Lesson: 86
Indirect object pronouns

What is a pronoun?

Before we cover indirect object pronouns, we need to check that we know what we mean by a pronoun.

Basically, a pronoun is a word that replaces a noun.

I see Peter  In this sentence, Peter is the noun.
I see him  In this sentence, him is the pronoun that replaces the noun Peter.

Why ‘indirect’?

In any given sentence, most verbs have and want a direct object, as generally an action happens to something. These are known as direct objects.

I eat the apple
I see you
I study Italian
I bought a book

Indirect object pronouns replace the recipient of the verb /action.

I’ll buy you an ice cream

I’m not buying you, I’m buying the ice cream, and you are the recipient of that ice cream.

Using pronouns makes conversation more fluid and sound much more natural and native-like. We do it all the time in English, likewise in Italian!
Some examples

The following sentences are very similar, yet when we take out one element, it changes the meaning entirely.

*I buy her a book.*  Her (she) is the recipient of the object, which is the book.

*I buy her.*  In this sentence, *her* has now become the object that has been bought! Not cool.

*I buy a book.*  The book is once again the object, but for whom, we don’t know.

*I buy her a book.*  With all elements together again, the meaning is much clearer!

Direct or Indirect?

*I see a house*  **DIRECT**

*I sell a house*  **DIRECT**

*I sell you a house*  Sell what?  **The house**  **DIRECT**
To whom?  **You**  **INDIRECT**

*I see you*  **DIRECT**

*I give my son a house*  Give what?  **A house**  **DIRECT**
To whom?  **My son**  **INDIRECT**
Pronomi indiretti

mi  to me / for me

 ti to you / for you

 gli to him / for him

 le to her / for her

Le to you / for you (formal)

 ci to us / for us

 vi to you guys / for you guys

gli / loro to them / for them

There is no need to worry about egli, ella or esso, if you have heard these before!!! They are a much older way of saying he, she and it, but are no longer used by any Italian and are only found in higher register written materials and old literature.

Mi

For me / to me

mi dai una penna  You give me a pen

The indirect object pronoun must always go BEFORE THE VERB!!

Literally, “To me you give a pen”
**Ti**

*For you, to you*

- ti diamo un bacio: *We’re giving you a kiss*
- ti do 10 euro: *I’m giving you 10 euro*
- ti va il gelato?: *Do you feel like ice cream?* (*“to you it goes well ice cream?”*)
- ti compro un gelato: *I’m buying you an ice cream*

**Gli**

*For him, to him*

- gli dai un regalo: *I’m giving him a present*
- gli date un dolce: *You guys are giving him a sweet*
- gli danno problemi: *They are giving him problems*
- non gli va di dormire: *He doesn’t feel like sleeping* (*with him it doesn’t go well to sleep*)

**Le (not capitalized)**

*For her, to her*

- le dai un regalo: *You give her a present*
- le date un dolce: *You guys give her a sweet*
- le danno problemi: *They give her problems*
- le va di dormire: *She feels like sleeping* (*“to her it goes well to sleep”*)
Le

For you, to you (formal) (always with a capital ‘L’)

Even though this is the same word as for her and to her, the context of the situation will inform us to whom we are referring. If someone is clearly addressing you and looking at you and uses LE, then they are referring to you politely.

- Le do un regalo  I give you a present
- Le danno problemi?  Are they giving you problems?
- Le va di mangiare?  Do you feel like eating?  (“to you does it go well to eat?”)

Ci

For us, to us

- ci date un caffè  You guys give us a coffee
- ci dai 10 euro?  Will you give us 10 euro?
- ci danno problemi  They are giving us problems
- ci dà un pezzo di pizza, per favore?  Will you give us a piece of pizza, please, sir/ma’am?

Vi

For you guys, to you guys

- vi do un abbraccio  I’ll give you guys a hug
- vi dà le chiavi  He/she is giving you guys the keys
vi diamo 5 minuti  
*We give you guys 5 minutes*

vi danno un regalo  
*They are giving you guys a present*

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**Gli**

*For them, to them*

Even though this is the same word as *for him* and *to him*, context will again inform us as to whom we are referring.

- gli dai un regalo  
  *You give them a present*

- gli date un dolce  
  *You guys give them a sweet*

- gli danno problemi  
  *They give them problems*

- No gli va di dormire  
  *They don’t feel like sleeping*  
  (“*to them it doesn’t go well to sleep*”)

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**Loro**

*For them, to them*

**LORO** is the traditional way to say *for them* and *to them*. For a long time, **GLI** has been used among people in speaking contexts yet it was originally considered incorrect. Nowadays, it is considered completely acceptable, yet I still prefer to use **LORO**. You may even find it easier, as it is placed in the same position of the sentence as *them* in English - *after* the verb!

- Dai loro un regalo  
  *You give them a present*

- Date loro un dolce  
  *You guys give them a sweet*

- Danno loro problemi  
  *They give them problems*

- A loro non va di dormire  
  *They don’t feel like sleeping*  
  (“*to them it doesn’t go well to sleep*”)

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Manu’s Tips

If all these different pronouns seem super confusing, here’s a handy idea. In Italian, we have a bunch of pronouns for the subject, object, possessive and reflexive forms, but they exist in English too!

**Subject pronouns**
- I, you, he, she, it, we, you guys/all, they

**Object pronouns**
- Me, you, him, her, it, us, you guys/all, them

**Possessive pronouns**
- Mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, yours, theirs

**Reflexive pronouns**
- Myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves

Oh wow there’s so many! As a native English speaker, you use them all the time without even thinking about when to use which one and why. In Italian, believe it or not, we use the exact same word for pronouns in the **first** and **second** person **singular** and **plural** (whether we need a **direct**, **indirect object**, or **reflexive** pronoun).

Despite this, I need you to understand exactly what you are replacing with the pronoun. Is it the recipient? Is it the object? This is very important so you can get it right whenever you are not referring to the first or second person.

So, with that information, we can see that in any given situation, we can use a pronoun, no matter what role pronoun performing.

If the sentence is about **me**, use **mi**

If the sentence is about **you**, use **ti**

If the sentence is about **us**, use **ci**

If the sentence is about **you guys**, use **vi**

Using this trick, try and “cheat” your way into getting them right. Anytime you are thinking that the verb has to do with **me**, you use **Mi**, just put it before verb. You actually already do this with phrases that we have already learned.
Mi chiamo    I call myself    Reflexive    I do it to myself
Mi chiami    You’re calling me    Direct object    I’m the object
Mi dai un libro    You give me a book    Indirect object    I’m the recipient

If you do it this way, even if you still aren’t sure of the difference between direct, indirect and reflexive pronouns, no one will know because they are the same anyway! Also, remember that we’ve only looked at *indirect object pronouns*, not the others!

In the meantime, you do need to understand what you are replacing with the pronoun because in the *third person* the pronouns are all different, so you can’t get away with this trick!

Your notes