

Different Approaches to the Pronoun as a Part of Speech in Modern Linguistics

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Abstract:

This article studies various theoretical approaches put forward by linguistic scientists to the pronoun as a primary part of speech in modern linguistics.

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The problem of parts of speech is one that causes great controversies both in general linguistic theory and in the analysis of separate languages. We shall have to examine here briefly a few general questions concerning the pronoun as a parts of speech which are of some importance for modern linguistics.

The meaning of the pronoun as a separate part of speech is somewhat difficult to define. In fact, some pronouns share essential peculiarities of nouns (e.g. he), while others have much in common with adjectives (e. g. which). This made some scholars think that pronouns were not a separate part of speech at all and should be distributed between nouns and adjectives. However, this view proved untenable and entailed insurmountable difficulties. Hence it has proved necessary to find a definition of the specific meaning of pronouns, distinguishing them from both nouns and adjectives. From this angle the meaning of pronouns as a part of speech can be stated as follows: pronouns point to the things and properties without naming them. Thus, for example, the pronoun it points to a thing without being the name of any particular class of things. The pronoun its points to the property of a thing by referring it to another thing. The pronoun what can point both to a thing and a property. Form. As far as form goes pronouns fall into different types. Some of them have the category of number (singular and plural), e. g. this, while others have no such category, e. g. somebody. Again,

some pronouns have the category of case (he — him, somebody — somebody's), while others have none (something). Function. (a) Some pronouns combine with verbs (he speaks, find him), while others can also combine with a following noun (this room). (b) In the sentence, some pronouns may be the subject (he, what) or the object, while others are the attribute (my). Pronouns can be predicatives. [1]

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

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

Case. In dealing with the category of case in pronouns, we must bear in mind that they need not in this respect be similar to nouns.

Some of them may, and indeed do, have peculiarities which no noun shares.

All other pronouns have no category of case (something, anything, nothing, everything, some, any, no, my, his, etc.; mine, hers, etc.). [7]

Number. It ought to be emphasised that what we mean here is the grammatical category of number, and the question is, in what pronouns and to what extent that category is actually found. As to the pronouns I / we; he, she, it / they, it must be stated that there is no grammatical category of number here. We is not a form of the pronoun I, but a separate word in its own right. In a similar way, they is not a form of he, or she, or it, or of all of them, but a separate word

There is no grammatical category of number either in the pronouns my / our; his, her, its / their, and mine / ours; his, hers / theirs. E. g., her and their are different words, not different forms of one word. [5]

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

Distinction of types of pronouns. There are many examples in English pronouns of the same phonetic unit used to express different meanings in different contexts. So the question arises whether this is a case of polysemy, that is, different meanings of the same word, or of homonymy, that is, different words sounding alike. We may state the following cases in point:

that demonstrative and that relative; who interrogative and who relative; which interrogative and which relative; myself (and the other self-pronouns) reflexive, and the same pronouns intensive (non-reflexive).

That seems to be the easiest of the problems to settle, as we can apply the test of the plural form here. The demonstrative that has a plural form those, whereas the relative that remains unchanged in the plural.

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

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

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

Many is in several respects similar in meaning and function to the pronouns some and several; some children, some of the children, some of them; several children, several of the children, several of them; many children, many of the children, many of them. In this respect many differs from adjectives, which of course cannot be followed by the group "of + noun or pronoun". That would favour the view that many belongs to the pronoun class. On the other hand, however, many has an important characteristic which separates it from pronouns and brings it together with adjectives; it has degrees of comparison: more, (the) most. No pronoun has degrees of comparison, and indeed the pronouns some and several, which stand so close to many in other respects, cannot form such degrees. So, in determining the part of speech to which many belongs we have to decide which of its characteristics is more essential, unless we prefer to state that many, few, much and little are hybrids, partaking both of pronouns and of adjectives. Since the choice of the more essential feature remains somewhat arbitrary, the conclusion on the word many may be affected by it. If, for example, we decide that the morphological feature is more essential, we will say that many is an adjective, but we shall have to add that it shares some vital syntactical features with pronouns.

It has been shown above that words fall into classes known as parts of speech in accordance with their lexico-grammatical meanings, morphological categories, typical stem-building elements, combinability and functions. [1]

The peculiarity of pronouns as a class of words is that they are not united by any of the above-mentioned features. True, they have certain grammatical peculiarities, but what unites them is the way they denote reality.

Pronouns are words serving to denote substances, qualities, quantities, circumstances, etc. not by naming or describing them, but by indicating them.

As words of the vocabulary pronouns have extremely general meanings. But in speech pronouns indicate particular objects or qualities. When a speaker says /, he refers to himself, i. e. to a particular person of definite age, height, colour of hair, etc. When another speaker says /, he also refers to himself, but this time it is another person with other features. Thus, the meaning of /, general as it is, remains the same, but the objects referred to are different. [1]

The meaning of the pronoun such as "of the same kind", but one speaker may use such to indicate a definite colour, another speaker may use it with reference to some size, a third one to indicate a particular temperature, etc.

On the other hand, one and the same person may be referred to as /, you or he, depending upon who speaks. This and that may indicate the same object, depending on the relative position of the speaker and the object. Thus, pronouns can be defined as words whose meanings are very general and stable, but whose references in speech are particular, variable and relative with regard to the speaker and the situation of speech.

We insist on the stability of meaning and the variability and relativity of reference, because many authors speak of the relative meaning of pronouns '. But when we ask What is this? referring now to the blackboard, now to a piece of chalk, we use the word this with the same meaning, "the object I point at" or "the object I demonstrate", and not with the meanings of "blackboard", "piece of chalk", etc. Those are only the objects of reference and not the meanings of the word this.

Etymologically the word 'pronoun' means "a word used instead of a noun". This meaning reflects, to some extent, the role of pronouns in language. Owing to the exceptional variability of reference a pronoun may replace hundreds of nouns with comparatively stable or limited references. This explains the fact that pronouns are used very frequently and form a considerable part of any text, though as a class of words they are not numerous. But the role of pronouns is much greater than it can be inferred from the meaning of the word pronoun. It is not always that a pronoun is substituted for a noun. Pronouns can be substituted not only for nouns, but for other parts of speech as well. Traditionally, pronouns are divided into 'noun pronouns' and 'adjective pronouns'. In reality pronouns may also be used instead of numerals (twenty books — several books, many books) and adverbs (here, there, now, then). Using the prefix pro- in its meaning "instead of", we may, therefore, classify pronouns with regard to the parts of speech into pro-nouns, pro-adjectives, pro-numerals and pro-adverbs. [4]

Thus, pronouns are a collection of words correlated with different parts of speech, which accounts for their not being united by any morphological categories or syntactical functions. Sometimes a pronoun is correlated with one part of speech only. But very often this is not so. In a part of speech, as we know, variants of the same lexeme may belong to different subclasses. The peculiarity of pronouns is that variants of the same lexeme may be correlated with different parts of speech. This in the sentence Is this the bike? (Saroyan) is a pro-noun, while in the sentence He gave me this bike? It is a pro-adjective. Here in He lives here is a proadverb, but in from here to Tashkent it is a pronoun. [13]

As pointed out by A. I. Smirnitsky, the boundaries of pronouns and those parts of speech with which they are correlated are rather fluid. The word this in this bike may be regarded both as an adjective pronoun and as a pronominal adjective, the word here — as a pronominal adverb and as an adverbial pronoun.

The relative references of the words today, yesterday, tomorrow are somewhat akin to those of pronouns, yet they are not relative enough because the words denote definite units of time, days. Cf. now or then. [13]

It is no wonder, therefore, that there exist many words which are regarded as pronouns by some authors and as nouns or adjectives by others.

So the pronoun is the part of speech in which the definition of it as a separate part of speech has caused many difficulties. More than once in the history of linguistics the very existence of pronoun as a part of speech has been denied. However attempts of this kind have not proved successful and in present –day grammars, both English in Uzbek, the pronoun is recognized as a part of speech.

B.S.Khaimovich's points about pronouns is similar to Ilyish's opinions. It has been known that words fall into classes known as parts of speech in accordance with their lexico-grammatical meanings, morphological categories, typical stem- building elements, combinability and functions. B.S. Khaimovich gave a good definition to a pronoun: Pronouns are words serving to denote substances, qualities, quantities, circumstances, etc, not by naming or describing them, but by indicating them. The peculiarity of pronouns as a class of words is that they are not united by and of the above-mentioned features. True they have certain grammatical peculiarities, but what unites them is the way they denote reality. [6]

Another definition of or “pronoun” is given by R.Quirk and S.Greenbaum is also worth to say: “Pronoun constitute a heterogeneous class of items with numerous subclasses. Despite their variety, they are several features that pronouns (or major sub-classes of pronoun) have in common which distinguish them from nouns: they do not admit determiners; they often have in objective case; they often have person distinction; they often have overt gender contrast; singular and plural forms are often not morphologically related.[13] As to Uzbek linguistic G.M.Hoshimov, the pronoun is a primary part of speech denoting substances, qualities, circumstances, etc. not by naming or describing, but indicating them, pointing them. It has the grammatical meaning of “reference”, indication. [2]

In the Uzbek language, “olmosh” (Eng. pronoun) is a word of Arabic language origin “almash” that means ‘to replace’ in English. Uzbek linguists such as N. Mahmudov and A. Nurmonov also tried to give their definitions of the pronoun as a part of speech: “the pronoun is a primary part of speech denoting substances, qualities, circumstances, etc. not by naming or describing, but indicating them, pointing them.”[10]

Pronouns are said to ‘deputize’ for other parts of speech: nouns (he, she, it, they); adjectives (his, her, its, their; this/these, that/those); numerals (many, much, few, several, some), and adverbs (here, there, thus). In conclusion, pronouns are a relatively small, class of words that function in the place of nouns or noun phrases, numerals, adjectives, adverbs and etc.

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