

FRENCH LANGUAGE IN MASS MEDIA IN FRANCE AT THE END OF THE XX CENTURY¹

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present France’s modern language policy in relation to the French language in the mass media at the end of the XX century. On the basis of the analysis of the documents that refer to the language policy in this area, we have concluded that, in terms of the radio and TV stations, the state regulates the use of the French language in the programmes. France also pays special attention to the print media and cinematographic production, which contribute to spreading of the French language and culture. The institutions, in charge of the protection of the French language in this area, point out that the biggest part of the mass media duly fulfil this obligation. The most common violations are the lack of translation, illegibility, grammar errors and increase presence of English words. These measures provide the protection of the French language in the mass media on both national and international level.

KEY WORDS: French language, mass media, language policy in France

INTRODUCTION

The language policy encompasses all measures, plans and strategies the goal of which is to regulate the status and form of one or several languages (Calvet 1993:111-123, Calvet 1996:3-9, Calvet 1999:154-155, Calvet 2002:15-16, Crystal 1999:190, Dubois 2001:369). France’s language policy in terms of the French language encompasses the

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following areas of application and intervention: business life, informing the consumer, protection of the worker, science and technique, as well as its use during events, seminars and congresses, and its use in magazines and publications. The policy also refers to its standing in the fields of education and science, in the public services (both nationally and in international communications), in the mass media as well as its terminological enrichment (Saint Robert de 2000 & Николовски 2002).

Few articles of the 1994 Law on the Usage of the French Language regulate the usage of the French language in the mass media programmes (radio and TV) which secures the usage of the French language and spreading of the Francophonie on national and international level. They are also in charge of broadcasting certain quota of francophone events, to promote the production of the modern French performers, and to allocate the quotas for production of genre specialized radio stations. This is done in order to better represent the French music palette and because of the increased disregard by certain radio stations which do not fulfill their programme obligations.

The Superior Council of the Audiovisual (Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuelle) is in charge of the proper application of the French language in this area, and it informs the media for certain faulty use of the language as well as about the recommendations to substitute the anglicisms which appear in the *Journal officiel* de la République française on regular basis. The larger media houses have their own advisers for proper usage of the French language when broadcasting the programmes.

The 1998 guidelines for development of the French language programmes outside the territory of France increase the financial aid to the French language programmes in order for them to be more present on foreign televisions; they also encourage the development of satellite French language programmes and cooperation with foreign media, and determine the activity of the television operators intended for foreign audiences. They also motivate the subtitling of the foreign language shows which are suitable for the broadcasting regions, thus fully respecting the multilingualism principle.

France pays special attention to and also provides financial aid to the print media in French language and to the institutions that enable their printing, thereby contributing for the care for the language and culture. It pays special attentions to its cinematographic production which notes constant growth and increased interest on an international level. Financial aid is provided to cinematographic accomplishments which fully or to a large extent fulfil the high artistic and technical criteria, to the institutions

which contribute towards the spreading of the French cinematographic production as well as to the reference achievements in film in the French language or in regional language of France.

FRENCH LANGUAGE IN MASS MEDIA

Three articles from the 1994 Law on Usage of the French language refer to this area. According to the economic and media programme, it is compulsory for the French language to be used in labelling, offering, representing, in user manuals or in warranty conditions of goods, products or services (Art.2). Its usage is also mandatory in all advertisements or shows on radio or television (Art. 12). However, Article 13 sets forth the principle for usage of the French language and spreading of the Francophonie by all broadcasting institutions. Four exceptions are envisaged in this area, regarding the usage of the French language, in terms of the cinematographic and audio and visual accomplishments in their original version, in the music pieces where the text is entirely or partly written in a foreign language, in the programmes or advertising messages in a foreign language whose goal is learning of the language or in broadcasting religious services (Art. 12).

The obligation for the TV stations to broadcast certain quota of francophone events (Décret 90-66, Art. 8) and certain quota of French songs on the radio stations (Loi n°94-88, art. 12) has been in force since 1990.

In terms of the cinematographic production, there are several legal mechanisms that envisage financial aid for accomplishments in French language, supplemented with the 1999 Decree (Décret n°99-130).

The Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuelle is in charge for proper usage of the French language in this area (Loi n°86-1067, art.1^{er}). Basically, there are no larger violations of the provisions related to the application of the French language in this area (*Rapport au Parlement sur application de la loi du 4 août relative à l'emploi de la langue française*, 2000: 88-106). The most common violations are made by lack of translation, illegibility or grammar errors in the advertisements. Increased presence of anglicisms is noticed in the radio and TV programmes (*La langue française dans tous ses états*, 1999: 43-46), and in the print media, which causes reactions by the authorized associations for defense of the French language. The Supreme Broadcasting Council regularly informs the employees of these institutions about the language irregularities, and also about the new words which are published in the *Journal officiel* de la République française. The larger TV broadcasters appoint advisors which

intervene on a regular basis in case of certain language irregularities used during the broadcasting. Additional, number of shows with a goal to promote and spread the French language are broadcasted.

In relation to the obligation of the televisions to broadcast 40% works of French original expression (œuvres d'expression originale française)² in prime time (Décret du 17 janvier 1990, art 8, 9), and the biggest part of the TV houses fulfill this obligation.

The quota system also encompasses the songs broadcasted on the radio stations. All privately owned radio stations are obliged to broadcast French songs in prime times since 1966, half of which should be from modern performers or to be part of the new production, amounting to at least 40% of the overall programme (Loi n°99-130, art. 32). The already established quota remains with the new law from 2000 (Loi n°2000-719), but quotas are allocated for genre specific radio stations. Namely, those radio stations which nurture the French musical legacy must broadcast 60% in French language, 10% of which should be part of the new production. Radio stations that promote young artists must broadcast 35% francophone music pieces, 25% of which should belong to newer artists (Loi n°2000-719, art. 42). The changes in the broadcasting quotas of musical work are aimed at better representing of the French music palette as well as due to the increased disregard that the French radio stations are making by failing to fulfil their obligation in this area.

Since 1998, a decision has been made which provides development guidelines for the French language programmes outside the territory of France (Communication du 30 avril 1998). It emphasizes the necessity of increasing the financial assistance for French programmes in order to increase their presence on foreign TV stations, French satellite programmes development, and determining the mission of specialized television operators intended for foreign audiences. Some of the television companies are subtitling their shows in several foreign languages depending on the region they cover, thus fully complying with the principle of multilingualism.

Several television houses have established cooperation with other similar institutions from other countries in the world and we have witnessed the agreement between the governments of France and Canada at the state level, to increase the cooperation in the production of quality television performances in French (Décret n°90-736, art. 2).

² Films or audiovisual works in original French expression shall mean works which in their original version are completely or main in French or regional language used in France (Décret du 17 janvier 1990, art. 5).

France pays particular attention to print media in French language. In 1991, a Fond for French Print Expansion Abroad (Fonds d'aide à l'expansion de la presse française à l'étranger was established), the purpose of which is the expansion of periodical publications and newspapers, wholly or partly written in French, which contribute to the expansion of the French language, thought and culture outside the country (Arrêté du 25 février 1991, art. 1^{er}, 2). Also, in the period between 1996-1998, we noted five decisions regarding a financial assistance for weekly regional and local publications in French language (Décret n°96-410, art. 2), for daily political, regional, communal and local newspaper (Décret n°97-1068, art. 2) and for national daily newspapers in French language (Décret n°98-714, art. 2). Assistance is granted to the facsimile transfer to the printing houses (Décret n°98-793, art. 1^{er}, 2), as well as to institutions which enable printing publications in French (Décret n°98-1009, art. 2). Cinematographic production in France in the last years of the 20th century has seen a steady increase. Films which are fully or mainly performed in French or in a regional language, provided that they meet the high artistic and technical criteria, can be financially supported by 25% of the total amount needed for their realization (Décret n°99-130, art. 32). Featured cinematographic performances may be subsidized (Décret n°99-130, art. 53), as well as short films, if 80% of the costs for the film are spent in France (Décret n°99-130, art. 78), institutions which contribute for the expansion of the French cinematographic production (Décret n°99-130, art. 109) and cinematographic producers of reinvestment performance (œuvres de réinvestissement)³ (Décret n°97-449).

According to Unifrance, there is an increased interest for French language films, which is particularly seen in European countries where the francophone culture is traditionally strong, but the increased interest is noticeable also in Japan (*Rapport au Parlement sur application de la loi du 4 août relative à l'emploi de la langue française*, 2000, 99).

CONCLUSION

Although the 1994 French Law on the Use of the French Language strengthens the use of French language in mass media on a national and international level (by regulating its use in shows,

³Reinvestment works are reference performances whose original version is, entirely or mainly, realized in French or in a regional language used in France or in a language of the country of the majority co-producer, provided that its part is at least 50% of the cost price (Décret n°97-449, art. 4).

broadcasting a certain quota of francophone production, etc.), however, certain deviations and non-compliance with obligations have been registered. In order to present the Francophone music palette in a more suitable manner, as well as due to the increased disregard for the obligations of the French radio stations, the volume of French tunes and the quotas of young performers of the new production of genre specialized radio stations has been increased. In this manner, the nurturing of the French musical expression is enhanced, particularly by the young population. The fact that no major violations of the provisions on the application of the French language by most of the media are noted, as well as the appointment of advisers who take action in certain language situations by the larger media, shows the seriousness of their approach regarding the use of the French language.

With the 1998 guidelines for the development of French-language programmes abroad (increasing the financial support, encouraging cooperation with foreign media, developing francophone satellite programmes, translating French to other foreign languages depending on the region of broadcasting, etc.) the principle of multilingualism is respected, and the creation of high-quality television performances that contribute to the expansion of the French language is encouraged. Also, through France's special relationship with the print media, the French publishing houses and its cinematographic production, it directly contributes to the expansion of the language on a global scale.

All of France's language policy measures in relation to the French language at the end of the 20th century indicate that it consistently provides increased use of the French language through the mass media, both nationally and internationally.

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