

"FALSE FRIENDS" IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: CAUSES AND PROBLEMS OF MISUNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

This thesis examines the phenomenon of "false friends" in English and Uzbek, referring to lexical units that are similar in form or pronunciation but differ partially or completely in meaning. Because of their formal similarity, such words may lead language learners and translators to make incorrect semantic assumptions. The study analyzes the factors contributing to the emergence of false friends, their relationship with cross-linguistic interference, and the problems they may cause in the translation process. It also examines the relationship between formal similarity and semantic difference through examples of pseudointernational words in English and Uzbek. The findings demonstrate that avoiding reliance on the external form of a word, identifying its meaning in context, consulting reliable dictionaries, and applying contrastive analysis are important for reducing such errors.

Keywords: false friends, translation, English, Uzbek, lexical interference, semantics, language contact, context.

Introduction

Globalization and the development of international relations have resulted in increasingly intensive contact between different languages. The widespread use of English in international communication, education, technology, business, and mass media has strengthened its influence on other languages. Such language contact results not only in the borrowing of new words but also in the emergence and misinterpretation of lexical units that are similar in form but different in meaning.

In linguistics, such units are commonly referred to as "false friends" or "translator's false friends." They appear similar in two languages and therefore may create the impression that they have the same or a similar meaning. However, their meanings, areas of use, or stylistic characteristics may differ. As a result, language learners or translators may be more likely to interpret a word incorrectly when they rely primarily on its form.

The issues of language contact and interference have been discussed in the works of researchers such as Haugen (1950) and Weinreich (1953). Lado (1957) and James (1980) also demonstrated that differences between a learner's native language and a foreign language can create various difficulties in language learning. These theoretical perspectives provide an important basis for examining false friends in English and Uzbek.

Research Aim and Methods

The main aim of this study is to identify the main characteristics of false friends in English and Uzbek, analyze the reasons why they are misunderstood, and examine the problems they create in translation and foreign language learning.

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The study employs **descriptive, comparative, semantic, and contextual analysis**. The research materials include lexical units in English and Uzbek, studies related to translation and linguistics, and academic works addressing lexical interference between English and Uzbek.

The Concept of "False Friends"

The main characteristic of false friends is the mismatch between the formal or phonetic similarity of lexical units in two languages and their meanings. Such words may cause a language learner to assume that "the word looks familiar, so its meaning must also be familiar."

For example, the English word **actual** is used to mean "real," "existing," or "in fact." The Uzbek word **aktual**, however, is commonly used in the sense of "relevant," "urgent," or "important." Therefore, automatically equating the English word actual with the Uzbek word aktual may lead to an incorrect interpretation.

Another example is the English word **fabric**. In English, fabric means "cloth" or "textile material." Because of its formal similarity to the Uzbek word **fabrika**, it may be incorrectly associated with the meaning "factory.

" This example demonstrates that formal similarity does not necessarily indicate semantic equivalence.

False Friends and Cross-Linguistic Interference

Cross-linguistic interference plays an important role in the misunderstanding of false friends. Language learners often attempt to interpret a new word on the basis of their existing knowledge of their native language. When two lexical units have similar forms, learners may assume that their meanings are also identical.

Lado's (1957) views on contrastive analysis are particularly relevant to explaining such situations. Similarities between a learner's native language and the target language may facilitate language learning in some cases, while incorrect associations based on superficial similarities may cause errors. James (1980) also considers contrastive analysis a useful means of identifying differences between languages and explaining difficulties in language learning.

The presence of international lexical units that have entered Uzbek through other languages, particularly Russian, can further complicate this process. Therefore, the misunderstanding of certain English lexical units in Uzbek may be examined not only in terms of direct English–Uzbek contact but also within the broader context of English–Russian–Uzbek language relations.

Problems in the Translation Process

False friends can cause significant difficulties in the translation process. If a translator relies on the external form of a word and replaces it with the first familiar equivalent in the target language, the meaning of the original text may be distorted.

For example:

The actual situation is different.

In this sentence, actual means "real" or "the situation as it really is," rather than the Uzbek meaning associated with aktual. If a translator interprets it according to the formal similarity and translates it as "dolzarb vaziyat," the meaning of the sentence may change.

Similarly:

The dress is made of a soft fabric.

In this sentence, fabric means "cloth" or "textile material." Associating it with fabrika because of their formal similarity would result in a translation error.

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Thus, one of the major problems associated with false friends is **literal translation and excessive reliance on formal similarity**. In such cases, translators should consider the grammatical function of the word, the surrounding lexical units, and the overall meaning of the text.

Examples of English–Uzbek False Friends

A number of pseudointernational lexical units have been discussed in studies of English and Uzbek. Some examples include:

English word Similar Uzbek word Meaning in English Meaning in Uzbek

actual aktual real, existing, current relevant, urgent

fabric fabrika cloth, textile material factory

magazine magazin journal, periodical shop, store

decade dekada a period of ten years a ten-day period

complexion kompleksiya appearance/colour of the skin body build/constitution

lunatic lunatik a mentally disturbed or insane person a sleepwalker

aspirant aspirant a person who aspires to something postgraduate researcher

replica replika an exact copy a response/reply or a specialized meaning

anecdote anekdot a short, interesting or amusing story a joke or humorous story

sympathetic simpatik understanding, compassionate attractive/pleasant in some common uses

These examples also demonstrate that false friends do not necessarily have the same degree of semantic difference. In some cases, their meanings are completely different, while in others, the meanings may partially overlap or their areas of use may differ.

The Importance of Context

Context is one of the most important tools for correctly understanding false friends. Instead of relying solely on the form of a word, learners and translators should consider its relationship with other words in the sentence.

For example:

The actual cost of the product is higher than expected.

Here, actual means “real” or “the real amount.” Interpreting it as “relevant” would change the meaning of the sentence.

Similarly:

This jacket is made of artificial fabric.

The meaning of fabric as “cloth” can be understood from its relationship with jacket and the phrase made of.

Therefore, context allows language learners and translators to verify whether an interpretation based on formal similarity is correct.

Results and Discussion

The analysis shows that errors related to false friends can mainly be explained by three factors. First, **formal or phonetic similarity** may lead learners to make incorrect assumptions. Second, **the influence of the native language** and cross-linguistic interference may result in the inappropriate transfer of word meanings. Third, **insufficient attention to context** may increase semantic errors in both translation and comprehension.

Studies of international and borrowed lexical units in Uzbek also demonstrate the relevance of this issue. The entry of English lexical units into Uzbek and their adaptation to the new linguistic environment have been examined by Nishonova (2024), Kuchkarov (2025), and Yoqubjonova and Yoqubjonova (2025).

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Such language contact contributes to vocabulary enrichment while also increasing the need to distinguish between formally similar lexical units.

From this perspective, studying false friends is important not only for translation studies but also for foreign language teaching. Introducing such lexical units as a separate category and teaching learners to interpret them in context may help reduce lexical errors.

Conclusion

False friends in English and Uzbek are lexical units that are formally or phonetically similar but differ in meaning or usage. They may create significant difficulties in language learning and translation. Formal similarity, native-language influence, cross-linguistic interference, and insufficient attention to context are among the main factors contributing to their misunderstanding.

The study demonstrates that relying solely on the external form of a word is insufficient for understanding false friends correctly. It is necessary to identify the meaning of a word in context, consult reliable dictionaries, and apply contrastive analysis between English and Uzbek.

Thus, the systematic study of false friends can contribute to improving translation quality, reducing lexical interference, and developing the semantic competence of Uzbek-speaking learners of English.

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