

# FALSE FRIENDS IN INTERPRETING: THE CASE OF ENGLISH, FRENCH AND LATVIAN

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**Abstract.** False friends are the result of language interference on a lexical level. They have been studied in various language combinations and from various aspects, often resulting in different classifications and subtypes. The paper highlights the issues related to false friends from English and French into Latvian in the interpreting scene and considers the current lexical and semantic processes in the Latvian language. Research shows that the number of deceptive loans in Latvian has increased considerably during this century. The diachronic change of false friends may reflect the need for updated lexicographic resources on false friends, since they are an important tool for distinguishing them. However, false friends also exist on an idiomatic level. The discourse on false friends has been assessed through an analysis of a survey that was delivered to Latvian interpreters working in European Union institutions and in the Latvian local market. The study and conclusions may be of interest to linguists, interpreters and translators as well as language teachers and learners.

**Key words:** false friends, interference, loans, idioms, interpretation

## INTRODUCTION

False friends are considered a linguistic error, whose primary sources are interference and insufficient knowledge of the source and target languages. They can greatly influence communication by creating misunderstandings and different mistakes. The English and French languages are known for their high number of false friends. However, they have not yet been viewed with regard to the Latvian language, which is the novelty of this paper. Taking into account the dominance of the English language as the global language, there are many new borrowings in Latvian. Therefore, it is important to make note of these loans and compare their respective meanings. False friends in these language combinations will be regarded from the interpreting point of view. Interpreters are taught to be aware of language interference and to convey the message, not translate word for word. However, due to time constraints and insufficient knowledge of the speech (often it is necessary

to start interpreting without knowing how the phrase is going to end), false friends may appear as an additional obstacle to accurately transferring the message. A survey was conducted to find out more about interpreters' experiences and opinions regarding this linguistic phenomenon.

## THEORY ON FALSE FRIENDS

The term *false friends* was coined in 1928 by Koessler and Derocquigny in their work *Les faux amis, ou, Les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais: conseils aux traducteurs* (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008: 16). The denomination is in fact a calque from the French *faux amis*, which exists in other languages as well. Previously in Latvian scientific terminology, the term *viltus draugi* was used; however, it is more convenient to use the compound *viltusdraugi* (Baldunčiks, 2005: 58). According to the *Dictionary of Lexicography* by Hartmann and James, false friends are '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). They can be categorized into interlingual homographs (words with the same written form) and interlingual homophones (words with the same pronunciation). False friends have become a serious study field since the twentieth century, when the first studies were carried out. The first Latvian linguist to bring up the subject of false friends was Bankavs in 1989 with the study *Les faux amis du traducteur franco-lettons*.

False friends in the translation sphere are also called *lexical pseudo-equivalents* (Stankevičienė, 2002; Baldunčiks, 2005). Another term could be *deceptive cognates* (Granger, 1988: 108). However, the term *cognates* is a hyponym of false friends, since 'all false cognates are false friends, but not all false friends are false cognates' (Gouws, 2004: 3). For the sake of clarity, the term *false friends* will be used in the present paper.

False friends exist within a language pair since they occur due to the confrontation of two languages and are viewed as 'a part of a recent linguistic domain called contrastive linguistics' (Bankavs, 1989: 4; trans. mine). Thus, they are always regarded in comparison with another language or several others. Therefore, the situation is always changing: 'the occurrence of false friends differs from one language pair to another' (Gouws, 2004: 797). False friends can also appear within one language between its variants or dialects, for example, British English and American English, or standard French and Canadian French (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008: 12). A vivid example of a false friend between standard French and Canadian French would be the noun *char*, which in standard French means 'a tank' and is used in military terminology, but in Canadian French it is simply 'a car' (Online 1). In order for a false friend to manifest in a language pair or between several languages, it needs to appear 'during the same synchronic movement' (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008: 33).

False friends are generally of common etymology, but not always. It is believed that 'the higher the number of loans in a language the higher the possibility of [false

friends]’ (Veisbergs, 1998: 12). One of the most common causes of the apparition of false friends is due to the resemblance of certain words in two different languages. The mistaken use of false friends can lead to false associations, misunderstandings and the wrong use of words, as well as distortion of context, improper stylistic colouring and imprecision (Veisbergs, 1998: 13).

False friends have been ‘labelled as one of the major sources of interference errors’ (Szpila, 2000: 77). Interference is ‘typical in cases of diglossy where a foreign language is used, since one projects the memories of his mother tongue in his formulations’ (Ballard and Wecksteen, 2005: 3; trans. mine). False friends create a big challenge for language learners who are learning a language close to the one they use: ‘the stronger the resemblance between two languages the bigger the confusion potential’ (Gouws, 2004: 799). Theoretically, the French and English language pair would be a champion case of false friends, but looking at false friends from the Latvian language perspective would be a meaningful, relevant and productive practice as well.

According to Žigūre, the reasons due to which mistakes related to false friends appear are several: formal similarity due to homonymy, homography, paronymy, cross-language interference, or insufficient knowledge of the cultural contexts of two or several different countries (Žigūre, 2004: 191). Another reason mentioned by Baldunčiks is synonymy, as it was in the case of the erroneous translation of *Silicon Valley*, which in its first translation appeared as ‘Silikona ieleja’ and only then turned into ‘Silicija ieleja’ (Baldunčiks, 2005: 58). Errors related to false friends arise due to insufficient knowledge in a certain language pair; yet sometimes the situation can be more complex, for example, if a certain word has changed its meaning over time in the target or source language, or both.

False friends are often regarded as a negative feature for translators and language learners, a language trap that one can easily fall into. As a result, research usually aims to warn of a potential risk. However, it is possible to study false friends from a positive point of view, as language interference can be used ‘to create some stylistic and cognitive effects’ (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008: 11). This can be accomplished in different artistic spheres like films and literature; however, in translation and interpretation, false friends lead to errors and should be avoided.

## LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE AND ITS LINK TO FALSE FRIENDS

Many languages have influenced Latvian over the course of its history, including German, Russian, Swedish, Polish, Finno-Ugric, French, and others. Apart from direct language contacts, languages can also be influenced indirectly. There is a high number of foreign words in Latvian (borrowings, calques and loaned expressions), for example, ‘more than 2000 synthetic words and 200 phraseologisms have been borrowed from French with the help of intermediary languages (particularly Russian and German)’ (Bankavs, 1989: 25; trans. mine).

Borrowing usually starts with interference, ‘the process or result of interlingual transfer resulting in, for example, error in the target language’ (Hartmann and James, 1998: 75). Interference occurs due to contact of two or more languages, cultures and civilisations (Alic, 2011: 131). It can be seen on all levels of language: phonetical, morphological, syntactical, semantical and lexico-stylistical. Yet the largest amount of interference is present on the lexical and semantical level, which is the level where false friends occur. The definition of interference is far from ideal, since it seems ambiguous and unclear with the presupposition that everyone knows what the term means, which causes subjectivity problems. Veisbergs suggests that ‘interference is omnipresent, in fact inevitable [...] It is the initial stage of the linguistic interchange, enriching and energizing the languages in contact’ (Veisbergs, 2016: 25).

Interference is mostly regarded as an error. If the influence of one language over another is viewed positively, it will most certainly be called *transfer*, but if it is negative, it becomes *interference* (Veisbergs, 2016: 31). Perhaps the negative perception comes from the connotation of the word ‘to interfere’, meaning ‘to get involved in, try to influence a situation’ (Online 2). According to Alic, interfering errors could be divided into two sub-categories: calques and false friends. While linguistic calque in itself is not a language error but is stylistically inappropriate, false friends are considered a mistake (Alic, 2011: 132). False friends are often viewed as *equivalent to interference*, but they ‘constitute a small share of meaning shifts’ (Veisbergs, 2016: 38). Language similarity plays an important role because ‘when dealing with closely related languages, the occurrence of homonymic convergence could easily lead to the introduction of false friends’ (Gouws, 2004: 800).

According to Laua, ‘loans enrich the language and broaden the stylistic possibilities of the language’ and can be classified in several types by taking into account the origin of the borrowing, its level of assimilation, age, domain of employment, and stylistic colouring (Laua, 1981: 104-105; trans. mine). Not all loans appear due to the advent of new ideas, words and notions; they can also be duplicates of already existing words. Some loans are the vogue words; many of them now have different stylistic connotations or are pejorative, as is the case with many Russian and German borrowings (*liste* and *saraksts* [both mean ‘a list’, from German], *kurtka/pufaika* and *vējaka* [‘a blazer’, from Russian]) (Laua, 1981: 110; trans. mine).

Loans appear through translated literature, the press, and often through a third language (Druviete, 1994: 15; trans. mine). ‘During the most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian language was an important intermediary language which heavily influenced “the Latvian lexicon internationalisation”’ (Bankavs, 1989: 21; trans. mine). In the 1990s, with the restoration of independence, when Latvian language contacts with other languages increased significantly, the number of English lexical pseudo-equivalents into Latvian grew rapidly as well (Baldunčiks, 2005: 59). It was also the time when the demand for translation grew. Latvian experienced many ‘newcomers’ from English that were new lexical units on their own—their

predecessors in Latvian simply did not exist. This intensified after Latvia joined the European Union in 2004—such words as *kohēzija* ('cohesion'), *konsenss* ('consensus'), *multidimensionāls* ('multidimensional') among many others, were introduced into Latvian.

Since loans are a result of linguistic interference, they enter the language and start a life on their own, often pushing out the previously existing words and becoming the dominant ones, or by occupying lacunae—being the only designation to describe a certain phenomenon or concept. This is the case of many new realia, for example, in the sphere of technologies (*clickbait*, *cookie*, *feed*, *streaming*), where the Latvian equivalent did not exist. It becomes, in a way, a race where linguists are trying to coin or find a euphonic neologism that the society might integrate into its everyday linguistic use: *klikšķēsma*, *sīkdatne*, *plūsma*, *straumēšana* (Online 3). Some are compounds; others are existing words in Latvian with a newly added meaning. By using the existing form, the perception of the meaning is alleviated (Veisbergs, 2016: 38).

Looking at the situation of the Latvian language, 'firstly, the English language has a general hegemony—it dominates the public information space and the official and economic communication within the European Union' (Baldunčiks, 2005: 56; trans. mine). With the digital era on the rise, every citizen can participate in communication with the help of the internet, social media, and other platforms. Thus, if a Latvian speaker were to translate, interpret or summarise a certain idea, text or concept from English into Latvian, it would most likely be subject to a noticeable interference from English. It creates a large amount of loans, calques and stylistic structures; the more frequently they are used, the more currency they gain in the language. Many are not aware of the English language interference in Latvian or choose not to pay attention to it. At the end of the twentieth century, it was estimated that there were around 2,500 loans from Romance languages and 1,500 from English in Latvian (Druviete, 1994: 15; trans. mine). Taking into account the new reality of Modern Latvian, one must assume that the number of English borrowings in Latvian has significantly increased since then. We can now presume as well that the interference from English is much broader than being only on lexical and semantical levels.

## TYPES OF FALSE FRIENDS

Several categorisations of false friends have been suggested. Baldunčiks (2005: 60) categorises false friends according to the frequency with which they appear: episodic false friends; rare but regularly used false friends; and epidemic false friends that are used by many language users. This terminology suggests a rather purist attitude towards language. Veisbergs (1998: 13-15) classifies false friends into three different types: proper false friends; occasional or accidental false friends; and pseudo false friends that are created by language learners. Also, Gouws expresses a similar idea by sorting false friends into absolute and partial false friends (2004),

the same as Ballard and Wecksteen (2005). However, Bankavs does not consider chance or accidental false friends with phonetic or graphic similarities but no etymological links to be false friends:

Form coincidence is not a factor in possible mistakes. Since there are no etymological links, they appear in different contexts, and these [word] pairs do not create additional difficulties. The human mind does not link these words specifically with one another in the text (translation) or in the speech, and consequently, these pairs do not create associations that could generate involuntary misunderstandings. (Bankavs, 1989: 6; trans. mine)

Bankavs (1989: 8) proposes his classification of false friends, which consists of semantic, stylistic, contextual (syntactical, phraseological), and morphological false friends. Thus, combining the above classifications, it is possible to suggest the following scheme:

1. Chance/accidental false friends,
2. Semantic false friends:
  - a. Monosemantic (absolute) false friends,
  - b. Polysemantic (partial) false friends,
3. Pseudo false friends.

To compare the significations of the following illustrative examples, three dictionaries will be used: the *Larousse French Dictionary*, the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, and the *Latvian Dictionary*.

## 1 CHANCE OR ACCIDENTAL FALSE FRIENDS

*Accidental false friends* are word pairs that are similar by coincidence and do not have any etymological links. They are also called *non-cognate interlingual analogues*. Since these word pairs reflect different logico-subject groups, users find it easier to distinguish them (Veisbergs, 1998: 15). They are also called chance false friends and may account for many misunderstandings and miscommunications and can be found at unexpected moments (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008: 5). 'When both languages do not share any common origin, the ratio of chance false friends is higher than semantic false friends' (ibid.: 6). This could be the case of *just* ('only') and *just* ('to feel') in English and Latvian; or *a store* ('a shop'), *un store* ('a blind') and *store* ('type of fish') in English, French and Latvian respectively. Since they do not appear in the same context, the foreign language user might suspect that these words have diverging meanings.

## 2 MONOSEMANTIC FALSE FRIENDS

*Proper or absolute false friends* are a pair of monosemantic words whose meaning is completely different in the two languages: 'two lexical items from two different languages with the same form but different meaning' (Gouws, 2004: 798).

Sometimes, both in English and in French, words mean the same thing, as in the case of *a gymnasium* and *un gymnase* ('sports hall'), whereas in Latvian, its counterpart *ģimnāzija* means 'high school'. *An anecdote* in English and *une anecdote* in French mean 'a short story', yet in Latvian it means 'a short joke'.

The verb *to demolish* in English or *démolir* in French is not the same as *demolēt* in Latvian, where it in fact means 'to vandalise', not 'to destroy', as its counterparts do. The French verb *améliorer* or the English *to ameliorate* could give the false indication that it means the same as *meliorēt* in Latvian ('to drain the land of water'), but in French and English it means 'to make something better, to improve'. The English adjective *actual* ('real, existing') is not an equivalent of the Latvian word *aktuāls* or the French word *actuel*, where it means 'topical'.

French itself is very peculiar in translation since many words cannot be interpreted literally but need to be adjusted in order to be comprehensible. For example, the phrase 'ce document est complètement *extravagant*' does not mean the same as in Latvian, where *ekstravagants* means 'peculiar, elegant, excessive, unusual'. The meaning in English and in French, however, is the same: 'lavish' and 'exaggerated'. Translating the phrase literally, would lead to a strange result and would not portray the original meaning. These examples show how varied the range of meaning can be in the case of false friends.

### 3 PARTIAL FALSE FRIENDS

*Partial false friends* occur when a word is polysemantic in one language with one or a few meanings that coincide with the other language. Hence, it can be problematic to deduce which is the correct meaning in a particular case. As stated by Ballard and Wecksteen (2005: 3), 'the category of partial false friends is of greater significance'. It seems that absolute and partial false friends introduce more issues in their use than chance false friends.

The French noun *une licence* is not only a permit or authorisation as in English, *a licence*, and Latvian, *licence*, but it also means 'bachelor's degree'. Similarly, *mémoire* has the meaning of 'memoir', but also 'a dissertation'. When combining these two false friends, one gets *mémoire de licence* which is very logical for French-speaking people ('BA Paper', 'bakalaura darbs'). In no way should it be translated as *memuāra licence*. Such polysemic words can appear in similar contexts but carry largely diverging meanings, as is the case with the English *partisan*, the French *partisan* and the Latvian *partizāns*. In French and Latvian, the primary meaning of the word is 'a resistance fighter'. In French, it also means 'a defendant or supporter of a cause or idea'. Yet in English, its primary sense is 'supporter'. A visual representation of these diverging notions is shown below:

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| FR PARTISAN:  | 1. Resistance fighter,<br>2. Strong supporter of a party/idea, |
| ENG PARTISAN: | 1. Strong supporter.   |
| LV PARTIZĀNS: | 1. Resistance fighter.   |

The verbs *to project* in English and *projeter* in French have various meanings, whereas in Latvian *projektēt* has mainly one meaning: 'to make a project (of a building)' or 'to plan'. In English and French, it can mean 'to project a film', 'to project an idea', or 'to predict' among many others. The verb *to realise* in English means 'to become aware', 'to achieve something', 'to happen', 'to sell', etc. In French, *réaliser* can be used to mean 'to be the author of a piece of art (e.g. 'réaliser un film'), 'to convert a good in cash' and others. In Latvian, *realizēt* can be 'to fulfill' and also 'to sell'. Thus, each word carries a different meaning.

The French word *solide* carries many meanings, among them 'resistant', 'strong', 'sound', 'well-established' and 'solid'. In English, however, it has an additional meaning: 'to describe a person who is dependable, trustworthy'. In Latvian, it has only the latter meaning ('to describe somebody who is respectable, trustworthy, authoritative, polite') and also something big, valuable and good (*solīdi ienākumi* – 'solid income'). The Latvian false friend thus cannot be used in the same context as its French counterpart like *solīda virsma* ('solid surface') or *solīdi nervi* ('solid nerves'). Another meaningful example are the adjectives *génial* ('genius, brilliant, great' in French), *genial* ('friendly' in English), and *ģeniāls* ('ingenious' in Latvian). It is a minor nuance; however, in a sentence such as 'c'est un film *génial*', it is not an ingenious film but a great one. The same goes, for example, when describing personal characteristics: 'il est *génial*' does not mean in Latvian that the person is a genius, but that they are simply of good character. The English *sensible* ('reasonable, practical, aware of something'), French *sensible* ('sensitive, delicate, discernible') and Latvian *sensibls* ('sensitive, used to characterise a person') are all different words and should be treated as such. The equivalent of the English word would be *saprātīgs, praktisks*; for the French word it would be *jūtīgs* or *jutīgs*. However, it could be that language speakers now associate this adjective with its meaning in English, taking into account its influence.

The French word *personne* with its meanings 'a person' and 'nobody', is a peculiar example (e.g. 'personne t'aidera' means 'no one will help you'). If somebody is guided by the same logic that it might mean the same thing as in English and Latvian, it might cause great misunderstandings. *Personne* ('no one') in French is used as a part of the negation phrase with *ne* before and *personne* after the verb (e.g. 'je *ne* connais *personne*' means 'I don't know anyone'). It could cause some issues to the language users who do not know this rule.

#### 4 PSEUDO FALSE FRIENDS

A rarely discussed topic concerns *pseudo false friends*. They arise when a language learner or user creates a non-existent word in the target language based on their native tongue knowledge presuming it exists in the target language. Pseudo false friends can distort the comprehension of what is said.

Many examples appear when trying to translate or interpret from one's native tongue into a foreign language since the influence of the native language is reigning over the knowledge of others. For example, it would be wrong to translate from



Latvian into English such verbs like ‘proklamēt’ as *to proclaimate* (correct: ‘to proclaim’), ‘muzicēt’ as *to musicate* (‘to play music’), ‘fotografēt’ as *to photographate* (‘to take a photo’), ‘implicēt’ as *to implicate* (‘to imply’), etc. It would also be wrong to translate certain nouns like ‘producenti’ as *producer* (correct: ‘producer’) or ‘sportisti’ as *sportist* (‘sportsman’/‘sportswoman’; ‘athlete’). The latter could be inspired by the analogy of different nouns with the same ending: artist, chemist, psychologist, etc.

From Latvian into French there would be several possible nuances associated with the formation of words: ‘benzīns’ as *benzine* (correct: ‘essence’), ‘automašīna’ as *automachine* (‘voiture’), ‘medikis’ as *medique* (‘médecin, docteur’), or ‘frizūra’ as *frissure* (‘coiffure’). Many other examples from English and French and vice versa could be possible.

## FALSE FRIEND IDIOMS

An *idiom* is ‘a fixed expression whose overall meaning is not always transparent from the combination of meanings of its constituent words’ (Hartmann and James, 1998: 71). It is a frozen pattern of language that allows little to no variation in form and, in the case of idioms, often carries meanings that cannot be deduced from their individual components (Baker, 1992: 63). They are also called *phrasemes* or *phraseological units* and are characterised by three main features: the number of components (two or more words), stability, and figurativeness (of at least one component) (Veisbergs, 2013: 110-112). One cannot (unless attempting a conscious joke or playing with words) change the order of the words, delete or add a word to it, replace one word with another, or change its grammatical structure (Baker, 1992: 63).

Idioms are problematic in translation, as it is not easy to find their equivalents; sometimes the thought-to-be equivalent or the closest idiom in its form can have a different meaning, or the equivalent does not exist. A true friend idiom would be *like two drops of water* in English, *comme deux gouttes d'eau* in French, and *kā divas ūdens lāses* in Latvian, which designate the same idea in all three languages. Similar idioms, but in different forms, can be *to kick the bucket* in English, *casser sa pipe* (‘to break one’s pipe’) in French, and *nolikt karoti* (‘to put down the spoon’) in Latvian. All are used in informal settings to describe dying. Of course, when translating, one must comprehend the idiom in the source language or recognise it (Veisbergs, 2016: 41). Some idioms are easier to spot than others (‘it’s raining cats and dogs’), and some don’t obey the conventional grammatical rules (‘blow someone to kingdom come’). Generally speaking, the less sense the idiom makes in a given context, the more likely a translator will recognise it as such (Baker, 1992: 65).

An idiom may be easily misinterpreted when it seems transparent because a valid translation exists in the target language. Yet the meaning might vary, like in the case of *to go out with somebody*—in English, it might mean either ‘to spend time together’ or ‘to have a romantic or sexual relationship’. In Latvian, these phrases

could be interpreted as 'iet ārā' for the first meaning, which is the literal translation, and 'būt kopā' for the second meaning. This can also occur due to an idiom in the source language that has a very close counterpart in the target language in that it looks similar on the surface but has a totally or partially different meaning (Baker, 1992: 66). This is the case of the idiom *to have butterflies in one's stomach*, whereas in English it means 'being nervous', in Latvian it means an exciting thrill or anticipation of further events, often used to describe the feeling of being in love. The Latvian idiom *runāt caur zobiem* ('to speak through one's teeth') means to speak unwantedly, to be pushed to speak without wanting it. In English, there is the similarly sounding idiom *to lie through one's teeth*, but here, as it already indicates, it means to lie. Thus, it can be concluded that there are also semantic differences on a phraseological level, which could be viewed as false friends of idioms.

## DIACHRONIC CHANGE

Borrowings, when taken up by another language, mostly have the same denomination as in the original language; however, with time the meaning can evolve into a different one or the word could acquire an additional meaning. It is generally a slow process, and one should ascertain whether the 'semantic evolution of words occurs in the source language, the intermediary language, or the target language' (Bankavs, 1989: 28; trans. mine).

Diachronic research on false friends shows that 'this linguistic category is ever so changing' (ibid.: 20; trans. mine). When looking at false friends, one must take into consideration the diachronic factor as well as different sources of information available on false friends, different meanings in sociolects and dialects of languages. The diachronic change may mean that at one point in history, a false friend was a *true friend* whose significations coincided in a language pair. Only later did the meaning diverge or evolve into something else. For example, the English word *preservative* in the eighteenth century was a euphemism for 'condom'; it gained its meaning as 'conservative' only later (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008: 11). It is notorious for its misunderstandings in the English-French language pair because, in French, this word still carries the old English meaning. So it does in Latvian. The French word *vélocipède* is the ancestor of the word 'bicycle'. In Latvian, it means 'bicycle' as we know it today. So this particular word has experienced changes in the source language but not in the target language. When reading historic texts, one should take into account that not all false friends nowadays used to be such in the past.

Equally, false friends in a language pair can have existed historically, changed meaning, and slipped out of the category of false friends. Thus, the following Latvian words have over the last decades adopted new additional meanings: *drastisks*, which means 'cheerful', 'full of bravado', or 'rude', now also means 'radical'; *kritisks*, which means 'full of criticism' (e.g. 'critical article', 'critical point of view'), now also means 'important'; *dramatisks* ('connected with drama, theatre, or strong

feelings' or 'a difficult experience') now also means 'sudden'; and *oriģināls* ('unique', 'different from others', or 'peculiar') now also means 'the first one'. This shows that the English meaning prevails over the previous Latvian meanings.

The English noun *intelligence*, or French *des intelligences*, denotes 'intellectual capacity' and 'secret information that is collected'. In Latvian, *inteliģence* has the meanings 'mental capacity' and 'an intellectual group of people'. However, there is also the Latvian term *biznesa inteliģence*, which has the same meaning as its equivalents in English and French (e.g. 'business intelligence').

The French noun *une affaire* is highly polysemantic, with significations like 'activity', 'personal belongings, problems', 'matter', 'field of expertise', 'scandal', and 'business'. In English, *affair* carries only the meanings 'public/political activities', 'scandal', and 'romantic liaison'. In Latvian, it mainly means 'dishonest, risky transaction' and has been used with this sense. However, recently it seems to have adapted also the meaning of 'romantic relationship'; for example, the Latvian translation of the film title *The Love Punch* is 'Mīlas afēra'. It would be erroneous, though, to use the Latvian counterpart *afēra* when translating, for example, the phrase 'this is a state affair'.

A case where a new meaning appeared could be the word *ekspertīze*, which previously meant in Latvian 'an examination by an expert' or 'a group of specialists carrying out examination'. It was spotted in the Latvian media (Online 4), when a journalist thanked an expert 'for his expertise', most likely meaning 'his knowledge'. Here, it is unknown whether this was a prepared text that the journalist voiced (which could mean that it was considered to have a stable and accepted meaning) or if the journalist improvised on the spot. Yet it can be regarded as a peculiar example of adding a different meaning to an existing word. It can be concluded that these words are undergoing a diachronic semantic change. This shows the impact of the English language on Latvian.

## LEXICOGRAPHICAL SOURCES ON FALSE FRIENDS

False friend dictionaries usually contain the most common false friends of a certain language pair. Since these dictionaries are designed for translators, interpreters and language learners, there ought to be an explanation or context given to understand the issues with specific false friends (Veisbergs, 1998: 3). These resources show a very broad approach: some include 'words of common etymology, synchronically accidental words of common spelling and/or pronunciation, just similar words, international words' (Stankevičienė, 2002; 129).

Even though lexicographers are aware of false friends, often bilingual dictionaries do not provide lengthy descriptions because they are simply not needed, especially in the case of two unrelated languages: 'it would suffice with symbols to mark certain lexical units' (Gouws, 2004: 799). One should also consider the limited space and volume of dictionaries: 'it is inevitable that general dictionaries are unable, in the limited space that is available, to do them full justice'

(Granger, 1988: 117). Also, the issue of different types of false friends adds further problems:

The stronger the false friend version, the slimmer the chances are that the user will experience difficulties or confusion with the relevant items from two languages. The weaker the false friend version is, the better are the chances of the user being confused and experiencing difficulties. Weak version false friends typically require disambiguating entries in their lexicographic treatment. (Gouws, 2004: 804)

Sometimes general dictionaries provide a misleading translation by noting the cognate as the main translation of the headword. Dictionaries of false friends would need to indicate the usage frequency of a specific lexical unit since 'some senses are added to the polysemous paradigm of a given lexical item or certain senses become extinct and are phased out' (ibid.: 802). The change in the use of a word may start at the level of usage frequency; a sense can move to the periphery and eventually be omitted completely.

## FALSE FRIENDS AND INTERPRETATION

Conference interpreting is a 'modern-day phenomenon [...] and among the primary domains of translational activity' (Pöchhacker, 2011: 307). It is operated mainly via two modes: consecutive and simultaneous. In consecutive interpretation, the interpreters can listen to some part or the whole speech, take notes if necessary, and then render it in the source language. Simultaneous interpretation is, as the name suggests, simultaneous or 'quasi-simultaneous', where the interpreter is a few words or phrases behind the speaker (Jones, 1998: 6). Conference interpreting mostly refers to simultaneous interpreting in international conferences and organisations; its defining characteristic has become 'the ability to interpret speeches of any complexity' (Pöchhacker, 2011: 308).

Certain advantages and disadvantages occur with regards to each interpretation mode. Consecutive could be advantageous from the point of view that the interpreter has heard the whole message (sentence, full phrases) before starting to interpret. This may allow for solving many issues related to false friends. This is often not the case for simultaneous interpreting. Thus, this study could be more relevant to the simultaneous interpretation sphere since this is the mode where, due to time constraints, interpreters are not able to analyse at length what is being said. This can in fact lead to the preference for direct transfer or literal translation, also known as 'word for word', where false friends could come up unexpectedly and create problems.

### 1 THE SURVEY

In the case of the current study, it was necessary to analyse interpreters' views and experiences in relation to false friends. The survey consisted of 22 questions

divided into three parts. In the first part, working languages and years spent in this profession are indicated. The second part consisted of general questions about false friends, and the third part consisted of different examples in English and French. There were six examples in both languages; one example was a trap where the words in the source and target languages coincide ('cohesion' in English and 'amusant' in French). The answers provided were in mixed order. The survey was sent to the Directorate-General for Interpretation (SCIC), Latvian booth interpreters, and a Latvian translation and interpretation agency.

In total 19, participants shared their views. All 19 responded that their working language is English, of which seven also have French, six German, and four Russian. Additional languages were Italian, Spanish, Hungarian and Greek. The largest group of interpreters (six participants) was with 6-10 years of work experience, followed by 11-15 years (4 participants), 6-10 years and 21-25 years (3 participants for each group).

All participants responded affirmatively that they had indeed heard about the linguistic phenomenon as false friends, while 89 percent admitted that they have experienced problems with it, mentioning many spheres like economy, internal affairs, migration, finances, medicine, cartography, politics and textiles. Half of them responded that when interpreting, they recognised false friends; some reported that at the beginning of their careers, this was more difficult. 57 percent affirmed that they have noticed the diachronic change of false friends, naming such examples as *dekāde*, *drastisks*, *kritisks*, *spekulācijas*, and *formāls*. 63 percent affirmed that they use available resources (dictionaries, internet resources) to find information about false friends and confirmed their usefulness.

In the practical part of the survey, it was discovered that such English words as *design*, *sensible* and *isle* and French words like *location* and *affaire* did not pose a problem to the interpreters. However, there were diverging views on whether 'expertise' should be *ekspertīze* or *prasmē/pratība* in Latvian and whether the idiom 'to have butterflies in one's stomach' means a positive thrill or, on the contrary, negative stress. This leads to the conclusion that most likely many words, including *ekspertīze*, are undergoing a diachronic change and extra meanings might need to be added to the Latvian dictionary. In the case of the French false friend *anecdote*, 11 percent responded wrongly with its thought-to-be equivalent in Latvian *anecdote* (see 2 MONOSEMANTIC FALSE FRIENDS). The most surprising result was that 77 percent of the participants thought that the French phrase *mener quelqu'un par le bout de nez*, which could be literally translated as 'to lead someone by the nose', was mistaken for its Latvian counterpart *vazāt aiz deguna*. In Latvian, this expression means 'to trick or deceive somebody', whereas the proposed French expression means 'to have total control over somebody'. Its true equivalent in Latvian could be *būt zem tupeles*.

## CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that there is no single categorisation of false friends; they can be classified according to their frequency, semantics and other factors. False

friend idioms constitute an interesting subject that could lead to a field of research of its own, yet it shows the necessity of contrastive studies in this field. Besides, the diachronic aspect must be taken into account whenever looking at false friends, since some are undergoing a semantic change by either adopting additional meaning or dominating and pushing out the previous signification. Dictionaries of false friends are available in certain language pairs; however, their length, volume, and information density are in question.

False friends need to be taken into consideration when interpreting. Experienced interpreters confirm that they have faced situations where false friends could create problems. Interpreters recognise many fields where false friends can be found and have noticed diachronic changes in the course of their work experience. These changes reflect the need for updated resources on false friends, which would be a valuable tool for interpreters.

Finally, everyone, not only interpreters but also translators, language teachers, and professionals, could benefit from such studies and available informative material especially taking into account the diachronically rapidly changing semantics of the Latvian vocabulary.

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