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IMPERSONAL USES OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

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The personal pronouns *you*, *we*, and *I* in English can be used as impersonal pronouns in discourse situations involving structural knowledge and general truths. In such sentences the pronoun may be replaced by *one*, and in indirect speech the expected person shifts do not occur. The stylistic and rhetorical differences among impersonal *you*, *we*, and *I* follow from their deictic use. Although the extension of the 2nd person pronoun to an impersonal is widespread in languages, it is restricted to those with small, closed pronoun sets, thus excluding such languages as Japanese and Korean.

1. Introduction

There has been a great deal of attention to shifts in pronoun use. Studies in this area, however, have generally concentrated on sociolinguistic factors, e.g. the use of *tu* versus *vous* or *he* versus *she*.[1] There has been much less discussion of shifts within the various persons or of the various shifts between personal and impersonal pronouns. Our concern in this paper is primarily with the use of person shifts that are of a semantic-pragmatic nature – in particular with the use of *you*, *we*, and *I* for impersonal use. A few observations on sociolinguistic and stylistic matters will be included as asides.

Person shift is discussed in an important paper by Laberge and Sankoff (1979), who describe the rising tendency of the impersonal use of *tu*/*vous* in

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[1] See Philipsen and Huspek (1985) for a bibliography of sociolinguistic studies of personal address, and McConnell-Ginet (1979) and Mathiot (1979) for studies of the use of gender pronouns.

French to fill the vacuum created by another pronoun shift – that of the indefinite pronoun *on*, which is taking over the function of the personal pronoun *nous*. Since *nous* is being replaced by *on* as a personal pronoun, *tu/vous* is filling the gap by serving as an impersonal pronoun. However, *you* is also used as an impersonal in English where no corresponding phenomenon exists. Therefore, the shift in French of *on* for 'we' cannot be a sufficient explanation for the change, though it may be a part of the explanation.

The fact is that the impersonal use of personal pronouns is a rather widespread phenomenon in languages of the world. Our aim in this paper is to provide a precise characterization of this phenomenon using English for primary data, suggest explanations of the phenomenon in terms of discourse strategies, and relate these insights to genericity elsewhere in the language. In the process, we attempt to provide a precise characterization of the psychological and discourse principles involved in the use of the pronouns.

The structure of the paper is as follows: In section 2 we give some preliminary discussions on impersonal uses of personal pronouns; in 3 we distinguish between impersonal and vague uses; section 4 relates the impersonal uses to verb aspect; and section 5 provides a typology of pronoun systems.

2. Impersonal use of personal pronouns: A characterization

Reference grammars of English standardly divide pronouns into subsets, one of which is the set of personal pronouns: *I, you, he, she, we, they* (and their corresponding object and genitive forms). The personal pronouns are typically deictic and referential, especially in the 1st and 2nd person. That is, "the 1st person forms refer to the speaker/writer, while the 2nd person refers to the addressee or a group including at least one addressee but not speaker/writer" (Huddleston (1984: 288)). Impersonal pronouns include *one* and morphologically complex forms ending with *one*, e.g. *anyone, someone, everyone*. Impersonal pronouns, like personal pronouns, refer to one or more persons, but no specific person is picked out in contrast to the personal pronouns. Grammarians, however, have also standardly acknowledged that there are some deviations. Thus, Jespersen (1909) comments: "English has no pronoun for the generic person", which is expressed by passives, *we, you, they, one*, or a substantive denoting a person preceded by the indefinite article; "in *we*, the speaker includes himself, often with a certain humility", and *you* is "distinctly colloquial in tone" (p. 153). Huddleston says that the "generic" *you* is "a stylistically less formal variant of non-deictic *one*" (p. 288), and that it need not include the addressee in its reference, nor is the speaker excluded. A precise characterization of these generic pronouns, however, has not been attempted often, and our aim is to provide one.

Typical examples of the impersonal *you*'s in English are found in (1) and (2)

below – an interview with a man who teaches fiction writing, and an essay on the drudgery of daily life.

(1) But I have a gift for teaching ... Plus, teaching fiction writing is a lot like writing. *You* have to examine manuscripts, use *your* mind, come up with possibilities, respond to characters in situations. In a lot of ways, it's like working on *your* own work.
(*The Arizona Post*, October 3, 1986, p. A3; our italics)

(2) Friday rolls around and *you* go home to a partnerless house. *You* could stare out the window, yell at the kids, or watch TV. ... *You* know *you*'re lonely.
(Written by Amy Parsons, *Tucson Weekly*, February 5, 1986, p. 4; our italics)

The interviewee in (1) is not saying that the interviewer must examine her own manuscripts or respond to her characters; he is saying that anyone who teaches fiction writing must do so.

We in the following passage serves as a typical example of impersonal *we*:

(3) Language is like fashion. *We* must make *our* selections carefully and appropriately. Just as *we* would not wear formal clothes at the beach or bathing suits in church, so *we* do not use obscenity or slang for formal public lectures nor pedantic, bookish forms when speaking intimately with *our* sweethearts.

In these cases not only can *one* replace *you* and *we*, but also *you* and *we* themselves are virtually interchangeable with each other without affecting the informational content of the text. (There is, of course, a significant difference in textual and rhetorical flavor to which we will turn in sections 4 and 5.) Although person shifts (*we, you, one*) within a text or utterance are considered stylistically inelegant, they do in fact occur frequently in spontaneous conversation, testifying to their informational equivalence. Note that the pronouns in (1) and (2) are not deictic and are not necessarily referential; that is, they do not refer to the speaker or addressee. Although such impersonal uses cannot be represented in a system of extensional logic, they are closer to the universal quantifier than to the existential quantifier (an adequate representation of generics is a problem in any case). This fact becomes even more obvious when *I* is used impersonally. A good example is Descarte's 'I think, therefore I am'. Or consider the following passage from Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983: 345–346; our italics):

(4) We form a frame of script for this kind of situation. ... Thus, in order to be able to take the subway in New York *I* simply need a 'taking a subway'

> script or frame, if *I* have one, and supply now relevant specific information about the situation. But at the same time, *I* may – even if *I* take the subway daily – be reminded of yesterday's trip when *I* met this strange man, or last year's when there was a fire in the subway. If *I* do not have a frame or script, *I* may well be reminded of the rather vague and remote (i.e., macro-) information from the model *I* built when some years ago *I* took the subway in New York. ...

First of all, it is unlikely that *I* in the above text would refer to the author, since the book is co-authored, and *we* would be more appropriate if the pronoun were referential. Secondly, the passage could be paraphrased by *one* (or *we, you*) without changing the essential message of the text. Impersonal *I* is more limited in its distribution than *you* and *we* and seems to occur mainly in hypothetical contexts (Ken Safire, p.c.).

3. Contrasting impersonal and vague uses of personal pronouns

In order to see clearly the nature of the impersonal use of personal pronouns in English, we need to distinguish it from another type of generalized usage of personal pronouns, which we will call 'vague' use. The distinction we make between referential, impersonal, and vague uses of pronouns can be roughly stated as follows. Referential uses identify specific individuals. (Deictic uses are a subset of referential pronouns, where the identification of individuals is specified in terms of the speech situation.) An 'impersonal' use of a pronoun applies to anyone and/or everyone. A 'vague' use applies to specific individuals, but they are not identified, or identifiable, by the speaker. Whereas impersonal uses are akin to an interpretation with the universal quantifier (often subject to restricted quantification), the vague use requires the existential quantifier.

Let us first characterize the impersonal use of *you* as in (5); (a) and (b) are from Laberge and Sankoff (adopting their characterization of 'indefinite' use of *tu/vous*), and (c)–(e) are ours:

(5a) It conveys the theme of *generality* – particularly a generally admitted truth or a personal opinion that the speaker hopes is shared. (p. 275)
(5b) It can be replaced by an indefinite pronoun (e.g. *on* in French, *one* in English). (p. 275)
(5c) Impersonal use of a personal pronoun cannot exclude in its reference what its normal (deictic) use would signify (e.g., the addressee cannot be excluded from the reference of impersonal *you* by a phrase such as 'I don't mean you personally').

(5d) The meaning of sentences with impersonal use of personal pronouns approximates that of sentences with universally quantified NPs or variables bound by them.
(5e) A personal pronoun used impersonally resists the pronoun shift in indirect quotation.

3.1. *Vague* you

The vague usage can be illustrated by the example in (6), spoken to one of us (A.L.) by a European woman talking about American political and military policy in Europe.

(6) *You*'re – I don't mean you personally – *you*'re going to destroy us all in a nuclear war.

In this utterance, the referents of (italicized) *you* are not specified in a way whereby the hearer could pick out the individuals. Yet, *you* here could not be replaced by *one* as in the case of impersonal pronouns that we have presented so far. In contrast to (6), consider the oddity of (7b).

(7a) You have to examine manuscripts, use your mind. (cf. (6))
(7b) ?*You have to examine manuscripts – I don't mean you personally – use your mind.

(7b) is odd because the impersonal use potentially includes everybody, including the addressee, but (7b) contradicts this implication by explicitly exluding the addressee.

Note also that with a sentence like (6) the addressee must make a pronoun shift if she were to report the utterance to her countrymen, as in (8a). On the other hand, if a bystander were to report the event to Europeans, he might say (8b).

(8a) The European woman said to me that *we* – not *me* personally, of course – are going to destroy *them* in a nuclear war.
(8b) The European woman said to her that *they* – not *her* personally – were going to destroy *us* in a nuclear war.

A personal pronoun used impersonally, on the other hand, resists the pronoun shift in indirect quotation. Suppose that (9a) and (9b) are direct quotes of John's speech:

(9a) '*We* can generate an infinite number of sentences.'
(9b) '*You* can build *your* own TV set if *you* buy a kit.'

One can repeat John's utterance in (10a) and (10b), showing no pronoun shift:

(10a) John said that *we* can generate an infinite numbers of sentences.
(10b) John said that *your* can build *your* own TV set if *you* buy a kit.

In indirect speech, even *I* can be retained without distortion as in the following example.

(11) Van Dijk and Kintsch say that in order to be able to take the subway in New York, *I* simply need a 'taking a subway' script or frame, if *I* have one. ...

In both impersonal and vague uses of *you* the interlocutor assumes the status of representative in some sense of the intended referent – either as representing potentially all humanity in the impersonal case, or a subgroup (e.g. Americans in charge of the political/military decisions) in the case of vague usage. But the contrast discussed here indicates that these two types of pronominal usages should be kept distinct and that possible inclusion of the addressee as a referent is critically related to the discourse function of impersonal *you*, although not to that of vague *you*.

3.2. Number feature

It is interesting to note that impersonal *you* is singular in its 'number' feature. The reflexive form referring back to an instance of impersonal *you* normally assumes the singular form, as the following examples show.

(12) Two hundred years ago, *you* used to go into the forest when *you* wanted firewood for *yourself*/**yourselves*.
(13) *You* kill *yourself*/*??yourselves* to raise *your* kids properly, and guess what happens.
(14) *You*'re – I don't mean you personally – *you*'re going to destroy *yourselves*/**yourself* in a huge nuclear disaster.

Impersonal *you* in (12) and (13) may thus be distinguished also in terms of number from vague *you* in (14) which is plural both notionally and grammatically.

3.3. We

The vague *we* is illustrated by the following quote from *USA Today* (June 5, 1986, p. 1), a publication that frequently uses *we* (*us*) as a reference for Americans.

(15) Nationwide only 7.8% of *us* are without a telephone at home.

The *us* is limited to Americans, and only an American could properly report this indirectly with *us*.

Although we have proposed that impersonal and vague uses of personal pronouns should be kept distinct, borderline cases can muddy the distinction with *we* because the 1st person plural pronoun signifies in English an incompletely defined collectivity that includes the speaker and one or more others, without specifying who the others are.[2] Referential *we* includes specified others, vague *we* unspecified others, and impersonal *we* everyone else. Frequently, however, it is the predicate itself which signals the interpretation of non-referential *we*. In (16), the preferred interpretation is impersonal, allowing substitution with *one*, while in (17) the preferred interpretation is vague, allowing explicit exclusion.

(16) *We* are obliged to make the world a better place to live.
(17) *We* ought to do something to reduce the bureaucracy at *our* university (not you and me personally).

Notice that vague *we* has a rhetorical force which contrasts with vague *they*, as illustrated in the following story quoted in Howard Cosell's column in *The Arizona Daily Star* (September 4, 1986, C-1), entitled 'Racism charges wrong' (our italics):

(18) "No," says black sociologist and educator Harry Edwards. "It's utterly ridiculous to call it [the requirement that athletes meet certain academic standards] racist. Blacks are pathological about this subject. *They* refuse to look in the mirror and see *themselves* as *they* are. *We* need education. *We* need teachers who can teach. Education is the core of the problem, and there is no future for any of *us* without it".

As noted by Watson (1975), *we* 'includes' and *they* excludes, reflecting the social alignment of these pronouns. Notice, however, that *we* is restricted to Blacks, not all people. Therefore, *one* cannot substitute for *we*.

[2] With English *we*, instances of blatant deviation from the more standard deictic use are found in those cases wherein *we* is deliberately made to supplant the factually more appropriate deictic *you*.

(ia) Sergeant to enlisted men: 'We're going to clean up now.'
(ib) Nurse to patient: 'Shall we take our medicine?'
(ic) Teacher to students: 'OK. We will take our test.'

Notice that these sentences seem offensive. They can be used to emphasize power relationships by calling attention to a deliberately misplaced sense of solidarity.

3.4. 3rd person pronouns

Third person pronouns may be vague, but they are never impersonal, because they exclude the speaker or addressee. An instance of vague *they* then seems to serve as an "indication of some anonymous group-agent" (Yule (1982: 319)).

(19) Well, I saw a demolition order there actually – a few months ago – *they* said *they* were going to demolish some of the flats – which is a pity – I don't know what *they're* doing with Edinburgh though – as long as *they* don't do what they did with Glasgow.

Yule claims that *they* in this text functions as a semantically empty dummy element. We prefer to say that the *they* is vague. Specific individuals are not identified or even identifiable, and the speaker does not care about the referent. Levels of usage and registers may be relevant here. The agentless passive is preferred in formal discourse, especially, writing, whereas passives are relatively infrequent in casual speech.

Except for a few pat phrases such as *they say*, it seems that vague *they* needs to be anchored somehow in space or time as in (19), (20a) and (20b).

(20a) *They* don't allow dogs on the beach.
(20b) In Renaissance Italy, *they* built a lot of palaces.

Without any anchoring, *they* is likely to be taken as deictic (or implicitly anaphoric).[3]

(21a) *They* don't allow dogs.
(21b) *They* built a lot of palaces.

There seems to be no instance of *he* or *she* corresponding to vague *they*. A non-deictic singular 3rd person pronoun must always be anchored either anaphorically or cataphorically.[4]

[3] We assume that it is possible to identify a given 3rd person pronoun as either anaphoric/cataphoric or deictic. But, as many linguists have pointed out (Lyons, Yule, Stenning among others) it is in fact not always easy to decide between deixis and anaphora in 3rd person pronominal uses.

[4] In an anaphoric context like (22), a 3rd person singular (especially *he*, as generally conceived) is interpreted impersonally. The use of *they* seems to be somewhat more restricted in this regard, but an example like the following is certainly well-formed:

(i) If people – and I mean anybody! – want to succeed, they must work hard.

It should be noted, however, that *they* does not easily occur with cataphoric reference; restrictive relative clauses, as in (ii) below, are especially odd in modern English.

(ii) ??They who want to succeed in life must work hard.

We do not have a clear explanation of this. (This fact, however, may be related to a co-ocurrence

(22a) If anyone wants to succeed, *he* must work hard.
(22b) *He* who wants to succeed in life must work hard.

Without anaphoric anchoring, *he* or *she* is likely to be interpreted as a deictic.

(23) *He* must work hard to succeed.

However, some uses of the 3rd person singular, either anaphorically or cataphorically anchored, are analogous to what Donnellan (1966) has called the attributive use of definite descriptions.[5]

(24a) Someone killed Mrs. Smith, but no one knows who. *He* must have been crazy.
(24b) *He* – whoever killed Mrs. Smith – must have been crazy.

The similarity between attributive definite descriptions and vague pronoun uses is that the speaker believes that an individual who fits the description in the predicate exists but cannot pick out that individual. As Yule would put it, such pronouns "can receive a non-identifying referential assignment via the interpretation of the information predicated of them" (p. 321).

Table 1 summarizes the impersonal and vague uses of personal pronouns. Impersonal *I* is limited to hypothetical contexts. The interpretation of *we* is largely dependent on the nature of the predicate. The most representative of the impersonal use of personal pronouns is clearly the case of impersonal *you*. In what follows, then, we will mainly focus on impersonal *you*.

Table 1
Non-deictic pronoun use.

	Impersonal	Vague
Par excellence	you (sg.)	you (pl.) they
In a qualified sense	I they	we
In anaphoric contexts	he, she, they (see fn. 4)	he, she (see (22))

restriction of *they* + Noun: e.g. **they Americans*.) Milton's line 'They also serve who only stand and wait' (from *On His Blindness*) suggests that such a structure as (ii) may have been acceptable at earlier stages of the language.

[5] Dick Oehrle points out (p.c.) that *he* and *she* in a similar context can also be deictic, if, for example, a detective views the scene and utters 'He must have been crazy'. In this case the interpretation is parasitic on some unspoken description. See Nunberg (1978).

4. Structural knowledge and life drama

Generally speaking, impersonal *you* typically appears in the present tense context in an utterance expressing a "generalization" or "a truism or moral" (Yule (1982: 320)). There is an interesting correlation between this state of affairs and what Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger (1982) call a 'structural knowledge' description.

Attempting to account for the semantic distinction between the use of present progressive and present tense in English, Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger claim that in general we can "describe the world in either of two ways: by describing what things happen in the world, or by describing how the world is made that such things may happen in it" (p. 80). The former expresses 'phenomenal' knowledge with a sentence like (25) with the progressive, using a version of 'Watch Mr. Wizard' narration as a normative example (their (23), p. 87). The latter expresses 'structural knowledge', and a sentence like (26) with present tense can be given as its typical example (cf. their (20), p. 87).

(25) Now he's picking up a glass flask and pouring its contents into a beaker. Now he's lighting the Bunsen burner and – wait! He's reaching into his pocket for what seems to be his handkerchief!
(26) And now he takes the flask of sodium nitrate and pours the contents into the beaker; now he lights the Bunsen burner and heats it to a boil.

An unknowledgeable spectator of 'Watch Mr. Wizard' can narrate Mr. Wizard's act as in (25), but not, under normal circumstances, as in (26). The latter is a "description of the structure of the experiment" that Mr. Wizard is performing (p. 87), and it calls for a narrator who knows the routine as an insider (e.g. the master of ceremony for the show).

In the context of a structural knowledge description impersonal *you* occcurs typically. Consider the quoted segments involving impersonal *you* in the following newspaper report on a college football game (*The Arizona Daily Star*, September 28, 1986, p. E-4; our italics):

(27) Greathouse said he felt some obligation as Adam's replacement. "The past three games, our running game has been a major factor. So I knew I had to gain some yards. I had to perform," Greathouse said. "It's not pressure. *You* keep it in *your* mind; *you* know *you* have to do it. Out there, *you* don't think about it. *You* just go play by play."

This is a structural knowledge description in the Goldsmith-Woisetschlaeger sense in which the speaker, as an acknowledged insider, gives his account of what happens to any good football player in a game.

The two pragmatic categories identified by Laberge and Sankoff as the

primary discourse functions of "indefinite" *tu/vous* are "formulation of morals or truisms" and "situational insertion" (p. 280). Both may be characterized as a type of a structural knowledge description. An example like (13) can be considered as a 'formulation of a moral or truism', while the italicized portion in the example below would pass as an instance of 'situational insertion'.

(28) Yesterday, we went to Sabino Canyon. And I was talking with this guy who happened to drop in on us. And all of a sudden he began to get agitated, and he swung at me. *You react instinctively at a time like that.* I hit him back.

By using *you*, the speaker "assimilates himself", to use Laberge and Sankoff's phraseology, "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" (p. 281).

The present tense is not always required, however, for *you* to be used impersonally. We have already seen such a case in (12) with the past tense. And impersonal *you* is possible with the present progressive, as the following example (pointed out to us by a reviewer) shows.

(29) *You*'re going down the highway, *you*'re having a wonderful time, singing a song, and suddenly – *You* get into an argument.

Here, although the 'resolution' (the 'turn of event') is in the present tense, the preceding discourse with impersonal *you*'s is in the progressive mode. We will call this category a 'life drama' subtype. The following is another example.

(30) *You* are in Egypt admiring the pyramids and feeling that *you* have really left *your* own world and time behind when suddenly *you* meet *your* next-door neighbor from home.

The *you*'s in these sentences are, intuitively, instances of impersonal *you*'s. What is remarkable about this 'life drama' subtype is that its occurrence (with the progressive mode) is limited to the 'scene setting' portion of a mini-tale whose 'resolution' is presented in the present tense. It is as though the occurrence of impersonal *you*'s in the progressive context is licensed by the more normative final *you* with the present tense situated in the resolution portion of the tale. If the resolution portion were to be given in the progressive mode (e.g. 'and suddenly ... *You are getting* into an argument' for (29)), it would lose the 'punch line' force and might only function as a prolonged continuation of the 'scene setting', leaving the audience still expecting the resolution. Mini-tales like (29) and (30) must be complete with both

the scene setting and the resolution. With this requirement met, they may constitute a flavor of a life drama episode that is potentially applicable to anyone at all. And it is this universally applicable life drama set-up that presumably sanctions the occurrence of these impersonal *you*'s to begin with.

We may summarize the discussion of this section as follows, using both Laberge and Sankoff's and Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger's terminologies. There are three subtypes of impersonal *you*:

(31a) The 'Situational Insertion' type (occurring in the structural knowledge description), e.g. (28).
(31b) The 'Moral or Truism Formulation' type (occurring in the structural knowledge description), e.g. (12), (13).
(31c) The 'Life Drama' type (not limited to the structural knowledge description), e.g. (29), (30).

It turns out that these three subtypes of impersonal *you*'s behave differently with respect to their affinity to universal quantification. 'Situational insertion' *you*'s can be replaced naturally by *one, everyone or anyone*; either of the following may be substituted for the italicized portion of (28) without significantly affecting its well-formedness.

(32) One/Everyone/Anyone reacts instinctively at a time like that.

Instances of impersonal *you*'s occurring with a modal auxiliary may be grouped with this subtype:

(33a) *You* can build *your* own TV set if *you* buy a kit.
(33b) *One* can build *one*'s own TV set if *one* buys a kit.
(33c) *Everyone/Anyone* can build his own TV set if he buys a kit.

In the case of the 'moral or truism formulation' type, *you* may be replaced by *one*, but not so easily by *everyone* or *anyone*:

(34a) *You* kill *yourself* to raise *your* kids properly, and guess what happens. (=(16))
(34b) *One* kills oneself to raise *one*'s kids properly, and guess what happens.
(34c) ?*Everyone*/**Anyone* kills himself to raise his kids properly, and guess what happens.

While (34c) with *everyone* may not be entirely ill-formed, its message content is quite different from (34a) and (34b). Prescriptive uses of impersonal *you* fall naturally into this subclass:

(35a) *You* don't say 'Hi, buddy!' to a Japanese customs officer.
(35b) *One* doesn't say 'Hi, buddy!' to a Japanese customs officer.
(35c) *Nobody* says 'Hi, buddy!' to a Japanese customs officer.

While (35c) is not ill-formed, the prescriptive sense is not necessarily present there. (35a) and (35b), on the other hand, must be understood as prescriptive in their intent.

With the 'life drama' type of impersonal *you*, neither *one* nor *everyone* can replace it without significantly altering the intended effect of the discourse or affecting its well-formedness.

(36a) *You* are in Egypt admiring the pyramids and feeling that *you* have really left *your* own world and time behind when suddenly *you* meet your next-door neighbor from home. (= (30))
(36b) ?*One* is in Egypt admiring the pyramids and feeling that he has really left his own world and time behind when suddenly he meets his next-door neighbor from home.
(36c) ?**Everyone*/**Anyone* is in Egypt admiring the pyramids and feeling that they have really left their world and time behind when suddenly they meet their next-door neighbor from home.

Along with the issue of universal quantification, the indirect quotation test (see (5e)) may tend to pick out the 'life drama' *you* as somewhat distinct from the other two listed in (31); (37c) seems a little less acceptable than (37a, b).

(37a) Rodenmyer says that *you* react instinctively at a time like that. ('Situational Insertion'; cf. (28))
(37b) Rodenmyer says that *you* kill *yourself* to raise *your* kids properly, and guess what happens. ('Moral or Truism Formulation'; cf. (13))
(37c) ?Rodenmyer says that *you* are in Egypt admiring the pyramids and feeling that *you* have really left *your* own world and time behind when suddenly *you* meet *your* next-door neighbor from home. ('Life Drama'; cf. (30))

These examples show that a sense of universality can be expressed at various levels of abstraction – as straightforward generic statements, as event-oriented structural knowledge descriptions, and as 'life drama' narratives. This shows that personal pronouns in English can tie into the system of generality in some interesting ways, suppressing the normal deictic and referential uses.

We turn now to the semantic and pragmatic factors that are responsible for the impersonal uses.

5. Role distinctions

Impersonal *you*, *I* and *we* are often interchangeable. But they are nevertheless distinct from each other with respect to rhetorical force and pragmatic implications, mirroring their more normative 'personal' use. With the impersonal uses of personal pronouns, the role identities of speech act participants are abstracted from their immediate deictic domain and used nonreferentially to depict universally applicable life events. A discourse effect of this is that speech act participants can be viewed as dramatis personae in the world of generalized and abstract discourse, somewhat like 'Everyman' in a medieval morality play.

Viewed in this way, we see why only 1st and 2nd person pronouns may function as impersonal pronouns, since these are the roles most susceptible for dramatic casting. Lyons's account of person-deixis (1977: 638) is informative:

"The grammatical category of person depends upon the notion of participant-roles and upon their grammaticalization in particular languages. The origin of the traditional terms 'first person', 'second person' and 'third person' is illuminating in this connexion. The Latin word 'persona' (meaning "mask") was used to translate the Greek word for "dramatic character" or "role", and the use of this term by grammarians derives from their metaphorical conception of a language-event as a drama in which the principal role is played by the first person, the role subsidiary to this by the second person, and all other roles by the third person. ... only the speaker and addressee are actually participating in the drama. The term 'third person' is negatively defined with respect to 'first person' and 'second person': it does not correlate with any positive participant role."

In a language like English with its closed pronominal set, personal pronouns may function primarily as person-deixis, as Lyons also maintains. The speaker's locus is the deictic center. The speaker, accordingly, can always refer to him/herself as *I*, and to the addressee as *you*, giving no thought to his/her own social status or the power-relations relative to the addressee. This 'person-deixis' framework enables the speaker to abstract the 2nd person pronoun away from its referential property associated with the immediate speech act domain to the sphere of a universally applicable life drama script or a structural knowledge description, while maintaining his/her locus as 'the zero-point of the spatio-temporal co-ordinates' of 'the deictic context'.

A sense of informal camaraderie is often present with the use of impersonal *you* precisely because the speaker assigns a major 'actor' role to the addressee. In so doing, s/he is letting the hearer into the speaker's world view, implying that the hearer also shares the same perspective. This can be considered as an act of camaraderie.

On the other hand, in a context such as (4), where the use of impersonal *I* is appropriate, replacement of *I* by *you*, while acceptable, would result in a presumptuous tone.

(38) We form a frame or script for this kind of situation ... Thus, in order to

be able to take the subway in New York *you* simply need a 'taking a subway' script or frame, if *you* have one, and supply now relevant specific information about the situation. But at the same time, *you* may – even if *you* take the subway daily – be reminded of yesterday's trip when *you* met this strange man, ...

In the context given by (4)/(38), if the speaker, but not the addressee, is familiar with what is being described, a sense of presumption results presumably because the addressee is forced to play a role which is not apparent to him. In such a context, the use of impersonal *I* is a safe choice because the speaker is offering himself as a role model, describing how the particular world he presents works. In fact, the use of impersonal *I* is felicitous only in a context where this 'role model' sense is called for in a purportedly hypothetical discourse.

6. Typological differences among languages

Although the use of the 2nd person singular for an impersonal is widespread, not all languages permit such an extension. A partial pattern appears to be the following:

(39) The extension of the 2nd person pronoun to an impersonal is possible only in languages with small, closed pronoun sets.

(39) would place such languages as Chinese, English, French, German, Gulf Arabic, Modern Hebrew, Hindi-Urdu, Italian and Persian (Farsi) among those possibly having recourse to impersonal use of the 2nd person pronoun; these are all languages with a closed set of personal pronouns. It would place, on the other hand, such languages as Japanese and Korean among those having no recourse to impersonal use of 2nd person pronoun; neither Japanese nor Korean possesses a clearly defined closed set of personal pronouns. In languages like Japanese and Korean, a combination of person and number can be represented variously by a number of lexical items, reflecting semantic and pragmatic properties relative to social and psychological factors (cf. Kuroda (1965)).[6]

Examples are given below to provide some perspectives on (39); the

[6] In Japanese, for example, 'I' can be expressed as *watashi, boku, washi, ore,* etc., depending on various sociological, psychological and gender factors involved; likewise, 'you' may be expressed as *anata, kimi, omae,* and so on (cf. Suzuki (1976)). Thus, the use of *anata* 'you' generally implies that the speaker considers the addressee to be a person worthy of some respect and affection. A wife typically addresses her husband with this form. A son or daughter, even if grown, on the other hand, can use this form to address the parents only at the risk of appearing to treat them as strangers. The use of *kimi,* also meaning 'you', would indicate that the speaker considers the

'situational insertion' portion in (28), repeated as (40), may be expressed in Chinese, German, Gulf Arabic, Modern Hebrew, Hindi and Italian respectively, with the (italicized) 2nd person pronoun used impersonally, as in (41)–(46).

(40) *You* react instinctively at a time like that.

(41) *Chinese:*
Tang shih *ni* hui-pu-yu-tzu-chu-ti nei yang fan-ying.
such time you(sg.) instinctively that way react

(42) *German:*
In solchen Situationen reagirst *du* instinktiv.
in such situations react you(sg.) instinctively

(43) *Gulf Arabic:*
Inta yitsarraf gharīziyyan fi mithl hal waqt.
you(sg.m.) react instinctively at time like that

(44) *Hindi:*
Āp aise waqt par apne-āp kāryawāī karte haĩ
you(polite) such time at by-your-self action do be-Pres

(45) *Modern Hebrew:*
Ata megiv instinktivit bizman kaze
you(sg.m.) react instinctively at-a-time like-this

(46) *Italian:*
(*Tu*) reagisci istintivamente in casi come questi.
(you,sg.) react-Pres instinctively in case like such

In both Chinese and German, a general term meaning 'person' (*ren* in Chinese, and *man* in German) is preferable, but the point is that the 2nd person can also be used in its place. In Hindi, *āp* 'you' is the 2nd person

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addressee as a person of equal status or inferior in some relevant respects. It is associated with a certain urbane tone. It is also the term predominantly used by men, except in a context where a female speaker is clearly in the authority position (e.g., a female teacher to a male student at an elementary school or in a camaraderie context) – but a mother would not usually use this form to address her son unless in jest. The use of *omae* (which is composed of the honorific prefix *o* and a lexical noun *mae*, still meaning 'you', is similar to that of *kimi* as far as the social status and gender factors are concerned. But it lacks *kimi*'s urbane tone, and it is used commonly by a mother addressing her child regardless of the child's age. There are more terms that can be added to the list, expressing the sense of 'you' with some other sociological and/or psychological nuances. There is a general tendency to avoid the use of overt personal pronouns in Japanese, preferring rather actual names, kinship terms, titles (e.g. *kachoo* 'section chief', *sensei* 'teacher'), some descriptive terms (e.g. *yokochoo no oji-san* 'a man who lives at the corner'), or simply omitting any lexical reference altogether, resorting to the use of 'zero pronoun'). The Japanese speaker, in selecting a form for his/her addressee must therefore weigh all these factors, and consider the relative status relationship between them, as well as the immediate social context in which they speak.

pronoun which, although plural formally, is used in a polite discourse for both singular and plural. And in the Italian example, while the lexical pronoun *tu* 'you (sg.)' may often be omitted, the verb is marked with the 2nd person singular agreement features.

As mentioned above, Farsi has a closed set of pronouns. But we invariably seem to find *insān* 'person' (or *ādam* 'person') occurring as an indefinite pronoun, as in the following example corresponding to the set of examples given above.

(47) *Farsi:*
Dar chunin moqe? insān bi mahāba aksul amal nishan midehad.
in such situation person instinctively reaction shows

(39), therefore, represents only what appears to be a necessary condition.

We have seen that the 'number' features (along with 'person') play a critical role in the impersonal use of the 2nd person pronoun. The gender features, however, are not necessarily affected in this context. In Modern Hebrew (where the masculine 2nd person singular form is *ata*, and the feminine form *at*) partial gender-leveling does take place. The masculine *ata* 'you' in (45) can be used regardless of the gender status of the addressee. However, if the addressee is a woman, the feminine form *at* may be used in place of the masculine form without losing its 'impersonal' status, particularly if the speaker is a woman as well (Shoshana Green, p.c.). The feminine form is clearly marked, since it is not used if the addressee is a man, while such discrimination is not necessary for the masculine form. Gender-leveling, however, is not a factor at all in Gulf Arabic. (43), with the masculine form *inta* 'you (sg.)', is well-formed only if the addressee is a man; if the interlocutor is a woman, the feminine form *inti* 'you (sg.)' must be used instead (Hamdi Qafisheh, p.c.). Either form may be understood impersonally, replaceable by the indefinite pronoun *ilwāhid* 'one'.

Languages like Japanese and Korean lack a closed set of personal pronouns. These languages would therefore be expected by (39) not to use impersonal *you*. And they do not. What would correspond to (40)–(46) are the following:

(48) *Japanese:*
Sooiu toki-ni-wa honnooteki-ni ugoi-te sima-u.
Such time-at-Top instinctively moving end-up-Pres

(49) *Korean:*
kirŏl-ttae-n paro hayngtong-il chwihae-yaci.
such-that-time-Top immediately action-Obj show-should

In both (48) and (49), the 'impersonal' sense is expressed by a 'zero pronoun'

(cf. Kuroda (1965), Kim (1976)). Alternatively, it can be expressed by lexical nouns denoting 'person', such as *hito* in Japanese and *saram* or *inkan* in Korean.

If our typological classification of languages into these two groups, as indicated by (39), is basically correct, an obvious question is the following: Why should there be this correlation between the closed set of personal pronouns and the impersonal *you* phenomenon?

The question may be answered straightfowardly with respect to Japanese and Korean. By definition, personal pronouns used impersonally are not restricted to the speech act context. But in languages like Japanese and Korean, the so-called (lexical) personal pronouns, especially those having to do with 1st and 2nd persons, are too closely tied to the actual speech act context. They are simply too loaded with semantic and pragmatic information (cf. fn. 6) to be generalized or used impersonally.

The explanation of why languages like Chinese, English, French, German, Gulf Arabic, Modern Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, etc. exhibit the impersonal *you* phenomenon is less obvious. These languages have a closed set of personal pronouns which serve as person-deixis. The 1st and 2nd person, especially, refer to spatial and temporal individuals but allow extension and abstraction of person-deixis to discourse and psychological domains.[7] 1st person is semantically incorporated in *I, this, here*, words which refer to speaker's locus. 2nd person is incorporated in *you; that* and *there* may also be included in the hearer's locus.

Consider the fact that demonstratives can often be extended from a spatial use to discoursal and psychological extensions, as in (50), discussed in R. Lakoff (1974):

(50) *That* Henry Kissinger sure knows his way around Hollywood!

What is the function of *that*, since the name should suffice to pick out the referent here? How does *that* contrast with the other demonstrative, *this*, in a similar context? Lakoff notes that "emotional-deictic *that* is a means of reaching out to other people, saying 'We share this – we're in this together'" (p. 355). That is, "spatial *that* establishes a link between the speaker and

[7] Cross-linguistically a sort of inverse phenomenon to the impersonal use of English *you* seems to take place with the case of avoidance tabu exercised in some languages over the use of 2nd person pronominal. In Navajo, for example, the obviative (or 'fourth person') pronominal *ji-* may function as an impersonal (like English *one* and French *on*) as in *jini* 'it is said, people say' (cf. Akmajian and Anderson (1970), Young and Morgan (1980)). As 'a deferential', however, this *ji-* "represents the 2nd person in 'polite' discourse between siblings and in-laws of opposite sex, and is often used by a speaker in making direct reference to a respected member of his audience" (Young and Morgan, p. 187). Impersonal uses of *you* in English and 'deferential' uses of the obviative pronominal *ji-* in Navajo are both marked cases of pronominal usage. Conceivably, they might even follow the same psychological path – only, heading in opposite directions.

addressee: it enables them to relate spatially to one another, through the intermediacy of the object alluded to" (p. 353). In contrast, *this* is used to introduce a new referent into a conversation (Hawkins (1978), Prince (1981)), and thus is a manifestation of the speaker's sphere only, as in (51):

(51) I was sitting in *this* restaurant and *this* man comes up to me.

Similar phenomena can be found in other languages. The *a*-series Japanese demonstrative work like the English *that*. Kitagawa (1979) and others show that the *a*-series, when used anaphorically, represent a sense that both the speaker and addressee share the same perspective with regard to the referent in terms of their background knowledge, acquaintanceship, and familiarity. In Spanish the speaker may use *este* 'this (near me)' and in Chinese he may use *zheige* 'this' as a hesitation form, the effect being to indicate that the floor still belongs to him.

The close notional affinity between demonstratives and person-deixis has its counterpart in the impersonal use of personal pronouns in just languages where the latter comprises a closed set of person-deixis.

7. Concluding words

We have examined the use of personal pronouns in contexts where they are not interpreted as personal – where the referent of *you* need not refer to the addressee exclusively, or *I* to the speaker exclusively. We have distinguished between impersonal and vague uses. Impersonal *you* does not permit the addressee to be explicitly excluded, while in its vague use such an exclusion is allowed. With vague uses, replacement by *one* is generally difficult, and the regular person shift in indirect speech will occur. Impersonal use of personal pronouns tends to approximate universal quantification, while the vague use requires the existential quantifier.

When used impersonally in a typical structural knowledge description, *you*, *I* and *we* are generally replaceable by *one* (cf. (5b)), and there is no person change in indirect speech (cf. (5e)). This rule, however, does not extend to the case of impersonal *you* occurring in a universally applicable 'life drama' script, which may not quite fit Goldsmith and Woisetschaeger's characterization of structural knowledge descriptions. In the case of structural knowledge descriptions, the 'situational insertion' type allows substitution by both *one* and *everyone*, while the 'moral or truism formulation' type allows substitution by *one* only.

We have proposed, following Lyons's account of person-deixis, an explanation as to why personal pronouns can be used impersonally in a language like English.

And finally we have proposed a typological difference between languages which permit impersonal uses of personal pronouns and those which do not. The former have a closed set of pronominal systems, whereas the latter do not. Since not all languages in the former class permit such extension, further studies of more diverse languages in this regard need to be undertaken.

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