

PRONOUNS AS MEANS OF IMPERSONAL PRESENTATION IN ENGLISH QUALITY PRESS

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The current paper presents the analysis of pronouns as means of impersonal presentation in English quality press. The article gives the definition of the pronoun as a grammatical category and describes the use and purpose of impersonalization strategies. The data for the investigation was taken from the international English quality newspapers: The Financial Times (UK) and The Wall Street Journal (US), which are the leading daily broadsheet newspapers in the UK and the USA having millions of both print and online subscribers worldwide. The articles on political, economic, and social issues were chosen on a random basis and scrutinized for pronouns as means of impersonal presentation of fact. The body of 187 cases of impersonalization chosen for the analysis were divided into groups with focus on the grammatical category they belong to. The most and least often used classes of pronouns were identified and compared. The results of the current study may be useful for editors, journalists, writers, as well as for further study of impersonalization strategies in the English language.

Keywords: pronoun, impersonal pronoun, personal pronoun, indefinite pronoun, distributive pronoun, quantitative pronoun, quality press.

Introduction

English quality press, i.e. broadsheet newspapers, published both in the UK and the USA, is considered to be the most popular and reliable source of news. English broadsheets present both hard and soft news, which are related to political, economic, and social events as well as gossip, scandals, and entertainment, respectively.

While reading daily English quality press, one may notice abundant cases of the impersonal strategies used in both headlines and articles (news articles, feature articles, also editorials, columns and opinion pieces) with no direct indication to a person or an institution. This is being done intentionally, especially when presenting political or economic issues in articles,

by authors in order to disguise the agent, to mystify, as well as to avoid responsibility and/or culpability. In many cases, the result of such mystification is the impossibility to guess or retrieve the agent from the context of an article.

There are various means of impersonal presentation in English, such as agentless passive, nominalization, ed-participle, resultative, impersonal pronouns, inchoative, infinitive clauses, existentials, metonymy, etc. The term “impersonal” is considered by linguists as very broad and is viewed from semantic, syntactic and morphological perspectives. The current paper uses the semantic approach to “impersonality” and on the absence of agentivity as well as non-specified person in English quality press articles.

The *object* of the research is news articles on economical, political and social issues in English quality press.

The *aim* of the present paper is to investigate common patterns of pronouns use as means of impersonal presentation in British and American broadsheet newspapers.

The *objectives* of the current paper are: 1) to define the pronoun as a grammatical category and means of impersonal presentation in the English language, 2) to determine the most frequently used classes of pronouns as means of impersonal presentation in English quality press, 3) to identify the reasons for the use of this impersonalization strategy in the quality press, and 4) to compare the frequency of use of the pronouns as means of impersonal presentation.

The *material* of the current research is a body of 187 cases of impersonalization in articles on political, economic, and social issues from the international English quality newspapers: The Financial Times (UK) and The Wall Street Journal (US). Both the Financial Times (hereinafter, FT) and The Wall Street Journal (hereinafter, WSJ) are the leading daily broadsheet newspapers in the UK and the USA respectively, are published six days a week, with the main focus on business, politics, economy and social issue, are distributed internationally

and have millions of both print and online subscribers worldwide. The articles for the research have been chosen on a random basis with no preference given to any specific type of articles, as the main aim of the current investigation is to analyze impersonalization strategies, namely, the use of pronouns, in English quality press in general.

The following *methods* were used for the current study: quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, content analysis, and contrastive analysis.

Theoretical background

The Pronoun as a grammatical category and means of impersonal presentation in the English language

As maintained in Juana Marin-Arrese, Elena Martinez-Caro and Soledad Perez de Ayala Becerril (2001: 369), the means of impersonal presentation in the English language are as follows: agentless passive, nominalization, ed-participle, resultative, impersonal pronouns, inchoative, infinitive clauses, existentials, metonymy, etc. These linguistic strategies are used for variation in mystification degrees. In addition, they are used to avoid responsibility for one's words and to disguise the agent of the action. As mentioned before, the current paper focuses on the semantic perspective on the analysis of one of impersonalization strategies used in English quality press, i.e. impersonal pronouns.

As a grammatical category, pronouns do not possess a concrete lexical meaning, but have a generalized meaning and are deictic words, which, according to Kobrina *et al.* (1999: 170), “point to objects, their properties and relations, their local temporal reference, or placement without naming them”. These deictic words fall under the following classification of pronouns: personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns, emphatic pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, indefinite pronouns, reciprocal pronouns, interrogative pronouns, and conjunctive pronouns. Two classes of pronouns

are used as means of impersonal presentation in the English language, i.e. indefinite pronouns and personal pronouns.

In their book, scholars Krylova and Gordon (1999) classify the indefinite pronouns into: indefinite pronouns proper (some, any, no; somebody, someone, something, anybody, anything, nobody, no one, nothing; one, none), distributive pronouns (all, every, each, other, either, neither, both; everybody, everyone, everything), and quantitative pronouns (much, many, little, few, a little, a few, a lot, lots of, a great deal, a great many, etc.) (Krylova, Gordon 1999: 359). In both written and spoken discourse these pronouns and their compounds (especially, “some”, “any”, “one”, “somebody”, “anyone”, etc.) may perform a generic function and refer to people in general, indefinite persons or things. For instance, the generic pronoun “one”, which is rather infrequent in both formal speech or in writing, can possess the meaning of people in general; it is also impersonal and rather formal (Biber *et al.* 2002: 96–101).

As scholars Chisato Kitagawa and Adrienne Lehrer (1990) maintain, personal pronouns do not always carry a personal meaning and may be used referentially (when personal pronoun stand for specific individuals), impersonally/generically (when pronouns stand for anyone, everyone, people in general), and vaguely (when pronouns stand for specific unidentified individuals) (Kitagawa, Lehrer 1990: 742).

It may be observed that generic pronouns (“we”, “you”, “they”) usually retain a trace of the basic meaning. Therefore, the pronoun “we” is most commonly used in writing and puts emphasis on shared knowledge and involves the speaker’s knowledge or experience. In contrast, the pronoun “you” is more typical of a spoken language and its choice is determined by the appeal to common human experience to involve the addressee, also to invite empathy from them. The pronoun “they” is also common in spoken discourse and generally refers to “people, but not the addresser or addressee (Biber *et al.* 2002: 96).

According to Anna Siewierska (2008), only the constructions in which the third person plural is anaphoric to “people”, “everyone” or “anyone” are considered to be impersonal and not vague. While Elena Martinez-Caro (2002) claims that personal pronouns “we”, “you”, “they” demonstrate the most frequent occurrence in English discourse among all the cases of impersonal use of personal pronouns.

Thus, both indefinite and personal pronouns may be used vaguely and/or generically to refer to people in general or to specific unidentified individuals.

Discussion and results

As it was discussed in the theoretical part above, there are a few means of making sentences impersonal with the use of impersonal pronouns. First, it may be accomplished by indefinite pronouns: indefinite pronouns proper, distributive pronouns, and quantitative pronouns. Second, it may be implemented by indefinite-personal pronouns, such as “we”, “they”, and “you”.

The most frequent indefinite pronouns in English quality press and reasons of their use

The most frequently used *indefinite pronoun proper* in the articles of The Financial Times is “some” and its derivatives. The frequency of the use of “some” is high due to the majority of the sentences in the articles are positive ones. Other pronouns are used in negative and interrogative sentences.

The pronoun “some” and its derivatives are basically used in spoken language:

*“Winding down **some** of these programs takes time” Mrs. Clinton said on MSNBC’s “Morning Joe.” (WSJ, 26 August 2016)*

The pronoun “something” is mostly found in sentences dealing with direct speech where the speaker wants to mention indefinite factors, which may influence the forecasts or indefinite things that may force him to speak:

*In offering his criticism, Mr. Ryan said that he tried to stay out of the Republican primary fray, but stressed that “when I see **something** that runs counter to who we are as a party and as a country, I will speak up”.* (FT, 2 March 2015)

Another compound of “some” is “somebody” and “someone”. The reason of the usage of the following pronouns is to emphasize any person who performs an action:

*“But that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t report those conclusions... When **somebody** is saying something that is flat-out untrue, we should say that.”* (FT, 2 March 2015)

*“The way we actually measure unemployment is after X number of months if **someone** can’t find a job, congratulations, they’re miraculously off,”* Trump Jr. said on CNN. (WSJ, 26 July 2016)

The pronoun “any” is not frequent in the articles. A few cases found are used conventionally in the negative sentences. Several cases were used in positive sentences in the meaning of “one” among many when it is not important which one:

*“**Any** political instability in the UK following a leave vote would slow down negotiations.”* (FT, 2 March 2015)

Such pronoun as “no” and its derivatives “nothing” and “nobody” were found in scrutinized articles indicating the absence of some feature or thing:

*He added that “congratulations are meaningless” when “there is **nothing** binding yet” and “there is still **no** guarantee of reaching the finishing line.”* (FT, 10 April 2015)

The indefinite pronouns “one” and “none” are infrequent in the analyzed articles.

*Among 17 Republican appointees who responded to Journal inquiries, **none** said they supported Mr. Trump.* (WSJ, 25 August 2016)

*What is **one** to make of the rise of Donald Trump?* (FT, 2 March 2015)

In the case above, the pronoun is used in the meaning of “a person” and the author wants to say that one person is not able to make the rise of Donald Trump. The pronoun refers to nobody in particular.

Other means from the group of indefinite pronouns is *distributive pronouns*. The most frequent distributive pronoun which occurred in the newspaper The Financial Times is “all”. The pronoun is predominantly used with the noun in of-phrases. In some sentences “all” refers to the meaning of “all people”.

*“I became chancellor – that of course is very different from the picture painted by those who criticised UK policies during that period, not **all** of them are in post anymore.”* (FT, 12 October 2015)

In the example above, “not all of them” means “not every person who criticised UK policies”.

The next frequently used distributive pronoun is “other” and its derivatives. It almost always indicates the link between the object and another group of the related objects and divides them in two parts.

*Even compared to **other** presidential elections in recent memory, however, between 75% and 80% have agreed this one is more uncertain than usual.* (WSJ, 14 July 2016)

The pronoun “another” normally stands for “one more”. The intention of usage of the following pronouns is an indication to another member or group of members, which is different.

*“But if there is **another** banking crisis, will this body be held accountable for it?”* (FT, 2 April 2015)

The usage of the pronoun “everybody” is not typical for the analyzed articles. There was only one sentence with this pronoun found.

*“I will tell you, Chris, and I pledge to you and **everybody** who’s watching that those events are actually being planned. And we’re very excited about them.”* (WSJ, 28 August 2016)

The third means from the group of indefinite pronouns is **quantitative pronouns**. Among all the articles, there is a sufficient number of cases of quantitative pronouns, such as “much” which is used with uncountable nouns, “many” used with countable nouns and “most” which stands for “the majority”.

Many other political observers have drawn a line between Brexit and the antitrade and anti-immigrant sentiments now roiling the U.S. election. (WSJ, 26 July 2016)

*“High-income households pay **much** more in taxes under Secretary Clinton’s policies”, it says.* (WSJ, 29 July 2016)

*Using Google Flu data, the researchers said they found that when American workers gain access to paid sick leave, the general flu rate goes down by **a lot**.* (WSJ, 23 August 2016)

The prevailing one was “many”. Quantitative pronouns are used to point out that the amount of the noun it modifies is indefinite. The sentences with “few” and “little” were not found in the analyzed articles.

The most frequent indefinite-personal pronouns in English quality press and reasons of their use

The final group of pronouns as the means of impersonalization is indefinite-personal pronouns. According to the collected data, the most frequently used indefinite-personal pronoun is “we”. The pronoun “they” is used less frequently and “you” is the least frequently used indefinite-personal pronoun. Normally, “we” may be used including or excluding the addressee. The samples of the use of this pronoun were found in the direct speech and all of them exclude the addressee.

1. *“Yarmouk is being returned to the embrace of Islam,” an Isis supporter said on Twitter. “**We** will turn Damascus into hell.”* (FT, 2 April 2015: 5)

2. *“**We** don’t have the same incentives other countries have for women to stay in the labour force after they have kids”, said Elise Gould of the Economic Policy*

Institute in Washington DC. (FT, 12 October 2015: 6)

In the first example, the pronoun represents Isis supporters. In the second one, it represents US women, who have kids. The pronoun “we” stands for people of various occupations, social status, sex or race. In all the cases the pronoun was used in the direct speech. It may indicate that the authors of the articles tend to cite other people’s phrases and words not taking responsibility of paraphrasing the words using the pronoun to stay unbiased.

The pronoun “they” is rarely used in comparison with the pronoun “we”. It is found in the direct speech. The authors cite the words and do not paraphrase as they do not take the responsibility to speak out their opinion.

*Marty Baron, executive editor of the Washington Post, said: “On the one hand, when **they’re** succeeding **they** say **they** don’t need us and when **they’re** failing **they** say we’re to blame. I don’t know that both of those can be true, actually.”* (FT, 2 March 2015: 5)

The last indefinite-personal pronoun is “you” which is not frequent and is generally found in the direct speech, citing the words of people:

*“But this is true of all forecasting models, and if someone tells ‘**you**’ they’re going to be exactly right, they’re drastically underestimating the uncertainty of these forecasts.”* (FT, 10 April 2015: 3)

*“What the hell do **you** have to lose? Give me a chance,” Mr. Trump said.* (WSJ, 28 August 2016)

According to the analyzed data, the most commonly used pronouns are indefinite-personal “we”, “they”, and “you”. Normally all the indefinite-personal pronouns are used in the direct speech.

The frequency of indefinite and personal pronouns as means of impersonal presentation in English quality press

The analysis of 187 cases of pronouns use in both *The Financial Times* and *The Wall Street*

Journal articles on politics, economics and social issues has shown that there are 125 examples of the indefinite pronouns (67%) and 62 instances of personal pronouns (33%) used as means of impersonalization. As can be seen from Figure 1, there is a rather drastic difference in the quantity of the examples of the two classes of pronouns used as the impersonalization strategy with the indefinite pronouns being used twice more often than the indefinite pronouns.

As presented in Figure 2, among 125 examples of indefinite pronouns used as means of impersonal presentation of facts, the indefinite pronouns proper are used more often than distributive and quantitative pronouns and make up 54 instances (43%) of 125 cases of indefinite pronouns used in the both analyzed English quality newspapers; whereas distributive pronouns are identified in 30% and quantitative pronouns in 27% of the analyzed excerpts (37 and 34 instances respectively).

There exists a considerable difference in the use of personal pronouns as means of impersonalization in the analyzed cases from the two English quality papers (Fig. 3).

As can be seen in Figure 3, out of 62 analyzed examples of personal pronouns used in their indefinite meaning, the personal pronoun “we” (61%, i.e. 38 examples) is used almost three times more often than the personal pronoun “they” (24%, i.e. 15 examples), and four times more frequently than the personal pronoun “you” (15%, i.e. 9 examples).

Table 1 below presents the summary of pronouns as means of impersonal presentation in English quality press research.

The data in the table demonstrate that the impersonal presentation strategies are implemented most frequently by the use of the indefinite-personal pronoun “we” (20%), the indefinite pronoun proper “some” and its derivatives (14%), the distributive pronoun “(an) other” (11%), and the quantitative pronoun “many” (9%), i.e. 38, 27, 21, and 18 instances of all 187 analyzed examples respectively. Whereas, the least common pronouns utilized as means of impersonal presentation of fact in

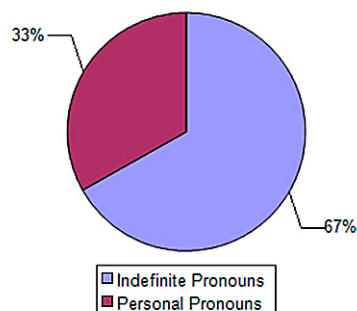


Fig. 1. The Indefinite and Personal Pronouns ratio

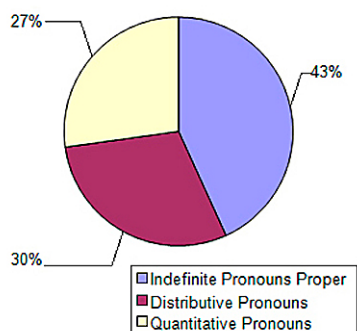


Fig. 2. The distribution of Indefinite Pronouns Proper, Distributive Pronouns, and Quantitative Pronouns

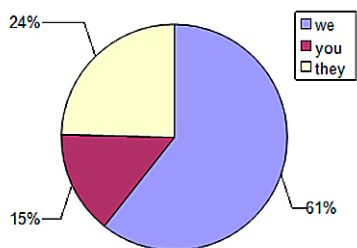


Fig. 3. The distribution of Personal Pronouns

the analyzed English quality newspapers are the indefinite-personal pronoun “you” (5%), the indefinite pronoun proper “one” (4%), the quantitative pronoun “a lot” (2%), and the distributive pronoun “everybody” (1%), i.e. 9, 7, 3, and 1 instances of all 187 analyzed examples respectively.

Table 1. Research summary

Indefinite Pronouns									Indefinite-Personal Pronouns		
Indefinite Pronouns Proper			Distributive Pronouns			Quantitative Pronouns			Personal Pronouns		
Pronoun	Number of cases	%	Pronoun	Number of cases	%	Pronoun	Number of cases	%	Pronoun	Number of cases	%
some (+ derivatives)	27	14	all	15	8	much	13	7	we	38	20
any (+ derivatives)	9	5	(an)other	21	11	many	18	9	you	9	5
no (+ derivatives)	11	6	everybody	1	1	a lot	3	2	they	15	8
one	7	4									
Total:	54	29		37	20		34	18		62	33

Conclusions

1. There are abundant cases of the impersonal strategies used in English quality press with no direct indication to a person or an institution, especially when presenting political or economic issues in articles, in order to disguise the agent, to mystify, as well as to avoid responsibility and/or culpability.
2. The impersonal strategies are often implemented by the use of impersonal pronouns, i.e. the indefinite pronouns and personal pronouns in their indefinite (vague and/or generic) meaning.
3. The impersonal pronouns (both indefinite and personal) are mostly used in direct speech or citations in order to avoid mentioning concrete entities, achieve a generic interpretation with the reference to any individual, and to achieve an obscure interpretation with reference to specific unidentified individuals.
4. The impersonal strategies are most frequently implemented by using of the indefinite-personal pronoun “we”, the indefinite pronoun proper “some” and its derivatives, the distributive pronoun “(an)other”, and the quantitative pronoun “many”.
5. The least common pronouns utilized as means of impersonal presentation of fact in the analyzed English quality newspapers are the indefinite-personal pronoun “you”, the indefinite pronoun proper “one”, the quantitative pronoun “a lot”, and the distributive pronoun “everybody”.

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ĮVARDŽIAI KAIP BEASMENIO PATEIKIMO PRIEMONĖS ANGLŲ RIMTOJOJE SPAUDOJE

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Straipsnyje analizuojami įvardžiai kaip beasmenio faktų pateikimo priemonė anglų rimtojoje spaudoje. Teorinėje straipsnio dalyje pateikiama įvardžio kaip gramatinės kategorijos apibrėžtis, aprašomi beasmenio pateikimo strategijų tikslai ir naudojimas. Tyrimo duomenys paimti iš angliškos rimtosios spaudos: „The Financial Times“ (JK) ir „The Wall Street Journal“ (JAV). Šie dienraščiai pirmauja Jungtinėje Karalystėje ir Jungtinėse Amerikos Valstijose ir turi milijonus prenumeratorių. 187 beasmenio faktų pateikimo pavyzdžiai buvo suskirstyti į grupes, atsižvelgiant į gramatinę kategoriją, kuriai jie priklauso. Tyrimo metu buvo nustatytos ir palygintos dažniausiai bei rečiausiai vartojamos įvardžių kategorijos. Šito tyrimo rezultatai gali būti naudingi redaktoriams, žurnalistams, rašytojams, taip pat tolimesniems beasmenio pateikimo strategijų anglų kalboje tyrinėjimams.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: įvardis, beasmenis įvardis, asmeninis įvardis, nežymimasis / neapibrėžiamasis įvardis, skiriamasis įvardis, kiekybinis įvardis, rimtoji spauda.