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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute Vocabulary

### False friends



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*This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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#### **Finn**

Hi! I'm Finn.

#### **Catherine**

And I'm Catherine. Welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary. Today we're talking about false friends.

#### **Finn**

But false friends aren't people! False friends are words that look or sound the same in two different languages – but have different meanings in each language.

#### **Catherine**

That's right and today we'll give you plenty of examples...

#### **Finn**

There will be a quiz of course...

#### **Catherine**

...and we'll also bring you a top tip for remembering these words.

#### **Finn**

But first, here's Jim. He works as a student advisor, and he's talking about students' problems.

#### **Catherine**

While you're listening to Jim, try to guess what the student called Camilla's problem really was...

### **INSERT**

#### **Jim**

Lots of students come to me with their problems, but sometimes I have to guess what they mean! Claus from Germany asked me for a **rat** because his father was busy in the **kitchen**. Simone, who's French, was worried about the **buttons** on her face. Camilla, from Spain, didn't know what to do because she was **embarrassed**. And when I helped Pierre, he said "Thank you very much, that's **terrible!**"

**Finn**

So, did you guess what Camilla's problem really was?

**Catherine**

And the answer is Camilla was actually **pregnant!** But she used the wrong word when she said she was **embarrassed**.

**Finn**

She did. Because **embarrassed** is a false friend in Spanish and English. The Spanish word **embarazada** means **pregnant**. Apologies for my Spanish pronunciation there! Spanish speaking people need to be very careful before they tell someone they are **embarrassed** – or that their husband is! Listen out for more false friends in this clip.

**INSERT**

**Jim**

Claus from Germany asked me for a **rat** because his father was in the **kitchen**. Simone, who's French, was worried about the **buttons** on her face.

**Catherine**

So I'm guessing that Claus didn't really want a **rat**?

**Finn**

I don't think so, I think he wanted some **advice** from Jim. The German word **rat** means **advice** in English. And Claus was worried because his father was in **prison**. The word **kitchen** can mean **prison** in German.

**Catherine**

Confusing. And what about Simone, who said she had **buttons** on her face...

**Finn**

Indeed. In French, the word **boutons** means **spots**. So, Simone thought that the English word buttons had the same meaning.

**Catherine**

OK. Now, let's have another clip. Pierre also said something quite strange.

**INSERT**

**Jim**

And when I helped Pierre, he said "Thank you very much, that's **terrible!**"

**Catherine**

So do you think that Jim was upset when Pierre said that? After all, Jim was trying to help.

**Finn**

Well, Pierre didn't mean to be rude. But in French **terrible** – like terrible – can have two meanings. It can mean **very bad**, but it can also mean **great**. It depends on the sound of your voice when you say it. Pierre meant that Jim's advice was **great**, not **terrible**.

### **Catherine**

Well, big misunderstanding. So the message is: don't get upset if someone from another country says something that seems a bit strange or perhaps rude. They might just be using a word that's a false friend.

### **Finn**

Exactly. And be very careful yourself when you're speaking in another language. You know, there was this one time, I was in a hotel in France and I asked for a **cushion** – I thought that meant a cushion – for my bed. But it sounded like the French word **cochon** which means **pig**!

### **Catherine**

So you asked for a pig for your bedroom!

## **IDENT**

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### **Catherine**

And it's time for a quiz! Today, we're going to play a guessing game. So number one: If a French man is holding some £10 notes in his hand but he says that he's got no money, what does he mean?

### **Finn**

The answer is that he means that he's got no coins. Yes, **monnaie** in French means coins or change.

### **Catherine**

Very good. And number two: If a German woman in an English restaurant says that she wants to **become** a steak, is she joking or does she really want to turn into a meal?

### **Finn**

Well, the answer is neither. **Bekommen** in German is a false friend for **become** in English. She means that she wants to get a steak to eat.

### **Catherine**

Right then. Number three: If someone from the US invites you to a party, Finn, and tells you to wear **pants**, should you be shocked?

### **Finn**

Well, actually, no, you shouldn't. **Pants** in American English means **trousers**. It doesn't mean **underwear** like in British English!

### **Catherine**

That's a relief! And that's the end of the quiz. Well done if you got them all right. And before we go, here's a vocabulary tip. Keep a note of false friends between your language and English. You could use word cards, with the word on one side and the information with example sentences on the other.

### **Finn**

And there's more about this at [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com). Join us again soon for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

### **Both**

Bye!

## **Vocabulary points to take away:**

False friends are words that look the same in two languages but have different meanings.

Some examples of false friends with English words are:

**embarazada** – embarrassed  
Embarazada means pregnant in Spanish

**rat** – rat  
Rat means advice in German.

**boutons** – buttons  
Boutons means spots on your face in French.

**terrible** – terrible  
Terrible can mean very bad or very good in French.

**monnaie** – money  
Monnaie means coins or change in French.

**bekommen** – become  
Bekommen means to get or have something in German.

**pants** – pants  
Pants means trousers in American English.

When you are learning a language, it's easy to make a mistake by using a false friend. So don't be surprised if people from other countries do this.

Take time to learn false friends between your language and English so that you don't say strange or rude things by mistake.