

POTENTIAL SCIENTIFIC TRANSLATION PROBLEMS DERIVED FROM “FALSE FRIENDS” OR CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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At the present phase in the History the English, this language has two main usages: (i) it is used as a native language having an official status or co-official status in several nations and states around the world (1), and (ii) it is used as world language, the *lingua franca* of the modern era, especially in scientific and technological documents (2).

When the English language is used as *lingua franca* in many cases it is translated into other languages. In my opinion, the usage of English as *lingua franca* should take into account the potential problems derived from translations to other languages, especially due to the dangerous “false friends”, and the differences between different cultures or different regulatory environments. A “false friend” is a word which is often confused with a word existing in another language because the two words look or sound similar, but which have different meanings (3).

Thus, scientific writers should be aware that, when they are writing in English used as *lingua franca*, the text they are producing will probably be translated to other languages. In this process the words that can be considered “false friends” should be ideally avoided. However, English has different “false friends” in relation to particular languages, it is generally very difficult for any writer to know when a English word is a “false friend” in another language. Probably, these “false friends” potentially dangerous in translation should be recognized and accepted by consensus, and described in the instructions for authors by a publishers in languages different from English.

In our professional field two examples of “false friends” in English into Spanish and Catalan (and probably into other Romance languages) are the words “medicine” and “medical” used in some specific contexts. For instance, the terms “medical device” used in the English version of several standards from the International Organization for Standardization or the European Committee for Standardization, is translated into Spanish and Catalan as *producto sanitario* (“healthcare product”). This is due to the adjective “medical” in Spanish and Catalan is (or must be) restricted to things related to activities done by surgeons or physicians. In Spanish and Catalan, the adjective *sanitario* or *sanitari* means “related to healthcare”. Bearing in mind that healthcare is delivered, but not limited to, by practitioners in clinical sciences, dentistry, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, a conclusion is that, when using English as *lingua franca* the term “healthcare device” is more appropriate than the term “medical device” in order to avoid a “false friend”.

The other example of “false friend” is the word “medicine” as used in the term “laboratory medicine”. In Roman languages in general, but probably in other languages too, the word “medicine” has the same restrictions as the word “medical”. In addition, in many countries around the world, most of the practitioners and directors of clinical laboratories have different high university degrees (PhD, Master, etc.) in biochemistry, biology, chemistry or pharmacy, rather than university graduates in medicine (MD, MD-PhD or other). Thus, another conclusion in order to avoid “false friends” is when using English as *lingua franca* the term “clinical laboratory sciences” is more appropriate than the term “laboratory medicine” to design the concept ‘branch of health sciences that is concerned with the in vitro examination [measurement and identification] of biological properties of materials derived from the human body for the purpose of providing information for the diagnosis, prevention, treatment of disease in, or the assessment of the health of, human beings, by means of chemical or biological techniques’ (4). Without forgetting that clinical laboratory sciences are much more than just “testing specimen for certain analytes” and that it is indeed a health sciences speciality.

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