

Title: Implicit actors: semantic effects of invisible participants

Category: Oral or poster

Despite recently renewed attention to impersonal constructions (e.g. Siewierska 2008), the term „impersonal” continues to be used for an array of construction types, without a consensus on its typological classification. This paper contributes to the debate with a study of valency-reducing devices within a single language, Estonian, namely the constructions exemplified in (1a-d): the impersonal active (1a), marked with distinct verbal inflection, the personal passive (1b), comprising *be* + past passive participle (PPP), „zero-person” (1c), with default 3SG marking, and the derivational anticausative (1d). The paper aims to (a) describe the interaction of these constructions with verbal semantics, and (b) examine the status of their absent actors, in order to enrich the typological picture of impersonals and related constructions.

- (1) a. komistades kuku-takse ja mur-takse jalg või süda [IMPERSONAL]  
tripping fall-IMP.PRS and break-IMP.PRS foot-NOM or heart-NOM  
*When tripping, one falls and breaks one's leg or heart.*
- b. Peterburi linn on läikima löödud [PERSONAL PASSIVE]  
Petersburg city-NOM be-3SG.PRS shine-INF hit-PPP  
*St. Petersburg has been polished to a shine.*
- c. Peab vist mehed ka sauna kutsuma! [ZERO-PERSON]  
must-3SG probably men-NOM also sauna-ILL invite  
*I think we have to invite the men into the sauna too!*
- d. kogu maailm peab euroopast-uma-amerikaniseer-uma [ANTICAUSATIVE]  
whole world must-3SG Europeanise-Americanise-ANTC.INF  
*The whole world has to Europeanise-Americanise itself.*

Whereas the impersonal does not affect the verb's aspectual class or agentivity and imposes few restrictions on input verbs, both the personal passive and zero-person are stativizing constructions – the first, resultative and past-oriented, and the second, future-oriented with potential modality. The anticausative tends to be inchoative, although it is compatible with various verb and situation types. The Estonian and Finnish impersonals are very similar – and etymologically related – yet they differ in some crucial ways: several of the arguments used to claim that the Finnish impersonal is a demotional passive fail when applied to Estonian (*contra* Hiietam & Manninen 2005). These include the case-marking patterns of the impersonal patient, word order, the indefinite interpretation of the actor referent, and co-occurrence with oblique agentive phrases (Blevins 2003). Crucial to this debate is the status of the implicit actor argument.

This talk examines data from some classic tests (Bhatt & Pancheva 2006), and probes the accessibility of the actor referent for reference by various anaphora, in order to determine the demotional status of the implicit actor. The resultative passive has an undisputedly demoted actor, and the anticausative has no semantic trace of an actor argument, but the impersonal is inconclusive: it does not allow *by* phrases (with exceptions), but it can act as a controller and is compatible with agentive adverbials. The impersonal actor referent is available to bind clause-internal anaphora like reflexive pronouns but not interclausal definite pronouns, aligning this inflectional construction with the French construction involving an overt pronoun, *on* (Koenig & Mauner 2000). Data show that the subject-oriented possessive pronoun *oma* can refer to either the overt (nominative) patient or the implicit actor, a problematic finding for theories wishing to categorise the impersonal as a demotional passive.

## References

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