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INTRODUCTION: IMPERSONALIZATION FROM A SUBJECT-CENTRED VS. AGENT-CENTRED PERSPECTIVE

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1. PRELIMINARIES

The notion of impersonality is a broad and disparate one. In the main, impersonality has been studied in the context of Indo-European languages and especially Indo-European diachronic linguistics (see e.g. Seeffranz-Montag 1984; Lambert 1998; Bauer 2000). It is only very recently that discussions of impersonal constructions have been extended to languages outside Europe (see e.g. Aikhenvald et al. 2001; Creissels 2007; Malchukov 2008 and the papers in Malchukov & Siewierska forthcoming). The currently available analyses of impersonal constructions within theoretical models of grammar are thus all based on European languages. The richness of impersonal constructions in European languages, has, however, ensured that they be given due attention within any model of grammar with serious aspirations. Consequently, the linguistic literature boasts of many theory-specific analyses of various impersonal constructions. The last years have seen a heightening of interest in impersonality and a series of new analyses of impersonal constructions. The present special issue brings together five of these analyses spanning the formal/functional-cognitive divide. Three of the papers in this volume, by Divjak and Janda, by Afonso and by Helasvuo and Vilkuna, offer analyses couched within or inspired by different versions of the marriage of Construction Grammar and Cognitive Grammar as developed by Langacker (1991), Goldberg (1995, 2006) and Croft (2001). The paper by Kibort provides an analysis within Bresnan's (2001) Lexical Functional Grammar and the paper by Mendikoetxea elaborates further the analysis of impersonals currently being developed with Chomsky's (1995, 2000, 2005) Minimalist Program.

The different theoretical orientations of the papers go hand in hand with somewhat different approaches to impersonality, which, while not radically divergent, do not overlap entirely and, significantly,

1 provide different points of reference for the proposed analyses. Let
2 me therefore contextualize the discussion in the five papers by
3 outlining the two approaches to impersonality which they reflect.
4

5 2. WHAT IS AN IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTION? 6

7 The term impersonal, as used in the linguistic literature, has
8 received both a structural and a communicative-functional character-
9 ization. From the structural point of view impersonalization is
10 associated with the lack of a canonical subject, from the functional
11 perspective with agent defocusing.¹

12 Under the subject-based view of impersonalization, a canonical
13 subject is one realized by a verbal argument which is fully
14 referential and manifests the morpho-syntactic properties of
15 subjects in a language. In terms of this subject-based approach,
16 constructions which have been viewed as impersonal include: (a)
17 those with a subject which is not fully referential, (b) those with a
18 subject which does not display canonical subject properties, (c)
19 those with a subject which is not a verbal argument but merely a
20 place filler manifesting no semantic or referential properties, i.e. an
21 expletive subject, and (d) those with no overt subject at all. Needless
22 to say, given the controversies surrounding the notion of subject
23 and its forms of expression, the efficacy of the above classification
24 and the identity of the constructions within each of the four groups
25 is very much theory dependent.

26 Impersonals of the first type, which are seen to have a subject but
27 not a fully specified one, are typically identified with constructions
28 in which a subject denotes a generic human or a loosely specified set
29 of individuals. Such constructions come in a number of guises. One
30 big sub-group embraces pronominalized subject constructions in
31 which the non-referential subject is realized by a generalized noun
32 or a personal pronoun used non-referentially. The generalized noun
33 or personal pronoun may be a free form (e.g. *man* in German or
34 *they* in English), a bound form (e.g. the proclitic *mi* in Northern
35 Tepehuan, Bascom 1982:288, or the person inflection of null subject
36

37 ¹The third type of characterization frequently mentioned in the literature (see e.g.
38 Lambrecht 1998; Bauer 2000; Siewierska 2007) is morphological, i.e. invariant
39 marking of the verb for person. This characterization is, however, not applicable to
40 languages which have no verbal person marking such as Mandarin and many other
41 Sino-Tibetan and Austro-Thai languages.

1 Impersonals of the second type, which have a subject but one
 2 displaying non-canonical encoding, are generally taken to
 3 include constructions featuring predicates expressing sensations,
 4 emotions, need, potential, in which the argument bearing the
 5 highest semantic role on the semantic-role hierarchy (with a given
 6 predicate) is an experiencer or cognizer. The relevant argument is
 7 typically marked dative, as in (6) from Icelandic, but may also
 8 occur in the genitive, as is the case in the Finnish necessity
 9 construction discussed in more detail by Helasvuo and
 10 Vilkuna (this volume), or even accusative, as is the case in
 11 Quechua (7).

13 (6) *Mér likar ágætlega við hann.*
 14 Me:DAT like:3SG well with him:ACC
 15 'I like him.' (Icelandic; Barðdal 2005: 108)

17 (7) *Nuka-ta-ka uma-ta nana-wa-n-mi.*
 18 me-ACC-TOP head-ACC hurt-OBJ-PRES-3-VAL
 19 'My head hurts me.' (Quechua; Hermon 2001: 151)

21 Also included in this group may be existential and locative
 22 constructions with non-canonical subject marking (and lacking an
 23 overt expletive subject).² Two cases in point are illustrated in (8)
 24 from Finnish in which the subject is in the partitive case and (9)
 25 from Russian in which the subject is in the genitive. This genitive
 26 marking in Russian (and also Polish) is restricted to negative
 27 clauses.

29 (8) *Ulkona leikki lapsia.*
 30 outside played:3SG child:PL:PART
 31 'There were children playing outside.'

33 (9) *Deneg ne bylo.*
 34 money:GEN not be:3SGNEUT
 35 'There was no money.'

37 Worth mentioning here are also constructions in which the
 38 non-canonical marking is dependent on the semantic properties
 39

40 ²Existentials with expletive subjects belong to group three, to be discussed below.

of the subject. This is so with respect to instrumental marking of the subject in Sinhala (10) which according to Gair (1990) occurs only when the subject designates a collectivity or institution.

- (10) *Aanduwerŋ* *ət* *adaarə denəwa*
 government-INSTR that:DAT support give
 ‘The government gives support for that.’
 (Sinhala; Gair 1990: 13,14)

The third type of impersonal occurs in languages which have overt expletive subjects. Such subjects are found in constructions which have no arguments available to function as subject and thus would otherwise lack a subject. This is what we find in impersonal passives of intransitive verbs, as in (11), and (some) constructions with meteorological predicates, as in (12).

- (11) *Es wurde* *getanzt.*
 it become:PAST:3SG dance:PP
 ‘There was dancing.’ (German)
- (12) *Bad. dimmer*
 it darkening
 ‘It is getting dark.’ (Icelandic)

Expletive subjects are also common in constructions in which the only candidates for subject are not encoded as such by virtue of their informational status in the discourse, as is the case in existentials (e.g. *There are many linguists in Europe*) and locatives (e.g. *There’s a man at the door*) which have a presentation function or in the case of extraposed clausal arguments both finite (e.g. *It is a pity that you can’t come to the party*) and non-finite (e.g. *It is a pity to go home so early*). In all of these constructions the verb, in languages which have verbal person marking, is in the third person singular or (when there is no distinction in number) in the third person.

With the exception of impersonal passives of both transitive and intransitive verbs and (some) constructions expressing weather phenomena (but see the discussion in the papers by Helasvuo and Vilkkuna and also Kibort), the nature of the constructions

1 belonging to group-four impersonals, those lacking a subject
 2 altogether, is the most theory dependent. Much rests on whether
 3 subjectless clauses are permitted by the theoretical framework in
 4 question, on the range of empty categories amenable to a subject
 5 analysis recognized and especially the tolerance of infinitival
 6 subjects. The most obvious candidates of subjectless impersonals
 7 are constructions with no obligatory nominal arguments or
 8 arguments which are more object-like than subject-like. An
 9 example of the former is the Polish impersonal modal construction
 10 built on the special indeclinable ex-verbs such as *trzeba* 'to be
 11 necessary' or *wolno* 'to be allowed' typically followed by the
 12 infinitive, illustrated in (13).

- 14 (13) *Wolno (nam) wracać do domu.*
 15 allow (we:DAT) return:INF to home
 16 'One is allowed to return home.'/'We are allowed to return
 17 home.' (Polish)

19 As shown in (13), the dative argument is optional, and it is not
 20 completely clear whether it is an argument of the modal element
 21 *wolno* or the infinitive, or both (see Słoń 2003 for an illuminating
 22 discussion). The precise structure of two similar constructions in
 23 Russian is discussed in the paper by Divjak and Janda. Two
 24 constructions which have an obligatory argument which is more
 25 object-like than subject-like are the Finnish emotive causative
 26 construction shown in (14), which is more fully discussed in the
 27 paper by Helasvuo and Vilkuna, and the Polish construction with
 28 an infinitive and accusative NP illustrated in (15), which receives
 29 consideration in the paper by Kibort.

- 31 (14) *Minu-aharmi-tta-a ~ pelo-tta-a ~*
 32 I-PAR annoyance-CAU-3SG~
 33 *aivastu-tta-a.*
 34 fear-CAU-3SG ~ sneeze-CAU-3SG
 35 'I am annoyed ~ scared ~ I feel like sneezing.' (Finnish)

- 37 (15) *Czuć wiosnę.*
 38 feel:INF spring:ACC
 39 'One can feel spring (in the air).' (Polish)

1 Turning to the agent defocusing view of impersonalization, the
2 agent is here understood rather broadly, as the causal participant of
3 an event, and is also referred to as the actor, instigator or initiator.³
4 In what follows, I use the term instigator. The notion of defocusing
5 is used in the sense of diminishing the prominence or salience from
6 what is assumed to be the norm or, in the terminology of Langacker
7 (1991), archetype. The defocusing may involve (a) the non-
8 elaboration or under-elaboration of the instigator, (b) the demotion
9 of the instigator from its prototypical subject and topic function or
10 (c) both demotion and non-elaboration. Given the direct mention
11 of subjecthood in the above characterization of impersonality, there
12 is a considerable degree of overlap in the range of constructions
13 which emerge as impersonal under the subject-based and instigator-
14 based characterizations of the term. The constructions which are
15 seen to have a non-elaborated or under-elaborated instigator
16 correspond to those lacking a fully referential subject. These are
17 the impersonals of group one and those in group four which, in the
18 absence of an overt referential argument, convey a generic or a
19 pragmatically specified human agent, as is the case in both (13) and
20 (14). The demotion of the instigator from subject covers the other
21 impersonals of groups two, three and four with the exception of
22 those not depicting events and thus lacking an instigator, i.e., the
23 presentative existential and locative impersonals. These last con-
24 structions are at best considered to be on the very margins of
25 impersonality under the instigator defocusing view. The third
26 possibility, demotion and non-elaboration, relates to a construction
27 not mentioned above, namely the agentless passive (see below).

28 In the majority of cases, it is fairly clear which of the above three
29 instigator-defocusing strategies is at play in any given impersonal
30 construction. Nonetheless, in some instances it is difficult to decide
31 whether an obliquely marked argument corresponds to a defocused
32 instigator or rather should be seen as an additional participant of
33 the event. In the Polish constructions in (16) and (17), for example,
34 the urine and smell may be considered to be the defocused
35 instigators, or the instigator may be taken to be a necessarily
36 unelaborated ‘something’ corresponding to the third-person singular
37 marking of the verb.

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40 ³The actor, initiator or initiator may but need not be conceived of as an actual macro-role.

1 (16) *W tym domu cuchnie moczem.*
 2 in this house stinks:3SG urine:INSTR
 3 'In this house it stinks of urine.'

4
 5 (17) *Mdli mnie od tego zapachu.*
 6 nauseates me:DAT from this:GEN smell:GEN
 7 'This smell makes me nauseous.'

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 9 The former analysis is the one developed by Divjak and Janda in
 10 their paper in this volume and, by and large, also by Kibort in her
 11 contribution. Under Kibort's analysis, however, the third-person
 12 singular marking on the verb in such clauses may indicate an
 13 unelaborated 'something' if there is no other overt expression of the
 14 instigator. Such clauses would then qualify as impersonal by virtue
 15 of the non-elaboration of the instigator. In the case of (16) and (17),
 16 under Kibort's analysis just as under Divjak and Janda's, the
 17 impersonality is a function of instigator demotion.

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 20 3. DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN THE SUBJECT-CENTRED AND
 21 AGENT-CENTRED PERSPECTIVES

22 Despite the high degree of overlap in the range of constructions
 23 which are identified as impersonal under the subject-based and
 24 instigator-based characterizations of the term, there are important
 25 points of difference between the two. First of all, the instigator
 26 defocusing approach adds to the set of impersonal constructions
 27 those in which an argument other than the instigator has been
 28 selected for subject in preference to the instigator. Most notably
 29 such constructions include personal passives, both agentless ones
 30 and those with an agent. Two other constructions displaying similar
 31 atypical subject assignment to a non-instigator rather than to the
 32 instigator are locative subject clauses (e.g. *The garden is swarming*
 33 *with bees*), and constructions with predicates expressing sensation,
 34 emotion, need, potential, possession, etc., such as the one in (18).

35
 36 (18) *Honum trytur peningur.*
 37 him:DAT lacks:3SG money:NOM
 38 'He lacks money.' (Faroese; Bardal 2001: 108)

1 Constructions like the one in (18) are similar to the one in (6)
 2 illustrated earlier both with respect to the type of predicate with
 3 which they occur and the presence of an argument in the dative, the
 4 major difference being that the dative argument in (18) is less
 5 amenable to a subject analysis than the one in (6) in view of there
 6 being another argument manifesting subject properties. In terms of
 7 the subject-based approach to impersonals, none of the constructions
 8 just mentioned is typically regarded as such.

9 The second important difference between the two approaches to
 10 impersonalization is that the subject-based approach is not in
 11 principle dependent on the agentivity of the absent canonical subject.
 12 I have already mentioned one reflex of this, the impersonal treatment
 13 of constructions which do not involve an instigator, namely existential
 14 and locative constructions performing a presentative function
 15 and constructions with extraposed clausal complements. Another
 16 less frequently discussed consequence relates to ergative or split
 17 ergative languages in which the transitive subject may be identified
 18 not with the instigator but rather with the patient. In such languages,
 19 the subject-based definition of impersonals identifies as impersonal
 20 constructions with a non-fully specified or non-canonically marked
 21 patient and a fully specified ergatively marked agent. Such construc-
 22 tions are referred to by Lazard (1994, 1998) as anti-impersonals, by
 23 analogy with anti-passives. Two cases in point from Basque are
 24 illustrated in (19), taken from Creissels (2007: 38).

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 26 (19) a. *Bilbon ikasi dut*
 27 Bilbao:LOC learn:PFV AUX:PRS:3SGP:1SGA
 28 ‘I studied in Bilbao.’
 29 b. *Otsoak ardiari esetsi zion*
 30 wolf:ERG sheep:DAT attack:PFV AUX:PAST.P:A3SG:D3SG
 31 ‘The wolf attacked the sheep.’ (Basque)

32
 33 In (19a) the P, the subject studied, indicated by the agreement
 34 marking on the auxiliary receives a non-specific reading corre-
 35 sponding to that of the English translation. (The clause is also open
 36 to a definite interpretation.) In (19b) the P, the sheep, receives
 37 atypical dative rather than absolute marking. Thus if the subject
 38 in Basque is identified with the patient rather than the agent, the
 39 subject is a non-referential one in (19a) and a non-canonical one in
 40 (19b). The construction in (19a) can thus be seen as corresponding

1 to the pronominalized subject impersonals in null-subject languages
2 of group one, and that in (19b) as corresponding to the
3 non-canonical subject impersonals of group two. Under the
4 instigator-based approach, the examples in (19) are evidently not
5 impersonal. Within the context of the subject-based approach, the
6 relevant constructions can be excluded from the domain of
7 impersonality, if being an instigator is taken to be a property of
8 canonical subjects. However, in order to achieve this and simulta-
9 neously avoid intransitive unaccusative clauses (e.g. *The children*
10 *arrived*) from being treated as impersonals, a canonical subject
11 would have to be identified with the highest available argument on
12 the semantic-role hierarchy occurring with a given predicate. Such a
13 merger of the subject-based and instigator-based approaches does
14 away with the Basque constructions, but also incorporates passives,
15 locative subject constructions and subject-inversion constructions
16 (e.g. *In the garden stands a fountain*) into the structurally based
17 domain of impersonality. It is thus not without consequence.

18 The third way in which the subject- and instigator-based views of
19 impersonals differ is that under the instigator-defocusing approach
20 impersonality is not associated solely with elements of or operations
21 on argument structure or even necessarily tied to constructions.
22 Impersonality is conceived of more widely as involving speaker-
23 choice with respect to the construal of an event and is seen to be
24 sensitive to the effects of discourse. Thus, anticausatives (e.g. *The*
25 *vase broke*) qualify as at least borderline impersonals in terms of
26 agent defocusing, since an event which could have been construed
27 as involving an instigator (e.g. *Did you break the vase?*) is depicted
28 as not involving one (*No, it just broke.*). Structurally, however,
29 anticausatives are not impersonal owing to the fact that the only
30 available argument is the subject. Another group of constructions
31 which may be classed as impersonal in terms of instigator
32 defocusing are action nominalizations (e.g. *the circling of the camp*
33 *by the tribe*). Action nominalizations focus on a process at the cost
34 of the participants involved in that process. While not only
35 instigators but also patients may be affected, the instigator is
36 commonly omitted in nominalizations (e.g. *the circling of the camp*)
37 while the patient often cannot be omitted unless the instigator is
38 also elided (**the circling by the tribe*). Nominalizations, like
39 passives, can thus be treated as a means of instigator omission.
40 They are not, however, considered to be impersonal constructions

1 from the structural point of view. Interestingly, J.T-S Sun (to
2 appear) reports that in a cluster of closely related Tibeto-Burman
3 languages of Sichuan, the rGyalrongic languages, nominalizing
4 affixes on the verb are used in impersonal constructions to convey a
5 generic human agent, as in (4). It is also worth noting that the
6 translations into English of impersonal passives of intransitive
7 verbs involve a nominalized form of the verb, as shown in (11). Yet
8 another set of constructions which may acquire an instigator-
9 defocusing function in wider discourse-pragmatic context are
10 existentials. They will be discussed more extensively in section
11 three with reference to the article in this volume by Afonso, which is
12 devoted to the impersonal use of existentials.

13 The last significant difference between the subject-based and
14 instigator- defocusing-based approaches to impersonalization that
15 needs to be mentioned is that instigator defocusing, unlike the
16 presence versus absence of a subject, is a matter of degree. Thus
17 analyses of impersonalization in terms of instigator defocusing tend
18 to be strongly concentrated on elaborating degrees of impersonality.
19 This is particularly evident in analyses couched within the
20 Construction Grammar and Cognitive Grammar traditions in
21 which categories are viewed in terms of their prototype structure,
22 owing to the fact that not only defocusing but also the category of
23 instigator is itself scalar. Consequently, instigator defocusing may
24 be quite nuanced and interpreted along more dimensions than
25 under other approaches: with respect to verbal argument structure,
26 with respect to the prototypical transitive event in terms of which
27 the archetypal instigator is identified (Langacker 1991,238), with
28 respect to degrees of referentiality and specificity, and with respect
29 to grammatical encoding. Thus, for example, in terms of argument
30 structure a distinction can be made between the degrees of
31 instigator defocusing shown in (20), correlating with five types of
32 impersonal: those with an instigator subject which is not fully
33 referential (the generic and arbitrary subject impersonals), those
34 with a demoted instigator which maintains argument status and is
35 obligatory (the experiencer subjects of emotive and psychological
36 predicates), those with a demoted argumental instigator which is
37 optional (the optional experiencer of, for instance, Russian and
38 Polish root infinitives), those with a demoted instigator which loses
39 argument status (passives both personal and impersonal) and those
40 without any instigator (anticausatives).

- 1 (20) focal argument > under-elaborated argument > demoted
 2 obligatory argument > demoted optional argument >
 3 demoted non-argument > no argument
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5 Another scale of impersonality, relating to the dimensions of
 6 transitivity and grammatical encoding is discussed in Divjak and
 7 Janda's contribution to this volume.

8 While impersonalization is less tied to subjecthood under the
 9 agent-based approach than under the subject-based one, in the
 10 actual analyses of impersonal constructions in theoretical models of
 11 grammar of all persuasions the nature of the subject plays a crucial
 12 role. As one would expect, particularly challenging is the analysis of
 13 the wide variety of impersonal constructions with covert subjects,
 14 listed above in either group one or four. At issue is in the first place
 15 the existence of a covert subject, once it is assumed to exist, its precise
 16 nature, and then the formal mechanisms via which it can be
 17 represented which would reflect the structural and semantic differ-
 18 ences obtaining between the various constructions. Some idea of the
 19 structural differences can be gathered from the pre-theoretical
 20 discussion above. The semantic differences include: the necessarily
 21 human versus inanimate nature of the covert subject, its person,
 22 number and gender features, its referential interpretation with
 23 respect to the inclusion of the speaker and hearer, its openness to
 24 generic versus existential readings and the cognitive accessibility of
 25 its referents. All of these semantic differences also receive due
 26 attention in the contributions to this special issue, to which I now
 27 turn.
 28

29 4. THE FIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

31 The first contribution to this special issue, *Ways of attenuating*
 32 *agency in Russian* by Divjak and Janda, deals with two of the
 33 controversial and apparently subjectless impersonals of group four,
 34 which have also been analysed as having a subject, an infinitival one
 35 by some, and a dative one by others. The constructions in question
 36 illustrated in (21) are similar to the Polish example in (13) and
 37 feature a finite verb in the third-person singular neuter and an
 38 infinitive plus often an accompanying NP in the dative case as in
 39 (21a,b) or, less frequently, in the accusative case.
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- (21) a. *Devuške nadoelo šit.*
 Girl:DAT bore:3SGN sew:INF
 ‘The girl got sick of sewing.’
- b. *Vam nadležit vstretit’ etu nuždu.*
 you:DAT be required:3SG meet:INF that:ACC
 need:ACC
 ‘You have to meet that need.’

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Divjak and Janda argue that despite the superficial structural similarity of (21a) and (21b), they are in fact instantiations of two distinct constructions. Under their analysis the verb *nadoest* ‘to bore’ in (21a) is a full verb with normal argument-structure properties and takes an argument in the nominative and an optional experiencer argument in the dative. The nominative argument may be realized by a referential entity but also by an infinitive, as in (21a). In the latter case the non-prototypical choice of filler by an event rather than a referential expression is indicated by the obligatory third-person singular neuter marking of the verb, which the authors interpret not as default marking but as a reflection of the reification of the event as a thing. The verb *nadležit* ‘to be required’ in (21b), by contrast, is treated by Divjak and Janda as a defective verb lacking the ability to take arguments. It cannot, however, stand alone and thus requires the presence of the infinitive. The defective verb and infinitive thus form a complex event and, unlike in (21a), there is no reification. As for the dative NP, this is the subject of the infinitive which owing to the presence of the defective verb is marked dative rather than nominative, the case of the subject in Russian. Semantically, this dative argument is thus not a experiencer, as in the case of the dative argument in (21a) but rather what Divjak and Janda call an agent experiencer, as it is the agent of the activity specified by the infinitive and the experiencer of the modality imposed by the defective verb. Significantly the initiator of the modality expressed by the defective verb is absent from the argument structure altogether.

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◆ In sum, according to Divjak and Janda’s analysis the construction in (21a) is not in fact subjectless but has a subject, albeit a highly atypical non-human and inanimate one expressed by the infinitive. It thus qualifies as impersonal not by virtue of lacking a subject but rather by virtue of instigator defocusing, i.e. the event rather than the instigator being assigned the subject function. The construction in

1 (21b), on the other hand, does lack a subject. It also involves
 2 instigator defocusing of two types. The entity imposing the modality
 3 expressed by the defective verb is defocused by virtue of being absent
 4 from the argument structure altogether, while the initiator of the
 5 action carried out by the infinitive is non-canonically marked. In
 6 terms of their three degree scale of impersonalization, the construc-
 7 tion in (21b) emerges as lower in degree of impersonality than the
 8 one in (21a), since an agent experiencer is viewed by them as being
 9 closer to a prototypical agent than an experiencer.

10 The article by Afonso, *Existentials as impersonalising devices: the*
 11 *case of European Portuguese*, focuses on the *haver* construction in
 12 European Portuguese, which is associated in Romance linguistics
 13 primarily with existential and presentative usage. Although the
 14 *haver* construction is typically regarded as impersonal under the
 15 subject-based approach, but not under the instigator-defocusing
 16 one, Afonso argues that it may in fact acquire an agent-defocusing
 17 function by virtue of the discourse context.

18 Building on Ziv's (1982) impersonal analysis of certain uses of the
 19 non-deictic *there* construction in English, Afonso distinguishes
 20 three types of impersonal use of the *haver* construction in European
 21 Portuguese. The first of these is the action nominal *haver*
 22 construction in which the coda is an action nominal or nominal-
 23 ization. As mentioned earlier, action nominals may be viewed as a
 24 means of instigator defocusing by virtue of the fact that they focus
 25 on a process at the cost of the participants in an event, which are
 26 either not expressed at all or potentially in an adjunct phrase. This
 27 action nominal impersonal use of *haver*, like that of English *there*
 28 constructions, emerges in certain discourse contexts, such as the one
 29 in (22) where the *haver* construction (in bold) is preceded by two
 30 instances of the impersonal *se* construction.

- 31
 32 (22) *Olhe conversava se talvez se vivesse uma vida*
 33 look:3SG speak :3SG se maybe live:3SG a life
 34 *melhor que agora viva se melhor.*
 35 better than now live:3SG se better
 36 ***Talvez houvesse mais dialogo***
 37 maybe there:be:3SG more dialogue
 38 'Well, one talked, maybe one lived a better life than
 39 nowadays, one lived better. Perhaps there was more
 40 dialogue.'

1 Afonso points out, that in the absence of the preceding two *se*
2 constructions, the *haver* construction could be seen as presentative,
3 i.e., as introducing a new discourse topic (the nature of the dialogue
4 engaged in by people in the past), rather than as downgrading the
5 active involvement of the speaker as an instigator in the described
6 event. In other words there is nothing in the part in bold in (22)
7 which in itself would induce an impersonal reading. The impersonal
8 reading is a function of the interaction of the construction with the
9 discourse context.

10 The second type of impersonal *haver* construction distinguished
11 by Afonso downgrades the actor by focusing on the property rather
12 than the action of an event. It features a coda expressing a property
13 which is encoded by a de-adjectival noun and is therefore referred
14 to by Afonso as the de-adjectival *haver* construction. In the third
15 type of impersonal *haver* construction the defocusing of the actor is
16 achieved via focusing on another participant in the event, or its
17 circumstances such as location or time and is termed by Afonso the
18 focused non-agentive entity impersonal *haver* construction.. It is
19 important to note that the third type of impersonal usage is seen to
20 be even more strongly dependent on the context of the utterance
21 than the action nominal and the deadjectival types as there is no
22 structural element in the construction, such as a nominalization, to
23 formally deflect attention from the actor. This is achieved solely via
24 the discourse context. Needless to say, the context dependence of
25 the impersonal interpretation of the *haver* constructions and in
26 particular of the focused non-agentive entity impersonal *haver*-
27 construction is viewed by Afonso as an argument for extending the
28 notion of construction from a pairing of form and meaning
29 (meaning in the wide sense of the term incorporating semantic and
30 pragmatic meanings), as originally conceived of by the founders of
31 Construction Grammar, to a triumvirate of form-meaning and
32 context of use.

33 The article by Helasvuo & Vilkuna, *Impersonal is personal:*
34 *Finnish perspectives*, provides an overview of impersonal construc-
35 tions in Finnish which highlights their use, somewhat paradoxically,
36 in denoting human participants. In terms of what in the Finnish
37 linguistic tradition is referred to as unipersonality, i.e., invariant
38 marking of the verb for person, there are at least seven construc-
39 tions in Finnish which may be seen as impersonal. These range from
40 the often discussed impersonal passive in (23) which also meets all

1 the other criteria used in the determination of impersonality (lack of
 2 an overt grammatical subject, instigator-defocusing, and non-
 3 elaboration), to possessive constructions which merely exhibit an
 4 atypical distribution of subject properties: the possessor bears
 5 locative marking and the item possessed is in the nominative.

- 6
 7 (23) *Simu-t valit-tiin.*
 8 YOU-ACC choose-PASS.PAST
 9 ‘You were elected.’

10
 11 In all of these constructions with the exception of weather
 12 impersonals the defocused primary argument is necessarily or
 13 typically human. This holds both for the constructions which do
 14 not permit the overt expression of the defocused primary argument
 15 (the impersonal passive, the zero construction) and those in which it
 16 can occur in an oblique case, such as the genitive (the necessity and
 17 retrospective constructions), the partitive (the emotive causative
 18 construction), as illustrated in (14), or adessive (the possessive
 19 construction). Moreover, in some of these constructions the
 20 defocused human participant is typically the speaker and/or
 21 addressee or a recently mentioned discourse participant. This is
 22 so both in what Helasvuo & Vilkuna call the retrospective
 23 construction, built on the verb *tulla* ‘to become’ and a form of
 24 the past passive participle and the zero construction featuring a
 25 verb in the third- person singular, illustrated in (24).

- 26
 27 (24) *Jos osta-a uude-n konee-n ilman*
 28 if buy-3SG new-ACC computer-ACC without
 29 *käyttöjärjestelmä-ä, mitään ei*
 30 operating.system-PAR nothing.PAR NEG:3SG
 31 *tapahdu.*
 32 happen.CONNEG
 33 ‘If one buys a new computer without an operating
 34 system, nothing happens.’

35
 36 The zero construction, also mentioned in the paper by Mendi-
 37 koetxea, is especially interesting since it provides an important
 38 contrast with the impersonal passive in (23), the passive versus
 39 active status of which has been the subject of considerable debate
 40 (see especially Blevins 2003). Helasvuo & Vilkuna argue that while

1 both constructions are used exclusively for situations involving
 2 human participants which are obligatorily left unexpressed, they
 3 differ structurally precisely in regard to the syntactic status of the
 4 unexpressed participant. That this is indeed so is suggested by a well
 5 known case-marking peculiarity of Finnish nominal objects (as
 6 opposed to objects which are personal pronouns) which bear
 7 accusative case only if there is another nominative argument
 8 present in the clause, and otherwise occur in the nominative case.
 9 We see that in the zero construction in (25) *uuden koneen* ‘new
 10 computer’ occurs in the accusative case while in the impersonal
 11 passive in (23) *kone* ‘machine’ is in the nominative.

- 12
 13 (25) *Kone* *ostet-t-i-in*.
 14 machine[NOM] buy-PASS-PST-PERS
 15 ‘The machine was bought.’
 16

17 This suggests that while in the passive the human participant is
 18 removed from the syntactic argument structure, in the zero
 19 construction it is merely suppressed. Helasvuo & Vilkuna rightly
 20 point out that under an active rather than a passive analysis of (23),
 21 this contrast between the two constructions would elude explanation.

22 The article by Kibort, *Impersonals in Polish: an LFG perspective*,
 23 addresses the issue of the morpho-syntactic status of the subject in a
 24 subset of the impersonal constructions in Polish within the confines
 25 of Bresnan’s LFG. All of the constructions in question lack an overt
 26 lexical or pronominal structural subject and fall into group one or
 27 four of impersonals in the classification that I used in section two.
 28 Kibort divides them into three types according to how the apparent
 29 lack of the structural subject could be formally dealt with in LFG.

30 The first type are called pro-drop constructions since Kibort sees
 31 them as analysable in terms of the same mechanism as used for
 32 absent pronouns accompanying bound person markers on the verb.
 33 The constructions in this group, two of which were illustrated
 34 earlier in (16) and (17), express either weather phenomena or
 35 natural forces, involuntary bodily sensations or other sensory
 36 experiences and often have an adversative flavour. They feature a
 37 verb in the third-person singular and convey an inanimate as
 38 opposed to an animate instigator, which may in some instances be
 39 expressed in an oblique phrase, at least under some analyses (see the
 40 discussion earlier above). Kibort argues that the subject of all these

1 impersonals is simply the indefinite *coś* ‘something’, and thus all
2 may be seen to involve *pro*-_{Indef}-drop.

3 Impersonals of the second type, which Kibort calls morpholexical,
4 have a necessarily human subject indicated by non-pronominal
5 morphology, i.e., the *no/to* participle, or the reflexive *się* plus the
6 third-person singular neuter form of the verb. Kibort’s analysis of
7 these constructions reflects the standard Polish approach which sees
8 them as preserving the syntactic and semantic argument structure of
9 the basic predicate without the possibility of expressing the
10 instigator. Curiously, though, the instigator is by no means
11 necessarily generic. In fact much more often than not it corresponds
12 to a referent high on the accessibility scales in the sense of Ariel
13 (1991). This is especially so in the *no/to* participle construction (see
14 especially Słoń 2003). The LFG analysis which Kibort proposes is
15 to view the covert subject in both constructions as a pronominal
16 anaphor as in the case of the ‘missing’ subject of non-finite clauses,
17 [Pred ‘Pro’], corresponding to PRO in Chomskian theory.

18 The third type of impersonal is seen by Kibort to lack a subject at
19 all levels of structure, argument structure, functional-structure and
20 constituent structure. There are two constructions which she
21 considers as falling under this type, both conveying a necessarily
22 human instigator, those with a small set of defective (non-inflecting)
23 verbs and an argument in the accusative, illustrated earlier in (15)
24 and impersonal passives of intransitives, such as those shown in
25 (26).

- 26
27 (26) *W tym pokoju było już sprzątane.*
28 in this room was:3SG:NEUT already clean:PASS P.
29 ‘There has already been cleaning of this room.’

30
31 The impersonal passive in (26) seems to be a characteristic
32 essentially of the spoken language and as such has not received
33 much attention in the Polish linguistic literature. It is formed using
34 the auxiliary *być* and the passive participle. The agent may
35 occasionally be expressed in the form of a prepositional phrase,
36 but as pointed out by Kibort, this occurs much less frequently than
37 with personal passives. For the defective verbs Kibort proposes
38 lexically impersonal argument structures, i.e., argument structures
39 lacking a subject argument altogether. For the impersonal passives
40 of intransitives, she suggests oblique function assignment to the

1 only available argument. The necessarily human interpretation of
 2 both constructions may presumably be attributed to pragmatic
 3 convention along the lines suggested by Kański (1992) (see below).
 4 Kibort's subjectless analysis of the third type of impersonals runs
 5 counter to the LFG Subject Condition which requires all finite
 6 clauses to have a subject. This requirement, Kibort argues, needs to
 7 be abandoned. The default mapping of arguments to grammatical
 8 functions can then be expressed directly in terms of the LFG
 9 markedness hierarchy.

10 The last article in this collection, *Clitic impersonal constructions in*
 11 *Romance: syntactic features and semantic interpretation*, by Mendi-
 12 koetxea offers an analysis of the syntax and semantics of the well
 13 known *si/se* constructions illustrated in (2) (and also in (20)) within
 14 the context of Chomsky's (1995, 2000, 2005) Minimalist Program.
 15 The analysis is inspired by the desire to provide, on the one hand,
 16 an invariant interpretation of *si/se* in its impersonal and passive
 17 uses and, on the other hand, a unified account of impersonal *si/se*
 18 and other impersonal constructions with a non-fully referential
 19 human subject. Mendikoetxea takes the view that *si/se* is a
 20 pronominal subject agreement clitic rather than, say, a valency-
 21 reducing particle or case absorber in both personal and impersonal
 22 *si/se* constructions and is not personless, as argued by Burzio
 23 (1986), but rather has an unspecified (zero-person) feature which is
 24 non-referential, along the lines of Kayne (1993). These two
 25 assumptions allow her to develop a coherent analysis of the
 26 impersonal *si/se* construction within the constraints of Minimalism.
 27 The key elements of this analysis are a *si/se* induced non-referential
 28 interpretation of the verbal inflection and the filling of the subject
 29 position not by referential pro, the empty category which occupies
 30 the subject position in pro-drop constructions of null subject
 31 languages, but rather by G(eneric)-pro. The G-pro is seen to be
 32 deficient in ϕ features, having a number feature but no person
 33 feature. Formally, the lack of person features of the G-pro enables
 34 it to be merged with the non-referential Agr(ement) features of the
 35 verbal inflection induced by the presence of *si/se*. Semantically, the
 36 lack of person features accounts for the fact that the subject of
 37 impersonal *si/se* constructions may be interpreted as arbitrary in
 38 reference.

39 Having G-pro in the subject position of the impersonal *si/se*
 40 construction makes this construction structurally very similar to

1 impersonal pronominalized subject constructions. While these
2 constructions may have an overt subject, such as *man/on/one* or
3 *they*, or a bound or even a null one, the non-referential interpretation
4 of the subject suggests that they too may be seen as having a
5 non-referential person feature. If so, this raises the question of why
6 some languages use one set of constructions to express non-fully
7 referential human reference while others use another. Mendikoetxea
8 pursues a line of explanation developed by Holmberg
9 (2005; to appear) which relates the availability of different sub-types
10 of the relevant impersonal construction in a language to the status
11 of null subjects in that language. Simplifying somewhat, Holmberg
12 argues that non-referential subjects in strictly non-null-subject
13 languages such as English or French should receive overt pronominal
14 realisation, those in partially null-subject languages (where first and
15 second person can be null but a definite third person cannot) such as
16 Finnish or Brazilian Portuguese should receive null realisation (no
17 danger of a referential interpretation arises) and those in strict
18 null-subject languages such as Spanish or Italian should be realized
19 by verbal or other non-pronominal morphology (without which a
20 referential reading would emerge). This three-way typology makes
21 correct predictions, for the languages mentioned above, under the
22 assumption that only in partially null-subject languages is the
23 presence of a null pronominal in the subject position sufficient for
24 the construction to be interpreted as impersonal. (Holmberg considers
25 the subject of *si/se* constructions to be *si/se*.) Mendikoetxea, however,
26 not only takes *si/se* constructions to have an empty subject position
27 but also, *man/on* constructions the *man* or *on* of which she sees as
28 being a pure expletive, following Egerland (2003). Therefore in order
29 to capture the differences observed by Holmberg, she conditions the
30 presence of G-pro in non-null-subject languages to the existence of
31 an overt category which technically can enter into a checking
32 relationship with the relevant Extended Projection Principle (EPP)
33 features on T(ense). The G-pro in *si/se* constructions is of course
34 (indirectly) licensed by the *si/se*.

36 In relation to the semantics of *si/se* constructions, Mendikoetxea
37 makes two interesting suggestions. The first relates to the necessarily
38 human interpretation of the referents of *si/se* impersonals, the
39 second to the quantificational properties of their subjects. Following
40 Kański (1992), she attributes the former to a pragmatic convention,

1 whereby individual variables not restricted to any particular
 2 domain confine the universe of discourse to human individuals
 3 and even to discourse participants. As for the well known
 4 quantificational properties of the subjects of *si/sei* constructions,
 5 i.e., their ability to be open to a quasi-universal and quasi-
 6 existential reading, Mendikoetxea argues that this follows from
 7 their being similar to indefinite NPs. Thus, unlike Cinque (1988)
 8 and others, Mendikoetxea does not tie the existential versus
 9 universal readings to the presence versus absence of specific time
 10 reference but rather to the presence of a locational element which
 11 can restrict the variable introduced by G-pro. (A yet different
 12 explanation for the two readings is developed by Alonso-Ovalle
 13 (2002.)

14 As suggested by the above, the five contributions cover an
 15 impressive range of impersonal constructions, many of which have
 16 not been previously discussed in the general, as opposed to
 17 language-specific, linguistic literature. The different theoretical
 18 perspectives adopted by the authors highlight different facets of
 19 the investigated constructions, which provides a better picture of
 20 the existing variation within the domain of impersonality than
 21 would be achieved from a single theoretical position. It is hoped
 22 that the analyses presented will contribute to further developing
 23 cross-linguistically applicable accounts of impersonal constructions
 24 within the discussed theoretical frameworks and beyond.

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