

Lesson 201: Use of il quale

by Keith A Preble, info@ilgur.com

Il quale can be used as a relative pronoun when it is combined with the definite article, **il, la, i, le** or when it is articulated with a simple preposition (**alla, dalle, dei, sul**, for example). When used in the plural, **quale** becomes **quali**. It is a variable relative pronoun -- meaning that it changes form depending on the antecedent, which it must agree with in number and in gender.

REMEMBER:

The antecedent is the noun (or pronoun, in some cases) which the pronoun refers back to.

Throughout this post, when we say **il quale**, it also means **il quale** or one of its variants below, depending upon what role it plays (that is, what part of speech) in the relative clause:

il quale	la quale	i quali	le quali	= che
al quale	dal quale	del quale	nel quale	= cui
alla quale	dalla quale	della quale	nella quale	
ai quali	dai quali	dei quali	nei quali	
alle quali	dalle quali	delle quali	nelle quali	
sul quale	con quale	tra/fra quale	per quale	
sulla quale	con quale	tra/fra quale	per quale	
sui quali	con quali	tra/fra quali	per quali	
sulle quali	con quali	tra/fra quali	per quali	

Il quale can generally be used instead of **che**, but **only when the relative pronoun functions as the subject of the relative clause**. When the **relative pronoun functions as a direct object** (un complement oggetto), then **che** is generally

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preferred (although *il quale* can be used in formal writing situations):

CORRECT:

Adesso mio padre deve comprare una nuova macchina **la quale** purtroppo costa troppo!

*Now my father has to buy a new car **that** unfortunately costs too much!*

Helpful hint: Some people get confused as to the function of the relative pronoun. A quick way to determine whether your relative pronoun is the subject of your clause is to replace the relative clause with the antecedent. Also, the verb of the relative clause must be of the same number as that of the antecedent.

MORE FORMAL:

Adesso mio padre deve comprare una nuova macchina **la quale** Marco e Julia non vogliono guidare.

*Why the example is wrong: The subject of the relative clause is **Marco e Julia**, not **la quale** (that is, **la macchina**). **Che** is preferred.*

It's better to write:

Adesso mio padre deve comprare una nuova macchina **che** Marco e Julia non vogliono guidare.

*Now my father has to buy a car **that** Marco and Julia do not want to drive.*

Usually, **il quale** is used when the use of **che** might create ambiguities:

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Ho visto la figlia di Alessandro **che** abita a Roma.

*I saw Alessandro's daughter **who** lives in Rome.*

In the example above, are we referring to the daughter or to Alessandro? Which one lives in Rome? While in English it might seem obvious that we are referring to the daughter, in Italian, if there is confusion created by the context within the sentence, Italian clears up this dilemma by using **il quale** or its variants in place of **che**:

Ho visto la figlia di Alessandro **la quale** abita a Roma.

La quale is a clear reference to **la figlia**. This does not apply only to people but can be used with 'things', too:

Devo andare in centro all'ambasciata italiana **che** ha appena riaperto.

*I have to go downtown to the Italian embassy **that** just re-opened.*

While it might seem *obvious*, this is not always the case. Perhaps downtown has been closed because of excess smog? Or perhaps there was a traffic accident earlier? Using **il quale** can help to clarify the meaning of the sentence by zeroing in on one which noun is functioning as the antecedent:

Devo andare in centro **all'ambasciata** italiana **la quale** ha appena riaperto.

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Since **che** and **cui** are invariable and don't agree in number or gender, this can often lead reader to wonder as to whom or what the antecedent is.

Il quale is also used when the *antecedent* and *relative pronoun* are separated from each other:

Mia madre ha comprato **quella macchina** di cui mio padre le ha detto **che** parte sempre e non viene troppo.

Mia madre ha comprato **quella macchina** di cui mio padre le ha detto **la quale** parte sempre e non viene troppo.

Il quale is also used at times to avoid repeating **che**:

Non sapevo **che** Giulio, **che** è andato in Spagna un mese fa, parla spagnolo correntemente.

Non sapevo **che** Giulio, **il quale** è andato in Spagna un mese fa, parla spagnolo correntemente.

I didn't know that Giulio, who went to Spain a month ago, speaks Spanish fluently.

Remember that repetitions of the same word in Italian should be avoided, especially in writing, and you will often see **il quale** substituted for **che** when possible to avoid these repetitious constructions. This is an aspect of Italian that is often missed by learners but one that comes with practice of reading and speaking.

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The use of **il quale** is more often seen in writing when ambiguities need to be avoided or in a court of law setting or bureaucratic setting when it is vitally important that ambiguities be avoided. It is important to understand its use as it is common in writing, and these rules should certainly be applied when writing. In spoken Italian, it will probably be rare to hear **il quale** spoken.

Il quale can also be combined with **articulated prepositions** (just as **cui** is combined with **simple prepositions**: a, di, da, in, su, fra, tra, per, con) as a substitute for **simple preposition + cui** (as seen in the chart above).

While **cui** remains invariable, the prepositions used with **il quale** combine with the appropriate definite article and **quale** changes according to the number of the antecedent that it relates to. Like **cui**, **il quale** or its variants open the relative clause.

See the example below:

Oggi ho visto la ragazza **con cui** avevamo parlato durante la nostra passeggiata ieri. È ancora single?

Yesterday I saw the girl with who we had talked with during our stroll yesterday. Is she still single?

This relative pronoun, **con cui**, can be replaced with **con la quale**:

Ieri ho visto la ragazza **con la quale** abbiamo parlato durante la nostra passeggiata. È ancora single?

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It should be mentioned that **dei quali** and **delle quali** are preferred over **di cui** when the antecedent is a number:

Ho comprato quattro libri oggi, **tre dei quali** in inglese.
I bought four books today, three of which are in English.

and not:

Ho comprato quattro libro oggi, **di cui** tre in inglese.

The use of the **full form** of the relative pronoun is synonymous with **di cui**. If you're unsure of when to use **che** or **cui**, it might be helpful to review their respective lessons.

In summary:

- **Il quale** can be used in place of **che** when the relative pronoun is the subject of the relative clause. Generally, when the relative pronoun functions as the direct object, **che**, is preferred.
- **Il quale** is generally used only when there is ambiguity in the phrase and when using **che** or **cui** would create confusion about as to what the relative pronoun *relates* back to in the phrase (i.e *the antecedent*).
- If the relative pronoun is the direct object, then **che** is preferred unless a more formal register is required.
- **Il quale** can be used in place of **preposition + cui**. The relative pronoun then functions as a complement indiretto

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(*indirect object*). Remember that, in Italian, prepositions finish a sentence.

- Whereas **che** and **cui** are invariable (they *do not* agree with the antecedents in gender or number), **il quale** agrees in gender and in number with the antecedent.

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