

Impersonal impersonals and personal third persons: an argument for binary [\pm PART]

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The agreement behavior of **SAPs** (speech act participant; 1st/2nd persons), **third persons**, and a null **impersonal pronoun** in **Passamaquoddy-Wolastoqey** justifies a **tripartite division** between [**+PART**], [**-PART**], and [**]** (underspecified).

The broader theoretical question

There is debate about the **featural representation of person categories**, e.g. **privative vs. binary** features and the status of **third person**.

Harbour (2011) and Kouneli (2021), investigating the representation of number, note that **binary [\pm F]** generates a **tripartite division** between [**+F**], [**-F**], and [**]**, whereas **privative [F]** only generates a **binary division** between [**F**] and [**]**.

To decide between privative vs. binary person features, we can thus look for evidence of **tripartite vs. binary partitions** of the person space.

Passamaquoddy-Wolastoqey provides evidence for a **tripartite partition** of the person space into [**+PART**], [**-PART**], and [**]**.

The data of interest: The agreement behavior of **SAPs** (1st/2nd persons), **third persons**, and a **null impersonal pronoun** pro_x .

Language and data background

Passamaquoddy-Wolastoqey is an **Eastern Algonquian** language typically divided into two dialects:

- **Passamaquoddy** (spoken in eastern Maine) /pæsəməkwɔdi/
- **Wolastoqey** (spoken in New Brunswick) /wə'lastəgwei/

Data for this talk comes from paradigms and example sentences from the **online Passamaquoddy-Wolastoqey dictionary** (<https://pmportal.org/>) and **my own fieldwork** with 2 Passamaquoddy and 2 Wolastoqey speakers carried out primarily over Zoom in 2020–present day.

Unspecified subject forms

Algonquian languages feature a set of inflectional forms called “**unspecified subject**” (X subject) forms, found with both transitive and intransitive verbs:

- 1) a. **Kis-oka-n** welaqik. b. **Kisi= pkon-a-Ø** sakom wolaku.
PFV-dance_{AI-N} last.night PFV= pick_{TA-3OBJ-3SG} chief yesterday
'There was a dance last night.' 'A chief was elected yesterday.'

There is debate about whether they are **passives** or have a **null impersonal/ indefinite subject**. Dryer (1996), Lochbihler (2012), and Oxford (2014) argue that these are **not passives** (contra Rhodes 1976, Dahlstrom 1991, a.o.), mainly with **morphological arguments** (e.g. presence of normal object agreement). Here's a novel (to my knowledge) **syntactic argument** for this conclusion: we can get X subject forms with **unaccusatives**:

(assumption: unaccusatives, lacking an EA, cannot passivize; Perlmutter & Postal 1977, 1984, Legate et al. 2020)

- 2) a. **Siktwoc-ulti-n** welaqik. b. neqt **eli= tpskusi-mok**
feel.cold_{AI-PL-N} last.night one **IC.as= be.measured**_{AI-X.CJ}
'People were freezing last night.' 'one as one is measured.' (e.g. 1 mile)
<https://pmportal.org/dictionary/tpsikusu>
- c. Waht **weckuwya-mok** eci= wolinaqah-k.
over.there **IC.come.here**_{AI-X.CJ} IC.much= be.beautiful_{I-CJ}
'Coming here from there, it's very beautiful.'
<https://pmportal.org/dictionary/waht-wahte-wahta>

If these are true **impersonal** constructions with a **null impersonal subject** that we can call pro_x , then we must ask: **what is the featural makeup of pro_x ?**

Abbreviations: 1 'first person'; 2 'second person'; 3 'third person'; AI 'animate intransitive'; AN 'animate'; AUG 'augmented'; CJ 'conjunct order'; DFLT 'default'; EMPH 'emphatic'; IC 'initial change'; II 'inanimate intransitive'; IN 'inanimate'; INV 'inverse'; N 'N formative'; OBJ 'object'; PART 'participant'; PFV 'perfective'; PL 'plural'; SAP 'speech act participant'; SG 'singular'; TA 'transitive animate'; TI 'transitive inanimate'; I 'impersonal'; π 'person'

pro_x is specified for number

(at least [\pm AUG])

Intransitive verbs show a **SG-DU-PL distinction** (more or less), with plural being the dual plus a **plural suffix** right after the verb stem (-ulti, -uhti, -ahti, -awoloti-, or -hoti, depending on the stem). (Elsewhere there's only a SG-PL distinction using the “dual” markers.)

X subject forms participate in this, distinguishing **bare forms** from **plural forms**:

- 3) a. **Kis-oka-n** welaqik. b. **Kis-ok-ahti-n** welaqik.
PFV-dance_{AI-N} last.night PFV-dance_{AI-PL-N} last.night
'There was a dance last night.' 'People danced last night.'

NB: The distribution of these plural suffixes is sensitive to **morphosyntactic features** rather than being purely semantic, as they're **incompatible with SG plurality-denoting subjects** like *psi-te wen* 'everyone' with a collective predicate:

- 4) a. Psi=te wen **kisi= maqeh-e-Ø-Ø** b. *...kisi= maqah-ahtu-Ø-Ø
all=EMPH who PFV= gather_{AI-DFLT-3SG} PFV= gather_{AI-PL-DFLT-3SG}
'Everyone gathered.'

pro_x is specified for animacy

(it's [+AN])

Algonquian verbs have verbalizing suffixes called **finals** which mark the verb's **transitivity**, the **grammatical animacy** of one of the arguments (by default the “absolute” argument), and maybe also some more concrete **lexical meaning**. (they realize v; Brittain 2003, Mathieu 2007, Ritter & Rosen 2010, Slavin 2012, a.o.)

X subject forms are only possible with **finals that take [+AN] subjects**.

- 5) a. moci-mahsi-n b. *moci-mahte-n
bad-smell_{AI-N} bad-smell_{II-N}
'someone smells bad' Intended: 'something smells bad'

NB: Finals are sensitive to **grammatical animacy**, not notional animacy:

- 6) a. **Woli-hpukot-Ø-ul** sahti-yil.
good-taste_{II-DFLT-IN.PL} blueberry-IN.PL
'Blueberries taste good.'
- b. **Woli-hpuksu-Ø-wok** pskihqimins-ok.
good-taste_{AI-DFLT-AN.PL} strawberry-AN.PL
'Strawberries taste good.'

As far as I'm aware pro_x can only range over humans, a common restriction for impersonal pronouns/constructions. All humans happen to be grammatically [+AN].

3rd persons are [-PART], pro_x is [**]**: evidence from C

C agrees **omnivorously** with **third persons only**. (Grishin 2023b, 2024)

- 7) a. n-conehl -a -nnu -k b. n-conehl -oku -nnu -k
T $\sqrt{+v}$ Voice T C T $\sqrt{+v}$ Voice T C
1-stop_{TA} -3OBJ -1PL -AN.PL 1-stop_{TA} -INV -1PL -AN.PL
'we stop them' 'they stop us'

(NB: no syntactic inversion in the 3→SAP inverse; Grishin 2023a, Oxford 2023)

C must be specified for a feature found **only on third persons**. This is easy with **binary features**, with SAPs being [+PART] and third persons being [-PART]: we can specify **C** to only interact with third persons: [**INT:-PART**]. In contrast, **C never agrees with pro_x** , indicating that it's **not specified [-PART]**:

- 8) a. op -ulti -n (*-ok) b. n-conehl -oke -pon(*-u-k)
 $\sqrt{+v}$ # T C T $\sqrt{+v}$ Voice T C
sit_{AI} -PL -N (-AN.PL) 1-stop_{TA} -INV.X -1PL -AN.PL
'people sit' 'we are stopped (by people)'

3rd persons are [-PART], pro_x is [**]**: evidence from T

T only agrees with **animates**, [INT:+AN]. In intransitives with **IN subjects**, you get a **default exponent of T**. This is clearest in the **subordinative mode**, the verbal inflectional paradigm you get in **CP-less clauses**, as in **Table 1**.

(exponents of T in red and burgundy; I assume Fission, following Oxford 2019, Xu 2022) (this avoids C-T dissimilation effects which obscure the underlying pattern; Oxford 2017, 2020) (on CP-less clauses: Grishin 2023a, to appear)

Note:

- » **3IN** subjects get **-(w̃)** 'DFLT' (the umlaut indicates that -w̃ umlauts stem-final a→e)
- » When **T** successfully agrees, we get **-n(e) 'N'** (glossed below as 'AN')
- » We only get full **person agreement** with **SAP** and **3rd person** subjects
- » With **X subjects**, we get **-n(e) 'N'** but **no person agreement**, indicating that T has **successfully agreed with pro_x** , but it **lacks person features**. (maybe also lacks [\pm SG]?)

SAPs are [+PART], 3rd persons are [-PART], and pro_x is []**.**

	SG	DU (≥2)	PL (≥3)
1EXC	<i>nt- ... -n</i> 1- ... -AN	<i>nt- ... -ne -n</i> 1- ... -AN -1PL	<i>nt- ... -ulti -ne -n</i> 1- ... -PL -AN -1PL
1INC		<i>kt- ... -ne -n</i> 2- ... -AN -1PL	<i>kt- ... -ulti -ne -n</i> 2- ... -PL -AN -1PL
2	<i>kt- ... -n</i> 2- ... -AN	<i>kt- ... -ni -ya</i> 2- ... -AN -2/3PL	<i>kt- ... -ulti -ni -ya</i> 2- ... -PL -AN -2/3PL
3AN	<i>t- ... -n</i> 3- ... -AN	<i>t- ... -ni -ya</i> 3- ... -AN -2/3PL	<i>t- ... -ulti -ni -ya</i> 3- ... -PL -AN -2/3PL
IMPERS	<i>...-n</i> ...-AN		<i>... -ulti -n</i> ... -PL -AN
3IN		<i>...-w̃</i> ...-DFLT	

Table 1: Subordinative intransitive paradigm (CP-less clauses)

No privative alternative(s)

This **tripartite partition of the person space** comes for free with binary [\pm PART]. Is there a way to capture this data with **privative person features**?

Attempt 1: SAP [π , PART], 3rd person [π], impersonal [**]**.

- » Can't capture the behavior of **C agreement** (omnivorous third person).

Attempt 2: Add a second privative feature [3].

(Bondarenko 2020, Grishin 2023b, Bondarenko & Zompi to appear)

- » Generates an **unattested quadripartition**: [PART, 3], [PART], [3], [**]**.
- » If we stipulate that [PART] and [3] **cannot co-occur**, we've **reinvented binary features** ([PART] = [+PART], [3] = [-PART]).
- » Can't rule this out **semantically**, because third person referents **can include speaker and addressee**. (contra Alexiadou et al. 2024)

references:

