



WHEN SIMILAR WORDS MISLEAD: FALSE FRIENDS IN ENGLISH– UZBEK TRANSLATION

MAVZU: TASHQI O'XSHASHLIKNING SEMANTIK ZIDDIYATI:
INGLIZ–O'ZBEK TARJIMASIDA SOXTA EKVIVALENTLAR

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Abstract: This article looks at false friends, that is, words which look or sound alike in English and Uzbek but differ in meaning, and at the translation errors they cause. Most such pairs in this language combination did not appear through direct contact between English and Uzbek. They came into Uzbek mainly through Russian, where their meanings had often already shifted. On the basis of a contrastive analysis of selected word pairs checked against bilingual and explanatory dictionaries, the study divides these words into three groups: complete, partial, and connotative false friends. It then discusses why such errors are so persistent and suggests practical techniques for translators and teachers.

Keywords: false friends, translation errors, English–Uzbek translation, lexical interference, loanwords, polysemy, contrastive analysis, language teaching

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillarida shakli yoki talaffuzi o'xshash, ammo ma'nosi farq qiladigan so'zlar, ya'ni "soxta do'stlar" va ular keltirib chiqaradigan tarjima xatolari tahlil qilinadi. Bu til juftligidagi bunday so'zlarning aksariyati ikki til o'rtasidagi bevosita aloqa natijasida emas, balki rus tili orqali o'zlashgani va ma'nosi o'zgargani sababli yuzaga kelgan.



Tanlangan soʻz juftliklari ikki tilli va izohli lugʻatlar bilan solishtirilib, toʻliq, qisman va konnotativ soxta doʻstlarga ajratildi. Maqolada bu xatolarning barqarorligi sabablari koʻrib chiqiladi hamda tarjimonlar va oʻqituvchilar uchun amaliy tavsiyalar beriladi.

Kalit soʻzlar: soxta doʻstlar, tarjima xatolari, ingliz–oʻzbek tarjimasi, leksik interferensiya, oʻzlashma soʻzlar, polisemiya, kontrastiv tahlil, tilni oʻqitish

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются «ложные друзья переводчика» — слова, сходные по форме или звучанию в английском и узбекском языках, но различающиеся по значению, — и ошибки перевода, которые они вызывают. Большинство таких пар возникло не в результате прямого контакта двух языков: слова пришли в узбекский через русский, где их значение нередко уже успело измениться. На основе контрастивного анализа отобранных пар, сверенных с двуязычными и толковыми словарями, выделены три группы: полные, частичные и коннотативные ложные друзья. Обсуждаются причины устойчивости этих ошибок и предлагаются практические приёмы для переводчиков и преподавателей.

Ключевые слова: ложные друзья переводчика, ошибки перевода, англо-узбекский перевод, лексическая интерференция, заимствования, полисемия, контрастивный анализ, преподавание языка

Introduction

Anyone who has checked translation homework in an Uzbek classroom knows this moment. A student reads the English sentence “I bought a magazine” and writes “Men magazin sotib oldim.” The student is sure about it, because the two words look almost identical. The trouble is that the Uzbek sentence now





says “I bought a shop.” The error is hard to catch precisely because the learner feels no doubt.

Words of this kind were named *faux amis*, “false friends,” by Koessler and Derocquigny in their 1928 book on French and English [3,9]. Chamizo-Domínguez later defined them as pairs of words from two languages that resemble each other in form but differ in meaning, completely or in part [1,5]. Granger and Swallow called the whole area a kaleidoscope of translation difficulties, a label that fits, since causes and results differ from pair to pair [2,12]. Most research deals with European languages such as French, Spanish, and German. For English and Uzbek the topic usually appears as a small part of wider discussions of lexical equivalence [4; 8].

The situation in Uzbekistan has its own complication. Many learners meet English after Russian, and a large layer of international vocabulary reached Uzbek through Russian long before English became a school subject. These words feel familiar, and learners tend to trust that feeling. This article therefore asks which English–Uzbek pairs are the most misleading, how the mismatch arose, and what teachers and translators can do about it.

Research Methodology

The article uses a qualitative contrastive design. It is not a corpus study, and it does not report test results from learners. The material is a set of about twenty word pairs, chosen on purpose because they are common in general English and easy to confuse in translation. The set is illustrative, not exhaustive.

The work went in three steps. First, the current meanings of each English word were taken from the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, and the meanings of the Uzbek counterpart from the explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language [9]. Second, the origin of each Uzbek word was traced, with attention to whether it came directly from a European language or through Russian. Third,





the pairs were sorted by the degree of overlap in meaning, using the distinction between total and partial false friends [1,5], and by the kind of error they are likely to produce. The practical side of the analysis rests on the view that a translator should be suspicious of an easy equivalent that seems to fit at once [7,18].

Analysis and Results

The first group consists of complete false friends, where two words share a form and almost nothing else. The English *magazine* has a look-alike, *magazin*, which in Uzbek means a shop. *Fabric* (mato) meets *fabrika*, a factory. *Family* (oila) is matched by *familiya*, a surname. *Actual* means real or existing, while Uzbek *aktual* means urgent or relevant (dolzarb). A *cabinet* in English is a cupboard or a group of ministers, but *kabinet* in Uzbek is a room used as an office or classroom. Finally, *prospect* is a possibility or an outlook for the future, whereas *prospekt* is a wide avenue. A student who relies on appearance will mistranslate every one of these.

The second group is partial false friends, and in practice these are more dangerous. The words do overlap, so a wrong choice is sometimes right and the learner never gets a clear signal. *Artist* is a good case. In English it can mean a painter or any creative person, whereas the Uzbek *artist* is mostly a stage performer, an actor or a singer. *Technique* is a method or a way of doing something, but *texnika* is first of all machinery and equipment, so a sentence about a pianist's technique turns odd or simply wrong. *Novel* and *roman* match in most contexts, yet English *romance* is not a long book but a love affair or a love story, and the two are often mixed up.

The third group concerns connotation rather than basic meaning. *Sympathetic* in English means understanding and kind towards someone's trouble, while Uzbek *simpatik* is said about a person who looks pleasant and attractive. *Intelligent* describes anyone who thinks and learns quickly, but the



Uzbek *intelligent* carries the older sense of an educated, cultured member of society, a status as much as a quality. In colloquial Uzbek *akkurat* describes a neat, tidy person, while English *accurate* means correct and precise. A dictionary would accept each of these choices, but a native reader still feels that something is off.

The analysis also shows a pattern in how the mismatch appeared. Almost every pair in the first two groups reached Uzbek through Russian: *magazin*, *fabrika*, *familiya*, *prospekt*, and *aktual* all have Russian forms of the same shape. In some cases the English and Russian words even share a distant source. *Magazine* came into English from French *magasin*, which goes back to an Arabic word for a storehouse, and Russian магазин took a similar path before settling on the meaning of “shop.” English kept the older sense of a place where things are stored and later extended it to a publication that collects articles. So the two words are distant relatives that drifted apart, and their similar look hides that history.

Several reasons explain why such errors stay in learners’ work for years. Laufer found that words with similar forms are harder to learn and are often confused with each other [5,44]. Nation describes knowing a word as knowing its form, meaning, and use together [6,18], and a learner who meets a familiar form tends to stop after the first of these. The error is also invisible. A wrong word that looks right causes no pause, as an unknown word would, and a student who thinks they know the word never opens a dictionary.

Conclusion

The comparison shows that English–Uzbek false friends are largely a product of Russian mediation and fall into three types: complete, partial, and connotative. Complete pairs can be taught as a list, while partial and connotative pairs need context. The error comes from misplaced trust, so vocabulary lists alone will not fix it.



Several practical steps follow. Teachers can ask learners to build a small contrastive glossary of their own, with the English word, the Uzbek look-alike, and a sentence for each. Translation tasks can contain deliberate traps, so that learners practise doubting a word that seems obvious. Back-translation, where the student turns the Uzbek version back into English, quickly exposes a false match, and explaining the history of a word, such as the path of *magazine* from Arabic through French, gives learners something to remember. Translators, for their part, should check every international word in both an English and an Uzbek dictionary, even when they feel certain. The word set here is small, and a corpus of student translations would show which pairs cause the most errors.

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