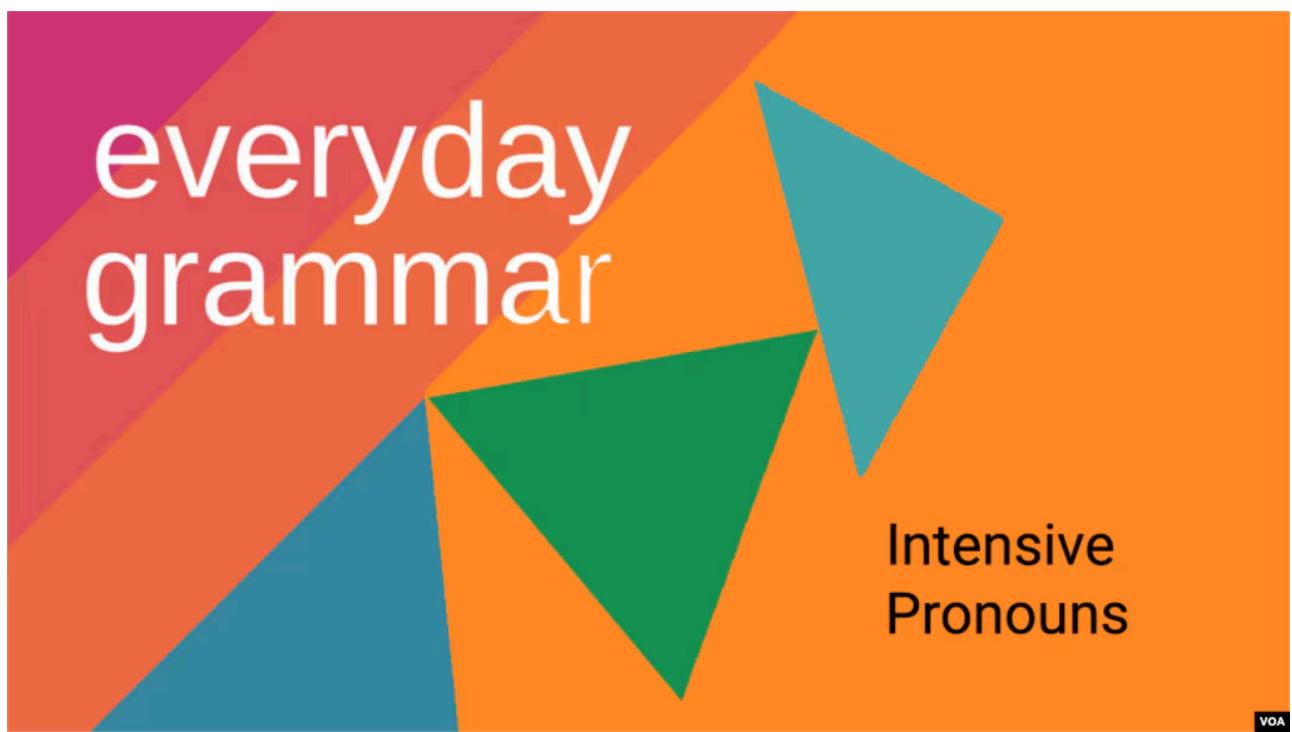


What Are Intensive Pronouns?



Everyday Grammar: Intensive Pronouns

Imagine you are watching an American film or television show - a mystery, for example. You hear one of the actors say the following words:

"I myself am going to Boston..."

You might stop and think about what you heard. Why would the speaker say, "I myself...?"?

That question will be our subject on Everyday Grammar. Today, we will explore the mysterious world of intensive pronouns.

But first, what exactly is a pronoun?

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns in a sentence.

There are three terms you need to understand: personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns, and intensive pronouns. We will explore each in turn.

Personal pronouns are words such as my or our. Personal pronouns have different forms depending on where they are in the sentence. They can take the place of the subject, object, and so on.

Personal pronouns are the starting place for reflexive pronouns. English speakers generally make reflexive pronouns by adding the terms –self or –selves to the personal pronoun.

For example, in the first person, the singular pronoun my becomes myself; the plural pronoun our becomes ourselves.

Before we get to intensive pronouns, let us stop and think about why pronouns are useful.

Consider this sentence:

"Bob hit Bob while Bob was hammering a nail."

Note that the noun, Bob, appears three times in the sentence. Such a sentence is a little clumsy – much like poor Bob!

What if some of the nouns were replaced by pronouns? Then, the sentence could be:

Bob hit himself while he was hammering a nail.

Or this:

Bob hit himself while hammering a nail.

In each sentence, the noun Bob appears once. The word himself, a reflexive pronoun, refers to Bob. And the personal pronoun he also means Bob.

What about intensive pronouns?

Intensive pronouns have the same form as reflexive pronouns. The difference is in how they are used.

How to use intensive pronouns

In a sentence, the intensive pronoun serves as an appositive – a word or group of words that renames a noun. Appositives tell more information about a noun or noun phrase.

Imagine you hear some Americans talking about their favorite food. You might hear one of them say any one of the following lines:

Myself, I prefer pizza.

I myself prefer pizza.

I prefer pizza myself.

In our examples, the intensive pronoun myself renames the subject of the sentence – the word I.

Note that the intensive pronoun appears at the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence. It does not have to appear next to the noun or pronoun that it is renaming, although in many cases it does.

You might be wondering why English speakers use the intensive pronoun. It refers to the same thing as the subject of the sentence. What information could it add?

The answer is this: the intensive pronoun gives more emphasis or force to a statement. That is why intensive pronouns are sometimes called emphatic reflexive pronouns.

If you are unsure whether a word is acting like an intensive pronoun or reflexive pronoun, you can do a kind of test.

If you remove the intensive pronoun, the sentence should still be complete. This is because appositives give more information. You can remove the information and the sentence will still work.

For example:

I told him myself.

Becomes:

I told him.

Now let's do the same test on a sentence with a reflexive pronoun:

He cut himself while shaving.

If you remove himself, the sentence is no longer complete.

Closing thoughts

We began this report with the line from an imaginary film or television show:

I myself am going to Boston.

Now you know that the speaker used the words “I myself...” to add more force to the statement. Perhaps she has had a disagreement with someone else about where to go. Perhaps she wants to show that she has made a different choice.

The next time you are watching a program, listen to how the speakers use intensive pronouns. Over time, you will begin to understand the important information that such pronouns can give.

I'm John Russell.

And I'm Ashley Thompson.

John Russell wrote this story for VOA Learning English. George Grow was the editor.

Words in This Story

plural – *adj. grammar:* relating to a form of a word that suggests more than one person or thing

hammer – *v. to force (something) into a place or shape by hitting it with a hammer; n. a tool with a heavy metal head*

clumsy – *adj. moving or doing things in a very uneasy or difficult way; badly made or done*

phrase – *n. a group of two or more words that express a single idea but do not usually form a complete sentence*

prefer – *v. to like (someone or something) better than someone or something else*

shave – *v. to cut off hair or something else very close to the skin*

We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments Section.