

# On the discourse properties of dedicated impersonal pronouns in episodic sentences

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In this talk, I address the discourse properties of dedicated impersonal pronouns in the restricted contexts of episodic sentences. These are sentences that describe a specific situation, and do not make any general claims about the existence of a regularity. This talk focuses on German *man* in episodic sentences, “existential *man*” (EM), which contributes a similar meaning to that of indefinite pronouns, see (1). In contrast to the existential use, German *man*, like all dedicated impersonal pronouns, has a generic use which is only available in generic sentences (pace Malamud 2013), see (2).

- (1) *Gestern hat man die Uni angezündet.* (existential *man*  $\approx$  someone)  
yesterday has MAN the uni set-on-fire  
‘Yesterday, someone set the university on fire.’
- (2) *Man muss seine Eltern respektieren.* (generic *man* = one)  
‘One has to respect one's parents.’

**Note:** the existential use is not cross-linguistically universal – most notably English *one* can only occur in generic sentences, see translation of (2); e.g. French *on* (cf. Cabredo-Hofherr 2004), Italian *si* (cf. Cinque 1988), and other European languages behave like German *man*.

The **aim of this talk** is to address one persisting point of contention for dedicated impersonal pronouns: their (in)definiteness. They have been argued to be definite expressions (e.g. Alonso-Ovalle 2002, Kratzer 1997), indefinite(-like) expressions (e.g. Condoravdi 1989, Malamud 2013, Moltmann 2012), and even suggested to be “a-definite”/implicit argument-like expressions (Koenig & Mauner 1999). Most of these investigations focus on the pronouns’ semantic behavior, and either only discuss English *one* in its generic use, or mix existential and generic uses. Since in the generic use, any contribution of the pronoun is masked by a quantificational generic operator *Gen*, I argue that the existential use provides better evidence for the (in)definiteness of dedicated impersonal pronouns. **Previous results based on their semantic behavior** group dedicated impersonal pronouns with indefinites since they allow for QVE with adverbs of quantification (cf. Malamud 2013 and references therein). **But:** EM does not share the same scope-taking behavior with either indefinite pronouns (Zifonun 2000) or indefinite singular DPs. **Central remaining question:** Is EM indefinite? Or does it behave like implicit arguments, as argued by Koenig & Mauner? I give an in-depth analysis of the discourse anaphoric potential (DAP) of EM which supports Koenig & Mauner’s suspicion that in their existential use, dedicated impersonal pronouns behave like implicit argument-like expressions (pace Malamud 2013). The analysis that I propose below captures this behavior, as well as Zifonun’s (2000) result that EM differs substantially from indefinite pronouns in its DAP – without running into the formal problems noted by Malamud (2013) for Koenig & Mauner’s account. Informally, EM is best conceptualized as referring to an indeterminate “group” of individuals (possibly a singleton) for which I write “X”.

**1. Preceding sentence/context:** EM can occur in out-of-the-blue contexts, see (3), and does not require its referent to be previously introduced.

- (3) *Hast du das gehört? Gestern hat man die Uni angezündet.*  
‘Did you hear? Yesterday, X set the university on fire.’

Previously introduced (groups of) discourse referents can be understood as referents of EM, but have to be inferred as such. In general, highly topical/salient discourse referents are considered as referents of EM, depending on the discourse relation between the utterances (Asher & Lascarides 2003), see (4).

- (4) *Eine Gruppe von Studenten ist für ihren Vandalismus bekannt. Gestern hat man zum Beispiel die Uni angezündet.*  
 ‘A group of students is known for their vandalism. For example, yesterday X set the university on fire.’  
 (X = the group of students)

Since *zum Beispiel* (Engl. ‘for example’) marks an elaboration, the group of students introduced in the first sentence is easily inferred as the referent of EM in the second sentence. **But note:** the speaker in (4) does not explicitly claim that the group of students is indeed responsible, i.e., *man* is not anaphoric.

**2. Subsequent sentence/context:** EM cannot be taken up by 3rd sg. pronouns or arbitrary definite descriptions (see Cabredo-Hofherr 2008, Zifonun 2000). However, it can be taken up (i) by 3rd pl. personal and demonstrative pronouns with a corporate reading (pace Malamud 2013), (ii) bridging definites (pace Malamud 2013), and (iii) EM. Arguably, these expressions all involve *inferred referents*, i.e., they are not strictly anaphoric to EM; this is also supported by the different number specifications. Example (4) can be continued by (5) (illustrates i & ii) or (6) (illustrates iii).

- (5) *Sie / die / die Brandstifter haben ein Streichholz in einen Mülleimer geworfen.*  
 they / d-pron / the arsonists have a match in a garbage-can thrown  
 ‘They / the arsonists threw a match in a garbage can.’
- (6) *Man hat ein Streichholz in einen Mülleimer geworfen.*  
 MAN has a match in a garbage-can thrown  
 ‘X’ threw a match in a garbage can.’ (X’ = X of (4))

EM in a subsequent sentence does not have to co-refer with occurrences in preceding utterances: (7) can also naturally continue (4).

- (7) *Man sucht noch nach den Brandstiftern.*  
 ‘X” is still looking for the arsonists.’ (X” = the police)

**Note:** Malamud (2013) claims that EM cannot be taken up by either personal or demonstrative pronouns or definite DPs, and concludes from this that Koenig & Maurer’s parallel between implicit arguments and dedicated impersonal pronouns cannot be confirmed. As example (5) shows this conclusion is premature.

**3. Sentence internally,** EM can only co-refer with a select few elements: (i) the 3rd sg. reflexive pronouns, (ii) PRO, and (iii) EM (Cabredo-Hofherr 2008, Zifonun 2000). It cannot co-refer with any suppletive forms in the accusative and dative or with possessives (cf. Kratzer 1997).

- (7) a. *Man hat sich entschlossen PRO zu bleiben.*  
 MAN has self decided PRO to stay  
 ‘X decided to stay.’ (only exhaustive control, cf. Landau 2010)
- b. *Man hat beschlossen, dass man bleibt.*  
 MAN has decided that MAN stays  
 ‘X decided that X’ stays.’ (X = X and X = X’ possible)

As Koenig & Mauner (1999) and Landau (2010) show, the same discourse behavior, as sketched for EM above, is also exhibited by implicit arguments, e.g. the demoted agents of passives. This is challenged by Malamud (2013) who argues that implicit arguments do not show QVE unlike EM. However, it is unclear at this point whether silent elements can enter into QVE configurations at all. **Further support** that EM parallels implicit arguments comes from a corpus study in which uses of *man* in German literary texts are compared to their English translations. Since English *one* lacks an existential use, translators need to use different but similar strategies: EM is translated either (i) as an implicit argument or (ii) as a personal pronoun corresponding to the inferred set of referents.

- (8) a. *Man hörte Regentropfen auf das Fensterblech aufschlagen.*  
 ‘X heard rain drops hitting the window pane.’  
 T : ‘Drops of rain could be heard hitting the pane.’ (passive → implicit argument)
- b. *Man sah auf den Vorplatz der Wohnung hinaus.*  
 ‘X saw out onto the landing of the flat.’  
 T : ‘He could see onto the landing.’ (‘he’ is the currently most salient male individual)  
 (Kafka, 1917, “Die Verwandlung” (‘The Metamorphosis’); Translation (T: David Wyllie, 2002))

**Formal proposal:** The central idea of my analysis is that EM is a weak nominal. It contributes a (contextually constrained) set of animate individuals, but no distinguished referent that can be taken up by anaphoric pronouns. This idea is similar in spirit to Chierchia’s (1995) proposal for Italian *si* and Koenig & Mauner’s (1999) proposal for implicit arguments. As Malamud (2013) correctly argues, however, a DRT account in the spirit of Koenig & Mauner cannot be maintained for EM since the introduction of a discourse referent is needed in DRT to derive QVE for dedicated impersonal pronouns. Nevertheless, a dynamic treatment is needed to capture EM’s DAP. I adapt McNally & Van Geenhoven’s (1998) proposal for the semantics of weak nominals:

- (9)  $[[\text{man}]]^g = \{gxg' \mid x \in \{y : y \text{ is an animate individual}\} \ \& \ g = g'\}$

According to (9), EM contributes a variable  $x$  of type  $e$  that ranges over the set of animate individuals, but which does not change the variable assignment to add a new referent which could be picked up by anaphoric pronouns. The existential flavor that motivates EM’s translation as ‘someone’ is contributed by existential closure of the property denoted by the sentence containing EM, which is a straightforward result of EM combining with the verb. Furthermore, I assume that reflexivization and control are not mediated by the variable assignment (see Chierchia 1995, Landau 2010), and can hence occur with EM.

**Generic *man*:** The context-change potential proposed for EM in (9) already provides everything needed to analyze the use of *man* in generic sentences. Following previous proposals, I assume that in the generic use, the generic operator *Gen* binds the variable contributed by *man* (cf. Zobel 2014). Similarly, **the QVE cases** are derived by assuming that the adverb of quantification unselectively binds the variable (cf. Malamud 2013 and references therein). For any potential cases of donkey-pronoun uses of *man*, I follow Chierchia (1998), who proposes that *Gen* or adverbs of quantification bind the variables contributed by both occurrences simultaneously.

**Selected references:** Chierchia. 1998. “Reference to kinds across languages”. *NLS* 6. Krifka et al. 1995. “Genericity: an introduction”. In: *The Generic Book*. Koenig & Mauner. 1999. “A-definites and the Discourse Status of Implicit Arguments”. *JoS* 16. Landau. 2010. “The explicit syntax of implicit arguments”. *LI* 41. Malamud. 2013. “(In)definiteness driven typology of arbitrary items”. *Lingua* 126. McNally & Van Geenhoven. 1998. “Redefining the weak/strong distinction”. *CSSP* 1997. Zifonun. 2000. “Morphosyntax und Semantik des Pronomens *man*”. *DS* 28. Zobel, S. 2014. *Impersonally Interpreted Personal Pronouns*. University of Göttingen.