

R-impersonals in Atlantic and Mande languages

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1. Introduction

This presentation is about R-impersonals in a sample of West African languages spoken in Senegal and in the surrounding countries, belonging to the Atlantic and Mande families.¹ The Joola data are from Bassène & Creissels (2011). The Mandinka data are from Creissels (2013), Creissels & Sambou (2013), and unpublished field notes. The Lebu data have been kindly provided by Jean-Léopold Diouf. The other data quoted in this presentation were collected for a collective paper on impersonality in Senegalese languages that will be published in *Africana Linguistica* (Creissels & al. to appear),² with the exception of Wolof and Soninke data I collected after this paper was accepted for publication.

The presentation is organized as follows: Section 2 is about the definition of R-impersonals. Section 3 provides background information on the most basic aspects of verbal predication in Atlantic and Mande languages. Section 4 consists of general remarks on the expression of vague human reference in Atlantic and Mande languages. Sections 5, 6, and 7 examine the non-specific uses of third person plural pronouns or indexes, the non-specific uses of second pronouns or indexes, and dedicated vague human pronouns or indexes, respectively. Section 8 summarizes the main conclusions.

¹ “The Atlantic or West Atlantic languages of West Africa are an obsolete proposed major group of the Niger–Congo languages. They are those languages west of Kru which have the noun-class systems characteristic of the Niger–Congo family; in this they are distinguished from their Mande neighbors, which do not. The Atlantic languages are highly diverse and it is now generally accepted that they do not form a valid group. Linguists such as Dimmendaal, Blench, Hyman, and Segerer classify them into three or more independent branches of Niger-Congo... The Atlantic languages are spoken along the Atlantic coast from Senegal to Liberia, though transhumant Fula speakers have spread eastward and are found in large numbers across the Sahel, from Senegal to Nigeria, Cameroon and Sudan.” (Wikipedia) On the classification of Atlantic languages, see Pozdniakov (2012).

“The Mande languages are spoken in several countries in West Africa by the Mande people and include Mandinka, Soninke, Bambara, Dioula, Bozo, Mende, Susu, and Vai... The Mande languages have traditionally been considered a divergent branch of the Niger–Congo family, though this classification has always been controversial.” (Wikipedia) On the classification of Mande languages, see Vydrine (2009).

² This paper was elaborated within the frame of the ‘Sénélangues’ project (ANR-09-BLAN-0326).

2. R-impersonals as the non-compositional expression of vague reference³

Before applying a term such as R-impersonal to languages that do not have relatively ancient and well-established descriptive traditions, it is important to discuss its definition in order to ensure the comparability of the phenomena for which it will be used with those for which it has been used previously in the description of other languages. Translational equivalence is clearly not a valid criterion, since it is easy to observe that the meanings expressed by clauses including human impersonal pronouns can also be expressed by constructions in which no impersonal pronoun is present, either within the same language or cross-linguistically.

Impersonal pronouns or indexes⁴ such as French *on*, German *man*, English *one*, or Spanish *uno*, have in common that they express (varieties of) vague human reference, and that their use cannot be described within the synchronic system of noun determination that regulates the systematic expression of the same reference values by means of determiners combining with nouns, or pronouns that can be straightforwardly described as determiners used pronominally.

Forms available to express vague human reference in a non-compositional way are very common cross-linguistically. However, a distinction must be made between dedicated vague human pronouns / indexes, and vague human readings of pronouns / indexes that are also available to express reference to speech act participants, or anaphoric reference to discursively salient entities: vague 2SG and vague 3PL are probably the most widespread varieties of R-impersonals.

The relationship between the expression of vague human reference and vague reference to non-human entities is also a question that deserves some attention. There are quite obvious asymmetries, but also possible overlaps, as evidenced by the ‘impersonal’ uses of French *ça*.

Finally, I would like to comment briefly on the potentially misleading nature of terms such as ‘R-impersonals’ or ‘human impersonal pronouns’, which suggest subsuming the non-compositional expression of vague human reference under the notion of impersonal construction. The main problem in this respect is that all definitions of impersonal constructions operate in terms of deviation from the subject prototype (see in particular Malchukov & Ogawa 2011), whereas not all vague human pronouns are restricted to subject function, as illustrated by the Spanish example (1), in which the vague human pronoun **uno** fulfills the object function in a sentence including a subject that meets all criteria of canonical subjecthood.

³ For a general approach to R-impersonals, see Cabredo Hofherr (2014) and references therein.

⁴ I use ‘index’ in the sense of Haspelmath (2013), i.e. as a short term for ‘bound person form’. In this terminology, ‘personal pronoun’ is restricted to free forms occupying the same positions in the clause as NPs, and ‘index’ is a cover term for all person forms (clitics, affixes or non-concatenative morphological elements) that express similar meanings but occupy positions in which they are bound to some other element (most often, but not always, the verb), irrespective of their precise relationship to NPs or (free) pronouns representing the same referents. Depending on their precise morphosyntactic nature and on terminological traditions, indexes may be variously referred to as ‘weak pronouns’, ‘pronominal clitics’, ‘affixed pronouns’, ‘pronominal affixes’, ‘agreement markers’, etc. According to the terminology I use, French *on* is not a pronoun, but an subject index, since it belongs to a paradigm of bound forms expressing person distinctions referring to the subject argument.

(1) Spanish (<http://noticiasantesdelfin.com/resp0234.html>)

Dios castiga a uno con enfermedades.

God punishes ACC VH with illnesses

‘God punishes humans with illnesses.’

The reasonable conclusion is that, although R-impersonals are related by family resemblances to the other types of constructions commonly referred to as ‘impersonal’, the precise nature of the relationship cannot be considered as captured satisfactorily by the current definitions of impersonal constructions.

3. Verbal predication in Atlantic and Mande languages

3.1. The notion of subject in Atlantic and Mande languages

In Atlantic and Mande languages, the relationship between the basic transitive predication and other types of verbal predication is of the type commonly designated as ‘accusative alignment’. The sole argument of monovalent verbs has the same coding properties as the agent in the basic transitive construction, and more generally, the only coding frames available for verbs normally include a term encoded like the agent of the basic transitive construction. In the description of such languages, a notion of subject similar to the notion of subject in traditional European grammar can be introduced with the following definition: in a verbal clause, the subject is the NP whose coding coincides with that of the agent in the basic transitive construction. Crucially, defined in this way, the subject in Atlantic and Mande languages shows behavioral properties similar to those of subjects in Standard Average European languages.

However, across Atlantic and Mande languages, there is some variation in the coding characteristics that distinguish subject NPs from NPs fulfilling other functions in predicative constructions. In all Atlantic and Mande languages, subjects occupy a fixed position distinct from that occupied by objects and obliques,⁵ and show no overt mark of their function, but three types can be distinguished with respect to subject indexation and obligatoriness / optionality of subject NPs:

- languages with obligatory indexation of subjects and optional subject NPs;
- languages with a relationship of complementarity between subject indexes and subject NPs;
- languages with obligatory subject NPs and no subject indexation.

⁵ All Mande languages have a rigid SOVX constituent order. Atlantic languages have a rigid SVOX constituent order, with however the exception of Kisi, whose constituent order pattern is characterized by SVOX ~ SOXV alternation.

3.2. Languages with obligatory indexation of subjects and optional subject NPs

In the languages with obligatory indexation of subjects and optional subject NPs, the relationship between subject NPs and subject indexes is similar to that found for example in Latin or Turkish. As regards the languages with obligatory subject indexation dealt with in this presentation, a distinction must be made between languages with third person indexes that have the ability to represent any discursively salient referent without expressing anything else than the *singular* vs. *plural* distinction, and languages with third person indexes expressing additional distinctions. Additional distinctions in the third person are found among the Atlantic languages that have a noun class system (i.e., a division of nouns into agreement classes similar in many respects to the gender systems found in Indo-European or Afroasiatic languages, but in which the *masculine* vs. *feminine* distinction plays no role).⁶

Ex. (2) illustrates the obligatoriness of subject indexes contrasting with the optionality of subject NPs in Joola Banjal. This example also illustrates the class distinctions expressed by third person indexes in this language.

(2) Joola Banjal (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

a. **A-ññul** **aku** ***(na-)tey-ε.**

CLa-child CLa.DEF CLa-run-CMPL

‘The child ran.’ (**a-ññul** ‘child’ belongs to noun class A)

b. **Gu-ññul** **gagu** ***(gu-)tey-ε.**

CLgu-child CLgu.DEF CLgu-run-CMPL

‘The children ran.’ (**gu-ññul** – plural of **a-ññul** ‘child’ – belongs to noun class GU)

c. **ε-jɔba** **yayu** ***(ε-)tey-ε.**

CLe-dog CLe.DEF CLe-run-CMPL

‘The dog ran.’ (**ε-jɔba** ‘dog’ belongs to noun class E)

d. **Su-jɔba** **sasu** ***(su-)tey-ε.**

CLsi-dog CLsi.DEF CLsi-run-CMPL

‘The dogs ran.’ (**su-jɔba** – plural of **ε-jɔba** ‘dog’ – belongs to noun class SI)

e. **Na-tey-ε.** ‘He/she (class A) ran.’

Gu-tey-ε. ‘They (class GU) ran.’

ε-tey-ε. ‘It (class E) ran.’

Si-tey-ε. ‘They (class SI) ran.’

⁶ Noun classification is a major typological contrast between Atlantic and Mande languages, since almost all Atlantic languages have noun class systems of the type found in other branches of the Niger-Congo phylum (and vestiges of a former noun class system can be identified in the few Atlantic languages in which the mechanism of noun class agreement has been lost), whereas the division of nouns into classes manifested in agreement is a phenomenon completely alien to Mande languages.

Ex. (3) shows that, in Wolof, subject indexes are equally obligatory, and have the same ability to represent the subject argument without being accompanied by a subject NP. The difference with Joola Banjal is that, although Wolof has noun classes manifested in the agreement of noun modifiers with their head, no noun class distinction is expressed by subject indexes.

(3) Wolof (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

a. **Xale bi daanu na.**
 child CLb.DEF fall PRF.3SG
 ‘The child fell down.’

b. **Xale yi daanu nañu.**
 child CLy.DEF fall PRF.3PL
 ‘The children fell down.’

c. **Kër gi daanu na.**
 house CLg.DEF fall PRF.3SG
 ‘The house collapsed.’

e. **Daanu na.** ‘He/she/it fell down.’ (no noun class distinction)
Daanu nañu. ‘They fell down.’ (no noun class distinction)

3.3. Languages with a relationship of complementarity between subject indexes and subject NPs

Some Atlantic languages have subject indexes that are obligatory in the absence of a subject NP, or when the subject is expressed by an NP in topic (left-dislocated) position, but are not used if the clause includes a subject NP. Here again, a distinction can be made between languages in which subject indexes express class distinctions in the third person – Ex. (4), and languages in which subject indexes express person and number distinctions only – Ex. (5).

(4) Balant Ganja (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

a. **À-fúlá mà góbù.**
 CLha-girl DEF fall
 ‘The girl fell down.’

b. **Bù-fúlá mà góbù.**
 CLbi-girl DEF fall
 ‘The girls fell down.’

c. **B-tá mà góbù.**
 CLb-tree DEF fall
 ‘The tree fell down.’

- d. **Tá mà góbù.**
(CLu)tree DEF fall
'The trees fell down.'
- e. **À-góbù** 'He/she (class HA) fell down.'
Bù-góbù 'They (class BI) fell down.'
B-góbù 'It (class B) fell down.'
Û-góbù 'They (class U) fell down.'

(5) Biafada (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

- a. **Pula roo-re.**
(CL)girl go-CMPL
'The girl went away.'
- b. **Maa-fula roo-re.**
CL-girl go-CMPL
'The girls went away.'
- c. **Bə-reegə roo-re.**
CL-boat go-CMPL
'The boat went away.'
- d. **Saa-reegə roo-re.**
CL-boat go-CMPL
'The boats went away.'
- e. **Roo-le.**
go-CMPL.3SG
'He/she/it went away.' (no class distinction)
- f. **Roo-ləmma.**
go-CMPL.3PL
'They went away.' (no class distinction)

3.4. Languages with obligatory subject NPs and no subject indexation

Most Mande languages and a very small number of Atlantic languages have no argument indexation. None of them admits null subjects of any kind (either with anaphoric reference, non-specific reference, or expletives), which means that, in the languages in question, with the only exception of the imperative, clauses with no morphological material at all in the syntactic slot for subject NPs are simply impossible – Ex. (6)

(6) Mandinka (Mande) – pers. doc.

a. **Kewó ye máŋkôo díi dínđíño la.**
 man.D CMPL mango.D give child.D to
 ‘The man gave a mango to the child.’

b. **A ye máŋkôo díi dínđíño la.**
 3SG CMPL mango.D give child.D to
 ‘He/she gave a mango to the child.’

c. **Dóo yé máŋkôo díi dínđíño la.**
 some CMPL mango.D give child.D to
 ‘Someone gave a mango to the child.’

d. ***∅ ye máŋkôo díi dínđíño la.**

3.5. Null indexes encoding vague reference

The system briefly presented in this section has been found in Joola languages (Atlantic) and in Fula (Atlantic). These languages have paradigms of subject indexes expressing person/number and noun class distinctions attached to the verb. In Joola languages the subject indexes are an obligatory component of the verbal word (see Ex. (2) above), whereas in Fula they are in complementary distribution with subject NPs, but in both cases, in addition to non-null indexes expressing person/number or class values, the paradigm includes a null index that expresses vague reference. However, this does not concern us here directly, since this null subject index can only be used with reference to non-human entities that are not viewed as concrete things occupying a well-defined portion of space. For example, in Joola Banjal – Ex. (7), ‘the river’ in subject position must be resumed by the subject index of the corresponding noun class attached to the verb ‘be far’, whereas the null subject index must be used if the argument of ‘be far’ is a place vaguely identified as ‘where we are going’.

(7) Joola Banjal – Bassène & Creissels (2011)

a. – **F-al fafo fu-reli-reli ?**
 CLfi-river CLfi.DEF CL.fi-be_far-be_far
 ‘Is the river far (from here)?’

– **Kant, fu-reli-ut.** / ***Kant, reli-ut.**
 no CLfi-be_far-NEG
 ‘No, it is not far.’

b. – **Bɔ nu-ja-ale-me reli-reli ?**
 CLbi.REL 1PL-go-1PL-SBD be_far-be_far
 ‘Where we are going, is it far (from here)?’

- **Kani, reli-ut.** / ***Kani, fu-reli-ut.**
no be_far-NEG
'No, it is not far.'

Not surprisingly, in Joola languages as well as in Fula, this null subject index is typically found in meteorological expressions – Creissels & al. (to appear).

4. Introductory remarks on vague human reference in Atlantic and Mande languages

In the languages dealt with in this presentation, generic reference (reference to kinds) is expressed productively, either by bare nouns (for example, in Wolof), or by nouns combined with a determiner. Depending on the noun determination system of individual languages, the determiner found with nouns referring to kinds may be a definite article, or a default determiner similar to the Basque article (for example, in Mandinka). Not surprisingly, generic reference to humans can be expressed by using the noun for 'human being' in the same way as nouns referring to other species, as illustrated by Ex. (8) to (10).

- (8) Mandinka (Mande) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

Jatôo búka moô màa, fó a dáalámáayáa-ta.
lion.D INCMPL human_being.D touch unless 3SG be_wounded-CMPL
'Lions don't attack humans, unless they are wounded.'

- (9) Soninke (Mande) – pers. doc.

Dànmên nǎ sèrén pòrén cùgùnú.
bed_bug.D INCMPL human_being.D blood.D suck.GER
'Bed bugs suck human blood.'

- (10) Wolof (Atlantic) – pers. doc.

Coy mën naa roy wax-u nit.
parrot be_able PRF.3SG.LNK imitate voice-of human_being
'Parrots can imitate human voice.'

Consequently, it would not be correct to confuse generic uses of the noun for 'human being' with vague human pronouns just because of the translational equivalence with vague human pronouns of other languages, as in Ex. (11).

(11) Soninke – pers. doc.

Sèrén nà̀n qáwà dú kòró̀siní jà̀nbáyè̀n ɲá

human_being.D POS must REFL watch.GER betrayal.D POSTP

‘One must protect oneself against betrayal.’

lit. ‘The human being must watch himself as regards betrayal.’

Such uses of nouns for ‘human being’ may constitute the starting point of grammaticalization processes resulting in the emergence of vague human pronouns such as German **man** or French **on**, but as far as the other nouns can be used exactly in the same way to express generalizations about other species, there are no grounds for considering that a grammaticalization process is engaged.

Various other types of non-specific reference to humans can be expressed similarly by indefinite determiners combined with the noun for ‘human being’, or by pronouns identical or related to indefinite determiners, as in Ex. (6) above. In this example, **dóo**, translated as ‘someone’, is an indefinite determiner that can combine with any noun and also has the ability to be used pronominally with reference to any kind of entity, human or non-human.

Most Atlantic and Mande languages also have passive constructions. However, in passive constructions, the interpretation of the unexpressed argument as [+human] can be triggered by the lexical meaning of the verb but does not constitute a general property of the construction .

As regards the expression of vague human reference by means of grammatical tools that unambiguously imply [+human] and have no equivalent for non-humans, three possibilities are attested in Atlantic and Mande languages:

- non-specific uses of *third person plural pronouns or indexes* are found in all Atlantic and Mande languages for which I have been able to find the relevant data;
- non-specific uses of *second person singular pronouns or indexes* are found in all Atlantic and Mande languages for which I have been able to find the relevant data;
- *dedicated vague human pronouns or indexes* are not common among Atlantic and Mande languages, since within the limits of the documentation I have been able to gather, Wolof (Atlantic) is the only language illustrating this possibility.

5. Non-specific uses of third person plural pronouns or indexes

5.1. Existential and universal readings of third person plural pronouns or indexes

In the languages that have subject indexes (either obligatory or in complementary distribution with subject NPs), non-specific uses are possible with third person indexes, but not with the corresponding pronouns. In languages that do not have subject indexation but have a distinction between emphatic and non-emphatic forms

of personal pronouns, non-specific uses of third person pronouns are found with non-emphatic forms, but not with the corresponding emphatic forms.

I am not in a position to state whether non-specific uses of third person plural pronouns or indexes are equally productive across Atlantic and Mande languages, but at least in the two languages for which I have relatively detailed data, Wolof (Atlantic) and Mandinka (Mande), the non-specific uses of third person plural cover the whole range of possibilities from temporally anchored existential readings to universal readings – Ex. (12).

(12) Wolof (Atlantic) – pers. doc.

a. **Ñungi fëgg bunt bi.**

3PL.PRESENT knock door CLb.DEF

‘Someone is knocking at the door.’

lit. ‘They are knocking at the door.’

b. **Gis nañu sa kalpe bi.**

see PRF.3PL 2SG purse CLb.DEF

‘Your purse has been found.’

lit. ‘They have seen your purse.’

c. **Wax nañu ci yow ca ndaje ma.**

talk PRF.3PL about 2SG at.DIST meeting CLm.DEF.DIST

‘You have been talked about at the meeting.’

lit. ‘They talked about you at the meeting.’

d. **Yokk nañu lempo yi.**

increase PRF.3PL tax CLy.DEF

‘The taxes have been increased.’

lit. ‘They have increased the taxes.’

e. **Mali, bambara lañu fa-y làkk.**

Mali Bambara FOC.3PL there-INCMPPL speak

‘In Mali they speak Bambara.’

5.2. Restrictions on the non specific use of third person pronouns or indexes

It has been observed in other languages that non-specific uses of third person plural pronouns or indexes are possible in subject function only, and this restriction applies to the Atlantic and Mande languages I have examined. By contrast, at least in the Atlantic and Mande languages for which I have detailed data, two cross-linguistically common restrictions on the universal reading of third person plural pronouns or indexes do not apply.

On the one hand, the universal reading licensed by a locative illustrated by (12e) above does not imply exclusion of the speaker, as shown by Ex. (13), which can be

uttered by a Wolof speaker living in Dakar. Ex. (14) illustrates the same phenomenon in Soninke.

(13) Wolof (Atlantic) – pers. doc.

Dakaar, wolof lañu fi-y làkk.
 Dakar Wolof FOC.3PL here-INCMPPL speak
 ‘In Dakar, people speak Wolof.’

(14) Soninke (Mande) – pers. doc.

Ì nà jàxón kàriní Bàanàncallén ñà yí.
 3PL INCMPL sheep.PL.D kill.GER Tabaski.D FOC POSTP
 ‘It is on the occasion of Tabaski (Aid al-kabīr) that people kill sheep.’

On the other hand, the universal reading of third person plural pronouns or indexes need not be licensed by a locative. For example, as illustrated by Ex. (15), universal readings or third person plural pronouns or indexes are common in proverbs whose interpretation does not involve any spatial anchoring, or in sentences referring to customs that are not bound to any particular place.

(15) Mandinka (Mande) – pers. doc.

a. **I ka mbíróo dórónj ne bórij.**
 3PL INCMPL wrestler.D only FOC strike_down
 ‘Only wretlers can be struck down.’
 lit. ‘They strike down wrestlers only.’

b. **I búka yíróo selé a jambóo la.**
 3PL INCMPL.NEG tree.D climb 3SG leaf.D POSTP
 ‘One does not climb trees by the leaves.’
 lit. ‘They don’t climb trees by the leaves.’

c. **I ká beróo sñj pikáasóo le la.**
 3PL INCMPL stone.D extract pickaxe.D FOC POSTP
 ‘People use pickaxes to extract stones.’
 lit. ‘They use pickaxes to extract stones.’

d. **Wúlôo mîj mánj sene fó a mée-ta,**
 bush.D REL CMPL.NEG cultivate until 3SG last-CMPL
i ká a fó le bíríño.
 3PL INCMPL 3SG say FOC bíríño
 ‘A land that has not been cultivated for a long time is called **bíríño**.’
 lit. ‘... they call it **bíríño**.’

6. Non-specific uses of second person pronouns or indexes

6.1. Generic use of second person pronouns or indexes

It is cross-linguistically very common that second person pronouns or indexes, which canonically represent the addressee of the speech act, can also express generalizations over sets of human beings whose delimitation is generally left implicit and can only be inferred from the context, as in Ex. (16), in which **you** expresses a generalization over human beings present in Los Angeles.

(16) **It is so smoggy in Los Angeles that you can barely breathe.**

This generalizing use of second person pronouns or indexes is particularly widespread among Atlantic and Mande. The semantic distinction with the universal reading of third person plural pronouns or indexes is not easy to define, but it seems that, in their universal uses, third person plural pronouns or indexes imply the mere description of customs, without any modal shade, whereas second person pronouns or indexes suggest a modal interpretation that can be roughly paraphrased as ‘in the kind of situation referred to, people are expected to behave in a certain way, or can only behave in a certain way’.

This semantic distinction is made apparent by a minimal pair like (17). (17a), with the third person plural pronoun as the subject of **fó** ‘say’, simply formulates a definition, whereas (17b), with the second person singular pronoun as the subject of the same verb, refers to the probable reaction of a person trying to identify an unfamiliar object.

(17) Mandinka (Mande) – pers. doc.

- a. **Kénô mîj be laaráño níj bújo téema,**
 space.D REL LOCCOP bed.D with wall.D between
i ká a fó wǒ le ye kúfámfoo.
 3PL INCMPL 3SG say DEM FOC to kúfámfoo
 lit. ‘The space between the bed and the wall, *they say to it kúfámfoo.*’
 → ‘The space between the bed and the wall is called **kúfámfoo.**’

- b. **Í ká a fó wǒ le ye**
 2SG INCMPL 3SG say DEM FOC to
Tubáabólu lá muróo mu wǒ le ti.
 European.D.PL GEN knife.D EQCOP DEM FOC POSTP
 lit. ‘*You say to it [that] it is a European knife.*’
 → ‘One would identify it as a kind of European knife.’

Description of the normal way to proceed in a given type of activity is a typical context in which second person pronouns or indexes are found with a generic meaning. The sentences in Ex. (18) are taken from Joola Banjal texts describing palm-wine making, fishing, and marriage customs, respectively.

(18) Joola Banjal (Atlantic) – Bassène & Creissels (2011)

a. ... **nũ-kək ga-ndapa-i nũ ñi-it ññaũ**
 2SG-tie CLgu-climbing_belt-2SG on CLñi-palm_tree CLñi.DEF
 ‘... you tie your climbing-belt on the palm tree

mũ u-pirik u-bes-ñũ.
 and 2SG-cut CLu-branch-CLñi
 and you cut its branches.’

b. **U-ban-me nũ-təs bi ticce**
 2SG-finish-SBD 2SG-move up.to another_place
 ‘When you have finished, you move to another place

mũ u-bet yayu e-mbal.
 and 2SG-throw CLe.DEF CLe-fishing.net
 and you throw the other fishing-net.’

c. **Nũ anaare u-ɲes-ɔl ukki u-re netot nũ-rẽm-ɔl.**
 then (CLa)woman 2SG-fetch-3SG until 2SG-reach middle 2SG-get_engaged-3SG
 ‘In that time, a woman, once you had courted her up to a certain point, you asked for her hand.’

Generalizations expressed as conditional sentences constitute another typical context in which second person pronouns or indexes can be found with a non-specific reading.

(19) Mandinka (Mande) – Creissels & al. (to appear).

a. **Níŋ í máŋ féŋ sene, í búka féŋ káti.**
 if 2SG CMPL.NEG thing cultivate 2SG INCMPL.NEG thing reap
 ‘If one does not cultivate anything, one does not reap anything.’

b. **Níŋ í yé wóoró níŋ fulá kafu ñóoma,**
 if 2SG CMPL six with two join together
 ‘If one adds six and two,
wo mú jolú le ti?
 DEM EQCOP how_much FOC POSTP
 how much is it?’

c. **Níŋ í yé sólóo barama, fó í yé sílá kútôo ñíniŋ.**
 if 2SG CMPL leopard.D wound OBLIG 2SG SUBJ road new.D look_for
 ‘If you wound a leopard, you must look for a new road.’

d. **Dolôo máŋ haráamu, níŋ í mâŋ síira.**
 wine.D CMPL.NEG be_forbidden if 2SG CMPL.NEG get_drunk
 ‘Wine is not forbidden, if you do not get drunk.’

6.2. Restrictions on the non-specific use of second person pronouns or indexes

Contrary to third person plural pronouns, which can be found with non-specific meanings ranging from universal to existential, the non-specific use of second person pronouns is restricted to the expression of generalizations with a modal shade.

Another difference is that third person pronouns or indexes can express vague reference to humans in the plural only, whereas in the second person, generalization is usually expressed by singular pronouns or indexes, but second person plural pronouns or indexes expressing generalization can also be found, in contexts implying reference to plural individuals, as in Ex. (20), taken from a text describing marriage customs.

(20) Nyun Gubëeher (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

U-dæək-əŋ ɔ-nɔɔx-ɔŋ na an ɔ-yaax-aŋ naŋkaa...
 2-aller-PL 2-sit-PL there and 2-eat-PL there
 ‘You (pl.) go and sit there, and you (pl.) eat there...’

A third difference between third person and second person pronouns or indexes in their non-specific uses is that, in the second person, non-specific readings are not restricted to indexes (in languages that have subject indexation) or to non-emphatic pronouns (in languages that have a contrast between emphatic and non-emphatic pronouns). Ex. (21) illustrates the possible use of the emphatic form of the second person singular pronoun with a generic reading in Mandinka.⁷

(21) Mandinka (Mande) – pers. doc.

Níŋ keebáa ye díŋo ménj soto, níŋ í siimaayáa-ta,
 if mature_person.D CMPL son.D REL have if 2SG get_older-CMPL
 lit. ‘If [a mature person]_i has a son, if [you]_i get older,

keebáa ka ménj dúwaa,
 mature_person.D INCMPL REL wish
 what [the mature person]_i wishes is

íte ye faa í yé wo tú
 2SG.EMPH SUBJ die 2SG SUBJ DEM leave
 that [you]_i die first and [you]_i leave him.’

⁷ This example also illustrates the phenomenon that will be analyzed in Section 6.3, namely the possibility that second person pronouns or indexes have generic NPs as their antecedents.

→ ‘If a middle-aged man who has a son gets older, his wish is to die before his son.’

Finally, as illustrated by Ex. (22) & (23), contrary to third person plural pronouns or indexes, second person pronouns or indexes can have non-specific readings in syntactic functions other than subject.

(22) Soninke (Mande) – pers. doc.

Nà án kàllùngòoràyàxàrén ñàxí, kén dàgàntén nì.
INF 2SG female_cross_cousin.D marry DEM allowed.D EQCOP
lit. ‘To marry your cousin, this is allowed.’
→ ‘A man is allowed to marry his cousin.’

(23) Wolof (Atlantic) – pers. doc.

Lu la mar mayul, màtt du la ko may.
REL 2SG lick give.NEG bite NEG 2SG 3SG give
‘What licking did not give you, biting will not give it to you.’

6.3. Generic second person pronouns or indexes with antecedents

In some Atlantic and Mande languages at least, second person pronouns or indexes expressing generalizations exhibit coreference properties somewhat unexpected. In languages more familiar to linguists, generic *you* can introduce generic referents but cannot refer back to generic referents already introduced by a noun phrase. By contrast, at least in some Atlantic and Mande languages, second person pronouns or indexes also have the ability to resume generic referents introduced by noun phrases. In this use, second person pronouns freely vary with third person pronouns without any difference in meaning.

In Ex. (24), the topicalized relative clause **oxu warna okiin** ‘whoever kills a person’ includes no second person mark, and it could be resumed by a third person index, but this example shows that in this context, a second person index is possible with exactly the same meaning.

(24) Sereer (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

Oxu warna okiin, o-damel fisel o Jaxaaw.
whoever kill.SBD person 2SG-arrest.PASS bring.PASS to Jaxaaw
lit. ‘Whoever_i kills a person, you_i are arrested and brought to Jaxaaw.’
→ ‘Murderers are arrested and brought to Jaxaaw.’

In Ex. (25), **jaamanj** ‘people’ is resumed in the verb form by a second person plural index. Here again, a third person plural index would be possible without any change in meaning.

(25) Nyun gubëeher (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

Jamaaŋ g-u-ficay-eŋ hɔŋjɔŋ ...
 people COND-2-share-PL.CMPL thing.PL
 ‘When people share things...’ lit. ‘If people_i you_i-share things...’

In ex. (26), **ku** ‘whoever’ is resumed by a second person possessive within the relative clause, and by a second person object clitic in the main clause.

(26) Wolof (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

Ku yar sa kuuy, yow la-y jëkka daan.
 whoever raise 2SG ram 2SG FOC-INCMPL do_first gore
 lit. ‘Whoever_i raises your_i ram, it is you_i it goes first.’
 → ‘A person who raises a ram is the first one to be gored by it.’

In Ex. (27), the antecedent of the second person pronoun is **sèrê** ‘a/the person’.

(27) Soninke (Mande) – pers. doc.

Sèrén gà ná nàabùrén kità lémináaxùn dí,
 person.D SBD PROSP wealth.D get youth.D in
án ñá béwùnú.
 2SG INCMPL be_contemptuous.GER
 lit. ‘If [a person]_i gets wealth while young, you_i will be contemptuous.’
 → ‘A person who becomes wealthy early in life tends to be contemptuous.’

Similarly, in Ex. (28), the antecedent of the second person pronoun is **moô** ‘a/the person’. Note that, in sentence (b), the second person pronoun in genitive function is included in a topicalized noun phrase and precedes its antecedent.

(28) Mandinka (Mande) – Creissels (2013)

a. **Moô ñánta í lá musóo mara-la báake.**
 person.D should 2SG GEN wife.D watch-INF well
 lit. ‘[A person]_i should watch your_i wife well.’
 → ‘One should keep a close eye on one’s own wife.’

b. **Í báadíŋkéwo, moô si sílá a la.**
 2SG brother.D person.D POT be_afraid 3SG POSTP
 lit. ‘Your_i brother, [a person]_i may be afraid of him.’
 → ‘One may be afraid of one’s own brother.’

For a detailed analysis of this use of second person pronouns in Mandinka, see Creissels (2013).

7. Dedicated vague human pronouns or indexes

Within the limits of the documentation I have been able to gather on Atlantic and Mande languages, I have found only two cases of dedicated vague human pronouns or indexes: Wolof **-ees** and Lebu **in**. Lebu is considered a Wolof variety, but the dedicated vague human pronoun **in** found in Lebu does not seem to exist in any other Wolof variety, and it is certainly not cognate with **-ees**. As regards the dialectal distribution of **-ees**, it is found at least in the Dakar and Saloum varieties, and probably in other varieties too, but I am not in a position to be more precise on this point.

7.1. Lebu *in*

As illustrated by Ex. (29), Lebu **in** ‘one’ occupies the syntactic slot for subject NPs (immediately to the left of the verb), and cannot be found in any other position. Note that Ex. (29a) illustrates a configuration considered typical for dedicated vague human pronouns, in which two successive occurrences of **in** represent the same generic referent.

(29) Lebu (Wolof, Atlantic) – Jean-Léopold Diouf, pers. com.

a. **Jamana yoogë nak, in hamul fa Ndayaan neekë,**
 time that then VH savoir.NEG.3SG where Ndayane be_found
 ‘At that time, people did not know where Ndayane (a village) is,

in deegë na tur-u Ndayaan rek.
 one hear PRF.3SG name-of Ndayane only
 they had just heard of it.’

b. **Man, in ebal na ma sah kër jaambur.**
 1SG VH send PRF.3SG 1SG even house(of) someone_else
 ‘As for me, I was even sent (lit. ‘one sent me’) to another person’s place.’

c. **Fas wa la gañe, in du ka sañse.**
 horse DEF INCMPL win VH NEG 3SG change
 ‘A winning horse, one does not change it.’

Given the formal resemblance between **in** ‘one’ and **nit** ‘human being’, it is reasonable to assume that **in** is a grammaticalized form of **nit**. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the bare form of the noun **nit** ‘human being’ is widely used in Wolof to express generalizations about human beings.

No description of Lebu is available, but I have been able to examine a corpus of Lebu texts recorded, transcribed and glossed by Jean-Léopold Diouf. Further investigation would be necessary before drawing precise conclusions on the possible readings of Lebu **in** and on possible restrictions on its use, but this corpus

unquestionably shows that **in** is quite productive in Lebu, and lends itself to a variety of existential as well as universal readings.

Interestingly, in this corpus, **in** also occurs in contexts suggesting a first person plural reading, and in such cases, the verb may show first person plural agreement, as in Ex. (30).

(30) Lebu (Wolof, Atlantic) – Jean-Léopold Diouf, pers. com.

Ba nu gaanaayoo ñetti juni,
 if 1PL provide_oneself 15000 francs
 ‘If we provide ourselves with 15000 francs,

defe nama ne in dunu toopa dara.
 think PRF.1SG that VH FUT.NEG.1PL follow anything
 I think that we won’t have any problem.’

Another interesting observation about verb agreement with the vague human pronoun **in** in subject function is that the corpus includes a sentence in which the verb shows second person singular agreement – Ex. (31). Given that **in** in this sentence has a universal reading, this is consistent with the use of second person pronouns or indexes resuming generic noun phrases presented in Section 6.3.

(31) Lebu (Wolof, Atlantic) – Jean-Léopold Diouf, pers. com.

Ag mbooka, in dal kaa rafetal.
 INDEF.CLg kinship_relationship VH VFOC.2SG 3SG.INCMPL cultivate
 ‘A kinship relationship, one cultivates it.’

7.2. Wolof *-ees*

Wolof *-ees* is incompatible with the presence of a noun phrase expressing the subject argument, and triggers a non-specific human interpretation of this argument. The verb is in the third person singular. In all the examples I have at my disposal, *-ees* can be rendered as **on** in French. As illustrated by Ex. (32), it is obvious that, contrary to Lebu **in**, *-ees* does not occupy the position for subject NPs, since Wolof is a strict SVO language.

(32) Wolof (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

a. **Xam-ees na ko.**
 know-VH PRF.3SG 3SG
 ‘Everybody knows that.’ – French ‘On sait ça.’

b. **Ter-ees na ko te daan-ees na ko.**
 forbid-VH PRF.3SG 3SG and punish-VH PRF.3SG 3SG
 ‘This is forbidden and punished.’ – French ‘On l’interdit et on le punit.’

c. **Mën-ees-u ko bëtt.**

be_able-VH-NEG.3SG 3SG violate

‘One cannot violate this.’ – French ‘On ne peut pas porter atteinte à cela.’

In Ex. (32), **-ees** seems to be suffixed to the verbal root. In Wolof, this position is typically occupied by derivational morphemes expressing valency operations, which might suggest identifying **-ees** as a kind of impersonal voice marker. However, this analysis must be rejected, since in tenses other than those illustrated in Ex. (32), **-ees** is found in other positions – Ex. (33), and therefore cannot be analyzed as suffixed to the verbal root.

(33) Wolof (Atlantic) – Creissels & al. (to appear)

a. **Noonu l-ees di doxale**

thus FOC-VH INCMPL proceed

‘One proceeds like that.’ – French ‘On procède ainsi.’

b. **Saṅsañ yooyu, d-ees na leen doxal.**

right CLy.DEM INCMPL-VH PRF.3SG 3PL implement

‘Those rights are implemented.’ – French ‘On met en oeuvre ces droits.’

c. **f-ees di dem**

where-VH INCMPL go

‘the place where one goes’ – French ‘l’endroit où on va’

d. **n-ees ko-y jëfandikoo**

how-VH 3SG-INCMPL use

‘the way one uses it’ – French ‘la façon dont on l’utilise’

I am aware of no analysis of **-ees** in the literature (and most descriptions of Wolof simply fail to mention this morpheme), but judging from the data at my disposal, **-ees** must be described as a clitic whose position is determined by the following rule:

- if other clitics are present to the left of the verb, **-ees** always takes the second position in the clitic chain, whatever the nature of the other clitics and the precise rule that determines their position;
- if no other clitic precedes the verb, **-ees** places itself immediately after the verb.

This unique distribution probably has a historical explanation, but unfortunately I am aware of no possible etymological analysis of **-ees**.

As regards its possible functions, **-ees** can be found not only in universal uses, as illustrated by the examples above, but also in existential uses, as illustrated by Ex. (34).

(34) Wolof (Atlantic) – pers. doc.

Tabax-ees na benn loppitaal ci dëkk bi.
build-VH PRF.3SG CLb.INDEF health_center in village CLb.DEF
'A health center has been built in the village.'
French 'On a construit un dispensaire dans le village.'

However, although sporadically found in texts, the existential use of **-ees** is often rejected in elicitation. The problem is that I have not been able to identify any clear semantic restriction on the existential use of **-ees**. The only obvious observation is that, whatever the precise meaning intended, Wolof consultants invariably express a strong preference for third person plural.

The only domain in which **-ees** is fully productive is the expression of generalizations with a shade of deontic meaning. It is symptomatic that **-ees** has a very high frequency in the Wolof version of the Senegalese Constitution (from which several of the examples above have been taken), whereas its frequency in other types of texts or in everyday speech is relatively low.

8. Conclusion

In the sample of Atlantic and Mande languages examined in this presentation, dedicated vague human pronouns are rare, but non-specific uses of third person plural and second person pronouns or indexes are very productive in all the languages of the sample.

Third person plural pronouns and indexes are used to encode a variety of universal and existential meanings, but non-specific readings of third person plural pronouns or indexes are possible in subject function only. By contrast, the non-specific use of second person pronouns or indexes is limited to the coding of generic reference, but there is no syntactic restriction on this use of second person pronouns or indexes. Generalizations expressed by third person plural subject pronouns or indexes are purely descriptive, whereas generalizations expressed by second person pronouns or indexes have a normative flavor.

In comparison with other languages whose R-impersonals have already been analyzed, the main particularities of the Atlantic and Mande languages dealt with in this presentation are as follows:

- (a) Vague third person plural is particularly productive, and the universal use of third person plural pronouns or indexes is not bound to restrictions such as exclusion of the speaker or necessity of a locative licensing.
- (b) Second person pronouns or indexes have the ability to co-occur with noun phrases representing the same generic referents, and such constructions are characterized by free variation between second and third person pronouns or indexes.

Abbreviations

ACC = accusative, CL = noun class, CMPL = completive, COND = conditional, D = default determiner, DEF = definite, DEM = demonstrative, DIST = distal, EQCOP = equative copula, FOC = focus marker, FUT = future, GEN = genitive, GER = gerundive, INCMPL = incompletive, INF = infinitive, LNK = linker, LOCCOP = locational copula, NEG = negation marker, OBLIG = obligative, PASS = passive, PL = plural, POS = positive, POSTP = multifunction postposition, POT = potential, PRESENT = presentative, PRF = perfect, PROSP = prospective, REL = relativizer, REFL = reflexive, SBD = subordination marker, SG = singular, SUBJ = subjunctive, VFOC = verb focus marker, VH = vague human.

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