Human impersonals in the outskirts

Workshop on typological and functional perspectives to human impersonals
Organizers: Pekka Posio (Stockholm University) and Max Wahlström (University of Helsinki)
Venue: Department of Romance Languages and Classics, Stockholm University
October 11-12 2018

This workshop brings together linguists interested in human impersonal constructions (Malchukov & Siewierska 2011) and working on languages situated in the outskirts of the Standard Average European (SAE) language area (Whorf 1956, Haspelmath 2001). By the word "outskirts" we refer to both geographic location on the edges of the linguistic area, e.g. varieties of Portuguese, Finnish and Karelian – the latter two sharing many grammatical features with SAE but not usually included in the group – and non-standard varieties of SAE languages, e.g. dialectal varieties of Ibero-Romance and South Slavonic languages.

The term human impersonals is nowadays widely used in the functional and typological linguistics to refer to constructions that are syntactically and/or semantically impersonal and refer to unspecified human participants (see e.g. Siewierska 2011, Siewierska & Malchukov 2011, Posio & Vilkuna 2013, Gast & van der Auwera 2013). Human impersonals include e.g. the man-impersonal constructions found in Germanic languages (*man*) and French (*on*), the impersonal or non-referential uses of personal pronouns and verb forms such as the second person singular and the third person plural (both found in many languages including Spanish, Finnish, Karelian and Slavonic languages), and dedicated impersonal verb forms such as the impersonal/passive form in Finnish.

By shifting the focus from the well-studied SAE languages like German and French towards the outskirts of the European language area, we want to bring together knowledge of and perspectives into less well-known language varieties and examine whether similar tendencies are found and whether hypotheses developed within one language variety can be successfully tested in other languages. As an example, it has been claimed that there is a typological correlation between the expression of pronominal subjects and man-type impersonals, and that pronouns like *man* or *on* are not found in null subject languages (Siewierska 2011). However, we have evidence of similar grammaticalization phenomena with words referring to 'people' or 'person' from null subject languages like Portuguese (Posio 2017) and from several Slavonic languages (Giacalone Ramat & Sansò 2007). The use of such constructions may be marginalized or typical of non-standard varieties, and may thus have slipped the attention of language typologists.

Our aim is to discuss both empirical and theoretical questions related to human impersonals, for example:

> (1) What is their relation to the person marking and the personal pronoun and verb forms in the languages we examine?

> (2) What is the division of labour between the human impersonal constructions in languages that have several such constructions?

Personal referential devices such as pronouns and human impersonal constructions have a two-way relationship with each other: for example, personal pronouns can receive generic and impersonal readings (as is the case with 'you' and 'they), but impersonal pronouns may often develop

personal uses, as is the case with French *on* and Portuguese *a gente* that have replaced the "traditional" first person plural pronouns in some varieties of these languages (the same development is found with the Finnish impersonal/passive voice).

As for the division of labour between these constructions, it is clear that human impersonals have different kinds of referential properties that partially account for their distribution, i.e. whether their referential scope (Posio & Vilkuna 2013) includes or excludes the speaker and whether the potential referent is conceptualized as individual or collective. However, the choice of human impersonals depends also on genre (Posio 2015), sociolinguistic factors (Posio 2016), the expression of (inter)subjectivity and the language variety in question (Posio 2017). It is nevertheless less clear why closely related languages differ radically from each other. For example, why do some languages prefer the use of person forms such as the second person singular in contexts where other languages employ *man*-type impersonals?

We have asked the workshop participants to present and discuss their research findings and theoretical perspectives to the data, as well as methodological questions related to the study of non-standard, spoken and/or dialectal data. Each speaker is allocated 30 minutes for the presentation and 15 minutes for discussion.

Programme
Thursday October 11th (B522A, Universitetsvägen 10B)

15:30-16:15	Workshop introduction
16:15-17:00	Pekka Posio (SU) & Max Wahlström (Helsinki University): Impersonal uses of 'person' in Romance and Slavonic: grammaticalization of noun-based impersonals in European Portuguese and Bulgarian
17:00-17:45	Maria Vilkuna (Institute for the Languages of Finland): Between us and them: Interpreting plural person forms in context

Friday October 12th (B522AB, Universitetsvägen 10B)

9:30-10:15	Laura Álvarez, Anna Jon-And, Beatrice Järlung, Pekka Posio (SU): Variation in verbal and pronominal forms of second and third person singular in Portuguese spoken in Cabinda, Angola
10:15-11:00	Juanito Ornelas de Avelar (SU): On the use of "geral" as an impersonal pronoun in Brazilian Portuguese
11:00-11:30	Coffee break
11:30-12:15	Maxim Makartsev (Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg / Institute for Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences): Man-impersonals and definiteness in Standard Albanian and Balkan South Slavic
	Lunch break
13:45-14:30	Carlota de Benito Moreno (University of Zürich): Human impersonals in Spanish: the role of transitivity
14:30-15:15	Milla Uusitupa (University of Eastern Finland): Open person constructions in Border Karelian dialects
	Coffee break
15:45-16:30	General discussion

Selected references

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