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Human impersonal pronoun uses in English, Dutch and German*

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1. Introduction

In the title of the James Bond book and film in (1) (Fleming 1964), the pronoun *you* does not refer to the addressee or addressees or, rather, not exclusively. The reference is to all human beings, a set which includes the addressee(s).

(1) *You* only live twice.

In German the title was translated as (2), with *man* instead of *you*.

(2) *Man* lebt nur zweimal.

The pronoun *man* derives from the homophonous noun meaning ‘man’. English had such a pronoun, but it disappeared in the 15th century (Rissanen 1997: 517–521), so Modern English does not have a ‘man’ strategy for impersonal reference. Conversely, German, at least in the written register, very rarely uses a ‘you’ strategy of the type illustrated in (1). Dutch would seem to have both a ‘man’ and a ‘you’ strategy:¹

(3) *Je* leeft maar twee maal.

(4) *Men* leeft maar twee maal.

* Thanks are due to Ad Foolen and to Roel Vismans for drawing our attention to, respectively, Tarenskeen (2010) and Linthe (2010). We are also grateful to two anonymous reviewers and the editors of this volume for valuable comments

¹ When we discuss something about a ‘you’ pronoun, English is used as metalanguage. Italics (e.g. *you*, *je*) are used for specific forms.

The ‘man’ strategy sounds archaic though, and not surprisingly, the Dutch translator of Fleming’s novel chose the ‘you’ strategy (Fleming/Falk 1965).

In this paper we will compare pronoun uses such as those illustrated in (1) to (4) in contemporary written English, Dutch and German. Pronouns allowing these uses will be called ‘human impersonal pronouns’, ‘HIPs’ for short. The leading question is whether there is any sense in which Dutch can be considered to be located ‘in between’ English and German, a claim associated with Van Haeringen (1956) and the follow-up studies in Hüning et al. (2006) and Vismans et al. (2010). Since Northern (Dutch) and Southern (Belgian) Dutch differ with respect to pronoun usage, in particular for *je* (often *ge* in the South) and maybe also for *men* (which seems to be more common in the South), we restrict ourselves to the Northern variant. It is also the variant that is used in the text analyzed in a quantitative pilot study presented in Section 6 below.

In Section 2 some relevant earlier work on human impersonal pronouns in the languages under investigation (as well as in some other European languages) is briefly summarized. Section 3 contains some general comments on the semantic map methodology, preparing the ground for Section 4, where this methodology is applied to the domain of human impersonal pronouns. Section 5 describes the distributional properties of human impersonal pronouns in English, Dutch and German on the basis of the semantic map introduced in Section 4. Section 6 presents the results of a quantitative pilot study investigating the frequencies of the various types of HIPs found in English, German and Dutch. Section 7 contains some concluding remarks.

2. Earlier work on HIPs in English, Dutch and German

The claim that human impersonal pronoun uses illustrate the intermediate position of Dutch between English and German has already appeared in print. The linguist is Weerman (2006) and the facts are those of the ‘man’ pronouns alluded to in Section 1. Table 1 summarizes the contrasts described by Weerman (2006). It indicates whether or not a language uses a ‘man’-pronoun for human impersonal reference.

	English	Dutch	German
modern language	–	±	+
earlier stage	+	+	+

Table 1: The intermediate status of Dutch according to Weerman (2006)

English, Dutch and German once all had ‘man’ pronouns. The pronoun of English is long gone, in German it is very much alive, and in Dutch it is disappearing. To

explain this, Weerman (2006) hypothesizes a connection with the more general morphological properties of the three languages. First, the ‘man’ pronoun is argued to be a kind of extension of verbal inflection (“een soort uitbreiding, een soort aanhangsel, van de verbale inflectie”, Weerman 2006: 30), largely because it only has a subject form, and verbal inflection is, in general, strong in German, weak in English and intermediate in Dutch. And, second, as to why it is that English has deflected most, German least, and Dutch is somewhere in between, Weerman (2006) sees a link with the amount of language contact the three languages have been exposed to.

We are skeptical about Weerman’s (2006) two explanatory hypotheses. First, it is not to be doubted that pronoun use and inflection are related phenomena, nor that the ‘man’ pronouns are ‘abnormal’ pronouns in the sense that they only have a subject form (though Germ. *man* is often assumed to form a paradigm with the oblique forms of *einer* [NOM], i.e. *einen* ‘MAN.ACC’ and *einem* ‘MAN.DAT’, see e.g. Dimowa 1981: 51ff., Zifonun 2001: 232 and Sect. 5.3 below). However, the vagueness of the claim that the ‘man’ pronoun is ‘a kind of extension of verbal inflection’ undermines its potential of explaining the intermediacy described above. Furthermore, Swedish and Norwegian have also undergone strong deflection, yet in these languages the ‘man’ pronouns (*man* in both languages) are present and very much alive (cf. Altenberg 2004/5 and Johanson 2002/3).

Second, the link between the disappearance of the English ‘man’ pronoun and the intensity of language contact is bold and interesting, but not obvious. Weerman (2006) correctly alludes to the importance of language contact between English and Old Norse (up to the 11th century), and to the role of Amsterdam as a melting pot of languages in the formation of Standard Dutch. But the English ‘man’ pronoun did not disappear until the 15th century and it is probable that the demise of the Dutch ‘man’ pronoun is a 20th century phenomenon (see Weerman 2006: 32). Also, surely Yiddish is a contact language *par excellence* and it seems that Yiddish *man* is as vibrant as German *man* (cf. Prince 2006). And why is it that the Romance equivalent to ‘man’ survives best in the most Germanic of all Romance languages, viz. French, with impersonal *on*, deriving from Latin *homo* ‘man’?

By looking at Germanic and Romance languages only it will be difficult to find reasons for the disappearance of ‘man’-pronouns in some of the languages concerned, and for their retention in others. While we feel that Weerman (2006) has not (fully) explained the facts represented in Table 1, we have no alternative explanation to offer and we focus on the description of similarities and differences between the languages under investigation.

Weerman’s (2006) claim that with respect to the ‘man’ pronouns Dutch is intermediate between English and German seems to be correct. But that does not imply that Dutch is intermediate with respect to the other human impersonal

pronouns, such as ‘you’, illustrated in (1) and (3) above, or ‘one’ as in (5) and ‘they’ as in (6).

- (5) What should *one* say to that?
(6) *They* drink a lot of wine in France.

In this study we reconsider Weerman’s (2006) intermediacy claim against the background of a larger set of human impersonal pronouns. We use our native speaker’s intuitions (for Dutch and German), but we have also gathered corpus data (cf. Sect. 6). Moreover, we obviously rely on insights gained in previous work on the topic. Several authors have focused on one or more of the languages or pronouns mentioned above, e.g. Dimowa (1981), Linthe (2010) and Zifonun (2001) on German *man*, Johanson (2002/3) on German *man* and its correspondences in English and Norwegian, Egerland (2003) on Swedish *man* and Altenberg (2004/5) on Swedish in comparison to English, König & Gast (2012: 291–294) on German and English, Hoekstra (2010) on West Frisian *men* as compared to Dutch and German, and Coussé & van der Auwera (2012) on Swedish *man* and Dutch *men*. There are also studies investigating larger sets of European languages, in particular Giacalone Ramat & Sansò (2007) on ‘man’ constructions, Siewierska & Papastathi (2011) on ‘they’ constructions, and Siewierska (2011) on both ‘they’ and ‘man’. As far as we are aware, however, Weerman (2006) is the only study that targets English, Dutch and German, so it is this study that provides our primary point of reference.²

3. Semantic maps: General remarks

One issue that any study of human impersonal pronouns has to deal with is that the relevant pronouns may differ in the range of impersonal uses that they cover, and that they may also have non-impersonal uses. For the first problem, consider the German pronoun *einer*. We can illustrate it with sentence (7), a translation of the English example in (5). While Engl. *one* and Germ. *einer* are approximately equivalent in such contexts, Germ. *einer* differs from Engl. *one* in that it cannot be used in the counterpart to (2) above (cf. 8).

- (7) Was soll *einer* dazu sagen? ‘What can one say to this?’
(8) **Einer* lebt nur zweimal. int.: ‘One only lives twice.’
(ok with anaphoric reading, i.e. ‘One of them only lives twice.’)

For the second problem, note that though Dutch *men* and *je* are semantic alternatives in (3)/(4), in another use, illustrated in (9), the variant with *je*, shown in (10), is not

² Van der Auwera (2012) is based on an earlier version of this paper, but it appeared before this one.

equivalent to *men*. In (9) *men* refers to an unidentified and even numerically unspecific agent, whereas *je* refers to the hearer.

- (9) *Men* heeft mijn fiets gestolen. ‘Someone has stolen my bike.’
 (10) *Je* hebt mijn fiets gestolen. ‘You have stolen my bike.’

Given that the pronouns often if not always have more than one use, how should these uses be related to one another? This question is most interestingly addressed by Siewierska and Papastathi (2011), who propose to relate the various uses on a so-called ‘semantic map’. This is also our approach. Before introducing a semantic map for human impersonal pronouns in Section 4, some general remarks concerning semantic maps will be made in this section.

A semantic map is essentially a representation of (possible patterns of) polysemy or, if one prefers, polyfunctionality. Technically, it is a graph, i.e. a set of nodes and edges linking the nodes to each other (cf. Diestel 2010, Gast & van der Auwera forthcoming). It so happens that one of best known semantic maps – and the only one that has been treated in a book length study – concerns a domain that is close to that of impersonal pronouns, viz. indefinite pronouns (Haspelmath 1997). According to Haspelmath (1997), indefinite pronouns have at least nine different uses, corresponding to nine nodes in a graph. These are represented in Figure 1. The numbers refer to the sentences illustrating each use below.

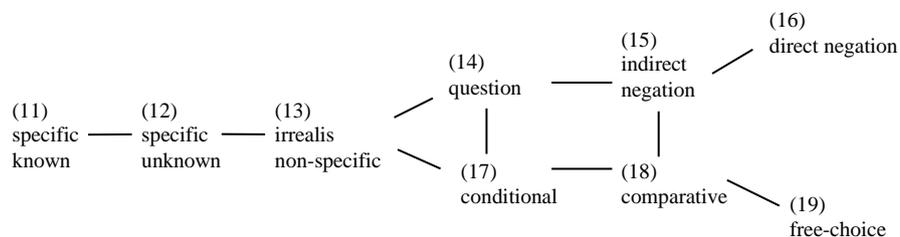


Figure 1: A semantic map for indefinite pronouns (Haspelmath 1997)

- (11) *Somebody* called you while you were away: guess who?
 (12) I heard *somebody*, but I couldn’t tell you who.
 (13) Please ask *somebody* else.
 (14) a. Did *somebody* tell you about it?
 b. Did *anybody* tell you about it?
 (15) I don’t think that *anybody* knows the answer

- (16) a. I haven't seen *anybody*.
 b. I have seen *nobody*.
 (17) a. If you see *somebody*, tell me immediately.
 b. If you see *anybody*, tell me immediately.
 (18) He is better than *anybody* else in the group.
 (19) *Anybody* can solve this problem.

The range of functions associated with a given lexical item can be represented graphically as shown in Figure 2, where the meanings of English *somebody*, *anybody*, and *nobody* are represented.³

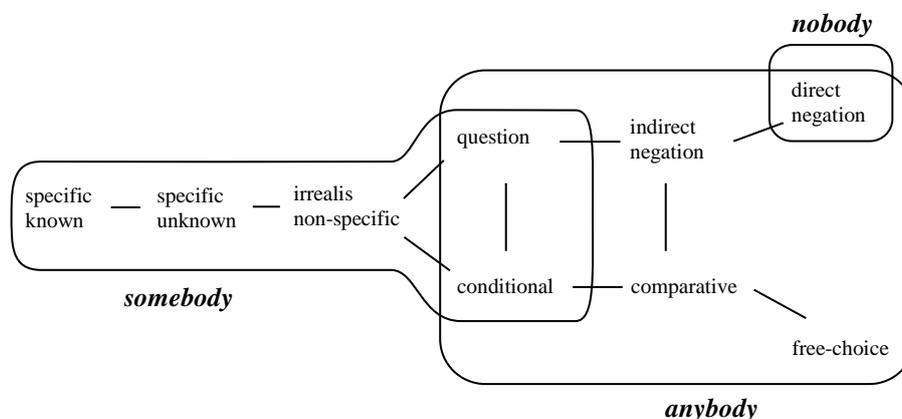


Figure 2: The semantic map for English *somebody*, *anybody* and *nobody*

This is not the place to discuss Haspelmath's (1997) proposal in detail (see e.g. van der Auwera & Van Alsenoy 2011 for discussion), nor the properties or types of semantic maps in general (see e.g. Croft & Poole 2008, van der Auwera 2008), but the following three points are important. First, as Figure 1 already suggests, despite the fact that the map is called 'semantic', it actually represents uses, and not really meanings (Haspelmath 1997: 59). English *somebody*, for instance, has both the 'specific known' and the 'specific unknown' function and the map is perfectly compatible with the claim that the meaning of *somebody* is the same in both uses. In fact, when one proposes 'semantic maps', one steers clear of the semantics pragmatics demarcation problem. Second, the reason for having as many as nine nodes is that each node represents a break off point for at least one indefinite pronoun in one language. The difference between 'specific known' and 'specific

³ *Someone*, *anyone* and *no one* have the same uses. We do not go into the distinction between the forms with *body* and those with *one*.

unknown’ is not justified by the facts of English. *Somebody*, for example, has both uses, and *anybody* or *nobody* has neither. But we don’t have to go further than German to see the discriminatory value of the distinction: German *irgendjemand* allows a ‘specific unknown’ use, but not a ‘specific known’ use (Haspelmath 1997: 245). Third, it is predicted that *ceteris paribus* – see van der Auwera & Temürçü (2006) for a discussion of the exceptions – no pronoun has uses that are not adjacent on the map. Figure 2 shows that *somebody*, *anybody* and *nobody*, as analyzed by Haspelmath (1997), indeed cover connected nodes in the graph. The crucial relation between the nodes is thus their connection. The distance between two nodes is irrelevant. Of course, if two nodes are connected via a third one, the distance between the first two is greater than that between either the first or the second, on the one hand, and the third, on the other.

With respect to human impersonal pronoun uses, the challenge is whether they fit on a semantic map, too, exactly the way indefinite pronouns do. The literature already provides at least two positive answers to that question. One is implicit: Giacalone Ramat & Sansò (2007: 106) distinguish three uses and put them on a grammaticalization path, which can be interpreted as a semantic map (see Narrog & van der Auwera 2011). The second is explicit, the one given in Siewierska & Papastathi (2011: 604–605). These studies provided inspiration for our new semantic map, which we present in the next section.

4. A semantic map for human impersonal reference

4.1 The dimensions of the map

In order to propose a semantic map for human impersonal pronouns,⁴ we first need to define the nodes of the map. Each node will be classified in terms of two dimensions: (i) the state of affairs that the sentence denotes (we use ‘S’ for both), and (ii) the **human participant** that the **human pronoun** refers to (we use ‘HP’ for both). We will use the features listed in (20) (not all features are relevant to all nodes).

- (20) a. For the S:
- + generic (or characterizing), marked as ‘Gen’, vs.
 - generic or + episodic, marked as ‘Epi’;

⁴ Our map will include all of the uses discussed on the earlier maps, except perhaps for Siewierska & Papastathi’s (2011) ‘inferential’ use, which goes back Cabredo Hofherr (2003: 83) and which is argued to be appropriate for propositions ‘inferred from a result’, such as the smell of food in (a).

(a) *They* have eaten seafood here.

This use is often tied to rather specific grammatical contexts, like the Present Perfect in Spanish.

- + modal or, marked as ‘Mod’, vs.
– modal or veridical, marked as ‘Ver’.
- b. For the HP:
- + generic, marked as ‘Gen’, vs.
– generic or + existential, marked as ‘Exst’;
 - + definite, marked as ‘Def’, vs.
– definite or indefinite, marked as ‘Indef’;
 - + plural, marked as ‘Pl’, vs.
– plural or singular, marked as ‘Sg’;
 - + exclusive, marked as ‘Excl’, vs.
– exclusive or inclusive, marked as ‘Incl’;
 - + collective, marked as ‘Coll’, vs.
– collective or individual, marked as ‘Ind’.

Moreover, we will include nodes with (personal) reference to the first or second person (for a ‘purely impersonal’ map, see Gast & van der Auwera forthcoming). They will be regarded as special cases of definite/individual reference.

4.1.1 The classification of the sentence or state of affairs (S)

There is one dimension that is used for both states of affairs and human participants, viz. genericness, and, equally importantly, the attribution of this feature to S and HP is independent (cf. the distinction made by Krifka et al. 1995 between generic/kind-referring NPs and generic/characterizing sentences). A sentence is generic (or characterizing) if it contains, or if one could add *salva veritate*, phrases such as *in general*, *typically*, *necessarily*, *invariably*, *usually*, etc. We are fully aware that these paraphrases are not equivalent and it may therefore be useful to distinguish between subtypes of genericity, yet in all cases we propose that we are dealing with an intuitive notion of a generalization over states of affairs. (21), the less poetic variant of (1), is a general truth. We disregard the reading in which *you* only refers to the addressee(s).

- (21) *You* only live once. [S: Gen]
(22) *You* usually only live once.

When explicitly generalizing adverbs are impossible, the state of affairs is mostly episodic. Episodic sentences can typically be temporally located relative to a definite Topic Time (Klein 1994), e.g. with *just before/when/etc.* Consider (23), in the reading in which *they* refers to an indefinite set of agents. A generalizing adverbial

cannot be added (cf. 24), but the event can be located relative to a definite Topic Time (TT), as in (25).

- (23) *They stole my bike.* [S: Epi]
 (24) *In general *they stole my bike.*
 (25) *They stole my bike [just when I was in the shop]_{TT}.*

The second major feature that is used to classify the state of affairs, \pm Mod/Ver, is notoriously difficult to define. Without going into further details, we will use the tag ‘modal’ for any type of clause containing a (modal, conditional) operator indicating that the proposition in its scope is not (implied to be) true. Sentences without such an operator will be called ‘veridical’, represented as ‘Ver’ (cf. Zwarts 1995). In a discussion of human impersonal pronouns, the class of modal clauses comprises, most importantly, those with a modal auxiliary (e.g. *One shouldn’t do that*), as well as the protases of conditionals (cf. Kratzer 1986 on the assumption that conditionals imply a [universal] modal operator). Note that the protasis of (26) is regarded as an episodic statement, as it is temporally located relative to a definite Topic Time.

- (26) *Indeed, if [one looks at Europe [at the moment]_{TT}]_{PROT}, although it is early days, one could say that divergence is more the keynote ...* [S: Epi, Mod]
 (Lord Howell of Guilford in a parliamentary debate on 23 February, 1999,
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199899/ldhansrd/vo990223/text/90223-06.htm>)

4.1.2 The classification of the human impersonal participant(s) (HP)

The second set of features classifying each node concerns the genericness of the human participant. In the generic sense, the pronoun is ‘quasi-universal’, i.e. it can be roughly paraphrased by *everybody* or, in contexts licensing free choice readings of existential indefinites, *anybody*. In the non-generic/episodic uses, this paraphrase is not available. Thus *you* in (21) is generic, as is the state of affairs or sentence (cf. 27).

- (21) *You only live once.* [S: Gen, Ver; HP: Gen]
 (27) *Everybody (generally) only lives once.*

When the human participant is not generic, it is existential (‘Exst’) and can thus approximately be paraphrased with *somebody* or *someone* (cf. 28).

- (23) *They stole my bike.* [S: Epi, Ver; HP: Exst]
 (28) *Someone/*everyone stole my bike.*

Existential uses will be sub-classified according to three features, i.e. (i) number, (ii) in/definiteness and (iii) person. Existential occurrences of impersonal pronouns may be unambiguously singular, they may be unambiguously plural, or they may be unspecified with respect to number. Moreover, they may be indefinite as in (23) above, or they may be definite, as in (29), which can be paraphrased as in (30).

- (29) *They've* raised the taxes again. [S: Epi, Ver; HP: Exst, Def]
(30) Those responsible for tax raising have raised the taxes again.

The definite use illustrated in (29) is typically found with some type of 'collective' referent (Kleiber 1994: 163–175) or 'corporation' (cf. Pesetsky 1995: 39, Cabredo Hofherr 2003: 84), for instance, governments. Typically, the class of referents that the subject belongs to can be inferred from the predicate (e.g. *They've raised the taxes*, where *they* refers to members of the government and/or parliament). We will thus call these uses 'collective', abbreviated as 'Coll'. The feature 'Coll' contrasts with 'Ind' for 'individual', which is used for 'common' (i.e. non-impersonal) anaphoric uses of pronouns.

The reading in which (31) below has *you* referring to the hearer will also be considered definite (more specifically, deictic). Note that this reading still involves a general (timeless) truth, even though it is not meant to apply to everybody, but only to the hearer ('2Sg'). It is therefore classified as generic at the level of the sentence (more specifically, it is habitual, i.e. a type of characterizing sentence):

- (31) *You*_{speaker} (generally) drink too much alcohol. [S: Gen, Ver; HP: Exst, Def, 2Sg]

(31) also shows that the genericness of the state of affairs need not go hand in hand with that of the human participant: (31) is generic/non-episodic for the state of affairs, and existential, more specifically, definite/deictic for the human participant. The opposite situation is also found, i.e., an episodic state of affairs can have a generic human participant. This is illustrated in (32), with the reading paraphrased in (33).

- (32) *You* could see that he was afraid. [S: Epi, Mod; HP: Gen]
(33) Everyone (present) could see that he was afraid.

The paraphrasability of *you* with *everybody* illustrates that the human participant is generic (the contextual restriction to those participants that were present is

independent of the interpretation of *you*). (34) and (35) show that the state of affairs can be located relative to a definite Topic Time and is thus episodic.

- (34) [When the minister entered]_{TT}, *you* could see that he was nervous.
(35) When the minister entered, everyone (present) could see that he was nervous.

Finally, human impersonal pronouns may differ in their range of reference, in particular with respect to whether or not they refer to the speech act participants. While we could distinguish various uses of HIPs depending on the inclusion or exclusion of the speaker, the addressee and a third person, we will only make a binary distinction between ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’ uses.⁵ This is motivated by the (Germanic) data used for the present study, where we find systematic differences between ‘you and me’ (inclusive) on the one hand, and ‘neither you nor me’ (exclusive) on the other. We can use examples (1) and (6) to illustrate this difference:

- (1) *You* only live twice [S: Gen, Ver; HP: Gen, Indef, Incl]
(6) *They* drink a lot of wine in France. [S: Gen, Ver; HP: Gen, Indef, Excl]

4.1.3 Summary: Parameters of classification

The features introduced above allow for a large number of combinations, but not all of them are relevant to human impersonal pronouns. Some combinations can be neutralized, others do not normally co-occur. The feature combinations that we will use for our semantic map are shown in Table 2 (for the interpretation of ‘Sg/Pl’, see Sect. 4.2). The numbers in the first column refer to the identifiers of the relevant nodes on the map. Note that they are assigned arbitrarily and are only needed for future reference. For each combination, one example is given. Note that not all of the rows in Table 2 correspond to impersonal (uses of) pronouns (1: specific/indefinite; 5: definite/anaphoric; 10–13: deictic reference to speech act participants).

⁵ It is possible that the inclusion or exclusion of the speaker and hearer is basically a result of another distinction, i.e. the one between speaker empathy (‘referential shift’) and the absence of such empathy; see for instance Moltmann (2010), Zobel (2010) and Malamud (2012) for discussion.

	S		HP				
1	Epi	Mod/Ver	Exst	Indef	Excl	Sg	
<i>There's somebody standing on the street.</i>							
2	Epi	Mod/Ver	Exst	Indef	Excl	Sg/Pl	
<i>They've stolen my car.</i>							
3	Epi	Mod/Ver	Exst	Indef	Excl	Pl	
<i>They've surrounded us.</i>							
4	Epi	Mod/Ver	Exst	Def	Excl	Pl	Coll
<i>They've raised the taxes again.</i>							
5	Epi	Mod/Ver	Exst	Def	Excl	Pl	Ind
<i>Bill and Fred went to jail. They'd robbed a bank.</i>							
6	Epi	Mod	Gen		Incl		
<i>If one broke down in the old days, help always came.</i>							
7	Epi	Ver	Gen		Excl/Incl		
<i>One saw that he was afraid.</i>							
8	Gen	Mod/Ver	Gen		Excl		
<i>They eat late in Spain.</i>							
9	Gen	Mod/Ver	Gen		Incl		
<i>One only lives once.</i>							
10	Gen	Mod/Ver	Exst	Def		Sg	1
<i>One_{speaker} doesn't want to set quotas.</i>							
11	Epi	Mod/Ver	Exst	Def		Sg	1
<i>I had lunch at Hugo's.</i>							
12	Gen	Mod/Ver	Exst	Def		Sg	2
<i>You smoke too much.</i>							
13	Epi	Mod/Ver	Exst	Def		Sg	2
<i>You looked pale yesterday.</i>							

Table 2: Feature combinations and nodes on the map

4.2 Existential human impersonal pronouns in episodic states of affairs

The first set of nodes on our map covers five uses in which neither S nor HP is generic, i.e. we are dealing with existential quantification in an episodic sentence (S: Epi, HP: Exst). The dimension of modality does not play a role here. The existential HPs are all exclusive, i.e. neither the speaker nor the hearer is included. The nodes vary with respect to definiteness and number. The arrangement of Nodes 1–5 is shown in Figure 3. Note that here as well as in the other diagrams, ‘neutral’ feature specifications (e.g. ‘± Mod’) will not be represented (i.e. the absence of such a specification indicates neutrality). We will build up the map step by step, arranging

the nodes in the preliminary versions in correspondence with their location on the final map.

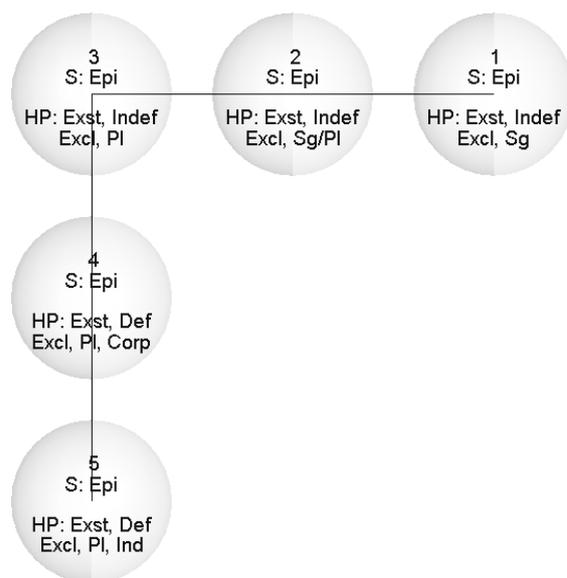


Figure 3: Nodes 1–5: Features

Node 1 stands for singular uses of indefinite pronouns as illustrated in (36).

(36) There's *somebody* standing on the street. I think it's the postman.

Even though examples like (36) are not normally regarded as belonging to the domain of (human) impersonal reference, we will include such contexts in our map, as they often license pronouns that are also used in genuinely impersonal contexts. For example, *somebody* is also found with impersonal reference in conditional clauses such as (37), where it is basically equivalent to *one*, though *one* seems more clearly inclusive than *somebody*:⁶

(37) People didn't rush in those days. If *somebody* somewhere along the roads broke down, help always came. (Butko 2002: 257)

⁶ Note that the universal interpretation of both pronouns is (originally) due to a 'quantificational variability effect' in the sense of Lewis (1975), which leads to the universal readings of indefinites in the scope of some universal quantifier.

Node 2 stands for indefinite (unspecific) uses where no information about the number of referents is provided or even available. These uses have been called ‘vague’ by Cabredo Hofherr (2003, 2006) and “only imply that an event of the type described has taken place” (Cabredo Hofherr 2006: 243), while no information about the subject referent is available (we disregard the distinction between ‘vague’ and ‘inferred’ uses made by Cabredo Hofherr 2003, 2006). This situation licenses the use of Germ. *man* in examples like (38). It will be represented by the feature ‘Sg/Pl’. Note that *man* is not possible when the speaker has access to the number of referents, as in (39), i.e. in the case of specific indefinite reference:

- (38) *Man* hat mein Fahrrad gestohlen. ‘They’ve stolen my bike.’
[S: Epi; HP: Exst, Indef, Excl, Sg/Pl]
- (39) **Man* steht auf der Straße. int.: ‘There’s someone standing on the street.’

In examples like (38), no specific information about the subject referent(s) is available. *Man* thus signals ‘ignorance’ with respect to the number of the set of people who have stolen the speaker’s bicycle. This is maybe the same as what we find in the first part of example (40), discussed by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011: 581–582).

- (40) *They*’re knocking on the door. It’s your mother.
[S: Epi; HP: Exst, Indef, Excl, Sg/Pl]

In the second part the speaker must have used evidence other than the knocking: perhaps s/he has looked at his/her watch and realizes that at that time his/her mother tends to visit him/her.

Node 3 stands for situations in which there is known to be a plurality of referents. For instance, the German pronoun *sie* is used in such cases. It cannot be used if the speaker has information that there was just a single referent.

- (41) Gestern haben *sie* den Willy erschlagen. (Song by Konstantin Wecker)
‘They slew Willy yesterday.’
[S: Epi; HP: Exst, Indef, Excl, Pl]

In Node 4, the (plural) referent is a socially restricted group of people. *They* in (42) refers to the responsible politicians – we have used the term ‘collective’ for such cases:

- (42) *They* have raised the taxes again. [S: Epi; HP: Exst, Def, Excl, Pl, Coll]

That the collective use needs a cell of its own is demonstrated by the fact that German, but neither Dutch nor English, allows a definite pronoun like *die* ‘those’ here, which it does not for the other nodes introduced so far.

- (43) *Die* haben die Steuern wieder erhöht. [Node 4]
 ‘They’ve raised the taxes again.’
- (44) **Die* haben geklingelt. Das ist der Postbote/das sind deine Eltern.
 ‘They’ve knocked at the door. It’s the postman/your parents.’
 [Nodes 1, 2, 3]

The last node in Figure 3, Node 5, corresponds to the anaphoric use of *they* and other personal pronouns. It is distinguished from the other definite node (Node 4) of the map by the feature ‘Ind’ (vs. ‘Coll’). Example (23) is repeated with more context in (45).

- (45) I was not on good terms with Fred and John. For one thing, *they* had stolen my bike.

Like *someone*, *they* in anaphoric uses (as in 45) is not regarded as an instance of an impersonal pronoun. Given that such pronouns (in specific contexts) tend to have impersonal uses, however, they will also be taken into consideration.

It will be useful to specify diagnostic contexts for each node on the map. This is done for the contexts considered so far in Figure 4 (cf. also the examples given in Table 2 above).

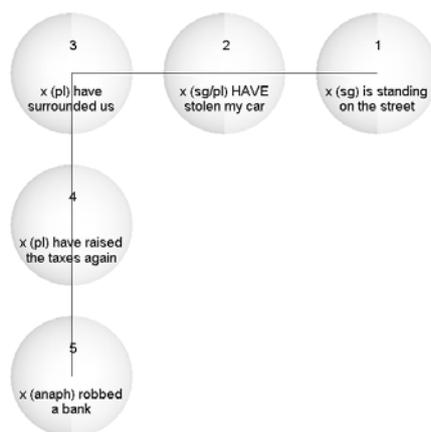


Figure 4: Diagnostic contexts for Nodes 1–5

We can thus add two nodes to our map – Nodes 6 and 7 – corresponding to the examples in (46)/(47) and (48), respectively. Thus extended, the map can be represented as shown in Figure 5 (with features and diagnostic contexts). The arrangement of the nodes is motivated by ‘geometrical economy’ and the intention to keep those nodes together that are encoded by the same markers.

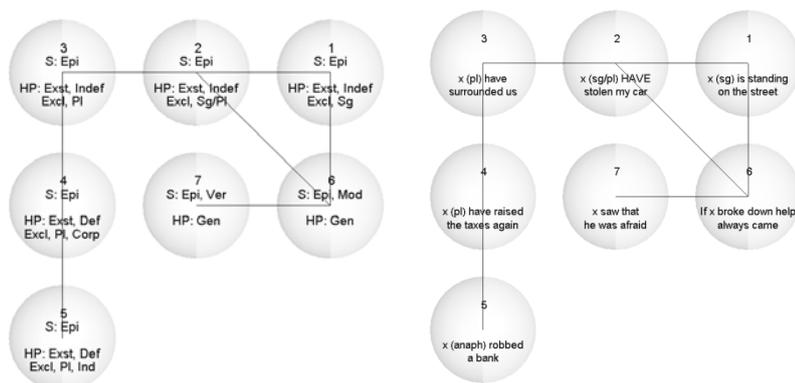


Figure 5: Nodes 1–7: Features and diagnostic contexts

4.4 Generic states of affairs

We will now add nodes to the map that represent generic states of affairs. This applies to Nodes 8–11. They are integrated into the map as shown in Figure 6.

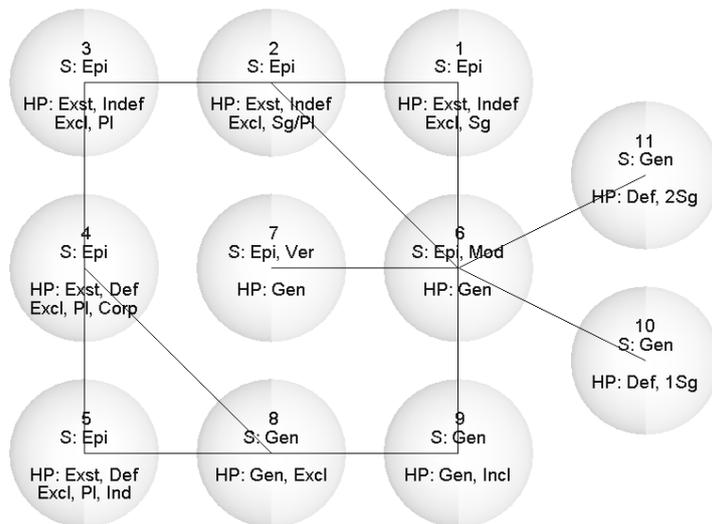


Figure 6: Adding S-generic nodes to the map

Node 8 represents contexts in which a general statement is made about some group excluding the hearer and speaker (hence, 'Excl'). It is illustrated by (49). The paraphrase in (50) shows that both the S and the HP are generic. Note that S-generic sentences are not further sub-classified in terms of modality.

- (49) *They* (generally) eat late in Spain. [S: Gen; HP: Gen, Excl]
(50) Everybody (generally) eats late in Spain.

Node 8 also subsumes uses of impersonal pronouns with speech act verbs, in particular *say*, as in (51).

- (51) *They* say that he is an idiot.

Siewierska & Papastathi (2001: 585) have argued on the basis of crosslinguistic evidence that these uses deserve a cell of their own, because Finnish apparently allows impersonal readings of third person plural forms only in such contexts. If this observation is correct, we will have to add a further distinction or feature to our map. For the time being, we will assume that impersonal uses of *they* as in (51) correspond to the same type of context as (49) above, i.e. they are regarded as generic at both levels (S and HP), and as exclusive.

Use 9 is like use 8 except that the HP-genericness is inclusive. This case was illustrated with (21), repeated below. (52) is another example. It nicely contrasts with (53), which is exclusive. We take the present construal in (52) to include the speaker and the hearer, unlike the past construal in (53).

- (21) *You* only live once. [S: Gen; HP: Gen, Incl]
(52) In this day and age *you* don't marry young. [S: Gen; HP: Gen, Incl]
(53) In the middle ages *you* married young. [S: Gen; HP: Gen, Excl]

Finally, the S-generic layer also contains nodes corresponding to the first and second person singular, i.e. instances of deictic reference (Nodes 10 and 11). Habitual statements like (54) and (55) represent special cases of characterizing sentences, as can be illustrated with the use of generalizing adverbs:

- (54) *You* (generally) smoke too much. [S: Gen; HP: Def, 2Sg]
(55) *I* (generally) drink too much. [S: Gen; HP: Def, 1Sg]

We will also add deictic uses in episodic contexts to the map (Nodes 12 and 13). The ‘final’ version of the map is shown in Figure 7, where the area of impersonal nodes is also indicated. The map with diagnostic sentences will be used in Section 5 below in the representation of the human impersonal pronouns of English, Dutch and German.

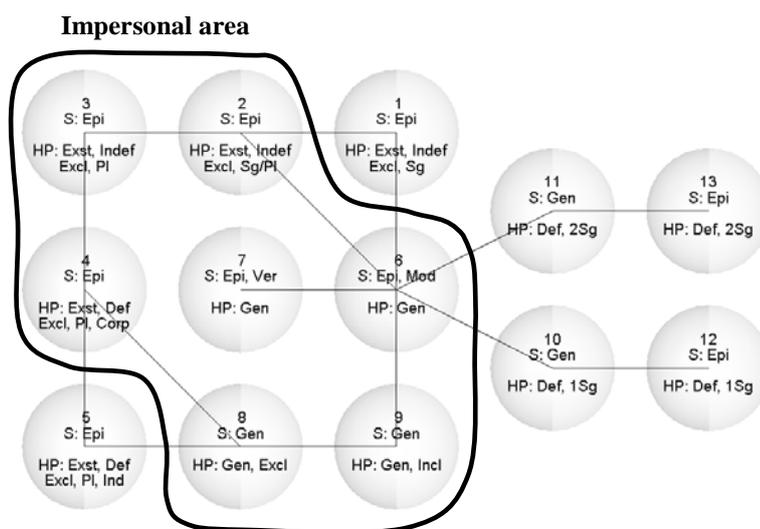


Figure 7: A semantic map of human impersonal pronouns

Of course, the map is ‘final’ only for the purposes of this paper. At several occasions we have made clear that we refrain from certain refinements, and that the application to languages other than German, Dutch and English is bound to lead to some changes as well.

5. Mapping the German, Dutch, and English human impersonal pronouns

We can now use the impersonal map to describe German, Dutch and English. We restrict ourselves to the written register language. This is an important restriction and the languages differ in an interesting way. Only Dutch typically doubles up its personal pronouns with tonic and atonic forms, e.g. *jij* vs. *je* and *zij* vs. *ze*, and the impersonal pronouns are typically if not always unstressed. Thus none of the impersonal *je* and *ze* forms illustrating various shades of impersonality can be replaced by *jij* or *zij*. Neither written English nor written German has special atonic forms, although such forms are of course regularly used in the spoken language (for

instance, German uses the atonic form [zə] for third person singular pronouns and [tə] or [də] for the second person singular).

Another restriction is that we do not include the pronoun *we*, illustrated in (56).

(56) *We* only live once.

We assume that the generic and deictic ‘we’ uses are the same in English, German and Dutch and by leaving them out we avoid crowding the maps too much.⁷

5.1 *The pronouns of English*

English uses *one*, *you*, *they*, and *somebody* (and *someone*) for impersonal reference. *One* covers uses 6, 8 and 9, i.e. uses in which the HP is generic, and S is either generic or modal. Use 6 is illustrated in (57) and use 8 in (58).

(57) When *one* travels, the umbrella has to come along.

(58) *One* married young in the Middle Ages.

(59) shows that *one* is possible in modal sentences with an actuality entailment.

(59) *One* could see that he was tired.

Arguably as a result of analogy to sentences like (59), impersonal *one* is also found in combination with verbs of perception when there is no modal operator (Node 7). (60) has been taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English. Note that the example is episodic. Like Dutch *je*, *one* in combination with episodic non-modal predicates seems to be restricted to verbs of perception (and perhaps cognition).

(60) The look on Clinton’s face suggested that even if his staff thought the program to be the mother of all photo ops, and the father too, he was seriously concerned about the children and their questions. *One* saw that again later when he tried to comfort a little boy who has AIDS. [COCA]

In generic contexts, *one* is also often used for reference to the first person, especially if the speaker wants to represent his/her behaviour as a result of general rules, as politicians often do. Even though such uses can be regarded as a ‘pragmatic

⁷ The fact that we do not discuss the 1PI uses for English, German and Dutch in no way implies that this category is cross-linguistically uninteresting. It suffices to think of French *on*, which is an historically ‘man’ pronoun that now also has a deictic 1PI use. See also Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990: 168–206).

narrowing' of the referential range associated with impersonal pronouns (see e.g. Zifonun 2001), we will assume that *one* is also used for reference to the first person only (in generic contexts), and that it also covers Node 10. (61) is an authentic example uttered by a British politician:

- (61) *One* doesn't want to set quotas. *One* doesn't want to set diktats, but *one* does want to maintain a dialogue and *one* does want to maintain pressure.
 (Ed Vaizey, Culture Minister on January 24, 2012;
 cf. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-16697629>)

The 'partial graph' corresponding to Engl. *one* is displayed in Figure 8.

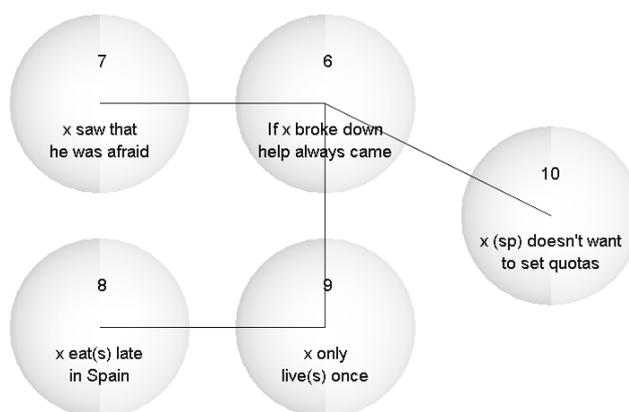


Figure 8: English *one*

The uses of *you* are the same as those of *one*, except that we can also include the direct reference to the hearer, in both generic and episodic contexts (Nodes 11 and 13; cf. Figure 9).

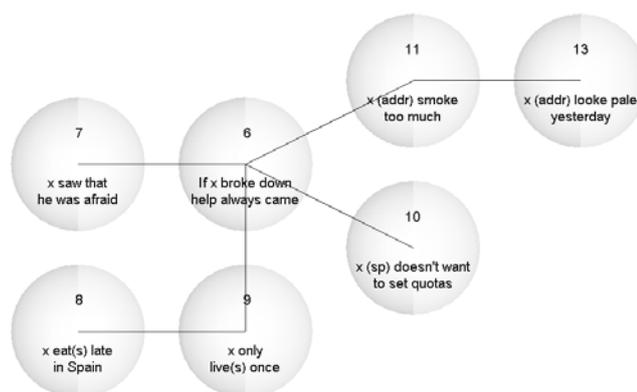


Figure 9: English *you*

They is rather different from *one* and *you*: the unifying factor is exclusiveness, in both its generic and non-generic uses; it covers Nodes 2 to 5 and Node 8. It always contains an element of plurality, even though this aspect of interpretation can weaken (insofar as number is left vague), as in the use illustrated already in (40).

(40) *They*'re knocking on the door. It is your mother.

The partial graph for English *they* is given in Figure 10.

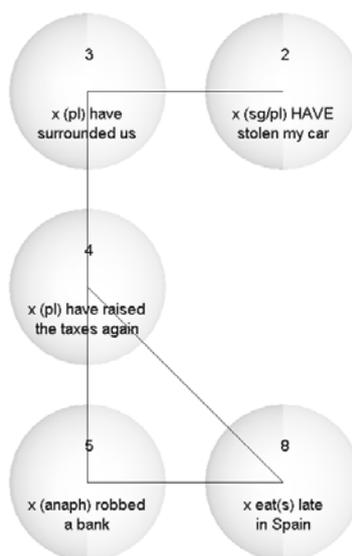


Figure 10: English *they*

Somebody, finally, has four uses, i.e. indefinite ones in epistemic contexts as illustrated in (36), and the one illustrated in (37), repeated here.

- (36) There's *somebody* standing on the street/(knocking on the door). [Nodes 1, 2, 3]
- (37) People didn't rush in those days. If *somebody* somewhere along the road broke down, help always came. [Node 6]

The four nodes covered by Engl. *somebody* are shown in Figure 11.

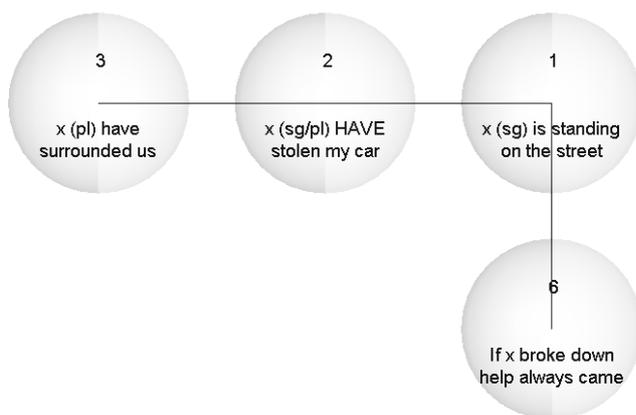


Figure 11: English *somebody*

We can survey the distribution of *one*, *you*, *they* and *somebody* on a single map as shown in Figure 12.

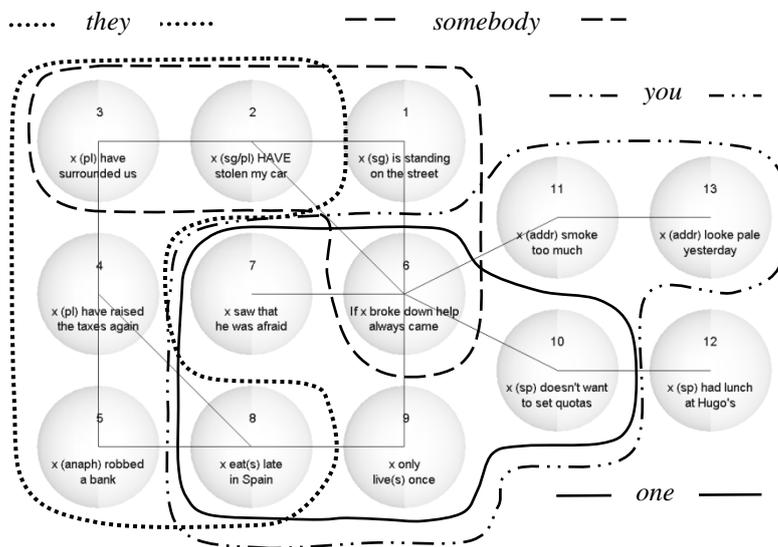


Figure 12: The pronouns of English

5.2 *The pronouns of Dutch*

Dutch *iemand* and *ze* have the same uses as English *somebody* and *they*, and *je* is like Engl. *you*. It can be S-episodic and HP-generic without the presence of a modal element (Node 7) – see example (48) (with a verb of perception), repeated below. (62) illustrates the pragmatic narrowing to the speaker, a use first described by Appel (1993) (see Tarenskeen 2010 for a review of the literature of ‘self-referring’ *je*). In the first part of (62) we get the deictic 1Sg pronoun and it is clear that the 2Sg pronoun *je* also refers to the speaker.

(48) *Je* zag dat hij schrik had.

(62) ... maar dat zijn wel schrijvers die *me* interesseren en die *je* blijft volgen in hun ontwikkeling.

‘...but those are authors who interest me and who I keep following in their development’ (Tarenskeen 2010: 34)

Dutch lacks an etymological counterpart to *one*, but it has *men*, which covers Nodes 2–4 and 6–10 (cf. Figure 13).

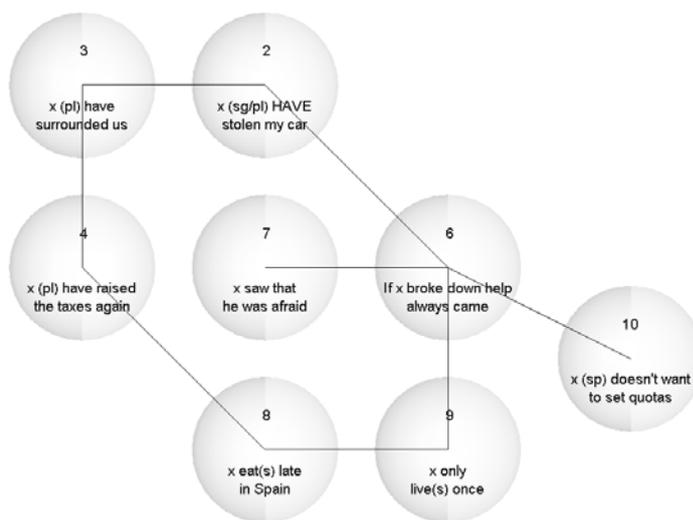


Figure 13: Dutch *men*

Figure 14 surveys all impersonal pronouns of Dutch.

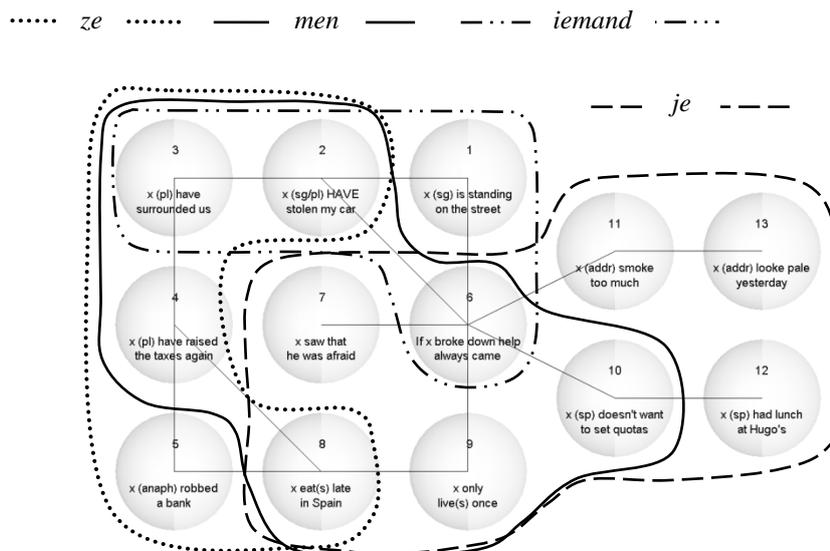


Figure 14: The pronouns of Dutch

5.3 The pronouns of German

German has seven human impersonal pronouns: *einer* (with the oblique forms *einen/einem*), *jemand*, *man*, *die*, *sie*, *du*, and *ich*. *Man* has the same extension as Dutch *men*, *du* is like English *you*, and *jemand* is like English *somebody* and Dutch *iemand*. The distribution of *einer* is more complicated, as it varies systematically with case. Even though the forms *einen* (accusative) and *einem* (dative) can be regarded as suppletive elements of a *man*-paradigm (cf. Zifonun 2001), we probably have to distinguish two types of *ein*-pronouns (cf. also Dimowa 1981). Nominative *einer* is only used for (exclusive) singular reference in episodic sentences (cf. 63). This use is not commonly found with oblique forms, and *jemanden* (accusative) or *jemandem* (dative) are normally used instead (cf. 64).

- (63) Da steht *einer/jemand* auf der Straße.
 ‘There’s somebody standing on the street.’

- (64) Ich seh' da ?*einen/jemanden* auf der Straße.
 'I can see someone standing on the street.'

Moreover, nominative *einer* is used with an inclusive reading in modal contexts. The latter use is highly restricted, however, and is found only in (near) idiomatic cases like (65):

- (65) Wenn *einer* eine Reise tut, dann kann er was erzählen.
 lit.: 'If one takes a trip, one has many stories to tell.'

The oblique forms of *einer* are also used in generalizing sentences where (nominative) *einer* is impossible, e.g. in contexts corresponding to Node 8 (exclusive) or Node 9 (inclusive, cf. 66 and 67):

- (66) Lehrer schenken *einem* immer Bücher zum Geburtstag.
 lit.: 'Teachers always give one books as presents.'
 (67) Von Lehrern bekommt *man*/**einer* immer Bücher zum Geburtstag.
 lit.: 'You're always given books as presents by teachers.'

Moreover, *ein-OBL* is also found with perception verbs in episodic non-generic sentences (cf. 68), and with reference to the speaker (cf. 69).

- (68) Da wurde *einem* klar, dass es zu spät war.
 'Then one/you realized that it was too late.'
 (69) Dieses Ergebnis kann *einen* nicht zufriedenstellen.
 'This result cannot satisfy one/me.'

Because of the distributional differences between the various case forms of *einer* pointed out above we will assume that there are two *ein*-pronouns in German, one for singular existential quantification in episodic contexts (only nominative), and one for generic reference in modal and/or S-generic contexts (only oblique forms). The two 'partial graphs' are given in Figure 15.

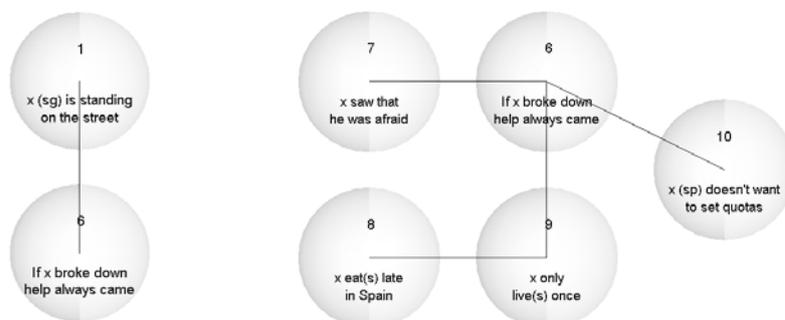


Figure 15: German *einer* (left) and *ein_{obl}* (right)

The ‘they’ forms are interesting, too. German *sie* is marginal in the written language, but it is more commonly used in the spoken language, mostly in the cliticized form ([zə]) after the finite verb. The ignorance/vague Sg/Pl use does not seem to be possible.⁸ Moreover, there is the demonstrative *die* ‘those’, which is used for the collective or corporate uses:

- (70) Jetzt haben *die* schon wieder die Steuern erhöht.
 ‘Now they’ve raised the taxes again.’

Figure 16 shows the distribution of Germ. *sie* (left) and *die* (right).

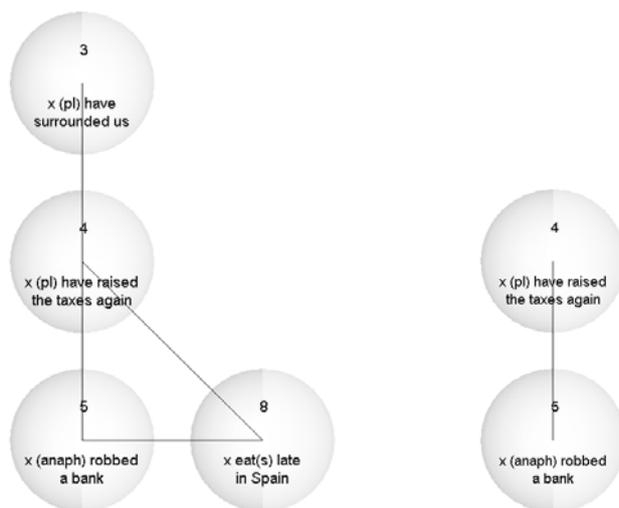


Figure 16: Germ. *sie* (left) and *die* (right)

⁸ Paul-Georg Meyer has pointed out to us that a plural interpretation of *sie* is possible in *Im Radio haben sie gesagt ...* ‘They said on the radio ...’. While this is a very good observation, we believe that the plurality of ‘speakers’ could be interpreted literally, in the sense that the sender (of the communicative act) is not just a single person (the radio presenter), but the entire editorial team. In other words, *say* would be interpreted more or less as *inform* in such cases. Still, such uses certainly provide bridging contexts for a reinterpretation of plural ‘they’ as vague ‘they’.

Finally, German also allows the first person pronoun *ich* to be used impersonally, as was first described by Zobel (2010). (71) is an authentic example uttered by a soccer manager (who was not playing himself and consequently not using the first person pronoun deictically).⁹

(71) U. Hoeneß: “Wenn ich als Mannschaft gewinnen will, dann muss *ich* auch mit breiter Brust auf den Platz gehen und dem Gegner zeigen, wer hier nach 90 Minuten als Sieger das Feld verlassen wird. Ich muss mich wehren.

lit.: ‘If I want to win as a team, I have to go on the pitch with broad chest and show the opponent who will leave the pitch as a winner after 90 minutes. I have to fight.’

(http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article532778/Schlechte_Argumente_fuer_den_Aufnahmeantrag_an_die_G_14.html, accessed on October 27, 2011)

Figures 17 and 18 survey the pronouns of German.

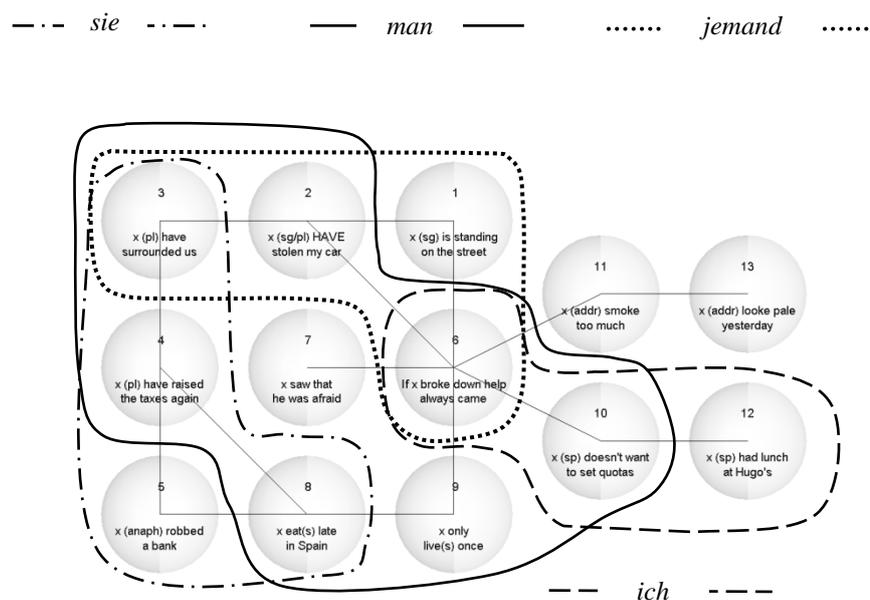


Figure 17: The impersonal pronouns of German: *man*, *sie*, *ich*, *jemand*

⁹ One anonymous reviewer thinks that Dutch and English also allow this use. We are hesitant, but the matter clearly needs more work.

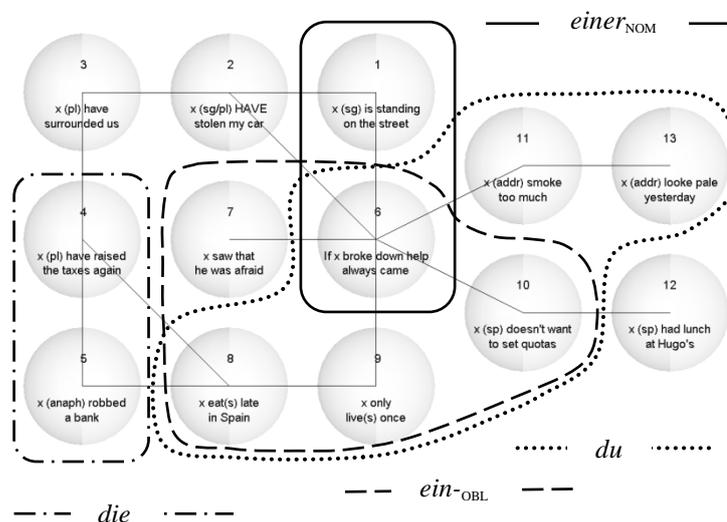


Figure 18: The impersonal pronouns of German: *die*, *du*, *einer_{NOM}*, *ein_{OBL}*

5.4 Is Dutch between English and German?

We are now ready to address the intermediacy claim of Dutch vs. English and German. Differently from the Weerman-based Table 1, we can tabulate human impersonal pronouns in general, and not just the ‘man’ pronouns. We will not yet engage in any frequency or markedness claims, reflected in Weerman’s ‘±’ – we will deal with this in Section 6. Table 3 merely shows whether or not English, Dutch or German allow an impersonal use for a given pronoun, independently of which one it is. The bottom line supplies the total number of human impersonal pronoun uses.

	English	Dutch	German
‘man’	–	+	+
‘they’	+	+	+
‘you’	+	+	+
‘those’	–	–	+
‘one’	+	–	+
‘somebody’	+	+	+
‘I’	–	–	+
	4	4	7

Table 3: English, Dutch, and German impersonal pronouns

For Dutch to be intermediate in a real sense, it would be sufficient if the number of human impersonal pronouns were in between the figure 4, needed for English, and 7, needed for German. That is not the case, though. Dutch could still be intermediate if, where the three languages differ, Dutch went with either German or English, and there would be no pronoun allowing an impersonal use in both German and English, but not in Dutch. This is not the case either. Though Dutch sides with German with respect to the ‘man’ pronoun, and with English in not having ‘those’ or ‘I’ impersonal uses of pronouns, it differs from both English and German in not having a ‘one’ pronoun. For neither sense of intermediacy does Dutch qualify.

We can also look at the uses distinguished on the map in more detail. To some extent, Dutch is more like English: it has four impersonal pronouns, instead of the seven of German – or even eight, if we can count *einer*_{NOM} and *ein*-_{OBL} separately. Also, for the three pronouns for which Dutch differs from either German or English, but not from both, it sides with English twice (in not having ‘those’ or ‘I’) and with German only once (in having ‘man’).

For the pronouns that are shared by all three languages, viz. ‘they’, ‘you’ and ‘somebody’, there are no differences: their spread on the map is the same in the three languages. Then there are two pronouns that are shared by two languages. First, ‘man’ is shared by Dutch and German, but again, there are no differences: all the uses of German *man* can be matched by uses of Dutch *men*. Second, ‘one’ is shared by English and German. Here the comparison is interesting.

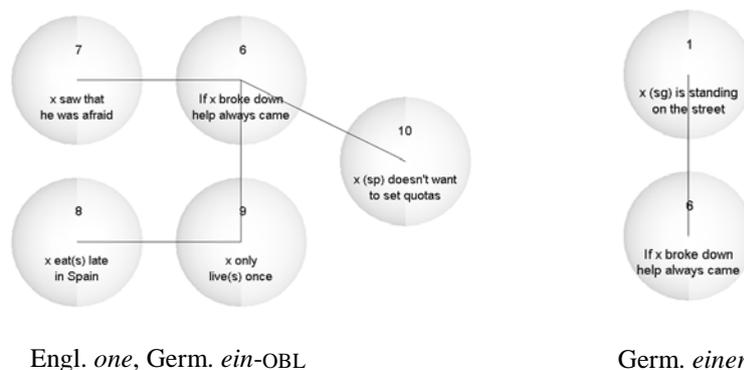


Figure 19. English *one* and German *ein*-_{OBL} vs. Germ. *einer*

Figure 19 shows that the correspondence is not perfect. English *one* corresponds to German *ein*-_{OBL} but not to German *einer*_{NOM}. The relevance for the issue of the intermediacy of Dutch vs. German and English is this. It is the existence of ‘one’ in English and German but not in Dutch that prevents us from saying that Dutch is

indeed intermediate – and within this intermediacy space closer to English than to Dutch. But German and English ‘one’ are only partially similar, which means that the argumentative force of the presence vs. absence of a ‘one’ pronoun in blocking the intermediacy claim for Dutch is limited.

Of course, the discussion so far only describes what is possible, not what is frequent or rare.

6. Using the German, Dutch, and English human impersonal pronouns

To get a glimpse of the frequencies with which speakers actually use the strategies that are available, we engaged in a pilot corpus study. We investigated the impersonal uses of relevant pronouns in Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince* and its Dutch and German translations. In carrying out this pilot study on the basis of data from just one book, with each time only one translator, the results are obviously very tentative (and some readers might even object to the very use of translated texts in a comparative study). Still, it seems to us that the results to an extent match our intuitions. Table 4 lists the frequencies of the impersonal uses of ‘man’, ‘they’, ‘you’, ‘those’, ‘one’, ‘somebody’ and ‘I’ pronouns.

	English	Dutch	German
‘man’	0	4	168
‘they’	13	11	2
‘you’	60	116	9
‘those’	0	0	0
‘one’	5	0	3
‘somebody’	0	0	0
‘I’	0	0	0

Table 4: Impersonal uses in *Harry Potter and the half-blood prince*

What do these figures, however tentatively, tell us about the intermediacy claim? As to ‘man’, it is indeed true that 4 is in between 0 and 168. But that misses a point. 4 is very much closer to 0 than to 168. This means that even though grammarwise, as we have seen, Dutch sides with German (with regard to *man/men*), usagewise it sides with English. This is itself a nice illustration of the intermediacy claim, and a corroboration of the point made by Weerman (2006). The numbers for ‘they’ are more modest, but we again see that Dutch sides with English. Strictly speaking 11 is between 13 and 2, but it is closer to 11 than to 2 (cf. Figure 20 below for a significance test). Then comes ‘you’. English uses ‘you’ quite a bit, Dutch uses it almost twice as often, but German uses it very sparingly. To the extent at least that

‘you’ is not rare, Dutch again sides with English. We need not discuss (impersonal uses of) ‘those’, nor ‘somebody’ or ‘I’ for that matter: they do not occur in our Harry Potter text. This leaves us with ‘one’. ‘One’ is available in English and German, but rare in both. Also, we have seen that grammarwise English *one* and German *einer* have different uses. This is also reflected in the pilot study: none of the *one* pronouns was translated by *einer* (or *einem* or *einen*) into German.

The fact that usagewise, English and Dutch behave similarly while German is different from both languages can be seen even more clearly when we represent the figures of Table 4 in the form of an association plot (Friendly 1992), as is done in Figure 20. Each box of this plot corresponds to one cell of a contingency table, and its size is proportional to the difference between the observed frequency and the frequency as expected on the assumption of statistical independence.¹⁰ The ‘polarity’ of this difference is reflected in the position of the box

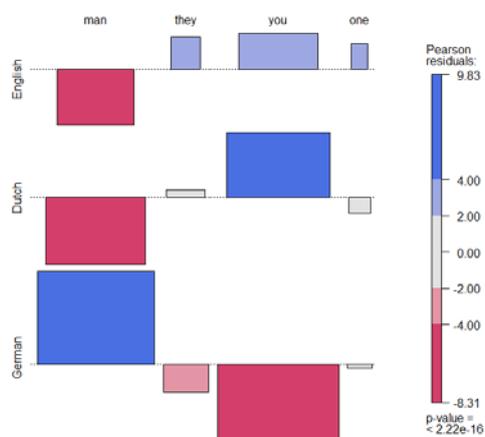


Figure 20: The data of Table 4 shown in the form of an association

relative to the (dotted) base line. If a box is above the base line, the relevant pronoun is more frequent than expected; if it is below the baseline, it is rarer than expected. Moreover, association plots provide information about the statistical significance of a deviation from independence (light and dark shading for significant and highly significant deviations, respectively). For instance, the top left cell corresponds to the ‘man’-pronoun of English. Given that English does not have a ‘man’-pronoun, the frequency of the relevant cell in the contingency table is ‘0’. As this is lower than expected on the assumption of statistical independence, the cell is beneath the baseline, and given that the ‘man’-strategy is underrepresented to a considerable extent, the box is relatively large and shaded in dark grey. The box corresponding to the Dutch ‘man’-pronouns is similar in size to that of English. German, unsurprisingly, behaves differently from both English and Dutch, as ‘man’-pronouns are overrepresented considerably here (as is indicated by the position of the box relative to the baseline as well as its size and dark shading).

¹⁰ More precisely, the height is proportional to the (signed) contribution to chi-square, and the width to the square root of the expected frequency.

We need not go into further details with respect to the interpretation of the association plot shown in Figure 20. Suffice it to say that the ‘profiles’ of English and Dutch are largely parallel, and that accordingly, usagewise Dutch patterns much more with English than with German.

7. Conclusions

In this paper we revisited Weerman’s claim that Dutch is intermediate between English and German with respect to the human impersonal pronoun deriving from the noun ‘man’. We put his comparative claim into the context of a broader comparison of the human impersonal pronoun use of the three languages and for these uses we construed a semantic map. The innovative feature of the map is that genericness applies to both states of affairs and to human participants, and independently so. The map was then shown to accommodate all the relevant uses of the impersonal strategies of the three languages. We also distinguished between the grammar of the human impersonal pronouns and their usage (frequency). With respect to the grammar, strictly speaking, Dutch is not intermediate, for it lacks the ‘one’ strategy, whereas German and English have it. However, when it comes to the uses distinguished on the map, the German and English ‘one’ strategies differ and if one can therefore to some degree abstract from the fact that German and English have something that Dutch lacks, Dutch does end up in the middle, and more to the side of English (in not having ‘I’ and ‘those’) than to the side of German (in sharing ‘man’). That Dutch patterns with English is also the conclusion of our study of the frequency of use of the various strategies used for impersonal reference in the languages under investigation.

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