

Foreword

Many words in the English vocabulary are of French origin, most coming from the Anglo-Norman spoken by the upper classes in England for several hundred years after the Norman Conquest, before the language settled into what became Modern English. Thoroughly English words of French origin, such as art, competition, force, machine, money, police, publicity, role, routine and table, are pronounced according to English rules of phonology, rather than French, and are commonly used by English speakers without any consciousness of their French origin.

Contents

A

apéritifs with amuse-gueules

à la carte

lit. "on the card, i.e. menu"; In restaurants it refers to ordering individual dishes "à la carte" rather than a fixed-price meal "menu". In America "à la Carte Menu" can be found, an oxymoron and a pleonasm.

A propos

Regarding/concerning (the correct French syntax is à propos de)

aide-de-camp

lit. "camp helper"; A military officer who serves as an adjutant to a higher-ranking officer, prince or other high political dignitary.

aide-mémoire

lit. "memory aid"; an object or memorandum to assist in remembrance, or a diplomatic paper proposing the major points of discussion.

amour propre

"Self-love", Self-respect.

Amuse-bouche or **amuse-gueule**

lit. "mouth-amuser"; a single, bite-sized hors d'œuvre. In France, the exact expression used is amuse-gueule, gueule being slang for mouth (gueule is the mouth of a carnivorous animal; when used to describe the mouth of a human, it is vulgar), although the expression in itself is not vulgar. The expression refers to a small mouthful of food, served at the discretion of the chef before a meal as an hors d'œuvre or between main courses.

ancien régime

A sociopolitical or other system that no longer exists, an allusion to pre-revolutionary France (used with capital letters in French with this meaning: Ancien Régime.)

aperçu

A preview; a first impression; initial insight.

apéritif or **aperitif**

lit. "[drink] opening the appetite", a before-meal drink. In colloquial French, un apéritif is usually shortened to un apéro.

appellation contrôlée

Supervised use of a name. For the conventional use of the term, see Appellation d'origine contrôlée.

appetence

1. A natural craving or desire 2. An attraction or affinity; From French word "Appétence", derived from "Appétit" (Appetite).

après moi, le déluge

lit. "After me, the deluge", a remark attributed to Louis XV of France in reference to the impending end of a functioning French monarchy and predicting the French Revolution. It is derived from Madame de Pompadour's après nous, le déluge, "after us, the deluge". The Royal Air Force No. 617 Squadron, famously known as the "Dambusters", uses this as its motto.

arête

A narrow ridge. In French, also fishbone; edge of a polyhedron or graph; bridge of the nose.

armoire

A type of cabinet; wardrobe.

arrière-pensée

Ultterior motive; concealed thought, plan, or motive.

art nouveau

A style of decoration and architecture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It takes a capital in French (Art nouveau).

attaché

A person attached to an embassy; in French it is also the past participle of the verbe "attacher" : to fasten, to tighten, to be linked.

attaque au fer

An attack on the opponent's blade in fencing, *e.g beat, expulsion, pressure.

*e.g : exempli gratia

au contraire

On the contrary.

au courant

Up-to-date; abreast of current affairs.

au fait

Being conversant in or with, or instructed in or with.

au gratin

"With gratings", anything that is grated onto a food dish. In English, specifically 'with cheese'.

au jus

Lit. "with juice", referring to a food course served with sauce. Often redundantly formulated, as in 'Open-faced steak sandwich, served with au jus.' No longer used in French, except for the colloquial, être au jus (to be informed).

au naturel

1. a. Nude. b. In a natural state: an au naturel hairstyle. 2. Cooked simply.

au pair

A young foreigner who does domestic chores in exchange for room and board. In France, those chores are mainly child care/education.

au revoir !

"See you later!" In French, a contraction of Au plaisir de vous revoir (to the pleasure of seeing you again).

avant-garde (pl. avant-gardes)

Applied to cutting-edge or radically innovative movements in art, music and literature; figuratively "on the edge", literally, a military term, meaning "vanguard" (which is a corruption of avant-garde) or "advance guard", in other words, "first to attack" (antonym of arrière-garde).

avant la lettre

Used to describe something or someone seen as a forerunner of something (such as an artistic or political movement) before that something was recognized and named, e.g., "a post-modernist avant la lettre", "a feminist avant la lettre". The expression literally means "before the letter", i.e., "before it had a name". The French modern form of this expression is avant l'heure.

avoir du pois

Used in Middle English, avoir de pois : commodities sold by weight, alteration of Old French avoir de peis = "goods of weight"

B

baguette

A long, narrow loaf of bread with a crisp crust, often called "French bread" or "French stick" in the United Kingdom. In French, a baguette is any long and narrow stick-like object, for example a "chopstick". Also, a rectangular diamond, cut to twenty-five facets.

banquette

A long upholstered bench or a sofa.

beaucoup de

Used interchangeably with the English equivalent of "lots of/many/a great number of". Appropriate when the speaker wants to convey a greater positive connotation and/or greater emphasis. Often used as an informal expression, mostly in small regional dialect-pockets in the Canadian Prairies and the American South, especially in Alberta and Louisiana respectively.

beau geste

lit. "beautiful gesture", a gracious gesture, noble in form but often futile or meaningless in substance. This French expression has been pressing at the door of standard English with only partial success, since the appearance of P. C. Wren's Beau Geste (1924), the first of his Foreign Legion novels.

Beaux-Arts

Monumental architectural style of the early 20th century made famous by the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

bel esprit (pl. beaux esprits)

lit. "fine mind"; a cultivated, highly intelligent person.

Belle Époque

A period in European social history that began during the late 19th century and lasted until World War I.

belles-lettres

lit. "fine letters"; literature regarded for its aesthetic value rather than its didactic or informative content; also, light, stylish writings, usually on literary or intellectual subjects.

bien entendu

Well understood, well known, obvious – "of course"

bien pensant

lit. "well thinking"; right thinking, orthodox. Formerly implied willful blindness to dangers or suffering faced by others but, nowadays corresponds to "politically correct". The noun form bien-pensance is rarely seen in English.

billet-doux

lit. "sweet note", love letter

blasé

Unimpressed with something because of overfamiliarity, jaded.

bon appétit

lit. "good appetite"; "enjoy your meal".

bon mot (pl. bons mots)

Well-chosen word(s), particularly a witty remark ("each bon mot which falls from his lips is analysed and filed away for posterity", The European Magazine, August 29 – September 4, 1996.)

bon vivant

One who enjoys the good life, an epicurean.

bon voyage

lit. "good journey"; have a good trip!

bourgeois

Member of the bourgeoisie, originally councilmen, burghers or even aristocrats living in towns in the Middle Ages. Now the term is derogatory, and it applies to a person whose beliefs, attitudes, and practices are conventionally middle-class.

bric-à-brac

Small ornamental objects, less valuable than antiques; a collection of old furniture, china, plates and curiosities. Cf. de bric et de broc, corresponding to English "by hook or by crook", and brack, refuse.

bricolage

To improvise or assemble something useful from what happens to be at hand; to expedite or economize a project with readily available components, versus a kit or outside sources; to reuse spare parts for other than their original purpose; to create something new by arranging old material; to create a new, valuable purpose for an object that has completed its original purpose and otherwise be discarded. Connotes an intrepid do-it-yourself spirit or clever repurposing. Differs from tinkering which merely modifies an existing arrangement. The term is used metaphorically to describe inventive philosophy, theories, and practices in business and academic fields, where new concepts are found in interactions of old ideas.

brioche

A sweet yeast bun, kind of a crossover between a popover and a light muffin; French also use the term as slang for 'potbelly', because of the overhang effect.

bureau (pl. bureaux)

Government office; an agency for information exchange. Also means "desk" in French, and in the U.K.

C

ça ne fait rien

"that doesn't matter"; rendered as *san fairy Ann* in British World War I slang.

cache

A collection of items of the same type stored in a hidden or inaccessible place (such as in an *oubliette*). Often used for weapons.

cachet

lit. "stamp"; a distinctive quality; quality, prestige.

café

A coffee shop (also used in French for "coffee").

café au lait

Coffee with milk; or a light-brown color. In medicine, it is also used to describe a birthmark that is of a light-brown color (*café au lait spot*).

calque

Acopied term/thing.

canard

(*canard* means "duck" in French)

An unfounded rumor or anecdote.

A leading airfoil attached to an aircraft forward of the main wing.

A slang word for "newspaper".

A piece of sugar slightly soured with coffee or cognac (or another strong alcohol).

canapé

A small, prepared and usually decorative food, held in the fingers and often eaten in one bite. In French, it can also refer to a "sofa".

carte blanche

lit. "white card" (i.e. blank check); unlimited authority.

carte de visite

lit. "visiting card"; a calling card.

cause célèbre

Controversial celebrity issue.

c'est la guerre:

"That's war!"

c'est la vie:

"That's life!" or "Such is life!"

Though either foreign expression can be used to say that life is harsh but that one must accept it, the former may imply a more deliberate cause thereof, while the latter, more accidental.

chaise longue

A long chair for reclining; sometimes misstated as "chaise lounge" .

Champs-Élysées

lit. "Elysian Fields"; Avenue des Champs-Élysées, one of the broadest boulevards in Paris. Often referred to as simply les Champs.

chanteuse

Female singer, a female singer, especially at a nightclub, bar, cabaret, or diner.

chargé d'affaires

A diplomat left in charge of day-to-day business at a diplomatic mission. Within the United States Department of State, a "chargé" is any officer left in charge of the mission in the absence of the titular chief of mission.

chauffeur

Driver.

chef d'œuvre

A masterpiece.

cherchez la femme

"Look for / seek the woman", in the sense that, when a man behaves out of character or in an otherwise apparently inexplicable manner, the reason may be found in his trying to cover up an illicit affair with a woman, or to impress or gain favour with a woman. This expression was first used in a novel by Alexandre Dumas (père), in the third chapter of *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1854), in the form of *cherchons la femme* ("let's look for the woman"). The expression is found in John Latey's 1878 English translation: "Ah! Monsieur Jackal, you were right when you said, 'Seek the woman.'" The phrase was adopted into everyday English use and crossed the Atlantic by 1909.

chez

At the house of: often used in the names of restaurants and the like; *Chez Marie* = "Marie's".

chic

Stylish.

chignon

A hairstyle worn in a roll at the nape of the neck.

cinéma pur

An avant-garde film movement which was born in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s.

cinéma vérité

Realism in documentary filmmaking. "Vérité" means "truth".

cliché

Originally referred to a printer's block used to reproduce type, compare the original meaning of stereotype. A phrase that has become trite through overuse; a stereotype.

clique

A small exclusive group of friends; always used in a pejorative way in French and, usually, in English. Often pronounced the same as "click" in British English.

cloisonné

An ancient technique for decorating metalwork objects.

commandant

Commanding officer of a base, depot or training area. In France, used for an airline pilot (le commandant de bord), in the Army as appellative for a chef de bataillon or a chef d'escadron (roughly equivalent to a major) or in the Navy for any officer from capitaine de corvette to capitaine de vaisseau (equivalent to the Army's majors, lieutenant-colonels and colonels) or for any officer heading a ship.

comme ci, comme ça

lit. "like this, like that"; neither good nor bad, so-so.

communiqué

lit. "communicated"; an official communication.

concierge

A receptionist at a hotel or residence.

concordat

An agreement; a treaty; when used with a capital C in French, it refers to the treaty between the French State and Judaeo-Christian religions during the French Empire (Napoleon): priests, ministers and rabbis became civil servants. This treaty was abolished in 1905 (law Church-State separation) but is still in use in Alsace-Lorraine (those territories were under German administration during 1871–1918).

confrère also confrere

A colleague, an associate

contre-coup

Against the blow. This word describes the repercussion of a physical or mental shock, or an indirect consequence of an event.

contre-jour

Against daylight. This word (mostly used in art namely photography, cinema or painting) describes the light that illumines an object from the other side of your own point of view.

contretemps

An awkward clash; a delay.

coquette

A flirtatious girl; a tease.

cordon bleu

(lit. "blue ribbon"). A "cordon bleu" may refer to several things, both in French and in English.

A person who excels in cooking.

An award given to such a person.

An international group of hospitality management and cooking schools teaching French cuisine, founded in France.

An escalope of veal, chicken or pork stuffed with ham and cheese, then breaded and fried.

cordon sanitaire

A policy of containment directed against a hostile entity or ideology; a chain of buffer states; lit. "quarantine line".

corniche

A road that clings like a ledge to the side of a cliff or mountain.

cortège

A funeral procession; in French has a broader meaning and refers to all kinds of processions.

coup de foudre

lit. "thunderbolt" ("strike of thunder"); a sudden unforeseen event, usually used to describe love at first sight.

coup d'état

Political coup, government overthrow

coup de grâce

The final blow that results in victory (lit. "blow of mercy"), historically used in the context of the battlefield to refer to the killing of badly wounded enemy soldiers, now more often used in a figurative context (e.g., business).

coup de main

(lit. "a blow with the hand."), means "help from someone". Example : "Besoin d'un coup de main ?" means "Need help ?"

coup de maître

Stroke of the master, master stroke. This word describes a planned action skilfully done. See also tour de force below.

coup de théâtre

a dramatic turn of events.

coup d'œil

lit. "a blow or touch of the eye"; a glance.

couture

Fashion (usually refers to high fashion).

couturier

A fashion designer (usually refers to high fashion, rather than everyday clothes design. In French, it means 'tailor'; a couturière is a seamstress.

crèche

A nativity display; more commonly (in the United Kingdom), a place where children are left by their parents for short periods in the supervision of childminders; both meanings still exist in French.

crème brûlée

lit. "burnt cream"; a dessert consisting primarily of custard and toasted sugar, that is, caramel.

crème de la crème

Best of the best, "cream of the cream", used to describe highly skilled people or objects. A synonymous expression in French is fin du fin.

crème fraîche

lit. "fresh cream", a heavy cream slightly soured with bacterial culture, but not as sour or as thick as sour cream and does not curdle.

crêpe

A thin sweet or savoury pancake eaten as a light meal or dessert.

crêperie

A takeaway restaurant or stall, serving crêpes as a form of fast food or street food, or may be a more formal sit-down restaurant or café.

critique

A critical analysis or evaluation of a work, or the art of criticizing. From Latin criticus, from Ancient Greek κριτικός (kritikos).

croissant

A crescent-shaped bread made of flaky pastry; in French also the word for crescent.

Originally "bottom of sack"[and used in English in anatomy since 1738. Used for dead end (street) since 1800 in English, since 14th century in French. The often heard erroneous folk etymology "arse [buttocks] of the sack" is based on the current meaning of cul in French, but cul-de-sac is used to refer to dead ends in modern French and is not vulgar, though the terms impasse and voie sans issue are more common in modern French.

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D

de rigueur

Required or expected, especially in fashion or etiquette.

de trop

Unnecessary, unwanted, or more than is suitable.