

EXERCISE: CVG 1

Module:	Specialised Language Competencies
Type of exercise:	Vocabulary
Topic:	False cognates
Learning Outcome(s):	On completion of this exercise, trainees will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understand what a cognate is• be aware that false cognates can produce serious errors when interpreting or translating in the legal field• be able to identify false cognates and find appropriate equivalents for these terms.
Language (Combination):	English/Spanish
Equipment:	N/A
Time:	30 minutes
Suitable for:	Intermediate
Contributed by:	Carmen Valero-Garcés, University of Alcala (Spain)
Notes:	“False cognates” are words or expressions that have the same form but a different meaning. They can occur within the same language (intra-linguistic) or between two or more languages (extra-linguistic). They have very diverse origins and can even be due to changes in meaning throughout time. Although translators should not be worried about literally translating words that seem to mean the same thing in both languages, it is necessary to know when a

"false cognate" appears in order to handle them correctly when translating.

Extra-linguistic false cognates are interferences that contaminate the language and can give rise to totally erroneous translations.

BACKGROUND

Some examples in the English/Spanish language pair include:

- A *peculiar* situation = Situación *especial (rara, insólita)*.
- I cannot *resist* ice-cream. = *Me encantan* los helados.
- This food is very *rich* = Esta comida es muy *pesada*.
- I do really sympathize = *Lo siento* de verdad.
- A sensible answer = Una respuesta *sensata (razonable)*.

In the legal field, and for the Spanish/English language pair, some of the most common false cognates are:

- Sentence/*sentencia*
 - o “To sentence” in Spanish is *imposición de condena*)
 - o “*Sentencia*” in English is judgment or ruling
- Evidence/*evidencia*
 - o “Evidence” in legal contexts in Spanish is *prueba*.
- Court/*corte*
 - o “Court” in Spanish is *tribunal* but could also be *juzgado* (the physical place, courthouse) or *juez* (judge) depending upon the context
- Violator/*violador*
 - o “Violator” in English is someone who infringes a law. In Spanish this would be *infractor, transgresor*, or even *autor de un delito*
 - o *Violar* in Spanish in legal contexts usually refers to the crime of rape and so using *violador* could be misconstrued as “rapist.”
- Crime/*crimen*
 - o “Crime” should be translated into Spanish as *delito*.
 - o *Crimen* is a term used only for very serious crimes in Spanish, such as murder or assassination.

EXERCISES

With the previous explanations in mind:

1. Translate the following phrases to another language and analyse the possibility that they are false cognates.

1. A **simple** person.
2. A **simple** question.
3. The **relevant** documents.
4. A birth **certificate**.
5. He has some **outstanding qualities**.
6. They gave the impression of being very **candid** in their replies.
7. The actual **value** of an object.
8. The money I have is **adequate** for this trip.
9. El hombre **adecuado** para el trabajo.
10. El procedimiento es **adecuado** para esta finalidad.
11. They **eventually** decided to leave.
12. No usaba sombrero más que **eventualmente**.
13. A **consistent** worker.
14. Un argumento **consecuente**.
15. Her contribution was more **substantial** than mine.
16. A **regular** customer.
17. De estatura **regular**.
18. Una casa bastante regular.
19. **Regular** hours of work.
20. The financial **implications**.

2. Look for 10 examples of false cognates in the languages that you know, especially in the legal realm.