

*SHALL WE HORS D'OEUVRES ? \**  
**THE ASSIMILATION OF GALLICISMS INTO ENGLISH**

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## **1. Introduction**

My interest in this topic is as an English linguist who, in the course of communicating over recent years with French Romance linguists, largely within the framework of the LADL research network of Maurice Gross, has become more aware of the treasury of French vocabulary and phraseology in my own language. So it is curiosity that has led to this initial study. My intention is to look into the linguistic treatment of Gallicisms in current English text, more specifically in British broad-sheet journalism, and to unearth some of the principles and issues involved. This paper was conceived as a tribute to Maurice Gross, and is addressed to him and his team.

### *Brief History of Gallicisms in English*

Gallicisms, by which I mean French loan words, have been entering the English language since before the Norman Conquest. Precise figures are impossible to ascertain, since early evidence lies solely in the relatively few extant English manuscripts, the practice of writing in English virtually dying out between 1100 and 1200. The biggest single influx of French loans took place between 1200 and 1400. The earliest borrowings were Anglo-Norman, the later ones tended to be Central French.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that over 10,000 French words were adopted during the Middle English period, 75% of which survive in English today. The actual figure must be much larger, bearing in mind that written sources are the only available basis for calculation, and that most 'words' involve several inflexions and derived forms. In subsequent centuries, the climate continued to favour French borrowing. Caxton's press of 1476 helped to make the French component of English a permanent fixture. The Renaissance, 1500-1650, fostered

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\* Sic. See § 5.2.2. and 5.2.3.ii.

<sup>1</sup> Linguists and lexicographers are in dispute over the precise etymologies of French loans over the centuries.

scholarly translation requiring hundreds of foreign borrowings, many from French. The Age of Exploration, beginning in 1650, added further French words in spite of the new colonial focus, and in the eighteenth century, French was a highly popular source of loans, being at the height of prestige among the English upper class. From the nineteenth century until today, French loan words have continued to accompany cultural imports or add a gloss to aspects of English culture.

In the mediaeval era, France contributed to English much of the terminology of government, religion, law, military, sport, social life, etiquette, morals, fashion and cuisine; also much of the vocabulary of art, learning and medicine (Geipel 1971; Baugh & Cable 1997; Freeborn 1998). It even made a significant early contribution to the basic vocabulary of English, many of the “simple, forceful” words in English being French, such as: “*beak, cry, fool, frown, fury, glory, horror, humour, isle, pity, river, rock, ruin, stain, stuff, touch, wreck and calm*” (Baugh & Cable, *ibid.*).

Thereafter, France remained until the 19<sup>th</sup> century a model of civilisation for England and English writers, both in terms of its philosophy and its manners. Today, France still retains an aura of style and sophistication in the English imagination, and this is reflected in more recent French loan vocabulary, and in the stylistic roles to which it is put.

## 2. Some Reasons for the Loan of French words in English

Fowler (1908) gave a prescriptive account of the uses of Gallicisms at the turn of the century. He saw pretension as the chief motivation (e.g. in saying *distrain* instead of ‘absent-minded’; *bien entendu* for ‘of course’). He allowed, however, that it was ‘defensible’ to borrow a French (or foreign) word if it possessed ‘a definite meaning that no existing English word had’ (*entente* being preferable to ‘good understanding’). He also conceded that ‘giving an atmosphere’ through the use of a French word, might be ‘praiseworthy’ under some circumstances (e.g. using the French word *déjeuner* instead of English ‘lunch’ in the context of inviting the officers of the French Fleet to lunch). The source of Fowler’s attestations was largely the Times newspaper of the day. My language data are late 20<sup>th</sup> century *Independent* newspaper texts. Here, I still find evidence of the same applications and motivations as Fowler, though not of all the Gallicisms he cites (e.g. no cases of *démarche, démenti, dérouté*). I would characterise the reasons for their use as follows. One purpose is to fill ‘lacunae’ or gaps in English. A second is the need or desire to indicate membership of a social or educational elite. A third motivation is to exploit the loan as a stylistic device: to create humour, or to evaluate and indicate authorial attitude. Of course, the same Gallicism may be employed in more than one role at any point.

### 2.1. *Galicisms used to fill lacunae in English*

A lacuna is a gap in a language where no word exists that is adequate to convey a particular denotation or connotation, reference or nuance. Lacunae exist in English for imported French cultural concepts, inventions and institutions. If we have no indigenous term for *chemin de fer* (card game), *nouvelle cuisine* and so on, we use the French one. Equally, if there is sometimes no single, neat word in English to express an English concept, and if the gap can be better filled by a French term, we will adopt it. Such loans include *carnet*, *faux ami*, *joie de vivre*, *poignant* and *RSVP*. Signs that a loan word has achieved bona fide status as an English word can include some degree of modification in spelling, accentuation and pronunciation; also some metaphorical extension of meaning. Another indication is likely to be its inclusion in the English headword list of a dictionary such as the Collins English Dictionary (2000); or as a head word in the English section of bilingual dictionary such as the *Collins-Robert French-English Dictionary* (1998). In some cases, English may actually have a native word which serves the purpose, but a French equivalent is nevertheless more resonant or apt, and is employed in preference on a fairly regular basis. A Gallicism with this intermediate status may be offered in the French section of *Collins-Robert* as an English translation of the identical French word, but it will not feature as a headword in the English section.

French terms have also come into English, as well as other languages, as part the globalisation in language use. Globalisation has been in progress since the first man set sail, and is evident in the cognate and shared vocabulary across many languages. Dunn (2000) has a particular focus; he sees globalisation reflected in the recent spread of words which “derive from Britain's membership of the European Union: these include the adjective *communautaire*, as in the phrase<sup>2</sup> *acquis communautaire*, which appears to have no English equivalent...”. Thus, we begin to find in EU documents somewhat incongruous phraseology such as: *the state of the citizenship acquis communautaire*, as well as the infiltration into popular use of French words or new French meanings for existing English words; these include *communautaire* (meaning ‘EU-spirited’), *derogation*, (meaning ‘dispensation’ rather than ‘denigration’), and *competence* (newly used to mean ‘jurisdiction’, not ‘skill’).

### 2.2. *Galicisms used to indicate membership of educated, cosmopolitan English elite*

The use of Gallicisms in English is something that comes naturally to many native English speakers, but perhaps more so, the more educated and more au fait with French they are. It is evoked naturally in some contexts, particularly those associated with Frenchness and style, as I have said. However, it would seem that

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, a ‘phrase’ means ‘une expression’ (une expression figée, un nom composé, un syntagme, etc.).

there is also a desire, or a need, to impress through the use of Gallicisms; to associate oneself with the sophistication and cosmopolitanism attached to the term, sometimes laying oneself open to the charge of pretension or snobbery, whether social or intellectual. Modern-day use is, it should be said, very measured and mild in comparison with some of the overblown, ridiculous posturing cited by Fowler (*ibid*) and others in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### *2.3. Gallicisms used to make allusions, add connotations, evaluate, create humour*

The use of Gallicisms is partly the consequence of a state of mind, which is triggered by the real-world and/or textual context to employ this manner of speaking, perhaps somewhat akin to switching into repartee. The stylistic motivation for using Gallic quote in English is to inject a connotation of France or Francophony (e.g. an allusion to Belgium) into the text. The stylistic impetus is particularly marked in journalistic text, as might be expected. According to our data, journalists in the *Independent* newspaper chiefly employ Gallicisms in the context of style, fashion, cuisine, sophistication and licentiousness; also of relevant institutions (e.g. Channel Tunnel), matters of water and sea, as well as for the fairly predictable gamut of daily life and culture. Gallicisms are also used ironically of self-important businessmen and politicians, and of political, especially EU, deviousness.

The effects created by journalists vary from humour and irony to ridicule and criticism. They are achieved in various ways. In general terms, irony is created through the use of oxymoron: by juxtaposing sophisticated Gallic terms with down-to-earth English vocabulary. The corollary is that where irony or ridicule is not desired, or where mannered writing is inappropriate, Gallicisms will be avoided. Thus, they are not used in texts about Anglo-Saxon culture or mores, nor about other non-Romance topics, nor to discuss serious topics, nor in texts where the affected behaviour of a celebrity is the object of criticism.

### **3. Definition of the Term 'Gallicism'**

As said, a Gallicism is a word or idiom borrowed from the French language at some stage in its history. The entire body of French loans embedded in current English, ranging from words that have been part of English since the Middle Ages to brand new, neologistic borrowings, would ultimately qualify for consideration in this study. One might reasonably add to these the many French translation equivalents, both semantic and literal, that exist in English. In this paper, however, I shall focus primarily on French loans from the seventeenth century and later. These are well on the way to being assimilated into English, but have not disappeared entirely in the manner of the earliest French loans, having retained their original pronunciation and spelling, and thus something of their potential for

allusion to aspects of Frenchness. I want to look at the linguistic treatment they receive in English text, and, in so doing, to discover some of the linguistic manoeuvres that can extract stylistic effects from them.

#### 4. Methodology and Data used in the Study

My point of departure was to have been a sub-set of Gallicisms extracted by semi-automatic means from journalistic text. As a matter of practicality, I took ‘the English language’ to be co-extensive with these data. Clearly, a full investigation could be expected to reveal quantified evidence as to how Gallicisms occur and behave differently according to the particular medium or textual domain.

The ‘journalism’ referred to consists of 10 years of *The Independent* newspaper, from 1989-1999, mentioned above. French words are in principle automatically identifiable in English text by a variety of means. However, our approach, involving a series of matching techniques devised by Mike Pacey and based on our APRIL text analytical tool (Pacey *et al.*, forthcoming), is still under development. Consequently, my data selection method involved personal introspection, informal enquiry and manual text study. The selectional criteria employed were thus less than rigorously scientific, but as stated earlier, they involved considerations of form and style. Formally, the chosen Gallicisms should consist both of words and phrases (compounds, idioms, quotations, proverbs and slogans), which have not been translated or completely Anglicised. Stylistically, they should be words and phrases which, whether partly or even totally assimilated into English, are still capable of evoking Frenchness. Extended concordances as well as statistical information were generated for selected Gallicisms – words, word pairs and strings – so that the nature of their collocation, semantics, grammar, pragmatics, style and semantic prosody could be observed.

News data are received by us as plain ascii code, omitting accents and diacritics, italicisation and other highlighting. Such information, whilst intrinsic to the study of Gallicisms, is anyway not quantitatively interpretable at the present time. The vast numbers of French words in the Middle English period settled into English without trace, but for most of this century the orthographic treatment of foreign loan words has been in flux. Mencken (1921) commented on the contemporary “preciosity” of English editors in carefully italicising and accentuating all foreign loans in publications, dictionaries and journals, stating that even “good old English words [i.e. of French origin, but anglicised centuries previously] have been displaced by foreign analogues thought to be more elegant, e.g. *repertory* by *répertoire...*”. By contrast, today we find Speake (2000), in the preface to the Oxford Dictionary of Foreign Words and Phrases, remarking on the non-retention of accents, saying that “the native English writer has a strong tendency to drop them”. Recently, the *Independent* Editorial section (personal communication, 2001) stated that accented foreign words had only recently been introduced into

*Independent* text; my own observation of newspapers reveals that accents are not consistently applied even within the same issue. These factors, together with my sense that most users of English are uncertain as to their use, led me to proceed with this initial study, leaving the matter of accents for another occasion. However, it should be acknowledged that accents which English speakers perceive as affecting pronunciation, notably the acute accent on a final syllable *e*, as in *fiancé*, *manqué* or *arrivée*, will normally be employed.

### ***Galicisms used in this Study***

From a larger list of Gallicisms, I selected the following sub-set of items:<sup>3</sup>

<b>Word/Phrase</b>	<b>Word/Phrase</b>	<b>Word/Phrase</b>
<i>adieu</i>	<i>faute de mieux</i>	<i>RSVP</i>
<i>apropos</i>	<i>faux pas</i>	<i>savoir-faire</i>
<i>avant-garde</i>	<i>gaffe</i>	<i>savoir-vivre</i>
<i>bijou</i>	<i>hors de combat</i>	<i>soi-disant</i>
<i>bon mot</i>	<i>hors d'oeuvre</i>	<i>soupçon</i>
<i>bon viveur</i>	<i>je ne sais quoi</i>	<i>tete-a-tete</i>
<i>cause celebre</i>	<i>joie de vivre</i>	<b>Quotations/Sayings</b>
<i>comme il faut</i>	<i>liaison</i>	<i>apres moi le deluge</i>
<i>coup de foudre</i>	<i>manque</i>	<i>c'est la vie</i>
<i>critique</i>	<i>nouveau (riche)</i>	<i>honi soit qui mal y pense</i>
<i>cul de sac</i>	<i>nouvelle (cuisine)</i>	<i>la belle dame sans merci</i>
<i>déjà vu</i>	<i>nuance</i>	<i>le beaujolais nouveau est arrive</i>
<i>de rigueur</i>	<i>pied-a-terre</i>	<i>medecins/jeux sans frontieres</i>
<i>de trop</i>	<i>pirouette</i>	<i>noblesse oblige</i>
<i>double entendre</i>	<i>portmanteau</i>	<i>plus ca change, plus c'est la meme</i>
<i>enfant terrible</i>	<i>quel/quelle (horreur)</i>	<i>chose</i>
<i>ennui</i>	<i>rendezvous</i>	<i>sans culottes</i>

## **5. Findings of the Study**

My observations on the behaviour of this sample of Gallicisms in context are presented below. They relate to the semantics, conventional and creative use, and processes of assimilation, of Gallicisms in English.

<sup>3</sup> The sub-word Gallicism, the suffix *-ette*, is very productive in English; apparently less so in French. This and other sub-word French loans will be the subject of future reporting. See also Renouf & Baayen (forthcoming).

### 5.1. *Semantics: Discrepancies between Gallicisms and French Source Terms*

The long history of borrowing from French would explain why several popular Gallicisms used today are old-fashioned or obsolete in modern French; it also explains why mismatches have evolved in the denotative or connotative meaning or range of meaning for the same word in English and in French. It is interesting to see the processes of language diversification at work. It is rather the exception than the rule that a Gallicism has retained its original French meaning and use. The discrepancies associated with Gallicisms found in my sample data are of several kinds.

- They have never existed in French. In this category is *bon viveur*, expressed as *bon vivant* in French, the latter variant existing but rarely in English. Another absence in the French language is the English *double(-)entendre*, denoting an ambiguity where one meaning is indelicate; also the type of humour depending on this ambiguity. The expression *double entente* apparently existed in C17<sup>th</sup> French, but lacked the implication of naughtiness. The modern French semantic equivalent of *double entendre* is *mot à double sens* or *mot en sous-entendu*.
- They no longer occur in current French. In the obsolete category is *jeu d'esprit*, meaning 'a light-hearted display of wit or cleverness' (CED, 2000). The closest to this in current French is *ce sont des jeux d(e l)'esprit*, which means 'intellectual constructs with no basis in reality'.
- They exist in French in a restricted concrete sense, where in English they have evolved further senses and metaphorical extensions. The term *portemanteau* in French denotes a coat hanger, coat rack or hat stand, whilst in English, the Anglicised *portmanteau* denotes a travelling case, but moves metaphorically into the sense of 'embodying several uses or qualities', and denoting a superordinate term in linguistics, or a linguistic blend. The word *bijou* simply denotes a jewel in French, whereas in English its additional and primary use is metaphorical, in characterising types of domicile, often ironically, as 'small but elegant and tasteful'. The phrase *hors de combat* is a sporting reference in French that has been generalised in English to encompass any circumstance of incapacity, physical or metaphorical.
- There can be both formal and semantic conflation, as with the Gallicism *savoir-faire*. This lexeme seems to encompass the meanings both of French *savoir-faire*, denoting know-how, and of *savoir-vivre*, denoting mannerliness. The latter loan does exist in English but is rarely used.

### 5.2. *Uses of Gallicisms*

#### 5.2.1. Conventional Uses of Gallicisms by French Standards

Gallicisms are employed 'conventionally' in English to some degree; that is to

say, in a manner that equates to the normal use of these words in French. The contexts below illustrate some ‘conventional’ uses:

***Contextualised Gallicisms:***

a propos of nothing in particular  
 the little airport is bijou  
 chacun a son gout, of course  
 the service is comme il faut  
 it was the coup de foudre  
 his critiques of modern art are superb  
 she lived in a cul de sac  
 chocolate sauce is a little bit de trop  
 shirt and tie are de rigueur  
 the enfants terribles of German politics  
 she studied, faute de mieux, in London  
 she made a serious faux pas

it is a major social gaffe  
 he was hors de combat for weeks  
 just an hors d'oeuvre on the political  
 menu  
 it lacked a certain je ne sais quoi  
 a fine wit and great joie de vivre  
 you're a priest manque  
pirouettes of verbal brilliance  
 his savoir faire on the golf course  
 she had a proper tete-a-tete with her  
 fiancee

However, the types of correspondence with normal grammatical French use that are shown here happen to occur because these are also perfectly conventional in English grammar, even down to the post-positional *manque*. The treatment that French loans receive in English is essentially a series of processes by which they are converted into workable approximations of conventional English words. By workable, I do not mean that they lose all sign that they were French. One type of conversion occurs where English speakers, in the absence of English rules to cope with French grammar and spelling, adopt a somewhat adhoc approach to representing French words orthographically and in incorporating them into English syntax, producing forms which are ‘incorrect’ by French standards. Since this paper is addressed to French speakers, I shall call these ‘unconventional uses’, though they are really ‘standard English strategies for dealing with foreign objects’ – provisional measures which must nevertheless be fairly established, since the objects have been part of English for centuries.

5.2.2. Misuses of Gallicisms by French Standards

This section deals with English treatment of grammar and spelling of Gallicisms. We shall begin with an exposition of two aspects of French grammar that find virtually no correspondence in English morphology today. The first of these involves concord in number. In English, we do have plural markings for nouns, but we do not for adjectives. Moreover, English plurals are usually audible; that is to say, they generally involve a pronounced suffix, whereas the equivalent morphemes in French are, to English ears mysteriously, silent. The English treatment of French number agreement is thus somewhat un-French. Some examples are provided in the set below:



## i) Lack of Concord in Number in the Use of Gallicisms

- E sing Det + Gall pl NP: *a spicy hors d'oeuvres of an innings*  
*this ultimate jeux sans frontieres*
- Gall sing N functioning  
as Mod + E pl N: *the nouveau riche working classes*  
*Pop stars manque*  
*its window display of bijou rezzes*  
*the old pied noir apartments*  
*avant-garde chairs*
- Gall pl Adj/N+ E sing N : *a rather bijoux corner of Knightsbridge*
- Gall generic NP + E pl V: *The nouveau riche are top of the league table*
- Gall [pl N + sing Adj] NP: *Mrs Clinton's bon mots*  
*occasional causes celebre*  
*from enfants terrible to mid-life crisis*  
*the Roman nouveau riches*
- Gall NP [pl 2nd element]: *cases which have become cause celebres*  
*the ageing enfant terribles*  
*a reunion of pied noirs*  
*a collection of double-entendres*  
*family homes rather than pied-a-terres*  
*long, intimate tete a tetes*
- Gall Mass not pl N: *The trottoirs steaming with coup de foudre*  
*eyes that look like hors d'oeuvre*  
*to recover some jeu d'esprit*  
*my bravado and some tete-a-tete*

## ii) Lack of Gender Agreement in the Use of Gallicisms

The second problem for English in dealing with French loans lies in the matter of gender agreement. We do have morphological marking for the semantics of gender (e.g. *-ess* in *princess*), but no morpheme for adjectival gender agreement. The following examples show a lack of gender agreement in noun phrases, either within the Gallicism or between the Gallicism and the English or French noun it modifies. (There may well be cases of a French noun wrongly modified by an English adjective or modifier elsewhere in the data.)

- Gall masc. N + E/Fr fem. N: *she was more nouveau than the supposed*  
*arriviste*  
*the princess manque*  
*Dani, the Spice Girl manque*

- Gall masc. Mod + Fr fem N: *the nouveau gauche approach*  
*she ran off with (quel horreur) an English*  
*officer*  
*grand passion and petite amour*
- Gall fem. Mod + Fr masc N: *an embassy aide said: ‘Quelle jour’*  
*grand passion and petite amour*
- Gall masc sing Adj + E fem pl N: *the nouveau princesses*
- Gall masc sing Adj + fem pl N: *The French nouveau realistes*  
*new-newer-newest nouveau romantiques*  
*Boston's fashionable nouveau cuisine cafes*
- Gall agreement on invar. Adj: *the Philadelphia soi-disante feminist*

In the examples above, we see both absence of gender agreement and wrong gender agreement. The adjective *nouveau* is perhaps conceived emblematically and so not inflected for agreement with its feminine nouns, but treated as though it were invariable. Meanwhile, the adjectives *grand* and *manque* are masculine and do not agree with their feminine nouns. By ‘feminine nouns’, I mean nouns that are semantically gendered (e.g. *she*, *girl*), or morphologically marked as female (e.g. *princess*), or are gender-neutral nouns in English but feminine in French translation (e.g. Engl. *approach* – Fr. *approche*, *f*). In contrast, the invariable adjective *soi-disante*, and the adjective *petite* and intensifier *quelle*, are feminised to match nouns which are in fact masculine. The latter gesture may indicate knowledge of the feminine ‘e’ inflexion in French, or it may echo the whim that Talman scorned in the American treatment of Gallicisms in 1915: “the public taste seems to favour *dansante* (as in *the dansante*), which doubtless has a Frenchier appearance, provided you are sufficiently ignorant of the Gallic tongue”. Either way, such strategies for dealing with number are likely to stay.

### iii) Misspelling of Gallicisms<sup>4</sup>

French native speakers, and indeed English speakers of French, would find many instances of misspelling of Gallicisms in English journalistic data (though not in English dictionaries). For some English speakers, however, these errors simply constitute different strategies for coping with strange words and sounds. As with any printed text, misspellings can be due to slips of the finger or slips of the brain. Some words are intrinsically mis-typable in English: *liaison* and *hors-d’oeuvre*, which figures prominently in the error list below, must be prime cases. But these are also good examples of the many French words which combine letters in ways

<sup>4</sup> We shall not consider here cases where the English spelling has been Anglicised for centuries, or has retained the original Old French form, as with ‘*honi soit qui mal y pense*’ – in modern French, ‘*honni soit qui mal y pense*’.

that are not easy for an English speaker to visualise, so that accuracy (in French terms) may be something achieved on one occasion but not another by the same writer.

However, the cases of misspelling (in French terms) that I have observed in our data seem to fall into four categories (though there may well be more). The first type of misspelling occurs where a French (or come to that, English) homophone exists for the French loan, as is the case with French *vous* versus *-vu* in *deja-vu*; English *gaff* versus *gaffe*. This type of confusion produces *deja-vous* and the erroneous *gaff*, below.

A second category of misspelling, or rather strategy for handling French spelling, comes about when the Gallicism ends in a consonant, which would be silent in French but pronounced in English, as with *avant* in *avant-garde*, and *coup* in *coup de grace*. Here, the English speaker perhaps sometimes over-compensates by adding a final 'e' to be on the safe side, writing *avante-garde* and *coupe de grace*. (Added to which, of course, *coup* and *coupe* (and *coupé*) all exist in English).

A third category of spelling error, or strategy, occurs in similar circumstances to the previous one, except that this time the English speaker opts not to provide a particular letter, perhaps because the word looks to have more or less the right number of letters; at any rate sufficient, according to English phonology, to be pronounceable. Such cases are *faut* in *faut de mieux*, *gaff*, *joi* in *joi de vivre*, *liasons*, *rendezvouing*, *rendevous* and *rigueur* in *de rigueur*.

The fourth category of spelling error occurs in conjunction with what I shall call 'the silent something' syndrome. An Egyptian friend once explained that the word he had written as *pnuckle* was intended to be the word *knuckle*, with the silent 'p'. The English speaker is dimly aware that there are many cases in French of unpronounced letters and silent endings. However, if s/he does not know the spelling of the word, s/he often also has no other means (e.g. etymological) of guessing what the appropriate letter to represent a given silence might be. In this situation, they sometimes adopt the 'what the heck' strategy, inserting their best guess into the space in question. This leads (in our data) to spellings such as: *adiеus*, *jois* in *jois de vivre*, and *rendezvouizing*.

<i>final adieus</i>	<i>served as hors d'ouvres</i>
<i>the avante-garde Gallery</i>	<i>relegated as hors d'uvre</i>
<i>the coupe de grace</i>	<i>more joi de vivre</i>
<i>a sense of deja-vous</i>	<i>innocent jois-de-vivre</i>
<i>denim was de rigueur</i>	<i>liasons amoureux</i>
<i>they will win faut de mieux</i>	<i>a rendevous with his mistress</i>
<i>a historical gaff</i>	<i>arrived at the rendezvouz</i>
<i>a free hors d'oeurve</i>	<i>rendezvouizing in a car park</i>
<i>followed by hors d'oevres</i>	<i>rendezvouing off Sharjah</i>
<i>goat's cheese hors d'oeuvres</i>	<i>an undisclosed rendezvouz</i>

### 5.2.3. Conventional English Treatment of Assimilated Foreign Loans

Another set of linguistic procedures that English speakers apply to Gallicisms results in usage that, whilst it may not be conventional according to French grammar rules, does accord with the standard English treatment of indigenous neologistic coinages. We shall call this usage ‘conventional’. The procedures will now be considered under the following categories: simplification, derivation and grammatical shift, lexico-grammatical frameworking, abbreviation, the use of Gallicisms as English translation equivalents, and finally, word play.

#### i) Formal and Orthographic Simplification of Gallicisms

Established Gallicisms, whilst still recognisable, have often undergone a degree of formal and orthographic simplification in English, losing anything from particles to accents, as discussed earlier, and being written as single words where they were originally compounds or even phrases. One example in our data is the all-purpose *apropos* (very rarely, *a propos*), which in French is written as *à-propos*, *à propos de*, and *à propos*, demonstrating its different grammatical functions of noun, preposition and adjective. *Tete-a-tete* (occasionally unhyphenated, *tete a tete*) is another instance, which in English retains the same whether it is grammatically a noun, noun modifier or adverb, whereas in French the form varies between *tête-a-tête* as noun, and *en tête-a-tête* as adverb.

#### ii) Derivation, Inflexion and Change in Syntactic Function of Gallicisms

English, with its few inflections, is particularly conducive to grammatical and syntactic variation. Baugh and Cable (*ibid.*) remarked of 13<sup>th</sup> century English that “the rapidity with which the new French words were assimilated is evidenced by the promptness with which many of them became the basis of derivatives”. This seems to be the case today, although Baugh and Cable were referring to conventional formations, such as the attachment of English suffixes to French roots, whereas what I particularly notice in the data, in addition to these, are the creative formations which regularly occur, which would be unthinkable to the French reader. Some of the more established Gallicisms, such as *hors d'oeuvre* and *tete-a-tete*, seem to move freely between most grammatical classes. The following sample of the many instances gives a fairly representative impression:

N to V:                    *contemporary art has avant-garded itself*  
                               *Clive Jenkins, a man who bon viveurs for Wales*  
                               *It had deja been vued*  
                               *Shall we hors d'oeuvres now?*  
                               *cosmonauts pirouetted and rendezvoused*  
                               *He has portmanteau-ed a number of assumptions*  
                               *her staff are RSVP-ing in the negative*  
                               *He's been tete-a-teting with foreign diplomats*

- N to VN/non-fin V: *His new kitchen tome makes "hors d'oeuvring" look easy*  
*I found myself portmanteauing one sentence to the next*  
*Would you expect to go to a wedding without RSVPing ?*  
*a private corner for a little tete-a-teting*
- N to Adv: *ministers were allowed to lunch 'tete-a-tete' with journalists*
- N to N: *the pirouettings when UK groups linked up with the US giant*  
*others are pushing avant-gardery to the limit*  
*that rather forlorn band of Sixties avant-garders*  
*the viewer is a deja vue-er*
- N to Nmod: *famous in avante garde circles*  
*elevation to cause celebre status*  
*a quick coup-de-grace chop*  
*deja-vu country*  
*folie de grandeur exoticism*  
*the hors d'oeuvre stage*  
*on sartorial and joie de vivre grounds*  
*a perfect pied-a-terre property*  
*regular tete-a-tete exposes*
- N to V to Adj: *an avant-garded type composer*  
*a terrace house now bijoued up*  
*a few ennui-ed lunchtime shoppers*
- N to Adj/Compl: *the meetings were tete-a-tete*
- N to adj/mod: *a bit deja vu-ish*  
*very deja vu-esque*  
*a deja vu-like pleasure*  
*risky or double-entendre-ish*  
*a bit subtexty and double-entendry*  
*disappointingly hors d'oeuvre-ish*  
*tiny little nuancey details*
- AdvPhr to N: *the comme il faut of short fiction*
- Adj post to premod: *a manque Kate Bush*
- AdvPhr to Compl: *her homosexuality was faute de mieux*
- Quantifier as mod: *doubts, albeit of soupcon proportions*
- Prep as mod: *spectacular if de trop designs*  
*my current hors de combat accomplice*
- Phrase as mod: *chacun a son gout telly*

### iii) Gallicisms in Lexico-Grammatical Frames

Established Gallicisms can sometimes be marked as such by their insertion into a series of lexico-grammatical frameworks which are used in English to indicate the awareness of the writer of the possibly hackneyed nature of a phrase, proverb or quotation if used in full. Some examples are:

it was a case of *c'est la vie*  
a classic case of *coup de foudre*  
it was a case of faute de mieux  
the faute de mieux factor  
*The score seems to be heading for the proverbial nul points*

This flagging extends to metalinguistic interpolation or comment of the kind:

*Chacun, as they say, a son gout*  
As Orlofsky would say, 'chacun a son gout'

### iv) Abbreviation of Gallicisms

A lexical item in English must be familiar to its audience for it to be abbreviated. This is not often the case with Gallicisms, though the following example was found:

*The details got more grown-up and serious as dinner went from hors to pud*

### v) Gallicisms as English translation equivalents of foreign terms

Some Gallicisms have been assimilated into English to the point where they can be offered as the English translation of a foreign term. We noted some entries in the Collins English Dictionary earlier. An example from our data is *hors d'oeuvre*, in the following culinary contexts:

*tapas, Spanish hors d'oeuvres*  
*the zensai, or hors d'oeuvres*  
*a table was laid with zakuski (hors d'oeuvres)*

## 5.2.4. Word Play with Gallicisms

Consistent with their role as sources of humour and irony in text, and in evoking things French, Gallicisms that are familiar features of English are ready targets for word play, whether subtle or groaningly obvious, among the chattering classes. The kinds of linguistic treatment this punning and allusion involves are similar to those routinely applied to English phrases with the relevant potential. Below, we see a fair range of the standard types of English exploitation of a set expression or idiom, based on the manipulation of sound, rhyme, onomatopoeia, semantics, reference, connotation, grammar, and usually a combination of these.

*apres moi le deluge:*

*Apres le Chunnel, le deluge* [ref. to anticipated tourist influx]  
 After us that shower takes over [joke translation in retirement speech]  
*Apres the bonfire came le deluge* [ref. to financial success of film 'Bonfire of the Vanities']

*avant garde:*

*It is reckoned to be thoroughly deriere garde* (sic)  
*Garden ornaments: Art for the avant-gardener*

*La Belle Dame Sans Merci:*

*Cleopatra – a kind of belly-dancer sans merci*  
*a beldam sans merci equipped with an all-powerful handbag* [ref. to Margaret Thatcher]

*Le beaujolais nouveau est arrive:*

*Le nouveau satellite, c'est arrivee*  
*Le nouveau Labour /budget est arrive*  
*la premiere neige est arrivee*

*bon mot:*

*With a Scots burr, Norman dispensed bonny mots*  
*The normally urbane Frenchman mouthed les mal mots*  
*His mots must not only be bons, but tres petits too*

*chacun a son gout:*

*Shagan a son gout*

*coup de foudre:*

*Un amitie de foudre between our Tony and Bill Clinton*

*deja vu:*

*the US may be headed for 'deja voodoo'*  
*a strong sense of deja claret and blue* [rhyming slang for Aston Villa football colours]

*double entendre:*

*single entendre films were a peculiarly British concoction*  
*Most of the entendres are distressingly singular*  
*one-and-a-half-entendre DIY advice about drilling deep*  
*more multiple entendres in a phrase than you can take in*  
*So careful to avoid ambiguity that it had no entendres at all*  
*Jokes with ever-increasing doubles, often singles, entendres*

*ennui:*

*is severe millennui to blame?*

*faux pas:*

*It was a fax pas as much as a faux pas*

*Honi soit qui mal y pense:*

Honey, your silk stocking's hanging down [joke translation]

*hors-d'oeuvre:*

ordure (with French intonation, sounds like 'hors d'oeuvre')

*je ne sais quoi:*

Theatre: That old Genet sais quoi

*manque:*

Monkeys are evolved; the diarist manque is a simple beast  
Travis looks like a musician rather than a manque cow-poke  
You're a scientist manque – Don't call me a manque  
Don't make a manque out of me

*medecins /jeux sans frontieres:*

the cliches of the peur sans frontieres thriller  
Making the piece a fiasco sans frontieres  
the Levi commercial, 'Jeans sans frontieres'  
Cantona's status as a joueur sans frontieres

*noblesse oblige:*

A philosophy of life that can be summed up as richesse oblige

*nouveau riche:*

The exuberance of the nouveau very riche indeed

*plus ca change,*

Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme show

*plus c'est la meme chose:*

plus ca change, plus c'est la meme World Cup

*sans culottes:*

the poseurs and 'sans socks' who meet in the bar  
she turned up at a Bastille Day reception sans culottes

*tete a tete:*

A Tate a tete. The future of London's Gallery

## 6. Frequency of Use of Gallicisms in English

We have indicated here that established Gallicisms are widely used to contribute to the style and sophistication of English writing. It is known that thousands of early French words and phrases form an integral and nowadays undetectable part of the English language. We know that new French words and phrases regularly enter English text, particularly journalistic and other ephemeral text, the majority



departing again as current affairs change their focus, but some settling. What is not known is precisely how common or how stable is the use of Gallicisms in English. My own impression, perhaps reflecting my idiolect, is that it continues unabated.

Clearly, as mentioned earlier, textual domain and social context have an effect on the degree of borrowing. An issue of *The Independent* newspaper for 8th Feb. 2001, providing a 150,000 word sample, reveals pretty thin pickings: a total of 7 Gallicisms, all but one in the 'Review' section: *son et lumiere (sic)*, *ancien régime*, *sang-froid*, *à la, oeuvre, clichéd* and *clichés*. If this were to imply that Gallicisms account for a mere 004% of the running words in English journalistic text, it would not be significant. (A calculation based on word types would of course boost their percentage contribution). At the other extreme, a recent article in the English-language 'Time Out' section of the weekly *Pariscope*, fortuitously found, demonstrates a far livelier use.

**Film: Moulin Rouge** (Pariscope / Time Out, 10-16 October 2001)

"What do you get when you *purée fin-de-siècle* Montmartre with a Gloria Estefan/Nirvana soundtrack? The new film from Oz director Baz Luhrmann. Satine (Nicole Kidman), the world-weary *courtesan* with a heart of gold, and Christian (Ewan McGregor), the uncompromising English romantic, sing their way through incongruous top-40 numbers, past and present. The techno-opera *grand finale* is excellent, but the film walks a long, contrived path to get there: 100 minutes of grinding exposition, tortured romance, Benny Hill slapstick, confused *clichés*, 2D characters that we are asked to care about and witless *double entendres*".

Over 6 % of the words in the text are Gallicisms. This figure is explained by the topic, journalistic co-text, and strong Gallic influence on the writer, all of which surely put him into that associative frame of mind that I mentioned earlier. Within these two extremes lie a range of text types, purposes and associated frequencies.

With automated help, a quantified picture of these phenomena can also be established over a longer period of our journalistic database, revealing their changing patterns of frequency and use in text over time.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

Gallicisms continue to be treated much as they have been since about the thirteenth century. That is to say, welcomed into English on condition that they behave themselves. Nobody expects them to lose all identity; on the contrary, they are appreciated for their rather charming foreign eccentricities, even brought out and paraded around on occasion. However, they must expect to be subject to the

same rules of conversion that are applied to all upstarts and alien elements in English, and to undergo such modification as renders their native spelling and grammar (and pronunciation) less troublesome to the average English speaker.

This study has raised questions for the future as to the kinds of words and phrases that have been adopted, the relative frequencies of these phenomena, the change in their use over time, the functions of sub-word Gallicisms, and a detailed look at the stylistic and other roles that Gallicisms play. In this study, I have for instance, mentioned the use of Gallicisms to fill lacunae in English, but not investigated it in operation. There may be a difference in the balance of purposes of borrowing between France and England at this point in history. This possibility notwithstanding, one is tempted (if not entitled) to draw a provisional conclusion that, all in all, modern English appears to be assimilating French every bit as much as modern French is being ‘invaded’ by English.

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**Summary**

The dialects of the region now known as France have been contributing words and idioms to the English language for the last millennium. These Gallicisms serve a number of purposes, from filling lacunae, to associating the writer with French sophistication and style, to creating particular stylistic effects in writing and speech. This study takes a subset of established Gallicisms, which are formally and stylistically capable of evoking Frenchness, and examines their linguistic treatment in English. Sometimes they are used just as they are in French. Some uses are simply inaccurate by French standards: in relation to gender and number agreement, and to spelling. Other uses are unconventional by French standards but represent the standard English practices of modifying foreign loans to fit English norms; these include the possible conflation of formal and orthographic variants of a Gallic phrase, the tendency to employ a word across a range of grammatical and syntactic classes, and the use of word play. The study concludes with the impressionistic observation that English seems to assimilate French as much as modern French is 'invaded' by English.