

ARPP DOCTRINE SHEET - FRENCH LANGUAGE

This doctrine sheet aims to present in a synthetic manner all the rules applicable to the use of the French language in advertising messages. These rules are of multiple natures. While the principle concerning the use of foreign terms and their translation into French falls under hard law texts (see below), other aspects related to the use of the language involve soft law and more particularly the ethical rules of the ARPP Code of Advertising Recommendations (see the [Notes and Overlays Code](#) for the readable and understandable presentation of translations) or interprofessional practices (respecting rules ensuring a good level of language).

The advertising Industry has long been committed and invested in the issue of the French language and its proper use, notably within the ARPP and through various actions. This commitment has mainly been reflected by the conduct of [Observatories](#) on this subject in partnership with the General Delegation for the French Language and the Languages of France (DGLFLF) and by its participation in expert panels, including the Commission for the Enrichment of the French Language (CELF) placed under the authority of the Prime Minister, which receives their terminological and neological works.

In two Opinions, the Advertising Ethics Council (CEP), an anticipation and reflection body associated with the professional regulation system of advertising set up by the ARPP, focused on "[The Use of the French Language in Advertising](#)" in 2007 and on "[Linguistic Cultural Diversity and Advertising](#)" in 2023.

The French language is of constant interest to both civil society and public authorities. The latter have notably provided professionals with tools to participate in the promotion of the language (among others) and useful resources such as: the [France Terme platform](#), which groups all the French equivalents to foreign terms recommended by the CELF and published in the Official Journal, and the [Dictionary of the French Academy](#), valuable in case of doubt about spelling.

The rules detailed below are intended to ensure a framework for creative advertising, a communication vector, and a reflection of our cultural and social identity, in compliance with applicable rules while promoting everyone's access¹ to understanding advertising messages.

1. The Use of Foreign Languages and their translation into French

Reminder of the Legislative and Regulatory Framework

[Law No. 94-665 of August 4, 1994, relating to the use of the French language](#), known as the "Toubon Law," states in its Article 2: *"In the designation, offer, presentation, instructions for use or utilization, description of the scope and conditions of warranty of a good, product or service, as well as in invoices and receipts, the use of the French language is mandatory. The same provisions apply to all written, spoken, or audiovisual advertising. The provisions of this article do not apply to the designation of typical products and specialties with a foreign name known to the wider public. Trademark legislation*

¹ The following guides are available: For audiodescription: <https://diversite-inclusion.aacc.fr/handicap/audiodescription/> - Guide to Audiodescription for TV Advertisements: www.arpp.org/actualite/publication-1er-guide-audiodescription-des-publicites-tv/ For subtitling: Best Practices Guide: http://www.arpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/08022016_-_Guide_de_bonnes_pratiques_relatif_au_sous-titrage_des_publicites.pdf

does not preclude the application of the first and third paragraphs of this article to mentions and messages registered with the trademark."

It specifies in its Article 4: "*In all cases where the mentions, announcements, and inscriptions provided for in Articles 2 and 3 of this law are supplemented by one or more translations, the presentation in French must be as readable, audible, or intelligible as the presentation in foreign languages."*

The circular of March 19, 1996, provides that "*the mentions and messages in a foreign language accompanying a trademark must, when used in France, be translated into French. This rule applies even if these mentions and messages have been registered within a trademark in accordance with intellectual property law."*

Scope of Application:

All advertisements broadcast on French territory or aimed at the French public, regardless of the medium of diffusion and their form (written, audiovisual, digital), must use the French language.

Advertisements showed in France in publications or associated with editorial content exclusively in a foreign language are excluded.

Thus, terms, indications, allegations, hooks, legal or informative mentions formulated in a foreign language must be accompanied by a translation into French.

Only foreign language names designating products or services marketed or exploited under these names can be used without translation.

Accessory elements to these names in a foreign language (slogans, signatures, logos, etc.), even if registered and protected under trademark law, remain subject to the regulatory obligations mentioned above when used for advertising purposes.

Translation Modalities:

Translations provided for foreign terms must make the advertisement understandable to all, regardless of the format and medium used for its diffusion.

Furthermore, translations must be understandable and not misleading. Even if a literal translation is not required, it must remain "*in the spirit of the original text.*"²

a. General Presentation Rules:

Refer to the [ARPP "Notes and Overlays" Code](#) applicable to all media, which provides the conditions for good readability:

To be readable under normal reading conditions, mentions must be horizontal and use characters:

² Point 2.1.2 of the aforementioned Circular of March 19, 1996, specifies: "*A similarity of the two presentations and a parallelism of the modes of expression between the two versions are not required.*"

- of a sufficient size
- normally spaced
- of a font allowing easy reading (without necessarily being uniform throughout the advertisement)
- of a color contrasting with that used for the background of the advertisement. For example, avoid a light color for text written on a background that is also light.

In accordance with the spirit of the Law of August 4, 1994, the translation must therefore respect these essential principles. Its font size, without necessarily being equivalent, and its placement require particular attention.

In this regard, the reading direction is important, and the size used for the translation must not be disproportionate to that used for the foreign term(s).

Regarding supports using audio, the translation in audio must be easily audible without accelerating the vocal rate.

The translation must be explicitly linked to the terms it accompanies, notably through referral signs ("*" "(1)...). In this regard, the size of the sign present both next to the foreign term and at the beginning of the translation *"must be sufficiently large to always be readable under normal reading conditions."*

In audio, the proximity of the two formulations will allow the consumer to make the connection between them.

b. Specific Rules for Media with both written and audio:

For these media, foreign terms spoken in audio can be translated into French only in audio.

Foreign terms mentioned in writing must be exclusively translated in writing.

2. The Use of the French Language and Regional Languages

While considering that the freedom of creation is inherent to advertising, it is necessary to ensure the proper use of the French language. In this regard, grammar, spelling, punctuation rules, and typographic conventions must be respected in writing.

The usual spoken language is used in audio.

Regional languages, [whose heritage protection has been affirmed](#), can be used without being accompanied by French terms, provided their use does not hinder the understanding of the advertisement by the targeted public.

Terms derived from popular language such as slang, verlan, or expressions used by the youth, which demonstrate the perpetual evolution of the French language, can be used. However, their use must not hinder the understanding of the advertisement by the targeted public.

While also ensuring that the message is understandable, it is furthermore possible to use puns, term creations that demonstrate creativity, or even form or semantic neologisms that are innovative and reflect the French language beyond the Hexagon, enriching it and giving it a global dimension.

3. The Use of coarse or shocking Terms

Regarding advertisements containing terms likely to be perceived as coarse or vulgar, care must be taken to ensure appropriate dissemination to the exposed public, especially children.

In a spirit of exemplarity and protection of all audiences, the use of injurious terms of a violent or sexual nature is to be avoided.

However, when it is a matter of denouncing their use, notably in awareness campaigns or major causes, these terms can be used provided that the denunciation is manifest and explicit.