1. Introduction

A great deal of attention has been dedicated to the syntax and semantics of impersonal pronouns. Generative oriented approaches have tried to capture the interaction between fundamental, presumably universal principles of interpretation, and broad cross-linguistic micro-variation. This paper aims at contributing to the understanding of such phenomena. Its purpose is essentially empirical in that, through a survey of Swedish data, I will try to capture the empirical generalisations behind the syntax and semantics of impersonal pronouns. The point of departure is subject man ‘man’, ‘one’, in Swedish. Consider the following two sentences:

(1) a. Man måste arbeta för att förtjäna uppehållet.

\(\text{man must work to earn a living}\)

b. Man arbetade i tre månader för att lösa problemet.

\(\text{man worked for three months to solve the problem}\)

(1a) is a generic statement. The subject, man, in (1a) refers to a quasi-universal set of individuals, roughly equivalent to ‘people’, ‘everyone’ or ‘anyone’. In (1b), the tense reference is episodic and the subject takes on an existential reading. In this example, man denotes a non-specific group of individuals, equivalent to ‘some people’, impersonal ‘they’, or even ‘someone’. Henceforth, the reading of (1a) will be called generic and that of (1b) arbitrary. In addition, there is a further usage of man illustrated in (2):
Subject *man* in (2) is equivalent to the 1st singular, ‘I’. The expression means that I was employed yesterday. Traditionally, this latter usage has been considered substandard and not all native speakers are inclined to accept it.\(^1\) However, the alternation between the impersonal usage of *man* as in (1a-b), and the specific one in (2), is not merely a matter of register, communicative strategy or social variation. It may be shown that the differences in reading between the various instantiations of *man* relate to syntactic and semantic factors.

The facts under discussion have been described and analysed in a seminal work by Cinque (1988) on the Italian *si*-construction. Cinque argues that the interpretation of the impersonal expression is essentially guided by two interacting factors, namely the time reference of the clause, and the argument structure of the predicate. Some more recent approaches have revealed that the correct generalisations can be captured in terms of aspect. According to D’Alessandro & Alexiadou (2003), genericity is crucially restricted by clausal aspect (essentially the perfective-imperfective distinction). Egerland (2003) argues that arbitrariness relates to ‘inner aspect’ or *Aktionsart* (essentially the telic-atelic distinction). Developing on such ideas, a drastically simplified account of the syntax of impersonal pronouns may be within reach.

The discussion in this paper is organised as follows: In section 2, I will show how the interpretation of subject *man* is sensitive to aspectual context. In section 3, I will discuss how one is to formulate the accurate generalisation. My claim is that the interpretation

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\(^1\) For some, the usage of *man* for ‘I’ has the flavour of modesty; a communicative strategy to avoid the 1st person singular pronoun when the speaker does not wish to emerge as the focus of attention. This could perhaps be advanced as the historical origin of the construction, but as an explanation of its synchronic syntactic properties it is far from satisfactory, as we shall see. For many speakers, the usage in question no longer has any particular stylistic implications. For further discussion on this and related topics, the reader is referred to Jónsson (1992) who analyses the impersonal pronoun *madur* in Icelandic.
of Swedish *man* may be reduced to a matter of the interaction between clausal and inner aspect.²

2. The Data: *Man*, Genericity, and Arbitrariness

In (3a-d), the subject *man* appears with transitive, unergative, unaccusative, and passive predicates. In all of these cases, *man* can be interpreted as generic, hence paraphrased as ‘people’. However, a specific reading corresponding to the 1ˢᵗ person singular is also available. Henceforth, the two readings will be abbreviated as Gen(eric) and Spec(ific):³

(3)  a. Man äter middag sent i Spanien.  
    *Trans. (Gen/Spec)*
    
    man eats dinner late in Spain
    ‘people have dinner late in Spain’ / ‘I have dinner late in Spain’

   b. Man måste arbeta för att förtjäna uppehållet.  
    *Unerg. (Gen/Spec)*
    
    man must work to earn a living
    ‘People have to work to earn a living’ / ‘I have to work to earn a living’

². It should be pointed out from the beginning that the following discussion is inspired by Cinque (1988) and that some of the Swedish examples are adapted from Cinque’s treatment of Italian. Despite this, Cinque’s classification differs from the one adopted here. Cinque compares a quasi-universal reading of Italian *si* (equivalent to ‘people’, hence the reading I have chosen to call *generic*), and a quasi-existential reading that is “roughly paraphrasable as ‘unspecified set of people including the speaker’ (‘we’)” (Cinque 1988, 542). Considering the empirical similarities between Swedish and Italian impersonal constructions, there are solid reasons to believe that the specific ‘I’-reading of Swedish *man* is strictly parallel to the ‘we’-reading of Italian *si* as described by Cinque. However, this issue will only be briefly commented upon. An in-depth comparison between Scandinavian and Romance falls outside the scope of this work.

³. In many cases, only the generic reading is salient, whereas the specific (substandard) one may be far-fetched or require a particular scene setting. Thus, (3a) is compatible with a specific reading if, for instance, I am living for some period each year in Spain and wish to say something like ‘When I’m in Spain I have dinner late (at home I dine earlier)’. (3d) could be a claim about the general situation on the working market (‘people don’t get steady jobs anymore’). It could also mean that nobody wants to employ me. Because the examples are so numerous, they are generally given without context.
c. Med flyget kommer man fram i tid. 

with the plane arrives man on time  

‘With the plane people arrive on time’ / ‘With the plane I arrive on time’

d. Nuförtiden blir man inte fast anställd. 

nowadays is man not steadily employed  

‘Nowadays people are not steadily employed’ / ‘Nowadays I’m not steadily employed’

(3a-d) are all imperfective in that they describe ongoing or non-completed events. In contrast, in perfective sentences like (4a-d) man cannot be interpreted as generic. Instead, subject man is arbitrary (Arb) and denotes a group of people. However, this reading is dependent on what kind of predicate is used. With transitive and unergative verbs, the Arb reading is available along with the Spec one. With unaccusatives and passives, only the Spec reading is possible:

(4) a. I går åt man middag sent på kvällen. 

yesterday ate man dinner late in the evening  

‘Yesterday some people/they had dinner late’ / ‘yesterday I had dinner late’

b. Man arbetade i två månader för att lösa problemet. 

man worked for two months to solve the problem  

‘Some people/they worked for two months…/ I worked for two months …’

c. I går på eftermiddagen kom man fram i tid. 

yesterday afternoon arrived man on time  

‘Yesterday afternoon I arrived on time’

d. I går på eftermiddagen blev man fast anställd. 

yesterday afternoon was man permanently employed  

‘Yesterday afternoon I was employed’

That is to say, (4a) is compatible with a situation where some people (roughly equivalent to unspecific ‘they’) had dinner late in the evening; Först såg man på matchen till sent på kvällen, sedan åt man middag ‘First, they watched the game until late, then they had dinner’. A similar consideration holds for (4b). At the same time, in
both (4a) and (4b), *man* is interpretable specifically as ‘I’. However, (4c-d) can only mean that I myself arrived or was employed yesterday afternoon.\(^4\)

There are ways of detecting the difference between these predicate types, as suggested in Cinque (1988). If the expression has an *Arb* subject, it will be compatible with a sentence that points out some group of people as a plausible agent, for instance *det måste ha varit några tonåringar som vanligt* ‘it must have been some teenagers as usual’. If the subject is specifically 1\(^{st}\) person singular, it will not tolerate the adding of such a sentence. Consider the following examples

(5)  

a. Klockan fem sjöng man sånger i trappuppgången.  
    *Transitive*  
    *at five o’clock sang man songs in the staircase*  
    Det måste ha varit några tonåringar som vanligt.  
    ‘*It must have been some teenagers as usual.*’

b. Klockan fem skrek man i trappuppgången.  
    *Unergative*  
    *at five o’clock shouted man in the staircase*  
    Det måste ha varit några tonåringar som vanligt.  
    ‘*It must have been some teenagers as usual.*’

c. Klockan fem föll man i trappuppgången.  
    *Unaccusative*  
    *at five o’clock fell man in the staircase*  
    *Det måste ha varit några tonåringar som vanligt.*  
    ‘*It must have been some teenagers as usual.*’

d. Klockan fem blev man knuffad i trappuppgången.  
    *Passive*  
    *at five o’clock was man pushed in the staircase*  
    Det måste ha varit några tonåringar som vanligt.  
    ‘*It must have been some teenagers as usual.*’

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\(^4\) Christer Platzack (p.c.) points out to me that (i) is acceptable without the specific reading:

(i) I går kom man åter fram i tid.  
    *yesterday came man again on time*

I suggest this is so because in (i), genericity is re-established by the adverbial. (i) does not really describe a single, specific event, but rather takes on the reading ‘Yesterday it was again possible to arrive on time’.
In (5a-b), subject *man* is compatible with an arbitrary reading. The added sentence points out ‘some teenagers’ as the agent of the action expressed by the predicates. In (5c) this is not possible because the subject is necessarily understood as the speaker. A similar consideration holds for (5d) although with a different result. In (5d), subject *man* is interpreted as the Patient and ‘some teenagers’ is understood as the agent. (5d) can only mean that it must have been some teenagers who pushed the speaker in the staircase.

Furthermore, the effect of unaccusatives and passives can be made more evident if we use predicates that, for pragmatic reasons, exclude the 1st person singular (the test was suggested by Cinque 1988; it is also used by D’Alessandro & Alexiadou 2003). Consider (6a-b):

(6)  a. Klockan fem dog man.  \(\text{Unaccusative (}^*\text{Arb/Spec)}\)
    at five o’clock died man

   b. Klockan fem blev man begravd.  \(\text{Passive (}^*\text{Arb/Spec)}\)
    at five o’clock was man buried

The oddity of examples such as (6a-b) is merely due to the fact that such predicates in perfective contexts impose a specific 1st person singular reading of *man*. The discussion in the following section aims at capturing the relevant empirical generalisation emerging from these data.

3. Analysis

3.1. Genericity and Clausal Aspect

First consider the *Gen* reading. Following the literature on this topic, the generalisation can be stated as in (7) (cf. e.g. Chierchia 1995):

(7)  **Restriction on Genericity (1st version)**

*Gen* is incompatible with a specific time reference

It is clear, however, that Gen is not ruled out merely because a specific time reference has been made explicit. What matters is not the actual duration or time span, but whether the event is seen as completed or not. There are contexts that “suspend”
perfective Aspect and hence favour genericity. For instance, in modal environments the Gen reading is clearly available both with ergative and passive predicates regardless of whether some time reference is made explicit. The effect is observable in embedded interrogatives (8a), in conditionals (8b), and in when-clauses with a conditional value (8c) (cf. Dahl 1975; Cinque 1988, 544; Kratzer 1995, 129-130; Krifka et al. 1995, 49ff.):

(8)  

a. [De strejkar på flygplatserna]  
[they are on strike at the airports]  
Jag undrar om man kom fram i tid i går också.  
Unacc. (Gen)  
I wonder whether man arrived on time yesterday also  
b. Om man hade blivit anställd i går hade man haft tur.  
Pass. (Gen)  
If man had been employed yesterday, had man been lucky  
c. [Arbetslösheten var hög på trettitalet]  
[Unemployment was high in the thirties]  
När man blev fast anställd hade man tur.  
Pass. (Gen)  
When man was permanently employed was man lucky

In modal environments like conditionals and indirect questions, the Gen reading is available. There is nothing really surprising about this. Obviously, aspect and mood interact, in the sense that irrealis mood suspends perfective aspect.

In addition, the Gen-reading may be available in spite of a specific reference to some point in the past, if it is made clear that the event described was regularly or repeatedly carried out until this point (cf. Krifka et al. 1995, 36). Consider (9a-b):

(9)  

a. Man kom fram i tid fram till i januari  
Unacc. (Gen/Spec)  
man arrived on time until January  
[sedan blev förseningarna vanliga]  
[after that delays became common]  
b. Man blev lätt avskedad till i januari  
Pass. (Gen/Spec)  
man was easily fired until January  
[sedan ändrades lagarna]  
[after that laws were changed]
(9a) states that people regularly or repeatedly arrived on time until a certain point in the past, from after which this was no longer true. Likewise, (9b) means that people were fired easily until a certain point in the past, when the laws changed. (The specific 1st person singular reading is in principle available in both cases.) There is indeed a specific time reference in (9a-b), until January. However, the context induces iteration or habitual repetition of the event. The aspectual interpretation is altered and the restriction of (7) does not rule out Gen interpretation in these cases.

Furthermore, consider predicates like die or be buried as in (6a-b) above. In a perfective environment they impose a specific 1st person singular reading of subject man as we have seen. In a context with different aspectual properties, such verbs are perfectly compatible with subject man under generic readings, witness (10a-b):

(10) a. Till för femtio år sedan dog man vanligtvis hemma. Unacc. (Gen)  
    until fifty years ago died man usually at home  
    b. Fram till medeltidens slut blev man begravd i kyrkan. Pass. (Gen)  
    until the end of the medieval ages was man buried in church

That is to say, (10a) is acceptable meaning that at least until a certain point in the past people used to die in their homes (and not in the hospital). (10b) is well-formed if it is intended to mean that people in the medieval ages used to be buried inside the church (and not outside, in the graveyard). In both cases there is a specific time reference of sorts, but the contexts make it clear that the event is to be understood as habitually repeated. Therefore, the generalisation of (7) should be restated as in (11):

(11) **Restriction on Genericity (2nd version)**

Gen is incompatible with perfective aspect

What (11) expresses is that a Gen interpretation is available if the event is not understood as completed, hence under an imperfective reading. With the perfective aspect, the event is interpreted as having been carried out at a precise moment of time (which may or may not be explicit). In conditional or hypothetical environments, the event is looked upon as not having been carried out at all.
3.2. Arbitrariness and Inner Aspect

This section is dedicated to the discussion of how arbitrariness relates to argument structure. Under 3.2.1 a restriction on arbitrariness will be formulated. The following paragraphs are intended to show that the major verb classes obey to this restriction.

3.2.1. Capturing the generalisation

Consider the Arb interpretations that obtain in perfective contexts. Transitives and unergatives allow for both an Arb and a Spec interpretation, whereas with unaccusatives and passives only the Spec reading is acceptable. A first attempt to state the relevant generalisation could be the one in (12):

(12) Restriction on Arbitrariness (1st version):
Arb interpretation of man is barred with unaccusatives and passives

There is a particular point to be made in stating (12) as a restriction on ‘arbitrary’ interpretations instead of, say, formulating a principle that positively imposes specific interpretations. (12) not only covers the intuitions of those speakers who accept man with an ‘I’ reading, but also those who do not. In other words, for native speakers who do not allow for the specific usage of man, (4c-d) and (5c-d), for instance, are unacceptable. (12) captures those contexts where arbitrary readings are not permitted. In those cases, speakers have recourse to the specific reading if such a reading is available in their grammar. If not, the result is unacceptability. Moreover, if the specific reading exists in a given grammar, it is in principle unrestricted, and hence always available.

But there are further generalisations to be captured. Suppose the surface subject of an unaccusative predicate is a “deep object” (e.g. Burzio 1986). Likewise, suppose the surface subject of a passive is an internal argument promoted to subject position (e.g. Jaegglí 1986). Then, the restriction on Arb appears to hold if the subject man starts out as an internal argument of V, typically a Patient. The subjects of transitives and unergatives, on the other hand, are external arguments, typically Agents. Therefore, the restriction on arbitrary reading can be restated as in (13):

(13) Restriction on Arbitrariness (2nd version):
Arb interpretation of man is barred if man is a Patient.
(13) appears to be a correct descriptive generalisation. However, given the data we have seen, a more radical formulation is, in fact, within reach. In the examples of *man* given above, the aspecurial interpretation crucially correlates with the argument structure of the verb, and the syntactic promotion of an internal argument to subject position. Following a well-known line of thought in generative grammar, a second aspectual notion should be considered, namely the one which signals whether the predicate itself describes an event which may be completed, or whether it is rather seen as ongoing in a non-limited period of time. In work by Tenny (1987, 1994), Borer (1993, 1995), and Arad (1995, 1999), this is referred to as the delimited/non-delimited distinction. I will here continue to use the term *telic* since the choice of term is not of crucial importance.

Suppose that the internal argument has a privileged relation to the predicate. In a sentence such as *John worked at the hospital*, the predicate *work* is atelic because it has no intrinsic limit. In *John arrested Bill* the predicate *arrested* describes a telic event since there is an intrinsic point at which the event will be completed. It is the object, *Bill*, that inherently puts a limit to the event, not the subject *John*. In *Bill was arrested*, it is still *Bill*, now promoted to subject position, that marks this limit. Crucially, telicity hinges only on the internal argument only, not on the external one.

Now consider the fact that in the relevant examples, (4c-d), (5c-d), (6a-b), the subject *man* is the internal argument of the telic predicates. The surface subject of a verb such as *arrive* is an internal argument which puts a limit to the event described by the verb. Likewise, *to employ* is telic, and the subject of the passive expression *to be employed* is thus the deep object of a telic predicate. Therefore, we could attempt a stronger formulation of the restriction on *Arb* interpretations. In (14), the reference to theta-roles in (13) has been replaced by a reference to telicity.

(14) **Restriction on Arbitrariness (3rd version):**

*Arb* interpretation of *man* is barred if *man* is the internal argument of a telic predicate.

What this means is that impersonal *man* can never be the arbitrary subject of a telic event, if man itself corresponds to the argument that puts the limit to the event.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) The advantage of this approach depends on the question of the theoretical status of theta-roles. It is an explicit aim of the aspect-oriented approaches already cited to do away with thematic labels (Borer 1993; Arad 1995). For relevant discussion, see also Hale & Keyser (1993, 2001).
Aspectual interpretation is to some extent elastic; whether a predicate should be thought of as telic or not is partly a matter of morpho-syntactic context. Consequently, an important prediction falls out from the generalisation as formulated in (14). If arbitrary interpretations depend on inner aspect, they are expected to be elastic to the same extent that aspectual interpretations are. I believe the most correct description is precisely this. In the following paragraphs (3.2.2-3.2.5), I will go through the relevant verb classes in order to argue for this claim and thus the correctness of (14).

3.2.2. Particle Verbs

Certain verbs lend themselves to both delimited and non-delimited readings depending on context. Take a couple of Swedish verbs such as springa ‘run’, and gå ‘go’, ‘walk’. Assuming that the atelic readings are the unmarked readings, in Swedish as well as in many other languages, the interpretation of the predicate may be strengthened or altered by prepositional elements, or particles. So for instance, springa omkring ‘run around’, gå omkring ‘walk around’ are unambiguously atelic. Then, as one would expect, in (15a-b) such predicates pattern with unergatives:

\[(15)\]

\[a. \text{Igår sprang man omkring i trappan fram till fem på morgonen.} \]
\[\text{yesterday ran man around in the staircase until five in the morning.}\]

\[b. \text{Igår gick man omkring i trappan fram till fem på morgonen.} \]
\[\text{yesterday walked man around in the staircase until five in the morning.}\]

\[\text{Det var väldigt störande. Jag kunde inte sova.} \]
\[\text{‘It was quite annoying. I couldn’t sleep.’}\]

That is to say, the interpretation of subject man in (15a-b) clearly is ambiguous between Arb and Spec readings. If an expression such as I couldn’t sleep is added, the interpretation is contextually determined as Arb; ‘Yesterday at five some people were running/walking around in the staircase’. In contrast to the above, springa in i ‘run into’ or gå in i ‘walk into’ are telic expressions. Consider (16a-b):
(16) a. Igår vid fem sprang man in i väggen. 
   yesterday at five ran man into the wall (??ARB/SPE)
b. Igår vid fem gick man in i väggen. 
   yesterday at five went man into the wall (??ARB/SPE)

The effect is the expected one. In (16a-b), the Arb interpretation is far fetched. The salient readings are that I myself ran or walked into the wall yesterday at five. The arbitrary interpretation thus is sensitive to a change of inner Aspect.6

3.2.3. Psych-Verbs

The complex typology of psych-verbs puts our hypothesis to a test. At least from Rizzi & Belletti (1988), different kinds of such predicates have been recognised in the literature, such as fukta ‘fear’, oroa ‘worry’ or skrämma ‘frighten’. Following Arad’s (1999) more recent classification, such verbs may be: 1. stative, if no change of state takes place in either participant; 2. agentive, if the subject intentionally causes some reaction in the object; 3. eventive, in which case a change of state in the surface subject (in theta-theoretic terms, the Patient) is the cause for the psychological state of the surface object (the Experiencer).

To begin with, psych-verbs of the type fukta ‘fear’ describe states since there is no change of state in either participant. Therefore, (14) predicts that there should not be any restriction on the Arb reading. This is indeed true, witness (17a-b):

   Psych. ‘fear’ (Arb/Spec)
   man fears the soon break-out of a war
b. I går fruktade man ett snart krigsutbrott i tre timmar.
   Psych. ‘fear’ (Arb/Spec)
   yesterday feared man the soon break-out of a war for three hours

As expected, (17a) can be paraphrased as ‘people feared …’, and (17b) as ‘(some) people…’.

Under the agentive reading, a verb such as skrämma, ‘frighten’, is expected to behave like a transitive, cf. (3a) and (4a) above. This prediction is indeed carried out:

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6. Note that the data only follow from a restriction formulated in terms of inner aspect. It is not clear how Theta theory would account for the difference between (15a-b) and (16a-b).
(18) a. Man skrämmer lätt små barn.  
*Psych. ‘frighten’ (Gen/Spec)*  
*man frightens easily small children*  
b. I går klockan tre skrämde man ett litet barn.  
*Psych. ‘frighten’ (Arb/Spec)*  
*yesterday at three frightened man a small child*

Hence, in the generic statement of (18a), subject *man* refers to ‘people’. In the episodic context of (18b), *man* means ‘somebody’ or ‘some people’. There is no restriction on *Arb*.

However, consider the eventive verb *oroa* ‘worry’ in the examples of (19a-b):

(19) a. När man är ung  
*When man is young*  
oroar man ofta sina föräldrar utan anledning.  
*Psych. ‘worry’ (Gen/?Spec)*  
*worries man often one’s parents without reason*  
b. Idag har man oroat sina föräldrar utan anledning.  
*Psych. ‘worry’ (*Arb/Spec)*  
*today has man worried one’s parents without reason*  

(19a) is a generic statement, meaning that parents are usually worried because of their children. The interpretation of *worry* in (19b) is episodic. (19b) describes a single, specific event. What (19b) says is that a change of state in the surface subject provoked the reaction of worry in the surface object. In this case, *man* appears to be the argument putting a limit to the event. As expected, the arbitrary reading in (19b) is barred because the construction now falls under the restriction of (14). (19b) takes on the specific reading only, to wit, ‘I worried my parents’.7

Although admittedly the interaction of agentive and aspectual readings is complicated, especially in the field of psych-verbs, I conclude that the generalisation covers the data considered so far and that psych-verbs behave as predicted. *Frukt* ‘fear’ with a stative reading, patterns with atelic predications in general; *skrämma* ‘frighten’ with an agentive reading patterns with transitives; *oroa* ‘worry’ with a telic, eventive reading patterns with passives and unaccusatives.

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7 It is of relevance that the verb *oroa* ‘worry’ in Swedish does not lend itself to the agentive reading as easily as, for instance, *skrämma*. 
3.2.4. **Copular Constructions**

Given that copular constructions generally describe a state, the restriction (14) should not apply. Therefore, *man*, as the subject of a copular construction, is expected to be compatible with *Arb* interpretations. In fact, in Swedish, an example such as (20) may be understood as *Arb* or *Spec*:

\[(20)\] Man är välvilligt inställd till invandrare. \hspace{1cm} \text{Copular (Arb/Spec)}

*man is kindly disposed towards immigrants*

The perfective sentences in (21a-b) still allow for both interpretations:

\[(21)\] a. [I det ögonblicket förändrades attityderna]

*man blev plötsligt välvilligt inställd till invandrare.* \hspace{1cm} \text{Copular (Arb/Spec)}

*man was suddenly kindly disposed towards immigrants.*

b. Man har blivit mer välvilligt inställd till invandrare på sistone.

*man has become kindly disposed towards immigrants lately*

Such scene-settings might describe a sudden change of attitude among the inhabitants of a village, for instance. Since there is no telicity involved, there is no ban on the *Arb* interpretation.\(^8\)

3.2.5. **Raising Constructions**

The interpretation of *man* in raising constructions is a delicate matter. Consider that, in Swedish as well as in several other languages, expressions of distance have raising properties (Gunnarson 1989; (22a-b) = his (2) and (4)):

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\(^8\) Cinque (1988, 522, 542) claims that the quasi-universal reading of Italian *si* is generally ruled out with psych-verbs. However, the psych-verb used to exemplify the effect is Italian *preoccupare*, which seems to pattern with *worry*. Therefore, it is licit to suspect that Cinque’s conclusion might not be generally valid for psych-verbs, but only for verbs of this particular subclass of psych-verbs.
(22) a. De var nära att förlora omröstningen.
   they were near losing the poll
b. Det var nära att de förlorade omröstningen.
   it was near that they lost the poll

Such a predicate is inherently stative. Therefore, according to the restriction of (14) a raising expression like vara nära att ‘to be close to’ should not play a role in the interpretation of subject man. Consider the examples in (23a-b):

(23) a. I tre dagar var man nära att gripa den skyldige.  Raising (Arb/Spec)
   for three days was man close to catch the culprit
b. I tre dagar var man nära att bli gripen av polisen.  Raising (??Arb/Spec)
   for three days was man close to be caught by the police

(23a-b) are both perfective. There is a difference between the two cases however, in that (23a) is ambiguous between a specific and an arbitrary reading, while (23b) tends to be specific. Interestingly, the raising expression appears to be of no relevance for the interpretation of subject man. Notice that the complement is a transitive predication in (23a) and a passive one in (23b). In fact, (23a) patterns with the transitive example given as (4a) above, and (23b) behaves like the passive example in (4d). Again, this is the expected result; the raising verb itself is stative, and thus is ‘invisible’ as far as the arbitrary interpretation is concerned.

In contrast, the expression visa sig ‘turn out’ has raising properties but is telic, witness (24a-b):

(24) a. Det visade sig att Johan var lämplig för jobbet på mindre än en månad.
   it turned out that John was suitable for the job in less than a month
b. Johan visade sig vara lämplig för jobbet på mindre än en månad.
   Johan turned out to be suitable for the job in less than a month

In a perfective context, subject man takes on a specific reading as in (25):

(25) Efter en månad visade man sig till slut vara lämplig för jobbet.
   Raising (??Arb/Spec)
   after a month man turned out finally to be suitable for the job
In (25), *man* is the subject of an adjectival predication selected by a telic predicate. The restriction of (14) comes into play ruling out the *Arb* reading of (25), which means that I myself turned out to be suitable for the job.\(^9\)

4. Conclusions and final discussion

Summing up, the survey presented in this paper has brought us to conclude that an impersonal expression such as *man* is subject to restrictions of essentially two kinds, both of which are related to aspect.

As a phrasal subject, *man* enters into a semantic relation with clausal aspect. If this is perfective, a generic reading of *man* is ruled out.

In perfective contexts, there is a further restriction. If *man* is the internal argument, *man* enters into a semantic relation with inner aspect, or the *Aktionsart* of the predicate. If this is telic, an arbitrary reading of *man* is ruled out.\(^{10}\)

A more radical simplification would be within reach if, furthermore, we accept that clausal aspect and inner aspect are not distinct systems but rather “parts of the same system operating at different levels of composition” (Tenny & Pustejovsky 2000, 6). This possibility, however, has not been pursued here. In any case, the data can be taken

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\(^9\) As for Italian *si*, Cinque (1988, 522, 542) reaches the conclusion that raising-predicates generally rule out the quasi-universal reading of the impersonal. The Swedish data suggest that this is true for some, but not all, raising verbs. Instead, I suggest here that Cinque’s result is not valid for raising verbs in general but rather is due to the precise verb being used in Cinque’s survey, namely Italian *risultare* ‘turn out’ which is a telic predicate.

\(^{10}\) The restrictions of (11) and (14) could be captured in derivational terms, though that would extend the scope of the present work. Assume that the syntactic derivation includes aspeccutal features such as [+perfective] and [+telic]. Then, the restrictions concern two configurations, in both *man* raises to the sentence subject position. Firstly, if *man* is the sentence subject of a clause with a [+perfective] feature, *man* is in a checking relation with this feature and genericity is blocked. Secondly, if *man* is the externalised argument of a telic event, *man* first enters into a checking relation with the feature [+telic], and successively with [+perfective]. In such a context, arbitrariness is blocked. The syntactic account thus would build on the assumption that the interpretation of an impersonal subject is settled by the checking relations it enters into during derivation.
to support the view that aspectual semantics are among those lexical factors that feed syntax and that the relevant features are in fact part of syntactic derivations.

Beyond these two restrictions, which I hold to be universal in nature, the interpretation of *man* is a highly variable matter. The arbitrary reading appears to be entirely open to context, and is in principle compatible with any kind of referent. In addition, *man* is (substandardly) associated to the specific ‘I’-reading, which may be a lexicalised option.

The interest of an impersonal expression such as *man*, then, lies in the fact that it combines universal principles of interpretation with language-specific microvariation, the latter being partly communicative-pragmatic, partly lexical. Only when the analysis abstracts away from such variations, the fundamental and invariable properties of the system become transparent. This result is sufficient to claim that further research on the topic is warranted.
References


