

## ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF IMPERSONAL PASSIVES IN ENGLISH

*Concha Castillo*  
*University of Málaga*

### *Abstract*

In this paper I argue that impersonal passives are impossible in English (\*There was danced / \*It was danced (= There was dancing)) but not in the rest of the Germanic languages because English passive participles must necessarily be licensed in V, at the site where they merge with a logical object, whereas participles in impersonal passives merge in the light verb *v* position, in a parallel fashion to perfect participles. A functional projection in charge of checking the agreement features of both the participle and the object and also, crucially, the *-en* feature of the participle is argued to be available in between VP and *v*P. I criticise previous analyses in the literature that support the view that passive participles of Germanic languages other than English can actually merge with covert cognate objects, or that they can check nominative case, or otherwise that the auxiliary can check default agreement features. Further, I defend an approach to expletives that distinguishes English there from the expletives introducing impersonal

### *Resumen*

En este artículo se defiende que las pasivas impersonales son agramaticales en inglés (véase \**There was danced* / \**It was danced* (= *There was dancing*), pero no así en el resto de las lenguas germánicas, debido a que los participios pasivos del inglés se legitiman en V, esto es, en el mismo nódulo que combina en la derivación con el llamado objeto lógico, mientras que los participios propios de las pasivas impersonales se legitiman en la proyección superior del verbo ligero *v*, al igual que ocurre con los llamados participios perfectos. Se propugna la existencia de una proyección funcional entre VP y *v*P, encargada de cotejar los rasgos de concordancia del participio y del objeto, y asimismo el rasgo categorial *-en* del propio participio. La discusión incluye una revisión crítica de la bibliografía que defiende que los participios pasivos de las lenguas germánicas, pero no así los de la lengua inglesa, tienen la capacidad de seleccionar objetos cognados implícitos o encubiertos, y asimismo se critican los análisis que defienden que los auxiliares de dichas lenguas, pero no los del inglés, pueden cotejar rasgos de concordancia por defecto. Se defiende un análisis del expletivo inglés

passives in both TEC languages and non-TEC languages within the Germanic family. The English expletive *there* is claimed to merge in Spec,v because of its locative properties. By contrast, expletives in the other Germanic languages merge in pure non-theta positions as are Spec,C or Spec,T.

*Key words:* impersonal passive, passive participles vs. perfect participles, Germanic expletives, English expletive *there*, thematic justification.

*there* donde éste contrasta con los expletivos de las pasivas impersonales germánicas, tanto de las lenguas TEC (*Transitive Expletive Construction*) como de las lenguas que no admiten este fenómeno. De forma específica, argumento que el expletivo inglés *there* se inserta o acopla directamente en la posición de Especificador de *v*, debido a sus propiedades locativas, mientras que los expletivos de las restantes lenguas germánicas se insertan en posiciones no argumentales, como son la posición de Especificador de C(omplementante), o de T(iempo).

*Palabras clave:* pasiva impersonal, participios pasivos vs. participios perfectivos, expletivos en lenguas germánicas, expletivo inglés *there*, justificación temática.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Periphrastic passives or passives that consist of some form of the auxiliary verb *be*, or any of its counterparts cross-linguistically, and an *-en* participle, are commonly built upon a transitive verb: in other words, the *-en* form of a passive is the participle of a verb that selects both a logical object and an external argument or logical subject, as in English (1) or German (2) below. The general ban on passives of unaccusative verbs across languages can be expressed in a statement like (3), which follows directly from the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter 1978). As is widely known, the Unaccusative Hypothesis establishes two classes of intransitive verbs depending on whether these select for a logical object or a logical subject (see below in this section).

(1) The soldiers were arrested / The Canadian waltz was danced

(2) Dar Projekt ist geplant worden  
the project is planned been  
“The project has been planned”

- (3) Only those verbs that assign a role to the external subject can passivise

The observation in (3) does not only oppose the class of transitive verbs to that of unaccusatives; it also opens up the possibility that unergative verbs behave in a parallel fashion to transitive verbs with regard to the passive: as standardly assumed, the argument structure of unergative verbs contains an external argument though it lacks any logical object, at least one that is overt (see Section 2 below).

Now, it is well known that Germanic languages in general allow for passives of unergative verbs or impersonal passives.<sup>1</sup> This is true of German, Icelandic, or Dutch, and also of the Mainland Scandinavian languages, that is Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish: see the examples in (4). However, a Germanic language like English does not allow for impersonal passives: note the ungrammaticality of both (5) and (6). In this paper I attempt to explain the impossibility of the impersonal passive in English as opposed to the rest of the Germanic languages.<sup>2</sup>

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| (4) a. Es wurde getanzt                     | (German)    |
| it/there was danced                         |             |
| “There was dancing” / “People were dancing” |             |
| b. Er wordt gedanst                         | (Dutch)     |
| there was danced                            |             |
| “There was dancing” / “People were dancing” |             |
| c. Det ble danset                           | (Norwegian) |
| it/there was danced                         |             |
| “There was dancing” / “People were dancing” |             |
| (5) *There was danced                       | (English)   |

<sup>1</sup> Though the term impersonal passive is used in this paper to refer to the passive of an unergative verb, it can also be applied to the structural type illustrated in (6a) in the main text.

<sup>2</sup> Languages of the Romance family like Spanish or Italian also disallow the impersonal passive, though the Germanic/Romance contrast is out of the scope of this paper:

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| (i) a. *Fue bailado (= Se bailó/ Hubo baile) | (Spanish) |
| it-was danced                                |           |
| b. *È stato ballato                          | (Italian) |
| it-is been danced                            |           |

(6) \*It was danced (=There was dancing)<sup>3</sup>

I propose to argue that the passive participles of transitive verbs in both English and the other Germanic languages (and actually cross-linguistically) are obligatorily licensed in the lower V head of the v-VP architecture that is currently assumed in minimalist theory, but that Germanic languages count additionally on a strategy that consists in that the participles of unergative verbs that eventually combine with the passive auxiliary are licensed in the light verb or v position above VP, very much like perfect participles. The proposed account thus departs from any syntactic theory in a generative framework that so defends that all passive participles on a general basis raise from V to v just like any other verbal form. Instead, it is argued that passives of transitive verbs which agree (overtly or covertly) with an object in phi-features (that is, person and/or number features) do not need to raise to v. The reason is that these participles have their –en feature licensed in a functional projection between VP and vP. The core of the argumentation is provided in Section 2.3 below.

The present discussion is part of current research by the author on passive participles that is centred on two major aspects: one is the need to offer a unified account of passive participles as occurring both in tensed structures and in non-tensed structures, and the other is the idea that passive structures with a (tensed) be-auxiliary project an external argument position, more precisely a Spec,v position that is occupied by a covert category.<sup>4</sup> The overall research project revolves around the idea of two distinct licensing positions for –en participles, as mentioned in the paragraph immediately above: this paper in particular establishes a connection between the syntax of impersonal passives and the hypothesis that passives project an external argument, though the present discussion aims to be legitimately irrespective of whether the idea that passives project an external argument is eventually proven to be on the right track (in the cited work in preparation).

Given the availability of various kinds of expletive constructions in both English and the Germanic languages, it is necessary to acknowledge that the structural type under analysis in this paper features a pronominal expletive in some Germanic languages (note German *es* “it” or Norwegian *het* “it” in (4a, c))

<sup>3</sup> The sequence in (6) is of course grammatical on a reading where it is an ordinary pronominal substituting for a DP like e.g. the Canadian waltz or a tango.

<sup>4</sup> As I argue in work in preparation, the idea that passives project an external argument makes it possible (i) to account for the principle in (3) in a straightforward way, and (ii) to explain the classical puzzle of control phenomena in passive constructions, as in *The ship was sunk [PRO to collect the insurance]*.

and a locative expletive in others (note Dutch *er* “there” in (4b), or also Danish *der*). Both the pronominal and the locative expletive are made to correspond in this discussion in a fundamental way with expletive *there* (consider (5) again), which is due to the existential interpretation that is readily available for all the cases in (4): in this respect, impersonal passives can be claimed to denote the mere existence of an action, that is, the taking place of an action without the need to mention either the agent or logical subject, or the object. Nevertheless, the analysis of the ungrammaticality of a sequence like (6) above, with expletive *it*, is actually a key factor on the present approach, since ordinary or canonical passives introduced by an expletive *while* at the same time featuring a logical object or theme are readily available in the language: these are of course so-called extraposition-*it* constructions, as in (7), and they are dealt with in the first part of the paper.

- (7) It was claimed / believed / announced / regretted that he would  
give up the post

The paper is organised in two major sections. Section 2 deals with the cause of the ungrammaticality of impersonal passives in English: specifically, various analyses that have been offered in the literature on the quality of the participle are discussed, and in Section 2.3 I introduce an approach based upon the licensing of the passive participle in lower *V* vs. higher *v*. In Section 3, I complete the characterisation of impersonal passives in the Germanic languages with an analysis of the expletives occurring in such constructions. A contrast is established between the expletives used in impersonal passives of Germanic languages allowing for Transitive Expletive Constructions (TECs) vs. those that do not, and both types of expletives are differentiated in a crucial way from the English expletive *there*. Given that the various analyses to be described in Section 2 rely on important aspects in the theory of the passive in the generative GB model, it is convenient to offer a brief account of the latter first.

As is widely known, passives are defined in seminal works within GB theory (Chomsky 1981, 1986; Marantz 1984) as structures where (i) no theta-role is assigned to the subject position, and (ii) no accusative case is assigned to the object position, a characterisation that derives from the Relational Grammar principle known as 1AEX or 1-Advancement Exclusiveness Law (Perlmutter 1978; Perlmutter & Postal 1984). 1AEX, which defends that only one argument can occupy the subject position in the derivation of a given clause, is directly based on Perlmutter’s (1978) Unaccusative Hypothesis, according to which the subject constituent of certain intransitive predicates must actually be characterised as a deep or logical object.

The account of Baker, Johnson and Roberts (1989), preceded in a significant way by Roberts (1986) and Jaeggli (1986), becomes one of the hallmarks in the theory of passives since it manages to treat both properties (i) and (ii) as resulting from the syntax of an independent element instead of analysing one as the by-product of the other. Baker, Johnson and Roberts (1989) actually analyses the –en suffix or passive morpheme as an argument associated to the position of the external argument and at the same time in need of accusative case. The relevant approach thus comes to reduce 1AEX to the Theta-Criterion,<sup>5</sup> though it is subsequently criticised both as regards the mechanism of theta-role transmission between –en and the logical subject, and in relation to case absorption.<sup>6</sup>

According to GB theory, the –en suffix of typical passive sentences like (1) receive accusative case from V, with the result that the logical object or theme cannot remain to the right of the participle and must move in search of (nominative) case. At the same time, the –en suffix is argued to form a chain with the nominal contained within the by-phrase. The movement of the object to Spec,T also satisfies the Extended Projection Principle (EPP).

(8)[the soldiers<sub>h</sub> were arrested<sub>i</sub> t<sub>h</sub> (by the sergeant<sub>i</sub>)] / [the Canadian waltz<sub>h</sub> was danced<sub>i</sub> t<sub>h</sub> (by John<sub>i</sub>)]

The association of the external argument property and the accusative case property with one element, namely the –en suffix, is actually contained in the principle known as Burzio's Generalisation (Only those verbs that select for an external argument can assign accusative case), and comes later to be implemented within the minimalist framework (Chomsky 1995) by way of positing that the light verb *v* that occurs in passives is a defective head that is unable to project either a Spec position for the external argument, or a Spec position for the checking of accusative case; by contrast, a canonical transitive construction features a non-defective verb *v* (more specifically, a verb *v*\*) with the relevant Spec nodes. The tree-diagrams in (9) below correspond, roughly speaking, to the verb phrase that is currently assumed in minimalist syntax for an active structure (9a) and for a passive one (9b).

<sup>5</sup> As is well known, the Theta-Criterion is a biconditional principle ensuring that the number of arguments coincide with the number of theta-roles.

<sup>6</sup> Effectively, for passive participles to absorb accusative case has been put into question for certain passive types in languages like Ukrainian (Sobin 1985) or Japanese (Marantz 1991).

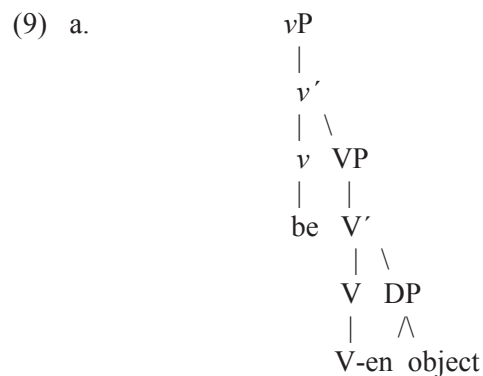


Figure 1

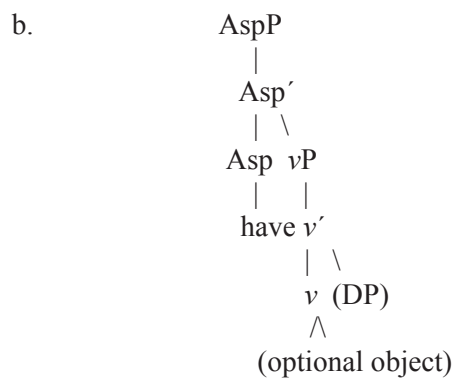


Figure 2

## 2. ON THE PARTICIPLE OF IMPERSONAL PASSIVES

The approach that I propose to explore in Sections 2–2.3 is whether passive participles in the Germanic languages allowing for impersonal passives have some kind of property or ability that English passive participles lack. I begin by describing current analyses in the literature in Section 2.1, and then, in Section 2.3, I specify the analysis that is proposed here.

## 2.1. THE COGNATE OBJECT ACCOUNT

Given the availability of relevant theories in the literature that argue in favour of unergative verbs as taking a cognate object in the lexicon (Hale & Keyser 1993) or in the syntax proper (Rothstein 1992; Dobrovie-Sorin 1998), it is to be expected that some approaches assimilate impersonal passives to canonical passives by making use of the notion of cognate object. Such is actually the analysis defended by Cabredo Hofherr (1999), who proposes (10) as the configuration for German (4a) above. In (10), the –en participle of the unergative verb is argued to select an object, just as if it were a transitive verb. The relevant object has covert status, but it is claimed to check nominative case, just as any canonical object of a passive structure (see the standard analysis of the passive in generative theory at the end of Section 1 above).

(10) [Es [wurde [[null object [getanzt]]]]]

Now, aside from the virtues or advantages that the cognate object theory of unergative structures may have in general, and also aside from works like López (2001) or Sigurðsson (2006), which defend the legitimacy of unergative v heads proper with the ability to project only one Spec position, I would like to argue that an approach like Cabredo Hofherr (1999) does not appear to be explanatory enough. This is because it simply stipulates that passive participles of unergative verbs in a language like German but not those in English happen to have the ability to project an object. On top of this, a cognate object analysis like Cabredo Hofherr's faces two major problems. One is described in Ruys (2007:6) and consists in that impersonal passives whose verbs do not allow for any overt DP object are indeed available. The author illustrates the Dutch passive below, whose verb selects for a PP object.

(11) Er wordt op Piet gerekend  
 there is<sub>pass</sub> on Piet counted

The second difficulty that the cognate object approach encounters is that it must be able to justify a certain kind of restriction that, as far as I know, has not received enough attention in the literature, or has not even been acknowledged, though it appears to have massive importance for any given account of –en participles. The restriction consists in that no language allowing for impersonal passives appears to allow for the corresponding absolute construction, that is a non-finite construction like (13). If it were the case that *getanzt* in (12) selected for a covert cognate object, in a similar way to the covert Operator selected by



the transitive –en participle in (13), then (12) should be expected to be as grammatical as (13), which is not at all the case.

- (12) \*Bis 21 Uhr getanzt,...  
 until 21 o'clock danced  
 "Having danced until 21 o'clock,..."
- (13) Sitzengelassen von alle, blieb er im Krankenhaus  
 abandoned by all remained he in hospital  
 "Abandoned by all, he remained in hospital"

Bowers (2002) also accounts for impersonal passives through resorting to the cognate object figure. The author actually proposes a novel approach to passive structures where passive verbs, in a similar fashion to active transitive verbs, all occupy a Tr(ansitive) head: transitive verbs thus assign or check accusative case, whether they are active or passive elements. Unergative verbs in those languages allowing for the impersonal passive are no exception on Bowers' approach since they also figure as elements moving to the Tr head. As I have tried to argue, postulating the existence of covert cognate objects of unergative verbs does not seem to solve the ungrammaticality of English (5) above.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2. THE CASE-FEATURE AND THE AGREEMENT-FEATURE ACCOUNTS

The GB account of the passive in Roberts (1986), Jaeggli (1986), or in the more refined Baker, Johnson and Roberts (1989) is centred upon canonical or ordinary passives, that is passives with participles of transitive verbs. The core idea is that the –en suffix of the passive participle is assigned the case value that the logical object needs, with the result that the logical object is left without case and is therefore forced to move (see Section 1 above). A parallel analysis is actually implemented in Roberts (1986) with an aim to explain impersonal passives: since impersonal passives lack any internal or logical argument –at least an overt one– the passive participle is claimed not to check accusative (as in ordinary passives) but nominative case. This way, Roberts argues that the participle of impersonal passives is assigned nominative case by Inflection: more specifically, nominative is transferred from the expletive onto the participle.

---

<sup>7</sup> Bowers (2002) will be a relevant guide for the discussion on expletives in section 3.1.1 below.

Vikner (1995) translates in minimalist terms the case-based account of impersonal passives of Roberts (1986) and argues that T (former Inflection) acts as a probe for the participle, which eventually gets its nominative case valued, and also additionally its phi-features or agreement features (that is, person and/or number features). In Vikner's approach, passive participles have therefore as a rule a case feature to check or value: either accusative, as in canonical or ordinary passives, or default nominative (since it is restricted to 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular), as in impersonal passives. Now, despite its conceptual coherence, such a case-based approach does not seem to explain the ungrammaticality of English (5) above, repeated below with the same numeration: it is simply stipulated that T fails to check the relevant features against the passive participle in English or, the same, that no chain is formed between the expletive and the participle in English, whereas this is actually the case for the rest of the Germanic languages.

(5) \*There was danced

Ruys' (2007) account of the ill-formedness of English impersonal passives also relies on the checking of default features, but not of case features on the participle, but of the agreement or phi-features of T on the auxiliary itself.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, such an approach to the ban on impersonal passives in English appears to be as stipulative as Vikner's in that the mechanism of default valuation of phi- or agreement features posed by the author is arguably restricted to the impersonal passive phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> In Section 2.3 below, I propose to account for the impossibility of impersonal passives in English basing upon the argument the structure of transitive verbs, which are of course the verbs that admit the passive in English (and also in the vast majority of languages). The relevant account is expected to be explanatory enough and not to be ad hoc because it relies basically on the standard minimalist theory that internal or logical objects merge in the complement position of V, whereas external arguments merge in the Spec of the light verb *v* (see tree-diagram in (9a) above).

<sup>8</sup> It must be noted that the focus of Ruys (2007) is on the characterisation of the Dutch expletive *er* "there" as a non-theta marked element in contrast to the theta-marked expletive *het* "it," as in *It turned out that...*, *It was regretted that...*

<sup>9</sup> Further, positing that English lacks altogether a rule of T's valuation of default phi-features appears to contradict the widely-extended structural type in (i), where the contracted form "there's" co-occurs with a lexical DP in the plural. The construction is nevertheless commonly regarded as substandard:

(i) There's many people at the Conference venue.

## 2.3. THE LICENSING OF THE –EN PARTICIPLE

Passive sentences in English necessarily feature a logical or internal object, whether this is a DP, as in (1), or a CP, as in the so-called extraposition-it structure (7).<sup>10</sup> As described in Section 2 in relation to GB theory, the DP object in (1) is commonly analysed in minimalist theory as moving into Spec,TP to value its case features; at the same time, the EPP-feature of T is satisfied by the movement of DP. As for the CP object in (7), this is arguably allowed to stay in situ to the right of the participle because it need check no case features; in the relevant structure, expletive it is in charge of satisfying the EPP-feature of T (Postal & Pullum 1988; Williams 1994). An alternative analysis of (7) that is proposed in the literature is for the that-clause to be an adjunct of the pronominal it, which is not an expletive in that case but the real argument of the verb (claim) – see Bennis (1986), Vikner (1995), or Ruys (2007). Each of these two options is represented in a schematic way in (14a) and (14b), respectively.

- (1) The Canadian waltz was danced
- (7) It was claimed that he would give up the post
- (14) a. [<sub>TP</sub>It ... [<sub>VP</sub>claimed<sub>v</sub> [<sub>VT<sub>v</sub></sub> [<sub>CP</sub>that he would...]]]]  
 b. [<sub>TP</sub>... [<sub>VP</sub>claimed<sub>v</sub> [<sub>VT<sub>v</sub></sub> [<sub>Spec,CP</sub>it [<sub>C</sub>that he would...]]]]]

Now, whether the correct analysis for (7) is (14a) or (14b), the grammaticality of (7) as opposed to the ill-formedness of (6) (also repeated here with the original numeration) is in need of an explanation, and it so seems to be the case that the accounts of the Germanic impersonal passive described in the preceding sections fail to satisfy this demand.

- (6) \*It was danced (= There was dancing)

Effectively, given that the participle (claimed) need check no accusative case in (14a), it could safely be argued that it checks nominative, or also it could be claimed that the auxiliary checks T's default agreement features: nevertheless, despite all this, the question should still remain why such explanations are not useful for a sequence like (6). As for the analysis in (14b), where it is treated as an argument, the same type of explanation would be required as for an ordinary passive like (1), namely, why passive V in English (and also in the vast majority of languages) must necessarily subcategorise for a logical object: such is the type of approach that I will entertain immediately

<sup>10</sup> The numeration of the examples corresponds to their first occurrence in the text.

below. Incidentally, it must be emphasised that for it not to be arguably an existential expletive cannot be used to support the cited accounts on nominative case checking or default agreement checking because these do not rely on the nature of the expletive. Further, it must be recalled that an English sequence like (5) with the expletive *there* is likewise ungrammatical.

(5) \**There was danced*

I would like to explain the grammaticality of (1) or (7) vs. the ill-formedness of (6) or (5) by positing that passive participles in a language like English are licensed in the lower V head and do not raise into the higher *v* head on top of VP. The proposed approach, which I also implement in work in preparation on *-en* participles of unaccusative verbs,<sup>11</sup> consists in that a functional projection mediates between VP and *v*P, and is in charge of checking the agreement features shared by the *-en* participle and the DP object and also, crucially, the *-en* suffix of the participle. The relevant projection is called FP in a provisional way in this paper, and is of course reminiscent of the AgrOP projection that is proposed in well-known works like Kayne (1989), and also later Belletti (1990), Koizumi (1993), Lasnik (1995), or Caponigro & Schütze (2003). See the tree-diagram in (15) below.

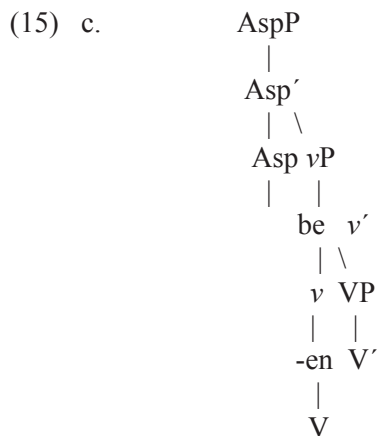


Figure 3

<sup>11</sup> Specifically, the cited work covers both finite and non-finite constructions featuring an *-en* participle, and it involves transitive, unergative, and unaccusative verbs (see also reference in Section 1 above).

Nonetheless, two aspects crucially distinguish FP in (15) from the classical AgrOP projection: first, no overt Spec-head agreement relation is obligatory, that is, neither the DP nor the participle are forced to move overtly into the Spec and head positions of FP (which, incidentally, has important consequences with respect to the non-finite constructions analysed in the abovementioned work in progress by the author) and second, and very importantly for the present discussion, the *-en* suffix, which has the status of a feature, is valued by the participle together with its agreement or phi-features.

The lexical array out of which a passive sentence is constructed thus contains a verb in participial form, a logical object or theme, and the abovementioned functional projection FP –in addition of course to the functional projection DP (or otherwise CP) out of which the object is constructed. The participial verb merges with the object, and FP is in charge of valuing the agreement or phi-features of both the participle and the object, and also the *-en* feature of the participle. Subsequently, the participle remains in the lower part of the verb phrase, that is, it does not need to move into the *v* head because all its features are already licensed or valued; as for the DP object, this still has a case feature to value: therefore, as standardly assumed, T acts as a probe for the DP object and the latter moves into Spec,T, where it checks nominative case.

Now, in case no object or theme is merged with the participle initially in the derivation, no FP is instantiated and no agreement relation is established between the object and the participle. Next, the participle raises into the little *v* head to check the corresponding *-en* participle, and the object arguably raises into a Spec position of *v*, where it checks accusative case. As just mentioned, such constructions exhibit no morphophonological agreement between the object and the participle, which can be labelled a perfect participle (or also active participle). See the tree-diagram in (16) below.

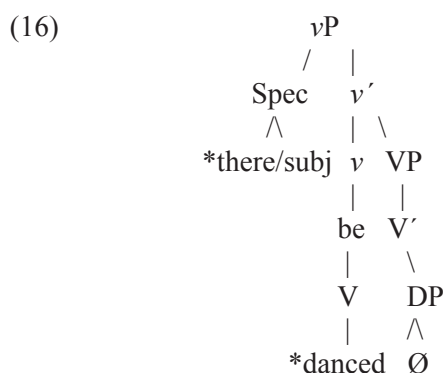


Figure 4

In the approach proposed here, a configuration like (16) corresponds to ordinary perfect constructions in English (and also cross-linguistically): see (17) below. In a crucial way, I would like to argue that (16) is also the configuration that explains impersonal passives of Germanic languages, the difference with perfect constructions being that in these the auxiliary that combines somewhere above VP with the participle in *v* is *have*, whereas in impersonal passives the relevant auxiliary is *be*. The configuration in (4a') is thus the one proposed in this paper for a German impersonal passive like (4a), repeated here with the same numeration. Incidentally, the position of merge of the expletive is dealt with in Section 3 below.

- (17) a. They have danced  
 a.' [... have...<sub>[vp]</sub>they <sub>[v]</sub>danced<sub>i</sub>[<sub>[vt]</sub>]]]  
 b. They have danced a waltz  
 c. They have arrested the soldiers
- (4) a. Es wurde getanzt  
 a.' [... wurde... <sub>[vp]</sub><sub>[v]</sub>getanz<sub>t</sub><sub>i</sub> [<sub>[vt]</sub>]]]

The analysis of impersonal passives that is defended in this paper hinges therefore on the licensing of the *-en* feature of the participle in *v* vs. its licensing in *V*. Specifically, Germanic languages are argued to value their *-en* participles in two different positions: ordinary passives or passives of transitive verbs (as in (2)) have their participle licensed in *V*, whereas impersonal passives or passives of unergative verbs (as in (4)) have their participles licensed in *v*, exactly the same as in perfect constructions. By contrast, English (and actually any language disallowing for impersonal passives) only allows for passive participles of transitive verbs, which means that participles combining with passive *be* have their *-en* feature licensed in *V*.

In the constructions analysed above, both the *-en* participle in *V* (or passive participle) and the *-en* participle in *v* (or perfect participle) are indistinguishable from a morphophonological point of view because the *-en* participles in *v* are non-agreeing participles and, for their part, the *-en* participles in *V* happen to bear covert agreement features for the languages under analysis. However, it is the case that passive participles in some Germanic languages bear overt agreement features, in a similar fashion to Romance languages. I would thus like to argue that the hypothesis that participles of Germanic impersonal passives be licensed in *v* instead of *V* appears to be supported in a strong way by the availability of canonical passives (that is passives of transitive verbs) in Scandinavian languages where the DP object follows the participle and, crucially, no overt agreement is instantiated

between the object and the participle. The relevant aspect is that these languages have available two morphologically distinct –en participles, one with overt agreement features and one without, it being precisely the second one that is used in these constructions. A Norwegian construction like (18) below would thus feature a (non-agreeing) –en participle in *v* and an object or theme to its right, just as in an ordinary active sentence, though the passive auxiliary used is actually *be*, which would mark the construction as a passive one.<sup>12</sup>

- (18) Det har blitt skrevet tre bøker om dette  
it/there have been written three books about this (Holmberg 2002:85)

In this section, I have argued that the different status of a sequence like (6) \*It was danced (= There was dancing) as opposed to (7) It was claimed that... trivially means that English passive participles obligatorily merge with a logical or internal object. In order to explain the ungrammaticality of both (6) \*It was danced (= There was dancing) and (5) \*There was danced, I have argued that a cognate object approach does not appear to be viable (Section 2.1) and I have also rejected as stipulative of any analysis based on the failure of nominative case checking by the participle, or of default agreement checking by the auxiliary (Section 2.2). –en participles of impersonal passives in Germanic languages have been claimed to be participles licensed in *v*, just as perfect participles or participles combining with the auxiliary *have*. By contrast, participles combining with passive *be* in English (and also in any language disallowing for impersonal passives) have been argued to be licensed in *V*, at the site where they merge with a logical object or theme.

### 3. ON THE SITE OF THE MERGE OF EXPLETIVES

There are two aspects of passive constructions in general that are out of the scope of this paper but that are analysed in work in preparation by the author (see Section 1): one is the site of the merge of the passive auxiliary *be*, and the other is the possibility that passives project an external argument in *Spec,v*. Now, the second aspect bears a special connection with the site of the merge of

<sup>12</sup> A careful analysis of the structural type in (18) is of course connected with the ungrammaticality of an English sequence like (i) vs. the well-formedness of (ii). In Castillo (2009), I provide an existential analysis of (ii).

- (i) \*There were arrested several people  
(ii) There were several people arrested

the expletive in the constructions under analysis in this paper, namely impersonal passives, because expletives are variously argued in the literature to merge in different positions, both within and outside the verb phrase. This way, in case the hypothesis that passives project an external argument in Spec,v is eventually shown to be on the right track, then the expletives in Germanic impersonal passives cannot possibly be argued to merge in the relevant Spec,v position. Nonetheless, independently of the validity of the abovementioned hypothesis, my purpose in this part of the paper is to complete the characterisation of impersonal passives of Germanic languages by analysing the site of the merge of expletives in these constructions. In the following sections, I propose to argue that Germanic expletives differ in crucial ways from English there.

### 3.1. THE THEMATIC STATUS OF ENGLISH THERE

The general trend in GB theory and within minimalist literature (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001) is to treat English expletives in general as elements merging in Spec,T (that is, in a position external to the verb phrase), one possible exception being whether it (Chomsky 1981, 1986). However, Hoekstra and Mulder (1990) and later Bowers (2002) reject this view and argue that for there to be banned from English structures that have an external argument (see below in this section), can very possibly mean that the expletive belongs originally within the verb phrase, rather than in a higher position. In a framework like Bowers (2002), the expletive there (and also weather it) is argued to merge in the Spec of a Pr(edication) projection that roughly speaking replaces the standard VP of Chomsky (1995), though Pr can serve as the site of all predicate types in general and not just of verbs and, further, it is assumed by the author to have an EPP-property, in a similar fashion to T.<sup>13</sup> Hazout (2004) is another relevant work arguing for the merge of existential there (and likewise weather it) in Spec,v: specifically, the author aims to establish the part that is contributed by the expletives to the predication structure of existential meaning.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Bowers (2002) was mentioned in 2.1 above in relation to the cognate object approach. On that occasion, it was observed that the clausal architecture defended by the author features a TrP for all transitive verbs, whether active or passive. The replacement of vP by PrP is another novelty of Bowers (2002).

<sup>14</sup> Hazout (2004) is actually an extreme case in the literature in that it establishes an existential connection between expletive there and weather it. For this, the author uses the grammar of Hebrew.



An approach like Bowers (2002) is close to the rationale underlying the present discussion since it takes into account a crucial contrast existing between English *there* and the expletive of certain Germanic constructions. A brief description or evaluation of Bowers' approach is therefore considered to be interesting for the present discussion.

Bowers (2002:194ff.) argues that two major aspects of the distribution of the expletive *there* are accounted for in a straightforward way if the expletive is analysed as merging in Spec,v (or Spec,Pr, as in the author's framework): (i) the ban of *there* from transitive and unergative constructions, that is constructions projecting an external argument (19), and (ii) the position of the lexical DP in Spec,V instead of Spec,v in constructions with *there* (20).

- (19) a. \*There will someone eat a bagel  
 b. \*There laughed someone raucously
- (20) a. There will [<sub>vP</sub>be [<sub>VP</sub>someone in the garden]]  
 b. \*There will [<sub>vP</sub>someone be [<sub>VPt</sub> in the garden]]

As the author himself acknowledges, (20) can be accounted for without resort to the position of the expletive by endorsing the standard idea that unaccusative verbs do not project an external argument. The facts of (19), by contrast, must necessarily rely on the site occupied by the expletive: this is due to the fact that so-called Transitive Expletive Constructions or TECs are not possible in English (as (19) clearly demonstrates) though they are perfectly legitimate in other Germanic languages like German, Icelandic, or Dutch (see (21)), where the expletive has been proven to occupy the specifier position of C. Effectively, evidence variously based on adverb placement, the distribution of the negative particle, or the phenomenon of object shift point in the direction of the expletive as occupying Spec,C in TECs: the reader is referred to (22) below, and also to the manifold data provided in Bobaljik and Jonas (1996). In 3.1.1 below I briefly describe two approaches in the literature that deal with the conditions that make the TEC phenomenon possible at all.

- (21) a. Es hat jemand einen Apfel gegessen (German)  
 it/there has someone an apple eaten  
 "Someone has eaten an apple"
- b. Það hafa margir jólasveinar borðað búxing (Icelandic)  
 it/there have many Santa Clauses eaten pudding  
 "Many Santa Clauses have eaten pudding"
- (22) Það kláruðu margar mys ostinn alveg (Icelandic)  
 it/there finished many mice cheese-the completely

“Many mice finished the cheese completely”

In a crucial way, while the lack of TECs in English is a relevant factor to explain the site of the merge of the expletive *there* vs. its homologues in TEC languages, this can only be half of the story for an analysis of impersonal passives, since Mainland Scandinavian languages (Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish), which do not allow for TECs, nevertheless allow for impersonal passives.

Bowers (2002), where incidentally no connection is established between TEC languages and non-TEC languages on the one hand, and languages permitting or forbidding impersonal passives on the other, discards in a completely speculative way the possibility or the convenience that Spec,T actually be a site of merge of expletives (Bowers 2002:196), and concludes, in light of the distribution of *there* in (19)–(20), that the expletive is merged in Spec,v. Though the present approach also aims to argue that *there* merges in Spec,v (which of course will justify the status of (19)–(20)), the driving idea of this discussion is that English *there* merges in Spec,v but not so the expletives in Germanic languages. This means that English *there* must be distinguished from German *es* or Dutch *der* (4a, b) and also from an expletive like Norwegian *det* (4c) or Danish *der*: German and Dutch both allow for TECs, but not so Norwegian or Danish; however, they all contrast with English in permitting impersonal passives. My aim is to show that there is a thematic justification for the merge of *there* in Spec,v, a task which requires counting on Spec,T as a potential site of merge for expletives (though not for the specific case of English *there*). In 3.1.1 I deal with the expletive used in impersonal passives of TEC languages, and in 3.1.2 I focus on the expletive of impersonal passives of Mainland Scandinavian.

### 3.1.1. EXPLETIVES IN TEC LANGUAGES

It is widely known that the last decade has seen a proliferation of the literature on the Germanic TEC phenomenon and the parametric variation that can possibly explain the contrast between TEC languages on the one hand (German, Icelandic, Dutch, Yiddish,...) and non-TEC languages on the other (English and the Mainland Scandinavian languages: Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish). The classical work of Bobaljik and Jonas (1996), preceded by Platzack (1987) or Holmberg and Platzack (1995), establishes a close connection between TECs and V-to-I movement, and so defends that TEC languages

feature a richer functional architecture than non-TEC languages, specifically one allowing for two subject positions above the verb phrase: Spec,AgrS and Spec,T. In later minimalist theory, such spec positions are replaced by Spec,C and Spec,T, respectively, though the big issue is not so much the availability of functional structure in the various languages (since non-TEC languages like English and Mainland Scandinavian arguably feature a CP on top of TP, and further T is active in these languages though main verbs do not raise to T overtly) but rather the functional structure that is available for the expletive itself to merge. In this respect, I would like to mention two approaches in the literature, Holmberg (2000) on the one hand and Koenenman and Neeleman (2001) on the other, and observe that Holmberg (2000) appears to be more explanatory than Koenenman and Neeleman (2001).

Koenenman and Neeleman (2001), in the wake of Lasnik (1992) and Chomsky (1995), make use of a framework for expletive constructions where the so-called associate or lexical DP moves to the expletive at LF in order to be licensed as a subject. The authors argue that only if the expletive is generated outside the m-command predication domain of VP can the movement of the associate count as motivated. Such languages as English or Mainland Scandinavian have available only one position for the expletive, namely the specifier of T (or I), which is within the m-command domain of VP. By contrast, the specifier of C is available as a site of merge for the expletive in German or Icelandic: since Spec,C is outside the predication domain of VP, it then follows that TECs are possible in these languages. For the expletive in German or Icelandic TECs as in (21a, b) above to be in C (or in AgrS, as in Bobaljik and Jonas 1996) is amply demonstrated by the placement of adverbs, of the negative particle, etc. (see (22) above).

Koenenman and Neeleman (2001) must additionally be able to account for a well-known restriction affecting TEC languages in general, which consists in that the expletive is incompatible with so-called stylistic fronting. Thus, German *es* or Icelandic *það* cannot be preceded by a topicalised phrase in Spec,C, which arguably means that the expletive cannot hold a position lower than C, namely Spec,T. In effect, it is widely known that German is an asymmetric V2 language that does not allow for the expletive in an embedded structure like the ones in (24): however, (23a) features no embedded clause and therefore the impossibility of the expletive asks for an explanation. Besides, Icelandic expletives are totally grammatical in embedded contexts, that is, they are not restricted to occurring in first position in main clauses, which similarly requires that (23b) be explained.

- (23) a. Gestern ist (\*es) ein Junge gekommen (German)  
 yesterday is it/there a boy come  
 b. Í gær hefur (\*það) komið strákur (Icelandic)  
 yesterday has it/there come a boy
- (24) a. \*... [CPdass [TPes [jemand [einen Apfel gegessen hat]]]] (German)  
 that it/there someone an apple eaten has  
 b. \*... [CPdass [TPes [ein Junge gekommen ist]]]  
 that it/there a boy come is

Koenenman and Neeleman (2001) attempt to explain the impossibility of expletives in Spec,T of the German and Icelandic structures in (23) by arguing that T (or I), which has rich agreement in these languages, counts as an argument, with the result that Spec,T is within the m-command predication domain of VP: raising of the associate therefore creates an ungrammatical structure. The fact that T has no rich agreement in Mainland Scandinavian languages explains, according to the authors, that the expletive is not barred from topicalisation structures: see (25). Incidentally, it must be noted that Dutch represents an exceptional case with regard to stylistic fronting since it seems to allow for structures like Danish (25) despite it being a TEC language like German or Icelandic (see below in this section).

- (25) Igar er der kommet en dreng (Danish)  
 yesterday is there come a boy  
 “A boy came yesterday”

Now, aside from the criticism that the raising of the associate to the expletive position has in general received within minimalist literature, Koenenman and Neeleman (2001) faces one major problem, as is the grammatical status of an impersonal passive like German (4a), precisely the sentence-type under analysis in this paper. They refer at this point to Ackema and Neeleman (1998), where the view is similarly adopted that expletives are licensed by adjunction of the associate to the expletive at LF. The authors implement an analysis of the classical GB principle known as the EPP (Extended Projection Principle) where the subject is defined thematically. As a result, they must necessarily make the claim that constructions like (4a) constitute an exceptional case in the grammar since they lack a thematic or logical subject and thus violate the EPP.

- (4a) Es wurde getanzt

Holmberg's (2000) explanation of the contrast between German or Icelandic (23) on the one hand and Mainland Scandinavian (25) on the other is more explanatory than Koeneman and Neeleman (2001), though they both rely on the rich agreement exhibited by German or Icelandic as opposed to Mainland Scandinavian, or English. The benefits of Holmberg's approach appear to derive from the fact that the EPP of T is not given a thematic justification. Thus, the expletive in a TEC structure is claimed by the author to satisfy a P-feature or phonological feature (which is roughly equivalent to a structural EPP property), whereas the expletive in a non-TEC language is argued to satisfy or value T's agreement feature on the grounds that verbs in these languages lack a D-marked agreement morpheme. Additionally, the expletive in Spec,T arguably checks case.<sup>15</sup> The compatibility between the expletive and stylistic fronting in Mainland Scandinavian (25) is explained in Holmberg (2000) through having the expletive value the D-feature of T; by contrast, the expletive and the topicalised phrase are not compatible in TEC-languages (23) since the role of the expletive is to value a P-feature, and this is already done by the fronted or topicalised phrase. Further, for a TEC language like Dutch to allow for stylistic fronting constructions with no expletive (as is generally the case with TEC languages) and likewise for constructions where both a topicalised phrase and an expletive occur (as in non-TEC grammars) could be explained by the expletive's ability to merge indistinctly in Spec,T or Spec,C, with the subsequent contrast in feature-checking.<sup>16</sup>

The lack of explanatory force of the account of impersonal passives in Ackema and Neeleman (1998) and Koeneman and Neeleman (2001) is not a problem for an analysis like Holmberg (2000), since the presence of the expletive in the relevant sequences is justified on the same grounds as in TEC sequences: namely, the expletive is expected to value a P-feature. As will be recalled, for an expletive to occur without an associate is a major obstacle on an approach like Ackema and Neeleman (1998).

Now, the above description relative to the site of merge of the expletive in TEC sequences is considered necessary in order to set the stage for the main goal of the present section, as is the specification of the site of merge of the expletive in impersonal passives of TEC languages, that is in sequences like (4a, b). In the approach proposed here, the German expletive *es*, or Icelandic *það* merge in Spec,C in TEC sentences like (21), as standardly assumed,

<sup>15</sup> The idea that the expletive in Spec,T checks case is criticised below in this section.

<sup>16</sup> The reader is referred to Ackema and Neeleman (1998:17) for relevant instances in Dutch.

whereas the same expletive merges in Spec,T in case the construction is an impersonal passive (4a, b). (26) below is thus the structure that is proposed here for the German impersonal passive (4a), or indeed for any impersonal passive of a TEC language. In the same line as Holmberg (2000) or Koenenman and Neeleman (2001), or indeed the vast majority of approaches in the minimalist literature, the present approach does not question the capacity or convenience of Spec,T as the place of merge of an expletive, as is the case in Bowers (2002) – see Section 3.1 above. Also, I would like to recall from the discussion in Section 2.3 that the passive participle of impersonal passives has been argued to be licensed in *v*.

(28) [<sub>Spec,T</sub>Es [<sub>T</sub>wurde [<sub>VP</sub>getanzt [<sub>VPt</sub>]]]]

For the expletive to be the same element in both TECs and impersonal passives means on the approach proposed here that it is a pure expletive, that is an element devoid of thematic properties; hence, it is expected to merge in a pure non-theta position: Spec,C or, alternatively, Spec,T. The expletive in Spec,T of impersonal passives is expected nevertheless to differ from the expletive in Spec,C of TECs in that the former arguably checks the agreement or phi-features of T, specifically default 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, whereas no such valuation process applies for the expletive in Spec,C of TECs (see above in relation to the D-marked feature in Holmberg 2000). As for the checking or valuation of a case feature, none is expected to apply in either case: the expletive in Spec,C of TECs would lack this property altogether, and so would the expletive in Spec,T of impersonal passives on an approach like the present one, where the expletive is argued to be merged directly in Spec,T. Since the checking of case is claimed in current minimalist theory to apply just in case a goal constituent moves from its merge position into a higher position, so as to check the EPP-property of the constituent acting as a probe, and it being the case that the expletive of Germanic impersonal passives is argued to merge in Spec,T in situ, then it is expected to check or value no case.

I would like to emphasise that the original adverbial or otherwise pronominal status of the expletive occurring in impersonal passives is not regarded here as a relevant factor for the features that these elements might actually check: what is significant is the fact that they merge directly in Spec,T, in addition to the potential richness of T (that is, the availability of V-to-I movement). In Section 3.1.2 below I concentrate on the expletives in impersonal passives in Mainland Scandinavian, and I try to argue that they are similar to those in TEC languages, but different from English there.





language from a structural point of view. In a logical way, it is so-called locative inversion structures that can be used as evidence of this. The argument on locative inversion can be developed as follows.

The EPP-feature of T in English is typically satisfied by movement of a nominal phrase to Spec,T (or otherwise by an expletive). However, a locative phrase can realise that function on the condition that certain properties be fulfilled: the verb must be one of movement or position, and the phrase that is moved to initial position must likewise indicate direction or place. For a description of the semantic conditions licensing locative inversion structures, the reader is referred to the classical works of Bresnan (1994) and Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), and for the abovementioned theory or idea that the EPP-feature of T can be licensed independently of its agreement or phi-features, see e.g. Collins (1997), or also Holmberg (2000) in Section 3.1.1 above.

- (28) a. In the distance was a tower  
 b. Down the hill will roll several balls

A relevant aspect of locative inversion structures is that these are not compatible with the expletive *there*, despite the fact that the verbs occurring in locative inversion structures can typically appear in combination with *there*: compare the ungrammaticality of (29) vs. the well-formedness of (28) above and likewise (30) below.

- (29) a. \*In the distance was there a tower  
 b. \*Down the hill will there roll several balls

- (30) a. There was a tower in the distance  
 b. There will roll several balls down the hill

By contrast with English *there*, in a crucial way, the Danish expletive *der*, or the Norwegian or Swedish expletive *det* can occur perfectly well in structures where a locative phrase has been topicalised:

- (31) a. I avtalet har det funnits en övre gräns (Swedish)  
 in the-agreement has it/there found(pass) an upper limit  
 b. På bordet ligger der en bog (Danish)  
 on the-table lies there a book

Now, if English *there* is assumed to merge in Spec,v, then the ungrammaticality of (29) can be justified on the grounds that a Minimal Link Condition conflict arises between *there* and the locative PP within VP, since



there is closer to the probe of T than the PP: see (32) below.<sup>17</sup> This is actually the analysis defended in Bowers (2002), where Pr (which is, as will be recalled, roughly equivalent to standard *v*) is argued to have an EPP-property, in a similar fashion to the EPP-property of T. I would like to argue that the proposal that English *there* merges in Spec,*v* (or Spec,Pr) just because of an EPP-property of *v* is completely speculative. This way, though I agree that a clash actually occurs between *there* and the locative PP, I would like to propose that a semantic or thematic justification must be provided for the merge of *there* in Spec,*v* in the first place, since Spec,*v* is not a pure non-theta position as is Spec,T, or otherwise Spec,C.

(32) [TP... [VPthere be<sub>v</sub> [VPt<sub>v</sub> [a tower] [in the distance]]]]

In the present approach, the original locative value of English *there* justifies its merge in Spec,*v*. Mainland Scandinavian expletives arguably lack such locative value, which prevents them from merging in Spec,*v*. The failure to convey locative meaning turns out to be particularly relevant in the case of Danish *der* or Dutch *er*, since these are of locative origin, in a similar fashion to English *there*. In the proposed analysis, the expletive in sequences like (31a, b) merges directly in Spec,T, which in turn merges with a CP, in a similar fashion to (27) above.<sup>18</sup>

(33) a. [CPI avtalet<sub>i</sub> har<sub>v</sub> [TPdet t<sub>v</sub> [VP funnits...t<sub>i</sub>]]]  
 b. [CPPå bordet<sub>i</sub> ligger<sub>v</sub> [TPder [VPt<sub>v</sub> en bog t<sub>i</sub>]]]

It is important to observe that the ungrammaticality of English (29) is claimed here to be of a different kind than the ungrammaticality of (23) above, since in (23) the topicalised phrase arguably values the EPP-feature of T, and the ban on the expletive is justified on the grounds that it is an unnecessary element (let us recall the discussion in Section 3.1.1 above). By contrast, the English expletive is analysed here as an element merging in Spec,*v* because of

<sup>17</sup> Specifically, the PP in the distance occupies the object position of V whereas the subject of location a tower occupies the Spec of V. Though other analyses of these two constituents are indeed possible, the relevant aspect is that there in Spec,*v* is always closer to T than the locative phrase.

<sup>18</sup> Platzack (p.c.) observes that the tendency in non-formal speech is to use the expletive, though the latter can actually be absent in formal registers. On the present approach, the absence of the expletive would mean for the locative phrase to occupy Spec,T (instead of Spec,C) and to value the EPP-feature of T much as in TEC languages. Thus, there is no reason to presuppose a clash between arguments (the expletive and the topicalised phrase) as is argued to be the case for English (32). A crucial aspect is that the topicalised phrase in Mainland Scandinavian does not need to have a locative interpretation: see immediately below in the main text.

its locative properties: subsequently, an incompatibility arises between there and a locative constituent in VP in case it is the latter that is attracted to Spec,T and not there. In other words, it is no coincidence that the topicalised phrase in Mainland Scandinavian can be locative or non-locative, whereas the EPP-feature of English T is typically valued in inversion structures by locative phrases.

As observed in the Introduction, one aspect that must trivially be shared by the overall set of expletives occurring in impersonal passives is their contribution to existential meaning. From a structural or syntactic point of view, this entails that languages have the capacity to express the taking place of an action without the need to mention any of the participants being involved (either the logical subject or the logical object): this is indeed the case with the sequences introduced in (4) above. The overall aim of Sections 3–3.1.2 has been to argue that the Germanic expletives occurring in impersonal passives merge in Spec,T but not in Spec,v, as seems to be the case with English there.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper has been to offer an explanatory account of the impossibility of impersonal passives in English (\*There was danced / \*It was danced (=There was dancing)) as opposed to the rest of the Germanic family. It has been argued that English differs from the other Germanic languages in that English participles that combine with passive be (that is, passive participles) can only be licensed in V, at the site where they merge with an internal or logical object. This idea is supported by an analysis of the contrast between the grammatical type *It was claimed that...* vs. the ill-formed construction *\*It was danced (=There was dancing)*. By contrast with English passive participles, the participle in Germanic impersonal passives is claimed to be licensed at the same site as perfect participles, that is, in the light verb *v* itself.

I have argued that there is a functional projection in between VP and vP, which is reminiscent of AgrOP projections of former generative frameworks, and which is in charge of licensing the *-en* feature of the participle while at the same time ensuring the corresponding agreement relation between the participle and the object.

Previous approaches to Germanic impersonal passives presented in the literature have been criticised. The covert cognate object approach to passive

participles has been rejected mostly on the grounds that no absolute constructions with covert objects are possible. On the other hand, the analyses of the participle of impersonal passives as elements checking nominative case, or of the auxiliary as valuing default agreement features, in Germanic languages in general but not in English, have been criticised as purely speculative.

The focus of Section 3 onwards has been on the site of merge of the expletives occurring in impersonal passives of Germanic languages vs. English expletive there. After distinguishing TEC languages from non-TEC languages, I have argued that the expletive introducing impersonal passives in TEC languages merges in Spec,T, an approach that is expected to agree with general assumptions in the literature. The crucial aspect of the overall analysis concerns, nevertheless, the site of merge of the expletive in English as opposed to non-TEC languages. It has been claimed that English there is a quasi-argument that merges in Spec,v, while the expletive in non-TEC languages allowing for impersonal passives (that is, Mainland Scandinavian) merges in Spec,T, in identical fashion to the expletive in TEC languages. The thematic properties of there have been argued to show in the incompatibility between there and locative inversion, a restriction that is not operative in Mainland Scandinavian. By contrast with Bowers (2002), it is emphasised that for there to merge in Spec,v (instead of a pure non-theta position as Spec,T, or otherwise Spec,C) requires a thematic justification.

## REFERENCES

- Ackema, Peter and Ad Neeleman. "Conflict resolution in passive formation." *Lingua* 1 (1998): 13-29.
- Baker, Mark, Kyle Johnson and Ian Roberts. "Passive arguments raised." *Linguistic Inquiry* 20 (1989): 212-251.
- Belletti, Adriana. *Generalized Verb Movement*. Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990.
- Bennis, Hans. *Gaps and Dummies*. Dordrecht: Foris, 1986.
- Bobaljik, Jonathan and Dianne Jonas. "Subject positions and the roles of TP." *Linguistic Inquiry* 27 (1996): 195-236.
- Bowers, John. "Transitivity." *Linguistic Inquiry* 33 (2002): 183-224.
- Bresnan, Joan. "Locative inversion and the architecture of Universal Grammar." *Language* 70 (1994): 72-131.

- Cabredo Hofherr, Patricia. "Two German impersonal passives and expletive pro." *Catalan Working Papers in Linguistics* 7 (1999): 47-57.
- Caponigro, Ivano and Carson T. Schütze. "Parameterizing passive participle movement." *Linguistic Inquiry* 34 (2003): 2931-308.
- Castillo, Concha. "On there-passive participle constructions." *Atlantis* (2009): 91-110.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Lectures on Government and Binding*. The Pisa Lectures. Dordrech: Foris, 1981.
- . *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin and Use*. Praeger: New York, 1986.
- . *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995.
- . "Minimalist inquiries: The framework." *Step by Step: Essays on Minimalist Syntax in Honor of Howard Lasnik*. Eds. Roger Martin, David Michaels and Juan Uriagereka. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000: 89-155.
- . "Derivation by Phase." *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*. Ed. Michael Kenstowicz. Cambridge, Mas.: MIT Press, 2001: 1-52.
- Collins, Chris. *Local Economy*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997.
- Dobrovie-Sorin, Carmen. "Impersonal se constructions in Romance and the passivization of unergatives." *Linguistic Inquiry* 29 (1998): 399-437.
- Hazout, Illan. "The syntax of existential constructions." *Linguistic Inquiry* 35 (2004): 393-430.
- Hale, Kenneth and Samuel Jay Keyser. "On argument structure and the lexical representation of syntactic expressions." *The View from Building 20*. Eds. Kenneth Hale and Samuel Jay Keyser. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993: 531-110.
- Hoekstra, Teun and René Mulder. "Unergatives as copular verbs." *The Linguistic Review* 7 (1990): 1-79.
- Holmberg, Anders. "Scandinavian stylistic fronting: How any category can become an expletive." *Linguistic Inquiry* 31 (2000): 445-483.
- . "Expletives and agreement in Scandinavian passives." *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 4 (2002): 85-128.
- Holmberg, Anders and Christer Platzack. *The Role of Inflection in Scandinavian Syntax*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Jaeggli, Osvaldo. "Passive." *Linguistic Inquiry* 17 (1986). 587-633.
- Kayne, Richard. "Facets of Romance past participle agreement." *Dialect Variation and the Theory of Grammar*. Ed. Paul Benincà. Dordrecht: Foris, 1989: 85-104.
- Koenenman, Olaf and Ad Neeleman. "Predication, verb movement and the distribution of expletives." *Lingua* 111 (2001): 189-233.
- Koizumi, Masatoshi. "Object agreement phrases and the split VP hypothesis." *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* 18 (1993): 99-148.

- Lasnik, Howard. "Case and expletives: Notes toward a parametric account." *Linguistic Inquiry* 23 (1992): 381-405.
- . "Case and expletives revisited: On Greed and other human failings." *Linguistic Inquiry* 26 (1995): 615-633.
- Levin, Beth and Malka Rappaport-Hovav. *Unaccusativity: At the Syntax-Lexical Semantics Interface*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995.
- López, Luis. "On the (non)complementarity of  $\theta$ -Theory and Checking Theory." *Linguistic Inquiry* 32 (2001): 694-716.
- Marantz, Alec. *On the Nature of Grammatical Relations*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984.
- . "Case and licensing." *ESCOL '91: Proceedings of the Eighth Eastern States Conference on Linguistics*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, Department of Linguistics, 1991: 234-253.
- Perlmutter, David. "Impersonal passives and the Unaccusative Hypothesis." *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*. Berkeley, California: Berkeley Linguistics Society University of California, 1978: 157-189.
- Perlmutter, David and Paul Postal. "The 1-Advancement Exclusiveness Law." *Studies in Relational Grammar 2*. Eds. David Perlmutter and C. Rosen. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984: 81-125.
- Platzack, Christer. "The Scandinavian languages and the null-subject parameter." *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 5 (1987): 377-402.
- Postal, Paul and Geoffrey Pullum. "Expletive Noun Phrases in subcategorized positions." *Linguistic Inquiry* 19 (1988): 635-670.
- Roberts, Ian. *The Representation of Implicit and Dethematized Subjects*. Dordrecht: Foris, 1986.
- Rothstein, Susan. "Case and NP licensing." *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 10 (1992): 119-139.
- Ruys, E.G. "Expletive selection and CP arguments in Dutch." Ms., UIL-OTS, University of Utrecht, 2007.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. "The nominative puzzle and the low nominative hypothesis." *Linguistic Inquiry* 37 (2006): 289-308.
- Sobin, Nicholas. "Case assignment in Ukrainian morphological passive constructions." *Linguistic Inquiry* 16 (1985): 649-662.
- Vikner, Sten. *Verb Movement and Expletive Subjects in the Germanic Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Williams, Edwin. *Thematic Structure in Syntax*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994.

*How to cite this article:*

Castillo, Concha. "On the impossibility of impersonal passives in English." *ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa* 31 (2010): 55-84.

*Author's contact:* ccastillo@uma.es