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Serbo-Croat — English False Pair Types

0.   This paper is intended as an exercise in contrastive ana-
lysis at word level. More specifically, the paper will deal with
the question of false pairs, or deceptive cognates, in Serbo-Croat
and English. These are, characteristically, words (and word
elements, as will be shown below) from the classical or modern
European languages that have found their way into both English
and Serbo-Croat and, somewhat less frequently, words of English
origin that have been adopted in Serbo-Croat.[1] It is not at all
unusual that such words should behave differently in the two
languages. And it is even less unusual that they should present
problems to those using them in the foreign language. Good
teachers have recognized the needs of their students and explain-
ed and drilled the use of "words which are — and yet are not —
the same". Textbook writers in several countries, aware that
even otherwise highly proficient speakers and skilled translators
will often stumble over deceptive cognates, have prepared dic-
tionaries of "false friends".[2] In this country, the problem has

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[1] The analysis which follows will remain strictly contrastive. No
attempt will be made here to trace these words to their source languages,
to ascertain whether they have been taken over directly or through inter-
mediaries, or to follow their phonetic (and graphic), morphological or
semantic modifications in the process. All this has been done, at least for
words of English origin, by Professor R. Filipović in his three articles:
"Principi lingvističkog posuđivanja I. Fonološki aspekt" (Principles of
Linguistic Borrowing I. Phonological Aspect), *Filološki pregled*, Belgrade,
1965, I—II, pp. 117—131; "Principi lingvističkog posuđivanja II. Morfološki
aspekt" (Principles of Linguistic Borrowing II. Morphological Aspect),
Filološki pregled, Belgrade, 1966, I—IV, pp. 1—16; "Principi lingvističkog
posuđivanja III. Semantički aspekt" (Principles of Linguistic Borrowing
III. Semantic Aspect), *Filološki pregled*, Belgrade, 1967, I—IV, pp. 83—94.

[2] M. Koessler & J. Derocquigny, *Les faux amis ou les pièges du
vocabulaire anglais*, 5th ed., Paris, Vuibert, 1961, XXVIII + 389 pp.; F.
Boillot, *Le vrai ami du traducteur anglais-français et français-anglais*, 2nd
ed., Paris, Oliven, 1956; P. Daviault, *Langage et traduction*, Ottawa, Roger

been felt too, but it has not been treated extensively or systematically for Serbo-Croat and English.[3]

0.1. Deceptive cognates can be established at two levels — semantic and morphological. While the semantic level is readily recognized as a potential source of trouble for the learner and non-native speaker, it is perhaps less obvious that the morphological (word-formation) level should also be productive of systematic errors of deceptive identity.

0.2. The explanation for the treacherous nature of deceptive cognates, both semantic and morphological, can be found in their partial identity which the non-native speaker, unaware of the differences between the two languages, assumes to be complete. Because a word in a foreign language resembles a counterpart word in his own language (allowing for the differences in shape which he is sophisticated enough to sense), he is prepared to assume that it should also mean the same thing. And if his automatic belief is strengthened by the fact that the two words actually have elements of meaning that are identical, he will find it quite difficult to fully master the points of difference between them — much more difficult, in fact, than to master the differences between lexical items that have nothing in common.

1. *Semantic Level*

1.1. It is possible, on a purely logical basis, to set up four groups of words of similar shape in any two languages: (a) the first group will include pairs with identical meanings (complete overlap) in the two languages under consideration; (b) in the second group will be pairs whose meanings overlap to a certain extent but in which the range of meaning in the first language is narrower than in the second; (c) in the third group meanings also partially overlap, but the meaning in the first language is

Duhamel, 1963, 397 pp.; W. Fischer, *Leicht verwechselbare Wörter der englischen und französischen Sprache*, München, Max Hueber Verlag, 1964, 48 pp.; *Англо-русский и русско-английский словарь 'ложных друзей' переводчика*, Москва, Советская энциклопедия, 1968.

[3] O. Vukomanović, "Neke semantičke promjene engleskih tuđica u srpskohrvatskom jeziku" (Certain Semantic Changes in English Loanwords in Serbo-Croat), *Pitanja književnosti i jezika Filozofskog fakulteta u Sarajevu*, Sarajevo, II, 1—2, 1955, pp. 97—774; Ž. Bujas, "Doslovno prevođenje s engleskog jezika" (Literal Translation from English), *Jezik*, Zagreb, VI, 1, 1957, pp. 29—31; Ž. Bujas, "Začarani krug nafte u engleskom i našem jeziku" (The Vicious Circle of *nafta* in English and Serbo-Croat), *Lingvist*, Zagreb, I, 1, 1963, pp. 9—10; E. Abberton, "Some Persistent Vocabulary Problems for Speakers of Serbo-Croatian", *English Language Teaching*, London, XXII, 2, 1968, pp. 167—73; D. Brozović, "Jezični savjetnici — šampioni jezične kulture" (Language Advisers — Champions of Language Culture", *Telegram*, Zagreb, IX, 403, 1968, p. 2; D. Brozović, "Traže se koncepcije, ne koncepti" (*Koncepcija* is the Word, not *koncept*), *Telegram*, Zagreb, IX, 402, 1968, p. 2.

broader than in the second; (d) the fourth group contains pairs whose meanings are completely disparate without any overlapping.

1.2. A fifth group could also be established to accommodate those words which are at the same time broader and narrower in meaning in one language than they are in the other. This is to say, of course, that a word of this kind has meanings in one language which its "pair" in the other language lacks; but at the same time, this "pair" covers some meanings not covered by its counterpart in the first language. An example of this type is the word *realizacija* in Serbo-Croat: in addition to its use in the meaning of *ostvarenje*, which is common to both English and Serbo-Croat, it is also used in the sense of *unovčenje, prodaja* and *iznos prodaje* (e. g. 'Proizvodnja napreduje ali realizacija zaostaje', 'Prošlogodišnja realizacija iznosila je sedam milijuna dinara'), which is translated in English as *sale, marketing and income from sales*. Even though *realization* can mean *sale*, it is ruled out in contexts like those covered by the examples given here. On the other hand, one of the meanings of the English word *realization* is *grasping* or *understanding clearly*, which is not present in the meaning of *realizacija*. Similar examples are provided by the Serbo-Croat words *partija* and *akcija*. The former is used in two senses in which *party* is not used: first, in the sense of *pošiljka* (e. g. *partija robe*) which is translated by *batch, consignment, lot;* second, in the sense of *sportski susret* when its English equivalents are *game* and *match*. But *party* is used in senses in which *partija* is never used: *social gathering (sijelo, zabava, prijem), a group of people gathered for some special purpose or task (ekipa, skupina, društvo), one of the litigants in a legal proceeding, a signatory to a a legal instrument (strana, stranka)*. Similarly, *akcija* has meanings that *action* does not have (*akcija za pružanje pomoći — relief work; akcija spasavanja — rescue operation; dobrovoljne radne akcije — voluntary work drive; akcija opismenjivanja — literacy campaign; akcija prikupljanja pomoći za žrtve poplave — raising (collection) of funds for flood victims; akcija za sigurnost u saobraćaju — traffic safety plan (scheme); burzovna akcija — share, stock*. But *action* is also used in a sense in which *akcija* is not — that of a legal process — and is then translated by *parnica, tužba*.

However, instead of providing a separate group for such words, it was thought better to list them twice: once among the words whose Serbo-Croat meaning is broader than their English meaning, and the second time among those that are used in a narrower meaning in Serbo-Croat than in English.

1.3. In all the four groups given above, the morphological, phonetic and graphic similarity is assumed between these pairs,

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due to the fact of common origin. The differences are only those that are normally produced by the laws of loan-word adaptation in any particular language.

The discussion of false pairs or deceptive cognates is usually confined to words belonging to my fourth group, although it could perhaps be said that the second and third groups are more productive of fine shades of meaning and certainly more difficult to teach. As for the first group, it could be left out of our analysis altogether if it could be proved that complete overlap is at all possible in language. As it is, this group can also be examined with profit — but only with considerable difficulty, in view of the fact that any statements of difference can only be made in terms of ranges of collocation, frequency, and level of use for each member of the pair.

1.4. The classification in the four semantic groups of deceptive cognates has been arrived at logically, without reference to any specific languages, but it will now be applied to Serbo-Croat and English.[4]

1.5. *Pairs with identical meanings in Serbo-Croat and English*

1.5.1. This group includes Serbo-Croat words of foreign origin that find their counterparts in English used in the same meanings. In so far as identical counterparts can be said to exist in any two languages, this group could be labelled "true pairs" or "true cognates" since one-to-one correspondence usually holds between them in Serbo-Croat and English.[5]

Examples of words in this group come mainly from the scientific and technical fields: *atom — atom, molekula — molecule, biologija — biology, tradicija — tradition, teorija — theory,* etc.

While these can be said to be as nearly identical in meaning as can be expected, there are pairs in this same group that do not match so perfectly but rather differ in their ranges of collocation, or in frequency of use, or in the levels at which they are used.

1.5.2. Different ranges of collocation:

In this sub-group we get those words that, while covering the same area of meaning, collocate differently in the two

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[4] The analysis will be based on several examples of each type. No attempt will be made to present exhaustive lists of items in each particular group. More exhaustive treatment is reserved for the author's Serbo-Croat — English and English — Serbo-Croat dictionary of deceptive cognates (in preparation).

[5] Only semantic aspects are considered here; the fact that morphological difference is sometimes involved will be noted further below in the sections devoted to morphological false pairs.

languages. Thus *atomski* and *atomic* are an almost perfect pair, except for the possibility of *atom bomb* in English, which narrows down the range of collocation of the English member of the pair. Similarly, kemijski and chemical which differ only in the fact that *kemijsko čišćenje (dry cleaning)* is a permissible collocation while **chemical cleaning* is not. *Stilski* and *stylistic* differ in the collocation *stilski namještaj (period furniture)* which lacks the English counterpart *stylistic furniture. Energija* and *energy*, though true cognates in many instances, collocate differently in the following cases: *vodena energija — water power, električna energija — electric power, atomska energija — atomic power, potrošnja energije — power consumption,* etc. While in Serbo-Croat one can *likvidirati nepismenost, likvidirati zaostlaost, liquidate* is not used in English in collocations of this kind but is rather replaced by *eradicate, eliminate, abolish.*

One might wish to include such pairs into the groups containing words whose meanings are broader or narrower in Serbo-Croat than in English. But it is felt that the deviations here are less marked than in those groups, so that one does not move from one semantic field into another (as one does, for instance, when the Serbo-Croat *matrica* is used not only for *matrix* but also for *stencil*). What would be needed perhaps would be a gradient scale of meanings, in terms of possible collocations, rather than a discrete classification into different groups.

1.5.3. Different frequency of use:

This sub-group contains pairs of which one member is used much more rarely than the other. Thus, for instance, the Serbo-Croat *analfabet* has the English *analphabet* as its counterpart, but is normal equivalent is *illiterate. Aerodrom* is a normal word in Serbo-Croat, while the English *aerodrom (airdrome)* is rare and *airport* is used instead. *Milliard* is now hardly ever used, even in British English, and the normal equivalents of *milijarda* are *one thousand million* and *billion. Death rate* and *birth rate* are more frequent equivalents of the Serbo-Croat *mortalitet* and *natalitet* than are *mortality* and *natality.*

Frequency is admittedly a rather sensitive criterion but is nevertheless very real: even though *katastrofa* has *catastrophe* as its counterpart, *disaster* is usually the normal equivalent; *Olympic Games* is the term that corresponds to *Olimpijada* rather than *Olumpiad; missile* is in many cases the equivalent of *raketa* rather than *rocket.*

1.5.4. Different levels of use:

Pairs whose meanings are identical may nevertheless differ in the level of use: one of the members may be a common term while the other is stylistically marked or used in certain registers

only. The Serbo-Croat *angina,* for instance, is much more wide-spread in ordinary use than its English counterpart, and it finds its equivalents in such terms as *sore throat, tonsillitis, quinsy,* etc. The English *ambient* is restricted to the technical field, while the Serbo-Croat *ambijent* is used more freely in situations in which *environment, atmosphere,* or *surroundings* are used in English. The Serbo-Croat *birokracija* is regularly used in such colloquial contexts in which *red tape* rather than *bureaucracy* is its English equivalent.

1.6. *Pairs in which the meaning of the Serbo-Croat member is narrower*

In addition to the examples already given (*akcija, partija, realizacija* in 1.2.), other examples of pairs in which the Serbo-Croat is narrower in meaning would be *katolički — catholic* (where *catholic tastes, catholic approach,* etc. do not find their equivalent in *katolički* but rather in *širok, širokogrudan, liberalan); kemičar — chemist* (where the British English meaning *pharmacist, druggist* is not contained in the Serbo-Croat term but is translated by terms like *ljekarnik, farmaceut, apotekar); model — model* (where the English term is used in the meaning not covered by its Serbo-Croat counterpart, that of a person whose profession is wearing clothes so that prospective buyers may see them, and is translated by *maneken-ka*).

Such pairs present no difficulty for Serbo-Croat users of English, because the meaning of the Serbo-Croat term is contained in its English counterpart, but they do cause trouble to English speakers of Serbo-Croat and sometimes even to translators from English into Serbo-Croat. If translators remain persistent in their mis-translation of the English term (or rather in mere transliteration in cases in which full translation is needed), its Serbo-Croat counterpart may gradually expand to include the meaning of the English term. This is what has happened to the Serbo-Croat word *šampion:* originally it was only used in the sense of somebody taking the first place in a competition and not in the sense of a person who fights for or defends any person or cause. Now, however, under the influence of the English *champion,* it is beginning to assume this second meaning as well. (See D. Brozović, "Jezični savjetnici — šampioni kulture", quoted in footnote 3 above.)

1.7. *Pairs in which the meaning of the Serbo-Croat term is broader*

The situation in this group is the reverse of that in the preceding group and examples of this type are particularly important for Serbo-Croat learners and users of English because they tend to assume complete identity in items that are identical

only to a certain extent. Contrastive analysis shows which pairs differ in this way and to what extent they differ. As already noted, many of the words in this group will be those that belong also to the preceding group.

Illustrative examples include pairs such as *akademija — academy* (where the Serbo-Croat member is used also in the sense of *commemoration, solemn observance, ceremony* and in the sense of */teacher-training/ college,* in both of which senses the English *academy* is not used); *aranžman — arrangement* (with the Serbo-Croat extending into the field of *contract* or *agreement*); *auditorij — auditorium* (where the Serbo-Croat word covers not only the English *auditorium* but also *audience*); *baterija — battery* (with *baterija* including also the English *electric torch* or *flashlight*); *eter — ether* (where the English term normally lacks the Serbo-Croat meaning of *radio waves* or *air,* like in the expression *u eteru — on the air*); *himna — hymn* (where the Serbo-Croat word covers the meaning of *national anthem*); *koncert — concert* (where then Serbo-Croat term includes both the English *concert* and *concerto*); *motor — motor* (with the Serbo-Croat word including also the meaning of *engine*).

1.8.   *Pairs that do not overlap in meaning*

Deceptive cognates of this type are the ones that are usually thought of and exemplified as "the translator's false friends". They are the pairs that must have originated from the same source but have then followed completely different paths in their respective languages. Contrastive analysis shows that their meanings are disparate and predicts difficulties for the learner and non-native user. With words in this group, the likelihood of error is equally great for the Serbo-Croat speaker of English and for the English speaker of Serbo Croat.

Examples of such pairs abound: *afirmirati se* (establish oneself, gain reputation) — *affirm* (potvrditi, posvjedočiti); *agregat* (power unit, power set, electric generator unit) — *aggregate* (skup, cjelina); *akademik* (academician, fellow /member/ of the academy) — *academic* (akademičar); *aktualan* (current, topical, pressing, urgent, timely, up-to-date) — *actual* (zbiljski, stvaran, sadašnji); *ambulanta* (out-patient clinic /department/) — *ambulance* (kola hitne pomoći); *apartman* (suite) — *apartment* (namještena soba; US stan); *brigadir* (team /group/ leader, leading /charge/ hand, assistant /petty/ foreman) — *brigadier* (zapovjednik brigade); *direkcija* (top management, board of directors, directorate; main /head/ office, headquarters) — *direction* (smjer, pravac; upravljanje); *diverzija* (sabotage, subversion) — *diversion* (skretanje; razonoda; lažni manevar), etc.

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It is interesting to note that this group, too, has supplied words that do not affect only individual users but also the language as a whole. Thus, for instance, the Serbo-Croat *koncept* is beginning to acquire the meaning of *koncepcija*, in addition to its original meaning of *first draft* or *rough copy*. (See D. Brozović, quoted in footnote 3.) *Petrolej* is sometimes used in the meaning of *petroleum* and not only in its usual meaning of *kerosene oil*. The author has heard English speakers in this country use *syndicate* and *cadres* for *trade unions* and *personnel* respectively on the model of the Serbo-Croat *sindikat* and *kadrovi*.

2. *Morphological Level*

2.1. The term "false pair" is usually limited to two words that happen to exist in two languages under consideration. I would like to extend its application to another, closely related, phenomenon which is again a source of frequent difficulty in foreign language learning and which, too, is amenable to contrastive treatment. It has to do with words of foreign origin in one language and their counterparts in another — the conterparts being different words altogether or words formed from the same roots but of a different morphological make-up. This is the situation when the student invents a perfectly plausible English word — which does not happen to exist in English because it has not been adopted there as it has been in Serbo-Croat, or when he forms it with a prefix or suffix that could have been used — but was not in fact used — in the actual formation of the English word. This is of course an instance of the student's generative creativity: he has an intuitive command of the rules of English word formation but is not yet aware of all the restrictions that operate in this process.

2.2. Under this heading, also, several cases can be analyzed:

(1) words that form part of the first language but not of the second, although they look as if they might;

(2) prefixes and suffixes that form particular words in the first language, while quite different prefixes and suffixes form their counterparts in the second language;

(3) prefixes and suffixes that form particular words in the first language, while no prefixes or suffixes are used in the second;

(4) words without prefixes or suffixes in the first language that happen to be formed with prefixes or suffixes in the second language.

It is possible for one and the same word to be included in more than one of the above groups. Thus, for instance, the Serbo-

Croat word *dezinformirati* will be included in group (2) because its prefix is different from that in its English counterpart (*misinform*), but it will also be included in group (3) because no suffix corresponds in English to its suffix *-irati*.

2.3. *Words from European languages that exist in Serbo-Croat but not in English*

This group is quite large and very interesting as a source of amusing and highly indicative mistakes in the speech of the Serbo-Croat speakers of English. It is important to note that the (usually quite proficient) speakers form these words in complete harmony with the rules of word formation in English. We shall now list a few examples of such words, giving the Serbo-Croat form first in each case followed by its English equivalent in brackets. The forms produced by learners will not be given, but every person with an intuitive feeling for English word-formation rules will easily supply the nonce forms for himself. The Serbo-Croat words in this group come mainly from the West European languages, classical and modern: *adresar* (directory); *akviziter* (canvasser, sales agent); *aranžer* (window dresser); *atest* (certificate); *degustacija* (/wine/ tasting, sampling of food products); *deprimiran* (depressed); *dijafilm* (film-strip); *dirigent* (conductor); *dotacija* (grant/-in-aid/, subvention); *fagot* (bassoon); *instalater* (plumber, electrician); *kalij* (potassium); natrij (sodium); *klimatizacija* (air-conditioning); *renomiran* (reputable); *rentabilan* (profitable, paying, remunerative, lucrative), etc.

2.4. *False-pair prefixes and suffixes: different elements in Serbo-Croat and English*

This and the remaining two sub-sections deal with word-elements rather than with whole words. One can say that just as there are false-pair words, there are also false-pair prefixes and suffixes, and these are no less important as a potential source of trouble in the speech of foreign language learners and users. The mistakes here — as elsewhere in the field of deceptive cognates — are quite systematic: the non-native speaker takes the prefix or suffix of foreign origin that exists in his own language and gives it the shape that it might, though it does not, have in the foreign language that he happens to be speaking or writing. Or he uses it in words in which that particular foreign language does not use it.

2.4.1. Prefixes:

Examples of different prefixes in Serbo-Croat and English can be seen from the following list: *anorganski — inorganic; autoportret — selfportrait; debalans — imbalance; demaskirati*

— *unmask; destimulans* — *disincentive; dezinformacija* — *mis-information; hiperprodukcija* — *overproduction; hiperprofiti* — *super-profits*, etc.

2.4.2. Suffixes:

The following are illustrative of the Serbo-Croat suffixes of foreign origin that are not matched by the same forms in English: *akrobacije* — *acrobatics; anakroničan* — *anachronistic; aneksija* — *annexation; apatičan* — *apathetic; autogram* — *autograph; kondenzator* — *condenser; rivalitet* — *rivalry; sta-dion* — *stadium*, etc.

2.5. *False-pair prefixes and suffixes: zero element in English*

With prefixes and suffixes, as with individual words above, false pairs are also possible with one member of the pair being zero. In this group we give examples of Serbo-Croat prefixes and suffixes whose proper English equivalent is zero.

2.5.1. Prefixes:

The following examples illustrate Serbo-Croat prefixes matched by zero in English: *autobus* — *bus; eksplozija* — *plosion* (in phonetics); *interpunkcija* — *punctuation; komplot* — *plot; reconvalescent* — *convalescent*, etc.

2.5.2. Suffixes:

The following are examples of suffixes used in Serbo-Croat whose English equivalent is zero: *anulirati* — *annul; fotografija* — *photograph; grafikon* — *graph; profanirati* — *profane; repre-salije* — *reprisals; turistički* — *tourist*, etc.

2.6. *False-pair prefixes and suffixes: zero element in Serbo-Croat*

This group contains examples of Serbo-Croat zero prefixes and suffixes whose English equivalents have to be learned sepa-rately, even though the bases with which they are used are cognate in the two languages.

2.6.1. Prefixes:

Zero-prefixes with non-zero English equivalents: *gravirati* — *engrave; kodirati* — *encode; municija* — *ammunition*, etc.

2.6.2. Suffixes:

Zero-suffixes with non-zero English equivalents: *azil* — *asylum; fotograf* — *photographer; geolog* — *geologist; maligni* — *malignant; monopol* — *monopoly; tuberkuloza* — *tubercu-losis*, etc.

3.   The phenomenon discussed in this paper is an example of interference, potential or real, which is a normal concomitant of almost any case of bilingualism. Since bilingualism itself is by definition not a phenomenon of language but a characteristic of its use, thus belonging to 'parole' and not to 'langue',[6] one might be tempted to regard deceptive cognates as isolated instances of learners' errors, more or less motivated by the situation in their mother tongue. However, the foregoing discussion has shown, it is hoped, that such errors are systematic and predictable. They can be predicted on the basis of contrastive analysis, the hypothesis being that the likelihood of error is the greatest in those areas in which a degree of similarity exists which is then — following the line of least resistance — assumed to mean complete identity. By putting such elements of any two languages against one another, contrastive analysis can spot their similarities and dissimilarities and map problem areas for the non-native user. In the case of deceptive cognates, such problem areas, as demonstrated above, are semantic and morphological. At the semantic level, interference is produced not only by words that look the same and have completely different meanings but also by those that look the same and mean the same to a certain extent. Interestingly enough, in this latter case it is not only the mother tongue which interferes with the foreign language but also the foreign language which interferes with the mother tongue — so much so that interference ceases to be an individual affair and becomes collective, affecting 'langue' as well as 'parole'. At the morphological (word-formation) level again, interference is not confined to the formation of non-existent words modelled on words of foreign origin in the mother tongue but is also clearly present in the use (or non-use) of word-elements, prefixes and suffixes, according to the rules of the mother tongue.

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[6] William F. Mackey, "The Description of Bilingualism", *The Canadian Journal of Linguistics*, Toronto, VII, 2, 1962, pp. 51—85.