29. GRAMMAR: The direct object and the indirect object; the object pronouns [*les pronoms complément d'objet direct (cod) et complément d'objet indirect (coi)*]

As already mentioned, pronouns primarily serve the purpose of avoiding annoying repetitions in sentences. Read the following story in which we didn't use personal pronouns, and judge for yourself how the text comes across.

Here is a version of the story without using personal pronouns for "la femme sud-africaine" (the South African woman) and "l'employé" (the employee):

Une femme sud-africaine$_{sujet}$ a été transportée à la morgue[1] par erreur. Un employé qui venait vérifier le corps, a retrouvé la femme sud-africaine$_{cod}$ vivante dans le réfrigérateur de la morgue de Carletonville, près de Johannesbourg, en Afrique du Sud. On avait amené cette femme sud-africaine$_{cod}$ dans la morgue$_{compl.lieu}$ après qu'on avait déclaré la femme sud-africaine$_{cod}$ morte à la suite d'un accident de la route. Quand l'employé$_{sujet}$ a découvert que la femme sud-africaine$_{sujet}$ était en vie, l'employé$_{sujet}$ a immédiatement demandé à la femme sud-africaine$_{coi}$ si la femme sud-africaine$_{sujet}$ avait pris des drogues.

As you can see, a story without the use of pronouns quickly becomes unreadable and hopelessly boring. The use of pronouns makes texts much more digestible.

You are already familiar with pronouns in the subject position (*les pronoms sujets*): *je, tu, il, ...* You know that these always stand with a verb, and that you adjust the ending of the verb according to the pronoun: ***je*** *chant**e*** but ***tu*** *chant**es***.

Pronouns can also appear in other sentence functions, and in those cases, they take on a different form. The two functions we will discuss here are: the ***complément d'objet direct*** (abbreviated as ***cod***) and the ***complément d'objet indirect*** (abbreviated as ***coi***). In English, these functions are called *direct object* and *indirect object*, respectively.

It might be best not to focus too much on defining both functions, but rather to apply a few simple tests so we can easily identify the ***cod*** (direct object) and ***coi*** (indirect object) in a French sentence:

How do I find the direct object (*COD*) in a sentence?

- You ask the question ***sujet + verbe + 'qui / quoi'***, and the answer to that (if there is one) will give you the direct object (*COD*).

- Some examples :

  - *Marie frappe son chien. - > Marie frappe **quoi ?** → Son chien* [**cod**!]
    --- > *sujet = Marie, verbe = frappe, quoi => Marie frappe quoi ?*
    --- > answer : « son chien » (*=cod)*

  - *Marie épouse Luc. - > Marie épouse **qui** ? → Luc* [**cod**]
    ---- > Same idea

- *Marcus regarde les filles* - > *Marcus regarde* ***qui*** *?* → *Les filles* [**cod**!]
---- > same idea

How do I find the direct object (*COD*) in a sentence?

- You ask the question ***sujet + verbe + "à qui"*** [1] and the answer to that (if there is one) will provide the *coi* (indirect object).

Some examples:

-Marie parle à son mari. - > *Marie parle* ***à qui*** *?* → *à son mari* [**coi**!]
-Marie donne un cadeau à Luc. - > *Marie donne un cadeau* ***à qui*** *?* → *à Luc* [**coi**]

1. A *coi* (indirect object) is, unlike a *cod* (direct object), almost always a person. That's why the question is limited to "à qui" (to whom).

Now that we can identify the COD/COI in a sentence, the next step is to figure out what these pronouns look like. Below is an overview of the ***les pronoms COD*** (direct object pronouns) and ***les pronoms COI*** (indirect object pronouns):

Pronoms cod	**Pronoms coi**
[regarder qn]	**[parler à qn]**
Il **me** regarde.	Il **me** parle.
Il **te** regarde.	Il **te** parle.
Il **la**[1] [3] **| le**[2] [3] regarde .	Il **lui**[3] parle.
Il **nous** regarde.	Il **nous** parle.
Il **vous** regarde .	Il **vous** parle.
Il **les** regarde.	Il **leur** parle.
1 *Il LE regarde* = he sees HIM **2.** *Il LA regarde*. = he sees HER **3.** If *le/la* precedes a verb that starts with a vowel, we are required to use the form *l'*: → *Il aime Marie* becomes *Il l'aime* and **not** **Il la aime*. The same applies to the pronouns *me* and *te* : *elle **m'**aime / elle **t'**aime*	**3.** The ***coi*** in the third person singular does not distinguish between masculine and feminine. *Il lui parle* can therefore be translated in two ways: - He speaks to HIM. - He speaks to HER. The context will have to determine which translation is correct.

*** Some notes :**

(1) A ***COD*** (*complément d'objet direct*) is essentially a noun phrase (e.g., *Une femme âgée, un policier agressif, trois élèves turbulents, un prof surmené*) that follows a verb directly without any preposition.

→ *il rencontre une femme âgée.*
→ *Le commissaire interroge le policier agressif*
→ *Le prof réprimande trois élèves turbulents.*

(2) The CODs that begin with a word expressing quantity (or start with *de*) are never replaced by a pronoun like *le, la, les*. Instead, you use *en*.

→ Il achète **DU beurre** → Il **en** achète. [en niet ~~*il l'achète.*~~]
|_>**cod** (that begins with a partitive article : quantity!)
→ Il frappe **UN chien** → Il **en** frappe **un.** [en niet ~~*il **le** frappe*~~.]
|_>**cod** (that begins witn an indefinite article : quantity!)
→ Il boit **trop de bière** → Il **en** boit **trop.** [en niet ~~*il **le** boit*~~]
|_>**cod** (that begins with an adverb of quantity)

(3) The ***COI*** (*complément d'objet indirect*) is often found with verbs that involve **giving**, **telling**, or **communicating**.

> *dire/demander/confier/raconter/avouer... un secret à un ami/*

> *répondre/téléphoner/parler... à un ami*

> *offrir/donner/envoyer/laisser... un cadeau à un ami*

(4) Attention: with the following verbs, the underlined parts are not *COI* and therefore you should **NOT** replace them with a pronoun from above. The only valid replacement is with a stressed pronoun *(pronom tonique : moi, toi, lui, elle, nous, vous, eux, elles) : penser à quelqu'un / s'intéresser à quelqu'un / s'adresser à quelqu'un / faire attention à quelqu'un / songer à quelqu'un*

→ *Je pense à mon oncle → je pense **à lui*** [**NOT** ***je lui pense.**]*

→ *Je fais attention à mes enfants. → je fais attention **à eux***

→ *Je m'adresse à la prof → je m'adresse **à elle.***

(5) Remember : You **almost** always replace *à + chose* with the pronoun ***y*** *:*

→ *Je pense à ma nouvelle voiture : J'y pense.*

(6) As you have already noticed, some verbs can have both functions. :

- *Elle raconte son secret à ses parents.*
|_>cod |_>*coi*

(7) We always place the pronouns COD, COI, and "y" before the conjugated verb. If there is an infinitive following the conjugated verb, you place the pronoun before the infinitive:

- *Elle **la** veut.*

- *Il **nous** regarde.*

- *Il veut **les** inviter.*

- *Je vais **la** manger*

- *Il **nous** a vus.*

And now we can finally eliminate annoying repetitions from our texts. Take a close look at the following example:

Here's the same story using personal pronouns for "*la femme sud-africaine*" (the South African woman):

Une femme sud-africaine$_{sujet}$ a été transportée à la morgue[1] par erreur. Un employé qui venait vérifier le corps, **l'$_{cod}$** a retrouvée vivante dans le réfrigérateur de la morgue de Carletonville, près de Johannesbourg, en Afrique du Sud. On **l'$_{cod}$** y avait amenée après qu'on **l'$_{cod}$** avait déclarée morte à la suite d'un accident de la route. Quand l'employé a découvert qu' **elle$_{sujet}$** était en vie, **il**$_{sujet}$ **lui$_{coi}$** a demandé si **elle$_{sujet}$** avait pris des drogues.

After reading both texts, you undoubtedly understand the importance of pronouns and can also see that these pronouns take different "forms" depending on the role they play in the sentence: *la femme sud-africaine* is replaced in the text above by the pronouns *elle* (subject), *l'* (direct object), and *lui* (indirect object).