6 Nouns and pronouns

6.1 Word classes

Tudor and Stuart schoolboys would have been quite familiar with the grammatical concepts to be discussed in this chapter. As evidenced by Greaves's exercise in Chapter 2, parts of speech are the most enduring categories in Western grammatical thinking. In this chapter the traditional term *part of speech* will be used interchangeably with *word class* to stress structural reasons alongside semantic ones for setting up categories of words. Instead of simply saying that a noun is 'the name of a person, place or thing', as traditional grammar defines it, a structurally oriented approach also refers to the *inflectional* endings attached to nouns, and the relations nouns have with other word classes in sentences.

As opposed to derivational endings discussed in Chapter 5, which form new words from existing ones (create *lexemes*), inflectional endings mark grammatical distinctions in lexemes (create *word-forms*). English nouns, for example, take inflections that indicate a *number* contrast between the singular (*cat*) and the plural (*cat**s***), as well as a *case* contrast between the common case (*dog*) and the genitive (*dog'**s***). Inflections are similarly used to mark person, number, tense, aspect and mood contrasts in verbs. In the following we will see how the major word classes were constructed in Early Modern English, what long-term trends they showed, and how they differed from Present-day English. This chapter is concerned with nouns and pronouns, and Chapter 7 with verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

When talking about word classes, however, morphology makes up only part of the story. In order to understand the work they do we also need to know how they combine into larger constructions. These arrangements of words in sentences belong to the province of *syntax*, to be discussed in Chapter 8.

6.2 Nouns

The Early Modern English system of noun inflections is essentially that of Present-day English, and the same regular forms are found in number and case endings. The Old English four-case system has been reduced to two, the genitive and the common case, which appears in both subject and object positions in the sentence. Some more variability, however, exists in Early Modern number and case marking than in Standard English today.

6.2.1 Number

In Early Modern English, the plural of nouns was regularly formed with the *-(e)s* ending. There were a few exceptions, most of them the same as now such as *men*, *women*, *children*, *oxen, feet*, *mice* and *sheep*. But there were also forms no longer in current use such as *eyen* ('eyes'), *shoon* ('shoes'), *chicken*, often used as the plural of *chick*, and *kine*, the plural of *cow*. *Kine* is still more frequent than *cows* in texts in the first half of the seventeenth century; see examples (1) and (2).

(1) Touching the gentlenesse of **kine**, it is a vertue as fit to be expected as any other; for if she bee not affable to the maide, gentle, and willing to come to the paile … shee is vtterly vnfitte for the Dayrie. (HC, Gervase Markham, *Countrey Contentments*, 1615: 107)

(2) Wee lost in the service and prey about 100 serviceable **horse**, y^e^ draught **oxen**, and 130 **cowes**; I lost an horseman and my best horse. (CEEC, John Jones, 1651: JONES, 181)

Example (2) also illustrates the form *horse* after a numeral. It may be a sign of the noun being treated collectively (cf. *a hundred **pound***), or the unchanged relic plural of the word. It occurs in Shakespeare, for instance, together with other similar cases such as *year* and *winter*.

6.2.2 Case

The only case ending in Early Modern English nouns is the genitive *-s*, which is added to words in the singular (*child's*) and to irregular plurals (*children's*). In writing, the apostrophe was introduced to the singular form before *-s* in the latter half of the seventeenth century, and after the regular plural *-s* only in the eighteenth century (although text editors can add them even to original-spelling editions as a matter of punctua-

tion). So no distinction was usually made in Early Modern English between the common-case plural (*kings*), the genitive singular (*king's*) or the genitive plural (*kings'*): all three were spelled *kings* and pronounced alike.

Although the historical unstressed vowel of the genitive ending *-es* had been dropped in most contexts in Late Middle English, it continued to be pronounced in nouns ending in sibilants ('s'-sounds), where the ending was /ɪz/ – the same as today. This genitive suffix was also sometimes replaced by the possessive pronoun *his* in Late Middle and Early Modern English texts. The writers of these texts may have felt that the regular *-(e)s* ending was an abbreviation of *his*, and indicated this in spelling by the use of *his*, particularly with masculine nouns ending in a sibilant sound (i.e. /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/). This variation is reflected in (3), where Henry Oxinden has *-s* in both *Mr Trusser's bond* and *Mr. Dickenson's bond* but resorts to a *his*-genitive in *Mr Crux* ***his*** *bond*.

(3) **Mr. Trusser's bond** and **Mr. Dickenson's bond** I intend, God willing, to pay tomorrow being Mooneday; if I see Mr. Twiman I intend to pay him what is due to Him; and if **Mr. Crux his bond** be sent up, I intend to pay that, so that I shall not be troubled with their summons any further. (CEEC, Henry Oxinden, 1663/5: OXINDEN, 292)

This use of *his* may also reflect a more general tendency in Late Middle and Early Modern English to mark syntactic relations by analytic means for the sake of clarity. By analogy, *her* was occasionally used with female possessors, as in the verse passage in (4) referring to the Greek goddess Pallas Athena.

(4) The which he did with duetifull regaird
According to **heighe pallas her command**
For loe that sacred altar vp he raird . . .
(LION, Patrick Gordon, *The First Booke of Penardo and Laissa*, 1615, VIII: 1769–72)

Even with sibilant-final singular nouns the *his*-genitive was, however, less common than the regular *-s* genitive, or the plain base form of the noun (Altenberg 1982: 43). The suffixless or *zero genitive* was typically found with names ending in *-s*, as in example (5) from George Fox's autobiography. It also occurred with native English nouns especially in the north of the country throughout the Early Modern period. The two illustrations in (6) come from Frances Basire's letters to her husband.

(5) And att last there came two or three women to **Tho: Atkins wife** into her shoppe pretendinge to by somethinge of her . . . (HC, George Fox, *Autobiography*, 1694: 153)

(6) I ham sory for **your deare frend deth**. Thoue you are not plesed to nam him, yet I thinke I know him – **Ser John Gudrike brother**. (CEEC, Frances Basire, 1651: Basire, 108)

Although it is customary to call the English genitive a case ending, this is not quite accurate because it can attach not only to a noun (*king's*) but also to a noun phrase (*king of Denmark's*). The example in (7) illustrates this *group genitive*, which was well established in Early Modern English. It was also recognised by the contemporary grammarian John Wallis in his *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1653).

(7) great endeavrs are acted by Sweden to take of that Crowne from theire allyance with the States to w*ch* purpose that King desires **the King of Denmarkes sister** in Marriage . . . (ICAME, *Newdigate Newsletters*, 1674: 117)

One of the broad trends in the history of English is a tendency to level inflections to zero endings or to replace them by alternative (*periphrastic*) expressions. The genitive, the sole surviving nominal case ending, also has zero representation with regular plural nouns in *-s* (the apostrophe is only a spelling device!). In many cases the genitive is replaced by an *of*-construction. In (8) *y^e^ forces of y^e^ King of Denmark* could in principle have been *y^e^ King of Denmark's forces* (cf. (7)).

(8) ye Citty of Hamburg has Writt to y*e* Elector of Brandenburg that they are very much allarmd at y*e* march of **y*e* forces of ye King of Denmark** w*ch* will in all lykelyhood fall upon them . . . (ICAME, *Newdigate Newsletters*, 1674: 51)

The *of*-construction gained ground in Middle English as many functions of the Old English genitive were taken over by this prepositional phrase. The genitive case came to be confined largely to personal nouns, and the *of*-construction to non-personal nouns. In a large database of seventeenth-century possessive constructions, the genitive occurred in two out of three animate nouns (persons, animals), but only in one in ten inanimate nouns; the genitive was also much more frequent in informal than formal prose (Altenberg 1982: 147, 254). These differences may reflect the subject matter – focusing on people – and the stylistic prefer-

ences of informal prose, which favour the use of the genitive rather than the *of*-construction.

6.3 Pronouns

Pronouns can basically assume the same functions in sentences as nouns and phrases made up of nouns. But unlike nouns, pronouns are *closed-class* items as their number cannot be increased freely. Only one personal pronoun form was introduced into Early Modern English, the possessive *its*. It was motivated by animacy, the distinction between personal and non-personal reference, which also largely lay behind the division of labour between the *-s* genitive and the *of*-construction.

6.3.1 Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns are used to indicate the speaker (*I*) and the addressee (*you*) or others involved in the text or discourse context (*he/she/it, they*). English personal pronouns show number (singular v. plural) and case, but mark personal as opposed to non-personal reference only in the third-person singular (*he/she* v. *it*). Apart from the possessive, the case system distinguishes between forms used as subjects and those used as objects in the sentence. Possessive forms are used either as independent pronouns (*it's* ***ours***) or, more often, as determiners of nouns, that is, alongside *a(n)* and *the* (*it's* ***our*** *cat*; cf. *it's* ***a*** *cat*; for determiners, see Chapter 8, section 2). Table 6.1 provides an outline of the Early Modern English

Table 6.1 Early Modern English personal pronouns

Person/ Number	Subjective case	Objective case	Possessive, determiner	Possessive, independent
1st sing.	*I*	*me*	***my/mine → my***	*mine*
1st pl.	*we*	*us*	*our*	*ours*
2nd sing.	***thou ~ ye → you***	***thee ~ you***	***thy/thine → thy ~ your***	***thine ~ yours***
2nd pl.	***ye → you***	*you*	*your*	*yours*
3rd sing. personal	*he, she*	*him, her*	*his, her*	*his, hers*
3rd sing. non-personal	***(h)it → it***	***him, (h)it → it***	***his (thereof) → its (of it)***	(***his → its***)
3rd pl.	*they*	*them* (*'em*)	*their*	*theirs*

system and the changes it underwent; the major changes are indicated in boldface.

The overall trend in the General dialect is towards less variation in the personal pronoun system, but the system itself has forms of both southern and northern origin. Let us begin by looking at the third-person plural. In Late Middle English the southern subject and possessive pronouns with *h-* had largely been replaced by the northern *they* and *their*(*s*) even in the south. This process was completed in the fifteenth century when the northern third-person plural object form *them* replaced the southern *hem*. The southern form can occasionally be found in writing in the early sixteenth century. The change would perhaps have been harder to detect in speech, because the unstressed forms of *hem* and *them* could have identical realisations, often rendered by *'em* in writing imitating speech. The example in (9) comes from Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*.

(9) They knew he and *Clemene* were scarce an hour in a day from my lodgings; that they eat with me, and that I oblig'd **'em** in all things I was capable of. I entertained **them** with the loves of the *Romans*, and great men . . . (HC, Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*, 1688: 192)

Another change of northern origin affected the first and second-person singular possessives when the long determiner forms with *-n*, *mine* and *thine*, went out of common use by the early seventeenth century. These long forms had been employed before words beginning with a vowel (***mine*** *uncle*; cf. ***an*** *uncle*), and the short ones elsewhere (***my*** *friend*; cf. ***a*** *friend*). The loss of *-n* occurred earlier in the north than in the south. In the course of the sixteenth century the short forms *my* and *thy* spread to most contexts and the long ones were retained only in poetic language and fixed expressions (*mine own*, *thine eyes*).

A notable asymmetry arose in the personal pronoun system when the singular *thou* (*thee, thy, thine*) retreated from the General dialect and, with the generalisation of the originally plural *you* (*ye*, *you*, *your*, *yours*), the number distinction between the second-person singular and plural was lost. This gradual process started in Middle English, when the plural *you* spread as the polite form in addressing one person (cf. French *vous*, German *Sie*). Social inferiors addressed their superiors by using *you*, and in the upper ranks *you* came to be established as the norm even among equals. *Thou* retreated to the private sphere, but could surface in public discourse when emotions ran high. Around 1600, *thou* is found in fiction, drama and poetry and in religious contexts of all kinds, especially with reference to God, as well as in trial records. The passage in (10) shows how *you* and *thou* varied in Sir Walter Raleigh's trial in 1603, where Sir

Edward Coke, the Attorney General, combined *thou* with terms of abuse, and even used it as a verb. By the early eighteenth century *thou* gradually disappeared from most kinds of writing, including trial records.

(10) *Raleigh.* I do not hear yet, that **you** have spoken one word against me; here is no Treason of mine done: If my Lord *Cobham* be a Traitor, what is that to me?

Attorney. All that he did was by **thy** Instigation, **thou** Viper; for I thou **thee**, **thou** Traitor.

Raleigh. It becometh not a Man of Quality and Virtue, to call me so: But I take comfort in it, it is all **you** can do.

Attorney. Have I anger'd **you**?
(HC, *The Trial of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 1603: 209)

Throughout the Early Modern period *you* vastly outnumbers *thou* in personal letters, which reflect everyday language use. The contexts where *thou* typically occurs in seventeenth-century correspondence include a mother writing to her child, or spouses expressing their mutual affection. Even these writers alternate between the two pronouns within one and the same letter. The excerpt in (11) is from Lady Katherine Paston's letter to her young son, a student in Cambridge, and the one in (12) from Henry Oxinden's letter to his beloved wife. Both writers come from rural areas, Katherine Paston from Norfolk and Henry Oxinden from Kent. The use of *thou* continues in regional dialects until the present day especially in the north and west of England (Trudgill 1999: 92–3).

(11) My good Child the *Lord* blese **the** ever more in all **thy** goinges ovtt and **thy** Cominges in. euen in all **thy** ways works and words, for his mercy sake: I was very glad to heer by **your** first letter that **you** wer so saffly arriued at **your** wished portt. (HC, Katherine Paston, c. 1624: 65)

(12) I read **thy** Letters over and over and over, for in them I see **thee** as well as I can. I am **thine** as much as possibly. I hope our Children are well. My service to all **you** think fitting to speake it to. (HC, Henry Oxinden, 1662: 274)

Thou is regularly included in the personal-pronoun paradigm by Early Modern English grammarians, but John Wallis (1653) notes that using the singular form in addressing someone usually implies disrespect or close familiarity (Kemp 1972: 323). In his *Short Introduction to English*

Grammar (1762: vi), Robert Lowth remarks that *thou* is disused even in the familiar style.

Another change that simplified the Early Modern English second-person pronoun system was the loss of the subject form *ye* when the object form *you* was generalised in the subject position in the General dialect. This levelling of case forms took place in the sixteenth century, spreading from informal contexts to more formal ones. It never made it to the King James Bible, however, which retained the traditional subject form *ye*.[1] Among the early adopters of *you* was King Henry VIII, who consistently used it in the subject function in his personal correspondence; see (13).

(13) Myne awne good Cardinall, I recomande me unto you with all my hart, and thanke yow for the grette payne and labour that **yow** do dayly take in my bysynes and maters, desyryng yow (that wen **yow** have well establyshyd them) to take summe pastyme and comfort, to the intent **yow** may the longer endure to serve us; (CEEC, King Henry VIII, 1520s: ORIGINAL 1, 269)

By contrast, the third-person singular non-personal pronoun generalised its weak subject form *it* to both subject and object functions, so losing its strong variant *hit* and the old neuter objective case form *him*. This change was completed in the course of the sixteenth century. One reason for it must have been the potential confusion of the non-personal *him* with the masculine form *him*. The example in (14) shows a typical late use of non-personal *him* in that it refers to an artery, part of the human body, which might be thought of as personified by the writer.

(14) The other Arterye that hath two cotes, is called *vena Arterialis*, or the great Artery that ascendeth and dissendeth; and of **him** springeth al the other Arteirs that spreade to euery member of the body, for by **him** is vnified and quickneth al the members of the body. (HC, Thomas Vicary, *The Anatomie of the Bodie of Man*, 1548: 59)

This transfer of *it* to the objective case went part of the way to solving a conflict created by forms going back to the earlier *grammatical gender* system at a time when English had already gone over to *notional gender*. In Old English all nouns were assigned a grammatical gender, just as in French or German today. Grammatical gender is semantically arbitrary: there is no inherent reason why *soleil* ('sun') in Modern French should be masculine but its German equivalent, *Sonne*, feminine. These distinctions are used to express grammatical relationships between words and

word groups in sentences, and pronoun choices are determined by the grammatical gender of the word. Notional (or *natural*) gender, by contrast, is semantically motivated in that it encodes real-life distinctions such as the animacy and sex of the entities referred to. These are indicated in English by the third-person singular personal pronouns (*he*, *she*, *it*) and *reflexive pronouns* (*himself* (often *hisself* in Early Modern English), *herself*, *itself*).

Now, the problem that Early Modern English speakers had even after the levelling of the object forms of *it* was the non-personal possessive *his*, which coincided with the masculine possessive *his*. This form, illustrated by the passage from Thomas Blundeville's treatise on geometry in (15), was common at the turn of the seventeenth century.

(15) WHICH IS THE ARCTIQUE CIRCLE, AND WHY IS IT SO CALLED?
The Arctique Circle is that which is next to the North Pole, and hath **his** name of this worde *Arctos*, which is the great Beare or Charles wayne . . . (HC, Thomas Blundeville, *The Tables of the Three Speciall Right Lines Belonging to a Circle*, 1597: 156r)

This clash between personal and non-personal gender was resolved by the introduction of the new possessive form *its*, presumably by analogy with the genitive suffix *-s*. The excerpt in (16) from John Taylor's *Pennyles Pilgrimage* spells the new form with an apostrophe.

(16) I was faine to wade ouer the Riuer of *Annan* in *Scotland*, from which Riuer the County of *Annandale*, hath **it's** name. (HC, John Taylor, *Pennyles Pilgrimage*, 1630: 128)

Its is first found in John Florio's Italian–English dictionary, *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598). The traditional form persisted in the 1611 Bible, as in *if the salt haue lost* ***his*** *savour, wherewith shall it be salted?* (Matthew 5: 13). The new variant *its* spread to the determiner function in the first half of the seventeenth century, becoming the norm in the second half of the century. Unlike the determiner, the independent possessive pronoun *its* is marginal even today (Quirk et al. 1985: 346).

Notional gender, however, is subject to cultural conventions as well. Although a word like *earth* takes the non-personal possessive *its* in the seventeenth century, it can also be assigned the feminine pronoun. The same optionality applies to *church*, *city*, *month*, *moon*, *sun* and similar words, which may take a personal pronoun besides a non-personal one. A change of perspective can take place even within one sentence as in (17), where the Mother Earth begins as a neuter (*its*) but changes to feminine

(*her*) after the mention of the Sun, which takes the masculine. Cases such as this are not simple instances of *personification*, but are also textually motivated: the use of *it*(*s*) across the board would have obscured the internal reference relations in the paragraph.

(17) But as **the Earth**, the Mother of all Creatures here below, sends up all **its** Vapours and proper emissions at the command of **the Sun**, and yet requires them again to refresh **her** own Needs, and they are deposited between them both in the bosome of a Cloud as a common receptacle, that they may cool **his** Flames, and yet descend to make **her** Fruitful: So are the proprieties of a Wife to be dispos'd of by her Lord; (HC, Jeremy Taylor, *The Marriage Ring*, 1673: 19)

The rise of *its* was not a straightforward case of substituting one form for another but involved other morphological options, notably *thereof* and *of it*. They link it up with the choice of the *of*-construction instead of the genitive with inanimate nouns. *Thereof* was a frequent alternative in Late Middle English, but became rare in most registers in the second half of the seventeenth century. Blundeville uses it in a chapter heading in (18). By contrast, *of it* has continued as an option until the present day. It is illustrated in (19) by the description of a flea from Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*, which draws a parallel between *its* and *of it*.

(18) Of the meridian, and of the vses **THEREOF**.
(HC, Thomas Blundeville, *The Tables of the Three Speciall Right Lines*, 1597: 153v)

(19) The strength and beauty of this small creature, had it no other relation at all to man, would deserve a description. For **its** strength, the *Microscope* is able to make no greater discoveries of it then the naked eye, but onely the curious contrivance of **its** leggs . . . But, as for the beauty **of it**, the *Microscope* manifests it to be all over adorn'd with a curiously polish'd suit of *sable* Armour . . . (HC, Robert Hooke, *Micrographia*, 1665: 210)

Notional gender distinctions also emerge in the Early Modern English *relative pronouns*, which will be discussed below in 6.3.2.

The *generic* use of personal pronouns does not appear to have undergone any major changes in Early Modern English. When the sex of the referent was undetermined, the traditional masculine *he* was used throughout the period, but we often also find the plural pronoun *they*, which in this use goes back to Middle English. Generic *he* is found in (20),

which comes in George Colville's *Boethius* translation (*whosoeuer . . .* ***he***). Generic *they* occurs in (21a), in Lucy Russell's letter to her friend Jane Cornwallis (*nonne of yours . . .* ***them***), and in (21b), Arabella Stuart's letter to her grandmother Elizabeth Talbot (*one . . .* ***they***, ***theyr***).

(20) For when euerye one of them is the selfe same, and lyke the other, **whosoeuer** seketh to get any one of them w^t^out the others, certes **he** hath not that **he** desyrethe. (HC, George Colville (transl.), *Boethius*, 1556: 70)

(21a) be confident that ther is **nonne of yours** to whom I will be more wanting in any thing I may do for **them** then I wold have binn to my owne if God had continued me a mother . . . (CEEC, Lucy Russell, 1619: Cornwallis, 62)

(21b) He taught me by the example of Samuell that **one** might pretend on errand and deliver an other with a safe conscience. By the example of Sampson that **one** might and (if **they** be not too foolish to live in this world) must speake riddles to **theyr** frends and try the truth of offred love . . . (CEEC, Arabella Stuart, 1603: Stuart, 130)

Early Modern legal language also displays the double form *him or her*, illustrated in (22a). That this use is motivated by the need to provide for all eventualities rather than to avoid a gender bias can be seen in cases like (22b), where the plural *them* is singled out separately.

(22a) Then **everie person** soe offendinge shall forfeyte and lose fower tymes the value of everie suche Cable so by **him or her** made or cause to be made as ys aforesaide . . . (HC, *The Statutes of the Realm*, 1592–3: 857)

(22b) Provided always neverthelesse That this Act shall not extend to any **Person or Persons** in Execution for any Fine on **him her or them** imposed for any Offence by **him her or them** committed. (HC, *The Statutes of the Realm*, 1695–6: 76)

It is worth noting, however, that the avoidance of a gender bias may be reflected in *indefinite pronouns*, whose referents are not specified. The generic use of *man* declined in the compounds *some man*, *any man*, *no man* and *every man* during the Early Modern English period, as *-one* and *-body* compounds gained ground (cf. the relic use of *man* in *no man's land*).

6.3.2 Relative pronouns

Relative pronouns introduce relative clauses, which modify nouns and noun phrases. English has three basic relativisation strategies: *wh-*, *th-* and *zero* (*a person* ***who(m)***/ ***that***/ [**0**]/ *I know*). *Wh-* pronouns distinguish personal from non-personal referents (*who* v. *which*), but do not show number contrast (*a person*/ *persons* ***who***; *a thing*/ *things* ***which***), and only *who* inflects for case (subjective, objective and possessive). *That* has the same functions as *wh-* relative pronouns in the subjective and objective case, but it is uninflected and does not distinguish between personal and non-personal referents or number (*a person*/ *things* ***that*** *I know*). The *zero* strategy is found in cases where the relative clause does not have an overt relative marker (*a person*/ *things* [**0**] *I know*). Table 6.2 shows the Early Modern English system, which is quite similar to the one we have today.

A formal distinction between subjective and objective case becomes part of the relative pronoun system in Early Modern English, when the subject pronoun *who* is consolidated in the language. As *who* gradually replaces *which* with human referents, it also strengthens the animacy distinction. This is yet another case where notional gender appears to be the driving force behind linguistic change in Early Modern English.

The relative *who* is first attested as a subject relative pronoun in the early fifteenth century in closing formulae of letters and prayers with reference to God (. . . *that knoweth* ***God***, ***who*** *have you in his blessed kepyng*, from the Stonor letters; Rydén 1983: 127). *Who* began to diffuse from divine to human reference towards the end of the fifteenth century. Because of its origins, it was first used in relative clauses that provided new information about the referent (*non-restrictive relative clauses*) but were not required to identify it (as is the case in *restrictive relative clauses*). Example (23) is typical of the sixteenth-century usage. The convention of separating a non-restrictive relative clause by commas is of later date.

Table 6.2 Early Modern English relativisers

Gender	Subjective case	Objective case	Possessive, determiner	Determiner
personal	***which*** → ***who***	*whom*	*whose*	*which*
	that	*that*		
	(zero)	zero		
non-personal	*which*	*which*	*whose*	*which*
	that	*that*	(*whereof*)	
	(zero)	zero	(*of which*)	

(23) All this I shewed to G. Nonne **who** semeth very lothe that Dobbes shuld have yt becawse he thynketh he will deale streyghtlye with the tenantes . . . (CEEC, Francis Wyndham, 1577: Bacon, 249)

In the sixteenth century the relative pronoun *which* could be used with personal and non-personal referents and in restrictive and non-restrictive functions; *that* occurred in both but with a preference for the restrictive function; and the zero relative was confined to the restrictive function alone. In (24) *which* introduces a restrictive clause which identifies the particular messenger talked about, and in (25) the relative clause headed by a zero relative is similarly used to describe the generic *no man*.

(24) The messenger **which** had my last letters was reternyd back by whether ageyn . . . (CEEC, Robert Dudley, 1586: Leycester, 134)

(25) There is no man here [**0**] dealethe more honorably and faythefully towardes your lordship then this bearers master . . . (CEEC, Francis Walsingham, 1586: Bacon 273)

In the course of the Early Modern English period, the zero strategy lost ground in the subject position and *who* was established especially in the written language. *Who* could also appear in the object position instead of *whom*, although this was less common with the relative *who* than with the corresponding *interrogative* pronoun. The two alternative forms of the relative *who* in (26) come from *Richard III*.

(26a) Hath she forgot alreadie that braue Prince,
Edward, her Lord, **whom** I (some three monthes since)
Stab'd in my angry mood, at Tewkesbury?
(William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 1623: I.ii. 255–7)

(26b) *Clarence*, **who** I indeede haue cast in darknesse,
I do beweepe to many simple Gulles . . .
(William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 1623: I.iii. 335–6)

Whose continued to function as a possessive determiner with personal as well as non-personal referents, as in (27). This is the case even today in written language. But parallel to *thereof*, the synthetic relative *whereof* could be used with non-personal referents (28). The analytic alternative, *of which*, parallel to the *of*-construction found with nouns and personal pronouns, also gained ground with non-personal referents especially in the seventeenth century (Schneider 1992). It is illustrated in (29).

(27) So is it by me also wel approoued, this plaister called *Oxicroceum*, **whose** composition is not far to be sought for. (HC, William Clowes, *Treatise for the Artificiall Cure of Struma*, 1602: 15)

(28) Besides he spake of Plots and Invasions; of the Particulars **whereof** he could give no Account, tho *Raleigh* and he had conferred of them. (HC, *The Trial of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 1603: 209)

(29) most of the white branchings disappear'd, and most also of the redness or sucked blood in the guts, the *peristaltick* motion **of which** was scarce discernable; (HC, Robert Hooke, *Micrographia*, 1665: 213)

In Middle English the relative pronoun *which* had a longer variant, *the which*, but the plain *which* largely replaced it in the General dialect in the course of the sixteenth century (see Chapter 10, section 4).

The determiner *which* is used with personal and non-personal referents particularly in formal registers. The case in (30) from Francis Bacon's *Aduancement of Learning* is typical of relative clause use in written Early Modern English in that it illustrates a *continuative relative clause*.

(30) For it is one thing to set forth what ground lyeth vnmanured; and another thing to correct ill husbandry in that which is manured.

In the handling & vndertaking of **which** worke, I am not ignorant, what it is, that I doe now mooue and attempt, nor insensible of mine own weakenes, to susteine my purpose . . . (HC, Francis Bacon, *Aduancement of Learning*, 1605: 6v)

Modelled on Latin, continuative relative clauses could begin a sentence, or even a new paragraph as in (30), and were intended to improve the cohesion of the text. They are very frequent especially in the sixteenth century. *Demonstrative* pronouns and determiners (*this*, *these*, *that*, *those*) could be used for similar purposes.

6.4 Summary

Apart from the zero and *his*-genitives, the number and case marking of Early Modern English nouns does not basically differ from Present-day English. More changes took place in pronouns. The number distinction began to erode in the second-person pronouns when *you* became common for singular as well as plural addressees; the process was completed when *thou* went out of use in the General dialect in Early Modern English. The case contrast between the subjective *ye* and objective *you* was similarly lost with the generalisation of *you* in both functions.

One of the few additions to the pronoun system of the language was the introduction of the inflectional possessive pronoun *its* at the end of the sixteenth century. Like the subject relative *who*, another latecomer to the system, *its* is unambiguous between personal and non-personal reference. Marking this semantic distinction is expedient in a language with notional gender, and there is a clear trend towards animacy and personal gender being marked in Early Modern English pronouns. This is also apparent in the 'dehumanisation' of the relative pronoun *which*, and in the variation between the genitive and the *of*-construction in nouns.

Note

1. This second-person plural form *ye* should not be confused with the <ye> spelling of the definite article *the* found in many editions of Early Modern English texts; see, for instance, example (4) in Chapter 2. This spelling of *the* normally appears in manuscripts in an abbreviated form (*yᵉ*), which goes back to an earlier spelling with the letter thorn <þ>. The spelling of the pronoun *ye* reflects its pronunciation with /j/; it is also occasionally spelled with the letter yogh <ȝ> in the sixteenth century.

Exercises

1. In *The English Grammar*, published in Oxford in 1633, Charles Butler writes about the plural of nouns formed in *-en* (Butler's special characters have been replaced with their standard equivalents, for example, <ð> with <th>):

> The Plural number is likewise made of the Singular, by adding *en*: as of *ox oxen*, *chick chicken*, *marg margen*, *brother brotheren*, and contracte[d] *brethren*, of *childe* (*r* put betweene) *children*, of *man mannen* . . . which wee contract into *men*, of *hous housen*, though most usually *houses*, of *hose*, *peas*, *hosen peasen*: but in these two the singular is most used for the plural: as a pair of *hose*, a pek of *peas*, though the Londoners seeme to make it a regular plural, calling a *peas* a *pea*. (Butler 1633: 34)

Using the OED, comment on (a) these plural forms and (b) the criteria Butler introduces to account for the choice of forms.

2. Discuss the *periphrastic* (circumlocutory) means of expressing (a) the genitive case in nouns and (b) the possessive case in personal and relative pronouns in Early Modern English. What semantic motives could be suggested for the use of the periphrastic forms?