

## Whatever happened to 'she'?

"You can hug me, as well as that one," says my 3-year-old grandson magnanimously, referring to his small sister and neatly sidestepping the tricky issue of "her".

Talking to people is one of the main goals for our learners. Talking *about* people is just as important. Unfortunately the words for doing so are short, forgettable and easily confused with other look-alikes.

- When the person is the *subject* (the do-er) of an action, we use  
he      she      it      they

*"Do speak to Aunt Phyllida, Eustace. I think **she's** swallowed the goldfish."*

- When the person is the *object* (on the receiving end of) the action, we use  
him    her    it      them (spot the similarity? The only similarity?)

*"No, false alarm. She sat on **it**. You should speak to **her** all the same, though."*

*"Rosemary and Basil are engaged! I wonder where she met **him**?"*

*"I think they met at a herbal society. So romantic! We wish **them** every happiness, don't we, Petronella?"*

- In detail unusual for English, we distinguish not only between one and more than one: he/she/it-----they; him/her/it-----them) but also between male, female and neither (neutral? ): **he/him-----she/her-----it/it**, and between subject and object: **(he/him-----she/her-----they/them)**

Research and commonsense suggests that we tutors deal with these fiddly bits one small spoonful at a time, and always as part of meaningful communication.

*"Poppy likes kindy. **She** wants to go every day. At the moment I take **her** three times a week. Tell me about your daughter...."*

OPTIONAL EXTRA: read on for some of the sneaky look-alikes.

- His    her    its (without the apostrophe) their are *possessive adjectives* (precede a noun).

*"Quincy can't find **his** umbrella."*

*"Constance has lost **her** lorgnette."*

- His    hers    theirs are *possessive pronouns* (replace a noun).

*“Grandma is using Humphrey’s snuff box. I wonder where she left **hers**?”*

- The he/she/his/her thing is considered a bit fiddly these days and is often replaced by a plural form, which is quicker. Try not to lose sleep over whether it’s correct English or not: it happens.

*“The perfect teacher does everything in **their** power to clarify such silliness for **their** learner.”*

*“Everyone should exit the room as quickly as **they** can reasonably do so, preferably with **their** grammar book.”*

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