INDEFINITE PRONOUNS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

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A R T I C L E I N F O.	Abstract
Keywords: A set of Indefinites, ontological categories, core functions, negative polarity items.	Indefinite pronouns have traditionally played only a minor role in descriptive linguistics, but the theoretical work in semantics, pragmatics and syntax of the last few decades has shown that the distribution of indefinite pronouns is highly complex and interesting in many ways. These theoretical discussions have often used the narrower terms quantifiers or negative polarity items for certain sub-classes of indefinite pronouns. This article gives a comprehensive overview of the main theoretical debates around the semantic and syntactic properties of indefinite pronouns.

The in-depth study of indefinite pronouns does not have a long history in linguistics. To be sure, indefinite pronouns have generally been described in reference grammars. In the European tradition of grammaticography, which goes back several centuries, there is always a separate section on pronouns, divided into subsections on different kinds of pronouns, usually in the following sequence: personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns, interrogative pronouns, indefinite pronouns. But the description of indefinites is very often restricted to the formal side in such works, i.e. to their derivational structure and their inflectional properties. Only reference grammars with a very complete syntactic component, such as Kühner and Stegmann, Paul, Schwyzer have had anything to say on the functions of indefinite pronouns. In these older grammars, much of the syntax component consists of the description of syntactic and semantic properties of grammatical categories and grammatical words, and the functions of indefinite pronouns are then described in the section on pronoun syntax. In more modern grammars, where the syntax is generally given more autonomy, the situation sometimes becomes worse. The functional properties of indefinite pronouns do not fit into any of the major parts of the syntax, and as a result even voluminous grammars may be completely silent on the functions of indefinite pronouns, e.g. Švedova, Engel.In smaller reference grammars, especially grammars of little-known languages, indefinite pronouns are often completely ignored.

Indefinite pronouns with some and any are used to describe indefinite and incomplete quantities in the same way that some and any are used alone.

Indefinite pronouns are placed in the same location as a noun would go in the sentence.

Noun   Indefinite pronoun

I would like to go to Paris this summer. I would like to go somewhere this summer.

Jim gave me this book.　　　Someone gave me this book.

I won't tell your secret to Sam.　　　I won't tell your secret to anyone.

I bought my school supplies at the mall. I bought everything at the mall.

Affirmative indefinites referring to the major ontological categories (person, thing, place, time, manner,...). For instance, English has the some-series (somebody, something, somewhere,...), the anyseries (anybody, anything,...), and the no-series (nobody, nothing,...); Russian has the -to-series (kto-to 'somebody', čto-to 'something', gde-to 'somewhere',...), the - nibud'-series (kto-nibud' 'anybody', čto-nibud' 'anything',...), and others. In terms of synchronic formal structure, languages are remarkably similar typologically, but extremely interesting cross-linguistic variation is observed in the different meanings or functions that these different series can express identify nine core functions (i.e. meanings and/or contexts) that must be distinguished for the purposes of cross-linguistic comparion. Not all of these functions are distinguished formally in every particular language, but each function is justified by attested differences between the functional ranges of different indefinite pronoun series. These nine functions are as follows:

1. Specific, known to the speaker

Somebody called while you were away

2. guess who! specific, unknown to the speaker

 I heard something, but I couldn't tell what kind of sound it was.

3. non-specific, irrealis

 Please try somewhere else.

4. General question

 Did anybody tell you anything about it?

5. conditional protasis If you see anything, tell me immediately.

6. standard of comparison

 In Freiburg the weather is nicer than anywhere in Germany.

7. direct negation

 Nobody knows the answer.

8. indirect negation

 I don't think that anybody knows the answer.

9. free choice

Anybody can solve this simple problem.

Some of these functions are well known and well established (e.g. 'free choice', 'negation'), while others are less known (e.g. 'known vs. unknown to the speaker', 'irrealis'). There is one distinction that is very often made in the literature but that does not appear in the above list: 'Negative polarity items' are often said to be restricted to the functions in (8)- (9), but the cross-linguistic data show that the notion of negative polarity is too 3 crude. In addition to indefinite pronoun series that are restricted to precisely these five functions, there are other indefinites that are restricted to a subset of these five functions, or to a set of functions that comprises some non-negative polarity functions in addition to some negative-polarity functions. It could be objected that the pronouns of the any-series mainly express free choice

rather than indefiniteness (as in You may take anything), and that the pronouns of the no-series express non-existence rather than indefiniteness. This may be true, and perhaps the definition 'pronouns whose main function is to express indefinite reference' should be made more specific to include all of them. However, the crucial point to note is that there are very close connections between different series of indefinite pronouns , not just in English but in many other languages as well, as we have shown in the course of this work.

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