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## **LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE IN LEARNING FRENCH**

The aim of this article is to analyze the possible impact of the English learnt as the first foreign language on learning French as the second foreign language. When learning a second language a student can benefit from knowledge in his/her first language, but the thing is that lexical resemblances between the two languages can become the root of some problems in translation and lead to the occurrence of errors in foreign language learners' production.

Learners of foreign languages may draw on their previous knowledge, especially if the source language and the target language contain many similarities. In translation, many of them fall in the trap of false friends because of this reliance.

For instance, speaking about French for professional purposes, the language of legal documents should be taken in consideration, as an example of the mutual influence of both English and French.

It goes without saying that the development of a body of legal ideas is inseparable from the creation of special legal language, which in the case of English, has three sources: English language itself, Latin and French. In particular, French borrowings have been adopted into English throughout the centuries since before the Norman Conquest. The status of French as the language of law was significant. In fact, as it is mentioned by J. H. Baker, «medieval English lawyers spoke French in courts».

French has long been the source of borrowings in the history of English (as well as English was and is the source of borrowings for French). The French influence on the English lexicon represents the focus of linguistic concern in a considerable number of investigations of the language and its development. French borrowings can be found in different subject fields starting from cuisine and ending with diplomacy.

As many researchers notice, French has had a great influence on legal English language. A vast amount of legal vocabulary is French in origin, including such basic words as appeal, attorney, bailiff, bar, claim, complaint, counsel, court, defendant, demurrer, evidence, indictment, judge, judgment, jury, justice, party, plaintiff, plea, plead, sentence, sue, suit, summon, verdict and voir dire.

Law French was primarily a written language and was pronounced as if it were English. It persisted because of tradition and because most of the books in lawyers' libraries were printed in French or in Latin. It also functioned as a form of shorthand for lawyers to use in recording legal propositions. In other words, spoken English was transcribed in French. This use resulted in an artificial technical vocabulary, uncorrupted by the vicissitudes of vernacular English usage. Law French terminology formed the cornerstone of the law vocabulary. Some of the words still used today are

arrest, assault, attainder, covenant, debtor, demand, disclaimer, escrow, heir, indictment, joinder, lessee, larceny, merger, negligence, nuisance, ouster, proof, remainder, tender, tort, trespass etc.

French also had a limited impact on various features of English syntax. Peter Tiersma mentions an example of French influence: in that language, unlike English, adjectives normally follow the noun (there are some exceptions, but they are not the peculiarity of the legal language). Several such combinations are common in legal English, including attorney general (originally procureur general), court martial (originally cour martiale), fee simple absolute (droit de propriété simple absolu), letters testamentary (lettres testamentaires), and solicitor general (solliciteur general). Also, legal French allowed the creation of words ending in -ee to indicate the person who was the recipient or object of an action (lessee: «the person leased to», employee: the person employed etc.). New words are created according to this pattern, including asylee, condemnee, detainee, expellee and tippee.

The semantic impact of language contact with French also led to the coexistence of native and foreign terms. This can be seen, for instance, in the differences between the written (e.g. legal contracts) and spoken language, when, for example, the verb to start can be used during the negotiations while the borrowed term commence is used in the text of a written agreement.

When two languages come into contact with each other because of many reasons they typically interact and influence each other. Consequently, it leads to the occurrence of different linguistic interferences then to language borrowing.

Although French and English belong to different branches of the Indo-European family of languages their vocabularies share a great number of similarities. Some are words of Latin and Greek origin: e.g., education and theory. A small number of very old genetic cognates go back all the way to Proto-Indo-European e.g., mère – mother and pied – foot. The majority of these pairs of words penetrated the French and English language due to the geographical, historical, and cultural contact between the two countries over many centuries, and here we talk about borrowings. Other cognates can be traced to the conquest of Gaul by Germanic tribes after the collapse of the Roman Empire and by the period of French domination of England after the Norman Conquest.

Most of the borrowings have changed their orthography following different orthographic rules and most likely their meaning as well. Some of the adopted words replaced the original word in the language while others were used together but with slightly or completely different meanings.

Cognates are words in different languages that have similar spelling and meaning. They can help a second-language learner on the tasks of vocabulary expansion and reading comprehension. The learner needs to pay attention to pairs of words that appear similar but are in fact false friends, have different meanings. Partial cognates are pairs of words in two languages that have the same meaning in some but not all contexts. The problem is to recognize, whether the words are cognates or false friends.

False friends or *faux amis* are words in a foreign language bearing a deceptive resemblance to words in one's own language. For example the word actually means really in English. In French *actuellement* has a different meaning; it means at present.

This is a list of English-French *faux amis* (false friends).

**English word      French Equivalent**

- to abuse *insulter* and not *abuser* (which means in English *take advantage of*)  
to accommodate *loger* and not *accommoder* (which means in English *prepare*)  
to achieve *réaliser* and not *achever* (which means in English *complete*)  
actually *en fait* and not *actuellement* (which means in English *at present*)  
caution *prudence* and not *caution* (which means in English *guarantee*)  
character *personnage* and not *caractère* (which means in English *nature*)  
to charge *faire payer* and not *charger* (which means in English *load*)  
check *contrôle* and not *chèque* (which means in English *cheque*)  
close *proche, serré* and not *clos* (which means in English *closed*)  
commodity *marchandise* and not *commodité* (which means in English *convenience*)  
comprehensive *complet* and not *compréhensif* (which means in English *understanding*)  
conductor *contrôleur* and not *conducteur* (which means in English *driver*)  
confection *friandise* and not *conféction* (which means in English *ready-made clothes*)  
consistent *cohérent* and not *consistant* (which means in English *solid, thick*)  
contemplate One of its meanings is *envisager* and not *contempler* (which means in English *gaze at*)  
countenance *expression (visage)* and not *contenance* (which means in English *capacity*)  
to deceive *tromper* and not *décevoir* (which means in English *disappoint*)  
delay *retard* and not *délaï* (which means in English *time limit*)  
to dispose *débarrasser* and not *disposer* (which means in English *arrange*)  
dispute *conflit* and not *dispute* (which means in English *quarrel, argument*)  
engaged *occupé* and not *engagé* (which means in English *committed*)  
estate *domaine* and not *état* (which means in English *state, condition*)  
eventually *finalemant* and not *éventuellement* (which means in English *possibly*)  
expertise *compétence* and not *expertise* (which means in English *expert's report*)  
extra *supplémentaire* and *extra* (which means in English *first-rate*)  
fortunate *chanceux* and not *fortuné* (which means in English *wealthy, well-off*)  
gentle *aimable, doux* and not *gentil* (which means in English *nice, kind*)  
grand *grandiose* and not *grand* (which means in English *tall, big*)  
grapes *raisin* and not *grappe* (which means in English *bunch of grapes*)  
habit *habitude* and not *habit* (which means in English *dress, clothes*)  
hazard *danger* and not *hasard* (which means in English *chance*)  
inconvenient *inopportun* and not *inconvenant* (which means in English *improper*)  
indulge *laisser aller* and not *indulgence* (which means in English *leniency*)

- invaluable *inestimable* and not *non valable* (which means in English *invalid, not valid*)
- lecture *conférence* and not *lecture* (which means in English *reading*)
- location *emplacement* and not *location* (which means in English *renting, lease*)
- mechanic *mécanicien* and not *mécanique* (which means in English *engineering*)
- medicine *médicament* and not *médecin* (which means in English *doctor*)
- mercy *miséricorde* and not *merci* (which means in English *thanks*)
- notice *avis, préavis* and not *notice* (which means in English *note, instructions*)
- partition *séparation* and not *partition* (which means in English *(musical) score*)
- petrol *essence* and not *pétrole* (which means in English *oil, petroleum*)
- photograph *photographie* and not *photographe* (which means in English *photographer*)
- phrase *expression* and not *phrase* (which means in English *sentence*)
- to prevent *empêcher* and not *prévenir* (which means in English *warn*)
- proper *adéquat* and not *propre* (which means in English *clean, decent*)
- to recover *rétablir* and not *recouvrir* (which means in English *cover*)
- to regard *considérer* and not *regarder* (which means in English *look at*)
- relieve *soulager* and not *relever* (which means in English *raise*)
- to resume *recommencer* and not *résumer* (which means in English *sum up*)
- route *itinéraire* and *route* (which means in English *road*)
- rude *grossier* and not *rude* (which means in English *rough, hard*)
- sensible *raisonnable* and not *sensible* (which means in English *sensitive*)
- socket *douille* and not *socquette* (which means in English *sock*)
- store *grand magasin* and not *store* (which means in English *blind shade*)
- suit *costume* and not *suite* (which means in English *rest*)
- to supply *fournir* and not *supplier* (which means in English *implore*)
- to survey *examiner* and not *surveiller* (which means in English *supervise*)
- sympathetic *compatissant* and not *sympathique* (which means in English *nice, friendly*)
- wagon *chariot* and not *wagon* (which means in English *carriage, car*)

In fact, a number of French nouns look like their English equivalents, but their spelling is different:

- une adresse (address),
- un appartement (apartment),
- un comité (committee),
- le confort (comfort),
- un cornes pondant (cornes pondent),
- un ennemi (enemy),
- un exemple (example),
- le gouvernement (government),
- un héros (hero),
- le langage (language),

- la littérature (literature),
- des progrès (progress).

It is sometimes difficult for the students not to confuse the following:

1. nuit and soirée  
«J'ai passé la soirée avec lui» doesn't mean «J'ai passé la nuit avec lui».  
Nuit (night) – time from 23:00 until the morning,  
Soirée (evening) – time from 19:00 to 23:00;
2. chambre (a bedroom) and pièce (a room);
3. librairie (a bookstore) and bibliothèque (a library);
4. injure (offending words) and blessure (a wound);
5. position (opinion, location), place (a job, a square or a place) and poste (a job);
6. caractère (personality) and personnage (a film or a book character);
7. humeur (mood) and humour (sense of humour);
8. monnaie (loose change or currency) and argent (money).

As it is mentioned by the authors of «The Handbook of Linguistics», «we can safely say that these fake friends are a serious linguistic problem which belongs to the field of interference. Interference is the phenomenon we experience when linguistic structures we already learnt interfere with our learning new structures». This problem should be further explored in the context of learning French as the second foreign language.

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