Impersonal human reference in French Sign Language (LSF)

Brigitte GARCIA, Marie-Anne SALLANDRE, Marie-Thérèse L’HUILLIER, Hatice AKSEN

UMR 7023 SFL – University Paris 8 / University Paris-Lumières & CNRS

**STATE OF THE ART**

**Definition:** “R-impersonals have the appearance of regular, personal constructions but feature a subject which is human and non-referring.”

(Siwierska 2011: 57; see also, a.o., Cabredo-Hofherr 2006)

- Barbera & Quer 2013: pioneering work on impersonal human reference in a sign language: Catalan Sign Language (LSG) = LSC overtly marks impersonal human reference through a distinctive spatial location in the upper area of the frontal plane, a zone already identified for encoding non-specific indefinite referents (Barbera 2012).
- Note: in LSF, a similar value of the upper area of the frontal plane has been noted, as a starting point for the motion of directional/agreeement verbs with an indefinite agent (Millet 1997; Cuxac 2000)
- Special issue of Sign Language & Linguistics: ‘Impersonal reference in Sign Languages’ (Barbera & Cabredo-Hofherr, 2018) >> RSL, LSG, TID, HKSL, LSF, LSC


**THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL OPTIONS**

**Semiological approach**

[Cuxac 2000, Cuxac & Sallandre 2007, Garcia & Sallandre 2014...]

- **Transfer Units =**
  - classifier constructions/productive signs/desciptrig signs
  - constructed action/role shift/surrogare

- Two semiological and linguistic modes of meaning production in SLs

  - Telling by showing
    - Transfer Structures, instantiated in transfer units
  - Telling without showing
    - Standard Structures, using lexical units, pointing units and deixilogical units

**Approach for our discursive corpora**

[L’Huillier et al 2016]

- A cognitive-functional approach
  - (Richer) (Bagnew 1991, Cornish 1999, Johansen 2011)
  - Prevalence of semantic and communicative intent
  - Taking into account the cognitive representations of the interlocutors

**TYPOOMP QUESTIONNAIRE**

- Adaptation to SLs by Cabredo-Hofherr & Barbera (2015) of a questionnaire developed by the Franco-German project Towards a typology of human impersonal pronouns (Typology), AKL-FR-011-FINAL-2011-DQG—

The questionnaire cover a range of contexts that are characteristic for human impersonal subjects in better-studied languages such as English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Italian, and Turkish.

1. Anchored existencial context (anchoring at a known point in space and time).
2. Vague existencial context (event took place at some point in the past).
3. Indent existencial existentials (event is inferred on the basis of (mostly visual) evidence)
4. Predicate requiring a plurality of referents
5. Existential uses with a generalizing/habitual predication
6. Corporative collective subjects
7. In an episodic context
8. In a generic context
9. In an episodic context
10. Universal impersonal pronouns with a modal

**MAIN RESULTS**

**DIRECTIVE VERBS (including verbs of saying), like GIVE, SAY or INFORM: use of a high frontal zone as a marker of impersonal human reference in LSF (starting point of directional verbal).**

- **Universal:** the preferred strategy appears to be the agent ellipsis.
- **Existential:** tend to occur with overt agent marking

**Types of space:**

- The figure synthesizes the different distances and heights used in ‘ALL DEAF’ (blue) – ‘ALL WORLD’ (red) – ‘ALL’ (green) – ‘THREE PERSONS’ (blue) – ‘ALL THREE’ x3 (yellow) – ‘PUBLIC’ (white).

(Aksen, 2018)

**EXISTENTIAL WITH GENERALISING/HABITUAL PREDICATION and LOCATIVE UNIVERSALS**

**FRANCE**

WHAT EAT SNAIL

Transit. Eng: to France. PI: eat some salads. (In France you can mange des escargots.)

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**UNRESTRICTED UNIVERSAL**

**Dominant strategy: agent ellipsis without spatial anchoring: highest degree of Impersonality**

MUST ENJOY ONE TIME LIFE

Transit. Eng: You live alone. (If you are not very single.)

**TWO ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES**

1: Intransitive personal transfer

2: 2nd person pronoun : pointing IX2 (rare)

**CONTACT**

hatice.aksen@etu.univ-paris8.fr

 References


