

Non-Prototypical Uses of Personal Pronouns and Their Grammaticalization in Chinese

Tunan Hu

College of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics, Hangzhou, China

Moying Li*

Dongfang College, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics, Hangzhou, China

Abstract—With an interesting typological study on the non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns, Helmbrecht (2015) demonstrates that the form-meaning mismatch with regards to personal pronouns is essentially based on discourse. It is claimed that the referents of personal pronouns dynamically keep changing with a particular context, and some kind of additional pragmatic meaning tends to be encoded into them. Based on his study, Helmbrecht proposes two hypotheses about how the phenomena at issue could be grammaticalized: (i) Plural pronouns may shift to singular ones; (ii) third-person pronouns may shift to second- or first-person ones, but not vice versa. Drawing on a more comprehensive typological perspective, this article presents various patterns in Mandarin Chinese that supplement Helmbrecht’s generalization and adjust his hypotheses concerning the grammaticalization of personal pronouns (Hu, 2018).

Index Terms—Non-prototypical use, Personal pronoun, Reference, Grammaticalization

I. INTRODUCTION

Helmbrecht’s (2015) typological study on the non-prototypical uses of personal pronoun is intriguing, revealing that the form-meaning mismatch involving personal pronouns is essentially discourse-based, in the sense that the referents of personal pronouns dynamically vary with a particular context, and hence some kind of additional pragmatic meaning tends to be encoded into them. For instance, a soccer fan can naturally say ‘We won the game last night’, though s/he is not a player of the winning team. Helmbrecht’s study also reveals that at least a subset of the non-prototypical uses appears to be stabilized in the diachronic change of personal pronouns. Based on his study, Helmbrecht (2015) proposes two hypotheses about how the phenomena at issue could be grammaticalized: (i) Plural pronouns may shift to singular pronouns; (ii) third-person pronouns may shift to second- or first-person ones, but not vice versa. Based on our previous study, in this article, we present some non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns in Chinese to complement Helmbrecht’s generalization as well as to modify his hypotheses of grammaticalization (Hu, 2018).

II. NON-PROTOTYPICAL USES OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN CHINESE¹

The issue of pragmatic referentiality in Chinese has been addressed in the literature (e.g., Chen, 2009; Chen et al., 2010). Due to the particular focus of this article, we only present the non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns in Chinese, which Helmbrecht’s generalization, as given in Table 1, does not seem to apply to. The general information of Chinese pronouns is given in Table 2 (Hu, 2018).

TABLE 1
 THE GENERALIZATION OF NON-PROTOTYPICAL USES OF IMPERSONAL PRONOUNS (HELMBRECHT, 2015)

Meaning Form	impersonal uses		1SG	1PL	2SG		2PL	3SG		3PL
	generic	specific			honorific			honorific		
1SG										
1PL	INCL	+					+	+		+
	EXCL		+							
2SG	+	+	+							
2PL					+					
3SG					+	+				
3PL	+	+			+			+		

* Corresponding Author.

¹ The abbreviations used in this article is in line with those in Helmbrecht’s study: 1, 2, 3 = first, second, third person; SG = singular; PL = plural; INCL = inclusive; EXCL = exclusive; > = this symbol translates as ‘used as’ or ‘changed to’; lower case indices in Table 1 indicate the number of tokens of speech act role, e.g. 2_{2-n} = 2 up to n hearer (Hu, 2018).

TABLE 2
THE GENERAL INFORMATION OF CHINESE PRONOUNS

Person	Number		Chinese pronouns	Reference sets	English counterpart	
	SG				I	
1			<i>wo</i>	{1}	we	∅
	PL	INCL	<i>zan/zanmen/women</i> ²	{1+2 _{1-n} }; {1+2 _{1-n} +3 _{1-n} }		∅
		EXCL	<i>women</i> ³	{1+3 _{1-n} }		
2	SG		<i>ni</i>	{2}	you	
	PL		<i>nimen</i>	{2 _{2-n} }; {2 _{1-n} +3 _{1-n} }		
3	SG		<i>ta</i>	{3}	he/she/it	
	PL		<i>tamen</i>	{3 _{2-n} }	they	

A. Non-Prototypical Uses of Third-Person Pronoun

(a). 3SG > 1SG

Under the dynamic context, the 3SG pronoun *ta* ‘he/she/it’, which is prototypically used to refer to a third party, can be employed to mean the speaker himself or herself (which is supposed to be a 1SG pronoun) in order to enhance the objectivity of the statement expressed by some utterance. The use of *ta* in (1) below is arguably a typical case in which the speaker exploits the alienation characteristic of a 3SG pronoun to achieve her purpose (Hu, 2018).

- (1) 凤姐道：“至今珍大哥还抱怨后悔呢。你明儿了他，好歹赔释赔释，我年轻，原没见过世面，谁叫大爷错委了他呢。”清代曹雪芹《红楼梦》
- | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|-----------|-------------|-------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Fengjie | dao, | “zhijin | Zhendage | hai | baoyuan | houhui | ne. |
| Fengjie | say | up to now | Cousin Zhen | still | complain | regret | PAR |
| ni | mingge | jian | le | ta, | haodai | peishi | peishi, wo |
| 2SG | tomorrow | see | ASP | 3SG | anyhow | apologize | apologize 1SG |
| nianqing, | yuan | mei | jian | guo | shimian, | shui | jiao |
| young | originally | not | see | ASP | aspects of society | who | make |
| daye | cuo | wei | le | ta | ne. | | |
| Cousin Zhen | mistakenly | entrust | ASP | 1SG | PAR | | |
- ‘Fengjie said, “I’m sure Cousin Zhen is still regretting his rashness. When you see him tomorrow, do apologize for me. Tell him he should never have entrusted such a task to someone so young and inexperienced” (The Dream of Red Mansions by Xueqin Cao) (Hu, 2018).

In (1), the speaker, Fengjie, creates a fictive scenario in which the hearer, her husband, would apologize on her behalf to Cousin Zhen for her fault. Under this circumstance, the speaker directly explains why she botches up the task entrusted by Cousin Zhen, and wants the hearer to verbatim repeat what she said. During the course of her account, the speaker shifts the deictic center from herself to her husband by using a 3SG pronoun instead of a 1SG one, which is manifest in the information flow from the speaker-oriented explanation (using the 1SG pronoun *wo* ‘I’) to the hearer-oriented comment on Cousin Zhen (using the 3SG pronoun *ta* ‘she’). Seen this way, the second 3SG pronoun is not related to Cousin Zhen, but anaphorically connected with the 1SG antecedent, namely Fengjie, the speaker herself. Due to the shift of the deictic center, each part of this excuse performs its own function, respectively: On the one hand, the speaker-oriented explanation shows that it is characteristic of her to courageously admit her own mistake; on the other, the hearer-oriented comment reveals the speaker’s intention that she wants to reasonably put the blame for her own fault on Cousin Zhen (Hu, 2018).

(b). 3SG > 3PL

It has been noticed in the literature that 3SG pronoun can be intended to have a plural meaning (Xu, 1999; Wu & Matthew, 2010; Chen & Wu, 2011). As illustrated in (2), *ta* should be construed as a collective meaning, referring to the gang xiaotou ‘the gang of thieves’ in topic position (Hu, 2018).

- (2) 这帮小偷，警处恨不得杀了他。
- | | | | | | | | |
|------|------|----------|---------|--------------|------|-----|-----|
| Zhe | bang | xiaotou, | jingchu | henbude | sha | le | ta. |
| this | gang | thieves | police | would-rather | kill | ASP | 3PL |
- ‘This gang of thieves, the police would rather kill them’ (Xu, 1999, p. 5).

(c). 3SG > Impersonal Generic Use

The impersonal uses of personal pronouns mean that they can be related to an indefinite referent in a particular context (see Kitagawa & Lehrer, 1990; Biq, 1991 inter alia). In terms of the degree of individuation, Helmbrecht (2015)

² Both *zan* and *zanmen* are 1INCL.PL pronouns in Chinese. However, there still exists an observable distinction between them, from a sociolinguistic viewpoint, namely, the former is popular in rural areas, whereas the latter can be regarded as a formal variant relatively (cf. Lü 1984).
³ In Chinese, *women* can be used as 1INCL.PL pronoun as well as exclusive one, as the case may be.

categorizes this usage into two classes, viz., generic use and specific use: The former means that the personal pronoun refers to a generalized group, whereas the latter relates the personal pronoun to an arbitrary individual. In general, personal pronouns in Chinese can be impersonally used to have a generic meaning, as shown in (3) (Hu, 2018).

- (3) 不管是谁, 只要年满十八周岁, 他都有选举权。
 Buguan shi shui, zhiyao nian man shibazhousui,
 no matter SHI who as long as age reach 18 years old
ta dou you xuanjuquan.
 generalized group all have suffrage
 ‘Whosoever is over 18 years old has suffrage.’

In (3), *ta* does not refer to a third party but a generalized group of people meeting the condition of age. This kind of non-prototypical use has not been mentioned in Helmbrecht’s study, but it is also quite common in English, especially in some idiomatic expressions, such as ‘He that talks much errs much’, in which *he* is apparently related to the generalized group of people instead of a particular third party (Hu, 2018).

B. Non-Prototypical Uses of Second-Person Pronouns

(a). 2SG > 1PL

Cross-linguistically, a 2SG pronoun is frequently used to take a 1PL reference. So it is the case with the Chinese *ni* ‘you’. This referential strategy is often employed to effectively establish an intimate relationship between speaker and hearer, as illustrated by (4) (Hu, 2018).

- (4) 大家一条心, 死守着我们的都城。我们受平原君的惨痛教训, 即使你投降, 敌人也要把你斩尽杀绝。所我们都宁肯战死, 也不愿被人屠杀。郭沫若《虎符》
 Dajia yitiaoxin, sishou zhe women de ducheng.
 everyone be of one mind defend to the last ASP 1PL DE capital
 women shou Changping de cantong jiaoxun, jishi ni touxiang,
 1PL learn Changping DE plainful lesson even if 1PL surrender
 diren ye yao ba ni zhanjinshajue. suoyi women dou
 enemies also will BA 1PL kill all so 1PL all
 ningken zhansi, yebuyuan bei ren tusha.
 would rather die in battle than BEI someone slaughter
 ‘Everyone should be of one mind for defending our capital to the last. We have learned more from Changping’s painful lesson. Even if we surrendered, our enemy would still kill us all. So, all of us would rather die in this battle than be slaughtered by them’ (*Tiger-shaped Tally* by Moruo Guo) (Hu, 2018).

In the context of (4), the speaker, a general, intends to inspire the soldiers to fight against their enemies. To dismiss the idea of surrender completely, the speaker uses the 2SG pronoun non-prototypically to refer to the whole army as an individual indivisible, showing that they are all tied together to survive the battle (Hu, 2018).

(b). 2SG > 3PL

Interestingly, the 2SG pronoun may also be used as a 3PL one, as shown in (5).

- (5) 王国军心里咒骂着, “这些吃着我们的大米、穿着我们的衣服来屠杀我们的王八蛋! 你就是远在天边, 我也要让炮弹追上你。”杨笑影《赤子之心》
 Wang Guojun xinli zhouma zhe, “zhexie chi zhe women
 Wang Guojun silently swear ASP these eat ASP 1PL
 de dami chuan zhe women de yifu lai tusha women
 DE rice wear ASP 1PL DE clothes come slaughter 1PL
 de wangbadan! ni jiushi yuanzaitianbian, wo ye yao
 DE bastard 3PL even if far away 1SG also will
 rang paodan zhuishang ni.”
 make cannonball catch up with 3PL
 ‘Wang Guojun swears silently: “These bastards eating our rice and wearing our clothes come to slaughter us! Even if they are far away from me, I will make the cannonball catch up with them also”’ (*The Heart of A Newborn Babe* by Xiaoying Yang) (Hu, 2018).

In (5), the speaker expresses his hatred for a group of enemy soldiers who attack him and retreat safely. Because the swear is just the speaker’s internal monologue, there is no specific hearer despite the use of 2SG pronoun *ni* ‘lit. you’ in this context. Instead, *ni* here is anaphorically connected with the constituent *zhexie wangbadan* ‘these bastards’ which is supposed to be referred to by a 3PL pronoun. The referential meaning of the 2SG pronoun could best explain why it is interpreted as a third party here: Using *ni* in this way, the speaker wants to construct a context in which he is roundly cursing the enemies face-to-face, expressing his hatred and wrath vividly (Hu, 2018).

(c). 2SG > 3SG

In addition to serving as a 3PL pronoun, the 2SG pronoun can also mean a 3SG one, which aims to establish a closer relationship between the speaker and the referent which is supposed to be referred to by a 3SG pronoun. This effect can be seen most clearly in examples like (6) below:

- (6) 他临死前会想到什么? **你**会不会想到党? 想到**你的**祖国, **你的**亲人? 《人民日报》“中国人的良心”

Ta	linsi	hui	xiangdao	shenme?	ni	huibuhui	xiangdao
3SG	on his deathbed	will	think of	what	3SG	will or not	think of
dang?	xiangdao	ni	de	zuguo,	ni	de	qinren?
party	think of	3SG	DE	motherland	3SG	DE	relative

What would he think of when lying on his deathbed? Would he think of CCP, his motherland or relatives? (“The Conscience of Chinese People”, *People’s Daily*, Dec 19th, 1953).

In the context of (6), the speaker tries to reason out the last thoughts of a dying soldier with *ta* ‘he’ at the very beginning, revealing that there is a spatial or social distance between them. Whereafter, the speaker uses *ni* ‘you’, pretending that he is asking the soldier face to face, as with the example (5) discussed above. Thus, the 2SG pronoun is anaphorically related to the 3SG antecedent in order to bridge the given gap.

(d). 2PL > Impersonal Generic Use

There are also typical cases whereby the 2PL pronoun *nimen* ‘you’ can be impersonally used to convey a generic meaning.

- (7) 俺就相信巡警, 相信头戴警徽的人, **你们**不管什么时候都能保护老百姓。《人民日报》“110走向成熟”

An ⁴	jiu	xiangxin	xunjing,	xiangxin	toudai	jinghui
1SG	only	trust	policeman	trust	wear	police badge
de	ren,	nimen	buguan	shenme	shihou	
DE	person	generalized group	no matter	what	time	

douneng baohu laobaixing.
can protect civilian

‘I only trust the policeman. Whenever, the men wearing the police badge are capable of protecting the civilians’ (“The Development of Policing”, *People’s Daily*, Mar 3rd, 1998).

In (7), the speaker expresses his confidence in *xunjing* ‘policeman’, who does not refer to any particular one, but the police as a whole. The 2PL pronoun *nimen* should thus be interpreted generically. Under this context, the impersonal *nimen* has the effect of highlighting the speaker’s affection for policemen.

C. Non-Prototypical Uses of First-Person Pronouns

(a). 1EXCL.PL > 3SG

1EXCL.PL pronoun *women* ‘we’ in Chinese can be used to refer to a third party in a context where the speaker bears a close relationship with the intended referent, especially between parents/guardians and children, as in (8) (Hu, 2018).

- (8) (王太医) 刚要告辞, 只见奶子抱着大姐出来, 笑说: “王老爷也瞧瞧**我们**。”清代曹雪芹《红楼梦》

(Wangtaiyi)	gangyao	gaoci,	zhijian	naizi	baozhe	dajie
Doctor Wang	be about to	leave	just see	nurse	carry	Dajie
chulai,	xiao	shuo,	“Wanglaoye	ye	qiaoqiao	women. ”
out	simle	say	Mr. Wang	too	look at	3SG

‘Just as Doctor Wang was about to leave, Dajie’s nurse carried her out and asked with a smile: “Will Mr. Wang look at us too?”’ (*The Dream of Red Mansions* by Xueqin Cao) (Hu, 2018).

In (8), since the patient called Dajie is unable to talk, the nurse serves as her mouthpiece. On the face of it, the 1EXCL.PL pronoun refers to Dajie and the nurse herself, yet it means Dajie only (Hu, 2018).

(b). 1EXCL.PL > Impersonal Generic Use

In Chinese, it is commonplace that 1EXCL.PL pronoun can be impersonally used for a generic reference, as in (9) below.

- (9) 京东客服中心特此通知您, 您的申请**我们**已受理, 请保持电话畅通, **我们**将尽快与您联系。

Jingdong	kefu	zhongxin	teci	tongzhi	nin,
Jingdong	customer service	center	hereby	inform	2SG.polite
nin	de	shenqing	women	yi	shouli,

⁴ An is the dialectal version of 1SG pronoun in Sinitic languages.

2SG.polite DE application generalized group already accept
 qing baochi dianhua changtong, **women** jiang
 please keep telephone in operation generalized group will
 jinkuai yu nin lianxi.
 as soon as possible with 2SG.polite connect
 ‘The customer service center of Jingdong (an e-commerce company) hereby informs you that we have accepted your application. We will contact you as soon as possible. Please keep your telephone on’.

(9) is a receipt from *kefu zhongxin* ‘the customer service center’ to the consumer applying for after-sale service. In this case, the pronoun *women* ‘we’ is an exclusive one, which is anaphorically related to the customer service center. In view of the collective meaning of its antecedent, the 1EXCL.PL pronoun here takes reference to a generalized group of staff members in the center.

(c). 1INCL.PL > 1SG

According to Helmbrecht (2015), 1PL pronoun, the exclusive one in fact⁵, can be non-prototypically used as a 1SG one with two different meanings, “majestic plural” and “editorial-we”. The 1INCL.PL pronoun *zan/zanmen/women* ‘we’ in Chinese can also do it. Consider (10).

(10) 刘局长, 我这样做也是为你着想。单位好多人住房都紧张, 咱们孩子一下住这么大房子, 我怕有人到处告你。李唯《腐败分子潘长水》
 Liujuzhang, wo zheyang zuo ye shi wei ni zhuoxiang.
 Director Liu 1SG this way do also SHI for 2SG considerate
 danwei haoduo ren zhufang dou jinzhang, **zanmen** haizi
 unit so many people house all shortage 1SG son
 yixia zhu zheme da fangzi, wo pa youren
 suddenly live so big house 1SG worry someone
 dao chu gao ni.
 everywhere accuse 2SG

‘Director Liu, what I have done in this way is for you. So many people in our unit are faced with the housing problem. I worry that someone will accuse you everywhere, because my son is all of sudden allotted so big a house’ (*The Badger Hat Changshui Pan* by Wei Li).

In (10), the hearer, Director Liu of the unit in a shortage of houses, takes bribes from the speaker and wants to illegally allot the speaker’s son a big house in return. Despite some degree of unease, the speaker signals an intimate relationship to the hearer by means of using *zanmen*, which assumes that the speaker’s son has a quite close relationship with the hearer, as with the kinship, with the intent to get a house. In fact, *zanmen* refers to the speaker only.

(d). 1SG > 1PL

In view of the use of the singular pronoun with a plural meaning in the discussions above, it is no surprise at all that the 1SG pronoun *wo* ‘I’ can be non-prototypically used in a plural way, as shown in (11), which is taken from a government report (Hu, 2018).

(11) 伯承同志是我党我军的大知识分子, 大军事家。《邓小平文选》第三卷
 Bocheng tongzhi shi **wo** dang **wo** jun de da
 Bocheng comrade SHI 1PL party 1PL army DE noted
 zhishifenzi, da junshijia.
 intellectual noted strategist

‘Comrade Bocheng is the noted intellectual and strategist of our party and army’ (*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol. 3).

In (11), *wo* should be construed as having a collective reading, in the sense that it refers to all members of the party and the army as an impartible entity (Hu, 2018).

(e). 1SG > Impersonal Generic Use

In the particular construction where the 2SG and the 1SG pronouns co-occur, the generic interpretation of both them is allowed as in (12).

(12) 战士们你一言我一语, 说着陇东的高原, 陕北的大山, 黑压压的森林和富丽的河川。杜鹏程《保卫延安》
 Zhanshimen **ni** yi yan **wo**
 soldiers generalized group one word generalized group
 yi yu, shuo zhe long dong de

⁵ Although Helmbrecht does not clearly mark the concrete class of the 1PL pronoun taking a 1SG reference in his study, we can reason out that the hearer is excluded out of the referents of the 1PL pronoun discussed in his examples (23) and (24).

one word talk about ASP Gansu province east DE
 gaoyuan, shan bei de dashan, heiyaya de
 plateau Shanxi province north DE mountain dark DE
 senlin he fuli de hechuan.
 forest and magnificent DE river

‘All soldiers are talking about the plateaus in eastern Gansu, the mountains in northern Shanxi, the dark forest and the grand river’ (*Defend Yan’an* by Pengcheng Du).

In (12), neither *ni* ‘you’ nor *wo* ‘I’ refers to any specific interlocutor, but the generalized group of soldiers. It may thus be interpreted as ‘All soldiers are talking about something’ rather than as ‘Both you and I, as soldier, talk about something’. The expression is often employed to effectively describe a situation in which all participants do the same thing or take the same attitude.

Non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns as presented and discussed above demonstrate that the construal of a personal pronoun as having the meaning of another one is essentially pragmatic-oriented, as Helmbrecht correctly points out. On the one hand, the from-meaning mismatch involving the use of Chinese personal pronouns provides supportive evidence for Helmbrecht’s study, and on the other, complements his generalization. A comprehensive description of non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns in Chinese is given in Table 3.

TABLE 3
 NON-PROTOTYPICAL USES OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN CHINESE (HU, 2018)

Meaning Form	impersonal uses		1SG	1PL	2SG	2PL	3SG	3PL
	generic	specific						
1SG	+			+				
1PL	INCL	+	+		+	+		
	EXCL	+	+				+	
2SG	+	+	+	+			+	+
2PL	+				+			
3SG	+		+		+			+
3PL	+						+	

So far, we have discussed the inadequacies of Helmbrecht’s typological generalization on European languages. In what follows, we take issue with his argument on the use of 1PL pronoun taking a 2SG reference in terms of the pragmatic function (Hu, 2018).

As has been stated in Helmbrecht (2015), “this use of the 1PL is patronizing and can be very offensive for the hearer/addressee in certain contexts, because it is implied that the speaker has some authority over the hearer/addressee” (p. 183). We find his argument unconvincing. Consider (13) (Hu, 2018).

(13) 老支书：“喜旺啊，你就别推辞了，大伙选咱，那是信任咱。”邵力《李双双》

lao zhishu, “Xiwang a, ni jiu bie tuici
 old branch secretary Xiwang PAR 2SG should not refuse
 le, dahuo xuan zan, na shi xinren zan.”
 ASP we all elect 2SG that SHI trust 2SG
 ‘The old branch secretary said, “Xiwang, you should not refuse. We elect you, because we trust you’ (*Li Shuangshuang* by Li Shao).

In the context of (13), there is a clear gap of authority, as Helmbrecht argues, between the speaker, the old branch secretary, and the hearer, a common villager named Xiwang. To persuade the hearer to accept the election results, the speaker closes the relationship between them by using 1INCL.PL pronoun *zan*, which actually does not refer to the two interlocutors here but to the hearer only. Contrary to Helmbrecht’s claim, this kind of use effectively eliminates the gap between the interlocutors in order to develop a close relationship. Consider Helmbrecht’s examples (20) and (21), repeated here as (14) and (15) (Hu, 2018).

(14) Wie fühlen wir uns denn heute?
 ‘How do we feel today?’

(15) Welches von den beiden TV-Geräten nehmen wir denn?
 ‘Which of the two TV-sets do we buy, now?’

(Helmbrecht, 2015, p. 183)

(14) is an utterance in the context of medical consultation whereby the speaker, doctor or nurse, shows that the patient is not a stranger that he or she is responsible for temporarily but a familiar member of their own group. Seen this way, the patronizing and offensive implication claimed by Helmbrecht seems untenable. In (15), which is an utterance between a vendor of TV set and a customer, the use of 1PL pronoun could possibly improve the vendor’s chance to make a sale through closing their relationship (Hu, 2018).

To sum up, both Helmbrecht’s generalization based on European languages and our supplement from Chinese evidence point to the pragmatic-oriented nature of non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns. Nevertheless, there seem to exist some differences between the Chinese language and European languages (Hu, 2018). Specifically, the

emphatic function;

c) [NMV + *ta* + Clause]: *ta* is cataphorically related to the event conveyed by the clause.

Consider the examples below. (22) represents the first construction, with *ta* construed as taking an indefinite reference. (23) shows that *ta* is related to nothing at all. (24) exemplifies the third one in which *ta* refers to the event of *linyē luò* ‘leaf falls’ in effect.

(22) 给他个见道就走。

Gei **ta** ge jian dao jiu zou.
give indefinite CL see road just walk
‘Walk by all means in the sight of road.’

(23) 把荷花画他几枝。

Ba hehua hua **ta** ji zhi.
BA lotus draw non-referential some CL
‘Draw a picture of lotus.’

(24) 秋到任他林叶落，春来从你树开花。

Qiu dao ren **ta** linye luo, chun lai
autumn arrive no matter cataphora leaf fall spring come
cong **ni** shu kaihua.
no matter cataphora tree bloom
‘No matter that the leaf falls in autumn as well as the tree blooms in spring’

(Lü 1985, p. 18-24).

The examples presented above reveal the extent to which 3SG pronoun becomes grammaticalized within these constructions. Precisely, *ta* serves the structural function as an auxiliary, without any specific content. Note that 3SG pronoun, despite previous discussions, can still be construed as a specific third party in the first two patterns, that is, it depends on the particular context whether *ta* serves as a personal pronoun or a grammatical constituent.

Like *ni* ‘you’, *ta* can also function as a discourse marker in Beijing Mandarin dialect. Consider (25), where the 3SG pronoun is not intended to have any referent at all, anaphorically or cataphorically, but to construct a new topic opposed to the previous one.

(25) 您瞧我这小辫不顺眼，他我还不顺心呢。老舍《茶馆》

nin qiao wo zhe xiaobian bu shunyan,
2SG.polite see 1SG this plait not pleasing to the eye
ta wo hai bu shunxin ne.
discourse marker 1SG also not satisfactory PAR
‘Not only you but I feel annoyance about my plait’ (*Teahouse* by Lao She).

The observation and discussion presented above so far points to the conclusion that the impersonal uses of personal pronouns, at least in Chinese, can gradually become grammaticalized as well, which runs contrary to Helmbrecht’s hypotheses.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this article we have shown that Chinese personal pronouns can be non-prototypically used beyond Helmbrecht’s typological generalization on European languages. We have addressed the potential problems with Helmbrecht’s grammaticalization hypotheses (which are based on the form-meaning mismatch among personal pronouns only), pointing out that non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns with impersonal meanings can become grammaticalized both in theory and practice. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that we have no intention of devaluing Helmbrecht’s study which has not only broadened our perspective on non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns, but redefined the research direction of grammaticalization (Hu, 2018).

REFERENCES

- [1] Biq, Yung O. (1991). The multiple uses of the second person singular pronoun *ni* in conversational Mandarin. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 16(4), 307-321.
- [2] Chao, Yuenren. (1968). *A Grammar of Spoken Chinese*. University of California Press.
- [3] Chen, Cuizhu. (2009). *A Study on the Chinese Personal Pronoun*. Ph.D. Thesis. Central China Normal University.
- [4] Chen, Jing, Wu, Yicheng. (2011). Less well-behaved pronouns: singular they, in English and plural *ta*, ‘it/he/she’ in Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(1), 407-410.
- [5] Chen, Jing, Huang, Huaxin, Wu, Yicheng. (2010). Aspects of pragmatic referentiality. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42(3), 870-874.
- [6] Chen Ping. (2009). Aspects of referentiality. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(8), 1657-1674.
- [7] Eckardt, Regine. (2012). Grammaticalization and semantic reanalysis. In: Heusinger, Klaus von, Claudia Maienborn, Paul Portner, (Eds.), *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning (Vol. 3)*, pp. 2675-2702. Mouton de Gruyter.
- [8] Fang, Mei. (2009). Beijinghua Renchengdaici de Xuhua (Grammaticalization of personal pronoun in Beijing dialect). In: Wu, Fuxiang, Cui Xiliang (Eds.), *Yufahua yu Yufa Yanjiu* (Grammaticalization and Grammatical Studies) (pp. 36-55). Commercial

Press.

- [9] Helmbrecht, Johannes. (2015). A typology of non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns: synchrony and diachrony. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 88, 176-189.
- [10] Hopper, Paul J., Traugott, Elizabeth C. (2003). *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Hu, Tunan. (2018). Non-prototypical Uses of personal Pronounce in Chinese. *Proceedings of 3rd International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities*. Retrieved March 31, 2023 from <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/iccassh-18/25898085>
- [12] Lü Shuxiang. (1984). *Hanyu Yufa Lunwenji* (Proceedings of Chinese Grammar). Commercial Press.
- [13] Lü Shuxiang. (1985). *Jindai Hanyu Zhidaici* (Pronouns in Modern Chinese). Xuelin Publishing House.
- [14] Wu, Yicheng, Matthews, Steven. (2010). How different are expletive and referential pronouns? A parsing perspective. *Lingua*, 120(7), 1805–1820.
- [15] Xu, Liejiang. (1999). A special use of the third person singular pronoun. *Cahiers de Linguistique – Asie Orientale*, 28(1), 3–22.
- [16] Zhang, Bojiang, Fang, Mei. (1996). *Hanyu Gongneng Yufa Yanjiu* (Functional Studies of Chinese Grammar). Jiangxi Educational Press.

Tunan Hu, Ph. D, is currently a lecture of School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics in Hangzhou, P. R. China. His research interests include typology and cognitive linguistics.

Moying Li is currently a teacher in the Dongfang College, Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics. Her research interests include semantics and pragmatics.