

**INTERNATIONAL WORDS AND FALSE FRIENDS OF THE
TRANSLATOR**

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Annotation: *The article examines two important linguistic concepts—international words and false friends—and their impact on translation accuracy. It outlines how international words, which have similar forms and meanings across languages, can facilitate understanding, while false friends—deceptively similar words with different meanings—can lead to errors and miscommunication. Through practical examples, the article emphasizes the translator’s responsibility to navigate these complexities using contextual and cultural awareness. The study is useful for linguists, translators, and language learners aiming to improve cross-linguistic competence.*

Keywords: *international words, false friends, translation challenges, linguistic interference, comparative linguistics, translator competence, bilingualism, semantic differences, translation studies*

In the realm of linguistics and translation, two fascinating phenomena often arise: international words and false friends. Understanding both is crucial for accurate communication across languages, especially in professional translation and language learning.

International words are terms that appear in many languages with similar spelling, pronunciation, and meaning. Often derived from Latin, Greek, French, or English, they emerge through globalization, science, technology, and cultural exchange. Common examples include telephone, cinema, doctor, bank, and university. Such words help streamline communication and make language learning more accessible.



However, while international words can be useful, they also require careful attention. Pronunciation, spelling variations, or slight shifts in meaning can still cause confusion if misinterpreted.

False friends (or faux amis) are deceptive linguistic pairs. They are words in two languages that appear similar but carry different meanings. These misleading pairs are particularly dangerous in translation, where assumptions based on appearance can lead to errors. Examples:

English fabric vs. French fabrique (which means "factory")

English library vs. Spanish librería (which means "bookstore")

German Gift (which means "poison") vs. English gift

These examples demonstrate how false friends can create misunderstandings or awkward situations, especially in formal or professional contexts.

Translators must exercise critical thinking and deep linguistic knowledge to navigate between true cognates, false friends, and cultural nuances. Relying solely on word similarity often results in incorrect interpretations. Contextual awareness, idiomatic usage, and cultural literacy are essential tools in any translator's skill sets. Translation is far more than the substitution of words from one language to another; it is a complex cognitive, linguistic, and cultural process.

One of the greatest challenges translators face is navigating the subtle yet critical differences between international words and false friends. These linguistic phenomena can mislead even experienced translators if they rely too heavily on surface similarities without considering the broader context.

International words, though helpful, may vary slightly in connotation, frequency, or usage across languages. A translator must determine whether the word functions identically in the target language or requires adaptation. For example, the English word "manager" may be rendered differently in various languages depending on the industry, hierarchy, or local business culture.

False friends pose an even greater risk. Their deceptive similarity can lead to mistranslations that alter the intended meaning, damage credibility, or confuse the audience. Mistakes with false friends are particularly problematic in technical, legal,



and medical texts, where accuracy is paramount. A classic example is the English word “eventually”, which does not mean “possibly” (as the French *éventuellement* does), but rather “in the end” or “finally”.

In addition to linguistic knowledge, translators must also be equipped with strong research skills and cultural awareness. Understanding idiomatic expressions, register, tone, and socio-cultural references is essential for effective communication. For instance, translating humor, sarcasm, or culturally bound references often requires creative reformulation, not direct translation.

Professional translators must therefore combine language expertise with subject-matter knowledge, critical thinking, and an ability to make informed linguistic choices. This makes the translator’s role not just linguistic, but interpretive and creative. Good translation is not a mechanical act—it is an act of informed judgment.

International words offer bridges between languages, while false friends are traps that require careful navigation. Recognizing the difference between the two is vital for effective translation and language education. Accurate communication depends not just on vocabulary, but on understanding meaning, context, and cultural background.

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