

France Expels

By Jonathan C. Randal

Washington Post Foreign Service

PARIS — After a decade of complaining about Franglais, or the insidious inroads of "Anglo-Saxon" words into the French language, the French finally did something about it last week.

The Journal Officiel, the government's official gazette, published a list of 350 French words which government employees and teachers, at least, are to use rather than the English equivalents that have crept into the French language and bothered French cultural nationalists in and out of the government for so long.

Despite the purge of such everyday Franglais words as *hit parade*, *zoning* and *tanker*, the first of several official lists dealt mostly with highly technical terms.

Set up in 1970 at the behest of President Georges Pompidou — who studied Greek and Latin but is not known to speak any modern foreign language with any fluency — the terminology commission for official use divided the words into two groups. The first list is obligatory for official use.

The second — and longer — list is simply recom-

mended, a precaution apparently born of the realization that everyday usage of a living language cannot be decreed.

The cultural chauvinism behind the commission's mandate was first encouraged by the late President Charles de Gaulle, who adopted the anti-American thesis of a best-selling book entitled "Parlez-Vous Franglais?" written by Sorbonne Prof. Rene Etiemble.

Arguments that English included many French words — including modern ones such as automobile and television — or that the last European government that indulged in similar language purification was Nazi Germany were to no avail.

At one point, de Gaulle ordered French scientists and technicians attending international conferences to avoid speaking English, a dictate which forced them to insert English technical terms into otherwise linguistically pure speeches.

But Pompidou produced the practical impetus for the commission in an attempt to prove that French, as the language of a modern and rapidly industrializing nation, could be adapted to modern technology.

The incentive loomed even larger once France dropped its veto of British membership in the European Common Market. Despite British Prime Minister Edward Heath's solemn promises to respect French sensitivities, backed up by intensive French courses for British civil servants headed for the Common Market's Brussels headquarters, English is expected to challenge

English Words

French as the working language of the now-expanded European Economic Community.

Close scrutiny of the official gazette provided some potentially negative and/or amusing pointers.

Conteneur for "container" does not bespeak much linguistic imagination, nor does *bipasse* for "bypass." The commission simply gave up and accepted the English words unchanged when it came to *hardware*, *software*, *management*, *satellite* and *pipeline*.

A small blow for correct usage was struck by the commission which quite correctly objected to the mistaken French notion that a building *de grand standing* means a luxury apartment house. Nothing, however, was done to end the firm and usage-consecrated French belief that *tennis-man* is a tennis player, that *glass* is a drink.

The first lists dealt with English vocabulary accretions in show business, space technology, television and transportation. Later ones will grapple with health, finance, computers,

sports, tourism, economics, military terms and the automobile and aircraft construction industries.

Will *retrospectif* really replace "flashback," *spectacle solo* take the place of "one-man show," *palmares* be used rather than "hit parade"?

The new words were passed on by the French Academy, which for more than 300 years has served as arbiter of what is and is not French usage. But even the "Immortals" — as the Academy's members are known — would appear to be less chauvinistic than the terminology commission. The Academy recently accepted "bulldozer" — changing it only slightly for the French ear to read *bouladozer* — while the new official word is *bouteur*.

Perhaps it is only fair to note that surrounded by French people who talk about *baby sitters*, *happenings*, *shopping*, *deodorants*, *jukeboxes* and *hamburgers*, the influential Larousse Dictionary only last year yielded and admitted the expression "Franglais" itself into columns.