
Intellectual franglais

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Some adjectival links across the Channel

OF THE countless delights and complexities to be discovered in the relationships among the Indo-European languages, particularly fascinating are the connections between English and French. The two languages start together in proto-Indo-European (if there ever was such a thing), diverge into the Germanic and Latinate branches of the family, come together (north of the channel only) with the merging of French and English after the invasion of William of Normandy in 1066, and have been glued together even more by the influence of the classical languages, particularly Latin, in and after the Renaissance.

For the first stage, comparative philologists can show us not only that there is a common origin to words that look similar, such as *lake* and *lac*, but also that apparently unconnected forms, such as the English *come* and the French *venir*, are really the same word; from the second, we get doublets in English, such as *wonder* (verb: Germanic) and *marvel* (French); in the third, English makes that a triplet with the Latinate *admire*. And both languages invent Latin-sounding words, such as *inflation*.

There are many books and articles on this topic. For the newcomer who can read French I recommend Henriette Walter's *Hon(n)i soit qui mal y pense: l'incroyable histoire d'amour entre le français et l'anglais* ('The amazing love-story between French and English'). This tells us the interesting things that the amateur, rather than the expert, wants to know and keeps us involved with light-hearted quizzes and tests.

One point the two languages have in common that could help the French learner of English, or vice-versa, is a group of adjectives related to certain basic nouns. The French and English forms of the adjectives are either identical in spelling or very close. Some are themselves the basis for a further noun. The French nouns, such as *mer* ('sea') and *nez* ('nose'), come from a post-

classical development of Latin, that became the Romance languages, whereas the adjectives, *maritime* and *nasal*, are based on noun and adjective forms that still correspond with those of classical Latin (roughly 150 BC to AD 250); in this case the Latin words are *mare*, *maritimus*, *nasum*, and *nasalis*. Many of the English nouns are Germanic in origin and so, at this historical stage, do not resemble the adjective at all, and some also have a Germanically-based adjective. This is the sort of thing that makes English so rich in distinctions of sense among words of similar meaning.

How do native speakers feel about these adjectives? To those who are sensitive to such things, the adjectives have a more intellectual feel to them than the nouns, because they sound more classical, though this may be felt more strongly by native speakers of English rather than French. It makes one wonder, however, about the use of some adjectives at an early stage in the historical development of French. If linguistic self-consciousness is a conservative influence, might there have been some adjectives that were used only in intellectual circles, so that they did not change in the same way as the nouns? Perhaps it was only intellectuals who talked of *animaux nocturnes* ('nocturnal animals') whereas the linguistically unreflecting would speak of *ani-*

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An adjectival bond

French noun	Adjective		English noun
ami	amical	amicable	friend
chien	canin	canine	dog
ciel	céleste	celestial	sky
citoyen	civil		citizen
dieu	divin	divine	god
eau	aquatique	aquatic	water
école	scolaire	scholarly	school
ennemi	inimical		enemy
fable	fabuleux	fabulous	fable
fils	filial		son
fleur	floral		flower
géant	gigantesque	gigantic	giant
gloire	glorieux	glorious	glory
île	insulaire	insular	isle
jour	diurne	diurnal	day
lettre	littéraire	literary	letter
main	manuel	manual	hand
maître	magistral	magisterial	master
mer	maritime		sea
nez	nasal		nose
nuit	nocturne	nocturnal	night
œil	oculaire	ocular	eye
père	paternel	paternal	father
peinture	pictura	pictorial	picture
voix	vocal		voice

maux de la nuit ('animals of the night').

We can make a three-column list, then, of the French and English nouns and the adjectives they share, the list of twenty-five items below being representative but very far from exhaustive. I have no idea how many words a complete list would contain.

For the French words, I have included only items in which there is a formal link between noun and adjective, though sometimes it may not be apparent. As in English, there are some adjectives for which the cognate noun does not exist. For example, there is *félin* ('feline') but no noun for 'cat' based on the Latin *felēs*; instead, modern French has *chat*, from which no adjective is formed. It is the same with *nau-*

tique ('nautical'): although there are the nouns *astronaute* and *internaute*, the French for 'sailor' is *marin* or *matelot*, rather than a classical **naute* from the Latin *nauta*.

In English, likewise, the adjective *domestic* has no cognate noun such as **dom*, that would be based on the Latin *domus* ('house'). Some of the English nouns have both Latinate and Germanic adjectives. So, for *brother*, *horse* and *nose*, there is not only *fraternal*, *equine*, and *nasal*, but also *brotherly*, *horsey*, and *nosy*. The Germanic adjectives are more emotional and personal than the Latinate ones.

The accompanying panel, then, is a quick, partial view of this intellectual bond between English and French. ■