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Chapter · October 2015

DOI: 10.1075/slcs.171.15der

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CHAPTER 15

Impersonal uses of the second person singular and generalized empathy

An exploratory corpus study of English, German and Russian

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Second person forms of pronouns (e.g. Engl. you, Germ. du) or verbs (e.g. Russian пишеш ‘you write’) have a basically deictic function and refer to the addressee. In uses that have been called “impersonal” or “non-canonical”, the second person forms are used in a generalizing way (e.g. You only live once), often in combination with predicates that are not literally true of the addressee (e.g. As the Pope you have to be righteous, said by the Pope to a reporter). In this contribution we pursue two main goals. First, we propose a taxonomy of non-canonical uses of the second person as a frame of reference for future, especially quantitative, studies. Our second goal is to determine the pragmatic (non-truth-conditional) interpretive effects of impersonal uses of the second person. We argue that all instances of such forms imply, at an interactional level, the establishment of solidarity between the interlocutors, and at an expressive level, the presence of empathy with the members of the category over which a generalization is made. Accordingly, we propose the term “generalized empathy” as the main function of the relevant uses of the second person.

1. Introduction

Second person (singular) forms of pronouns or verbs are commonly used with “impersonal” or “non-canonical”, i.e. other than direct-referential, reference in European languages, as well as in many other languages in the world (see for

Such non-canonical uses of the second person are illustrated in (1)–(3) (the Russian examples are transliterated according to the ISO 9 standard).

(1) Mr President, we usually say, if you want to find the crime, follow the money. [EP]

(2) Eine Möglichkeit, Stimmen zu gewinnen, ist, wenn du irgendwo auftrittst und deine Gegner nicht. 'One way to win a vote is to turn up (lit. “if you turn up”) when your opponents do not.’ [EP]

(3) Kogda putešestvuješ v gorah, beseda stanovitsâ vdvojne priâtnoj, i vremâ letit nezametno. 'When you travel in the mountains, talking is doubly pleasant, and time flies by.' [PS]

Using the second person non-canonically as in (1)–(3) above implies that a generalization about the members of a specific category is made. There are cases, however, where such a generalization is not easily recoverable (cf. also Kitagawa & Lehrer 1990; van der Auwera et al. 2012: Sect. 5.2). (4)–(6) – reports of the speaker's personal memories – are pertinent examples from our data.

(4) You almost feel like saying that you will come back tomorrow to see if the story is the same. [OS]

(5) Kein Kabelfernsehen, du hast die Wahl zwischen Synchronschwimmen … oder … ‘(There is) no cable TV, you have the choice between synchronized swimming … or …’ [OS]

(6) A ty stojš' kak durak i šipleš' svoû borodku. 'You’re standing there like a fool and pull your goatie.' [PS]

As we will aim to show, even examples like (4)–(6) imply a generalization, though a more indirect one, based on the typification of either referents or participants (cf. Section 3.2).

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1. Impersonal uses of the second person can be regarded as a special case of non-canonical uses. Given that we are not concerned with any use types that are non-canonical but not impersonal, the two terms are used interchangeably in the present study.

2. This is our translation. The English translation in the subtitles is “The cable goes out and you’re left with synchronized swimming… or…”
According to recent analyses of cases like (4)–(6) (e.g. Moltmann 2006, 2010 on *one*; Malamud 2012 also on *you*), the second person forms are moreover used to invite the addressee to engage in simulation, i.e. to imagine that she is experiencing the situation in question herself. Generalization and simulation will be treated as semantic effects of non-canonical second person forms. Simulation is regarded as a semantic effect insofar as it relates to the truth-conditional evaluation of a sentence: sentences with non-canonical forms of the second person are not, literally speaking, true if the second person form is interpreted deictically.

On a pragmatic level, we also identify two interpretive effects, i.e., empathy with the members of a class of referents over which a generalization is made, and solidarity between the speech act participants. The combined (semantic and pragmatic) effect of using the second person non-canonically is claimed to be that of “generalized empathy”.

Our exploratory study is based on corpus data from English, German and Russian. The choice of languages is intended to represent different language types with respect to the realization of pronominal arguments (pro-drop [Russian] vs. no pro-drop [English, German]), and languages with a richer verbal morphology (Russian, German) vs. languages with a poorer verbal morphology (English). Our qualitative study has not brought to light any systematic differences in the use of non-canonical second person forms between these languages. We nonetheless consider it useful to provide data from a certain range of languages or language types, as future studies may show that there are actually systematic quantitative differences in the distribution of non-canonical uses of second person forms (cf. van der Auwera et al. 2012 for some quantitative data).

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 contains some information about the data used for our study. In Sections 3 and 4, we illustrate and discuss the semantic effects of generalization (Section 3) and simulation (Section 4). Sections 5 and 6 deal with the pragmatic effects of empathy and solidarity, and introduce the concept of “generalized empathy”.

2. Remarks on the data

For English and German, we have used data from two corpora, Europarl (cf. Cartoni et al. 2013) and OpenSubtitles. These corpora contain fundamentally different registers, scripted political speech in the case of Europarl, and scripted conversation in the case of OpenSubtitles. They can be expected to differ considerably in
their degrees of formality. For Russian, we have used the ParaSol corpus, a parallel corpus of literary texts (cf. von Waldenfels 2011). It should be noticed that our corpora contain original language as well as translations. We have used parallel corpora because that allowed us, to some extent, to identify non-canonical uses of the second person automatically. For instance, we could use “dedicated” impersonal pronouns like Germ. man in the German part of the corpus to identify non-canonical uses of second person forms in the corresponding sentence from another language (of which man is the translational equivalent). Given that the ratio of non-canonical to canonical uses of the second person is rather low (for example, in the German part of the OpenSubtitles corpus it is approximately 1:200), this considerably facilitated the search for relevant data. As we will not interpret our data quantitatively, we take it that the procedure of data extraction is not of crucial importance. We will use the data basically for illustration purposes.

3. Second person forms and generalization

3.1 Generalizing from a representative

In its general sense, the term “generalization” is used mainly in two ways, as “[t]he action or process of forming or expressing a general concept or proposition on the basis of inference from particular instances”, or as “[a] concept or proposition arising from this process” (OED, s.v. generalization). In the present context we are primarily interested in the second meaning, in generalization as a type of proposition. A generalization thus understood is a proposition which expresses, extensionally speaking, a non-accidental subset relation holding between two properties, say, A ⊆ B – for instance, All men are mortal. Generalizations are non-accidental insofar as the fact that A is a subset of B is regarded as a more or less intrinsic property of A. Generalizations are thus based on intensional meanings, e.g. on the intensions of the predicates “man” and “mortal”. Moreover, generalizations are often regarded as allowing for exceptions, perhaps because of their intensional nature. While a statement expressing contingent universal quantification, such as All men in this room are blond, would normally be evaluated as “false” if there was a single black-haired man in the room, a generalization of the type Dogs are good-natured is likely to allow for exceptions.

Generalizations can be made over individuals as well as states of affairs. Given that it seems to make a difference for the distribution of (specific types of) impersonal pronouns whether a speaker generalizes over individuals or states of affairs, typologies of impersonal pronouns normally keep these cases apart. For instance, Gast and van der Auwera (2013) distinguish between “episodic” and “generic”
sentences or states of affairs, and between “universal” vs. “existential” quantification for the domain of individuals. While the two parameters correlate strongly, they are not co-extensive, as there are cases of impersonal pronouns with universal reference in episodic sentences. For instance, “episodic modals” as in *One could see that the minister was drunk* refer to a particular situation, but *one* generalizes over all individuals present on the occasion.

As the present contribution is not primarily concerned with the sentence semantics of impersonal pronouns, but with the interpretation of impersonal you from a pragmatic point of view, we will disregard the distinction between generalizations at the level of the state of affairs (generic vs. episodic), and at the level of the individual (universal vs. existential). In the vast majority of cases, sentences with impersonal you generalize over both individuals and states of affairs.

Generalizations over individuals are often expressed using bare plural nouns (*Dogs are good-natured*) or some other type of nominal predication. A generalization over states of affairs is most naturally expressed using a conditional: *When/if it rains, the ground gets muddy* means that in all situations in which it rains, the ground gets muddy or, put differently, the set of situations in which it rains is a subset of the set of situations in which the ground gets muddy. Given that non-canonical uses of the second person, as we will argue, invariably imply generalization, it comes as no surprise that they are typically found in conditionals. Relevant examples are given in (7)–(9).

(7)  So if you are going to make this kind of comment, you need to be sure that you have some people from your own political family to support you. [EP]

(8)  Wenn du tust, was du immer getan hast, wirst du bekommen, was du immer bekommen hast. ‘If you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always got.’ [EP]

(9)  […] i sladkaâ žut’ podkatyvaet k serdcu, kogda dumaeš’ o tom, čto v ètom dome sejčas pospevaet avtor “Don Kihota”, ili “Fausta”… ‘[…] and a sweet awe creeps into one’s heart at the thought [lit.: when you think] that in this house there is now ripening the future author of a Don Quixote or a Faust…’ [PS]

When interpreted out of context, such sentences are often ambiguous between an addressee-specific and a generalizing reading. For instance, (7) could be interpreted in such a way that it applies to the addressee only; alternatively, it can be interpreted as having general validity (which is the reading intended in the present context, as far as we can tell). In this case there seems to be a process of reasoning that we could call “induction from representative”: a statement is made about the addressee, and there is no reason to assume that the addressee is, in any way,
different from any other member of the class of referents under discussion. This
type of inference can be regarded as an “inference to stereotype” (Atlas & Levin-
son 1981), an I-implicature in terms of Levinson (2000). In using second person
forms in this way, speakers abstract away from the individual differences between
referents and focus on their common property or properties – in the case of (7),
the property of being a politician. Such instances of reference to the addressee qua
member and representative of some category can be made explicit in English with
as-apposition, as in (10). The same type of structure is available in German (with
als). The generalizing nature of the sentences in question can be explicated by
adding adverbs like generally.

(10) So if you [as a (sensible) politician] are going to make this kind of
    comment, you [generally] need to be sure that you have some people from
    your own political family to support you.

In Russian, the status of the addressee (or any other referent) as a representative
of a category can be expressed with a participial form of the copula byt’ (budući),
as in (11).

(11) Â èto tože isproboval – [budući ohotnikom] i na podmetki ne zarabotać,
    bol’še istopčes’.
    “I, too, have gone through this,
    [as a hunter] you don’t even earn the soles that you run down.” [PS]

The category referenced by non-canonical second person forms is mostly not
made explicit in actual discourse, but it can be inferred from the context. In (12),
for instance, as in many other examples from the Europarl corpus, it is clear that
you stands for politicians or decision makers of some type.

(12) Thirdly, you need to create institutions which respect those differences, and
    the fourth element is working together in the common interest. [EP]

The German example in (13) is introduced as a maxim of the Aymara, whose pres-
ident spoke to the European Parliament, and thus minimally applies to all Aymara,
perhaps to all human beings.

(13) … du sollst nicht stehlen, du sollst nicht schwach sein, du sollst nicht lügen.
    ’You must not steal, you must not be weak, you must not lie.’ [EP]

In the Russian example (14), the addressee stands for strangers, or at least non-
lords (note that the form of the verb in (14) is not unambiguously a second person
form, but the context makes it clear that a non-canonical second person reading
is intended).
(14) Raz už zagovoril, tak už nepremenno arestovat’!
'What is it – you start a conversation, and right away it's got to be an arrest!' [PS]

As mentioned above, the type of generalization described in this section can be regarded as an inference by default – an I-implicature in the sense of Levinson (2000). As long as there is no reason to assume that the statement made about the addressee does not hold of the category represented by him/her, it will be generalized to that category. Such inference by default can be cancelled, for instance, by adding a reason clause, which makes it clear that the proposition expressed only holds of the addressee. The material in brackets in (15) has been added to an original example from the Europarl corpus.

(15) Finally, you should stop supporting the EU/China human rights dialogue [because you are an interested party]. [EP]

3.2 Generalization based on typification

There are impersonal uses of the second person singular that do not prima facie imply generalization. A relevant example is given in (16), taken from a movie. It is an answer given to the question What’s worse? (cf. (5) above for a similar example from German).

(16) You’re stuck on the Bay Bridge in traffic… and you’ve just had two strong cups of coffee and three bran muffins. [OS]

That the sentence is not obviously generalizing is reflected in the fact that we could not simply insert a generalizing adverbial such as generally (cf. (17)), nor could we easily find an appropriate as-apposition for such examples.

(17) # You’re generally stuck on the Bay Bridge in traffic… and you’ve just had two strong cups of coffee and three bran muffins.

We argue nevertheless that examples like (16), too, imply a generalization. This sentence, like any other sentence of its type, does not make reference to specific situations but epitomizes a type of situation. As one answer given to the question What’s worse?, it represents a situation type of “being desperate, stuck in an unpleasant situation without an obvious way out”. Another answer to that question is the one given in (18), epitomizing a situation of high expectations and pleasant anticipation resulting in extreme disappointment or even disgust.

(18) You go to your favourite restaurant… order your favourite meal, take a bite… and under the steak is a scabby Band-Aid. [OS]
Even though sentences of the type of (16) and (18) do not readily accept adverbials like *generally*, they express generalizations via typification. A hypothetical situation stands for any other situation of a similar type. This also implies generalization at the level of the participant: the (here, negative) emotions associated with the hypothetical situations will be experienced by anybody participating in a situation of the relevant type. Remember that (16) and (18) are answers to the question *What's worse?* The generalizing nature of the answers can be explicated by embedding the whole proposition under an expression of typification (*type of*), as in (19).

(19) *What's worse?*

The type of emotion that any individual *x* would (generally) experience when *x* goes to *x*’s favourite restaurant, orders *x*’s favourite meal, takes a bite… and under the steak is a scabby Band-Aid.

Examples of the *What's worse*-type can be subsumed under the term “situational typification” or, focusing on the participant, “participant typification”. Typification is also possible at the level of the individual. A relevant example from Russian is given in (20), an utterance attributed to Pontius Pilate in a book.

(20)  Vse vremâ tasovat’ vojska, čitat’ donosy i âbedy, iz kotoryh k tomu že polovina napisana na tebâ samogo! Soglasites’, čto èto skučno. O, esli by ne imperatorskàâ služba!..

‘The shifting of troops all the time, reading denunciations and calumnies, half of which, moreover, are written against yourself! You must agree, it’s boring. Oh, if it weren’t for the imperial service!’ [PS]

(20) is not so much about the individual Pontius Pilate as it is about his office, his duties, his way of life etc., and the non-canonical use of the second person makes it clear that anyone else, in the position of Pontius Pilate, would experience the same kind of boredom. Such cases can be characterized as instances of “referential typification”.

Given that even cases like (16), (18) and (20) express generalization – on the basis of typification – we believe that impersonal uses of the second person are invariably generalizing. Note that the properties attributed to the category in question have to be more or less intrinsic to allow for generalization, e.g. insofar as (20) seems to convey that being the prefect of Judaea is intrinsically boring.

4. Second person forms and simulation

Specific non-canonical uses of the second person occur in sentences that are not, literally speaking, true. For instance, the addressee of (16), in all likelihood, did not find a Band-Aid under his steak at any time in his life, and the addressee of (20) cannot be Pontius Pilate, who is speaking. We will assume such cases to
imply “simulation”, a term which was introduced in the literature on impersonal pronouns by Moltmann (2006, 2010) (cf. also Malamud 2012). We can distinguish two types of simulation (Section 4.1): (i) the addressee is invited to simulate participating in a situation in which she does not actually participate (“participant simulation”), and (ii) the addressee is invited to attribute to herself (individual-level) properties that she does not actually have (“category simulation”). As we will aim to show, participant and category simulation, though not being entirely independent of each other, can be combined and cross-classified (Section 4.2).

4.1 Participant simulation and category simulation

In cases of participant simulation, illustrated above with (4)–(6) as well as (16) and (18), a statement is made about the addressee that is not, literally speaking, true. Another pertinent example from Russian is given in (21).

(21) [This world of ours had been struck by storms of intolerance, hope, and despair, all together. … Imagine a river, wide and majestic, which flows for miles and miles between strong embankments, where the land is firm. At a certain point, the river, out of weariness […] no longer knows what it is, loses its identity. It becomes its own delta. A major branch may remain, but many break off from it in every direction, and some flow together again, into one another, and]
… i ty uže ne možeš’ skazat’, čto čemu poslužilo pričinoj, i ty uže ne znaeš’, čto tut eše možno nazyvat’ rekoj, a čto – uže morem
‘… you can’t tell what begets what, and sometimes you can’t tell what is still river and what is already sea.’ [PS]

Unlike most examples of its type, (21) contains an explicit instruction to simulate a situation in the preceding text (“Imagine a river, wide and majestic…”). A scene is then described which the addressee is invited to imagine – a situation for which the addressee is invited to simulate participation.

In cases of category simulation, what is simulated is not participation in a given situation, but having specific (individual-level) properties, or even being a specific person. Such cases imply a referential restriction at the propositional level. The range of reference is restricted in such a way that the addressee cannot be literally included in the set of possible referents. Referential restrictions may be provided by the context or speech situation, as in (2) above (“One way to win a vote…”, which restricts the referential range to politicians), or they can be linguistically encoded, e.g. in the form of an as-apposition, as in (22).

(22) This becomes apparent if you go to that part of the world as an EU representative, when you will find, for example, that no one is satisfied with a statement that you are representing the European Union – you will always be asked which Member State you come from. [EP]
While in (22), it is not entirely clear to what extent the addressees are potentially included in the class of EU-representatives, (23) seems to be a clearer case of category simulation. Most of the audience – the members of the European Parliament – are not actually trade unionists, so they are not literally included in the range of reference.

(23) Of course it is essential to seek a majority but, as every trade union knows, to secure a 3% pay rise you must start by asking for 6%. [EP]

The degree of simulation in (23) is rather minor, however, as it will probably not be difficult, even for right-wing politicians, to imagine themselves as trade unionists in pay rise negotiations. This is different in (20) above (about Pontius Pilate), as well as in the German example (24), which applies only to the speaker (Batman).

(24) [Context: Batman and Robin both want to kill Harvey. Robin wants to be Batman’s partner, so Batman explains what this would mean for him: “Then it will happen this way: You make the kill. But your pain doesn’t die with Harvey, it grows.”]

Du rennst in die Nacht hinein, um ein anderes Gesicht zu finden, und noch eins, bis du eines schrecklichen Tages merkst, daß Rache der Inhalt deines Lebens ist, ohne zu wissen weshalb. [OS]

‘So you run into the night to find another face, and another, and another, until one terrible morning you wake up and realize that revenge has become your whole life. And you won’t know why.’

In the recent literature on impersonal pronouns (e.g. Gast & van der Auwera 2013), the presence or absence of simulation is reflected in the distinction between the inclusion or exclusion of the addressee in the range of reference of a pronoun. Cases of (category or participant) simulation are those that are classified as “exclusive”. We use the concept of “simulation” in the present context because we focus on the interpretive effects of the second person singular (used impersonally) and, in particular, the expression of empathy associated with such uses.

4.2 Cross-classifying category and participant simulation

As pointed out above, participant and category simulation are, in principle, independent of each other, but they can co-occur. In other words, the different types of simulation can be cross-classified. Moreover, simulation can be regarded as a matter of degree. We will distinguish three levels for both types of simulation, so that we end up with nine possible types of simulation, two of which are logically excluded, however.

For participant simulation, there are two extreme cases, i.e. the statement of a factual generalization, which does not imply any degree of simulation (e.g. (25)
and reference to non-factual, simulated events which are represented linguistically as factual (e.g. (26)).

(25) … du sollst nicht stehlen, du sollst nicht schwach sein, du sollst nicht lügen. 'You must not steal, you must not be weak, you must not lie.' [EP]
(26) You're going down the highway, you're having a wonderful time, singing a song, and suddenly – you get into an argument. (Kitagawa & Lehrer 1990: 749)

Reference to hypothetical events in conditional or modalized clauses can be regarded as an intermediate type, as it implies the imagination of non-factual situations. The difference between participant simulation and hypothetical event descriptions is that the latter are grammatically marked as non-factual, while the former are presented as if they were true. In the German example (27), impersonal du occurs in an indirect question and is thus not represented as actually taking place. As its non-factual status is indicated, there is no (participant) simulation involved.

(27) Kellnerinnen würden sich für die Kasse nie eine Kugel einfangen. Den Tellerabräumern ist es egal, ob du den Besitzer beklaust. Und die Gäste wissen gar nicht, was los ist. Sie essen, und plötzlich hältst du ihnen eine Knarre ins Gesicht.

'Waitresses, forget it, they ain’t takin’ a bullet for the register. Busboys, some wetback getting’ paid a dollar fifty an hour gonna really give a fuck you’re stealin’ from the owner. Customers are sittin’ there with food in their mouths, they don’t know what’s goin’ on. One minute they’re havin’ a Denver omelette, next minute somebody’s stickin’ a gun in their face.' [OS]

As regards referential restriction, we can also distinguish between two major cases: (i) the addressee is included in the range of reference (and the clause is truth-conditionally valid), or (ii) there is a referential restriction factually excluding the addressee. In the latter case, we can moreover make a gradual distinction between a broader type of restriction referencing a category (e.g. trade unionists, as in (23)) and narrower types of restriction, in an extreme case, to an individual (e.g. Batman in (24)). Once again, we should mention, however, that we are really dealing with a scale here. Even at the unrestricted end, there are various types of implicit restrictions. For instance, ethical statements of the form “You should not…” often do not apply to all human beings indistinguishably and allow for exceptions such as children of a specific age, or severely disabled people.

A cross-classification of “participation” – with the levels “factual”, “hypothetical” and “simulated”, on the x-axis – and the dimension of “referential restriction” – with the three levels “addressee included”, “addressee excluded/broad category simulation”, and “addressee excluded/narrow category simulation” on the y-axis – is shown in Table 1. The cells are numbered for future reference. Moreover, they
contain references to examples either mentioned in the text above, or given below. Cells I and IV are shaded because they are conceptually impossible: when the addressee is excluded, the sentence cannot be literally true.

Table 1. A cross-classification of referential and situational simulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referential Range</th>
<th>Addressee Excluded</th>
<th>Addressee Excluded</th>
<th>Addressee Included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrow Category Simulation</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressee Excluded</td>
<td>e.g. (28)</td>
<td>e.g. (4), (20), (24)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>e.g. (30), (31)</td>
<td>e.g. (6), (23)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>e.g. (11)–(14)</td>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressee Included</td>
<td>e.g. (1)–(3)</td>
<td>e.g. (16), (21), (27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples have been given for most of the cells, but we will provide more illustration here. (28) provides an example of a narrow referential restriction in a hypothetical situation (cell II). In (29), the referential restriction is looser than in (24) – the predication applies to Hobbits going out to have adventures – but the situation is simulated (cell VI).

(28) Wenn du in den Mondschatten eintrittst und der Mond zwischen dir und der Sonne ist, siehst du Sterne, die klarer sind, als was du je zuvor in den klarsten Erdennächten gesehen hast.

‘When you go into the shadow of the moon … and the moon is between you and the sun, then you see stars that are more brilliant than anything you’ve seen … on the clearest nights here on Earth.’ [OS]

(29) Bilbo to Frodo: “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet … … there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to…” [OS]

(30) and (31) exemplify cell V.

(30) Bei denen findest du eh’ nix! Das, was du brauchst, kriegst du nicht.

‘You won’t find anything anyway in their documents; you won’t get what you need.’ [EP]4

(31) Kogda pišeš’ vsâkie istorii, to tebâ časten’ko sprašivaût: …

‘When you write stories, people often ask you: …’ [PS]

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4. This is our translation. The English translation in the Europarl corpus is much freer and does not make use of a second person form: “Journalists have come to believe that they might as well be looking for needles in haystacks as trying to find the documentation they need.”
The cross-classification of referent and participant simulation shown in Table 1 allows us to make degrees of simulation more explicit. A minimal degree of simulation is found in cell VII, a maximal degree in cell III. Cells II and VI imply higher degrees of simulation than cell V, etc. While it is not our intention to quantify over degrees of simulation, it is should be borne in mind that such degrees exist, and at least for a rough comparison of situation types, Table 1 may provide a useful frame of reference.

5. The pragmatic effects of non-canonical uses of the second person

So far, we have distinguished two interpretive features of using a second person form non-canonically, which are located at a semantic level insofar as they concern truth conditions: the expression of a generalization, which we have argued is always present, and simulation, which we have assumed, following Moltmann (2006, 2010) (on one), to characterize those cases where the predicate expressed in the clause does not literally hold of the addressee. In this section we turn to the pragmatic effects of non-canonical second person forms. Such effects have been described in some detail in the relevant literature, mostly for English, but also for Danish and Spanish, among other languages. They have to do with modesty/avoiding explicit reference to oneself, vagueness, involvement/empathy, camaraderie/solidarity between the speech participants, etc. (cf. O’Connor 1994; Nielsen et al. 2009; Stirling & Manderson 2011; Myers & Lampropoulou 2012, among others). We will focus on those aspects that we believe to be most essential, i.e. joint empathy with the set of referents over which a generalization is made, and solidarity between the speech participants. Having established these notions in Section 5.1, we will consider some specific cases of simulation in Section 5.2, with a focus on the pragmatic effects.

5.1 Joint empathy and solidarity

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive review of the various definitions of empathy (see Davis 1996: 1–12; Batson 2009). The term has been applied to a wide range of phenomena. What seems to be crucial for our purposes is the aspect of perspective-taking, i.e. “the attempts by one individual to understand another by imagining the other’s perspective” (Davis 1996: 17). As a starting point, we refer to the definition of Rogers (1959: 210–211), who defines empathy as a state which implies

[perceiving] the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person…
We will aim to show that in non-canonical uses of the second person, speakers and addressee(s) jointly empathize with the group of referents about which a statement is made. We will call this group the “target of empathy”, abbreviated as “T”. For example, in (32) (= (22)), the target of empathy is explicitly identified as “an EU representative”.

(32) This becomes apparent if you go to that part of the world as an EU representative, when you will find, for example, that no one is satisfied with a statement that you are representing the European Union – you will always be asked which Member State you come from. [EP]

Joint empathy presupposes that the speech participants are willing to share a perspective. As it is the speaker who invites the addressee to empathize with the target of empathy, the use of non-canonical second person forms thus presupposes that the addressee is willing to take the perspective of the target of empathy, T, together with the speaker. This, in turn, implies that the addressee is willing to behave in a cooperative way, i.e. to show solidarity with the speaker. We use the term “solidarity” as the main antagonistic force of “power” in the negotiation of social relations (cf. Brown & Gilman 1960). Roughly speaking, solidarity can be defined as an attitude of common group membership that is based on perceived similarities, rather than differences, and symmetry rather than asymmetry, between the speaker and the addressee. Accordingly, we can expect the use of non-canonical second person forms to be associated with the display of solidarity, e.g. by pointing out aspects of similarity between the speaker and the addressee with respect to some relevant dimension (such as age, occupation or social identity), and shared experiences.

Empathy and solidarity are located at different levels of meaning. Empathy is, broadly speaking, a type of “expressive meaning”: meaning which “covaries with characteristics of the speaker” (Brown 1958: 307, quoted in Lyons 1977: 51), or “the kind of meaning by virtue of which speakers express, rather than describe, their beliefs, attitudes and feelings” (Lyons 1995: 44). It has to do with subjectivity and perspective-taking. While empathy is not necessarily associated with emotions or evaluations – which distinguishes it from sympathy and antipathy – it implies the emulation of the physical and psychological set-up of some individual. Solidarity, by contrast, is a relationship between speech participants and thus an aspect of “social meaning”, broadly conceived (cf. Lyons 1977).

What characterizes the second person used impersonally, from a pragmatic point of view, is, we claim, “joint empathy”: The speaker and the addressee, on the basis of an attitude of solidarity, jointly empathize with the members of some set of individuals. The speaker intends to evoke empathy in the addressee by using a second person form. The addressee, if not literally included in the category constituting the target of empathy, is thus invited to engage in simulation, in order to be able to self-ascribe the property attributed.
It is difficult to find appropriate terminology for the types of pragmatic meanings and preconditions associated with non-canonical uses of the second person. We will assume that solidarity and empathy have the status of a specific type of presupposition, which we call ‘interpersonal presupposition’, similar to Stalnaker’s (1974: 200) “pragmatic presuppositions” (“P pragmatically presupposes Q iff whenever the utterance of P is conversationally acceptable, the speaker of P assumes Q and believes his audience to assume Q as well”). The concept of interpersonal presupposition is defined in (33).

(33) In making an utterance U, speaker S interpersonally presupposes P with respect to the addressee A iff P is a precondition for U to successfully convey S’s communicative intentions to A.

A trivial type of interpersonal presupposition is, for instance, that A speaks S’s language. A less trivial type concerns A’s attitudes, which may provide necessary conditions for some attitudinal meaning to be conveyed successfully by S to A.

For a felicitous use of non-canonical instances of the second person, we can now posit two types of interpersonal presuppositions: (i) the addressee’s showing (or at least willingness to show) solidarity with the speaker, and (ii) the addressee’s empathizing (or at least willingness to empathize) with the target of empathy. On this basis, we will argue below that simulation is a process of accommodation, a repair strategy parallel to presupposition accommodation for cases of descriptive or propositional meaning (cf. Karttunen 1974; von Fintel 2008).

5.2 Some cases of non-canonical second person forms

We will now consider the sub-cases of non-canonical second person forms as distinguished in Table 1, focusing on the effects of joint empathy and solidarity. We will oppose factual and hypothetical situations to simulated ones, thus distinguishing between the presence and absence of simulation.

5.2.1 Factual situation, addressee is included

In cells VII and VIII, the addressee is included in the range of reference, there is no referential restriction, and the situation is either factual or modalized. A pertinent (modalized) example is repeated in (34) (=7)).

(34) So if you are going to make this kind of comment, you need to be sure that you have some people from your own political family to support you. [EP]

The speaker – a politician – makes a statement about the addressee as a representative of the target of empathy, politicians. Since the addressee, too, is in fact a member of this category, presupposing him or her to empathize with the category of politicians is rather straightforward, and empathy is here simply self-empathy. Solidarity follows from joint membership to a prominent category (politicians).
This situation is depicted in Figure 1. The rounded rectangle stands for the feeling of solidarity between S and A. The ovals labelled “R” and “P” stand for “referential class” and “participation” (in a given situation), respectively. In the case of (34), R corresponds to politicians, and P to participation in the relevant situation (e.g. \( \lambda x[ x \text{ needs people to support } x ] \)). T is identical to R, as politicians are the target of empathy. The predicates denoting the situations in question are here represented using the \( \lambda \)-notation. They are represented as being interpreted relative to a model \( M \), which will allow us to distinguish between “real-world models” and “simulated models” in cases of simulation (cf. also Gast et al. forthcoming for the roles of models in the process of simulation).

\[
R = T = \lambda x[ x \text{ is a politician in } M ] \\
P = \lambda x[ x \text{ needs some people } \ldots \text{ to support } x \text{ in } M ]
\]

**Figure 1.** Speaker and addressee are both included in \( R (=T) \) and \( P \)

### 5.2.2 Simulated situation, addressee is included

Cell IX in Table 1 describes a situation where only participant simulation, but no category simulation, is involved. The addressee, while not having to attribute any new individual-level properties to herself, is invited to imagine herself in a situation which does not actually take place, but which is conceivable for her – the type of “What’s worse”-scenario in (16) (“You’re stuck on the Bay Bridge in traffic…”) and (18) (“You go to your favorite restaurant…”). The German example (5), which is of this type, is repeated in (35).

\[
(35) \quad \text{Kein Kabelfernsehen, } du \text{ hast die Wahl zwischen Synchronschwimmen… oder…} \\
\quad \text{‘(There is) no cable TV, you have the choice between synchronized swimming… or…’ [OS]}
\]

This situation is represented in diagram form in Figure 2. S and A are not included in \( P \), i.e. they do not actually participate in the situation type \( P \). However, \( P \) is extended to \( P' \) (by participant simulation) in such a way that it includes S and A. \( P' \) corresponds to the set of individuals that participate in the situation in question, in the simulation model \( M' \) (cf. Gast et al. forthcoming). R is basically unrestricted and hence corresponds to the category ‘human being’.
5.2.3 *Simulated situation, addressee is excluded*

Within the cases of category simulation, we have distinguished two cases, those where a category of individuals is generalized over, and those where an individual typifies a given category. The two cases basically differ with respect to the cardinality of the category \( R \) and can thus be treated on a par here. (20) – here repeated as (36) – is a generalization about the category “prefect of Judaea”.

\[(36) \quad Vse \ vrem\’a \ tasovat’ \ vojska, \ citat’ \ donosy \ i \ ábedy, \ iz \ kotoryh \ k \ tomu \ že \ polovina \ napisana \ na \ tebâ \ samogo! \ Soglasites’, \ čto \ èto \ skučno. \ O, \ esli \ by \ ne \ imperatorskââ \ služba!.. \]
\n‘The shifting of troops all the time, reading denunciations and calumnies, half of which, moreover, are written against *yourself*! You must agree, it’s boring. Oh, if it weren’t for the imperial service!’ [PS]

This case is depicted in Figure 3. The addressee \( A \) is not part of the category \( R \) (prefect of Judaea). Given that only prefects can participate in the situation in question, \( A \) is not an element of \( P \), either. Via simulation, both \( R \) and \( P \) are extended in such a way as to include \( A \), and the newly created category is at the same time the target of empathy \( T \).
The solidarity effect can also arise if the speaker is not part of either R or P, as in (37), said by a member of the European Parliament to other members of that parliament about refugees trying to enter Europe. The type of simulation exemplified in (37) is represented diagrammatically in Figure 4.

(37)  I think you would need to be the invisible man or jump down from a satellite. [EP]

\[
\begin{align*}
R &= \lambda x [x \text{ is a refugee in } M] \\
P &= \lambda x [x \text{ would have to be the invisible man in } M] \\
P' &= R' = T \\
&= \lambda x [x \text{ is a refugee and } x \text{ would have to be the invisible man in } M']
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 4. Neither speaker nor addressee is included in R or P

5.3 Accommodation and coercion of simulation and empathy

We have regarded the condition of empathy as an interpersonal presupposition, at an expressive level. The speaker assumes that the addressee is empathic, or at least willing to empathize, with the target of empathy. The likelihood that an empathic reaction on the part of the addressee will take place depends on several factors, including the nature of the situation and the “degree of similarity between the observer and target” (Davis 1996: 15). In the simplest case, the addressee is a member of the category in question (cf. the inclusive cases, as in Cell VII in Table 1), and is thus intrinsically empathic and need not change his/her perspective. When (s)he is not a member of that category, (s)he will have to simulate such membership. Simulation is thus a precondition of empathy. Given that we have regarded empathy as a type of presupposition, we can regard simulation as an instance of presupposition accommodation (Karttunen 1974; von Fintel 2008). As accommodation is necessary to appropriately understand a sentence with an impersonal use of the second person, the non-canonical use of the second person implies an invitation to accommodate the right perspective. As a matter of fact, the addressee does not have much of a choice and is thus “coerced” into a process of accommodation and, hence, simulation. Consider the example in (38). A violent criminal in prison writes to a journalist about his experiences in stabbing other prisoners. Even if the journalist addressed does not empathize with someone who does such things, the use of impersonal you, in a way, forces the addressee to share the writer’s perspective, or the perspective of any other violent criminal.
(38) Here is how it is: you are both alone in his cell. You’ve slipped out a knife [...]. You’re holding it besides your leg so he can’t see it. The enemy is smiling and chattering away about something. You see his eyes: green-blue, liquid. He thinks you’re his fool; he trusts you. You see the spot. It’s a target between the second and third button on his shirt. As you calmly talk and smile, you move your left foot to the side to step across his right-side body length. [...] (Abbot 1991: 76; cited in O’Connor 1994: 53–54)

In most cases, however, cooperative speakers will only invite addressees to empathize with the relevant category if they have good reasons to assume that the addressee is either empathic to that category already, or else willing to empathize with it. The willingness to share a perspective with the speaker, in turn, has also been regarded as a type of interpersonal presupposition, at the level of social meaning.

6. Where do generalized empathy and solidarity come from?

We have argued that non-canonical uses of the second person are associated with the expression of generalized empathy. The question arises as to where this effect comes from. We believe that the generalizing character of the relevant sentences is contributed by the sentential context. Sentences with non-canonical second person forms keep their generalizing character if we replace the pronouns with an indefinite noun phrase. (39)a. and (39)b. are therefore basically equivalent.

(39) a. When you go into the shadow of the moon … then you see stars that are more brilliant than anything you’ve seen … (= (25))

b. When an astronaut goes into the shadow of the moon… (s)he sees the stars that are more brilliant than anything (s)he has seen…

What makes (39)a. and (39)b. different is the presence of empathy in the former example. We argue that the contribution made by the second person form in the relevant contexts is precisely the expression of empathy. This can be illustrated with minimal pairs from the three languages under consideration. Let us start with English. The impersonal pronoun one is known to be basically equivalent to non-canonical you. There is an obvious register difference between them, but that is not the whole story. As Bolinger (1979), among others, has shown, there are subtle contrasts in acceptability that appear to be related to the presence or absence of empathy (see also Malamud 2012: 13–14). Bolinger (1979: 202) provides the pair of examples reproduced in (40).
(40) a. Everybody loses a loved one – but when it happens you realize it's not a cause for you or anybody to despair.

b. *Everybody loses a loved one – but when it happens one realizes it's not a cause for one or anybody to despair.

(40) b. is considered ungrammatical (in Bolinger’s judgment) because it would be awkward to conjoin one with an indefinite pronoun like anybody, which, in the type of context illustrated in (40), expresses universal quantification. Both pronouns would basically mean the same thing. With you this problem does not arise – in our view, because you (interpersonally) presupposes empathy, whereas anybody does not. There is thus a conjunction of those that are emotionally affected (you), and those that are not (anybody [else]).

Empathy is also what distinguishes non-canonical uses of the second person from other strategies of expressing impersonal reference in Germanic languages other than English. German, for instance, has a dedicated impersonal pronoun man, which can often be used interchangeably with du “you”. Unlike du, man does not, however, force the addressee to empathize with the relevant category. A pair of relevant German sentences is given in (41). Example a. is neutral with respect to empathy and could be said to anyone. Example b. implies the type of accommodation that is also characteristic of (38) above. While (41)a. is basically inoffensive and neutral, (41)b. coerces the speaker into empathizing with the stabber, and moreover into a relationship of solidarity with the speaker.

(41) [What is it like to stab a person?]
   a. Man hält ein Messer in der Hand …
   b. Du hältst ein Messer in der Hand …
      ‘You are holding a knife in your hand…’

A similar effect can be observed in Russian. Russian has the cross-linguistically rare property of allowing uses of the third person plural in which the addressee is included in the range of referents. Consider (the made-up example) (42).

(42) Soveršенно estestvenno čto vas prinimaet za sumasšedšego.
   ‘It’s quite natural that you are taken for a madman.’
   (lit.: ‘… that they (including me) take you to be a madman.’)

A speaker uttering (42) at least potentially subscribes to the offensive content of the proposition. There is no display of empathy, however. In this respect the third person plural (in its impersonal use) differs from the second person singular. Now consider (43) and (44). A Ukrainian from Kiev disapproving of Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 would be unlikely to utter (43). By contrast, (44) is unproblematic.
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(43) V Krymu govoris’ po-russki.
    ‘In Crimea you speak Russian.’

(44) V Krymu govorât po-russki.
    ‘In Crimea they speak Russian.’

Such examples show that the non-canonical uses of the second person singular discussed in this paper differ from other strategies of impersonal reference in presupposing that the addressee is willing to empathize with the (set of) referent(s) under discussion. If this presupposition is not met, accommodation is required to render the relevant utterances felicitous.

To summarize, we believe that the generalizing component of non-canonical second person forms is a function of the sentential context, while empathy is contributed by the second person form. From a lexical-semantic point of view, this seems to be straightforward. Note that Wechsler (2010) has proposed to analyse all second person forms as denoting an attitude de se, i.e. as implying self-ascription of properties at some level. While we cannot go into more detail with respect to this question at this point, it seems to us that a de se interpretation of second person forms could provide a reasonable explanation for the observation that second person forms induce empathy.

Finally, the question remains as to where the attitude of solidarity, which we have claimed to characterize non-canonical second person forms at a social level, comes from. The sentential context does not seem to induce such solidarity, nor does the second person form itself. To be sure, it is normally the (informal) T-forms of second person pronouns that are used for generalized empathy, but impersonal second person forms are also found in languages that do not distinguish between formal and informal variants of second person forms.

We believe that solidarity is a precondition – an interpersonal presupposition – for the expression of generalized empathy. Generalized empathy implies that the speaker and the addressee share a perspective. In cases of simulation, the addressee needs to adopt and accommodate the perspective of the target of empathy, which is also the perspective of the speaker. This willingness presupposes not only a cooperative speech behaviour but also an attitude of solidarity, of common group membership. When there is no solidarity present, it will thus be accommodated, much in the same way as empathy is accommodated if it is not present.

7. Conclusions

First considering the two interpretive effects of generalization and simulation associated with non-canonical uses of the second person, and distinguishing some
sub-cases of simulation (category and participant simulation), we have addressed
the question of how generalization and simulation relate to each other. We have
argued that non-canonical uses of the second person invariably express “gen-
eralized empathy” – a generalization over a category of referents with which the
speaker and the addressee jointly empathize. This category has been called the
“target of empathy”. If the speaker and the addressee are not, literally speaking,
members of the target of empathy, they can simulate belonging to that class. We
have assumed that in using a second person form non-canonically, the speaker
interpersonally presupposes that the addressee either empathizes with, or is will-
ing to empathize with, the target of empathy. This presupposition is based on an
attitude of solidarity between the speech act participants. We have pointed out that
the attitudes of empathy and of solidarity are located at different levels: empathy is
a type of expressive meaning and relates to members of a specific category (the tar-
get of empathy), while solidarity is a social meaning that holds between the speech
act participants (who are not necessarily empathic with each other).

Having provided a unifying analysis of non-canonical second person forms,
we could actually define this class in positive, rather than negative, terms. If our
analysis is correct, the term “generalized empathy” would be appropriate for this
use of the second person. Such uses would be opposed to direct-referential, deic-
tic uses. If we assume that deictic uses per se imply self-empathy and are, thus,
also inherently empathic – see Wechsler (2010) for a similar proposal in terms of
reference de se – the difference between canonical and non-canonical uses of
the second person would basically consist in the fact that a canonical use of the second
person implies “self-empathy”, whereas a non-canonical use implies “generalized
empathy” with others. While it seems to us that this line of reasoning is promis-
ing, more empirical research, qualitative and especially quantitative, is needed to
determine whether all uses of the second person fit into the classificatory sche-
mata proposed in the present contribution.

Acknowledgements

The present study emerged from a project on “A typology of human impersonal
pronouns”, jointly funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG, Ga-1288/6)
and the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (principal investigators V. Gast/DFG
and P. Cabredo Hofherr/ANR). Financial support from these institutions is grate-
fully acknowledged. We wish to thank two anonymous reviewers for valuable
comments and suggestions. Moreover, we are grateful for input from various col-
leagues, especially Patricia Cabredo Hofherr, Holger Diessel, Stephan Druskat,
Martin Schäfer and Christoph Rzymski.
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Sources

[EP] Europarl corpus
[OS] OpenSubtitles corpus
[PS] ParaSol corpus

Reference


