

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

Talking about the future

When we talk about the future in English, we have broadly three ways of doing it, depending on how close in the future we are talking about, how fixed it might be or whether it is some future hope or long-term prediction. We are eating out this evening, we might say, using the ordinary present tense as we salivate in anticipation. Someone's going to fix the door next Tuesday – it's all arranged, always assuming he turns up. Or perhaps, I'm going to go out this evening and I don't care what you say (determination in the face of opposition). We'll see you again next year, you might say as you gratefully turn your back on Aunt May.

In the first two instances, French does exactly the same thing with almost exactly the same implications. *Nous mangeons au restaurant ce soir.* (Remember French has only one present tense for both we eat and we are eating). *On va réparer la porte mardi prochain,* using *aller* to produce a pre-planned “going to” future, or again, *Je vais sortir ce soir et je m'en fous de ce que tu vas en dire.* Especially for the *aller* going-to future, the rules are loose enough for you to be able to use this regularly as an easy-peasy future, except that the third kind of future is quite important in helping towards the expression of other time relationships, making it worth while in the long term to come to grips with its awkwardnesses. *Chère tante, nous te reverrons l'an prochain.*

If you look at the English, we'll see you again next year, what makes it future is the 'll sound in we'll see, as opposed to we see, the habit. In modern snappy English you'll even find things like *The company'll see you right, there'll be more of this kind of thing, the children'll be at school by now, etc.* So it's the L that is giving the future dimension. In French it is an RR. *Nous te veRRons l'an prochain. Nous mangeRons au restaurant, Je le finiRai en avril.* A strong R and a strong ending.

At it's most straightforward, you start off with the infinitive, say, *manger, maigrir, vendre* and you stick endings on the last R. For the “nous” and “vous” endings your add –ons and –ez as always, but the for rest, the easiest way to describe it is to say you put the Present of “avoir” on the end: *Je mangerAI tu mangerAS il mangerA nous mangerONS vous mangerEZ ils mangerONT.* None of your silent –ENTs here, all these endings are strongly pronounced as if the rest of the word is leaning into them.

Which they are, as in French the emphasis in a word is usually placed on the final syllable. We say CUMf-tabel ; they say conforTABL. With the future tense longer and heavier than all the other verb forms, the vowels in the syllables in the earlier part of the word get crushed, squashed and splattered in the rush to get to the end of the word. And, yes, it's the most used words that are the most ragged. So *AvoïRRAI* becomes *aurai*, *savoïRRAI* becomes *saurai*, *pouvoïRRAI* becomes *pourrai* and *alleRRai* becomes *irai*. *DevoïRRAI* becomes *devrai*, *voïRRAI* becomes *verrai*, *faiRRAI* becomes shorter – *ferai*, and when there is an ‘n’ or an ‘l’ mixed in there, you get ‘d’s occurring all over the place – *vouloïRRAI* becomes *vouDRAI*, *veniRRAI* becomes *viendrai* (*vyandray*) and *teniRRAI* becomes *tiendrai* (*vyandray*) etc. And the worst of the lot ? probably *être* as usual – do you remember Doris Day when she was a just a little girl? *Que sera sera* whatever will be will be – yes, *êTRRAi* becomes *serai* and in French, what will be is “ce qui sera”

You will remember my reluctance to get people to learn any but the four most difficult verbs, and how a much simplified pattern emerges from the others. (see my article *Who thinks verbs are difficult?*) When you are familiar with what is in my minimal box, you know all there is to know about a verb and everything else follows on according to rules set in stone. Well the future tense form is one of those things in the box, together with the past participle. Everything else can be deduced mechanically. To remind you, your box for *venir* would be:

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VENIR	
je viens	nous venons
	ils viennent
je viendrai (future)	je suis venu (passé composé)

What makes it worthwhile coming to grips with these horrid forms – well, they form the backbone of the conditional, too. So they serve twice – or more if you include the futures of avoir and être which help in making future and conditional perfect tenses, too. But more about this anon. In the meantime, keep gazing into the crystal ball... Un jour je gagnerai au Lotto?