FALSE FRIENDS – TRUE ENEMIES IN LANGUAGE?

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Abstract

This paper has a twofold objective: on the one hand, I try to distinguish between false friends and some bordering phenomena, such as translation, folk etymology and semantic calque, by checking the mechanisms underlying the semantic transfer and the causes which favour inappropriate use/misuse; on the other hand, I call attention to the cases where false friends cease to be real enemies and become part of language history, by repeated use, or part of literary texts, by intentional use.

Key words: *false friends, folk etymology, semantic calque, translation, language dynamics*

Résumé

Cette étude a deux objectifs: premièrement, je vise à tracer une limite entre les faux-amis et plusieurs phénomènes apparentés, tels que la traduction, l'étymologie populaire et le calque sémantique, en vérifiant les mécanismes qui se trouvent à la base du transfert de sens et les causes qui favorisent leur utilisation inappropriée; deuxièmement, j'attire l'attention sur les situations où les faux-amis ne sont plus des ennemies, mais deviennent partie intégrante de l'histoire du langage, par utilisation répétée, ou partie des textes littéraires, par utilisation intentionnelle.

Mots-clés: *faux-amis, étymologie populaire, calque sémantique, traduction, dynamique des langues*

0. Introductory remarks

The objective of the present paper is to throw some light on a phenomenon that has increased throughout the last ten years or so, as a result of globalisation and, more specifically, of a growing impact of English on other languages. Yet, my approach is more descriptive and to a certain extent predictive rather than prescriptive, as the analysis of the data enabled me to distinguish between different cases of false friends, some of which are quite difficult to separate from semantic calques, whereas others range closer to folk etymology. The question is thus to see whether one deals with a semantic enrichment, influenced by semantic calques, or with a semantic misuse, triggered by formal resemblance between two or more words.

Following the above-mentioned possibilities, Section 1 of the paper aims at providing a definition of false friends, Section 2 focuses on false friends and the bordering categories of semantic calque, on the one hand, and folk etymology, on the other hand (without neglecting the problem of translation). Sections 3 and 4 are devoted to the causes and effects, respectively, of false friends, whilst Section 5 brings forward some conclusions drawn, based on an inventory of false friends registered in contemporary Romanian, most of which have English origin.

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1. Definition(s) of the concept

Generally, the concept of *false friends*[1] is used in the plural, since it involves pairs/sets of words which have look-alikes in other language(s), that is, words which are similar in appearance and/or pronunciation (they look or sound similar), but have different meanings. To put it in another way, false friends are words that share their signifiers but differ totally or partially as regards their meaning (Chamizo-Domínguez, 2008: 1). This is tantamount to saying that false friends represent words which can be confusing for some speakers, especially for students learning a foreign language, who tend to overgeneralise and overestimate their own linguistic competence[2], by assuming that they know the meaning of these words, which are actually misleading. The result of such an action is a misidentification of the words, following some sort of interference (negative transfer) from their first language, given that a word in a foreign language bears a deceptive resemblance to a word in one's own language, without sharing any meaning[3]. Consequently, false friends, in virtue of their formal resemblance and absence of shared meaning(s), are to be interpreted as a particular case of cross-linguistic homonymy or paronymy. Actually, some authors refer to paronyms as internal false friends (Maillot, 1997, *apud* Jorge Chaparro, 2012: 177) and to false friends as heteronyms, that is, homonyms/paronyms belonging to different languages (Jorge Chaparro, 2012: 184).

According to Cenoz (2001, 2003) and Kellerman (1983), this cross-linguistic influence is more apparent when the languages involved are typologically related[4]. The reality of contemporary Romanian seems to contradict them, since the vast majority of false friends involve English words, which is quite strange, taking into consideration that the two languages do not belong to the same linguistic family. Yet, one should bear in mind that English has been extensively influenced by Latin, which led to a parallel lexical development, that is, words of the same (Latin) origin have evolved differently, giving rise to uneven correspondences. Consequently, in such cases, the deceptive meaning comes as a result of semantic change and dissimilar development (Chacón Beltrán, 2006: 30).

2. False friends and the bordering phenomena of semantic calque and folk etymology

What brings these three phenomena together is the fact that they all involve a transfer of substance, that is, a new meaning is added to an existing lexical unit[5]. Yet, they

[1] See also the French concept of *faux-amis*.

[2] It corresponds to the *potential knowledge* (learners' knowledge or familiarity with a word/grammar construction which actually does not exist in L2 (Ringbom, 1992, *apud* Chacón Beltrán, 2006, p. 31).

[3] Here comes the so-called etymological feeling: when people hear a foreign word for the first time, they try to make sense of it by relating it to words they know better. They guess what it must mean – and often guess wrongly, which leads to the mistaken use of one word for another. This is quite a common mistake among non-native speakers, also called malapropism (from the proper name *Malaprop*, a character who frequently made inappropriate statements). Another phrase used to designate this type of misuse is *deceptive cognates* (as opposed to *cognates*, words in two or more languages [that] have a common origin because of their diachronic relationship and, as a result, they share some sort of formal and/or semantic affinity (Chacón Beltrán, 2006, p. 29).

[4] *Apud* Chacón Beltrán (2006, p. 30).

[5] For a detailed discussion about semantic calques and folk etymology, see Hristea (1968, 1981, p. 17-22).

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differ in terms of the way this transfer is achieved: semantically motivated, in the case of semantic calques, and formally triggered, in the case of false friends and folk etymology.

The difference between false friends and semantic calques is sometimes difficult to make. Generally speaking, semantic calques are considered half loans which means that a word "borrows" a new meaning from its foreign counterpart. Consequently, this transfer involves the existence of a common semantic content (the two words sharing at least one meaning), as opposed to the formal similarity which accounts for the emergence of false friends.

That is to say that, in order to speak about a semantic calque, three basic conditions should be met: the model (the word in the source language) is polysemous; the model and the copy (the word in the target language) share at least one meaning; the model has at least one meaning more than the copy and, based on the shared meaning(s), the additional meaning(s) is/are transferred to the copy.

For instance, the Romanian word *pânză* ("canvas"), initially monosemantic, acquired a new meaning from its French counterpart, *toile*, which has an additional meaning resulted from a metonymic transfer ("painting made on canvas"). This additional meaning is transferred to the copy, based on the shared meaning. The same can be said about more recent semantic calques, such as *atelier*, used with the meaning of "seminar" ("seminar; a conference or other meeting for discussion or training; a small group of students at university, meeting to discuss topics with a teacher"), under the influence of Eng. *workshop* ("a meeting at which a group engages in intensive discussion and activity on a particular subject or project"), *a îngheța* "to freeze"(prices, for instance), meaning "keep or stop at a fixed level or in a fixed state", under the influence of French *géler*, *imagine* "public perception, notoriety", according to the second meaning of Eng. *image* "the general impression that a person, organization, or product presents to the public" (see also Fr. *image*), *provocare* "difficult but exciting situation which proves smb.'s qualities", etc, corresponding to the first meaning of Eng. *challenge* "1. a call to someone to participate in a contest or fight to decide who is superior; a demanding task or situation; an attempt to win a sporting contest". It is quite strange, however, that Romanian dictionaries do not register these new meanings attached to *imagine* and *provocare*, although they are very frequent and are referred to as semantic calques by Stoichițoiu Ichim (2006: 76).

The situation of Rom. *expertiză* ("thorough examination of a certain object, made by an expert") and Eng. *expertise* ("great skill or knowledge in a particular field") is slightly different; yet, quite recently, the Romanian word seems to have acquired a new meaning, triggered mainly by formal proximity and perhaps secondly by some shared semantic content[6], as proved by its being used with the meaning of the British word.

To further distinguish between false friends and folk etymology[7], it is essential to mention that the formal similarity I referred to involves words from different

[6] Since a thorough examination is normally performed by someone who proves great skill or knowledge in a particular field. In my opinion, given the semantic affinity and the frequency in use, the pair *expertiză/expertise* illustrates a case of partial false friends.

[7] The process of altering otherwise incomprehensible/unfamiliar words from the same language, in order to give them a semblance of meaning; a popular but mistaken account of the origin of a word or phrase; the process by which the form of an unfamiliar or foreign word is adapted to a more familiar form through popular usage.

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languages, in the former case, and words from the same language, in the latter case. In other words, one can speak of a sort of cross-linguistic homonymy/paronymy, as opposed to an intralinguistic homonymy/paronymy.

The risk of mixing up false friends and folk etymology is limited to the situations which result in the corruption of meaning, whilst the form stays unaltered. As expected, this kind of folk etymology involves recent loanwords, incompletely assimilated or incorrectly represented which in addition present an obvious formal resemblance with one/more word(s) from the same language, without sharing any semantic content. This enables me to say that folk etymology which alters the meaning of words represents the reverse of false friends. More precisely, folk etymology is caused by paronymic attraction and consists in the use of the loanword with the meaning of the (better-known) indigenous word which resembles it, whereas false friends involve the use of an indigenous word with the meaning of the loanword, based on the same formal affinity.

Compare, for instance, Eng. *location*/Rom. *locație*, on the one hand, and Rom. *vindicativ* ("vengeful, vindictive")/vindecător ("which helps smth./smb. to heal"), on the other hand. In the first situation, the use of *locație* ("1. rent; 2. space for which a rent should be paid") with the meaning of *location* ("1. a particular place or position, the action or process of locating, and 2. an actual place in which a film or broadcast is made, as distinct from a simulation in a studio") used to be referred to as a classic example of false friends, where the meaning of a rather technical word is broadened, not on semantic/etymological grounds, but as a result of an accidental formal resemblance between the Romanian and the English words involved. Yet, DEX 2009 ended by accepting a new meaning of *locație*, close to the second meaning of *location* ("a certain place, precisely identified"), which seems to question the status of false friends usually attached to the pair *locație/location*.

Unlike the previous example, the use of *vindicativ* ("vengeful, vindictive") with the meaning of *vindecător* ("which helps smth./smb. to heal") falls within the scope of folk etymology which alters the meaning of words, since a false etymology is established between the two words. Such unmotivated semantic transfers occur quite often when recent loans, whose meaning(s) is/are more or less obscure, end by being used with the meaning of a better-known, older word, as a consequence of a mere formal proximity. Other cases of the same kind are represented by words such as: *salutar* ("welcome, salutary, beneficial"), *specios* ("misleading, deceptive"), *mutual* ("mutual, reciprocal"), *fortuit* ("fortuitous, accidental"), *inextricabil* ("difficult, complicated"), which are sometimes wrongly associated with *a saluta* ("to greet"), *special* ("special"), *mut* ("dumb"), *forțat* ("forced") and "which cannot break down", respectively[8].

One should also take into account the linguistic connection between false friends and translation, since all the situations which fall within the scope of false friends are triggered by inaccurate/inappropriate translations. Yet, three observations are worth making here: false friends always involve an inaccurate/inappropriate translation; some translations are appropriate/successful, thus contributing to the enrichment of the target language; not all inaccurate/inappropriate translations are triggered by false friends.

[8] See also Avram (1987, p. 217, 219-220).

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The first observation needs further discussion, given that it accounts for the negative treatment of translation, as expressed in the famous aphorism *Traduttore, tradittore*. In other words, in the case of false friends, one could indeed speak of a translation which betrays the user/the original meaning, as a result of an erroneous transfer of meaning from a foreign word to a word in one's own language, based on a mere formal resemblance between them, while completely ignoring the total lack of common semantic content. Such a transfer results in the use of an indigenous word with the meaning of a foreign word which is very similar to/identical with it in terms of form (either written or spoken).

For instance, Rom. *determinat* represents the past participle of the verb *a determina*, consequently, it means "caused, triggered by". Its formal closeness to Eng. *determined* ("having firmness of purpose; resolute") accounts for the fact that Romanian speakers who have some knowledge of English use the former word with the meaning of the latter, despite the absence of common meaning to account for the transfer.

The second observation should represent the rule, since (accurate) translations lead to the enrichment of a language with new words and/or meanings; yet, there are numerous translations that diverge from this rule, which may have negative impact on the target language.

As for the last observation, inappropriate translations can be also triggered by lack of attention, haste, the influence of other languages (not necessarily the mother tongue), as well as – most frequently – by a precarious knowledge of the source language.

3. Causes of false friends

The examples analysed above tend to indicate six major causes of false friends:

3.1. The globalisation process, reflected in the growing use and impact of English on other languages, the extreme point of which is represented by the so-called anglomania[9]. What is even more troublesome is the fact that anglomania often combines with a superficial knowledge of either the Romanian or the English meanings (or, even worse, of both).

3.2. Lack of systematicity in media translations[10].

3.3. Oversimplification of lexicographers when writing dictionaries (there are false friends which have become commonplace, so they are quoted in some dictionaries[11], together with the correct meaning of the respective word).

3.4. Borrowings can be a frequent source of false friends, in three ways: 1. in the target language, the borrowed word can be restricted to just one of the possible meanings of a polysemous word in the source language (for example, the French word *chef*, which has been borrowed by almost all European languages, but its original

[9] It is worth mentioning that there are very few examples of false friends which do not involve English models. Among them, I can quote the Italian words *morbido* ("soft"), *autista* ("car driver"), *tenerezza* ("tenderness") and *sinistra* ("left"), whose forms are dangerously close to the Romanian *morbid* ("morbid"), *autist* ("autistic"), *tinerețe* ("youth") and *sinistră* ("sinister, gloomy, dark"). As for French, an example of false friends is represented by the pair *aglomerat* ("crowded") and *aglomérée* ("conglomerate, conglomeration, mixture").

[10] The lack of systematicity in media translations, as one of the causes of false friends, is beyond the scope of this paper.

[11] See, for example, Forăscu and Popescu (2005).

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meaning has been restricted to the culinary area); 2. the borrowings can develop meanings which were absent in the source language (see, for example, the case of Rom. *leader*, whose meaning is richer than that of its English counterpart), and 3. the meaning of borrowings can diverge from the meaning(s) of the model, as a result of their being used figuratively, as illustrated by Rom. *miting*, which relates to Eng. *meeting* "(any kind of) gathering", whose meaning has been narrowed to "an assembly where people gather to claim different rights or to discuss political/social issues in public" (Chamizo Domínguez & Nerlich, 2002: 1845).

3.5. Semantic change and dissimilar development in two or more languages, especially those which are typologically related. In such cases, some authors speak of semantic false friends, as opposed to the so-called chance false friends (Chamizo-Domínguez, 2002 and 2008). As far as I am concerned, I prefer to use the labels of partial and total false friends respectively since all false friends are semantic (they all refer to the corruption of meaning). While total false friends represent words that share the same (graphic/phonetic) form, but have different etymology and different meanings, partial false friends are usually words with shared etymology, which underwent a process of semantic change and dissimilar development in two or more languages, but one can still detect semantic relations between them (they correspond to a certain kind of cross-linguistic polysemy). The link between their meanings is inferred *via* metaphor, metonymy, euphemism, but also *via* specialisation/ generalisation (Chamizo Domínguez & Nerlich, 2002: 1833). See, for example, Eng. *seminary*, *seminar* and Rom. *seminar*: the former meant literally and originally "seedbed", a meaning which has partly been taken over by *nursery*, used metaphorically the other way round. That standard meaning lays at the basis of the emergent meanings: 1. school, by means of a metaphor; 2. school for the ministry, by means of specialisation; 3. school for girls, *via* a second specialisation; 4. brothel, by means of a euphemism, and 5. the female genitals (old-fashioned meaning), triggered by both metonymy and euphemism. The chain of figures for Rom. *seminar* looks as follows: 1. school, by means of a metaphor; 2. school for the ministry, by means of specialisation; 3. a special kind of meeting/class taking place in the universities (*seminar*). In other words, Eng. *seminary*, *seminar* and Rom. *seminar* are partial false friends following the different chains of figures underlying the semantic changes in the two languages (Chamizo Domínguez & Nerlich, 2002: 1840).

3.6. Formal and, sometimes, structural[12] or semantic resemblance between the foreign model and the copy.

The structural resemblance is a particular case of formal resemblance, which can account for the problematic use of the Romanian adjective *determinat* and the corresponding noun, *determinare*. Originally, as seen before, they both refer to the verb *a determina* ("to cause, to trigger, to make smth. happen"), representing its past participle and long infinitive forms, respectively. Their use with the meaning of the English adjective *determined* ("having firmness of purpose; resolute") and noun *determination* ("1. the quality of being determined; firmness of purpose and 2. the process of determining smth.") illustrates, in my opinion, a case of false friends triggered by morphological similarity, since the *-ed* of *determined* indicates a past participle form, like *determinat*, the past participle of *a determina*, whose meaning is,

[12] See also Jorge Chaparro, 2012, p. 175) for a typology of false friends.

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nevertheless, "caused/triggered by", in virtue of the causative value of the base form. Likewise, *determinare* seems to no longer evoke the Romanian verb *a determina*, although it represents a post-verbal creation, but the English *determination*, a polysemous noun, one of whose meanings is a false friend. Yet, after initially speaking of a case of false friends (Stoichițoiu Ichim, 2001: 109), the same author re-evaluates the status of *determinat* (and, implicitly, of *determinare*) and speaks about a recent semantic calque (Stoichițoiu Ichim, 2006: 76) .

A more recent example of a similar semantic change is represented by the adjective *balansat*, the past participle of the (transitive) verb *a balansa*, which has begun to be used with the meaning of Eng. *balanced*, the past participle of *to balance* ("be or put in a steady position; establish equal or appropriate proportions of elements"), in virtue of their formal (structural) and semantic resemblance[13]. The problem here is that in Romanian *balansat* can be also related to the reflexive verb *a se balansa* ("to swing, to sway"), which shares no meaning with its transitive counterpart.

With respect to the semantic resemblance, false friends proved to be a scalar notion which is sometimes difficult to separate from semantic calques. This is the case of the Romanian verb *a agrea*, whose meaning has been enriched ("to approve of"), under the influence of *to agree with*. DEX 1998 accepts this meaning, but only to speak about people: *a agrea pe cineva* "to see someone in a positive light". Still, the noun *agrement* ("leisure activity") is rarely used with the meaning of *agreement* ("1. harmony in opinion or feeling; the state of being consistent; (grammar) the condition of agreeing with another word, and 2. a negotiated and typically legally binding arrangement"), despite the obvious formal proximity. Moreover, DEX 1998 indicates a second meaning which could lie at the basis of a semantic enrichment/broadening of meaning: "approval given to/requested for by a government of a country in order to appoint its diplomatic representatives". Forăscu and Popescu (2005: 16) speak about a semantic calque, in this case, while Stoichițoiu-Ichim ranges it in the category of false friends (Stoichițoiu-Ichim, 2001: 109).

As for the relationship between Rom. *a realiza* and Eng. *to realise* ("1. become fully aware of as a fact; understand clearly; 2. cause to happen; achieve smth. desired or anticipated; fulfil; 3. give actual or physical form to a concept or work; (music) add to or complete a piece of music left sparsely notated by the composer, and 4. sell for or make a profit of; convert an asset into cash"), it is again hard to tell whether it represents a case of false friends, given that the meanings overlap only partially, or a semantic calque, taking into account the second (shared) meaning – "cause to happen; achieve smth. desired or anticipated; fulfil"). Anyhow, this new meaning appears in Romanian dictionaries (DEX 1998, 2009), which means that it has been accepted, thus ceasing to be considered a case of false friends. Moreover, Stoichițoiu-Ichim (2006: 76) speaks about a semantic calque with multiple etymology, English and French (see also *réaliser*).

A similar problem appears in the case of Rom. *audiență*, influenced by Eng. *audience* ("1. the assembled spectators or listeners at an event; 2. the readership of a book, magazine or newspaper, and 3. a formal interview with a person in authority"), where linguists' opinions oscillate between false friends (Stoichițoiu-Ichim 2001: 109)

[13] DEX 1998 also indicates a technical meaning of *balansat* (restricted to different devices), which is quite close to the meaning of Eng. *balanced*: "set so as to respect the limits of balance".

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and semantic calque (Forăscu & Popescu, 2005: 30, Stoichițoiu-Ichim, 2006: 80). Yet, Romanian dictionaries do not register this new meaning, which seems to favour the first interpretation.

I can also refer to the uncertain status of some Romanian words such as *suport* and *tribut*, whose semantic information does not completely overlap with that of Eng. *support* ("1. a person or thing that supports; the action of supporting or the state of being supported; corroborative evidence, and 2. assistance, encouragement, or approval") and *tribute* ("1. an act, statement, or gift intended to show gratitude, respect, or admiration; smth. resulting from or indicating the worth of smth. else; 2 – **historical** – payment made periodically by one state or ruler to another, especially as a sign of dependence, and 3 – historical – a proportion of ore or its equivalent, paid to a miner for work, or to the owner or lessor of a mine"), respectively, which should be enough to place them in the category of false friends. In my opinion, the first example can be considered a semantic calque, given that one can infer the new meaning *via* a movement from concrete to abstract (see also Stoichițoiu Ichim, 2006: 84), whereas the second example ranges in the class of stylistic false friends[14], since the two words share a meaning which is current in one of the languages, but archaic in the other. Yet, DEX (1998 and 2009) accepts both new meanings attached to *suport* and *tribut*[15], probably following their frequent use in contemporary Romanian, corroborated with the influence of the French *support* and *tribut* (< Lat. *tributum*).

Another interesting example of stylistic false friends that can be quoted here is that of the adjective *patetic*, whose original meaning ("showing/displaying vivid emotions/pathos") seems to have been gradually replaced by "jalnic" ("pitiful"), under the pressure of Eng. *pathetic* ("1. arousing pity, especially through vulnerability or sadness; 2 – informal – miserably inadequate, and 3 – **archaic** – relating to emotions").

Actually, some authors distinguish between total and partial false friends, the former class comprising words which have an utterly different meaning, whereas the latter refers to polysemous words, one of whose meanings is a false friend and the other(s) is/are true cognate(s) (Chacón Beltrán, 2006: 32). Partial false friends have a main meaning in one of the languages, but may exhibit a certain number of different meanings in the other language. Total false friends, however, show a clear semantic difference in both languages, by establishing a correspondence between one word and one meaning (*ibidem*, 36). From this perspective, Rom. *suport*, *tribut* and *patetic* range in the class of partial false friends, since they share some semantic content with Eng. *support*, *tribute* and *pathetic*, respectively.

Another possible taxonomy tends to group false friends according to whether they are graphic or phonetic false friends, that is, whether their spelling or pronunciation, respectively, evokes the spelling/pronunciation of a word in L1. Yet, one should bear in mind that all false friends, regardless of their form (written/spoken) or origin, are semantic. The examples analysed before, as well as the vast majority of

[14] Words whose meanings overlap only partially and the shared meaning has a different stylistic status, for example, current *vs*. archaic (Jorge Chaparro, 2012, p. 175).

[15] The problematic status of words such as *suport* and *tribut* is proved by the fact that Stoichițoiu Ichim first ranges them in the category of false friends (Stoichițoiu Ichim, 2001, p. 109), and later on, given their frequent use, the same author labels them as semantic calques (Stoichițoiu Ichim, 2006, p. 77, 84).

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false friends, seem to be graphic false friends, since the mistaken transfer is triggered mainly by the written form of the words involved.

Concerning the Romanian expression *a aplica pentru* (o bursă, for instance) "to apply for (a scholarship)", in comes another problem, that of assessing the quality of false friends or phraseological calque of the above-mentioned structure. Here, the syntactic regime of the verb changes from transitive to intransitive, due to the English phrasal verb *to apply for*, which could be an argument in favour of its phraseological interpretation[16]. Yet, despite its frequent use, Romanian dictionaries do not register this structure, so it seems that lexicographers favour the solution of false friends.

To take another example, *a acomoda*, used transitively, is sometimes (wrongly) connected with Eng. *to accommodate* ("1. provide lodging or sufficient space for, and 2. fit in with the wishes and needs of"), which in my opinion represents a mere case of false friends, strengthened by the fact that this meaning does not appear in Romanian dictionaries. Interestingly enough, the same Romanian verb, used intransitively, as a reflexive verb, shares the second meaning of *to accommodate*, which means that in addition to the formal proximity, a grammatical interference (a change of syntactic regime) lies at the basis of this emergent use. Another observation which is worth signalling here is that, like in the case of *a agrea/agrement*, *a se acomoda/acomodare*, the latter used to mean "a room, building, or space in which someone may live or stay", the nouns obtained by derivational means are less likely to undergo the semantic transfer which is responsible for the emergence of false friends, although both nouns share the secondary meaning of *agreement* ("a negotiated and typically legally binding arrangement") and *accommodation* ("adjustment to or reconciliation of changing circumstances"), respectively.

4. Effects of false friends

False friends may have complementary effects, depending on whether they lead to a semantic enrichment or to a semantic misuse. The first effect appears when false friends are difficult to separate from semantic calques (and are often labelled as such), or when their frequent use results in the emergent meaning being accepted (see the cases of *a agrea*, *locație*, *a realiza*, *suport*, *tribut*, analysed before). I can add here that, besides being ever present semantic traps which can mislead unwary speakers, false friends can also offer semantic opportunities, by being successfully exploited in literary texts. The latter effect (semantic misuse) is illustrated by examples like *a acomoda/acomodare* and *agrement*, which are not entirely accounted for by Eng. *to accommodate/accommodation* and *agreement*, respectively.

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have tried to distinguish between false friends and a few bordering phenomena, such as translation, on the one hand, folk etymology and

[16] Stoichițoiu-Ichim (2001, p. 109) ranges this example in the category of false friends, to later change the label to semantic calque (Stoichițoiu-Ichim, 2006, p. 83). In their turn, Forăscu and Popescu (2005, p. 23-24) speak of homonymy and false friends, given the lack of common semantic content between the two verbs. Unlike them, I am tempted to consider this example as being primarily a case of phraseological calque, in virtue of preserving the preposition from the source language, as proved by the frequent use of *a aplica pentru*, as a literal translation of *to apply for* ("to ask for a job, scholarship, etc. in writing, using conventional formulae") and secondly a semantic change which is only partially motivated (given that *to apply* also means "bring into operation or use and put (a substance) on a surface"), that is, a case of partial false friends.

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semantic calques, on the other hand. In order to do that, I checked the mechanisms underlying the semantic transfer and the causes which favour inappropriate use/misuse.

Anyhow, be they a product of ignorance (folk etymology) or snobbery/ cosmopolitism (false friends), such semantic transfers triggered by formal similarity should not be underestimated as a factor of language history, for many familiar words owe their form to them. The "guess" (the inferring strategy) speakers make might be mistaken; yet, if enough people make the same mistake, the error can become part of the language and end by being accepted. That is why some false friends, especially those that have become commonplace, cease to be real enemies, either because they are used repeatedly (in current speech) or intentionally (within literary texts).

My analysis has proved that false friends always represent cases of inaccurate translations (yet, it is worth mentioning that not all translations are inaccurate and, most importantly, not all inaccurate translations are triggered by false friends). Folk etymology which alters the meaning of words represents the reverse of false friends and is caused by intralinguistic paronymy, the result of which is the use of the more recent word with the meaning of the older, better-known word, based on an accidental formal resemblance between them. Unlike folk etymology, false friends involve the use of an indigenous word with the meaning of the loanword, based on the same formal affinity. Concerning the linguistic relation between false friends and semantic calques, the resemblance between the two words is placed at the formal level, in the former case, and at the semantic level, in the latter case.

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