

## Lesson 183: The pronoun, chi / Il pronome, chi

The pronoun, **chi**, has several functions in Italian grammar. It typically corresponds to the English *who* or *to whom* but it can have other meanings.

Let's look at how it is used when it functions as an **interrogative pronoun (pronome interrogativo)**:

1. **Chi** is commonly found in questions, and, as such, it is an **interrogative pronoun**. It can function as the subject or as an indirect object or object of the preposition (**complement indiretto**):

**Chi** vuole andare al cinema?  
*Who wants to go to the movies?*

**Chi** ha comprato quella macchina blu?  
*Who bought that blue car?*

**Con chi** vedi il film?  
*With whom are you seeing the film?*

**Da chi** vai domani sera?  
*To whose house are you going tomorrow?*

Readers always ask - how do you know if it is the subject or the indirect object/object of the preposition. First, when **chi** functions as an indirect object/object of the preposition, it will have a preposition before it (*di, da, con, etc.*). Second, the form of the verb can also be something other than the third person singular (see the last two examples above). Otherwise, when **chi** is the subject, the verb is always in the third person singular (see the first two examples above).

2. **Chi di + tonic pronoun noi, voi or loro** can have the meaning *Which of* in questions:

**Chi di noi...?** | *Which of us...*  
**Chi di voi...?** | *Which of you...*  
**Chi di loro...?** | *Which of them...*

**Chi di noi** va alla festa di Daniela?  
*Which of us is going to Daniela's party?*

It's possible that you could have phrases such as *Chi di me* (Which of me...) if you're being existential or philosophical (you might hear it in songs or see it in poetry), but it's generally used in the plural (**noi, voi, loro**).

3. **Di chi** can mean *whose* when forming questions:

**Di chi** è questo?  
*Whose is this?*

**Di chi** sono questi?  
*Whose are these?*

**Di chi** sono queste chiavi?  
*Whose keys are these?*

4. **Chi** is heard often over the telephone, as in the following expressions:

**Chi** parla?  
*Who's calling?*

**Con chi** sto parlando?  
*With whom am I speaking?*

Now let's look at how it is used when it functions as an **relative pronoun (pronome relativo)**:

1. **Chi** can also be used as a relative pronoun (**pronome relativo**) as either the subject or an indirect object/object of the preposition (**complemento indiretto**). It has the following meanings:

*the person who, the one who  
the man/woman who/whom  
the people/those who/whom  
someone who/somebody who  
anyone who (in negative phrases)*

2. **Chi** can also be preceded by prepositions in the following combinations:

*a chi*

Lascero la mia eredità **a chi** si comporterà meglio nei miei riguardi.  
*I will leave my inheritance to those who behave better towards me.*

*con chi*

I miei figli giocano **con chi** c'è al parco.  
*My children play with who is there at the park.*

*da chi*

Il governo prende **da chi** può pagare.  
*The government takes from whoever is able to pay.*

*di chi*

Quel giornalaccio parla **di chi** vive scandalosamente.  
*That rag talks about whoever lives scandalously.*

*in chi*

Ho fiducia **in chi** dice la verità.  
*I trust those who tell the truth.*

*per chi*

Ho votato **per chi** è sembrato il più onesto.  
*I voted for whoever seemed the most honest.*

*su chi*

Gennaro è sfortunatissimo alle corse. Punta sempre **su chi** perde.  
*Gennaro is unlucky at the track. He bets always on those who lose.*

*tra/fra chi*

Sceglierò a chi dare i miei regali solamente **tra chi** mi porterà in vacanza con lui  
*I will choose who to give my gifts only among those who will bring me on vacation with them.*

3. Remember that a relative pronoun joins a relative clause to the main clause. **Chi** does not require an antecedent (unlike **che** and **cui**) as it functions as both the relative pronoun and antecedent at the same time.

Another important aspect of **chi** is the fact that, since it lacks an antecedent, it usually describes an unknown person. In English, we might say something like *I have to find someone who can write in French*. We don't know *who* exactly we will find.

Here are some examples in Italian:

Devo trovare **chi** sa scrivere in francese.  
*I have to find someone who knows how to write in French.*

Non posso ricordarmi **chi** è arrivato con Emilio.  
*I can't remember who arrived with Emilio.*

**Chi** spende sempre non risparmia mai.  
*Those who always spend never save.*

**Chi** dice cazzate sembrerà stupido.  
*He (or she) who talks nonsense will seem stupid.*  
*Those who talk nonsense will seem stupid.*

Non mi piace **chi** mente.  
*I don't like those who lie.*

4. **Chi** can mean: *whoever, anyone*

Assuma **chi** vuole. Lei è il capo.  
*Hire anyone/whoever you want. You are the boss.*

5. **Chi di + noi/voi/loro** can also be used as a relative pronoun to mean *Those of us/you/them who* :

**Chi di voi** vuole sapere di più della situazione politica può consultare al mio sito web.  
*Those of you who want to know more about the political situation can visit my web site.*

6. **Chi(...chi)** can also mean: *some people...others*

**Chi** can also be used correlatively, that is two pronouns that refer to two distinct groups of the same thing, as in English we might say "some" or "some people" and "others":

C'è **chi** viaggia, **chi** sta a casa.  
*Some people travel, others stay home.*

When studying relative pronouns, it's important to understand how they differ so that you can use them correctly -- if you listen to spoken Italian on TV, on the radio or among your Italian friends, you'll find that they don't use **che** for every sentence. Italian is a language that is spoken well when it is varied.

If you're unsure of when to use **cui** or when to use **chi**, one important distinction is that **cui** requires an antecedent. You might become confused because both **cui** and **chi** can be preceded by preposition. Take a look at the example below:

Dottore Giambattista, **da cui** sono andato ieri, ha studiato a Milano con mio padre.  
Doctor Giambattista, who I went to yesterday, studied in Milan with my father.

You **cannot** use **chi** in this example for one very important reason - **da cui** refers back to **Dottore Giambattista**. We *know* who we are speaking about, **Dr. Giambattista (the antecedent)**.

Let's look at the example below:

Annalisa: Vai da un medico specifico?  
Annalisa: Are you going to a particular doctor?

Marco: Vado **da chi** riesce a curare la mia malattia.  
*Marco: I am going to whomever is able to cure my illness.*

We use **da chi** instead of **cui** because there's no antecedent - we don't know which doctor Marco will see because Marco hasn't said (perhaps even he doesn't know or even care). However, if we have an antecedent, then we must use **cui**:

Marco: Vado a visitare Dottore Giambattista **da cui** va mia madre.  
*Marco: I'm going to see Doctor Giambattista whom my mother goes to.*

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