The Function of Indefinite Pronouns in English and Kurdish Language
(A Comparative Study)

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Abstract:

This paper is devoted to the discussion of indefinite pronoun constructions in English and Kurdish languages; it mainly focuses on a syntactic account of the functions of compound indefinite pronouns in both languages. The indefinite pronouns have played a central role in these languages because they can be used for expressing an indefinite reference, they do not refer to an identifiable person or thing. However, these pronouns have been paid little attention theoretically, especially in Kurdish language. The comparison of the functions of indefinite pronouns in English and Kurdish languages seems to be intrinsically interesting because many similarities and differences of the indefinite pronouns of these languages may prevail. Thus, the paper aims to find the functional relationship of indefinite pronouns in these two languages from the syntactic perspective. The results of the paper show that in spite of having some functional similarities, many distinctions can be found between the indefinite pronouns of English and Kurdish languages.

Key words: *Compound indefinite pronouns, syntactic functions, English language, Kurdish language, and modification*

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Introduction:

The category of indefiniteness can be expressed through many devices, one of which is the indefinite pronouns. The indefinite pronouns incorporate a group of pronouns referring to someone or something whose identity may not be known to the speaker or hearer. These pronouns require a specific syntactic treatment because of their special formation and behavior. For the ease of analysis, these pronouns have been divided into *some* –series, *any*– series, *every*–series, and *no*–series. Thus, this paper handles the compound indefinite pronouns in English and Kurdish languages, but it is restricted to the syntactic functions of these pronouns. However, some semantic hints of these pronouns have been mentioned since they were inevitable. The other accounts of the indefinite pronouns lie outside the scope of this paper.

The paper has been outlined in this way. Section one presents a brief theoretical prelude of the indefinite pronouns including their important features. Section two investigates the syntactic function of the compound indefinite pronouns in English language including subject, subject complement, direct object, indirect object, prepositional complement and determinative function. The third section discusses the syntactic function of the compound indefinite pronouns in Kurdish language including subject, subject replacement, nihad, complement of noun, object, indirect object, and complement of auxiliary verb. The last section contains the main concluding points that have been drawn from the research paper.

1. A Theoretical Overview on the Indefinite Pronouns

The pronouns are words that comprise a small set in the closed-class of word forms in the English language. The pronouns appear to be crucially important because they provide the function of substitution in a sentence. Thus, they are used to avoid repetition. There exist various types of pronouns, such as personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns, reciprocal pronouns, indefinite pronouns, etc. The main task of the present study is to discuss the indefinite pronouns. According to the idea of Crystal (2003: 230) and Matthews (2007: 188), the indefinite pronouns include a subclass of pronouns having no specific identifiable reference; they lack the feature of definiteness. Apparently, these pronouns do not refer to a specific individual or antecedent which is previously mentioned in a context. Thus, what they express is an indefinite reference.

Basically the indefinite pronouns fall into some types, Quirk et al. (1985: 376) believe that they are categorized into two main classes; they are compound indefinite pronouns and of-structure indefinite pronouns. However, the main concern of the present study is the compound ones. Morphologically, the compound indefinite pronouns are composed of two separate morphemes; they include a determiner morpheme, such as *some -, any -, every -,* and *no -* ([1]), as well as a nominal morpheme, such as - *one, -body,* and - *thing*. Generally, these sorts of indefinite pronouns are regular in their morphological structure because they are written as one word; the only irregularity can be seen in *no one* which is written as two words.

It is believed that these compound indefinite pronouns have been derived from the generic nouns, but this kind of change existed after passing a long period of time. Haspelmath (1997: 28) is of the opinion that the generic nouns as *person, thing*, etc. give rise to the existence of indefinite pronouns. In fact, the diachronic process in which the generic nouns have acquired the property of indefiniteness appears to be quite obvious. Firstly, the generic ontological-category nouns were used alone, then they have been combined with the indefiniteness markers, such as *some -, any -, every -,* and *no –* to qualify them as real indefinite pronouns. Gradually, they acquired the morphological and syntactic features so as to set off the

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([1]) They are also known as the indefiniteness markers (Haspelmath, 1997: 23).

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indefinite pronouns as in (1a) from the indefinite nouns as in (1b). (See also Lyons, 1999: 150)

(1)   a. Someone called the police officer last yesterday.

b. Some people called the police officer yesterday.

The indefinite pronouns can be characterized by some features; the following are the most important ones:

1-The indefinite pronouns have an indefinite meaning because they do not refer to a specific person or thing. It is unknown who and what is talked about and no referent may be already present in the context, they stand for persons or things in general. Thus, these pronouns are regarded as a flexible means that refer to any sort of virtual reality (Langacker, 2008: 313).

2-The indefinite pronouns are quantitative because they express the meaning of an amount of something or non-specific quantity (Leech et al., 2001: 441). Owing to the fact that the quantifiers *some, any, every,* and *no* participate in the structure of indefinite pronouns, they are realized to be the determiner morpheme in these pronouns; they preserve their quantificational meaning in the formation of the indefinite pronouns.

3-In English language, the modification of indefinite pronouns seems quite different from the modification of nouns. Larson and Yamakido (2008: 61-62) state that the adjectives should occur pre-nominally as they modify nouns, but they should occur post-nominally as they modify the indefinite pronouns.

(2)   a. This is a charming garden.

b. *This is a garden charming.

(3)   a. The food is something delicious.

b. *The food is delicious something.

Sentence (2a) indicates that the attributive adjectives modifying a noun occur in the pre-nominal position, not in the post-nominal position (2b). Conversely, the adjectives modifying the indefinite pronouns occur in the post-nominal position (3a), not in the pre-nominal position (3b). (See also Larson and Marusic, 2004: 45)

4-The indefinite pronouns are gender-neutral because they neither show nor imply any kind of sex to the referent. These pronouns fall into two types; they are personal and non-personal, the indefinite pronouns with personal reference are unmarked for sex whereas the indefinite pronouns with non-personal reference have nothing to do with human being. Thus, the distinction of sex among the indefinites is neutralized (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973: 109).

When the indefinite pronouns are replaced by the sex-inclusive pronouns, the substitute is not agreed upon. Firstly, these indefinite pronouns are treated as singular because they require the singular form of the verb. However, there is no sex-neutral third person singular pronoun in English. This issue is solved in this way, the indefinite pronouns can be substituted by either unmarked *they*, *he*, or *he-she* although it is not very satisfactory (Celce-Murcia and Larcen-Freeman, 1999: 306).

(4)   a. Everyone sends his children to school.

b. Everyone sends his or her children to school.

c. Everyone sends their children to school.

It is believed that the pronoun *they* is an appropriate way for avoiding the issue of coordinating *he or she* and unmarked *he*. Besides, this indefinite pronoun incorporates notional plurality as the collection of many individuals.

5-The indefinite pronouns contain positive indefinites and negative indefinites. Leech and Svartvic (1994: 374) think that the positive indefinite pronouns such as *someone, somebody, something, everyone, everybody,* and *everything* occur in positive sentences, but *no one, nobody, nothing, anyone, anybody,* and *anything* occur in negative sentences. Actually, *no-*indefinites can negate the sentence without *not*.

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2. The function of Indefinite Pronouns in English language
The syntactic function of the indefinite pronouns is related to the role performed by the indefinite pronouns in the context of a sentence. Due to occurring in the position of nouns, these pronouns perform various syntactic functions.

2.1 Subject
The subject is considered as a syntactic element that typically functions as agent, it can also be affected by the action of the verb. Leech et al. (2001: 215) state that when the indefinite pronouns occur in the subject position, they perform the function of the subject in the sentence. All the types of indefinite pronouns, such as *some*-series, *any*-series, *every*-series, and *no*-series can perform this role.
(5)   a. Everyone can attend the conference.
      b. Nobody stayed at home.

2.2 Subject Complement
This type of complement incorporates a word, phrase or a clause that follows an auxiliary or linking verb; it belongs to and modifies the subject of a sentence. The indefinite pronouns can occur in that position and they perform the function of subject complement (Alexander, 1996: 87).
(6)   a. There should be something in John's eyes.
      b. The fisher is someone active.

2.3 Direct Object
The direct object is a syntactic element that follows the verb constituent as it is transitive. It typically includes a person or thing which is affected by the action of the main verb. In case of occurring with di-transitive verbs, the direct object follows the indirect object. The indefinite pronouns can perform the role of direct object since all the types of these pronouns occur with transitive verbs (Leech et al., 2001: 215).
(7)   a. The students met nobody in the library.
      b. The housekeeper gave the beggar something to eat.

2.4 Indirect object
This type of object co-occurs with a main verb on the condition that the verb is di-transitive. The indirect object is an entity which typically performs the role of recipient or beneficiary. The indefinite pronouns can occur with the di-transitive verbs and they perform the function of indirect object (Ibid: 215). However, it seems odd for the –*thing* related indefinite pronouns to have the role of indirect object because they are impersonal and it is not possible for them to be recipient.
(8)   The head offered everybody some gifts.

2.5 Prepositional Complement
This complement belongs to a syntactic element that follows a preposition so as to complete its meaning. A prepositional phrase is made up of a preposition which is the head of the phrase and it is followed by another element functioning as a prepositional complement. The indefinite pronouns perform the role of a prepositional complement because they occur after a preposition (Haspelmath, 1997: 67).
(9)   Allen did not get a response from anyone.

2.6 Determinative
This term can be applied to the grammatical function of words and phrases that determine the type of reference of a noun. This function is performed by various classes of determiners as well as genitive inflection (Quirk et al., 1985: 64, 336). The indefinite pronouns –*one* and –*body* perform the determinative function because they can be inflected with genitive –*s*.

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However, -*thing* indefinite pronouns do not have this function because only people and animate beings contain the feature of possessive.

(10)   The officer put someone's passport on the table.

3. The Function of Indefinite Pronouns in Kurdish Language

In Kurdish language, the indefinite pronouns incorporate these pronouns that can be used on behalf of the name of a person, an animal, or anything else. However, it is not obvious to whom these pronouns refer because they belong to non-specific person or thing. According to the idea of Amedi (1987: 264), the indefinite pronouns in Kurdish are classified into two main groups; they are simple indefinite pronouns, such as *flan, fisar, wanêk, kesêk, yekêk, herama,* etc. and compound indefinite pronouns, such as *flan kes, flan şt, her kesêk, her ştêk, hemû ştêk, hemû kesêk,* etc. These pronouns perform a wide variety of functions in Kurdish language.

3.1 Subject

The subject is an essential part of a sentence that includes a person or thing performing the role of the doer of an action. Amedi (1987: 265) believes that various types of indefinite pronouns in Kurdish can occur in the subject position and they perform the syntactic function of the subject because they play the role of the doer of an action.

(11)   Flan kes nani xuard.   (Someone ate a piece of bread.)

3.2 Nihad ([2])

The grammatical function of nihad includes these words which cannot perform the action of the verb, but something is attributed to them. This type of function exists in a sentence when there exists an auxiliary verb *be* in a sentence. The indefinite pronouns perform the function of nihad as they occur with these types of verbs (Xoşnaw, 2012: 53, 76).

(12)   Hemû ştêk azade.   (Everything is free).

3.3 Subject Replacement

The subject replacement is a word which is not the real subject of a sentence, but it has been used on behalf of the subject in a passive sentence. The main verb of the sentence having the subject replacement should be transitive. The indefinite pronouns have the function of replacing subject as they can be followed by transitive verbs (Ibid: 53, 76).

(13)   Hic ştêk nabistrêt.   (Nothing is heard).

3.4 Complement of Noun

This type of complement belongs to a word that completes or determines the noun preceding it. The process of noun complementation can be performed by the article (i) that occurs after the determined noun. The indefinite pronouns in general have the grammatical role of noun complement since they occur after the specified noun (Mukuriani, 2005: 91).

(14)   Aspi flan kes xêra derwat.   (Someone's horse is running fast.)

3.5 Object

The object incorporates these words that complete the meaning of a verb; it is affected by the action of the verb. The occurrence of object is required by the nature of a verb because only the transitive verbs require an object in a sentence. It falls into two types; they are direct object and indirect object. The indefinite pronouns occur in the position of direct object so as to perform the syntactic function of direct object (Amedi, 1987: 265).

(15)   Azad hemû kes denasêt.   (Azad knows everybody).

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[2] In Kurdish language, the term (Nihad) refers to the part of a sentence that precedes predicate and it does not function as the doer of the action.

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3.6 Indirect Object
   This type of object includes these words that complete the meaning of a verb through the occurrence of prepositions, such as *le, be, bo,* etc. Various types of indefinite pronouns occur in that position; they perform the role of indirect object (Xoṣnaw, 2013: 36, 51).
(16)   Nihênieke be hiç kes nalêm.   (I do not tell anyone the secrecy).

3.7 Complement of Auxiliary Verb (be)
   The auxiliary verb (be) in Kurdish language refers to these verbs that cannot be used alone to complete the meaning of the sentence. Thus, they are attributed to other words through which the auxiliary verbs complete the meaning of the sentence, they are known as the complement of auxiliary verbs. Different types of indefinite pronouns perform the function of the complement of auxiliary verbs because these verbs complete of the meaning of the sentence through these indefinite pronouns (Ibid: 34, 51).
(17)   Awa helei flan kes bü.   (This was someone's mistake).

   This can be apparently seen in (17) that the compound indefinite pronoun *flan kes* can perform the function of the complement of the auxiliary verb *be*. The verb cannot complete the meaning of the sentence alone; it can be done through an indefinite pronoun.

Conclusion:
1-The indefinite pronouns in both English and Kurdish languages belong to a group of pronouns that replace the name of persons and things, but devoid of specifying the type of referent. They do not exhibit any property of definiteness because they cannot be restricted to a particular person or thing, they express entities in general.
2-In English language, the indefinite pronouns are categorized into compound indefinite pronouns and of-structure indefinite pronouns. In Kurdish language, the indefinite pronouns also fall into two types; they are simple indefinite pronouns and compound indefinite pronouns.
3-The indefinite pronouns in English language perform the syntactic function of subject, subject complement, direct object, indirect object, prepositional complement and determinative. The indefinite pronouns in Kurdish language perform the role of subject, nihad, subject replacement, complement of noun, direct object, indirect object and complement of auxiliary verb (be).

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پوختەی توێژینەوە

ئەم توێژینەوەیە کە ناونیشانەکەی بریتی یە لە " ئەرکی جێناوە نادیارەکان لە زمانی ئینگلیزی و کوردی دا "، هەولێکە بۆ بەراووردکردنی جێناوە نادیارە لێکدراوەکانی زمانی ئینگلیزی و زمانی کوردی لە ڕوانگەی ئەرکی سینتاکسی یـەوە. جێنـاوە نادیارەکـان ئەوجێناوانەن کە لە جێگای کەسێک یان شتێکی دیاریکراو بەکارناهێنرێن. ئەگەر چی ئەو جێناوە نادیارانە ڕۆلێکی بەرچـاویان هەیـە لە هەر دوو زمانەکان دا، بەلّام بەشێوەیەکی گشتی بە پێی پێویست لە ڕوانگەی ئەرکی سینتاکسی یەوە کاریان لەسـەر نـەکراوە. لەبـەر ئەوە ئەو توێژینەوەیە لە ئەرکی سینتاکسی ئەو جێناوە نادیارە لێکدراوەکانە دەکۆڵێتـەوە کـە لـە هـەردوو زمانـەکان دا هاوبەشـن، بەمەبەستی دۆزینەوەی خالّی هاوبەش و جیاوازی نێوانیان.

ناوەڕۆکی توێژینەوەکە دابەشکراوە بۆ سێ بەشی سەرەکی. بەشی یەکـەم پێـک هـاتووە لـە سـەرەتایەکی تیـۆری دەربـارەی جێنـاوە نادیارەکان و بەشێک لە سیفەتە گشتیەکانیان. بەشی دووەم تەرخانکراوە بۆ ئەرکی جێناوە نادیارەکـان لـە زمـانی ئینگلیـزی دا، ئـەم تەوەرانە لەخۆ دەگرێت. بکەر، تەواوکەری بکەر، بـەرکاری ڕاسـتەوخۆ، ، بـەرکاری ناڕاسـتەوخۆ، تەواوکـەری ئـامرازی پەیوەنـدی و دیارخراو. . بەشی سێیەم تەرخانکراوە بۆ ئەرکی جێناوە نادیارەکان لە زمانی کوردی دا، ئەم تەوەرانە لـەخۆ دەگرێـت بکـەر، جێگـری بکەر، نیهاد، تەواوکەری ناو، بەر کاری ڕاستەوخۆ، بەرکاری ناڕاستەوخۆ و تەواوکەری فرمانی بەیاریدە. لە کۆتـایی دا، گرنگترین ئـەو ئە نجامانە خراونەتەڕوو کە توێژەر لە میانەی توێژینەوەکەدا بەدەستی هێناون.

ملخص البحث

هذه الدراسة التي عنوانها "دور الضمائر المستترة في اللغتين الإنكليزيـة والكرديـة"، محاولـة لمقارنـة الضمائر المستترة المركبة مـن منظور دورها الترکيبي بين اللغتين الإنكليزية والكردية، والضمائر المستترة هي التي لاتستخدم مكـان شخص أو شـيء معلـوم، مـع أن هـذه الضمائر لها دور ملحوظ في کلا اللغتين، ولكن بصورة عامة لم تدرس قدر المطلوب من ناحية دورها الترکيبي، لذا فإن هذه الدراسـة تبحـث عن دور الترکيبي لهذه الضمائر المركبة المشتركة بين اللغتين، بغرض اكتشاف نقاط التشابه والاختلاف بينهما.

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