October 19, 2017

A Pronoun Primer

Pronouns are words that stand for nouns. Return to an earlier sample sentence in English: *The boy went to the store and the boy bought the boy's father a gift.*

Pronouns "prevent the monotony which would necessarily result from the indefinite multiplication of nouns."[1] For example: *The boy went to the store and he bought his father a gift.* "He" and "his" are pronouns used to avoid the repetition of the noun "boy." The word that the pronouns represent is called the antecedent.

As simple as that sounds, think how often you use pronouns almost every time you speak or write. The New Testament uses pronouns at least that much, maybe more. Pronouns have a variety of uses, and "like moving vans, can carry a big load."[2] Because of the variety of uses, pronouns can be subdivided into numerous categories. The present goal is not necessarily to memorize all the details of the differences. The parsing tags we are using (on BibleHub[3] or from the *Analytical Greek New Testament*[4]) describe the type of pronoun in the Greek text. Being aware of the various functions will help understand how they are used. For more about the various pronoun forms, see, for example,

http://ucbclassics.dreamhosters.com/ancgreek/paradigmsU/paradigmtables3BOM.html#par28

Functions of Pronouns

Please don't be intimidated but the numerous pronoun functions or categories. You probably use most of these kinds of pronouns in English without even noticing. Just become generally familiar with the different ways pronouns are used so you can recognize them in Greek text. Then you can always come back to this brief reference (or even better, one of the texts mentioned in the footnotes) to refresh your pronoun proficiency.

- **Personal pronouns** refer to a person (I, you, he, she, they, we, it etc. – "it" would be a neuter personal pronoun). Greek verbs are "inflected." The form indicates if the verb is first person (I or we), second person (you singular or plural), or third person (he, she, they). Therefore the pronoun is not essential to understand the meaning of the verb. For example, βλέπω and ἐγω βλέπω both mean "I see." Usually the pronoun is included only if it is necessary for clarity in the context or for emphasis on who the subject of the verb is.

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[1] H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 122.

[2] Darrell L. Bock, "Exegetical Insight" in William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1993), 86.

[3] http://biblehub.com/interlinear/

[4] Barbara Friberg & Timothy Friberg, *Analytical Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984).

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- **Possessive pronouns** are used in Greek instead of the English apostrophe-s (as in "Bob**'s** house"). Possession can be shown by:[5]

  o The actual possessive pronoun: ἡ κρίσις ἡ **ἐμὴ**, "my judgment" (John 5:30)

  o The genitive of the personal pronoun: τὸ πάσχα **ἡμῶν**, "our Passover" [lit., "the Passover of us"] (1 Corinthians 5:7)

  o The article, when the context makes it clear: ἐκτείνας **τὴν** χεῖρα, "He stretched out His hand" [lit., "the hand"] (Matthew 8:3)

  o Emphatic possession uses ἴδιος: τὴν **ἰδίαν** πόλιν, "His own city" (Matthew 9:1)

- **Relative pronouns** "relate one substantive to another."[6] These are words such as "who" or "which" or "that" all represented by different forms of the Greek relative pronoun ὅς. (Note the rough breathing and the accent. This is slightly different from the definite article "the" which is ὁ with rough breathing but no accent.) A relative pronoun may be used without reference to a specific person: **ὃς** γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν καθ᾽ ἡμῶν, ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐστιν. "For **who** is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40).

- **Demonstrative pronouns** point out things, "with special emphasis to a designated object."[7] The English equivalents are "this" (the near demonstrative, οὗτος) or "that" (the far demonstrative, ἐκεῖνος). Demonstrative pronouns are often used alone with as a substantive. οὗτος [masculine singular] βλέπει, "This man [or this one] sees." ἐκεῖναι [feminine plural] βλέπουσι "Those women see."

- **Reciprocal pronouns** "represent an interchange of action between the members of a plural subject."[8] The English representation is usually "one another" or "each other" from the Greek word ἀλλήλους, as in ἀγαπᾶτε **ἀλλήλους**, "love **one another**" (John 13:34).

- **Reflexive pronouns** are used "when the action expressed by the verb is referred back to its own subject."[9] Different forms of the Greek words ἐμαυτοῦ, σεαυτοῦ, ἑαυτοῦ and ἑαυτῶν are typically represented by the English "myself," "herself," "themselves," etc. Ἐὰν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ **ἐμαυτοῦ**… "If I bear witness about **myself**…" (Also note the use of the personal pronoun ἐγὼ, "I" to emphasize the subject. Some translations bring out this emphasis on the subject "I", such as "If I *alone* bear witness…" in ESV.)

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[5] H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 130-132.

[6] Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1950), 118.

[7] H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 127.

[8] Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1950), 120.

[9] H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 131.