

ITS and IT'S

“So what are we going to look at today, great master?”

“It’s a secret.”

“Shouldn’t that be ‘its’, without the apostrophe?”

“Not in this case. You only drop the apostrophe in the **possessive case**.”

“The what?”

“The **possessive case**. Do you know that little Pekinese that belongs to my receptionist?”

“That horrible little creature? I’d love to punch it on its silly little nose!”

“I wish you would control your aggressive tendencies. Anyway, what does the ‘it’ refer to in your last sentence?”

“That horrible little creature - the Pekinese!”

“Right, and the silly little nose, what does that **belong to**?”

“The dog!”

“So we could say, you would like to punch the silly little nose which **belongs to, or possessed by**, the Pekinese.”

“Well, you could...”

“But you wouldn’t because it’s very longwinded.”

“I would call it daft, but I’ll agree with your ‘longwinded’.”

“This is the possessive case! Interestingly, it’s native speakers, most of whom are blissfully unaware of possessive cases who muddle up ‘its’ and ‘it’s’. Foreign learners sometimes correct their teachers!”

“Wait a minute. You used another it’s, but this time you used an apostrophe: it’s native speakers.”

“Well spotted. But in that case it’s simple contraction.”

“Cold weather again...”

“It’s native speakers..., is the contracted form of ‘It is native speakers...’.”

“Got you so far. But I’ve got a problem.”

‘Just the one?’

‘Ha ha. Okay, listen to this. I’ve got a table in my kitchen but it’s only got three legs.’

‘With an apostrophe.’

*‘Exactly. But surely the legs **belong to, or are possessed by,** the table. So surely I should use the **possessive case form without an apostrophe!**’*

‘Interesting, but your example is another case of contraction.’

‘It is only got three legs? Pull the other one. Ha ha, pull the other one, that was a good one, wasn’t it?’

‘Not particularly. Anyway, you’ve clearly got your contractions muddled. The uncontracted form is ‘It has only got three legs.’’

‘So it’s not a case of the possessive case?’

‘Sorry. And that was another simple contraction - it’s, it is.’

‘I noticed that one. Is that all there is too it? If there’s a contraction then I put an apostrophe but if it’ s the possessive case then I don’t?’

‘Yes, that’s all there is to it.’

‘Easy- peasy.’

‘Glad to have been of assistance.’