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# Lexical Foes One More Time: a Global View

## Povzetek

### Globalni pogled na leksikalne sovražnike

Prispevek (napisan na povabilo) je osnovan predvsem na avtorjevem delu iz obdobja 1990–95. Sorazmerno izčrpno se ukvarja z različnimi možnostmi razumevanja, interpretiranja in analiziranja medjezikovnega pojma lažnih prijateljev na leksikalni ravni, pri čemer skuša osvetliti zlasti nekatere v strokovni literaturi redko omenjene širše vidike te tematike (npr. slabše razumevanje pomena leksikalnih enot v J1, J2 kot vzrok za leksikalne napake v J1, lažni prijatelji z »dvojno težavo«, dekodiranje/enkodiranje, težave z besednimi družinami, lastna imena), povzema pa tudi nekatere leksikografske ugotovitve o specifikah slovarske obravnave tega pojava. Navedenke oziroma bibliografske enote predstavljajo izbor zlasti novejših tujih del s tega področja.

## Abstract

### Lexical foes one more time: a global view

The article (invited contribution) is based primarily on the author's work done in the period 1990–95. It provides a fairly detailed discussion of the various possibilities in interpreting and analyzing the interlingual concept of false friends on the lexical level, focusing on certain rarely discussed wider aspects of the topic (e.g. vague awareness of the meaning of L1 item, L2 item causing lexical error in L1, double-difficulty-type false friendship, decoding vs. encoding, word-family-related problems, proper names). It also summarizes some lexicographical observations relating to dictionary treatment of the topic. The references represent a selection of pertinent recent writings on the subject published for the most part outside Slovenia.

## Introduction

Words that look the same, you know. A familiar topic? Sure, we all know – *sensible, sympathetic, genial, actual, eventual* and the lot. But there's a lot more to it than a handful of notorious pairs, and this is exactly what I have set out to show here. This essay focuses on the well-known interlingual lexical topic usually referred to as **false friends** (also known as **false pairs**, **deceptive cognates**, **false cognates**, **faux amis**, or – somewhat less commonly – as **agents doubles** or even **interlingual homographs** [Hartmann and James 1998: 75]), not

to mention the decidedly more exotic **deceptive demons** and **cunning cognates** (Nicholls 1994). According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995: 68) the term *faux amis* is a variant on *mots-sosies* ('double words'), apparently first used by H. Veslot and J. Banchet in their work *Les traquenards de la version anglaise* (1922). It occurs for the first time in the pioneering work *Les faux amis ou les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais* (1928) by M. Koessler and J. Derocquigny (5<sup>th</sup> edn., 1961), a classic in the field.



False friends are usually defined in the standard English-language reference sources (notably Asher ed. 1994: 5121, Bussmann 1996, Chalker and Weiner 1994, Crystal 1999, Matthews 1997, Trask 1997) as such pairs of lexical items in two languages as resemble each other in form (i.e. they "look [nearly] the same" or "look similar"), or less commonly in sound, or indeed both, but express wholly or partly dissimilar meanings: They are SEMANTICALLY DIVERGENT and are false in the sense that they may be easily taken by mistake as interlingual pairs having the same meaning (Matthews 1997: 126). Perhaps the best short definition is "one of two or more words or phrases from different languages, which are similar in form but not in meaning" (Hartmann and James 1998: 56); a good longer one is "false cognates [are] items in one language that, through their morphological structure, would seem to correspond in meaning to words in another language, but which in fact have partially or totally different meanings" (Taylor 1998: 320). The concept is fairly well-known, and is entered and defined in quite a few general monolingual English dictionaries of both native-speaker and EFL orientations, such as the *New Oxford* (Pearsall ed. 1998) and the *Encarta*® (Soukhanov and Rooney eds. 1999) on the native-speaker side and the *Longman* (Summers ed. 1995) and *Cambridge* (Procter ed. 1995) on the EFL side.<sup>1</sup> The last of these, for instance, defines the concept as follows: "A false friend is a word in a foreign language which looks or sounds similar to a word in your own language but does not have exactly the same meaning" (Procter ed. 1995: 502). An excellent definition of the phenomenon can be found in S. Pit Corder's classic on applied linguistics: "The incorrect choice of a word in the second language because of its physical resem-

blance to a word in the mother tongue" (Corder 1973: 289). Corder also implies that this is particularly common where two languages have a number of such corresponding items, and where these are also so similar in both meaning and grammatical function that they are synonymous in most contexts. Some definitions are loose and relatively vague, such as "a word or phrase whose relationship to another is based on mistaken facts or irrelevant information, especially in two different languages, e.g. *actually* (meaning 'in reality') is not the same as the French *actuellement* (meaning 'now, at present')" (Ruse and Hopton 1992: 116).

Most definitions stress the deceptive formal similarity and different meaning; thus e.g. Carl James (1998: 15) notes that false-friend errors tend to occur when a mother-tongue word and a target-language word are identical or similar in form but different in meaning, adding that instances of such relationships between parts of the word-stocks of cognate languages can be collected as learner aids, one example being Helliwell (1989), designed to help German learners of English.<sup>2</sup>

What lies at the heart of false friendship has been described by a translation theorist as "an erroneous matching triggered by some perceived but spurious similarity between an element of the source text and some presumed equivalent in the target language" (Malone 1988: 26). That is, false friends go a long way toward illustrating the fact that "contrary to the naive speaker's expectations, the identity of shape and sound does not necessarily imply the identity of meaning and use" (Ivir 1988: 95). This interlingual lexical problem is considered the most obvious type of **lexical interference** (cf. e.g. Newmark 1991: 23, 35, 79, 81-84; Smith and Klein-Braley 1985: 52-61; Swan

<sup>1</sup> However, the item is not to be found in any of the major American college dictionaries, i.e. those produced by the four leaders (Merriam-Webster, Random House, Webster's New World, and Houghton Mifflin). But if you check a search engine, say Google, you will be amazed by the number of hits generated by *false friends* – or *faux amis* for that matter. Surfing the Net in search of false-friend-related sites and checking what they contain might thus well become a translator's pastime.

<sup>2</sup> James (1998: 145-49) also classifies this type of lexical error as a formal one, specifically one of **formal misselection** where "the misselection is motivated by the formal resemblance between the TL [= target-language] word and an MT [= mother-tongue] word (an interlingual misequation)" (p. 147).



and Smith eds. 2001, *passim*), which is why quite a few translators and teachers alike have compiled their own empirically determined lists of falsely equated pairs, even though there are few thorough studies of the phenomenon currently available (a notable exception being Lázár 1998). This empirical work, however unsystematic, reflects the authors' awareness that lexical interference is more dangerous than grammatical interference because it can distort the meaning of a sentence (Newmark 1991: 83), and more specifically, that translators have to guard against the literal translation of false friends which thrust unnecessary new senses into old words, such as e.g. *control* in the sense of 'check' or 'verify,' and impose unnecessary new collocations on their own language (Newmark 1991: 35). "This type of mistake is humiliating (and usually not repeated because never forgotten) since words have been taken at their face value, with the idea that they exist in the foreign language with the same meaning as in the language of habitual use" (Newmark 1991: 79). Nicholls (1994) believes that false friends represent "language interference at its most perfidious." This is true not only of the general language, but of specialized terms as well; it is so deceptively simple and logical, for example, to assume that SI kapital and EN capital are a universally valid semantically equivalent pair, yet the financial sense of the Slovene item often calls for equity as its EN equivalent. Indeed, in false friends partial semantic overlap seems to be, generally speaking, the toughest nut to crack (Partington 1998: 52), because partial overlap is psycholinguistically so easy to regard as being full, that e.g. SI fatalen or fantazija and EN fatal or fantasy are – must be – fully equivalent. Yet on closer examination, a number of such pairs turn out to be surprisingly complex or difficult, witness e.g. SI diploma, ekskluziven, harmonija, and repertoar vs. EN diploma, exclusive, harmony, and repertory, or indeed emancipacija vs. EN emancipation, the actual English equivalent being in most cases women's movement, reflecting the commonest sense of the Slovene noun. Some pairs may

contain an unexpected problem, while some others may be, to the consternation of many language users, semantically miles apart, say SI kavalirsko vs. EN cavalierly (which means 'disrespectfully' or 'offhand'). In many cases, the difficulty involved varies with the amount of context-dependence in determining the sense of a given item or translating it into another language.

There is broad agreement, then, that false-friend-related confusions arise from a mistaken assumption that perceived surface similarity equals semantic identity. Thomas (1995: 46) observes that the confusion might arise

- because of a chance similarity in SPELLING
- because the ORIGINAL MEANING, in one or other language, has CHANGED over the years
- or because the original word was borrowed from one language and, from the start, USED DIFFERENTLY in the other.

The situation seems to be particularly difficult when the two items are very close to each other "on the surface," but not in terms of meaning, as e.g. in SI šef 'boss' vs. EN *chef*, 'a skilled cook, esp. in a hotel or restaurant' [SI *kuharski mojster*]. The difficulty may be even greater due to the influence of another similar "false" EN noun, viz. *chief*. Somewhat less obviously, errors may also arise when the L1 word is not very well known to most users, such as SI *rabat*, 'discount', which most Slovenian speakers would vaguely associate with EN *rebate*, 'tax return' without any hesitation, particularly because both belong to the field of finance. A similar situation exists, for many Slovenians at any rate, in the case of the SI adjective *virtualen* and its seeming English equivalent *virtual*, where the situation is further complicated by the adverbial pair *virtualno* vs. EN *virtually*. On the other hand, SI *dosje* is better known to most Slovenians, though it resembles a problem just referred to, in that it can be equated with two English nouns, *file* or *dossier*. A closely related problem can be observed in pairs that are likely to be almost automatically – but erroneously – taken as perfect equivalents of each other, such as SI *makadam(ski)* vs. EN *macadam*, which on closer in-



spection often turn out to be surprisingly complex, witness the “additional” EN “equivalents” *non-asphalt, tarmac, dirt (road)*. Likewise, SI *alimenti* must be considered versus not only *alimony* but also AmE *palimony*, AmE *child support*, and BrE *(child) maintenance*. In yet another related problem area, a relatively well-known SI item has two equivalents in EN that differ subtly in meaning and usage, such as SI *politika* vs. EN *politics* and *policy*, or SI *električen* vs. EN *electric* and *electrical*. Dodds (1998: 59), too, highlights this type of

problem, calling it the intralingual lexical error that manifests itself when students mistakenly opt for an inappropriate term when non-equivalent cognate pairs exist for just one L1 term.<sup>3</sup>

False-friend-related lexical research is typically carried out in synchronic contrastive terms, focusing on contemporary language problems, even though diachronic aspects of the phenomenon occasionally come up for discussion too (e.g. O'Neill and Casanovas Catalá 1997: 103–8).

## Recognition Criteria and Properties of False Friends

Again, what is basic to the very concept of false friendship is the existence of typically paired items in two or more different languages that exhibit both FORMAL CONGRUENCE and SEMANTIC NON-EQUIVALENCE (Kirkness 1997: 5). This means simply that such items are similar in form but different in meaning. The problems surrounding the concept of equivalence need not be dealt with here (cf. Kenny 1998). It is invariably the **physical resemblance** between the items of two languages that leads to “analogical overgeneralization” (Corder 1973: 290).

Some authors – but certainly not all of them (cf. e.g. Crystal 1997: 427 and Malone 1988: 21) – argue that such pairs of lexical items must also have the **same origin** (e.g. McArthur ed. 1992: 400), that is, that they must be identical in ETYMOLOGY (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995: 68). This, as Corder (1973: 290) points out, is irrelevant to the explanation of the phenomenon; furthermore, there may be cognates (= words in two or more languages that derive from the same parent word) which do not give rise to errors, simply because they do not physically resemble each

other sufficiently. Yet this type of error is common where the languages involved are cognate (James 1998: 147). Indeed, it has been observed that false friends are particularly treacherous in two closely related languages such as Dutch and German, the reason being that since there are in them so many “faithful friends” (= items that are identical in form and content), the learner often fails to take into account the – likewise very frequent – hidden differences (Arntz 1998: 68). To determine whether a pair of items have the **same origin**, of course, one will at least occasionally need to consult a reliable dictionary, preferably an etymological one, such as the user-friendly Barnhart (ed. 1988) for English and Snoj (1997) for Slovenian.

Furthermore, some authors also maintain that there is yet another salient feature of false friends, namely that they are, phonetically speaking, **foreign-sounding** to most native speakers. This feature reflects the native speaker's psycholinguistic awareness of (a degree of) “foreignness” – sometimes associated with semantic difficulty – of some of the loanwords in his/her mother tongue (= L1), coming chief-

<sup>3</sup> Dodds regards this as an intralingual error because it has to do with the system of the L2 alone. It is not to be interpreted as a basically “monolingual affair,” as there must logically exist a (partially) false interlingual “lexical equation,” say SI *politika* vs. EN *politics* or *policy*. There is actually a parallel situation in Italian and English that Dodds draws on.



ly from the classical languages, or of loanwords in L1 (in this essay, Slovenian [= SI]) taken from a foreign language (= L2) (in this essay, chiefly English [= EN]).

Note, however, that the concept of foreignness may be fuzzy: Take e. g. SI *karfijola*, in EN *cauliflower*. Does the Slovene item count as a false-friend-like L1 item? What about *porcija*? Come to think of it, even formal similarity is problematic! In fact, the two frequently adduced criteria for false friendship, namely that the interlingual pairs in question must be FORMALLY SIMILAR and FOREIGN-SOUNDING, do not really stand up to objective scholarly analysis (when are two lexical items [no longer] so similar in form as to qualify for false pairs? When is a loanword still/no longer felt as a foreign item?), which militates against the very idea of a well-reasoned scholarly treatment of the subject. For example, how is one to find out whether the SI noun *basen* (EN *faible*) is foreign enough to be admitted into the class of false friends? Indeed, this must be the reason for the typically breezy, impressionistic (not *impressionist!*), light-hearted, and humorous treatment usually given to the topic: The damn pairs – false friends, no doubt! To make matters worse, we don't really know, to begin with, exactly when an L1 item qualifies as a (potential) false friend. Neither can we really say, with any scholarly precision, whether and when it is too specialized to merit the general user's attention. For example, are SI *tekstura*, *terca*, *terminal*, *titula*, *tonalen*, *traktat*, *tribunal*, *trust*, *turbulenca* – to mention but a few *t*-examples – too specialized to get a place among our candidates? Exactly how much should we know or tell the user about the pair under discussion? By contrast, in theory, things can be pretty neat, plus you typically have the luxury of citing only those examples that support your point.

However that may be, it is beyond doubt that this is a very real and persistent interlingual lexical problem, well known to translators and L2 learners (Veisbergs 1996), not to mention (seasoned) foreign language teach-

ers. In a nutshell, whenever we find a cognate form in an L2, we are usually delighted, because it makes the language seem familiar and offers us a break – we already know the new vocabulary item! Unfortunately, such forms can have different, or partly different, meanings (Hatch and Brown 1995: 128).

Yet other authors introduce a PRAGMATIC criterion, stressing that false friends look similar but are used differently (Smith and Klein-Braley 1985: 52). Lázár (1998: 78–79) identifies as many as fourteen relevant points found in various definitions of false friends, three of them covered only in the French-language sources but not in the English ones examined (viz. directionality, whether false friends are restricted to the lexicon, and partial vs. total overlap [i.e. semantically broader/narrower items in one language] between the senses of false friends).

Finally, quite a few lexicographers and pedagogically-minded (applied) linguists and foreign-language teachers would suggest that FREQUENCY OF ERROR be another important criterion in deciding whether or not two formally similar lexical items in two languages count as false friends and are hence to be treated as such.

In any case, the meanings of false pairs are today (partly) different because they underwent **different semantic developments** in their respective languages. Note that cognates may retain the same meaning across a number of related languages, as in EN *book*, Danish *bog*, and German *Buch* (Swan 1997: 159); this makes them GOOD, TRUE or FAITHFUL FRIENDS (Helliwell 1989: 3, Newmark 1988: 72) that are often used to facilitate foreign-language vocabulary teaching.<sup>4</sup> In general, there are more faithful friends than false friends, “and we must not hesitate to use them, since any other translation is usually wrong” (Newmark, *ibid.*). In the realm of language teaching, enemies seem to have got the better of friends: While “a cottage industry has grown up in FL teaching based on false friends and how to avoid them,” it is a fact that “too often overlooked in FL learning circles are the bene-



fits bestowed by trusty friends, as Ringbom (1987) has shown" (James 1998: 147). Interestingly, both "false" and "good" interlingual aspects of lexical items can occasionally be found in the same cognate forms; for instance, SI noun *orkester* and its EN counterpart *orchestra* are **good friends**, whereas the related EN verb *to orchestrate* can only partly be regarded as such, given that the meaning 'to organize, esp. secretly' exists only on the EN side, thus contributing to possible errors on the part of Slovene users of English who will typically be aware of the "musical" sense only, regardless of the word class in question.

*The Cambridge International* (Procter ed. 1995: 502) points out that the English language has many words which are false friends for speakers of other languages, there being two main reasons for this:

- English words often have the same origins as similar words in other languages, but sometimes different meanings of the words have developed in the different languages. This is especially true for other European languages. For instance, EN *sensible* looks very much like French and Spanish *sensible* or like German, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish *sensibel*, but in fact does not mean the same: these words all mean the same as EN *sensitive*.

- English words have been borrowed by other languages, and sometimes these have been given new or different meanings. For instance, EN *super* has been borrowed by Japanese, Korean, and Thai, but the word in these languages is used as a noun meaning 'supermarket' (Japanese, Korean) or 'lead fuel' (Thai).

As a genre, then, the dictionary of false friends can be regarded as a subcategory of the dictionary of foreign terms, which is itself not very far from the earliest general monolingual dictionaries of English: Made in the 17th century, those were chiefly lists of

"Anglicized foreignisms" glossed in the everyday language of the day (McArthur 1998: 22). The etymology criterion of false friends seems indispensable if we are to exclude from consideration instances of INCIDENTAL HOMONYMY (e. g. EN *sin* vs. SI *sin*, 'son'); the latter can be divided (Hartmann and James 1998: 56) into INTERLINGUAL HOMOGRAPHS (e. g. EN gift 'present' vs. German Gift 'poison') and INTERLINGUAL HOMOPHONES (e. g. EN *man* 'male' vs. Persian /mčn/ 'I'). Nevertheless, some authors do not wish to automatically exclude from consideration instances of incidental homonymy; thus the definition of false friends given in a state-of-the-art volume on vocabulary studies (Schmitt and McCarthy eds. 1997: 327) runs like this: "False friends include words which look like cognates, but are actually unrelated (*pan* [Spanish – bread] and *pan* [English – cooking pot]), and words which may share a common origin but which have developed different meanings in different languages (*actual* [English – real or factual] and *actuel* [French – current or present])." One must be aware, however, that instances of incidental homonymy usually do not represent an appreciable interlingual difficulty, whether in translating or in foreign-language learning, and can be quite trivial, simply because the two items are semantically and perhaps even cognitively too far apart to represent a real lexical danger, as it were, at least for most intermediate and post-intermediate learners. In any case, such a definition simply reflects the great importance of the similarity in form between pairs of lexical items in a given language pair. True, some of them might confuse foreign-language learners; this, after all, is why "they are often collected in special dictionaries of false friends" (Hartmann and James 1998: 56). What is amazing, generally speaking, is the great variety of semantic relationships that

<sup>4</sup> The two categories, false friends and faithful friends are often treated as the only two types of this particular interlingual topic. However, Arntz (1998: 69) reports on a pragmatic systematic method developed in his course for advanced language students, which distinguishes between *faithful friends*, *false friends*, and *distant acquaintances*. In the last of these, the meaning is (near-)identical in the two languages, and there is a certain formal similarity as well, and yet the content connections can only be reconstructed with difficulty. He notes that even good friends and distant acquaintances can cause the learner problems.



obtain between pairs of lexical items of a given language pair exhibiting superficial or su-

perficial-only similarity: formal, orthographic, and/or phonetic.

## Scope of False Friendship – and Related Lexical Topics & Types

While there may well be broad agreement over the concept of false friendship, actual interpretations vary a lot. In some authors, the idea is limited to interlingual pairs of lexical items showing partial or zero semantic overlap (e.g. SI *monden*, *parola* vs. EN *mundane*, *parole*). Yet for others, false friendship is very broad, standing for virtually any perceived interlingual lexical difficulty based on only partially true, false, or assumed identity of two lexemes in two languages based on superficial similarity – mostly in form, but often combined with pronunciation and/or spelling. Indeed, sometimes the very existence of a foreign-sounding/learned lexical unit in an L1, or even of any conceivable interlingual lexical problem, will be enough as long as the corresponding L2 item is not semantically quite identical or, alternatively, does not even exist to begin with. Thus the phenomenon can be recognized simply on the basis of a specific interlingual problem related to an L2 difficulty, say L2 words that are fairly well known by learners in one (or some) of their meanings, but which have at least one more sense, not so well known, such as EN *to advise* meaning not only 'to suggest' but also 'to inform' (Wróblewski 1997: 213). While many authors recognize false friendship only in the lexicon (Lázár 1998: 81), others find it between lexical items on the level of grammar (see below, {4}, p. 15), and on various other levels of language description such as collocation, spelling, and even pronunciation. Some researchers (e.g. James 1998: 102) note that whereas most false-friend listings are limited to lexical items, there are false friends on other language levels too, "most pervasively in grammar," according to James (*ibid.*), so that for example the English *that*-clause misleads many French or Spanish learners to produce errors like *I want \*that you*

*pay the bill*. Listing of these could also be effective aids to error avoidance. Note that grammatical points may be surprisingly complex; the EN noun *medium* has the plural form *media* or *mediums*, depending on the meaning (SI has *medi-ji* for both), but additionally there is within English something of a usage problem involved here having to do with grammar, viz. using *media* – incorrectly, according to some people – as a singular noun (cf. e.g. Kahn ed. 1985: 348).

Not to be forgotten, false friendship can be based on **frequency**; consider, for instance, SI *angina*, *arhiv* and *aperitiv* vs. the decidedly less frequent EN *angina* (cf. *sore throat*), *archives* (cf. *records*, *files*) and *aperitif*; SI *ateljé* vs. the much less common EN *atelier* (cf. *studio*); or cf. also the paired items SI *ekstrakt*, *esenca* vs. EN *extract*, *essence*, where the SI *esenca* is decidedly less frequent than EN *essence*. To take an example where frequency applies to a single sense of a polysemous item, SI *demonstrirati* is much less common in the sense of 'to show' than its English counterpart, *to demonstrate*. Next, the SI noun *polivinil* is a word of everyday occurrence, whereas EN *polyvinyl* is not even entered in the 80,000-entry *Longman* (Summers ed. 1995), the actual everyday equivalent being *plastic*. The same might be said of SI noun *asfalt* vs. EN *asphalt*, where the usual EN translation is *tarmac*, but there is additionally also the word-formation-related issue of translating the related verb and the participle, *asfaltirati* and *asfaltiran*. Similarly, EN *pyromaniac* may be both more technical and formal, and hence less frequent, than its SI counterpart, *piroman*. Frequency may thus be a logical consequence – a reflection – of register-related factors.

Along similar lines, Moulin and Hayward (1984) point out that while false friends repre-



sent only one kind of interlingual lexical problem, it is complex enough, in that it may involve not only semantics but orthography, lexical morphology, syntax, phraseology and pragmatics as well as entire culture; indeed, one could easily argue that false friendship can be found even at the level of pronunciation (cf. the likely Slovenes' pronunciations – in speaking English, of course – of, say, *Galapagos*, *Orion*, *Tibet*, *heretic*, *acclimatize*, *catheter*, *peroxide* and *streptomycin*). Yet it seems that semantics-related false pairs stand for PROTOTYPICAL FALSE FRIENDSHIP, with several other types being recognizable too, particularly in terms of "permissible grammatical context" or collocation (Swan 1997: 159). Even within semantics, linguists recognize different kinds of false friendship, the assumption that the semantic differences between deceptive cognates are of the same general kind as those observed between the so-called translation equivalents: denotative, connotative, stylistic and collocational (Van Roey 1990: 116, 118–25). For example, there is a subtle interplay of style and denotation in SI *finta*, which is informal and general, used in sports as well as with reference to clever moves in general, whereas its EN counterpart, *feint*, is stylistically neutral and largely restricted to boxing and fencing. Some cases are difficult to classify: In English, for instance, you can find the largely synonymous – but stylistically different – *lie detector* and *polygraph*, the latter being more technical, even though the collocation *to take a polygraph* is quite common in fairly non-technical contexts. In Slovene, on the other hand, there is only *detektor laži*; *poligraf* does exist, but, according to the *SSKJ*, the leading Slovenian monolingual dictionary, with a totally different meaning. Is this a false-friend situation to begin with?

The phenomenon is evidently difficult to delimit precisely, witness Nash's (1993) *Illustrated Dictionary of Spanish/English False Friends* (now also available in a thematically organized edition, Nash 1997 with only lists of items), where the entries (common lexical errors made by adult Spanish-speaking EFL learners) are divided into traditional deceptive cog-

nates, morphological mix-ups, orthographic oddities, phonetic confusions, and accidental creations. A mixed bag if ever there was one!

There is, then, plenty of room for typological study of the phenomenon (cf. Ivir 1968, Hayward and Moulin 1984, Antunović 1996, O'Neill and Casanovas Catalá 1997, and Lázár 1998), depending on how broad or narrow the interpretation of false friendship one adopts (cf. Gabrovšek 1996: 27–29). For instance, Van Hoof (1989: 110–11) recognizes semantic, stylistic, and phraseological false friends. Granger and Swallow (1988: 108) present another classification: The FORMAL SIMILARITY of false friends consists of a whole array of differences at a variety of levels; basically, there are semantic differences (sometimes denotational, but sometimes also connotative, collocational, or stylistic), and differences of a syntactic nature. On the CONCEPTUAL LEVEL, a distinction is made between **totally deceptive** cognates (i. e. no meanings in common: these are historically related words in two languages that used to be synonymous but which now have totally divergent meanings) and partially deceptive cognates (i. e. at least one shared meaning: specifically, a single word in L1 corresponds to two or even more words in L2, only one of the latter corresponding in form and meaning with the L1 word). For example, SI noun *radar* has the predictable EN equivalent *radar*, but when it refers to the dreaded device used by the police for measuring speed on the roads, it becomes EN *speed-trap*. This distinction has been drawn by Granger (1996), who reports on a study that made use of the International Corpus of Learner English to test, *inter alia*, a hypothesis about learners' use of L1 : L2 cognates, namely whether lexical false-friend errors are persistent errors. This was indeed found to be the case, since one-third of all lexical errors were the result of partially deceptive cognateness. The conclusion was that we need dictionaries that cater specifically to learners with a particular L1, dictionaries that will draw their attention to the pitfalls of false friends.

In any case, in the "lexical sense," *false friends* are instances of "words you think you know"



(Laufer 1997a: 25, 25–27), along with the other major types of lexical difficulty, notably

- cases of DECEPTIVE TRANSPARENCY (e.g. *shortcomings* taken to mean 'short visits'),

- words with a DECEPTIVE MORPHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE (e.g. *discourse* taken to mean 'with-out direction'),

- IDIOMS (e.g. *a shot in the dark* translated literally, word by word),

- words with MULTIPLE MEANINGS (e.g. *abstract* interpreted as 'not concrete' instead of 'summary'), and

- SYNFORMS, that is, pairs or groups of words that are similar in form or in morphological makeup especially – but not necessarily – in a foreign language (e.g. EN *cute/acute, available/valuable, reduce/deduce/induce*). Laufer (1997b: 147–48) identifies ten categories of synforms in English on the basis of "specific synformic similarities." In her experiment, over 500 foreign learners of English were tested on all the possible synformic confusions; the results show that the most problematic synforms were those which differed according to suffixes (e.g. *industrial/industrious, comprehensive/comprehensible*; let me just add here the danger of extending a word-formation pattern to cases where it no longer obtains: SI *peticija* is *petition*, but SI *investicija* is not \**investment*), and those identical in consonants but different in vowels (e.g. *conceal/cancel, adopt/adapt, proceed/precede*). Such false pairs perhaps be analyzed for their difficulty specifically in foreign-language production (= encoding).

The phenomenon of false friends is necessarily associated with interlingual situations, particularly in translation, bilingual lexicography, and/or foreign-language learning and teaching, which is mirrored in many definitions of the concept (e.g. Crystal 1997: 349). Even a straightforward resource book of dictionary activities (Wright 1998), with only one chapter devoted to the use of bilingual dictionaries, found it necessary to enter and define it in its brief "Glossary of key terms" (pp. 163–65): Words which look similar in different languages, but which have different mean-

ings, for example, *actual/aktuell* in German, *embarrassed/embarazada* in Spanish (p. 164). McArthur (ed. 1992: 400) gives the term a pedagogical slant: It is "a term in language teaching for a word that has the same origin and general appearance as a word in another language, so that learners mistakenly assume that both have the same meanings and uses: English *deceive* to trick, French *décevoir* to disappoint." Teaching false friends certainly makes sense; according to James (1998: 102), "learners seem to be able to avoid these errors once they have been warned." Lexicographers too "must always be wary of 'false friends'" (Benson 1990: 52), a phenomenon where subtleties can be considerable: American *yogurt* is not the same as Yugoslav *jogurt*, the latter variety being more liquid, and is drunk like milk, so that in an English-SerboCroatian dictionary English *yogurt* was glossed by a completely different SerboCroatian term, viz. *kiselo mleko*. False friends will thus be found to be the focus of attention of translators and even translation theorists (e.g. Newmark 1991, passim, Koller 1979 [cf. Munday 2001: 46–47], and Malone 1982) as well as lexicographers (e.g. Nelson 1981, Wright 1981). Translators and foreign language teachers are well aware of the dangers of false friends in specific languages, say the Italian (vs. English) *costipato, eventualmente, grandioso, terrificante, tremendo, consistente, coerente, importante, rilevante, eccentrico*, all briefly discussed in a humorous piece on the unexpected pitfalls of learning foreign languages (Kedzierski 2000).

A related term, *internationalisms*, has been defined as words which are used in several languages, are mostly of either Greek or Latin origin or have been taken from major modern languages (especially English, German and French), and whose phonological, morphological and semantic similarity only rarely amounts to full identity due to their different borrowing histories and their different developments in the borrowing languages. In our Eurocentric tradition, Ivir (1988: 93–94) observes, a word qualifies as an internationalism if it exists in a few major European languages, from which it may then find its way into other, European and non-European,



languages. Examples of such internationalisms include EN *brigadier*, *hazard*, *actual* and their seeming equivalents in other languages, such as Croatian *brigadir*, French *hasard*, and German *aktuell*. In many cases, the senses of internationalisms (say, *avditorij* vs. *auditorium*) are fuzzy, blurred at the margins (Ivir 1996); accordingly, their treatment in bilingual dictionaries is simplified and sketchy. There is yet another related term, **Europeanism**, defined as a word, or at least word form, common to two or more European languages (Kirkness 1984: 109; cf. Hartmann and James 1998: 53, 76); their forms may vary from one language to another – especially in spoken usage – but the words remain easily recognizable. If a Europeanism is ultimately derived from Græcolatin or Neolatin, it is a (*Neo*-)Classicism.

This non-common-core vocabulary is important in offering unique opportunities, e.g. for facilitating international communication in the sciences, for teaching LSP to foreign students, for international standardization of terminologies. But there are also pitfalls, the major INTRALINGUAL problem being the language bar between academics and non-academics, experts and laymen, the latter often having at most only a passive command of “hard words,” the most obvious INTERLINGUAL problem being “one too well-known to foreign language teachers or translators and even to lexicologists to require more than passing mention, that of deceptive cognates or ‘faux amis’” (ibid.). Internationalisms/Europeanisms can be given special labels in dictionaries, the best-known example in general lexicography being *ISV*, standing for ‘international scientific vocabulary,’ used for etymological purposes in the famous American *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (Gove ed. 1961).

Sørensen’s (1990) **pseudo-English** words in Danish, such as *butterfly*, *speaker*, *struggler* (the correct EN equivalents being *bow-tie*, *announcer*, *social climber*, respectively), refer to items which, while being English in form, do not mean in English what they mean in Danish. They could be counted simply among members of all the other Danish/English false friends with no (as contrasted with either full or partial) semantic overlap.

Next, there are the rather intriguing **dictionary words** in English, that is, the learned words listed only in (some of the) large dictionaries (Gabrovšek 1997) that often turn out NOT to be

usable equivalents of their “actually existing” Slovenian foreign-sounding relatives, e.g. SI *fakultativen*, *kulturološki*, *garnitura*, *graver*, or *žaluzija* vs. their dubious EN equivalents (*facultative*, *culturological*, *garniture*, *graver*, *jalousie*) given in the larger dictionaries of English (cf. EN *optional*, *culture-bound*, *set*, *engraver*, *shutter* or *blind*).

If we examine the treatment of the phenomenon of false friends in the language reference sources, we will likely be satisfied with the informative 25-line entry in Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997: 57–58). Drawing on the work of Mario Wandruszka (specifically Wandruszka 1978), it provides all the essential information: False friends are items in two – in many cases closely related – languages which have the same or very similar form but different meanings; the phenomenon is caused by historical chance, as cognate words may have developed differently in closely related languages; some false friends have totally different meanings (EN *assist* ‘help’ vs. French *assister*, ‘to be present’), but the greatest danger of **interference** – a more modern synonym being **crosslinguistic influence** (Swan 1997) – arises where the difference is more subtle, and, as Taylor (1998: 25) puts it in translating EN *gentle* into Italian, “therefore much more insidious” (EN *grin* and the more restricted German *grinsen*); some false friends are different only connotatively (EN *let us* and the more elevated German equivalent *lasst uns*). Finally, if a target-language false friend is used frequently enough in the source-language text it can eventually become a “true friend” by taking on the source-language meaning in addition to its own. I, for one, believe that this process can occasionally also operate the other way round – the source-language meaning spreading to the target-language equivalent, with the original target-language meaning being either preserved or discarded at some point, witness the EN adjective *sympathetic* that seems to be taking on the “European” (French, German, etc.) meaning, ‘likeable, nice’. Similarly, a decade or so ago it seemed safe to say that SI *epizoda* was to be translated by EN *installment* rather than *episode*, while nowadays *episode* seems to be just as – or even more – current. Such facts may be easier to find in (parallel) corpora; Partington (1998: 48ff.) argues that a study of a large number of uses in context of



"look-alike" items in two languages, made possible by a concordancer, can provide more information about the textual environments in which pairs of items constitute translation equivalents than is available through traditional means such as mono- and bilingual dictionaries, thesauruses, etc.

Kirkness (1997: 5) observes that it is because the Eurolatin divergences between vernacu-

lars are many and significant that forms congruent with those in another language, say English, are not equivalent in meaning (as e. g. in German/French *aktuell/actuel*, *genial/génial*, *sensibel/sensible*, *sympatisch/sympathique* not being equivalent in meaning to EN *actual*, *genial*, *sensible*, and *sympathetic*).

## False Friends and the Dictionary

The superficial – and spurious – similarity characterizing false friends has been a (surprisingly) frequent source of learner and even translator errors (Baker 1992: 25–26), which lends support to the idea of a special dictionary of false pairs. Indeed, it is precisely because false pairs may confuse foreign-language learners that they are often collected in special dictionaries of false friends (Hartmann and James 1998: 56). As James (1998: 101) observes, a false-friend dictionary is relevant to learners of a specific L2 who speak a particular mother tongue: So there can be no universal dictionary of false friends. It would doubtless help the user avoid making embarrassing mistakes (e. g. SI *gimnazija* vs. EN *gymnasium*, a hardy perennial if ever there was one, or the tantalizing but incorrect equation SI *kvaliteten* = \*EN *qualitative*), even if it were to present a somewhat simplified picture of interlingual lexical correspondences. Such a dictionary can be quite comprehensive, as its macrostructure (= entry list) might include a number of paired items with relatively slight and even trivial but often unexpected and hence (potentially) bothersome differences involved, ranging from the simple SI *ciklama* vs. EN *cyclamen*, all the way to EN *professional* (n. and adj.) and not only its obvious SI equivalents, *profesionalec* and *profesionalen*, because in many cases SI will use *strokovnjak* and *poklicen* (cf. e. g. *language professionals* – *strokovnjaki za jezik* or *jezikovni strokovnjaki*). To take another subtle example, the Slovenian use of the noun *kolega* is rather peculiar when compared to its seemingly perfect English equivalent, *colleague*, in that it refers to someone you work with, and in an academic context either to a fellow teacher of yours or to any college student;

the English item can only have the first of the three senses. Similarly, SI *defekt* and EN *defect* will be found to differ from each other semantically in several respects, though this pair is decidedly more complex: On another level of contrasting the two, only the English item can be either a noun or a verb – but this just could be the reason for regarding it as being semantically broader than the corresponding Slovene item. Also, the polysemy of the English noun and verb *credit* (as many as thirteen senses in the EFL *Longman*) and *check/cheque* contrasts with the "financial"-only senses of the corresponding SI nouns *kredit* and *ček*; thus in translating into English, Slovenian translators will characteristically underrate the semantic range of *credit* and *check/cheque*. Likewise, in equating the adjective *lingvistični* and EN *linguistic*, many will fail to realize that the latter can mean not only 'pertaining to linguistics,' but also 'pertaining to language' (SI *jezikoven*), though *language* used attributively is also available, to be sure. Interestingly, a number of such pairs would not even be considered by most Slovenian-speaking EFL users to be cases of false friendship at all if taken only "at face value." More obviously, users would expect to find similar equivalents of members of a word family, but might be in for a surprise, as e. g. in *ministrant* = *altar boy* (also, more generally, *acolyte*) but *ministrati* = *to serve*.

There are basically two different traditions in compiling such a dictionary, the encyclopedic and the linguistic. In the "encyclopedic" type of false-friend dictionary the entries can easily turn into veritable essays on a given subject, offering little in the way of lexical false friends but more on the history, civilization, geography, so-



ciology, special features, customs etc. of a given nation and/or country. Such a work consists of discursive and wide-ranging (mini-)essays discussing not only (partly) false lexical correspondences and related problems of interlingual equivalence but a host of historical, cultural, civilizational, sociological, philosophical, scientific, geographical, etymological etc. matters, frequently offering insights into the complex web of the history, culture and society as embodied and expressed in the L2 in question, often with little relevance to interlingual linguistic-translational issues (cf. e. g. Thody and Evans 1985). Not infrequently, the entries in such works are listed and discussed in topical chapters. Bridgham (1996), divided into ten broad subject areas, provides cultural context and notes distinctions between German, Austrian, and Swiss German, as well as between British and American English. Such works are less dictionaries to consult for particular entries than works for browsing in.

On the other hand, the **linguistic (or translation-oriented) false-friend dictionary** will instead typically focus on encoding-type translation problems, i. e. on contextualized L1 items and their equivalents in L2, often in parallel columns and in several sections to account for L1/L2 asymmetries or areas of overlap, with copious (foot)notes providing additional linguistic-translational information (idioms, collocations, compounds, rare/specialized senses, context-dependence, and so forth), as in the admirable 800-page Van Roey et al. (1991), reviewed by Evans (1997).

Which of the two is to be preferred, and by whom? Translators and language students typically show their utilitarian attitude: Few would seem to be interested in colorful etymological descriptions of the cognates and in discursive essay-like explanations and notes. What they want to know, in most cases, is the correct equivalent in the L2. This might give us grounds to suggest as the optimum "base information" line the L1 item followed only by the correct L2 item (say SI *parola* = EN *slogan*), or perhaps one stressing also what should be avoided (say SI *parola* – EN not *parole* but *slogan*), though I remember reading somewhere that the very appearance in print of an incorrect item – even if preceded by an asterisk, exclamation point, or some other warning signal –

might have a negative effect on the learner. Moreover, such treatment can only be used in case of simple pairs.

Naturally enough, most existing dictionaries of false friends concentrate on TWO languages and are mostly designed for speakers of one of them; the lexical pitfalls of a world language will often be exemplified and explained for the benefit of the native speakers (characteristically translators) of less widely spoken languages. Those few false-friend dictionaries that do contain (many) more languages (e. g. Hill 1982) present a very superficial and simplified lexical picture, as it were. However, the comprehensive, erudite but also readable Spalatin (1990) deals with five languages, Croatian being the language of the headwords as well as of the entry-articles. The work is rooted in the lexical-linguistic tradition, while also offering a lot of etymology.

In any case, a false-pair relationship not infrequently turns out to be complex and multifaceted rather than being merely a simple either-or, yes-or-no affair, what with partial semantic overlap, divergent polysemy, differences in terms of (near-)synonymy, dissimilar connotation, style, collocation, grammatical features, frequency, unexpected cultural implications, etc., all present in varying quantities. This is why the very notion of false friendship has to be relativized to some extent; for example, the SI participial adjective *deformiran* has the predictable (ain't it easy!) EN equivalent *deformed* which, however, while being semantically O.K., is rather infrequent and semantically narrower (of something) having the wrong shape, especially because it has grown or developed wrongly'; cf. Summers ed. 1995: 360), since as it is often replaced by the commoner *distorted*. The category of false friends that is often regarded as being especially "treacherous" is the one where an item "shares the meanings of its English homonym but has additional meanings all its own" (Nicholls 1994).

To compile a false-friend dictionary, one needs far more than one's own notes, personal interest, and (linguistic/teaching etc.) experiences; rather, the knowledge available from various sources – individuals, the best existing works, in the first place false-friend studies and dictionaries of for-



eign terms and of fields such as business, economy and politics – must be pooled, re-edited, and assessed primarily against the background of users' needs and expectations. Such a false-friend dictionary for a given language pair might:

(1) Be based on a BROAD INTERPRETATION of false friendship, thus including also false-friend-related matters of pronunciation, grammar, word formation, pragmatics, and even spelling, provided the problem in question has been identified empirically. The entries may all be given in a single main-body listing, the alternative being main body plus back-matter appendices (say, for spelling false friends).

(2) Follow the LEXICAL-LINGUISTIC orientation, that is, with focus on translation equivalents in L2, with relatively little encyclopedic material – etymology included – added wherever it seems useful. Culture in general is too broad a topic to be treated in depth or systematically in such a false-friend dictionary.

(3) Be geared primarily to ENCODING needs, i.e. translating from L1 into L2. That is why the work will incorporate translated examples of typical language use showing context and collocation, and employ extensively labels and notes. The length of the entry-articles will vary, ranging from an item and its equivalent to complex essay-like treatments of polysemous, connotation-rich and phraseologically rich entries. Occasionally,

false-friend information provided might serve decoding needs, even though here the context will often help one avoid committing an error.

(4) Have a HEADWORD LIST where the relevant unmarked L1 lexical items must be included almost automatically. Rare, dialectal, archaic items as well as many scientific and technical terms are to be included if they can be found in general texts. Included will be both common L1 false-pair items (e.g. *blamaža*, *gliser*, *ordinacija*), and the more learned ones that could be only vaguely understood or even not understood at all by many L1 speakers but that can be found in general texts (e.g. *andragog*, *dispanzer*, *mistika*, *tehnika*, *monopolen*), the latter – combined with their English false friend – being in most cases decidedly more difficult than the former.<sup>5</sup>

(5) Have the HEADWORD LINE consisting of the L1 (= Slovenian) lexical item immediately followed by its correct L2 (= English) translation equivalent(s), with usage labels, brief meaning-discriminating phrases, etc., added in parentheses (unless the entry is too complex), the reason being that this is what most users will be looking for. A viable alternative is to have each L1 item followed by both its false L2 equivalent (preceded by some warning sign) and its correct L2 equivalent(s). Other available options are generally less useful in terms of access and user needs.

<sup>5</sup> The number of entries might be anywhere between a few hundred and a few thousand. There is an intriguing point rarely discussed in the literature, viz. whether such a dictionary should contain a selection of good friends as well, properly marked as such, to reassure the user that a given pair is in a good-friend relationship.

A fairly comprehensive Slovenian-English dictionary of false friends should probably (could? might?) contain the following a-entries (the asterisked items being some of the less obvious entry candidates): abonent, abonma, abortus, aboten, absolvent(ski), \*absolvirati, ad acta, adaptacija, adaptirati, administrirati, administrativen, \*adresa(r), advent, advokat, aerodrom, afekt, afera, afirmacija, afirmirati se, \*agenda, agitacija, agitirati, agregat(en), agrotehnika, \*agrumi, akademija, akademik, akademski, akcija, akcijski, akontacija, akord (two senses), akreditiv, akt, akter, aktiv, \*aktivist, aktualen, aktualizirati, akustika, \*akvarij, akviziter, alarm(irati), aleja, alimentacija, \*alkalijski & alkalen (= alkaline; [collocation-dependent]), alkotest, alt, amandma, ambient, amorfen, amortizer, \*amortizirati, analitik, analiza, \*anamneza (= case history), ananas, andragog(ija), \*anekdota (-dotski, -dotičen), anesteziist, angina, \*angažiran, \*angažirati, \*angažma, animator, anketa, \*anke-tiranje, ansambel, antika, \*antikvaren, antikvariat, \*antikviteta (= antique), aparat, aparten, apartma, apatičen, apel(irati), aperitiv, apoen, apoteka(r), aranžer, aranžirati, aranžma (two senses), arbiter, arest(ant), argument(irati), arhiv(irati), arkada, \*armada (EN armada, usually 'a large group of warships'), armatura, armaturen, arondacija, artikel, arzenal, artist, asket, \*asistenca, asortiman, atentat(or), atest, \*atlet, atribut, avantura, avanzirati, aviatičar, avditor, avditorij, avizo, avtokozmetika, avtokamp, avtomat, avtoriteta, azil, ažuren, ažurirati.



# The Varied and the Unexpected & “Compounded-Difficulty” False Friends

## L1 Can Be Difficult Too!

The difficulty involved is often compounded by the fact that few researchers seem to have brought up, namely that in a significant number of cases native speakers are only vaguely or only partly aware of what the L1 item really means, doubtless a result of the L1 item in question being in most cases a rather learned, (semi-)technical, (quasi-)foreign one; this is why, for instance, SI *mandaten* ((of a fine) ‘payable on the spot’) can be vaguely and erroneously taken to mean EN *mandatory* (‘obligatory, compulsory’); the same may be true of the pair SI *mistika* – EN *mystique*. This happens even in cases of relatively simple L1 items: Consider the SI adjective *kompakten*, for instance, vs. EN *compact*. Also, it is so very easy to assume that e. g. SI *format* and *atlet* just have to mean what they do in English, but in actual fact full equivalence is exceedingly rare, witness e. g. the seemingly perfect SI *festival* vs. EN *festival*, as in *a jazz festival*, but note e. g. Christmas being a *major festival*; likewise, SI *absolvirati* and EN *absolve* seem to belong together, but the translation is usually EN *to complete*. A similar point can be illustrated by SI *elipsa* and the twin EN “equivalents,” *ellipse* and *ellipsis*, and – to reverse the situation – by SI *funkcijski* and *funkcionalen* vs. EN *functional*. Somewhat different but still close to this type is the unexpectedly tricky pair of SI *karijera* vs. EN *career*. Often, one is simply unsure about the degree to which the paired items are translationally equivalent, as in SI *regija* vs. EN *region*, or EN *routine(ly)* vs. SI *rutinski(-ko)*; likewise, while pairs such as *administracija* – *administration* and *birokracija* – *bureaucracy* look like perfect equivalents, they will often be found to differ in a number of – sometimes very subtle – ways. The reasons for the difficulties are varied; thus e. g. SI *aritmetika* is, in a sense, a good friend of EN *arithmetic*, the difficulty being that the English item can be either a noun or an adjective, and the two are also pronounced differently. Is this enough for us to regard them as false friends?

It is very hard to precisely determine the **line of difficulty**, i. e. one at which falseness becomes easier to deal with, or when it gets decidedly more difficult, and indeed when the learner can be expected to anticipate, say in decoding, that an L2 item is or is not in a false relationship with a similar L1 item. For example, consider SI *rahitis* and its EN counterpart, *ricketts*. Is this a spelling-type false pair? A compound one, because of the *s* which is not a plural marker here? A difficult one? A noteworthy one? One to be dismissed as a mere triviality?

Furthermore, even the translator may find out that his/her knowledge of his/her own mother tongue, so often taken for granted, is more deficient or patchy than s/he thought it would be. For instance, I have seen a newspaper ad for kitchen scales extolling their “sodobno *ergonomsko* obliko”; not very many Slovenes know the meaning of the adjective *ergonomski* (= ergonomic). Another important point often lost on researchers is that those L1 items which are labeled in the standard monolingual dictionaries as rare, obsolete, dialectal, technical, and perhaps even informal or slangy (say, SI *labradorit*, *lafeta*, [*koncentracijski*] *lager*, *lakrimarij*) do not count as real false friends, because they are too specialized to merit inclusion in a general-purpose dictionary on a par with common paired items that are of universal interest. And finally, there is the little-researched but very relevant problem of false friends involving words that are not entered in standard dictionaries but that can be found in print. For example a recent letter to the editor of the Ljubljana *Delo* (Saturday supplement section, p. 29) refers to highly poisonous gases that “zelo težko jih je detektirati v večjih koncentracijah” (Djurašević 2001), where the verb *detektirati* (= EN *to detect*) is used that is not listed in the SSKJ. This category might include some of the “unnecessary” English words recently taken over – uncritically, as some complain – into an L2, specifically Slovenian, a not uncommon pattern these days.



## What Can Also Count as False Friends

Many authors would not hesitate to regard as a special type of false friends all those cases where a foreign-sounding L1 (= Slovenian) item has **no formally similar equivalent** in an L2 (= English), however foreign it might look or sound (e.g. SI *parter* vs. EN *orchestra* {AmE}, *stalls* {EnE}, SI *maketa* vs. EN *model*, SI *akrobacija* vs. EN *stunt*, SI *frak* vs. EN *tails* or *tailcoat*, SI *pavšalen* vs. EN *lump-rate* or *flat-rate*, SI *ministrant* vs. EN *altar boy*, SI *bonboniera* vs. EN *box of chocolates*, SI *karnisa* vs. EN *curtain rod*, SI *statist* vs. EN *extra*, SI *depilacija*, *depilirati* (se) vs. EN *hair-removal*, to *remove one's hair* [but cf. EN *depilatory*, n. and adj.]). Talking about such cases, Corder (1973: 290) notes that the process of generalization may even be extended to the invention of non-existing forms by analogy, as in *A majestic melody* (FR *majestueux* = EN *majestic*), produced by a French learner of English, or – to add an example of my own – EN *\*epruvette* (for *test-tube*) generated by a Slovene student (cf. SI *epruveta*) on the basis of false analogy with the good-friend pair EN *pipette* (SI *pipeta*). The invented item does not exist at all in a recognizably similar form in L2. This **dissimilar-equivalent** false-pair type includes a number of tricky cases such as SI *kabriolet* vs. EN *convertible*, (less commonly) *cabriolet*, or SI *tehnika* vs. EN *technology* (cf. the translation of the compound *bela tehnika*, viz. EN *white goods*). This category comprises **culture-bound items** such as SI *beneficiran staž* (EN *accelerated retirement pension plan/scheme*), including subtler cases such as *plebiscite*, where there is little difference in terms of denotation but a lot more in cultural/historical terms. Note that cultural specificity works in many, sometimes surprisingly subtle, ways: SI *avenija* and *bulvar* look like perfect equivalents of EN *avenue* and *boulevard*, but their cultural associations, if nothing else, are a lot different, much more remote and less clear.

In the area of **word formation**, one could easily regard as false pairs of the MORPHOLOGICAL TYPE those which display a DIFFERENT AFFIX in the two languages, including the no-affix vs. affix type (e.g. *anorganski* – *inorganic*, *avtogram* – *autograph*, *bankrot* – *bankruptcy*; *klor* – *chlorine*). Take word families, where matters may turn out

to be unexpectedly tricky; in Slovene, for instance, the word family *dezorganizirati*, *dezorganizacija*, and *dezorganiziran(ost)* seem to be equally current, even though the Grad-Leeming (1990) dictionary lists only the first two. Yet in English only the adjective *disorganized* seems to be really common. It is also the only item in the (potential) word family to be listed in the *Longman* (Summers ed. 1995). No wonder, then, that the English equivalent of *dezorganizacija* given in the Grad-Leeming dictionary, *disorganization*, does not sound like an everyday English word. Another relevant word family is *monopol*, *monopolen*, *monopolist*; the only corresponding word to have currency in English is the noun *monopoly*. In a number of cases, the existence of an "easy" L2 equivalent, as e.g. *štipendija* vs. *grant*, *scholarship*, often seems to be responsible for the naive learner's belief that derivatives are likely to be just as easy to translate, which need not be so: Here, both *štipenditor* and *štipendist* are not nearly as easy to translate, the latter being the more or less predictable *scholarship holder*, the former a much more awkward *one who grants a scholarship*. Note that in theory, English should be able to offer agent-noun forms even where there are none in Slovenian (cf. e.g. *eater*, *smoker* vs. *sleep-er*, *drinker*, *mind reader* in Slovene translation).

Some items belonging to the same word family may show varying degrees of interlingual difficulty depending on meaning, in the sense that the more specific meaning will be easier to translate: Thus e.g. the SI culture-bound phrase *beneficiran (delovni) staž* calls for an explanatory equivalent, *accelerated retirement pension plan/scheme*, while the corresponding base verb, *beneficirati*, is a tougher nut to crack.

Not to forget, there are also matters of **grammar** that – according to many linguists – count as false pairs, such as the distinction in number between e.g. SI *javne finance* (pl.) and EN *public finance* (sg.), or SI *pikado* (sg.) vs. EN *darts* (pl.), or different transitivity of e.g. SI *evakuirati* (T only) vs. EN *to evacuate* (either T or I), or more generally matters of countability, e.g. SI *akna*, *akne* vs. EN *acne* (uncountable).

Next, the concept may include e.g. the **phonological** type, that is, items similar in the two languages whose pronunciation differs in ways that will often make the Slovenians pronounce such items incorrectly, virtually always in line



with their L1 pronunciation (pattern)/intonation/word stress, particularly the primary-stress syllable (e.g. *absolutist*, *Aladdin*, *amalgam*, *electrolysis*, *Gibraltar*, *Goliath*, *Iscaiot*, *Kazakhstan*, *Komodo dragon*). Consider, for instance, SI *linolEj* or *baklAva* [with primary stress on the capitalized boldface letters] vs. EN /lɪ'nəʊliəm/ or /'bækləvə/ or /'bɑ:k-/ or /-'vɑ:/. By the way, Wells's pronouncing dictionary, either edition (1990 or 2000), contains some items marked with an exclamation point as "a warning that the pronunciation is quite different from what the spelling might lead you to expect!" (Wells 2000: ix). Occasionally, falseness exists between Slovenian and one major variety of English only: *paprika*, for instance, is a "true friend" in relation to BrE, where it is pronounced /'pæprɪkə/, but a false one in AmE, where the standard pronunciation is /pə'pri:kə/ (Davies 1997: 30).

One might even argue for false friends on the level of **spelling**, as e.g. in SI *antilopa*, *fregata*, *garnizija*, *gekon*, *horizont*, *karneval*, *kofein*, *mahagonij*, *majaron*, *mungo*, *sfiga*, *skarabej*, *turkizen* vs. EN *antelope*, *frigate*, *garrison*, *gecko*, *horizon*, *carnival*, *caffeine*, *mahogany*, *marjoram*, *mongoose*, *sphinx*, *scarab*, *turquoise*. This type includes a few dozen proper-names, mostly geographical, such as SI *Arhangelsk*, *Benetke*, *Bruselj*, *Budimpešta*, *Dunaj*, *Ferski otoki*, *Firence*, *Křbenhavn*, *Kremelj*, *Krf*, *Livorno*, *Moskva*, *Neapelj*, *Rim*, *Solun*, *Šlezija*, *Toskana* and *Visla* vs. EN *Archangel*, *Venice*, *Brussels*, *Budapest*, *Vienna*, *Faroe Islands*, *Florence*, *Copenhagen*, *the Kremlin*, *Corfu*, *Leghorn*, *Moscow*, *Naples*, *Rome*, *Thessaloniki* (or the English versions, *Salonica* or *Salonika*), *Silesia*, *Tuscany* and *Vistula*, and perhaps even some notable personal names such as *Aleksander Makedonski* vs. *Alexander of Macedon*. Of course, any instance of translated or "transonymised" (Newmark 1999: 192) foreign names, such as EN *Leghorn*, *Brunswick*, *Lyons* for the original forms *Livorno*, *Braunschweig*, *Lyon*, is a potential source of lexical difficulty in the area of spelling. A related problem concerns a handful of somewhat more complicated pairs such as SI *Jordan* (the river) and *Jordanija* (the country) vs. the single EN form *Jordan*, or SI *Gruzija* (the country) and *Georgia* (a state in the USA) vs. the single EN form *Georgia*. The trouble may simply reside in the fact that one is unaware of the form of a proper name in English, or indeed of what it indicates, witness items such as

*Laplant* and *Cologne* (SI *Laponska* and *Köln*) that I remember seeing rendered incorrectly into Slovenian. Let us merely note here that in such cases decoding (L2:L1 translation) may be in fact more problematic than encoding (L1:L2 translation); usually it is the other way around. There are also a few proper names, again chiefly geographical, showing grammatical differences, such as SI *Balkan* (sg.) vs. EN *the Balkans* (pl.).

All of these views of false friendship indicate that there are several ways of looking at it, and that e.g. the translator's view is not necessarily shared by the language teacher or the lexicographer. Indeed, even members of the same profession sharing the same L1 background may find themselves in disagreement over cases of false friendship, the types, their status, importance, and relevance. One will do well to keep in mind that, depending on the lexicographer's interpretation of the concept, a dictionary of false friends could enter a very different set of paired lexical items, ranging from a relatively small number of no-semantic-overlap-type false friends (e.g. *lektorirati* – \*to lecture) all the way to every conceivable "foreign-sounding" L1 form (e.g. *non-stop*, *depandansa*, *fonolaboratorij*, *keks*, *kondicija*, *konzerva*) that just might induce one to make an interlingual lexical error on the basis of assumed identity between that L1 item and its (assumed but sometimes even nonexistent in recognizably similar form) L2 equivalent, deriving from perceived superficial/formal similarity. In between, there are quite a few options. This all suggests that the notion of **cline**, or gradience or continuum, defined as "a one-dimensional scale expressing some characteristic which a relevant object may possess to any degree between zero and 100 per cent" (Trask 1997: 43), could be usefully as well as realistically applied to false friends too.

Overall, there are two extreme positions, but with quite some room for maneuvering in between: On one hand, as broad an interpretation of false friendship as is possible, almost equal to virtually ANY type of **interlingual lexical problem** associated with surface similarity – whether in form or in pronunciation or both – or simply with the concept of foreignness, or even mere (unexpected) semantic differentness, or indeed interlingual differentness of any conceivable kind, regardless of the degree of surface similarity, as e.g. in SI *šola* vs. EN *school*, where *law*



*school* and *medical school* are in fact *pravna fakulteta* and *medicinska fakulteta* (not *šola*); note that *school* is not used for university or higher education in the UK (Davies 1997: 95). Also, *EN to sport* may be understood by Slovenian users of English only in the sporting sense, so that e.g. *to sport a mustache/jacket*, or a dictionary sporting 100,000 entries might be looked at with consternation, the (false-friend?) lexical problem being an L2 lexical item that "restricts" a foreign-language user as to its expected meaning. Next, *SI delta Mekong* vs. *EN the Mekong Delta* differ only in the order, aside from capitalization, and yet this is enough for some people to regard them as false friends.

On the opposite – "narrow" – pole, there are those who regard as "genuine" false friends solely those semantics-based false pairs whose meanings or senses are entirely divergent, with no semantic common ground, as it were, as e.g. *SI lektorirati* (= *EN to revise, to edit*), *objektiv* (= *EN lens*), *parola* (= *EN slogan, motto, password*), *protekcija* (= *EN favoritism, preferential treatment, [infml] pull*), *regal* (= *EN wall unit*), *renta* (= *EN annuity*), *trajekt* (= *EN ferry*), *transparent* (= *EN placard, banner*) vs. *EN to lecture, objective, regal, rent, traject, transparent*. However, this interpretation is narrow indeed; an instance of such an interpretation of the concept can be found in McCarthy (1990: 50), where the term false friends refers to such cognate interlingual pairs that differ in their degree of coreness (= the extent to which they are central vocabulary elements). McCarthy's example is *EN go* that is more core than Swedish *gf*, the latter meaning usually 'to go on foot.'

However that may be, it seems safe to say that many language professionals are likely to opt for a broader "middle" way, accepting as false friends all those pairs which display an interlingual problem of MEANING of whatever kind, but always caused by actual or assumed surface similarity. I, for one, endorse this view.

More specifically, linguists and translators have come up with and discussed a variety of specific (types of) false-friend(-like/-related) problems; thus e.g. Gläser (1992: 289–90) concentrates on false friends in LSP (= language for specific purposes), identifying a special type existing among technical terms that involves a proper-name constituent; one of her examples that holds true for

English and Slovene too is *SI Boyle-Mariottov zakon* (in physics) vs. *EN Boyle law*.

Indeed, one might well be tempted to go into proper-name-related false friends in general language as well, such as *SI Sikstinska kapela* vs. *EN Sistine Chapel* (spelling), *SI Čeljabinsk* vs. *EN Chelyabinsk* or *SI Menjuhin* vs. *EN Menuhin* (pronunciation), or the decidedly more trivial – but potentially dangerous, even if only in a trivial way and on a relatively low foreign-language-proficiency level – ones, such as *SI Danska* vs. *EN Denmark*.

To take another example, Kedzierski (2000) brings up the subject of the "strange phenomenon whereby – cut off from Europe by the Channel one presumes – the English meaning of a Latin expression has evolved from the original and, as a consequence, from the Italian sense." Thus *ad hoc* in both Italian and English – and in Slovenian – refers to something done with a specific purpose in mind and without taking account of further considerations. But, where in Italian it means 'made-to-measure,' 'designed for the purpose,' and is thus very positive, in English it tends to have a negative connotation of 'improvised' or 'done in a slap-happy fashion.' Similarly, *quid pro quo* (Italian *qui pro quo*) in English signifies 'something given or received for something else,' while in Italian the meaning is 'something heard or understood for something else.' In Slovenian, the phrase – labeled as literary and rare in the SSKJ – means 'confusion (of thought).'

What is funny is that handling lexical falseness may be very easy, provided you are aware of it and know the specific answer (let us see e.g. what the EN equivalents might be of *SI rokada/rošada* or *reverz*); but on the other hand it may as difficult as anything if you are either blissfully unaware of the danger involved or simply too lazy to do what it takes to avoid making the (embarrassing) mistake. And embarrassing they can be, let me assure you, as when a Slovenian reporter was overheard recently (December 2001) on the Slovenian national TV asking her Belgian guest about a certain *\*crise* (*SI kriza*), an elementary error if ever there was one, elementary all the way, my dear Watson. In many cases, one simply comes upon a foreign-sounding L1 item, say *granulom* (*EN abscessed tooth, gumboil*), that cannot be found in any relevant dictionary, so that one is acutely aware of a dictionary's shortcomings while also knowing – or suspecting – that one must not automatically as-



sume that a similar item having a similar meaning exists in the L2 (EN \**granulome*), and the reliable monolingual L2 dictionary will act as a reliable guide to meaning.

Another general observation that is mostly ignored in discussions of false friendship is that sometimes an L2 item may cause a lexical error in L1, provided native speakers of L1 are sufficiently exposed to it, e.g. when a correspondent living in a foreign country picks up such an item and transfers it wrongly into his L1. For example, a Slovenian TV correspondent in London was heard to say *britanski \*analisti*, doubtless a case of the erroneous transfer patterned on the English noun *analysts*, the correct Slovenian equivalent being *analitiki*. Also, a friend of mine, a Slovenian who has been living in England since the late 1960s, once asked me on the phone whether I had sent for the *\*ambulanca* (what he actually meant was *rešilni avto* or [infrm.] *rešilec*, the Slovenian equivalent of *ambulance* which is nonexistent in Slovenian). The same type of problem may be semantic, the incorrect L1 item selected being a real word: A Slovene movie translator recently rendered the American *two specials* (a person was ordering a lunch in a restaurant) as *dve specialiteti* ('two specialties,' or "specialities," in BrE terms), for example; the translation should have been *dva menija* or *dve kosili*. Of course, such cases are not nearly as frequent as those where interference works in the direction from L1 to L2.

## The Compounded Difficulty

A number of false pairs display more than one type of interlingual difficulty. Let us take the telling example of the SI noun *direkt* (rather evident-

ly *direct* in EN, according to many naive Slovenian users of English) as used e.g. in boxing, for instance in the phrase *levi direkt*, literally *left direct*, meaning 'a blow delivered with the unbent left arm.' Unfortunately, *direct* is not a noun in English – it can be either an adjective, a verb, or an adverb. Second, the user may be bewildered at the possible equivalents of the general term – *jab*, *blow*, *punch*. This line of thinking, too, will produce little in the way of an acceptable EN translation equivalent of the phrase: What we need to know is that EN here uses the NOUN *left*, 'a blow with the left hand,' but even here, *direct* cannot be used as an adjective, however logical it might seem to be; the correct equivalent is *straight left*. How are we to interpret and classify this case? The "compounded difficulty" or double-difficulty (in this case spelling and grammar [number]) can be also observed in SI noun *citre*, EN *zither*, for example. Another fitting example is SI *paleta* vs. EN *palette* (pronunciation/spelling and meaning; cf. *paleta možnosti* – *a range of possibilities*), SI *biftek* vs. EN (*beef*)*steak* being an interesting similar case (spelling and meaning; cf. SI *biftek* vs. *zrezek*). Furthermore, a kind of "double difficulty" can be found to exist on both sides, as it were: Consider *olje* – *oil*, a partial false friend for at least two reasons (SI *nafta* is EN *oil* as well, while EN *fuel oil* is SI *mazut*). Related problem areas include a false-friend-type difficulty combined with a collocational one<sup>6</sup>, as e.g. in *akrobacija* vs. EN *stunt* and *izvesti akrobacijo* vs. EN *to do a stunt*, and cases of a one-to-two false relationship, as in SI *šef* vs. EN *chief* and *chef*. Perhaps such cases of double-difficulty pairs could be regarded as exhibiting a greater-than-average learning difficulty. However, such a conclusion must be based on empirical evidence.

<sup>6</sup> With the advent of corpus linguistics, collocational behavior in contrast has assumed greater importance than ever before; thus Partington (1998: 53–56), in comparing EN *correct* and Italian *corretto* on the basis of corpus evidence, notes that there is a considerable difference in the collocational behavior of the two words, *correct* collocating most frequently with *response*, *weight*, *procedures*, *interpretation*, and *corretto* especially with *procedura*, *interpretazione*, *comportamento*, and *prospettiva*. From this kind of evidence one can hypothesize that a good number of the occurrences of *correct* are unlikely to be rendered in translation by *corretto*. Corpus analysis, then, can be usefully employed in studying false friendship.



## The Lexicographer's Angle – and Beyond

Lexicographically, the problem of the "fatal attraction of the cognate" can be addressed in two ways: You either incorporate an explicit contrastive lexical false-friend component into a **general bilingual dictionary**, which happens infrequently (but cf. Bujas 1983, and less so 1989, who provides a number of explicit "pedagogical" notes in some of his entries warning the Croatian user of a [potential] false-friend-type danger), or create a **specialized bi- or multilingual dictionary of false friends**. The latter, "the most specialized kind of alphabetically organized listing of errors" (James 1998: 101), is well known, particularly for French & English and German & English language pairs; the modern tradition dates back to the 1920s for the former pair and to the late 1940s for the latter (cf. Gorbahn-Orme and Hausmann 1991, with about seventy dictionaries of false friends and some forty other sources). The French/English tradition has been particularly strong (e.g. Cohen 1982, Dovey 1983, Rothwell 1993, Van Roey 1990: 111–25; Van Roey et al. 1991, Kirk-Greene 1981, and Thody and Evans 1985). As James (1998: 101) observes, the dictionary of false friends is relevant only to learners of a specific L2 who speak a particular mother tongue: in this sense, there can be no universal dictionary of false friends. German linguists in particular seem to have been attracted to the subject; for instance, the proceedings of a conference on new departures in contrastive linguistics (Mair and Markus eds. 1992) contain as many as four studies of false friends, all by German scholars, and a glance at their bibliographies will lend further support to the idea of German scholars being prominent in false-friend-type research work. In a more general vein too, false friendship has attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention; Spillner's (1991) comprehensive bibliography on error analysis includes over a hundred references to false friends, and James (1998), an analysis of errors in foreign-language learning and use, also includes several references to false friends.

In all fairness, one has to admit that in handling false friends, even the best general bilingual dictionaries can hardly at all be expected to do them full justice – they can be so complex plus

there is simply so much ELSE to enter too! Still, one is disappointed, perhaps only slightly, to find that, for instance, neither the leading Slovene-English dictionary (Grad and Leeming 1990) nor Bujas (1999) nor its chief Serbian/Croat-English competitor, Benson (1994), provides at the entry **garsonjera** the common English equivalent, viz. *studio* or *studio apartment* (AmE)/*studio flat* (BrE).

False-friend-related information may be given not only in a dictionary of false friends but in a variety of lexical works, whether monolingual or bilingual. Thus e.g. Berold (1987), a thematically organized vocabulary book (referred to in Hartmann 1995: 408), contains collocational information and warnings about false friends. The *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (Procter ed. 1995), a monolingual English learners' dictionary, incorporates false-friend information (typically half-page lists) for sixteen languages, even though I, for one, am of two minds about the usefulness of this feature, if only because of its superficiality and the ensuing danger of oversimplifications. The English learners' dictionary may be a foreign learner's tool, and a good one at that, but as a genre it necessarily lacks the kind of language specificity that foreign learners of the language and translators into English as their L2 frequently need so desperately in creating foreign-language texts. To take only one example, the Slovenian learner of English needs explicit guidance on the translation of, say, *cenzura*; his English learners' dictionary may list and duly label and define *censure* without pointing out that what is really needed in many cases is actually *censorship*, the practice or system of censoring something rather than 'an act of expressing criticism.' Indeed, the very concept of a homogeneous *foreign learner*, while perhaps making sense on a basic level of L1/L2 interface, indicates that what may be an advantage may at the same time turn out to be a drawback too – much of the difficulty such a learner will have in learning English is likely to depend on his/her L1 background, meaning that to talk about a "common difficulty ground" of users of English as a foreign language will often be but convenient fiction.



This **skeletal** glossary-type lexical-linguistic treatment of false friends can characteristically be found in the form of appendices or special lists of false pairs given either in general (e.g. in Procter ed. 1995, just referred to) or specialized (e.g. Levieux and Levieux 1980: 111-14, *passim*) language dictionaries, chiefly as a "bonus" feature.

Next, there is also a monolingual learners' dictionary of French that includes, *inter alia*, an appendix with French-based false-friend information for fourteen languages (Rey-Debove ed. 1999: 1109-49, the English section comprising pp. 1112-17).

A different problem that is also related to dictionaries has to do with data available from even the best English dictionaries presently available. For instance, in drafting the dictionary entry for *SI skarpa*, a student of mine noticed that the information given for *scarp* in the leading four EFL dictionaries was far from being uniform: It is not even listed in the *COBUILD* (Sinclair ed. 1995) and in the *Cambridge* (Procter ed. 1995); the *Longman* (Summers ed. 1995) gives it the label *technical* and defines it as 'a line of natural cliffs,' whereas the *Hornby* (Crowther ed. 1995) enters it unlabeled and defines it as 'a very steep slope,' the latest edition (Wehmeier ed. 2000) adding the label *technical*. Well, there are cases when even the combined resources of the four leading English learners' dictionaries fail to provide the satisfactory answers; additional sources must be consulted, general and specialized. In a similar vein, consider *SI rabat* vs. EN *rebate*; in the *Hornby* (Crowther ed. 1995), it is defined as 'an amount by which a debt, tax, etc. can be reduced' (*SI olajšava*); confusingly enough, the latest *Hornby* (Wehmeier ed. 2000) lists two senses, viz. 'an amount of money that is paid back to you because you have paid too much' (*SI olajšava*) and 'an amount of money that is taken away from the cost of sth, before you pay for it' (*SI popust*). The *Longman* (Summers ed. 1995) says it is 'an amount of money that is paid back to you when you have paid too much tax, rent etc.' (*SI vračilo*). The *Cambridge* (Procter ed. 1995) concurs with *Longman*, and so does the *COBUILD* (Sinclair ed. 1995). Check the *Collins* (Treffry ed. 1998), a well-known, dependable and comprehensive native-speaker dictionary – it tells you that *rebate* is in fact the same as *discount* (*SI popust*).

One positively starts feeling that having so many dictionaries of English around may not be such an advantage after all!

The false-friend dictionary should reflect concern over several issues, notably WHO the dictionary is compiled and intended FOR, and for what PURPOSE; what SOURCES it is to be based upon; whether the overall APPROACH is to be **lexical-linguistic** or **discursive-encyclopedic**, and whether in the former case the false-friend dictionary is to be used especially in **DECODING** (= L2 → L1) or in **ENCODING** (= L1 → L2).

## Decoding or Encoding?

If the approach/orientation is to be lexical-linguistic, is the false-friend dictionary to be used primarily in decoding (= reception function, i.e. L2 : L1 translation) or encoding (= production function, i.e. L1 : L2 translation)? This is important: Focusing on decoding means laying heavy stress on meaning, particularly the L2 equivalents, whereas emphasis on encoding will bring about a much more complex entry-article structure. The general answer, it seems, should be: Mostly for encoding, because in decoding an L2 context will help a lot; James (1998: 147), for instance, refers to "the facilitative effects" of deceptive cognates "in **receptive** language use, where context will neutralize any potential semantic misassociations" [his emphasis]. Other authors agree on this point, typically in the context of interference: Mackey (1965: 109-10) notes that if the learner is learning simply to understand the language, the greater the similarity between the first language and the second, the easier the latter will be to understand. In using the language, however, it is the similarity that may cause interference by the misuse of deceptive cognates, like *local* and *location* in French and English. Thus the direction in which awareness of and assistance with false friendship are likely to be crucial is mostly encoding, whereas in decoding, context will usually help us avoid making the dreaded mistake. For instance, the various senses of EN *to serve* ('servirati,' 'služiti,' 'ministrirati' etc.) will mostly be clear from various dictionaries and from the context, but on the other hand there is a real danger that a Slovene will be tempted to trans-



late the SI verb *ministrirati* by the vaguely familiar but incorrect *\*ministrate*, and the same could be true of *petrolej* (*\*petroleum*).

Nevertheless, Lázár (1998: 95) points out that the existing types of false-friend errors are diverse – of varying complexity, one might add – and that they may manifest themselves in encoding as well as decoding, adding that in decoding, false-friend-related difficulties “are more tempered by the context.” Thus the matter is not as straightforward as it might appear at first sight, a lack of consensus being obvious: According to Gorbahn-Orme and Hausmann (1991: 2884), false-friend dictionaries comparing more than two languages are not helpful to students because they do not help them in language production (implied focus thus being on encoding tasks). By contrast, Hayward and Moulin (1984: 190) point out that in false friends, confusion arises because an L2 word looks or sounds exactly or nearly like an L1 word (stress on decoding). Finally, Hartmann (1994: 259) observes that some cognates pose traps for the learner, which may lead to errors in reception or production (stress on both decoding and encoding). Whatever the verdict, it is a fact that difficulties with false friends can and do occur also in decoding: First, the context may not always be revealing. Second, formal similarity is a powerful source of lexical interference even in cases of the so-called **total false friends**, i. e. those where there is presently no semantic overlap at all between the two items, so that their meanings may be drastically different (e. g. SI *parola* ‘slogan’ vs. EN *parole* ‘permission to leave prison’; SI *fagot* ‘bassoon’ vs. EN *faggot*, especially in its AmE sense of ‘homosexual’). Note that partial overlap may well turn out to be even trickier, even in decoding: In coming upon EN *delicacy*, for instance, many Slovenes will hardly ever – whatever the context – associate it with ‘something good to eat that is expensive or rare,’ relating it rather to *delikatesa* (‘delicatessen’) or *delikaten* (‘delicate’); likewise, to a Slovenian, EN *athlete* will likely conjure up someone having to do with *athletics* (i. e. track and field) only. The same may be true of fairly specialized L1 words that are far more general in L2, witness e. g. *caucasian*, translated – in a movie – into SI by the

questionable *kavkazijec* or *kavkaški* rather than simply *belec*. Interference, incidentally, can work both ways, so that e. g. EN *sergeant* may well lead one to translate it by the old-fashioned SI noun *seržant*, though *narednik* is doubtless a lot more appropriate as a stylistically neutral equivalent. That this is not really surprising can be seen from word-association responses in foreign learners, especially it would seem elementary-level learners, which show that in their semantic factors are often overridden by extraneous phonological factors, such as the chance resemblance between an L1 form and another in L2 (Meara 1984: 229–34).

Let us examine a subtler point where a false-friend-type error was committed in decoding: It was probably due to the fact that EN *secret agent* has as its equivalent the predictable SI *tajni agent* that led to the analogous but unfortunately erroneous rendering of EN *free agent* by a Slovenian translator as SI *\*prost(i) agent*, the correct meaning being rather ‘a person whose actions are not constrained by others,’ especially ‘(in sports) an athlete eligible to play a pro sport who is free to sign a contract with any team.’ The phrase, that is, was wrongly taken “at face value,” that is, as a semantically compositional one, i. e. as a mere free combination, while in fact it is a nominal compound with opaque meaning and therefore listed and defined as such in most of the better dictionaries of English.

At any rate, overall, encoding is to be given more attention, which will characteristically result in a more complex (= varied) dictionary entry-article makeup, with a number of examples of typical language use, meaning discriminations of near-synonyms in L2, and liberal use of style labels, for example.

## Kinds of Falseness in False Friends<sup>7</sup>

Whatever our interpretation of false friendship, there is bound to exist a fairly specific **cline of difficulty** for users of every single language pair, which should be reflected in the false-friend lexical statement, as it were. To begin with, each such statement typically contains three kinds of

<sup>7</sup> This section in particular is based on Gabrovšek (1998: 169–73).



information (typically given in some conventionalized form):

$X_{(L1)}$  looks like but is not  $Y_{(L2)}$  but rather  $Z_{(L2)}$   
{or  $Z_{(L2)1}$ ,  $Z_{(L2)2}$ ,  $Z_{(L2)3}$  ...}

while the fourth bit of information may add the correct L1 equivalent(s) of  $Y_{(L2)}$ .

Note that the absolute minimum is to provide two kinds of information:

$X_{(L1)}$  is (= must be translated by)  $Z_{(L2)}$  {or  $Z_{(L2)1}$ ,  
 $Z_{(L2)2}$ ,  $Z_{(L2)3}$  ...}

Typical SI – EN examples illustrating the four types of false-friend information include:

SI *parola* n. – EN \**parole* / *slogan* {*parole* = pogojni izpust}

SI *kanvas* – EN \**canvas(s)* / *trampoline* {*canvas(s)* = platno; oljnata slika}

SI *faktografski* – EN \**factographic* / *factual*, *fact-oriented* {*factographic* does not exist}

SI *monden* – EN \**mundane* / *fashionable*, *plush*, *posh*, *ritzy*, *stylish* {*mundane* = dolgočasen, nezanimiv}

Note that in false friends semantic relationships are often far from being simple and straightforward; this is frequently due to diverging polysemy or simply to a different semantic development and hence only PARTIAL OVERLAP in meaning, or to dissimilar collocations (cf. e.g. SI *akcija*, *ček*, *misija* vs. EN *action*, *check*, *mission* [e.g. SI *reševalna akcija* vs. EN *rescue operation*], while EN *operation* vs. SI *operacija* represents a different problem, but basically again that of partial-only overlap). That is why e.g. Duff (2000: 178) labels *action* as a “semi-false friend.” Indeed, the term *semi-false cognate* is not uncommon with reference to words that can only sometimes be translated by the similar word in the other language. A different number of equivalents, too, may create subtle problems, as in SI *baza* vs. EN *basis* and the less relevant – but not irrelevant – *base*. The complexities (in essence the degree of semantic overlap plus contextual factors) involved are hard to capture in full.

A number of authors have suggested specific topics/areas where false-friend difficulties are known to exist or can be anticipated (e.g. Granger and Swallow 1988, Ivir 1968, Moulin and Hayward 1984), such as **diverging polysemy** (various more or less tricky types of partial semantic

overlap, also known as **split** [James 1998: 148–49]), more or less identical denotation but (widely) different **connotation** and/or **style values**, and dissimilar **collocational ranges**. A list of representative false-friend-difficulty types for the Slovenian/English language pair might include the following:

(1) SI lexical items having a good-friend relationship with similar items in several European languages, especially in German, traditionally the most influential and widely understood foreign language in Slovenia, but a false-friend relationship with similar English items, such as SI *absolvirati*, *aktualen*, *eventualen*, *genialen*, *demantirati*, *konstatirati*, *motor*, *publika* and their English deceptive lookalikes *absolve*, *actual*, *eventual*, *genial*, \**dement*, \**constate*, *motor*, *public*. A look at the list of some 150 German false friends in the *Cambridge International* (Procter ed. 1995: 343) and at a somewhat similar list in Helliwell (1989: 183–91) reveals many items where the English–German false pair is at least partly paralleled by the English–Slovenian one (e.g. German *absolvieren*, *aktuell*, *Benzin*, *Kabine*, *Karte*, *Chef*, *Chips*, *isolieren*, *Konzept*, *Konjunktiv*, *Kuriosität*, *Delikatessen*, *energisch*, *eventuell*, *Fabrik*, *Fagott*, *famos*, *Formular*, *genial*, *graziös*, *imprägnieren*, *Instanzen*, *Laborant*, *lack*, *Lokal*, *Mappe*, *Marmelade*, *Mimik*, *Mode*, *Necessaire*, *nobel*, *Notiz*, *ordinär*, *Police*, *Politik*, *Pudding*, *Ratio*, *Rezept*, *reklamieren*, *Reklamation*, *Salat*, *Schema*, *sensibel*, *Smoking*, *solid(e)*, *sympathisch*, and many others). Firstly, such pairs may be unexpectedly difficult to analyze exhaustively (e.g. *kontrola* vs. *control* [n.], which are occasionally equivalent, but more often the EN correspondent will be *check*, *inspection*, *supervision*; cf. also the innocent-looking *bife* vs. *buffet*, where the English item turns out to be a lot more complex than the Slovenian one); secondly, false relationships are not necessarily fixed and static. For instance, as Parkes and Cornell (1992: Preface, p. vii) point out, noting that linguistic change leads to the emergence of new false cognates and the disappearance of old ones, that EN *sympathetic*, ‘feeling/showing sympathy’ and German *sympathisch*, ‘likeable, congenial’ are closer together now than a few decades ago, a view supported by the *Collins COBUILD* dictionary (Sinclair ed. 1995), which tells us (*sympathetic*, sense 3) that “you describe someone as **sympathetic** when



you like them and approve of the way that they behave," thus bringing it close to the meaning of its German (and French, Spanish, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Russian as well as Slovenian) cognate, i.e. 'likeable, congenial.' Also, Partington (1998: 53) compares the English *sanc-tion* and the Italian *sanzione* and *sanzionare*, noting that the Italian verb "is undergoing a (very drastic) change in meaning"; such a discrepancy between a dictionary definition and corpus evidence may thus be attributable to semantic shift.

In a more general vein, as Newmark (1991: 83) observes, many of the former interlingually false senses have converged or are converging again (e.g. EN *control*, *actual*, *global*) due to the influence of international organizations as well as the media and other regulated language contacts.

(2) Phrase-related false friendship that does not exist on the level of single-word items:

SI *direkten* – EN *direct*, but *direkten vlak/cesta* – through train/road

SI *fiziološki* – EN *physiological*, but *fiziološka raztopina* – saline

SI *univerzalen* – EN *universal*, but *univerzalni ključ* – master key

SI *takten* – EN *tactful*, but *dvotakten motor* – two-stroke engine.

The problem may exist in the other "direction," i.e. starting with English:

EN *civil* – SI *civilen*, but *civil war* – *državljanska vojna*.

The situation may become more complex or subtle, witness pairs such as

SI *signalen*, *raketa* – EN *signal*, *rocket*, but *signalna raketa* – distress flare

SI *propaganda* – EN *propaganda* (cf. also the collocational equivalence in *politična propaganda* – political propaganda), but *ekonomska propaganda* – advertising, publicity, (on TV) commercials.

Further complications may involve derived words; e.g. the adjective *positive* is often SI *pozitiven*, while certain collocations call for a different rendering (e.g. *pozitivna ocena* is EN *passing grade*); furthermore, the adverb *positively* is often NOT to be translated into SI by *pozitivno*, particularly when emphasis is involved, witness e.g. *she's positively beautiful*. Next, SI *test* and *pozitiv-*

*en* are straightforward, but *biti pozitiven na testu* (speaking of athletes) is to *test positive*. Finally, there are also cases of a collocation vs. non-collocation type of equivalence, as in SI *petrolejka* – EN *kerosene lamp*.

Finally, problems with certain word combinations such as SI *imunološki sistem* vs. EN *immune system* are indicative of some complexity too. While the false-friend feature is uncontroversial, the two combinations are probably compounds rather than collocations; second, the status of EN adjective *immunologic(al)*, listed in most major dictionaries of English, is unclear. In such cases, representative corpora of the language must be consulted (cf. also footnote 7).

(3) One item in L1, two or more – often related – items in L2:

SI *reklama* – EN *\*reclaim* / *ad*; *commercial* (near-synonyms)

SI *adaptirati* – EN *adapt* BUT ALSO *redo*, *redecorate* (e.g. a bathroom) (additional L1 sense)

SI *deformacija* – EN *distortion*, *deformity*, *deformation* (several related L2 equivalents)

SI *pavza* – EN *break*, *intermission*, *interval*, *pause*, *recess* ({near-}synonyms)

SI *major* – EN *major*; *\*mayor* (two formally similar L2 items that have different meanings)

In such cases, brief meaning-discriminating phrases as well as contextualized examples and usage notes will be invaluable for encoding purposes.

(4) Grammatical dissimilarities, such as

– different number: SI *pižama* (sg.) – EN *pyjamas* or {AmE} *pajamas* (always pl.)

SI *akna*, *akne* (sg., pl.) – EN *acne* (sg. only)

SI *taktika* (sg.) – EN *tactics* (usually pl. in the military sense)

– different verb complementation: SI *diskutirati* or *poročati* + Prep.O. – EN *to discuss* or *to report* + DO.

(5) Regional variation – especially national, mostly English English vs. American English – within EN, sometimes accompanied by style and grammar differences, as in

SI *atletika* – EN *athletics* {EnE}

track and field {AmE}

SI *tableta* – EN *pill*, {esp EnE also} *tablet*.



Of course, there are also more or less straightforward cases of falseness where AmE and BrE terms simply exist side by side in the same relation with a single Slovenian item, or its relevant sense, such as SI *peron* – AmE *track*, BrE *platform*.

Finally, an item may only exist in one variety only, as in BrE *electrics*, 'the parts of a machine that use electrical power'.

Note that the matter may be subtler: e. g. BrE (still?) makes a distinction between *programme* and *program* (the latter only used in the computer-related sense), while in AmE *program* is the only form whatever the meaning intended.

(6) Different use of affixes, with or without a change in meaning, e. g.

SI *avtomatiziran, dezinformacija* – EN *automated, misinformation*

SI *teoretik* – EN *theorist* also *theoretician* (the latter form is less frequent)

SI *politika* – EN *politics; policy*.

Note that this category as a rule excludes the spelling-type affix-related error, as e. g. in SI *dezinfekcija* vs. EN *disinfection*.

(7) "English-sounding" L1 items that have no formally similar equivalents in English:

SI *bankomat* – EN *cash machine; cashpoint, cash dispenser* {EnE}, ATM {AmE}

SI *kaskader* – EN *stuntman, stuntwoman*

SI *faktoografski* – EN *factual*.

The false English equivalent may occasionally exist, but with a totally disparate meaning:

SI (*okenska*) *roleta* – EN *\*roulette / (window) shade* {AmE} *roller blind* {EnE}

These categories represent recurrent types of "lexical falseness" noticed by Slovenian users of English composing in – occasionally translating from – English. Individual cases can display a number of surprisingly complex relationships, including combinations of the above categories, and be relevant in encoding as well as decoding, such as e. g. SI noun *panika* vs. EN *panic* (good friends), but the adjective *paničen* is not normally rendered by EN *panicky* for both stylistic and collocational reasons (cf. e. g. *panično iskanje* – a *frantic search/a \*panicky search*). Or consider SI *akord*, at this point only in the musical sense: A Slovenian encoding it often generates EN false

equivalent *\*ac(c)ord* (cf. *chord*), partly on the basis of the vague awareness of similar EN words *ac-cord, according*; this may in turn make one believe, this time in decoding, that EN *accord* has a musical sense corresponding to SI *akord*!

## The Bewildered Learners

As to the use-user dictionary perspective, the little empirical work done so far indicates that as dictionary users, language learners seem to underestimate false friends as sources of interlingual difficulty (Bogaards 1998); on the other hand, learners look up infrequent words a lot more frequently though they – when not looked up – caused errors less frequently than false friends (ibid., p. 156). This is one of the reasons why it certainly makes a lot of sense to teach false friends in the foreign-language classroom and raise students' awareness of this timely topic.

Pedagogical material on false friends concentrates, for the most part, on two specific languages (cf. e. g. Arntz 1998, Bogaards 1998, Granger 1993, and Holmes and Guerra Ramos 1993); occasionally, however, the one-versus-many approach can be found, as in Thomas's all-English EFL vocabulary book (1995: 46–50), where the relevant exercise is based on the assumption that "speakers of other, mainly European, languages may come across certain English words and because they look similar to words in their own language wrongly assume that the meaning is the same" (p. 46). He goes on to list twenty-six word pairs, the first being the false friend, the second being the word it is often confused with, the exercise being for the learner to put each word in its correct place in the sentences that follow each pair. These "international" pairs are:

*actual*, 'real,' confused with *present*, 'current, existing now'. Note that *actual* in particular is "a notorious false friend for translators into English" (Duff 2000: 25);

*ignore*, 'deliberately take no notice of,' 'pay no attention to,' confused with *not know*;

*formidable*, 'causing fear,' 'difficult to achieve,' confused with *wonderful*;

*camping*, 'activity of holidaying in a tent,' confused with *camp-site*, 'place for setting up tents';



*morale*, 'spirits,' 'state of mind,' confused with *moral*, 'right, proper, virtuous';  
*frequent*, 'go to often,' confused with *attend*, 'be present at';  
*adequate*, 'enough,' confused with *suitable*, 'right for the purpose';  
*argument*, 'disagreement' or 'supporting reason,' confused with *subject*, 'something talked or written about or studied';  
*eventually*, 'finally,' confused with *possibly*, 'perhaps';  
*dancing*, 'activity of dance,' confused with *dancehall*;  
*experience*, 'previous knowledge or work' or 'event,' confused with *experiment*;  
*fabricate*, 'make up something false,' confused with *manufacture*;  
*chauffeur*, 'uniformed car-driver employed to drive others,' confused with *driver*;  
*assist*, 'help,' confused with *attend*, 'be present at';  
*pass*, 'be successful in test, exam,' confused with *take*, 'attempt test, exam';

*remark*, 'make a comment,' confused with *notice*, 'happen to see';  
*souvenir*, 'something bought as a reminder of a visit, occasion,' confused with *memory*, 'something remembered' or 'ability to remember';  
*stamp*, 'postage stamp,' confused with *print*, 'picture made from engraved block';  
*reunion*, 'gathering of friends, colleagues after separation,' confused with *meeting*;  
*sympathetic*, 'showing understanding,' confused with *nice*, 'pleasant';  
*corps*, 'special group of people,' confused with *corpse*, 'dead body';  
*voyage*, 'journey by sea,' confused with *journey*, 'traveling from one place to another';  
*legend*, 'very old story,' confused with *key*, 'symbols and their meanings on a map';  
*become*, 'develop into,' confused with *obtain*, 'get possession of';  
*on the contrary* introducing contradiction, confused with *on the other hand* introducing counter-argument; and  
*critic*, 'reviewer,' confused with *review*, 'article written by critic.'

## Conclusions

There are a number of possible interpretations of false friends and false friendship, but in most cases, the phenomenon refers to a specific interlingual vocabulary problem, viz. one where two items in two languages are similar in form and/or pronunciation but only partly or not at all in meaning and usage. At least for research purposes, then, the concept must be carefully defined. False friendship involves many lexical topics, ranging from simple ones to very difficult ones,

and it is an internationally recognized subject researched and discussed by translators, bilingual lexicographers, foreign language teachers, and applied linguists. To compile false friends in a generally useful reference work, one needs a lot more than one's own notes, personal interest, and (linguistic/teaching etc.) experiences. Such a work must also reflect a clear awareness of the needs of envisaged users.<sup>§</sup>

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