

Helen de Hoop and Lotte Hogeweg*

The use of second person pronouns in a literary work

Abstract: For this study we investigated all occurrences of Dutch second person pronoun subjects in a literary novel, and determined their interpretation. We found two patterns that can both be argued to be functionally related to the development of the story. First, we found a decrease in the generic use of second person, a decrease which we believe goes hand in hand with an increased distancing of oneself as a reader from the narrator/main character. Second, we found an increase in the use of the descriptive second person. The increased descriptive use of second person pronouns towards the end of the novel is very useful for the reader, because the information provided by the first person narrator himself becomes less and less reliable. Thus, the reader depends more strongly on information provided by other characters and what these characters tell the narrator about himself.

Keywords: Dutch, pronouns, you-narration, narratorial reliability

***Corresponding authors:** Helen de Hoop *Radboud University Nijmegen*. Email: h.dehoop@let.ru.nl; and Lotte Hogeweg *Radboud University Nijmegen*. Email: l.hogeweg@let.ru.nl

1. Introduction

Creating imaginary worlds is the domain of literature, and language provides the tools by which this is accomplished. This study attempts to investigate how language is used to evoke processes of interpretation such as identification and distancing that people experience in reading literature (cf. Levie and Wildschut, this issue). It specifically focuses on the effects of the use of second person pronouns in a novel with a first person narrator.

In everyday communication first and second person pronouns are generally used to refer to the two interlocutors in the conversation, i.e., the speaker and the addressee. For each utterance there is always only one speaker, whereas there may be one or more addressees (de Schepper 2013). In literature, however, the narrator can be conceived of as the speaker, but there is no clear-cut addressee. Also, while a conversation is a bidirectional process in which speakers and addressees switch roles, in literature the interaction is unidirectional, from a fixed speaker (narrator) to an addressee (reader). There is no interaction between the narrator and the reader. Hence, the roles of speaker and addressee do not constantly

switch, like in speech. Narrators can (pretend to) address their readers, but they cannot even be sure who their readers are.

Suppose a novel starts with a sentence, *You enter the room and there she is*. The second person pronoun *you* in this sentence cannot (directly) refer to the reader of this sentence, since there is no way the narrator can know that the reader at the time of reading is entering a room. At best, *you* can refer to an implied reader or to the reader indirectly, in the sense that readers are invited to imagine themselves in a situation as described (Iser 1974). But it is also possible that in fact *you* refers to the narrator here, to a fictive reader or addressee, or to another character in the story (cf. Fludernik 1994). The reader of that particular sentence does not know who the second person pronoun *you* refers to and also does not know (yet) who uttered it. Schofield (1998), in his dissertation on the functions and effects of second person pronouns in narrative prose fiction, emphasizes the fluidity and ambiguity of this mode. He shows that in many cases it is unclear whether the second person is a character, the narrator or an implied reader, no one in particular, or a combination of all of these. At least readers know that *you* cannot really refer to themselves, but they might still interpret it as an invitation to self-ascribe the sentence (Wechsler 2010; de Hoop and Tarenskeen, to appear), and for the time being to identify with the unknown person who *you* refers to.

This article investigates the use of second person pronouns in the novel *Dit is van mij* (2009) ('This is mine') by the Flemish writer Saskia De Coster. The first person narrator of this story is Jakob, a man whose psychotic state of mind becomes apparent (and probably worsens) during the story. The article aims to develop an integrated linguistic-literary theory of the use of the second person in the novel. In order to be able to unveil specific patterns of second person use in the novel, Section 2 first sketches the use of second person pronouns in ordinary spoken Dutch. Section 3 then discusses the identification effect of generically used second person pronouns. Section 4 investigates the use of second person pronouns in the literary novel *Dit is van mij*, and compares it to the earlier findings on spoken Dutch. Section 5 provides an analysis of the use of second person pronouns in the novel, and Section 6 presents the conclusion.

2. Deictic and generic use of second person pronouns in spoken Dutch

While the use of second person pronouns in novels is particularly interesting because novels have a complex and varied narrative structure, the flexibility of the second person pronoun is not limited to literary fiction. De Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear) found that second person pronouns in spoken Dutch are used extremely flexibly too. Traditionally, the meaning of pronouns is described using a set of features that determine what or who the pronoun refers to. First person pronouns are commonly ascribed the feature 'speaker' and second

person 'addressee', but in actual language use we see that this division is not that strict. The second person pronoun in Dutch is extremely flexible and can refer to the addressee, the speaker, a third unspecified person, etc. Although generic pronouns (i.e., all pronouns that can have generic reference) are usually thought to refer to people in general, very often their reference is contextually restricted, and the speaker or the addressee usually (though not necessarily) belongs to this subset of people referred to. Yet, generic *je* 'you' can be used to refer to (a group of) third persons exclusively as well. De Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear) found that in spoken Dutch the second person pronoun *je* 'you' gets a deictic interpretation (i.e., refers to the addressee) in only half of the cases. The other half of the time *je* 'you' gets a generic interpretation in which the pronoun *you* refers to people in general, or more specifically, to a group of people including the speaker and/or the addressee, or to a third person or group of other persons. This is rather surprising, given that the main function of the second person pronoun is assumed to be reference to the addressee. This raises the question what types of context trigger the other reading so often. For example, conditionals, modal verbs, and perception verbs seem to facilitate a generic reading of *you* (de Hoop and Tarenskeen, to appear), as in a sentence like *If you go to Paris, you should see the Eiffel Tower.*

One important difference that seems to play a role in distinguishing between the two readings of *you* is the difference between two functions of language, the descriptive and the interactive function, such as is traditionally studied in e.g. speech act theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). Second person subject pronouns are typically used to *interact* with the addressee directly, i.e., to ask questions, gather information, to persuade, to influence the addressee's behavior or opinions, while first and especially third person subject pronouns are more often used to *describe* the world to the addressee, i.e., to inform the addressee or to entertain the addressee, to narrate. For example, sentence (1) can be used as an epistemic modal sentence to describe the world, a world in which a third person referred to by *he* will try to put the key into this slot, while sentence (2) is preferably used to interact directly with the addressee. As such, it gets interpreted by the addressee referred to by *you* as a suggestion to try to put the key into the slot (von Stechow 2006; Foolen and de Hoop 2009).

- (1) *He might try to put the key into this slot*
- (2) *You might try to put the key into this slot*

Some sentence types are more frequently used in one function of language than in another. Imperatives appear to be exclusively interactive in that the speaker requires a certain action from the addressee. In imperative sentences the subject referring to the addressee is usually left implicit. Also, questions are prototypically interactive (the speaker requests information or confirmation from the addressee). De Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear), who found that the deictic and the generic readings of *you* arise more or less equally often in Dutch,

hypothesized that generic readings will be more frequent in descriptive contexts and deictic readings will be more frequent in interactive contexts. The reason that deictic readings are expected to be rare in descriptive language is that speakers usually do not have information about addressees that the addressees do not have themselves. Deictic readings are more frequent in interactive contexts when speakers want something from their interlocutors, such as information or an action. Under the assumption that declarative sentences are prototypically used descriptively while questions are prototypically used interactively, de Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear) measured the effect of sentence type (declarative or question) on type of reading (generic or deictic), and they found a significant effect indeed. In declaratives 66% of *you* obtained a generic and 34% a deictic reading, while in questions, only 12% received a generic, and 88% a deictic reading. Context presumably helps the addressee to arrive at the right interpretation of the ambiguous second person pronoun *je* 'you' in Dutch.

3. The identification effect of generic second person pronouns

Siewierska (2004) shows that it is cross-linguistically quite common for second person pronouns to have the possibility of generic reference, and even speaker-reference. The general idea is that second person pronouns in their generic and speaker-referring interpretations retain part of their original interpretation of reference to the addressee (see for instance Malamud 2012; de Hoop and Tarenskeen, to appear). The second person pronoun is interpreted as an invitation to the addressee to put themselves into someone else's shoes, and as such it appeals to the addressee's involvement and feelings of empathy. Scheibman (2007) suggests that generalizations in discourse have a solidarity marking function. Speakers who use a second person pronoun when referring to themselves generalize from their own stance and this can be considered a strategy to get the empathy of the addressee. According to Scheibman (2007), generalizations have an inclusive effect: the conversational partners use them in order to emphasize their mutual agreement.

De Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear) use Wechsler's (2010) theory of self-ascription in order to cover this identification effect of using the second person pronoun *you*. Wechsler (2010) argues that a second person pronoun does not actually *refer to* the addressee, but rather invites the addressee to *self-ascribe* the property of being *you*. For example, the possessive pronoun *your* in the sentence *Write your name at the top of the page*, uttered by a teacher to a class of students, is not interpreted by the addressees as referring to the set of addressees. Rather, in accordance with the theory of self-ascription, each addressee interprets the second person pronoun *your* as referring to themselves and will therefore write their own name at the top of the page (Wechsler 2010: 353). Deictic *you* is thus interpreted by the addressee via self-ascription. However, when a second person pronoun gets a generic interpretation, it does not refer to the addressee, hence the addressee should

not interpret *you* via self-ascription. Although Wechsler (2010) does not discuss the generic use of second person pronouns, de Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear) argue that his analysis can be used to explain the idea of identification that has been reported for the generic use of second person pronouns in comparison to third person pronouns (cf. among others Malamud 2012). De Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear) assume that the process of self-ascription by the addressee upon hearing *you* takes place even when the second person pronoun gets a generic reading, and that this accounts for the arousal of empathy or at least identification.

The identification effect of second person pronouns has also been attested in narratives. Brunyé et al (2011) examined emotional reactivity and resulting memory representations of participants who read two sets of existing narratives that were manipulated in such a way that either the pronoun *I* or *you* was used to refer to the protagonist. They found increased reader engagement as a result of using the pronoun *you* instead of *I* in the domain of spatial representation as well as in the domain of emotional reactivity. Another small-scale experiment along these lines was conducted by Andeweg et al (2013) for Dutch. For this experiment a writer of literary stories wrote a short (one page) story in which the main character committed a crime at the end of the story. There were two versions of the story, one with a first person and one with a second person narrator/main character. After reading, people had to answer seven questions. These questions were clustered in two clusters, 'Identity' (three questions) and 'Empathy/sympathy' (three questions), and a seventh separate question. The questions relating to Identity were: 1. In my imagination it was as if I was the main character; 2. I put myself in the position of the main character; 3. I had the feeling I went through what the main character went through. The three questions relating to Empathy were: 1. I felt for the main character; 2. I empathize with the main character; 3. I find the main character sympathetic. The seventh question was: In that situation I would have done the same. The difference between the two versions of the story was (only) significant for the factor Identity. That is, readers identified more with the main character in the second person pronoun version than in the first person pronoun version. Thus, from the experiments of Brunyé et al (2011) and Andeweg et al (2013) we may conclude that the use of a second person pronoun in narrative fiction indeed increases readers' engagement and identification with the main character compared to the use of a first person pronoun.

4. The interpretation of second person pronouns in a novel

This section investigates the use of second person pronouns in the novel *Dit is van mij* (2009) by the Flemish author Saskia De Coster. The aim of our study was to investigate the role of the second person pronoun with its different functions in processes of interpretation such as identification and distancing. One of the reasons we chose this novel was because it contains

many dialogues, that is, representations of natural conversations between the main character Jakob and other characters in the book. In these conversations we expect a rather natural use of second person pronouns whose interpretation can be either deictic (directly referring to the addressee of the utterance) or generic.

Another reason why we chose this novel is that the main character and narrator of the story goes through a development with respect to his mental state. His delusional state of mind worsens during the story, to the point that he commits a murder about which he seems to have no recall. Dancygier (2012: 169) notes the recent emergence of numerous novels in which characters have various mental and neurological disorders. She argues that literary production “has strived to give readers access to the minds of characters since its inception” and that the means to do so “have gradually adapted both linguistically and psychologically” (Dancygier 2012: 169). One well-known example of a linguistic achievement to meet this end is the use of free indirect discourse (cf. Clement, this issue, and Maier, this issue). We are particularly interested in the use and effects of different types of second person pronouns on the perception of readers and their degree of identification with these characters (see also Levie and Wildschut, this issue). We set out to investigate the use of second person pronouns in relation to the course of events in the story and to the mental state of the first person narrator.

Apart from the use of *you* in direct speech, the narrator of the story can also use *you* generically in order to generalize from his own stance, and thus to make it easier for the reader to identify with the first person narrator who is also the main character. For example, the novel opens with the following sentences (the occurrences of second person pronouns are in bold):

(3) Geen reden is de beste reden om **je** op sleeptouw te laten nemen. Om zomaar te ontwaken op **je** rug naast een kamermeisje, warm gestreeld door de zon.

‘No reason is the best reason to let **you** be carried away. To awake just like that lying on **your** back next to a maid, warmly caressed by the sun.’

The first sentence in (3) is clearly generic; it presents a general truth or opinion. In the second sentence of this passage the possessive pronoun *je* ‘your’ is also used generically, yet the scope of the second sentence is far less general. How many readers have awoken lying on their back next to a maid? Nevertheless, the second person pronoun invites the reader to imagine themselves in a similar situation. Another example of a generically used second person pronoun is given in sentence (4). Again, the generic flavor of this sentence is clearly mixed with a first person perspective.

(4) Wanneer **je** vroeger met Bob op pad ging, wist **je** dat de nacht lang zou zijn en de gevaren ontelbaar.

‘When **you** went out with Bob in the old days, **you** knew the nights would be long and the dangers uncountable.’

By using the second person here instead of the first, the personal experience of the first person narrator/main character is generalized and thereby readers are invited to identify themselves with the narrator. In accordance with Brunyé et al (2011) and Andeweg et al (2013), we believe that the second person pronoun by its direct appeal to the addressee evokes a higher level of involvement and identification with the character than the first person pronoun. Compare, for example, the following fragment (first person pronouns in bold):

(5) Er komt een vrouw in een opvallende citroengele jas zomaar **mijn** terras op gewandeld. Het is niet zo vreemd dat **ik** in het felle zonlicht een vrouw hallucineer. Er zijn zelfs mensen die in hun vaatdoek het gelaat van Jezus herkennen. Zo sus **ik mezelf**.

‘There is a woman in a lemon yellow coat, who just walks up **my** terrace. It is not so strange that **I** hallucinate a woman due to the bright sunlight. There are even people who see the face of Jesus in their dishcloth. That is the way **I** soothe **myself**.’

This fragment is the first instance in the novel where the *I*, Jakob, clearly hallucinates, something that happens increasingly often in the course of the book. Note that the narrator does not choose to use a second person pronoun here, while it would have been possible and even quite natural to do so. The use of a second person pronoun would have raised the suggestion that indeed anybody might get a hallucination in that particular situation. By the use of *I* instead of generic *you*, however, readers can distance themselves from the hallucination (or are distanced from it, by the narrator): for you, Jakob, it might not be strange to hallucinate, but I, the reader, do not share that experience.

4.1. Methodology and results

In order to investigate the role of second person pronouns and their different functions in processes of interpretation, we want to be able to compare the use of second person pronouns in the novel with the ‘natural’ uses of second person pronouns in ordinary spoken Dutch, as found by de Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear). To this end, we extracted all occurrences of the second person pronoun from the novel that were used as a subject. However, unlike de Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear) we looked at all types of second person singular subjects, not only reduced *je* ‘you’, but also non-reduced *jij* ‘you.NOMINATIVE’, the polite form *u* ‘you.POLITE’ and the occasional use of the English pronoun *you*. This yielded

760 occurrences. For each of the occurrences we determined whether it was used generically or whether it referred to the addressee. There was an agreement of 97.9% between the two authors. Disagreements were solved through discussion. Of the occurrences of the second person pronoun, 24.3% was used generically and 75.7% was used deictically to refer to the addressee. These percentages are illustrated in Figure 1.

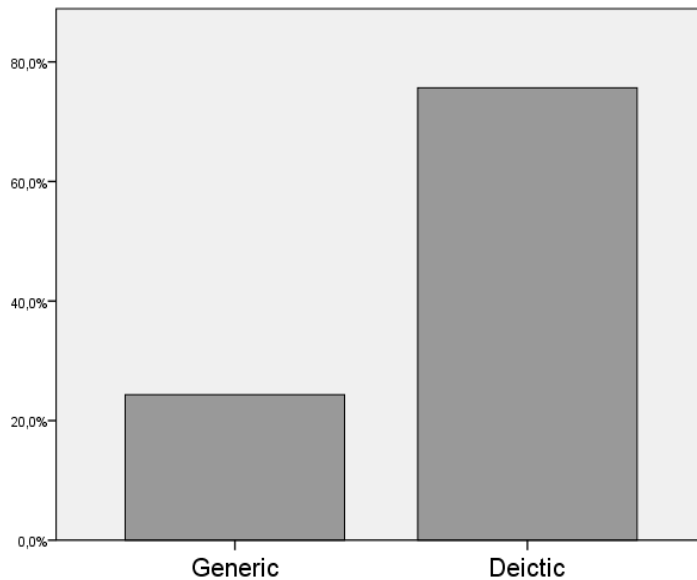


Figure 1: Distribution of generic and deictic readings of second person subjects in the novel *Dit is van mij* (2009)

While de Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear) found that only 53.2% of the second person pronoun subjects was used to refer to the addressee, Figure 1 shows that in the novel 75.7% of the second person pronoun subjects obtained the deictic reading. Note, however, that contrary to de Hoop and Tarenskeen, we included the polite form *u* ‘you’ and the non-reduced form *jij* ‘you’, which do not or only rarely get a generic reading. If we filter these out and only look at the distribution of deictic and generic readings of the reduced form *je* ‘you’, 65.8% of the occurrences get a deictic reading. This is still a lot more than the 53.2% of deictic readings of subject *je* ‘you’ found in de Hoop and Tarenskeen. Clearly, there are more deictic readings of second person pronouns in this novel than in spoken Dutch. The data we discuss in the remainder of this section reflect the distribution of all second person pronouns.

A reason for the larger amount of deictic readings in the novel might be that the dialogue in the book in which the second person pronouns were used mostly contained more interactive language. De Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear) showed that context, in particular sentence type, is an important predictor of the type of reading that a second person pronoun gets. Therefore, we also determined whether each of the occurrences of second person pronoun subjects in the novel was part of a question or a declarative sentence. There was an agreement of 98% between our classifications. Disagreements were again solved through

discussion. In total, 26.2% of the second person pronouns occurred in a question, while 73.8% occurred in a declarative.

Not only do we find a larger percentage of deictic uses of second person pronouns in the novel than in spoken Dutch, the proportions of generic and deictic interpretations across sentence types (declaratives and questions) also differ between the two studies. In spoken Dutch 9.5% of the generic interpretations was found in questions (de Hoop and Tarenskeen, to appear) while this percentage was 4.9% in the novel. These low percentages of generic interpretations in questions are not surprising since questions are prototypical instantiations of interactive contexts between the interlocutors in a conversation, which therefore trigger addressee reference. However, deictic readings do occur relatively more often in declaratives in the novel than in spoken Dutch. In spoken Dutch, more than half of the deictic interpretations of second person pronoun *je* 'you' (60.5%) occurs in questions (de Hoop and Tarenskeen, to appear), while in the present study only 33% of the deictic interpretations was found in questions. Hence, contrary to what has been found for natural speech, most of the deictic interpretations in the novel occur in declarative sentences rather than in questions.

To sum up, when we look at generic and deictic readings in the novel separately, we find the following distribution: of the pronouns that were used generically, 95.1% occurred in a declarative utterance and 4.9% in a question. Of the pronouns that referred to the addressee, 67% was part of a declarative utterance and 33% was part of a question. These percentages are illustrated in Figure 2.

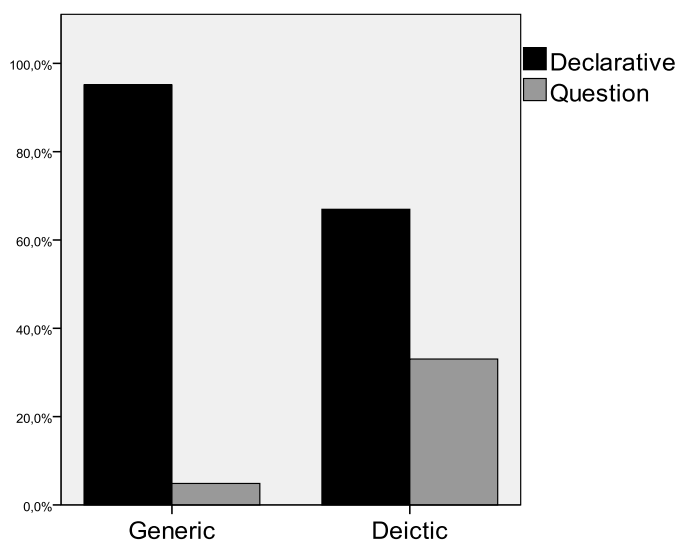


Figure 2: Proportions of questions and declaratives for generic and deictic second person subjects in the novel *Dit is van mij* (2009)

Thus, substantially more deictic readings of second person pronouns occur in declaratives than in questions by comparison with spoken Dutch. This raises the question whether these deictic second person pronoun subjects are used in an interactive or a descriptive way, that is, whether they are used to interact with the addressee directly, to get things done with the addressee, to influence him or her; or to report and describe the world to the addressee, to inform the addressee about his or her own whereabouts. With respect to the subject pronouns that were used to refer to the addressee, we therefore wanted to know how many were part of a descriptive utterance and how many were part of an interactive utterance. The deictic pronouns that were part of a question were classified as interactive. This left us with 385 utterances to annotate. Since this type of information is very context-dependent, we used a big part of the set for training and fine-tuning between the annotators. For the 140 utterances we annotated separately, there was an agreement of 81.7%. Differences were resolved through discussion. Together with the aforementioned factors, the annotation for interactive versus descriptive yielded three groups of uses of the second person pronoun, generic interpretations (24.3%), descriptive use of deictic interpretations (11.6%), and interactive use of deictic interpretations (in questions as well as declaratives) (64.1%).

Since the descriptive use of second person pronouns seems rather atypical in everyday communication but does occur relatively often in the novel, we wondered whether this descriptive use could have a special function within the story. To find out whether the proportions of the different uses were constant throughout the story or whether a change could be identified, we divided the 49 chapters by seven and looked at the use of the second person pronoun for each of these seven parts separately. The numbers and proportions for the three different uses (generic, descriptive and interactive) can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Absolute numbers and percentages of descriptive deictic, interactive deictic, and generic uses of second person pronoun subjects in the novel *Dit is van mij* (2009)

Part	Chapters	Descriptive		Interactive		Generic		Total
		Absolute	Percentage	Absolute	Percentage	Absolute	Percentage	
1	Chapters 1-7	6	6%	63	63%	31	31%	100%
2	Chapters 8-14	8	5.7%	88	62.9%	44	31.4%	100%
3	Chapters 15-21	8	9.9%	54	66.7%	19	23.5%	100%
4	Chapters 22-28	17	12.1%	89	63.1%	35	24.8%	100%
5	Chapters 29-35	10	9.7%	72	69.9%	21	20.4%	100%
6	Chapters 36-42	16	16.7%	57	59.4%	23	24%	100%

7	Chapters 43-49	23	23.3%	64	64.6%	12	12.1%	100%
	Total	88	11.6%	487	64.1%	185	24.3%	100%

What is especially noticeable in Table 1 is the increase in the percentage of descriptive uses and the decline of the percentage of generic uses in the later chapters. This development is illustrated in Figure 3.

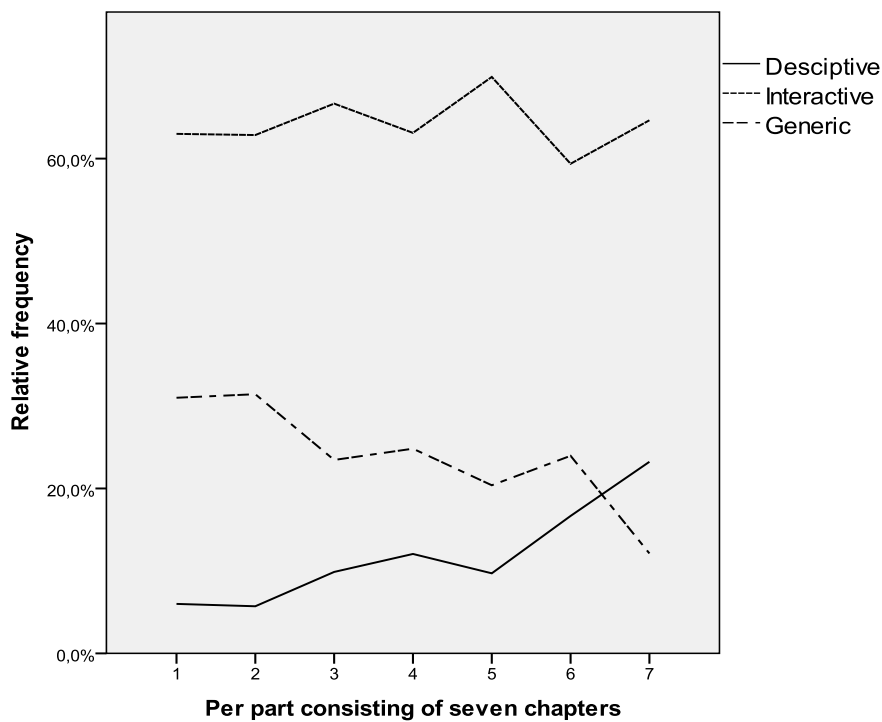


Figure 3: Relative frequency of descriptive deictic, interactive deictic, and generic uses of second person pronoun subjects in *Dit is van mij* (2009) per part (seven parts each consisting of seven chapters)

In Figure 3, the relative percentage of each of the three types per part of the story is plotted. Figure 3 clearly shows that the descriptive use becomes more frequent in the last part of the novel, especially in relation to the generic use of second person pronouns. In the next section we will attempt to account for this remarkable development in the novel.

5. A literary-linguistic analysis of the use of second person pronoun subjects in the novel *Dit is van mij* (2009)

We found two striking patterns in the functions of second person pronouns throughout the novel *Dit is van mij* by Saskia De Coster: first, a decrease in the use of generic second person, and second, an increase in the use of descriptive second person. We believe that the decrease in the generic use of the second person pronoun goes hand in hand with an increased distancing oneself from the narrator/main character. That is, in the course of the story, the reader identifies less and less with Jakob, the main character.

The identification effect of the generic use of a second person pronoun (Malamud 2012; de Hoop and Tarenskeen, to appear; Brunyé et al 2011; Andeweg et al 2013) is reminiscent of the effect of identification that readers appear to experience when a narrator of a literary story uses a second person pronoun to refer to themselves or to a character in the story. As Ryan (2001: 138) puts it: “Despite their different references, all of these uses [of second person pronouns] play on our instinctive reaction to think *me* when we hear *you*, and to feel personally concerned by the textual utterance.” Ryan (2001: 138) links this mechanism to the process of identification, which can be equated with the process of self-ascription when an addressee hears *you*: “Even when it refers to a well-individuated character in the textual world, the pronoun *you* retains the power to hook the attention of the reader and to force at least a temporary identification with the implied reference.” Thus, by its direct appeal to the reader via the mechanism of self-ascription, the use of a second person pronoun may evoke a higher level of identification with a narrator/character in a story than for example a first person pronoun would.

The second pattern that we found, an increase in the descriptive interpretation of the second person pronoun, is rather surprising, because normally speakers do not have to inform their addressees about themselves. An example of the descriptive use of *je* ‘you’ in the novel is given in the conversation below, where a girlfriend is talking to Jakob (the second person pronouns are in bold):

(6) ‘Dat eindeloze zwemmen, die onophoudelijke zoektocht, dat zenuwachtige roken, **je** hele dagen opsluiten in **je** appartement. Graven, graven, tot **je jezelf** bedelft. Er is iets wat **je** dwars zit, maar volgens mij weet **je** zelf niet eens wat.’ Ze plukt aan haar handdoek. ‘**Je** hebt een duistere kant die me bang maakt.’

“That endless swimming, the continuous search, the nervous smoking, locking **you** up entire days in **your** apartment. Digging, digging, until **you** cover **yourself**. There is something which is bothering **you**, but I don’t think **you** know **yourself** what it is’. She plucks her towel. ‘**You** have a dark side which frightens me.’”

Throughout the story the descriptive passages about *you*, Jakob, become increasingly important. It is very enlightening for the reader to know how other people see the main character because, clearly, this type of information about his strange behavior cannot be

derived reliably from what Jakob himself as first person narrator tells the reader directly. Towards the end it appears that Jakob has committed a murder, a fact which he has concealed from the reader and apparently even from himself. The reader only finds this out when Jakob is arrested. The detective tells Jakob her impression of the course of events that may have culminated in committing the crime. The detective's summary and interpretation of what happened earlier in the story is very helpful to the reader, and it sheds a completely different light on several earlier passages in the book. Below is one excerpt of what the detective tells Jakob (and thus the reader) (the polite second person and possessive pronouns *u* 'you' and *uw* 'your' are in bold):

(7) Rechercheur Lamartine zegt: 'Hoe gaat het met **u**? **U** heeft het niet zo gemakkelijk gehad de laatste tijd. **U** hebt onlangs **uw** baan verloren. **U** hoort **uw** ouders maar zelden en ook met **uw** broer Tim Gilles heeft **u** geen optimaal contact. **Uw** grootvader heeft zijn heup gebroken en verblijft nu in een ziekenhuis. **Uw** vriendin Roos Hampton heeft **u** gevraagd om wat afstand te houden en **uw** vriend Jack Li Wong is er met **uw** geld vandoor. (...)'

'Detective Lamartine says: 'How are **you** doing? **You** had a rough time lately. **You** recently lost **your** job. **You** seldom hear from **your** parents and **your** relationship with **your** brother Tim Gilles is not optimal either. **Your** grandfather broke his hip and is staying in hospital. **Your** girlfriend Roos Hampton asked you to give her some space and **your** friend Jack Li Wong took off with **your** money. (...)'

In the first sentence detective Lamartine asks Jakob how he is doing. This is clearly an interactive use of *you*. In the second sentence she suggests that he has been having a rough time lately. Then she starts using *you* descriptively by sketching things that have happened which may have caused Jakob's present state of misery. This helps the reader to interpret the past course of events, since the first person narrator has turned out to be extremely unreliable. By now, the reader has understood that the narrator is psychotic or maybe even suffers from schizophrenia. Since Jakob is the narrator and also the only focalizer in the story, readers can only get incomplete and unreliable information from what Jakob himself says and thinks. However, the other characters in the book, as long as they are 'real' people (not Jakob's hallucination) still seem reliable. Because Jakob is the narrator, there is no principled reason why readers should rely on the information given by other characters in the story, since all they say is of course reported by Jakob. Yet, the only way to understand what has actually happened in the story is by paying attention to what these other characters say to Jakob. In everyday communication it is very uncommon for addressees to be informed about themselves. Usually, an addressee knows all this information better than the speaker. In the novel, however, in order for the reader to understand things about Jakob, it is very convenient that the other characters address Jakob and provide information about him. Thus, the increased descriptive use of second person pronouns towards the end of the story is indeed functional.

6. Conclusion

This article compared the use of the second person pronoun *je* 'you' in spoken Dutch, as investigated by de Hoop and Tarenskeen (to appear), to the use of second person pronouns in a literary work. While the two studies show clear similarities in the use of second person pronoun subjects, there are some striking differences as well. In the novel we found more deictic uses of second person pronouns referring to the addressee in a descriptive way. We have argued that the increased descriptive use of second person pronoun towards the end of the novel is very useful for the reader because the information provided by the first person narrator himself becomes less reliable. Thus, the reader depends more on information provided by other characters and what these characters say to Jakob about Jakob. We also found a decline in the generic use of the second person pronoun, which we believe goes hand in hand with an increased distancing of oneself from the narrator.

Our aim in this study was to investigate how language is used to evoke processes of interpretation such as identification and distancing that people experience in reading literature. Although the use of the second person pronoun is of course only one of the elements of the language used in the novel, the two observations described above clearly illustrate how linguistic means such as the use of particular (functions of) pronouns contributes to how a novel is interpreted and experienced by the reader.

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Primary source

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