On Impersonal se / się in Slavic.

1. Introduction.

All Slavic and Romance languages with a reflexive clitic share uses for this clitic called, among other labels, (a) reflexive/reciprocal, (b) middle/passive, (c) anticausative, and (d) inherent, as in Table 1. In such uses, the NP is Nom(inative) and V agrees with it in phi-features. With the exception of French, all languages share with many types of intransitive Vs (e) a use often called impersonal, without overt NP. These five uses are illustrated in (1) with Slovenian (Sl). Similar examples could be given in Bulgarian (Bl), Czech, Macedonian, Polish (P), Croatian and Serbian (SC), Slovak, and several Romance languages that include Italian, Rumanian, and Spanish.

(1)  a. Janez  se  oblači. "John dresses himself."
    b. Ta knjiga  se  lahko  bere. "This book reads easily."
    c. Veja  se  je  zlomila. "The branch broke."
    e. Tukaj  se  veliko  dela. "Here people work a lot."

TABLE 1
Uses shared by Slavic and Romance reflexive clitics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflect/recipr</th>
<th>Mid/pass</th>
<th>Anticaus.</th>
<th>Inherent</th>
<th>Intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>All but French</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use called here Subject Impersonal in (2-3) separates Slavic and Romance into two groups, as in Table 2. This use is found in P, Sl (Italian, and Spanish), and, with restrictions, in some varieties of Croatian and Serbian. To our knowledge, it is totally absent from Bl, Czech, Macedonian, Slovak (French, and Rumanian).

TABLE 2
The Subject Impersonal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slavic</th>
<th>Polish</th>
<th>+</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slovenian</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Croatian/</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serbian</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Czech/</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slovak</td>
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<tr>
<td>Romance</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish,</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>French</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rumanian</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In this use, (i) the NP is Acc(usative) in affirmative clauses, and Gen(itive) in negative ones, and (ii) V is consistently 3S(ingular) in the Present, and Neu(ter) in the Past.

(2) a. Tę książkę {czyta/ czytało} się z przyjemnością. (P)
this book_{ACC} read_{3S/NEU} self with pleasure
“One {reads/read} this book with pleasure.”
b. Tej książce nie {czyta/ czytało} się z przyjemnością.
this book_{GEN} Neg read_{3S/NEU} self with pleasure.
“One {does/did} not read this book with pleasure.”

(3) a. Starše se {uboga/ je ubeogalo}.                               (Sl)
parents_{ACC} self {obey_{3S}/ be_{3S} obeyed_{NEU}}
“One {obeys/(has) obeyed} parents.”
b. Staršev se ne uboga.
parents_{GEN} self Neg obey_{3S}
“One does not obey parents.”

The use illustrated in (4) called here Object Impersonal, is shared by all the mentioned Slavic languages, and is not found in Romance.

(4) a. Marek się bĳe.                               (P)
Mark NOM self fight_{3S}
“Mark fights (others).”
b. Učiteljica, Janezek se spet {grize/ poriva}.
Teacher, Janezek NOM self again {bite/push_{3S}}
“Teacher, Janezek is {biting/pushing} (others) again.”

Following Rivero (1998,1999), we argue that the Subject and Object uses in (2-4) represent a new type of indefinite pronoun: a syntactic S(implex) E(xpression) anaphor as in (Reinhart & Reuland 1993). In the syntax, clitic se/się indicates a null NP on an argument position of the predicate: external in (2-3), and internal in (4). This NP has a human feature but no phi-features, so cannot be interpreted independently, and must raise to the clitic to repair its (a) formal and (b) referential deficiency. Movement allows the NP (a) to check structural Case (Nom or Acc/Gen) against the clitic, which removes its uninterpretable feature as formal imperfection. In addition, movement allows the NP (b) to acquire existential force, which repairs its referential imperfection, and permits it to be interpreted as an indefinite pronoun (Chierchia 1995) without phi-features. By contrast, the SE-anaphors mentioned by R & R, which include Dutch zich, are syntactic pronouns also without phi-features, but raise to I = Agr/Tense to inherit phi-features from the subject, as in Max legt het boek achter zich “Max puts the book behind him=Max”. In brief, the Impersonal in (2-4) involves a chain with the syntax of a SE-anaphor of a new type, following Rivero, and the semantics of an indefinite pronoun restricted to humans, following Chierchia.

2. The Subject Impersonal.

This section mentions important properties of the Subject Impersonal that distinguish P/Sl from other Slavic languages, and also reveal the mixed character of some varieties of Croatian / Serbian.

First, recall the morphology in (2-3), which motivates the assumption that se/się is Nom, as in sect. 4.1. There is an Acc/Gen NP, and a 3S/Neut predicate. In other Slavic languages that share the middle-passive morphology, as in Bl (5a), patterns equivalent to this impersonal are ungrammatical, as illustrated with SC (5b).
Croatian and Serbian constitute restricted exceptions to the above situation, in that, open to idiolectal variation, the pattern with a human NP with Acc may be grammatical: (6) (see Tilburg 1986 for geographical distribution in Croatia).

(6) Roditelje se poštuje. (grammatical for some) (SC)
parents\textsubscript{ACC} se obey\textsubscript{3S}
“One obeys parents”

Overall, then, P and Sl differ from other Slavic languages on morphological grounds.

Second, the P and Sl impersonal can bind anaphors of several types: local reflexives, (7a-a’), possessive reflexives, (7b-b’), and long distance Nom possessives: (7c-c’).

(7) a. Teraz się myślę tylko o sobie. (P)
now się think\textsubscript{3S} only of oneself
a’. Sedaj se misli samo na sebe. (Sl)
now se think\textsubscript{3S} only of oneself
“Now one thinks only of oneself.”

b. Swoich przyjaciół tak się nie traktuje. (P)
POSS\textsubscript{GEN} friends\textsubscript{GEN} so się Neg treat\textsubscript{3S} (Siewierska 1988)
b’. Svojih prijateljev se tako ne tretira. (Sl)
POSS\textsubscript{GEN} friends\textsubscript{GEN} se so Neg treat\textsubscript{3S}
“One does not tr eat one’s friends like that.”

c. Myśli się, że swoje błędy są bardziej usprawiedliwiane niż innych.
think\textsubscript{3S}się that POSS\textsubscript{NOM} mistakes are more justified than of.others (P)
c’. Verjame se, da so svoje napake bolj upravičene kot napake drugih. (Sl)
believe\textsubscript{3S} se that are POSS\textsubscript{NOM} mistakes more justified than of.others
“People think their own mistakes are more justified than those of others.”

Possessive anaphors lead to clear contrasts between P/Sl and other Slavic languages. For instance, in Bl and SC, se cannot be a binder for this type: (8a-b). Local reflexives may be less symptomatic. In the general case, se in SC seems able to bind this type: (8c).

(8) a. *Swoite kartini se gledat s udovolstvijem. (P)
POSS pictures se see\textsubscript{3PL} with pleasure
b. *Svoju decu se uvek sluša sa pažnjom (SC)
POSS children\textsubscript{ACC} se always listen\textsubscript{3S} with attention
c. Sada se misli samo na sebe. (SC)
now se think\textsubscript{3S} only of oneself
“Now one thinks only of oneself.”

Third, the P/Sl impersonal can control into adjuncts, which is well known, but also into complements that include passive sentences, which is less known: (9). It has been argued that the last type of control is by an argument present in the syntax (Jaeggli 1986).

(9) a. Chce się być admirowanym. (P)
Want\textsubscript{3S} się to.be admired\textsubscript{INS}
b. "One (always) wants to be admired."
In sum, some important properties shared by the P/Sl Subject Impersonal are:

a) The same clitic characteristics as non-tonic pronouns.

b) A distinctive morphology with Accusative (or Gen) on overt NP, and a predicate without phi-features, and no distinction as to animacy.

c) Various semantic (Theta) roles otherwise held by an (overt) Nom subject. The Sl impersonal is more restricted than the P impersonal in this respect, and stativity seems to be a relevant factor.

d) Binder for all types of anaphors: local and long distance.

e) A syntactically present controller for complement clauses (and adjuncts).

f) A syntactic argument with formally encoded human denotation, arbitrary reference, and no phi-features.

g) Quantificational variability along the lines of indefinites.

3. The Object Impersonal.

All the Slavic languages under consideration here display the Object Impersonal in (4), also illustrated in (13), which is colloquial and typical of child language. Rivero (1999) argues that the use glossed in (13) with others is the object counterpart of (2-3): an arbitrary deficient pronoun with a human feature and Acc (or, in negative sentences Gen), not Nom.

(13) a. Ivan iska decata da se bijat. (Bl)
Ivan want_{3S} children.the da se spank_{3P}
“Ivan wants the children to spank others.”

b. Nie pchaj się, pan! (P)
neg push_{IMPS} się, man
“Stop pushing others, sir!”

c. Deca se grle. (SC)
children se hug_{3P}
“The children are hugging others.”

d. Pokaži kako se poljubljaš. (Sl)
show how se kiss_{2S}
“Show me how you kiss others.”

What makes the Object Impersonal in (13) particularly interesting is its (a) human denotation, (b) lack of phi-features, and (c) quantificational variability, with existential/universal-like readings that may include the speaker, as in (13b).

A fourth characteristic making this object use similar to the Subject Impersonal is sensitivity to aspect / generic time reference ((Cinque 1988) on the Italian subject impersonal). Sl (14) illustrates that imperfective Aspect/Aktionsart, as in (14a), brings to light the universal-like reading of this use suppressed with perfective Vs, as in (14b) (the other Slavic languages behave along parallel lines).

(14) Ko je bil majhen, se je Janez grozno {a. grizel / b. ugriznil} (Sl)
w{ind} -teen, se is Janez terribly {bitten_a. IMP b.PERF}
IMP: “When he was little, J. would bite {himself / others} horribly.”
PERF: “When he was little, J. bit himself horribly (once).”

Rivero (1999) suggests that the effect of Aspect in (14) belongs with quantificational variability. Imperfective aspect resembles an adverb of quantification such as always, which is not a new idea, and can provide (universal-like) force to the object impersonal as indefinite pronoun as proposed by Chierchia for the subject use, which is discussed in sect. 4.2.
4. The syntactic and semantic analysis of the Subject and Object Impersonal.


Following Rivero (1999), Nom/{Acc/Gen} Impersonal in 2 and 3 is an S(implex) E(xpression) anaphor, or defective pronoun. This idea is implemented by assuming that the clitic is “base generated” / merged outside the VP, and attracts a defective (null) NP that is the external or internal argument of V. This movement hypothesis is coupled with (the spirit of) the binding theory of R & R (1993).

Let us begin with the analysis of the Subject Impersonal as in Tę książkę czytało się “One read this book ” in (2) and Starše se uboga “One obeys parents.” in (3), proposing that the skeleton of these sentences is as in (15):

\[(15) \ldots [\text{CLP} \ [\text{CI} \ se/ się] \ [\text{TP} \ [T \text{Pres} / \text{Past}] \ [\text{VP} \ NP1 \ V \ NP2 \ ]]]\]

V heads VP, which contains two NP arguments. The “arbitrary” NP1 as external argument is equivalent to a null defective pronoun, different from little pro: it has a human feature, (structural) Nom Case, but no phi-features (no gender, number, or person). The internal argument NP2 is the overt Acc object this book or parents. The T(ense) P(hrase) is headed by T(ense), which is defective in that it also lacks phi-features (no gender, number, or person). TP takes VP as complement and V checks features against T. Given that T is defective, V is either 3S or Neu, i.e. without phi-features. The other functional projection dubbed Cl(itic) P(hrase) is headed by se/ się. The core idea is that in (15), NP1, which is a syntactically projected argument of the predicate for all the reasons stated in sect. 2, must repair deficiencies by raising to ClP, checking structural Case against the clitic. Thus, NP1 in the Subject Impersonal construction contrasts with the null pronoun little pro of the ordinary null subject sentence, which is often assumed to check features with a non-defective T in TP.

The clitic, then, is directly merged in a functional slot outside of the VP (known as the “base generation” approach). That is, se/ się are functional entries of the lexicon. When merged into a phrase marker, they are similar to other clitic pronouns in heading a Functional Projection. The next question is why NP1 raises to ClP. Recall that Chomsky (1998) proposes two operations to check formal features: MOVE and a new operation AGREE, which is more economic. Oversimplifying, a category can MOVE to the Spec of a functional head to check features, or the functional head can check features with a category in its complement via AGREE, without the need for movement. The last operation is preferred. One important question in this framework, then, is why MOVE and not AGREE applies in the impersonal -- what forces the deficient NP in (15) to leave the VP. Another important question is why MOVE must target functional se/ się. Structural Case combined with the lack of phi-features can provide a formal answer to these questions. In (15), both NP1 and T lack phi-features, so they cannot establish an appropriate checking relation with each other. The required relation is established between NP1 and the clitic, when the first moves to the second. These categories are each equipped with a structural Case feature, which allows them to match for checking (for further discussion (Rivero 1999)). In brief, absence of phi-features, a prominent characteristic of the impersonal construction, makes the NP raise to CL to satisfy formal needs (feature checking for Case).

Now consider binding, the other dimension in our analysis. R&R (1993: sect.1) distinguish between Pronouns, SELF-anaphors, and SE-anaphors, with two features: Refl(exivizing function) and R(eferential Independence). Pronouns such as him in John hates him are not reflexivizers and contain phi-features, which allows them to be interpreted independently: [–Refl; +R]. SELF-anaphors such as himself in John hates himself are referentially defective, and reflexivizers [+Refl; –R]. SE-anaphors are like pronouns in not being reflexivizers, and like SELF-anaphors in not having a full specification of phi-features,
so cannot be interpreted independently: [–Refl ; –R]. The content necessary for their
terpretation is obtained via movement, which makes them similar to a pronoun: [+R; –Refl].
Dutch zich is a SE-anaphor. It does not make a predicate reflexive when on one of its
argument positions: *Max haat zich / Max hates SE-anaphor. It lacks phi-features but can
obtain the content necessary for interpretation by movement. In Max legt het boek achter zich
“Max puts the book behind him=Max”, zich adjoins in LF to I (= T) to inherit subject
features (1993:659), which results in a well formed A-chain that is +R and Case-Marked. The
movement does not make the predicate put reflexive, but coindexes zich with Max as subject.
In sum, for R&R a SE-anaphor is a defective pronoun that repairs deficiency by acquiring
phi-features via a movement that coindexes it with the subject.

The impersonal use of the reflexive clitic is comparable to a SE-anaphor in three
ways, with interesting differences. One, since it lacks phi-features the null NP in (15) does not
project an argument that can be interpreted independently. Two, movement enables it to
obtain the content for its interpretation. R&R’S SE-anaphors adjoin to I to inherit the phi-
features of the subject, which makes them (a) “subject-oriented”, and (b) interpretable as
ordinary personal pronouns with a full set of phi-features. However, our defective NP repairs
deficiency by moving to CliticP with se / się, which lacks phi-features. The movement
with the impersonal is thus different, but achieves the same syntactic result, which is to create
a well-formed LF-chain that can serve as input for semantic interpretation. For R & R, an A-
chain is well formed if it is +R and Case-Marked. In our case, the movement of the phi-less
NP up to the clitic ensures that it can be considered +R. Since the NP checks Case , the chain
is also Case-Marked. The similarity between the SE-anaphors of this paper involving a clitic
as target and the Dutch SE-anaphors, which need not involve a clitic, is that movement of a
phi-less NP on an argument position of a predicate results in a chain that is interpretable at
LF. The third aspect that makes the impersonal like a SE-anaphor is the Binding Theory,
highlighting its pronominal character: impersonal se/ się is a clear pronoun. SE-anaphors
pattern with pronouns in that they occur on an argument position of a predicate without
making this predicate reflexive. On this view, the defective null NP that serves as double for
the clitic patterns like a pronoun. It fits in unproblematic ways traditional principle B
(Chomsky 1981): a pronoun is free in its governing category. Alternatively, following R&R,
it does not make the predicate reflexive when it occurs on one of its argument positions
(external at this point/ internal immediately below). R&R propose no principle to prevent a
SE-anaphor from being free, and we saw above that Dutch zich is coindexed with the subject
not because of the binding theory, but due to the movement for phi-features. The impersonal
uses of se / się behave like pronouns rather clearly. Intuitively speaking, they
are “antecedentless” expressions. These uses, then, are pronominal as they indicate a SE-
anaphor, which does not reflexivize the predicate (–Refl), and repairs referential deficiency by
moving to se / się (in R&R’s terms, it changes its value from [–R] to [+R]).

The analysis just proposed for the Subject Impersonal can easily extend to the Object
Impersonal in (13). In this case, NP1 in (15) stands either for the overt nominative subject
that checks features against T in TP, or for pro. T is not defective, and contains a complete set
of phi-features. NP2 is the null item with the human feature, (structural) Acc Case, but no phi-
features. It raises to ClP to check Case. Similar to an arbitrary subject, NP2 as object has the
pronominal characteristics of a SE-anaphor, and raises to form a chain that is interpretable at
LF.

The last question is why the clitic in (15) can attract for checking purposes the
defective subject NP1 of sect. 2, or the defective object NP2 of sect. 3. Inspired by proposals
in (Chomsky 1998), we assign to sel się as target of the movement a structural Case feature
that is unvalued. This feature can thus be used to check any structural Case feature, which
may be either Nom, as on the defective external argument NP1 in sect. 2, or Acc /Gen, as on
the defective NP2 in sect. 3 (for more details (Rivero 1999)).

In sum, sel się with an unvalued Structural Case feature is merged in CL. NPs without
phi-features cannot enter into an AGREE relation, and check structural Case by MOVING to
This operation results in a LF-chain interpreted as an expression with a pronominal and a human character, which is the SE-anaphor.

4.2. **The semantic analysis: the impersonal as indefinite pronoun (Chierchia 1995).**

In 4.1, it was proposed that the movement of the NP in (15) bypassing TP to the “based-generated” clitic to check structural Case results in a well-formed chain interpretable at LF. This chain can thus serve as an appropriate input for later levels of semantic interpretation.

What are the semantics of the impersonal? Chierchia (1995) argues that the Subject Impersonal in Italian is an indefinite pronoun. We see next that this proposal is quite compatible with the syntactic analysis of sect. 4.1, and captures important interpretive parallelisms shared by the P and Sl impersonals with their Italian and Spanish counterparts, which are not discussed here.

Some important features in Chierchia’s proposal illustrated in this paper with P and Sl are as follows. First, the impersonal is an indefinite pronoun with a sortal restriction (i.e. human). This resembles our proposal in sect. 4.1 that it is a SE-anaphor with a formally encoded human feature. As pronoun, the impersonal can antecede itself, as in (16). Thus, it does not fall under the Novelty Condition proposed by Heim (1982) for indefinites.

(16) a. Jeśli sie gra zle, przegrywa sie. (P)
   If sie plays badly, loses sie
b. Če se igra slabo, se izgubi.              (Sl)
   If se plays badly, se loses
   “If one plays poorly, one loses.”

For Chierchia, the Novelty Condition at work in If a player does not play well, [he /*a player] loses is not independent, but a consequence of principle C for NPs (Chomsky 1981), which does not regulate pronouns. In this respect, the impersonal in (16) is comparable to little pro, which can also antecede itself, as in P Jeśli gra zle, przegrywa. “If he plays poorly, he loses.”

Second, indefinites have intrinsic existential force, which is illustrated below in (19). This semantic aspect also fits well with our syntactic analysis. The movement hypothesized in 4.1. forms a chain whose head combines the raised NP with a human feature, and a clitic that can be seen as an operator providing existential force: the foot of this chain contains a trace (or copy) that can be considered a variable. From this perspective, the proposed syntactic chain shares A and A-bar characteristics, which captures syntactic and semantic aspects. On the one hand, it is a pronoun of the SE-anaphor type, or an A-chain involving the Case system and formal feature-checking, as in traditional NP-movement. On the other hand, it is an indefinite with quantificational force, or an A-bar chain involving variable binding, as in traditional Quantifier Raising.

Third, while intrinsically existential, indefinites may be disclosed by adverbs of quantification that come to bind them. In conditional sentences such as (17), the adverb may thus determine the quantificational force of the impersonal. That is, the impersonal coupled with always may be equivalent to everyone, as in (17a). When coupled to usually, it may be equivalent to many people, as in (17b), and when coupled to seldom it may be equivalent to few people, as in (17c).

(17) a. Jeśli sie gra zle, zawsze sie przegrywa. (P)
   a’. Če se igra slabo, se vedno izgubi.              (Sl)
   “If one plays poorly, one always loses.”
   b. Jeśli sie gra zle, zazwiczaj sie przegrywa. (P)
If one plays poorly, one usually loses.

“Jeśli się gra źle, rzadko się przegrywa.”

“If one plays poorly, one seldom loses.”

From this perspective, the examples in (17) are roughly equivalent in truth conditions to the corresponding relatives in (18).

(18) a. Wszyscy, którzy grają źle przegrywają.
    Vsakdo, ki igranje slabo, izgubi.
    “Everyone who plays poorly loses.”

b. Wielu ludzi, którzy grają źle przegrywają.
    Veliko ljudi, ki igranje slabo, izgubi.
    “Many people who play poorly lose.”

c. Niewielu ludzi, którzy grają źle przegrywają.
    Malo ljudi, ki igranje slabo, izgubi.
    “Few people who play poorly lose.”

Fourth, disclosure is optional, so the impersonal may retain its intrinsic character. In the conditional construction in (19), each impersonal clitic may preserve its own existential force, which gives rise to the disjoint reference reading: those who explain the problems or the theory and those who do not understand need not be the same.

    If explains się problemsACC so badly, usually not understands się themGEN
    “If one explains {problems/ a theory} so badly, {they /it} {are/is} usually not understood.”

b. Če se teorijo razloži tako slabo, se je navadno ne razume.
    “If se theoryACC explains so badly , se itGEN usually not understands”

Fifth, disclosure is reserved for adverbs of quantification such as always. It does not extend to quantifiers such as every. In (20), the person who invites and the host need not be the same. Since each occurrence of the impersonal clitic is existentially closed, different se / się are not semantically forced to covary.

(20) a. Wszyscy, których się zaprasza na konferencję.
    Everybody whoACC się invites to conference,
    oczekuja że się będą ich dobrze traktować.
    “Everybody who is invited to a conference expects to be treated well.”

b. Vsakdo, ki se ga povabi na konferenco,
    Everybody that se invitations to conference,
    pričakuje, da se ga bo spoštljivo obravnava.
    “Everybody who is invited to a conference expects to be treated well.”

In sum, the semantic analysis proposed by Chierchia for Italian si can also account for the interpretative properties of P się and Sl se, and capture the important parallelisms of the Slavic and Romance impersonal.

Impersonal se/ się is a syntactic Simplex Expression anaphor: a null expression whose defective interpretable content amounts to a human feature, and which raises to the clitic to repair formal and referential deficiencies. It repairs its formal deficiency by checking Case, and its referential deficiency by acquiring quantificational force (i.e. in R&R’s terms, it forms a Case-marked chain, and goes from –Ref to +Ref), while remaining without phi-features. It can function as syntactic controller, syntactic binder of all types of anaphors, including the long distance type, and external argument of many predicates. As to predicate classes, the Sl impersonal is more restricted than its P counterpart, and seems excluded with stative predicates. The impersonal is a non-reflexivizer, so similar to a regular pronoun it can be free. Semantically, the impersonal is a human indefinite pronoun with existential force. As a pronoun, it can escape the Novelty Condition and antecede itself, which is not possible for indefinite NPs. The impersonal is existential but displays (optional) quantificational variability when adverbs of quantification disclose it and bind it. Thus the impersonal can be equivalent to some and all, as many in the past have noted, but also to many and few, which is less known.

References.


