

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

The donkey in the goal – y en

You may remember (with horror?) the article about those awkward pronouns – the hims and hers and its and somes – that the French put in front of the verb. You use pronouns when you don't want to have to repeat the name of the thing or person you are talking about over and over again. I him have seen - *Je l'ai vu* and I them have lost – *Je les ai perdu*, not to mention *Je les lui ai donnés* I gave him them. I promised you more about the donkey in the goal – y en, so here it is!

There is a pecking order for pronouns in front of the verb if you have more than one of them. They look a little like a football line-up:

The Pronoun Line-Up				
me				
te	le	lui		
se	la	leur	y en	
nous	les			
vous				

We had a look at the first three columns in the last article, so we are concentrating on the last two this time.

You come across them without thinking in expressions like: Il y a de l'argent sur la table – There is some money on the table. Allez-y – go on then! Moi, je m'en vais – I'm off! Il n'y en a plus – there is none left. They have quite a lot in common, as both of them have several jobs to do and don't always mean the same thing each time you meet them.

“y” can stand for a place. Vous allez à Paris? Oui, j'y vais – I'm going there Mon ami y habite depuis un an – He has lived there for a year Nous allons en Espagne cette année. Nous y allons tous les ans – We go there every year. Regardez dans le tiroir – J'y ai déjà regardé – I have already looked there.

You also use “y” when the thing you don't want to repeat is tied into the sentence with an “à”. Pensez aux vacances! – think of the holidays! Oui, j'y pense - Yes I'm thinking about them!

“en” can stand for a place you're back from: Il doit aller à Paris – mais il vient d'en revenir – He's just got back from there. It can also mean “one” or “some” - Vous avez des bonbons? Oui, j'en ai. Vous voulez du café? Oui, j'en veux bien. Vous avez une voiture? Oui, j'en ai une. (Notice you have to put the “one” in, too)

It is closely associated with what I call the “de” family. “un” and “une” are members of this family: after all, you only have to have more than one and either becomes “des”. And after a negative either one becomes “de”. So if you are trying not to repeat something with “un” or “une” in front of it, you use “en”. Voulez-vous une pomme? Non, je n'en veux pas.

And of course, just as “y” is used in expressions where there is an “à” so “en” is used in expressions where there is a “de”. J'achète un marteau parce que j'en ai besoin – I need it
J'en rêve – I dream about it

But remember that these can only be used for things or for talking about people in a depersonalised way. Vous avez combien d'enfants? J'en ai quatre. But when you are talking about Céline Dion you'd say not J'y pense but Je pense à elle and not J'en rêve but Je rêve d'elle!