

## Unit 34 - Relative pronouns (2)

### 1 **Dont**

If the word / phrase being replaced by a relative pronoun is introduced by *de*, the rules expressed in 33:7 above can still theoretically be applied. However, in practice French speakers contract both *de qui* and *duquel* to *dont*.

Note that this applies only when the *de* is used as a self-standing preposition (as in *parler de qch*, *être satisfait de qch*), and not when it is part of a longer phrase containing another preposition (such as *à côté de qch*, *avec l'aide de qch* - see section 2 below) :

La femme **dont** tu parlait ...

*The woman you were talking about ...*

**but** La femme **à côté de qui** j'étais assis ... (and **not** \*La femme **à côté dont** ...)

*The woman next to whom I was sitting ...*

*Dont* replaces the following complements introduced by *de* :

#### 1.1 Noun complements, for example *être le professeur de quelqu'un / le fondateur de quelque chose* :

La fille **dont** il est le professeur paraît très douée

*[i.e. il est le professeur de la fille]*

*The girl whose tutor he is seems very gifted*

La société **dont** il était le fondateur est devenue très grande

*[i.e. il était le fondateur de la société]*

*The company of which he was the founder has grown very big*

Note that *dont* expresses possession in the same way as the English relative pronoun *whose* :

Pierre, **dont** j'ai acheté la voiture, est mon meilleur ami

*[i.e. j'ai acheté la voiture de Pierre]*

*Pierre, whose car I bought, is my best friend*

La maison, **dont** les murs sont en brique rouge, est très chère

*[i.e. les murs de la maison sont en brique rouge]*

*The house, whose walls / the walls of which are made of red brick, is very expensive*

#### 1.2 Verb complement, for example *parler de quelque chose* :

La façon condescendante **dont** il vous a parlé

*[i.e. il vous a parlé d'une façon condescendante]*

*The condescending way in which he spoke to you*

#### 1.3 Adjective complements, for example *être satisfait de quelque chose* :

Le repas **dont** nous n'étions pas satisfaits

*[i.e. nous n'étions pas satisfaits du repas]*

*The meal we weren't satisfied with*

## UNIT 34 - RELATIVE PRONOUNS (2)

### 1.4 The structure of *dont* clauses

The relative pronoun *dont* is always the first word of the relative clause. This contrasts with the English *of which* used to express possession, which is preceded by the thing possessed :

La société **dont** le nom m'échappe pour le moment...

*The company the name of which name escapes me for the moment...*

Note also that nouns with which *dont* is used to indicate possession are always preceded by the definite article, whilst in equivalent English clauses involving *whose* no article is used. English learners of French often wrongly add a possessive adjective :

La femme **dont** le [and not \**dont son*] nom m'échappe pour le moment...

*The woman whose name escapes me for the moment...*

### 1.6 *Dont* is sometimes used without a verb with the sense of "including" :

Il y a 43 membres du gouvernement **dont** 12 femmes

*There are 43 members of the Government, of which 12 are women / including 12 women*

## 2 *De qui / duquel*

These are used when the word / phrase being replaced is preceded by *de* which is part of a longer phrase containing a preposition :

### 2.1 *De qui* is used for people :

L'homme **avec l'aide de qui** j'ai trouvé les documents...

*The man with whose help I found the documents...*

La femme **près de qui** j'étais assis...

*The woman next to whom I was sitting...*

### 2.2 And *duquel* and derivatives are used for things (note that *de laquelle* is always two words) :

La montagne **sur les pistes de laquelle** il y a toujours beaucoup de neige...

*The mountain on whose slopes there is always plenty of snow...*

La maison **près de laquelle** l'incident a eu lieu

*The house near to which the incident took place*

## 3 *Où*

### 3.1 *Où* can be used to express various ideas of time and place where *auquel* or *dans lequel* would otherwise be used :

La ville **où** l'on m'a envoyé

*The town to which I have been sent*

A l'époque **où** je l'ai connu

*At the time (that or when) I knew him*

NB - If used as a relative pronoun, the English word *when* is never translated by *quand* :

On the day **when** I was supposed to take my exam

*Le jour où j'étais censé passer mon examen*

This contrasts with *when* used as a conjunction introducing an adverbial clause, in which case *quand* is used :

In 1993, **when** the Single Market came into force, there were many changes in Europe

*En 1993, **quand** le Marché Unique est entré en vigueur, il y a eu beaucoup de changements en Europe*

## UNIT 34 - RELATIVE PRONOUNS (2)

The difference is that *when* used as a relative pronoun refers back to a specific word, whilst *when* used as a conjunction introducing an adverbial clause refers back to an idea.

### 3.2 Où can also be used with *par, de, là* and *partout*:

**Partout où** elle va ...

Everywhere she goes ...

**Là où** j'habite ...

Where I live ...

La route **par où** on est passés ...

The route that we came by ...

## 4 Agreement

The pronoun *lequel* agrees with its antecedent :

La raison **pour laquelle** j'ai démissionné

The reason (why) I resigned

Note that whilst in English it is acceptable to say *the reason why*, in French this must **always** be rendered by *la raison pour laquelle*.

The remaining pronouns have an invariable form, but all adjectives or participles in the relative clause must agree if the circumstances require it :

La chambre qui m'était **destinée**

The bedroom that was meant for me

La voiture que j'ai **achetée** est très rapide

The car (that) I bought is very fast

Furthermore, the verb in the relative clause must agree in number and person :

Vous qui **avez** de l'argent

You who have money

## 5 Ce + relative pronoun

### 5.1 Meaning *what* (i.e. *the thing which*)

#### 5.1.1 This occurs in what are sometimes called "free" relative clauses, that is where the antecedent is non-specific :

Elle vient de me dire **ce qui** s'est passé

She's just told me **what** happened

A en croire **ce que** disent les journaux, il est très ambitieux

If we are to believe **what** the papers say, he's very ambitious

Dis moi **ce dont** tu as besoin / **ce à quoi** tu penses

Tell me **what** you need / are thinking of

#### 5.1.2 This is also used within the structure *ce* + relative pronoun [...], *c'est* as a means of bringing an idea to the forefront of the sentence. This is sometimes called **extraction** (see 56:1) :

**Ce qui** me gêne, **c'est** qu'on ne m'a rien dit

**What** annoys me is that no-one told me anything

**Ce qu'il** me faut / **Ce dont** j'ai besoin / **Ce à quoi** je pense, **c'est** ...

**What** I need / **What** I'm thinking of is ...

"Free" relative clauses are also used in reported questions (see 44:3.2.4) and with *tout* (see 35:7.1).

## UNIT 34 - RELATIVE PRONOUNS (2)

### 5.2 (Meaning *which*) referring to an idea rather than to a noun

*Ce* is also used to refer to the idea contained within the preceding clause rather than to a specific noun :

Il m'a dit de m'en aller, **ce qui** n'était pas gentille de sa part

*He told me to go away, **which** wasn't very kind of him*

Il m'a dit de m'en aller, **ce que** je trouve bizarre

*He told me to go away, **which** I find strange*

Il m'a dit de m'en aller, **ce à quoi** je ne m'attendais pas

*He told me to go away, **which** I wasn't expecting*

## 6 Flow chart summary of main points of Units 33 and 34

