

MAJOR LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF IMPERSONAL SENTENCES IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: The article demonstrates that impersonal sentences in English represent a unique class of constructions characterized by the absence of a specific, referential subject. Their study has attracted considerable attention in linguistic theory due to the interplay between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Various approaches have been proposed to explain the structural, functional, and semantic properties of impersonal sentences.

Keywords: language, general, abstract, non-agentive information, contrastive analysis, impersonal event

INTRODUCTION

The following review presents the major linguistic approaches: structural-syntactic approach; semantic approach; transformational-generative approach; functional-pragmatic approach and comparative and contrastive approach.

I. *Structural-Syntactic Approach to Impersonal Sentences in English.* The structural-syntactic approach emphasizes the grammatical arrangement and formal properties of impersonal sentences, focusing on the roles of dummy subjects, predicate verbs, and sentence components. This approach is grounded in traditional syntax as well as modern structuralist frameworks, where the form of a sentence is analyzed independently of its semantic content.

II. Semantic Approach to Impersonal Sentences in English

The semantic approach focuses on the meaning and functional role of impersonal sentences, rather than merely their syntactic form. Unlike the structural-syntactic approach, which emphasizes the grammatical position of dummy subjects, the semantic approach examines how impersonal constructions convey generalizations, human experiences, or abstract situations.

METHODOLOGY

1. **Meaning over Form:** The semantic approach prioritizes the communicative purpose of the sentence. An impersonal sentence is analyzed in terms of the situation, state, or action it represents, rather than the presence or absence of a concrete grammatical subject.

2. Generic and Universal Reference: Many impersonal sentences express general truths or laws of nature. The subject is non-specific because the sentence refers to events, conditions, or phenomena in general, rather than a particular entity: *It rains a lot in spring*. Focus is on the general phenomenon of rainfall, not on a particular instance.

3. Abstract or Non-agentive Events: Impersonal constructions are often used when no specific agent is performing the action, or when the agent is irrelevant to the statement: *It is said that he is talented*. The source of the statement is unspecified; the focus is on the truth value or occurrence of the proposition.

III. Transformational-Generative Approach to Impersonal Sentences in English

The Transformational-Generative Approach is part of the larger framework of Chomskyan generative grammar, which emerged in the mid-20th century. This approach analyzes sentences in terms of underlying structures, transformations, and the rules that generate grammatically correct sentences.

The approach was initiated by Noam Chomsky in the 1950s, particularly with the publication of *Syntactic Structures* (1957). N. Chomsky introduced the idea that surface structures (what is spoken or written) are derived from deep structures (underlying grammatical relationships) through transformations.

In the 1960s and 1970s, linguists like Harris, Ross, and Postal extended Chomsky's ideas to explain complex constructions, including impersonal and passive sentences. Impersonal sentences became a key area of study because they deviate from the canonical subject-verb-object (SVO) order, raising questions about underlying structures.

The Transformational-Generative Approach interprets impersonal sentences as surface realizations of underlying structures where dummy subjects (it, there) are inserted to satisfy English syntactic requirements, while the true semantic subject may be absent or abstract. This approach bridges form and meaning via transformations and provides a universal framework for understanding English grammar patterns.

This approach explains the syntactic necessity of dummy subjects and provides insights into the mechanisms by which English transforms underlying propositions into grammatical sentences.

IV. Functional-Pragmatic Approach to Impersonal Sentences in English

The Functional-Pragmatic Approach focuses on the communicative purpose of sentences, examining how language is used in context to convey meaning, rather than only its formal or structural properties. This approach is especially relevant for impersonal sentences, where the subject may be absent or non-referential.

Developed in the mid-to-late 20th century as a response to strictly structural or generative analyses of syntax. Key figures include Halliday (Systemic Functional

Grammar) and Russian linguists like V.Vinogradov, A.Smirnitsky, and B.Ilyish, who emphasized functional and communicative roles of sentence elements.

Language is a tool for communication, and sentences must be analyzed not only by their grammatical structure but also by their pragmatic function - what the speaker intends to do with the sentence in context. Impersonal sentences are studied in terms of how they manage information flow, focus, and speaker attitudes.

Functional Sentence Perspective. Each sentence has a theme (what is given or known) and a rheme (what is new or emphasized). Impersonal sentences often highlight the action or situation rather than the actor: *It is known that the Earth orbits the Sun.* Focus is on the knowledge (rheme), not on the agent.

Pragmatic Function of Dummy Subjects. Dummy subjects (it, there) serve communicative and pragmatic roles, such as: Maintaining the canonical subject position for English syntax. Shifting focus to the predicate or event. Mitigating responsibility or agency in statements: *It is believed that...*

Information Structuring. Impersonal constructions allow the speaker to structure information according to given vs. new information, topic continuity, and emphasis: *There is a book on the table.* The existential construction presents new information (a book) while keeping the sentence grammatically complete with there.

The Functional-Pragmatic Approach interprets impersonal sentences as tools to structure discourse and convey meaning. Dummy subjects, such as it or there, are pragmatic devices that help speakers manage information focus, maintain syntactic requirements, and express general, neutral, or impersonal statements. Unlike structural or generative approaches, this perspective emphasizes the communicative function over formal form.

This perspective highlights the pragmatic value of impersonal constructions in shaping how information is presented and received in communication.

V. Comparative and Contrastive Approach to Impersonal Sentences in English. The Comparative and Contrastive Approach studies language by comparing structures, functions, and meanings across two or more languages. In the context of impersonal sentences, this approach examines how different languages express subjectless constructions and the role of dummy subjects.

Emerged in the mid-20th century alongside growing interest in language teaching, translation, and typological linguistics. Particularly influential in contrastive linguistics, pioneered by scholars like Lado (1957), who highlighted the importance of comparing L1 and L2 to predict and explain learner errors. Identify similarities and differences between English impersonal sentences and their equivalents in other languages. Understand how grammatical structures, word order, and pragmatic functions differ across languages.

RESULTS

Focuses on cross-linguistic differences that may cause difficulties for second-language learners. Example: English requires dummy subjects (it, there) in many impersonal constructions, while some languages (e.g., Russian, Uzbek, Spanish) can omit the subject entirely: English: *It is raining*. Uzbek: *Yomg'ir yog'moqda* (No subject). Learners whose native language allows subject omission may produce ungrammatical sentences in English by omitting it or there.

Typological Observation. Some languages use impersonal verbs, reflexive constructions, or passive voice to express impersonal meaning. English relies on a strict SVO structure, so dummy subjects serve both syntactic and pragmatic roles.

DISCUSSION

The Comparative and Contrastive Approach to impersonal sentences underscores the unique role of dummy subjects in English and how these constructions differ from languages where subject omission is possible. This approach is particularly valuable for second-language acquisition, translation studies, and typological analysis, helping explain learner errors and facilitating cross-linguistic understanding.

This approach is especially valuable in translation studies and second language acquisition, where learners often struggle with the use of dummy subjects due to cross-linguistic interference.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of impersonal sentences benefits from a multifaceted approach. Structural-syntactic analysis clarifies the formal requirements of English syntax, while semantic and pragmatic perspectives illuminate meaning and communicative purpose. Transformational approaches explain the derivation of surface structures from deep structures, and comparative studies reveal cross-linguistic variation. Integrating these approaches provides a comprehensive understanding of impersonal sentences, accounting for their form, function, and meaning in English.

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