

# Transferred Reference in Chinese Vocabulary -Taking the First Person as Examples

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## ABSTRACT

This article uses corpus analysis to analyze and summarize the types and contexts of the transferred reference of Chinese first person "I" and "we", and analyze the motivation from the perspective of pragmatics. "I" has three types: "you", "he/she" and "we", and three contexts: formal occasions, turn-taking between the two parties, and entering a virtual scene; "We" has four types: "I", "you", "he/she" and "they", and four contexts: expressing opinions, persuading or comforting each other, reducing responsibility and embodying close relationship. There are three motivations: to follow the politeness principle, to achieve pragmatic empathy or de-empathy and to adjust the pragmatic distance.

**Keywords:** *Reference, I, We, Type, Context, Pragmatics.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On May 29th, 2015, a Chinese star published her love affair on Weibo with the word "We" and a photo. On June 27th, 2019, they broke up and ended with "We are no longer us (we, in Chinese), we are still us (we)". So, What's the meaning of these "we"?

When the love was published, "we" referred to sweethearts. In the break-up declaration, the first and third "we" had conventional sense, while the second and fourth "we" were endowed with new connotations. The second "we" referred to sweethearts, "We are no longer us" means they were no longer sweethearts. The fourth "we" had two meanings: First, it referred to the two people themselves; Second, it referred to the two of them, returned to the original state of friends.

In daily life, the phenomenon of "I" and "we" referring to other persons can be seen everywhere. However, in the current dictionary, the definitions of "I" and "we" still emphasize the semantic interpretation, while ignoring the transferred reference and pragmatic function. Although the academic circles have begun to explore the transferred reference of personal pronoun from different angles, most of them are single.

The author discussed the type, context and motivation of the first-person transferred reference, hoping to sort out and summarize them, to enrich the research content.

## 2. TRANSFERRED REFERENCE TYPE

### 2.1. The Type Of "I"

E.g. (a) Li Nian: I feel lucky, too. I think God can still see your efforts.

Li Jing: Yes, that's why I think you are quite good. That is, I have to fight for a lot of difficulties.

(b) (The teacher exhorted students to study hard) "In the last few months, you should seize the time and work hard. Nobody hope, I come back for another year!"

In turn-taking from example (a), the "I" in the second sentence referred to "you", Li Nian. In example (b), the "I" referred to "you", the students, and was used to advise students to study hard.

E.g. (c) The rent paid by people living in public housing is relatively low. However, if I rent a house by myself, the rent I pay may be much higher than the price of public housing.

In example (c), the "I" referred to "he" in the previous topic.

(d) My (I, in Chinese) Sanmen Island Coastal Defence Force detained nine British for breaking into our territorial waters.

In Chinese, using "my (I)" to mean "our (we)" was concise, serious and formal.

From discussed above, "I" has three types: "you", "he/she" and "we".

### 2.2. The Type Of "We"

E.g. (e) Does he still like to say that mantra? -"For the liberation of the people, there is a bit of heat, we have to send a little light!"

(f) Teacher: Please Open the book, where were we learn last class?

These "we" above all referred to "I", the speaker himself.

(g) (The mother persuaded her children to give toys to others) "Baby, what does mom usually tell you? We are good boy, we should share with others.

(h)(Parent-teacher Meeting) Teacher: "Summer vacation is coming, we must pay attention to the safety of our children and don't go swimming in the river."

These "we" above referred to "you". In Example (g), it referred to the children. In Example (h), it referred to the parents. The teacher instructed parents to pay attention to the safety of their children.

E.g. (i)"Qingwen, You can go outside for a walk. We made a mistake". When Qingwen heard she said the word "we", it's naturally her and Baoyu, she's jealous and sneered:".....". Xiren was Blushing with shame, and knew she said wrong.

The "we" referred to "he", JiaBaoyu. When Xiren had sexual relationship with JiaBaoyu, She hoped Qingwen wouldn't blame him, but she regarded herself and JiaBaoyu as one, so she blurted out "we".

E.g. (j)"I mobilized them door to door, and we all dug at night. More than 60 poor peasants were very firm, they said that if we couldn't leave our children, the war of resistance against Japan could not be won."

The "we" referred to "they", the poor peasants.

From discussed above, "we" has four types: "I", "you", "he/she" and "they".

### **3. TRANSFERRED REFERENCE CONTEXT**

In different contexts, the types and frequency of transferred reference will be different. Therefore, context is a very important factor.

#### **3.1. The Context Of "I"**

##### *3.1.1. Official Occasions Such as News, Conference Reports, Etc*

E.g. (k) Teachers in my (I, in Chinese) school participated in general education seminars under the background of the new era.

"My (I)" referred to "our" (we), embodied the characteristics of news speeches, was clearer and more forceful, and was seldom used in informal speech communication. In example (d), the writer achieved emotional resonance, fully aroused the listener's emotions, conveyed the strength of sharing weal and woe, and expressed the recognition of the group to which "I" belongs.

##### *3.1.2. In the Turn-Taking Between Two Parties*

"I" refers to "you" often appears in the turn-taking between two people in communication. Generally speaking, the speaker expresses his/her active participation in the conversation in order to show his/her attention to the other party, and stand in the other party's perspective and reach empathy with the other party. In example (a), Li Jing's words were a kind of positive feedback to Li Nian, showing that she listened carefully to what she just said and praised her spirit.

##### *3.1.3. Entering A Virtual Scene*

"I" refers to "he/she" or "you", which often appears in such simulated scenes. In example (c), "I" referred to "he", simulated the situation of people renting public housing paying rent; In example (b), "I" referred to "you", which meant the teacher substituted himself as students and simulated the students' mood when they failed to go to college.

### **3.2. The Context Of "We"**

#### *3.2.1. Expressing One's Views*

E.g. (l) When we read this, we know that scholars in the early Tang Dynasty realized the basic motivation of writing "Luoyang Galand" by Yang Xuanzhi, and his thought of discharging Buddha.

"We" referred to "I" above, which leded readers to participate in this article and think with the author.

#### *3.2.2. Persuading and Comforting Someone by Giving Advice or Criticism*

When "we" refers to "you", it often appears in this context. For example, in cases (g), mom persuaded her children share others by following good guidance; in cases (h), the teacher used "we" to refer to "you", suggesting that parents should pay more attention to students' safety, and expressed their feelings of solidarity.

#### *3.2.3. Reducing Speaker's Responsibility or Attention*

E.g. (m)"Yes! People like Yu, especially according to the instructions of the municipal party Committee, use these three magic weapons."

"If you don't say it, we almost forgot. "

"We" referred to "I", that is, speaker himself. He actually alleviated and evaded his responsibilities.

(n) Yan Chenxu: But sometimes, people from afar, greet me, I don't pay attention because I can't see clearly. Later, they will say we are so arrogant.

This sentence, "I" referred to "we", which expanded the scope of the group, weakened himself and alleviated his inner embarrassment.

#### *3.2.4. Embodying Close Relationship*

In case (i), in order to resolve the contradiction, Xiren hurriedly persuaded Qingwen, but she used the word "we" to refer to "he", and failed to break the deadlock. In her heart, she had already regarded Baoyu and herself as one, so she made this gaffe. Also, in case (j), "we" referred to "they", reflected the close relationship with these poor peasants.

### **4. TRANSFERRED REFERENCE MOTIVATION**

#### *4.1. To Follow the Politeness Principle*

Politeness Principle was put forward by British linguist Leech on the basis of Grice's Cooperative Principle, is divided into six criteria: Tact Maxim, Generosity Maxim, Approbation Maxim, Modesty Maxim, Agreement Maxim and Sympathy Maxim.

The first context in which "we" refers to "I" follows the Modesty Maxim. When writing scientific papers, people are habitually modest, and reflects the rigorous attitude.

In the latter two contexts of the "I", the speaker adopts the Agreement Maxim and Sympathy Maxim, Standing on the other side's point of view. In example (a), From the perspective of Li Nian, Li Jing affirmed her efforts, responded positively to each other. The fourth context of "we", also embodies the Sympathy Maxim.

The second and third contexts of "we", adopts the Generosity and Approbation Maxim. The second context is to give advice or criticism to the other party, so you must not speak too sharply, so as not to hurt the other party. In addition, using "we" to refer can also ease the tone, making it easier for each other to accept suggestions. For example, in case (g), Although the child was still young, he also had self-esteem. The mother used "we" to persuade her children to share, which would make the children feel the mom respecting him. It was much better than ordering the children directly. In the third context, the speaker chose "we" in order to avoid focusing on himself, Which relieved his own responsibilities.

#### *4.2. To Achieve Pragmatic Empathy and De-Empathy*

Ran Yongping (2007) thought that pragmatic empathy shortens the psychological distance between the two sides in order to achieve psychological convergence, or intimacy between the two parties to

reflect the close relationship, or show the speaker's respect for the target. The speaker's choice and reference of personal pronouns on different occasions and contexts all reflect the characteristics of pragmatic empathy.

In this paper, the three contexts of "I" all reflects pragmatic empathy, such as "my (I, in Chinese) school" and "my (I) island" in the first context, using "I" to refer to "we" makes the listener consciously substitute for the identity of "I" and has an emotional convergence towards the collective to which "I" belongs.

The four contexts of "we" can also be explained by empathy. For example, in the first context, when expressing one's own views or writing articles, using "we" can make readers think along with the author's ideas; In the third context, the speaker wants to reduce his responsibility, and using "we" can make the listener think from his own perspective and understand each other.

Pragmatic de-empathy is just the opposite. In some cases, the speaker highlights the difference with the listener by changing his speech habits or style, or choosing words in violation of the routine, and deliberately pulls the distance between the two parties.

E.g. (o) I'm not so lucky, not as good as Baochai has gold and jade, we are just very ordinary people like the grass and wood.

This sentence is an expression of jealousy and anger after Daiyu knew the "golden jade", She used "we" to refer to "I" and opened the distance from Baoyu.

#### *4.3. To Adjust the Pragmatic Distance*

Wang Jianhua (2001) thought that pragmatic distance referred to the closeness of the relationship between the two parties in a specific communication environment. The speaker adjusts his own perspective, chooses suitable personal pronouns in the process of communication, and constantly adjusts the psychological distance with the other party, that is, the pragmatic distance.

The pragmatic empathy mentioned above actually shrinks the pragmatic distance between them, but the pragmatic de-empathy widened the pragmatic distance. For example, in case (a), the conversation between Li Jing and Li Nian had a pragmatic distance at the beginning of chatting. As the conversation unfold, the pragmatic distance between the two sides was shrinking. Therefore, Li Jing finally chose "I" to refer to "you", and stood in Li Nian's perspective to make the conversation more harmonious.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, "I" has three types: "you", "he/she" and "we", and three contexts: formal occasions, turn-taking between the two parties, and entering a virtual scene; "we" have four types: "I", "you", "he/she" and "they", and four contexts: expressing opinions, persuading or comforting each other, reducing responsibility and embodying close relationship. There are three motivations: to follow the politeness principle, to achieve pragmatic empathy and de-empathy and to adjust the pragmatic distance.

As an indispensable part of our daily communication, the transferred reference is not strange. It is worth the attention by both scholars and ordinary people, as proper transferred reference can improve the efficiency of communication, thus easily achieving the purpose of communication.

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