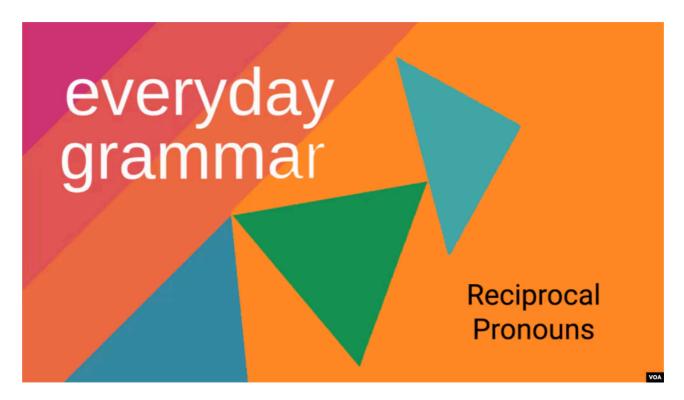# What Are Reciprocal Pronouns?

The Sixth Sense is a famous American movie. The 1999 film tells the story of a young boy who has an unusual issue. He claims that he can see dead people.

In the film, the boy describes his problem:

"I see dead people....Walking around like regular people. They don't see each other. They only see what they want to see..."

Today on Everyday Grammar, we will explore some of the words that you just heard. We also will explain a **pronoun** that the boy used – the words "each other." This term is an example of a reciprocal pronoun.

But first, let's start with a few definitions.

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that take the place of a noun. Words such as I, me, or my are personal pronouns. The word you choose depends on how it is used in a sentence. For example, personal pronouns can act as the subject or object. They can also show possession. This is known as the possessive case.

When using the first person, the subject pronoun is I, and the object pronoun is me. The possessive pronoun is my. Some **grammar** books use the term possessive adjective in place of the term possessive pronoun.*

Reciprocal pronouns

What exactly are reciprocal pronouns?

Reciprocal is a word that describes a relationship in which people or groups do something similar, as in this sentence:

Mark helped Bob, and Bob helped Mark.

In newspapers, you might read about reciprocal trade agreements. Consider an imaginary trade deal between two countries. Country A reduces taxes on goods from Country B. And in return, Country B lowers taxes on goods from Country A.

In grammar, reciprocal pronouns are pronouns that **refer to** a **previously** named noun. They suggest that one person or group does something to or for another person or group. In exchange, that person or group does something to or for the first person or group.

Luckily, there are only two reciprocal pronouns you need to know. They are "each other" and "one another."

Consider our earlier example.

Mark helped Bob, and Bob helped Mark.

With a reciprocal pronoun, the sentence would become:

Mark and Bob helped each other.

The pronoun each other refers to two people: Mark and Bob.

Reciprocal pronouns have two common uses. First, they can act as objects referring to previously named nouns, as in our example about Mark and Bob.

Second, they can act as determiners - words that mark nouns - in the possessive case. Here is an example:

Mark and Bob even do each other's homework!

Now you might be wondering about the second reciprocal pronoun, "one another." How is it different from "each other?"

In general, "each other" refers to two nouns, while "one another" refers to three or more nouns. Here is an example:

All the players on the team help one another with their homework.

Knowing the difference between "each other" and "one another" is important for a very **strict** writing test.

But to be honest, when talking with a native English speaker, you do not need to worry too much about the difference. Sometimes native speakers use "each other" to refer to three or more.

What is most important is that you understand the idea of reciprocal pronouns and how they act in a sentence.

Closing thoughts

At the beginning of this report, you heard a few lines from the movie The Sixth Sense:

"They don't see each other."

You will hear native English speakers use reciprocal pronouns in many other films, television shows, and news stories. Listen carefully to how native speakers use them.

A piece of advice for you. When you use "each other" in speaking, pay careful attention to the "ch" sound at the end of "each." It is a difficult sound for speakers of many languages.

I'm John Russell.

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

*There are alternate forms of the possessive case. My and mine are two examples. My acts as a determiner - a marker of a noun. Mine takes the place of the noun head word.

Words in This Story

pronoun – *n. grammar:* a word (such as I, he, she, you, it, we, or they) that is used instead of a noun or noun phrase

grammar – *n.* the whole system of a language or of languages

refer to - *v.* to have a direct connection or relationship to (someone or something)

previously – *adv.* formerly; earlier or before

strict – *adj.* severe; firm or uncompromising

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