

Voldemort phrases in generic sentences - seemingly impersonal uses of 3rd person singular pronouns

Sarah Zobel
University of Tübingen

Oberseminar English Linguistics, University of Göttingen
16.12.2014

The puzzle

Voldemort phrases: third person singular pronouns modified by restrictive relative clauses

(Lord Voldemort = *He Who Must Not Be Named*, Harry Potter Series)

- (1) a. ***He who walks out of negotiations*** loses.
 b. ***He who goes cautiously***, goes safely and goes far.
 (Europarl Parallel Corpus)

Observation: the sentences in (1) express statements about people who walk out of negotiations / people who go cautiously, **in general**
→ they are **generic sentences**

The puzzle

Voldemort phrases: third person singular pronouns modified by restrictive relative clauses

(Lord Voldemort = *He Who Must Not Be Named*, Harry Potter Series)

- (1) a. ***He who walks out of negotiations*** loses.
 b. ***He who goes cautiously***, goes safely and goes far.
 (Europarl Parallel Corpus)

Puzzle:

How does the generic interpretation of these sentences arise? Specifically, what is the role of the Voldemort phrase (a referential expression!) in deriving this interpretation?

Preliminaries: Genericity - I

Two ways to express generalizations:
(cf. Krifka et al. 1995, Mari et al. 2013)

Characterizing sentences:

- ▶ quasi-universal quantification over individuals and/or situations induced by *Gen*
- ▶ expressed by: indefinite singular NPs, bare plurals

(2) ***A potato*** contains vitamin C.

Kind predications:

- ▶ reference to a kind entity
- ▶ expressed by: definite singular NPs, bare plurals

(3) ***The potato*** was first cultivated in South America.

Preliminaries: Genericity - II

A kind entity always “allows access” to its members.

Possibility: kind denoting expressions in characterizing sentences that express quasi-universal quantification over the set of members.

(4) ***The potato*** is highly digestible.

Which strategy is used in the generic sentences containing Voldemort phrases?

Outline of the talk

Introduction

An impersonal use?

More observations

Voldemort phrases denote singular kinds

Formal proposal

Connection to impersonal *you*?

English *you* allows for an impersonal use, in which it behaves like the impersonal pronoun *one*:

(Kitagawa & Lehrer 1990, Malamud 2006)

- (5) a. If ***you*** walk out of negotiations, ***you*** lose.
 b. If ***you*** go cautiously, ***you*** go safely and far.

Possible connection:

He in (1) and *you* in (5) both do not seem to contribute their standard meaning: *he* does not refer to a salient, male individual, *you* does not refer to the addressee

- (1) a. ***He*** who walks out of negotiations loses.
 b. ***He*** who goes cautiously, goes safely and goes far.

He is not used impersonally!

- ▶ the generic interpretation observable for (1) arises **only** when *he* is modified by a relative clause
- ▶ *he* and *you* cannot be substituted for each other *salva veritate*

- (4) a. **He** *who walks out of negotiations* loses.
 b. **You** **(,) who walk out of negotiations *(,) lose.*

(4-b) only has an (odd) addressee-referential interpretation and requires a non-restrictive relative clause

He is not used impersonally!

- ▶ the generic interpretation observable for (1) arises **only** when *he* is modified by a relative clause
- ▶ *he* and *you* cannot be substituted for each other *salva veritate*

But: genuine impersonal uses of personal and impersonal pronouns do not require a relative clause to be present and are freely interchangeable (modulo pragmatics)
(Kitagawa & Lehrer 1990, Zobel 2014)

- (5)
- | | |
|---|--------|
| a. If you walk out of negotiations, you lose. | (gen) |
| b. If one walks out of negotiations, one loses. | (gen) |
| c. If he walks out of negotiations, he loses. | (*gen) |

Quantifying over the pronoun's situation variable - I

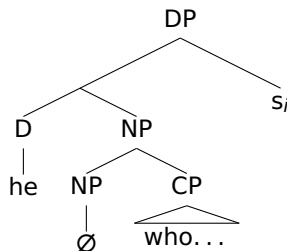
These observations **preclude a suggestion in Elbourne (2013):** *Gen* binds the pronoun's situation variable to induce generic quantification over (male) individuals that have the relative-clause property

Preliminary assumption: third person singular pronominal forms are part of a complex structure that forms a DP (cf. Elbourne 2013)

General structure of pronouns: $[[pronoun\ NP]\ s_i]$

Quantifying over the pronoun's situation variable - II

Structure of Voldemort phrases:



Denotation of 3rd person singular pronouns:

- (6) $\llbracket he \rrbracket^g = \llbracket she \rrbracket^g = \llbracket it \rrbracket^g = \llbracket the \rrbracket^g =$
 $\lambda f_{\langle e, st \rangle}. \lambda s : s \in D_s \ \& \ \exists ! x [f(x)(s)]. \iota x [f(x)(s)]$
 (Elbourne 2013:193)

Quantifying over the pronoun's situation variable - III

Undesirable prediction:

Gen should in principle be able to bind the situation variable of bare third person singular pronouns

→ Comes down to: “*He* has an impersonal use.”

As shown above, this is not borne out:

(7) *He loses.* \neq *People lose.*

Conclusion: generic quantification over situations cannot be the entire story.

Outline of the talk

Introduction

An impersonal use?

More observations

Voldemort phrases denote singular kinds

Formal proposal

English vs. other European languages – I

The use of Voldemort phrases in general statements about people who share a certain property seems to be an idiosyncratic property of English.

Comparison: English vs. German

- (8) ??**Er, der** sich aus Verhandlungen zurückzieht, verliert.
he who himself out negotiations pulls-out loses
- (9) **Wer** sich aus Verhandlungen zurückzieht, verliert.
who himself out negotiations pulls-out loses
- (10) **Der(jenige), der** sich aus Verhandlungen
dem/def who himself out negotiations
zurückzieht, verliert.
pulls-out loses

English vs. other European languages – II

Result of a small-scale cross-linguistic study: (Europarl Parallel Corpus)
for other European languages, the expressions used as counterparts to English Voldemort phrases in generic sentences form two general classes

- ▶ free relatives
- ▶ “demonstrative/definite + restrictive relative clause”

- (11) a. **He who** goes cautiously, goes safely and goes far.
 b. **Celui qui** avance avec prudence va sûrement et va loin. (F)
 c. **Chi** va piano va sano e lontano. (I)
- (12) a. **He who** sows the wind shall inevitably reap the whirlwind.
 b. **Qui** sème le vent récoltera sans doute la tempête. (F)
 c. **Wie** wind zaait zal storm oogsten. (D)

English vs. other European languages – III

Result of a small-scale cross-linguistic study:

- ▶ free relatives
- ▶ “demonstrative/definite + restrictive relative clause”

***He who** laughs last, laughs best.*

- | | | |
|------|---|-------------|
| (13) | a. <i>Rira bien qui rira le dernier.</i> | (French) |
| | b. <i>Ride bene chi ride ultimo.</i> | (Italian) |
| | c. <i>Wie het laatst lacht, lacht het best.</i> | (Dutch) |
| | d. <i>Wer zuletzt lacht, lacht am besten.</i> | (German) |
| | e. <i>Kdo se směje naposled, <u>ten</u> se směje nejlíc.</i> | (Czech) |
| | f. <i><u>Ten</u> się śmieje, kto się śmieje ostatni.</i> | (Polish) |
| (14) | a. <i>Den der ler sidst, ler bedst.</i> | (Danish) |
| | b. <i>Den som ler sist, ler best.</i> | (Norwegian) |

→ unsurprisingly, related languages pattern together

Alternatives to *he who* in English? - I

Voldemort phrases are **archaic expressions** nowadays found only in Bible texts, proverbs, and proverb-like sayings (already noted in Curme 1912).

Modern alternatives:

- (i) -ever free relatives
- (ii) *anyone who*
everyone who
the one/person/man/woman/... who
those who

→ a similar set is also found in different Bible translations

Alternatives to *he who* in English? - II

Alternatives (i): -ever free relatives

- (15) a. **He** *who abides in love abides in God.* (NKJV)
 b. **Whoever** *abides in love abides in God.* (ESV)
 (1 John 4:16)

Note: Simple free relatives introduced by *who* are degraded in subject position

- (16) ***Who** *Glenn married didn't make much money.*
 (Patterson and Caponigro 2014:1)

Alternatives to *he who* in English? - III

Alternatives (ii): *anyone who, everyone who, the one/person/man/woman/... who, those who*

- (17) a. **He** who abides in love abides in God. (NKJV)
 b. **The one** who remains in love remains in God. (HCSB)
 c. **Anyone** who leads a life of love shows that
 he is joined to God. (NIRV)
 d. **Everyone** who lives in love lives in God. (ERV)
 e. **Those** who live in love live in God. (EXB)
 (1 John 4:16)

Question: Is there a “closest” alternative?

The development of Voldemort phrases

- ▶ Modern *he who* is modernized Middle English *he that*
→ rise of *who* as human-specific relative pronoun
- ▶ Middle English *he that* is derived from Old English demonstrative based relative clause constructions

Plausible:

he who is a variant of “demonstrative/definite + restrictive relative clause”
(cf. Curme 1912)

→ patterns with ‘*the one who*’, ‘*those who*’

Support: 'he who' \approx 'the one who'/'those who'

Quantificational Variability Effects: (QVE)

only *he who*, *the one who*, and *those who* show QVE with adverbs of quantification

- (18) a. *He who blames others is **often** full of blame himself.*
 \approx Many people who blame others ...
 b. *The one who tells the lie is **rarely** its originator.*
 \approx Few people who tell a lie ...
 c. *Those who leave are **often** shunned by the group.*
 \approx Many people who leave ...
- (19) *Whoever/Anyone who comes from Southern Italy is **rarely** tall.*
 \neq Few people from Southern Italy are tall.
 (Caponigro 2003:156)

→ **Given number marking:** *the one who*

Interim summary

'He who'...

- ▶ is idiosyncratic for English
- ▶ seems to be a modernized variant of “demonstrative/definite + restrictive relative clause”
- ▶ closest modern alternatives:
'the one who' (& *'those who'*)

and its interpretation in generic sentences is not a genuine impersonal use

What is its semantic contribution in generic sentences?

Outline

Introduction

An impersonal use?

More observations

Voldemort phrases denote singular kinds

Formal proposal

The central idea

Proposal:

Voldemort phrases that occur in generic sentences or that show QVE denote **singular kinds**, i.e. a kind entity

(A similar proposal is made in Hinterwimmer (2008). He proposes that free relatives in generic sentences denote plural kinds.)

English singular kinds

On English definite singular DPs and singular kinds:

- ▶ Any definite singular DP can denote a singular kind if its “contrast set” is known/given. (Dayal 2004b)
- ▶ Any definite singular DP can denote a “natural kind” = a type of entity to which “sufficiently regular behavior” can be attributed. (Chierchia 1998)

Support: contexts of use

- **Bible examples:** Voldemort phrases are often used in contrast to one or more other Voldemort phrases

The Law Concerning Violence (Exodus 21:12–17, NKJV)

12 **He who strikes a man so that he dies** shall surely be put to death. 13 However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered *him* into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.

14 But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.

15 And **he who strikes his father or his mother** shall surely be put to death.

16 **He who kidnaps a man and sells him**, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.

17 And **he who curses his father or his mother** shall surely be put to death.

Support: contexts of use

- ▶ **Bible examples:** Voldemort phrases are often used in contrast to one or more other Voldemort phrases
- ▶ **Proverbs** are conventionalized expressions that communicate an “established” generality
- ▶ **Proverb-like sayings** arise as generalizations from one or more specific cases that suggest a general pattern

Support: copular sentences

Voldemort phrases occur in copular sentences with kind-denoting definite singular DPs:

- (20) ***The Artist*** *is he who detects and applies the law from observation of the works of Genius.* ***The Artisan*** *is he who merely applies the rules which others have detected.*
(Henry David Thoreau)

Support: quantificational variability effects

- ▶ **Traditionally:** QVE arises only between adverbs of quantification and indefinite expressions
- ▶ Voldemort phrases show QVE, but seem to pattern with definites and demonstratives

Hinterwimmer (2005):

Definite singular DPs show quantificational variability-like effects with adverbs of quantification if certain requirements are fulfilled.

Support: quantificational variability effects

- ▶ **Traditionally:** QVE arises only between adverbs of quantification and indefinite expressions
- ▶ Voldemort phrases show QVE, but seem to pattern with definites and demonstratives

Hinterwimmer (2005):

Definite singular DPs show quantificational variability-like effects with adverbs of quantification if certain requirements are fulfilled.

Quantificational variability - I

Definite singular DPs show QVE with adverbs of quantification if certain requirements are fulfilled.

(Hinterwimmer 2005)

- (21) *I love going to jazz concerts. The PIANO-player usually is INTELLIGENT.* (Hinterwimmer 2005:111)

- ▶ the definite singular DP bears contrastive topic intonation
- ▶ the singleton set denoted by the NP-complement varies with the members of an independently specified set of situations (the domain of quantification)

- (22) *#The PIANO-player usually is INTELLIGENT.*
(Hinterwimmer 2005:111)

Quantificational variability - II

Observation: Even though Voldemort phrases seem to be definite singular DPs, they do not need to satisfy the requirements identified above

(23) **He who** *blames others is often full of blame himself.*

Intuition:

Voldemort phrases denote possibly non-unique individuals that exemplify a certain “type of people”

Conclusion: Voldemort phrases are **not** “ordinary” individual-denoting definite singular DPs
→ kind-denoting definite singular DPs?

QVE with singular kinds

Kind-denoting simple definite singular DPs also show QVE with adverbs of quantification:

- (24) *Ancient Malagasy legend states that the aye-aye is a symbol of death, and is viewed as a bad omen by many natives. Due to this unfortunate bad press, **the aye-aye** is **often** killed on sight by superstitious locals.*

Note: In these cases, the definite singular DP does not have to bear contrastive topic intonation, and no adequate set of situations has to be determined beforehand.

Outline

Introduction

An impersonal use?

More observations

Voldemort phrases denote singular kinds

Formal proposal

Definite singular kind terms

(25) *The dodo is extinct.*

- ▶ Chierchia (1998): the unique group entity built from all dodos in the denotation of the NP
- ▶ Dayal (2004b): the unique kind entity in the denotation of the NP (shifted to a kind-predicate)

Difference: definite singular kind terms – bare plural kinds

singular definite generics cannot combine with predicates that require a count interpretation (Chierchia 1998:381)

- (26) a. **The tiger is three/many/numerous.*
 b. *Tigers are numerous.*

Creating a singular kind (Dayal 2004b)

(27) *The dodo is extinct.*

1) Dayal's (2004b) kind-shift operation for singular NPs:

(28) $[\lambda x. \text{dodo}(x)] \Rightarrow [\lambda X. \text{DODO}(X)]$

2) Application of the regular singular definite determiner:

(29) $\iota X[\text{DODO}(X)]$

→ the unique kind-individual having the property DODO

Voldemort phrases as singular kinds

Given Elbourne's structure: $[[he]_{NP} NP [RC \textit{who} \dots]] s_i$

- ▶ **Assumption:** the NP is per default *person/human*
- ▶ The full NP is shifted to a kind-property:

$$(30) \quad [\lambda x. \lambda s. x \text{ is a person in } s \ \& \ RC(x)(s)] \Rightarrow \\ [\lambda X. \lambda s. \text{PERSON-WHO-RC}(X)]$$

- ▶ After combination with '*he*' and s_i , the DP denotes:

$$(31) \quad \iota X[\text{PERSON-WHO-RC}(X)]$$

→ the unique kind-individual having the property
PERSON-WHO-RC

Combination with predicates

- (32) a. *He who walks out of negotiations loses.*
 b. *He who goes cautiously, goes safely and goes far.*

→ the singular kind usually combines with non-kind predicates

Access to the members of a kind:

- (33) Chierchia's (1998) member-of relation:
 $\lambda y. \lambda X. \lambda s. [\text{member-of}(y, X, s)]$

→ the individual y is a member of the kind X in s

→ y can be bound or existentially closed

The final representation

(34) ***He who goes cautiously, goes safely and goes far.***

Final proposal for the representation of (34):

Gen s, y [member-of($y, \iota X[\text{PERSON-WHO-GOES-CAUTIOUSLY}(X), s]$)
[goes-safely-and-far(y, s)]]

Paraphrase: All minimal normal situations that contain a member of the kind of person who goes cautiously can be extended to a situation in which that member of the kind goes safely and goes far.

Kind predication? - I

The analysis obviously predicts that Voldemort phrases can combine with kind predicates.

Actual examples of kind-predication?

- (35) ??*According to a new study, dinosaur farts may have caused prehistoric Global Warming. You know what they say, **he who stinked it, is extinct.***
(The Colbert Report, Episode 1035, 2012)

→ maybe certain kind predicates are restricted in their arguments?

Kind predication? - II

Actual examples of kind-predication?

- (36) *He who has independent ideas is hated by the mass.*
(Shang Yang)
- (37) *When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and he who tramples underfoot has vanished from the land, then a throne will be established in steadfast love, [...]*
(Isaiah 16:4-5, ESV)

But: Unfortunately not unambiguous kind-predicates...

Summary

'He who'...

- ▶ is idiosyncratic for English
- ▶ seems to be a modernized variant of “demonstrative/definite + restrictive relative clause”
- ▶ has modern alternatives; the closest alternative: *'the one who'*

& its interpretation in generics is not a genuine impersonal use.

Proposal:

- 1)** In generic sentences, Voldemort phrases denote a singular kind; the denotation is derived as for all other kind-denoting definite singular DPs.
- 2)** The generic interpretation arises via generic quantification over members of the singular kind.

References I

Caponigro, Ivano. 2003. Free Not to Ask: On the Semantics of Free Relatives and Wh-words Cross- linguistically. Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Chierchia, Gennaro. 1998. Reference to Kinds Across Languages. *Natural Language Semantics* 6:339–405.

Curme, G. O. 1912. A History of English Relative Constructions. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 11:355–380.

Dayal, Veneeta. 2004a. Licensing by modification. *Ilha Do Desterro*, special issue on Semantics: Lexicon, Grammar and Use Vol 47:217–238.

Dayal, Veneeta. 2004b. Number Marking and (In)Definiteness in Kind Terms. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 27:393–450.

Elbourne, Paul. 2013. *Definite Descriptions*. Oxford University Press.

Hinterwimmer, Stefan. 2005. Q-adverbs as Selective Binders: The Quantificational Variability of Free Relatives and Definite DPs. Doctoral Dissertation, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

References II

Hinterwimmer, Stefan. 2008. Why Free Relatives Sometimes Behave as Indefinites. In SALT XVIII , ed. T. Friedman and S. Ito.

Kitagawa, Chisato, and Adrienne Lehrer. 1990. Impersonal uses of personal pronouns. Journal of Pragmatics 14:739–759.

Koehn, Philipp. 2005. Europarl: A Parallel Corpus for Statistical Machine Translation. MT Summit 2005

Malamud, Sophia A. 2006. Semantics and pragmatics of arbitrariness. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

Patterson, Gary, and Ivano Caponigro. 2014. The puzzling degraded status of who free relative clauses in English. Ms. University of California, San Diego.

Zobel, Sarah. 2014. Impersonally Interpreted Personal Pronouns. Doctoral Dissertation, Universität Göttingen.

Licensing by modification - I

Observation: English definite plural DPs can only get a generic interpretation if they are modified by a relative clause (Dayal 2004a)

- (38) a. *The students work hard.* (ex/*gen)
 b. *The students who work hard are successful.* (ex/gen)
 (Dayal 2004a:221)

But: Not any relative clause will do; the verb has to carry aspectual marking that is compatible with a generic interpretation

- (39) *The students who are working hard are successful.*
(ex/*gen)
(Dayal 2004a:227)

Licensing by modification - II

Proposal: (Dayal 2004a:228)

- ▶ the “right” kind of relative clause contributes an embedded quantificational structure
- ▶ the familiarity presupposition triggered by a definite plural DP interpreted in the embedded structure can be accommodated in the restrictor of the higher structure

Gen $s, x[C(s) \ \& \ \text{students-in-}s(x) \ \&$

Gen $s' \ \exists y[\text{students-in-}s'(y) \ \& \ \text{work-hard-in-}s'(y) \ \& \ y = x][s < s']]$
[successful-in- $s(x)$]

Which restriction does the embedded *Gen*-structure add?
Is it a plausible denotation for the embedded RC?