

**REVIEW - RESEÑA: PEDRO JOSÉ CHAMIZO
DOMÍNGUEZ. 2008. SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS
OF FALSE FRIENDS. NEW YORK, LONDON:
ROUTLEDGE. ISBN: 978-0-415-95720-5¹**

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Semantics and Pragmatics of False Friends is one of the most recent publications on the interlinguistic phenomenon of false friends. This work is a must-have for those who are interested in this area of research since it presents a unique perspective on the semantic processes involved in the origin of these deceptive pairs. It could be regarded as Pedro Chamizo's masterpiece in the field of false friends. The author of this book has written several articles on this subject matter since 1999 and has dedicated part of his research effort to analyze this phenomenon: "False Friends: Mousetraps for Communication and Translation" (1999) is the first of his many contributions to the topic: "Variaciones representacionales y falsos amigos" (2005), "False friends (2006) or "Los falsos amigos desde la perspectiva de la teoría de conjuntos" (2009) are some of his most recent papers. Most of his articles touch upon the etymological dimension of false friends, the reasons why two terms become false friends and the pragmatic strategies which one can adopt to avoid being deceived by these lexical items. Chamizo puts all these issues together in the book reviewed here. This book was published in 2008 by Routledge.

As suggested by the title, *Semantics and Pragmatics of False Friends*, the author deals with two different aspects. On the one hand, he pays attention to the semantic side of false friends by looking into the different mechanisms of semantic change which produce false friends between languages; on the other hand, he takes into account the pragmatic facet when providing translators with some practical strategies to succeed in managing false friends in the translation task.

Chamizo's book is structured into six chapters: chapters 1 to 5 present the author's main theses concerning the semantics and pragmatics of false friends, while chapter 6 summarizes the essentials of the book and explains the main conclusions. Although physically organized into 6 chapters, readers might think of a different division: an opening part with the introduction and chapter 1 which provides valuable background information, the body of the book which is concerned with different semantic-related issues (chapters 2, 3, 4), translation strategies to handle false friends (chapter 5) and the closing part or conclusions section (chapter 6)

In the introduction, Chamizo states his motivations to write this book. The author refers to the scarcity of theoretical studies on the subject as well as the little attention paid

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to false friends from a diachronic viewpoint. Lack of research in this respect has led him to undertake this project.

The linguist starts by “Clearing the Terrain”, which provides some background information related to different terminologies, definitions and classifications put forward in the literature of the topic; these are necessary to set out the scene and draw up the boundaries of the object of study. In this first chapter, there are three important issues. To begin with, Chamizo claims that although experts normally regard Koessler and Derocquigny 1928’s work as a milestone in the study of this phenomenon, studies on false friends go back as far as the 17th century. Secondly, the author overtly opts for T. Hayward and A. Moulin’s definition of the problem which uses Saussurean terms (pp. 2); thirdly, Chamizo proposes a novel classification of false friends which aims at unifying different proposals. In this taxonomy, false friends are divided into two main categories: chance false friends, which have neither the same etymology nor semantic relation of any type, they would be the result of random chances between languages (e.g. Spanish *misa* “holy mass” and Slovakian *misa* “platter”), and semantic false friends, which have the same origin but have developed totally or partially different meanings in different languages (e.g. Spanish *escolar* “pupil” and English *scholar* “intellectual”). At the end of this first chapter, the author alludes to the creative use of false friends to achieve certain humoristic and cognitive effects.

After this first introductory notes and background information, Chamizo goes into the analysis of the semantics of false friends. The author makes a great effort to examine the semantics of false friends minutely, giving plenty of illustrative examples. In chapter 3, “Synonymy, Polysemy, Homonymy, Register and Diachrony”, he makes reference to different semantic relations between words such as synonymy, polysemy or homonymy. As a matter of fact, he makes a number of comparisons and connects false friends with these three notions. Thus he likens the translation process to the identification of synonyms within a given language and he states that the difference between homonymy and polysemy in a single language is related to the distinction between chance false friends and semantic false friends (pp. 59). Chance false friends would be equivalent to homonymy within a language and semantic false friends would relate to the concept of polysemy. In chapter three and four, the “Semantics of False Friends” are analyzed while mentioning “Borrowings, Calques, Inheritances” (chapter 3) and “Tropical False Friends” (Chapter 4). In fact, the author explains that borrowings and calques are an inexhaustible source of semantic false friends between languages; some false friends emerge as a result of some mechanisms of semantic change, such as semantic restriction or specialization (French *madame* > Spanish *madama* “prostitute”), pejoration (Spanish *macho/hembra*-derogatory- vs. English *male/female*-neutral-) or amelioration (English *regular* in comparison with Spanish *regular*). Likewise, he also shows how some figurative or tropical meanings have lexicalized in some languages bringing about false friends. For instance, there are several cases which arise out of a metaphoric transfer from the animal to the human domain. This is the case with Spanish *camello* or English *camel*, that is, “a large hornless ruminant quadruped, distinguished by its humped back, long neck, and cushioned feet...” (OED), but it also denotes a “drug-dealer” in Spanish. It is this last denotation which makes of the Spanish word a tropical false friend for many languages which have not developed that figurative sense.

In chapter five, professor Chamizo talks about the difficulties of translation with regards to partial semantic false friends and explains that problems with false friends in translation are not only a matter of the translator's lack of competence. Translating means more than having linguistic competence, there is also a need for strategy competence. In that sense, professionals should develop different skills. Broadly speaking, a mistranslation involving false friends could give way to two different situations: 1) the resulting text makes sense but it expresses something slightly different from the source text, or 2) the target text is odd and not very coherent. In that case, the translator could adopt different pragmatic strategies by making assumptions of what the original source could have said according to what they are reading in the target text and by resorting to the hearer/reader for a gloss, a synonym or a backtranslation which may help professionals to reconstruct the text more faithfully.

The sixth and last section constitutes a summary of the main contents. Although it could be considered redundant since each chapter ends with a synopsis of the main points, this chapter is helpful so that readers can have a holistic view of the main arguments presented throughout the book and establish more clear links between them.

The volume finishes off with some end notes, a seven-page-bibliography and an index with key terms that facilitates selective reading.

The application of a diachronic perspective to the study of false friends together with their relationship with the theories of semantic change can be regarded as the author's main contributions. However, there are two really interesting issues that are superficially tackled: the positive exploitation of false friends as a way of achieving humour and special cognitive effects, and the existence of false friends at the level of phraseology (e.g. English *bush telegraph* "groundless rumours" or French *grain de café* meaning "coffee bean" as well as "clitoris"). These two interesting topics are cursorily discussed. This would probably be one of its main shortcomings. Any reader could feel the need for further information on the humorous use of false friends and on those fixed phrases which are deceitful for speakers of other languages in order to have a wider picture of the phenomenon.

Apart from that, there seems to be a lack of balance in the book: the chapters concerned with semantics are longer and more far-reaching than the one addressing the pragmatics of false friends, which only deals with useful pragmatic strategies to handle false friends in translations. The pragmatic differences existing between false friends of different languages are not mentioned; and differences in the sociocultural associations, levels of formality and register of these lexical items are sometimes crucial and yield false friends among languages (Gouws *et al.* 2004).

However the shortcomings of the book are minor compared to its valuable contributions. Moreover, Chamizo's linguistic style is transparent and clear. It does not abound in an excessive use of technical terms and when doing so, he provides definitions in order to avoid any misunderstandings. Furthermore, his explanations are accompanied by a good number of examples that illustrate and provide a clearer account of the phenomenon under analysis. This makes the topic greatly accessible, even to those who are not fully acquainted with the subject.

Last but not least, I would like to end this review by telling that this is a good book and it is highly recommended, especially for linguists, semanticists, translators and interpreters.

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