Impersonal pronouns in Swedish and Dutch
A comparative study of *man* and *men*

Paris
September 2001

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University of Gothenburg

Johan van der Auwera
Center for Grammar, Cognition, and Typology
University of Antwerp
SEAN CONNERY
SOM JAMES BOND
EN FANTASTISK UPPVISNING!
Mer än någonsin har han grepet över oss med sina fantastiska äventyr!
MAN LEVER BARA TVÅ GÅNGER
YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE
DEN BÄSTA BONDFILMEN!
Väldigt underhållande - TEKNISK TOPP!
Toppen i underhållning!
Härlig underhållning!
Mest pakostad hittills - hemtext!
Teknik elgans - sköna brudar!
Gott gryffin underhållning!
Man lever bara två gånger
one lives only two times
Man lever bara två gånger
one lives only two times
Man lever bara två gånger
one lives only two times
Man lever bara två gånger
one lives only two times

Je leeft maar twee maal
you live only two times

Men leeft maar twee maal
one lives only two times
‘human impersonal pronouns’ (‘HIP’)
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Semantic interest
   Kleiber (1994)

Syntactic interest
   Cabredo Hofherr (2003, 2006)

Contrastive interest

(Areal-)Typological interest
   Giacalone Ramat & Sansò (2007)
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someone, anyone, no one

specific known — specific unknown — irrealis non-specific

question — indirect negation — direct negation

conditional — comparative — free choice

The semantic map for indefinites
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The semantic map for indefinites

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conditional —— comparative —— free choice

direct negation

The semantic map for indefinites

bla ble bli
Haspelmath (1997)
someone, anyone, no one

The semantic map for indefinites
First semantic map
Explicitly in Siewierska & Papastathi (2011: 604)
Implicitly in Giacalone Ramat & Sansò (2007)

van der Auwera (2012)
van der Auwera, Gast & Van der Biesen (2012)
1. The map
2. Swedish *man* vs. Dutch *men*
3. Conclusion
1. The map
Each cell has max three layers

Line 1       ± generic at the level of the State of Affairs (SOA)
Line 2       ± generic at the level of the Human Participant (HP)
Line 3       Additional semantics, if relevant
Each cell has max three layers

- **Line 1**: ± generic at the level of the State of Affairs (SOA)
- **Line 2**: ± generic at the level of the Human Participant (HP)
- **Line 3**: Additional semantics, if relevant

**SOA-generic**

- *In general/usually/typically/etc.* …

**SOA-episodic**

- progressive is possible with dynamic predicates;
  otherwise *This happened just before* …

**HP-generic**

- HIP ~ *everybody or anybody*

**HP-episodic**

- HIP ~ *somebody or definite NP*
In general, one only lives twice.
→ SAO-generic
Everybody/*somebody only lives twice.
→ HP-generic

You only live twice.
They’re knocking at the door.

Progressive aspect
→ SAO-episodic
≈ Somebody is knocking at the door.
→ HP-episodic
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+ generic at both SOA and HP levels

– generic at both SOA and HP levels
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+ generic at both SOA and HP levels
+ generic at SOA level and – generic at HP level
– generic at SOA level and + generic at HP level
– generic at both SOA and HP levels
This happened before you could see that he was afraid.

→ SAO-episodic

Everybody/anybody could see that he was afraid.

→ HP-generic
They generally say that he is an idiot. → SAO-generic

*?Everybody says that he is an idiots once. → HP-generic

They say that he is an idiot.
German *man*
English *you, one, they*
Cross-linguistic variation

‘they’ in French, English and Ewe
*Ils sonnent à la porte. C’est ta mère.
Ils ont trouvé un moto dans la cour.
Ils ont encore augmenté les impôts.
En Espagne ils mangent tard.
*Ils disent qu’il est génial.
*Ils sonnent à la porte. C’est ta mère.
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Variation in German
Nominative *einer*  

*man*
Nominative einer

Oblique einem/einen

man
Nominative einer

Oblique einem/einen

man
du
Nominative einer

Oblique einem/einen

man
du
sie/se
2. Swedish *man*
Dutch *men*
State of the art

Germanic language have / had impersonal pronoun derived from ‘human being’
- *man* in German
- *man* in Swedish
- *men* in Dutch
- ...

Specialized in human generic reference

Same semantic potential
⇒ Cover the same area in the semantic map
German man
Swedish man
Swedish *man*
Dutch *men*
However...

despite the shared meaning potential

- Swedish *man*: alive and kicking
- Dutch *men*: moribund

cf. differences in usage in SALT-corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pronoun</th>
<th>frequency</th>
<th>corpus size</th>
<th>normalized frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish <em>man</em></td>
<td>2 320</td>
<td>1 026 033</td>
<td>22.6 per 10 000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch <em>men</em></td>
<td>170</td>
<td>429 410</td>
<td>4.0 per 10 000 words</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Typologically / structurally, Dutch *men* and Swedish *man* seem to be the same. However, in USAGE, there is a striking difference.

Where do these differences in usage lie?

Type of research
Usage ⇒ corpus data for frequency distributions
Comparative perspective ⇒ parallel corpus
Corpus and method

SALT-corpus of the Swedish Language Bank at the University of Gothenburg

- Dutch texts translated into Swedish: 429 410 words
- Swedish texts translated into Dutch: 1 026 033 words

Contains literary and non-fiction texts
Aligned at sentence level

Text search for *man* and *men* (randomized output)
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(a) Congruent subject</th>
<th>Dutch translation of Swedish <em>man</em></th>
<th>Swedish translation of Dutch <em>men</em></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je ‘you’</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men / man ‘one’</td>
<td>1047</td>
<td>92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ze / de ‘they’</td>
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<td>zij ‘she’, het ‘it’</td>
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<td>(b) Functional shift</td>
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Different translation strategies

(b) Functional shift

The referent of the subject is changed
e.g. use of passive in order to avoid naming the agent

*Men herkende de postbode voornamelijk aan zijn kepie, de kleur van zijn rond gezicht was lichtblauw.*
‘One recognized the mailman predominantly by his uniform cap…’

*Brevbäraren kändes igen främst på mössan, det runda ansiktet var ljusblått till färgen.*
‘The mailman was predominantly recognized by the uniform cap…’
(c) Clause reduction

The clause is rearranged so that the subject is left out e.g. replacement of clause by to-infinitive clause without subject

Men kon nu niets doen, het was te donker om te zoeken en misschien kwam ze in de komende uren uit zichzelf terug. 'One could not do anything now...'

Det var omöjligt att göra något mer, det var för mörkt att leta och hon kanske kom tillbaka av sig själv under de närmaste timmarna. 'It was impossible to do something more...’
(a) Congruent subject

The referent of the subject remains unaltered, but a different form can be used

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Findings

- Dutch *men* is predominantly translated by Swedish *man* (88%)
- Occasional translation by *de* ‘they’, *vi* ‘we’ and *folk* ‘people’
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- Dutch *men* is predominantly translated by Swedish *man* (88%)
- Occasional translation by *de* ‘they’, *vi* ‘we’ and *folk* ‘people’

⇒ Swedish *man* is unmarked translation equivalent of Dutch *men*
⇒ Swedish *man* covers most/all of the meaning potential of Dutch *men*
### Dutch translation of Swedish man

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<th>Swedish translation of Dutch men</th>
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<td><em>ze / de</em> ‘they’</td>
<td>289 12%</td>
<td>149 88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>we / vi</em> ‘we’</td>
<td>310 13%</td>
<td>2 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ik</em> ‘I’</td>
<td>49 2%</td>
<td>2 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>hij</em> ‘he’, <em>zij</em> ‘she’, <em>het</em> ‘it’</td>
<td>76 3%</td>
<td>6 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>iemand</em> ‘someone’, <em>iedereen</em> ‘everyone’, <em>sommige</em> ‘some’, etc.</td>
<td>52 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun (<em>de mensen</em> ‘people’, <em>Stig</em> ‘Stig’, <em>de vijand</em> ‘the enemy’)</td>
<td>38 2%</td>
<td>3 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(b) Functional shift</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>320 14%</td>
<td>8 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other subject replacement</td>
<td>222 9%</td>
<td>5 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(c) Clause reduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-finite clause</td>
<td>61 3%</td>
<td>5 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominalisation, etc.</td>
<td>21 1%</td>
<td>3 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellipsis</td>
<td>13 1%</td>
<td>2 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(d) Omission</strong></td>
<td>48 2%</td>
<td>1 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2317 100%</td>
<td>170 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(a) Congruent subject

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je ‘you’</td>
<td>1047</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men ‘one’</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ze ‘they’</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we ‘we’</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>ik ‘I’</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hij ‘he’, zij ‘she’, het ‘it’</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iemand ‘someone’, sommige ‘some’, etc.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun (de mensen ‘people’, Stig ‘Stig’)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

- Swedish *man* is only marginally translated by Dutch *men* (12%)
- Mostly translated by *je* ‘you’ (45%) and also by *ze* ‘they’ (13%)
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- Swedish *man* is only marginally translated by Dutch *men* (12%)
- Mostly translated by *je* ‘you’ (45%) and also by *ze* ‘they’ (13%)

⇒ Dutch *men* does not seem to cover all of the meaning potential of Swedish *man*
We can deduct a part of the actual usage of *man* from the translation into Dutch:

- *man* → *je/we* speaker inclusive 47%
- *man* → *ze* speaker exclusive inclusive 13%

Manual annotation of *man* → *men* (12%):

- speaker inclusive 4%
- speaker exclusive 8%

⇒ speaker inclusive 51% vs. exclusive 21%
Meaning Swedish *man*

We can deduct a part of the actual usage of *man* from the translation into Dutch

- *man* → *je/we* speaker inclusive 47%
- *man* → *ze* speaker exclusive 13%

Manual annotation of *man* → *men* (12%)

- speaker inclusive 4%
- speaker exclusive 8%

⇒ speaker **inclusive 51%** vs. exclusive 21%

...at least!
Meaning Dutch *men*

Manual annotation of *men*

- speaker inclusive 40%
- speaker exclusive 60%

Manual annotation of *man → men*

- speaker inclusive 33%
- speaker exclusive 67%

⇒ Dutch *men* is most often speaker exclusive
Discussion

Dutch *men* is most dedicated to speaker exclusive
~ competition with speaker inclusive strategies
  e.g. *je* ‘you’ is a prominent generic pronoun

Swedish *man* is not so strongly dedicated to
  speaker exclusive
~ less competition of speaker inclusive strategies
  e.g. *du* ‘you’ no large role as generic pronoun

Is dominance of speaker exclusive reference
  prerequisite for / consequence of
  competition with speaker inclusive strategies?
Further research

- Further semantic annotation of Swedish *man*
  ⇒ a lot of work, but feasible (28% of 2317)

- Refining of annotation to categories of semantic maps
  ⇒ very difficult: e.g. general vs. episodic SOA

- Further investigation of history of Swedish *man* and Dutch *men*
  ⇒ a whole different project
Swedish *man*
Dutch *men*
Swedish *man*

Dutch *men*
3. Conclusion
HIP – semantic maps
HIP – semantic maps

For an account of what is possible
HIP – semantic maps

For an account of what is possible

For an account of what is frequent

"Ils sont à la porte. C'est ta mère. Ils ont trouvé un mot dans le cœur. En Espagne ils mangent tard. "Ils disent qu'il est génial.

Swedish man
Dutch men