

The Phenomena of False Cognates and Deceptive Cognates: Issues to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching Methodology Based on Set Theory

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Abstract : The aim of this study is to establish differences between the terms 'false cognates', 'false friends' and 'deceptive cognates', usually considered to be synonyms. It will be shown they are not synonyms, since they do not designate the same linguistic process or phenomenon. Despite their differences in meaning, many pairs of formally similar words in two (or more) different languages are true cognates, although they are usually known as 'false' cognates – such as, for instance, the English and Italian lexical items 'assist x assistere'; 'attend x attendere'; 'argument x argomento'; 'apology x apologia'; 'camera x camera'; 'cucumber x coconero'; 'fabric x fabbrica'; 'factory x fattoria'; 'firm x firma'; 'journal x giornale'; 'library x libreria'; 'magazine x magazzino'; 'parent x parente'; 'preservative x preservativo'; 'pretend x pretendere'; 'vacancy x vacanza', to name but a few examples. Thus, one of the theoretical objectives of this paper is firstly to elaborate definitions establishing a distinction between the words that are definitely 'false cognates' (derived from different etyma) and those that are just 'deceptive cognates' (derived from the same etymon). Secondly, based on Set Theory and on the concepts of equal sets, subsets, intersection of sets and disjoint sets, this study is intended to elaborate some theoretical and practical questions that will be useful in identifying more precisely similarities and differences between cognate words of different languages, and according to graphic interpretation of sets it will be possible to classify them and provide discernment about the processes of semantic changes. Therefore, these issues might be helpful not only to the Learning of Second and Foreign Languages, but they could also give insights into Foreign and Second Language Teaching Methodology. Acknowledgements: FAPESP – São Paulo State Research Support Foundation – the financial support offered (proc. n° 2017/02064-7).

Keywords : deceptive cognates, false cognates, foreign language learning, teaching methodology

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