The generic use
of the second person singular pronoun
in Mandinka[1]

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1. Introduction

The term 'impersonal' has been applied to a heterogeneous range of phenomena loosely bound together by some kind of family resemblance, and it is extremely doubtful whether the traditional use of this term can be validated by a feature common to all and only the various phenomena traditionally called 'impersonal'.[2] This point will not be further discussed in this paper, devoted to a particular kind of so-called R(eference)-impersonals, i.e. impersonals involving a reduction in referentiality.[3]

My interest in the coreference properties of pronouns expressing generalizations about humans or referring to unspecified humans, commonly called 'impersonal pronouns', was initially motivated by the hypothesis that the coreference properties of pronouns or pronoun-like forms such as French *on* or German *man* be different from those of semantically similar markers that do not originate from pronouns, like those occurring in generic or unspecified subject constructions originating from reflexive or passive constructions. The data I gathered showed that things are much more complex than I imagined at first, but at the same time convinced me that detailed descriptions of the coreference properties of various types of generic or unspecified human participants in individual languages may contribute to a better understanding of R-impersonals in a cross-linguistic perspective.

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

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[1] When I participated in the workshop on impersonals organized in 2008 by Anna Siewierska and Andrej Malchukov at the SLE meeting in Forli, I initially intended to present a paper on the generic use of the second person pronoun in Manding, but I realized that it was not possible to discuss this question properly without filling in some gaps in the data I had at my disposal, and I eventually presented a paper on the coreference properties of French *on*. Since in the meantime I did fieldwork in Senegal in order to gather material for a Mandinka grammar, when I was invited to contribute to a volume dedicated to the memory of Anna Siewierska, the choice of this topic was immediately obvious to me.

[2] On the typology of impersonal constructions, see Creissels (2007), Siewierska (2008), Malchukov & Ogawa (2011).

[3] Note however that precisely R-impersonals are problematic for an approach to impersonality in terms of departure from canonical subjecthood, since the pronouns or pronoun-like forms involved in some varieties of R-impersonals are not necessarily restricted to the syntactic role of subject, as can be seen from the example of English *you* (*Brushing **your** teeth is healthy*) or *one* (*Brushing **one's** teeth is helpful*).

inferred from the context, as in example (1), in which *you* expresses a generalization over human beings present in Los Angeles.

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

This generalizing use of second person pronouns or indexes, usually termed 'impersonal', is particularly widespread among West African languages. Moreover, in some West African languages at least, the second person pronoun or index used in this function exhibits coreference properties somewhat unexpected, given what is known about the generic use of second person pronouns or indexes in more familiar languages, in which generic *you* can introduce generic referents but cannot refer back to generic referents already introduced by a noun phrase.

In this article, I provide a detailed description of the use of the Mandinka second person pronoun *í* in co-reference chains in which it refers back to non-specific noun phrases making explicit the domain within which the generalization applies. To the best of my knowledge, the situation I describe has never been analyzed before, either in Mandinka or in other languages, and none of the descriptive grammars of West African languages I have been able to consult mentions it, although it undoubtedly occurs in texts, not only in other Manding varieties (Bambara, Maninka, Dyula, etc.),[4] but also in languages whose genetic relationship with Mandinka is, at most, very remote, for example, Wolof.[5] This coincidence is important to observe, since it excludes the possibility that the situation described in this article might be due to phonetic changes in the history of Manding resulting in an accidental homonymy between two pronouns originally distinct, and calls for a functional explanation.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides some basic information about Mandinka and Mandinka grammar. Section 3 presents the various strategies used in Mandinka to express non-specific human participants. Section 4 describes the coreference properties of the second person singular pronoun in its generic use. Section 5 puts forward a possible grammaticalization path.

The Mandinka data presented here is entirely drawn from Mandinka texts gathered in Sédhiou (Sénégal).[6] All the examples illustrating the coreference properties of the 2nd person singular pronoun used generically are natural discourse examples.

2. Some basic information about Mandinka and Mandinka grammar

Mandinka, spoken in Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau by approximately 1.5 million speakers, is the westernmost member of the Manding dialect cluster, included in the western branch of the Mande language family. The area where Mandinka is spoken

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[4] The Manding languages are a group of fairly mutually intelligible languages or dialects included in the western branch of the Mande language family. Bambara, Mandinka, Maninka, and Dyula, are the most widely spoken and best-known Manding varieties. The most recent classification of Mande languages, elaborated by Valentin Vydrin, can be found at
http://mandelang.kunstkamera.ru/index/langues_mande/famille_mande/

[5] Mandinka belongs to the Mande language family, whereas Wolof is an Atlantic language. Mande and Atlantic were included by Greenberg in the Niger-Congo phylum, but the evidence for a Niger-Congo affiliation of Mande is rather slim.

largely coincides with the sphere of influence of the pre-colonial state of Kaabu.[7] Speakers of Mandinka call themselves *Mandiŋkóolu* (singular: *Mandiŋkôo*) and designate their language as *mandiŋkakáŋo*.[8] Rowlands (1959), Creissels (1983), and Creissels & Sambou (to appear 2012) constitute the main references on Mandinka grammar.

The most striking characteristic of clause structure in Mande languages is the extreme rigidity of the typologically unusual SOVX constituent order, and this is particularly true of Manding languages or dialects, including Mandinka. No operation such as focalization or questioning triggers a change in constituent order, and with the exception of some types of adjuncts, noun phrases or adposition phrases cannot move to topic position (at the left edge of the clause) without being resumed by a pronoun in the position they would occupy if they were not topicalized.

As a consequence of the rigid SOVX constituent order, Mandinka clause structure is characterized by a particularly clear-cut distinction between core arguments, which invariably precede the verb, and obliques, which with few exceptions obligatorily follow it, and can never be found between S and V.

Another important characteristic of Mandinka clause structure is that transitive and intransitive predications are formally differentiated by TAM and polarity marking. It is also remarkable that Mandinka has a total ban on null subjects or objects, with either an anaphoric or arbitrary interpretation – see Creissels (to appear) for a discussion of this aspect of Mandinka syntax.

As illustrated by example (2), in transitive predication, the subject and the object obligatorily precede the verb, and the subject obligatorily precedes the object. Declarative and interrogative transitive clauses always include a *predicative marker*, a portmanteau morpheme encoding aspectual and modal distinctions and expressing polarity, inserted between the subject and the object. Obliques (most of the time encoded as postposition phrases) follow the verb. The subject and the object bear no mark of their syntactic role and are not indexed on the verb. [9]

(2)   a. *Jat-óo ye   dánn-óo   barama.*
          lion-DEF PF   hunter-DEF hurt
          'The lion hurt the hunter.'

      b. *Dánn-óo ye   jat-óo   barama.*
          hunter-DEF PF   lion-DEF hurt
          'The hunter hurt the lion.'

      c. *I   yé   bank-óo-lu   táláa   kabíil-oo-lú le   téema.*
          3PL PF   land-DEF-PL   divide   clan-DEF-PL   FOC   between
          'They divided the lands between clans.'

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[7] According to oral traditions, the Kaabu kingdom originated as a province of the Manding empire conquered in the 13th century by a general of Sundiata Keita called Tiramakhan Traore. After the decline of the Manding empire, Kaabu became an independent kingdom. Mandinka hegemony in the region lasted until 1867, when the Kaabu capital (Kansala) was taken by the armies of the Fula kingdom of Futa Jallon.

[8] *Mandiŋkôo* is the definite form of a noun *mandiŋká* resulting from the addition of the suffix *-ŋká* 'people from …' to the toponym *Mandíŋ*, which primarily refers to the region that constituted the starting point of the Manding expansion. *Mandiŋkakáŋo* is literally 'language of the people from Manding'.

[9] The following abbreviations are used in the glosses of Mandinka examples:

d. *Kambaan-óo maŋ ber-ôo fáyí palantéer-óo kaŋ.*
boy-DEF   PF.NEG stone-DEF-PL throw   window-DEF   on
'The boy did not throw the stone into the window.'

e. *Kew-ó ka a téerímâa máakóyí kód-óo to.*
man-DEF IPF 3SG friend.DEF help   money-DEF LOC
'The man helps his friend financially.'

As illustrated by example (3) below, pronouns occupy the same positions as NPs representing the same participants, they have the same form in all their possible syntactic roles, and they do not express gender-like distinctions.

(3) a. *Wul-óo ye díndíŋ-o kíisándí dimbáa ma.*
dog-DEF PF child-DEF   save   fire.DEF OBL
'The dog saved the child from the fire.'

  b. *A yé a kíisándí a ma.*
3SG PF 3SG save   3SG OBL
'He/she/it saved him/her/it from him/her/it.'

In intransitive predication, the subject precedes the verb. It bears no mark of its syntactic role and is not indexed on the verb. Obliques behave exactly in the same way in transitive and intransitive clauses.

    As already mentioned above, in intransitive predication, some TAM-polarity values are not encoded by the same markers as in transitive predication:

– the predicative marker expressing 'perfective positive' has a different tonal structure in transitive predication (*máŋ*) than in intransitive predication (*mâŋ*);
– the negative copula used in the function of imperfective negative marker has a different tonal structure in transitive predication (*té*) and intransitive predication (*tê*);
– the predicative marker *yé* expressing 'perfective positive', used exclusively in the transitive construction, is in complementary distribution with a verbal suffix (*-tá*) expressing the same value in intransitive constructions – example (4a).

As illustrated by example (4b-c), in intransitive predication, the predicative markers common to transitive and intransitive predication and those which differ only in tone are inserted between the subject and the verb. The only TAM-polarity marker suffixed to the verb is *-tá* (perfective positive, intransitive).

(4) a. *Yír-óo boyi-ta síl-óo kaŋ.*
tree-DEF fall-PF   road-DEF on
'The tree fell down on the road.'

  b. *New-ó ka kómóŋ jíy-o kóno.*
iron-DEF IPF rust   water-DEF in
'Iron rusts in water.'

  c. *Kew-ô mâŋ kúmá mus-óo ye.*
man-DEF PF.NEG talk   woman-DEF BEN
'The man did not talk to the woman.'

Not all semantically bivalent verbs are syntactically assimilated to prototypical action verbs. Some of them occur in a formally intransitive construction in which one of the two arguments is an *oblique argument* encoded as a postpositional phrase that differs in no way from postposition phrases in adjunct function, as shown in example (5).

(5)   *Kew-ó   lafi-ta   kód-óo   la.*
          man-DEF   want-PF   money-DEF   OBL
          'The man wants money.'

Note also that Mandinka does not have constructions of the type commonly termed 'double object constructions', which means that one of the arguments of semantically trivalent verbs must be encoded as a postposition phrase whose behavior is in no respect different from that of postposition phrases in adjunct function.

3. Unspecified human participants in Mandinka

At first sight, the situation of Mandinka with respect to the expression of non-specific (generic or unspecified) human participants is not particularly original. In addition to the possible use of indefinite determiners or agentless passive constructions (which however have the cross-linguistically rare feature of involving nothing that could be analyzed as passive morphology),[10] various semantic types of non-specific human participants can be encoded as *mǒo* (definite form of *mǒo* 'human being'),[11] *i* (low-toned) 'they', or *í* (high-toned) 'you (sg)'.

     As illustrated by example (6a) below, *mǒo* is commonly used to express generalizations about human beings. From the point of view of Mandinka grammar, it would however not be justified to recognize the existence of a more or less grammaticalized impersonal pronoun *mǒo*, since morphologically, *mǒo* is the definite form of the noun *mǒo* 'human being', and syntactically, any Mandinka noun can be used in the definite form to express generalizations about other kinds of entities, as illustrated by *jatôo* (definite form of *jatá* 'lion') in example (6b).

(6)   a. *Mǒo   ka   kúm-ôo   fó   le   bii,   sǎama   a   yé   a   báayi.*
           person.DEF IPF   word-DEF   say FOC today tomorrow 3SG SUBJ 3SG cancel
           'One says something today, and retracts tomorrow.'
           lit. 'The man says a word today ...'

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[10] On the passive construction of Mandinka, see Creissels (to appear).

[11] In Mandinka, the definite form of nouns is formed by suffixing a low-toned *o* to the noun stem (for example, *kúlúŋ* 'boat' → *kúlúŋo*), but with stems ending with a vowel, the definite suffix interacts with the last vowel of the stem in various ways. In the case of stems ending with *aa* or *oo*, and optionally for those ending with *ee*, this interaction results in a purely tonal distinction between the bare noun stem and the definite form (for example, *báa* 'river' → *bâa*, *mǒo* 'human being' → *mǒo*, *kěe* 'man' → *kewô* or *kěe*), but depending on the context, the tonal distinction between the bare noun stem and the definite form may be neutralized by tone sandhi rules.

b. *Jat-ôo búka mǒo   maa, fó   a   dáalámáayáa-ta.*
lion-DEF IPF.NEG[12] person.DEF attack unless 3SG be_wounded-PF
'Lions do not attack humans, unless they are wounded.'
lit. 'The lion does not attack the man …'

As illustrated by example (7) below, the non-specific use of *i* 'they' includes the expression of unspecified participants with reference to habitual events, and vague reference in episodic contexts. Depending on the discourse context, *i* in the same sentences could be interpreted as referring to a specific group of people ('the people in question').

(7) a. *I   ka   kín-ôo tábí kalée-róo le   kóno.*
3PL   IPF   rice-DEF cook pot-DEF   FOC   in
'Rice is cooked in a pot.'
(alternative reading: 'The people in question cook rice in a pot')

b. *I   yé   a   ñiniŋkáa a   ka   mêŋ jéle.*
3PL   PF   3SG ask   3SG IPF REL   laugh
'He was asked what he was laughing at.'
(alternative reading: 'The people in question asked him …')

As illustrated by example (8), as in other languages, the non-specific use of the second person singular pronoun in Mandinka is typically found in generalizations about humans in a given type of situation, often expressed as conditional sentences, and this use of the second person pronoun is widely attested in proverbs.

(8) a. *Í   sí   jal-ôo jé,*
2SG   POT   griot-DEF see
'You may see a griot

a   sí   Suñjátá la   kúw-o   sáatá ñáa dóo ma,
3SG   POT   Sunjata   GEN   matter-DEF explain way INDEF OBL
who tells you Sunjata's story in one particular way,

í   sí   dóo fánáŋ jé, a   sí   a   sáatá ñáa dóo ma.
2SG   POT   INDEF also   see 3SG POT   3SG explain way INDEF OBL
but later you may see another one who will tell it to you in another way.'

b. *Níŋ í   máŋ féŋ sene, í   búka   féŋ káti.*
if   2SG   PF.NEG thing cultivate 2SG IPF.NEG   thing reap
'If one does not cultivate anything, one does not reap anything.'

c. *Níŋ í   yé   wóoró níŋ fulá kafu ñóoma,*
if   2SG   PF   six   with two join together
'If one adds six and two,

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[12] Note that the first syllable of *búka* 'imperfective negative' cannot be isolated as a negative marker in a synchronic analysis of Mandinka, since there is no other case in which negation would be expressed via the addition of a syllable *bú*. The first syllable of *búka* may however be cognate with a negative marker found in other Mande languages – Creissels & Sambou (to appear 2012: 80).

> *wo   mú   jolú   le   ti ?*
> DEM COP how_much FOC   OBL
> how much is it?'

d. *Níŋ   í   yé   sól-óo   barama,   fó   í   yé   sílá   kút-ôo   ñíniŋ.*
   if   2SG PF   leopard-DEF wound   OBLIG   2SG SUBJ road   new-DEF look_for
   'If you wound a leopard, you must look for a new road.'

e. *Dol-ôo   máŋ   haráamu,   níŋ   í   mâŋ   síira.*
   wine-DEF PF.NEG   be_forbidden if   2SG PF.NEG   get.drunk
   'Wine is not forbidden, if you do not get drunk.'

4. The use of generic *í* with a discourse antecedent

In French, generic *tu* 'you (sg)' can only refer back to another occurrence of generic *tu*, and generic *vous* 'you (pl)' can only refer back to another occurrence of generic *vous*, or to generic *on* (dedicated non-specific human index), and similar constraints can be observed in other European languages. By contrast, Mandinka *í* 'you (sg)' in its generic use may refer back to a variety of antecedents that could equally be resumed by 3rd person pronouns, without any difference in meaning.

When generic *í* 'you (sg)' introduces a generic referent, as in example (8) above, it cannot be substituted by *a* 'he, she, it', which could only be interpreted as referring anaphorically to some specific referent retrievable from the context. By contrast, in the examples quoted in this section, *í* referring back to a generic noun phrase can always be substituted by *a* 'he, she, it' without any difference in meaning, as illustrated by example (9).

(9) a. *Níŋ   míŋ   ŋa   ń́   soosoo,   í   sí   táa   jee   í   yé   a   juubee.*
      if   REL   PF   1SG contradict 2SG POT   go   there 2SG SUBJ 3SG look
      lit. '[Anyone who contradicts me]$_i$, you$_i$ should go there and look at it.'

      'Anyone who does not believe me should go there and have a look at it.'

   b. *Níŋ   míŋ   ŋa   ń́   soosoo,   a   sí   táa   jee   a   yé   a   juubee.*
      if   REL   PF   1SG contradict 3SG POT   go   there 3SG SUBJ 3SG look
      lit. '[Anyone who contradicts me]$_i$, he/she$_i$ should go there and look at it.'

      same meaning as (a)

In example (10), generic *í* occurs in a conditional sentence similar to those in (8) above, with however the difference that the topic position at the left edge of the sentence is occupied by a generic NP equivalent to English 'any prince', coreferent with *í*.

(10)   *Mansadiŋ   wó   mansadiŋ,   níŋ   í   ñán-ta   mansayáa-lá   Mandiŋ,*
        prince   INDEF prince   if   2SG must-PF reign-INF   Mande
        lit. '[Any prince]$_i$, if you$_i$ were doomed to reign over Mande,

        Suusûu   Súmáŋkúrú   be   í   faa-la   dóróŋ.
        Suusuu   Sumankuru   COP   2SG kill-INF only
        Suusuu Sumankuru would just kill you$_i$.'

        'S.S. would kill any prince who was doomed to reign over Mande.'

In example (11) below, the antecedents of generic *í* are ordinary relative clauses in topic position. Such relative clauses are not inherently generic, and in other contexts, they could lend themselves to specific readings: 'the person whom love has killed' and 'the king whom I serve' respectively. They are interpreted here as generic because of the coreference relation with 2nd person *í*, which (in contrast with 3rd person *a*) can only refer back to generic antecedents.

(11) a. *Kanú   ye   méŋ faa, í   mâŋ   jífa.*
      love   PF   REL   kill   2SG   PF.NEG   die_miserably
      lit. '[The person whom love has killed]ᵢ, youᵢ did not die miserably.'

      'If one is killed by love, one does not die miserably.'

   b. *Ńte   bé   mansâ mêŋ nóoma, í   mâŋ   ñánna   kumbóo-la !*
      1SG   COP   king   REL   after   2SG   PF.NEG   must   pleurer-INF
      lit. '[The king that I serve]ᵢ, youᵢ must not cry !'

      'Whoever he may be, the king that I serve must not cry.'

In example (12), the antecedent of generic *í* is again a free relatives in topic position, but it belongs to another type of relative clauses, which are necessarily interpreted as non-specific: 'any person who tries to cut this tree'.

(12)   *Moo   wó   moo   yé   wo   yíróo   sĕe   faŋ-ó   la,*
      person   INDEF   person   PF   DEM   tree-DEF   cut   cutlass-DEF   OBL
      lit. '[Anyone who tried to cut this tree with a cutlass]ᵢ,

      í   ká   făa   le.
      2SG   IPF   die   FOC
      youᵢ would die.'

      'Anyone trying to cut this tree with a cutlass would die.'

In example (13), the antecedent of generic *í* is *mŏo*, definite form of the noun *mŏo* 'human being', the use of which to express generalizations over sets of human beings has already been illustrated by example (6) above.

(13)   *Wŏ   tum-ôo, mŏo   búká   mansayáa   sotó jaŋ,*
      DEM   time-DEF   person   IPF.NEG   kingship.DEF   get   here
      lit. 'In those days, [the man]ᵢ did not become king here

      fó   níŋ   í   táa-tá   Mandiŋ.
      unless   if   2SG   go-PF   Mande
      unless youᵢ went to Mande.'

      'In those days, one did not become king here without first going to Mande.'

In example (14), the antecedent *moo wó moo* 'anyone' is the subject of the clause to which the first occurrence of generic *í* belongs.

(14)   *Moo   wó   moo   láa-tá   í   fáŋ   na,*
         person   INDEF   person   trust-PF   2SG   self   OBL
         lit. '[anyone]$_i$ trusting in yourself$_i$,

         í   sí   bulá   ñiŋ   túlúŋ-o   to.
         2SG   POT   take_part   DEM   game-DEF   LOC
         you$_i$ may take part in this game.'

         'Anyone trusting in themselves may take part in this game.'

In example (15) too, the first occurrence of generic *í* has its antecedent (the relativizer *mêŋ*) in the same clause.

(15)   *Níŋ   méŋ   ye   ñĭŋ   taamanseer-óo-lu   súutée   í   bála,*
         if   REL   PF   DEM   symptom-DEF-PL   notice   2SG   on
         lit. '[Anyone]$_i$ who notices these symptoms on you$_i$,

         í   sí   táa   kátábáke   í   níŋ   dókítár-óo-lu   ye   ñôo   jé.
         2SG   POT   go   quickly   2SG   with   doctor-DEF-PL   SUBJ   RECIP   see
         you$_i$ should go quickly to consult doctors.'

         'Anyone who notices these symptoms on themselves should go quickly to consult doctors.'

In example (16), in the same way as in several of the preceding examples, a free relative occupies the topic position at the left edge of the sentence, and generic *í* is included in the main clause. However, the antecedent of generic *í* is not the free relative, but *mŏo* 'the man', the subject of the relative clause.

(16)   *Mŏo   ye   mêŋ   fíi,   wŏ   le   ka   fálíŋ   í   ye.*
         person.DEF   PF   REL   SOW   DEM   FOC   IPF grow   2SG   BEN
         'What [the man]$_i$ has sown, this is what grows for you$_i$.'

         'One reaps what one has sown.'

In example (17), the antecedent of generic *í* in genitive function is *mŏo* 'the man' in subject function in the same clause.

(17)   *Mŏo   ñán-ta   í   lá   mus-óo   mara-la   báake.*
         person.DEF   must-PF   2SG   GEN   wife-DEF   look_after-INF   carefully
         lit. [The man]$_i$ must look after your$_i$ wife carefully.'
         'One must look after one's wife carefully.'

An finally, example (18) illustrates the same syntactic configuration, but with generic *í* included in a topicalized noun phrase preceding *mŏo* 'the man' in subject position.

(18)   *Í   báadíŋkéw-o,   mŏo   si   sílá   a   la.*
         2SG   brother-DEF   person.DEF   POT   be_afraid   3SG   OBL
         lit. 'your$_i$ brother, [the man]$_i$ may be afraid of him.'

         'One may be afraid of one's own brother.'

To summarize, in Mandinka, generic *í* may refer back to non-specific noun phrases making explicit the domain within which the generalization applies (either the whole set of human beings, or a proper subset thereof), and there is no obvious syntactic restriction on the establishment of such coreference chains. Generic *í* may even precede the expression it is co-referential with.

In the generic use of *í* with a discourse antecedent, the selection of a particular semantic type of antecedent (non-specific noun phrases or relative clauses) seems to be the only thing that distinguishes the behavior of generic *í* from that of third person pronouns. When *í* 'you' introduces a non-specific human referent, as in example (8) above, it is of course not equivalent to *a* 'he/she/it', which in the absence of an overt antecedent is interpreted as referring to some specific entity whose identity is recoverable from the context. By contrast, when it resumes a non-specific noun phrase or relative clause, second person *í* can be replaced by third person *a* without any difference in meaning. Not surprisingly, generic *í* is particularly common in proverbs, and when working with consultants on proverbs such as that quoted above as example (16), I observed that the consultants indifferently quote the same proverbs with alternative formulations in which the same non-specific noun phrase or relative clause is resumed by either a second or a third person pronoun.

5. A possible grammaticalization path

In this section, I discuss a possible scenario according to which the reanalysis of a construction widely attested cross-linguistically may have resulted in coreference chains of the type described in Section 4.

Given the observations presented above, there is no difficulty in analyzing example (19) as involving a coreference chain in which a topicalized noun referring to a kind constitutes the antecedent of generic *í*.

(19)   *Furêe,   níŋ í   yé   í   nukuŋ í   kuubáa-lu   ma,*
       corpse.DEF   if   2SG PF   REFL hide   2SG   washer.DEF-PL OBL
       lit. '[the corpse]$_i$, if you$_i$ hide from the persons who must wash you$_i$,

       í   níŋ kós-óo   le   ka   táa alikiyáama.
       2SG   with uncleanness-DEF   FOC IPF go   next_world
       you$_i$ go unclean to the next world.'

        'A corpse hiding from those who must wash it goes unclean to the next world.'

There is however another possible interpretation of this sentence, since Mandinka has no vocative marker, and the same definite form is equally used in Mandinka for common nouns referring to kinds and for common nouns in vocative function. The noun in left-dislocated position in example (19) can therefore equally be understood as a pseudo-vocative directed to a virtual referent of *furée* 'corpse': 'Corpse, if you hide from those who must wash you, you go unclean to the next world!'

The beginning of example (20) below exhibits the same ambiguity, but the use of an imperative in the last part of this sentence shows that *díndíŋo* must be interpreted here as a vocative. [13]

(20) *Díndíŋ-o,   níŋ í   táa-tá duláa   to,*
      child-DEF   if   2SG   go-PF   place.DEF   LOC
      'Child, if you go somewhere,

      níŋ í   yé   keebáa   tará jee,
      if   2SG PF   old_person.DEF   find   there
      and if you find and old person there,

      kána   hórómántáŋyáa sambá a   kaŋ.
      SUBJ.NEG disrespect.DEF   bring   3SG   on
      do not be disrespectful to them!'

Constructions with a second person pronoun coreferent with a pseudo-vocative directed to the potential referents of a noun are extremely common, cross-linguistically, as a possible discourse strategy for expressing generalizations, as illustrated in (21) by a famous verse from the pen of the French poet Charles Baudelaire, and in (22) by a Dutch proverb.

(21) *Homme   libre,   toujours   tu   chériras   la   mer !*
      man   free   always   you   will.cherish the   sea
      'Free man, you will always cherish the sea!'

(22) *Als de   vos   de   passie   preekt, boer   pas op ye   kippen!*
      when the   fox   the   compassion preaches farmer   watch   your chicken
      'When the fox preaches compassion, farmer watch your chickens.'

Starting from that, it seems reasonable to suppose that the coreference chains involving generic *í* described in Section 4 originate from the reanalysis of such constructions. Example (18) illustrates the type of context in which, in a language in which nouns in vocative function are not formally distinct from topicalized nouns referring to kinds, a second person pronoun quite regularly resuming a pseudo-vocative directed to a virtual addressee in sentences expressing generalizations may be reanalyzed as resuming a non-specific noun phrase in topic function. This is probably what occurred in the history of Manding (or in the history of another West African language from which the construction may have spread to neighboring languages). The use of the second person pronoun as a resumptive pronoun taking non-specific noun phrases or relative clauses as its antecedents was subsequently extended to contexts in which the non-specific antecedent is not interpretable as a pseudo-vocative, as illustrated by the examples quoted in Section 4.

6. Conclusion

West African languages are rarely mentioned in general discussions of impersonality. In this article, on the example of the generic use of the second person singular pronoun in

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[13] In Mandinka, the imperative singular is characterized by the absence of anything in the position normally occupied by a subject noun phrase. In the positive imperative, no predicative marker is present either, whereas the negative imperative is marked by *kána* 'negative subjunctive'.

Mandinka, I have tried to show that West African language data may contribute to a better understanding of the phenomena traditionally grouped under the label 'impersonal', and in particular of so-called R-impersonals, by revealing possible connections that are not apparent in the languages for which the study of impersonality has a long-standing tradition.

Abbreviations

BEN = benefactive, COP = copula, DEF = definite, DEM = demonstrative, FOC = focalization, GEN = genitive, INDEF = indefinite, INF = infinitive, IPF = imperfective, LOC = locative, NEG = negative, OBL = oblique, OBLIG = obligative, PF = perfective, PL = plural, POT = potential, RECIP = reciprocal, REFL = reflexive, REL = relativizer, SG = singular, SUBJ = subjunctive.

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