

Language Contact, Translation and the Challenges of Internet Technology

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Abstract

Translation leads to language contact which is a social and linguistic phenomenon by which speakers of different languages (or different dialects of the same language) interact with one another, leading to a transfer of linguistic features. It is a major factor in language change. Language contact is unavoidable in a multilingual set up. Languages must interact to develop and no human society can avoid such a linguistic dynamic. This paper examines language contact between English and French from a historical perspective, that is, how the contact came about, and the effects it has on English language and its likely challenge in for the translator with special reference to the concept of Faux-Amis (false friends). The paper also examines the effects of internet on language use and how this could constitute new challenges to translation and translators. We used textual analysis method in carrying out this research. The theory used in this work is functional theory

Keywords: French, English, Language contact, Internet, Translation

Introduction

Stephan (2012) notes that contact with other languages and other dialectal variety of one language is a source of alternative pronunciations, grammatical structures, and vocabulary. Therefore, language contacts have been in focus since philologists became aware that no language is free from foreign elements and that languages influence one another at different levels. At the beginning, the structural approach to the problem of language contact was dominant in most of the investigations carried out by linguists who tried to explain all the intricate relations between two language systems. In the course of its development, contact linguistics has drastically changed its profile in favor of a more complex approach which includes several disciplines closely related to the problem of language contacts. These disciplines are among others: sociology, anthropology, ethnology, and psychology.

Translation is primarily an example of language contact. As an interlingual activity, it requires the presence of at least two languages, two different ways of depicting reality. The major argument in this paper is that apart from the internal or direct consequences resulting from the formal nature of language, translation as an activity, is also faced with a new challenge: the one associated with the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the internet, as a result of which new forms of discourse in new forms of communication platforms have emerged. Discourse has transcended the ordinary face to face communication, where physical distance is not a barrier to create a virtual world where you only know your addressee by what he says. These platforms have adopted a new use of language which has a disruptive effect on the way language is used. What are the challenges associated with the surge of ICT and internet on translation, especially as far as French and English languages are concerned? The rationale behind this choice is that French and English constitute historically an example of language contact. But also, recently, progress in science and technology and the advent of social media has opened a new dimension in the way French and English languages relate. This paper is set out to identify and discuss effects of the historical contact between the two languages and that of the social media and internet technology on translation.

Methodology

The study applied textual analysis as a methodological approach. We used Internet sources and our personal experiences to build up this work. We also consulted other authors' works in the field of translation and language contact.

French and English

Socio-historical exchanges between France and Britain have been more prominent than between other countries in Europe. These exchanges include centuries of conquest and settlements, political alliances, cultural, scientific and commercial exchanges each of which has been reflected especially in the lexicon of the two languages (Wise, p.19). The Norman Conquest made French the language of the ruling class in England for more than two centuries (Barfour, p.26). People accepted the new order as a *fait accompli*; they accepted it as a fact and adjusted themselves to it. The fusion of Normans and English was rapid.

French influence on the English vocabulary

French influence is much more direct and observable upon the English vocabulary. Many English words found their way into the French spoken in England, but their number was not so large as that of the French words introduced into English. The number of French words that included into English was unbelievably great. There is nothing comparable to it in the previous or subsequent history of the language. Two stages can be observed, according to Barfour (2016). The borrowings of the first stage appeared in English before 1250, roughly 900 in number, they were such as the lower classes would become familiar with through contact with French-speaking nobility: Baron, noble, dame, servant, messenger, feast, minstrel, and juggler. Others such as story, rime, and lay, obviously owed their introduction into English to literary channels. The largest single group among the words that came in early was associated with the church,

where the necessity of transference from the clergy to the people. In changing from French to English, they transferred much of their governmental and administrative vocabulary, their ecclesiastical, legal and military terms, and their familiar words of fashion, food and social life, the vocabulary of art, learning and medicine. These borrowed words chiefly came from three major domains: Government and Administration, Religion and Law court. Examples are the words *government, govern, administer, crown, state, empire, realm, etc.* The word office and the titles of many offices are likewise French: chancellor, treasurer, minister, viscount, mayor, chamberlain, marshal, governor, councillor, constable, and coroner. Except for the words like king and queen, lord, and lady.

Designations of rank are French: *baron, nobility, prince, princess, duke, duchess, count, countess, marquis, squire, page, and titles of respect like sire, madam, mistress.* Words relating to the economic organisation: *manor, homage, vassal, peasant, slave, servant.* Monasteries and religious houses and objects associated with the service: *religion, theology, sermon, homily, sacrament, baptism, communion, confession, prayer, lesson, passion, psalmody, crucifix, incense, image, chapter, abbey, convent, priory, hermitage, cloister, sanctuary;* Indications of rank or class as: *clergy, clerk, prelate, cardinal, hermit, dean, pastor, vicar, abbess, novice, friar, hermit;* Fundamental religious or theological concepts: *creator, saviour, trinity, virgin, saint, miracle, mystery, faith, heresy, reverence, remission, devotion, sacrilege, temptation, penitence, redemption, salvation, immortality, piety, sanctity, charity, mercy, pity, obedience.*

However, the change in the traditional trend of English being at the receiving end appears to have changed in the mid-nineteen century with Britain as a super power economically and technologically. A lot of English borrowings into French were related to textiles, fashion, sports, industry, commerce, science and technology and entertainment. English borrowings included words such: jersey, cardigan, blazer, weekend, lobby, jazz, film, star, pullover, pajamas, boycotter, gadget etc. (Barfour, 2016).

The flow of English borrowings gained another momentum around the 1930s and especially after World War II with the United States dominating the world stage economically and militarily. Wise (1997) argues that the development of mass means of communication correlated with the growth and expansion of the United States leading to the marketing of products, ideas and American lifestyle. This is exhibited in the lexical borrowings such as: *snackbar, hotdog, hamburger, bestseller, chips, bluejean, sweater, flash-back, marketing, joking, fan, gag, tee-shirt, bowling, clip, design, zoom* etc.

According to Wise (1997), the number of English borrowings into French outnumbered that of French borrowings into English during this period for the first time in history. Hagège (1987) asserted that the appropriate term to use from that period is *franricain* instead of Étiemble's (1964) term, *franglais*. (Hagège, 1987, cited in Wise, 1997). English borrowings are said to have become more visible through advertising and mass media in recent years leading to severe interventions by language defenders in France to reduce English use in commercial settings. (Barfour 2016).

Linguistic consequences of French and English contact

The term assimilation of a loan word is used to denote a partial or total conformation to the phonetical, graphical and morphological standards of the receiving language and its semantic

system. The degree of assimilation depends upon the length of period during which the word has been used in the receiving language, upon its importance for communication purpose and its frequency. Oral borrowings due to personal contacts are assimilated more completely and more rapidly than literary borrowings, i.e. borrowings through written speech.

1. Loan words not completely assimilated phonetically.

- a) Some of them keep the accent on the final syllable: *machine, cartoon, police*.
- b) others, alongside with peculiarities in stress, contain sounds or combinations of sounds that are not standard for the English language and do not occur in native words. The examples are:
 [ç] *bourgeois, camouflage, prestige, regime, sabotage*;
 [wa:] as in *memoir*, or the nasalized
 [a], [î] *mélange*.

In many cases it is not the sounds but the whole pattern of the word's phonetic make-up that is different from the rest of the vocabulary

2. The pronunciation of words where the process of assimilation is phonetically incomplete will often vary, as in ['foiei] or ['fwaje] for *foyer* and ['bu:lva:]['bu:hva:], ['bu:leva:], ['bu:lva:d] for *boulevard*.

3. Loan words not completely assimilated graphically:

This group, as Balinskaya (cited in Barfour 2016) shows, it is fairly large and variegated. There are, for instance, words borrowed from French in which the final consonant is not pronounced, e.g. *ballet, buffet, corps*. Some may keep a diacritic mark: *café, cliché*. Specifically French digraphs (*ch, qu, ou*, etc.) may be retained in spelling: *bouquet, brioche*.

The relevance of vocabulary in translation.

Vocabulary is the raw material for speech or writing, when we speak or write we use words. It can be defined as "words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)" (Neuman& Dwyer, 2009). Hornby (1995) defines vocabulary as "the total number of words in a language; vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings". While Ur (1998) states: "Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than just a single word: for example, post office, and mother-in-law, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea. A useful convention is to cover all such cases by talking about vocabulary "items" rather than "words." In addition, Burns (1972) defines vocabulary as "the stock of words which is used by a person, class or profession. According to Zimmerman cited in Coady and Huckin (1998)' vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learning. Furthermore, Diamond and Gutlohn (2006) state that vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings. From the definitions above, it can be concluded that vocabulary is the total number of words that are needed to communicate ideas and express the speakers' meaning. That is the reason why it is important to learn vocabulary. According to Brysbaert et al, the differing degrees of word knowledge imply a greater *depth of knowledge*, but the process is more complex than that (Brysbaert *et al* (2016).

Translation

Translation is considered as a reasonable way of communication between different cultures and languages. It was defined by Nida and Taber as “reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (Nida, p.12). Catford, however, claims that “it is the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language” (1965). Newmark (1988) supported the idea that translation is based on the importance of preserving the effect of the original text or the source text. He said that translation aims mainly at reaching an “equivalent effect”. Yet, it would be difficult to achieve this between languages with considerable cultural differences. Hatem and Mason (1990) assert that words in each language tend to have different meanings; as a result, one-to-one correspondence is rare between any two languages. To settle this difficulty, Newmark suggested a strategy called “cultural equivalent” (1988). According to Baker (1992) this strategy involves replacing a cultural-specific item or expression with target language item which does not have the same propositional meaning.

In this work, we used functional theory. Functionalist approaches to translation **places great emphasis on the vital role of the target text in translation.** They function within the target text-oriented translation that valorizes the function or purpose of the translation.

Translation and the concept of faux-amis

It is doubtless that translation is not an easy task and the consequences of inadequate translation are misleading. This was explained by Delisle (1981), in Gerding-Salas (2003) article, when he described translation as “an arduous job that mortifies you, puts you in a state of despair”. Among the asserted issues that translators face in their tasks is the question of vocabulary. This problem stems mostly from nonequivalence between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) and language transfer. Faux-amis for instance, are a thorny problem that belongs to the category of vocabulary issues; therefore, it is not redundant to emphasize the necessity to verge on and deal with such unstoppably recurrent problem. First, it is important to be acquainted with the notion of Faux-amis in order to provide an exhaustive and systematic treatment to them, so it is indefatigable to offer their definition and description. According to Iwala, Iwala *Les faux-amis sont des termes à la forme proche ou identique dans les deux langues mais dont les sens sont radicalement différents d’une langue à l’autre. Une bonne connaissance de l’usage permettra d’éviter les calques et les contresens* (Iwala, Iwala,, P. 170). According to these two authors, faux-amis are identical words in two languages but have different meaning.

Concept of faux-amis.

Faux-amis, are words that share the same form and etymology but evolved in the midst of two languages and two different civilizations where they may acquire different meanings. Beside the term Faux-amis, they have others that have been used to describe this linguistic phenomenon such as false cognates, false friends, false pairs, false equivalents, false brothers, deceptive words, deceptive cognates, treacherous twins and belles infidèles (Iwala, Pp.55-58). The idea of faux-amis is defined from various points of view. Koessler and Derocquigny (1975) who examined French words embedded in English and the translation pitfalls that they “constituted” to unsuspecting speakers, faux-amis words whose “identity of form” does not

necessarily lead to the identity of meaning". Koessler (1975) even speaks of faux-amis which exist within the same language. In French, he distinguishes three types: Homonyms which, by their identical form, can be the source of misunderstandings between unilingual speakers. Words having semantic variations in space: these are dialectical words whose regional meanings are different from those of the norm. Words having semantic variations in time due to the natural evolution of the language during which the meanings of the words change. Thus, speakers of a given era do not mean by this or that word the same thing as speakers of another era. Some points of this concept survive in Colignon-Berthier defining faux-amis as words of the same language (especially French) that "we use one for the other [...], we interchange their respective meanings, whether because of a more or less close or more or less distant resemblance (paronymy), an approximate synonymy, or for any other reason". What these authors consider as faux-amis are words that are known in linguistics as paronyms or false brothers. As far as the etymological aspect of the definition is concerned, we must count on the history of faux-amis because that is where this problem comes from.

The formation of faux-amis

Faux-amis do not exist in a language (such as synonyms or paronyms): it is the unequal linguistic knowledge of the bilingual speaker that produces them (Iwala, p 26,). During communication, a multilingual speaker, deceived by the similarity of a foreign word with a word of his primary language, holds the two words for equivalents and uses the one in the sense of this one, while ignoring that the meaning of the foreign word is not identical to the one he attributes to it. When faux-amis are observed in communication, it is as a result of lack of knowledge of the different codes and thus belong to the language of the individual and not to the language itself. The emergence of faux-amis can therefore be considered on the one hand from the view point of errors of translation or bilingualism (psycholinguistic aspect), on the other hand from the view point of the process of borrowing (etymological aspect).

Kiss (2002) featured that, contrary to synonyms or paronyms, faux-amis are not innate in any language, but they are yielded in it. Thus, they should be considered first from an etymological perspective and second from a psychological one to envisage their formation.

a) Etymological Perspective

In this concern, Horea (2007) pointed out that etymology is the first accountable for the linguistic confusion. Since language is not determined and steady, it can give and receive a variation of words during given periods and for different purposes. Hence, language borrowing is of a prime cause for the existence of faux-amis. Generally, linguistic borrowers try to keep the same form of the borrowed word; however, as any linguistic sign, the foreign form tries to meet the requirements of its new system. Consequently, it is unavoidable that the borrowed word undergoes many modifications. In addition to the phonological and morphological changes, these modifications may include semantic ones. These mutations were specified by O'Neill and Casanovas (1994) as reversion to [the] original sense, specialization, generalization, and the acquisition of new connotations.

The probabilities of these adaptations have been classified by Kiss (2002) into four groups:

- i. The loan word preserves the primeval sense while it is dropped in the original language. If we take the adjective “sensible” with Latin origins we find that English preserved its original meaning “wise” while French changed into “sensitive”.
- ii. The original language changes or develops the significance of the borrowed word while it remains the same in the new one. Let us consider the example stated by Casanovas and O'Neill when they said that the noun “bug” in Middle English referred to all kinds of insects, yet in the 19 Century came to refer to bedbugs (a type of lice). So, the word has undergone a process of specialization.
- iii. The native denotation of the loanword is mislaid in its new milieu while it is maintained in the original one. The two adverbs “eventually” and “actually” constitute a tangible examples of faux-amis . They were borrowed from French earlier where they meant and still do “possibly” and “at the moment” respectively. English has adopted new meaning for them as “finally” for eventually and “in fact” for actually.
- iv. The word develops alongside in both languages but differently and by keeping the same morphology. Consequently, it would be wrong to translate these different meanings by the same form and non-equivalent sense; otherwise the meaning will be completely distorted.

b) Psycholinguistic perspective

From this point of view, the occurrence of faux-amis does pose the danger of translating the Target Text in terms of the mother tongue or a previously well-known language, particularly if the two languages are close to each other. In this respect, the inter-linguistic influence of the dominant language within the polyglot explains the most frequent errors. In the case of polysemous words, the learners imagine that they will find the same meanings in the other language. However, they do not exist in the target language, which leads to the emergence of faux-amis. So, when foreign language learners feel familiar with the target language they inevitably establish equivalences and analogies to curtail the distance between the languages in question and reduce stress.

Traps of bilingual vocabulary: faux-amis

Since the birth of the faux-amis , created by Koessler who published his first collection of faux-amis in 1928¹, specialists (lexicographers, language teachers) and profane speakers still ignore the effective recipe that would help them avoid the pitfalls vocabulary in a foreign language. Here is an example to illustrate the pitfalls of vocabulary. In Cranston Szlakmann's notebook, a Frenchman in front of a (obviously) hippie couple talking about their alternative diet, seems to be quite shocked when he hears them say the following sentence: "We eat food without reservatives". This man, because of his knowledge of imperfect English ("preservative" is a chemical agent used to preserve food, to prevent the alteration, so it means conservative or preservative), was deceived by the formal resemblance of the word English and French "condom", which led to a misinterpretation of the statement. This example shows how faux-amis can disturb communication and that the misunderstanding, caused by faux-amis, can be not only comical, but also painful.

Internet, linguistics and translation concerns

One of the obvious challenges that come with the internet is the rapid introduction of new and alternative vocabulary. In 2013, Oxford English Dictionary declared “selfie” to be their Word of the Year this might be a fitting example of how much vocabulary that got its start on the net has seeped into everyday use (the first known use of “selfie” was in 2002, when the word was posted on an Australian Internet forum, but it started gaining wider popularity in 2013). In addition to “selfie”, “Google” has become a widely accepted verb. But more common than inventing new words, is appropriating existing vocabulary to stand for something different. Think about “wall”, “wireless”, “tablet” and “like” while these words have traditional meanings stretching back for decades (if not centuries), they are now used in a completely new setting.

While creating new vocabulary and evolving is something languages have always done, the Internet serves to hasten this process considerably. Another curious aspect is the speed at which new vocabulary is introduced, used, overused, and discarded in the Internet Age. While the internet creates a new form of language, it is at the same time a great threat to those smaller languages that are not able to absorb the shock. English, as the most dominant language on the Internet, is seeping into everyday use, to start creating a new type of Pidgin. Playfully, this phenomenon is named differently across cultures think Franglais or Denglisch. But, while the bigger languages have the option of absorbing this effect, the smaller ones are under threat of being overwhelmed by English technology-talk.

Linguists are concerned with the influence this system may have on a living language. The Internet, in conjunction with radio and television, telephone communication and printed materials, creates the universal information net, which is called “Cyberspace” and all the people using the online communication are “Netizens” in this net (the word is easily associated with “citizens”). The regular users are “Webies”, the new ones -“Newbies”. The language we use in the net is “Netspeak” But the internet has also been a springboard for all forms of informal writing. The ability to gather a large following doesn't require so much eloquence and proper spelling as it did in the day of the paper- or hardback. Most online bloggers have no one looking over their shoulder to make proper language use an issue to take into consideration. In an era where anyone can be their own author, editor, and publisher, it might not be surprising traditional grammar rules are being replaced by something more flexible. People unfamiliar with the mechanisms of Online Communication and familiar with the conventions of offline communication, think that there can be no analogy of online communication with speech.

Crystal's views on electronic discourse

The well-known British linguist sees online language, which he also terms as Netspeak, as a non-monolithic /disparate set of communication methods and types such chatrooms, Internet Relay Chat, World Wide Web pages, Websites etc. He suggests that online language is best viewed as a new species of interaction, a genuine “third medium” (besides the written and oral forms of English), which is evolving its own systematic rules to suit new circumstances. (Crystal, p.25). He largely dismisses the common view that online communication is illiterate and dumbed-down language. He agrees that much of it is non-standard, playful, highly deviant in bending the usual rules of language, tolerant of typographic and spelling errors, and

full of new words. But he is fascinated by its variety and innovation and takes a very positive view, suggesting that "The phenomenon of Netspeak is going to change the way we think about language in a fundamental way, because it is a linguistic singularity - a genuine new medium". (Crystal 25).

According to Crystal (2001) technology bears gifts also for linguistic investigation: Netspeak is a new opportunity for academic study. He outlines the "once in a lifetime" opportunity offered by the emerging communication media. A new academic study of "Internet Linguistics" includes, at the very least, a comparative study of the style of different formats and the development of language change within these new media. Participants use all types of shortened forms simply to combat the limiting conditions of the medium itself. The use of syntactically-reduced forms like acronyms, symbols, word clippings are therefore purely for practical reasons they reduce the time and effort necessary to communicate.

Users therefore tend to produce utterances of an average of 6 words. Respect is given to those who can communicate the most information, whether direct or implied in the shortest amount of time. The mainstream lexis is reformed into hybrid, heteroglossic, exclusively narrow, covert norms, (lexicalization as defined by Halliday 1978 and over lexicalization as defined by Werry 1996) good examples of which are acronyms simulating laughter:

1. **lol** (laughing out loud, is used to express general laugh),
2. **lmao** (laughing my arse off, is reserved for something very amusing),
3. **rotflol** (rolling on the floor laughing out loud, is used for something wild crazy and very amusing),

The change imposed by internet and the new forms of communication not only pose a problem to translation in terms of content, that is the way in which language changes but how to adopt those changes into other languages that are in use on the social media.

Conclusion

In our discussion of language contact between French and English, we observed that the Norman conquest saw an upsurge of French vocabulary into English language. Though it was very much pronounced from that time, it's worth to mention that the proximity between Normandy and England was partly responsible for presence of some French words in English language. Whatever may be the causes of contact (conquest, trade, diplomacy etc.) language contact has some attending consequences which vary in degree and affect various aspects of language as seen in our discussion. The contact between French and English from the Norman conquest, we could see that the influence was systematic because it affected all walks of life in the English society: Government, Administration, War, Literature, Arts, land tenure, religion, etc. Despite the large presence of French vocabulary in English language, it does not mean words keep the same meaning in various contexts. That is why for example research into the nature of faux-amis has revealed that even the concept of faux-amis came as a result of wrong choice of equivalent in the two languages by bilingual speakers. In addition, faux-amis manifest themselves in different ways as shown in the presentation of their typology. The concept of faux-amis was taken beyond isolated words to groups of words. In our discussion we emphasized on idiomatic expressions which also constitute an area affected by language

contact between French and English. Therefore, the concept of faux-amis, whether they phonetic/spelling false friends, cultural false friends, could become obstacles to the translator.

As an activity, translation could face various challenges. Some of these challenges could be inherent to the formal nature of language itself because no two languages describe reality in the same way. The problem of Faux-amis which we discussed here remains a challenge till tomorrow and the translator must reckon with it and try as much as possible to minimize its impact in the process of translation. However, it does not stop there. Revolution in the new information technology has created new ways of communication that are no respecter of the formal characteristic of the language we traditionally know. This disruptive effect of the 'nets peak' will say a lot about the practice of translation and even the language of the translator. Communication on the net will continue unabated and while a translator cannot stop it, he has to be aware of the potentials it has to affect translation activities.

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