

Some remarks on arbitrary pronouns^{*}

IAN ROBERTS
University of Cambridge
igr20@cam.ac.uk

The interpretation of indefinite, or arbitrary pronouns, is an important topic in both syntax and semantics. This became an important aspect of the analysis of Italian impersonal/mediopassive *si* constructions after Cinque (1988), which built on the pioneering work of Belletti (1981). In this short paper, I focus in particular on one aspect of the syntax of these elements that was observed in Jaeggli (1986) and Cinque (1988) (see also Borer 2005): the fact that certain readings of arbitrary pronouns, what Cinque calls the “quasi-existential” reading, are restricted to external arguments. I propose a new account of this restriction, based on two ideas: first, that arbitrary pronouns have two potential licensors in structurally distinct positions in the clause and, second, the locality condition imposed by the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC). I will try to show how this approach accounts for the interpretations of the arbitrary readings associated with Italian *si*-constructions, those of implicit arguments of passives in English and Turkish, and “arbitrary PRO”, *you* and *one* in English.

References

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