Workshop “Impersonal constructions: a cross-linguistic perspective”
Organizers: Anna Siewierska and Andrej Malchukov

Selected abstracts (in alphabetical order)

Impersonal passivization in which languages?
Werner Abraham

I discuss in some detail impersonal constructions of the following type:

(1) a. Dano mu.DAT.SG.M ksiazke.ACC.SG.F ... Polish
b. Es wird gelaufen derived from NP[+human] läuft ... German
c. Wird (*es) heute gelaufen? ... German
d. Currit-ur ... Latin
e. Er/*Het wordt gelopen ... Dutch
f. *It is run ... English
g. *Il est couru derived from On[+human] cours ... French
h. ḵað er dansað í skólanum ... Icelandic
i. Í skólanum er (*₇hað) dansað. ... Icelandic
j. Er (*₇hað) dansað i skólanum? ... Icelandic
k. Det dansas i skolan. ... Swedish
m. Dansas det i skolan? ... Swedish

Impersonal passives, as opposed to stative passives, appear to be subject to the following constraints:

(2) it is characterized by a uniform sequence of event points since of imperfective/durative event quality; aspect/Aktionsart dependent; event typing identical to English progressive;

(3) it is the aspectual inverse of the stative passive in as much as the former is imperfective, the latter, however, is perfective; clear aspect/Aktionsart dependency.

(4) The external argument (eA) in the impersonal passive is demoted in order to avoid a personal subject, i.e., a subject too low in referentiality to be tolerated in subject (= thema) position. The ‘special indefiniteness’ of demoted subjects in impersonal passives amounts to ‘generic agenthood’. Consider that any IP can be paraphrased by the indefinite human pronoun man in German, one in English, and si in Italian.

(5) Assuming that unaccusative (‘ergative’) predicates in German (cf. Abraham 2000) are intransitive perfectives, the impersonal passive stands in an interesting detransitivizing hierarchy:

(i) Detransitivization of 2-place perfectives yield perfective 1-place passives; this is derivation-identical, on the lexical level, to the German unaccusative;

(ii) no detransitivization of an (perfective) unaccusative is possible, since the unaccusative is already derived under an identical process of theta reduction; German unaccusative/ergative (phrasal) verbs denote the incremental phase of intransitive resultatives and therefore imply a stative result;

(iii) the German impersonal passive is the valence reduction of a 1-place intransitive; it is restricted to imperfectives and consequently does not permit stative (IS as opposed to WERD/BECOME) passivization.

References:
Impersonal Constructions in Hebrew, an (S)VO language: Usage-based perspectives

Ruth A. Berman

The paper follows on from prior analyses of structural properties of passives, middles, and impersonals as three related classes of constructions in Modern Hebrew (Berman, 1979), and from research into two classes of subjectless impersonal constructions in Hebrew as an (S)VO language. The latter take the forms of (1) 3rd person plural statements with non-specific reference -- e.g., *kvar sipru lo še ze kara* ‘(have) already told+PLUR him that it happened = he’s already been told;’ and (2) and non-agentive modal propositions *carix le-saper lo še ze kara* ‘must to-tell him that it happened = he must be told …’ (Berman, 1980). These are analyzed as strictly subjectless, and hence as differing from two other predicate-initial constructions in Hebrew: existential and possessive clauses that are typically verb first -- e.g., *hayu (li) harbe be’ayot ito* ‘were (to me) many problems with him = I had many problems ~ (there) were many problems with him’ Ravid, 1997; Ziv, 1976); and optionally VS clauses -- e.g., *nishbar (lo) ha-af* ‘broke (to-him) the nose = his nose got-broken ~ he broke his nose’.

Use of some of these constructions was subsequently considered in analyses of null subject constructions in children’s oral narratives in Hebrew (Berman, 1990; Berman & Ne’em, 1994), and of related constructions in expository texts written by schoolchildren, adolescents, and adults in Hebrew and other languages (Jisa et al, 2002; Reilly et al, 2002; Tolchinsky & Rosado, 2005).

The present analysis extends these “usage-based” perspectives (Bybee, 2006) to linguistic analysis to compare the distribution and discursive function of different means for downgrading agency in narrative compared with expository texts and in speech compared with writing. The following predictions will be tested: First, given the rich range of devices for downgrading agency in Modern Hebrew – by means of “strictly subjectless” impersonal constructions as well as intransitive, middle voice morphology – speaker-writers will rely relatively little on use of passive voice compared with subject-requiring languages like English or French. Second, expository discourse by its very nature will elicit more use of impersonal construction than (personal-experience) narratives, since it is largely topic-oriented, focusing on concepts and ideas whereas narrative discourse is concerned mainly with people, their actions and motivations (Berman & Nir-Sagiv, 2007; Longacre, 1996). Third, modality is not expected to have a significant effect on use of such constructions, since they are determined more by overall “discourse stance” (Berman, Ragnarshöft, & Strömqvist, 2002) rather than of a spoken versus written medium of production. Fourth, developmentally, younger school-age children will not differ significantly from adolescents in the amount they use these constructions, but the content and discursive force of these constructions will change as a function of age, for example to express epistemic, cognitively based rather than deontic, prescriptive prepositional attitudes.

These analyses demonstrate the importance of a text-embedded approach to linguistic structures, and the need to go beyond surface distributions to functional facets of how specific constructions – in this case impersonals – are used in different types of discourse.
Impersonal constructions in Ainu

Anna Bugaeva

Impersonal constructions in Ainu display a number of cross-linguistically unusual properties, and thus present a challenge to the comprehensive typology of impersonals. I will describe these constructions and discuss their typological implications.

There are two impersonal constructions in Ainu (Southern Hokkaido dialects; Northern Japan) under consideration: impersonal proper (indefinite subject construction) and impersonal passive. In fact, the impersonal passive in Ainu originated from the impersonal proper, which appears to be a commonly attested grammaticalization path (Malchukov 2008: 96).

The Ainu impersonal proper must have, in its turn, developed from the inclusive (1) since both employ the same verbal morphology, viz. $a=$ for A (2) and $=an$ for S (3), which may possibly be traced back to the existential verb $an$ ‘exist’.

(1) $suy\ u-nukar=an\ ro$
   again REC-see=INC.S COHR
   ‘Let’s (I and you) meet again.’ (Bugaeva 2004: 94)

(2) $\varnothing=num-i\ a=\varnothing=kar\ wa\ a=\varnothing=sakanke$
   ‘They took the nuts of (water caltrops) and preserved them by boiling and sun drying.’
   (Tamura 1984: 26)

(3) $to\ ka\ \varnothing=sat\ kane\ cip-ta=an$
   lake top 3.S=be.dry as.if boat-dig=IND.S
   ‘They made (so many) boats2 that the lake (looked) dry (when all the boats were there).’
   (Tamura 1984: 26)

The impersonal passive in Ainu is a subjectless construction with a retained direct object which is formed by the prefix $a=$ on transitive (4) and ditransitive action predicates. The impersonal passive allows for Agent extension via an oblique phrase, viz. $or-o$ wa ‘from the place of’ with animate Agents (5) or ani ‘by’ with inanimate Agents (6), which is rather uncommon cross-linguistically (Siewierska 1984: 174). Here, $a=$ can no longer be analyzed as a marker of the impersonal subject ‘we/one/they’ and should rather be analyzed as the dummy subject marker ‘it’.

(4) $neno\ e=iki\ yak\ a=e=koyki\ na$
   like.this 2SG.S=do if PASS=2SG.O=scold SGST
   ‘If you do that, you will be scolded.’ (Tamura 2000: 71)

(5) $hapo\ or-o\ wa\ a=en=koyki$

---

1 In this presentation, I use the following abbreviations: 1/2/3 = person, $\varnothing =$ zero-marked third person, A = transitive subject, COHR = cohortative, DEC = decausative, INC = inclusive, IND = indefinite, O = object, PASS = passive, POSS = possessive, REC = reciprocal, S = intransitive subject, SG = singular, SGST = suggestive particle.

2 Lit. ‘they boat-made’.
mother place-POSS from PASS=1SG.O=scold
‘I was scolded by mother.’ (Tamura 2000: 72)

(6) rera ani cikuni, \( a=\emptyset=\)kekke wa
wind by tree PASS=3.O=break and
‘The tree was broken by the wind.’ (Bugaeva 2004: 41)

The marker \(a\)- used on transitive ‘psych (=perception, cognition and psychological) predicates’ has a detransitivizing effect and triggers a decausative interpretation which may be regarded as an extension of its original function.

Sentences with first or second person Agents resist passivization because these participants are far too high in topicality to be defocused.

References


Impersonal constructions and accusative subjects in Late Latin

Michela Cennamo

A well-known change taking place in the domain of transitivity in Late Latin is the use of the accusative in subject function, well attested by the 4th-5th century A.D. This phenomenon, also referred to in the literature as the “extended accusative”, occurs in particular with intransitive and intransitive-like patterns such as equative clauses (\(totam\ curationem haec est\) ‘this is the whole treatment’), anticausatives (\(minutum\ fiat\) ‘it is reduced to small pieces’), impersonals (\(lapidem\ non revolvatur\) ‘the gravestone should not be turned over’, passives (\(omnes\ cibos\ comedantur\) ‘that all the food be eaten’), one-argument verbs denoting change of state/location (\(nascitur\ contractionem\) ‘there arises a spasm’/\(sanguinem\ exeat\) ‘the blood comes out’), non-agentive activity (\(crepitavit\ panem\) ‘bread crackled’), and state (\(si...causam\ advenirit\) (‘if a dispute arose’), i.e., with unaccusative verbs/patterns, pointing to the existence of the active alignment of grammatical relations in the transition from Latin to Romance (Plank 1985; Cennamo 2001, forthc, int. al.). In this paper we explore the role played by impersonal constructions, in particular by so-called impersonal passives with an accusative argument (e.g. early Latin \(me\ despicatur\) ‘I am despised’, late Latin \(illum\ servum\ concremetur\) ‘this servant is to be burnt’) in the use of the accusative in ‘subject’ function with one-argument verbs in Late Latin, which we claim spread from low transitivity domains to more central, canonical structures, extending from impersonal constructions to passive/intransitive clauses, probably owing to the ambiguity resulting from the interchangeability among voice forms (e.g., between passives and impersonals), consequent to the loss of the grammatical dimension of voice in the transition to Romance (Cennamo 2001). We hope to show that
the Late Latin data offer interesting insights into possible paths through which active coding systems may arise, in the light of the current debate on the role played by impersonal constructions in this type of change (Creissels 2007; Malchukov 2008 and contributions in Donohue & Wichmann (2008).

References

From pronouns to valency operators: a possible origin of impersonal markers
Denis Creissels

Among the constructions to which the term ‘impersonal’ been applied in various traditions, at least three types can be recognized: simple, special and covert impersonal constructions.
– Simple impersonal constructions concern verbs occurring in canonical predicative constructions, and involve no change in the argument structure or in the encoding of arguments other than S/A; their only particularity is that an arbitrary interpretation of the S/A argument is triggered by other means than the use of a canonical indefinite NP in S/A role.
– Special impersonal constructions, either involve verbs that cannot combine with a referential NP showing the coding characteristics of canonical subjects, or deviate from canonical constructions of the same verb in such a way that the introduction of a referential NP showing the coding characteristics of canonical subjects implies formal changes in the rest of the construction or a modification of argument structure.
– Covert impersonal constructions include a referential NP showing the coding characteristics of canonical subjects, but devoid of the corresponding behavioral properties.

In my talk, I will discuss an evolution that may affect simple impersonal constructions. Unmarked simple impersonal constructions use the same verb forms as predicative constructions with a referential NP in S/A role, whereas marked simple impersonal constructions involve a morphological marking of the verb.

Unmarked simple impersonal constructions may involve null subjects, dedicated impersonal pronouns occurring only in subject role (such as French on or German man), or subject pronouns normally used with an anaphoric or deictic interpretation. Marked simple impersonal constructions may involve reflexive marking, passive marking, or a specific type of morphological marking.
Derived verb forms specifically used in impersonal constructions are found for example in Finnish and in Estonian. They occur only in a null subject construction identical in all other respects with the canonical construction of the same verb. The *impersonal marker* they involve can therefore be described as a valency operator that blocks the expression of the subject argument without changing anything else in the construction of the verb.

In my talk, I will present evidence that the evolution of pronouns involved in unmarked simple impersonal constructions is a possible source of impersonal markers. A first illustration is the evolution of French *on*. French grammars uniformly describe *on* as an impersonal pronoun filling the subject clitic slot. There is however evidence that *on* still functions as a pronoun in some of its uses only, whereas in one of its uses, *on* has lost the discourse properties characteristic of pronouns and functions rather as a valency operator blocking the expression of the subject.

The second illustration I will discuss concerns Bantu languages that have lost the Bantu passive and have innovated an impersonal construction involving an impersonal marker still homonymous with the subject marker of class 2 (human plural) from which it originates.

**Impersonal domain in Eastern Caucasian:**

**struggling for nominatives**

Michael Daniel, Zaira Khalilova, Zarina Molochieva

1. Various impersonal constructions, according to formal varieties and semantic grouping, are represented in Eastern Caucasian (EC) to different extent.

Bodily sensations expressed with dative Experiencer do not seem to be a common pattern (the only example we are aware of is that of Khvarshi). This is interesting because EC seems to be very sensitive to the role of Experiencer, regularly using dative or even dedicated (*affective*) marking. Apparently, the tendency to isolate Experiencers is applied to bivalent verbs only, such as mental states (‘know’), perceptions and modal verbs, generating intransitive patterns with nominative Stimulus (see Kibrik 2003, Ganenkov 2007), while in European the preferred pattern for such verbs is, in general, transitive. On the contrary, the default pattern for bodily sensation predicates in European languages is specific (impersonal, i.e. lacking prototypical subject), while dative or affective marking is normally not used in EC in this case.

2. Another group of prototypical impersonals are meteorological predicates. These are widely represented in EC and follow the pattern with no overt argument (ex. 1). Some details are worth mentioning. EC often allows overt nominative slot to be filled by loanword ‘world’, and the same agreement class is attributed to meteorological predicates when the noun is absent. In Chechen, however, no overt noun is possible, and the agreement unexpectedly follows feminine out of the four possible classes (ex. 2).

3. Theoretical issues of impersonals derived from transitive verbs in ergative languages will be discussed (cf. Creissels 2007). Understood broadly, transitive impersonals as originally transitive constructions with missing subjects are based on the notion of subj ection which, in EC, is not uncontroversial (Kibrik 1997). Both Agent and Patient may be omitted, and both may have some subj ectionhood properties. Anchoring the definition of impersonals in the notion of morphosyntactic subject allows to identify impersonals in ergative and accusative languages in a uniform way as constructions failing the nominative requirement (obligatory presence of a nominative argument). In this sense, EC disfavors impersonals. Constructions similar to ex. 3 are rare and lexically determined. The facts discussed in 1 and 2 above also indicate that retention of a nominative is a strong tendency in these languages (no intransitive impersonals for bodily sensations, availability of dummy subject for meteorological predicates). Notably, however, this morphosyntactic approach leads to strong functional
divergence between impersonals derived from transitive predicates in ergative and accusative languages.

Examples:

(1) 
[dunijal]    ori 
[world]      thunder.strike
‘Thunder stroke’

(2) Chechen, Nakh 
šiel-lu-š   j-u 
cold-ANTIKAUS-CVB.SIM 2-cop.PRS
‘It is getting cold.’

(3) Bagvalal, Andic 
ali-r   turi 
Ali-ERG    spit
‘Ali spat’

References:

Introducing discourse referents in Germanic and Romance – presentational in comparative perspective

Volker Gast & Florian Haas

Presentational sentences (or simply ‘presentational’) are used “to call the attention of an addressee to the hitherto unnoticed presence of some person or thing in the speech setting” (Lambrecht 1994: 39). Two basic types can be distinguished, on the basis of the propositional content expressed (cf. also Birner & Ward 1998): (i) ‘existential presentational’ and (ii) ‘descriptive presentational’. Existential presentational simply contain an existential predicate and a description of the discourse referent itself (cf. [1]). Descriptive presentational contain a predicate which describes a state of affairs that entails or presupposes the existence of the discourse referent introduced. In most Germanic and Romance languages, descriptive presentational are characterized by verb-subject order, as illustrated in (2):

(1)  Existential presentational
Once there was a king...

(2)  Descriptive presentational
Until the end of the war so very few folk had beards, and then only short ones nicely trimmed, but into the room came a most handsome young man with a black fuzz of over eight inches. [BNC]

The question arises of what are the patterns and limits of variation in this domain. Two basic types of parameters can be distinguished in Germanic and Romance: (a) structural properties of the constructions itself, and (b) distributional constraints. Variation in the make-up of
presentationals concerns parameters like the type of existential predicate used, the presence vs. absence of an expletive and its type or origin as well as the syntactic relation of the post-verbal NP. Distributional constraints manifest themselves in (i) the type of pre-verbal constituent allowed in the various constructions (e.g. directionals, temporal adverbials, etc.), (ii) the range of verb types used, and (iii) the accessibility status of the post-verbal NP (esp. [in]definiteness).

Given that no comprehensive and systematic survey of such constructions is available as yet, we will start by providing an overview of the most important structural and distributional aspects of variation, and their manifestations in the languages under investigation. Both qualitative and quantitative differences will be investigated, the latter on the basis of corpus findings and parallel texts. Building on these results, we will address the question of correlations between the variant properties pointed out above. Moreover, we will discuss to what extent the constructions under discussion are specialized to the function of a presentational. For instance, subject-main verb inversion in English is usually used as a presentational construction, whereas V-S order in Romance languages has a less specific function (basically, ‘theticity’). In more general terms, our hypothesis is that the degree to which a given construction is specialized as a presentational (e.g. subject-main verb inversion in Engl.) correlates positively with the number of contextual restrictions imposed on each constituent within the construction.

Selected references


A typological study into Hungarian and the impersonal

Casper De Groot

In this paper I will discuss data from Hungarian against the background of three different typological perspectives: (i) a descriptive, (ii) a comparative, and (iii) a linguistic typology of impersonal constructions.

Descriptive perspective. I will focus on constructions lacking a referential subject. Since Hungarian is a pro-drop language where finite forms of verbs are always specified by a cross-referencing marker, it is actually difficult to establish a category of impersonal constructions. Moreover, Hungarian lacks the category of impersonal pronouns and a passive form similar to English The letter is written by Paul. The general form of the Hungarian impersonal construction is the third person plural verb form:

(1) Mond-ják, hogy paprika egészséges.
    say-3PL.DEF that paprika healthy
    ‘They say that paprika is healthy.’

Example (1) is ambiguous between personal and impersonal. If the personal pronoun is used, the impersonal reading is excluded. Given the fact that Hungarian does not have a passive, non-specification of the subject is not possible, as for instance in Dutch:

(2) a. Dutch
Er wordt geschaatst.
there become.3SG skate.PAST.PART
‘There is skating going on.’

b. Hungarian
Korcsolyáz-nak.
Skate-3PL
‘They skate.’ / ‘There is skating going on.’

Hungarian has a rather productive system of derivational rules, where a number of derivations includes the reduction of the Agent argument. It could be argued that the output of such rules may be taken to be a kind of impersonal forms:

(3) a. ép-it [build (Agent) (Patient)] ↔ ép-ül [build (Patient)]
b. zár [close (Agent) (Patient)] ↔ zár-őd [close (Patient)]

Comparative perspective. I will have a look at expressions in Hungarian equivalent to the traditional (Indo-European) usage of impersonal. Most of the weather verbs allow the overt expression of the subject as in:

(4) a. Esik (az eső) [fall.3SG the rain] ‘It is raining.’
b. Fúj (a szél) [blow.3SG the wind] ‘The wind is blowing.’

Psych verbs often have a full paradigm with all person distinctions, as e.g. fázik ‘be cold’: fázom, fázol, fázik, fázunk, fázatok, fáznak. In other cases, psych predicates take the form of possessive/existential constructions, such as Meleg-em van. [warm-1SG.POSS is] ‘I am hot.’ A comparison to other languages may reveal what strategies Hungarian uses to express a content similar to that of impersonal constructions.

Linguistic perspective. I will raise the question of the relation between parameters of linguistic typology and the form which impersonal constructions may take. I will bring forward an explanation for the absence of a genuine or unique impersonal construction in Hungarian and claim that the agglutinative character of Hungarian plays an important role here.

References


Siewierska, Anna (2004), Person. Cambridge: CUP.

The impersonal in Breton

Steve Hewitt

Breton verbal syntax is simultaneously VSO and V-2, or more precisely [P = predicate syntagm] PSO/XPSO and [T = tense] T-2. “Bare” presentations begin with a predicate
syntagm; “lead-in” presentations with a non-predicate constituent \([X = S/O/ADV/CIRC, \text{etc.}],\) which may be either thematic or focused. In “bare” presentation, the negative tense particle ne is sufficient to fill the first position in order to satisfy the T-2 constraint. But in the affirmative, with simple verbs, a dummy auxiliary “do” arises; with auxiliary structures (copula, existential, compound tenses), there is AUX-PRED > PRED-AUX inversion.

The **apersonal conjugation**, formally identical with the 3SG, marking tense, but not person or number, is used before expressed nominal subjects, and after initial subjects in the affirmative. The personal conjugation marking tense, person and number represents the inclusion of post-verbal subject pronouns; it is also used after initial subjects in the negative (subject agreement).

The **impersonal forms** in –r and –d constitute a seventh form in the personal conjugation, referring to some indeterminate human subject. In Breton these forms are fully active, may not be used with agentive phrases, and are best translated with French on / English one, even though there is no corresponding pronoun in Breton.

**Impersonal constructions** include the **existential**, **meteorological phenomena**, **indirect impersonal verbs** of the type “it pleases me”, and the **impersonal compound passive** dañssed \(e \text{ vež} \) [danced.PP AFF is.3SG.HAB] “there is dancing/people dance/es wird getanzt”. With none of these constructions is it possible to reformulate with an initial subject pronoun. A possible analysis is that what appear to be 3SG verb forms may actually be the independently required apersonal conjugation, with no person/number reference, and that these constructions are thus subjectless.

The inventory of impersonal constructions in Polish (or how to find hidden subjects)

Anna Kibort

Polish has a large number of constructions which have been referred to as impersonal, and which qualify as impersonal under Siewierska & Malchukov’s broad definition characterising them as ‘constructions lacking a referential subject’:

(a) clauses with ‘weather verbs’ (e.g. Pada/Świta ‘rains/dawns’)
(b) ‘adversity impersonals’ (e.g. Odrzuciło go w bok ‘threw-off.3SG.NEUT him.ACC to side’)
(c) clauses expressing physical or psychological states (e.g. Mdli mnie ‘nauseates me.ACC’)
(d) clauses with inherently impersonal predicates (e.g. Słychać ja ‘hear.NON-PERS her.ACC’)
(e) impersonal passives of intransitives (e.g. Było sprzątane ‘was tidy-up.PART.3SG.NEUT’)
(f) the -no/-to impersonal (e.g. Bito Piotra ‘beat.IMPERS Peter.ACC’)
(g) the reflexive impersonal (e.g. Biło się Piotra ‘beat.3SG.NEUT REF Fl Peter.ACC’)
(h) predicative adverbial constructions (e.g. Milo cię spotkać ‘nicely you.ACC meet.INF’)
(i) nominativeless clauses with predicates requiring a genitive argument (e.g. Przybywa wody ‘becomes-more water.GEN’)

I will discuss lexical, syntactic and morphological properties of these constructions in turn, and argue that they can be classified into four distinct types:

1. Constructions (a)-(c) in Polish result from subject ellipsis, with their omitted subject being the indefinite pronoun referring to non-humans. That is, they are instances of pro\(\text{INDEF}\)-drop, analogous to clauses formed from predicates with a dropped personal pronoun (pro-drop). Verbs in these constructions in Polish can occur in any other person and number form, as well as with an overt expression of a nominative subject.
This is surprising because corresponding verbs in many languages are zero-place nontransitive predicates that do not accept any overt subject nominals and can be conjugated only in 3SG. Hence, Polish shows that while conceptualising weather phenomena as an agentless process may perhaps be a cognitive universal, it is evidently not a grammatical one.

2. Constructions (d)-(e) are genuinely subjectless: they have neither an overt nor an omitted/covert syntactic subject which could participate in syntactic operations such as control or raising. Construction (d) uses basic (non-derived) verbs from a small class of defective non-inflecting verbs, while (e) uses passivised (derived) predicates. Both constructions argue against constraints, proposed in most theoretical syntactic frameworks, that require all clauses to have subjects (including null or shared subjects).

3. Constructions (f)-(g) are both derived, and are only superficially subjectless. Despite disallowing any overt subject, they have a fully operational (binding, controlling, available for raising) and interpretable ‘covert’ syntactic subject. They are best termed ‘morpholexical’ or ‘morphological’ impersonals. They are frequently misanalysed and misclassified as ‘ill-behaved’ impersonal passives because they overlap with the passive in their function; however, their morphosyntactic behaviour is very different.

4. Finally, constructions (h)-(i) are not subjectless at all, but have overt non-agreeing subjects. Thus, they pattern with other clauses whose subjects have some nominal properties but are nevertheless not appropriate controllers of subject-predicate agreement. Such subjects are prepositional phrases, clausal subjects (including infinitival subjects), some quantifier phrases (with quantifiers requiring their complements to bear genitive case), and certain indeclinable subjects such as acronyms and foreign place names. These constructions are the least surprising because languages are expected to have a morphological strategy for situations when subject-predicate agreement breaks down.

Impersonal constructions: variation on the theme
Andrey Malchukov & Akio Ogawa

The talk addresses the question of how formal variation displayed by impersonal constructions relates to their semantic/functional characteristics. Starting with the functional properties, we assume (with Keenan and others) that canonical subjects share certain functional characteristics: they are verbal arguments, which are further typically specific/definite, topical, animate and volitional (the latter two properties pertain to transitive subjects but not necessarily to intransitive ones). Further it will be shown that a decrease in any of these properties may lead to an impersonal construction (although does not need to, given availability of alternative strategies). The cross-linguistically preferred encoding of individual types is similarly determined by functional factors. Thus, although both constructions lacking an argument (formed by weather-verbs) and constructions with indefinite subjects, may leave the subject unexpressed (cf. Russian svetaet ‘it dawns’ and govorjat ‘they say’), only the latter constructions make a frequent use of generic pronouns (cf. man-constructions in German) or agreement, or else take recourse to an impersonal passive to block a referential interpretation (as, e.g., Turkish). This is arguably due to the fact that for weather verbs explicit marking of (non-)specificity is dispensable. Further, although both presentational constructions and involuntary agent constructions may pattern impersonally, the loss of formal (subject) properties on the part of a “demoted” notional subject proceeds differently. While in case of presentational constructions, the coding properties are affected in the following order: position > agreement > case (cf. Givón 1997), in involuntary agent constructions case-marking is normally affected before other properties do. This is again
functionally well-motivated given the primary function of the respective coding properties (e.g. universal use of word order to encode information structure, case-markers to encode roles, etc). The same functional considerations can also explain counterexamples to such hierarchies, as when the case is sensitive to information structure (cf. the ga/wa alternation in Japanese), or a multi-value agreement is used to encode semantic roles (as in many split intransitive languages).

Thus, different functional types of impersonal constructions tend to have distinct preferential encoding, yet the distinction between these types may be blurred when the same or a similar encoding is used for different semantic subtypes. Thus, in Germanic languages the same expletive may be used both in weather-constructions and presentational constructions. Impersonal passives of intransitives may be used in presentational function if they allow expression of the subject (Frajzyngier1982). In Kambera (Klamer 1998), object agreement is used to cross-reference not only non-volitional subjects, but also indefinite subjects, and in Yagua (Payne & Payne 1990), object agreement is used for newly introduced subjects of unaccusative verbs. Such examples motivate a joint consideration of different functional varieties of impersonal constructions, as the same construction may register different deviations from the subject prototype.

### Impersonal constructions in a few Oceanic languages

Claire Moyse-Faurie

Many instances of impersonal verbs or impersonal constructions may be found in Oceanic languages (even when they lack a passive voice), especially in those which necessitate no personal or tense-aspect marking on the verb. Besides meteorological verbs (1), a few verbs such as "be finished", "be enough", "be nothing" (2) are also avalent. Impersonal constructions come under different types:

- (i) frequent omission of the argument referring to a 3rd person singular (3);
- (ii) optional impersonal construction of intransitive verbs (4) or intransitive construction of transitive verbs (5), associated with different meanings;
- (iii) genitive (6a) or locative (6b) subject verbs;
- (iv) restricted choice of personal arguments depending on the tense-aspect marker (7);
- (v) impersonal optative or exhortative sentences (8).
- (vi) ergative case avoidance (cf. Duranti, 1994), with a possessive noun phrase instead of an ergative argument (9)
- (vii) deletion as a mean of expressing anaphora (10).

1. **Xårâcùù (South of the Mainland, New Caledonia)**
   
   \[ xùpè sè na amù. \]
   
   cold big PST yesterday
   
   ‘It was cold yesterday.’

2. **East Uvean (Nuclear Polynesian)**
   
   \[ 'e uta. \]
   
   NPST enough
   
   ‘That’s enough.’

3. **Drehu (Lifu, Loyalty islands)**
   
   \[ kola meköl. \]
   
   PROG sleep
‘Someone is sleeping.’

(4) Xárâcùù (South of the Mainland, New Caledonia)
   a.  wâ xutuè.
       PRF last.long
       ‘It’s been a long time.’
   b.  è xutuè rö a.
       3SG last.long at here
       ‘S/he has been here for a long time.’

(5) East Futunan (Nuclear Polynesian)
   a.  na kai‘ā le toe
       PST rob ART child
       ‘The child robbed.’ or ‘The child was robbed.’
   b.  na kai‘ā le toe e le tagata fili
       PST rob ART child ERG ART man enemy
       ‘The enemy robbed the child.’

(6) Nêlêmwa (North of the Mainland, New Caledonia)
   a.  kâyaa i hla hagi shâlaga
       habit POSS 3PL fish crab
       ‘They have the habit of fishing crabs’ (Bril, 2002 :98)
   b.  hleena thaamwa xe kâyaa na shi-hla hagi shâlaga
       DEIC woman TOP LOC side-3POSS.PL fish crab
       ‘These women, they have the habit of fishing crabs.’ (lit. …habits their side fish crab) (id.)

(7) Drehu (Lifu, Loyalty islands)
    eni a pane sipo (*kola pane sipo eni)
    1SG IPRF first ask PROG first ask 1SG
    ‘I ask for silence!’ (‘I am asking for silence’)

(8) East Uvean (Nuclear Polynesian)
    ’e lelei age ke koutou omai apogipogi
    NPST well DIR that 2PL go(PL) tomorrow
    ‘It will be better if you come tomorrow.’

(9) East Futunan (Nuclear Polynesian)
   a.  e taisi ‘iki’iki le fasie e Petelo
       NPST cut small ART firewood ERG Petelo
       ‘Petelo is chopping lots of firewood into small pieces.’
   b.  e ’iki’iki le taisigâ fasie a Petelo
       NPST small ART cutting firewood POSS Petelo
       id. (lit. the firewood cutting of [agentive possession] Petelo is small)
Tuvaluan (Ellicean, Nuclear Polynesian)

\[
\text{eat SBJV satiated 2DU finished [2DU] turn off please ANAPH [2DU] ART light}
\]

‘(The two of you) eat till you have had enough, [when you] are finished, turn of the light.’ (Besnier, 2000:193)

References


Moyse-Faurie, Claire, 1995. Le xârâcùù, langue de Thío-Canala (Nouvelle-Calédonie). Éléments de syntaxe, Peeters-Selaf, LCP 10


Maa (Eastern Nilotic) Impersonals

Doris L. Payne

The Maa Impersonal construction is quite promiscuous: it can occur with nearly every verb tested, whether transitive, intransitive, active or stative. The Impersonal construction is itself intransitive, disallowing a Nominative NP in the clause though the verb is marked as if it had a third person subject. If the Impersonal contains an otherwise-transitive stem, an Accusative NP can occur, expressing a non-Agent involved in the event or situation.

The Impersonal is formed with a suffix -i which derives historically from an old plural subject affix (Greenberg 1959). In the contemporary language, however, -i does not pattern or function like other bound-pronominal argument prefixes. (In non-impersonal constructions, -i still can occur as an optional plural marker though it does not appear to be a subject pronominal per se.)

Functionally, the Maa Impersonal construction expresses three kinds of situations. First, it is used when the communicative focus is on the event or situation, as in 'Arriving will happen', 'Being together with the Kisii [a Bantu ethnic group] occurs', or 'People make-noise/Noise-making happens.'

Second, it is used in a range of functional passive situations. For example, it may be used if the patient is known but the agent is general "people" with unknown reference. The construction is unlikely to evoke the concept of an inanimate agent (even though inanimate agents are otherwise completely possible as subjects in Maa.) In passive function the construction may also—though less frequently—be used where a fairly specific agent is known from context, as in the following translations of a text excerpt (the parts corresponding to Impersonal clauses are underlined): so he [the warrior] did to Olarinkoi below the ear, pau!
He [Olarinkoi] was hit, he [Olarinkoi] was hit. Olarinkoi's club came out of the other cheek.

Clearly the understood agent of hitting is 'the warrior' (or possibly 'the club').

Third, the Impersonal is used with the stative possessive verb ata 'have' to render an existential (though not canonically presentational) function, as in 'There is a place like that' or 'There was a strap that people used to communicate with God'. (Based on a further extension of the 'have'-existential in which -i drops, the emergence of a type of "split-S" system could be argued for, in what is otherwise a Marked Nominative case-system language.)

Finally, the paper explores whether the Accusative-marked NP in an Impersonal has any subject properties at all, in any of its three sub-functions (i.e. focus on activity/situation, passive and existential). The general conclusion from all syntactic tests is that the construction is indeed subject-less.

**Mordvin equivalent for impersonal**

Merja Salo

According to the 2002 census there were 843 000 Mordvins in the Russia. There are two primary ethnic and linguistic subgroups of Mordvins, the Erzya and the Moksha. Due to the fact that these varieties have low mutual intelligibility, both have developed a literary language of their own based on Cyrillic letters. These differ to some degree at all levels of language, of which the lexical differences are the most pronounced. The Mordvins have their own republic in central Russia, but constitute only a third of its population, while over 70% of Mordvins live scattered over neighbouring areas and even much further. It is generally estimated that there are twice as many Erzya speakers as Moksha speakers. Although their number does not seem small, they are to be considered as endangered, owing to fast Russification of younger generations. There are very little native Mordvin children and the position of the languages in the school curriculum is mostly marginal — especially outside the titular republic.

As well as their relatives the Finnic languages of the Finno-Ugrian language group, Erzya and Moksha are typologically agglutinative and SVO languages. The verbal system of Mordvin is known for its abundance of derivational suffixes. Of these two can be used to form the passive: the highly productive -v- and the unproductive -t-. The t-derivatives can have also a special, earlier so called reflexive meaning, describing a physiological state of a human being (pain, ashe, cramp, nausea, tickle). Some of these derivatives can be interpreted as passives, but the primary actant (+human AGENTIVE) can never be reflected as the agent in the surface structure. It can also be used to describe weather conditions as the only constituent part of a sentence, but this is very marginal. The root verbs can be either transitive or intransitive and their meaning is often linked with the nuance that something happens unexpectedly or under the influence of some extraneous force. The relationship between the derivatives and the root verbs is illustrated using valence roles of case grammar.

All the meanings of t-derivatives are very unsufficiently represented in any Mordvin grammar. I have analysed the meanings of t-derivatives in material collected from folklore, dictionaries and modern literary sources.

**Towards a typology of third person plural impersonals**

Anna Siewierska and Maria Papastathi

The impersonal use of third person pronominals is widely attested cross-linguistically. In the generative literature ever since Cinque (1988) a distinction is made between two types of
impersonal uses of these forms, the so-called generic or universal use, as in (1a) and the so-called existential or arbitrary use, as in (1b).

(1) a. In Spain, they eat late.
   b. They’ve changed the tax laws yet again.

In the formal semantics literature (see Alonso-Ovalle 2000, 2001; Cabredo Hofherr 2003, 2006; Malamud 2001) as many as five different types of impersonal uses of the 3pl are recognised: a) the specific existential, b) the vague, c) the inferential, d) the corporate and e) the universal, exemplified in (2).

(2) a. They’re knocking at the door.
   b. They’ve seen him in the vicinity of the gym.
   c. They’ve stolen my bag!
   d. They changed the tax laws last year.
   e. In Spain, they eat late.

This paper seeks to determine to what extent the five uses in (2) constitute a viable typology of the impersonal uses of the 3pl, which of them are attested in languages other than English, and whether the cross-linguistic distribution of the uses found correlates with any structural features of the investigated languages. In exploring the last point we will focus on the relationship between the semantic interpretation of impersonal 3pls in a language, the formal realization of the 3pl and the nature of the agreement system of the language. The existence of a strong link between the formal realization of impersonal human reference and the verbal agreement system has been posited within generative linguistics (see especially Cabredo Hofher 2006; Holmberg 2005) and a potential relationship between the formal realization of the 3pl and its referential interpretations has been suggested both by generativists (see e.g. Cardinaleti and Starke 1998) and functionalist (see e.g. Myhill 1997 and Siewierska 2008).

The empirical data for the study will be based on a cross-linguistic corpus of translations of Harry Potter and acceptability judgements elicited by a questionnaire.

References
Alonso-Ovalle, Luis 2000 Is the ’Arbitrary interpretation’ a semantic epiphenomenon?
Cabredo Hofher 2003 Arbitrary readings of theird person pronominals. In Wesig
----- 2006 “Arbitrary” pro and the theory of pro-drop. In P. Ackema et. al. (eds),
Cardinaletti, A and Starke, M 1998 “The typology of structural deficiency”. In H. van
   36(4), 533–564.
Siewierska, A. 2007 Ways of impersonalizing: pronominal vs. verbal strategies. In L.
   Mackenzie et al. (eds), Amsterdam John Benjamins, 27-61.

Speakers, entities and situations: impersonal configurations in Afroasiatic
   Mauro Tosco and Amina Mettouchi

Afroasiatic languages, though widely different in many respects, present at least a few common morphosyntactic features: among them, subject-marking on the verb through affixation is prominent; deictic markers are the source of many morphemes within languages,
and a robust derivational system expresses valency and voice (with, e.g., passive, middle, reflexive, transitive-causative derivations).

Those linguistic features create the conditions for impersonal predications that are in some ways quite different from the ones usually discussed in Romance or Germanic languages. Third person masculine or neutral pronouns for instance are not dominant in Afroasiatic impersonals. Rather, deictic predications, thetic sentences and generic pronouns are preferred strategies.

Our journey through the phylum will take us from Cushitic and Omotic to Berber, with a more cursory presentation of data from Semitic, Chadic and Ancient Egyptian.

The phenomena that will be discussed are the following:

1. atmospheric verbs, that fall into various types (“the rain falls”, “the rain rains”, “rain here”, “it’s raining”) depending on which part of the predication is backgrounded;
2. modal predications, that resort sometimes to third person predications, but very often to deictic constructions attaching a construed situation to the speaker’s *hic et nunc*;
3. agent-removing or -backgrounding constructions: alongside passive structures (possibly the preferred strategy) constructions with impersonal or generic pronouns are not rare.

We will finally attempt a delimitation of the concept of impersonal, between the non-referential and the non-definite, the non-subjectal and the non-agentive.