

## THE BASICS OF SPEECH 2: PRONOUNS I

In the English language, pronouns are words used mostly as substitutes for nouns or noun phrases. The use of pronouns allows a writer to continue depicting a person, a place, or a thing without repeating the discussed noun. This prevents the flow of a particular piece from becoming bulky and repetitive.

Pronouns used in complete sentences have antecedents. An antecedent is simply the noun which the pronoun refers to, or supersedes.

Lanre desperately searched for his keys to the safe, but he could not find them.  
(The pronoun *his* stands for *Lanre's*, and the pronoun *he* stands for *Lanre*; the writer uses *them* to avoid repeating *keys to the safe*. *Lanre* is the antecedent of *his* and of *he*; *keys to the safe* is the antecedent of *them*.)

### Classification of Pronouns

Pronouns are generally classified into seven groups, as follows: **personal, reflexive, intensive, relative, indefinite, interrogative, and demonstrative.**

In this first part, we will look into personal, reflexive, and intensive pronouns.

#### **Personal Pronouns**

A personal pronoun is a word used in place of a specific person or thing. Personal pronouns include *I, you, he, she, it, mine, yours, his, hers, our, ours, and theirs.*

Personal pronouns take on four different forms, respectively identified by:

##### 1. The number

The number of a pronoun can be singular if it refers to one thing, or plural if it refers to more than one thing. Singular pronouns include *I, you, he, him, she, her, my, mine, and it.* Plural pronouns include *we, us, ours, they, them, its, and their.*

I apologize for not taking the matter more seriously.  
(The singular pronoun *I* replaces the name of the person making the apology in this sentence.)

**We** now should be able to claim the farmland as **ours**.  
(The plural pronoun *We* stands for the persons now able to claim the farmland. *Ours* replaces the antecedent *We*.)

## 2. The gender

The gender of a pronoun can be masculine, feminine, or neuter. Masculine pronouns include *he*, *him*, and *his*. Feminine pronouns include *she*, *her*, and *hers*. Neuter pronouns include *it*, *its*, *they*, *them*, and *their*.

For the **computers** to work properly, **they** need a newer operating system.  
(The neuter pronoun *they* replaces the neuter noun *computers*.)

**Ms. Shelly** lost **her** dog three days ago.  
(The feminine pronoun *her* replaces the feminine noun *Ms. Shelly*.)

**Br. Johnson** showed me a picture of the new house **he** bought from the auction.  
(The masculine pronoun *he* replaces the masculine noun *Br. Johnson*.)

## 3. The person

Personal pronouns belong to one of three persons: the person/people speaking (**first person**), the audience (**second person**), and the person or thing spoken about (**third person**).

**I** need to sleep soon.  
**We** must not allow the trade secrets to leak anymore.  
(In both sentences, *I* and *We* are used to refer to the person/persons speaking. *I* and *We* are used in the first person )

**Lois**, **you** are really getting too old for that!  
Where is **your** cousin now?  
(In the first sentence, *you* refers to the antecedent *Lois* and is used in second person: *Lois* is being spoken to. In the second sentence *your* is also used in the second person, referring to the person spoken to.)

Did **she** not leave behind instructions?  
**He** is always playing video games.  
(In both sentences, *she* and *He* are used in third person: *He* and *she* refer to someone being spoken about.)

#### 4. The case

The case of a pronoun tells us how it is to be used in relation to other words. There are three such cases: the **subjective** (or **nominative**) case, the **objective case**, and the **possessive case**.

*Subjective* (or *Nominative*) – A personal pronoun is in the subjective (or nominative) case when it is used as the subject of a verb (or clause).

**I** want fish.

Do **you** think the proposal is beneficial to **your** position in this company? (In the first sentence *I* is the subject of the verb *want*, and is thus a subjective case pronoun. In the second sentence *your* [which refers to the antecedent *you*] is the subject complement of the verb *think*, and thus a subjective case pronoun.)

A pronoun is also in the subjective case when it follows a form of the *be* verb (*am, is, was, were, been, seem, feel*).

“Am **I** even saying this?” asked her Grandmother.

(The pronoun *I* follows the verb *am*, making *I* a subjective case pronoun.)

*Objective* – A personal pronoun is in the objective case when it is used as the direct object of a verb, the indirect object of a verb, or the object of a preposition.

The dog really likes **her**.

(*her* is the direct object of the verb *likes*, making *her* an objective case pronoun.)

The statisticians showed **me** the records.

(*me* is the indirect object to whom the action of the verb *showed* is done. *me* is also receiving the direct object *records*. Hence, *me* is an objective case pronoun.)

Give the rest of the food to **him**.

(*him* is the object of the preposition *to*. As such, *him* is an objective case pronoun.)

*Possessive* – A possessive case pronoun is used when the pronoun identifies possession or ownership. Note that an apostrophe is not used with a personal pronoun to show possession (*their's, your's, our's, her's, his's*, and so on, do not exist).

Look at all these free books. That red one is **mine**!  
(*mine* shows possession of the red book. Thus, *mine* is in the possessive case.)

That is not the rug. **Theirs** have black and red dots all over.  
(*Theirs* shows ownership of a rug that has black and red dots. So, *Theirs* [which is also in third person] is in the possessive case.)

### Reflexive Pronouns

A reflexive pronoun refers back to the subject of a sentence, indicating a person or thing that simultaneously performs and receives the action of a verb. Reflexive pronouns are always the objects, and never the subjects, of a sentence. Examples include *myself*, *yourself*, *himself*, *herself*, *ourselves*, *yourselves*, and *themselves*. Note that reflexive pronouns can also function as intensive pronouns.

Pour in any more acid and you will burn **yourself**.  
(The *you* responsible for *pouring acid* will receive the action of *burning*, if he/she were to pour in any more. Note that *yourself* acts as a direct object.)

Although his Uncle promised to repair his car, Hassan ended up doing it **himself**.  
(In this sentence *Hassan* repairs his car for *himself*. *Himself* refers to *Hassan* who both performs and receives the action of repairing the car. Note that *himself* is the indirect object.)

### Intensive Pronouns

While intensive pronouns carry the same form as reflexive pronouns, they differ in usage. An intensive pronoun is used to emphasize its antecedent and usually appears right after the subject of the sentence.

I **myself** will tell the story.  
We **ourselves** made certain the dog was properly buried.  
The volunteers **themselves** were able to deal with the escalating tensions amongst the youth that day.  
(In all three sentences, the pronouns *myself*, *ourselves*, and *themselves* emphasize their antecedents *I*, *We*, and *The volunteers* respectively. *I*, *We*, and *The volunteers* are emphasized in the actions they perform through the use of *myself*, *ourselves*, and *themselves*.)

It is equally possible for the pronoun to precede the noun.

By **itself**, Mathematics is quite the subject.

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