The generic use
of the second person singular pronoun
in Mandinka¹

Denis Creissels
University of Lyon
denis.creissels@univ-lyon2.fr
http://deniscreissels.fr

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

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.), but also in languages whose genetic relationship with Mandinka is, at most, very remote, for example, Wolof. 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). 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.

6 This paper has benefited from the support of the French National Research Agency (ANR) within the frame of the ‘Sénélangues’ project (ANR-09-BLAN-0326).
largely coincides with the sphere of influence of the pre-colonial state of Kaabu. Speakers of Mandinka call themselves Mandiŋkóolu (singular: Mandiŋkôo) and designate their language as mandiŋkakáŋo. 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.

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(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.’

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 Mandiŋkóo 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:
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-ôo ye  díndíŋ-o  kúsândí  dimbáa ma.
dog-DEF  PF  child-DEF  save  fire-DEF OBL
‘The dog saved the child from the fire.’

b. A  ye  a  kúsândí  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 (māŋ) than in intransitive predication (mâŋ);
– the negative copula used in the function of imperfective negative marker has a different tonal structure in transitive predication (tê) 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-ôo  boyi-ta  síl-ôo  kaŋ.
tree-DEF  fall-PF  road-DEF  on
‘The tree fell down on the road.’

b. New-ô  ka  kómóŋ  jý-o  kóno.
iron-DEF  IPF  rust  water-DEF  in
‘Iron rusts in water.’

c. Kew-ô  māŋ  kúmá  mus-ôo  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)  
\[ \text{Kew-ó lafi-ta kód-óo la.} \]
\[ \text{man-DEF want-PF money-DEF OBL} \]
\[ \text{‘The man wants money.’} \]

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 postpositional 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 i (hightoned) ‘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.  
\[ \text{Mǒo ka küm-ôo fó le bii, sãama a yé a báayi.} \]
\[ \text{person.DEF IPF word-DEF say FOC today tomorrow 3SG SUBJ 3SG cancel} \]
\[ \text{‘One says something today, and retracts tomorrow.’} \]
\[ \text{lit. ‘The man says a word today ...’} \]

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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’ → báa, mǒo ‘human being’ → mǒo, kèe ‘man’ → kewô or kèe), 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 móo maa, fó a dálámáayáa-ta.*
lion-DEF IPF.NEG 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 tábi 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 ŋiniŋkáa a ka měŋ 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 Suŋjátá 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 fánánj 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).
Denis Creissels, *The generic use of the second person singular pronoun in Mandinka*, p. 7/12

*wo mú jolú le ti?*

DEM COP how much FOC OBL

how much is it?’

d. *Níŋ í yé sól-ô barama, fó í yé sílá kút-ô ŋûńíŋ.*

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 máŋ súra.*

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 ñ’ soosoo, í sì táa jee í yé a juubee.*

if REL PF 1SG contradict 2SG POT go there 2SG SUBJ 3SG look

lit. ‘[Anyone who contradicts me], you 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 ñ’ soosoo, a sì táa jee a yé a juubee.*

if REL PF 1SG contradict 3SG POT go there 3SG SUBJ 3SG look

lit. ‘[Anyone who contradicts me], he/she 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 ŋán-ta mansayáa-lá Mandiŋ,*

prince INDEF prince if 2SG must-PF reign-INF Mande

lit. ‘[Any prince], if you 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.’

‘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.

    love PF REL kill 2SG PF.NEG die.miserably
    lit. ‘[The person whom love has killed], you did not die miserably.’

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

b. Ñte bé mansâ mëŋ nóoma, í mâŋ ñána kumbóo-la !
    1SG COP king REL after 2SG PF.NEG must pleurer-INF
    lit. ‘[The king that I serve], you 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 sêe 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],

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

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

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

   unless if 2SG go-PF Mande
    unless you 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.
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(14) *Moo wó moo láá-tá́ í fáŋ na,*

person INDEF person trust-PF 2SG self OBL

lit. ‘[anyone]_{1} trusting in yourself_{1},’

í sí bulá ŋiŋ túlíŋ-o to.

2SG POT take_part DEM game-DEF LOC

you_{1} 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 mêŋ ye ŋiŋ taamanseer-óo-lu súutée í bála,*

if REL PF DEM symptom-DEF-PL notice 2SG on

lit. ‘[Anyone]_{1} who notices these symptoms on you_{1},’

í sí táa kátdábke í ŋiŋ dókítár-óo-lu ye ŋóo jé.

2SG POT go quickly 2SG with doctor-DEF-PL SUBJ RECIP see

you_{1} 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 mǒo ‘the man’, the subject of the relative clause.

(16) *Mǒo ye mêŋ fíi, wó le ka fálíŋ í ye.*

person.DEF PF REL sow DEM FOC IPF grow 2SG BEN

‘What [the man]_{1} has sown, this is what grows for you_{1}.’

‘One reaps what one has sown.’

In example (17), the antecedent of generic í in genitive function is mǒo ‘the man’ in subject function in the same clause.

(17) *Mǒo ŋán-ta í lá mus-óo mara-la báake.*

person.DEF must-PF 2SG GEN wife-DEF look_after-INF carefully

lit. [The man]_{1} must look after your_{1} 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 mǒo ‘the man’ in subject position.

(18) *Í báadiŋké-w-o, mǒo si sílá a la.*

2SG brother-DEF person.DEF POT be_afraid 3SG OBL

lit. ‘[your]_{1} brother, [the man]_{1} 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) *Furée, ní í yé í nuku í kuubá-lu ma,*
    corpse.DEF if 2SG PF REFL hide 2SG washer.DEF-PL OBL
    lit. ‘[the corpse] if you hide from the persons who must wash you,  
    í ní kós-óo le ka táa alikiyáama.
    2SG with uncleanness-DEF FOC IPF go next_world
    you 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

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(20) } & \text{Díndíŋ-o, níŋ i táa-tá duláa to,} \\
& \text{child-DEF if 2SG go-PF place-DEF LOC} \\
& \text{‘Child, if you go somewhere,} \\
& \text{níŋ i yé keebáá tará jee,} \\
& \text{if 2SG PF old_person-DEF find there} \\
& \text{and if you find and old person there,} \\
& \text{kána hórómántáŋyáa sambá a kaŋ.} \\
& \text{SUBJ.NEG disrespect-DEF bring 3SG on} \\
& \text{do not be disrespectful to them!’}
\end{align*}
\]

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.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(21) } & \text{Homme libre, toujours tu chériras la mer!} \\
& \text{man free always you will cherish the sea} \\
& \text{‘Free man, you will always cherish the sea!’}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(22) } & \text{Als de vos de passie preekt, boer pas op ye kippen!} \\
& \text{when the fox the compassion preaches farmer watch your chicken} \\
& \text{‘When the fox preaches compassion, farmer watch your chickens.’}
\end{align*}
\]

Starting from that, it seems reasonable to suppose that the coreference chains involving generic i 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

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.

**References**


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