

2.3.1 The various “avatars” of “that”

We covered *pronouns* (Section 2.1.2) and *conjunctions* (Section 2.1.7) earlier. Figure 12 below encapsulates the various usages of *that* in English Grammar:

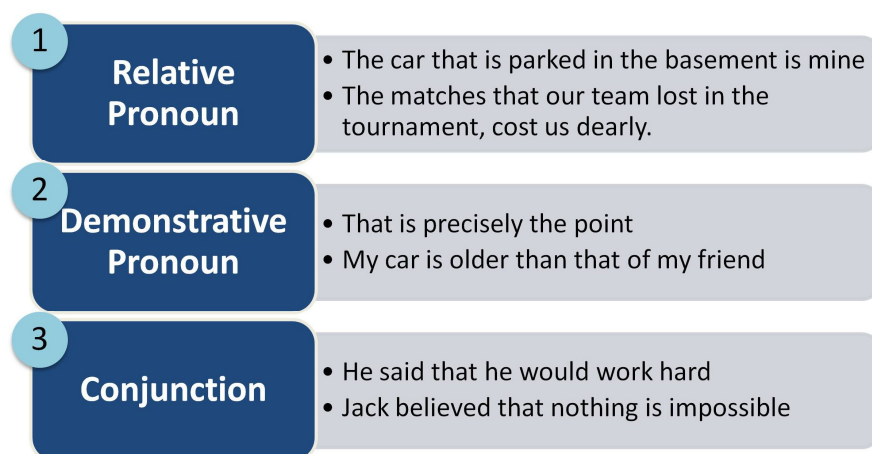


Figure 12: Various "avatars" of "that"

that can be used:

1. As a *relative pronoun*, “that” *relates* to another noun preceding it in the sentence. In the sentences in Figure 12 above, *that* relates to *car* and *matches* respectively.
2. As a *demonstrative pronoun*, “that” stands for a person, place or thing that must be pointed to.
3. As a *conjunction*, “that” connects two clauses (refer to section 2.2.1 for *clauses*). In the first sentence in Figure 12 above, that connects two clauses *He said* and *he would work hard*. Similarly, in the second sentence in Figure 12 above, that connects two clauses *Jack believed* and *nothing is impossible*.

The intent of introducing the various avatars of *that* is to depict that not all usages of *that* can be treated in the same manner.

Note #1: When used as a *relative pronoun*, *that* can refer to both *singular* and *plural* nouns. So, both the following are correct:

The car that is parked in the basement is mine.

– Relative pronoun *that* refers to singular noun *car*.

The cars that are parked in the basement are mine.

– Relative pronoun *that* refers to plural noun *cars*.

However, when used as a *demonstrative pronoun*, *that* can only refer to *singular* nouns.

So, while the following are correct:

That is the car I like.

That is precisely my point.

Following are *not* correct:

That are the cars I like.

That are precisely my points.

To fix the above sentences, we need to use *these/those*:

Those are the cars I like.

These are precisely my points.

Note #2: When used as a *demonstrative pronoun*, *that* can refer to both *persons* and *non-persons*. So, both the following are correct:

Jack's car is better than that of Peter.

– Demonstrative pronoun *that* refers to non-person: *car*.

Michael's wife earns more than that of James.

– Demonstrative pronoun *that* refers to person: *wife*.

However, when used as a *relative pronoun*, *that* can only refer to *non-persons* (refer to Figure 15); *that* cannot refer to *people*. So, while the following is correct:

Mary sold the car that her father had gifted.

– Relative pronoun *that* refers to non-person: *car*.

Following is *not* correct:

Peter's friend that met with an accident is recovering in the hospital.

– Relative pronoun *that* refers to person *friend*, but this is not allowed (*that*, when used as relative pronoun, can only refer to *non-persons*). Hence, this sentence is *incorrect*; the relative pronoun *who* needs to be used.