

## WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

### Telling a story in the past 2.

### The verbs that take ÊTRE

Last month we started looking at how to tell stories in the past, and how for most verbs one used a combination of the present tense of *AVOIR* with a bit of the verb called the Past Participle when you were telling the facts of a story or saying what you did rather than were doing. So instead of saying I felt in my pocket and found my money, you say I have felt in my pocket and I have found my money – *j'ai fouillé dans ma poche et j'ai trouvé mon argent*.

But as I said at the end, there are some verbs that use *ÊTRE* instead. For instance you might want to say I put on my hat and went out, but this becomes I have put on my hat and I am gone out – *j'ai mis mon chapeau et je suis sorti*.

These verbs are ones about coming and going, going up and down, in and out, falling and staying put, leaving and returning, and dying and being born. Most of them work in pairs – *aller/venir, partir/arriver, entrer/sortir, monter/descendre, naître/mourir, tomber/rester*, and an odd pair *passer & retourner*. Just these fourteen plus their compounds – *repartir, devenir, rentrer* etc. It is a bore to learn these, but the pay off is that these are almost the only way in French of talking about the movement concerned.

In English we use little words – in, out, up, down etc to describe movement. He ran in, I rushed out, they drove off. In French you almost always use the key movement verbs and then describe how – *Il est entré en courant, je suis sorti à la hâte, ils sont parti en voiture*. So it's like everything else in French – the more irregular or awkward it is, the more you find it useful! And vice versa.

But it isn't even that easy – there are some of them that sometimes use *être* and sometimes use *avoir*, depending on how they are being used or what they mean. *Je suis sorti* (I went out) but *J'ai sorti le chat* (I put the cat out) *Il est descendu* (He came down), but *Il a descendu les valises* (He brought the cases down). *La famille est rentrée* (The family have come home), but *Vous avez rentré la poubelle?* (Have you brought the bin back in). They use *être* when there is movement but *avoir* when something is being moved or carried.

One of these schizophrenic verbs is *passer*. *Le facteur est passé* (the postman has been by) *Je suis passé le voir* (I dropped in to see him) but *Il a passé ses vacances en Espagne* (he spent his holidays in Spain) *Nous avons passé l'après-midi à jouer aux cartes* (We spent the afternoon playing cards)

There is another much larger group of verbs that also use *être* to make the Passé Composé, an almost infinite number of them. These are the ones called Reflexive verbs, where one is doing something to oneself. Why infinite? Because there is almost no limit to what you can do to yourself or for yourself. But more on this in another note (Each for Himself)!