A STUDY OF THE ENGLISH PERSONAL PRONOUN IN REPRESENTATIVE GRAMMARS OF THE EIGHTEENTH, NINETEENTH, AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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PREFACE

I first became interested in the history of the English language while enrolled in Professor Robert C. Pooley's English 124 course at the University of Wisconsin in the spring of 1952. This interest influenced my choice of a thesis topic.

The scope of formal grammar is quite wide, of course, and for any brief study such as a thesis, the field must be considerably narrowed to permit adequate study. Therefore, I chose the treatment of the personal pronoun by a selected group of eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century grammarians. The study is somewhat limited because of the great difficulty in securing the grammar books, particularly those of the eighteenth century. Most of the ones used were secured by inter-library loan.

I wish to thank Professor Cecil B. Williams for his invaluable assistance as my adviser on this thesis and Professor Loyd Douglas for his critical reading of the manuscript. Also, I would like to thank Mr. Alton P. Juhlin, of the Oklahoma State University Library, for his help in securing the books used in this study.

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CHAPTER I

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ATTITUDES TOWARD GRAMMAR AND THE PERSONAL PRONOUN

The purpose of this thesis is to show the treatment of the personal pronoun by representative grammarians of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. In the history of the English language there have been many changes in morphology, the forms, of the personal pronouns. These changes took place in general before the eighteenth century; consequently, the main emphasis in this study will be on the grammar and the usage of the forms that have survived. Since historical perspective is essential to a good understanding of any changes in grammar that have taken place, a brief sketch of the attitudes toward grammar will be given. Then the philosophies of grammar propounded by the individual grammarians will be presented. The closing part of this chapter will be devoted to the grammarians' definitions of the personal pronouns and a brief statement of specific problems in personal pronoun usage to be discussed in this thesis.

Before the eighteenth century in England, grammar books were few and not widely circulated. Formal grammar during Shakespeare's time, the Elizabethan period, seems not to

have been a matter of vital concern even to the professional writer. For example, Elizabethan authors, not subjected to restraints in grammar imposed by textbooks or grammarians, exercised great freedom in the use of double negatives and double comparisons.

Beginning about the eighteenth century, scholars began to take a greater interest in language and grammar. This interest seems to have been related generally to that period in English literature known as the Neo-Classical Period or Augustan Age. The dominant characteristics of the literature of this time were restraint, order, and reason. Attempts were made to "improve" Shakespeare and to edit Milton. In language a similar need was felt for improvement. The idea which had originated in a few scattered writers during the seventeenth century--that English lacked the beauty and grace of Latin and Greek--then came into prominence, according to the modern-day grammarian, Robert C. Pooley.[1]

As a result of this interest, there was a great increase in books about the language. Pooley describes this interest as follows:

> Prior to 1700 there were few books devoted to language criticism; in the first half of the eighteenth century approximately fifty such books appeared, and in the succeeding half century over two hundred were published. These figures reveal the tremendous interest in language which characterized the latter part of the eighteenth century.[2]

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[1]Robert C. Pooley, Teaching English Usage (New York, 1946), p. 8.

[2]Ibid.

In general, then, the eighteenth century saw the beginning of a standardized and formal grammar. Some of the grammarians of the twentieth century have fostered a revolt against certain rules set down by the earlier grammarians, finding these rules too static and inflexible to guide a changing language.

The attitude of a writer toward his subject matter determines to a large extent how that subject matter is handled. Therefore, the philosophy of grammar held by each of the individual grammarians throws light upon his treatment of even so specific a grammatical item as the personal pronoun. Most of these grammarians have been rather specific, though brief, in stating their attitudes toward the function of grammar.

It can be seen that a characteristic trait of eighteenth century intellectual life was its strong inclination toward ordered and regularized thinking. This trait gave rise to a hope that an English Academy patterned after the French Academy, founded in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu, could be established, with the purpose of gathering and systematizing all knowledge. Many scholars thought that the language might benefit from making it conform to Latin. Joseph Priestley, however, takes exception to this notion: "This [fixing the language] will never be effected by the arbitrary rules of any man, or body of men whatever. . ."[3]

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[3]Joseph Priestley, Rudiments of English Grammar (London, 1798), p. ix.

Elsewhere he states:

I own that I am surprised to see so much of the distribution, and technical terms of the Latin grammar, retained in the grammar of our tongue; where they are exceedingly awkward and absolutely superfluous.[4]

The prevalent eighteenth century philosophy of grammar is quite different from Priestley's, however. Robert Lowth takes quite a different viewpoint:

Does it [Swift's charge that English grammar is degenerate] mean that the English Language as it is spoken by the politest part of a nation, and as it stands in the writing of our most approved authors, oftentimes offends against every part of Grammar? Thus far, I am afraid, the charge is true.[5]

He further states what he believes to be the chief function of grammar:

The principal design of a Grammar of any language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that language, and to be able to judge of every phrase and form construction, whether it be right or not.[6]

Lindley Murray, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, is not very specific about his philosophy of grammar. "Purity of Style," he says, "consists in the use of such words and such constructions as belong to the idiom of the language we speak."[7] He does not explain what he means by "the idiom of the language."

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[4]Ibid., p. iii.

[5]Robert Lowth, A Short Introduction to English Grammar (London, 1762), p. iii.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Lindley Murray, English Grammar (Boston, 1825), p. 244.

Henry Sweet devotes quite a large amount of space to what he thinks the function of grammar should be.

We study the grammar of our own language for other objects than those for which we study the grammar of foreign languages. We do not study grammar in order to get a practical mastery of our own language, because in the nature of things we must have that mastery before we begin to study grammar at all.[8]

He continues:

Nor is grammar of much use in correcting vulgarisms, provincialisms, and other linguistic defects, for these are more dependent on social influence at home and at school than on grammatical training. In considering the use of grammar as a corrective of what are called "ungrammatical" expressions it must be borne in mind that the rules of grammar have no value except as statements of facts: whatever is in general use in a language is for that very reason correct. A vulgarism and the corresponding standard or polite expression are equally grammatical--each in its own sphere--if only they are in general use.[9]

He realizes the fundamental fact of language change.

But whenever usage is not fixed--whenever we hesitate between different ways of expression, or have to find a new way of expression--then grammar comes in, and helps us decide which expression is most in accordance with the genius of the language, least ambiguous, better fitted to express what is required.[10]

The general opinion of the twentieth century grammarians included in this study is that grammar and usage should adjust themselves to the changing language. For example, Margaret Bryant says, "What is good English today will not with any certainty be good English tomorrow."[11] A statement

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[8]Henry Sweet, A New English Grammar (Oxford, 1892), p. 4.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Margaret M. Bryant, Modern English and Its Heritage (New York, 1948), p. 264.

of this sort reflects the belief that language rules should change to accommodate the change in language and not *vice versa*.

Robert C. Pooley says that linguistics, or the science of language,

> . . . teaches us to look at language from the viewpoint of history, psychology, and sociology, and to understand and interpret modern usage in the light of these factors rather than upon a set of traditional authorities.[12]

He is specific in his definition of good English:

> Good English is that form of speech which is appropriate to the purpose of the speaker, true to the language as it is and comfortable to speaker and listener. It is the product of custom, neither cramped by rule nor freed from all restraint; it is never fixed, but changes with the organic life of the language.[13]

Ruth Mary Weeks presents basically the same idea in *Current English Usage*, a joint project sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English.

> For language is a living thing, and the great law of life and growth is change. Dictionaries, grammars, books of rhetoric are not eternal statutes handed down from heaven like the Mosaic law. They are history, not dogma; description, not command--descriptions of the changing speech habits of the mass of men. As speech changes, so do dictionaries and grammars change; so must they change if we are to prepare our students to speak the language of their own time . . .[14]

Charles C. Fries in *American English Grammar* also insists on a rather liberal viewpoint in matters of usage

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[12]Pooley, p. 10.

[13]Ibid., p. 14.

[14]Sterling A. Leonard, *Current English Usage* (Chicago, 1932), p. xiv (Preface by R. M. Weeks).

and, therefore, finds fault with the "conventional" point of view. He says that grammar is not a body of rules to be applied to the language but is merely a written record of how the language is used at a given time.

Although there are discernible areas of agreement on philosophy within each period of time, each authority maintains his own individual attitude toward grammar and usage.

The main part of this thesis will be concerned with the grammar and usage of the personal pronoun. To lend perspective to this study, a brief history of the early changes that took place in the form of the personal pronoun will be given here. The historical background of English which is important in the study of the personal pronoun may be summarized briefly. Generally, the period of Old English, or Anglo Saxon, is called the period of full inflections; the Middle English period is the period of leveled inflections; and the Modern period is the period of lost inflections.

The personal pronoun tends to have fairly complete inflections at any period because of two factors. According to Baugh, these are (1) the frequency of use and (2) the necessity for specific reference when used.[15] Old English had not only the two numbers in use today, but also a set of forms for two persons or two things. This was called dual

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[15]Albert C. Baugh, A History of the English Language (New York, 1935), p. 69.

number. In practice, the use of this dual number must have proved impractical, for it was abandoned.

The Middle English period saw the development of a tendency to depend less on formal indications of gender, case, and number, and to rely instead upon juxtaposition, word order, and form words (such as prepositions) to clarify the meaning of a sentence. Also, some simplification came with the weakening of final syllables.

In the sixteenth century the pronoun became established in the form it has had ever since. Three important changes took place at this time--the discarding of thou, thy, and thee, the substitution of you for ye in the nominative case, and the introduction of its as the possessive of it. These changes took place so gradually that at the beginning of the eighteenth century the grammarians were still concerned with them. In general, by the opening of the eighteenth century, many of the pronouns had lost their inflections, and variant forms of the personal pronouns, usually quite highly inflected, also were becoming simplified.

The general definition of "pronoun" is fairly well agreed on in the grammarians of the eighteenth century. The entry in Samuel Johnson's famous dictionary defines "pronoun" thus: "Pronoun, S. [Substantive], a word used for a noun."[16]

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[16] Samuel Johnson, Johnson's Dictionary in Miniature (Boston, 1810).

Joseph Priestley has this: "Pronouns are words that are used as substitutes for nouns, to prevent the too frequent repetition of them . . ."[17]

Robert Lowth's definition reads, "A pronoun is a word standing instead of a Noun, as its Substitute or Representative."[18]

Henry Sweet gives a fuller definition in his grammar of 1891, as follows: "Pronouns are a special class of nouns and adjectives, and are accordingly distinguished as noun-pronouns, such as _I_, _they_, and adjective-pronouns, such as _my_ and _that_ in _my book_, _that man_ . . ."[19] Sweet goes on to point out that pronouns are different from nouns and adjectives in that they have several formal characteristics which nouns and adjectives do not have, or have to a more limited degree. These distinctions are case inflections and gender inflections. He further classifies pronouns into independent and dependent pronouns. All pronouns can be divided further into definite and indefinite pronouns. He says the classifications of _personal_, _possessive_, _emphatic_, _reflexive_, _reciprocal_, _interrogative_, and _quantitative_ pronouns are simply special divisions that cross one another in various ways.[20]

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[17]Priestley, p. 8.

[18]Lowth, p. 38.

[19]Sweet, p. 4.

[20]Ibid., p. 73.

Sweet calls the pronoun a mark word.

When a man says of himself I think instead of William Smith thinks--or whatever his name may be--or when he speaks of some other man as he, instead of calling him by name, or saying the man who was here yesterday, etc., he does much the same as the man who makes a cross instead of signing his name, or puts a block of wood on his library shelf to show where a book has been taken out.[21]

He goes on to point out that the personal pronoun also serves as a substitute. For example, when a speaker says "you" in referring to a large audience, he is substituting a brief form for "all of the people to whom I am now talking."

Sweet says also that the pronoun has no independent meaning of its own. Although some distinction is made on the basis of gender ("he" refers to a "male being" and "she" to a "female being")[22], in English one also is accustomed to using he for a variety of other meanings. For example, an animal of either sex usually is referred to as he; a ship, a city, or a nation is referred to as she. A baby, though possessing sex, is sometimes called it. Of all the grammarians studied here, Sweet gives the most space to the actual definition of pronouns.

Alexander Bain in his English Grammar of 1874 points out in his general definition of pronoun that pronouns serve other uses besides standing for nouns. They frequently take the place of infinitives and clauses. Pronouns also give

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[21]Ibid., p. 72.

[22]Alexander Bain, English Grammar as Bearing upon Composition (New York, 1874), p. 40.

information about who is speaking. He stresses the importance of the proper use of pronouns: "The clearness of composition is more dependent upon them than upon any single matter coming within the scope of grammar."[23] Bain classifies he, she, it, and they as demonstratives, because they perform the function, as do the demonstrative pronouns, such as this, that, these, and those, of pointing out.

Personal pronouns are declined in all periods in the history of English for number, case, and gender. In the eighteenth century several grammarians gave different names to the three cases--nominative, objective, and possessive. William Loughton refers to the nominative case as the leading state and to the objective case as the following state. These labels reflect rather accurately the function of the pronouns and the position of pronouns within the sentence. Joseph Priestley and Samuel Johnson use the term oblique case, which is used after most verbs and prepositions.

The labels that Loughton uses--leading state and following state--are functional labels which indicate the use of the pronouns. Charles C. Fries of the twentieth century similarly designates position of pronouns in the sentence. Word order in the English sentence has become so important, says Fries, that a part of the English sentence

[23]Ibid.

has come to be regarded as "subject territory."[24] The words in each territory adapt themselves to the character of the territory. Note the following example in which word order has triumphed:

Modern English: I was given a book.

Old English: Me waes gegiefen an boc.

Here, because the pronoun is in "subject territory," it has taken the nominative case. Fries goes on to point out that there are two important situations in which word order pressure clashes with traditional use of forms: (1) the personal pronouns used as predicatives and (2) the interrogative and relative _who_ as object.[25] Fries goes on to explain:

> The predicatives stand in "object" territory and personal pronouns so used tend therefore to take the dative--accusative form. As an interrogative, _who_ usually stands in "subject" territory and tends therefore to discard the dative--accusative form even though the objective relationship remains.[26]

Fries here is basically pointing out that usage may change the case of a pronoun in certain instances where the pressure of custom is strong.

Correct usage of the personal pronoun is an important problem in speaking and writing English today. Its use is

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[24]Charles C. Fries, _American English Grammar_ (New York, 1940), p. 90.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., p. 91.

ambiguous for several reasons. There are many language situations in which traditional rules and accepted practice conflict. This is nowhere more true than in the use of personal pronouns. For instance, the proper case following a copulative verb is traditionally the nominative case, as in the construction, It is I. However, the pressures of usage have sanctioned as a colloquial usage It is me. Here historical usage and most grammarians call for the nominative case following a form of to be without exception. There are also other examples of disagreement in rulings on correct case forms between older and newer grammarians and also between grammarians of the same period.

The task of the present-day teacher of English is made more difficult because he is expected to uphold a workable standard of usage. This is hard to do because standards change rapidly, with the result that there is much disagreement on what is right and what is wrong.

Because the personal pronoun is used frequently in both writing and speaking, ascertaining its proper use seems to be a significant problem in the area of usage. There are many individual problems in the use of the personal pronoun. This thesis will treat those which seem to be the most important. The first one is the case of the personal pronouns; the second is the agreement of the pronoun with its antecedent. In Chapter IV some of the most significant of the other uses of the personal pronoun will be discussed.

It is hoped that by looking carefully at the treatment of the personal pronouns by these grammarians the reader will have a better understanding of historical treatment and the present-day usage of the personal pronoun.

CHAPTER II

CASE IN THE PERSONAL PRONOUN

In Chapter I, definitions of the "pronoun" were presented, and variant terms for the three cases of the personal pronoun were discussed. These terms were the oblique case (used for the objective), the "leading state" (nominative case), and the "following state" (objective case). The possessive case sometimes is called the genitive. However, in this chapter only the terms, nominative, objective, and possessive will be used.

There are several specific problems in case use of the personal pronoun. To be discussed here are:

1. Case in the archaic pronouns
2. Case after that and as
3. Case before a gerund
4. Case after to be
5. The possessive case

Case in Archaic Pronouns

The so-called archaic pronouns were used widely before the eighteenth century, and with diminishing prevalence after that time. Since the use of the archaic pronouns is,

for the most part, unfamiliar today, some examples will be given before presentation of their treatment by the grammarians. The cases of these pronouns as used by pre-eighteenth century writers were as follows:

TABLE I

CASE FORMS OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	Thou, or you	Ye
Oblique, or Objective	Thee	You
Possessive	Thine	Your

Baugh cites the following example of the distinguishing of the two forms. "No doubt but ye [nominative subject] are the people, and wisdom shall die with you [objective, object of preposition]."[1]

It is interesting to note that Shakespeare in Two Gentlemen of Verona shows ye used in the reverse of the historical use: "A southwest wind blow on ye / And blister you all over."[2] By the seventeenth century, you already had come into use as the regular form for both cases. This sort of leveling or simplification seems to follow the usual

[1]Albert C. Baugh, A History of the English Language (New York, 1935), p. 300.

[2]Ibid.

trend of English usage. When a word or a form no longer meets a need, it drops into disuse and may disappear entirely. It has been pointed out in Chapter I that this was the case with the dual number in Anglo Saxon.

William Loughton (1735) objected to the use of thou in the singular and preferred you. "Custom has made us do so [use you as singular], it being counted ungentile, and rude, to say thou dost so or so."[3]

Robert Lowth (1762) tried to resist the inevitable change by attempting to keep the distinction between the cases of ye and you. "Some writers have used ye as the Objective Case Plural of the Second Person; very improperly and ungrammatically."[4]

In the nineteenth century, Alexander Bain gives a history of these archaic pronouns. He points out that the thou of the second personal pronoun was used once as a term of contempt, as the following passage illustrates: "Sir Edward Coke, the king's attorney, addressed Sir Walter Raleigh at his trial thus: 'All that he (Lord Cobham) did was by thy instigation, for I thou thee, thou traitor.'"[5]

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[3]William Loughton, A Practical Grammar of the English Tongue (London, 1735), p. 53.

[4]Robert Lowth, A Short Introduction to English Grammar (London, 1762), p. 33, n. 1.

[5]Alexander Bain, English Grammar as Bearing upon Composition (New York, 1874), p. 47.

Bain mentions another point concerning the use of _thou_ in his own time. He finds it a serious error to use both _you_ and _thou_ in the same sentence: "There should not be a mixture of 'thou' and 'you' in the same passage."[6]

Suffice it to say that these differences in the second person are leveled now so that _you_ is both singular and plural in both the nominative and objective cases, and _your_ and _yours_ are established in the genitive. The archaic personal pronouns are used now only in special cases (for example, in the prayer and ritual and in the speech of the Quakers).

Case after _than_ and _as_

Baugh points out that the proper case after _than_ and _as_ was a question that troubled the eighteenth century greatly (he is taller than I, or me).

George Campbell says in his grammar, _The Philosophy of Rhetoric_, first published in 1776, that the real question in this case is whether the particle (than) is a conjunction or a preposition. He gives as examples of the usage the following two sentences: "1. I esteem you more than they. 2. I esteem you more than them."[7] Campbell favors

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[6]Ibid.

[7]George Campbell, _The Philosophy of Rhetoric_ (New York, 1858), p. 206.

considering than only as a conjunction, believing this to be the only way to remove ambiguity. Therefore, the thought of the first sentence becomes, I esteem you more than they esteem you. The second is, I esteem you more than I do them. At any rate the elliptical expression must be supplied before the case can be determined. Other grammarians of the eighteenth century, notably Lowth, Loughton, and Priestley, also called than a conjunction and favored the nominative case following than and as.

The Case Before a Gerund

The proper case of the pronoun preceding a gerund is also important in the study of the personal pronoun. From the author's observation, most textbooks of the modern day favor the possessive case for the substantive modifying the gerund, especially when this substantive is a pronoun. In the eighteenth century, particularly by George Harris, there was an objection to the use of the possessive in this position. Others of his time had different opinions. Priestley allows either possessive or accusative with the gerund. Campbell concludes formally "that the idiom in question ought not to be entirely repudiated."[8]

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[8]Robert C. Pooley, Teaching English Usage (New York, 1946), p. 144, as quoted from Sterling A. Leonard, Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800, pp. 199-200.

Pooley points out that on this subject:

Baker first stated a positive rule calling for the possessive case preceding a gerund . . . Webster is equally positive on his point, and we perhaps owe to him the dogma that the possessive must invariably be used in this construction.[9]

Pooley goes on to say that in modern usage there are some situations in which "the choice of the objective or possessive case of the substantive is governed in part by custom and in part by the exigencies of the construction."[10]

In such a sentence as, "Can you picture me jumping rope?" the use of the objective is clearly for emphasis. The force and meaning of the sentence would be lost if it read, "Can you picture my jumping rope?" Pooley formulates what he believes to be the best solution for this problem in the following words:

For this case then the statement of a rule should be: The pronoun immediately preceding a gerund is usually in the possessive case, except that in sentences where great emphasis on the pronoun is desired the objective case may be used.[11]

There is a special situation in which the possessive is virtually never used--in such a sentence as, "Why do you insist on this (or that) being done?"[12]

Occasionally, the pronoun is separated from the gerund by a modifying phrase or clause. Example: "Have you heard

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[9]Ibid.

[10]Pooley, p. 116.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

of his, the thief's, being captured?"[13] This construction is found generally in informal speech and has two possessives instead of one.

Fries says that to use the inflected form of the noun or pronoun before a gerund is not general American practice. He draws his conclusions from a number of letters whose writers he classifies into groups on the basis of their formal education. Fries found that 52 per cent of the cases in Standard English used the genitive before the gerund, and 48 per cent used the dative-accusative form. He gives several examples from Standard English. The numbers in the parentheses refer to letter numbers, not pages. "Because of his being a married man (6416)" [Genitive case] "Certain things were done without you being consulted." (7092) [Dative-accusative case]. Fries' examples show that the uses of the genitive and the dative-accusative are divided about equally in Standard English.

Proper Case after to be

Very little specific mention is made on the problem of case after to be by the eighteenth century grammarians studied here, with the exception of Joseph Priestley. In the question and answer form in which his grammar is written, he states the preference thus:

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[13] Ibid., p. 117.

Q. In what case must a declinable pronoun be used after any part of the verb be?

A. In the nominative; as I am he: except when a noun or pronoun comes before the radical form To Be, in which instance it must be used in the oblique as I supposed it to be her.[14]

In English the tendency seems strong to use the objective case in the position after the verb and the nominative case in front of the verb.

One of the most interesting of the uses of the objective case is in the construction It is me. This expression has had varying degrees of acceptance from time to time. Pooley quotes as follows from the Leonard-Moffett study, which discusses the acceptance of this construction:

On a scale of 4 points in which 1 represents "literary or formal" and 4 "uncultivated English," the average rating of "it is me"

23 Authors.......................................was	3.2
24 Editors...	3.2
24 Business men......................................	3.6
68 Members of the M. L. A.	2.4
50 Members of the English Council....................	2.9
12 Teachers of Speech................................	2.5[15]

Pooley cites a passage from Havelock Ellis, who also defends "it is me."

The Frenchman, when asked who is there, does not reply "Je!" but the would-be purist in English is supposed to be reduced to replying "I!" Royal Cleopatra asks the Messenger: "Is

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[14]Joseph Priestley, Rudiments of English Grammar (London, 1898), p. 41.

[15]Sterling A. Leonard and H. Y. Moffett, "Levels in English Usage," English Journal (May, 1927), as quoted in Pooley, p. 69.

she as tall as me?" The would-be purist no doubt transmutes this as he reads into "Is she as tall as I?" We need not envy him.[16]

Pooley asks that grammarians state the facts, not the preferences, of It is me:

The honest textbook writer of the future must face the facts. He must bow to social custom. In his discussion of the first person singular pronoun after the verb to be he must say: In formal literary, and solemn style the pronoun I is used; in cultivated colloquial usage custom has also established the pronoun me. The tone and purpose of the speech or writing must in all cases determine the choice of the pronoun.[17]

Thus, in the case of it is me, Pooley asks that the evidence for and against the usage be examined in the light of linguistic history and psychology.

His second consideration in the use of personal pronoun case after to be is the proper case of the personal pronoun. He finds that the objective case following the form of to be is much less common in cultivated English than the objective in it is me. This exemplifies the fact that custom, not logic, determines a usage, because it is her (or him) is of similar construction to it is me. Pooley gives another possible reason for the stronger insistence on the nominative form: "It is possible, too, that the customary telephone reply, 'This is he (she) speaking,' has had an influence in preserving the nominative forms."[18] The

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[16]Havelock Ellis, The Dance of Life (Boston, 1923), as quoted by Pooley, p. 70.

[17]Ibid., p. 71.

[18]Ibid.

following statement which Pooley quotes from Professor Krapp summarizes the case uses of her, him, and them after to be:

Though widely current, these uses do not have the sanction of authority, and are usually designated as incorrect by grammarians and other critics of speech . . . It is possible that in time general use will make these constructions so customary that they will be accepted as correct, but that time has not yet arrived.[19]

In the it is I, it is me controversy Fries takes the historical approach. From Chaucer he quotes, "Wostow nought wel that it am I."[20] Here, although it is the grammatical subject, the verb agrees with the more dominant I. By the end of the fifteenth century, it (which is in subject territory) is so definitely felt to be the subject that the verb agrees with it. "It is I that am here in your syth."[21] By Shakespeare's time it is as follows: "Sir Andrew. That's me. I warrant you."[22] Here the usage has absorbed the objective flavor by its position following the verb. Fries admits the use of it is me as correct in conversation but not in more formal writing. His conclusion is:

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[19] G. P. Krapp, Comprehensive Guide to Good English (Chicago, 1927), as quoted by Pooley, p. 72.

[20] Chaucer, ed. Skeat, pp. 214, 588, as quoted by Charles C. Fries, American English Grammar (New York, 1940), p. 91.

[21] Coventry Mysteries, p. 219, as quoted by Fries, p. 91.

[22] Twelfth Night, II, pp. 5, 87, as quoted by Fries, p. 91.

It should be noted here that such an expression as "It is me" or "It is I" is primarily a matter of colloquial English. The situations which call for its use are conversation situations. Formal literary circumstances furnish practically no occasion for use of the construction; it is written only when there is an attempt to reproduce conversation.[23]

Fries says that in all the letters he studied there was only one instance of the personal pronoun used as a predicative. He cites this as a demonstration of the fact already mentioned--that conversation situations provide the circumstances for such expressions as It is I (me). Position would make a pressure for the dative-accusative case.

George Oliver Curme in his grammar of 1925[24] discusses the case after to be: "In choice language we should resist the strong colloquial drift to put an inflected predicate pronoun in the proper form: it is he."[25]

The Possessive Case

The genitive, or possessive case, is another important consideration in the personal pronoun. Of all the possessive forms, its as possessive perhaps has the most interesting history, which is necessary to the understanding of the treatment of this pronoun by the grammarians.

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[23]Fries, p. 91.

[24]George Oliver Curme, College English Grammar (Richmond, 1925).

[25]Ibid., p. 112.

In Old English the neuter pronoun was declined hit, his, and hit. By the merging of the dative and accusative under hit in Middle English, the declension became hit, his, and hit. In unstressed positions, hit was weakened to it, so that at the beginning of the modern period, it was the usual form for subject and object. His was the general possessive case to the middle of the seventeenth century.

Since genders became masculine, feminine, and neuter, a form for the possessive neuter was sought. Sometimes it was used, as when Horatio describes the ghost in Hamlet: "It lifted up it head." Also, the sometimes was used in place of the pronoun, as in "growing of the own accord." (Holland's Pliny, 1601).[26]

Analogy finally solved the problem, at least for a time. The apostrophe was used in other personal possessive forms, as in her's, our's, your's, and their's. An apostrophe was added to it, making the possessive it's.

The apostrophe was used in it's down to about 1800.[27] Gradually the other possessives--her's, our's, your's, etc., dropped the apostrophe. In the present time the apostrophe in the possessive form is counted an error; one reason is that present day writers use it's as a contraction of it is. It is a strange phenomenon of language that while it's is

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[26]Baugh, p. 301 (Italics mine).

[27]Ibid.

often used incorrectly as a possessive today, in the other forms, <u>hers</u>, for example, there is no discernible tendency to use the apostrophe.

In defining other possessives and their uses, Loughton says:

Q. What qualities are derived from personal names?

A. These personal possessives, my, mine, thy, thine, his, our, ours, your, yours, her, hers, their, theirs.

Q. Is there any difference in the use of my and mine, thy and thine?

A. Yes; my, thy, her, our, your, their must have a name after them . . . But mine, thine, hers, ours, yours, theirs, are used when the name is left out.[28]

This discussion of the possessive case in general is common to all the grammarians of the eighteenth century studied here.

In Lindley Murray's grammar published in 1795, Murray comes out against the contraction <u>it's</u> as being improper and incorrect, and he feels that the genitive <u>its</u> has simply been transplanted to fill another need. "The genitive, its is often improperly used for <u>'tis</u> or <u>it</u> <u>is</u>: as, 'It's my book' instead of '<u>It</u> <u>is</u> my book.'"[29]

In the twentieth century the contraction of <u>it</u> <u>is</u> to <u>it's</u> is accepted as a legitimate contraction by all grammarians, although some may object to the use of all such

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[28]Loughton, p. 60.

[29]Lindley Murray, <u>English</u> <u>Grammar</u> (Boston, 1825), p. 170.

contractions in the most formal writing. Its again is the standard possessive case form.

Two of the twentieth century grammarians studied here--Fries and Pooley--point out in their grammars that the language program of the schools, particularly the grades through junior high school, could be improved by the careful selection of items to be taught. Fries' point of view is this:

> From the material examined here [Fries refers to the letters on which he did research] it seems clear that the following items, for example, are not matters of difference between Standard English and vulgar English. They all appear to be used with some frequency in the Standard English materials.[30]

Among these items he speaks of is "the use in accord with the pressures of word order of the case forms of the six pronouns which still retain dative-accusative forms."[31] He refers to such a construction as it is me.

Pooley also contends that there should be a strict limit to the number of items to be attacked in the elementary grades.[32] He goes on to say that two observations of great significance support this principle. These principles have a great bearing upon what he says about case in the personal pronoun.

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[30]Fries, p. 287.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Pooley, p. 178.

1. The constant repetition of a relatively small number of errors constitutes over 90 percent of the usage problems in the elementary grades.

2. A large number of "errors" listed in textbooks and language work books are not errors at all, but are colloquial English appropriate to the speech of young children.[33]

Pooley lists the following case uses of the pronoun which should be, in his opinion, eradicated in the elementary school.

1. her, him, and me went.
2. hisself
3. me and Mary went.
4. them books
5. theirselves
6. us boys went
7. with we girls
8. it is yourn, hern, ourn, theirn.[34]

He goes on to list other case forms which should not receive formal class instruction. Among these are such usages as, "She gave it to John and I" and "It is me, him, her, them."[35]

Similarly, Pooley points out that it is important to outline errors to be attacked in the junior high school. In the matter of case these are the following:

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[33]Ibid., p. 179.

[34]Ibid., p. 180.

[35]Ibid., p. 181.

1. Case forms

    a. Him, (her) and me went.

    b. It was him, her, them.

    c. Will you wait for John and I?

    d. Did you see her and I?

    e. Let him and I do the work.

    f. Us boys want to go.

    g. She invited we girls to the party.

    h. This is the man which did the work.[36]

The forms to receive no class instruction at this level are:

1. Case forms

    a. It is me, us.

    b. Tim is taller than me, her, him.

    c. Mary is as tall as me, her, him.

    d. Everybody (everyone) had their lesson.

    e. When you are driving a car you should be able to act quickly.[37]

The list is more comprehensive for the senior high school grades. Errors to be attacked in the senior high school are:

1. Case forms

    a. It was her, him, them.

    b. I am as tall as him, her, or taller than him, her.

    c. Did you see John and I?

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[36]Ibid., p. 194.

[37]Ibid., pp. 196, 197.

d. Give the book to John or I.

e. Let him and I go.

f. Everyone came but she and John; or John and I.

g. Us fellows went early.

h. The candy was meant for we girls.[38]

Pooley would favor ignoring certain questionable forms, even at the high school level; among these is the construction, it is me.

In summary, it may be pointed out that there has been a shift in the general attitude of the grammarians toward several of the specific problems in pronoun case presented in this chapter. Of course, the archaic pronouns were being used less frequently even by the eighteenth century and naturally are not given much space in the grammars of today.

Few changes have taken place in attitudes toward the case after than and as or the proper case preceding the gerund, except that in the latter, research has shown that the inflected form of the pronoun in this position is not the usual practice (Fries). The attitude toward the objective case after to be also has become more flexible, as has been pointed out in the preceding pages. The possessive its, without the apostrophe, is now the accepted possessive of it.

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[38]Ibid., p. 218.

In general, the grammarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were more strict in their insistence on "proper" case forms than are grammarians of the present time.

CHAPTER III

AGREEMENT OF THE PERSONAL PRONOUN WITH VERB AND ANTECEDENT

Another consideration in the study of the personal pronoun, rivaling case in importance, is the agreement of the pronoun with its verb and with its antecedent. The discussion of agreement of the pronoun with its antecedent has occupied more space in the grammars than has pronoun and verb agreement.

In the eighteenth century, Joseph Priestley defined antecedent thus: "that preceding noun to which it [the pronoun] is related, as an adjective to its substantive."[1] This definition still serves today.

Many examples may be cited in both older and contemporary authors of a lack of agreement between pronouns and antecedents. George Campbell quotes an example from Addison in the passage below. He objects to Addison's lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent. In quoting from authors who have misused or ignored the rules of the grammarians, Campbell and other grammarians of his period are prescriptive; that is, they show that they feel that the

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[1]Joseph Priestley, Rudiments of English Grammar (London, 1798), p. 10.

rule-maker, not the author or the user of English, is the final authority.

Sometimes the pronoun does not agree in number with the antecedent. "Each of the sexes," says Addison, "should keep within its particular bounds, and content themselves to exult within their respective districts."[2]

What Campbell objects to in this passage is the plural <u>themselves</u>, which refers to <u>each</u>. The subject in the quoted sentence, though singular in form, is plural in meaning. Possibly there may be an ellipsis involved here; that is, [they, or men and women should] "content themselves within their respective districts." If this is true, then Addison's usage would be acceptable. However, this passage still could serve to exemplify the fact that the best authors were not scrupulous in observing this usage. The rule on agreement of pronouns with antecedents carried to its extreme application would uphold the following as correct: "Everyone enjoyed the performance so much that <u>he</u> hated to leave," or "Nobody came because <u>he</u> couldn't buy tickets."

In such sentences as the foregoing, the meaning behind the singular form is actually a plural meaning. In the first sentence "everyone," though a singular indefinite pronoun, actually refers to a whole group; the same situation is true of the second sentence.

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[2] George Campbell, <u>The Philosophy of Rhetoric</u> (London, 1776), p. 208.

Lindley Murray, who also wrote during the eighteenth century, makes the first mention of the following rule on agreement of subject and verb which is quoted in modern-day handbooks of grammar. There often has been much disagreement, or confusion, about the agreement of the verb with a compound subject of different numbers. Murray's dictum is that with singular pronouns of different number the verb agrees with the one nearest it. He has this example: "I or thou _art_ to blame."[3] He further states that when there is a conjunction between a singular and a plural pronoun, the verb agrees with the plural, as in the following example: "Neither poverty nor riches were injurious to him."[4] However, this seems to be a rather poor example of this particular rule, because the plural form in the last sentence would be required anyway under the preceding rule.

Concerning the agreement of personal pronouns with antecedents, Murray says that they always must agree in person, number, and gender.[5] Murray sets down a rule, then shows by examples from literature and other usages how it has been violated or misused. He reports that there are many violations of this precept, such as: "Can any one, on their entrance into the world, be fully secure that they

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[3]Lindley Murray, _Grammar of the English Language_ (London, 1795), p. 146.

[4]Ibid., p. 148.

[5]Ibid.

shall not be deceived?"[6] A corollary to this first rule is that every relative must have an antecedent, either expressed or implied: "Who is fatal to others is so to himself."[7]

Alexander Bain, in the nineteenth century, has some interesting comments on the general subject of agreement between antecedent and pronoun. He also treats of confusion in antecedents, using for an example the third person plural they and its possessive form their.

> The pronoun they merges sex, and therefore has not the advantage of keeping persons separate from things. Without having the same variety of reference as the singular neuter demonstrative, this pronoun abundantly occasions perplexity to the reader.

He continues,

> "Many of their [the Teutons'] chief settlements, and among them our own settlement in Britain, happened so late that we know a good deal about them." "Their" means persons, the Teutons; "them" means things, settlements. Recast thus: "Many of the chief Teutonic [corresponding adjective] settlements, and among these [a form very convenient for an immediate reference] our own settlement." The single remaining "them" will now refer unmistakably to the principal subject "settlements."[8]

Henry Sweet takes up the prevalent problem of the pronoun used to refer to he, she. He explains it thus:

> In such a sentence as let every man or woman do as he or she likes, the group he-or-she is used as a sort of compound to

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Alexander Bain, English Grammar as Bearing upon Composition (New York, 1874), p. 40.

supply the want of a personal pronoun of the common gender in the singular corresponding to the plural they. The difficulty is evaded in various ways.

One is by using he only, leaving the application of the statement to woman as well as men to be taken for granted.

In the spoken language the difficulty is got over by the use of the genderless plural they: let every one do just what they like/ if any one comes tell them to wait/ a person cannot help their birth.[9]

Sweet does not say that such a usage would be acceptable in anything but the spoken language, where it is used by virtually everyone.

The general opinion of the earlier grammarians was that the antecedent always must agree with the pronoun. In the twentieth century, however, a different viewpoint has been taken by some of the grammarians, Pooley, for example.

It generally is conceded that the pronouns everyone, everybody, anyone, anybody, etc., are singular. However, as Pooley points out, "as antecedents of pronouns they have been and still are used as plural words when the sense demands a plural, despite the efforts of rule makers to control them."[10] Pooley goes on to point out that a lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent shows up occasionally on the literary level of usage, as in this sentence

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[9]Sweet, p. 72.

[10]Robert C. Pooley, Teaching English Usage (New York, 1946), p. 89.

from Harper's: "He had in his time been almost everybody's bosom friend, and usually their secretary."[11]

The British seem to be more liberal in the plural use of the indefinite pronoun than are Americans. Pooley sums up the matter by saying,

> The impartial student is forced to conclude that the rigid rules of the textbooks are not accurate in limiting the indefinite pronouns to singular use only. There are many occasions in English speech and writing in which the plural use is desirable for convenience, if not absolutely necessary.[12]

In such a sentence as the following, it seems that necessity would dictate the usage: "Everybody was at the party, and they all seemed to have a good time." The use of the double pronoun, his or her, is eliminated also by the substitution of the "incorrect" their, as in, "Each member should bring his, or her (their) ticket."

The general observation concerning the singular indefinite pronouns is this: When everyone, everybody, either, neither, etc., are singular in meaning, they should be referred to by singular pronouns. (Everybody had his own excuse). When these pronouns are definitely plural in meaning, it is permissible to use the plural pronoun. (Everyone in the church disagreed with their pastor's views).

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[11] W. Graham Robertson, "Whistler, Sargent, and Others," Harper's Magazine (October, 1931), as quoted by Pooley, p. 90.

[12] Ibid., p. 91.

Fries agrees in substance with Pooley on the problem of personal pronouns and their agreement with their antecedents. Fries says that in Modern English they usually agree in meaning (singular or plural) but not always in form.

Fries concludes that there are some grammatical items not worthy of emphasis.

> From the material examined here [Fries refers to the letters on which he did research] it seems clear that the following items, for example, are not matters of difference between Standard English and Vulgar English. They all appear to be used with some frequency in the Standard English materials.[13]

He goes on to list the three items he feels are not worthy of emphasis. These items are as follows:

1. None with plural verb.
2. The indefinite everyone, everybody, etc., with a plural reference pronoun or a plural verb separated from the indefinite by other words.
3. The use in accord with pressures of word order of the case forms of the six pronouns which still retain dative-accusative forms.[14]

Pooley feels that there are several items of usage in pronoun agreement that should receive no class instruction at the elementary level. Among these are such sentences as, "None of us are, were there" and "Everybody, everyone said that they . . ."[15] At the junior high school level, he

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[13]Charles C. Fries, American English Grammar (New York, 1940), p. 287.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Pooley, p. 181.

suggests that such a sentence as, "Everybody (everyone) had <u>their</u> lesson,"[16] should receive no class instruction.

On the senior high school level, however, Pooley calls for a more rigid agreement of the pronoun with its antecedent. He would favor giving formal class instruction in the following items:

Agreement with antecedent:

a. Everybody brought their friends.

b. Has everyone their hats?

c. Everyone helped themselves.

d. He is the one which did it.[17]

Still untaught at the high school level could be these items:

Agreement with antecedent:

a. They had a bad earthquake in San Francisco last week.

b. Everyone was here, but they all went home early.

c. I failed to answer his question, which was thoughtless of me.

d. If you are going to make a wind-mill, you need tools.[18]

In general, even though there have been many violations of the rule of agreement of pronoun with antecedent, the grammarians before the twentieth century preferred the

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[16]Ibid., p. 196.

[17]Ibid., pp. 218, 219.

[18]Ibid., pp. 221, 222.

strict observance of the principle. In modern times, the tendency of the grammarians seems to be to stress the meaning behind the communication instead of the form the communication takes. Thus, if the meaning of an antecedent is plural, in many cases (see the preceding examples), they would condone a plural antecedent even though the pronoun to which it refers is singular in form.

CHAPTER IV

OTHER PRONOUN USES AND CONCLUSIONS

During the eighteenth century the grammarians seemed to take for granted a rather limited use of the personal pronoun. For this reason their main emphasis was on matters of case and agreement. Their treatment of these two phases of the personal pronoun has been discussed in preceding chapters. In the twentieth century, grammarians seem to be more interested in specialized or infrequent uses of the personal pronoun. Of the earlier grammarians only Lindley Murray touched upon other pronoun uses, as will be seen in the following pages.

To be discussed in this chapter are the following main topics:

1. Confusion in the use of pronouns
2. Pronominal subjects
3. _It_ and _they_
4. Specialized use of pronouns

This detailed discussion will be followed by a summary of the thesis as a whole.

Confusion in the Use of Pronouns

Sometimes confusion arises in a sentence because of the limitations on the function of the personal pronoun by virtue of its very nature. For example, in reading such a sentence as the following, confusion naturally arises in the mind of the reader: "He turned to him, and the man slowly put on his coat." Here the confusion could be cleared up easily merely by substituting nouns for pronouns: "John turned to Mark, and Mark slowly put on his, or (his own) coat."

Murray (1795) treats of ellipsis, or omission of the pronoun. Example: "She loves and she fears him, i.e., She loves and fears him."[1]

Later Alexander Bain (1874) observed that confusion in reference to pronouns may be governed mainly by two factors he calls Prominence and Proximity. In the following sentence, the reference of the second pronoun, <u>he</u>, is unclear. "The man shook his friend's hand, and then <u>he</u> departed." By a judicious omission of a word, the sentence can be cleared up immediately: "The man shook his friend's hand and then departed." In this sentence the only possible actor is the subject of the entire action.

Proximity has to do with the closeness of the personal pronoun to its antecedent. Though the following sentence is

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[1]Lindley Murray, <u>Grammar of the English Language</u> (Boston, 1825), p. 66.

perhaps not as clear as it could be, Bain would say that the she of the second clause takes its meaning from its location in the sentence. "The woman consoled and kissed the little girl, and then she ran happily away." The she refers to "little girl."

In some constructions, the pronoun is named several times as the sentence progresses, as in "He felt that he should go because it was his responsibility" and "One cannot be too careful nowadays about one's companions." Bain says of this type of construction:

> English idiom requires that, when the pronoun has to be again referred to, it should be used itself a second time. The correct usage is shown by Pope: "One may be ashamed to consume half one's day's in bringing sense and rhyme together: It would be against idiom to say, 'half his days.'"[2]

John Hart, in his Manual of Composition and Rhetoric (1897), though not contributing any different interpretations of the personal pronoun, has a comment similar to Bain's discussion on the use of the third person singular pronoun. It is as follows:

> When two or more masculine nouns occur in the same sentence, the use of "he" often becomes ambiguous. To avoid this ambiguity, some other form must be given to the expression, or instead of using the pronoun, we must repeat the noun.[3]

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[2]Alexander Bain, English Grammar as Bearing upon Composition (New York, 1874), p. 60.

[3]John S. Hart, A Manual of Composition and Rhetoric (New York, 1897), p. 77.

The opinion of the modern grammarian differs considerably from the preceding interpretations. Paul Roberts, for example, in Understanding Grammar says:

When we refer back to one. . . , we either employ one again (with the genitive one's) or use a personal pronoun form:

> One should love one's mother, for one never knows when one will lose her.
>
> One should love his mother, for he never knows when he will lose her.
>
> One [referring to girls] should love her mother, for she never knows when she will lose her.[4]

Pronominal Subjects

The pronoun as subject is another aspect of pronoun use which has occupied the grammarians. The usual definition of "pronoun," as has been seen, is a word that takes the place of, or substitutes for, a noun. Murray points out that it is, therefore, improper and illogical to use a personal pronoun redundantly directly after a noun when reference is made to the same person or thing. He says, "Personal pronouns, being used to supply the place of the noun, are not employed in the same part of a sentence as the noun which they represent."[5] It is held, therefore, incorrect to say, "The king he is just."[6]

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[4]Paul Roberts, Understanding Grammar (New York, 1954), pp. 88, 89.

[5]Murray, p. 149.

[6]Ibid.

Another aspect of the pronominal subject is treated by Curme. Occasionally, Curme says, there is a double expression of the subject, as in, "Your friends, what will _they_ say?"[7]

There are several pronominal subjects which are general or indefinite. Such sentences as the following illustrate this use of the personal pronoun. "_You_ or _we_ don't like to be snubbed," and "In Japan _they_ generally marry without love."[8]

The pronominal subject is sometimes omitted, specifically in three instances: (1) in imperative sentences, (2) in the first person in a few set expressions, such as "Thank you," and (3) in cases where the situation makes the subject clear. Example: "He will do it as soon as [it is] possible."[9]

The use of _we_ as subject also has been treated at length by several of the grammarians. The first person plural pronoun _we_ is sometimes used with the force and meaning of _you_, as the following quotation shows: "_We_ is often used with the force of _you_: Are _we_ down-hearted today? Often sarcastically: How touchy _we_ are!"[10]

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[7]George Oliver Curme, _College English Grammar_ (Richmond, 1925), p. 112.

[8]Ibid., p. 99.

[9]Ibid., p. 101.

[10]Ibid., p. 100.

Sweet outlines fully the distinguishing characteristics of first, second, and third persons, pointing out in several cases the logic of the current assumptions concerning each one. He points out, for example, that:

> The first person plural we is not really the plural of I, whose meaning does not admit of plurality: we means either one or more than one person, or "It he, she, it, or they'; that is, the only way of making a plural to I is by associating with it the idea of the second or third person pronouns.[11]

The second personal pronoun you also is used commonly as subject and as both singular and plural, as in: "You, Bob," or "All you people."

It and They

Lindley Murray finds three general grammatical uses of the personal pronoun it. It is used to express the following:

1. The subject of a discourse or inquiry.
2. The state or condition of a person or thing.
3. The thing that is the cause of any event or thing.[12]

Examples of the preceding three uses are:

1. It is the truth.
2. It is a cold day.
3. We heard her say it was not he.[13]

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[11]Henry Sweet, A New English Grammar, Part I (London, 1891), p. 4.

[12]Murray, p. 153.

[13]Ibid.

It is and it was are sometimes used in plural constructions as well as in singular number. Murray, although admitting that it may serve a useful function in rather general constructions, protests against an indiscriminate use of the pronoun with an indefinite antecedent in mind. He attempts to categorize just what the word it stands for as used in the preceding examples.

However, Murray finds fault with such a sentence as, "It is wonderful the very few accidents which in several years, happen from this practice."[14] Here the it is too vague and indefinite to be used in accurate expression, according to Murray.

Bain also comments on the third person neuter pronoun. He points out that it is used sometimes to anticipate something further on in the sentence. He calls this the Prospective or Anticipative use, as in, "It was a pity she could not return home." Here the reader is not sure what it refers to until he has reached the end of the sentence. Sometimes the antecedent for it can be pointed out easily; sometimes the antecedent is more obscure, as in the sentence, "It is very cold."

In the twentieth century Robert C. Pooley points out the following rule which condemns the use of it as an indefinite while it uses the word in the construction.

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[14]Ibid., p. 152.

A pronoun should refer definitely to its antecedent. It is not enough that there should be a specific antecedent for a pronoun. The reference should be so explicit that no confusion is possible.[15]

Pooley's conclusion is that

. . . it is frequently used without a definite antecedent in constructions other than "it rains," "it is warm" and is so commonly accepted in these constructions that careful rule-makers could use it unwittingly in the heart of a general rule prohibiting it.[16]

Pooley goes on to say that there is much to be said for the use of it without a specific antecedent. In the sentence, "When a pupil does poor work it is not always the fault of the teacher," it has no specific antecedent, but this is less awkward than changing the subject of the sentence: "When a pupil does poor work, the teacher is not always at fault." The it as used above has the advantage of retaining the subject idea throughout the sentence.

Curme discusses the anticipatory it. This word serves for what Curme calls a provisional subject, pointing to the real one. For example, this situation is shown in the sentence, "There once lived in this house an interesting old man."[17] Another type of anticipatory it occurs in a sentence when the noun is lifeless or in a clause. Example: "It is indeed beautiful, this view of the mountains," and

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[15]Pooley, p. 123, quoting from J. M. Thomas, F. A. Manchester, and F. W. Scott, Composition for College Students (New York, 1925), p. 168.

[16]Ibid., p. 124.

[17]Curme, p. 99.

"It is seldom that I ever see him any more."[18] The situation it as subject is used to refer to something defined by the situation, as in "John came home late; it provoked his father." It is evident from these examples that there are many uses for personal pronouns other than referring to persons.

The term expletive is used often to describe a "filler word" found in the subject position. The most common expletives are it and there. As Roberts points out, "This it [referring to expletive use] is not--notionally, at least--the subject of the verb; rather it fills in for the subject, which comes later in the clause."[19] He goes on to explain in the same passage that it is convenient to restrict the term to the usage in which an infinitive or a noun clause answers the question what? before the verb. Examples of a noun clause and an infinitive clause used as actual subjects follow.

It is hard to believe that Clinton is sixteen. [Actual subject: that Clinton is sixteen.]

It is impossible to tell an adolescent anything. [Actual subject: to tell an adolescent anything.][20]

The third person they also has received much attention from the grammarians. In such sentences as the following,

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Roberts, p. 252.

[20]Ibid.

the *they* has no direct antecedent: "*They* thought in olden times the earth was flat," and "*They* say it was she who did it." Neither of these uses of the indefinite *they* is unclear. The comparatively early grammarian, Bain, admits the existence of the indefinite *they* and says that this use is familiar and that in formal composition other forms should be used. According to Bain, "'They' stands for whoever expresses an opinion on the matter; it is the popular voice."[21]

In brief, the indefinite *they* seems to be well established in English.

Specialized Uses of the Personal Pronoun

There are several minor and specialized uses in the personal pronoun. O! and Ah! require the objective case after them, Murray says, as in "O! Me!"[22] He also notes a special use for the personal pronoun. This is in the formation of new words by prefixing a personal pronoun to them. This is one of the varied ways that English has of showing sex distinction. Examples are "a he-bear," a "she-bear" and a "he-goat" and a "she-goat."[23]

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[21] Bain, p. 61.

[22] Murray, p. 152.

[23] Ibid., p. 49.

Summary and Conclusions

Because of its frequency of use and disagreements arising about its use, the personal pronoun was adjudged a suitable object of thesis study. In this thesis, its most significant and controversial aspects have been examined in detail, both with respect to the dicta of the grammarians and to practice as developed by usage.

It is evident from an examination of the material here presented that the attitude of the grammarian toward his material has an important bearing on his work. In so broad a subject as English grammar and attitudes toward it, it is difficult to make a general statement, because there are exceptions to almost every possible generalization.

The popular idea is that the grammarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transmitted to the present time an undesirable attitude toward the function of grammar. These early grammarians often are called "conservative" because they believed that the function of grammar was to eliminate errors by setting up strict rules to be followed. The present-day grammarian, on the other hand, takes a different viewpoint. He says that the purpose of grammar is to describe the language as it is being used at a given time. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are changes in the treatment of pronouns from time to time.

In the problem of pronoun case, for example, it has been seen that the earlier grammarians insisted upon strict

observance of the proper case forms and even quoted writers who broke these rules. The same was found to be true in matters of agreement. For instance, the earlier grammarians were, in general, insistent that the pronoun and its antecedent should agree always.

Generally, the modern-day writers have been more scrupulous in describing the minor uses of the personal pronoun, such as those outlined in this chapter.

The main value of any study of grammar lies in its useful contribution to clearer expression. There is no grammatical item more important to clarity of expression than the personal pronoun. This thesis has outlined the most important of the uses of the personal pronoun and has presented the treatment or interpretation of its uses by a selected group of scholars of the language. Examination of the evidence has made it apparent that a considerable evolution in personal pronoun usage has occurred through the centuries and that the evolution is still going on. Although some of the grammarians, particularly the earlier ones, tried to dictate rules for the use of the pronoun, they probably had little actual influence. The trend today among grammarians is to describe usage rather than to control it. Thus they, as the writer of this thesis has endeavored to do, contribute to an <u>informed</u> use of the language.

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