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Interactive French — Scenarios:

Direct, Indirect and Tonic Pronouns - Which One Should I use?

Replacing nouns with pronouns makes our use of the language much more fluid and economical. In both English and French, the choice of which pronoun to use is determined by its role in the sentence, i.e. subject, direct object or indirect object, etc. In French the choice is made even a bit more complicated because of the existence of the so-called disjunctive, or tonic, pronouns. Leaving subject pronouns aside, let's look at how you can make the correct choice of whether to use “*lui*”, “*la*” or “*elle*” when you want to say “her” or between “*lui*” or “*le*” when referring to “him”.

Study the following explanations about the difference between the three types of pronouns and then practice them through the following role play exercises.

Direct Object Pronouns

The **direct object** is the person or thing that receives the action of the verb in a sentence. To determine the direct object in a sentence, ask yourself the question: Who? or What? **Direct object pronouns** take the place of the direct object nouns. While a noun that is the direct object follows the verb, the **pronoun is instead placed in front of it**, for example: *Tu prends l'avion* (You take the plane), *Tu le prends* (You take it).

Examples:

Est-ce que tu regardes la télé ? = Do you watch TV?

Oui, je la regarde = Yes, I watch it.

Est-ce que tu aimes le professeur ? = Do you like the teacher?

Oui je l'aime bien = Yes, I like him.

Est-ce que tu m'amènes chez Rose ? = Are you taking me to Rose's?

Non, je t'amène chez Karine = No, I'm taking you to Karine's!

The French direct object pronouns are as follows:

Me/m' = me

Te/t' = you

Le/l' = him, it (masc)

La/l' = her, it (fem)

Nous = us

Vous = you

Les = them

Note: *Me*, *te*, and *le/la* change to *m'*, *t'*, and *l'* in front of a vowel or mute h.

Indirect Object Pronouns

Indirect objects can only be used for persons and are those people in a sentence **to whom the action** of the verb occurs. You can determine the indirect object by asking yourself the question, “To whom” or sometimes “for whom”. Many of the verbs of communication (*parler, écrire, dire, répondre, demander, téléphoner*) take an indirect object.

I'm talking to **Caroline** = *Je parle à Caroline.*

To whom am I talking? to **Caroline**.

The French indirect object pronouns are as follows:

Me/m' = me

Te/t' = you

Lui = him, her

Nous = us

Vous = you

Leur = them

Note that it is only in the third person singular and plural where there is any difference between the actual form of direct and indirect object pronouns. It is also important to remember that the indirect object pronoun “*lui*” can mean either “to him” or “to her”.

Like the direct object pronouns, the indirect object pronouns are placed **in front of the verb**.

Examples:

Est-ce que tu parles à ta voisine ? = Do you speak to your (female) neighbour?

Oui, je lui parle ! = Yes, I speak to her!

Est-ce que vous écrivez un email aux étudiants? = Are you writing an email to the students?

Oui je leur écris des directives = Yes I'm writing some directions to them.

Note: When deciding between direct and indirect objects, the general rule is that if the person is preceded by the preposition “*à*”, that person is an indirect object.

Tonic Pronouns

Tonic pronouns are used for emphasis and in some special situations. They always refer to a **person**.

They are used mainly:

- after prepositions such as: *sans* (without), *pour* (for), *dans* (inside), *après* (after), *chez* (at someone's place), *avec* (with), *devant* (in front), etc...
- when you have a double subject (*Paul et moi allons au cinéma ce soir* = Paul and I are going to the cinema this evening.)
- after the preposition “*à*” in many expressions (*être à* indicating possession, *faire attention à*, *penser à* – *Ce stylo est à moi* = This pen is mine, *C'est très gentil de penser à nous* = That's very nice to think about us)
- alone in answer to a question or for emphasis (*Qui est là ? Moi !* = Who's there ? Me ! *Lui, il est vraiment con !* = He is really stupid)

- together with “-même” (*moi-même* = myself, *lui-même* = himself)
- after *c’est* and *ce sont*: (*Ce sont eux qui sont venus ici* = They are the ones who came here.)
- with the negative adverb *ne... que* and conjunction *ne... ni... ni*: (*Je ne prends qu’elle dans mon équipe!* = I’m only taking her in my team!)

The tonic pronouns are as follows:

Moi = me
Toi = you
Lui = him
Elle = her
Soi = one
Nous = us
Vous = you
Eux = them (masc)
Elles = them (fem.)

Note that with the tonic pronouns, you must distinguish between masculine and feminine in the third person singular and plural

Examples:

Tu viens chez moi ? = You’re coming to my place?
Non, je vais chez elle ! = No, I’m going to her place!
J’achète ce livre pour toi ! = I’m buying this book for you !
Attention ! Devant toi, il y a une voiture ! = Careful! In front of you there is a car!
Je suis vraiment bête, moi ! = I’m really stupid!
Cette voiture est à vous, monsieur ? = Is this your car, sir ?

Céline Anthonioz

Try this exercise!

Fill in the missing blanks with the appropriate pronoun! If you wish, you can try to translate the paragraph into English. Look on page 36 of *French Accent* for the answers and the translation.

“Que penses-tu de Serge? Je ___ aime! Je ___ trouve beau, généreux et drôle. Je ne suis pas certaine qu’il ___ aime car quand je ___ dis : Je ___ aime, il ___ répond ‘merci’. Je ___ envoie des emails pendant la journée à son travail et je ___ demande toujours comment il va. Il ne ___ répond pas toujours mais je sais qu’il pense à ___ . J’ai rencontré ses amis et nous ___ appelons de temps en temps pour ___ inviter à sortir avec ___ (Serge et moi-même). J’aime bien être avec ___ (les amis) car ils sont très sympas et je pense qu’ils ___ apprécient bien. De temps en temps, un ami à Serge ___ demande: ‘Alors, quand est ce que vous allez vous marier? Et Serge ne répond pas. Je pense qu’il aime bien être avec ___ parce que quand je ne suis pas avec ___ pendant quelques jours, il ___ appelle pour ___ dire qu’il est triste sans ___ et que je ___ manque ! Je suis un peu perplexe.”

**SUMMARY TABLE
OF SUBJECT/DIRECT/INDIRECT AND TONIC PRONOUNS**

Subject	Direct Object	Indirect Object	Tonic
je	me	me	moi
tu	te	te	toi
il elle on	le la	lui	lui elle soi
nous	nous	nous	nous
vous	vous	vous	vous
ils elles	les	leur	eux elles

1st Role Play—Beginner Level

Une maman parle de son fils à la maîtresse d'école.

La maman : Bonjour, je voudrais vous poser quelques questions sur Jérôme.

La maîtresse : Allez-y, je vous en prie.

La maman : Est-ce que Jérôme vous écoute bien en classe ?

La maîtresse : Non, il ne m'écoute pas toujours très bien. Il préfère parler avec ses amis en classe.

La maman : Ah bon ! Il parle beaucoup avec eux ?

La maîtresse : Oui, lui et deux autres enfants !

La maman : Est-ce que vous lui dites quelque chose ?

La maîtresse : Oui, bien sûr ! De temps en temps, je lui donne une petite punition.

La maman : Ah, je comprends ! Je vais lui parler aussi.

La maîtresse : C'est une bonne idée. Mais je suis contente car son niveau de français est meilleur. Est-ce que vous l'aidez à la maison ?

La maman : Oh oui, beaucoup ! Avec mon mari, nous passons beaucoup de temps avec lui à parler en français.

La maîtresse : C'est très bien ! Est-ce qu'il regarde la télé française ?

La maman : Oui, il la regarde !

La maîtresse : Est-ce qu'il écoute les chansons françaises pour enfants ?

La maman : Oui, il les écoute !

La maîtresse : Est-ce qu'il lit les bandes dessinées françaises ?

La maman : Oh oui, il les aime bien !

La maîtresse : Très bien, continuez à l'encourager...

La maman : Ah merci, je suis rassurée pour son français !

A Mom is speaking about her son to the school teacher.

The mom: Hello, I would like to ask a few questions about Jérôme.

The school teacher: Go ahead, please.

The mom: Does Jérôme listen to you well?

The school teacher: No, he doesn't always listen well. He prefers to speak with his friends in class.

The mom: Oh really! He speaks a lot with them?

The school teacher: Yes, he and two other children.

The mom: Do you say anything to him?

The school teacher: Yes, of course! From time to time, I give him a small punishment.

The mom: Ah, I understand! I'm going to speak to him also.

The school teacher: That's a good idea. But I am happy because his level of French is better. Do you help him at home?

The mom: Oh yes, a lot! With my husband, we spend a lot of time with him practicing French.

The school teacher: Very well! Does he watch French TV?

The mom: Yes, he watches it.

The school teacher: Does he listen to French songs for children?

The mom: Yes, he listens to them.

The school teacher: Does he read French comic strips?

The mom: Yes, he likes them a lot!

The school teacher: Very well, continue to encourage him...

The mom: Ah thank you! I am reassured for his French.

2nd Role Play—Intermediate Level

George va partir deux semaines en vacances et sa voisine va s'occuper de sa maison et de ses animaux. Il lui explique la liste des choses à faire.

George : Salut voisine !

La voisine : Salut George! Alors tu es prêt pour ton voyage ?

George : Oh oui ! Et comment! J'ai besoin de me changer les idées. Avec ma femme, on te remercie beaucoup de t'occuper des animaux et de la maison !

La voisine : Pas de problème ! Alors dis-moi, pour ta chatte – je **lui** donne quoi à manger ?

George : Tu peux **lui** donner quelques croquettes. Ce bol-là est à **elle** !

La voisine : Et je **les lui** donne quand ?

George : Elle a l'habitude de **les** manger le matin.

La voisine : D'accord, et qu'est-ce que je dois faire avec les poissons ?

George : Tu peux **leur** donner à manger également le matin !

La voisine : Où est la nourriture ?

George : Tu **la** trouveras à côté de l'aquarium.

La voisine : Et le courrier ? Tu veux que je **le** récupère tous les jours et que je **le** mette sur ton bureau ?

George : Oui, je veux bien ! Ce serait très gentil. Juste une dernière chose : une société de bois va venir faire une livraison mardi à 14 heures, est-ce que tu peux aller **les** rejoindre devant la porte ?

La voisine : Oui, bien sûr ! Je verrai avec **eux** pour la livraison et je **leur** montrerai où il faut l'empiler chez **toi**. Tu **le** places toujours dans le garage à côté de la porte ?

George : Oui, et aussi est-ce que tu peux faire une toute dernière chose pour Claire ?

La voisine : Oui, qu'est-ce que je peux faire pour **elle** ?

George : Si tu vas au marché le samedi avant qu'on revienne, est-ce que tu peux **lui** acheter quelques légumes, un peu de fromage de

George is going to leave for two weeks on holiday and his neighbour is going to take care of his house and his animals. He explains to her the things that need to be done.

George: Hello neighbour!

The neighbour: Hi George! So, you're ready for your trip?

George: Oh yes! And how! I need a change of air. With my wife, we thank you a lot for taking care of the animals and the house!

The neighbour: No problem! So tell me, for your cat – What do I give her to eat?

George: You can give her some pellets. This bowl there is hers!

The neighbour: And when do I give them to her?

George: She's used to eating them in the morning.

The neighbour: OK, and what should I do with the fish?

George: You can give them some food, also in the morning!

The neighbour: Where is the food?

George: You'll find it next to the aquarium.

The neighbour: And the mail? Do you want me to get it everyday and should I put it on your office desk?

George: Yes, I would like that! That would be nice. Just one last thing: A firewood company is going to make a delivery on Tuesday at 2pm; can you meet them in front of the door?

The neighbour: Yes, of course! I will meet them for the delivery and I will show them where they must stack it at your place. Do you still put it in the garage next to the door?

George: Yes, and also, can you do one very last thing for Claire?

The neighbour: Yes, what can I do for her?

George: If you go to the market on the Saturday before we return, can you buy her some vegetables, some goat cheese and some

<p>chèvre et du pain ? Elle te serait infiniment reconnaissante !</p> <p>La voisine : Mais c'est avec plaisir ! Elle sait bien que je vais au marché tous les samedis matin – tu pourras lui dire que je lui prendrai tout ça... Elle n'aura qu'à me donner sa liste avant de partir.</p> <p>George : Merci mille fois Catherine, tu es un ange !</p>	<p>bread? She would definitely be most grateful!</p> <p>The neighbour: With pleasure! She knows that I go to the market every Saturday morning – you can tell her that I'll pick it all up... She can just give me her list before leaving.</p> <p>George: Thanks a million Catherine, you're an angel!</p>
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Le coin des branchés

In keeping with the main theme of this issue, the following idiomatic expressions all employ a culinary vocabulary to express something that is quite often far removed from food. In most cases, we provide a literal translation plus its idiomatic meaning.

La cuisine électorale (electoral cooking) = all the behind-the-scenes manipulations and shady deals of politicians at election time.

Rajouter de la sauce/allonger la sauce (to add some sauce/adding more liquid to a sauce) = to exaggerate considerably.

A toutes les sauces – *Mettre quelqu'un à toutes les sauces* = to pile on jobs and/or responsibilities.

Jeter de l'huile sur le feu (to pour oil on the fire) = to make matters worse.

Faire noir comme dans un four (It's as black as in an oven) = It's pitch black. You can't see anything.

Etre sur le grill (to be on the grill) = to be on the hot seat.

Etre grillé/Se faire griller (to be grilled) = to be discredited, to have blown everything.

Etre cuit (to be cooked) – *Il est cuit* = to be drunk **or** to be all washed up.

C'est du tout cuit (It's already cooked) = it's a sure thing, it's in the bag.

Etre dur à cuire (to be difficult to cook) = said about someone who is not easily discouraged, very resistant in the face of difficulty.

Mijoter (to simmer) – *Qu'est-ce qu'il mijote ?* = to cook up. What's he cooking up, plotting?

Chanter comme une casserole (to sing like a pot) = to sing off key.

Faire un bruit de casserole (to make a noise like a pot) – *Cette vieille bagnole fait un bruit de casserole* = literally to sound like a pile of junk. This old jalopy sounds like a pile of junk, a tin can.

Passer à la casserole (to get to the pots and pans) = an expression used by women who reluctantly and unenthusiastically allow their husbands to make love to them. It's a drudgery.

Se mettre à table = to sit down at the diner table.

Mettre les pieds dans le plat (to put one's feet in the plate) = to put your foot in your mouth

Mettre les petits plats dans les grands (to put the small dishes in the larger one) = to put on a big spread.

Faire tout un plat de quelque chose (to make an entire dish out of something) – *Il a raté son permis de conduire, il en a fait tout un plat !* = to make a big deal out of something. He failed his driving licence exam and he made a big deal/fuss about it.

Dans son assiette (in his/her plate) – *Il n'est pas dans son assiette aujourd'hui !* = to be out of sorts. He's not in great form today.

Avoir un bon coup de fourchette (to be capable/handy with a fork) = to be a good eater.

Ne pas y aller avec le dos de la cuillère (not to go at it with the back of the spoon) = Not to beat around the bush, to get right to the point.

Etre à ramasser à la petite cuillère (to be in a condition that you could be scooped up with a teaspoon) = to be totally exhausted.

Régler une affaire en deux coups de cuillère à pot (settle an affair in two blows of a large cooking spoon) = to settle something very quickly.

Tourner autour du pot (to circle around the pot) = to beat around the bush.

A la fortune du pot (the luck of the pot) = a pot luck meal where everyone brings a dish.

Rester en carafe (to stay in the carafe) = to be left behind, forgotten.

Avoir du pain sur la planche (to have a lot of bread on the breadboard) = to have one's work cut out for one, to have a lot to do.

Tomber comme un cheveu sur la soupe (to fall like a hair into the soup) = to come like a bolt out of the blue.