

The existential use of German *man* and implicit agents of passives

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In Standard German, the dedicated impersonal pronoun *man* allows for an “existential use” in addition to the characteristic generic use, see (1) (see e.g., Cabredo Hofherr 2008, 2010, 2015; Zifonun 2000).

- (1) a. In Wien trinkt man viel Kaffee. (generic)
‘In Vienna, MAN drinks a lot of coffee.’ (~ ‘people (in general)’; ‘one’/‘they’)
b. Man hat mir gestern mein Rad gestohlen. (existential)
‘Yesterday, MAN stole my bike.’ (~ ‘someone’)

The existential use of *man* can only be observed in episodic sentences (i.e., sentences that describe a particular situation in the world of evaluation), while the generic use is restricted to generic sentences (i.e., sentences that describe rules or regularities about the world). In these two uses, *man* seems to make rather distinct semantic contributions: in the generic use, *man* is used to talk about (a subset of) humans in general, while in the existential use, it is used to talk about a particular, indeterminate (possibly singleton) set of humans. In the literature, these two interpretations are generally attributed to different quantifiers (see e.g., Chierchia 1995; Malamud 2006, 2012, 2013; Zobel 2017). In either use, *man* contributes an individual variable restricted to humans, but in the generic use, a generic operator *Gen* contributes quasi-universal quantification, while in the existential use, the variable is bound by an existential quantifier.

In this talk, I take a closer look at the semantic contribution made by *man* in the existential use. I show that the semantic behavior of existential *man* markedly differs from that of other nominal expressions that are analyzed as involving existential quantification. It, however, seems to share its semantic behavior with implicit agents of short passives, see (2) (see also Koenig & Mauner 1999).

- (2) Gestern wurde mir mein Rad gestohlen.
‘Yesterday my bike was stolen.’ (~ ‘by someone’)

I discuss the advantages and shortcomings of the two types of analyses that could be pursued for existential *man* and implicit agents: analyses involving existential quantification and alternatives that try to do away with existential quantification. We will see that, regardless of the type of analysis that is pursued, an adequate analysis of examples like (1-b) and (2) requires us to assume additional mechanisms to capture their observed behavior. Which of the two is chosen then depends on the viability of the necessary extensions.