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THE OFFICIAL DEVICE FOR ENRICHMENT OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE OF SPORT

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ABSTRACT

The article describes the language policy of standardization of new sports terminology by the French government and the French Academy. The government bodies in charge of proposing new sports terms are special standing committees at the ministerial level. The language policy of the French government is justified by the special status of French as an official language of the IOC, continual emergence of new sports practices and the necessity of drafting clear rules of different sports games. The official device for enrichment of French sports vocabulary remains an important initiative of the French government, which tries to respond proportionally to the social and cultural impact of different world sports on French culture and society.

The French decree from July 3, 1996 stipulates that each ministry of the French government has to appoint and maintain a standing committee for terminology and neology. The missions of these committees include establishing cases where it is necessary to supplement French terminology, proposing relevant terms and their definitions, and contributing to the spread of the officially approved terms and definitions. Each committee relies on its ministry for the follow-up and dissemination of its proceedings, and is assisted by a high-ranking civil servant and a service appointed to inform Secretary General.

These committees submit special terminological forms to the General Committee of Terminology in the Prime Minister's Office, which then examines them and sends them for approval to the "Académie Française" (the French Academy), whose opinion conditions publication of the new terms in the "Journal Officiel" (French government

publication of record). The entire process is coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office for the French Language and the Regional Tongues of France (DGLFLF).

As regards the French Ministry of Sports, its terminological committee consists of about thirty members, 35% of whom are representatives of the sports movement, 23% are civil servants, 20% are linguists (lexicologists or terminologists), 11% are journalists, 10% are representatives from the "Académie Française" and the DGLFLF and one member is a representative of the French Intellectual Games Federations. The Committee works on a daily basis through a dedicated Extranet Website and meets once a month.

France has official vocabulary because French is the official language of the French Republic. The recommended vocabulary items correspond to the necessity of having terms expressing the rapidly changing present-day

realities, which the French language lacks. The French administration, elected representatives and citizens should be able to access the new terms and use them to fill the gaps in French in all semantic fields.

The terminology of sport is in many ways special and enjoys a special status. The reasons behind the specificity of sport terminology include:

- varied, technical and evolutionary character of the sports language;
- continual emergence of new sports practices;
- necessity of drafting clear rules (safety rules in particular);
- importance of training and coaching in sports practice;
- international status of French as an official language of the International Olympic Committee and of around thirty other international sports bodies. The Olympic Charter stipulates that “In the case of divergence between the French and English texts of the Olympic Charter and any other IOC document, the French text shall prevail unless expressly provided otherwise in writing.”

We need words for all kinds of purposes: to think, to work, to exist, to exchange, to tell, to teach, to regulate, to understand us, to identify us, to modernize us, etc. The future of a tongue relies on its vocabulary, and the creation of new words reflects its vitality.

In the 6,000 languages still spoken in the world today, only 300 words can be exactly translated into all other tongues (me, you, us, one, two, man, woman, to eat, to see, to hear, sun, moon, star, earth, fire, water, white, black...); all others enrich the world heritage reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of humankind.

Words include terms, i.e. vocabulary items indicating concepts appropriate for a particular domain of knowledge or practice. A lexicographer establishes dictionaries of general language by drawing up directories of words and expressions in a given tongue, whereas a terminologist dedicates himself to the development of specialized vocabularies by linking names with their respective concepts. The reasons explaining the emergence of new words are multiple and include the need to describe new realities, desire of assertion of an identity, simple errors or malpractice.

A term appears either “in vivo”, through a spontaneous initiative; or “in vitro”, through a deliberated initiative. The latter is the case of the

mentioned terminological and neological committees. There are three ways of creating a new term: (1) to give a new meaning or a new grammatical status to an existing word; (2) to borrow a term from a foreign language; (3) to make up an entirely new term. The three simple questions which each committee has to answer positively before proposing a new term are:

1. Is the creation of a new term necessary to identify a notion or an object?
2. Is the term clear enough to be easily associated with the notion or with the object it identifies?
3. Does the new term respect the French morphological and syntactic system?

To be published in the “Journal Officiel” a newly recommended term has to include a definition expressed in a single sentence, which should be clear, precise and understandable to the majority of French speakers.

Following is an example of terminological entry published in the “Journal Officiel”:

planche à voile

Domaine: Sports/Sports de glisse-Sports nautiques.

Définition: Planche nautique grée d’une voile, d’une bôme double et d’un mât articulé; par extension, la pratique sportive consistant à utiliser ce type de planche.

Voir aussi: planche nautique, véliplanche.

Equivalent étranger: windsurf, windsurfing (pratique).

A possible translation of the entry into English might be:

sailing board

Domain: sports/sliding sports-water sports.

Definition: nautical board rigged with a sail, a twin boom and an articulated mast; by extension, the sports practice consisting in using this type of board.

See also: nautical board, windsurfer.

Foreign equivalent: windsurf, windsurfing (practice).

The official device of enrichment of the French language of sport has been operational for twelve years now. It seems effective in term of quality; however, its pace still lags far behind the rapid development of sports. On the average, it takes eighteen months from the moment the standing committee decides to study a concept, until the completed entry is officially published. Once national vocabulary is modified, however, it

remains as such for decades. In the process of creation of new vocabulary, for each word several two-way exchanges take place between the Sports Committee, the General Committee and the French Academy. The number of new published sports terms amounts to about forty a year.

The official device for enrichment of French sports vocabulary remains an important initiative of the French government, which tries to respond proportionally to the social and cultural impact of different world sports on French culture and society.