Ideas and resources for teaching *False Friends*

https://www.teaching-english-and-spanish.de/

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Objectives

- to make learners aware of false cognates (*False Friends*) between German and English
- to achieve sustainable learning, i.e. learners transfer their knowledge about *False Friends* to their long-term memory to be able to translate *False Friends* correctly from German into English and vice versa

Introduction

English and German belong to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family. Due to their common roots, numerous related words or cognates can be found in the two languages that have evolved differently and taken on different meanings. In addition, there are loanwords in both languages that are derived from ancient Greek and Latin. German native speakers make a lexical error when they are not aware that a similar-sounding word in English is a false cognate and does not have the same meaning as the German word, for example *actual, become* or *sea*. This type of error often affects understanding and can lead to confusion or even embarrassment – for example when translating *Rückseite* with *backside*. It is therefore important to raise learners' awareness to the issue of *False Friends* at an early stage so that the incorrect use of false cognates does not become fossilized.

Ideas and resources for teaching *False Friends*

Several free materials and easy-to-use tools to teach *False Friends* are presented below, including two playlists of animated videos that illustrate a communication problem caused by the use of a false cognate.

For lists of German-English *False Friends*, visit the following websites:

https://www.learngermanonline.org/german-english-false-friends/

https://www.lal.de/blog/false-friends-falsche-freunde/

https://www.fluentu.com/blog/german/false-friends-english-german/

https://www.br.de/grips/faecher/grips-englisch/23-present-perfect-vokabeln-false-friends100.html

https://www.englisch-hilfen.de/words/false_friends.htm

Interactive online exercises can be used for expanded learning, which means that students review new content after the first meeting and then at gradually increasing intervals. **Interactive online exercises** can be found, for example, on the following websites:

https://www.bento.de/today/englisch-quiz-erkennst-du-diese-falschen-freunde-a-00000000-0003-0001-0000-000002149169

https://www.ego4u.de/de/chill-out/games/false-friends

https://www.lernort-mint.de/MCtest/Englisch/test_false_friends.html

Another useful tool are flashcards. **Quizlet** is an easy-to-use online flashcard app (https://quizlet.com/de) that can be used on a computer, tablet or phone. First, the teacher sets up a class account and creates bilingual flashcards with which students can learn the *False Friends* and play online games. Several learning sets for *False Friends* are already available, for example at

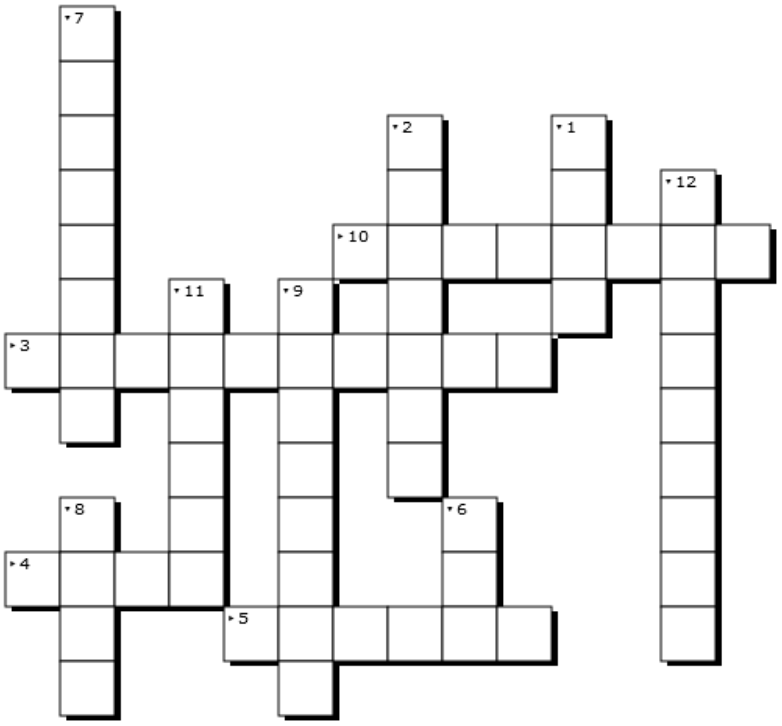
https://quizlet.com/123323842/false-friends-englisch-german-flash-cards/. (Registration is necessary to play the games.)

Learners can use the flashcards at home for revision or in a competitive classroom game that can be played individually or in teams. The teacher shows the German words with a projector and learners write down the correct translations. After that, the translations or phrases can be checked in the plenary or by another team.

Jeopardy is an American television game show featuring a quiz competition. Several online templates allow teachers to create their own questions and automatically record the contestants' or teams' score, for example https://www.superteachertools.us/jeopardyx/.

In addition, online **crossword puzzle generators** that allow the quick and easy creation of revision tests can be used, as shown in the following example:

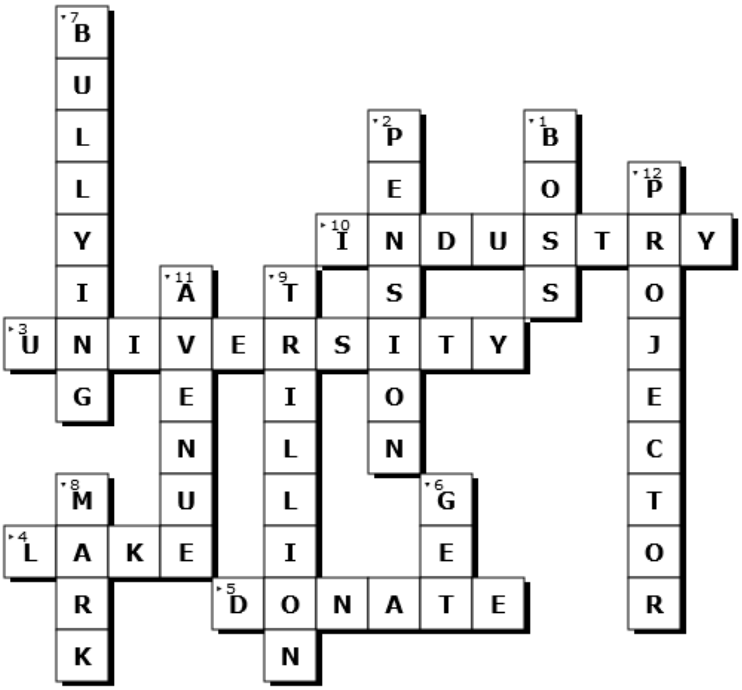
FALSE FRIENDS



1. Chef
2. Rente
3. Hochschule
4. See
5. spenden
6. bekommen
7. Mobbing
8. Note
9. Billion
10. Branche
11. Allee
12. Beamer

Created with XWords – the free online crossword puzzle generator
https://www.xwords-generator.de/en

FALSE FRIENDS



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Furthermore, a playlist of humorous **videos** that deal with *False Friends* is available on YouTube. The videos can be shown during class or be watched by students at home. They can be accessed at the following address:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UClFXIlQFyZYoHiTu-7oOqag

The videos can help learners achieve a higher recall value than only text-based materials due to the "multimedia effect", which can be described as follows: "The multimedia effect refers to the finding that students learn more deeply from a multimedia explanation presented in words and pictures than in words alone."[1]

Another type of words that can partly be considered *False Friends* are terms that do not have a direct one-to-one relationship in English and German, i. e. words in German for which there are two or more terms in English, such as *drive, ride, go by* (fahren), *motor/engine* (Motor) or *tube/pipe* (Rohr). This mismatch makes it difficult for learners to conceptualize the two or more different meanings in English. The channel mentioned above offers the playlist **Tricky words** containing various videos that deal with this issue.

The videos were created using an animation program called GoAnimate (now Vyond) (https://move.vyond.com/animation-solutions/) which enables users to create animated stories and add sound by means of a text-to-speech program. If teachers or students want to create their own animations, online cartoon makers that offer free versions (without the text-to-speech option), are for example, https://www.toonytool.com/, https://www.powtoon.com or https://www.animaker.de/.

Teachers can supplement the videos by **creating worksheets** to focus their learners' attention on the different meanings of the German and English lexemes (see the example below).

Actual/aktuell

What does the word *actual* mean? _____

I paid €250 for this bike, but its actual (= real) value may be higher.

I expected the lesson to be boring but actually it was very interesting.

But *actual* does not mean *aktuell*. Now translate the following sentences:

Haben Sie den aktuellen Katalog? _____

Aktuelle Nachrichten _____

Die aktuelle Krise _____

[1] Mayer, Richard E. & Ruth Colvin Clark (2003). E-learning and the Science of Instruction: Proven Guidelines for Consumers and Designers of Multimedia Learning, San Franciso: Pfeifer.

Words in German for which there are two or more terms in English

Drive and ride

You can **go or travel by** car, train, bus, plane, boat or ship.

You **walk or you go on foot**.

When you **drive,** you move or travel in a motor vehicle (a car, truck, bus, train) as the person controlling the vehicle's movement. You can also drive a wheelchair (vehicle) when it has got a motor.

You **ride a horse, a bike or a motorbike.** This means that you are in control.

When you ride a bus or train, you travel as a passenger and you are not in control of it.

Are you going by train?" "No, I'm driving."

She drives a red sports car.

What means of transport do you use?

go by	**ride**	**drive**

False Friends can also be practised with questions:

False Friends Questions

What is the difference between a sea and a lake?

What do you train at a German *Gymnasium*? What do you train at a gym?

Do you normally get good … in your exams?

Do you know an effective note-taking system ?

What's on the … in the canteen today?

What is the name of your … (your superior at work)?

How many zeros are in a billion? How many zeros are in a trillion?

What software te… will dominate the 2020s?

I need to buy some food. Where is the … supermarket?

What search … do you normally use?

Have you heard the … news? Is there a … in the classroom to project a presentation?

Another example of a worksheet dealing with *False Friends* and tricky words can be found here:

https://www.english-practice.at/b2/vocabulary/general-vocabulary/gv010-false-friends.pdf

Suggested Procedure for teaching *False Friends*

Raise Awareness and Facilitate Understanding

Learners are shown two to three videos each lesson (or watch them at home). Then they do the corresponding paper-based translation exercises during class or as homework.

Revise and Consolidate Vocabulary

Learners do exercises (online exercises, crossword puzzles, Quizlet) either during class or at home spread over several lessons to allow expanded learning.

Apply and Create

Learners work in small groups. They are given three two four cards that contain *False Friends* (or draw them from a pile). Each group writes a sketch that shows misunderstandings caused by their *False Friends* and perform it before the class. The teacher acts as a facilitator assisting the learners during the task. Alternatively, students can film the sketch outside the classroom.