

Generalised meaning of pronouns

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Abstract

This manuscript aims to provide a view over the generalised meaning of pronouns in the Albanian language, basically the personal, reflexive, demonstrative, possessive, relative and indefinite pronouns, based on our viewpoint.

In some uses, pronouns can reflect ambiguity. They can state a generalised or an individualised referent. This ambiguity is clarified in context. We will provide examples of the Albanian language to illustrate and analyse this phenomenon, but there will also be cases which we encounter in various English and French grammars.

However, in linguistics, generalization is viewed as a problematic and controversial phenomenon (Galmiche, 1985, 2), thus our explanations can be considered at the stage of debatable hypotheses.

Keywords: ambiguity, pronoun, generalised meaning, specific/individualised meaning.

Introduction

Personal pronouns are described as a system of three persons, singular and plural: first person (*I, we*), the speaker is in opposition to the second person (*you*), the person to whom the speaker is speaking to. The third person is not part of this oppositional system. As third person personal pronouns uses the demonstratives (*he/she/it, they*) (Benveniste, 1996).

In the grammatical tradition, personal pronouns are treated as part of the speech apart, outside the nominal group and the verbal group, and most of the time in a chapter that includes all kinds of pronouns (Charaudeau, 1992, 119).

In addition to the above definitions which are linked to the most frequent uses of the personal pronouns, in the Albanian language, there are cases when we use the plural *You* to reflect the singular politeness or the plural *we* for the modesty in the scientific singular.

1.1 The first person (*I, we*)

The personal pronoun *I/we* with a generalised meaning is accomplished in those conditions when the speaker is situated as an abstract actor who expresses a general action. The personal pronoun *I/we* takes this generalisation for granted as to provide an example which allows its analysis, for instance: *if I/ we should go far, I need to walk slowly* (Charaudeau, 1992).

In the French language we encounter uses of *I* as an individual which applies to all, considered as a continuity of the example to be followed: *Tomorrow, I vote* (= *you vote*)¹, but even an *I* for a third person, collective in scientific experiments: *If I add*

¹ "Demain, je vote (voterez)... Procédé d'exemplarité. Mise en scène d'un locuteur qui décrit ce qu'il

silver nitrate to these few drops of sodium chloride, I get silver chloride. (Si j'ajoute à ces quelques gouttes de chlorure de sodium du nitrate d'argent, j'obtiens un précipité de chlorure d'argent.), in controversial articles, maximas, etc. (Charaudaou, 1992, 142).

In the Albanian language we have not encountered similar uses of the first person singular. The first person singular recognizes individualized use. As the personal pronouns of the first and second person as a subject are not usually expressed in sentences, because the verbs clearly distinguish the person (a characteristic of the Albanian language), we will follow with an example, the use of *the generalised meaning*, without the presence of the personal pronoun:

(1) *Sa të fus merak, ma mirë i ve kapak* (Haxhihyseni, 2004, 130).

We encounter this use in the popular sentences. In these examples we state that we deal with a first person of generalised meaning, because we do not deal with a particular, specific individual, but an individual who serves as an example for all (*I, you, the others, whoever...*). The first person *I* can be equalized to *each one of us*.

Two different contents of the plural *we* are recognized:

- The inclusive form *we = I + you*: - *Ne miq kemi qenë dhe miq mbetemi, or Osman Mejdani! Vetëm thuaji të dalin ata të tre që ke brenda!* – thirri Kalem Gashi me një zë të trashë si nëpër hundë. (Agolli, 2006, 137).

- The exclusive form *we = I + they (he)*: - *Po të të zbojnë ty, bëjmë grevë ne...*, - *tha Peri i Këputur* (Xoxa, 1980, 393).

Based on these two forms, we suggest another content of the plural *we* with a generalised meaning:

we = I + you + they

The generalised *We* can be found in the artistic literature and publicistics. We have noticed cases of the use of the first person plural with a generalised meaning in English² and French.³

1.2 Second person (you)

The second person singular is distinguished as a generalised meaning person in the Albanian language (Çeliku, 1980). Establishing whether the second person singular personal pronoun is in its individualised or generalised meaning depends on the context.

(2) *Si s'e ditke ti se nga tjetri ka gjasë të shpëtosh, por nga vetvetja kurrë?* (Kadare, 2009, 50).

The subject pronoun *you* can refer to:

a) The interlocutor, a specific, individualised referent who the speaker is talking

fait sur le mode du constat ou de l'évidence. Celui-ci se présente comme un exemple à suivre. Du même coup, l'interlocuteur est appelé à suivre cet exemple; en s'appropriant la parole du je, il deviendra lui-même un modèle pour les autres.

Remarque: L'interlocuteur-récepteur est multiple de par la situation de communication. Mais il est appelé à devenir unique à travers le je. Un unique qui vaut pour tous." (Charaudaou, 1992, 142).

² "... any group which you fell yourself to be part of, such as a school, your local community, or even mankind as a whole.

we are in fact a multicultural society.

We all need money."

³ "... expressions où se mêlent le besoin de donner ® "nous" une compréhension indéfinie et l'affirmation volontairement vague d'un "je" prudemment généralisé." Problèmes de linguistique générale, 1, Emil Benveniste, Gallimard, 1996, f. 235

to.

b) Each one of us, a generalised referent where we include the interlocutor, even where the speaker includes him/herself.⁴

The personal pronoun of the second person is the mostly used personal pronoun with a generalised meaning in Albanian language.

(3)

a) *Mendimet e hanë kohën shpejt. Ajo vrapon pa e kuptuar dhe ti vështron orën dhe çuditesh: "Kur shkoi nëntë?"* (Agolli, 2006, 227).

b) *Nuk e ke nga ai. – tha Petriti. – Edhe ti vetë e di që nuk e ke nga ai.* (Xoxa, 1980, 382).

We think it is intuitively obvious that in the example (3a) *you* presents a generalised referent, *you* represents the human being, *everyone, each one of us*. Whereas in the example (3b) *you* clearly expresses an individualised person, the cospeaker.

1.3 Third person (he/she, they)

We have noticed cases of generalised meaning in the English grammar for:

- The personal pronoun of the third person plural⁵ (*Isn't that what they call love?*),

- The pronoun *one*⁶ (One has to think of practical side of things.);

Whereas in French it is recognized to the pronoun *on*, among others, even the use with a generalised meaning.⁷

The personal pronoun of the third person singular or plural recognizes rare cases of the generalised meaning use even in the Albanian language. We encounter that in

⁴ The personal pronoun *you*, can establish in various contexts each of the presented referents. As we notice in the example, this ambiguity is carried even by the reflexive pronoun *myself*, as it is anforic and will establish that individualised or generalised referent, as it presents the personal pronoun *you*.

⁵ "'They' is also often used to refer to people in general. Isn't that what they call love?"

⁶ "'One' is used to make statements about people in general which also apply to yourself.

One has to think of practical side of things.

Going round Italy, one is struck by the number of opera houses there are.

This scene makes one realize how deeply this community has been affected."

⁷ "on = tout le monde

on renvoie à un tiers collectif qui englobe une totalité. C'est l'effet de generalization que l'on trouve dans les maxims, dictons, proverbes et toute phraséologie à valeur de vérité générale.

On doit respecter ses parents.

On a souvent besoin de petits pois chez soi (publicité)..." (Charaudeau, 1992, 130).

"*on* = whoever

On refers to a collective third which includes a whole. This is the effect of generalization which we encounter in maxims, sayings, proverbs and every phrase with the value of general truth.

We should respect our parents.

We often need peas at home. (advert)."

"*On* était ravis de vous retrouver (on = nous tous)", (Pougeoise, Colin, 1998, 7).

the cases of anaphoric use, when it takes a generalised meaning noun or when it is accompanied by a noun with generalised meaning.

Short forms of personal pronouns (determiners)

Përnaska (1982/4), Çeliku (2012) think that 'short forms of personal pronouns' (an issue which constitutes Balkanisation) actually work as determiners of the verb in linguistics, firstly marking the transitivity of verbs and consequently its actual meaning in the concrete saying; they also act as grammatical means referring to the text, marking the person of the action, etc. Çeliku thinks that we deal with the phenomenon of changing *ex – pronouns* into *formal – grammar determiners* and does not regard them as objects in a sentence. But the short forms of the personal pronouns, determiners, also know uses of generalised meaning.

Some examples of determiners with generalized meaning, in the accusative and dative case, second person singular and first and second person plural:

(4) *Pamja e tij të linte përshtypjen se në këtë vështrim spikasin mendime të thella, por unë e dija se në të nuk kishte asnjë mendim* (Agolli, 2006).

(5) *Errësira të kallte datën.* (Mapo, 27 korrik 2011)

In the case of determiners with generalized meaning, we can state that a person can be easily exchanged with another without altering the meaning of the sentence, which is characteristic of the personal pronouns with generalised meaning in general: (13) *Errësira të (më, na, ju) kallte datën.*

Determiners with generalised meaning are widely encountered almost in all types of texts: in artistic literature, publicistics, statements, phrases and the proverbs of the people, etc.

Reflexive Pronouns

(6) *Por ai nuk mund ta përmbante veten. Ndonjëherë të përmbash veten duhet të kesh edhe shëndet të mirë dhe të jesh i fortë fizikisht.* (Agolli, 2006).

Example (6) carries two cases of the reflexive pronoun *self*. The first case is the one of the reflexive pronoun with individualized meaning: self referring to the subject he. In the second case, intuitively we understand that from an individualized referent, we have moved onto a generalized referent. Apart from the logical and intuitive explanation, we support our idea even with these data:

- The second sentence *Ndonjëherë të përmbash veten duhet të kesh edhe shëndet të mirë dhe të jesh i fortë fizikisht* comes as a sentence (which are the most typical cases where we encounter generalised meaning uses);
- The verb is in the present, versus the use in the past in the first sentence (another particularity linked to the generalised meaning);
- There is the use of the second person versus the third person in the first sentence (another particularity linked to the generalised meaning).

Possessive Adjectives

We think that interpretations of the generalized meaning allow possessive adjectives of the first person plural and the second person singular or plural, as well as indefinite pronouns in a non anaphoric use or when they refer to an actor with a generalized meaning, for instance:

(7) *Hapni tani një llogari kursimi Alpha Smart dhe maksimizoni me zgjuarsi përfitimet tuaja!* (Shekulli, 2011)

Indefinite pronouns

The Albanian Academy Grammar (1995) considers the indefinite pronouns with invariable meaning in every context.⁸

We think that the indefinite pronouns are ambiguous. They know other uses of individualized or generalized meaning. It is the context which clarifies ambiguity. The generalized interpretation allows the indefinite pronouns: *whoever, nobody, no one, everybody* etc. We always encounter these pronouns in cases of a *non anaphoric use* or when we *refer to an actor with generalized meaning*

Let's analyse the following example:

(8) *Po njeriu po të jet' i likë e i dobëtë, gjith' i hipinë siprë, jo vetëm anëmiqtë, po edhe miqtë.* The use of the indefinite pronoun *gjith'*(*every*) in this case, allows the generalized interpretation. It refers to *everybody, whoever*, not a particular group. The following accuracy explains this fact *jo vetëm anëmiqtë, po edhe miqtë.*

- Whereas in the sentence *Të gjithë ia krisën të qeshurit, përveç zonjës Ermion* (Xoxa, 1980, 61) the indefinite pronoun *everybody* has individualized meaning. *Everybody* refers to the group which is present.

(9)

a. *Pastaj ne ecëm gjatë të heshtur, secili duke menduar më vete* (Agolli, 2006).

- b. *Secili në këtë botë kaotike shikon atë që dëshiron, - tha Raq Kripani, - se ka ç'të shikojë gjithsecili* (Xoxa, 1980, 57).

The sentence (9a) does not allow generalized interpretation. *Everyone* states the individuals of a *WE* which is present in the sentence, whereas in the case (17b) we claim that we are dealing with the indefinite pronoun *everyone* with a generalized meaning. *Everyone* states *whoever of us*. We think that the difference between the individualized indefinite pronoun and the one with generalized meaning is evident and this fact is reinforced by the following use of the pronoun *gjithsecili* (*whoever*).

Demonstrative pronouns

(10) ... *mendonin se ishte vështirë të gjykohej dikush që gjendej brenda, nga të jashtmit, e po kështu këta (çdo i jashtëm, të gjithë të jashtmit), nga i brendshmi, e kështu me radhë...* (Kadare, 2009, 59).

The pronoun *these* is anaphoric; it substitutes the noun *të jashtmit*, which is a noun with generalized meaning. For this reason, we think that even the demonstrative *these*

⁸ "The basic particularity of indefinite pronouns is indefiniteness. This very general meaning of indefinite pronouns is preserved in every speech circumstance. Here they are distinguished from all the other pronouns whose meaning is established by context or speech situation. The meaning of the pronouns *somebody, nobody, everybody*, etc is invariable in every context, ..." (f. 249).

is a demonstrative with generalized meaning, carrying all the significancies of the noun *të jashtmit*.

We also encounter uses of generalized meaning in the demonstrative (*he, they*):

(11) *E kishte thënë pa atë kuptimin e keq politik, përkundrazi e kishte nxjerrë në pezëm e sipër, siç thuhej për ata që çonin e binin fjalë, në jetën e përditshme* (Kadare, 2009, 15).

(12) *Pastaj, ai që të dashuron, nuk të vret ...* (Agolli, 2006, 139).

Relative pronouns

We encounter uses of generalized meaning of the relative pronoun *that/who/which* in the cases when they refer to generalized referents and in the indefinite relative pronouns *who, how, what* which are divided into two pronouns (= *the one who*)

(13) *Nuk ka njeri, që të jetë në dijeni të këtyre punëve dhe të të mos të ngrëjë ty në qiell me lëvdatat më të mëdha...* (Noli, 1989, 207).

(14) *Kush (ai, kushdo që) nuk çalon, nuk bie, - ia prita unë.* (Agolli, 2006, 19).

Let's compare the examples on the table. We think that it is evident that the use of relative pronouns in sentences clarifies their generalized or individualized meaning.

Relative pronouns with generalized meaning

Kush (kushdo që) s'ka kokë, ka këmbë.

Më kërkoi çfarë (çfarëdo që) të duash.

Sa (të gjithë ata që, kushdo) lindin, vdesin.

Relative pronouns with individualized meaning

Kush (kushdo nga të pranishmit që) dëshiron të mbetet këtu, le të flasë.

Mos harroni çfarë (atë që) ju thashë.

Sa (ata, të pranishmit që) qenë aty, votuan kundër.

Conclusions

Generalization is a widespread phenomenon in almost all types of texts in the Albanian language. Some grammar – lexical units, in specific linguistic situations and contexts, know uses of generalized meaning and this use is present even in the pronouns category.

Personal pronouns can be used with generalized meaning in all cases when the individual expressed by the subject pronoun represents the whole of us. It is distinguished from a particular individual referring an individual or a group. The Albanian specific person which has generalized meaning uses is *the second person singular*.

Generalized meaning uses apply even to *short forms of personal pronouns (determiners)*, in the accusative and dative cases, second person singular and plural. Interpretations with a generalized character allow even *possessive adjectives* of the first person plural and the second person singular and plural, *reflexive pronouns*, some *indefinite pronouns*, in case of a *non anaphoric use* or when we refer to an actor with generalized meaning.

Uses of generalized meaning apply even to the relative pronoun *who, which, that*, in the cases when they state a generalized referent, and the *indefinite relative pronouns who, which, how, what* which are divided into two pronouns (= *the one who*).

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