

## 4 Relatives

### 1 Defining and Non-defining Adjectival Clauses

In order to decide which relatives to use one should distinguish between defining and non-defining adjectival clauses.

*Defining clauses tell us who or what the noun is; non-defining clauses simply give information about the noun.*

Compare the following pairs of sentences:

- 1 (a) The professor *who described new methods of overcoming illiteracy at the Paris conference* will visit this country next month.  
(b) The Minister of Education, *who is now nearly seventy*, said he would retire soon.
- 2 (a) The teacher *who taught us last year* has now returned to England.  
(b) Our history teacher, *who used to live in France*, gave a talk on French politics last night.
- 3 (a) The book *which he borrowed last week* was a novel.  
(b) This book, *which I bought in Lagos*, has helped me with my economics.
- 4 (a) The furniture *which he bought last year* is already broken.  
(b) Locally made furniture, *which is much cheaper than imported furniture*, is now found in almost every home.

In the first sentence of each of the pairs the words in italics tell us precisely who or what the noun is. In the second sentence of each pair the words in italics tell us something about the noun but do not define it. Defining clauses are essential to the meaning of the sentence and if they are omitted one is inclined to ask 'Which professor?' (1(a)), 'Which teacher?' (2(a)), 'Which book?' (3(a)), and 'Which furniture?' (4(a)). On the other hand if a non-defining clause is omitted one loses only information, which, although it may be of interest, is not essential to the sentence.

(The distinction between defining and non-defining adjectival clauses is also important for punctuation. Commas are never used with defining clauses but must be used with non-defining clauses. See p. 141.)

## 2 Omission of the Relative Pronoun

Sentences 3(a) and 4(a) may be rewritten without the relative:

The book (which) he borrowed last week was a novel.

The furniture (which) he bought last year is already broken.

In these sentences the relatives were objects of verbs (*borrowed* and *bought*). In sentences 1(a) and 2(a) the relatives are subjects of verbs (*described* and *taught*). In other words the relative pronoun of a defining adjectival clause may be omitted if it is the object of a verb.

## 3 The Use of 'that'

Sentences 1(a), 2(a), 3(a) and 4(a) may be rewritten with *that* as the relative pronoun, although *who* is more common:

The Minister of Education *that* described new methods of overcoming illiteracy at the Paris conference will visit this country next month.

The teacher *that* taught us last year has now returned to England.

The book *that* he borrowed last week was a novel.

The furniture *that* he bought last year is already broken.

*That* can be used as the relative pronoun in defining adjectival clauses. In non-defining adjectival clauses we use:

*who* for persons (subject)

Our history teacher, *who* used to live in France, gave us a talk on French politics last night.

*whom* for persons (object)

Our history teacher, *whom* I saw on my way here, said he would not give us a test today.

*which* for things or animals

The book *which* he borrowed last week was a novel.

*That* is never the object of a preposition following it:

Here is the book *to which* he referred.

The joke *at which* I laughed was rather silly.

*That* may, however, be used if the preposition is placed at the end of the sentence or clause:

Here is the book *that* he referred *to*.

The joke *that* I laughed *at* was rather silly.

(Note: The construction with *that* and the preposition at the end of the defining clause is much more usual than the construction with *which* preceded by the preposition.)

## 4 The Possessive Relative

Use *whose* for persons, countries and towns:

The boy *whose* pen I'm using is Usman.

Note that for things we often use a different construction – *with* instead of a relative and an adjectival clause:

The house *with* the damaged roof is being sold.

is more normal English than:

The house *of which* the roof is damaged is being sold.

Similarly, we may say:

The girl *with* red hair is my sister.

## 5 Adverbs as Relatives

*When*, *where* and *why* are used in the same way as relative pronouns:

Friday is the day *when* we have the party.

This is the place *where* the accident happened.

He didn't tell us the reason *why* he couldn't come.

## 6 'What' as a Relative

We can avoid using *the thing(s) which* and *the thing(s) that* by simply using *what*:

He forgot *the things which* he was going to say.

He forgot *what* he was going to say.

*The thing that* is not clear is why he came.

*What* is not clear is why he came.

### EXERCISE 70

Complete the following sentences with suitable relatives *unless no relative is necessary* (i.e. omit the relatives wherever possible):

- 1 The book ... is lying on the table is mine.
- 2 The water ... he drank was dirty.
- 3 The letter ... he wrote was in reply to mine.
- 4 Robert Mugabe, ... became first Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, took several university degrees.
- 5 The car ... I bought ten years ago is still in good working order.
- 6 The boy ... was knocked down by a lorry is now in hospital.
- 7 Anybody ... comes is welcome.
- 8 The girl ... the Minister gave the prize to was in Form 1.
- 9 The girl to ... the Minister gave the prize was in Form 1.

- 10 Have you completed the work . . . you were given?
- 11 Where is the boy . . . father came to see the headmaster?
- 12 The concert . . . we attended last night was very enjoyable.
- 13 The hotel . . . we stayed at last summer is now closed.
- 14 The meal . . . I had last night made me ill.
- 15 The chair . . . is standing in the corner will have to be repaired.
- 16 That magazine, . . . is published four times a year, contains a lot of interesting articles.
- 17 The lecturer talked about Waugh, . . . novels I have started reading.
- 18 Gaelic, . . . is the language of the Scots, is little spoken nowadays.
- 19 The play, . . . our English teacher is producing, will be performed five times next week.
- 20 The toothbrush . . . he used is almost worn out.
- 21 This is the paragraph about . . . the teacher was talking.
- 22 Where is the pen . . . I was using this morning?
- 23 I haven't seen the boy . . . suitcase was stolen.
- 24 They are painting the wall . . . I usually lean my bicycle against.
- 25 On his way to Rome, . . . he had visited before, he stopped in several Italian towns.