

Transitive expletive constructions in Swedish

David Håkansson

This article discusses the existence of transitive expletive constructions (TECs) in Swedish. It is often claimed that TECs are a distinctive feature of Insular Scandinavian, but do not exist in Mainland Scandinavian. In this article, however, it is shown that such constructions do occur throughout the history of Swedish and, to some extent, still occur in present-day Swedish, although nowadays the language has none of the features previously proposed as licensing TECs. It is also shown that Swedish has a broader repertoire of associate subjects in TECs than does Icelandic. Unlike in Icelandic, associate subjects can also be definite in Swedish. The presence of TECs in Swedish calls into question the previous analysis of the licensing of this construction, and in this article a new explanation for the phenomenon is proposed. It is claimed that TECs are possible if the expletive can merge in a position structurally higher than the canonical subject position. In the case of V2 languages, this implies that expletives must be able to merge in Spec,CP, and it is shown that in Swedish they are able to merge in this position.

Keywords: diachronic syntax, expletive pronouns, Mainland Scandinavian, Spec,CP, Swedish, syntactic change, syntactic variation, transitive expletive constructions

David Håkansson, Department of Scandinavian Languages, Uppsala University, PO Box 527, SE-751 20 Uppsala, Sweden. david.hakansson@nordiska.uu.se

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since interest in comparative syntax took off in the 1980s, expletives have been a central field of research – not least owing to the considerable variation in expletive constructions in the Germanic languages. This variation is particularly evident in the Scandinavian languages; the Insular Scandinavian languages clearly differ from those of Mainland Scandinavia with respect to expletives and expletive *pro*. Particular attention has been paid to TRANSITIVE EXPLETIVE CONSTRUCTIONS, i.e. constructions containing an expletive followed by an active transitive verb. While active transitive verbs, too, can appear in expletive constructions in Icelandic (and to some extent in Faroese; see Thráinsson et al. 2004:282), ‘the standard claim is that transitive expletives are not possible’ in the Mainland Scandinavian languages (Thráinsson 2007:336). Vikner (1995) illustrates the difference between Insular and Mainland Scandinavian with the following examples:

- (1) a. **Það** hefur einhver borðað epli. (Icelandic)
 EXPL has someone eaten apple

- b. ***Der** har nogen spist et æble. (Danish)
EXPL has someone eaten an apple
 ‘Someone has eaten an apple.’

Several explanations have been offered to account for the difference between Insular and Mainland Scandinavian demonstrated in (1). Substantially, the point of departure has been conditions in the Scandinavian standard languages, and various morphological and syntactic features, such as verbal agreement and verb movement, have been proposed as licensing transitive expletive constructions, the presence or absence of these features being considered to explain why such constructions occur in Insular but not in Mainland Scandinavian. In addition to accounting for differences between Insular and Mainland Scandinavian, these proposals also have diachronic implications. Although transitive expletives are generally assumed not to exist in the present-day Mainland Scandinavian languages, the proposed licensing factors predict that they will occur in earlier stages of Mainland Scandinavian, and Holmberg & Platzack (1995:139) show that these predictions are in fact borne out – at least in the sense that Early Modern Swedish allows such constructions:¹

- (2) **Thet** rådhæ wel andre Herrar offuer oss vtan tigh. (EMS; 1541)
EXPL rule probably other masters over us besides you
 ‘Other masters probably rule over us besides you.’

However, in this article we will argue that the standard claim that transitive expletive constructions are not possible in Mainland Scandinavian cannot be maintained. On the contrary, we will show that these constructions have occurred throughout the history of Swedish and – to some extent – still occur in present-day Swedish. Hence, the difference between Insular and Mainland Scandinavian regarding transitive expletive constructions is not as clear-cut as has generally been assumed, which in turn challenges previous accounts of the phenomenon. The occurrence of constructions of this kind in Swedish suggests that the construction is completely independent of licensing factors such as verbal agreement and verb movement, and in this article we will instead emphasize the lexical inventory of expletive pronouns in a language as crucial. In short, we will claim that transitive expletive constructions are licensed if the expletive pronoun can merge in a position structurally higher than the canonical subject position. In the case of V2 languages, this implies that expletives must be able to merge in Spec,CP, and we will show that expletive pronouns can in fact merge in this position in Swedish. At first glance, such a claim might seem counter-intuitive, since expletive pronouns in Swedish – in contrast to Icelandic – can undoubtedly occur not only in Spec,CP, but also in the canonical subject position to the right of the finite verb, as shown in (3) (from Holmberg & Platzack 1995:100):

- (3) a. I dag har *(det) kommit många lingvister hit. (Swedish)
 b. Í dag hafa (*það) komið margir málvísindamenn hingað. (Icelandic)
today have EXPL come many linguists here
 ‘Today, many linguists have arrived here.’

We will claim, then, that the lexical inventory of Swedish contains two expletive pronouns: a topic-related expletive, merged in Spec,CP, and a subject-related expletive, merged in Spec,vP. Whereas the higher, topic-related CP expletive was already established in Old Swedish (see Falk 1993), the lower, subject-related expletive is an innovation that developed during Early Modern Swedish. Within this perspective, the crucial difference between Icelandic and Swedish as far as transitive expletive constructions are concerned is not related to verbal agreement or verb movement, but rather to the lexical inventory: whereas Icelandic only has a topic-related expletive, Swedish has two expletive pronouns – although today the topic-related CP expletive mainly occurs in spoken Swedish.

The structure of the article is as follows. To begin with, Section 2 discusses how, within the framework of generative grammar, transitive expletive constructions have been traced back to different language-internal licensing factors. Although most of these factors have been discussed from a synchronic point of view, they are also of diachronic relevance, predicting that transitive expletive constructions will occur in earlier stages of Swedish, but not in the present-day language. However, the data in Section 3 show that these constructions have occurred throughout the history of Swedish and to some extent still occur in the present-day language. While transitive expletive constructions are found in both Insular and Mainland Scandinavian, though, there are also clear differences with respect to them between the languages. Section 4 focuses on associate subjects and shows that Swedish is reminiscent of Icelandic in the sense that two positions are available for them, but that – unlike Icelandic – Swedish also allows definite associate subjects in transitive expletive constructions. The presence of transitive expletives in Swedish calls for a new explanation of the phenomenon, and therefore in Section 5 it is claimed that constructions of this type are dependent on the lexical inventory of expletives in a given language. Section 6 discusses whether this analysis applies to Swedish and shows that present-day Swedish in fact has two different expletive pronouns: a topic expletive merged in Spec,CP, and a subject expletive merged in Spec,vP. It may seem impossible to tell whether an expletive pronoun in Spec,CP is merged in this position or not. However, if the expletive can merge in Spec,CP, we would expect expletive pronouns not only to occur in transitive expletive constructions, but to combine with definite associate subjects in general, and we show that these predictions are in fact borne out. Section 7 is a summary of the main conclusions of the article.

2. TRANSITIVE EXPLETIVES – SYNCHRONIC GENERALIZATIONS AND DIACHRONIC IMPLICATIONS

With the introduction of the theory of principles and parameters (Chomsky 1981), generative research changed from postulating rules for individual languages to comparing syntactic characteristics in different languages. Early on, it was noted that expletive constructions exhibit a high degree of variation in the Germanic languages, and various proposals have been presented to account for this variation. As for transitive expletive constructions, several attempts have been made to present a uniform analysis of the phenomenon. In this section, some of these proposals will be discussed.

The point of departure will be Bures's (1993) claim that in the Germanic languages there is a correlation between object shift and transitive expletive constructions, in the sense that 'the languages that allow object shift (OS) of full NPs are the same ones that have transitive expletive sentences' (Bures 1993:15). According to Bures (1993), the reason for this correlation is that both constructions involve the raising of two arguments in the same cycle, either at LF (as far as transitive expletive constructions are concerned) or at PF (as far as OS of full DPs is concerned). Bures (1993) does not assume that the associate subject has to leave VP, but supposes that existential sentences 'involve raising at LF of an argument to adjoin to the expletive' (Bures 1993:14), as shown in (4):

(4) [There [two ships]_{*i*}] arrived _____{*i*} in the harbor.

Raising of two arguments in the same cycle is only possible in languages that allow A-movement through Spec,TP, as illustrated in the structure in (5).

(5) [_{AgRP} NP_{*i*} Agr [_{TP} _____{*i*} Tense [_{AgRP} NP_{*k*} Agr [_{VP} _____{*i*} V _____{*k*}]]]]

If A-movement through Spec,TP is prohibited, the object blocks raising of the subject, ruling out both covert and overt movement of two arguments.

According to Bures (1993), A-movement through Spec,TP is allowed in Icelandic, but not in the Mainland Scandinavian languages, and hence object shift of full DPs is expected to occur only in Icelandic.² That is indeed the case, as shown in (6).

- (6) a. Jón ávarpaði Maríu ekki. (Icelandic)
John addressed María not
 'Jón didn't address María.'
- b. *John tilltalade Maria inte. (Swedish)
John addressed Maria not

Among the Scandinavian languages, Bures (1993) discusses Icelandic in contrast to Mainland Scandinavian, and if we accept the standard claim that

transitive expletive constructions are not allowed in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, the prediction of his generalization is borne out: transitive expletives and object shift occur in Icelandic, but not in Mainland Scandinavian.³ However, the diachronic implications of the generalization are not entirely clear: since there is no evidence that full DP object shift has occurred in the history of Swedish, it is not obvious that A-movement through Spec,TP ever was a possibility in that language. Hence, Bures's generalization cannot account for the fact that transitive expletive constructions were possible in Early Modern Swedish (recall (2) above).⁴

While Bures (1993) correlates transitive expletive constructions with full DP object shift, another correlation has been proposed between transitive expletives and V°-to-T°/I° (henceforth V°-T°) movement. The latter correlation is often referred to as VIKNER'S GENERALIZATION, after Vikner (1995), who argues that transitive expletive constructions are dependent on the V2 phenomenon in combination with V°-T° movement. According to Vikner, the associate subject position can only be case-licensed to the left of the non-finite verb if T° has morphological content. Only in languages with V°-T° movement is T° filled, and transitive expletive constructions are thus only possible in languages showing V°-T° movement. It is well known that Icelandic differs from the Mainland Scandinavian languages in this respect. While all of the Scandinavian languages are V2 languages, they vary with respect to V°-T° movement. Icelandic (and to some degree Faroese – see Bentzen et al. 2009 and Heycock et al. 2012) shows V°-T° movement, but the Mainland Scandinavian languages do not (at least not to the same extent; see further Wiklund et al. 2007). The examples in (7) and (8) illustrate:

- (7) a. ... að Jón **keypti ekki** bókina (Icelandic)
 that Jón bought not the.book
 ‘that Jón didn’t buy the book’
 b. [CP að [TP [Spec,TP Jón_i] keypti_v [VP ekki [VP ____i ____v bókina]]]]
- (8) a. ... att Ulf **inte köpte** boken (Swedish)
 that Ulf not bought the.book
 ‘that Ulf didn’t buy the book’
 b. [CP att [TP [Spec,TP Ulf_i] [VP inte [VP ____i köpte boken]]]]

As shown in (7), in Icelandic subordinate clauses the finite verb moves to the T-domain, whereas in the standard varieties of the modern Mainland Scandinavian languages it remains *in situ*, as shown in (8). However, the older stages of the Mainland Scandinavian languages follow the pattern of Insular Scandinavian rather than that of their standard modern counterparts in this respect (Falk 1993, Sundquist 2003, Håkansson 2011, as is shown in (9)).

Author's year of birth	Total	with V°–T° movement	without V°–T° movement	% with V°–T° movement
1495–1535	99	40	59	40
1536–1570	44	23	21	52
1571–1600	97	14	83	14
1601–1635	66	10	56	15
1636–1670	81	13	68	16
1671–1700	44	3	41	7
1701–1735	90	9	81	10

Source: Falk (1993:176)

Table 1. V°–T° movement in subordinate clauses in Early Modern Swedish.

- (9) a. ... æn min guþ **brytar eigh** niþar þin guþ (Old Sw.)
if my god breaks not down your god
 ‘... if my god doesn’t break down your god’
- b. ... naar hennes øl oc mad **kunne ickæ** til
when her ale and food could not VPL
 reckæ (Middle Danish)
suffice
 ‘... when her ale and food were not sufficient’

In the case of Swedish, the old subordinate clause word order with V°–T° movement is gradually replaced in Early Modern Swedish with the modern order without V°–T° movement. This development is shown in Table 1.

According to Falk (1993), V°–T° movement is triggered by verbal inflection, and she argues that V°–T° movement in subordinate clauses in Swedish finally disappears when agreement in number is lost during the 17th century. If, with Vikner (1995), we assume a connection between V°–T° movement and transitive expletive constructions, we would expect the latter to occur in Swedish as long as V°–T° movement is a syntactic possibility in subordinate clauses, i.e. until the 17th century.

A connection between V°–T° movement and transitive expletive constructions has also been put forward by Bobaljik & Thráinsson (1998). In contrast to Vikner, however, those authors do not assume a causal relationship between the two syntactic phenomena: rather, they are both regarded as consequences of the same parameter, the SPLIT-IP PARAMETER:

(10) The split-IP parameter (SIP)

If a language has a positive value for the SIP, then it will obligatorily have V-to-I movement and it will also have an ‘extra’ subject position available (and possibly also an extra object position).

(Thráinsson 2009:6)

Bobaljik & Thráinsson (1998) argue that the (standard) Mainland Scandinavian languages have a negative value for the split-IP parameter, and that this negative value is the reason for the lack of transitive expletive constructions in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish: given that the associate of the expletive has to leave VP, there is no position available for it in the T-domain, since this position is already occupied by the expletive. In Icelandic on the other hand, the split-IP parameter has a positive value and from this it follows that transitive expletive constructions occur: even if the expletive occupies a position in the T-domain, there is still a position available for its associate. As in much of the generative syntactic research of the 1990s, Bobaljik & Thráinsson (1998) assume a relationship between overt morphology and parameter setting, and as far as the split-IP parameter is concerned, the expression of both tense and agreement by discrete morphemes (as Icelandic *kasta-ði-r* ‘throw-PAST-SG.2’ or *köstu-ðu-m* ‘throw-PAST-PL.1’) results in a positive value of the parameter.

In the history of the Mainland Scandinavian languages, too, tense and agreement were expressed by discrete morphemes – at least in the past tense plural, see (11) below for Old Swedish – and hence we would expect Old Swedish to have an internal structure of the T-domain that patterns with Icelandic rather than with the standard modern Mainland Scandinavian languages.

(11) Old Swedish **kalla** ‘to call’ (Delsing 2002:935f.)

	PRESENT	PAST
SG1	kalla-(r)	kalla-þi
SG2	kalla-r	kalla-þi
SG3	kalla-r	kalla-þi
PL1	kall-um	kalla-þu-m
PL2	kall-in	kalla-þi-n
PL3	kall-a	kalla-þu

As shown in (11), Old Swedish retained a morphological system in which finite verbs agreed in number and person with the subject. Whereas the singular forms were non-distinct, in the plural all persons were distinct (Wessén 1965:122). In Late Old Swedish (approximately in the 15th century in the dialects of central Sweden), agreement in person was weakened by the use of common forms. If the internal structure of the T-domain is dependent on verbal inflection, we would expect the value of the split-IP parameter to have changed in Swedish during the 15th century, and if – like Bobaljik & Thráinsson (1998) – we assume a connection between the internal structure of the T-domain and transitive expletive constructions, we would expect the latter to occur in Swedish as long as the split-IP parameter is set positively, i.e. until the 15th century. After that, tense and agreement are no longer expressed by discrete morphemes, and hence there is no longer an ‘extra’ subject position in the T-domain.

To summarize, several factors have been proposed as licensing transitive expletive constructions and accounting for the difference between Mainland and Insular Scandinavian in this respect. Although the main focus of these theories is synchronic, they all have implications for the history of Swedish and make predictions for the diachronic development of the phenomenon: we expect transitive expletives to occur in Old Swedish and Early Modern Swedish, but not thereafter, if the predictions of earlier synchronic generalizations are borne out. In the next section, these predictions will be tested against data from the history of Swedish.

3. EXPLETIVES IN SWEDISH

As shown above, it is generally assumed that transitive expletives do not exist in the modern Mainland Scandinavian languages. In earlier stages of Swedish, however, they do occur (as is shown in (2) above). Although it is clear from previous research that transitive expletive constructions have occurred in the history of Swedish, to the best of our knowledge no detailed diachronic investigation of the phenomenon has been undertaken. To fill this gap, this section presents results from an empirical study of transitive expletive constructions in the history of Swedish. In sum, these results show that such constructions were possible in written Swedish until the 19th century, but subsequently seem to have been restricted to the spoken language. This finding is highly unexpected in the light of earlier research indicating that transitive expletive constructions are not possible in the Mainland Scandinavian languages.⁵

Following the theoretical proposals discussed in the previous section, we would expect transitive expletives to occur in Old Swedish and Early Modern Swedish, but not thereafter. However, the predictions of such a hypothesis are in fact very difficult to test – at least as far as Old Swedish is concerned, since it generally provides very few instances of expletives. In a study of existential sentences in Old Swedish, Varho [Sandelin] (1995) shows that more than 99% of such sentences from Early Old Swedish (prior to 1375) lack an expletive pronoun. In Late Old Swedish (after 1375), the use of such pronouns increases, especially in religious texts, but even so the mean proportion of existential sentences with overt expletive pronouns does not exceed 10% in any genre (Varho [Sandelin] 1995:168). Although the frequency of expletive pronouns is low in Old Swedish, active transitive verbs with an overt expletive can be attested, as shown by Söderwall, Ljunggren & Wessén (1953–73:960):

- (12) for thy **thz** takir tha sakin therä ända ällir skugga (Old Sw.; JS)
 for EXPL takes then the.cause their end or shadow
 'because then the cause or shadow take their end'

During Early Modern Swedish the use of overt expletive pronouns continues to increase (Falk 1993). However, in combination with active transitive verbs, expletives

are still quite rare. In the Swedish Bible translation from 1541, there are some examples (see (13a)), but in other Early Modern Swedish texts only isolated instances can be attested (see (13b)):

- (13) a. **thet** haffuer iagh alt hållet vthaff min vngdom. (EMS; GVB 1541)
EXPL have I certainly held out.of my youth
 'I was certainly fond of my youth.'
- b. **Thet** halv mig ingen bön. (EMS; Horn c. 1657)
EXPL helped me no prayer
 'No prayer could help me.'

As for Late Modern Swedish, Olson (1913) and the Swedish Academy dictionary SAOB (1910:D824) give a few examples of expletives combined with transitive verbs (see (14) below), but according to Olson (1913) expletive pronouns are unusual in this context, and judging from SAOB expletive pronouns have occurred in combination with transitive verbs in Swedish, but nowadays (i.e. in 1910) they are hardly used. The latest examples given by SAOB, in (15), are from the 1840s.

- (14) **Det** böd dem ingen qvar. (LMS; 1772)
EXPL invited them nobody left
 'Nobody invited them.'
- (15) a. **Det** lemnar ingen dessa dikter utan att känna att ... (LMS; 1841)
EXPL leaves no one these poems without to feel that
 'No one leaves these poems without feeling that ...'
- b. **Det** kan någon af oss föreställa mur. (LMS; 1847)
EXPL can someone of us represent wall
 'One of us can represent a wall.'

Interestingly, however, although transitive expletive constructions occur rather sparingly in the written language throughout the history of Swedish, Ljunggren (1926) reports that they were frequently attested in spoken Swedish around 1900. Some of his examples are given in (16)–(17):

- (16) a. **Det** får väl någon annan överta vakten då
EXPL may MP someone else take.over watch then
 'Someone else will have to take charge of the watch then.'
- b. **Det** köper inte många sina kläder så billigt som hon
EXPL buy not many their clothes as cheaply as she
 'Not many people buy their clothes as cheaply as she does.'
- (LMS; Ljunggren 1926:351–352)

- (17) a. **Det** hade de en städerska som kom dit varje morgon
EXPL had they a maid who came there every morning
 ‘They had a maid who came there every morning.’
- b. **Det** hade de rackarna satt ett stort skåp i farstun ...
EXPL had those rascals put a big cabinet in hall
 ‘Those rascals had put a big cabinet in the hall ...’
 (LMS; Ljunggren 1926:351)

Ljunggren (1926) gives many examples of transitive verbs with expletive pronouns, but it is not clear whether this usage was widespread in contemporary spoken Swedish or restricted to particular dialects. According to Heinerz (1930), transitive expletive constructions were unattested in the Scanian dialects, and Wallin (1936) argues that they mainly occur in south-western Swedish. However, Stenström (1948) shows that such constructions occur in the traditional dialect of Gotland (see (18) below), while Nordberg (2004) reports examples from the spoken language of central Sweden, used by informants born around the turn of the past century (see (19)). Overall, there seems to be good reason to believe that, around 1900, expletive pronouns could combine with active transitive verbs in spoken Swedish – completely independently of licensing factors such as verbal agreement and verb movement.

- (18) a. U **de** skrivd Ros en skrivälsä
and EXPL wrote Ros a letter
 ‘and Ros wrote a letter’
- b. **de** ha vörr aikstälpar, sum skall huggäss äut
EXPL have we oak.poles that shall carve.PASS out
 ‘We have oak poles that will be carved out.’
 (LMS, c. 1890; Stenström 1948:23)
- (19) a. å **dä** kände man igen varenda en som ... kom på stan
and EXPL recognized one VPL everyone that came on town
 ‘and you recognized everyone that you met in town’
- b. å **de** kunne rom spela bitar
and EXPL could they play tunes
 ‘and they could play tunes’
 (LMS; Nordberg 2004:145, 148)

As noted above, the standard view is that expletive pronouns cannot combine with active transitive verbs in present-day Mainland Scandinavian languages. This may be true of the written languages, but in spoken Swedish there are undoubtedly examples of expletive *det* in combination with an active transitive verb. The examples in (20) below are drawn from the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009) and were recorded in different parts of Sweden: the north (Anundsjö in the province of Ångermanland), the south (Bara in Skåne), the east (Fole on the island of Gotland), and the central part of Sweden (Villberga in Uppland; Skinnskatteberg

in Västmanland), while those in (21) are taken from a newspaper (quoted speech) and a radio broadcast.⁶

- (20) a. **det** har vi ju bevarat en hel del efter han (Swedish; Anundsjö)
EXPL have we MP preserved a lot after him
 ‘We have preserved a lot after him.’
- b. **det** har jag saknat andra grejor också ... (Swedish; Bara)
EXPL have I missed other things too
 ‘I have missed other things too’
- c. **det** har väl alla barn gjort något (Swedish; Fole)
EXPL have surely all children done something
 ‘Surely all children have done some [mischief].’
- d. nej sa jag, **det** ska jag inte köpa någon bil (Swedish; Villberga)
no said I EXPL shall I not buy any car
 ‘No, I said, I will not buy a car.’
- e. men de har ju en finskförening och **det** har de väldigt
but they have MP a Finnish.association and EXPL have they very
 mycket aktiviteter (Swedish; Skinnskatteberg)
much activities
 ‘but they have a Finnish association and they have a lot of activities’
- (21) a. Och **det** brukar dom ju försöka ... göra ganska vackra
and EXPL use they MP try make quite nice
 glasögon till barn och så där.
glasses to children and so there
 ‘And they usually try to make quite nice glasses for children and so on.’
 (Swedish Radio, 7 July 2011; Josefsson 2012:369)
- b. **Det** torde ju inte en sjuksköterska gå och säga till en doktor.
EXPL dared MP not a nurse walk and tell VPL a doctor
 ‘A nurse did not dare to tell a doctor.’
 (Swedish; *Dagens Nyheter*, 10 November 2014)⁷

Again, the use of expletive pronouns with active transitive verbs in contemporary Swedish cannot be traced back to licensing factors such as verbal agreement and verb movement, since those factors are more or less absent in present-day speech.

In a Scandinavian context, the term ‘transitive expletive construction’ is normally used to refer to a transitive verb in combination with an expletive pronoun and an indefinite associate subject (as in (1a) above – repeated here as (22)). However, the Swedish examples discussed in this section include a broader repertoire of associate subjects with definite associate subjects in majority. From an Icelandic point of view, this is an unexpected pattern. At the same time, it has to be emphasized that the Swedish instances of transitive expletive constructions are not unique. In German, too, active transitive verbs can combine with expletive pronouns and a definite associate, as will be further discussed in the next section.

- (22) **Það** hefur einhver borðað epli. (Icelandic)
EXPL has someone eaten apple
 ‘Someone has eaten an apple.’

Since both definite and indefinite associate subjects show the same diachronic development in Swedish, there is no reason to believe that they represent different constructions. In other words, there is no need to reserve the term ‘transitive expletive construction’ for sentences with indefinite associate subjects, and if the term is used in this broader sense, it is clear that transitive expletive constructions have occurred throughout the history of Swedish. The empirical investigation presented in this section has also provided evidence that transitive expletives are a feature of present-day Swedish, contrary to the standard claim that they are not possible in Mainland Scandinavian.⁸ In fact, there is no change over time as far as transitive expletive constructions in Swedish are concerned, although from around 1900 there is a clear demarcation between the spoken and the written language: in present-day Swedish, transitive expletives are practically unattested in writing, but still possible in speech. Taken together, the results of this investigation give reason to question not only the view that transitive expletive constructions do not occur in Mainland Scandinavian, but also the diachronic implications of the synchronic generalizations made: the fact that present-day Swedish does not show any of the features put forward as licensing transitive expletives points strongly to a need for a new explanation of the phenomenon.

4. THE ASSOCIATE SUBJECT – STRUCTURAL POSITIONS AND THE INDEFINITENESS REQUIREMENT

The point of departure of this article has been differences among the Scandinavian languages with respect to expletive constructions. In the previous section, it was shown that expletive pronouns could combine with active transitive verbs in Swedish, and this finding highlights another difference between Insular and Mainland Scandinavian related to expletive constructions: the positions and form of the associate subject.

In Icelandic, the associate subject can occur in different positions, either to the left or to the right of the non-finite verb:

- (23) a. **Það** hefur verið einhver köttur í eldhúsinu.
EXPL has been some cat in the.kitchen
 b. **Það** hefur einhver köttur verið í eldhúsinu.
EXPL has some cat been in the.kitchen
 ‘There has been some cat in the kitchen.’

(Icelandic; Vangsnes 2002:44)

Although Icelandic has two positions for associate subjects, Vangsnes (2002) shows that these different positions allow different types of nominal phrases. Much as in English and Mainland Scandinavian, associate subjects in the postverbal position in Icelandic are subject to the definiteness effect, ruling out definite descriptions (24a–b), universally quantified noun phrases (24c–d) and partitive noun phrases (24e) from this position:

- (24) a. **Það** hefur verið *kötturinn / *Pétur í eldhúsinu.
EXPL has been the.cat Pétur in the.kitchen
- b. **Það** hefur verið *þessi köttur / *köttur Péturs í eldhúsinu.
EXPL has been this cat cat Pétur's in the.kitchen
- c. **Það** hefur verið *sérhver köttur í eldhúsinu.
EXPL has been each cat in the.kitchen
- d. **Það** hafa verið *allir kettirnir / *báðir kettirnir í eldhúsinu.
EXPL have been all the.cats both the.cats in the.kitchen
- e. **Það** hafa verið *sumir kettir í eldhúsinu.
EXPL have been certain cats in the.kitchen

(Icelandic; Vangsnes 2002:46)

The intermediate position, to the left of the non-finite verb, on the other hand, is not subject to the definiteness effect, since noun phrase types that are excluded in the postverbal position, such as universally quantified and partitive noun phrases, can occur in the position before the non-finite verb, as shown in (25) below. However, definite noun phrases are excluded from the intermediate position as well, as shown in (26) (if they are not embedded in a universally quantified noun phrase, as in (25b–c)).

- (25) a. **Það** hefur sérhver köttur verið í eldhúsinu.
EXPL has each cat been in the.kitchen
 ‘Every cat has been in the kitchen.’
- b. **Það** hafa allir kettirnir / báðir kettirnir verið í eldhúsinu.
EXPL have all the.cats both the.cats been in the.kitchen
 ‘All the cats / both cats have been in the kitchen.’
- c. **Það** hafa sumir kettir verið í eldhúsinu.
EXPL have certain cats been in the.kitchen
 ‘SOME cats have been in the kitchen.’

(Icelandic; Vangsnes 2002:48)

- (26) a. **Það** hefur *kötturinn / *Pétur verið í eldhúsinu.
EXPL has the.cat Pétur been in the.kitchen
- b. **Það** hefur *þessi köttur / *köttur Péturs verið í eldhúsinu.
EXPL has this cat cat Pétur's been in the.kitchen

With respect to transitive expletive constructions, the intermediate position is of particular interest, since associate subjects in such constructions can only occur in this position:

- (27) a. **Það** hefur einhver köttur étið mýsnar.
EXPL has some cat eaten the.mice
 ‘Some cat has eaten the mice.’
- b. ***Það** hefur étið einhver köttur mýsnar.
EXPL has eaten some cat the.mice
 (Icelandic; Vangsnes 2002:45)

It is widely acknowledged that Icelandic differs from Mainland Scandinavian with respect to the structural positions available for associate subjects, and it has been argued that only the postverbal position is available for such subjects in Mainland Scandinavian (see Vangsnes 2002 among others). However, Engels (2010) has shown that, around 1900, the intermediate position was also available in the Mainland Scandinavian languages, although, she claims, only quantified and negative associate subjects could occur in this position:

- (28) a. **Der** kan mange si det. (Norwegian)
EXPL can many say that
 ‘Many can say that.’
- b. **Der** kan ingen si det. (Danish)
EXPL can nobody say that
 ‘Nobody can say that.’
- c. **Det** kan ingen göra den saken bättre än han (LMS)
EXPL can nobody do that thing better than he
 ‘Nobody can do that thing better than he can.’
 (Engels 2010:127)

However, the data presented in Section 3 above give reason to question Engels’s (2010) claim that the intermediate position allowed only quantified and negative associate subjects, at least as far as Swedish is concerned.⁹ On the contrary, those data may indicate that there is an intermediate position for associate subjects in Swedish and that it is not restricted to those that are quantified or negative, since definite associate subjects can also occur in this position – both in the history of Swedish and in the present-day language. Whereas in Icelandic associate subjects in the intermediate position cannot be definite (see (29b) below), this is clearly an option in Swedish, as shown in (29a). Hence, the conclusion – contrary to what is standardly claimed – is that at least some varieties of Swedish have two positions for associate subjects, and that associate subjects in the intermediate position are immune from the definiteness effect. (In (29a), the symbol % marks idiolectal and dialectal variation.)

- (29) a. %**Det** har väl Elsa klätt sin julgran för längesen. (Swedish)
EXPL has MP Elsa dressed her Christmas.tree for a.long.time.ago
 ‘Elsa surely decorated her Christmas tree a long time ago.’
- b. ***Það** hefur Elsa skreytt jólatréð sitt fyrir löngu síðan. (Icelandic)
EXPL has Elsa decorated Christmas.tree her for long since

Thus, in this respect, Swedish patterns not with Icelandic but with German, where definite associate subjects are also possible (see Barðdal & Eythórssón 2003 and references cited there):

- (30) **Es** hat nur der Hans dieses Buch nicht gelesen. (German)
EXPL hat only DEF Hans this book not read
 ‘Only Hans has not read this book.’

According to Barðdal & Eythórssón (2003:769), it ‘seems that some pragmatic factors rather than definiteness are responsible for the restrictions on the co-occurrence of an expletive and a subject in German’, and the same can also be said to hold for Swedish: pragmatic factors rather than definiteness determine whether expletive pronouns can combine with an associate subject and a transitive verb.

To conclude, it has been argued in this section that Swedish has two positions available for the associate subject. In this sense, it is reminiscent of Icelandic, but unlike Icelandic, Swedish – just like German – also allows definite associate subjects in the intermediate position.

5. STRUCTURAL POSITION(S) OF THE EXPLETIVE

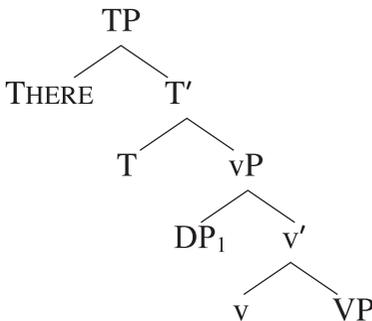
The presence of transitive expletive constructions in Swedish challenges earlier accounts of the phenomenon, since present-day Swedish does not show any of the different morphological and syntactic features, such as verbal agreement and verb movement, that have been proposed as licensing transitive expletive constructions. A new explanation for the phenomenon is therefore needed, and in this section we will launch the hypothesis that transitive expletive constructions are dependent on the lexical inventory of expletive pronouns in a given language. In short, we will claim that these constructions are licensed if the expletive pronoun can merge in a position structurally higher than the canonical subject position. In the case of V2 languages, this implies that expletives must be able to merge in Spec,CP. The central idea goes back to Platzack (1983), who argues that transitive expletive constructions are possible in languages where the expletive does not show syntactic subjecthood (such as Icelandic and German), but impossible in languages where it has the syntactic status of a subject. Expressed in more contemporary

terms, Platzack's (1983) analysis sets out from the assumption that only when the expletive is merged in the sentence-initial position is the subject position empty and the associate subject thus able to occupy that position. If the expletive is a subject pronoun, on the other hand, it is base-generated in the subject position and therefore there is no empty position in the structure for the associate subject. For the Scandinavian languages, similar analyses have since been put forward by Maling (1988) and Christensen (1991a, b).¹⁰ More recently, Henry & Cottell (2007) have proposed a similar approach to account for transitive expletive constructions in Belfast English. According to those authors, whereas such constructions are ungrammatical in Standard English, they do exist in Belfast English, as shown in (31):

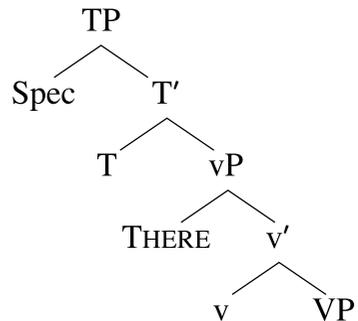
- (31) a. **There** have lots of people eaten their lunch already.
 b. **There** shouldn't anybody drink wine before dinner time.

Henry & Cottell (2007) argue that expletives in Belfast English are merged in a higher structural position than in Standard English, and hence there are positions available both for the expletive and the associate subject in Belfast English, but not in Standard English:¹¹

(31) a. *Belfast English*

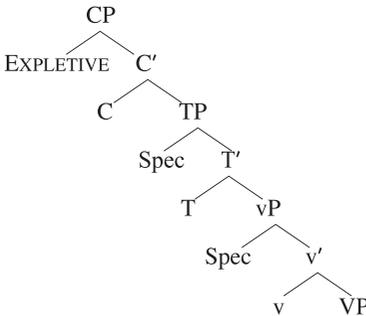


b. *Standard English*

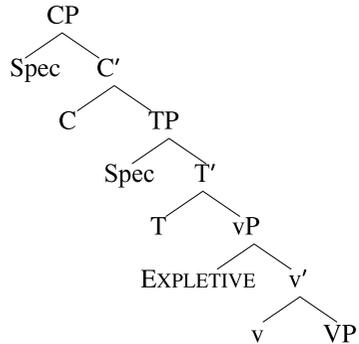


If the analysis suggested by Henry & Cottell (2007) were to be applied to V2 languages, it might be proposed that the expletive merges in Spec,CP in languages allowing transitive expletive constructions, but in Spec,vP in languages in which such constructions are not allowed. See (32a) and (32b):

(32) a. *V2 languages with transitive expletive constructions*



b. *V2 languages without transitive expletive constructions*



Since, as shown above, transitive expletive constructions occur in both Insular and Mainland Scandinavian (at least in Swedish), one would expect the structure in (32a) to be the appropriate one in these languages. However, it is well known that Icelandic differs from the Mainland Scandinavian languages as far as the placement of expletive pronouns is concerned. In Mainland Scandinavian the expletive can occur to the right of the finite verb, whereas in Icelandic it can never do so, as shown in (3) above, here repeated as (33). Thus, there seems to be good reason to believe that (32a) cannot be the correct analysis for all V2 languages that allow transitive expletive constructions.

- (33) a. I dag har ***(det)** kommit många lingvister hit. (Swedish)
 b. Í dag hafa **(*það)** komið margar málvísindamenn hingað. (Icelandic)
today have EXPL come many linguists here
 ‘Today, many linguists have arrived here.’

A common way of handling the difference between Mainland and Insular Scandinavian illustrated in (33) is to assume that the expletive in Icelandic is some sort of a placeholder, merged in a different position than expletive subjects in Mainland Scandinavian. Biberauer (2010) has argued that, in the Scandinavian languages, expletives are merged either in Spec,CP (Icelandic) or in a lower structural position (Mainland Scandinavian), but she suggests that there are languages, such as German and Dutch, where they can merge in either the higher or the lower structural position. For German, Biberauer (2010) points to the fact that quasi-arguments can occur to both the left and the right of the finite verb (see (34)), whereas non-argumental expletives are never overtly realized to the right of the finite verb, as shown in (35).¹²

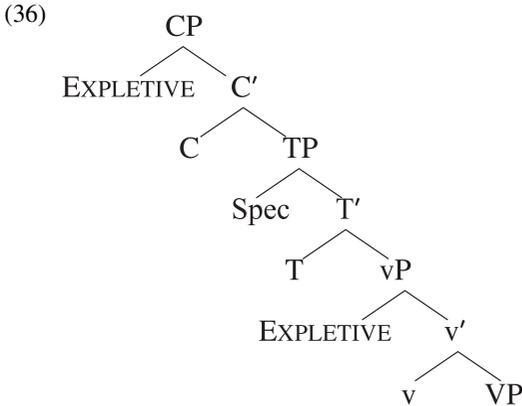
- (34) a. **Es** schneit heute.
EXPL snows today
 ‘It is snowing today.’
 b. Heute schneit **es**.
today snows EXPL
 ‘Today it is snowing.’

(German; Biberauer 2010:159)

- (35) a. **Es** ist heute ja doch ein Brief gekommen.
EXPL is today MP MP a letter come
 ‘A letter did after all come today.’
 b. *Heute kam **es** ja doch ein Brief.
today came EXPL MP MP a letter

(German; Biberauer 2010:158)

Since non-argumental and quasi-argumental expletives show different properties with respect to word order, Biberauer (2010) claims that expletives in German can be merged either in Spec,CP (non-argumental *es*) or in Spec,vP (quasi-argumental *es*). Here, we will propose a similar analysis to account for transitive expletive constructions in V2 languages in general, and as far as the Scandinavian languages are concerned we will claim that expletives can merge in two different positions: either as a topic expletive in Spec,CP or as a subject expletive (non-argumental or quasi-argumental) in Spec,vP. In Icelandic, only the former position is possible, whereas in present-day Swedish, expletives can merge either in Spec,CP or in Spec,vP (although nowadays CP expletives are restricted by certain idiolectal factors):



When the expletive is merged in Spec,CP, a position is available for the associate subject in the T-domain, which enables transitive expletive constructions. However, if the expletive is merged in Spec,vP, we would not expect the expletive pronoun in transitive expletive constructions to occur to the right of the finite verb, in contrast to subject expletives, and in fact this prediction seems to be borne out: according to

Ljunggren (1926:344), an expletive element is only possible in clause-initial position together with a transitive verb. In our judgement, transitive expletives are not possible either in main clauses with a non-subject topicalized or in subordinate clauses, i.e. in the canonical subject position, an assessment that is confirmed by the fact that we have found no instances of expletive pronouns in combination with transitive verbs in the canonical subject position.¹³ In this respect, the Swedish transitive expletive differs from other expletive pronouns in Swedish and instead behaves in same way as expletives in transitive constructions in Icelandic or German – occurring only to the left of the finite verb in main clauses (Engels 2010:103):

- (37) a. **Það** hefur einhver stolið hjólinu mínu.
EXPL has someone stolen the.bike my
 ‘Someone has stolen my bike.’
 (Icelandic; Thráinsson 2007:310)
- b. *Hjólinu mínu hefur **það** einhver stolið.
the.bike my has EXPL someone stolen
- (38) a. **Es** baut die Stadt hier ein neues Stadion.
EXPL builds the city here a new stadium
 ‘The city is building a new stadium here.’
- b. *Ein neues Stadion baut **es** die Stadt hier.
a new stadium builds EXPL the city here

In this section, we have launched the hypothesis that the occurrence of transitive expletive constructions is dependent on the structural position of the expletives in a given language; furthermore, we have claimed that present-day Swedish in fact has two different expletive pronouns: a topic expletive merged in Spec,CP, and a subject expletive merged in Spec,vP. In the next section, the predictions of this hypothesis will be further tested.

6. TWO EXPLETIVE PRONOUNS IN SWEDISH?

In the previous section, it was claimed that the expletive could merge in two different positions in present-day Swedish, either in Spec,CP or in Spec,vP. Such an analysis may account for the variation in present-day Swedish, where expletive pronouns in transitive constructions only occur to the left of the finite verb in main clauses, whereas other expletives can also appear in other positions, i.e. to the right of the finite verb in main clauses and after the complementizer in subordinate clauses. However, it is doubtful whether this analysis also applies to Old Swedish, since expletives in Old Swedish are generally restricted to Spec,CP.

As already mentioned in Section 3 above, there are very few instances of expletive pronouns in Old Swedish, but where one does occur it appears almost exclusively in

sentence-initial position in main clauses. In an extensive study of existential clauses in Old Swedish, Varho [Sandelin] (1995) found only three instances of expletive pronouns that do not follow this pattern: in these cases, the expletive occurs to the right of the finite verb in a main clause, as shown in (39).

- (39) *jngen segel, bölyor, aaror, äller strömmeer kwnna **thet** komma aff*
no sail waves oars or currents can EXPL come of
them stadenom. (Old Sw.; Varho [Sandelin] 1995:145)
this city
 ‘No sail, waves, oars or currents can come from this city.’

As for subordinate clauses, expletive pronouns mainly seem to occur in clauses where topicalization is possible. Since clauses like (40) can show main clause word order, they do not represent counter-evidence to the analysis of expletive *det* as merged in Spec,CP:

- (40) *Han sadhe [at **thet** voro 2 brödher i hedhen tijma].*
he said that EXPL were two brothers in heathen time
 ‘He said that there were two brothers in heathen times.’
 (EMS; Falk 1993:254)

In subordinate clauses where topicalization is more or less ruled out, however, there are very few instances of expletive *det*. According to Falk (1993:254) ‘[s]ome examples’ can be found, but in Old Swedish we are aware of only one (Jørgensen 1987:135):

- (41) *e hwar **þæt** liggær utæn tomtæ ra ærræt lik*
if EXPL lies outside plot's boundary scarred corpse
ok undæt
and wounded
 ‘if there is a scarred and wounded corpse lying outside the boundary of the plot of land’
 (Old Sw.; Jørgensen 1987:135)

To conclude, there appears to be quite strong evidence that expletive pronouns in Old Swedish are merged in Spec,CP only. For Icelandic *það*, a similar analysis has been proposed. Although the analysis of Icelandic *það* as some sort of placeholder merged in Spec,CP may have its advantages, it has also been questioned (see further Hornstein 1991 and Thráinsson 2007), on two grounds. Firstly, *það* can also occur in embedded clauses. Since topicalization is possible in some embedded clauses in Icelandic, just as in Old Swedish, this may at first glance seem unproblematic, but in fact *það* can be inserted even in embedded clauses where topicalization is more or less impossible, as shown in (42).

Author's year of birth	Total	with <i>det</i>	% with <i>det</i>
1495–1535	135	11	8
1536–1570	79	4	5
1571–1600	96	7	7
1601–1635	130	39	30
1636–1670	97	32	33
1671–1700	104	19	18
1701–1735	134	41	31

Source: Falk (1993:235)

Table 2. Expletive *det* in expletive constructions in Early Modern Swedish.

- (42) a. Fílar verða hræddir [ef það setur einhver mýs í vatnsdallinn].
elephants become scared if EXPL puts somebody mice in the.water-bowl
 ‘Elephants get scared if somebody puts mice in the water bowl.’
- b. ?*Fílar verða hræddir [ef mýsnar setur einhver í vatnsdallinn].
elephants become scared if the.mice puts somebody in the.water-bowl
 (Icelandic; Thráinsson 2007:328)

Secondly, expletive *það* can occur in *wh*-clauses, as shown in (43). If *það* is merged in Spec,CP, this would be unexpected, since this position is often assumed to be blocked by the *wh*-operator:

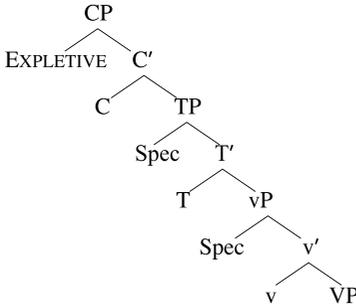
- (43) Ég man ekki [hvenær það voru síðast mýs í baðkerinu].
I remember not when EXPL were last mice in the.bathtub
 ‘I don’t remember when there were last mice in the bathtub.’
 (Icelandic; Thráinsson 2007:329)

However, even if these objections are relevant to the analysis of expletive *það* in Icelandic as some sort of placeholder, merged in Spec,CP, they may be less so when it comes to the syntactic status of expletive *det* in the history of Swedish, since there seems to be quite strong evidence that expletives in Old Swedish could only merge in Spec,CP. In Early Modern Swedish, however, the use of expletive pronouns increases, as shown in Table 2, and Falk (1993) argues that this increase reflects a change in their syntactic status: according to her, after 1600 expletive pronouns are no longer placeholders in Spec,CP, but represent true syntactic subjects in Swedish. In different terms, this change can be interpreted as expletives in Swedish no longer merging in Spec,CP, but rather in Spec,vP.

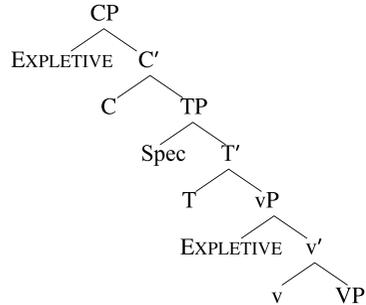
As argued above, however, there may be reason to doubt that expletives are always syntactic subjects in Swedish post-1600: the occurrence of transitive expletive constructions throughout the history of Swedish suggests that expletives can continue

to merge in Spec,CP, even after that date. We would therefore suggest that a system of vP expletives does not replace the earlier system of expletive pronouns as some sort of placeholders merged in Spec,CP. In fact, we would argue that a lexical inventory of two different expletives arose in Swedish after the introduction of expletive subjects around 1600, as shown in (44):

(44) a. Old Swedish



b. Modern Swedish



However, if pragmatic factors rather than definiteness are responsible for the restrictions on the co-occurrence of an expletive and an associate subject in Swedish, we would expect expletive pronouns to occur in Spec,CP not only together with associate subjects of transitive verbs, but with definite associate subjects in general. According to Falk (1993:263), such constructions do occur in Early Modern Swedish, as shown in (45), but are ‘very rare’:

- (45) **dätt** måste wist feelet wara hosz påstmästaren i skara
EXPL must certainly the.mistake be at the.postmaster in Skara
 ‘Certainly, the mistake must be with the postmaster in Skara.’

Although the construction is rare, expletive *det* clearly can occur together with definite associate subjects in general – throughout the history of Swedish. Some Old and Early Modern Swedish examples are given in (46):

- (46) a. **thz** är ey än thän timen komin (Old Sw.; BJ)
EXPL is not yet that time come
 ‘That time has not arrived yet.’
- b. **thz** haffde konungen bortfarit i v daga (Old Sw.; DI)
EXPL had the.king gone.away in five days
 ‘The king was away for five days.’
- c. **thet** kom icke min tijdh än (EMS; Swart 1560)
EXPL came not my time yet
 ‘My time had not yet come.’

- d. **Thett** lät sig konungen behaga (EMS; Brahe 1585)
EXPL allowed REFL the.king to.please
 ‘The king allowed himself to be pleased.’

In Late Modern Swedish the use of expletive *det* with definite associate subjects seems more restricted. According to SAOB (1910:D824), the construction is no longer possible and the latest examples given are from the 18th century. One of these examples is given in (47):

- (47) **Det** är måhlet såsom borto ifrån migh. (LMS; 1707)
EXPL is the.language as.if away from me
 ‘It is as if I have lost my tongue.’

Although expletive *det* rarely seems to combine with definite associate subjects in written Swedish after the 18th century, Ljunggren (1926) reports examples of the construction from the contemporary spoken language:

- (48) a. **Det** gick han här och visslade
EXPL went he here and whistled
 ‘He walked around here whistling.’
 b. Och **det** kom den lilla sötnosen in till mig varje morgon
and EXPL came the little sweetie-pie VPL to me every morning
 ‘And the little sweetie-pie came in to me every morning.’
 c. ... men **det** var han så djävla snål
but EXPL was he so damn stingy
 ‘but he was so damn stingy’
 d. ... och **det** kunde hela eftermiddagen gå ...
and EXPL could whole afternoon go
 ‘and the whole afternoon could disappear ...’
 (LMS; Ljunggren 1926:351)

Stenström (1948) and Nordberg (2004) report similar examples (see (49) and (50 below)), and searches that we have conducted in the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009) indicate that expletive *det* can still combine with definite associate subjects – not only with active transitive verbs – as shown in (51).

- (49) a. u **de** arbetad han där a par träi täimar i vattnä
and EXPL worked he there a couple three hours in the.water
 ‘and he worked there in the water for a couple of hours’
 b. da vidd han, att vörr skudd gläid däit u säi dum i gän,
then wanted he that we should stroll there and see them again
 u **de** gick vörr
and EXPL went we
 ‘then he wanted us to go there and see them again and we did.’
 (LMS; Stenström 1948:23)

- (50) a. **de** brukar vi hålla till ve reningsverket
EXPL tend we hang.around VPL by the.sewage.works
 ‘Usually, we tend to hang around by the sewage works.’
 b. **de** måste jag gå å fråga
EXPL must I go and ask
 ‘I have to go and ask.’
 (LMS; Nordberg 2004:150)
- (51) a. **det** är min bror mer fiskeintresserad (Swedish; Asby)
EXPL is my brother more interested.in.fishing
 ‘My brother is more interested in fishing.’
 b. **det** kom den ena gruppen efter den andra ut (Swedish; Torsö)
EXPL came the one group after the other out
 ‘One group after another came out.’

The occurrence of definite associate subjects in expletive constructions in Swedish resembles the use of topic expletives in German, as in (52) below, and clearly shows that Swedish not only has quasi-argumental and non-argumental expletives, but also a topic expletive, merged in Spec,CP.

- (52) a. **Es** hatte sich auch ihr Verhältnis zu den Nachbarn
EXPL had REFL also her relationship to the neighbours
 verändert. (German)
changed
 ‘Her relationship to the neighbours had changed.’
 b. **Es** hat doch eben Peter angeklopft. (German)
EXPL has MP just Peter knocked
 ‘Peter has just knocked.’

In this section, we have argued that the possibility of merging expletives in vP was an innovation that developed during Early Modern Swedish, whereas expletives could merge in Spec,CP as early as in Old Swedish. However, when expletives began to merge in vP during Early Modern Swedish, a lexical inventory of two expletive pronouns arose in Swedish, as the old system of CP expletives was not completely replaced by a new system of vP expletives. On the contrary, the data presented above clearly show that CP expletives have continued to occur side by side with vP expletives in Swedish.

7. SUMMARY

It is generally assumed that transitive expletive constructions do not exist in Mainland Scandinavian. In this article, we have shown that that view cannot be maintained – at least not for Swedish. Throughout the history of Swedish, transitive expletive constructions do occur – contrary to the standard claim that they are not possible.

Although this article has been confined to a particular construction, its findings may be of broader relevance. Within the framework of generative grammar, the presence or absence of transitive expletives has been explained internally, by relating the construction to licensing factors such as verb movement and verbal agreement. However, these factors appear to be COMPLETELY IRRELEVANT to the presence of transitive expletives in Swedish, and it thus seems doubtful whether these constructions can be included in a morphology-driven parametric approach to language variation and change (see Holmberg 2010). Rather, we have shown that languages such as Swedish, Icelandic and German share the property of a topic expletive, merged in Spec,CP. Hence, the presence or absence of transitive expletive constructions follows directly from the lexical inventory of expletive elements in a given language.

From a diachronic point of view it is interesting that, while transitive expletives still occur in Swedish, the construction is nowadays more or less confined to the spoken language. The reason for this may be puristic: transitive expletive constructions have been regarded as a result of German influence (see Beckman 1918, Wellander 1939). In written languages, certain constructions may be banned, but it is certainly more difficult to force them out of a spoken language. The fact that transitive expletive constructions are restricted to spoken Swedish, or certain varieties of it, and do not occur in the standard language, may also be a reason why they have not previously been observed in Swedish. As Hudson (1995:1518) points out, it is ‘all too easy to draw general and fundamental conclusions about the basic structure of a language on the basis of facts which turn out not to apply generally to all dialects of the same language’.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SOURCES

Old Swedish

BJ = Barlaam och Josaphat. *Prosadikter från Sveriges Medeltid*, ed. G. E. Klemming, 1887–1889. Stockholm: Norstedt. MS from c. 1442.

DI = *Sagan om Didrik af Bern*, ed. G. O. Hyltén-Cavallius, 1850–54. Stockholm: Norstedt. MS from the late 15th or early 16th century; originally written c. 1450.

JS = *Speculum Virginium – Jungfruspegel*, ed. R. Geete, 1897–98. Stockholm: Norstedt. MS from c. 1500; originally written between 1472 and 1486.

Early Modern Swedish

Texts available electronically via Fornsvenska textbanken (Lund University) or Språkbanken (University of Gothenburg) are marked *.

GVB = *[Gustav Vasas Bibel] *Nya Testamentet i Gustav Vasas Bibel*, ed. N. Lindqvist, 1941. Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelsens bokförlag. Selected books: Gospel of Mark, Gospel of Luke, Book of Revelation. Originally written 1541.

Swart = *[Peder Swarts krönika] *Konung Gustaf Is krönika*, ed. Nils Edén, 1912. Stockholm: Ljus. Originally written c. 1560.

Brahe = *[Per Brahes krönika] *Per Brahe den äldres fortsättning av Peder Swarts krönika I och II*, ed. O. Ahnfeldt, 1896–97. Lund. Originally written c. 1585.

Horn = *[Agneta Horns leverne] *Beskrivning över min vandringstid*, ed. G. Holm, 1959. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell. Originally written c.1657.

NOTES

1. We will use the following designations for the historical periods of Swedish: Old Sw. = Old Swedish (c. 1225–1526); EMS = Early Modern Swedish (1526–1732); LMS = Late Modern Swedish (1732–c. 1900); Swedish = present-day Swedish. A closer dating of the cited examples is given after (some of) the designations.
2. The relationship between full DP object shift and transitive expletive constructions is also highlighted by Bobaljik & Jonas (1996), who – contrary to Bures (1993) – claim that the associate subject always has to leave VP.
3. If the perspective is broadened to include Faroese, the picture is less clear. Standardly, it is assumed that full DP object shift is unattested in Faroese (Barnes 1992, Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Thráinsson et al. 2004), although transitive expletive constructions do occur to some extent:

- (i) *Jógvan keypti bókina ikki.
Jógvan bought the.book not
 ‘Jógvan didn’t buy the book.’

(Faroese; Barnes 1992:28)

- (ii) **Tað** hevur onkur útlendingur keypt húsið ...
EXPL has some foreigner bought the.house
 ‘Some foreigner has bought the house ...’

(Faroese; Thráinsson et al. 2004:285)

However, Thráinsson (2013:179) argues that full DP object shift is in fact an option in Faroese, although it is ‘heavily dependent on context, much more so than in Icelandic’. If this is the case, Bures’s generalization makes correct predictions not only for Icelandic, but also for Faroese.

4. It is usually claimed that full DP object shift was absent in Old Icelandic (Haugan 2000, Sundquist 2002), but according to Thráinsson (2013) it was possible in that language as well:

- (i) Peir finna Guð aldregi.
they find God never
 ‘They never find God.’

(Old Icelandic; Thráinsson 2013:160)

In the history of Swedish, a few isolated examples of full DP objects in front of a negation can be found (Cecilia Falk, personal communication), but since we know that full DP object shift is NOT an option in Modern Swedish, unlike in Icelandic, a handful of Old Swedish examples cannot be used to conclude that it was an option in the history of Swedish.

5. In order to establish the diachronic development of transitive expletive constructions in the history of Swedish, a representative sample of older Swedish texts (c. 1225–1732) was excerpted. Full details of the cited texts can be found in the list of sources towards the end of the paper. Examples from Late Modern Swedish (1732–c. 1900) were mainly collected from SAOB, Olson (1913) and Ljunggren (1926). Present-day Swedish data were gathered primarily from the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009), a corpus of spoken Scandinavian languages. The Swedish data in the corpus were recorded from 1998 to 2000.
6. As shown by Garbacz (2011), transitive expletives also occur in the Dalecarlian dialects (Mora, Orsa, Sollerön and Venjan):

- (i) a. **Äd** a nån jäti upp kaka. (Swedish; Mora)
 b. **Ed** a nönn jäti upp kaka. (Swedish; Orsa)
EXPL has someone eaten VPL cookie
 ‘Someone has eaten the cookie.’
- (ii) a. **Ä** a jänn rev täj önor fö voss. (Swedish; Sollerön)
EXPL has some fox taken chickens for us
- b. **Ä** a jänn röv täj hönnsä worå. (Swedish; Venjan)
EXPL has some fox taken chickens our
 ‘Some fox has taken (our) chickens (from us).’

However, speakers of the Dalecarlian dialect of Älvdalen seem to reject transitive expletives, as shown by Angantýsson (2015).

7. Thanks to Elisabet Engdahl for drawing my attention to this example.
8. Admittedly, we must keep in mind that the spoken Swedish examples represent informal speech and therefore cannot always be taken as true representations of the speakers’ grammars. However, there are so many examples of transitive expletive constructions that they cannot be explained away as ‘performance errors’.
9. Although the intermediate position seems more restricted in Danish and Norwegian than in Swedish, it is not open to quantified and negative associate subjects only, as Engels (2010) claims. In the case of Danish, Mikkelsen (1975:29) indicates that the position is

less restricted in the spoken language, as seen in her example (i) below. As for Norwegian, examples such as (ii) can be at least marginally attested.

- (i) **Der** har en præst fortalt mig noget lignende.
EXPL has a priest told me something similar
 ‘A priest has told me something similar.’

(Danish; Mikkelsen 1975:29)

- (ii) **de** tok ho gråten
EXPL took she the.crying
 ‘She started to cry.’

(Norwegian; NO 1966:1399)

10. Maling (1988) argues that the argument structure is crucial in explaining the restrictions on transitive expletive constructions in Mainland Scandinavian and English. According to her, an NP that has been assigned the thematic role of AGENT cannot be left inside VP, but has to move to a higher position in the structure (the T-domain in more recent terms). However, in languages such as Mainland Scandinavian and English, there is no higher position available in the structure, since the expletive is base-generated there. In Icelandic and German, on the other hand, the expletive has no subject status and hence the subject position is available as a target position for the agentive NP.
11. For a critical discussion of this analysis, see Borsley (2009).
12. In this respect, German differs from Icelandic, where expletive pronouns never occur to the right of the finite verb, irrespective of whether they are quasi-argumental or non-argumental. Compare (34b) with the example in (i):

- (i) Í gær rigndi (*það). (Icelandic)
yesterday rained EXPL
 ‘Yesterday it rained.’

13. A potential counterexample can be found in South Ostrobothnian, a Swedish dialect spoken in Finland. According to Ivars (2010), expletive *det* can also occur to the right of the finite verb in this dialect, if the main clause begins with a sentence adverbial (such as *inte* ‘not’ or *nog* ‘certainly’), as shown in (i):

- (i) a. Å itt veta e ju Valtär na: å U:no
and NEG know EXPL MP Valtär anything and Uno
 ‘and Valtär and Uno don’t know anything’
- b. Itt a e vi konna skri:va na tåldde itt
NEG have EXPL we been.able write something that not
 ‘We couldn’t write a [letter] like that’
- c. Nei no: måta he tjenaren bestå: se me:blen sjölv
no certainly must EXPL the.servant provide REFL the.furniture self
 ‘No, certainly, the servant has to provide the furniture himself.’

We will leave these inverted transitive expletive constructions for further research.

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