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nationalities

# Lesson 48

## Notes

### Deux voitures françaises

#### Adjectives: colours and nationalities

##### Programme Notes

Welcome to Coffee Break French, the podcast aimed at independent learners of French. Our regular podcasts will introduce you to the French language in easy steps. In this week's notes we move on to a different area of French grammar. In the past few lessons we have been looking at verbs and we are now going to look at adjectives.

Let's start by taking a closer look at the question Mark normally asks Anna before starting the lesson: *est-ce que tu es prête?* meaning "are you ready?" Mark uses the feminine form of the adjective, *prête*, because Anna is female. The masculine form is *prêt*. Note that the *-t* at the end of *prêt* is silent. But in the feminine form, *prête*, we pronounce the *-t-* as there is an *-e* at the end of the word. This is often the case with French adjectives that end in a consonant. When an *-e* is added for the feminine form, the consonant is pronounced. The existence of patterns like this makes French adjectives much easier to understand.

We are now going to look at some colours in more detail. So far we have learned particular colours simply as items of vocabulary but we are now going to consider them as being adjectives that have to agree in gender and number with the noun they are describing.

In English, the word for a colour does not change regardless of what it is describing, eg. "a green car", "a green house", "a green book", "green leaves." However in French, the word for "green" changes slightly depending on whether the noun it is describing is masculine singular, feminine singular, masculine plural or feminine plural.

Let's translate the phrase "a green book" into French. In most situations in French, the adjective (green) comes **after** the noun (book). Since the French word for "book" (*livre*) is masculine and singular, the word for "green" (*vert*) does not change. So "a green book" is *un livre vert*.

When describing a feminine singular word, eg. *une voiture* ("a car") an *-e* is added to the end of the adjective, in the same way as *prête*. So "a green car" becomes *une voiture verte*. The *-t-* in *verte* is pronounced as it is now followed by an *-e*.

This same rule is applied to *noir* ("black") and *bleu* ("blue"). Notice that the feminine versions of "black" and "blue" sound exactly the same as the masculine versions but they have an *-e* added when written down.

**un livre noir**  
a black book

**une voiture noire**  
a black car

**un livre bleu**  
a blue book

**une voiture bleue**

a blue car

Let's now consider the word *rouge* meaning "red". The masculine form, *rouge*, already ends in an *-e* which gives the *-g-* a soft sound. This means that we do not need to add another *-e* for the feminine form. So the masculine and feminine singular forms of *rouge* sound and look exactly the same. The same applies to *jaune* ("yellow").

**un livre rouge**

a red book

**une voiture rouge**

a red car

**un livre jaune**

a yellow book

**une voiture jaune**

a yellow car

When an adjective ends in a consonant, sometimes it does not follow the exact pattern we have found so far. Usually this is to ensure that the word 'sounds right' in French and this is what happens with the word for "white" (*blanc*). To get the feminine form of *blanc*, we add *-he* so it becomes *blanche*. This idea of making changes to words to make them sound better is quite common in French.

**un livre blanc**

a white book

**une voiture blanche**

a white car

So far we have been looking at singular nouns eg. "a book." Let's now move on to the plural forms of the adjectives we have looked at and how they change to agree with the noun. To say "two yellow books" we would say *deux livres jaunes*. *Jaunes* sounds exactly the same as *jaune* but it is spelled with an *-s* on the end to show it is plural. The feminine version is exactly the same so "two yellow cars" is *deux voitures jaunes*. The word *rouge* follows the same pattern. Where adjectives end in *-e* in the masculine (and feminine) singular form, you simply add an *-s* to get the plural form.

Let's now look at the plural forms of *noir* ("black"). In the masculine plural form, we simply add an *-s* to *noir*, eg. *deux livres noirs* ("two black books"). In the feminine plural form we add *-es* to give *noires*, so "two black cars" is *deux voitures noires*. Note that these four different forms of the word "black" (*noir*, *noirs*, *noire* and *noires*) all sound exactly the same but they are all spelled differently.

The fact that French has a lot of silent letters can make it quite difficult when listening to spoken French. However when you see these silent letters written down it makes things much clearer and it can help you to determine the gender of the noun if you didn't already know it.

The masculine plural form of *blanc* is *blancs*. Note that the *-c-* and the *-s* are both silent. To get the feminine plural form, we add an *-s* to the feminine singular form, *blanche*, to give *blanches*.

The table below shows all forms of the colours we have looked at.

English	m singular	f singular	m plural	f plural
<i>green</i>	vert	verte	verts	vertes
<i>black</i>	noir	noire	noirs	noires
<i>blue</i>	bleu	bleue	bleus	bleues
<i>red</i>	rouge	rouge	rouges	rouges
<i>yellow</i>	jaune	jaune	jaunes	jaunes
<i>white</i>	blanc	blanche	blancs	blanches

We are now going to apply the rules we have learned to another type of adjective that we have looked at before: nationalities. Let's take the word *américain* ("American"). This is the masculine singular form of this adjective. Following the rules we have been using, we can work out the other forms. When an *-e* is added to *américain* to give the feminine singular form, *américaine*, the *-n-* is pronounced and there is no longer a nasal sound as there is at the end of *américain*. The masculine singular and masculine plural forms sound exactly the same, as do the feminine singular and feminine plural forms.

English	m singular	f singular	m plural	f plural
<i>American</i>	américain	américaine	américains	américaines

Many adjectives associated with nationalities end in *-s*, eg. *français*, *anglais*, *écossais* and *japonais*. In each case, the *-s* is silent but when an *-e* or *-es* is added, the *-s-* is pronounced. Since you cannot add an *-s* when the word already ends in an *-s*, the masculine plural forms are exactly the same as the masculine singular forms.

English	m singular	f singular	m plural	f plural
<i>French</i>	français	française	français	françaises
<i>English</i>	anglais	anglaise	anglais	anglaises
<i>Scottish</i>	écossais	écossaise	écossais	écossaises
<i>Japanese</i>	japonais	japonaise	japonais	japonaises

Although there has been a lot of new content in this lesson, we hope you have recognised the patterns that have emerged. Once you have learned some of the patterns, you will see that the same formula can be applied to many adjectives.

Note that the information listed below is part of the test in the bonus podcast. We would advise you to listen to the podcast before you read the content below.

Bonus episode test		
1	<b>Caroline est française, mais Marcello est italien.</b>	Caroline is French but Marcello is Italian.
2	<b>Nous sommes anglais mais ils sont écossais.</b>	We are English but they are Scottish.
3	<b>J'ai une voiture rouge mais mon frère a une voiture bleue.</b>	I have a red car but my brother has a blue car.
4	<b>Mon livre est jaune mais j'ai aussi un livre noir.</b>	My book is yellow but I also have a black book.
5	<b>La maison noire est à côté de la pharmacie.</b>	The black house is beside the chemist/pharmacy.
6	<b>Les voitures sont blanches.</b>	The cars are white.
7	<b>Pourquoi est-ce que tu vas avec la femme française?</b>	Why are you going with the French woman?
8	<b>Les voitures allemandes arrivent demain.</b>	The German cars arrive tomorrow.
9	<b>À quelle heure est-ce que tu arrives avec l'homme américain?</b>	At what time do you arrive with the American man?
10	<b>Je voudrais acheter une voiture blanche.</b>	I would like to buy a white car.



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