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IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN BELARUSIAN  
AND CLOSELY RELATED LANGUAGES:  
A TYPOLOGICAL AND AREAL ACCOUNT

1. *Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, I discuss the functional and morphosyntactic features of impersonal constructions in Belarusian<sup>2</sup> and four languages closely related to it, both genetically and geographically: Russian, Ukrainian (East Slavic), Polish (West Slavic) and Lithuanian (Baltic). These languages share not only a common ancestry, but also a long history of co-development. Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian speakers have, at different times in their history, been subjects of the same highly multilingual political entities (the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish *Rzeczpospolita*, the Russian and the Austrian Empires). Moreover, these languages are all spoken in the Circum-Baltic region (Dahl - Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001), a linguistic area characterised by intensive and diffused language contact. As I show in this paper, the impersonal constructions in the languages

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(<sup>2</sup>) In this paper, I mostly limit the discussion to standard Belarusian. The question what Standard Belarusian is is not trivial, and it does not have an easy answer. *De facto*, two different standards, *taraškevica* and *narkamaŭka*, are currently used by Belarusian speakers, with differences in both lexicon and morphosyntax as well (see the discussion in Mazzitelli 2015: 77-81 and the very recent and detailed analysis in Bazhutkina 2020). In this paper, I did not differentiate between the two – to the aims of this study, I understand Standard Belarusian as written, non-dialectal Belarusian as it is attested in Belarusian literary works and on the Belarusian-language websites.

under examination display significant structural and semantic similarities. While these are mainly due to the common ancestry, in some cases the only explanation for the observed convergences is language contact: see, for instance, the emergence of participial reference impersonals in Ukrainian and Belarusian as a result of contact with Polish (Section 4.3 below) and the emergence of adessive coding of experiencers in Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian as a result of contact with Finno-Ugric languages (Section 2).

Following Malchukov - Ogawa (2011) and Schlund (2018), I define impersonality as a functionally-driven deviation from formal prototypical subjecthood. I show that in all impersonal constructions found in these languages the highest-ranking participant is both formally and functionally lacking one or more of the prototypical subject properties individuated in Keenan (1976). The only exceptions are the agented Ukrainian reflexive impersonal and the Belarusian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian agented participial impersonals: these display a functionally prototypical subject which receives an unexpected non-prototypical encoding. I suggest, following Seržant (2012), that this synchronic anomaly may have arisen from a diachronic contamination process with the passive.

The paper is organised as follows: in Section 1. I elaborate on the topic of non-prototypical subjecthood and its relation with impersonality. In Sections 2. to 5. I discuss the different types of impersonal constructions found in the languages under discussion, and in Sections 6. and 7. I draw some conclusions.

### 1.1. *Impersonality as deviation from prototypical subjecthood*

I define impersonal constructions as constructions *formally* lacking a prototypical subject and *functionally* having an instigator that has undergone a reduction in agentivity, animacy, referentiality or topicality (Siewierska 2008, 2011; Malchukov - Ogawa 2011; Schlund 2018; Kor Chahine - Guiraud-Weber *forthc.*).<sup>3</sup> The notion of subject is no-

<sup>(3)</sup> Under ‘subject’ and ‘instigator’ I understand the highest-ranking participant of an event – the only participant in intransitive events and the more agent-like participant in a transitive or di-transitive event. ‘Subject’ refers to its grammatical role, and ‘instigator’ to its semantic role: the latter term has been suggested instead of a-

toriously difficult to define cross-linguistically: its properties and defining criteria vary in different languages and alignment types. However, some generalisations about what constitutes a cross-linguistically prototypical subject can be made. In his seminal paper, Keenan (1976) distinguishes three kinds of prototypical subject properties: functional, behavioural and coding. The functional properties refer to the semantics and pragmatics of a subject: it is prototypically referential, animate, definite, topical and agentive. The behavioural properties refer to syntactic operations such as control of reflexives and infinitives. Finally, coding properties refer to morphological phenomena such as person marking on the verb, gender/number agreement and case marking. Table 1. shows the properties of a prototypical Slavic and Baltic subject.

Functional properties	Behavioural properties	Coding properties
Animacy	Control of reflexive <i>pro</i>	Person marking on the verb <sup>4</sup>
Agentivity	Control of infinitive <i>pro</i>	Gender/number agreement on the verb
Definiteness		Nominative case
Topicality		First place in the clause
Animacy		Person marking on the verb <sup>5</sup>

Table 1. Prototypical subject properties in Slavic and Baltic languages.

*gent* as a cover-all term by Siewierska (2008), who rightly observes that, often, “agents” of impersonal constructions are not agentive at all. In the remainder of this paper, I use *subject* and *instigator* interchangeably.

(<sup>4</sup>) In Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian past tense forms lack person marking because of the loss of the auxiliary, cf. Belarusian *ja chadzi-ŭ/-la* ‘I go-PST.MASC/-PST.FEM’; *ty chadzi-ŭ/-la* ‘you go-PST.MASC/-PST.FEM’; *on chadzi-ŭ/ ona chadzi-la* ‘he go-PST.MASC/she go-PST.FEM’.

(<sup>5</sup>) In Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian past tense forms lack person marking because of the loss of the auxiliary, cf. Belarusian *ja chadzi-ŭ/-la* ‘I go-PST.MASC/-PST.FEM’; *ty chadzi-ŭ/-la* ‘you go-PST.MASC/-PST.FEM’; *on chadzi-ŭ/ ona chadzi-la* ‘he go-PST.MASC/she go-PST.FEM’.

Non-prototypical subjects,<sup>6</sup> on the other hand, lack one or more of these properties, while retaining others.<sup>7</sup> An example of non-prototypical subjects are the Belarusian dative-coded experiencers of predicates denoting psycho-physical states (1).

(1) Belarusian<sup>8</sup>

- a. *Mne budze soramna*  
 I.DAT be.FUT.3SG shameful.PRED  
 ‘I will be ashamed’ (*Belacorpus*)
- b. *Jamu, bačyce, bylo choladna*  
 he.DAT see.PRS.2PL be.PST.N.SG cold.PRED  
 ‘You see, he was cold’ (*Belacorpus*)

The dative oblique in (1a, b) is a non-prototypical subject. It has indeed some functional and coding subject properties, such as animacy and first place in the clause, but it lacks others, such as agentivity and nominative encoding, and it is not indexed on the predicate, which appears in the impersonal (non-agreeing) default form (third person singular, neuter gender agreement), which Schlund (2018) terms as impersonal morphology.

It must be noted, that not all functionally non-prototypical subjects are stripped of nominative encoding, thereby triggering the use of impersonal morphology on the verb. In (2), the subject is non-agentive

<sup>(6)</sup> I do not distinguish here between non-canonical subjects and subject-like obliques (cf. Seržant 2013 and Schlund 2018); I refer to both types as “non-prototypical subjects”.

<sup>(7)</sup> I do not take into account here behavioural properties. In fact, some Slavic non-prototypical subjects lacking functional and coding properties can still retain control of reflexives and infinitives (see Schlund 2018), cf. Russian *Ej ‘she.DAT’ ne bylo skučno v étoj komnate, so svoimi ‘REFL.INS.PL’ mysljami* ‘She was not bored in this room, in the company of her own thoughts’ (NKRJa). Whilst behavioural properties are important to define the degree of non-prototypicality of a specific subject (and thus whether it is a non-canonical subject or a subject-like oblique), they are not relevant with regard to morphosyntactic impersonality. This is defined, at least in Slavic, by the absence of coding properties (nominative case, indexing, agreement). Henceforth, I will refer to formal subject properties understanding only coding properties under this label.

<sup>(8)</sup> Glosses conform to the Leipzig glossing rules standard. Exceptions: IMP impersonal; PPP past passive participle.

and inanimate, but it is still formally prototypical and the predicate agrees with it.

- (2) Belarusian  
*Budyŋki, vysokija i šėryja [...],*  
 building.NOM.PL tall.NOM.PL and grey.NOM.PL  
*zacjanjajuc' vuzkija vulački.*  
 shadow.PRS.3PL narrow.ACC.PL alley.ACC.PL  
 'The buildings, tall and grey [...], overshadow the narrow alleys'  
 (M. Prochar, *Vosen' u Vil'njuse*)

Conversely, in the languages I analyse in this paper, all formally non-prototypical subjects also lack one or more functional subject properties (with the notable exceptions discussed in Section 3.2 and 3.4). I maintain, thus, following Malchukov - Ogawa (2011) and Schlund (2018), that formal subject non-prototypicality is a consequence of the loss of the functional subject properties: formally non-prototypical subjects are also functionally non-prototypical.

This correlation between form and function is what Schlund (2018), in her treatment of Russian impersonals, calls the "unifying approach" to impersonality: impersonal morphology emerges as a result of the loss of coding properties, which, in their turn, is a result of the loss of functional subject properties. As I show in this paper, Schlund's unifying approach applies well also to the Belarusian, Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian data. Differently from Schlund, I do not limit my discussion to predicates showing impersonal morphology, but I also include predicates with third person *plural* agreement and an obligatorily covert non-referential pronominal subject, which I dub 3PL impersonals (Section 3.1): as I will show below, the subject in such constructions is non-prototypical too, both formally and functionally. My focus in this paper is primarily on Belarusian and secondly on Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian; for completeness' sake, I also include Russian, even though this language has already been analysed at length in Schlund (2018).

### 1.2. Typologising impersonality: Malchukov - Ogawa's model

In their cross-linguistic study of impersonal constructions, Malchukov - Ogawa (2011) break down subject prototypicality to four main properties: agentivity, animacy, topicality and referentiality. They

thus distinguish three kinds of impersonal constructions: Agentivity/Animacy impersonals (A-impersonals), Reference impersonals (R-impersonals) and Topicality impersonals (T-impersonals). As the following examples from Russian show, A-impersonals are sensitive to a reduction in the animacy/agentivity of the highest-ranking participant (3); R-impersonals are sensitive to a reduction in referentiality (4), and T-impersonals are sensitive to a reduction in topicality (5).

- (3) Russian  
*Menja träsët.*  
 I.ACC shake.PRS.3SG  
 ‘I am shaking/trembling’ (Malchukov - Ogawa 2011: 48)
- (4) Russian  
*S’edeno bylo mnogo sladkogo,*  
 eat.PPP.N.SG be.PST.N.SG much candy.GEN.SG  
*i noč’ju.*  
 and night.INS.SG  
 ‘Lots of candy was eaten, even at night’ (Schlund 2018: 156; Babby 2010: 22)
- (5) Russian  
 a. *Tri čeloveka prišli (\*prišlo)*  
 three man.PAUC come.PST.PL (\*come.PST.N.SG)  
 ‘(The) three men came’  
 b. *Prišli / prišlo tri čeloveka.*  
 ‘Three men came’ (Malchukov - Ogawa 2011: 30)

Cross-linguistically, A-impersonals are more commonly associated with strategies such as differential marking, agreement loss and passive/inverse; R-impersonals with indefinite pronouns, dedicated impersonal forms, subject omission and agentless passive;<sup>9</sup> T-impersonals with word order inversion, agreement loss and agented passives (Malchukov - Ogawa 2011: 38). In the following sections, I use Malchukov - Ogawa’s descriptive labels to classify and describe the impersonal constructions found in the languages under discussion here.

<sup>(9)</sup> I have decided to avoid the term ‘agent’ in favour of the term ‘instigator’. However, I keep to the tradition of using the term ‘agent’ for passives; therefore, I speak here of agentless and agented passive and participial impersonals, instead of “instigatorless” and “instigated” passive.

2. Agentivity/Animacy impersonals (*A-impersonals*)

A-impersonals are characterised by the loss of the functional subject properties of agentivity and/or animacy. In Belarusian, A-impersonals are expressed through constructions with a non-nominative overt instigator, which is typically a dative-, accusative- or instrumental-coded participant.

Usually, dative-coded instigators are experiencers of psychological or physical states (6a, b). They may also be subjects of modal predicatives (7a), modal infinitives (7b) and of the so-called “involuntary states” constructions (Rivero - Arregui 2012), where the predicate is marked as reflexive (8).

## (6) Belarusian

- a. *Mne budze soramna*  
 I.DAT be.FUT.3SG shameful.PRED  
 ‘I will be ashamed’ (*Belacorpus*)
- b. *Bylo vidac’, što jamu choldadna*  
 be.PST.N.SG see.INF COMP he.DAT cold.PRED  
 ‘One could see that he was cold’ (*Belacorpus*)

## (7) Belarusian

- a. *Tabe jaščë nel’ha ŭstavac’*  
 you.SG.DAT still not.allowed.PRED get.up.INF  
 ‘You should not get out of bed yet’ (*Belacorpus*)
- b. *Mne pracjahvac’?*  
 I.DAT continue.INF  
 ‘Should I go on?’ (*Belacorpus*)

## (8) Belarusian

- Sënnjanam dobra pracavalasja.*  
 Today we.DAT well work.PAST.SG.N.REFL  
 ‘Today we worked well’ (Fehrmann et al. 2010: 213)

Accusative-coded participants are usually experiencers of uncontrollable physical states (typically of discomfort; 9a) and psychological states (9b).

## (9) Belarusian

- a. *Jaho zvanitue*  
 he.ACC feel.nauseated.FUT.3SG

‘He will feel nauseated’ (*Belacorpus*)

- b. *Mjane cjahnula da backoŭ*  
 I.ACC pull.PST.N.SG to parent.GEN.PL  
*u vėsku.*  
 in village.ACC.SG

‘I wanted to go to my parents’ in the village’ (*Belacorpus*)

Instrumental non-prototypical subjects occur in the so-called adversity impersonals (Babby 1994), elemental constructions (Mustajoki - Kopotev 2005), or active impersonal constructions (Schlund 2020), cf. (10).

- (10) Belarusian  
*U Baranavickim raėne malankaj*  
 In Baranavičy.ADJ.LOC.SG region.LOC.SG lightning.INS.SG  
*zabila 64-hadovaha mužčynu.*  
 kill.PST.N.SG 64.years.old.ACC.SG man.ACC.SG  
 ‘In the region of Baranavičy a lightning killed a 64-year-old man’  
 (<<http://zviazda.by/be/news/20180518/1526651796-u-baranavickim-rayone-malankaj-zabila-64-gadovaga-muzhchynu>>)

In (10) the instrumental constituent *malankaj* ‘lightning.INS’ is not high enough in animacy to be granted nominative encoding and thus be able to control agreement. However, it is still agentive enough to trigger active alignment and to not be further demoted, as it would be the case in the correspondent canonical passive structure (11), where the subject role is given to the object.

- (11) *Malankaj byŭ zabity*  
 lightning.INS.SG be.PST.M.SG kill.PPP.M.SG  
*64-hadovy mužčyna*  
 64\_years\_old.NOM.M.SG man.NOM.SG  
 ‘A 64-year-old man was killed by a lightning’

Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian A-impersonals are substantially identical to those found in Belarusian. In all the four languages, dative, accusative, and instrumental instigators are found, with the same semantics as in Belarusian.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>(10)</sup> For reasons of space, I limit here the examples to one type per language. For more examples, see *inter alia* Kor Chahine - Guiraud-Weber (forthc.); Schlund 2020; Pugh - Press (1999: 100); Ambrazas (1997: 602, 630).



(12)

- a. Russian  
*Mne neponjatno i obidno*  
 I.DAT ununderstandable.PRED and offensive.PRED  
 ‘I don’t understand and I feel offended’ (Kor Chahine - Guiraud-Weber forthc.)
- b. Ukrainian  
*Meni cholođno*  
 I.DAT cold.PRED  
 ‘I am cold’ (Pugh - Press 1999: 272)
- c. Polish  
*Łamie mnie w kościach*  
 break.PRS.3SG I.ACC in bone.LOC.PL  
 ‘I feel pain in my bones’ (Kor Chahine - Guiraud-Weber forthc.)
- d. Lithuanian  
*Sniegu užnešė kelius.*  
 snow.INS.SG cover.PST.3 road.ACC.PL  
 ‘The roads were covered with snow’ (Schlund 2020: 54)

In Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian, experiencers in constructions involving body-parts can also be encoded as adessive phrases, cf. (13a-b). In this case, the adessive participant bears the role of experiencer in virtue of its being understood as the possessor of the involved body-part (Mazzitelli 2015: 35ff.). The adessive coding of possessors/experiencers in East Slavic is commonly regarded as an effect of long-lasting contact with Finnic languages, where possessors and experiencers are encoded in the adessive case (Seržant 2012; Mazzitelli 2015: 65ff).

(13)

- a. Belarusian  
*U ich [...] zvinela ŭ vušach.*  
 at they.GEN ring.PST.N.SG in ear.LOC.PL  
 ‘Their ears rang’ (<<http://petrikov.by/bol-yaki-shchymic-ikryvatochyc/>>)
- b. Russian  
*U menja carapaet v gorle, treščit v ušach*  
 at I.GEN itch.PRS.3SG in throat.LOC.SG  
 rattle.PRS.3SG in ear.LOC.PL

‘I have a scratchiness in my throat, a ringing in my ears’  
(Timberlake 2004: 279)

c. Ukrainian

<i>U n'oho</i>	<i>dzvenilo</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>vuchach</i>	<i>ta</i>
At he.GEN	ring.PST.N.SG	in	ear.LOC.PL	and
<i>šumilo</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>holovi.</i>		
be_noisy.PST.N.SG	in	head.LOC.SG		

‘He had a ringing in his ears and a noise in his head’  
(<<https://youcontrol.com.ua/catalog/court-document/3924774/>>)

### 3. Reference impersonals (*R-impersonals*)

R-impersonals are sensitive to a reduction in referentiality: they are represented by the constructions that Kor Chahine - Guiraud-Weber (forthc.) term “constructions with indefinite (or generic) subject”.<sup>11</sup> In the languages of Europe, R-impersonals can be encoded by a wide range of constructions: pronominalized forms of the numeral ‘one’, impersonal pronouns, personal pronouns used non-referentially (such as English “vague they” and “vague you”), constructions with an indefinite third person plural subject obligatorily realised as zero (3PL impersonals), impersonal passives, middle voice of the verb (reflexive impersonals).

In the five languages under examination here, three types of R-impersonal constructions are found: 3PL impersonals (cf. Siewierska 2011), participial impersonals (which show passive morphology), and reflexive impersonals.

#### 3.1. 3PL impersonals

The 3PL impersonal construction, exemplified in (14), is the most frequent and less lexically restricted R-impersonal in Belarusian. As the example shows, 3PL impersonals actually do have a subject (formally, third person plural), which governs agreement on verb and it is indexed in it (in the present and future tense).

<sup>(11)</sup> In this paper, I will not take into consideration the 2SG generic construction, where the subject reference is generic and it includes the speaker: (see Siewierska 2011: 58; Mazzitelli 2019).

- (14) Belarusian
- |                      |                |                      |                |                |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <i>Mjančuk</i>       |                | <i>namaljavaŭ</i>    |                | <i>Pahonju</i> |
| Minsk_citizen.NOM.SG |                | paint.PST.M.SG       |                | Pahonja.ACC.SG |
| <i>na</i>            | <i>ploce.</i>  | <i>na</i>            | <i>jaho</i>    |                |
| on                   | fence.LOC.SG   | on                   | he.ACC         |                |
| (* <i>jany</i> )     | <i>zavjali</i> | <i>kryminal'nuju</i> | <i>spravu.</i> |                |
| (*they)              | bring.PST.PL   | criminal.ACC.F.SG    | account.ACC.SG |                |
- ‘A citizen from Minsk painted the Pahonja symbol on a fence. He has been charged (lit. ‘they have charged him’) with a criminal offence’ (<https://belsat.eu/news/03-03-2021-myanchuk-namalyavau-pagonyu-na-plotse-na-yago-zavyali-kryminalnuyu-spravu>).

3PL impersonals seem to pose a problem for impersonality defined as deviation from prototypical subjecthood, because the subject is formally indexed on the verb. However, there are both functional and formal grounds for considering the subject in 3PL impersonals as non-prototypical: functionally, because of its lack of referentiality, and formally because of its obligatory zero encoding. In Haspelmath’s (2013, 2019) terminology, nouns and pronouns which are co-referential with bound person indexes are labelled conominals. In Belarusian, conominal pronouns are usually expressed, though they may optionally be omitted in anaphora (15a). In 3PL impersonals, the expression of conominals is forbidden (15b), lest they be interpreted referentially.

- (15) Belarusian
- a.
- |                 |                      |                     |            |               |
|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------|------------|---------------|
| <i>Ty</i>       | <i>dze</i>           | <i>živeš?</i>       | <i>Na</i>  | <i>hêtaj</i>  |
| you.SG.NOM      | where                | live.PRS.2SG        | on         | this.LOC.F.SG |
| <i>vulicy?</i>  | <i>– Ne, ja – na</i> | <i>Bjalinskaha.</i> |            |               |
| street.LOC.SG   | no I.NOM on          | Bjalinskij.GEN      |            |               |
| <i>Bo</i>       | <i>tut</i>           | <i>blizka.</i>      | <i>- U</i> | <i>školu</i>  |
| because here    | close.PRED           | at                  |            | school.ACC.SG |
| <i>chadziŭ?</i> | <i>– Chadziŭ</i>     |                     |            |               |
| go.PST.M.SG     | go.PST.M.SG          |                     |            |               |
- ‘Where do you live? In this street? – No, I am on the Bjalinski street. Because it’s near to here. - Did (you) go to school? – (I) did.’ (*Belacorpus*)
- b.
- |                    |              |             |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|
| <i>Aŭtuchoviču</i> | <i>ŭves’</i> | <i>čas</i>  |
| Aŭtuchovič.DAT     | all.ACC.M.SG | time.ACC.SG |

(\*jany)                    *mjanjali*                    *abvinavanni*,  
 (\*they.NOM)            change.PST.PL            accusation.ACC.PL  
*nichto*                    *ne razumeŭ,*                    *za što*  
 nobody.NOM            NEG    understand.PST.M.SG            for    what  
*jaho*                    (\*jany)                    *aryštavali*.  
 he.ACC                    (\*they.NOM)            arrest.PST.PL  
 ‘The accusations against Aŭtuchovič were constantly changed,  
 nobody understood why he had been arrested [lit. why they had  
 arrested him]’ (*Belacorpus*)

3PL impersonals are found in Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian,<sup>12</sup> too, with the same formal and functional characteristics observed in Belarusian: obligatorily zero-coded subject and indefinite human reference, cf. example (16) from Polish.

- (16) Polish  
*Znowu                    podnieśli                    cenę                    paliwa.*  
 Again                    raise.PST.3PL.VIR            price.ACC.SG            fuel.GEN.SG  
 ‘They have raised the fuel price again’ (Bunčić 2018: 103)

Their status, however, is strikingly different. On the one hand, 3PL impersonals are the major strategy for the expression of referential impersonals in Russian and Belarusian; in Ukrainian, they are one of the two major R-impersonal strategies, the other being participial impersonals (see Section 3.3 below). In Polish, on the other hand, the use of 3PL impersonals is marked as colloquial (Bunčić 2018: 103); in the Lithuanian written language, they are quite rare, too (Mazzitelli 2019).

### 3.2. Reflexive impersonals

Reflexive impersonals are a further type of R-impersonals, where the predicate is marked as reflexive by means of the affix *-sja/-ca* in Belarusian and Ukrainian, *-s’/-sja* in Russian, *się* in Polish and *-s/-si-* in Lithuanian. In Belarusian, reflexive impersonals are lexically restricted. As Fehrmann et al. (2010) state, they can only be formed from predicates “which alternatively subcategorize for an accusative

<sup>(12)</sup> Lithuanian does not express the category of number for the third person: *ji/jos yra* ‘she/they(F) is/are’. Therefore, the PL specification does not apply to this language.

nominal expression or a prepositional phrase/subordinate clause, e.g., *verba dicendi et sentiendi*” (Fehrmann et al. 2010: 210), cf. (17).

- (17) Belarusian  
*Na sustrěčy [...] havarylasja ŭ*  
 In meeting.LOC.SG speak.PST.N.SG.REFL in  
*peršuju čarhu ab prablemach*  
 first.ACC.F.SG line.ACC.SG about problem.LOC.PL  
*haspadarčaha kompleksu.*  
 economic.GEN.M.SG complex.GEN.SG  
 ‘In the meeting [...] people talked in the first place about the problem of the economic complex’ (*Belacorpus*)

In Belarusian, the reflexive marker *-sja* is also involved in the formation of the passive of imperfective verbs (18a) and, as such, it can be used to express impersonality through the non-expression of the instigator (agentless passive; 18b).

- (18) Belarusian
- a. Agented reflexive passive  
*Materyjal zbiraŭsja*  
 material.NOM.SG collect.PST.M.SG.REFL  
*aŭtaram bol’s za čverc’*  
 author.INS.SG more than quarter.ACC.SG  
*stahoddzja.*  
 century.GEN.SG  
 ‘The material was collected by the author over more than a quarter of a century’ (Fehrmann et al. 2010: 210)
- b. Agentless reflexive passive  
*Materyjal zbiraŭsja bol’s za*  
 material.NOM.SG collect.PST.M.SG.REFL more than  
*čverc’ stahoddzja.*  
 quarter.ACC.SG century.GEN.SG  
 ‘The material was collected over more than a quarter of a century.’ (adapted from Fehrmann et al. 2010: 210)

Agentless passives are only functionally impersonal. Formally, they are not: the subject is nominative-coded, overt and regularly indexed on the verb. Reflexive impersonals differ from agentless reflexive passives in that there is no canonical subject and the predicate shows impersonal agreement.

Reflexive impersonals are found in Russian, Ukrainian and Polish, too, while they are absent in Lithuanian (Wiemer 2006). In Russian, reflexive impersonals show the same lexical restrictions as in Belarusian, being only allowed with verbs which govern an accusative nominal expression or a prepositional phrase/subordinate clause (Fehrmann et al. 2010: 210). In Polish, they can be built from verbs of any argumental and semantic structure (intransitive unergative and unaccusative, transitive), provided the instigator is understood as being human (Wiemer *forthc.*; Fehrmann et al. 2010). In Ukrainian, the target of possible lexical input is extended to imperfective unergative (19a) and transitive verbs (19b) (Fehrmann et al. 2010: 214).

(19) Ukrainian

- a. *Tancjuvalosja* (\**namy*) *až* *do*  
 dance.PST.N.SG.REFL (\*we.INS) PRTCL until  
*ranku*  
 morning.GEN.SG  
 ‘One danced until morning’ (Fehrmann et al. 2010: 206)
- b. (*Matir’ju*) *myjet’sja* *dytynu*  
 (mother.INS.SG) wash.PRS.3SG.REFL child.ACC.SG  
 ‘The child is being washed (by the mother)’ (Fehrmann et al. 2010: 206)

As example (19b) shows, with transitive predicates, Ukrainian allows the expression of the instigator (which is blocked with intransitives). The question arises why a functionally prototypical subject is encoded as an oblique, without there being a promotion of the object to a formal subject, which would turn the sentence into a reflexive passive (19c).

(19) Ukrainian

- c. (*Matir’ju*) *myjet’sja* *dytyna*  
 mother.INS.SG wash.PRS.3SG.REFL child.NOM.SG  
 ‘The child is being washed (by the mother)’ (Fehrmann et al. 2010: 206)

I believe, that the retention (or acquisition) of the instigator phrase in the reflexive impersonal may be due to a process of contamination with the passive. The two constructions, being functionally very similar, might have also come together syntactically: the impersonal has

retained the active alignment, but, because of analogy with the passive, has also started allowing instigator phrases (cf. Seržant 2012: 26 on a similar process in participial impersonals, Section 3.4 below).

### 3.3. Participial impersonals

A further type of R-impersonals, which I term “participial impersonals” (cf. Wiemer *forthc.*) is found in all the languages under discussion here, except Russian. In these impersonals, the predicate bears the form of the non-agreeing (neuter singular) passive participle in *-n/-t* (Slavic) and *-m/-t* (Baltic) (Wiemer - Giger 2005: 11). Participial impersonals are attested in Belarusian dialects, but not in the contemporary standard language; their use is nowadays very rare (Wiemer - Giger 2005: 53). They are quite widespread in Polish, Ukrainian and Lithuanian, while they are not found in Russian (Wiemer *forthc.*; Lavine 2005; Shevelov 1969: 171).

Participial impersonals are exemplified in (20a-d). The object is in the accusative case in dialectal Belarusian, Ukrainian and Polish; in Lithuanian, it may be in the nominative or in the accusative case (the latter being a very rare option in contemporary Lithuanian; Sprau-nienė *et al.* 2015: 339-340).

(20)

- a. Dialectal Belarusian  
*Hryby* *pazbirana*  
 mushroom.ACC.PL collect.PPP.PRED.N.SG  
 ‘Mushrooms have been collected’ (Lopatina 2000: 139)
- b. Ukrainian  
*Joho peremiščeno na kafedru rosijskoji*  
 he.ACC transfer.IMP on chair.ACC.SG Russian.F.GEN.SG  
*movy*  
 language.GEN.SG  
 ‘He was transferred to the department of Russian language’ (Pugh - Press 1999: 252)
- c. Polish  
*Budowano szkołę*  
 build.IMP school.ACC.SG  
 ‘They were building a/the school’ (Kibort 2008: 265)
- d. Lithuanian

<i>Rašoma</i>	<i>laiškas</i>	<i>/laišką</i>
write.IMP	letter.NOM.SG	/letter.ACC.SG
'A letter is being written' (Ambrazas 1997: 661)		

In contemporary Polish and Ukrainian, the ending in *-o* (the former neuter singular form of the nominal declension of the participle) is restricted to the impersonal. Passive neuter participles have the ending *-e*: Polish *napisane* 'write.PPP.N.SG; written' – *napisano* 'write.IMP; one wrote'; Ukrainian *polamane* 'break.PPP.N.SG; broken' – *polamano* 'break.IMP; one broke'. In Belarusian (both standard and dialectal), the ending *-a* is retained for neuter participles used predicatively, while neuter participles used attributively have the ending *-ae* (21). In Lithuanian, the old neuter morphology has gone lost and it is retained in non-agreeing forms of adjectives and participles only.

(21) Belarusian

- a. *Užaran-ae*                      *pole*  
 plough.PPP.NOM.N.SG      field.(N)NOM.SG  
 'Ploughed field'
- b. *Pole*                              *bylo*                      *užaran-a*  
 field.(N)NOM.SG              be.PST.N.SG      plough.PPP.PRED.N.SG  
 'The field had been ploughed' (Plotnikaŭ - Antanjuk 2003: 229).<sup>13</sup>

Despite their similar structure, participial impersonals in these languages show significant syntactic and semantic differences. Their diachronic development and actual conditions of use are the object of a by now huge body of literature, to which I refer the readers (*inter alia*, Wiemer forth.; Lavine 2005, 2017; Seržant 2012; Danylenko 2005; Wiemer - Giger 2005 and references therein). Here, I will only give a very brief overview of their main characteristics.

Polish participial impersonals only allow a preterital (or conditional) interpretation. They have no aspectual restrictions on the input predicate, except with unaccusative predicates, which are only allowed if atelic/iterative (Lavine 2017: 185).<sup>14</sup> Ukrainian participial imper-

<sup>(13)</sup> Because of phonological *akan'e* (which is also represented graphically) feminine singular and neuter singular endings are homophonous.

<sup>(14)</sup> Bunčić (2018) observes that the acceptability of Polish part-IMP decreases along the degree of agentivity of the instigator, independently from the telicity of the predicate.



sonals show aspectual and actional restrictions: they are rarely formed from intransitive, transitive imperfective and atelic predicates. They can have a pluperfect, preterite, future and even resultative interpretation (Wiemer - Giger 2005: 62; Levine 2005, 2017). Lithuanian participial impersonals have no transitivity, aspectual, actional or temporal restrictions on the verbal input (Wiemer *forthc.*). As for the functional characteristics of the instigator, Polish and Lithuanian participial impersonals require it to be human – a common feature of R-impersonals (Bunčić 2018). This requirement is lifted in Ukrainian, cf. example (22).<sup>15</sup>

- (22) Ukrainian  
*Chatu*                      *bulo*                      *spaleno*  
 house.ACC.SG              be.PST.N.SG      burned.down.IMP  
 (*blyskavkoju*).  
 (lightning.INS.SG)  
 ‘The house was burned down by a strike of lightning’ (Lavine 2017: 193)

Unfortunately, probably because of their rarity, not many data are available about dialectal Belarusian participial impersonals (cf. the still valid observations in Shevelov 1969: 172) and the semantic restrictions on them.

It has been argued that the Belarusian and Ukrainian participial impersonals are a borrowing from Polish: their first attestations in Polish date back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century; in Ukrainian and Belarusian they appear around the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Wiemer *forthc.*; Moser 1998: 339-340; Shevelov 1969). Polish influence on (Middle) Belarusian and (Middle) Ukrainian was undoubtedly significant, especially during the centuries of political union in the *Rzeczpospolita*. However, Danylenko (2005) and Seržant (2012), *contra* the opinion that sees participial impersonals as a mere borrowing from Polish, argue for a shared development: several layers of language contact would have contributed to their establishment. This shared development is not exclusive to Slavic and Lithuanian: in fact, impersonals with an identi-

<sup>(15)</sup> Lithuanian *ma/ta* impersonals may have a non-human instigator, too, but they then acquire an evidential semantics (cf. Wiemer 2006), and I thus exclude them from this discussion.

cal structure are found in Finnic languages spoken in close proximity to Slavic and Baltic, such as Finnish, Estonian and Votic, and in North Russian dialects (Seržant 2012).

### 3.4. *Agented participial impersonals*

Formally, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian participial impersonals allow the expression of the instigator, coded as an instrumental in the first two languages and as a genitive in the latter. In both cases, the encoding is the same as the one of passive agents (23-25).

#### (23) Dialectal Belarusian

##### a. Agented participial impersonal

*Chatu šče dzedam*  
house.ACC.SG still grandfather.INS.SG  
*pastaŭlena*  
built.PPP.PRED.N.SG

‘The hut has still been built by grandfather’ (Wiemer - Giger 2005: 53)

##### b. Agented passive

*Lekcyja prasluchana studëntami*  
lecture.NOM.SG hear.PPP.NOM.F.SG student.INS.PL

‘The lecture is listened to by the students’ (Plotnikaŭ - Antanjuk 2003: 225)

#### (24) Ukrainian

##### a. Agented participial impersonal

*Aleožyv, jak podano jomu*  
but liven.up.PST.M when give.IMP he.DAT  
*batjuškoju ikonu*  
priest.INS.SG icon.ACC.SG

‘But he livened up, when he was given the icon by the priest’ (Wiemer - Giger 2005: 65)

##### b. Agented passive

*Pytal’nyk buv skladenyj*  
questionnaire.NOM.SG be.PST.M.SG compose.PPP.NOM.M.SG  
*mynuloho*  
last.M.GEN.SG

*roku kymos’ z instytutu*  
year.GEN.SG somebody.INS from institute.GEN

‘The questionnaire was made up by someone from the institute last year’ (Wiemer forthc.)

(25) Lithuanian

a. Agented participial impersonal

<i>Praeitą</i>	<i>naktį</i>	<i>musų</i>	<i>buvo</i>
last.ACC.F.SG	night.ACC.SG	we.GEN	be.PST.3
<i>miegota</i>	<i>blogai</i>		
sleep.IMP	badly		

‘Last night we slept badly [lit. ‘it was slept badly by us’]’ (Wiemer 2006: 277)

b. Agented passive

<i>Kitą</i>	<i>dieną</i>	<i>[jie]</i>	<i>buvo</i>
next.ACC.F.SG	day.ACC.SG	they.M.NOM	be.PST.3
<i>apklausti</i>		<i>saugumo</i>	
interrogate.PPP.M.NOM.PL		security.GEN.SG	
<i>darbuotojų.</i>			
worker.GEN.PL			

‘The next day they were interrogated by security agents’ (Spru-nienė et al.: 324)

In Polish, the expression of the agent in participial impersonals is blocked (26).

(26) Polish

<i>Znaleziono</i>	<i>niemowlę</i>	<i>w</i>	<i>koszu</i>
find.IMP	baby.ACC.SG	in	basket.LOC.SG
	<i>(*przez lekarzy)</i>		
	<i>(*by doctor.ACC.PL)</i>		

‘They found a baby in a basket (\*by the doctors)’ (Lavine 2005: 82)

Now, it is clear, that the Ukrainian, Lithuanian and (dialectal) Belarusian agented participial impersonals are not Reference impersonals, because the instigator is indeed referential. They can hardly be categorized as Animacy/Agentivity or Topicality impersonals, because the instigator must be human, it may be agentive and it may be topical/definite. Therefore, from a functional point of view, agented participial impersonals are actually neither A- nor T- nor R-impersonals. This poses a problem for the unifying approach to non-prototypical subjecthood: if this is supposed to arise as a consequence of the loss of functional properties, why then do the formally non-prototypical

instigators in agented participial impersonals show no such loss? I believe that the answer may come from the functional and morphosyntactic proximity (and common origin) of these impersonals with passives, which are also formed from the *n/t* participles in Slavic and *m/t* participles in Baltic (cf. examples above). A contamination process between canonical passive and the impersonal may presumably have taken place, whereby the impersonal has retained the active alignment but has also taken over the possibility of expressing the instigator from the passive. As Seržant (2010: 26) states, “the passive *-n/-t*-correlate did have a strong impact on the development of the active counterpart in some languages: Standard Russian borrows the agreement and subject properties from it, while Standard Ukrainian and Lithuanian overtake the agent phrase case-marking.”. The original (agentless) form of participial impersonals did indeed have a functionally and formally non-prototypical subject (for it had to be coded as zero), in accordance with the unifying approach hypothesis. The current situation, however, arisen because of analogy with the passive construction, cannot be accounted for by the unifying approach anymore: in this case, morphosyntactic impersonality (non-agreeing predicate and non-nominative subject) does not correlate with a functionally non-prototypical subject.

#### 4. *Hybrid impersonal constructions: at the intersection between A- and R-impersonals*

Some constructions cannot be defined as being exclusively A-, T- or R-impersonals, but are better defined as hybrid impersonals, because the non-prototypicality of their subjects is due to more than just one single property.<sup>16</sup>

##### 4.1. *Environmental constructions*

The so-called environmental constructions (cf. Kor Chahine – Guiraud-Weber *forthc.*) describe meteorological phenomena and phenomena linked to the environment (27; 28; 29). They are found in all languages under examination.

<sup>(16)</sup> As such, also T-IMP in Belarusian are hybrid impersonals, because, as said above, topicality alone is not enough to trigger the use of non-prototypical subjects.

- (27) Belarusian  
*Večarami, kali cjamnela, menšyja*  
 evening.INS.PL when get\_dark.PST.N.SG smaller.NOM.PL  
*dzeći isšli damoŭ.*  
 child.NOM.PL go\_away.PST.PL home  
 ‘In the evenings, when it got dark, the smaller children went home’  
 (*Belacorpus*)
- (28) Belarusian  
*U laz’ni bylo choladna*  
 In sauna.LOC.SG be.PST.N.SG cold.PRED  
 ‘In the sauna it was cold’ (*Belacorpus*)
- (29) Russian  
*V komnate pachnet jablokami.*  
 In room.LOC.SG smell.PRS.3SG apple.INS.PL  
 ‘It smells like apples in the room’ (Kor Chahine - Guiraud-Weber  
 forthc.)

The instigator here lacks all functional prototypical subject properties: it is inanimate, non-agentive, non-referential and non-topical and, in (27) and (28), it is completely absent.<sup>17</sup> As such, environmental constructions may be considered as being, at the same time, A- and R-impersonals alike.

#### 4.2. A-impersonals with generic reference

As seen in Section 2. above, Belarusian is rich in A-impersonals with a dative- or accusative-coded instigator. In some cases, the instigator, in addition to its non-agentivity, is also generic or indefinite (30a-b).

- (30) Belarusian
- a. *Pry sėnnašnim patoku*  
 at of\_today.LOC.SG flow.LOC.SG  
*infarmacyi, trėba ŭmec’*  
 information.GEN.SG must.PRED be\_able.INF  
*spynicca, skazac’ sabe “stop”.*  
 stop.INF.REFL say.INF oneself.DAT stop

<sup>(17)</sup> For a semantic and syntactic analysis of sentences such as the one in (28), cf. Guiraud-Weber (1980).

‘With the current flow of information, one must be able to take a break, to tell oneself “stop”’ (*Belacorpus*)

- b. *Saučanka dazvoliū razlikam dobra*  
 Saučanka.NOM allow.PST.M.SG crew.DAT.PL well  
*adaspacca. Dyj na*  
 rest.INF.REFL but in  
*choladze, u syrych nišach, ne*  
 coldness.LOC.SG in damp.LOC.PL hole.LOC.PL NEG  
*nadta spicca.*  
 too\_much sleep.INF.REFL  
 ‘Saučanka allowed the crew to get a good night’s sleep. But in the cold, in the damp holes, one does not sleep much’ (*Belacorpus*)

I include active transitive impersonal constructions with an obligatorily zero-coded conominal in the class of hybrid A-/R-impersonal, too (31).

- (31) *Hetman taksama byū u*  
 Hetman.NOM.SG also be.PST.M.SG in  
*vjalikaj nebjaspecy: pad im*  
 great.LOC.F.SG danger.LOC.SG under he.INS  
*zabila kanja.*  
 kill.PST.N.SG horse.ACC.SG  
 ‘The hetman also was in great danger: his horse had been killed underneath him’ (*Belacorpus*)

The instigator here is left unspecified and is non-referential, but, crucially, it is understood as non-human – just as in regular active transitive impersonals with an overt instrumental instigator (cf. 11 above). Hybrid A-/R-impersonals are found in Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian, too, cf. example (32) from Polish.

- (32) Polish  
*Habermas [...] przypomina, że nie trzeba*  
 Habermans.NOM remind.PRS.3SG COMP NEG need.PRED  
*być wierzącym by*  
 be.INF believer.INS.SG COND  
*rozumieć i akceptować przesłanie*  
 understand.INF and accept.INF message.ACC.SG  
*pisma*  
 Scripture.GEN

‘Habermas [...] reminds that it is not necessary to be a believer to understand and accept the message of the Scripture’ (NKJP)

5. Hybrid A-/T-/R-impersonals with genitive subjects

In all the languages examined in this paper non-canonical subjects may appear in the genitive case. Two main types of constructions may be distinguished: genitive independent subjects and quantified genitive subjects, headed by a numeral or a quantifier.

In the Slavic languages, genitive independent subjects occur with negated existential and unaccusative predicates (cf. Schlund 2018: 147-149) and with predicates with quantifying semantics, such as those with the prefix *na-* indicating excessive quantity, cf. examples (33a-d). In Lithuanian, in addition to the predicate types already mentioned for Slavic, non-negated unaccusative predicates with no quantifying semantics may have genitive subjects, too (34).

(33)

- a. Belarusian  
*Inšaj zbroi ne bylo.*  
 other.GEN.F.SG weapon.GEN.SG NEG be.PST.N.SG  
 ‘There was no other weapon’ (*Belacorpus*)
- b. Ukrainian  
*Ne pryjšlo vidpovidi.*  
 NEG come.PST.N.SG answer.GEN.SG  
 ‘No answer came’ (Kryshevich 2010: 12)
- c. Russian  
*Snegu navalilo!*  
 snow.GEN.SG pile\_up.PST.N.SG  
 ‘There were piles of snow!’ (Van Petenghem - Paykin 2013: 95)
- d. Polish  
*Ubyło wody w rzece.*  
 decrease.PST.3SG.N water.GEN.SG in river.LOC.SG  
 ‘There was less water in the river’ (Błaszczak 2008: 117)

(34)

- Lithuanian  
*Prašau deputatus dar kartą*  
 beg.PRS.1SG delegate.ACC.PL again time.ACC.SG  
*užsiregistruoti, nes*  
 register.INF.REFL because

*atėjo naujų deputatų*  
 arrive.PST.3 new.GEN.PL delegate.GEN.PL  
 ‘The delegates are asked to register once again, because (some) new delegates have arrived’ (DLKT)

In all the examined languages, quantifiers and some numerals<sup>18</sup> govern the genitive case of their dependent content word (Koptjevskaja-Tamm - Wälchli 2001: 659-660). In Polish and Lithuanian, such quantified genitive subjects always trigger the use of impersonal morphology (35a-b; 36).

(35) Polish

- a. *Dużo chłopców wróciło*  
 Much boy.GEN.PL come\_back.PST.N.3SG  
*zmarzniętych.*  
 frozen.GEN.PL  
 ‘Many boys came back freezing’ (Stroińska 1992: 430)
- b. *Pięćdziesiąt pięć dziewczynek zdało*  
 fifty.NOM five.NOM girl.GEN.PL pass.PST.N.3SG  
*egzamin*  
 exam.ACC.SG  
 ‘Fifty-five girls passed the exam’ (Stroińska 1992: 435)

(36) Lithuanian

*Išleista šimtai knygų.*  
 publish.IMP one\_hundred.NOM book.GEN.PL  
 ‘Hundreds of books are published’ (Ambrasas 1997: 280)

In Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian, quantified genitive subjects may both trigger the use of impersonal morphology, cf. examples (37a-c), and of agreeing personal forms, cf. examples (38 a-c).

(37)

- a. Russian  
*Prišlo tri čeloveka*  
 come.PST.N.SG three people.PAUC

<sup>(18)</sup> In Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian and Polish, numerals higher than 5 (except those ending in 1, 2, 3, 4 such as 21, 22, 23, 24 etc.) govern the genitive case of the dependent noun, cf. Belarusian *pjac’ knihaŭ* ‘five book.GEN.PL’. In Lithuanian, numerals from 10 to 19 and numerals indicating tens (10, 20, 100, 1000, etc.) govern the genitive case, cf. *dešimt vaikų* ‘ten child.GEN.PL’ (Ambrasas et al. 1995: 167).



‘Three people came’ (Malchukov - Ogawa 2011: 30)

b. Belarusian

*U vyniku aviaryi zahinula 15*  
 In result.LOC.SG accident.GEN.SG die.PST.N.SG 15  
*čalavek.*

people.GEN

‘Because of the accident, 15 people died’ (*Belacorpus*)

c. Ukrainian

*V jchn'omu vahoni pomerlo*  
 in their.LOC.M.SG wagon.LOC.SG die.PST.N.SG  
*vže šist' čolovik*

already six people.GEN

‘In their wagon already six people have died’ (*LUMC 2014*)

(38)

a. Belarusian

*U pačatku studzenja 2015*  
 At beginning.LOC.SG January.GEN 2015  
*Hoda pry nekal'kich napadach*  
 year.GEN.SG at some.LOC.PL attack.LOC.PL

*u Paryży [...] zahinuli 17 čalavek*  
 in Paris.LOC die.PST.PL 17 people.GEN

‘At the beginning of January 2015 17 people died in Paris in some attacks [...]’

(<https://www.svaboda.org/a/27860917.html>)

b. Russian

*V 1999 g. umerli 5 bolnych v*  
 In 1999 y(ear) die.PST.PL 5 ill.GEN.PL in  
*vozzraste starše 60 let.*  
 age.LOC.SG older 60 year.GEN.PL

‘In 1999, 5 ill people older than 60 died’ (NKRJa)

c. Ukrainian

*Za dobu 3 červnja v*  
 For period.ACC.SG 3 June.GEN in  
*Ukrajni zafiksuvaly 2266*  
 Ukraine.LOC.SG record.PST.PL 2266

*novych vypadkiv zachvorjuvannja*  
 new.GEN.PL case.GEN.PL infection.GEN.SG

*na COVID-19, [...], pomerli 95 chvorych.*  
 in COVID-19 die.PST.PL 95 ill.GEN.PL

‘On June 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Ukraine 2266 new cases of infection with COVID-19 were recorded [...], 95 ill people died’  
 (<<https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/06/5/7296161>>)

Malchukov - Ogawa (2011: 30) define example (37a) as a Topicality impersonal (see Section 1.1 above). However, lack of topicality (understood as “aboutness topicality” in the spirit of Lambrecht 1994) is not a sufficient criterion to determine the use of an impersonal form in Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian, as examples (38a-c) shows: the subject is non-topical, nonetheless it triggers agreement with the predicate.

I suggest to consider constructions with genitive subjects, both independent and quantified, as hybrid A-/T-/R-impersonals, and not as Topicality-impersonals, *contra* Malchukov - Ogawa 2011. Beside the lack of topicality, several other factors contribute to the functional non-prototypicality of such subjects and the consequent use of impersonal forms: indefiniteness, non-agentivity, partitivity, low individuation, non-referentiality (cf. Schlund 2018: 149ff; Borschev - Partee 2002; Corbett 1983 and references therein). I go here in the opposite direction from Magnani (2019), who subsumes animacy, agentivity, specificity and definiteness under the roof of topicality. Of course, topics do tend to be definite, individuated, referential and non-quantified: consequently, non-topics tend to be indefinite, low individuated, non-referential and quantified. However, topicality alone is not a sufficient criterion for the use of impersonal forms: therefore, I think that a classification of genitive subject constructions as hybrid A-/T-/R-impersonals is more accurate than a classification as T-impersonals *tout court*. As a matter of fact, Malchukov - Ogawa (2011: 44-45) consider T-impersonals as an “intermediate link” between A-impersonals (with which they share the prominence dimension) and R-impersonals (with which they share the dimension of discourse referentiality).

## 6. Summary

Table 2. offers a general overview of the impersonal constructions reviewed in the previous sections, categorized per encoding patterns.

	Belarusian	Russian	Ukrainian	Polish	Lithuanian
<b>Animacy/Agentivity impersonals</b>					
<b>Dative A-impersonals</b>	+	+	+	+	+
<b>Accusative A-impersonals</b>		+	+	+	+
<b>Instrumental A-impersonals</b>	+	+	+	+	+
<b>Adessive A-impersonals</b>	+	+	+	–	–
<b>Reference impersonals</b>					
<b>3PL impersonals</b>	+	+	+	+	+
<b>Participial impersonals</b>	–	–	+	+	+
	+ dialectal				
<b>Reflexive impersonals</b>	+	+	+	+	–
<b>Hybrid A-/T-/R-impersonals</b>					
<b>Environmental predicates A-impersonals with generic reference</b>	+	+	+	+	+
<b>Genitive subject impersonals</b>	+	+	+	+	+

Table 2. Impersonals in Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian: an overview

As Table 2. shows, the languages under examination show very similar structural patterns in the encoding of their impersonal constructions. These structural similarities are due to genetic closeness, as well as to a long history of co-existence among speakers of these languages, cf. the role of Polish influence in the emergence of Belarusian and Ukrainian participial impersonals (Section 4.3 above).

### 7. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to describe the form and function of impersonal constructions found in contemporary Belarusian, Russian,

Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian applying to them Malchukov - Ogawa's (2011) typological classification. Also, the paper aimed at showing that Schlund's (2018) unifying approach to impersonality, seen as a functional and formal deviation from prototypical subjecthood, is a valid explanatory tool not only for Russian, but also for Belarusian, Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian data.

There is still much that needs a more detailed analysis. First of all, in this paper, I have only briefly touched upon dialectal data, which hold significant material for the investigation of areal patterns (cf. Wiemer *forthc.*; Seržant 2012; Danylenko 2005; Shevelov 1969). Also, I have only taken into account the subject coding properties (such as nominative case and agreement on the verb), taking them as a diagnostic criterion of formal non-prototypical subjecthood, while disregarding behavioural properties. In order to formulate a complete analysis of Belarusian subjecthood, however, behavioural properties must be taken into account, too. It will then be possible to determine, following Seržant's (2013) definition, which Belarusian subjects are non-canonical subjects, with a good number of behavioural properties, and which ones are subject-like obliques, with almost no behavioural properties at all.

Finally, I have not touched upon the topic which yields, to my mind, the greatest potential for future research: namely, the discourse functions of R-impersonals and their competition with similar constructions such as passives, especially in languages such as Lithuanian and Ukrainian, where three constructions (3PL impersonal and the agentless passive) are in apparent competition. Some corpus-based studies have already been done for Lithuanian (Geniušienė 2016; Mazzitelli 2019), but I am not aware of any about Ukrainian. It has been argued, that Standard Russian 3PL-impersonal has taken over some functions of the passive (Siewierska 2011: 82); I am not aware of any works that would analyse the situation in Belarusian and Ukrainian. I hope, that this paper may inspire future research on these topics.

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*Le costruzioni impersonali in bielorusso e nelle lingue strettamente correlate:  
un resoconto tipologico e areale*

Il presente articolo discute le costruzioni impersonali del bielorusso e di quattro lingue – russo, ucraino, polacco e lituano – strettamente correlate a questo sia dal punto di vista genetico sia dal punto di vista geografico. L'articolo illustra i principali tipi di costruzioni impersonali presenti in queste lingue: costruzioni con soggetto da

tivo, accusativo e strumentale; costruzioni con soggetto indefinito alla terza persona plurale; costruzioni participiali in *-n/-t* e *-m/-t* senza accordo. Seguendo la classificazione tipologica delle costruzioni impersonali proposta da Malchukov - Ogawa (2011) e la sua applicazione al russo illustrata in Schlund (2018), l'impersonalità in queste lingue viene definita come una deviazione dalle caratteristiche prototipiche del soggetto. Tale deviazione è sia formale (mancanza di soggetto al caso nominativo; assenza di accordo sul predicato) sia funzionale (soggetto non agentivo, animato, referenziale o topicale): la non-canonicità formale del soggetto nelle costruzioni impersonali è analizzata come derivante dalla sua non-canonicità formale. L'articolo dimostra che la definizione di impersonalità come deviazione dalle caratteristiche prototipiche del soggetto si applica perfettamente a tutti i tipi di costruzioni impersonali nelle lingue analizzate. L'unica eccezione, rappresentata dalle costruzioni riflesive con agente espresso in ucraino (ucr. *mater'ju myetsja dytynu* 'il bambino (ACC) viene lavato dalla madre') e dalle costruzioni participiali con agente espresso in ucraino e bielorusso (blr. *chatu dzedam pastaŭlena* 'la casa (ACC) è stata costruita dal nonno'), viene spiegata come un caso di contaminazione sintattica dal passivo.

*Keywords:* impersonality; language contact; non-canonical subjects; linguistic typology; semantics; syntax.