

Indirect Object Pronouns: Part II

Let's begin with a review of the previous lesson.

The indirect object (IO) tells us where the direct object (DO) is going.

He gives the book to María.

DO=Book

Where is the book going?

To María.

IO=María

He gives María the book.

DO=Book

Where is the book going?

To María.

IO=María

The indirect object answers the question "To whom?" or "For whom?" the action of the verb is performed.

He gives María the book.

To whom does he give the book?

To María.

IO=María

He buys me flowers.

For whom does he buy the flowers?

For me.

IO=me

Sentences that have an indirect object usually have a direct object. Remember, the IO tells us where the DO is going. Notice how the sentences below just wouldn't work without a direct object.

He gives María . . .

the book, the pen, the diamond, etc.

He buys me . . .

flowers, candy, an ironing board, etc.

Sometimes the direct object is not stated; rather it is implied, or understood.

My mother writes me every week.

DO=letter (understood)

IO=me

(My mother writes me a letter every week.)

She told him.

DO=it (understood)

IO=him

(She told it to him.)

To identify the indirect object use our two guidelines:

1. The IO tells us where the DO is going.
2. The IO answers the question "to whom?" or "for whom" the action of the verb is performed.

When a pronoun takes the place of the name of the indirect object, use the following pronouns:

me (me)

te (you-familiar)

le (him, her, you-formal)

nos (us)

os (you-all-familiar)

les (them, you-all-formal)

In a negative statement with one verb, the indirect object pronoun comes between the negative word and the conjugated verb.

Él no me compra nada.

He doesn't buy me anything.

He doesn't buy anything for me.

Ella no te trae el desayuno.

She doesn't bring you breakfast.

She doesn't bring breakfast for you.

No le mando a él la cuenta.

I don't send him the bill.

I don't send the bill to him.

Ellos no nos compran ningún regalo.

They don't buy us any gifts.

They don't buy any gifts for us.

Compare the affirmative statements with their negative counterparts.

Él **me compra** algo.

Él **no me compra** nada.

Ella **te trae** el desayuno.
Ella **no te trae** el desayuno.

Le mando a él la cuenta.
No le mando a él la cuenta.

Ellos **nos compran** regalos.
Ellos **no nos compran** ningún regalo.

Remember, don't translate word-for-word. Instead, think in terms of phrases, or concepts. "Ellos no nos compran ningún regalo" contains 3 concepts:

1. ellos nos compran (they buy us)
2. regalo (gift)
3. no, ningún (make the sentence negative)

The key to learning to use the indirect object pronouns is the same as the key for direct object pronouns. You must learn to think in phrases, not words. The phrases consist of a pronoun and a conjugated verb. In the following examples, note that the IO remains the same, while the subject of the phrase changes.

no me compra he doesn't buy (for) me
no me compras you don't buy (for) me

Remember, the IO pronouns **le** and **les** present a special problem because they are ambiguous. That is, they can stand for different things.

le
to (for) him
to (for) her
to (for) you-formal

les
to (for) them
to (for) you-all-formal

The following sentences, while grammatically correct, are ambiguous:

Ella no le escribe una carta.
Ella no les escribe una carta.

Out of context, there is no way we can know the meaning.

Ella no le escribe una carta.
She doesn't write him a letter.
She doesn't write her a letter.
She doesn't write you (formal) a letter.

Ella no les escribe una carta.
She doesn't write them a letter.
She doesn't write you-all (formal) a letter.

Since **le** and **les** can mean more than one thing, a prepositional phrase is often added to remove the ambiguity.

Ella no le escribe a Juan una carta.

Ella no le escribe a su hermana una carta.

Ella no le escribe a usted una carta.

Ella no les escribe a sus padres una carta.

Ella no les escribe a ustedes una carta.

Sometimes a prepositional phrase is added not for clarity, but rather for emphasis.

Juan no me da a mí el dinero.

John doesn't give **me** the money.

(emphasizing that the money is not given to me but rather to someone else)

Juan no te da a ti el dinero.

John doesn't give **you** the money. (emphasis on you)

There is no ambiguity in the following sentence. It can only mean one thing.

Juan no me da el dinero.

John doesn't give me the money.

The addition of a prepositional phrase merely adds emphasis.

Juan no me da a mí el dinero.

John doesn't give **me** the money.

Remember:

- The IO tells us where the DO is going.
- The IO answers the question "to whom" or "for whom."
- In order for a sentence to have a IO, it must also have a DO.
- Sometimes the DO is not stated, but rather is implied, or understood.
- The IO pronouns are: me, te, le, nos, os, les.
- In a negative sentence, place the pronoun between the negative word and the conjugated verb.
- Think in phrases, do not translate word-for-word.
- Le and les are ambiguous.
- Prepositional phrases are often used for clarity and for emphasis.