When one is singular: Notes on zero-person constructions in Latvian

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Abstract. Axel Holvoet has demonstrated that Latvian has two types of zero-person constructions which formally differ in grammatical number, and that the singular type has a parallel in Finnic, but not in Lithuanian. This paper shows that the meanings covered by the two types are distinct and do not overlap. Using the framework proposed by Gast and van der Auwera for the description of human impersonal pronouns, it is shown that the singular type is characterized by non-veridicality and an internal perspective. As in Finnish, but not Estonian, it is used in conditional sentences with all kinds of verbs. The plural type is used in Latvian as well as in Lithuanian with veridical propositions and an external perspective.

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1 Introduction

Of Axel Holvoet's many achievements in the analysis of Baltic language structures, one that has always impressed and intrigued me is the distinction of two types of zero-person constructions in Latvian, and especially his illuminating description of the singular type. In his paper "Indefinite zero subjects in Latvian" (1995), he shows how the two types are formally clearly distinguished by number. The notional difference between the two types lies in referentiality: the plural version refers to a non-identified group of persons (possibly having only one member, similar to English indefinite *they*), while the singular

zero subject is never referential – it has a hypothetical or generalized meaning (Holvoet 1995, 154–155). Holvoet further points out that the singular type is typical for Latvian and hardly attested in Lithuanian, but has parallels in Finnic languages (see also Holvoet 2001).

Holvoet's discovery is far from trivial. A zero-person construction is most common with a predicate in present or past tense, and Baltic languages do not distinguish number in third-person forms in these tenses. According to the common opinion number in zero-person constructions in Baltic is undecidable or vague. Holvoet (1995) however shows that there are instances where a participle, a converb, or a predicative adjective or noun with its agreement features unambiguously shows whether the zero person is grammatically singular or plural. This grammatical distinction does not equal a notional distinction, as the singular type may have plural referents and the plural type may refer to a single actor.

In this paper, I will corroborate the existence of two zero-person grams in Latvian by further exploring the meanings that each of them covers and showing how they are attested in contemporary Latvian. All examples are taken from the corpus lvTenTen14[1]. For the distinction of meanings, I rely on Gast and van der Auwera's framework on human impersonal pronouns, where a connectivity map with seven positions is proposed (Gast & van der Auwera 2013). The authors build on earlier work, especially by Anna Siewierska (e.g. Siewierska & Papastathi 2011). The meanings on this map are defined by combinations of features from two sets: concerning the state of affairs (±veridical, ±episodic, ±modal), and the human participants (universal (internal, external) vs. existential (definite, indefinite: vague, plural); the features will be explained below when discussing Latvian examples. The meanings established by these features are ordered in a chain, but the authors argue for a bridge between the last and the first position, so that the chain forms a circle. The German pronoun *man* and the Dutch *men* can express all seven meanings, while other pronouns are used only in some adjacent meanings. For each meaning, the authors propose one or two diagnostic sentences in German and English. Using these sentences as a point of departure and searching the corpus for constructions used in these and

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1   In a few instances, the orthography of the corpus sentences was corrected, by adding macrons and correcting obvious typos.

similar meanings, I found that the two types of Latvian zero-person constructions clearly cover two different areas on the map, and they are separated by one position where neither of the types was found.

In Section 2 I present the results of testing the use of the constructions in each of the seven meanings distinguished by Gast and van der Auwera (2013) and discuss competing constructions found for this meaning in the corpus. Section 3 offers a very short look at parallels in Lithuanian, Finnish, Estonian and German.

2 Latvian zero-person constructions on Gast & van der Auwera's connectivity map

The result of my investigation, the details of which will be described in this section, is that the Plural Zero Person covers positions 1-4 on the connectivity map, while the Singular Zero Person covers positions 6-7. The Latvian plural type thus behaves like English indefinite *they* and the non-pronominal third person plural forms in Russian, Italian and several other languages.

The diagnostic sentences for Position 1 are German *Man klopft an der Tür*, English *They are knocking at the door*, and German *Man hat mir das Auto gestohlen*, English *They have stolen my car*. The state of affairs is characterized by the features **veridical** – the proposition is assumed to be true, and **episodic** – it is anchored in a specific place and time (Gast & van der Auwera 2013, 137). A referent for the actor must exist, but it is unknown to the speaker, and it may be a single person or several persons. Thus, the referent is **indefinite**, and **vague** with respect to the number of persons acting. The Latvian example (1) illustrates these features

(1) *2005.*   *gada*   *augusts.*   ***Pie*** ***durvīm***   ***klauvē****.*
     2005   year.GEN.SG   August.NOM.SG at   door.DAT.PL   knock.PRS.3
     [*Aija atver un skatās kaut kur uz augšu. Ienāk Aivis Beļakovs*]
     'August 2005. **They are knocking at the door**. [Aija opens and looks up somewhere. Aivis Beļakovs enters.]'

The corpus contains several examples of a zero-person construction for the situation where unknown persons are knocking at a door (or window), but they all are in present or past tense and thus do not show grammatical number. An

alternative construction in this context is with the pronoun *kāds* 'someone', and with this pronoun compound verbforms do occur (2). Note that, though this pronoun formally is singular, it also is semantically vague with respect to the number of actors.

(2) *viņa   teica,   ka uz rīta   pusi   regulāri*
      3.NOM.SG.F say.PST.3 that to morning.GEN.SG side.ACC.SG regularly
      kāds   klauvējis   *klusu klusu   pie loga.*
      someone.NOM.SG knock.PST.PA.SG.M quietly quietly at window.GEN.SG
      [*Nospriedām, ka kādi spoki.*]
      'She said that towards morning regularly someone was knocking very quietly at the window. [We decided that it was ghosts.]'

A zero person with vague reference, in contrast, is formally plural. With the verb 'steal', the Plural Zero Person is well attested in tense forms showing grammatical number, especially forms of the evidential (reportative), as in (3).

(3) [*Kandidāte ieradās uz interviju ar vienu kurpi. Viņa paskaidroja ka*]
      *otru   kurpi   viņai   **esot   nozaguši***
      other.ACC.SG shoe.ACC.SG 3.DAT.SG.F be.EVI PVB.steal.PST.PA.PL.M
      autobusā.
      bus.LOC.SG
      '[The candidate appeared at the interview with one shoe. She explained that] **they had stolen** her other shoe in the bus.'

Positions 2 and 3 on the map also entail a veridical and episodic proposition, but differ from Position 1 with respect to the referential properties of the human actor. In Position 2, it is indefinite, but clearly plural, and in Position 3, it is a definite group of persons or an institution such as the government. The diagnostic sentence for Position 2 is *They have surrounded us*. No Latvian equivalent with a zero-person construction was found in the corpus (but see below for a metaphorical meaning of the verb 'surround'). Instead, there are examples where the word *cilvēks* 'human person' in the plural is used to refer to an indefinite plural human actor, as in (4). More often, a passive construction is used, as in (5).

(4) *Mūs*   *ir*   *aplenkuši*   *cilvēki!*
1PL.ACC   be.PRS.3   surround.PST.PA.PL.M   human.NOM.PL
'They've surrounded us!', 'We are/have been surrounded by people!'

(5) *Mēs*   *esam*   *aplenkti*   *šajā*   *purvā*
1PL.NOM   be.PRS.1PL   surround.PST.PP.PL.M   DEM.LOC.SG   swamp.LOC.SG
'We have been surrounded in this swamp'

   The diagnostic sentences with 'surround' describe a single event with a plural actor. A different kind of indefinite plural referent may be found in sentences expressing repeated situations, as in (6). For this type, clauses with a participle in the predicate are easily found, such as (7) and (8). The cumulative nature becomes evident through adverbials such as 'thousands of years' in (7) and 'how many times' in (8).

(6) **Mūs**   **māca**,   *ka*   *darbs*   *esot*   *no*   *pērtiķa*
1PL.ACC   teach.PRS.3   that   work.NOM.SG   be.EVI   from   ape.GEN.SG
radījis   *cilvēku.*
create.PST.PA.SG.M   human.ACC.SG
'**They teach us** that work has made humans out of apes.'

(7) *Tūkstošiem*   *gadu*   **mūs**   **ir**   **mācījuši**
thousand.DAT.PL   year.GEN.PL   1PL.ACC   be.PRS.3   teach.PST.PA.PL.M
nenosodīt   *citus,*   *bet*   *mēs*   *vienalga*
NEG.condemn.INF   other.ACC.PL   but   1PL.NOM   anyhow
to   *darām*   *nepārstājot*
DEM.ACC.SG   do.PRS.1PL   NEG.cease.CVB
'For thousands of years **they have been teaching us** not to condemn others, but we are doing it anyhow ceaselessly.'

(8) [*ja Sudraba zin vēsturi, tad varētu paskaitīt*]
cik   *reizes*   **mūs**   **ir**   **okupējuši**
how.many   time.ACC.PL   1PL.ACC   be.PRS.3   occupy.PST.PA.PL.M
'[If Sudraba knows history, s/he may enumerate] the times we have been occupied (lit. how often **they have occupied us**).'

While each individual situation may have a single actor, the cumulation of such situations leads to a plurality of actors; unlike instances of Meaning 1, these sentences imply that the repeated actions were carried out by more than one person in sum. I therefore categorize it as a subtype of Gast and van der Auwera's Meaning 2. This subtype would also comprise constructions with speech-act verbs ('they say'), which Siewierska & Papastathi (2011) set apart as a special use of third-person plural forms, while Gast and van der Auwera (2013, 142–143) exclude this use from their map, stating that it needs further investigation. In Latvian, the Plural Zero Person is frequent with speech act verbs (*runā, ka* 'they say that'). An alternative is the use of the nouns *ļaudis* 'people' or *cilvēki* 'people', plural of 'man, human, person' as subject, which is common in many languages (Gast and van der Auwera 2013, 127).

With other verbs, it is often difficult to decide whether a sentence expresses Meaning 2 (with an indefinite plural actor about whose identity nothing is known) or Meaning 3, where the actor is some specific group of actors, such as the government in the diagnostic sentence *They have raised the taxes again*. I categorize example (9), which contains an instance of the verb 'surround' in a figurative sense, as expressing Meaning 3. The unexpressed actors are clearly members of the party, people associated with the authorities in a communist state. The adverb *pamazam* 'little by little' shows that the process of 'surrounding' was gradual, that is, it may have come about by several individual acts with a single actor.

(9) ***Man   piedāvāja*** *iestaties kompartijā,   es*
    1SG.DAT offer.PST.3 join.INF communist.party.LOC.SG 1SG.NOM
    atrunājos,   ka   neesmu   vel izaudzis,
    plead.PST.1SG.RFL that NEG.be.PRS.1SG yet PVB.grow.PST.PA.SG.NOM
    *taču   **mani**   pamazam   "**aplenca**".*
    however 1SG.ACC little_by_little surround.PST.3
    '**They offered me** to join the communist party. I pleaded that I hadn't yet grown up. However, gradually **they "encircled" me**.'

Meaning 3 is however also found with reference to a single act by an institution or group of actors, such as in the diagnostic situation of tax raising (or lowering). Example (10) shows that the zero person is grammatically plural.

(10) *redz,*   **nebūtu**   **samazinājuši**   *PVN, būtu*   *vēl*
see.PRS.2SG   NEG.be.IRR   lower.PST.PA.PL.M   VAT   be.IRR   yet
dārgāk
more.expensive
'you see, if **they hadn't lowered** the VAT, it would be still more expensive'

Meaning 4 differs from Meanings 1-3 in that the state of affairs is **generic** and not episodic, that is, not anchored in a specific time (Gast & van der Auwera 2013, 137), and second, in that the actor is **universal** (generic), referring to 'everybody in general'. The diagnostic sentence is *They eat dragonflies in Bali*. A Latvian instantiation of the type is given in (11).

(11) *Āfrikā*   **ēd**   *daudzus*   *asus*   *ēdienus*
Africa.LOC.SG   eat.PRS.3   many.ACC.PL   spicy.ACC.PL.M   dish.ACC.PL
'In Africa **they eat** a lot of spicy dishes'

Generic sentences most often appear in present tense, where the grammatical number of the zero person does not show. A type of discourse where it does appear is reports about traditions. In this register, a participle as a form of the evidential is often used, as in (12).

(12) *Tradicionāli*   *Pelnu*   *dienā*   **ēduši**   *plāceņus*
traditionally   ashes.GEN.PL   day.LOC.SG   eat.PST.PA.PL.M   pie.ACC.PL
un   *karašas.*
and   cake.ACC.PL
'According to tradition, on Ash Wednesday **they ate** pies and flat cakes.'

Concerning universal referents, Gast and van der Auwera distinguish between an **external** and an **internal** perspective (2013, 138–139; the authors build on own prior work and on analyses by Moltmann 2006; 2010). Meaning 4, illustrated by examples (11) and (12), entails an external perspective, where the speaker regards the situation from outside without considering themselves or the hearer as part of the set of possible referents. In an internal perspective, the speaker is either included ('everybody' = 'we all') or an inclusion of speaker or hearer is simulated; the authors illustrate this with the sentence *As a member of the Royal family you have a lot of duties*. The distinction between

an external and an internal perspective is crucial for the use of the two types of zero person in Latvian: the Plural Zero Person is only used with an external perspective; it can never mean 'we all'. The Singular Zero Person in turn (almost) always expresses an internal perspective.

The diagnostic sentence for Meaning 5 (veridical and generic state of affairs, universal referent, internal perspective) is German *Man lebt nur einmal*, English *You only live once*. In the corpus, sentences with such a meaning most often contain an overt subject either in the form of the noun *cilvēks* 'man, human being' in the singular (13), or the first person plural (14).

(13) *Paskatieties, laukā   ir   vienkārši brīnišķīgs*
     look.IMP.2PL   outside   be.PRS.3 simply   wonderful.NOM.SG.M
     laiks   un   cilvēks   dzīvo   tikai vienu
     weather.NOM.SG and   human.NOM.SG live.PRS.3   only   one.ACC.SG
     reizi!
     time.ACC.SG
     'Look, the weather outside is simply wonderful, and **you only live once**!'

(14) *Atceries,   ka   dzīve   ir   skaista,*
     remember.PRS.2SG that life.NOM.SG be.PRS.3 beautiful.NOM.SG.F
     mēs   dzīvojam   tikai vienu   reizi   un   to
     1PL.NOM live.PRS.1PL   only   one.ACC.SG time.ACC.SG and   DEM.ACC.SG
     ir   jāizbauda.
     be.PRS.3   DEB.enjoy
     'Remember that life is beautiful, **we only live once** and must enjoy that.'

No unambiguous example with a zero-person construction was found in the corpus for such a sentence. A problem for the analysis is that the third person of the verb *dzīvot* 'live' is homophonous to the second singular in present tense. The use of the second person singular in generic meaning is possible in this context, although it appears rarely in simple sentences and sometimes has an explicit reference to the English sentence *You only live once*. Without the personal pronoun, the form *dzīvo* is ambiguous. This ambiguity has no effect on the interpretation, as both forms may express generic meaning with an internal perspective. Consider examples (15) and (16), which will also serve to illustrate further distinctions.

(15) *ja   jau   **dzīvo**   tikai   vienu   reizi,*
    if   PTC   live.PRS.3/2SG   only   one.ACC.SG   time.ACC.SG

    *tātad,   ņem   no   dzīves   visu   ko   **vari***
    thus   take.PRS.2SG   from   life.GEN.SG   all.ACC.SG   what.ACC   can.PRS.2SG

    'If / as you only **live** [2SG or 3] once, so take from life everything you **can** [2SG].'

(16) [*Viens normāls vecis, ar kuru treniņos satiekamies, teica –*]

    *ja   **tu**   **dari**   kaut ko   tikai tāpēc, ka **jādara**,   tad*
    if   2SG.NOM   do.PRS.2SG   something.ACC   only   because   DEB.do   then

    nedari   *vispār!* ***Dari***   *visu   no   sirds –*
    NEG.do.PRS.2SG   at_all   do.PRS.2SG   all.ACC.SG   from   heart.GEN.SG

    un   tad   būs   rezultāts.
    and   then   be.FUT.3   result.NOM.SG

    *Neko   **nedrīkst**   **darīt**   tāpat vien,   jo   **dzīvo***
    nothing.ACC   NEG.may.PRS.3   do.INF   just so   for   live.PRS.3/2sg

    tikai   vienu   reizi.
    only   one.ACC.SG   time.ACC.SG

    '[A cool guy who we meet at the training said:] if **you do** [2SG] something only because [you / one] **must do** it, then **don't do** [2SG] it at all! **Do** [2SG] everything with your heart, and there will be a result. One **must not do** [3] anything just like that without reason, for you only **live** [2SG or 3] once.'

    Meanings 1-5 all included a veridical proposition. The two last positions in Gast and van der Auwera's connectivity map are characterized by the feature **non-veridical**, that is, there is no assumption that the proposition is true. Non-veridical meanings are further categorized as either modal (Meaning 6) or non-modal (Meaning 7) (Gast & van der Auwera 2013, 137). There may however be some grey zones between veridical and non-veridical and between modal and non-modal meanings. In (15), we have a conditional clause with the subordinator *ja* 'if', which is usually considered to be non-veridical. However, with the particle *jau* following the subordinator, the condition gets close to an assertion (*ja jau* 'if, as you know and I assume to be true' = 'as'), which is further strengthened by the adverb *tātad* 'thus'. Example (15) could therefore be categorized either as Meaning 5 (veridical) or Meaning 7 (non-veridical, non-modal). In (16), the proposition in the last clause ('you only live once') is

clearly asserted, but the context is full of non-veridical statements: conditionals ('if you do'), imperatives ('do!') and modals ('have to do', 'must not do'). This is not just a coincidence – it is the typical, probably even necessary environment for the singular type of the zero person. As Holvoet already remarked (1995, 155), this type most frequently occurs either in conditional periods or with modal verbs. Using the terminology and typology proposed by Gast and van der Auwera (2013), we may state that it is used with a non-veridical proposition.

In Latvian, necessity is mostly expressed in constructions with a dative and not a nominative subject, which excludes the use of a zero person at least in the narrow sense. However, the dative argument is often omitted and the construction has a generic meaning (if the person to whom the necessity is ascribed is not given in the context). Gast and van der Auwera's diagnostic sentence for Meaning 6 (non-veridical, modal) is *You should never give up*, which in Latvian is expressed with the impersonal verb *vajadzēt* (17).

(17) [*Ar šo dziesmu vēlos pateikt to, ka*]

    nekad   **nevajag**   **padoties,**
    never   NEG.need.PRS.3   give_up.INF
    [*lai cik sāpīgi un grūti reizēm arī nebūtu.*]
    '[With this song I want to say that] **you should never give up**,
    [however painful and hard it sometimes may be.]'

Another construction with an omissible dative is with the debitive form, for example *jādara* 'one/you must do' in (16). A nominative subject is used with the verb *drīkstēt* 'be allowed, may', which also could be seen in (16): in the clause *neko **nedrīkst** darīt tāpat vien* 'one must not do anything just like that without reason', it appears with a zero person. The most important verb expressing possibility is *varēt* 'can, be able'. Both *drīkstēt* and *varēt* are well attested with a zero person, and a participle as predicate shows that the grammatical number is singular (18-19).

(18) [*Vēl viņi raksta par likuma izmaiņām –*]

    agrāk *auto* ***drīkstējis***   *vadīt*   *ar*   *0,8 promilēm*
    earlier car may.PST.PA.SG.M drive.INF with 0.8 per_mill.DAT.PL

alkohola	*organismā,*	*tagad*	*tikai*	*ar*	*0,5.*
alcohol.GEN.SG	organism.LOC.SG	now	only	with	0.5

'[They further write about changes in the law:] formerly **one could** (was allowed to) drive a car with 0.8 per mill of alcohol in one's system, now the limit is 0.5.'

(19) *Bet* *smieties* *jau* **nedrīkstējis,** *tā* **varēja**
but laugh.INF.RFL PTC NEG.may.PST.PA.SG.M thus can.PST.3
arī *pie* *"baltajiem* *lāčiem"* *nonākt.*
also at white.DEF.DAT.PL.M bear.DAT.PL end_up.INF
'But one **could not** laugh, for then one **could** end up at the "polar bears".' (= in Siberia)

Also well attested is the use of the Singular Zero Person in Gast and van der Auwera's Meaning 7 (non-veridical, non-modal), especially in conditional clauses. Their diagnostic sentence is *What happens if one drinks sour milk?* (20) shows one of several examples with a zero person in a conditional clause introduced by 'what happens' found in the Latvian corpus.

(20) *Redz, kas* *notiek,* **ja neizlasa** *rakstu*
look what.NOM happen.PRS.3 if NEG.PVB.read.PRS.3 article.ACC.SG
līdz *galam* *: D.*
to end.DAT.SG
'Look what happens **if you don't read** an article up to the end : D.'

Quite often we find a conditional clause with an apodosis that contains a modal verb (21, 22).

(21) *tīru* *sejas* *ādu* **var** *iegūt,* **ja**
clean.ACC.SG face.GEN.SG skin.ACC.SG can.PRS.3 obtain.INF if
dzer *daudz svaigu* *gurķu* *sulu*
drink.PRS.3 much fresh.GEN.PL cucumber.GEN.PL juice.ACC.SG
'You **can** obtain a clean face skin **if you drink** a lot of fresh cucumber juice.'

(22) *Vējbakas* **var** *dabūt* *tikai* *tad,*
chickenpox.ACC.PL can.PRS.3 get.INF only then
ja nav slimojis *ar* *tām* *bērnībā.*
if NEG.be.PRS.3 be_ill.PST.PA.SG.M with DEM.DAT.PL childhood.LOC.SG
'You **can** only get chickenpox **if you hadn't been ill** with it as a child.'

Instead of a zero person, the apodosis may contain the pronoun *ikviens* 'everybody, anyone', as in (23).

(23) *Ar* *velobraukšanu* **var** *nodarboties* **ikviens,**
with cycling.ACC.SG can.PRS.3 practice.INF.RFL anyone.NOM.SG
pat **ja nav sportojis** *ilgāku* *laiku.*
even if NEG.PRS.3 do_sports.PST.PA.SG.M longer.ACC.SG time.ACC.SG
'**Anyone can** practice cycling, even **if they/you haven't done sports**
for a longer time.'

An alternative to the Singular Zero Person in Meanings 6 and 7 is the second person singular, shown in (24).

(24) *Visu* **var** *sasniegt* *ar* *centību* *un* *darbu,*
all.ACC.SG can.PRS.3 achieve.INF with zeal.ACC.SG and work.ACC.SG
pat **ja neesi dzimis** *"laimes*
even if NEG.be.PRS.2SG be_born.PST.PA.SG.M luck.GEN.SG
krekliņā".
shirt.DIM.LOC.SG
'With zeal and work you **can** achieve everything, even **if you haven't
been born** with a caul.'

Another non-veridical use of the zero person very typical for Latvian is in instructions, especially in recipes and practical advice (25, 26). This use imitates a veridicality in using clauses that are formulated as statements. There are no lexical or morphological markers of non-veridicality.

(25) *Kartupeļus* **sagriež** *uz* *pusēm* *vai* *četrās* *daļās,*
potatoe.ACC.PL cut.PRS.3 to half.DAT.PL or four.LOC part.LOC.PL

ieliek		*plastikāta*	*maisiņā,*	***pievieno***	
PVB.put.PRS.3		plastic.GEN.SG	bag.DIM.LOC.SG	add.PRS.3	
marinādi		*un*	***atstāj***	*uz*	*15 minūtēm.*
marinade.ACC.SG		and	leave.PRS.3	to	15 minute.DAT.PL

'**Cut** the potatoes into halves or quarters, **put** them into a plastic bag, **add** the marinade and **let sit** for 15 minutes.'

(26)
No	*balta*	*apģērba*	*rūsas*	*pleķi*
from	white.GEN.SG.M	garment.GEN.SG	rust.GEN.SG	stain.ACC.SG
tīra	*ar*	*citrona*	*sulu,*	***patur***	*virs*
clean.PRS.3	with	lemon.GEN.SG	juice.ACC.SG	hold.PRS.3	over
tvaika	*un*	***mazgā***	*kā*	*parasti.*
steam.GEN.SG	and	wash.PRS.3	as	usual

'**Clean** rust stains from white clothing with lemon juice. **Hold** over steam and **wash** as usual.'

Procedural texts as a register are characterized by non-veridicality and an internal perspective – the very features that are necessary for the use of the Singular Zero Person in Latvian. These texts are therefore an ideal environment for the use of this construction. An alternative form is the imperative (as in English, where it is the most common form in procedural texts), most often of the second person singular, less often plural. For many verbs, the 2SG imperative/present is morphologically the same as third person present tense, so there is a potential for ambiguity. However, procedural texts typically contain several coordinated clauses, and at least some of the verbs will unambiguously show third person. Of the seven verbs in examples (25) and (26), three forms are morphologically ambiguous (*pievieno, atstāj, mazgā*) and four are clearly marked as third person (*sagriež, ieliek, tīra, patur*).

Non-veridicality is a crucial feature here. In sentences such as (25, 26), there is no commitment as to whether anybody has ever acted in the way described. This is different in formally similar sentences which describe usual behavior, as in (27). Here, we have a veridical generic state of affairs. The sentence describes what people do and would be false if nobody acted that way. It is an instance of Meaning 5

(27) *No ogām **iegūst** sulu, **gatavo** tējas* […],
from berry.DAT.PL obtain.INF juice.ACC.SG prepare.PRS.3 tea.ACC.PL

*lapas **pievieno** gurķu un sēņu*
leaf.ACC.PL add.PRS.3 cucumber.GEN.PL and mushroom.GEN.PL

marinādei
marinade.DAT.SG

'The berries are used for juice and teas, the leaves are added to the
marinade of cucumbers and mushrooms.'

Sentences such as (27) can be put into past tense and the verbs may have
the form of past active participles, which is a stylistic means for telling about
customs in the past, where plural marking will show. The predicates may also
be changed into passive forms without altering the meaning. The zero person
of (25, 26) in turn alternates with an imperative. Thus, even if on the surface
sentences such as (26) and (27) look very much alike, there are several ways to
show that they contain distinct types of zero person. Another clue is the differ-
ent ways these sentences are translated into English.

The different meanings of zero-person constructions and competing expres-
sion means are summarized in Table 1.

	speaker-exclusive; external perspective				internal perspective		
	veridical					non-veridical	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Zero PL	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Zero SG					?	✓	✓
other means (non-exhaus-tive list)	*kāds* 'some-one' PASSIVE	*cilvēki, ļaudis* 'people' PASSIVE	name of institu-tion ('the govern-ment') PASSIVE	*cilvēki* 'people' PASSIVE	*cilvēks* 'man, a person' *mēs* 'we' *tu* 2SG *katrs* 'each'	*tu* 2SG *ikviens* 'anyone' *katrs* 'each' *neviens* 'nobody'	*tu* 2SG IMPERA-TIVE

TABLE 1. Distribution of means over meanings

Table 1 illustrates what Holvoet already stated in his paper of 1995: the
two types of zero person are clearly separate grams belonging to different

gram types. The Plural Zero Person is characterized by the features [+veridical, +external], while the Singular Zero Person is characterized as [-veridical, +internal]. None of the types is (clearly) found in Meaning 5 with the feature combination [+veridical, +internal], though there were some ambiguous examples which may be interpreted as containing the Singular Zero Person. The focus of this gram however is clearly in Meanings 6 and 7. Occasional uses in Meaning 5 may be extensions – rather than the other way around. That is, there is no evidence that the non-veridical meanings have derived from a veridical generic meaning. We also find occasional extensions in the other direction, towards Meaning 1 (which corroborates Gast and van der Auwera's concept of a circle). In (28) the Singular Zero Person has vague existential reference and could be replaced by the pronoun *kāds* 'someone'. The sentence has an external perspective and makes vague reference to concrete episodes that took place in the past.

(28) [*Dažkārt prēmiju piešķīrām vienkārši par labu darbu. Tāpat vien nevienam neko nemaksājām, bet*,]
      ja   bija   pelnījis,   *tad   arī*   **saņēma**.
      if   be.PST.3   earn.PST.PA.SG.M   then   also   receive.PST.3
      '[Sometimes we awarded a bonus simply for good work. We did not pay anybody without reason,] but **if someone had earned** it, **they got** [a bonus].'

Such a use seems however to be rare.

3 A short look at the neighbors

With Lithuanian, Latvian shares the plural type of the zero person; possible differences between the two languages, and between Baltic and Slavic languages, are still waiting to be discovered in contrastive studies. There is only one short remark about the zero person in Lithuanian in Ambrazas et al. (2006, 268): "3rd person verbal forms are used to refer an action to an indefinite agent, i.e. to people in general". In a recent study of Lithuanian reference impersonals, Mazzitelli assumes that grammatical number of these third person forms is ambiguous or undecidable (Mazzitelli 2019, 37–38). However, all her examples show instances of the meanings found with the plural type in Latvian,

and some examples do contain overt markers of plurality. In (29), the converb *norėdami* shows that the zero subject is grammatically plural. Notionally it is vague, and in this concrete example it is more likely that there was just one person on the telephone.

(29) Lithuanian (Mazzitelli 2019, 46, from a novel by Ivanauskaitė)

Staiga	*aš*	*supratau,*		*kad*	**skambina**	*iš*
suddenly	1SG.NOM	understand.PST.1SG	that	call.PRS.3	from	

klinikos,	**norė-dam-i**	*pranešti*	*apie*	*mano*	*brolio*
clinic.GEN.SG	want-CVB-PL.M	inform.INF	about	my	brother.GEN.SG

mirtį.
death.ACC.SG

'Suddenly I understood that **they were calling** from the clinic, **wanting** to communicate my brother's death.'

From Mazzitelli's study one may see that in contexts where Latvian uses the Singular Zero Person, Lithuanian uses either second person singular or the non-agreement form of the passive. The latter is also commonly used in Lithuanian procedural texts such as recipes (cf. Nau, Spraunienė & Žeimantienė 2020, 65).

In Standard Finnish, on the other hand, the plural type is attested only marginally, mostly with verbs of speaking ('they say'. 'they call this…'). In dialects, especially in Eastern dialects, a third person plural impersonal is found in more contexts, both with and without a personal pronoun (Posio & Vilkuna 2013, 178). Characteristic for Finnish is the singular type of zero person, used predominantly in Meanings 6 and 7 of Gast and van der Auwera's (2013) map. This construction type is well described in academic as well as pedagogical grammars and in dedicated research papers (see especially VISK, paragraph 1347-1365, and literature given there; in English: Laitinen 2006; more recently and with more specific research questions: Varjo & Suomalainen 2018; Kaiser 2019). Just as in Latvian, the Finnish Singular Zero Person is used with a non-veridical state of affairs, most often with modal predicates and in conditional sentences, and has an internal perspective. Its use with veridical states of affairs (Meaning 5) is more common than in Latvian, but there are lexical restrictions: it is not found with verbs expressing voluntary actions, but rather

with verbs where the subject has the role of experiencer, beneficiary, or patient (Kaiser 2019, 5, with reference to Laitinen 1995; 2006). Thus, the form is used in generic statements such as 'You feel tired after the sauna', but not 'You get dressed after the sauna' (ibid.). As researchers of Finnish remark, there are no lexical restrictions for the zero person in conditional sentences (e.g. Kaiser 2019, 6). This is different in Estonian, where the use of the zero person shows the same restrictions in conditional sentences as in generic clauses: it occurs only with involuntary actions, especially with perception verbs (Jokela 2012, 180). Thus, with respect to zero person in conditional sentences, Latvian is more similar to Finnish than to Estonian, but with respect to other non-modal generic sentences, Finnish and Estonian are more similar to each other, while Latvian differs. All three languages agree in their use of zero person with modals. This may be the core area from which each language extends the use in a slightly different way. For Finnish and Estonian, Jokela states: "In my data, a typical sentence with the zero person in both languages is a generic statement which tells us what can or cannot be done" (Jokela 2012, English abstract). This may be applied to Latvian as well.

The use of the zero person for directives in procedural texts is not characteristic for Finnish and Estonian. In recipes, imperatives are used in these languages. A parallel to Latvian is found in German, where the human impersonal pronoun *man* can be used in instructions. In recipes, it was the preferred form used in the 19th century and earlier 20th century, but got out of fashion later and is rather rare today (Donalies 2012, 29)[2]. However, you still frequently find *man* in other types of procedural texts, as in (30) from instructions on how to tie the ribbons of a dirndl.

(30) German (https://www.lederhose.com/de-AT/tipps-tricks/schleife-binden)
Zunächst **legt** **man** *die* *Bänder* *vorne* *überkreuz,*
first lay.PRS.3SG HIMP DEF.PL ribbon.PL front crosswise
dann **bindet** **man** *einen* *flachen* *Knoten.*
then tie.PRS.3SG HIMP IDF.ACC.SG.M flat.ACC.SG.M knot
'First **cross** the ribbons at the front, then **tie** a flat knot.'

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2 I am speaking here only of the construction with *man* + indicative, not of the construction with an irrealis verbform (*man nehme* 'take'), which also once was characteristic for recipes.

As instructional written texts in 19th century Latvia were doubtlessly influenced by German models, it is possible that the zero person in this function came about as a stylistic calque. Notwithstanding this possible source, this use fits well with other Latvian uses of the Singular Zero Person as non-veridical with an internal perspective.

4 Conclusion

Sometimes a short paper is all that is needed. In Holvoet (1995), the author manages to describe, analyze and illustrate a complex phenomenon in merely nine pages in a lucid and sufficiently comprehensive way. The current paper could do little more than corroborate his findings, discuss a few nuances and add more data. It showed that the Singular Zero Person and the Plural Zero Person are two different grams that cover two different, non-overlapping areas on Gast and van der Auwera's (2013) semantic map. The plural type is characterized by the features [+veridical, +external], the singular type is [-veridical, +internal]. While the plural type is found in many languages of Europe and beyond, the singular type is especially intriguing. The parallel to Finnish is striking, as is the lack of a parallel in Lithuanian. How far this situation is a result of language contact cannot be said without thorough diachronic and dialect studies. In any case, the Latvian data to which Axel Holvoet already drew attention 25 years ago should be considered in future studies of impersonals and other fields of linguistic investigation.

Abbreviations

1	first person	GEN	genitive
2	second person	HIMP	human impersonal pronoun
3	third person	IDF	indefinite (article)
ACC	accusative	IMP	imperative
CVB	converb	INF	infinitive
DAT	dative	IRR	irrealis (conditional)
DEB	debitive	LOC	locative
DEF	definite (article)	M	masculine
DEM	demonstrative	NEG	negation
DIM	diminutive	NOM	nominative
EVI	evidential (reportative)	PA	active participle
F	feminine	PL	plural

PRS	present	PVB	preverb
PST	past	RFLГ	eflexive
PTC	particle	SG	singular

Sources

lvTenTen14   Corpus of Latvian compiled from Internet sources. 530,367,474 words. Accessed through sketchengine.eu.

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