

Personal pronouns in present-day English

KATIE WALES

Professor of English Language

Royal Holloway University of London



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1 Personal pronouns: definitions and descriptions

Haiku, you ku, he
She, or it kus, we ku, you
Ku, they ku. Thang ku.

(Ted Hipple, *The traditional grammarian as poet*)

1.1 Definitions

Definitions of the pronoun by English grammarians have changed little since the sixteenth century, when the term first appeared in English. Even then, the term and its definitions were based on Latin, and ultimately Greek sources: Latin *pro-nomen*, Greek *anto-numia* 'standing for a noun'. Michael (1970) traces the word-class as a separate part of speech back to Dionysius Thrax in the second century BC. In those modern grammar books for both native and foreign speakers of English, where the pronoun is actually defined at all, a definition of it as standing for a noun or as a 'substitute for a noun' is by far the most popular type (see Swan 1980); or, at least, as a substitute for a noun or noun phrase (NP) (see Leech and Svartvik 1975; Young 1984; Freeborn 1987; Crystal 1988; Greenbaum 1991; McArthur 1992). Lees and Klima (1969: 145) approve whole-heartedly of such an 'etymological' definition, which indeed has proved influential in generative grammars and related theories, as we shall see in chapter 2.

As we shall also see in greater detail in chapter 2, the notion of 'substitution' has played an important role in the discussion of personal pronouns generally, particularly the third person pronoun (henceforth 3PP). Indeed, it may be argued that for various (related and unrelated) reasons, the 3PP is often seen as the 'prototypical' personal pronoun in contrast to the first and second (henceforth 1PP and 2PP); just as the personal pronoun itself is seen as the 'prototypical' pronoun in contrast to the seven other subclasses of pronouns traditionally distinguished (possessive, reflexive, reciprocal, relative, interrogative, demonstrative, indefinite).¹

In many definitions, the conditions for 'substitution' are not specified. So the pronoun is said to stand for a noun 'already mentioned' (Robertson 1959; *OED*); or 'replace an earlier' NP (Leech and Svartvik 1975), but it is not clear whether a sentence provides the co-text or a text. With such definitions, the assumption is that the pronoun (implicitly and normally the 3PP) has

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characteristic ‘anaphoric’ reference, i.e. ‘referring back’ (see further chapter 2); also that it thus avoids (unnecessary) repetition of the noun or NP, and so has a significant stylistic function. So a string of sentences like

- (1) *Babar* grew fast. Soon *Babar* was playing with the other baby elephants. *Babar* was one of the nicest of them.

is normally less likely than

- (2) *Babar* grew fast. Soon *he* was playing with the other baby elephants. *He* was one of the nicest of them. (J. de Brunhoff, *The story of Babar* (London: Methuen, 1991), pp. 4–5)

(But see further 2.4.) As Michael (1970) also states, this function is found repeated in many definitions and discussions of the pronoun, beginning with Isidore of Seville (c. 570–636). But, as we shall see further in chapter 2, the whole question of ‘avoidance of repetition’ is a complex one. In many kinds of discourses, or for particular reasons, the noun or NP may not necessarily be replaced by a pronoun.

A definition according to textual substitution also implies that who or what the pronoun ‘refers’ to is thus ‘known’: from the co-text. In this respect, the function of the pronoun resembles that of the definite article. There is another kind of ‘substitution’ often described, which, again, recalls the function of the definite article: namely, that the pronoun is used instead of a noun which designates something or someone known from the context of situation (see *OED*; Crystal 1988; Leech 1992): what Halliday and Hasan (1976) term ‘exophoric’ as distinct from ‘endophoric’ (textual) reference. So a child might point to an elephant in the zoo and say ‘Look at *him!*’ Strictly speaking, however, despite popular definitions, the pronoun is not ‘substituting’ for a noun here: at best, as Dionysius Thrax noted in the first century BC, it is standing in place of a noun (*elephant*) that could have been used instead. ‘Substitution’, therefore, is very much a textually rather than contextually conceived term. Both noun and pronoun, in this kind of situation, could be seen to be ‘referring’ expressions, referring to an object (an elephant), with the pronoun choice being semantically simply less explicit.² As with textual or discourse reference, the speaker/writer normally expects the addressee to understand the pronominal reference. How the addressee does this will be explored further in chapter 2.

Another way of looking at an utterance like ‘Look at *him!*’ is to see the pronoun functioning as a deictic or ‘pointing’ expression, indicating something that is obvious in the situation. (I say ‘obvious’ rather than ‘visible’ since an utterance like ‘Just listen to *him!*’ is equally plausible if the elephant is trumpeting behind closed doors.) This deictic function can be extended to textual reference; and again, one can note the similarity with the definite article. In this respect, it is interesting to note Lyons’ discussion (1977, vol. 2) of the origins of the 3PP. The demonstrative pronoun is the source of both the

definite article and the 3PP in Germanic and Romance languages, ultimately derived from a common Indo-European deictic form, so that the 3PP would have a meaning like ‘that male/female one’.³ Greek grammarians included pronouns in the category of articles.

So far I have concentrated mainly on the 3PP, to the apparent exclusion of the 1PP and 2PP. As we shall see in chapter 3, it is important to distinguish these from the 3PP for many reasons, so that a sense of their differences from, as well as their similarities to, the 3PP is reasonable to establish here. One problem, for example, in defining the 1PP and 2PP in terms of ‘substitution’, is deciding what they ‘substitute’ for. It is the problem of context again, but heightened. The 1PP and 2PP are characteristically used in the situational context, and refer normally to human beings in a ‘dialogue’, the speaker (‘I’) and addressee (‘you’): properly, ‘inter-personal’ pronouns. It is harder here to see their function linguistically as substituting for a noun, since the speaker and addressee can be referred to by an infinite number of nouns, depending on their known or perceived roles or attributes: *woman, mother, teacher, harridan, wit*, etc. What can happen, of course, is that nouns to do with status can be used for direct reference to the addressee in certain social situations: ‘Come here, *mum/nurse*’; or replace the speaker in others (e.g. baby-talk: ‘*Mummy* will mend it’; and see further, 3.2). But the choice of term depends on the speaker’s perspective, and is more varied than applies with the 3PP. One can say ‘Look at *the animal*’ or ‘Look at *the monster*’, instead of ‘Look at the *elephant*’, but these would be unusual. And all of the varied terms together, as possible ‘substitutes’ for 1PP and 2PP, are more marked than nominal alternatives for the 3PP, referring to a particular entity.

One common kind of definition is that represented by the *OED*, as ‘stand[ing] instead of the names of the speaker and the person spoken to’. Certainly, in a (rare) textual use, the 1PP and 2PP can co-occur with proper names in apposition: as in legal texts or the marriage service:

- (3) *I, Katie Wales, do take thee, David Bovey, to be my lawful wedded husband.*

In certain situations also, proper names can refer to the speaker (as in baby-talk again: ‘*Katie* will mend it’; 3.2). As Lyons says (1977: 640), it is just conceivable that a language with proper names could dispense with pronouns; although, as he also suggests, participants in a conversation may not always know the names of the other(s). Certainly, in some contexts 1PP and 2PP are omitted in speech (and 3PP in some non-standard, e.g. African, varieties of English).

Semantically, it is easier to say that *I* is the alternative to the NP *the speaker*, and *you* to NPs such as *the addressees/listeners/reader(s)*; or deictically, to say that *I* refers or points to ‘the one who is speaking’ and *you* to ‘the one who is listening/reading’. In either case, in one sense the referents, unlike those for proper names, are not fixed or stable but ‘shift’ according to the situation (see further 1.3 and especially 3.1). A speaker can become a listener, or a non-

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participant altogether. Yet, in another sense, there is semantic stability, which comes from the fact that discourse is speaker-orientated: the 'I' of speech (nearly) always refers to the 'ego' who speaks, and so is essentially reflexive. (I recognise that in utterances like '*I* should take an umbrella', *I* means 'you': see chapter 3.) Hence it is the natural pronoun to use for direct speech:

(4) Katie Wales said: '*I* am the Prime Minister.'

As Reboul (1992: 176) notes, this sentence can only be a false proposition because Katie Wales is not the Prime Minister, not because Katie Wales is not '*I*'. The IPP cannot be said to '*refer*' to referents in the same sense as the 3PP, their referential field is more restricted. *She*, for example, in contrast, can refer to a huge list of entities that are marked for the female gender.

In conclusion, however, it must be said that whatever problems there are attached to the idea, grammatically speaking, of pronouns generally as standing in place of nouns, or substituting for them, it is clear that all the personal pronouns can be seen to be useful 'shorthand' referring expressions, used as alternatives either to ostensibly more explicit or descriptive forms, or to those more cumbersome (1PP and 2PP). As we shall see further in 2.4 with the 3PP, their use or function can be seen as more 'stylistic' than that of the 1PP and 2PP, since in the canonical speech situation *I* and *you* are normal/(almost) obligatory.

1.2 Pro-forms

If we concentrate for the moment on the idea of pronouns as useful devices in information processing, on the part of both the speaker and the addressee(s), for economy of expression and ease of comprehension, then we can appreciate why Quirk *et al.* (1985), for example, delimit a generic class of 'pro-forms' (pp. 75f. and chapter 12). These comprise not only pronouns (from which the term is obviously derived), but a miscellaneous group of words including adverbs (*so*; *thus*), verbs (*do*) and pronoun/determiners (*such*; *that*, 'substitute' (*sic*) *one*), etc. Again, the emphasis tends to fall on textual function rather than situational, and pro-forms are seen as an aspect of 'cohesion' (Halliday and Hasan 1976), providing covert linkage between sentences and clauses.

In the framework of Halliday and Hasan's general approach, however, the notion of 'substitution' is an entirely (lexico-)grammatical concept, to be distinguished from 'reference': 'a relation in the wording rather than in the meaning' (1976: 88), which means, in the event, that for them pronouns are not typically substitute words. A form like *one* or *do* is a 'counter' used to avoid the repetition of a lexical item, as in

(5) Katie saw a big elephant, and Tim a small *one*. (i.e. 'elephant')

(6) Katie likes elephants and Tim *does* too. (i.e. 'likes')

For them 'substitution' has to be a grammatical concept, since, as the example with *one* makes clear, semantically speaking it does not 'refer' to the same elephant as in the first clause, only an equivalent one (*sic*). We would normally understand a pronoun like *she*, *he*, *it*, however, to refer to the same elephant, and hence be 'co-referential', in a sentence like

(7) Katie likes the elephant, and Tim likes *it* too.

However, as 2.2 reveals in detail, even the 3PP does not always refer to exactly the 'same' referent as its partner NP. The reference is often less precise, and hence that of equivalence rather than identity:

(8) Sampson himself did *baby-sitting*, and *they* didn't mind a bit about hurting his feelings. (Graham Oakley, *The church mouse* (London: Macmillan, 1972), no page number)

(9) My husband gives me his *pay-slip*; my best friend has to ask for *it*.

And, as we shall see in chapter 5, it is hard to see the so-called 'generic *he*' as anything but a traditionally convenient grammatical slot-filler, in the absence of an epicene or dual pronoun to refer to both sexes, in generalising statements like

(10) Nobody likes *his* tutor.

(This is not to say, however, that *he* has no 'male' meaning, as we shall see further in chapter 5.)

For Halliday and Hasan, and for Quirk *et al.* (especially 12.9), the category of pro-form is thus complex and somewhat confusing. On the one hand, pronouns and other pro-words are regarded as having the same informational or stylistic function of avoiding repetition or redundancy of expression; on the other, they can be distinguished according to their reference, so pronouns are not 'substitute' words in the traditionally accepted sense. Yet both 3PP pronouns and pro-forms commonly function with anaphoric 'reference': pointing back to a referent or to a linguistic unit.⁴

1.3 'Meaning' and 'person'

From an informational point of view, what is striking about pro-forms generally is their apparently low semantic content, since their function is to avoid repetition. Even non-textual, situational uses of pronouns, as described in 1.1, can be seen in terms of 'given' information, designating or indicating someone or something known from the context, whether speaker, addressee or 'another'. From such an informational viewpoint, certain kinds of nouns can themselves be seen as pro-forms, or 'pseudo-pronouns'. There are, for example, what Bolinger (1977) terms 'classifiers', like *thing* and *person*.⁵ Compare

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- (11) a. I tried to start the lawn-mower, but *the thing* just wouldn't go.
b. I tried to start the lawn-mower, but *it* just wouldn't go.

The use of the NP *the thing* can, admittedly, be said to add an emotive connotation to the utterance; and certainly there are pseudo-pronouns which generally have an evaluative or emotive tone: called 'epithet' NPs by Lakoff (1976) and Bosch (1983) and classed with pronouns proper as 'shifters' by Varenne (1984), following the terminology of Jakobson (1957). (Jakobson was particularly interested in 1PP and 2PP in this respect: see further chapter 3.) NPs like *the poor sod*, *the bastard*, etc. do not say anything new about the referent already mentioned (or indicated in the context) but indicate the speaker's attitude or stance. So when I glare at the lawn-mower and say '*The bastard won't go*', my (frustrated, angry, negative) attitude is very clear.

In semiotic terms the whole class of 'shifters' including pronouns, are pointing or deictic words, and the primacy of this deictic function over the anaphoric has been much stressed by Lyons (1977). From this perspective pronouns again are said to have little lexical meaning: their full significance is to be understood from the context of utterance or from the linguistic co-text – what is termed the 'semantic content hierarchy' and what MacKay and Fulkerson (1979) term the 'pronominal surrogate hypothesis' (see further chapters 2 and 5). So Sperber and Wilson (1986: 72–3) state categorically that 'pronouns like "she" and "it". . . do not correspond to definite concepts, but merely mark an unoccupied place where a concept might go'.

But let us consider the following text. In *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll the White Rabbit reads out a letter in the trial scene, which begins (and continues in a like manner):

- (12) *They told me* you had been to *her*
And mentioned *me* to *him*:
She gave me a good character,
But said *I* could not swim.

He sent them word *I* had not gone
(*We know it* to be true):
If *she* should push the matter on,
What would become of *you*?

Alice does not believe that there is 'one atom of meaning in it'; but despite its apparent illogicality and the fact that referents for the pronouns are actually not specified, there is none the less the impression of a definite situation, and we as listeners or readers can make sense of the pronouns, give them some 'meaning'. There is more to them, in this respect in fact, than other 'pro-forms', which more plausibly are interpreted in relation to something else in the co-text. The pronouns refer or point to 'persons' (*sic*) which take their orientation from the speaker's (*I*; *me*) perspective (see further chapter 3). This orientation would apply to other deictic elements, such as demonstratives (*this*, *that*) and adverbs

of place (*here, there*) and time (*now, then*), indicating degrees of proximity to the speaker. So in this text there is an addressee (*you*) and others: *they, them* (collectively), a male (*he; him*); and a female (*she; her*). Some of these pronouns also indicate number (see 1.5 below), so adding another semantic feature to be taken into account: *they/them, we*. *You* in modern English can be either singular or plural depending on the context, and is thus ambiguous in this text. The pronoun *we* is ambiguous in another sense: referring either to the speaker and addressee (the so-called 'inclusive' *we*), or to the speaker and another ('exclusive' *we*). The pronouns therefore invoke, as it were, a mini-drama, with 'participants'.

The Greek and Roman grammarians may well have had the dramatic situation in mind when they introduced the terminology of 'person' into their grammars, since *persona* means 'role'. Again, the point of departure in the speech situation is speaker-orientated, primacy given to the 'first person' (*I*); followed by the 'second' (*you*, addressee). The 'third' person is anyone or anything else, who may or may not be present (*he, she, it, they*), but with a non-participatory role: what Quirk *et al.* (1985) term the 'third party'. These 3PP forms are also in English marked by the feature of gender in the singular, which adds another semantic feature of significance to their 'meaning'. It also adds a complication to the terminology, since in modern English masculine and feminine 3PP (*he* and *she*) make what is known as 'personal' gender distinctions, i.e. refer mostly to male and female 'persons' in the ordinary sense of human beings; whereas the 3PP *it* normally refers to non-humans (animals and objects), and so is of 'non-personal' gender (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 6.8)⁶

The category of person, frequently part of the definition of pronouns in medieval and Renaissance grammars, continues to be the most frequently used distinguishing feature of the 'person-al' pronoun classification in English, and also marks the possessives and the reflexives (see 1.5). What I hope to show in later chapters, however, is that these labels are but a traditional convenience. While we can take the canonical speech situation as our starting-point, it is more illuminating for the analysis of pronominal behaviour, roles and changes to think, for example, of speaker-orientation and addressee-orientation; and not only of specific situational reference but also of generalised. This introduces another complexity into terminology, since this kind of reference is sometimes termed 'im-personal': meaning 'in-definite' or 'generic'. Viewed in this way, the traditional distinctions of first, second and third person become blurred, since, for example, the first person 'slot' can be filled with *we, you* and *one* as well as *I*; and conversely, *we, you, it* and *they* (traditionally 1PP, 2PP and 3PP), all function as 'im-personal' pronouns. None the less, even here, the latter uses are not as devoid of specific connotations as such labelling suggests, as I discuss in chapters 2 and 3.

In more general terms, the stance adopted in the following chapters is that the personal pronouns are multi-functional in their roles in different contexts, which is tantamount to a kind of polysemy. I cannot therefore agree with

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Brainerd (1979: 3), who says sweepingly of the personal pronouns that 'with the possible exception of *it*, they are free from polyfunctionality, functioning only in their anaphoric capacity'. (The latter clause, again, is far too sweeping and inadequate a generalisation: see chapter 2.) Concentration in traditional grammars has been on their 'denotation', so to speak, their mono-functioning with person-deixis, as part of a general focus in any case on formal/paradigmatic rather than functional, pragmatic and sociolinguistic characteristics. Many of their interesting uses and rhetorical effects are either ignored completely or relegated to footnotes (e.g. so-called 'editorial' *we*), of usefulness, however, to foreign learners of English especially. As Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990: 15) argue, what are sometimes seen as 'displaced' uses of pronouns are actually commoner in discourses other than artificially constructed sentences.⁷

What is also interesting to note is that some pronouns have developed what can only be described as special 'connotations', over and above their polyfunctionality. A simple example is provided by *he* and *she*, which are sometimes used generically, and symbolically, to refer to men and women. Such a function is characteristic of advertising language, as in the following example:

- (13) Clinique Bonus Time For *Her*, For *Him*, Now at Harrods. (*Mail on Sunday*, 17 April 1994)

The common formula '*He* is an X and *she* is a Y' is punningly exploited in the following example, where *she* is the proper-name title of a magazine:

- (14) SHE is a woman and a lover
SHE is a worker and a mother
SHE is the magazine for women
Who juggle their lives . . .⁸

This kind of structure and generic meaning is echoed in the following example from the French feminist Luce Irigaray. The use of quotation marks heightens the stereotypical connotations for ironic effect:

- (15) '*She*' is indefinitely other in herself . . . not to mention her language in which '*she*' goes off in all directions and in which '*he*' is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. (1977; repr. 1985: 101)

A richer example of connotation is provided by *they*. As we shall see in chapters 2 and 3, there are various 'meanings' for non-specific *they*, which is often said (all too) vaguely to refer to 'people in general'. One of its sociolinguistic functions is in the distinguishing of in-groups from out-siders, 'us' from 'them'; and this alien-ating sense is heightened in utterances like '*They* Came from Another Planet', used in film and book titles, etc. (Compare *Them!* (1954), where we have no difficulty in interpreting *they/them* as specifically aliens (*sic*) even in the absence of an accompanying visual image.) A more obvious extension of 'meaning' in the same context, because *it* is used for non-personal/in-animate reference (chapter 6), is the film title *It Came from*

Outer Space (1953); and the title of Stephen King's novel *It* (1986); and of a book of science-fiction postcards, *Things, its and aliens* (D. Gifford (1991)). On the significance of the plural marker, see 1.4 below.⁹

The *Longman dictionary of English language and culture* (1992) (*LDEL*C) gives four/five different specific 'lexical' senses to *it* (which, interestingly, is thus classified as a noun: see 1.4), but 'alien' is not one of them. There is what they claim is the 'old-fashioned' 'gin and *it*,' referring to Italian vermouth, illustrated, however, in a recent strip-cartoon in the *London Evening Standard*:

(16) Augusta: What is that, Grandma?

Answer: This is a gin and *it*, darling, and it is perfectly frightful. *The it* has got altogether above *itself*. (25 November 1994)

*LDEL*C also cite *it* in playground discourse for 'the most important person in a children's game'.¹⁰ There is the sense, marked 'slang' in *LDEL*C, of the 'most important moment' as in 'This is *it*' which, superlative as it is, could also be the basis in part of the signification of the Coca-Cola slogan 'Coke is *it*' (the best? the real thing?), and of the phrase 'She thinks she's *it*' (the 'bees' knees').

The fourth sense classified, also 'slang', is divided into (a) 'sexual intercourse' (not illustrated) and (b) 'sex-appeal', labelled as 'old-fashioned'. The latter is particularly associated with Hollywood in the 1920s and the silent screen flapper Clara Bow, dubbed the '*it*-girl'.¹¹ There is no doubt, however, of the strong association of the word even in the 1920s with sex itself as well as sex-appeal, and this particular connotation is very prominent in today's usage, where it functions as a euphemism for the sex-act itself. *How was it for you?*¹² is the title of a book by Maureen Lipman in the 1980s, echoing the well-known post-intercourse question; and Jonathan Green (1993) writes (more generally) of *It: sex in the sixties*. The most commonly seen co-text and context is that of car-stickers, with the formulaic structure 'X do *it* + adverbial phrase', where X designates an occupation, and so it is punningly ambiguous: as in

(17) a. Teachers do *it* with class.

b. Linguists do *it* with their tongues.¹²

1.4 Pronouns as 'noun-like'

As I have noted above, *LDEL*C distinguishes *it* as pronoun from *it* as noun, presumably solely on the grounds of specific, or idiomatic, senses. (Stress could be a factor, but not for the meaning of 'sexual intercourse'.) What is thus implied is that pronouns normally do not have 'lexical' meaning; only nouns do. Yet it must be noted here (for amplification in chapter 2) that, semantically speaking, it is difficult to draw such a clear-cut distinction, and that it is preferable to envisage a cline or continuum of lexical meaning, with the so-called 'prop *it*' at one end, and numerous and various quite precise uses at the

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other. It is hard to work out (and even harder for the foreign learner of English) why 'the most important moment' is singled out by *LDEL*C as one of the senses of *it* (n.), when there are common usages such as 'You've never had *it* so good' (the Conservative slogan of the Macmillan government), or 'How's *it* going?', where *it* presumably means 'life (in general)'.

At first glance it might be easier to make a distinction between pronoun and noun on formal rather than semantic grounds. So if we can talk of *its* (plural) as aliens, then we are assigning a feature of countability normally associated with nouns. (Number in pronouns characteristically operates rather differently, signifying 'X + other', rather than 'X + X, etc.'). In this respect, the distinction between pronoun and noun made in *LDEL*C for the entries for *he* and *she* looks as much formal as semantic, since the illustrative sentence shows the pronouns preceded by an article, the usual criterion for marking items as nouns: e.g.

(18) Is your dog a *he* or a *she*?

Semantically speaking, the sense is simply the denotational one of 'male' or 'female'.¹³

There are other formal characteristics of nouns which sometimes apply to pronouns: for example, pronouns can occasionally be found to be the first element of compounds, as in *it-girl* (cited in 1.3); *theydunnit* (*LRB*, 28 April 1994), *me generation*, etc. *He-* and *she-* are actually well-established markers of gender in compounds such as *he-/she-goat*; *she-devil*, *he-man*, etc. Occasionally also they can be (pre-)modified by adjectives, as in *poor you*, *dear me*, and (post-)modified by relative clauses, as in the archaic/literary '*He* who would valiant be . . .'

All these features so far mentioned (premodification by article/adjective, compounding, plurality), however, are not the 'usual' attributes for personal pronouns; if anything, they are similar to proper names in these respects. Yet many grammarians, traditional and present-day, stress in their definitions that pronouns are a subclass of nouns (their name sounding as if this is the case, of course): see Hudson (1992). Greenbaum (1991: 84) and Fabb (1994: 47) call them a 'special' kind of noun. Certainly they share with nouns the categories of gender (3PP) and case, if number is slightly problematic; but the category of person (1.3) also applies morphologically to verbs in many languages, and survives in modern standard English only in the so-called 'third person' singular present tense ending *-s*.¹⁴ There is thus 'concord' or 'agreement' between the subject of the sentence (which can be a noun, NP or proper name, as well as the 3PP) and the verb. (Problems of concord relating to pronouns will be discussed in chapter 4.) In a language like Latin, the personal pronouns are in fact redundant in subject position, and are usually only present for emphasis; whereas in modern English, pronouns are obligatory as subjects, 1PP and 2PP as well as 3PP, if so selected instead of a NP or proper name.

Certainly, those grammarians who see the pronoun as a type of noun (but also other present-day grammarians) are most likely to stress the similarity

between nouns and pronouns in respect of their grammatical functioning as subjects of clauses, and also as objects or complements, and complements in prepositional phrases. But, unlike nouns, these different functions are reflected morphologically in case distinctions, subjective v. objective ('*She* loves *him*'). The use of the possessive, however, as Quirk *et al.* (1985: 6.3) note, does correspond largely to that of the genitive of nouns/proper names ('That painting is *hers*/Kate's'). (See below, 1.5, and chapter 7 for further discussion of the possessive.) Pronouns, therefore, can appear in positions where proper names, nouns and pre- and postmodified nouns (NPs) appear, and usually stand alone as heads, as in

- (19) a. *Jumbo* likes peanuts.
 b. *Elephants* like peanuts.
 c. *Those African elephants with the big ears* like peanuts.
 d. *They* like peanuts.

Grammarians like Quirk *et al.* (1985: 6.1) hesitate to call them nouns, but compromise by viewing pronouns as having a 'nominal function . . . 'noun-like', or more frequently, 'like a noun phrase'. Earlier, Quirk *et al.* have stated that pronouns can 'deputise' for NPs (5.1): thus echoing the traditional definition of pronouns as substitute words (1.1).

Nominal function pronouns may have, but, as we have seen in previous sections of this chapter, they also have functions that cut across either a nominal or even a pronominal classification: viewed as a subtype of 'pro-form', for instance (1.2), and of deictic words, along with demonstratives and adverbs (1.3). A 'special' word-class indeed. The origin of the 3PP as a demonstrative was noted in 1.1, and the similarities of this pronoun with the definite article, for indicating endophoric and exophoric reference. The relations of the possessive pronouns with determiners will be discussed in the next section and chapter 7; but I should like to conclude this section with an examination of a particular construction which highlights the difficulty of trying to classify personal pronouns as nominals/nouns or NPs. It features in utterances like (20a, b) and (21a) and also with (informal) *us* + NP as subject, e.g. (21b):

- (20) a. *You boys/guys/lot* come here. (plural vocatives)¹⁵
 b. *You bastard/swine/idiot*, look what you've done. (evaluative vocatives)
- (21) a. *We women/British/responsible ones* must stick together.
 b. *Us cats* wouldn't have anything else. (television advertisement for Kite-Kat, September 1993).

(On the significance of the case variation, see chapter 4.)

This particular construction is not discussed in many grammars, but in Quirk *et al.* (1985: 17.88), in a discussion of apposition as 'primarily and typically, a relation between noun phrases' (17.65), it is suggested that pronouns followed

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by NPs could be analysed as 'restrictive apposition'. They do, however, distinguish three kinds:

- (a) definite determiner + NP + name/NP (general + specific), as in *that prolific novelist Barbara Cartland; the year 2000*;
- (b) name + definite determiner + NP, (specific + general), as in *Barbara Cartland the writer*;
- (c) NP + name (common in journalese) as in *superstar Gloria Estefan*.

Quirk *et al.* cross-refer to 7.25(c), where it is clearly stated that *you British*, for example, can be analysed as having *you* as 'head', with the names as NPs in restrictive apposition; but which of the three types it is, is not stated. In a personal communication Greenbaum admits that note 7.25(c) does not fit in clearly with any of the types in 17.88, although he leans towards type (c). Here, as Quirk *et al.* themselves state, the first appositive functions like a premodifier, and is really a 'partial apposition'. There certainly appears to be a difference in degrees of headship between phrases like *we women* and, say, *we the women of England*; or *you with the stars in your eyes*.¹⁶ That *you* and *we* could be seen in pronoun + noun/(adj. + N) constructions as determiners is strengthened by the fact that phrases like *we women* and *you boys* seem comparable in deictic force to phrases like *those women/boys*; consider also *some of you boys/those boys*.

Moreover, in many dialects of English and in informal usage, the 3PP is in fact used as the equivalent demonstrative, as in

(22) *Them boys* are throwing stones.

Jespersen (1914: 399) is reluctant to call *them* in this usage a personal pronoun, but he would have to have done, if the construction had not been confined to what he calls 'vulgar speech', and if he had noted the similarity with *we/us* and *you*. Stigmatised it may well still be in standard English English, but it is the preferred form of young urban speakers in Britain (except Glasgow).¹⁷ 'Non-standard' speech in the broadest sense confirms the determiner, as well as the nominal, function of pronouns; and in this area of investigation, as in others we shall examine below (1.5) and subsequently, non-standard speech is extremely important for the fuller understanding of pronominal patterns and usage.

1.5 Pronoun paradigms

However slight the treatment of pronouns in grammar-books, there is frequently a 'table' provided, listing the different persons and cases of the personal pronouns in modern English, reflecting the continuing preoccupation of grammarians with form. See, for example, Jespersen (1933), Robertson (1959), Quirk *et al.* (1972), (1985), Leech and Svartvik (1975), Phythian (1980), Leech *et al.* (1982), Young (1984), Bald *et al.* (1986), Crystal (1988), Huddleston (1988), Thomson and Martinet (1990), Greenbaum (1991), and

Table 1.1 Prototypical pronoun paradigm (standard English)

		Personal pronouns		Possessive pronouns		Reflexive pronouns
		subjective case	objective case	determiner function	nominal function	
1p	sg.	<i>I</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>my</i>	<i>mine</i>	<i>myself</i>
	pl.	<i>we</i>	<i>us</i>	<i>our</i>	<i>ours</i>	<i>ourselves</i>
2p	sg.		<i>you</i>	<i>your</i>	<i>yours</i>	<i>yourself</i>
	pl.					<i>yourselves</i>
3p		masc.	<i>he</i>	<i>him</i>	<i>his</i>	<i>himself</i>
		fem.	<i>she</i>	<i>her</i>	<i>hers</i>	<i>herself</i>
	sg.	non-personal	<i>it</i>		<i>its</i>	<i>itself</i>
	pl.		<i>they</i>	<i>them</i>	<i>their</i>	<i>theirs</i>

Leech (1992). Some of these works incorporate the possessives and/or reflexive pronouns in their tables also (e.g. Quirk *et al.*, Thomson and Martinet, Young); grammars like Greenbaum's list them separately. Hence a prototypical table might look like table 1.1¹⁸

It is easy to see why the personal pronouns lend themselves to tabular description, since this word-class has hitherto preserved most of its case and number features inherited from Old English, the conservatism of form no doubt tolerated because of the sheer frequency with which pronouns are used in everyday speech and writing. We can note some neutralisation or levelling of features: notably with *you* (sg./pl. subj. and obj. case), *it* (subj. and obj. case; already in Old English), *her* (obj. and poss.), and some possessives (*his* and *its* for both determiner and nominal functions)¹⁹

What the prototypical table presents, of course, is standard English forms: more precisely, standard English English and written forms. Pronouns, normally unstressed in speech as 'grammatical' as distinct from 'lexical' items, are hardly ever pronounced in connected discourse as they are given in such tables, unless stressed for emphasis. Yet very few grammars actually give the spoken pronunciation variants, considerably 'reduced' as they often are, despite being useful to foreign learners of English (but see Palmer and Blandford 1939, repr. 1950: 45 (1st edn. 1924 (*sic*)); Strang 1962: 101). Again, a prototypical table might be as table 1.2.

Such a table is important, as we shall see below, as part of the whole discussion of the relation between informal, colloquial standard usage and that of dialect; for all too often it is assumed that they are markedly different. So Wells (1994: 200) believes the 'vulgar' (*sic*) /jə/ is 'eschewed' in RP for *your* and (final) *you*. What grammarians themselves describe, inevitably, is written standard English, often itself 'idealised'. Quirk *et al.* (1985), for example, note /əm/ in 'familiar use' in a footnote (p. 346); dialectologists