

## 47. Relative pronouns - *after* prepositions

### 1 **Dont**

*Dont* is the equivalent of *of which* or *whose* in English - it stands as a part of a relative clause introduced by *de*:

C'est le professeur **de la fille** ⇒ La fille **dont** il est le professeur ...

*He's the girl's teacher* ⇒ *The girl whose teacher he is ...*

J'ai acheté la voiture **de Pierre** ⇒ Pierre, **dont** j'ai acheté la voiture, ...

*I bought Pierre's car* ⇒ *Pierre, whose car I bought ...*

Il vous a parlé **de l'affaire** ⇒ L'affaire **dont** il vous a parlé ...

*He spoke to you about the matter* ⇒ *The matter which he spoke to you about ...*

Nous n'étions pas satisfaits **du repas** ⇒ Le repas **dont** nous n'étions pas satisfaits ...

*We weren't satisfied with the meal* ⇒ *The meal we weren't satisfied with ...*

Note that *dont* is not used when it is part of a longer phrase containing another preposition, such as *à côté de qch*:

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

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

### 2 **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 (*le, la, les*), 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 ...*

### 3 **After prepositions except *de***

Where the relative pronoun stands as a part of a relative clause introduced by a preposition other than *de*, the rules are as follows:

#### 3.1 [Preposition] + *qui* is used **for people**:

Tu parlais **à la femme** ⇒ La femme **à qui** tu parlais ...

*You were talking to the woman* ⇒ *The woman (who) you were talking to ...*

#### 3.2 [Preposition] + *lequel, laquelle, lesquels* or *lesquelles* is used **for things**:

Je me trouve **dans une situation difficile** ⇒ La situation difficile **dans laquelle** je me trouve ...

*I find myself in a difficult situation* ⇒ *The difficult situation (that) I find myself in ...*

Note that *à + lequel* contracts to *auquel*:

Le guichet auquel il fallait m'adresser ...

*The window I had to enquire at ...*

**3.3** *Quoi* is used after prepositions when the relative pronoun refers to a fact or idea rather than to a person or thing:

Je lui ai dit que je n'aimais pas Mozart, **à quoi** il a répondu que ...

*I told him that I didn't like Mozart, to which he replied that ...*