
Paradigmatic structures, defectivity, and the specificity of referents

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1 German indefinite pronouns

1.1 Paradigmatic structures

In German, there are different indefinite pronouns that can be used to refer to humans. Due to their development based on masculine nouns, each of them has very specific paradigmatic properties. Most cannot mark plurals (e.g. *einer* 'one'), some have exclusively masculine singular forms (e.g. *wer* 'who' or *jemand* 'someone'). Their paradigms are therefore often classified as defective in traditional approaches (cf. e.g. Pittner 1996 and Harnisch 2009 for *wer* and Thieroff 2011, 2012 for a contrasting view), with some showing more, some less possibilities for morphological differentiation.

1.2 Specificity of referents

These differences in paradigmatic properties have been linked to certain functional-semantic properties these pronouns had in older stages of German. For example, *einer*, which has masculine (*einer*), feminine (*eine*) and neutral (*eines*) singular forms, has been used for specific referents, while *jemand*, which has only masculine singular forms, was used for non-specific referents (cf. Fobbe 2004). In these contexts, the masculine indefinite pronoun *jemand* could refer generically to persons of any (or non-specified) gender (1) while the gender-specific forms of *einer* could refer to persons of specified masculine or feminine gender (2).

In contemporary German, however, these indefinite pronouns can be used for different degrees of specificity (cf. Haspelmath 1997). *Jemand*, for example, can also be found in contexts of specific reference (3). This increasingly dissolves the clear functional boundaries. When referring specifically to female referents, there are issues with the genericity of the masculine form *jemand*, which can be observed, for example, in varying agreement forms (3). For contexts like these, there are already some metalinguistic descriptions that classify them as being syntactically or pragmatically conspicuous (e.g. Kotthoff & Nübling 2018).

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|-----|--------------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------------|------------|----------------|
| (1) | <i>Kann</i> | <i>mir</i> | <i>bitte</i> | <i>jemand</i> | | <i>helfen?</i> |
| | can | me | please | someone.M.SG | | help |
| | 'Can someone help me, please?' | | | | | |
| (2) | <i>Da</i> | <i>ist</i> | <i>ein-e,</i> | <i>die</i> | <i>ich</i> | <i>kenne.</i> |
| | there | is | one- F.SG | who.F.SG | I | know |
| | 'There's one I know.' | | | | | |
| (3) | <i>Da</i> | <i>ist</i> | <i>jemand,</i> | <i>der/?die</i> | <i>ich</i> | <i>kenne.</i> |
| | there | is | someone.M.SG | who.M.SG /?who.F.SG | I | know |
| | 'There's someone I know.' | | | | | |

So far, there has been no comprehensive empirical study of the degrees of specificity of different indefinite pronouns in contemporary German or of the frequency or acceptability of these new functional-semantic contexts.

3 Theoretical framework

The special paradigmatic properties of indefinite pronouns as well as the functional-semantic properties linked to them offer an interesting testing ground for contemporary approaches to

defectiveness. Based on Sims (2015: 26), a defective paradigm can be defined as one that lacks a cell for a morphosyntactic or morphosemantic feature F, although this feature is defined for other representatives of this part of speech. Sims (2015) assumes that even though there are syntactic structures that would demand F, these structures would become ungrammatical when the corresponding lexeme from the defective paradigm was inserted.

On my poster, I will expand this concept from syntactic structures to reference semantic structures. By this definition, both indefinite pronouns would not be classified as defective in their original functional distribution. In older stages of German, they exhibited a strong degree of specialization in restricted contexts. *Jemand* prototypically occurred only in contexts where it refers generically to non-gender-specified referents via a masculine form. Thus, the feature FEMININE and PLURAL were not required. *Einer* referred to individual specific referents only. Therefore, the feature PLURAL was not required.

However, if *jemand* and *einer* do actually occur with new functional-semantic properties in contemporary German, this can affect their degree of defectivity according to the definition based on Sims (2015). This applies in particular for the feature FEMININE, for which the paradigm of *jemand* does not provide a distinct form, but which needs to be particularly expressed in contexts with reference to specifically female persons, as in (4).

(4) *Ich kenne jemanden, der/die dir helfen kann: Lea.*
I know someone.M.SG who.M.SG /?who.F.SG you help can Lea (name)
'I know someone who can help you: Lea.'

In these contexts, other features may be required which are not provided by the paradigms. In this case, the distinct feminine form of *jemand* is missing. The varying agreement forms of *jemand* as well as the metalinguistic discussion on the phenomenon, indicate that the masculine forms cannot necessarily be classified as grammatical in the corresponding contexts. The expansion of functional-semantic properties could thus be accompanied by an expansion of defectivity.

3 Empirical data

The poster is based on a contrastive analysis in the corpus *Mode- und Beauty-Blogs* 'fashion and beauty-blogs' which can be accessed via dwds.de. The corpus contains informal written language data of contemporary German. Given the nature of the data, one can expect innovative grammatical structures.

In this corpus, evidence for *jemand* and *einer* is analysed, with forms of all genders referring to people. In order to analyse similar contexts and to gain information on varying agreement forms, only contexts with *jemand* or *einer/eine/eines* followed by a relative pronoun (as in (3) and (4)) have been examined. The degree of specificity is classified for each context. It is determined whether the indefinite pronouns refer to a specific or a non-specific referent. For specific referents, the social gender was identified in order to make statements about the need for the feature FEMININE. This allows us to determine the extent to which the original functional spectrums of *jemand* and of *einer* have expanded and provides an empirical base for the theoretical discussion on the degree of defectivity of the two indefinite pronouns.

The data indicate that the functional boundaries separating *einer* and *jemand* are increasingly dissolved in contemporary German: Both *einer* and *jemand* can be used with specific as well as non-specific reference. However, differences in the frequency of the functions are still evident. With *jemand*, non-specific reference is clearly more frequent than with *einer*. The empirical data show that the two indefinite pronouns undergo a process of functional expansion which is yet to be completed.

4 Aim of the poster

On the poster, I will compare the German indefinite pronouns *einer* and *jemand*. First, a brief overview concerning their paradigmatic properties will be given followed by a discussion of their defectivity based on previous and contemporary definitions of the notion. Afterwards, I will compare the degrees of specificity of *einer* and *jemand* based on the corpus analysis in order to discuss the interaction between defectivity and specificity in the data. I will also discuss indications of the word forms being classified as ungrammatical in certain contexts. The poster thus provides an insight into the interaction of paradigmatic structures and functional-semantic properties as the specificity of referents.

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