A contrastive corpus study of Swedish *man* and Dutch *men*

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This contribution presents a contrastive study of the human impersonal pronouns *man* in Swedish and *men* in Dutch. Both impersonal pronouns are etymologically derived from *man* ‘human being’ and are known to share large parts of their referential meaning. However, there are important differences in the usage of the impersonal pronoun in both languages. In this study, the similarities and differences between Swedish *man* and Dutch *men* are studied in great empirical detail in a Dutch-Swedish parallel corpus. Analyzing a parallel corpus has the advantage of allowing one to both study the distribution of *man* en *men* in original texts and to contrast the meaning and usage of these pronouns with their translations. In total, 3980 occurrences of *man* and *men* were extracted from the parallel corpus. The data show that *man* and *men* are used with overlapping meanings in the Dutch-Swedish parallel corpus. Both pronouns are used in original texts and translations in order to express generic human reference and other types of indefinite reference. However, despite their overlapping meaning, *man* and *men* appear to be used rather differently in the Dutch-Swedish parallel corpus. First, *man* occurs relatively frequently in both fiction and non-fiction texts, whereas *men* appears to be mainly restricted to non-fiction prose. Moreover, *man* seems to dominate the domain of impersonal reference in Swedish, whereas *men* is used next to an array of alternative strategies to express impersonal reference such as the personal pronouns *je* ‘you’ and *ze* ‘they’.