

Coffee Break **French**

Season 4, Episode 38

Language Study



CoffeeBreak
French

SEASON 4

Mark: Alors on est de retour avec l'épisode
supplémentaire pour cette semaine.

PB: Oui exactement.

Mark: Donc nous allons parler du texte de Sylvie
cette semaine.

PB: Oui c'est Sylvie qui envoie un email, c'est ça?

Mark: À sa mère.

PB: À sa mère. Très bien.

Mark: En fait c'est le dernier mail de Sylvie de notre
série.

PB: Non!?

Mark: Allez on va parler du premier paragraphe
maintenant.

Salut maman, Je ne sais pas par où
commencer, tu me poses tellement de
questions! Je vais essayer de te répondre du
mieux que je peux. Tout d'abord, ne t'inquiète
pas du retard, j'ai moi-même été très prise au
boulot ces derniers jours. J'allais juste vite fait
sur Internet le soir avant d'aller me
coucher. Guillaume m'a envoyé un message

avant de partir et nous nous sommes promis de nous écrire plus régulièrement que ces derniers temps. Je suis comme vous, bien tentée d'aller lui rendre visite. On pourrait presque y aller ensemble ? Enfin, il faut déjà que je finisse l'année afin d'avoir droit à mes congés annuels. Du coup pour moi ce ne sera pas avant mai l'an prochain. On a le temps d'en reparler.

Mark: D'accord donc nous allons maintenant parler de ce que Sylvie a dit.

PB: Oui alors c'est parti.

Mark: Donc elle commence:

PB: Salut maman, je ne sais pas par où commencer, tu me poses tellement de questions!

Mark: This is quite interesting actually, even in our first sentence. She says, je ne sais pas par où commencer. Donc par où commencer, I don't know where to begin. But when in French we're saying to start by doing something, it's commencer par quelque chose.

PB: Très bien.

Mark: Commencer par faire quelque chose?

PB: Oui exactement Mark. Commencer par + un verbe, un infinitif, ou commencer par, par exemple ici, commencer par le premier paragraphe. You would have a noun.

Mark: Ok. So, in this case then, *je ne sais pas par où commencer*. So, we've got to have the *par où* in there. Could she say *Je ne sais pas où commencer*?

PB: You could but I think it's nice here to say *Je ne sais pas par où commencer* because *par* is obviously dictated *commencer*.

Mark: So, I don't know where to begin *tu me poses tellement de questions!* You ask me so many questions. She then goes on to say I am going to try to answer you in the best way I can. Let's have a listen to that:

Je vais essayer de te répondre du mieux que je peux.

Mark: *Du mieux que je peux.*

PB: *Oui.* It's a nice expression.

Mark: *Du mieux que je peux. Du mieux...*

PBH: Yes, *du mieux que je peux.* But I think she could have made life easier for herself if she'd said: *je vais essayer de te répondre de mon mieux.* That's quite nice as well.

Mark: *Oui.*

PB: It's easier to use.

Mark: So *faire de son mieux* can be to do one's best and to reply in one's best way; *répondre de mon mieux.*

PB: Très bien.

Mark: Or du mieux que je peux, in the best way I can.
Ok, so she goes on:

PB: Tout d'abord, ne t'inquiète pas du retard, j'ai
moi-même été très prise au boulot ces
derniers jours.

Mark: First of all, don't worry about the delay. I
myself have been very busy, très prise, literally
very taken at work, ces derniers jours, these
last few days. And then she says something
else interesting. Let's have a listen:

J'allais juste vite fait sur Internet le soir avant
d'aller me coucher.

Mark That vite fait is nice, it's a very nice expression.
It's very common in French. J'allais juste vite
fait sur Internet le soir.

PB: And it's interesting here Mark she doesn't say
je suis allée vite fait sur Internet le soir avant
d'aller me coucher, which would have been
fine. The fact that she used the imperfect here,
it was something that she did repeatedly,
every night before going to bed.

Mark: Alors Pierre-Benoît, tu peux nous donner vite
fait quelques exemples de « vite fait » ?

PB: Oh ho, Mark, that's smart because that's vite
fait as well. Yes, for example I would say j'ai

préparé ma valise vite fait parce que je n'avais que 5 minutes pour partir.

valise (f)
suitcase

Mark: So, vite fait literally, quickly done, but it's used very, very regularly just to say something that you do quickly. I just had a quick look at something: j'ai regardé vite fait sur Internet pour voir la disponibilité de l'hôtel, ou quelque chose comme ça.

disponibilité (f)
availability

PB: Très bien ou j'ai regardé la télé, j'ai allumé la télé vite fait pour voir les informations pendant 2 minutes.

Mark: Exactement.

PB: There's an idiomatic phrase as well, vite fait... and what's the next part?

Mark: Vite fait... non je ne connais pas cette expression!

PB: Vite fait, bien fait.

Mark: Ah oui. Vite fait, bien fait. Donc, ça veut dire ?

PB: Quickly done, but also you want it to be done well.

Mark: Not just quickly, but do it well.

PB: The quality's got to be there as well.

Mark: Très bien. Continuons donc, vite fait bien fait.

PB: Guillaume m'a envoyé un message avant de partir et nous nous sommes promis de nous écrire plus régulièrement que ces derniers temps.

Mark: So, Guillaume sent me a message before leaving, and we promised each other, nous nous sommes promis de nous écrire, to write

to each other more regularly than we have been doing recently. So, a couple of interesting points in there. *nous nous sommes promis de nous écrire, se promettre*, to promise to each other, and then, *de nous écrire, s'écrire*, to write to each other: *nous nous sommes promis de nous écrire plus régulièrement que ces derniers temps*.

PB: And I quite like as well, *avant de*. I know we've seen that so many times, but *avant de* + an infinitive and it's not always easy to translate back from English into French.

Mark: Particularly because in English we don't normally use the infinitive; before doing something. It's a gerund.

PB: It's a gerund.

Mark: Yes, ok. So, Sylvie goes on:

PB: *Je suis comme vous, bien tentée d'aller lui rendre visite. On pourrait presque y aller ensemble ?*

Mark: So, I am like you. I am really tempted to go and visit him. We could even go there perhaps together.

PB: And shall we remind our listeners that it's *rendre visite à quelqu'un*, or *aller voir*, as I like to teach it because it's much easier.

Mark: Yes, to go and see someone. Ok.

PB: *Enfin, il faut déjà que je finisse l'année afin d'avoir droit à mes congés annuels.*

Mark: So, here we're using a nice subjunctive; *il faut déjà que je finisse*, I must finish the year, *afin d'avoir droit à mes congés annuels*, so that I have the right to my annual holidays. And we've talked about that whole cultural point before.

PB: Ah *oui*, Mark, but before we move on, am I allowed to go back to *afin d'avoir*? *Afin de* + infinitive. Sometimes you get *pour* + infinitive. I think the whole point I'm making here is that sometimes when we want to translate it from English into French, because it's this kind of infinitive we use to, to be able to do something or to manage to do something or whatever, when it's the intention, we forget the *pour*, or the *afin de*.

Mark: *Tout à fait. Tu nous donnes un exemple?*

PB: *Eh bien, par exemple, je vais aller à Glasgow ce week-end pour rencontrer un copain.*

Mark: *Pour rencontrer un copain.* We don't translate that as "for to visit a friend", but, of course, in English, if we were just saying I'm going to Glasgow this weekend to visit a friend, it's the tendency of the possibility that a learner might think, to visit a friend is just *rendre visite* or *rencontrer*.

PB: Or *aller voir*. They might not think about using *pour* or *afin de*.

Mark: *Afin de* is probably a higher level than *pour*, and we can also think about the fact that if we

have *afin que*, then that is a situation where we have two subjects, for example: *je vais à Glasgow ce week-end afin que tu puisses venir me voir après*. So that you can do something.

PB: And obviously you would have to use a subjunctive. That would be maybe trickier, but very interesting.

Mark: *il faut déjà que je finisse l'année afin d'avoir droit à mes congés annuels*.

PB: *Du coup pour moi ce ne sera pas avant mai l'an prochain*.

Mark: And anyway, for me, it won't be before May of next year. And indeed, they got time to talk a little more about it.

PB: Yeah I like this expression: *on a le temps d'en reparler*.

Mark: *On a le temps d'en reparler*.

PB: *D'en* = D'E-N

Mark: As opposed to *dents* which we spoke about in other episode. We'll not go back into my sore teeth at the moment. *On a le temps d'en reparler*. *Ok très bien. Donc nous allons continuer maintenant avec notre deuxième paragraphe*.

Je peux tout à fait t'imaginer trépigner
d'impatience de connaître un peu plus de
choses sur Matthieu! Alors, oui je suis sûre

qu'il te plaira mais on va attendre un peu avant que tu ne le rencontres ! Il est complètement l'opposé de Pierre, c'est une bonne chose je pense. Il est très propre sur lui. Il aime beaucoup son boulot et travaille très dur. Il est aussi très galant, je n'ai jamais été habituée à ça ! De plus, en discutant, nous nous sommes aperçus que nous avons pas mal de points en commun. Par exemple, nous aimons tous les deux aller au cinéma, faire du sport comme la course à pied. Il aime aussi sortir et prendre le temps de vivre, comme moi. C'est déjà un bon début, tu ne trouves pas ?

Mark: C'est déjà un bon début.

PB: C'est un très bon début!

Mark: Tout à fait. The first sentence we've already spoken about in our other episode.

PB: Je peux tout à fait t'imaginer trépigner d'impatience de connaître un peu plus de choses sur Matthieu!

Mark: Sylvie is fully aware that her mother will be desperate to know a little more about Matthieu. So, she goes on to say:

PB: Alors, oui je suis sûre qu'il te plaira mais on va attendre un peu avant que tu ne le rencontres.

Mark: I am sure that, literally, he will please you, that you will like him, mais on va attendre un peu,

but we are going to wait a little, *avant que tu ne le rencontres*, before you meet him.

PB: *Il est complètement l'opposé de Pierre, c'est une bonne chose je pense.*

Mark: He is completely the opposite of Pierre, her previous boyfriend. *C'est une bonne chose, je pense*, It's a good thing I think. And then Sylvie goes on to say:

Il est très propre sur lui.

Mark: This is an interesting phrase. *Propre, propre* means clean, but in this case, *Il est très propre sur lui*, he's very neat and tidy.

PB: He presents well. Yes, I would say something like that. I would say he presents well is a much nicer expression than this one. *Il est très propre sur lui* because you could see that it could actually be sarcastic. It could have a negative effect, kind of ironic. *Il est très propre sur lui*. Does it mean before that Sylvie had boyfriends who were like, didn't look nice?

Mark: A complete mess.

PB: They were smelly? I don't know!

Mark: Well, we won't go into that. Maybe that's for another episode.

PB: I think it's the idea of clothes, you know? He presents well. He's always well dressed.

Mark: He's smartly dressed.

PB: He's well dressed; *Il est très propre sur lui*. It's the idea of manners as well.

Mark: And then she goes on to describe him further:

PB: *Il aime beaucoup son boulot et travaille très dur.*

Mark: He really likes his work and he works very hard.

PB: *Il est aussi très galant, je n'ai jamais été habituée à ça !*

Mark: Well, maybe she is making a point there! He is also very gallant, very charming!

PB: Yes, he is a gentleman.

Mark: And unfortunately Sylvie has never been used to that. She's never had that experience before; *je n'ai jamais été habituée à ça !*

PB: You can see the link with *il est très propre sur lui*.

Mark: *Tout à fait*. Ok, so Sylvie goes on:

PB: *De plus, en discutant, nous nous sommes aperçus que nous avons pas mal de points en commun.*

Mark: What's more, as we continued talking, as we got talking more, we realised we had lots of things in common.

PB: *Nous nous sommes aperçu* or we could have used *nous nous sommes rendu compte*.

Mark: *Rendu compte*, and in that situation what would happen to *rendu*?

PB: Just a -U.

Mark: Yes. Well done! Putting you on the spot. **Vite fait!**

PB: The expression I really like in this phrase is **en discutant**. The idea of as we got talking, as you rightly translated it. Sometimes we want another option. How else could we translate that or what other expression could we use? So, I like the **au fur et à mesure que ...**

Mark: **C'est élégant comme expressions. Au fur et à mesure que ...**

PB: And obviously it triggers a...?

Mark: An imperfect here because we're describing what was going on, what was happening as we continued talking. **Au fur et à mesure que nous discutons**. I'm not saying *mesure* correctly. I'm saying "mésure" but it's *mesure* ok. **Mesure**.

PB: **Un imparfait. Je n'aurais pas fait mieux, Mark.**

Mark: Ok, she goes on, she finishes the paragraph by giving some examples of the things they do have in common.

PB: **Par exemple, nous aimons tous les deux aller au cinéma, faire du sport comme la course à pied. Il aime aussi sortir et prendre le temps de vivre, comme moi. C'est déjà un bon début, tu ne trouves pas ?**

Mark: We've just finished the complete paragraph there. Let's go through it **par exemple, nous aimons tous les deux**, we both like, remember that when we say we both like something it's

je n'aurais pas fait mieux

I couldn't have done better myself

nous aimons tous les deux, and if it's two females who both like something, nous aimons toutes les deux, aller au cinéma, so going to the cinema, faire du sport comme la course à pied, doing sport, like running, like jogging. He also likes going out, il aime aussi sortir et prendre le temps de vivre, taking the time to live, experience life and enjoying himself.

PB: Just enjoying life. That's the right translation I think. He just likes enjoying life.

Mark: That's exactly like Sylvie, she says comme moi, and that's not a bad start: c'est déjà un bon debut.

PB: Tu ne trouves pas?

Mark: Don't you find? Don't you think? OK, très bien pour le deuxième paragraphe.

PB: Yes, some nice expressions.

Mark: There were actually.

PB: I like trépigner as well. It's good.

Mark: On va continuer avec la troisième paragraphe.

Effectivement, nous sommes allés au ciné mercredi soir pour voir Gatsby le magnifique. Une amie le lui avait recommandé. Nous sommes allés au cinéma Gaumont-Pathé à Ivry, nous nous sommes retrouvés devant à 18h30. Par contre, il est très long, plus de 2h donc nous sommes allés à la séance de 19h. Nous l'avons vu en VO, il était encore

mieux. Je vous le conseille si vous souhaitez aller voir un film avec papa. Il y a bien eu environ 20 minutes de publicités et de bandes annonces avant le film. Nous sommes sortis sur les coups de 21h45. C'était parfait pour une sortie un jour de semaine.

Mark: Ok, so we're getting a detailed explanation of their visit to the cinema. In fact Monique had already mentioned that in her email to her daughter. What Sylvie is starting by saying here is you're right. You're right enough. We did go to the cinema on Wednesday evening to see The Great Gatsby.

PB: Effectivement, nous sommes allés au cinéma mercredi soir pour voir Gatsby le magnifique.

Mark: She also says a friend had recommended it to him, talking about Matthieu.

PB: Une amie le lui avait recommandé.

Mark: So, notice the order of our pronouns there. Une amie le lui avait recommandé. That's tricky to get the right order in there.

PB: And it's the opposite when you compare it with English, am I right?

Mark: A friend had recommended it to her, to him even, in this situation, because it's to Matthieu, but lui can mean either to him or to her. Let's just think about that order there. First of all we

have the pronouns **le, la, les** and they will come before **lui** and **leur**.

PB: Yes, the direct before the indirect.

Mark: In this situation because of course there some changes, depending on the particular situation. I have very fond memories of my French teacher in secondary school who taught me the order of these pronouns and it's always the case that you have **me, te, se** coming before **le, la les**. So there you've got indirects coming before directs. So, for example, **tu me le donnes**. You give me the book.

PB: You give it to me, yes.

Mark: Ok, so you give it to me; **tu me le donnes**. So **me** there coming before the **le**. However, the **lui** and **leur** come after **le/la/les**. So, let's say I'm writing a letter to my mother, I write it to her, talking about the letter, to her. So, **je la lui écris**. Ok, très bien.

PB: **Merci**.

Mark: **Je la lui écris**. So, in that table, if you imagine a table in your head with five columns. In the first column, **me, te, se**, the second column **le, la les**, the third column, **lui, leur**, and there are two other pronouns that we are going to put in here. And one is the word for there and the other is the word for "of it" or "any" or something like that. I think you know where we're going with this.

PB: It's the **en** and the **y** or the **y** and the **en**.

Mark: Exactly and which goes in which order?

There's a very obvious version of this.

PB: **Oui, il y en a beaucoup.**

Mark: **Tout à fait.** When we have got **y** and **en** in the same sentence **y** has to come before **en**. Now it's probably completely impossible to have one sentence with all of these in them, because we've been trying to think up a sentence with lots of different pronouns in it. It's pretty tricky, however, if you are thinking about which comes first, then have that order in your mind. **Me, te, se; le, la, les; lui, leur; y; en**, in those five columns across your table.

PB: Fantastic! Tricky however. The order is always tricky. I was thinking about something else as we were doing this, Mark. If I give you an example in French, no, sorry, in English, the first two years.

Mark: I wonder if our listeners can work out how you would say the first two years. It is, of course:

PB: Well, **les deux premières années.**

Mark: So, the **deux** comes first, then you've got **premières années**, then ...

PB: Technically we're saying the two first years.

Mark: It's perhaps a philosophical question. If we're talking about the first two years then we are focusing on those two years, but if we say the two first years as we would do in French, perhaps we're thinking more that that first year

was the first of those first years and the second was the second of those first years. Do you know what, I think we'll move on with our paragraph because we're getting a little ...
retournons à nos moutons!

PB: *Retournons à nos moutons! Nous sommes allés au cinéma Gaumont-Pathé à Ivry, nous nous sommes retrouvés devant à 18h30.*

Mark: So, we went to the Gaumont Pathé cinema in Ivry. We met outside at half past six.

PB: *Par contre, il est très long, plus de 2h donc nous sommes allés à la séance de 19h.*

Mark: So, she's obviously thinking of the time on a week night here. It is very long, two hours long, so we went to the showing, *la séance*, at seven o'clock.

PB: *Nous l'avons vu en VO, il était encore mieux.*

Mark: We saw it in the original version, *en version originale*, so, in English in this case. It was even better.

PB: *Je vous le conseille si vous souhaitez aller voir un film avec papa.*

Mark: This I find is quite interesting because she's saying, she's talking to both her parents here; *je vous le conseille*, advise it to you both, *si vous souhaitez aller voir un film*, if you want to go and see a film, *avec Papa*. Now can I ask you, Pierre-Benoît, would you ever say in this situation, *je te le conseille si tu souhaites aller voir un film avec papa?*

PB: **Oui, oui.**

Mark: What's the difference? Why has she gone for the **vous** here?

PB: **Vous** because she is including her Mum and her Dad.

Mark: But I think the interesting thing is the fact that if we were saying in English, Mum I suggest you go to see this film at the cinema.

PB: Yes, I see where you're coming from here, Mark!

Mark: We don't have to have made that decision yet as to who we're talking about, because the you can be singular or it can be plural.

PB: But I think in English it would be singular. It would be, whereas in French it tends to be a plural.

Mark: You've already thought about that other person.

PB: But I've made the assumption that there'll be that other person. That's with that, by the way.

Mark: So, if we're translating that, that's the key time we need to think about that, if we're going from English in to French. We need to think about what the "you" means. It's the first you in that sentence. You should 'go and see that film, I mean you and Dad. **Vous devez aller voir ce film.**

PB: **Oui.** Or else you would use **tu**. She could have said actually **si tu souhaites aller voir un film avec papa un jour.**

Mark: Yes.

PB: That would be ok as well.

Mark: But it's interesting with the **vous** there. So she talks a little bit about the adverts before the film.

PB: **Il y a bien eu environ 20 minutes de publicités et de bandes annonces avant le film.**

Mark: Tricky here because of the **il y a eu**, which is of course, the perfect tense of the expression **il y a**. And she's thrown in a **bien** in the middle in there. And of course when **bien** is followed by a vowel or a vowel sound, then we make the nasal ending of **bien** into a non-nasal ending.

Listen again to how PB says this:

PB: **Il y a bien eu.**

Mark: **Il y a bien eu** and again it's tricky for a learner to think about that. **Il y a bien eu** or **Il y a bien eu** when making the liaison there. **Il y a bien eu environ 20 minutes de publicités et de bandes annonces avant le film.** So, **les publicités** are the adverts and the **bandes annonces** are the trailers.

PB: **Nous sommes sortis sur les coups de 21h45.**

Mark: I like that. **Sur les coups de 21h45**, so that's on the blows literally.

PB: On the dot, or on the nose of 21h45.

Mark: Very, very specific there. **Sur les coups**. I think I've got an image of someone hitting a bell or something like that. **Sur les coups**.

PB: I think it goes back church bells and maybe when people didn't have the time they would listen to the church in the background, especially in rural France. We go back to that.

Mark: Let's have a listen one more time to that expression:

Nous sommes sortis sur les coups de 21h45.

Mark: So it was perfect for going out in the middle of the week for a weeknight.

PB: C'était parfait pour une sortie un jour de semaine.

Mark: Ok, another interesting paragraph. Perhaps not quite as much as the previous one. Let's see what we've got in our final paragraph now.

J'étais allée au cinéma à pied mais il a insisté pour me raccompagner en voiture. Nous avons bien discuté dans la voiture et nous avons décidé de nous revoir un peu plus régulièrement à partir de maintenant. Par contre, nous ne voulons pas brûler les étapes. Tu sais, je dois dire que je suis très contente car il a vraiment l'air d'être un gars charmant. On verra bien ! Allez je vais me coucher, je suis crevée. Bisous, Sylvie

Mark: Ok, so in this final paragraph we've actually already spoken about two of the expressions here. So let's begin:

PB: *J'étais allée au cinéma à pied mais il a insisté pour me raccompagner en voiture.*

Mark: I had gone to the cinema on foot, but he insisted on taking me home in the car.

PB: *Nous avons bien discuté dans la voiture et nous avons décidé de nous revoir un peu plus régulièrement à partir de maintenant.*

Mark: So, we had a good chat in the car, *nous avons bien discuté dans la voiture*, and we decided to see each other a little more regularly from now on, *à partir de maintenant*. And next she goes on and uses another expression we've heard already:

PB: *Par contre, nous ne voulons pas brûler les étapes.*

Mark: So, we don't want to rush things.

PB: *Tu sais, je dois dire que je suis très contente car il a vraiment l'air d'être un gars charmant.*

Mark: Sylvie is quite delighted because he really does seem like a nice guy; *un gars charmant*.

PB: *On verra bien !*

Mark: We'll soon see!

PB: *Allez je vais me coucher, je suis crevée. Bisous, Sylvie.*

Mark: So, she's off to bed because she's exhausted and with that she finishes her text and we finish this episode.

PB: [Parce que nous sommes crevés aussi.](#)

Mark: [Oui, il faut le dire!](#) So, as usual we hope you enjoyed this episode and we'll be back next time with the second last episode in our series.

PB: [L'avant-dernier.](#)

Mark: [Oui.](#) And that time it doesn't change. It's the first two... anyway. It's the second last episode and we'll be hearing from Gabrielle next week for the end of her story. [Merci beaucoup et à très bientôt!](#)

PB: [Oui, à la prochaine, salut!](#)

