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When looks are not deceiving: false and true friends (cognates) at advanced levels

25 DE FEVEREIRO DE 2016

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Teachers usually overemphasize the need to exercise caution when it comes to identifying **false cognates** (or **false friends**). No one needs false friends, we all know, so we do our best to keep them away. Beginning students will all too easily rely on false friends, because they look like friends at their disposal when they need just that word that insists on slipping away. But, as the saying goes, looks can be deceiving.

However, as students move beyond lower levels towards more advanced stages, it would be advisable to encourage them to look at **true cognates** (or **true friends**) more closely. Because learners were constantly warned against misusing the so-called **false friends** in initial stages, they may be led to make the erroneous assumption that every word that looks the same in Portuguese should be avoided at any cost. What is more, words originated from Latin roots are generally unknown to native speakers, but assuming that all of them should be frowned upon is nothing short of a mistake. It is true that sometimes they belong to elevated registers (literature, for example), but some of them are quite common and of high frequency in ordinary English (not in conversation, though).

Let us take the word “adore”, for example. Hardly ever do we see a Brazilian using it, maybe assuming that, since it is obviously from Latin root, it is a rare word in everyday English, and therefore it is not used by native speakers at all, which is far from the truth. This word actually belongs to the informal register and is widely used: *I absolutely adored the cake.* or *The cake was absolutely adorable!*

So, next time you come across words such as these, ask them: Are you a true or a false friend? and decide whether you should make friends with them or not.

False friends

Adept does not mean *follower* (= proficient, skilled): *an adept mother*

Antique (as a noun) does not mean *ancient, old* (= relic): *Antique is a collector's item.*

Authoritative does not mean *authoritarian* (= reliable): *an authoritative encyclopedia*

Cafeteria does not mean *coffee shop, cafe* (= canteen)

Comprehensive does not mean *understanding, sympathetic* (= unabridged): a comprehensive dictionary

Convict does not mean *sure, positive* (= prisoner)

Deception does not mean *disappointment* (= deceit): *have the courage to admit to one's deception*

Discussion does not mean *quarrel, (fiery) argument* (= exchange of ideas): *topics for discussion*

Educated does not mean *polite* (= schooled): a university-educated man

Eventually does not mean *occasionally* (= finally): Eventually, he graduated from Oxford University and moved to New York.

Exquisite does not mean *strange, odd* (= beautiful, excellent): an exquisite taste

Hazard does not mean *bad luck* (= danger, risk): occupational hazards

Legend does not mean *subtitles* (= myth): Legend has it that...

Luxury does not mean *lust, lewdness* (= splendor): a five-star luxury hotel

Novel does not mean *soap opera* (= narrative, romance): a novel by Mary Shelley

Physician does not mean *physicist* (= doctor) (especially in American English)

Resume does not mean *sum up, summarize* (= restart): resume negotiations

Retired does not mean *withdrawn, aloof* (= former, emeritus): a retired teacher

Spectacles (plural) does not mean *concert, show* (= glasses)

Support does not mean *stand, tolerate* (= assist, help): *give someone support*

Ultimately does not mean *lately, recently* (= basically)

Vicious does not mean *addicted* (= cruel): a vicious dog (or murder)

True friends (advanced level)

Below you will find a list of words you should be careful before incorporating them into your vocabulary or consigning them to oblivion, wrongly assuming they are extremely rare words. Instead, note that they are used in the same way as in Portuguese. In many cases, students may avoid them altogether because they are not known in their own language.

Accentuate (= highlight): accentuate someone's physical characteristics

Adore (= love dearly): *simply adore coffee*

Belligerent (= quarrelsome): *a belligerent attitude towards others*

Capricious (= whimsical): *a capricious adolescent*

Captious (= sarcastic): *make captious comments*

Caustic (= acerbic, bitter): *reply caustically*

Chimerical (= absurd): *a chimerical dream*

Convalescence (= recuperation): *a long convalescence period*

Corroborate (= confirm): *corroborate findings or results*

Credulous (= naive, ingenuous): *credulous tourists*

Deleterious (= harmful): *a deleterious effect*

Demagogue (= rabble-rouser)

Deplorable (= reprehensible): *in a deplorable state*

Didactic (= instructive): *a didactic tone*

Erudite (= knowledgeable): *an erudite scholar*

Euphemism (= circumlocution): *in mild euphemisms*

Exacerbate (= aggravate): *exacerbate a problem or situation*

Gratuitous (= uncalled-for): *a movie full of gratuitous violence*

Impasse (= deadlock): *reach an impasse*

Impertinent (= arrogant): *an impertinent young man, an impertinent question*

Mundane (= banal, worldly): *a mundane existence (unexciting)*

Odious (= abhorrent, loathsome): *odious character, hypocrisy*

Opine (= express an opinion): *someone opined that...*

Pernicious (= harmful): *pernicious effects, influence*

Picturesque (= quaint, scenic): *a picturesque account of an adventure*

Repudiate (= reject): *repudiate stereotypes*

Rudimentary (= basic): *a rudimentary knowledge of something*

Solicitous (= attentive): *a solicitous staff*

Temerity (= foolhardiness): *have the temerity to do something*

Traumatized (= shocked, disturbed): *traumatized by an experience*

Ubiquitous (= omnipresent, universal): the *ubiquitous* McDonald's food chain

Vicarious (= indirect, empathetic): a *vicarious* pleasure

Taken from <http://blogdisal.com.br/when-looks-are-not-deceiving-false-and-true-friends-cognates-at-advanced-levels/>

(Publicado originalmente no blogdisal.com.br)