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TRANSLATION OF FALSE FRIENDS AMONG B2 LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Abstract

This paper investigates how successful B2 level English language learners (ELLs), high school students are in translating a group of most common false friends (FFs) from English to BCS and vice versa and examines whether they are more successful in translating absolute or partial FFs. In line with the classification by Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2015), false friends are considered to be a class of cognates. They are further sub-classified into absolute FFs, which have the same or similar form and dissimilar meaning in two languages (e.g. eventually, meaning finally in English and eventualno, meaning possibly in BCS) and partial false friends with the same or similar form and one same and another dissimilar meaning. (e.g. argument in English, meaning reason, the same as argument in BSC and disagreement, the meaning for which a different word is used in BCS, rasprava). Due to their deceptive nature, FFs have been researched within different theoretical frameworks - theoretical, contrastive, applied linguistics, semantics, pragmatics and translation studies. By means of a survey and descriptive and inferential statistics, this paper confirms the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference between correct translation of FFs from English to BCS and their correct translation from BCS to English. Furthermore, the second hypothesis was also confirmed, namely that the B2 ELLs are more successful in translating partial than in translating absolute FFs. The research results suggest that in

teaching FFs as items of deceptive vocabulary both explicit and implicit methods need to be applied

Key words: false friends, absolute, partial false friends, cognates, translation

Introduction

The phrase false friends, *faux amis*, originates from French (Koessler, 1928). Those are “words that look the same in two languages and do not mean the same thing” (Crystal, 2015, p. 357) or “lexical items in different languages that resemble each other in form but have different meanings (Roca-Varela, 2015, p. 2). Since then, many other terms have been used to describe pairs of word such as these: false equivalents, false cognates, false pairs (Ivir, 1968), treacherous twins, synonymous diamorphs (Hauge, 1956), deceptive cognates (Lado, 1957) and deceptive words (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2015). Some consider false friends synonymous with cognates (Aarts, 2014, p. 155). Others consider false friends to be a category of cognates (Berthele, 2011) or a type of cognates, historically related words with wholly different meanings (Ringbom, 2007, p. 73). Still others differentiate between cognates, “words that overlap across languages” and interlingual homographs, “words that overlap across languages in their orthographic form and meaning (Dijkstra, 2003, p. 14). False friends may be encountered among words used in various spheres of life and cause different reactions, from confusion and misunderstanding through laughter to a scandal.

The predominant view, nevertheless, in the recent sources is the one held by Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2015, p. 46) that cognates are “words similar in their form and meaning, which have descended from a common parent word, have been borrowed from Lx language to Ly language, or are internationalisms borrowed independently by languages Lx, Ly and Lz.” Further, “they do not have to be identical since they have been adapted to fit the rules of spelling, phonology and morphosyntax of Lx, Ly and Lz (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2015, p. 46).

From the angle of language acquisition, Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2015, p. 46) further explains that “not all the words which have similar form in two languages share exactly the same

meaning. In two languages there will be pairs of words which sound or look similar but whose meaning is different.... Such deceptive words, that is words in two languages which have the same, or similar orthographic form but not have common semantics are commonly called ‘false friends’.

The same view is maintained by Rusiecki (2002, p. 73), who refers to cognates as *internal analogues* and defines them as “a class of words in any language (Lx) that sound and/or look familiar to speakers of another language (Ly)”. According to him, internal analogues include both internationalisms and false friends.

Similarly, Ringbom explains that cognates may be found in “related languages, and to a minor extent also in unrelated languages because of possible loanwords” (Ringbom, 2007, p. 73).

Rusiecki (2002) classifies false friends into ‘absolute’ and ‘partial’ false friends. “While the meaning of partial false friends may overlap, absolute false friends are those words in one language whose meaning is entirely different than it would seem from their similarity to words in another language” (Rusiecki, 2002, p. 74). This typology has been taken over in the present paper too.

False friends have been researched as a linguistic phenomenon in general (Crystal, 2015), as a potential difficulty they pose to learners of foreign languages. They have been explored and listed in the context of a variety of language combinations, such as Croatian and English (Filipović, 1986), (Ivir, 1968), English and Serbian (Jovanović, 2008), English and Spanish (Lang, 2015), English and German (Schellabear, 2011) English and French (Granger, 1988; Janke, 2015).

False friends have also been analyzed in the framework of translation studies, as they pose a significant problem not only in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language, but in the context of translation too. Granger and Swallow (1988), for example, explore some of the difficulties they encountered analyzing 1,000 pairs of English and French false friends. They classify the differences displayed by false friends as semantic (Granger and Swallow, 1998, p. 108), denotational and connotative, and syntactic differences.

In the framework of historical linguistics, Broz (2008), for example, investigated the diachronics of false friends. More specifically, he investigated a group of ten words in German,

Spanish and Croatian and their departure and shift in meaning in English based on the Oxford English Dictionary.

False friends are also considered to be a result or a sign of semantic change. Chamizo-Dominguez (2008) investigated the semantics and pragmatics of false friends. He explored their relation to metaphor, metonymy, specialization and generalization (Chamizo Dominguez & Nerlich, 2002). He argues that “the ultimate explanation of the phenomenon of false friends is this incessant process of export/import of meanings and signifiers among different languages.” Chamizo-Dominguez (2008, p. 89). According to him, borrowings are an “inexhaustible source of false friends” (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008, p. 90).

Interest in false friends in general may be said to reflect the interest in contrasting two languages. False friends are an excellent example of negative language transfer between L1 and L2. Such investigations have the potential of being used for pedagogical purposes, intended for second language teaching or possibly translation studies. Their final outcome may be in the form of a textbook intended for a specific register or a dictionary, which would both aid SL teaching in classrooms and assist translators and interpreters in their work.

In recent years, research into false friends and cognates as an umbrella phenomenon has been conducted in the framework of applied linguistics too, particularly in the context of second language acquisition (Otwińska-Kasztelanica, 2011; Arabski and Wojtaszek, 2011) and crosslinguistic influence (De Angelis, 2011). Similar to collocations, false friends may be said to be important for acquiring new vocabulary and mastering a foreign language in general, affecting the communicative competence of language learners. False friends and false cognates have been explored in the context of second language teaching, too. Namely it is claimed that because there are thousands of such words in European languages, the best approach would be to teach them straightforwardly” (Arabski & Wojtaszek, 2011).

That false friends pose difficulties to the BCS learners of English is acknowledged by Riđanović (2007, p. 367-375). He provides specific examples he encountered both as a professor and a translator/interpreter and provide linguistic explanations for the mistakes made. Other than that, a more detailed research into false

friends in the context of the two languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina is lacking despite the fact that we may come across such examples in the media almost on a daily basis. A partial attempt to do so was made by Rizvić-Eminović et al. (2017) within a research involving grammatical competence. Consequently, this research was designed in an attempt to establish whether students use more false friends when translating potentially deceptive words from English to BCS or from BCS to English. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was generated stating that among B2 level ELLs, there is a statistically significant difference between correctly translated FFs from English into BCS and correctly translated FFs from BCS to English. Because both absolute and partial FFs were tested in the survey, hypothesis 2 was generated, namely that among B2 level ELLs, there is a statistically significant difference between correctly translated absolute FFs and correctly translated partial FFs. The research results have confirmed both hypothesis. B2 level ELLs are better at translating FFs from English to BCS than from BCS to English and they are better at translating partial than absolute FFs.

Method

To establish whether there is a statistically significant difference between correctly translated FFs from English to BSC and correctly translated FFs from BCS to English, and to investigate whether Bosnian ELLs are more successful in correctly translating absolute than partial false friends, a survey was designed including a total of 28 false friends, 15 partial and 13 absolute false friends. The examples of both were collected from written translation assignments given to students at B2 level of EL learning over the course of one academic year. This level of learners was chosen because it was observed in the researchers' teaching practice that it was at this level that learners make a great deal of mistakes when translating false friends.

The list of collected false friends showed that the partial FFs were more numerous, which is why their number in the survey questions is somewhat higher than that of absolute FFs. Short sentences were then constructed resembling those from the translation assignments in which the following partial FFs were

used: *argument, recruitment, diplomacy, administration, literature, diet, minutes, memory, director, company, fabrics, campaign, original, authority, faculty*. The absolute FFs used were: *billion, etiquette, prospekt, simpatičan, recept, ambulanta, eventualno, senzibilan, trafika, realizirati, gimnazija, simpatija, aktuelan*. For the purpose of efficiency, the students were asked to provide only the translation of the word, i.e. the false friend in the sentences, which were written in capital letters. 17 sentences were translations from English to BCS, 11 translations from BCS to English.¹ The researchers opted not to balance out the number of partial FFs (15) and absolute FFs (13) or the number of FFs to be translated in the survey from English to BCS (17) and from BCS to English (11) because they are authentic examples and genuine ratios of FFs collected from the corpus of student translations. Additionally, this does not affect the results in any way taking into account that inferential statistics procedures were applied.

A total of 73 students attending the fourth grade of Second Comprehensive School in Zenica took part and provided their

¹ The sentences contained in the survey were as follows: They are having an ARGUMENT; Even the RECRUITMENT of flight attendants did not go according to plan; It took all her tact and DIPLOMACY to persuade him not to resign; These laws are general and their ADMINISTRATION should be uniform and equal; It was like being present at the birth of a piece of LITERATURE; DIET varies between different countries in the world; Who's going to take the MINUTES; After the stroke, she could not remember even her own telephone number. MEMORY is so strange; The former manager stole BILLIONS of dollars from investment funds; He is a famous movie DIRECTOR; I'd rather you didn't mention it when we're in COMPANY; She designs her own FABRICS using woodblocks to create patterns on the material; Social ETIQUETTE dictates that men cannot sit while women are standing; The allies are intensifying their air CAMPAIGN; Sadly, half of the ORIGINAL 104 settlers had died; I'll give my lawyers AUTHORITY to act on my behalf; Even at an old age, this extremely rich man still had all his FACULTIES; Dobio sam neke PROSPEKTE o temi zdravstvene zaštite; Momak zelenih očiju i plave kose je bio veoma SIMPATIČAN; Doktor mu je dao RECEPT za potrebne lijekove; AMBULANTA je zatvorena tokom vikenda; Pokušat ćemo ispraviti EVENTUALNE greške; Ona je izuzetno SENZIBILNA osoba; TRAFIKA je mjesto gdje se kupuju novine i sokovi; Bilo je veoma teško REALIZIRATI ovaj projekat; Završila je GIMNAZIJU, a onda upisala fakultet; Sara je bila moja SIMPATIJA u srednjoj školi; Želite li moje mišljenje o AKTUELNIM događanjima?

responses in a written survey, which they had 30 minutes to complete. All the students learned English for 11 years and their current course books were at B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages put together by the Council of Europe. Four types of answers appeared among student translations of the given words: 1. false friend; 2. skipped translation; 3. correct translation; 4. incorrect translation. In the analysis of frequencies types 2 and 4 were merged to one type and represented as incorrect translation. Further, to establish whether there is statistically significant difference in the translation from English to BCS and *vice versa* and between translating partial and absolute FFs, only types 1 and 3 were used as relevant for that analysis. The data were analyzed using the SPSS software package and the results obtained by both descriptive and inferential statistics are presented in the paper. Because the results obtain fall under normal distribution and frequencies and standard deviations were calculated, which show homogeneity of variance, a parametric test was used, namely the t-test to establish whether there is a statistically significant difference between correctly translated FFs from English to BSC and correctly translated FFs from BCS to English, as well as between correctly translated absolute and correctly translated partial false friends.

Results and discussion

As presented in Table 1 below, the analysis of the overall success rate of translation of FFs per types of student answers for all the sentences in the survey shows that only 23.31% students correctly translated the given false friend in a sentence:

Table 1. *Overall percentages of translations per types of answers*

Translation category	Total number of translations	Percentage
False friend	1144	48.41%
Skipped	647	27.38%
Correct	551	23.31%
Incorrect	21	0.88%

Table 2. *Frequency of incorrect, correct and translation with a FF for individual words in the survey*

	Word	Translation frequency		
		Incorrect	False friend	Correct
FFs translated from English to BCS	ARGUMENT	4.1	47.9	47.9
	RECRUITMENT	80.8	15.1	4.1
	DIPLOMACY	30.1	68.5	1.4
	ADMINISTRATION	17.8	82.2	0
	LITERATURE	11	82.2	6.8
	DIET	12.3	67.1	20.5
	MINUTES	27.4	71.2	1.4
	MEMORY	12.3	41.1	46.6
	BILLIONS	12.3	58.9	28.8
	DIRECTOR	4.1	57.5	38.4
	COMPANY	12.3	46.6	41.1
	FABRICS	19.2	42.5	38.4
	ETIQUETTE	53.4	28.8	17.8
	CAMPAIGN	28.8	64.4	6.8
	ORIGINAL	23.3	63	13.7
	AUTHORITY	31.5	61.6	6.8
	FACULTIES	75.3	23.3	1.4
	AVERAGE	26.82	54.23	18.94
FFs translated from BCS to English	PROSPEKTI	46.6	47.9	5.5
	SIMPATIČAN	61.6	13.7	24.7
	RECEPT	41.1	49.3	9.6
	AMBULANTA	9.6	89	1.4
	EVENTUALNI	43.8	45.2	11
	SENZIBILNA	46.6	38.4	15.1
	TRAFIKA	67.1	20.5	12.3
	REALIZIRATI	37	45.2	17.8
	GIMNAZIJA	13.7	72.6	13.7
	SIMPATIJA	43.8	11	45.2
	AKTUELAN	68.5	26	5.5
	AVERAGE	43.58	41.71	14.71

Table 2 presents the frequency of correct, incorrect and translation with a false friend for individual words tested in the survey. Shading is used for the cells presenting the frequency higher than 50%. Interestingly, for nearly half of the words tested more than half of the students were “deceived” by its meaning and used the false friend in translation. More instances of the use of FFs were observed in the translations from English to BCS, namely 10, than in the translations from BCS to English, only 2. On average, it is 54.23%. Since the survey participants are teenagers, this might suggest that they are more under the influence of English, they believe they are familiar with the meaning of the English word and translate it into BCS by simply borrowing its English form, without being aware of the deceptive meaning. The same technique of borrowing is also misapplied in the case of translation from BCS to English to a slightly less degree, though, in 41.71% of the cases.

By applying the t-test, it has been established that there is a statistically significant difference between correctly translated FFs from English to BCS and correctly translated FFs from BCS to English, as illustrated in Table 3 below. Although the results show that the overall frequency of correct translation of FFs is rather low (23.31), the B2 level ELLs are better at translating FFs from English to BCS than *vice versa*.

Table 3. *T-test result for correctly translated FFs from English to BCS from BCS to English*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	St. Error Mean
Correct ENG→ BCS transl. of FFs	73	18.863	7.6473	.8950
Correct BCS→ ENG transl. of FFs	73	9.4384	6.10552	.71460
Paired samples correlations				
	N	Correlation	Sig	
Pair 1 correct ENG→ BCS vs BCS→ENG	73	.735	.000	

As illustrated in Table 4, another t-test has also confirmed that B2 ELLs are better at translating partial than at translating absolute FFs.

Table 4. *T-test result for correctly translated partial and absolute FFs*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	St. Error Mean
Correct translation of partial FFs	73	16.59	6.326	.740
Correct translation of absolute FFs	73	11.71	7.396	.866
Paired samples correlations				
	N	Correlation	Sig	
Pair 1 partial FFs vs absolute FFs	73	.745	.000	

The reason for a better success rate of translation of partial FFs might be the fact, in general, there are more partial than absolute FFs, which is corroborated by the number of examples extracted from the corpus of student translations at this level. Further, partial FFs have at least two meanings, which is why ELLs are more likely to be familiar with at least one of them.

Conclusion

The results obtained in the t-test have confirmed both hypotheses. The B2 ELLs are better at translating FFs from English to BCS than *vice versa* and they are better at translating partial than absolute FFs.

Since it was conducted on a sample of students from one high school, the present research is by no means a comprehensive study into the phenomena of understanding and translation of false friends from English to BCS. Its general purpose was to show primarily that there has to be awareness among teachers of the fact that false friends pose a difficulty for BCS learners of English. Although the students are better at translating FFs from English to BCS than *vice versa*, the frequency of correct translation of FFs, be it from English to BCS or *vice versa*, is only about 23%.

Unfortunately, there is no available data or research about the success rate of translation of FFs in other languages. Therefore, it is difficult to say whether the result for this pair of languages is low or similar in comparison with other languages. This means that a study such as this one is extremely important as it quantifies how well BCS B2 level learners understand FFs. Further, the statistically significant difference in favor of translating from English to BCS with the correct translations frequency of 18.52 compared to 14.39 for translation from BSC to English is to be expected, as students are less inclined to make mistakes when translating into their native language. However, such a low rate of correct translation of FFs at B2 level indicates that there is a lot of potential for misunderstanding both in written and oral communication in English despite the fact that the research was conducted among the upper intermediate levels ELLs. Additionally, this result implies that a new approach in teaching such words has to be taken. This research suggests that a combination of both explicit and implicit teaching should be used. Explicit teaching would ensure, as suggested by Nuttal (1996), that L2 learners make more conscious effort to learn false friends, absolute false friends in particular. On the other hand, implicit methods, particularly at higher levels of language learning would ensure that several meanings of one and the same words are properly acquired, particularly, the deceptive meaning.

Teachers have to be cognizant of the fact that false friends are not a uniform category. The confirmation of the second hypothesis in this paper corroborates that claim. The fact that the ELLs tested were more successful in translating partial than in translating absolute false friends imposes an obligation on teachers to pay more attention to the multiple meanings of such words, particularly at higher levels of EL learning, which further speaks in favor of both explicit and implicit teaching of FFs. Finally, as implied by Nagy (2005) and further supported by Arabski and Wojtaszek (2011), it can be concluded that, the same as other vocabulary instruction, FFs need to be taught on a long-term basis, at all levels of foreign level proficiency on account of their deceptive nature.

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PREVOĐENJE LAŽNIH PRIJATELJA MEĐU UČENICIMA ENGLSKOG JEZIKA NA NIVOU B2

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Sažetak

Predmet ovog rada je uspješnost srednjoškolskih učenika engleskog jezika B2 nivoa u prevođenju nekolicine najčešćih tzv. lažnih prijatelja sa engleskog na bosanski, hrvatski, srpski jezik i obratno, kao i u prevođenju apsolutnih i djelimičnih lažnih prijatelja. U skladu sa klasifikacijom koju zastupa Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2015), lažni prijatelji predstavljaju jednu od klasa srodnih riječi. Dodatno se dijele na apsolutne lažne prijatelje, koji imaju isti ili sličan oblik a drugačije značenje u svim jezika (npr. *eventually*, što na engleskom znači konačno i *eventualno*, što na bosanskom, hrvatskom, srpskom jeziku znači možda) i djelimične lažne prijatelje, koji imaju isti ili sličan oblik i jedno isto, a drugo drugačije značenje u dva jezika (npr. *argument* na engleskom što znači argument, isto kao na bosanskom, hrvatskom, srpskom, ali i rasprava). Upravo zbog svoje sposobnosti da obmanjuju onoga koji uči strani jezik, lažni prijatelji su bili predmet istraživanja unutar različitih teorijskih okvira, kao što su teorijska, kontrastivna, primijenjena lingvistika, semantika, pragmatika i prevodilačke studije. Koristeći anketu, te deskriptivnu i inferencijalnu statistiku u radu se potvrđuje hipoteza da postoji statistički značajna razlika u tačnosti prevođenja lažnih prijatelja sa engleskog na bosanski, hrvatski, srpski jezik i tačnosti njihovog prevođenja u obrnutom pravcu. Nadalje, potvrđena je i druga hipoteza da su učenici engleskog jezika B2 nivoa uspješniji u prevođenju djelimičnih nego u prevođenju potpunih lažnih prijatelja. Rezultati ovog istraživanja, stoga, navode na zaključak da je prilikom podučavanja lažnih prijatelja kao riječi koje su po prirodi obmanjujuće potrebno primijeniti i eksplicitne i implicitne metode.

Ključne riječi: lažni prijatelji, srodne riječi, prijevod, kontrastivna analiza.

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ترجمة دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية للنظائر المخادعة في المستوى فوق

المتوسط (B2)

الملخص

موضوع هذا البحث هو التحقق من مدى صحة حلول الترجمة المقدمة من دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية في المدرسة الثانوية ذوي المستوى فوق المتوسط (B2) أثناء ترجمة عدد من المفردات الشائعة المصطلح على تصنيفها كنظائر مخادعة من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة البوسنية/الكرواتية/الصربية/والعكس، مما يتضمن ترجمة النظائر المخادعة الكلية والجزئية. طبقا للتصنيف الذي تبناه الباحثة Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2015) فإن النظائر المخادعة تعتبر نوعا من الكلمات المشابهة. وهي بذلك تُقسم إلى نظائر مخادعة كلية، وهي كلمات متشابهة في الصيغة ومختلفة في الدلالة بين اللغات (مثلا كلمة eventually التي تحمل في الإنجليزية معني الانتهاء والإمكانية والتي تترجم إلى اللغة البوسنية/الكرواتية/الصربية/ "من الممكن أن")، وإلى نظائر مخادعة جزئية، وهي كلمات متشابهة في الصيغة ومتشابهة في دلالة ومختلفة في أخرى بين اللغتين (مثلا كلمة argument التي تعني دليل، وهو معناها كذلك في اللغة البوسنية/الكرواتية/الصربية، ولكنها بجانب هذا المعنى تعني النقاش أيضا) . وبناء على ذلك كانت أشباه النظائر مادة بحث داخل مختلف المسارات النظرية، مثلا في إطار التحليل التقابلي واللغويات التطبيقية علم الدلالة والتداولية والدراسات الترجماتية. ومن هذا المنطلق، فإن هذا البحث، واستنادا إلى نتائج الاستبيان الجرى وبناء على نتائج الإحصاءات الوصفية والاستقراء الإحصائي، يؤكد الفرضية القائلة بأن هناك تباينا في صحة الترجمة بالمقارنة بين ترجمة النظائر المخادعة من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة البوسنية/الكرواتية/الصربية/ وترجمتها من هذه اللغات إلى الإنجليزية. وكذلك يؤكد

البحث الفرضية الأخرى القائلة بأن دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية في المستوى فوق المتوسط (B2) أكثر نجاحا في ترجمة النظائر المخادعة الجزئية من نظيرتها الكلية. وبهذا فإن نتائج هذا البحث تقودنا إلى استنتاج مفاده وجوب تطبيق طرق الشرح الضمنية والصريحة عند تدريس النظائر المخادعة بصفتها مفردات مضللة بطبيعتها .

الكلمات الأساسية: النظائر المخادعة، الكلمات المشابهة، الترجمة، التحليل التقابلي