

Chapter Eighteen

World of Foreign Words

There are some words and phrases from foreign languages like Latin and French that are used in English also. In this chapter I have attempted to compile the important ones.

ad infinitum (*Latin*): If something goes on *ad infinitum*, it goes on without limit. It goes on for ever. It goes on upto infinity. This journey is so long; it seems to go on *ad infinitum*.

ad nauseam (*Latin*): If something happens *ad nauseam*, it happens to an excessive or unacceptable extent. It becomes nauseating. It irritates and disgusts you. He has nothing else to talk about except his sons and daughters; he talks about them *ad nauseam*.

a fortiori (*Latin*): *X, a fortiori Y*. What does this mean? That *X* is a strong reason. And *for this strong reason*, *Y* is true. He is good at computers; *a fortiori* he must be good at maths.

agent provocateur (*French*): This refers to a person employed to help in catching suspected criminals by tempting them to act illegally. In other words, he or she provokes the criminal and then traps them.

aide-de-camp (*French*): He is a military officer who acts as assistant to a senior officer. In short, he is referred to as ADC. You must have heard of ADC to Governor.

a la (*French*): If you do something *a la* somebody, you do it in his style. You do it like him. This cricketer tries to play *a la* Sachin Tendulkar.

a la carte (*French*): If you eat *a la carte* in a restaurant, you eat items selected from the menu. That is, you order your meal as separate items from a menu, as opposed to a complete meal charged at a fixed price.

a la mode (*French*): If your clothes or ideas are *a la mode*, they are fashionable. Maria dresses herself up *a la mode*.

alfresco (*Italian*): If something happens *alfresco*, it happens in the open air. Several *dhabas* have provision for *alfresco* dinner.

alias (*Latin*): See “World of Words” (WW).

alibi (*Latin*): In law, an *alibi* is a formal statement or evidence that a person was elsewhere at the time of a crime. So this becomes a sort of excuse. The accused were prepared with *alibis* for the day of murder.

allegro (*Italian*): If a piece of music is played *allegro*, it is played in quick time. It is fast and lively. The piece itself is also known as *allegro*.

Alma Mater (*Latin*): It means “Gracious Mother”. Students use it as a term of

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respect for the school, college or university they attended. One of our school songs was: “*Alma Mater!* We love thee.”

alter ego (*Latin*): It means “the other self”. It refers to a close friend who is very like oneself. Or, it is the other side of your personality.

amour propre (*French*): Your *amour propre* is your own sense of dignity and worth. It is your self-respect. Never hurt your employee’s *amour propre*.

angst (*German*): It is a feeling of anxiety, guilt or regret, especially about the condition of the world. The poet’s *angst* is palpable in his works.

a posteriori (*Latin*): See WW.

apparatchik (*Russian*): He is an official in a large (political) organisation.

apres-ski (*French*): It refers to social activities and entertainment after a day’s skiing in a resort.

a priori (*Latin*): See WW

au fait (*French*): If you are *au fait* with something, you are completely familiar with it. I am *au fait* with this city; I have been here for more than a decade.

au pair (*French*): She is a young woman from abroad who works in the house. She also looks after the children. And in return for her work, she stays free of charge with the family.

au revoir (*French*): It is a French expression for “goodbye”. It is used when we expect or hope to see the other person again.

avant-garde (*French*): If somebody is *avant-garde*, especially in art and literature, he favours new and unusual ideas. The *avant-garde* writers challenge the norms set by their predecessors.

beau monde (*French*): In earlier times, a rich fashionable young man was referred to as a *beau* or dandy. The *beau monde* refers to a fashionable society.

belles-lettres (*French*): This refers to literary studies and writings. The word is used to contrast it with writings on commercial, technical or scientific subjects.

bete noire (*French*): See WW.

bijou (*French*): It means “a jewel”. A *bijou* place or building is very fashionable and rather snobbish. It is small and elegant.

blitz (*German*): A *blitz* is a sudden concentrated military attack, especially from the air. *The Blitz* refers to the German air attacks on Britain in 1940. And what is *blitzkrieg*? It is a concentrated military campaign intended to win a quick victory. Figuratively, the media also launches a *blitzkrieg*.

bona fide (*Latin*): Literally, it means “in good faith”. So a *bona fide* agreement or organisation is genuine or real. There is no deception or fraud involved. In law, somebody’s good or sincere intentions are referred to as his *bona fides*.

bonhomie (*French*): If somebody shows *bonhomie*, he shows cheerful

friendliness. Ms Srivastava loves guests and is full of *bonhomie*.

bon mot (*French*): It is a funny and clever remark.

bourgeois (*French*): *Bourgeois* lifestyle, attitudes and beliefs are considered to be typical of quite rich middle-class people in towns. They are conventional and conservative. Those who are *bourgeois* are mainly interested in possessions and social status. They support the interests of capitalism.

The *bourgeoisie* are the middle classes in society, who own most of the wealth in a capitalist system.

cadre (*French*): A *cadre* is a small group of highly trained soldiers, workers or managers. The BJP and the Communists are *cadre*-based parties.

canard (*French*): A *canard* is a false report or rumour. *Canards* are often made up and spread deliberately. This may be done in order to discredit somebody or his work. Some people spread a *canard* about the presence of beef in everything.

carte blanche (*French*): If you have *carte blanche* to do something, you have the complete freedom to act as you think best. There cannot be too much Central control; you have to give *carte blanche* to the States on more and more issues.

caveat emptor (*Latin*): Literally, it means "let the buyer beware". It refers to the principle that the buyer is responsible for checking the quality of goods that he or she buys.

charge d'affaires (*French*): He or she is a subordinate diplomat. A *charge d'affaires* is a person appointed to act as the head of a diplomatic mission when the ambassador is absent. Or, he or she is the head of a small diplomatic mission.

chauffeur (*French*): A *chauffeur* is a person employed to drive a car, especially for somebody rich or important. One of the perks associated with top jobs is a *chauffeur*-driven car.

chef-d'oeuvre (*French*): An artist's *chef-d'oeuvre* is his masterpiece. It is a very fine piece of work done by him. *Mona Lisa* is the *chef-d'oeuvre* of Leonardo da Vinci.

circa (*Latin*): It is used with a particular year to say that this is the approximate date. Papanatha temple was built in *circa* 680 AD. If we use abbreviations, we can say *c.* 680 AD or *ca.* 680 AD.

cognoscenti (*Italian*): The *cognoscenti* are the people who have a lot of knowledge or experience of something, especially art, food, wine etc. You have to be very cautious while talking about art among the *cognoscenti*.

coiffure (*French*): It is the way in which hair, especially a woman's hair, is arranged. In other words, it is a hairstyle. The boys went crazy after her sexy *coiffure*.

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communiqué (French): It is an official announcement, especially to newspapers. The only witness of the massacre issued a *communiqué* to the press.

corps de ballet (French): It refers to dancers in a ballet company who dance together as a group.

corrigendum (Latin): It refers to corrections in a book. Often, newspapers and magazines print something wrong. When they realise this mistake, they put a *corrigendum* in a subsequent issue. *Corrigendum* is also known as *errata*.

coup de grace (French): It is a finishing stroke or a death blow. It is an action or event which finally destroys something, say an institution, which has gradually been growing weaker. The economic depression dealt the *coup de grace* to his business; inefficiency had weakened it earlier.

coup d'état (French): It is a coup that gets rid of the president or govt of a country. It is a sudden, illegal, and often violent, change of govt. Several govts in Pakistan have been overthrown by *coups d'état*.

creme de la creme (French): Literally, it means "cream of the cream". In other words, the best people or things from a group. The IITs take only the *creme de la creme*.

crescendo (Italian): It is a gradual increase in the volume of a piece of music. In general, it is a gradual increase in any noise. The peak thus reached is also known as *crescendo*. More generally, it is the busiest or most intense moment in a period of activity or excitement. Sales reach a *crescendo* just before Diwali.

cuisine (French): The *cuisine* of a particular place is the style of cooking associated with it. I like Hyderabadi *cuisine*.

The *cuisine* of a particular restaurant is the range of food that is served in it, especially when it is cooked with great skill. Karim's is renowned for its *cuisine*.

cul-de-sac (French): A *cul-de-sac* is a street that is closed at one end. It also refers to a little town where nothing interesting happens. Figuratively, if something enters a *cul-de-sac*, it can make no further progress. His career has now entered a *cul-de-sac*; there is not much excitement left.

debut (French): Your *debut* is your first appearance. Sachin Tendulkar made his Test *debut* in 1989.

de facto (Latin): See WW.

deja vu (French): It is the feeling that you have already experienced in the past what is happening at the present. But, in fact, you have not.

de jure (Latin): See *de facto* in WW.

de rigueur (French): If something is *de rigueur*, it is required by social custom. It is a fashionable possession or habit. Therefore, if you want to avoid being considered old-fashioned or unusual, it is necessary. Mobile phones are *de rigueur* for businessmen.

detente (*French*): It is the reduction of dangerous tension, especially between countries. It is a state of friendly relations when previously there had been problems between them. There has been a *detente* in relations between the two Koreas.

detour (*French*): A *detour* is a longer route taken instead of the direct one. This may be done either to avoid a problem or to see something on your journey. Since there had been a landslide, we had to make a *detour*.

de trop (*French*): If you are *de trop*, you are not wanted. You are not welcome. It was a family gathering; an outsider like me would have been *de trop*.

dictum (*Latin*): It is a short, well-known statement. In other words, it is a saying. My friend lives by the *dictum* "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

double entendre (*French*): It is a word or phrase that can be understood in two ways. And one of the meanings is usually sexual. Remember the controversy created by "*Choli ke peeche kya hai* (what's behind your blouse)"?

dramatis personae (*Latin*): The *dramatis personae* of a play are all the characters in it. Before you start seeing or reading a play, you should be aware of the *dramatis personae*.

eclat (*French*): If somebody performs with *eclat*, his performance has a brilliant effect. Pt Bhimsen Joshi sings with *eclat*.

eg (*Latin*): The letters *eg* are an abbreviation of *exempli gratia*, which means "for example" or "for instance". Several rivers flow in India, *eg* Ganga, Yamuna, Kaveri and Narmada.

elan (*French*): If you do something with *elan*, you do it with enthusiasm and energy. You do it with verve. Walk into an interview with *elan*; it makes the atmosphere positive.

El Dorado (*Spanish*): It refers to the golden land of one's dreams. It is the imaginary golden land. The US is the *El Dorado* for most of the Indians.

elite (*French*): An *elite* is a group considered to be the best or most important because of their power, talent or wealth. Masala movies do not appeal to the intellectual *elite*.

emeritus (*Latin*): It is used with a professional title. It indicates that the person bearing the title has retired but still keeps it as an honour. Romila Thapar is a professor *emeritus* at JNU.

en bloc (*French*): If people do something *en bloc*, they do it all together. They do it all at the same time. The ministers of party X have put in their papers *en bloc*.

enfant terrible (*French*): He or she is usually a young person whose behaviour or ideas annoy, shock or embarrass those with more conventional attitudes. At

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one time Pt Ravi Shankar was an *enfant terrible* in the world of Indian classical music. His association with the West was unconventional.

en masse (French): If people do something *en masse*, they do it in a mass or crowd. They do it all together and at the same time. The employees sat on a strike *en masse*.

ennui (French): See WW.

en passant (French): If you mention something *en passant*, you mention it in passing. That is, you mention it briefly while talking about something else. While talking about films in general, he mentioned it *en passant* that he was also making one.

en route (French): If you do something *en route*, you do it on the way. You do it while travelling. People generally halt at Allahabad *en route* from Delhi to Patna.

en suite (French): If something, like rooms, is *en suite*, it forms a single unit. The bedroom has a living room *en suite*.

entente (French): An *entente* between countries is a friendly understanding between them. Minor incidents should not be allowed to disrupt the *entente* between India and Bangladesh.

entourage (French): An *entourage* is a group of all those persons who accompany and assist an important person. Though Gandhi himself spent less, the expenditure on his *entourage* was substantial.

entrepreneur (French): An *entrepreneur* is a person who starts or organises a commercial enterprise, especially one involving financial risk. We are yet to turn from a nation of job-seekers to one of *entrepreneurs*.

ergo (Latin): It is used instead of *therefore* in formal or humorous sentences. Water is getting scarce, *ergo* we should drink less of it.

esprit de corps (French): It is a feeling of loyalty and pride that unites the members of a group. This feeling makes them consider themselves to be different from others in special way. The *esprit de corps* of old boys of a good school can be clearly seen.

et al (Latin): It is used after a name to indicate that “and other people” are also involved. The Picador Book of Indian Literature has the works of Tagore, Premchand, Narayan *et al*.

et cetera (Latin): Usually abbreviated as *etc*, it means “and other similar things”. For an office, you need chairs, tables, cabinets, *etc*.

eureka (Greek): Literally, it means “I have found it.” It is used as a cry of triumph at making a discovery. When Archimedes, in his bath tub, discovered why a body floats, he ran out naked, shouting ‘*Eureka!*’.

ex gratia (Latin): An *ex gratia* payment or grant is one that is made as an act of grace. That is, it is given as a favour or gift, and not from any (legal) obligation.

ex officio (*Latin*): If you do something *ex officio*, you do it by virtue of your office, position or rank. The Prime Minister is the *ex officio* chairman of the Planning Commission. That is, he is the chairman because he is the prime minister.

facsimile (*Latin*): It is an exact copy of a piece of writing or of a picture. If you send a *facsimile* electronically, you *fax* it.

factotum (*Latin*): It refers to a person employed to do all types of work. My friend does not need a cook or a butler; he needs a *factotum*.

fait accompli (*French*): If something is a *fait accompli*, it cannot be changed. Therefore, it makes no sense to argue about it. With only one run to be scored, their victory is now a *fait accompli*.

faux pas (*French*): It is an action or remark which causes embarrassment because it is not socially correct. Instead of touching his feet, he shook hands with the Swamiji. Later on, he realised it was a *faux pas*.

femme fatale (*French*): She is a woman to whom a man feels very strongly attracted, with dangerous or unhappy results. She is mysterious, attractive and seductive. She leads men into dangerous or difficult situations by her charm.

frisson (*French*): It is a sudden strong physical feeling, especially of excitement or fear. You could see a *frisson* of delight on her face.

genre (*French*): It is a particular style or type, especially of works of art or literature. Literature has several *genres*, eg short story, poem, novel, epic, essay etc.

glasnost (*Russian*): It is the policy of more open govt and wider spread of information in public affairs. Mikhail Gorbachev brought about this policy in the former Soviet Union.

gratis (*Latin*): If you do something *gratis*, you do it without payment. You do it free of charge. Since you are a friend of mine, you can attend classes *gratis*.

guru (*Sanskrit*): He is a Hindu spiritual leader. But the term also refers to a respected and influential expert. Thus we hear of management *gurus*.

habeas corpus (*Latin*): It is a law that states that a person cannot be kept in prison unless he or she has been physically brought before a judge or a magistrate. The judge must then decide whether it is lawful for that person to be kept in prison.

hara-kiri (*Japanese*): It means "suicide". More specifically, it is a ritual act of killing oneself by cutting open one's stomach with a sword. In Japan, the Samurai (military class) performed *hara-kiri* as an honourable way of avoiding disgrace.

haute couture (*French*): It refers to the leading companies making fashionable clothes. Besides, it also refers to their products or to high fashion.

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haute cuisine (*French*): It is cookery of a high standard. *Cookery* is the skill or practice of cooking.

hors de combat (*French*): If you are *hors de combat*, you are unable to take part in an activity or a sport because you are injured. Amit was *hors de combat* with a sprain in his left foot.

hubris (*Greek*): It is arrogant pride. It is *hubris* that leads to the downfall of a hero and results in tragedy.

ie (*Latin*): It is the abbreviation of *id est*, which means "that is to say" or "in other words". He bought the house for Rs 5 lakh, *ie* half the price at which his friend did.

impasse (*French*): See WW.

incognito (*Italian*): If you do something *incognito*, you do it with your true identity hidden. For example, by using a false name. Some people donate money *incognito*.

in extremis (*Latin*): If somebody is *in extremis*, he is at the point of death. When I went to meet Mrs Williams, she was *in extremis*. She could not have lasted more than a couple of hours.

There is another meaning also. If somebody is *in extremis*, he is in a very difficult situation and has to use extreme methods in order to solve his problems. I was not willing to compromise, but I had to do it *in extremis*.

infra dig (*Latin*): It is the shortened form of *infra dignitatem*. If you feel something is *infra dig* for you, it is beneath your dignity. You feel it is not appropriate for you. Travelling by bus is *infra dig* for businessmen.

ingenue (*French*): She is an innocent young woman, especially as portrayed in a play or film. Kareena Kapoor has played the role of a poor little *ingenue*.

in loco parentis (*Latin*): If you are *in loco parentis*, you act for or instead of a parent. You have the responsibility of a parent. Teachers are often seen to be *in loco parentis*.

in memoriam (*Latin*): If something is done *in memoriam*, you do it in memory of a dead person. The phrase is especially used on gravestones.

in situ (*Latin*): If something is *in situ*, it remains in its original or proper place while work is done on it. They will repair the television *in situ*.

inter alia (*Latin*): See WW.

in toto (*Latin*): If you agree to something *in toto*, you totally agree to it. I cannot approve your proposal *in toto*; a few amendments need to be made.

ipso facto (*Latin*): See *de facto* (WW).

je ne sais quoi (*French*): It is a pleasing quality that is difficult to describe. There is a certain *je ne sais quoi* in happy homes.

- joie de vivre** (*French*): If you are full of *joie de vivre*, you are full of cheerful enjoyment of life. I like the company of persons with a spirit of *joie de vivre*.
- kibbutz** (*Hebrew*): It refers to a farm in Israel in which people live together and share work, profits, decisions, etc.
- kosher** (*Hebrew*): If a food is *kosher*, it is permitted by the laws of Judaism. More generally, if something is *kosher*, it is genuine. It can be trusted. It is right and honest. It happens in the way which is approved of.
- lacuna** (*Latin*): If there is a *lacuna* in something, it means something is missing in it. There is a gap that needs to be filled. Any law that you make is certain to have *lacunas*.
- laissez-faire** (*French*): It is the free market policy. That is, the govt allows business companies to operate and develop freely without interfering or controlling them.
- leitmotif** (*German*): In a piece of music, the *leitmotif* is a short, constantly repeated theme associated with a particular person, thing or idea. The *leitmotif* of his arguments was that the state should give up its controls.
- lingua franca** (*Italian*): It is a language used for communicating between the people of an area in which several languages are spoken. Clearly, at the global level, English is the *lingua franca*.
- literati** (*French*): The *literati* are the educated and intelligent people who enjoy literature. Not everyone at the book-reading sessions belongs to the *literati*; some of them come merely because they enjoy parties.
- Mafia** (*Italian*): The *Mafia* is a secret organisation of criminals. Originally, it was found in Sicily. But it has now spread to Italy, the US and even elsewhere. More generally, *mafia* refers to a group of people having secret influence in society.
- magnum opus** (*Latin*): It is a work of art, music or literature that is regarded as its author's greatest. *War and Peace* was the *magnum opus* of Leo Tolstoy.
- mandarin** (*Chinese*): Formerly, a *mandarin* was a high-ranking govt official in China. Now, it is used for other countries also. A *mandarin* is a powerful high-ranking official, especially in the civil service or in a political party.
- manque** (*French*): If you are an artist *manque*, you hoped to follow the specified career (here as an artist) but did not. Or, you failed in it. "An artist" is just an example. You could use *manque* with other careers also.
- matinee** (*French*): Originally, it was a morning performance. But now a *matinee* is a play or film which is performed or shown in the afternoon. A *matinee idol* is an actor who is greatly admired, especially by women.
- melange** (*French*): A *melange* is a mixture or variety of different things. India is a *melange* of different cultures.

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melee (*French*): A *melee* is a confused crowd of people. It is a confused struggle. People are rushing about in different directions and doing different things. At a number of businesshouses you will find a *melee*; but the good ones are organised.

menage (*French*): It refers to the members of a household. A *menage a trois* is a household consisting of three people, especially a husband, a wife and a lover.

metier (*French*): One's *metier* is one's profession, trade or main area of activity. He is from marketing; designing is not his *metier*.

minutiae (*Latin*): The *minutiae* of something are its very small or unimportant details. Those who are interested in the *minutiae* can get it on our website.

modus operandi (*Latin*): Your *modus operandi* is your particular method of working or dealing with a task. The *modus operandi* of that organisation is not very clear.

modus vivendi (*Latin*): It is a practical arrangement by which people who are quarrelling can continue to work or live together while waiting for their dispute to be settled. It is an arrangement which allows people of different attitudes to live and work together. Though our thinkings differ, we have evolved a *modus vivendi* for the office.

nirvana (*Sanskrit*): In Buddhism and Hinduism, *nirvana* is a state of perfect happiness and freedom. In this state the individual becomes absorbed into the supreme spirit. It is the ultimate state of spiritual enlightenment.

noblesse oblige (*French*): It is a saying which means "rank has its obligation". That is, people of high rank must accept the responsibilities of their position. For example, helping people in need is one of those responsibilities.

nom de plume (*French*): A writer's *nom de plume* is his pen-name. That is, the name he uses for his writings instead of his real name. Mark Twain was the *nom de plume* of Samuel Langhorne Clemens.

nonchalance (*French*): If you do something with *nonchalance*, you do it calmly. See *nonchalantly* (WW).

non compos mentis (*Latin*): If somebody is *non compos mentis*, he is not able to think clearly. He is not in his right mind. Mahesh was *non compos mentis* after the party; so he asked me to meet him another day.

non sequitur (*Latin*): If a statement is *non sequitur*, it does not follow in a logical way from the previous one. It is a piece of false reasoning.

nouveau riche (*French*): If somebody is *nouveau riche*, he has recently become rich. And he displays his wealth in a very obvious manner. Since he comes from a lower social class, he has tastes and manners that others consider vulgar.

objet d'art (*French*): It is a small decorative or artistic object. My friend is a collector of *objets d'art*.

oeuvre (French): It refers to all the works of a writer, artist, etc. Narayan's *oeuvre* consists of novels, short stories and an autobiography.

outré (French): If somebody's behaviour or ideas are *outré*, they are very unusual and quite shocking. People get embarrassed at the *outré* dresses she wears to college.

paparazzo (Italian): A *paparazzo* is a journalist or photographer who follows famous people around in order to get interesting stories or photographs. The plural is *paparazzi*. It is common knowledge that Diana was hounded by the *paparazzi*.

papier mache (French): It is paper mixed with glue, or flour and water, etc. it is used for moulding into boxes, trays, ornaments, etc.

par excellence (French): If somebody or something is *par excellence*, they are better than all of their kind. Sachin Tendulkar is a cricketer *par excellence*.

parole (French): If a prisoner is released on *parole*, he is released before the end of his sentence if he promises to behave well. Or, he is released temporarily for a special purpose.

passee (French): See WW.

per (Latin): "Per unit" means "for each unit of time", length, etc. It is used to express rates, prices, etc. *Per annum* means for each year. *Per capita* means for each person. *Per cent* means in or for every hundred. *Per diem* means for every day. *Per mensem* means for every month.

perestroika (Russian): It is the reform of the economic and political system. Like *glasnost*, this was also emphasised upon by Mikhail Gorbachev in the former Soviet Union.

per se (Latin): It means "by or of itself". There is nothing wrong with milk *per se*, but milk products do not suit his digestive system.

persona non grata (Latin): A *persona non grata* is a person who is not welcome or acceptable to others, especially to a foreign govt. The diplomat was declared *persona non grata* on being suspected of spying.

piazza (Italian): It is a public square, especially in an Italian town.

piece de resistance (French): The *piece de resistance* of a group of things, especially creative work, is the most important or impressive item in it. The Hyderabadi *biryani* was the *piece de resistance* of last night's dinner.

pied-a-terre (French): It is a small flat, usually in a town, that one does not live in as one's main home. One keeps it for use when necessary. My uncle lives in Allahabad but has a *pied-a-terre* in Purnia.

post-mortem (Latin): Literally, it means "after death". It is a medical examination of a person's body made after death in order to find the cause of death. Figuratively, it is a discussion or review of an event after it has happened.

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pot-pourri (*French*): It is a mixture of dried flowers and spices used for making a room, cupboard, etc smell pleasant. Figuratively, it is a mixture of various things that were not originally intended to form a group.

prima ballerina (*Italian*): She is a leading woman opera singer. Besides, it also refers to a person who thinks he or she is very important and behaves badly when things go wrong or others do not do as he or she wants.

prima facie (*Latin*): Literally, it means “at first sight” or “on the face of it”. If something is done *prima facie*, it is based on what seems at first to be true or real. There is no further or deeper investigation. A *prima facie* evidence is sufficient to establish something legally, unless it is found to be false later.

pro rata (*Latin*): If something happens *pro rata*, it happens in proportion to something else. If oil prices increase, there will be a *pro rata* increase in prices of other commodities.

protege (*French*): If you are a *protege* of somebody, your welfare and career are looked after by that influential person, especially over a long period. In the field of arts, your career develops initially as a *protege* of the ones who are already established.

pro tem (*Latin*): If something happens *pro tem*, it happens for the time being. It happens temporarily. A *pro tem* speaker looks after the functioning of the house before a permanent one is elected.

quid pro quo (*Latin*): See WW.

qv (*Latin*): It is the abbreviation of *quod vide* and means “which may be referred to”. It is used to direct a reader to another part of a book, etc for further information.

raison d’etre (*French*): See WW.

realpolitik (*German*): It is an approach to politics based on the actual circumstances and needs of one’s own people, not on morals or ideals.

recherche (*French*): If something is *recherche*, it is too unusual or obscure to be easily understood. It makes people think that it has been planned, made or said by a knowledgeable and intellectual person. *Recherche* films do not have mass appeal.

rendezvous (*French*): A *rendezvous* is a place where a particular group of people often meet. If you have a *rendezvous* with somebody, you have a meeting with him at an agreed time or place. The lovers often have a secret *rendezvous*.

resume (*French*): A *resume* is a summary of something. We posted the *resume* of our meeting on the website. Now, you can also make a *resume* of your life. Thus *resume* has also come to mean *curriculum vitae* (*CV*) or *bio-data*. Post your *resume* on naukri.com.

RSVP (*French*): It is the abbreviation of *repondez s'il vous plait*, which means "Reply if you please" or "Please reply". It is written especially on invitations.

sangfroid (*French*): See WW.

savoir-faire (*French*): It is the ability to behave in the appropriate way in social situations. Those who lack *savoir-faire* are not likely to get ahead in social life.

shibboleth (*Hebrew*): It is an old idea, principle or phrase that is no longer regarded by many as important or relevant. Examinations are becoming a *shibboleth* in the modern world.

sic (*Latin*): It is placed in brackets after a quoted word or phrase that seems to be misspelled or inappropriate. It shows that the quotation is accurate and the mistake is a part of the original (from where the quotation has been taken).

sine die (*Latin*): If something happens *sine die*, it happens without a date being fixed. In view of the agitation, schools have been closed *sine die*.

sine qua non (*Latin*): See WW.

sobriquet (*French*): See WW.

soiree (*French*): It is a social gathering in the evening, especially for music or conversation. *Soirees* are a common phenomenon in cities that value culture.

son et lumiere (*French*): Literally, it means "sound and light". It is an entertainment held at night at a famous building or place, where its history is told and acted with special lighting and recorded sound. Have you ever been to the *son et lumiere* show at Lal Qila?

sotto voce (*Italian*): If you say something *sotto voce*, you say it in a low voice, so as not to be heard by everyone. "Will you marry the fat woman?" Mr Jolly asked his son *sotto voce*.

status quo (*Latin*): See WW.

sub judice (*Latin*): If a case is *sub judice*, it is still being considered by a law court. A *sub judice* case cannot be discussed in public — neither in the parliament nor in a newspaper.

tableau (*French*): It is a dramatic, striking or attractive scene, especially one presented on stage without words or movement. The plural is *tableaux*. On the Republic Day, the states exhibit their *tableaux*.

table d'hote (*French*): It is the fixed meal of a restaurant. It consists of a limited range of dishes served at a fixed price. Unlike *a la carte* menu, you can't order as per your choice in a *table d'hote* menu.

terra firma (*Latin*): It means "firm or solid ground". It is used to refer to the ground when you are contrasting it with the sea or air, especially because it seems safer. The sailor was glad to be back on *terra firma* after having met with an accident in the sea.

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tete-a-tete (*French*): It is a private conversation between two people. We love to have *tete-a-tete* over a cup of tea.

touche (*French*): It is an interjection. It is used in an argument or a discussion to show that one accepts a good or clever point made by somebody else. *Touche!* I never thought on those lines.

vendetta (*Italian*): A *vendetta* is a dispute between families in which murders are committed in return for previous murders. Besides, it also means a series of harmful or offensive actions directed by one person against another. We must not show political *vendetta* against our neighbouring countries.

versus (*Latin*): *Versus* is used to mean “against”. It is used especially in sports and law. It is abbreviated as *v* or *vs*. What happened in the India-*vs*-Zimbabwe match?

via (*Latin*): If you go to X *via* Y, you go through Y. In Latin, *via* means “road”. Thus *via media* means “middle course”. They went from Delhi to Mumbai *via* Nagpur.

viva voce (*Latin*): It is a spoken examination, as opposed to a written one. The UPSC mains exam consists of 2300 marks — 2000 for written and 300 for *viva voce*.

viz. (*Latin*): It is an abbreviation for *videlicet*. It is used in written English to introduce a list of specific items or examples. Most of us love living in the four metros, *viz* Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai.

volte-face (*French*): A *volte-face* is a complete change of attitude, opinion, policy, etc. That is, one’s attitude becomes the opposite of what it was before. There has been a *volte-face* in his thinking since he has got married.

wanderlust (*German*): It is a strong desire to travel. Men like Marco Polo had *wanderlust*.

yang (*Chinese*): In Chinese philosophy, *yang* is the active bright male principle of the universe.

yin (*Chinese*): In Chinese philosophy, *yin* is the passive dark female principle of the universe.

Zeitgeist (*German*): It is the characteristic mood or quality of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas, beliefs, etc of the time.

Zen (*Japanese*): It is a Japanese form of Buddhism that emphasises the importance of controlling or concentrating the mind more than learning from religious books.