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THE STUDY OF PRONOUNS: A LEARNING AND TESTING TOOL BASED ON ESL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

"Pronouns make a small class of word,but with a very high frequency of use–(Frank, 1972)". A pronoun like *I, me, he, she, herself, you, it, that, they, each, few, many, who, whoever, whose, someone, everybody,* etc. is a word that takes the place of a noun in a sentence. In the sentence, *Siva saw Melany and he waved at her,* the pronouns he and her take the place of the nouns Siva and Melany respectively. If there is no pronoun in English, the nouns then have to be repeated all the times in writing and speaking, which will make English language learning irritating and uninteresting. Thus, in the absence of the pronouns, the above sentence will have to be written or uttered like Siva saw Melany and Siva waved at Melany,which is quite boring. Pronouns which can do all of the things that nouns can do, are the elements of creating a better relationship between the author and the reader in terms of coherency. They are used by the authors to promote a better understanding of a piece of writing and to provide a mental image of them. Therefore, studying pronouns and their types is inevitable for a student learning English as a second language. Based on this concept, this paper attempts to develop a technology-incorporated learning and testing tool regarding the study of pronouns for the good side of the students of ESL.

KEY WORDS:pronoun, word class, coherency, ESL, Technology-incorporated learning tool.

INTRODUCTION :

Greek, Latin, and English grammarians have all considered *pronouns* to be a word class, especially *closed class words.* The term *pronoun* and its definitions were based on Latin, and ultimately Greek sources: Latin *pro-nomen*, Greek *anto-numia* 'standing for a noun' or 'substitute for a noun'. Thus, pronouns fill the position of a noun or whole noun phrase in a sentence. The reference of a

pronoun is usually made clear by its context. Pronouns help sentences flow more smoothly and make them easier to write and utter. For instance, look at the following sentences:

1.Arul lost Arul's car key.
2.When Chomskiya went to the libray, Chomskiya found some useful books for Chomskiya's paper.
3.Priya gave the book to Saran so that Saran could use the book to study.

The above will be the sentences if we have no pronouns in English. But luckily English has pronouns. Thus, the above sentences can be re-written with the help of the pronouns as:

4.Arul lost *his* car key.
5.When Chomskiya went to the library, *she* found some useful books for *her* paper.
6.Priya gave the book to Saran so that *he* could use *it* to study.

The word that a pronoun stands for is called its antecedent. For example, in the above sentence 4, *Arul* is the antecedent of the pronoun *his*; and in sentence 6, *Saran* is the antecedent of the pronoun *he*; and *book*, the antecedent of the pronoun *it*. Sometimes the antecedent is not stated. For instance, in *Ram gave his lunch to her,* Ram is the antecedent of the pronoun *his*and the pronoun *her* has no antecedent in this sentence.

Therefore, as substitutes for nouns, pronouns are used in English language to bring the variety and efficiency.By using the pronouns to their full potentialin writing and speaking, the cohesion is smoothly expressed among sentences in a discourse or paragraph. As a result, especially the writing ability of a student of ESL should be perfect and flow-ranged. There are classes of pronoun and when they are studied properly and applied meaningfully in a text, the text becomes semantically rich and fluently readable. Thus, the studying about the classes of pronouns is very essential for a learner of ESL.

CLASSES OF PRONOUNS:
There are eight major classes of pronouns in English. They are *personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, reciprocal pronouns, indefinite pronouns, relative pronouns, and interrogative pronouns.*

PERSONAL PRONOUNS:
Personal pronouns have different forms depending on their person: *first person*, the person who is speaking; *second person*, the person or thing spoken to; and *third person*, standing for a person or thing spoken about; and usually, number (singular and plural). Sometimes, in the third person singular, they take different forms according to gender (he and she). They also take different forms depending on whether they stand for the subject or the object of the sentence. The prototypical personal pronouns paradigm is given below for reference:

| | | | Personal pronouns | |
Person	Number	Gender	Subjective case	Objective case
1st person	singular plural		*I* *we*	*me* *us*
2nd person	singular plural		*you* *you*	*you* *you*
3rd person	singular	masculine feminine non- personal	*he* *she* *it*	*him* *her* *it*
	plural		*they*	*them*

SUBJECTIVE PRONOUNS:

Personal pronouns can be used as the subject of the verb in a sentence. The subject of a verb does the action of the verb. The personal pronounsI, *we, you, he, she, it,* and *they* can all be used as the subject of a verb, thus known as *subjective pronouns*. Lookat the following two sentences:

• *Saranya likes* **linguistics.** *Shereads***many books of linguistics.**

In the first sentence, the proper noun *Saranya* is the subject of the verb *likes* and in the second sentence, the pronoun *she* is the subject of the verb reads.

While the personal pronouns of 3rd person (singular or plural) are used as subjects in sentences, the subject-verb agreement is to be noted. For instance:

•*Siva* is playing football. *He* likes sports. (The subjects Siva and He are in singular sense, then the verbsareis playing and likes.)
•*Siva and Arul* are playing football. *They* like sports. (Here, the subjectsSiva and Aruland They are in plural sense, thus the verbs, are playing and like.)

Objective pronouns:

Personal pronouns can be used in the slot which is to the object of the verb in a sentence. The object of a verb receives the action of the verb. The personal pronouns *me, us, you, him, her, it,* and *them* can all be used as the object of a verb, therefore called as objective pronouns.Study the following two sentences:

• Saranya likes *linguistics***. She likes to master** *it***.**

In the first sentence, the noun *linguistics* is the object of the verb *likes*. In thesecond sentence, the pronoun it is the object of the verb master.

Possessive pronouns:

Possessive pronouns are used to talk about things that belong to people. The words *mine, yours, his, hers, ours* and theirs are possessive pronouns. The following is a table for you to remember

which possessive pronoun can be used with which personal pronoun.

singular personal pronoun	possessive pronoun	plural personal pronoun	possessive pronoun
I, me	mine	we, us	ours
you	yours	you	yours
he, him she, her	his hers	they, them	theirs

Sometimes, students of ESL confuse the possessive pronouns like *mine, yours*, etc. with the respective possessive adjectives *my* and *your*. Especially, they are more confused with the possessive pronoun *his* as the possessive adjective his also is similar in form. Thus, the confusion can be cleared through the sentence structure, i.e. a possessive pronoun functions as a noun phrase in which it is the head word. For instance, in the sentence *The red car is his*, the possessive pronoun his is the noun phrase and it is the head word, too. But in The red car is his brother's, his brother's is the noun phrase in which his functions as the possessive adjective not as the possessive pronoun.

REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS:
Reflexive pronouns that refer to the noun or pronoun, reflect the action back to the subject of the verb in a sentence. They are the necessary part of the sentence. The words *myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves,* and *themselves* are reflexive pronouns. In the following examples, the pronouns in *italics* are reflexive pronouns.

1. Be careful not to cut *yourself* with that knife.
2. The players train every day to keep *themselves* fit.
3. I made *myself* a sandwich.

singular personal pronoun	reflexive pronoun	plural personal pronoun	reflexive pronoun
I (sp) me (op)	myself myself	we (sp) us (op)	ourselves ourselves
you (sp/op)	yourself	you (sp/op)	yourselves
he (sp) him (op) she (sp) her (op)	himself himself herself herself	they (sp) them (op)	themselves themselves
it	itself		

sp – subject pronoun   op – object pronoun

Reflexive pronouns and intensive pronouns look the same. Both of them end in *–self or –selves*. The difference between these two is that the reflexive pronouns as stated above are used to represent the subject of the sentence; and intensive pronouns emphasize a noun or pronoun in the same sentence, i.e. they do not need to refer to the subjectand they can refer to any noun or pronoun in the sentence. When the reflexive pronouns are removed from the sentence, the meaning of it gets changed. For example, in *I made myself a sand*wich, the reflexive pronoun is *myself* and it is necessary in the sentence. But in the sentence,*I made a sandwich for my mother herself,* the pronoun herself is not the reflexive pronoun, but the intensive pronoun which is referring to the noun *mother* which is an object of the preposition *for*. Since an intensive pronoun is used only foremphasis, it is not essential to the sentence and it does not give any new information to it. Thus, though the intensive pronoun is taken out of a sentence, the sentence would still reflect the same sense. Therefore, the sentences *I made a sandwich for my mother herself* and *I made a sandwich for my mother* are equal in the sense.

DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS:

Demonstrative pronouns are *this, these, that, and those.* They are used for pointing out a person, a place, a thing, or an idea. For instance:

• *This* is the spelling chart.   *These* are the rules.
• *That* is the house where Shakespeare lived. *Those* are the memorable debris.

RECIPROCAL PRONOUNS:

Reciprocal pronouns are used to indicate a 'reciprocal' or mutual actionby the subject of the verb in a sentence.*Each other* and *one another* are reciprocal pronouns in English language. They are used interchangeably. For example, the sentence *Rama and Sita smiled at each other* implies that *Rama smiled at Sita* and that *Sita smiled at Rama.*

INDEFINITE PRONOUNS:

Indefinite pronouns refer to something which is not considered as definite or particular, i.e. an indefinite pronoun does not refer directly to any other word. Most indefinite pronouns express the idea of quantity. Indefinite pronouns are *somebody, someone, something, any, anybody, anyone, everybody, everyone, nobody, no one, everything, one, anything, several*, etc. For example:

• *Everybody* is welcome at the function.   *Does anybody* care for his illness?

Many indefinite pronouns can also serve as adjectives. For instance:

• *Several* of the students have already submitted their assignments. (Indefinite pronoun)
• *Several* sacks of mangoes have been loaded. (Adjective)

RELATIVE PRONOUNS:

Simply stating, a relative pronoun introduces a subordinate clause or a relative clause. *Who,whom, whose, which,* and *that* are relative pronouns in English. Usually, the relative pronoun immediately follows its noun antecedent. For example:

• People *who* smoke in the bus annoy the co-passengers.

• The book *which* I am reading is about linguistics.

INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS:

Interrogative pronouns also known as *wh*-pronouns (*who, which, what, whose,* etc.) are used to ask or form questions. For instance:

1. *What* is your pet name?
2. *Who* is your favourite teacher?

In the second question above, the pronoun *who* is the subject of the verbis. And *who* can also be used as the object of the verb. For example:

• *Who* are you inviting to your key-birthday?

It is to be noted that in writing and formal speaking, the pronoun *whom* can be used as the object of verbs and prepositions. For example:

• *Whom* did the people criticize?　　To *whom* is the prisoner talking?

But the pronoun *whom* cannot be used as the subject of a verb. Thus, it cannot be said like:

* *Whom* came to the party last night?

Instead, it can be as:　　*Who* came to the party last night?

METHODOLOGY:

English language learning is inevitable in the current trend of pedagogy as English language is a famous lingua-franca. In India and Sri Lanka, English is taught in schools and universities as a second language; and in most of the universities as the medium of instruction, too. As far as the development of English is concerned, the knowledge in the grammatical category *pronouns* is needed for a student of ESL to be a successful writer and speaker. Thus, it is vital to imparta deeper knowledge in pronouns to the students of ESL. Based on this concept, the first and second year studentsofthe English department at Annamalai University were taken for this study and were given the task sheet containing the sentences with blanks where the correct pronouns had to be used. Some sentences in the task sheet were *1. Arul and Siva are good friends and …………. like …………..2. John does ….…..…… homework …….…… without any help from………….. parents.3. …………. is your favourite subject?*, etc.In the result analysis, it was found out that only 45 % of the students were successful in their answers and others were not. This shows that the 55% of the students lack of the knowledge in the correct usage of pronouns. As being in academic field, it's our duty to make these students confident in the study and usage of pronouns correctly and successfully in their endeavour. Further, it is felt that providing the knowledge in this area through the computer based technology will be an added ideal learning environment. Thus, having considered all these matters in mind, a simple user-friendly computational tool is developed for learning and testing the main types of pronouns in English. The tool is believed to improve the knowledge in the said grammatical category, i.e. *pronouns*. Further, the programming language VB6is successfully used to design this tool.

SAMPLE VISUAL OF THE DEVELOPED TOOL:
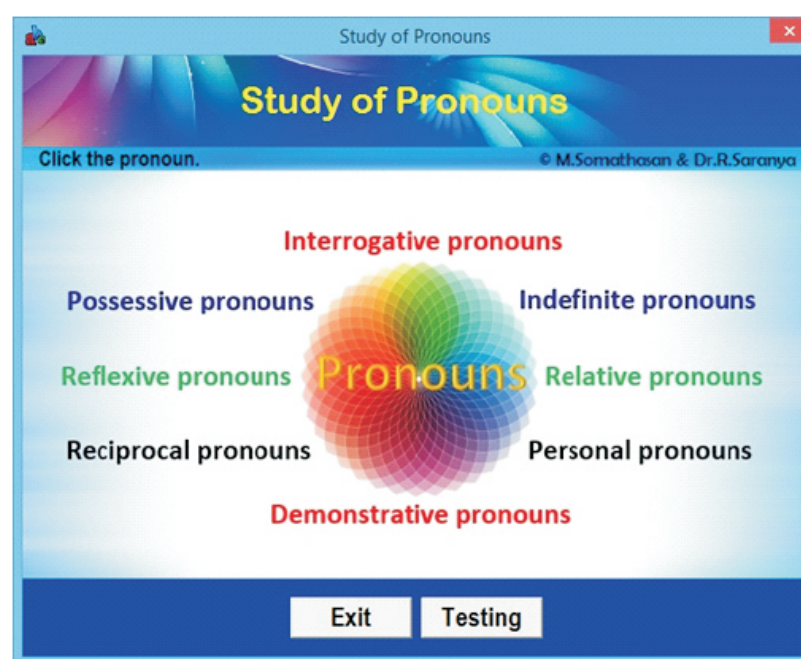
CONCLUSION:

Pronouns are those clever little inventions that allow the learners of English to replace or substitute for nouns. The key benefit of pronouns is that they are useful in making the language not be so repetitive and keep it from bogging down.If there are no pronouns and when we talk about someone or something, we will have to keep repeating their name over and over which is fully irritating. There are eight major classes of pronouns: *personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, reciprocal pronouns, indefinite pronouns, relative pronouns,* and *interrogative pronouns.* Each type of pronoun can be used according to their function. For example, the subject or subjective pronoun functioning as the subject of the verb in a sentence, does the action of the verb.For example, in the sentence *We are writing an article on the study of pronouns*, We is the subjective pronoun and it is doing the action of the verb writing. Thus, the knowledge in pronouns is an essential part for students of ESL and when they understand the nature of pronouns, definitely they can nurture the knowledge of English in their academic arena with the help of the developed tool.

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