

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

Small Talk – No big deal

It's all very well all this grammar stuff and vocabulary and things, but how do you have a *conversation* in French? How do you handle a situation where you meet someone for the first time? How do you get to know somebody new?

The answer is much the same in any language. In a former life, when one entertained (and I mean "one") one steered clear of certain subjects, like politics and religion and I can remember long and tedious conversations about schools. Advanced stuff for someone setting out in any language, though I guess the same taboos exist here. So how do you go about it?

The first hint is to keep within subjects you know enough language to be safe about. The French talk about the weather just as much as we do (see "Talking about the weather"), and simple comments on the current weather or what is forecast will often break the ice, literally at this time of year! Try to keep to, or as close as possible to, the fixed phrases that trot off the tongue rather than trying to say something really profound that gets your tongue all twisted up. It is a good habit to try to stick to language you are familiar with, especially if this encourages you to practise more, even on your own, to get your mouth around more and more expressions. But on the other hand don't be afraid to have a go. If the other person is interested in talking to you they won't be put off by mistakes, and if they are, it means they weren't!

"Vous venez ici souvent" – the old clichés still work!

Find out more about them – Ça fait longtemps que vous habitez ici? Vous habitez où exactement? Vous avez de la famille ici? Qu'est-ce que vous faites/faisiez dans la vie? (what do/did you do as a livelihood?) Elicit their opinions with "Qu'est-ce que vous pensez de...?" "Comment trouvez-vous.....?"

"Qu'est-ce que vous aimez commemusique, films, cuisine..?" – what kind of music, films, cuisine do you like?

You might agree with them – Je suis d'accord, Je pense comme vous, Moi, aussi, je..... Or not – Moi, je préfère....., Moi je n'aime pas trop (I'm not too keen on)...

Make suggestions - Ça vous dirait d'aller au cinéma, manger au restaurant? - Si on allait au théâtre? – How about going to a cinema etc.

If you find you have interests in common, these would be a good basis for chatting, although it inevitably will involve jargon. But then you will be picking this up when you are buying the stuff you need for your habit.

As you get to know someone better you might ask – On peut se tutoyer? – can we say "tu" to each other? It is easier (more cowardly?) to wait until the other person says "tu" to you.

At that point you may be more brazen -

Tu veux sortir avec moi? Would you like to(eg) go out with me?

J'aimerais t'inviter à manger au restaurant – I would like totake you out for a meal.

Je vais ... Tu veux venir? Would you like to join me....?

J'adore danser. Et toi?. I love dancing – how about you?

Tu es très jolie, belle, amusante! You are verypretty, beautiful, amusing.

J'adore ta robe, ta chevelure, ton sourire. I love your.....dress.....hair.....smile

Où est-ce qu'on se rencontre? Where shall I meet you.

On se revoit à? Shall we meet me at

Tu me plais vraiment, je t'aime etc... I really like you. I love you. Etc.

Don't forget, though, that you must listen to what comes back at you. All the best guide books for successful small talk say that the most important skill is to listen. Add into the equation the delight that French speakers have in the sound of their own voice, and staying quiet and listening becomes a positive virtue.