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FRENCH OR ANGLAIS à la Mode

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Ever since the Norman conquest of England, it has been fashionable to substitute the French term for the more prosaic Anglo-Saxon. Thus in the earliest times we find at the table beef (*bœuf*) instead of cow veal O.F. (*veal* → *veau*) instead of calf, pork (*porc*) instead of pig, and so forth.

In this matter of food especially, French *cuisine* has always dominated and the *menus* for *banquets* are still almost invariably printed in French. The terms *à la carte* with *hors-d'œuvre*, *soupe*, *entrée* and *dessert* are now completely at home in English even though *hors-d'œuvre* may not always be too well pronounced.

In Canada, however, there has frequently been a reaction against the affectation of using a French word where a plain English one will do — perhaps the result of the long-seated animosity between French and English Canadians. Only in the larger CPR and CNR hotels is one likely to find a menu in French, in the West at least. But even among quite ordinary people, the appellation "French" is commonly used to describe unusual and exotic foods or a fancy way of preparing plain foods.

In what is probably the best-known example, "French-fried" potatoes, the significance of the term "French" is really almost lost because the mental image is so clearly that of potatoes fried in deep sizzling fat. Even so, no one in Western Canada would dream of saying "deep fried" as is commonly done in the United States instead of "French fried."

The term "French beans" no longer is used in Canada to describe green beans (*haricots verts*) but, on the contrary, French-cut green beans (i.e., cut on the bias) is a very familiar term. Similarly, every housewife knows that to have pork tenderloin cut up and pounded flat, she must ask to have it "Frenched." And any small restaurant cook would know that "French toast" is bread dipped in a batter of egg and milk and fried in a pan.

The terms "French rolls", "French bread" (or a "French loaf"), "French pastries" or wines, and "French dressing" are merely descriptive of varieties indigenous to France. French dressing, for example, is that made with oil and vinegar as opposed to the more common English boiled dressing.

"French ice-cream", on the other hand, is a richer, creamier type of ice-cream and "French (or Belgian) endive" (chicory) is the less well-known but more interesting salad green.

In the realm of dressmaking and tailoring, the French have also continued to lead the way. The *négligée*, the *peignoir*, the *brassière* and *lingerie* are examples of words which have been accepted into English. *Redingote* is a more interesting word since here we have the original English "riding-coat" borrowed by the French and then re-borrowed as used to describe a dress with a matching overdress buttoning part way down the front.

Here, too, Canadians accept the well-established French importations but tend to resent new impositions. *Négligée*, for example, is commonly used but "house-coat" would probably be preferred to *peignoir*.

But here again, the adjective "French" is used without any discretion whatever to describe materials, techniques, and styles. The pant-cuff turned up on the inside and then folded up in half on the outside is a "French cuff". Similarly, the more elegant double cuffs on shirts used with cuff-links are French cuffs. Men's underwear of the "jockey shorts" style is sometimes called French shorts. In dressmaking, "French canvas" is used to stiffen very light materials and some of them are also finished with "French seams". "French tacks" are used to hold belts on to dresses. For cleaning suits or dresses, the very finest dry-cleaners are, of course, "French cleaners". For shoes, fine supple calf skin of the best quality is "French calf".

In embroidery, the "French knot" is that made by twisting thread round and round a needle which is then pulled through the material to leave a small colored dot or rosette on the surface. For children, "French knitting" is done with a spool on which the stitches are linked into a sort of long chain by lifting the wool in sequence over four or more pins or nails on the top of the spool while the finished cord pushes out through the bottom.

In the house, "French windows" (or doors) are well-known but not too practical in this rigorous climate. "French polishing" is the term used to describe the finest type of furniture finishing — much superior to varnishing or shellacking. "French walnut" is beautifully grained dark wood even though it probably never came from France.

The term "French horn" for what is called in France a *cor à pistons* or *cor d'harmonie* is universal in English. Other commonly accepted terms are the "French curve" (for draughtsmen and designers), "French briar" (for pipes), "French cambric" (for fine linen handkerchiefs) and "French heels" (the slim but elegant curved heels of moderate height which were the distinguishing mark of the nobility in the 17th and 18th centuries.)

With the appellation "French", one can easily see that generally speaking something unusual or attractive is being glamorized. The term "French" indicates that the particular object or style is exciting, ingenious and desirable. No such connotation exists for "anglais" in French, however, where the term is mostly reserved for items that can only be called practical, prosaic and unromantic.

In French, for instance, the monkey wrench is a *clef anglaise* and the safety pin an *épinge anglaise* although French Canadians tend to *naud anglais* and a book bound in cheap buckram instead of fine leather

is said to have a *reliure anglaise*. The hunting saddle is a *selle anglaise* and Epsom salts are *sel anglais* or *sel d'Angleterre* !

None of the above terms in English or French have a literally translated form in the other language except possibly for "French fried" potatoes. In French, potatoes which are simply boiled or steamed — the least imaginative and the least appetizing way ever devised to serve this vegetable, are called "*pommes à l'anglaise*".

There are a few other expressions, however, which exist in both languages. The English horn, for instance, is a *cor anglais* and the English garden a *jardin à l'anglaise*. The French nail or wire nail is called a *clou de Paris* — not quite the same thing, but almost !

And finally, there are several uncomplimentary terms which both the English and the French are anxious to disown. Venereal disease used to be called French pox while the French called it Italian. Similarly, the rather lascivious kiss where the tongue is introduced into the partner's mouth is in English called a "French" kiss but in French a *baiser à l'italienne*. The vulgar French letter or safe is in the other language a *capote anglaise* ! And the expression to take "French leave" (which originally merely meant to depart without making a point of speaking to the host or hostess but by extension, to desert from the Army) in French is "*filer à l'anglaise*".

In the use of the adjectives *French* and *anglais* then, we have a very interesting commentary on international relations between two cultures. There are many more instances of the use of *French* in English than of *anglais* in French. Most of them show the originality, the style and the elegance of the French as opposed to the rather dull practicality of the English.⁽¹⁾



¶ EXCUSE MY FRENCH

Si je puis me permettre d'ajouter quelques précisions à l'intéressant article de M. Graham, je noterai d'abord que ce sujet est très riche de possibilités pour le traducteur, puisqu'il démontre éloquentement qu'on ne traduit pas les *termes* d'un syntagme figé, mais son sens global. Il serait intéressant de faire un relevé complet de ces expressions d'origine onomastique, pour savoir si l'anglais et le français du Canada en possèdent autant (et possèdent les mêmes) que l'anglais et le français d'Europe.¹

◆ Nous ne saurions mieux faire que de proposer des traductions pour les exemples anglais donnés par l'auteur. Les lecteurs voudront bien les vérifier, et le cas échéant les compléter par des équivalents canadiens qui m'ont échappé. Les voici, dans l'ordre du texte :

¹ Cf. Déciry, Françoise, *Dérivation onomastique et création lexicologique*. U. de M. Thèse de M. A. 1955.