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The uses of the impersonal pronoun *man* in written German and Norwegian

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Dedicated impersonal pronouns

■ Forms of dedicated impersonal pronouns:

- HUMAN-based: German *man*, Norwegian *man*, French *on*, ...
- numeral-based: English *one*, Norwegian *en*, ...
- reflexive-based: Italian *si*, ...

■ Three potential uses: generic, existential, referential

Which uses are available for German *man*, which for Norwegian *man*?

(see “R-impersonals” across languages: Cabredo Hofherr 2008, 2010, 2015; Egerland 2003, 2018; Gast & van der Auwera 2013; Siewierska 2008, 2011 a.m.o.)



Potential uses of impersonal pronouns – I

Generic use: meaning close to “people (of a certain group) in general”

- (1) a. **Man** lebt nur einmal. (German)
b. **Man** lever bare en gang. (Norwegian)
c. **One** only lives once. (English)

⇒ cross-linguistically available, predominant use

⇒ sentences express a rule, norm, or regularity for (a subgroup of) humans



Potential uses of impersonal pronouns – II

Existential use: not universally available cross-linguistically; roughly translatable into English with “someone”

⇒ available for German *man*: (see Fenger 2018, Zifonun 2000, Zobel 2017)

(2) *Man* hat für dich angerufen.

MAN has for you called

(≈ ‘Someone called for you.’)

(German)

⇒ unclear availability for Norwegian *man*:

(see Fenger 2018)

(3) ? *Man* har ringt etter deg.

MAN has called after you



Potential uses of impersonal pronouns – III

Referential use: non-impersonal use; substitutes 1st person singular or plural pronouns

⇒ described for French *on* and Swedish *man*:

- (4) *On* doit encore faire les courses.
ON must still do the shopping

‘We still have to do some shopping.’

(Cabredo Hofherr 2015:17)

- (5) *I går* blev *man* avskedad.
yesterday was MAN fired

‘Yesterday, I was fired.’

(Egerland 2003, 2018)

⇒ unavailable for German *man*; no discussion for Norwegian *man*



Plan for today

Closer look at the **generic and existential uses** in connection to **written German and Norwegian (Bokmål)**:

- Do we find attested existential uses of Norwegian *man*?
- How frequently do the available uses arise in German vs. Norwegian?
- 1 address the difficulty of studying the uses of impersonal pronouns on the basis of attested examples
- 2 report the results of two corpus studies conducted in parallel for German and Norwegian



Central difficulty of studying attested examples

- **In short:** There are no operationalizable tests for the generic and existential uses.
- The descriptions of both uses focus on the most basic cases:
 - generic use \approx “people in general”
 - existential use \approx “someone”
- Two problems for using substitution with these expressions as a test:
 - both uses can be overtly and contextually restricted; in restricted cases, neither expression captures the contribution of *man*
 - some occurrences of *man* are compatible with either expression



German examples: contextual restriction

- (6) *Man weiß als Lehrer morgens nie, was der Tag bringen wird.*
MAN knows as teacher in.the.morning never what the day bring will
'As a teacher, one never knows in the morning what the day will bring.'
(DWDS: Die Zeit, 29.05.2013, Nr. 23)
- (7) *Alle sechs Wochen hat man Tischdienst.*
all six weeks has MAN table.duty
'Every six weeks, one has table duty.' (about living at a dorm)
(DWDS: Lebert, Benjamin: Crazy, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch 1999 [1999], S. 85)
- (8) *Man hat wieder die Steuern erhöht.*
MAN has again the taxes raised
'They have raised the taxes again.'



German examples: compatibility with both

- (9) *Kindern malte man das Zeichen "König" auf die Stirn.*
children drew MAN the character king on the forehead
'MAN drew the character for "king" on the forehead of children.'
(Olbrich, H. (Hg.), Lexikon der Kunst, Berlin: Directmedia Publ. 2001, 35029)
- (10) *Man reagierte und wechselte die Marketing-Strategie.*
MAN reacted and changed the marketing-strategy
'MAN reacted and changed the marketing strategy.'
(Hars, W.: Nichts ist unmöglich! Lexikon der Werbesprüche, München: Piper 2001, 42)
- ⇒ the preceding text determines the use:
– first example: generic
– second example: existential



Different strategy: correlating properties – I

- **Starting point:** cross-linguistic work on the possible uses of human impersonal pronouns and their linguistic contexts
 - ⇒ Cabredo Hofherr (2015), Gast & van der Auwera (2013): fine-grained typologies distinguishing various generic and episodic uses
- **Central tenets:**
 - The generic use is cross-linguistically restricted to generic sentences; the existential use is restricted to episodic sentences.
 - Uses are restricted to sentences that show certain morphosyntactic and lexical characteristics.



Different strategy: correlating properties – II

- **Central idea:** annotate morphosyntactic and semantic properties of the containing sentences that correlate with the uses of *man*
 - ⇒ indicate which occurrence of *man* is likely generic or likely existential
- **Morphosyntactic properties:**
 - M1 SENTENCE TYPE: declarative, interrogative
 - M2 presence of a MODAL EXPRESSION
 - M3 occurrence in a CONDITIONAL STRUCTURE
- **Semantic properties:**
 - S1 SITUATION TYPE: habitual, episodic, static
 - S2 INTERPRETATION OF 2SG *du* (when substituted for *man*)



Intro
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Identifying the use
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Corpus studies
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Discussion
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Conclusion
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Plan for today

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Identifying the use of *man*
- 3 The corpus studies**
- 4 Discussion of the results
- 5 Conclusion



Corpus samples

- genre-balanced corpora reflecting the synchronic use of written German/Norwegian *man*

- German:
 - 298 occurrences of *man*
 - “Kernkorpus 20” (time range: 1990–1999, available at *Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*)

- Norwegian:
 - 202 occurrences of *man*
 - “Leksikografisk Bokmålskorpus” (time range: 2003–2012, available via the University of Oslo).



Annotation

- Corpus items were **annotated separately by two native speaker annotators per language** for the same five categories.
- **Morphosyntactic categories:** straightforward annotation guidelines
 - M1 SENTENCE TYPE: declarative, interrogative
 - M2 presence of a MODAL EXPRESSION
 - M3 occurrence in a CONDITIONAL STRUCTURE
- **Semantic categories:**
 - S1 SITUATION TYPE: habitual, episodic, static
 - ↪ annotation guideline developed by Friedrich et al. 2015
 - S2 INTERPRETATION OF 2SG *du*: impersonal, referential
 - ↪ substitute *du* for *man* (see Malamud 2012, Zobel 2014)
 - ↪ Is the resulting sentence necessarily addressee-referential?



Evaluation: generic vs. existential uses of *man*

The **likely use of an occurrence of *man*** can be inferred based on the annotated grammatical categories:

■ Likely occurrences of generic *man*:

- sentences annotated with habitual situation type
- sentences annotated with static situation type and interrogative sentence type, a co-occurring modal, a conditional structure, or impersonal interpretation of *du*

■ Likely occurrences of existential *man*:

- sentences annotated with episodic situation type
- sentences annotated with static situation type and referential interpretation of *du*



Results: relative frequencies for M1–M3

■ M1: sentence type

- Ger: 98% declarative, 2% interrogative
- Nor: 95% declarative, 5% interrogative

■ M2: presence of a modal expression

- Ger: 61% no modal, 39% with modal
- Nor: 62% no modal, 38% with modal

■ M3: occurrence in a conditional structure

- Ger: 84% no conditional, 16% in conditional
- Nor: 77% no conditional, 23% in conditional

⇒ no real difference between the German and Norwegian samples



Results: relative frequencies for S1–S2

■ S1: situation type

- Ger: 21% habitual, 10% episodic, 68% static
- Nor: 15% habitual, 8% episodic, 78% static

■ S2: interpretation of 2sg *du*

- Ger: 66% impersonal, 34% referential
- Nor: 83% impersonal, 17% referential

⇒ biggest difference regarding the interpretation of 2sg *du*



Results: estimated proportions

	generic use	existential use
German (n=298)	82.55%	17.45%
Norwegian (n=202)	90.1%	9.9%

Table 1: estimated proportions of generic and existential uses in the German and Norwegian corpus samples

- ⇒ necessarily imperfect results
- ⇒ generate possible candidates among the Norwegian corpus items that contain an existential use



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Existential use of Norwegian *man* – I

- The results suggest that among the 202 corpus items studied for Norwegian, 20 are good candidates for containing existential *man*.
- Individual, in-depth discussion of the items supported the result.

(11) *Deretter satte man ut reker i bur i og rundt et*
then set MAN out shrimps in cages in and around a
oppdrettsanlegg i Rogaland.
aquaculture in Rogaland
'Then, MAN placed shrimps in cages in and around an aquaculture in
Rogaland.'
(SA07Bell0302.539, position: 32929873)

⇒ in written Norwegian (Bokmål), *man* is used existentially



Existential use of Norwegian *man* – II

- (12) *I Madison, Alabama opprettet man, etter 9/11, en besøkslogg hvor alle som skulle besøke rådhuset måtte skrive seg inn.*
in Madison Alabama installed MAN after 9/11 a visitors.log where
all who should visit the.city.hall must write SELF in
'In Madison, Alabama, MAN installed a visitors' log after 9/11, where everyone who visited city hall had to sign in.'
(UN05JA04094.15, position: 99095813)
- (13) *I tillegg finner man altså to av Georges Lamberts fingre.*
in addition find.PRES MAN PRT two of George Lamberts fingers
'In addition, MAN finds two of George Lamberts's fingers.'
(SK01ThJo01.7334; position: 85564175)



Existential use of Norwegian *man* – III

But: asking for native speaker judgments of sentences with existential *man*, produces a different result (examples are judged as acceptable in German)

- (14) Peter explains to his friends why he did not come by bike to the meeting.

Peter: # Man stjal sykkelen min.

MAN stole bike.the my

(intended: 'Someone stole my bike.')

- (15) Fatima tells her husband about the changed amount of child support.

Fatima: # Man økte barnetrygden til 1600kr per måned.

MAN increased child.support.the to 1600kr per month

(intended: 'They increased child support to 1600kr per month.')

⇒ existential *man* seems to be **only available in written Norwegian (Bokmål)**



Can a more accurate result be achieved?

- A **more accurate count of the uses of *man*** in a corpus sample requires a better understanding of the uses.
 - Is situation type the deciding factor?
 - What is the effect of intensional material in the clause?
 - What is the effect of contextual restrictions?
 - ...

- We need reliable tests and criteria that can deal with varying sentence contexts and the context sensitivity of *man*.
 - ⇒ more targeted research on specific uses
 - ⇒ recent work in formal semantics: Malamud 2012, 2013; Zobel 2017, 2020, 2021;



Summary and conclusion

- As dedicated impersonal pronouns, German *man* and Norwegian *man* can, in principle, have **a generic use and an existential use**.
- The availability and frequency of the two uses was studied using **two corpus studies on *man* in written German and Norwegian (Bokmål)**.
- **Main results:**
 - For both German and Norwegian (Bokmål), we found both generically and existentially used *man*.
 - Existential *man* is seemingly more frequent in German than in Norwegian.
- Results of questionnaire studies on the uses of *man* in Norwegian suggest that the **existential use is restricted to written Norwegian**.



Thank you

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