

The Paris Savannah Connection



Dear Friend

When I first began teaching English in France many years ago, I heard an expression I had never encountered before: False Friends. What in the world could that mean? Only a Frenchman studying English would know ... that he meant word look-alikes or even worse, imposters or traitors!

There are quite a few words which, in French and in English, have the same or similar spellings, maybe the same roots, maybe even similar pronunciations but which are not used in the same ways in the two languages. As with wild mushrooms ... some look-alikes ... are dangerous.

If you hear a Frenchman - or Frenchwoman, of course, say "actually" in English ... be suspicious. The word slips into a sentence easily and isn't illogical in most cases. If the Frenchman knows that the word means "in fact" and he uses it that way ... that's fine. No need to be suspicious. BUT if it seems that "actually" is being used as a faithful translation of the French word "actuellement" ... we're mistaken and into a case of ... look-alikes: A fair translation of the idea of "actuellement" would be "now, at the present time." We are thus facing *not just two words but two different concepts*.

So, in fact, the French word, *actuel*, expresses a concept in TIME; the English word *actual* expresses the concept of fact, of ACCURACY or REALITY, or TRUTH even if these are not always objective ... facts!

Misunderstandings may be born of ... false assumptions. Beware of look-alikes!

Tip of the day: In order to avoid misunderstandings, ask questions! Just to confirm what you think you understood. It's very ... economical.

Fortunately ... "false" friends aren't the only kind ... There are real friendships too, with long and deep roots, including a vital one that is called Franco-American.

And that was shown once again this past June when we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy. If you're interested in learning more, take a look at the [AmCham](#) site and the [Freedom and Solidarity Forum](#).

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Respectfully yours,

Mark Levinson

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