

THE YAQUI IMPERSONAL AS A THETIC CONSTRUCTION*

Impersonals are a language universal construction type which remains relatively unstudied. These constructions show a number of specialized syntactic features related to the fact that they lack a lexical subject with potential deictic properties – that is, they lack a subject that may receive focus. The English impersonals in (1) show pleonastic subjects (“it”, “they”), which may not carry stress.

- 1) a. It is said that Columbus discovered America.
- b. They say that Columbus discovered America.

McCloskey (in press), Stenson (1989) and Harley (2000) have drawn attention to the syntactic and semantic properties of impersonal constructions in Irish and other European languages. Irish is one of the languages which lack an overt pleonastic subject such as the English “it”. Impersonals show a special “autonomous” (i.e., subjectless) inflection of the Irish verb, which is historically related to a passive, and is often translated as a passive; the construction is exemplified in (2):

- 2) cuitear i mboscai iad
 put.PRES.AUT in boxes them
 They are put in boxes. (McCloskey 1c)

To quote McCloskey:

“The puzzle of understanding the autonomous form iswhat becomes of the subject argument of the verb in which the inflection applies....[what] licenses silence where the most prominent argument of the verb ought to be?”

In this paper we document some unusual properties of impersonal constructions in Yaqui, where a similar problem of analysis arises. Yaqui (Hiaki, Yoeme¹), is a language

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¹ “Hiaki” and “Yoeme” are Yaqui names by which the Yaqui people prefer to designate themselves and their language, and some relevant literature uses these terms. The official name of the tribe in Arizona is the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. “Pascua” is Spanish for “Easter”, the high point in the Yaqui ceremonial calendar.

belonging to the Cahitic branch of Uto-Aztecan, spoken in Arizona and Northern Mexico.

Yaqui has a verbal suffix *-wa* that derives an impersonal construction. These impersonals are often glossed as passives by bilingual native speakers, or as having an ‘understood’ non-referential third person plural human subject (“people, they”). Compare:

- 3) a. Ume ha’amuchim vachi-ta tuuse
The.PL women.PL corn-ACC grind.TRANS
The women are grinding corn.
- b. Vachi tuusi-wa
corn grind.TRANS-*wa*
Corn is being ground; People/They are grinding corn.

Yaqui has no other passive. Impersonals, like passives, have the discourse function of making it possible to assert the existence of an event or situation without specifying an agent or subject. When a *-wa* construction includes a nominative nominal, as in (3b), this nominal is the accusative object of the corresponding transitive construction, as in (3a).

If an active verb of Yaqui has a direct object, that direct object argument becomes the subject of the corresponding impersonal—it cannot retain its accusative case and direct object status. In this latter respect Yaqui impersonals differ conspicuously from impersonals in Irish and other languages, which retain the same object-marked nominals as the corresponding non-impersonal sentences. We will show below, however, that *-wa* constructions are true impersonals in that they need not have any surface subject whatsoever. Although the construction requires promotion of the object argument if there is one, *-wa* may also perfectly felicitously apply to intransitive verbs, producing a truly subjectless construction.

We propose that the Yaqui suffix *-wa* is a non-active Voice head which can usefully be glossed as an existential auxiliary verb EXST. This verb has overt existential force, as opposed to a simple copula. Langacker (1976) identifies *-wa* with Uto-Aztecan *-tɪwa*, “be”. In the next section, we survey the environments in which *-wa* occurs, and situate it within the clausal architecture. We then show that *-wa* constructions truly lack any syntactically realized

external argument. Finally, we argue in support of the claim that *-wa* is an existential verb, and discuss its ability to expressthetic judgments.

1 The distribution of *-wa* as a verbal suffix.

Yaqui is an SOV language with case-marked NPs. Ex.(4a) shows an intransitive sentence; (4b) shows a corresponding impersonal with *-wa*. Note the absence of any overt subject nominal in (4b)—*aman* ‘there’, is an optional adverbial locative element, not a DP.

- 4) a. Ume yoemia aman yaha
 The.PL people there arrive.PL
 The people are arriving there.
- b. Aman yahi-wa
 There arrive.PL-EXST
 (People, they) are arriving there; Arriving there is going on.

Ex. (5a) below shows a transitive, and (5b) the corresponding impersonal.

- 5) a. Hose vachi-ta bwasa’a
 Joe corn-ACC cook.TRANS
 Joe is cooking corn.
- b. Vachi bwasa’a-wa
 Corn cook.TRANS-EXST
 There is corn being cooked; (People, they) are cooking corn.

In terms of its morphological distribution within the verb complex, the suffix *-wa* follows any derivational verbal suffix (illustrated in section 2), and precedes any element from the set of Tense/Aspect suffixes: The following is a paradigm of the Tense/Aspect inflections of the Yaqui verb with *-wa*:²

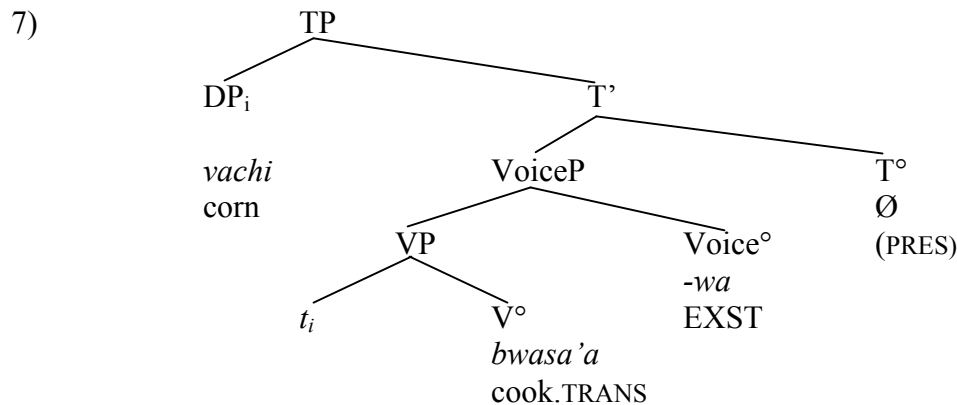
² When *-wa* co-occurs with the Hiaki future/irrealis suffix *-ne*, rather each appearing distinctly in the agglutinative fashion that is usual in the language, the *-ne* and *-wa* fuse into a single passive future/irrealis suffix *-na*:

i. bwiik-na [-wa+-ne] sing-EXST-FUT

Like *-wa*, *-ne* follows all derivational suffixes. It is in complementary distribution with the inflectional suffixes *-k* ‘P.PRF’ and *-n* ‘P.IMPF’, since the latter two suffixes encode past tense and *-ne* is interpreted as a future marker in matrix clauses. However, unlike the latter two suffixes, but like *-wa*, *-ne* suffixes to the stem form of the (potentially derived) verb, rather than to the free form. Because of their similar distribution patterns, and because of the

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|----|---------------|------------------------|
| 6) | bwiik-wa | sing-EXST |
| | bwiik-wa-k | sing-EXST-PRF |
| | bwiik-wa-n | sing-EXST-PST.IMPRF |
| | bwiik-wa-ka-n | sing-EXST-PST.PPL-IMPF |

This distribution suggests that *-wa* occupies an auxiliary or “light” verb projection just below Tense/Aspect. A Voice projection in this position, between the lexical and functional portions of the clausal architecture, has been proposed by Kratzer (1996), Jelinek (1998) and adopted in Harley (2006), among others. Assuming that *-wa* is located in that Voice head, a partial structure for the impersonal in (5b) is illustrated in (7):



The suffix *-wa* may not attach to any verb that does not refer to an action or experience of a human being.³ Compare:

- | | | | |
|----|----|--|-----------|
| 8) | a. | munim | bwase |
| | | bean-PL | cook.INTR |
| | | (The) beans are cooking. | |
| | b. | *bwase-wa | |
| | | cook:INTR- <i>wa</i> | |
| | | [Cannot mean ‘Food/something is cooking’; can only mean (infelicitously) ‘People are cooking’ (unaccusative—that is, in the process of being cooked)] ⁴ | |

fusional form that they take when they co-occur, we conclude that *-wa* and *-ne* occupy adjacent positions in the inflectional structure.

³ Yaqui has another existential construction that is used with overt non-human referents. In answer to a question such as “Is there anything to eat?”, a reply might be:

- | | | | |
|----|-------|-------|------------|
| i. | vachi | ama | aayu-k |
| | Corn | there | be/do-PERF |

There’s corn.

This construction is a locative intransitive—a thetic.

⁴ Some speakers allow this in an “activity” interpretation; others strongly reject it.

Similarly, the transitive active sentence in (9a) has no corresponding impersonal:

- 9) a. Tuuka, ume totoim sii voam yoh-yohta-n
 Yesterday the.PL chickens.pl EMPH feathers RED-drop-PST.IMPF
 “Yesterday, the chickens were dropping a lot of feathers.” (i.e. molting)
- b. *Tuuka sii voam yoh-yohta-wa-n
 Yesterday EMPH feathers RED-drop-EXST-PST
 [Cannot mean,
 “A lot of feathers were dropping yesterday (from unspecified birds).”
 Can only mean “People were dropping a lot of feathers yesterday.”]⁵

Since unaccusative verbs typically do not assign agent or experiencer theta-roles, and consequently typically occur with non-human arguments, many unaccusative verbs in Yaqui exclude *-wa*. However, *-wa* occurs freely with verbs such as “die”, which apparently is interpreted as having an experiencer subject:

- 10) Sawaria-ta-mak koko-wa-n [FE said -po; ck]
 Yellow.(fever)-ACC-with die.PL-EXST-PST.IMPF
 People were dying from yellow fever.

Similarly, verbs of motion, which Harley, Haugen and Tubino (2006) argue are unaccusative in Hiaki, may be marked with *-wa*, since they typically take a human argument:

- 11) Yee-mahta-wa-’a-po tenni-wa
 People-teach-EXST-EV-to run.PL-EXST
 People/they are running to school (the place where people are taught).

And certain “psych” verbs may be marked with *-wa*:

- 12) Ne-u omti-wa
 me-to angry-EXST
 People/they are mad at me; There are people mad at me.

Even the predicative copula may occur with *-wa* in its transitive reading as “serve/act as” = “being”. Compare (13 a,b,c):

- 13) a Aapo ya’ut
 he leader
 He is a leader.

⁵ Our consultants remark that this interpretation has an idiomatic meaning: “People were dancing really hard.”

- b. Aapo ya'ut-tu-n
He leader-be-PST.IMPF
He was (used to be) a leader.
- c. Ya'ut-tu-wa
Leader-be-EXST
(People, they) are being (acting as) leaders, i.e. assuming authority.

The copula is null in present tense sentences (13a). Overt *-tu* serves as a base for the attachment of other verbal suffixes, including the Tense/Aspect suffixes (13b) and *-wa* (13c).

2 *-wa* in derived contexts.

There is both noun and verb incorporation in Yaqui, producing a complex verb which permits *-wa* attachment. (14a) illustrates an active sentence with verb incorporation. (14b) presents the corresponding impersonal with verb incorporation; and (14c) an impersonal with both noun and verb incorporation:

- 14) a. Peo Hose-ta yi'i-mahta-k
Pete Joe-ACC dance-teach-PRF
"Pete taught Joe to dance."
- b. Hose yi'i-mahta-wa-k
Joe dance-teach-EXST-PRF
Joe was taught to dance; (People, they) taught Joe to dance.
- c. Hose maaso-yi'i-mahta-wa-k
Joe deer-dance-teach-EXST-PRF
Joe was taught to deer-dance (People, they) taught Joe to deer-dance.

Among the nominals which may be incorporated are the reflexive pronoun, and an object pronoun referring to humans:

- 15) a. Tu'ii-si emo-ania-wa
good-ADV self-help-EXST
People/they are helping themselves/each other well.
- b. Yee-ania-wa
People-help-EXST
People/they are helping people; People are being helped.

Compare the following transitive sentence:

- 16) Peo yee-ania-n
 Pete people-help-IMPF.PST
 Pete helped people.

Yaqui has a set of highly productive derivational verbal suffixes that are apparently derived from former lexical verbs that no longer occur independently in the language. (Some other affixal verbs, such as *naate*, ‘begin’, alternate between free and bound forms, and some of the suffixes which only occur as bound forms in Yaqui do occur as free verbs in the closely related language Mayo, spoken in Mexico.) In (17), active sentences containing the causative suffix *-tua* and the directive suffix *-sae* are presented:

- 17) a. Maria Hose-ta yi’i-tua-k
 Mary Joe-ACC dance-CAUS-PRF
 Mary made Joe dance.
- b. Maria Hose-ta yi’i-sae-k
 Mary Joe-ACC dance-DIR-PRF
 Mary told Joe to dance.

Other similar suffixes that are parallel in this aspect of the morphosyntax include *-ria*, the benefactive, and *-ii’aa*, meaning “want X to do Y”. All of these constructions allow *-wa*.

- 18) a. Hose yi’i-tua-wa-k
 Joe dance-CAUS-EXST-PRF
 Joe was made to dance; People made Joe dance..
- b. Hose yi’i-sae-wa-n
 Joe dance-DIR-EXST-IMPF.PST
 Joe was told to dance; People told Joe to dance.
- c. Maria yi’i-ria-wa-n
 Mary dance-BEN-EXST IMPF.PST
 Mary was “danced for”; People danced for Mary.
- d. Maria yi’i-’ii’aa-wa-n
 Mary dance-DESID-EXST-PST
 Mary was desired to dance; People wanted Mary to dance..

The *-wa* suffix cannot occur inside these derivational morphemes (19). We assume, following e.g. Harley 1995 and later work, that causative, benefactive and other derivational morphemes occupy ‘light’ verbal projections, appearing above the projection which hosts the

verbal root but below the inflectional realm. The fact that *-wa* must occur outside these suffixes, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (19e), shows that these light verbal projections also occur below Voice. (This is consistent with the assumptions in the previous literature discussing the relationship between vP and VoiceP.)

- 19) e. *Hose yi'i-wa-tua-k
 Joe dance-EXST-CAUS-PRF
 (Would mean: "Jose caused people to dance / caused there to be dancing")

The Hiaki impersonal *-wa*, then, occurs immediately between the lexical layer and the inflectional layer of verbal projections in the clause.

3 The Yaqui impersonal does not have a covert subject

We turn now to the question of whether there is a covert external argument in Yaqui *-wa* constructions—a syntactically present null subject, that might be identified as *pro*, or PRO. In languages which allow it it, a referential “little” *pro* subject is interpreted according to the agreement features of the relevant verb, as in a Spanish or Italian sentence:

- 20) *pro* beve molto vino
 _____ drink.3SG much wine
 He/she drinks a lot of wine.

The Yaqui verb does not show agreement as to person. Nonetheless in ordinary (non-impersonal) sentences, a subject may be dropped in discourse context. (21a) contains an overt referential subject; (21b) is interpreted in the same way. Note that the direct object retains its case-marking in (21b):

- 21) a. Vempo pahko-po wakas-ta bwasa'a
 they fiesta-at meat-ACC cook.TRANS
 At the fiesta, they [deictic] are cooking meat.
- b. _____ Pahko-po wakas-ta bwasa'a
 fiesta-at meat-ACC cook.TRANS

The omission of the subject in (21b) is licensed in only an appropriate discourse context, where the subject has a specific discourse antecedent; the subject of (21b) is

necessarily referential. (21b) cannot be taken as an impersonal. An impersonal interpretation requires *-wa*, as in (22).

- 22) Pahko-po wakas bwasa'a-wa
 fiesta-at meat cook-EXST
 At the fiesta, meat is being cooked.; People/they are cooking meat.

Next we consider whether Yaqui impersonals might have a PRO subject. “Big” PRO is restricted to non-finite contexts in English, as in (23):

- 23) PRO to know him is PRO is to love him.

But this not true of Irish, where autonomous impersonals are finite and yet have a PRO subject (Stenson 1989). However, a more important feature serves to differentiate *-wa* from impersonals in other languages. This is the distribution of case. In *pro* and PRO contexts, objective case is assigned to any direct object argument of the clause. In transitive impersonals in the European languages, we see patient NPs marked with accusative case. For example, Irish autonomous impersonals differ conspicuously from Yaqui Impersonals in that in transitive impersonals, the single NP, with a patient theta role is marked with objective case. This is shown in (2) above, repeated here as (24).

- 24) cuitear i mboscai iad
 put.PRES.AUT in boxes them
 They are put in boxes; (They) put them in boxes. (McCloskey 1c)

In contrast, Yaqui speakers strongly reject impersonals of transitives with object case marking on the NP. (25a) confirms that it is ungrammatical for the internal argument of an impersonal construction to retain its direct object marking. Rather, the internal argument appears as a nominative subject as shown in (25b)=(5b); compare also (21b) and (22)).

- 25) a. *Vachi-ta bwasa'a-wa
 corn-ACC cook-TRANS-EXST
 b. Vachi bwasa'a-wa
 Corn cook.TRANS-EXST
 There is corn being cooked; (People, they) are cooking corn.

The NP with the patient theta-role, ‘vachi’ (“corn”), cannot carry objective case-

marking in the *-wa* construction. We conclude that there is no null pro or PRO subject pronoun in the *-wa* construction, since if there were, it would occupy the subject position, preventing the internal argument from becoming the subject. Similarly, the Yaqui impersonal, has no pleonastic subject such as “it”, or “there”, as is frequently seen in impersonals across languages; again, in such a situation, we would expect the Irish pattern, where the object retains its accusative marking. This does not occur in Yaqui. We assume that, unlike an active Voice head, the impersonal *-wa* Voice head introduces no argument whatsoever in its specifier, and assigns no accusative case (Kratzer 1996).

It then follows that in impersonals of intransitive verbs, when no internal argument is available for promotion to subject (as in (4b), repeated below as (26)), the impersonal construction is truly subjectless.

- 26) Aman yahi-wa
 There arrive.PL-EXST
 (People, they) are arriving there; Arriving there is going on.

Further, Yaqui has no oblique “by” phrase that may be attached to impersonals (Escalante, 1990a). In short, the missing external argument may not be specified in the construction at all.⁶

4 *-wa* in derived nominals: Asserting the existence of an event

There is a relativizing suffix *-me* in Yaqui that derives nominals which usually refer to

⁶ Yaqui, like many Uto-Aztecan languages, has a limited number of intransitive verbs which have different, suppletive forms depending on the number of their subject. The verb *yaha~yepsa*, ‘arrive.sg~arrive.pl’, is such a verb. Where the verb suppletes for number, only the plural form may serve as a base for *-wa* attachment; compare (4b) with the ungrammatical (i).

- i) *Aman yepsa-wa
 there arrive.SG-BE

the subject of the verb or verb complex to which it attaches. In (27a), an active intransitive clause is given. (27b) illustrates the corresponding subject-nominal form with *-me*:

- 27) a. Hose bwiika
 Joe sing
 Joe is singing, sings.
- b. U bwiika-me
 The sing-REL
 The one who is singing, sings (now)

The nominal of (27b) refers to the subject of a clause bearing tense/aspect information; a contrast between a present-tense interpretation like that in (27b) and a past interpretation in (28a) is possible (employing the past participle suffix *-ka*); further, there is a clear contrast between (27b) and (28a) on one hand and (28b) on the other; (28b) is a derived nominal formed with the agentive suffix *-reo*, not temporally bound.

- 28) a. U bwiika-ka-me
 The sing-P.PPL-REL
 The one who sang
- b. U bwiik-reo
 The sing-AG.NOM
 The singer (not temporally bound)

When *-me* is attached to a transitive verb, it again refers to the subject of that transitive verb; the object retains its accusative case:

- 29) a. Peo uusi-ta mahta
 Pete child-ACC teach
 "Pete is teaching the child.
- b. Uu uusi-ta mahta-me
 The.SG child-ACC teach-REL
 The one who is teaching the child.

Of course, *-wa* can apply to the verb in (29a), creating a clause in which the object is promoted to become a subject (30a). The nominalizer *-me* can be attached to such an

The plural form of the verb is pragmatically less restricted than the singular, which presupposes just one entity; we assume that this presupposition is incompatible with the nonspecific subject entailed by the impersonal *-wa*.

impersonal verb, creating a nominal referring to the derived subject of the verb:

- 30) a. Uusi mahta-wa
child teach-EXST
The child is being taught.
- b. U mahta-wa-me
The teach-EXST-REL
The one who is being taught, the student.

Importantly, however, one can also attach *-me* to the impersonal form of an *intransitive* verb. Consider the impersonal corresponding to the intransitive clause in (27a), presented in (31). In this sentence, there is no overt syntactic subject, and we have argued in section 3 above that there is no covert syntactic subject either.

- 31) Bwiik-wa
sing-EXST
There are people singing.

When the nominalizer *-me* attaches to such subjectless impersonal clauses, the nominal simply refers to the occurrence of an *event*—not to some unspecified subject argument. This confirms the conclusion of the preceding section that *-wa* impersonals of intransitive sentences are truly subjectless. They are simply assertions of events, with no syntactic subject.

- 32) a. Ume bwiik-wa-me
The.PL sing-EXST-REL
The (current) singing; the songs that are being sung
*The ones who are singing
- b. Ume bwiik-wa-ka-me
The.PL sing-EXST-P.PPL-REL
The (previous) singing; the songs that were sung
*The ones who were singing

This assertion of an event is a property of all stage-level constructions (Kratzer 1995). It is our claim that *-wa* in stage-level sentences (cf. 27b) makes this property morphologically overt—it is used to assert the occurrence of an event or the existence of a situation.

In the preceding examples, we have seen *-wa* as an existential quantifier. This

existential quantifier may also occur under the scope of a generic operator, as we might expect:

- 33) a. Tucson-po, tu'ii-si hiapsi-wa
Tucson-in, good-ADV live-EXST
In Tucson, people/they live well.
- b. ume nau weweri-m vit-ta'a-wa
The.PL together relatives-PL see-know-EXST
People/they recognize relatives;
Those who are related know each other by sight.

These generic constructions are not temporally restricted, as occurs in the stage-level sentences we have seen above.

5 Some typological observations.

In the derivation of impersonals, languages employ a variety of strategies to avoid a referential NP in the subject position. Some languages, including English, employ “it” or a vague “they”, as in “they say...” constructions, as in (1) above. We see the pleonastic “it” in examples like (34):

- 34) a. It's raining.
b. It's late already.

Weather and temporal constructions in Yaqui cannot use *-wa*, which, as noted above, is confined to situations involving human beings. The bare verb, with no AGR, is employed:

- 35) a. yuke It's raining.
b. haivu kupte It's late already.

Languages such as French and German have overt impersonal subjects in locative impersonal constructions.

- 36). a. Hier man spricht Deutch.
Here IMP speaks German
b. Ici on parle francais
Here IMP speaks French

As noted above, Spanish and Italian are pro-drop languages with rich verbal

agreement. This agreement licenses an interpretation with a definite subject that has a discourse antecedent. In impersonals in these languages, a reflexive is employed, avoiding a construction with an NP subject.

- 37) Aqui se trabaja mucho,
 Here REFL works a.lot
 People/they work a lot here.

In transitive impersonals, the verb agrees in number with the NP with the object theta role, as in a passive.

- 38) a. Se habla español
 REFL speak.SG Spanish

 b. Aqui se hablan español y portugues
 Here REFL speak.PL Spanish and Portuguese

Objective case, visible with a pronoun, is assigned to an NP with an Object theta role:

- 39) se me ayuda mucho con esto
 REFL 1sg.ACC help a.lot with this.
 People are helping me a lot with this.

The reflexive construction in the impersonal precludes a subject argument.

6 Concluding remarks: Impersonals and theticity.

The discourse function of impersonals is to assert that some event or situation obtains, while no semantically “external” argument—a transitive agent or experiencer, or an intransitive subject—is specified. Yaqui *-wa* constructions are taken to apply to some unspecified, maximally vague human plural subject. Weather and temporal sentences exclude *-wa*, since they do not involve human beings.

Since the days of Aristotle, canonical sentences in universal grammar are traditionally held to have a bipartite structure: there is a predicational base, and some predicate assigned to that base, in what is now recognized as a topic/comment structure. Topics are familiar, presuppositional material, while comments are new information in that context. But not all

sentences have a topic/comment structure. Sasse (1987), following work by the nineteenth century philosophers Brentano and Marty, notes the contrast between “categorical” constructions, which in discourse function are bipartite constructions in which a predicate is assigned to a subject, vs. “thetic” constructions that are intended as simple “assertions of states of affairs”. Compare:

- 40) Q. What is my mother doing?
 A. Your mother is CALLING you. (Categorical)
- 41) Q. What is going on?
 A. Your MOTHER is calling you. (Thetic)

Krifka (1991:49) identifies the thetic/categorical contrast as a matter of topic/comment structure; categorical sentences have topics, whereas thetics do not. In (38A), a predicate is assigned to a subject which is the topic of the sentence (“your mother”). In contrast, (39A) is a thetic construction, which identifies some event as a whole. The shift of the peak stress in the English example (39A) to the subject NP shows that the entire utterance is in focus, and that there is no topic/comment structure.

Across languages, we see a number of syntactic devices employed to derive thetic constructions, where there is no topical subject. Kuroda (1972) analyzes the *-ga/-wa* contrast in Japanese as marking a thetic/categorical contrast.

- 42) a. Neko ga asoko de nemutte iru (Thetic)
 cat NOM there sleep is
 “The/a cat is sleeping there”
- b. Neko wa asoko de nemutte iru (Categorical)
 cat TOP there sleep is
 “The/a cat is sleeping there”

The sentence in (42a), where the subject is marked with the *-ga* particle, is appropriate for reporting a thetic judgment, for example, perception of a situation in which a/the cat is sleeping in a certain place—it asserts the existence of the eventuality. The sentence in (42b), with the *-wa* particle on the subject, reports a categorial judgment about a specific,

presupposed cat; it says, of that cat, that it is sleeping there. The bare noun in (42b) cannot be understood as a nonspecific indefinite.

The Yaqui *-wa* Impersonals exclude the expression of a semantically “external” argument and thus avoid subjects that are topics. Crucial support for the claim that there is no thematically external argument in Yaqui impersonals—a putative empty category in that position—is the promotion of a thematically internal argument to an IP position, as shown in section 3 above.

Other languages mentioned here derive impersonals via various constructions that avoid a subject that serves as a predicational base; thus we see *pro* and *PRO* constructions. Stenson (1989) argues that the subject argument in Irish Impersonals is *PRO*. The fact that in transitive Impersonals in Irish, an internal object NP receives objective case marking, is evidence for a (non-topical) subject argument in IP.

Indefinites cannot be topical; they are not presuppositional. The LF locus of indefinites is the VP (Diesing 1992), and sentences with indefinite subjects are thetics that lack a topic/comment structure. Some languages elect to exclude simple sentences with indefinite subjects entirely; Egyptian Arabic is an example (Jelinek 1981; Diesing and Jelinek 1995).

- 44) a. *kaan walad 9al-baab
Was boy at.the-door
[a boy was at the door]
- b. kaan fiih walad 9al-baab
Was in.it boy at.the-door
There was a boy at the door.

Both Yaqui impersonals and Egyptian Arabic locative existential sentences as in (44) lack a topic/comment structure. When there is no topic/comment structure, the entire clause is under focus, and there is an existential interpretation.

Other languages (Irish, Spanish) that we have briefly surveyed show overt objective

case marking in transitive Impersonals -- evidence that they have an EC in subject position.

In sum, in this very small and biased sample, we have seen the following strategies employed to avoid a topical subject NP in Impersonals:

- 46) a. Pleonastic subjects: English “one, they”; German “man”, French “on”, etc.
- b. PRO subject, as in Irish.
- c. Impersonals as reflexive constructions: Spanish, Italian “se”, “si”.
- d. Yaqui *-wa* , which casts Impersonals as “agentless” existentials..

Pleonastics, PRO, and reflexives cannot serve as topics, since they are not presuppositional. Impersonals are universallythetic constructions. While all the syntactic strategies listed in (46) for deriving impersonals succeed in precluding a topic/comment structure, only Yaqui does so by excluding any potentially topical argument whatever, without relying on dummy subjects or reflexives, etc. It will be of interest to determine how commonly this typological feature is present in impersonals in universal grammar.

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