

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

Who says verbs are hard?

There's a Mr Becherelle who classified all French verbs into 70 or so different patterns, so that anyone who was in doubt about what the third person plural of the past subjunctive form of any verb in the French language could look it up and be sure of what he found. He must have made a fortune, as every school child seems to have one of these tucked under his or her arm from the age of 8 upwards! I have come across textbooks which say that you can only really rely on "ER" verbs as there were no rules for any others. But "ER" verbs are not different from the others and also come in all shapes and sizes.

Well, there *is* an easier way to look at verbs and there *are* patterns which apply to all verbs except the really nasty four, *être*, *avoir*, *aller* and *faire*. (You just have to learn these, though even they have a pattern of their own) Especially if you are learning French to speak and not to write.

The first thing to get rid of is "elle and on" *je..tu..il..elle..on* – Why learn 5 things when 3 will do? In fact why learn 9 things *je..tu..il..elle..on..nous..vous..ils...elles..* when just 3 will do? Sounds too good to be true?

First of all, Who is the most important person in a conversation (especially a French conversation!)? Well, *I* always reckon it's *me* (*moi,je..*), coz I'm doing the talking. So if I'm number one, you must be number two, since without you listening, there wouldn't be much point in my saying anything. Anyone else, or anything else is a third party, as the insurers would say. He, she, it or they are not taking part in the conversation, whether you are talking behind their backs or they are actually there. In French everything is a "him" or a "her" so these third parties could be people, but they might just as well be animals, inanimate objects or abstract ideas. It isn't just *il* or *elle* or *on* that does whatever you may be talking about, it's anything that is not you or me. So why put three things next to it and say the same thing three times? Just choose one and be done with it. I use *Il*.

Sometimes you share being number one with someone else and you speak on their behalf, too – We (*Nous*). Sometimes you are talking to more than one person - You lot (*Vous*), So you can have more than one number two. In French you talk to someone you don't know too well as if they were more than one person, giving them extra weight.

The first rule is that in all cases except the 4 dreadfuls, if you are talking about one person or thing doing something, it doesn't matter who it is it always *sounds* the same. (*je bois* I drink, *tu bois* you drink, *il boit* he drinks) they all sound like "bwa". And it's always the shortest soundbite you can make and still know you are talking about drinking. i.e. It's always shorter than the infinitive.

The second rule is that more than one something is heavier than one something, so the sound for more than one is more substantial. When you are talking about *them* doing something it sounds heavier. It has a consonant at the end. So "They drink" is EEL BWAV "*Ils boivent*" Of course you don't pronounce the ENT on the end.

The third rule is that because we and you lot are more than one person, we/you are heavy too, so they also have this consonant on the end, but they also each have a distinctive sound after that, and the effect of this is that the front of the word can sometimes get squeezed up and sound shorter. When you are talking about "us" (*Nous*) then the verb always has ONS (ONG) on the end, and when you are talking about "you lot", or "you, sir" the verb always has EZ (AY) on the end. When a doorknob says Poussez or Tirez who is it talking about, why, You, of course! That EZ (Ay) on the end means "Ay, You"

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

So why only three things to learn? Well....

je bois (bwa) and so do tu and il and elle, not to forget on Know the first and you know the rest
Nous buvons, so that means vous buvez. These two always have the same stem.
and that leaves Ils boivent whoever they are, and probably like fishes!

This applies to all verbs, even "ER" ones, though these tend to have a consonant on the end already, and you can't add another one.

Je mange (marnj) (and so does tu, and il, elle, and on)
Nous mangeons marnjong so vous mangez (marnjay)
and ils mangent (marnj) whoever they are, and gastronomically in France.

You may notice apart from Nous and Vous they all sound the same in ER verbs. Of course in all verbs there are spelling differences, but in spoken French you don't hear them.