCAP. The sample consisted on 32 students who had to fill in a cloze test where there were given the correct word and the ff, (for instance, actually/presently; pretended/intended; consultation/appointment, among others) mixed randomly, and they had to choose which was the appropriate word for that specific blank space according to the context. These students should already be proficient in English, as its majority comes from the secondary school with, at least 5 years of exposure to that foreign language, but it varies from 5 to 9 years. So it was expected that they would not have much difficulty when doing this kind of exercise, as they, for sure, had been exposed to this type of words/terms before.

But that wasn't the real situation. They experienced lots of difficulties in filling the test, and sometimes a complete absence of knowledge about the correct word to use. So, simply they left an empty blank. The reasons for doing so are of various kinds:

- They don't read much, and the absence of exposure to reading causes lack of vocabulary, and with it lack of knowledge that one word may not have that particular meaning in the L2, but presumably more than one, depending on the context given;
- the exposure to ff in high school was not a meaningful one, and it seems that they weren't given the correspondent relevance;



- in classes they were told to look for glossaries of ff but the majority they had access were Brazilian glossaries in English, because in Portuguese they only have few studies that were devoted to other languages (French and Spanish – (cf. Xatara Oliveira 1995, Silva et ali. 2003), being the last one only devoted to the issue. So the reality was a complete shortage of English- Portuguese studies, on that particular domain.

The results of this preliminary study were similar to the ones reached by Lerchundi and Moreno (1999). In their survey they had a majority of FF2, followed by FF1 and finally FF3.

Most of the students involved in this preliminary study (52%) committed FF1 - pure ff. It means they didn't know at all i.e. there was a total absence of correspondence between the words either in L1 as in L2, what is consistent with the thesis of lack of lexical knowledge.

A range of 41% didn't write anything, leaving simply the blank space, as it was presented in the cloze test.

5,5% of the students committed FF2 – partial ff.. It seemed they already knew one meaning but not the other possible ones, due to all the lexical deficit mentioned before.

Only 1,5% committed FF3 – not considered ff, because they don't affect a lot the meaning but the context – that's why they are considered contextual.

So the solution to this problem could be provided with the help of the teacher by asking them:

- what would be the real meaning of the FF1 in both languages, using for instance, on line glossaries available adverting them for the dangers of relying on the realities of one single language, even if it seems so close as Portuguese from Brazil;
- the correct contextualisation of FF2, by thinking about other possible meanings and then give examples, explaining their reasoning to reach to that/those word(s); search in the web, on glossaries or on corpora, and again focus their attention on the role of context;
- to look up in the dictionary, to gather information about the word/s that have select instead of the correct one to the context, so that they could see the differences or chromaticisms and, after that, try to search for the correct word/term as to FF3.

This is nothing but a preliminary study on ff. I intend to enlarge it to other languages and realities, to see if the underlying mental processes of word acquisition are the same or they change, depending on the pairs of languages studied.

But, as far as English is concerned, this kind of help, together with the research made by the students have proven to be very helpful to strength the acquisition and learning of vocabulary.

Abbreviations:

FF – false friends

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