

# False Friends

## Problems of Language Interference between German and English and Spanish and English and Possible Solutions

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### Introduction

The term “false friends“ or “faux amis“ refers to pairs of words that are very similar in pronunciation or spelling but have different meanings. This phenomenon was first described and named “faux amis” by Maxime Koessler and Jules Derocquigny in 1928. False friends are also called false cognates and belong to the linguistic field of *interference*. Linguistic interference describes the process of prior knowledge interfering with the learning of new concepts or in this case acquisition of new vocabulary (therefore also occasionally called *negative transfer*).

False friends can be divided in several subcategories: semantic, grammatical, or orthographic. This paper will be dealing with semantic false friends since they seem to cause the most problems in language learning. False friends often have a common origin but due to language change developed different meanings.

As the term *interference* suggests, false friends present a difficulty for all learners of a foreign language as well as translators and interpreters. The idea of this project is to take a closer look at the specific difficulties German and Spanish native speakers face when learning English as a foreign language. Using the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) the paper will try to identify typical mistake patterns these English learners make and after analyzing their occurrence will try to find solutions how these errors can be avoided in the future.

### Data and methodology

Firstly, it is important to make lists of false friends that frequently occur in texts of native speakers of German and Spanish who learn English. Books such as *False Friends. A Short Dictionary* by Dretzke and Netzer or *Learner English: A Teacher's Guide to Interference and Other Problems* by Swan and Smith are very helpful for creating such lists. The next step is to search the English word of the false-friend-pair in the ICLE and create a frequency list of occurrences. The words the ICLE shows the most results for are downloaded with two sentences to the left and to the right of the sentence the searched-for word occurs in to provide sufficient context. This data will then be analyzed thoroughly to see where mistakes have been made and if those correspond to the expected mistakes of the false friend in the native language of the author. After having counted the errors I will try to identify a mistake pattern and look for similarities between the individual errors. The idea is that once patters are recognized it will be easier to make learners aware of those and help them to avoid these mistakes in their texts.

### Results

Example Word counts false friends German – English

actually	also	become	hardly	realize
74	443	269	71	79

Example Word counts false friends Spanish – English

actually	introduce	realize	support
21	44	82	50

### Conclusion

**Conclusions are yet to be drawn since the research and analysis hase not yet been fully carried out.**

### References

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