Impersonal pronouns, arbitrary PRO, and Case (lessness)

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Impersonal pronouns are not syntactically uniform across languages. In this talk, I provide a case study in such variation through an investigation of the impersonal pronoun in Atchan (Kwa, Côte d'Ivoire). In addition to empirically establishing that the relevant item is indeed an impersonal pronoun, I show that it is syntactically reduced and distributionally restricted, fitting it into Fenger's (2018) typology as an NP-sized impersonal. I connect this observation about small size to larger properties of Case assignment by showing that the Atchan impersonal can occur in a select set of environments in which Case is not assigned: we thus arrive at a broader generalization that the Atchan impersonal can, but need not, receive Case. I argue that this view is consistent with the analysis of this element as structurally-reduced, on a view on which Case assignment involves addition of more syntactic structure. The analysis raises broader questions regarding commonalities between impersonals and arbitrary PRO, as well as the semantic distinctions between true impersonals and impersonal-like uses of 3PL pronouns.