



LANGUAGE IS A RESOURCE, LEARNING A RIGHT.

✧ *Bite-Sized PD*

COGNATES AND CROSS-LINGUISTIC CONNECTIONS

Using cross-language patterns unlocks academic vocabulary

Quick Take

Utilizing cognates & cross-linguistic connections helps students **leverage what they already know** in one language to understand and express academic vocabulary in another. It activates prior knowledge, reduces cognitive load, and accelerates content vocabulary growth.

Key ideas:

- Languages share deep structural relationships
- Cognates unlock academic vocabulary
- Cross-linguistic analysis builds metalinguistic awareness

Research shows that multilingual learners who identify and use cognates develop larger vocabularies, access complex texts more easily, and express ideas with greater precision.

Classroom Snapshot

Science: Photosynthesis Vocabulary

Students examine key terms:

- chlorophyll, energy, organism

Teacher highlights cognates:

- energía (Spanish)
- organisme (French)

Polyglot Practice

Choose one academic word from your lesson. Have students identify cognates or related forms in any language they know. Model how those cross-linguistic clues reveal meaning or morphology. Ask students to turn that insight into one precise English sentence that uses the word accurately.

- хлорофилл (Russian)

Students complete a **Cognate Sort**:

- “Looks the same”
- “Sounds the same”
- “Means the same”

Teacher moves:

- Model how to spot roots and affixes
- Have them compare meanings across languages
- Highlight false cognates with examples

Result: Students confidently access complex vocabulary.

AI + Digital Tools

1. Use AI to generate multilingual cognate sets for a unit
2. Use translation tools to preview vocabulary in home languages
3. Use digital morphology tools to highlight roots and affixes
4. Use multilingual dictionaries for deeper semantic exploration

Implementation Notes

- Teach common **roots, prefixes, and suffixes** (bio-, photo-, geo-)
- Provide **cognate charts** for key units
- Use **color-coding** to show shared morphemes
- Compare sentence structures across languages to **highlight shared patterns**

Try This Tomorrow

Pick one key term from your lesson. List its cognates or related forms in languages your students know. Ask students to use those clues to write one clear English sentence that shows accurate meaning.

Build predictable routines:

- “What part of this word looks familiar?”
- “How do you say this at home?”

Pro Tips

- Use **morphology** to deepen understanding (photo = light, syn = united)
- Encourage students to **teach you** cognates from their languages
- Use **visuals** to reinforce meaning
- Highlight **false cognates** to prevent misconceptions
- Integrate cognates into word walls to **highlight patterns**

Pitfalls & Fixes

Pitfall: Ignoring morphology

>>Fix: Teach roots, prefixes, and suffixes explicitly

Pitfall: Assuming all languages share cognates

>>Fix: Ask students to contribute equivalents from their languages

Adaptations for ML Profiles

Newcomers

- Use bilingual glossaries
- Provide visuals for key ideas
- Allow home-language discussion before English

LTEs

- Compare academic vocabulary across languages
- Analyze roots, affixes, and morphology
- Identify and clarify false cognates

Advanced MLs

- Analyze roots, affixes, and morphology across languages
 - Compare discipline-specific terms for nuance and precision
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What the Research Says

- Cross-linguistic analysis strengthens comprehension and metalinguistic awareness (García & Kleyn, 2016).
 - Literacy development for multilingual learners builds on existing linguistic knowledge (August & Shanahan, 2006).
 - Academic vocabulary grows through morphology and word relationships (Nagy & Townsend, 2012).
 - Linguistic interdependence supports transfer across languages (Cummins, 2000).
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Leadership Lens

Leaders should see...

- **Visible** cognate charts and morphology tools
- Teachers prompting students to make **cross-linguistic connections**
- Cognates **integrated into vocabulary instruction**
- A culture that values **linguistic assets**

Systems Impact

- Faster vocabulary acquisition
- Stronger reading comprehension
- More precise academic writing
- Increased confidence and participation

Building Teacher Capacity

- Analyze vocabulary instruction with videos
- Build shared tools:
 - cognate charts, morphology banks
 - multilingual word walls
 - cross-linguistic comparison routines
- Discuss how cognates support **content mastery + English development**

Why This Matters

Cognates and cross-linguistic connections turn students' existing linguistic knowledge into a powerful pathway for academic vocabulary growth.



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