This is the text of a series of 3 lectures I gave at the University of Tartu (June 02 – 03 2008)
A previous version of this text was presented at the ALT VII conference (Paris, sept. 2007)

Impersonal and related constructions:
a typological approach

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1. Introduction

So-called impersonal constructions constitute a major topic in the syntactic description of European languages. Similar constructions have been identified in languages spoken in various areas of the world and belonging to different language families, and some types of impersonal constructions have been widely discussed by generativists, but most typologists, including those working on alignment typology, have not given much attention to impersonal constructions. For example, 'impersonal' does not figure in the subject index of Dixon's *Ergativity* (Dixon 1994). Among relatively recent and influential typologically oriented handbooks of syntax, it is symptomatic that 'impersonal' does not figure in the subject index of Dik 1997 or Van Valin & LaPolla 1997 either, and that impersonal passives are the only type of impersonal constructions mentioned in the subject index of Givón 2001.

The situation is however changing, as evidenced by several recent or forthcoming typologically oriented publications addressing various aspects of the analysis of impersonal constructions (see in particular Aikhenvald, Dixon & Onishi (eds.) 2001, Bhaskararao, P. & K.V. Subbarao (eds.). 2004, Siewierska (ed.) Forthcoming, Donohue & Wichmann (eds.) Forthcoming).

This paper is an extended version of my presentation at ALT VII. Its aim is to sketch out a classification of the constructions designated as impersonal constructions in various descriptive traditions, and to discuss their status within a broader framework of syntactic typology, in particular from the point of view of alignment typology.

In section 2, I put forward a notion of *accusative / ergative alignment* generalizing the notion of intransitive alignment (or S alignment) on which alignment typology has concentrated in the last decades.

In section 3, I introduce a distinction between *simple*, *special* and *covert* impersonal constructions.

Sections 4, 5 and 6 are devoted to simple, special and covert impersonals respectively.

Section 7 discusses the relevance of impersonal constructions to alignment typology, and the possibility to find the equivalent of the three types of impersonal constructions in languages whose predominant alignment patterns differ from those of the languages in which impersonal constructions have been traditionally recognized.

Section 8 examines the question of exceptional valency patterns in predominantly ergative languages ('anti-impersonal' constructions).

In section 9, I propose a few remarks about the emergence of exceptional valency patterns.

2. Extended accusative / ergative alignment

In the last decades, alignment typology has concentrated on a notion of alignment involving three primitives, A, P (or O) and S. An obvious limitation of this approach is that it considers the alignment properties of monovalent verbs only, leaving aside constructions involving semantically bivalent verbs whose arguments are not simply aligned with the core arguments of prototypical action verbs (Lazard's 'classes mineures de verbes biactanciels' – Lazard 1994:146-158).[1] Since impersonal constructions are not limited to semantically monovalent verbs, a clarification of this point is crucial before discussing their status from the point of view of alignment typology.

The following definition, which includes no reference to S, extends the notion of accusative / ergative alignment to any predicative construction not fully aligned with the prototypical transitive construction, irrespective of the semantic valency of the verb involved:

For each coding or behavioral property marking a contrast between the two core arguments A and P of the prototypical transitive construction, predicative constructions that are not fully aligned with the prototypical transitive construction can be characterized as showing:

- **accusative alignment** *if they include an argument aligned with A for the property in question, but no argument aligned with P,*
- **ergative alignment** *if they include an argument aligned with P, but no argument aligned with A,*
- **neutral alignment** *if they include neither an argument aligned with A, nor an argument aligned with P.*

For example, in Akhvakh, a predominantly ergative language, (1a) illustrates the construction of a prototypical action verb: A in the ergative case contrasts with P in the absolutive case, and the verb (in this example: the copula in auxiliary function) agrees in gender and number with P. (1b) illustrates ergative alignment in case marking and verb agreement in the construction of a semantically monovalent verb. (1c) and (1d) illustrate constructions that are, neither fully aligned with the prototypical transitive construction, nor intransitive in the narrow sense of this term. According to the definition put forward above, (1c) shows accusative alignment in case marking (it includes an ergative argument but no absolutive argument) and in gender-number agreement (in the absence of an argument aligned with P, the verb does not show variations in gender and number, and takes the neuter

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[1] See Bickel Forthcoming for an alternative approach to the basic notions of alignment typology. On the limitations of traditional alignment typology, and the necessity of a finer-grained approach to the question of lexically driven alignment splits, see also Nichols Forthcoming.

singular form by default),[2] whereas (1d) shows ergative alignment in case marking (it includes an absolutive argument but no ergative argument) and in gender-number agreement (the verb agrees with the absolutive argument).

(1)   *Akhvakh*

    a. *wašo-de   mašina   q'elaje   godi*
       boy$_O$-ERG   car   repair.CVB   COP$_{SGN}$
       'The boy has repaired the car'

    b. *waša ħečo   gudi*
       boy   sneeze.CVB$_{SGM}$ COP$_{SGM}$
       'The boy has sneezed'

    c. *wašo-de   jašo-ga eq̇aje   godi*
       boy$_O$-ERG   girl-LAT look_at.CVB COP$_{SGN}$
       'The boy has looked at the girl'

    d. *wašo-ƛa   jaše harigwe gidi*
       boy$_O$-AFF   girl   see.CVB   COP$_{SGF}$
       'The boy has seen the girl'

In Basque (another predominantly ergative language), (2) illustrates a bivalent verb in a construction showing accusative alignment in case marking and verb agreement: this construction includes an ergative argument and a dative argument, but no absolutive argument, and the apparent 3rd person singular P agreement mark must be analyzed as default, since it is impossible to insert an NP in P role.

(2)   *Basque*

    Koldo-k   Gorka-ri   deitu   dio
    Koldo-ERG   Gorka-DAT   call.PFV   AUX.PRS.A3SG.P3SG.D3SG
    'Koldo called Gorka'

In Tamil (a predominantly accusative language), (3a) illustrates the construction of a prototypical action verb. (3b) involves a bivalent verb which is not a prototypical action verb but whose construction is fully aligned with the prototypical transitive construction, whereas (3c) involves a bivalent verb whose construction shows ergative alignment, with an accusative argument but no nominative argument, and default 3rd person neuter agreement.

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[2] Within theoretical frameworks postulating the presence of 'silent (or invisible) words' in syntactic representations, default agreement is analyzed as agreement with a 'silent dummy/expletive' – see a.o. Perlmutter 1983, Perlmutter & Moore 2002.

(3)   *Tamil*

   a. *(avanga)   oru   aaʈʈ-e   koɳɳaanga*
      (3PL)   one   goat-ACC kill.PST.A3PL
      'They killed a goat'

   b. *(naan)   aruɳ-e   paartteen*
      (1SG)   Arun-ACC see.PST.A1SG
      'I saw Arun'

   c. *ena-kku   aruɳ-e   piɖikkum*
      1SG-DAT   Arun-ACC like.FUT.3N
      'I like Arun'

In Latin (another predominantly accusative language), (4) illustrates a bivalent verb in a construction showing ergative alignment in case marking and verb agreement (with an accusative argument but no nominative argument, and an apparent 3rd person singular agreement mark with an A argument that, given the impossibility to have an NP governing verb agreement in this construction, must be analyzed as default).

(4)   *Latin*

   ut   me   pigeat   stultitiæ   meæ
   so that   1SG.ACC   displease.SBJV.A3SG stupidity.SG.GEN my.SG.GEN
   'so that I am displeased by my stupidity'

3. Simple, special and covert impersonal constructions

In languages in which the general rule is that predicative constructions include a subject fully aligned with the agent of prototypical transitive verbs, traditional grammarians use the term *impersonal* both for 'impersonal subjects' and for various types of predicative constructions that do not show the canonical manifestations of a subject.

In recent times, some authors have rejected the use of *impersonal* for constructions traditionally identified as impersonal but including 'non-canonical subjects', and at the same time, the term *impersonal* has been extended to constructions not considered impersonal by traditional grammarians, but in which the term showing the coding characteristics that suggest identifying it as a subject is devoid of the behavioral properties considered typical of subjects.

Given the lack of consensus in the use of the term *impersonal*, and the obvious heterogeneity of the constructions to which it has been applied in various traditions, I will not try to propose a general definition of these constructions. I will rather propose to deal separately with at least three types of constructions I will call respectively *simple*, *special* and *covert* impersonal constructions:

– In languages in which accusative alignment predominates, *simple impersonal constructions* concern verbs occurring in canonical predicative constructions, and involve no change in the argument structure or in the encoding of terms other than the subject; their only particularity is that an arbitrary interpretation of the subject is triggered by other means than the use of a canonical indefinite NP in subject role.

– *Special impersonal constructions*, either involve verbs that cannot combine with a referential NP showing the coding characteristics of canonical subjects, or deviate from canonical constructions of the same verb in such a way that the introduction of a referential NP showing the coding characteristics of canonical subjects implies formal changes in the rest of the construction or a modification of argument structure.

– *Covert impersonal constructions* include a non-dummy term showing the coding characteristics of canonical subjects, but devoid of the corresponding behavioral properties.

Special impersonal constructions may include *dummy subjects* that occupy the same syntactic slot as pronouns semantically involved in a mechanism of anaphoric / deictic subject identification, and possibly behave in the same way in some syntactic mechanisms (for example in raising / control constructions), but do not contribute to the semantic content of the clause.

Special and covert impersonal constructions may include *non-canonical subjects* showing behavioral properties characteristic of the agent of prototypical action verbs, but differing from it in their coding characteristics. This question has been widely debated in recent literature – in addition to the various contributions included in Aikhenvald, Dixon & Onishi (eds.) 2001, see a.o. Munro 2007 on the Arawakan language Garifuna.

4. Simple impersonal constructions

Functionally, simple impersonal constructions must be characterized with reference to the particular type of arbitrary reading they admit, and the semantic restrictions they may impose on the understood subject. Formally, they can be divided into *unmarked* simple impersonal constructions using the same verb forms as predicative constructions with a referential NP in subject role, and *marked* simple impersonal constructions involving morphological marking of the verb.

4.1. Functional types of simple impersonal constructions

4.1.1. Types of arbitrary reading

Cabredo Hoffher 2003 shows the necessity to distinguish at least five types of 3rd plural arbitrary readings: 'specific existential', as in (5a), 'vague existential', as in (5b), 'inferred existential', as in (5c), 'corporate', as in (5d), and 'universal', as in (5e).

(5)   *Spanish*

  a. *Tocan   a la   puerta*
     knock.PRS.A3PL to DEF.SGF door.SG
     'Someone is knocking at the door'

  b. *Han   encontrado una   motocicleta en el   patio*
     AUX.A3PL find.GER   INDEF.SGF motorbike.SG in DEF.SGM courtyard.SG
     'A motorbike has been found in the courtyard'

  c. *Aquí han   comido mariscos*
     here AUX.A3PL   eat.PTCP seafood.PL
     'Here someone has eaten seafood'

  d. *Volvieron   a aumentar el   IVA*
     return.PFV.A3PL to raise.INF   DEF.SGM VAT
     'They raised the VAT again'

  e. *En España hablan   español*
     in   Spain   speak.PRS.A3PL Spanish
     'In Spain they speak Spanish'

As illustrated by ex. (5), in Spanish, depending on the context, the same null-subject construction with the verb in the 3rd person plural can have any of these five types of readings, but other examples discussed by Cabredo Hoffher show the necessity to distinguish them.

4.1.2. Semantic restrictions on the understood subject

Simple impersonals implying an unspecific but [+human] referent are particularly common, but this restriction on arbitrary subjects is not universal, as shown by ex. (10b) below.

Another possible restriction on the understood subject is the exclusion of speech act participants. As noted by Cabredo Hofherr, this restriction seems to be general in the case of arbitrary readings of 3rd person plural subjects, but it does not hold for arbitrary readings of 2nd person subjects, and it does not hold for impersonal reflexives either. For example, (5e) above implies that the speaker him/herself does not live in Spain, whereas (6) can perfectly be uttered by a person who is resident in Spain.

(6)   *Spanish*

  En España se   habla   español
  in   Spain   REFL speak.PRS.A3SG Spanish
  'In Spain Spanish is spoken'

4.2. Unmarked simple impersonal constructions

Simple impersonal constructions may involve null subjects, dedicated impersonal pronouns occurring only in subject role (such as French *on* or German *man*), or subject pronouns normally used with an anaphoric or deictic interpretation.

In languages in which verbs obligatorily agree with their subject, the form of the verb used in simple impersonal constructions involving null subjects must also be taken into account.

On dedicated impersonal pronouns, see a.o. Egerland 2003 and references therein.

The possibility of arbitrary readings of sentences with a 3rd person plural subject pronoun, or of null-subject constructions with the verb in the 3rd person plural, illustrated by ex. (5) above, is cross-linguistically particularly common. Ex. (7) provides an additional illustration.

(7)   *Russian*

    Včera   tancevali   na   stole
    yesterday dance.PST.PL on   table.SG.LOC
    'Yesterday people were dancing on the table'

A 'universal' interpretation of 2nd person singular subject pronouns or of null-subject constructions with the verb in the 2nd person singular is also very common.

Ex. (8) & (9) illustrate a less common type of null-subject construction with a universal reading, found a.o. in Finnish (Holmberg Forthcoming) and Brazilian Portuguese (on arbitrary null subjects in Brazilian Portuguese, and a comparison with European Portuguese, see Barbosa & al. 2003). In this type, the verb in the 3rd person singular.

(8)   *Finnish* (Holmberg Forthcoming)

    Tässä   istuu   mukavasti
    here   sit.PRS.A3SG comfortably
    'One can sit comfortably here'

(9)   *Brazilian Portuguese*

    Aquí não pode   nadar
    here   NEG   can.PRS.A3SG swim.INF
    'One can't swim here'

In French, the short form *ça* of the neuter demonstrative pronoun *cela* 'that', when filling the subject clitic slot, shows a particular semantic behavior. In particular, in this position (and only in this position), *ça* is ambiguous between an anaphoric / deictic reading and an arbitrary reading, and the arbitrary reading of *ça* can involve animate as well as inanimate referents, as illustrated by ex. (10).

(10) *French*

    a. *Hier   soir   ça   dansait   sur   la   table*
       yesterday evening   that   dance.IPRF.A3SG on   DEF.SGF table.SG
       'Yesterday evening people were dancing on the table'

    b. *Ça   cogne   dans le   moteur*
       that   knock.PRS.A3SG in   DEF.SGM motor.SG
       'Something is knocking in the motor'

Among predominantly accusative languages ignoring verb agreement, Mandarin Chinese illustrates the possibility of an arbitrary reading of null-subject constructions. In Mandarin Chinese, null subjects commonly receive an anaphoric / deictic interpretation, but an arbitrary reading is possible too, at least with predicates including a modal auxiliary, as illustrated by ex. (11).

(11) *Mandarin Chinese* (Chang 1992)

    a. *Yinggai qichuang   le*
       should   rise   SFP
       'One should rise'

    b. *Keyi xiyan   ma?*
       may   smoke   Q
       'May one smoke?'

    c. *Yao chenggong,   jiu   yingdang   nuli*
       want   succeed   then   should   persist
       'If one wants to succeed, one should persist'

4.3. Marked simple impersonal constructions

As discussed a.o. by Blevins (Blevins 2003), the verb in simple impersonal constructions may show reflexive marking, passive marking, or a specific type of morphological marking. This type of construction may involve null subjects or dummy subjects. In contrast with unmarked simple impersonal constructions, it seems that, in languages having obligatory verb agreement, verbs in marked simple impersonal constructions are always in the 3rd person singular.

4.3.1. Impersonal reflexives

This type occurs a.o. in Spanish. (12a) illustrates the canonical transitive construction of *encontrar* 'find'. In (12b), the construction is de-transitivized by the presence of the reflexive clitic *se*; the NP in post-verbal position governs verb agreement, and the construction is ambiguous between a reciprocal and a passive reading. In (12c), the NP in post-verbal position is introduced by the same accusative preposition *a* as in (12a) and does not govern

verb agreement, and there is no possibility to add an NP governing verb agreement. Consequently, (12c) is a null-subject variant of the basic construction of *encontrar* in which reflexive morphology blocks the expression of the argument normally represented by a subject NP and triggers an arbitrary interpretation.

(12) *Spanish*

    a. *El   policía   encontró   a   los   ladrones*
       DEF.SGM policeman.SG find.PFV.A3SG ACC DEF.PLM thief.PL
       'The policeman found the thieves'

    b. *Se   encontraron   los   ladrones*
       REFL find.PFV.A3PL DEF.PLM thief.PL
       1. 'The thieves met'
       2. 'The thieves were found'

    c. *Se   encontró   a   los   ladrones*
       REFL find.PFV.A3SG ACC DEF.PLM thief.PL
       'The thieves were found'

In this connection it is interesting to observe the contrast between Brazilian Portuguese, in which a subjectless construction with the verb in the 3rd person singular may have an arbitrary reading – ex. (9) above, and European Portuguese, which expresses the same meaning by means of a construction involving the reflexive clitic – ex. (13).

(13) *European Portuguese*

    Aquí não se   pode   nadar
    here NEG   REFL   can.PRS.A3SG swim.INF
    'One can't swim here'

For a generative analysis of this type of impersonal construction, see Dobrovie-Sorin 1998.

4.3.2. Impersonal passives

In French – ex. (14), the same result (subject blocking and arbitrary interpretation of the corresponding argument, in a construction otherwise identical with the basic canonical construction of the same verb) can be achieved by combining a dummy 3rd person masculine singular pronoun and passive morphology.

(14) *French*

    a. *Le   president a   pris   une   décision*
       DEF.SGM president.SG have.PRS.A3SG take.PTCP INDEF.SGF decision.SG
       'The president took a decision'

b. *Une*   *décision*   *a*   *été*   *prise*   *(par le*   *president)*
INDEF.SGF   decision.SG   have.PRS.A3SG   be.PTCP   take.PTCP.SGF   by   DEF.SGM   president.SG
'A decision was taken (by the president)' – canonical passive

c. *Il*   *a*   *été*   *pris*   *une*   *décision*
3SGM   have.PRS.A3SG   be.PTCP   take.PTCP   INDEF.SGF   decision.SG
'A decision was taken' – impersonal passive, lit. 'It was taken a decision'

Ex. (15) & (16) illustrate the impersonal passive of Tswana, a language in which the use of impersonal passives is fully productive not only with transitive verbs – ex. (15), but also with intransitive verbs – ex. (16).

(15) *Tswana*

a. *Màbúrú*   *á-rék-íl-é*   *díkgòmǫ́*
6.Afrikaner   A3:6-buy-PRF-FIN   8/10.cow
'The Afrikaners have bought (the) cows'

b. *Dìkgòmǫ́*   *dí-rèk-íl-w-è*   *(kę́*   *Màbúrù)*
8/10.cow   A3:8/10-buy-PRF-PASS-FIN   by   6.Afrikaner
'The cows have been bought (by (the) Afrikaners)' – canonical passive

c. *Gǫ́-rék-íl-w-é*   *díkgòmǫ́*
A3:15/17-buy-PRF-PASS-FIN   8/10.cow
'Some cows have been bought' – impersonal passive, lit. 'There has been bought cows'

(16) *Tswana*

a. *Kítsǫ́*   *ǫ́-bù-íl-è*
1.Kitso   A-3:1-speak-PRF-FIN
'Kitso has spoken'

b. *Gǫ́-bù-íl-w-è*
A3:15/17-speak-PRF-PASS-FIN
'People have spoken' – impersonal passive, lit. 'There has been spoken'

On impersonal passives, see in particular Comrie 1977, Siewierska 1984:93-126.

4.3.3. Simple impersonals involving specific verb forms

Ex. (17) illustrates the use of specific forms of the Finnish verb in simple impersonal constructions.

(17) *Finnish*

    Täällä   *puhu-taan*   *saksaa*
    here   speak-IMPERS.PRS   German
    'German is spoken here / They speak German here'

A dedicated impersonal form of the verb is found in Estonian too – Torn 2002. These forms, misleadingly called 'passive' in many Finnish and Estonian grammars, occur only in a null subject construction identical in all other respects with the canonical construction of the same verb – Blevins 2003:482-9. On the contrast between this construction and the unmarked impersonal construction illustrated by ex. (8) above, see Holmberg Forthcoming.

An impersonal marker is found in Hausa, with however a behavior departing from that of typical impersonal markers: the Hausa impersonal marker is found most commonly in clauses including no NP representing the subject agreement, triggering an arbitrary reading, but it also occurs in a semantically marked construction including an NP that represents the S/A argument but does not govern verb agreement (Newman 2000:270-275).

Polish has the three types of marked simple impersonal constructions: impersonal reflexive – ex. (18), impersonal passive – ex. (19), and an impersonal construction in which the verb takes the dedicated impersonal ending *-no/-to* – ex. (20). On these constructions, see Siewierka 1988, Kibort 2003, Blevins 2003, and references therein. Ex. (20) shows that, in the *-no/-to* construction, the understood subject can control gerunds and reflexives. More generally, this form belongs to a type of impersonals that "pattern syntactically with synthetic verb forms that incorporate a subject argument" and differ from them only in that the suppressed subject receives a human indefinite interpretation – Blevins 2003:482.

(18) *Polish* (Kibort 2003)

    a. *Tutaj*   *się*   *tańczyło*
       here   REFL   dance.PST.A3SGN
       'There was dancing here'

    b. *Tu* *się* *pije*   *wódkę*
       here   REFL drink.PRS.A3SG   vodka.SG.ACC
       'One drinks vodka here'

(19) *Polish* (Kibort 2003)

    Tutaj   *było*   *tańczone*
    here   be.PST.A3SGN   dance.PTCP.SGN
    'There was dancing here'

(20) *Polish* (Kibort 2003)

    a. *Tutaj*   *tańczono*
       here   dance.IMPERS
       'There was dancing here'

b. *Zakończywszy   posiłek   rozpoczęto   dyskusję*
finish.GER   meal.SG   begin.IMPERS   discussion.SG.ACC
'Having finished the meal, they began the discussion'

c. *Oglądano   swoje   zbjory*
look at.IMPERS   POSS.REFL.PL.ACC   collection.PL.ACC
'One looked at one's collection'

Depending on the individual verbs, Nahuatl uses three distinct morphological operations to derive impersonal forms of intransitives: (a) some intransitive verbs take the suffix *-lo* also used in passive derivation of transitive verbs – ex. (21), (b) others take the 'introversive' prefix *tla-* also used with transitive verbs to represent an unspecific inanimate object – ex. (22), (c) a third group of intransitive verbs takes a special impersonal suffix *-hua* – ex. (23). Note that, in Nahuatl, impersonalization can apply to intransitives derived from transitives (by means of either reflexive/middle derivation, or object blocking derivation), but not directly to transitives – Launey 1981, Launey 1994.

(21) *Nahuatl* (Launey 1981)

a. *Mayāna   in   pilli*
A3SG.be_hungry.PRS   DEF   child
'The child is hungry'

b. *Mayāna-lo*
A3SG.be_hungry-PASS.PRS
'People are hungry'

(22) *Nahuatl* (Launey 1981)

a. *Popōca   in   tepetl*
A3SG.smoke.PRS DEF   mountain
'The mountain is smoking'

b. *Tla-popōca*
A3SG.INTRV-smoke.PRS
'Something is smoking'

(23) *Nahuatl* (Launey 1981)

a. *Tzàtzi   in   pilli*
A3SG.scream.PRS   DEF   child
'The child is screaming'

b. *Tzàtzī-hua*
A3SG.scream-IMPERS.PRS
'Somebody is screaming'

Simple impersonals involving specific verb forms are not uncommon, but their existence is often masked by the label 'passive' traditionally attached to them in the description of many languages in which such forms occur. In addition to that, some typological accounts do not distinguish them clearly from passives, for example Dryer & Keenan 2007, or Givón 2001, vol. II:134-141, who subsumes all subtypes of marked simple impersonal constructions under the appellation 'non-promotional passives', irrespective of the particular kind of morphological marking they involve.

4.3.4. The origin of impersonal markers

Among the various imaginable scenarios capable of resulting in the creation of a dedicated impersonal marker, French illustrates the possibility of a grammaticalization path *impersonal pronoun → impersonal marker*. Another illustration, from the Bantu language Lunda, will be presented in section 4.4

French grammars uniformly analyze *on* as an impersonal pronoun filling the subject clitic slot, but there is evidence that, in one of its uses, *on* has lost the pronominal properties it still shows in its other uses. As shown by ex. (24), 'universal' *on* can be the antecedent of a possessive, and therefore must be identified as a pronoun, whereas 'existential' *on* cannot, which can be viewed as evidence that, in this use (and only in this use), *on* has ceased to be a pronoun and has been grammaticalized as an impersonal marker.

(24) *French*

a. *On$_i$ ne prête pas ses$_i$ habits*
   one   NEG lend.PRS.A3SG NEG POSS3SG.PL clothe.PL
   'One does not lend one's clothes' (universal *on*)

b. *On a oublié un chapeau ici*
   one AUX.PRS.A3SG forget.PTCP INDEF.SGM hat.PL   here
   'Someone has forgotten a hat here' (existential *on*)

c. **On$_i$ a oublié son$_i$ chapeau ici*
   one AUX.PRS.A3SG forget.PTCP POSS3SG.SGM hat.PL   here
   would be OK with the meaning 'Someone$_i$ has forgotten his$_{j≠i}$ hat here'
   but cannot mean 'Someone$_i$ has forgotten his$_i$ hat here'

4.4. Subject blocking and subject demotion in simple impersonal constructions

Some languages have null or dummy subject constructions that differ from those presented in sections 4.2 and 4.3 by the possibility to express the argument normally represented by a subject NP by means of an oblique phrase similar to the 'agent phrase' found in passive constructions.

Ex. (25) illustrates an unmarked simple impersonal construction with an agent phrase in Russian, and ex. (26) illustrates an impersonal passive with an agent phrase in German.

(25) *Russian*

Stenu   razbilo   molniej
wall.SG.ACC destroy.PST.SGN thunderbolt.SG.INSTR
'The wall was destroyed by a thunderbolt'

(26) *German*

In der   Küche   wurde   von vielen   Leuten   geraucht
in DEF.SG.DAT kitchen.SG.DAT AUX.PST.A3SG by many.PL.DAT many.PL.DAT smoke.PTCP
'There was smoking by many people in the kitchen'

As discussed by Hewitt 2002, Welsh and Breton have historically related impersonal forms of the verb that cannot take a canonical subject, but Welsh allows the impersonal form to combine with an agent phrase, whereas Breton does not – ex. (27) & (28).

(27) *Welsh* (Hewitt 2002)

Pregethir   Dydd Sul   (gan y Parch.   Elwyn Davies)
preach.FUT.IMPERS sunday   with the Rev.   Elwyn Davies
'There will be preaching Sunday (by the Rev. Elwyn Davies)'

(28) *Breton* (Hewitt 2002)

*Prezeg a raffer   dissul   (*gant an Tad   Erwan Lagadeg)*
preach   a do.FUT.IMPERS sunday   with   the Father   Erwan Lagadeg
'There will be preaching Sunday (*by Father Erwan Lagadeg)'

Note that languages having canonical passive with agent phrases and impersonal passives do not necessarily allow impersonal passives with agent phrases.

The development of such constructions from unmarked simple impersonal constructions involving an arbitrary reading of 3rd person plural verb forms has been described in Lunda, Kimbundu and other South-western Bantu languages (Givón 2001, vol. 2:149-151, Kawasha 2007). See also Haspelmath 1990.

Ex. (29) illustrates a canonical transitive sentence of Lunda – sentence (29a) – and three variants of the corresponding impersonal construction with an oblique agent phrase ('pseudo-passive'). In the three variants, the impersonal marker is homonymous with the subject marker of class 2 (human plural) from which it originates, but its invariability and the possible presence of an oblique agent phrase belonging to other classes forbid analyzing it as a subject marker. In the (29b) and (29c) variants, the NP representing the P argument stands in the canonical object position, and the only difference between these two variants is the presence of an optional object marker cross-referencing *kánsi* 'child'. In (29d), the object is fronted and

obligatorily cross-referenced in the verb form. This makes the construction more similar to a canonical passive construction, but the cross-referencing prefix is an object marker.

(29) *Lunda* (Kawasha 2007)

  a. *Chibínda*   *w-a-(mu-)tambik-a*   *kánsi*
      1.hunter   A3:1-TNS-(P3:1-)call-FIN   1.child
      'The hunter called the child'

  b. *A-tambik-a*   *kánsi*   *kúdi chibínda*
      IMPERS.TNS- call-FIN   1.child   by   1.hunter
      'The child was called by the hunter' (etym. 'They called the child by the hunter')

  c. *A-mu-tambik-a*   *kánsi*   *kúdi chibínda*
      IMPERS.TNS-P3:1-call-FIN   1.child   by   1.hunter
      'The child was called by the hunter'

  d. *Kánsi*   *a-mu-tambik-a*   *kúdi chibínda*
      1.child   IMPERS.TNS-P3:1-call-FIN   by   1.hunter
      'The child was called by the hunter' (etym. 'The child they called him by the hunter')

5. Special impersonal constructions

Two types of constructions are grouped here under the label 'special impersonal constructions:

– *Pragmatic* impersonal constructions do not affect the argument structure of the verb and do not block the expression of an argument either. They modify the logical structure of the predication, canceling the default topic status of the S argument of intransitive verbs and triggering a 'thetic' (or 'existential', 'presentational', 'sentence-focus') interpretation.
– *Lexico-semantic* impersonal constructions, either constitute the only possible constructions of the verb they involve, or imply an argument structure different from that encoded by canonical constructions of the same verb.

5.1. Pragmatic impersonals

Pragmatic impersonals concern intransitive verbs whose S argument takes characteristics of the patient of prototypical transitive verbs.
French – ex. (30b) – and Tswana – ex. (31b) – have constructions of this type in which the NP representing the S argument loses the control of verb agreement and occurs in the position occupied in canonical predicative structures by the object of transitive verbs.

(30) *French*

   a. *Une   femme   viendra*
      INDEF.SGF woman.SG   come.FUT.A3SG
      'A woman will come'

   b. *Il   viendra   une   femme*
      A3SGM come.FUT.3SG INDEF.SGF woman.SG
      lit. 'It will come a woman', same denotative meaning as (a), but with a different perspective (something like 'There will be a woman coming')

(31) *Tswana*

   a. *Bàsímàn̩ẹ́ bá-tláà-bínà*
      2.boy   A3:2- FUT-dance
      'The boys will dance'

   b. *Gǫ́-tláà-bíná   bàsímàn̩ẹ́*
      A3:15/17-FUT-dance 2.boy
      'There will be boys dancing', lit. 'There will dance boys'

Finnish has a semantically similar construction with the S argument of an intransitive verb in the partitive case and the verb invariably in the 3rd person singular – ex. (32). It is important to observe that, with transitive verbs, partitive case marking is possible in Finnish for P, but not for A, which confirms the impersonal nature of this construction.

(32) *Finnish (Sands & Campbell 2001)*

   a. *Lapset leikkivät   ulkona*
      child.PL play.PST.A3PL outside
      'The children played outside'

   b. *Ulkona leikki   lapsia*
      outside play.PST.A3SG child.PL.PART
      'There were children playing outside'

In ex. (33), illustrating the existential construction of *olla* 'be', the NP in postverbal position shows the case marking pattern of an object even more clearly, since personal pronouns (which in Finnish are the only nominals having an unambiguous accusative form) occur in the existential construction with accusative marking – ex. (33).

(33) *Finnish* (Sands & Campbell 2001)

   Niin kauan kuin minulla on   sinut,
   so   long   than 1SG.ADES be.PRS.3SG 2SG.ACC

tunnen   itseni   onnelliseksi
feel.PRS.1SG   myself   happy.TRAN
'So long as I have you, I find myself to be happy'

In Russian, an impersonal construction of this type, with the S argument in the genitive and default 3rd person singular or neuter verb agreement, is possible under certain conditions with intransitive verbs combined with negation – ex. (34). Here again, the identification of this construction as a special impersonal construction follows from the fact that subjects of transitive clauses never appear in the 'genitive of negation'.

(34) *Russian*

  a. *Otvet   ne   prišel*
     answer.SG   NEG   come.PST.SGM
     'The answer did not come'

  b. *Otveta   ne   prišlo*
     answer.SG.GEN   NEG   come.PST.SGN
     'No answer came'

Mandarin Chinese has neither case marking of core arguments nor indexation, and the notion of impersonal construction is not traditional in Chinese linguistics, but the transitive construction has the basic AVP order, without any possibility to move A in postverbal position, whereas the S argument of intransitive verbs occurs in postverbal position (and can therefore be analyzed as overtly aligned with P) in 'presentative sentences' –ex. (35).

(35) *Mandarin Chinese* (Li & Thompson 1981:509-519)

  a. *Tao-le   san-zhi yang*
     escape-PFV   three-CLF sheep
     'Three sheep escaped' (cf. French *Il s'est échappé trois moutons*)

  b. *Women-de   wanhui zhi   lai-le   Zhangsan gen   Lisi*
     1PL-GEN   party   only come-PFV   Zhangsan and   Lisi
     'Only Zhangsan and Lisi came to our party' (cf. French *Il n'est venu que Zh. et L.*)

Functionally, the impersonal constructions examined in this section belong to a family of constructions (including in particular so-called 'locative inversion' – Bresnan 1994) in which a presentational reading is associated with the postverbal position of the S argument of intransitive verbs in languages that have the basic AVP order in the prototypical transitive construction. Presentational constructions, which have figured prominently in discussions about unaccusativity (see a.o. Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995:215-77), show variations with respect to case marking and indexation of S arguments in postverbal position. This section was limited to cases in which no coding characteristic of the postverbal S argument shows alignment with A. In section 6.2, we will examine functionally similar constructions that, according to the definitions put forward here, have the status of *covert* impersonals. The

status of pragmatic impersonals from the point of view of alignment typology will be discussed in section 7.3.

5.2. Lexico-semantic impersonals

Section 5.2.1. is devoted to impersonal constructions that constitute the only possible construction of the verb they involve, whereas sections 5.2.2 to 5.2.6 discuss some common functional types of lexico-semantic impersonals implying an argument structure different from that encoded by canonical constructions of the same verb.

5.2.1. Verbs occurring in impersonal constructions only

In French, *falloir* 'need' cannot occur in a canonical construction with a subject NP and does not inflect for person – ex. (36a-b). Originally, this verb had a behavior similar to that of *manquer* 'lack' illustrated by (36c-d), but the impersonal construction has become its only possible construction.

(36) *French*

    a. *Il   me faut   ces   livres*
       A3SGM   D1SG need.PRS DEM.PL   book.PL
       'I need these books'

    b. **Ces   livres   me   ?fallent*
        DEM.PL book.PL   D1SG   need.PRS.A3PL

    c. *Il   me manque   ces   livres*
       A3SGM   D1SG lack.PRS.A3SG   DEM.PL book.PL
       'I lack these books'

    d. *Ces   livres   me   manquent*
       DEM.PL book.PL   D1SG lack.PRS.A3PL
       'I lack these books'

Occitan *caler* 'need' shows a behavior similar to that of French *falloir*: it does not inflect for person, and its construction includes an NP fully aligned with P, and a dative NP. The difference with French is that the impersonal constructions of Occitan do not involve dummy pronouns – ex. (37).

(37) *Occitan*

    Li   cal   de   bonas cambas per pujar   tan   naut
    D3SG need.PRS INDEF good.PLF leg.PL   to   climb.INF so   high
    'He needs good legs to climb so high'

In Algerian Arabic, intransitive verbs agree with their sole core argument as transitive verbs with A, but the copula *rā-* agrees with the NP representing the entity of which a property is predicated by means of suffixes identical to the pronominal suffixes representing the P argument of transitive verbs, and therefore shows an ergative indexation pattern – ex. (38). The historical explanation is that this copula results from the grammaticalization of the imperative of *raʔā* 'see', which is not attested in Algerian Arabic with the meaning 'see' anymore, but whose imperative has been reanalyzed as a copula.

(38) *Algerian Arabic*

　a. *je-xdem*
　　　A3SGM-work.IPFV
　　　'He works'

　b. *ʃufti-h*
　　　see.PFV.A2SG-P3SGM
　　　'You saw him'

　c. *rā-h　　f-es-sūq*
　　　be-P3SGM in-DEF-market.SG
　　　'He is at the market' (histor. < 'See him at the market')

5.2.2. Existential impersonals involving a transitive verb of possession

Many languages among those having a transitive verb of possession ('have') use this verb in impersonal constructions expressing existential predication, for example Greek – ex. (39).

(39) *Greek*

　a. *O　　　maθitís éxi　　　pollá　vivlía*
　　　DEF.SGM pupil.SG have.PRS.A3SG　many.PLN book.PL
　　　'The pupil has many books'

　b. *Éxi　　　　pollá　vivlía*
　　　have.PRS.A3SG　many.PLN book.PL
　　　1. '(S)he has many books'
　　　2. 'There are many books'

　c. *Éxi　　　pollí　　fasaría (s-to　　　spíti)*
　　　have.PRS.A3SG　much.SGF　noise.SG　at-DEF.SGN house.SG
　　　'There is a lot of noise (in the house)'

As illustrated by (39b), in Greek, the 3rd person singular *éxi* of *have* is ambiguous between a possessive and an existential reading. The semantic connection is obvious, and in the absence of a precise definition of subtypes of impersonal constructions, it could be tempting to analyze this kind of existential predication as a simple impersonal construction. However,

existential clauses express a predication about a place represented by a preposition phrase, and possessive clauses express a predication about a possessor encoded by a subject noun phrase. Consequently, possessive and existential clauses have related but distinct argument structures, and the existential construction of *have* implies an arbitrary interpretation of a missing prepositional phrase, not of a missing subject NP as in the first reading of (39b).

In Wolof, the transitive verb of possession *am* 'have' is used impersonally exactly in the same way as in Greek, with the same ambiguity between two possible readings of *am na* |have|PRF.A3SG| '(s)he has' or 'there is'.

In Fula, the particular nature of the existential construction of *have* is more obvious than in Greek, due to the fact that null-subject constructions are not productive in Fula (apart from *have*, they are found only with a limited set of meteorological verbs), and no dummy occurs in the existential construction – ex. (40).

(40) *Fula*

   a. *Debbo   yi'i   puccu*
      woman.CL   see.PFV   horse.CL
      'The woman saw a horse'

   b. *O   yi'i   puccu*
      3.CL   see.PFV   horse.CL
      '(S)he saw a horse'

   c. **Yi'i   puccu*
       see.PFV   horse.CL

   d. *O   woodi   puccu*
      3.CL   have.PFV   horse.CL
      '(S)he has a horse'

   e. *Woodi   puccu*
      have.PFV   horse.CL
      'There is a horse'

In Romance, the impersonal use of *habere* 'have' as an existential verb is attested as early as Vulgar Latin (Melander 1921, quoted by Lambrecht 2000), often with the locative adverb *ibi*, and this construction constitutes the usual expression of an existential predication in several modern Romance languages. In Occitan – ex. (41), the impersonal use of *aver* 'have' in existential clauses involves a locative dummy (*i* 'there', which in this construction is not understood as referring to a specific place). The existential use of French *avoir* 'have' cumulates a locative dummy and a dummy subject pronoun (which however seems to be due to the prescriptive influence of 17th century grammarians, and is commonly dropped in spoken French – Melander 1921 quoted by Lambrecht 2000) – ex. (42).

(41) *Occitan*

Davant	*l'ostal*	*i*	*aviá*	*un*	*òme*
in front of	DEF.SGM-house.SG	there	have.IPRF.A3SG	INDEF.SGM	man.SG

'There was a man in front of the house'

(42) *French*

Devant	*la*	*maison*	*(il)*	*y*	*avait*	*un*	*homme*
in front of	DEF.SGF	house.SG	A3SG	there	have.IPRF.A3SG	INDEF.SGM	man.SG

'There was a man in front of the house'

The evolution of such constructions may result in impersonal existential constructions involving verbs that do not occur in canonical constructions at all. For example in Spanish, the Romance verb of possession *haber* is still used as an auxiliary verb, but its use as a lexical verb is now restricted to an impersonal use in existential clauses, with a frozen locative dummy in the present form *ha-y* (but not in the other tense forms: future *habrá*, imperfect *había*, etc.).

German and Danish have impersonal presentational constructions of the verb *give* comparable to the constructions of *have* described above. There is an obvious semantic connection between *give* and *have*, since *give* can be analyzed as *cause to have*. See Joseph 2000 for a discussion of the possible historical origin of this use of *give*.

5.2.3. Meteorological impersonals

In many languages, clauses describing meteorological events (or at least some of them) can be characterized as lexico-semantic impersonals. Here again, in the absence of precise definitions, the recognition of meteorological expressions as special impersonals may not be obvious. For example, in English, *It's cold* is ambiguous between an anaphoric / deictic reading and a meteorological reading. In other languages, the analysis is complicated by the fact that meteorological verbs are optionally used with the same meaning in null-subject constructions or in constructions in which their subject is a noun like *place*, *earth*, *world*, *day*, or *sky*.

However, it is clear that the meteorological reading of null subject constructions or of constructions involving subject pronouns cannot be described as an arbitrary interpretation with respect to a set of entities of which a given property can be predicated. Starting from Chomsky's proposal to analyze weather-*it* as a 'quasi-argument' different from the dummies found in other types of impersonal constructions, the exact nature of the argument structure of meteorological expressions has caused considerable controversy (see a.o. Alba-Salas 2004 for a recent discussion within the frame of Relational Grammar). I have nothing new to propose in this respect, but it seems at least hardly disputable that, even if the verbs they involve occur also in canonical constructions, the syntactic particularities of meteorological impersonals are the reflect of an argument structure that does not involve a canonical subject.

Clauses describing physiological or psychological states or events affecting animate beings often have impersonal constructions analyzable as conditioned by an argument structure involving an experiencer, and some of them may involve predicates occurring also in meteorological impersonals. For example, in Russian, the singular neuter form of the adjective *xolodnyj* 'cold' occurs in impersonal constructions expressing a meteorological or affective meaning, and the only difference between these two types of impersonal constructions is that the affective construction includes a dative NP representing the experiencer – ex. (43).

(43) *Russian*

    a. *Segodnja   xolodno*
        today   cold.SGN
        'It's cold today'

    b. *Mne   xolodno zdes'*
        1SG.DAT cold.SGN here
        'I'm cold here'

Russian also has a class of verbs occurring in an impersonal construction in which they assign the role of experiencer to an accusative NP. Some of these verbs are attested exclusively in this construction, others also have canonical constructions with more or less transparently related meanings – see section 9.1 below for illustrations.

A similar situation, with two subclasses of affective impersonals differing in the case marking of the experiencer (accusative or dative) is found a.o. in Icelandic.

Imbabura Quechua has a class of verbs typically expressing physiological states occurring only in an impersonal construction in which the experiencer is encoded in the same way as the patient of prototypical action verbs – Hermon 2001. Note that at least one of these verbs has a second accusative NP in its construction – ex. (44).

(44) *Imbabura Quechua* (Hermon 2001)

    a. *Ñuka-ta-ka   chiri-wa-rka-mi*
        1SG-ACC-TOP   be cold-P1-PST-VAL
        'I was cold'

    b. *Ñuka-ta-ka   uma-ta   nana-wa-n-mi*
        1SG-ACC-TOP   head-ACC   hurt-P1-PRS.A3-VAL
        'My head hurts me'

The meaning expressed in the Quechua sentence (44b) by an impersonal construction involving two accusative-marked NPs is rendered in Tamil by an impersonal construction with a dative NP representing the experiencer and an accusative NP representing the aching body part – Asher 1985:105. Ex. (3c) above, repeated here as (45), provides another illustration of

the affective construction of Tamil with a dative experiencer and a second argument in the accusative case.

(45) *Tamil*

    ena-kku   *aruŋ-e*   *piɖikkum*
    1SG-DAT   Arun-ACC   like.FUT.3N
    'I like Arun'

In the Papuan language Tobelo, Holton Forthcoming describes affective impersonals in which the experiencer is indexed by the same prefix as the P argument of transitive verbs, and the A prefix slot is occupied by a 3rd person non-human prefix which however "has no definite reference or antecedent" – ex. (46).

(46) *Tobelo* (Holton Forthcoming)

    a. *no-hi-tidingi*
       A2SG-P1SG-punch
       'You punched me'

    b. *to-boa*
       A1SG-arrive
       'I arrived'

    c. *i-hi-maata*
       A3-P1SG-cold
       'I am cold'

Affective impersonals have figured prominently in discussions about non-canonical subjects, since dative- or accusative-marked experiencers tend to show behavioral properties typical of canonical subjects. However, affective constructions with a dative- or accusative-marked experiencer are not necessarily special or covert impersonal constructions. For example, the usual expression of some physiological states in Baule is a construction in which an experiencer is encoded as the object of a perfectly canonical transitive construction – ex. (47).

(47) *Baule*

    Awe   *kun*   *min*
    hunger   kill   1SG
    'I am hungry' (lit. 'Hunger kills me')

5.2.5. Modal impersonals

Modal impersonal constructions involve verbs that also occur in canonical constructions, and add a modal component of obligation or volition to the semantic role assigned to the

subject of the canonical construction. Note that, in the Russian modal impersonal illustrated in ex. (48), the verb is in the infinitive, whereas the construction illustrated by ex. (49) uses reflexive morphology combined with default 3rd person singular / neuter agreement.

(48) *Russian*

　　a. *Čto　　my　　delaem?*
　　　 what.ACC 1PL　 do.PRS.A1PL
　　　 'What are we doing?' (canonical construction)

　　b. *Čto　　nam　　delat'?*
　　　 what.ACC 1PL.DAT　 do.INF
　　　 'What are we to do?' (modal impersonal)

(49) *Russian*

　　a. *Ja　　ne　　splju*
　　　 1SG　 NEG　 sleep.PRS.A1SG
　　　 'I am not sleeping' (canonical construction)

　　b. *Mne　　ne　　spit-sja*
　　　 1SG.DAT　 NEG　 sleep.PRS.A3SG-REFL
　　　 'I cannot sleep' (modal impersonal)

Finnish has a set of about 20 modal verbs occurring in a 'necessive' or 'necessitative' construction (Sands & Campbell 2001:269-274) that can include no canonical subject NP, and in which a genitive NP represents the person of which the obligation to do something is predicated – ex. (50).

(50) *Finnish*

　　 Sinun　　pitää　　mennä
　　 2SG.GEN　 must.A3SG　 go.INF
　　 'You must go'

Imbabura Quechua has a productive desiderative suffix *-naya-* in the presence of which the verb shows an invariable 3rd person subject agreement mark, and the NP representing the S/A argument shows accusative case marking – Hermon 2001. Note that this suffix does not affect the rest of the construction of the verb, and that, consequently, transitive verbs in the desiderative form have a double-accusative construction – ex. (51).

(51) *Imbabura Quechua* (Hermon 2001)

　　a. *Ñuka-ka　　Juzi-man　　aycha-ta　　kara-rka-ni*
　　　 1SG-TOP　　José-DAT　　meat-ACC　　serv-PST-1
　　　 'I served meat to José'

b. *Ñuka-ta-ka   aycha-ta   miyu-naya-rka*
1SG-ACC-TOP   meat-ACC   eat-DESID-PST.3
'I want/desire to eat meat'

Roberts 2001 describes impersonal desiderative constructions in the Papuan language Amele.

In Tamil, *muḍiyum* 'can' exists only in the 3rd person neuter form. It takes an infinitival complement, and the NP representing the person of which the capability to do something is predicated can optionally be in the nominative case (but without governing verb agreement), or in the instrumental case – ex. (52).

(52) *Tamil*

a. *naan vara   muḍiyum*
1SG   come.INF can.FUT.A3N
'I can come'

b. *ennaale   vara   muḍiyum*
1SG.INSTR   come.INF can.FUT.A3N
'I can come'

This variety of special impersonals has obvious affinities with the affective impersonals presented in the preceding section.

5.2.6. Impersonal constructions conditioned by clausal arguments

Lexico-semantic impersonal constructions conditioned by the presence of clausal arguments are common too. For example, in French, *apparaître* 'appear' has the behavior of a canonical intransitive verb in combination with a nominal argument, but in combination with a clausal argument, its only possible construction is the special impersonal construction illustrated in (53b). Note that *il* in this construction is a dummy, and cannot be analyzed as a cataphoric pronoun in a right-dislocation, since the complement clause cannot occupy the canonical subject position immediately to the left of the verb, and the construction does not show the intonation characteristic of dislocated constructions.

(53) *French*

a. *Le   soleil   est   apparu   à travers   les   nuages*
DEF.SGM sun.SG   AUX.PRS.A3SG appear.PTCP through   DEF.PL   cloud.PL
'The sun appeared through the clouds'

b. *Il   est   apparu   que l'enfant   mentait*
A3SGM   AUX.PRS.A3SG appear.PTCP that DEF.SGM-child.SG lie.IPRF.A3SG
'It turned out that the child was lying'

c. *Que   l'enfant   mentait   est   apparu
    that   DEF.SGM-child.SG   lie.IPRF.A3SG   AUX.PRS.A3SG   appear.PTCP

Given the frequency of such alternations, it is not surprising that verbs whose argument structure includes clausal arguments often have an impersonal construction as their only possible construction. This is for example the case of Greek *prépi* 'be necessary' – ex. (54).

(54) *Greek*

    Prépi   *na*   *kópsis*   *to*   *tsiɣáro*
    be necessary.PRS   that   give up.PRS.A2SG   DEF.SGN   cigarette.SG
    'You must give up smoking'

5.2.7. Others

The preceding sections have illustrated the functional types of special impersonals that are well-attested cross-linguistically. However, special impersonals that do not belong to one of these types can also be found sporadically. For example, in Icelandic, *svipa* 'resemble' has a special impersonal construction with an argument in the dative case and a the other introduced by the preposition *til* 'to'.

6. Covert impersonal constructions

Covert impersonal constructions have been defined as constructions including a non-dummy term showing the coding characteristics of canonical subjects, but devoid of the corresponding behavioral properties.

The identification of covert impersonal constructions is much less obvious than that of the other two types, since it implies the use of subjecthood tests whose interpretation is not always straightforward, and whose validity may be debatable. Discrepancies between authors describing the same construction in the same language are frequent, and in addition to that, the search for typological generalizations is made difficult by the mere fact that many language descriptions do not provide the data necessary to detect the existence of covert impersonals.

It seems however that, cross-linguistically, covert impersonals are typically found, either in constructions in which their function is to block the expression of the A argument of a transitive verb, or in constructions fulfilling the functions described for special impersonals in sections 5.1 (pragmatic impersonals) and 5.2.6 (affective impersonals).

6.1. Covert impersonals with a transitive subject blocking function

Romance covert impersonals, characterized by the presence of post-verbal NPs governing verb agreement but devoid of other properties characterizing canonical subjects, have been widely discussed in recent literature on impersonals and unaccusativity.

A first type can be illustrated in Italian by the so-called *impersonal-passive SI* construction. Ex. (55) & (56) from Frigeni 2004 illustrate the distinction between this construction, in which

the P argument of a transitive verb governs verb agreement – ex. (55), and *impersonal-active SI*, which is an overt impersonal construction in which reflexive morphology blocks the expression of the S/A argument without changing anything else in the construction – ex. (56), in the same way as in the Spanish construction illustrated by ex. (12c) above. Note in particular that, in (55b) and (56c), the infinitive is equally controlled by the implicit agent of the first verb.

(55) *Italian*

    a. *Stanotte si   scrutinano i   voti*
       tonight   REFL count.PRS.A3PL DEF.PLM vote.PL
      'The votes are counted tonight / One counts the votes tonight' ('impersonal-passive' SI)

    b. *I   libri si   ripongono negli   scaffali*
       DEF.PLM book.PL   REFL put.PRS.A3PL in.DEF.PLM   shelf.PL
      dopo aver-li   catalogati
      after   AUX.INF-P3PLM classify.PTCP.PLM
      'One shelves the books after having classified them'   ('impersonal-passive' SI)

(56) *Italian*

    a. *Si   accusò   i   colpevoli*
       REFL accuse.PRS.A3SG DEF.PLM guilty.PLM
      'One accused the guilty persons'   ('impersonal-active' SI)

    b. *Li   si   accusò*
       P3PLM   REFL accuse.PRS.A3SG
      'One accused them'   ('impersonal-active' SI)

    c. *Si   legge   i   giornali*
       REFL read.PRS.A3SG   DEF.PLM newspaper.PL
      prima di   cominciare   a lavorare
      before   of   begin.INF   to work.INF
      'One reads the newspaper before starting to work'   ('impersonal-active' SI)

The analysis of the Italian 'impersonal-passive' SI construction, and of similar constructions attested in other Romance languages, is made difficult by the fact that, superficially, this construction is not easy to distinguish from so-called 'middle' SI, in which an NP representing the P argument of a transitive verb has all properties of canonical subjects. The insertion of A-oriented or P-oriented adverbs provides however evidence that these two constructions must be distinguished – ex. (57).

(57) *Italian*

    a. *Gli   elettori si   corruppero   deliberatamente*
       DEF.PLM voter.PL   REFL bribe.PFV.A3PL deliberately
       'One bribed the voters deliberately'   ('impersonal-passive' SI)

    b. *Gli   elettori si   corrompono facilmente*
       DEF.PLM voter.PL   REFL bribe.PRS.A3PL easily
       'Voters are easy to bribe'   ('middle' SI)

6.2. Pragmatic covert impersonals

Pearlmutter 1983 provides a very detailed analysis of the Italian construction illustrated by ex. (58b). In this construction, the S argument in post-verbal position controls verb agreement in the same way as the canonical subject of (58a), but it loses the other properties typical of subjects, for example the possibility to control the gerund construction – ex. (58c-d).

(58) *Italian*

    a. *Dei   profughi ungheresi sono   rimasti   nel   paese*
       INDEF.PLM refugee.PL hungarian.PLM be.PRS.A3PL remain.PTCP.PLM   IN.DEF.SGM country.SG
       'Some Hungarian refugees remained in the country'

    b. *Sono   rimasti   nel   paese   dei   profughi   ungheresi*
       be.PRS.A3PL remain.PTCP.PLM   IN.DEF.SGM country.SG   INDEF.PLM refugee.PL hungarian.PLM
       'Some Hungarian refugees remained in the country'

    c. *Avendo ottenuto   i   permessi di lavoro,*
       AUX.GER obtain.PTCP DEF.PLM permit.PL   of work. SG
       dei profughi ungheresi sono rimasti nel paese
       'Having obtained work permits, some Hungarian refugees remained in the country'

    d. **Avendo   ottenuto i   permessi di lavoro,*
       AUX.GER   obtain.PTCP DEF.PLM permit.PL   of work. SG
       sono rimasti nel paese dei profughi ungheresi

The English existential construction of *be* (with the NP in post-verbal position governing verb agreement, but dummy *there* showing the behavior of a subject in raising and control constructions) is another case in point.

Quizar 1994 describes an SV ~ VS alternation apparently similar to that of Italian in the Mayan language Ch'orti'. Contrary to most Mayan languages, in which pragmatically unmarked orders tend to be verb-initial, Ch'orti' has a relatively fixed AVP order in transitive clauses. In intransitive constructions, SV and VS orders are equally usual, but intransitive verbs agree in the same way with preverbal and postverbal S's. VS order is used "whenever the subject is not the topic of discourse", and the strong predominance of the AVP order in transitive clauses can be explained by the fact that "A is by far the most common role for

topics, while O is almost never a topic". Quizar's conclusion is that Ch'orti' has a "split-ergative system based on the relative topicality of A, S, and O". This conclusion seems reasonable, with however the reservation that 'fluid-intransitive system' would be preferable to the term 'split-ergative' used by Quizar to characterize the SV ~ VS alternation of Ch'orti' – see section 7.3.

6.3. Affective covert impersonals

Icelandic affective constructions with the experiencer in the dative case and the stimulus in the nominative case provide an uncontroversial example of constructions in which coding properties and behavioral properties characteristic of canonical subjects do not attach to the same argument. Ex. (59) illustrates the fact that, in control constructions, Icelandic dative experiencers are obligatorily omitted in the same way as canonical subjects.

(59) *Icelandic* (Andrews 2001)

    a. *Strákana   vantar   mat*
       lad.PL.ACC   lack.PRS.A3SG   food.SG
       'The lads lack food'

    b. *Ég   vonast   til   að vanta   ekki peninga*
       1SG   hope.PRS.A1SG.MID toward   to lack.INF NEG money.SG
       'I hope not to lack money'

Note that, as illustrated by ex. (60), in Icelandic covert impersonals, even at the level of coding properties, the nominative argument departs from canonical subjects in that it controls verb agreement only in a limited way, since 1st and 2nd person pronouns are excluded from this role –Sigurðsson 2002.

(60) *Icelandic* (Sigurðsson 2002)

    a. *Ég   veit   að   honum   líka   Þeir*
       1SG   know.PRS.A1SG that   3SGM.DAT   like.PRS.A3PL 3PL
       'I know that he likes them'

    b. **Ég   veit   að   honum   líkið   Þið*
       1SG   know.PRS.A1SG that   3SGM.DAT   like.PRS.A2PL 2PL
       intended: 'I know that he likes you'

    c. **Ég   veit   að   honum   líkum   við*
       1SG   know.PRS.A1SG that   3SGM.DAT   like.PRS.A1PL 1PL
       intended: 'I know that he likes us'

Spanish affective constructions with a dative argument in preverbal position are analyzed in Fernández Soriano 1999a as another example of a construction in which a dative

experiencer shows subjectal properties, in spite of the fact that verb agreement is controlled by the NP representing the stimulus, as in (61).

(61) *Spanish*

A	*María*	*le*	*gustan*	*las*	*telenovelas*
to	María	D3SG	like.PRS.A3PL	DEF.PLF	TV serial.PL

'María likes TV serials'

Note however that Gutiérrez-Bravo 2006 argues against an analysis of Spanish preverbal datives as non-canonical subjects and proposes an analysis accounting for this construction "without compromising the evidence that the nominative argument of these verbs is the true grammatical subject".

Note also that, as observed by M. L. Rivero (Rivero 2004), Spanish constructions with preverbal datives do not behave uniformly with respect to person restrictions: with *gustar* 'like', there is no person restriction on the nominative argument, whereas *antojar(se)* 'fancy, take a fancy to' falls under the same person restriction as Icelandic covert impersonals.

Among less-known languages, it is worth mentioning Munro's detailed analysis of oblique NPs patterning with canonical subjects in many aspects of their behavior in the Arawakan language Garifuna – Munro 2007.

The following two sections (6.4. & 6.5) are devoted to constructions that can be viewed as particular cases of affective covert impersonals.

6.4. Possessive constructions with an oblique NP representing the possessor

Many languages have possessive constructions that can be described as resulting from the adjunction of a genitive, dative, comitative, or locative NP representing the possessor to an existential construction in which the NP representing the possessee has the coding characteristics of a subject, as in Classical Latin *Mihi est pecunia* lit. 'To me is money' → 'I have money'.

In such constructions, it may happen that the possessee NP, in spite of its coding characteristics, is devoid of behavioral properties typical of S/A arguments, whereas the possessor NP can be analyzed as a 'quirky subject' that does not share coding characteristics with canonical S/A arguments, but shares some syntactic properties with them, as discussed for example by M. Onishi for Bengali (Onishi 2001).

6.5. 'Dative anticausative' constructions

This type of construction has been signaled in several Slavic and Romance languages, Greek, and Albanian (Rivero 2003). It can be described as resulting from the adjunction of a dative NP to a core constituted by a reflexive construction with an anticausative reading. As illustrated by ex. (62), in the unmarked constituent order, the NP representing the entity affected by a change of state follows the verb, and the dative NP precedes it. Semantically, the dative NP in this construction can be interpreted as a possessor, a beneficiary/maleficiary, or an involuntary agent.

(62) *Spanish*

a. *María   rompió   las   gafas*
   María   break.PFV.A3SG   DEF.PLF   glasses.PL
   'María broke the glasses'

b. *Las   gafas   se   rompieron*
   DEF.PLF   glasses.PL   REFL   break.PFV.A3PL
   'The glasses broke'

c. *A María   se   le   rompieron   las   gafas*
   to María   REFL   D3SG   break.PFV.A3PL   DEF.PLF   glasses.PL
   1. 'María's glasses broke'
   2. 'María was affected by the glasses breaking'
   3. María broke the glasses involuntarily'

As shown in Fernández Soriano 1999b, in this construction, the NP governing verb agreement is devoid of some behavioral properties characteristic of prototypical subjects, whereas the dative NP shows a subject-like behavior in raising and binding, and can therefore be analyzed as a 'quirky subject'. See however Rivero 2003 for a somewhat different analysis.

7. Impersonal constructions in a typological perspective

7.1. General remarks

Special and c*overt* impersonal constructions are distinct constructions, directly relevant to alignment typology: *special* impersonals can be viewed as exceptions to the predominant accusative pattern of alignment, and *covert* impersonal constructions can be viewed as instances of mismatches between morphological and syntactic alignment.

It is crucial to observe that, if the definitions of alignment patterns are explicitly formulated as referring to *arguments* (i.e., to terms contributing to the semantic content of clauses), the presence of dummies showing the behavior of a subject in some syntactic mechanisms does not contradict the analysis of special impersonals as instances of exceptional alignment, since dummies do not represent arguments. The same can be said of the presence of default agreement marks. We will return to this question in section 8.1.

By contrast, the description of *simple* impersonal constructions necessitates nothing more than a rule allowing for an arbitrary interpretation of missing subjects, or of pronouns in subject role, or a lexical specification that some verbs allow a missing subject or a pronoun in subject role to show a particular kind of non-canonical semantic behavior in a construction that, from a strictly formal point of view, does not depart from the predominant alignment pattern. Consequently, it would not be justified to analyze them in terms of alignment split.

Not surprisingly, the generalization of these notions to languages whose alignment patterns differ from those of the languages in which impersonal constructions are traditionally recognized raises very different questions.

7.2. Generalizing the notion of simple impersonal construction

From a broader perspective of syntactic typology, simple impersonals are just a particular case of arbitrary interpretation of a core argument triggered by other means than the use of a canonical indefinite NP or of a valency changing derivation.

There is no a priori reason to limit the study of unspecific core argument encoding to A-like arguments in predominantly accusative languages, or to extend it only to P-like arguments in predominantly ergative languages. For example, Kwaza (an accusative language) uses verb suffixes to encode both unspecific S/A arguments and unspecific P arguments – van der Voort 2004:259-277, and it has already been observed in section 4.3.3 above that Nahuatl (which on the whole can be considered as a typical accusative language) uses the same morphological operation to encode unspecific inanimate objects and to impersonalize a subclass of intransitive verbs.

In this perspective, it is interesting to observe for example that cognate object constructions are cross-linguistically a very common way to encode unspecific P arguments, and that predominantly accusative languages show no uniformity in the choice between an arbitrary and an anaphoric interpretation of null P arguments. For example, Turkish is a typical accusative language in which verbs agree with S/A and do not agree with P, and P follows a differential marking pattern, but in contrast to European languages in which core syntactic terms show similar coding characteristics, null objects in Turkish have an anaphoric rather than arbitrary reading – ex. (63), and the cognate object strategy is widely used to encode unspecific P's – Göksel & Kerslake 2005:140-1, 537-8.

(63)   *Turkish*

a.   *—Bu   ev-i   bir   gün   mutlaka   el-de   ed-eceğ-im.*
   DEM   house-ACC   one   day   certainly   hand-LOC do-FUT-A1SG
   —Ne-den bu   kadar   çok   ist-iyor-sun?
   what-ABL DEM   like   much want-PRS-A2SG
   '—I will certainly get this house one day. —Why do you want [it] so much?'

b.   *Ayşe'yi gör-dü-m   ve   çok   sev-di-m*
   Ayşe-ACC see-PFV-A1SG and   much like-PFV-A1SG
   'I saw Ayşe and liked [her] very much'

Other interesting observations in this connection are that:

(a) arbitrary interpretations of 3rd person plural and 2nd person singular S/A arguments are attested in predominantly ergative languages too (see for example Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina (eds.) 2003:572-3 on Basque, or Fortescue 1984:81 on Greenlandic);

(b) Kumakhov & Vamling 1994 describe the grammaticalization of the 2nd person singular prefix to encode unspecific S/A arguments in constructions involving non-finite verb forms in Kabardian (an ergative language belonging to the North West Caucasian family);

(c) the development of a construction similar to the Lunda 'pseudo-passive' resulting from the evolution of an unmarked simple impersonal construction involving an arbitrary reading of 3rd person plural verb forms has been described in Kaqchikel, an ergative language belonging to the Mayan family (Broadwell & Duncan 2002).

There seems however to be a correlation between accusativity / ergativity and the use of marked verb forms to block the expression of a core argument without affecting the rest of the construction. The use of reflexive, passive or dedicated impersonal morphology to block the expression of A/S without affecting the expression of P is common in predominantly accusative languages – see section 4.2, and the use of reflexive morphology or of specific 'introversive' derivations to block the expression of P in transitive constructions without affecting the expression of A is also found in accusative languages. In contrast, among predominantly ergative languages, it seems difficult to find attestations of marked verb forms used, either to block the expression of P/S without affecting the expression of A, or to block the expression of A in transitive constructions without affecting the expression of P.

A typological study of constructions triggering or permitting an arbitrary interpretation of core arguments should therefore begin with a systematic investigation of possible correlations with the use of anaphoric null-argument constructions on the one hand, and the existence of argument indexation on the other hand. It is only at a subsequent stage that it would make sense to look for correlations between possible configurations and alignment types.

The question of possible correlations between the coding of unspecific subjects, the anaphoric use of null-subject constructions, and presence / absence of subject indexation, has been widely debated in generative linguistics. Null-object constructions also have attracted the attention of generativists. The typology of null subjects an null objects has been discussed by formal syntacticians, and several cross-linguistic generalizations concerning null-subject and null-object constructions have been put forward (see Huang 2000:50-90 for a survey and a discussion of previous studies; among more recent studies, see Neeleman & Szendrői 2005, Holmberg 2005, Xu 2006, and references therein; see also Bresnan 2001 for an OT account of null pronouns, and Vincent 1998 for a diachronic analysis of null arguments in Latin and Romance within the same framework).

However, in order to evaluate the relevance of the notions used in generative analyses of null arguments, it would be necessary to separate those that have a firm empirical basis from those implying very specific hypotheses about the underlying architecture of clauses, which is not always an easy task. As for the generalizations about null arguments found in the generative literature, the only obvious thing is the existence of counterexamples (see in particular Huang 2000). But on the basis of the relatively limited sample of languages dealt with in generative studies of null-argument constructions, it is impossible to decide whether the generalizations in question are at least statistically valid, although not absolute, or should rather be simply rejected.

7.3. Pragmatic impersonals and alignment typology: pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity[3]

7.3.1. French as a fluid-S language

In the impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs illustrated by ex. (30) in section 5.1., repeated here as (64), the S argument appears in post-verbal position (i.e., in the canonical object position), does not govern verb agreement, and more generally shows no evidence of being a subject.

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[3] For a more detailed treatment of the questions addressed in this section, see Creissels Forthcoming.

(64) *French*

a. *Une   femme   viendra*
   INDEF.SGF   woman.SG   come.FUT.A3SG
   'A woman will come'

b. *Il   viendra   une   femme*
   A3SGM   come.FUT.3SG   INDEF.SGF   woman.SG
   lit. 'It will come a woman', same denotative meaning as (a), but with a different perspective (something like 'There will be a woman coming')

As illustrated by ex. (65) to (67), in this construction, the post-verbal NP representing the S argument of an intransitive verb patterns with transitive objects with respect to a range of properties that are not shared by transitive subjects: *en*-cliticization – ex. (65), combinability with restrictive *que* – ex. (66), possibility to take the determiner *de* in negative environments – ex. (67), etc.

(65) *French*

a. *Le   garçon   a   mangé   trois   **pommes***
   DEF.SG.MASC   boy.SG   AUX.PRS.A3SG   eat.PTCP   three   apple.PL
   'The boy ate three apples'

     → *Le garçon **en** a mangé trois*
       'The boy ate three of them'

b. *Trois   **garçons** ont   vu   ce   film*
   three   boy.SG   AUX.PRS.A3PL   see.PTCP   DEM.SGM   film.SG
   'Three boys have seen this film'

     → * *Trois **en** ont vu ce film*
       intended: 'Three of them have seen this film' (OK: *Trois ont vu ce film*, or *Il y en a trois qui ont vu ce film)*

c. *Trois   **garçons** sont   entrés*
   three   boy.SG   AUX.PRS.A3PL   enter.PTCP.PLM
   'Three boys entered'

     → * *Trois **en** sont entrés*
       intended: 'Three of them entered' (OK: *Trois sont entrés*, or *Il y en trois qui sont entrés*)

d. *Il   est   entré   trois   **garçons***
   A3SGM   AUX.PRS.A3SG   enter.PTCP.SGM   three   boy.PL
   'Three boys entered'

→ *Il **en** est entré trois*
    'Three of them entered'

(66) *French*

    a. *Jean n'a   invité   que   Marie*
        Jean   NEG-AUX.PRS.A3SG invite.PTCP   RESTR   Marie
        'Jean invited only Mary'

    b. **Que   Jean n'a   invité   Marie*
        RESTR   Jean NEG-AUX.PRS.A3SG invite.PTCP Marie
        intended: Only Jean invited Mary (OK: Il n'y a que Jean qui a invité Marie)

    c. **Que   Jean n'est   venu*
        RESTR   Jean NEG-AUX.PRS.A3SG come.PTCP.SGM
        intended: 'Only Jean came' (OK: Il n'y a que Jean qui est venu)

    d. *Il   n'est   venu   que Jean*
        A3SGM   NEG-AUX.PRS.A3SG come.PTCP   RESTR Jean
        'Only Jean came'

(67) *French*

    a. *Jean n'a   pas   mangé   de   pommes*
        Jean   NEG-AUX.PRS.A3SG NEG   come.PTCP   *DE*   apple.PL
        'Jean did not eat apples'

    b. **De garçons n'ont   pas   vu   ce   film*
        DE   boy.PL   NEG-AUX.PRS.A3PL NEG   see.PTCP DEM.SGM film.SG
        intended: 'No boy saw this film' (OK: Il n'y a pas de garçon qui ait vu ce film)

    c. **De garçons ne   sont   pas   entrés*
        DE   boy.PL   NEG   AUX.PRS.A3PL   NEG   see.PTCP;PLM
        intended: 'No boy entered (OK: Il n'y a pas de garçon qui soit entré)

    d. *Il   n'est   pas   entré   de   garçons*
        A3SGM   NEG-AUX.PRS.A3SG NEG   enter.PTCP   *DE*   boy.PL
        'No boy entered'

    The only evidence against identifying the post-verbal NP as fulfilling the object role is that it cannot be represented by an object clitic pronoun. But this is not really a problem, since the post-verbal NP in this construction cannot be represented by clitic pronouns at all, and this can be viewed as a mere consequence of the 'thetic' (or 'existential', 'presentational') meaning of the construction. This pragmatic function, repeatedly underscored in the literature (whatever the terms used to characterize it) is sufficient to explain both the fact that some

intransitive verbs have a particular affinity with this construction, and the impossibility to cliticize the post-verbal NP, since cliticization is incompatible with the introduction of a new referent. There is to my knowledge no convincing evidence against the analysis according to which the post-verbal NP fulfills the same *syntactic* role as the post-verbal patient NP in the prototypical transitive construction, but the *discourse* value of the construction blocks the manifestation of objectal properties implying a topical status of the object.

The theory according to which the post-verbal NP in the French impersonal construction of intransitive verbs fulfills the *syntactic* role of object, in spite of being assigned the same *semantic* role as the subject of the same verb in a canonical predicative construction, is not new in French syntax, since it was already proposed by Brunot 1926. But it is interesting to observe that it has been recently re-discovered by formal syntacticians, for example S. Cummins (Cummins 2000), who concludes her analysis of this construction by stating that French has "two basic types of intransitive clauses: subject-verb and verb-object". Although she does not states it explicitly, this implies that the notion of ergativity is relevant to the analysis of the impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs.

In addition to that, contrary to an opinion popularized by early studies within the frame of the Unaccusative Hypothesis, this construction is not restricted to a limited subset of 'unaccusative' intransitive verbs. As shown a.o. by Cummins 2000 on the basis of the corpus provided by Hériau 1980, the list of the 50 most frequent verbs in this construction also includes several typically 'unergative' verbs, and no semantic subclass of intransitive verbs can be considered as absolutely excluded from this construction. The fact that some intransitive verbs (including 'unergative' ones) occur with a particular frequency can be satisfactorily explained by the mere fact that their lexical meaning is "highly compatible with the 'presentational' value of the I[mpersonal] C[onstruction], expressing appearance or existence at location" (Cummins 2000:239), and with intransitive verbs of other semantic classes, whose compatibility with this construction may at first sight seem questionable, the presence of a locative complement improves the acceptability of the impersonal construction.

If one accepts this analysis of the impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs with a post-verbal NP representing the S argument, from a typological point of view, the only possible conclusion is that French is a *fluid-S* language (Dixon 1994:78-83), since intransitive verbs have an optional construction in which S is aligned with P. The only difference with the fluid-S type as defined by Dixon is that, in French, the choice of ergative alignment is not based on the semantic feature of control, but rather has the pragmatic function to express a 'presentational' (or 'thetic', 'existential') organization of predication.

The functional motivation of this type of fluid intransitivity can be analyzed as follows: in the transitive construction, A is typically more topical than P, and new referents are typically introduced in P position; consequently, in a language in which accusative alignment predominates, it is natural to de-topicalize S by means of a construction in which S aligns on P. According to Lambrecht,

> "S[entence] F[ocus] marking involves cancellation of those prosodic and/or morphosyntactic subject properties which are associated with the role of subjects as topic expressions in P[redicate] F[ocus] sentences … One natural way of achieving non-topic construal (though not the only logically possible one) is to endow the subject constituent with grammatical properties which are conventionally associated with FOCUS arguments. Since in a P[redicate] F[ocus] construction the unmarked focus argument is the OBJECT, topic construal can be cancelled by coding the subject with grammatical features normally found on the object of a P[redicate] F[ocus] sentence." (Lambrecht 2000:624-5)

In addition to the impersonal construction analyzed above, French has several constructions in which an NP representing the S argument of an intransitive verb occurs in postverbal position. They are not clearly distinguished by traditional grammar, but have been analyzed in detail by Bonami, Godard and Marandin (see Marandin 1999, Bonami, Godard & Marandin 1999, Bonami & Godard 2001). In two of them ("inversion in extraction contexts" and "heavy subject NP inversion"), A arguments of transitive verbs may occur in postverbal position too, and are equally concerned by the loss of some properties typical for canonical S/A NPs. The constructions in question cannot be analyzed in terms of alignment variation, and do not necessitate a revision of the characterization of inverted NPs as subjects. But in the construction termed "unaccusative inversion" in Marandin's terminology, illustrated by ex. (68), the possibility to occur in postverbal position is limited to the S argument of intransitive verbs.

(68)   *French* (Marandin 1999)

    a. *Je voudrais que vienne Marie*
        lit. I would like that come Marie
            'I would like Marie to come'

    b. [*Le silence se fit.*] *Alors sont entrés deux hommes*
        lit. [Silence fell.] Then entered two men

    c. *Pierre ne savait pas que suivaient d'autres personnes*
        lit. Pierre did not know that were following other persons

In this construction, unlike "inverted subjects in extraction contexts", indefinite postverbal S NPs trigger *en*-pronominalization in the same way as P NPs in the transitive construction. But in other respects they are aligned with A: as shown in detail by Marandin 1999, unlike postverbal S NPs in the impersonal construction, S NPs in the "unaccusative inversion" can control adjuncts like canonical S/A NPs, and agree with the verb in number. Therefore, they do not lend themselves to a straightforward characterization as syntactic subjects (as in "inversion in extraction contexts") or objects (as in the impersonal construction), and are best analyzed as a special type of complement (Bonami & Godard 2001:123). In other words, this construction is a *covert* impersonal construction analyzable as an instance of *partial* fluid intransitivity.

7.3.2. Pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity in other languages

The impersonal construction of Tswana intransitive verbs illustrated in section 5.1 – ex. (31) – lends itself to the same analysis as the impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs. The only clear difference with French is that the impersonal construction of intransitive

verbs is much more frequent in Tswana than in French, due to constraints on the topicality of NPs in subject role particularly strict in Tswana.[4]

This kind of impersonal construction occurs in Finnish (see section 5.1) and in Northern Italian dialects (Saccon 1993), but on the whole, it is not very common among European languages. Presentational constructions of intransitive verbs have been described in many other European languages – see section 6.2. for an Italian example,[5] but most of them are rather *covert* impersonal constructions similar to the French construction presented at the end of section 7.3.1 and illustrated by ex. (68), in which the S argument occurs in post-verbal position and is aligned with P with respect to some other properties, but remains aligned with A as regards the control of verb agreement. Languages in which such constructions are found can be characterized as having pragmatically driven fluid-S systems, but their fluidity involves an alternation between accusative and *mixed* alignment (and not between accusative and *ergative* alignment, as in the case of the impersonal construction of French verbs, in which the NP representing the S argument has no property in common with canonical subjects).

The same analysis can be applied to the contrast found in Ch'orti' between fixed alignment with respect to indexation and fluid alignment in constituent order (see section 6.2. above).

Mandarin Chinese is also a case in point (see section 5.1. above), with however the particularity that Chinese simply cannot have mismatches between constituent order and other coding characteristics of core syntactic terms, due to the total absence of case marking and argument indexation.

The recognition of "focus-oriented split intransitivity" has been proposed by Maslova 2006 on the basis of Dogon and Tundra Yukaghir data. Tundra Yukaghir has a marker *-le(ŋ)* with the following distribution: in transitive predication, regardless of information structure, it attaches to P and is incompatible with A – ex. (69a-b), whereas in intransitive predication, *-le(ŋ)* attaches to S if and only if S is focalized – ex. (69c-d).

(69)   *Tundra Yukaghir* (Maslova 2006)

  a. *met   ten'i   n'awn'iklie-leŋ   toŋore-meŋ*
      1SG   here   polar_fox-*LEŊ*   chase-PFV.1/2SG
      'I have been chasing A POLAR FOX here'

  b. *nime-le   aq   pajp   wie-nun*
      dwelling-*LEŊ*   only   woman.SG   make-HAB(AFOC)
      'Only WOMEN install dwellings'

  c. *... qahime-leŋ   kelu-l*
      ... raven-*LEŊ*   came-SFOC
      '... A RAVEN came'

d. *qad'ir   apanala: me-kelu-j*
    DISC   old_woman   AFF-come-STOP
    'The old woman CAME'

The term used by Maslova is somewhat misleading, since the phenomenon she describes in Tundra Yukaghir does not involve a division of intransitive verbs into two subclasses, and therefore illustrates the same type of *fluid* intransitivity as the impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs.

7.4. Generalizing the notion of lexico-semantic impersonal construction

Contrary to simple impersonal constructions, the predominance of accusative alignment is essential in the notion of lexico-semantic impersonal construction.

Contrary to pragmatic impersonals, lexico-semantic impersonals cannot be analyzed as instances of fluid alignment, and constitute exceptional valency patterns in languages in which accusative alignment predominates.

Consequently, as proposed by Lazard (see Lazard 1985, Lazard 1995), in predominantly ergative languages, it is possible to recognize *anti-impersonal* constructions with exceptional valency patterns symmetric to those of the special impersonal constructions characterized here as lexico-semantic impersonals. This question will be developed in section 8 below.

7.5. Generalizing the notion of covert impersonal construction

In predominantly accusative languages, covert impersonal constructions constitute exceptional cases of mismatch between morphological and syntactic alignment. The problem in generalizing this notion to predominantly ergative languages follows from the well-known fact that predominantly accusative and predominantly ergative languages show opposite tendencies with respect to the relationship between morphological alignment and syntactic alignment. As repeatedly noted in the typological literature, languages whose predicative constructions show accusative alignment in their coding characteristics tend to be consistently accusative, whereas in morphologically ergative languages, discrepancies between morphological and syntactic alignment tend to be the rule rather than the exception. Consequently, the transposition of the notion of covert impersonal would not be very useful in analyzing the valency patterns of morphologically ergative languages.

For example, in the affective constructions of Nakh-Daghestanian languages – illustrated above by ex. (1d), behavioral properties that can be used as evidence in support of a notion of subject tend to attach to dative experiencers rather than absolutive stimuli, as discussed in Haspelmath 1993:294-298 for Lezgian. But at the same time, in the prototypical transitive construction, these properties attach to ergative agents, not to absolutive patients, so that it is difficult to decide what is regular and what is not in the behavior of Caucasian dative experiencers.

8. Anti-impersonal constructions

As illustrated by ex. (70), in Basque, a distinction can be drawn between canonical constructions in which a missing argument receives an arbitrary interpretation, and non-canonical (or *anti-impersonal*) constructions that depart from the predominant ergative alignment. Ex. (70a) is a canonical transitive construction; (70b) accepts an arbitrary reading of the unexpressed P argument of the transitive verb *ikasi* 'learn', but the same sentence can also be interpreted as referring to a specific P argument whose identity must be retrieved from the context. In (70c-d) the same verb in the same form occurs in anti-impersonal constructions. What occurs here is that the second argument of *ikasi* 'learn' in the sense of 'learn a skill' can be encoded as a VP in a non-finite form or as an NP in the instrumental case, but the coding characteristics of the first argument are not modified, and the verb remains in the same form as when its second argument is encoded as an NP in the absolutive case.

(70) *Basque*

   a. *Gauza   asko ikasi   dut   Bilbon*
      thing   many learn.PFV AUX.PRS.P3SG.A1SG Bilbao.LOC
      'I learnt many things in Bilbao'

   b. *Bilbon   ikasi   dut*
      Bilbao.LOC   learn.PFV AUX.PRS.P3SG.A1SG
      1. 'I learnt it in Bilbao'
      2. 'I studied in Bilbao'

   c. *Gidatzen   ikasi   dut*
      drive.IPFV   learn.PFV AUX.PRS.P3SG.A1SG
      'I learnt driving'

   d. *Euskaraz   ikasi   dut*
      Basque.INSTR   learn.PFV AUX.PRS.P3SG.A1SG
      'I learnt Basque'

The sentences in ex. (71a-c) are additional examples of Basque anti-impersonal constructions, in which it is impossible to identify a missing argument that could be encoded like the P argument of a transitive verb, in spite of the fact that the verb shows default 3rd person singular P agreement. The difference with (70c-d) is that the verbs occurring in ex. (71) have no possibility to be used in a canonical transitive construction.

(71) *Basque*

   a. *Otsoak   ardiari   esetsi   zion*
      wolf.SG.ERG sheep.SG.DAT   attack.PFV   AUX.PST.P3SG.A3SG.D3SG
      'The wolf attacked the sheep'

b. *Urak   irakin   du*
water.SG.ERG   boil.PFV   AUX.PRS.P3SG.A3SG
'The water has boiled'

c. *Telebistak   ez   du   funtzionatzen*
television.SG.ERG   NEG   AUX.PRS.P3SG.A3SG work.IPFV
'The TV doesn't work'

In principle, it should be possible to develop a typology of anti-impersonal constructions comparable to that sketched in section 5 for special impersonal constructions, and to bring out generalizations about types of argument structures favoring their use.

Lazard 1985 & 1995 puts forward a list of types of meaning typically encoded by anti-impersonal constructions, based however on a language sample relatively limited from a genetic and areal point of view. In order to evaluate the validity of these proposals, it would be useful to distinguish between monovalent and bivalent anti-impersonals.

Not surprisingly, the monovalent anti-impersonals mentioned by Lazard include intransitive verbs generally recognized as typical 'unergative' verbs in discussions about unaccusativity.

Verbs of aiming ("verbes de visée") constitute the only type of bivalent verbs mentioned by Lazard as typically used in anti-impersonal constructions. Constructions in which the aimer has the coding characteristics of the agent of prototypical action verbs, but the target has the coding characteristics of locative or allative obliques, are cross-linguistically very common, irrespective of alignment patterns. But in predominantly accusative languages, they do not contradict the rule according to which predicative constructions must include an A-like argument, whereas in predominantly ergative languages, they contradict the rule according to which predicative constructions normally include a P-like argument.

For example, in several Nakh-Daghestanian languages, bivalent verbs whose arguments can be characterized resp. as *aimer* and *target* occur in the construction illustrated by ex. (1c), repeated here as (72a). At least in some cases, a possible historical scenario is that such constructions result from argument structure reduction in constructions that originally included a P argument representing a missile ('an aimer aims a missile at a target'), as illustrated by ex. (72b).

(72) *Akhvakh*

a. *wašo-de   jašo-ga eqaje   godi*
boy$_O$-ERG   girl-LAT look_at.CVB COP$_{SGN}$
'The boy has looked at the girl'

b. *wašo-de   jašo-ge (č'uli) ҳ'ore   godi*
boy$_O$-ERG   girl-ESS   stick   apply.CVB COP$_{SGN}$
'The boy has hit the girl (with a stick)' – lit. 'has applied (a stick) at the girl'

Additional data on ergative languages corroborate the propensity of verbs of aiming to occur in similar constructions. In several Australian languages with ergative morphology, verbs of aiming (or at least some of them) require an ergative NP representing the aimer and

a dative NP representing the target (see a.o. Tsunoda 1981 on Djaru and Hale 1982 on Warlpiri).

9. Exceptional valency patterns and alignment changes[6]

9.1. The evolution of 'transimpersonal' constructions

As discussed in Holton, Malchukov and Mithun's papers included in Donohue & Wichmann (eds.) Forthcoming, in predominantly accusative languages, split intransitivity may develop as the result of the reanalysis of 'transimpersonal'[7] constructions, i.e., of constructions involving a dummy subject or default subject agreement and a referential term encoded like the P argument of prototypical action verbs.

However, the following point remains open to discussion: at which stage in the evolution of such constructions is it justified to consider that they have been reanalyzed as ergatively aligned intransitive constructions? The aforementioned authors seem to consider that, so long as the formal trace of a possible A argument is maintained, they cannot be analyzed as intransitive constructions. However, on the basis of the distinction between simple and special impersonal constructions, it seems to me that the crucial move in this evolution is not the total disappearance of the frozen trace of a possible A argument, but rather the loss of the possibility to re-establish a canonical A term.

I illustrate this point by the comparison of Amharic and Russian impersonal constructions that can be viewed as representing different stages in the evolution of transimpersonal constructions towards intransitive constructions with an exceptional alignment pattern.

Amharic is a predominantly accusative language in which constructions with a verb marked for 3rd person A agreement and no corresponding NP normally have an anaphoric interpretation. But with some verbs, the absence of an NP in A role also allows for an indeterminate rather than anaphoric interpretation.

For example, the state of being hungry, without any hint about a possible external cause, is rendered in Amharic by a verb showing an A marker of 3rd person singular masculine that does not refer to any specific entity, and a P marker representing the person or animal being hungry – ex. (73a). But the same verb occurs in a canonical transitive construction in which A and P are respectively assigned the roles of stimulus and experiencer – ex. (73b).

(73) *Amharic*

    a. *rabä-ñ*
       hunger.PFV.A3SGM-P1SG
       'I am hungry', lit. 'It hungered me'

    b. *injära   rabä-ñ*
       bread   hunger.PFV.A3SGM-P1SG
       'I am hungry for bread', lit. 'Bread hungered me'

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[6] For a more detailed treatment of the questions addressed in this section, see Creissels 2008.
[7] According to Malchukov Forthcoming, this term was coined by Mary Haas (Haas 1941).

Consequently, (73a) is a simple impersonal construction that does not contradict the predominant accusative pattern of alignment. But one can easily imagine evolutions that might convert (73a) into a special impersonal construction – for example the loss of the construction illustrated by ex. (73b).

The impersonal construction of the Russian verb *trjasti* 'shake' results from an evolution of this type. This verb occurs in a canonical transitive construction – ex. (74a-b), but also in the impersonal construction illustrated by ex. (74c-d), in which the only core term is an experiencer in the accusative case, and the expression of an external cause by means of a preposition phrase in oblique role blocks the possibility to add a nominative NP.

(74) *Russian*

    a. *Ja   trjasu   kovër*
       1SG   shake.PRS.A1SG carpet.SG.ACC
       'I am shaking the carpet'

    b. *Menja   trjasët   lixoradka*
       1SG.ACC shake.PRS.A3SG fever.SG
       'Fever shakes me'

    c. *Menja   trjasët   ot   lixoradki*
       1SG.ACC shake.PRS.A3SG from fever.SG.GEN
       'I am shaking with fever', lit. 'It shakes me from fever'

    d. *V poezde   trjasët*
       in train.SG.LOC shake.PRS.A3SG
       'One gets shaken in the train', lit. 'It shakes in the train'

It seems reasonable to assume that the impersonal construction developed from the reanalysis of a null-subject construction with an arbitrary reading: '[An unspecified cause] shakes me'. But the fact that the cause is encoded as an oblique introduced by the ablative preposition *ot* proves that, in the present state of Russian, this construction is no longer an elliptical variant of the transitive construction. It has been reanalyzed as a distinct construction, and consequently can be viewed as an exceptional case of an ergatively aligned construction in a predominantly accusative language.

A semantic specialization of the impersonal construction may subsequently blur the relationship between the impersonal construction and the canonical construction from which it originates, as in the case of *rvat'* 'pull out', used in the same type of impersonal construction as *trjasti* with the meaning 'vomit' – ex. (75). Another possibility is that a verb loses the possibility to occur in a canonical construction and subsists only in an affective impersonal construction with the experiencer in the accusative case and default 3rd sing./neuter verb agreement, as in the case of *tošnit'* 'feel nauseous' – ex. (76).

(75) *Russian*

   a. *Menja   rvët*
      1SG.ACC   vomit.PRS.A3SG
      'I am vomiting'

   b. x_{NOM} *rvët* y_{ACC} = '*x* tears *y*'

(76) *Russian*

   a. *Menja   tošnit*
      1SG.ACC   feel nauseous.PRS.A3SG
      'I feel nauseous'

   b. *x_{NOM} *tošnit* y_{ACC}

Symmetrically, in predominantly ergative languages, constructions initially analyzable as transitive constructions in which a missing P argument receives an arbitrary interpretation may evolve into accusatively aligned constructions. This is in particular a possible explanation of the anti-impersonal constructions implying verbs with an argument frame *aimer / target* in Akhvakh and other Nakh-Daghestanian languages, as mentioned in section 8 above.

In this connection, I would like to emphasize that current practice is much more 'liberal' in recognizing alignment splits in predominantly ergative languages than in predominantly accusative languages. In particular, many a typologist would probably disagree with the proposal to consider the Russian construction illustrated in (74c-d), (75) & (76), or the Latin construction illustrated in (4) above, as instances of ergative alignment, because the verb in such constructions shows what could be the trace of 3rd person singular A argument.[8] But accepting this objection implies putting dummies and default agreement marks on a par with NPs or bound pronouns representing arguments in the definition of alignment types, and the same line of argument should be applied for example to Basque constructions currently considered as an instance of alignment split in a predominantly ergative language, such as those illustrated in ex. (71) above.

These constructions of Basque with an ergative NP and no absolutive NP are the exact mirror image of Russian impersonal constructions including an accusative NP, since they include the transitive auxiliary in the form that normally implies a 3rd person singular P argument. Consequently, they can be considered as an exception to the ergative alignment rule only if dummies and default agreement marks are distinguished from referential NPs and bound pronouns in the identification of alignment patterns. It is therefore inconsistent to recognize an overt intransitivity split in Basque but not in Russian.

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[8] There are however some notable exceptions, in particular Moravcsik 1978. In this article, devoted to manifestations of ergativity in predominantly accusative languages, E. Moravcsik recognizes "accusatively marked intransitive subjects" (and consequently, ergative alignment) in constructions including an experiencer in the accusative such as Old English *Mec longade*, 'I longed' (lit. 'Me longed'), Latin *Pudet me* 'I am ashamed' (lit. 'Shames me'), or German *Es friert mich* 'I am cold' (lit. 'It freezes me').

9.2. Asymmetries in the development of exceptional valency patterns

Malchukov Forthcoming rightly points out that the same types of evolutions may occur in predominantly accusative and predominantly ergative languages with however very different consequences for the alignment patterns. For example, the reanalysis of transitive constructions with an arbitrary interpretation of the A argument as intransitive constructions has no consequence on alignment patterns in predominantly ergative languages (as in the Iwaidjan languages discussed by Evans 2004), whereas the same reanalysis may yield a split intransitive pattern when it occurs in predominantly accusative languages.

The coalescence of light verb compounds involving a noun in P role provides another illustration of the same phenomenon.

As in other cases of compounding, the two elements of light verb compounds tend to coalesce in some way or another, which results in re-establishing the canonical situation in which the main verb of a clause encodes the type of event to which the clause refers. In languages making extensive use of light verbs, this process may result in the massive creation of new verbal lexemes. If this evolution occurs in constructions that have the appearance of regular transitive constructions with the noun that forms a compound with the light verb in P role, it results in constructions including a term showing the coding characteristics of A, but no term showing the coding characteristics of P.

In predominantly accusative languages, this process has no incidence on alignment patterns. By contrast, in languages in which ergative alignment predominates, if no readjustment occurs in the coding characteristics of the remaining terms, it creates constructions departing from the predominant alignment pattern.

Let's for example retake the anti-impersonal construction of Basque already illustrated by ex. (2) above – repeated below as (75a). This construction is synonymous with the light verb construction *dei egin*, lit. 'do call' (taking *call* as a noun). In the light verb construction, the two participants are encoded exactly in the same way as with the verb *deitu*, but given the presence of a noun in the absolute form (*dei*), the construction looks like the expansion of a canonical transitive construction – ex. (75b).

(75) *Basque*

    a. *Koldo-k   Gorka-ri   deitu   dio*
       Koldo-ERG   Gorka-DAT call.PFV   AUX.PRS.A3SG.P3SG.D3SG
       'Koldo called Gorka'

    b. *Koldo-k   Gorka-ri   dei   egin dio*
       Koldo-ERG   Gorka-DAT call.ABS   do.PFV AUX.PRS.A3SG.P3SG.D3SG
       'Koldo called Gorka' (lit. 'did call to Gorka')

It seems reasonable to assume that (75b), perfectly regular from the point of view of alignment, represents the original construction, and that in (75a), the phrase *dei egin* has been substituted by a verb *deitu* derived from its nominal element, without any modification in the coding characteristics of the terms representing the participants, which automatically created an anti-impersonal construction.

Note that the recognition of this kind of evolution as a possible source of anti-impersonal constructions illustrates the necessity to treat the question of possible semantic generalizations about (anti-)impersonal constructions with the greatest caution. The point is that there is no limit to the semantic roles that can be assigned to the A term of light verb constructions formally aligned with the prototypical transitive construction. In particular, the use of *do* as a light verb is commonly observed in constructions in which the participant encoded as the A argument of *do* has very few agentive features (see for example Basque *lo egin* 'sleep', *ñirñir egin* 'shine', or Turkish *vefat etmek* 'die'). This implies that no semantic coherence must be expected in the argument structure of anti-impersonal constructions originating from the coalescence of such compounds.

10. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show that a typological approach to impersonal constructions necessitates to distinguish at least three types of constructions variously identified as 'impersonal' in different traditions, two of which are directly relevant to alignment typology, and I have discussed the possibility to identify comparable constructions in languages whose alignment patterns are different from those of the languages in which impersonal constructions are traditionally recognized.

In addition to the well-known fact that special and covert impersonals are essential for the study of alignment mismatches, I have argued that the interest of impersonal constructions for alignment typology is manifold:

 – the analysis of impersonal constructions form the point of view of alignment necessitates a revision of the current definitions of alignment types, which do not take into account bivalent verbs whose construction is not fully aligned with the prototypical transitive construction;
 – the analysis of constructions such as the impersonal construction of French intransitive verbs from the point of view of alignment typology leads to the recognition of a type of pragmatically driven fluid intransitivity not recognized in classical works on alignment typology;
 – taking into account impersonal constructions in alignment studies implies making explicit the way dummies and default agreement marks are taken into account in the recognition of alignment patterns, and makes apparent the existence of a bias in the way split alignment patterns are currently recognized in predominantly accusative and predominantly ergative languages;
 – a study of the evolution of impersonal constructions shows the necessity to specify at which stage of the evolution canonical constructions in which a missing argument or a dummy triggers an arbitrary interpretation can been considered as having been reanalyzed as constructions showing a non-canonical valency pattern.

Abbreviations

In glosses of Bantu examples, numbers at the beginning of nominal forms, or after '3:', indicate noun classes (3:1 = 3rd person class 1, etc.). Otherwise, numbers indicate persons

A: person mark referring to the agent of prototypical action verbs
ABL: ablative
ABS: absolute
ACC: accusative
ADES: adessive
AFF : affective *or* affirmative
AFOC: focalization of the A argument
AUX: auxiliary
CL: noun class marker
CLF: classifier
COP: copula
CVB: converb
D: person mark referring to a participant represented by a dative NP
DAT: dative
DEF: definite
DEM: demonstrative
DESID: desiderative
DISC: discourse particle
ERG: ergative
ESS: essive
FIN: final (in descriptions of Bantu languages, 'final' designates an inflectional ending of verbs that does not carry a meaning by itself, but contributes to the identification of tense)
FUT: future
GEN: genitive
HAB: habitual
IMPERS: impersonal
INDEF: indefinite
INF: infinitive
INSTR: instrumental

INTRV: introversive (blocking of undergoer argument)
IPFV: imperfective
IPRF: imperfect
LAT: lative
LOC: locative
MID: middle voice
NEG: negation
N: neuter
NOM: nominative
O: oblique stem formative
P: person mark referring to the patient of prototypical action verbs
PART: partitive
PASS: passive
PFV: perfective
PL: plural
PLF: plural feminine
PLM: plural masculine
PLN: plural neuter
POSS: possessive
PRF: perfect
PRS: present
PST: past
PTCP: participle
Q: interrogative
REFL: reflexive
RESTR: restrictive
S : single argument of monovalent verbs
SBJV: subjunctive
SFOC: focalization of the S argument
SFP: sentence final particle
SG: singular
SGF: singular feminine
SGM: singular masculine
SGN: singular neuter
STOP: topicalization of the S argument
TNS: tense
TOP: topic
TRAN: translative
VAL: validator

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