A Semantic and Pragmatic Study of False Friends Phenomenon in English and Arabic

Mohammed Essa Alwan 1
University of diyala, college of engineering
essa9781@gmail.com
Wassan Abdulhadi Abdulameer 2
wassan412@gmail.com
University of diyala /college of education for human Sciences

Abstract

This paper explores the topic of fake friends (or false cognates) in English and Arabic. The research includes various forms of fake friends in English and Arabic. The article offers meanings, forms and causes of misunderstanding that arise from engaging with false friends.

The first form refers to the basic mistake that two terms are identical in any way but entirely different because they are from other communities, the English and the Arabic are prime examples. The second form refers to the students' misapprehension of the source language terms themselves.

The third form of fake friends observed in the study arose from an etymological confusion of the terms in the study. The fourth form of false friends is the product of loan words. It is concluded that semantic and etymological context awareness is a means of preventing such misunderstanding.

Introduction

If we talk about fake friends, we make reference to terms which have the same shape and etymology but have formed in the middle of two languages and two different cultures where they can have multiple meanings (Boumali, 2010:11).

Besides the expression "false friends," some were used to characterize this linguistic phenomena, such as false cognates, false pairs, false parallels, misleading terms, deceptive cognates and treacherous twins.

Literature Review

The Formation of False Friends

Kiss (2002) argued that, opposed to synonyms or paronyms, fake friends are not inherent in any language, but are made in that language. Therefore, they should be viewed first from an etymological point of view and second from a cognitive point of view in order to visualise their shape.

Etymological Perspective

In this respect, Horea (2007:5) points out that etymology was the first to be blamed for linguistic misunderstanding. Although the language is not established and constant, it will transmit combinations of words during other times and for various reasons. Language borrowing is thus a primary reason for the presence of fake friends.

Language borrowers usually want to retain the same type of the loan word; but, like any textual symbol, the international form attempts to meet the specifications of the current scheme. As a consequence, it is likely that the term borrowed will experience several changes.

Additionally, phonological and morphological shifts involve other ones such adjustments may involve semantic ones. These modifications were defined by O'Neill and Casanovas as "reinterpretation to [the] original meaning, specialization, generalization and acquisition of new connotations" (1994: 107). (Boumali, 2010:12).

The probability of these modifications have been separated into four categories by Kiss (2002):

1. The loan word keeps its primordial value although it is lost in the original language.

2. The original language alters or evolves the meaning of the loan word although it maintains the identical in the current one.

3. The native concept of the idiomatic phrase is misplaced in the current world when it is preserved in the source.

4. The term evolves simultaneously for both languages, but in a separate manner and by retaining the basic morphology (Boumali, 2010:13).

Psycholinguistic Perspective

From this perspective, the phenomenon of false friends presents a trouble of interpreting the TT into a mother tongue or a formerly well-known language, especially if the two languages are similar to one another. In this regard, the most common mistakes are clarified by the interlinguistic effect of the primary language inside the polyglot.

In the case of word meanings, the learners assume that they can find a certain interpretation in the other language. They may not occur in the target language, though. As a consequence, a mass manufacturing of fake friends is going to occur. Thus, as language learners become acquainted with the target language, they naturally create correlation and analogies to minimize the gap between the languages in issue and minimize tension.

False Friends Typology

A significant percentage of false friends, of course, ask that a category be formed as a reference across their tangle in order to encourage their care for learners and lexicographers of bilingual dictionaries, particularly if the two languages involved are strongly related.

The present study cannot endorse all forms of false friends, it is only in the pursuit of semantic classification. Rufus, Prinsloo and De Shryver (2004) have listed false friends according to their semantic consistency as follows:

a. Absolute false friends: they are the "strong version" of false friends and hold one end of the ranking axis. Things with identical written form fit; but visibly distinct semantically. This form is a participant and it causes a real challenge because the learner will translate each one incorrectly (Boumali, 2010:14)

b. Partial false friends: this category is the most nuanced aspect of the problem of false friends, since it involves several variants, such as homonymy, resistance, polysemy and specificity (Boumali, 2010:15).
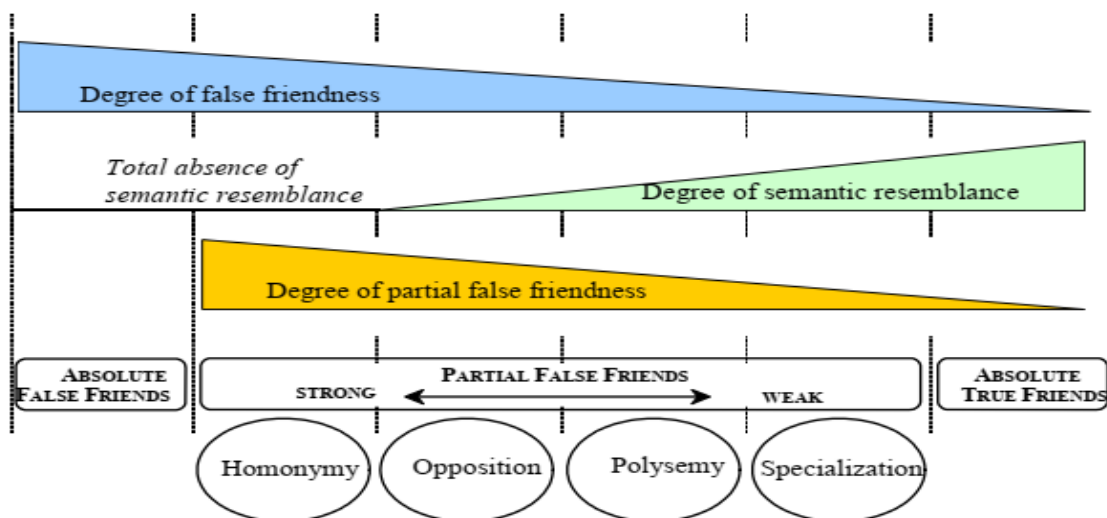
Figure (1) A semantic continuum of false friends Adapted version from Rufus, Prinsloo and Gilles-Maurice (2004: 805)

The problem of false friends has become a popular subject of debate in the fields of linguistics, language learning, translation and lexicons. False friends (FFs) are commonly described as sets of words that appear or sound phonologically and/or orthographically identical in two languages, but vary substantially in their sense.

What is sometimes manipulative or confusing in the phenomena of FFs, as stated by Yaylaci and Argynbayev (2014), is that the pronunciation or (Al-Athwary, 2021:368) orthographic form of such pair does not always match their appropriate sense particularly for non second-language participants. Semantically speaking, and according to Veisbergs (1996: 628-29), the FFs can be classified into three major groups: (i) false friends, (ii) occasional or unintended false friends, and (iii) pseudo false friends. The first category is further classified into three types: complete or full FFs (also known as total FFs in the literature), partial FFs and differentiated word pairs.

Complete or absolute FFs relate to certain sets of terms in the two languages that are "monosemantic" (each word has only one meaning) and this meaning is distinct from the other part of the set. On the other hand, partial FFs include instances of word pairs where one word has multiple meanings (polysemantic) which correlate with one meaning or more of other word of the set.

Finally, complex distinct FFs are those word pairs that are fundamentally identical in a denotative way, but typically vary in a connotative context. The second kind, i.e. accidental FFs, involves those pairs of words in two languages which, by circumstance or coincidence, have a common formal presence and have a different meaning. These pairs do not share any etymological relationship.

It can be assumed that the Chamizo Domínguez and Nerlich (2002) semantic FFs and chance FFs listed above relate to the correct and incidental FFs simultaneously. The last form of pseudo-FFs is trivial and is not generally mentioned. FFs of this sort are the result of L2 creativity, are not actual pairs of terms, and are generated on the foundation of a false comparison (Al-Athwary , 2021:369).

Semantics of False Friends

It is very common for two languages to have similar meanings, either because two words are derived from a shared word in a third language or because one of the languages inherited the term in concern from the other (Nefedova 2017).

Or even by way of a questions when needed, as is the issue for the adjective eventueel in the Netherlands and Afrikaans, since this adjective means "possible" in the Netherlands, while it denotes "final" in the Afrikaans because of the possible effect of the sense of the English adjective (Gouws et al. 2004: 803–4).

If it is the case that a word often shares its meanings in both languages, translating one into another may be called a purely mechanical operation. Nevertheless, sometimes, the fact that two words have signifiers—even where both originate from a similar word in a third language—does not suggest they also exchange their meanings. On the opposite, they sometimes vary, in part or in entirety, in terms of their context (Chamizo-Domínguez, 2020:141).

These words, which have the identical etymological roots as any identification or relation in their signs but vary in their context, are recognized as semantic false friends (Chamizo-Domínguez 2008: 3–20). reSemantic false friends resulted with the idea that at least one of the words altered its meaning at some time previously.

This transition generally consists of introducing a different meaning to one of the languages in discussion, while this did not exist or resulted in a particular way in the other language. Analysis of these semantic shifts offers unintended surprises (Chamizo-Domínguez and Nerlich 2002; Frunza and Inkpen 2009). From a synchronic point of view, semantic false friends can be divided into two groups:

1) Absolute semantic false friends, or sets of words which, despite the fact that they have a similar root, do not share any of their meanings;

2) partial semantic false friends, or sets of words that relate their root and at least one of their interpretations; (Chamizo-Domínguez , 2020:142).

Pragmatics of False Friends

Pragmatic variations also influence the semantic level, as the interpretation of each lexeme or word is also based on characteristics that supersede the lexical level. Roca-Varela (2012: 31) considered it unequivocally that this kind of pragmatic discrepancy can give rise to a false friendship, provided that there are two reasons that make false friends in this group: a) Stylistic variations or limitations, otherwise referred to as variations in the register, as in the formal vs. informal distinction; and (b) connotative complexities or other connotative influences. To these we have added c) contextual variations d) frequency variations, where one word of the pairs is very recent, while the other is somewhat rare; (e) usage or feature variations; and (f) cultural components, where technically similar words will not currently be used in equivalent situations due to cultural differences; (Hayward and Moulin 1984: 194) (Chatzopoulou, 2017:98).

a) Stylistic differences or restrictions / register differences

Reid (1048: 292) reflects on vocabulary that may have obsolete uses in one of the two languages concerned. Lietz (1996: 92) is another scholar who addresses false friends in the register of two words of a set.

b) Connotative nuances or additional connotative factors

Gottlieb (1986: 111) too distinguishes between nuances of meaning and discusses word pairs that share denotations, but differ at the stylistic level (Chatzopoulou, 2017:99).

c) Contextual differences

The authors O'Neill and Casanovas Catalá (1997: 109) classify false friends according to meaning overlaps in the graphs, divided into three categories: segregation (no coincidence of meanings), intersection (some meanings shared, but not all) and inclusion (all meanings of one word correlate with the other).

d) Frequency differences

It is thought that they would like to point out that although one component of the set of false friends will occur regularly in its language (or linguistic variety), the other will scarcely be seen in his own language (or linguistic variety).

e) Use or function differences

For Lipczuk (1993), words of equivalent or related type and different communicative purposes, primarily offering morphologically or phonetically similar greetings in different languages with multiple features or purposes.

f) Cultural elements

Galiñanes Gallén (2006: 6) calls this kind of impurity false friends and they exist in an incredibly close or equivalent shape (Chatzopoulou, 2017:100) and have the same sense in both languages.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in the study is contrastive and taxonomic. The study proposes a general taxonomy for IFFs and then applies it to English and Arabic. Different types of IFFs in English and Arabic are contrasted to show the semantic and pragmatic aspects of difference between them. All set words, including Arabic and English meaning of these words , follow the list.

False Friends in English and Arabic

This table shows us that English and Arabic words are similar in pronunciation but their meanings are different:

English words	Meaning in Arabic	Arabic words	Meaning in English
Bar	حانة	بار	dutiful; faithful; loyal; pious
Toot	بوق	توت	**Huckleberry**
Nab	امسك,اعتقل	ناب	Eyetooth, act in someone's behalf
Far	بعيد	فار	Rat, flare up
Shy	خجول	شاي	Tea
Tab	سعر,عروة,حبة	تاب	Repent
Sad	حزين	ساد	spread through, be mastered of
Shim	الرقائق	شم	Smell
Sheen	لمعان	شين	Arabic letter
Seen	رأى	سين	Arabic letter
Ray	شعاع	ري	Irrigation, watering
Bead	خرزة,حبة	بيد	Wilderness
Shack	كوخ	شاك	Suspicious ,doubter
Jab	ابرة	جاب	Go from one place to another
fat	سمين	فات	go beyond
dean	عميد كلية	دين	religion
mass	كتله	ماس	diamond
He	ضمير للمذكر	هي	Pronoun for feminine
Whom	أداة استفهام للتملك (لمن)	هم	They
Feel	يشعر	فيل	An elephant
Knife	سكين	نايف	A person's name
Silk	حرير	سلك	A wire
Are	فعل مساعد	عار	Shameful
Fat	سمين	فات	Pass
Mat	بساط	مات	Died
Tar	قير	طار	Fly
Tool	اله	طول	Length
Tour	رحله	طور	Develop
Shall	فعل مساعد	شال	Veil
Jab	وخز	جاب	Bring
Sit	يجلس	ست	Miss
Run	يركض	رن	Ring

Rub	يدعك	رب	God
Tear	دمعه	طير	Bird
Loan	قرض	لون	Colour
Dome	قبه	دوم	Always
Hem	حافه	هم	They
Lamb	خروف	لام	Collect
Shed	يلقي على	شد	Tighten
Bait	طعم	بيت	House
Moose	غزال	موس	Razor
Sack	كيس	ساق	Leg
Jet	طائرة	جت	Plant
Sir	سيد	سر	Secret
Cool	بارد	قول	Say
Suck	يمتص	صك	Cheque
Hoot	صياح	حوت	Whale
Dude	صديق	دود	Worm

In the above table, we contrasted the Arabic and English false friends. Semantically, these words have different meanings as a word in Arabic such as صك which is a Cheque (noun) has an equivalent false friend in English "suck" (verb). Other cases have adjective= verb relationship, noun=noun, noun=verb, etc. Pragmatically speaking, these different false friends have different functions in different contexts. For example, the false friend couple in "bait" and "بيت" have different functions and uses in one context and other function in another context. The uses and meanings of these false friends are culturally bounded and each group of people have certain meanings of the couple friends differ from other people.

Conclusions

Two words of similar roots are semantic false friends as they acquire opposite interpretations as time progresses. When it is true that some words have at least one meaning, although they vary with respect to the others. We've put together a collection of fake friends in two languages, and we've tested them semantically and pragmatically. Despite its exploratory aspect, this research appears to offer some clarity into the role of FFs in Arabic and English and presents them with a general classification. Analysis of the study found that FFs do occur between Arabic and English. The suggested approach is used to compile and compare pairs of fake friends for a set of languages.

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