

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

From us to them and him to her, the little words that stop us having to repeat ourselves

A couple of months ago we were looking at different ways of talking about me, one of my favourite topics (*Moi, j'adore parler de moi!* Et surtout quand on *me* fait des compliments!) You will remember the good news that *me* is the same word in French *me* but rhyming with *sir*, not *see*. The bad news was that it didn't fit where you think it should. In French it's *It me seems.. Il me semble* or *That me hurts.. Ça me fait mal* or *You me have told .. Vous m'avez dit..*, with the *me* bit going in front of the active part of the verb.

Sadly, we can't always be talking about me or you, and other people (third parties) have to be included too – him or her or it or them. Of course whether it's English or French, you can't say "him" or "her" or "it" or "them" unless you already know who or what you're referring to. You are using these little words to avoid having to repeat much longer ones.

One of the reasons I like talking about me is that there is only one version of me that tucks in front of the verb (*Elle me voit* – she sees me. *Elle me le donne* – she is giving it to me) and you don't have to worry about exactly what relationship it has to the rest of the sentence. Unfortunately, this is not true of him, her and it. (*Elle le voit* – she sees him. *Elle le lui donne* – She is giving it (*le*) to him (*lui*))

In this last example the little word you use depends on whether its the item being given (the direct object) or the person to whom it is being given (the indirect object)

You can usually tell when it's an indirect object because you can put "to" in front of it and it still makes sense. I'm talking to him – je *lui* parle, I'm phoning "to" him – je *lui* téléphone.

Direct objects are the things or the people that the action is done to. The cat, for instance, when the dog bites it. The house when you've sold it. *etcetera* when you are reading it. You can't put "to" in front of it. (Mind you, be careful of words like listen *to* and look *at* in English, because the French equivalent has a direct object)

Direct object pronouns are the same as the words you would use for "the" – *le, la* or *les*, according to whether they are masculine or feminine or whether there's more than one of them. In just the same way, *le* and *la* drop their second letter in front of a vowel (*Je l'ai vu* I saw *him* or *her* or *it* – of course you already know who or what you are referring to).

The indirect object pronouns are *lui* ("*lwee*")= *to him* or *to her* and *leur* = *to them*. You can only use them for people, and they are mainly about communicating or giving. *Je lui ai demandé* – I asked *him*. *Elle leur a écrit* – She wrote *to them*. *Mon ami lui a dit* – My friend told *him*. *Vous leur téléphonez souvent* – You phone *them* often. *Je lui envoie un cadeau* – I'm sending *him* (or *her*) a present.

You can easily get into situations where there are more than one of these things that you want to use. For example *Elle me le donne* – She gives it to me or *Elle le lui donne* – She gives it to him. So you have to learn which order to put them in. It's like a football line-up:

Forwards	Half backs	Backs	and...	the donkey in goal
me (=me or to me)				
te (=you or to you)	le (=him or it)			
se (=oneself or to oneself)	la (=her or it)	lui (= to him or to her)		y en (more about these later)
nous (=us or to us)	les (=them)	leur (=to them)		
vous (=you or to you)				

This bit of language is not easy to handle and takes a bit of trial and error. As with all the new bits of language you learn, the secret is to listen to other people's conversations and try to pick them out. You'll soon hear how much they are used. Then go out and try it yourself and let yourself be corrected!