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)  
  \[ u = \text{to, for}, \]
  \[ ku = \text{in}, \]
  \[ ka = \text{from, out of}, \]
  \[ la = \text{with}. \]

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

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

2 The pronoun la in Somali

- Somali has no verbal passive. Passive sentences are translated by using la.
- Kirk (1905, p.34) \textit{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 (≠ pronouns in Plank (2003)):

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

- la combines with 3ms agreement on the verb.

  (6)  
  Buuggan 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.

    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 *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 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 A Y AA U goes.3ms
When you are ill, LA goes to the doctor.

- The relationship *la* /2sg differs from the suppletive pair *man* / *leiner* 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 subjeet ou objet 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.

   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:

<table>
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<th>weak pronouns</th>
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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 iibiyeey.
   two days from before BAA LA sold.3ms
   It was sold two days ago. Zorc and Issa (1990, p.171)

c. Waa la cayaarayaa.
   WAAN 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.

   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)

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2.4.2 Scope

- man / on do not have scope variation (≠ quantificational indefinites) (Zifonun (2000)). man and on take scope below the adverb (= bare plurals, ≠ 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.).
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.

References


