

DECEPTIVE COGNATES IN PORTUGUESE

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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 Altrocchi, (1) Scatori, (2) Koessler and Derocquigny, (3) among others, for the Italian, Spanish, and French languages in relation to English. Altrocchi was the first to use the term "deceptive cognates" in his work, and Scatori 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.:

- (1) Rudolph Altrocchi, *Deceptive Cognate Italian-English and English-Italian* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1935), p. 72.
- (2) Stephen Scatori, "Deceptive Cognates in Spanish", *Modern Language Journal*, XVI, 5 (Feb 1932), 396-401.
- (3) Maxime Koessler and Jules Derocquigny, *Les Faux Amis* (Paris: Librairie Vuibert, 1949), p. 389.

ENGLISH

contribution
immigrant
illegal
vaporous
announce
compare

PORTUGUESE

contribuição
imigrante
ilegal
vaporoso
anunciar
comparar

But there are words, and a great number of them, which have developed along different lines or acquired different affixes, while sharing a common etymological form and retaining the same meaning:

ENGLISH

charge
exchange
impassioned
unarmed
engrave
repent

PORTUGUESE

encargo
câmbio
apaixonado
desarmado
gravar
arrepender

Other pairs of cognates have one or more meanings in common, with additional ones in one language or the other:

ENGLISH

bachelor

cape

cash
case

garden
yard

PORTUGUESE

bacharel
solteiro

capa
cabo

caixa

jardim

Finally, we have cognate words which show a similarity of form but not necessarily of meaning; in some instances they have retained identical meanings, but frequently these are not primary ones. These cognate words are called deceptive cognates. They originally had identical meanings which gradually changed with time and culture, having developed in a different milieu and felt the impact of different ideas and emotions. This phenomenon has a general character, but it is of interest primarily among the romance languages.

Deceptive cognates can be found in every grammatical category, and we present a limited list in every category.

NOUNS

Caution—(L. *cautione*) usually means *precaução, cuidado*. The word *caução* means *bail*.

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*.

Editor should be translated as *publisher*.

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 estudos.

He has shown great diligence in his studies.

Library—(L. *libraria*) should be translated by *biblioteca* (Gr. *bibliotheke*).

I am going to the Library of Congress today.

Vou hoje à Biblioteca do Congresso.

Meu pai tem uma livraria no centro.

My father owns a bookstore downtown.

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

She has a prejudice against foreigners.

Ela 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 *enroller*) 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—(LL *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* (*espoliar, roubar, saquear*) it has in English also the meaning of *spoil with indulgence*, and *decay, mimar e deteriorar* respectively.

She is a spoiled child.
É uma criança mimada.
The heat spoiled the meat.
O calor deteriorou a carne.

Sympathetic—(Gr. *sympathetikos*). A sympathetic man is not **um homem simpático** but **um homem compreensivo**.

A good teacher is always sympathetic.
Um bom professor é sempre compreensivo.
Que jovem simpático!
What a likeable youngman!

VERBS

Advise—(LL. *advisare*) is often not **avisar** but **aconselhar**.
He advised me not to do it.
Ele me aconselhou a não fazê-lo.

Appoint—(VL *appunctare*) is not **apontar** but **nomear, marcar**.
He was appointed governor.
Ele foi nomeado governador.
The time appointed for the meeting is 2 P. M.
A hora marcada para a reunião é 14 hs.

Attend—(L. *attendere*) besides other meanings, it is often **assistir**.
He attended a meeting last night.
Ele assistiu a uma reunião ontem à noite.

Intend—(L. *intendere*) is often **tencionar, pretender, not atender**.
What do you intend to do tonight?
Que pretende você fazer esta noite?

Realize—(Fr. *réaliser*) is often **perceber, dar-se conta**.
Does she realize her error yet?
Ela já se deu conta do seu erro?
I did not realize then it would be so difficult.
Não percebi então que seria tão difícil.

Pretend—(L. *praetendere*) is not **pretender** but **fingir**.
He pretended he was sick.
Ele se fingiu de doente.

Abuse—(L. Eccl. *abusari*) means **usar mal**. English has extended the meaning of the word to signify **insultar**.
He abused his brother.
Ele insultou o irmão.

ADVERBS

Actually—(L. *actualis*) usually it is not **atualmente** but **realmente**.
He actually went to Paris, not London.
Ele realmente foi a Paris, não a Londres.

Eventually—(L. *eventus*) had once the same meaning as **eventualmente**. *Today* the word means **finalmente, conseqüentemente**.
Eventually his plan was adopted.
Finalmente seu plano foi adotado.

Decidedly—(L. *decidere*) has often the sense of **incontestavelmente, indubitavelmente**.

The Greek language is decidedly a difficult one.

A língua grega é incontestavelmente 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. Should we say: **He kicked the bucket**, it should be translated by something like **esticou a canela** and not **faleceu**.

Here are some common idioms with an equivalent free translation. (4)

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.

Deixe de conversa fiada.

It is all water under the bridge.

Águas passadas não movem moínhos.

(4) The translations are Brazilian-Portuguese.