CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Madam,

In an otherwise informed and stimulating review of Tufala Gayman: Reminiscences from the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides (JPS 112:174-76), Stuart Bedford on two occasions uses wording which takes him into some anomaly-ridden semantic territory. The problems occur when he describes the publication under review as “a collection of reminiscences from former French and English administrators” (p.174), and when he comments “With two countries as mismatched as England and France, joint administration of the islands was never going to be simple” (p.175). As I interpret them, the first of these passages implies that the administration of the Condominium was a French and English matter, with the administrators respectively being French and English, and the second implies that the two countries constituting the Condominium were France and England.

Bedford’s “English administrators” were in fact functionaries of the British Administration in the New Hebrides, the personnel of which included not only ethnic English, but also ethnic Irish, Scots and Welsh, and also the occasional Australian and New Zealander. These functionaries of the British Administration had titles such as British Resident Commissioner, British District Agent, Assistant British District Agent and so on, and the whole entourage was known as the British Service, a Service that was employed by, and was under the political direction of, the British Government. At a less formal level the Britishness, rather than Englishness, of the “Anglo-” component of the Condominium was evidenced by the existence of the British Paddock and the British Ex-servicemen’s Association.

Bedford may well have been led astray by the use of the standard but anomalous phrasing “the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides” in the title of the book under review, though it should be noted that the terms “Britain” and “British” are used with scrupulous appropriateness in the body of the book.

Just how and why the term “Anglo-French”, in which the “Anglo-” component is anomalous when the referential facts of the situation are taken into account, came to be the standard compound adjective in English describing the New Hebrides Condominium has not, to the best of my knowledge, been thoroughly elucidated. The following examples of usages relating to the New Hebrides are from publication titles listed in O’Reilly (1958) with the page number, item number [italicised], and year of publication being cited for each instance:

(a) “Anglo-French Land Commission” (p.209 2269 1905) and “Anglo-French Condominium” (p.192 2097 1914, p.188 2086 1949, 2087 1951 and 2089 1955);
Correspondence

(b) “L’accord franco-anglais” (p.207 2248 1905), “Le condominium franco-anglais” (p.209 2263 1908), “la convention franco-anglaise” (p.208 2253 1906, p.209 2271 1907 and 2264 1911);


By the 1950s, as the examples under (c) demonstrate, the French had got it right, while the British Colonial Office, as the three examples from p.188 under (a), all from His/Her Majesty’s Stationery Office publications, show, had not.

Whether or not the French usages had any influence on the adoption of the term “Anglo-French” in English I leave for the lexicographers to determine. I do suggest, however, that when “Anglo-” is used in reference to the Condominium of the New Hebrides the facts of the situation dictate that it has to be interpreted as referring to “Britain”, not “England”, as one of the two countries constituting the Condominium.

There is an ironic postscript to the 74-year saga of the Condominium. By the end of 2005 the British Government will have terminated its direct formal representation in the Republic of Vanuatu by closing down its High Commission in Port Vila, a decision which may well give some comfort to Britain’s long-standing partner-cum-adversary in the former Condominium.

D.S. Walsh
Aberdeen, NSW, Australia

REFERENCE