
In the preface to *Italian False Friends*, Ronnie Ferguson indicates that little attention has been given to Italian-English *falsi amici* in English pedagogical circles. This fact is rather surprising, given the extent to which Italian cognates of English words are utilized incorrectly in a variety of contexts and *milieux* ranging from the second-language classroom to the average multi-ethnic neighbourhood and even to the odd scholarly journal, on occasion, even in scholarly writings. According to some statistics gathered by Ferguson, “[even] in extended journalistic articles it is not unusual for around 10% of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs to be false friends” (ix). It would be fair to say, in fact, that an investigation of practically any environment in which both Italian and English are employed will reveal how widespread the erroneous use of English-Italian cognates is. The need for a text such as Ferguson’s in the field of Italian studies, therefore, is quite evident.

The text *Italian False Friends*, in essence, may be defined as a specialized Italian-English dictionary, whose entries have been chosen for the reason that, because of their confusing nature to users of Italian of a variety of levels, whose common obstacle is a lexical and even cultural interference with English, to a greater or lesser extent their proper English equivalents are not always exclusively their corresponding cognates. All of the entries are in Italian, with text explanations in English, including information which, in some cases, is not found in most Italian-English dictionaries. For instance, for the adjective *eccellente* (44), one is able to discover that in most cases there is no problem in translating “excellent” with its Italian cognate. At times, however, the term may correspond to the English words “distinguished” or “celebrity,” because of the Italian term’s historical association with Eccellenza (“Your Excellency”). Ferguson provides both concrete examples of the manner in which the term is utilized in Italian, as well as pertinent cultural references. In the case of *eccellente*, there is a reference to the title of Francesco Rosi’s 1975 film, *Cadaveri eccellenti* (“distinguished corpses”). Thus, the users are supplied with a considerable amount of information regarding the cognate: its etymology and its function in contemporary Italian language, not to mention an instance of its use in the title of a noted film, something which may add to one’s knowledge of Italian culture. There is, moreover, an abundance of cultural references in *Italian False Friends*, taken, among other sources, from “Italian authors, as well as from daily newspapers, periodicals and advertising” (x). It is clear that Ferguson makes a conscious attempt to take into consideration the sociological context of language. The placing of the entries in a socio-cultural context is a highly desirable feature of the text, in that it exposes the readers to the living language, and contributes to their cultural enlightenment.

Ferguson’s text contains different ‘kinds’ of cognates, for indeed, not all false friends pose the same problems. Some further examples from the text illustrate this point. The entries include “false friends” proper, which have completely different meanings, such as “destituzione, n.f. — not destituzione (= l’indigenza or l’estrema miseria/povertà) but dismissal from an office [. . .]” (37); loan words from Italian which have taken on different meanings in English: “pronto, adv. and interj. - not pronto (= subito) but ready, so that *il pranzo sarà pronto subito* means that the dinner will be ready right away. Italians exclaim *pronto!* when they pick up the phone” (89). There is also the category of cog-