

## Free Indirect Discourse and Personal Pronoun *One* in *To the Lighthouse*

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### 1. Introduction

In this paper, I will focus on the narrative form and the use of personal pronoun *one* in *To the Lighthouse* (1927; *TL*). *TL* is known as one of the self-consciousness describing novels written by Virginia Woolf (1882-1941). Self-consciousness description is also known as a “stream of consciousness” technique. In *TL*, this technique is achieved through the mixed use of various narrative forms, and also with the use of personal pronoun *one* in them.

The first section shows how often *one* occurs in *TL*, and the second and third sections show how deliberately narrative forms are mixed where this personal pronoun occurs. I will examine examples of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, who are main characters in this novel, and discuss the characteristic of *one* which differs from those of other personal pronouns such as *she*, *he* or *I*.

### 2. Occurrence of *one* in *To the Lighthouse*

Although there have been several definitions or functions concerning the use of *one*, I do not discuss the definitions of this pronoun here in the present section. This section focuses on the occurrences of *one* in *TL*. The following table shows the occurrences of *one* in *TL*, which are classified according to user.

Character	Occurrences of <i>one</i>			
	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3	Whole text
Lily Briscoe	39	—	80	119
Mrs. Ramsay	63	—	—	63
Mr. Bankes	20	—	—	20
James	—	—	13	13
Mr. Ramsay	8	—	1	9
Mr. Tansley	6	—	—	6
Cam	—	—	5	5
The narrator	—	4	1	5
Nancy	2	—	—	2
Paul	1	—	—	1
Prue	—	1	—	1
Total	139	5	100	244

Those names listed in the table are not all of the characters in *TL* but some of them. Not everyone in the novel uses *one*. The right hand column shows how many times each character uses *one* in the whole text. Among the characters, Lily Briscoe uses *one* most frequently, namely 119 times, which is almost half (about 48%) of all the occurrences, and the second frequent user, Mrs. Ramsay, uses *one* 63 times, which is about one fourth. These results suggest that these two women are the main characters in this novel, and their consciousness description seems to occupy most of the parts where they appear in *TL*. The table also shows the occurrences of *one* in Parts 1, 2, and 3 separately. The story progresses in the first Part showing Ramsay family spending time with some guests on an island in Scarborough. The second Part describes the house itself where they spent time in Part 1, but the house is now empty and decaying after Mrs. Ramsay's sudden death. The third Part describes those who gathered together, still alive, in the same house.

It is obvious that in Part 2, which depicts the decaying house and the family information, there are only a few appearances of *one*. There are, in fact, only four examples of *one* in the narrative and one in Prue's speech.

Mrs. Ramsay uses *one* 63 times out of total 139 shown at the bottom of the table, which is about 45% of all in Part 1. She is the most frequent user of *one* in this Part. In the following Part, however, Mrs. Ramsay's death is reported, which means she appears only in the first Part, and she is still the second most frequent user of *one* in the whole text. This fact indicates that her use of *one* is prominent in this novel.

Lily uses *one* 119 times in total, and she is the most frequent user of *one* in *TL*, but her use of *one* is mostly found in Part 3. It seems that she just supports Mrs. Ramsay in the first Part, but she becomes the main character in the third Part, where she acts as a main presenter of the consciousness and uses 80 per cent of all the examples of *one* in this Part. This shows that her consciousness constitutes the most of the third Part.

The total number of occurrences of *one* in *TL* (244) is the greatest among Woolf's main "stream of consciousness" describing novels: *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *TL*. These are the works written before Woolf produces *The Waves* (1931), which has a style different from those three, although it is also a consciousness-describing novel. There are 107 examples of *one* in *Jacob's room*, and 157 in *Mrs. Dalloway* in total. The fact that these three novels including *TL* are almost the same in length reminds us how frequently personal pronoun *one* occurs in *TL*.

The high frequency of *one* seems to be something particular in some of Woolf's novels. Daiches points out the numerous employment of *one* in Woolf's novels, and he calls this *one* employed in her novels as a "compromise pronoun" (1942: 64). The word "compromise" here indicates one of personal pronoun *one*'s characteristics, which can be employed either in third person narrative or first person narrative. In fact, the choice of personal pronoun depends on the narrative form. For example, the third person narrative employs personal pronouns such as *s/he*, and the first person narrative employs personal pronouns such as *I*. The "compromise

pronoun”, however, is not restricted in any particular narrative form. And this means that it helps to change narrative forms in each sentence, or even in one long sentence without giving readers any discomfort about the change. Personal pronoun *one* of this type is important in expressing characters’ minds, although this does not mean that *one* is always employed in consciousness describing scenes.

### 3. *One* in use (1)

In this section, I examine narrative forms and the use of personal pronouns in each form. Examples picked up here are the sentences or thoughts only of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily, because their consciousness occupies the most part of *TL*, as I mentioned in the previous section.

In expressing people’s minds there are several kinds of discourse forms. They are direct thought, indirect thought, free direct thought and free indirect thought. Personal pronoun *one* can appear in each of these forms. The following example is one of the actual uses of *one* in thought:

- (1) But the dead, *thought Lily, encountering some obstacle in her design which made her pause and ponder, stepping back a foot or so, Oh the dead! she murmured, **one pitied** them, **one brushed** them aside, **one had** even a little contempt for them.* (166)\*

The italicised part in this extract is reporting clauses, and it also indicates the whole passage is in indirect thought. The verbs in the past tense, ‘pitied’, ‘brushed’ and ‘had’, also indicate the passage is indirectly told through the narrator. Generally, indirect thought tends to employ *s/he* rather than *one*. The following is an example of indirect thought employing ‘she’.

- (2) **She had** always **found** him [Mr. Ramsay] difficult. **She had** never **been** able to praise him to his face, *she remembered.* (162)

Although both (1) and (2) are examples of Indirect Thought (IT), they employ different personal pronouns. What is interesting here is the impression each pronoun gives to the reader. The difference appears when we presume original words Lily may have actually thought. It may be just an assumption, but the shift is possible in the way of transferring the indirect form to the direct. The original words may be something like (1’) and (2’):

- (1’) But the dead, Oh, the dead! **one** pities them, **one** brushes them aside, **one** has even a little contempt for them.
- (2’) **I** have always found him difficult. **I** have never been able to praise him to his face.

In (2'), *I* is used in place of *she* in the extract (2), and the verb tense is changed from past to present. When the original indirect sentence (2) contains *she*, the interpretation can only be subjective so that it can be changed to *I*. The change from *she* to *I* is the only choice in this type of sentence.

On the other hand, *one* in (1) is not changed in (1'). *One* in IT as in extract (1) can be changed into other pronouns. In (1'), some people may put *people* instead of *one*, and others may put *I* instead of *one*. These choices derive from the general idea of *one* in English. When *people* are put in place of *one* in (1'), the information will be as objective, and in the case of *I*, the information will be subjective. Therefore, it is possible to interpret the information either objectively or subjectively. This ambiguous feature of *one* is important in describing character's minute thought.

Adding to the characteristic use of *one*, the use of Free Indirect Thought (FIT) is one of the most frequently used narrative forms in the "stream of consciousness" technique. The usual FIT can be seen in the following:

- (3) When she looked in the glass and saw her hair grey, her cheek sunk, at fifty, she thought, possibly she might have managed things better – her husband; money; his books. *But for her own part she would never for a single second regret her decision, evade difficulties, or slur over duties.* (6)

The italicised sentence here is in FIT. It employs *she* and *her* referring to the thinker (i.e. Mrs. Ramsay), and the verbs are in the past tense. Personal pronoun *she* is the general pronoun in IT and FIT, but it is important to note that *she* is also used to refer to the thinker's viewpoint. (4) occurs when Mrs. Ramsay is thinking about Lily:

- (4) With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; but she was an independent little creature, *Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it, and so remembering her promise, she bent her head.* (16)

In this passage Mrs. Ramsay is thinking about the picture of Lily, who is posing for her painting. Underlined *she* and *her* refer not to the thinker (Mrs. Ramsay), but to Lily from Mrs. Ramsay's point of view, and the verbs are in the past tense. The sentence in italics is a reporting clause, therefore the preceding utterance is in IT. IT tends to impress readers with the narrator's voice, but in this example until the expression 'Mrs. Ramsay' appears, it is as if the voice came out from the thinker herself rather than the narrator, because there are no definite personal pronoun referring to Mrs. Ramsay except the personal pronoun *one*. And *one* is, as we saw in the example (1), makes the point of view ambiguous concerning its subjectivity, even

though the verbs in the past tense in this example also indicate the indirectness of the sentence.

Passage (4) contains *one* only once and does not contain any other pronouns referring to Mrs. Ramsay (the thinker) until the reporting clause appears, which enables the reader to recognize Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts without much disturbance.

#### 4. *One* in use (2)

In this section, I examine the passages from (5) to (7) below.

- (5) What was the reason, *Mrs. Ramsay wondered, standing still to let her [Rose] clasp the necklace she had chosen, diving, through her own past,* some deep, some buried, some quite speechless feeling that **one** had for **one's** mother at Rose's age. Like all feelings felt for **oneself**, *Mrs. Ramsay thought*, it made **one** sad. It was so inadequate, what **one** could give in return; and what Rose felt was quite out of proportion to anything she actually was. (75)
- (6) But this morning everything seemed so extraordinarily queer that a question like Nancy's – What does **one** send to the Lighthouse? – opened doors in **one's** mind that went banging and swinging to and fro and made **one** keep asking, in a stupefied gape, What does **one** send? What does **one** do? Why is **one** sitting here after all? (140)
- (7) And she [Mrs. Ramsay] sat, having found them [spectacles], silent, looking out to sea. *And Lily, painting steadily, felt as if a door had opened,* and **one** went in and stood gazing silently about in a high cathedral-like place, very dark, very solemn. Shouts came from a world far away. (163)

The italics here indicates reporting clauses. In (5), Mrs. Ramsay thinks about the reason why Rose, one of her daughters, thinks it's important to choose her mother's jewel to wear for dinner. Here IT is selected, but the employment of *one* in the passage may give us the impression that it is not fully 'reported' by the narrator. It is because we cannot exactly pin down whether the point of view is either objective or subjective. Personal pronoun *one* allows the reader to interpret the point of view belonging to the thinker as well as the narrator, as we saw in the last section. This ambiguity represented by *one* is similar to that by FIT. Verdonk points out the ambiguous function of FIT as doubling the voice, and this characteristic of FIT stands out in the straightforward third-person narrative (2002: 48). The important point is that both *one* and FIT have some ambiguous function in common, which causes an unreliable judgement between objectivity and subjectivity. Extract (5) contains the case where both *one* and FIT are mixed: "It was so inadequate, what one could give in return; and what Rose felt was quite out of proportion to anything she actually was." Although this sentence is indirectly

reported, which is clearly detected through the verb tense, the use of *one* adds subjectivity to objectivity in this sentence. The narrator has not totally disappeared, but the presence of the narrator seems to be overwhelmed by the character's figure, here by Mrs. Ramsay. Her voice and point of view are observed clearly from the pronoun *one*. When *one* is employed in FIT, it enables the reader to recognize the character's inner self more than when the usual pronoun *she* is employed.

(6) represents Lily's thought at the beginning of Part 3 in *TL*. She is sitting in a living room and having tea alone. Then she repeats the same words Nancy said a few moments ago: "What does one send to the lighthouse?" It is easy to see that (6) is written in the mixed form as shown in the use of verb tenses both of past and present. It is interesting to find that the first Direct Thought (DT) is put between dashes, not in quotations, and that the other DTs are just represented without quotation marks or even dashes. And then Lily herself continues thinking in FIT. There is no reporting clauses in (6), but the indirectness is observed in the tense of verbs, 'opened', 'went' and 'made'. The personal pronoun referring to the thinker (Lily) is always *one* in this extract. At this point, it is important to point out that *one* is ambiguous in its interpretation (i.e. objective and/or subjective) when it is employed in FIT, while it is surely interpreted as subjective within DT.

It is true that the meaning of *one* differs slightly whenever it actually occurs in (6), but there is no hesitation to use it. In (6), discourse forms seem to change gradually from FIT to DT. This gradual change is found possible because of the ambiguous effect both FIT and *one* can bring about. Containing subjectivity in indirect forms leads the reader smoothly to direct sentences as this extract goes onto "What does **one** do? Why is **one** sitting here after all?"

(7) also represents Lily's thought in which 'Mrs. Ramsay' recurs. The extract includes three sentences. What is interesting is that the first and third sentences do not have any personal pronoun that refers to the thinker, Lily. The pronoun *she* in the first sentence refers to Mrs. Ramsay from Lily's point of view. *One* is the only pronoun referring to Lily in the passage. The middle sentence, which contains *one*, is in IT, which is clear from the use of a reporting clause indicated in italics in the extract. The extract itself is Lily's reminiscence, and the first and third sentences are Lily's Direct Thoughts.

From these extracts we can see that *one* is employed in various forms of thought representation, and that it is used so naturally that "stream of consciousness" flows smoothly in the description.

## 5. Conclusion

It is interesting to know that *TL* contains many *ones*, and that almost all of them are employed in the thoughts of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Pronoun *one* is employed in various narrative forms, which makes it possible to create the smooth flow of the consciousness of characters. Consciousness described in various narrative forms with *one* and without quotation marks can be read so smoothly that we nearly ignore the presence of the narrator.

### **Note**

\* Numbers in brackets indicate the page number of the text. Italics, bold letters and underlines in quotations are mine.

### **Texts**

Virginia Woolf (1927) *To the Lighthouse*. London: Hogarth Press, 1990.

Virginia Woolf (1922) *Jacob's Room*. London: Hogarth Press, 1990

Virginia Woolf (1925) *Mrs. Dalloway*. London: Hogarth Press, 1968.

### **References**

Daiches, David (1942) *Virginia Woolf*. New York: New Directions Books.

Verdonk, Peter (2002) *Stylistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.