

The False Friends in Foreign Language Learning/Teaching Process and Translation/Interpretation

Adriana Gjika¹

University of Vlora « Ismail Qemali »

Faculty of Human Sciences

Vlorë, Albania

Dorjana Flett²

University of Vlora « Ismail Qemali »

Faculty of Human Sciences

Vlorë, Albania

Abstract:

When two interlocutors speak two different languages and have different cultural backgrounds, it is difficult for them to achieve their common goals during communication. Our greatest concern is the risk of misunderstanding due to the existence of false friends (FFs), which is the subject of our research. In this article, we attempt to explain the definitions of FFs proposed by many linguists, their genesis, and their different varieties and demonstrate why they constitute significant obstacles to foreign language learning or translation. We have described the differences in meaning, the typical errors made when they are confused, and the potential effects on communication in each case. After that, we discussed ways and strategies to avoid FFs, and we offered some practical tips to avoid them. In different situations, such as commercial, literary, or professional translation, we have explored the effects of FFs. The experience of interacting with students at our institution while learning French, which served as the basis for the examples used in this article and included in the appendix. It can be said that recognizing a gap in the existing literature on FFs in the Albanian language establishes the importance of our study. It demonstrates our contribution to the field by addressing a specific linguistic phenomenon in the context of Albanian.

Keywords: false friends, foreign language, translation, culture, misunderstandings.

¹ adigjika123@gmail.com ORCID ID: 0009-0003-7783-9939

² dorianaklosi@gmail.com ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2046-123X

Introduction

Every day, languages are in contact with each other in different situations, either in a foreign language teaching or learning process, in translation or interpretation, or direct communication between two interlocutors belonging to different languages and cultures. All these contacts are enriching, but not infrequently they also generate difficulties and obstacles arising from the interference generated by the application in a borrowing language of a phonetic, morphosyntactic, or semantic feature of a lending language, which constitutes a violation of the language norm that gets this trait. And this phenomenon of linguistic contamination (imitation) affects all languages in contact (Alline 1999).

A special case of cross-linguistic interference is false friends (FFs), which are words that are written and pronounced the same or almost the same in both languages but have different meanings.

e.g., '*Bless*' in French means '*wound*', '*injure*', or '*offend*'.

Or

'Library' in French means '*bookshop*'.

Since language is a living, constantly changing organism, any of its elements can become polysemous at any moment, so FFs constitute an inevitable and endless problem arising from the contact between languages (Bocquet 2005). The study of FFs is important not only in the field of translation/interpretation, where the translator/interpreter must rely heavily on the context of the speech, but also in the teaching/learning process. There are many teachers who pay attention to this natural tendency, e.g., by highlighting True Friends translation pairs between the mother language and foreign languages, which simplifies learning new lexical items. But attention must be vigilant because appearances can be deceiving, and FFs are always there to put a foothold on strays (Hartmut 1991).

Specifically, we undertook this study out of the need to clarify this phenomenon that happens frequently in the teaching and learning process, especially among students at the initial level, but also at the more advanced level (Breitkreuz 1991). A trend of their security was noticed when the moment came to translate new lexical elements, where, under the influence of Albanian, French words with similar pronunciation were often

mistranslated based on their Albanian counterparts. All the examples found in the annex of this paper are authentic, recorded, and noted in class with our students.

2. What are the false friends (FFs)?

It is enough to familiarize yourself with the countless works on this issue to understand how difficult it is to define the notion of FFs. This term was coined in 1928 for the English-French pair by Koessler and Dercquigny in “*Les faux amis, ou les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais*”. According to both authors, FFs are called pairs of words that belong to two languages and that constitute “cross-linguistic paronyms” because their formal similarity (either thanks to the common origin or the fact that one of the languages borrowed it from the other) often provokes wrong equivalences. In fact, the similarity of the names makes you think that the names correspond. However, this is not always the case because a borrowed word does not have the same semantic extension (or even stylistic value) in the target language and does not go through the same evolution of meaning as the source language word (Kiss 2002).

However, not all authors favor this definition, which is made according to the semantic criterion (Duduc 1980). There are many papers where the authors talk not only about semantic-level FFs (for which the meanings or connotations do not coincide from one language to another) but also about morphological-level FFs (which differ in their lexical structure, grammatical nature, and syntactic function).

The difficulty of defining FFs is undoubtedly related to the choice of the target audience and the way of studying the problem. When the authors state that they address both source and target language users, beginning students, or multilingual communication professionals, they give a broad definition of FFs, i.e., semantic and morphological (Shochi 2008).

Before talking about the authors and their opinions on this problem, we would like to point out that most of them agree on a division of full FFs and partial FFs. The full FFs have no common meaning; they belong to completely different semantic fields, and consequently, the risk of confusing

them is very rare³. While it is different from the second ones, the more they belong to the same semantic field, the more dangerous they are, as is the case of “*machine*” in French, which in “Albanian” should not be translated as “*car, means of circulation.*”

In “La stylistique comparée du français et de l’anglais” (1958), Vinay and Darbelnet talk about the stylistic level of FFs or structural level FFs, which derives from the abusive copying of lexical or syntactic structures (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958).

In his work “Les faux amis des vocabulaires anglais et américain”, Koesller (1975) shows that FFs derive from semantic changes that are explained by distance, either in time or geographical, or even social or religious: thus, Saint Augustin had noticed that in Latin two interlocutors could be confused by the word “*salus*”; the Christian would give it the moral meaning, while the atheist would understand only physical health (Koesller 1975).

In 1979, KÜHNEL published in East Germany “Kleines Wörterbuch des faux amis deutsch-französisch/französisch-deutsch (Kuhnel 1979). Then, in 1993, he republished it in the West under the title «Typische Fehler Französisch» (Kuhnel 1993). 2800 falsche Freunde Französisch und Deutsch. There, the author distinguishes 6 categories: 1) the words that have a common etymology and the borrowings that represent changes in meaning or semantic scope (e.g., *bureau/Büro*), 2) FFs of the structure (morphological changes, specifically those of endings), 3) French-sounding German words that have no homophones in French (e.g., *Raffinesse, Blamage*), 4) FFs of syntactic structure (e.g., *abonnieren/s'abonner*), 5) FFs of orthographic structure (e.g., *Aggression/aggression*) and 6) FFs of grammatical structure (changes in gender, number as for *der Likör/la liqueur*) (Breitkreuz 1991).

While Roger GOFFIN, in a scientific forum held in Heidelberg in October 1988, divides FFs into 6 categories: 1) FFs of form, or graphemic (aggressive/aggressive), 2) phonological FFs, 3) grammatical FF, precisely for gender (*die Garage/le garage*), 4) syntagmatic FFs (eng. *zinc ammonium*

³ Resplandy, Franck (2006) *L'étonnant voyage des mots français dans les langues étrangères*, Paris, Bartillat.

chloride/fr. chlorure de zinc d'ammonium), 5) syntactic FFs (*abonnieren/s'abonner*), and 6) semantic FFs.

In 1991, it was released. "False Friends. Stolpersteine des deutsch-englischen Wortschatzes" by Hartmut BREITKREUZ. Intended for German speakers learning English, the work distinguishes orthographic FFs, pronunciation FFs, meaning FFs, and "multiples" FFs. This work, being didactic, first aims to present the existence of FF, then gives examples, tips and exercises for their learning (Breitkreuz 1991).

Michel BALLARD, in "Les faux amis anglais-français" of 1999, gives some milestones of the history of the notion of FFs, then makes a short definition which he comments on, explaining the principles that are at the basis of his work. He details the problems that FF's existence poses on two fronts: understanding and expression; in other words, topic and version: a poorly understood statement in a foreign language produces a wrong statement in this language.

3. Methodology

The acknowledgement of a gap in existing literature on false friends in the Albanian language establishes the significance of our study. This demonstrates our contribution to the field by addressing a specific linguistic phenomenon within the context of Albanian.

On the theoretical level, this work is based on the studies so far on FFs in foreign languages since we have not found any real work in the Albanian language, so we feel good that we have undertaken such a study, which is not intended as exhaustive. While on the practical level, the paper is entirely based on our teaching and learning work with the students and on the actual cases that occurred during the lessons. It is about students of the English and Italian bachelor's programme who study French as a second foreign language. We have identified 50 words and examined their false friends in French and English as compared to Albanian. Students were supposed to have used their Albanian equivalent whenever they had to translate a text or compare two texts in French or English into Albanian. This hands-on approach allows students to actively engage with language use, leading to the compilation of a corpus based on authentic examples encountered during their studies. Whenever they encountered FFs, they

noted them down, and at the end of two years of study, we were able to compile a corpus of them. All the examples found in the annex of this paper are authentic, recorded, and noted in class with.

Students learnt to identify those false friends, especially when the meaning of them in the other language affected the meaning of the whole sentence or context. The misunderstanding or misuse was mostly caused by the similarities in pronunciation of the words that sounded the same in different languages, which led to the misconception that those words had the same meaning in Albanian.

4. Results

4.1. The origin of FF

From the etymological point of view, FFs can be formed in different ways:

- Borrowing from one language to another led to the creation of FFs. Language A borrows a word from a language B, and subsequently, either the word takes on a slightly different meaning or takes on an added meaning.
- In other cases, words with the same root in different languages develop separately from each other.
- Coincidence too. Some words, although they do not have the same root, come from different languages and have been transformed over the centuries. There comes a point when they have the same pronunciation but not the same meaning.

4.2. Categories of FF and their classification

The FFs approach should consider all categories that may create problems. After a careful examination of the FFs list, we focused on the graphic and phonetic ones and deemed it necessary to make a hierarchical classification going from the most distant homographs (in terms of meaning) to the closest, dividing them into 3 groups: in total FF, partial FFs and True Friends (TFs). While other FFs may be the subject of another study in the future by us or other researchers,

4.2.1. Total FF is the most interesting category and the one that brings the most misunderstandings, either in translation or in the classroom. The meanings of the same graphic form in French and Albanian are so far apart that it reminds us to be careful not to fall into the trap. Among them, we can mention:

- **Graphics:** *Mot* (word in French), which in Albanian means *year, time, weather*

Mal (bad in French), which means *mountain* in Albanian.

Net (internet in French), which in Albanian means the *plural of night*.

Pas (step in French), in Albanian, it means *behind, back*,

Top (top in French) which in Albanian means *ball*

Lot (batch in French), which means *tears* in Albanian.

Fin (end in French), which in Albanian means *elegant*, etc.

- **Phonetics:** *Robe* (clothe in French), which in Albanian means *slaves*,
Datte (persimmon in French), which in Albanian means *date*,
Colère (anger in French), which in Albanian means *cholera, a kind of disease*

Ballon (ball in French), which in Albanian means *balloon*, etc.

In the examples above, we have changes in meaning, and the words belong in most of them to the name as a part of speech, while in the smallest cases, we have changes in the part of speech, for example, from noun to preposition or from noun to adverb.

4.2.2. Partial FFs or partial True Friends are the most difficult to distinguish since we are never sure if a French form, for example, carries, among different meanings, at least one meaning the same as the Albanian word.

- **Graphics:** *Golf a* (kind of sport in French), which in Albanian means both *sports* and a kind of *clothing*,

Bar (coffee shop in French), which in Albanian means *coffee shop* and *grass*,

Bouton (button in French), which in Albanian means both *button* and *pimple*.

- **Phonetics:** *Ampoule* has two meanings in French: *ampoule* and *lamp*, while in Albanian it only has the meaning of *ampoule*, etc.

4.2.3. TFs are generally words of foreign origin for both languages, both French and Albanian, which mostly lie in the field of

- Medicine: *virus, lumbago, sanatorium, placebo, abdomen, anus, uranium*

- Physics: *ultraviolet, transistor, etc.*

- Botany: *marijuana, opium, acacia, etc.*

- Zoology: *alligator, gazelle, etc.*

- Music: *disco, jazz, soprano, Charleston, polka, samba, tango, radio, etc.*

- Food: *caramel, gelatin, puree, sandwich, pizza, tortilla, ravioli, etc.*

- Drinks: *vodka, whiskey, brandy, etc.*

- Sports: *golf, hockey, slalom, etc.*

- Means of transport: *plane, scooter, tram, etc.*

Even TFs can be total (*radio, tram, golf, sport, etc.*) when the words have the same graph and phonetics or partial (*scooter, brandy, disco, hockey, etc.*) when they have small changes in writing or pronunciation.

In general, as you may have noticed above, FFs of the French and Albanian languages are first words, monosyllabic, short words with few letters, which have more chances for similarity and analogy and consequently lead more easily to the misunderstanding of error. It is different from TFs.

4.3. FF avoidance strategies

FFs makes learning and translating a foreign language more difficult. Because we said that when we are in front of a foreign word that seems like a word in our language, the tendency is to think that both words have the same meaning. And this happens not only to the student but also to the translator, although the concept of FFs is relative and elastic. Relative, as it depends on the knowledge of the language on the part of the translator and the learner, and elastic, because the more a translator or learner owns the language, the smaller the chances of mistakes will be.

So, some of the ways and strategies to avoid the error related to FFs are as follows:

1. Today, there are different dictionaries of FFs in many languages (except for Albanian) that help us not to make mistakes. For the Albanian

language, there is still no such dictionary, but further works and studies on this topic will sensitize linguists to create such a dictionary. It is a necessity that time demands, and that must happen.

2. Consulting reliable bilingual dictionaries to verify the meaning of words. We need to make sure that they are deeply understanding the nuances and different contexts of the use of each word.

3. Avoiding automatic translation, focus on the meaning of the text and the word.

4. Studying culture and idioms: FFs can also be present in idioms and sayings. By learning the culture associated with the target language, one will be better equipped to grasp the true meaning of words and avoid mistakes.

5. Familiarizing ourselves with common FFs: making a list of the most common FFs in the language pair we are studying. And then, let's start using them in practice in order to memorize them as well as possible.

6. Reading and listening attentively: By reading authentic texts in the target language and listening to native speakers, one becomes familiar with words and their appropriate usages. This will help us avoid translation errors by using FFs incorrectly.

7. Practicing actively: using the words and expressions we learn in real-life contexts. Connecting with native speakers or people who are fluent in the target language to get feedback and advice on word usage.

8. We do not forget to check the meaning in context. When we come across a questionable word, we need to make sure we understand it in the overall context of the sentence or text. Sometimes words can look like FFs, but they have different meanings depending on the context. So, we must give due importance to the context in which the word is located, since the context, in many cases, is our strong ally.

9. Being aware of cultural differences: The meaning of words can vary from culture to culture. We need to be aware of cultural differences in the use of words and make sure to use them correctly.

By using these strategies, we will be better prepared to avoid FF-related mistakes and improve our translation and foreign language learning skills. Regular practice and consultation with native speakers can enhance both linguistic and cultural competence.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we tried to shed some light on FFs in the Albanian language, a problem little or not addressed in our language, which, being in the dialectic of things, is enriched and developed daily with new positive elements but also with errors caused by interference. The closer the languages are historically, or the closer the contacts between them, the more numerous the FFs. Based on our data and its analysis, we can state that false friends found in the Albanian language prove that the closer the contact with other languages, the more words that sound the same or almost the same in both languages. But this does not exclude the other fact that there are FFs between two languages that have developed independently of each other (Petton 1995). We agree with this claim because that's exactly the Albanian language and the French language are in such a situation, but cases of FFs are not rare (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958). This claim is evidenced in the section of the annexes where false friends can be found among these languages: French, English and Albanian. And we notice these not only in translation and interpretation activities but also in the foreign language teaching/learning process at our university with our students.

Moreover, identifying True Friends served as a benchmark for comparison, and recognizing TFs helps contextualize the challenges posed by false friends and underscores the need for vigilance in distinguishing between them. While TFs may not present immediate challenges, the inclusion of this category emphasizes the need for a cautious approach, as linguistic similarities can sometimes be deceiving. Our study tried to provide insights into why certain words may appear similar but have consistent meanings. We also tried to make a hierarchical classification to our analysis, which facilitated a more systematic exploration of the various categories of false friends. This approach enabled us to do a focused examination of Total FFs, Partial FFs, and TFs, offering a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic landscape.

From the research that we did in this field in the Albanian language, we did not find any theoretical studies. We only came across FFs shortlists. We are pleased to document some examples of phonetic and graphic FFs, observed not only in the classroom but also during our translation activity as French and English translators. The paper concludes with the strategies we

should use to avoid falling into the trap of FFs. We wish that this work would be done continuously by all teachers of the French language and of foreign languages in general in their teaching process. We cannot claim that it is exhaustive work. We hope that this material will modestly serve for further studies either on this topic or on other categories of FFs (lexical, semantic, phonetic, stylistic, morphological, etc.) in other languages related to Albanian or in the fields of others such as gastronomy, economy, politics, science, etc. Moreover, we also hope that this article, which (as far as we know) is the first of its kind in the Albanian language, will be enriched by other, more in-depth studies in other languages.

References:

- Allinne, F. 1999. *Les faux amis de l'anglais*, coll. "Le français retrouvé". Paris: Belin.
- Ballard, Michel. 1999. *Les faux amis anglais-français*. Paris: Ellipses.
- Bocquet, Catherine. 2005. *La traduction, contact de langues et de cultures 1*. Artois Presses Université.
- Breitkreuz, Hartmut. 1991. *False friends. Stolpersteine des deutsch-englischen Wortschatzes*. Rowohlt.
- Dubuc, Robert. 1980. *La situation en terminologie*. Linguattech, Conseil International de la Langue Française.
- Dubuc, Robert. 1985. *Manuel pratique de terminologie*. Linguattech, Conseil International de la Langue Française.
- Goffin, Roger. 1961. Nef (Ernst). "Das Werk Gottfried Benns". *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 39 (1): 124-125.
- Kiss, Monika. 2002. "Les pièges du vocabulaire bilingue: les faux amis". *Revue d'études françaises* 7: 41-55.
- Klein, Hans Wilhelm. 1975. *Schwierigkeiten des deutsch-französischen Wortschatzes*. Stuttgart: Klett.
- Koessler, Maxime. 1975. *Les FA des vocabulaires anglais et américain*. Paris.
- Koessler, M., & J. Derocquigny. 1928. "Les faux amis: Ou, Les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais (conseils aux traducteurs)". Paris: Vuibert.
- Kuhnel, Helmut. 1979. *Kleines Wörterbuch des FA deutsch-französisch*. Leipzig.
- Kuhnel, Helmut. 1993. *Typische Fehler Französisch. 2800 falsche Freunde Französisch und Deutsch*. Berlin.
- Petton, André. 1995. *Les faux-amis anglais en contexte*. Rennes: PU de Rennes.
- Resplandy, Franck. 2006. *L'étonnant voyage des mots français dans les langues étrangères*. Paris: Bartillat.

Shochi, Takaachi. 2008. *Prosodie des affects socioculturels en japonais, français et anglais: à la recherche des vrais et faux-amis pour le parcours de l'apprenant*. PhD thesis, University Grenoble 3, France.

Vinay, Jean Paul & Jean Darbelnet. 1958. *La stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*. Paris: Didier.

<https://cursus.edu/fr/22356/quand-la-langue-nous-joue-des-tours>

<https://www.adhoc-translations.com/fr/blog/reconnaitre-les-faux-amis-pour-communiquer-efficacement-dans-une-autre-langue/>

<https://traduc.com/blog/traduction-anglais-faux-amis/>

<https://www.proiezionidiborsa.it/cosa-sono-i-falsi-amici-conoscere-la-linguistica-ed-evitare-gaffe/>

https://m4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.118/ST_118_Matasci_falsi_amici.pdf

<https://www.ever-est.it/blog/linguistica/false-friends-cosa-sono-e-come-stare-in-guardia-15>

<https://www.adhoc-translations.com/fr/blog/reconnaitre-les-faux-amis-pour-communiquer-efficacement-dans-une-autre-langue/>

(ANNEX)

EXAMPLES OF FF

French-Albanian

French	Albanian
Blouson = jacket	Bluzë = top
Botte = shoes, boots	Botë = world
Bouse = dung	Buzë = lips
Cour = yard	Kur = when
Dors = sleep	Dorë = hand
Du = of	Dy = two
Fat = popinjay	Fat = chance
Fer = iron	Ferr = hell
Folle = stupide	Fol = speak!
Fric = money	Frikë = fear
Fils = son	Fis = tribe

Gare = train station	Garë = competition
Gymnase = gym	Gjimnaz = high school
Glace = ice cream	Glasë = poultry droppings
Hâle = brown tan	Halë = fishbone
Jupe = skirt	Xhup = jacket
Lac = lake	Lak = loop
Laps = lapse	Laps = pencil
Lys = lily	Lis = oak
Machine = machine	Makinë = car
Mise = put	Mizë = fly
Natte = mat	Natë = night
Paille = straw	Pajë = bride's dowry
Partie = part	Parti = (politic) parti
Pâte = dough	Patë = goose
Pêche = peach	Peshë = weight
Pelle = shovel	Pelë = mare
Peigne = comb	Penj = thread
Pie = bird	Pi = drink
Pré = pre	Pre = prey
Rai = streak	Re = crowd
Rêne = rein	Rrenë = lie
Rosse = nasty	Rosë = duck
Trêve = truce	Trevë = region , territory
Verre = glass	Verë = wine
Ville = city	Vilë = villa
Vers = towards	Verë = wine

French-English

French⁴	English⁵
---------------------------	----------------------------

⁴ <https://traduc.com/blog/traduction-anglais-faux-amis/>

⁵ <https://www.adhoc-translations.com/fr/blog/reconnaitre-les-faux-amis-pour-communiquer-efficacement-dans-une-autre-langue/>

Actuellement = now, at present	Actually = in effect
Attendre = to wait	To attend = to assist, to participate
Blesser = to wound, to hurt	To bless = to grace
Bras = arm	Bras = corset
Car = because	Car = automobile
Ceinture = belt	Century = 100 years
Chair = flesh	Chair = seat
Chat = cat	Chat = virtual communication
Caractère = personality, nature	Character = in a movie, book
Collège = middle school	College = university
Décade = 10 days	Decade = 10 years
Délivrer = to set free	Deliver = bring
Divers = several	Divers = pl of the diver
Draguer = flirter	Drag = pull
Enfant = kid	Enfant = newborn
Habit = item of clothing	Habit = custom
Librairie = bookstore	Library = book room
Location = rent	Location = area
Main = hand	Main = principal
Médecine = cure	Medicine = pills
Monnaie = change, currency	Money = cash, funds
Pain = bread	Pein = ache
Photographe = photographer	Photograph = picture
Race = breed	Race = of horses, cars, etc.
Relatif = regarding, related to	Relative = parent, member of the family
Rester = to stay, to remain	Rest = have a pause
Sale = dirty	Sale = discount of articles
Store = awning	Store = shop