

Impersonal pronouns in Somali, German and French

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- Description of syntax and semantics of the impersonal pronoun *la* in Somali.¹
- Comparison with the impersonal pronouns Ge. *man* and Fr. *on*.
- In what follows *impersonal* should be understood as *impersonal human*, since the traditional term *impersonal* covers heterogeneous constructions such as *It rains* and *One could say that*.

1 The Somali language

- Somali is a Cushitic language (Afro-Asiatic language family) spoken in the countries of the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Djibuti, Kenya).
- Somali is an SOV language with postnominal modifiers (N+Mod *nin dheer*, "man tall").
- Somali verbal inflection distinguishes masculine and feminine gender in the 3sg.

(1) a. Cige wuxuu ark-**ay** Rooble.

Cige.masc WAXAA+3ms saw.3ms Rooble 'Cige saw Rooble.'

b. Canbaro waxay arag-**tay** Rooble.

Canbaro.fem WAXAA+3fs saw.3fs Rooble 'Canbaro saw Rooble.'

- Somali declarative main clauses obligatorily contain one of the following particles ("obligatory focus marking"):

(2) a. BAA/AYAA the focus markers

b. WAXAA the focus+ extraposition marker

c. WAA the declarative marker (focus on the verb)

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d. MA the negation

- Somali has four adpositions that appear in a fixed order in the preverbal field:

- (3) *u* = to, for,
ku = in,
ka = from, out of,
la = with.

- The Somali preverbal field contains the following elements in a fixed order (see e.g. Orwin (1995, p.81)):

- (4) a. LA > obj. pronouns > adpositions > neg. > refl. > deictics > V
 b. negation = *ma*
 reflexive = *is*
 deictics = *soo* (“her”), *sii* (“hin, weg”), *wada* (“together”), *kala* (“apart”)

2 The pronoun *la* in Somali

- Somali has no verbal passive. Passive sentences are translated by using *la*.
- Kirk (1905, p.34) *la*: *one, they, people*. *Similar to the French pronoun on, in meaning and construction. This pronoun is used in construction like any simple personal pronoun.* See also Orwin (1995); El-Solami-Mewis (1987); Saeed (1993, 1999) and others.

2.1 Morphological properties of *la*

- *la* is not related to the expressions for human/people in Somali (\neq pronouns in Plank (2003)):

- (5) a. *dad-ka*, people-the.m
 b. *qof(-ka)*, person-the *qof* can have an indefinite reading corresponding to *someone*
 c. *nin-ka*, man-the
 naag-ta, woman-the

- *la* combines with 3ms agreement on the verb.

- (6) *Buggan ayaa la soo gatay*
 book-this AYAA LA bought.3ms
 It is this book that LA bought.

- *la* differs from the other 3ms NPs with respect to the focus markers:

- (i) *la* appears with the bare focus/ extraposition/ declarative markers;
- (ii) the other 3ms NPs appear with a weak pronoun on these markers.

- (7) a. Buug-gan **ayaa** la soo gatay
 book-this AYAA/BAA LA bought.3ms
 It is this book that LA bought.
- b. Nin-ku buug-gan **ayuu/ buu** soo gatay
 man-the.nom book-this AYAA+3ms / BAA+3ms bought.3ms
 It is this book that the man bought.

- (8) a. **Waxaa** la sexeedaa toban-ka.
 WAXAA LA sleeps.3ms ten-the
 LA sleeps at ten.
- b. Nin-ku **wuxuu** sexeedaa toban-ka.
 man-the.nom WAXAA+3ms sleeps.3ms ten-the
 The man sleeps at ten.

- *la* and weak pronouns appear in different positions in embedded clauses:

- (i) *la* is part of the preverbal field, (ii) the weak pronouns are enclitic on the complementiser:

- (9) a. Waxaan ogahay in arrintaas **la** la socoda.
 * Waxaan ogahay **inla** arrintaas la socoda.
 WAXAA+1sg know.1sg comp (LA) matter-this LA LA follows
 I know that LA knows about this matter.
- b. * Waxaan ogahay in arrintaas **uu** la socoda.
 Waxaan ogahay **inuu** arrintaas la socoda.
 WAXAA+1sg know.1sg comp (3ms) matter-this 3ms LA follows
 I know that he knows about this matter.

- Phonologically, *la* is a proclitic, weak pronouns are enclitic:

- (10) a. in + la + ka → in laga
 comp + LA + KA (notice voicing of intervocalic -k-)
- b. in + uu + ka → inuu ka
 comp + 3ms + KA

Conclusion: LA clearly does not behave like the other weak subject pronouns.

Question: Analyse *la* as a subject pronoun or as a prefixed passive morpheme?

Arguments to analyse LA as a pronoun

- (11) a. When LA is present, no other NP can bear the nominative marking and the verb is always in the 3ms-form
 →none of the other NPs is promoted to subject.
- b. LA appears with the active forms of the verb
 →if LA were not the subject these sentences would be subjectless.
- c. *la* is the most external element of the preverbal clitic field
la occupies a position different from the clitic object pronouns
la is clearly different from the reflexive pronoun *is*
 →LA is not a case of a reflexive passive.
- d. Verbal inflection in Somali is affixed onto the verb stem,
la is the most external element of the preverbal clitic field
 →LA is not plausibly analysable as a verbal passive morpheme.

Hypothesis: LA is a impersonal subject pronoun with a special syntax.

- In other languages the impersonal pronoun may differ in its syntax:

- (12) a. Standard Italian is a null subject language that has no clitic subject pronouns but has a clitic impersonal subject pronoun *si*.
- b. In some Italian dialects *si* has been reanalysed as a subject pronoun (i.e. it is compatible with an accusative object), but still occupies the internal position in the clitic cluster that the reflexive *si* occupies.
- c. French *on* differs from other subject clitics wrt VP co-ordination:
 Il chante et danse. 'he sings and dances'
 On chante et on danse 'one sings and one dances'.

- I will ignore the reading of *on* corresponding to the 1pl *nous*. The shift from impersonal element to 1pl is attested for heterogeneous expressions such as

- (13) a. Italian *si* (from a reflexive/ an impersonal subject pronoun).
- b. French *on* (an impersonal subject pronoun).
- c. Brazilian Portuguese *a gente* (a noun phrase) (see Menuzzi (1995))

2.2 Limitation to subject position

- *la* can only be a subject, in object position the impersonal use of the 2sg appears:

(14) Haddii harrad ku hayo biya la cabbaa.
 when thirst you.sg holds.3ms water LA drinks.3ms
 When thirst holds **you** LA drinks water.

- In this *la* resembles *man* and *on* and differs from English *one* and Spanish *uno*:

(15) a. *one* can be possessor: *one's (own) house*.
 b. *uno* can be direct object (prepositional accusative):
 Cuando lo convocan *a uno* eso quiere decir que hubo un problema. (Sp)
 when 3ms.acc summon A UNO, this wants say (= means) that (there) was a problem

- *la* can be co-referential with a “generic” 2sg subject:

(16) Haddii bugtid dakhtar-ka ayaa loo tagaa.
 when ill-be.2sg doctor-the AYAA LA U goes.3ms
 When you are ill, LA goes to the doctor.

- The relationship *la* /2sg differs from the suppletive pair *man* /*einer* in German. The suppletive form *einer* is only possible in positions where *man* cannot appear (dative and accusative); subject *einer* is not impersonal but implies a single individual (Zifonun (2000)).
- German *einer* in the nominative is not impersonal while French *tu/vous* ‘you.sg/pl’ can have impersonal readings as subjects (an instance of impersonal readings of 2nd person pronouns, which are widespread cross-linguistically).

2.3 Co-reference

- Discuss co-reference for German *man* following Zifonun (2000), and compare with French *on* and Spanish, then examine Somali *la*.

- In French and German *on* and *man* have restricted possibilities of co-reference.
- French and German *on* and *man* can appear with co-referential:

(17) (i) **reflexives:**
 a. Man schlägt sich nicht selbst vor.
 On ne se propose pas soi-même
 One does not propose oneself.

- b. Man muss sich morgens und abends die Zähne putzen.
 On doit se laver les dents matin et soir.
 One should SELF brush the teeth morning and evening.

(ii) **reciprocals:**

- c. Man grüßte einander wieder.
 On se saluait à nouveau.
 One greeted each other again.

(iii) **possessives:**

- d. Hier darf man sein Auto nicht parken.
 Ici, on ne peut pas garer sa voiture.
 One cannot park poss.3ms car here.

- French and German *on* and *man* cannot appear with co-referential 3sg pronouns.

(i) In subject position *man* and *on* have to be repeated (see Zifonun (2000) for *man*)

(ii) in object position *man* has to be taken up by *einen/einem*.

(18) **No co-referential 3sg pronouns:**

- a. Man holt sich einen Schnupfen wenn man/*er nicht aufpasst.
 On rattrape un rhume si on ne fait pas attention.
 One catches a flu if one/*he is not careful.
- a'. Jeder/ Hans holt sich einen Schnupfen wenn er nicht aufpasst
 chacun / Jean rattrape un rhume s'il ne fait pas attention.
 Everyone / John catches a flu if he is not careful.
- b. Wenn man sich einen Schnupfen holt, muss man/ *er im Bett bleiben.
 Quand on attrape un rhume, on/*il doit rester au lit.
 When one catches a flu, one/*he has to stay in bed.
- b'. Wenn jemand / ein Mann sich einen Schnupfen holt, muss er im Bett bleiben.
 Quand qqn / un homme attrape un rhume, il doit rester au lit.
- c. Man holt sich einen Schnupfen wenn die Kleider einen/*ihn nicht warmhalten.
 One catches a cold if the clothes do not keep one(suppletive)/*him warm.
- d. Wenn man sich nicht anstrengt, wird einem/*ihm auch nichts geschenkt.

- *man* and *on* are different from

(a) certain readings of the 3pl “arbitrary” pronouns in Spanish for which co-reference with a null 3pl subject or object is possible.

- (19) a. Cuando preparan algo importante ponen mucha atención en los detalles.
when (they) prepare something important, (they) put much attention on the details
- b. En este país, si te dicen algo, no tienes que contradecirlos.
in this country, when (they) tell you something, (you) not have-to contradict-them

(b) Spanish *uno* which can be taken up by a null subject or repeated (unlike indefinite pronouns).

- (20) a. Cuando uno prepara algo importante pone mucha atención en los detalles.
when UNO prepares something important, (3sg) puts much attention on the details
- b. Cuando uno prepara algo importante uno pone mucha atención en los detalles.
when UNO prepares something important, UNO puts much attention on the details
- c. Cuando alguien prepara algo importante alguien pone mucha atención en los detalles.
when someone prepares something important, someone puts much attention on the details
no co-reference between the two “alguien”

2.3.1 Reflexives/reciprocals

- *la* can be the antecedent of *is* (the reflexive) in its reflexive and in its reciprocal reading:

- (21) a. Murayadda waa la is ku arki karaa.
mirror-the WAA LA is KU see can.3ms
LA can see refl. in the mirror. (reflexive)
- b. Waa la is diley.
WAA LA is killed
LA killed himself. (reflexive)
- c. shaley baa la isla hadlay
yesterday BAA LA IS+LA spoke.3ms
Yesterday, LA spoke to each other. (reciprocal)

2.3.2 Possessives

- *la* cannot be the antecedent of a possessive pronoun

(22) a. Halkaan baabuur-ka looga ma tegi karo.
 * Halkaan baabuur-kiisa looga ma tegi karo.
 here car-the/*-his LA +U+KA neg leave can.3ms.

b. Waa in la sameeya waajibaad-ka.
 * Waa in la sameeya waajibaad-kiisa.
 It is necessary LA does duties-the/*-his. (One has to do one's duties.)

- In principle, the possessive pronoun allows a bound pronoun interpretation:

(23) Qof-kasta wuxuu dhistaa aqal-kiisa.
 Person-each WAXAA+3ms builds house-his.

- In these cases, (i) either avoid a possessive and use a simple definite (see ex 22), or (ii) use the 2sg-construction:

(24) a. Aqal-ka markaa la dhisayo, aad baa looga tahadaraa.
 house-the moment+BAA build.3ms, very-much BAA LA +U+KA attentive-be
 When LA builds a house, LA is careful.

b. Aqal-kaaga mark-aad dhisaysid, aad baa looga tahadaraa.
 house-yours moment+BAA+2sg build.2sg, very-much BAA LA +U+KA attentive
 When you.2sg build your.sg house, LA is careful.

2.3.3 Weak 3ms pronouns

- *la* cannot be the antecedent of a 3sg pronoun, repeat *la* or use 2sg.

(25) a. Halkaan waxaa loo yimadaa in lagu nasto.
 here WAXAA la+U comes.3sg comp LA + KU rest.3sg
 Here LA comes to rest.

compare :

* Halkaan waxaa loo yimadaa inuu ku nasto.
 here WAXAA la+U comes.3sg comp+3sg KU rest.3sg

b. Halkaan waxaa loo yimadaa in buugag laga iibsado.
 here WAXAA la+U comes.3sg comp books la+KA buy.3sg
 Here LA comes to buy books.

- c. Haddii la buko dakhtar loo tagaa.
 when LA ill-be doctor LA U goes.3ms
 When you are ill, LA goes to the doctor.

- Summarising:

(26)

	reflexives	reciprocals	possessives	weak pronouns
la	yes	yes	no	no
man	yes	yes	yes	no
on	yes	yes	yes	no

2.4 Episodic readings

- *la* commonly appears in episodic sentences:

(27) a. Berri hawadduna aad bey u kululaan doontaa, baa la yidhi.
 tomorrow weather-the-and will be very hot, so they said.

b. Laba maalmood ka hor baa la iibiyey.
 two days from before BAA LA sold.3ms
 It was sold two days ago. Zorc and Issa (1990, p.171)

c. Waa la cayaarayaa.
 WAA LA having-fun.3ms
 LA is having a party.

- In this respect *LA* is like *man* and *on* and unlike Engl *one*. *man* and *on* also have episodic (non-generic) readings, (roughly paraphrasable by “someone”).

(28) a. Gestern hat man mir mein Rad geklaut.
 Hier, on m’a volé mon vélo.
 Yesterday, MAN/ON stole my bike.

b. An der Rezeption hat man mir gesagt, ich könne den Aufzug benutzen.
 À l’accueil on m’a dit que je pouvais utiliser l’ascenseur.
 At the reception MAN/ON told me I could use the lift.

- With passives and unaccusatives *on* cannot be episodic/ existential (Cinque (1988)). The same is true for *man* in German (for Danish and Swedish *man* see Egerland (2003)). With the generic reading of *on* / *man* this restriction on the type of predicate does not hold.

- (29) a. # Gestern wurde man verprügelt.
 hier on a été tabassé (≠ “qqn a été tabassé”)
 yesterday MAN/ON was beaten up (≠ someone was beaten up)
- b. # Gestern kam man um 10 Uhr an.
 hier on est arrivé à 10h (≠ “qqn est arrivé à 10h”)
 yesterday MAN/ON arrived at 10 o'clock (≠ someone arrived at 10 o'clock)

• In Somali, the same restriction does not hold:

- (30) a. Shalay waxaa lagu kufay jaranjaraad-dayda.
 yesterday WAXAA LA +ku fell.3ms stairs-mine.
 Yesterday someone fell on my stairs.
- b. Waa saaka waa lagu yimid.
 time morning WAA LA +2sg came
 This morning someone came to see you.

2.4.1 Co-reference and existential readings

• The co-reference with a reflexive, a reciprocal and a possessive pronoun is bad for existential *man* and *on* (unlike for the generic uses):

- (31) a. Heute morgen hat man eine Nachricht für dich hinterlassen.
 Ce matin on a laissé un message pour toi.
 This morning one left a message for you.
- b. * Heute morgen hat man seine Adresse für dich hinterlassen.
 * Ce matin on a laissé son adresse pour toi.
 this morning one left poss.3sg address for you.
- c. * Gestern hat man sich die Zähne geputzt.
 * Hier on s'est lavé les dents. 'Yesterday one SELF brushed the teeth.'
- d. * Gestern hat man einander gegrüsst.
 * Hier on s'est salué.'Yesterday one greeted each other.'

• Co-reference with a reflexive or a reciprocal reading of *is* are ok for existential LA :

- (32) a. Shalay teleefoon baa la diray si la iska warramo.
 yesterday telephone BAA LA send manner LA refl+KA news-give.3ms
 Yesterday LA called in order to LA of-self news-gives.
 Yesterday someone called to give their news.

b. Waa la isla hadlayaa.

WAA LA refl+LA is-speaking.3ms 'LA is speaking with each other.'

• Summarising:

(33)

	reflexives	reciprocals	possessives	weak pronouns
generic man	yes	yes	yes	no
generic on	yes	yes	yes	no
la	yes	yes	no	no
exist. man	no	no	no	no
exist. on	no	no	no	no

2.4.2 Scope

• *man* / *on* do not have scope variation (\neq quantificational indefinites) (Zifonun (2000)). *man* and *on* take scope below the adverb (= bare plurals, \neq definite expressions).

(34) a. Man hat mir schon wieder mein Rad geklaut.

On m'a encore volé mon vélo.

Man/On has stolen my bike again. (again » someone)

b. Mein Nachbar/er hat mir schon wieder mein Rad geklaut.

Mon voisin/il m'a encore volé mon vélo.

My neighbour has stolen my bike again. (my neighbour » again)

2.5 Conclusion

- Impersonal expressions do not form a homogenous class cross-linguistically.
- *man* / *on* / LA cannot be taken up by a 3sg weak subject pronoun.
- Diachronically, the generic reading precedes the existential/episodic reading (for *on* in French see Welton-Lair (1999), for *man* Old and Middle English see van Gelderen (1997), quoted from Egerland (2003)).
- The existential use of *man* is clearly rarer than the generic use (18,7 % vs 81,3 % in a study cited in Zifonun (2000)).
- Working hypotheses:
 - H 1: The generic use is the basic one for German and French (coreference possible, but lost in the episodic use).
 - H 2: The episodic use is the basic one for Somali (coreference impossible in the base form and therefore not available in the derived generic use.).

(35) Questions:

- a. Why can't *man /on /LA* be taken up by a 3sg pronoun?
- b. Why are *man /on /LA* restricted to subject?
- c. How does the existential use come about German/French?
- d. Is the classification into existential/ generic sufficient?

In Cabredo Hofherr (2003) I have argued that for so-called *arbitrary* 3pl pronouns at least 5 readings have to be distinguished, so probably, for the meanings of *man /on / LA* we also need more detailed distinctions.

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