

## LEARNING TO *CRÉER UN LIEN*

by Rutherford

In 1999, while working in a French consulting firm in Sophia Antipolis (the French high technology park north of Antibes), Delphine – a young and recently married and pregnant French co-worker sometimes drove me home to Nice. Although she spoke English well, we usually spoke *en français*.

One afternoon on our way back to Nice, she asked me whether I thought that the father should be present for the birth of the child. When I told her that, yes, I did, she asked why I thought so.

Now, as English speakers who speak French (and French speakers who speak English) will attest, as a result of the large number of words shared by the two languages whose meaning more-or-less overlaps (if not precisely, then closely enough), if one does not know ‘le mot just’, one can often make one’s intended meaning sufficiently clear by putting a French ‘spin’ on the English word. For example, if one puts a French ‘spin’ on the word ‘camera’ (which, in English, makes still photos, but in French, refers to a movie camera) and says « *Hier soir, j’ai fait cette photo avec ma caméra* » (‘Yesterday evening, I took this photo with my camera’) a French speaker is likely to understand the intended meaning.

Often. But not always.

There are a few heffalump traps known in French as *faux amis* (‘false friends’).

I wanted to tell her that ‘It is very important for the father to have the chance to bond with his child’.

Halfway through my explanation, I came up short, realising that I did not know the French verb for ‘to bond with’, and so plunged ahead by putting a French ‘spin’ on the English verb and told her that:

« *C’est très important pour le père d’avoir l’opportunité à bander avec l’enfant.* »

There was a pause before Delphine exploded in uncontrollable laughter, losing control of the car which began to career dangerously back and forth across several lanes of the very busy A8 motorway that runs along the coast of Alpes-Maritimes.

Realising that something important had clearly been lost in translation, I asked her frantically « *Qu’est ce que j’ai dit? Qu’est ce que j’ai dit?* » (What did I say?)

Between bouts of laughter while trying desperately to catch her breath, Delphine finally managed to gasp out: « *Demande à ta femme* » (Ask your wife.)

I now know that « *bander* » means ‘to become sexually aroused’.

I will leave it to the reader to imagine the confused and distressed look on my wife’s face when, arriving home that evening, I casually asked her what it means to « *bander avec un enfant* ».

Before telling me what it meant, she demanded, naturally enough, to know “In what possible context did *that* come up?”

In case anyone wants to know, the sense of ‘to bond with’ I had intended here is « *créer un lien (avec)* »

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