
très SHOW

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Creative wordplay in *franglais*: mixed messages in French
publicity glimpsed from a bus

CHANGE OF function in English words adopted into French is familiar enough, so *Feeling Beauté*, glimpsed from the bus above a beauty salon, was not particularly surprising, nor the explanatory US borrowing, *wellness*. But something else seemed to be going on in *très SHOW*. Not recorded in my old French-English dictionary (*Collins Robert*, 1978), *show* is glossed in my more recent French dictionaries (*Larousse*, 1985, 1996) in the following terms:

noun (English word): a theatrical production centred on a music hall performer, singer, presenter, etc...

as in English – except that it wasn't being used as such in advertising the Casino's seasonal programme – rather, adjectively, modified by 'very' (*très*), to characterise the whole season. There is a French adjective that chimes closely with the English noun, *chaud*:

adjective: which has or provides heat;
figuratively: lively animated; recent, as in 'hot news'

And what we seem to have here is wordplay, exploiting an English spelling to suggest the sound of an altogether different French word, with both used jointly to promote the season's new and exciting entertainments.

The bus (*bus* is both English and French) was labelled, *SUNbus*, the logo suitably decorated with a sun image – with reason enough on the French Riviera: we had a cloudless fortnight! But, while this chimes nicely in English, it doesn't in French, however it is pronounced – if at all, since the point seemed to be entirely graphic. It was glossed as *Service urbain de Nice* ('Nice city service'), so: a French acronym forming an English item in another piece of English-French word play.

More contrived was the name of a hair dressing salon: *ATMOSP'HAIR*. The French word *atmosphère*, rhymes more closely than the Eng-

lish *atmosphère*, with the target English *hair*, highlighted here by our old friend the over-worked apostrophe, disrupting the French orthographic correspondence <ph>, as in English, for /f/, to make the point.

And similarly, another shop sign, *LABEL PUB*. Two uses of the form *pub* in French are recorded by *Larousse*:

noun: a British 'pub'

noun (familiar): publicity, advertising (short form of *publicité*)

Glossed as *sérigraphie* here, so evidently for a print shop ('reprographics'). But *label?* –

noun: trademark, mark of quality

here used as a pre-modifier – and/or as a corruption of *la belle* ('the beautiful')

(pre-modifying): fine, stylish, elegant...

with even perhaps an allusion to the humblest sort of printing at least in the English sense of *label?* Alas, no time to get off and ask.

So there we have it: 'franglais' as witty word games in French public signs, logos and advertising – 'très show'! ■

References

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