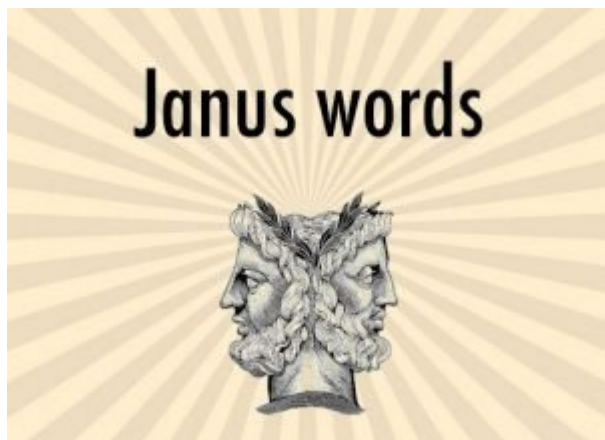


Janus words

8 de agosto de 2016



A Janus word is two-faced (de dos caras), that is, a word that has opposite meanings. Strange is it not? A little history: the word “Janus” comes from Roman mythology, referring to a god that could look forwards and backwards.

So a Janus word is one with two opposite meanings, e.g. *sanction* (sancionar), which can mean both ‘a penalty for disobeying a law’ and ‘official permission or approval for an action’.

Are you confused? ¿Está confuso? Such words exist in Spanish too - *lívido* (que significa amoratado y furioso) and *sancionar* (que podría significar aprobar o castigar).

Here are some examples in English that you need to learn:

- **Peruse:** which can mean “read with care” (leer detenidamente) or browse (hojear).
- **Dust:** one can dust furniture (quitarle al polvo a los muebles) and one can “dust” (espolvorear) a cake, and one can “dust feet”: she dusted her feet with talcum powder (se echo talco en los pies).
- **Inflammable:** this can mean “liable to catch fire” (prender fuego) and “fire proof” (ignífugo o incombustible).

How do you know which meaning applies: the context (el contexto) and common sense (sentido común), as you must do in Spanish.

There are some others - for another day!