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# Does *you* mean *I*?

## Generic *du* ('you') as a case of informalization and subjectification in Swedish

*Sanna Skärhund*

In Swedish today, *du* ('you') is sometimes used with generic reference. This use of generic *du* is often claimed to be a new invention, triggered by English influence in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, in this article an analysis of occurrences of *du* from the period 1225–2013 is presented that demonstrates that generic *du* was used even as early as the Old Swedish period (1225–1526), i.e. long before the English influence on Swedish began. Nevertheless, the analysis also reveals that the use of generic *du* has increased in newspapers during the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that examples of generic *du* from before and after the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century differ in several important aspects, the most important being that *du* in Swedish today often refers to the speaker him/herself. In this article it is argued that this development is best understood as a case of *informalization* (e.g. Fairclough 1995) and *subjectification* (e.g. Traugott 2010).

Keywords: generic pronouns, *du*, *you*, Swedish, subjectification, informalization, language change

### 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Genericity is an intriguing subject that has attracted a great deal of attention during the last few years. In particular, research centring on pronouns with

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1. I thank the editors of this volume as well as three anonymous reviewers for pointing out unclear passages in an earlier version of this article and suggesting ways of improvement. Also, I want to thank Lars-Olof Delsing and Morgan Dryden for their valuable comments. All remaining mistakes are, of course, my own.

generic reference has proliferated (e.g. Egerland 2003, 2010; Altenberg 2004/5; Giacalone Ramat & Sansò 2007; Jensen 2009; Hoekstra 2010; Siewierska 2011; Coussé & van der Auwera 2012; Gast et al. 2015; de Hoop & Tarenskeen 2015). In Swedish, several pronouns are used to express human generic or indefinite reference, in particular *man* ('man'), but also *en* ('one') and *de* ('they'), all in use since at least the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century (Söderwall 1884–1918).<sup>2</sup> There is, however, also a purportedly newer addition to the repertoire of generic pronouns in Swedish. Since the late 1970s, linguists have observed that the second person singular pronoun *du* ('you') is used with generic reference (e.g. Pettersson 1978; Ljung 1982). See examples (1) and (2) from *Svenska Akademiens Grammatik* (henceforth SAG, 1999, 2: 264):

- (1) Under franska revolutionen var **du** tvungen att vara för eller mot.  
'During the French revolution **you** had to be either for or against.'<sup>3</sup>
- (2) Den manliga läkaren anser att utbrändhet är ett sjukdomstillstånd.  
– Är **du** djupt deprimerad är **du** sjuk, betonar han.  
'The male doctor considers burn-out to be a disease.  
– If **you** are profoundly depressed **you** are sick, he emphasizes.'

This way of using a personal pronoun with generic reference is far from unique to Swedish. Generic uses of personal pronouns are common among the world's languages (Kitagawa & Lehrer 1990: 740). Siewierska (2004: 212) lists Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages, as well as Gulf Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin, Modern Hebrew and more than a dozen others, as languages that have developed a generic use of a second person singular personal pronoun.

In English, the personal pronoun *you* is widely used with generic reference. Hence, it is normally assumed that generic *du* in Swedish is a new phenomenon that has become popular because of increased English influence during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Pettersson 1978; Ljung 1982; Törnudd-Jalovaara 1997; Fremer 2000). However, in this article the notion of generic *du* as new and foreign to traditional Swedish is contested. A study of occurrences of *du* in Old Swedish (1225–1526) is presented that shows how *du* with generic reference was used well before the English influence on Swedish began. Nevertheless, an analysis

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2. *En* ('one') is traditionally most used in regional varieties (see Dahl 2015: 212), but has also been reclaimed by Swedish feminists trying to avoid the pronoun *man* because of its connotation with the noun *man* ('man') (Skärlund 2016).  
3. All translations from Swedish are my own.

of occurrences of *du* in Swedish newspaper corpora also demonstrates that occurrences of generic *du* from before and after the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century differ in several important aspects. This is further illustrated by the third point made in this article: that the development of generic *du* in newspapers during this period is best understood as a case of *informalization* (e.g. Fairclough 1995) and *subjectification* (e.g. Traugott 2010).

Even though generic *du* has been studied to a great extent in Danish conversations (Jensen 2009; Beck Nielsen, Fosgerau & Jensen 2009; Maegaard et al. 2013; Jensen & Gregersen 2016), as well as to a more limited degree in Swedish conversations in Finland (Fremer 1999, 2000), there are no prior diachronic studies of the phenomenon in Swedish, to my knowledge.

In section 2 the material and method applied in the study are presented. Section 3 relates the results of the study, while section 4 discusses and analyses those results. Section 5 is a conclusion.

## 2 Material and method

In the study, an analysis of occurrences of *du* in subject position in Swedish corpora from the periods 1225–1526 (Old Swedish) and 1900–2013 (Late Modern Swedish) has been carried out. The main focus has been on the period 1900–2013; older texts have mainly been included to see if, and to what extent, *du* was used with generic reference before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Old Swedish corpus consists of excerpts from 19 texts (398 800 words) of different genres (law texts, religious texts, fiction and verse). A variety of genres was included to develop a general view of the use of generic *du* during the period. In the texts, all instances of *du* (1 530 in total) were analysed as having either definite (D) or generic (G) reference. Definite examples of *du* all refer to another person mentioned in the text (or, in a few cases, to God), while generic examples have a vaguer reference, indicating an arbitrary person or set of persons (cf. SAG 1999, 1: 176). Consider examples (3) and (4) (*du* here has the Old Swedish alternate forms *thu* and *tu*):

- (3) Min kære fadher jak bidher thik vm alzwaloghan gudh at **thu** lære mik hwilkin æro tyo gudz budh Min kære son them wil iak thik gerna læra at **thu** wili for mik bidhia (*Själens Tröst*, 1420–30)  
 ‘My dear father I beg you, about God Almighty, that **you** teach me which the Ten Commandments are. My dear son, I would like to teach you them, so that **you** will pray for me.’

- (4) Ty at suå sighr Salomon wise: **Tu** skalt ey diruas tala i mykla ok witra manna närwaru Ok ther gamble män äru skal **tu** ey mykit tala (*Konungastyrelsen*, 1330)  
 ‘Because this Salomon the wise says: **You** shall not dare to talk in the company of many and wise men. And where old men are, **you** shall not talk much.’

In (3), the first *thu* refers to the father and the second *thu* to the son, both of them mentioned in the text. Consequently, the reference of *thu* is definite. In (4) though, *tu* does not have definite reference since there is no person mentioned in the text that could be the addressee of *tu*. The passage with *tu* conveys morals and general wisdom and *tu* could possibly refer to the reader of the text (‘you, the reader, should not talk in the company of wise men’), or to people in general (‘no one should talk in the company of wise men’). Since the reader could be anyone, a clear distinction between the two interpretations is difficult to make.

The Late Modern Swedish material includes five corpora of newspapers from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century (more than 169 million words). Newspapers were included because of the opportunity of making a diachronic study spanning over a longer time period than possible with corpora of spoken Swedish, and since newspapers were assumed to include a higher percentage of generic *du* than fiction.<sup>4</sup> In the analysed corpora, *du* occurs almost a hundred thousand times (see Table 1). Therefore, a sample of the pronoun *du* from five different time periods was analysed (1 303 examples in total). One of the corpora (Press 65) only included 103 examples of *du*: all of these were analysed.<sup>5</sup> From the other four, 300 examples of *du* from each corpus were randomly collected. The occurrences of *du* were analysed as either definite (D) or generic (G) in the same way as *du* in the Old Swedish texts.<sup>6</sup> However, a more fine-grained analysis of the generic examples was also carried out. The generic instances of *du* were classified as belonging to one of four groups, according to the reference of the pronoun. The first group includes examples of generic *du* addressing the (unknown) reader in contexts in which generic *man* cannot be used (most of them in direct questions).<sup>7</sup> The second group includes ambiguous examples of

4. According to Fremer (2000: 135), generic *du* is common in interviews in newspapers.
5. Examples of *du* in titles of plays, TV-shows, books, songs etc. have been excluded from the study because the reference of *du* is hard (often impossible) to establish out of context.
6. In newspapers, the addressee is often not mentioned in the text. The nature of the passage including *du*, however, normally makes it clear whether *du* has definite reference (e.g. to an interviewee) or not.

*du*: they can either refer to the reader of the text (or, in a few examples from the latest corpus, the interviewing reporter) or to people in general. These examples neither appear in the reader-addressing contexts just mentioned nor in proverbs. The third group includes truly generic examples of *du* in proverbs and similar fixed phrases where the reference of *du* obviously includes all people. The fourth, and last, group consists of generic examples of *du* whose reference does not include the reader or addressee at all, most often because the speaker is talking about his/her own experiences. I have labelled such examples *pseudo-generic* (cf. Altenberg 2004/5: 95, who uses this term for similar uses of generic *one*). One example from each category is given in (5)–(9):

- (5) *Definite*:  
**Du** är så otroligt jobbig, mamma! (DN 1987)  
 ‘**You** are such a pain, mum!’
- (6) *Addressing the reader*:  
 Vill **Du** (/ \*man) lära Dig segla i sommar? (Press 76)  
 ‘Do **you** want to learn how to sail this summer?’
- (7) *Ambiguous*:  
 Möbler, kläder och navelpiercingar. Listan kan göras lång över vad **du** kan köpa på auktionssidor på Facebook. (GP 2013)  
 ‘Furniture, clothes, and belly-button piercings. The list can be made long of the things **you** can buy at auction-sites on Facebook.’
- (8) *Truly generic*:  
 Redan från början blev hennes stora grundsats: hjälp andra och **du** blir själv omedvetet hjälpt. (Press 65)  
 ‘Already from the start her main principle became: help others and unconsciously **you** will be helped yourself.’

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7. While one of the reviewers suggested that *du* referring to a reader should rather be understood as definite, another reviewer suggested that it is generic. Apparently, it is possible to analyse *du* addressing a reader of a text in different ways.

(9) *Pseudo-generic:*

– Det är svårt, man tänker inte på det när man är i det. Det är samma sak personligt, gör **du** några dåliga matcher så tänker **du** inte på det [...]. (GP 2013)

‘It is difficult, one does not think about it when one is involved in it. It is the same thing personally, if **you** have a couple of bad games **you** don’t think about it.’

An overview of the number of *du* in the material, as well as the number of studied examples of *du* and the word-count size of the corpora from each time period, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of studied *du* and size of corpora.

| Time period                     | No. of words       | No. of <i>du</i> | No. of studied <i>du</i> |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Old Swedish (1225–1526)         | 398 800            | 1 530            | 1 530                    |
| Late Modern Swedish (1900–2013) | 169 484 800        | 98 147           | 1 303                    |
| <i>Total</i>                    | <i>169 883 600</i> | <i>99 677</i>    | <i>2 833</i>             |

### 3 *Du* with generic reference 1225–2013

In this section the results of the analysis are related. First *du* in Old Swedish texts (1225–1526) is presented, then *du* in Late Modern Swedish corpora (1900–2013).

#### 3.1 *Generic du in Old Swedish (1225–1526)*

In the Old Swedish corpus, all 1 530 instances of *du* have been analysed. Of those examples, 1 292 have definite reference and 232 have generic reference, the latter found in 3 of the 19 studied texts (there are also 6 unclear examples). See Table 2 where the absolute as well as relative numbers of each category are presented.

Table 2. Definite and generic *du* in Old Swedish texts (1225–1526).

| No. of <i>du</i> | Definite       | Generic      | Unclear   |
|------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|
| 1 530            | 1 292 (84.4 %) | 232 (15.2 %) | 6 (0.4 %) |

In two of the three texts including *du* with generic reference, the examples of *du* are similar to that of (4), since they could be understood as either referring to the reader or as truly generic. Consider (10) and (11):

- (10) Wilt **tu** wara rätvis Tå skalt **tu** först älska gudh at **tu** måghe älskas af hånöm. Tå älska **tu** gudh tå **tu** fylghia hans wilia ok rådhom [...].  
(*Konungastyrelsen*, 1330)  
‘If **you** want to be fair, then **you** shall first love God, so that **you** might be loved by him. **You** love God when **you** follow his will and advice.’
- (11) Mænniskia wil **thu** thz fiærdha budhordhit wel halda tha skal **thu** thinom forældrom fadher oc modher sina nødhthorfft giwa.  
(*Själens Tröst*, 1420–30)  
‘Man, if **you** want to keep the fourth Commandment, then **you** shall give your parents, father and mother, what they need.’

In (11) the word *mænniskia* (‘man’) in the beginning of the sentence probably gives the statement a more generic flavour than if this word had been missing.

The third text including *du* with generic reference is a collection of proverbs. This makes it plausible that the examples of *du* in this work should be construed as truly generic; i.e. the pronoun does not only refer to the reader of the text but to all people, people in general. The common denominator between the three Old Swedish texts with examples of generic *du* then, is that they all contain advice about the right way to live. Consider (12) and (13):

- (12) **thu** skalt land sidh fölia ællir land fly (*Ordspråk*, 1450)  
‘**you** shall follow the customs of the country or flee the country’
- (13) **thu** skalt ey giffua barne mæn thæth bedhis ok ey hund swa tiith han sin stiærth rørir (*Ordspråk*, 1450)  
‘**you** shall not give the child when it begs and not the dog every time he moves his tail’

In the same text there are also many similar examples of proverbs with generic *man* as subject. This again makes it likely that *du* in (12) and (13) truly have generic reference.

Apart from the examples of generic *du* found in Old Swedish texts, there are also other indications that the generic *du* is not a new phenomenon in Swedish. According to Söderwall (1884–90, II: 741), *du* was used with general reference in orders, requests and directions in the Old Swedish period. The historical lexicon *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok* (henceforth SAOB 1925, 7: D2303)



also states that *du* was formerly used analogous to generic *man* in proverbs, commands, rules and the like; the examples cited are from 1526–1825.

### 3.2 Generic *du* in Late Modern Swedish (1900–2013)

The studied Late Modern Swedish material comprises 1 303 occurrences of *du*, of which 892 have definite and 333 generic reference (78 examples have unclear reference, most often due to the restricted context given in the corpora). In Table 3 the absolute and relative numbers of each category are presented.

Table 3. Definite and generic *du* in Late Modern Swedish newspapers (1900–2013).

| Corpus            | No. of studied <i>du</i> | Definite          | Generic           | Unclear         |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Kubhist 1900–1919 | 300                      | 282 (94 %)        | 15 (5 %)          | 3 (1 %)         |
| Press 65          | 103                      | 87 (84 %)         | 14 (14 %)         | 2 (2 %)         |
| Press 76          | 300                      | 212 (71 %)        | 58 (19 %)         | 30 (10 %)       |
| DN 1987           | 300                      | 193 (64 %)        | 90 (30 %)         | 17 (6 %)        |
| GP 2013           | 300                      | 118 (39 %)        | 156 (52 %)        | 26 (9 %)        |
| <i>Total</i>      | <i>1 303</i>             | <i>892 (68 %)</i> | <i>333 (26 %)</i> | <i>78 (6 %)</i> |

Table 3 clearly demonstrates that the percentage of analysed *du* with generic reference is increasing steadily in the material during the period. Generic examples represent a mere 5 % of the studied instances of *du* in the newspapers from 1900–1919, but a whole 52 % in 2013.<sup>8</sup>

All generic examples have furthermore been classified as belonging to one of four categories, as specified in section 2. In Figure 1 the result of this analysis is given by a presentation of the relative numbers for each category. From this figure we can conclude that truly generic examples of *du* are quite rare overall in the studied corpora (1–4 %). However, a couple of examples are found as early as in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Consider (14):

8. This should not, however, be taken to mean that the total number of definite examples of *du* has declined in newspapers during the period. Skärland (forthcoming) shows that occurrences of *du* have increased to a great extent in newspapers overall since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The reason for the declining numbers of definite *du* in Table 3 is not, then, that *du* is used more rarely with definite reference today than during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but rather that *du* is used much more often with generic reference.

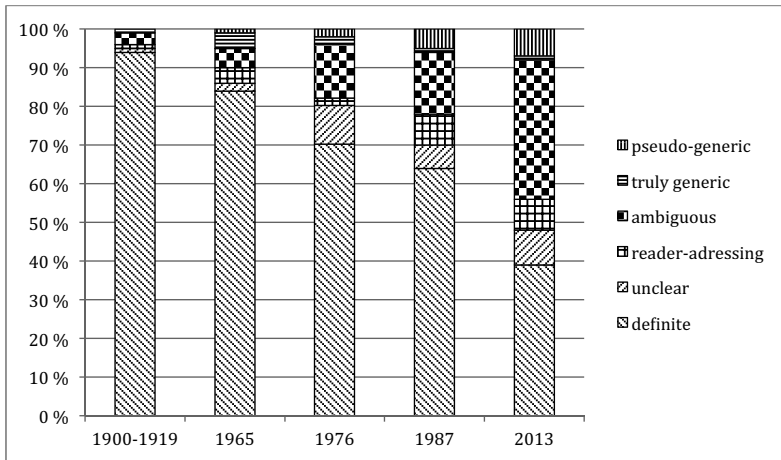


Figure 1. Reference of *du* in Late Modern Swedish newspapers (1900–2013).

- (14) Och han tillät sig vädja till det gamla ordspråket: Uppskjut ej till morgondagen hvad **du** kan göra i dag, ty öfver morgondagen är **du** ej herre. (Kubhist, *Kalmar*, 1900-03-24)

‘And he allowed himself to appeal to the old proverb: Do not postpone until tomorrow what **you** can do today, because over tomorrow **you** are not the master.’

Figure 1 also demonstrates that examples of *du* addressing the reader or being ambiguous between addressing the reader and having generic reference are scarce before the 1970s, but increase substantially after this time. In the material from 2013 they make up almost half of all the studied occurrences of *du* (44 %).<sup>9</sup> Consider the typical ambiguous examples in (15) and (16):

- (15) Om **du** inte gillar färdiglagad musik, ska **du** gå till Café Stravinskij som också serverar vegetarisk mat, öl och vin. (DN 1987)

‘If **you** don’t like ready-cooked music, **you** should go to Café Stravinskij, where also vegetarian food, beer and wine are served.’

9. Moreover, even though there are 12 examples of reader-addressing/ambiguous *du* in the oldest texts from 1900–1919, these should probably be considered special cases since most of them occur in *Dalpilen*, a newspaper from Dalecarlia. In this Swedish province, *du* has been the common form of direct address, like *you* in English, at least since the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In other parts of Sweden, *du* was primarily used between peers before the 1970s (Ahlgren 1978: 104).

- (16) Och mobilen är såpass tjock att den kan stå för sig själv på en plan yta, så **du** kan fota dig själv framför det tjusiga landskapet om **du** vill. (GP 2013)  
 ‘And the mobile is thick enough to stand alone on a flat surface, thus **you** can take pictures of yourself in front of the lovely landscape if **you** like.’

In these examples, *du* can refer to the reader of the newspaper and be substituted by *du läsare*, ‘you reader’, but it can also indicate people in general, since not only the reader but all people could go to the café mentioned or take pictures of themselves with the thick mobile.

There is only one pseudo-generic example of *du* in the newspapers from 1965; by contrast pseudo-generic *du* make up 7 % of the studied occurrences in 2013 (22 instances of *du*). Some illustrating examples are given in (17)–(19):

- (17) I dag är din adress ett säkert tecken på om **du** är rojalist eller republikan och de områdena som är hårt segregerade på det här sättet är alla sådana där arbetare – eller arbetslösa familjer bor. (Press 76)  
 ‘Today your address is a tell-tale sign of whether **you** are a royalist or a republican and the areas that are very segregated in this way are all places where workers – or unemployed families live.’
- (18) – Många av oss orkar inte. Är **du** sjuk en dag ställs krav på att man i stället jobbar under en ledig dag, exempelvis en helgdag. Är **du** frisk och går till jobbet kommer **du** att bli sjuk. (GP 2013)  
 ‘Many of us are too tired to go on. If **you** are sick one day there are demands that one instead goes to work during a non-working day, for example over the week-end. If **you** are not sick and go to work **you** will get sick.’
- (19) – Det är surt. Det vill sig inte – och det är klart att jag är besviken. **Du** håller på med det här för att **du** vill vinna matcher, säger han. (GP 2013)  
 ‘It is hard. It doesn’t work – and of course I am disappointed. **You** are doing this because **you** want to win games, he says.’

In (17) the speaker is talking about the situation in Belfast, and *du* refers to people living in this city, not to the writer or to the reader. This is, however, a rare example in the studied material. Instead, most pseudo-generic occurrences of

*du* are similar to those of (18) and (19): they seem to refer first and foremost to the speakers themselves and their very own experiences, in a way quite similar to the first person singular pronoun *jag* ('I'). For example, it is not certain that all people practicing the sport mentioned in the last example are doing it only to win games. Moreover, the reporter is not included in the reference of *du*.

Generic *man* is often used in a self-referring fashion in Swedish when the speaker wants to relate something from his or her own point of view, but would still like the statement to have a more generic flavour (cf. SAG 1999, 2: 395). This strategy appears to have become quite common with the generic *du* too. As is made apparent from examples (9) and (18), *du* and *man* are also often used interchangeably when they have pseudo-generic reference.

#### 4 Discussion

It has only been since the late 1970s that linguists have noticed that the personal pronoun *du* is used with generic reference in Swedish. However, my analysis of Old Swedish texts has demonstrated that *du* was used with generic reference in Swedish even as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century in proverbs, commands and similar contexts (see (10)–(13); parallel examples are also given by Söderwall 1884–90, II: 741 and SAOB 1925, 7: D2303). Furthermore, I find examples of truly generic *du* in a newspaper from the year 1900, i.e. almost eighty years before Swedish linguists began observing the phenomenon. There are, however, some important differences separating the older and newer uses of generic *du*. First of all, the ambiguous and reader-addressing examples of *du* increase substantially in the studied newspaper corpora during the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in comparison with the definite examples of *du* (see Figure 1). Secondly, occurrences of generic *du* whose reference does not (at least potentially) include the reader of the text are rare before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Connected to this phenomenon is the fact that quite a few of the examples of *du* in 2013 first and foremost refer to the speakers themselves, similar to that of a definite *jag* ('I').

Not surprisingly, the first increase of ambiguous and reader-addressing examples of *du* coincides with the so called *du*-reform of the late 1960s (see e.g. Teleman 2003: 154f), which made it possible to address everyone in Sweden (i.e. also readers of newspapers) with *du* instead of using other more polite expressions. This reform no doubt was necessary for *du* to become frequently used by journalists to address readers or people in general. Nevertheless, this reform was quite abrupt (see Svensson 1993: 39; Teleman 2003: 155). Therefore

it cannot explain why such examples with *du* continue to increase to increase well after 1976. Instead, this is most likely a consequence of the ongoing *informalization* of public discourse in the western world in general (e.g. Fairclough 1995) as well as in Swedish society and Swedish news media in particular (e.g. Svensson 1993: 38ff; Josephson 2013[2004]). The language of Swedish newspapers has become much more informal and intimate during the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Josephson 2013: 96). According to Josephson (2013: 92ff), this tendency towards greater intimacy does not end with the *du*-reform, but rather starts with it. He also states that the language of Swedish newspapers has approached spoken discourse, and is now in some aspects (such as the use of informal phrases and a more spontaneous way of structuring sentences) similar to that of an everyday intimate conversation.

A similar development has taken place in Norwegian and Danish. Lundeby (1996) argues that *du* with generic reference in Norwegian gives the same intimate impression as the personal pronoun *du*, and states that the increase of generic *du* in Norwegian is part of a tendency towards the use of a more intimate language overall since the 1970s. The rise of generic *du* in Danish has also been explained as owing to the fact that we speak differently with each other compared to before the 1970s (Beck Nielsen et al. 2009; Jensen 2009). In a similar vein, Josephson (2013: 93) connects the development of generic *du* in Swedish to the *intimization* of language: generic *du* is seen as a way for the speaker/writer to come closer to the listener/reader. The fact that second person singular pronouns are used with generic reference to create closeness between speaker and addressee is also the general view in the international literature on the subject, as pointed out by Zobel (2016: 393).

In the newspapers from 2013, examples of generic *du* frequently occur when information for consumers is given (as illustrated by examples (7) and (15)–(16) above). All in all 84 of the 128 instances of *du* which refer to the reader or are ambiguous in the material from 2013 belong to this category. This supports a conclusion reached by Fairclough (1995: 12): that the audiences of public media are increasingly being constructed as consumers. In Swedish advertisements, *du* is commonly used to address the reader. This use increases dramatically at the end of the 1960s and is particularly characteristic for the advertisements of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Nowak & Andrén 1981: 47; Korpus 2008: 48ff).

When *du* is used with generic reference, it applies to people in general. But to talk about people in general is also to talk about oneself. Therefore, it is not

surprising that we find examples of *du* which should more accurately be termed pseudo-generic, referring first and foremost to the speakers themselves. Similar self-referring uses of generic second person singular pronouns are also reported from English, Canadian French, and Dutch (Helmbrecht 2015: 182; de Hoop & Tarenskeen 2015: 164f.). This seems to be a typical case of *subjectification*: the reference of *du* becomes anchored in the speaker's own perspectives and attitudes. Traugott and Dasher (2002: 6) maintain that subjectification is an overarching tendency in semantic change, articulating how the meaning of an expression becomes anchored in the perspective of the speaker. They even claim that subjectification is “the most pervasive type of semantic change identified to date” (Traugott and Dasher 2002: 30). Subjectification has also been defined as the development of speaker-oriented meanings, i.e. meanings used to express the speaker's own attitudes, opinions, and views (Traugott 2010).

This use of *du* as a covert *jag* ('I') appears to be particularly common among practitioners of sport. Josephson (2013: 93f) suggests that sports stars were early adopters of *du* ('you') substituting for *man* ('one/you') which actually means *jag* ('I'). Among 22 pseudo-generic examples of *du* in the newspaper texts from 2013, 10 are found in the context of sport. This characteristic use of self-referring *you* among sport stars is a phenomenon that has been reported from other languages as well (Dutch, French, and Italian is mentioned by Kluge 2016: 503; for a couple of English examples see Gast et al. 2015). In Dutch, according to Helmbrecht (2015: 181), there even exists a special term for this usage: *voetballers je* ('footballers' you').

The reason for pseudo-generic *du* being popular among sports stars is probably that they are often interviewed about their performances, and that this is a rather face-threatening situation. If the performance was poor, replacing the pronoun *jag* ('I') with *du* ('you') with pseudo-generic reference might be a smart way to disclaim responsibility for what has happened (cf. examples (9) and (19) above). Altenberg (2004/5: 94) explains that using a generic pronoun when referring to oneself tends to “have an ‘impersonal’ effect, placing the speaker at a distance from the event described”. In SAG (1999, 2: 395) it is noted that substituting a personal pronoun for a generic pronoun can be a more delicate way of speaking than to mention the speaker or listener directly. Helmbrecht (2015: 182), discussing similar examples of self-referring second person singular pronouns in English and Canadian French, points out that the speaker, by using the second person form, “reduces her peculiarity by embedding herself in some generalized other”. de Hoop and Tarenskeen (2015: 165f.), citing parallel Dutch examples, argue that the distancing effect given by generic *you* can

be a good choice “when the speaker feels uncomfortable or is ashamed, for example, in order to avoid criticism”. This ties in well with the concept of *inter-subjectification*: how the speaker modifies his or her utterance by taking into consideration the self-images of the speaker and listener and their wishes not to lose in social status and face before each other (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 23). By replacing *jag* (‘I’) with pseudo-generic *du* (‘you’), the speaker does not need to admit the loss of status connected with a failure.

## 5 Conclusion

This article shows that *du* (‘you’) used with generic reference is not as new and as foreign to Swedish as has often previously been assumed. There are, however, some important aspects separating an older generic use of *du* from newer uses, the most significant being that the reader of the text is rarely excluded from the reference of generic *du* in examples from before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In texts from the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century such addressee-exclusive reference is not uncommon. In fact, several examples of *du* must be understood as referring to the speaker him/herself, which means that *du* takes on the function normally associated with the pronoun *jag* (‘I’). This process is probably best understood as a case of subjectification, as discussed by Traugott in several works (e.g. 1989, 2010).

## Corpora

### *Old Swedish texts 1225–1526*

Excerpts from 19 texts (398 800 words) including different genres (law texts, religious texts, profane texts and verse) collected from Fornsvenska textbanken: <<http://project2.sol.lu.se/fornsvenska>> [retrieved October 2015].

### *Late Modern Swedish Corpora 1900–2013*

Corpora including newspapers collected from Språkbanken: <<http://spraakbanken.gu.se/korp/>> [retrieved March–October 2015].

| <i>Corpus</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>No. of words</i> |
|---------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Kubhist       | 1900–1919   | 145 020 000         |
| Press 65      | 1965        | 1 120 300           |
| Press 76      | 1976        | 1 351 100           |
| DN 1987       | 1987        | 5 122 200           |
| GP 2013       | 2013        | 16 871 200          |

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