Indefinite pronouns: A review of Haspelmath (1997)

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for *Linguistic Typology*

Martin Haspelmath: *Indefinite Pronouns*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997.
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This is an important book. It deals with the formal and semantic properties of indefinite pronouns, a wide-spread linguistic category whose elements often show quite complex distributional patterns, as can be seen from the examples in (1) involving English *someone* and *anyone*.

(1) a. *Someone once said that anything goes*
b. **Yesterday I saw anything from my window*
c. ?*Nobody loves someone*

Certain properties of indefinite pronouns have received considerable attention in the literature. For instance, negative polarity indefinites such as English *any* constitute the focus of the bulk of the literature on negative polarity items, the fact notwithstanding that Klima in his seminal 1964 paper did not fail to show that members of other syntactic and semantic categories may be restricted to negative contexts in comparable ways (van der Wouden 1997). This new book, however, a thoroughly revised edition of the author's F.U. Berlin dissertation (Haspelmath 1993), is the first one to aim at a comprehensive overview of the properties of indefinite pronouns across languages – and it does a very fine job indeed.[1]

The volume contains XVI plus 264 pages, including two appendices, almost twenty pages of references, as well as indexes of languages, authors and subjects. The approach chosen is primarily typological, which is evident from the chapters' titles: 1. Overview 2. A Typological Perspective on Indefinite Pronouns 3. Formal and Functional Types of Indefinite Pronouns 4. An Implicational Map for Indefinite Pronoun Functions 5. Theoretical Approaches to the Functions of Indefinite Pronouns 6. The Grammaticalization of Indefinite Pronouns 7. Further Sources of Indefinite Pronouns 8. Negative Indefinite Pronouns 9. Conclusions. Extensive data concerning a 40 language sample, biased towards European languages due to limitations on the availability of data, are given

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[1]Next to indefinite pronouns, as discussed in Haspelmath's book, other types of indefinite expressions, such as indefinite noun phrases, have been the focus of study as well. Diesing (1992) is one of a number of studies dealing with the interpretation of indefinites in relation to their structural position.

in Appendix A, Appendix B lists some important aspects of indefinite pronouns in a 100 language sample with much less geographical or typological bias. As is observed throughout the book, typological breadth necessarily implies some loss of depth in the description of individual languages – we will return to some of the consequences of this fact.

According to page 1, the book's major original contributions are a large-scale cross-linguistic study of indefinite pronouns and a detailed investigation of the diachronic sources of the markers of indefinite pronouns. I would like to add that it gives a thorough overview of the theoretical issues in indefinite pronoun research as well.

The diachronic sources of indefinite pronouns are split in two groups: four types are dealt with in Chapter 6 on grammaticalization, various other types are discussed in Chapter 7. Chapter 6 features the 'dunno'-type (e.g. Middle High German *neizwer* 'nobody' < *ne weiz wer* '(I) don't know who'), the 'want/please'-type (e.g. Latin *qui-vis* 'anybody' < *qui* + *vis* 'you want'), the 'it may be'-type (e.g. French *qui que ce soit* 'anyone' < 'whoever it may be'), and the *no matter who*-type (e.g. French *n'importe qui* 'anyone' where *il n'importe* (*pas*) = 'it does not matter'). Chapter 7 covers 'indefinite pronouns marked by scalar focus particles (e.g. Japanese *nani-mo* 'nothing' < *-mo* 'also' and Dutch *ook maar iemand* 'anybody' (cf. below) < *iemand* 'someone' + *ook maar* 'even, at least'), the possibility of infinite pronouns derived from *or* (which is argued against), 'bare interrogatives as indefinites' (e.g. Classical Greek *tis* and Hopi *hak* 'who, someone'), 'indefinite pronouns derived by reduplication' (e.g. Latin *quisquis* 'anybody, whoever' < *quis* 'who' and Vietnamese *ai ai* 'anybody, everybody' < *ai* 'who') as well as some minor categories. As far as I can see, the main reason for this split into two groups is that grammaticalization theory cannot explain the form-meaning relation in the latter types as easily as in the former. This may be caused by the fact that all indefinite pronouns discussed in Chapter 6 have a clear phrasal origine, whereas this is not the case with the items discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 4 presents the principal typological generalization emerging from the data of the 40 language sample, and that is what this review will concentrate on. Edmondson (1983) already proposed the implicational scale in (2) in order to account for the distribution of negative polarity auxiliaries such as English (uninflected) *need*, German *brauchen* 'need' and Mandarin *yong* 'need':

(2) negatives > interrogatives > conditionals > comparatives

The prediction is that if a polarized auxiliary may felicitously occur in some category, it will also be found in any of the categories to the left of it.[2]

Haspelmath replaces one-dimensional hierarchical structures such as the one in (2) by two-dimensional ones, so-called implicational maps. The general form of such a map for indefinite pronouns is given in (3) (Fig. 4.4 on p. 64):

[2]A counterexample to Edmondson's generalization is the Dutch modal auxiliary verb *hoeven* 'need', which is acceptable with negation for all speakers from the Netherlands (for most Belgian speakers of Dutch, *hoeven* is virtually non-existent), with interrogatives for some speakers, in conditional constructions for none, but with comparatives for many (van der Wouden 1996a; van der Wouden 1996b). Haspelmath does not speak about polarized auxiliaries but note that the distribution of *hoeven* fits quite well into his implicational maps.

(3) **Insert Fig. 4.4 on p. 64 here**

Haspelmath claims that the categories in (3) are relevant for the distribution of all indefinite pronouns he studied in all languages from his samples. He moreover claims that indefinite systems share the following properties cross-linguistically: if an indefinite occurs in more than one of the categories in the map, the categories are adjacent. Consider, for example, English, depicted in (4) (Fig. A.3 on page 249):

(4) **Insert Fig. A.3 on page 249 here**

The *no*-series of English (*nobody, nowhere* etc.) is restricted to the upper rightmost category, direct negation; the *some*-series is only found at the left, in the categories 1 through 5; indefinite pronouns containing *any* are found to the right in 4 through 9, whereas *ever* lacks a free choice reading, and thus lives in the categories 4–7 and 9.[3] As all these elements inhabit parts of the map that are connected, they are possible indefinites; impossible are, e.g., indefinite pronouns that only occur in conditionals and free-choice contexts.

This is a very interesting result. It is, however, not unproblematic – although I didn't find any counterexamples so far. It should, however, be noted first that category 9, direct negation, is used ambiguously. Consider English: both the *no*-series and the *any*-series occur in that type of contexts or functions:

(5) a. *Nobody could travel to the Caucasus that year*

b. *I don't know anything about Lezgian*

[3] Apparently, fossilized and highly idiomatic usages of *ever* as in *for ever and ever* and *ever the innovator, Larry beta-tests the Personal Belt Buckle Assistant* (Andy Rathbone: *Windows 95 for Dummies*, p.293) are not taken into consideration, although one might think of a connection with free choice usage.

There is, however, a considerable difference between these two examples, at least from a traditional perspective: whereas *no*-elements such as *nobody* create a direct negation reading, i.e., they express negation all by themselves, *any*-elements like *anything* occur in, or are triggered (Klima 1964) or licensed (Ladusaw 1979) by direct negation contexts. In Chapter 8 on Negative Indefinite Pronouns, Haspelmath shows that such a strict dichotomy is untenable cross-linguistically. For speakers of languages such as English, however, there is a crucial intuitive difference between the two examples in (5), which is not accounted for by categorizing both cases as "direct negation".

Secondly, other categories are sometimes problematic as well. It is observed (pp. 80–81) that indirect negation can be subdivided in at least two functions: implicit negation, i.e., with expressions such as *without* and *lack*, and superordinate negation, i.e., negation from within a higher clause.[4] It is shown that German *jeder* and Latvian *jeb WH* behave differently in these two contexts (6–7).

(6) German

a. *ohne jede Vorwarnung*
without INDEF warning
'without any warning'

b. **Es ist nicht nötig, dass jeder kommt*
It is not necessary, that anybody comes

(7) Latvian

a. *Trūka jeb-kāda ēdamā*
lack INDEF-which food
'Any food is lacking'

b. **Es nedomāju, ka jeb kas atnāks*
I not:think that INDEF who came
'I don't think that anybody came'

But that cannot be the whole story either. Haspelmath does not discuss weak negative quantifiers such as *few* and *hardly*, although indefinite pronouns like English *any* are fine in these contexts, so they should be characterized as either direct or indirect negation.

(8) a. *Few members of the House saw any reason for impeachment*

b. *There is hardly any food left*

And whichever option one chooses, Dutch *ook maar* (*iets*) 'anything (at all)', is problematic, as it is found with direct negation (9a), in *without*-clauses (9b), with superordinate negation (9c), but not with weak negatives (9d) or adjacent to sentential negation (9e) (cf. below):

[4]Note that it depends on the intervening verb whether or not a matrix negation may reach into a subordinate clause, as Dutch *ook maar* (*iets*) 'anything (at all)' shows: *niemand gelooft dat Martin ook maar iets gedaan heeft* 'nobody believes that Martin did anything at all', with the negative raising predicate *geloven 'believe', is fine, but* *niemand weet dat Martin ook maar iets gedaan heeft, *with factive* weten *'know' is ungrammatical. Cf. van der Wouden (1995).*

(9) a. *Hij heeft nooit ook maar iets van Joyce gelezen*
He has never INDEF INDEF of Joyce read
'He never read anything by Joyce'

b. *Zonder ook maar iets te zeggen liep hij weg*
Without INDEF INDEF to say walked he away
'He walked away without saying anything'

c. *Ik denk niet dat hij ook maar iets van het Ket weet*
I don't think that he INDEF INDEF of the Ket knows
'I don't think he knows anything about Ket'

d. *Hij weet nauwelijks (*ook maar) iets van het Ket*
He knows hardly INDEF INDEF of the Ket
'He hardly knows anything about Ket'

e. **Hij heeft niet ook maar iets van Joyce gelezen*
He has not INDEF INDEF of Joyce read

Haspelmath's type of analysis is too coarse-grained to account in a straight-forward way for this kind of distributional pattern, which has been reported for certain indefinite pronouns in Korean and Japanese (Nam 1994) and Hindi (Vasishth 1997) as well.[5]

As Haspelmath points out himself (p. 81 ff.), the question category in the implicational map refers to polar questions only, but certain indefinite pronouns are found in WH-questions as well. This suggests that this category might have to be split or that the implicational map has to be extended. It has, moreover, been reported for English and Serbo-Croatian that certain indefinites yield better results in rhetorical questions than in other questions (Progovac 1994). This perhaps asks for another split: "It appears that ordinary parametric questions must be situated to the left of the 'question' function of the map, perhaps just coinciding with the 'irrealis-nonspecific' function, whereas rhetorical parametric questions must be close to the indirect-negation function, perhaps just coinciding with the 'question' function." (p.81). Lakoff (1970) reports that certain negative polarity items are fine in conditionals used as threats but much worse in conditionals used as promises. The same appears to hold for the Dutch *ook maar* (*iets*) indefinite (van der Wouden 1997):

(10) a. *Als je ook maar iets fout doet dan ontsla ik je*
If you INDEF wrong do then fire I you
'If you do anything wrong I'll fire you'

b. *?Als je ook maar iets goed doet dan beloon ik je*
If you INDEF right do then reward I you
'If you do anything right I'll reward you.

[5] Another contrast which is hard to explain in terms of Haspelmath's implicational maps is the one between relative clauses of various kinds: NPI-indefinites such as *any* are fine in relatives headed dependent on universally quantified NP's such as *Everybody who knows anything about syntax can explain verb raising* but much worse in the case of existential quantification: **Somebody who knows anything about syntax can explain verb raising*. In Ladusaw's system, however, the contrast follows straightforwardly from the fact that the first argument of a universal quantifier is downward entailing, whereas that of a existential is not. Cf. Zwarts (1983).

This might ask for yet another split. It is an open question whether the categories in Haspelmath's implicational map can be subdivided and/or multiplied in such a way that they can account for the subtle distibutional facts involving indefinite pronouns, while preserving the main generalization that indefinite pronouns only live in connected areas on the map. Perhaps two dimensions will turn out to be too little. I cannot think of any principled argument against three-dimensional (or even multi-dimensional) implicational maps, but linguists will have an even harder task in grasping the complex distributional patterns of indefinite pronouns in the languages of the world, let alone representing them.

Another crucial question hardly touched in the book (or anywhere else) is why indefinite pronouns are sensitive to the boundaries between the various areas on the implicational map, and not, say, for other grammatical properties such as past tense or telicity. Haspelmath does, however, try to offer an explanation for the topography of his implicational maps. Essentially, the relations between the various areas are founded on four binary features: "known to the speaker vs. unknown to the speaker", "specific vs. non-specific", "scalar endpoint vs. no scalar end-point" and "in scope of negation vs. not in scope of negation". An additional feature, "endpoint on non-reversed scale vs. endpoint on reversed scale" applies to functions with the feature value "scalar endpoint" only. Note that Haspelmath departs from the influential formal tradition of Ladusaw (1979) to try to reduce scalar phenomena to the semantic property of downward monotonicity and related notions such as anti-additivity (Zwarts 1998; van der Wouden 1997) and non-veridicality (Zwarts 1995; Giannakidou 1998), but rather returns to the more pragmatic approach of Fauconnier (e.g. his 1975) (cf. also Israel (1998)).

Now for some minor quibbles. As regards Dutch, my native language, I dare to disagree with the presentation in Appendix 1 (pp. 246–248). Haspelmath presents the inventory of indefinite pronouns in Dutch as in (11):

(11)

	interrogative	*iets*-series	*dan ook*-series	*niets*-series
person	*wie*	*iemand*	*wie dan ook*	*niemand*
thing	*wat*	*iets*	*wat dan ook*	*niets*
place	*waar*	*ergens*	*waar dan ook*	*nergens*
time	*wanneer*	*ooit*	*wanneer dan ook*	*nooit*
manner	*hoe*		*hoe dan ook*	
determiner	*welke*	*een*	*welke dan ook*	*geen*

to which Haspelmath adds, correctly, that the *WH dan ook* series has the alternatives *WH ook* and *WH ook maar*, and that *wat* may replace *iets* in colloquial speech (cf. also Postma (1994)). Missing from this listing is the infamous *ook maar iets* series, already exemplified in (9) and (10), and discussed extensively in the literature (e.g. Paardekooper (1979), Zwarts (1981), Vandeweghe (1981), Hoeksema (1983), and recently Rullmann & Hoeksema (1997)).[6] Above I argued that the distribution of *ook maar*-series does not happily fit in Haspelmath's system, and according to my and other

[6]The claim that the indefinite determiner *enig* 'any' is the only member of its series (p. 246) isn't completely correct either: it is also part of morphologically complex indefinite pronouns such as *enigermate* 'to some extent', *enigszins* 'somewhat; at all, in any way, ever', and *enigerlei* 'of some kind', which itself is also member of yet another series of indefinite expressions ending in *lei*: *velerlei* 'of many kinds, various', *generlei* 'of no kind', etc. We might also mention *ene* which is used in specific unknown contexts (*ene Pietersen heeft opgebeld* 'some Pietersen guy called') and with direct negation (*het interesseert me geen ene moer* 'it interests me no one nut, i.e., I don't give a damn', among others, and complex free choice indefinites of the form *eender WH*, found mainly in Belgian variants of Dutch.

native speakers' intuitions, the distribution of *WH dan ook* is more restricted than Haspelmath suggests: the examples of this indefinite in irrealis non-specific contexts (repeated as (12) below; the alternative with *iets* is fine) and in questions (13) (fine with *iemand*) are unacceptable:

(12) a. **Koop wat dan ook voor haar verjaardag*
'Buy something for her birthday'

b. *Koop iets voor haar verjaardag*
'Buy something for her birthday'

(13) a. **Zou er nog wie dan ook komen?*
Would there yet INDEF come?

b. *Zou er nog iemand komen?*
Would there yet anybody come?
'Will anybody else come?'

Moreover, it is not true that "[i]n the comparative and the free-choice functions, only the *dan ook*-series is possible", as the alternatives below show (14):

(14) a. *De jongen loopt harder dan wie dan ook in zijn klas* (247: A15)
'The boy runs faster than anyone in his class'

b. *De jongen loopt harder dan ook maar iemand in zijn klas*
'The boy runs faster than anyone in his class'

c. *De jongen loopt harder dan iemand in zijn klas*
'The boy runs faster than someone/anyone[7] in his class'

(15) a. *Je mag wie dan ook uitnodigen* (247: A16)
'You may invite anyone'

b. *Je mag iemand uitnodigen*
'You may invite anyone/someone (guess who/I don't care who)'

Let me finish this review with pointing at a few methodological weaknesses of this kind of approaches. Even large reference grammars often pay very little, if any, attention to the functional properties of indefinite pronouns (p. 13), and in smaller grammars these elements are often ignored altogether. This partly explains the bias in the 40 language example mentioned earlier. Moreover, indefinite pronouns can be quite subtle things, and if a grammatical description is not completely unambiguous, misunderstandings may occur – as is, I assume, the case with the Dutch sentences in (12–13): sentence (13b) is in Geerts *et al.* (1984), Haspelmath's source, and the title of the section in which it occurs lists a number of indefinite pronouns, so the non-native researcher may easily

[7] If *iemand* is stressed, most speakers get the *any*-reading, i.e., 'no-one in his class runs faster than this boy'; with unstressed *iemand*, the *some*-reading is preferred: 'at least someone runs less fast than the boy'. In general, the role of intonation on the interpretation of indefinite pronouns – on which, e.g., Giannakidou (1998) – remains somewhat underexposed in Haspelmath's book.

be led to the conclusion that any of these can be plugged in any of the examples, but that is not the case.[8]

Another serious problem with the usage of grammars as one's source of language data is that they are often more or less prescriptive in nature. Let me illustrate this once again with a Dutch example. On p. 247 Haspelmath writes "As in German and English, only one negative per clause is used in the standard language unless multiple negation is intended." This is only true for the written language: in colloquial spoken Dutch, both sentences in (16) are fine:[9]

(16) a. *Niemand vertelt me ooit iets*
Nobody tells me ever anything
'Nobody ever tells me anything'

b. *Niemand vertelt me nooit niks*
Nobody tells me never nothing
'Nobody ever tells me anything (at all)'

As the glosses show, however, there is a slight meaning difference between the two variants: in (16b), the negativity of the clause is stressed. In other words, it is a case of emphatic double negation, a phenomenon also known from colloquial variants of other languages as well (Jespersen 1917). With Horn (1989) we can try to explain the emphatic effect of the multiple negation from Gricean maxims: both speaker and hearer know that both variants of (16) are possible utterances of the language, (16a) being the unmarked variant (both morphologically and according to the standard taught at school). If the speaker nevertheless uses (16b), the hearer will know that the speaker chose a marked variant, and (s)he will suspect this is done on purpose. Putting emphasis on the negative aspect of the utterance is one of the obvious possible interpretations. In an ideal book on this topic, this colloquial variant of Dutch (and other languages) would have been treated alongside the "standard" variant of the language.

To conclude: Haspelmath's is a very interesting and important book. It offers many new data and many new insights. It is, however, perfectly clear that the book, like other important scholarly works, is not so much the culmination of research, but rather a starting point.

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[8] This was apparently missed by the "Dozens of native speakers and linguists", including various Dutch linguists mentioned by name who, according to his acknowledgements, helped Haspelmath.

[9] *Niks* 'nothing' is the colloquial variant of *niets*.

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