

TRANSLATION ACES NEWS

APRIL 2010

◆ FALSE FRIENDS ◆

FALSE FRIENDS (or *faux amis*) are pairs of words in 2 different languages that look or sound similar but differ in meaning. This is not the same as **homonyms**, words in the same language that sound the same and may or may not have different spellings but definitely have different meanings, such as *to/too/two*.

There are thousands of false friends in every language! A few examples:

◆ FRENCH ◆

Eventuellement is NOT “eventually” but rather “possibly”

Actuellement is NOT “actually” but rather “at present”

Demander is NOT “to demand” but rather “to ask” or “request”

Avertissement is NOT an “advertisement” but rather a “warning” or “notice”

◆ GERMAN ◆

Eventuell is NOT “eventually” but rather, as in French, “possibly”

Rat is NOT a rodent but rather “advice” or “council”

Handy is NOT “handy” but rather a mobile phone

Gift is NOT a present but rather “poison,” with originally the same meaning in English and German.

In Old German, *Gift* was the term for an “object that is given.” Though it had always also been a

euphemism for “poison” (“being given”), it underwent a complete change over time to today’s

German meaning of “poison.” In Swedish and Norwegian, *gift* means “poison” but also “married”!

◆ SPANISH ◆

Embarazada is NOT “embarrassed” but “pregnant”!

Asistir is NOT “to assist” but “to attend”

Mayor is NOT the “mayor” of a city, but an adjective meaning “larger” or “older”

Billón is NOT a “billion” but 1,000,000,000,000, or a trillion in American English; yet it is a billion in British English. In other words, *billón* is a cognate in London but a false friend in New York!

◆ FEATURE ◆ Lingua Quiz!

1 – What does the “Q” in *Q-Tip* stand for?

(a) Quality (b) Quick (c) The cotton ball shape and stick resembled the letter “Q”

2 – What does the “X” in *X-ray* stand for?

(a) Excellent (b) Unknown (c) Xenon

3 – Why is there no “&” symbol in Russian?

(a) Russians never had choices (b) They use a Soviet star ☆ instead (c) It’s unnecessary

ANSWERS:

1 -- (a) The Q-tip was invented by Leo Gerstenzang in the 1920s!
2 -- (b) X-rays were first discovered in 1895 when W.C. Röntgen saw a nearby fluorescent screen glow; he attributed it to previously unknown rays and called them X-rays, since X is the math symbol for an unknown quantity.
3 -- (c) There's no need for such a symbol because in Russian, "and" is a one-character word: И

◆ 29 Broadway, Suite 2301 ◆ Tel.: 212-269-4660 ◆ Fax: 212-269-4662 ◆ info@translationaces.com