



# A typology of non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns: synchrony and diachrony

Johannes Helmbrecht\*

University of Regensburg, Germany

## Abstract

Personal pronouns as referential means have been investigated in general and comparative linguistics mostly with regard to their normal, prototypical use, which usually confirms to the essential combinations of person and number features. This paper deals with a much less investigated topic in the realm of pronouns, the non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns. Non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns are discourse uses, in which the reference (set) of the pronoun deviates from its prototypical one. For instance, a first person plural pronoun can be used to refer to a second person singular in doctor–patient dialogs. Or, a second person singular pronoun can be used impersonally in many languages. Non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns are restricted to certain communicative situations and usually have some additional pragmatic effects. In the first part of the paper, a synchronic typology of the non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns is presented together with a short characterization of the communicative motivations and effects. Examples from a variety of mostly European languages will illustrate these uses. The second part of the paper examines the question whether these non-prototypical uses have an effect on the diachrony of personal pronouns. It will be argued that this is indeed the case and that these effects cannot be subsumed under the heading of grammaticalization. It will be hypothesized that personal pronouns may acquire new person/number values historically only, if these new category values are semantically either more individuated (plural > singular) or higher on the person hierarchy (3 > 2 > 1), or both.

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**Keywords:** Reference; Non-prototypical use; Grammaticalization; Politeness; Empathy; Personal pronouns

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. Theoretical background

Personal pronouns are deictic expressions that refer to one or more individuals by means of identifying their role(s) in a speech act. As deictic expressions – designating person deixis – they presuppose a deictic center<sup>2</sup> which, in most cases, is identical to the actual speaker. The deictic center may be shifted to other participants in discourse, though. Since the

\* Correspondence to: Universität Regensburg, Fakultät für Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften, Universitätsstrasse 31, D-93053 Regensburg, Germany. Tel.: +49 9419433388.

E-mail address: [johannes.helmbrecht@sprachlit.uni-regensburg.de](mailto:johannes.helmbrecht@sprachlit.uni-regensburg.de).

URL: <http://www.avs.uni-regensburg.de>

<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are used: 1, 2, 3 = first, second, third person; SG = singular; PL = plural; DU = dual; INCL = inclusive; EXCL = exclusive; FAM = familiar; HON = honorific; M = masculine; FEM = feminine; NOM = nominative; ACC = accusative; DAT = dative; > = this symbol translates as 'used as' or 'changed to', e.g. 3PL > impersonal is to be understood as 'a grammatical 3PL pronoun is non-prototypically used with an impersonal meaning; in the context of an historical change, it means grammatical category value x changes to grammatical category value y in a specific form.

<sup>2</sup> *Origo* in Bühler's terms (cf. Bühler 1984[1934]).

Table 1  
Reference sets of the most important person/number values (cf. Helmbrecht, 2004a).

person/ number values		referential sets		English examples	
1SG		{1}		<i>I</i>	
2SG		{2}		<i>you(SG)</i>	
3SG		{3}		<i>he/she/it</i>	
1PL	INCL	{1+2 <sub>1-n</sub> }	{1+2 <sub>1-n</sub> }	<i>we</i>	∅
	EXCL	{1+3 <sub>1-n</sub> }	{1+2 <sub>1-n</sub> +3 <sub>1-n</sub> }		∅
2PL		{1+2 <sub>1-n</sub> +3 <sub>1-n</sub> }	{1+3 <sub>1-n</sub> }	<i>you(PL)</i>	
3PL		{2 <sub>2-n</sub> }	{2 <sub>1-n</sub> +3 <sub>1-n</sub> }	<i>they</i>	

speaker role changes in the flux of discourse, the reference of personal pronouns changes accordingly. With respect to this property they are also called shifters.<sup>3</sup>

The essential syntagmatic, distributional and paradigmatic properties of personal pronouns can be summarized as follows.

Formal properties:

- i. Personal pronouns are referential expressions that replace a full NP; as such they may fill all argument slots of the predicate and may appear also in the periphery of a clause; a frequent grammatical category of personal pronouns is therefore case encoding the semantic/syntactic relation of the pronoun in the clause;
- ii. They do not allow restrictive modifiers (since they are inherently referential);
- iii. They occur variously as free words, clitics, and pronominal affixes; in the latter two cases they are also called bound pronouns;
- iv. Personal pronouns are almost always members of a closed class of words or formatives in a language;
- v. They are organized in paradigms; i.e. as members of a paradigm they stand in opposition to each other;

Functional properties:

- i. The meanings of personal pronouns can be defined according to their position in a paradigm; meaning differences can be described by means of distinctive semantic features;
- ii. The essential categories that define the meaning of personal pronouns are person and number;
- iii. The category of person refers to the main participants of a speech act: there are essentially three person values, first person (speaker), second person (hearer/addressee), third person (a person not involved in the speech act, i.e. a non-speech act participant) (cf. Benveniste, 1956);
- iv. The category of number has a different meaning with personal pronouns than with common nouns; with common nouns a category value such as plural indicates more than one instance or token of the class of entities designated by the noun; in personal pronouns, however, plural indicates, in addition, a plurality of types (cf. Cysouw, 2003). For instance, the 1PL pronoun *we* may refer to a group of third persons plus a first person, or *we* may refer to a group of third persons, a second person and a first person. Hence, plurality in personal pronouns indicates a plurality of speech act roles (types) and a plurality of instances (tokens of these types) at least for the first and second person categories. Third persons are more like common nouns in this respect;
- v. The meaning of personal pronouns with regard to person and number can be defined in terms of referential sets, cf. Table 1. For instance, the 1PL person/number value in the left column may refer to various groups of individuals including one or more hearers and/or one or more third persons. The speaker belongs obligatorily to these various groups;
- vi. Personal pronouns are inherently definite and specific; this is obvious for all singular pronouns but holds also for the plural pronouns. For instance, a 2SG pronoun *you* refers to the hearer/addressee of the speech act, which is given by means of the shared perception of the speech act situation. A 1PL pronoun *we* refers to a group of individuals including the speaker, and this speaker group is either given by the speech act context or was introduced in the preceding discourse;
- vii. There are of course other grammatical categories such as gender or class distinctions, kinship relations, politeness distinction, and some others that can be found in personal pronouns (see Mühlhäusler and Harré, 1990, or Helmbrecht, 2004b for extensive surveys on this).

<sup>3</sup> The term *shifters* was coined by Jakobson (1971[1957]).

The definitions and characterizations of personal pronouns given so far are common ground in the linguistic literature and reflect the prototypical usage of personal pronouns; cf. (1) as an illustrative example.

- (1) *Could you please pass me the salt?*  
(Possible context: dinner situation with several participants around a table)

However, there are also uses of personal pronouns that deviate significantly from this prototypical usage; I will call them non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns; cf. (2)a for an illustrative example.

- (2) a. *Two hundred years ago, you used to go into the forest when you wanted firewood for yourself.*  
(Example from Kitagawa & Lehrer, 1990: 744)  
b. *Two hundred years ago, one used to go into the forest when one wanted firewood for oneself.*  
c. *Two hundred years ago, people used to go into the forest when they wanted firewood for themselves.*

The clause in (2)a represents an example of an impersonal use of the 2SG pronoun; in this use, the 2SG pronoun does not refer to the addressee of the utterance, but to a generalized group of people expressing a kind of general historical knowledge. That there is no second person reference in this example can be inferred from the propositional content of the utterance: the hearer/addressee cannot possibly be the one who looked for fire wood two hundred years ago. In addition, the lack of a specific reference to the addressee can be demonstrated, if one replaces the 2SG pronoun by the indefinite pronoun *one* (cf. (2)b) or other expressions such as *people* or *they* (cf. (2)c) that are used impersonally. The propositional content does not change here.

However, the choice of the impersonal 2SG instead of other indefinite pronouns/impersonal pronouns is not random. The speaker signals a close or even intimate relationship to the hearer/addressee of the utterance. The addressee of the utterance is somehow involved in the described situation. The speaker signals that he or she wishes the hearer/addressee to share the same perspective. It is also a kind of empathy with the hearer/addressee – which is also called an “act of camaraderie” in the literature (cf. Kitagawa and Lehrer, 1990:752; Biq, 1991:310) – which is lacking in the corresponding clauses with the indefinite pronouns.

Note that in German, the distinction between a familiar and a more distant polite relationship is preserved. The familiar 2SG.FAM *du* (cf. (3)a) as well as the 2SG.HON *Sie* (cf. (3)b) may be used impersonally; cf. the examples in (3). But in (3)a the hearer/addressee has most likely a close relationship to the speaker while in (3)b there is most likely a distant relationship between speaker and hearer.

- (3) a. *Leckeren Käse kannst du (2SG.FAM) in dem Laden da nicht finden.*  
b. *Leckeren Käse können Sie (2SG.HON) in dem Laden da nicht finden.*  
c. *Leckeren Käse kann man (INDEF) in dem Laden da nicht finden.*  
d. *You (2SG) can't find delicious cheese in that grocery store.*  
e. *One (INDEF) can't find delicious cheese in that grocery store.* (Possible context: a conversation on grocery stores in the neighborhood)

There are two further peculiarities that can be observed with the impersonal use of the 2SG pronoun in English and German.

- (1) The impersonal use of the 2SG is not possible with the corresponding 2PL *ih* or *you* (PL). Semantically, the 2PL contains a more general and less specific set of second and third person referents. This generality in the referential meaning probably blocks the impersonal usage of the 2PL. In addition, the connotations of the 2SG mentioned above cannot be expressed with a form that has a potential plurality of addressees in its meaning.  
(2) This non-prototypical use of the 2SG is distributionally restricted; (a) the 2SG impersonal pronoun appears mostly in subject position; (b) in addition, it is not possible to find it in imperative clauses, and (c) assertive clauses usually have a modal (in particular a deontic) meaning.

Non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns thus show three sorts of properties: (a) the prototypical reference set is modified to some extent implying a shift in the pronominal category; (b) there is some kind of additional pragmatic meaning (or connotation) associated with such uses; (c) the non-prototypical use is usually strongly restricted to certain contexts (grammatical contexts/pragmatic and discourse contexts). The non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns are the topic of this paper. I will try to find at least some preliminary answers to the following questions:

- i. What kind of non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns occur and which ones don't?
- ii. What are the semantic/pragmatic effects of these usages, or differently put what are the communicative motivations of speakers to use personal pronouns in this way?
- iii. Do these uses leave traces in the diachronic change of personal pronouns?

## 1.2. Some remarks on the data

The data for the present paper come from the literature, occasional observations, and introspection. Most of the German data are generated by introspection. The data from German are, however, not some weird invented examples, but reflect types of uses of pronouns most Native speakers of German would or could agree on. For the equivalent non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns in other European languages, I rely on responses I received from a query on this subject on Linguist List from Oct. 1, 1996. This query consisted of a small questionnaire with non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns in English. The responses came from linguists who mostly were native speakers of the respective European languages.

In any case, a discourse study on non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns based on balanced text corpora including written, oral, conversational, and narrative texts from different languages is still lacking and awaits future research.

In the subsequent sections I will first summarize the phenomena in question together with some possible pragmatic explanations of these uses. In Section 2.1, I will start with non-prototypical uses of third person pronouns, in Section 2.2 the non-prototypical uses of second person pronouns will be examined and in Section 2.3 the same phenomena for first person pronouns. In Section 3 I will argue that the non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns have been thoroughly neglected in the research on the grammaticalization of personal pronoun for certain reasons. In addition, I will demonstrate that there is at least some evidence that non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns may lead historically to category extensions and category shifts in personal pronouns. Two hypotheses concerning the possible and the impossible diachronic changes of personal pronouns will be formulated.

## 2. The phenomena

### 2.1. Non-prototypical uses of third person pronouns

#### 2.1.1. 3PL > impersonal generic/specific uses

In many European languages, a 3PL pronoun may be used impersonally. These uses differ with regard to the degree of individuation. The English example in (4) refers to an unspecific indefinite group of people, while the Russian and Spanish examples (5) and (6) refer to specific but nevertheless indefinite individuals.

(4) **They** are going to raise taxes. (example from [Siewierska, 2011: 58](#))

(5) Russian

**Pozvonili** čtoby skazať čto vystuplenie budet v sredu.

**called.3PL** in.order say.INF that performance be.FUT on Wednesday

'Someone called in order to say that the performance will be on Wednesday.'

(Perlmutter 2001: 10 as cited in [Siewierska, 2011: 59](#)).

(6) Spanish

**Preguntan** por ti

**ask.3PL** for you

'Someone is asking for you'

(Alonso-Ovalle (2000:3) as cited in [Siewierska, 2011: 63](#)).

The unspecific uses of 3PL pronouns (as given e.g. in (4)) always exclude the speaker and the hearer/addressee from the group referred to. This is not necessarily the case with impersonal pronouns that are historically derived from a noun such as 'man', 'person' and 'people'. For instance, the French indefinite pronoun *on* (derived from Latin *homo* 'man, human being'; NOM) is frequently used in Colloquial French to refer to a speaker group (1PL.INCL) and replaces more and more the Standard French 1PL pronoun *nous* in atonic subject position. Indefinite *on* is even used to refer to the speaker (1SG); cf. (7).

(7) *Sur le pas de sa porte, le patron criait: 'Mado!'. 'On arrive!' répondit-elle avec...*

'On the step of her door the boss shouted: 'Mado! I'm coming!' she answered with...

(example from R. Queneau's "Zazi dans le Metro" ([Queneau, 1959: 76](#))).

German *man* (<*Mann* ‘man’) is similar in this respect, it may be used to refer to the speaker. However, *man* would not be used in the context given in (7).

### 2.1.2. 3PL > 3SG.HON

In Old Tamil, a Dravidian language of India, there was a 3PL pronoun *avaar* which became a 3SG honorific pronoun in an intermediate stage of the historical development of Tamil. The old form was repluralized with *-kaL* receiving a new 3PL *avaarkaL*. This repluralized form became a 3SG honorific pronoun like *avaar* in Modern Tamil. The result is that there is a 3SG.HON pronoun in Modern Tamil that shifted its category value totally (no polysemy), and a 3SG.HON pronoun that is also a 3PL pronoun without honorific value.

#### (8) Category change in Tamil third person pronouns (Dravidian; [Brown and Levinson 1987: 293](#))

	Old Tamil	Intermediate Tamil	Modern Tamil
3SG	<i>avaan</i>	<i>avaan</i>	<i>avaan</i>
3SG.HON	---	<b><i>avaar</i></b>	<b><i>avaar</i></b>
3SG.HON	---	---	<b><i>avaarkaL</i></b>
3PL	<b><i>avaar</i></b>	<i>avaar + kaL</i>	<b><i>avaarkaL</i></b>

These historical changes imply stages in which the 3PL *avaar* was prototypically used as a 3PL pronoun and non-prototypically as a 3SG.HON pronoun simultaneously.

### 2.1.3. 3PL > 2SG.HON

The polite pronoun of address *Sie* ‘you (2SG.HON)’ in German is historically derived (18th century) from a 3PL pronoun *sie*, and still has both functions. The same process is also attested for Danish and Norwegian (Bokmål), but did not reach Swedish (cf. [Haugen, 1984: 384, 476f](#); [Helmbrecht, 2003, 2005a,b](#)).

#### (9) German 3PL pronoun

<i>sie</i> ‘they’ (3PL)	<i>sie</i> ‘they’ (3PL)
	<i>Sie</i> ‘you’ (2SG.HON)

Italian also has a 3PL form *loro* that is used in very formal address situations. The driving force behind this process is politeness (cf. [Brown and Gilman, 1960](#); [Brown and Levinson, 1987](#)). The direct reference to the socially superior hearer/addressee is avoided by using a 3PL pronoun. The reference set of the 3PL does not contain a second person and is plural. The referent, however, is given inferentially in the speech act situation. It is assumed that the development of this polite address form was mediated by anaphora to polite nominal address terms in the plural such as *Euer Gnaden* ‘Your Grace(s)’ (cf. [Helmbrecht, 2004b: 364](#) for further details).

### 2.1.4. 3SG > 2SG.HON

Before the 3PL became a 2SG.HON pronoun in German, it was the 3SG.M and 3SG.FEM pronouns *er/sie* ‘he/she’ that were used as polite pronouns of address. The polite use of the 3SG pronouns in German is attested between the 17th and the 19th century (cf. [Simon, 1997, 2003](#) for a detailed reconstruction of the emergence of different polite pronouns in German). The driving force for this development is, again, politeness. A direct reference to the socially superior hearer/addressee is avoided. This linguistic avoidance behavior led to the conventionalization of the category extension of the 3SG.M/FEM to a 2SG.HON pronoun. The respective pronouns never gave up the function as 3SG pronoun in German.

The following example illustrates the use of a 3SG.FEM as a polite address pronoun. It also illustrates that the 3PL as 2SG.HON as well as the 3SG.FEM as 2SG.HON coexisted for a while in German expressing different degrees of politeness. In the comedy by Gotthold. E. Lessing “*Minna von Barnhelm*” (1763), the host (*Wirth*) addresses the young Lady Minna von Barnhelm by ***ihnen*** (3PL.DAT), but her servant, Franziska, by ***ihr*** (3SG.FEM.DAT). It is obvious that there are at least two politeness distinctions in pronouns. The 3SG was less polite than the newly invented 3PL pronoun.

#### (10) “Der Wirth: ... *ich komme, gnädiges Fräulein, ihnen* (3PL.DAT) *einen unterthänigen Guten Morgen zu wünschen, --- (zur Franciska) und auch ihr* (3SG.FEM.DAT), *mein schönes Kind.*”

‘The host: ... I am coming to wish **you**, graceful mistress, a submissive Good Morning, --- (to Franciska) and also to **you**, my beautiful child.’ (From Lessing “*Minna von Barnhelm*”; cited after Jakob & Wilhelm Grimm *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Vol. 16:764; lexical entry “SIE”)

In Northern varieties of German, the usage of a 3SG.M/FEM as a 2SG.HON still exists (cf. [Simon, 2003: 106](#)); a 3SG pronoun conventionalized as a 2SG.HON polite address pronoun does also exist in Italian, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Czech. It can be assumed that the development of these usages was induced by language contact (cf. [Helmbrecht, 2005b](#)).

### 2.1.5. 3SG > 2SG

The polite usage of 3SG pronoun as a 2SG.HON pronoun disappeared in Standard German by the end of the 18th century or the beginning of the 19th century. However, uses of 3SG pronouns as address pronouns still exist; they can be found mostly in contexts when the hearer/addressee is socially inferior, or when the speaker wants to be impolite and offensive toward the addressee; cf. (11).

- (11) *Ist er schon wieder am Nörgeln?*  
 'He is crouching again?'  
 (uttered by an upset parent towards a misbehaving child).

According to Marina Yaguello (p.c.), the 3SG in French is commonly used by doctors and nurses to address patients and it is obviously a mark of condescension, cf. (12).

- (12) French (example from Marina Yaguello p.c.)  
*Alors, comment va-t-elle aujourd'hui?*  
 'Well, how does she feel today?'  
 (uttered by a doctor or nurse to a female patient).

## 2.2. Non-prototypical uses of second person pronouns

### 2.2.1. 2PL > 2SG.HON

A majority of European languages developed at one point in their history the usage of a 2PL pronoun as a polite 2SG.HON address pronoun; this can be considered as an areal feature of European languages (cf. [Helmbrecht, 2005b](#)). French is a good example here: the 2PL *vous* is conventionally used as a 2SG.HON address pronoun without losing its 2PL function. As a honorific pronoun it stands in a paradigmatic opposition to *tu* (2SG.FAM); the driving force for the development of this usage is politeness, i.e. the avoidance of direct reference to the socially superior hearer/addressee. This usage emerged presumably first in so called face threatening speech acts (cf. [Brown and Levinson, 1987](#)).

### 2.2.2. 2SG > impersonal (generic) uses

The impersonal use of a 2SG pronoun was already touched upon in the introduction above. It is probably the best studied kind of non-prototypical use of personal pronouns (cf. [Laberge and Sankoff, 1979](#); [Vila, 1987](#); [Kitagawa and Lehrer, 1990](#); [Biq, 1991](#); [Ushie, 1994](#); [Myers and Lampropoulou, 2012](#), and certainly others). An important context/function of the impersonal use of 2SG pronouns is, according to Laberge & Sankoff the expression of "truisms or morals", reflecting on conventional wisdom (cf. [Laberge & Sankoff, 1979: 429](#)).

- (13) *You simply don't steal, right?* (for instance in discussing a case of shop lifting; example invented).

In this case, the speaker does not refer to the hearer/addressee, but to a generalized other (the term was coined by G.H. Mead).

### 2.2.3. 2SG > impersonal (more specific) uses > 1SG

Another function of the impersonal use of 2SG pronouns is what Laberge & Sankoff call "situational insertion". The speaker "assimilates himself to a much wider class of people, downgrading his own experience to incidental status in the discourse, phrasing it as something that could or would be anybody's" ([Laberge and Sankoff, 1979: 429](#)).

- (14) *Ich bin dann zum Doktor gegangen. Der verschreibt dir etwas und dann gehst du wieder nach hause.*  
 'Then I went to the doctor. He prescribes something for you and then you go back home again.' (Context: the speaker speaks about his sickness and his probably not very satisfying visit of the doctor; example invented)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> One of the anonymous reviewers indicated that this non-prototypical use of the 2SG pronoun is very common in certain jargons in Dutch, especially in sports. In Dutch, there exists even a name for this usage, *voetballers je*. For instance, *Je krijgt de bal en dan scoor je meteen* 'You get the ball and score right away' is typically used by soccer players in a post-match interview. Many thanks for this observation.

The 2SG pronoun is often used impersonally in order to bring about a rhetorical effect of vividness, immediacy, and camaraderie.

- (15) **Du** konntest richtig spüren, wie die Erde bebte.  
 'You could really feel how the earth was shaking.'  
 (Uttered in a conversation in which the speaker reports on his experience of an earthquake; example invented)

The speaker assigns a major participant role to the hearer/addressee in the narrated event (cf. Kitagawa & Lehrer, 1990: 7532, Biq, 1991: 310f). Thus, the speaker invites the hearer/addressee to take over the perspective of the speaker. A to some extent comparable non-prototypical use of second person pronouns is reported from Ik (Kuliak, Nilo-Saharan). The 2SG is frequently used to indicate the topical protagonist of a narration (Serzisko, 1998). The interesting aspect of this usage is that the reference of the 2SG pronoun is specific (not generalized) and definite. It resembles a third person reference with a strong link to the hearer/addressee.

Sometimes, the impersonal use of 2SG pronouns can be interpreted even more specific as referring to the speaker; cf. the examples in (16) and (17).

- (16) Canadian French  
*Quand tu vois ça, tu te dis Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un gouvernement?*  
 'When **one** sees that, **one** wonders What's a government?' (example from John Reighart p.c.)

The speaker in (16) expresses his opinion on the government, but indicates that his conclusions on this are probably shared by everyone.

- (17) A: *Why do you want to kill yourself?* (asked by a psychologist in a conversation with a female patient)  
 B: *Well, you just want to see if anyone cares.* (Answered by the patient) (example from Harvey Sacks 1990:166/349)

In the answer of the patient in (17), the 2SG *you* really refers to the speaker, but indicates that this attitude toward the suicide could be shared by others too. In doing so the speaker reduces her peculiarity by embedding herself in some generalized other.

#### 2.2.4. 2SG > 1SG (talk to oneself)

There are also clear cases where a 2SG pronoun refers to a 1SG; consider the invented example in (18).

- (18) *Plötzlich erschien ein Löwe vor mir. Jetzt mußst du ganz ruhig bleiben und darfst dich nicht bewegen.*  
 'All of the sudden, there appeared a lion in front of me. You have to stay cool now and you should not make a sudden movement.' (example invented)

However, as far as I can see, examples like the one in (18) appear in direct speech contexts and hence are similar to shifts in the deictic center (*origo*) one finds in direct speech. The difference is that in this case the deictic center remains in the speaker, but the speaker is seen as two persons including a speaker and hearer (or in the terms of G.H. Mead a *I* and a *me*). In principle, I exclude cases of a shift of the deictic center in direct speech contexts, because they are different from the cases of a category extension discussed so far.

### 2.3. Non-prototypical uses of first person pronouns

#### 2.3.1. 1INCL.PL > impersonal/generic

In Kiranti languages (Sino-Tibetan, Nepal), independent pronouns and pronominal affixes of the 1INCL.PL are systematically used for a generic and impersonal reference (Balthasar Bickel p.c.).

#### 2.3.2. 1PL > 3PL

Quite common is the use of a 1PL pronoun with a 3PL reference in German. Speakers choose this referential means in order to express a kind of close relationship with the third persons group referred to; cf. the example in (19).

- (19) **Wir** haben letzte Nacht das Spiel gewonnen.  
 'We won the game last night.'  
 (Uttered by a supporter of the successful soccer club with respect to the last game; invented example).

The speaker does certainly not belong to the team of soccer players that won the game, but does identify with the team thus expressing his commitment to them. In French, this use of the 1PL is uncommon. French speakers would probably prefer to use *on* (*on a gagné le match hier soir* 'We won the game last night.' Marina Yaguello p.c.; Marc Eisinger p.c.).

### 2.3.3. 1PL > 2SG (nursery-we)

There are many uses of a 1PL pronoun referring to a hearer/addressee only and not to the speaker; cf. the examples in (20) and (21).

(20) *Wie fühlen wir uns denn heute?*

'How do **we** feel today?'

(Doctor or nurse in hospital to a patient, for instance, during a ward round; own observation)

(21) *Welches von den beiden TV-Geräten nehmen wir denn?*

'Which of the two TV-sets do **we** buy, now?'

(Uttered by a vendor of TV sets to a customer after having demonstrated two TVs to him; own observation).

The utterance in (20) represents an example of the so-called **nursery-we**, or, more technically, pseudo-inclusive. This use of the 1PL can be found not only in medical institutions. Doctors, nurses, and other care-takers express their strong commitment to the patients or children they are responsible for. This use of the 1PL is patronizing and can be very offensive for the hearer/addressee in certain contexts, because it is implied that the speaker has some authority over the hearer/addressee. The usage of the 1PL in (21) does not have this patronizing flavor. With this form of address, the salesman expresses that he identifies with his customer and shares his view or perspective.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.3.4. 1PL > 2PL

The 1PL pronoun may also be used to refer to a 2PL, i.e. a group of hearers/addressees; cf. the example in (22).

(22) *Letzte Stunde haben wir gelernt, dass...*

'Last lesson, **we** have learnt that...'

(Uttered by a teacher or professor to his students during class; own observation)

The speaker in (22) is not included in the reference set of *wir* 'we'. However, using this pronoun, the teacher or professor expresses his commitment to the successful instruction of his students.

### 2.3.5. 1PL > 1SG (majestic plural/pluralis majestatis)

(23) *Wir haben gestern angeordnet, dass...*

'Yesterday, we gave the order that...'

(Example invented)

Some high ranking official (ruler, king, governor, etc.) announces that he has taken some action or measurement. The use of the 1PL in this context refers mainly to the single speaker even if there are public officers or officials in the background who work for the speaker. The use of the 1PL in this context signals the social and/or political superiority over the ordinary audience.

### 2.3.6. 1PL > 1SG (editorial-we)

(24) *In einem früheren Kapitel haben wir schon erwähnt, dass...*

'In a previous chapter, **we** already mentioned that...'

(example invented)

The utterance in (24) is an example of the so-called editorial-we. Often, authors use the 1PL pronoun in their publications to refer to themselves which brings more dignity and authority into their writings. It may also be interpreted as a sign of modesty, though. The 1PL is rightly a 1PL in contexts when the author reports on research brought about by a group of researchers, of which he/she is a member, or even the leader.

<sup>5</sup> See also the recent article by De Cock (2011) on the second person interpretation of 1PL pronouns.



### 3. Are there historical changes based on the non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns?

Research on the grammaticalization of personal pronouns up to now has almost exclusively concentrated on the emergence of new pronouns out of paradigm-external lexical material (cf. Heine and Song, 2010, 2011; Helmbrecht, 2004a; Heine and Kuteva, 2002; Heine and Reh, 1984; Lehmann, 1985, 1995; Traugott and Heine, 1991a,b; Hopper and Traugott, 2003; Rankin, 1996; Forchheimer, 1953, and others). The major focus of attention was the concomitant grammatical and semantic properties a lexical form displays when undergoing the development from a lexical item to a grammatical form – a personal pronoun for instance – as in (25). The parameters of the semantic and grammatical properties are summarized in (26).

(25) lexical item > pronoun

(26) Parameters of grammaticalization (cf. Heine & Song, 2011: 591):

- i. pragmatic: extension of use to new contexts
- ii. semantic: desemantization/generalization of meaning
- iii. morphosyntactic: decategorialization
- iv. phonetic: erosion/phonetic reduction

With regard to the grammaticalization of personal pronouns, the pragmatic parameter (i) (“extension to new contexts”) and the morphosyntactic parameter (iii) lack the most research. Parameter (iii) is put too narrow in focusing only on decategorialization. Equally important is the acquisition of morphosyntactic properties of the new category, namely the process of becoming pronouns in the present context. Actually, not much is known on the process of the integration of future pronouns into an already existing pronominal paradigm. The question formulated in the headline of this section has – to the best of my knowledge – not been dealt with at all. There are presumably three reasons for the lack of grammaticalization studies on personal pronouns in general and in particular on the non-prototypical uses of them in the context of the grammaticalization of personal pronouns:

- i. Not much is known about historical changes in pronouns and their paradigms at all (neither language specific nor cross-linguistically), because they are considered to be historically the most stable forms in the grammar of a language; this also holds for the low likelihood of pronouns to be borrowed (cf. Matras, 2009:203–208; but see Thomason & Everett, 2001 for a different view);
- ii. There is a general lack of discourse studies on the usage of personal pronouns so that we do not know really much about prototypical and non-prototypical uses of them;
- iii. The extension or shift of category of a personal pronoun from one person/number value to another person/number value within one and the same pronominal paradigm is not a kind of grammaticalization, since the resulting pronoun is not more grammatical than the source pronoun. Heine & Song propose the ad hoc notion of “*grammaticalization in a wide sense*” (Heine and Song, 2011: 617);

The process of a historical change of person/number values in a specific personal pronoun can be considered as an idealized sequence of steps; cf. Table 2.

A personal pronoun of a certain person/number value (*x*) – this is stage I – may acquire a second person/number value (*y*). The result is a polysemous pronoun with two different eventually conventionalized person/number values. This stage II of the historical process may be called category extension. The category extension of a personal pronoun may be the result of frequent non-prototypical uses of the form, as described in Section 2. Finally, the pronoun may give up or lose

Table 2

The process of a paradigm internal category shift (cf. Helmbrecht, 2004b: 252).

Source Stage I	Category extension Stage II	Category shift Stage III
<b>pro<sub>i</sub></b>	<b>pro<sub>i</sub></b> (person/number value ( <i>x</i> )) <b>pro<sub>i</sub></b> (person/number value ( <i>y</i> ))	<b>∅</b> (gap) or: replaced by another new <b>pro<sub>j</sub></b> with the person/number value ( <i>x</i> ) <b>pro<sub>i</sub></b> (person/number value ( <i>y</i> ))
<b>Example from Ilocano (Austronesian)</b> 1INCL.PL * <i>ta</i>	1INCL.PL (* <i>ta</i> ‘we all’)  1INCL.DU (* <i>ta</i> ‘we two’)	<i>tayo</i> (1INCL.PL ‘we all’ < <i>ta</i> 1INCL.DU + <i>yo</i> 2PL; cf. Thomas, 1955; Dahl, 1976; Blust, 1987) <i>ta</i> (1INCL.DU ‘we’)

one of the two person/number values (most likely person/number value (x), i.e. the old original one) leaving a gap in the paradigm. This gap may be left as zero or may be filled with a new form, which then has to be grammaticalized from paradigm-external material or by the composition of the old pronoun with some reinforcing or otherwise distinguishing element. In each case, the result is a complete change in the person/number value of the pronoun; hence this stage III part of the process will be called a category shift.

This process can be illustrated with an example from Ilocano subject pronouns, cf. the paradigm in (27). Ilocano is a Western Malayo-Polynesian language of the Austronesian language family.

(27) Ilocano subject pronouns (Western Malayo-Polynesian; Thomas, 1955)

	SG	DU	PL
1INCL		<b>ta</b>	<b>tayo</b>
1EXCL	<i>co</i>		<i>mi</i>
2	<i>mo</i>		<b>yo</b>
3	<i>na</i>		<i>da</i>

The 1INCL.DU form *ta* ‘we both, you and me’ goes back to the Proto-Austronesian (PA) 1INCL.PL *\*i-[k]ita* (cf. Dahl, 1976; Blust, 1977), and the 1EXCL.PL *mi* derives from the PA *\*i-[k]ami*. It is obvious that both PA forms were significantly shortened in the modern language leaving only the last syllables intact. The phonological changes involved here are disregarded. The old 1INCL.PL *\*ta* was semantically narrowed to a first person dual inclusive, and the gap (1INCL.PL) was filled with a new form. The Ilocano speakers did not use the strategy mentioned above, i.e. to attach a plural marker to the old form (cf. for instance, the Tamil example in (8) above). Instead they added the second plural pronoun *yo* to the inclusive dual form to form a new 1INCL.PL *tayo*. The second plural pronoun underlines the inclusive meaning of the new pronoun. It is an instance of the inclusory composition of pronouns.

As we saw in Sections 2.1–2.3 there is a remarkable diversity of types of non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns and it was also shown that there is some evidence that these uses are not restricted to English or German. The question that will be dealt with in the subsequent sections is: do these category extensions lead to category shifts in personal pronouns. The short answer to this is question is yes and no. It will be argued that only a subset of these category extensions in personal pronouns may eventually lead to category shifts. These historical processes are constrained by two hypotheses to be proposed below, cf. Tables 3 and 4. Non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns may lead to category extensions and finally to a category shift ONLY, if the category extension and shift obeys the Category Extension and Shift Hierarchies I and II (cf. also Helmbrecht, 2004b: 253).

The first hypothesis – the Category Extension and Shift Hierarchy I: Number – claims that only those non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns may ultimately become a historical category shift that obey the number hierarchy, i.e. plural pronouns may shift to singular pronouns historically, but not vice versa.

The second hypothesis – the Category Extension and Shift Hierarchy II: Person – claims that only those non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns may ultimately become a historical category shift that obey the person hierarchy, i.e. pronouns of a third person may shift to the second or first person, but not vice versa.

The Category Shift Hierarchy I and II state that, if a personal pronoun undergoes a historical shift in its person/number value, then always down the hierarchies specified in Tables 3 and 4. This process always includes a previous category extension in the same direction (cf. Table 2). The general claim behind these hierarchies is that personal pronouns may historically shift their person/number values only in the direction of more specific/more individuated referents that are higher on the person hierarchy (i.e. closer to the speaker). It can then be concluded from this, that all pronominal category extensions that do not follow the proposed direction will not result in a pronominal category shift eventually. This is an

Table 3  
“Category Extension and Shift Hierarchy I: Number”.

PLURAL >	(DUAL) >	(SINGULAR)
Less specific	>	More specific
Less individuated	>	More individuated

Table 4  
“Category Extension and Shift Hierarchy ii: Person”.

THIRD >	(SECOND) >	(FIRST)
Low on the person hierarchy	>	High on the person hierarchy

empirically testable prediction that can be derived from both hypotheses. Before summarizing the evidence (and counter-evidence) found so far, the hypothesis will be illustrated with an example.

The second person pronoun in Standard English *you*, does not distinguish singular and plural. It stems historically from the 2PL.ACC pronoun and took over the function of the old 2SG *thou* completely neutralizing the singular/plural distinction in the second person. This process happened in England during the Middle English period, cf. (28).

(28) Diachrony of English *you*

Middle English	Modern Standard English	Non –Standard varieties of English
<i>thou</i> (2.SG.FAM)	<i>you</i> (2SG/PL)	<i>you</i> (2SG)
<i>you</i> (2SG.HON; < 2PL.ACC)		<i>you-all</i> (2PL) <i>you-s</i> (2PL) <i>you guys</i> (2PL)

This process was functionally driven by politeness and a generalization of the usage of the polite 2PL.HON pronoun *you*. This polite pronoun gained more and more ground in the address of the hearer losing its polite value at the same time. Simultaneously, the original familiar 2SG pronoun of address fell into disuse. In contemporary English it can be found only in certain religious contexts. In terms of the process model presented in Table 2, the Standard English 2nd person pronoun *you* reached stage II. Originally, it was a 2PL, then acquired an additional person/number value (the 2SG) eventually neutralizing the distinction between singular and plural in this form. This extension obeys the “Category Extension and Shift Hierarchy I: Number” in that the newly acquired person/number value is more specific and more individuated than the original person/number value 2PL. Since this change did not affect the person value, the second hierarchy is not applicable here. Interestingly, there are certain sub-standard varieties of English, in particular colloquial American English, where speakers create a new 2PL pronoun either with a nominal pluralization of *you-s*, or with a plural noun *guys* or a quantifier *all* thus filling the 2PL gap in the pronominal paradigm. This repluralization of original 2PL *you* can be considered as the beginning of stage III. This process follows the Category Extension and Shift Hierarchy: PL > SG.

On the other hand, in Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 various impersonal uses of the 2SG pronouns in different languages were described. Although these uses are widespread, it has – to the best of my knowledge – never been reported that there is an impersonal pronoun with a 2SG etymology; i.e. as far as I know it has never been reported that an impersonal pronoun stems historically from a 2SG pronoun; for instance, Haspelmath (1997) in his book on *Indefinite Pronouns* does not mention such a grammaticalization. This observation is exactly what the second hypothesis predicts. Such a change in the person/number value of a pronoun would contradict both hierarchies in Tables 3 and 4.

In Tables 5 and 6, the evidence for both hypotheses that has been found so far is summarized. The cases in favor of both hypotheses come from unrelated languages around the world. It is obvious that the first hypothesis with respect to number is much better substantiated than the second hypothesis with regard to person. For all singular and dual pronouns

Table 5  
Historical evidence for the “Category Extension and Shift Hypothesis: Number”.

Category extension/shift	Languages
1PL > 1DU	Nganasan (Northern Samoyedic);
1PL > 1SG	Chol, Chontal, Tojolabal, Tzeltal (all Mayan); Coll. Turkish (Turkic); Meithili (Indo-Aryan);
1PL > 1INCL.DU (I and you)	Hoocak, Lakhota (both Siouan);
1INCL.PL > 1INCL.DU	Ilocano (Malyo-Polynesian);
1INCL.PL > 1SG	North Moluccan Malay, North Irian Malay (both Austronesian);
2PL > 2DU	Nganasan (Northern Samoyedic)
2PL > 2SG.HON	French, and most European languages from medieval times onwards; Turkish (Turkic);
2PL > 2SG/PL > 2SG	English; cf. (28) above; Argentine Spanisch ( <i>voseo</i> ); Yolŋu (Pama-Nyungan; Northeast Arnhem Land, Australia); Yidin <sup>y</sup> , Dyaabugay (Pama-Nyungan; Northeast Queensland, Australia);
3PL > 3DU	Nganasan (Northern Samoyedic);
3PL > 3SG	Panyjima (Pama-Nyungan; Pilbara region, Western Australia);
3PL > 3SG.HON	Tamil (Dravidian); cf. (8) above;
3PL > 3SG	Tamil (Dravidian); cf. (8) above;

Table 6  
Historical evidence for the “Category Extension and Shift Hypothesis: Person”.

Category extension/shift	Languages
3PL > 1PL	Kiowa (Kiowa-Tanoan)?
3PL > 1INCL.PL	Not attested
3PL > 2PL.HON	German; Italian
3PL > 2SG.HON	German, Danish, Norwegian (Bokmål) (all Germanic)
3SG/PL > 1EXCL.PL	Shuswap (Interior Salish; Canada)
	Waiwai (Carib; Brazil)
2PL > 1INCL.PL	Sanuma (Yamomani; Brazil)?
	Tiwi (isolate; Australia)?
3SG > 2SG.HON	German, Italian (Indo-European)
3SG > 1SG	Not attested
2SG > 1SG	Not attested

Table 7  
Counter examples for the “Category Extension and Shift Hypothesis: Person”.

Counter examples	Languages
1PL > 2SG	Takic (Uto-Aztec)
1INCL.PL > 2SG.HON	Malay varieties of South and Southeast Sulawesi

in the languages listed in Table 5, it can be shown that the historical origin or etymology is a plural pronoun of the respective person value.

Less convincing is the evidence found for the hierarchy regarding person. There are cases marked with a question mark that probably represents a shift in the predicted direction, but clear cut historical reconstructions of the origins are not available. There are also cases which could be derived theoretically from the hypothesis in Table 4, for which no examples were found so far. For instance, it would be possible to predict that there is a shift from 3SG and 2SG to 1SG. No instances were found for both cases, yet. It might also be the case that such historical shifts do not exist or are rare. Anyway, it is much more difficult to find examples of historical shifts in personal pronouns that involve a change in the person value.

In addition there are even two cases that have to be considered as counter-examples at least with respect to the category of person; cf. Table 7.

The first counterexample deals with an extension from a 1PL form to a 2SG form which was reconstructed for Takic, a subgroup of the Uto-Aztec languages spoken in Southern California. The Proto-Uto-Aztec (PUA) form for the 1PL (independent) pronoun is reconstructed as *\*(i)ta(-mö)*, the dependent 1PL pronoun is *\* = ta* (cf. Langacker, 1977b: 124–126). According to Langacker, the old PUA 2SG was replaced by the 1PL form *\*-ta* in Proto-Takic times (cf. Langacker, 1977a: 99). The same extension could be observed in Aztec languages leading to a syncretism between the 2SG and the 1PL in many paradigms of modern Aztec languages. Cf., for instance, the paradigm of subject prefixes in Tetelcingo Náhuatl in (29).

(29) Tetelcingo Náhuatl subject prefixes (Aztec; Tuggy 1979: 81)

	SG	PL
1	<i>ni-/n-*</i>	<i>ti-/t-</i>
2	<i>ti-/t-</i>	<i>ne(e)-</i>
2HON	<i>ti-...mo-</i>	<i>ne(e)-...mo-</i>
3	$\emptyset$ -	$\emptyset$ -
3HON	$\emptyset$ -...mo	$\emptyset$ -...mo

The 2SG *ti-/t-* in (29) is identical in form with the 1PL. The */t/* element reflects the old PUA 1PL *\* = ta*. An inclusive/exclusive distinction cannot be reconstructed for PUA, but Langacker (1977a: 100) hypothesizes that it was the inclusive reference which led to the extension of the 1PL to the 2SG person value. The pragmatic background could be the expression of solidarity like in the nursery usages of English *we* (which will be regarded as an instance of positive politeness). The PUA 1PL *\* = ta* acquired a 1INCL.PL meaning in Nomic languages (comprising languages such as Northern Paiute, Mono, Shoshone, Comanche, Southern Paiute, Chemehuevi) and Tubatulabal.

Another case of an extension from a 1INCL.PL to a 2SG is reported from some varieties of Malay. The 1INCL.PL form *\*kita* in Standard Indonesian/Malay (cf. Sneddon, 1996: 160) derives from Proto-Austronesian (PA) *\*i-[k]ita*

(cf. Dahl, 1976; Blust, 1977). There are varieties of Malay where this form developed to a 1SG polite pronoun, a process termed “First Malay Politeness Shift” by Blust (1977). This shift is in full accordance with the person and number hierarchies postulated above. However, there are other innovations that can be observed with regard to this form. In the Malay varieties of South and Southeast Sulawesi, as well as in Palu, Central Sulawesi, the 1INCL.PL form \**kita* became a second person singular polite pronoun (cf. Donohue and Smith, 1998: 69–71). Nothing is known about the pragmatic background of this extension in Malay, but it is plausible to hypothesize that politeness may be the driving force behind this process particularly because politeness plays an important role in this linguistic area (cf. Helmbrecht, 2005a). It has to be stressed that this is still an extension of stage II and not a completed shift. But, it has to be admitted that this instance of a change in the meaning of personal pronouns does not confirm to the second hierarchy, the hypothesis that extensions and shifts in personal pronouns go always up the person hierarchy.

#### 4. Conclusions

It has been shown that personal pronouns may be used in ways that deviate remarkably from their prototypical semantics. These non-prototypical uses imply changes in the reference of these forms and are often accompanied by various pragmatic effects such as politeness. In addition, it has been argued that at least a subset of these non-prototypical uses could lead to historical changes in the person/number values of personal pronouns. Two hypotheses have been postulated, one claims that the direction of such changes goes from plural (to dual) to singular, i.e. from less specific to more specific. The second hypothesis claims that shifts in the person/number value of a pronoun can only go up the person hierarchy. Evidence for both hypotheses was presented. The inverse conclusion of these constraints is that there are no shifts in person/number values that run against these hierarchies. This seems to be the case but more diachronic research in this question is necessary.

Given the fact that both hypotheses turn out to be essentially right in the light of future research on the historical changes with regard to personal pronouns, the question arises why should that be so. First of all, it can be speculated that the non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns that obey the two hierarchies are more frequent in discourse than the ones that don't. This is an empirical question that can be investigated by corpus linguistic studies in the future. The question that follows immediately is: why are these uses more frequent than those that do not obey the hierarchies. I think the answer may be found in the properties of the context of an utterance that contains such uses of personal pronouns. The more individuated and specific a referent is, the more given and topical it is in a speech act, and in turn that means the more accessible it is with regard to cognitive processing. The speech act participants are always the most accessible referents in a discourse (cf. also the theory of the accessibility of referents by Mira Ariel and more specifically the accessibility marking scale (Ariel, 1990:73) that does not, however, distinguish the degree of accessibility among the three persons).

Two further observations need to be addressed in future research. First, if it is only the subset of non-prototypical uses defined by the two hierarchies or constraints that has a chance to lead to historical changes in pronouns than this can only be explained with differences in textual frequency. This means that the non-prototypical uses defined by the two hierarchies are more frequent than the ones that are ruled out. This is an empirical question that could be answered by corpus linguistic studies. The second observation is that the number hierarchy that constrains value shifts in pronouns differs from the markedness scale of the category of number where plural is more marked than singular and dual is more marked than plural. Since the markedness scale makes diachronic claims too, there are potentially contradicting predictions. So if the number hierarchy that was proposed here is correct one would expect to find historical shifts in person/number values in pronouns that are not predicted by the traditional Greenbergian markedness scale. And indeed this is the case. In Nganasan (Northern Samoyedic), the whole set of plural pronouns shifted to dual, replacing the gap with new plural pronouns. This is a change toward a more marked number value, something that is against the predictions of markedness theory. On the other hand, this instance fits nicely in the predictions made by the number hierarchy proposed in this paper, namely that historical shifts go from less to more specific, from less individuated to more individuated. However, more research has to be done in the future on this question.

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