

THE BASICS OF SPEECH 2: PRONOUNS II

In the first part of this essay we looked at personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns, and intensive pronouns. In this part we will consider relative pronouns, indefinite pronouns, interrogative pronouns, and demonstrative pronouns.

Relative Pronouns

A relative pronoun relates one part of the sentence to a word in another part of a sentence. They are called relative pronouns because they usually introduce dependent clauses¹ by relating further information to the rest of the sentence. As such, each relative pronoun in a sentence refers back to an antecedent (a noun that precedes the pronoun). Through the use of a dependent clause, a relative pronoun describes a noun in the independent clause²; hence, a pronoun acts as the subject or the object of a dependent clause. Relative pronouns include *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, *that*, *whomever*, *whichever*, and *whatever*. Do note that a dependent clause that begins with a relative pronoun is also known as a **Relative Clause**.

There goes the driver **who won the race** on his way to the West Indies.
(In this sentence the relative pronoun *who* refers back to *the driver*. *Who* is the subject of the verb *won*, and the relative clause *who won the race*. The independent clause in this sentence is *There goes the driver on his way to the West Indies*.)

Who and *whoever* are used (formally) as the subjects of a dependent or relative clause, while *whom* and *whomever* are used as the objects of a relative clause. *Who*, *whoever*, *whom*, and *whomever* are used for persons. *Who* is used when a particular person is spoken about. *Whose* denotes possession.

The student **who gets the best grade** is not guaranteed a secure career.
Most of the neighborhood, **whoever did not own a garden**, bought their vegetables from the farmer's market.
(In the first sentence, the relative pronoun *who* relates back to the noun *The student* and is the subject of the verb *gets*. *Who* also introduces the relative clause *who gets the best grade*, which further describes the independent clause *The student is not guaranteed a*

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- 1 A dependent clause, like an independent clause, also has a subject and a predicate. However, it is always introduced by a relative pronoun or a subordinating conjunction.
 - 2 An independent clause is a combination of words including a subject and a verb; a dependent clause can stand alone as a sentence.

secure career. In the second sentence, the relative pronoun *whoever* relates back to the noun phrase *Most of the neighborhood* and is subject of the compound verb *did not own*. *Whoever* also introduces the relative clause *whoever did not own a garden*, which further describes the independent clause *Most of the neighborhood bought their vegetables from the farmer's market*. Since *who* and *whoever* start the action in both sentences, they are in the subjective case.)

The board shall send invitations to the Bosco Family alone, **whomever** you choose.

The lady to **whom** you have just spoken is the owner of the company.

(In the first sentence, *whomever* introduces the relative clause *whomever you choose* and is the object of the verb *choose*. *Whomever* also relates back to the noun phrase *the Bosco Family*. In the second sentence, *whom* relates back to the noun *The lady* and is the object of the verb *spoken*. Since *whom* and *whomever* receive action in both sentences, they are in the subjective case.)

How do you know to choose correctly between *who* and *whom*? One way is to identify whether the relative pronoun needed is the subject or the object of the relative clause (dependent clause). As mentioned in the examples above, if the relative pronoun needed receives the action it is in the objective case. Should the relative pronoun initiate action, it is in the subjective case. Another useful tip is provided in the section dealing with interrogative pronouns.

While *which* and *that* can be used for persons in speech, they are formally used for things. Additionally *that* is used (formally) only in restrictive relative clauses, and can sometimes serve as a substitute for *who* (when referring to people in a general manner) and *which* (when referring to things, or the previous clause as a whole). *Which* may be used in both non-restrictive relative and restrictive relative clauses: When used in restrictive relative clauses, *which* places more emphasis on an explanation.

This is the car **that** had wonderful art pieces etched all over it.

The store did not have the recordings **which** I wanted.

(*That* relates back to the noun *the car* and adds information essential to our understanding of the sentence. *Which* relates back to the noun *the recordings*. Because *which I wanted* is a relative clause, it places more emphasis on the explanation.)

Restrictive Relative Clauses (also defining relative clauses) detail the meaning of a sentence in a substantial way, and are mostly introduced with the pronoun *that*. **Non-restrictive Relative Clauses**

(also non-defining relative clauses) simply provide additional information, and are typically introduced with the pronoun *which*. Non-restrictive relative clauses are distinguished by a set of commas while restrictive relative clauses are not.

The building **that was recently painted green** is to the left of the postal office.
The building, **which was recently painted green**, is to the left of the postal office.
(In the first sentence, the relative clause *that was recently painted green* restricts the meaning of “building” to one particular building – the information is very specific. In the second sentence, the clause *which was recently painted green* simply adds coincidental detail.)

Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns do not substitute for specific nouns. Instead, they function as nouns. They are called indefinite because their antecedents are unclear or unknown: Indefinite pronouns point to an identifiable but unspecified person or thing. Indefinite pronouns include *all, any, anybody, each, each one, everyone, everything, either, neither, few, much, nothing, something, and such*.

Most indefinite pronouns are singular, only taking singular verbs (*anybody, anyone, everybody, no one, someone, somebody*).

Each of the pencils **is** accounted for.
Anyone courageous enough to take on this challenge **is** welcome.
Nobody **is** leaving here tonight.
(In the sentences above, the pronouns *each, anyone, and nobody* are followed by the singular verb *is*.)

A few indefinite pronouns are always plural and, thus, only take plural verbs (*both, many, ones, others, few, several*)

Many of the immigrants **are** still waiting for **their** clearance at the airport.
Both the families involved in the altercation **are** reaching a settlement as we speak.
(In the first sentence *many* is plural, and so are *their* and *are*. In the second sentence, *both* is plural and so is *are*.)

However, some indefinite pronouns can either be singular or plural (*all, any, some, more, most, none*). Whether or not the indefinite pronoun is singular or plural depends on the context. Compare the following sets of sentences:

Some of the fruits were quite rotten before we even left the port.
Some of this fruit is rotten.

More students are expected to leave the campus before the storm arrives.
More of this particular dish is what I want.

None of them were willing to accompany Trod through the cold forest.
None of what the teacher says is making sense.

Interrogative Pronouns

As suggested by the name, an interrogative pronoun is used to ask a question. The interrogative pronoun represents the person or thing that we ask the question about. Interrogative pronouns include *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, and *what*. Note that *who*, *whom*, or *which* can be used as relative pronouns. You will also find that *who*, *whom*, and (sometimes) *which* are used to refer to people, while *which* and *what* are used to refer to things and to animals. *Which* is generally used for additional specificity than *what*.

Which of the houses belongs to the merchant?
(The interrogative pronoun *which* asks about the particular house belonging to the merchant.)

What did the police officer say?
(The interrogative pronoun *what* asks about what the police officer said.)

Whom did you tell?
Who told you?

(*Who* versus *Whom* – The “He-Him Technique”: This is an informal way to know the proper choice between *who* and *whom*. It basically entails envisioning the answer with *he* or *him*. If the answer requires *he*, then use *who*; if the answer requires *him*, then use *whom*. So it follows, the answer to the first question would be *I told him*; hence, the use of *whom*. For the second question, the answer would be *he told me*; hence, the use of *who*.)

Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are pronouns that identify specific nouns. Demonstrative pronouns substitute nouns without naming them, as the clarification of such particular nouns can be understood from the context. Demonstrative pronouns include *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*.

Demonstrative pronouns represent things that are:

- i. nearer in distance,
- ii. nearer in time,
- iii. farther in distance, and
- iv. farther in time

They additionally identify the replaced noun as singular or plural.

Some examples below:

That looks quite like a crouching pheasant from up here.
(The demonstrative pronoun *that* represents a singular thing that is farther in distance.)

These are the donations that need to be taken quickly to the orphanage.
(*These* represents the donations [plural] that are nearer in distance.)

Those were the days indeed.
(*Those* identifies a period in the distant past.)

While demonstrative pronouns are typically used to identify things, they can also be used for people (when the person is identified).

This is the Governor speaking. Is **that** the police chief?
(*This* identifies the person speaking. *That* refers to the listener.)

That sounds like your grandmother.
(*That* identifies the sound of a voice familiar to the person being spoken to.)

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