I, YOU, AND WE IN SERBIAN EFL ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING FROM THE ESSAY TITLE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Frequent personal pronoun use, mainly treated as involvement feature overuse, is a commonplace in EFL argumentative writing. This article explores whether the first and second person pronoun use in the Serbian component of ICLE v3 may have been prompted by the essay title factor. Therefore the selected essay titles were assessed according to the two criteria: the presence/absence of first and second person pronouns, and their different uses as regards personal involvement, i.e. personal (specific), or generic (non-referential) uses. The results of the analysis show that the pronoun use has been enhanced by the essay titles at least up to some extent. Moreover, student writers used the pronouns in their personal meanings more readily if such a model was offered in the essay title. The implication is that student writers should not only be advised to avoid personal pronoun use in EFL writing; they should be supported in becoming aware of the options of expressing their identity, which will lead to adapting their linguistic choices to genre requirements more successfully.

Keywords: first person singular; first person plural; second person; essay title; informal style; generic use; personal use

Introduction

In the relevant literature on EFL writing (Gilquin and Paquot 2007: 10; Lee and Swales 2006: 57; Altenberg 1997: 121; Granger 1993: 59),¹ it has been pointed out that most advanced language learners do not encounter difficulties in EFL writing concerning grammatical features, but they do have problems with lexical and stylistic features. Thus, the impression of non-nativeness in EFL student writing may be caused even by “over- and underrepresentation of words and structures” (Altenberg 1997: 121). Apart from other occurrences, the effect of non-nativeness in EFL writing may be induced by forms used in order to interact with

¹ The terms *EFL writing* and *learner writing* are used synonymously in this paper. The terms *learner writers* and *non-native writers* are used synonymously as well.

readers explicitly, or by forms expressing personal feelings and attitudes, almost as in informal spoken language. Such forms are frequently referred to as *involvement features* in literature (Ädel 2008; Gilquin and Paquot 2007; Recski 2004; Altenberg and Granger 2001; Petch-Tyson 1998²). Involvement features, even in L1, are acquired before “the opposite” *detachment features*, which produce the effect of formal address and lack the explicitness of the writer-reader relationship. It is important to notice that acquiring detachment features requires systematic acquisition provided only in formal education even in L1, which offers at least a partial explanation for exploiting involvement features in EFL writing.

Typical representatives of involvement features are first and second person pronouns. The issue of the first and second person pronoun use in EFL argumentative writing has been discussed in several studies, and mostly treated as an instance of overuse. Thus, Granger and Rayson (1998) reported that French learners of English overused first and second person pronouns; Granger (1998) and Aijmer (2002) reported that EFL learners heavily relied on *I think* in their writing; Leedham and Fernandez-Parra (2017) reported that non-native speakers studying at UK universities overused *we*, unlike *I*, in their writing. The papers did show that the pronoun overuse was evident, whereas they did not discuss whether the writing tasks themselves might have enhanced personal pronoun use.

Therefore this article aims to fulfill the abovementioned vacancy. In actual fact, the article should answer the question whether the first and second person pronoun use in the Serbian component of *ICLE v3* may have been encouraged by the title factor itself. The rationale behind the proposed aim is the fact that a number of Serbian *ICLE v3* essay titles use the personal pronouns themselves, which will be dealt with in more detail in the following part.

Literature overview

Recski (2004: 7) explored the proportions of first and second person pronouns in the six sub-corpora of the *ICLE v1* corpus: Czech, Brazilian, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Finnish. His results of first and second person frequencies are presented in percentages of the total

² Petch-Tyson (1998: 108) uses the term *writer/reader visibility* in order to denote such features.

number of words and compared with the native corpus LOCNESS (the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays).³

Ädel (2006: 82) provided parallel results for the Swedish sub-corpus. The results (transformed into percentages for comparability) are 1.22, 0.53, 1.61, the total 3.36, respectively. The same calculation⁴ performed for the Serbian sub-corpus of *ICLE v3*, henceforward ICLE-SE, makes 0.61, 0.102, and 1.95, respectively, with the total 3.58. Thus, the data clearly show that all the eight learner corpora of different linguistic backgrounds exploit first and second person pronouns more frequently than the native corpus.

	Czech	Brazilian	French	Spanish	Dutch	Finnish	Native
<i>I, me, my, mine, myself</i>	1.28	0.79	0.55	0.49	0.58	0.70	0.29
<i>you, your(s), yourself/-es</i>	0.47	0.42	0.38	0.29	0.47	0.37	0.14
<i>we, our(s), ourselves</i>	1.21	0.97	1.24	1.15	0.52	0.93	0.45
Total	2.76	2.18	2.17	1.93	1.57	2.00	0.88

Table 1. The first and second person frequency percentages (Recski 2004: 7)

On the other hand, the proportions of the pronoun use obviously differ among the non-native learner groups. Individual pronouns show considerable differences among the learner corpora as well. Serbian learners convincingly turned out to be the most frequent users of the second person; besides, Serbian learners were also the most frequent users of the first person plural, followed by Swedish learners.

Discussing the degree of comparability of the learner corpora data, Ädel provides an overview of the four distinct factors causing linguistic differences at the discourse level:

Factor	Argument	Explanation
Register awareness	instructional	background knowledge, primarily acquired through instruction
Cultural conventions	typological	differing conventions in L1 and L2
General learner strategies	universal claim	foreign language writers employ universal strategies

³ The Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays consists of both British and American argumentative essays written by university students, native speakers of English. The overall size of the LOCNESS corpus is 319,789 words. It was also collected at the Catholic University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.

⁴ Calculated on the basis of the complete corpus via the relevant *ICLE v3* homepage, <https://corpora.uclouvain.be/cecl/icle/home>.

Genre comparability	apples and oranges	corpora not being comparable due to external factors (e.g., time given, intertextuality)
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Table 2. The four factors causing linguistic differences (Ädel 2008: 41, modified)

In light of the overview above, the differences in the proportions of the pronoun use in the eight learner corpora can be ascribed to the factors of register awareness, cultural conventions, general learner strategies, and, also, to instances of *genre comparability*. Namely, although all the corpora nominally consist of the same genre, i.e. argumentative essays, and they were collected following consistent and strict collection guidelines, the issue of their full comparability can be raised concerning titles themselves.

Firstly, the native and the non-native corpora differ considerably according to the title factor, since a number of essays in *LOCNESS* was written on the topics which do not require personal responses (e.g., “A single Europe: A loss of sovereignty for Britain”, “French society and Institutions”), whereas most titles in the non-native corpora do favour personal involvement. This was first mentioned by Recski (2004: 2), who remarked that first and second person (over)use may have been caused by titles themselves. In other words, he noted that *ICLE* participants were expected to write argumentative essays that, by definition, should be formal, whereas essay titles included instances of explicit personal reference themselves, e.g., “Some people say that in our modern world, dominated by science, technology and industrialism, there is no longer place for dreaming and imagination. What is YOUR opinion?” This, according to Recski (2004: 3), can be seen as a factor causing the noticeable pronoun overuse in non-native corpora.

Paquot et al. (2013: 378) also note that personal reference cannot be avoided “in the case of argumentative essays such as those contained in the International Corpus of Learner English.” Their aim was to explore whether the noticeable EFL learners’ involved style can be attributed to the genre itself, i.e. the argumentative type of texts. Their pilot study, however, showed that “the more involved style commonly attributed to EFL learners’ writing is not prompted solely by the type of argumentative writing that has usually been analyzed in learner corpus research,” though they did conclude that students “adapted to genre requirements to some extent” (2013: 385).

Secondly, although it has to be recognized that most non-native *ICLE* essay titles imply personal involvement, they also differ among themselves regarding whether they contain first and/or second person pronouns, and, if they do, whether the pronouns are in personal or

generic use, implying different levels of personal involvement. In other words, the results in Table 1 extended for the Swedish and Serbian data obtain no information on first and second person use in essay titles; they do not provide any insight about the pronoun occurrences in generic or non-generic (personal) uses either.

First and second person pronouns as involvement features

It has already been stated that first and second person pronouns are generally seen as involvement discourse features, typically used in informal speaking. The ICLE-SE examples below, (1) and (2), imply personal involvement:

- (1) When *we* started our relationship, *I* was only a kid who was madly in love with him. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0005.1>⁵)
- (2) Wow, *you've* read through all of that opinionated, ill- informed sensationalist tripe. Congratulations on making it to the end. (<ICLE-SE-NS-0015.1>)

Now, *I* is rather unambiguous in its reference (Biber et al. 1999: 329), and it is typically an exponent of personal involvement. However, *you* and *we* are much more ambiguous (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1465-1468; Biber et al. 1999: 329; Quirk et al. 1985: 350), since they fluctuate between generic (non-referential) and personal (specific) uses. In actual fact, the preliminary analysis of ICLE-SE for first and second person pronoun use (Marković 2017) showed that the overuse of *you* and *we* in the corpus mostly includes their *generic* uses, denoting the mankind on the whole:

- (3) In books *you* are allowed to be an angel, an alien, a demigod, a hero or just an ordinary man. *You* can be in love, *you* can hate or *you* can suffer. (<ICLE-SE-ES-0008.3>)
- (4) [...] *we are all God's children*. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0010.2>)

Since the concept of personal involvement primes the qualities of personality and uniqueness, generic use should be treated as directly opposite to personal involvement. Besides, generic meanings are also commonly achieved using other linguistic means, e.g. *people*, *all human beings*, *everyone*, etc., whereas *personal* uses could be replaced by a very limited number of rarely used linguistic means (e.g. *the writer himself*, *dear reader*, etc.). Subsequently, generic *you* and *we* are not seen as features of personal involvement in the article.

⁵ Essay codes are provided in brackets following examples. First and second person pronouns are marked by italics in the examples.

It is important not to think about the *generic/personal* distinction as a clear-cut dichotomy, but rather as a continuum with intermediate areas. Thus, for example, *you* may be ambiguous, since “the deeper we go into impersonal *you*, the more personal it seems” (Bolinger 1975: 205); in the long run *you* may serve as a disguise for the writer’s personality. That use is referred to as *author pronoun* (Hyland 2002b: 352), and classified as personal involvement in the article:

- (5) When *you* look at both, good and bad sides [...], *you* can easily draw the conclusion that [...] (<ICLE-SE-BG-0052.2>)

In light of the literature review, as previously mentioned, the article aims to explore the factor of essay titles as regards first and second person use in ICLE-SE. More precisely, essay titles in the article are assessed according to the two criteria: the presence/absence of first and second person pronoun forms in titles, and their different uses as regards personal involvement, i.e. *personal (specific)*, or *generic (non-referential)* uses. The methodology in the paper is dominantly qualitative, including some basic quantitative data, i.e. frequencies.

The research and the results

This paper exploits Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (Granger 2015; Granger 1996) in a specific inter-corpus manner. The part of ICLE v3 (Granger et al. 2020) that is being explored selectively is ICLE-SE, the Serbian learner corpus, containing 325 argumentative essays, or 202,621 words. The selected part consists of 101 essays, or about 63,600 words.

Every national team contributing a sub-corpus to ICLE v. 3 was free to provide their own titles, apart from the essay titles provided by the ICLE team. In ICLE-SE, in the end, the number of essay titles was twenty-six. After careful qualitative analysis of title relevance to the issue in question, a selection process has been carried out.

Firstly, there are some essay titles which were used extremely rarely (e.g. “All armies should consist entirely of professional soldiers: there is no value in a system of military service”), and subsequently may be seen as individual, idiosyncratic responses. On the other hand, there are a few titles to which more than twenty students responded, which makes them more favourable for the research.

Secondly, some of the titles are not methodologically exploitable in the proposed research into the causal links. Thus, for example, “Early marriages are more likely to end up with early divorces” is a topic to which student writers respond differently: those who have had some marriage experience will offer personal responses, unlike others; “Does age matter in relationships?” lends itself easily to a personal answer

after some personal experience of that kind. Subsequently, in the case of such essay titles (i.e. most essay titles) the degree of personal involvement may be ascribed to the writer's life experience, and not primarily to the presence/absence of personal pronouns in the titles and their uses.

After discarding a number of essay titles for the abovementioned reasons, the following titles, each of which is specific for *presence/absence* of *generic/personal* pronoun use, were deemed suitable for the exploration of causal links:

- "Are we too dependent on computers?", being the only essay title containing the first person plural *we* in the *generic* meaning, with 24 essays or 16,512 words (Group 1),
- "In our modern world, dominated by science, technology and industrialization, there is no longer a place for dreaming and imagination. What is *your* opinion?", being the only essay title containing the second person pronoun *you* in the *personal* meaning, with 14 essays, or 9,617 words (Group 2),
- "Most university degrees are theoretical and do not prepare *students* for the real world," being the only essay title referring to all participants as a social group, but with no explicit pronoun use, containing 26 essays, or 15,644 words (Group 3),
- "Conflicts are necessary for healthy relationships", being the only essay title judged to easily lend itself to a personal response to all the student writers (since everyone must have had some experience in the topic), but with no explicit personal pronoun use, with 20 essays or 11,716 words (Group 4).

In order to form a 'non-personal' control group, the essay titles judged to be least personal in the corpus were identified. Taking into consideration the usual lifestyles and the socio-cultural background of the Serbian learner writers (Blagojević 2013), the control group (CG) was made up of the three essay titles, "Is artificial intelligence a threat to humankind?", "Is freedom of speech an illusion?" and "Should books, plays and films be subjected to censorship?," forming the group of 17 essays (5, 8, 4, respectively), or 10,111 words. The three titles discuss the topics related to the mankind or the society, thus encouraging *generic* uses of personal pronouns (if any); they do not use personal pronouns themselves; finally, they are all in the same, question form.

The quantitative overview

The initial overview of the quantitative data is presented in Table 3. It contains the basic data: individual pronoun hits, pronoun totals, and the overall total.⁶ Thus, *n* stands for the number of occurrences, *f*/10,000 stands for normalized frequencies per 10,000 words.

	G1		G2		G3		G4		CG	
essays	24		14		26		20		17	
words	16,512		9,617		15,644		11,716		10,111	
	n	f/10,000	n	f/10,000	n	f/10,000	n	f/10,000	n	f/10,000
<i>I</i>	69	42	56	58	109	70	65	55	17	17
<i>me</i>	6	4	4	4	8	5	5	4	4	4
<i>my</i>	26	16	4	4	8	5	24	20	4	4
1 st sg. total	101	61	64	67	125	80	94	80	25	25
<i>you</i>	73	44	22	23	96	61	150	128	16	16
<i>your</i>	23	14	11	11	38	24	85	73	7	7
2 nd total	96	58	33	34	134	86	235	201	23	23
<i>we</i>	325	197	184	191	191	122	74	63	177	175
<i>us</i>	77	47	63	66	65	42	15	13	40	40
<i>our</i>	193	117	99	103	96	61	29	25	53	52
1 st pl. total	595	360	346	360	352	225	118	101	270	267
total	792	480	443	461	611	391	447	382	318	315

Table 3. The quantitative overview

Group 1 (“Are we too dependent on computers?”)

The G1 data show that the 69 *I* hits appear in 16 out of the 24 essays in the group. Their role, just as the role of *me* and *my*, is personal. A closer look at the *AntConc* concordance plot shows that the distribution of *I* occurrences in G1 is rather uneven: whereas most essays contain a few *I* hits, an essay in the group contains almost a third of all the occurrences (21 hits):

⁶ The use of the possessive determiners turned out to be of much more importance for the research than the use of the relevant pronouns (*mine*, *yours*, *ours*). More precisely, possessive pronouns in the five groups turned out to be almost non-existent (a single “mine” hit in G2, a single “yours” hit in G4, and one more “mine” one in the CG). Therefore, we opted for the inclusion of the possessive determiners in this case at the expense of the pronoun forms.

- (6) First of all, *I* have to say that *I* chose this topic for *I* am a huge fan and user of all gadgets related to computers in general [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0026.1>)

Thus, had the abovementioned essay been left out, the average number of occurrences per essay would have been about two.

On the other hand, the distribution of *you* is more even, with up to maximum 7 hits in a single essay. It appears in 17 essays, mostly in generic use (just like *your*):

- (7) The principle is like this: *you* enter a vehicle, [...] and the vehicle starts to drive on its own without *you* even having to move a finger. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0003.1>)

The first person plural analysis shows, firstly, that all the 24 essays contain *we* occurrences. The maximum number of *we* hits in an essay is 37, all in generic use, just like *we* in the essay title. A part of the concluding paragraph is provided below:

- (8) [...] *we* are surrounded with them wherever *we* go, and *we* need them. But, *we* should have limits, and *we* should not use them all the time [...]. *We* should find a normal and healthy balance when it comes to *our* dependence on computers [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0004.2>)

Most essays contain between 10 and 20 *we* hits, in generic use, the average number per essay being 14. It is insightful to add that the number of *our* hits is very high – the highest across the groups: *our* appears in 23 essays, with the average 8 hits per essay. Moreover, its usage is also generic, and it seems to be inserted wherever possible, e.g.:

- (9) Technology undoubtedly plays a major part in *our* modern day lives. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0003.1>)
- (10) On top of that, we cannot leave out *our* mobile phones, a gadget so small and yet so useful. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0003.1>)
- (11) With the advent of personal computers, *our* pace of life has increased exponentially. *We* are all connected and tuned in. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0016.2>)

Group 2 (“In our modern world, dominated by science, technology and industrialization, there is no longer a place for dreaming and imagination. What is your opinion?”)

Out of the 14 essay responses to the ‘*your* opinion’ title, 11 contain the first person singular *I*, used in order to retell personal experience or attitude:

- (12) So, yes, *I* think there are still left some few calm places on this planet [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0045.1>)

Moreover, the previous excerpt is a direct answer to the title question, which obviously echoed in the writer's mind.

You hits are distributed in half the essays. What is important to emphasize is that, unlike in other groups, they appear in full personal involvement apart from generic use:

(13) Machines are taking people's jobs and replacing them in factories and companies more and more every day, which is terrible and just a little bit scary if *you* ask me. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0009.1>)

(14) Some of those people have made their dreams come true, but now I ask, will *you* do the same? (<ICLE-SE-BG-0020.1>)

The student writers are obviously 'talking' to their target readers in the course of essay writing. In (14), moreover, the writer is asking a question, which also shows that the title form echoed in his mind.

The first person plural is used in all the essays in the group. The average of *we* hits per essay is 13. *We* is used mostly generically, or, in several places, it is used as author pronoun *we*, in order to answer the title question implying the author's opinion under the disguise of the first person plural:

(15) However, *we* must ask *ourselves* if that is really true. [...] Having that in mind, *we* can deduce [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0020.1>)

(16) [...] *we* must not assume that newer generations are wrong [...] If *we* look at it this way, imagination and dreams are definitely not something that can easily be destroyed. [...] *We* must accept the differences [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0024.2>)

(17) The only thing that is left for *us* to do is deal with what comes in our stride and live *our* lives as best as *we* can [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0020.1>)

Our is also quite frequent, 7 hits per essay on average, mostly used generically.

Group 3 ("Most university degrees are theoretical and do not prepare students for the real world")

The G3 title refers to all student writers themselves, questioning whether most university degrees are only theoretical. However, it does not contain any pronouns. The first person singular *I* is used in 18 out of the 26 essays, the number of hits exceeding 10 only in one essay (28 hits). Just as in the previous groups, *I* is used in order to present personal experiences:

(18) When *I* left university and started teaching English in a secondary school, *I* found that, although *I* had good theoretical knowledge of what *I* was teaching, *I* had difficulties teaching it

to students and *I* did not know how to do the paperwork *I* was expected to do. (<ICLE-SE-ES-0007.3>)

The same role is performed by the two other parts, *me* and *my*.

You appears more frequently than in G1 and G2. Its role is mostly generic:

(19) After all, *you* can't become a doctor if *you* don't get through all these procedures. Similarly, *you* can't become a lawyer without spending some time in a courtroom, *you* can't be a teacher without getting in touch with pupils [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0037.1>)

However, in <ICLE-SE-ES-0016.3> *you* is used personally – describing the first-hand writer's experience, i.e. as an author pronoun:

(20) When *you* come to a real school and meet the real situations the things become terrifying. First of all *you* have some kind of unwritten pedagogical rules that are shared between *your* present colleges. Those rules and their teaching style might be total opposite to the things *you* learned. *You* can have attitude that this is not *your* business but *you* have already *your* first problem. [...] *You* are like a lonely soldier facing the firm and well organized system that will try to make *you* do the things on their own way. [...] (<ICLE-SE-ES-0016.3>)

We appears in 24 out of the 26 essays in G3, but it is less frequent than in G1 or G2 (225 vs. 360). It mostly denotes – students, either collectively, or as a specific group to which the writer belongs; nevertheless, its usage does imply personal involvement:

(21) When *we* study at a university we spend so much time in classrooms, in front of computers, and learning. *We* learn a variety of things, *we* cover different topics, *we* spend *our* time on various projects, and *we* listen to our teachers and their lectures. But what *we* do not do [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0037.1>)

(22) Most of my friends believe that *we* lack practical education in general and that the very lack of it is the basic issue for many problems in *our* public sector, government, law etc. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0001.2>)

We is also used as an author pronoun in an essay the conclusion of which echoes the title:

(23) Because of all the above, *we* can conclude that most university degrees are in fact theoretical and do not prepare students for real world because of the reasons related to students, teachers and universities. (<ICLE-SE-ES-0014.1>)

The average number of *we* hits is 7, but three essays exceed the average greatly, containing 20 or 23 hits.

The closer analysis of the two essays containing no first plural forms at all (*we, us, our*), which is generally rare in *ICLE-SE*, has showed that the two student writers took a completely impersonal attitude, not 'uncovering' their own student status to putative readers. Both writers use *student(s)* or *they*, but not *we*, unlike all other student writers in the group:

- (24) The happiness in the photograph of any *student* who has recently graduated cannot be described adequately, even if the greatest poets wanted to write about it or if the greatest painters tried to paint it. [...] The piece of paper, so carefully wrapped in red leather binding, means the world to *the student*. It means they made it. [...] *They* are the ones who have recently adopted the UN resolution on climate change [...] (<ICLE-SE-BG-0039.2>)
- (25) Most university degrees are theoretical and do not prepare *students* for the real world [...] On the other hand, the statement that university degrees are theoretical and do not prepare *students* for real life can be interpreted in a different way as being not completely true or false at all. (<ICLE-SE-ES-0014.3>)

Group 4: "Conflicts are necessary for healthy relationships"

The first person singular *I* is used in (only) 8 out of the 20 G4 essays. In one of them, <ICLE-SE-BJ-0044.1>, it is used 24 times, retelling personal experiences:

- (26) *I* think conflicts are good [...] *I* do not solve a problem by getting mad or yelling eventhough *I* sometimes feel relieved [...] *I* don't like people who try to be dominant over their partners and *I* also don't like people who avoid confrotations because they are afraid to speak up. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0044.1>)

The excerpt, as easily noticeable, contains a direct response to the title. Anyway, other *I* hits serve the same function, of retelling personal experience:

- (27) Since *I* was a child my mother have been telling *me* that *I* am a quarrelsome young girl. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0007.1>)
- (28) Even If *I* feel angry *I* try not to blame the other person because *I*'m aware that *I* also make mistakes and maybe don't have enough understanding and words of a support. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0044.1>)

You is used generically. Although it is nominally more frequent than in the previous groups, it is important to note that six essays contain more than 4/5 of the total hits. Thus, the maximum number in a single essay reaches 30:

- (29) If *you* simply accept everything that he or she says without stating *you[r]* own opinion, *you* might get into a trouble. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0007.1>)

On the other hand, *we* is less frequent than in the previous groups. Its role is generic:

- (30) Although, sometimes *we* find it easier to avoid conflicts, *we* should bear in mind that it is counterproductive. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0036.2>)

There are three essays in G4 containing no first person plural forms. Generic meanings are acquired using e.g. *people*, *many*, or *you*:

- (31) [...] *people* either ask their friends or family members for advice [...] So, are conflicts necessary for a healthy relationship? In my opinion, they are definitely a natural part of it, [...] Additionally, things that often lead up to a conflict are an essential part of getting to know the person *you're* dating – their habits, ways of thinking, what makes them tick, and so on. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0004.2>)

- (32) At the end if *you* are in a relationship with someone *you* need to try and do everything *you* can to keep the relationship strong and healthy, and some minor conflicts could help in making that possible. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0002.1>)

- (33) *People* going through a conflict are frequently seen as incompatible for each other's company. [...] To conclude, conflicts are very important in a healthy relationship. [...] (<ICLE-SE-NS-0008.1>)

Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that the title statement echoes in excerpts (31) and (33); the writers make direct references to it either by making a question out of it and answering it directly (31), or by confirming the exact statement in the conclusion (34).

The Control Group (“Is artificial intelligence a threat to humankind?”, “Is freedom of speech an illusion?”, “Should books, plays and films be subjected to censorship?”)

Firstly, it should be noted that the titles do not contain pronouns, and that the CG essays use the pronouns least frequently on average.

First person singular is also less frequent than in the four groups – at least twice less frequent. Thus, *I* appears in 8 out of 17 essays with the personal reference in a relatively even distribution.

The second person *you* is less frequent than in other groups, too. It appears in 7 essays, most of them containing 1 or 2 hits in generic use. The exception is <ICLE-SE-BG-0020.2>, containing 8 *you* hits in the personal reference:

- (34) Can *you* speak with a Scotch tape over *your* mouth? Nobody forbids *you* to do it, but are *you* able to pronounce the words clearly? If somebody told *you* to think outside the box, but then made sure the box is properly closed, would *you* be able to see, think, explore? I will tell *you*. *You* would not.

First person plural is less frequent than in G1 and G2, but more frequent than in G3 and G4. Its distribution is rather uneven across the essays. Thus, *we* is used in 15 out of the 17 essays, but 4 essays contain about 60% of the total *we* occurrences. All the four essays use *we* in the generic role:

- (35) Do *we* look to them like children lost in supermarkets, hurrying around, looking for someone or something, unaware of the rest of the world passing by us? If they do, they are partially right. *We* are hungry for information. *We* run, *we* seek, *we* discover. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0011.2>)
- (36) *We* use one of our most precious rights to insult people who think differently, to claim supremacy over others, or simply to mock because sometimes being "smart" of "funny" in *our* virtual lives makes *us* feel better about ourselves. *We* rarely stop [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0006.3>)

On the other hand, there is an essay containing no first person plural hits:

- (37) *Many* believe that major censorship should exist. [...] On the other hand, censorship tends to be seen as a violation of human rights: not only does it not let *people* entertain themselves [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0016.1>)

The essay also contains the direct answer to the title question:

- (38) Finally – yes, censorship should exist, but to a certain extent only.

Moreover, there are a few essays using e.g. *people*, *humans*, *everyone*, or *many* generically, and containing a sporadic first plural hit (*we* or *our*):

- (39) If *we* talk about movies, or plays, handouts could be handed out with every ticket sold that would contain ways in which they can be interpreted. [...] *People* have different opinions when it comes to this topic [...]. (<ICLE-SE-BG-0010.2>)
- (40) In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. held a historical speech, where he demanded a racial equality, justice for all people, since *we* are all God's children. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0009.2>)
- (41) [...] *every human being* is guaranteed the right to form and state any opinion on any topic of their choosing, without being punished for doing so. Ideally, *people* ought to understand that

[...]. One of the most pressing social issues of *our* time is determining where to draw the line between the right to freedom of speech and the right to not be discriminated against. [...] It is not unreasonable to expect that *humans*, as sentient beings, should be capable of appreciating the difference. [...] *Everyone* is offended by something. (<ICLE-SE-BJ-0023.1>)

Discussion

In G1, where the title includes generic *we*, the first plural is most frequent, and it appears in all the essays in the generic role; subsequently all the G1 essays contain at least a single pronoun form. Therefore, it can be concluded that the generic *we* in the essay title is responded to by extensive generic *we* and *our* use in the essays themselves, establishing a causal link between the two. The general impression after reading the essays in this group is that the first person plural occurrences fill in all the potential vacancies in the essays.

The G2 title contains a direct address to the student writer via '*your opinion*'. Here all the pronouns can be found in personal roles. Namely, the second person is used to address the reader, apart from its generic role; whereas first person plural, which is as frequent as in G1, is used as author pronoun apart from its generic use. Just like in G1, every G2 essay also contains at least a single pronoun form. Therefore, the G2 analysis shows that there is a causal link between the G2 title pronoun and the G2 essay pronoun use.

G3 title contains no pronouns, but the topic easily lends itself to personal responses, being closely related to student writers. Apart from the exceptional use of *you* and *we* as author pronouns in an essay each, it is worth noting that the first person plural is used mostly in denoting students collectively. However, there are two student writers taking a completely impersonal stand, not identifying themselves as students. Not every essay in the group contains first person plural, which is the most widespread pronoun generally speaking. All these summarizing statements lead to the conclusion that there is also a causal link in the case of G3.

G4 title contains no pronouns, but the topic is universally personal – conflicts in relationships. Its six essays use generic *you* very frequently, unlike the remaining twelve ones, using it sporadically; thus, overall frequent use of generic *you* is a rather individual choice. On the other hand, generic first person plural is the least frequent among the groups. Three essays do not contain first person plural at all. Thus, it is observed that although the topic is as a very personal one, the overall pronoun use is both less frequent than in the previous groups and mostly generic.

The following conclusion can be drawn: the title pronoun absence, although in the case of a rather personal topic, is not responded to by extensive use of dominantly personal pronouns, which may have been expected on the grounds of the topic itself.

Finally, CG consists of essay responses to the three least personal topics, the titles containing no pronouns. The total normalized frequency in this group is the lowest, which is also the case with first person singular and second person individually. The pronouns *you* and *we* are used generically. There is an essay not containing first person plural at all. Subsequently, it can be concluded that apart from sporadic personal *I* uses, the essays are devoid of personal *you* and *we*.

It is important to emphasize that direct responses or references to essay titles are found in all the groups. Even more importantly, the lexico-grammatical constructions used in the title are mostly kept in the student writer responses.

It is obvious that there is a degree of general inconsistency in the pronoun use in the student writing that is title-independent. Thus, student writers (in all the groups) use a range of available linguistic means to achieve mostly generic meanings, taking for granted that they are fully interchangeable. In this way, advanced EFL writing clearly exhibits a high degree of variability, the expected 'defining characteristic of learner language' (Saville-Troike 2005: 102).

Conclusion

In light of the findings, it is concluded that there are causal links between first and second person pronouns in the essay titles and the extensive pronoun use in the essays themselves. Namely, in totality, all the essay responses to the two titles including pronouns contain pronouns themselves; moreover, most essays use them very extensively. The generic *we* in the title is responded to by both extensive generic *we* and generic *you* in the essays; the personal *you* is responded to by personal uses of *you* and *we*, apart from their generic uses. On the other hand, the two groups whose titles do not contain pronoun forms at all, one of them being very personal, comprise essays without any pronoun forms.

Based on the preceding summary, we may conclude that, in the case of the ICLE-SE essays, interpreting first and second person pronoun only as an instance of personal involvement feature overuse is a serious simplification. In other words, the extensive pronoun use by the Serbian-speaking student writers turns out to be at least partially induced by pronoun use in the essay titles themselves. Moreover, it is also clear that the student writers are sensitive to whether pronoun uses in the titles

are dominantly personal or generic, adapting their linguistic choices to the "title model". It should be added that the general influence of the original title wording is also visible in several direct references made by student writers in their essays apart from pronoun use.

Furthermore, it is noticeable that first person singular is sometimes replaced by author pronouns *we* or *you*. The reasons are certainly to be found in the cultural conventions of the Serbian-speaking community (Blagojević, 2013), being a clearly "we"-oriented one. However, since the L1 culturally-grounded linguistic choices in a foreign language certainly make an 'ideologically loaded question' (Lee and Chen 2009: 92), this linguistic choice is justified in the paper.

We must not forget the fact that authorial reference is expected to be *generally* avoided by L2 students as a result of *formal instruction* (Hyland 2002a). Seeing such instruction as a disservice to students, Hyland (2002b: 357) claims that learners should be assisted in becoming aware of the options of expressing their identity. His view is even more to be supported in the case of essays which require the expression of the writer's identity, such as the bulk of the *ICLE-SE* essays.

Obviously, students should be supported and provided with available options of expressing their identity in EFL writing, not only advised to avoid authorial reference in formal styles. In other words, it is more plausible to help Serbian-speaking writers build the necessary consistency between genres and interpersonal discourse features than simply regard any pronoun use as unnecessary non-native personal involvement feature in EFL writing. Obviously students will express their identity and build some writer-reader relationship in their EFL writing; therefore, the only option is to instruct them how to make a reasonable balance between the genre conventions and their linguistic choices.

Finally, we may add that in order to assess student writing in an unbiased way, it is compulsory to take all the factors into consideration, including the very beginning – the essay title.

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ЈА, ТИ И МИ У АРГУМЕНТАТИВНОМ ПИСАЊУ НА ЕНГЛЕСКОМ ЈЕЗИКУ КАО СТРАНОМ КОД СРБОФОНИХ ГОВОРНИКА ИЗ УГЛА НАСЛОВА САСТАВА

Учестала употреба личних заменица представља једну од заједничких карактеристика неизворних корпуса писаног енглеског језика. Углавном се тумачи и интерпретира као експонент неформалног стила, односно последица недовољне упућености у жанровске карактеристике писаног језика.

У овом раду истражујемо да ли се употреба личних заменица првог и другог лица у корпусу неизворног енглеског код србофоних говорника, у оквиру међународног корпуса *ICLE v3*, може довести у везу са фактором самих наслова аргументативних састава који чине корпус. Прецизније, анализирали смо евентуални утицај коришћења личних заменица првог и другог лица у наслову састава на учесталост заменица у саставима, посебно у негенеричким употребама. Резултати анализе показали су да се

учесталост коришћења личних заменица у саставима повећава уколико се личне заменице користе у самом наслову. Даље, заменички облици такође прате наслове и када су у питању негенеричке употребе, што је још значајније за истраживање.

Подразумевамо да су србофони студенти извесно примили инструкције у погледу непожељности честог коришћења личних заменица првог и другог лица у академском писању, али извесно је да су такве инструкције мање сугестивне од употребе заменичких облика у самим насловима. На основу тога закључујемо да релевантне формалне инструкције морају бити допуњене представљањем других језичких могућности изражавања мишљења и сопственог идентитета на енглеском као страном језику. У том случају србофони говорници своју потребу за изражавањем идентитета могу делимично реализовати коришћењем формалнијих механизма, у циљу усаглашавања карактеристика дискурса са циљним жанром, односно овладавања стилским и жанровским карактеристикама писаног дискурса страног језика.

Кључне речи: прво лице једнине, прво лице множине, друго лице, наслов састава, неформални стил, генеричка употреба, лична употреба