

The subjecthood requirement in impersonal pronouns. The view from Japanese

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Dedicated impersonal pronouns (such as *man* in German or *one* in English) provide a unique window into the nature of what it means to be a subject. It has been proven difficult to determine why some of these pronouns cannot occur as objects: this has been tied to a combination of their feature-make up in relation to either their argument position or their need for agreement or them resisting case assignment. In order to tease these options apart, I look in this talk at a language that lacks overt agreement, but has overt case morphology (specifically in the nominative), namely Japanese.

In this talk I show three novel puzzles regarding the impersonal pronoun in Japanese. The pronoun shows curious restrictions regarding (i) midfield scrambling, (ii) resisting nominative case when it is a ‘canonical’ subject, (iii) except when it is an object in nominative object constructions. I provide an answer in terms of the feature make up of this pronoun, and the positions it can end up in. Specifically, when it is a ‘canonical’ subject, it goes to a high subject position, higher than SpecTP. Finally, I take the findings of this investigation and return to Germanic languages to see whether this helps solve the puzzle of why some of these pronouns cannot occur as objects.