

**Personal pronouns and their phenomena in establishing relations
in a pragmalinguistic context**

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Abstract

This paper analyses the four types of personal pronouns (deictic, anaphoric, bound and descriptive pronouns) that we came across during a research conducted for the project “The role of explicit instruction in developing pragmatic competence in learning English and German as a foreign language”, which is underway at the Faculty of Philology, University Goce Delchev in Stip.

We perform our analysis using theories and definitions from the field of pragmatics in its widest sense, which is based on many diverse approaches united by a common functional (social, cultural, cognitive) perspective on language in communication, i.e. the pragmalinguistics (linguistic pragmatics, pragmatic linguistics,

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internal pragmatics) and focuses primarily on the study of linguistic phenomena (i.e. code) involving meaning, utterance and the context. We try to analyse personal pronouns from the point of view of their usage, since it is not easy to distinguish what is exactly referred to with a certain personal pronoun on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is very complex to capture the unsystematic image that draws the attention of all grammarians.

The referential and the implicit meaning of the pronoun in the practice of communication is not always clear, and it is inevitably advisable to pay attention to it in the classroom, in the process of teaching and learning foreign languages.

Key words: *meaning, pragmatic linguistics, pronouns, usage.*

Speaking as action – introduction to pragmatic linguistics

We begin our paper with a famous saying by Goethe's Faust (Prelude on the Stage / Vorspiel auf dem Theater, 214/215):

„Der Worte sind genug gewechselt, laßt mich auch endlich Taten sehen!“

“Words enough have been exchanged, let me at last see some action!”

Goethe

All famous ideas are explained by words and language as opposed to doings or actions. With all due respect to the great German writer and statesman J.W. Goethe, in his saying, we can point out to the wrong understanding of the relation of words and speech, that appears against the following statement and applies in reality: *Whenever we speak, we act.*, or even shorter: *Speaking is an action.* That is the fundamental thesis of pragmatic linguistics (*eng.*), or Pragmalinguistik (*germ.*), /*griech.*= prágma, *germ.* = das Handeln, *eng.* = an action/.

The idea for this paper came as a result of a research related to the project “The role of explicit instruction in developing pragmatic competence in learning

English and German as a foreign language.” (*germ.* "Die Rolle der expliziten Anweisung in der Entwicklung pragmatischer Kompetenz im Englischen und im Deutschen als Fremdsprache). The participants in the project are students of English and German at the Faculty of Philology at “Goce Delcev” University in Štip, Republic of Macedonia. The project was motivated by the importance of pragmatic knowledge, which allows learners to adequately communicate in the target language.

In the course of our research for this project we do not expect to find a valid and universally accepted definition and answers to the questions that arise in finding and defining the focus of the main research of the linguistic branch *pragmatic linguistics*, or the strict distinction which determines and distinguishes it from the other branches of linguistics - because there is no unique and strict definition and distinctness.

The openness to other linguistic branches makes it difficult to differentiate the pragmatics from other branches of the linguistics. The interest and the meanings of the language expressions that are in the focus of this linguistic discipline is common with the focus of research of the semantics: therefore some authors are uncertain about the differences in these two disciplines and promote instead another discipline, the so called *practical semantics*. (vgl. Heringer et. al. 1977). The interest in the integration of the language in social and cultural correlations in the society makes pragmatics share some common features with sociolinguistics and language sociology. An independent and an exclusive description area that is covered by phonology or syntax cannot be supplied for pragmatic linguistics.

All attempts to define this discipline appear to be complex and complicated. In the large overview in the book of *Pragmatics* written by Stephen C. Levinson (1983) ten definitions are explicitly discussed and then rejected on thirty pages. Thereby, the author also points out that in the Anglo-Saxon world, the term pragmatics is used more closely, i.e. rather in the context

of an integral grammar theory (at this point compare Abraham 1986), while the European continent linguists consider this topic as more sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic phenomena. (see Rehbein 1988)

The pragmatics is not only an active element, a module, a component of grammatical rules and regulations, but also distinctly delineated border branch of linguistics. It outlines more specific questions of interest, even though it includes: the user's aspect in syntax/sentence semantic, then lexical semantics, word formation, lexicography, stylistics, text linguistics, speech research, institutional discourse, public discourse, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics etc.

We consider pragmatics as the study of the practical aspects of human action and thought, and the study of the use of linguistic signs (words and sentences) in actual situations. Jenny Thomas (1995) writes that pragmatics considers:

- the negotiation of meaning between speaker and listener,
- the context of the utterance,
- the meaning potential of an utterance.

There are many linguists who have created and used theories in pragmatics, but for the purpose of this paper we will refer only to some of the key thinkers. Firstly, we try to define the subject matter of *pragmalinguistics* (linguistic pragmatics, pragmatic linguistics), and then we proceed with the analysis of the four types of pronouns from the point of view of their usage, and explain their referential meaning, too.

Often we can find the following, very general view as stated by Ernst Peter (2002): "Pragmalinguistics is the science of the use of linguistic signs". Pragmatics is often understood as a general expression, which refers to human action in general and pragmalinguistics gives the closer overlook to the human act in correlation to the language as a narrower term.

Considering the etymology, the word *pragmatics* comes from the Greek word *pragma* = *do, act*, so we could consider that "pragmatics is the study of an

action". But, linguists show interest only in goals which have to do with the language.

We consider all human activities as physiological acts, including eating, sleeping, walking, etc. as well as those activities that are connected to the language, such as speaking, writing, reading, etc. They are all part of the human action, too. Hence, we come to the definition that pragmatics is a theory of human action.

At this point we introduce the theory of Gerald Gazdar¹, for whom the pragmatism is equivalent to the semiology (science of the meaning), if one excludes the truth conditions of the utterances. The definition of G. Gazdar is shown schematically as follows: Pragmatics is equal to the meaning minus truth conditions: *pragmatics = meaning - truth conditions*.

However, since pragmatic linguistics also considers the extra linguistic context, the boundaries are not quite clear. So, we can consider pragmatic linguistics as a theory of relations between language and context, grammaticalised or encoded in language structures.

We accept the view of Peter Ernst (2002) that the terms pragmatics and linguistic pragmatics are synonymous and equivalent². The terms pragmatic linguistics, pragmatics, linguistic pragmatics, language pragmatics denote the doctrine of linguistic action, too.

While the field of pragmatics in its widest sense is constituted of many diverse approaches (without clear-cut boundaries) united by a common functional (social, cultural, cognitive) perspective on language in communication (cf. Verschueren 1999), pragma linguistics (linguistic pragmatics, pragmatic linguistics, internal pragmatics) focuses primarily (though not exclusively) on the study of linguistic phenomena (i.e., code) from

¹ Gazdar 1979, S. 2: dt. Übersetzung zit. nach Levinson 2000, S. 13: vgl. auch Meibauer 2001. S. 5.

² Gluck 200, S. 543. Hier werden Pragmatik und linguisticshe Pragmatik im Lemma gleichgesetzt.

the point of view of its usage. As it is impossible to offer an exhaustive definition of pragmatics, it might be easier simply to present a list of the topics studied: deixis, implicature, presupposition, speech acts and aspects of discourse structure (cf. Levinson 1983; for the scope of pragmatics and the detailed coverage of its major topics see Tárnyiková 2000).

Developing pragmatic competence and understanding pragmatic meanings

The idea for this paper came out as a result of collecting and analysing written responses and recorded materials from our students during the work of the project. The project was motivated by the lack of valid data on communicative competences of Macedonian learners of English and German as well as by the need of tracing effective methods for reinforcing communication skills. Therefore, the subject of this research is the role of explicit instruction in developing pragmatic competence in foreign language learning (in particular in learning English and German). The main goals of teaching foreign languages have long been preparing learners to communicate effectively in the language they are learning. Followers of the Communicative Method for decades have been highlighting the fact that knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures is not enough for successful communication in the target language. Learners need to be trained to choose the right linguistic means with reference to their interlocutor and their relationship with him/her. Having in mind this goal of language instruction, we may expect pragmatics to have the leading role in language learning and teaching. Unfortunately, it remains on the margins of foreign language teaching. In language learning textbooks it is represented only as much as it is necessary so that authors are not blamed for not following the modern approaches to language learning and still holding firmly to the traditional way in which grammar is most important, vocabulary is second, and there is a miscellaneous mixture of other areas, including pragmatics. In order to

improve our language learning reality, this project aims at reinforcing the pragmatic component in learning English and German.

Pragmatic competence enables interlocutors to penetrate deeper than the literal meaning of what is said or written in order to understand what speakers want to say, to understand their implications or intentions, as well as their linguistic behaviour. Understanding pragmatic meanings can be a problem for learners since it is not always obvious, and they do not have sufficient amount of pragmatic knowledge to be able to interpret the behaviour of their interlocutors.

Pronouns and their relations in the context – phenomena in pragmatic linguistics

Most reliable issue that is covered in the traditional grammar and will also be analysed in this project is the flexion of the personal pronouns: *Eng: I, my, me; you, your / Germ: ich, meiner, mir, mich, du, deiner... Mac: jas, moe, mene; ti, tebe, tvoe,*

In linguistics and grammar, a pronoun is a word that substitutes a noun or noun phrase. It is a particular case of a pro-form. Grammarians also suggest that one should distinguish between number and case and only in the 3rd person singular in gender, and this differentiation may be also determined by the situational context. Pronouns have traditionally been regarded as one of the parts of speech, but some modern theorists would not consider them to form a single class, in view of the variety of functions they perform. Subtypes include: personal pronouns, reflexive and reciprocal pronouns, possessive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns, interrogative pronouns, and indefinite pronouns.

The use of pronouns often involves anaphora, where the meaning of the pronoun is dependent on an antecedent. This applies especially to third-person personal pronouns, and to relative pronouns. For example, in the sentence *That busy professor looks as if he needs some more time*, the antecedent of the

pronoun *he* is the noun phrase *that busy professor*. The adjective associated with pronoun is *pronominal*. A pronominal is also a word or phrase that acts as a pronoun. For example, in *That's not the one I wanted*, the phrase *the one* (containing the prop-word *one*) is a pronominal.

In Duden grammarbook (Drosdowski 1984: 317) it is stated:

"These words are called personal pronouns (personal words) and he defines:

first-person pronouns normally refer to the speaker, in the case of the singular [as the English *I*, German *ich*, Macedonian *jas*], or to the speaker and others, in the case of the plural [as the English *we*, German *wir*, Macedonian *nie*]. Or, a person who speaks of himself/herself (*ich, wir / i, we / jas, nie*)

1. **second-person** pronouns normally refer to the person or persons being addressed [as the English *you*, German *du*, Macedonian *ti*]; in the plural they may also refer to the person or persons being addressed together with third person. (*du, ihr / you, you / ti, vie*)

2. **third-person** pronouns normally refer to third individuum other than the speaker or the person being addressed [as the English *he, she, it, they* / German *er, sie, es, sie* / Macedonian *toj, taa, toa, tie*]. Person (or thing), who is spoken of (*he, she, it, they / er, sie, es, sie*).

In grammatical terms, the first person, the second person, and the third person refer to personal pronouns. Each "person" has a different perspective, a "point of view," and the three points of view have singular and plural forms as well as three case forms.

Personal pronouns are pronouns that are associated primarily with a particular grammatical person – first person (as *I / ich / jas*), second person (as *you / du / ti*), or third person (as *he, she, it / er, sie, es / toj, taa, toa*). Personal pronouns may also take different forms depending on number (usually singular or plural), grammatical or natural gender, case, and formality. The term "personal" is used here purely to signify the grammatical sense; personal pronouns are not limited to people and can also refer to animals and objects (as

the English personal pronoun *it*, in German *es*, or in Macedonian *toa* usually does).

Much more accurate and reasonable explanation is presented by Plank (1984), who describes the meaning of the pronouns with the help of sets of references containing the three speech acts and roles of the speaker, addressee and speech-uninvolved person, as elements, sometimes repeatedly or in combination. According to his view, it is apparent that in the case of *wir/we/nie* and *ihr/You/vie* it cannot be precisely determined whether they always simply refer by analogy to the singular or plural forms of the speaker or addressee (see. Lyons, 1968 277; Levinson 1983 69f). When we use the personal pronoun *wir/we/nie*, the following variations should be taken into consideration:

-a variant that includes an addressee (+ S³ / + A⁴)

-a variant that exclude an addressee, a variant that includes a third person (+ S / -A / + T)

- a variant that includes an addressee and a third person (+ S / + A / + T⁵)

-another three „choral“ variations, with more than one speaker / writer (+SS / + A; + SS / -A / + D; + SS / + A / + D)

You (sg.)/du/ti; you (pl.)/vie/ihr and You (politeform)/Ihr/Sie/vie/Vam/Vie may include addressee or addressees and a third person, but never the speaker or the speakers. Especially, the different meaning variants of *we/wir/nie* and *you/You/ti/Vie; ihr/Sie/vie/Vie* are in the communication repeatedly problematic and therefore the reference to existing polysemy provokes subtle differences. The so-called "improper", but systematic and regular usages have not been so far analysed and recorded; they complicate the picture considerably and lead to further interesting cases, which are compiled uncompleted and somewhat arbitrary in grammars.

³ S= a speaker

⁴ A= an addressee

⁵ T= third person

The speaker normally assumes the deictic (pointing) speaking of himself: The *I-here-now-Origo* lies at the speaker. But, *I/ich* can also refer to the addressee or to a third person, if the *I-here-now-Origo* shifts, which is presented in Bühler (1934, 121ff) in "Deixis am Phantasma", while Lyons (1977) speaks of "deictic projection":

Würdest du sagen „Ich mache das“? / Would you say "I do this" ?

Eng. you (sg.) / germ. du / mac. ti may be generalized and used in the term of *one (eng.)/man (ger.)*, while the third person, or *one/man* can refer to speaker/s or listener/s:

ENG: In Berlin you can (sg.) / you can (pl.) / You can (polite form) / one can visit Brandenburg Gate.

GER: In Berlin kannst du / könnt ihr / können Sie / kann man Brandenburger Tor besichtigen.

Mac: Vo Berlin mozes (ti) / mozete vie / mozete Vie / moze da se poseti Branderburskata kapija.

A: How are you? (eng.) / Wie geht es Ihnen? (germ.) / kako ste Vie? (mac.)

B: One/you lives/live (surviving). (eng.) / Man lebt. (germ.) / Se živee/preživuva. (mac.)

A: How do you experience such a journey? (eng.) / Wie erlebt man eine solche Reise ? (germ.) / Kako se dozivuva edno takvo patuvanje? (mac.)

B: I liked it a lot. (eng.) / Mir hat es gut gefallen. (germ.) / Mi se dopadna mnogu. (mac.)

Taking into consideration these meaning variants of *wir/we/nie* and *ihr/you/vie*, according to Eisenberg (1989, 190) we can confirm his statement that:

„dass *ich, du, wir, ihr* sowie das unpersönliche Personalpronomen *man* (das nur als Subjekt vorkommt) weitgehend ohne Bedeutungsveränderung gegeneinander austauschbar sind, wenn nur die Äußerungssituation genügend Hinweise auf das jeweils Gemeinte gibt.“

["that *I, you, we, you* and the impersonal personal pronoun *one* (which occurs only as a subject) are interchangeable, mainly if only the context of the utterance indicates and refers to the situation."]

The interchangeability of *ich, du, wir, ihr / i, you, we, you* and *man / one* without difference in the meaning, that is stated by Eisenberg (1989, 190) refers only to the referential part of the meaning. Furthermore, it should be described pragmatically and stylistically, what the speaker additionally means when he/she uses a certain form. Thereby, there is no 1:1 correspondence by the utterances and forms of meanings that correspondent to the usual polysemy and vagueness of the utterances.

At this point, we have to point out the particularities by using the pronoun *we/wir/nie*, that is used more common in grammars, but whose meaning is rarely completely listed; and it refers to the following mentioned usage:

-variant of meaning in singular (+S / -A / -T), where one can assign different motives (*Plularis maiestatis, modestiae, auctoris*),

-speaker exclusive variant (-S / + A / ?D), also called "educational/pedagogical" or "Krankenschwester-wir" (in German).

-at the transition from both forms there is an authorial (from the perspective of the author) variant, which should cause common features: *wir haben gesehen, dass... / we have seen that*

What is exactly referred to with a certain personal pronoun is thus not easy to distinguish on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is very complex to capture the unsystematic image that draws attention by all grammarians. Therefore, Hoffmann (1984, 88) explicitly criticized the concept of set of referential meanings in the book *Grundzügen einer deutschen Grammatik* (vgl. Heidolph u.a. 1981): "In the context of a theory of reference it should be clearly determined that: there are no expressions, to which the static reference is assigned to, but reporting is the element of speech of acting process, that facilitated the understanding of the communicative specific speech act.

The referential meaning and the significance of the pronoun is also in the practice of communication not always clear, and it would be helpful to pay attention to it in the classroom, too. The student could learn to ask questions: What is meant by the speaker / by the writer anyway? Is he/she just neglectful or makes certain target with an utterance, if not intentionally, says frankly what he/she thinks?

The following table which presents some variations in expressions is therefore not intended to be seen as a rigid set of rules, which explicates all possibilities. It is intended to give an impression, clues and instructions about the intensity of relation and rating of the personal pronouns.

Rating	himself/herself	Partner	
appreciation	I → ⁶ we / ich → wir boasting, modest	du → Sie you → You	politeness
rejecting devaluation	I → one / ich → man rejecting, uncertain	smart	disregard
intensity of relation			
personalisation	I → one / man → ich ich → du/Sie I → you/You persisting intensiv	man → du/Sie du/Sie → wir Sie → du confrontation, solidarity	closeness
depersonalisation	Ich → man closed and restraining	Du/Sie → man Du → Sie Formality,	distance

⁶ can be replased with

		respect	
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Table 1. Rating and intensity of relation in personal pronouns

Phenomena in the pragmatic linguistics: pronouns

We restrict our analysis to the personal pronouns that we came across in the tests of our students and try to analyse the four types of personal pronouns in singular and plural:

- Singular: *I, you, he, she, me / ich, du, er, sie, mir / jas, ti, toj, taa, mene*
- plural: *we, you, they, you / wir, ihr, sie, euch / nie, vie, tie, vam*

According to the different usage of the pronouns we accept the concept developed by Huitink J. and Meier C. (2009), and we take into consideration the four types of personal pronouns: deictic, anaphoric, bound and descriptive and try to explain their functions in a given context.

Deictic use of pronouns: **Deictic pronouns** are pronouns whose reference must be fixed through the context of the utterance. We support this statement with the following examples that are taken from the tests of our students during doing some research in the frame of the above mentioned project.

(1) Ich habe ihn (den Professor) im Klassenraum gefunden. / 1. pers. / 3 pers.sg.

(2) Sieh dir ihn an! / 3rd pers.sg.

Anaphoric use of pronouns: The term **anaphoric pronoun** refers to a pronoun which 'refers back' to another constituent in the sentence. Pronouns which are not anaphoric are called deictic

The antecedent can be a proper name:

(3) Prof. Schmidt hat im Klassenraum unterrichtet, als ich bei ihm eingetreten bin. /

(4) Peter ist ein Gourmet. Er wohnt in Berlin. (germ. *Textanapher, Diskursanapher, Faulheitspronomen*) = „Peter ist ein Gourmet. Der Mann von Eike wohnt in Berlin“

In the example (3) the anaphoric relation is set within the sentence, but in the example (4) the anaphoric example is set across sentence border. One could say that the pronouns here might be represented by the nominal phrase that they refer to.

The pronouns in these cases may be the nominal they represent a nominal phrase, and can be replaced with nominals or/and noun phrase that they present or refer to.

The antecedent can be an indefinite person:

(5) Es war einmal ein Buchhandler, der sehr viele Bücher besaß. Er wohnte in einer kleinen Stadt. ≠ “Es war einmal ein Buchhandler, der sehr viele Bücher besaß. Ein Buchhandler wohnte in einer kleinen Stadt”.

If the antecedent is an indefinite, the replacement with the simple pronoun by the antecedent is not possible. The indefinite descriptions have a new condition. The individual that is introduced into the discourse or in the text, must not have been previously mentioned. In grammar, an antecedent is an expression (word, phrase, clause, etc.) that gives its meaning to a pro-form (pronoun, pro-verb, pro-adverb, etc.). A pro-form takes its meaning from its antecedent, e.g. *I arrived late because traffic held me up*. The pronoun *me* refers to and takes its meaning from *I*, so *I* is the antecedent of *me*. Pro-forms usually follow their antecedents, but sometimes they precede them, in which case one is, technically, dealing with *postcedents* instead of antecedents. The prefix *ante-* means 'before' or 'in front of', and *post-* means 'after' or 'behind'. The term *antecedent* stems from traditional grammar. The linguistic term that is closely related to *antecedent* and *pro-form* is *anaphora*. Theories of syntax explore the distinction between antecedents and postcedents in terms of binding.

Also, the plural expressions can function as antecedent:

(6a) Peter und Maria wohnen in Skopje. Sie sind miteinander verheiratet.
(Plural antecedent)

(6b) Peter hat Maria in Skopje abgeholt. Sie sind dann gemeinsam nach Stip gefahren.

(antecedent is constructed by summing up the individuals into one entity).

Both deictic and anaphoric pronouns are used referential. But, that is not the only form of use of the pronouns: there are also so-called bound pronouns.

Bound pronouns: Pronouns that receive their meaning by the interpretation of quantificational structure. A bound variable pronoun (also called a bound variable anaphor or BVA) is a pronoun (like *she* or *he / er* or *sie*) which has a quantified determiner phrase (DP) – such as *every*, *some*, or *who* (*jeder*, *manch*, or *kein* in German) – as its antecedent.

(7) Jeder/Manch ein/ Kein Kandidat hofft, dass er gewinnt.

Jeder

Manch ein Kandidat hofft, dass er gewinnt

Kein

≠ „Jeder

≠ “Manch ein Kandidat hofft, dass jeder/manch
ein/kein Kandidat gewinnt“

≠ “Kein

(Jeder Kandidat X) x hofft , dass x gewinnt.

Every instant of „ x hofft , dass x gewinnt“ is true. Ambiguity between readings with interpretation with anaphoric and bound pronoun:

(9) Nur Hans hat seine Hausaufgaben gemacht.

(9a) Nur ich habe meine Hausaufgaben gemacht.

Descriptive pronoun: descriptive pronouns are referential pronouns with a qualificational antecedent:

(10) Der Professor hat einen Vortrag gehalten und die Studierende haben ihn aufmerksam gehört.

=Der Professor hat eine Vortrag gehalten und die Studierende haben [den einzigen Vortrag, den der Professor gehalten hat] aufmerksam gehört.

In Plural forms there is maximisation (generalising):

(11) Peter hat ein paar interessante Aufsätze geschrieben. Er will sie seinen Mitstudenten zeigen.

=Peter hat ein paar interessante Aufsätze geschrieben. Er will [die interessanten Aufsätze, die er geschrieben hat] (alle) seinen Mitstudenten zeigen“.

≠ „Peter hat ein paar interessante Aufsätze geschrieben. Er will ein paar interessante Aufsätze, die er geschrieben hat, seinen Mitstudenten zeigen.“

=Peter hat ein paar interessante Aufsätze geschrieben und will seinen Mitstudenten zeigen“.

=Peter hat ein paar interessante Aufsätze geschrieben, die er seinen Mitstudenten zeigen will“.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper is on the analysis and description of four different types of personal pronouns (deictic, anaphoric, bound and descriptive) which are analysed as a part of the study of linguistic phenomena (i.e. code) from the point of view of their usage. Starting point for our analysis are theories and definitions from the field of pragmatics in its widest sense, since it is constituted of many diverse approaches united by a common functional (social, cultural, cognitive) perspective on language in communication, i.e. the pragma linguistics (linguistic pragmatics, pragmatic linguistics, internal pragmatics) which focuses primarily on the study of linguistic phenomena (i.e., code) involving meaning, utterance and the context. Our analysis has shown that it is not easy to distinguish what exactly is referred to with a certain personal pronoun on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is very complex to capture the unsystematic image that draws attention to all grammarians, which considerably complicates the picture and leads to further interesting cases, that are compiled uncompleted and somewhat arbitrary in grammars. The referential meaning and the significance of the pronouns are also in the practice of communication not always clear, and it would be helpful to pay attention to them in the classroom, too. Students could learn to ask questions: what is meant by the speaker / by the writer anyway?

Variations in the expression are presented in a table which is intended to give an impression, clues and instructions about the intensity of relation and rating of the personal pronouns in the certain context.

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