

The French of finance: a vocabulary to be maintained

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French has a complete financial vocabulary, forged over the centuries by French-speaking bankers, lawyers and economists and enriched by the terminological work of francophone institutions. The notions of the bill of exchange, the annuity, discounting, the pledge, the fiduciary relationship, wealth management, the investment fund, the structured product or the documentary credit have precise French equivalents, often older than their English counterparts. Parts A to C of this book showed that several of these notions were born or developed in the French-speaking world, from Lyon to Geneva and Paris.

This vocabulary is threatened by the growing use of English in finance, which leads many French-speaking practitioners to use English terms for notions that have a French equivalent, or to copy English turns of phrase. The Organisation internationale de la Francophonie and the terminology bodies of France, Quebec and Switzerland publish recommendations and glossaries proposing French equivalents for the English terms of finance.¹ This work is not binding, but it offers practitioners resources for drafting in French without unnecessary anglicisms.

What is at stake goes beyond the purity of the language. A precise and living French financial vocabulary makes it possible to serve French-speaking clients in their own language, to draft documents that French-speaking courts and authorities can understand, and to train young practitioners to reason in French. A financial centre that allowed its French to crumble in favour of an Anglo-French jargon would lose part of the advantage that this Part describes. The present book, written in French with the concern to use French terms wherever they exist, makes a modest contribution to that effort.

1 Notes

1. Federal Chancellery, “TERMDAT” page (bk.admin.ch): the terminology database of the Federal Administration, with some 400,000 multilingual entries in German, French, Italian, Romansh and English, maintained by the terminology section of the Central Language Services with the assistance of the multilingual cantons (CoTerm) and available free of charge at [termdat.ch](https://www.bk.admin.ch/termdat); in France, the Commission d’enrichissement de la langue française publishes its recommendations on FranceTerme, and in Quebec the Office québécois de la langue française publishes the Grand dictionnaire terminologique (oqlf.gouv.qc.ca). ↩

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