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GENERIC USES OF THE SECOND PERSON SINGULAR – HOW SPEAKERS DEAL WITH REFERENTIAL AMBIGUITY AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

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Abstract

The present contribution examines how interlocutors resolve reference problems concerning the second singular person (2sg) in ongoing conversation. Apart from its 'normal' reading as a term of address, generic and also speaker-referring uses have been documented and studied for a variety of languages. However, there are amazingly few documented cases of interlocutors who openly display having problems of disambiguation between forms of address and reference to a larger entity 'anybody in this particular situation'. A sequential analysis shows that interlocutors tend not to ask for further specification of reference in a possibly ambiguous situation, most likely for face reasons: Instead, they tend to rely on contextualization in later conversational development and on all available conversational resources. Ambiguous reference that leads to misunderstandings only becomes a topic once serious conversational problems arise and the need for disambiguation becomes more important than interlocutors' face needs.

Keywords: 2nd person pronoun; Terms of address; Referential ambiguity; Generic reference; Misunderstandings; Turn-taking system; Facework.

1. Introduction[1]

The generic use of the second person singular (2sg) has aroused considerable attention in the last years. Generic seconds[2] can be interpreted as an invitation to the addressee to insert him or herself into a particular discursive position which is suggested to the addressee by the speaker. This idea was initially suggested by Laberge/Sankoff (1979)

[1] I wish to thank Barbara De Cock as well as the anonymous *Pragmatics* reviewer for comments on previous versions of this article. This paper is partially reporting results originally presented in my habilitation thesis (Kluge 2012). I wish to thank Martin Hummel, Barbara Frank-Job, Stella and Valeriano Bellosta von Colbe, Ulrich Dausendschön-Gay, Christiane Maaß and the discussants at different colloquia in Bielefeld and Hildesheim university for their in-depth discussion of my ideas on the subject. They were sensitized to the existence of generic seconds to such a degree that, over the years, they have provided me with a multitude of examples, some of which are analyzed in this paper.

[2] In what follows, I adopt Tarenskeen's (2010) notion of *generic seconds* for the use of the 2sg with generic reference as a means to refer to the generic use of the 2sg on a cross-linguistic basis. Also, I will refer to T and V-forms of address according to the terminology originally proposed by Brown/Gilman (1960). Thus, generic seconds also include pronominal terms of address that rely on the third person, as in the case of Spanish *usted* (3sg) and German *Sie* (3pl). In many languages that allow for a generic T, generic V is also possible, although in most contexts T is preferred (cf. Kluge 2012).

under the label 'situational insertion'. As a matter of example, consider the following case (1) where a speaker discusses the dangers of drinking too much versus taking drugs

Example (1): 'tu peux te prendre pour Batman ou Superman'
J'aime mieux boire une bonne brosse, c'est mieux que fumer de la drogue, je trouve. Le lendemain, *tu as* un gros mal de tête mais ça fait rien, *tu es* tout' là, tandis qu'avec la drogue *tu sais pas* si *tu vas être* là le lendemain. *Tu peux te prendre* pour Batman ou Superman puis *tu te pitches* dans les poubelles.
(example 25, cited in Laberge/Sankoff 1979: 428)

> Translation:
> I prefer to drink myself stoned, it's better than smoking dope, I think. The next morning *you have* a bad headache but that's no big deal, *you are* all in one piece, whereas with drugs *you don't know* if *you will be* there the next day. *You might decide* y*ou're* Batman or Superman and *take off* into a garbage can. (ibid.)

Here, the interlocutor is invited to insert him or herself in the position of the person drinking alcohol, especially on the morning after. This situational insertion can be (re-)interpreted, within a mental space theoretic account, following Rubba (1996) and Ehmer (2011). In this case, the speaker creates a protagonist character within a mental space and makes use of the 2sg to invite the interlocutor to identify with the protagonist. The resulting mental space can subsequently be elaborated on, or be juxtaposed with another, hypothetical one (as in the case of the Batman scenario in example 1). Another explanation is offered by pragmatically oriented studies (e.g. Stewart 1995; following Brown/Levinson 1987), where the use of generic seconds is explained by the notion of face: It is less face-threatening to criticize the interlocutor by using a token of the 2sg that can be interpreted generically. The hearer is included in a larger, rather anonymous entity; the possibility of a face threat is thus somewhat lessened, as it is less directly aimed at the addressee.

One key problem has not been solved satisfactorily, however: If the 2sg can take on vastly different meanings besides its 'normal' use as a term of address, how do interlocutors, during an ongoing conversation, resolve the ensuing referential ambiguity? When do interlocutors interpret a 2sg token as a term of address and when do they perceive it as used in a generic way? How do they cope with mismatches in conversation when they realize that in fact there has been a misunderstanding? While linguists have amassed considerable corpus data in the last decades, these corpora document amazingly few cases where interlocutors openly display having disambiguation problems. The aim of this contribution is, therefore, to examine how interlocutors resolve their uncertainties about problematic cases of 2sg reference in ongoing conversations.

To begin with, I will show how generic seconds can be explained as forming part of a reference continuum of the 2sg, ranging from the most prominent use as terms of address to a very peculiar use in which the 2sg is employed to refer exclusively to the speaker. Five focal points can be identified on the continuum. From a theoretical perspective, I will follow mental space theory's suggestion of an animated, generic protagonist within a mental space. Building on this, the problem of misunderstanding the reference of the second singular can then be tackled. In order to do so, I will turn to politeness theory and the mechanisms of turn-taking (cf. the research traditions begun by Brown/Levinson 1987; on the one hand, and Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 1992; on the other). Broadly following a sequential analysis inspired by

conversation analytic methodology, I will show that interlocutors tend not to ask for further specification of reference in a possibly ambiguous situation for face reasons, relying on contextualization cues in the subsequent development of the conversation instead. Ambiguous reference that might lead to misunderstandings only becomes a topic once serious conversational problems arise and the need for disambiguation becomes more important than the face needs of the interlocutors.

Besides data discussed in the scientific literature, I will draw on two data sources: First of all, the Spanish and French subcorpora of C-ORAL-Rom (Cresti/Moneglia 2005). This reference corpus of spoken language is comparatively small (some 300.000 words per subcorpus), but each subcorpus consists of a variety of different communicative genres and registers. In the C-ORAL-Rom data, most speakers know each other well. This is highly relevant, since I have shown elsewhere (Kluge 2012) that the better interlocutors know each other, the more often they recur to generic seconds. The choice of C-ORAL-Rom data is therefore justified as opposed to larger corpora that rely to a larger extent on data derived from sociolinguistic interviews. For written data, the C-ORAL-Rom data will be supplemented by a small ad-hoc corpus of ca. 80 interviews that were published in a variety of newspapers and magazines during the last eight years. Emphasis was placed on soccer players, since they are perceived to be heavy users of generic seconds[3], but also other celebrities and less famous persons were included. The language of most articles is German, but the written corpus also includes French, Spanish, Portuguese, and English-language examples.[4]

2. Generic seconds as part of a continuum

Generic readings of the same pronouns that are 'normally' used as terms of address have increasingly been documented and studied in a great variety of languages (see Kitagawa/Lehrer 1990; and Siewierska 2004 for an overview; and Bolinger 1979; Coveney 2003; deMello 2000; Kluge 2010, 2012 for English, French, and Spanish data, to name just a few). Generic seconds are cross-linguistically attested in many languages, but they are far from universal. Also, it appears that its frequency is rising considerably in several languages, as has been shown by several sociolinguistic studies. The C-ORAL-Rom corpus mentioned above documents considerable variation between individual speakers and between registers, with an average of 21% in the French data and 25% in the Spanish data. There were 755 French, and1526 Spanish-language tokens

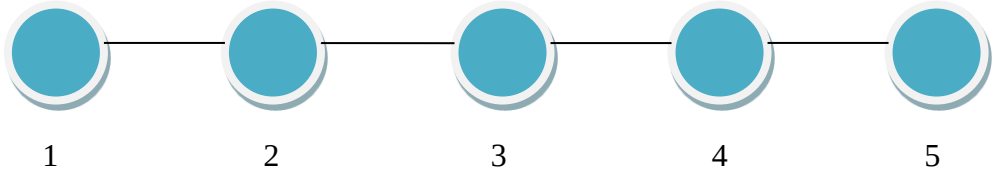
[3] In Dutch, the public use of generic seconds is called *soccer-je*, but its use is not restricted to soccer players (this name was possibly coined because they are interviewed more often than, say, golf players). Similarly in French and Italian, this use is claimed to be very popular among soccer players (personal communication Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni and Emanuela Cresti, Berlin 2011). In order to validate this impression, I tried to collect as many tokens from written interviews as possible. There is some truth to the impression that generic seconds occur more often in interviews given by sport practitioners, actors and artists than by politicians, but this could also be due to a more frequent practice of proof-reading by members of the political class, where generic seconds may be eliminated. A more systematic search for generic seconds was carried out in interviews published during the Soccer World Cups 2006, 2010 and 2014 as well as the European championships of 2008 and 2012. Still, I cannot put any claim on quantitative data.

[4] Most interviews were carried out in the interviewee's native language or the one s/he is most fluent in, but there are also some very interesting cases of translation of generic seconds. For reasons of space, I cannot discuss these cases here.

that could neither be interpreted as terms of address, speech and though representation nor as interaction markers. However, at least in Danish, the data presented by Jensen 2009 (also see Gregersen/Jensen, this volume) suggest that frequency in recent times has reached a peak or is even somewhat declining. Still, one should not place too much emphasis on quantitative data, since different results for quantitative calculations of frequency often also are the result of different counting procedures: More often than not, ambiguous cases are deliberately left out. In a sense, this is a reflection of how canonical expectations that every *signifiant* has one – and one only – *signifié* hinder our understanding, as we do not expect a linguistic sign to have an ambiguous reference. This is important for the main argument of the present article, since it will be shown that ambiguity of reference can be an advantage in conversation.

Analysis of all tokens of the 2sg (T-form as well as V-form of address) in the Spanish and French subcorpus of C-ORAL-Rom revealed the existence of a continuum of reference. Five focal points were identified: One end of the continuum (in Graphic 1: Focal point number 5) is formed by the use of the 2sg as a term of address, the 'normal', 'canonical' use of the 2sg. The other end, number 1, is constituted by a use of the 2sg that refers to the speaker – that is, a speaker who 'hides', so to speak, under the 'cover' of a 2sg, thus presenting his or her own experience as something generalizable, comparable to the experience of others. In between these focal points one can identify three more points that can be paraphrased as 'speaker as representative of a larger entity' (number 2), the generic 'anyone in this position' (number 3), and 'hearer as representative of a larger entity' (number 4). The continuum can be visualized as follows:

Graphic 1: continuum of reference of the 2sg



with number 1 to 5 denoting the following focal points:

1 I, the speaker (hiding behind 'you')
2 I, the speaker, as a representative of a larger entity
3 anyone
4 you, the person in front of me, as a representative of a larger entity
5 you, the person in front of me (= term of address)

As an example for a case where a hearer is presented as a representative for a larger entity, consider the following case, taken from the French C-ORAL-Rom corpus where a vendor, PAT, is trying to sell cooking moulds and bowls to a group of women. She invites the women to imagine themselves cooking with the moulds and bowls she is showing to them. She does not address them exclusively or particularly, but posits them as typical representatives of a larger entity, encompassing 'anyone who has bought these moulds and uses them for cooking'. Since the action depicted is (she hopes) taking place in the near future, she uses the periphrastic future, *aller + infinitive*.

Example (2): fnatbu02, 28-32 'vous allez toujours cuire bouchon fermé'[5]

28 PAT: […] *vous allez cuire* aussi sans matière grasse // # hein // # donc elles se composent /
29 du corps / # la &ca [/] du corps / donc celui-ci fait trois litres / hein # elle existe aussi
30 en deux litres / # et de deux bouchons / # un qui *vous* servira donc / # pour la
31 conservation au congélateur / # au réfrigérateur / # et un qui *vous* servira pour la
32 cuisson / # puisque *vous allez toujours cuire* bouchon / # fermé // # hhh

Translation :

28 PAT […] *you will also cook* without fat / right ? so they consist of/ #
29 the body / # the &cas [/] the body / so this one over here measures three liters/ right # there's another one as well
30 with two liters / # and two lids / # the first one will serve *you* to / # for the
31 conservation in the deep freezer / # in the freezer / # and the other one will help *you* with
32 cooking / # since *you will always be cooking* with a closed lid // # hhh

Similarly, there are cases where the speaker posits herself as a typical representative for a larger entity. C-ORAL-Rom data contain several travel narratives, where a speaker describes some personal traveling experience to another person who has not lived through the same experience. In the following example, the speaker, ANA, tells about her experience of living in China for a year. She recently returned home to Spain and meets with her friends. The use of generic seconds indicates that her assertions are based on a personal experience, but of a nature that lends itself to generalization to others as well. Example (3) involves the experience of Beijing smog and its effect on the laundry.

Example (3): efamcv04, 34-36 'la ropa te sale negra'

32 ANA: […] pues luego es que es una ciudad también +
33 PAS: enorme debe de ser //
34 ANA: es enorme // hay una contaminación / bueno / que *tiendes* fuera / y la ropa *te* sale /
35 ANT: negra //
36 ANA: / manchada //

Translation

32 ANA: […] but then it's that it is a city that's also +
33 PAS: must be huge //
34 ANA: it is huge // contamination is / well */ you hang out your* laundry and *your* clothes are /
35 ANT: black //
36 ANA: / dirty //

ANA exemplifies the degree of air pollution by the set-up of a short-lived mental space (see below) in which the protagonist hangs out the laundry outside (*que tiendes ropa fuera*, line 34). Interestingly, her interlocutor ANT clearly perceives the referent of 2sg to be generic and is therefore able to offer a co-construction to ANA's utterance (ANA: *y la ropa te sale;* ANT: *negra*, lines 34/35).

[5] Examples of C-ORAL-ROM follow the transcription conventions laid out in Moneglia (2005: 25-38). I have added lines in order to facilitate reference to particular discourse parts. In the case of newspaper articles, I follow the usual orthographic rules, except for example (5).

In the C-ORAL-Rom data, the most frequent use was the 'prototypical' or 'normal' interpretation of the 2sg as term of address, but once we consider terms of address as part of a continuum, it must be reconceptualized as only one end of the scale. Even the generic reading that is analyzed in most sociolinguistic studies on the subject is only the 'middle' interpretation. The continuum's other 'end' is formed by a rather peculiar case where the speaker uses a 2sg form to refer to him or herself, in a sense 'hiding' behind a 'mask' of generic reference. In the C-ORAL-Rom data, this interpretation was rather rare. Also, and more troublesome for the analyst working on data she had not taped herself, C-ORAL-Rom data lacks a thorough description of the social relationships of speakers in a specific interaction. Therefore, it was not always possible to decide with certainty that a speaker wanted to refer exclusively to herself, or whether, on the contrary, she would want to present her case as being representative for a larger entity, possibly everyone. For the sake of the present article, I therefore turn to my newspaper corpus to present a unique case where a speaker refers exclusively to himself.

On October 14th, 2012, in a highly mediatized event, Austrian base jumper Felix Baumgartner jumped from a helium balloon who had brought him to the top of the atmosphere at 39 kilometers above the earth. No one before has jumped from this altitude, with the previous record established by American pilot Joe Kittinger sixty-five years earlier standing at 31 kilometers. Baumgartner says (in English), immediately before the jump:

Example (4): 'sometimes you have to be up really high'
Baumgartner: I know the whole world is watching now. I wish you could see what I can see. Sometimes *you have* to be up really high to understand how small *you are* … I'm going home now.[6]
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U32eT7lcnPc, 7.3.2013, minutes 3:49 – 4:04 (7.3.2013)

The first token of *you* (*I wish you could see what I can see*) is directly addressed to his family, friends and colleagues at mission control and to the TV audience and is thus a term of address. His second utterance (*sometimes you have to be up really high* …), however, has a broader, generic reference: Anyone who climbs or flies up very high will most likely get to experience something similar. By switching back and forth between 1sg *I* and 2sg generic *you*, the connection between Baumgartner's unique experience and other similar experiences of being 'up really high' is highlighted even further.

In his first interview after returning to Earth, Baumgartner sets out to retell his unique experience to an Austrian journalist. Both are talking in a regional variety of Austrian German (I try to transcribe the dialectal variety). Here, as in previous and subsequent occasions, Baumgartner proves to be a very heavy user of the second person singular (*du*) to present his own unique experience in a generalizable manner.

Example (5): 'du sitzt drinnen und des is jedes Mal wieder anstrengend'
Interviewer: […] das ist ein Wahnsinn. Wie geht's einem Mann, der sich gerade den Traum seines Lebens erfüllt hat?
Baumgartner: du, I glaub, mir sind grad 20 Tonnen Last von den Schultern gfalln. Wenn *du* sowas … SIEben Jahre *vorbereitest*, ja … und diesen Moment schon so oft im Geiste *durchspielt hast*, und dann

[6] A video document of the entire jump can be found on Youtube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U32eT7lcnPc, 7.3.2013); lines cited in example (3) start at minutes 3:49 – 4:04).

kummt er net dann kummt er net *du hast* immer diese ganzen up and downs diese ganzen Probleme selbst am heutigen Tag wo wir sehr schön .. wegkommen sind mit dem Ballon ja, dann dieses Drama mit dem (faceplate??) i hob ka ..keine Visierbeheizung mehr ghabt … dann war zwischendrin amol die … da hat mer mol glaubt man müsste das Ganze abbrechen und da *denkst* (da *hast gehabt*) da haben wir endlich erfolgreich gelauncht nach dem ersten .. Fehlversuch und dann scheitert das Ganze an der Visierbeheizung ja das kann doch nicht sein, *du sitzt* drinnen und des is jedes Mal wieder anstrengend jedes Mal wieder energieraubend und *du kannst* sowas net glauben, dass das Ganze jetzt an einer Visierheizung scheitert.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OsJe1dVD8o (min. 10:49 – 11:40)

> Translation:
> Int: […] That's so awesome. How does a man feel after fulfilling the dream of his life?
> Baumgartner: You know, I think some twenty tons of weight just fell off my shoulders. If *you prepare* something like that for seven years … and *you have visualized* this moment mentally many times, and then it doesn't come it doesn't come *you have* all these ups and downs all these problems even today when we got off to just a good start with the balloon, right, and then this drama with the (faceplate??), my visor heating didn't function anymore … in between the- … that's when we thought we had to abort everything and then *you think (you have had)* then we finally were successful after the first try and then everything goes amiss because of a simple visor heating well that simply can't be, *you sit* in there and it is very tiresome every time, very energy consuming every time and *you cannot believe* that the whole thing is about to fail because of a simple visor heating. […]

Here, it is obvious that seven of the eight tokens of *du* refer to Baumgartner and his problems while preparing for the jump (the eighth token is an interaction marker at the beginning of the excerpt): *Du* cannot be a term of address, as the direct addressee is the interviewer on the ground. No one else has done a similar jump before, and Baumgartner is the only one who can talk about his emotions during the wait. He could have used 1sg *ich* throughout the narrative, but does so only once when mentioning the problems with his visor heating. Choice of 2sg *du* is a way to involve his spectators to relive his emotions, inviting them to mentally join him in his recollections of the jump. Some tokens (e.g. *you have visualized this moment mentally many times*) possibly not only refer to Baumgartner alone, but also to his team, as he and his crew all dreamed of the event for several years. Also, Baumgartner often employs 1pl *wir* (e.g. *we got off to a good start, we thought we had to abort everything*), thereby placing emphasis on the team effort. The switches between *we* and speaker-referring generic seconds involve the team effort in a more permanent way than switches between *we* and *I* would have done. Also, the spectators are involved more permanently: As I will stress in the next section, the spectators are invited to a mental space where they are – via use of generic seconds – placed in the animated role of the mental space's protagonist.

2. Generic seconds within a mental space theoretic account

As mentioned earlier, generic seconds can be explained satisfactorily by mental space theory. According to Sweetser/Fauconnier (1996: 11),"as we think and talk, mental spaces are set up, structured, and linked under pressure from grammar, context, and culture. The effect is to create a network of spaces through which we move as discourse unfolds." Thus, mental spaces are an important element of online construction of meaning in conversation. The concept of mental spaces originated in Gilles Fauconnier's initial work on opaque sentences and ambiguities (Fauconnier 1979), and

was subsequently enlarged by a long-standing cooperation with Mark Turner (Fauconnier/Turner 2002). Today integrated into an overall cognitive theory of meaning, mental space theory now is seen as an integral and important part of a broader theory of conceptual blending (also called conceptual integration).

The first to analyze the use of generic seconds in a mental space theoretic approach was Rubba (1996), who reminds her readers that deictics such as *I, you, this* are "only partially specified, and therefore may apply across a large number of actual discourse situations. […] The pronoun *I* is applicable to any person who is currently taking the role of speaker; no further features of that individual are specified" (1996: 228). This might cause problems in the case when there is not enough established context in the on-going conversation to judge the intended reference. In her 1996 article, in which she analyzes interview data on the view held by inhabitants of San Diego about immigration, Rubba examines two related phenomena, the use of deictics in utterances that may be characterized as quotes or as free indirect speech, and generic seconds. She recurs to the concept of alternate grounds to the actual discourse context, relying on the theory of mental space proposed by Fauconnier (1985) and combined with the concept of cognitive models (Lakoff 1987) that can provide a frame of interpretation for the deictics employed. The actual utterance situation is seen as the default ground containing several entities that are being profiled, leading to the linguistic expression of, for example, speaker (*I*), hearer (*you*), or the location (*here*) (cf. the very similar notion of the *hic-et-nunc*-situation by Bühler 1934). Thus, mental space grammar proposes a view on deictics in discourse in which pronouns help trigger a decentering move (or deictic shift, according to Duchan/Bruder/Hewitt 1995) to another mental space, and serve as connectors, or space builders, between the discourse ground and other spaces constructed in ongoing conversation.

It should come as no surprise that generic seconds are very frequent in narratives, and that they often occur in series. Narratives often serve as a means to transport an interlocutor to a specific scenery, in order to mentally take the position of the narrator or of a particular character that the narrator suggests (see Ehmer's 2011 argument on the animation of characters in mental spaces). In the Spanish C-ORAL-Rom, there is even an anecdote with no less than twelve generic seconds in a row. In the extract given below in example (6), the speaker is narrating his personal experience on the Camino de Santiago, the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Northern Spain:

Example (6): epubmn02, 196-204 'haces favores / sin saber a quién los haces'

196 HOY: […] anécdotas de esas hay muchos a lo largo del camino // de cómo / a una persona /
197 pues que / la *ves* hecha polvo / pues *te paras* / en vez de seguir andando / *te paras* / le
198 *quitas* las botas / le *das* / un masaje en los pies / le *revientas* una ampolla / le *pones* un
199 vendaje / y *sigues* // y al cabo de dos días / *te* la *encuentras* / pues como nueva / y *te*
200 agradece / por lo bien que / lo *hiciste* / no ? lo bonito del camino es que / hhh / *haces*
201 favores / sin saber a quién los *haces* // es / un [///] no voy a decir sembrar / porque
202 suena como muy [///] es un [/] una palabra muy religiosa / no ? pero sí que es / el hacer
203 favores / pero / sabiendo que nadie *te* los va a devolver nunca / o sea / mirando un
204 poco a [/] en general / no ? al futuro //

Translation

196 HOY: there are stories like these along the Camino // like // a person *you see* / she's totally worn out / so *you stop* instead of going on / *you stop / you take* her boots off / *you give* her / a foot massage / *you open* up a blister / *you apply* a band aid / and *you go on* / and two days

> later / *you meet* her again / like she's a new person / and she thanks *you* / for the good that / *you did* to her / right? the beautiful thing about the Camino is that / ehm / *you're doing a favor* to someone / without knowing to whom *you're doing a favor* // it's / a [///] I'm not going to say disseminating / because that sounds very [///] it's a [/] a very religious word / right? but yeah it's all about / doing favors / but / knowing well that no one is ever going to return them to *you* / that is / looking a bit at [/] at the whole picture / right? at the future //

The entire anecdote is retold using generic seconds, thereby marking the incident as based on personal experience, but generalizable to anyone; the speaker presents himself as someone who has had an experience representative of what others have experienced. That generic seconds should indeed occur very often in narratives seems logical from our discussion of mental spaces so far: If generic seconds serve to introduce a mental space that the addressee is "invited to join", imagining herself in the position of the protagonist, then it would be counterproductive to proceed in a less personalized way after the mental space has been built, or to abandon the mental space after its laborious construction. A generic verb or a generically interpretable object pronoun thus increases the likelihood of the next possible token also being interpretable as generic.

Verb series of generic seconds can often also be found at the turning point of narratives. In the following example, a boxing trainer who also coaches managers narrates how he himself learned to deal with defeat:

Example (7): ‚und dann stellst du dir die entscheidende Frage'

KarriereSPIEGEL: Und Sie persönlich? Lagen Sie auch schon mal am Boden?

Hoffmann: Oh ja, vor ein paar Jahren. Da hatten mir innerhalb weniger Wochen drei Hauptkunden Aufträge gestrichen, im Gesamtwert von mehr als einem halben Jahresumsatz. Zur selben Zeit, und ich dachte, die Welt verschwört sich gerade gegen mich, rasselten mir auch noch zwei Absagen von potenziellen Neukunden ins Haus, für die ich nächtelang Präsentationen ausgearbeitet hatte. Was dann passierte, hatte ich so noch nie erlebt: Mich zogen mit einem Mal Gewichte aus Mutlosigkeit, Selbstzweifel und Trübsinn schon morgens beim Aufstehen auf die Matratze zurück. Bumm. Die folgenden Monate glichen Tiefschlag-Touren, als rammte mir aus meiner eigenen Psyche täglich irgendein Persönlichkeitsanteil selbst was in die Fresse. Und dann *stellst du dir* die entscheidende Frage, die nur *du selbst beantworten kannst*: Wem *kaufst du* mehr ab, den Schlägen des Alltags oder *deiner* Selbstachtung? Dieser Glaube an sich selbst ist eine Lebensentscheidung. Von da kann *dich* zwar vieles immer noch umhauen, aber *du warst* am Meeresgrund und hast *keine* Angst mehr vor Pfützen, *tauchst* immer wieder auf. Diese Zeit will ich echt niemals gemisst haben.

> http://www.spiegel.de/karriere/berufsleben/box-coaching-fuer-niedergeschlagene-fuenf-sechs-sieben-aufstehen-a-787941.html (26.9.2011)

> Translation:
> KarriereSPIEGEL: How about you personally? Have you ever been knocked down, too?
> Hoffmann: Oh yes, a few years ago. Three senior business partners cancelled their deals with me within a few weeks, worth about six months' sales volume. And simultaneously, two possible new customers rejected my offers, after I had spent several nights on business presentations for them. I thought the whole world was against me. I never had experienced anything like what was happening then: I was being dragged down by weights of dejection, self-doubts and gloom, they kept pulling me back onto my mattress. Boom. The following months were hard, as if some part of my psyche would punch me in my face on a daily basis. And then *you begin to ask* the questions that only *you can answer* for *yourself*: who *are you* more likely to give credit to, to the daily life punches or to *your* own sense of self-esteem? This belief in oneself is a decision for life. From then on, a lot of things can *knock you down*, but *you've been* to the bottom of the sea and *you're not afraid* anymore of small puddles, *you're always resurfacing*. I don't really want to miss those days.

In example (7), the narrator switches perspective to generic *du* precisely when he recalls having to make an important decision on how to deal with backlashes. He thereby represents this life-changing moment as something generalizable, possibly also applicable to the interviewer and the reader of the article. The latter are invited to imagine themselves in this situation and how they would deal with it. Also note the pronominal switches within the sequence of generic seconds where the speaker refers to himself impersonally by *sich selbst* (*This belief in oneself is a decision for life)*, followed by the 'return' to the base space, and the deictic perspective expressed by the 1sg, in the last sentence (*I don't really want to miss those days*). I will argue later on that pronominal switches like these are an important strategy to display that a certain token be understood generically.

Pronominal switching can also be found in the following example, from an interview to South Tyrolean mountaineering legend Reinhold Messner. This example provides a whole variety of generalization strategies in German, all of them being R-impersonals in the terminology proposed by Malchukov/Siewierska (2011: 7), that is, a construction with "a notional subject lacking in referential properties":

Example (8): 'du bist ganz auf dich allein gestellt'
Interviewer: Viele sagen, sich absichtlich in Todesgefahr zu begeben, sei töricht.
Reinhold Messner: Ich würde das nur teils bejahen. *Wir werden* ins Leben *geworfen* mit dem Wissen, dass wir sterben werden. *Jeder* hat die Freiheit zu entscheiden, wie er mit dieser Situation umgehen will. Natürlich trägt *jeder* Verantwortung, gegenüber der Familie, Eltern, Freunden. Aber diese Verantwortung kann nicht so weit gehen, dass *wir unser* Leben einschränken. Im Grunde geht es um eine Ur-Erfahrung jenseits der Zivilisation. Die Zivilisation ist entstanden, weil *der Mensch* nicht permanent exponiert sein wollte. So hat *er* sich Sicherheiten geschaffen: Feuer, Höhlen, Wohnungen, Kühlschränke, Städte. Wenn *ich mich* aus dieser Behütung *hinauskatapultiere, erfahre ich* Leben wie vor 100.000 Jahren. *Du wirfst dich* in einen Gefahrenraum, in dem das Dasein anstrengend ist, gefährlich, ungewiss. *Du bist* ganz auf *dich* allein gestellt. Dies ist die größtmögliche Erfahrungsquelle, die es auf der Erde gibt. Danach weiß *man*, wie *man* als Mensch tickt. Bergsteigen betreibt *man* nie aus Idealismus. Es dient immer der *eigenen* Erfahrung. Es hat immer mit Egoismus zu tun.
http://www.merian.de/magazin/himalaya-reinhold-messner-mount-everest-interview.html (September 2009)

Translation:
Interviewer: Many say it's foolish to consciously get oneself into a situation of danger of death.
Messner: I would only partially agree with that. *We are thrown* into life knowing that we will die. *Everyone* has the freedom to decide for himself how to deal with this situation. Of course *everyone* has responsibilities for family, parents, friends. But this responsibility cannot go so far that *we restrict our* way of life. In a sense it is a primeval experience that goes beyond civilization. Civilization came about because *man* did not want to be permanently exposed. That is why *he* created securities: fire, caves, homes, refrigerators, cities. If *I* catapult *myself* out of this protection zone, *I* experience life as it was 100.000 years ago. *You throw yourself* into a danger zone in which existence is tiresome, exhausting, insecure. *You're* completely on *your* own. This is the greatest source of experience on Earth. After that, *one* knows how *one* functions as a person. *One* never practices mountaineering out of idealism. It always serves *one's own* experience. It always has to do with egoism.

Messner starts generalizing by an all-encompassing first plural *wir* 'we' (*we are thrown into life*), then focusing on the individual person by means of *jeder* 'everyone', only to return to *wir* 'we' a little later. When commenting on the role played by civilization, Messner switches from *jeder* 'everyone' to *der Mensch* 'mankind', possibly because

'we' might be taken to refer to present-day man, while Messner's focus is more on human evolution throughout the last 40.000 years, as is evidenced by his mention of fire and caves. He then switches to a generic *ich* 'I', presenting himself as a good representative of a larger generic entity. Referring to a generalizable experience by means of generic *I* could be taken to exclusively refer to Messner's own experience, as he is well-known for having stepped out of the protection zone offered by civilization repeatedly. However, in the context built up so far by references to greater social groups (reaching up to mankind itself), this 1sg is rather obviously meant in a generic way. The construction of a mental space is further obvious in the use of a hypothetical, conditional conditional construction (cf. Dancygier/Sweetser 2005 for an indepth discussion of conditionals in mental spaces.). Note that, unlike in Zobel's contribution to this volume (Zobel, this volume, Appendix A) no qualifying construction, e.g. *I as a mountaineer*, is needed here; in fact, such a qualification would have an opposite effect in the sense of making Messner's argument applicable only to himself, not to mankind in general. Still, the use of generic *ich* is ambiguous, less frequent than generic *du* and could be misunderstood by the interviewer, which may be the reason why Messner then switches to generic *du* 'you', and later to *man* 'one', in order to generalize in a way that clearly encompasses the interviewer (and the reader of the interview).

3. Why are there so few documented misunderstandings?

On a more general level, to invite someone to a mental space and to encourage her to imagine herself in another person's position is also part of the "relational work" (e.g. Locher/Watts 2005) or "rapport management" (Spencer-Oatey 2005, 2007) carried out by interlocutors in conversation. As has been made increasingly clear by the social sciences, generalizations, including the use of generic seconds, are an important membership categorization device used to negotiate membership categories. The speakers make use of generalizations for assertions and clarifications on how they see the world, and their position within it. For these purposes, generic seconds offer a unique advantage: As personal pronouns, they are underspecified, and the scope of their reference is left vague on purpose. This fact has been analyzed mostly in relation to vagueness of first and third plural pronouns (e.g. Duszak 2002; de Fina 2003; Temmermann 2008; Du Bois 2009, 2010; Borthen 2010; De Cock 2014), but it should be obvious that generic second pronouns also fit this category (see Stewart 1995 who has focused most on this point).

On the other hand, when using generic seconds, interlocutors are faced with a reference problem and risk conversational misunderstandings that might even endanger the relationship to the interlocutor. Interlocutors, as well as analysts, are therefore faced with the problem of how to disambiguate pronominal reference in conversation, preferably in the 'correct', intended meaning. In this section I will show that the interactional process is key to understand why there are so few documented cases of conversational trouble that are caused by different ascriptions of reference.

As mentioned in the introduction, existing linguistic corpora show amazingly few misunderstandings involving the 2sg. In the C-ORAL-Rom data (cf. Kluge 2012: 93-94), there was only one example in the Spanish subcorpus in which both interlocutors clearly intended 2sg *tú* to have a more or less vague referent, but putting

slightly different focus on the exact referent (in one case, the basketball players of a club, while the interlocutor intended to put perspective on the club's management). But there was no example to be found where generic seconds were 'mistaken' for a term of address, or vice versa.

In fact, many researchers have reported personal anecdotes to illustrate use of generic seconds in order to make up for the lack in corpus data. One very illustrious example is provided by Katie Wales:

Example (9): 'Me?'
Tim: Friends can be two-faced.
KW: What do you mean?
Tim: The way they talk about you.
KW: Me?
Tim: No, me!
(personal conversation, 6 July 1994, cited in Wales 1996: 79)

Here, Wales' interlocutor was aiming for a generalization based on his own experience (personal friends talking negatively about him), but his use of generic *you* was understood by Wales as a term of address and interpreted as a warning to her not to put too much trust into her friends. At her astonished request (*Me?*), her interlocutor then clarified that he had in fact thought of himself as a representative of this generically framed assertion (*No, me*!).

Another example for the ubiquity of the use of generic seconds in French was provided to me by a Belgian colleague who overheard a discussion between three colleagues. They are talking about the upcoming graduation ceremony (*les délibés*) and the heat wave announced for that day. Colleagues A and C are male, B is a woman.

Example (10): 'elle ne porte pas de froc'
A to B: Pour les délibés, on meurt de chaud. *Tu es* là avec ton froc…
C to A: Bon, elle ne porte pas de froc.
A: Non, mais c'était un tu générique.

Translation :
A to B: During the graduation ceremony, we're gonna die from heat. *You're* there with your jacket …
C to A: Well, she doesn't wear a jacket.
A to both: No, but that was a generic you.
(personal email conversation with a friend, 17.12.2012)

In this case, it is unclear, but in fact rather unlikely that C would have understood A's initial use of *tu* (*tu es là avec ton froc*) as a term of address to B. It could have been meant as a slight pun raising attention to the fact that not everyone would be so unlucky to have to wear a coat on a hot day. This illustrates that intentional 'misunderstandings' involving generic seconds exist as well, with speakers making strategic use of the referential ambiguity of the 2sg.

But the question remains why there are so few misunderstandings documented in existing linguistic corpora, even when in the last years so many have been made publicly available. Of course, one reason could be that linguists haven't yet looked for them in corpora. Since most existing corpora are not tagged for semantic reference (as is also pointed out by Zobel, this volume), researchers would have to manually tag the

corpus themselves, a very arduous task where the exact determination of the referential scope is often impossible precisely due to the ambiguity of the token in question. For example, Borthen (2010) begins her article on plural pronouns with her problems to define their referential scope, and how she would hate the days of tagging. Another reason for the scarcity of misunderstandings involving generic seconds could lie in the fact that many linguistic corpora tend to be based on sociolinguistic interviews. As I have noted in the introduction, the power asymmetries between interviewer and interviewee(s) and the fact that interlocutors do not know each other well speak against its heavy use (cf. Coveney 2003). So it could well be that the lack of misunderstandings of generic seconds is, at least partially, based on a bias in our choice of corpus data.

However, a more important reason why we do not find many misunderstandings is that interlocutors do not often produce questions concerning the referential scope of a 2sg token. On the one hand, possibly they never have problems to understand the intended referents, and only linguists – working on ex post data – find the exact reference difficult to place. The existence of personal anecdotes like the ones cited above is an argument against this. On the other hand, it could be that interlocutors do have problems to correctly identify the intended reference, but do not ask, for reasons yet to be determined. Possibly, there is a kind of "*go along*-principle" that will encourage people, in situations of conversational uncertainty, to not ask for clarification of reference, only in the utmost need.

An important indicator that interlocutors do find generic seconds to be problematic is the existence of self-initialized self-repairs in the data. They can be interpreted as instances where trouble is averted 'at the last moment'. This would mean that speakers notice that a reference problem could arise in the utterance they are currently producing. In order to avoid being misunderstood, they will either switch to another construction (for example French *on*) or clarify explicitly that the 2sg is not to be understood as a term of address. For the first case, switching to another construction, consider the following example, again from the French subcorpus of C-ORAL-Rom. Here, a pottery artists talks about the work of sculptor Osmane Souw, whose statues are so life-like that they appear to breathe and flex their muscles:

Example (11): ffamdl28, 310-317: 'tu as [/] on a l'impression qu'il sont réels quoi'

310	MAR:	[…] et il crée des personnages &euh # pff pff &euh de taille humaine / ou
311		même en plus grand // # hhh
312		%exp: reniflement (hhh)
313		/ et qui sont d' une expression [/] enfin qui sont vraiment &euh [/] *tu as [/] on a*
314		l' impression qu' ils sont réels quoi / quand ils sont sous nos yeux / on a l' impression
315		qu' ils sont là /
316		vivants / en train de respirer &euh # &euh avec des muscles qui sont en train de
317		bouger

Translation

310	MAR:	[…] and he creates statues & hm # pff pff &hm of human scale / or
311		even bigger // # hhh
312		%exp: snuffles (hhh)
313		/ and who have an expression [/] well they are really &hm [/] *you have [/] one has*
314		the impression that they are real eh / when they are before our eyes/ one has
315		the impression that they are there /
316		alive / breathing &hm # &hm with muscles that are being
317		flexed

The main speaker MAR self-corrects herself in lines 313 / 314 (*tu as [/] on a l'impression qu' ils sont reels quoi*), possibly because *tu as* 'you have' could be seen as a term of address, thus obligating the addressee (i.e., the interviewer) to sense something he might not feel himself. *On a*, on the other hand, is less imposing on the addressee, who is nevertheless being involved into the action in line 314 by use of first plural *nos* (*quand ils sont sous nos yeux*).

Alternatively, speakers could clarify more explicitly the intended reference by stating that the 2sg token is not meant as a term of address. A good example is provided by Boutet (1986: 28), who analyzes the variation of *on* 'one' and *tu* 'you' in the speech of 40 female industrial workers in the Paris region. The speaker corrects herself in order to clarify the intended reference to 'anybody in the situation alluded to', or possibly a speaker-referring *tu*:

Example (12): 'tu t'sens bien'
*avec un sauna t'*es *en super form* – tu t'sens *bien – pas toi (rires) – le sport et* toi *hein ça fait deux*
(personal conversation, Boutet 1986: 28)

> Translation:
> With a sauna *you're* in great shape – *you feel* good – not you (laughter) – the sport and *you* that's a great team

Unfortunately, Boutet does not give further context (apparently the example was noted by Boutet in an anecdotal fashion): The person being spoken to must either have mentioned previously that s/he does not like to go to a sauna, or this is a well-known fact to both interlocutors. The speaker nevertheless begins to list the advantages of regularly visiting a sauna. Noting that *t'es en super form – tu t'sens bien* is ambiguous and possibly a threat to the face of the interlocutor, the speaker then explicitly excludes the addressee from the intended entity being referred to. (Another alternative for disambiguation / clarification of reference would be to use 2sg together with other strategies of impersonalization during the same turn, as was noted in the previous section in relation to pronominal switches.)

De Hoop/Tarenskeen (2014) likewise cite an example in which an interviewer, during an after-game interview with a Dutch soccer player, feels the need to reformulate the initial question in a more face-saving way, so that the referent of vague *jij* 'you' (refering to an individual person) becomes more obviously the entire team who lost its game despite a very strong opening period.

Example (13): 'in ieder geval jij niet alleen'
Doe je dan iets fout? Jij niet, maar – in ieder geval jij niet alleen – maar doet het Nederlandse team dan iets fout?

> Translation:
> Aren't you doing something wrong then? Not you, but – *I mean not you alone* – but isn't the Dutch team doing something wrong then?
> (De Hoop/Tarenskeen 2014, example 14, my italics)

Here, the interviewer takes care to broaden reference of the 2sg to include the entire Dutch team and makes the intended reading explicit, thereby risking his own face (by acknowledging the need to self-correct) in order to save the interviewee's face.

A similar, even more explicit example of self-initialized clarification of reference was reported by Adrienne Lehrer, who, during a conversation that probably took place in the 1970s or 1980s, was reproached by a European woman in the middle of a discussion on American military policy in Europe:

Example (14): 'you're – I don't mean you personally'
You're – I don't mean you personally – *you're going to destroy* us all in a nuclear war.
(Kitagawa / Lehrer 1990: 743, example 6, my italics)

In this utterance, as Kitagawa/Lehrer (ibid.) point out, the referents of the italicized *you* are not specified and should be seen as an example of vague or ambiguous *you*, where the referent would be left unidentified, either by choice of the speaker or for being unidentifiable. Here, the referent of *you* can be inferred from contextual and world knowledge – most likely representatives of United States politics, especially the U.S. president. Talking to a U.S. citizen, *you* evokes a membership categorization device in terms of the interlocutor's nationality. After noting the possible face-threatening effect, the speaker reformulates her utterance by explicitly excluding her immediate addressee, Adrienne Lehrer, who is not in a position to start a nuclear war.

4. An explanation: Politeness and the mechanisms of turn-taking

I will now propose an account how generic seconds are disambiguated in an ongoing interaction. This explanation is based, on the one hand, on mental space theory, including frames and scenes as an explanation how speakers manage to involve their addressee into a certain depicted action and/or to present an addressee as a typical representative of a larger entity in the first place. On the other hand, an explanation must be based on the interactional process itself. Generic seconds' disambiguation must be anchored to a greater extent in interaction than previously done. This also includes participants' individual and group face needs and strategic argumentative decisions. Most notably, the turn-taking system also is important, as it not only allocates turns but is also instrumental in allowing interlocutors to jointly negotiate the reference of a token, here, the second singular.

Interlocutors in a conversation constantly need to pay attention to the ongoing action, asking themselves whether they are being talked to, or whether their utterance could be understood to be addressed to a particular interlocutor. Being talked to would entail other conversational obligations in the turn-taking process. If directly addressed in a 'current speaker selects next'-technique, the hearer is obliged to respond (rule 1a of Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974). If, on the other hand, the hearer is not directly addressed, the hearer can, but need not take over the turn (rule 1b). In the case of generic seconds, this situation is a bit modified: The hearer first needs to establish a likely reference of 2sg, preferably consistent with the reference intended by the current speaker, in order to know whether turn-taking obligations are placed on him or not. In order to establish reference, he will thus recur to all conversational resources that can be thought of as relevant: Context, world knowledge as well as currently active mental spaces and/or frames and scenes. The 'procedures of disambiguation' employed by a hearer to disambiguate between address and generic seconds, reflecting interactants' actual conversational work, are probably somewhat like the following:

1. "Are you being talked to?" If so, you will need to respond in some way. But you could still be only one of several people addressed, so relax.[7]
2. "Are you being talked to exclusively?" If so, 2sg is a term of address, and you need to respond in some way; if not: 2sg is probably generic, but could be speaker-referring as well.
3. "Try to disambiguate 2sg use by using contextual and world knowledge, knowledge of the interlocutor's life, and including knowledge of frames, scenes and currently active mental spaces" – 2sg could refer to speaker or to anyone. Obviously, the better interactants know each other, the more contextual knowledge they will have here.
4. If *you* occurred within an already established mental space: If one token of 2sg can be interpreted generically or speaker-referring, if other tokens of R-impersonals have previously occurred in the same syntactic position, or if the currently active mental space is a generic one, then likelihood increases that other tokens in the direct environment are generic as well;
5. If possible, show alignment and thus confirm interpretation as generic: "Go along with generic 2sg in the next turn";
6. If you are unsure: "It probably doesn't really matter, wait for more information to disambiguate!";
7. Only in case of serious trouble, ask.

These procedures recur to the insight formulated in the second subsection that the interpretation of the 2sg as a term of address is but one of several focal points on a referential continuum. Address terms need specification in a similar way as do interpretations of 2sg pronouns as generic or speaker-referring. Speakers, by means of choosing a certain expression and/or different space-builders and other contextualization cues, can more or less influence how their utterance is meant to be understood, but they also leave their utterance open to (re)interpretation – intentionally or unintentionally. For them, the referential ambiguity of the 2sg offers some advantages and can be strategically exploited, as was mentioned in the discussion of examples (10) and (13). If A uses, in a certain context, a form that B can interpret as either form of address or as generalization, it is only in B's next turn that the referent of this ambiguous form is decided upon – by the next speaker. And even in these instances, we still do not know if speaker A intended his utterance to be understood generically, only that speaker B chose to give it this reading. Alternatively, A might intend *you* as a term of address, but B understands it generically and answers in a generalizing manner (or: Did understand that she was meant directly, but without wanting to seem rude, chooses not to make it a topic and to reinterpret *you* as generic, thus calling for other conversational duties, and rights). As Wedgwood (2011) stresses, interlocutors can remain intentionally vague to allow each other a graceful opt-out strategy (e.g., in example 11, not imposing on the other the conviction that going to the sauna is something healthy). Speaker-intentions thus need not be congruent with the interpretation that is set as relevant in the subsequent interaction.

[7] This recalls Goffman's (1981: 129ff.) distinction between different participation roles for each speaker and hearer, e.g. hearers are either ratified or unratified (but still acknowledged as hearers by the speaker), as bystanders or eavesdroppers.

In fact, we can only be sure that people will understand the 2sg in a generic way if in the next move the next speaker also employs a generic second and thus displays "its speaker's understanding of a prior turn's talk" (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974: 728). As Schegloff (1992) stresses in his *repair after next turn*-principle, if misunderstandings arise (or rather: Suspicions that there has been a conversational misunderstanding), then the third turn is the place where a repair sequence would be initiated. In all other cases the jointly constructed meaning is supposed to be considered unproblematic by both interactants (at least unless other evidence arises). However, this 'strategy of confirming' *you* as generic cannot always be employed in the course of a conversation.

For listeners, furthermore, in many situations it may be unimportant to know for sure that they are the only persons referred to or whether they are included in a group of other possible referents – as long as they can correctly identify those cases where they are being addressed exclusively. In all other cases, a 'go along'-strategy is most likely the less face-threatening and most effective strategy, as Stewart (1992, 1995) had already acknowledged. Context will in most cases help to disambiguate reference, without the necessity to recur to meta-communicative routines of asking for the precise intended referent. Hearers will usually not display reference problems for reasons of interactional politeness – unless they have serious trouble of interpretation. They will avoid clarification of reference for face reasons, since asking for clarification is a dispreferred action that interrupts the normal flow of conversation. Also, asking could be interpreted as an indirect accusation of the current speaker of imprecise speaking and /or as accusing the next speaker (= the current hearer) of not paying attention. If possible, interactants will therefore try to align themselves by using generic seconds as well, in order to mark the generic interpretation as such – and only in utmost trouble, they will ask.

In fact, an example for a 'go along, it does not really matter'- strategy does exist in the French subcorpus of C-ORAl-Rom. In a conversation between three friends, talk has revolved for some time along the topics of accidents and how expensive cars have become. EST then moves on to tell how she had brought the car to the body shop a few days earlier for a revision of the brakes: Now the mechanic calls to inform her about a problem concerning the water pump, asking whether he should fix it:

Example (15): ffamcv11: 280-297 'ils te trouvent toujours des trucs'

276	EST:	[…] donc je l' ai amenée
277		chez le garagiste / et tout // donc il me fait ça / puis il m' appelle / il me dit / bon la
278		pompe à eau / # elle [/] elle fuit un peu // ben / changez // hhh
279		%exp: rires (hhh)
280	DEL:	ouais / non / mais c' est &*ils te trouvent* toujours des <trucs> //
281	CHR:	<ouais> //
282	EST:	<non / non / mais> il est honnête / mais il a raison // je préfère <qu' il m' avertisse>
283	DEL:	<mais &euh [/]>
284	EST:	/ que la <pompe>
285	DEL:	<ouais //>
286	EST:	/ <à eau> fuit / tu vois /
287	DEL:	<ouais> //
288	EST:	<qu' il me la laisse> / et que trois mois après j' explose le moteur // <xxx>
289	DEL:	<ouais / il va falloir> que je l' amène aussi faire des révisions / parce que là / elle [/]
290		elle fait un drôle de clac // bon ça fait depuis pas mal de mois qu' elle fait ce bruit-là /
291	EST:	ouais // #

293 DEL: <xxx>
294 EST: <elle fait clac / clac> ? c' est le [/]
295 DEL: quand je repasse la première ou &euh je sais pas si c' est les &in je [/] je pense que je
296 dois avoir des problèmes au niveau des [/] de la suspension / <ou d' un amortisseur
297 qui est nase>

Translation
276 EST: […] so I brought it
277 to the garage / and everything //so he makes that for me /then he calls me and says / well the
278 water pump / # is [/] is dripping a bit // well / change it please // hhh
279 %exp: laughter (hhh)
280 DEL: yeah / no / but it's &*they always find some* <*trouble*> //
281 CHR: <yeah //
282 EST: <no / no / but> he's honest /he's right // I prefer him to <tell me>
283 DEL: <but &eh [/]>
284 EST: / that the <water>
285 DEL: <yeah //>
286 EST: / <pump> drips / you know /
287 DEL: <yeah> //
288 EST: <to leaving it like it is> / and then three months later the motor explodes //<xxx>
289 DEL: <yeah / I need to> take my car as well to revision / cause it's / it [/] makes a
290 funny noise // well it's made that noise for a couple of months now /
291 EST: yeah // #
293 DEL: <xxx>
294 EST: <it makes clickety / clack> ? that's the [/]
295 DEL: when I change to first gear &eh I don't know if it's the & eh I [/] I think I must
296 be having trouble with the [/] the suspension / <or a broken-down
297 buffer>

In line 280, the speaker DEL voices the opinion that it is typical of mechanics to find additional problems that have to be fixed, using both vague third plural *ils* for the group she affiliates less with (the mechanics) and generic *te* for the character she wants to identify with. However, EST apparently mistook her generically framed utterance as something relating to her own specific situation (in spoken French, there is no acoustic difference between 3pl *ils te trouvent* and 3sg *il te trouve*). She protests that her particular mechanic is very honest (*il est honnête*, 282) and that she actually prefers to be warned by him of some potentially dangerous trouble. DEL apparently sets out to protest and clarify the misunderstanding (*mais &euh*, 283), but is not able to win the turn. Starting in line 289, in her next turn she begins to present her own problems with her car (*elle fait un drôle de clac*, 290) and does not return to the conversational misunderstanding produced in line 280. The misunderstanding therefore goes unnoticed by DEL's interlocutors EST and CHR. Apparently, face needs among friends and the wish for an amiable chat with her friends are more important to DEL than a precise disambiguation of reference and clarification of a misunderstanding; so DEL does not insist on being understood as originally intended.

5. Conclusion

Ambiguity of the second person is not only a decision between its 'prototypical', 'normal' use as a term of address and 'anything else', that is, its generic interpretation. As I have shown in this article, reference of the second person can be reconceptualized as an entire continuum of possible references, where term of address is but one end of the reference continuum. A continuum can also explain the existence of uses where the speaker refers to herself by a generic second.

The seeming scarcity of misunderstandings documented in linguistic corpora can be attributed to several factors: Available linguistic corpora often are not tagged for reference, and corpus data tends to be derived from sociolinguistic interviews. While the corpus data do not show open resolution of misunderstandings the way they have been noted in anecdotal fashion, there are in fact some indications of trouble in the data: Self-initialized self-repairs. Speakers produce them to avert trouble 'at the last moment' and to clarify that the reference of a particular token of the second person pronoun is to be understood as generic or vague, not as a term of address. In this case, speakers will either switch to another construction (e.g. French *on* or German *man*) or they will clarify explicitly that the token in question is not meant as a term of address. Another explanation put forward is that interlocutors tend not to ask for clarification of reference out of considerations of face (their own as well as that of the speaker). They draw on all available resources in order to disambiguate tokens of the 2sg, including contextual and world knowledge, knowledge of the interlocutor's life, and their knowledge of relevant frames, scenes and currently active mental spaces.

Thus, existing corpora most likely do contain more conversational misunderstandings than previously thought. Put differently: There will be cases where at least one interlocutor feels unsure about the intended referent. However, from the interlocutors' perspective, these cases rarely need to be clarified, only when interlocutors notice that their respective conceptual blends are vastly incongruent, and when problematic issues arise that are deemed important for the subsequent course of the conversation. Again, the more information interlocutors have about the life circumstances of their conversational partners, the easier is the 'correct' disambiguation. Therefore, generic seconds should be more likely to occur in these interactions than among people who know each other less well.

Corpus

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