R-impersonal pronouns, plurality and distributivity
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Introduction

(1) Siewierska (2011, p.57-8)
   a. **R-impersonals**: impersonals triggered by a reduction in referentiality.
   b. R-impersonals have the appearance of regular, personal constructions but feature a subject which is human and non-referential.

• Here non-referential = antecedentless (with the descriptive content recovered indirectly).

(2) a. They stole my bike.
   existential readings —→ no descriptive content beyond [+human]
   b. Here, they **collect the rubbish** at 7am.
   corporate reading —→ subject associated with the predicate
   c. In Spain, they **eat late**.
   quasi-universal reading —→ subject associated with the locative predicate

• General hypothesis: With R-impersonals we should look at:

(3) Meaning contrasts: **You** only live once. vs. **They** only live once.

(4) Formal contrasts (binding properties, interpretation of locatives)
   a. In Spain **they** eat late. (+/- people in Spain)
      In Spain, **one** should visit the Prado. (when one is in Spain)
   b. Ce matin **on a appelé** pour laisser *son* adresse.
      this morning **ON has called to leave** POSS address
      (existential, *binding of the possessive)

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1 This work is part of the project Le marquage de la (co-)distributivité à travers les langues (Fédération TUL CNRS FR 2559) and of the ANR-DFG project Towards a typology of impersonal human pronouns, ANR-11-FRAL-0011.
c. On appelle ce numéro pour laisser son adresse.
   (generic, binding of the possessive ok)
   (see Creissels [to appear] for a detailed discussion of binding properties of on)

• Looking at possible contexts of use (=contexts that are truth conditionally compatible) as a probe for properties of R-impersonals is problematic.
• Impersonals (and passives) invite all sorts of oblique strategies:

(5) Context: parent and child before dinner
   a. Man isst keine Bonbons vorm Abendessen.  
      man eats no sweets before-det dinner
      One does not eat sweets before dinner. (man-impersonal) (German)
   b. Du isst jetzt keine Bonbons.  
      you eat now no sweets
      You are not eating any sweets now. (direct prohibition, 2sg addressee)

• Beyond (5a) / (5b) have options (5a/b/c).

(6) a. Jetzt werden keine Bonbons gegessen.  
      now passive-aux.3pl no sweets eat.pastpp
      No sweets will be eaten now. (personal passive) (German)
   b. Jetzt isst hier KEINER Bonbons.  
      now eat3sg here no-one sweets
      Nobody will eat any sweets here now. (stressed negative indefinite)
   c. Bonbons sind jetzt nicht angesagt.  
      sweets are now not at-issue
      Sweets are not allowed now. (implicit argument allowed for x)

1 The contrast

• Expectation: contexts with a locative universal reading pattern as a class (content of subject recovered from a locative).
• This appears to be the case in English (also Spanish and French).

(7) a. In France, they go to work at 8am.
   b. In France, they eat snails.
   c. In France, they eat late.

• It also works for the lexical 3pl pronoun zot in Mauritian Creole:
(8) a. Dan Lafrans, zot al lekol boner.
   In France 3PL go school early
   In France, they go to school early.

b. Dan Lafrans, zot manz eskargo.
   In France 3PL eat snails
   In France, they eat snails.

c. Lespagn, zot manz tar.
   Spain 3PL eat late
   In Spain, they eat late. (Alleesaib and Cabredo Hofherr (submitted))

• However, for R-impersonals with a null subject in Mauritian Creole we found that there are contrasts between the examples (for certain speakers).

(9) a. Dan Lafrans, Ø al lekol boner.
   In France go school early

b. #Dan Lafrans, Ø manz eskargo.
   In France eat snails

c. %/*Lespagn, Ø manz tar.
   Spain eat late
   (examples in Alleesaib and Cabredo Hofherr (submitted))

2 Distributivity and "lawlike" modality

2.1 Distributivity

• R-impersonal pronouns (human impersonal pronouns) differ in their behaviour wrt to collective and distributive predication. As Andersson (1972) notes, Swedish man and English they and one show the following contrasts:

(10) a. Man odlar mycket råg i England./ Man har många gräsmattor i England. (Sw)

b. They grow a lot of rye in England./ They have a lot of lawns in England.

c. # One grows a lot of rye in England./ # One has a lot of lawns in England.

• The examples in (1c) with one as a subject are pragmatically deviant as they imply that the property of growing a lot of rye / having a lot of lawns applies to individuals of the relevant type, while the examples with they allow a collective reading: growing a lot of lawns applies to the plurality associated with in England, not to each individual (corresponding approximately to people living in England).
• Other R-impersonal pronouns vary with respect to their generic readings:

(11) a. Au Mexique ils mangent des grillons. / Au Mexique on mange des grillons. (Fr)
    both ils and on allow the descriptive reading.

b. %In Mexiko isst man Heuschrecken. (Ge)
    In Mexiko MAN/ON eats grasshoppers.
    For the descriptive reading I prefer the passive or die:
    In Mexiko werden Heuschrecken gegessen. / In Mexiko essen die Heuschrecken.

c. En Francia comen caracoles. vs. En Francia uno come caracoles. (esp)
    In France, they eat snails vs. In France, one eats snails

• The difference in distributivity provides an explanation for the contrast between zot and
the zero R-impersonal if we assume that the zero is a zero one, not a zero 3pl pronoun:

(11) a. Dan Lafrans, zot manz eskargo. (Mauritian Creole)
    in France 3pl eat snails
    ‘In France, they eat snails.’

b. %Dan Lafrans, Ø manz eskargo.
    in France eat snails

2.2 Lawlike modality

• But distributivity alone does not give an explanation for the third contrast:

(12) a. Dan Lafrans, zot manz tar. (Mauritian Creole)
    in France 3pl eat late
    ‘In France, they eat late.’

b. %/#Dan Lafrans, Ø manz tar.
    in France eat late

• Distributivity combines with the lawlike character of the predicate:

(13) a. Lawlike predicate: In France, they go to school early.

b. Descriptive predicate: In France, they eat snails.

c. Ambivalent predicate: In Spain, they eat late.

2 Attested example of this type:

(i) Ich dachte, in China essen die jeden Tag Reis.
    I thought in China eat 3pl every day rice
• This combined contrast of law-like predicate and distributive interpretation is found in other instances of R-impersonal pronouns.

(14)  a. Lawlike predicate:
In France, they / you / one go(es) to school early.

  b. Descriptive predicate:
In France, they / #you / # one eats snails.

  c. Ambivalent predicate:
In Spain, they / you / one eat(s) late.

3 Two types of generics

• The contrast is further parallel to the different types of generic predicates (cf. Lawler (1972, 1973), Dahl (1975) accidental generalisations vs nomic or law-like statements, Greenberg (2007) "in virtue of genericity").

• As Lawler points out this difference is correlated with number on the subject.

(15)  a. Definitional generics:
Madrigals are polyphonic. A madrigal is polyphonic.

  b. Descriptive generics:
Madrigals are popular. *A madrigal is popular. (exs in Lawler 1972)

• Carlson (1995):

(16)  a. inductionist view of generics: a generic sentences is true if it is true for a sufficiently high proportion of relevant individuals, which depends on how things are in the world.

  b. rules-and-regulation view of generics: generic sentences refer to rules which are considered to be irreducible entities.

• Krifka explores the idea that indefinite sg generics are somehow "distributive" in that they look at individual exemplars while bare plurals look at sums of individuals:

(17)  a. descriptive generalisations are typically expressed by bare plurals because they typically rely on observing many instances

  b. definitional statements are typically expressed with indefinite singulars because it can be determined with single individuals whether or not they fit to the defining properties Krifka (2012)
The same contrast is found in German (for definite and bare plural vs. indefinite singular), French and Spanish (for definite plural vs. indefinite singular).

Krifka (2012) cites Cohen (2001); Carlson (2009) with the observation that modified indefinite singulars are possible if the modification provides a motivation for the predication.

(18) a. #A king is generous. / # A banana is flat.
    b. A good king is generous. (Cohen 2001)
    c. A banana that has been sat on by a rhinoceros is flat. (Carlson 2009)

I think the factor is not "motivation" but a tripartite (if/when-like) structure. • R-impersonal pronouns do not admit modification.

However, if the decisive factor is explicit contextual restriction then equivalent examples are possible for R-impersonals.

(19) a. If a king is good, he is generous.
    b. If a banana has been sat on by a rhinoceros, it is flat.

Explore the following hypothesis for R-impersonal subjects:

(20) Hypothesis:

Singular R-impersonal subjects are limited to definitional generics,

number neutral R-impersonal subjects allow definitional and descriptive generics.

4 Testing number for generic R-impersonal pronouns

Two types of arguments for number neutrality of R-impersonal pronouns:

(21) a. Singular-like: The truth-conditional number neutrality of existential R-impersonals:

despite plural agreement on the verb the sentences is true in a situation where
the agent is singular.
They stole my bike.

b. Plural-like: grammatically sg lexical R-impersonals are compatible with reciprocals

R-impersonal pronouns license reciprocals in German and Yiddish, and reciprocal readings of reflexives in French, German and Yiddish.

(22) a. reciprocals
i. Man grüsste einander wieder. (Ge)
One greeted each other again.

ii. me kukt eyns af dos andere on grisen zikh (Yi)
MEN looks one on the other without greet REFL
One looks one at the other without greeting each other.

b. reciprocal readings of reflexives

Man grüsste sich wieder. (Ge)
On se saluait à nouveau. (Fr)
One greeted each other again. [Cabredo Hofherr 2008]

* However, the examples in the literature are for man/on

(23) a. Quand on se connaît, on s'(entr)aide. (Fr., ex. Anne Zribi-Hertz)

b. Wenn man sich kennt, hilft man sich gegenseitig. (Ge)
When MAN/ON REFL knows helps MAN/ON REFL mutually. ADJ
When one knows each other one helps each other.

"Fair play is highest commandment. Man respektiert einander, ohne den other prt oppress writes P.S. in "U.T", Man kennt sich, oder man lernt sich eben kennen, weil gemeinsam MAN knows REFL OR MAN learns REFL PRT know.inf, because together manrefs the success now or never MAN REFL PRT and wiped REFL the Hände sauber an weissen Servietten.

b. NEU07/OKT.00017 Neuland: Das Wirtschaftsmagazin der Regionen, 01.10.2007, S. 14-14; Marcus Ehrgott, 36, Wirtschaftsförderer Landkreis Germersheim

Know each other

C. WWO08/APR.00009 Weltwoche, 30.04.2008, S. 17; Aufstand des Blätterteigs

«Auf den Erfolg, jetzt oder nie!», prostete man sich zu und wischte sich die hands clean on white napkins
d. WWO08/APR.00023 Weltwoche, 30.04.2008, S. 41; Der Schönwettermacher

Neben ihm sitzen: Res Strehle, Stellvertretender Chefredaktor des Tages-Anzeigers, und Andreas Büchi, langjähriger Produzent. **Man trifft sich** zur täglichen Blattkritik.

sich treffen "meet", needs plural subject

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e. WWO08/APR.00023 Weltwoche, 30.04.2008, S. 41; Der Schönwettermacher

Doch ebenso einig ist **man sich** auch darüber: Wenn ein Erfüllungsgehilfe seinen Mitarbeitern gegenüber loyal ist, dann ist keiner loyaler als Peter Hartmeier.

sich einig sein "to be of one opinion, agree" needs plural subject

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f. WWO08/APR.00024 Weltwoche, 30.04.2008, S. 58; Eigensinnig und frei

In den 1990er Jahren scheiterte das Projekt eines gemeinsamen Spitals der Halbkantone, **man konnte sich nicht zusammenraufen**.

sich zusammenraufen "to get together despite differences to achieve a common goal", needs plural subject

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g. NEU07/OKT.00012 Neuland: Das Wirtschaftsmagazin der Regionen, 01.10.2007, S. 213-213; Entdecken Sie Neuland 02 die Südpfalz hilft Ihnen dabei.

Hier trifft **man sich** zum Spaziergang in bis zu 15 Metern Höhe. here meet MAN REFL for-the walk in up to 15 m height

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h. MK2/ZTG.00011 Kieler Nachrichten, 05.09.1973 [S. 17]

"die Marinen der ganzen Welt - die sind so etwas wie eine internationale Mafia ..." was heißen soll, daß **man sich versteht**.

sich verstehen "get along, have a good relationship, understand each other"

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• With **uno/one** the reciprocal examples are not as natural.

(25) a. # Cuando **uno** se conoce se ayuda. (Sp)
when **UNO REFL** knows **REFL** helps
(# reciprocal, ok reflexive)
b. When **one** knows each other **one** helps each other.

(26) CREA corpus

a. no case of *uno se ayuda*

b. no case of *uno se respeta*

c. 1 example of *uno se conoce* — reflexive in the CREA corpus:

No solo no es cierto que se es más feliz si uno se conoce, sino que hacerte una imagen embellecida de uno mismo es fundamental para poseer una cierta salud mental. Not only is it not true that one is happpier if one knows oneself, but rather to have an embellished image of oneself is fundamental to having a certain (extent of) mental health.

- As the contrast concerns generic readings, the fact that existential readings of *man/on* are compatible with a singular agent is not a reliable test for the number properties of the generic *man/on*.
- The orginal examples in Anderson are problematic since they involve *haben*

(27)  

a. En Angleterre on a beaucoup de pelouses. (Fr)  

b. *In England hat man viele Autos. (Ge)*  

In England *MAN/ON* has many cars.

(28)  

a. Au Mexique on mange des grillons. (Fr)  

b. %In Mexiko isst man Heuschrecken. (Ge)  

In Mexiko *MAN/ON* eats grasshoppers.

### 4.1 An alternative hypothesis: Definiteness

- An second hypothesis to explore be to link the two types of genericity to definiteness (definite plural vs. indefinite sg.).

(29) Hypothesis 2:  

Definite generics allow descriptive and definitional readings.  
Indefinite generics allow definitional readings.
Malamud (2013, 14) argues that quantificational variability is a test for indefiniteness.

(30) Wenn man klug ist, ist man gewöhnlich stolz. (Ge)
   ‘If MAN smart is, is MAN usually proud’
   ‘If a person is smart, he/she is usually proud.’
   (QVE available: Most smart people are proud) (Malamud 2013, 14, ex (18))

• gewöhnlich is more restricted than meistens

(31) a. Wenn man klug ist, ist man meistens stolz. (Ge)
   ‘If MAN smart is, is MAN usually proud’
   b. even better with auch "too": Wenn man klug ist, ist man meistens auch stolz.
   c. Wenn man blond ist hat man häufig auch blaue Augen.
      when MAN blonde is has MAN often also blue eyes

• Examples are difficult to find since they have to exclude a t-variable.

(32) T00/DEZ.59692 die tageszeitung, 23.12.2000, S. 27,

   Vor Weihnachten ist man oft deprimiert,
   Before Christmas is MAN often depressed ...
   Many people are depressed before Christmas
   (not: one is depressed numerous times before Christmas)

• De dicto definites allow QVE

(33) The Pope is usually a man.

Conclusion

• R-impersonal pronouns differ in their behaviour wrt to distributive vs collective readings.
• For full generic DPs a similar contrast correlates with a sg/pl contrast (Lawler).
• The tests for number neutrality of R-impersonal pronouns do not align with the distributive / collective readings.
• Not clear whether QVE distinguishes between one-type and 3pl impersonals (wrt definiteness).
• Open question: is the type of predicate the decisive factor?
  Doetjes (2007) proposes an analysis of the contrast between beaucoup "a lot" and souvent "often" in terms of plural (delimited) events and mass predicates.

(34) a. Sylvie va beaucoup au cinéma.
    ‘Sylvie goes to the movies a lot’
b. Sylvie va souvent au cinéma.
   ‘Sylvie goes often to the movies.’

c. *Pierre a beaucoup acheté trois kilos d’olives.
   ‘Pierre has bought three kilos of olives a lot.’

d. Pierre a souvent acheté trois kilos d’olives.
   ‘Pierre has often bought three kilos of olives.’ [Doetjes 2007 ex 1a-d]

• The modified hypothesis to be tested would then be

(35)  a. *On number neutral: can behave as sg or as pl
   b. *Man non-singular but not individuated (like mass) — need individuation from
      the predicate
   c. One / Sp. uno: singular

Corpora: Institut für Deutsche Sprache (2014b): Deutsches Referenzkorpus / Archiv der
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CREA corpus

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