

Towards a classification of impersonal constructions in Komi: A functional-typological approach¹

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1. Introduction

Although the coding of impersonal constructions shows a broad variety cross-linguistically, some obvious patterns can be outlined in this domain. The aim of this paper is to give a classification of the impersonals in Komi (Zyrian and Permyak), following Siewierska's (2008a: 116) definition, according to which, from the functional viewpoint, "impersonalization is associated with agent defocusing". Accordingly, Komi impersonals are seen here as representatives of certain levels of agent demotion, being illustrated as a scalar category. (For this approach, see Siewierska 2008b; Malchukov & Ogawa 2011). There are a few summaries of the constructions studied here in Finno-Ugric languages (Stipa 1962; Schiefer 1981), and while the phenomenon is discussed in detail in literature on Komi (e.g., Lytkin 1962; Tsypanov 2005), typological application has been neglected. Therefore, recent research can bring both Uralistics and language typology up to date. In the following paper, I first survey different approaches to the phenomenon (Section 2), and I then demonstrate the functional parameters, corpus and methods used in this study, with a brief overlook on textual frequency (Section 3). Then I provide an agent-based classification for Komi impersonals (Section 4), and finally, I summarize the study and present some possible directions for further research (Section 5).

2. The impersonal domain: approaches and definitions

A universal definition of impersonals cannot be found in the linguistic literature (see Barðdal 2004, for instance). Varying approaches use different interpretations of the term, placing their focus mostly on structural or functional features of these constructions.

2.1 Functional approaches: agentivity and agent demotion

According to Holvoet (2001: 363), impersonal constructions serve "to describe an action, state, etc. ascribed to an indefinite (referential or non-

¹ I am indebted to Ferenc Havas and Jyri Lehtinen for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

referential) subject”. From a semantic-pragmatic viewpoint, impersonality is closely related with the demotion of Agent (A) (cf. Givón 1990; Siewierska 2008a). From another viewpoint, animacy and topicality are handled within the same domain of prominence, as animate beings are higher on the empathy hierarchy; therefore, they are more topical in the discourse (Malchukov & Ogawa 2011: 32).

Following Siewierska (2008a: 121), agent demotion means “the diminishing of the prominence or salience from what is assumed to be the norm”. For this study, the term A has a broader application; it is not only the actor of the action but can also be instigator, causer, or the most affected participant. On the basis of thematic roles, A occupies the highest place on the Semantic Role Hierarchy (SRH) – that is $A > \text{Beneficent} > \text{Patient} > \text{other}$ (Givón 1990: 566) – being often but not necessarily animate and human. Moreover, Givón (*ibid.*) states that in the prototypical active sentence, A has the role of the grammatical subject. According to recent typological results of cross-linguistic analyses, the impersonal domain within a given language can best be described as a gradual scale (cf. Barðdal 2004; Malchukov & Ogawa 2011), since agent defocusing shows a continuum, and may involve the following stages (Siewierska 2008a: 121):

- a) the non-elaboration or under-elaboration of the agent,
- b) the demotion of the agent from its prototypical subject and topic function, or
- c) both demotion and non-elaboration.

It is not always unambiguous which particular construction belongs to which of the types mentioned above, so in order to get a more accurate picture of Komi impersonals it is worth taking into consideration some other parameters as well (see 3.2).

2.2 Formal approaches

Impersonals have been typically studied within the scope of Indo-European languages, often from a diachronic perspective (e.g., Malchukov & Siewierska 2011). In this sense, impersonals are interpreted as structures bearing certain morphological markers (often corresponding to particular thematic roles), as in Seefranz-Montag’s (1995: 1277) classification, which is based on verbal valence. She finds that the impersonal domain contains constructions with zero-valence verbs, expressing weather phenomena; verbs with obligatory non-nominative arguments whose thematic role is experiencer; two-valence (bivalent) verbs with an experiencer coded by a non-nominative, obligatory argument and with an optional adjunct in the role of the patient; and finally, impersonal passives and reflexives.

There are studies that interpret impersonalization as a syntactic operation. Blevins (2003: 516), for instance, states that impersonals are transitivity preserving forms of personal verbs that “inhibit the expression of a syntactic

subject". The distribution of impersonals compared with that of passives is frequently analyzed, often with the tool of valence or transitivity. In this sense, Vihman (2002: 2) finds that impersonals do not change the dynamicity of the verb, contrary to passives, which are stativizing. In most cases, the above mentioned approaches, especially morphology-based, can be found in Komi and Permyak reference grammars (cf. Lytkin 1962 and Kalina & Raspopova 1983, for instance), since impersonals are defined as certain verb forms (or sentences) with no overt subject at all, or if there is a subject-like element, it expresses impersonal meaning. In these descriptions, the question of agent demotion is usually neglected, but semantic properties are discussed to some extent. Selkov (1967) divides constructions into two main groups: impersonal constructions (e.g., meteo verbs, verbs expressing sensations and emotions) and personal constructions in impersonal use (e.g., reflexive constructions with an oblique argument). Henceforth, I concentrate on functional parameters principally (see Section 3.2.2), but describe morphologic features as well.

3. Methods and corpus

3.1 On data

Different kinds of methods were used in this study. Firstly, I collected data from reference grammars (Selkov 1967; Lytkin 1962; Kalina & Raspopova 1983; Bartens 2000; Tsypanov 2005) and chrestomathies (Rédei 1978; Ponomareva forthcoming), in order to have an extensive view on structures that are interpreted as impersonals. Since the functional aspects of impersonals have received less attention in the literature, this first classification focuses on the semantics and morphology of verbal constructions as discussed above. Therefore, I collected additional data from native speakers² using a questionnaire to be translated into the target languages, containing 87 examples. The sentences were provided in both Hungarian and Russian, and in some cases more than one translation for a given sentence was provided by the informants. Finally, there were some discussions of the doubtful examples with the native speakers when needed – that is, when counterexamples were provided as well.

Besides these, I compiled a small corpus-based survey on Komi impersonals, expecting to see different genres show discrepancies in textual frequency. The corpus consists of 10 texts, of which five are written in Permyak and five in Zyrian. By genre, there are five newspaper texts and five mythical texts (e.g., folktales and legends). I assumed that representatives of the latter genre would contain more examples of

² I would like to thank Larisa Ponomareva, Nikolay Kuznetsov, and Nikolay Rakin for providing data and useful feedback on my examples.

impersonals than journalistic texts. While it is possible in both cases that the identity of A is left open because of its unimportance, A might in mythical texts be someone whom it is forbidden to mention.

3.2 Parameters used in ranking

In order to provide a scalar classification of Komi impersonals, I tried to rank certain types of constructions using both structural (i. verb form; ii. case form) and functional (iii. referentiality; iv. readings) parameters. While it is well-known that textual frequency has a direct connection with (morphological) productivity (Bybee 2006), and therefore productivity has to do with prototypicality, it is worth examining frequency as well. But since such an implication cannot be attested on the basis of the corpus used in this study, this parameter was not used in ranking.

3.2.1 Structural features

From a morphological perspective, impersonals share certain verbal properties, the most obvious being restrictions on verb form. In most cases, if the construction involves a verb, it stands in a given form, which is often the third person singular or plural (cf. Bartens 2000; Malchukov & Ogawa 2011). Further restrictions may refer to the lack of person opposition or the lack of verbal agreement (e.g., Siewierska 2008b). If in a given construction restrictions like these do exist in opposite to other expressions, the construction can be described as impersonal.

Another typical feature of some impersonals is non-canonical case marking. Givón (1990: 566) states that in prototypical active sentences, the most prominent verbal argument is the subject, which bears the thematic role of A. Since the SRH relates to the case form of the primary arguments, the construction can be interpreted as impersonal, if A does not bear the typical case form. Therefore, the case form is closely connected with demotion, as mentioned in 2.1.

3.2.2 Functional features

Agent demotion has certain pragmatic motivations: A can be already known from the context or it can be predictable, general, universal or simply unimportant in the context (Givón 1990). According to this, impersonality relates to A's referential range, as impersonal reference is to be distinguished both from vague and generic reference (Siewierska 2008b)³. The reference is rather impersonal when the speaker is unable to specify a set of individuals or any group which could be referenced. Impersonal reference is not the

³ In this study, the reference of the A is also present in those cases in which the syntactic subject of a given construction is not overt. For more on this approach, see Siewierska (2008b; 2011).

same as generic or vague reference; impersonal reference is characterized by its quasi-existential nature (that is, it refers to at least one individual) rather than being quasi-universal (that is, referring to all, every, or any individual). It requires specific time reference, excludes the speaker, and often forbids restriction on the subject (ibid. 7–11).

Following Keenan's definition, Malchukov and Ogawa (2011: 23) consider a subject prototypical if it is a referential argument, a definite NP, topical, animate, and agentive. According to Siewierska (ibid.), impersonal reference can be distinguished not only from generic but from indefinite (or vague) reference as well. She finds that impersonal constructions refer to an unspecified group of individuals, while in the case of indefinite reference the group itself is specified, such as being at least somewhat known to the speaker and/or the addressee (ibid. citing Cavadas Afonso 2003). For instance, the referent of a construction like *Taxes will be raised again* evokes a specified group in the speaker's or addressee's mind, such as the government, for instance (cf. Siewierska 2011). The reference is more impersonal when it cannot be defined without broader context. Using the feature of indefiniteness, I examine whether the referent of a given construction is an individual or a group. In the latter case, the expression is more impersonal-like than in the former.

Referentiality and indefiniteness show overlap, but the former refers to the whole structure itself while the latter, primarily to A. It was not possible in the case of each of the constructions to specify the value they represent on the basis of data collected from grammars, so I have drawn mostly on data provided by the informants. As we will see in Section 4, the more parameters mentioned above hold for a given example, the more typically impersonal the construction is.

4. An agent-based classification of Komi impersonals

In the following section, I provide examples of each construction in regard to Siewierska's (2008a) classification and discuss the parameters given in 3.2. The examples are from grammars and native speakers, referred to by their initials.

4.1 Constructions with under-elaborated agents

This subclass includes constructions in which the primary argument of the verb is a human, unspecified A; that is, it is not exactly determined, nor described (cf. Siewierska 2008a; 2008b). This kind of A can be encoded in four ways in Komi: by an indefinite pronoun, by a generic noun, by a 3PL impersonal, or by a quasi-causative construction.

4.1.1 Indefinite pronoun constructions

This group includes structures in which the under-elaborated A corresponds to a non-referential subject or the absence of an overt referential argument, and which convey a generic or a pragmatically specified human A (Siewierska 2008a: 121):

(1a) Permyak (Ponomareva forthcoming: 153)

kinke gušeņik kerku-as pir-e noš čele-ni
 someone silently house-3SG.ILL enter-3SG and fall.silent-3PL
 ‘Someone enters the house silently and they fall silent.’

(1b) Zyrian (N. R.)

kođke ez kuśed bi-se
 someone NEG.PST.3SG switch.off fire-3SG.ACC
 ‘Somebody did not switch off the light.’

In both cases, the reference of A is left open, but while in (1a) it can be understood only as quasi-universal, since it can refer to any arbitrary person, in (1b) the reference is rather quasi-existential, as it is true for at least one individual. For example, the person carrying out the action expressed by the latter (rather than the former) expression is demoted because of its unimportance. Both types of referentiality can be found in the corpus of Zyrian and Permyak as well. Since quasi-universal reference is not a canonical impersonal property with respect to this feature, the indefinite pronoun constructions are very far from the core of the impersonal domain. This interpretation seems to be supported by the property of indefiniteness, given that in most cases, A corresponds to a demoted individual and not a group. The syntactic subject expressed by the indefinite pronoun is a canonical one – that is, it bears the typical features of subject. In Komi, the canonical subject is in the nominative case, precedes the verb (cf. Rédei 1978), and controls agreement. To sum up, this type represents the very periphery of the impersonal domain.

4.1.2 Generic noun constructions

A non-referential subject is often expressed by a generic pronoun (Siewierska 2008a), such as *man* in German or *one* in English. In Komi, generalized nouns express the same function: e.g., Zyrian *jez*, Permyak *ot’ir* ‘people’ and *mort* ‘man’. The referentiality of A is mostly dependent on the context; generally it is described as indefinite or generic (Rédei 1978):

(2a) Permyak (L. P.)

Ot’ir čeka vovl-e / vovle-ni tače.
 people often go-3SG / go-3PL here.ILL
 ‘People often come here.’

(2b) Zyrian (Rédei 1978: 94)

<i>jez-is</i>	<i>tene</i>	<i>bur-en</i>	<i>liɖɖe-ni</i>
people-3SG	you.ACC	good-INS	think-3PL
‘People consider you good.’			

The syntactic subject does not control agreement in Zyrian (Tsypanov 2005), and we can assume the same in the case of Permyak as well, as it can be seen in (2a). Since the canonical subject is in the nominative case (e.g., Ponomareva forthcoming), this type is not a typical representative of impersonals on the basis of its formal features. With regard to reference, it is not clear whether it is existential or universal, as its interpretation depends on a broader context. With regard to the value of indefiniteness, this type of construction is a more typical candidate for impersonals than the former one. While indefinite pronoun structures are in the most cases interpreted as individuals, generic nouns often support plural readings or interpretations.

4.1.3 3PL impersonals

3PL impersonals (i.e., impersonal constructions using third-person plural verb forms) are used very often cross-linguistically to encode a non-elaborated A (cf. Malchukov & Ogawa 2011: 27–9). Siewierska (2008b: 14) finds that 3PL impersonals “are seen to be restricted to agentive subjects of either transitive or intransitive clauses”:

(3a) Permyak (Ponomareva forthcoming: 170)

<i>Kam dor-is</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>sue-ni</i>	<i>Kom-mu-en.</i>
Kama near-ELA	land	call-3PL	Komi-land-INS
‘The land nearby Kama is called Komi land.’			

(3b) Zyrian (N. R.)

<i>mij jiliš</i>	<i>eni</i>	<i>oz</i>	<i>šorhitni</i>
what about	now	NEG.3PL	speak
‘People speak about everything nowadays.’			

I have found many examples in which reference is existential rather than universal (which is the case in (3b)). Although quasi-existential reference often indicates individual reading, this is not the case here. As verbal markers show that a plural interpretation is more natural, this subtype is located closer to core of the domain. In these constructions, usually there is no overt pronominal subject. If an overt subject is expressed, it indicates a deictic reading (for further details, see Siewierska 2008b). As it follows from the above mentioned, this latter type is the most typical impersonal construction within this subclass.

4.1.4 Quasi-causative construction

There are special structures in Komi which consist of a transitive verb and an object, expressing human physical states (Selkov 1967):

(4a) Permyak (L. P.)

zonka-es *kijn-t-e*
 boy-3SG.ACC freeze-CAUS-3SG

‘The boy is freezing.’ Lit. ‘[Something] makes the boy freeze.’

(4b) Zyrian (N. K.)

zon-se *kize-d-e*
 boy-3SG.ACC cough-CAUS-3SG

‘The boy is coughing.’ Lit. ‘[Something] makes the boy cough.’

In these constructions referentiality is restricted in a certain sense; that is, the most affected argument (A) is clearly defined but the identity of the causer of the described event is left open. The reference of A, marked by the accusative, is always existential, so this property characterizes the construction as a typical impersonal. In terms of indefiniteness, this type is not a typical candidate for an impersonal, as A is definite and refers to an individual. From the formal aspect, the verb form is strictly restricted, and there is no verbal agreement. This structure is broadly known among Finno-Ugric languages, and parallel examples can be found in Finnish and Mari, for instance (cf. Stipa 1962; Havas 2007; Gulyás 2011).

4.2 Constructions with demoted agents

Demoted-A constructions are analogous to those that have a subject but they do not share canonical subject properties (Siewierska 2008a: 118–9). This primarily means that the subject is marked non-canonically – i.e., differently from the norm in some way, or the subject’s topic function is demoted (for the latter, see Malchukov & Ogawa 2011). These structures generally describe “sensations, emotions, need, potential, in which the argument bearing the highest semantic role on the semantic-role hierarchy (with a given predicate) is an experiencer or cognizer” (Siewierska *ibid.* 118). Since both Permyak and Zyrian have nominative sentence structure, the canonical case for subject (of both intransitive and transitive verbs) is the nominative. If this argument does not overlap the A, or it overlaps it but is marked by a non-nominative case, the construction can be considered impersonal. This subclass includes 4 types: a modal, an adjectival, a reflexive, and a participle construction.

4.2.1 Modal construction

In the literature, these constructions are generally considered to be impersonals (Tsypanov 2005), although alternative interpretations can also

be found (Bartens 2000). Modal structures consist of a verb expressing need or potential, an infinitive verb, and an obligatory argument marked in the dative:

(5a) Permyak (Bartens 2000: 330)

<i>menim</i>	<i>kol-e</i>	<i>mun-ni</i>
I.DAT	must-3SG	go-INF
'I must go.'		

(5b) Zyrian (N. K.)

<i>sili</i>	<i>poz-e</i>	<i>ju-ni</i>	<i>alkogol'</i>
(s)he.DAT	may-3SG	drink-INF	spirit
'(S)he may drink spirits.'			

The reference is rather existential than universal in this case, so this type can be a core representative of the domain on the basis of this parameter. But the indefiniteness feature makes it less typical, since the reference of A is connected with a special individual (of an unspecified group). The dative marked argument expresses the A and bears the role of the syntactic subject (in the sense of Siewierska 2008a: 118; cf. Bartens 2000) and does not trigger verbal agreement. On the basis of the above mentioned, I consider this a typically impersonal pattern. Permyak has a very similar construction, which does not contain the modal verb. While it has a special, underlining function, its values remain the same, so it is not worth classifying it as an independent subtype.

(6) Permyak (Kalina & Raspopova 1983: 24)

<i>mij</i>	<i>mijanle</i>	<i>eni</i>	<i>ker-ni</i>
what	we.DAT	now	do-INF
'What should we do now?' Lit. 'What for us to do now?'			

4.2.2 Adjectival construction

This construction is quite similar to the former one. In Komi it is possible for the predicate to not contain a verb. In special cases, the only available argument is marked by the dative:

(7a) Permyak (L. P.)

<i>zonka-le</i>	<i>umel'</i>
boy-DAT	bad
'The boy feels sick.'	

(7b) Zyrian (N. K.)

<i>zonm-is-li</i>	<i>zar</i>
boy-3SG-DAT	hot
'The boy is hot.'	

A universal reading cannot be supported here, since the expression cannot be true for all/any arbitrary referent; that is, reference is existential in this case, although we should keep in mind that reference is restricted in the sense that A always refers to a particular (definite or vague) individual. In this case, there is no need to take features referring to the verb into consideration. Thus, this subtype can receive the same evaluation according to ranking as the modal constructions mentioned above.

4.2.3 Reflexive construction

Both the reflexive and the resultative constructions discussed in the following are defined as impersonal in grammars (Lytkin 1962). Selkov (1967: 153) considers this reflexive construction to be a special kind of impersonals, in which “the verb expresses physical acts or sensations irrespectively of the actor itself”. Therefore, the primary function of this structure is to denote spontaneous events:

(8) Zyrian (Selkov 1967: 153)

<i>djr</i>	<i>menam</i>	<i>vetljš-š-is</i>
for long	I.GEN	hurry-REFL-PST.3SG

‘I was in a hurry for a long time.’

The reference of A is the same as in the former cases, and it denotes a particular individual again. The non-canonical subject does not control agreement, but there are restrictions to verb form; the verb has to be in a third-person singular form. According to the features mentioned here, reflexive constructions are closer to the core of the impersonal domain.

4.2.4 Resultative construction

According to Bartens (2000: 330), the meaning of this construction is primarily resultative. This is in some ways the same claim as what Langacker (2009) states when he represents impersonalization as a cognitive process, where the focus is taken over from the actor to the act or event itself.

(9) Zyrian (Bartens 2000: 330)

<i>menam</i>	<i>kesj-ema</i>
I.GEN	promise-PTCP

‘[Finally] I promised it.’

The reference of A is restricted, focusing on a particular individual within an unspecified group, as is true for the whole subclass. Regarding the parameter of indefiniteness, this expression is not a typical candidate for the category. On the other hand, a quasi-existential reference can be stated for this type.

There is no agreement⁴, but restrictions on the verb form do exist. This type is considered as being equal to the former one on the impersonality ranking.

4.3 Constructions with demoted and non-elaborated agents

The last subgroup includes constructions with agents that are both demoted and non-elaborated. The typical representatives of this group are impersonal passives and weather verbs (Siewierska 2008a). Some other subjectless constructions in which A is understood to be a human, such as in 4.3.1 and 4.3.2, are classified as belonging here. Siewierska (ibid. 120) includes constructions with “no obligatory nominal arguments or arguments which are more object-like than subject-like” in this subclass.

4.3.1 Instrumental construction

In the instrumental construction, there is no overt subject, nor can there be one at all (cf. Lytkin 1962). The verb describes a spontaneous event that happens without any human intervention. The “instigator” of the event, a natural force in general, becomes secondary and so it is marked by the instrumental case (Kalina & Raspopova 1983):

(10a) Permyak (Kalina & Raspopova 1983: 24)

<i>tel-en</i>	<i>nebet-is</i>	<i>kriša</i>
wind-INS	carry-PST.3SG	roof[ACC]

‘The roof was carried away by the wind.’

(10b) Zyrian (Selkov 1967: 151)

<i>lijmj-en</i>	<i>kut-is</i>	<i>tirt-nj</i>
snow-INS	begin-PST.3SG	cover-INF

‘Everything began to be covered by snow.’

The referent of the A cannot be defined by the universal-existential pairs, since A is clearly identified. A always refers to a certain individual, though it is neither human nor animate. In this sense, this construction can be considered a very marginal example of impersonals. There is a restriction on the verb form, since it must stand in the third person, but no other restrictions, such as tense, for instance, exist, in contrast to the former cases, where such restrictions do exist.

4.3.2 Reflexive (zero) construction

I separate this type from the one introduced in (8), since in this construction, the appearance of any obligatory argument of the verb is excluded:

⁴ Rédei (1978) analyzes the *-a* element of the *-ema* suffix a verbal person marker. In this sense, the predicate is a finite verb, and the subject controls verbal agreement.

(11) Zyrian (Tsypanov 2005: 195)

<i>gožem-in</i>	<i>śiv-ś-ε</i>	<i>ov-ś-ε</i>
summer-INE	sing-REFL-3SG	live-REFL-3SG

‘[People] sing and live [well] in summer.’

The reference within this construction is rather existential than universal, as can be seen from the translation; it refers to an unspecified group of individuals that are not distinct. The verb is always in the third-person singular and the reflexive *-ś* affix is obligatory. Tsypanov (2005) considers this type an impersonal passive, but the participle-based construction (cf. 4.3.4) seems to be a better candidate. I identify this construction as a prototypical impersonal.

4.3.3 Weather verb

In the literature, weather verbs in most cases are typical examples of impersonal constructions (e.g., Schiefer 1981), regardless of the framework of the study. A detailed overview on these structures is provided by Bartens (1995) and Salo (2011), for instance. Both in Zyrian and Permyak, meteo verbs stand without any overt syntactic subject:

(12a) Permyak (L. P.)

Virdale.
‘It’s lightning.’

(12b) Zyrian (N. R.)

Gjmale.
‘The sky is thundering.’

There is no human A that can be involved in constructions like these, so the reference of A is open, or more accurately, it cannot be defined here. Since the A is totally absent, weather verbs show no connection with personality in any sense, thus they are the prototypical representatives of impersonals. Since the mere verb stands for the whole construction, case form is not examined. For the same reason, there is no verbal agreement, although there is a strong restriction on the verb, which must be in third-person singular.

4.3.4 Impersonal passive

The impersonal passive is a frequently examined part of the domain and is perhaps the best-studied type of impersonal in Finno-Ugric languages (cf. Blevins 2003, Vihman 2002). In this construction, it is not possible for a subject referring to an unspecified (generally) human agent to appear, although the construction allows for (without requiring) the inclusion of an A of this kind. If A is present, it does not bear the usual markers of a subject, as there are no referential restrictions according to subject either (Siewierska 2008a). Givón (1990) describes these passives as demoted-A constructions

that remove A from its typical topic position. Another crucial point with respect to impersonal passives is the fact that the demotion of A does not induce the promotion of patient (P) to topic function, as it is obvious in the case of personal passives (cf. *ibid.*):

(13a) Permyak (L. P.)

<i>esten</i>	<i>veral-ema-ś</i>
here	hunt-PST.PTCP-REFL

‘There was hunting here’ or ‘Someone has hunted here’.

(13b) Zyrian (N. R.)

<i>tani</i>	<i>veli</i>	<i>vetliyl-ema</i>
here	was	walk-PST.PTCP

‘Someone has walked here.’

The examples in (13) illustrate that both Permyak and Zyrian constructions formulated by the past participle *-ema* (cf. Bartens 2000: 238) satisfy the criteria listed above. Another important feature of these constructions is that they can be formed from both transitive and intransitive verbs. This is a typical parameter of impersonal passives (cf. Siewierska 2008a). A is referentially restricted; it cannot include the speaker, and A refers to a group, within which the individuals are not distinct. The reference is quasi-existential; universal reference cannot be supported. The verb form is restricted, and the participle affix is obligatory. Since participles do not show any opposition in person, this construction is the core type of impersonals according to verb form. The lack of any obligatory verbal argument makes the question of case form irrelevant here. In summary, I consider impersonal passives to be the most typical form of impersonal constructions, with regard to each parameter used in this study.

4.4 Summary

Following a description for each type of impersonals, a short overview of the findings is provided. Table 1 shows the parameters for each construction, with a final value in the last column.

The ranking of impersonals was determined in terms of referentiality and indefiniteness.

	Reference	Indefiniteness	Verb form	Case	Prototypicality
Indefinite pronoun	univ/exist	individual	non-restricted	Nom	0
Generic noun	univ/exist	group	non-restricted	Nom	1
3PL impersonal	univ/exist	group	restricted for person	Nom	2
Quasi-causative	existential	individual	restricted for person + affix	Acc	3
Modal	existential	individual	restricted for person	Dat	3
Adjectival	existential	individual	–	Dat	3
Reflexive	existential	individual	restricted for person + affix	Gen	3
Resultative	existential	individual	restricted for person + affix	Gen	3
Instrumental	–	individual (inanimate)	restricted for person	Ins	3
Reflexive (zero)	existential	group	restricted for person + affix	–	4
Weather verb	existential	–	restricted for person	–	4
Impersonal passive	existential	group	restricted for person + affix	–	4

Table 1. A classification of Komi impersonals

As can be seen in Table 1, the prototypical representatives of the impersonal domain are constructions with non-restricted referentiality and existential reading. They contain a verb appearing exclusively in the third-person singular, with or without a special (reflexive) marker and the verb is not controlled with regard to agreement. If a verbal argument is present, it is not obligatory and is more object-like than subject-like. Such constructions are impersonal passives, zero reflexives and weather verbs – that is, constructions with demoted and non-elaborated A's. More marginal representatives of the impersonal domain are quasi-causative, instrumental,

3PL, reflexive and resultative constructions, in which the referentiality or the reading does not fulfill the requirements of impersonals. Adjectival constructions and those which contain a generic noun or an indefinite pronoun represent the border of the category. With respect to the initial question, the classification of Komi impersonals as a prototypicality-based domain can be shown as in Figure 1, where the less typical representatives are far from the core:

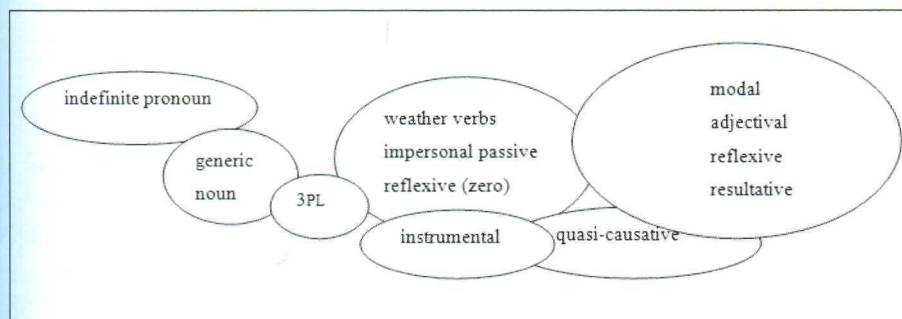


Figure 1. Komi impersonals as a prototypicality-based category

4.5 Textual frequency

As already mentioned in 3.1, I conducted a small study of textual frequency, supposing that different genres would show different data in frequency. Namely, I assumed that mythical texts would show more types (and tokens) of impersonal constructions than newspaper texts. Both registers were represented by approximately the same size of texts. As the corpus is quite small (containing ca. 11,000 words), here I only summarize the results for type frequency, which is shown in Table 2.

Type	Zyrian		Permyak	
	mythical	newspaper	mythical	newspaper
Indefinite pronoun	2	-	-	1
Generic noun	4	9	1	2
3PL impersonal	13	2	-	1
Quasi-causative	-	-	-	1

Type	Zyrian		Permyak	
	mythical	newspaper	mythical	newspaper
Modal	11	14	1	17
Adjectival	–	–	–	–
Reflexive	–	–	–	–
Resultative	2	2	–	–
Instrumental	1	2	–	–
Reflexive (zero)	3	2	–	1
Weather verb	–	–	–	–
Impersonal passive	3	9	7	1

Table 2. Type frequency in mythical and newspaper texts in Komi

The results show that the initial assumption was not supported by the data, since in 4 of 12 cases, the newspaper texts contain more impersonal constructions, while in 3 cases, both registers have the same amount of data. Although expanding the corpus would be necessary in order to get relevant information on textual frequency features in Komi, some general tendencies can still be outlined. For instance, modals are overwhelmingly present in both kinds of texts, and quite often, impersonal passives and 3PL impersonals are as well. A possible reason for this can be the fact that in case of other types, there are more restrictions on the verb form; e.g., a causative, reflexive, etc. affix has to be present, while in other cases the construction can be formed from any verbal stem.

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper, I introduced an agent demotion-based classification of Komi impersonal constructions. I put 12 constructions into 3 major subclasses according to Siewierska's (2008a; 2008b) distribution, focusing on both functional and structural parameters of each type. I have found that the impersonal domain can be described in terms of prototypicality, since Komi impersonals show a continuum rather than distinct classes. In addition, I made a small corpus-based study on textual frequency which eventually disproved my initial assumption that mythical texts would contain more types of impersonals than newspaper texts. It is important to bear in mind that an expanded corpus may offer different results. For further research, it would be useful to extend the sample to other Finno-Ugric languages, as

well as broaden the set of parameters. It is worth studying the internal and external language contacts Finno-Ugric languages share with Indo-European and Turkic languages in light of some similarities shared in impersonal constructions. In summary, the use of functional parameters in the description of the impersonal domain has proven to be an effective tool for gaining a more complex view of Komi impersonals, and further research may be able to provide useful data for both the fields of Uralistics and language typology.

Abbreviations

1 first person	DAT – dative	INS – instrumental	SG – singular
2 second person	ELA – elative	NEG – negation	
3 third person	GEN – genitive	PL – plural	
A – agent	ILL – illative	PST – past tense	
ACC – accusative	INE – inessive	PTCP – participle	
CAUS – causative	INF – infinitive	REFL – reflexive	

Data sources

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