

'Disguised *I*': Generalization vs Individualization

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Abstract

Whether *one* is an indefinite pronoun, which denotes no person in particular, or a generic one often synonymous to *I*, is a long-standing issue in semantics. In the article we present evidence in favour of *one*'s generic nature, and argue that the pronouns *one* and *I*, despite being referentially identical, have denotational characteristics of their own, and therefore function in different ways. The pronoun *I*, which is characterized by the highest level of semiotic individualization, is the basic lexical unit employed to denote the speaker, but it is by no means the only one. In all languages there are numerous ways of referring to the addresser of the message, including the employment of lexical units with generic reference. In the present paper we are going to discuss the use of *one* instead of *I*, in which the former operates as a 'disguised *I*', particularly in the speech of people holding a high position. This function of *one* used to be sociolinguistically marked, but in the present-day society with its emphasis on egalitarianism and political correctness, in most cases, the speaker's choice of *one* is explained by his wish to sound more formal rather than more socially distinguished. However, the semantic features of this pronoun, as will be shown in the article, account for such linguistic interaction in which the use of *one* signalizes the existence of a certain distance between the interlocutors.

Key words: denotation, reference, sociolinguistically marked, peer group, social status, royalty, formal words.

Introduction

The use of personal pronouns to denote a generic person occurs across all natural languages, and the semantic characteristics of such use are also of a universal character. That is why the existence of generic pronouns in English is in expected accordance with this linguistic universal. It is the status of the pronoun *one* that makes the pronominal system of English somewhat different. We argue that this pronoun 'specializes' on the denotation of a generic person, and being frequently interchangeable with the personal pronouns *you* and *we* (used with generic reference), it 'attracts' them into a separate class of pronouns, which we describe as generic-personal. Thus, in our opinion, in English there is a special pronominal class, whose centre is the pronoun *one*.

Although there is a tradition of defining *one* as an indefinite rather than a generic pronoun, we are not alone in considering it a generic pronoun and more and more scholars are inclined to define it as such (see, for example, Bolinger 1977; Dahl 1997; Cohen 1999; Safir 2004; Moltmann 2006).

There is a variety of attitudes to pronominal meaning. Ours is based on the interpretation of meaning as the information conveyed by the word about its referent. The theoretical assumptions on which our attitude to pronominal meaning is based (Seliverstova

1988) allow us to insist that the information communicated by the addresser, who is using *one*, *you*, *we*, is not about an indefinite but about a generalized person.

To begin with, the term 'indefinite' itself is rather ambiguous and combines a number of features. Among the most apparent ones are those which deal with the representation of the object as a member of a certain class, one unknown to the speaker and/or the hearer. We think, however, that these characteristics are the consequences of the basic feature which the so-called indefinite linguistic units possess. Hence, in order to define this feature we focus on the information that the addressee receives on hearing or reading the word. Accordingly, when the information about the referent is insufficient or entirely lacking, we can speak about an indefinite mode of presentation. In this case the missing facts can be supplied in the following acts of speech. On the other hand, if the word conveys information about a generalized referent without pointing to the absence of data about it, we deal with generic reference. In the latter case the information about the referent is self-sufficient and is perceived as an abstraction, a concept which does not need further concretization. The generic-personal pronouns represent their referent in the way described: they denote a generalized participant of the given situation.

It should be pointed out that this participant is the subject of consciousness (the speaker or the hearer) – the very person on whose example a set of potential participants of the same situation is constructed. In the case of the pronoun *one* we deal with two variants of the same lexeme.

The first variant of *one* presents the referent of the word only as a participant of the situation, detached from the speaker's personality. This *one* is used in academic writing, in official documents, etc.

In the case of the second variant of *one* the subject of consciousness is a member of a certain closed set of people with the same scale of values. This peer group might be called 'me and those who are like me', in which the possible participants' attitudes to the situation are similar to the speaker's. As M. Halliday puts it, "You" and "one" often by implication denote any person I would approve of" (Halliday, Hasan 1978: 39). The criterion on which the group 'me and those who are like me' has been constructed in the speaker's mind can be deduced from the context. As studies have shown, these criteria differ in the cases of *one*, *we* and *you*.

Semiotic Characteristics of the Generic-Personal Pronouns

In order to explain these differences we have to touch upon the semiotic characteristics of each of these pronouns. It is known that the word characterizes its referent in various ways: the referent can be represented as a class, a member of a class or as an individual. Regarding these distinctions, it should be said that while the pronouns *you* and *we* characterize their referent as a personality, *one* presents it as merely a participant of the situation. One of the arguments in favour of this assumption is that *you* and *we* are genetically related to the corresponding personal pronouns *you* and *we*, while the status of *one* is that of the third person who does not have the characteristics of a personality.

The pronoun *we*, being plural in meaning, stands apart from *you* and *one*; the latter two are generally considered synonymous, and their differences are usually defined as

purely stylistic: *one* is regarded as a formal word, and *you* as informal. However, as we have said, this differentiation is more profound and lies in the semiotic representation of the referent. Thus, the members of the group covered by the generic-personal *you* are similar to the speaker in the sense that they are presented as individuals, while the members of the *one* peer group share social, gender, age, professional, etc. characteristics with the speaker. This use of *one* is often convenient when the speaker avoids speaking about himself straightforwardly. Rather, he thus disguises his utterance as a generic statement, suggesting that the addressee, being of the speaker's kind, is sure to understand all the implications of the situation in which he and the hearer have appeared. K. Safir calls this use a 'coy first person use of one': "The speaker employs *one* to represent a hypothetical typical person the salient properties of whom her audience is supposed to share, but who really has the properties of only the speaker herself. For example the sentence 'One spends one's millions with aplomb', uttered at a club of billionaire philanthropists, merely produces nods of recognition. The irony of this utterance is lost if rendered 'I spend my millions with aplomb'" (Safir 2004).

Thus, the pronoun *one* denotes a generalized member of a peer group, whereas it usually refers to a specific person – the speaker, the hearer or someone else whom the speaker empathizes with.

Use of *One* in Speech

In today's Britain the use of the pronoun *one* is typical of scientific and official discourse. In everyday speech its use is marked, and this is something all grammarians agree upon: "*One* is used in conversation mostly by 'careful' speakers, especially, perhaps by middle and upper class people and intellectuals" (Swan 1984:440). The English informants, whom we interviewed, gave the following characteristics to the use of *one* in their young English friends' everyday speech: 1. absence or rare use of the pronoun *one*, 2. deliberate employment of *one* in conversation to imitate academic style, the elders' old-fashioned speech habits or someone's pompous speech.

In the speech of young American speakers the use of *one* is even less common. In the United States, *one* sometimes has a high-flown feel to it; if anyone's speech abounds in this pronoun, it leaves an impression of being pretentious (Shopen, Williams 1981:75). On one of internet forums a young American writes that when he was still at university, the professor gave him a lower score only because in his talk he had used the pronoun *one* instead of *you*. The teacher explained that because of *one* his speech sounded arrogant and snobbish to the audience (Practice Your English, <<http://www.efl.ru>, 2005>).

The analysis carried out has shown that the second variant of the pronoun *one* can be characterized by a meaning which V. Karasik calls 'a meaning of social status': "The meaning of status is a reflection of inequality between the partners of communication, one of whom has the right to speak on behalf of the society or some part of the society in the capacity of someone who expresses the social norms of behavior" (Karasik 1989:67). V. Naumov thinks that the so-called speech habits are unconscious markers of a person or of part of the linguistic community, which is generated on the basis of common features (the same social class, the same age, etc.) (Naumov 2006: 6). Thus, this use

of *one*, first of all, characterizes the speaker as someone who considers himself distinguished in this or that respect.

Besides saying something about himself, by using *one*, the speaker shows his attitude to the hearer. The addressee can be regarded by the addresser as his equal, as a member of a prestigious group who shares its norms and beliefs with him.

Let's consider the following example:

(1) *There are some things a gentleman can't do, Eleanor. Anything else I'll do gladly. God knows, I don't attach any importance to that sort of thing, but if one's a sahib one can't help it, and damn it all, especially in these days, one does owe something to one's class.* (S. Maugham)

As we see, the speaker prides himself on the higher status of the group to which he belongs. The ethic norms accepted in the society impose certain obligations upon its members: '*one does owe something to one's class*'.

(2) *Mrs. Marchmont: I come here to be educated.*

Lady Basildon: Ah! I hate being educated.

Mrs. Marchmont: So do I. It puts one almost on a level with the commercial classes, doesn't it? (O. Wilde)

Mrs. Marchmont opposes the higher class (which she is related to) to the lower classes and suggests that she shares her dignified position with her interlocutor.

In the XIX century, as well as at the beginning of the XX century the pronoun *one* was quite frequently employed in works of literature, and not only in narration but also in dialogues. Our hypothesis about *one* being sociolinguistically marked is confirmed by the fact that the characters in the works of such authors as O. Wilde, A. Huxley, V. Woolf, P.G. Wodehouse, S. Maugham use this pronoun very often. It is known that these writers were not indifferent to the class distinctions of their heroes, many of whom belonged to the upper class.

At present, however, social stratification is becoming an anachronism. That is why cases of socially marked uses of *we* and *one* in the speech of important persons nowadays become even more noticeable. British speakers are very sensitive to issues of political correctness, and emphasizing class, ethnic, religious or sex differences is carefully avoided, hence, the usage of *one*, which might stress the speaker's and his interlocutor's social status, is unpopular. Although rare, such uses do exist: "In the speech of the contemporary British aristocracy and of the representatives of the middle class *one* is sometimes used instead of *I* and *we*. This allows making the utterance less self-confident. For example, "Hello, Charles. How's it going?" "Oh, *one* can't complain." (Veikhsman 2002:52).

Use of *One* in Reference to a Speaker Holding a Unique Position

As previously mentioned, though the referent of the generic pronouns is presented as a generic person, the real referent is a specific one. However, it is implied that other peo-

ple can find themselves in a similar situation. On the other hand, there are unique referents, such as the monarch, the Prime Minister, and the like whose position is special. That is why when a person of such rank uses a generic-personal pronoun (except the pronoun *you*, which as we have shown, is conversational and intimate), he or she can sound arrogant. Such use is exemplified by the widely quoted statement made by Queen Victoria: "*We are not amused*". Likewise, Margaret Thatcher is known to have said in an interview on the occasion of her grandson's birth: "*We are a grandmother*."

There was a similar statement in a newspaper headline a year ago when Prince William's son was born:

The British are well known for both their hugely popular tabloids and a love of all things royal. So the birth of a future king was always going to get the headline writers attempting to outdo each other on the front pages. The pick of the bunch on Tuesday is probably 'The Daily Mail'. It runs a large picture of Prince Charles looking particularly pleased with himself – arms outstretched – alongside the headline: "Oh boy! One's a grandpa."
(<http://news.msn.co.nz/nationalnews>)

In the 1980s in an interview with Queen Elizabeth a journalist asked her: "*Do you do any housework?*" The Queen answered: "*One does when one can*." According to the informant, who recounted the episode, this answer was disapproved by the readers because it was considered pretentious and arrogant.

Having analyzed the cases of *one*'s use by a person of high office, we think that they might be classified into three types. The examples are taken from "The Uncommon Reader" by Alan Bennett (2007), a novella about English Queen Elizabeth II. This is not a real story, but rather a 'what-if' one: "In *The Uncommon Reader* Mr. Bennett poses a delicious and very funny what-if: What if Queen Elizabeth at the age of 70-something were suddenly to become a voracious reader?" (The New York Times). In the story, A. Bennett shows many typical features of the Queen's speech, one of them being the abundant use of *one*.

1. In some cases *one* is used in statements which presuppose a generalization of situations; here *one* serves to form a norm-imposing utterance. The fact that the speaker is endowed with power makes these norms institutionalized, therefore such statements either lead to the hearer's consent, as in example (1), or else they can sound as an imposition on the hearer, as in example (2).

(1) "*It's supposed to be fiction, ma'am, only the author did have a dog in life, an Alsatian.*" (He didn't tell her its name was *Queenie*.) "*So it's really disguised autobiography.*"

"*Oh,*" said the Queen. "*Why disguise it?*"

Norman thought she would find out when she read the book, but he didn't say so.

"*None of his friends liked the dog, ma'am.*"

"One knows that feeling very well," said the Queen, and Norman nodded solemnly, the royal dogs being generally unpopular. (A. Bennett)

(2) *"I can understand", he [Sir Kevin] said, "Your Majesty's need to pass the time."*

"Pass the time?" said the Queen. "Books are not about passing the time. They're about other lives. Other worlds. Far from wanting time to pass, Sir Kevin, one just wishes one had more of it. If one wanted to pass the time one could go to New Zealand."

With two mentions of his name and one of New Zealand Sir Kevin retired hurt. (A. Bennett)

2. There are cases without real generalization, a very specific situation being talked about. In those cases the use of *one* demonstrates the Queen's unwillingness, for different reasons, to speak openly about herself. For example:

(1) *"Archbishop. Why do I never read the lesson?"*

"I beg your pardon, ma'am."

"In church. Everybody else gets to read and one never does. It's not laid down, is it? It's not off-limits?" (A. Bennett)

Here, as we see, *one* and *I* are used interchangeably: in the case of *one* a certain detachment from herself is felt, but later the Queen uses *I*, showing an emotional state in which she finds herself as a an ordinary person.

(2) *"About my Christmas broadcast,"*

"Yes, ma'am?" said the prime minister.

"I thought this year one might do something different."

"Different, ma'am?"

"Yes. If one were to be sitting on a sofa reading or, even more informally, be discovered by the camera curled up with a book, the camera could creep in – is that the expression? – until I'm in mid-shot, when I could look up and say, 'I've been reading this book about such and such,' and then go on from there." (A. Bennett)

The alteration of formality and intimacy of tone shows the Queen's disposition: she is in a situation which she is really concerned about. It seems that she starts by observing the unwritten rule for a person of high rank to sound impartial and reserved. Later she 'forgets' this obligation and speaks quite informally.

3. This use is the closest to the 'royal we': the Queen does not conceal that she is unique, and her functions are of immense importance. For example:

"One has met and indeed entertained many visiting heads of state, some of them unspeakable crooks and blackguards, and their wives not much better."

...

"One has given one's white-gloved hand to hands that were steeped in blood and conversed politely with men who have personally slaughtered children. ... to be Queen, I have often thought the one essential item of equipment a pair of high-length boots."

...

"I am the Queen and head of Commonwealth, but there have been many times in the last fifty years when that has made me feel not pride but shame. However" – and here she stood up – "we must not lose our sense of priorities and this is a party after all, so before I continue shall we now have some champagne?" (A. Bennett)

This passage contains an interesting combination of pronominal uses. At first, the Queen employs a formal *one* to show that she is different from other people. Then she uses *I* to say that she is the monarch, and here, naturally, she should point to herself without any implication of a generalization, and finally she uses the personal pronoun *we* to denote herself and her equerries. The pronoun *we* is unlikely to be interpreted as a 'royal we' because of the last part of the utterance in which the Queen suggests having champagne.

We see that though the word *one* is not as heavily marked sociolinguistically as it used to be a century ago, its formal character presupposes an establishment of a certain distance between the interlocutors. When the word is pronounced by the Queen or another very important person, it acquires connotations of inequality between the interlocutors. This is an essential feature of formal words in English. As V. Karasik states, "in English there is a big group of formal words which are used in formal situations. They are indicators of the official nature of communication and are in agreement with other etiquette indices of the situation – the manners, the clothes, the distance between the interlocutors" (Karasik 1992:200). The purpose of these words is to express status relations. When these words are used inappropriately, they show that the addresser deliberately transforms the interaction into a more official one. Sometimes, however, they indicate that the speaker wishes to turn the conversation into a more humorous one. Finally, the inadequate use of formal words can show the speaker's insufficient speech competence (Karasik 1992:201).

Conclusion

The pronoun *one* is characterized by a special combination of denotational and referential features. Its meaning (denotation) is that of a generic person, while its reference is usually limited to one person with whom the speaker empathizes, and as a rule, it is the speaker himself. On the denotation plane, the generic person is presented as a member of a peer group 'me and those like me', in which the similarity between the co-participants

can be based on different grounds: on the identical social position, the same age, the same nation, etc. The sociolinguistic component of the meaning was quite obvious a century (and more) ago, however, in modern egalitarian Britain, the sociolinguistic colouring of the word is gradually diminishing. *One* becomes restricted to the academic register and formal discourse.

A special case is the use of *one* by speakers of high rank. Although some speakers choose this pronoun as simply a formal word, their high status, in reality, puts the interlocutor at a certain distance, marking the speech event as different from an ordinary one with *I*. Thus, when employed by a person of high office, and particularly, by a royalty, *one* regains some of its sociolinguistic features and expresses the existing social relations between the communicants.

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«Քողարկված *ևս*». ընդհանրացում ի հակադրություն անհատականացման

Հոդվածը նվիրված է *one* դերանվան իմաստային առանձնահատկություններին, որոնցով պայմանավորված են այդ բառի օգտագործման հնարավորությունները առաջին դեմքի դերանվան փոխարեն: «Քողարկված *ևս*»-ի գործառույթը դիտվում է որպես *one*-ի հիմնանշանակային իմաստի և դրա վերաբերության յուրահատուկ

զուգորդման արդյունք: Այսպես, տվյալ դերանվան վերաբերելին ներկայացվում է որպես իրավիճակի մասնակցի ընդհանրացում, իսկ ուշադրության կենտրոնում անհատականացված անձն է՝ խոսողը: «Ես և իմ նմանները» խումբը, որը վերաբերում է տվյալ մասնակցին, կարող է կազմվել նաև նույն սոցիալական շերտին պատկանելու սկզբունքով, ուստի այն կարող է ունենալ որոշ հանրալեզվական ուղղվածություն, մանավանդ այն դեպքում, եթե խոսողը պատկանում է հասարակության վերնախավին:

“Замаскированное я”: обобщение против индивидуализации

В статье рассматриваются семантические свойства местоимения *оле*, которые предопределяют возможность его использования вместо местоимения первого лица. Эта функция “замаскированного я” является результатом своеобразного сочетания денотативного значения и референциальной предназначенности *оле*. Так, в плане денотации *оле* представляет свой референт как обобщенный концепт участника ситуации. В то же время, это слово осуществляет референцию к лицу, находящемуся в фокусе эмпатии говорящего, в подавляющем большинстве случаев, к самому говорящему. Референтная группа “я и мне подобные” конструируется в сознании говорящего на основании некоторой общности, в том числе и социальной. Социолингвистические особенности *оле* в определенной степени актуализируются, если “замаскированное я” употребляется личностью, наделенной властью.