

# A French Twist

## Foreign terminology makes a cultural impact and adds some life to American vocabulary

By **ANGELA HAMPTON**  
Staff Writer

"C'est la vie, c'est la vie..." there's that song again on the radio. Yeah, that's it. It's foreign—French, right? That phrase they keep singing: "C'est la vie." Hmmm... catchy.

Most Americans, whether French scholars or not, have heard the saying "C'est la vie" sometime in their lives, and most immediately think to themselves, "ah, such is life." It's a common French expression that has been used in the English language for ages.

Why employ French words when there are English equivalents to express the same meaning? Americans (as well as most other people) often associate French language and culture with art, fine food, fashion and, ah, romance. So, perhaps the recognition and utilization of French expressions signifies some sort of knowledge.

French terms are certainly abundant in American culture. For example, a person looking for a good breakfast or lunch might stop at a cafe for coffee and croissants. However, the cuisine at a larger restaurant may be more appealing for dinner. One can start with hors-d'oeuvres, or perhaps les escargots, for an appetizer. Then, for an entree, dishes like coq au vin and chicken cordon bleu are very délicieux. Still hungry? Then, dessert is a must. Mousse au chocolat fantastique! But bons bons from a gourmet sweet shop can be equally as appealing. Whatever the decision, bon appetit!

The world of fashion is another outlet for French vocabulary. French brand names, such as Esprit, are tres chic to Americans who wish to be a la mode. French labels can be expensive, though. It is not common to find a beau chapeau a bon marche in an exclusive boutique.

It is clear that Americans have adopted many French expressions.

But is this the extent of the French-American cultural exchange? Has America had no influence or impact on France?

Au contraire! There is an expanding English American vocabulary within the French language as well.

Charles Bice, a senior English economics major, spent a year studying abroad in Montpellier, France. Bice said he noticed words like le weekend, le parking, and super which were used commonly by the French people with whom he came in contact. "They're so integrated that you get to where you don't even think about it," he said.

The use of English words by many French people is probably prompted by the airing of U.S. television shows in France. Bise says, "They all get syndicated American TV," he said, "so they (the French) may get catch words from it."

Paula Stafford, a bio-statistics major, noticed the influence of U.S. television on French views of America when she spent a year in Montpellier, France. "To them, America is California, Dallas and New York," she said. "They see our TV shows and think we all dress like Pamela Fwing."

Bice said that use of English expressions was more prevalent in larger cities and among the students and that the university crowd has access to English because it is the first foreign language they usually learn.

Hence, English words, usually old hat, are used by the French to reflect cultural trends. Words like le fast food and l'hamburger have directly resulted from fast food chains, such as McDonalds, which are now scattered throughout France and much of Europe.

Fiona Doloughan, a French IV teaching assistant who is a graduate student in comparative literature, spent a year in Lyon, France and several summers working in Brittany. Doloughan said that about 10 to 15 years ago, certain elite classes of Parisians considered it stylish to use English words such as le drink and

le livingroom rather than their own French counterparts. "What is different from your own always has a sort of appeal."

American clothing trends have also influenced French terminology. Doloughan said that words like le t-shirt, le jean and le short were often used while she lived in France. She said that the French even called their high-top tennis shoes les baskets after American basketball shoes.

Advances in industry and technology have resulted in recent additions to the French vocabulary. "In technical or scientific circles, you would find the use of English words," Doloughan said. She had often heard the word le computer, even though the French term for computer is l'ordinateur.

But the French carefully monitor the addition of new words into their vocabulary. Through l'Academie Francaise (the French Academy), which has been in existence for 350 years, the French pass judgement on new words, grammar and its usage.

"Within the last decade, they (l'Academie Francaise) had a trend where they tried to purify the French language," said Doloughan. "I'm not sure that they've been very successful in that just because English is such an international language."

Doloughan said that in the future, it is more likely that American English words will be integrated into the French language than British English words. This mix is probable because the American vocabulary is expanding more rapidly than that of the British.

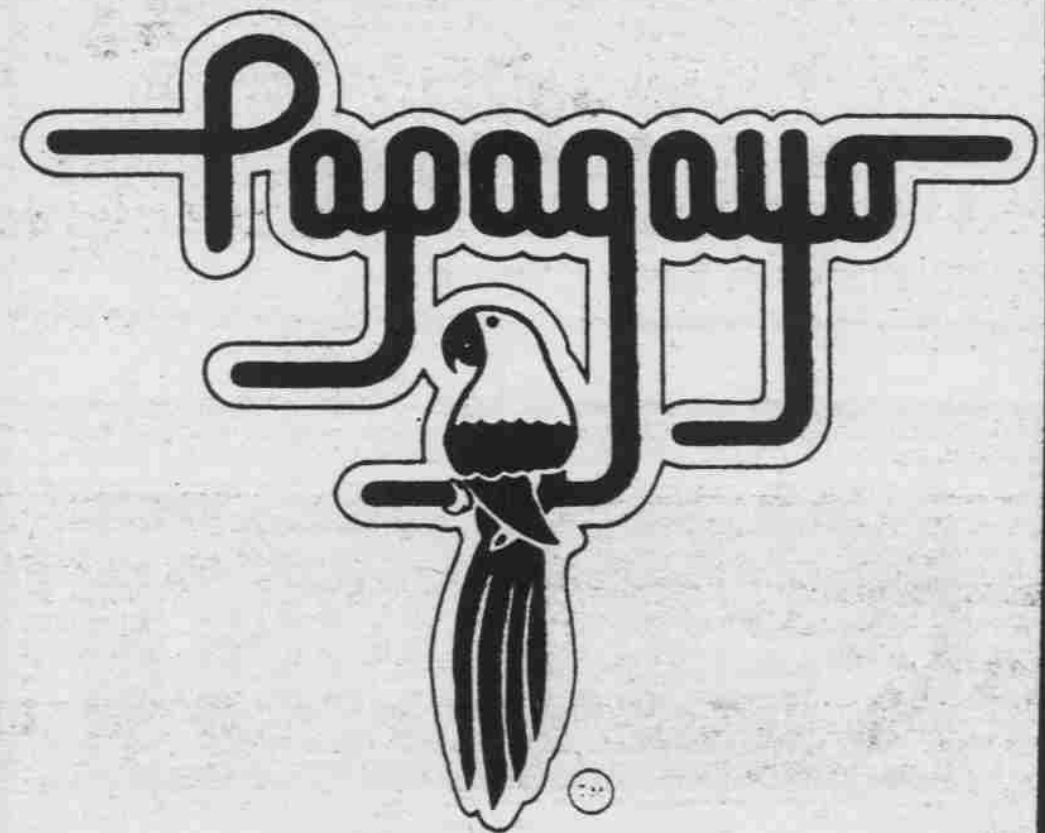
It is not certain which country, France or America, has integrated more of the other's language into its own, but both vocabularies are expanding steadily. At any rate, it just might pay off to brush up on the old Francais at a time when more and more trends are influenced by the French. As they say, "Vive La France!" Of course, in France, that may be changing to "Vive l'America!"

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