

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

Survival French – Identifying yourself

I was at the Gendarmerie with a client the other day, and the lady gendarme said how surprised she was that so many Brits did not have even enough French to summon the Pompiers or the Gendarmerie to an emergency. It is true that most published language learning stuff is aimed at the tourist, though even there you probably won't find the French to ask where the loo is.

So what is the really minimum French that you need to survive? Maybe the first step is what the French call your coordonnées, your contact details. Being able to identify yourself confidently is really essential and should not be left to do "on the hoof", when the excitement of the moment may empty your head. Je m'appelle Ware dooblervay ah air euh. Spelling out your name is often vital! Mon prénom est (Mornng praynorng aye Richard). Mon adresse est (Morn address aye..) Mon numéro de téléphone est le.....(mornng new may roe deuh tay lay phone aye leuh).

So you need the numbers and letters in your name and address, and to remember that the numbers are clustered in pairs.

(0)zayro (1)ung (2)deuh (3)trwa (4)katrer (5)sank (6)cease (7)set (8)wheat (9)nerf (10)deece (11)ornz (12)dooze (13)trez (14)katorz (15)canz (16)sez (17) deece-set (18) deez wheat etc

combined with:

(20)vang (30)traunt (40)karaunt (50) sank aunt (60) swa saunt and (80) katrer vang. For 30-60, be sure to pronounce the final "t" strongly.

For 21, 31, 41, 51 and 61, you add aye ung instead of just ung: vang aye ung, traunt aye ung etc), but you don't do this for 81 (katrer vang ung). For 71 you say swa saunt aye ornz but for 91 you say katrer vang ornz – well it is French, after all! Otherwise you just piece them together – (34)traunt katrer (46)karant cease (57) sank aunt set. Above 69 it becomes mental arithmetic – (70) swa saunt deece (73) swa saunt trez (84) katrer vang katrer (95) katrer vang canz etc.

It doesn't trip off the tongue, which is why you really have to learn your key numbers – fixed and mobile numbers – clustered in twos, like true French speakers, off by heart without hesitation. My number is 05 55 00 31 15 – zayro sank, sank aunt sank, zayro zayro, traunt aye ung, canz.

The next bit is spelling out your name, and possibly the name of your village. If you are in the Bourg of a commune, life is easier as they will already have a good idea, but for what they call Lieu Dit (lyeuh dee) you can't rely on them recognising the name. Here is what the French alphabet sounds like:

A – ah! **B** – bay **C** – say **D** – day **E** – euh **F** – eff **G** – jay! **H** – ash **I** – ee! **J** – jee! **K** – ka
L – el **M** – em **N** – en **O** – oh! **P** – pay **Q** – kyu **R** – air **S** – ess **T** – tay **U** – yu **V** – vay
W – doublevay **X** – iks **Y** – ee greck **Z** – zed.

As before, it is a case of working out how you spell your name in French, writing it down and learning it by heart. If you do live in a village which is not the actual commune, announce the name by saying Lyeuh dee. For example, morn address aye Lyeuh dee sang jervaye : jay euh air vay ah ee ess, katrer van set meal see song veedex. (LD St Gervais, 87600 Videix). When you spell your name out, emphasise every letter, just as you would in English. If you are doing it over the phone, you sometimes need to distinguish between S and F or N or M. If there is one of these letters in your name/details, then have a comparison ready – s comme saucisses, f comme France (S as in sausages, F as in France etc).

The last bit that makes up who you are (your "Etat civil") is your date and place of birth. If you don't want to learn the months of the year, then you can do the date with the (paired up) numbers. Add deez-nerf song to the front of the year and away you go. Je suis né à Londres le 09/03/1946. Jeuh swee nay ah lorndrer (bradford, penzance etc) leuh zayro nerf zayro trwa deez nerf song karaunt cease.

Once you have let them know who you are and where you live, you can get on to telling them why you are calling, which we will get to next month!