

SEMINAR 7B – PRONOUNS – INTRODUCTION + PERSONAL PRONOUNS

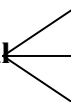
- introduction – general characteristics and classification of pronouns
- personal pronouns in detail – person, gender, number and case; specific v. generic reference; the pronoun *it*; modification of pronouns

The most common category of pro-forms – the pronoun – is rather wide-ranging as the following example illustrates:

e.g. As *it* turned out, *somebody* offered Elaine a bicycle at a price which *she* and *her* friends knew was well below *that* of a new *one*.

Since the meaning of **pronouns is general and undetermined**, in a sentence like this their referential meaning is determined purely by the **linguistic or situational context** in which they occur. **Semantically**, most pronouns function like **noun phrases**.

We distinguish the following classes and subclasses:



1. **central**  **personal** – *I, me, you, they, them, ...*
reflexive – *myself, themselves, ...*
possessive – *my / mine, their / theirs, ...*

2. **reciprocal** – *each other, one another*

3. **relative** – *which, that, ...*

4. **interrogative** – *who, what, ...*

5. **demonstrative** – *this, those, ...*

6. **indefinite**  **positive**  **universal** – *both, each*
assertive – *some, several*
non-assertive – *any, either*

negative – *nobody, neither*

Some pronouns have **morphological characteristics that nouns do not have**:

- 1) **case**: a contrast between subjective v. objective case (*I / me, she / her*)
- 2) **person**: a contrast between 1st, 2nd and 3rd persons
- 3) **gender**: personal v. nonpersonal; masculine v. feminine
- 4) **number**: *I / we, he / they*

CENTRAL PRONOUNS

I. PERSONAL PRONOUNS

- like all central pronouns, personal pronouns have a **person contrast** (i.e. separate 1st, 2nd and 3rd person forms)
- in the 3rd person there are three genders – **masculine, feminine, nonpersonal**
- there are also number contrasts (**sg. v. pl.**)
- in the personal subclass – 1st and 3rd person also have a contrast in **case (subjective v. objective)**, 2nd person forms are in both cases identical (*you*)

A) PERSON

- 1st person = the speaker / writer
 - 2nd person = the addressee
 - 3rd person = the persons/ things which are neither of the previous two
- if more pronouns are coordinated, the sequence is considered:

1st person – You and I can go together, can't **we**?

2nd person – You and Gillian / she agree with that, don't **you**?

3rd person – Fred / he and Mona / she met in Tunis, didn't **they**?

The order of pronouns

- 1st person comes last (especially if it is the singular)
- 2nd person usually comes first

e.g. *You, Jack and I* will still be at work.
Why didn't they invite *you* and *her*?

- in the 3rd person – usually the masculine comes before the feminine

e.g. *He and she* were both elected.

- the pronoun comes before the noun phrase

e.g. *She* and *another student* were expelled from school.

B) GENDER

- gender distinctions are largely restricted to 3rd person singular of personal, possessive and reflexive pronouns – masculine, feminine and nonpersonal forms

e.g. *He* has hurt *his* hand.

She asked *herself* why she had had bought it.

Personal v. nonpersonal gender

- personal – not only human beings, also supernatural beings (*the Deity, gods, angels*) and higher animals

- the pronoun *it* can be also used to refer to e.g. *babies*

- personification – *a computer = he, a car = he or she*

- if we do not know the gender as for example in:

Someone is knocking so I'd better go and let _____ in. (*him or her?*)

→ the masculine can be used as the unmarked form but many people prefer to use reference to both sexes as in:

An ambitious player must discipline *himself* or *herself*.

Someone is knocking so I'd better go and let *him* or *her* in.

- often the **gender-neutral plural** can be used (when we do not have to express number concord strictly), usually with indefinite pronouns – *someone, somebody, anyone, anybody, no one, nobody*

e.g. *Everyone* thinks *they* have the right to be here.

Someone has parked *their* car under the 'No parking' sign.

Has *anybody* brought *their* dictionary?

- the personal / nonpersonal contrast is also found in relative pr. (*who* v. *which*) and indefinite pr. (*somebody* v. *something*)

C) NUMBER

- with the 2nd person there is number contrast only in the reflexive pronoun (*yourself* v. *yourselves*)

e.g. Look at your hand, *Jack*. You've cut *yourself*.

Keep your voices down, *children*, you must behave *yourselves*.

- **but** (=except) used as a preposition – many people prefer the subjective form if it is in the subject territory:

e.g. Nobody but she objected.
Nobody but she can solve the problem.

Usually, we use objective forms, subjective forms are possible in a more formal style.

However, in object territory both forms are possible:

e.g. Nobody objected but she / her.
Nobody can solve the problem but her.

We can also avoid this saying: Nobody said anything but myself.

Specific reference

- central pronouns – usually have definite meaning and specific reference, in the 3rd person the identity of reference is supplied by the linguistic context either **anaphorically** (a) or **cataphorically** (b)

a) There is an excellent museum here and everyone should visit it.
My brother is afraid that he will fail the test.

b) When she had examined the patient, the doctor picked up the telephone.

- with anaphoric reference (which is more common than cataphoric) it does not have to be always clear to what / which person we refer:

e.g. Mr Fairweather asked Janice if she could come into her room; she seemed to be more upset than she had ever seen her.

→ the pronouns have sg feminine reference – they do not determine the specific identities – it depends on the larger context or situation; to avoid ambiguity or confusion we may use the nouns again

Generic reference

- in certain cases the reference is rather generic, especially with relative clauses, as in:

e.g. He (i.e. anyone) who hesitates is lost.
Ever since he found a need to communicate, man has been the ‘speaking animal’.

- for ordinary purposes the pronouns such as ‘*we, you, they*’ can be used as generics:

e.g. These days *you* have to be careful with your money.
We live in an age of moral dilemmas.
They will soon find a cure for cancer.
They say it’s going to snow today.

- the pronoun ‘*they*’ is especially convenient when we express **regret** or **disapproval**:

e.g. I wonder why *they* don’t repair the roads more often.
I see *they* are raising the bus fares again. What will *they* be doing next?

- the pronoun ‘*we*’ implies the 1st person involvement

- the pronoun ‘*you*’ implies special interest in the addressee

Special uses of ‘*we*’

- a) How are *we* feeling today? - a doctor talking to his patient
- b) *We*’re in a bad mood today. – one secretary talking to another about the boss
- c) As *we* saw in chapter 3 – in serious writing ‘*we*’ seeks to involve the reader in a joint enterprise
- d) As *we* showed a moment ago, – in formal writing – the writer wants to avoid ‘I’ which might be felt somewhat egoistical

The pronoun *it*

- any sg noun phrase that does not determine reference by ‘*he*’ or ‘*she*’ is referred to by ‘*it*’ – collectives, nouncount concretes, singular abstractions

e.g. The *committee* met soon after *it* had been appointed.
He bought some *salmon* because *it* was her favourite food.
When you are ready to report *it*, I would like to know your assessment of the problem.

The last example shows that ‘*it*’ can refer to the content of whole sentences and sequence of sentences:

e.g. I don’t like to say *it* but I must. You have lost your job because you didn’t work hard enough. You have only yourself to blame.

It is also possible to use the so-called ‘**extra positional *it***’:

e.g. *It* has to be said that you have lost your job because

The so-called '**anticipatory it**' is used in cleft sentences:

e.g. It was only last week that the death was announced.
It was John that told me about her failure.

'It' is also used as the so-called '**prop**' (or '**dummy**' or '**empty**') **subject**, especially denoting time, distances and atmospheric conditions:

e.g. If *it* stops raining, we can go for a walk.
It's getting dark.
What time is *it*?
How far is *it* to York from here?

It is found not only in the subject position:

e.g. I take *it* that she has declined the invitation.

It is often found in idioms:

e.g. He had a hard time of *it* in the army. (= to find life difficult)
At last we've made *it*. (= achieved success)
How's *it* going?

It can also be used as a substitute for a predication:

e.g. She was a rich woman and she looked *it*. (=a rich woman)

Modification of pronouns

- is generally limited
- concerns mainly personal pronouns with the objective case

a) adjectives (esp. in informal exclamations)

e.g. *Poor you! Silly me! Clever you! Poor us!*

b) appositive nouns, with plural 1st and 2nd person

e.g. Will *you others* please wait here?
We doctors think that

c) 'here' and 'there' with 1st and 2nd person

e.g. Whatever you others do, *we here* would be willing to leave now.
Could *you there* collect your passports at the desk? (!this tends to sound rude!)

d) prepositional phrases

e.g. It is very much the concern of you / us *in the learned professions*.
You *in the rain coat* (impolite!)

e) emphatic reflexives

e.g. I *myself* would not do that.
They *themselves* said so.
She *herself* wanted to

f) universal pronouns with plurals

e.g. We *all* except responsibility.
You *both* need help.

g) relative clauses, mainly in formal style

e.g. We *who fought for this principle* will not lightly abandon it.
He or she *who left a case in my office* should claim it as soon as possible.

Note:

- combination 'they that' is rare, '**those who**' is preferred ('they who' is not possible)