

### **XXIII. Beware of Faux Amis**

No language possesses 100% of its words that are free from any foreign influence. The English language is no exception to the rule and contains many words borrowed from many different languages worldwide.

Today, English is pointed out as the main language on which new words are based (especially in scientific research and Information Technology). This can appear as a great advantage, especially for non-native English speakers who have to deal with the English language at work. Indeed, this makes it easier for them to understand new words because they can guess the English meaning by finding the equivalent which is similar to their own language.

However, it is dangerous to simply "transpose" a word from one language into the other. This could create big misinterpretations because the meaning of some words can be misleading. Such misleading words are called: *Faux-amis* (false friends). These are opposed to *transparent words* that have the same meaning in both languages.

#### **Transparency = transparenence**

*Transparent words* are two words that have a similar spelling and the same meaning. For example, the words "Kalendar" (German) and "calendar" (English) are nearly identical and their meaning can be deducted very easily. A

lot of transparent words can be found in English. However, they are not always as transparent as they appear.

### **What is a Faux-ami?**

Two apparently *transparent words* that have a complete different meaning. If a French speaker for example comes across the sentence: "The family was sympathetic towards Julia." He could consider sympathetic as a *transparent word* and understand the sentence meaning that the family was friendly to Julia since "sympathique" in French does not mean compassionate but friendly. Here, there is quite a difference in the meaning and this can have a lot of consequence on the text.

### **How to recognise a Faux-ami?**

It is not a simple task to differentiate *Faux-ami* from *transparent words*. Unfortunately, there are no set rules that allow to distinguish between the two categories so the best thing to do is to rely on the context.

### **Influence of the context**

The most important point to remember when reading or translating a text is to try and understand the word using the context as a backup and if necessary the dictionary. You cannot understand a word without its context.

### **Last but not least!**

To conclude, beware of the different "nuances" between the different languages: a "Bus" in German does not necessarily mean a "bus" in English, it can also mean a *coach* (a more comfortable bus for longer journeys). Words that are borrowed from the English do not always mean the same thing in other languages. For example, the word "*handy*" which means mobile phone in German. has nothing to do with the English expression "*to come in handy*". The same applies to French where a "*Smoking*" is translated by a dinner jacket in English. How confusing!!!

Text "Transparent Words or Faux Amis" by Kate Gardy

Reading Guidelines:

Avoid reading distracters. Distracters can be inside and outside the text you are reading. To avoid distraction inside the text, your mind and thinking should be focused on the main ideas, and then the details. Outside the text distracters can be avoided by allocating them enough time after you finish your reading.

**Q.I** Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: possesses, advantage, guess, transpose, misinterpretations, misleading, identical, deducted, sympathetic, compassionate, consequence, backup, beware, nuances, handy, confusing.

**Q.II** Derive as many words as you can from the following words: possesses, influence, advantage, transparent, meaning, recognize, rely, context, conclude.

**Q.III** Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: faux, possesses, borrowed, main, appear, advantage, easier, misleading, identical, comfortable, handy, confusing.

**Q.IV** Answer the following questions briefly:

1. How should we linguists and translators view foreign influences? How do puritans view them?
2. What is the position of English among world languages?
3. How misinterpretations and faux amis could be created? How are they opposed to transparent words?
4. What are faux amis, and how can we recognize them?
5. How can we avoid the danger of faux amis?
6. Do words borrowed from English always have the same meaning in other languages?

**Q. V** Discuss and translate the paragraphs with the titles "What is a faux ami? How to recognize a faux ami? Influence of the Context".

Research Activity:

Can you think of any other faux amis in addition to confusing "similar" words between languages. Suggest any such false friends and give examples.

**Quote of the Day:**

Translation is that which transforms everything so  
that nothing changes

Günter Grass