

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

Making what you know go further

Inevitably, when you start using a foreign language from absolute scratch, the milestones are just managing to get by in simple situations and every day transactions. Finding words that get your needs met. Ça va?...Je voudrais..... C'est possible pour moi de... C'est nécessaire de... C'est combien... Où sont les toilettes etc. These expressions become habitual, so we don't have to think about them, just like if someone says "Bonjour" to you, you say "Bonjour" back, You don't consult your watch to see if you should be saying "Bonsoir" ! (By the way the answer to "When do you say bonsoir as oppose to bonjour?" is like every thing else you say – it's however you feel at the time. I have heard French people say "bonsoir" at 4pm and "bonjour" at 8.30 in the evening). Building on what you can do spontaneously is at the heart of all language learning, as is listening to everything that goes on around you.

Mind you it doesn't come naturally, especially if your needs are met each time you use your one off formula. But it is worth expanding your range of ways to say what you want, as you can get a lot of the every day patterns of the French language out of the way these phrases work. If you want a new expression to come into your head at the right time, then it takes practice. Saying it with your mouth and making it sound right is a key to it going into memory. Think of it as a game. Make it sound like Allo! Allo! Consciously experiment on your own by adding alternatives on to the end, and your tongue will get used to saying it and your ear will 'ear it, too.

Alternative ways of asking for things in a shop: Je voudrais, yes but why not j'aimerais (I would like) Avez-vous – have you got.. with the Vous ending –ez (AY). Even better, Est-ce que vous avez (ESKA VOOZ AVAY) – Get used to saying ESKA and you have the key to asking questions successfully in French. Add all sorts of possibilities on the end – ESKA vous avez du sucre, est-ce que vous avez des pommes, est-ce que vous avez une voiture, est-ce que vous avez de l'eau, est-ce que vous avez de la limonade etc (sugar, apples, a car, water, lemonade etc).

As you hear and recognise other people saying the same thing you can pick up on when they say du sucre as opposite to de la bière or des cigarettes. Masculine and Feminine has such an impact on how things are said in French that you have a good chance of your head associating the word with its gender, especially with words that are used frequently.

Je vais prendre (I am going to have (take, really, but the French take everything – drinks, sandwiches, rendez vous etc.)) Je vais (Jur Vay) is a simple way of talking about the future – providing you know the rest of the dreaded Aller verb. Donnez-moi – give me... (not as impolite as it seems in English)

Having got you tongue round ESKA (ignoring the dreadful way it is written!) other things can become easier: Est-ce que je peux (ESKA Jur Pur) is a way to ask permission: Est-ce que je peux regarder? – can I look? Est-ce que je peux essayer.. – can I try.. ? Est-ce que je peux prendre... ? – can I take... ? And is it necessary to... becomes : Est-ce qu'il faut (Esk eel foe) but always follow it with an infinitive, or you're in trouble! – Est-ce qu'il faut payer – Is it necessary to pay?

People say you don't need much French, not when you can pick what you want off the supermarket shelf. But what happens when you can't find it? Est-ce que vous avez.... is one way of dealing with it, but why not say Je cherche (SHAIRSH)... I'm looking for... Je cherche le lait (milk) , Je cherche des produits anglais (English stuff). Of course this works outside a shop too – Je cherche la Poste, un distributeur de billets (BEEYAY) (an ATM), la route de Calais (the road to Calais) etc. You can build your vocabulary base by thinking up things you might want to stick on the end and finding them in a dictionary. Back in the shop, my favourite question is « Où est-ce que vous avez caché les chips ? – where have you hidden the crisps ? Why do they put everything in the wrong places?