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Fast French: Shrink, Shrink, and Shrink Some More!!

The French love doing everything they can to shorten the words and phrases they use in conversation, both orally and on text. This is a natural tendency across all languages, especially spoken language, where people shorten truncate sounds and words in conversation to facilitate articulation. For example, they have dropped the **ne** part of their negation structure and just use the **pas** to indicate negation now. Example, “Je ne sais pas” — “zhuh nuh say PAH” (/ʒə nə sɛ pa/) (*I don't know*) became “Je sais pas” — “zhuh say PAH” (/ʒə sɛ pa/). In fact, many speakers now don't even pronounce the “je” and the “sais” separately, making the phrase “**ché pas**” — “shay pah” (/ʃe pa/). Another example is “à ce qu'il paraît” — “ah suh-keel pah-REH” (/a sɛ kil paʁɛ/) (*apparently, from what I hear*) that has become **askip** — “as-KEEP” (/askip/). That is, a phrase having 5 syllables has been cut down to have just 2 !!

Some more everyday French examples:

- **À tout'** — “ah TOOT” (/a tut/) → **À tout à l'heure** — “ah toot ah LUR” (/a tut a lœʁ/) (*See you later*)
- **Chuis / chui** — “shwee” (/ʃɥi/) → **Je suis** — “zhuh SWEE” (/ʒə sɥi/) (*I am*)
- **Comme d'hab** — “kum dab” (/kɔm dab/) → **Comme d'habitude** — “kum dab-ee-TUHD” (/kɔm dabityd/) (*As usual*)
- **D'acc / dac** — “dak” (/dak/) → **D'accord** — “da-KOR” (/dakɔʁ/) (*Okay, agreed*)
- **Y'a** — “ya” (/ja/) → **Il y a** — “eel ee YAH” (/il i a/) (*There is/are*)

You'll hear a lot more along the same lines in fast speech: “**p'tit**” — “pteet” (/ptit/) for **petit** — “puh-TEE” (/pəti/) (*small*); “**t'as**” — “tah” (/ta/) for **tu as** — “tew AH” (/ty a/) (*you have*); “**j'peux pas**” — “zhpuh pah” (/ʒpø pa/) for **je ne peux pas** — “zhuh nuh puh pah” (/ʒə nə pø pa/) (*I cannot*). A lot of this comes from three forces working together: **cliticization** (little words gluing to neighbors), **schwa deletion** (dropping the “e” muet), and **frequency pressure** (common phrases erode first).

The french also love their abbreviations on text, for example:

- **A+** → **À plus (tard)** — “ah PLU” (/a ply/) (*See you later*)
- **Bcp** → **Beaucoup** — “boh-KOO” (/boku/) (*A lot*)
- **Bjr** → **Bonjour** — “bohn-ZHOOR” (/bɔ̃ʒuʁ/) (*Hello*)
- **DSL** → **Désolé(e)** — “day-zo-LAY” (/dezɔle/) (*Sorry*)
- **JTM** → **Je t'aime** — “zhuh TEM” (/ʒə tɛm/) (*I love you*)
- **MDR** → **Mort de rire** — “mor duh REER” (/mɔʁ də ʁiɛ/) (*French “LOL”*)
- **PK** → **Pourquoi** — “poor-KWAH” (/puʁkwa/) (*Why*)
- **PTDR** → **Pété de rire** — “peh-TAY duh REER” (/pete də ʁiɛ/) (*French “LMAO”*)
- **QQ1** → **Quelqu'un** — “kel-KUN” (/kɛlkœ̃/) (*Someone*)
- **RDV** → **Rendez-vous** — “ron-day-VOO” (/ʁɑ̃devu/) (*Meeting, appointment*)
- **STP** → **S'il te plaît** — “seel tuh PLEH” (/sil tɛ plɛ/) (*Please, informal*)
- **TLM** → **Tout le monde** — “too luh MOND” (/tul mɔ̃d/) (*Everyone*)
- **Tkt** → **T'inquiète** — “tan-KYET” (/tɛ̃kjet/) (*Don't worry*)

Why does this matter? First, it's **normal**. All languages compress in casual registers; French is just particularly **systematic** about it. Second, it can be **brutal for L2 speakers**. If you trained only on “textbook French,” **ne**-dropping, schwa deletion, and smashed-together clitics can make familiar phrases sound brand new. Hearing “**Y’a du monde**” — “ya dyu MOND” (/ʒa dy mɔ̃d/) the first time most like will not map to “**Il y a du monde**” (There are people/crowds).

There's also a social layer: using the compact forms signals **informality and in-group ease**. Saying “**Chuis crevé**” — “shwee kruh-VAY” (/ʃʁi kʁɛvɛ/) (*I'm finished*) instead of “**Je suis très fatigué**” (*I am very fatigued*) is faster, warmer, and how most people talk with friends and family.

A couple of quick tips if you're learning French:

- **Train your ear on reduced speech.** Search for podcasts/YouTube/TikTok where speakers talk fast and casual; shadow “**j’sais pas / chais pas**,” “**y’a**,” “**t’inquiète**,” etc.
- **Pair each reduced form with the “full” form.** Keep a two-column list so your brain links **askip** ↔ **à ce qu’il paraît**, **y’a** ↔ **il y a**.
- **Practice saying the reductions.** Production helps recognition: try reading dialogues twice—once careful, once casual.

The short forms aren't “wrong French”; they're the **real operating system** of everyday talk and texting. If you're an L2 speaker, learning them pays off twice: you'll **understand more** and you'll **sound more natural**—without needing to write your exams as “PTDR.”