



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Pronouns in English Language

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### Abstract:

The English pronoun, among other characteristics, is the part of speech that replaces the noun. The pronoun helps the speaker or the writer avoid repetition. English pronouns can be seen as connectors in communication. They help people express several things about the same person, thing, activity, etc, without mentioning the name, object or idea over and over again. The pronoun can be used in the same sentence with the noun that it stands for or it can be used to continue the same idea in separate sentences or phrases as in the examples: e.g.: *Mark* goes to work, he arrives there by bus. (In this case the personal pronoun *he* replaces the proper noun *Mark* within the same sentence). *Whereas: Mark* goes to work every day from Monday to Friday. Although he has two cars and all of them are *his*, *he* prefers to go to work by bus. (In this larger context – the personal pronoun *he* replaces the same proper noun *Mark* and the possessive pronoun *his* refers also to *Mark*). According to the *Cambridge Dictionary 2023*, in English there are *eight types of pronouns*: *personal pronouns*, *possessive pronouns*, *reflexive pronouns*, *interrogative pronouns*, *demonstrative pronouns*, *indefinite pronouns*, *reciprocal pronouns* and *relative pronouns*. For the *personal pronouns* we have (*I, you, he, she...etc*) , *demonstrative pronouns* (*this, that, these, those*), *interrogative* (who, whom, whose, which, what), *indefinite* (anybody, everyone, someone, anything, somebody, ...etc), *possessive* (mine, yours, his, hers...etc), *relative* ( are similar to the interrogative pronouns, the difference is that they can also be used in forming affirmative or negative sentences), *reciprocal* (one another, each other) and *reflexive pronouns* (myself, yourself, himself, herself...etc). The 9<sup>th</sup> category of pronouns that is mentioned in other English grammar books is represented by the *intensive pronouns*. Although this division of English pronouns can vary depending on different grammatical analysis, English pronouns are an important part of speech because they can be found in almost every sentence; to know how and when to use them, helps foreign learners of English establish a good and fluent communication. Therefore, this article focuses on the description of the English pronoun, providing theory as well as examples.

**Keywords:** *English language, pronouns, grammar, theory, examples.*

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### Introduction

Learning a foreign language means to dedicate a certain amount from your personal time in understanding and learning the grammar of that language, practicing your vocabulary and grammar knowledge, developing your skills in using the foreign language in free speech and exercising the foreign language in written texts. When it comes to English, its learners have to be familiarized with the main parts of speech, with English grammar rules and they have to enrich their English vocabulary whenever it is possible. All this knowledge has to be used in written and oral conversations because using a foreign language on a daily basis or at least three or four times a month assures that you will not forget everything you have learnt. To know how to link sentences, how to give them sense without annoying repetition or poor vocabulary represents an important step in becoming a skilful learner and user of English language. Nevertheless, English, as any other language creates a special "...connectivity to its speakers, as the speakers grow and evolve or even possibly devolve, so does the language. Complex and specialized language is the concrete manifestation of a powerful and diverse society. The living, transformational nature of language should be approached systematically based on merging social evolution with geographic and cultural proliferations."(Chirişescu&Păunescu, 2021:93)

Therefore, English language has to be treated as any other language – that means – it has a transformational nature when it comes to its vocabulary and even to its grammar. Furthermore, the ways and methods by which each teacher decides to present his lessons depends on how he sees the students and what he thinks are the most appropriate methods for them to understand and to apply what they receive from their teacher. This means that: “ One cannot deny the variety of learning styles existent in a seminar room, such as visual learners – who can profit mostly from the visual aids, kinaesthetic learners and touch learners – who appreciate working with physical objects, tablets, phones or flashcards.” ( Bărbuceanu, 2020: 39). No matter the method, English grammar represents a key pillar in the process of learning any language and that is why in this article I will refer to a certain part of speech – *the English pronoun*.

Although it is true that in the learning process, intelligence plays a major role, we as teachers should not make differences between students because:”Different from the level of intelligence, which stays the same throughout life, competences based on affective intelligence are erudite skills, in other words, any individual can increase his own degree of emotional intelligence through instruction (...)” (Bărbuceanu, 2022:187). Therefore, education is the best method that offers people the chance to train their intelligence and to develop their social skills including their emotional intelligence. To know how to speak grammatically correct is essential for a good communication. Due to the fact that we live in a global, multicultural society, it is important to find a bridge language that can help us communicate with people of different nationalities. This bridge language can be English and if we want to go further in:”extrapolating the importance of language in the area of social exchanges establishes a clear and undeniable bond between linguistics and the transactional world in which we are willing or unwilling participants (...)” (Lăpădat&Lăpădat, 2021:113) So, linguistics plays a major role in our communication and the grammar of each language should be well taught and learnt.

In nowadays, the teaching process has changed a lot and students often look for alternatives on the internet and in mass-media. If we type *English* or *English lessons* on the internet using search engines, we receive an abundance of information. We can

access online tutorials, articles, opinions, examples, samples of grammar exercises and so on. This means that the internet and mass-media: “often surpasses its condition as a simple courier of information, facilitating a heritage of trust and relevance even between governing structures and citizens,(...)” (Lăpădat, 2022: 10) In some cases, the internet with its abundance of information can be quite a helpful tool in the process of, for example, learning a foreign language. But, in other cases, the information regarding English grammar can be quite confusing and this is why it is somehow mandatory for those who want to learn this language, to attend specialized classes with well-trained English teachers. As I said in a previous published article :”(...) when we refer to English teachers and their classes; communication is essential because it is a direct way to prepare students for the working environment in which they will perform.” (Stoian, 2019)

Going back to the subject of this article, *English pronouns* are an important part of speech. They improve our communication and their usage is highly necessary. Along with English nouns that: “represent the most important grammatical category” (Stoian, 2022:42), *English pronouns* replace nouns in order to avoid repetition and to make our communication in English fluent and comprehensive.

*English pronouns* are parts of speech that serve different purposes in oral and written communication. English pronouns are essential in the process of learning and mastering English. Their main characteristic is the fact that they can and should replace nouns in order to avoid repetition. In fact, this part of speech – the pronoun – is among the first things that an English course (for beginners) teaches. Categorizing English learners depending on their proficiency levels shows that for level A1 – beginner, the English learner has to know to present himself/ herself, to talk in a simple way about his/her family, his/ her city or country; to ask at a basic level for the things he/ she wants in a store or restaurant. This list of simple questions and small, basic descriptions of things can continue, but what I wanted to emphasize is that in all these, the English learner has to use different types of pronouns like: the personal, the interrogative, the possessive pronoun etc. So, the English pronoun is essential even in the most basic and simple conversations in this foreign language.

### *Types of Pronouns*

First of all, it is important to note that English pronouns have gender. For the feminine part we use: *she, her, hers*; for the masculine: *he or his* and for the neuter we can use: *it or its*. When it comes to the plural forms, we no longer have gender delimitation, but we have person delimitation: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>.

In English there are 8 types of pronouns: *the personal pronoun, the demonstrative pronoun, the interrogative pronoun, the possessive pronoun, the indefinite pronoun, the relative pronoun, the reflexive pronoun, the reciprocal pronoun*. As I mentioned in the abstract, there is another category of pronouns – *the intensive pronouns*. In some grammar books they are treated separately while in others the characteristics of the intensive pronouns are listed at the reflexive pronouns. The situation is quite tricky because intensive pronouns have the same form as the reflexive ones. The only difference is that they add emphasis to the situation that you describe:

e.g. Mark wanted to see if he could cook so, he bought *himself* a lot of ingredients. (In this situation the emphasis is on Mark and on what he can do for himself. As a pronoun – *himself* is considered *an intensive pronoun* in this situation)

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**1. The English personal pronouns** are probably, the most used ones and the forms are: I, you, he/ she, we, you, they. A clearer classification of English personal pronouns looks like this:

For the 1<sup>st</sup> person: I singular (used as subject), me (used as object). The plural form: we (subject), us (object) and mine or ours for the possessive case.

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular and plural we have the pronoun: you. The possessive case uses yours.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> person may be the most complex one because it has gender. As I mentioned before, for the feminine we have she, for the masculine he and for the neuter it. The plural form is used for every gender: they. We use them for object accusative and theirs for the possessive case.

**2.** Another type of pronoun is the demonstrative pronoun. In English, this pronoun has four forms: this, that (for the singular) and these, those (for the plural). This type of pronoun is used to point out a certain thing or person. We use this for the thing/ the person who is closer to us, in our vicinity (here); while that is used for something or someone who is far, at a bigger distance:

e.g. That boy plays in the park. (In this case the demonstrative pronoun that means the boy is over there, he is not close to us). The same rules apply for the plural forms of the demonstrative pronouns: these and those.

These is used for something that is close to us, while those for something that is far from us:

e.g. This is our new house. Do you like it? / That was their proposal. You either accept it or not. / What are these on the table? / Those pencils are on the last shelf, unfortunately, I can't reach them.

**3. The interrogative pronouns** – are used to ask questions. Pronouns like: who, what, which, whom and whose are interrogative:

e.g.: Who came to see you?

What is the name of that song?

Which is your favourite actor Ben Affleck or Brad Pitt?

To whom did you tell about our plan?

Whose is it? (The answer: This scarf is beautiful)

**4. The possessive pronouns** are used to emphasize one's possession over something or someone. These pronouns indicate ownership and their forms are: **1<sup>st</sup> person**: mine (singular)/ ours (plural), **2<sup>nd</sup> person**: yours (singular)/ yours (plural), **3<sup>rd</sup> person**: his/hers (singular)/ theirs (plural). The possessive pronouns have a unique characteristic: their form is quite similar to the possessive determiners like: my, yours, his/ hers... etc. Unlike possessive pronouns, the possessive determiners appear before a noun and they can't replace it:

e.g.: (Possessive pronoun). That cat is mine. / This house will be ours/ That book is his. / Those shoes were hers.

(Possessive determiners) This is my cat. / This is our house. / That was his wallet.

**5. The relative pronouns** are used when we want to introduce relative clauses. The relative pronouns from English are: who, that, whom, which. Here is how we use English relative pronouns:

e.g. who – These are the men who made that project.

that – She saw the dress that I want to buy.

**whom-** The women (*whom/who*) were present at that show received small gifts from the organizers.

**which** – The movie *which* is so popular among teenagers can't be seen on the Internet.

6. Another type of English pronouns is represented by the ***reflexive pronouns***. In order to form this type of pronoun we need to add the word - ***self*** to the personal pronouns in the singular form:

e.g. ***my – myself***: I see *myself* visiting that city in the next two years.

***you – yourself***: You saw *yourself* in the mirror in that new dress.

***He – himself / she- herself***: He bought *himself* a nice car. / She bought *herself* a dress for the party.

***The reflexive pronoun*** has 3 alternatives for the plural: for the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural – We see ***ourselves*** visiting that city.

2<sup>nd</sup> person: Can you make ***yourselves*** some coffee while I attend this meeting?

3<sup>rd</sup> person: They made ***themselves*** comfortable after I left.

To conclude, ***this type of pronoun- the reflexive one*** – is used to clarify or to emphasis who or what is referred to, who makes the action and it is used in the object position when the object and the subject are the same.

As I mentioned in the abstract of this article, there is no difference *in form* between ***the reflexive and the intensive pronoun***. Because they have identical forms it can be difficult to differentiate between the reflexive pronoun and the intensive one. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that intensive pronouns are used only to emphasis something or someone. Moreover, several English grammar books don't even mention this category.

7. As a general rule, we find ***the intensive pronoun*** right after the noun that it determines and as an exception – we can also find the intensive pronoun apart from the noun that it proceeds. The ***major difference between a reflexive and an intensive pronoun*** is that ***the intensive one isn't essential to the sentence's meaning***:

e.g. The teacher ***herself*** highlighted the mistakes from your English test. (Intensive pronoun) – This sentence can keep its exact same meaning even if we erase the pronoun ***herself***: The teacher highlighted the mistakes from your English test.

The same applies for the other examples with intensive pronouns.

The engineer went to check the wires ***himself***. (Intensive pronoun)

I'll finish this article ***myself***. (Intensive pronoun)

We offered to clean the house ***ourselves***. (Intensive pronoun)

A simple way of differentiating between an intensive and a reflexive pronoun is to check if the forms: myself, yourself, himself, herself... etc, can be omitted from the sentence. ***The intensive pronoun*** can be omitted because it is used only for emphasis, therefore it does not affect the meaning of the sentence. ***The reflexive pronoun can't be omitted from the sentence***:

You saw ***yourself*** in the mirror in that new dress. / You saw in the mirror that new dress. (In this case, the omission of the reflexive pronoun changes the meaning of the sentence completely. We, therefore, have two different sentences.)

8. Moving on, another type of pronouns is represented by ***the indefinite*** ones. These pronouns refer to persons or things in a general way. The ***indefinite pronouns*** don't refer to someone in particular:

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e.g. **One** can succeed if the interview is passed. / **Many** of them saw it as an excuse to abandon the project. **Some** are already in the classroom. / **All** paid attention to the speaker.

Other forms of indefinite pronouns can be formed by using **four base words** to which we add: **body, one, thing**.

e.g.: **1. every -**: everybody, everyone, everything.

**2. some -**: somebody, someone, something

**3. Any -**: anybody, anyone, anything.

**4. No -**: nobody, no one, nothing.

Indefinite pronouns that are formed with **every-** can be used for a complete quantity, those indefinite pronouns formed with **some** – can be used to express an indefinite quantity and those that begin with **no-** are used in affirmative sentences that have a negative meaning:

e.g.: Here is **everything** that you need for this salad. (You have all the ingredients.)

I think **somebody** tried to open the door. (You don't know exactly who, or how many)

In that place there is **nothing** to visit. (Even if the sentence is affirmative, it has a negative meaning).

In addition, **whoever, whatever, other, each, few, none, and any**, are also indefinite pronouns.

**9. Reciprocal pronouns** express a mutual relationship or action. *English language has only two reciprocal pronouns: each other and one another:*

e.g: They offered **each other** gifts for their birthdays.

They support **one another** in every situation.

### **Conclusions**

In English, pronouns are an important part of speech. Pronouns can function as nouns, they can replace nouns and they can also be the subject of a sentence. English pronouns are used when we have to avoid repetition, when we want to emphasize something, when we have to introduce relative clauses and when we want to ask something.

As for grammar, English pronouns are similar in functions with nouns. Therefore, it is important for any English learner to be able to identify and to use correctly: the English noun, the English pronoun, the English verb, adverb and so on. Each part of speech helps the user of English to construct his/ her sentences properly. To know grammar, no matter the language, means to be able to speak and to write grammatically correct. This proves that you are an educated person.

To conclude, grammar has the aim: "to turn skilful pupils into skilful users of English grammar. Learning English grammar means to achieve the skill of building personal correct structures in English." (Stoian, 2022:47)

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