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The third person plural impersonal in Swedish

A typological account

1. Introduction[1]

Impersonal expressions have been studied in a variety of the world's languages, although as Siewierska (2008a: 3) notes, the term 'impersonal' is very wide and always needs specification within a particular research endeavor. It may be applied, among other things, to constructions not including an agent within a linguistic conceptualization, or to **references to "events which may be brought about by a human agent but crucially one which is not specified"** (Siewierska 2008a: 4). In this article we will focus on the latter type of constructions, accepting Siewierska's semantic/referential view of

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impersonality or agent defocusing in discourse (see Siewierska 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2011, Siewierska and Papastathi 2011). [2]

An impersonal agent may be conceived in different ways. Some researchers treat it as "no concrete person or a group of persons" while others interpret it as "anyone or everyone" – a content ascribed to generic constructions "expressing law like propositions which hold for all the members of a group, however defined" (Siewierska 2008a: 8, 9). In both cases, Siewierska (2008a: 8) notes, the agent is a non-specific controller of the action expressed by the predicate and the reference is vague or ambiguous. However, it may include or exclude the speaker and/or the addressee.

Using the term impersonal in its sense rendered above, Siewierska (2011) distinguishes a class of expressions responsible for "reduction in referentiality", which she calls R-impersonals:

> R-impersonals have the appearance of regular, personal constructions but feature a subject which is human and non-referential. The non-referential human subject may be expressed lexically, pronominally or by the whole construction. (Siewierska 2011: 57–58)

The most popular language items mentioned in research on R-impersonals are such pronouns as *on* in French, German *man*, Spanish *uno* or English *one*. The category also encompasses third person plural pronouns (e.g. English *they*) or the lack thereof in Slavic languages, where information about the person involved in the action is expressed by the inflectional verb form. Moreover, some impersonal uses of the 1st and 2nd person (singular as well as plural) pronouns are discussed in the literature. In such cases the referential ambiguity or vagueness of the personal pronouns means that the person being referred to cannot be determined unequivocally. In this kind of conceptualization, for instance, the 2sg personal pronoun *you* can extend its reference and express the meaning 'anyone'. (De Cock & Kluge 2016: 352) On the other hand, the English noun *people* can appear in quasi pronominal uses expressing generic content, as in *Why are people taking drugs?* (Gast & van der Auwera 2013: 2). Nouns of this type are also considered to be R-impersonals.

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[2] Viberg (2010: 122) remarks that this way of analyzing impersonality implies an agent-centred perspective, that is functional and concerned with agent defocusing.

The realm of impersonals still remains underexplored and this paper seeks to address a small part of this gap. It focuses on the Swedish 3pl personal pronoun *de/dom* 'they', which can be used non-referentially and belongs to the group of R-impersonals. In such cases the pronoun constitutes the core of the so-called 3pl impersonal construction, enabling agent defocusing in the action expressed by the predicate. An example of this kind of construction is shown in (2) below. It is also confronted with a prototypical occurrence of the 3pl *de/dom* in Swedish (1).

The Swedish *de/dom* 'they' is mainly used as an anaphoric pronoun referring to an antecedent present in the previous context, as in (1):

(1)   Kalle och Lisa bor i Stockholm. **De** trivs där.
      Kalle and Lisa live in Stockholm. **They** like it.[3]

The referent of the 3pl pronoun can be identified unequivocally and the agent is featured as a specific controller of the action.

The situation is somehow different in the example (2):

(2)   I Hollywood betalar **de** tio tusentals dollar för en kyss, och en halv cent för din själ.[4]
      In Hollywood, **they** pay tens of thousands of dollars for a kiss, and a half cent for your soul.

In (2) the reference of *de* 'they' is not specified. It is vague, because we do not know who these *de* 'they' are. We can only assume that it is anyone or everyone involved in the action expressed by the verb and its arguments. As Siewierska describes it, the 3pl pronoun is non-referential and is used impersonally, defocusing the agent within the sentence.

Because the 3pl construction in Swedish does not seem to have been satisfactorily accounted for in linguistic research, it has been chosen for the subject of a more thorough analysis in this article. We will aim to describe the

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[3] Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Swedish into English in the paper are mine (E.D.-B.).
[4] https://livet.se/ord/liknande/se_38291

patterns of variation in this construction, and in particular to answer the following question:

> How do the impersonal uses of the Swedish 3pl pronoun fit into the typological taxonomies that have been proposed for 3pl impersonals in European languages?

I believe that turning the spotlight onto this under-addressed issue and presenting it in a broader context of cross-linguistic research might lead to a revision of our understanding of impersonal pronominal reference (or agent defocusing constructions, as rendered above) in Swedish, preparing the ground for a more complex data-based approach to R-impersonals in this language.

2. A missing language

Recent years have seen an outpouring of research on pronominal impersonal constructions defocusing the agent in the described event (e.g. Achard 2015, van der Auvera et al. 2012, de Cock & Kluge 2016, Creissels 2008, Egerland 2003a, 2003b, Helmbrecht 2015, Jensen 2009, Kitagawa & Lehrer 1990, Malchukov & Siewierska 2011, Malchukov & Ogava 2011, Malamud 2007, 2012, Moltmann 2010, Prince 2006, Rudolf 2014, Rudolf & Sansò 2007, Sansò 2006, 2016, Słoń 2007, Zifonun 2001). The occurrence of referential ambiguity of this kind has been well documented in various particular languages, although Swedish seems clearly underrepresented in this context. This has meant that the language is hardly present in cross-linguistic typological characteristics pertaining to impersonality (see e.g. Gast & van der Auwera 2013, Gast 2015, Malchukov & Siewierska 2011, Siewierska 2011b).

Modern linguistic research[5] on Swedish R-impersonals has mainly focused on a few constructions. Viberg (2010), in a corpus-based study, conducted a thorough investigation of the non-referential *det* 'it' in the formal subject position in agentless passive sentences and of the generalized pronoun *man* 'one' used as the subject with general ('all of mankind') or vague reference. The two constructions are also compared to their counterparts in German, English, French, and Finnish. As Viberg (2010: 156) writes, "from

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[5] Among early research on impersonal constructions in Swedish, we can mention Ljunggren (1926) and Dahl (1975).

a functional point of view, the *man*-construction is the major expression of referential impersonality in Swedish". The use of the impersonal 3pl *de* 'they', which is treated only briefly in Viberg's study, seems to be restricted to vague reference. The Swedish *man*, compared mainly to Icelandic, French, and Italian, was also investigated in a diachronic perspective by Egerland (2003b). Additionally, contrastive synchronic studies of *man* and its direct correspondences in Dutch (*men*) and English (*one*) are to be found in Coussé & van der Auwera (2012) and Altenberg (2004/2005), respectively.

Research pertaining to other Swedish R-impersonals is rather scarce, though three progressive studies by Skärlund deserve to be mentioned here. Skärlund (2014) proves conclusively that the Swedish item *folk* 'people', traditionally treated as a noun, is undergoing a change and becoming a kind of generic pronoun. The Swedish scholar (Skärlund 2017a) also investigates the Swedish personal pronoun *du* 'you' used with generic reference (e.g. *Om* **du** *blivit mobbad eller trakasserad på arbetet och ...* 'If **you** have been bullied or harassed at work and ...'), demonstrating that this occurrence of the pronoun, often claimed to be a new tendency in contemporary Swedish, was already present in the Old Swedish period. Moreover, the impersonal *du* is analyzed on the conceptual level as a means of informalization and subjectification (as defined by Traugott 2010). In her more complex study focused on *du* 'you' and other Swedish generic pronouns (*man* and *en*), Skärlund (2017b) takes a stance on the 3pl *de* 'they' in its generic (i.e. impersonal) use in this language. As she writes:

> A review of all occurrences of the ancient Swedish texts constituting my language data, however, showed that in these texts *de* is used in the same way as in contemporary Swedish: when the word occurs without a clear antecedent, it usually refers to an unspecified group in a certain context (usually referring to persons in a particular location) [...]. It is therefore likely that *de* in this use has not undergone significant semantic development from ancient Swedish until today. Therefore I have chosen not to investigate this pronoun further. (Skärlund 2017b:22)[6]

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[6] En genomgång av alla förekomster på *de* i det äldre fornsvenska materialet visade emellertid att *de* i dessa texter används på samma sätt som i nutida svenska: när ordet förekommer utan en tydlig antecedent betecknar det vanligen en viss inte närmare preciserad grupp i ett visst sammanhang (oftast refererande till personer som befinner sig på en viss plats) [...]. Det är därmed sannolikt att *de* i denna användning inte genomgår

In light of what Skärlund argues, a tentative conclusion may be drawn that the content expressed by *de* in its impersonal uses has been clearly defined and as such it does not undergo any changes. Consequently, the pronoun offers the poorest research potential as compared to other items that can be counted among R-impersonals in Swedish. This, however, seems a clear oversimplification.

The picture of the Swedish *de/dom* also remains unclear in typological research. In her pioneer contribution Siewierska (2008a) describes the 3pl impersonal construction, which co-exists with different verbal impersonals fulfilling similar functions in several languages, including Swedish. However, the available information about the Swedish 3pl impersonal (3pl IMP) seems imprecise and incomprehensive. The cross-linguistic description of 3pl IMPs in 8 languages by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011), for instance, does not consider Swedish or indeed other Scandinavian languages. These facts may be seen as representative of the state of art in research on 3pl IMPs. As Siewierska (2008a: 13) herself expresses it: "in the case of European languages much unclarity about the uses of the 3PL impersonal remains".

In Siewierska (2008a: 15) the use of the English 3pl pronoun *they* in example (3) below is characterized as expressing "the joint specific common activity."

(3) (…) and it showed where **they** used to take the prisoners in and **they** took 'em in at the side where the steps are going up to Townley, […] and **they**'d take them in underneath there and **they** were torturing them (Siewierska 2008a: 15, bold E. D.-B.)

As Siewierska (2008a: 15) points out, in such cases the agent cannot be assessed in relation to its "institutional or organizational affiliation" – a kind of content that is more common in the world's languages. It is rather to be seen as 'whoever' participated in the action expressed by the verb. A common denominator for such individuals is, nevertheless, that they were "jointly involved in performing a series of specific activities".

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någon betydande semantisk utveckling från fornsvensk tid till idag, och jag har därför valt att inte undersöka detta pronomen vidare (Skärlund 2017b: 22).

Siewierska (2008a: 15) asserts that such use of the 3pl is "marginal" in Icelandic and Danish and unavailable in Swedish, but this deserves closer scrutiny. Reading different webpages, for instance, we can find such statements as in (4) below:

(4)

Varför sprider **de** miljögifter över Sverige?	Why do **they** spread pollution across Sweden?
De vanligaste teorierna uppdaterad[7]	The most common theories updated

The excerpt in (4) is the title of a short film displayed on You Tube. In comments under the pictures (showing white streaks and heavy clouds in the sky), the question *Vem gör det?* (Who is doing this?) is asked. Even though we do not know exactly who these *de* 'they' may be, the pronoun designating the agent represents individuals jointly involved in performing a series of specific activities, which schematically can be described as spreading pollution across Sweden.

Moreover, 3pl IMPs are characterized as not able to designate a single individual known to the speaker and the addressee (Siewierska 2008a: 16). Some languages, however, do allow this kind of designation and the identity of the person involved can, for instance, be specified in the following context, as in example (5) below taken from Italian:

(5)
Italian
Prima Hanno telefonato: mi pareva tua sorella.
Earlier have.3PL telephoned me seemed your sister.
Someone (*They) telephoned earlier. It seemed to me that it was your sister.

(Cinque 1988: 543, after Siewierska 2008a: 17)

Such use of the 3pl is, according to Siewierska (2008a: 17), marginal in Icelandic and Danish but "completely disallowed" in Swedish.

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[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pS7YYwlcYA

Here again, this claim about Swedish seems imprecise. The example (6) below comes from a blog written by a mother of small children *Ett mamma-liv. Precis som det är* (One mom's life. Just as it is). One of the webpages begins as follows:

(6)

Igår ringde **de**	Yesterday **they** called
Kuratorn som jag har träffat på Bup ringde igår för att kolla hur det går för oss. Hon är väldigt bra och sympatisk tycker jag.[8]	The custodian I met on Bup called yesterday to see how things are going for us. She is very good and sympathetic, I think.

The definite form of the noun *kuratorn* 'the custodian', which is additionally specified by the use of the following relative clause, seems to represent the same type of expression as *your sister* in Siewierska's (2008a) example above. Yet, when *de* 'they' appears in the beginning of the text the addressee (reading the webpage) cannot identify the agent unequivocally, though s/he can assume that it was a single person. The communicative effect of the Swedish example resembles the Italian conceptualization, which serves as an accepted (prototypical) reference point for distinguishing such readings of the 3pl pronouns in research on pronominal impersonality.

3. Methodological remarks

In the context sketched out here, several intriguing questions arise pertaining to the location of Swedish on the map of 3pl impersonals (IMPs) in the world's languages. Nevertheless, answering them is not simple, even though grammarians have started to mention some non-prototypical uses of the 3pl, including those that qualify as impersonal (as defined above).

The newest grammar of the Swedish language, *Svenska Akademiens Grammatik* (SAG) (Teleman et al. 1999: 286, 395), yields some insights into the existence of the 3pl IMP in this language. It fails, however, to see such uses of *de/dom* 'they' as a category of interrelated content. On the other hand, it is suggested in the SAG that the occurrence of the 3pl IMP in Swedish is

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[8] http://nouw.com/ettmammaliv/igar-ringde-de-29588450

connected with stylistic variation. Such occurrences may be simply restricted to less formal registers, mainly the spoken language (*talspråk*) (Teleman et al. 1999: 286). In this regard the Swedish *de*/*dom* resembles the English *they*. Usage restrictions of this kind may influence the possibilities of researching an item and consequently the current state of knowledge about it.

An analysis of instances of *de*/*dom* 'they' in a corpus mainly based on written language data must proceed with some caution. Some limitations of doing studies focused on 3pl IMPs on parallel written corpora have been for example revealed in an investigation conducted by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011) on language data taken from the Harry Potter corpus encompassing German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Russian and Greek translations of the English original (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 606).

The problem is even more complex because *de*/*dom* has several functions in Swedish and it is represented extraordinarily frequently in the available language corpora. The selection of relevant occurrences of the item has, therefore, to be done by close-reading and then by relating of each identified instance of *de*/*dom* to context in order to eliminate, for instance, the more frequent anaphoric uses of the pronoun. This procedure makes a potential corpus-based investigation extremely time-consuming. On the other hand, the reconstruction of context in a corpus material has its limits and the identified occurrences of an item may be subject to misreading.

The mentioned facts urge us to consider other research possibilities, possibly better suited to gaining insight into the occurrence of the Swedish impersonal *de*/*dom*, particularly at an initial stage of investigation. One such possible technique may be having native speakers of a particular language fill out a questionnaire, as done for instance in Siewierska's (2008a) investigation.[9] However, this tool, too, has proved insufficient for acquiring the relevant information pertaining to Swedish (see examples (3)–(6) described above).

Given all of the above, in the present article a close-reading of Swedish webpages of different types was chosen as a source of information about the impersonal uses of *de*/*dom* 'they'. However, a wider perspective of lan-

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[9] The research by Siewierska (2008a) is based on information provided to her in a questionnaire filled out for 31 languages by her colleagues and students of the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University (Siewierska 2008a: 12). A questionnaire was also used as an adjunctive research tool in the work by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011).

guage structures fulfilling similar functions in other languages was applied as a point of departure in collecting the relevant language data. This due to the hypothesis that some uses of 3pl IMPs are to be tied to a narrow range of situational contexts (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 606). Taking into consideration the stylistic restrictions connected with the occurrence of the 3pl IMP in Swedish, mainly the pronoun's less formal form *dom* was searched for in the Google Chrome web browser. The identified examples were confronted with a taxonomy established for 3pl IMPs in European languages and widely applied in typological studies (Gast 2015). It should be stressed, however, that our data still is expanding and the examples presented in this paper are rather to be seen as a confirmation of the identified types of impersonal content of *de/dom* than an illustration of their range in contemporary Swedish.

4. Third person plural IMPs from a typological perspective

A model for a typology of 3pl IMPs has been presented in Siewierska & Papastathi (2011). It is based on pioneering work by Cabredo Hofherr (2003, 2006) and Myhill (1997) and aims at establishing a basis for a more thorough investigation of such items in a sample of European languages. This model has been further developed by Gast & van der Auwera (2013) and Gast (2015) within the cross-linguistic research project "Towards a typology of human impersonal pronouns", which is focused on the interaction of different impersonal constructions with specific types of context. The German scholar and his group have established a semantic map that is encompassing both a synchronic and a diachronic interpretation for the 3pl impersonal readings in different languages. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the diagnostic sentences representing the range of meanings within the map are strictly related to Siewierska's and Papastathi's taxonomy.

From the point of view of Siewierska & Papastathi (2011), six different types of impersonal readings (branded by Cabredo Hofherr (2003: 83) as antecedentless readings) of the 3pl pronouns can be distinguished. These readings may be ordered on semantic grounds as follows:

a) universal, e.g. *In Spain, they eat late.*
b) corporate, e.g. *They changed the tax laws last year.*
c) vague existential, e.g. *They've found his bike in the back of a barn.*
d) inferred existential, e.g. *They've been frying chips here.*

e) specific existential, e.g. *They're knocking on the door.*
f) the speech act verb *say construction,* e.g. *They say he met vampires in the Black Forest.*

(see Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 581, 584)

A common feature of impersonal uses of 3pl pronouns is the exclusion of the speaker and the hearer from the construed conceptualization (Cabredo Hofherr 2003: 85, Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 577). The distinction between the **existential** reading, on the one hand, and the **universal** and the **corporate** readings, on the other, is based on whether the agent may be interpreted as a single individual or as a group. It means in practice that in such contexts the 3pl pronoun potentially can be **paraphrased with *some-one***, which is possible in the former but not in the latter case. (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 581) As Siewierska & Papastathi (2011: 581) remark, the universal and corporate impersonals are only semi-impersonal because they indicate a collective from which an individual agent can be distinguished conceptually. They provide only very vague information about the agent, and therefore they cannot be paraphrased with *someone.* The existential readings, by contrast, do not imply plurality (Cabredo Hofherr 2003: 86).

On the other hand, the 3pl in its **universal** uses differ from its **corporate** readings in terms of additional information present in the context of the sentence. The former is distinguished if the sentence includes a locative expression, the latter, primarily in terms of the meaning of the profiled verb and its arguments. (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 582) This condition manifests itself particularly clearly when a locative expression is replaced by a temporal one, e.g. *In the war, they just got on with it / During the summer, they just got on with it.* As the scholars express it themselves, "[w]hile it is easy to think of people […] during the war, it is virtually impossible to do so of people […] during the summer, unless some additional specification of place is provided" (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 582).

Moreover, with respect to the corporate uses the reading presupposing a particular group as the agent clearly depends on the verb. Such readings are typical for situations where the event described by the verb may be dependent on a group conducting the action (e.g. *raise taxes* as opposed to *raise the blinds*) (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 582). As Cabredo Hofherr (2003: 84) points out, the corporate reading distinguishes itself from the other uses be-

cause it implies a collective agent. That is why the term was originally understood as pertaining to expressions designating "some socially designated group of people, prototypically governments, bosses, criminals, or shopkeepers".

A special case among the impersonal uses of the 3pl is the **specific existential** reading, implying a single individual who may be known to the speaker. Only this kind of reading involves a specific point in time (typically the present), which has influence on the interpretation of the sentence. Siewierska & Papastathi (2011: 582) add: "[g]iven a particular place and time the interlocutors may have very clear expectations about the likely identity of the referent of the subject, even if it is not overtly expressed."

In contrast, the **universal** readings of the 3pl IMPs are not connected with a specific event anchored in time, but rather with content that can be seen as a general truth. In this respect they show a clear similarity to generic sentences (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 582).

The last feature that enables different impersonal readings of the 3pl to be distinguished pertains to the opposition between **vague** and **inferred**. In the latter case the content is strictly connected with a perceivable result of a previously occurred event. In the examples *Here (they) have eaten seafood* or *They've been frying chips here* the agent can be inferred on the basis of the perception of the smell of cooking or frying. The vague reading does not imply this kind of connection between the result and its cause. Moreover, the vague reading is connected with no distinct (contextual or verbal) features provided for the agent identification. (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 584)

Siewierska & Papastathi (2011: 584) argue that an additional, sixth, type of impersonal readings of the 3pl pronoun should be included within the typological model. This use is connected with **the speech act verb** *say*, as in example (7) below:

(7)

They say he met vampires in the Black Forest

(Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 585).

The scholars point out that sentences including the verb *say* are often seen as prototypical instances of the vague readings. Such sentences do not, however, fit to this type of reading in Carbedo Hofherr's (2003) classification, because they do not refer to a specific event and they cannot be substituted by

someone. On the other hand, they may be the only type of 3pl IMPs that is allowed in some languages (e.g. Finnish or Estonian), which in Siewierska and Papastathi's opinion (2011: 585) supports the decision to treat them as a separate type. Moreover, the content expressed in such sentences can be seen as a general truth.

The characteristics of the six types of 3pl IMPs with respect to the criteria discussed by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011) are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the 3pl IMPs[10]

Property	universal	corporate	vague	inferred	specific	'say'
Necessary group identification	+	+	–	–	–	+
Delimitation of group by locative	+	–	–	–	–	–
Delimitation of group by predicate	–	+	–	–	–	+
Anchoring in time	–	+	(+)	+	+	–
Specific time reference	–	–	–	–	+	–
Inferred by result	–	–	–	+	–	–

Source: Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 583, with modifications by E.D.-B.

Given these characteristics we can talk about a certain variation within the 3pl construction, which can be treated as a category of subconstructions depending on particular and very precisely determined contextual conditions. The presented model may therefore serve as a useful reference point in conducting research on the 3pl impersonal in various languages. In what follows,

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[10] 'Anchoring in time' is counted as a defining feature for the vague existential reading by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011) while it is excluded by Cabredo Hofherr (2003). Therefore, the symbol (+) confirming this feature has been put in brackets in Table 1. Other modifications of the table pertain to the inclusion of the *say*-construction and its characteristics into the taxonomy presented by Siewierska & Papastathi.

we will examine to which extent this model can be applied to conceptualizations in the Swedish language.

5. Looking at the Swedish impersonal *de* from a typological perspective

In Swedish the following types of impersonal uses of the 3pl have been identified:

5.1. Universal (including a locative): *In Spain, they eat late*

Some examples mentioned by the SAG enable us to confirm the universal reading of the 3pl in Swedish (see examples in (8) below). However, the uses of *de/dom* in such cases are characterized by the grammarians as marginal instances of the so-called indirect anaphor, where the pronominal reference is achieved via a relation to an object present in (previous) context, e.g. *Jag gick till affären och bad **dem** hjälpa mig* (I went to the store and asked **them** to help me) (Teleman et al. 1999: 268). On the other hand, Teleman et al. (1999: 286, 395) point out that *dom/de* 'they' can be used in spoken language instead of the more frequent and stylistically more formal impersonal *man* 'one' in contexts where the speaker and the listener are not included and *man* expresses: a) anyone at all or b) any of a given group of people:

(8)

a) I England kör **dom** fortfarande till vänster. (Teleman et al. 1999: 286)

In England **they** still drive on the left.

I England kör **man** fortfarande till vänster.

In England **one** still drives on the left.

b) Här tror **de** att hundratals människor omkommit.

Here **they** believe that hundreds of people died.

Här tror **man** att hundratals människor omkommit. (Teleman et al. 1999: 395)

Here **one** believes that hundreds of people died.

This kind of reading of the 3pl has also been confirmed in our language data taken from the Internet. The example (9) is a joke presented on Facebook:

(9)

– Vad säger **dom** när man knackar på dörren i Litauen?

– What do **they** say when knocking on the door in Lithuania?

– Vad Villnius?[11]

– What Vilnius?

According to the SAG, the number of individuals designated by *de/dom* is often only vaguely delimited, which means that the speaker does not have to refer to all persons associated with the given context. Yet, the impression that 'anyone or everyone' is included is preserved. For example, in (10) a possible interpretation is some part of the inhabitants in Stockholm.

(10)

I Stockholm tror **dom** väl att
vi inte är riktigt kloka.
(Teleman et al. 1999: 286)

In Stockholm, **they** think surely,
we are not really wise.

All examples presented above fulfill the requirements of the universal reading of the 3pl impersonal: they imply a group agent that is clearly delimited by a locative functioning as a background in the linguistic conceptualization. Yet, they are not precisely anchored in time and the predicate does not determine the character of the agent, either.

On the other hand, an example clearly resembling the universal reading is presented in (11). It comes from a song of the world-famous ABBA-singer Agnetha Fältskog:

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[11] https://www.facebook.com/Javligtsurhumor/posts/865870326824235

(11)

Dom Har Glömt	**They** Have Forgotten
Jag sjöng mina sånger I parkerna och nån enstaka krog nån kväll som jag gjort alla år sen mitt namn stod på topp.	I sang my songs in parks And some taverns some nights Like I've done every year since my name was on the top
Men det har **dom** redan glömt	But **they**'ve already forgotten it
Dom har glömt att dom sände mej röda rosor.	**They** forgot, that they sent me red roses
Dom har glömt att dom aldrig lät mej gå.[12]	**They** forgot that they'd never let me go.[13]

The pronoun *dom* clearly implies an agent that can be characterized as generic and paraphrased as *folk* 'people' or *man* 'one' – a content present in e.g. (8). Yet, it is not delimited by a locative and not anchored in time either, even though the present perfect tense profiles a result of the action.

The conceptualization in (11) was difficult to place within the typological model discussed in the previous part of the article. Nevertheless, the content is clear enough to be identified in contemporary Swedish.

5.2. Corporate reading: *They changed the tax laws last year.*

The main feature of this type of reading is an institutional affiliation that potentially can be ascribed to the agent. In the prototypical case the agent can then be "branded" precisely.

A post starting a discussion on the Sweddit forum begins as follows:

(12)

Ytterligare en skatt på elektronik... vad håller **de** på med?	An additional tax on electronics ... what are **they** doing?

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[12] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlDS68FfomQ; http://www.songtexte.com/songtext/agnetha-faltskog-dom-har-glomt-3d62537.html
[13] http://lyricstranslate.com/en/dom-har-gl%C3%B6mt-they-forgot.html

Vi i Sverige betalar redan premium priser på datorer, tv apparater, spel konsoler och datorkomponenter i jämförelse med många länder.

We in Sweden already pay premium prices on computers, TVs, game consoles and computer components in comparison to many countries.

De tröck ju även in skatt på hur mycket lagring man har och nu på vikten av grejerna. Nånstans måste det väl ta stopp [...].[14]

They also charge taxes on how much storage you have and now on the weight of the stuff. Somewhere, it must take a stop [...].

The predicate and its arguments *tröck in skatt på* 'charged taxes on' enable a clear delimitation of the group. The events are anchored in time. Yet, other elements of the context (e.g. the fact that the sentence is in Swedish) also enhance the identification of the implied agent as a corporate group, that is to be branded as the Swedish government.

This type of reading is also mentioned in the SAG. According to the grammar, the subject here features people who are in a certain place and engaged in some activity (Teleman et al. 1999: 286). In (13) the predicate *satt upp ett nytt anslag* 'set out a new directive' enhances this reading:

(13)

Nu har **dom** satt upp ett nytt anslag igen. Snart får vi väl lämna in skriftligt när vi ska på toaletten. (Teleman et al. 1999: 286)

Now **they** have set out a new directive again. Soon we will have to apply in writing when going to the loo.

The example in (14) is a title of an article:

(14)

Här bygger **de** mitt i natten[15]

They are building in the middle of the night here.

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[14] https://www.reddit.com/r/sweden/comments/5ye0ti/nu_%C3%A4r_kemikalieskatten_p%C3%A5_elektronik_klubbad/?st=j9vqpbv2&sh=3176bb21
[15] https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/norrbotten/har-bygger-de-mitt-i-natten

Thanks to the predicate we can infer that the agent is a construction company (even though its name is not mentioned in the whole text) and that the individuals are acting together in performing the action. Moreover, the situation is clearly anchored in time. Yet, the identity of the individuals constituting the group is unknown.

And a review of a restaurant from Trip Advisor states:

(15)

| Här har **dom** gått hela vägen | Here **they** have gone all the way. |
| En fantastiskt restaurang i hamnen, maten, inredningen, servicen allt kanon bra.[16] | A fantastic restaurant on the harbor, the food, the decor, the service, everything is really great. |

In (15) the group identification of the agents is preserved (the restaurant). Yet, the cooperation of the plural agent is backgrounded because the predicates do not enhance its interpretation. Moreover, the situations' anchoring in time is somehow weaker. The function of delimiting the agent can be ascribed to the visual context present on the web page appointed by the deictic adverb *här* (here).

A less prototypical instance of corporate reading of *de* can be found in (16), which is the beginning of a leader training ad that will help a potential leader to manage a group of people more successfully.

(16)

| Varför gör **de** inte som jag säger? | Why don't **they** do what I'm saying? |
| Så skapar du rätt beteenden som ledare för att nå era mål.[17] | So, you create the right behaviors as a leader to achieve your goals. |

In this example the group cannot be ascribed a distinct brand. Nevertheless, the agent (*de*) is conceived as a group (with rather fuzzy borders) of individuals subordinate to a leader for a particular occasion. It resembles an as-

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[16] 8 https://www.tripadvisor.se/ShowUserReviews-g670159-d6908613-r492265455-Hamnplats_3-Bastad_Skane_County.html

[17] http://www.framfot.se/seminarier/varfor-gor-de-inte-som-jag-sager/

semblage of individuals. Moreover, the situation's anchoring in time and even the idea of the individuals' cooperation while performing the action are clearly backgrounded in comparison with (12) or (13), for instance. The conceptualization may be therefore seen as a link into the next type of impersonal readings of 3pl pronouns.

5.3. Vague existential: *They've found his bike in the back of a barn*

A prototypical vague existential reading of the 3pl, as defined by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011) and exemplified in the sentence above, was not identified in our investigation. However, an analogical construction including the impersonal *man* 'one' was found:

(17)

Har **man** hittat din stulna cykel?[18]   Has **one** found your bike?

On the other hand, a deeper analysis of all the readings of the 3pl conceived in the model for impersonals by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011) allows us to come to a conclusion that the description of the vague existential reading is most imprecise of all the proposed readings (see the table 1 above) and as such difficult to capture. The only defining feature that according to the scholars should be present in distinguishing this reading – 'anchoring in time' – is excluded by Cabredo Hofherr (2003), who characterizes this type as 'not temporally anchored'. The main characteristic of this reading is simply that "virtually no clue to the identification is provided in the context" (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 584).

Taking this into consideration, it is justified to claim that in a case of the vague existentials the 3pl pronoun itself is mainly responsible for featuring the character of the defocused agent. However, too little consideration has been given to this issue in the literature. Such an interpretation of the agent definitely excludes the universal 'everyone' and the corporate 'group as a branded whole' features. On the other hand, the agent potentially may be described as *someone*. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to notice that in the sentence above *They've found his bike in the back of a barn* the agent may take

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[18] http://www.kuriren.nu/nyheter/?clip=8877886

more varied interpretations than the suggested implied *someone*. As Siewier-ska & Papastathi (2011: 581) remark "a paraphrase with *someone* may be at-tributed to the fact that in the absence of any information about the referent of the subject, the possibility of the referent being a single individual cannot be excluded." However, due to the 3pl pronoun's meaning, the agent can be imagined as more than one individual, but not necessarily a group of cooper-ating individuals who perform the action together (as in the corporate read-ing). The agent may then be imagined as an unspecified single individual or as plural, though unspecified and non-referential. Therefore, the observation made by Cabredo Hofherr (2003: 86) that the existential reading does not im-ply plurality is somehow an overgeneralization. Plurality is profiled by the 3pl pronoun, but it means an assemblage of individuals, but not necessarily a co-operating group (see e.g. (12), (13), etc.).

Applying this wider view of the agent as possible in identifying the vague existential reading for the 3pl IMPs, the conceptualization (18) below (quoted as (4) in the initial part of this article) may be included in this type in Swedish.

(18)

Varför sprider **de** miljögifter över   Why do **they** spread pollution
Sverige? De vanligaste teorierna   across Sweden? The most common
uppdaterad[19]   theories updated

In (18) the agent represents here individuals involved in performing a se-ries of specific activities. Yet, the group seen as a gestalt is not part of the image here, because the verb does not support such an interpretation of the agent. Neither are the individuals featured as cooperating with one another and possessing an affiliation. Moreover, the 'everybody' universal interpre-tation is excluded. Finally, the impersonal *de* 'they' can be substituted by the indefinite pronoun *någon* 'somebody' – a fact that confirms the existential vague reading of the construction:

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[19] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pS7YYwlcYA

(19)

Varför sprider **någon** *miljögifter över Sverige?*
Why does **somebody** spread pollution across Sweden?

On the other hand, however, the plurality of the defocused agent cannot be excluded in this conceptualization. In fact, the agent is some unspecified agents involved in the same specific action (see Siewierska 2008a: 15).

Another example of this type is given below:

(20)

– Vet ni vad det största problemet är?, frågar Eduardo. Allt skräp. **De** har öppnat en Mc Donald's en bit härifrån. Nu ligger det skräp överallt, [...].[20]	– Do you know what the biggest problem is? Eduardo asks. All garbage. **They** have opened a Mc Donald's a bit from here. Now there is garbage everywhere […].

Neither in this conceptualization is the affiliation of the agent known to the speaker. However, it can be one individual or a few individuals, who are involved in performing the action.

Example (21) comes from the discussion forum Kolozzeum, dedicated to nicknames invented by people for several occasions. The pronoun *dom* 'they' (in bold), which potentially can be substituted by *någon* 'somebody', enhances the vague existential reading.

(21)

kom på att nån har kallat mig tjockis någon gång när jag sagt min viktuppgång. Fast jag är långt ifrån tjock.. vad vill dom mig? vill **dom** göra mig illa? :([21]	notice that someone has called me fatty once when I said my weight gain. Though I'm far from being fat… what do they want from me? do **they** want to hurt me? :(

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[20] http://flamman.se/a/knacka-dorr
[21] http://www.kolozzeum.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-42573.html

5.4. Inferred existential (inferred from a result):
They've been frying chips here.

The significant defining feature of the inferred existential reading of the 3pl is the result of the action that has occurred previously. This result is determined in a very special way, i.e. not on verbal but on situational grounds. In the present investigation no such uses of the Swedish *de/dom* have been identified. However, it cannot be excluded that an analysis of truly spoken language data would yield different results.

5.5. Specific existential (temporally anchored):
They're knocking on the door

A prototypical example constituting this type of impersonal reading of the 3pl in Swedish was presented in (5) in the initial part of this article. One more is mentioned below in (22). They are excerpts from a discussion forum entitled *Varför ringer brevbäraren på dörren?* (Why does the postman ring the doorbell?).

(22)

För mig har **de** ringt på och sen bara lämnat ett paket utanför dörren, och redan hunnit försvinna som om brevbäraren var självaste batman.[22]	To me **they** have rung the doorbell and then just left a package outside the door, and already disappeared as if the postman was the batman himself.

It may be noticed that the specific impersonal reading of the 3pl is connected with a situation where the action expressed by the verbal predicate cannot be performed by more than one person. In our experience, there is usually one individual acting under specific conditions in a particular situation. In the conceptualizations (22) above the situation itself indicates that individual, because usually only one person presses the bell button and from the given context we can infer (or at least assume) who that person may be. As Siewierska & Papastathi (2011: 582) add "[t]he fact that the identity of the

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[22] https://www.flashback.org/t1063701

subject may be known to the speaker and even the hearer is largely a consequence of the specific time reference. ”

The example (23) below has been counted into this type too. Even though at first impression a corporate reading of the pronoun may be assumed here, it is obvious that the action expressed by the predicate can be performed exclusively by a single individual.

(23)

Dom har skrivit fel datum i min förlossningsjournal.[23]	**They** have entered a wrong date in my child birth case book.

The predicate and its arguments 'enter a wrong date in a book' determine clearly a single individual responsible for the action – a fact that enables (23) to be distinguished from e.g. (13), where an institutional character of the cooperating agent is clearly implied. By the use of the 3pl *de/dom* the identification of this single individual becomes blurred. This impersonal use of the Swedish *de* resembles examples taken from other languages and considered in the literature. Discussing the impersonal uses of the 3pl connected with an individual interpretation of the agent, Siewierska (2008a: 16) mentions English and Dutch, where the 3pl is mainly applied if the agent is seen as "acting as a representative of a group".

However, it should be stressed that in Swedish the defocused agent designated by *de/dom* 'they' is usually featured as a single individual in special contextual circumstances. Most common are expressions in which the background of the event is clearly anchored in time and often also in space, overtly represented by adverbials in the sentence. Such adverbials limit conditions for identifying a human agent. The 3pl *de* is, however, non-referential. The example (24) represents this kind of situation:

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[23] http://www.familjeliv.se/forum/thread/4071043-dom-har-skrivit-fel-datum-i-min-forlossningsjournal/1

(24)

Torsdag 5 november	Thursday November the 5th
De ringde från röntgen i Hudiksvall och erbjöd en tid kl 12 i morgon.[24]	**They** called from the X-ray station in Hudiksvall and offered a time for the visit at 12 am tomorrow.

5.6. The speech act verb *say*-construction: *They say he met vampires in the Black Forest*

The final reading of the 3pl construction distinguished in typological research occurs when the pronoun is connected with the verb *säga* 'say' pertaining to a so-called accepted truth earnestly repeated by the language users, as in (25).

(25)

De säger att tiden läker alla sår men **de** ljuger. Tiden läker ingenting, man bara lär sig att leva med ett avgrundsdjupt hål i hjärtat.[25]	**They** say that time heals all sores, but **they** lie. Time heals nothing, you only learn to live with an abyss hole in your heart.

A version with the generic *man* 'one' is also possible in an analogical context:

(26)

Som **man** säger, tiden läker alla sår, för vissa tar det längre tid och för andra är tiden oändlig.[26]	As **you/one** say/s, time heals all sores, for some it takes longer and for the others the time is infinite.

The speech act verb construction was not difficult to trace on Swedish websites. Yet, the search resulted in a more general question to be asked in the context of the 3pl impersonals. In (25) above the pronoun *de* appears not only

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[24] http://www.ugglemor1.se/Dagbok/Dagbok%202015/dagb-nov15.htm
[25] https://www.facebook.com/sprowede/posts/1484527735122402
[26] http://www.enfilosofiskresa.com/meningen-med-livet/tiden-laker-alla-sar/

with *säger* but also with the verb *ljuger* 'lie'. In the context of the whole sentence, a clear similarity between *de ljuger* 'they lie' and *de säger* 'they say' may be observed, because both constructions may be interpreted as a kind of lexicalized fixed expression. Then, it seems that the former too has been entrenched by language users to express a general truth. The question whether only the verb *say* and its equivalents in other languages should be counted as enhancing this particular kind of impersonal reading of the 3 pl pronoun remains to be answered in future research.

5.7. Classification problems

The 3pl IMPs with *say* may be problematic also in other respects. They are often counted as prototypical instances of the vague reading (Siewierska & Papastathi 2011: 585), which is the case in (27). In this case *de säger* 'they say' pertains to a content that cannot be seen as an accepted general truth. However, according to the criteria presented earlier the vague reading is expected to be based on a specific event, which *say* does not profile.

(27)

"Surströmming är absolut inte rutten fisk. Den är jäst."	"Surströmming is definitely not rotten fish. It is yeast."
Jäst ?, då har jag nog missförstått surströmmingen helt. Att den skulle vara ruttet har jag hört talas om. Varför säger **dom** det om det inte är det ? Kanske för lukten, måste ändå vara den mest svåraste sorten av delikatess.[27]	Yeast? Then I've probably misunderstood the Surströmming completely. I've heard about it being rotten. Why do **they** say that though it's not real? Perhaps because of the smell, still it must be the most difficult kind of delicacy.

Moreover, our investigation identified some other linguistic conceptualizations that were somehow difficult to classify under the criteria distinguished by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011). One such example is mentioned below – (28) is an online comment:

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[27] http://www.familjeliv.se/forum/thread/26585081-surstromming/2

(28)

Simon brukar **dom** kalla mig.	Simon usually **they** call me ..
Det är bara för att jag tränar!	It's just because I'm training!
Fan vilka namn **dom** hittar på!	Shit what names **they** invent! *
grr27 *rolleyes* ;)[28]	grr27 * * rolleyes *;)

In both cases the universal 'everybody' reading of *de* 'they' is possible, but space-anchoring expressions are not present within the sentences (similarly as in (11) above). As the verbs pertain to specific events, according to the criteria presented earlier the vague existential reading may be possible here. On the other hand, it is not clear whether the 3pl pronoun potentially can be paraphrased with *någon* 'someone', which would exclude a group identification of the agent. A series of observations of this kind led us to hypothesize that the contextually based criteria for distinguishing the particular types of readings of the 3 pl IMP proposed by Siewierska & Papastahi (2011) somehow are insufficient and need elaboration.

6. Concluding remarks

A prototypical agent is featured in linguistic conceptualizations as an active participant, an actor whom the speakers easily can identify and refer to. This actor takes control and responsibility for the action expressed by the predicate. S/he can, however, be left unspecified and vague by the use of certain language items (R-impersonals), among which the 3pl personal pronouns, in their non-referential function, play an important role.

The analysis presented herein has confirmed the impersonalizing or agent-defocusing potential of the Swedish 3pl *de/dom* 'they', constituting the core of the 3pl construction in this language. This potential is far greater than the traditional grammars suggest. We can certainly talk about some clear patterns of variation within the construction, which can be seen as a complex category of readings (subconstructions) showing clear mutual connections on the conceptual level. On the other hand, our investigation has revealed several linguistic conceptualizations that were difficult to classify under the criteria

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[28] http://www.kolozzeum.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-42573.html

proposed by Siewierska & Papastathi (2011) – a fact that may enhance discussion on a revitalization of the taxonomy.

The Swedish 3pl impersonal construction appears in different types of specific contexts helping speakers to defocus the agent in different ways. Against the backdrop of the typological taxonomy developed for European languages, described above, it can be concluded that the Swedish 3pl impersonals cover the great majority of the established readings. In this respect our investigation may be considered as providing new knowledge for the most recent cross-linguistic research on 3 pl IMP, which is conducted by Gast (2015) and his group.

The universal reading, licensed by a locative, is clearly entrenched in Swedish. The same pertains to the corporate reading, which seems to be the dominant subtype within the category. What may be seen as surprising in the context of the existing typological literature is that both the vague and specific existential readings can also be identified in the language under discussion. Whether they are marginal or common must be confirmed in a broader investigation focused on truly spoken language anchored in a physical context. Nevertheless, even though both types were not easy to find, the collected examples confirm that they are possible to be construed by the Swedish language users for particular purposes. A closer look at the Swedish equivalent of the so-called *say*-construction displayed its dispersed character and clear links to the universal and vague existential readings, confirming their presence within the category in the Swedish language. Additionally, the analysis enabled us to assume that it cannot be excluded that the impersonal reading (defined as 'a general truth') connected with *say*-construction may also occur with other verbs. Some good candidates seem to be e.g. other speech act verbs or verbs of cognition (*påstå* 'state', *tro* 'believe', *tänka* 'think'), which, similarly to *they say*, may be considered as lexicalized in connection with the pronoun. Whether this is so remains to be investigated. Lastly, the inferred existential reading has not been identified in the conducted analysis. Its strong connection with the physical situation, whose deeper recognition was not possible on the basis of the chosen linguistic material, enables us to conclude that this reading may also not be ruled out in Swedish. This information has been confirmed by two native speakers of Swedish who claimed that using *de/dom* in an analogical context as in *Here (they) have eaten seafood* or *They've been*

frying chips here [reacting to the smell] is possible. Further elucidating this issue is, however, an alternate aim of future investigation.

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**Konstrukcja nieosobowa z zaimkiem
trzeciej os. l.mn. w języku szwedzkim – ujęcie typologiczne**

(streszczenie)

W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowano konstrukcję nieosobową z zaimkiem 3 os. l.mn. *de/dom* 'oni/one' w języku szwedzkim. Zgodnie z ujęciem Siewierskiej (2008a) zaimek jest traktowany jako językowy środek przedstawiania agenta w dyskursie jako niereferencyjnego i nieokreślonego (lub nieostrego). Celem analizy jest ustalenie, w jakim zakresie szwedzkie wypowiedzenia zawierające taki zaimek wpisują się w taksonomię nieosobowych znaczeń, ustaloną dla języków europejskich i szeroko dyskutowaną w badaniach typologicznych. Analiza danych językowych zaczerpniętych ze stron internetowych pozwala nakreślić bardziej wiarygodny obraz nieosobowego szwedzkiego *de/dom*. Jak to zostało wykazane, zaimek ten posiada znacznie szerszy repertuar sensów, niż zakłada się w szwedzkich gramatykach. Pokrywa on całe spektrum znaczeń określanych jako uniwersalne (*universal*), korporacyjne (*corporate*), niejasne (*vague existential*) oraz specyficzne (*specific existential*). W funkcji nieosobowej występuje także w konstrukcji zawierającej czasownik mówienia *säga*. W przeprowadzonym badaniu nie potwierdzono natomiast znaczenia presuponowanej obecności sprawcy czynności (*inferred existential*).