

Afranaph New Research Topic proposal
Antecedentless subjects, impersonal constructions and passives
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The Anaphora in the African Languages Questionnaire focuses on bound anaphora and notably the syntax, semantics and morphology of reflexive and reciprocal anaphors.

The present projet proposal focuses on a complementary phenomenon, namely *antecedentless* human uses of personal pronouns (these uses are also variously called *arbitrary* or *impersonal*), comparable to the following examples from English and French:

- (1) a. Ils ont encore augmenté les impôts. (French)
 They raised taxes again.
- b. Ils ont volé mon vélo. (French)
 3Pl have.3pl stolen my.ms bike.ms
 They stole my bike.
- c. En France, ils mangent des escargots. (French)
 In France they eat def.indef.pl snails.

Constructions with antecedentless subjects such as (1) are particularly relevant to the analysis of passives cross-linguistically. In generative analyses of passives it has been proposed that passives contain a morpheme that is assigned the external theta-role of the underlying predicate (Jaeggli 1986, Baker, Johnson, Roberts 1989). Proposals differ on two points (i) whether this morpheme is the passive morpheme (e.g. *-en* in English) or a silent pronoun *pro* in a lower specifier position and (ii) whether the morpheme that absorbs the external theta role should also be analysed as absorbing accusative case.

This analysis views passives as similar to constructions with a backgrounded subject. As Blevins (2003) points out, however, this analysis blurs the distinction between (intransitivised) passives and (fundamentally transitive) impersonal verb forms. This distinction has fundamental consequences as the studies of reflexive passives in Romance (*se*-constructions) and participial *-no/-to* passives in Slavic have shown. In Romance, for example, languages differ with respect to the syntax of *se*-constructions that background an agentive subject. In certain Italian varieties the reflexive *se* has been reanalysed as an arbitrary human subject clitic, allowing co-occurrence with a reflexive *se* and 3sg agreement on the verb with a plural DP object (as well as passive *se*), while in other Romance varieties such as Romanian the *se*-construction always has the behaviour of a passive with promotion of the logical object DP to grammatical subject (Dobrovie-Sorin 1998).

Contrastive studies of participial *-no/-to* passives in Polish and Ukrainian have further shown that accusative case on the logical object DP is not incompatible with a passive analysis of the construction in Ukrainian.

Given the observations made on the basis of Slavic and Romance a subject-less construction with an accusative underlying object is then amenable to three analyses: (i) an impersonal subject analysis, comparable to lexical impersonal subjects like *one* in *one doesn't eat with one's fingers* or *they* as in (1), (ii) and impersonal verb analysis with a subjectless but otherwise transitive structure (as proposed for Baltic in Blevins 2003) and (iii) a passive analysis with an intransitive syntactic structure.

Antecedentless 3pl constructions as in (1) have been studied in some detail in the recent literature in contrast with lexical human impersonals such as *one* or Germanic *man/men* (see Siewierska 2011 and references cited there). The present proposal aims to widen the empirical base of these studies in two related domains: (i) extending 3pl subjects to null subjects in languages without person-number agreement on the verb (classifier-languages and agreement-less languages), and (ii) the distinction between impersonal verb forms and passives for subjectless constructions.

Null subjects without person-number agreement Most languages considered by Siewierska (2011) have either lexical subjects (French, English) or person-number agreement on verbs (Spanish) and the subjects are consequently marked 3pl either lexically or by agreement with the predicate. Similarly, based on data from Modern Hebrew, Russian and Spanish, Cabredo Hofherr (2006) proposes that antecedentless 3rd person subjects receive quasi-argumental interpretation when mass (with 3sg agreement) and human interpretation when countable (3pl) agreement. Notice however, that person is independent of countability and the amalgamation of person and number is language specific. Some languages without person-number marking allow a wider range of constructions, including null subjects that have no person-number specification:

- (2) a. Dan Linn, **zot** manz avek lame. (Mauritian Creole)
 In India 3pl eat with hand
 In India, they eat with (their) hands. (lexical 3pl subject)
- b. Lalmagn, [Ø] al lekol wit-er.
 Germany to school eight-o'clock
 In Germany, they/ one goes to school at eight-o'clock. (Ø subj. no person/nmbr specification)

As Mauritian Creole has no person-number agreement on verbs, the null subject does not have person or number features. As indicated by the translation, the sentences with *zot* “3pl” are semantically 3rd person in that they exclude the speaker (indicated by a translation with *they*). The example with a null subject is not marked for person as it allows a reading including the speaker (comparable to “one”) as well as a reading where the speaker need not be included. This correlation between person-marking co-occurring with zero pronouns is also found in Modern Hebrew: in the tenses where the verb marks only number-gender, the reading including the speaker is possible, in person-marking tenses the interpretation is speaker-exclusive.

The questionnaire study of antecedentless subject constructions and the co-occurring agreement is necessary to test the following generalizations:

- (3) a. 3rd person antecedentless pronouns exclude the speaker (like antecedentless *they*)
b. antecedentless pronouns that are unmarked for person include the speaker

- (4) Countability correlates with interpretation of the antecedentless pronoun:
 - a. countable pronouns are interpreted as animate (3pl)
Ø tocan a la puerta (Sp)
Knock.3pl at the door
They/ somebody are knocking at the door. (Not: something is knocking at the door)
 - b. mass pronouns are interpreted as inanimate (3sg)
Ø llovió ayer (Sp)
Rained.3sg yesterday

For the hypothesis in (4), classifier-agreement languages could provide a more differentiated picture of how agreement features are interpreted by default. Regularities in the default semantics of agreement may also provide an insight into the features that allow a human 3sg generic pronoun in Finnish (Holmberg 2005).

Notice that languages that allow null antecedentless subjects do not necessarily allow full pro-drop.

Mauritian Creole is not a full pro-drop language since it does not allow null pronouns referring to a discourse antecedent (Syea 1993). Mauritian Creole is a partial pro-drop language allowing *antecedentless* null subjects and in particular antecedentless human null subjects (Syea 1993). In particular, the null subject in Mauritian allows existential (5a) and universal (5b) readings.

- (5) a. [Ø] finn koke Pyer so loto (Mauritian Creole)
asp stole Pierre his car
“They/ someone stole Pierre's car”. (Syea 1993)
- b. [Ø] fer rom ar disik
make rhum with sugar “
One/ they make rhum with sugar” (Syea 1993)

The interpretation of null antecedentless subjects may also be subject to additional restrictions. According to Law & Muyskens (2001), Papiamentu only allows the *generic* use of the null subject.

The proposed questionnaire study will therefore also aim to establish (i) which non-pro-drop languages allow antecedentless null subjects and (ii) which readings are available for the antecedentless null subject (argumental vs. quasi-argument, types of argumental subjects: human, agents, causers, and for human agents: type of reading universal & existential, universal only, existential only).

Data from African languages offer a possibility to tease apart person from other agreement factors to establish whether (i) whether person-independent classifier agreement may serve to disambiguate antecedentless readings in a way compatible with the mass/ count hypothesis in Cabredo Hofherr (2006) (ambient quasi-argument/ natural causes vs. human agents) (ii) whether classifier agreement may further disambiguate types of antecedentless human readings (e.g. universal vs. existential).

Impersonal verb forms vs. passives The availability of antecedentless null subjects in non-null subject languages gives rise to structures that contain no surface subject. These forms are semantically akin to passives in that they suppress the logical subject of the underlying predicate. As pointed out by Blevins (2003), however, impersonal verb forms found in Baltic languages have clearly distinct properties from passives. Blevins' criteria (a.-e.) are complemented by criteria f.-g. proposed by Maling (2006:203).

		Passives	Impersonal verb forms
a.	Agentive by-phrase	yes/no	No
b.	Compatible with unaccusative Vs, (come, go)	No	Yes
c.	Logical object retains object properties	No	Yes
d.	Human interpretation of the implicit actor	Not necessarily	Yes
e.	Changes transitivity	Yes(derived intransitive)	No (derived subjectless transitive)
f.	Logical subject retains subject properties: Binding of anaphors (reflexive and reciprocal) by logical subject is possible	No	Yes
g.	Logical subject retains subject properties: Control of subject oriented adjuncts is possible	No	Yes

The English passive fulfills the passive criteria, while sentences with lexical impersonal pronouns such as French *on* and Germanic *man/men* fulfill the impersonal criteria (Maling 2006).

For *subjectless* forms the diagnostic tests do not align neatly however. This is illustrated for syntactic properties by Ukrainian and for semantic properties by Celtic impersonal verb forms.

As argued in detail in Lavine (2005) the Polish and Ukrainian cognate *-no/-to* participle constructions are diachronically syntactically distinct. This is shown by contrasts wrt to the possibility of a *by*-phrase, and binding by the implicit agent. While the Polish construction is a transitive impersonal, the Ukrainian counterpart has the hall-marks of a passive, albeit with accusative marking on the logical object (see Lavine 2005 and references cited there):

- (6) a. Znaleziono niemowlę w koszu. (Polish)
found-NO babyACC in basket
'They found a baby in a basket.'
- b. Nemovlja bulo znajdeno u košyku. (Ukrainian)
babyACC aux.past found-NO in basket
'A baby was found in a basket.' (Lavine 2005)

This analysis implies that direct-object syntax of the single DP argument of a construction does not guarantee transitive syntax (contra Burzio's generalisation).

Celtic impersonal verb forms differ syntactically and semantically from typical impersonal forms. First, they contrast semantically with impersonal pronouns in that the implicit subject is not limited to humans but allows implicit causers (McCloskey 2007 for Irish). Secondly, Celtic impersonals have been described as being compatible with *by*-phrases. These facts pose two puzzles: First, transitive subjects in Romance and Germanic are incompatible with *by*-phrases:

- (7) a. #Someone_i built the house by the builder_i. (German)
Intended: "The house was built by the builder."
- b. Jemand hat das Haus von dem Maurer gebaut.
Only: Somebody built the house of the builder. Not: "The house was built by the builder."
- c. #Quelqu'un a construit une maison par l'ouvrier. (French)
Not: "The house was built by the builder."

This raises the question why subjectless sentences that have hall-marks of transitivity allow *by*-phrases. Two possibilities could be the locus of variation: (i) the feature content of the subject in null-subject constructions and (ii) the type of *by*-phrase (see e.g. Timberlake 1976 for differences between *by*-phrases in North Russian *u+N_{dative}* and in Standard Russian *N_{instrumental}*).

Secondly, why do certain transitive impersonal verb forms allow natural causes as implicit subjects (e.g. Irish)?

Data from African languages may shed light on these questions by providing answers to the following questions:

- (8) a. does the type of (classifier-)agreement correlate with
(i) the possibility of combining *by*-phrases with a particular antecedentless null-subject construction
(ii) the possibility of having implicit natural causes as subjects?
- b. do different types of *by*-phrases correlate with the possibility of having *by*-phrases in syntactically transitive subjectless constructions?

Binding properties further distinguish passives from impersonal constructions. Lexical impersonal pronouns like

English *one*, French *on* and Germanic *man/men* can bind possessives in universal contexts (but not in existential contexts):

- (9) a. One should look after **one's** children.
b. Man sollte sich um **seine** Kinder kümmern. (German)
Man should refl prep poss.3sg children take-care. (= 9a)
- (10) a. One's children are taken care of.
(≠ One takes care of one's children).
b. Es wird sich um seine Kinder gekümmert. (German)
His children are taken care of. (≠ One takes care of one's children).

Methodology The proposed project will use the questionnaire developed within the project *Towards a typology of impersonal human pronouns* (Volker Gast, Jena & Patricia Cabredo Hofherr, Paris, funded by the ANR and the DFG). This questionnaire proceeds in three stages.

A base questionnaire elicits the constructions that appear in typical human impersonal contexts. These constructions are then analysed and only finite constructions will be considered (as the relationship between impersonal subjects and the PRO_arb of uncontrolled infinitives is not yet clear).

The second questionnaire elicits the range of impersonal contexts that a particular strategy (such as null subjects, lexical pronouns, different agreement-types) can appear in.

For the binding properties, the project will be able to build on the results of the AfrAnaph questionnaire. Like the AfrAnaph questionnaire, the Jena-Paris questionnaire is modeled on the Questionnaires developed in Utrecht for reflexives and reciprocals (Dimitriadis & Everaert).

For those languages that have impersonal null subjects, a complementary questionnaire based on the criteria proposed by Blevins and Maling will be developed to chart the passive-like and impersonal-like properties found for null-subject constructions.

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