



Coffee Break French

Season 3, Lesson 1

Radio Lingua Ltd

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Introduction

Welcome to Season 3 of Coffee Break French. This season is aimed at intermediate learners who have already completed seasons 1 and 2 of our course.

The lessons of Season 3 will continue to present the French language in an engaging way, allowing learners to develop their confidence in the vocabulary, expressions and structures of French through examples written by native speakers.

These lesson notes accompany the audio lessons and focus on the language presented in both the 'public' version of the audio episode and the version for members.

SEASON 3 CONTEXT

The lessons of Season 3 will focus on a series of texts written by our characters Katie, Alf and Veronica, three students who are attending an eight-week French course in a language school in Nice in the south of France. The characters have been asked by their teacher, Mme Soulabaille, to keep a diary of their experiences. These texts will be used as the basis of the learning material for the majority of this season.

Katie

Katie is a young American student from Vermont who is travelling around Europe and is currently spending some time in Nice. It's the first time Katie has been away from home, but she is enjoying her travels and taking advantage of every opportunity to experience new cultures and languages.

Alf

Alf is a retired teacher from England who is renovating a house which he and his wife have bought near Nice. Alf's wife will join him in France towards the end of his course. He learned French at school but is a bit rusty, so is taking the chance to improve his language skills by attending the class in Nice.

Veronica

Veronica is an Australian business woman who runs property development websites. She is looking for a house on the Riviera on behalf of one of her clients.

Lesson 1 Notes

In this lesson we are introduced to the three characters with the first part of their first text. We've provided the transcript of each paragraph of the texts below, followed by language notes and vocabulary.

TEXT: KATIE

Bonjour tout le monde. Je m'appelle Katie et je suis étudiante américaine. Je passe deux mois ici à Nice où je fais un cours de français dans une école de langues. J'apprends le français depuis deux ans, et j'espère améliorer mon français ici.

je passe deux mois ici à Nice

Note the use of the verb **passer** to mean “to spend time”. In English “to pass the time” tends to suggest that you have nothing else to do. However **passer du temps** in French means simply “to spend time”, eg. **j’ai passé le week-end à Dublin**, “I spent the weekend in Dublin”.

un cours de français

A French course.

j'apprends le français depuis deux ans

“I have been learning French for two years”. Remember that you use the present tense with **depuis** if you want to say that you have been doing something for a certain length of time.

j'espère améliorer mon français ici

“I hope to improve my French here”. The word **améliorer** means “to improve”, or “to get better at”. Note that **espérer** (“to hope”) is immediately followed by the infinitive, without a preposition.

Je viens d'une petite ville près de Montpellier, dans la région de Vermont aux États-Unis. J'aime bien où j'habite mais jusqu'à maintenant je n'ai jamais vraiment voyagé. J'ai toujours voulu voir le monde, et surtout connaître l'Europe. Alors j'ai décidé de passer une année en Europe, et j'ai déjà passé quatre mois en Irlande, et deux semaines à voyager en Norvège, en Suède et au Danemark. J'ai beaucoup aimé la

Scandinavie: mon grand-père était suédois donc j'ai toujours rêvé d'y aller.

Montpelier, dans la région de Vermont aux États-Unis

Montpelier is a city in the US state of Vermont. It was established in 1787 named after the southern French town of Montpelier in honour of the aid provided by the French in the American Revolution. From a language perspective, remember that the USA is a plural country: **les États-Unis**, so “in the USA” is **aux États-Unis**.

jusqu'à maintenant

The expression **jusqu'à** means “until”.

je n'ai jamais vraiment voyagé

“I have never really travelled (much)”. There are two points to note in this phrase. Firstly, remember that **ne ... jamais** means “never” and it goes around the verb. In this case the verb in question is the auxiliary verb of the perfect tense. So, if Katie was saying “I have never travelled” she would say **je n'ai jamais voyagé**. She qualifies this by adding in the word **vraiment**, meaning “really”. In English we would probably translate the sentence as “I've never really travelled much”. For now, note the position of **vraiment**: we'll come back to this later.

j'ai toujours voulu voir le monde

“I have always wanted to see the world”. Again, note the position of the word **toujours**, between the conjugated auxiliary verb **j'ai** and the past participle **voulu**.

j'ai décidé de passer une année en Europe

“I decided to spend a year in Europe”. Note that “to decide to do something” is **décider de faire quelque chose**. So “we decided to go to the park” would be **nous avons décidé d'aller au parc**. You must include the **de** before the infinitive.

j'ai déjà passé [...] deux semaines à voyager en Norvège, en Suède et au Danemark

Katie has spent two weeks travelling in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Note that while Norway and Sweden are both feminine countries (**la Norvège, la Suède**), Denmark is masculine (**le Danemark**), and therefore you must say **au Danemark** for “in/to Denmark”. Compare this with “in/to Norway” - **en Norvège** and “in/to Sweden” - **en Suède**. Other masculine countries include **le Japon, le Portugal, le Canada** and **le Brésil**.

mon grand-père était suédois

“my grandfather was Swedish”. Note the use of the imperfect tense of the verb **être**, describing his nationality.

j’ai toujours rêvé d’y aller

“I have always dreamed of going there”. Once again, note that **toujours** comes between the auxiliary verb and the past participle. “To dream about something” is **rêver de quelque chose**, for example, **j’ai rêvé de toi** - “I dreamed about you”. Katie has always dreamed about going to Scandinavia because of her family roots. She says **j’ai toujours rêvé d’y aller**. In this case the word **y** refers to **la Scandinavie** which has been previously mentioned.

TEXT: ALF

Bonjour. Je m'appelle Alf. Je suis anglais et en ce moment j'habite près de Nice en France. Je parle un peu français. Je suis marié et ma femme Jennifer habite toujours en Angleterre. Elle va arriver bientôt parce que nous avons acheté une maison près de Nice. J'essaie de rénover la maison avant son arrivée.

en ce moment

“at the moment”. Note that in French you say “in this moment” whereas in English we are more likely to say “at the moment”.

ma femme habite toujours en Angleterre

“My wife is still living in England”.

elle va arriver bientôt

“She’s arriving soon” or “she is going to arrive soon”. Alf uses the immediate future tense here, combining a part of **aller** with the infinitive.

j’essaie de rénover la maison avant son arrivée

“I’m trying to renovate the house before she arrives”. Note that the verb **essayer**, meaning “to try”, requires **de** before the following infinitive: “he is trying to learn Spanish” - **il essaie d’apprendre l’espagnol**. With regard to **avant son arrivée**, we’ve translated it as “before she arrives”, but literally this expression means “before her arrival”. As we will see in future lessons, this is to avoid using a subjunctive.

J'ai commencé à apprendre le français à l'âge de 13 ans quand j'ai commencé l'école secondaire, mais ça c'était en

1962, donc j'ai beaucoup oublié! Néanmoins j'ai toujours aimé le français et nous sommes allés en vacances en France plusieurs fois, donc j'ai toujours voulu améliorer mon français.

j'ai commencé à apprendre le français

"I started to learn French". Note that **commencer** requires **à** before the following infinitive: **nous commençons à manger** - "we are starting to eat".

à l'âge de 13 ans

"at the age of 13".

j'ai beaucoup oublié

"I have forgotten a lot". Note that the most natural position for **beaucoup** is between the auxiliary verb and the past participle, just like **toujours** and **vraiment** in earlier examples.

néanmoins

"nevertheless"

j'ai toujours voulu améliorer mon français

"I have always wanted to improve my French".

TEXT: VERONICA

Bonjour! Je m'appelle Veronica, ou Véronique en français. Je suis australienne et en ce moment j'habite à Nice sur la Côte d'Azur en France. Je suis femme d'affaires et je travaille ici sur plusieurs projets.

Je m'appelle Veronica, ou Véronique en français

The French version of Veronica is Véronique.

australien(ne)

Australian

la Côte d'Azur

Literally "the azure coast". In English the Côte d'Azur is normally referred to as the French Riviera.

je suis femme d'affaires

“I am a business woman”. Remember that when referring to jobs in French you do not use an indefinite article (the word for “a/an”).

je travaille ici sur plusieurs projets

“I’m working on several projects”.

REVIEW OF KEY POINTS

In this lesson there have been two main points which have come up on several occasions:

Position of adverbs with the perfect tense

When using the perfect tense, the adverb often goes between the auxiliary verb and the past participle:

*j’ai **toujours** voulu voir le monde*

*je n’ai jamais **vraiment** voyagé*

*j’ai **déjà** passé deux mois...*

*j’ai **beaucoup** aimé la Scandinavie*

Verbs which are governed by prepositions

Some verbs in French require a preposition when they’re followed by an infinitive, and others don’t. The most common prepositions used in this way are **à** and **de**. In this lesson we have seen the following examples:

Commencer à: *j’ai commencé **à** apprendre le français*

Rêver de: *j’ai toujours rêvé **d’y** aller*

Essayer de: *j’essaie **de** rénover la maison*

Espérer []: *j’espère [] améliorer mon français*

(ie. no preposition)

We will come across many examples of these verbs in the course of these lessons.