

Lexical genericity: R-impersonal pronouns

It is well-known that many languages do not have a specific linguistic form on nouns or verbs for expressing genericity. However, many languages do have a special pronominal form that is dedicated to generic statements involving humans, namely pronouns such as Engl *one*, Spanish *uno* and arguably French *on* and German *man*. Following Siewierska (2011), I will call these pronouns R(eferential)-impersonals (to distinguish them from impersonals like *it* in *it is raining*). The points made in (1)-(3) will be illustrated here with English examples, but they hold for the other three pronouns as well.

I propose that generic R-impersonal pronouns should be analysed as personal pronouns referring to a generic person by virtue of including a generic operator. R-impersonal pronouns are sometimes treated as indefinite pronouns in traditional grammars. This is not adequate since R-impersonal pronouns clearly differ from indefinite pronouns like *someone* in allowing generic readings

- (1) (i) *one* shouldn't say that (generic ok)
- (ii) *someone* shouldn't say that (generic *)

Arguments for an analysis of R-impersonal pronouns as personal pronouns are the following: R-impersonal pronouns contrast with existential and universally quantified pronouns in that they (i) do not allow co-reference with a 3rd person personal pronoun and (ii) they do allow co-reference with another instance of the same pronoun:

- (2) a. If someone_j has a complaint he_j/someone*_j should speak to the supervisor.
- b. If one_j has a complaint he*_j / one_j should speak to the supervisor.
- c. If she_j has a complaint she_j should speak to the supervisor.
- (3) a. Before an exam everyone_j thinks that he_j/ everyone*_j will do well.
- b. Before an exam one_j thinks that he*_j/ one_j will do well.
- c. Before an exam she_j (always) thinks that she_j will do well.

Spanish further allows null subjects and the null subject with 3sg inflection on the verb is equally compatible with an indefinite pronoun like *alguien*, "someone", a (strong) lexical pronoun like *ella* "she" so it is not surprising it is equally available for the R-impersonal *uno*.

- (4) Cuando uno_j tiene una queja, uno_j/ *pro*_j / él*_j debe hablar con el supervisor.
when uno has a complaint uno/ *pro*/ he should.3sg speak with the responsible.

French *on* and German *man* differ from English *one* and Spanish *uno* since they allow an **episodic** reading in addition to the generic reading.

- (5) a. On a livré un paquet pour toi.
- b. Man hat ein Paket für dich abgeliefert.
"Someone (lit. "one") has delivered a parcel for you."

I propose that episodic and generic R-impersonal pronouns differ in their featural makeup:

- (6) a. generic R-impersonal pronouns contain a lexical generic operator
- b. episodic R-impersonal pronouns lack that generic operator.

An analysis positing two lexical entries is supported a number of observations. First, R-impersonal pronouns need not allow the episodic uses (cf. Engl *one*) suggesting the two readings are independent of each other. Secondly, historically, the generic R-impersonal is the first to appear, with the episodic variant arising later in the languages that develop it (Welton-Lair 1999 on Fr *on*). This is compatible with an analysis of the later usage as semantically impoverished with respect to the earlier usage. Thirdly, there can be morphological differences: in German only generic *man* has oblique forms *einen* (*acc*) *seinem* (*dat*) while existential *man* does not (cf. Hoekstra 2010, Hoekstra calls what I call generic *man* *inclusive*, see also Moltmann 2006 on *one*). Fourthly, both uses differ in their scope properties. While the generic R-impersonals have wide scope with cardinal adverbs, the existential R-impersonals take narrowest scope only (see Zifonun 2000 for German Cabredo Hofherr 2008 for French *on*):

- (7) a. Wenn man zweimal durchfällt, muss man den Kurs abbrechen.
 If one fails one's exams twice, one has to leave the course.
one > twice
- b. Man hat mir zweimal mein Rad geklaut. (Ge)
 On m'a volé mon vélo deux fois. (Fr)
 Twice someone stole my bike (twice > sb) (not sb > twice)

An additional argument that generic R-impersonals involve an operator is provided by the fact that it patterns with generic bare plurals and indefinites with respect to quantificational variability effects with frequency adverbs (Malamud 2006). As Hoekstra (2010) points out this is not an argument for an indefinite analysis of R-impersonals since *definite* generic DPs (in West Frisian and other languages that have definite generic NPs) display the same behaviour.

- (8) Students rarely complain.
 Few students complain.
 Students make few complaints.
- (9) Man sieht nur selten einen grünen Specht. (Ge)
 One sees only rarely a green wood-pecker
 Wenige Personen sehen einen grünen Specht.
 "Few people see a green wood-pecker."
 Man sieht nur wenige grüne Spechte.
 "One only sees few green wood-peckers"

If the analysis here is correct then R-impersonals are cases of lexically encoded genericity. A comparison between R-impersonals and full NPs may then shed further light on the contribution of different types of NPs in generic sentences.

Cabredo Hofherr, Patricia, 2008. Les pronoms impersonnels humains - syntaxe et interprétation. *Modèles linguistiques*, 57:35–56. **Hoekstra**, Jarich, 2010. On the impersonal pronoun *men* in Modern West Frisian. *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics*, 13:31–59. **Malamud**, Sophia, 2006. *Semantics and pragmatics of arbitrariness*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania. **Moltmann**, Friederike, 2006. Generic *One*, arbitrary PRO, and the First Person. *Natural Language Semantics*, 14:257–281. **Siewierska**, Anna, 2011. Overlap and complementarity in reference impersonals: Man-constructions vs. third person plural-impersonals in the languages of Europe. In Malchukov, Andrej and Anna Siewierska (eds.), *Impersonal Constructions. A cross-linguistic perspective*, p. xx. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. **Welton-Lair**, L.K., 1999. *The evolution of the French indefinite pronoun "on": a corpus-based study in grammaticalization*. Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University. **Zifonun**, G., 2000. "Man lebt nur einmal". Morphosyntax und Semantik des Pronomens *man*. *Deutsche Sprache*, 28:232–253.

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