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A Study of Emic Proportions:
Contextualising Phraseological False Friends

Abstract. The discipline of phraseology covers a wide variety of topics relating to the structure and usage of phraseological units. These units of language carry cultural meanings which are reproduced within their own cultural context. Among the different types of phraseological units are false friends. False friends are lexical or phraseological units that take a similar or identical form in two or more languages, but which vary semantically. False friends are deeply intertwined with the context in which they are created. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the importance of the relationship between text and context in the study of phraseological false friends using an emic approach. The findings outline the need for context to be emphasised in the production of dictionaries containing phraseological false friends. The study of these deceptive phraseological units has implications for contrastive analysts, curriculum designers, foreign language teachers and students, philologists, translation theorists, translators, as well as phraseographers and phraseologists.

Key words: *context, emic, false friends, language learning, methodology*

1. Introduction

Language is all about context. The two go together like salt and pepper. Understanding the context of a given text is required to understand the text itself, but understanding context is not always easy. Contexts exist which we are not familiar with, especially when it comes to studying language across cultures. False friends are an example of context-specific texts which deceive those who are not familiar with a particular language. False equivalence occurs when words or phrases take an identical or similar form in two or more languages but differ semantically. At a lexical level, *false friends*, *false equivalents* or *false cognates* appear or sound similar or identical, such as the Polish word *lunatyk*, meaning "sleepwalker", which takes

a similar form to "lunatic" in English, or the Russian word *город*, meaning "town", which takes an identical form to the Ukrainian word meaning "garden". False lexical equivalence has earned a great deal of attention from linguists concerned with misunderstandings in intercultural communication (Szpila 2000b: 77). However, *phraseological false friends* (PFFs), which are units of false equivalence at the phraseological level, present a greater problem for language learners, as the concept behind the phrases does not equate to the sum of its parts. Even if each word is understood, the meaning of the phrase may vary greatly. One example of PFFs can be found in the Italian idiom, *essere una lucertola* "to love basking in the sun" and the Polish idiom *być jaszczurką* "to be a malicious woman", both of which have the literal translation "to be a lizard" (Szerszunowicz 2006: 1056). There have been far less studies conducted on false equivalence at the phraseological level (Leonidova 1983: 174), yet an effective record of PFFs, for example in the form of a dictionary or database, would make an effective learning resource for language learners. To record these phrases, one must understand them from the perspective of the native speaker, as an understanding of expressions and idioms relies heavily on knowledge of the cultural context in which they exist. A native speaker will understand the meaning much more comprehensively than an outsider. Therefore, the best approach to gathering information on the context of a phrase is an emic approach.

The term "emic", as coined by Pike (1967), refers to a subjective approach to gathering information; that is, analysing a language from the perspective of a native speaker. The emic approach is rarely mentioned in the field of phraseology, yet it has a great deal to offer. PFFs cause an issue for non-native speakers of a language because they carry metaphors that are specific to their cultural context. Therefore, if an insight into the meanings of PFFs can be acquired from the perspective of native speakers, these insights should be recorded as a reference tool for non-native speakers. These records could then be systematised in the form of a dictionary or database. However, the structure of the dictionary or database is also important. As beneficial as it is for linguists to gather information about the context of a language using an emic approach, it is also beneficial to language learners to understand this context when learning about false friends. Therefore, dictionaries should use a context-based format, where language learners can look up PFFs according to their context. Each entry should be informed by an etymological analysis to describe the historical origin of the phrase, and follow up with an emically informed description of contemporary use of the phrase for a deeper understanding. This structure would emphasise the importance of context in understanding PFFs.

The main goal behind this study is to look at ways of structuring language learning tools to deal with the problem of understanding and translating PFFs for language learners. There is currently a need for resources containing PFFs, but before we can meet this need, we must look at how to structure resources to effectively suit their purpose. Resources should be structured in a way that is most effective for users. Dictionaries and databases that are developed as language learning tools should reflect the importance of context in language learning throughout their structure. Therefore, this chapter proposes a structure for PFF dictionaries and databases as language learning tools, that is contextually-centred with each entry comprised of information on the type of PFF language learners are dealing with, along with an etymologically and emically informed description of the phrase.

2. Types of False Equivalence

False friends at the lexical level are often discussed in linguistics because of the difficulties they present for language learners. Studies on PFFs, on the other hand, are not so common, though there are some useful works available. Rajxštejn (1980) deals with lexical, syntactic and semantic aspects of German and Russian PFFs, while Ettinger (1994; 2004; 2009; 2011; 2012) has done a great deal of work on French and German PFFs and false cognates. Piirainen's work with Dobrovol'skij (2005) looks at the cultural foundation of conventional figurative language. Szpila's works (2000a; 2000b; 2005; 2011) look at false friends and false equivalence using Polish-English and Polish-Upper-Sorbian case studies. Although Marzan and Chahardahcherik (2015) argue the relevance of genealogy in the exploration of cognates and false cognates at the lexical level only, their study may be relevant to phraseology, as it traces false friends back to Proto-Indo-European, indicating the possibility of semantic divergence as a cause of false equivalence. Vrbinc (2010) also looks at etymological origins, using English-Slovene PFFs as a case study. In an attempt to accurately define the problem presented in this chapter, this study will borrow Vrbinc's description of idioms as "a linguistic unit comprising two or more items whose meaning does not represent the sum of meanings of its individual components" (2010: 1243–1244) and Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen's definition of PFFs as "two or more expressions that evoke almost identical or very similar mental images but show significant differences in the actual meaning" (2005: 109). However, rather than "mental images" (Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen 2005: 109), this chapter will use the term "form", referring to the syntactic similarities between PFFs.

False equivalence can be described and categorised in many different ways, according to the type of study that is undertaken. Some studies, such as that conducted by Marzan and Chahardahcherik (2015), categorise types of false equivalence into either chance false equivalence or semantically divergent false equivalence, according to origin. Chance false equivalence occurs when there is no etymological relationship between two similar or identical words or phrases across two or more languages (Marzan and Chahardahcherik 2015: 22). Semantically divergent false equivalence occurs when words or phrases that are similar or identical across two or more languages have the same etymological origin, but differ semantically because their meanings have diverged from their origin (Marzan and Chahardahcherik 2015: 22). This may be due to a difference in conceptual metaphors (Szpila 2011: 354) or the adaptation of borrowings to suit local contexts.

In her study of faunal themed PFFs, Szerszunowicz divides PFFs into seven categories of pseudo-equivalents: 1) idioms whose components and structure are identical in two or more languages, but differ semantically; 2) idioms whose components and structures are identical in two or more languages, but are composed of fewer/more components and differ semantically; 3) idioms whose components are similar in two or more languages, but differ structurally and semantically; 4) idioms whose components are similar in two or more languages and whose structures are identical, but differ semantically; 5) idioms whose components are similar or identical in two or more languages, but which are polysemous in one language and monosemous in in the other/s; 6) idioms whose components and structures are identical in two or more languages, but which differ in their stylistic markedness; and 7) idioms whose components and structures are identical in two or more languages, but which differ in meaning and register (2006: 1056–1059). Szerszunowicz's study provides a thorough categorisation of PFFs according to the different ways in which the components and structure can differ. The *tertium comparationis* of similar or identical form remains constant, as this is the aspect of PFFs that presents a problem for language learners, and the phenomenon that is of interest to linguists.

3. Availability of Resources on False Equivalence

There are entire dictionaries dedicated to idioms and false cognates (Dronov 2011; Szpila 2005; 2007). In any bookshop with a section dedicated to languages, one can find a book on slang, colloquialisms and other lo-

calised phrases. University bookshops have useful tools for students, such as the *faux amis* wheel which, when turned, lines up a false friend in another language with its semantic equivalent in English. However, there is much less information available for false friends at the phraseological level. After studying twelve dictionaries of false friends, Szpila found that only one of the twelve included PFFs (2005: 82–83). This Czech-Polish dictionary, entitled *Czesko-polski słownik zdradliwych wyrazów i pułapek frazeologicznych* or 'Czech-Polish dictionary of treacherous word and idiom traps', contains several phraseologisms that are similar in form, but semantically different, as is consistent with the definition of a false friend (Szpila 2005: 83). However, Szpila contests that most of the phrases in the dictionary do not adhere to this definition (2005: 83). In some cases, idiomatic phraseological units from one language in the dictionary were compared with a free unit in another, for example:

Czech	
phraseological unit stát někde s kloboukem v ruce	*gloss* 'ask humbly', cf. *go cap/hat in hand*
Polish	
phraseological unit stać z kapeluszem w ręce	*gloss* lit. stand with a hat in one's hand

(Szpila 2005: 83)

In other cases, the dictionary documented phraseological units that took a similar form in two languages, but differed semantically due to a false cognate, for example:

Czech	
phraseological unit dobré bydlo	*gloss* 'good living conditions'
Polish	
phraseological unit dobre bydło	*gloss* 'good cattle'

(Szpila 2005: 83)

Other phraseological units had a different form but the same meaning, for example:

Czech	
phraseological unit natáhnout bačkory	*gloss* lit. put slippers on, cf. *kick the bucket*
Polish	
phraseological unit wyciągnąć kopyta	*gloss* lit. stretch the hooves, cf. *kick the bucket*

(Szpila 2005: 83)

These examples do not adhere to the description of PFFs as two or more expressions which have a similar or identical form, but which differ semantically: the first is an example of an idiom that does not have an idiomatic equivalent in the second language and instead uses a literal translation; the second is an example of lexical equivalence, rather than phraseological equivalence; and the third is an example where two phrases are identical semantically, but do not take a similar form (Szpila 2005: 83). In the final example, the units diverge from the original *tertium comparationis*; "they are traps, but do not result from false semantic similarity" (Szpila 2005: 83). Examples such as these should not be included in a record of PFFs, but are instead suited to a study of idioms which highlights different issues in cross-cultural understandings of idioms that does not specifically focus on PFFs.

Another aspect that is often lacking in these dictionaries is context. Dictionaries with a focus on idioms, whether monolingual or bilingual, may include some information on the origin of the idiom and its context, but this is not always the case for dictionaries of false friends. Lubensky's *Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms* sets out to provide as much context as possible, so that English speakers can understand in which contexts the idiom can be used (2014: xiv). This context should be the focal point in a dictionary of PFFs. Another example of a record of idioms is *Excuse my French!* by Best and Van Waes (2013). Although it was never intended as an academic study, the book is well-structured for the purpose of recording PFFs. Chapters are divided according to a situation-specific context, for example chapter one looks at idioms used to describe people, while chapter five looks at those related to expressing opinions and chapter nine looks at those related to food and drink (Best and Van Waes 2013). Each chapter describes the meanings of a number of idioms further, with some reference to etymology (Best and Van Waes 2013). An index is provided at the end of the book with a list of all of the idioms in alphabetical order (Best and Van Waes 2013: 202–207). How-

ever, the index only provides the English idioms, as the book is intended for English speakers to find equivalents of English idioms in French (Best and Van Waes 2013: 202–207). In this book, the *tertium comparationis* is clearly the meaning; idioms are provided in English with an equivalent French idiom and an explanation of why they are semantically similar or identical. Thus, this cannot be described as a record of false friends, but it nevertheless provides a framework that could be used to construct an effective dictionary of PFFs.

4. Approaches to Phraseological False Friends

When we study PFFs, we want to understand what these utterances mean to the societies that use them. Colson argues the importance of an insight into culture in phraseological studies, claiming that culture and phraseology are closely linked and that this link "is best revealed by proverbs and fully idiomatic set phrases, because they tend to rely heavily on images, traditions or habits that are characteristic of a given culture" (2008: 193). An understanding of this link can be developed through an etymological analysis and an emic approach. Etymological analysis is a traditionally-used method of developing an understanding of phrases through an insight into their origins and the historical context in which they were created (Marzan and Chahardahcherik 2015). Less commonly spoken of in phraseology is the emic approach, which takes a subjective view of the current uses of phrases by native speakers. Reesink argues the need for understanding the meanings of words and syntactic constructions within their own system of language, stating that "glosses of words or morphemes, as well as the free translations of complete utterances they are part of, are indispensible in descriptive grammars, but they can easily obscure the genius of the language described" (2008: 867). Together, an etymological analysis and an emic approach to gathering information can provide a comprehensive understanding of the context of language use. For language learners to acquire an understanding of PFFs, they must first understand the context in which each phrase exists, because the context is the key to understanding the localised meanings behind the text. Dictionaries and databases that are developed as language learning tools should reflect the importance of context in language learning throughout their structure. Thus, a context-based structure in which each entry has an etymologically and emically informed description would be most effective.

4.1. Etymological Analysis

In 1786 Sir William Jones suggested that Greek, Latin and Sanskrit had a common root in a language family that was later referred to as Indo-European (Patil 2003: 249). Although he was not the first to suggest this notion, his announcement is considered to have marked the beginning of the branch of linguistics called "etymology" (Auroux 2000: 1156; Marzan and Chahardahcherik 2015: 25). Etymology looks at the origin of words, and more recently of phrases, and how they have developed and changed over time. While some overlaps in form may occur simply by chance, the many languages of the world appear to have many connections and correspondences, and if we can trace texts back to their origins, we can locate several divergences from a common root (Marzan and Chahardahcherik 2015: 25). Marzan and Chahardahcherik argue that "some languages show correspondences of form that cannot be because of chance convergences" (2015: 22). Their argument that lexical and syntactic overlap can be traced back to a single language, Proto-Indo-European, gives rise to the question of cultural influence on the divergence of language to create false equivalence. Phraseological units, particularly idioms and proverbs, are frequently traced back to folk etymology, which is specific to a particular culture, meaning that the images conjured by the phrases "trigger certain associations in native speakers" (Vrbinc 2010: 1242). This is where etymological and emic methodologies go hand-in-hand; while an etymological analysis looks at the history of a phrase, situated within its cultural past, an emic approach looks at the contemporary use of the phrase, situated within its current cultural context. Thus, the etymological analysis is the precursor to the emic approach. When PFFs are identified, an understanding of the cultural history, through a folk etymology analysis, can give an insight into the reasons behind semantic divergence, paving the way for an emic approach to the understanding of the contemporary context of the phrase.

4.2. Emic Methodologies

An emic approach to the study of the context of a given text allows us to better understand the meanings behind the text. In the case of PFFs, which are made up of phrases that are deeply enshrined in cultural context, this approach means we can better understand where they come from and why they are culturally significant. The term "emic", along with its counterpart, "etic", was developed by the linguist and anthropologist, Kenneth Pike (1967). Derived from the suffixes of the words "phonemic" and

"phonetic", the two terms represent two different perspectives. The word "phonetic" refers to an outsider's perspective of a language, exemplified in the International Phonetic Alphabet, which allows speakers of any language to record and analyse the sounds of another without being a native speaker. The term "phonemic", on the other hand, refers to the native speakers' representation of that sound from an insider's perspective. For instance, the initial sound in the English word "shoe" is represented by the phonetic symbol [ʃ], or the phoneme /sh/. While each language has its own set of phonemes to represent the units of sound that make up its lexicon, the phonetic representation of these units of sound were developed by an outsider in the attempt to transcribe language using a system that allows comparisons to be drawn with other languages. The emic perspective is therefore an outsider's attempt to accurately reproduce the perceptions of an insider, while the etic perspective is an outsider's attempt to compare, contrast and systematise information about the insider (McCutcheon 1999). In short, the emic approach is subjective, while the etic approach is objective. While each of these approaches has its place in particular areas of study, they work best together, where an emic approach is used to gather information and develop an understanding of the subject, and an etic approach is used to organise the information, for example in the form of a dictionary or database. One key reason that Pike's distinction between emic and etic is so valuable is that we, as researchers, remain constantly aware of the bias that our understanding of our own language puts on our analysis of other languages (Reesink 2008: 867). We need to be careful and well-informed when we choose which glosses to use in translations. An emic approach to gathering this information can help us to more accurately record and describe phrases.

To study PFFs emically is to look at the context of utterances from the perspective of a native speaker. Methodologies for gathering data using an emic approach include surveys and interviews, or any other method that focuses on the perspective of the native speaker. Benish-Weisman and Horenczyk used surveys in their emic study of cultural identity and perceived success amongst Israeli immigrants in Russia (2010). They argued that taking an emic approach provided a richer understanding of participants' experiences (2010: 518). If we apply the same concept to phraseology, we can see a link between the experiences of a culture and the use of a particular expression. Culture provides a context in which the expression is used to communicate a specific meaning that is relevant to that culture. Therefore, directly consulting a native speaker leads to a deeper understanding of the phrase in question, as it is currently used in its relevant cultural context.

While the focus of this study is on the emic approach to gathering information, it is also important to outline the uses of an etic approach. The main advantage of taking both an insider and an outsider approach is that the researcher is presented with two perspectives: a subjective perspective through the eyes of one who is experiencing a phenomenon first-hand and an objective perspective through the eyes of one who is able to take a step back and observe from a contrastive viewpoint. This allows each language to be observed as its own unique phenomenon, while also allowing for cross-linguistic comparison of specific constructions (Reesink 2008: 869). The most effective way to use an emic-etic approach is to gather information with an emic perspective and analyse or systematise it with an etic perspective. While an emic approach is effective for understanding language as it is understood by a native speaker, bilingual dictionaries of false friends are created with an outsider's perspective to cater to outsiders, for example language learners, using a descriptive format.

4.3. Contextualising Phraseological False Friends

In order to share the contextualised concepts behind the PFFs with language learners, dictionaries should be systematised according to their context. This allows language learners to gain a stronger understanding of the context in which the phrases are used, so that they can learn to use them appropriately and distinguish more easily between L1 and L2/L3 phrases. For this concept to work effectively, dictionaries and databases used to record PFFs as a resource for language learners should have the following: 1) a context-centred structure; 2) an index in each language, sorted by alphabetical order; 3) an etymological explanation to describe the origin of the phrase; 4) an explanation of the type of PFF according to its structure, as outlined by Szerszunowicz (2006: 1056–1059); and 5) an emically-informed description.

While *Excuse my French!* admits to being "neither a grammar study nor a serious dictionary", and contains idioms which do not adhere to the *tertium comparationis* of PFFs, it is well-structured in the sense that it is sorted according to situation-specific contexts and contains an index in alphabetical order (Best and Van Waes 2013: 7). Sorting the phrases according to context gives the reader an understanding of the situation in which the use of each idiom is appropriate. However, an alphabetised index in each language is important for cases where the phrase is unknown. After looking up a phrase in the index, the language learner is directed to the context-specific section for an explanation of the phrase and thus, will visualise the phrase in its

relevant context. Unlike traditional alphabetised dictionaries this structure allows language learners to look up phrases according to their contexts for use in real-life situations, which serves as a practical language learning tool, as well as an academic reference tool. In this way, the dictionary would function much like a phrasebook, as well as a dictionary.

The structure of each entry is equally important to the structure of the dictionary or database as a whole. Each entry should contain an etymological explanation of the phrase and its false equivalent, so that it is known to the reader if it is a chance false friend or a semantically divergent one. There should also be an explanation of the type of false friend, as outlined by Szerszunowicz's seven categories of pseudo-equivalents (2006: 1056–1059) mentioned in section two of this chapter. This would prevent the addition of any idioms whose equivalence exists outside their form, as in the case of Szpila's findings in his study of dictionaries (2005: 83) mentioned in section three of this chapter. Finally, each entry requires a detailed explanation of the contemporary use of the phrase, informed through the emic approach to gathering information. This structure provides important information required for language learners to develop a comprehensive understanding of PFFs and their uses.

5. Conclusion

Each language has its own inventory of lexical and phraseological utterances with which to communicate. This inventory is defined by the cultural context in which its texts were created. The phenomenon of phraseological false friends in the field of phraseology should be analysed through the application of an emic approach, in order to gain an insight into this cultural context and to pass this insight on to language learners. Dictionaries and databases of PFFs should be structured with context as their main focal point, sorted by situation-specific contexts with an alphabetised index for reference. Structuring a dictionary or database on PFFs according to the context of each phrase improves the practical usage of these language learning tools as a phrasebook, as well as a dictionary. Each entry in the dictionary or database should include an etymological explanation to describe the origin of the phrase, an explanation of the type of PFF according to its structure, and an emically-informed description to provide a comprehensive record of PFFs to language learners. Contextual information gives language learners an insight into language as it is experienced by a native speaker. Moreover, it aid the development of cross-cultural understandings and improves learners'

metaphorical competence by allowing them to visualise phrases within their cultural context, as a native speaker would.

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Badanie proporcji emicznych: kontekstualizowanie frazeologicznych fałszywych przyjaciół

Streszczenie

W obrębie frazeologii prowadzone są rozmaite badania poświęcone strukturze związków frazeologicznych i ich zastosowaniom. Stałe połączenia wyrazowe występujące w języku są nośnikami znaczeń kulturowych, które są odtwarzane w danym kontekście kulturowym. Wśród związków frazeologicznych – podobnie jak w przypadku wyrazów – występują również jednostki wykazujące znaczne podobieństwa leksykalno-składniowe, ale różniące się znaczeniem. Noszą one nazwę fałszywych przyjaciół tłumacza. Takie połączenia wyrazowe są powiązane z kontekstem, w którym powstają. Celem artykułu jest omówienie znaczenia relacji między tekstem

i kontekstem w badaniach nad frazeologicznymi fałszywymi przyjaciółmi z wykorzystaniem podejścia emicznego. Przeprowadzona analiza pokazuje, że przy opracowywaniu słowników fałszywych przyjaciół istnieje konieczność uwzględniania kontekstu. Badanie tych jednostek, wykazujących pozorne podobieństwo, ma implikacje dla analiz kontrastywnych, twórców programów nauczania, nauczycieli języków obcych, filologów, teoretyków przekładu, tłumaczy oraz frazeografów i frazeologów.