Use of *We* in Writing

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Abstract

Pronouns are few and fixed, but used frequently in language and their forms and functions have been reviewed in the past. This qualitative study theoretically underpinned by various linguistic philosophers is a teacher's reflection about the use of English pronoun 'we' in ninety-six extended written responses of English language learners studying two disciplines of knowledge in a public institution of higher education in Karachi. The data were collected from ninety-six participants in 2018, analyzed in 2019 and drafted in 2020. The occurrence of the royal 'we' in the sentences of the participants was reportedly too low to connect it with exclusive 'we'. However, its deictic use was a frequent representation of togetherness. This study's usefulness lies with further investigations into this linguistic behavior of the pronoun amongst its users.

INTRODUCTION

English pro-forms have been researched and exemplified. They are mainly used for substitution and their use as a linguistic reference in text is taught in reading and promoted in writing. It is imperative to highlight here that language undergoes a change in space and time and its representative change is witnessed in English language studies as well. Although the use of English personal pronouns has been quite stable across times, the second person singular pronoun is found congruent with its past objective and subjective cases of thee and thou respectively (Bergmann, et al., 2012). The use of the pronoun 'we' has been perceived with schematic meaning in the language. It is one of English functional words, whose employment to draw the reference to an already placed noun phrase in an utterance or a sentence accrues meaningfulness for text development. Not only is it applied to increase textual cohesion, it is also used to display pragmatic control over the body of communication in today's English. As its utilization is a repeated phenomenon in everyday academic and professional communication, its production deepens in speaking patterns of communication. In addition to its value of substitution, it has been identified with varying frequency for communicative purposes. On the one hand, academic reasoning is replete with authorial voice attaching itself to a school of thought in its absence from a formal discourse of academia. On the other hand, the pronoun is heightened to grab commercial success. Its frequency and sensitivity in different domains of communication indicate a potential measure of pragmatic use for language proficiency of English language users. Perhaps this is the reason why pronominal use is high in fluent English language users.

Research Questions

The study in hand aimed to problematize the frequency of the nominative pronoun in the participants sentences written in response to a writing task. The following questions were formed to collect the data:

1. What was the frequency of the royal we in the sentences of the users of English as a second language?

2. To what extent was the pronoun representative of (linguistic) the text?

3. Did the pronominal contribute to the specification of the user's group(s)?

4. Was the pro-form an indicator of linguistic proficiency and social polarization?

5. What was the significance of its semantic function?

The Pronouns

The use of English pronouns needs to be reviewed with the help of their historical and contemporary usage. First-person plural pronoun in the language was also used for first-person singular in the past. Subjective or nominative 'we' was used to refer to power in the royal kingdoms of Great Britain. Members of the royal families of the subcontinent of Asia used its equivalent 'hum' for 'mei' in public and private domains of language use. The shift is understood as mark of power by few of solidarity gained through and celebrated with armies, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, and citizens. It was also a tool used to discriminate by separating royal lineages as a higher social class. The use of the first-person plural for the first-person singular has become infrequent in speech communities of Urdu now. It has been phonologically reported with tonic stress; whereas, its equivalent in modern English is rarely accented. Power and solidarity attached to the pro-form has been a distinguishable characteristic of speech among family heads and groups of Urdu speakers. In fact, the pro-form was introduced in Urdu poetry and recited, almost sung, in durbars of Mughal Empire. As the act of recitation was used to praise the royal members and earn for sustenance, the pronoun was likely to be exploited to imply the kings' and the queens' traits of mannerism, eloquence, generosity, aesthetics, authority, wisdom, sensibility, and sensitivity. This is the factual reason as to why the first-person plural 'hum', that is, 'we' for the first-person singular 'mei', that is,' I' is found in abundance in Urdu literature. Despite its functional use in the language system, linguists have taught and documented its pragmatic and semantic significance in and outside speech communities. Apart from its grammatical capacity to place itself as nominative or subjective, it (has) had meanings pertaining to feelings and thoughts. More to the point, the pronoun is a referent to humans who can listen, speak, read, and write and a discriminator among communicators. The discrimination has been discussed with the terms 'tu' and 'vous' (Brown & Gilman, 1968). The former term is used to address a person informally; whereas, the latter is a formal or polite address to the same person. Both terms are used to refer to the second person pronoun of language. The unique use of 'we' in English has vanished while 'hum' is in use in some speech communities of Urdu settled in urban Sindh.

A text is a referential system of communication. It has been typified with subgroups of literary and non-literary in stylistics. Theories of speech acts and conversational analysis are usually applied to search for a methodological way to interpret spoken texts. The pro-form binds utterances into a thread and sentences into a composition of some length; therefore, it is not merely a word gender specifier, quantifier, case-contrast maker or person descriptor. Its frequent utilization is also text developing (Quirk, et al., 1972). Pronouns are more frequently available in English than Urdu. The pronoun in question is a reference to linguistic applications of endophera and exophera of text analysis. The inclusion of I along with you in an event of speech in the reference and without you, add the properties of inclusive- 'we' and exclusive- 'we' to the word respectively. All pronouns including the first-person pronouns are applied deictically as their referents are found congruent with a co-text.
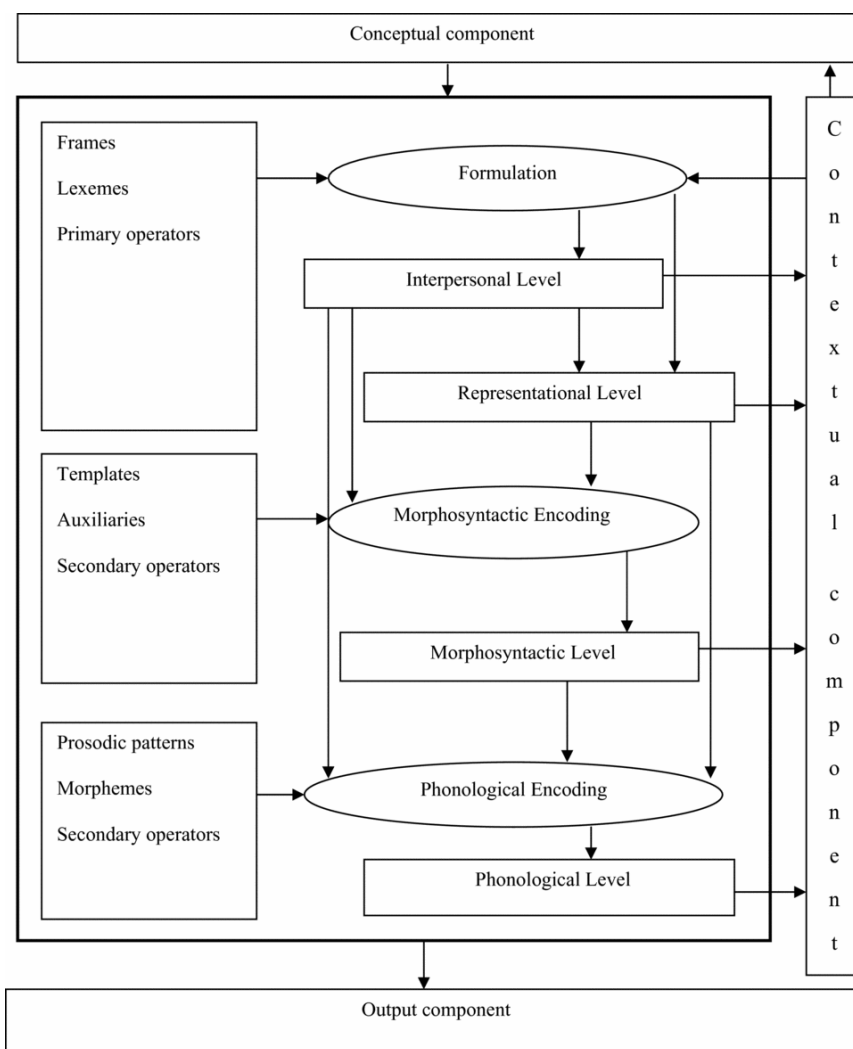
Pragmatic Significance

Although pronominalization is central to text development, pronouns' interpretation continues to be problematic for adult users of English language as well. The users are required to demonstrate their understanding about English pro-forms for language proficiency. Even though their acquisition usually takes places between the age of four to six years among English native speakers, their inconsistent comprehension is a reported phenomenon among L1 children and L2 users (Spenader, et al., 2009; Contemori, et al., 2021; Bergmann, et al., 2012). If the users are provided the required input in the target langauge, a measurable improvement is likely to report for the appreciation of this almost meaning free unit of the langauge. In addition to an efficient utilization of one, do so, that and these in English speech, there are numerous occassions of getting to English apposition with we and you (Keizer, 2011). For example, "You sweetheart are going with us." Another example is worded in the expression, "We lions will fight to win the battle." Becaue of the complexity of pragmatic choice of some pronouns, children tend to confuse subjective pronouns with reflexive ones. Spenader, et al. (2009) highlight the difficulty in their production and comprehension in childhood. They add that children who interpret reflexive pronouns correctly fail to understand the grammatical significance of object pronouns until the age of six. Though the acquisition of ourselves before us is reportedly true in language studies, it is a fact that the acquisition of pronouns is found asymmetrical. However, there is a consensus among linguists that pronouns are semantically empty and in need of a meaning gain from text-driven information (Bergmann, et al. 2012). Their syntactic value lies with their right placement as replacement for a linguistic unit in language use. Moreover, their pragmatic use is criticial in the development of a text and and a comprehension buidling measurement among L1 and L2 users of English, if their semantics and syntax are central to the definition of English language grammar. Keizer (2011) suggests to take help from Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) for communicative purpose, as the language's fundamential aspect is its application of interaction between a speaker and an addressee. The Figure 1 by Keizer (2011) given below is a depiction of the interaction that takes places in a communicative environment. The speaker's conceptual component is used to generate a communicative intent to its expansion into pragmatic (interpersonal) and semantic (representational) levels, before it is conditioned to the level of speech organization (morphosyntactic and phonological). The speech organization is a structure of sounds adding to meaning (semantic representation). The words (lexemes) acquire grammar (auxilaries) to language use (prosodic patterns and morphemes). The levels interact with immediate discourse context (contextual component) before they are trickled down to speaking and writing (output component). Therefore, the levels and components are indicators of correct pro-form's usage. While discussing grammaticalization, Hein and Song (2011) define pronouns in the following words:

> Markers for personal deixis belong to the most conservative parts of grammar, that is, they are diachronically fairly stable, as is suggested by the fact that in many cases they can be traced back etymologically to or even beyond the earliest stages of re constructible language history (p. 587).

These are usually retained as unaccented words in English. The rarity of accentuation is contrasted with emphatic stress, when an utterance containing a personal pronoun is spoken in a way that shifts the listener's attention to the pronouns' complete phonetic quality and quantity. 'We' if unaccented in an utterance, is produced with a short closing vowel. Similarly, English tone group that displays sense group is reported with a rare change in the production of personal pronouns pragmatically placed at a different contextual background. The pronouns are grammatically free from inflection and modifiers. L2 users of English need to improve pragmatic knowledge if they lack understanding of the pronouns.

Figure 1
FDG: general layout

Source. Keizer (2011)

Semantics and Society

Besides its grammatical and syntactic significance to the production of utterances and the formation of sentences, the pronouns need a degree of semantic reevaluation. The utterances and/or sentences are ambiguous if the nominative is a representation of unintended meaning of individualism, inclusive-'we' and exclusive-'we'. A common example is a combination of a noun phrase with a verb phrase. The verb phrase, which is named as participant process by Downing and Locke (1992), is a denomination of actions, feelings and thoughts. Let us call the phrase as progression as it manifests language development and thought patterns. The former is reification of mental state and symbolization, while the latter shows development of schemes of action towards concreteness and measurability. The noun phrase, which is substituted by its respective pro-forms, has been semantically defined with linguistic values of describability, namely an agency of doing or an agent participant, an affected participant, an effected participant, a beneficiary participant, a recipient participant, a

possessor participant, and a possessed participant. A linguistic event is framed with the participation of the agency and the progression.

The faculty of language is examined with (grammatical) rules and social practices. Innatists agree with the view that the faculty is an index of intelligence inherited from human beings. Its study is possible with a finite set of rules and the production of infinite sentences and utterances. Grammatical maturation in a child's brain takes place naturally. The faculty is further nurtured to guide language users to use the same universal rules of space and time and display their spectacular ability to speak a language and take part in communication. Pedagogic practices are certainly viewed differently in L2 contexts. While the pronominal use is a stable phenomenon across times, English grammar, which is reliant upon phonology, semantics, and syntax, is in a state of change. A number of varieties of English are being introduced to the literature of World Englishes today. While discussing possibilities of positive effects of testing upon language teaching in Pakistan's classrooms, the author strengthened his stated place in Shohamy, 2000 (as cited in Raza, 2009) words:

> …most ESL curricula focus a priori grammar without considering that grammar, English grammar in particular, is dynamic, changing and regularity-based, not a fixed-rule governed phenomenon, which reduces the cultural and social role of language learning and inhibits students from the language classroom discourse. (p. 184)

Behavioral scientists insist on the arrangement of language learning, encompassing the phases of facilitation, transfer, and interference. Language learners are supplied with inputs and expected to produce (linguistic) expressions as outputs appropriated to social and linguistic conditions for the description of succession of the inputs. Computational approaches have been devised into language programs. The programmers are trained to utilize them as an interface among the users initiating a connection of contents of various shapes and sizes with a set of forms of language(s). For example, Piaget's program is configured to promote genetic-environmental relationship in language acquisition (Corder, 1973). It monitors human sensorimotor intelligence (genetic) maturation with (social) interaction (environment). The programmer supports constructivism in a way that strong structures build on weaker ones once the brain begins wiring and schematizing actions with objects in the course of developmental stages of language competence (underlying grammar). A set of grammar rules (language performance) is put forth later. Cooper (1973) groups habits and rules in the same semantic field. There is no disagreement about the word meanings though. Apart from phonological development, a child begins speaking with single words, for example, ball for a ball or I want a ball. This structures sequence from weaker to stronger ones is language development. In a second and/or foreign language learning, the learners get accustomed to using would you mind…, how are you? and I mean to say long before they learn basic English structures.

After reviewing the pro-forms placement in the language, its learning and its usage, it is suggested to come back to the variables determining the language's role. Social class, education, country, nation, economic development, and family have been used to assess significance of relationships between language acquisition and proficiency. Twelve social variables have been listed that carry significance for language learning/acquisition and proficiency variables and four conditions, that is, teaching capacity, learning motivation, language use and language prestige. Social class, age, gender, occupation, religion, political affiliation, family, locale, national origin, school, financial background, and legal structures are the social variables. Wingen, et al., (2021) correlates social class with quality of life. One who has high social class has power and status adding to physical, social, mental, and environmental facets of life. Rubin's conditions are

effortlessly met if one from such a social class is motivated to learn a language. Power that controls valuable resources can be contrasted with status, that earns public respect; therefore, the one who has power is perceived differently from the one who is granted a status. Nonetheless, both power and status are the effects of social class. In addition, it is important to remember that the importance of religion in an individual's life living in a cosmopolitan city plays a prominent role in specifying the social class. A virtuous participation in religion results in its positive relationship with prosocial behavior. Zhang (2021) sees cosmopolitism as a place of global citizenship that enjoys new pluralism of identities melting to form global consensus on ethical and moral grounds over systems of state and faith. It is theorized to offer global justice to citizens. The relationship between religion and cosmopolitism is perceived as dichotomous. Religion that promotes in-group ties is theorized and operated against out-groups as well. The city that is considered for the research has an array of identities conflicting or complementing the discourse of power and status.

METHOD

This was a small-scale study framed under a qualitative paradigm of research methods and theoretically justified by Rubin (1972), Keizer (2011), and Downing and Locke (1992). Two groups of students were taught a course of English language in two different departments of a public institution of higher education in 2018 in Karachi. The institution understands implications of 'a large-scale-one-time' achievement test (Raza, 2009). It lends its support to national and international research, the government of Pakistan's foreign offices, the city's colleges and Maddrassas and over 40,000 local and foreign citizens for studentship and scholarship. Despite financial crunch and disturbing political landscape, including a composite challenge of youth's pressure, multiethnic momentum (political marginalization of Urdu-speaking muhajirs), resettlement places for Pushtun-speaking groups in the wake of international war against terrorism, registration of Kashimir origin's nationals, noticeable presence of citizens from the Punjab and Gilgit-Baltistan, and migration of Karachites' families of Sindh origin, academic endeavors in the universities continue.

The test-takers were given a set of test items after successful completion of the course. Out of 96 respondents, 66 (69%) test-takers were found expressing their opinions with the English subjective pronoun at two hundred and forty places (240) of their writings in reply to an extended written response-based test items about the uses of mobile phones. The occurrences along with the sentences were listed down manually and alphanumerically coded. Tacit knowledge was one of the key sections of data interpretation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Firstly, there was no true event of representation of the royal 'we' in the speeches of the users of English. Probably its departure from being an example was because of the theoretical limitations of its (further) discovery and identification in second language speeches in the absence of (comparative) data of its equivalents (that is, hum) of /in the user's first language. Even if it is assumed that the users had reportedly been using the royal pronoun in the first language, doing a comparison between the pro-forms of the languages was beyond the scope of the study. However, few sentences can be interpreted with the exceptional use. For instance, S75 had the pronoun in agreement with the verb, which is consistent with the principles of English syntax, but acted as a referent to a human being in the noun phrase a normal person. Conveying such meaning and syntactic arrangement are discouraged in English language education. The deictic use of the royal 'we' is pragmatically questioned in the contextual component of Keizer's (2011) framework of English pro-forms. Few examples are:

S75: If 'we' want to switch our life from a mobile freak to a normal person…. (01)

S195: 'We' cannot forget the incidence of two young school lovers, who shot themselves just because they could not live together. (02)

Although S195 was an account of personal experience, its nominative case of 'we' contained an exopheric reference to the user, blurring the pronoun's characteristics of quantification and gender specification. As a result, the meaning of the first-person plural along with its constituents in S51 received ambiguity. If the pronoun was not a reference to the royal 'we', S51 could be rewritten with a non-participant pronominal in an indirect structure.

S51: So, we can easily say that mobile phone is good and also bad, but it depends on the users.   (03)

S51 (rewritten): So, it can easily be said that mobile phone is good and bad, but it depends on the users. (04)

The royal pronoun was used to mean singularity of human beings, diminish the characteristics of quantification and gender specification, and leave ambiguity in S51, S75 and S195. Apart from grammatical inaccuracies, the occurrence of the royal pronoun's rarity and unpredictability in the user's speeches cannot be considered as an example to support the extra-grammatical use.

Secondly, there were around two-hundred and forty (240) occurrences of the pronoun reported to identify a pronominal representation in text and text development. This fairly frequent utilization was an indicator of its linguistic capacity to generate text and the required textual cohesion. Almost eighty per cent (80%) of the occurrences were reported in sentences of simple structures of present time. Excessive grammatical employment of English modal verbs, spread over more than fifty per cent (50%) of the pronouns, included sentences which were helpful to display uses of the mobile phones. Besides English auxiliary verbs, the device's operation and function were expressed through activity verbs. Textual characteristics were found close to spoken speech. Despite usage of positive sentences and active language, there were almost 15% instances of grammatical inaccuracies at elementary level. Yet, it cannot be denied that the pronoun was successfully applied to introduce an English text describing uses of mobile phones in a physical setting of an educational institution.

Thirdly, the pronoun was used to represent an in-group feeling. It was used to emphasize Islamic values and belief system among the users of English despite the fact that there were only two instances (>1%) of religious affiliation to embody the users' identity group (See S61). In addition, the use of 'we' was found as a reference to family membership in S93 and S94 and an indicator of young, dependent family members in S89 and S154. Their association with technology, communication, research, education, entertainment, and personal management was noticeable in almost every second sentences of the corpus. Nevertheless, there was not a single reference made through the subjective pronoun to structure information carrying details of geographic locations and the users' national identities. The pronominal was also utilized to appreciate the users' integration with their family relatives. None of the sentences had any piece of information about their professional and political affiliations either.

S61: We are living in an Islamic country…. (05)

S93: We can keep contact with our friends and relatives. (06)

S94: We can play games in it …. (07)

S89: We can call our parents or guardians and inform …. (08)

S154: …and we inform our family in mobile. (09)

Fourthly, the text corpus was a presentation of English language used by a group of adults enrolled in two taught programs in an institution of education under a foreign influence to English language and its speakers. They used Urdu and other regional languages for interpersonal communication and learning during the semester and were expected to pass one or two courses of English language to graduate for further studies. Despite the unfavorable conditions for English language education or educational communication in English language or its promotion by other means, they were found capable of structuring appropriate sentences. Their grammatical inaccuracies ranging from subject-verb agreements to English tenses and aspects was an indication of a section of the speech community deprived from required language accuracy and fluency. These linguistic deprivations of varying degrees and values have been socially stratified. Highlighting the quality of English language education offered to the masses in Pakistan, Shamim (2008) groups proficient users of English in expensive, elitist private system of schools in the country, and places deficient English speakers in public schools. Both teachers and students struggle to communicate in English in public and under-resourced Pakistani institutions of education. This language deficiency seems to have produced an indicator of power and status for the definition of social class and a problematic part of quality of life for low-income groups pursuing education in under-resourced urban and rural places of learning. Thus, the inaccuracies were a sign of the presence of an under-resourced educational place and weak English language education.

Lastly, there were 34% occurrences of the modal verb 'can' preceding English subjective-plural pronoun, projecting the users' capability to do (agent as participant) in the set of the sentences were visible. Its syntactic negation in three instances (S54, S103 and S115) is, in fact, a display of a relationship of human life with technology. Sporadic modal verb's utilization for advice, obligation, necessity, and possibility was found. The writers' capacity was a contribution to the meaning of utility or consumer's utility. At the same time, the learners who had been referred to as adult users of English in the text tended to perform as beneficiary as participant. The pronoun was a reference to those positive minded adult human groups who liked to use the device constructively.

S54: We can't imagine our lives without mobile phones. (10)

S103: In the present century we can't imagine to live without technology. (11)

S115: We cannot do our simple work without it. (12)

Discussion

The pronominal use in language is normal and its frequency in English language is an indication of the user's accuracy and fluency. If one hails from Urdu-speaking regions of Pakistan and India, he/she will find the use of

the subjective plural for the subjective singular in speeches of some communities as a linguistic marker of differentiation. However, its royal use in English is reportedly limited to past kingdoms of English-speaking communities and has almost ceased to exist in today's patterns of English language. The unavailability of the royal 'we' can also be confirmed with English language teaching materials in today's discourse of English language education. The language users are savvy to apply English subjective plural to identify themselves to a group. This application also helps in promoting togetherness and generating a rhetoric, resulting in language effectiveness and persuasion. Most users of the present study were probably good at doing it. The paucity of the royal pronoun in their speech patterns supports the materials used to learn English language in foreign/second language settings. The users were representative of consumers of technology. Their expressions containing the pro-form were also indicating their family ties in the communities living in Pakistan and they found themselves in good relationships and wanted to be remembered in a group. Although their unique identity was lost somewhere as a result of the absence of the singular pro-form from the speeches, the plurality was guided to in-group feelings. Further studies about the use of we may also claim about grammaticality of the speeches of such users in the future.

CONCLUSION

The use of the royal pronoun was hardly noticeable in the sentences. This shows that the participants were pragmatically aware of the pronoun's modern usage even if they were not linguistically proficient. Their social affiliation was indicated by the pronominal use. The sentences containing, 'we' specify the participants to the category of young Muslims using English as a second language and technology for communication. As a result, it became an interpretable part of the sentences contributing to text development. Its usage was helpful for preliminary valuation of linguistic proficiency in English. In addition, its semantic value was limited to beneficiary as participant.

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