12. GRAMMAR: Reflexive and Reciprocal Verbs [les verbes pronominaux]: different types of reflexive verbs

In English, verbs that have *a reciprocal / reflexive pronoun* in the infinitive are called *reciprocal / reflexive verbs*. Some examples are: to wash oneself, to enjoy oneself, to kiss each other,... When conjugating such verbs, we must take this extra pronoun into account: I wash *myself* every morning, She washes *herself*,...

You probably already guess that French also has reciprocal/reflexive verbs; these are called verbes pronominaux. Some examples are: *se lever* (to get up), *se laver* (to wash oneself), *se promener* (to take a walk), *se parler* (to speak to each other), …

Before continuing, we want to add that reciprocity in English does not necessarily mean reciprocity in French, and vice versa: *se promener* (*verbe pronominal* in French) → *to walk* (not so in English)!

Reciprocal/Reflexive verbs are conjugated as follows:

se laver [to wash oneself]

je **me** lave	[I wash myself]
tu **te** laves	[you wash yourself]
il/elle/on **se** lave	[he washes himself, she washes herself]
nous **nous** lavons	[we wash ourselves]
vous **vous** lavez	[you wash yourselves]
ils/elles **se** lavent	[they wash themselves]

In French, we distinguish three types of reflexive verbs based on meaning:

(1) The true reflexive verbs (*les verbes pronominaux réfléchis*): With these verbs, the subject and the direct object are identical, which is exactly why a reflexive pronoun is used. Here's an example to clarify: Let's say you, as parents, want to wash your baby, then you would say (a):

(a) *On va laver le bébé ?*

In (a), the action of washing is performed by the parents (subject) on the baby (direct object). But how do we express that the parents are washing themselves? Exactly, with a reflexive pronoun; this pronoun signals that the action (here: washing) is being performed on the subject itself:

(b) *Après cela, **je** vais **me** laver aussi.*

(2) Reciprocal verbs (*les verbes pronominaux réciproques*): These verbs express a mutual relationship between multiple people and always appear in the plural. You always need more than one person to form a mutual relationship. In English, this connection is shown by the pronoun "each other".
For example, if you take the verb *connaître* (to know someone), a reciprocal relationship between two people can be expressed as follows:

(c) *Luc and Jef know **each other**. (= Jef knows Luc and Luc knows Jef)*
*Luc et Jef **se** connaissent. (= Jef connaît Luc **ET** Luc connaît Jef)*

(3) The 'fake' reflexive verbs: in this type of verbs, the reflexive pronoun doesn't serve any real function (other than being a filler); this group contains many verbs. Some examples:

(d) *s'intéresser à / se préoccuper de*

How do we negate a reflexive/reciprocal verb?

(e) *Elle **ne** s'intéresse **pas** à la politique.*
| _____ |
→ The negations « *ne pas, ne rien,...* » goes around both the verb and the reflexive pronoun!