Lesson 61 Notes

In this edition: two pronouns: *y* and *en*

Il y en a trois
Looking at two pronouns: *y* and *en*

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.

Lesson 61 marks the start of Level 2b of Coffee Break French, which includes Lessons 61-80. In this week's lesson we are looking at two tiny French words which, despite their size, can cause some confusion for French learners! These words are: *y* and *en*.

Mark begins by asking Anna a bit about what she has done this week so she can practice the perfect tense.

Mark	Anna, qu'est-ce que tu as fait cette semaine?	Anna, what have you done this week?
Anna	Cette semaine, je suis allée en Allemagne.	This week I went to Germany.
Mark	Tu es allée avec qui?	Who did you go with?
Anna	Je suis allée avec mon frère et ma sœur.	I went with my brother and sister.
Mark	Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait en Allemagne?	What did you do in Germany?
Anna	Nous avons fait beaucoup de choses. Nous sommes allés à un concert.	We did lots of things. We went to a concert.

Mark was asking Anna what she had done in Germany. One way of asking this, using the *tu* form is:

qu'est-ce que tu as fait en Allemagne?
what did you do in Germany?

If we wanted to say "what did you do there?" we could replace the words "in Germany" with one word in French: *y*, meaning "there". So the question would become:

qu'est-ce que tu y as fait?
what did you do there?

Anna could reply to this question by saying:

nous y avons fait beaucoup de choses
we did lots of things there

The word *y* almost always comes before the verb. When we are using the perfect tense, *y* comes before the auxiliary verb and the past participle. Note that the *-s* of *nous* is pronounced in the phrase *nous y avons fait beaucoup de choses*, as it is followed by a vowel sound.

When *y* comes after *je*, we shorten *je* to *j'* so it becomes *j'y*. To say "I go there" we would therefore say *j'y vais*.

j'y vais tous les vendredis
I go (there) every Friday

In English we don't always translate the word *y*. We could simply say "I go every Friday". *Y* is a very useful French word as it replaces a place. Since the place is normally a noun, eg. the cinema, Germany etc, then *y* is a pronoun as it replaces the noun.

je vais au cinéma tous les vendredis	I go to the cinema every Friday
j'y vais tous les vendredis	I go (there) every Friday

Mark puts Anna to the test by giving her some sentences in French and asking her to replace the place with the pronoun, *y*.

je vais à l'école demain	I am going to school tomorrow
j'y vais demain	I am going (there) tomorrow

nous allons en France la semaine prochaine	we are going to France next week
nous y allons la semaine prochaine	we are going (there) next week

est-ce que tu es arrivé(e) à la gare à dix heures?	did you arrive at the station at ten o'clock?
est-ce que tu y es arrivé(e) à dix heures?	did you arrive (there) at ten o'clock?

j'ai fait mes devoirs dans le jardin ce matin	I did my homework in the garden this morning
j'y ai fait mes devoirs ce matin	I did my homework (there) this morning

At the beginning of most of the Coffee Break French lessons, Mark or Anna says *allons-y!* This means "let's go!" We now know that it literally means "let's go there" but it is simply translated as "let's go!"

Another common expression where the *y* is not directly translated is *vas-y*. We would translate *vas-y* as "on you go" or "go ahead". The formal or plural form would be *allez-y*.

allons-y!
let's go!

vas-y
on you go / go ahead
(singular informal)

allez-y
on you go / go ahead
(singular formal or plural formal or informal)

Another small pronoun which is very often associated with *y* is *en*. *En* can mean "in" or "to", for example *je vais en France*, "I am going to France". However when it used as a pronoun, it is not always directly translated.

Let's think of *en* in the context of food.

tu veux du pain?
do you want some bread?

If the person asking the question was holding the bread in his or her hand, they could simply say "do you want some (of it)?"

tu en veux?
do you want some (of it)?

The other person could reply:

oui, j'en veux
yes, I want some (of it)

Notice that *je* is shortened to *j'* as it is followed by a vowel.

En stays the same whether the noun is masculine, feminine or plural. For example, *tu veux de la glace?* ("do you want some ice cream?") would become *tu en veux?* ("do you want some (of it)?") *Tu en veux* can also mean "do you want some of them?" and equally *oui, j'en veux* can mean "I want some (of them)." Like *y*, *en* is also a pronoun as it stands for "of it" or "of them".

Another situation in which *en* is often used is when we are talking about what we think of something. *Penser de* means "to think of" so we could ask:

qu'est-ce que tu en penses?
what do you think of it?

qu'est-ce que tu en as pensé?
what did you think of it?

Note that when *en* is followed by a vowel sound, it loses its nasal sound and the *-n* is pronounced.

Y and *en* could also be used when talking about what there is in a particular town or village. For example:

dans la ville où j'habite, il y a un supermarché
in the town where I live, there is a supermarket

In this case, *il y a* literally means "it there has" but we would translate it as "there is" or "there are".

Anna asks Mark the question:

il y a combien de supermarchés dans la ville où tu habites?
how many supermarkets are there in the town where you live?

Mark gives two possible answers to this question:

dans la ville où j'habite, il y a trois supermarchés
in the town where I live, there are three supermarkets

The second option using *en* is as follows:

dans la ville où j'habite, il y en a trois
in the town where I live, there are three (of them)