

Grammar and function of *we**

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1. Theoretical introduction

Human beings are socially organized, they are not able to survive in isolation. Important social groups are the core family and the expanded family, the clan, the village, the nation etc. Membership in these groups usually lasts for a life-time and plays an important part in the cultural and social development of the human individual. Within these all-encompassing time-stable groups, human individuals establish smaller, dynamic groups — sometimes on a day-to-day basis — which have to fulfill certain tasks or goals. An important feature of the more time-stable groups is that their members create and establish a social identity with respect to their group membership. Social identity means that individuals know about their own membership and the membership of others of the same group and that they presuppose this knowledge for the others. Usually, this knowledge is communicated to people of the same group in order to confirm and reestablish this relationship as well as to people of other groups in order to raise a difference in the relation to them. It is a common experience that social groups develop certain signs of recognition which their members use in order to communicate them to other non-members; these signs may be emblems, or logotypes worn on t-shirts to indicate the membership in a specific school or University, certain graffiti on walls indicating the territory of a street gang, or other symbols which designate nothing more than group membership. Since group membership is so important to human beings, it does not come as surprise that it does also play an important part in our verbal communication.

One almost universal means to refer to speaker-groups are first person non-singular pronouns such as English *we*, German *wir*, and French *nous*. The usage of first person plural pronouns consists of at least three important operations. Firstly, the speaker refers to a set of human individuals which were introduced in some way or other in the previous discourse. Secondly, he determines this set of people as a group, and thirdly, he explicitly states that he is a member of this group excluding others from membership in this group at the same time. The first two operations constitute the anaphoric side of first person plural pronouns. It is generally not

possible to start some conversation with *we* without a previous introduction of the members of this group. An utterance such as (1) would make no sense to the addressee if it were used as an opening to a conversation. In (2) on the other hand, the reference of *we* does not cause any problems, since the members of the speaker-group are explicitly named in the previous context.

- (1) Listen, we went to Weimar last weekend.
- (2) Can you believe it? John and Paul dropped in yesterday and we made a trip to Weimar.

The anaphoric side of first person plural pronouns — often neglected in linguistic textbooks — make them similar to third person plural pronouns. This similarity is certainly one reason why third person plural pronouns are frequently the historical source for first person plural pronouns. (I'll come to this point later, see Section 5. below).

On the other side, first person plural pronouns are deictic expressions since they refer to the actual speaker of the speech act, i.e. without knowing who is speaking the addressee cannot understand *we*. The speaker is the central person in a speech act for various reasons. He intends to cause an effect on the side of the addressee, for this purpose he wants to communicate something to the addressee, he attracts the attention of the hearer, he initiates the speech act, and finally he chooses and uses the linguistic expressions he considers to be appropriate to let the addressee recognize what his purposes are.

The centrality of the speaker in the speech act is the reason for the grammatical prominence first person forms often have compared to second and third person forms (cf. Benveniste 1946, 1955; Helmbrecht 1999). This prominence of first person forms over other persons has been observed with respect to the morphological combination of person categories with other categories and with respect to the syntactic coding of grammatical relations in pronominal paradigms in languages all over the world. These facts are summarized and described theoretically by the so-called empathy hierarchy (cf. Silverstein 1976, Givón 1976, Kuno & Kaburaki 1977, Zwicky 1977, Dixon 1979, DeLancey 1981, Planck 1985, Croft 1990, and others). The empathy hierarchy which includes the person hierarchy as its upper part states that the first person precedes all other person categories, that personal pronouns precede nouns and that human and animate nouns precede inanimate nouns; cf. (3)

- (3) Empathy Hierarchy (Silverstein 1976, Givón 1976, Dixon 1979, etc.)
 $1 < 2 < 3 < \text{proper names} < \text{human} < \text{animate} < \text{inanimate}$

The cited studies on the empathy hierarchy do not distinguish between first person singular and non-singular categories. They state the hierarchy as it is reproduced in (3). However, the empathy hierarchy and its functional background — the central-

ity of the speaker — has also its effects on the formal characteristics of first person non-singular pronouns (cf. Helmbrecht 1996a). From the point of view of European languages, first person plural pronouns do not seem to show formal characteristics and categorical distinctions which support the outstanding position of this morphological category. Cross-linguistically, however, there are categorical distinctions which are unique to first person plural forms, e.g. the inclusive and exclusive distinction. In addition, the representation of the first person non-singular category in pronominal paradigms shows many formal features which allow the conclusion that it is a very important category to be marked morphologically. There are various morphological asymmetries with respect to first person non-singular forms which will be dealt with in Section 4 below.

To show the prominence of this person category, I would like to begin my presentation with an overview of the referential possibilities of first person non-singular pronouns in Section 2. In Section 3., I will summarize the categorical distinctions languages make with respect to the referential possibilities of the first person non-singular category. In Section 4., I would like to present some evidence that paradigmatic asymmetries with respect to the first person non-singular category may be explained by the empathy hierarchy, and in Section 5., I would like to make some remarks on the grammaticalization of first person non-singular pronouns which support the theoretical account and the typological observations presented in the previous sections so far. I will conclude my presentation in Section 6. with some remarks on the impact of the different WE categories on the social identity of speakers.

2. First person non-singular reference

The first person non-singular category is, from a referential point of view, the most complex category of all person categories. The referential values of this category comprise various combinations with all other person categories, e.g. there are referential combinations of the first person with the second person and with the third person. No other person category has such a wide variety of referential values. The set of referential values combined with the corresponding pronominal categories is summarized in Table 1.

Some explanatory remarks with respect to Table 1. are necessary. First of all, Table 1. does not represent a natural language paradigm of first person non-singular pronouns. Real language paradigms would not have a separate first person plural pronoun if they have two forms with an inclusive/exclusive distinction in the plural. Furthermore, if paradigms have dual forms for the first person, the referential values of the corresponding plural forms exclude references on two human individuals.

Table 1. Referential values of the first person non-singular categories¹

Pronominal category	Reference
First dual	{S + H ₁ / S + HUM ₁ }
First plural	{S + H _{1-n} / S + HUM _{1-n} / S + H _{1-n} + HUM _{1-n} }
First inclusive dual	{S + H ₁ }
First exclusive dual	{S + HUM ₁ }
First inclusive plural	{S + H _{1-n} / S + H _{1-n} + HUM _{1-n} }
First exclusive plural	{S + HUM _{1-n} }

Secondly, only prototypical usages of pronouns are covered in Table 1. There are at least two usages of *we*, the so-called “nursery *we*” and the so-called “pluralis majestatis” or, “majestic *we*”, which have a singular reference. The nursery *we* refers to a single addressee connotating a certain relationship of care between speaker and hearer. The majestic plural refers to the speaker connotating institutional power or superiority of the speaker compared to the addressee.

Thirdly, the referential sets in Table 1. contain abbreviations such as H_{1-n} (H subscript 1 to n) which designate “one or more hearers”. The category “hearer” is ambiguous with respect to number, i.e. the addressee can be one individual accompanied with some bystanders, or a group of individuals which are addressed equally.

In most pronoun systems I know of, [Hearer+Bystander] or [Hearer+Hearer ...] are not formally distinguished. There are, however, so-called bystander honorifics (Levinson 1983: 90) which honorify an audience or non-participating overhearers which show that bystanders or audience are important parameters in the process of speaking (cf. the alternative vocabulary in the presence of taboo relatives in Dyirbal; cf. Haviland (1979) on Guugu Yimidhirr). Occasionally, deictic distinctions appear which refer to the category of audience. E.g. in Samal (Philippine), there are deictic expressions which refer to the audience which is a) close to S, b) close to A, c) close to audience (other members of conversational group), and d) close to persons present, but outside the conversational group that consists of S + H + Audience (cf. Levinson 1983: 81).

The referential possibilities of the first person non-singular category are grammaticalized into pronouns in various languages in various different ways. The variation of first person non-singular pronouns will be surveyed in the following section.

3. The typology of first person non-singular pronouns

As was mentioned above, human beings belong to various groups at a time, more stable, life-long groups and more dynamic short-term groups changing from day to day. The overwhelming majority of first person non-singular pronouns do not distinguish between these types of group-memberships. In Hunzib, however, an East Caucasian language of the Tsez-family in Dagestan, there are two alternative possessive pronouns meaning 'our'. The first one is simply a plain genitive or instrumental case marked personal pronoun meaning 'ours, our family', the second one is a genitive or instrumental case marked pronoun plus an unspecific marker meaning 'our, our nation'; cf. the forms in (4)

- (4) Hunzib (Tzes, Caucasus; van den Berg 1995: 60)
- ilu-s* (we-GEN) / *il-do* (we-INST)
 'ours, our family'
- il-do-s* (we-unspec.-GEN) / *il-do-d* (we-unspec.-INST)
 'ours, our nation'

The forms in (4) are an example for a speaker-group distinction between nation, i.e. the ethnic group, and family.

Another example for a similar speaker-group distinction is reported from Maxakalí, a South American Indian language of the Macro-Gê stock. Maxakalí has different sets of free personal pronouns distinguishing all three persons and first person inclusive and exclusive. There is no separate number distinction. In addition, there are special first person plural forms *tikmū'ūn* 'we Maxakalí people' and *tikmūg* 'we Maxakalí men' where the first element *tik-* derives from a noun meaning 'man' (cf. Popovich 1986: 356).

Other features such as lineage and generation play a role in different sets of plural pronouns in some Australian Aboriginal languages. These sets of pronouns are used if the individuals referred to belong to the same or a different generation as the speaker, or if they belong to the same lineage as the speaker or not (cf. Dixon 1980: 247, 276). In Martuthunira, a Ngayarda language of the Pama-Nyungan family, spoken in the Pilbara Region of Western Australia, there are two alternative first person non-singular forms — *nganajumarta* (first person dual disharmonic) and *nganajumartangara* (first person plural disharmonic) — which are used if the *we*-group includes members of the next generation with respect to the speaker (cf. Dench 1995: 100f). The regular harmonic first person non-singular pronouns are used if the *we*-group consists of members of the same generation as the speaker or members of the grandparents' generation. The distinction between a harmonic and a disharmonic set of pronouns is, however, not restricted to first person non-singular pronouns in other Australian Aboriginal languages.

A distinction which can be frequently found in pronoun systems around the world is the inclusive/exclusive distinction. According to Nichols (1992), the distribution of the inclusive/exclusive distinction is geographically conditioned with areas of a particular high density of occurrence in the Americas, Papua New Guinea, Australia, and the Pacific Ocean. First person inclusive pronouns include the addressee in the group referred to, first person exclusive pronouns exclude the addressee from this group. This categorical distinction is independent of number categories in pronouns. Even languages with no number distinctions in pronouns may have an inclusive/exclusive distinction, cf. the paradigm of Nimboran in (5), a Papuan language from Irian Jaya.

(5) Nimboran (Irian Jaya; Anceaux 1965)

	SG/PL	
1. INCL.	<i>io</i>	(you(SG/PL) + I/we)
	EXCL. <i>ŋo</i>	(I/we)
2.	<i>ko</i>	(you (SG/PL))
3.	<i>no</i>	(he/she/it/they)

Another example which might be adduced here is Yosondúa Mixtec and other Mixtec languages from Mexico. They have no number distinctions in their pronominal systems, but an inclusive/exclusive distinction, cf. e.g. Farris (1992: 135).

Frequently, however, the inclusive/exclusive distinction is morphologically combined with number distinctions such as plural and dual. If languages have all these categorical distinctions grammaticalized they have a set of four separate first person non-singular pronouns, more than all other person categories in the same paradigm. Subsets of these pronominal categories occur too. A rather rare instance of the grammaticalization of number distinctions and the inclusive/exclusive distinction in first person non-singular pronouns can be found in Gooniyandi, an Australian language spoken in the southern Kimberley region of Western Australia. There are two alternative non-singular forms which are called first person restricted versus first person unrestricted (cf. McGregor 1990: 167). The restricted form *ngidi* includes a first person dual inclusive or exclusive reference and a first person plural exclusive reference. This form is paradigmatically opposed to a first person inclusive form *yaadi* which is then called unrestricted. The referential values of these forms exhibit an inclusive/exclusive distinction in the plural reference, but they neutralize this distinction in the dual reference. The restricted form *ngidi* expresses exclusive in the plural reference, but also inclusive in the dual reference which is rather unusual.

The first person dual inclusive is of special interest here, because there are languages which grammaticalize this pronominal category as a singular pronoun. First person inclusive dual pronouns refer to the main speech act participants

Table 2. Rembarrnga paradigm of dative pronouns.

person	minimal	unit augmented	augmented
1	ŋəvə	yarr-pparraʔ	yarr-ə
1+2	yəkkə	ŋakorr-parraʔ	ŋakorr-ə
2	kə	nakorr-parraʔ	nakorr-ə
3MASC	nawə	parr-pparraʔ	parr-ə
3FEM	ŋətə	parr-pparraʔ	parr-ə

speaker and hearer. Some Australian languages such as Bardi and Nygina from West Kimberley, Malak-Malak from Daly River and others (cf. Dixon 1980: 352) have paradigms of four singular or so called minimal pronouns plus the corresponding non-singular forms, cf. the Rembarrnga paradigm of dative pronouns in Table 2.

The pronouns which are listed in the first column headed “minimal” have a regular singular reference with one exception. The 1+2 pronoun *yəkkə* has a dual reference. In traditional terms, it is a first person dual inclusive pronoun which is used by a speaker to refer to himself and the hearer. The traditional way to represent personal pronouns in grammars is by using a two dimensional table with one axis representing the person category, and the other axis representing the number category. This system is based predominantly on the referential values of the pronouns as far as they have some formal correlate in the paradigm. The ordering of the Rembarrnga pronouns in Table 2., however, is based on the morphological shape of the pronouns. From a referential point of view, the form *yəkkə* should be placed under the heading “unit augment” since there are all pronouns with a dual reference, except the first person inclusive pronoun *ŋakorr-parraʔ* which refers to the speaker, the hearer and someone else. The same holds for the plural pronouns in the third column. The suffixes *-parraʔ* and *-ə* are dual and plural number markers. They are combined morphologically with the first person inclusive form, as if this form had a singular reference. This means, from a morphological point of view that the group of the central speech act participants is treated in Rembarrnga as a unit, as a single person. The peculiarity of these paradigms is that a “unit augmented” first person dual inclusive results in a trial reference, i.e. three human individuals including speaker and hearer, although all other corresponding pronominal forms have a dual reference. Speaker and hearer who constitute the minimal group for a speech act are considered a unity in these languages. These paradigms are better described by means of the notions “minimal”, “unit augmented” and “augmented” thus avoiding the traditional notion singular which causes problems with respect to the first person dual inclusive pronouns in these languages.

Other categorical distinctions such as gender distinctions or politeness distinctions do not occur in first person non-singular pronouns. Rare exceptions confirm

this rule. Modern Hebrew, e.g., has two first person plural pronouns, *anáHnu* which is unspecified for gender contrasting with *ánu*, a first person plural feminine pronoun (cf. Glinert 1989). The paradigm of free personal pronouns and pronominal clitics in Yosondúa Mixtec and other Mixtec languages do not exhibit number distinctions, but a distinction between a familiar and a polite first person exclusive form (cf. Farris 1992: 135)

4. The paradigmatic prominence of first person non-singular forms

The grammatical category which is most frequently morphologically combined with person categories is number. This is no surprise considering the nature of number marking. Counting presupposes the concept of unity and identity of an entity. The entities which are most easily and most obviously recognized as units are human beings and perhaps large animals. The development of a body schema and personal identity during childhood may provide the model for the conceptualization of humans, animals and finally inanimate entities as units.

Linguistic facts reflect these cognitive features. Cross-linguistically, obligatory number marking is more frequently found with nouns designating human beings than with nouns designating animals and inanimate objects. Furthermore, grammatical marking of number distinctions is more frequently found with personal pronouns than with nouns. The reason is the same, personal pronouns refer to human individuals² which are the primary entities to be counted. This can be illustrated e.g. with Japanese pronouns. There are three suffixes *-tati* (animate), *-ra* (animate and inanimate), and *-domo* (demeaning) which are used to pluralize personal pronouns basically preserving the politeness and speech level status of the singular pronoun. There is, however, no grammatical number marking in Japanese nouns.

Among personal pronouns there is a clear ranking with respect to person and number. If there is a distinction between singular and plural in a pronominal paradigm, it is in the first person first, i.e. the singular/plural distinction emerges in the first person and spreads over to the other person categories later. Number marking develops and grammaticalizes along the lines of the person hierarchy shown in (3). The dual category is marked with respect to plural and again emerges first in the first person; i.e. if personal paradigms with a regular singular/plural distinction develop a dual, this category will appear in the first person first (cf. Schmidt 1926, Forchheimer 1953, Smith-Stark 1974, Biermann 1982, Helmbrecht 1999, in prep.). To illustrate this, there are languages which have a singular/plural distinction only in the first person, cf. the pronominal paradigm of Kuman, a Papuan language of the Chimbu family in (6), and there are languages which have

singular and plural pronouns, but a distinction between dual and plural only in the first person; cf. the actor paradigm of pronominal prefixes in Hočank (Winnebago), a Siouan language of Wisconsin, USA in (7).

(6) Kuman, Chimbu (Piau 1985, cited after Foley 1986: 70)

	SG	PL
1.	<i>na</i>	<i>no</i>
2.		<i>ene</i>
3.		<i>ye</i>

(7) Hočank (Winnebago; Sioux; Lipkind 1945)

	SG	DU	PL
1.	<i>ha-</i>	<i>hi-</i>	<i>ha...-wi</i>
2.	<i>ra</i>		<i>ra...-wi</i>
3.	\emptyset -		<i>-ire</i>

The inclusive/exclusive distinction seems to be independent from number marking. There are languages which have an inclusive/exclusive distinction, but no number distinctions (cf. the case of Nimboran in (5) above), and there are also languages which have number distinctions in first person pronouns, but no inclusive/exclusive distinction (cf. the case of Kuman (6), and Hovčank (7)). The prominence of the first person with respect to number marking and the prominence of the first person with respect to the inclusive/exclusive distinction — there is no such distinction reported from any other person category — reflects the great cognitive and pragmatic importance of *we*- or speaker-groups.

5. On the historical sources of first person non-singular pronouns

The referential complexity of first person non-singular pronouns is often not reflected in the morphological structure of these forms. Frequently, we find lexical items or morphemes which do not allow any morphological segmentation. This is the case with English *we*, German *wir*, and French *nous*. Historically, these forms go back to a proto-form in some reconstructed proto-language of the Indo-European family. Remarkable with respect to these forms is that they are not morphologically formed by the addition of some plural marker. This corresponds to the cross-linguistic observation that first person non-singular pronouns rather tend to show suppletivism. Second and third person pronouns are more frequently pluralized by separate morphemes than first person pronouns (cf. Forchheimer 1956). This has — of course — to do with the prominence of the first person category for number marking, something which is predicted by the person hierarchy, see (3) above, and the nature of the first person non-singular category.

Table 3. Shift of category value towards first person plural

Target	Source	Languages
First plural	< plural marker	Tsimshian (Tsimshianic)
	< third plural	Kiowa (Kiowa-Tanoan)
	< indefinite pronoun	Dogrib, Koyukon, Slave (Athapascan), Yuchi (Isolate), French (Indo-European), etc.
	< based on a second person (via a first person incl. pl. form)	Wiyot (Algonquian)

It is possible though to find first person plural pronouns which (a) show an internal morphological structure, and (b) whose morphological components can be traced back to other historical sources by means of internal reconstruction. Some of these processes which often involve a shift or change of the category value of a source form toward a target form are summarized in Table 3.

Unfortunately, the cases in Table 3 cannot be discussed in detail³ here, because of lack of space. However, some general observations can be drawn from the processes in Table 3. According to Table 3, first person plural pronouns derive historically from plural markers, third person plural pronouns, indefinite pronouns and from second person pronouns, i.e. pronouns of a lower person category may shift their category value up the empathy hierarchy toward the first person.

Remarkable in this respect is the historical process from an indefinite pronoun to a first person plural pronoun, as it happened obviously in some Athapascan languages (cf. Saxon 1993) and as it can be observed in contemporary French (cf. M. J. Frayne 1990). The fact of the replacement of the atonic, weak first person plural pronoun *nous* by the indefinite pronoun *on* in contemporary French has received a detailed account by M. J. Frayne, but the functional background, i.e. the reasons why speakers start to use an alternative form to refer to we-groups, remains quite dark in this study. There is no doubt about it that the systematic structural environment favors such a replacement in French, e.g. there is a systematic distinction in the personal pronouns between tonic and atonic forms such as *moi* versus *je*, *toi* versus *tu* etc., but this distinction is lacking in the first person plural *nous*. The tonic forms are used for emphasis, e.g. in *moi, je pense, que ...*, but with regard to the first person plural form, there is no tonic/atonic distinction. *Nous* in the same construction occurs twice, e.g. *nous, nous avons décidés, que ...*. In this type of constructions, the replacement achieves a structural analog to the constructions mentioned above, e.g. *nous, on a décidé, que ...*. To replace atonic *nous* by *on* would reestablish and enforce the perceptibility of the tonic/atonic distinction. In reflexive constructions, the replacement of *nous* by *on* is nearly completed. Here, the rather

heavy and clumsy repetition of the subject pronouns and the reflexive pronouns, e.g. in *nous nous dépêchons*, has been replaced by *on se dépêche* which could be interpreted as the outcome of economic reductions. Another condition in this respect might be the historical tendency in the French verb to reduce personal inflection. The syllabic agreement suffix *-ons* for first person plural subjects *nous* is replaced by the agreement suffix for third person singular which has no phonetic substance, i.e. this process is a further step in leveling out the personal inflection of the verb.

All these grammatical conditions in French make the replacement of *nous* by *on* a structurally possible and preferable solution, but for what? The reasons why speakers of a language community start to use an indefinite pronoun *on* to refer to their speaker group instead of an well-established and paradigmatically existent first person plural pronoun *nous* is still not clear. The reasons have to be looked for in the communicative intentions speakers try to fulfill in the process of talking with others. It can be hypothesized that speakers may want to avoid an explicit and direct reference to themselves, because it is an act of impoliteness to set oneself too obvious in the foreground of what is communicated. The more or less natural prominence of first person reference as shown above is certainly subject to social and cultural politeness rules of the form "don't put yourself in the first place!" or the like. The taboo of explicit self-reference may play a role too.

The intended reference to the speaker group by means of an indefinite pronoun *on* usually poses no problems on the side of the hearer, since the pragmatic context provides the necessary information. If this avoidance of explicit self-reference by means of an indefinite pronoun becomes a more and more regular phenomenon, the indefinite pronoun becomes more and more associated with a first person plural meaning. This outcome is not intended by the speakers, no one has consciously assigned *on* a first person plural meaning. The shift of the category value from indefinite pronoun to first person plural meaning is an epiphenomenon of the avoidance strategy underlying the use of the indefinite pronoun *on* in French. A detailed historical survey about the speech acts, tense and mood forms of the sentences where this usage of *on* has begun and how it has spread through the various tense, aspect and mood forms would probably bring more light in the question of the motivations speakers had to use *on* in the way described above.

A similar process can be observed in colloquial Turkish too. The regular first person plural pronoun *biz* is occasionally used in colloquial Turkish to refer to the speaker alone thus disguising the intention to refer to oneself. Since the regular first person plural pronoun *biz* is now in danger to become ambiguous, people have started to repluralize it with the regular plural marker *-lar/-ler* in Turkish resulting in a new first person plural pronoun *bizler* (cf. Lewis 1967: 68)

6. Conclusions

Membership in social groups needs repeatedly to be confirmed and communicated among the various members. There are a great number of linguistic and extra-linguistic means to do that. Linguistic means may include the forms of reference and address among members of an in-group. There are, e.g. generic names and terms of address such as English *Mom*, *buddy*, *cutie*, *sweetheart* etc. which are more likely to be used among in-group members (family, friends, etc.) than among people outside. They signal social closeness and solidarity, an effect also achieved by the use of familiar or intimate second person pronouns — the so-called T-pronouns in the terms of Brown & Gilman (1960) — if languages have such politeness distinctions in pronouns at all. The choice of a certain jargon, slang, dialect or language may have the same function. E.g. physicians in a hospital or laborers in a steel plant may develop a certain professional slang which they also use outside their working place in case they meet colleagues somewhere else. The use of this certain slang may facilitate the talking about the respective professional issues, but indicates at the same time a certain social closeness, even if the interlocutors do not know each other personally. The use of certain slang expressions indicates a) that the speaker assumes that the hearer knows them and that he has therefore the same cognitive background, and b) that the speaker wants to signal the addressee that he assumes the addressee belongs to their common in-group.

As has been outlined above, the use of WE pronouns is intrinsically connected to the linguistic establishment of social groups. Speakers define explicitly and publicly social groups vis à vis their interlocutors by using WE pronouns. At the same time, they state their membership to these groups. This is the prototypical use of WE pronouns. They are therefore per se a strong means to establish and reinforce social identities.

The typology of WE pronouns presented in Section 3. has shown that the type of social group is only rarely grammaticalized in personal pronouns. Usually, there are no different sets of WE pronouns for e.g. '*we-nation*', '*we-family*', '*we-village*', '*we-soccer team*' etc. — exceptions occur though (cf. the Hunzib case above in (4)). There are at least two principal reasons for the typological rare occurrence of WE pronouns distinguishing the type of social group. First of all, there are only a few occasions speakers would really use a pronoun '*we-nation*', because this group of individuals is too big in size and numbers of individuals to act collectively. The low frequency of usage certainly prevents this concept from being grammaticalized in a single word form. The reference to groups of the size of nations by means of WE pronouns is usually made clear by the context of the utterance or, in case of doubt, may be clarified by simple juxtapositions as e.g. in '*we Americans*'.

The second reason is that the creation of WE pronouns even for the most important social groups would inflate the number of different word forms dramatically. The economic demands to keep the number of forms low in a paradigm of morphological forms certainly prevents these concepts to be grammaticalized in single morphemes too.

The harmonic-disharmonic opposition, however, is a clear semantic category which is the basis to judge group membership in several Australian Aboriginal societies. The choice of WE pronouns from one set of pronouns or the other depends on the membership in the same (ego' and ego's grand parents) or different (ego's parents or children) generations. Other categories such as the membership in the same lineage (patrilineage) as ego may complicate the choice. The fact that these kinds of semantic categories are grammaticalized in pronoun systems may be interpreted as evidence for the exceptional social importance of the placement of individuals at a specific point in their kinship systems. In addition, it may be hypothesized that such semantic set distinctions are more likely to be grammaticalized in languages of rather small societies, because the correct use of these forms requires that the speaker is familiar with the generational position of every potential member in a WE group.

Much more frequent cross-linguistically are the inclusive/exclusive distinctions and number distinctions (plural/dual) in WE pronouns. These grammatical categories are more general or abstract in the sense that WE groups are referred to by pronouns on the basis of number and speech act role.

Grammaticalized number categories such as 'two' (dual) versus 'many' (plural), or 'two' (dual) versus 'three/some' (trial/paucal) versus 'many' (plural) do not say anything about the type of WE group such as nation, village, family etc. It is left to the pragmatic and discourse context to infer the type of group referred to. These categories of WE pronouns are therefore maximal flexible to use. In addition, number categories do not distinguish between hearer/addressee and other members of the WE group.

This, however, is the function of the inclusive/exclusive category. If this category is present in the pronoun system speakers have to decide whether the addressee is a member of the WE group or not. Since the speech act role addressee is a universal role and since the addressee more likely belongs to the speakers WE groups than not, the inclusive WE pronouns are universally the unmarked members of such an opposition. If such an opposition is newly introduced in a pronoun system, usually the old first plural form becomes the inclusive part and the new form — e.g. a repluralized first plural form — receives the exclusive interpretation. The inclusive/exclusive distinction is, like the number distinctions, not a grammatical category for the categorization of specific social groups.

The importance of the WE pronouns for the establishment and reinforcement of social groups and social identities can be seen more clearly in non-prototypical uses of WE pronouns. Up to now, I have discussed only those cases in which WE pronouns are used to refer to WE groups consisting of the speaker plus various sets of addressees and non-speech act participants. It is, however, easy to demonstrate that WE pronouns are often used to express an emotional or a social connection of the speaker to a group without referring to the speaker or without including the speaker in the group of individuals referred to. Utterances such as (8–10) illustrate the usage of WE pronouns without a reference to the speaker of the utterances.

- (8) Hey, we won the game yesterday.
- (8') Hey, Manchester United won the game yesterday.
- (9) We declared war to Japan after Pearl Harbor
- (9') The US government declared war to Japan after Pearl Harbor
- (10) We do not teach mathematics here at this University.
- (10') The members of the faculty of this University don't teach mathematics.

Sentence (8) is a perfect natural utterance by a visitor of a soccer game who tells a friend or colleague later that the team he usually supports in the sports stadium won the match. Here, the context makes it clear that the speaker is not a member of the team on the field and definitely not the one who won the game. But as a fan he feels close to his team and does express this closeness by using the WE pronoun. Neutral with respect to the commitment of the speaker would be an utterance like (8'). Similarly in sentence (9); if this sentence is uttered by a young American student in the 1990ies, this student — because of his age and his political position — is certainly not the one who declared war on Japan. By using *we* this student expresses his emotional connection to his nation. Sentence (9') would be neutral with respect to the commitment to one's nationality. If sentence (10) is uttered by someone who is working in the enrollment office of the University and who is not teaching courses at all, this person certainly does not belong to the group of teachers of mathematics and is therefore not included in the referential set of *we*. This person, however, does express that he or she belongs to the University as an employee. Again, (10') would be neutral with respect to this effect.

All three usages of *we* are non-prototypical, because the speakers of the sentences do not belong to the group of individuals who perform the action expressed. From a referential point of view the speakers are excluded from the set of individuals referred to by the WE pronouns in the cited sentences. Speakers, however, express their strong commitment and at least in utterances (9–10) their membership in the groups mentioned. The usages of *we* in the examples (8–10) establish and reinforce the social identities of the speaker.

There are other non-prototypical uses of WE pronouns which express a strong commitment on the side of the speaker to the addressee. In utterances such as in (11)

- (11) How do we feel now?

the speaker — perhaps a doctor or a nurse — asks the patient about his or her health condition. The WE pronoun in examples of this type refers solely to the addressee, but the speaker expresses deep care and solidarity for the addressee by using the WE pronoun. This usage of *we* is possible, because the prototypical function of WE pronouns is to establish *we*-groups. Doctors and patients are not necessarily a social group, but in using a WE pronoun as an in-group marker, the speaker reduces the social distance and encourages the patient to cooperate in the process of the medical treatment. This non-prototypical use of the inclusive *we* (with a second person singular reference) may be the starting point for a category shift toward a second person pronoun. In Classical Ainu, a language isolate of Japan, there existed an independent first person plural pronoun *aoka* which then developed in Colloquial Ainu a) to an inclusive first person plural pronoun and b) to a second person honorific pronoun used for the polite reference to a hearer (cf. Shibatani 1990: 31/55.). The same process may have happened in Nahuatl. In Tetelcingo Nahuatl as well as in other Nahuatl languages, the first person plural independent pronoun and subject prefix is identical with the second person singular pronoun and pronominal prefix, respectively (cf. Tuggy 1979: 80f). This homonymy of pronominal forms is very old and, unfortunately, there are no historical data available.

Quite similar to these non-prototypical uses of WE pronouns are the hortatory uses of WE pronouns in order to follow a positive politeness strategy in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987). The strategy is to minimize the social distance between speaker and hearer in order to minimize the risk of face loss on the side of the hearer. Requests, orders and many other speech acts belong to the potential face threatening acts (FTAs in Brown & Levinson's terminology) in communication on the side of the hearer. The social distance between speaker and addressee can be minimized by including both, speaker and hearer in the activity. If, e.g. the speaker and the hearer are on their way to some place and the speaker wants to have something to eat, he might say

- (12) Let's stop for a bite.⁴

With utterance (12), the speaker includes the hearer in the request in order to minimize the imposition on the side of the hearer which the speaker may cause with his request to stop in a fast food restaurant. If the speaker includes the hearer in the command by means of an inclusive WE pronoun he signals social closeness which makes it easier to request some favor from the hearer.

Notes

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1. The following abbreviations are used throughout the paper: S = Speaker; H = Hearer; HUM = 3rd person individual not participating in the speech act, the subscripts HUM_{1-n} indicate that there are one or more members of the same speech act role category; sg = singular; pl = plural; incl. = inclusive; excl. = exclusive; 1st = first person; 2nd = second person; 3rd = third person, masc = masculine, fem = feminine, gen = genitive, inst = instrumental, unspec = unspecified.
2. This is certainly true for first and second person pronouns. Third person pronouns may also refer to inanimate objects, but often their reference is limited to animate or human beings.
3. For more details and a more comprehensive account, see Helmbrecht (1996a, 1996b, and in prep.).
4. Example is taken from Brown & Levinson (1987:127).

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