

# Who Is to Believe When You Bet: on Non-Referential Indexical Functions of the Pronoun *You* in English

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**ABSTRACT:** Using English-language material this paper presents an account of a number of functions of the pronoun *you* that are not directly related to reference. The analysis focuses on occurrences of the second-person pronoun in utterances of prediction, judgment and generalization. The possibility of non-referential uses of the pronoun *you* stems from double indexicality as an inherent property of personal pronouns. As a non-referential item the pronoun *you* is shown to be indexed to the speaker's internal experiences and/or communicative activities.

*Keywords:* personal pronoun, reference, index, internal experience, communication.

**RESUMEN:** Con material en lengua inglesa, este artículo presenta una explicación de una serie de funciones del pronombre *you* que no están directamente relacionadas con la referencia. El análisis se centra en ejemplos del pronombre de segunda persona en enunciados de predicción, juicio y generalización. Se demuestra que la posibilidad de usos no referenciales del pronombre *you* surgen de la doble indexicalización como propiedad inherente de los pronombres personales. Como elemento no referencial, el pronombre *you* indica las experiencias internas y/o las actividades comunicativas del hablante.

*Palabras clave:* pronombre personal, referencia, índice, experiencia interna, comunicación.

## 1. Referential and Non-Referential Properties of Personal Pronouns

One of the most common accounts of the meanings of personal pronouns is that which is based on generalizations over their referential properties. From a referential perspective, meanings of first-, second-, and third-person pronouns are realized, respectively, through the indication of the speaker (*I*), the hearer/addressee (*you*), and the person or entity (*he, she, it*) referred to in a particular speech event. For example, English

personal pronouns are characterized in terms of reference to speech-event participants in such well-known grammar manuals as Jespersen (1933: 147), Huddleston (1998: 97), Quirk *et al.* (1999, ch. 4). Complementary to accounts of personal pronouns in terms of their referential properties, pragmatic theories of meaning (see, for example, Levinson, 2003: 62; Mey, 2001: 52-56) relate pronouns to items of person deixis, that is, words which function as “pointers” to someone or something in a particular context.

However, quite a number of uses of personal pronouns can hardly be explained in terms of reference alone. Here belong, for example, the generic uses of pronouns. For instance, in (1) the pronoun *I* does not refer uniquely to the speaker, but, rather (according to the context), to the whole group of (independently-minded) people:

- (1) *I can counter my nemo by conflicting; by adopting my own special style of life. I build up an elaborate unique persona, I defy the mass.* (J. Fowles, *The Aristos*, 38)

Generic reference is one of the functional properties of the second-person pronoun *you* which frequently occurs in utterances such as the following:

- (2) *You never know what will happen next.*

In (2), it is generic reference of the second-person pronoun which makes the latter correlative with the indefinite pronoun *one* occurring in utterances like (3) (that are popular in American English):

- (3) *One never knows what he expects will happen next.*

Occasionally, a third-person pronoun singular can have generic reference, as is the case with the pronoun *he* when the latter is used in proverbs or sayings, as in (4):

- (4) *He laughs best who laughs last.*

On the other hand, personal pronouns can be used with “shifted reference”, or as indexical signs pointing to “false” participants of the respective speech event. For instance, the pronouns *I* and *you* can alternate in speech, both, either directly or indirectly, indicating the speaker. This usually occurs in three cases.

First, alternations of *you* and *I* are to be found in collocations with the verb *bet* in utterances of prediction, as in (5):

- (5) *You (vs. I) bet they are going to win.*

Second, both *I* and *you* can refer to the speaker in utterances of judgment, as in (6):

- (6) *You would think (vs. I think) they are working.*

Finally, example (7) below demonstrates one of the most frequent uses of the pronoun *you* with reference to the speaker in utterances of generalization:

- (7) *As an unashamed “romantic”, I have always been subject to boredom. [...] You feel you can’t ignore it, can’t take your eyes off it [...].* (C. Wilson, *Mind Parasites*, 81)

There are two interrelated questions in connection with the occurrence of *you* in examples (2), (5), (6) and (7). First, there are no obvious reasons or logical motivations for using the pronoun *you* in the mentioned examples with (partial) reference to the speaker. Second, it cannot be stated with sufficient certainty whether it is reference alone which is at issue in the given uses of the second-person pronoun.

With the formulated questions as a background, the next section of the paper gives a brief overview of how the problems are commonly treated in the literature and suggests a working hypothesis for further investigation.

## 2. On the Double Indexicality of Personal pronouns: A Hypothesis

Interpretations of referential properties of personal pronouns are often based on the assumption that pronouns are inherently multifunctional, or polysemous. For example, it is observed in Jespersen (1933: 151) that one of the meanings of the pronouns *we* and *you* in English is the meaning of ‘generic person’ which, in turn, may lend emotional coloring to the utterance in familiar speech.

It is pointed out in Marmaridou (2003: 78) that many pragmatically oriented studies treat the functional variety of deictic words (including personal pronouns) on the basis of differentiation between different types of deixis, such as, for example, personal and social deixis. This approach is, in part, reflected in Kamio (2001), where the pronouns *we*, *you* and *they* are regarded alongside the pragmatic (and social) parameter “speaker’s territory of information”, with only occasional remarks on how this parameter relates to the (more prototypical) function of the pronouns, which consists in indicating participants/non-participants of communication.

On the other hand, some attempts have been made to subsume the pronouns’ referential and non-referential uses within one unified framework. Thus, it is claimed in Smith (1989) that uses of linguistic indexicals (including personal pronouns) are governed by invariable and generalized high-order metarules that, in turn, determine variable reference-fixing rules governing indexicals on particular occasions of use. The author’s claim is substantiated with reference to a number of indexicals, including the pronoun *I* in English (Smith, 1989: 182-186). From a psychologically oriented perspective, the common denominator for the variety of uses of indexical expressions is established on referential grounds in Clark (1996). Specifically, the symbolic constituent of meaning of the personal pronoun *I* is defined as “oneself” or “the person uttering this item”, whereas the indexical core of the pronoun is understood as “the self indicated by origin of voice” (Clark, 1996: 162).

Acknowledging the above overviewed observations on correlations of referential and non-referential properties of personal pronouns, this paper, however, suggests a somewhat different perspective on the phenomenon under discussion. The proposed study will proceed from two theoretical points of departure. First, the paper takes up Benveniste’s (1966: 232) point that the pronouns *I* and *you* are tied up by “correlation of

subjectivity”, which presupposes, in turn, the constitutive role of the subjective component in the pronouns’ meaning.

Second, the paper follows Adamczewski and Delmas’ (1982) treatment of grammatical, or function words in English, which postulates that words of this kind (including pronouns) function as “indices” or “tracers” of the speaker’s internal(ized) operations, such as perceptually and/or conceptually grounded judgments, evaluations, subject-predicate linking procedures. With reference to English indexicals, it is shown by Delmas (1982, ch. 8, 9) that indexical words do more than simply pointing to external entities. Namely, the demonstratives *this*, *that*, as well as the personal pronoun *it* (Delmas, 1982: 221-227) are shown to be indexed to such internal operations of the speaker as self-positioning inside or outside a particular situation, recalling something or appealing to the hearer’s memory, differentiation between new (rheme) and known (theme) information.

From a semiotic perspective, Adamczewski’s account of English grammar presupposes that the notion of linguistic indexicality could be extended to include – besides the function of pointing to external entities in a particular context – the function of *indicating the speaker’s internal positioning towards what is being referred to*.

The semiotic implication of Adamczewski’s theory links to the account of basic vocabulary items (called “primitive vocabulary”) suggested – from an evolutionary perspective – in Allott (2001). One of the key claims of the book consists in the assumption that structures of individual words “carry within them either a direct representation of a percept or action or an indirect clue or indication of the percept or action to which the word relates” (Allott, 2001: 60). With reference to the pronoun *you* in English, it is observed that the pronoun relates, on the one hand, to a particular gesture (“a strong forward pointing with the forefinger”) and, on the other hand, contains an internal component (Allott, 2001: 100) which, in turn, is understood as a particular internal state or activity (Allott, 2001: 95).

With these briefly overviewed theoretical assumptions as a backdrop, the paper puts forward the following hypothesis:

*One of the inherent properties of personal pronouns as items that have both referential and non-referential functions consists in their double indexicality. As referential items, personal pronouns perform the function of pointing to speech-event participants/non-participants. The function of personal pronouns as non-referential items consists in (implicit) indication of the speaker’s internal states, experiences and/or communicative activities.*

The suggested hypothesis will be further substantiated with reference to linguistic data drawn from English-language fiction. The corpus of literary texts has included works of British and American authors written within a time span of about fifty years: from the middle up to the end of the twentieth century. The corpus has comprised over three thousand pages of printed text.

### 3. The Pronoun *You* as an Index of Internal Experiences and Communicative Activities

#### 3.1. The Contribution of the Pronoun *You* to the Expression of Uncertainty: The Case of *You Bet*

Most frequently, the pronoun *you* refers to the speaker in collocation with the predicate *bet*, as in (5). Below is another example of the same usage type:

- (8) *You're thinking what I'm thinking? You bet I am [...].* (M.H. Clark, *Before I Say Good-Bye*, 302)

According to the context, the character saying *you bet* is not quite sure about his own words. The utterance, however, would sound with greater certainty as soon as the pronoun *you* is replaced by *I*, as in (9):

- (9) *You're thinking what I'm thinking? I bet I am [...].*

The modality of uncertainty which is often conveyed by the expression *you bet* (contrastively to *I bet* expressing the opposite modality) is implied in most dictionary definitions of the expression. Thus, Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1994: 108) gives the following typical example of using *you bet*:

- (10) *You bet I'll be there*

As explained in Merriam Webster (1994: 108), the expression *you bet* in the given example means "to be able to be sure". In vein with this definition, A.S. Hornby's *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English* (1980: 78) says that *I bet* is equivalent to "I'm certain", whereas *you bet* means "you may be certain".

The question which arises in connection with the briefly overviewed examples in (8) – (10) concerns the contribution of the pronouns *I* and *you* to the expression of certainty and uncertainty respectively.

The contribution of the pronoun *I* to the expression of certainty can be explained by the fact that – alongside reference to the speaker – the pronoun also introduces a first-person mode of thinking (Runggaldier, 1995) and, thus, introduces the psychological structure called 'self'. Consciousness of one's own 'self', in turn, involves the whole range of subjective experiences, of which the basic ones, according to Gallagher (2000), are preconceptually grounded senses of agency and ownership for action, as well as the experience of immediate access to one's own self. One's sense of agency and/or ownership for action can be held responsible for the significant role that, according to Austin (1962), the pronoun *I* plays in performative utterances. On the other hand, it is possible to assume that the speaker's access to his/her own internal experiences is responsible for the modality of certainty conveyed by utterances with the expression *I bet*. Some support for this assumption can be provided by examples like (11) in which *I bet* collocates with another expression of certainty, namely, *I'd put money on it*:

- (11) [...] *I bet he's looking at her grave. I'd put money on it.* (V. McDermid, *Killing the Shadows*, 365)

Importantly, in case of switching from the first- to the second person-pronoun, as demonstrated in (12), the resulting utterance would hardly be acceptable, if possible at all:

- (12) [...] *You bet he's looking at her grave. ??I'd put money on it.*

The constraint on using *you* in (12) can be explained with due consideration of the contrast in the epistemic implications of *you* and *I* as used, respectively, in *you bet* and *I'd put money on it*. Whereas the pronoun *I* in general and, especially, in the mentioned expression presupposes the speaker's egocentric space (Runggaldier, 1995: 138) and, thus, conveys a high degree of experientially anchored certainty, the second-person pronoun *you*, by contrast, does not presuppose the speaker's subjective experience, which, in turn, leads to the expression of uncertainty in *you bet*.

Though the expression of uncertainty appears to be the primary function of the pronoun *you* in collocation with the verb *bet*, it does not mean that the pronoun's referential function is in this case entirely suppressed. Consider the following utterance:

- (13) [...] *You can bet your bottom dollar it would have been a long time before the police managed to nail him.* (V. McDermid, *Killing the Shadows*, 393)

In (13), the epistemic connotation of the pronoun *you* is that of the speaker's uncertainty. On the other hand, the context of *vis-à-vis* communication in which the utterance in (13) is pronounced presupposes that by using *you* the speaker makes direct reference to the addressee, literally inviting the latter to take some responsibility (*you can bet*) for the suggested prediction. However, though the pronoun *you* in (13) functions both as a referential and non-referential item, it is obviously the pronoun's non-referential (epistemic) function which plays the dominating role in the general communicative structure of the utterance. Thus, a switch from the second-person pronoun used in the original utterance in (13) to the first-person pronoun in the transformed utterance in (14) would result (not so much) in the change of reference ('addressee' – 'speaker'), but in the transition from the modality of uncertainty (*you can bet*) to the modality of certainty (*I can bet*):

- (14) [...] *I can bet my bottom dollar it would have been a long time before the police managed to nail him.*

A case when the speaker is in a state of hesitation between asserting and hypothesizing about a particular state of affairs is demonstrated in (15):

- (15) *Diesel fuel doesn't cause explosions, he thought. I'll bet anything that if that boat was turned into confetti, it was because somebody planted a bomb on that; you can bet on that.* (M. H. Clark, *Before I Say Good-Bye*, 74)

By contrast with the example in (13), the given fragment of discourse makes part of the character's inner speech. As a consequence of this, the pronoun *you* in *you can bet* has the same referent as the first-person pronoun in *I'll bet*: in both cases it is the speaker (and author of the inner monologue) in an instance of self-reference. The difference between *I* and *you* is of epistemic rather than of referential nature. Whereas the pronoun *I* – because of the implicit indication of the speaker's egocentric space – presupposes the speaker's certainty (see above), the pronoun *you* implies, according to Langacker's (2000: 205) viewing arrangement, the speaker's positioning as the subject of perception and thus (probably) hypothesizing and prediction. This positioning of the speaker directly relates to the function of *you* as a means of expressing uncertainty. The contrast in the epistemic implications of *I* and *you* in (15) is emphasized through the same kind of contrast between the expressions the pronouns collocate with. Thus, whereas the pronoun *I* agrees with the expression *will bet anything* in conveying the idea of the speaker's certainty, the pronoun *you*, by contrast, agrees with the expression *can bet* in connoting the speaker's state of hesitation and lack of certainty. The epistemic indexical value of each pronoun (especially of the pronoun *I*) is so closely tied up to the implication of the ensuing expression that a switch from one pronoun to the other one (e.g. from *I* to *you*) could result, as was the case in (12), in a low degree of acceptability of the transformed utterance:

- (16) *Diesel fuel doesn't cause explosions, he thought. ??You'll bet anything that if that boat was turned into confetti, it was because somebody planted a bomb on it [...].*

The analysis of this subsection has shown that the pronouns *I* and *you* in collocation with the verb *bet* perform *the communicatively relevant function of indicating the speaker's internal positioning with respect to the designated speech act*. The pronoun *I* indicates the speaker's egocentric space and agentive power, which makes the utterance *I bet* a (semi-)performative and thus – to a high degree – equivalent to actual bet. The pronoun *you*, on the contrary, indicates the speaker's position as the subject of perception and hypothesizing, which lends the modality of uncertainty to the utterance *you bet* and makes it a kind of prediction rather than assertion.

In what follows it will be shown that non-referential indexical functions of the pronoun *you* feature prominently in utterances of judgment (3.2.) and generalization (3.3.).

### 3.2. Indexical Functions of *You* in Utterances of Judgment

The pronoun *you* can be used alternatively with the pronoun *I* in collocation with either cognitive verbs (e.g. *think, believe, consider*) or speech act verbs in the transferred meaning of cognitive categorization (e.g. *say, tell, call* in the meaning “interpret”, “classify as”). Consider the example in (17) where the subject of inner speech and (simultaneously) the subject of opinion are represented in the predication *you'd think*:

- (17) [...] *He could see the beaks tucked into the feathers. 'You'd think they'd be feeding,' he said to himself, 'not just standing in that way.'* (D. Du Maurier, *The Birds*, 40)

The use of *you* in (17) may seem to carry the same connotation of uncertainty as the use of *you* in *you bet*. Thus, a switch from *you* to *I* in (17) would yield a more certain expression of the character's opinion, as the transformed utterance in (18) clearly shows:

- (18) [...] *He could see the beaks tucked into the feathers. 'I think they are feeding,' he said to himself [...].*

However, the occurrence of *you* in cases like (17) involves the realization of one more important function of the pronoun besides the function of connoting the speaker's uncertainty. Consider the example below, where, unlike (17), the speaker has a "real" interlocutor:

- (19) [...] *I'm two-faced, 'cos sometimes I want to stand on my hind legs and tell Elaine exactly what I think of her, but do I do it? No...' 'That's not being two-faced, lass, that's diplomacy. That's what you call diplomacy.'* (C. Cookson, *Justice Is a Woman*, 176)

The example in (19) represents a fragment of conversation between a young lady, who is imagining she is "two-faced", and an elderly man, who is trying to convince the lady to be less self-critical and to characterize her attitude towards her own sister (called Elaine) in terms of "diplomacy". The use of *you* in the man's utterance (*That's what you call diplomacy*) presupposes, in part, direct reference to the addressee. Besides, by using *you* in combination with the verb *call* the speaker is signaling that the person he is addressing could (potentially) share his views and beliefs. In other words, the pronoun *you*, as used in (19), points to *the speaker's interactive strategy of involving the addressee into his system of opinions and assumptions*. Due to this interactive implication of the pronoun *you* the utterance with the verb *call* used in the present indefinite form receives interpretation as the speaker's appeal to share his point of view, not as the speaker's description of the addressee's point of view (which would be a more common way of interpreting the present-indefinite predication). The interactive implication of the utterance *You call it diplomacy* makes it, on the one hand, synonymous to *I would like you to call it diplomacy* and, on the other hand, different from *I know that you call it diplomacy*.

The transformed example in (20), where *you* is replaced by *I*, demonstrates a low degree of the speaker's cooperativeness:

- (20) *'That's not being two-faced, lass, that's diplomacy. That's what I call diplomacy.'*

Though the indication of the speaker's interactive strategy is communicatively important in uses of *you* like those in (19), the second-person pronoun's indexical link to the speaker's positioning as the subject of viewing and, in part, as the subject of (not quite certain) prediction (see 3.1.) is not entirely suppressed. Consider the example in (21), where *you* combines with the modal predication *could say*:



- (21) *Christopher Dawe held up a hand. "Just one moment. Tell me how he moves. [...] How he moves. Walks, for example." "Fluidly," Angie said. "You could say he almost glides."* (D. Lehane, *Prayers for Rain*, 231)

In (21), the use of *you* in the statement of the speaker's own (tentative) opinion indicates that the speaker (Angie) is inviting the addressee (Christopher Dawe) to join her in making perceptual judgments about the person being discussed. At the same time, the pronoun *you* invokes the speaker as the viewer and thus – as the one who can only *predict* the possibility for the addressee to share a particular point of view, not impose it in a straightforward and certain manner. In (21), the hypothetical nature of the addressee's involvement is marked by the modal auxiliary *could*: *You could say he almost glides* (vs. more categorical, if acceptable, *??You say he almost glides*).

The pronoun *you* functions as a complex index pointing to the speaker's involvement strategy, on the one hand, and to the speaker's positioning as the subject of perception and prediction, on the other, in the following example:

- (22) *For that matter, could anyone say that Mrs. Stoner was a bad person? No. He could not say it himself, and he was no freak. She had her points, Mrs. Stoner. She was clean. [...] She had her other points, to be sure – her faults, you might say. She snooped – no mistake about it [...]* (J. F. Powers, "The Valiant Woman", *Love Stories*, 72)

In (22), the pronoun *you* occurring in the expression "you might say" indicates that the speaker (who is at the same time the subject of inner monologue) is willing to share his opinion about another character (Mrs. Stoner) with any person within his communicative domain. This indexical function of the second-person pronoun makes it different in the given example from the pronoun *anyone*, which locates the potential subject of the same opinion outside the speaker's immediate sphere of communication. Since it is the relationship of perception and hypothesizing which links the speaker to any individual even within his own sphere of communication (*you*), the verb *say* that refers to an individual's judgment-making appears with the modal auxiliary *might*: *you might say* (vs. *??you say*).

Utterances of judgment with second-person subjects have one more important peculiarity besides those discussed in this subsection. Namely, such utterances, in contrast to their counterparts with first-person subjects, produce the effect of generalization. The special contribution of the pronoun *you* to this effect would be the concern of the next subsection of the paper.

### 3.3. Indexical Functions of *You* in Utterances of Generalization

Uses of *you* in a generic sense are among most common ones in Contemporary English. In many cases the so-called "generic" *you* indicates the speaker's mental image produced in an instance of self-reflection. Illustrative in this respect is the following example:

- (23) *If I'd stayed all night, she thought, in the morning when the fog burned off I'd have known how far **you** could see from the top of the hill.* (E. Parsons, "The Nightingales Sing", *Love Stories*, 38)

From a referential point of view, the pronouns *you* and *I* in (23) appear to be very near equivalents, so that a switch from the second- to the first-person pronoun, as shown in (24), would not result in any change of reference:

- (24) *If I'd stayed all night, she thought, in the morning when the fog burned off I'd have known how far **I** could see from the top of the hill.*

On the other hand, whatever the degree of interchangeability of *I* and *you* in utterances like (23), the use of the second-person pronoun brings about the effect of generalization. What could be the source of this effect?

It has been mentioned previously that the use of *you* invokes the speaker as the subject of perception and hypothesizing. From a broader discourse oriented perspective, this may mean that the second-person pronoun could activate the whole situation of perception (Hausendorf, 2003) in which the subject and object of perception (the referents of *I* and *you* respectively) are separated by a *spatial distance*.

Assuming that the pronoun *you* is (implicitly) indexed to distance between the speaker and addressee, it becomes clear that the generalizing effect of *you*-utterances comes as a natural result of an inherent link between distance and generalization. With reference to the second-person pronoun in typical generic uses this link has been pointed out in Reilly *et al.* (2005: 189, 198). In cases like (23), the pronoun *you* invokes the speaker's mental image, as well as viewing this image as if from a distance.

Consider another example involving the occurrence of *you* in inner speech:

- (25) *And taking care of somebody made **me** feel good. Like discovering **you're** more than **you** thought **you** were.* (B. Greene, *Morning Is a Long Time Coming*, 33)

In (25), the contrast between the pronouns *I* and *you* is foregrounded due to the contrast of clauses in which the pronouns occur. Thus, the pronoun *I* (occurring in the objective case "me") refers to the subject of inner speech as an actual experiencer of the predicated state ("feeling good") and, accordingly, makes part of the factual proposition. The pronoun *you*, by contrast, is indexically linked to the mentally construed image of the experiencer, which agrees with the occurrence of the pronoun in the counterfactual clause introduced by the comparative conjunction *like*. The idea of distance evoked by the second-person pronoun in (25) correlates with the mentally conceived distance between the world of reality (reflected in the clause with the first-person pronoun) and the world of one's imagination (referred to in the clause with the second-person pronoun).

Distance and generalization appear to be two realities indexed by the second-person pronoun in the example below:

- (26) “Now that’s loyalty,” Stevie Zambuca said. “**I** try and instill that in my men, but **I** can’t. They’re only as loyal as their wallets are thick. See, **you** can’t teach loyalty. **You** can’t instill it. It’s like trying to teach love. [...]” (D. Lehane, *Prayers for Rain*, 198)

In (26), the ‘I’-participant of communication switches from *I* to *you* in the instance of generalizing over his experience of teaching loyalty. The effect of generalization comes as a natural result of *the speaker’s establishing a distance* between himself as a bearer of actual experience (*I try [...] but I can’t*) and his construed image of any individual having the same experience (*you can’t teach loyalty*). The verb *see* which introduces the utterance of generalization indicates the speaker’s appeal to his interlocutors to *have a mental view and comprehension* of the situation being spoken about. On the other hand, the pronoun *you* in (26) refers, in part, to the people the speaker is addressing and indicates the speaker’s attempt to involve the addressees in sharing his experience. The multiple implications of the pronoun *you* in the analyzed example (as was the case with some previously analyzed uses of *you*) reveal the possibility of the pronoun’s functioning as a complex indexical integrating the properties of a referential item and, at the same time, a non-referential word which connotes the speaker’s internal positioning with respect to the designated event.

#### 4. Conclusion

The proposed analysis of the pronoun *you* in English has revealed that there is a number of uses of the pronoun that cannot be adequately interpreted with recourse to the pronoun’s basic referential property – pointing to the addressee in a canonical speech event. The present study singles out three types of utterances in which the second-person pronoun functions as either a non-referential item or (more commonly) as a word with “shifted” reference, i.e. pointing to the speaker rather than the addressee: (i) predictions; (ii) judgments; (iii) generalizations. In accounting for the possibility of using *you* without direct reference to, or even in the absence of, the addressee the paper puts forward and substantiates the hypothesis that this possibility stems from the inherent property of personal pronouns (and, maybe, some other indexical words) which manifests itself through the pronouns’ double indexicality. Namely, it is shown that besides indicating the addressee as an external participant of a speech event the second-person pronoun functions as *an indexical pointing to internal experiences of the speaker* with respect to the content of the proposition expressed in the utterance. When the speaker-related indexical function of the pronoun *you* becomes highly relevant for the purposes of discourse the pronoun’s basic referential function (pointing to the addressee) may be partially suppressed. In most cases this leads to the effect of either indefinite or “shifted” reference.

The suggested account of non-referential indexical functions of the pronoun *you* in English maps out a model for the study of other pronouns and/or indexical words in general which would envisage all kinds of explicit and implicit semiotic links of the words in question and which could thus reveal the variety of facets in their semiotic potential.

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