

Chapter 8 Respectfully Replacing Nouns: The Pronoun

Additional information and practice

Supplemental Information on the Value of Pronouns (not included in the text)

Imagine a daily conversation in which you must constantly repeat the {NPs} in your clauses because there were no words in your language to substitute for them. While such a linguistic situation may help the speakers (and writers) clearly state who is doing what to whom, such a system might feel quite repetitive. Take the paragraph from the nursery rhyme *Mary had a little lamb* where we've removed all pronouns:

Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb. Mary had a little lamb. *The lamb's* fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go. *The lamb* followed *Mary* to school one day. *The lamb* followed *Mary* to school one day, which was against the rule. *The lamb* made the children laugh and play. *The lamb* made the children laugh and play to see the lamb at school.

Compare with the original version, with pronouns added back in:

Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb. Mary had a little lamb. *Its* fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go. *It* followed *her* to school one day. *The lamb* followed *her* to school one day, which was against the rule. *The lamb* made the children laugh and play. *It* made the children laugh and play to see the lamb at school.

Which version do you prefer? Pronouns enable us to reduce all the repetition in the initial paragraph—a nifty and useful language feature! Still, different languages show variation in the types and uses of pronouns. Mark Lieberman explains on his website *Language Log* that some linguists consider Japanese to lack the personal pronouns *I* or *me*. He says that in Japanese, the words that are sometimes used for *I* or *me* are words that are {NPs} with lexical meanings that mean “private” or “personal.” Similarly, he states that in Vietnamese, there is no single pronoun that means *I*. Instead, there are several pronouns that are equivalents to English *I*, depending on

the speaker's gender and age relative to the person they're speaking with. This is sometimes used to claim that in Vietnamese, people can't say "I love you"¹ in the same way as we do in English. But rest assured that Vietnamese can of course express the same sentiment—you must pick the right pronoun for yourself and for the person you want to profess your love to!

The role that pronouns play—replacing {NPs}—is a function of economy. Yet, pronouns can introduce the potential for ambiguity. If a speaker or writer uses a pronoun without a clear referent or uses too many pronouns making the referent of each unclear, then the listener or reader may become lost. Have you ever been in a conversation in which you had to stop the speaker to ask which *he*, *they*, or *she* they were talking about?

Supplemental Information on Reflexive Pronouns (not included in the text)

Building on your knowledge from Chapter 8, let's compare the paradigms across non-sE and sE dialects for **reflexive pronouns** and possessive determiners. Pay attention to the italicized forms.

Possessive determiners – sE	Reflexive pronouns – sE	Reflexive pronouns – non-sE
my your <i>his/her/their</i>	myself yourself <i>himself/herself/theirself</i>	myself yourself <i>hissel/hersel/ theihsel</i>
our your <i>their</i>	ourselves yourselves <i>thehselves</i>	ourselves yourselves <i>thehselves/thehselves</i>

Chart 1: Comparison of reflexive and possessive pronoun paradigms

As you can see, the possessive determiner forms *my*, *your*, etc. (left column) make an appearance in reflexive pronoun forms (*my* > *myself*, *your* > *yourself*, etc.). Yet, for sE third person singular and plural, instead of *his*, *her*, *their*, we can see that *him*, *her*, *them* is used to form *himself*, *herself*, *thehsel*, and *thehselves*. That is, the object form of the personal pronouns is what *-self/-*

¹ Lieberman, M. (2014). 'No word for "I" or "me" or "mine"', *Language Log*, 29 April, Available online: <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=12061>.

selves attaches to. Now, look at the non-sE column in Chart 5 and you can see a neat correspondence between the possessive determiners and reflexive pronouns. They all use the possessive determiners as the base to which *-self/-selves* is added, which gives us *hisself* and *theirselves*—no irregularities! And yet, the non-sE pattern is often derided as incorrect or lazy English when it is, in fact, more consistent than the sE pattern. At this point, you know what’s coming: All dialect patterns are equally grammatical!

More practice from Exercise 1

Substitute the italicized {NPs} in the chart below with an appropriate pronoun.

Exercise 1:

Function	Sentence with NP	Pronoun Substitution
Subject	a) <i>Sara and Bill</i> went home. (sE)	
Object of the Preposition	b) The cat hid in <i>the cupboard</i> . (sE)	

More practice from Exercise 2

Identify all personal pronouns in this excerpt and label each by person (first, second, third) and number (singular, plural). Indicate if the pronoun is in subject form or object form.

- a) Some students studied with them all night. (sE)
- b) Our friend asked him out. (sE)

More practice from Exercise 3

Identify all reflexive pronouns; include person and number information!² Be on the lookout for some personal datives from AE and ChE dialects as well!

- a) He was a detective *hisself*.³ (AAE)
- b) Step up here, boys, and help you’*unself*.⁴ (AE)
- c) Mary is fixing to make her some cotton dresses.⁵ (AE)
- d) He saw himself in the mirror and smiled. (sE)

² The sE examples were written with the help of OpenAI, 2024.

³ Kendall, T., R. Fasold, C. Farrington, J. McLarty, J., S. Arnsen, and B. Josler (2018). *The Corpus of Regional African American Language: DCA (Washington DC 1968)*. Version 2018.10.06. Eugene, OR: The Online Resources for African American Language Project. <http://oraal.uoregon.edu/coraal>. Transcript ID DCA_sel_ag1_m_07_1.

⁴ University of South Carolina (n.d.). Grammar and Syntax of Smoky Mountain English (SME), Available online: <https://appalachian-english.library.sc.edu/node/796.html>.

⁵ Ibid.

- e) We decided to treat ourselves to a night out. (sE)

More practice from Exercise 4

Identify all possessive pronouns (independent possessives) and possessive determiners (dependent possessives). Include information about person and number for each.

- a) The colts is theirs.⁶ (AE)
b) We met our biggest fan at the after show. (sE)

More practice from Exercise 5

Identify all demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative determiners. Determine if the demonstratives are singular or plural.

- a) I dən drove that car before.⁷ (AAE)
b) I was up there on that river about eighteen year.⁸ (AE)
c) We met those who were there later. (sE)
d) Now that was an experience I experienced my own self.⁹ (AE)
e) We'll try another'un, being that'un paid off.¹⁰ (AE)
f) This constitutes a clear breach of privacy. (sE)

More practice from Exercise 6

Identify all quantifying pronouns and quantifying determiners in the sentences below.

- a) I have been powerful bothered for several days.¹¹ (AE)
b) They ain't many places to stop.¹² (AE)
c) They is not so many there now.¹³ (AE)
d) People be thinkin' teenagers don't know nothin'.¹⁴ (AAE)
e) Don't nobody be hoopin' at Rogue Park.¹⁵ (AAE)
If somebody come up and push me.¹⁶ (ChE)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Baker-Bell, A. (2020), *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity and Pedagogy*, New York: Routledge, p. 43.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁶ Bayley, R. (2012). "Chicano English," In B. Kortmann, and K. Lunkenheimer, (eds), *The Mouton World Atlas of Variation in English*, 156-165, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 163.