

THE PRONOUNS AS SPECIFIC WORD – CLASSES IN THE ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL SYSTEM

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The meaning of the pronoun as a separate part of speech is somewhat difficult to define. In fact, some pronouns share essential peculiarities of nouns (e.g. *he*), while others have much in common with adjectives (e.g. *which*). This made some scholars think that pronouns were not a separate part of speech at all and should be distributed between nouns and adjectives. However, this view proved untenable and entailed insurmountable difficulties. Hence it has proved necessary to find a definition of the specific meaning of pronouns, distinguishing them from both nouns and adjectives. From this angle the meaning of pronouns as a part of speech can be stated as follows: pronouns **point** to the things and properties without naming them. Thus for example, the pronoun *it* points to a thing without being the name of any particular class of things. The pronoun *its* points to the property of a thing by referring it to another thing. The pronoun *what* can point both to a thing and a property.

As far as form goes pronouns fall into different types. Some of them have the category of number (singular and plural), for example *this*, while others have no such category, for example, *somebody*. Again, some pronouns have the category of case (*he – him, somebody – somebody's*), while others have none (*something*).

Functionally some pronouns combine with verbs (*he speaks, find him*), while others can also combine with a following noun (*this room*). In the sentence, some pronouns may be the subject (*he, what*) or the object, while others are the attribute (*my*). Pronouns can be predicatives.

As we have already seen the definition of pronouns as a separate part of speech has caused many difficulties. More than once in the history of linguistics the very existence of pronouns as a part of speech has been denied. However, attempts of this kind have not proved successful and in present – day grammars, both English and Russian, pronouns are recognized as a part of speech. This in itself seems to prove that they indeed have some peculiar features which cannot be “explained away”.

Thus, the pronoun *I, you, he, etc.*, though pointing to things (in the widest sense of the word) and in so far resembling nouns, cannot as a rule be modified by adjectives. (Phrases like *poor me* appear to be rare.) These pronouns differ from nouns in that they cannot be connected with any article, or modified by a

prepositional phrase, etc. we will therefore start on the assumption that pronouns do constitute a separate part of speech, and proceed to investigate their grammatical properties.

We usually find in grammars a classification of pronouns into personal, possessive, interrogative, indefinite, relative, etc. It is clear, however, that some points in that classification are not grammatical at all. Thus, if we say, for example, that a pronoun is indefinite we do not characterize it from a grammatical but from a semantic point of view. There is no doubt that the pronoun *something* is indefinite in its meaning, but that indefiniteness of meaning is in no way reflected either in its morphological properties or its syntactical functions. This is as much as to say that the indefiniteness of its meaning is irrelevant from the grammatical viewpoint. In a similar way, if we state that the pronoun *nothing* is negative, we characterize its meaning (and a most important characteristic it is, too), but, again, this is irrelevant for grammar, since it does not entail anything concerning the morphological or syntactical peculiarities of the word. Therefore, in proceeding to a study of pronouns, we will try to keep the grammatical viewpoint firmly in mind, though this will not always be an easy thing to do.

In dealing with the category of case in pronouns, we must bear in mind that they need not in this respect be similar to nouns. Some of them may, and indeed do, have peculiarities which no noun shares.

Some pronouns distinguish between two cases which are best termed nominative and objective (instead of nominative we might also say subjective). These are following:

Nominative case: *I, he, she, (it), we, (you), they, who*

Objective case: *Me, him, her, (it), us, (you), them, whom.*

The two pronouns in brackets, *it* and *you*, might have been left out of the list. We have included them because they share many other peculiarities with the pronouns *I, he, she, we* and *they*. No other pronoun, and, indeed, no other word in the language has that kind of case system.

A certain number of pronouns have a different case system, they distinguish between a common and a genitive case, in the same way as the nouns treated above. These are, *somebody, anybody, one, another*, and a few more.

All other pronouns have no category of case (*something, anything, nothing, everything, some, any, no, my, his, etc.; mine, hers, etc.*).

The case system in pronouns of the *somebody* types is identical with that of the nouns of the *father* type. So we need not go into this question any further.

The case system of the pronouns given on this page, on the other hand, is quite isolated in the language, and requires special investigation.

Opinions on the precise stylistic colouring of such sentences differ to some extent. What seems certain here is that the nominative forms *I, he, etc.* are being gradually restricted to the function of subject, whereas the objective case forms *me, him, etc.*, are taking over all other functions. This process seems to have gone further with the first person singular pronoun than with the other; the reason for this is not yet clear. It is the isolated position of this case system in the language which must be held responsible for the change.

With the pronoun *who* the development is partly similar, and partly different. It is similar in the main point: the case difference between *who* and *whom* is quite obviously disappearing. But here it is the original objective case form that is giving way, and it is no longer preserved in any specific syntactic function. Thus, the sentence *whom did you see?* is being superseded by the variant, *who did you see?*, and, similarly, *who* tends to take the place of *whom* in such sentences as, ***This is the man who(m) you wanted to see.***

It ought to be emphasized that what we mean here is the grammatical category of number, and the question is, in what pronouns and to what extent that category is actually found.

It will be easily seen that the category of number has only a very restricted field in pronouns. It is found in the pronouns ***this/these, that/those, other/others*** (if not used before a noun). We need not dwell here on the very peculiar means which are used to form the plural of **this** and of **that**. The question is one of the history of English rather than of Modern English structure. We can limit ourselves to the statement that the method by which each of the two words forms its plural is quite individual and unanalysable from the viewpoint of the modern language.

As to the pronouns: **I, we; he, she, it / they**, it must be stated that there is no grammatical category of number here. **We** is not form of the pronoun **I**, but a separate word in its own right. In a similar way, **they** is not a form of **he**, or **she**, or **it**, of all of them, but a separate word.

There is no grammatical category of number either in the pronouns: **my/our; his, her, its/their, and mine/ours; his, hers / theirs**. For example, **her** and **there** are different words, not different forms of one word.

A peculiar difficulty arises here with reference to the pronouns: **myself / (ourselves), ourselves; yourself / yourselves; himself, herself, itself / themselves**.

If we compare the two pronouns: **myself and ourselves**, we shall see at once that the difference between the first elements of the two words is purely lexical (just as

in the corresponding words **my** and **our**). Whereas the second elements differ from each other by the same suffix – **s** that is used to form the plural of most nouns (And of course also by the alternation [f]/[v], just as in the nouns. Shelf/ shelves, wolf/wolves, etc. this is irrelevant here).

Thus, we are brought to the conclusion that **ourselves** is essentially a different word from **myself**.

There are no other grammatical categories in the English pronoun: there is no category of gender. The pronouns: **he, she, it** and also the pronouns: **his, her, its; his, hers; himself, herself, itself**, are all separate words. Thus, **she** is not a form of the word **he** a separate word in its own right.

There are many examples in English pronouns of the same phonetic unit used to express different meanings in different contexts. So the question arises whether this is a case of polysemy, that is, different meanings of the same word, or of homonymy, that is, different words sounding alike. We may state the following cases in point: **that** demonstrative and **that** relative; **who** interrogative and **who** relative; **which** interrogative and **which** relative; **myself** (and the other **self** – pronouns) reflexive, and the same pronouns intensive (non – reflexive).

That seems to be the easiest of the problems to settle, as we can apply the test of the plural form here.

The demonstrative **that** has a plural form **those**, whereas the relative **that** remains unchanged in the plural.

It is obvious that the **that** which remains unchanged in the plural cannot be the same word as **the that** which has the plural form **those**. So we arrive at the conclusion **that** there are two different pronouns: **that** (relative) and **that / those** (demonstrative parallel to **this**).

With the other pronouns mentioned above no criterion of this kind can be applied, as they, none of them, have any special plural form so, if that question is to be solved at all, we shall have to look for criteria of a different kind, which may not prove so decisive as the one we applied in the case of **that**.

We shall have to rely on meaning and syntactical function. It is not hard to distinguish between the interrogative and the relative meaning in the pronouns **who, what, and which** can introduce subordinate clauses. However, it is not so easy to say whether the pronoun **what** is interrogative or relative in the sentence like the following: **I know what you mean**. On the one hand the meaning of the pronoun **what** seems to be the same as in the sentence: **I know what has happened**. (a so – called indirect question), where it is obviously interrogative. On the other hand, it can hardly be denied that **what** may be taken here as equivalent to **that which** and

as connecting the subordinate clause with the main clause. Since no clear distinction can be established, it seems unjustified to separate the two and to say that they are homonyms. More or less similar considerations apply to the other cases enumerated in our paper. We will therefore speak of “the pronoun **himself**”, etc. Without distinguishing “the reflexive pronoun **himself**” and “The emphatic pronoun **himself**”. The question of polysemy and homonymy of words is of course a Lexicological not a grammatical, question. We only touched on it here because we have to express a row of these words when we speak of their grammatical peculiarities.

The limits of the pronoun class are somewhat difficult to define. That's is, there are words which have some pronominal features, without being full pronouns, or, even, have other features which are not pronominal at all. We may take the word **many** as a case in point.

Another case in point is the word **certain**. When used as a predicative it is of course an adjective, as in the sentence, **we were quite certain of the fact**. Things are different, however, when **certain** is used as an attribute standing before a noun and has a meaning much the same as **some, for example, there are certain indications that this is true**, or **A certain Mr. Brown wants to see you**. The question arises, is this the same word, the adjective **certain** as in the first sentence, or is it a pronoun? Here, too, we should apply some objective tests. One of the peculiarities of the word is that it can be preceded by the indefinite article, which generally is not case the pronouns (A special case is **another**; here the indefinite article has become an integral part of the pronoun in the singular). We must also find out whether **certain** can be followed by the group “**of + noun or pronoun**”. If no such examples are met with, we shall have to conclude that there are no sufficient reasons to class **certain** with the pronouns, in spite of the peculiar meaning it has in such sentences.

With numerals, even more than with pronouns, it is difficult to keep the strictly grammatical approach and not to let oneself be diverted into lexicological considerations. O. Jespersen has quite rightly remarked that numerals have been treated by grammarians in a different way from other parts of speech. This is what he says, “...the grammarian of this chapter on numerals does what he never dreamed of doing in the two previous chapters (those on nouns and adjectives – B.I.), he gives a complete and orderly enumeration of all the words and orderly enumeration of all the words belonging to this class. (1, p. 37)

It seems therefore all the more necessary to stick to the grammatical aspect of things when dealing with this particular category of words. What, indeed, ought to be said about numerals from a grammatical viewpoint.

There are no grammatical categories to be discussed in numerals. There is no category of number nor of case, nor any other morphological category. The numerals are, to all intents and purpose, invariable. So there is only the function of numerals to be considered, and also possibilities of their substantivisation.

The most characteristic function of numerals is of course that of an attribute preceding its noun. However a numeral can also perform other function in the sentence (it can be subject, predicate and object) if the context makes it clear what objects are meant, as in; **we are seven, of the seven people I was looking for I found only three.**

An ordinal numeral can also be modified by infinitive denoting the action in which the object mentioned occupies a definite place; a characteristic example of this usage is, **He was the first to come.**

The numerals, both cardinal, show certain peculiarities of syntactic construction with pronouns. **For example, five children, five of the children, five of them,; some children, some of the children, some of them;** also **the first travelers, the first of the travelers, the first of them.** This, however, does not seem a sufficient reason uniting pronouns and numerals into one part of speech, and such a union has not so far been proposed. (2, 73).

Literature

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