

22. Impersonal pronouns (2)

1 Constructions with *être* + adjective

These can be used on their own, or be followed by an infinitive or *que*.

1.1 When anticipating an idea, *il* is used. The word *de* comes before an infinitive:

Ces jours-ci, **il** est difficile **de trouver** un emploi permanent

These days it is difficult to get a permanent job

Il est surprenant que ses notes aient été si mauvaises

It is surprising that his marks were so poor

1.2 When referring back to an idea, *ce* is used. The word *à* comes before an infinitive:

Ces jours-ci, trouver un emploi permanent, **c'est** difficile **à faire**

These days getting a permanent job is difficult

Ses notes ont été très mauvaises, **c'est** surprenant

His marks were very poor, it's surprising

2 Constructions with *être* + other words

Where *être* is followed by something other than an adjective, *ce* is used:

C'est **le professeur**

It's the teacher

C'est **ainsi** que je l'ai trouvé

That's how I found him

Il a pris une décision courageuse: c'était **de continuer**

He took a brave decision: to continue

- Qui est là? - C'est **moi**

"Who's there?" "It's me"

Note that *ce* is generally followed by a verb in the third person singular:

C'est moi, c'est nous, c'est eux, c'est mes parents

It's me, it's us, it's them, it's my parents

3 *Ce* v *il* / *elle* as personal pronouns

When *ce* and *il* are used as **impersonal** pronouns, this means they are equivalent to the English impersonal pronoun *it* as in ***It is Peter on the telephone***, i.e. they do not refer to a specific noun. This is not to be confused with their use as **personal** pronouns which do refer to a specific noun, equivalent to *it* in *Your new house? I think **it** is very nice*. The following rules apply with the verb *être*:

3.1 *Il* and *elle* can only be used if they are followed by an **adjective** or a **noun behaving like an adjective**:

Voilà ma maison. **Elle** est très belle
That's my house. It's very beautiful
Voilà Pierre. **Il** est très sympathique
There's Pierre. He's very nice
Voilà Mr Dupont. **Il** est professeur
There's Mr Dupont. He's a teacher

3.2 *Ce* is used when followed by a conventional **noun**:

Voilà où j'habite. **C'est** une belle maison
That's where I live. It's a beautiful house
Voilà Pierre. **C'est** une personne sympathique
There's Pierre. He's a nice person
Voilà Mr Dupont. **C'est** un professeur
There's Mr Dupont. He's a teacher