

How impersonal does *one* get ?*

A study of *man*-pronouns in Germanic

Paula Fengler

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Abstract

This paper focuses on overt impersonal pronouns such as English *one* and Dutch *men* in eight Germanic languages (English, Frisian, Icelandic, Danish, Dutch, German, Norwegian and Swedish). Cinque (1988), Egerland (2003), a.o., argued that there are two types of impersonal pronouns; one type that can occur in multiple syntactic positions but can only have a generic reading and another type that can have generic and existential readings but can only occur as an external argument. I show, based on novel data from ECM constructions, passives and unaccusatives, that it is not the syntactic position which restricts the distribution of *men*-type pronouns, but that it is case. English-type pronouns can occur with multiple cases, but can only have a generic inclusive reading. All Dutch-type pronouns can only occur with nominative case and can have multiple impersonal readings. Moreover, I show that Dutch and Swedish allow an existential reading when the pronoun is a derived subject (contra Cinque 1988, Egerland 2003). I propose a direction for this correlation between the different readings and case by assuming different feature make-ups for the pronouns, following Egerland (2003), Hoekstra (2010), Ackema and Neeleman (2018): *one* has ϕ -features and, therefore, always needs to be obligatorily inclusive; *men* lacks this functional layer and, therefore, has no restriction on its readings. Furthermore, I propose that since *men* lacks a phi-layer, it is too deficient to project a KP, and thus can only occur with unmarked nominative case.

1 Introduction

Dedicated impersonal pronouns, such as Dutch *men* and English *one* in (1), are found in many languages and can express generic and/or existential statements (Siewierska 2011, a.o.).

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(1) Generic reading – subject position

- a. Wanneer **men** in Italië is, eet men pasta. [Dutch]
When IMP in Italy is, eat IMP pasta.
- b. When **one** is in Italy, one eats pasta. [English]
'When **people** are in Italy, they have the habit of eating pasta.'

These pronouns can only have impersonal readings, and cannot be used with a personal reading.¹ Therefore, they are *dedicated* impersonal pronouns. This paper focuses on the similarities and differences between English and Dutch-type pronouns in Germanic languages and sketches the beginnings of an analysis for overt dedicated impersonal pronouns. First, I show that the empirical picture is different and, in certain aspects, more complex than has been noted in the literature (Cinque 1988, Egerland 2003, a.o.). This study presents data from eight Germanic languages: English, Frisian, Icelandic, Danish, Dutch, German, Norwegian and Swedish. Among these languages, the first three pattern together against the latter five. Previously it has been assumed there are two types of impersonal pronouns; one type that can occur in multiple syntactic positions but can only have a generic reading and a type that can have generic and existential readings but can only occur as an external argument (Cinque 1988, Egerland 2003). First of all, I show that it is not the syntactic position which restricts the distribution of *men*-type pronouns, but it is case. English-type pronouns can occur with multiple cases, but can only have a generic inclusive reading. All Dutch-type pronouns can only occur with nominative case and can have multiple impersonal readings. Moreover, I show that Dutch and Swedish allow an existential reading when the pronoun is a derived subject (contra Cinque (1988) and Egerland (2003), i.e., not an external argument; while the German and Danish pronoun does not.

Having established the empirical generalization, I make some tentative proposals towards an account. For the structure of the pronouns, I base myself on existing accounts of impersonals, which treat them as defective (van Gelderen 1997, Egerland 2003, Hoekstra 2010, Ackema and Neeleman 2018, Holmberg and Phimsawat 2016), in the sense that they lack specific person or number features and are therefore different from referential pronouns. The English-type has (at least) an unspecified ϕ -bundle, whereas the Dutch pronoun is underspecified for any functional information; the structures are given in (2).²

¹Compare this with pronouns such as *you* or *they*, which can be used to express a referential second or third person, or generic statements. The usage of *you* as an impersonal pronoun is crosslinguistically very common Siewierska (2004). Examples are given in (i).

- (i) a. When you are in Italy, you eat pasta.
Intended: 'When people (including you or me) are in Italy, we eat pasta.'
- b. They eat pasta in Italy.
Intended: 'When a certain group of people/someone is in Italy, they eat pasta.'

These pronouns will not be the focus of this paper, which will be 'dedicated' impersonal pronouns.

²For simplicity, *men* will be represented as N even though it might not truly be a noun. If that were the case, it would be similar to the noun *man* or its equivalent in other languages. As discussed in section 4, I take pronouns to be constructed from different functional projections, and the base is a type of variable or root in the sense of Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz 1993, Elbourne 2005, Kratzer 2009).

- (2) a. *one*
 ϕ
 ϕ N
- b. *men*
 N

Following Ackema and Neeleman (2018), I assume that an unspecified ϕ -bundle is interpreted roughly like a free-choice operator: the pronoun is compatible with any choice of ϕ . Since speaker and addressee are among possible choices for ϕ , this yields an inclusive interpretation, and is incompatible with an episodic, existential interpretation. Lacking ϕ -features altogether frees the pronoun of this interpretive restriction, and therefore can end up with existential and generic readings. I propose that it is possible to draw a distinction among different types of defectiveness that will allow a connection between interpretation and case-restrictions: if there are no ϕ -features, the pronoun can only occur with unmarked (nominative) case. That is, assuming that non-nominative cases syntactically project a KP (Preminger 2014, Levin and Preminger 2015, Kornfilt and Preminger 2015), the restriction of *men*-type pronouns to nominative case would be a special case of the kind of truncation phenomena seen elsewhere (Wurmbrand 2014, 2015 on restructuring): lexical items may fail to project a complete extended projection, but may not skip nodes – lacking a low functional head entails the absence of all higher heads in the functional sequence. Secondly, this suggests that all *men*-type (2b) pronouns should allow existential readings. German and Dutch differ on this point: German does not allow the existential reading when the pronoun is a derived subject. Finally, I provide evidence that, except for Dutch, all languages that have a Dutch-type impersonal pronoun also have an English-type impersonal pronoun.

The paper is organized as follows: in the next section I will provide the data that support the idea that case restricts the distribution of the Dutch-type impersonal pronoun. In section 3 I show why existing accounts do not fully capture the data. In section 4 I will propose amendments and a different direction for an analysis will be given. Section 5 concludes.

2 The properties of dedicated impersonal pronouns

On the basis of the properties discussed in this section, a division can be made into two types of dedicated impersonal pronouns. A list of properties that will be discussed in this paper is given in table 1. In the remainder of the paper *imp- ϕ* and *imp-N* are used to refer to the two types of impersonal pronouns, based on their structural make-up.³

³A note on judgements. To ensure that the grammaticality of *imp-N* in a certain position is due to the pronoun itself, the sentences were also judged with other elements that allow quasi-existential readings, such as *they*. That is, when someone judged a sentence ungrammatical with *they*, the ungrammaticality of *imp-N* was not taken to indicate that it is the pronoun causing the ungrammaticality.

Table 1: Summary of properties of impersonal pronouns

Properties	imp- ϕ	imp-N	
		A.	B.
(i) verbal agreement	3sg	3sg	3sg
(iia) generic inclusive reading	✓	✓	✓
(iib) existential reading, subject	*	✓	✓
(iic) existential reading, derived subject	*	*	✓
(iii) Object position	✓	*	*
(iv) ECM/AcI	✓	*	*

The following section shows that both types of pronouns have some similarities, but that the imp- ϕ pronouns pattern together in that they allow only one type of impersonal reading, and can occur in multiple syntactic positions. On the other hand, imp-N pronouns allow multiple impersonal readings, but are only grammatical in nominative position. Novel data from ECM/AcI constructions and sentences where the pronoun is a derived subject (e.g. passive and unaccusative sentences) show that the syntactic distribution of imp-N pronouns cannot solely follow from (im)possible underlying positions (as proposed by Cinque (1988), Egerland (2003), Roberts (2017)), but that the restriction has to do with the surface, i.e., derived position. I argue in section 4 that the correlation between the readings and the syntactic distribution follows from the feature make-up of the pronouns.

Table 2 gives an overview of dedicated impersonal pronouns in Germanic languages. The choice for a language having imp- ϕ or imp-N (or both) is based on the properties summarized in table 1.⁴

Table 2: Overview of impersonal pronouns

Language	imp- ϕ	imp-N
Afrikaans (Van Olmen et al. 2015)	(n) mens	
English	one	
Frisian (Hoekstra 2010)	men	
Icelandic (Jónsson 1992, Sigurðsson and Egerland 2009)	maður	
Dutch (Weerman 2006, Ackema and Neeleman 2018)		men
Danish (Jensen 2009, Egerland 2003)	en	man
Flemish (De Belder, pc)	'n mens	men
German (Kratzer 1997, Zifonun 2001)	ein	man
Norwegian (Sigurðsson and Egerland 2009)	en	man
Swedish (Egerland 2003)	en	man

Note that this division in the literature has been made on the basis of the nominative forms of the pronouns. I will argue that all languages that have an imp-N pronoun listed, also have an imp- ϕ

⁴A note on the usage of some of the pronouns: The Dutch pronoun *men* is less frequently used than similar pronouns in other languages (Weerman 2006). It seems that mostly older speakers use this pronoun, and they do have systematic judgements about *men*. For English *one* it seems that the usage is more frequent in British English than American English, but I have not explored those differences systematically.

pronoun, except for Dutch. Thus, the accusative forms in German, Danish, etc., are actually imp- ϕ pronouns and not an accusative form of one and the same underlying pronoun (as, for example, in the case of Icelandic and Frisian). This will be discussed in more detail in section 4.4.

2.1 The data

First of all, both pronoun types have verbal agreement that is third person singular, as shown in example (3) for a language with an imp- ϕ pronoun (English) and a language with an imp-N pronoun (Dutch). As can be seen, the semantics of the pronoun is plural, since it refers to ‘people in general’; this can be seen by the use of the plural reciprocal (Egerland 2003, Weerman 2006, a.o.).⁵

- (3) a. In dit land geef-**t** **men elkaar** cadeautjes met kerst. [Du]
In this country give-s IMP each.other presents with christmas
b. In this country, **one** give-**s** **each other** presents at christmas. [Eng]

The verb takes third person -*t* for Dutch, (3a), and -*s* for English, (3b), while the pronoun itself binds the reciprocal, which is plural.⁶ Summarized in table 3, there is no difference for imp- ϕ and imp-N pronouns with regard to verbal agreement.

Table 3: Summary of properties of impersonal pronouns — Version I

Properties	imp- ϕ	imp-N
(i) verbal agreement	3sg	3sg

Secondly, as already shown in (1), both pronoun types can occur in subject position. With regard to the possible readings in subject position, there are several possibilities such as: an inclusive generic reading and an existential reading.⁷ Both pronoun types can have an inclusive generic

⁵Borer (2005) observes that dedicated impersonal pronouns behave like mass nouns: they are semantically plural but trigger syntactic singular agreement.

⁶Sometimes, some languages allow plural agreement on the adjective or participle. This is grammatical when the reading of the pronoun is plural Egerland (2003), as for example in (i) for Swedish.

- (i) Om man inte är gift / gifta måste man ha skilda rum på detta hotel [Swe]
If IMP not is married.SG / married.PL must IMP have separate rooms in this hotel
‘If one is not married, one should have separate rooms in this hotel’ (Egerland 2003)

Since *marriage* includes more than one person, plural agreement is possible. This type of agreement is possible in several languages, such as Swedish, French and Italian. It is not visible in languages such as Dutch, because there is no number agreement on the participle. Egerland notes it is not possible in Icelandic, an imp- ϕ pronoun language, because *maður* has phi-features which block plural adjective agreement. However, it seems that whatever features the Icelandic pronoun has, it needs to encode generic inclusivity, e.g. plural, not singular. I leave this issue for further research, since it is unclear if this is a restriction on imp-N pronouns, and if imp- ϕ pronouns can trigger plural agreement if the language allows for it.

⁷Another type of reading that has been noted in the literature is a more ‘personal’ reading, where the pronoun refers to first person plural or first person singular. This reading however, seems not restricted to imp- ϕ or imp-N. It has been noted to occur with imp- ϕ pronouns such as Frisian *men* and English *one* and imp-N pronouns such as French *on* and Swedish *man*. I do not focus on these readings here. See references for interesting discussion on these readings in different languages and their possible feature make-ups. (Cinque 1988, Jónsson 1992, Coveney 2000, Egerland 2003, Hoekstra 2010, Roberts 2017).

reading, referring to ‘people including you and me’. **Cinque (1988)** calls this the quasi-universal reading and this reading has the following properties: it is incompatible with specific/bounded time reference, it cannot occur with present perfect, and it is incompatible with the existence of a single individual satisfying the description (i.e. it cannot refer to ‘someone’).⁸ This is shown in (4) for the eight languages. Note that the (intended) translation is given above all examples, since all sentences have the same translation.

- (4) Intended: ‘When **people** are in Italy, they have the habit of eating pasta’
imp- ϕ , generic inclusive, subject
- a. When **one** is in Italy, one eats pasta. [English]
 - b. Wannear’t **men** yn Italië is, yt men pasta. [Frisian]
When IMP in Italy is, eat IMP pasta
 - c. þegar **maður** er á Ítalíu, borðar maður pasta. [Icelandic]
When IMP is in Italy, eat IMP pasta
- imp-N, generic inclusive, subject
- d. Wenn **man** in Italien ist, isst man Nudeln. [German]
When IMP in Italy is, eat IMP pasta
 - e. Når **man** er i Italien spiser man pasta. [Danish]
When IMP is in Italy eat IMP pasta
 - f. Når **man** er i Italia, spiser man pasta. [Norwegian]
When IMP is in Italy, eat IMP pasta
 - g. När **man** är i Italien äter man pasta. [Swedish]
when IMP is in Italy eats IMP pasta.
 - h. Wanneer **men** in Italie is, eet men pasta [Dutch]
When IMP in Italy is, eat IMP pasta.

Moreover, note that the impersonal pronoun has a bound variable interpretation (**Moltmann 2006**): all instances of the impersonal pronoun in the same sentence refer to the same x - i.e. they all mean: ‘For any GEN x , if x is in Italy, then x eats pasta.’ It does not mean: ‘For some arbitrary choice of x , if x is in Italy, then for some arbitrary choice of y , y eats pasta.’ This is a general property of quasi-universal pronouns, such as arbitrary *pro*, PRO, Italian *si*, Finnish *gi* (**Moltmann 2006**, **D’Alessandro 2007**, **Holmberg 2010**).⁹

There is a split between imp- ϕ and imp-N if we turn to existential readings, referring to ‘some-

⁸Sentences like (4)—unlike (5) below—are not true if just a single individual eats pasta, when in Italy. They imply a generic or quasi-universal quantification. Examples like (i) do not violate that - it is still generic in essence, even for anyone who happens to be God.

(i) One must learn to admit failure, even when one is God. (Ellie Wiesel, *Twilight*)

⁹It is not always the case that generic readings are inclusive; there can be exceptions. Based on the literature (**Hoekstra 2010**, **Egerland 2003**, .a.o), it seems that imp- ϕ pronouns always need to be inclusive, whereas imp-N pronouns allow exceptions. For the remainder of the paper, the division between inclusive and exclusive generic readings will not be discussed in much detail. However, the reader should keep in mind that this difference exists. See also **D’Alessandro and Alexiadou (2003)**, **D’Alessandro (2007)** for discussion. Note that third person plural *they* seems, just as imp-N to be ambiguous between generic and existential readings. However, the generic reading should always be exclusive and never be inclusive, compare (ia) and (ic).

one'.¹⁰ According to Cinque (1988) this quasi-existential reading is compatible with a specific, bounded time reference (D'Alessandro 2007), the present perfect, and the existence of a single individual that can satisfy the description. This is shown in the following example.

- (5) Intended: 'Someone has called for you, but I don't know what it was about'
 imp- ϕ , existential, subject
- a. ***One** has called for you, but I don't know what it was about. [Eng]
 - b. ***Men** hat foar Jo skille, mar ik wyt net wêr't it oer gie. [Fr]
 IMP has for you called, but I know not where it about went
 - c. ***Maður** hringdi í þig, en ég veit ekki hvers vegna. [Ice]
 IMP called for you, but I know not why
- imp-N, existential, subject.
- d. **Man** hat für dich angerufen, aber ich weiss nicht, worum es ging. [Ger]
 IMP has for you called, but I know not what it was
 - e. **Man** har ringet til dig men jeg ved ikke hvad det drejer sig om. [Da]
 IMP has called to you but I know not what it turn REFL about
 - f. ?**Man** har ringt etter deg, men jeg vet ikke hva det er om. [Nor]
 IMP has called after you, but I know not what it is about
 - g. **Man** har frågat efter dig, men jag vet inte om vad. [Swe]
 IMP has asked for you but I know not about what
 - h. **Men** heeft voor je gebeld, maar ik weet niet waar het over ging. [Du]
 IMP has for you called, but I know not what it about went

The examples show that in English, Frisian and Icelandic (a.-c.) it is not possible to use the dedicated impersonal pronoun to express an existential meaning. To summarize, imp- ϕ pronouns such as *one* in English, *men* in Frisian and *maður* in Icelandic can only have a generic inclusive reading. The German, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish pronouns *man* and the Dutch *men* can have multiple impersonal readings. Thus, we can extend our summary of properties as in table 4. imp- ϕ allows for only one reading, whereas imp-N allows multiple readings.

Another difference between the two pronoun types is the different syntactic positions they can occupy. Here we see the reverse pattern: imp- ϕ is less restricted and can occur with different cases, but imp-N can only occur with nominative case. In the literature, it has been claimed that pronouns that allow existential readings are not allowed as an internal argument (Cinque 1988, Egerland 2003). First, as has been noted in the literature (Cinque (1988), Egerland (2003), Hoekstra (2010), Weerman (2006), a.o.), imp-N pronouns cannot occur as a surface object, where imp- ϕ can. This

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- (i) a. In the middle ages, they used to die of the bubonic plague. [Generic Exclusive]
 =People, but not you or me used to die of the bubonic plague
- b. They have called for you, but I don't know what it was about. [Existential]
 = Someone has called for you,...
- c. When they are in Italy, they eat pasta. *[Generic Inclusive]
 ≠ When people, including you or me are in Italy, we eat pasta

Thus, even though there are pronouns that can have both generic and existential readings, only imp-N can be ambiguous between generic inclusive and existential readings.

¹⁰In order to make sure that people did not reject existential or generic readings with the dedicated impersonal pronoun because they were not able to use these readings, 3pl pronouns (*they*) were also tested.

Table 4: Summary of properties of impersonal pronouns — Version II

Properties	imp- ϕ	imp-N
(i) verbal agreement	3sg	3sg
(iia) generic inclusive reading	✓	✓
(iib) existential reading	*	✓

is shown in (6).

- (6) a. This reminds **one** of the war. [Eng]
b. *Dit herinnert **men** aan de oorlog. *[Du]
This reminds IMP of the war (Weerman 2006)

However, languages that have an imp-N pronoun, excluding Dutch, have a pronoun that can occur in object position. This pronoun can only have a generic inclusive reading. In (7) an example is given for German, a language with an imp-N pronoun which has an accusative form.

- (7) Es spielt gar keine Rolle, wer **man** ist oder wie man aussieht, solange **einen** /
It plays completely no role, who IMP is or how IMP out.look, as IMP.ACC /
***man** nur jemand liebt. [Ger]
IMP now somebody loves
‘It doesn’t matter who you are or what you look like, so long as somebody loves you.’
(Roald Dahl, *The Witches*)

Although *man* is not grammatical when used in object position, *einen* is. The same holds for Danish, Norwegian and Swedish *en*.

Second, if we look at ECM/AcI constructions, we can observe that imp-N is truly restricted to nominative case. In this construction the pronoun can be put in a position where it starts out as an external argument but ends up receiving accusative case. In (8) and (9) two ECM constructions are given. The first sentence provides a generic context and the second construction provides an existential context. Above all the sentences from the eight languages the intended reading is given. First, take a look at the generic ECM sentence. There is a clearly visible split with the possibility for impersonal pronouns to occur in ECM/AcI constructions: imp-N can never occur in this construction, whereas imp- ϕ can.

- (8) Context: He is a station master.
Intended: ‘Therefore he always sees **people** leave for the holidays’
imp- ϕ , generic, ECM.
a. The station master always sees **one** leave for the holidays. [Eng]
b. (i) Dêrom sjocht hy **men** altyd op fakânsje gear. . *[Fr]
therefore sees he IMP always in holiday go
(ii) Dêrom sjocht hy **jin** altyd op fakânsje gear. [Fr]
therefore sees he IMP always in holiday go
c. Þess vegna sér hann **mann** alltaf fara í frí. [Ice]
That because see he IMP always leave in holiday

imp-N, generic, ECM.

- d. (i) *Der Bahnhofswärter sieht **man** immer in die Ferien fahren. *[Ger]
The train.conductor sees IMP always in the holiday go
(ii) Der Bahnhofswärter sieht **einen** immer in die Ferien fahren. [Ger]
The train.conductor sees IMP always in the holiday go
- e. (i) *Derfor ser han **man** altid tage afsted i ferierne. *[Da]
Therefore see he IMP always take leave in vacations
(ii) Derfor ser han **en** altid tage afsted i ferierne. [Da]
Therefore see he IMP always take leave in vacations
- f. (i) *Derfor ser han **man** alltid dra på ferie. *[Nor]
Therefore sees he IMP always leave on holiday
(ii) ?Derfor ser han **en** alltid dra på ferie. ?[Nor]
Therefore sees he IMP always leave on holiday
- g. (i) *Därför ser han **man** alltid åka på semester. *[Swe]
Therefore see he IMP always go on holidays.
(ii) ?Därför ser han **en** alltid åka på semester. ?[Swe]
Therefore see he IMP always go on holidays.
- h. *Daarom ziet hij **men** altijd op vakantie gaan. *[Du]
Therefore sees he IMP always on vacation go

As illustrated in (8), the (a.-c.) examples are grammatical, whereas the (d.-h.) examples are not grammatical with *man* or *men*. Observe that Frisian has an unexpected pattern — since the *men* pronoun is not grammatical, *jîn* is used instead. I will come back to this observation in section 4.4. In (9) an ECM construction is given where an existential reading is triggered. As expected, the imp- ϕ pronouns are not grammatical, since they do not allow this reading at all. Crucially, there are also no grammatical examples with imp-N, as shown in (d.-h.).

- (9) Context: I lay awake all night.
Intended: ‘I hear **someone** work on the road.’

imp- ϕ , existential, ECM.

- a. *I hear **one** work(ing) on the road. *[Eng]
b. (i) *Ik hearde **men** oan de dyk wurkjen. *[Fr]
I heard IMP on the road work
(ii) *Ik hearde **jîn** oan de dyk wurkjen. *[Fr]
I heard IMP on the road work
- c. *Ég heyrði **mann** vinna vegavinnu. *[Ice]
I heard IMP work road.construction

imp-N, existential, ECM.

- d. (i) *Ich habe **man** auf/an der Strasse arbeiten hören. *[Ger]
I have IMP on the road work hear
(ii) *Ich habe **einen** auf/an der Strasse arbeiten hören. *[Ger]¹¹
I have IMP on the road work hear

¹¹This sentence is grammatical when there is an elliptical context with *einen* having a complement: *einen Man* ‘a

- e. *Jeg hørte **man** lavede vejarbejde. *[Da]
I heard IMP made road.work
- f. (i) *Jeg hører **man** arbeider på veien. *[Nor]
I heard IMP works on road
- (ii) *Jeg hører **en** arbeider på veien. *[Nor]
I heard IMP works on road
- g. (i) *Jag hörde **man** arbetade ute på gatan. *[Swe]
I heard IMP work out in the.street
- (ii) *Jag hörde **en** arbetade ute på gatan. *[Swe]
I heard IMP work out in the.street
- h. *Ik hoorde **men** aan de weg werken. *[Du]
I heard IMP on the road work

Crucially, the imp-N pronouns are never grammatical in an ECM construction, whereas imp- ϕ pronouns can be, if there is an appropriate context. The extended summary is given in table 5.

Table 5: Summary of properties of impersonal pronouns — Version III

Properties	imp- ϕ	imp-N
(i) verbal agreement	3sg	3sg
(iia) generic inclusive reading	✓	✓
(iib) existential reading	*	✓
(iii) object position	✓	*
(iv) ECM/AcI	✓	*

As seen in table 5, there is a clear asymmetry between imp- ϕ and imp-N pronouns: imp- ϕ pronouns only allow generic readings and can occur with different cases, whereas imp-N pronouns allow both generic and existential readings but are restricted to occurring with nominative case. Note that this is a different generalization than the one noted in the literature. According to Egerland (2003) imp-N is restricted to occurring as an external argument. However, Egerland makes the wrong generalization with regard to external arguments: in ECM constructions the imp-N pronoun is an external argument in the lower clause, but is nevertheless excluded. Another prediction Egerland (2003) and Cinque (1988) make is that imp-N pronouns can occur as an internal argument in passives and unaccusatives but only with a generic reading. The next set of data shows that this generalization does not hold either.

Another piece of evidence for the case-generalization comes from passive and unaccusative sentences. In these sentences a pronoun starts out as an internal argument, but ends up as the subject of the clause. Cinque (1988) and Egerland (2003) have argued that when the imp-N pronoun is the subject of a passive or unaccusative, it is not able to have an existential reading, i.e., it can only have a generic (inclusive or exclusive) reading. A generic reading is given in (10), and as shown, the sentence is grammatical in every language.

- (10) Intended: ‘**People** are being forced to work until the age of 65 (by the government).’
imp- ϕ , generic, passive

man’. The same holds for the *one* pronouns in the Scandinavian languages.

- a. **One** is being forced to work until the age of 65. [Eng]
 b. **Men** wurdt twongen te wurkjen oant it 65e libbensjier. [Fr]
 IMP *gets forced to work until the 65 life.year*
 c. **Maður** er neyddur til að vinna þar til maður er orðinn 65 ára gamall. [Ice]
 IMP *is forced to to work there to man is become 65 years old*
- imp-N, generic, passive.
- d. **Man** wird dazu gezwungen, bis 65 zu arbeiten. [Ger]
 IMP *becomes to forced, until 65 to work*
 e. **Man** er tvunget til at arbejde til man er 65. [Da]
 IMP *is forced to the work until IMP is 65*
 f. **Man** lir tvunget av myndighetene til å arbeide til 65. [Nor]
 IMP *is forced by government.DEF to work to 65*
 g. **Man** tvingas att arbeta tills man år 65. [Swe]
 IMP *forced.PASS to work until IMP is 65*
 h. **Men** wordt gedwongen te werken tot het 65e levensjaar. [Du]
 IMP *gets forced to work until the 65 life.year*

Thus **Cinque (1988)** and **Egerland (2003)**'s predictions are borne out with regard to the generic reading. However, if we construct examples with an appropriate context, the existential reading will become available in some languages. As expected, the imp- ϕ pronouns do not allow an existential reading, as observed in (11a-c). Within the imp-N pronouns there is a visible split: the Dutch and Swedish pronouns are allowed to have an existential reading, (11g-h). On the other hand, the German, Danish and Norwegian pronouns do not allow this reading, as can be seen in (11d-f). Again, the intended reading is given above the examples. Keep in mind that the sentences by themselves might be grammatical, but not with the intended reading.

- (11) Context: you are the owner of a restaurant. You can see that there is one empty plate at one table and a big tip.

Intended: '**Someone** was served well here.'

imp- ϕ , existential, passive.

- a. ***One** was served well here. *[Eng]
 b. ***Men** wurdt hjir goed behanelle. *[Fr]
 IMP *was here good served*
 c. ***Manni** var þjónað vel. *[Ice]
 IMP *was served well*

imp-N, existential, passive.

- d. ***Man** wurde hier gut bedient. *[Ger]
 IMP *was here good served*
 e. ***Man** blev godt betjent. *[Da]
 IMP *became well served*
 f. ***Man** ble servert bra. *[Nor]
 IMP *was served well*

- g. **Man** blev väl serverad här [Swe]
 IMP was well served here
- h. **Men** werd hier goed bediend. [Du]
 IMP was here good served

The same pattern holds for unaccusatives, which is a second construction where the pronoun starts as an internal argument but ends up being the subject of the sentence. First, as has been noted in the literature, a generic reading is allowed for the two pronouns. An example for each pronoun type is given in (12).

- (12) Intended: ‘In Holland, **people** always arrive on time when taking the train.’
- a. In Nederland arriveert **men** altijd op tijd met de trein [Du]
In the.Netherlands arrives IMP always on time with the train
- b. Í Niðurlöndum kemur **maður** venjulega tímanlega þegar lestin er tekin [Ice]
In Netherlands comes IMP usually timely when train is taken

If we now turn to the existential readings, the same pronouns in the same languages that allow this reading with a passive, allow this reading in an unaccusative sentence. Again, the context is set up so that the existential reading might be easier to get. However, for languages with an imp- ϕ pronoun, as well as for German, Danish and Norwegian, this reading is not available. Crucially, in Dutch and Swedish it is.

- (13) Context: It has been freezing and the lake in the forest is frozen. However, there is a hole in the ice.
 Intended: ‘Apparently, yesterday **someone** has fallen through the ice here.’
imp- ϕ , existential, unaccusative.
- a. *Apparently, yesterday **one** has fallen through the ice here. *[Eng]
- b. *Juster is **men** hjir troch it iss sake. *[Fr]
Yesterday is IMP here through the ice fallen
- c. ***Maður** hefur dottið gegnum ísinn hérna. *[Ice]
 IMP has fallen through ice.DEF here
imp-N, existential, unaccusative.
- d. *Letzte Woche ist **man** hier eingebrochen. *[Ger]
Last week is IMP here fallen.through
- e. *I går faldt **man** gennem isen her. *[Da]
in yesterday fell IMP through ice here
- f. *I går falt **man** tydeligvis gjennom isen. *[Nor]
in yesterday fell IMP apparently through ice.DEF
- g. **Man** har fallit genom isen. [Swe]
 IMP has fallen through ice.DEF
- h. **Men** is hier gister door het ijs gezakt. [Du]
 IMP is here yesterday through the ice fallen

To summarize, there is a different split with regard to external-argumenthood. Both imp- ϕ and imp-N pronouns can have a generic reading when the subject is derived from an internal

argument. There is a split with regard to the existential reading: Dutch *men* and Swedish *man* allow this reading when the pronoun is a derived subject (group $\text{imp-N}_{s/\text{du}}$ in the following table), but German, Danish and Norwegian seem to pattern with $\text{imp-}\phi$ in this respect (group $\text{imp-N}_{g/\text{da}/n}$). This observation is added to the summary and is now shown in table 6, point (iic).

Table 6: Summary of properties of impersonal pronouns — Final

Properties	$\text{imp-}\phi$	imp-N	
		$g/\text{da}/n$	s/du
(i) verbal agreement	3sg	3sg	3sg
(iia) generic inclusive reading	✓	✓	✓
(iib) existential reading, subject	*	✓	✓
(iic) existential reading, derived subject	*	*	✓
(iii) Object position	✓	*	*
(iv) ECM/AcI	✓	*	*

Note that there is now a split within the imp-N pronouns, which is based on the data where the pronoun is a derived subject, (11) and (13): $\text{imp-N}_{s/\text{du}}$ (Dutch and Swedish *men/man*) always allow existential readings in the nominative, while $\text{imp-N}_{g/\text{da}/n}$ (Danish, German and Norwegian) on the other hand only allow existential readings when it is an external argument and has nominative case. All imp-N pronouns do pattern together for all other properties – most importantly on points (iii) and (iv) in table 6. There are no grammatical ECM sentences or surface object positions for these pronouns, whereas the $\text{imp-}\phi$ pronouns are allowed in these constructions. Note that in this table the accusative forms, German *einen*, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish *en*, are not included. On the basis of the data presented in this paper, I conclude that these pronouns are $\text{imp-}\phi$ pronouns: they are allowed in positions where imp-N is not grammatical, but they only allow generic readings. Moreover, in all three languages there are varieties where this pronoun is also grammatical in nominative position. This will be discussed in 4.4.

Thus, we can conclude the following, which is summarized in table 7.

Table 7: Generalizations

	$\text{imp-}\phi$	imp-N	
		A.	B.
Case	NOM, ACC	NOM	NOM
Underspecified subject, \exists	*	✓	✓
Derived subject, \exists	*	*	✓

There seems to be a three-way distinction with dedicated impersonal pronouns: (1) $\text{imp-}\phi$ pronouns can occur in multiple positions and can receive multiple cases, but can only receive generic inclusive readings; (2) all imp-N pronouns can only occur with nominative case. (3) $\text{imp-N}_{s/\text{du}}$ (Swedish *man* and Dutch *men*) can have all readings in the available positions; finally, $\text{imp-N}_{g/\text{da}/n}$ (German, Danish and Norwegian *man*) is allowed in the same positions as the Dutch and Swedish pronoun, but *man* is more restricted than in Dutch and Swedish since an existential reading is only possible when it has nominative case and is the external argument.

Before we move to the proposed new direction, the next section discusses an alternative that cannot capture all the data. In section 4 I will build a direction for a new proposal, based on this existing account.

3 A previous account for the syntactic distribution

A recent proposal to account for the syntactic distribution of dedicated impersonal pronouns in Scandinavian and Romance has been made by Egerland (2003). He follows the literature in assuming that imp-N pronouns do not have any phi-features. However, he is not very explicit about the structure of imp- ϕ , although he does, indeed, argue that they do have phi features. A representation for both pronouns is given in (14).

- (14) a. *one*
 ϕ
 ϕ N
- b. *men*
 N

First we go over how the feature make up accounts for the semantic difference and after that we focus on the syntactic side of the account.

Egerland assumes that generic readings are derived via an operator [GEN] (Krifka et al. 1995) on top of the pronoun, whereas existential readings are crucially derived via the absence of any features. Since imp-N does not have any features it can receive a generic and an existential reading. On the other hand, imp- ϕ can only receive a generic reading, since there is always a feature present, namely some phi-features. imp- ϕ cannot get an existential reading, because this reading is derived via the absence of features. Thus this means that only imp-N pronouns can have existential readings. However, we will see below that there are other pronouns that can have an existential reading and must have phi-features.

To account for the syntactic difference, Egerland assumes that only pronouns with feature content can occur as an internal argument. Following Marantz (1984), Tenny (1987), he argues that objects have a different semantic relation with the verb than the external argument: the internal argument is the "undergoer" of the event, or "delimits" the event. Therefore, the internal argument has a closer relation to the verb than the external argument. According to Egerland, this relation needs to be evaluated at LF, to see what the exact role of the object is. This can only happen if the object has some feature content. Imp-N pronouns do not have any features and can therefore never be evaluated as an object. This predicts that imp- ϕ , having a phi-feature, can occur as object and subject. On the other hand, imp-N, lacking feature content, can only occur as an external argument, because it has no features to be licensed as an internal argument. Egerland claims that there is a way imp-N can be evaluated as an internal argument: the pronoun can occur as the subject of a passive with a generic reading (see section 2.1), because [GEN] can count as the feature content for the pronoun to start as an internal argument. Existential readings are still not possible with imp-N as a subject of a passive, because there is never any feature content. Egerland argues that these assumptions provide an account of the observations from table 6 that imp-N pronouns cannot occur as an object.

However, there are several problems with this approach. These problems stem from the basic premise that it is the theta-position (internal vs. external argument-hood) that regulates the distri-

bution of the pronouns. First, imp-N pronouns should be grammatical in an ECM configuration, when they are an underlying external argument in the embedded clause. As shown above, this is incorrect.¹²

Secondly, Egerland excludes imp-N pronouns with existential readings as derived subjects, since he and Cinque (1988) claim that [GEN] is necessary for a derived imp-N subject to have ‘sufficient content’ to be licensed as an underlying internal argument. Thus, generic readings are expected with derived subjects. Existential readings, on the other hand, follow from the lack of any features and imp-N can never be evaluated as a derived internal argument. We have seen, however, that there are languages that have imp-N as a derived subject with an existential reading.

Third, and related, this specific proposal cannot derive the difference between internal arguments that end up as a surface object and a derived object. Imp-N can never occur as a surface object (point (iii) in table 6), but the pronoun is grammatical as a derived subject. The question arises as to why [GEN] does not license the pronoun if it ends up being a surface object, but does license the pronoun if it ends up as a derived subject. Thus, the pronoun is expected to behave similarly in both cases.

Finally, a problem arises with regard to existential readings. Egerland argues that this reading is derived via the absence of any feature content. Thus, imp-N pronouns can have an existential reading, because there are no phi-features. However, this leads to a problem, since there are other pronouns that can receive this reading (as well as other readings). In (15) an example for German *wer* is given and for English third person plural *they* (the latter is already noted by Cinque (1988), Cabredo Hofherr (2003), Jaeggli (1986)).

- (15) a. Ich habe die ganze Zeit **wen** auf/an der Strasse arbeiten hören. [Ger]
 I have the whole time INDEF on the road work hear
 ‘I heard someone work on the road.’
 b. **They** have called for you, but I don’t know what it was about. [Eng]

If pronouns such as *wer* and *they* can receive an existential reading, it must mean according to Egerland that these pronouns also do not express any features. However, these pronouns can occur as personal pronouns or *wh*-elements, expressing some type of (phi-)features. Thus this must mean that existential readings are derived in a different way. If, alternatively, there is an existential operator, the question arises as to why existential readings are not possible for derived subjects, since there would be feature content (e.g. the operator), which can license the internal argument. Note that if existential readings are derived via an operator, Dutch and Swedish would not be a problem anymore, since in those languages the impersonal pronoun can have all readings as a derived subject.

Based on these problems, it seems that Egerland’s proposal is not sufficient to account for the data. In the following section I will propose a new direction. The basic structural difference between imp- ϕ and imp-N will stay the same, but the syntactic explanation will differ. I will argue that restricting the distribution via case leads to a better empirical picture. The imp-N pronoun is too deficient and therefore can never project a KP layer. This implies that, nominative being the unmarked case, imp-N pronouns cannot occur as a surface object or in ECM constructions.

¹²Moreover, if *einen* were truly the accusative form, it is unexpected that existential readings are not possible with this pronoun - especially since existential readings are not ruled out in ECM constructions: In German, the pronoun *wer* can be used with an existential reading, as is shown in (15a).

Moreover, it is predicted that imp-N pronouns can occur as derived subjects, both with a generic and an existential reading.

4 Accounting for the data

What needs to be accounted for is the generalization that imp- ϕ pronouns have only one reading and can occur in multiple syntactic positions. Imp-N pronouns on the other hand can only occur with nominative case and can have different impersonal readings. There is an additional restriction in German, Danish and Norwegian in that this pronoun can only have an existential reading when it occurs as the external argument and has nominative case. However, the possible syntactic positions seem to be restricted by the surface and not the underlying position.¹³ First, the structural make-up of the pronouns will be discussed in 4.1. After that, I explain how the different readings can arise in section 4.2. In 4.3, the proposal for case is explained. Section 4.4 provides evidence for the existence of both pronouns in one language.

4.1 The feature make-up of dedicated impersonal pronouns

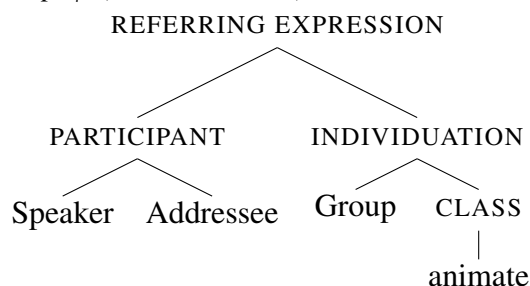
As pointed out in the introduction, several people have proposed different feature make-ups for imp- ϕ and imp-N pronouns (van Gelderen (1997) Egerland (2003); Hoekstra (2010); Ackema and Neeleman (2018), a.o). These authors all agree that imp-N does not have any phi-features, as shown in (16).

(16) *imp-N*: [N]

Moreover, all these authors agree that imp- ϕ pronouns have more structure. However, how much structure this pronoun type has and what features it has differs per proposal. The intuition behind all these proposals is that the structure needs to capture the fact that the pronoun needs to yield an inclusive meaning. Several proposals argue that [speaker] and [addressee] features are encoded in the syntax. For example, both Hoekstra (2010) and Nevins (2007) argue that imp- ϕ has a fully specified phi-bundle, including all features (both use a different feature geometry). As an example, Hoekstra's representation is given in (17). He adapts the feature geometry as proposed by Harley and Ritter (2002) to account for imp- ϕ .

¹³For an alternative proposal that the syntactic restriction on *men* is a surface restriction, see Weerman (2006). According to Weerman, the restriction comes from agreement, rather than the underlying position. When a language has more inflection on the verb, but is not a pro-drop language anymore, some element is needed for an impersonal reading, such as *man*. He bases his generalization on the fact that English, German and Dutch all had or have *men/man* at one point in history, and English now has *one*. Moreover, English does not have inflection on the verb anymore, whereas German and Dutch do. Therefore, he concludes that agreement and the occurrence of *men / man* are correlated. The question then is if agreement needs to be defined morphologically or syntactically. Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are all languages with the imp-N pronoun (see table 2), but they do not have overt verbal agreement. Thus, if *man* and agreement are correlated, agreement should be syntactic. If we adopt some version of AGREE (Chomsky 2000, 2001), this licensing mechanism does not need to have an overt reflex. However, usually it is assumed that AGREE holds for both subjects and objects. If the agreement restriction is both syntactic and needs to hold for both subject and objects, then it cannot be explained that imp-N does not occur in object position.

(17) *imp- ϕ* (Hoekstra 2010)



Hoekstra aims to give an explanation on how pronouns can be both personal and impersonal. He argues that the difference between the impersonal and personal use of pronouns is specificity and not the feature make-up of the different pronouns.

I will not follow these approaches, since it is not immediately clear how these approaches would account for all the facts. First of all, if features such as [plural] or [group] are visible in the syntax, it is not clear why these pronouns always end up with 3sg agreement on the verb, in contrast to plural referential pronouns such as *we* or plural impersonal *they*. Moreover, if all features are present, it is not clear how a pronoun such as *one* is different from personal pronouns. For example, impersonal pronouns seem to be ‘deficient’ in that they cannot be modified whereas strong pronouns can (Cardinaletti and Starke 1999). In the (a.) examples a strong pronoun is given for Dutch (18) and English (19) and in the (b.) examples the impersonal pronouns are given. For Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) this means that impersonal pronouns have less syntactic structure.¹⁴

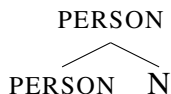
- | | | |
|------|---|------------------------------|
| (18) | a. Wij, de studenten, werken hard
<i>we, the students, work hard</i> | strong pronoun, Dutch |
| | b. *Men, de studenten, werken hard
<i>IMP, the students, work hard</i> | *impersonal pronoun, Dutch |
| (19) | a. We the students, work hard. | strong pronoun, English |
| | b. *One, the students, work hard. | *impersonal pronoun, English |

Ackema and Neeleman (2018) capture this inclusiveness of *imp- ϕ* pronouns in a different way. Leaving aside the details, the key point is that for them morphosyntactic person features restrict the interpretation of the pronoun (Ackema and Neeleman (2013), following Harbour (2011a,b)). For example, a [speaker] feature restricts the interpretation to the author of the speech act. One way in which their theory departs from others is in the understanding of underspecification – in essence, an underspecified person feature/ ϕ -bundle yields a pronoun which must be compatible with any arbitrary choice of person, including the speaker and/or hearer. It is this understanding of the relationship between morphosyntax and semantics which gives the representation in (20), where the person node is present but unspecified for any value, its inclusive interpretation.¹⁵ This

¹⁴Even though the tests proposed by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) show that impersonal pronouns are different from personal pronouns, they do not show a difference between *imp- ϕ* and *imp-N*. This might be expected since this paper argues they have different feature content. However, both *imp- ϕ* and *imp-N* are at the same level of deficiency for these tests, as illustrated in (18) and (19). At this point I will not pursue the reason why the pronouns pattern the same on these tests.

¹⁵For Ackema and Neeleman person features are introduced on a head above the root, and not on D. Also, as men-

(20) *imp- ϕ* (Ackema and Neeleman 2018)



Summarizing, for all approaches the result is that imp- ϕ ends up having a representation (syntactic or semantic) which includes speaker and addressee whereas imp-N on the other hand does not bear any phi-features, as shown in (21). Note again that both pronouns are underspecified for any specific ϕ -features, but that imp- ϕ has a syntactic ϕ -layer which restricts the possible readings to generic ones.



tioned, their interpretation of underspecification is slightly different from what is commonly assumed. See Ackema and Neeleman for details as to how their approach encodes the observation that third person is (often said to be) underspecified relative to first and second person, while at the same time treating impersonals as even more underspecified.

¹⁷This is similar to [Roberts \(2017\)](#)’s approach where person is unspecified, but not number

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see a difference between imp- ϕ and imp-N pronouns if we look at possessives. In the following examples it is shown that even when the subject should be a female, you still get third person masculine agreement on the possessive for German in (22a) and for Dutch in (22b). For concreteness, I assume that this third person masculine agreement is default agreement, since there are many approaches that take 3.SG to be the lack of features (e.g. Benveniste 1971, Corbett 2006). If there were a [masculine] feature on the possessive and on the impersonal pronoun, the facts would be hard to explain: we would need an extra stipulation to derive the fact that the interpretation is about women and not about pregnant men. Observe that this does not hold for English, where the possessive form of *one* can be used. The same holds for a second person generic pronoun, such as *je* in Dutch, in (22d), which also receives an impersonal reading.

- (22) a. Wenn man schwanger ist, muss man **seinen**/***ihren**/***mans** Körper ... [Ger]
 When IMP pregnant is, should IMP his/her/IMP body
 b. Wanneer men zwanger is, moet men **zijn**/***haar**/***men** lichaam ... [Du]
 When IMP pregnant is, should IMP his/her/IMP body
 c. When one is pregnant, one should take care of **one's** body [Eng]
 d. Wanneer je zwanger bent, moet je **je** lichaam ... [Du]
 When you are pregnant, should you your body ...
 ‘When people are pregnant, they should keep their body ...’

Moreover, a difference arises with the accusative forms of the pronouns in the languages with an imp-N pronoun. As can be seen in (23) for the Scandinavian languages, *en* is the same as English *one* in that the possessive form is *en* too. Thus this form truly has different properties than *man*. However, the German *ein* always takes the *seinen* ‘his’ form and not the pronoun *ein* itself.

- (23) a. In der erste Semesterwoche wiesen sie **einem seinen** vorläufigen Betreuer zu
 In the first semester.week assign they IMP REFL provisional advisor to
 [Ger]
 ‘In the first week of the semester they assign people their advisor’
 b. I slutningen af året giver de typisk **en** et kig i **en's** studenterfil [Da]
 At end of year give they typically IMP a look in REFL studentsfile
 ‘At the end of the year they usually give people a look in their studentfile’

In conclusion, I will take imp-N to have no phi-features and imp- ϕ to have underspecified phi-features, following Ackema and Neeleman. This will yield a different result with the allowed readings. In the next section the interaction between the feature make-up and the different readings will be discussed.

4.2 Generic and existential readings

To account for the different readings, I will follow Krifka et al. (1995) in that generic readings are derived via the presence of a generic operator [GEN] (Egerland 2003, Moltmann 2006, Ackema and Neeleman 2018, Roberts 2017). This generic operator can bind both imp-N and imp- ϕ . As for imp- ϕ , its feature specification includes the speaker and the addressee, and this is not contradictory to the requirements of [GEN]. It does not mean that [GEN] always needs to have an element which necessarily includes [speaker] and [addressee], but the element cannot have features that

are contradictory with [GEN]. Thus first person singular can never yield a generic reading, since it contains the features [person, singular] (cf. Ackema and Neeleman (2018) for a discussion). Since there is no syntactic feature specification for imp-N, there are no conflicting features for merging it with the generic operator. Thus this will yield a grammatical result.¹⁹

With respect to the existential reading, several options are possible.²⁰ Firstly, I will not follow Egerland in this respect; the problems with his approach have been pointed out in the previous section. A possibility would be that there is an existential operator in the DP (Ackema and Neeleman 2018) or that a pronoun can receive an existential reading because it is local to an aspect head, Asp. (D'Alessandro and Alexiadou 2003, Roberts 2017).²¹ I do not commit to either of those approaches, but note that the latter might be problematic. Roberts explicitly tries to rule out the option that existential readings are possible when an element is an internal argument. Asp cannot license an internal argument, since an arbitrary external or an event argument will intervene. However, as we have seen it is possible to get an existential when an imp-N pronoun starts as an internal argument. Crucially, it is not possible for imp- ϕ in either approach to receive an existential reading: since this pronoun always yields an interpretation that needs to include [speaker] and [addressee]. Whatever operation gives rise to an existential reading, means that [speaker] and/or [addressee] need to be excluded.

Having established the structure of both imp- ϕ and imp-N and how their readings arise, I will now turn to the Case properties of these pronouns.

4.3 Case

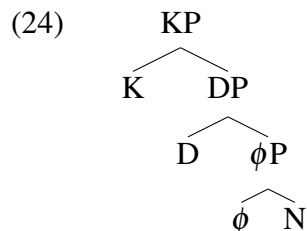
I take the structures in (21) to be correct: imp-N has less functional structure than imp- ϕ . Recall that imp- ϕ has a structure that will include the speaker and addressee, and is therefore always inclusive. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that it can only be bound by a generic operator, to yield a generic inclusive reading. Imp-N on the other hand does not have any functional structure and therefore is not restricted to occurring with a generic reading, and can be bound by an existential operator too. If this structural difference is on the right track, the question is why this would correlate with case. I suggest that the difference between nominative and non-nominative is in the presence or absence of a KP combined with the idea that KP layers are only possible if there is enough functional material. I assume, following Preminger (2014), Kornfilt and Preminger (2015), a syntactic theory of dependent case (Marantz 1991), that requires nominative to lack a KP, and requires nominals in other positions to have a KP (compare to i.e. Bittner and Hale 1996 for an earlier analysis in which nominative lacks KP but all other cases project a KP).

¹⁹Note that on this approach, generic (and also existential) readings are (dis)allowed because of combinations and restrictions of the operators with the phi-feature content. Generic and existential readings are not only allowed with dedicated impersonal pronouns, but also occur with personal pronouns such as *you* and *they*. This means that the feature content of these pronouns should be compatible with different operators as well. See Hoekstra (2010), Ackema and Neeleman (2018), Egerland (2003) for suggestions.

²⁰It has to be noted that this paper does not offer a full semantic account of the ambiguity of imp-N pronouns. In the semantic literature this issue has not been settled and there are at this moment a couple of competing analyses, such as Kratzer (1997), Malamud (2012), Zobel (2017).

²¹This means that existential readings do not arise when there are no features available, as Egerland proposes, but that the feature content of the pronoun should not include speaker and/or addressee features. This is for example the case with third person plural pronoun. See Ackema and Neeleman (2016) for an implementation of this idea.

I will assume, following recent literature, that the feature make-up of pronouns in general consists of several functional projections (Cardinaletti and Starke 1999, Déchaine and Wiltschko 2002, Elbourne 2005, Longobardi 2008, Kratzer 2009). Thus non-deficient pronouns have an extended projection that consists of at least a K-layer, D layer, a phi-layer and at the bottom a noun (or a root). This is presented in (24).²²



Now, recall that both *imp-phi* and *imp-N* are deficient in that they lack a D layer and have a very minimal phi-specification. I suggest that in order to get a KP layer, a pronoun needs to have at least some other functional projections; namely a phi-bundle. If there is no phi-layer present, KP can never be projected. This is similar to approaches to clausal restructuring where higher projections are not active in the absence of intermediate active projections (Wurmbrand 2001). Crucially, truncated projections are possible (Wurmbrand 2001, Radkevich 2010), but the presence of higher projections entails lower ones.²³ Thus, the distribution of the impersonal pronouns is a case of truncation in the DP as opposed to the CP.

Coming back to the impersonal pronouns, we predict that *imp-N* can never have a KP layer, whereas *imp-phi* can. If *imp-N* has a KP, then it has the lower projections in (24) too. However, in the last section we argued (with regard to the phi-features) that this is not the case. At this point however, if we assume that all cases are equal (NOM, ACC, GEN, etc.), we would expect that *imp-N* is never allowed in any position. This is not the case, since we have seen in section 2 that *imp-N* pronouns are possible with nominative case. Therefore, I follow the line of research that takes nominative to be the non-case (Jakobson 1936, Andrews 1982, Bittner and Hale 1996, Neeleman and Weerman 1999, Kornfilt and Preminger 2015); it does not include a KP layer. Other cases, such as accusative and dative do include this projection. This means that nominative arises because of the absence of a KP layer and therefore *imp-N* is grammatical with this case.

If we take nominative to lack a KP layer, and other cases including this, it is the case that a KP needs to project when any NP (not just an impersonal pronoun) will end up as a surface object and receives accusative case. It does not have to project when a NP will get nominative case. Another way to think about this is that, at least when an NP is local to T, KP will not project, even when the element starts as an internal argument (since the NP can be a derived subject). Also, the KP needs

²²See also Hall (in prep) for evidence that there is a difference between impersonal pronouns lacking D and semi-impersonal pronouns having the D-layer and the empirical differences between these two.

²³A reviewer suggests that this might give the wrong empirical outcome if we look at the division made by Landau (2010) that there is a difference between weak and strong implicit arguments. On Landau's account, strong implicit arguments have D and phi-features, whereas weak implicit arguments only have phi-features. On the analysis presented here both *imp-N* and *imp-phi* should behave like weak implicit arguments and should not be able to bind reflexives or cannot have secondary predicates, since they do not project D. One way to make the ideas presented here compatible with Landau's approach is to follow the idea of Wurmbrand (2014, 2015) that all layers are present, but that some layers are deficient in that they lack certain features, and that therefore higher layers cannot be merged with it. In this case it would mean that D is deficient, but still present on the impersonal pronouns.

to project in ECM constructions. This fits with the idea of a dependent case approach (cf. Marantz 1991) where nominative is the unmarked case, in the syntax, such as developed in Preminger (2014), Levin and Preminger (2015), Kornfilt and Preminger (2015). In this theory, when a phi-probe fails to find the features on a DP it searches for, the failure leads to unmarked agreement and/or case assignment.²⁴ Note that for this theory to work, it cannot be the case that a N (imp-N) can freely omit a KP – thus direct objects need to be KPs. So, for imp-N in ‘accusative’ position there is a conflict, since the syntax will require it to have a KP, but the structural make-up of the pronoun renders it incompatible with a KP.

If we now go back to the properties that need to be explained, we can see the following in table 8 (repeated from table 6 for convenience) .

Table 8: Summary of properties of impersonal pronouns — Final version

Properties	imp- ϕ	imp-N	
		g/da/n	s/du
(i) verbal agreement	3sg	3sg	3sg
(iia) generic inclusive reading	✓	✓	✓
(iib) existential reading, subject	*	✓	✓
(iic) existential reading, derived subject	*	*	✓
(iii) Object position	✓	*	*
(iv) ECM/AcI	✓	*	*

With regard to (i), it can be assumed that since both types of pronouns are deficient and lack actual person or number features, they occur with default agreement, which I assume is third person singular, since many proposals model this agreement as the absence of features (Benveniste 1971, i.a). The second point is discussed in the previous section: since imp-N has no phi-features, it is not blocked from being bound by a generic operator. Points (iii) and (iv) follow with the case proposal too: imp-N can only occur with nominative²⁵ and therefore it can occur both as a subject and as a derived subject, but it is not able to occur in object position or as an ECM-subject, since then it will project a KP layer. Imp- ϕ on the other hand has enough functional structure to have a KP and can thus occur in all environments.

²⁴At this point, it is not clear if imp-N is grammatical when it is local to T, or when it occurs in any position where there is nominative case. If the latter is true, more evidence is needed. However, at this point it is not clear how this evidence should look like, since constructions are needed that are not ruled out for independent reasons. Many of the nominative object constructions are available in Icelandic, but unfortunately it has a pronoun that can occur with different cases. If the relation with T turns out to be crucial, it might be that agreement restricts the distribution — even in languages where person agreement is not overtly spelled out on the verb. It would be interesting to look at languages with true object agreement to see if imp-N like elements can occur in accusative. Moreover, it would also be interesting to see what happens in absolutive-ergative languages. I will leave this for further research.

²⁵Following this approach, a problem might arise how exactly arbitrary PRO comes about. This element is always null, and needs refer to [+human]. The only difference between imp-N and PRO_{arb} is thus the overt spell out of the former. Sigurðsson and Egerland (2009) show that there is a whole range of different types of impersonal null elements, with different readings. They argue that some pronoun (i.e. a specific syntactic structure) may be expressed overtly in one language, while the same pronoun is expressed as a null element in a different language. At this point I recognize that this might be problematic for the approach sketched here and I do not have an answer, however it might be worthwhile to investigate which readings and positions are possible for the overt and the covert impersonal pronouns, as Sigurðsson and Egerland (2009) do. I will leave this for further research.

This means that the correlation between the readings and the syntactic positions of imp- ϕ and imp-N follows to a large extent. Imp- ϕ has a structure that always includes the speaker and the addressee and therefore always needs to get a generic reading. Moreover, it has enough structure to get a case projection. The structure of imp-N on the other hand does not give a restriction to a certain impersonal reading and can therefore have generic and existential readings. This structure also prevents it from occurring with any other case than nominative, since it is too defective to get a case layer.

Before we move on to the fact that derived subjects are still not explained, several notes are in order. I take the grammaticality of imp-N with nominative as an instance of unmarked case, and not necessarily as default case (Marantz 1991). The latter is the case that will only appear as some type of last resort option and case assignment is not possible. For example if a pronoun is not (syntactically) integrated into the sentence, it gets a special default case. This is for instance the case with *Me, intelligent?! versus *I, intelligent?!*, where the pronoun itself cannot get case licensed, but receives default case in order to be spelled-out (Schütze 1997). Many languages have the same unmarked and default case, but there are languages that have different unmarked and default cases, such as English. To test whether we are dealing with unmarked or default Case with imp-N, English does not help us, since *one* already can have different types of Case. Languages with an imp-N pronoun usually have nominative as the default case, which does not help to distinguish between unmarked and default either. There might be evidence that Danish has accusative as the default case (Sigurðsson 2006, Parrot 2015). However, even in this language *man* can only occur with nominative case, which points towards the analysis that imp-N pronouns can only occur with unmarked case. However, this correlation has not been investigated in too much depth and I will leave this for further research.

4.3.1 Derived subjects and existential readings

The only problem that we are left with is point (iic) in table 8, the fact that in German, Danish and Norwegian an existential reading is not possible when the pronoun is a derived subject. I present data that might suggest that the basic difference between impersonal pronouns still holds, but that there might be several independent differences between Dutch and Swedish on the one hand, and German, Danish and Norwegian on the other hand, which can perhaps serve as the basis for an account of why the difference in the availability of existential readings for derived subjects might arise. The first difference has to do with the availability of other pronouns that can express existential readings and the second difference has to do with different passive structures. If these data correlate, it might suggest that there is no difference between imp-N in these languages, but rather that the different distribution of this pronoun follows from independent properties in these languages. This correlation might be explained with an analysis based on blocking between different pronouns. However this analysis does not come without problems, since it is not immediately clear how to formalize the blocking relation. I will present the data, ideas and problems and leave the solution to this issue for future research.

Let us first look at some differences in the availability in pronouns. Section 2 showed that imp-N can have existential readings, but not when it is a derived subject in German. Even though imp-N is not grammatical, there is another pronoun that can be used with an existential reading, the wh-element *wer*. This pronoun can receive an existential reading, (25a), (25b). Crucially the same wh-element in Dutch or Swedish cannot be used for an indefinite reading, (25d) shows this

for Dutch.

- (25) a. Hier wurde **wer** gut bedient. [Ger]
Here was INDEF well served.
 ‘Here was someone served well.’
- b. Ich habe die ganze Zeit **wen** auf/an der Strasse arbeiten hören. [Ger]
I have the whole time INDEF on the road work hear
 ‘I heard someone work on the road.’
- c. Gestern hat **wer / man** für dich angerufen aber ich weiss nicht worum es ging. [Ger]
Yesterday had INDEF / IMP for you called, but I know not about.what it went
 ‘Yesterday someone called for you, but I don’t know about what’
- d. *Hier werd **wie** goed bediend *[Du]
here became WH good served
 Intended: ‘Here was someone served well’

One way to think about why *man* is not grammatical but *wer* is, is that these pronouns are in a blocking relation: *man* could in principle be grammatical in (25a), but there is a pronoun available that only has an existential reading, whereas *man* has multiple meanings. This means that there is no difference between the Dutch and German imp-N pronoun: the pronouns in both languages allow in principle both readings when imp-N is a derived subject. However, in Dutch there is no *wer*-like pronoun, as shown in (25d), and therefore *men* can have an existential reading when it is a derived subject. German *man* on the other hand cannot get an existential reading when it is a derived subject. In (25b) *man* is not possible, because it is in a position where it should receive case, but there is another pronoun that can save the sentence. However, multiple issues arise. First of all, the competition needs to be formalized between two structures: one that has no functional layers (imp-N), and one that has some functional layers (*wer*). The question is how the grammar decides which structures should be compared, since there are more pronouns that can receive existential readings, such as *someone* or *they*. Moreover, even when there is a way to evaluate only imp-N and *wer*, it is not clear why *wer* does not block an existential reading in a normal subject position, (25c). If *wer* is more specific (because it has more features, or because it only has one impersonal reading), it should also block the existential reading of *man* in any position, contrary to fact.

However, *wer* and *man* are not completely the same (apart from the fact that *wer* only is used for existential readings and *man* can also be used for generic readings). When *man* is used, it is preferable to refer back to this pronoun with a third person plural form, (26c) (this has been noted before by Cabredo Hofherr (2008), Zifonun (2001)). For *wer*, it is fine to either use third person singular masculine or feminine pronouns, (26a).²⁶

- (26) a. Gestern hat **wer** für dich angerufen, aber **er/sie** hat nicht gesagt, wie **er/sie**
Yesterday had INDEF for you called, but he/she has not said, how he/she

²⁶ Zobel (2017) argues that the fact that *man* behaves differently with regard to referring back than other indefinite pronouns such as ‘someone’, among with other evidence, that *man* is neither definite nor indefinite. Rather they are some type of a-definites, following Koenig and Mauner (1999). See for a discussion on the (in)definite status of impersonal pronouns section 4.5

heisst

called

‘Yesterday someone called for you, but he/she didn’t say what his/her name was’

- b. ?*Gestern hat **man** für dich angerufen, aber **er** hat nicht gesagt, wie **er** heisst
Yesterday hat IMP for you called, but he has not said, how he called
‘Yesterday someone called for you, but he/she didn’t say what his/her name was’
- c. ?Gestern hat **man** für dich angerufen, aber **sie** haben nicht gesagt, wie **sie** heissen
Yesterday hat IMP for you called, but they has not said, how they called

‘Yesterday someone called for you, but they didn’t say what their name was’

Thus, *wer* and *man* have different distributional and agreement properties and are not completely interchangeable. That is, the structure of *man* has to exclude agreement with specific features and it needs to block case-assigning positions. The structure of *wer* on the other hand needs to allow these properties. This might point towards the following: we have seen in previous sections that *man* lacking functional layers can account for the agreement and distributional properties. Following the reasoning proposed in this paper, *wer* needs to include more functional layers. But other than *imp- ϕ* , it needs to always lead to an existential reading rather than a generic reading. The fact that *wer* has more material in its extended domain can then account for the fact that this pronoun is grammatical in case-assigning positions and can agree for gender. The blocking between *wer* and *man* thus needs to come from (i) structural differences, or (ii) the specific readings that are allowed (e.g. *man* allows generic and existential readings, whereas *wer* only allows existential readings and is therefore preferred as the subject of a passive). In both cases formalizing the blocking relation seems hard, in that it is not clear what structures or readings are available for comparison. A blocking account seems promising in the light of (25a) versus (25d), since Dutch does not have two pronouns that can compete in this case, but problems arise with (25c) where both pronouns are available in the same position. Independently of the interaction between *wer* and *man*, blocking plays a role among other impersonal pronoun choices, notably in *man* and *ein* interactions. This blocking relation will be taken up in section 4.4.

Unfortunately, Danish and Norwegian do not have a pronoun similar to German *wer*. Even though I do not have a full explanation for this, there is another difference between Danish, Norwegian on the one hand and Swedish on the other hand. This has to do with different types of passive structures. It has been noted in the literature that with regard to passives, Swedish patterns differently from Norwegian and Danish (Engdahl 1999, Heltoft and Falster Jakobsen 1996, Holmberg 2000). It might be that the absence of existential readings and the differences with passives in Danish and Norwegian versus Swedish have a similar explanation. Thus, even though Swedish has both a morphological passive (adding *-s* to the verb) and a periphrastic passive (with *blev*), the latter type cannot form passives of intransitives, as is shown in (27).

- (27) *Det blev dansat på bryggan. *[Swedish]
It was danced on jetty. DEF (Engdahl 1999)

However, Danish and Norwegian allow impersonal periphrastic passives, as is shown in (28) for Danish.

- (28) Der bliver snydt [Danish]
there was cheated
 'Actual cheating is going on.' (Heltoft and Falster Jakobsen 1996)

Thus, recall from section 2 that Swedish allows existential readings in passives with *man*, but in (28) we see that it cannot form impersonal passives with the periphrastic construction. Danish and Norwegian on the other hand do not allow this reading with *man*, but can form impersonal passives with a periphrastic construction. It might be that the implicit argument in the passive constructions in Danish and Norwegian is interpreted existentially. However, if these constructions are not available in languages like Swedish, *man* needs to be used.

To summarize, the idea presented in the previous section still holds: case interacts with the feature make-up of dedicated impersonal pronouns and there are only two types of dedicated impersonal pronouns. The exceptions with regard to derived subjects come from language specific constructions. In German a pronoun is present that is not present in a language like Dutch. Thus in German there are other ways to express existential readings when the subject is derived. There is a different split in Norwegian and Danish versus Swedish with regard to the passive constructions that are available. In the next section we turn to the observation that in most languages there is a nominative and an accusative form of the dedicated impersonal pronouns.

4.4 A note on different impersonal pronouns

As mentioned before, all imp-N languages, except Dutch, have a pronoun that can only occur in nominative, namely *man*, and a pronoun that occurs with other cases, such as German *einen*. The next subsection argues that these pronouns are not underlyingly the same, but represent different pronouns. In subsection 4.4.2, a brief comment will be made about the interaction between dedicated impersonal pronouns and the impersonal use of *they*.

4.4.1 Where *one* helps *man*

In this section I argue that all languages with an imp-N pronoun, except Dutch, also have an imp- ϕ pronoun. Thus, an imp-N pronouns such as *man* that can only occur in nominative has a different feature make-up than the accusative pronoun, such as German *einen*. In table 9 an overview of the pronouns used in nominative and accusative in several Germanic languages is given.

As illustrated in table 9, all languages, except Dutch, that have an imp-N pronoun have an accusative impersonal pronoun too. Even though Standard Dutch does not have a non-nominative form, certain Flemish dialects do (Marijke de Belder, pc.), namely *'nmens*. Recall from the discussion in section 2 that even though languages with an imp-N pronoun have an impersonal pronoun in the accusative, this pronoun only allows generic inclusive readings, just like the English pronoun *one*. It is not always the case that the surface form of *man* is only restricted to nominative: in Icelandic and Flemish there is an accusative form. Moreover, in Old High German *man* patterns together with English/Frisian/Icelandic: the pronoun only expresses a generic reading and could occur with accusative case. It also is the case that in Gothic the impersonal pronoun is only attested with generic readings (Giacalone Ramat and Sansò 2007).²⁷ Thus, it seems that, on the surface,

²⁷ The type of analysis pursued here might explain a diachronic path, an idea also pursued by Egerland (2010). He looks at Old Italian *uomo* 'one' and argues that pronouns that have more readings available, have less functional

Table 9: Pronouns in nominative and accusative

	nominative	accusative
Afrikaans	<i>(n)mens</i>	<i>(n)mens</i>
English	<i>one</i>	<i>one</i>
Frisian	<i>men</i>	<i>jin</i>
Icelandic	<i>maður</i>	<i>mann</i>
German	<i>man</i>	<i>ein</i>
Danish	<i>man</i>	<i>en</i>
Norwegian	<i>man</i>	<i>en</i>
Swedish	<i>man</i>	<i>en</i>
Dutch	<i>men</i>	—
Flemish	<i>men</i>	<i>'nmens</i>

both Flemish and Icelandic pattern together, since they both have a nominative and accusative form of *man*; German and all Scandinavian languages seem to pattern with Frisian, since all have *man* in the nominative and some form of *one* in the accusative.

I propose that these are surface similarities and arguing that there is a real underlying difference between Afrikaans, Frisian, Icelandic and English on the one hand and German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Flemish on the other hand. In Frisian there is real suppletion: one structure for impersonal pronouns, namely $[\phi, N]$. This structure receives a different phonological form if it has case and when it occurs with the unmarked case. This follows a general pattern for suppletion, where the nominative is special (Smith et al. 2015). In the following example, the same structure on the lefthand side of the arrow is expressed as a different form, depending on the context: if there is a K(ase-head) present, the structure will be expressed differently than in the absence of this layer, which results in the nominative form.

- (29) a. $[\phi, N] \leftrightarrow \text{jin} / \text{__K}$
b. $[\phi, N] \leftrightarrow \text{men} / \text{__}$

Since both forms of the pronoun are underlyingly the same, they have the same syntactic and semantic restrictions; e.g. they only allow generic readings and can occur in case assigning positions. In German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Flemish there are in fact two different syntactic structures for impersonal pronouns, which are shown in (30) for the German vocabulary items. Thus, in these languages the underlying structure of the pronouns are different, which leads to different readings and different syntactic restrictions.

- (30) a. $[N] \leftrightarrow \text{man}$
b. $[\phi, N] \leftrightarrow \text{ein}$

An immediate question that arises is why *ein* occurs in accusative and *man* in nominative. Even though this distribution is found in some dialects of these languages, all languages also have dialects where both imp- ϕ and imp-N are grammatical in the nominative. As an example, Danish is given. Jensen (2009) reports that in the LANCHART corpus there are speakers in West-Jutland

structure. He only looks briefly at the difference between Swedish *man* and Icelandic *maður*. It might be fruitful to apply his analysis to the Germanic languages presented in this paper. I will leave this for future work.

(Denmark) that allow *en* in subject position. Also, the (b.) example shows that Swedish allows *en* as a subject, but only with a generic reading. The same holds for the other Scandinavian languages.

- (31) a. Skal **en** så i by om æ aften sommetider så bliver der altså ikke
shall IMP then in town in the evening sometimes then becomes there really not
 meget tid til at til at lave noget [Da]
much time to to to to make something
 ‘if one wants to go out in the night sometimes then there really isn’t much time to do anything [to earn money by working].’ (Jensen 2009:16)
- b. När **en** är i Italien äter en pasta. [Swe]
When IMP is in Italy, eat IMP pasta
 ‘When you are in Italy, you eat pasta’

Observe that *man* and *ein* are in a similar blocking relation as *man* and *wer* in section 4.3.1 in that *man* cannot occur in case assigning positions whereas *ein* can. The difference between *ein* and *wer* is that *ein* only allows generic readings and always is impersonal, whereas *wer* allows existential readings, but can also be used as another pronoun. Moreover, the same issue arises for *man* and *ein* that arose for *man* and *wer* in that in some positions both pronouns are grammatical (e.g. compare (31) and (25c).

Thus, on an intuitive level, a blocking account seems reasonable, but the implementation is less intuitive. Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) propose that languages prefer to use the most deficient pronoun whenever possible. They express this in a constraint, which they call MINIMIZE STRUCTURE. This constraint states that the smaller structure will be chosen, unless it is ruled out for independent reasons. Since there are no specific reasons in ‘normal’ transitive subject positions, *man* will be preferred over *ein*, since the latter has more structure, namely a phi-bundle. However, this solution does not work to account for *man* and *wer*, since in this case *wer* has more structure and should be dispreferred in passive and unaccusative structures, contrary to fact. The only way in which *wer* is more minimal is in the readings that are allowed – only existential readings are possible. But this also holds for *ein*, so *wer* and *ein* should behave similarly.

To summarize, at first glance, the distribution of imp-N and imp- ϕ on one hand and the distribution of imp-N and other pronouns such as *wer* seem to correlate, in that one pronoun occurs in one position and the other in other positions. This seems to point towards a blocking analysis. However, on second glance, a blocking analysis might not be the correct analysis, since several issues arise. Future work should focus on the question if the distribution of these specific pronouns is significant, or if another explanation is needed to account for the distribution of imp-N beyond only occurring in nominative positions.

4.4.2 Impersonal *they* and dedicated impersonal pronouns

The same type of reasoning (and the same problems) with regard to blocking can be applied if we look at the interaction between the dedicated impersonal pronouns and the third person plural *they* (Cabredo Hofherr 2003). This form is used to express exclusive generic readings or existential readings, as already mentioned briefly in section 4.2. If we now look at the usage of *they*, it turns out that it is used most frequently in languages that do not have a frequent usage of *man*. In English both *one* and *they* are used frequently, but they never have the same meaning: *one* always yields an inclusive reading, whereas *they* will always exclude the speaker. In all languages with an imp-

N pronoun, *they* and *man* can have the same meaning. It turns out that in German, Danish and Swedish *man* is used frequently (Jensen 2009, Ragnarsdóttir and Strömqvist 2005, Zifonun 2001) and *they* is less commonly used. Thirdly, in Dutch *men* is not used as frequently as in German (Weerman 2006) and both *men* and *they* can be used, but only as the weak form (Gruber 2013, Weerman 2006).

We can explain this (on an intuitive level) as follows. Recall that the structure of *one* includes a phi bundle, whereas imp-N pronouns are underspecified. *They* presumably also has some phi-features, since it agrees at least in [number] on the verb in most languages. Thus, in English all pronouns — including *one* — have ϕ -features, which means that *one* and *they* can compete; it is not the case that one pronoun is structurally lacking functional layers. As mentioned, in German, Danish and Swedish *man* is used more frequently. This pronoun also has less features than *they*, since it does not have any phi-features and therefore is preferred. Dutch seems to be an exception, since it has an imp-N pronoun and uses *they* frequently too. However, imp-N is used much less frequently than in German, and therefore it is not unlikely that *they* is used as well. Thus it seems that *they* is only used when there is no real competition from a pronoun with less structure. As pointed out before, the main issue with such an analysis is the question what structures are being compared. There are many more forms that can express existential readings (e.g. *someone*, *they*, *wer*) and the question is if these forms are all compared at the same time.

4.5 A note on (in)definiteness and the relation with D

Even though the focus of this paper is on the syntactic distribution of dedicated impersonal pronouns and not on the semantics, there is an issue that arises that needs to be addressed. This has to do with the argumentation developed here that impersonal pronouns lack a D-layer, and the status of those impersonal pronouns with regard to (in)definiteness. There is a debate in the literature as to whether these dedicated impersonal pronouns are definite or not: Cinque (1988), Chierchia (1995), Malamud (2012) argue that they are indefinite; Kratzer (1997), Alonso-Ovalle (2002) argues they are definite and Koenig and Maurer (1999), Zobel (2017) argue that they are ‘a-definite’. The goal of this section is not to show evidence in favor of one of the analyses proposed, but to show that it is not necessarily true that being definite entails a D-layer and that the proposal here therefore predicts that impersonal pronouns are indefinite. I would like to argue that there might be general semantic principles that give rise to definiteness effects, without there being a D-layer in the syntactic structure (Barwise and Cooper 1981, Keenan 2003).

The argument goes as follows. When looking at existential *there*-constructions, it looks like it is only possible to have an indefinite element as the subject, as in (32).

- (32) There is someone in the garden

Now, we have seen in this paper that imp-N pronouns allow existential readings and as such they should be allowed in this type of constructions; especially if they lack a D-layer as proposed in this paper. However, this is not what we find, (33a). Moreover, pronouns in general are not allowed in these contexts, even if they can refer to ‘someone’, (33b).

- (33) a. *Er is men in de tuin
 There is IMP in the garden
 b. *There is them in the garden

At first glance, it means that imp-N pronouns show a definiteness effect. However, even some true indefinites cannot occur in these contexts either, namely partitives (Barwise and Cooper 1981, Keenan 2003, i.a.). Thus, (34a) is generally argued to be an indefinite, but if this construction is put in a there-clause, the sentence is not grammatical, (34b).

- (34) a. One of the children
b. *There is one of the children in the garden

Since even elements that are considered true indefinites cannot be put in this type of construction, it has been argued that the definiteness effect follows from other principles rather than from the construction or pronoun itself being indefinite or not (Barwise and Cooper 1981, Keenan 2003). Thus, even though in my proposal impersonal pronouns lack a D-layer, it does not mean they should be grammatical in existential *there*-clauses.²⁸ Since the main goal of this paper is to show the syntactic distribution and not to provide evidence for the (in)definite status, I refer the interested reader to Zobel (2017) and Hoekstra (2010) for a more comprehensive overview on this topic.

5 Conclusion

This paper has shown that the empirical picture with regard to dedicated impersonal pronouns is more complex than previously noted in the literature. For convenience, the table with all the properties is repeated as table 10.

Table 10: Summary of properties of impersonal pronouns — Final version

Properties	imp- ϕ	imp-N	
		A.	B.
(i) verbal agreement	3sg	3sg	3sg
(iia) generic inclusive reading	✓	✓	✓
(iib) existential reading, subject	*	✓	✓
(iic) existential reading, derived subject	*	*	✓
(iii) Object position	✓	*	*
(iv) ECM/AcI	✓	*	*

Imp- ϕ pronouns can occur in multiple syntactic positions and can receive more than just nominative case. Imp-N pronouns can only occur with nominative case, but can have more readings. However, Danish, Norwegian and German *man* can only have an existential reading when it is nominative and when it is occupying the external argument position. To account for this, I have proposed that the defective nature of imp-N pronouns allows different readings, but the structure in (21) is too defective to receive case and therefore needs to occur with the unmarked case (i.e. nominative). The structure of the imp-N pronouns is less defective, which always gives rise to an inclusive reading. Moreover, this structure allows a KP and therefore it is grammatical with accusative case.

²⁸If one believes that the subjects in these constructions do not have nominative case, but partitive case Belletti (1988), it is predicted that imp-N pronouns are ruled out, since they cannot occur with case that requires a KP.

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