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Word Meaning in Argumentative Dialogue

Homage to Sorin Stati

VOLUME 1

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“TODAY, WE’RE ALL DANES”. ARGUMENTATIVE MEANING OF THE 1ST AND 2ND PERSON PRONOUNS IN NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS ON THE MUHAMMAD CARTOONS

MARTINA TEMMERMAN*

1. *The use of 1st and 2nd person pronouns in argumentative discourse*

This paper explores the use of 1st and 2nd person pronouns in newspapers’ argumentative discourse. The pragmatic meaning of these pronouns has already been studied in numerous articles. Some investigate the relation between text and context which is generally being established by the pronoun(s) (e.g. Bazzanella 2002), others focus on the meaning in specific kinds of discourse, like business communication (e.g. Dieltjens & Heynderickx 2003), political interviews (e.g. Bull & Fetzer 2006) or academic writing (e.g. Harwood 2005, 2007). Most of these articles limit their discussions to the 1st person pronouns.

In this paper we want to investigate the *argumentative meaning* of the pronouns. We will show that not only 1st person pronouns, but also 2nd person pronouns play an important role in the argumentative meaning of a text. We have based our analysis on a corpus of newspaper opinion articles, and as a special case, we have chosen the articles in Flemish newspapers that were written in the aftermath of the publication of some satirical cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005. This case has seemed to us specially relevant, as editorialists of other newspapers, writing about the publication in the Danish newspaper, must have been forced to consider the meaning of the personal pronouns they were using, thus taking a stance in whether they wanted to identify with their Danish colleagues or not and in how far they wanted their readers to identify with their viewpoints. The language the newspaper articles in our corpus are written in, is Dutch.

According to Fowler (1991: 221), in newspaper editorials,

[V]arious techniques are deployed to make salient the illusion of utterance by an authoritative speaker, addressing a particular kind of reader embraced in an ‘us’ relationship and taking a particular marked stance in relation to the persons and topics referred to.

This *us* relationship Fowler mentions is very interesting. The author will try to convince the reader of a proposition, so that both will reach a common viewpoint, a *we* stance. Or, as Fowler (1991: 214) states: “Readers are implicated in the ideological posi-

*The author wishes to thank Marit Trioen, who has carried out part of the research for this paper. The *we*-form this paper is written in, is therefore not to be interpreted as an *authorial we*.

tion of the ‘we’ to the extent that they accept these propositions.” The use of *us* and *we* here already indicates the importance of personal pronouns in argumentation. As long as the reader does not have the same viewpoint as the author, there is no *we*, but only an *I* and a *you*, i.e. a first and a second person. That is why we will also include the second person pronouns in our analysis.

2. The traditional approach to the meaning of 1st and 2nd person pronouns: an overview

The designation *1st and 2nd person pronouns* covers three strongly related subclasses of pronouns: personal pronouns, possessive pronouns and reflexive pronouns. Their interrelatedness results from the fact that the grammatical categories of *person*, *number* and *gender* apply to the three of them: they all distinguish between 1st, 2nd and 3rd person¹; between singular versus plural; and between personal versus non-personal gender, with a further distinction between masculine and feminine within the former. As a consequence, grammars often discuss these three subclasses under the same heading, presenting the personal pronouns as the prototypical class, which then has corresponding possessive and reflexive forms (see for instance Biber *et al.* 1999; Leech & Svartvik 2002). Table I offers an overview of Dutch 1st and 2nd person pronouns (the English forms are between brackets):

Person	Personal pronoun		Possessive		Reflexive pronoun
	Subject	Object	Determiner	Pronoun	
1 st Sg.	ik (<i>I</i>)	mij/me (<i>me</i>)	mijn (<i>my</i>)	mijne (<i>mine</i>)	mijzelf/mezelf (<i>myself</i>)
1 st Pl.	wij/we (<i>we</i>)	ons (<i>us</i>)	ons/onze (<i>our</i>)	onze (<i>ours</i>)	onszelf (<i>ourselves</i>)
2 nd Sg.	jij/je/u (<i>you</i>)	jou/je/u (<i>you</i>)	jouw/je/uw (<i>your</i>)	jouwe/uwe (<i>yours</i>)	jezelf/uzelf (<i>yourself</i>)
2 nd Pl.	jullie (<i>you</i>)	jullie/u (<i>you</i>)	je/jullie/uw (<i>your</i>)	uwe (<i>yours</i>)	jullie zelf/uzelf (<i>yourselves</i>)

Table I: *1st and 2nd person pronouns in Dutch and English* (after Biber *et al.* 1999: 328)²

As Wales (1996: 12) points out, tables “listing the different persons and cases” clearly dominate the overviews of personal pronouns, thus “reflecting the continuing preoccupation of grammarians with *form*”. Indeed, when it comes to a discussion of the *meaning* of 1st and 2nd person pronouns, grammars (even if they are called *communicative* grammars) remain rather silent. Haeseryn *et al.* (1997), which is a reference work for Dutch grammar, describes the primary meaning of the first person pronoun as *referring to the speaker(s) and those s/he-they is-are related to in one way or another*, and gives the same definition for the meaning of the second person pronoun but then referring to the hearer(s) (Haeseryn *et al.* 1997: 231ff – translation ours).

¹ Hence the ambiguity of the term *personal* pronoun: both possessive and reflexive pronouns are also ‘personal’, taking their orientation from the speaker’s perspective (1st, 2nd and 3rd party).

² Unlike English, Dutch distinguishes between a formal (*u, uw*) and an informal form (*je, jou(w), jullie*) of the 2nd person pronoun.

Nevertheless, various corpus-based linguistic studies have shown that 1st and 2nd person pronouns have strongly divergent uses which go way beyond their primary meanings of referring to speaker(s) and/or hearer(s). Particularly those studies analyzing the use of 1st and 2nd person pronouns in persuasive discourses have paid a considerable amount of attention to the variety of meaning of the 1st and 2nd person pronouns. For instance, different analyses of the use of *we* in academic discourse (Harwood 2005, 2007); in political discourse (Wilson 1990; De Fina 1995; Bull & Fetzer 2006); and in business discourse (Dieltjens & Heynderickx 2003; Van de Mie-roop 2006) have pointed out that 1st and 2nd person pronouns are

[...] open symbolically to rhetorical manipulation and negotiation of meaning in different kinds of discourse, in the pragmatic interests of power, and subjectivity (speaker orientation), or modesty, empathy and politeness (addressee orientation). Just as politics is a question of pronouns (Middleton 1993: 118), so pronouns are a question of politics. (Wales 1996: 84)

In the following sections, we will give an overview of the secondary meanings of the pronouns.

2.1 Secondary uses of the 1st person pronoun – plural form

In most grammars, attention is paid to the atypical uses of the 1st person plural *we*. It is then argued that, in comparison with the 2nd person singular, the use of *we* seems far more complicated, and that this extensive polysemy is to be explained by its referential ambiguity, since *we* embraces not only the three person categories (Wales 1996: 63), but also all possible *combinations* of person categories.

Despite their general acknowledgment of the broad referential potential the pronoun *we* has, the different authors diverge strongly in their respective approaches to these secondary uses, particularly with respect to the amount and classification of the mentioned uses. Biber *et al.* (1999: 329-30), for instance, solely mention the use of *we* “in academic prose, where *we* may refer to a single author [often called *authorial we* (M.T.), ex. 1], a group of authors, to the author and the reader [often called *inclusive we* (M.T.), ex. 2], or to people in general [often called *generic we* (M.T.)]”. Leech & Svartvik (2002) discuss two secondary uses of *we*: the *we* in “formal writing”, exclusively referring to the writer (ex. 1); and a “playful, condescending use of *we*, referring to the hearer” (ex. 3):

- (1) **We** will explain this theory in the next chapter.
- (2) As **we** saw in Chapter 3, ...
- (3) How are **we** feeling today? [doctor to patient]

Quirk *et al.* (1985: 350-51) overview finally lists five secondary uses. Their “inclusive authorial” (ex. 2) is to be found in “serious writing”, where it involves the reader “in a joint enterprise”. From their point of view, this inclusive authorial is not to be confused

with what they call an “editorial *we*” (ex. 1), the latter being used in scientific writing “in order to avoid an egoistical *I*”. The “rhetorical *we*” (ex. 4) comprises a “specific use of generic *we*” and is said to refer “to the nation”. Quirk *et al.* also mention “condescending *we*” in doctor-patient or teacher-student relations (ex. 3). The fifth and final use Quirk *et al.* distinguish is a *we* with reference to “a third party” (ex. 5):

(4) **We** have to be proud of this country.

(5) **We** don’t look happy today. [secretary about her boss]

Although this rudimentary overview contains excerpts from only three grammars, it gives an indicative impression of the traditional treatment of the secondary meanings of *we*. In this concern, particularly the two following observations deserve attention. First, the lack of systematicity and coherence is to be pointed out, both within one single approach and across the various authors. This problem is partly explained by the lack of a consistent criterion for classification. For instance, at least three different perspectives play a role in Quirk *et al.*’s overview of the secondary uses: the discursive context, the intended referent and the rhetorical function (which explains the difference between their inclusive authorial and editorial *we*). Secondly, these overviews strongly tend to be restricted to mere enumerations, in which the particular uses are approached as random, individual cases, “even oddities” (Wales 1996: 63). The actual meaning of the particular instances is generally discussed only in relation to the specific context in which they occur. As a consequence, no attention is paid to “general principles at work” *behind* the various atypical instances (Wales 1996: 63).

2.2 Secondary uses of the 2nd person pronoun – singular form

An examination of the different grammars mentioned above leaves us with one secondary meaning of the 2nd person singular *you*³. Besides its (standard) referential use, *you* may also be used generically. It then becomes an impersonal pronoun which refers to people in general, as in:

(6) **You** never know what the future will bring.

In such instances where structural knowledge and general truth are expressed, the personal overtone of *you* disappears.

3. *An answer to the traditional approach to the 1st and 2nd person pronouns: the pragmatic approach*

If we want to use the analysis of 1st and 2nd person pronouns in order to say something about argumentative techniques in newspaper editorials, a consistent and systematic approach to these pronouns is an absolute condition. Since various empirical studies

³ In Dutch, this use is restricted to the reduced form *je*.

that approach personal pronouns from a rhetoric point of view have shown that 1st and 2nd person pronouns, when not used in their prototypical ways, indeed do more than simply *refer* to the specific individuals for which they stand (Spiegelberg 1973: 132), and that, moreover, the particular secondary uses show recurring patterns of meaning which transcend the individual uses, this section is devoted to a systematic mapping of the pragmatic and argumentative functions of *we* and *you*. An analysis of personal pronouns from this point of view takes as its starting point an approach to personal pronouns as strategic devices rather than as purely “economy devices” (Biber *et al.* 1999: 327): a speaker does not only select a particular pronoun in order to *refer* to a specific (group of) person(s), but his/her choice may also be motivated by certain *communicative aims*.

On the basis of a thorough examination of the various secondary uses of the pronouns *we* and *you* as described both in traditional grammars and in empirical linguistic studies which pay attention to the occurrence of personal pronouns as rhetorical devices, four general rhetoric functions can be distinguished. In what follows, we will discuss these functions in more detail.

3.1 The establishment of solidarity

A first communicative aim the speaker may have by using the 1st person plural is to express ingroup solidarity. This particular rhetorical function is the one most closely related to the primary function of *we*, i.e. referring to “a *group* of people, including the speaker” (Leech & Svartvik 2002: 57 – our emphasis). Also in its prototypical use, the 1st person plural characteristically implies a certain degree of relatedness (Haeseryn *et al.* 1997): in using *we*, the speaker inherently sets up a connection between himself and the person(s) he involves in the reference. Nevertheless, the rhetorical function of establishing solidarity goes further than the simple declaration of a link between two or more people. The use of *we* enables the speaker to define social groups: not only does the speaker state membership, and thus emotional and/or social connection to the group, but s/he also has the power to decide who else belongs to this ingroup, and, with the same token, who doesn’t (Helmbrecht 2002: 42). As Wilson (1990: 58, 76) argues, such ‘otherization’-strategies are inextricably related to the establishment of a communal identity: a definition of one’s supporters implies an identification of one’s enemies – *us* being “basically everyone but them”. Moreover, the use of the 1st person plural enables the speaker to designate group indexicality without the need for a confirmation of this “social bonding” (Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990: 174) on the hearer’s side. Hence, Pennycook (1994: 176 – our emphasis) concludes that this particular rhetorical function is in essence related to a “covert *assumption* of shared communality”.

3.2 The mitigation of face threatening acts

A second argumentative function of *we* is rooted in the theory of *face threatening acts* as developed by Brown & Levinson (1987). According to these authors, speakers con-

stantly negotiate face in linguistic interaction, with the maintenance of face being the main concern (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). Their notion of face, derived from that of Goffman (1981), is to be interpreted as “the public self-image every member wants to claim for himself” and is further developed in the notions of positive and negative face (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61-2). Every person wants to claim for him/herself two related things: first, a “positive consistent self-image”, and secondly, a “freedom of action and freedom for imposition” (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). However, in everyday interaction there will always be “face threatening acts”: acts that intrinsically “run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker” (Brown & Levinson 1987: 65). For instance, orders and requests typically threaten the freedom of imposition on the side of the hearer. In such face threatening situations, the speaker needs to employ linguistic strategies in order to avoid, or at least minimize, the potential face threat (Brown & Levinson 1987: 68). One of these linguistic strategies is the use of 1st and 2nd person pronouns. *Let's* constructions are a typical example of such a strategy. Consider for instance the following request:

(7) *Let's not digress.* [chairperson in meeting] (Wales 1996: 67)

Here, the speaker includes him/herself in the request in order to minimize the threat to the hearer's negative face which the request may cause. In this sentence, the speaker wants the hearer to perform an action that is mainly in the speaker's own interest. But in using the 1st person plural instead of the 2nd person, a “surface meaning of modesty” or “joint activity” is generated, and the authoritative voice of the speaker is covered (Wales 1996: 66). This use of the 1st person plural in order to disguise a direct instigation makes the request more acceptable.

A comparable use is the use of generic *we* or *you* in order to mitigate a face threatening act. In kindergarten, children might be taught:

(8) *We don't eat meat with our fingers.*

By using the *we* form, the distance between speaker and hearer is reduced and the utterance does not take the form of a direct order. Generic *you* can be used in the same way:

(9) *You don't eat meat with your fingers.*

This use seems to be more face threatening than the one in example (8), but less than a direct order. However, drawing up a scale of the degree of face threat would lead us too far for the scope of this paper.

3.3 The evasion of personal responsibility

In persuasive discourses, both inclusive and generic *we* as well as generic *you* are often used in order to downgrade authorial responsibility (see for instance Harwood 2005; De Fina 1995; Wilson 1990). In such linguistic situations, the pronominal system is used in order to distribute, if not to project personal responsibility “from the *I* to the *we*” (Wilson 1990: 58), or from the *I* to humanity in the case of indefinite reference. A

prototypical example of this particular rhetoric function of *we* is the ‘academic *we*’, where “responsibility for what is said, suspected and so forth is diminished” (Mühlhäusler & Harré 1990: 175).

3.4 The enhancement of persuasion

In this last strategic use of the pronominal system, the speaker claims the hearer as an associate in order to enhance the persuasive power of the argument. This effect can be elaborated both by *we* and by *you*. Following Spiegelberg (1973: 131), the intended effect of an ‘editorial *we*’ for instance is – amongst others – to “overwhelm one’s audience by persuasion, not giving it even a chance to test, accept, or reject one’s opinions”. The speaker thus involves the audience in the elaboration of a personal, subjective argument in order to enhance the persuasiveness of the assertion. A similar strategy, though built up in a different way, is to be found in the use of generic *you* or *we*. In using an indefinite agent, a maximum degree of objectivity and generalization is generated, again in order to conceal the subjective tone in the argument. In both substrategies, the speaker not only downgrades his/her own presence, but moreover elaborates the argument on behalf of the audience, and the rhetorical implication of this strategy is that the audience must share the speaker’s view as being the only correct and possible view (Wales 1996). In doing so, the weight of the argument is enhanced to a maximum degree – in the end even to a degree of universality.

4. *Presentation of the data*

We have collected 25 newspaper editorials which were published between February 1 and February 15, 2006, in all Flemish newspapers. The editorials all deal with the publication of a number of satirical cartoons, some of them depicting the prophet Muhammad, in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on September 30, 2005 and the worldwide reactions to this publication in the beginning of 2006. Newspapers all over the world had to decide for or against (re)publication of the cartoons, and journalists were forced to take up an explicit standpoint in the debate. Due to the highly explosive context, these viewpoints had to be firmly substantiated and communicated to the readers. This makes the corpus we have collected very suitable for investigating argumentation. We would also expect argumentation on freedom of speech and freedom of press from an authoritative stance: journalists, being the executors of the rights of freedom of press, might be expected to defend this right in the case of the publication of satirical cartoons.

Table II gives an overview of the number of pronouns in the corpus. All personal, possessive and reflexive pronouns have been included in the count.

Pronouns				
Newspaper (# articles)	1st person	2nd person	Total	Average
<i>De Morgen</i> (7)	58	19	77	11
<i>De Standaard</i> (5)	28	8	36	7
<i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i> (3)	56	9	65	21
<i>De Tijd</i> (3)	4	1	5	1
<i>Het Nieuwsblad</i> (2)	9	4	13	6
<i>Gazet van Antwerpen</i> (2)	15	0	15	7
<i>Belang van Limburg</i> (2)	14	2	16	8
<i>Het Volk</i> (1)	11	0	11	11
Total	195	43	238	

Table II: Number of 1st and 2nd person pronouns in the corpus

A first point to be made is that pronouns of the 1st person occur a lot more often than those of the 2nd person. In the category of the 1st person pronouns, the plural forms occur more often than the singular forms. The 2nd person pronoun, on the other hand, is always used in the singular form.

4.1 Pragmatic meaning of the pronouns in the *corpus*

In order to find out the rhetorical functions of the 1st and 2nd person pronouns in the corpus, we always have to take the discursive context and the intended referent(s) into account.

4.1.1 Pragmatic meaning of the 1st person pronouns: singular form

Out of the 195 occurrences of 1st person pronouns in the corpus, only 34 are in the singular form. Mostly, the 1st person pronoun is referring to the author of the article, as in the following examples:

(10) **Ik** weiger om te geloven dat moslims anders zijn⁴.
I refuse to believe that Muslims are different.

(11) **Ik** sprak met imams, leden van de moskeeën en verenigingen.
I talked to imams, members of mosques and associations.

The author explicitly formulates a personal conviction here (ex. 10), or describes a personal anecdote (ex. 11) (which is a well-known rhetorical technique). In one instance

⁴ All examples are quoted in their original Dutch form and translated into English as closely as possible.

(ex. 12), the author gives a free translation of a quote which is attributed to Voltaire, in order to make his own standpoint clear:

- (12) “Ik verafschuw uw mening, maar ik zou mijn leven geven opdat u ze zou kunnen blijven uiten.”
“I detest your opinion, but I would give my life to make it possible for you to continue to express it”.

Citing somebody else’s words is a rhetorical technique, which we can consider as a case of shift in footing (Goffman 1981). Conversational footing is the degree of commitment the speaker expresses in connection with the message. By adopting the utterance of somebody else, the speaker makes a statement without taking the full responsibility for it. Still, in example (12) the *I* in the quote refers to Voltaire, but at the same time it stands for the journalist writing the article.

4.1.2 Pragmatic meaning of the 1st person pronouns: plural form

For the pronouns in the plural form, we find the same meanings as in examples 10 and 11, i.e. the author expressing a personal conviction/hope (ex. 13) or describing a personal anecdote (ex. 14):

- (13) **We** hopen dat het bij woorden blijft.
We hope that it won’t go further than words.
- (14) Het was een mopje waar **we** als communicantjes om giechelden tijdens de mis.
It was a joke we giggled about during mass when making our first communion.

Here the pronoun only refers to the author him/herself and possibly to his or her personal sphere. We have found that the meaning of the 1st person plural form can also refer to a number of groups the author belongs to. The use of the 1st person plural here is the so-called *exclusive* use (the reader is not included in the reference). This use applies to the previous two examples and also to examples where the author refers to (the editors of) the newspaper, as in:

- (15) Om duidelijk te maken hoe belangrijk de redactie van deze krant die waarden vindt, hebben **we** besloten om een aantal van de gewraakte cartoons vandaag opnieuw af te drukken.
In order to make clear how important the editors of this newspaper find those values, we have decided to reprint a number of the contested cartoons today.

The author uses an argument of authority here. The newspaper has the capacity of reproducing the cartoons and spreading them to a larger audience, and it does so, in order to make a statement.

In a few cases, *we* refers to a group the reader might or might not be included in. The first is the group of women in general. A female journalist writes mockingly:

- (16) Zowel aan de top van de bedrijfswereld als in de academische wereld zijn **wij** ruim vertegenwoordigd [...]
We are amply represented at the top of the business world as well as in the academic world.

The author states ironically that a society which treats its women as equals, can boast of a certain superiority.

In other cases, *we* refers to groups to which both author and reader belong. Here the 1st person pronoun is used *inclusively* (cf. section 2.1). Examples are:

- (17) **Wij** begrijpen de Franstaligen niet, zoals we de moslims niet begrijpen.
We don't understand the French-speaking, just like we don't understand the Muslims.
- (18) Want eerst mag de profeet niet meer afgebeeld worden, daarna mogen we niet meer lachen met prins Filip.
Because first the prophet cannot be depicted anymore, next thing, we're not allowed to laugh with prince Filip anymore.

These examples are rather specific for the Belgian situation, Belgium being a country which is split up in three linguistic communities, and where the general feeling of alienation and bad understanding between the Dutch-speaking and the French-speaking communities increases. What still unites the country is the monarchy, but as example (18) shows, for a number of Belgians, the royal family is an object of derision. The author tries to convince the reader of his/her standpoint by dragging the reader in into a certain group, as in the following examples:

- (19) Als het aankomt op de verdediging van de vrijheid van mening en de vrijheid van drukpers, zijn **wij** vandaag allemaal Denen.
If it comes to defending freedom of speech and freedom of press, today, we're all Danes.
- (20) Gevoeligheden waar **wij** al lang niet meer mee zitten, zijn nog intact in de moslimwereld.
Sensitivities we don't know anymore for a long time, still exist in the Muslim world.
- (21) Vandaar ook dat **wij** de hele polemiek in het westen nogal over het paard getild vinden.
That is why we in the West think the whole polemic goes over the top a little.

In these examples, *we* refers to the Western world, as opposed to the Muslim world. Here the authors revert to the *us/them* thinking which was also reported by Fowler (1991). Fowler has analyzed editorials in British newspapers after a bombardment in Libya and subsequent attacks and he found that authors often used the *us/them* contrast, where *we* (the British people) were represented as being completely different from and opposed to *them* (the terrorists).

Though there are at least 350 000 Muslim people in Belgium⁵, the editorialists never seem to think of their readers as possibly being Muslims. There are only two instances in the corpus where a 1st person pronoun refers to Muslim referents:

- (22) “Het is alsof ik [...] je vader en je moeder een klap zou verkopen [...]. Zo diep zit het bij **ons**.”
*“It’s as if I [...] would deliver your father and your mother a blow [...]. That’s how deep it goes for **us**.”*
- (23) In Vlaanderen [...] stelt niemand de vrije meningsuiting of de persvrijheid in vraag. Ook **onze** moslims niet.
*In Flanders, nobody questions freedom of speech or freedom of press. Neither **our** Muslims.*

In the first example, the author quotes a young Muslim explaining what impact the cartoons had on Muslim readers. In the second example, the Muslims living in Flanders are called *our* Muslims. They are being represented as belonging to the Flemish society, and thus being opposed to *them*, the extremist Muslims.

Both uses imply that the reader cannot be Muslim. The Muslim world is being represented as completely separated from the group of readers of the newspaper.

A last type of instances are those uses where *we* refers to mankind in general. This is the generic use of *we*, but still in these examples two camps are involved. The Western world and the Muslim world are summoned to work together, as two separate entities:

- (24) Dat **we** hier zonder dialoog niet uit zullen geraken, is duidelijk.
*It is clear that **we** won’t get out of this without a dialogue.*
- (25) Een toekomst die **we** hoe dan ook samen zullen moeten opbouwen.
*A future **we** will have to build up together anyhow.*

4.1.3 Pragmatic meaning of the 2nd person pronouns

All 2nd person pronouns are used in the singular form. It is interesting to note that when the authors address their readers directly, they address them as individuals, not as groups. In most cases, the use of the 2nd person pronoun is rather straightforward, as in the following examples:

- (26) Uiteraard kent **u** als verstandige lezer het antwoord op deze vraag.
*Of course **you**, as an intelligent reader, know the answer to this question.*
- (27) “Het is alsof ik in **uw** huis zou binnenstappen zonder te bellen.”
*“It is as if I would enter **your** home without ringing the doorbell.”*
- (28) Er waren net die bloedige aanslagen in Londen geweest, **je** wist dus maar nooit.
*There had just been those gory attacks in London, so **you** never knew.*

⁵ Interdisciplinary Centre for the Study of Religion and World View. “Islam in Belgium”, http://www.kuleuven.be/icrid/religies/wr_nl_islam.htm#moslimsbelgie (accessed August 24, 2008).

In example (26), the author addresses the reader directly. Moreover, this is done in a flattering way, which is a frequently used rhetorical technique (the so-called *captatio benevolentiae* in ancient rhetorics). In example (27), the author is quoting a Muslim friend, who describes the impact the cartoons had on Muslim readers. This again can be considered as a case of shift in footing (Goffman 1981, see also section 4.1.1 above). Example (28) is an instance of the most frequent use of the 2nd person in the corpus, i.e. the generic or impersonal use (cf. section 2).

A few cases of the generic use of the 2nd person pronoun deserve special interest. Examples are the following:

(29) Je kunt ook in de tegenaanval gaan en tot je eigen stomme verbazing merken dat je de dreiging de baas kunt.

You can also launch a counterattack and notice – to your own astonishment – that you can handle the threat.

(30) Respect toon je niet door te vuur en te zwaard je eigen gelijk af te dwingen.

You don't show respect by exacting your own right by fire and sword.

In both examples, the 2nd person pronoun does not refer to *anyone* in general, but to a specific group. Example (29) describes a debate in the Flemish parliament on the publication of the cartoons and how the democratic parties were perceived to win the debate from the Flemish extreme right party. *Je* in the example refers to the Flemish democratic parties (a *we*-stance). Also in example (30), *je* refers to a very specific group, i.e. the extremist Muslims. We have found two instances of this use in the corpus, and both contain a negation. The generic phrase here defines what *the others* should not do. We can conclude that the generic form of the 2nd person is used here in order to mitigate the *us/them* contrast (cf. Fowler 1991). This is a use we haven't found reported in the grammars and literature discussed in section 2.

5. Discussion of the data and conclusions

The following general conclusions can be drawn from the use of the 1st and 2nd person pronouns in the newspapers' editorials in our corpus. First of all, it should be noted that it is possible to write an argumentative editorial without any pronouns of the 1st or 2nd person. In our corpus we found 3 out of 25 articles like this. This may allow us to say that, when pronouns of the 1st and 2nd person are used in newspaper editorials, this is done in a purposeful or even deliberate way. We also have to remark that we always need the context in order to pin down the exact meaning of the pronoun. Pronoun and context together can form a persuasive unit. Apart from the cases where we found the pronouns in well-known rhetorical usage like recalling a personal anecdote, uttering a personal conviction or quoting another source, we also found a number of instances where we can apply the general rhetorical functions of the pronouns described in section 3. *The evasion of personal responsibility* (3.3) is a strategy which is less at stake here, but the other strategies do apply.

5.1 Establishment of solidarity

Using pronouns for the establishment of solidarity is a technique which is applicable to the 1st person pronouns in the plural (“we, ons, onze” / *we, us, our*) (cf. section 3.1). In our corpus, we have found a number of instances where *we* refers to groups the author and the reader belong to and which are being represented as being opposed to the Muslim world (Flanders, Belgium, the Western world). In the cases where *we* refers to the Western world as well as the Muslim world, the two entities are still represented as being separate, while having to cooperate (e.g. ex. 24). So a first strong argument which is being made by using *we* in the corpus, is that authors and readers belong to the same group, a group which must stand strong against an ‘otherized’ (cf. section 3.1) Muslim group.

5.2 Presenting the argument as a general truth

The inclusive and or generic use of the 1st person plural and the generic use of the 2nd person singular allow the speaker to present an argument as a general truth. The techniques we discussed in sections 3.2 and 3.4 apply here. Inclusive *we* generates a maximum degree of objectivity. The rhetorical implication of this strategy is that the audience must share the speaker’s view as being the only correct and possible view (Wales 1996: 66). Whether the group of women, Flemish people, Belgian people or the Western World is referred to, the reader will identify him/herself as belonging to the group, and thus there is a chance that s/he will go along in the argumentation of the author.

This also holds for the use of generic *you*, but here in a few instances we have seen that generic *you* was used to mitigate the *us/them* distinction (cf. section 4.1.3). The opposition of the Western world versus the Muslim world is again stated, but not in an explicit way (cf. ex. 29-30).

5.3 Authoritative argument

The argument we would have expected to be made by the use of the 1st person plural, i.e. the authoritative stance of “we as newspapers and defenders of the free press” is an argument we did not encounter very often in our corpus. Ex. 15 is one of the few instances where the author makes a statement referring to the freedom of press. But on the whole, we must conclude that the Flemish newspapers in the period we have studied considered themselves to be the voice of the Western world and the defenders of Western values as opposed to the extremist Muslim world and values. Everywhere in the editorials, the *us/them* distinction is present, sometimes in an explicit, sometimes in a more blurred way. The main value that is being defended is freedom of speech and there is very little reference to freedom of press.

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