

## WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

### All or nothing? Something you're not telling me?

This month's corner of the French language is very negative, with nobody never doing nothing but fret.

It always seems to me that the first things you learn in French are always so positive – I am (je suis) – I've got (j'ai) – There is (il y a) etc – I play tennis (je joue au tennis) – I go cycling (je fais du vélo) – I do the shopping (je fais les courses) – I go for a walk (je me promène) – I am exhausted (je suis épuisé) because I don't know how to say “ No ”! So how do you say you never want to see a bicycle again?

Well, there are lots of ways of being negative, too. Simply saying you don't want to do something takes two extra words “ ne ” and “ pas ” which get slung around the verb. Je ne veux pas jouer au tennis. Je ne fais pas de vélo. It's not really a double negative, it's just a formula that French speakers use, a bit like the extra “ do not ” English speakers use when they say they do not like something (ils n'aiment pas quelque chose). As you will see from this last bit, “ ne ” loses it's “ e ” in front of a vowel.

If you want to say no more forcefully, there is a range of words to use, all involving that “ ne ” or “ n' ”. Ne....point means absolutely not. Ne....plus means not any more – Il n'y a plus de cerises (there are no more cherries) To get the full feeling of disappointment that things have run out, you can say “ Il ne reste plus de pain ” There isn't any bread left. If someone says “ Plus de cerises! ” then he's saying No more cherries, not that there are more! For negative nostalgia On ne fait plus cela – they don't do that anymore!

Nothing and Nobody get the same treatment. Edith Piaff had no regrets – Non, je ne regrette rien. I'm all innocent – je n'ai rien fait! And if you never did anything you would say Je n'ai jamais rien fait – I never did nothing, honest! And if you never saw nobody you could say Je n'ai jamais vu personne. So you can do double negatives in French quite happily.

You can also put Nothing, Nobody and Never at the beginning of your sentence. Nothing happened, Nobody came. Never have I seen such a thing, but you mustn't forget to include the “ ne ” - Rien ne s'est passé. Personne n'est venu. Jamais je n'ai vu une chose pareille!

But you can't go through life being negative. You can't say never always (toujours). There's sometimes (quelquefois) something (quelque chose) round the corner, someone (quelqu'un) who will make a difference. There may even be some more cherries (encore des cerises). Everything (tout) is possible. Everybody (tout le monde) has his or her ups and downs.

There are a couple more of these useful sets, including “ Nulle part ” (nowhere). “ Aucun, aucune ” (not a single one)

It can be useful to see the Not – some – and all versions of these words together:

Rien	Quelque chose	Tout
Personne	Quelqu'un	Tout le monde
Jamais	Quelquefois	Toujours
Nulle part	Quelque part	Partout
Aucun/e	Certain/e/s	Tout/e Tous/toutes
Plus de	Encore du/de la/des	