



CORPUS STUDY OF THE CHOICE OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN SOCIAL MEDIA CHATS AMONG TERTIARY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Sociolinguistics variables such as age, gender and social class, among others, are said to bring the difference in the ways humans communicate. In this essence, this study investigated how age brings out the difference in the use of pronouns between three generational groups

Design/Methodology/Approach: Group WhatsApp chats were collected from three generational groups of students based on their willingness to give it out for analysis. These three generational groups are postgraduate students and undergraduates (Level 100, Level 400). These groups were randomly collected from over four hundred (400 students of the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast in Ghana based on convenience. A quantitative research design was adopted for this study with the help of a corpus tool (AntConc) to analyse the huge data gathered based on percentages.

Findings: This study found out that postgraduates and undergraduates (Level 100) use the first-person singular pronoun but postgraduates, especially those who represent the older generation tend to use the first-person pronoun more often while the second undergraduate group members (Level 400) use the third person pronouns. The study, per the findings, concludes that people tend to affiliate with others when they are young and lose group affiliation as they grow.

Research Limitation: The study was limited to WhatsApp group chats of university students within the undergraduate and postgraduate academic levels who permitted their chats to be used. This resulted in a narrow scope for the groups used.

Practical implication: The study reveals the preference or choice of pronoun usage among people based on their ages and the groups they affiliate more with. People may thus become more conscious of the choice they make of pronouns for usage as they become older or affiliate with older people.

Social Implications: the study re-examines existing literature on the use of adverbs, especially personal pronouns. Since many studies have been done on the use of adverbs, this adds a new strand of knowledge to existing ones on the subject.

Originality/Value: It provided empirical data on the demographic, precisely age characteristics of the subjects used for the research that affects their choice of personal pronouns among themselves and others.

Keywords: *Corpus linguistics. postgraduates. Personal pronouns. undergraduates. WhatsApp.*

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INTRODUCTION

That language varies with respect to age, gender, and status among several others is a fact that has been long established (Pennebaker, 2011). What does it mean, however, when one claims that *individuals identify themselves through their use of language because of their age, job, status, etc.*? What shows that such variations even exist? In the discussion, these questions are explored first from the perspective of what exists in scholarship and then a shift is made to further show how one can study language to claim such sort. In the second part of this paper, the study will investigate the variation in the use of pronouns by university students. For this exercise, the study grouped Level hundred (100) and Level four hundred (400) students as *undergraduate students* to represent younger people and *postgraduate* students offering Masters and PhD were selected in the adult group category.

Arguments as to whether language is dynamic or static have long existed in the literature on language studies. One view in the early stages of the study of language viewed language to be somewhat static whereas others found it as a dynamic phenomenon. In 1921, Sapir made a profound declaration that the variability of language is not news since everyone can attest to such change. In that, the sheer presence of difference in the use of the same language by two different native speakers warrants some sort of variability that is as much dependent on the language as it is on other social variables. Wagner (2012: 371) underscores the inherent need for variation in language upon realising that *like any other aspect of community social behaviour, language is as subject to change over time as clothing, music, government, policies, gender norms etc.* If clothes and style of dressing change over and within time, and the initiator of the change is mostly human, then the tendency that mankind will champion several changes in the use of language appears inarguable. Despite this look at variation, it took linguists up to the 20th century's advent of Sociolinguistics to put variationism on a proper footing and acknowledgement (Wagner, 2012; Wolfram, 2006).

Variation includes the alternative approach to doing or using something. Language variation then suggests alternative usages present at all linguistic levels. Wolfram (2006) established that *if a structure is at the heart of language, then variation defines its soul.* This attempts to explicate how for diverse purposes and different individuals, variation is inherent. In this study, it will be established that this is not so unique since as far back as the early parts of the 19th century, the great scientist, Charles Darwin, made interesting claims to the end that language change is the same if not as faster a rate as species of different animals possesses some distinctions. It is inferred thus that based on the purpose and the individuals involved in meeting that purpose, there is bound to be variation in the use of language (Aijmer, 2014). In other words, we can say that linguistic variation is functionally motivated, related to different purposes, influenced by different communicative tasks, produced under different circumstances and more so, by different people (Bano & Shakir, 2015).

Knowledge of language variation seems less than enough should one fail to investigate what brings the change and also what variables change. Among the scholarly brains behind language variation, credit is mostly given to the American linguist, William Labov, for providing empirical evidence to support language variation and equally to have postulated why such variations come about. An attempt will be made to look at linguistic variables of change.



Linguistic variables simply refer to linguistic units that are subject to change. They are structural units that have different variants which allow co-variations to be meaningful given an independent variable (Wolfram, 2006). In 1966, Labov's studies projected grammatical categories (such as pronouns, and tense) and even phonemes as variables. It is conclusive from this that the use of a grammatical category (such as personal pronouns) is subject to variations since it is variable. Bunyakarte (2015) added that for one to explore and show how such variables indeed are used variedly, one must know what brings variability to these variables.

Two views are held on the instrument of variation. These two have birthed two distinct studies in the field of Sociolinguistics. These two are diachronic and synchronic views. The two see variability in time. In this case, the diachronic approach focuses on changes that occur over a while synchronic sees changes that occur within a specific time. Wagner's views on these diachronic studies seem a summary enough for what such an approach sought to do or did. He writes:

By carefully examining the writings of earlier generations or civilizations, historical linguists were able, through a process called 'comparative reconstruction', to make educated guesses at how, for instance, spoken Latin evolved into its daughter languages such as French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian, or how the vowels of English underwent a dramatic reorganization in the late Middle Ages. This painstaking work has shown us that many diachronic changes (that is, operating over time) have progressed with a great deal of linguistic regularity. (Wagner, 2012, 371)

The value such studies possess and assist in theorizing in linguistics is akin to the provision of valuable information as to how some dialects or variables have changed over time and this is worth mentioning. The challenges inherent in this approach, however, are its usual neglect of social constructs as instruments of variation. Most of these studies are inclined to bring to the fore how language changes from one period to another. It was satisfying to have encountered Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) who interrogated this weakness of historical linguistics. Of all their arguments, the study finds their conclusion to be very informative. They conclude that the problem associated with the inability of historical studies to evaluate the problem, and provide the scope of such variation, among others could be solved, when variation studies focus on variation as and when the language happened. This opened a new way for synchronic studies. These studies, thus, found particular interest in other social constructs as channels of variation. Age, gender, context, and status are among the constructs involved.

Labov made an interesting observation when he set out to investigate variation in a specific speech community within a given time (Labov, 1966; 2001). Although several studies have made quite interesting findings, the pages of the current study are inadequate for a cursory list of even all the names of such studies. This study, however, relies on this finding to guide the study of pronouns among students with the principal aim of ascertaining if age could bring about variation in the use of personal pronouns.



Age aside, other social constructs may be relied on as means to tell how language varies (Afful, 2010). As indicated above, this may be looked at from two angles; either to ageing across/overtime or age within time. In the case of age and language change, Penelope Eckert has explained the practice quite well. Bentahar et al (2015) and Hovy and Sjøgaard (2015) explain that *ageing is moving through time*, [whereas] *age is a person's place at a given time to the social order: a stage, a condition, a place in history*. This explication can be relied upon to further position this study to be a kind of study that considers age and not ageing since it aims at investigating how a setting age period may result in variation in the use of personal pronouns. It is the aim of this study to reveal the puzzle involved in variation in personal pronoun use among undergraduate and postgraduate students.

THEORIES UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

Personal pronouns have received a lot of attention over the years. Grammarians like Randolph Quirk, Noam Chomsky, Sydney Greenbaum, etc. have written extensively on their grammatical qualities. Pennebaker (2011) among others has also looked at it from the psycholinguistics point of view. There are also authors like Ackerman (2019), Afful (2010) who have equally looked at the cognitive or sociolinguistics of address systems. There seems to be an agreement between Leech and Svartvik (1975), Greenbaum (1991), and Bunjakarte (2015). Sendén, et al (2021) defines pronouns as the part of speech that takes the place of a noun. This definition is reported to have emanated from the etymology of the word (Bradley, 2021). Even Lees and Klima in as early as 1969 supported the etymology, *pro-nomen*, (Greek for *anto-numia* which means *standing for a noun*) as a good ground for defining pronouns. The need to do away with ambiguities in the etymological angles that the definition of pronouns considers, led Leech and Svartvik (1975) to argue that a pronoun does not just replace a noun, but takes the place of a noun which has occurred earlier. This is also mentioned by Bonnin and Coronel (2021) in their write-up on people's attitudes towards gender-neutral Spanish when they weighed the issue of acceptability and ultimate adoptability. Harianja (2019) also argued that pronouns do not just replace nouns, but also take the functional place of nouns. They even give strong reasons to support this assertion. These pronouns include personal, reflexive, relative, interrogative, and demonstrative personal pronouns among others. Harianja (2019) argued to confirm what Wales in 1996 had pointed out that among all the types of pronouns, personal pronouns appear to be the prototypical pronoun. This has also been confirmed by Hekanaho (2020). Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) outlined in their *University Grammar of English* five basic qualities of pronouns that set them apart from nouns. They outlined that, pronouns do not admit determiners; often have an objective case; often have person distinction; often have overt gender contrast; and finally, in their singular and plural forms, they are often non-morphologically-related. These qualities of pronouns have been noted by writers like LaScotte (2016) and Conrod (2019) to support the position of Quirk and Greenbaum. These features also see personal pronouns as the prototypical of all pronoun types. This affirms the claim by Pennebaker (2011) and supported by Hevy et al (2015) that one could rely on personal pronouns to make predictions about the behaviour of others. And that one could tell who is more likely to commit suicide by considering the variation in the use of personal pronouns. Brown and Gilman's work of the 60's titled *The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity* set the pace for a variationist approach to the study of pronouns. They argue that the use of pronouns reveals



relationships between interactants. It was not long after this pioneering study that others followed suit to find out how social variables bring change in the use of pronouns and address systems in general. An example is that of Ackerman (2018). It is notable, however, that majority of the studies that followed Brown and Gilman were not necessarily into pronouns but addressed systems in general. This study, however, focuses on how social factors bring variation in the use of personal pronouns.

Empirical studies have been carried out on personal pronouns. Millan (2011) compared two dialects of Columbian Spanish to find out how pronouns of address are used in informal contexts. Considering that this study uses *WhatsApp chats* as the source of data, just like this work is doing, this study also finds it necessary to comment on Millan's work. The principal aim of her study was to examine sociolinguistic variables that inform the use of *vos*, *tú*, *usted*, and *mixed-use* in two varieties of Colombian Spanish. She relied on data from college students through interviews and questionnaires. In the first place, this spoke to the fact that studying college students' writings serves relevant data source for sociolinguistics studies. In her findings, she reported that extra-linguistic factors including sex, social class, place of interaction, relationship, generation, and emotional closeness play a great role in the selection of a pronoun over the other (Orozco & Hurtado, 2021). It is likely then for the current study to find some variations in the use of personal pronouns among undergraduate and postgraduate students in Ghana.

In a paper published in *English for Specific Purposes World*, Tayyebi (2012) did a cross-cultural study of *Personal Pronouns in English and Persian Medical Research Articles*. It was seen that first-person pronouns were the dominantly used personal pronouns in both cultures. English writers, however, made great use of self-mention than Persians. Li et al. (2012) observed that among social factors such as age, gender and occupation, age informed the choice of subject pronominal forms in Mandarin Chinese. For them, old respondents used more subject pronouns than young people. The corpus approach they used seems useful for the analysis of data of this sort. Most of these studies, however, did not use naturally occurring data and more so, failed to account for variations in the individual personal pronoun(s) used. Another work of interest to this study is that of Bano and Shakir (2015). They explored the use of personal pronouns in the *About Us* sections of university websites' homepages. This study analysed social media discourse and found interesting usage and it became a motivation for this study to rely on social media discourses for the investigation. This cross-cultural study made observations found important to mention. They found that the first-person pronoun was the dominantly used personal pronoun on the *About Us* sections of homepages. Among the first-person pronouns, the first-person plural 'we' was prevalent. This might have been because the universities wanted to advertise themselves to be part of a bigger entity than just an establishment for an individual or a few people. Bamman et al, (2014) also relied on corpus tools to study how gender brings about variations in tweets. They focused on 14,000 users of Twitter and found variations in the manner in which males position themselves to audiences, topics, and gender norms, differently from women. Finally, El Saj (2012) investigates discourse and social values in Oprah Winfrey Show hosting Queen Rania of Jordan. The finding suggests



among others that the arousal of emotions and sometimes passions emanate from values present though they are often hidden in the structures of texts.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study uses the quantitative method to conduct the research. This is mainly because it emphasises numeric and unchanging data and detailed convergent reasoning rather than divergent reasoning (Hopkins, 2008). This method will be helpful for this study because AntConc, which is the main tool for analysis, deals with figures and interpretations that will be used for this study. This will be deduced from the numbers generated from AntConc. These findings will be represented on a histogram chart for easy interpretation of all findings. The corpus tool is considerably good for the study of linguistics and a study of this kind is used for the current study. This approach is considered highly useful for studying linguistic phenomenon since it assists in providing a more objective view of linguistic studies (Ngula, 2012). Again, it allows one to easily analyse huge texts with less time. Considering that this study involved a huge data set, the study found it relevant to use this quantitative method. The corpus tool *AntConc* (version 3.4.3w) was used for this study.

Corpus Linguistics

The rise of the computer age and the increasing desire of mankind to know much more about himself and his environment called for research in every sphere of humanity. Of particular interest to the researchers have been the study of language (of course human language since by far mankind appears to have succeeded in making all believe he is the only organism that uses language). It is thus, interesting to find language being a subject of discourse in Philosophy, Theology, Psychology, among several others. When the term Linguistics was adopted as a cover terminology for the entire field of language study, it did not in any way answer the questions that border mankind. For example, questions as to the origin of language or why man was 'gifted' with language have not been responded to. It is in response to this need that Corpus Linguistics became a solution, so to speak, to this problem. Corpus linguistics allows one through a computer-mediated approach to study huge language production easily.

It must be mentioned that what is now termed Corpus Linguistics (CL henceforth) had been in existence far before the advent and popularity of computers (Poos & Simpson, 2002: 92) except that it has been facilitated by the advent of computers. Some scholars prefer to see Corpus being used to refer to texts collected as a representation of a given language or dialect. McEnery, however, provides a clearer explication of the concept as he points out that a corpus is a collection of (1) machine-readable (2) authentic texts (including transcripts of spoken data) which is (3) sampled to be (4) representative of a particular language or language variety (McEnery, Xiao, & Tono, 2006:5). Aijmer & Altenberg (2014) explain that Corpus Linguistics can be defined as the study of language that relies on computer software to analyse machine-readable linguistic data. This definition is ably re-echoed by McEnery et.al, (2006).



In summarizing the importance of using CL as an approach to the study of language, Ngula (2014: 522) seems to have explained it well. In his write-up, he outlines setbacks such as interesting lexical, phraseological, semantic and discourse insights which are easily seen in corpus studies. He mentions that they are hidden (for the linguist who runs from using the approach). Added to this, the tendency for CL to provide statistically accurate results approaches more objective because other means of language study lend the field to a great deal of subjective views. These reasons, notwithstanding, the current study employs the use of corpus as a tool because of two major reasons: the data set for this study adds to over one million words (1,292,975) and it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible for the researchers to do a manual analysis by going through all these words. When converted to machine-readable format, it became easier to analyse this data using AntConc. Again, Corpus Linguistics (CL) offers the researcher the resources to engage in sociolinguistic studies. For instance, the collocation tool which is present in most corpus software allows one to find the words that statistically significantly co-occur with a particular word under study (Baker et al, 2008). This among other features allows one to find the major discourse(s) surrounding a particular phenomenon. From there, it appears no better tool could ably assist the analysis of the three different groups in finding the frequency of occurrence of personal pronouns than a corpus approach. It was for these reasons, among several others that informed the choice of this approach for this study.

Population

The participants for this study were selected undergraduate and postgraduate students in Ghana. Group WhatsApp chats of these students were needed for analyses. To gain data for this exercise, the study relied on the convenience sampling approach to gather data and this allowed for the use of data from groups that could easily be found and from groups which were willing to provide their chats for analyses. Three WhatsApp group chats each from *Level 100* and *Level 400* students all from the University of Cape Coast were selected and these were readily available for the study. The postgraduate data included postgraduate group chats from the University of Cape Coast and University of Ghana, Legon. This was done because the token of each of the universities was not able to match up at all with the others from the undergraduate students. Despite all these, there were some disparities in the tokens of each of the data. *Level 100* chats had a token of 522,222; *Level 400* has 317,156, and *Postgraduates* has 453,597. The study was conducted despite these disparities because the researchers believe that each is above 300,000 tokens and that the variation and percentages will first be assessed internally; that is, within the group involved, this disparity will not present a major challenge to the validity of the findings.

It must be mentioned that the two groups of undergraduates were selected to see if there is a pattern of variation. Since the variation that will be found here may be extended age and variation in personal pronoun use, it is imperative that we set the age groups of all the participants. In the postgraduate groups, the age interval is largely between 26–34 and for *Level 100*, the age interval was 18-23 while *Level 400* had 23-25.



Process

The texts were first converted to a machine-readable format. Thus, all the WhatsApp chats were converted to plain texts to allow *AntConc* to assess them. After converting them, the study relied on concordance searches to find out the frequency of occurrence of the use of personal pronouns. The data was coded and each was given a name that will allow for easy identification. Each instance was recorded and divided by the total number of pronouns used and then multiplied by a hundred percent.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Use of Personal Pronouns Among Undergraduates and Postgraduates

To find the personal pronouns that were employed by the students in their chats, the study grouped the pronouns into three personal pronouns – first, second and third-person pronouns. Each datum was then explored to find out the total number of personal pronouns present and then the pronouns were grouped in terms of types of the personal pronoun. After this, there was a calculation done on the percentage of personal pronoun types present in the total number of personal pronouns used in the text. Table one shows a summary of the finding.

Table 1: Distribution of personal pronouns

PERSONAL PRONOUN TYPE	LEVEL 100		LEVEL 400		POSTGRADUATES	
	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1st Person	14, 008	35.6	9, 493	37.4	13, 427	40.5
2nd Person	12, 340	31.4	6, 206	24.4	9, 326	28.2
3rd Person	12, 961	32.9	9, 686	38.1	10, 364	31.3
TOTAL	39, 309		25, 385		33, 117	

The first person appears to be the most dominantly used personal pronoun. It was the most frequent pronoun used among all personal pronouns used by *Level 100*, and *Postgraduates* (35.6% and 40.5%, respectively). The first person is, however, the second most frequently used pronoun among the *Level 400*'s. The difference between the most used personal pronoun among the *Level 400*'s and the most used personal pronoun between *Level 100* and *Postgraduates* is 0.07, which is statistically insignificant. It can be concluded here that among undergraduate (*Level 100*) and Postgraduate students, first-person pronouns are the most used personal pronouns. In effect, they talk about themselves more than they talk about others. Examples of the use of first-person pronouns are presented below:

3/05/17, 12:15 - A: if **I** may ask can we use de NHIS card in registration????

3/05/17, 12:25 - C: **I**'m not sure, but let's all find out kk
 (Undergraduate chat)

10/05/17, 16:59 - A: Chaley come the room make **we** go find something eat

10/05/17, 16:59 - A: **I** dey hung

10/05/17, 17:02 - B: Well. Our attitudes determine who **we** are

10/05/17, 17:05 - C: where you dey? come make **we** pick some one-two
 (Postgraduate chats)



The emboldened parts of the extracts above are cases of the use of the first-person in the chats. It can be seen that the first-person plural and singular both occur in the texts. Thus, both the undergraduate and postgraduates talk more about either themselves as individuals (using I) or as part of groups (where we) is used.

Variation in the Use of First-Person Pronouns

It was interesting to look at how first-person pronouns were used in the chats. Since this type of personal pronoun occurred the most in the text, the study found it needful to investigate its distribution among the group of people investigated. As done above, the sum of first-person pronouns present in each of the texts was relied upon to find the percentage of times each of the first-person pronouns occurred in the texts. Table 2 is a summary of the finding.

Table 2: Distribution of First-Person Pronouns

FIRST- PERSON PRONOUN TYPE	LEVEL 100		LEVEL 400		POSTGRADUATES	
	FREQUENC Y	PERCENTAG E	FREQUENC Y	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENC Y	PERCENTAG E
I	4, 373	31.2	2, 833	29.8	4, 905	36.5
Me	1, 268	9.1	1, 207	12.7	1, 209	9.0
My	1, 520	10.8	941	9.9	1, 628	12.1
Mine	41	0.3	19	0.2	38	0.3
We	3, 564	25.4	2,192	23.1	2, 982	22.2
Us	1, 154	8.2	897	9.4	1, 182	8.8
Our	2, 030	14.5	1,396	14.7	1, 467	10.9
Ours	58	0.4	8	0.1	16	0.1
TOTAL	14, 008		9, 493		13, 427	

Unlike the distribution of all personal pronouns, there exists some variation in the use of first-person pronouns among the students. The difference lies greatly in the choice between first-person singular and first-person plurals. As can be seen in *Table 2* above, the first-person singular was mostly used in the chats of the postgraduate students than the undergraduate students. For instance, in the use of the first person singular (subject form), whereas the postgraduates recorded 36.5% of use, the *Level 100's* recorded 31.2% while the *Level 400's* recorded 29.8%. It can thus be argued that postgraduate students talk of themselves as individuals more than undergraduate students who tend to prefer the plural form more. This finding supports what Bradley (2021) and Hekanaho (2020) have both elucidated in their research. The variation in terms of the total percentage of use of the first-person plural and singular among the groups might help explain what is happening.

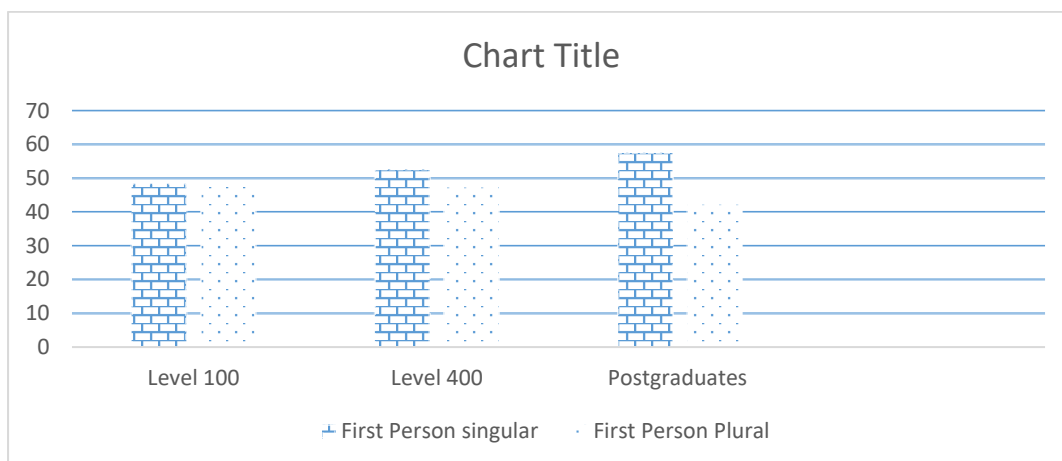


Figure 1: Difference in the use of first-person

After adding the percentages of use of first-person singular pronouns and the first-person plural pronouns, *Figure 1* above shows a pattern that the variation takes. In terms of first-person singular usage, *Level 100* records the lowest of instances of use, and *Level 400* is also lesser than *Postgraduates* who appear to make extensive use of the first-person singular of the three groups. In the case of the first-person plural, the picture turns so that *Level 100* records the highest followed by *Level 400* before *postgraduates*. The study can arguably conclude here that people tend to affiliate with others when they are young and lose the group affiliation as they grow as posited by Hekanaho (2022), Bonnin and Coronel (2021) and Senden et al (2021). Despite recording the least among all groups in terms of first-person singular pronoun use, the *Level 100*'s interestingly recorded as much as *Postgraduates* in the use of the first-person singular form “mine”. The study decided to explore to see what caused this. What was found is worthy of mention. As will be evident in *figures 2* and *3* below, *Level 100* students used the form “mine” as a determiner and not as a pronoun, unlike the *Postgraduate* students who always used it as a pronoun.

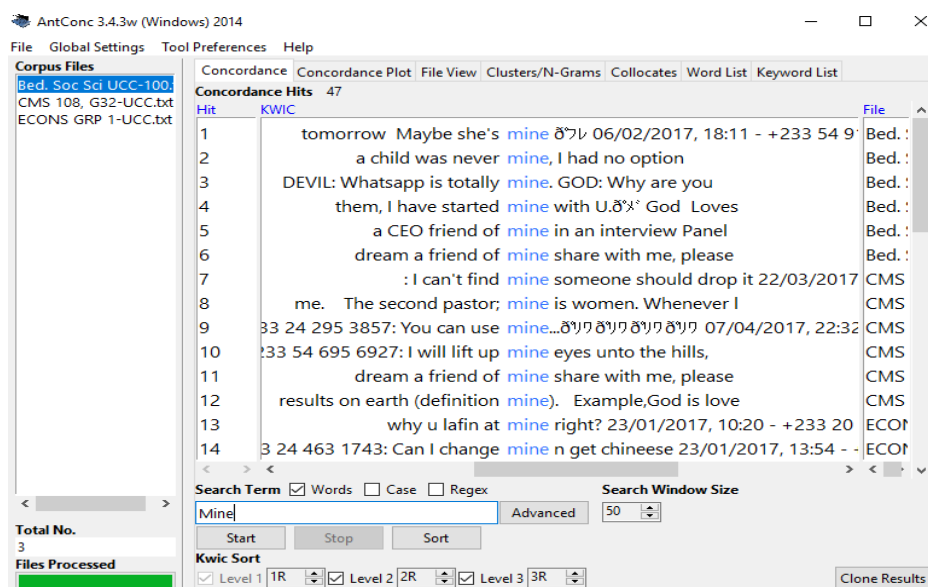


Figure 2: Level 100 use of Mine



As can be seen in figure 2, “mine” occurs before nouns. For example, *mine share*, *mine someone*, and *mine right* are present in the figure above but upon a close look at the figure below this structural pattern never occurs.

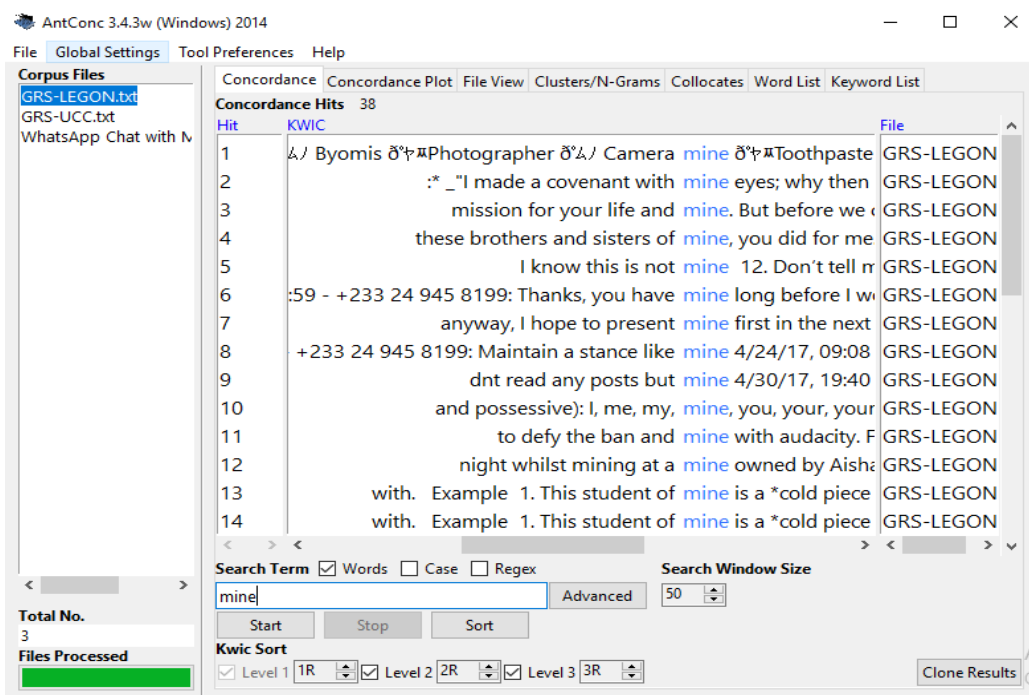


Figure 3: Postgraduates' use of Mine

There is no single instance of “mine” being used before a noun among the post graduates. *Level 400* towed the pattern of the *Postgraduates*.

Variation in the Use of Second-Person Pronouns

Unlike the first-person pronouns that showed marked variations in use among the three groups which became two broad groups, the use of the second-person pronouns did not have any significant variation. Table 3 below presents a distribution of the second person among the groups.

Table 3: Distributions of second-person pronoun

2ND PERSON PRONOUN TYPE	LEVEL 100		LEVEL 400		POSTGRADUATES	
	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
You	8, 332	67.5	4, 256	68.6	6, 556	70.3
Your	3, 933	31.9	1, 929	31.1	2, 710	29.1
Yours	75	0.6	21	0.3	60	0.6
TOTAL	1, 2340		6, 206		9, 326	

In table 3, though *Level 100 students* use less of the second-person subjective form than *Level 400's* and *Postgraduate* students, the variation is not marked. The same is the case in the variation in the use of the form “*your*”.

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Variation in the Use of Third-Person Pronouns

As evident in table 1 above, the third person appears to be the second most used personal pronoun form for *Level 100* and *Postgraduates* but the first most used among *Level 400* students. It appears then that aside talking about themselves, *Level 100* and *postgraduate students* talk about others more whereas *Level 400* students talk about others more than themselves. Table 4 below presents a summary of the use of the third person.

Table 4: Variation in the use of third-person pronouns

3RD PERSON PRONOUN TYPE	LEVEL 100		LEVEL 400		POSTGRADUATES	
	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
He	2, 203	17.1	1, 765	20.9	2, 069	20.1
She	847	6.5	438	5.2	446	4.3
It	4, 549	35.1	2, 363	28.1	3,501	33.8
Him	893	6.9	754	8.9	830	8.0
Her	888	6.9	512	6.1	510	4.9
Hers	6	0.1	0	0	2	0.02
They	1, 530	11.8	1, 158	13.7	1,261	12.2
Their	1, 158	8.9	806	9.6	1, 027	9.9
Theirs	17	0.1	13	0.2	13	0.1
Them	870	6.7	614	7.2	705	6.8
TOTAL	12, 961		8, 423		10, 364	

Like the use of the second person, there are many similarities between the two broad groups as far as the third person pronoun-use is concerned. There are some variations in the usage of the third-person pronoun. This finding is ably supported by the study conducted by Vergoossen (2021). *Level 400* students appear to have used the third-person singular pronouns more than the two others. They are followed by the *Postgraduates*. Interestingly, *Level 100* students appear to have used the first-person singular the least.

CONCLUSION

At a glance, one would have thought that the outcome of this study could have been obvious that the extremely younger (Level 100) and older (postgraduate) generations would have used the third person pronouns but it rather turned out that they are the group who are least interested in discussing issues related to other people. This study has been backed by the variationist approach in sociolinguistics and this theory has in its camp the variables that cause change or differences in the way humans communicate. These variables are gender, age and social class, amongst others. However, this study took on age as a variable to determine how this variable (age) among all the variables is said to have the greatest influence on communication. Corpus Linguistics helped in the analysis of the huge data this study worked with and at the end of the entire exercise with the help of *AntConc*, a conclusion can be reached that there exists some variation in the use of personal pronouns. The analysis revealed that the difference lies greatly in the choice between first-person singular and first-person plurals. It was found that the first-person singular was mostly used in the chats of the postgraduate students more than the undergraduate students (level 100). Again, postgraduate students talk of themselves as



individuals more than undergraduates (level 400) students who tend to prefer the plural form the most, as was found in the analysis.

To round it all up, the study can boldly conclude that undergraduates (level 400) tend to use the third-person pronouns more while postgraduates tend to use the first-person singular the most. It is also worthy of mention that despite this, a group in the undergraduate (level 100) also use first-person pronouns but that of the postgraduates is on the rise. People, therefore, tend to affiliate with others when they are young and lose group affiliation as they grow.

Further research

Further research can be carried out using other variables such as gender and social class in the use of pronouns. It will be interesting to find out what conclusions can be drawn from such a study.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Sample of Postgraduate Chats

AntConc 3.4.3w (Windows) 2014

File Global Settings Tool Preferences Help

Corpus Files
 GRS-LEGON.txt
 GRS-UCC.txt

Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams Collocates Word List Keyword List

Concordance Hits 2069

Hit	KWIC	File
1	nd the Scholarship Secretariat. He then handed over a letter	GRS-LEGON
2	the Minister told the us he had a meeting for which	GRS-LEGON
3	a meeting for which reason he cant stay any longer and	GRS-LEGON
4	stole a tray of egg. He got 30yrs in prison bcos	GRS-LEGON
5	collapsed. Do u know why? He stole a bag of rice. 8リ#8リヲ8リ	GRS-LEGON
6	attend any of the courses he/she prefers. You don't	GRS-LEGON
7	off man's penis as he 'attempted to rape her' Mr.	GRS-LEGON
8	to start washing the clothes, he dragged her from behind and	GRS-LEGON
9	I resisted initially and later he threatened me saying "he is	GRS-LEGON
10	later he threatened me saying "he is the commander and so	GRS-LEGON
11	he commander and so anything he wants he gets it" and	GRS-LEGON
12	and so anything he wants he gets it" and because he	GRS-LEGON
13	he gets it" and because he said that I got sacred	GRS-LEGON
14	said that I got sacred he would do something bad to	GRS-LEGON

Search Term Words Case Regex Search Window Size 50

Kwic Sort
 Level 1 1R Level 2 2R Level 3 3R

Total No. 2
 Files Processed

AntConc 3.4.3w (Windows) 2014

File Global Settings Tool Preferences Help

Corpus Files
 GRS-LEGON.txt
 GRS-UCC.txt

Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams Collocates Word List Keyword List

Concordance Hits 4890

Hit	KWIC	File
1	/14/16, 22:18 - +233 24 596 6077: I didn't sign up for	GRS-LEGON
2	/17/16, 11:21 - +233 24 305 2318: I mean this pags 9/17/16, 1	GRS-LEGON
3	the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to	GRS-LEGON
4	returning Officers First Degree/HND i. Experience in similar posit	GRS-LEGON
5	Degree/HND/ IT related Course i. Experience in similar posit	GRS-LEGON
6),Legal and Accounting Background i. Experience in Similar Posit	GRS-LEGON
7	teachers , Cert. 'A', SSSCE/ WASSCE i. Work experience in similar	GRS-LEGON
8	Dip. (Education), Teachers Cert. 'A' i. Experience in similar Posit	GRS-LEGON
9	2016 Ballot Issuers SSSCE/WASSCE i. Working Knowledge of Co	GRS-LEGON
10	option than to give in. "I offered him water and in	GRS-LEGON
11	to enter my other room I resisted initially and later h	GRS-LEGON
12	" and because he said that I got sacred he would do	GRS-LEGON
13	do something bad to me. "I decided to play to his	GRS-LEGON
14	gallery on the bed and I told him I am ready	GRS-LEGON

Search Term Words Case Regex Search Window Size 50

Kwic Sort
 Level 1 1R Level 2 2R Level 3 3R

Total No. 2
 Files Processed



Appendix 2 Sample of Undergraduate chats (Level 100)

AntConc 3.4.3w (Windows) 2014

File Global Settings Tool Preferences Help

Corpus Files
Bed. Soc Sci UCC-100:
CMS 108, G32-UCC.txt
ECONS GRP 1-UCC.txt

Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams Collocates Word List Keyword List

Concordance Hits FINISHED

Hit	KWIC	File
1	Nana is 3.8 feet and he is your Commander in	Bed. Soc Sci
2	* *9×9=81* *9×10=90* When He was done, he looked	Bed. Soc Sci
3	9×10=90* When He was done, he looked back at the	Bed. Soc Sci
4	letting us know that he's with us.δ'ルδ'リ? 10/01/201	Bed. Soc Sci
5	50 and Ghc110 respectively, if he/she goes by the	Bed. Soc Sci
6	"LORD' 'of 'LORD's,' He' 'is 'the' 'WAY', 'the "	Bed. Soc Sci
7	finished enjoying their meal he shouted for another order: "	Bed. Soc Sci
8	Pappu finished his drink he shouted again: "Give me	Bed. Soc Sci
9	CASTY and how good he has been as a	Bed. Soc Sci
10	Job was blessed when he prayed for his friends ...	Bed. Soc Sci
11	in our Parliamentary room..... He sleep under me thou...	Bed. Soc Sci
12	+233 50 848 0235: I don't think he is 06/02/2017, 18:02 - +233	Bed. Soc Sci
13	everyone according to what he has done. I am	Bed. Soc Sci
14	Repairer (rip33la) But He Later Sacked Me, Bcuz	Bed. Soc Sci

Search Term Words Case Regex Search Window Size 50

Start Stop Sort

Kwic Sort Level 1 1R Level 2 2R Level 3 3R Clone Results

AntConc 3.4.3w (Windows) 2014

File Global Settings Tool Preferences Help

Corpus Files
Bed. Soc Sci UCC-100:
CMS 108, G32-UCC.txt
ECONS GRP 1-UCC.txt

Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams Collocates Word List Keyword List

Concordance Hits 1530

Hit	KWIC	File
1	people are alone when they suffer a heart attack	Bed. Soc Sci
2	.pls check on dem.They said an accident has	Bed. Soc Sci
3	at the students and they were all *laughing at	Bed. Soc Sci
4	friends and hear what they would like to steal	Bed. Soc Sci
5	else their meals. When they finished enjoying their mea	Bed. Soc Sci
6	Christians but I think they forgot that the Bible	Bed. Soc Sci
7	into the ideal self they aspire to be. As	Bed. Soc Sci
8	4: Ikrδ'リツδ'リツδ'リツδ'リツ How can they say blacks are less	Bed. Soc Sci
9	despite the fact that they are students, have done	Bed. Soc Sci
10	the SRC officeδ'レムδ'マδ'マリand they are partnering the ministry	Bed. Soc Sci
11	3277-44% NPP: 5716026-53% THEY WANT TO FORGET, WE	Bed. Soc Sci
12	wash their robes, that they may have the right	Bed. Soc Sci
13	Many Show Organizers and they always Paid me with	Bed. Soc Sci
14	Soap Concert Party Audition" They Rejected Me" #AgyaKoo" I	Bed. Soc Sci

Search Term Words Case Regex Search Window Size 50

Start Stop Sort

Kwic Sort Level 1 1R Level 2 2R Level 3 3R Clone Results



Appendix 3 Sample of Undergraduate Chats (Level 400)

AntConc 3.4.3w (Windows) 2014

File Global Settings Tool Preferences Help

Corpus Files
Finallist GRP UCC.txt
Finally -UCC 400.txt
Phil Studs UCC-400.txt

Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams Collocates Word List Keyword List

Concordance Hits 2192

Hit	KWIC	File
1	mmediately Registration starts, we shall give you the	Finallist GRP
2	E REGISTRATION & POSTINGS. We don't want to	Finallist GRP
3	for now. With time, we will be giving you	Finallist GRP
4	/17, 17:23 - +233 24 339 7370: We shall be given you	Finallist GRP
5	E REGISTRATION & POSTINGS. We don't want to	Finallist GRP
6	for now. With time, we will be giving you	Finallist GRP
7	mmediately Registration starts, we shall give you the	Finallist GRP
8	/17, 18:07 - +233 24 339 7370: We shall be given you	Finallist GRP
9	E REGISTRATION & POSTINGS. We don't want to	Finallist GRP
10	for now. With time, we will be giving you	Finallist GRP
11	mmediately Registration starts, we shall give you the	Finallist GRP
12	/17, 19:08 - +233 24 339 7370: We shall be given you	Finallist GRP
13	E REGISTRATION & POSTINGS. We don't want to	Finallist GRP
14	for now. With time, we will be giving you	Finallist GRP

Search Term Words Case Regex Advanced Search Window Size 50

Start Stop Sort

Kwic Sort Level 1 1R Level 2 2R Level 3 3R Clone Results

AntConc 3.4.3w (Windows) 2014

File Global Settings Tool Preferences Help

Corpus Files
Finallist GRP UCC.txt
Finally -UCC 400.txt
Phil Studs UCC-400.txt

Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams Collocates Word List Keyword List

Concordance Hits 4256

Hit	KWIC	File
1	3/11/17, 16:57 - Messages you send to this group	Finallist GRP
2	C~ NSS 2017" 3/11/17, 16:57 - You joined using this group'	Finallist GRP
3	your pin is Available. You can only make GHC 40	Finallist GRP
4	an official procedure for you to follow if you	Finallist GRP
5	you to follow if you wish to do your	Finallist GRP
6	starts, we shall give you the process to follow.	Finallist GRP
7	, we will be giving you step by step process	Finallist GRP
8	24 339 7370: We shall be given you the REQUIREMENTS for Req	Finallist GRP
9	beneficial in terms of you getting your preferred place	Finallist GRP
10	, we will be giving you step by step process	Finallist GRP
11	beneficial in terms of you getting your preferred place	Finallist GRP
12	an official procedure for you to follow if you	Finallist GRP
13	you to follow if you wish to do your	Finallist GRP
14	starts, we shall give you the process to follow.	Finallist GRP

Search Term Words Case Regex Advanced Search Window Size 50

Start Stop Sort

Kwic Sort Level 1 1R Level 2 2R Level 3 3R Clone Results