ENGLISH-GREEK FALSE FRIENDS: NOW THEY ARE, NOW THEY AREN'T

Marina Mattheoudakis & Paschalia Patsala

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

marmat@enl.auth.gr, ppatsala@enl.auth.gr

Abstract

False friends are words in different languages which share similar phonological and morphological forms but whose meanings diverge to various degrees; as a result, they can easily mislead their users and create communication difficulties. The present study aims to examine the use of some frequent English-Greek false friends by Greek learners of English. In particular, it will explore: (a) students' knowledge of some commonly used English- Greek false friends, and (b) the effect of learners' proficiency level on the knowledge of these words. To this aim, a test was designed and distributed to 104 native Greek students of the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Students were divided into two proficiency groups: intermediate and advanced. Our findings suggest that the majority of the false friends examined pose difficulties to both groups of students. Although advanced learners performed better than intermediate ones, no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups.

1. Introduction

Cognates are traditionally defined as linguistic forms which are historically derived from the same source (Crystal 1997: 67). Such a definition implies that cognates will be particularly common across languages which belong to the same language family; however, cognates can also be found in languages that are historically unrelated. In those languages cognates may occur because of borrowing or loanwords (Αναστασιάδη 1994, Friel & Kennison 2001). True cognates resemble each other in meaning and phonology, though some researchers include a third criterion as well, that of orthography.

False cognates or false friends[1] are words that share the same phonology and perhaps orthography, in languages with similar orthographic systems, but their meanings are different or overlapping (Gernsbacher & Schlesinger 1997, Mattheoudakis 1998, Schlesinger & Malkiel 2005). False cognates have also been referred to as "interlingual homographs" (Klein & Doctor 1992), "homographic non-cognates" (Gerard & Scarborough 1989), "pseudocognates" (de Groot & Comijs 1995), "deceptively transparent words" (Laufer 1989,

---

[1] The two terms "false cognates" and "false friends" will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

1997) or "misleading cognates" (Taylor 1976). Sometimes the distinction between true and false cognates becomes quite complicated, as cognates will be true in some contexts and false in others, since only some aspects of their meaning or use will be common (Browne 1982, Mattheoudakis 1998, Taylor 1976). Such cognates have been termed *partial false friends* as opposed to *absolute false friends*, which share no common meanings. Gouws, Prinsloo and de Schryver (2004) have suggested that false friends can be graded according to both their falseness and friendship. They should be thus seen as placed on a continuum where the strongest version of false friends, i.e., the absolute false friends, will occupy the one pole and partial false friends the middle area up to the other pole. According to them, partial friends indicate not only the varying relations between two languages but they are also the result of language dynamics which can change true friends into false friends and vice versa. This view is similarly shared by Chamizo Domínguez & Nerlich (2002) who suggest that false friends are the semantic relics of pragmatic language use over time and space.

False cognates have been of interest to psycholinguists, to cognitive psychologists, as well as to researchers investigating the word recognition process in bilinguals and the relative activation levels of each lexicon, as many studies have used interlingual homographs (e.g., Dijkstra *et al.* 2000, Klein & Doctor 1992). Cognitive psychologists have suggested that cognates are pre-existing schemas which cause the automatic pairing of stimulus and response without allowing the speaker to pay any attention to the semantic differences between the stimulus and the response (Baddeley 1966, Shiffrin & Schneider 1977, both cited in Shlesinger & Malkiel 2005). Kirsner *et al.* (1993) proposed a model of bilingual lexical representation, according to which, words with common morphology, and not exclusively cognates, are stored together in clusters. Cognate translations share the same root morpheme, and thus, they are stored within the same morphological cluster, regardless of language (see also Cristoffanini *et al.* 1986).

Cognates have also attracted translators' and educators' interest because they have been found to provide advantages over non-cognates to both translators and language learners. On the other hand, relevant studies have shown that false cognates can become particularly problematic for translators (cf. Schlesinger & Malkiel 2005) and second language learners (Mattheoudakis 1998, Meara 1993).

In the case of translation or interpreting, Ivir (1981: 58) suggests that the translator will start his/her search for translation equivalence from formal correspondence and thus the cognate is the first solution to be considered; avoidance of this reaction requires a deliberate effort. As a result, cognates are over-represented in both translation and interpreting (Gellerstam 1986). Simonetto (2002) and Dodds (1999) have also found that translation and interpretation students will even create new cognates by anglicizing an Italian term. In this respect, false cognates are particularly problematic and have often deceived not only novices

but also highly experienced translators and interpreters (Bastin 2000, Malkiel 2006, Shlesinger & Malkiel 2005, Venuti 2002).

With regard to language learners, results of recent studies indicate that cognates provide learners with a significant advantage: in particular, L2 learners acquire and recall cognate translations more easily. What is more, fewer learning sessions are needed to help them recall cognates than non-cognates and response latencies in translating cognates are faster than for non-cognates (de Groot & Keijzer 2000, Ellis and Beaton 1993). Such findings actually suggest that cognates can be a significant source of positive transfer and can facilitate vocabulary acquisition in L2 as they offer an encouraging springboard into learning a new language (see also Nation 1990, Odlin 1989, Ringbom 1987). At the same time, however, false cognates have been found to be a persistent source of interference for the second language learner when morpho-phonological similarity between an L1 and an L2 word misleads them to assume semantic similarity as well. Translation-recognition studies actually suggest that once an inappropriate association is learned, it may become more difficult for the learner to replace it with the correct association than it would be with words that are morpho-phonologically different (Altarriba & Mathis 1997, Talamas *et al.* 1999). False friends are particularly problematic when they share some aspects of their meaning or use (partial false friends) rather than when their meanings are completely unrelated (absolute false friends). Unfortunately, partial false friends are far more frequent than absolute false friends (Vinay & Darbelnet 1958/1995: 69). According to Zethsen (2004), the phenomenon of false friends is more subtle than has been so far implied. False friends are not just words that are formally similar but semantically overlapping or unrelated. Divergences between two formally similar words in L1 and L2 may be observed at various levels: at the level of denotation, the level of connotation, frequency, formality, effect on the reader, etc. Thus it has been suggested that for two words to be true cross-linguistic equivalents, they must agree on all those levels (Zethsen 2004). Since such absolute equivalences are very rare to find, false friends usually present various levels of divergences: in this respect, they merit researchers' interest and language learners' heightened awareness.

2. English-Greek false friends

The research reported in this study was inspired by the publication of a dictionary of English-Greek false friends (2005). Greek and English share a large number of cognates – both true and false ones – since they are genetically related. This means that cognates are often the result of a single lexical stem which developed independently in the two languages into lexical items with a similar form. Other pairs of similar sounding words, however, are the result of borrowing. The process of borrowing is not unidirectional and may actually refer to three possible types of borrowing: (a) English and Greek borrowing a word from a third

language (e.g., Latin *bonus*), (b) English borrowing a word from Greek (e.g., *apologetic*), or (c) Greek borrowing a word from English (e.g., *film*). Such borrowings are due to denotative (material, financial or cultural) as well as to connotative (psychological) reasons (cf. Αναστασιάδη 1994). The former interprets borrowing between English and Greek as a process of cultural as well as linguistic exchange, whereby the L1 borrowed a word in order to denote new objects, new products or new technological achievements, which were the result of importation. This is what happened, for example, with several English loanwords in Greek which belong to the field of technology; also, English as well as most European languages borrowed Greek words related to areas of knowledge that had been highly cultivated in ancient Greece, e.g., philosophy, medicine, etc. The reasons for borrowing are psychological when L1 borrows from L2 a new reference for a referent which already exists in L1. In this case L1 speakers use the borrowed L2 lexical unit when this is considered part of a prestigious code (cf. Anastassiadi 1994). We believe that the use of several English loanwords in Greek (e.g., *sorry, bye bye,* etc.) may be due to connotative (psychological) reasons.

When a new lexical item enters the language, various semantic and other changes take place. Part of the word's original meaning is usually retained but new denotations and/or connotations may develop in the L1 (cf. Chamizo Domínguez & Nerlich 2002). Other more subtle changes may concern the level of formality of the new word, its frequency of use in L1 – for example, it may be lower or higher than that in L2 – as well as its register. Such changes take place gradually and are necessary in order to satisfy the linguistic and expressive needs of the L1 speakers. The result of such changes is quite often the creation of false friends.

3. The present study

Previous studies into false friends in various languages explored semantic and pragmatic differences between them as well as the acquisition problems they create to foreign language learners (Fischer & Lavric 2003, Laufer 1990, Mattheoudakis 1998). Such studies suggest that false friends very often resist acquisition as even advanced language learners tend to misuse and misinterpret them. This paper aims to examine the use of English-Greek false friends by Greek learners of English. The study of this lexical group is of particular interest to language educators and learners because of (a) the large number of loanwords in the two languages, (b) their high frequency, and (c) Greek learners' preference for English as a foreign language.

The large number of commonly used Greek loanwords in English provides the Greek learner with an asset from the very early stages of language learning. Especially in comprehension, Greek learners can take advantage of a number of lexical similarities between Greek and English. However, previous studies indicated that such words are often overused in

order to cover lexical gaps in students' vocabulary knowledge or misused in collocations which are transferred into English (Mattheoudakis 1998). Thus, the very likeness often becomes a source of misuse.

3.1 Aims

Taking the above findings into consideration, the present study aims to examine two types of English-Greek false friends: (a) English words deriving from Greek (e.g., *anonymous*) and (b) English words borrowed by Greek (e.g., *group*). To our knowledge, this is the first study that focuses on both types of false friends. First we compared the senses of the loanwords with those of their sources (e.g., *anonymous* vs. *ανώνυμος* (anonimos)*, group* vs. *γκρουπ* (grup), etc.); secondly, we tested Greek learners' knowledge of particular senses of those false friends in English. Their performance on this test was related to their level of language proficiency, as this was assessed with X_Lex, the Swansea Levels Test
 (Meara & Milton 2003).

3.2 Materials

X_Lex is a computer-delivered test that measures students' lexical and structural vocabulary knowledge at the most frequent levels in English. It thus provides a vocabulary profile and a vocabulary score, which allows teachers to assess learners' levels quickly and easily for placement purposes. Scores from the test have been normalised against international language standards. The test works on the principle that vocabulary size is a good indicator of general foreign language ability. According to its designers, vocabulary knowledge and size correlate particularly well with students' scores in reading comprehension, written tests of foreign language ability and tests of foreign language grammatical knowledge (Meara & Milton 2003). Thus, participants' scores in X_Lex were expected to be indicative of their general level of language proficiency.

For the purpose of this study, a test on English-Greek false friends was designed. This consisted of 35 sentences from the COBUILD corpus, slightly modified for the purpose of our experiment. Twenty-five (25) sentences included a false friend: 16 were lexical items that English has borrowed from Greek (e.g., *theatre*) and 9 were words that Greek has borrowed from English (e.g., *group*). All false friends selected from the corpus had a high or moderately high frequency. The rest of the sentences (10) were randomly chosen from the same corpus and used as distractors. The test was a translation task and required students to translate into Greek only the underlined part of the sentence which contained the false friend or the distractor:

e.g. His customers believed that <u>organic food was healthier</u> and demand for it was steadily increasing.

3.3 Procedure

The test on false friends was initially piloted with a group of 42 first-year students at the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. On the basis of their comments and feedback, we decided to re-write the instructions in order to further clarify them; we also replaced five of the original sentences of the test so as to provide more helpful context for the translation task.

The revised test was finally administered to 104 native Greek students of the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; all participants were at the first year of their studies. Prior to the test, students took the X_Lex in the computer lab; this lasted approximately 10 minutes. The test on false friends was given on a different date and took approximately 30 minutes. No problems or difficulties were encountered during the completion of the tests.

4. Selection and semantic analysis of false friends

The *English-Greek Dictionary of False Friends*, published by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (2005), was the primary source used in the present study for the selection of false friends. This contains approximately 1,000 entries and, according to its editor, these are English words whose semantic range is greater than that of their Greek counterparts (p. xviii). This means that one or more of the senses of the English lexical item cannot be rendered by the corresponding lexical item in Greek.

Two main criteria were used for the selection of false friends: (a) the frequency of the lexical items in English; this information was retrieved from the Cobuild Corpus, and (b) the semantic deviations between loanwords and their sources. With regard to the former criterion, we aimed to examine false friends which are frequently used in English. However, as all false friends selected are polysemous in English, the frequency regards the full range of senses of the words and not the particular senses examined. Regarding the latter, our aim was to shed light on those false friends whose semantic deviations in the two languages are mostly contextually dependent and therefore, interesting to analyse and challenging to learn.

As already mentioned, students were tested on two types of false friends: English words deriving from Greek, and English words borrowed by Greek.
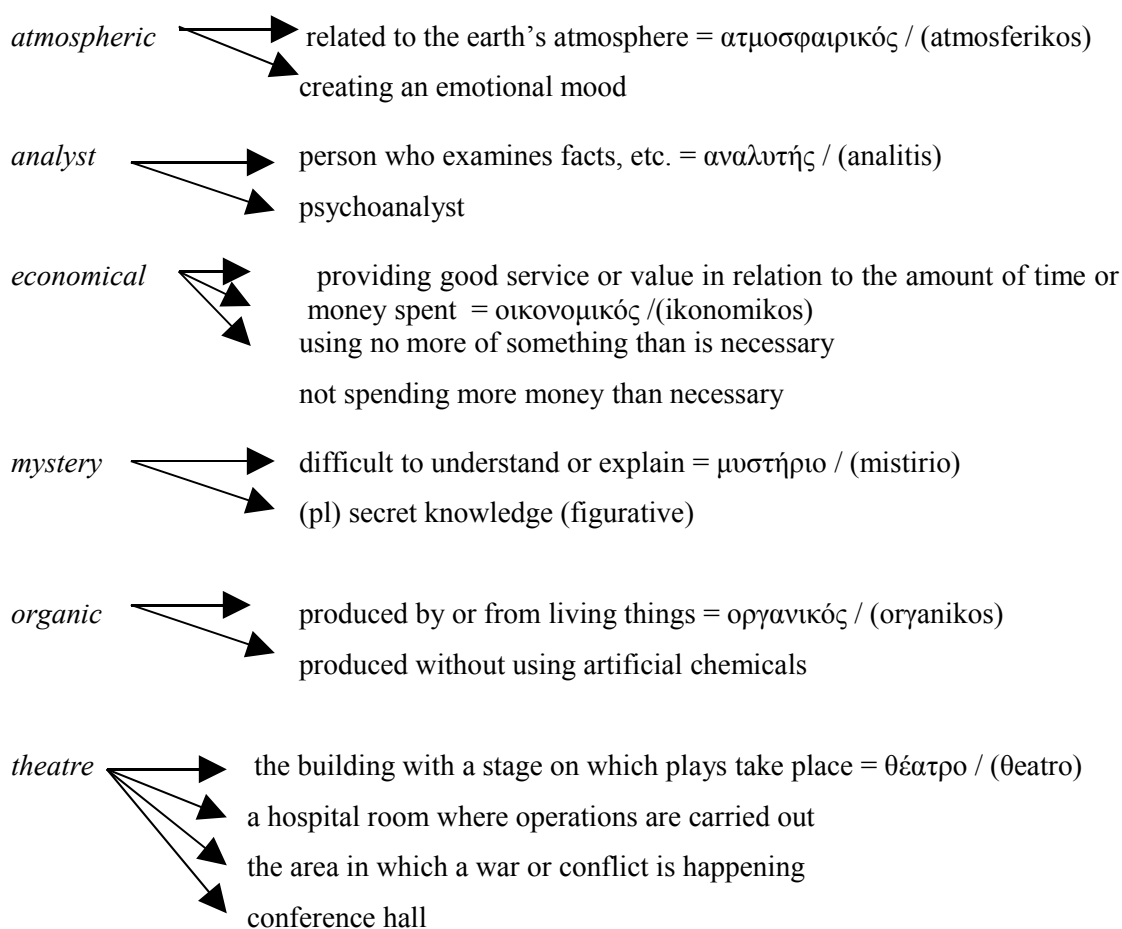
English words deriving from Greek

The first type of false friends included both absolute and partial false friends. As absolute false friends bear no semantic relatedness with their Greek sources, their semantic differences can be clearly and easily indicated through a simple analysis of their meanings. The following

table presents the absolute false friends included in the test and provides the senses of each pair of words in English and Greek, in the two respective columns.

Table 1. Semantic analysis of the absolute false friends in English and Greek

Absolute false friends	English	Greek
apology/απολογία (apolojia)	statement saying that you are sorry	defending oneself against accusations
sympathies/συμπάθειες (simbaθies)	showing that you understand and care about somebody's problems	positive feelings towards somebody
scheme/σχήμα (sxima)	a plan for doing something	shape
pathetic/παθητικός (paθitikos)	weak, useless	passive
tactical/τακτικός (taktikos)	carefully planned	tidy, organised

With respect to the partial false friends, there are varying degrees of semantic resemblance between the source and the loanword. All partial false friends selected in this study are polysemous in English and have a wider range of senses than their Greek source. As the following examples indicate, only the first of those senses corresponds to that of the Greek source:

atmospheric → related to the earth's atmosphere = ατμοσφαιρικός / (atmosferikos)
creating an emotional mood

analyst → person who examines facts, etc. = αναλυτής / (analitis)
psychoanalyst

economical → providing good service or value in relation to the amount of time or money spent = οικονομικός /(ikonomikos)
using no more of something than is necessary
not spending more money than necessary

mystery → difficult to understand or explain = μυστήριο / (mistirio)
(pl) secret knowledge (figurative)

organic → produced by or from living things = οργανικός / (orγanikos)
produced without using artificial chemicals

theatre → the building with a stage on which plays take place = θέατρο / (θeatro)
a hospital room where operations are carried out
the area in which a war or conflict is happening
conference hall

326

Apart from the partial false friends examined above, other cases of false friends present more subtle semantic differences and are, therefore, more difficult to analyse and explain. In particular, their definitions in English and Greek, as these are cited in the respective monolingual dictionaries, are very similar and in this respect, such pairs of words should be regarded as translationally equivalent. This is the case with *academic* and *ακαδημαϊκός* (akaδimaikos*), energetic* and *ενεργητικός* (enerjitikos), *anonymous* and *ανώνυμος* (anonimos), *exotic* and *εξωτικός* (eksotikos), *sphere* and *σφαίρα* (sfera). However, corpora nowadays allow us access to real language data and enable us to test dictionary definitions against the actual use of words in language. A close examination of the use of the lexical items mentioned above in the Cobuild Corpus and the Hellenic National Corpus (henceforth HNC), respectively, suggests that in several contexts these are not translational equivalents. The English loanwords seem to form collocations (e.g., *academic performance, energetic debate, anonymous actors,* etc.) whose meaning is easily inferred, but which require different lexical choices when translated into Greek (e.g., *academic performance* = 'σχολική επίδοση', *energetic debate* = 'έντονη συζήτηση', *anonymous actors* = 'άγνωστοι ηθοποιοί', *exotic wife* = 'εντυπωσιακή σύζυγος', *academic sphere* = 'ακαδημαϊκός κύκλος'); therefore, such pairs of words should be regarded as partial false friends (cf. Zethsen 2004). The following sentences from the Cobuild Corpus exemplify the point made above:

(a) The best predictor of student's *academic* performance in high school is IQ.
(b) The public can understand the different vision of the two parties if there's an *energetic* debate over a difference.
(c) The live-action turtles were played by *anonymous* actors.
(d) He stayed in the country with George and his *exotic* Russian wife.
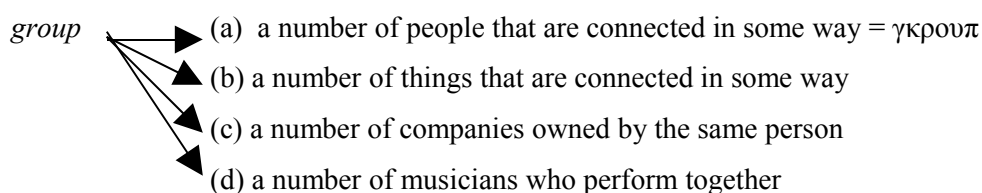(e) Dr Poole said it was difficult to break back into the academic *sphere* after taking time out to have a family.

English words borrowed by Greek

The second type of false friends includes 9 words borrowed by Greek – either directly from English or from French via English. All of them are partial false friends, since they are polysemous in English but Greek has borrowed only some of their senses. Two of them have been adapted to the Greek phonological and morphological system (*κόπια, λοταρία*) but the rest of them have not (*γκρουπ, μπολ, κόουτς, κουλ, σέρβις, σόκιν, στάνταρ*). However, most of them have been fully integrated in Greek and this becomes obvious when we examine their use in the HNC. No cases were found in the corpus of translation, explanation or paraphrase provided for those loanwords. In very few instances (see examples below), the loanword is
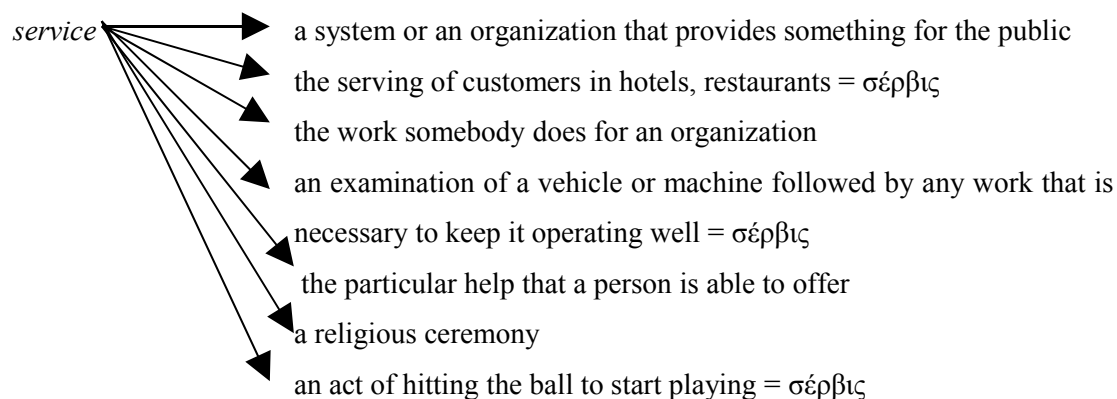
placed within inverted commas and such use indicates that it is being gradually integrated in the borrowing language (cf. Rey-Debove 1973). Due to space limitations, we have chosen to analyse the most interesting cases of false friends of this category.

Γκρουπ (grup) has the highest frequency in the HNC (745 occurrences), compared to the other false friends of this category. According to the *English-Greek Dictionary of False Friends* (2005), *γκρουπ* is used in Greek only in the first sense indicated below. However, in the Greek corpus it is mainly found in contexts related to music (e.g., *rock groups,* etc.) – that is, in the fourth sense – and less frequently in the first sense (e.g., *group of players, group of tourists, group of students*):

group (a) a number of people that are connected in some way = γκρουπ
(b) a number of things that are connected in some way
(c) a number of companies owned by the same person
(d) a number of musicians who perform together

In one case, *γκρουπ* was also found in the third sense. Although such equivalences are not indicated in the dictionary, it is possible that eventually *group* and *γκρουπ* will become translationally equivalent in all contexts.

Service is a highly polysemous lexical item in English and the Greek loan *σέρβις* (servis) has borrowed three of its senses. As a result, this loanword is polysemous in Greek as well; yet its frequency in the HNC is much lower than that of the loanwords previously examined (128 occurrences).
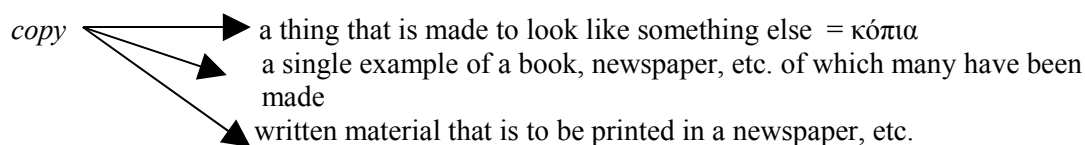
service a system or an organization that provides something for the public
the serving of customers in hotels, restaurants = σέρβις
the work somebody does for an organization
an examination of a vehicle or machine followed by any work that is necessary to keep it operating well = σέρβις
the particular help that a person is able to offer
a religious ceremony
an act of hitting the ball to start playing = σέρβις

Apart from the senses indicated above, the loan *σέρβις* is frequently found in Greek in the compounds *σελφ-σέρβις* (self-service) and *ρουμ σέρβις* (room service). *Σέρβις* is quite frequently used in inverted commas, at least in the senses of 'providing service in hotels' and 'hitting the ball' (examples 1 and 2, respectively). We believe that this may be due to the fact that in those senses, *σέρβις* is more frequently used in speech rather than in writing.

1. Εμείς περιμένουμε τη σωστή, τη λογική προσφορά, για να ανοίξουμε και να δώσουμε στους Αθηναίους και στους ξένους επισκέπτες την ατμόσφαιρα, την ποιότητα των προϊόντων και το *"σέρβις"* που συνήθισαν, με σερβιτόρους ντυμένους με σμόκιν, χειμώνα και καλοκαίρι.
2. Ο Τζόρτζεβιτς είχε το γενικό πρόσταγμα, ο Τζιοβάνι έβαζε τις ξεχωριστές πινελιές, τα τέσσερα κοντά «ζιζάνια» (Μαυρογενίδης, Γιαννακόπουλος, Νινιάδης, Πουρσαϊτίδης) δεν άφηναν τους φιλοξενούμενους σε ησυχία, το 1-0 (με το *«σέρβις»* του Τζιοβάνι και την κεφαλιά του Γιαννακόπουλου στο 15') ήταν σωστή ανταμοιβή.

The lexical item *copy* is the source of the Greek loan *κόπια* (kop □a). As already mentioned, this has been morpho-phonologically adapted in Greek and has even formed a plural form: *κόπιες* (kop □es). The frequency of this loan – in both singular and plural – is not particularly high (102). This may be due to the fact that the loan has borrowed only one sense of the English source, but also because its use is limited almost exclusively to a particular context: *κόπια* nearly always refers to the copy of a film.

3. Μέχρι στιγμής δεν είναι σίγουρο αν οι *παραγωγοί* θα προλάβουν να στείλουν εγκαίρως *κόπια της ταινίας* για προβολή στη συγκεκριμένη ημερομηνία (= copy of the film).

copy → a thing that is made to look like something else = κόπια
a single example of a book, newspaper, etc. of which many have been made
written material that is to be printed in a newspaper, etc.

Κόπια is also found in contexts like the ones below, where it has the meaning of 'replica':

4. "Δεν υπάρχει χειρότερο πράγμα για μένα από το να γίνεις η *κόπια του εαυτού σου*", λέει (= replica of yourself).

Finally, *σόκιν* (sokin) derives from *shocking* which covers at least two different senses:

shocking → something that offends or upsets people; that is morally wrong = σόκιν
very bad
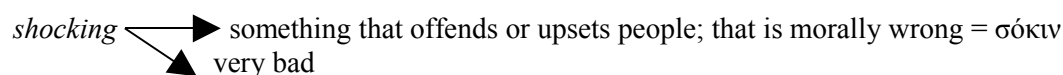
The Greek loan, on the other hand, has a very limited semantic content and can be used only in the sense of 'morally wrong'; hence, its low frequency (12):

5. Στις συνεδριάσεις του υπουργικού συμβουλίου είναι γνωστή ως αξεπέραστη στα *σόκιν ανέκδοτα* (= shocking jokes).

In order to render the meaning of 'offending or upsetting', Greek has coined a new adjective from the same source: *σοκαριστικός* (sokaristikos):

6. Χθες ο υπουργός Δημόσιας Τάξης ... παραδέχτηκε ότι ήταν *σοκαριστική η εικόνα* του μαντρώματος σε γήπεδο των αλλοδαπών και δήλωσε ότι θα γίνει προσπάθεια να συντομεύσει ο χρόνος ταλαιπωρίας των μεταναστών (= shocking picture).

5. Results

In order to test Greek students' knowledge of false friends, we chose to use these words either
(a) in the sense not shared by their Greek counterpart (e.g., *acting coach, colour scheme*), or (b) in collocations where the Greek counterpart is not an appropriate translation equivalent (e.g., *energetic debate, anonymous actors,* etc.). Our hypothesis was that students would disregard any helpful contextual cues provided and assign to the words examined the meaning of their Greek false friend.

On the basis of their performance in X_Lex, students were divided into two proficiency level groups: 56 intermediate and 48 advanced students. Their answers were recorded on an SPSS file and frequency counts of correct and wrong answers given by each group were run for each false friend separately. This allowed us to examine the degree of difficulty of each lexical item examined for the intermediate and advanced learners, separately. Finally, we used one-way ANOVA in order to compare the two groups of students and examine whether there are any significant differences between the scores attained by each group.

The results indicated that most false friends were translated incorrectly by the majority of the students in both groups. The only false friend that was correctly translated by the vast majority of students was the lexical item *shocking* in the phrase *shocking news* (100% of the advanced group and 85.7% of the intermediate group). Two false friends were translated correctly by almost half of the students in each group (*analyst* and *economical*), while the false friends *academic, group, atmospheric,* and *tactical* received the lowest number of correct answers by both groups of students (see Table 2 for a comprehensive breakdown of the results).

Table 2. Percentage of correct and wrong answers given by the intermediate and advanced group

	Intermediate group		Advanced group	
	correct	**wrong**	**correct**	**wrong**
bowl	17.9	82.1	18.8	81.2
exotic	10.7	89.3	14.6	85.4
lottery	32.1	67.9	35.4	64.6
mystery	10.7	89.3	12.5	87.5
organic	23.2	76.8	22.9	77.1
shocking	85.7	14.3	100	0
sympathies	39.3	60.7	56.3	43.7
theatre	41.1	58.9	64.6	35.4
analyst	50	50	58.3	41.7
anonymous	33.9	66.1	35.4	64.6
apology	30.4	69.6	43.8	56.2
copy	19.6	80.4	33.3	66.7
service	25	75	35.4	64.6
standard	26.8	73.2	45.8	54.2

academic	1.8	98.2	4.2	95.8
coach	26.2	73.8	33.3	66.7
cool	14.3	85.7	27.1	72.9
economical	51.8	48.2	52.1	47.9
group	1.8	98.2	4.2	95.8
scheme	8.9	91.1	18.8	81.2
sphere	17.9	82.1	20.8	79.2
pathetic	33.9	66.1	62.5	37.5
atmospheric	7.1	92.9	0	100
energetic	21.4	78.6	25	75
tactical	0	100	6.3	93.7

With respect to the two types of false friends examined – English words deriving from Greek and English words borrowed by Greek – students of both groups attained better scores in those of the second type (advanced learners: 41.23% vs. 31.7%; intermediate learners: 27.71% vs. 21.2%).

Comparing the two groups of students, advanced learners scored higher than intermediate ones in both types of false friends (31.7% vs. 21.2% for the first type and 41.23% vs. 27.71% for the second type). However, overall, the differences between the two groups are not statistically significant. Significant differences between them were found only in their answers to four false friends: *shocking, theatre, standard,* and *pathetic.* In those cases, advanced learners performed significantly better than intermediate ones (p<.05).

6. Discussion

The majority of all false friends examined were wrongly translated into their Greek counterparts by most students, regardless of their level. Previous studies found that intermediate EFL learners, who are likely to have greater uncertainty about their L2 knowledge than more fluent individuals, tend to rely more on formal similarity (Talamas *et al.* 1999). In our study, although advanced learners did better than the intermediate group, the results of the test indicated that advanced learners' competence in L2 does not contribute to significantly better results. The contextual cues that were carefully provided in each sentence in order to facilitate learners with the translation task were often ignored and form familiarity misinformed their choices. Similarly, previous studies on the effects of cognates on vocabulary learning (e.g., Ringbom 1987, Holmes & Ramos 1993), as well as studies on word association tasks (e.g., Meara 1984), all stressed the importance of formal similarity in the organization of the L2 mental lexicon. In particular, Holmes & Ramos (1993: 92) found that their learners relied exclusively on word familiarity and ignored any contextual cues in reading comprehension tasks, a phenomenon which they termed "reckless guessing". Similar findings were reported by Hall (2002) who aimed to test the parasitic model of vocabulary development. According to this, the key to learning a word is first to establish a form

representation; after registering the form, learners will try to identify a translation equivalent through translation into L1, by an L1 or L2 definition, a picture, contextual cues, etc. Hall used pseudo-cognates in his study and confirmed the Parasitic Hypothesis. With cognates (or pseudo-cognates), of course, the formal representation is already there, so little new must be learnt at the form level. Hall found that as the form features of the L1 and L2 word overlap, this activates automatically the meaning of the L1 word, via spreading from lexical to conceptual levels of the network (2002: 82). According to the Parasitic Strategy, such transitory activation in the recognition process can lead to more permanent connections and to the fossilization of false cognates, thus influencing the vocabulary acquisition. This argument may actually account for our learners' lexical errors in the translation task and for the low scores of the advanced group. In this case, inappropriate associations have been formed and learned and it becomes very difficult for the learners to replace those with the correct ones (cf. Altarriba & Mathis 1997).

The results of our study shed light on yet another interesting aspect of English-Greek false friends, namely, their collocations in the two respective languages. As already discussed, the Greek translational equivalent of some of the cognates examined is in some contexts the Greek counterpart (real friend); in other contexts, however, this would be clearly inappropriate. In the collocations examined (*academic performance, energetic debate* and *anonymous actors*) the Greek cognate is a false friend; yet, such collocations were wrongly rendered by most intermediate and advanced learners into *ακαδημαϊκή* instead of *σχολική επίδοση, ενεργητική* instead of *έντονη συζήτηση,* and *ανώνυμοι* instead of *άγνωστοι ηθοποιοί.* The truth is that such combinations are particularly misleading, first because they include a Greek-originated word which usually functions as a real friend; secondly, because there is nothing conceptually wrong with the collocations resulting from the translation of those cognates into their Greek counterparts: *ακαδημαϊκή επίδοση,* etc. However, these are not acceptable collocations in Greek in the contexts presented, where, for example in the particular case, there is clear reference to young learners' performance in the school setting. In a recent article, Wolter (2006) provided a theoretical account for how learners might draw upon L1 collocational knowledge when making assumptions about forming collocations in L2. What our study indicates is that the formal similarity between false friends can actually mislead learners into transferring L2 collocations into L1, even when these are clearly inappropriate in the context provided. If such (inappropriate) collocations are repeatedly transferred and used in L1, they might be expected to result in restructuring the L1 lexical network. Such restructuring would involve the use and integration of the above collocations in Greek. This is actually a phenomenon already witnessed in Greek with other false friends (e.g., *tipikos* in the sense of 'typical'/'characteristic').

With respect to the learners' better performance in the second type of false friends (English loans in Greek), we assume – and that is a tentative assumption – that this might be due to the limited variety of contexts in which they are used in Greek. This implies that participants have associated them with particular collocations but not with others (e.g., *σόκιν ανέκδοτα* ('shocking jokes'), but not **σόκιν νέα* ('shocking news')). Thus, their use in any other context may seem inappropriate or sound 'foreign'. The ability to limit the use of such lexical items in particular contexts and collocations seems to improve with learners' language proficiency. Advanced participants' better performance in the second type of false friends actually indicates a richer lexical network; this allows them to connect the English false friend (e.g., *standard, shocking,* etc.) with two or more translational equivalents in Greek and thus interpret it according to context.

7. Conclusion

False friends in English and Greek present an important challenge for language learners and L2 teachers. The large number of cognates and loanwords in the two languages can obviously function as a rich source of positive transfer which will facilitate L2 vocabulary acquisition. However, as the findings of our study indicate, this is not always the case: even true friends can change into false friends according to the context they are found in. Thus, sometimes they are true friends and therefore, helpful, while other times they are false friends, and potentially, misleading. Teachers and learners need to become aware of the different semantic and pragmatic nuances and collocations those words have in their native language and in L2, whether this is English or Greek. To this aim, the use of context, provision of translational equivalents and of phraseological equivalence can prove particularly helpful in the teaching/learning context. Apart from its pedagogic value, this approach will allow teachers and learners to analyse the various ways in which speakers of different languages use formally similar words to conceptualise reality.

References

Altarriba J. & K. Mathis (1997). "Conceptual and Lexical Development in Second Language Acquisition". *Journal of Memory and Language* 36(4), 550-568.

Αναστασιάδη Ά. (1994) *Νεολογικός δανεισμός της νεοελληνικής: άμεσα δάνεια από τη γαλλική και αγγλικοαμερικανική μορφοφωνολογική ανάλυση*. Θεσσαλονίκη: ΑΠΘ.

Bastin G. (2000). "Evaluating beginners' re-expression and creativity: A positive approach". *The Translator* 6(2), 231-245.

Browne R.L. (1982). Aural and visual recognition of cognates and their implications for the teaching of cognate languages. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Chamizo Domínguez P.J. & B. Nerlich (2002). "False friends: their origin and semantics in some selected languages". *Journal of Pragmatics* 34, 1833-1849.

Cristoffanini P., K. Kirsner & D. Milech (1986). "Bilingual lexical representation: The status of Spanish-English cognates". *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 38A, 367–393.

Crystal D. (1997). Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics (4th ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

De Groot A.M.B. & H. Comijs (1995). "Translation recognition and translation production: Comparing a new and an old tool in the study of bilingualism". *Language Learning* 45(3), 467-509.

De Groot A.M.B. & R. Keijzer (2000). "What is hard to learn is easy to forget: The roles of word concreteness, cognate status, and word frequency in foreign-language vocabulary learning and forgetting". *Language Learning* 50(1), 1-56.

Dijkstra T., E. de Bruijn, H. Shriefers & S. Ten Brinke (2000). "More on interlingual homograph recognition: language intermixing versus explicitness of instruction". *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 3(1), 69-78.

Dodds J.M. (1999). "Friends, false friends and foes or back to basics in L1 to L2 translation". In G.M. Anderman and M.A. Rogers (eds), *Word, text, translation: Liber Amicorum for Peter Newmark*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 56-65.

Ellis N.C. & A. Beaton (1993). "Psycholinguistic determinants of foreign language vocabulary learning". *Language Learning* 43(4), 559-617.

Fischer F. & E. Lavric (2003). "Real and pseudo-divergent learning structures: On some pitfalls in French and Italian business language for German learners". *IRAL* 41(1), 55-85.

Friel B.M. & S.M. Kennison (2001). "Identifying German-English cognates, false cognates, and non-cognates: Methodological issues and descriptive norms". *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 4, 249-274.

Gellerstam M. (1986). "Translationese in Swedish novels translated from English". In L.Wollin and H. Lindquist (eds), *Translation studies in Scandinavia*. Lund: CWK Gleerup, 88-95.

Gerard L.D. & D.L. Scarborough (1989). "Language-specific lexical access of homographs by bilinguals". *Journal of Experimental Psychology. Learning, Memory and Cognition* 15(2), 305-315.

Gernsbacher M.A. & M. Schlesinger (1997). "The proposed role of suppression in simultaneous Interpretation". *Interpreting* 2(1-2), 119−140.

Gouws R.H., D.J. Prinsloo & G.M. de Schryver (2004). "Friends will be friends – true or false. Lexicographic approaches to the treatment of false friends". *EURALEX 2004 Proceedings. Lexicological issues of lexicographical relevance*, 797-806.

Hall C.J. (2002). "The automatic cognate form assumption: Evidence for the parasitic model of vocabulary development". *IRAL* 40, 69-87.

Holmes J. & R.G. Ramos (1993). "False friends and reckless guessers. Observing cognate recognition strategies". In T. Huckin, M. Haynes and J. Coady (eds), *Second language reading and vocabulary learning*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 86-108.

Ivir V. (1981). "Formal correspondence vs. translation equivalence revisited". In I. Even-Zohar and G. Toury (eds), *Theory of translation and intercultural relations*. Tel-Aviv: The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University, 51-59.

Kirsner K., E. Lalor & K. Hird (1993). "The bilingual lexicon: Exercise, meaning and morphology". In R. Schreuder and B. Weltens (eds), *The bilingual lexicon*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 215–246.

Klein D. & E. A. Doctor (1992). "Homography and polysemy as factors in bilingual word recognition". *South African Journal of Psychology* 22, 10-16.

Laufer B. (1989). "A factor of difficulty in vocabulary learning: Deceptive transparency". *AILA* Review 6: 10-20.

Laufer B. (1990). "Why are some words more difficult than others? Some intralexical factors that affect the learning of words". *IRAL* 28(4), 293-307.

Laufer B. (1997). "The lexical plight in second language reading. Words you don't know, words you think you know, and words you can't guess". In J. Coady and T. Huckin (eds), *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 20-34.

Malkiel B. (2006). "The effect of translator training on interference and difficulty". *Target* 18(2), 337-366.

Mattheoudakis M. (1998). Problems related to Greek-English lexical loans. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Meara P. (1984). "The study of lexis in interlanguage". In A. Davies, C. Criper and A.P.R. Howatt (eds), *Interlanguage*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 225-235.

Meara P. (1993). "The bilingual lexicon and the teaching of vocabulary". In R. Schreuder and B. Weltens (eds), *The bilingual lexicon*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 279-297.

Meara P. & J. Milton (2003). *X_Lex, The Swansea levels test*. Newbury: Express.

Nation I.S.P. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. New York: Newbury House.

Odlin T. (1989). *Language transfer. Cross-linguistic influence in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rey-Debove J. (1973). "La sémiotique de l' emprunt lexical". *Travaux de Linguistique et de Littérature*
XI(1), 109-123.

Ringbom H. (1987). *The role of the first language in foreign language learning*. Clevedon, PH: Multilingual Matters.

Schlesinger M. & B. Malkiel (2005). "Comparing modalities: cognates as a case in point". *Across Languages and Cultures* 6(2), 173-193.

Simonetto F. (2002). Interference Between Cognate Languages: Simultaneous Interpreting from Spanish into Italian. In G. Garzone, P. Mead and M.Viezzi (eds), *Perspectives on interpreting*. Bologna: CLUEB, 129−146.

Talamas A., J.F. Kroll & R. Dufour (1999). From form to meaning: Stages in the acquisition of second-language vocabulary". *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 2(1), 45-58.

Taylor I. (1976). "Similarity between French and English words: A factor to be considered in bilingual language behavior?". *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 5(1), 85-94.

Terkourafi, M. (ed.) *English-Greek Dictionary of False Friends - Αγγλο-Ελληνικό Λεξικό Ψευδόφιλων Μονάδων* (2005). Αθήνα: Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών.

Venuti L. (2002). "The difference that translation makes: The translator's unconscious". In A. Riccardi (ed), *Translation studies: Perspectives on an emerging discipline*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 214–241.

Vinay J.-P.& J. Darbelnet (1958/1995). *Comparative stylistics of French and English: A methodology for translation* (trans. J. C. Sager and M.J. Hamel). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Wolter B. (2006). "Lexical network structures and L2 vocabulary acquisition: The role of L1 lexical/conceptual knowledge". *Applied Linguistics* 27(4), 741-747.

Zethsen K. (2004). "Latin-based terms: True or false friends?". *Target* 16(1), 125-142.