Lost in Lexical Translation: Challenges of Conveying 'False Friends' from English to Russian

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Abstract: The paper explores "false friends," words that pose translation challenges. It examines difficulties encountered by students from technical universities when translating such words and phrases from English to Russian. Specific instances of "false friends" in scientific texts are identified, along with examples of mistranslation of scientific terms and phrases from English.

Keywords: internationalisms, inter-lingual analogisms, translation, English, false equivalents, scientific text.

The acquisition of a foreign language within the academic setting of a non-linguistic university is intrinsically tied to the cultivation of competencies necessary for engaging with scientific and technical literature in English across various fields of study. Despite the increasing emphasis on nurturing English communication skills in educational curricula, which undoubtedly holds relevance for students' prospective professional trajectories, it remains imperative to underscore the pivotal importance of imparting precise translation abilities from English into Russian and vice versa.

The translation of a scientific text from English into Russian has its own specifics, since one word (term) can be translated differently in different fields of science and technology. Since international relations have been rapidly expanding recently not only with Western European and Eurasian countries, but also with the BRICS countries, there is also an intensive exchange of information, as a result of which many new words and terms appear that cause difficulties in translating from English into Russian. Such words include "false friends".

The concept of "false friends□ appeared in the first half of the 20th century and was introduced by French scientists M. Kessler and J. Derokigny (M. Koessler, J. Dercquigny) in 1928. This term is widely used nowadays not only by translators from various languages: French, German, English, Spanish, etc., but also by specialists who are able to work with scientific literature in foreign languages. However, such a group of words causes significant difficulties for students studying English at a technical university.

"False friends" represent a special group of words, "similar in form in both languages, but different in meaning or usage" [2, p.5], i.e. when the graphic or phonetic form of a word does not match its translation. According to Borisova L.I., when translating "this category of words, false identifications may occur, since interlanguage analogisms have some graphical (or phonetic), grammatical, and often semantic commonality" [3, p. 6].

Thus, this statement can be explained as follows: there is a certain category of words that can be classified as international words (interlanguage relative synonyms of a similar kind), because they read as written, but have completely different meanings when translated into another language. For example, Budagov R.A. gave his definition of this category of words: "Although the phrase "false friends" is long and too open to become a term, it has nevertheless been "termed" in recent years. Firstly, this phrase does not seem to have an equal and shorter equivalent; it seems to remind us what traps await everyone who deals with different languages" [4, p.362]. Consequently, such a name "very accurately characterizes the translation phenomenon" [3]. For example, such words include the following:

- Composition □ «состав», not «композиция»,

- Delicate – «легкий, тонкий», not «деликатный»,

- Formation – «образование», not «формация»,

- Intelligent – «умный, знающий», not «интеллигентный»,

- Momentum – «импульс», less often «момент»,

- Protection – «защита», not «протекция»,

- Revolution – «оборот», not «революция»,

- Technique – «метод», «способ», «технология», not «техника» , etc. [3].

In the second half of the last century, many scientists conducted fundamental research on this category of words. It should be noted the works of such scientists as V. V. Akulenko [1] and K.G. Gottlieb. They developed the main theoretical provisions concerning this category of words, and also compiled dictionaries and manuals "false friends". Akulenko V. V. He analyzed the origin of such words, introduced the concepts of "internationalisms" and gave a justification for "this broad, semantically heterogeneous bilingual category" [1, p.136]. Based on the analysis of the sources of the occurrence of such words, V. V. Akulenko came to the conclusion that they are all "the result of the mutual influence of languages" [1]. The scientist characterizes "translator's false friends" as "a semantically heterogeneous category of words, including international vocabulary (interlanguage

relative synonyms) and interlanguage paronyms ☐ a pair of words in two languages that are similar in spelling or pronunciation, but differ in meanings" [1].

The translation of the "false friends" from English into Russian causes quite a lot of difficulties for students studying English. Therefore, when teaching students to work with scientific literature, in particular, when teaching translation from English into Russian, first of all, it is necessary to take into account the student's specialty, i.e. the area of scientific knowledge that he studies or is interested in, since the same word or term may have different meanings in different fields of science and technicians. In scientific texts, the "false friends of the translator" have their own characteristics. Since most of the words in this category are internationalisms, students make a lot of mistakes when translating this particular category of words. It would seem that such words should not cause any difficulties when translating from a foreign language, because they have the same forms, and therefore the same meanings. However, this is not the case. It is international words that become the causes of a huge number of mistakes. Errors are especially common when "translating interlanguage analogisms, the meaning of which often coincide" [3], for example, in such general scientific international words as: accurate, dramatic, expansion, focus, factor, limit, nominally, typical etc. When translating an international word from English into Russian, the graphic form of which coincides with the form of the word in Russian, the student allows a literal translation of this word, while violating the norms of the Russian language. According to Borisova L. I., such words "coincide with Russian parallels in their international meanings and are therefore easier to identify. As a result of such identifications, either the meaning of the statement or the stylistic norms of the "Russian language" are violated [3]. This is especially true for phrases. However, words that sound similar in Russian and English may have different or even completely opposite meanings that is why such words are called «false friends☐. Such words should be treated with caution, because they can easily mislead and cause gross errors among students, undergraduates and graduate students when translating from a foreign language into Russian.

It should be noted that it is not always possible to use international meanings when translating commonly used and general scientific words and terms. There are quite a few words that are almost never translated into Russian by their international meanings.

Let's consider some typical difficulties that students face when working with scientific and technical texts in English using the example of commonly used and general scientific words used in the field of power engineering. As a classic example, we can take the word "original" in the phrase "original choice", which translates as "первоначальный выбор", and not "оригинальный" (e.g. "Metal fuel was the original choice in early fast reactors". – "Первоначальным выбором топлива в ранних быстрых реакторах было металлическое топливо") (author's translation) [7]. When

translating the word "original" into Russian, the student "transfers the usual meaning of his native word to a foreign one" [3], although it has a completely different meaning - "первоначальный". As a result, the meaning of the English utterance is distorted. The adjective "principal" is used to mean "главный, основной", and not "принципиальный" (e.g. "The principal peaceful application of nuclear energy is that of electricity generation" – "Основное мирное применение ядерной энергии заключается в производстве электроэнергии") (Translated by the author) [6]. In this example, the noun "generation" also refers to "false friends" and translates to "производство" or "выработка электроэнергии", although the meaning of "генерация" can be used in other fields of science (e.g. "noise generation" – "генерация шума").

According to scientists, "False friends" can be divided into two groups: a) words that have the same spelling and pronunciation, but have different meanings when translated into Russian, (e.g. "accurate" – "точный", not "аккуратный"; "complex" – "сложный", not "комплексный"; "phenomenon" – "явление", not "феномен"); b) words that match only in one of two or more meanings. The latter group includes the word "candidate", which can be used in the English sentence of the technical text as a noun meaning "option, type, means", for example, in the phrase "The potential candidate" ("The potential candidate for this system is a safety-grade reactor vessel auxiliary cooling system (RVACS)" – "Возможным вариантом для этой системы является вспомогательная система охлаждения корпуса реактора безопасного класса") (Translated by the author) [7]. Here, the adjective "potential" also refers to The category of "false friends" is translated as "возможный", not "потенциальный". The noun "candidate" is used in the function of an adjective in the meaning of "пригодный, перспективный". Therefore, the term "candidate material" should be translated as "перспективный материал", and not "кандидат для материала" (as students often translate this term), which fundamentally distorts the meaning of this term ("Two candidate materials for MYRRHA ADS systems have been investigated: the austenitic stainless steel and martensitic steel..." – "Для систем MIRRHA ADC исследовали два перспективных материала: аустенитную нержавеющую сталь и мартенситную сталь") (Author's translation) [5].

Therefore, scientific speech often involves "deinternalization" of word meanings. Comparing English scientific texts with their Russian translations reveals frequent occurrence of "false friends," internationalisms that are mistranslated, leading to inaccurate rendering of scientific terms and sometimes distorting entire sentences. Students, particularly those in non-linguistic fields, face challenges when translating due to specific terminology and contextual nuances, often requiring new translation approaches not found in standard dictionaries. Neglecting context and field of study can result in erroneous translations of internationalisms and scientific terms.

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