

chapter 4: DOPs & IOPs

Worry not, these acronyms are not contagious and don't hide anything sinister either. They simply stand for **Direct Object Pronouns** and **Indirect Object Pronouns**. In French, they are COD and COI (the C is for Complément).

Before we go any further, let me explain a couple of notions, so that we're all on the same page. Please, do accept my apologies if I am going into known territory.

Direct Object Pronouns

A **direct object** is (usually) a noun that **follows** a verb without need of a preposition, also know as a **transitive verb**, and answers the question **what?** or **whom?**, like so:

J'aime les bananes.

I like bananas.

I like **what?**

Bananas!



→ 'bananas' is the direct object of 'like'

When a **pronoun** replaces a direct object noun, it becomes a direct object pronoun, or **DOP** for short:

J'aime les *bananes*. Oh comme je **les** aime!

I like *bananas*. Oh, how I like **them**!

Eagle-eyed readers will have noticed that the placement of the DOPs is not the same in French and in English, but we will come back to that in a minute.

On the following page, you will find a handy little table to show you what DOPs look like.

DOPs			
me	me	nous	we, us
te	you	vous	you
le	him, it	les	them
la	her, it		

As you can see, the third person DOPs are the same as the definite articles (*le, la* and *les*).

Please also note that the singular forms all lose their final vowel in front of a word starting with another vowel, as per usual. **Me** become **m'**, **te** becomes **t'**, etc.

Being well-behaved pronouns, the DOPs agree in gender and number with the nouns they replace. Interestingly, *le/l'* can sometimes replace a verb or an adjective.

Tes invités sont **arrivés**?

Oui, ils **le** sont.

Let's now have a look at two of the most important factors to consider when using the DOPs: their **placement** and whether they affect the **past participles** or not.

Placement of DOPs

As with all pronouns, this is pretty much a straightforward affair: **DOPs precede** the **verb** of which they are the object.

This also applies to the **auxiliary** in compound tenses and the **infinitive** in infinitive constructions. This is important in the immediate future, as you will see in the examples. In **negative** constructions, the *ne* precedes the DOP.

Oui, ne t'inquiète pas, je **les** amène!

Yes, don't worry, I'm bringing **them**!

Je ne peux pas **le** supporter.

I cannot stand **him**.

Je ne **l'**ai jamais rencontré(e).

I have never met **him (her)**.



The only really complicated rule governing the placement of the DOPs happens in the imperative, which we will study later in this book.

In the affirmative imperative, the DOP goes **AFTER** the verb and is attached to it via a hyphen. On top of that, *me* becomes *moi* and *te* becomes *toi* (all other forms are left as they are).

Regarde-**moi**!

Look at **me**!

Ecoute-**la**!

Listen to **her**!

In the negative imperative, the DOPs follow the general rule:

Ne **le** regarde pas!

Don't look at **him**!

Agreement of past participles

It is not with some trepidation and glee that I approach this topic. This is a rule that Marcel Pagnol called 'désolante' and one with which many French students never get on.

I personally think it is a very elegant and clever rule, especially since it is in principle completely pointless. In other words, I LOVE IT! Here goes.

In the *passé composé*, if the **direct object** is placed **before** the **auxiliary**, the past participle **MUST agree** with it.

Get it? Let me break it down for you:

J'ai acheté des pommes.

I bought some apples.



In this example, 'des pommes' is the direct object and is placed after the auxiliary: there is no agreement.

Les pommes que j'ai achetées étaient bonnes.

The apples I bought were good.

Here, 'les pommes' is still the direct object, but this time it precedes the auxiliary: the past participle agrees with the direct object in gender and number. See? Elegant, I tell you!

Since the **DOPs**, through their nature, **always precede** the **auxiliary**, you must make sure that the past participle agrees with the DOP.

Je les ai achetées au marché.

I bought **them** at the market.

In this last example, **les** refers to the apples I bought. 'Les pommes' being feminine plural, I have added an extra 'es' to the past participle.

Et voilà, c'est plutôt simple, non !?

Indirect Object Pronouns

An **indirect object** follows a verb, just as a direct object does, but this time, it follows an intransitive verb, which means that it will be introduced by a preposition, usually *à* or *de*.

In English, you will easily recognise an indirect object, as it is often introduced by 'to':

A Noël, je donne *de la confiture* **à mes voisins**.

At Christmas, I give *jam* **to my neighbours**.

In the example above, 'jam' is the direct object, and 'à mes voisins' is the indirect object.

You can also find out if a sentence has an indirect object by asking the questions 'to whom?', 'to what' and 'of whom/what?'. Like this:

Je parle **à ma mère** au téléphone tous les jours.

I speak **to my mum** on the phone every day.

To whom do I speak?

My mum!

'*my mum*' is an indirect object

When an indirect object is replaced by a pronoun, it becomes an **indirect object pronoun**, or **IOP** for short.

A Noël, je donne de la confiture **à mes voisins**.

A Noël, le **leur** donne de la confiture.

At Christmas, I give **them** jam.



You will notice that once more, the **IOP** has found its rightful place **BEFORE** the **verb**. This also applies to the **auxiliary** in compound tenses, and to the **infinitive** in infinitive constructions.

In negative constructions, the *ne* precedes the IOP.

Here are the IOPs, by the way:

IOPs	
me to me	nous to us
te to you	vous to you
lui to him/her/it	leur to them

As always, **me** and **te** become **m'** and **t'** in front of a word beginning with a **vowel**.

As with the DOPs, IOPS are placed after the verb in the affirmative imperative, are attached by a hyphen, *me* becomes *moi*, and *te* turns into *toi*.

Let's have a look at a few examples to cement all this into place.

J'offre des cadeaux **à mes voisins**.

Je **leur** *offre* des cadeaux.



In this example, the **IOP** is placed directly in **front** of the verb in the **present** tense.

Je vais offrir des cadeaux **à mes voisins**.

Je vais **leur** *offrir* des cadeaux.

Here, the verb is in the **immediate future**, and the **IOP** is placed **before** the infinitive, and after the present tense of '**aller**'.

J'ai offert des cadeaux **à mes voisins**.

Je **leur** *ai offert* des cadeaux.

In this last example, the verb is in the **passé composé**, and the **IOP** is placed **before** the **auxiliary**.

You will have noticed in that last example that the **past participle** is **unchanged**, despite having an object pronoun placed before it. This is because the same rule which governs the agreement of past participles with a DOP does not apply to IOPs, a fact I am sure you will appreciate.