Subjective &

Objective Pronouns

There are several types of pronouns: subjective, objective, possessive, and reflexive; each pronoun represents a different meaning when used in a sentence. We’re going to focus our attention on subjective and objective pronouns.

Pronouns are a part of speech that refer to or takes the place of a noun (Bulkin, 2013). They are notoriously difficult for children to learn because they require extensive syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic knowledge. For example, even though the noun in a sentence usually determines pronoun use, conversational context is an integral facet that begs consideration (Owens, 2014).

* Harrington (2012) refers to the misapplication of pronouns as “pronoun reversal”. For children with autism spectrum disorder, who demonstrate echolalic speech or struggle to take the perspective of others, it is difficult to understand the rules for shifting the pronoun from “you” to “I.” Therefore, they may hear “Do you want me to hold you?” and repeat “hold you” instead of “hold me.”
* Other children may avoid using pronouns altogether, and instead use proper nouns and names to refer to others (e.g., “Billy wants Cheerios”; Harrington, 2012).



Ideas for

Intervention

Here you will find resource materials for intervention. These are not programs or recommended methods but are meant to aid you by providing myriad resources and techniques for intervention. We’ve taken the time to research available resources and to offer them for you to consider.



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* Some of your clients may refer to themselves and others using proper nouns. This is likely due to the fact that adults often speak to young children this way (e.g., “Daddy loves Katie” rather than “I love you”; Mize, 2015).
* In consideration of third person subjective pronouns (e.g., “he and she”), it is typical for children to use the objective forms (i.e., “him or her”) or to refer to both genders with one pronoun (Clark, 2013).
* Other reasons that children with language deficits may struggle with pronoun use include difficulty with self-monitoring speech and a preference for routine that prevents a change in their speech pattern (Mize, 2015).

Methods

Subjective & Objective Pronouns

When teaching pronouns to children younger than five years old, it’s important to introduce pronouns in order of complexity.

It is common for children to avoid an overt prenominal error by overusing nouns. Frequent noun use also helps them remember “who did what” when presented with detailed information. Structuring intervention in a hierarchical approach will reduce this overuse (Owens, 2014).

In a similar way, natural conversational speech can be confusing for the child while learning because the pronouns “I and you” are constantly shifting referents (e.g., the child hears “You have Teddy” when referring to himself or herself).



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Children who exhibit echolalia or have difficulty shifting perspective will likely repeat back, “You have Teddy,” when they mean, “I have Teddy.” To avoid reinforcing incorrect use of “you” for “I”, the clinician should model the phrase as it will be spoken by the child (Mize, 2015).

For example, the clinician should prompt the target phrase by saying, “Say, I want a cracker,” rather than “Tell her you want a cracker.”

* Initially, the clinician should target “I and me,” followed by “you”. These pronouns should be taught separately, in order to (a) avoid confusion, and (b) prevent frustration that may occur if the activity involves taking turns or sharing items
  + For example: After the prompt is presented, say: “Who will take the next turn?” the child answers “me”, rather than “you”, because they don’t want to take turns (Mize, 2015).
  + The clinician should prompt and reinforce the use of one pronoun at a time until the child demonstrates understanding and use of all three forms.
  + Initially, the use of the same phrase or carrier phrase is helpful to reduce the cognitive load as the child is learning to use correct pronouns (Mize, 2015).
    - For example, the clinician can ask different questions with different stimuli, but expect the same response of “I do.”



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* + - It is important to move quickly from this stage as the child demonstrates understanding of the pronoun to avoid the child learning this phrase as a single word (Vail, 2012).
* Typical pediatric language development informs us that facilitators should target subjective pronouns before targeting objective pronouns.

1. Subjective pronouns: *I, he, she, it, we, you, they*.
2. Objective pronouns: *me, you, him, her, it, us, them*.

* Deictic terms (e.g., I, you, etc.) are notoriously difficult to teach, as they often confuse the child’s frame of reference.
  + Pro-tip: when working one on one with a child, incorporate an additional conversational partner (e.g., another SLP, a peer, etc.) to provide a model, this way, you avoid confusing the child’s frame of reference.
    - Vlugter, Knott, McDonald, and Hall (2009) stated that practicing with multiple participants develops the appropriation of pronoun use more efficiently compared to teaching it in a single-participant context.
* Do not underestimate the power of direct modeling.
  + Clinicians and caregivers should avoid taking in the third person and referring to others with only proper names (e.g., “Daddy’s gonna get Ryan”). Instead, mature language models should be used once the child is developmentally ready to learn pronouns (e.g., “I’m gonna get you”; Mize, 2015).
  + Harrington (2012) suggests interchanging pronouns with proper nouns to connect the pronoun with the referent (e.g., “Mrs. Smith is hungry. I am so hungry!”).



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* + Mize (2015) suggests that children with good receptive language may also benefit from direct explanation of the pronouns and their referents (e.g., When Tyler says “I want the block”, “I” means Tyler because Tyler is saying “I”). This may not be successful if children have difficulty with language comprehension or auditory processing difficulties.

Resources

Subjective & Objective Pronouns

Books

[*A Planet Without Pronouns*](https://www.amazon.com/Grammar-Tales-Planet-Without-Pronouns/dp/043945820X/ref=sr_1_fkmrnull_1?keywords=the+planet+without+pronouns&qid=1556499435&s=gateway&sr=8-1-fkmrnull), written by Justin Martin and Jared Lee. This book teaches children learn the concept by not including pronouns in any of the sentences!

[*If You Were a Pronoun*,](https://www.amazon.com/You-Were-Pronoun-Word-Fun/dp/1404826394/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=if+you+were+a+pronoun&qid=1556499759&s=gateway&sr=8-1) written by Nancy Loewen and Sarah Gray. This book teaches pronouns through repetition.

[*I and You and Don’t Forget Who: What is a Pronoun*](https://www.amazon.com/You-Dont-Forget-Who-Categorical/dp/1575055961/ref=sr_1_fkmrnull_1?keywords=I+and+You%2C+and+Don%27t+Forget+Who%3A+What+Is+a+Pronoun%3F+by+Brian+Cleary+and+Brian+Gable&qid=1556499951&s=gateway&sr=8-1-fkmrnull)*?* Written by Brian Cleary and Brian Gable. This book teaches pronouns through rhyming verses and silly cartoons.

[*Mine, All Mine: A Book About Pronouns*](https://www.amazon.com/Mine-All-About-Pronouns-Explore/dp/0698117972/ref=sr_1_3?keywords=mine+all+mine&qid=1556500136&s=gateway&sr=8-3)*,* written by Ruth Heller. If you want more straightforward and comprehensive pronoun coverage, check out this book.

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Games and Activities

* Have the child request a highly preferred item. The clinician can ask “Who wants a cookie?” and have the child respond with “I do” (Mize, 2015). This can be repeated with favorite foods and toys. To increase complexity, the clinician can remove the question prompt, and wait for the child to initiate of a request (e.g., “I want”, “I want a cookie”)
* Have the child request an action, such as a push on the swing. The clinician can request the target by asking, “who should I push?” or “who is swinging?” and having the child respond, “push me” or “me” (Vail, 2002).
* Use a mirror to establish that the person they are looking at is “me.” The clinician can prompt the child with questions while looking in the mirror (i.e., “Who is that?”, “Who is making a happy face?”; Bulkin, 2013).
* A [helpful handout](https://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/173%20Teaching%20Pronouns.pdf) from Super Duper that contains definitions and activity suggestions.

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Subjective and Objective Pronouns

Websites

For easy to read definitions and examples, check out [Fact Monster](https://www.factmonster.com/features/grammar-and-spelling/pronouns-subjective-objective-possessive-demonstrative-more)

Make sure to check out “[Brain Pop](•%09https:/www.brainpop.com/english/writing/ivsme/)” if your client enjoys mind maps, movie making, coding, and interactive activities.

“[Watch, Know, Learn”](•%09http:/www.watchknowlearn.org/Category.aspx?CategoryID=2249) is a website that contains entertaining educational videos that are categorized by subject. If you would like to teach your client about subjective and objective pronouns using technology, this website is for you!

[Khan Academy](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/parts-of-speech-the-pronoun/subject-object-person-and-number/v/subject-and-object-pronouns-the-parts-of-speech-grammar) is a great website for older children due to the clear delivery of content.

[Turtle Diary](https://www.turtlediary.com/games/pronoun.html) provides numerous interactive computer games that are geared for specific subjects. Check out the pronoun games here:

A large variety of subjective and objective pronoun activities can be found [here](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Browse/Search:subject%20and%20object%20pronouns%20activities) and [here](https://busyteacher.org/23982-pronoun-power-6-fun-activities.html).

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Websites

Please visit [our Pinterest page](https://www.pinterest.com/sugarlanguage/_saved/) for additional resources and activities:

Pinterest Q&A:

What is Pinterest? Pinterest is a social media platform that serves as an electronic bulletin board. Many SLPs use it as a way to electronically “bookmark” (i.e., save) activities for future sessions.

How much does it cost? It’s free! However, you must create an account in order to access the SUGAR Language boards or use the website in general.

**References**

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Owens, R. (2014). *Language development an introduction* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

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