

## Eavesdropper, not (only) reader. Transgressive possibilities of doubly deictic “you”

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This article will take a closer look at the possible functions and stylizations of the use of the personal deictic “you” in the Croatian language. Since the double deixis manifests itself as a stylistic figure in its state of suspension – it is and is not a form of address – it is represented and exemplified by the so-called illocutionary overload as a (post-modern) discursive strategy that constructs the addressee and the audience. Narration or speaking in the second person singular will therefore serve as an illustration of (double) switches, a characteristic strategy for Tomičić’s drama for three voices, *Don’t forget to cover your feet*. It attempts to provide answers to questions such as: Does the reader have to be apostrophized to feel invited to participate in the discourse, does the present tense have to be a logical choice to achieve double deixis, what are signs of transition between the fictional and the real world in the Croatian language?

**KEYWORDS:** double deixis; personal pronoun “you”; cognitive stylistics; drama; *Don’t forget to cover your feet*



## Introduction

“You” has been the subject of much scholarship, and has been approached from multiple angles. Due to its unusual nature, evident in the fact that it is constantly threatening to merge with another grammatical person (Richardson, 2006), or its seductiveness evident in the fact that it draws the addressee into communication (Sorlin, 2022), “you” is of interest to psychologists, narratologists, linguists, cognitive scientists, rhetoricians, sociologists and, finally, stylisticians. No matter the perspective we view the second person pronoun from, there are uncertainties when it comes to accurately defining its use.

Since this paper will focus on attempting to interpret the text *Don't forget to cover your feet* by Tomičić, the author will approach the subject matter from a cognitive-stylistic perspective, which will significantly narrow attention to the stylogenic phenomenon of the pronoun “you” within the dramatic text, and the interpolation of the reader, i.e. their insertion into the fictitious dramatic world. Given that in the Croatian language, sentences can be free of personal pronouns because verbs carry this information as well, each time this particular pronoun is actually used is unusual and worthy of attention – though not every use has stylogenic properties. A “you” used in a dyadic communication where an emphasised addressee becomes both the speaker and the hearer through the use of the pronoun “you” is not of interest to a (cognitive) stylistician. The author will mostly focus on dramatic situations where the second person pronoun affects the reader by giving them the role of an eavesdropper in line with Goffman's work (1981, 139) who overhears what is being said, i.e. communicated to the protagonist-narrator (Herman, 2002, 358). It should be noted that the direct emphasis on the reader can be realised within the *ad spectatores* communication system of a dramatic discourse, but it is not a stylistically marked phenomenon. Sorlin notices that the “reader may attribute the role of recipient to themselves, even if the *you* is not primarily addressing them” (2022, 20), which is why the cognitive-stylistic analysis regarding the use of the second person pronoun by Tomičić will be focused on depicting how the linguistic, thematic, and multi-modal environment of its use can contribute to the sense of overstepping the boundary set between fact

and fiction. The double deixis in the second person pronoun is precisely what enables the transgression of the referential and appellative function because this pronoun resists anchoring (Herman, 2002, 350), so it seems that the two spatial-temporal frameworks (inside and outside of the text) operate simultaneously. In other words, the “you” that relates to “me + potential other person” will be marked as stylogenic, and within the context of *Don't forget to cover your feet*, this “potential other person” will depend on the applied verb tense and the alignment on the page of the dramatic text.

We could say that one of the direct effects of the double deixis in the second person pronoun is the reshaping of the reader into an eavesdropper, particularly from a sociological (Goffman, 1981) or linguistic (Herman, 1994, 2002) perspective. Although not everyone will agree with the terms “eavesdropper” and “eavesdropping” – and Dynel even proposes a more appropriate term “ratified participant” (2011, 50) – one of the goals of this paper is to interpret the position of the reader as an eavesdropper in the context of dramatic discourse – at least in the aforementioned text by Tomićić. When addressing the scalar use of the pronoun “you” in *Don't forget to cover your feet*, the author will focus on the issue of overstepping the boundaries set between the dichotomous pairs of subjectivity and objectivity, empathy and reason, fact and fiction, narration and performance, witnessing and acting, eavesdropping and listening. In line with the highly-researched so-called “you-narratives”<sup>1</sup>,

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1 The existing linguistic research has been exhausted during the overwhelming classificatory activities on defining different sub-types of the personal pronoun, while narratologists such as Stanzel, Genette and Fludernik focused on the relationship between showing and telling, i.e. between the narrator and whoever is at the receiving or interactive end of this communication framework (1994, 446). When it comes to the linguistic approach, Sandrine Sorlin objects its focus on classification, which led to seemingly contradictory arguments and clear disagreements regarding the function and properties of the general “you”, i.e. attempts to supplement narratology conclusions by including the relationship between the author and the reader, and she emphasises that the template can be built on or expanded from, depending on the genre and medium one wishes to focus on (2022, 22, 11). Although Sorlin is of the opinion that the linguistic typologies of the pronoun “you” are useless, she cannot help but apply a similar procedure. However, it should be noted that she still often emphasises its contextual character, i.e. sentence environment,

and wishing to present the pronoun “you” and the present tense as performative categories whose appearance in any type and genre of text underlines performability, the author will designate the dramatic discourse as one where the reader is encouraged to keep “intimate distance and a unique togetherness” (Sorlin, 2022, 72). In the readers’ reality, eavesdropping attempts are seen as an act of overstepping personally set boundaries, and these phenomena, if discovered, would surely be sanctioned in various conventionally and institutionally established ways. However, in a dramatic discourse, a reader’s eavesdropping has positive connotations as this act of overstepping is subtly encouraged through an indirect emphasis within the double deixis in the second person pronoun, as well as a mandatory taking of sides by graphically positioning the perspective in the form of left-aligned, right-aligned or centred text. The eavesdropper witnesses the performance of the play which has already happened and they should feel empathy towards the speaker and their performance, but at the same time there is a boundary set between the fictional world of the play and the reader’s reality, enough for the eavesdropper to maintain proper objectivity, which enables them to make rational conclusions about the depicted and experienced emotions.

### **When You have to take a side**

In *Don’t forget to cover your feet* by Espi Tomičić, subtitled “a dramatic text for three voices”, we arrive to the endpoint of questioning the boundaries set a long time ago between the epic and the dramatic, the objective and the subjective, the mimetic and the diegetic, and it can be said that the dramatic texts is presented as one that is by character always in the form of a dialogue, even when presented as a monologue. For starters,

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which is why she offers a new, specific division of subtypes of use for the personal pronoun “you” for every interpretation of a text. The categories are interesting, but they should be taken with a grain of salt, and we should continue questioning potential effects of use: context, theme and genre of a text, as well as the linguistic environment of “you” (Sorlin, 2022, 29).

it should be noted that the text by Tomičić is free of any paratextual dramatic characteristics, apart from the genre nature in the subtitle. On the one hand, this can appear as a post-modern process of deviating from Szondi's points of pure drama (2001, 14), and on the other it can even more strongly point to dramatic characteristics which do not need to be emphasised by a list of characters or graphic layout, but rather through a constant equation put in front of the reader or spectator, where  $x, y$  and  $z$  are unknowns which can only be identified by watching the dramatic text unfold on the stage. If we were to describe the dramatic plot, we would say that it already took place, i.e. the conflict already happened. We are presented with a family's story from the perspective of a single character, speaking in three voices. The deceased father is highlighted as a character who is the trigger for dramatic conflict in a secondary dramatic period; he drives the action and encourages the main character to reflect and face his emotions<sup>2</sup>.

Resolving the equation is further complicated by the introduction of third person speech, which brings the speech closer to narration, i.e., it moves away from pure dramatic mimesis, or a mimetic presentation of speech. However, this type of a situation within a dramatic text points to the fact that we cannot mark third person speech solely through the narrative or the diegetic – even this type of voice or speech is always aimed at someone, and this information will reach the reader even if it is not directly emphasised. Even narration without a clearly emphasised “you” is a dialogic structure in which the other side of the communication channel is silenced or not expected to react directly. The aforementioned determiners are unified in what we would call the close-up in film terminology, while this paper will use Groff's presentation of a drama of the character's “inner life” or “state of mind” (1959, 274). It can be said that the depiction of the character's inner world realises the possibilities of a reflexive character and what Sarrazac attributes to some of the didascalía (2015, 180–190) – a reflexive character is allowed to feel; moreover, the entire text is realised by subjecting the reader or spectator

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2 The duality is realised, as Ducrot would put it (1987), onto the actor and character, wherein the former is an entity of discourse (the locutor as such), and the latter a teller (the locutor-as-an-entity-of-the-world).

to emotions and deep suffering felt by the character, and when the exposition is shifted to the third person (the so-called narrative instance), it approaches a quasi-objective speech, but the reader sees it as more of a commentary to the reflection, which is why we cannot consider it an objective narrator.

The dramatic text *Don't forget to cover your feet* can be seen as either a letter addressed to the killer (*To you, who picked up an AK-47 that night and killed my father*) or a dramatic geometry created not by three characters, but by three voices transferred into the physical form of a text, where each left- or right-aligned or centred line suggests a change in perspective and voice, which the reader/spectator can decode as a divided subject. The main question is who takes the positions of Me, You and Him/Her. In any case, we can speak of there being several voices, all presented by a single character. The next question is about what we discover once we take a certain position.

First, there is noticeable pretence of an inter-level communication (*first work it out for yourself / you're not prepared to write about it / you haven't slept in days...*). In the part in italics, "You" refers to the man who killed the father with an AK-47. However, he only participates in the previous conflict, the drama which already took place within a secondary dramatic period. Both the right and left alignment in the text refer to a true deictic nature of the personal pronouns "I" and "you" – when we identify the pretence of a dialogue situation presented by dividing the speaking subject into A and A1, the conventional rules suggest a dialogue, and the linguistic situation marks it as such, but the situational context symbolises a plunge into an inner world, a reflexive character, pointing to the speaking subject and the described event.

Lines in the left-aligned text do not necessarily need to be addressed to anyone, or the emphasis is not clearly marked by a grammatical person, pronoun or a personal name, so we can see them as a purely monologic situation. Both Herman (1994) and Jensen (2019) describe these deictic forms as generic or generalised uses of "you". In so doing and by reference to Kitagawa and Lehrer (1990), Jensen addresses the double deixis which would be realised in using such a generalised You, while Herman describes this use as the most frequent type of second-person narration. The right-aligned text more frequently includes a dialogue, and there

is always an emphasised *You*, but these situations are typically dyadic communication types and they are irrelevant from a cognitive-linguistic perspective.

Depending on whether a line is uttered by a reflexive character or a participant in the narration, i.e. the speech event, the *You* position can be held either by the participant in the narration or by the killer, but due to the appellative force of “*you*” the readers themselves, even without direct emphasis. This enables the reader to access the speaker’s intimate world and past, and to relive traumatic events with him. On the one side, this is certainly a privileged position, but on the other we need to also be aware of the author’s intent to put the reader into such a position. We will characterise the double deixis in the second person pronoun, as well as the left, right and centred alignment as “pragmatic” (Sorlin, 2022, 29) or multimodal acts of directing because the author directs the changes of perspective at the inner and the outer level of communication. Due to the different textual positioning indicative of the speaker’s division, it appears as if the speaker is targeting and looking for the participant. Any person reading the text can become the participant, but if they accept the dyadic exchange, they will find themselves in the speaker’s or the killer’s place.

### **Past is present**

In principle, we will adopt the thesis that in the text by Tomićić one can notice the oversteppings on the level of verbal mode, linguistic code, more precisely deictic designations of grammatical person and tense, whose true meaning will be decoded in the exhibited form, during the performance. According to Jakobson, the grammatical tense and person are verb categories he refers to as indexical symbols (2008, 453) – a symbol is connected to a presented object through a conventional rule, and the index is in the existential relationship with the presented object. The conventional rule or symbolic relationship with the presented object manifested in the grammatical third person and past tense gives us the participant in the narrated event, i.e. the narrated event itself. Moreover, the use of the first and second grammatical person and the

present tense designates the participant is in the speech event, i.e. the speech event itself. However, we have concluded that the main character is realised in the polyphony, he is simultaneously the participant in the speech event and the narrated event, he presents both the speech and the narrated event.

The verb tense in the text by Tomičić is never purely symbolically realised in conventional rules, but it also consists of an indexical part – it is elaborated through a deep emotional involvement in the speech and narrated event, and it is highly existentially related to the presented object. Eco explains ostension as an exclusively theatrical category using the example of proxemics and kinesics, using certain props. Eco's thesis that an object needs to be derealised in order to represent an entire category might help in understanding the aforementioned verb categories as props. The grammatical person and tense move away from their conventional rules towards an existential relationship when a reflexive character, i.e. inter-level communication, is introduced into the dramatic text. According to Eco (1977, 110–115), this is possible due to the application of the semiotic square, the introduction of connotational power, social context and audience reactions.

As regards the symbolic and indexical portions of temporal deixis, we will focus on oversteppings related to morphosyntactic meanings and the deictic or discursive in the use of the past tense. Herman (1994) argues, recalling Bühler's distinction between deixis and phantasms, that if the I → You transfer is in the past tense, the speaker is evoking their past I, speaking to it and about it, as if it is immediately present in the deictic field, distinguishing it from the present I by using different tenses and persons. Therefore, we will argue that the use of the past tense in the pretence of the inter-level communication can be applied by only partially realising the grammatical function of the past tense, i.e., enabling simultaneous narration and presentation. This division between the narrated and the speech event is also evident in the emotional division, the taking of sides, both literally and figuratively:

Your father was a bully  
He put a gun to her face  
She fought for dignity



Father never wanted to hurt anyone  
Mother exaggerated all the time  
She wanted to turn us against him (2021, 105).

It is noticeable that the dialogue form showing the subject's division is realised in the oppositions in the very graphic layout of the text. The right-aligned character is trying to paint the father as a bully who beat his mother, while the left-aligned character validates the father and criticises the mother. The difficult position of the participant in the narrated and speech event is immediately evident in the grammatical and narratological description of the past tense. The past tense suggests involvement in a past event, ensuring a somewhat objective position, requiring the reader and eavesdropper to concentrate and to trust the speaker. However, in the excerpt from the text it is very clear that the participant and the speaking character finds himself in a certain speech situation, always a part of several speech situations. Not only was he involved in certain situation which he can now narrate, but he was also emotionally invested, allowing him to take a more subjective position, i.e. speech or presentation through speech.

However, the reflexive character steps away from the right-alignment to an italicised witness, realised in the linguistic plane through the use of third person singular, possessive adjective, as well as present tense. Having initially equalised the dialogue situation between the speaker and the killer in the speech event, we now see an interference of what we would conventionally designate as a participant in the narrated event and the narrated event as such. Therefore, we even picture a grammatical tense such as the present as what is currently happening, although it is clearly a narrated event, meaning that we are noticing the presentation of a narrated event<sup>3</sup>. In that moment, the participant in the speech event also becomes a participant in the narrated event, and we are observing the presentation of the narration. In the Croatian

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3 The present tense is a "mark of performance", and by the present tense, the reader is transported to the past through a "performed narrative" which is used to describe events in their immediate moment of happening (Fleischman, 1990, 78).

language, this is a relative use of the present tense<sup>4</sup> in the form of the historical or narrative present, which is combined with the appellative nature of the second person so as to reduce the artificial properties of similar first-person monologues (Sorlin, 2022, 62).

When faced with a speaker who is constantly switching between reminiscing and the need to settle accounts with his father's killer, as well as a similarly insecure participant and the You person, the grammatical tense is overstepping its set grammatical boundaries and takes on the characteristics of double deixis by simultaneously being a narrated and a speech event. According to Sorlin, combining the tense and the pronoun moves beyond a specific temporal anchorage (2022, 40), where both of the categories float between different textual alignments, and they will finally be caught at the moment of the performance, when deixes can be semantically charged.

### **Witness (me) by eavesdropping**

The first, second and third person participate in a dramatic narration, a narrative speech, and their exchange can point to an objective approach, but the reader is constantly reserved as he is not aware of being occupied by the main character's point of view. It should be noted that the reader, or spectator, is also in a divided position, just like the main character in the drama. He is at the same time postulated within the subject and the object<sup>5</sup>. Reading or observing can be seen as exposure to a cathartic experience, but similarly, given that the dramatic

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4 Speaking of the type of "life drama", Kitawaga and Lehrer (1990, 749) analyse examples of sentences in English which use the present progressive tense, concluding with a resolution in the present.

5 For instance, Gallese notes that interpersonal relations can be third-person relations, i.e. I-He/She or second-person relations, i.e. I-you (2014, 5). We can relate to the same individual like a thing among other things or like our beloved one. In the context of Tomićić who is constantly fluctuating between different persons, the relation between the author and reader can be described as hot and cold behaviours, ensuring the necessary intimacy at a distance, i.e. the possibility to achieve a high level of empathy, as well as understanding and reasoning.

conflict already took place, it cannot come to the rescue, its function is realised purely as reading or observing, there is no material assistance for the character, except maybe for a profound empathy. The observer or reader of the presented and narrated is also encouraged to reflect on it, which in the end also creates an apathy of observing. This Sarrazacian witnessing is not realised in the dramatic text itself, but only when reading or observing the play.

This is particularly evident in the possibility of the double deixis in the second person pronoun or possessive pronoun “yours”:

Childhood is what you reduce it to  
*I've been meaning to ask you, what was yours like? (2021, 93–94).*

Conventionally, the grammatical indication of the second person designates a dialogue within an internal communication channel. We have previously argued that the italicised text is addressed to the father's killer, so any rhetorical question may also refer to him. In this case, it would be a rhetorical question in the true sense of the word,<sup>6</sup> no answer is expected, and in this particular play the killer will not give one. It is asked only for the purpose of finding out more about the inner life of the speaking and narrating instance. However, should we move the tab on the scale of communication levels from the inner to the outer system, the You position can also be taken by the empirical

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6 We will mark the rhetorical question as a key stylistic strategy of Tomičić, whose stylistic effect is realised in several ways. We should particularly highlight Bağiç's assumption that the rhetorical question replaces the objective manner of speaking with a subjective (2015, 271), and its use in this case will resemble a variation of the objective position towards the subjective and *vice versa*. What are the aspects that the “I” is questioning in the italicised speech? In order: fear, waiting, humiliation, prohibition, foolishness, childhood, proximity, friendship, the role of a mother, and writing as an emotional exercise and discharge, potentially – writing as a form of therapy. The rhetorical question is followed by an introspection of the reflexive character, but it is not realised only in the participant of the speech, but also in that of the narrated event. This enables the introduction of new voices, all those characters who participated in creating the conflict or certain dramatic situations, and who have also created the feelings and opinions of the speaking participant.

reader. How can we argue this? Unlike all other participants in narrated events who are emphasised and had a voice at a certain point, such as the mother and the grandmother, the killer is an imaginary character. The speaking and narrating subject had never met him, he is essentially a set participant and his position can be taken by anyone, including the reader.

*I can't believe you pulled that trigger,  
For ten years I have pictured you doing it.*

*(...)*

*We haven't been the same since.*

*We have only imagined since.*

*I imagine*

*Everything that could've been,*

*(...)*

*I imagine*

*Him telling me*

*Good job, doofus,*

*Good job at school.*

*I imagine*

*That we are us*

*And everything is the same for me (2021, 129–131).*

When it comes to the position of the reader, the final part of the italicised text can be experienced as a full monologue, given also its positioning in the play. Plays usually close or open with strong monologues, and the reader can imagine that, at that moment, the character is “addressing *the theatron*” (Lehmann, 2004, 167). It appears that, due to the deictic markings, a shared space is established and the clearly set boundaries between the presented (inner world) and the audience are erased, placing the spectator in the point of view of the initially emphasised killer. We could say that the final cathartic experience is realised precisely in placing the reader into another’s shoes, but also in being aware of different perspectives, and in the movement of looks and voices from the participants in the speech to the participants in the narrated event. The fact that the reader is not the only one to step into this dramatic universe

can also be sensed in the final sentences of the italicised text, where the second and third person finally become plural:

*Don't worry,  
You couldn't let go of the trigger earlier,  
We needed that sound,  
That rhythmic repetition.  
That is why we can't count now,  
That is why we are us now (2021, 131).*

The completion of writing down a traumatic event, which would confirm the thesis of writing as a form of therapy, especially when realised in drama or theatre, can be recognised precisely in the grammatical use of the plural, which means that the cathartic experience of observing someone's trauma does not always have to manifest in the apathy of observing, in not participating or not finding a common voice, unison, chorus or collective. The *I* continues to exist, damaged, the *You* continues to exist forever changed (Govedić, 2005, 97), but there is also the *We*, where the experience and participation in the speech and narrated event meet. Putting oneself in another's shoes helps to understand the Other, and even to forgive:

*That is why we are us now.  
I have forgiven you.  
Good night.  
Don't forget to cover your feet,  
That is the one thing I couldn't forgive you for (2021, 131).*

The fact that this can be considered double deixis, or what Herman (1994) would call a metadeictic text, can be confirmed by the final transition of the first and second person into the third person plural. The double deixis in the second person narrative, according to Herman, suggests that the participant exists solely because the other participants and recipients of the message exist. What we understand as a speech situation is simply a part of a larger network of speech situations that the current one aims for and cannot avoid. As readers and as audience,

we are put in the position of an eavesdropper, we are not directly emphasised, but it appears as if we are involved as actual participants in the play that has already happened and in the one that is currently happening before our eyes or ears.

### In conclusion

The personal pronoun “you” has inspired various scientists to attach different nicknames to it throughout its scientific history. This is why “you” is mostly seen within certain zones with negative connotations, such as “shifting indexical”, “monster”, “fraudulent pronoun” or “pronominial imposture”. Whether we view them as pet names or insults, they stereotypically describe its fraudulence and elusiveness in its defining, always dependent on the context of use, as we have confirmed by analysing its discursive and linguistic environment in *Don't forget to cover your feet*, a play for three voices by Tomičić. According to Sorlin's request for a stylistic reading of the effects of the second person pronoun with a particular emphasis on the relationship between the author and the reader, we have viewed “you” by taking into account the context, theme and genre of the text by Tomičić, as well as the linguistic environment of “you”. The genre of the play is already designated as “a play for three voices”, which automatically overarches the former narratological designation as a category of narration. This positions “you” as a category of performative expression, pointing to a Ducrotian division of each speaker. This division is realised on several levels significant for the further analysis of double deixis and the role of the reader in the play. The speaker is at the same time a reflexive character, as well as a witness, an objective spectator, and a subjective sufferer, a participant in both the narrated and the speech event. More importantly, he requires that the participant be the same, and he has no qualms about finding him through either direct emphasis (a phenomenon less interesting for stylisticians) or various typographical, i.e. linguistic environments such as the left, right or centred alignment or presence of a grammatical tense.

The double deixis in the second person pronoun in a discursive environment very quickly overarches its inherent possibility of simulta-

neously subtly emphasising a dramatic character, divided subject and reader, and it affects its own environment as well. In its vicinity, the grammatical tense, whether present or past, ceases to have (only) its own grammatical properties, rather evading temporal anchorage in a specific event and also becoming a category of performative expression. After initially solving the equation, whose variables depend on whether the You is located in the left, right or centrally aligned text, the reader is quickly promoted to an eavesdropper within a personal tragedy and trauma taking place before his ears. Naturally, if the present tense and personal deixes “I” and “you” are categories inherent to the dramatic discourse, it is logical that any text based on such categories will have a performative potential. Reliving specific events from one’s past through a speech performance, as the voice in the play by Tomićić does, needs to involve the audience of eavesdroppers or listeners. However, they never need to be emphasised in order to feel called upon, but they will always maintain an appropriate distance in order not to overstep personally set boundaries.

Looking back on the position of the reader as an eavesdropper, driven by the double deixis in the second person pronoun, we can agree with Walsh, who spoke of the use of “you” as an “exercise of perspectival alignment” (2007, 99) or with Sorlin, who sees the second person pronoun as a “strategy of focalization” (2022, 22). Therefore, both examples highlight the human ability to assume someone else’s point of view or perspective. By placing the “you” in the dramatic discourse, this ability also passes to the speaker himself, impacting his division, or the capability that the I-speaker becomes the I-participant of a past event, or that the I-speaker becomes a participant in an imaginative dyadic exchange, and to settle accounts. The play for three voices by Tomićić is therefore an example of a post-modern illocutionary overload which is capable of generating an addressee and an audience with no indications of a “pure drama” or any typical genre descriptors, but using categories of performative expression – the personal pronoun and grammatical tense, as well as playing with the multi-modality of double deixis through typographical solutions.

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- **GABRIJELA PULJIĆ** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Croatian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, Croatia. She is the author and co-author of several academic papers on stylistics, media discourse and drama discourse. She is also co-editor of an anthology dealing with the problem of language and style and a member of the editorial board of the *stilistika.org* portal, where she is mainly involved in hosting and editing the podcast „Slobodnim stilom“. Her areas of interest are drama and media discourse, cognitive and pragmastylistics, multimodal stylistics, visual rhetoric and semiotics.