Impersonal constructions in typological perspective

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1. Introduction: Impersonality and impersonal constructions

In this presentation, I discuss a typological approach to a subset of the fairly heterogeneous set of phenomena traditionally subsumed under the label 'impersonal'.

Impersonality has been a regular topic of investigation in the description of the languages of Europe. The French grammatical tradition and the Russian grammatical tradition (see among others Hériau 1980, Guiraud-Weber 1984) are particularly rich in this respect. However, until very recently, impersonality was not the subject of typological research.

A major problem in a cross-linguistic investigation of impersonality is that no clear cross-linguistic definition of impersonality emerges from the inventories of phenomena viewed as instances of impersonality in different traditions. Most of the time, either the phenomena in question are just enumerated without any general definition, or they are delimited on the basis of strictly language-internal definitions. The general definitions that are sometimes suggested,

if taken at face value, would lead to apply the label 'impersonal' to many phenomena that no grammarian ever considered instances of impersonality. Moreover, the recent works that have tried to lay the basis for a cross-linguistic investigation of impersonality (such as Siewierska (2008), Malchukov & Siewierska (2011), Malchukov & Ogawa (2011)) provide definitions and discussions of various types of phenomena traditionally viewed as instances of impersonality, but do not really discuss the justification for grouping them under this label. In fact, they rather suggest that the phenomena to which the label 'impersonal' has been variously applied in different traditions do not share more than some kind of family resemblance. At the same time, they contribute to maintaining the confusion by indiscriminately using the term of impersonal CONSTRUCTION with reference to phenomena that do not really involve the selection of special constructions.

In this presentation, I propose to retain IMPERSONALITY as just a label for the traditional grouping of various phenomena that share nothing more than some vague family resemblance, without trying to justify this label by a definition worthy of the name, and to reserve IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTION for a subset of the phenomena in question, namely those than can be defined in terms of departure from what can be analyzed as the canonical type of verbal predicative construction in a given language.

2.   The typology of transitive-intransitive alignment and the notion of impersonal construction

A precise cross-linguistic definition of impersonal constructions in the sense of constructions departing from the canonical type of predicative construction can only be formulated within the frame of a general typology of the inventories of coding frames through which the verbs of a given language can express their argument structure.

2.1.   The basics of transitive-intransitive alignment

A general definition of the notion of alignment can be formulated as follows: a term T1 of a construction C1 and a term T2 of a construction C2 are aligned with respect to some feature if they share the same value of the feature in question.

This notion can be applied to various types of morphosyntactic constructions. However, in the recent typological literature, 'alignment' is generally restricted to what could be specifically referred to as TRANSITIVE-INTRANSITIVE ALIGNMENT, i.e. the alignment between the two core arguments (A and P) of transitive predication and the single core argument (S) of intransitive predication.[1]

For example, in Basque, the coding (flagging and indexation) of the unique core argument of *erori* 'fall' is aligned with that of the P argument of *puskatu* 'break', whereas the coding of the unique core argument of *irakin* 'boil' is aligned with that of the A argument of *puskatu*. In other words, the construction of *erori* 'fall' displays P-ALIGNMENT in its coding characteristics, whereas the construction of *irakin* 'boil' displays A-ALIGNMENT.[2]

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[1] For a detailed discussion of the notions briefly presented in this section, see Creissels (2018).
[2]   A-alignment and P-alignment are more commonly designated as *accusative* alignment (or *nominative-accusative* alignment) and *ergative* alignment (or *absolutive-ergative* alignment) respectively, but these traditional denominations are potentially confusing because of the polysemy of 'accusative' and 'ergative'.

(1)   Basque (isolate; pers.doc.)
(1a)   *Ispilu-a   erori   da.*
      mirror-SG   fall.CPL   be.PRS.3SG
      'The mirror has fallen down.'

(1b)   *Ur-ak   irakin   du.*
      water-SG.ERG   boil.CPL   have.PRS.3SG
      'The water has boiled.'

(1c)   *Haurr-ak   ispilu-a   puskatu   du.*
      child-SG.ERG   mirror-SG   break.CPL   have.PRS.A:3SG.P:3SG
      'The child has broken the mirror.'

As regards the coding characteristics of predicative constructions, most languages have a clear preference for either A-alignment or P-alignment. A-alignment is the general rule for example in Russian, as illustrated by example (2), where A and S are equally in the zero case (traditionally called 'nominative') and are equally indexed in the verb form.

(2)   Russian (Slavic; pers.doc)
(2a)   *Девушка   пришл-а.*
      girl$_F$ come.PST-SG.F
      'The girl came.'

(2b)   *Доктор   пришёл-Ø.*
      doctor$_M$ come.PST-SG.M
      'The doctor came.'

(2c)   *Доктор   вылечил-Ø   девушку.*
      doctor$_M$ heal.PST-SG.M   girl$_F$.ACC
      'The doctor healed the girl.'

P-alignment is the general rule for example in Avar, as illustrated by example (3), where P and S are equally in the zero case and indexed in the verb form.

(3)   Avar (Nakh-Daghestanian; pers.doc.)
(3a)   *jas   j-ač'ana.*
      girl$_F$ SG.F-come.CPL
      'The girl came.'

(3b)   *was   w-ač'ana.*
      boy$_M$ SG.M-come.CPL
      'The boy came.'

(3c)   *was-aš̄   χur   b-eλ̄'ana.*
      boy$_M$-ERG   field$_N$ SG.N-plough.CPL
      'The boy ploughed the field.'

As regards alignment relationships in the coding properties of core arguments (commonly referred to as morphological accusativity / ergativity), the traditional distinction between predominantly accusative and predominantly ergative languages is best understood with reference to a very general (although violable) constraint on the possible coding frames in a given language, for which I propose the term of Obligatory Coding Principle (Creissels 2018).

In the languages that have coding frame inventories fully consistent with this principle, there is a particular type of argument coding (defined in terms of flagging, indexation and/or constituent order) found in all coding frames, whatever the argument structure of the verbs

that select them. This particular type of argument coding can be viewed as the unmarked (or default) argument coding in a given language.

In the languages whose argument coding systems respect this principle, logically, there are only two possibilities for the basic transitive construction: the type of argument coding obligatorily found in every coding frame must coincide, either with A coding (in OBLIGATORY A-CODING LANGUAGES), or with P coding (in OBLIGATORY P-CODING LANGUAGES).

2.2. The notion of impersonal construction

The languages in the description of which the notion of impersonal construction has been used by traditional grammarians are languages in which A-alignment is strongly predominant, but in which the general rule according to which every coding frame must include a slot for an argument showing A-like coding is not without exceptions. In such languages, the following definition provides a precise cross-linguistic delimitation of a subset of the phenomena traditionally subsumed under the label 'impersonal':

> IN THE LANGUAGES IN WHICH A-ALIGNMENT IS STRONGLY PREDOMINANT, AN IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTION IS A CONSTRUCTION THAT DOES NOT INCLUDE A SYNTACTIC SLOT FOR AN ARGUMENT ENCODED IN THE SAME WAY AS THE AGENT IN THE BASIC TRANSITIVE CONSTRUCTION.

For example, in French, in (4a), the sole argument of *venir* 'come' has the same coding characteristics as A in the basic transitive construction (obligatory preverbal position and control of verb agreement). By contrast, in (4b), the 3rd person masculine A/S index *il* is a mere place-holder (or expletive) devoid of any reference, and the sole argument of *venir* 'come' is represented by an NP whose coding characteristics differ from those of A in the basic transitive construction, since it follows the verb and does not control verb agreement.

(4)   French (Romance; pers.knowl.)

(4a)   *Deux   femmes   sont   venues.*
        two   woman.PL be.PRS.3PL   come.PTCP.PL.F
        'Two women came.' (canonical predication)

(4b)   *Il   est   venu   deux   femmes.*
        A:3SG.M$_{EXPL}$ be.PRS.3SG   come.PTCP.SG.M   two   woman$_F$.PL
        'There came two women.' (impersonal construction)

As illustrated by this example, an impersonal construction may include a dummy element that could be interpreted as representing an A/S argument in other constructions. What is crucial for the analysis of a pronoun or index otherwise used to represent an A/S argument as a dummy in an impersonal construction is the impossibility of replacing it by a referential element without modifying the rest of the construction.

Note that this definition of impersonal construction is not applicable for all languages, but only for those in which A-alignment can be considered as strongly predominant. In the languages in which P-alignment is strongly predominant (such as Nakh-Daghestanian languages), a notion of 'anti-impersonal constructions' constituting the mirror image of the impersonal constructions can be considered (see Lazard 1985, 1995), but there are also so-called split-S languages (such as Basque or Georgian) in which neither A- nor P-alignment can be considered marginal, so that it would not make sense to try to define a notion that would be analogous to the notion of impersonal construction as defined above.

2.3. Impersonal constructions and R-impersonals

At this point, it is worth noting that, among the phenomena commonly viewed as instances of impersonality, those referred to as *reference impersonals* (or *R-impersonals*) in recent literature (see in particular Siewierska 2011) do not meet the definition of impersonal constructions put forward above. R-impersonals include:

- the non-specific interpretation of null subjects or of 3rd person plural pronouns or indexes;
- the generic use of the 2nd person;
- generic/vague human pronouns or indexes such as German *man* or French *on*;
- pronouns or indexes encoding vague reference to inanimate entities (French *ça*).

For example, in Russian, as illustrated in (5), in the absence of a co-nominal, a 3rd person plural subject index (or simply a plural subject index, in the past) is interpreted as referring to an unspecified group of people.

(5) Russian (Slavic; pers.doc.)
Вчера   танцевали   на   столе.
yesterday   dance.PST.PL   on   table.LOC
'Yesterday people were dancing on the table.'

Crucially, the analysis of (5) does not require positing a predicative construction different from that accounting for *Вчера гости танцевали на столе* 'Yesterday the guests were dancing on the table'. All that is needed is a rule according to which, in the absence of a co-nominal, a (3rd person) plural index included in a verb form can express reference to an unspecified group of people. The underspecified reference of the subject index in (5) must not be confused with the lack of any reference characterizing dummies in true impersonal constructions, such as the dummy 3rd person singular index in (6), where the two arguments of *трясти* (the cause and the experiencer) are overtly expressed, but none of them shows coding characteristics similar to those of A in the basic transitive construction.

(6) Russian (Slavic; pers.doc.)
Меня   трясёт   от   лихорадки.
1SG.ACC   shake.PRS.3SG   from   fever.GEN
'I am shaking with fever.', lit. 'It shakes me from fever.'

3. Types of impersonal constructions

An impersonal construction may constitute the only available option for a given verb with a given argument structure, but it may also be in competition with a canonical predicative construction expressing the same argument structure.

The French verb *falloir* 'need' illustrates the first case. In Modern French, this verb can only be used with the dummy A/S index *il* 'he', and its two arguments are obligatorily expressed in the same way as the non-A arguments of typical trivalent verbs – example (7).

(7) French (Romance; pers.knowl.)
Il   nous   faut   ces   livres.
A:3SG.M$_{EXPL}$ DAT.1PL   need.PRS.3SG   DEM.PL   book.PL
'We need these books.' lit. 'It needs us these books.'

Similarly, in Russian *тошнить* 'feel sick, nauseous' can only occur in a construction with an experiencer in the accusative case, and the cause can only be encoded as an oblique argument – example (8).

(8)   Russian (Slavic; pers.doc.)

(8a)   *Меня   тошнит.*
       1SG.ACC   feel_sick.3SG
       'I feel sick.'

(8b)   *Меня   тошнит   от   этого.*
       1SG.ACC   feel_sick.3SG   from   DEM.SG.N.GEN
       'It makes me sick.'

Example (4), repeated as (9), illustrates the case of an impersonal construction in competition with a canonical predicative construction.

(9)   French (Romance; pers.knowl.)

(9a)   *Deux   femmes   sont   venues.*
       two   woman.PL   be.PRS.3PL   come.PTCP.PL.F
       'Two women came.' (canonical predication)

(9b)   *Il   est   venu   deux   femmes.*
       A:3SG.M_EXPL   be.PRS.3SG   come.PTCP.SG.M   two   woman_F.PL
       'There came two women.' (impersonal construction)

In this particular case, the impersonal construction (commonly designated as a 'presentational inversion construction') differs from the corresponding canonical construction in that it triggers a thetic interpretation, but there may also be cases of free variation between an impersonal construction and the corresponding canonical construction, i.e., cases in which the choice of the impersonal construction has no semantic or pragmatic implication. Example (10) illustrates such a case in French with the verb *sembler* 'seem'.

(10)   French (Romance; pers.knowl.)

(10a) *Il   semble   que   tu   aies   un   problème.*
       A:3SGM_EXPL   seem.PRS.3SG   that   A:2SG   have.SBJV.2SG   INDEF.SG.M   problem
       'It seems that you have a problem.' (impersonal construction)

(10b) *Tu   sembles   avoir   un   problème.*
       A:2SG   seem.PRS.2SG   have.INF   INDEF.SG.M   problem
       'You seem to have a problem.' (canonical predicative construction)

The impersonal constructions that carry no pragmatic or semantic implication (in particular – but not only– those that constitute the sole option for a given verb) can be designated as LEXICAL IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS.

Depending on the factors that condition their use, those that alternate with canonical constructions of the same verb without being in free variation with them can be divided into PRAGMATIC IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS and MODAL IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS.

Finally, a special category of VOICE-RELATED IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS can be introduced to account for impersonal constructions conditioned by the presence of a voice marker in the verb form.

4.   Lexical impersonal constructions

Cross-linguistically, lexical impersonal constructions are particularly common with verbs expressing certain types of lexical meaning.

4.1.   Affective impersonal constructions

Clauses describing physiological or psychological states or events affecting animate beings often have impersonal constructions with P-like coding or dative coding of the experiencer. This was in particular the case in Latin (Ernout & Thomas 1951, Fedriani 2014). In (11), the experiencer is coded like the P argument of transitive verbs (accusative flagging, no indexation), the other argument is in the genitive case, and there is no possibility of introducing an NP showing A-like coding characteristics.

(11)   Latin (Italic; Cicero, De domo sua)

...ut	me	pigeat	stultitiæ	meæ.
so_that	1SG.ACC	displease.SBJV.3SG	stupidity.SG.GEN	my.SG.F.GEN

'...so that I am displeased by my stupidity'.'

Verbs occurring in such impersonal constructions can also be found in Russian. Some of them are attested exclusively in an impersonal construction, others also have canonical constructions with more or less transparently related meanings. For example, *тошнить* 'feel sick, nauseous' (example (8) above) is used exclusively in an impersonal construction, whereas *рвать* (example (12)) is found in a canonical transitive construction with the meaning 'pull out, tear out', and in an impersonal construction with the meaning 'vomit'.

(12)   Russian (Slavic; pers.doc.)

(12a)   *Ребёнка   рвёт.*

child.SG.ACC	vomit.PRS.3SG

'The child is vomiting.'

(12b)   *Ребёнок   рвёт   страницу.*

child.SG	tear_out.PRS.3SG	page.SG.ACC

'The child is tearing out the page.'

This kind of impersonal construction is also found among others in Tamil (13), Quechua (14), and Tobelo (15).

(13)   Tamil (Dravidian; pers.doc.)

(13a)   *(avanga) oru aaʈʈ-e   koɳɳaanga.*

3PL	one	goat-ACC	kill.PST.3PL

'They killed a goat.'

(13b)   *(naan) aruŋ-e   paartteen.*

1SG	Arun-ACC	see.PST.1SG

'I saw Arun.'

(13c)   *ena-kku   aruŋ-e   piɖikkum.*

1SG-DAT	Arun-ACC	like.PRS.3N

'I like Arun.'

(14) Imbabura Quechua (Quechuan; Hermon 2001)

(14a) *Ñuka-ta-ka   chiri-wa-rka-mi.*
      1SG-ACC-TOP   be_cold-P:1-PST-VAL
      'I felt cold.'

(14b) *Ñuka-ta-ka   uma-ta   nana-wa-n-mi.*
      1SG-ACC-TOP   head-ACC   hurt-P:1-PRS.A:3-VAL
      'My head hurts me.'

(15) Tobelo (North Halmahera; Holton 2008)

(15a) *No-hi-tidingi.*
      A:2SG-P:1SG-punch
      'You punched me.'

(15b) *To-boa.*
      A:1SG-arrive
      'I arrived'.'

(15c) *I-hi-maata.*
      A:3$_{EXPL}$-P:1SG-cold
      'I feel cold.', lit. something like 'It colds me.'

Affective impersonal constructions figure prominently in discussions about so-called non-canonical subjects, since dative- or accusative-marked experiencers tend to show behavioral properties they share with 'canonical subjects'.

4.2. Transitive verbs of possession used impersonally as existential verbs

Existential verbs have an argument structure <GROUND, FIGURE> distinct from that of 'have' verbs (<POSSESSOR, POSSESSEE>), but historically, existential verbs may result from the reanalysis of 'have' verbs in unspecified possessor contexts in which they can be reinterpreted as expressing presence of an entity at some place without reference to any possessor ('(At some place) they have *x*' > 'At some place there is *x*'). The existential verbs resulting from this evolution have a coding frame with the figure coded like the P argument of transitive verbs, but no argument coded like the A argument of transitive verbs.

For example, in Wolof, *am* as a verb of possession assigns A-coding to the possessor (which in particular controls agreement of the verb in person and number) and P-coding to the possessee, whereas *am* as an existential verb assigns P-like coding to the figure and invariably shows default 3rd person singular agreement. If no NP precedes the verb, there is no apparent distinction between the impersonal construction expressing existence and canonical transitive predication expressing possession with a 3rd person singular possessor whose identity must be retrieved from the context.

(16) Wolof (Atlantic; pers.doc.)

(16a) *(Astu)   am   na   jëkkër.*
      Astou   have   PRF.3SG   husband
      'Astou / she has a husband.'

(16b) *Am   na   ngelaw   léegi.*
      have   PRF.3SG   wind   today
      'There is wind today.'

Example (17) illustrates the reanalysis of a 3rd person plural pronoun originally expressing vague reference to unspecified human possessors into an expletive in an impersonal

existential construction, since a possessive reading of this sentence, although not completely excluded, is nevertheless highly unlikely.

(17) African American English (Creole; Green 2002: 82)
      Dey   got   a   fly   messing   with   me.
      they   have   a   fly   messing   with   me
      'There is a fly bothering me.'

In addition to the languages of Southern Europe, existential predication constructions resulting from the impersonalization of a Have Possessive construction are particularly common among the Atlantic languages of West Africa (Creissels & al. 2015), the languages of South East Asia, and Creole languages. For a more detailed discussion, see Chappell & Creissels (2019), Creissels (Forthcoming).

4.3. Modal verbs used in impersonal constructions

The French verb *falloir*, illustrated above with the meaning 'need', is also used as a modal verb of obligation in another impersonal construction in which its complement is an infinitive or a subjunctive clause – example (18).

(18) French (pers.knowl.)
(18a) *Il   me   faut   parler.*
       A:3SG.M$_{EXPL}$ DAT.1SG   need.3SG   speak.INF
       'I must speak.' lit. 'It needs me to speak.'
(18b) *Il   faut   que   je   parle.*
       A:3SG.M$_{EXPL}$ need.3SG   that   A:1SG   speak.SBJV.1SG
       'I must speak.' lit. 'It needs that I speak.'

Modal verbs requiring an impersonal construction in languages in which A-alignment is strongly predominant are not rare cross-linguistically. For example, Finnish has a set of about 20 modal verbs occurring in a 'necessitative' impersonal construction (Sands & Campbell 2001:269-274) including no NP with A-like coding characteristics, in which a genitive NP represents the person concerned by the obligation to do something – example (19).

(19) Finnish (Uralic; Sands & Campbell 2001)
      Sinun   pitää   mennä.
      2SG.GEN   must.3SG   go.INF
      'You must go.'

4.4. Impersonal constructions conditioned by the presence of a clausal argument

Impersonal constructions conditioned by the presence of clausal arguments are common too. For example, in French, *apparaître* 'appear' has the behavior of a canonical intransitive verb in combination with a nominal argument (20a), but in combination with a clausal argument, its only possible construction is the impersonal construction illustrated in (20b). Note that *il* in this construction cannot be analyzed as a cataphoric index in a right-dislocation construction in which the complement clause would fulfill the role of afterthought, since in (20b), if the constituent within square brackets is deleted, it is impossible to interpret *Il est apparu* as implying an elided *que*-clause retrievable from the context. In fact, such an interpretation is possible with *ça* 'that' in the slot for subject clitics, but not with *il*.

(20)   French (pers.knowl.)
(20a)   [*Le   soleil*]   *est   apparu   à travers   les   nuages.*
         the   sun   is   appeared through   the   clouds
         'The sun appeared through the clouds.'
(20b)   *Il   est   apparu   [que   l'enfant   mentait].*
         it_EXPL is   appeared that   the child   lied
         'It turned out that the child was lying.'

Cross-linguistically, the verbs that can only combine with clausal arguments often have a construction analyzable as impersonal as their only possible construction. This is for example the case of Greek *prépi* 'must, be necessary' – example (21).

(21)   Modern Greek (pers.doc.)
         Prépi   na   kópsis   to   tsiyáro.
         be_necessary.PRS   that give_up.PRS.2SG D.SG.N   cigarette
         'You must give up smoking.'

4.5. Impersonal constructions conditioned by animacy

Some languages have a total ban on transitive constructions with inanimate NPs in A role, and this observation can be related to the fact that some languages have impersonal construction conditioned by animacy, such as the Russian construction illustrated in (22b), available with some transitive verbs as an impersonal variant of the transitive construction, and analyzable as motivated by the reluctance to treat inanimate forces in the same way as true agents. With the verbs found in this construction, for example *разбить* 'destroy', the transitive construction is always possible, as in (22a), but when the A term does not refer to a human agent, *разбить* 'destroy' also has the alternative construction in which A is demoted to oblique without any other change in the construction, and without any change in the verb form, apart from the fact that, in the absence of an A/S argument, the verb form can only express default neuter singular agreement.

(22)   Russian (pers.doc.)
(22a)   *Молния   разбила   стену.*
         thunderbolt_F destroy.PST.SG.F   wall_F.ACC
         'The thunderbolt destroyed the wall.'
(22b)   *Стену   разбило   молнией.*
         wall_F.ACC destroy.PST.SG.N   thunderbolt_F.INS
         lit. 'It destroyed the wall by means of a thunderbolt.'
         > 'The wall was destroyed by a thunderbolt.'

5. Modal impersonal constructions

We saw in 4.3.3 that the selection of an impersonal construction may be a lexical property of modal verbs. The modal impersonal constructions described in this section do not involve modal verbs, but ordinary verbs that also occur in canonical constructions. In such cases, illustrated by examples (23) and (24), the function of the impersonal construction is to add a modal component (obligation, volition, or other) to the semantic role assigned to the A or S argument of the canonical construction. In both cases, the participant encoded as the A/S term of the canonical construction is in the dative case, and no NP showing the coding characteristics of an A/S term can be introduced in the construction.

(23)   Russian (pers.doc.)
(23a)   *Что   мы   делаем?*
      what.ACC   1PL   do.PRS.1PL
      'What are we doing?' (canonical construction)

(23b)   *Что   нам   делать?*
      what.ACC   1PL.DAT   do.INF
      'What are we to do?' (modal impersonal)

(24)   Russian (pers.doc.)
(24a)   *Я   не   сплю.*
      1SG   NEG   sleep.PRS.1SG
      'I am not sleeping.' (canonical construction)

(24b)   *Мнне   не   спит-ся.*
      1SG.DAT   NEG   sleep.PRS.3SG-REFL
      'I cannot sleep.' (modal impersonal)

Outside Europe, Quechua (Hermon 2001) and Amele (Roberts 2001) are among the language in which modal impersonal constructions can be found.

6. Pragmatic impersonal constructions

Like modal impersonal constructions, pragmatic impersonal constructions are alternative constructions in competition with a canonical predicative construction. The difference is that they imply neither a modification of argument structure, nor a particular modal value, their only function being the expression of variation in information packaging.

6.1. Presentational inversion constructions

In the languages whose basic constituent order in verbal predication can be schematized as A/S V P X ('SVO languages' in the tradition initiated by Greenberg's account of word order typology), there is often a discursively marked construction of intransitive verbs whose function is to de-topicalize the S argument, and whose general characteristic is the post-verbal position of the NP representing the S argument, contrasting with its canonical pre-verbal position. Such constructions are variously referred to as presentational inversion constructions, sentence focus constructions, etc.

6.1.1.   Presentational inversion constructions with full demotion of S

Example (4), repeated as (25), illustrates this kind of construction in French, in which the sole argument of *venir* 'come' loses the coding properties that characterizes A/S arguments in canonical verbal predication, and acquires P-like properties.

(25)   French (Romance; pers.knowl.)
(25a)   *Deux   femmes   sont   venues.*
      two   woman.PL   be.PRS.3PL   come.PTCP.PL.F
      'Two women came.' (canonical predication)

(25b)   *Il   est   venu   deux   femmes.*
      A:3SGM_EXPL   be.PRS.3SG   come.PTCP.SG.M   two   woman_F.PL
      'There came two women.' (impersonal construction)

Example (26) illustrates the same alternation with the bivalent intransitive verb *manquer* 'lack' (in French, the second argument of this verb is an oblique argument, introduced by the preposition *à* 'to' when expressed as a full NP, and indexable by means of dative indexes).

(26)   French (Romance; pers.knowl.)
(26a)   *Ces   livres   me   manquent.*
        DEM.PL   book.PL   DAT:1SG   lack.PRS.3PL
        'I lack these books.', lit. 'These books lack to me.'

(26b)   *Il   me   manque   ces   livres.*
        A:3SG.M_{EXPL}   DAT:1SG   manquer.PRS.3SG   DEM.PL   book.PL
        'I lack these books.', lit. 'It lacks me these books.'

In French, all possible tests unambiguously show that the S argument in the presentational inversion construction loses the properties that characterize canonical S's (i.e., S's fully aligned with the A term of the basic transitive construction) and acquire P-like properties (Lambrecht 2000). For example, in floating quantifier constructions with transitive verbs, the clitic *en* 'thereof' can be used with reference to P, but not with reference to A – example (27a-e). With intransitive verbs, *en*-cliticization of S is impossible in the construction with S in preverbal position (which is consistent with the alignment of preverbal S with A), but possible in the presentational inversion construction.

(27)   French (Romance; pers.knowl.)
(27a)   *J'ai   invité   beaucoup   de   gens.*
        A:1SG-have.PRS.1SG   invited   many   of   people
        'I invited many people.'

(27b)   *J'en   ai   invité   beaucoup.*
        A:1SG-thereof   have.PRS.1SG   invited   many
        'I invited many (of them).'

(27c)   *Beaucoup   de   gens   m'ont   invité.*
        many   of   people   P:1SG- have.PRS.3PL   invited
        'Many people invited me.'

(27d)   **Beaucoup   m'en   ont   invité.*
        many   P:1SG-thereof   have.PRS.3PL   invited
        intended: 'Many (of them) invited me.'
        correct: *Beaucoup (d'entre eux) m'ont invité.*

(27e)   *Beaucoup   de   gens   sont   arrivés.*
        many   of   people   be.PRS.3PL   arrived
        'Many people arrived.'

(27f)   **Beaucoup   en   sont   arrivés.*
        many   thereof   be.PRS.3PL   arived
        intended: 'Many (of them) arrived.'
        correct: *Beaucoup (d'entre eux) sont arrivés.*

(27g)   *Il   est   arrivé   beaucoup   de   gens.*
        A:3SG.M_{EXPL}   be.PRS.3PL   arrived   many   of   people
        'There arrived many people.'

(27h) *Il   en   est   arrivé   beaucoup.*
     A:3SG.M$_{EXPL}$ thereof   be.PRS.3PL   arrived   many
     'There arrived many (of them).'

Similarly, in the canonical construction of Tswana intransitive verbs, S precedes the verb and governs verb agreement in the same way as A in the basic transitive construction, but there is also an alternative presentational inversion construction, in which the NP representing the S argument occurs immediately after the verb and is not indexed on the verb, the morphological slot normally occupied by a variable S/A index being invariably occupied by a dummy S/A index of class 15/17 – example (28).

(28)   Tswana (Bantu; pers.doc.)
(28a) *bà-símàní $^{!}$bá-tɬáà-bî:nà.*
     PL-boy$_2$ CL2-FUT-dance
     'The boys will dance.'
(28b) *χʊ́-tɬáà-bíná   bà-símà:ní.*
     EXPL-FUT-dance   PL-boy$_2$
     lit. 'There will dance boys.' > 'The/some boys will dance.'

In French, not all intransitive verbs have equal access to the presentational inversion construction, but recent studies have argued against the hypothesis of a rigid division of intransitive verbs into two classes on the basis of their possible occurrence in the presentational inversion construction (see in particular Cummins 2000). In Tswana, the situation is different, since all the intransitive verbs of Tswana have equal access to the presentational inversion construction. This is probably motivated by constraints on the topicality of NPs in S/A role that are particularly strict in Tswana.

    Finnish has a presentational inversion construction with the S argument of the intransitive verb in the partitive case and the verb invariably in the 3rd person singular – example (29). It is important to observe that, with transitive verbs, partitive case marking is possible in Finnish for P, but not for A, which confirms the impersonal nature of this construction.

(29)   Finnish (Uralic; Sands & Campbell 2001)
(29a) *Lapset   leikkivät   ulkona.*
     child.PL   play.PST.3PL   outside
     'The children played outside.'
(29b) *Ulkona   leikki   lapsia.*
     outside   play.PST.3SG   child.PL.PRTV
     'There were children playing outside.'

Mandarin Chinese has neither case marking of core arguments nor indexation, and the notion of impersonal construction is not traditional in Chinese linguistics, but the transitive construction has the basic AVP order, without any possibility to move A in postverbal position, whereas the S argument of intransitive verbs may occur in postverbal position (and can therefore be analyzed as aligned with P) in 'presentative sentences', which consequently can be analyzed as having an impersonal construction – example (30).

(30)   Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic; Li & Thompson 1981:509-519)
(30a) *Tao-le   san-zhi   yang.*
     escape-PFV   three-CLF   sheep
     'Three sheep escaped.'

(30b) *Women-de wanhui zhi lai-le Zhangsan gen Lisi.*
1PL-GEN party only come-PFV Zhangsan and Lisi
'Only Zhangsan and Lisi came to our party.'

6.1.2. *Presentational inversion constructions with partial demotion of S*

The presentational inversion constructions illustrated in section 6.1.1 can be straightforwardly characterized as P-aligned constructions in languages in which A-alignment constitutes the general rule, but not all presentational inversion constructions are uncontroversial impersonal constructions. In the languages that have the basic AVP order in the basic transitive construction and a presentational construction of intransitive verbs characterized by the postverbal position of the S argument, there is cross-linguistic variation with respect to case marking and indexation of S arguments in postverbal position. In particular, S arguments do not always lose the control of verb agreement in presentational inversion constructions.

For example, in Spanish, the presentational inversion construction does not affect the status of S as the controller of verb agreement. However, it does affect some other aspects of its behavior, in particular, combination with determiners. Crucially, in the transitive construction of Spanish, bare nouns can occur freely in P role, but not in A role, whereas with intransitive verbs, the S argument may be realized as a bare noun in the presentational inversion construction (31a), but not in the canonical construction with S in preverbal position.[3]

(31) Spanish (Romance; Ortega-Santos 2006)

(31a) *Llegaron libros.*
arrive.PST.3PL book.PL
'There arrived some books.'

(31b) **Libros llegaron.*
book.PL arrive.PST.3PL

6.2. Russian genitive of negation

In the negative clauses of Russian, P arguments of transitive verbs, but not A arguments, can appear in the genitive case, and this property is shared by the S argument of at least some intransitive verbs, which constitutes a clear departure from the general rule of A-alignment (Babby 2001). This construction is typically found with 'unaccusative' intransitives, as in (32c), and is not easily accepted with 'unergative' intransitives, as in (32d).

(32) Russian (Pesetsky 1982)

(32a) *Мальчики не получили никаких писем.*
boy.PL NEG receive.PFV.PST.PL any.PL.GEN letter.PL.GEN
'The boys didn't receive any letters.'

(32b) **Никаких мальчиков не получило письма.*
any.PL.GEN boy.PL.GEN NEG receive.PFV.PST.SG.N letter.PL
intended: 'No boys received letters.'

(32c) *Не пришло ни одного мальчика.*
NEG come.PFV.PST.SG.N not_even one.SG.GEN boy.SG.GEN
'The boys didn't receive any letters.'

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[3] On this phenomenon, see among others Torrego 1989 for Spanish, Alexiadou 1996 for Greek.

(32d) **Не   танцевало   ни   одного   мальчика.*
         NEG   dance.PFV.PST.SG.N   not_even   one.SG.GEN   boy.SG.GEN
         intended: 'Not a single boy danced.'

6.3. Information structure and intransitive predication in Tundra Yukaghir

Maslova 2006 proposes the recognition of what she calls 'focus-oriented split intransitivity' in Tundra Yukaghir. This language has a marker *-le(ŋ)* whose distribution is described by Maslova as follows: in transitive predication, regardless of information structure, it consistently attaches to P, and can therefore be viewed as an accusative marker – example (34a-b), whereas in intransitive predication, it attaches to S if and only if S is focalized – example (34c-d).

(33)   Tundra Yukaghir (Yukaghir; Maslova 2006)

(33a) *met   ten'i   n'awn'iklie-leŋ   toŋore-meŋ.*
         1SG   here   polar_fox-*LEŊ*   chase-PFV.1/2SG
         'I have been chasing A POLAR FOX here.'

(33b) *nime-le   aq   pajp   wie-nun.*
         dwelling-*LEŊ*   only   woman.PL   make-HAB(FOC:A)
         'Only WOMEN install dwellings.'

(33c) *...   qahime-leŋ   kelu-l.*
         ...   raven-*LEŊ*   come-FOC:S
         '... A RAVEN came.'

(33d) *qad'ir   apanala: me-kelu-j.*
         DISC   old_woman   AFF-come-TOP:S
         'The old woman CAME.'

The term of focus-oriented split intransitivity used by Maslova is somewhat misleading, since this phenomenon does not involve a division of intransitive verbs into two subclasses, but rather a discourse-driven alternation in the construction of intransitive verbs. Interestingly, contrary to the presentational inversion constructions evoked above, this alternation does not involve constituent order, but like the presentational inversion constructions, it involves a coding of de-topicalized S arguments similar to that of P in the transitive construction.

7. Voice-related impersonal constructions

7.1. Impersonal use of passive verb forms

In general, the verb forms identified as 'passive' in language descriptions are typically found in alternative intransitive constructions of transitive verbs in which the participant encoded as the P term of the transitive construction is promoted to S, whereas the participant encoded as A in the transitive construction is either unexpressed or expressed as an oblique. In many languages, the same verb forms can also be found in alternative constructions of both transitive and intransitive verbs in which the participant encoded as A or S in the canonical predicative construction is similarly demoted, but its demotion is not compensated by the promotion of any other participant.

Example (34c) illustrates the impersonal passive of a transitive verb in Tswana, to be compared with the passive construction involving P-promotion (34b), whereas (35b) illustrate the impersonal passive of an intransitive verb.

(34)   Tswana (Bantu; pers.doc.)

(34a)   *mà-búrú $^!$á-rékílé   dí-q^{h}ò:mʊ́.*
         PL-Afrikaner$_6$ 3:CL6-buy.PRF   PL-cow$_{10}$
         'The Afrikaners have bought (the) cows.'

(34b)   *dì-q^{h}òmʊ́   dí-rèkílwè   (kí   Mà-bû:rù).*
         PL-cow$_{10}$ 3:CL10-buy.PRF.PASS   by   PL-Afrikaner$_6$
         'The cows have been bought (by the Afrikaners).'
         (passive construction with P-promotion)

(34c)   *χʊ́-rékílwé   dí- q^{h}ò:mʊ́.*
         3:CL17$_{EXPL}$-buy.PRF.PASS   PL-cow$_{10}$
         'Some cows have been bought.' (impersonal passive)
         lit. 'There has been bought cows.'

(35)   Tswana (Bantu; pers.doc.)

(35a)   *Kítsɔ́   ʊ́-bùî:lè.*
         Kitso$_1$ CL1-speak.PRF
         'Kitso has spoken.'

(35b)   *χʊ́-bùî:lwè.*
         3:CL17$_{EXPL}$ -speak.PRF.PASS
         'People have spoken.' (impersonal passive)
         lit. 'There has been spoken.'

7.2.   Impersonal use of reflexive / middle verb forms

The verb forms commonly designated as 'reflexive' or 'middle' in language descriptions may also have impersonal uses. For example in Spanish, (36a) illustrates the canonical transitive construction of *encontrar* 'find'. In (36b), the middle marker (originally, a reflexive clitic) *se* marks its conversion into an intransitive construction ambiguous between a reciprocal and a passive reading, in which the post-verbal NP has the properties of an intransitive subject (in particular, it controls verb agreement). By contrast, in (36c), the post-verbal NP is introduced by the same preposition *a* as in (36a) and does not govern verb agreement, and there is no possibility of introducing an NP governing verb agreement. Consequently, (36c) must be analyzed as an impersonal construction including a slot for a term showing P-coding, but no slot for a term showing A-coding.

(36)   Spanish (Romance; pers.knowl.)

(36a)   *El   policía   encontró   a   los   ladrones.*
         DEF.SG.M   policeman   find.PST.3SG   ACC   DEF.PL.M   thief.PL
         'The policeman found the thieves.'

(36b)   *Se   encontraron   los   ladrones.*
         MID   find.PST.3PL   DEF.PL.M   thief.PL
         'The thieves met.' or 'The thieves were found.'

(36c)   *Se   encontró   a   los   ladrones.*
         MID   find.PST.3SG   ACC   DEF.PL.M   thief.PL
         'They (unspecified) found the thieves.'

7.3. Specialized impersonal voices

Some languages have derived verb forms found exclusively in constructions including no term showing A-like coding characteristics, in which the participant encoded as A or S with the underived form of the verb is obligatorily left unexpressed or expressed as an oblique.

Example (37) illustrates this type of derived verb form with a transitive verb (37b) and an intransitive verb (387c) in Finnish. Such forms are called 'passive' in Finnish grammars, but the impersonal nature of their construction manifests itself in their inability to express agreement with any of their arguments.

(37)   Finnish (Uralic; pers.doc.)

(37a)   *Minä   tunne-n   sinut.*
      1SG   know.PRS-1SG   2SG.ACC
      'You know me.'

(37b)   *Sinut   tunne-taan   siellä.*
      1SG.ACC   know-IMPERS   there
      'You are known there. / They know you there.'

(37c)   *Täällä   puhu-taan   Saksaa.*
      there   speak-IMPERS   German
      'German is spoken there / They speak German there.'

8.   Meteorological impersonals: a controversial issue

The exact nature of the argument structure and syntactic nature of meteorological expressions such as English *It's raining*, *It's cold* or French *Il pleut*, *Il fait froid*, has caused considerable controversy (see among others Alba-Salas 2004 for a discussion within the frame of Relational Grammar). At first sight, the meteorological expressions in which the meteorological phenomenon is not lexicalized as a noun may seem to meet the definition of impersonal constructions, but several studies have drawn the attention to the fact that French *il* or English *it* in meteorological expressions behave differently from expletive *il* or *it* in uncontroversial impersonal constructions. For example, in French, meteorological *il* (but not expletive *it*) can be found in control constructions, as in (38a), and in Colloquial French, meteorological *il* (but not expletive *il*) is in free variation with *ça*, typically used to express vague reference (38b-c).

(38)   French (pers.knowl.)

(38a)   *Il   a   plu   avant   de   neiger.*
      A:3SG.M   have.3SG   rain.PTCP   before   of   snow.INF
      'It rained before snowing.'

(38b)   *Il/ça   pleut   fort.*
      A:3SG.M/that   rain.PRS.3SG   hard
      'It's raining hard.'

(38c)   *Il/*ça   viendra   beaucoup   de   monde.*
      A:3SG.M/*that   come.FUT.3SG   a_lot   of   people
      'There will come a lot of people.'

Ruwet (1990) provides a very detailed and insightful discussion of the meteorological expressions in which the meteorological phenomenon is not lexicalized as a noun, in which he convincingly argues against the analyses according to which, in meteorological expressions,

French *il* or English *it* would have a quasi-argumental status. A key point in Ruwet's argumentation is the need to take account of cross-linguistic data.

Cross-linguistically, the meteorological sentences including a noun referring to the meteorological phenomenon (*The rain is falling*, *The wind is blowing*, etc.) are unproblematic. Those that do not meet this definition may include no noun at all, in which case it may be tempting to analyze them as impersonal constructions, but very often (in particular –but not only– in the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa), they include a noun encoded like the sole argument of monovalent verbs, either 'sky', 'atmosphere', 'place', or 'God'. However, in meteorological expressions, the nouns in question do not really have an argumental status. The point is that, contrary to nouns in argumental function, their presence in meteorological expressions does not reflect a choice having an incidence on the meaning of the sentence, but rather a convention that varies from one language to another.

For example, in Ganja, an A/S V O X language in which S/A indexation marks gender-number distinctions, the verb *tʊb* 'rain' may combine either with the noun *Hàalá* 'God' in preverbal position or with the corresponding S/A index *à-* (human singular), as in (39b). Superficially, the construction is not different from the canonical predicative construction illustrated in (39a). However, in the meteorological sentence, the noun *Hàalá* 'God' and the index *à-* are as frozen as *it* in the meteorological sentences of English, as evidenced by the impossibility of focalizing or questioning this pseudo-subject (**It is God who is raining*, **Who is raining?*).

(39)   Ganja (Balant, Atlantic; pers.doc.)
(39a)   *Sáajó   n-tóyì.   /   À-n-tóyì.*
        Sadio$_{HA}$ ICPL-go   3:CLha-ICPL-go
        'Sadio is going.'   'He is going.'
(39b)   *Hàalá   n-tʊ́bì.   ~   À-n-tʊ́bì.*
        God$_{HA}$ ICPL-rain   3:CLha-ICPL-rain
        'It's raining.'

Such observations suggest that, whatever the appearance of the constructions in which meteorological verbs occur in the languages that have this kind of verb, they are basically avalent, in the sense that no precision about possible participants is required to convert their lexical meaning into a propositional content. In other words, with such verbs, a canonical predicative construction with an argument displaying the same properties as A in the transitive construction is simply inconceivable, since no such argument is available. However, meteorological verbs cannot have truly impersonal constructions either, if the possibility of imagining an alternative canonical predicative construction is considered essential in the notion of impersonal construction.

Put differently, meteorological *it*, in contrast to expletive *it*, does not mark that the syntactic slot normally used for an argument encoded like the A term of the basic transitive construction is blocked, but rather that this slot cannot fulfill its usual function because of the lack of argument structure that characterizes meteorological verbs. In other words, meteorological *it* is not really an expletive, but rather a kind default subject. This analysis is consistent with cross-linguistic observations that can be summarized by saying that the languages in which A-alignment is strongly predominant have different ways of resolving the issue of the choice of a default A/S term with meteorological verbs, resulting in constructions that sometimes have the appearance of canonical predicative constructions, and sometimes of

impersonal constructions. In particular, this analysis provides a convincing account of the observation that, in Colloquial French, meteorological *il* (in contrast to expletive *il*) is in free variation with *ça*, whose typical function is the expression of vague reference.

9. Conclusion

In this presentation, I have discussed a typological approach to a subset of the phenomena traditionally subsumed under the label 'impersonality', defined as constructions that do not include a syntactic slot for an argument encoded in the same way as the agent in the basic transitive construction, in languages in which A-alignment is strongly predominant. I have proposed to recognize four types of impersonal constructions: lexical impersonal constructions, modal impersonal constructions, pragmatic impersonal constructions, and voice-related impersonal constructions. Finally, I have discussed the question of the meteorological sentences in which the meteorological phenomenon is not lexicalized as a noun, and shown that cross-linguistic data support the view that they do not really meet the definition of impersonal constructions.

Abbreviations

A = argument coded like the agent of prototypical transitive verbs in the basic transitive construction, ACC = accusative, AFF = affirmative, CL = class (gender-number agreement marker), CLF = classifier, CPL = completive, DAT = dative, DEF = definite, DEM = demonstrative, DISC = discourse particle, ERG = ergative, EXPL = expletive, F = feminine, FOC = focus, FUT = future, GEN = genitive, HAB = habitual, ICPL = incomplete, IMPERS = impersonal, INDEF = indefinite, INF = infinitive, LOC = locative, M = masculine, MID = middle, N = neuter, NEG = negation, P = argument coded like the patient of prototypical transitive verbs in the basic transitive construction, PFV = perfective, PL = plural, PRF = perfect, PRS = present, PRTV = partitive, PST = past, PTCP = participle, REFL = reflexive, S = sole core argument in intransitive predication, SBJV = subjunctive, SG = singular, TOP = topic, VAL = validator.

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