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»FALSE-FRIENDS« AND SLOVENE-ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Pisec članka, dolgoletni lektor za angleški jezik na filozofski fakulteti v Ljubljani, v uvodu spregovori na splošno o slabih in neustreznih prevodih, ki jih vsak dan srečujemo na najrazličnejših področjih. Osvetliti skuša nekatere vzroke za te težave ter se dotakne tudi pomanjkljive prevajalske izobrazbe avtorjev. Skupni imenovalec vsem slabim prevodom je pač nezadostno jezikovno znanje.

Problem ponazori s krajšim zgledom iz neustreznega tiskanega prevoda. Glavnina prispevka obsega primere t. i. faux-amis (angl. false friends) izrazov, katerih prevod (v angleščino) se samo zdi enakovreden izvirniku ali pa le zveni tako, v resnici pa še daleč ni tak. Seznam obsega izraze, ki je nanje pisec najpogosteje naletel v prevedenih besedilih in ki so nanje opozorile tudi razprave na podiplomskem prevajalskem tečaju na filozofski fakulteti v Ljubljani.

It is, unfortunately, all too easy to find examples of woefully inadequate Slovene-English translation. And they can, sadly, be found in all areas: from short literary extracts and coffee-table books through to information leaflets and publicity materials, especially those with which the hapless tourist is bombarded (Where else would one find the classic recommendation: "We are suggesting you the old town nucleus sightseeings"?). Such texts may be the work of insufficiently-trained and hard-pressed young translators with no more experienced hand to consult; they may have been produced by students, or even teachers, trying to supplement their incomes with a little extra work; they might simply have been churned out by over-confident company employees who assume that an ability to use their mother tongue and a passing knowledge of English, combined with occasional use of a bi-lingual dictionary, are all the tools prospective translators need before they can get down to work. We can already see one of the roots of the problem taking shape he-

re: that translation is (except, perhaps, in the field of literature) consistently under-rated as a skill and that the translator is consistently under-valued. And a concomitant factor worth mentioning at this juncture is the frequent lack of "quality control" over the product: not only are translations rarely checked for linguistic acceptability by someone other than the translator, but even the need for proof-reading before printing is frequently overlooked.

We might consider, in passing, the question of how someone who may have studied English for many years can produce a poor English translation. Besides the obvious point that translation is, in any case, a very special skill with many inherent dangers of interlingual interference, there is the fact that the way languages are taught (and this is not just a criticism of the Slovene system!) can produce a fine passive knowledge of the language being learnt but still provide no real opportunity to develop the productive skills, especially writing. There are other factors which should be mentioned

here: lack of contact with the living language in real situation; paucity of "authentic" teaching materials; "institutionalisation" of errors (that is, those regularly passed on through generations of teachers and pupils, such as the use of "until" instead of "by" or "before", as in "Do it until the end of the week" — many of the most common of these being caused by interference from the mother tongue); over-generalisation of misapplied rules; and so on. The problem can be placed in a nutshell thus: frequently, the translator simply does not know the target language (in this case English) well enough. One consequence of this is over-reliance on bi-lingual dictionaries. Such dictionaries, especially the generalised variety, are rarely more than clumsy aids to the passive understanding of a foreign language, based as they are on rather spurious notions of what lexical equivalence actually is. An intuitive word-for-word "matching" of entries in monolingual dictionaries and ad hoc approximations between superficially equivalent lemmas tend too often to be the only rationale behind the compilation of such works. Moreover, they too often rely on undifferentiated list-type entries which give the user little real guidance as to usage, when what the foreign learner really needs is "genuine equivalents, together with an indication of the colloquial restrictions that operate in specific situational contexts"¹.

Let us now compare two supposedly equivalent texts: taken, in this case, from a "Dentol Anti-Plaque" toothpaste tube. The context here demands that, for the English text to be a successful translation of the Slovene text, it should be functionally equivalent; it should also, of course, be semantically equivalent.

Zobna medicina je ugotovila, da so zobne obloge glavni povzročitelj vseh obolenj zob in dlesni, ker se v njih razmnožujejo nevarne bakterije. Dentol anti-plaque učinkovito

odstranjuje te obloge, 12 ur zavira nastajanje novih ter tako preventivno varuje pred kariesom in parodontopatijo.

The dental medicine has stated that the plaques present the main cause of all teeth and gum diseases as dangerous bacteria are produced within them.

Dentol anti-plaque efficiently removes these plaques and for 12 hours prevents the appearance of new ones and thus preventively protects against caries and periodontal diseases.

There are many clear reasons why this is not a successful translation: ungrammatical use of the definite article on two occasions; the use of "state" for »ugotoviti«; treating "plaque" as a countable noun on three occasions; inappropriate use of the verb "present"; the use of "produce" for »razmnoževati«; the word order of the second sentence; and so on — it would not be difficult to add further points. I would, however, like to focus on just two lexical items in the Slovene text: »medicina« and »preventivno«.

The noun »medicina« is often translatable by the English "medicine"; in this context it is not — it cannot collocate with the adjective "dental" (»zoben«). An appropriate translation of this text would probably begin thus: "Dental research has shown that...". Similarly, the adverb »preventivno« cannot be translated by "preventively" here: "preventively protects against" (»varuje pred«) is not an acceptable collocation (nor, indeed, is "preventively" a suitable equivalent for »preventivno« in such contexts as »preventivno cepiti«). A suitable translation here would be: "and thus protects against". (»ter tako preventivno varuje pred...«) — or perhaps "helps protect against...".

This is the translation problem I shall be dealing with in the rest of this article: the mis-translation of lexical items from the SL (source language), using TL (target language) items which sound and/or look as if they should be equivalent in this particular

¹ R. R. K. Hartmann, »Contrastive Textology« (Julius Groos Verlag, Heidelberg, 1980)

context (or even, in some cases, in all contexts), but which in fact are not. In Britain, these items are often known by the French expression "faux amis"; we shall use the English expression "false-friends".

To take a classic example: the French adjective "sympathique" is a "false-friend" for the English learner because in most contexts it is not a translation equivalent for the English "sympathetic". And to take the two languages we are dealing with here: "sympathetic" is in most contexts not a translation equivalent for »simpatičen«. So, in the context of Slovene-English translation we can label »simpatičen« and "sympathetic" as "false-friends" (although interestingly, for the Slovene learner of French, "sympatique" is not a "false-friend").

Below, a number of Slovene words which can be regarded as "false-friends" are given; they are listed in thematic groups in order to make clear the kinds of contexts in which they occur. Beside them are suggestions for appropriate English translations: these are pragmatic equivalents only, and should not be regarded as "synonyms" or translation equivalents irrelevant of context. The words listed have been selected on an empirical basis: those which, in my experience, are sources of error for students of English (some of these are actually not "translation problems" as such, belonging more to informal, spoken registers) and those (the more "specialized" vocabulary) which emerged as problems during discussion on the faculty's postgraduate translation course.

energy: production and conservation; electrical goods

elektrarna	power-station
hidroelektrarna	hydro-electric power-station
termoelektrarna	thermal power-station
elektrogospodarstvo	Electricity Board
energetika	»problemi naše energetike« — energy supply »V prihodnjem letu ... prednost energetiki ...« — energy production and supply »nezadovoljstvo občanov ... z energetiko« — the energy situation
energetski	»energetske razmere« — the energy situation »energetske surovine« — energy-producing raw materials »energetski objekti« — power stations and plants
elektroenergetski sistem	the national grid
dispečer	distributor
agregat	generator
redukcija	power-cut
akumulacijsko jezero	reservoir
termoakumulacijska peč	storage heater
akumulator	(car) battery
baterija	torch (which is, of course, powered by batteries)
bomba (plina)	canister (smaller, e.g. for camping) cylinder (larger, for household use; oxygen etc)
bojler	immersion heater, water heater (in home) (boiler: in a hospital, on a ship, to supply a central heating system, etc)
izolacija	insulation
izoliran	insulated
klimatizacija	air-conditioning

klimatiziran	air-conditioned
antena	(television) aerial
fen	hair-dryer
aparat	»brivski aparat« — (electric) razor/shaver
	»telefonski aparat« — telephone
interna (telefon)	extension
economics, trade, business, industry	
konvertibilni trg	hard currency areas/market
subvencija	subsidy (e.g. of rent or prices)
	grant (a lump sum given by government etc)
participacija	(financial) contribution
reprodukcija	production, manufacturing
reprodukcijski material	semi-manufactures
rezervni deli	spare parts, spares (informal)
inventura	stock-taking
kontrolor	supervisor (industry)
	auditor (financial)
šef	boss
	»šef oddelka« — head of department
non-stop	(not really used in Britain: normally one sees only a sign with "Opening Hours...")
propaganda	publicity (material), advertising
politics, law, administration	
proces	trial
predsednik	chairman, chairperson (becoming more widely accepted)
predsednica	chairwoman, chairperson
	("president" for the head of a country, of a company, of a court)
šef države	head of state
aparat	»birokratski aparat« — (the) bureaucracy
	»državni aparat« — (the) administration,
	state administration
	a gathering
manifestacija	demonstration, parade (to commemorate sthng)
manifestirati	demonstrate (for or against sthng)
laburist	Labour Party member/supporter
laburisti	the Labour Party (or its members and supporters)
health	
nataliteta	(the) birth rate
recept	(doctor's) prescription
	(»recept za kuhanje« — recipe; the English word "receipt" is translatable by »račun«)
krema	ointment
	("cream" usually cosmetic)

land, building, etc

parcela	piece/plot of land
vikend	weekend house/cottage (depending on size), holiday home
blok	block of flats
lokal	premises
objekt	(varies widely with context: often "project" or "building"; otherwise one has to use a suitable paraphrase: »Največji objekt na novi avtocesti ...« — "The biggest piece of civilengineering on ..."; Objekt je dolg ...« — "The bridge is ..." etc)

transport, etc

šofer	(bus/lorry) driver (a "chauffeur" is a privately-employed driver; one who is publicly employed is an "official driver")
taksist	taxi-driver
tramvaj	tram, ("tramway" applies mainly to the rails)
kontrolor	ticket-inspector (train) conductor (bus/tram)
merilnik (hitrosti)	speedometer
rezervna (guma)	spare (tyre)
parking	car park, parking-place, lay-by (at the side of the road in the country)
relacija	(»avtobusna«) route (when applied to driving lessons there is no special English expression; for »nočna relacija«, "night-time driving-lesson" may be possible)
tankati	to put (some) petrol in (the car)

recreation, tourism, catering, etc

kamping, camping	campsite
depandansa	(hotel) annexe
trim	exercise (»trim steza« — exercise path)
trening	(can be "exercise" or "practice" as well as "training", depending on context)
trenirke	track-suit
bife	cafe, ("buffet" usually on a railway station, "buffet car" on a train)

education

(some of the terms used here may not be applicable to the American system)

lektor	lecturer (this term also valid for »predavatelj«)
profesor	lecturer (higher education) teacher (school) ("professor" is used mainly for the head of a university department — roughly equivalent to »redni profesor«)

kolega	fellow-student, (in informal speech) college/university friend ("colleague" is usually reserved for someone you work with) (as a term of address there is no English equivalent — students are addressed as "Mr" or "Miss" plus surname, or by first name only)
študijsko leto	academic year (»šolsko leto« — school year)
Filozofska fakulteta	Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Arts and Sciences (depending on what departments it contains)
gimnazija	grammar school (although not an exact equivalent)
disertacija	(Master's or Doctoral) thesis
negativna/pozitivna ocena	(we do not talk about "negative" or "positive" marks, but about people failing or passing — the latter with a high or low mark: the lowest mark with which you can pass is the "pass mark")
fonolaboratorij	language lab (oratory)
boks	booth (in language lab)
štipendija	grant (normally from public funds) scholarship (a special award, possibly from industry or some public body)
the arts	
kultura	(depends very much on context) »filmska kultura« — the film industry »likovna kultura« — the fine arts »glasbena kultura« — music (the word "culture" is much more restricted in use than its Slovene equivalent — usually it is used on a more abstract, generalised level)
kulturen	(paraphrase often unavoidable here as in English we do not talk about "cultural workers", "cultural monuments", etc e.g. »kulturni delavci« — people who work in the arts »kulturni spomeniki« — artistic and historical monuments) »kulturna skupnost« — Arts Council (although really outside the scope of this list, »skupnost« is another interesting example of a word which can be translated in a variety of ways, depending on context: e.g. »zavarovalna skupnost« — insurance company, »pedagoška skupnost« — education council, etc)
kulturna manifestacija	celebration (»proslava«) parade (»parada«) festival, e.g. »gledališka manifestacija« — drama festival

teza	theme/subject (e.g. at symposium)
kritika	(film, book) review
plastičen	vivid (description, portrayal of character)
idejen	intellectual (content — »vsebina«, problem, etc)
	conceptual (approach, etc)
kriminalka	(murder) mystery, detective story, criminal (adj.)
	story/film
sinhronizirati (film)	dub
sinhroniziran	dubbed
kinooperater	projectionist
maska	make-up
maska, masker(ka)	make-up artist
fotograf	photographer, photographer's (shop)
fotografski aparat	camera
fleš	flashlight, flashbulb
harmonika	accordion
publicist	journalist and/or writer
lektorirati	check (a text)
jobs	
modni kreator	(fashion-)designer
maneken(ka)	dummy (in a shop window)
	model, male model
arheolog, fiziolog	archeologist, physiologist, gynaecologist, etc
ginekolog, etc	
food, etc	
keks	biscuit
	(“cake” is »kolač« or »torta«)
toast	(in cafés etc) toasted sandwich
čips	crisps
	(“chips” are “pommes frites”)
puding	(“pudding” covers a wide range of dishes in England and could cover such things as »mlečni riž«, »prekmurska gibanica« and so on; Slovene “puuding” would best be described as some kind of “dessert”, e.g. “fruit dessert”, or perhaps as “mousse”)
solata	(the most common kind of salad in England is “lettuce”: »glava solate« in “a head of lettuce”; »mehka solata« and »ledenka« are also kinds of lettuce, the latter sometimes called “crispy lettuce”)
konserva	tin
konserve	tinned food(s), (or pl. “tins”)
keramika	pottery, crockery (cups, plates, etc)
kombajn	combine harvester

various nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs

fantazija	imagination (»bujna fantazija« — vivid imagination)
aktualen	topical, relevant (see discussion above)
simpatičen	nice (the most general, neutral possibility) likeable (person) kind (face, manner) (there are, of course, other possibilities, depending on context)
tip	person, kind (of person, man) (sometimes the context demands some rather different expression; "type" may be possible in certain contexts)
primitiven tip,	
primitivec	(pejorative) yob, moron
fenomenalen	»fenomenalen otrok« — child prodigy »Dosegli so fenomenalen rezultat« — excellent »Bilo je fenomenalno« — really good, very good
famozen	extraordinary, extremely good »Famozno smo se imeli.« — "We had a great time."
fajn	»Fajn se imejte!« — "Have a god time!" "Enjoy yourselves!"
soliden	reliable (product, person) very satisfactory, good (result, performance)
sklerozen, sklerotičen	(in everyday speech) forgetful, absent-minded
kondicija	»Nimam nobene kondicije.« — "I'm not fit." "I'm out of shape." »Ali imaš kaj kondicije?« — "Are you fit?"
eksistenca	life, living
manifestacija	expression (of) (as in »setanek je manifestacija prijateljstva med narodi« or »zunanja manifestacija čustev«)
manifestirati	express (»manifestirati politične nazore«)
evidenca	data
evidenčni karton	file, records (e.g. health)
evidentirati	record, check (information)
eventualen	possible
eventualno	(paraphrase usually unavoidable: e.g. "if it happens to...", "should it happen that..."; or more formally — "in the event of...")
uniformirati	make uniform
kontrolirati	check (documents, papers, passports, tickets, tyre pressure) measure, take (e.g. blood pressure)