1.7 Pronouns

The pronoun system in English is actually a bit like a time capsule; we have a glimpse of what the case-marking system of older forms of English was like when we analyze the way we use pronouns.

Case expresses the **grammatical function** of a noun, for example as the **subject**, the **direct object**, or as a **possessive**. English used to mark case on nouns, but now it only does so on pronouns. Consider these examples.

> The **girl** saw the **boy**.
> The **boy** saw the **girl**.

The nouns *girl* and *boy* look exactly the same whether they are at the beginning of the sentence, as the subject, or at the end, as the direct object. But when pronouns are used instead of full nouns, here's what you get:

> **She** saw him.
> He saw **her**.

She is the subject pronoun, and *her* is the object pronoun. (In grammar, the subject pronoun is said to be in **nominative** case, the object is said to be in **accusative** case. These terms may come up again when you study another language.) Native speakers don't have to learn this; they just know it.

English Pronouns

person	number and gender	subject	object	possessive
1st	singular	I	me	mine
	plural	we	us	ours
2nd	singular	you	you	yours
	plural	you	you	yours
3rd	singular masculine	he	him	his
	singular feminine	she	her	hers
	singular neuter	it	it	its
	plural	they	them	theirs

So pronouns have the function of replacing nouns; more specifically, they replace whole noun phrases. They can be really useful tools to help us identify subject noun phrases, as shown in Lesson 1.8.

The terms 1st person, 2nd person, and 3rd person are used to describe pronouns. Discuss these terms and what they mean.

Notice that the pronouns overlap: 2nd person singular and 2nd person plural are the same form, *you*. Does this ever lead to confusion? How do you distinguish between these when speaking to your friends? Are there other words you use to clarify when you mean more than one person for *you*?