

Coffee Break **French**

Season 4, Episode 21

Email: Monique to Sylvie



CoffeeBreak
French

SEASON 4

PB: Bonjour à tous !

Mark: [Bonjour tout le monde et bienvenue à Coffee Break French.](#)

PB: Alors, bien sûr, vous êtes toujours en compagnie de Pierre-Benoît,

Mark: Et Mark, et nous sommes ravis d'être ici avec vous encore une fois.

PB: Oui en plus il fait beau aujourd'hui, c'est agréable.

Mark: Il fait vachement beau !

PB: C'est super !

Mark: Yes, the weather indeed is absolutely stunning at the moment here in Scotland and we are not complaining because this will probably be our summer, the four days of it.

PB: Eh oui !

Mark: We are bringing you this episode of Coffee Break French as usual with lots and lots of interesting language. We are following the story of Monique and Sylvie, Matthieu and Gabrielle and this is the start of the second half of the course, if you like.

PB: [Oh !](#)

ravi

delighted

vachement

very, extremely, "dead"

The word **vachement** is commonly used in French to emphasise the adjective it describes. Since this is quite a colloquial register, the translations will vary from region to region.

Mark: So we are listening to Monique's email today.
She is preparing for the visit of Sylvie to Epinal to see her brother and it's time now to have a listen to that email.

PB: [Allons-y !](#)

Salut ma fille, bon je pense que tu vas toujours bien depuis ce matin ! On ne se sera jamais envoyé autant de messages dans un laps de temps si rapproché ! Bon, super pour ce week-end. Je viens à l'instant de le dire à ton frangin, et oui il vient juste de se lever, le décalage horaire soi-disant ! Enfin il est aux anges. Il lui tarde vraiment de te revoir. Il dit que toutes ces nouvelles technologies telles que Facebook, Skype ou même les e-mails, sont super mais ce n'est tout de même pas la même chose que de se voir en personne. Enfin c'est très pratique pour rester en contact quand on habite loin.

Oui oui il se remet tout doucement de son voyage. Il se couche encore très tard et il n'est donc pas matinal, mais bon, cela commence à changer. Il devrait être en pleine forme pour ce week-end quand tu arriveras. Tu t'es bien organisée pour ton voyage je trouve ! J'en parlerai à ton père ce soir quand il rentrera du boulot mais c'est un jour où il ne travaille pas donc il pourra venir te chercher. Au pire, ton

Information

Further notes on the text will be provided in the transcript of the Language Study episode.

frère prendra la vieille Clio et il descendra te chercher. Je te tiendrai au courant mais ne t'inquiète pas, quelqu'un sera là pour t'attendre à ta descente du train.

Ouh la la il me tarde d'être en week-end, je vais avoir mes deux enfants réunis, il va falloir marquer ce jour d'une pierre blanche ! Je viens de regarder la météo sur Internet, il devrait faire beau ce week-end. Peut-être pourrions-nous faire un barbecue dans le jardin ! Je vais contacter Mme Gauthier pour voir s'ils sont disponibles. Malheureusement Gérard et Michèle Martin ne sont pas libres, ils partent faire le tour des fjords en Norvège. Ils sont venus hier soir boire l'apéritif à la maison, ils voulaient discuter avec ton frère car ils ont pour projet d'aller visiter le Japon donc ils sont venus à la pêche à l'information ! Ils te passent le bonjour et sont très déçus de te louper encore une fois. Ils ont pris ton numéro de portable au cas où ils viendraient sur Paris.

Bon et sinon, je change de sujet mais toujours pas de nouvelles côté cœur ? On ne sait jamais si ce matin tu étais encore en retard et si tu étais encore entrée en collision avec un charmant jeune homme ! Bon, allez, je vais aller voir si ton frère veut aller se balader un peu, c'est dommage de rester enfermé par un

beau temps pareil ! Je te tiens au courant ce
soir pour ce weekend.
Bonne après-midi.
Bisous
Maman

Mark: So a very interesting text this week full of really
nice phrases, lots of future tenses too.

PB: Yes indeed, Mark. Very rich structures and I'm
sure were going to explore them now.

Mark: We are indeed. But first, I'm going to give you
the English summary, as usual.

So, in this week's email as we know, Monique
is full of excitement for Sylvie's forthcoming
trip to Epinal. As we know, Sylvie's brother has
returned from Japan for a visit and Sylvie is
going to be visiting this weekend. Monique is
replying quickly to the previous email from
Sylvie, and she starts by saying that they've
never replied to each other's emails so quickly.
It may well be a few weeks since we read
Sylvie's last email, but in terms of our story, not
a lot of time has passed! Guillaume, Sylvie's
brother, is delighted that she is coming to
spend the weekend with them. Talking about
Guillaume, Monique says...

PB : **Il est aux anges !**

Mark : He is really looking forward to seeing his

ange (m)

angel

être aux anges

to be in seventh heaven, to be in
the clouds

sister: all the new-fangled ways of keeping in touch like Skype and Facebook aren't quite the same as seeing someone face to face!

Monique tells Sylvie that Guillaume is gradually recovering from his long journey, but the [décalage horaire](#) - the time difference - is still taking its toll. He should be fighting fit by the time that she gets there, though.

Monique suggests that her dad will be able to come and collect her at the station, and if he's not available Guillaume himself will come and pick her up. Either way, someone will be there when she arrives.

Monique is delighted that she's going to have her two children together this weekend.

PB : [Je vais avoir mes deux enfants réunis !](#)

Mark : Now the weather is looking good too, so they're planning a barbecue in the garden and she's going to invite some friends. She knows that their friends the Martins aren't available because they're going to Norway on holiday. They had visited the previous evening with the main purpose of quizzing Guillaume about Japan as they plan to add that to their list of future travel destinations. And, just to be in the safe side, they've also taken Sylvie's phone number in case they're ever in Paris.

Monique finishes by checking up on the latest regarding Sylvie's love life.

PB : [Toujours pas de nouvelles côté cœur ?](#)

Mark : She's off to see if Guillaume wants to go out for a walk as it's a shame to be inside when the weather is so nice outdoors! That sounds quite familiar! As we're recording this in a very warm studio! But that is where our summary of this week's email from Monique to Sylvie comes to an end.

Mark: So, it's now time to talk about our famous four expressions. [Les quatre expressions choisies par Pierre-Benoît.](#)

PB: Yeah. Our fantastic four!

Mark: [Alors, numéro 1: qu'est-ce que tu as choisi ?](#)

PB: [J'ai choisi...](#)

Je viens à l'instant de le dire à ton frangin, et oui il vient juste de se lever, le décalage horaire soi-disant !

Mark: An interesting expression: lots in this one!

PB: It's not just one expression.

Mark: There are several. So, [je viens à l'instant de le dire à ton frangin.](#) Let's deal first of all with that interesting vocabulary: [ton frangin.](#)

PB: [Ah oui !](#) Quite colloquial.

Mark: Yeah, it's a colloquial version of what word?

PB: **Frère.**

Mark: Yeah, so **ton frère** **your brother** ; **ton frangin** is

I suppose is the equivalent of mère and
maman. **Père** - **papa**?

PB: **Non** because I think **frangin** is more colloquial.

Mark: OK, so it's kind of a slang we are talking about.
Your "bro"...

PB: Your "bro" and... **et aussi la frangine.**

Mark: **La frangine** for your...

PB: Yes, your "sis".

Mark: Your sis, I suppose, yeah. So your bro and your
sis although I suppose that they have a kind of
regional element. You might not talk about
your bro in the U.K. anyway. So **ton frangin** is
your brother but is a familiar way of referring
to your brother. But **je viens à l'instant de le**
dire à ton frangin , **je viens de faire quelque**
chose; I have just done something, of course.
So, **je viens à l'instant de dire** **or de le dire à**
ton frangin, I have just this minute told your
brother.

PB: Like you put literally.

Mark: Absolutely!

PB: I've just literally, it's just done it, just done it.

Mark: Yeah. And we see this expression in the next
part of the sentence too.

PB: **Il vient juste de se lever .**

Mark: It's funny here because this time it's not *il vient à l'instant de se lever*, but *il vient juste de se lever*. He has just, just...

PB: It's just, just. Just that minute!

Mark: We've spoken about this before on Coffee Break French. *Venir de faire quelque chose* is to have just done something. So if you add another *juste* or *à l'instant*.

PB: It becomes redundant.

Mark: Yeah, you don't really need it.

PB: But in spoken French, we tend to add that wee bit. I would say in written French, try to avoid using the *juste* and *à l'instant*. Just use the *venir plus de* plus the infinitive.

Mark: OK. So, *je viens à l'instant de le dire à ton frangin, et oui il vient juste de se lever*. And then I think we've got the most interesting part of this phrase that you've chosen.

PB: Yeah, that's why I chose it Mark to be honest.

Mark: OK.

PB: *Le décalage horaire soi-disant !*

Mark: So *décalage horaire* is the time difference, but we would probably use the expression 'jet lag' because the jet lag is what comes as a result of the time difference. So thinking about what's happening here, the mother Monique is saying to her daughter Sylvie, talking about Sylvie's brother, Guillaume: oh, he's still in his bed as a result of the jet lag apparently.

PB: And it's interesting how in French you only have *soi-disant* but our listeners cannot see my face. *Soi-disant* plus everything that's implied in the mimics of the face.

Mark: Yeah.

PB: When in English, you have to actually add so many words, you have to extrapolate just to explain the subtlety of the expression *soi-disant*.

Mark: Yeah, let's think of it grammatically: *soi-disant*. Now *soi* is S-O-I it's not S-O-I-T or anything. There's no subjunctive element in there.

PB: *Non, non, non*.

Mark: *Soi* as in self and then the *disant* part is the gerund of *dire* - to say. So, "saying self". Self saying or so he says or so she says...

PB: So one says you are nothing because it makes it very impersonal. Like anybody would say that.

Mark: Can we use *soi-disant* as a sort of adjective? You know for example, the "so-called" director, he thinks of himself as the director.

PB: Yeah, *le soi-disant directeur*.

Mark: And it will come before the noun because it's longer.

PB: Yeah, with everything that's implied in there, you know he thinks he is the director but he has not done a good job or a something. He's

not... you know he's not doing what he is supposed to be doing.

Mark: Almost like the self proclaimed director or something like that.

PB: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: So, here were using as an adjective **le soi-disant directeur**. Could we have another example?

PB: **La soi-disante amie**.

Mark: OK, I suppose a so-called friend there.

PB: Supposed to be friend.

Mark: So, give us an example of that in a sentence.

PB: **Oui, elle devait venir à ma fête, elle m'avait dit qu'elle préparerait la nourriture et tout, et tout, et finalement, cinq minutes avant la fête elle m'a téléphoné pour me dire qu'elle ne venait pas.**

elle devait venir à ma fête

she was supposed to come to my party

elle préparerait la nourriture

she would prepare the food

Mark: OK, let's just explain all this before you go on because that's quite a lot of fast French there. So you've got a friend who had said she was coming to your party. She was going to prepare the food and everything. She was going to be the best friend in the world and everything but 5 minutes before she cancelled on you. So this is where we can describe that person as...

PB: **Une soi-disante amie**.

Mark: Yeah, a so-called friend. Some friend she was. So we can use soi-disant as an adjective in this

sense but in the expression within our text, is slightly different. Because what we are saying in here is le décalage horaire soi-disant. And we have to go a little bit further than just the one word, the two word translation of soi-disant. In French **soi-disant** is a very succinct phrase but in English we need to extrapolate that a little more. So here, she says *je viens à l'instant de le dire à ton frangin*. I've just told your brother, et *oui il vient juste de se lever*, and he has just got up. Hmm, as a result of the time difference, as a result of the jet lag or so he says. As a result of the jet lag apparently and with that kind of knowing nod and that sort of tapping your nose kind of thing.

PB: Squinting eyes. Hmm.

Mark: Hmm. As a result of the time difference, yeah. OK so it's a very interesting phrase, a lot of rich stuff in there. Apart from all the *venir de* and the *frangin*.

PB: Yeah, for example Mark said to me we would record this in 5 minutes. *Soi-disant*.

Mark: Yeah, apparently.

PB: And it took 15 minutes.

Mark: Absolutely! Were now in 13 minutes, 15 seconds so... maybe a little longer than 15 minutes.

PB: No, but I think here were hitting the right thing here. We're talking about those kind of

expression, that you need to discuss. They're amazing!

Mark: Absolutely!

PB: Yeah, it's really good stuff.

Mark: So your second expression is also something we need to talk about as well. Let's listen to this one.

Il va falloir marquer ce jour d'une pierre
blanche !

Mark: So this is when Monique is delighted about having both her children in the one place for the weekend. She says I'm going to have both my children together and she says...

PB: Il va falloir marquer ce jour d'une pierre
blanche !

Mark: Literally, we can work out what that means. Literally we are going to have to mark this day with a white stone. Can you shed any light on the origin of this expression, Pierre-Benoît?

PB: Well I thought first it had something to do with the jail, you know like when you're counting the days, and you mark on the wall with the stone.

Mark: With the stone.

PB: You just mark the wall and then you would have like those Roman...

Mark: Yeah, the Roman numerals and the tally marks.

PB: And the fifth one you go across and I thought yeah, I can see that it's very important. So I thought you know that when you have something very important you want *marquer d'une pierre blanche* but it looks like it hasn't got to do anything with that.

Mark: It turns out it's a little bit different because we have done some research on this and it turns out that in the past when the men in France were going on military service, military service could be something that had an element of luck involved in it because they had to dip their hands into a bag and pull out a stone. If the stone was black when they pulled it out then they had to head off to the front line.

PB: The front line!

Mark: However, either that or pay someone to do it for them because they could actually get out of it that way in those times. However if they were able to pull out a white stone by luck, then that would mean they wouldn't need to head off to battle.

PB: Yeah.

Mark: And it was therefore an important day.

PB: Yes, so basically out of this we can truly define that it's the idea of an important event.

Mark: Event, yeah. So for Monique it's an important event the fact that she's got both her children together, which when her son lives in Japan

and her daughter lives in Paris, it's not the most...

PB: Is that the idea of cherishing this moment or it's like a wee treasure?

Mark: Yeah, in English we have an expression, a red letter day and there are I'm sure equally interesting stories behind the origin of that phrase. We'll not go into that here.

PB: No, no, no.

Mark: But a red letter day is a day that you remember, a day that you... a day that would go down in history. There's another expression. Good! So *marquer d'une pierre blanche*.

PB: *Marquer quelque chose d'une pierre blanche.*

Mark: *Très bien !*

PB: *Marquer ce jour d'une pierre blanche !*

Mark: *OK troisième expression s'il te plaît.*

PB: *Oui, on l'écoute tout de suite.*

Ils ont pour projet d'aller visiter le Japon donc ils sont venus à la pêche à l'information!

Mark: Interesting!

PB: Here again you're going to ask me, where do you think does this come from?

Mark: It's probably maybe just figurative here I think.

PB: Or could be from the English language?

Mark: It could well be, yeah. So, what we are talking about here, the Martins, the couple that Monique knows. They came over to talk to Guillaume and to find out a little more about Japan because they want to go there on holiday. And the expression is *ils sont venus à la pêche à l'information* ! So, *aller à la pêche...*

PB: *Oui, ça on connaît.*

Mark: ...means to go fishing. So *la pêche*, and just watch that because *la pêche* is fishing, it's also the word for 'a peach' *une pêche*.

PB: Or the expression as well, *avoir la pêche* is quite nice!

Mark: Yeah, to be feeling on form. To be feeling peachy.

PB: Yeah, to feel good.

Mark: Yeah. However, it's slightly different from the verb *pécher* because *pécher (pêcher)* can mean...

PB: To fish or to sin.

Mark: Exactly! So...

PB: And it will be a different accent.

Mark: Yeah. So, two different words there, slightly different spelling. *Pêcher* meaning 'to fish' is spelled *P-Ê-C-H-E-R*. *Pécher* the verb 'to sin', as in to do bad things is *P-É-C-H-E-R*. But here we are talking about *aller à la pêche, ils sont*

venus à la pêche , but what were they coming fishing for?

PB: Information!

Mark: Absolutely! They were coming fishing for information ; ils sont venus à la pêche à l'information ! And notice it's fishing for something but in French it's aller à la pêche...

PB: À l'information here. But that's a sens figuré obviously.

Mark: Figurative fishing.

PB: But if you go to sens propre, you are going fishing for fish! Aller à la pêche au saumon.

Mark: Yeah.

PB: I know it's not à because we've got à + le which becomes au. Aller à la pêche au crabe.

Mark: Yeah. So you're fishing for salmon, fishing for crab then in that case it's à + whatever it is.

PB: It's the same expression whether it's figurative or proper.

Mark: And what would be the difference between aller à la pêche au saumon and pêcher au saumon.

PB: Non. Pêcher le saumon.

Mark: Pêcher le saumon. OK. And is it the same meaning?

PB: Yeah. Je pêche le saumon, j'aime aller à la pêche au saumon.

Mark: OK, interesting stuff.

PB: It's *aller à la pêche à +* the noun OK, or *pêcher* and it's direct, it's *le*.

Mark: *Très bien !*

PB: *Intéressant ça.*

Mark: *Oui c'est une expression très intéressante.*
Bravo !

PB: *Oui.* I hope I explain it well.

Mark: Absolutely, yeah.

PB: And I'm not fishing for compliments.

Mark: *Oh là! Donc on peut pêcher des compliments ?*

PB: No, French people do not, do not compliment anybody, OK.

Mark: You got to be careful there.

PB: I don't know, I'm just joking. If you are looking for, or fishing for compliment you would say *chercher les compliments* or *chercher des compliments*.

Mark: *OK donc chercher...*

PB: *Et quand c'est pêcher des compliments...* no, that's wrong.

Mark: OK, let's get on to our fourth expression because time is marching on.

PB: Oh !

On ne sait jamais si ce matin tu étais encore en retard et si tu étais encore entrée en collision avec un charmant jeune homme !

Mark: Oh, that's an interesting one. Why have you chosen that?

PB: Oh, I just love the use of **si** twice Mark and the fact that Sylvie meant to translate it in English. And I realise that the **si** is not going to be used. Does it make sense?

Mark: Yes, it makes absolutely perfect sense. I've realised this. **On ne sait jamais** .

PB: And this is tricky the one I've chosen.

Mark: **On ne sait jamais**, so you'll never know, you'll never know. But the **si** there, literally, would be saying, "you never know if this morning you were still late"... or you were late again.

PB: So, that's it so the "if" in French implies that if this happened, if this did really happen.

Mark: But in English, we would be more likely to say 'you never know'. Maybe...

PB: Perhaps.

Mark: Perhaps this morning you are late and you had already bumped into a charming young man in the station again. So she's fishing for information about the... about Sylvie's love life here.

PB: What I find interesting Mark here is that the **si** in French will trigger a tense, a specific tense which in English will be different, we'll have to use a different tense because were using perhaps or maybe. And not **si** and not if.

Mark: Exactly! Because remember back to our **si** clauses, if something were the case, then something else would be the case and so and so. *On ne sait jamais si ce matin tu étais encore en retard*: one never knows if this morning you were late ; *et si tu étais encore entrée en collision avec un charmant jeune homme...* and if you **had** bumped into or collided with a charming young man. But because we are using no **si** in English, we are not using an if in English, it becomes, you never know! Perhaps this morning you were late, so we're still okay there with the imperfect.

PB: And you bumped...

Mark: Yeah, there's no **had** bumped, there's no progression backwards inside. That's very interesting!

PB: Yes, yes, yes! It's very... it's subtle again. I think this episode is just like the other one, very subtle. But I think even one step, even more subtle.

Mark: We're increasing the subtlety. We're also increasing the time, 22½ minutes of this lesson so we hope you've stuck with us all this time.

PB: Oh! Yes, maybe there's a subtle hint Mark for us to finish!

Mark: Indeed! Before we do, don't forget you can head over to coffeebreakfrench.com where

you can find all the information about signing up to become a member of Season 4 and access all of our materials and it includes our language study, audio shows, our full transcripts of this show and the language study show and lots more besides.

Coffeebreakfrench.com for the links for

Season 4. In the meantime, [merci beaucoup comme d'habitude et à une prochaine fois !](#)

PB: [Oui à très bientôt, au revoir !](#)



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