

*WIR BLEIBEN KANZLERIN – WE ARE PREGNANT?*  
ON GRAMMATICAL, SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC USAGES OF THE *WE*  
PRONOUN

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This paper convenes and discusses insights from different linguistic paradigms on the study of the first person plural pronouns *we* and *wir*. It questions the grammatical and semantic regularities as it addresses deviating structures and meanings. It further draws on cross-linguistic variation on the topic for a deeper understanding of grammatical and semantic peculiarities of the first person plural pronoun in English and German.

KEYWORDS: grammar, deictics, typology, reference, inclusive/exclusive *we*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The meaning of pronouns is highly dependent on prior discourse and speaker context. In all languages, the first person plural *we* has multiple referents and it usually refers to a group of at least two people that include the speaker.<sup>1</sup> The pronoun *we* refers 1) to a speaker and their addressee, or 2) a group that includes the speaker and other referents and not the addressee, or 3) a group that includes the speaker, the addressee and other referents. The meaning and referents of *we* thus always depend on the speaker and the discourse context (Auer 1999, Du Bois 2007, Hanks 2000). Pronoun deictics, the linguistic pointing and referring of *we* and *wir*, has been investigated extensively in sociolinguistic studies that focus on the meaning of pronouns in the construction of speaker identities and stances. These studies have shown that speakers align and distance themselves with and from others through pronominal choices in everyday speech (Yamaguchi 2006, Du Bois et al. 2008) and political speech (Buchholtz et al. 2005, Mc Ilvenny 1996). In the area of political discourse, the multiple functions and ambiguous meanings of pronouns are manipulated by speakers to foster identification, alignment and disalignment (Buchholtz et al. 2005). Against this background, this article looks deeper into grammatical and semantic aspects of the *we* pronoun in the genetically related languages English and German and offers a cross-linguistic comparison from other language families.

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<sup>1</sup> Cases of *we* and *wir* where the speaker is not included in the set of referents is discussed in section 5.

The English language is an INCLUSIVE language, which means that the first person plural pronoun includes the addressee(s) and the speaker within a set of referents (Filimonova 2005). About 40 % of the languages in the world distinguish between INCLUSIVE and EXCLUSIVE *we* (Bickel et al. 2005). These languages have pronominal systems which possess different morphemes or lexemes in situations where, first, the speaker wants to express that the addressee is referred to (inclusive) and, secondly, when the referents include the speaker and others, but not the addressee (exclusive). Further, in some languages, there are *we* pronouns that distinguish if two (dual), three (trial) or more persons (plural) are referred to (Daniel 2005:15). English and German and most other Indo-European languages are confined to the first person plural pronouns *we* or *wir* that include all of the meanings above and thus potentially have an unlimited number of referents. *We* and *wir* are, therefore, ambiguous and context-dependent in their meaning.

This paper convenes and discusses insights from different linguistic paradigms on the study of the first person plural pronouns *we* and *wir* in English and German. It provides a consciously selective view on central questions regarding the grammar and semantics of the *we* pronoun and it offers a cursory overview on some new developments in English and German. It does not claim completeness in its description of cross-linguistic variation, but rather hints towards differences and tendencies. The paper questions the grammatical and semantic regularities as it addresses deviating structures and meanings.

## 2 THE FIRST PERSON PLURAL AS THE REAL PLURAL OF *I*

In standard grammar, *we* is referred to as the first person plural pronoun. As a result, *we* is the plural of the first person singular pronoun *I*. In most speech act situations, whenever *we* is uttered, 'I and other people' or 'I and You' or 'I, You and other people' are the referents.

There are only very few speech act situations where it can be argued that *we* is the homogenous plural of *I*. In a scenario where multiple speakers utter *we* at the same time, *we* represents a plural of 'I' (*we* = 'I + I + I'). This is the case in speech act situations that are embedded in cultural activities such as sports, political demonstrations or church service. In these situations, a group of people form a community with a repertoire of genres which "facilitate collective involvement in grappling with events remembered and anticipated" (Cappset al. 2005:39). This type of speech is referred to as choral (Daniel 2005:6) or mass speaking (Mühlhäusler et al. 1990:201). Prayer can be such a form of mass speaking and is often elicited by one speaker, for example, a pastor or priest in a call-response system.

- (1) *Priest*                      *Let us pray.*  
*Congregation*                **Our** *Father who art in heaven (...). Give **us** today our daily bread. And forgive **us** our trespasses. As **we** forgive those who trespass against **us**. And lead **us** not into temptation, But deliver **us** from evil. (...)*

*Our Father*, a well-known prayer in Christianity, is featured by the memorized, prescribed precise wording, which is spoken simultaneously by a congregation. The first person plural pronouns are indeed referring to 'I + I + I' and its cases *us* = 'me + me + me' and *our* = 'my + my + my'.

Another form of choral can be found in the genre of academic writing. Here, research articles are often written by several co-authors, as in "the autonomy of grammar is evidently germane to *our* investigations" (Mühlhäusler et al. 1990:16). However, this is different from the equally common practice of the authorial *we* that a single author uses for rhetorical functions (see section 5).

Children's games equally often include such a *choral we* in rhymes and songs.

- (2) *Daddy's in the saucer, Mummy's in the cup, Daddy's in the saucer **we** all jump up.*

(Mühlhäusler et al. 1990:202)

Children's games and rhymes are equally prescribed, memorized and ritualized as prayers, even though their functions are different. Individual speakers would otherwise not be able to utter the same sentences at the same time.

Not all children's games are perlocutionary, as for example the well-known German children's game *Fischer, Fischer, wie tief ist das Wasser?* ('Fisher, how deep is the water?', my translation, IDB) In this game, one kid stands about 15-25 m apart from a group of kids who ask the single kid which movement they should use to come towards the single kid. They call in a sing-song.

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|-------------------|--|
| (3) <i>Group</i>  | <i>Fischer, Fischer, wie tief ist das Wasser?</i><br><i>Fisher, fisher, how deep is the water?</i> |
| <i>Single Kid</i> | <i>100 Meter tief!</i><br><i>100 meters deep!</i>  |
| <i>Group:</i>     | <i>Und wie kommen <b>wir</b> da rüber?</i><br><i>And how can <b>we</b> cross it?</i>               |
| <i>Single Kid</i> | <i>Kriechen</i><br><i>Crawling</i>   |

In the above examples, the indexical pronouns tie the speakers to the illocutionary force of the speech act, whereas in prayers, the speech acts are co-ordinated with bodily postures such as bowed heads and hands clasped together or extended to others around the table. Another example of *we* is audience/fan chanting (*we want more, we want more*) and soccer/football chanting as the chant for this German football team, which the German St Pauli fans sing in English.

- (4) **We** love St. Pauli, **we** do  
**we** love St. Pauli, **we** do  
**we** love St. Pauli, **we** do  
*St Pauli **we** love you.*

(Kiezkicker 2009)

Speaker-speaker co-ordinated choral speech acts such as fan chanting, prayers and children's rhymes are comparatively less frequent in everyday social life (cf. Daniel 2005). However, they are the speech act situations where the referent is HOMOGENOUS (Daniel 2005:8). The referents for *we* and *you* pl. are HETEROGENOUS, that is, (*we* = 'I + other people', *you* = 'you + other people'). Notably, in English and German, the semantic condition of the *we* and *wir* pronouns is 'that + [human]' and 'combined ± [human]' (Cardinaletti et al. 2000). Thus, including animals, for instance, the referents are at a different level heterogeneous.

### 3 MORPHOLOGICAL FORMATIONS OF THE FIRST PERSON PLURAL - CROSS-LINGUISTICALLY

In Russian or Mandarin Chinese, the plural of pronouns is formed through compounding. The personal plural pronoun consists of a stem of the corresponding singular pronoun and the plural suffix is added (*wo-* = I; *wo-men* (pl.) = we). The semantic ambiguity of *we* pronouns in English and German is reduced through the more differentiated lexical and morphological systems that other languages offer. In Japanese, there are three ways to form a plural. The first is repetitive compounding in which a word is simply repeated such as *bito-bito*= person-person, which is only used for some nouns (Mühlhäusler et al. 1990:205). Second, a suffix such as (*-ra*, *-tachi*, *-domo* or *-gata*) can be added to nouns to denote humans of any form, and whose meanings are dependent on the status and the attitude the speaker has towards the expressions such as *shibonka-domo* for capitalist or *sensei-gata* for respected teachers. The other two suffixes are rather neutral (Mühlhäusler et al. 1990:205).

In this sense, most languages around the Pacific Rim as, for example, Chinese, Japanese, Samoan, Malay, and most Aboriginal languages differentiate between an inclusive and an exclusive *we*. Most of the exclusive languages have different roots for the *we* pronoun. Samoan first person plural pronouns must be used with the dual suffix *-UA* or the plural number suffix *-TOU*. This results in *'itatou* and *ita'ua* while both consist of the former inclusive marker *'ita* (Cysouw 2005:219). Malay has the inclusive *-ita* and the exclusive *-ima* which results in sentences where the lexical choice marks a clear distinction between who is included (*kita* = all) and who is not (*kami* = just us).

Exclusive languages are thus languages that subdivide the first person plural into inclusive and exclusive forms. The languages often also distinguish not only in person but also in number categories (dual, trial, plural). The dual refers to 'we two', the trial to 'we three' and the plural has an undetermined number of referents.

Even though German and English do not have a dual or trial, it is noteworthy that some North Frisian languages had the dual nominative pronoun *wat* and dative/accusative pronoun *unc* well into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Howe 1996:199). Also, Old English possessed a dual first person plural pronoun which disappeared in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Chrystal 2003:21). 'We two' in Old English was nominative *wit*, accusative/dative *inc*, genitive *incer*. In many modern languages, this results in the grammatical system as outlined in table 1 below.

Table 1: General Inclusive-Exclusive and Number Distinction

	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Dual</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>1. Person (exclusive)</b>	speaker	speaker + third person	speaker + third person + third person + ...
<b>1.+ 2. Person (inclusive)</b>	inclusive	speaker + addressee	speaker + addressee + third person + ...

(Cf. Mühlhäusler et al. 1990:170f.)

Notably, some languages even possess a trial first person plural pronoun. In Gawaran, an extinct Australian Aboriginal language, the pronoun system corresponding to English and German has four different pronouns; in languages with a trial, there are even six different pronouns.

Table 2: Pronominal Distinction in Gawaran

<b>Singular</b>		<b>Dual</b>	<b>Plural</b>
1. <i>ngayu</i>	exclusive	<i>ngali (wè)</i>	<i>nurru (wè)</i>
	inclusive	<i>nunggala (wè)</i>	<i>ngambala (wè)</i>
2. <i>ninjidi</i>		<i>nimbala</i>	<i>narri</i>
3. <i>njulu</i>		<i>bula</i>	<i>yalu</i>

(Furby 1972:2 cited in Baltasar et al. 2005:50)

#### 4 GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF THE FIRST PERSON PLURAL PRONOUN IN ENGLISH AND GERMAN

The English and German grammatical systems for personal pronouns do not have a number and inclusive or exclusive distinction. With *we* and *wir* as subjects, the syntactic rules in English and German both require the surrounding paradigms such as verbs, nouns as subject complements and co-referential nouns mentioned in prior discourse must have plural marking. The syntagmatic relationship of predicate, predicate complement and subject pronoun is congruent. In examples 6-9, the first person plural pronoun always takes the plural form of the verb and plural subject complement in both languages.

- (5) *We're terrorists, this whole Guantanamo Bay thing...*

(Du Bois 2007:25)

- (6) *Ey kann ich ma weiterreden man? **Wir** waren so 15 Leute inner Klasse und er hat äh, er hat äh, 10 Pizzen gemacht und so.* ('Ey can I continue talking, dude? **We** were about 15 people in the class and he made umm he made 10 pizzas and so.' my translation, IDB)

(Du Bois, Vechta Corpus)

- (7) *so **we** had a drink and **we** wanted to go out to dinner and **we** just walked out the door and I was like "Isn't anybody going to turn off the TV" and they were like "Oh no it's OK" nobody cares.*

(Du Bois 2010:174)

- (8) *Gibt's ne Party die **wir** crashen wollen?* ('Is there a party we want to crash?') my translation, IDB)

(Du Bois, Vechta Corpus)

Adjunct phrases of the first person plural pronoun need to be congruent as well; they have to denote a plural noun, as they give a more specific reference of the plural pronoun.

- (9) *Who are **we** as women of color in this moment in history?*

(Alexander 2002:89)

- (10) ***Wir** - ich sage jetzt: **wir** als Migranten - sind risikobereiter?*

(Georgios Chatzimarkakis in DGB 1998)

The *we* pronoun can also function as a determiner "D-pronoun or pronominal determiner" (Radford 2004:39). Whereas determiners are typically articles (*a, the, some*), demonstratives (*this, that, these*), wh-determiners (*which, whose, what*), quantificational determiners (*any, some, one, each*), or possessives (*his, my, our, their*), the first person plural pronoun can have the same function as illustrated in the example below (Börjars et al. 2001).

- (11) ***We** Democrats disagree on many things because **we** don't walk in lock step with **our** party.*

(Martin et al. 2009)

Further, the pronouns *we* and *wir* have a neutral grammatical gender; there is no marker of feminine, masculine or neuter gender regardless of the referents' gender. Both English and German have three different declinations with dative and accusative as the identical form (*uns, us*).

Table 3: *we* and *wir* pronouns in English and German

Case	German	English
nominative	<i>wir</i>	<i>we</i>
genitive	<i>unser</i>	<i>our</i>
dative	<i>uns</i>	<i>us</i>
accusative	<i>uns</i>	<i>us</i>

Notably, both German and English declinations are inclusive. They do not differentiate between inclusiveness or exclusiveness and there is no dual or trial number marking other than by adding numbers such as *we two*, *the two of us*, *wir beide*, *wir zwei* or indefinite *we all* (Wales 1996); thus, numerals need to be added to denote the number of referents, inclusiveness or exclusiveness.

## 5 FIRST PERSON SINGULAR AND SECOND PERSON SINGULAR REFERENTS OF THE WE PRONOUN

In German and English, the referents of *we* do not always include the speaker. More specifically, there are several categories which are commonly used in everyday speech or academic writing, where the referents can be substituted with the first person singular or the second person singular; hence, the referents are not plural and can be replaced by *I* or *you*. Thus, this results in *we* = I or *we* = you. In many cases, the first person plural pronoun has a politeness function. It is useful to briefly explain the concept of politeness (Brown et al. 1987) and the concept of positive and negative face as they are relevant for the meaning of the above mentioned usages of *we* in German and English. Positive politeness “anoints to the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, [the speaker] wants [the addressee’s] wants” (Brown et al. 1987:70). In other words, the idea is that every person has a desire to be liked by others and for that, speaker and addressee share the same attitudes. Negative politeness “consists in assurances that the speaker recognizes and respects the addressee’s wants and will not...interfere with the addressee’s freedom of action” (Brown et al. 1987:70). In alignment with Cysow’s (2005) typology of honorific usages of the first person plural pronouns taken from all over the world (German and English are not investigated), I address the four usages as first and second person singular referents in English and German and further add two commonly first person usages (‘Royal WE’ and ‘Pluralis auctoris’) in this section.

The first exception in usage I want to call ‘Modesty Plural’. The speaker uses *we* as a humble first person (*we* = I). It can be considered negative politeness, as the speaker does not foreground his personal interest or position in the action. Through evading *I*, modesty is expressed and the threat to the own negative face is lowered. One hears this usage of *we* in interviews with authors (example 13), musicians (example 14) or football players, upon being asked how they feel about just having scored several goals (example 15) (*we* = I).

(12) **We** wrote the survey last year.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of 'I wrote the survey last year.'

(13) **We** made the song in 2007.

(14) **Wir** haben ein gutes Spiel gemacht. ('We played a good game.' my translation, IDB)

Through the use of the first person plural, the inherent asymmetry of the speech situation and the usage of the plural instead of direct self-reference can be considered as negative politeness as the speaker avoids a strong imposing of the self on the addressees. In every example, the individual experience of the speaker is hidden behind a collective team experience.

The second usage I want to call 'Directive Plural.' It is an indirect formulation of a directive reduction of negative face threats (*we* = you) and could in its most positive connotation also be considered as a bonding and positive politeness strategy. For example, in request situations, which are per se a threat to the addressee's negative face, they serve to minimize the speaker's imposition on the addressee. The speaker suggests a closeness between speaker and addressee by using the inclusive *we* (*we* = you).

(15) Haben **wir** schon abgewaschen? ('Have we done the dishes yet?' my translation, IDB)

Example 15 could take place within roommate or partner communication. This usage of the first person plural pronoun can certainly also be interpreted as slightly ironical and condescending, depending on the way it is uttered and intoned. Less irony, but a certain ambiguity is the case in example 16.

(16) **We** should finish that report by next week.

In this example, *we*, a boss-employee situation, is at stake. Here, a boss creates closeness and a common goal with the employee by using the inclusive *we*. Instead of employing the second person singular pronoun, the face threat is reduced as speaker and addressee seem to be equally involved in the situation and the suggested equality creates a bond between speaker and addressee. However, the usage of this politeness *we* differ in German and English conversation, in that in German this use of a speaker-involving *we* is less frequent than in English (Baumgarten 2008). This can lead to the misunderstanding that a German addressee does not recognize the directive and request that a native English speaker wants to convey in a given situation.

The third exception I call 'Parentese Plural,' in alignment with the term MOTHERESE in existing literature. Here, the *we* usage is employed in child directed speech. Bonding with the child takes place, but at the same times motherese can be characterized as language that enables the child to understand situational relationships. Parents provide their moral insight into human situations. This process often involves

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<sup>2</sup> Examples 12-18 were overheard by the author in conversations or the media.



directives and requests, which represent a negative face threat to the child's will. This is sometimes reduced by the usage of the first person plural pronoun (*we* = you).

(17) *Mom: Das machen wir jetzt aber nicht!* ('We are not going to do that now.' my translation, IDB)

(18) *Adult: We sure are tired, aren't we?*

(19) *Adult: Put some socks on. Our piggies are so cold.*

(Wills 1977:284 cited in Tracy 1983:122)

Examples 18-20 represent direct and indirect directives and requests, where the reader can immediately picture a child saying simply 'No.' The (indirect) directive is clearly softened by the usage of the inclusive *we*.

The forth exception can be 'Hospitalese Plural.' This is the plural employed in caretaker-elderly and nurse/doctor-patient speech. The term HOSPITALISE is borrowed from Börjars and Burrige (2001:57). In Germany, this type of speech in the professional field of nurses and doctors is considered to be reflective of a lack of respect for elderly people and patients. Nurses in training are taught not use the *we* plural in speech with elderly people due to the association with child directed speech<sup>3</sup>. However, it is still used by nurses and caretakers in some cases and might also be seen as a kind of softening of negative face-threats.

(20) *Let's eat up our brains and bacon now, shall we?*

(Börjars et al. 2001:57)

(21) *Haben wir heute unsere Tabletten wieder nicht genommen?* ('Have we not taken our pills again today.' my translation, IDB)

The fifth exception is the existing term 'Pluralis Auctoris' or 'Editorial *we*' that was mentioned above (*we* = I [+ Unknown You]). The Editorial *we* is a specific kind of usage of *we* in written discourse that includes the reader/audience and can be seen as an involvement strategy. Often, academic writing, research articles, lectures, teaching material, more in the English than the German context use phrases such as

(22) (...) *In both uses 'lexical' is the most common term and we will stick with this. So we can say there is a lexical category 'noun' "*

(Börjars et al. 2001:48).

So we say that, "first person [plural] pronouns in academic discourse serve to ...align the reader with the writers' perspective, and to express solidarity with the readership"

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<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with elderly home quality auditor.

(Baumgarten 2008:412). In example 22, a section of a text book, clearly the undergraduate student is the addressee/reader and the goal is to engage the reader in the material.

The sixth exception is the usage of the existing term 'Royal *we*'. The usage of *we* in this sense is more archaic and was used more often in English and German in former times (*we* = I).

(23) **We** are not amused.

These can be considered relicts in modern English and German while an authorial plural is still quite common for higher status people in some languages (Cysow 2005). Beginning with the 4<sup>th</sup> century, emperors have been addressed with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural pronoun and the plural in this case is symbolic for the power of the person speaking (Brown et al. 2003).

Through its inclusiveness, the *we* pronoun is ambiguous in many speech settings. This section showed that in German and English, it can be substituted for the first person singular and second person singular pronouns for face saving (modesty *we*, parentese *we*, hospitales *we*) and involvement (editorial *we*) strategies. In rare cases, it indicates power in situations where the speaker has a very high status position (royal *we*). The different usages hint towards the multiple connotations (politeness, solidarity, closeness, power) that are possible for the interpretation of meaning of the *we* pronoun.

## 6 NEW CONSTRUCTIONS- IRREGULAR GRAMMAR

In addition to the above-mentioned grammatical and semantic features, there are fairly new developments in German more than in English concerning the grammatical usage of the *we* pronoun. *We are pregnant* is now sometimes uttered by a mother-to-be in reference to her partner and herself. This utterance can increasingly be heard by German speakers as well; in 2008, there was even a German TV show named *Wir sind schwanger!* ('*We are pregnant!*' my translation, IDB). In the following, these new developments will be discussed in regard to their grammaticality. According to German and English grammatical syntactic rules, the formation of these sentences is ungrammatical and nonsensical, when both female and male partners are the noun phrase referents.

(24) ? **Wir** sind schwanger!

(25) ? **We** are pregnant!

The predicate complement takes a female subject noun or pronoun. Only in the case of many mothers-to-be speaking at the same time, the sentence would be grammatically correct.

The famous headline by the Bild Zeitung, the most popular German tabloid, on 20.4.2005, when the German Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope, was chosen second

place 'Word of the year 2005' just behind *Bundeskanzlerin* (Chancellor + female suffix) by the Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache (Society for the German Language).

(26) ? **Wir** sind Papst! ('We are pope!' my translation, IDB)

The headline changed the usage of the *we* pronoun since its first appearance. It is now used in media and football contexts such as *Wir sind Tim Wiese* ('We are Tim Wiese' my translation, IDB), Tim Wiese being the goal keeper of the Bremen football club Werder, or *Wir sind Michael Ballack* ('We are Michael Ballack' my translation, IDB), Michael Ballack being the German national football team's captain. This demonstrates group solidarity, be it as part of a national group or football team, or as part of fan solidarity with one extraordinary player.

Further, the *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* (Brünger 2007) employed a singular noun with a female suffix, which is in a different way equally humorous. In German, traditionally female referents are included in masculine proper nouns, but not the other way around (despite all politically correct language use). When the German national women's football team won the World Cup, its headline said:

(27) ? **Wir** sind Weltmeisterin! ('We are world champions (sg.+fem.)!' my translation, IDB)

Since the referents are all Germans, men, women and children, the feminine singular suffix is even more unusual than the masculine singular due to the gender markedness of *Weltmeisterin* in German semantics. The co-referential pronoun can only be a singular female noun or pronoun. Despite this ungrammaticality, this construction is used in the German media and by the CDU political party in Germany, as one can see in the following example.

Just a few years ago, the female gender suffix in *Kanzlerin* was unthinkable, but in 2009, both new constructions were united in a political party slogan

(28) ? **Wir** bleiben Kanzlerin! ('We stay chancellor (sg.+fem.)!' my translation, IDB)

The verb *bleiben* indicates that *we* and *Kanzlerin* are co-referential. The subject complement, however, is a singular feminine noun while the subject of the sentence is plural and the referents are intended to be Germans or maybe Christian Democrats (the political party of Angela Merkel, the chancellor). There are two grammatical impossibilities: the number aspect is not congruent and the grammatical gender needs to be neutral and cannot be feminine. Examples 11-13 represent ungrammatical sentences, but these constructions continue to be used by the media and political parties as slogans and headlines to unite party followers or a national group towards a collective identification. It will be interesting to see if these constructions will be continued to be used.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been to provide an insight into the complex semantic and grammatical features of the first person plural pronoun. In German and English, the *we* pronoun is inclusive and highly dependent on its discourse context whereas other languages distinguish between inclusive/exclusive usage and different number categories such as dual, trial and plural.

This paper identifies six cases where the referents of the first person plural pronoun are not plural, but singular. In these cases, the *we* pronoun is employed for politeness strategies, recipient solidarity and as a linguistic symbol of power. Further, the first person plural pronoun can be used for mitigating negative face threats in child directed speech, elderly speech and, in general, within directives and requests. In these cases, the referent can be a singular 'I' or 'you.'

Finally, contemporary English and German show a shift: the first person plural pronoun is used with singular subject complements. This linguistic innovation by the German media serves as a collective identifier for national groups, political parties and football fans. Further research in sociolinguistics, language typology, grammar, and semantics needs to be conducted on how inclusive languages deal with the lack of distinction in number categories and inclusive/exclusive distinctions. There need to be more systematic analytic frameworks for dealing with the *we* pronoun as it indicates membership and collective identity. This paper intended to provide a further systematic access to the different functions, referents and grammatical conditions for the first person plural pronoun at the cross-section of the above-mentioned linguistic subfields.

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