Section 13  personal pronouns; possessives

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possible further activities

Students can just read the advertisements. Or you can ask them to see if they can find five or more advertisements, song titles etc, containing personal pronouns and possessives.

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language notes

In some languages, subject and object pronouns are often left out when they are not completely necessary. This is unusual in English, though it happens sometimes in informal speech. Typical mistakes:

*Is raining again.
'More potatoes?' 'No, thanks. *Have enough.'
'She likes parties, but I don't like.'

The informal use of me etc in subject complements ('It's me again') and in one-word answers ('Who said that?' 'Her.') may be strange for students whose mother tongues have the equivalent of I etc in these contexts:

'Who's that?' 'It's I.' or '*I am.'

In some languages, ordinary nouns have grammatical gender. Beginners may use he or she for things (especially living creatures), reflecting the mother-tongue gender.

*Look at that spider! She's horrible!

possible further activities

'Me' Ask questions like the following. Students answer 'Me' or 'Not me'.

Who likes fish?
Who speaks [name of language]?
Who was born in March?
Who can drive?
Who goes to bed late?
Who gets up early at weekends?
Who goes skiing?
Who's been to the US?

Then, if you like, you can ask the questions all over again and ask for more complete short answers ('I do', 'I was', 'I can', 'I don't' etc).

Using 'it' Ask students to write or say answers beginning with it to the following questions:

Is your country [or name of other country] hot in summer?
What's the weather like today?
How far is it from your house to the nearest station / airport / …?

Internet Ask students to use the internet to find out what the weather is like in a country of your choice (or their choice), and to write two or three sentences about it beginning with it.

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use. ➔ Section 13 continues
language notes

In languages with grammatical gender, third-person possessives may be masculine or feminine according to the gender of the following noun, and not the possessor (as in English):

*Jack's much nicer than her sister.
*Julie and his husband spent the weekend with us.

Students may use articles together with my, your etc if this happens in their mother tongue:
*a my friend  *the my car

Another beginner’s mistake is to give possessives plural forms:
*I know theirs parents very well.

Students often put apostrophes in yours, its, ours and theirs. (Understandably, because possessive nouns have apostrophes.) Many native speakers make the same mistake.
*This is our’s, not your’s.

Note that technically my, your etc are both pronouns and determiners, not adjectives. Older grammars may call them ‘possessive adjectives’ to distinguish them from mine, yours etc (which are a different kind of pronoun). The terminology has no practical importance for students.

possible further activities

Extending Exercise 2  Get students to write some of the sentences from Exercise 2 in the form ‘Amy sold James her car’, ‘James sold Carlos his bike’ etc.

Who gave what to who?  Get eight volunteers to stand in a circle where everybody can see them. Each of them gives one of his/her possessions to the person on the left, while the others watch and memorise what happens. Then they sit down (hiding the things they were given), and everybody writes sentences saying who gave what to who.

or: Everybody in the class gives somebody else something in turn. Then everything is hidden, or given back, and students try to write sentences recalling all the exchanges.

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[Note: in an early printing of this book, the wrong names are given in the instruction to Exercise 2.]

possible further activities

Lying to the teacher  Turn your back on the class. Some or all of the students put possessions on your desk. You turn back, pick them up one by one, and ask ‘Whose is this?’ Three or more students tell you, but they don’t necessarily tell you the truth.

‘It’s his.’ ‘It’s hers.’ ‘It’s mine.’
You try to decide whose the thing is, and give your answer (‘It’s yours.’). The students tell you if you’ve got it right.
language notes

Some verbs for things that people do for themselves are not normally reflexive in English, but may be reflexive in the students’ mother tongue(s). Common examples: wash, shave, dress, get up, go to bed.

possible further activities

*Mime* Give some individuals and some pairs of students cards with instructions telling them to do things to themselves. Teach any new vocabulary in advance. For example:

- talk to yourself
- write on yourselves
- look at yourself
- kill yourself
- kick yourselves
- scratch yourselves
- kiss yourself
- sing to yourself
- read to yourselves
- stroke yourselves
- hit yourself
- shout at yourself

Students act out what is on their cards; the others have to say what it is. (‘He’s talking to himself.’ ‘They’re scratching themselves.’)

Then put students in pairs or groups, and do a similar activity, but with ‘each other’ on the cards instead of reflexives.

Not all of these actions (e.g. kiss each other), of course, would be appropriate for all types of class or cultural context.

*Checking non-reflexives* Get students to do an internet search to check the relative frequency of “He shaved himself quickly” and “He shaved quickly”. Get them to do the same for “They washed themselves quickly” and “They washed quickly”. What about “They dressed themselves” / “They got dressed”?