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**THE PROBLEM OF FALSE FRIENDS
FOR RUSSIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH
BA thesis**

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ABSTRACT

This BA thesis investigates the effect of the linguistic interference phenomenon known as ‘false friends’ among Russian-speaking school students who study English as a foreign language. The thesis focuses on one particular type of false friends - partial false friends. The hypothesis of the thesis is: semantic (partial) false friends are the source of negative transfer (direct influence of the mother tongue on the target language) for Russian-speaking learners of English.

The thesis consists of two main parts: the theoretical and the empirical part. The theoretical part gives an overview of the main concepts of the field and describes the error and a contrastive analysis used in the thesis.

The empirical part depicts the study that was conducted and the analysis the results obtained. The study consisted in a background questionnaire and two translation tasks (performed from Russian to English and vice versa). The results revealed that negative transfer was more apparent in the first translation task, in which students translated sentences from the mother tongue into the target language.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FF false friend

MT=L1 mother tongue

INTRODUCTION

Every language learner may face the problem of ‘false friends’ - target language words which have a graphic structure that is similar or identical to words existing in the learner's first language but which have a different or partly different (depends on the type of the ‘false friend’) meaning (O’Neill and Casanovas 1994: 103). Thus, the phenomenon of false friends (hereinafter FFs) can cause interference for language learners.

Many authors (e.g., Beltrán 2006, Chamizo-Domínguez 2008, Nefyodova 2018, etc.) address the subject of a semantic type of FFs, where word-pairs from different languages have the same etymology (e.g., Latin, Greek etc.), as well as a phonetical structure, but have different meanings. According to Chamizo-Domínguez (2008: 165) semantic FFs can be divided into two subtypes: full FFs where the word-pairs with the same graphic appearance and different meanings, and partial FFs, words with the same graphical structure, but with several meanings, where at least one of the meanings coincides. Different researchers (e.g., Hayward and Moulin 1984, O’Neill and Casanovas 1994, Beltrán 2006) claim that the most complicated type for language learners is the semantic one. Hence this thesis tests whether partial semantic FFs cause problems for Russian learners of English.

The use of FFs while learning the target language is often caused by interference (or negative transfer) from the mother tongue (hereinafter MT or L1). Problems occur when a language learner uses previous knowledge from his/her native language and does not recognise differences between the word-pairs from two languages. The learner transfers word forms from L1 to the target language. Thus, the main hypothesis of this study is that the semantic (partial) FFs are the source of negative transfer for Russian learners of English. The aim of the thesis is to identify the problems that FFs may cause by conducting research among school students of form 10.

The first part of this thesis discusses the concept of FFs, provides an overview of the classification of FFs, discusses the phenomenon of language transfer and approaches to studying learners' errors. The second part focuses on the empirical study, describing the study and discussing its results.

CHAPTER 1 Literature Review

1. False Friends

The phenomenon of FFs has been recognized already some time ago: The term ‘faux amis’ (direct translation from French language ‘false friends’) was first described in 1928 by Maxime Koessler and Jules Derocquigny in their work *Les faux amis, ou, Les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais: conseils aux traducteurs* (cited in Chamizo-Daminguez 2008: 1). Chamizo-Domínguez (2008: 1) gives a definition of the term: “...specific phenomenon of linguistic interference consisting of two given words in two or more given natural languages [that] are graphically and/or phonetically the same or very alike yet, their meanings may be totally or partially different.” To put it another way, FFs are the words with a similar or same phonetic structure, but with different or partly different meanings. For example, the English word *director* has a similar spelling and sounding with the Russian word *директор* (the correct translation is a ‘headmaster’) in Russian, but the meanings of these words are slightly different.

The formation of FFs is considered from two perspectives: behavioral and linguistic. The behavioral perspective of FFs’ formation concerns spoken language, where the choice of a FF instead of a correct translation is conditioned by spontaneity and speed of a conversation. Indeed, the speaker may unwittingly use a word that is similar to his/her mother tongue not to lose the track of a conversation. (Horea 2007: 971)

Linguistic confusion concerns the etymology. FFs are the result of the native language and target language having common roots. However, this does not mean that FFs occur only in languages that belong to the same language family. For example, English and Russian belong to different language groups, but are historically related and are Indo-European languages. In such languages FFs often emerged due to the common source language (e.g. Greek, Latin, French). (Nefyodova 2018: 77)

1.1. Classification of False Friends

Linguists (e.g., Hayward and Moulin 1984, Beltrán 2006, Chamizo-Domínguez 2008, etc.) have divided FFs into different types and subtypes. For example, Chamizo Dominguez (2002: 4) mentions two types: chance FFs and semantic FFs. The former are graphically/phonetically similar words, but do not share a common etymological background. The latter are graphically/phonetically similar and share etymological background. Moss (1992, cited in Beltrán 2006: 33) divides FFs into 8 categories based on the part of a speech, word length, number of vowels/consonants or the graphic/phonetic patterns, etc. Pinazo (1997, cited in Beltrán 2006: 33) divides FFs into four types: graphic, phonetic, semantic and FFs derived from loanwords. Hayward and Moulin (1984: 191) divide false friends into six categories: orthographical, morphological, syntactic, idiomatic, semantic and pragmatic. Their classification is reviewed in greater detail here as it provides a broader picture of different types (including the semantic one which is used in the present study).

The first type is orthographical, where word-pairs have a similar spelling in both languages (Hayward and Moulin 1984: 191). For example, the German word *Toleranz* has sufficiently similar spelling with the English word *tolerance*. The analogy can also be seen in the French-English word-pair *danse* and *dance*. However, Nefyodova (2018: 157) states that the orthographical type is not relevant for English-Russian false friends because of the different scripts: Cyrillic and Latin. The second type is morphological. Hayward and Moulin (1984: 192) explain that one can make a mistake by unconsciously transferring a morphological word pattern (e.g., adding an extra ending to a stem, or changing a suffix) from his/her mother tongue to a foreign language. A good example is an English-French word-pair where the wrong ending is added to the stem: the word *dénigration* (in English *denigration*) is used instead of the correct French word *dénigrement* (Hayward and Moulin 1984: 191). Nefyodova (2018: 156) gives an example of Russian-German false friends

оптимизировать and *optimisieren*, in which case the correct translation for the Russian word would be *optimalisieren* or *optimieren*. The third type, presented by Hayward and Moulin (1984: 192), is syntactic. This type illustrates the difference between the grammatical behaviour of words. For example, the Russian sentence *Она работает уже 6 часов* is translated as *She has been working for 6 hours now*, in which the literal translation of *уже* would be *already*, but it is not appropriate in this case.

The next type is idiomatic. Idiomatic false friends (phrases) look similar in both languages, but often have different meanings (Hayward and Moulin 1984: 192). Russian linguist Yuri Dolgoplov has compiled a dictionary *A Collection Of Confusable Phrases. False 'Friends' and 'Enemies' in Idioms and Collocations* (2004), which includes all English-Russian controversial idioms and collocations. Here are two similar idioms from Dolgoplov's book (2004): *to ask for someone's hand* (propose to a woman) and *to ask someone for a hand* (ask smb. to help in what the person is doing). The Russian false friend for the second phrase is *просить руку* meaning 'to propose to a woman', the correct translation, though, would be *просить о помощи*. According to several researchers (O'Neill and Casanovas 1994; Beltrán 2006) the most relevant type is the semantic one. This type has two subtypes: the first one is total false friends, word-pairs are graphically similar and share same etymology, but they have absolutely different meanings, and the second one is partial false friends, word-pairs that have the same etymology and graphic appearance, but have a lot of meanings and share at least one of them (Hayward and Moulin 1984: 193).

The last type discussed by Hayward and Moulin (1984: 193) is pragmatic. It concerns intonational and emotional aspect of the language. For example, the French word *merci* means *thank you* in English, but with special context and intonation it may be translated as *No, thank you*. In Russian there is a good example as well. The word *путина* has a negative

emotional meaning, at the same time the English word *routine* means something normal and regular.

1.1.2 Semantic Types of False Friends

As mentioned above, semantic FFs are word-pairs in two languages that share etymology and are graphically similar, but their meanings differ. Semantic FFs are divided into two subtypes: total and partial FFs.

Total FFs (different researchers call this type differently, e.g., *full FFs* by Chamizo-Dominguez 2008; *total FFs* by Hayward and Moulin 1984) are word-pairs in two languages that have a distinct semantic divergence, but at the same time, those word-pairs share a strong similarity in graphic appearance. Researchers (Hayward and Moulin 1984; Beltrán 2006) do not consider this type so problematic for language learners because it is easier to find a right translation as total FFs do not have a variety of equivalents in translation. An example of English and Russian total FFs is *ammunition* and *амуниция*. The English word means a supply of bullets, the Russian one means military equipment. Another example is the English word *avocado* and the Spanish word *abogado* 'a lawyer'. Those words are etymologically related and graphically similar, but their meanings are totally different.

The second type of semantic FFs is partial, which is considered as more complex. Partial FFs are word-pairs in two languages that are graphically similar, but can have an identical meaning in one case, and absolutely different meanings in the second. This type is more confusing for language learners because of its polysemantic nature. (Beltrán 2006: 32) An example of English-Russian partial false friends are the words *aggressive* and *агрессивный*. Both adjectives share the meaning of 'behaving in an angry or violent way'. However, the translation of the phrase *an aggressive election campaign* as *агрессивная предвыборная компания* would be incorrect because the word *aggressive* has a second

meaning 'being determined to win or succeed' and which is more suitable for this particular case.

1.2 The Role of Language Transfer

Various terms are used by different linguists to describe the language transfer or cross-linguistic influence: e.g language mixing (Selinker, 1972), linguistic interference (Ringbom, 1987), language transfer (Odlin, 1989), etc. (cited in Torrijos 2009: 148) There is a number of definitions as well, among other, the most comprehensive one is Oldin's (1989: 27) "transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired". Consequently, language transfer is result of comparing similarities and differences between L1 and L2.

There are two types of language transfer. The first one is positive transfer, when L1 and L2 have similar forms (e.g., rules, word-patterns, etc.) that make learning of the target language easier. (Wang, Xiang 2016: 209) For example, Italian and Spanish are related languages, they belong to the same Romance group, so it is more likely to see positive transfer between those languages. Another good example is the English-French word-pairs *possible* and *possibile*, *impossible* and *imposible*, where word-patterns coincide in the meanings in both languages.

The second type, which is more relevant for this paper, is the negative transfer. The negative transfer happens when the forms from the learner's mother tongue are being incorrectly used in the target language (Torrijos 2009: 149). Consequently, the language learner may use rules, similar word patterns, language structures from the native language in the target language, while ignoring mistakes made through negative language transfer.

Ringbom et al. (2001) studied lexical (negative) transfer and showed that there are two main subtypes: transfer of form and transfer of meaning. Thus, he interprets false friends as a particular case of transfer of meaning.

1.3 Approaches to Learner Errors

Foreign language learners face many kinds of learning problems, thereby they make a great number of errors. Linguists try to find causes of problems and ways to solve, or at least minimise them. Contrastive and error analysis are the ways of studying errors made by language learners. Both approaches complement each other, in the sense that the results obtained by the means of the one analysis can be corrected and modified by the results of another analysis. Consequently, two approaches are combined and used in this paper.

1.3.1 Contrastive Analysis

As reported by Johansson (2008: 9) contrastive analysis is a process of describing differences and similarities between two languages; it is a comparison of two (or more) languages. A more precise approach to this definition was also proposed by F (1998: 8), who describes the process of contrastive analysis in two stages. First of all, comparable features of the two languages (MT and TL) are being described, secondly “comparing the forms and resultant meaning across the two languages in order to spot the mismatches that would predictably (with more than chance probability of being right) give rise to interference and error” (James 1998: 8).

Several authors (e.g Torrijos 2009, Johansson 2008), however, consider contrastive analysis a debatable method for a sufficient research of difficulties in learning two languages. Yet, it is a good method “to pre-identify the probable areas of learning difficulty, which a given TL and learners speaking a given L1.” (James 1998: 9)

1.3.2 Error Analysis

The second approach is used in this paper to study the problem of false friends more precisely. According to Khansir (2012: 1029) error analysis focuses on the comparison between the target language and errors made in it. Ellis (1999: 296) gives a more detailed explanation of this term, describing error approach as a process that “involves collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their hypothesized classes, and evaluating their seriousness.”

Moreover, it is important to tell the difference between two terms ‘error’ and ‘mistake’ in order to make research more precise and analyse learners’ errors properly. Error is a consequence of linguistic incompetency, and a mistake is a random guess or inadvertence while using language. Unlike errors, mistakes can be self-corrected. (Corder 1981: 259)

Accordingly, it can be argued that contrastive analysis (CA) and error analysis (EA) complement each other (cf. Khansir 2012). As Ellis (1994: 48) puts it, “whereas CA looked at only the learner’s native language and the target language /.../, EA provided a methodology for investigating learner language.”

CHAPTER 2 Study

2. The Method

This section explains in detail the study conducted to detect whether semantic FFs really cause difficulties for Russian learners of English. In order to test the hypothesis of this thesis, that semantic (partial) FFs are the source of negative transfer for Russian learners of English, the study was conducted. 42 Russian-speaking school students in form 10 participated in this study. The research was made up of a background questionnaire and translation tasks.

The following sections consists of the description of preparing the research, description of the process and the results.

2.1 Participants

The target group of this study was chosen for the research for a number of reasons. First of all, it was decided to carry out a study among secondary school students, not among university students, because as Beltrán (2006: 30) stated “less proficient learners generally transfer more elements from their first language than those who have high proficiency”, therefore it is more likely to observe more transfer-induced errors among school students.

Secondly, students in form 10 were chosen for this study because this study was conducted in springtime, when students in form 11 were writing their research papers, and students in form 12 were writing final exams. Thirdly, secondary school students are supposed to have a relatively good command of English. According to Estonian *National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools* (2014) proficiency level of secondary school students is B, thus they know how to express thoughts and ideas in English, as well as, produce correct translations from the mother tongue. Finally, the choice of the secondary school students as

a target group was based on the fact that the process of undertaking the tasks can be controlled by teachers.

2.2 Tasks

The study consisted of two parts. The first part asked some background information about the respondents and their awareness about the meaning of the FFs. The second part included the translation task with two subtasks.

The translation task consisted of 32 sentences including sentences with FFs and filler sentences. 16 sentences had to be translated from English to Russian, and another 16 from Russian to English. It was decided to use both directions of translation (from MT and to MT) to test the hypothesis whether the presence of L1 increases the number of transfer-induced errors. In total, there were 10 filler sentences (5 in each part), with FFs acting as simple cognates.

In order to improve the tasks and set the time frame, the pilot study was conducted. This process was useful in the framework of this study, because it helped to identify ambiguous sentences in the tasks. As a result, several elements in the tasks were modified. In particular, the pilot study was necessary to make sure that the length and the complexity of a study was appropriate for school students.

2.3 Choice of the False Friends and Translation Sentences

All FFs used in this study were taken from the list of FFs published online in *English-Russian Dictionary of False Friends* by Krasnov (2004). Word-pairs were chosen according to English proficiency level of school students in 10 form (the words chosen were discussed with their English teacher). For example, such word-pairs as *purpuric* and *пурпурный*, *quartermaster* and *квартирмейстер*, *lyceum* and *лицей* are not suitable, because school students might not know the correct translations of these words. The FFs chosen for the study are

presented in Table 1. The meanings of the FFs (in both languages) used in the Table 1 are chosen according to the context of the formed sentences.

English-Russian False Friends	True meaning of the Russian word in English	True meaning of the English word in Russian
<i>actual vs актуальный</i>	актуальный - relevant	actual - реальный (real)
<i>alternative vs альтернатива</i>	альтернатива - alternative, choice	alternative - вариант (option)
<i>cabinet vs кабинет</i>	кабинет - room, office	cabinet - шкаф (cupboard); кабинет министров (ministry)
<i>camera vs камера</i>	камера (тюремная) - cell, prison	camera - фотоаппарат
<i>character vs характер</i>	характер - disposition, temper	character - персонаж (fictional character)
<i>concerete vs конкретный</i>	конкретный - particular, specific	concrete - бетон, бетонный
<i>delicate vs деликатный</i>	деликатный - sensitive	delicate - хрупкий (fragile); сложный (complex);
<i>dramatic vs драматический</i>	драматический - dramatic	dramatic - волнующий (exciting); резкий;
<i>element vs элемент</i>	элемент - piece	element - стихия
<i>figure vs фигура</i>	фигура - figure	figure - чертёж, рисунок, диаграмма
<i>mark vs марка</i>	марка - stamp	mark - пятно (stain), след;
<i>object vs объект</i>	объект - object, subject, matter	object - цель (aim), задача;
<i>position vs позиция</i>	позиция - position, stand	position - должность (post)
<i>pretend vs претендовать</i>	претендовать - claim to	pretend - притворяться
<i>production vs продукция</i>	продукция - production, output	production - производство
<i>rally vs ралли</i>	ралли - rally	rally - митинг
<i>realise vs реализовывать</i>	реализовывать - to implement, to pursue	realise - понимать, осознавать (become aware of)
<i>record vs рекорд</i>	рекорд - record, high score	record - запись;
<i>regular vs регулярный</i>	регулярный - day-to-day, regular	regular - обычный, стандартный (ordinary);
<i>session vs сессия</i>	сессия - examinations	session - заседание; встреча (meeting)
<i>solid vs солидный</i>	солидный - firm, considerable	solid - твёрдый
<i>sympathetic vs симпатичный</i>	симпатичный - nice, pretty	sympathetic - сочувственный

Table 1. Partial FFs used in the present study

32 sentences were created considering the time-limit of an English lesson. These translation sentences (both in Russian and English) were formed keeping in mind the level of vocabulary of school students in form 10.

2.4 Procedure

The study took place in high school. In total, 42 students from three 10 forms participated. Tasks were completed digitally during English lessons. English teachers coordinated the process of completion of the tasks. Teachers received instructions on the requirements of the tasks. Firstly, tasks had to be completed without any helping materials (online translators, dictionaries, etc.), teachers were kindly asked to monitor the implementation of this requirement. Secondly, all teachers were informed about time limit (approximately five minutes for the background questionnaire and 15-20 minutes for the translation tasks).

2.5 Analysis of the Results

This section (as well as a questionnaire itself) divided into two parts. The first one is concentrated on respondents' background information. The second contains the analysis of the translation tasks. Two approaches are used in this section: contrastive and error analysis.

While analysing translation sentences only errors concerning FFs are discussed. Incorrect translation (apart from the use of the predicted FF) of the target word is considered as error. Spelling mistakes as 'ofice' instead of 'office', or 'subtantial' instead of 'substantial' did not interfere with the research, so they were counted as valid for the analysis. Cases with answers as 'I don't know', a hyphen instead of translation or half-translated sentences (without a translation of a target word) were considered as sentences with no answer.

2.5.1 Background information

The background questionnaire showed that almost all the participants were 16-17 years old; there were only two students age who were 15. 59.5% of the respondents were female and 40.5% were male. The average duration of studying English of the respondents was 7-8 years. The native language of all respondents was Russian.

As for the participants' language competence, the most common answers were 'good' (38.1%) and 'average' (33.3%). 19% of all the students evaluated their knowledge as 'very good' and only 9.5% of respondents answered that their competence in English was bad. In this respect, the vast majority of participants feel confident in their knowledge of English.

The next question was about the context in which students use English. Here students could choose several answers and write their own option as well. The most common answer was 'At school during English lessons' (88.1% of all the respondents) and 'I watch movies/videos in English' (73.8%). Also there were two other answers with equal numbers of respondents (47.6%): 'I read books/magazines/articles in English' and 'I communicate with native speakers'. Moreover, five students also wrote their own answer about playing the computer games in English.

The most interesting part of the background questionnaire was about the participants' knowledge regarding FFs. The majority (61.9%) have never heard about FFs; however 16 respondents answered that they knew what the linguistic term 'false friends' meant. Then respondents that answered 'yes' in the previous question were asked to explain how they understood this term. Two respondents just translated the term into Russian, five respondents described this term literally saying 'it means unreliable friends that 'can betray you at any moment'. Only nine students gave a correct explanation of the term, three of them explained the term through examples. Therefore, only 21.4% of the students could explain what FFs actually meant.

2.5.2 Analysis of the Students' Translation Tasks

Translation from Russian to English

а) Моя сестра добрая, аккуратная и *симпатичная*.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations 'pretty' or 'nice' students tend to translate the word 'симпатичный' as 'sympathetic'.

In general, the adjective 'симпатичный' proved to be rather easy for students. The hypothesis was not supported, because the majority of the respondents (24 students) did provide an accurate translation, using such words as 'pretty' or 'nice'. Also, there were two students that used the adjective 'beautiful' (literally 'красивый', 'прекрасный'), which is not completely accurate in case of this translation and considered as error. 11 students mis-translated this word and used the predicted FF 'sympathetic'. Five students could not give any answer.

б) Он зашёл в *кабинет* к врачу.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations 'room' or 'office' students tend to translate the word 'кабинет' as 'cabinet'.

In total, almost half of the students, 21 out of 42, translated the word 'кабинет' as 'cabinet' in English. 19 respondents used the translations 'room' and 'office'. Two students did not answer at all. Still, the hypothesis of the word 'кабинет' was supported in this case.

с) *Сессия* в университете закончилась в июне.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translation 'examinations' students tend to translate the target word 'сессия' as 'session'.

The word 'session' was quite misleading for the students, because 29 students used the word 'session' in their translations. The use of 'session' can change the meaning in Eng-

lish into the ‘meeting’, while in Russian it refers only to the examinational period at university. Only 11 students used the correct translation ‘examinations’, ‘exams’ or ‘examination session’. Two respondents could not translate this sentence at all.

d) Глобальное потепление это *актуальный* вопрос сегодня.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translation ‘relevant’ or ‘hot’ (in the phrase ‘hot issue’) students tend to translate the word ‘актуальный’ as ‘actual’.

The analysis of the results showed that the word ‘актуальный’ was indeed deceptive for students, because 22 respondents used its FF ‘actual’. 17 students used correct translations such as ‘pressing’, ‘topical’, ‘relevant’ and ‘hot’ (issue). Interestingly, one student translated the Russian word as ‘neat’. The reason for such translation may be the student’s inattentive reading of the sentence in Russian, because Russian words ‘актуальный’ (‘relevant’) и ‘аккуратный’ (‘neat’) really sound and look alike. Two students did not answer.

e) Этот *конкретный* вопрос требует честного ответа.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘particular’ or ‘specific’ students tend to translate the target word ‘конкретный’ as ‘concrete’.

In this case the hypothesis was not supported, as the word ‘конкретный’ was relatively easy to translate for the greater part of the students. Only 12 students translated the Russian word as ‘concrete’, while 21 out of all the students used the word ‘particular’. Two students used ‘specific’. One student translated the word ‘конкретный’ as ‘exact’, which also seems to be a correct translation in case of this sentence. Three students just skipped the target word in this sentence, other three did not answer at all.

f) За хорошую работу Мэри получила *солидную* сумму денег.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘substantial’, ‘respectable’ or ‘significant’ students tend to translate the word ‘солидный’ as ‘solid’. Krasnov’s Dictionary gives another

equivalent for the target word - 'firm', however in the context of this sentence mentioned above synonyms are more appropriate.

The students do not seem to be very familiar with the translation of the word 'солидный', because 19 students out of 42 used 'solid' in their translations. Five respondents could not translate this sentence at all. However, seven students translated the target word as 'substantial', three translated as 'serious' (which is also acceptable in this translation) and only one used the word 'respectable'. Interestingly, some students provided more simplified translations using 'big' (five students) and 'huge' (two students). Such translations can also be considered as correct ones, because they do not change the meaning of this sentence.

г) Этот вопрос имеет сложный и *деликатный* характер.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translation 'sensitive' students tend to translate the word 'деликатный' as 'delicate'.

This sentence was not very deceptive for students. Only ten students translated this sentence using 'sensitive'. The vast majority (about 70%) translated the target word as a 'delicate'. Two students did not answer.

h) Джейк *реализовал* свои планы о поездке в Амстердам.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations 'to implement' students tend to translate the word 'реализовал' as 'to realise'.

The vast majority of the students (76.2%) were misled by the verb 'реализовывать' and did not translate it correctly. Only four students used the phrase 'brought to live' and three used the word 'to fulfill', both variants can be considered as correct. Three students did not provide any translation.

і) Мэри нашла недостающий *элемент* в пазлах.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘piece’ students tend to translate the target word ‘элемент’ as ‘element’. In total, 24 students translated the target word as ‘element’. 16 students used a different translation. 12 of them translated this sentence correctly using the word ‘piece’, and four students used the word ‘part’ (which is also correct in this case). Still, two students translated this sentence partly skipping the word ‘элемент’.

ж) Он *претендует* на место президента.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘to claim’ students tend to translate the target word ‘претендует’ as ‘to pretend’.

In general, the word ‘претендовать’ caused problems for respondents. 19 students out of 42 did not know the correct translation for this word and used the FF ‘to pretend’, which completely changes the meaning of the sentence. Only ten students used the correct verb ‘to claim’ in translation, three students used the phrase ‘is running for’, which is also quite appropriate for this sentence. Two students simplified the translation with the use of the phrase ‘wants to be’. Seven respondents did not provide a translation for this sentence at all.

к) Этот мужчина сидит в *камере* уже 10 лет.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘cell’ or ‘jail’ students tend to translate the target word ‘камера’ as ‘camera’.

As many as 15 students used the FF ‘camera’ in their translations. 25 students provided different translation options: jail (13 respondents), cell (eight), prison (three respondents) and prison cell (one). Here, only two students did not give any answer.

Translation from English to Russian

а) Ebenezer Scrooge is my favorite *character*.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘персонаж’ students tend to translate the target word ‘character’ as ‘характер’.

Almost all students (about 90%) easily translated this sentence correctly, with the use of the word ‘персонаж’ or ‘герой’ which is also an accurate translation. However, three students did translate this word as ‘характер’, with this translation the sentence loses its meaning.

b) Do you have a *record* of The Rolling Stones?

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘запись’ students tend to translate the word ‘record’ as ‘рекорд’.

The vast majority (38 respondents) translated this sentence correctly with the use of the words ‘запись’ or ‘альбом’. Only three students used the FF ‘рекорд’. The use of the word ‘рекорд’ makes the whole translation in Russian hilarious, because of the Russian translation (‘У тебя есть рекорд в Роллинг Стоунз?’) the actual band *The Rolling Stones* turns into a game where one can set a high score. One student did not answer at all.

c) The *rally* was held against the current government.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘митинг’ or ‘протест’ students tend to translate the word ‘rally’ as ‘ралли’.

Most respondents (33 students) gave a correct translation for the target word ‘протест’ or ‘митинг’. Four students mistranslated this word as ‘ралли’, and three translated ‘rally’ as ‘гонки’, therefore they used a synonym for the Russian word ‘ралли’. One respondent translated the target word as ‘забастовка’ (‘strike’), which has a different meaning from ‘митинг’ or ‘protest’, so this option can be considered as an incorrect one. Two students did not answer as well.

d) This led to a *dramatic* increase in serious crimes.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘резкий’ students tend to translate the target word ‘dramatic’ as ‘драматический’.

Only 14 students did not manage to use the correct translation and used the word ‘драматичный’. The majority (20) used the correct translation ‘резкий’. However, there were other correct, but simplified translations such as, ‘большой’ (three), ‘сильный’ (two), ‘координальный’ (one). Still two students could not give any translations at all.

e) My cat has a small heart-shaped *mark* on its head.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘пятно’ students tend to translate the word ‘mark’ as ‘марк’.

In this case the hypothesis of the word ‘марк’ was not supported. None of the students used this translation. However, there were a lot of equivalents for the word ‘mark’. 22 students translated the target word correctly as ‘пятно’ (or ‘пятнышко’). Translations as ‘отметка’ or ‘след’ can also be considered as correct ones. Such translation as, ‘значок’ (‘badge’), узор (‘pattern’) or the most frequent one ‘родимое пятно’/‘родимое пятнышко’ (‘birthmark’) (11 students) are incorrect in case of this sentence and considered as errors. Three respondents did not give any translations.

f) We took an *alternative* road.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translation ‘другой’ students tend to translate the target word ‘alternative’ as ‘альтернативный’.

This case was rather easy for respondents, because only 9 students translated this sentence using the FF ‘альтернативный’, the remaining (nearly 80%) used the correct translation ‘другой’.

g) Gender equality is the *object* of our movement.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘цель’ or ‘задача’ students tend to translate the target word ‘object’ as ‘объект’.

In this case the hypothesis was not confirmed: only 13 students used a FF ‘объект’ while 18 used ‘цель’ or ‘задача’. Other respondents also used correct equivalents, such as

‘предмет’ (two) or ‘тема’ (nine). There was one incorrect translation ‘символ’ (symbol). Three respondents could not provide any translations.

h) We need better result as shown in *Figure 1*.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘рисунок’ or ‘диаграмма’ students tend to translate the target word ‘figure’ as ‘фигура’.

Only nine respondents chose the translation ‘фигура’ for this sentence, 30 students translated it correctly as ‘рисунок’ or ‘диаграмма’. One student provided another translation ‘схема’, which can also be considered as a correct one in this case. Two students did not give the answer.

i) Coffee *production* volume increased in this part of the world.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘производство’ students tend to translate the target word ‘production’ as ‘продукция’.

In this case, 24 students provided the correct translation ‘производство’. Still 17 students mistranslated it using the FF ‘продукция’. Only one student did not give the answer.

j) The *position* of manager is already filled, sorry.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘должность’ or ‘вакансия’ students tend to translate the target word ‘position’ as ‘позиция’.

In total, 14 students used a FF ‘позиция’, the respondents used different appropriate translations such as: должность (17), вакансия (6), пост (2) and место (1). There was also a translation ‘работа’ (‘job’), which is not suitable for this sentence in Russian at all. One student did not translate this sentence.

k) It was a *regular* day at school.

Hypothesis: Instead of the translations ‘простой’ students tend to translate the target word as ‘регулярный’.

The word 'regular' proved to be relatively easy to translate, because a great majority (nearly 80%) of the respondents gave a correct translation for the target word 'простой' or 'обычный'. Only 9 students mistranslated it as a 'регулярный'. One student could not give any translation.

2.6 Discussion of the Results

The findings in the background questionnaire were quite surprising and suggest that only nine students out of 42 knew and could explain what the linguistic term FFs means. The majority of participants (26) answered that they had never heard about linguistic FFs and seven students failed to give a proper explanation for the term. Thus, it can be said that students are not aware of the FFs, and the problems these may pose them as language learners.

Based on the results, it can be argued that the first translation task (from Russian to English) was much harder for students than the second one, where they translated sentences from English to Russian. According to Torrijos (2009: 149) MT input in the target language increases the number of errors caused by negative transfer. It has been found that the negative transfer is more likely to occur in the first translation task as well. The analysis of the first task showed that the most problematic words for school students in form 10 were: 'сессия', 'реализовать' and 'элемент'. It can be assumed that the number of errors made in the sentence with the word 'сессия' depends on the under-use of this word by school students, because in Russian this word refers mostly to the examination period at university. The word 'реализовать' was difficult for participants because it was probably hard for them to find the right equivalent in English. The words with the least number of errors were 'деликатный' and 'симпатичный'. The sentence with the word 'деликатный' was not so tricky, because the use of the word 'delicate' in this case is not changing the meaning of the

sentence. However, this case verifies how students tend to use a more complex word ('delicate') because of the negative transfer, instead of the more common one ('sensitive'). Hence in this task, there were only four sentences in case of which the number of correct answers was higher than that of wrong ones. The overall results are summarised in Appendix 2.

The second task was completed more successfully by all the students; there were fewer errors made. In this task there were no cases where the number of errors was higher than the number of the correct answers. The most difficult words were: 'dramatic', 'production' and 'position'. It is quite hard to explain why students had difficulties with these words. An interesting case is the sentence including the word 'mark'. Here students did not use FFs at all, but they did provide a big number of incorrect translations. Most students translated the word 'mark' as a 'родимое пятно' ('birthmark'), which is not correct in this case. The results of the second translation task are presented in Appendix 3.

Summing up the results, it can be concluded that the aim of the thesis was fulfilled successfully. The analysis of both translation tasks revealed students' difficulties and problems in translation sentences with FFs. The hypothesis of the thesis was supported as well, the semantic (partial) FFs are indeed the source of negative transfer for Russian learners of English.

CONCLUSION

The present thesis studies the problem of false friends among Russian learners of English. It also covers the theoretical part of the phenomenon. Classification of FFs, the notion of negative transfer and approaches to learner's errors are discussed in the first chapter. The second chapter presents a description of and analyses the study conducted among Russian school students.

Contrastive analysis and error analysis are complementary to each other and relevant in the case of analysis of the conducted research. Firstly, contrastive analysis is reflected in the second chapter, where Russian and English FFs are compared, as well as, the analysis and the comparison of the results of the two translation tasks are made. In the analysis part, sub-hypotheses are stated before every stage of the analysis to predict errors in translation tasks. In the first task (translation from the MT), almost all hypotheses were proved to hold and a considerable number of errors was made by participants. The second task (translation from the FL) was much easier for participants, however, the number of errors was also sufficiently large. It was quite easy to track negative transfer in the participants' translation of items subject to FF interference. Therefore, summing up the results of both translation tasks, the main hypothesis of this thesis was supported: semantic (partial) FFs are the source of negative transfer for Russian learners of English.

The results of the research are quite clear and suggest the following conclusions: first, Russian language learners do face more challenges while translating from Russian to the target language and second, Russian learners of English are not familiar with the concept of FFs. Thus, the findings of this thesis may be useful for both teachers and language learners seeking to avoid FF interference.

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Appendix 1. Background questionnaire and translation tasks

Dear student,

My name is Jekaterina Gortalova and I am studying English studies at the University of Tartu. Currently I am collecting data for my Bachelor's thesis, so I kindly ask you to respond to my questionnaire and complete translation task. This will take you about 20 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Your answers are important for my research. The questionnaire is anonymous.

Thank you and good luck!

Part 1. General information. Awareness of 'false friends'.

Circle the choice that best represents your answer. You are allowed only one choice.

1. How old are you?

2. Gender:

- male

- female

3. How long have you been studying English?

4. How do you evaluate your competence in English?

- very good

- good

- average

- bad

5. What is your native language?

- Russian

- Estonian

- Other

6. Have you ever heard the linguist term *false friends*?

- yes

- no

7. If your answer is 'yes', please explain how you understand the term.

Part 2. The TEST.

Translate the following sentences from Russian to English.

1. Моя сестра добрая, аккуратная и симпатичная.

2. В этом фильме есть элемент неожиданности.

3. Кабинет министров рассмотрит это предложение.

4. Он зашёл в кабинет к врачу.

5. Сессия в университете закончилась в июне.

6. Глобальное потепление это актуальный вопрос сегодня.

7. Этот конкретный вопрос требует честного ответа.
8. Не забудь взять камеру с собой!
9. Сессия парламента завершилась в 15:00.
10. За хорошую работу Мэри получила солидную сумму денег.
11. Этот вопрос имеет сложный и деликатный характер.
12. Джейк реализовал свои планы о поездке в Амстердам!
13. Мэри нашла недостающий элемент в пазлах.
14. Оригинальный документ лежит в столе, а копия у меня в сумке.
15. Он претендует на место президента.
16. Этот мужчина сидит в камере уже 10 лет.

Translate the following sentences from English to Russian.

1. Ebenezer Scrooge is my favorite character.
2. Do you have a record of this album?
3. The rally was held against current government.
4. Our meetings should become regular.
5. This fact resulted in a dramatic increase in serious crimes.
6. My cat has a small heart-shape mark on its head.
7. Your position on this question is wrong.
8. Carl Lagerfeld was an important figure in fashion industry.
9. Sarah prefers the first alternative instead of the second one.
10. Gender equality is the object of our lecture.
11. We need a better results as shown in figure 1.
12. He lost control and started to cry.
13. James is a professional driver, he will win this rally easily.
14. Coffee production volume increased in this part of the world.
15. Position of manager is already filled, sorry.
16. It was a regular day at school.

Appendix 2. The results of the translation task from Russian to English

False Friend	Correct	Errors are False Friends	Other errors	No answer	Total number of errors
симпатичный	24	11	2	5	13
кабинет	19	21	-	2	21
сессия	11	29	-	2	29
актуальный	17	22	1	2	23
конкретный	24	12	-	6	12
солидный	18	19	-	5	19
деликатный	30	10	-	2	10
реализовал	7	32	-	3	32
элемент	16	24	-	2	24
претендовать	15	19	1	7	20
камера	25	15	-	2	15

Appendix 3. The results of the second translation task from English to Russian

False Friend	Correct	Errors are False Friends	Other errors	No answer	Total number of errors
character	39	3	-	-	3
record	38	3	-	1	3
rally	33	4	3	2	7
dramatic	26	14	-	2	14
mark	22	-	17	3	17
alternative	33	9	-	-	9
object	25	13	1	3	14
figure	31	9	-	2	9
production	24	17	-	1	17
position	26	14	1	1	15
regular	32	9	-	1	9

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Jekaterina Gortalova

The Problem of False Friends for Russian learners of English

Virvatulesõnade probleem vene emakeelega inglise keele õppijate seas

Bakalaureusetöö

2018

Lehekülgede arv: 37

Töö käsitleb virvatulesõnad kasutust vene keelt kõnelevate tudengite seas, kes õpivad inglise keelt. Töö eesmärk on püüda välja tuua, tänu läbiviidud uuringule, õpilaste poolt tehtud vead, mis on tingitud negatiivsest ülekandest. Lisaks sellele oli töös välja toodud hüpotees selle kohta, et virvatulesõnad on negatiivse ülekande allikaks vene keelt kõnelevate õpilaste jaoks, kes õpivad inglise keelt.

Käesolev töö koosneb kahest osast: teoreetilisest ja praktilisest. Esimeses osas on uuritud oluliste terminite mõisteid nagu: virvatulesõnad, nende klassifikatsioon, negatiivne ülekanne ja kaks analüüsi (vigade analüüs ja võrdlev analüüs). Teises osas on välja toodud tehtud töö kirjeldus ja analüüs.

Uurimistöö oli tehtud 10.klassi õpilaste seas ja kokku osales 42 inimest. Esilagu täitsid õpilased ära taustküsimustiku, milles nad andsid hinnangu oma teadmiste inglise keeles ja pidid kirjutama ka seda, kas neile on tuttav selline lingvistiline mõiste nagu "virvatulesõnad". Peale taustküsimustiku täitmist, pidid õpilased tegema kaks tõlkeülesannet: esimeses pidid nad tõlkima emakeelest võõrkeelde, teises vastupidi - võõrkeelest emakeelde. Negatiivne ülekanne ilmus suuremal määral esimeses tõlkeülesandes. Teises ülesandes tegid õpilased vigu kasutades õige vormi asemel virvatulesõnu. Läbiviidud uuringu abil oli hüpotees tõestatud, et semantilised virvatulesõnad on tegelikult negatiivse ülekandes allikaks.

Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et vaatamata sellele, et õpilased olid oma inglise keele teadmiste kohta päris hästi kirjutanud, kuid siiski suurem osa neist ei ole ikkagi kursis lingvistilise terminiga "virvatulesõnad". Uurimise tulemused näitasid ka seda, et vene keelt kõnelevad õpilased tegid palju vigu mõlemas tõlke ülesandes, tõestades sellega, et probleem virvatulesõnadega on siiani väga aktuaalne.

Märksõnad: Näiteks: Virvatulesõnad, negatiivne ülekanne.

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