FALSE FRIENDS ENCOUNTERED IN THE NAVAL ARCHITECTURE LANGUAGE

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Abstract: International terms acquire different basic or additional meanings when they enter Romanian. This led to false friends or false cognates. Having a similar form in English and Romanian, one has the tendency to use the Romanian form with the English meaning or vice versa. The present study illustrates this tendency trough examples from naval architecture texts.

Keywords: false friends, false cognates, naval architecture language, semantics

Introduction

There are many definitions of the category of word pairs that is traditionally called **false friends** or **false cognates** (and known under the rather loose term **prieteni falși** in Romanian). David Crystal he offers the following definition:

> In COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS, a term describing words in different languages which resemble each other in FORM, but which express different meanings; also called false cognates. . . . Examples include French demander, which translates into English as 'to request' not 'to demand', and Italian caldo which translates as 'warm' not 'cold'. (Crystal 2003, 176)

Robert Hill has pointed out in his *Dictionary of False Friends* (1982: i) that false friends are particularly treacherous words when it comes to understanding what somebody speaking another language actually means:

> Since the early 1960s, when I began teaching English as a foreign language, there has been a marked shift in emphasis in the way we teach, from detailed studies of texts, to methods which encourage the students to talk more. From the beginning, I remember noticing how the meaning of certain English words was repeatedly misunderstood: the context might offer no hint of the fact that words like sympathetic, smoking, or control meant something quite different in English from the similar word in other languages. I am ashamed too, when I think how many times I have used fastidious as a reasonable synonym for fussy before I discovered that the former was likely to be understood by all Latins (i.e. speakers of Portuguese, Spanish, French and Italian) as irritating, troublesome, or annoying.

Since ''the context might offer no hint'', a pragmatic strategy is needed to resolve this sometimes hidden semantic problem. This can be especially problematic when reading a (badly)

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translated text. Translations of false friends can lead to certain ambiguities which can, however, be exploited themselves in literature to achieve certain effects (cf. for example, Sender, 1994; Daninos, 1990).

Mistakes, misunderstandings, and the humorous exploitation of **false friends** are ubiquitous when translating technical texts from English to Romanian, as we did. Since **false friends** are perhaps the main enemy of technical translators, they must know their enemies thoroughly so as to be able to beat them.

Corpus

At this time there is no English-Romanian dictionary of naval architecture false friends produced so far. We have gathered a naval architecture corpus (university courses, catalogues, documents in English and Romanian) from which false friends can be withdrawn. Considering the increasing number of Romanian engineers who work in English speaking shipyards, the necessity of false friends entrances in general dictionaries as well as the production of a specialized ones arises.

Method

In order to discover the most frequent false friends in our corpus, we have studied the English words present in Romanian textbooks and counted their occurrence. Moreover, we have studied their meaning and usage in English and Romanian.

Findings

The present study shows the most frequent false friends encountered in our corpus. However, the presence of false friends in Romanian naval architecture texts is the proof that a technical translator must be proficient in both languages as well as the technical field he/she translates from/into. To illustrate our point of view, we have analyzed the following false friends:

Control / Monitoring. *Control* can easily lead to mistranslations because it indicates either the act of regulating/commanding or the act of monitoring. One illustrative error is translating *this device monitors the voltage* as *acest dispozitiv monitorizează tensiunea*. The proper translation is to write *acest dispozitiv monitorizează tendința de tensiune* or, through appropriate paraphrasing, to indicate that the device is *undetector de tensiune*. The right choice of the term to use for *control*: *de control, comandă,* depends greatly on the subject of the translation and on the degree of internal consistency needed. If the system operates only through direct human intervention or if its output can change, you use *control.* Sometimes clarity can be improved using *comandă* rather than *control*. For example, *control circuit (of a machine; the circuit used to regulate the machine's operation)*would be *circuitul de comandă***.** Other times *control* is the established term used in the technical literature, so you need to know that you must use a "false friend". For example, a *control valve* (like a throttle valve, which regulates the flow of a liquid) is*o supapă de control*. And sometimes you do not need to translate *control*. For

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example, almost always the context makes unequivocally clear that a *control board (or control panel*) is simply *tablou.*

Keyed. This term appears often in texts on computer hardware or electrical equipment, where it refers to various designs (a specially made slot/projection in each connector, a particular arrangement of the connectors pins/receptacles, etc.) for which two connectors can be inserted into each other only in one way. The false friend *codat* is a double false friend. First of all, in the mechanical field (where keyed comes from), when you have a rotating piece secured to another piece through keys, slots, etc., the correct term is *încuiat*. Secondly, there is already a well-established term for plugs and sockets, so that the proper solution is to write that the connectors are***polarizat***(a less specialized expression, which may be more appropriate depending on the technical knowledge of the intended audience, is *cuplareireversibilă*).

Measurement. Here we have an example of a word, *măsurătoare* which is appropriate in several technical contexts (as in the medical field), but which becomes a false friend in a specific technical context, the electrical field. Naval architecture uses constantly *măsură.* The usage of *determinare* in an electronic related text may signal the reader that the text has been written by an outsider.

Versus. This term may accompany charts (A versus B, where A and B are two physical quantities; e.g., power versus rpm, for an engine). A typical mistranslation is *împotriva*. *Versus* means that there is a functional relation between the two quantities; consulting English-only engineering manuals shows that it is used interchangeably with *as a function of.*[1] Therefore, the correct Romanian translation is *în funcție de.*

*Strain relief***.** Even the most popular hardcopy technical bilingual dictionaries do not include this term; in dictionaries available on the Web we found *Element de susținere, de reliefde scurgere/tulpina,* and*anti-aliasing glandei*. How can one determine which (if any) of these answers is right or if all of them are false friends? Here is a procedure: First, if the document we are translating does not give us enough information, we should use the web search engines to find relevant English pages with descriptions and illustrations. These will allow you to figure out that strain relief indicates a special fitting (it can be quite complex) which protects a cable from rubbing, and seals it against liquids and oils. Thus it cannot be*șaibăde cauciuc*(a simple rubber seal ring), *eliminare* (this is an action, not a device) or *presgarnitura*(packing, which is used for shafts). Secondly, one should consult relevant Romanian reference materials (preferably catalogues and ad pages) on cables and related devices where it would be possible to find a figure and possibly a description of a strain relief.

[1] Mechanical Engineers' Handbook (1998, John Wiley & Sons).

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Contact. Consider *Tighten until gasket contacts sealing surface on mounting base*. It may seem correct to translate it with*Strânge până cândgarnituraesteîn contactcusuprafața de etanșare*. But would you have used *contact*if the writer had written instead *until the gasket and the sealing surface on mounting base match* (or fit together)?or *se sprijină*. This last term is perfect when your readers do not have a specific background in mechanics (for example, medical device operators). If you are writing for mechanics, machinists, etc., the best translation is *pânăgarniturase sprijină pesuprafața de etanșare.*

Technical translators weigh the logic of the expression. How to deal with absolute modifiers? These are expressions such as *most unique, more complete, more perfect***,** etc. They often appear in marketing contents where writer's intention is to extol the products and services of a company. Academic authors and communication consultants argue about the correctness and validity of absolute modifiers. The following is a possible solution for an expression more often encountered in a "purely technical" context: *Bring the vehicle to a complete stop before unlocking the attachment.* The writer wants to say: *Do not unload the attachment while the vehicle is moving!* To avoid the false friend and simultaneously highlight appropriately and effectively the required part of the warning, you could write: *Before unlocking the attachment, stop the vehicle.*

Rotate (knobs, wheels, etc.). Technical English documents (not necessarily as a translator) are "contaminated" by the false friend *roti*. As a transitive verb, *a roti* means to cause to turn around fast and with energy. In correct Romanian, when you rotate knobs, wheels, keys, etc., you say *înșuruba*.

Procedure. The frequency of its occurrence in software documentation—for which loan translations are often used in Romanian—has spread the use of *procedură* even in texts that are not software-related. An examination of all the meanings presented in English and Romanian dictionaries shows that procedure also means *practică*. (Sometimes*instrucțiuni* may be more appropriate than *procedură*). Unfortunately,*procedeu* is also being pushed aside by *proces*, which closely follows process. However, *procedeu* is still used in technical sources.

Conclusion

With the previous example we tried to show an effective procedure (which unfortunately can be quite time consuming) to find solutions for technical false friends not included in the usual resources: consulting relevant English sources (hardcopy or on line, but not bilingual dictionaries), comparing them with corresponding Romanian materials, and making the appropriate parallelisms. We stress that a monolingual dictionary is better, as opposed to a bilingual dictionary, because by reading about the meaning and etymology of the Italian words as you translate, you can fight the "language contamination" due to the constant exposure to English vocabulary and syntax.

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