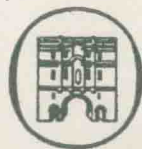


# FRENCH FALSE FRIENDS

*C. W. E. Kirk-Greene*



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## · PREFACE ·

Call them *Faux Amis*, *Mots-Pièges*, Treacherous Twins or what you will, they are an inherent part of the language. A knowledge of them is indispensable to users of the language at all levels, otherwise misunderstanding or worse is likely. Such misunderstandings can be slight and amusing but they can also be serious. There are many stories told about such instances – that a government got into a huff because it understood *La France demande que . . .* as 'France demands . . .'; and among very recently culled examples is the apparent confusion that arose owing to a reference to the Queen's dragons (instead of dragoons!) whilst a well-known stores has (had?) a notice telling passengers, in the event of the lift breaking down, to wear out (*user*) the telephone.

It would be interesting to have some sort of frequency count of False Friends, for even in the early stages of French one is likely to be confronted by such deceptive words as *le car*, *le curé*, *la monnaie*. By the intermediate level stage the candidate can expect to have to recognize such additional examples as *la cave*, *la prune*, *le store*, *sympathique*. At an advanced level, more refined words are likely to be met; for example *éventuel*, *fastidieux*, *truculent*, *versatile*. Outside the academic world, in diplomatic, business and social circles, in everyday language, there are numerous traps. One should not misunderstand the reference to the *armement* of a ship or the offer of *chips*, or the reference to *délai* where no delay is meant; or the modern sense of *un omnibus*, the subtle sense of *regretter* or the meaning of *le service civil*.

There are two main types of False Friend. The 'standard' one looks like an English word but its meaning is different. Sometimes the meaning is quite different (*le ballot*: bundle, *le verger*: orchard), sometimes it is close to the English (*une étable*: cowshed rather than stable), or a question of nuance, as in *troubler*. The other type is where the word does mean what it looks like, but it has another meaning (or meanings). A good example is *la serviette* with its three common meanings, or *une expérience* (experience but also experiment). Some words need particular care, as the false translation may make excellent sense – for example by understanding *le car* as car or *la monnaie* as money.

In addition, this book gives a number of semi-False Friends. Among others, these include words which, while not being exactly like English words, may none the less suggest one, such as *attachant* (*une jeune fille attachante*) or *la scolarité* (not scholarship); and also such words as *confortable*, *la collection*, *la dévotion*, *les minutes*. The words in this latter category mean what they look as if they mean and they should give no trouble in translation, but they are dangerous in the sense that they have not the full meaning of the English word. Thus *collection* will not do for church or pillarbox.

In a number of cases the deceptive resemblance between the French and English words is purely fortuitous – for example, *la chair*/chair, *le chat*/chat, *une haltère*/halter. It may be that some instances are more amusing than

useful, but it is a rash person (as any experienced teacher will testify) who declares that such words can never mislead. But in many cases the English words are deceptively similar because of a common origin (usually Latin), or French influence; whence the confusion, for example, between *la cave* and *cave*, *coi* and *coy*, *fou* and *fool*, *le lard* and *lard*. The correct meanings may be quite different (in the above list: cellar, quiet, mad and bacon), but it is usually not difficult to see some connection. In a number of examples French has kept the original meaning or sense whereas in English this has often become obsolete, specialized or rare, and a second meaning has taken over (which French may or may not have). For example *inférieur* has the literal sense of lower as well as the figurative sense of inferior, *intoxiquer* is to poison (which is an obsolete meaning in English), and *versatile* means changeable, whereas in English it now normally means changeable in a particular way; i.e. with regard to talents.

*Franglais* (and *anglomanie*) has brought its own False Friends. *Le building* is not an exact equivalent of 'building' and *le footing* does not mean 'footing'; in addition, there is the French fondness for abbreviation, particularly by omitting the second part of the word (English tends to omit the first part); thus we get such examples as *le cherry* (for *le cherry brandy*) and *le pull* (for *le pullover*). Indeed, one can play an intriguing game guessing what the missing word may be – does *le dry* stand, one may well wonder, for dry cleaning, a dry shampoo, or what?

The book does not claim to be complete, indeed it does not set out to be so, which would be virtually impossible. But it is hoped that it will seem reasonably full, especially as regards the most famous examples. With reference to the translation of the English words, such translations do not necessarily preclude other possibilities. Meanwhile, the two languages are alive, and one may expect to see new False Friends, while some may disappear (one wonders whether the fact that a French car model has been called *le car* will have any effect?).

My *Les Mots-Amis et les Faux-Amis* (Methuen) has been a *point de départ*, and particularly useful books on the subject are still Koessler and Derocquigny's erudite *Les Faux Amis* (Librairie Vuibert), Félix Boillot's amusing *Le Second Vrai Ami du Traducteur* (Editions J. Oliven) and J. G. Anderson's very informative *Le Mot Juste*, revised by L. C. Harmer (Cambridge University Press). As a guide for my original draft I used mostly Harrap's French dictionaries (Mansion). I would like to express my sincere thanks to Monsieur Michel Charlot (sometime *Lecteur* at Christ Church, Oxford) for very generously giving of his time to read through the bulk of my manuscript and for making some invaluable comments. I would also like to thank Monsieur Henry Bouillier, Directeur of the Maison Française, Oxford, and his staff for their kind welcome and for the pleasant ambiance which was so conducive to work.

# A

**abbé** (m) Abbot, priest, 'Father'.

Abbey = *abbaye* (f).

**abrutir** May mean to brutalize (to turn into a brute), but also just to exhaust or render mindless. *ça m'a abruti*: it left me exhausted, dazed, knocked out.

**abus** (m) Not abuse in the sense of insult, but in the sense of misuse. *un abus de son pouvoir*: misuse of his power.

Can also mean a mistaken conception. *C'est un abus de croire que le gouvernement s'y intéresse*: it is an error to think the government is interested in it.

Abuse, insults = *insultes* (f).

**abuser** Not to abuse or insult, but to misuse. *Il abuse de ma générosité*: he takes my generosity too much for granted. *Il ne faut pas abuser du vin*: you must not over-indulge in wine.

In addition to this idea of going too far with someone or something, there is the idea of deception, of leading astray. *Ils nous abusent avec leurs grandes phrases*: they delude us with their fine language.

*S'abuser*: to deceive oneself.

To abuse, insult = *insulter*.

**abusif** Wrongly used, misconceived, improper, overdone. *Grèves abusives*: unjustified, or prolonged strikes.

*Un père abusif (une mère abusive)* is not a father who uses insulting language, but a too possessive father (mother).

Abusive, insulting = *injurieux, grossier*.

**abusivement** Wrongly used, improperly. *Il a employé ce mot abusivement* does not mean that he used this word as a term of insult, but in the wrong sense.

Abusively, insultingly = *injurieusement*.

**accent** (m) Accent, and the strains of music, as in *en entendant les accents de la musique*: on hearing the strains of the band.

**acceptation** (f) Acceptance. *L'acceptation de tout le monde ici est essentiel*: everybody here must agree.

Acceptation (meaning, sense) = *acception* (f)

**accès** (m) Access, but also attack, outburst (fever, anger, etc.). *'Encore un accès de paludisme. Le troisième'* (Paul Pilotaz, *Combat avec l'homme*, Mercure de France).

**accident** (m) Accident, but also means the undulation of the ground. *Il s'est blessé à cause de l'accident du terrain*: he hurt himself because of the undulating ground.

**accidenté** May refer to accidents (*un pétrolier accidenté*: a damaged tanker), but often means rough, uneven, undulating. *Un paysage accidenté*: a hilly countryside.

**accommodation** (f) Adaptation.

Accommodation (for example in 'to look for accommodation') = *logement* (m), *chambres* (f).

**accommoder** To accommodate is sometimes a possible translation, but it usually means to suit, adapt, or prepare (of food).

But it cannot mean accommodate in the sense of 'having room', which is *avoir de la place, loger, tenir*.

**accompli** Accomplished, but also means thorough, complete. *Un gentleman accompli*: a perfect gentleman.**accoster** To accost (often pejorative), greet someone, but also (of ships) to berth or come alongside. To accost in a pejorative sense is also *raccrocher*.

(It is not surprising to find in both languages many words originally connected with the sea and ships.)

**accusé** Accused, or prominent. *Des traits accusés*: prominent features.**accuser** Not only to accuse, but also to accentuate, reveal, emphasize. *Son visage accusait la détresse*: his face was marked by distress. *Cette robe accuse sa jeunesse*: this dress brings out her youthfulness.

It can also mean to acknowledge, as of a letter (*accuser réception d'une lettre*).

It is also sometimes the equivalent of 'to blame'.

And it can mean to take, feel a blow = *il accuse un uppercut*: he takes an uppercut.

*S'accuser*: to accuse oneself, or to stand out, be prominent.

**achever** Means to finish, complete. *Il a achevé son livre*: he has finished his book.

Also means to finish off, in the sense of 'to kill': *Il respirait à peine et on l'a achevé peu après*: he was scarcely breathing, and they finished him off shortly afterwards.

To achieve = *accomplir*.

**acompte** (m) Instalment, deposit, advance.

Account = *compte* (m). *Mettez cela sur mon compte*: put that down to my account.

Account (version, description) = *récit* (m).

**acquitter** To acquit, discharge (someone). Also to discharge someone from a debt.

To fulfil an obligation, pay what one owes (*d'abord il a acquitté ses impôts*: first he settled his taxes).

To receipt a bill. *Demandez qu'on acquitte la facture*: ask for the bill to be receipted.

**acte** (m) Act, in various senses.

Also certificate (*acte de naissance*: birth certificate), deed. *Signature des actes*: signing of the deeds.

Note the idiom *faire acte de présence*: to put in an appearance. But Act of Parliament is *loi* (f).

**action** (f) Action. *Une bonne action* is a good deed.

*Action* can also mean share, in the financial sense. *Les actions baissent*: shares are going down.

**actuel** Occasionally actual, but normally it is present (day), current, topical.  
*Un problème actuel*: a topical problem. *Le gouvernement actuel*: the present government. *Les prix actuels*: present-day prices.  
 (Les actualités (f) means current events, or newsreel.)  
 Actual = *véritable, même*, etc.

**actuellement** Not actually, but at the present time, at the moment, nowadays. *Actuellement il fait de plus en plus froid*: at the moment it is getting colder and colder. *Qu'est-ce qui se passe en France actuellement?*: what is happening in France now? *Actuellement j'ai beaucoup à faire et je ne peux pas accepter*: at the moment I have a lot to do and I can't accept.  
 Actually = *effectivement*.

**addition** (f) Addition, but also – for obvious reasons – the bill, as in a restaurant. *Demandez l'addition*: ask for the bill.

**adepte** (m/f) Sometimes has the sense of adept but usually means 'follower', so that *les adeptes de ce genre de poésie moderne* refers to their interest and not to any skill. *Les adeptes des sports d'hiver*: winter sports enthusiasts.  
 Adept = *habile*.

**adéquat** Has the sense of appropriate, suitable.  
 The English 'adequate' often = *suffisant*, or, of (school) work, *passable*.

**adhésion** (f) Adhesion, but also just means 'belonging', for example to a party, association. *Beaucoup d'adhésions depuis Noël*: a large rise in membership since Christmas.

**adjudant** (m) (Note the difference in spelling.) Warrant officer or sometimes sergeant-major.  
 Adjudant = *adjudant-major* (m).

**adjudicateur** (m) Is either someone who allots a contract or (at an auction) someone whose job is to offer items.  
 Adjudicator = *juge* (m).

**adjudication** (f) Adjudication, award, tender, awarding of contract. *'Une deuxième tournée de pastis et il reprit: "J'avais obtenu du gouvernement une adjudication pour le sauvetage du Michel-Say"'* (Jacques-Yves Cousteau et Frédéric Dumas, *Le Monde du silence*, Hachette, Bibliothèque Verte).

Can also mean an auction.

Adjudication (often) = *jugement* (m).

**adjuger** To adjudge or allocate. In an auction: *Une fois! deux fois! adjudgé!*  
 Going, going, gone!

To adjudge (a matter) = *juger*.

(someone guilty) = *déclarer quelqu'un (coupable)*.

**admissible** Admittable, and admissible, what can be permitted, and it often means 'eligible' (as of candidate for a post). In exams, it is used to refer to those who have qualified to take the oral exam.



**admission** (f) Admission (to a school, club, etc.), entrance or entry, but not used for admission, acknowledgment (of facts), although it comes from *admettre*. In this sense the noun is *aveu* (m). *De son propre aveu*: by his own admission.

Admission free (in shops, etc.) = *entrée* (f) *libre*.

**adresse** (f) Address (note the difference in spelling), and also skill. *Il ne manque pas d'adresse*; he is not lacking in skill.

*Cela fut dit à votre adresse*: that remark was meant for you.

**affaire** (f) Affair, business. *Un homme d'affaires*: businessman. *Une bonne affaire*: a good deal, a bargain. *La belle affaire!*: Is that all, then? So what?

An 'affaire' = *liaison* (f) (*avec quelqu'un(e)*).

**affectation** (f) Affectation, but also posting to a job. *Il a une nouvelle affectation*: he has a new posting.

**affecter** To affect, in both senses. *Ceci affecte tout le monde*: this affects everyone.

To pretend, to adopt (an attitude). *Il affecte de paraître paresseux*: he puts on the impression of being lazy.

But also has the meaning of to allocate or post (to a job). *Il a été affecté chez nous*: he has been posted to us.

**affluence** (f) Affluence, but nowadays nearly always used in the sense of 'rush'. *Les heures d'affluence*: rush hour. *L'affluence des gens dans les magasins*: the crowds of people in the shops. *L'affluence touristique*: the tourist rush.

Affluence = *richesse* (f).

**affluent** (m) Tributary. *Les affluents de la région*: the tributaries in the region (not the affluent people, who would be *les riches*).

**affronter** To affront, face (a danger).

To affront (someone) = *offenser*, or indeed the noun can be used – *faire un affront à quelqu'un*.

**agenda** (m) Notebook, diary. *Avez-vous vu mon agenda?*: Have you seen my diary?

Agenda = *l'ordre* (m) *du jour*. *A l'ordre du jour*: on the agenda.

**agent** (m) Means 'agent' in a wide sense, as well as policeman (*agent de police*).

**agglomération** (f) Agglomeration, cluster. Also built-up area. *Il y a beaucoup d'accidents dans les agglomérations*: there are a lot of accidents in the built-up areas.

**aggravant** Aggravating, that is to say 'making worse' (the literal meaning).

Aggravating (in the sense of annoying) = *agaçant*.

**aggravation** (f) Making worse, worsening. *L'aggravation de la crise pétrolière*: the worsening of the oil crisis.

Aggravation (in the sense of annoyance) = *agacement* (m).

**aggraver** To make worse, i.e. *rendre plus grave*. *Le tout est aggravé par le mauvais temps*: the whole thing is made worse by the bad weather. *Cela*

*aggravera la tension dans la capitale*: that will increase the tension in the capital.

In English to aggravate can also mean to annoy or upset = *ennuyer, agacer*.

**agioteur** (m) Not an agitator, but a speculator on the Stock Exchange.  
Agitator = *agitateur* (m).

**agiter** To agitate, but also to wave, shake. *Le chien agite la queue*: the dog wags its tail. *Agitez-le deux fois avant de le boire*: shake it twice before drinking.

**agonie** (f) Death agony, death throes. *Il est à l'agonie*: he is at death's door.  
'*Enfin arrivèrent les jours d'agonie pendant lesquels la forte charpente du bonhomme fut aux prises avec la destruction*' (Honoré de Balzac, *Eugénie Grandet*).

Agony = *douleur* (f) *affreuse, supplice* (m).

**agonisant** Dying, at the point of death. *Un ami agonisant*: a friend who is dying.

Can also be used figuratively. *Une habitude agonisante*: a custom that is dying out.

Agonizing = *navrant, angoissant*.

**agréer** To accept or approve, hence (in a letter), *Veillez agréer l'assurance de mes salutations distinguées*: yours truly. *Ceci n'est pas encore agréé en Angleterre*: this is not yet approved (accepted) in England.

Also means to suit. *Si cela vous agrée*: if that suits you.

To agree = *être d'accord*.

**agrément** (m) Can be consent, approval, but often means pleasure or amenities. *Vous y trouverez sûrement de l'agrément*: you will surely find pleasure in it.

Agreement = *accord* (m).

**ailé** (f) Means wing. It should not be confused with aisle (*nef* (f) (*centrale*)).

**aimer** To like or love, but it has been known for it to be mistranslated as 'to aim' = *mettre quelqu'un en joue, viser*.

**aisé** Easy, but also well off (compare 'in easy circumstances').

**aisément** Easily (without difficulty) or comfortably.

*Il vit aisément*: he lives comfortably.

**Aix-la-Chapelle** Note that it is the same place as Aachen (its German name).

**ajuster** To adjust, but also to take aim. *Ajuster quelqu'un*: to aim at someone.

**alcoolique** Can mean alcoholic (of people or things, including drinks), but alcoholic drinks are usually *boissons* (f) *alcoolisées*, as opposed to soft drinks, *boissons non-alcoolisées*.

**aliénation** (f) A reminder that, in addition to the normal sense of alienation, it has the technical sense of the word, which in everyday English is insanity. (Hence *un aliéniste*, who looks after mental patients, a word replaced by *psychiatre* m/f.)

- allée** (f) Drive, avenue, path. *Il suit la belle courbe de l'allée avant d'arriver à la maison*: he follows the fine sweep of the drive before arriving at the house.  
Alley = *ruelle* (f), *passage* (m).
- alléger** To lighten, mitigate (*léger*: light).  
To *allege* = *alléguer*.
- alliance** (f) Alliance, also marriage. *Une alliance entre deux pays*: an alliance between two countries. *Une nièce par alliance*: a niece by marriage.  
Also a wedding-ring. *Il a trouvé l'alliance par terre*: he found the wedding-ring on the ground.
- allier** To ally, unite by marriage, blend. *S'allier à une famille*: to marry into a family.
- alliés** (m) **alliées** (f) Allies, but also relations by marriage. Camus in *La Chute* comments pungently on the word – '*Quant à ceux dont c'est la fonction de nous aimer, je veux dire les parents, les alliés (quelle expression!), c'est une autre chanson.*' Parents et alliés: family and relations (as used in obituary notices).
- allô** Hello (telephone). As a normal greeting, 'Hello' is *salut* or, if said in surprise, *tiens!*
- allure** (f) Can mean walk, gait, also speed. *Il roule à bonne allure*: he goes along at a good speed.  
It also means appearance, behaviour. *Avoir de l'allure*: to have a certain distinction.  
Allure = *charme* (m), *attrait* (m).
- altérable** Which is liable to deteriorate or become spoil.  
Alterable = *changeable*.
- altération** (f) Change for the worse in some form or other, faltering of voice.  
*Dès ce moment on a remarqué une certaine altération*: since that moment a certain deterioration was noticed.  
Alteration = *changement* (m).
- altéré** Faded of colours, drawn of features, faltering, broken (with emotion) of voice; it can also mean thirsting. *Un homme aux traits altérés que je n'ai pas reconnu*: a man with drawn features whom I did not recognize. '*Tu as sûrement aussi connu beaucoup de jeunes filles, dit-elle d'une voix un peu altérée*' (Alphonse Narcisse, *L'Ombre de la morte*, Plon).  
Altered = *changé*.
- altérer** Not 'to alter', but to alter for the worse, tamper with, spoil, falsify. *Le mauvais temps a altéré ces produits*: the bad weather has spoiled these products. *Rien ne va altérer son bonheur*: nothing will mar her happiness. *On a altéré le texte*: they have produced a garbled text.  
Altérer can also mean to give a thirst. *Cela vous altère*: that gives you a thirst. *S'altérer*: to change for the worse or to break (with emotion), falter (of a voice).  
To alter = *changer*.

- alto** (m) Means a viola (stringed instrument). An alto voice is *alto* (f), or *haute-contre* (m) (i.e. counter-tenor).
- amateur** (m) May mean amateur as opposed to professional. But the idea of doing something for pleasure rather than profit has been extended. *Un amateur de beaux livres*: a book-lover. *C'est un grand amateur de pâtisseries*: he is a great one for cream cakes.
- amazone** (f) Now normally means a female horse-rider. *Chaque matin on voit passer des amazones élégantes*: each morning you see elegant women riding past.  
Note also *monter en amazone*: to ride side-saddle.  
Amazon = *femme* (f) *athlétique*, 'gendarme' (m).
- amender** Usually has the sense of to improve (or to amend a Bill (politics)).  
Amend also = *corriger*, *rectifier*.
- aménité** (f) Charm, grace, pleasantness. '*Car il usait sans aucune aménité de sa nouvelle autorité de chef du service*' (Marcel Aymé, *Aller retour*, Gallimard).  
Amenities = *commodités* (f), *agréments* (m) (sometimes *civilités* (f)).
- ampoule** (f) Ampoule, phial (medical), also light-bulb, also blister.
- ancien** Old, ancient or senior or former. *Meubles anciens*: antique furniture.  
*Un élève ancien*: a senior pupil. *Un ancien élève*: an Old Boy. *Un ancien ministre*: a former minister. *Un ancien champion*: an ex-champion.
- angine** (f) Angina in everyday English usually suggests heart trouble. This = *angine de poitrine*; otherwise *angine* is likely to mean angina in the sense of tonsillitis or some throat trouble.
- Les Îles Anglo-Normandes** The Channel Islands.
- Anglo-Saxon** (m) **Anglo-Saxonne** (f) Anglo-Saxon, but is also used to mean English-speakers. *La pause-café que les Anglo-Saxons appellent quelquefois 'elevenses'*: the coffee-break that English-speakers sometimes call 'elevenses'.
- Anglo-Saxon** Anglo-Saxon, often used to mean simply 'English-speaking'.
- animation** (f) Animation, liveliness, but may also be used as an abbreviation of *le cinéma d'animation*: cartoon films (animation). Thus *Oxford, capitale de l'animation cette année*: Oxford, the centre for the cartoon film festival this year.
- annonce** (f) Announcement, but also advertisement. *Les petites annonces*: the small ads.
- annuité** (f) Usually means an annual repayment against money borrowed.  
Life annuity is usually *rente* (f) *viagère* or *viager* (m).
- anonyme** Anonymous, but *société* (f) *anonyme*: limited company (business).
- antenne** (f) Antenna. Aerial (TV, etc.), channel (TV).  
But has also a very different meaning – a first-aid post, field dressing station (*antenne chirurgicale*).

- anticipation** (f) Anticipation, but *un film d'anticipation* is a science fiction film. Whether this term will oust *science fiction* is doubtful.
- antiquité** (f) Antiquity. Also (in the plural) antiques. *Un marchand d'antiquités*: antique-dealer. *Antiquités anglaises*: English antiques.
- anxieux** Anxious, but in English the word also means wanting, concerned (I am anxious to . . .). In this case some such phrase as *je veux bien, je suis impatient de . . .* is required.
- apologie** (f) Apology, in the sense of vindication, justification.  
Apology (in the sense of being sorry) = *excuses* (f).
- apparent** Can mean apparent (not real), but often means apparent in the sense of visible, distinct. *A-t-il acheté la chaumière à cause de ses poutres apparentes?*: did he buy the cottage because of its visible beams? *Leur difficulté est apparente*: their difficulty is clear.
- apparition** (f) Can be an apparition (ghost) but frequently means appearance (on the scene).
- appel** (m) Appeal, but is also just a call (wireless, telephone). Or it can refer to a roll-call. *Faire un appel de phares*: to flash one's headlights.
- s'appliquer** To apply oneself. *Je vous conseille de vous appliquer à avoir ce poste*: I advise you to make an effort to get this job.  
To apply (for a job) = *solliciter un poste*.  
(*S'appliquer* also means to apply, be applicable.)
- appointements** (m) Salary. *Je m'occupe de vos appointements*: I will see to your salary.  
Appointment = *rendez-vous* (m).  
(to a job) = *nomination* (f).
- appointer** To pay a salary (to). *De plus en plus d'employés appointés*: more and more salaried clerks.  
To appoint = *nommer*.
- appréciation** (f) Appreciation, but often judgment, estimation, valuation.  
*Je le laisse à ton appréciation*: I leave it to you to judge. *Le service est à l'appréciation de la clientèle*: the service charge is as customers deem fit.
- apprécier** To appreciate, also to value, estimate, judge.
- appréhender** To apprehend, arrest or dread.  
To apprehend in the sense of to understand, realize = *comprendre*.
- apte** Means fit, fitted, suitable. *Il est particulièrement apte à ce travail*: he is particularly suited to this work. *Apte au service*: fit for military service.  
He is apt to = *il a tendance à*.  
Apt (expression) = *juste, qui convient*.
- arc** (m) Arc, arch. Also bow. *Il a plus d'une corde à son arc*: he has more than one string to his bow.  
(Noah's) ark = *arche* (f) (*de Noé*).

**arche** (f) Arch or ark. *Les arches d'un grand pont*: the arches of a big bridge.  
*L'arche de Noé*: Noah's ark.

**archiviste** (m/f) Archivist, but also filing clerk.

**ardent** Can mean ardent, passionate, keen, but is also used (of things) to mean burning, hot. '*Avant une heure, même les jours les plus ardents, je partais par le grand soleil . . .*' (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à M. de Malesherbes*). '*au pied des falaises ardentes qui réverbéraient le soleil . . .*' (André Gide, *Si le Grain ne meurt*).

**ardeur** (f) Ardour, but also burning heat. *Les aoûttiens se moquent de l'ardeur du soleil*: the August holiday-makers make light of the burning sun.

**arguer** To argue (that . . .), deduce, assert, put forward a pretext.  
 To argue (quarrel) = *se disputer*.

**argument** (m) Argument for or against something.

In English, argument often means little more than a quarrel – *une dispute*.

**aria** (m) Familiarly it is used for bother, worry. *Quel aria!*: what a 'to-do'! (rare).

Aria = *aria* (f) – a difference of gender.

**armement** (m) Armament, but can also just mean (of a ship) the fitting out. It is also a general word for shipping, as in an article lamenting the lack of French cruise ships: '*mais le drapeau tricolore est à peu près totalement absent révélant la grande misère de l'armement de croisière français* (*Le Figaro*, 10 January 1979).

**armer** To arm, but also fit out (a ship). *Ce navire arme maintenant à Cherbourg* – means nothing more sinister than that this ship is now being fitted out at Cherbourg.

Also to cock (a weapon). *Armer quelqu'un chevalier*: to dub someone a knight

Also to wind on (camera film).

**armurerie** (f) Barracks, armoury, but also arms factory, gunsmith's shop or the making of arms.

**arrêt** (m) Stop, stopping (also stop as in *arrêt d'autobus*: bus stop).

Also decree. Sometimes means arrest. *Maison d'arrêt*: jail.

Arrest (usually) = *arrestation* (f).

**arrêter** To stop or arrest. Also means to fix, settle. *Sa résolution est bien arrêtée*: his mind is firmly made up. *Il a arrêté ses plans*: he drew up his plans.

**arrière-pensée** (f) Mental reservation or ulterior motive.

Afterthought = *réflexion* (f) *après coup*.

**arriver** Has three useful meanings. To arrive, to happen and to succeed. *Je n'arrive pas à le faire*: I can't manage it.

**ouvrage d'art** (m) Not a work of art, but a technical term for the building of bridges, tunnels, etc.

Work of art = *oeuvre* (f) *d'art*.

**artère** (f) Artery or main road.

**artiste** (m/f) Artist, also actor, actress, theatrical performer, artiste. *L'entrée des artistes*: stage-door.

**as** (m) Ace (cards), also ace, champion, first-rate performer. *C'est un as*: he is top class!

(The s is pronounced, but one must not be misled into thinking of 'ass'.)  
Ass = *âne* (m).

**asile** (m) Asylum (the two words have the same origin). *Asile d'aliénés*: lunatic asylum, mental hospital. It can also mean asylum in the political sense.

It is also a general word for home, shelter (as for old people – *asile de vieillards*).

**asparagus** (m) Is not recommended for eating. It means asparagus-fern. Asparagus = *asperge* (f).

**aspersion** (f) Sprinkling, but not aspersion in the sense of 'to cast aspersions'. *Une petite aspersion comme ça ne fait pas de mal*: being sprinkled with a little water like that does no harm.

Aspersions (to cast aspersions) = *calomnies* (f).

**aspirant** (m) Aspirant, candidate, suitor, but also midshipman.

**aspirer** To aspire (to).

Also to aspirate (*il faut aspirer l'h*: the h is aspirated), and to breathe in – hence *un aspirateur*: a vacuum-cleaner.

**assassin** (m) Assassin, but it is often just the equivalent of murderer. *La police est aux trousses de l'assassin*: the police are on the heels of the murderer.

**assassinat** (m) Assassination or murder.

**assassiner** To assassinate, but also to murder. *C'est dans la forêt, paraît-il, qu'il a assassiné ses victimes*: it is in the forest, it seems, that he murdered his victims. *Le roi a été assassiné*: the king has been assassinated.

**assignation** (f) The word is used in two technical senses – assignment of money or shares (financial), and a summons to appear (legal), served with a writ or subpoena.

Assignation in the sense of meeting = *rendez-vous* (m).

**assigner** To assign, fix, also in legal language to summon or cite someone.

*Assigner quelqu'un en référé*: to apply for an injunction against someone.

**assises** (f) Assizes, also (regular) meeting, conference. *Tenir ses assises*: to hold one's meeting.

It can also mean foundations, layers.

**assistance** (f) Assistance, but also congregation, audience. *Toute l'assistance a ri*: all the spectators laughed.

**assistant** (m) **assistante** (f) Can mean assistant, but often means bystander, somebody who is present. *Il descendit de sa voiture, la jambe blessée, et il*

- demanda à quelques assistants de téléphoner à l'hôpital: he got out of his car with an injured leg and asked some bystanders to telephone the hospital.*
- assister** Means to assist, but *assister à* means to be present, to witness. *Ce jeune homme a assisté à l'accident: this young man was at the accident. J'ai assisté à son mariage: I attended her wedding.*
- assomption** (f) Assumption (of the Blessed Virgin).  
Assumption also often = *supposition* (f).
- assorti** The word has the same two conflicting meanings as it has in English – assorted, matching or assorted, mixed. But 'assorted' is probably more used in the second sense, so that *il porte un pullover jaune et des chaussettes assorties: he wears a yellow pullover and matching socks. Des bonbons assortis: assorted, mixed sweets.*
- assortiment** (m) Although assortment has the two meanings of the French word, it usually suggests in English a mixture rather than a matching. Thus *un assortiment de boissons: an assortment of drinks, but tous ces fauteuils en rouge, c'est un assortiment que je trouve parfait: I find all these armchairs in red to be a perfect matching.*
- assumer** In the sense of to assume a responsibility.  
To assume (suppose) = *supposer*.
- assurance** (f) Assurance, confidence, also insurance (assurance).
- attachant** Fascinating, interesting (e.g. book) and (of people) likeable, prepossessing. *Une jeune fille attachante: an attractive girl.*  
It does not have any idea of someone who clings unduly to you (= *collant*).
- attendre** To wait (for). *Je vous attendrai avec plaisir: I shall wait for you with pleasure.*  
To attend = *faire attention, s'occuper de, servir (quelqu'un)*.
- attention** (f) Attention. *Attention! Look out!*  
But, as a military command, attention = *garde-à-vous!*
- attirer** To attract. (To pull, draw – *tirer* – towards.)  
To attire = *vêtir, s'affubler*.
- attractif** Attractive – really in a literal sense as a magnet that attracts.  
Perhaps under the influence of *français*, it seems that it is being used more widely as in *rémunération attractive: attractive salary.*  
Attractive = *attrayant*.  
(woman) = *séduisant(e)*.
- attribuer** To attribute, also to assign, allot. *Les boissons attribuées aux campeurs: the drinks allotted to the campers.*
- aubergine** (f) Aubergine (egg-plant), but if this does not seem to make sense it is probably being used in its familiar sense of a (woman) traffic warden. The following reference is to Dominique Lavanant (and her new film) and her experience of being a traffic warden – *'Péripétie supplémentaire dans la vie de cet ancien professeur de français en Angleterre, puisque, auparavant, elle avait effectué un passage rapide au couvent. "Les femmes en uniforme me fascinent véritablement. Sa tenue pour une aubergine, c'est son voile.*



*Et le carnet à contraventions, son livre de prières'' (Michel Delain, L'Express, 29 December 1979). They are called aubergines because of the colour of the uniform, and the word is still used even though the colour may have changed.*

**audience** (f) Audience, in the sense of hearing, or a royal audience. Often refers to a (legal) court hearing, and a newspaper may have *un compte rendu d'audience*: a court report.

Audience (theatre, etc.) = *assistance* (f), *auditoire* (m).

**audition** (f) Audition, but also hearing (e.g. of witnesses in court).

Also sometimes recital or concert.

**auditoire** (m) Audience. *Il ne peut pas se plaindre de son auditoire*: he cannot complain about his audience.

Auditorium: *salle* (f).

**auditorium** (m) Studio (for auditions, recording) for wireless or television.

Auditorium is *salle* (f).

**auréole** (f) Aureola, glory, halo. Also, more down to earth, circular stain, ring (*aucune auréole!*: not a mark!, as an advertisement might say).

**autonome** Autonomous, but *un plongeur autonome* is a skin-diver and *un scaphandre autonome* is an aqualung.

**autonomie** (f) Autonomy, but also means cruising range. *Ce sous-marin a une autonomie impressionnante*: this submarine has an impressive cruising range.

**avancement** (m) Advancement, progress but often promotion. *Je suppose que la possibilité d'avancement te tente?*: I suppose you are tempted by the possibility of promotion?

**s'avancer** To advance, but familiarly it can mean to stick one's neck out.

*Sans m'avancer trop, je dirais qu'il est dans le pétrin*: without sticking my neck out too far, I would say he is in the soup.

**avantageux** Advantageous, but also conceited. *Est-ce que c'est parce qu'il a gagné plusieurs fois qu'il a cet air avantageux?*: Does he have this conceited air because he has won several times?

**aventure** (f) Adventure, but also chance (as in 'peradventure'). *Il se promène à l'aventure*: he walks aimlessly, as chance takes him.

Can also mean an (amorous) affair, but *la bonne aventure* is fortune-telling.

**avertir** Not to avert, but to warn. *Il faut l'avertir*: we must warn him.

To avert = *détourner*, *éviter*.

**avertissement** (m) Warning, notice. *Sur le mur il remarqua un grand avertissement*: on the wall he saw a large notice.

Also Foreword to a book.

Advertisement = *affiche* (f), *réclame* (f).

**avis** (m) Opinion. *C'est mon avis*: it is my opinion.

Also means notice. *Avis important*: important announcement.

Sometimes advice.

Advice (often) = *conseil(s)* (m).