

Restrictions on the generic interpretation of dedicated impersonal pronouns

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1-Background

Standard assumptions:

- impersonal pronouns contribute an individual variable x
 - the generic interpretation arises by a covert generic operator *Gen* binding x (e.g., Moltmann 2010; Malamud 2012)
- (Gen) a. **One** doesn't work on Sundays.
b. Gen x [x doesn't work on Sundays]

2-Contrasts to be accounted for

Given (Gen), these contrasts are unexpected:

- (1) a. #**One** eats carrots.
b. **Humans** eat carrots.
- (2) a. **One** eats {#a carrot / #carrots}.
b. In Norway, **one** eats {#a carrot / carrots}.
c. **One** eats {a carrot / carrots} for breakfast.

(Same contrasts are found for German generic *man*.)

References

Boneh & Doron. 2013. Hab and Gen in the expression of habituality. • Malamud. 2012. Impersonal indexicals: *one*, *you*, *man*, and *du*. • Moltmann. 2010. Generalizing Detached Self-Reference and the Semantics of Generic *One*. • Rimell. 2004. Habitual Sentences and Generic Quantification. This research is part of IPG-CORE, which is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 842363.

3-Accounting for (1)

Previous proposal: (a.o. Moltmann 2010)

- generic *one* expresses *first-person-orientation*
- (1-a) is odd because it cannot express a generalization based on a speaker's experience

New proposal:

- **Assumption:** the presence of *Gen* has to be motivated (see Rimell 2004, Boneh & Doron 2013)
- **Main claim:** lexical material in (1-a) fails to signal the tripartite quantificational structure needed to motivate *Gen* (unlike (1-b))
 - (1-a') a. #**One** eats carrots.
b. Gen x [???] [x eats carrots]
 - (1-b') a. **Humans** eat carrots.
b. Gen x [x is a human] [x eats carrots]
- **Support:** no oddness if a potential restrictor for *Gen* is added (e.g., a frame adverbial)
 - (2-b') a. In Norway, **one** eats carrots.
b. Gen x [x in Norway] [x eats carrots]

Generic impersonal pronouns depend on *Gen* but cannot license the presence of *Gen*.

4-Accounting for (2)

• Two types of habituais – Hab vs. Gen:

- non-quantificational*: iteration over events (*Hab*)
- quantificational*: quantification over situations (*Gen*)

⇒ only *Gen*-habituals allow for sg. objects

⇒ presence of *Gen* has to be motivated

(see Rimell 2004, Boneh & Doron 2013)

- (3) a. **Mia** eats {#a carrot / carrots}.
b. **Mia** eats {a carrot / carrots} for breakfast.

• Main claim: *Gen* only quantifies over variables motivated by material in restrictor

⇒ if *Gen* quantifies only over individuals, generic *one* is incompatible with indefinite singular objects:

(2-b') Gen x [in-Norway(x)]
[$\exists y$ [carrot(y) & Hab e [eat(y)(x)(e)]]] ⚡

(2-c') Gen s, x [breakfast(x)(s)]
[$\exists y$ [carrot(y) & $\exists e$ [e in s & eat(y)(x)(e)]]] ✓

Accounting for the restrictions on predicates combining with generic impersonal pronouns requires both *Gen* and *Hab*.