

## IMPERSONAL AND GENERIC REFERENCE: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC LOOK AT FINNISH AND ENGLISH NARRATIVES

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**Abstract.** In linguistic communication, in addition to referring to specific, known referents, we also need to deal with unknown, generic or non-specific referents. I investigated how the English generic *you* and impersonal *they* compare to the Finnish zero person construction and impersonal passive, respectively. In the first part of this paper, I compare the semantic, pragmatic and syntactic properties of these constructions, using examples from a range of sources. In the second part of this paper, I investigate how English generic *you* and impersonal *they* are translated into Finnish. As we will see, the differences in the semantic, pragmatic and syntactic properties of these constructions mean that the translator sometimes has to opt for alternative constructions (such as first person expressions or generic nouns). A detailed analysis of these patterns sheds light on our understanding of these typologically different constructions, and contributes to our understanding of how reference to generic and impersonal entities is accomplished in language.

**Keywords:** impersonal reference, generic reference, Finnish, English

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2015.6.2.01>

### 1. Introduction

There is a large body of prior research on the linguistic devices used by different languages to refer to specific referents, such as definite and indefinite noun phrases (e.g. *a little boy*, *the child*), pronouns (e.g. *she*, *he*, *it*), and demonstratives (e.g. *this*, *that*). Indeed, being able to introduce and successfully refer back to specific referents is a key property of human communication. However, in some situations speakers may not want to refer back to specific referents. For example, when the agent of an action is unknown or unimportant, a speaker may opt for a construction that defocuses or demotes the agent, such as the passive voice (example 1a). Alternatively, when a speaker wants to make a generalization that applies to humans in general or a set of humans,

she can use a generic form such as *one* or *you* (example 1b). In English, generic *you* or *one* can also include the speaker and the addressee. When the speaker wants to make a generalization that excludes the speaker and the addressee, she can use impersonal *they* (example 1c).

- (1a) In Finland, dishes are put in a special drying cabinet after they are washed.
- (1b) In Finland, after washing the dishes, you put them in a special drying cabinet.
- (1c) In Finland, they put the dishes into a special drying cabinet after washing them.

Languages use different linguistic means for expressing these kinds of generic and impersonal reference (e.g. Siewierska 2008). This paper compares some of the constructions used for generic and impersonal reference in Finnish and English. I took as my starting point (i) impersonal uses of third-person *they* (1c, 2a), and (ii) generic uses of second-person generic *you* (1b, 2b) in English.

- (2a) My mother was very beautiful once too. Or so **they** tell me. (Collins, *Hunger Games*, p.3)
- (2b) Then I glance quickly over my shoulder. Even here... **you** worry someone might overhear **you**. (Collins, *Hunger Games*, p.6)

To Finnish speakers, it often seems natural to translate these with the Finnish impersonal passive and zero person construction<sup>1</sup> respectively. English impersonal *they* does indeed resemble the Finnish impersonal passive, and in many ways generic *you* corresponds to the zero person construction. However, a comparison of the semantic, pragmatic and syntactic properties of these constructions reveals that there are some clear differences between them (Sections 2–3). Furthermore, by looking at a translation corpus (the novel “The Hunger Games” by Suzanne Collins, Sections 4–5), we can investigate how translators can deal with these differences – for example, if a certain type of generic *you* configuration in English cannot be translated using the Finnish zero person, what alternative does the translator opt for? As we will see, this

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the literature on Finnish uses the term *nollapersoona* (lit. zero person) for this construction (e.g. Laitinen 1995, Löflund 1998, Hakulinen et al. 2004). The term ‘missing person’ is also used (Hakulinen and Karttunen 1973).

kind of detailed analysis yields new insights into the linguistic encoding of genericity and impersonality.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, I compare the Finnish zero person and the English generic *you*, and conclude that the zero person is more constrained in terms of its word order and grammatical positions. In Section 3, I turn to the Finnish impersonal passive and English impersonal *you*. Although these constructions have a lot in common, they differ in terms of whether they allow inclusive reference to the speaker and addressee.<sup>2</sup> In Sections 4 and 5, we turn to the corpus. The corpus analysis reveals additional stylistic factors, and shows that divergent semantic, pragmatic and syntactic properties of these constructions mean that translators sometimes have to opt for alternatives (such as first-person expressions or generic nouns).

## 2. English generic *you* and Finnish zero person construction

In this section we take a closer look at some of the key properties of English generic *you* (example 3a) and its apparent counterpart in Finnish, the zero person construction (example 3b). Our focus is on generic *you* which is more common in present-day American English than generic *one* (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan 1999, see also Malamud 2006.) In Finnish, the zero person has no special verbal morphology: when the zero is in subject position, the verb is third person singular (example 3b). However, the zero subject is syntactically present, as shown by case-marking and anaphoric binding data (e.g. Vilkuna 1996, Vainikka 1989, Holmberg 2010, Kaiser and Vihman 2006). In this paper, I use  $\emptyset$  to denote the (presumed position of the) zero person. Crucially, Finnish does not have pro-drop of third-person arguments in matrix clauses (e.g. Vilkuna 1996), and thus a sentence like (3b) is not ambiguous between a referential and non-referential interpretation. A verb in a main clause marked for third person with a null subject is clearly a zero person construction. (Pro-drop patterns are different in embedded clauses.)

(3a) {You/one} can see the picture from the entrance. (Moltmann 2006: 258)

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2 I do not analyze the English passive in any depth, because my starting point was to see how generic and impersonal pronouns in English are translated into other languages. A detailed analysis of the English passive in relation to impersonal *they* and the Finnish impersonal passive is an important direction for future work.

- (3b) Kuva-n        ø näke-e   eteise-stä.  
 Picture-ACC ø see-3SG entrance-ELA

Both the English generic *you* and the Finnish zero person construction occur in generic statements that can include the speaker and addressee (e.g. English: Kitagawa and Lehrer 1990, Kamio 2001, Moltmann, 2006, Siewierska 2004, Stirling and Manderson 2011, Malamud 2012, Gast et al. in press, Finnish: Laitinen 1995, 2006, Helasvuo and Vilkuina 2006 and others). They can refer to a speaker's experience and make a generalization that extends to others (see also Moltmann 2006 on *one*).<sup>3</sup> The generic *you* is also “directly invite[s] [the addressee] to imagine himself in the situation or event expressed by the speaker and thus share in the world-view being presented or entertained” (Siewierska 2004: 212, see also Malamud 2006, Gast et al. 2015). Similar observations are made by Laitinen (1995) regarding the Finnish zero person. (We return to this in Section 5.1.2). The following subsections discuss the (i) semantic properties, (ii) grammatical role restrictions and (iii) word order patterns of the English generic *you* and the Finnish zero person.

## 2.1 Semantic properties

Both English generic *you* and the Finnish zero person are unacceptable in clearly episodic, non-habitual, non-generic sentences, as in (4a,b). However, both are fine with modal verbs of possibility or necessity (e.g. Finnish *täytyy* ‘must’, *saa* ‘be able to / may / be allowed to’, *voi* ‘be able to / may’, Hakulinen and Karttunen 1973, Vilkuina 1996, Löflund 1998, Hakulinen et al 2004). Examples with modals are in (5a,b).

- (4a) Just now, you burned a house. (adapted from Malamud 2006, p.10)  
 \* on generic reading, ok on ‘addressee’ reading

- (4b) \* Juuri nyt ø poltt-i        talo-n.  
 Just now ø burn-PST.3SG house-ACC

3 These sentences are also ok if the speaker has *not* had the experience herself (e.g. is blind), but in uttering the sentence puts herself in the position of ‘the normal person’ who can see the picture (Moltmann 2006: 266). It would be more accurate to describe these as the speaker stepping into the shoes of a ‘normal/average person’

(5a) Kalifornia-ssa  $\emptyset$  ei<sup>4</sup> saa omista-a lemmikkisiili-ä.  
 California-INE  $\emptyset$  neg.3SG be-allowed own-INF pet.hedgehog-PRT  
 ‘You are not allowed to own a pet hedgehog in California.’

(5b) Pyyhkeet  $\emptyset$  voi pes-tä 60 astee-ssa.  
 Towels-PL[ACC]  $\emptyset$  can-3SG wash-INF 60 degree-INE  
 ‘You can wash towels at 60 degrees (Celsius).’  
 (<http://www.kotivinkki.fi/jutut/siivoa-oikeilla-valineilla>)

Strikingly, when generic *you* and the zero person occur in conditional sentences (e.g. with ‘if’), there are no verb restrictions (English: Moltmann 2006, Finnish: Hakulinen and Karlsson 1973, Vilkuna 1996, Hakulinen et al 2004, Helasvuo and Vilkuna 2008, Jokela 2012). For example, agentive verbs (example (6a), e.g. Hakulinen and Karttunen 1973, Laitinen 1995, Löflund 1998: 155) and agent-oriented adverbials are possible (example (6b)), when the zero is in the antecedent or the consequent of a conditional. In these cases, English generic *you* is also ok.

(6a) (from Vilkuna 1996: 140)  
 Jos  $\emptyset$  ei kuuntele eikä  $\emptyset$  tee tehtäv-i-ä,  $\emptyset$   
 if  $\emptyset$  NEG.3SG listen NEG.and.3SG  $\emptyset$  do exercises-PL-PRT,  $\emptyset$   
 ei opi.  
 NEG.3SG learn  
 ‘If you don’t listen and do (your) homework, you won’t learn.’

(6b) (from Kaiser and Vihman 2006)  
 Eri asia on jos  $\emptyset$  tahallaan kävele-e  
 Separate.NOM thing.NOM is if  $\emptyset$  on-purpose walk-3SG  
 suoraan latu-ur-i-en päällä.  
 directly ski.track-PL-GEN top.ADE  
 ‘It’s a different matter if you walk right on top of the skiing tracks on purpose.’ ([www.jyvaskyla.fi/kysy/kysymys.php/2267](http://www.jyvaskyla.fi/kysy/kysymys.php/2267))

4 In negative sentences in the present tense in Finnish, the main verb is a bare inflectional stem without an ending. Negation is an auxiliary and agrees with the subject in person and number.

Both conditional if-clauses and modals have been argued to involve quantification over possible worlds or situations (e.g. Kratzer 1986, Stalnaker 1968). If we follow Kratzer's unifying analysis of these phenomena, it is not surprising that modals and if-clauses license generic *you* and the zero.

Interestingly, although modal verbs form the prototypical context for the zero person in non-conditional sentences, other verbs are also possible in non-conditional contexts (see Hakulinen and Karttunen 1973), including verbs of perception and emotion (e.g. Löflund 1998, Jokela 2012). Laitinen (1995) notes that the zero person tends to be interpreted as an affected argument, an experiencer, beneficiary, patient – crucially, not an agent (see also Helasvuo and Vilkkuna 2008). Thus, the zero person is fine in (7a), where 'feeling tired' is a non-volitional psych causative, but ungrammatical in (7b), where 'getting dressed' demands an agentive subject. Some seemingly agentive contexts can be rescued by adverbs which decrease agentive aspects of the zero (e.g. volition), see e.g. Laitinen (2006) and Jokela (2012). Examples (7c,d) show that other non-agentive, experiencer-type verbs (e.g. 'get used to') also allow the zero person.

(7a) Uinni-n jälkeen ø väsy-ttä-ä. (adapted from Laitinen 1995)  
Swim-GEN after ø tire-CAUS-3SG  
'After swimming, you feel tired.'

(7b) \*Uinni-n jälkeen ø puke-utu-u.  
Swim-GEN after ø get.dressed-3SG  
'After swimming, you get dressed.'

(7c) Uinni-n jälkeen ø tekee mieli levä-tä.  
Swim-GEN after ø make.3SG mind.NOM rest-INF  
'After swimming, you feel like resting.'

(7d) "...Iso-on värinäyttö-ön ja se-n mahdollista-miin  
Big-ILL color.display-ILL and it-GEN make.possible-PL.ILL  
uusi-i-n palvelu-i-hin ø tottu-u nopeasti."  
new-PL-ILL function-PL-ILL ø accustom-3SG quickly  
"...you quickly get used to the big color display and the functions it allows." (corpus example from Jokela 2012: 149)

The exact extent of the crosslinguistic similarities between English and Finnish in this area would benefit from further research. However, examples like (7c), and the fact that English speakers also feel that (7a) is better than (7b), suggest that non-agentivity also plays a role in English.

## 2.2 Word order restrictions

Something we have not yet touched upon concerns the word order restrictions on the zero person. Finnish has flexible word order, with SVO as the unmarked order (e.g. Vilkuna 1995). Simplifying somewhat, contrastive elements occur at the CP level, topical elements at the TP level (or FP level, see Holmberg and Nikanne 2002), and new information lower down in the syntactic tree. It is often claimed that the first position of zero person sentences needs to be filled with a phonetically overt element (e.g. a locative expression as in ex.(8a), an object as in ex.(8b), or an expletive), e.g. Holmberg (2010), see also Löflund (1998) for a corpus-based approach.

(8a) Ove-lta    ø   näke-e   vessa-n.  
 DOOR-ABL   ø   see-3SG   bathroom-ACC  
 ‘You can see the bathroom from the door(way).’

(8b) Vessa-n            ø   näkee    ove-lta.  
 Bathroom-ACC   ø   see-3SG   door-ABL  
 ‘You can see the bathroom from the door(way).’

(8c) #   ø   Näkee   vessa-n            ove-lta.<sup>5</sup>  
       ø   see-3SG   bathroom-ACC   door-ABL  
       ‘You can see the bathroom from the door(way).’

5 If we interpret this as having contrastive stress on the verb ‘see’, which would be associated with a syntactic structure where the verb has presumably raised to the CP domain (e.g. Vilkuna 1995), then the sentence becomes more acceptable. That is presumably due to the verb occurring in a higher position than it would with a non-contrastive reading. For now, I put aside these contrastive readings and focus on the fact that, in a non-contrastive/non-emphatic contexts, sentences such as (8c) are judged to sound bad.

The intuition that zero person constructions cannot be verb-initial is also clear in minimal pairs such as (9a,b) from Laitinen (2006). Example (9a) is interpreted as a generic zero person construction, and the embedded clause has *object-verb* order. Example (9b) is interpreted as a pro-drop sentence, and has *verb-object* order in the embedded clause. (Finnish allows third-person referential null pro in embedded clauses, but not matrix clauses.)

- (9a) Mikko huomas-i, ett-ei ove-sta ∅ pääse.  
 Mikko.NOM notice-PST.3SG, COMP-NEG door-ELA ∅ get  
 ‘Mikko noticed that one can’t get out of the door’ (Laitinen 2006, 213)

- (9b) Mikko huomas-i, ett-ei [null pro] pääse ove-sta.  
 Mikko.NOM notice-PST.3SG, COMP-NEG [null pro] get door-ELA  
 ‘Mikko noticed that he couldn’t get out of the door’ (Laitinen 2006, 213)

Why do zero person sentences ‘dislike’ verb-initial word order? We cannot attribute this to the phonetically null nature of the zero, because referential null pronouns can be sentence-initial. Example (10), with a referential first-person null pro, is perfectly grammatical.

- (10) [null pro] Lu-i-n kirja-n.  
 [null pro] Read-PST-1SG book-ACC  
 ‘I read a book’

Holmberg (2010) attributes the ungrammaticality of verb-initial zero person sentences to a violation of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP). In recent work (Kaiser 2013), I build on examples from Laitinen (2006) which show that some verb-initial zero person sentences are in fact acceptable. I extend aspects of Moltmann (2006)’s work on generic *one* as well as ideas from Vilkuna (1992) to explain why some zero person sentences in Finnish can be verb-initial whereas others cannot. Specifically, I suggest that Moltmann’s proposal that generic *one* involves two subtypes, (i) Inference *to* the first person and (ii) Inference *from* the first person, can be mapped on to Finnish. According to my analysis, Finnish zero person sentences that involve inference *to* the first person can be verb-initial, whereas zero person sentences that involve inference *from* the first person are not verb-initial.

In sum, although the Finnish zero person construction is not governed by an absolute ban on verb-initial word order, it is subject to word order constraints that do not apply to the English generic *you*: Generic *you* is acceptable in sentence-initial position (regardless of whether, in Moltmann's terms, we are dealing with inference to or from the first person).

### 2.3 Grammatical role restrictions

In this section we compare English generic *you* and Finnish zero with respect to the grammatical positions they can occupy. Generic *you* often occurs in subject position, but is also possible in non-subject positions, e.g. as the object of a preposition, a direct object or a possessor (11a-d):

- (11a) First, they are friendly with you and then they put you in jail. (Cabredo Hofherr 2008)
- (11b) NASA art exhibit surrounds you with the sounds of space (headline from Mashable.com, <http://mashable.com/2015/05/30/nasa-art-earth-science/>)
- (11c) People congratulate you when you graduate.
- (11d) Closing your eyes can help you remember a series of events (headline from the Independent, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/closing-your-eyes-can-help-you-remember-a-series-of-events-9983339.html>)

However, in Finnish, the syntactic position of the zero person is more constrained. It occurs in subject position associated with nominative case (5–6), as well as experiencer positions associated with partitive (7a) and genitive (7c). Though they are not nominative, these positions are viewed as the 'highest ranked' syntactic slots in their clause – like subjects (see also Helasvuo and Vilkuna 2008, Seilonen 2013). (Further evidence for the subject-like status of overt arguments in these positions is their ability to bind reflexives in some contexts, Hakulinen and Karlsson 1988: 366). What about clear direct object positions? Hakulinen et al (2004: 1293) note that zero persons can occur in object positions when the context also contains other zero persons, as in (12):

- (12) Eeva liikku-u itse, vaikka se on sano-nut,  
Eeva.NOM exercise-3SG self, although it.NOM be.3SG say-PTCP

ett-ei    ø saa       liikku-a     silloin=kaan jos käärme  
 COMP-NEG ø allowed.to exercise-INF when=CL if snake  
 on       pur-rut ø  
 be.3SG bite-PTCP ø

‘Eeva herself exercises, although she has said that you shouldn’t exercise when a snake has bit you.’ (Finnish corpus example cited by Hakulinen et al. 2004: 1293)

However, here the object-position zero is coreferential with a subject-position zero, which means that it is presumably a bound variable (see Moltmann 2006, Malamud 2006 on the importance of distinguishing first-mention uses of generic *you* from bound variable uses). Thus, (12) is not clear evidence for zero person occurring in a canonical direct object position. Furthermore, Laitinen (1996: 348) also notes that the zero is dispreferred in possessor position (perhaps due to ambiguity), unlike generic *you* in English which can easily occur as a possessor.

In sum, the zero person seems to largely avoid direct object and possessor positions (see also Hakulinen et al. 2004: 1297) and is more constrained than generic *you* in American English, which can freely occur in many different grammatical positions.<sup>6</sup> As a whole, although English generic *you* and the Finnish zero person construction are semantically similar, the zero person is more constrained with respect to word order and grammatical roles.

### 3. English impersonal *they* and Finnish impersonal passive

In this section, we compare the English impersonal *they* and the Finnish impersonal passive. Although I use the term ‘impersonal passive’ for the Finnish construction (and gloss it as PASS), it is important to note that its status as a passive is under debate (e.g. Blevins

6 Some Finnish dialects have an overt version of generic *you*, which uses a colloquial form of the singular second person pronoun, *sä* ‘you’ (colloquial) with an active-voice 2SG verb. Unlike the zero person, this construction is not constrained in terms of grammatical role and less constrained in terms of semantics. Indeed, Laitinen (1995) suggests that the *sä*-construction can act as a way of circumventing the restrictions of the zero person. However, this form is felt by many speakers to be very colloquial and potentially even ‘rude’ (see Seppänen 2000, Ojajärvi 2000, Mäki 2014, Leino and Östman 2008). The *sä*-form does not occur in our corpus, presumably due to its colloquial nature.

2003, Manninen and Nelson 2004). I will remain agnostic regarding this debate, as it is not central for this paper.

Unlike the zero person, the Finnish impersonal has distinct verbal morphology (*-taan/-tiin* in the present and simple past, the perfect tense is periphrastic). In Finnish transitive, intransitive, modal, auxiliary and even unaccusative verbs can occur as impersonals (e.g. Löflund 1998, Blevins 2003). The external argument is not realized syntactically; by-phrases are not available (e.g. Kaiser and Vihman 2006). The internal argument usually has nominative or partitive case, depending on verb semantics and aspect. Example (13a) is from Kaiser and Vihman (2006).

(13a) *siellä nuku-taan*  
There sleep-PASS

(13b) *Ikkuna pes-tiin.*  
Window.NOM wash-PASS.PST  
'The window was washed'

The implicit argument of the Finnish impersonal is interpreted as human (or a personified animate referent, e.g. Vilkuna 1996, Löflund 1998: 45), often agentive and morphologically plural (Hakulinen and Karlsson 1988, Shore 1988, Vilkuna 1996, Nelson 1998, Blevins 2003). As we saw in Section 2.2, the zero person in Finnish is subject to word order constraints. In contrast, although impersonal sentences in Finnish tend to have a preverbal constituent, this tendency is much weaker than the constraints on the zero person (e.g. Löflund 1998 for corpus work). As shown in example (14), impersonal passive verbs can occur sentence-initially.

(14) *Sano-taan, että Moskova-ssa valmistu-u joka päivä*  
Say-PASS, COMP m.-INE reach-completion-3SG every day  
300 uut-ta asunto-a  
300 new-PRT flat-PRT  
'It is said/they say that in Moscow 300 new flats/apartments reach completion every day.' (corpus example from Löflund 1998: 71)

As regards grammatical role, we saw the Finnish zero person is more constrained than English generic *you*. In some sense, the Finnish impersonal passive is even more constrained, since it targets the highest-ranked (human) argument of the verb (Manninen and Nelson 2004) –

there is no optionality regarding the argument which is demoted by a Finnish impersonal passive. This contrasts with the zero person and generic *you* which can target not only subjects but also other grammatical positions. What about English impersonal *they*? The majority of existing work focuses on examples where *they* is in subject position. However, according to Brody (2013), impersonal *they* can occur in non-subject position, and Cinque (1988) notes this for Italian third person plural object pronouns. More work is needed on this in English, but in general it seems fair to say that impersonal *they* is less constrained than the Finnish impersonal passive.

(In Section 5.2.1, we will encounter another, less frequent, Finnish impersonal construction which occurs in some dialects and uses active 3PL verbs, resembling impersonal *they* in English.)

### 3.1 Semantic properties

As we saw above, generic *you* and the Finnish zero person are subject to a range of semantic constraints. Furthermore, sentences with generic *you* and the zero person can include reference to the speaker and the addressee. This brings us to a striking contrast between those two constructions on the one hand, and the English impersonal *they* on the other hand, because the latter excludes reference to the speaker and the addressee (e.g. Cabredo Hofherr 2003, Kitagawa and Lehrer 1990, Siewierska and Papastathi 2011). Interestingly, as we will see later, the Finnish impersonal passive differs from impersonal *you* in allowing for inclusion of the speaker and the addressee.

A large amount of prior work has explored the semantic/pragmatic readings available with impersonal *they* (see e.g. Siewierska and Papastathi 2011, Cabredo Hofherr 2003, 2006, Malamud 2004, *inter alia*). Based on data from corpora and questionnaires, Siewierska and Papastathi (2011) test and extend the typology proposed by Cabredo Hofherr (2003, 2006) and conclude that in English, there are four main types of impersonal *they* constructions, as shown in (15a-d). (Examples 15a-c from Cabredo Hofherr 2003).

(15a) In Spain, they eat late. [universal]

(15b) They changed the tax laws last year. [corporate]

(15c) They've found his bike in the back of a barn. [vague existential]

(15d) They say living on the island is hard in the winter. [speech act]

On the universal reading (15a), impersonal *they* means something akin to ‘people in general’, with a universal interpretation delimited by the locative. On the corporate interpretation (15b), there exist “one or more members of an organization or an institution acting as a group” (Siewierska 2008), whose precise identity is irrelevant or unknown, who changed the tax laws last year. The vague existential (15c) use indicates that the described event has taken place, with no information provided about the subject. Siewierska and Papasthati also identify a speech act use (15d), where *they* is used in non-episodic sentences to refer to a group of people. In Siewierska and Papasthati’s corpus, the corporate, speech act and vague existential uses were more frequent in English than universal uses.

In sum, while the precise range of interpretations of impersonal *they* is still being investigated, the English impersonal *they* does not evoke the speaker or the addressee, unlike generic *you*. In fact, impersonal *they* is most commonly used when the precise identity of the subject is unknown or unimportant. This contrasts with generic *you*, which is closely tied to the speaker and the addressee.

The four readings in (15) are also possible with the Finnish impersonal (16). Since these were found by Siewierska and Papasthati to be by far the most common in English corpora, and since our starting point for the corpus study is an English-language text, I will not explore the different readings of the Finnish impersonal in detail here.

(16a) [universal]

Espanja-ssa syö-dään myöhään.

Spain-INE eat-PASS late

‘In Spain, it is eaten late.’

(16b) [corporate]

Verolaki muute-ttiin viime vuonna.

Tax.law.NOM change-PASS.PST last year

‘The tax law was changed last year.’

(16c) [vague existential]

Hän-en pyörä-nsä löyde-ttiin naveta-n takaa.

3SG-GEN bike-PX3RD find-PASS.PST barn-GEN behind

‘His/her bike was found behind the barn.’

(16d) [speech act]

Usein sano-taan, että pohjoise-ssa on talve-lla vaikea asu-a.  
 Often say-PASS COMP north-INE be.3SG winter-ADE hard live-INF  
 ‘It is often said that it is hard to live in the north in the winter.’

However, a key distinction between the English impersonal *they* and the Finnish impersonal construction is that the latter, but not the former, easily and frequently includes reference to the speaker and addressee (e.g. Posio and Vilkuna 2013, Helasvuo 2006). Speaker-exclusive and addressee-exclusive uses are possible, but crucially, the impersonal in Finnish can also be used for speaker- and/or addressee-inclusive uses. As Helasvuo (2006) notes, the term ‘impersonal’ is a bit of a misnomer. For example, example (17a) can be uttered when the speaker is included in the group of people trying to sleep. Example (17b) can be uttered when the addressee is included in the group of packers. This contrasts with English, where “They are trying to sleep here” or “Are they packing already?” are not interpreted as including the speaker or the addressee.

(17a) Tää-llä yrit-tään nukku-a! [reference can include speaker]

Here-ADE try-PASS sleep-INF  
 ‘We/people are trying to sleep here’

(17b) Paka-taan-ko tää-llä jo? [reference can include addressee]

Pack-PASS-Q here-ADE already?  
 ‘Are you/people packing already?’

In sum, the Finnish impersonal passive and English impersonal *they* are similar in many respects, but that one key difference is that impersonal *they* excludes the speaker and the addressee, but the impersonal passive is frequently used to refer to the speaker and the addressee.

#### 4. Corpus analysis

So far, we have seen that the English impersonal *they* seems to be very similar to the Finnish impersonal, with the crucial difference that Finnish impersonals can also have speaker- and addressee-inclusive uses. We also saw that the Finnish zero person is more constrained

that English generic *you* in terms of the grammatical roles and word orders that it occurs with, even though both can be used in speaker- and hearer-inclusive contexts. In this section, we use a translation corpus from English to Finnish to see how these differences and similarities surface in actual language use, and whether there are additional stylistic differences between these constructions.

To investigate how English impersonal *they* and generic *you* constructions are translated into Finnish, I analyzed the dystopian novel *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (Scholastic, 2008) and its Finnish translation by Helena Bützow (*Nälkäpeli*, WSOY 2010). The narration is in the first person, told from the perspective of Katniss Everdeen, a teenager living in a dystopian future world where teenagers and children are selected by lottery to participate as so-called tributes in a fight-to-the-death competition called the Hunger Games which is televised across the nation. The narrative is set in a country called Panem where people's lives are carefully controlled by a remote (yet omnipresent) dictatorial government. This novel is well-suited for our purposes because the quality of the translation is expected to be high, given that this book is a recent international bestseller (and indeed, the Finnish translator has extensive experience). This is important because we want to ensure that the translations of generic *they* and generic *you* from English to Finnish are as natural as possible. In addition, this book has been translated into many other languages, including Estonian, German and French, and thus provides opportunities for future work that explores crosslinguistic similarities and differences.

I identified 72 cases of impersonal *they* in the English original, as well as 85 cases of generic *you*. I included impersonal *they* and generic *you* in all grammatical roles, but the majority were in subject position. Occurrences that were ambiguous between referential and impersonal/generic uses were excluded. The occurrences that I analyzed are not all the occurrences in the entire book, but constitute the first 70–80 occurrences that I located.

Example (18) below illustrates the impersonal *they* – there is no antecedent for *they* provided in the preceding context, so we can assume that it is an impersonal use. The Finnish translation uses the impersonal passive form of the verb *sanoa* 'to say.' I have provided fairly direct Finnish-to-English translations of the context of the Finnish examples, as in example (18b). In some cases, these differ from the English original in their wording, due to choices made by the Finnish translator. For the critical sentences with generic *you* or impersonal *they* in English, I have included a Finnish gloss and translation, as in example (18c).

- (18a) English original (*broader context: Katniss wakes up and watches her mother and sister, who are still asleep*)

In sleep, my mother looks younger, still worn but not so beaten down. Prim's face is as fresh as a raindrop, as lovely as the primrose for which she was named. My mother was very beautiful once too. Or so they tell me. (*Hunger Games*, p.3)

- (18b) Finnish translation

Äiti näyttää nukkuessaan nuoremmalta, toki riutuneelta mutta ei niin kuluneelta kuin yleensä. Primin kasvot ovat raikkaat kuin sadepisara ja kauniit kuin kevätesikko. Äitikin oli aikanaan kaunis. Niin ainakin sanotaan. (*Nälkäpeli*, p.9)

'Mother looks younger when she sleeps, still wan but not as worn down as usual. Prim's face is as fresh as a raindrop and as beautiful as a primrose. Mother was beautiful in her time as well. At least, so it is said.'

- (18c) Or so they tell me [English original]  
 Niin ainakin sano-taan. [Finnish translation]  
 So at.least say-PASS

'So at least they say/At least, so it is said.'

Example (19) contains two cases of generic *you*. The first occurrence of generic *you* is inside a direct-speech utterance by Katniss. Because she mutters aloud while alone in the forest, we can tell *you* is generic; she is not addressing a listener. Later in the example, the switch from the first-person narrator in 'I glance...' to the second-person pronoun in 'you worry,' in a context that makes it clear that the narrator herself is both glancing and worrying, makes it clear that the second *you* is also generic. In both of these cases, the generalization expressed with *you* clearly includes the speaker/narrator. The two tokens of *you* in the English translation are both realized with a zero person construction in Finnish, shown in (19c) and (19c').

- (19a) English original (*context: Katniss has snuck out into the forest and is thinking about living conditions in District 12, the region of Panem where she and her family live*)

"District Twelve. Where you can starve to death in safety," I mutter. Then I glance quickly over my shoulder. Even here, even in the middle of nowhere, you worry someone might overhear you. (*Hunger Games*, p.6)

(19b) Finnish translation

»Vyöhyke 12. Paikka jossa voi turvallisesti kuolla nälkään», minä mutisen. Sitten vilkaisen nopeasti olkani yli. Kuulijoita pelkää täälläkin, missä ei ole mitään tai ketään.» (Nälkäpeli, p.12)

‘District 12. A place where  $\emptyset$  can safely die from hunger,’ I mutter. Then I glance quickly over my shoulder. You fear listeners even here, where there is nothing and no one.’

(19c) Where you can starve to death in safety. [English original]

Paikka jossa  $\emptyset$  voi turvallisesti kuol-la  
Place.NOM where-INE  $\emptyset$  can.3SG safely die-INF

nälkä-än [Finnish translation]

hunger-ILL

‘A place where you can safely die from hunger.’

(19c’) you worry someone might overhear you. [English original]

Kuulijo-i-ta  $\emptyset$  pelkä-ä täällä=kin [Finnish translation]

Listener-PL-PRT  $\emptyset$  fear-3SG here=CLITIC

‘You fears listeners even here’

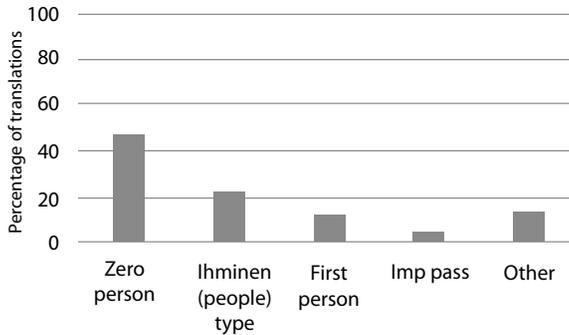
## 5. Results

Let us now take a closer look at how English generic *you* is translated into Finnish (Section 5.1) and how English impersonal *they* is translated into Finnish (Section 5.2).

### 5.1 English Generic *you* in the Finnish translation

As can be seen in Figure 1, three main devices are used to translate English generic *you* into Finnish: (i) the zero person construction (47%), (ii) constructions that use explicit nouns like *ihminen* ‘human’ (22%) and (iii) first person singular or plural (12%). In addition, 5% are translated with the Finnish impersonal passive. The remaining 14% are a mix of other constructions. Overall, then, the most frequently used alternative is the zero person, and a chi-square test (run on counts, not percentages) confirms that the alternatives differ significantly in their frequencies ( $\chi^2(4)=32.102$ ,  $p<.0001$ ). However, although the zero person

construction is significantly more frequent than the other alternatives (as confirmed by additional chi-squared analyses), it still accounts for less than 50% of all occurrences of generic *you*.



**Figure 1.** How English generic *you* is realized in the Finnish translation. (This figure does not include cases where the translation into Finnish was changed/reworded so that there was no construction that could be used for comparison (about 30% of *you* tokens).)

Example (20) below is an example of English generic *you* being translated into Finnish as a zero person construction. The zero person is inside an if-clause.

(20a) English original (*context: One of the other tributes, Rue, is telling Katniss about mockingjays, a type of bird, and how the birds will repeat a tune that Rue sings to announce the end of the workday*)

“And the mockingjays spread it around the orchard. That’s how everyone knows to knock off,” she continues. “They can be dangerous though, if you get too near their nests.” (Hunger Games, p.212)

(20b) Finnish translation

»Matkijanärhet toistavat sitä eri puolilla hedelmätarhaa. Silloin kaikki tietävät lopettaa työt. Mutta matkijanärhet voivat olla vaarallisia, jos menee liian lähelle pesiä.» (Nälkäpeli, p.220)

‘Mockingjays repeat it all around the orchard. Then everyone knows to stop working. But mockingjays can be dangerous if you go too close to the nests.’

(20c) They can be dangerous though, if you get too near their nests. [English]

Mutta matkijanärhet voi-vat ol-la vaarallis-i-a,  
 But mockingjays.NOM can-3PL be-INF dangerous-PL-PRT,  
 jos ø mene-e liian lähe-lle pes-i-ä [Finnish]  
 if ø go-3SG too near-ALL nest-PL-PRT

‘But mockingjays can be dangerous if you go too near the nests’

### 5.1.1 Overt generic noun used instead of zero person

Let us now take a closer look at some of the other devices, to see if we can gain more insights into what motivated their use. In tokens where the translator used an overt noun like *ihminen* (human being), in the majority of cases, this was done because a zero person construction would have been ungrammatical or otherwise grammatically problematic in Finnish. (Other lexical items beyond ‘human’ are also used, including *kävijä* ‘visitor’, *tribuutti* ‘tribute’, *matkustaja* ‘traveler’. See Vilkuna 1992: 149–150 for related discussion.) Such grammatical concerns cover about 70% of all of the cases where generic *you* is translated with an overt *ihminen*-type noun. The two most common grammatical factors are grammatical role and word order. Example (21) shows a case where generic *you* is used in the object position in English. As we saw in Section 2.3, the Finnish zero person strongly disprefers the direct object position, and the translator used the noun *ihminen* ‘human’ instead. (There is also no modal verb in the sentence.)

(21a) English original (*context: Katniss and Peeta are on top of a high building, discussing whether tributes could jump off the building. Peeta explains to Katniss that he had asked someone about that earlier and had been told that it’s not possible*)

“You can’t.” He holds his hand into seemingly empty space. There’s a sharp zap and he jerks it back. “Some kind of electric field throws you back on the roof.” (Hunger Games, p.81)

(21b) Finnish translation

»Että täältä ei voi hypätä», Peeta vastaa. Hän ojentaa kätensä tyhjiyteen. Kuuluu terävä räjähdys, ja Peeta nykäisee käden pois. »Jonkinlainen sähkökenttä heittää ihmisen takaisin katolle.» (Nälkäpeli, p.87)

”That you can’t jump from here,” Peeta answers. He stretches his hand into emptiness. A sharp crackling can be heard, and Peeta jerks his hand back. “Some kind of electric field throws the human back on the roof.”

(21c) Some kind of electric field throws you back on the roof [English]

Jonkinlainen sähkökenttä heittä-ä ihmisen  
Some.kind.NOM electric.field throw-3SG human/person.ACC

takaisin kato-lle [Finnish]

back roof-ALL

‘Some kind of electric field throws the human back on to the roof.’

It seems that the word order restrictions of the zero person – in particular, the fact that it often cannot occur in sentence-initial position, Section 2.2 – also push the translator to use a variant with an overt generic noun, as in (22). Here, the translator used the overt noun ‘visitors’ instead of using a sentence-initial zero person. An object-initial order (‘Uudelleen lavastettuihin peleihin  $\emptyset$  voi osallistua’) would have been infelicitous because the object is not old/given information (e.g. Vilkuna 1995).

(22a) English original (*Context: Katniss is preparing to enter the Hunger Games arena and is commenting on what happens to the arenas after the Games are over.*)

The arenas are historic sites, preserved after the Games. Popular destinations for Capitol residents to visit, to vacation. Go for a month, rewatch the games, tour the catacombs, visit the sites where the deaths took place. You can even take part in reenactments. (Hunger Games, p.145)

(22b) Finnish translation

Areenat ovat historiallisia paikkoja jotka säilytetään koskemattomina Nälkäpelin jälkeen. Capitolin asukkaat käyvät mielellään areenoilla lomamatkoillaan. Kuukauden kierroksella katsotaan pelien uusintoja, käydään katakombeissa, vieraillaan kuolinpaikoilla. Kävijöillä on jopa mahdollisuus osallistua uudelleen lavastettuihin peleihin. (Nälkäpeli, p.153)

The arenas are historical site which are preserved untouched after the Hunger Games. The residents of the Capital like to visit the arenas on vacation trips. On a month’s tour, replays of the games are watched, the catacombs are toured, the death sites are visited. Visitors even have an opportunity to participate in re-staged games.

(22c) You can even take part in reenactments. [English]

Kävijöillä on jopa mahdollisuus osallistu-a uudelleen  
Visitors-ABL be.3SG even chance participate-INF anew

lavastettu-i-hin pele-i-hin. [Finnish]

staged-PL-ILL game-PL-ILL

‘Visitors even have an opportunity to participate in re-staged games.’

There are also some cases (about 30% of the tokens where an overt *ihminen*-type noun is used for generic *you*) where the zero person would have been grammatical but the translator nevertheless opted for an overt generic noun, as in example (23). Thus, in some sense these could be regarded as ‘unnecessary’ uses of an overt noun, since a zero person would have been ok. However, in (23), the use of the overt noun *ihminen* may be motivated stylistically by the fact that the both preceding and subsequent clauses use the word *people* in English and the word *jotkut* ‘some (people)’ in Finnish. Perhaps using an overt generic noun allows for more consistency in referential style. In general, though, I could not identify one overarching principle that would have explained the ‘unnecessary’ uses of *ihminen*, suggesting that these subset of uses may be partially triggered by the stylistic choices of the translator. Further work is needed in this area.

(23a) English original (*context: Katniss is worrying about running into tracker jackers, which are mutant wasps*)

Like the jabberjays, these killer wasps were spawned in a lab [...] Most people can’t tolerate more than a few stings. Some die at once. If you live, the hallucinations brought on by the venom have actually driven people to madness. (Hunger Games, p.185)

(23b) Tappaja-ampiaiset on tuotettu laboratoriossa niinkuin matkijanärhetkin [...] Useimmat ihmiset eivät kestä muutamaa pistoa enempää. Jotkut kuolevat heti. Ja vaikka ihminen jäisi henkiin, myrkky aiheittaa niin pahoja hallusinaatioita, että jotkut ovat menettäneet järkensä. (Nälkäpeli, p.193)

‘The killer wasps were created in a lab like the jabberjays [...] Most people cannot tolerate more than a few sting. Some die right away. And even if a person stays alive, the poison causes such bad hallucinations that some have lost their mind.’ (English version by EK)

(23c) If you live.... [English original]

Ja vaikka ihminen jä-isi henkiin... [Finnish translation]

And even-if human stay-3SG.COND alive

‘And even if a person/human being stays alive...’

In sum, in the majority of the cases where the translator opted for an overt generic noun as the translation for English generic *you* were cases where the zero person construction was not grammatically possible in Finnish, due to grammatical role and word order patterns.

### 5.1.2 First person used instead of zero person

After the use of overt generic nouns like *ihminen*, the second most frequent non-zero-person translation option is the first person. About 12% of the occurrences of English generic *you* are translated into Finnish with the first person. Interestingly, all of these occurrences would have been grammatical with the zero person as well, i.e., there are no clear syntactic or semantic requirements that would have forced the translator away from the zero person – in contrast to the items discussed above that were translated with generic overt nouns like *ihminen*.

(24a) English original (*context: Peeta is feverish and injured. Katniss has made him some soup.*) Peeta eats without complaint [...] He rambles on about how delicious it is, which should be encouraging if you don't know what fever does to people. (Hunger Games, p.275–276)

(24b) Finnish translation

Peeta syö mukisematta [...] Hän kehuu soppaa monin sanoin, ja se olisi rohkaisevaa, jos en tietäisi mitä kuume ihmiselle tekee. (Nälkäpelit, p.287)

Peeta eats without complaints [...] He praises the soup lavishly, and this would be encouraging, if I didn't know what fever does to a person.

(24c) ...which should be encouraging you don't know what fever does to people.

... ja se olisi rohkaiseva-a,  
... and it be.3SG.COND encouraging-PRT,

jos e-n tietä-isi mi-tä kuume ihmise-lle tekee  
if NEG-1SG know-COND what-PRT fever human-ALL do.3SG

'... and this would be encouraging, if I did not know what fever does to a person.'

It is worth noting that all but one of the tokens where generic *you* is translated into Finnish first person are all events/situations that are true of the narrator of the story – i.e., they seem to be 'true' first-person

uses (e.g. in (24), Katniss does indeed know what fever does to people.) The one counter-example is a conditional. This raises the question of why did the author choose to use generic *you* in English in the first place? Why not simply use the first person in English? I suggest that this may be related to the pragmatic effects of generic *you*. In particular, English generic *you* invites the addressee to share the speaker's viewpoint and involves some kind of empathy (e.g., Stirling and Manderson 2011). Malamud (2006) notes that "even on its impersonal use, *you*, but not *on*, *man* or *si*, always requires that the addressee empathise with the agent denoted by *you*" (Malamud 2006:99). In recent work, Gast et al. (2015) note that "At an expressive level, [impersonal uses of the second person pronoun] imply empathy with the category over which a generalization is made" (Gast et al. 2015: 152). They specifically state that this empathy effect comes from the second person form of the pronoun (Gast et al. 2015). This is in line with Malamud's point that English second-person *you*, used generically, differs from other forms that do not have second-person morphological features such as French *on*, German *man* and Italian *si*.

These observations bring up an interesting contrast with the Finnish zero person, which triggers third person agreement – not second person. Although Finnish researchers have noted that the zero person in Finnish invites the addressee to identify with, to 'step into the place' of the zero (e.g. Laitinen 2006), perhaps this is less direct/less strong than in English, due to the fact that Finnish zero person does not have second person features? In fact, the colloquial variant discussed in footnote 6, the *sä*-form (*sä* is a colloquial word for *sinä* 'you'), does have second person features and is felt by many native speakers to be 'too forceful' in inviting/telling the addressee how they 'should' feel/think/act (e.g. Seppänen 2000, Ojajärvi 2000).

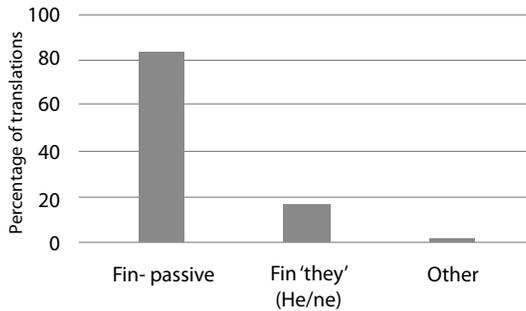
In light of these observations, it seems possible that in the original English text of the *Hunger Games*, one of the factors guiding the author's use of generic *you* is this empathizing effect that it has in English. If this effect is less strong or somehow different in Finnish, perhaps due to the fact that the zero person does not have second-person morphosyntactic features, this may be part of the reason why the translator opted for first person.

Overall, we find both grammatical and stylistic effects influencing the translation of generic *you* into Finnish. The most frequent translation choice is the zero person, but when it is not grammatically possible (due to word order or grammatical role of the *you* argument), the trans-

lator opted for overt nouns interpreted generally, such as *ihminen* (human). Furthermore, we also find stylistic effects, because sometimes the translator used the first person in Finnish even though a zero person would have been grammatically available. I suggest that this may be due to the zero person in Finnish not carrying any morphological second person features and thus perhaps not evoking empathy on the part of the addressee as strongly as the English second person. Further research is needed to investigate this idea further.

## 5.2 English impersonal *they* in the Finnish translation

Having observed the strong effects of grammatical constraints in how English generic *you* is translated into Finnish, I now turn to impersonal *they*. Figure 2 shows how the English impersonal *they* is translated into Finnish. By far the most frequent option is the impersonal passive (81%). The second most common option is use of plural third person verbs (in the active voice) with overt third person pronouns (17%). In these third-person plural examples, we find occurrences both of the standard human third person plural *he* ‘they (human)’ and the non-human *ne* ‘they (nonhuman)’, which is also used for humans in many dialects of colloquial Finnish. (This *he/ne* alternation merits further analysis with a larger corpus, in light of the (anti)logophoric functions of these pronouns, e.g. Laitinen 2002, 2005). These two options – the impersonal passive and the third person plural – cover all but 2% of the translations of the English impersonal *they* constructions. The difference in distribution is statistically significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 58.11$ ,  $p < .0001$ , chi-squared run on counts, not on percentages). As a whole, the corpus patterns provide show that English impersonal *they* is largely realized in Finnish with the passive construction, but raises the question of why the overt third person pronoun is used in 17% of the cases. In Section 5.1.1, I suggest that this is related to the fact that while English impersonal *they* excludes the speaker, the Finnish impersonal passive does not.



**Figure 2.** How English impersonal ‘they’ is realized in the Finnish translation. (Cases where the sentence was reworded/restructured to such an extent that the original ‘they’ construction is absent in the Finnish translation (about 25% of the tokens) are not shown here.)

Example (25) is an example of an English impersonal *they* construction being translated into an impersonal passive, and (26) is an example of impersonal *they* translated in Finnish as the plural pronoun *ne* ‘they (nonhuman).’ There are actually two occurrences of impersonal *they* in example (26) but we will focus on one in detail, for reasons of brevity.

(25a) English original

*(Context: Katniss and her friend Gale are discussing whether she will be able to build a bow during the Hunger Games. The environment changes every time, so they do not know what she will have access to.)*

“I don’t even know if there’ll be wood,” I say. Another year, they tossed everybody into a landscape of nothing but boulders and sand and scruffy bushes. I particularly hated that year. (Hunger Games, p.39)

(25b) Finnish translation

»En tiedä edes, onko siellä puuta», minä sanon. Yhtenä vuonna kandidaatit vietiin maastoon, jossa ei ollut muuta kuin kivenlohkareita ja hiekkaa ja risuisia pensaita. Se oli minusta erityisen inhottava vuosi. (Nälkäpeli, p.44)

“I don’t even know if there will be any wood,” I say. One year the candidates were taken to a landscape where there was nothing other than boulders and sand and scruffy bushes. I thought it was an especially horrible year.” (English version by EK)

- (25c) Another year, they tossed everybody into a landscape of nothing but boulders and sand and scruffy bushes [English]

Yhtenä vuonna kandidaati-t vie-tiin maastoon,  
 One year candidate-PL taken-PASS.PST landscape-ILL,  
 jossa ei ol-lut muuta kuin kivenlohkare-i-ta ja hiekka-a  
 where-INE NEG be-PTCP other than boulder-PL-PRT and sand-PRT  
 ja risuis-i-a pensa-i-ta  
 and scruffy-PL-PRT bush-PL-PRT

‘One year the candidates were taken to a landscape where there was nothing other than boulders and sand and scruffy bushes.’

- (26a) English original (*context: One of the competitors in the Hunger Games, called tributes, has just died. The authorities standardly send in a hovercraft to pick up the bodies.*)

I lean forward and press my lips against her [Rue’s] temple. Slowly, as if not to wake her, I lay her head back on the ground and release her hand. They’ll want me to clear out now. So they can collect the bodies. And there’s nothing to stay for. (Hunger Games, p.235–6)

- (26b) Finnish translation

Kumarrun ja painan huuleni Ruen ohimolle. Lasken hänen päänsä hitaasti maahan, aivan kuin pelkäisin herättäväni hänet, ja päästän hänen kätensä. Ne haluavat minun lähtevän nyt. Niin että ne pääsevät hakemaan ruumiin. Eikä minulla ole mitään syytä jäädä. (Nälkäpeli, p. 243–4)

‘I bend down and press my lips against Rue’s temple. I slowly lower her head to the ground, as if I were afraid to wake her, and let go of her hand. They want me to leave now. So that they can come and get the body. And I have no reason to stay.’

- (26c) They’ll want me to clear out now. [English]

Ne halua-vat minu-n lähte-vä-n nyt. [Finnish]  
 They want-3PL 1SG-GEN leave-PTCP-GEN now.

‘They want me to leave now.’

### 5.2.1 *Why not use impersonal passives for all occurrences of impersonal they?*

Why does the translator opt to use the overt plural third person in 17% of the cases, like example (26), even though the impersonal passive would have been grammatical? When used as ‘regular’ pronouns, these forms are used to refer to previously-mentioned entities. However, as noted by Posio and Vilkuna (2013), third person plural verbs in the active voice, mostly without but also sometimes with overt third person pronouns, can also be used in impersonal constructions in some dialects of Finnish (example 27) – especially in eastern Finland. As Posio and Vilkuna note, this usage of plural third person active voice tends to be restricted to colloquial/dialectal use.

(27) East, Northern Savo, Leppävirta

ne sano kiessiks noita semmosia kārriä joessa  
they say kiessi-TRANS those-PRT-PL such-PRT-PL cart-PRT-PL that  
 ol’ istuimet.  
 were seats-PRT-PL

‘They (used to) call kiessi those kinds of cart that had seats.’

Let us now consider how these patterns can explain why some occurrences of impersonal *they* in English were not translated with the Finnish impersonal passive. Posio and Vilkuna show that in dialects that use third person active voice along with the impersonal passive to express impersonal meanings, the third person active voice tends to express an “outsider perspective” (Posio and Vilkuna 2013: 221–222). Recall that the impersonal passive in Finnish can include reference to the speaker and the hearer (e.g. (17)). In dialects that also use the active voice third person plural to express impersonality, this second alternative seems to have a preference to *exclude* speaker (and hearer) perspective. (Posio and Vilkuna note that this is especially strong in dialects where the impersonal passive is more strongly associated with speaker-inclusive readings, such as Western dialects: “speakers of these dialects might be more likely to adopt the explicitly exclusive 3PL form in order to indicate a more distanced reading.”)

Although Posio and Vilkuna focus on dialects of colloquial Finnish and the *Hunger Games* translation is largely in standard Finnish, these are nevertheless interesting parallels. In particular, in the *Hunger Games* translation, all cases where the translator chose to use a

third person plural pronoun+active verb construction, rather than an impersonal passive, involve situations in which the characters of the novel are expressing negative opinions about some unknown authority (e.g. the dictatorial government or the gamemakers).<sup>7</sup> Recall that in Finnish, the impersonal passive allows speaker and addressee inclusion – unlike English impersonal *they* (Section 3.1). Thus, there are sentences in the English text that are clearly speaker-exclusive, but if they were translated into Finnish with the impersonal passive, this clear speaker-exclusion would be lost. In some cases this may not matter, but in some contexts it may be important to emphasize the speaker's emotional distance from the referents or events being described. It seems that in the *Hunger Games* corpus, the translator dealt with this by using the dialect-inspired impersonal third person plural active voice in cases where the speaker-exclusive meaning is emphasized. For example, (21) describes a turning point in the book, when one of the tributes (Rue) has been killed, and the first-person narrator, Katniss, wants to express her rebellion against the government and the organizers of the Hunger Games. By using the third person plural active voice for the Finnish translation of “They’ll want me to leave now”, the translator can emphasize this outsider/rebellious stance.<sup>8</sup> It is also very relevant that this example uses the non-human form *ne* (‘they.PL’) for human reference. This form, when used for human referents, contrasts in many dialects where the human form *he* has a logophoric role, in contrast to the *ne* form (see e.g. Laitinen 2002, 2005). These patterns merit further analysis with a larger translation corpus (in the *Hunger Games* corpus, it seems that both *he* and *ne* are used in negative/outsider contexts), as they are presumably intricately related to the perspective-taking effects discussed above.

In sum, I suggest that because the English impersonal *they* and Finnish impersonal passives differ in terms of whether they include the speaker and addressee, the translation from one to the other is

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7 Although the translator does not use the third person plural in all cases where the narrator stands in an opposed/negative relation to the corporate referent of impersonal *they*, all the cases where the third person plural variant is used are these kinds of opposed/negative situations.

8 One may wonder how easy it is to distinguish impersonal and referential uses of *they* and *he/ne* (see discussion by Posio and Vilkkuna). In my opinion, especially with ‘corporate’ impersonal *they* uses, the boundary between impersonal and referential can be unclear. One of the criteria I used is whether there are antecedents for *they/he/ne*. If an antecedent cannot be found in preceding discourse, the usage is presumably impersonal.

not always fully appropriate. Although further work is needed in this area, the data so far suggest that the translator opted for a third person plural active voice construction, used in an impersonal sense mostly for so-called corporate interpretations (see example 15), when the speaker-exclusivity of the utterance is emphasized.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

This paper investigated how two non-canonical uses of personal pronouns in English, the generic *you* and the impersonal *they*, compare to two constructions that are used to express generic and impersonal reference in Finnish, the zero person and the impersonal passive. In Sections 2 and 3 we looked at the semantic and syntactic properties of these constructions in both languages. This comparison revealed that generic *you* is more syntactically flexible than the zero person, although both constructions are semantically similar. Furthermore, when comparing impersonal *you* and the impersonal passive in Finnish, we identified both syntactic and semantic differences, in particular the fact that impersonal *you* excludes reference to the speaker and addressee whereas the impersonal passive can easily be used for speaker- and addressee-inclusive reference.

In Sections 4 and 5, we reported on the results of our small-scale corpus study, which looked at how occurrences of generic *you* and impersonal *they* in the novel *Hunger Games* are translated into Finnish. The results of the corpus study for translations of **generic *you*** show that the Finnish zero person is used for less than half of the cases of generic *you* in the corpus. A closer analysis shows that the word order and grammatical role constraints that govern use of the zero person are indeed responsible for the translator opting for other alternatives, in particular generic nouns such as *ihminen* ‘human, person.’ In addition, the corpus study also hints at an additional pattern than we had not anticipated, namely translating English generic *you* into the first person in Finnish, especially for descriptions/statements that hold for the first-person narrator. This brings up the question of why the author chose to use generic *you* for a sentence that could have been in the first person. Building on prior work, I suggest that this may be due to the empathizing function of generic *you*, which many researchers have explicitly linked to its second-person featural make-up. In other words, the author probably chose to use generic *you* rather than first-person *I*

in order to draw the readers in more, and to make them empathize more with the characters. However, why did the Finnish translator sometimes use the first person instead, even when the zero person would have been grammatical? This may be related to the fact that the zero person does not have any second-person features (it triggers third-person agreement) and perhaps does not ‘invite’ the listener to empathize as strongly as generic *you* does in English. This, combined with the increased prevalence of the so-called *sä*-form in spoken Finnish, is an intriguing topic for further work.

Turning now to the corpus results for **impersonal *they***, we found that the vast majority of the occurrences were indeed translated into Finnish with the impersonal passive, as we had expected. However, recall that whereas English impersonal *they* excludes reference to the speaker and addressee, the Finnish impersonal passive can easily be used for speaker- and addressee-reference. This mismatch has consequences in the corpus: We find that in some cases, the translator chose to use an overt third person pronoun and third person active verb in Finnish (with an impersonal, mostly ‘corporate’ meaning), even though the impersonal passive would have been grammatical. The contexts where the translator chose to use an impersonal third-person construction were cases where the narrator is speaking about something/someone that she feels negatively about – i.e., contexts where the sentence clearly does not include the speaker or the addressee. This suggests that when we have a situation where we need to highlight that reference is *not* speaker- or addressee-inclusive, the translator needs to find another alternative to signal this. I suggest that use of a third-person active voice construction with impersonal meaning is related to patterns observed in Finnish dialects (e.g. Posio and Vilkuna 2013, Laitinen 2002, 2005).

In sum, we observe an intricate interplay between grammatical, semantic and pragmatic factors. The corpus patterns confirm the typological distinctions we had identified, but also reveal other constraints in the use of these constructions that we did not anticipate (e.g. the use of first-person in Finnish where the English original had generic *you*) and/or have received much less attention in existing work (e.g. the use of third person pronouns instead of the impersonal passive in Finnish when translating English impersonal *you*).

Of course, many questions remain open for future work. My corpus is small in scale and limited to narrative fiction: Larger corpus analyses on a broader range of language types (written, spoken, formal, colloquial, fiction, non-fiction, etc.) should be done to further assess

the initial patterns discussed in this paper. Another interesting angle concerns the use of impersonal and generic constructions not only in translations but also by second-language learners of Finnish (see Seilonen 2013 for a detailed analysis). Furthermore, it would be important to look at a more diverse set of translators, as well as broader set of languages, and also to investigate the division of labor between impersonal *they*, English passives and the Finnish impersonal passive.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the organizers and participants of the *Workshop on referential devices in Uralic and adjacent languages*, as well as the ESUKA/JEFUL reviewers and editors, for their insightful comments and feedback. The workshop was held at the University of Tartu as part of “Grammar and Context: New approaches to the Uralic Languages”, June 2013.

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### Abbreviations

In the glossings appear the following abbreviations not included in Leipzig glossing rules: ADE – adessive, CL – clitic, ELA – elative, ILL – illative, INE – inessive, PRT – partitive, PX3RD – 3rd person possessive suffix, TRANS – translative,  $\emptyset$  – is used to denote the phonetically null zero person.

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**Kokkuvõte. Elsi Kaiser: Impersonaalne ja geneeriline viitamine: soome- ja ingliskeelsete narratiivide võrdlus.** Lisaks sellele, et keelelises suhtluses on vaja viidata konkreetsetele, tuntund referentidele, tuleb tihti viidata ka tundmatutele, geneerilistele või täpselt määratlemata referentidele. Võrdlesin inglise keele geneerilise *you* ja impersonaalse *they* kasutust soome keele nullisiku konstruktsiooni ja impersonaalse passiivi kasutusega. Artikli esimeses osas võrdlen nende konstruktsioonide süntaktilisi, semantilisi ja pragmaatilisi omadusi, tuues näiteid mitmetest eri allikatest. Artikli teises osas uurin, kuidas tõlgitakse inglise geneeriline *you* ja impersonaalne *they* soome keelde. Nagu näeme, sunnivad semantilised, pragmaatilised ja süntaktilised erinevused nende konstruktsioonide vahel mõnikord tõlkijat kasutama alternatiivseid konstruktsioone (näiteks esimese isiku väljendeid või geneerilisi substantiive). Nende mustrite detailne analüüs aitab neid tüpoloogiliselt erinevaid konstruktsioone paremini mõista ning täiendab meie teadmisi selle kohta, kuidas keeles geneerilistele ja impersonaalsetele isikutele viidatakse.

**Märksõnad:** impersonaalne viitamine, geneeriline viitamine, soome keel, inglise keel