A Comparative Study
of
the English Pronoun *it* and the French Pronoun *il*

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1. *it* across the board

1.1. Etymology

The present-day *it*, neuter pronoun of the third person, singular, (1) nominative, (2) dative, (3) accusative, derives from the Middle English (ME) *hit*, which in turn came down from the Old English (OE) *hit*. OE *hit* was akin in form and sense to the Old Frisian *hit*, the Middle Dutch *het* and Gothic *hitā*, which was demonstrative ‘this’. The pronoun was in Gothic *ita*, corresponding to German *es*.

OE *hit* was (1) nominative and (3) accusative; the (2) dative was *him* and the genitive *his*, identical with the same cases of the masculine *he*.

During the ME period, or between the 12th century and the 15th century, *hit* lost its initial *h*, first when unemphatic, and at length in all positions, in Standard English.

The Old (2) dative neuter *him* gave place to the accusative form *it*.

OE and ME genitive neuter *his* gave place to *its* in the Early Modern English period. It was an analogical formation from [*it*’s], actually written *it’s* until early 19th century.*

1.2. Grammar

The present-day English *it*, neuter pronoun of the third person, singular, is, from the point of case forms, (1) nominative, (2) dative, or (3) accusative.

1.2.1. Nominative *it*

The pronoun *it* in the nominative case (hereinafter referred to as Nominative *it*) serves as a subject of the sentence in which it stands.

As a subject of a sentence, the Nominative *it* is sometimes (A) real, (B) empty, (C) provisional, (D) entity-less, (E) vague, or (F) suppressed.

1.2.1.A. Real subject

There are two ways of using the real subject: (a) the anaphoric use and (b) the cataphoric use.

1.2.1.A.a. Anaphoric use

When the Nominative *it* is a real subject, it generally refers back to something previously mentioned. This is the anaphoric use of *it*. We may also say that *it* is of "backward reference." The thing referred to by *it* is (i) a lifeless thing, (ii) a living thing (when its sex is unknown or unimportant), (iii) a baby or a small child (when its sex is unknown or a matter of indifference), (iv) a person or a thing that is to be identified; in addition to these, it sometimes refers to (v) a phrase or a clause previously mentioned.

When translated into French, *it* is rendered into *il* or *elle* according as the gender of the noun for which it stands is masculine or feminine in its French equivalent. Furthermore, *it* is rendered into *ce*, *cela*, or *ça* when *it* is interpreted as demonstrative in French.

1.2.1.A.a.i. Referring to a lifeless thing

In the following, the noun is set in italic and the Nominative *it* referring to the noun is set in Gothic.
Here is a hat. Whose (hat) is it? — It's mine.
Voici un chapeau. A qui est ce chapeau? — Il est à moi. [masculine]

Whose hat is this? — It is mine.
A qui est ce chapeau? C'est à moi. [demonstrative] (Il est à moi. [masculine])

This is my watch. It is a Japanese one. (It is made in Japan.)
C'est ma montre. Elle est de fabrication japonaise.
(Elle est fabriquée au Japon.) [feminine]

Whose watch is that? — It is his.
A qui est cette montre-là? — Cela, c'est à lui. [demonstrative]
Elle est à lui. [feminine] *

*I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Shinichi Tomita for the valuable advices he has given me regarding the French sentences I have written here and hereafter throughout the paper.

1.2.1.A.a.ii. Referring to a living thing

In the following, the noun is set in italic and the Nominative it referring to the noun is set in Gothic.

Where is the cat? — It's in the garden.
Où est le chat? (Le chat, où est-il?) — Il est dans le jardin. [masculine]

What a beautiful flower it is! What is it? — Oh, it's a rose. It has thorns too.
Quelle belle fleur! Qu'est-ce que c'est? — C'est une rose. Mais la rose a aussi des épines. [demonstrative]

Where is the rose? — It is in the pot.
Où est la rose? (La rose, où est-elle?) — Elle est dans le pot. [feminine]

1.2.1.A.a.iii. Referring to a baby

In the following, the noun is set in italic and the Nominative it referring to the noun is set in Gothic.

She is expecting a baby and hopes it will be a girl.
Elle attend un bébé et elle espère que ce sera une fille. [demonstrative]

1.2.1.A.a.iv. Referring to an unidentified thing

In the following, the thing to be identified is set in italic and the Nominative it referring to the thing is set in Gothic.
It must be Mary who has come.
Ce doit être Marie qui est venue. [demonstrative]

What's that noise? —— It's a mouse.
Qu'est-ce que ce bruit? —— C'est un souris. [demonstrative]

(In the dormitory. Someone knocks at the door.)
Who is there? —— It's me, Peter.
Qui est là? —— C'est moi, Pierre. [demonstrative]

Who's that at the door? —— It's the postman.
Qui est à la porte? —— C'est le facteur. [demonstrative]

1.2.1. A. a. v. Referring to a phrase or a clause

In the following, the phrase or a clause is set in italic and the Nominative it referring to the phrase or the clause is set in Gothic.

I tried hard to open the door, but it was impossible.
Je faisait tous mes efforts pour ouvrir la porte, mais c'était impossible. [demonstrative]

He tried to reason his son out of leaving, but it was in vain.
Il a eu beau dissuader son fils de partir.
(Il a essayé de dissuader son fils de partir, mais c'était inutile.) [demonstrative]

The earth rotates on its axis once in 24 hours. It is true.
La terre tourne sur elle-même une fois en 24 heures. C'est vrai. [demonstrative]

He is ignorant of French. Oh, it's not true.
Il ignore le français. Ça, ce n'est pas vrai. [demonstrative]

He saw me at the park yesterday. It is not true.
Il m'a vu au parc hier. Ça n'est pas vrai. [demonstrative]

1.2.1. A. b. Cataphoric use

As we have seen in 1.2.1. A. a., the Nominative it generally refers back to something previously mentioned. But sometimes the Nominative it refers forward to something mentioned afterwards, that is something in grammatical extraposition. We call this type of use of pronouns cataphoric or of "forward reference."

In French, the indefinite ce is mostly used for anaphoric reference although it is also used for cataphoric reference in colloquial French. In
most cases, the impersonal it is used for cataphoric reference.

In English, the personal pronoun is mostly used for anaphoric use and it is sometimes used for cataphoric reference in colloquial English.

As we will see in 1.2.1.c., when the Nominative it plays the role of the provisional subject, it is used for cataphoric reference.

In the following, the Nominative it is set in Gothic and the words that are cataphorically referred to by it are set in italic.

Is it good, the beer you’re drinking now?
La bière que vous buvez, est-elle bonne?

It’s a hard work, the rock-climbing.
La montée en varappe, c’est un travail pénible.

It’s a queer fellow, that professor.
Le professeur, c’est un original.

It’s forbidding, the long, wavy snake.
Le long serpent sinuex, il est très désagréable.

It’s great! He won the top prize.
C’est épatant! Il a gagné le grand prix.

1.2.1.B. Empty subject

The Nominative it is sometimes used in a sentence as its formal subject without referring to anything special. This “Empty it subject,” so called by R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech and J. Svartvik in their book A Grammar of Contemporary English, serves to tell (a) weather, (b) time and (c) distance.*

"Unspecified it"

1.2.1.B.a. Empty it for weather

The Nominative it becomes the formal subject of a sentence telling a meteorological phenomenon. There are three types of sentences:

i. It rains. (It is raining.) [It+Impersonal Verb]
ii. It is fine. [It + be + Adjective]

iii. It is rainy weather. [It + be + Adjective + weather]

1.2.1. B.a. i. Type: It rains. (It is raining.)

The Nominative it followed by an impersonal verb descriptive of a meteorological phenomenon serves to tell the weather.

(ÉF2. 2. 2. A. a. i.) N.B. ÉF stands for cf.

It blows [thaws, thunders].
Il vente [déglace, tonne].

It is drizzling [hailing, snowing].
Il bruine [grêle, neige].

It is freezing hard.
Il gèle dur /à pierre.

It is raining cats and dogs.
Il pleut des hallebardes.

1.2.1.B. a. ii. Type: It is fine.

The Nominative it followed by be [or become, get, look] plus an adjective descriptive of a meteorological phenomenon serves to tell the weather.

(ÉF2. 2. 2. A. a. ii.)

It is bad [stormy, windy].
Il fait mauvais [orageux, du vent].

It is chilly [cool, cold, mild, warm].
Il fait frisquet [frais, froid, doux, chaud].

It is cloudy.
Le temps est couvert. / Le ciel est nuageux. / Le ciel s’assombrit. / Le ciel se couvre (de nuage).

It is fair /fine /good.
Il fait beau.

It is foggy /hazy /misty.
Il fait du bruillard. / Il y a du bruillard.

It is rainy /wet.
Le temps est à la pluie.

It is sunny.
Il fait du soleil.

(For the following, compare with 2. 2. 2. A. a. iii.)
It is already dark at six in the evening.
Il fait déjà nuit à six heures du soir.

It is hardly light at four o’clock in the morning.
Il fait à peine jour à quatre heures du matin.

1.2.1.B.a.iii. Type: It is good weather.

The sentence pattern [It+be+Adjective+weather] serves to tell the weather. (ÊF 2. 2. A.a. iii.)

It is bad / miserable / nasty weather.
Il fait (un) mauvais temps.

It is changeable / fickle weather.
Il fait un temps changeable / variable.

It is fair / fine / good weather.
Il fait (un) beau temps.

It is stormy weather.
Il fait une tempête.

It is sunny weather.
Il fait du soleil.

1.2.1.B.b. Empty it for time

The Nominative it becomes the formal subject of a sentence telling (i) a time point or (ii) a lapse of time.

1.2.1.B.b.1. For a time point

The Nominative it followed by be plus a noun indicative of a chronological point or an adjective descriptive of time serves to tell time. In French, il is used for hours but it is not usually used for days, months, or seasons. (ÊF 2. 2. A. b. i.)
It is five o'clock in the evening.
Il est cinq heures du soir.

It is midnight.
Il est minuit.

It is (getting) late.
Il se fait tard.

It is still early.
Il est encore tôt.

Today, it is Tuesday, the 3rd of October.
C'est aujourd'hui mardi, le trois d'octobre.

What day will it be tomorrow?
Quel jour serons-nous demain?

What month is it now?
Dans quel mois sommes-nous?

It is now November.
Nous sommes maintenant en novembre.

It is still winter.
C'est encore l'hiver.

1.2.1. B. b. II. For a lapse of time

The Nominative it followed by be plus a noun descriptive of a length of time serves to tell a lapse of time.  (1872. 2. 2. A. b. ii.)

How long is it since?
Combien y a-t-il de cela?

How many years is it since you began to learn English?
Combien d'années y a-t-il que vous avez commencé à apprendre l'anglais?

It's a long time since he left for France.
Il y a longtemps qu'il est parti pour la France.

It is more than seven years since I returned from Europe.
Il y a plus de sept ans que je suis rentré d'Europe.

It will be long before we see his like.
de longtemps on ne verra son pareil.
1.2.1.B.c. Empty *it* for distance

The Nominative *it* followed by *be* plus a noun descriptive of a spatial length serves to tell distance. (EF2.2.2. A. c.)

> How far is it from here to London?
> Combien y a-t-il d'ici à Londres?

> It is ten miles from here to London.
> Il y a dix milles d'ici à Londres.

> It's a long way to London.
> Londres est bien loin.

> It is half an hour’s walk from here.
> C'est à une demi-heure de marche d'ici.

> It's quite a short way (off).
> Le trajet n'est pas long.

1.2.1.C. Provisional subject

The Nominative *it* has also another very important function to represent a group of words which comes afterwards (in “extraposition”). The group of words may be (a) an infinitive phrase, (b) a gerundial phrase, or (c) a clause. This type of the Nominative *it* is called “preparatory *it*” by O. Jespersen, “anticipatory *it*” by R. Quirk and others, or “grammatical subject” by A. S. Hornby. Whatever the name, this is again the cataphoric use of the Nominative *it.* (EF2.2.2. B.)

*Jespersen, Otto, op. cit. pp. 154-5
Quirk, R. et al., op. cit. pp. 955-6

1.2.1.C.a. Representing an infinitive phrase

There are three types of sentences as the following:

i. *It* + *be* + Adjective or Noun + to-Infinitive

ii. *It* + *be* + Adjective or Noun + for one + to-Infinitive

iii. *It* + *V. T.* + one + to-Infinitive
1.2.1. C. a. i. Type: It + be + Adj. or Noun + to-Infinitive

In the following, the infinitive phrase represented by the Nominative it (the provisional subject) is set in italic. (Ex. 2. 2. B. b. i.)

It's a pleasure to hear him.
C'est (un) plaisir de l'entendre.

It is difficult to realize your plan.
Il est difficile de réaliser votre plan.

It is easy to say.
Il est aisé de dire. (On a vite fait de dire)

It is essential to keep yourself in good health.
Il importe de vous garder en bonne santé.

It is important to keep your room clean.
Il est important de tenir votre chambre propre.

It is impossible to work in this heat.
Il est impossible de travailler par cette chaleur.

It is never too late to mend.
Il n'est jamais trop tard pour s'amender.

1.2.1. C. a. ii. Type: It + be + Adj. or Noun + for one + to-Infinitive

In the following, the infinitive phrase represented by the Nominative it (the provisional subject) is set in italic and the phrase for one is set in Gothic. (Ex. 2. 2. B. b. ii.)

It is a cinch for him to speak the three languages.
C'est l'enfance de l'art pour lui de parler les trois langues.

It is difficult for me to accept.
Il m'est difficile d'accepter.

It is easy for him to do it.
Il lui est facile de le faire.

It is essential for a man to be fed, clothed and housed.
Se nourrir, se couvrir et se loger, c'est essentiel pour un homme.

It is impossible for me to do it.
1.2.1. C.a. iii. **Type: It + V. T. + one + to-Infinitive**

In the following, the infinitive phrase which is represented by the Nominative *it* (the provisional subject) is set in italic and the person that is the object of a transitive verb is set in Gothic.

*It excited him to watch the game.*  
Ça l'a excité de regarder le match. (De regarder le match, ça l'a excité.)

*It makes me happy to help you.*  
Cela m'amuse de vous aider.

*It offends me to hear him talk like that.*  
Cela me fâche de l'entendre parler de la sorte.

*It soothed her to listen to the music.*  
Ça l'a calmée d'écouter de la musique. (D'écouter de la musique, ça l'a calmée.)

*It will give me great pleasure to oblige you.*  
Cela me fera un grand plaisir de vous oblier.

*It will give me joy to work with you.*  
Cela me fera une joie de travailler avec vous.

1.2.1. C.b. **Representing a gerundial phrase**

In the following, the gerundial phrase represented by the Nominative *it* (the provisional subject) is set in italic.

*It is nice living here*  
Il fait bon vivre ici.

*It's nonsense talking like that.*  
C'est absurde de parler comme ça.

*(It is) no use crying over spilt milk.*  
(C'est) inutile de pleurer sur le lait versé.

*It is no use trying to deceive me.*  
Il est inutile que vous essayiez de me tromper.

*It is not nice being poor.*  
Il ne fait pas bon être pauvre.
It is not pleasant waiting long.
Ce n’est pas amusant d’attendre longtemps.

1.2.1.C.c. Representing a clause
There are two types of sentences as the following:
i. It + be + Adjective + Clause
ii. It + Verb + Clause

1.2.1.C.c.i. Type: It + be + Adjective + Clause
In the following, the clause represented by the Nominative it (the provisional subject) is set in italic. (☞2.2.2. B. c. i.)

It is important that everyone should know of it.
Il est important que tout le monde le sache.

It is of no importance to me what people will think of it.
Peu m’importe ce qu’on en pensera.

It is / seems perfectly natural that she should succeed.
Il est / semble parfaitement naturel qu’elle ait réussi.

It is strange that you should not have heard of it.
Il est étonnant que vous ne l’ayez pas appris.

It is true that I was there.
Il est vrai que j’étais là.

1.2.1.C.c.ii. Type: It + Verb + Clause
In the following, the clause represented by the Nominative it (the provisional subject) is set in italic. (☞2.2.2. B. c. ii.)

It doesn’t matter whether he comes or not.
Il importe peu qu’il vienne ou ne vienne pas.

It happens that the machine goes out of order.
Il arrive que la machine se dérègle.

It so happens that I have an hour to spare.
Il se trouve que j’ai une heure de libre.

It looks as if he wouldn’t go.
Il semble qu’il ne veut/veuille pas y aller.
It struck me that he could not answer you.
Cela m'a frappé qu'il n'ait pu vous répondre.

1.2.1.D. Entity-less subject

The Nominative it is used in a cleft sentence, so called by R. Quirk and others in their book A Grammar of Contemporary English. The cleft sentence brings into prominence a particular element of the clause which is divided into two separate sections. Each of the two sections has its own verb.*

*Quirk, R. et al., op. cit. p. 961

The sentence pattern of the cleft sentence is:

It + be + a particular element + that / who-Clause.

The particular element that is given prominence may be (a) subject, (b) object of a verb, (c) preposition and its object, (d) adverbial adjunct (time, place, cause, etc.).

In the following, the particular element given prominence is set in italic. We should note that when translated into French, the Nominative it is rendered into en instead of il.

1.2.1.D.a. Subject in focus

It was he who told me.
C'est lui qui me l'a dit.

It is Mr. Duval that teaches us Latin.
C'est M. Duval qui enseigne à nous le latin.

It is my friend that gave me the flower.
C'est mon ami qui m'a donné la fleur.

1.2.1.D.b. Object of a verb in focus

It is English and French that he wants to learn.
C'est l'anglais et le français qu'il désire apprendre.

It is John and Mary that I want to see.
C'est Jean et Marie que je veux voir.
1.2.1.D.c. Preposition and its object in focus

It is *from Japan* that I came.
C'est du Japon que je suis venu.

It is *to your father* that I wish to speak.
C'est à votre père que je desire parler.

1.2.1.D.d. Adverbial adjunct in focus

It is *at the station* that I wait for them.
C'est à la gare que je les attends.

It is *because he is ill in bed* that he is not with us today.
S'il n'est pas des nôtres aujourd'hui, c'est qu'il est alité.

It was *yesterday* that I went to London.
C'est hier que je suis allé à Londres. (C'était hier que j'allais à Londres.)

1.2.1.E. Vague subject

The Nominative *it* sometimes does not represent anything particular but it represents vaguely a situation. (Æ)2.2.C.

In the following, the vague subject *it* is set in Gothic.

How is *it* going with your business?
Comment vont les affaires?

If *it* were not for you, I should be lost.
Sans vous j'étais perdu.

*It's* all over with me.
Je n'y peux rien.

*It is* all right.
C'est parfait. (Tout va bien.)

That's how *it* is.
C'est comme ça.

That's *it*. (Note: Here *it* is a subjective complement.)
C'est ça.
Whose turn is it? (Who's next?)
A qui le tour?

It's your turn.
C'est à votre tour.

1.2.1.F. Subject suppressed

The Nominative *it* is sometimes omitted in certain idiomatic expressions. In the following, the Nominative *it* could stand at the position marked by the asterisk(*). (Ex. 2.2. D.)

As * is often the case with young women, she spends long moments in front of her mirror.
Comme il arrive souvent aux jeunes femmes, elle passe de longs moments devant son miroir.

As * is usual with young men, he has a nice lie-in on Sunday morning.
Comme tous les jeunes hommes, il fait la grasse matinée le dimanche.

We paid less than * was expected.
Nous avons payé moins que nous ne nous y attendions.

1.2.2. Dative *it*

The present-day English *it*, neuter pronoun of the third person, singular, dative (hereinafter referred to as Dative *it*) is not used very often. We meet the Dative *it* in the expression of “give it a / one thought”.

In the following, the Dative *it* is set in Gothic and the phrase in the accusative case (that is the direct object of the verb) is set in italic.

It is worth noting that there is no dative for *il* and that when the Dative *it* is translated into French, it is rendered into *y*.

Have you ever given it a thought?
Y avez-vous pensé un seul instant?

I haven't given it a thought.
Je n'y ai pas accordé la moindre réflexion.

I did not give it another thought.
Je n'y ai pas repensé.
Old age comes on without our having given it a thought.
La vieillesse arrive sans qu'on y pense.

1.2.3. Accusative it

The present-day English *it*, neuter pronoun of the third person, singular, accusative (hereinafter referred to as Accusative *it*) is used as a direct object of a verb or a preposition.

The Accusative *it*, as such, is sometimes (A) real, (B) provisional, or (C) vague.

1.2.3. A. Real object

As in the case of the Nominative *it* as a real subject (1.2.1. A.), the Accusative *it* as a real object generally refers back to something previously mentioned. The thing referred to by the Accusative *it* is (a) a lifeless thing, (b) a living thing (when its sex is unknown or unimportant), or (c) a baby or a small child (when its sex is unknown or a matter of indifference).

Inasmuch as French *il* is always nominative, we do not translate the Accusative *it* into *il*. In French, we use *le, la, en,* or *y* according as occasion needs.

1.2.3. A.a. Referring to a lifeless thing

In the following, the Accusative *it* is set in Gothic and the noun represented by *it* is set in italic.

A *thing* is impossible only when one thinks *it* so.
Une chose n'est pas impossible que lorsqu'on crois qu'elle l'est.
(N.B. elle: une chose  l': la i.e. impossible)

Do you like the *house*? — Yes, I like *it* very much.
Aimez-vous la *maison*? — Oui, je l'aime beaucoup.

Do you need this *dictionary*? — Yes, I need *it*.
Avez-vous besoin de ce *dictionnaire*? — Oui, j'en ai besoin.

Do you think of your *country*? — Yes, I think of *it* often.
Est-ce que vous pensez à votre *pays*? — Oui, j'y pense souvent.
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You have heard the *news*? — Yes, we were speaking of *it*.  
Vous avez appris la *nouvelle*? — Oui, nous *en* parlions.

1.2.3. A.b. **Referring to a living thing**

In the following, the Accusative *it* is set in Gothic and the noun represented by it is set in italic.

Do you like the *rose*? — Yes, I like it very much.  
Aimez-vous la *rose*? — Oui, je l'aime beaucoup.

That's the *panda* that is eating bamboo there. How do you like it?  
C'est le *panda* qui mange du bambou là-bas. Comment le trouvez-vous?

You have a nice *dog*. How many times a day do you feed it?  
Vous avez un bon *chien*. Combien de fois par jour le nourrissez-vous?

1.2.3. A.c. **Referring to a baby or a small child**

In the following, the Accusative *it* is set in Gothic and the noun represented by it is set in italic.

A *baby* is born to her. She loves *it* devotedly.  
Il lui est né un *bébé*. Elle l'aime comme ses yeux.

Take the *child* and put *it* in bed.  
Amènes l' *enfant* et le mets au lit.

The *child* is asleep. Don't wake *it* up.  
L' enfant est endormi. Ne l'éveillez pas.

1.2.3. B. **Provisional object**

The Accusative *it* is often used as a provisional object of a verb, representing a group of words to be mentioned afterwards. The group of words may be (a) an infinitive phrase, (b) a gerundial phrase, or (c) a clause.

We should note that there is not a provisional object in French.

1.2.3. B.a. **Representing an infinitive phrase**

In the following, the Accusative *it*, or the provisional object, is set in
Gothic; and the infinitive phrase represented by it is set in italic.

I leave it to others to answer.
Je laisse à d'autres le soin de répondre.

I make it a rule to take exercise every day.
Je me fais une règle de prendre l'exercice tous les jours.

I shall esteem it a pleasure to oblige you.
Ce sera pour moi un grand plaisir de vous obliiger.

She thought it useless to proceed on.
Elle jugea inutile de continuer.

They believe it their duty to look after our morals
Ils croient de leur devoir de surveiller nos mœurs.

They made it hard for us to find out the truth.
Ils ont rendu difficile pour nous de découvrir la vérité.

1.2.3.B.b. Representing a gerundial phrase

In the following, the Accusative it, or the provisional object, is set in Gothic; and the gerundial phrase represented by it is set in italic.

Do you think it possible your doing it? — I think I could.
Pensez-vous que cela vous serait possible? — Je pense que oui.

Don't you think it foolish strolling in the rain without a raincoat?
Tu ne trouves pas stupide de flaner à la pluie sans imperméable?

He calls it an utter waste of time and energy playing mahjong all night.
De jouer au ma-jong toute la nuit, il appelle cela une perte de temps et d'énergie.

I find it quite ridiculous his making such fuss.
Il me semble parfaitement ridicule qu'il en fasse si une grosse affaire.

I find it very childish his getting angry.
Ses accès d'humeur me semblent bien puerils.

I found it no use trying to tell him.
Je trouvais qu'il était inutile d'essayer de le lui dire.

I think it rather dangerous your venturing out in such weather.
Je crois qu'il est très dangereux pour vous de vous risquer dehors par un temps pareil.
1.2.3.B.c. **Representing a clause**

In the following, the Accusative *it*, or the provisional object, is set in Gothic; and the clause represented by it is set in italic.

I take *it* for granted *that you will come*.
C'est entendu que vous venez.

If you have *it that they are honest*, I have nothing to say.
Si vous soutenez qu'ils sont honnêtes, je n'ai plus rien à dire.

She took *it* into her head *that he was angry*.
Elle s'est mis dans la tête qu'il était fâché.

You will see to *it that he has all he needs*.
Vous veillerez à ce qu'il ait tout ce qu'il lui faut.

We owe *it* to him *that we had some oil last winter*.
Nous lui devons d'avoir eu quelque pétrole l'hiver dernier.

1.2.3.C. **Vague object**

In a number of idiomatic expressions, the Accusative *it* is used, representing nothing specified but vaguely the situation. Hereinafter this type of *it* is referred to as Vague object *it*. The Vague object *it* is often (a) the object of a verb but sometimes (b) the object of a preposition.

In the following, the idiomatic expression including the Vague object *it* is set in italic.

1.2.3.C.a. **Object of a verb**

He *lords it over* everyone.
Il vit comme en pays conquis. (Tout plie devant lui.)

I *gave it* him.
Je lui ai lavé la tête.

I let him *have it*.
(i) Je lui ai dit son fait.
(ii) Je lui ai flanqué une raclée.

That's *coming it* rather strong!
Ça, c'est un peu fort!
You'll *catch it!*
Vous allez être grondé! (Tu va être renner!)

1.2.3. c.b. **Object of a preposition**

*He is in for it!*
Le voilà dans de beaux draps!

*He made a clean breast of it.*
Il a fait des aveux complets.

*Let's make a day of it!*
Nous allons faire la noce aujourd'hui.

*There is nothing for it but to go yourself.*
Il n'y a rien (d'autre) à faire que d'y aller vous-même.

*You have the best of it.*
C'est vous le mieux partagé.

---

2. **il across the board**

2.1. **Etymology**

For the present-day French *il*, there are two etymological sources: (1) one for the personal pronoun *il* and (2) the other for the impersonal pronoun *il*.

2.1.1. **For the personal pronoun *il***

The present-day French *il*, personal pronoun of the third person, masculine, singular, unstressed, nominative, (hereinafter referred to as personal pronoun *il*), is derived from the 10th century Popular Latin *illi*, which comes from the Classic Latin *ille*, meaning 'that' (celui-là).*

2.1.2. **For the impersonal pronoun *il***

The present-day French *il*, impersonal pronoun of the third person,
neuter, singular, unstressed, nominative, (hereinafter referred to as impersonal pronoun *il*), is derived from the Classic Latin *illud*, meaning 'it' (cela), which is the neuter nominative form, the corresponding masculine and feminine forms being *ille* and *illa*.*


2.2. Grammar

The present-day French *il* is a pronoun of the third person, singular, unstressed, nominative. It is either (1) a personal pronoun, masculine, or (2) an impersonal pronoun, neuter.

2.2.1. Personal pronoun *il*

The personal pronoun *il* serves as a real subject of the sentence in which it stands. It refers back to a noun previously mentioned, masculine in gender and singular in number.

When translated into English, however, this *il* may be rendered into (a) *he*, (b) *she*, or (c) *it* according as the English noun into which the French noun is put is masculine, feminine or neuter in gender.

2.2.1.a. When *il* is rendered into *he*

In the following, the French noun referred to by *il* and its English version are set in italic; the personal pronoun *il* and its English version are set in Gothic.

— Mon frère désire aller en Suisse.
— Où est-il maintenant?
— Il est en Angleterre.

"My brother wants to go to Switzerland."
"Where is he now?"
"He is in England."

2.2.1.b. When *il* is rendered into *she*

In the following, the French noun referred to by *il* and its English
version are set in italic; the personal pronoun *il* and its English version are set in Gothic.

Voici notre *navire*. Il est battu par les vagues, mais *il* ne sombre pas.

Here is our *ship*. *She* is buffeted by the waves, but *she* does not sink.

2.2.1.c. When *il* is rendered into *it*

In the following, the French noun referred to by *il* and its English version are set in italic; the personal pronoun *il* and its English version are set in Gothic.

C'est à vous ce *chapeau*? Qu'il est bon!
Is this *hat* yours? How nice *it* is!

2.2.2. Impersonal pronoun *il*

Always nominative, as is with the personal pronoun *il*, the impersonal pronoun *il* serves as a subject of a sentence in which it stands. The impersonal pronoun *il* does not stand for a person nor a thing, animate or inanimate. It is a mere tool word (*mot-outil*), formally leading a verb.

As a subject of a sentence, the impersonal pronoun *il* is sometimes (A) empty, (B) apparent, (C) vague, or (D) suppressed.*


2.2.2.a. Empty subject

The impersonal pronoun *il* formally leads an impersonal verb indicative of an action or a state that cannot be attributed to any person or thing.

The sentence composed of this type of impersonal pronoun *il* (the empty subject) and an impersonal verb serves to tell (a) weather, (b) time, (c) distance, or (d) existence.
2.2.2. A.a. For weather

There are four types of sentences that are led by the empty subject *il* and serve to tell weather:

i. Il pleut.
ii. Il fait beau.
iii. Il fait (un) beau temps.
iv. Il tombe une pluie.

2.2.2. A.a. i. Type: Il pleut.

In this type, the impersonal *il* (the empty subject) is simply followed by an impersonal verb indicative of a meteorological phenomenon. (Ε₁ 2. 1. B. a. i.)

Il bruine [deglêle, gêle].
It is drizzling [thawing, freezing].

Il grêle / grésille [neige].
It is hailing [snowing].

Il pleut [tonne, vente].
It is raining [thundering, blowing].

2.2.2. A.a. ii. Type: Il fait beau.

In this type, the impersonal pronoun *il* (the empty subject) is followed by an impersonal verb *faire* plus an adjective descriptive of a meteorological phenomenon. (Ε₁ 2. 1. B. a. ii.)

Il fait beau [brumeux].
It is fine [foggy].

Il fait chaud [frais, frisquet, froid].
It is warm [cool, chilly, cold].

Il fait doux [mauvais, orageux].
It is mild [bad, stormy].

Il fait humide [lourd, sombre / obscure].
It is damp [sultry, dark].
2.2.2. A.a. iii. Type: Il fait (un) beau temps.

In this type, the impersonal pronoun *il* (the empty subject) is followed by an impersonal verb *faire* plus a noun indicative of a meteorological phenomenon. (\[\text{2.1.2. B. a. iii.}\])

Quel temps fait-il?
What is the weather (like)? (How is the weather?)

Il fait (un) beau [mauvais] temps.
It is fine [bad] weather.

Il fait du brouillard [soleil, vent].
It is foggy [sunny, windy] (weather).

Il fait des éclairs.
It is lightening. (Lightning is flashing)

Il fait un temps couvert / nuageux.
It is cloudy weather.

Il fait une chaleur accablante.
It is overwhelmingly warm.

Il fait une tempête.
It is stormy weather.

Il fait vingt-huit degrés à l’ombre.
The mercury stands at twenty-eight degrees in the shade.

Il va faire de l’orage. (Le temps est à l’orage.)
We are going to have a thunderstorm. (There is going to be a thunderstorm.)

For the following, compare with 1. 2. 1. B. a. ii.

En hiver il fait jour tard et il fait nuit tôt.
In winter it gets light (day breaks) late and it gets dark (night falls) early.

2.2.2. A.a. iv. Type: Il tombe une pluie.

The sentence structure of this type is the same as the 2.2.2. B.a. sentences. The impersonal pronoun *il* is the apparent subject of the sentence in which it stands. The noun which follows the impersonally-used verb is the real subject.
In translating this type of sentences into English, we can put the noun as the subject of the sentence, if we so wish.

Il s'étend un brouillard au-desus de la rivière.
A mist is hanging over the river. (There hangs a mist over the river.)

Il souffle un vent glacé.
An icy wind is blowing.

Il tombait du grésil/des grelons.
The hailstones were falling. (It was hailing.)

Il tombe de la neige à gros flocons.
The snow is coming down in large flakes.

Il tombe une pluie diluvienne/torrentielle.
(Il pleut/tombe des hallebardes.)
The rain is pouring down.
(It is raining cats and dogs.)

Il ventait tempêt.
A gale was blowing.

2.2.2. A. b. For time

The impersonal pronoun il (the empty subject) becomes a formal subject of a sentence telling (i) a time point, or (ii) a lapse of time.

(cf. 1. 2. 1. B. b.)

2.2.2. A. b. i. For a time point

The impersonal pronoun il (the empty subject) followed by an impersonal verb être (or se faire=être) plus noun indicative of a chronological point or an adjective descriptive of time serves to tell time. (Es1. 2. 1. B. b. i.)

Quelle heure est-il? — Il est deux heures un quart.
What time is it? — It's a quarter past two.

Il est cinq heures dix.
It's ten (minutes) past five (o'clock).

Il est huit heures moins le quart.
It's a quarter to eight.
Il est midi [minuit] juste.
It's just noon [midnight].

Il est neuf heures moins dix.
It's ten minutes to nine.

Il est encore tôt.
It is still early.

Il se fait tard.
It is (getting) late.

2.2.2 A. b. ii. **For a lapse of time**

The impersonal pronoun *il* followed by a verb phrase *y a* plus a noun indicative of duration of time serves to tell a lapse of time. (§1. 2. 1. B. b. ii.)

In this type of sentences, *il* is an apparent subject and the noun that follows the gallicism *il y a* is the real subject. (cf. 2. 2. 2. B.)

Il y a combien de cela?
How long is it since?

Il y a juste huit jours qu'il est arrivé.
It is just a week since he came.

Il y a longtemps qu'ils sont partis.
It is a long time since they left.

Il y a trente ans que je ne l'ai rencontrée.
It is thirty years since I met her last.

Il y eut une seconde d'hésitation de ma part.
There was a second of hesitation on my part.

2.2.2 A. c. **For distance**

The impersonal pronoun *il* followed by a verb phrase *y a* plus a noun indicative of a spatial length serves to tell distance. (§1. 2. 1. B. c.)

Here again *il* is an apparent subject and the noun that follows the gallicism *il y a* is the real subject. (cf. 2. 2. 2. B.)

Combien y a-t-il d'ici à Paris?
How far is it (what distance is there) from here to Paris?
Il y a dix kilomètres d’ici à Paris.
It is ten kilometers from here to Paris.

Il y a loin de Paris à Moscou.
It is a long way from Paris to Moscow.

Il y a loin jusqu’à Rome.
It is a long way to Rome.

Il y a une longue course d’ici là.
It is a long way from here.

2.2.2. A. d. For existence

A gallicism il y a, composed of the impersonal pronoun il and a verb phrase y a, serves to tell existence just as an anglicism there is does.

Here again il is an apparent subject and the noun that follows il y a is the real subject. Different from there is (there being not a subject at all), the noun that follows il y a may be singular or plural. (cf. 2.2.2. B.)

Dans le théâtre il n’y avait pas que des grandes personnes.
In the theater there were only grown-ups.

Il y a de la honte à agir ainsi.
It is a shame to act like this. (There is a shame in behaving like this.)

Il y a du vent.
It is windy. (There is some wind.)

Sur la table, il y a l’argenterie: des fourchettes, des couteaux et des cuillers.
On the table there is the silverware: forks, knives and spoons.

Il y en a qui pensent.
Among people, there are some who think.

Il n’y a pas de quoi se fâcher.
There is nothing one should be angry about.

Y a-t-il de reste?
Is there any left?

2.2.2. B. Apparent subject

When the impersonal pronoun il is followed by a personal verb set in
the impersonal construction (*un verbe personnel mis à la tournure/construction impersonnelle*), *il* is only the apparent subject (*le sujet apparent*). The real or logical subject (*le sujet réel ou logique*) follows the verb. But the verb agrees with the apparent subject *il* in person and number (the third person, singular), not with the real subject.

The real subject represented by the apparent subject *il* is sometimes (a) a noun or a noun phrase, (b) an infinitive phrase, or (c) a clause.

2.2.2. B.a. Representing a noun or a noun phrase

In the following the impersonally-used verb is set in Gothic and the real subject is set in italic.

*Il entre* au zoo *des millions de visiteurs.*
Millions of visitors enter the zoo.

*Il est* des choses qui ne sont bonnes à dire.
These are some things that you had better not mention.

*Il lui échappe* parfois la vérité.
He sometimes blurts out the truth.

*Il lui est arrivé* un malheur.
A misfortune has befallen him.

*Il était* une fois une fée.
Once upon a time there was a fairy.

*Il existe* une solution à ce problème.
There is a solution to this problem.

*Il n'est* point de rose sans épines,
There is no rose without a thorn.

*Il faut* de la patience pour ce travail.
Patience is needed for this work.

*Il manque* une feuille à ce livre.
There is a page missing in this book.

*Il passait* sans arrêt des voitures.
There was a constant stream of cars passing.
Il règna la silence sur tout.
Silence reigned everywhere.

Il reste seulement deux places.
There are only two seats left.

Il s'agit de son avenir.
His future is at stake. (It concerns his future.)

Il s'ensuivit de grands maux.
Big evils ensued.

Il se produisait un véritable drame.
A very dramatic event took place.

Il suffit d'une imprudence pour provoquer un accident.
An imprudence is enough to cause an accident.

Il vente si fort qu'il tombe par millions des feuilles mortes et qu'il n'en reste plus aux branches.
The wind is blowing so hard that dead leaves fall by millions and leaves are no longer left on the branches.

Il vient un courant d'air de ce côté.
There is a draft on this side.

2.2.2.B.b. Representing an infinitive phrase

There are two types of sentences as the following:

i. Il + Verb + Infinitive Phrase

ii. Il + me [te, lui, nous, vous, leur] + Verb + Infinitive Phrase
   or Il + V. + à / pour qn. [qch.] + Inf. Phrase

2.2.2.B.b.i. Type: Il + Verb + Inf. Phrase

In the following, the impersonally-used verb is set in Gothic and the infinitive phrase which is the real subject is set in italic. (Æ1. 2. 1. c. a. i.)

Il est honteux de mentir.
It is shameful to tell a lie.

Il est interdit de fumer ici.
Smoking is prohibited here.
Il est prudent de traverser la rue sur le passage clouté.
It is prudent to cross the road by the pedestrian crossing.

Il fait bon flanèr.
It is nice to stroll about.

Il ne faut pas courir deux lièvres à la fois.
Don't run after two hares at a time. (It won't do to run after two hares at a time.)

2.2.2. B. b. ii. Type: (Il+me [te, etc.]+V.+Inf. Phrase)
Il+V.+à/pour qn. [qch.] +Inf. Phr.

In the following, (me [te, etc.] + Verb) or (Verb+à/pour+qn. [qch.])
is set in Gothic and the infinitive phrase which is the real subject is set
in italic. (Ex. 2.1. C. a. ii.)

Il est difficile pour jeunes élèves d'exprimer leurs idées.
It is difficult for young pupils to express their ideas.

Il est rare à cette montre de se dérégler.
It is rare that this watch goes out of order.

La machine est très juste. Mais il lui arrive parfois de se dérégler.
The machine is very precise. But sometimes it happens that it gets out of order.

Il m'arrive souvent d'oublier.
I often forget. (I am apt to forget.)

Il m'est impossible de faire cela.
I cannot do that. (That's beyond me.)

Il me faut avoir de la volonté.
I have to be strong-willed. (I have to have a strong will.)

Il ne me convient pas d'agir ainsi.
It is not proper for me to act like this.

Il nous est important d'avoir une bonne santé.
It is important for us to have good health.

2.2.2. B. c. Representing a clause

There are two types of sentences as the following:

i. Il + être + Adjectif + Proposition
ii. Il+Verbe+Proposition

2.2.2. B. c. i. Type: Il+être+Adjectif+Proposition

In the following, the impersonally-used verb is set in Gothic and the clause which is the real subject is set in italic. (EF1. 2. 1. C. e. i.)

Il est important qu'on le sache.
It is important that it should be known.

Il est impossible qu'il revienne en temps.
He cannot possibly come back in time.

(Il est rare, dit le vendeur, que nos clients ne soient pas contents.)
"It is rare", says the salesman, "that our customers shouldn't be satisfied."

Il est vrai que j'étais là.
It is true that I was there.

Il n'est pas surprenant qu'un chien fasse des kilomètres pour retrouver son maître.
It is not surprising that a dog should go miles and miles to find his master again.

2.2.2. B. c. ii. Type: Il+Verbe+Proposition

In the following, the impersonally-used verb is set in Gothic and the clause which is the real subject is set in italic. (EF1. 2. 1. C. e. ii.)

Il convient que vous y alliez.
It is proper that you should go there. (You should go there.)

Il faut que les étudiants apprennent deux langues étrangères.
The students must learn two foreign languages

Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée.
The door should be either opened or closed.

Il importe peu qu'il vienne ou non.
It doesn't matter whether he comes or not.

Il s'en est fallu de peu qu'elle se fasse écraser.
She was within an ace of being run over.

Il s'ensuit que nous avons raison.
Hence it follows that we are right.
Il se trouve que vous avez raison.
You happen to be right.

2.2.2.c. Vague subject
The impersonal pronoun *il* sometimes does not represent a real subject but it vaguely represents an idea of the locution that precedes. *(F.1.3.2.E.)*

In the following, the impersonal pronoun *il* is set in Gothic and the locution that is vaguely represented by it is set in italic.

Répondez s'il vous plaît.
Answer if you please. (Answer if it pleases you.)

Interprète-le comme il vous plaira.
Interprete it as you like. (Interprete it as it will please you.)

J'ai différé de le dire, mais il m'échappe.
I have postponed to talk of it, but finally I blurt it out.

Je ne sais pas encore parler français comme il faut.
I can't yet speak French properly. (I can't yet speak French as I should do.)

2.2.2.d. Subject suppressed
The impersonal pronoun *il* is omitted in certain idiomatic expressions. *(F.1.2.1.F.)*

In the following, the impersonally-used verb is set in Gothic and the real subject is set in italic; in the parentheses, the asterisk (*) indicates the position that the suppressed *il* could stand in.

M'est avis qu'il viendra. (*'m'est avis...*)
I rather think that he will come.

Mieux vaut se passer de thé que manquer le train. (*'vaut mieux se passer....*)
Better do without tea than miss the train. (It would be better to do....)

Mieux vaut tard que jamais. (*'vaut mieux....*)
Better late than never. (Doing it late would be better than never doing it.)

N'empêche que cela m'a coûté cher. (*'n'empêche que....*)
All the same, it has cost me dear.
Peu m'importe que la chambre à coucher donne sur la montagne ou la mer. (*m'importe peu que...*)
It makes no difference to me whether the bedroom looks out on the mountain or the sea.

3. The Similarities between *it* and *il*

As we have seen in 1. and 2., there are much more differences than similarities between the English pronoun *it* and the French pronoun *il*.

The writer decides to let alone the differences and focus his attention on the similarities.

The pronouns *it* and *il* are remarkably similar to each other when they are (A) empty subjects or (B) provisional subjects of sentences.

3.A. Empty subjects

Both *it* and *il* play the role of empty subjects of sentences that tell of (a) weather, (b) time, or (c) distance.

3.A.a. Empty subjects in sentences telling of weather

Both the English pronoun *it* and the French pronoun *il* stand as empty subject of sentences telling meteorological conditions. They are empty because they do not represent anything specified but simply stand as the subjects of sentences.

The English pronoun *it* and the French pronoun *il* are closely similar to each other:

(i) when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.B.a.i. like 'It rains / It is raining' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.A.a.i. like 'Il pleut';

(ii) when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.B.a.ii. like 'It is fine' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.A.a.ii. like 'Il fait beau'; and
(iii) when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.B.a.iii. like 'It is good weather' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.A.a.iii. like 'Il fait (un) beau temps'. In the following, we will see some examples.

3. A.a.i. Type: \[
\begin{align*}
\text{Empty } & \text{it} + \text{Verb} \quad (1. 1. 1. B. a. i.) \\
\text{Empty } & \text{il} + \text{Verb} \quad (2. 2. A. a. i.)
\end{align*}
\]

It is blowing hard. (It blows hard.)
Il vente fort.

It is drizzling. (It drizzles.)
Il bruine.

It is hailing. (It hails.)
Il grêle.

It is freezing hard. (It freezes hard.)
Il gèle dur / à pierre.

It is raining. (It rains.)
Il pleut.

It is snowing. (It snows.)
Il neige.

It is thawing. (It thaws.)
Il dégèle.

It is thundering. (It thunders.)
Il tonne.

N.B. It is lightening. \((1. 1. 1. B. a. i.)\) (Lightning is flashing.)
Il fait des éclairs. \((1. 1. 1. B. a. i.)\)

3. A.a.ii. Type: \[
\begin{align*}
\text{Empty } & \text{it} + \text{be} + \text{Adj} \quad (1. 1. 1. B. a. ii.) \\
\text{Empty } & \text{il} + \text{faire} + \text{Adj} \quad (2. 2. 2. A. a. ii.)
\end{align*}
\]

It is bad.
Il fait mauvais.

It is chilly.
Il fait frisquet.

It is dry.
Il fait sec.

It is fair / fine / good.
Il fait beau.
It is cold. It is mild.
Il fait froid. Il fait doux.

It is cool. It is stormy.
Il fait frais. Il fait orageux.

It is damp. It is sultry.
Il fait humide. Il fait lourd.

It is dark. It is warm.
Il fait obscure / sombre. Il fait chaud.

N.B. It is cloudy. (1. 2. 1. B. a. ii.)
Le temps est couvert.

It is foggy / misty. (1. 2. 1. B. a. ii.)
Il fait du brouillard. (2. 2. 2. A. a. iii.)
Il y a du brouillard. (2. 2. 2. A. d.)

It is rainy. (1. 2. 1. B. a. ii.)
Le temps est à la pluie.

It is sunny. (1. 2. 1. B. a. ii.)
Il fait du soleil. (2. 2. 2. A. a. iii.)

It is windy. (1. 2. 1. B. a. ii.)
Il fait du vent. (2. 2. 2. A. a. iii.)

It is dark [light]. (1. 2. 1. B. a. ii.)
(Night falls. [Day breaks.])
Il fait nuit [jour]. (Il+faire+Noun: 2. 2. 2. A. a. iii.)

3. A. a. iii. Type: | Empty it + be + Adj. + weather. (1. 2. 1. B. a. iii.)
Empty it + faire + (Adj.) temps. (2. 2. 2. A. a. iii.)

It is bad / nasty weather.
Il fait mauvais temps.

It is changeable / fickle weather.
Il fait un temps changeable / variable.

It is cloudy weather.
Il fait un temps couvert / nuageux.

It is delightful weather.
Il fait un temps delicieux.
It is fine / good weather.
Il fait beau temps.

It is stormy weather.
Il fait une tempête.

It is sunny weather.
Il fait du soleil.

It is windy weather.
Il fait du vent.

3. A. b. **Empty subjects in sentences telling of time**

Both the English pronoun *it* and the French pronoun *il* stand as empty subjects of sentences telling time points or lapses of time. The subjects are empty because they do not represent anything specified but simply stand as the subjects of sentences.

The English pronoun *it* and the French pronoun *il* are closely similar to each other:

(i) when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.B.b.i. like 'It is five o'clock' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.A.b.i. like 'Il est cinq heures'; and

(ii) when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.B.b.ii. like 'It is three years since he went to Canada' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.A.b.ii. like 'Il y a trois ans depuis qu'il est allé au Canada'.

In the following, we will see some examples.

3. A. b. i. **Type:**

**Empty it + be + Time Point** (1.2.1.B.b.i.)

**Empty il + être + Time Point** (2.2.2.A.b.i.)

* It is six o'clock in the morning.
  Il est six heures du matin.

* It is ten minutes to eight o'clock.
  Il est huit heures moins dix.

* It is five minutes past eight.
  Il est huit heures et cinq.
It is 10 : 45.
Il est onze heures moins le quart.

It is 11 : 15.
Il est onze heures et (un) quart.

It is noon.
Il est midi.

It is three o'clock in the afternoon.
Il est trois heures du l'après-midi.

It is 7 : 30 in the evening.
Il est sept heures et demie du soir.

It is midnight.
Il est minuit.

N.B. What day is it today? (l. 2. 1. b. i.)
Quel jour sommes-nous?

Today it is Thursday, the first of June. (l. 2. 1. b. i.)
C'est aujourd'hui, jeudi, le premier de juin.

It is still winter. (l. 2. 1. b. i.)
C'est encore l'hiver.

3. A. b. i. Type: { Empty it + be + Time Length + since-Clause (l. 2. 1. b. ii.)
Empty il + y a + Time Length + (depuis) que-Clause (2. 2. 2. A. b. ii.)

How long is it since they left?
Combien y a-t-il qu'ils sont partis?

It is a long time since they left.
Il y a longtemps qu'ils sont partis.

It is five years since he took up residence in Rome.
Il y a cinq ans qu'il s'est installé à Rome.

It is more than seven years since I returned from Canada.
Il y a plus de sept ans que je suis rentré du Canada.

It is ten years since I met her last.
Il y a dix ans que je ne l'ai rencontrée.
3. A. c. Empty subjects in sentences telling of distance

Both the English pronoun *it* and the French pronoun *il* stand as empty subjects of sentences telling spatial lengths. The subjects are empty because they do not represent anything specified but simply stand as the subjects of sentences.

The English pronoun *it* and the French pronoun *il* are closely similar to each other when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.B.c. like 'It is ten miles from here to London' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.A.e. like 'Il y a dix milles d'ici à Londres'.

In the following, we will see some examples.

How far is it from here to the station?
Combien y a-t-il d'ici à la gare?

It is only ten minute's walk from here.
Il n'y a que dix minutes de marche d'ici là.

It is a long journey/ride from here.
Il y a longue course d'ici là.

It is long way to Paris.
Il y a loin jusqu'à Paris. (Paris est bien loin.)

It is seven hundred kilometers from here to Paris.
Il y a sept cent kilomètres d'ici à Paris.

It is a long way from Paris to Moscow.
Il y a loin de Paris à Moscou.

3. B. Provisional subjects

Both *it* and *il* play the role of provisional subjects, representing a group of words that come afterwards and are virtually real subjects.

In case of the French impersonal pronoun *il*, it can represent a noun or a noun phrase that comes afterwards and is virtually the real subject of a sentence. But this is not the case with the English pronoun *it*.

The group of words that can be represented by both *it* and *il* is either (a) an infinitive phrase or (b) a clause.
3.B.a. Representing infinitive phrases

The English pronoun *it* and the French pronoun *il* are closely similar to each other:

(i) when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.C.a.i. like 'It is easy to say' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.B.b.i. like 'Il est aisé de dire'; and

(ii) when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.C.a.ii. like 'It is easy for him to say' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.B.b.ii. like 'Il est aisé pour lui de dire/Il lui est aisé de dire'.

In the following, we will see some examples.

3.B.a.i. Type: \[
\begin{align*}
\text{It is easy to say. (1. 2. 1. C. a. i.)} \\
\text{Il est aisé de dire. (2. 2. 2. B. b. i.)}
\end{align*}
\]

- It is forbidden to smoke here.
  Il est interdit de fumer ici.

- It is important to keep your room clean.
  Il est important de tenir votre chambre propre.

- It is impossible to work in this heat.
  Il est impossible de travailler par cette chaleur.

- It is never too late to mend.
  Il n'est jamais trop tard pour s'amender.

- It is prudent to cross the road by the pedestrian crossing.
  Il est prudent de traverser la rue sur le passage clouté.

- It is shameful to tell a lie.
  Il est honteux de mentir.

3.B.a.ii. Type: \[
\begin{align*}
\text{It is easy for him to say. (1. 2. 1. C. a. ii.)} \\
\text{Il est aisé à / pour lui de dire. (2. 2. 2. B. b. ii.)} \\
\text{Il lui est aisé de dire. (2. 2. 2. B. b. ii.)}
\end{align*}
\]

- It is easy for him to do that.
  Il lui est facile de le faire.
It is difficult for young pupils to express their ideas.
Il est difficile à jeunes élèves d'exprimer leurs idées.

It is important for us to have good health.
Il nous est important d'avoir une bonne santé.

It is impossible for me to speak seven languages.
Il m'est impossible de parler sept langues.

It is not proper for him to act like that.
Il lui n'est pas convenable d'agir ainsi.

3.B.b. Representing clauses

The English pronoun *it* and the French pronoun *il* are closely similar to each other:

(i) when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.C.c.i. like 'It is true that I was there' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.B.c.i. like 'Il est vrai que j'étais là'; and

(ii) when English sentences are in the pattern of 1.2.1.C.c.ii. like 'It happens that the machine goes out of order' and French sentences are in the pattern of 2.2.2.B.c.ii. like 'Il arrive que la machine se dérègle'.

3.B.b.1. Type:

- **It is true that I was there.** (1. 2. 1. C. c. i.)
- **Il est vrai que j'étais là.** (2. 2. 2. B. c. i.)

It is important that everyone should know of it.
Il est important que tout le monde le sache.

It is/seems perfectly natural that she should succeed.
Il est/seemble parfaitement naturel qu'elle ait réussi.

It is rare that our customers should not be satisfied.
Il est rare que nos clients ne soient pas contents.

It is strange that you should not have heard of it.
Il est étonnant que vous ne l'ayez pas appris.

It is not surprising that a dog should go miles and miles to find its master again.
Il n'est pas surprenant qu'un chien fasse des kilomètres pour retrouver son maître.
A Comparative Study of the English Pronoun *it* and the French Pronoun *il*.

3. B. b. ii. Type: \{ It happens that-Clause (1. 2. 1. C. e. ii.) \\
Il arrive que-Proposition (2. 2. 2. B. c. ii.) \\

It happened that I met him again in London.
Il arriva que je le rencontrais à Londres.

It follows that we are right.
Il s'ensuit que nous avons raison.

It looks as if he wouldn't go.
Il semble qu'il ne veut / veuille pas y aller.

It doesn't matter whether he comes or not.
Il importe peu (ou Peu importe) qu'il vienne ou non.

It occurs that the machine goes out of order.
Il arrive que la machine se dérègle.

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### Table 2.

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<td>- 2.2.2. A. a. iii. Il fait (un) beau temps.</td>
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### Table 3.

<table>
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<td>- 2.2.2. B. a. i. Il est aisé de dire.</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Empty subject**

- 2.2.2. A. a. i. Il pleut. 3. A. a. i.
- 2.2.2. A. a. ii. Il fait beau. 3. A. a. ii.
- 2.2.2. A. a. iii. Il fait (un) beau temps. 3. A. a. iii.
- 2.2.2. A. b. i. Il est cinq heures. 3. A. b. i.
- 2.2.2. A. b. ii. Il y a 30 ans que-Proposition 3. A. b. ii.
- 2.2.2. A. c. Il y a dix milles à Londres. 3. A. c.

**Provisisonal subject**

- 2.2.2. B. b. i. Il est aisé de dire. 3. B. a. i.
- 2.2.2. B. b. ii. Il est aisé à/pour lui de dire. 3. B. a. ii.
- 2.2.2. B. b. ii. Il lui est facile de dire. 3. B. a. ii.
- 2.2.2. B. c. i. Il est vrai que j’étais là. 3. B. b. i.
- 2.2.2. B. c. ii. Il arrive que la montre se dérègle. 3. B. b. ii.