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introduction to
relative
pronouns:
qui and *que*

Lesson 65

Notes

C'est le fromage qui est bon ici

Relative pronouns: *qui* and *que*

Programme Notes

Welcome to Coffee Break French, the podcast aimed at independent learners of French. Our regular podcasts will introduce you to the French language in easy steps.

Today we are going to move on from looking at the imperfect tense to look at two French relative pronouns: *qui* and *que*. This is a topic which many French learners often find difficult to grasp but we hope that you'll find it a lot easier to understand after today's lesson.

Mark begins with some revision of the imperfect tense by asking Anna to give examples of situations in which the imperfect tense would be used.

1) To describe things in the past:

In order to help us remember the types of things that might be described using the imperfect tense, we learned a mnemonic:

Prince Philip Changes His Wig Frequently

P	People
P	Places
C	Clothes / Colours
H	Hair
W	Weather
F	Feelings

2) To say "was / were doing something":

je parlais français
I was speaking French

3) To say "used to do something":

je me promenais sur la plage
I used to walk on the beach

4) To say “would do something” referring to the evocative past:

j'allais à la plage tous les jours quand j'étais jeune

I would go to the beach every day when I was young

Before moving on to talk about *qui* and *que*, Anna asks Mark to go over the formation of the present tense of *-re* and *-ir* verbs.

To form the present tense of *-re* verbs, you take off the *-re* and add the following endings:

-re verb endings (present tense)	
-s	-ons
-s	-ez
-	-ent

For example, *vendre* (“to sell”) would be formed as follows:

vendre (to sell) - present tense	
je vends	nous vendons
tu vends	vous vendez
il/elle vend	ils/elles vendent

To form the present tense of *-ir* verbs, you take off the *-ir* and add the following endings:

-ir verb endings (present tense)	
-is	-issons
-is	-issez
-it	-issent

For example, *finir* (“to finish”) would be formed as follows:

finir (to finish) - present tense	
je finis	nous finissons
tu finis	vous finissez
il/elle finit	ils/elles finissent

Let's now move on to look at *qui* and *que*. These are two words which are used to join two parts of a sentence together. First of all we'll look at examples of *qui*:

c'est le garçon qui est sous l'avion
it's the boy who is under the plane

c'est Marie qui vient avec nous
it's Marie who is coming with us

In the two examples above, *qui* is used to mean "who". However it can also mean "which" or "that" as the next examples show:

les deux chambres qui donnent sur la mer sont au premier étage
the two rooms which/that have a sea view are on the first floor

c'est le fromage qui est bon ici
it's the cheese which/that is good here

Note that the use of "which" or "that" in English varies according to region.

So *qui* can mean "who", "which" or "that". Notice that in all the above examples, *qui* is immediately followed by a verb. From a grammatical point of view, this means that *qui* is referring to the subject of the sentence. In the following example, *le fromage* is the subject.

c'est le fromage qui est bon ici
it's the cheese which/that is good here

Que is another relative pronoun which can mean "which" or "that" and it can also mean "whom". Take a look at the following examples. Notice that this time, the "which", "that" or "whom" is followed immediately by a subject pronoun, eg. "I", "we" etc. When the relative pronoun is directly followed by a person or thing, we use *que* instead of *qui*.

c'est le fromage que j'aime
it's the cheese which/that I like

In this case, the subject of the sentence is *je* and the object is *le fromage*.

les deux chambres que nous voulons sont au premier étage
the two rooms which/that we want are on the first floor

c'est Marie que je connais
it's Marie that/whom I know

Note that the relative pronoun can sometimes be left out in English, for example we could say "it's the cheese I like", "the rooms we want are on the first floor". However we always have to include the relative pronoun in French.

At the end of this week's lesson, Mark mentioned a final point regarding a set of rules known as the Preceding Direct Object Rules. We'll look in more detail at further examples of the Preceding Direct Object in future lessons. In this lesson, let's consider just one situation which comes up as a result of

using *que*. When you use the perfect tense with the relative pronoun, *que*, you have to make the past participle agree with the object of the sentence. For example, if the object is feminine (eg. *la maison*) you add an *-e* to the past participle and if it is plural (eg. *les livres*) you would add an *-s*.

c'est la maison que j'ai achetée
it's the house which/that I have bought

ce sont les livres que j'ai achetés
they are the books which/that I bought

ce sont les deux maisons que j'ai achetées
they are the two houses which/that I bought

Note also that in spoken French *ce sont* often becomes *c'est*.



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French

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