

STRATEGY



SIMPLIFY YOUR SPEECH

Unfortunately, when you start speaking a foreign language, almost unconsciously, you want to be able to express yourself in the target language in the same way as you do in your native language. And this obstructs you! Because if you start in a foreign language, it is obvious that you do not yet master the subtleties of grammar, the complexities of sentence structures or an extended vocabulary. So **if you can't make it complicated, let's make it simple**. Even if simple, it's not always easy.

Infantilize your speech

Observe how children from 3 to 4 years old speak. They make short sentences. They **use a simple vocabulary**. Grammatical errors don't bother them any more than that. So go beyond a feeling of shame, and speak the French of a child of 3 or 4 years. **Subject-verb-object**. « Moi regarde la télévision. » (Me watch television.), « Moi veux manger » (Me want to eat.)

Speak like Tarzan or Friday

Another way to infantilize your speech is to speak like Tarzan or Friday. Without conjugating the verbs, without using the articles. « Tarzan aimer croissant » (Tarzan (to) love croissant). Again, **do not be ashamed to express yourself in a cartoonish way**. Because remember that it is a matter of surviving, of communicating in order to transmit or obtain information essential to your survival in a foreign country. **The important thing is not to block yourself**. « Moi pas comprendre toi. » (Me no understand you).

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Use reformulation

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More elegantly, **rephrase what you want to say in a simpler way**. You instinctively want to say something that would require in your language a complex sentence with several clauses. Make two or three sentences. Even if you repeat the same word two or three times at the beginning of the sentences. Instead of saying, « Je ne sais pas si je dois aller à Paris en train ou en voiture. » (I do not know if I have to go to Paris by train or by car.), you can say: « 1. Je dois aller à Paris. 2. Je peux aller à Paris en train. 3. Ou je peux aller à Paris en voiture. 4. Je ne sais pas. » (1. I have to go to Paris. 2. I can go to Paris by train. 3. Or I can go to Paris by car. 4. I do not know.).

Use detours

Another way of using reformulation is the circumlocution or the art of knowing how to make detours to achieve a language goal that could normally be expressed in a single sentence. **Break down your idea into several parts and make a simple sentence for each part**. It is often enough to describe an object, an action, a fact to obtain a circumlocution. Be careful, it is not always easy because it requires more words to describe a single word. And you run the risk of producing dictionary definitions. For example: « le lit = l'endroit où je dors » (the bed = the place where I sleep). However, this can still be useful in some situations.

The literal translation

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If you don't yet have enough control over the structures of the foreign language, but you know enough words, **don't hesitate and make a literal translation of your native language into the target language**. You will undoubtedly make mistakes (which may be corrected), but the important thing (again) is to express yourself and to be understood. If you want to give your age in French and you say « Je suis 30 ans vieux » which is the literal translation of "I am 30 years old", certainly, you have just produced an awful anglicism, but at least your interlocutor will have understood you.

Exercises

With friends, and in your native language...

1. Tell a story like Tarzan
2. Speak using no more than 4 words per sentence
3. Break down your ideas and sentences as much as possible to produce a simple idea per sentence
4. Conversely, tell (write) an action in 10 sentences, then reduce these 10 sentences to 50%, then to 20%, and finally to 10% even if it is not very correct but keeping the sense of what you wanted to say

With French learners or with French-speaking partners

5. Speak like a baby
6. Tell a story by trying to make simple sentences: subject - verb - complement
7. Are you able to achieve point 4 in French?

