DECEPTIVE COGNATES IN PORTUGESE

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One of the most fascinating subjects for language students and teachers, as well as for translators, is the study and effective use of false or deceptive cognates—words in two different languages which, while retaining a similarity of form, differ markedly in meaning.

Nothing is more treacherous than the misleading similarity of this type of cognate. The student hastens to use the principle of analogy, which can be a most precious resource in some cases and most misleading in others. If he consults a dictionary, this book of wisdom can also be deceptive, since it records not only the present meaning of the word but also old meanings, in case students should have to deal with ancient texts.

The present paper is intended as a modest contribution to the field of English—Portuguese false cognates and not as an exhaustive study on the subject.

The same topic has been covered by Altorcchi, (1) Scatorì, (2) Koessler and Deroquigny, (3) among others, for the Italian, Spanish, and French languages in relation to English. Altorcchi was the first to use the term “deceptive cognates” in his work, and Scatorì later used the same title in a similar study. I shall follow in their footsteps and use the same heading for the sake of uniformity.

In a strict sense, a cognate word is one that has had a parallel development with its corresponding word in another language and has acquired the same prefix or suffix as its equal, e.g.:

### Nouns

**Caution**—(L. cautelae) usually means precaução, cuidado. The word **caução** means ball.

- He opened the door with great caution.  
  - Ele abriu a porta com muito cuidado.
- He is out upon bail.  
  - Ele está solto sob fiança (caução).

**Editor**—(L. editor) is not editor but redator.

**Application**—(L. applicatio) in the sense of requesting or soliciting should be translated by petição, requerimento. The word **aplicação** means diligence.

- My application was turned down.  
  - Minha petição foi negada.
- Ele tem demonstrado muita aplicação nos esforços.
- He has shown great diligence in his studies.

**Library**—(L. libraría) should be translated by biblioteca (Gr. bibliothēke).

- I am going to the Library of Congress today.  
  - Vou hoje à Biblioteca do Congresso.
- My father owns a bookstore downtown.

**Prejudice**—(L. prejudicium) means among other things preconceito, prevenção, not prejuízo (also from L. prejudicium) which means usually loss.

- She has a prejudice against foreigners.  
  - Ele tem prevenção contra estrangeiros.
- Os prejuízos foram grandes.
- The losses were heavy.

### Adjectives

**Callous**—(L. callosus) is used in Portuguese in its original sense, pele grossa, com calosidade, and not in the figurative sense of hardened in mind or feelings—endurecido, insensível.

- His hands are callous from hard work.  
  - Suas mãos são calosas do trabalho pesado.
- He is perfectly callous to flattery.  
  - Ele é absolutamente insensível à lisonja.

**Enrolled**—(OF enrolle) in the sense of registered cannot be translated by enrolado (rolled up) but matriculado, inscrito.

- He enrolled at Georgetown University.  
  - Ele se matriculou na Universidade de Georgetown.

**Engrossed**—(L. ingrossare) does not signify engrossado (thickened); it is used in English in the figurative sense of absorto.

- She was engrossed in her thoughts.  
  - Ela estava absorta em seus pensamentos.

**Spoiled**—(L. spoliare). While in Portuguese the original word maintained the sense of to rob (espollar, roubar, saquear) it has in English also the meaning of spoil with indulgence, and decay,imar e deteriorar respectively.
Decidedly—(L. decidere) has often the sense of incontestávelmente, indubitáveismente.
The Greek language is decidedly a difficult one.
A língua grega é incontestávelmente difícil.
Presently—(L. praesens) besides being presentemente it is also dentro em pouco, brevemente.
I am going to the beach, not now, but presently.
Vou à praia, não agora mas daqui a pouco.

Having considered the various grammatical categories, there is still a point we should like to cover — the field of idioms. This area contains numerous difficulties for the translator. Not only must he use his imagination in an attempt to convey the idea with different words in his own language in order to render the exact mood intended by the author, but he must also avoid translating dignified English into Portuguese slang or vice-versa.

Don't pay attention. He is pulling your leg.
Não ligue. Ele está mexendo com você.

What a day! It is raining cats and dogs.
Mas que dia! Chove a cântaros.
There she was — out of the clear blue sky!
Lá estava ela, quando menos a esperávamos!

Stop beating about the bush.
Deixo de conversa fiada.
It is all water under the bridge.
Agas passadas não movem molhos.