

Education minister awarded the 'rug'

Annual 'booby prize' given for promotion of English in France

By Oliver Rowland

HIGHER Education Minister Valérie Pécresse is this year's winner of the *Carpette Anglaise* booby prize for promoting English over French after she urged more use of the language in universities.

According to the *Académie de la Carpette Anglaise* - a panel of judges including writers, politicians and members of language defence bodies - Mrs Pécresse said French was "in decline" and wanted to "break the taboo of English in European institutions and universities."

The minister has said every university student must be offered English classes as part of their course and proposed that some lectures be given in the language.

"We can't let a child come out of our education system without speaking it," she said.

The *carpette* (rug) is so-called because of the "door-mat" implications of the French term, suggesting servile acceptance of the increasing use of English in France. It is not a physical prize but it is widely publicised. The *académie's* secretary, Marc Favre d'Echallens, said he thought borrowings of some English words into French - such as *le weekend* - were acceptable and no worse than *cul-de-sac* in English.

However, he said the body was concerned that a tendency for wholesale replacement of French by English risked, in 50 years, English becoming dominant in France.

"It's not that we are against English as such but we would



LANGUAGE DEFENDER: Académie secretary Marc Favre d'Echallens

dn't like to see all university teaching end up in English," he said. "We don't want a situation where everything important is done in a foreign language. It would be a loss to French and French culture."

He said the *académie* did not agree with promoting one language as the main international one. "We believe in linguistic diversity - the motto of the EU is 'union in diversity' and the idea was to favour speaking and working in different languages, not just one."

"If you want to work with Germans or Spanish people it is more useful to learn German or Spanish," he said.

"You now see people in international negotiations, or promoted in companies, because they speak good English, even though they are not the most competent."

He added promoting routine use of English gave an unfair advantage to native speakers.

"No one is ever quite as confident in a foreign language as

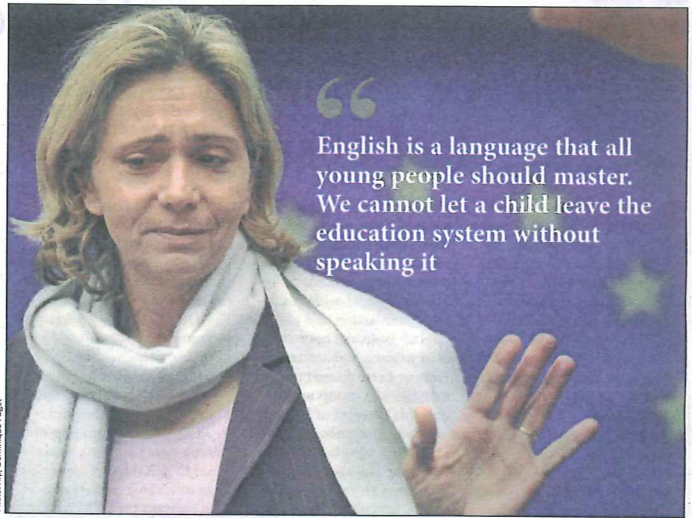
in their native tongue."

He said Mrs Pécresse was chosen because of her job.

"If it was a businessman who said these things it would not be as bad but she represents France," he said. "The constitution says the language of the Republic is French. She thinks English is the Language with a capital 'L' that opens up the world but it only opens a part of it" Eurostat, the European Commission's statistics service, which issues its 'Statistics in Brief' updates in English only, dropping French and German, won a special "*carpette*" for an international body. Mr Favre d'Echallens said English was in danger of becoming the only official language of the EU - "They celebrated the 50th anniversary in 2007 and all the posters in Brussels had the slogan 'Together' on them," he said. *Carpette* runners-up included Education Minister Xavier Darcos for insisting pupils become "bilingual" and Carrefour, whose *Champion* supermarkets (a French-origin word) are now to be called *Carrefour Market*.

Mr Favre d'Echallens said: "I can't see how that is going to give them a single extra customer. 'At one point France imported the word 'supermarket,' but we replaced it with *supermarché*."

He said signs of encroachment of English in France included recent prosecutions for firms that forced people to work in English, contrary to the law. They included one making medical scanners, he said, which expected people



POLICY: Higher Education Minister Valérie Pécresse wants universities to use more English

“English is a language that all young people should master. We cannot let a child leave the education system without speaking it”

to do highly technical work in English, and an insurance firm which insisted staff use an English version of software. He was also shocked by France's decision to put forward an English-language Eurovision song last year.

"It is symbolic of the way things are going - that France is not capable of putting forward a singer who sings in French." Mr Favre d'Echallens said the *Carpette* was a *prix citron* (a booby prize) which was meant to be satirical but with a serious goal.

He added that he was worried for the future of French - "If people all start working in English, French won't exist any more," he said.

As a related issue, he said he was concerned about the lazy French many youngsters spoke. "These days people say

'*c'est pas*' instead of '*ce n'est pas*' (see article, below) and don't use proper inversions for questions like '*puis-je*' - they say '*je peux*' instead."

Mr Favre d'Echallens said maternal English-speakers could learn good usage from

classic literature or the best contemporary writers, like Jean d'Ormesson - rather than radio or TV shows.

"Foreigners might think French is a complicated language but the best French is clear and simple," he said.

Send in your worst 'English in French' horrors

THE *Carpette Anglaise* is the booby prize for French establishment figures who boost the creeping use of English - however it works both ways. We too at *The Connexion* regularly grind our teeth over unnecessary, misused, pointless or bizarre anglicisms in France.

Of course, linguistic borrowings are nothing new. Swaths of English derive from Norman French (castle, court, justice...) apart from recent entries like *faux pas* or *à la carte* which still "look" French.

French has been returning the favour for centuries - 18th Century examples include *boulogne*, *boulingrin* and *redingote* (bulldog, bowling green and riding coat). However to language purists, trendy use of anglicisms when a suitable French word exists or blatant use of English assuming French people understand, is beyond the pale.

French writer René Etiemble identified the trend in 1964 when he coined the word *franglais* - but the phenomenon increases every year. Sometimes English words are used in curious contexts, seemingly only

half-understood.

Recent linguistic "horrors" identified by *Avenir de la Langue Française* (ALF), one of the associations behind the *Carpette*, include an exhibition of Arctic art at the Musée Quai Branly (a state museum) called *Upside Down - Les Arctiques*, and a student offer pack at BNP-Paribas called *Ze Box*.

The bank is also named and shamed for a poster promoting overdrafts showing two men stripping off at a nudist beach next to a sign saying *Bienvenue à Naked Land* - a reference to the word *découvert*, which means both "overdraft" and "uncovered" in French.

A Parisian boutique advertised its sale as "Crazy shopping - 30%." ALF also criticised energy company Alstom for recruitment slogans "It's all about people" and "We are shaping the future."

Please send in your suggestions for the worst modern examples of English words in French. We also welcome suggestions for the name of the award, currently known as the *Connexion Carpette*, at connexionfrance.com

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