



EVALUATING THE COMMUNICATIVE VALUES OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

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Abstract:

Personal pronouns have various uses in English grammar and communication. However, experiences have shown that many learners of English as a second language, especially students in Nigerian schools have problems with the effective use of personal pronouns in spoken and written communication even though adequate knowledge of the personal pronouns and usage is crucial to individual student's educational advancement and sustainable national development in this country. This article is therefore aimed at minimizing the problem encountered in the use of personal pronouns. To achieve this, the paper critically examined the concept of personal pronouns with copious illustrations. Finally, some recommendations were made that will serve as a guide to learners of English as a second language (students in particular) on the proper use of personal pronouns.

Keywords: evaluating, communicative, value

1. Introduction

Pronouns are generally referred to as words used in place of nouns, to avoid unnecessary repetition of words in English sentences.

"For instance, John used John's pen to write because John likes to use pen instead of pencil."

This sentence is very awkward and monotonous because of the tiresome repetition of the noun "John". When we re-write this sentence and substitute the noun (John) with the pronoun, we have a better sentence thus:

"John used his pen to write because he likes to use pen instead of pencil."

With the substitution of the noun (John) with the personal pronoun (he), the sentence sounds better. Thus, a personal pronoun used in place of a noun in a sentence improves the sense and sound of the sentence.

The next segment of this article focuses on the meaning of personal pronouns.

2. Personal Pronoun

Kujore (1993:166), Hamzat and Adebayo (1999:6), and Onochie (2000:45) all agree that a personal pronoun is, "a pronoun that shows by its form whether it refers to the person speaking, the person spoken to, or the person or thing spoken about" by this claim, all personal pronoun except the pronoun "it" refers to person while the pronoun "it" refers to lower animals and non-living thing. These types of pronouns are called personal pronouns because they refer to a person. Aremo (2004:15) agrees with this claim when he argues that, "they refer to persons and things technically known as a person, normally involved in actual communicative uses of language." The personal pronouns can be grouped into two forms based on their position in the sentence the subjective case and the objective case.

Quick and Greenbaum (2000:103) lay credence to this when they observe that: "The personal pronoun has two sets of case forms.... The subjective forms are used as the subject; the objective forms are used as the object." The subjective and objective forms of personal pronouns are presented in the table below for detailed information.

Table 1: Cases of personal pronouns

			Subject case	Object case
1 st person	Singular forms		I	Me
	Plural forms		We	Us
2 nd person	Singular forms		You	You
	Plural forms			
3 rd person	Singular	Masculine	He	Him
		Feminine	She	Her
		Neuter	It	It
	Plural		They	Them
	Plural/singular		Who	Whom

The table above shows the comprehensive forms or cases of personal pronouns. But, how effective do learners of English in Nigeria, especially the students use them in communication? An investigation was carried out in the course of this article on JSS III, SS II, and SS III students of Community Secondary School, Nasarawa.

The students were asked to choose the correct option of the personal pronoun in the three sentences below.

- (i) *Ahmed was expecting Amina, so when Abubakar knocked at the door, he thought it was her/she.*
- (ii) *It was him/him I saw.*
- (iii) *It appears to be she/her that is coming.*
- (iv) *Our teacher saw Ali and gave he/him the book.*
- (v) *Me and you will go to our teacher's office.*

Answers: (i) She (ii) He (iii) She (iv) Him (v) I.

This is because subject pronouns are generally used as the subject of a verb while object pronouns are used as the object of a verb. The results of the investigation are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Test on personal pronouns

Classes	Total no. of students	Question 1		Question 2		Question 3	
		No. pass	No. fail	No. pass	No. fail	No. pass	No. fail
JSS III	180	20	160	30	150	40	140
SS II	150	60	90	40	110	18	132
SS III	200	40	160	61	139	50	150
Total	530	120	410	131	399	108	422

2.1 Data analysis

Question 1:	%pass	=120/530	x	100/1	=23%
	%fail	=410/2530	x	100/1	=77%
Question 2:	%pass	=131/530	x	100/1	=25%
	%fail	=399/2530	x	100/1	=75%
Question 3:	%pass	=108/530	x	100/1	=20%
	%fail	=422/2530	x	100/1	=80%

From this analysis, the results are not encouraging. The researcher believes that there are many reasons responsible for poor understanding and use of personal pronouns by learners of English in Nigeria, especially among the students.

The generally low level of proficiency in English grammar we experience on a daily basis and the poor performance in the English language at the West Africa School Certificate Examination (WASCE) and National Examination Council (NECO) of Nigerian students are consequences of multiple factors. Some people erroneously feel that the English language is a foreign language in Nigeria, and so should not be a pride place in our society. Qualified English teachers are few in number and they are poorly remunerated. There is also the lack of access to Standard English textbooks, the social media and internet service also have negative impacts because these media have destroyed the reading culture among our students. Above all, the monster called examination malpractices which is an extension of the rot in our present-day society has contributed its quota to the problem. This is because the hope of examination malpractices gives students false confidence about the examinations and this makes the students develop a lukewarm attitude toward their studies. This poor state of the grammar of English, and indeed the use of personal pronouns need urgent improvement if we are to attain the much-

needed sustainable national development in Nigeria. The next stage of this paper demonstrates the use of personal pronouns.

2.2 Communicative Values of Personal Pronouns

The values of personal pronouns are seen in the students' various uses to communicate meaning in sentences and discourses. The uses of personal pronouns are illustrated here in a simplified manner so as to serve as a guide to learners of the English language in Nigeria.

a. Replacement of Nouns

Personal pronoun replaces nouns in related clauses. In this case, it takes the place of a noun to avoid unnecessary repetition in the sentence.

Example:

- (a) *John did not write the test because he was sick.*
- (b) *He bought a new car but I did not like it.*
- (c) *Peter tried but he failed.*

b. Personal Pronouns Indicate Gender in a Sentence

Example:

- (a) *Tina came in with her book.*
- (b) *Go to his room and meet him.*
- (c) *We came with her.*

c. Personal Pronouns Indicate Numbers in a Sentence

Example:

- (a) *They are invited.*
- (b) *They are in the class please call them.*
- (c) *Please call them for me.*
- (d) *We are writing.*

d. Personal Pronouns Indicate the Case of the Pronoun

Example:

- (a) *She is in the room; ask her to come.*
- (b) *He is the one I am expecting, call him for me.*
- (c) *Take the letter to her.*

Other uses of personal pronouns are also demonstrated here for proper understanding.

Example:

- (a) *It was he (not him) that bought the car.*
- (b) *It was I (not me) that did it.*

Note: It is me is only accepted in an informal usage.

- (a) *It is him (not he) over there.*

Note: After a preposition, the objective case of the pronoun is used.

- (a) *All of us (not we) were present at the accession*
- (b) *With you and I (not me) by her side, the victory is sure.*

Note: You and me are accepted only in an informal expression.

Note: “than” and “as” are used as conjunctions and not prepositions; therefore, the personal pronoun that comes after them should be in the subjective case.

Examples:

- (a) *I love her more than him (wrong).*
 - (b) *I love her more than he, does (correct).i.e "more than he loves her"*
- After “except” and “but” the object case is used.
- (c) *All the people were present (except/but) me (not I).*
 - (d) *The rat enters its (not it's) hole.*
 - (e) *It was we (not us) whom you saw yesterday.*
 - (f) *This book is for her and me (not she and I).*
 - (g) *There is a clash between you and me (not you and I).*
 - (h) *The man is believed to be him (not he).*
 - (i) *Neither he nor she (not her nor him) is to blame.*
 - (j) *Neither you nor I (not you nor me) is to blame.*
 - (k) *Let Peter and me (not I) see them.*
 - (l) *It was she (not her) who (not whom) took the book.*
 - (m) *The woman is said to be her (not she).*
 - (n) *There is no secret between us (not we) and them (not they).*
 - (o) *The teacher is supposed to be he (not him).*
 - (p) *It was to her (not she) whom (not who) I wrote the letter.*
 - (q) *It appears to be he/she (not him/her) that is coming.*

2.3 Personal Pronouns and Cohesion

Cohesion is the act of sticking together. As Halliday and Hassan (1976:4) put it, “the concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to the relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that defines it as a text.”

Cohesive relations are realized when the meaning of one element is dependent on another within a text. Opene in Onochie *et al.* (Ed) (2003:155) explains that “cohesion lies in the continuity

of reference, whereby the same thing enters into the discourse a second time", that is, personal pronouns may enter into a text to replace an element (item) that appeared before in a noun form or point forward to a noun which enters into the text later.

Reference has different forms. Gannon and Ezeiewska (1980:101) observe that "generally, a given instance of reference is either exophoric or endophoric". Exophoric is a reference to something outside the text, while endophoric is a reference to something within the text. However, only endophoric reference contributes directly to the cohesion of a text. Endophoric is classified into two types' "Anaphoric" which refers forward to what is mentioned later in the text.

Example:

- (a) *The oranges are very sweet, I bought them from the market.*
- (b) *I bought them from the market, the oranges are very sweet.*

The references in (a) and (b) above are therefore Endophoric. The pronoun "them" in (a) refers back to the oranges. It is therefore an anaphoric reference. In the same manner, the pronoun "them" in (b) refers forward to the oranges. So, it is a cataphoric reference.

Therefore, personal pronouns function as agents of cohesion in a text; They help to achieve cohesion in texts. Further illustrations of personal pronouns as an agent of cohesion in a text are demonstrated in the short passage below:

Martin, when you called, you asked me about Bimpe. Well, I do not know if she is getting along very well or not, and that is because we do not talk to each other anymore. Our relationship has turned sour. I know you will be wondering about this new development.

The use of personal pronouns here enables the passage to achieve cohesion and that makes it a text.

3. Conclusion

There is no doubt that personal pronouns have communicated values. They replace nouns to avoid tautology in sentences. They also specify numbers, gender, and cases in sentences. Furthermore, they help to achieve cohesion in texts. However, my investigation revealed that students do not have adequate knowledge and effective use of the pronouns. This inadequate knowledge and effective use of personal pronouns are crucial to individual students' educational advancement and sustainable national development considering the role English Language in Nigeria. There is therefore an urgent need for a concerted effort by all stakeholders of education in Nigeria to remedy this problem. The recommendation here will serve as a way forward.

4. Recommendations

The problem of inadequate knowledge and use is not peculiar to personal pronouns only. It has to do with a generally poor standard of English Grammar in our schools. We, therefore, need to go back to the root of the matter as Minister of State for Education.

The recommendations here will be steps in the right direction.

- The teacher's factor is very crucial to improving students' basic English grammar and indeed the use of personal pronouns. Ahamad, in Ngwu (Ed) 2006; 174) emphasizes this factor when he observes that, "No country will rise above the quality of its teachers". Therefore, qualified English Language teachers should be employed to handle the teaching of English in our schools.
- English teachers should be trained and re-trained to meet the current challenges of effective teaching of the English language.
- The remuneration of teachers should be improved. They should also be paid as when due. The present situation in which teachers in some states are owed some month's salary does not help the situation.
- The classroom should be made conducive for teachers to teach and the students to learn.
- The students on their own part should give less attention to social media and concentrate on their studies.
- Parents should provide necessary materials for their children and wards. They should also allow their children and wards to study instead of paying graduates of English to write examinations for them.
- Teachers of English should endeavor to simplify English Grammar in comprehensive textbooks for their students

It is hoped that, if these measures are taken into consideration, students will improve on their use of personal pronouns and indeed the basic grammar of English for personal advancement and the much-needed sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Benson Kayode Okundare holds B.A. (Ed.) English from Lagos State University Ojo, Lagos, and M.A. in English Language from Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. He has taught English Language in Secondary School in Nigeria for over six years and has published many articles in Local and International journals. He is currently a Principal Lecturer in the Department of Languages, the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa, Nasarawa State, Nigeria, where he has been teaching the Use of English and Communication in English for seventeen years. His research interests are Phonology and Grammar of English Language.

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