

# Germanic specCP-expletives revisited

## The view from Dutch microvariation\*

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### Abstract

This paper revisits a number of classical dichotomies concerning expletives in Germanic, namely (a) the question of whether or not they are positionally restricted (so-called specCP-expletives vs. specTP-expletives), (b) their morphological shape (locative vs. pronominal), and (c) whether or not they control  $\phi$ -agreement. After pointing out that these three properties are systematically interrelated, the paper sets out to provide a new analysis for specCP-expletives in Germanic. The entry point into the discussion are hitherto undiscussed microvariation patterns in Belgian dialects of Dutch, where the dichotomy between specCP- and specTP-expletives can be shown to correlate with four other empirical properties. Based on these data, the paper claims that specCP-expletives in dialect Dutch are main clause complementizers, much like similarly distributed clause-initial particles in Breton and Welsh. The final section of the paper extends the proposed account to German *es* and Icelandic *það*.

## 1 Introduction

Constructions involving expletives have always played a central role in generative linguistics (see Svenonius (2002), Hartmann (2008), and Longenbaugh (2019) for overviews and references). This is not surprising, given that even a simple sentence like (1) raises fundamental theoretical questions, ranging from the proper definition of subjecthood over the interaction between Move and Agree to the much broader issue of the autonomy of syntax.

(1) There is a man in the garden.

When viewed from a more specific cross-Germanic perspective, however, a number of additional issues crop up that have received less focused attention, especially in recent years. This paper zooms in on three such issues. The first concerns the fact that some Germanic expletives are what we could call 'positionally restricted', i.e. they can only occur in a limited number of structural positions or sentence types. An example involving the German expletive pronoun *es* 'it' is given in (2).

- (2) a. Es ist ein Junge gekommen.  
it is a boy come  
'A boy came.' German
- b. \*Ist es ein Junge gekommen?  
is it a boy come  
INTENDED: 'Did a boy come?' German

The instantiation of German *es* 'it' illustrated here can occur in sentence-initial position (see (2a)), but is disallowed when it occurs post-verbally, as in (2b).

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\*[Acknowledgements to be added]

The second source of intra-Germanic variation concerns the morphological—or etymological—status of the expletive pronoun. Some expletives, like English *there* in (1), are locative in nature, while others, including German *es* in (2), are pronominal (either personal pronouns or demonstratives). Thirdly, Germanic varieties differ as to the target of verbal agreement in a sentence containing an expletive: in examples like (1) and (2) it is the associate DP (*a man* and *ein Junge* respectively) that determines the agreement ending on the verb, while in the example in (3) it appears to be the expletive itself that controls verbal agreement.<sup>1</sup>

- (3) Es gibt zwei Brunnen im Garten.  
 it gives.3SG two wells in.the garden  
 'There are two wells in the garden.' German

The three issues just sketched played a very central role in the literature on Germanic in the nineties and early 2000s (see in particular Vikner (1995), Mohr (2005), and Richards and Biberauer (2005)), but they have faded from view since then (with Longenbaugh (2019) as a notable exception). The main goal of this paper is to put these topics back on the research agenda, by providing a novel perspective on them. After showing that there are systematic interrelations between the three properties, I turn to new data from Belgian Dutch dialects. This microcosm of language variation not only recreates the central contrasts that are found at the broader Germanic level, it also introduces a number of additional empirical phenomena that turn out to correlate with the three expletive properties mentioned above. These correlations form the basis for a new analysis of positionally restricted expletives, a core ingredient of which will be the new claim that these so-called specCP-expletives are to be reanalyzed as main clause complementizers.

This paper is organized as follows. The next section illustrates the three dichotomies mentioned above, points out the interrelations that exist between them, and gives an overview of the properties of expletives across Germanic. Section 3 then zooms in on microvariation in the varieties of Dutch spoken in Belgium. On the one hand, the dialect data recreate on a microscale the contrasts attested across Germanic, while on the other they add new empirical generalizations to the mix. Section 4 provides an analysis for the dialect Dutch facts, which section 5 extends to German and Icelandic. Finally, section 6 summarizes and concludes.

## 2 The lay of the land: expletives across Germanic

As pointed out in the previous section and as is well known from the literature (see in particular Vikner (1995), Mohr (2005), and Richards and Biberauer (2005)), expletive data from Germanic can be classified along three axes. The first concerns the morphology (or etymology) of the expletive element itself. In a number of Germanic languages, it is locative in nature, while in others it is pronominal (typically a personal pronoun or a demonstrative).<sup>2</sup> The sentences in (4) provide some examples of the locative type, while those in (5) illustrate the pronominal expletives (all examples are from Vikner 1995:225–226).

- (4) **locative expletives**
- a. Der er kommet en dreng.  
 there is come a boy  
 'A boy has come.' Danish
- b. Er is een jongen gekomen.  
 there is a boy come  
 'A boy has come.' Dutch
- c. There arrived three men.
- (5) **pronominal expletives**

<sup>1</sup>Alternatively, the third person singular ending on *gibt* 'gives' might be default agreement. Given that this issue will not play a role of any significance in the rest of the paper I gloss over it here.

<sup>2</sup>As pointed out by Hartmann (2008) for German and as will become clear in the next section, some languages have both locative and pronominal expletives. In fact, given that the interrelations introduced below hold at the level of the individual expletive element rather than at the level of the language, some of them will be illustrated on the basis of minimal pairs from within one language.

- a. Es ist ein Junge gekommen.  
it is a boy come  
'A boy has come.' German
- b. Það hefur komið strákur.  
it has come a.boy  
'A boy has come.' Icelandic
- c. Det har kommit en pojke.  
it has come a boy  
'A boy has come.' Swedish

The second axis along which we can categorize Germanic expletives concerns the extent to which they are subject to positional restrictions. In particular, while some expletives can only occur in a limited number of structural positions or sentence types, others are not positionally restricted in this way. The contexts relevant for this generalization are subject-initial—or rather, expletive-initial—main clauses, inverted main clauses, and embedded clauses, and we can discern three types of expletives. The first type, illustrated in (6), shows no positional restrictions and is allowed in all three contexts. The second type (see (7)) can occur in main clause-initial position, but is disallowed in the other two contexts, while the third type (illustrated in (8)) is only excluded in inverted main clauses.

(6) **type #1: no positional restrictions**

- a. Er staat een man in de tuin.  
there stands a man in the garden  
'There's a man standing in the garden.'
- b. Staat er een man in de tuin?  
stands there a man in the garden  
'Is there a man standing in the garden?'
- c. dat er een man in de tuin staat.  
that there a man in the garden stands  
'that there is a man standing in the garden.' Dutch

(7) **type #2: only allowed in main clause-initial position**

- a. Es ist ein Junge gekommen.  
it is a boy come  
'A boy has come.'
- b. \*Ist es ein Junge gekommen?  
is it a boy come  
INTENDED: 'Did a boy come?'
- c. \*dass es ein Junge gekommen ist.  
that it a boy come is  
INTENDED: 'that a boy has come.' German

(8) **type #3: only allowed in main clause-initial position and in embedded clauses**

- a. Það eru mýs í baðkerinu.  
it are mice in bathtub.the  
'There are mice in the bathtub.'
- b. \*Eru það mýs í baðkerinu?  
are it mice in bathtub.the  
INTENDED: 'Are there mice in the bathtub?'
- c. að það verð ball í skólanum á morgun.  
that it will.be dance in school.the tomorrow  
'that there will be a dance in the school tomorrow.' Icelandic, Thraínsson (2007:310, 312, 329)

The split between positionally restricted expletives (types 2 and 3) and non-positionally restricted ones (type 1) is also reflected in the terminology that is used for them: the former are traditionally called specCP-expletives—the idea being that this is the only structural position they can occupy—and the latter specTP-expletives. While these terms reflect a type of analysis that will be argued against in section 4, I

adopt them for the remainder of this paper as a useful shorthand to refer to the two types of expletives.

The third source of variation in Germanic expletive constructions concerns the agreement on the verb: in some cases verbal agreement tracks the  $\phi$ -features of the associate DP, while in others it tracks the  $\phi$ -features of the expletive (or yields default agreement, see footnote 1). An example of the former pattern is given in (9), while the non-agreeing variant is shown in (10).

(9) Es sind/\*ist zwei Männer im Garten.  
it are/is two men in.the garden  
'There are two men in the garden.' German

(10) Det er nett skote/\*skotne nokre elgar.  
it.N.SG is just shot.N.SG/shot.M.PL some elks.M.PL  
'Some elks were just shot.' Stryn-dialect of Norwegian, Åfarli (2009)

The finite verb *sind* 'are' in (9) agrees in number with the plural associate DP *zwei Männer* 'two men', not with the singular expletive pronoun *es* 'it', while in (10) this pattern is reversed: the passive participle *skote* 'shot' is neuter singular, like the expletive pronoun *det* and unlike the associate DP *nokre elgar* 'some elks', which is masculine plural.

This concludes the introduction of the three properties of Germanic expletives under discussion in this paper. Note that these three characteristics are largely logically independent from one another: there is no *a priori* reason why the morphological makeup of an expletive should matter for the structural positions it occurs in, or why positional restrictions should have an effect on verbal agreement. In practice, however, these three variables show a systematic pairwise interaction. Let us start with the combination of morphological makeup and positional restrictions. As was pointed out by Richards and Biberauer (2005:149-150n23) and Mohr (2005:142), expletives that show positional restrictions (i.e. specCP-expletives) never have locative morphology. This was illustrated by the German and Icelandic examples in (7) and (8), to which we could add the Yiddish expletive *es* 'it' (Vikner 1995:226). The second interaction is between positional restrictions and agreement: specCP-expletives never serve as the target for verbal agreement. Put differently, in sentences containing a specCP-expletive, it is always the associate DP that the verb agrees with. Consider some examples from German, Icelandic, and Yiddish in (11).

- (11) a. Es sind zwei Männer im Garten.  
it.SG are.PL two men.PL in.the garden  
'There are two men in the garden.' German
- b. Það eru mýs í baðkerinu.  
it.SG are.PL mice.PL in bathtub.the  
'There are mice in the bathtub.' Icelandic, Thraínsson (2007:310)
- c. Es veln oyfshteyn groyse khakhomim fun Daytshland.  
it.SG will.PL stand.up great sages.PL from Germany  
'Great sages from Germany will stand up.' Yiddish, Prince (1988:176)

German is particularly well-equipped to illustrate this second interdependence, in that it has two different versions of the expletive *es* 'it'. The first one, illustrated in (12), is a specTP-expletive that is used in combination with the verb *geben* 'to give' and that governs agreement on the verb, while the second one (see (13)) is a specCP-expletive that is not a possible target for verbal agreement. These examples thus form a near-minimal pair illustrating that specCP-expletives never serve as the target for verbal agreement.

- (12) a. Es gibt zwei Männer im Garten.  
it.SG gives.SG two men.PL in.the garden  
'There are two men in the garden.'
- b. Gibt es zwei Männer im Garten?  
gives.SG it.SG two men.PL in.the garden  
'Are there two men in the garden?'
- German

- (13) a. Es sind zwei Männer im Garten.  
it.SG are.PL two men.PL in.the garden  
'There are two men in the garden.'

- b. \*Sind es zwei Männer im Garten?  
 are.SG it.SG two men.PL in.the garden  
 INTENDED: 'Are there two men in the garden?' German

The third interaction is the one between the morphology of the expletive and verbal agreement: expletives that are morphologically locative never serve as agreement target for the verb. Arguably, this is not wholly unexpected under the assumption that locative elements do not bear (a full set of)  $\phi$ -features and hence cannot enter into an Agree-relation with a  $\phi$ -Probe. This third generalization can be illustrated by the Stryn-dialect of Norwegian introduced earlier, where we can create minimal pairs differing only in the morphological makeup of the expletive. As shown below, the (participial) agreement tracks this difference:

- (14) a. Det er nett skote/\*skotne nokre elgar.  
 it.N.SG is just shot.N.SG/shot.M.PL some elks.M.PL  
 'Some elks were just shot.'  
 b. Der er nett \*skote/skotne nokre elgar.  
 there is just shot.N.SG/shot.M.PL some elks.M.PL  
 'Some elks were just shot.' Stryn-dialect of Norwegian, Åfarli (2009)

The example in (14b) contains the locative expletive *der* 'there' and the participial agreement tracks the  $\phi$ -features of the associate DP, while in (14a) (which is identical to the example in (10)) the participle agrees with the expletive pronoun.

This concludes my overview of Germanic expletives, viewed through the lens of their morphological makeup, positional restrictions, and agreement properties. Table 1 summarizes the patterns and generalizations just outlined and lists sample languages for each attested pattern.<sup>3</sup>

	PRONOMINAL		LOCATIVE	
	specTP	specCP	specTP	specCP
<b>AGREEMENT WITH ASSOCIATE</b>	Faroese <sup>4</sup>	German, Icelandic, Yiddish	Dutch, English, Stryn dialect of Norwegian ( <i>der</i> )	
<b>AGREEMENT WITH EXPLETIVE</b>	Swedish, Stryn dialect of Norwegian ( <i>det</i> )			

Table 1: Overview of Germanic expletives

Note that the two most common types of expletives in Germanic are represented by the two middle cells in the upper row: pronominal, non-agreeing specCP-expletives and locative, non-agreeing specTP-expletives. The other cells are empty, possibly empty (see fn4), or they contain fewer representatives (in the case of the pronominal, agreeing specTP-expletives in the lower left corner). It is the contrast between the two common types that will serve as the basis for the discussion in the remainder of the paper.

<sup>3</sup>Recall from footnote 2 that these languages are a shorthand for individual expletive pronouns and that one language can contain more than one type of expletive pronoun. I have made this explicit in the case of the Stryn dialect of Norwegian, but it holds for some of the other languages as well.

<sup>4</sup>Faroese is the only Germanic language I know of that has a pronominal specTP-expletive, but where the verbal agreement tracks the associate. The facts are debated, however: while the agreement data are clear, some authors claim that the Faroese expletive *tað* 'it' is of the specCP-type (see Erikson 2009, Cardinaletti 1997:523n2, Holmberg and Platzack 1995:103n13, and Thrainsson et al. 2004:275 for conflicting views). If that turns out to be the case, this cell might also be empty.

### 3 Zooming in: expletive patterns in Belgian Dutch dialects

Most of the patterns and generalizations outlined in the previous section are known from the literature (though they are rarely explicitly discussed or presented as one coherent whole). What this paper wants to do is to shed new light on these cross-Germanic facts and to propose a new analysis for some of them by looking at microvariation patterns concerning expletives. In this section we zoom in on expletives in the Dutch dialects spoken in Belgium. In these dialects we can recreate on a microscale the basic contrasts outlined above, but in addition, the expletive facts can be shown to correlate with other empirical properties of the dialects in question. The correlations will form the starting point for the analysis presented in section 4.

Expletive constructions in the dialects of Dutch spoken in Belgium show the same basic contrast between non-locative, non-agreeing specCP-expletives and locative, non-agreeing specTP-expletives that we found across Germanic. Consider first some examples of the latter type in (15).

(15) **specTP-expletives, locative, agreement with associate**

- a. *Dr stonj twieë vantjn inn of.*  
there stand.PL two men in.the garden  
'There are two men in the garden.'
- b. *Stonj er twieë vantjn inn of?*  
stand.PL there two men in.the garden  
'Are there two men in the garden?'
- c. *da tr twieë vantjn inn of stonj*  
that there two men in.the garden stand.PL  
'that there are two men in the garden'

Wambeek Dutch

In this dialect, the expletive pronoun *dr* 'there' is locative in nature, it is not positionally restricted, and the finite verb agrees with the plural associate DP *twieë vantjn* 'two men'.<sup>5</sup> In other words, expletives in the dialect of Wambeek behave like those of English, Afrikaans, Danish, or *der* in the Stryn dialect of Norwegian. At the same time, Belgian Dutch also contains dialects where expletives have the following characteristics:

(16) **specCP-expletives, pronominal, agreement with associate**

- a. *T zyn gisteren drie studenten gekommen.*  
it are yesterday three students come  
'Three students came yesterday.'
  - b. *\*Zyn t gisteren drie studenten gekommen?*  
are it yesterday three students come  
INTENDED: 'Did three students come yesterday?'
  - c. *\*da-n t gisteren drie studenten gekommen zyn*  
that-PL it yesterday three students come are  
INTENDED: 'that three students came yesterday'
- Lapscheure Dutch, Grange and Haegeman (1989), Haegeman (1986), L. Haegeman p.c.

The *t*-expletive in Lapscheure Dutch is like its counterparts in German, Icelandic, and Yiddish in that it is positionally restricted, pronominal in nature, and it does not control  $\phi$ -agreement on the verb. Lapscheure Dutch differs from those languages, though, in that the ungrammatical examples in (16b) and (16c) cannot be rendered grammatical by simply removing the offending expletive. Instead, it uses a locative expletive in those contexts:<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Due to voice assimilation and /t/-deletion, the expletive pronoun can surface as [dər], [tər], or [ər]. Given that I have been unable to find any differences in syntactic behavior between these three forms, I treat them as different surface manifestations of the same underlying element, and I gloss all three of them as 'there'.

<sup>6</sup>Dialects differ as to whether they allow this locative expletive to also show up in clause-initial position. In Lapscheure Dutch, this is marked (Haegeman 1986:10), but in the other dialects I have looked at the choice of the expletive is optional in clause-initial position.

- (17) a. Gisteren zyn der drie studenten gekomen.  
 yesterday are there three students come  
 'Three students came yesterday.' Lapscheure Dutch, Grange and Haegeman (1989:160)
- b. dan der nie vele mensen woaren  
 that there not many people were  
 'that there weren't many people' Lapscheure Dutch, Haegeman (1992:50)

When looking at the Belgian Dutch dialects more broadly, it turns out that Wambeek Dutch and Lapscheure Dutch are instantiations of a more widely attested dialect split. The western part of Dutch-speaking Belgium (roughly the provinces of East and West Flanders, including the Dutch dialects spoken in the northern tip of France) are like Lapscheure Dutch in having a pronominal specCP-expletive, while the eastern part (roughly the provinces of Antwerp, Flemish Brabant, and Limburg) are like Wambeek Dutch in only having a locative specTP-expletive. The map in Figure 1 illustrates this distribution.

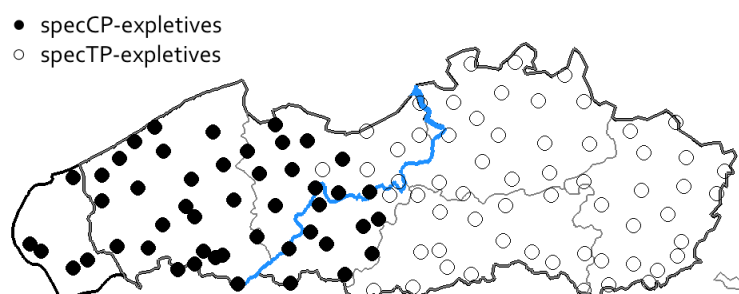


Figure 1: Two expletive types in Belgian Dutch (data from Barbiers et al. 2006)

In the remainder of this paper I will be referring to dialects with pronominal specCP-expletives (like Lapscheure Dutch) as *C-dialects*, and to dialects with (only) locative specTP-expletives (like Wambeek Dutch) as *T-dialects*. It will become clear that the split between these two groups of dialects is not just based on what kinds of expletives they have, but also on a number of additional empirical properties (see also van Craenenbroeck and van Koppen 2016 for related discussion). As a first indication of this, consider the contrast between (18) and (19).

- (18) Zittn \*(dr) ier nievers geen muzn?  
 sit there here nowhere no mice  
 'Aren't there any mice here?' Torhout Dutch, Barbiers et al. (2006)
- (19) Zittn (dr) ie nievest gin mozzjn?  
 sit there here nowhere no mice  
 'Aren't there any mice here?' Wambeek Dutch

The example in (18) illustrates that in the dialect of Torhout (and see Haegeman 1986:3 for a similar observation about Lapscheure) the use of the locative expletive is obligatory in inverted main clauses. In the dialect of Wambeek on the other hand, the use of the expletive is optional in this context, and just as was the case with the contrast between (15) and (16), this one also generalizes to a larger dialect split. Moreover, as Figure 2 shows, this split is highly similar to the one we found in Figure 1.

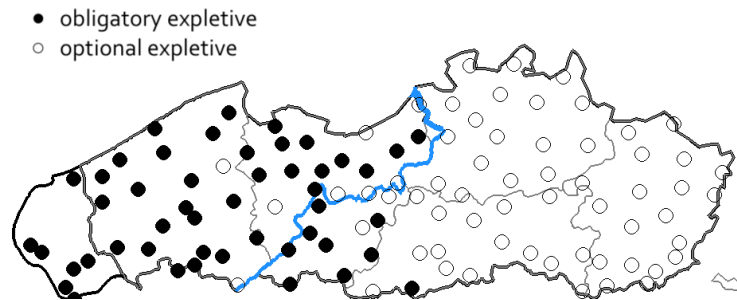


Figure 2: Obligatory expletive in inverted main clauses (data from Barbiers et al. (2006))

A third property that shows the same dialect split concerns the use of the strong locative form as an expletive pronoun. Unlike English but like Standard Dutch, most (if not all) Dutch dialects make a morphological distinction between a weak locative adverb (corresponding to Standard Dutch *er* 'there') and a strong one (like Standard Dutch *daar* 'there', see also Wesseling 2018). In the dialect of Wambeek, both these forms can be used as an expletive (see also van Craenenbroeck 2019 for extensive discussion):<sup>7</sup>

- (20) Leit { ?*dui* / *dr* } *ie* nen brief op tuifel?  
 lies there.STRONG / there.WEAK here a letter on tabel  
 'Is there a letter over here on the table?' Wambeek Dutch

By using the conflicting locative adverb *ie* 'here', we ensure that *dui* 'there' is interpreted as an expletive pronoun, rather than as a locative modifier. The fact that the resulting example is perfectly well-formed and interpretable shows that both the weak form *dr* 'there' and the strong one *dui* can be used as an expletive pronoun. In the dialect of Lapscheure on the other hand, we get a different result:

- (21) Ligt { \**doa* / *er* } *ier* nen brief ip tafel?  
 lies there.STRONG / there.WEAK here a letter on tabel  
 'Is there a letter over here on the table?' Lapscheure Dutch, L. Haegeman p.c.

Only the weak form is allowed in this dialect; the strong locative adverb *doa* 'there' can never be used as an expletive pronoun. When we extrapolate this two-dialect difference to the whole Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, we once again find the by now familiar split between C- and T-dialects. This is shown in Figure 3.

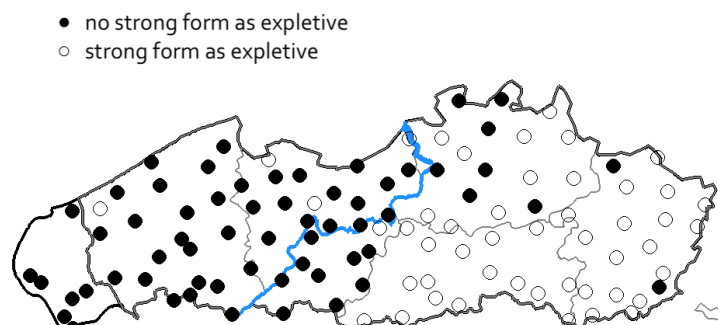


Figure 3: Use of the strong locative form as expletive (Barbiers et al. 2005:49)

<sup>7</sup>As indicated by the grammaticality judgments, the weak form is preferred in this example. I return to this contrast in section 4.4.4. What is relevant here is the possible use of the strong form as an expletive in T-dialects (even if sometimes slightly marked), versus its absence in C-dialects.



The fourth and final property I want to discuss in this section is the phenomenon commonly known as complementizer agreement, whereby a complementizer agrees in person and/or number with the subject of the clause it introduces (see van Koppen 2017 for general discussion). An example from the dialect of Lapscheure is given in (22).

- (22) K vinden da-n die boeken te diere zyn.  
 I find that-PL those books too expensive are  
 'I think those books are too expensive.' Lapscheure Dutch, Haegeman (1992:51))

In this sentence the complementizer *da* 'that' bears the same plural ending that is also found on the finite verb, suggesting that it agrees in number with the subject of the clause *die boeken* 'those books'. As it turns out, this type of agreement is pervasive in C-dialects, but absent in T-dialects. This is illustrated in Figure 4.

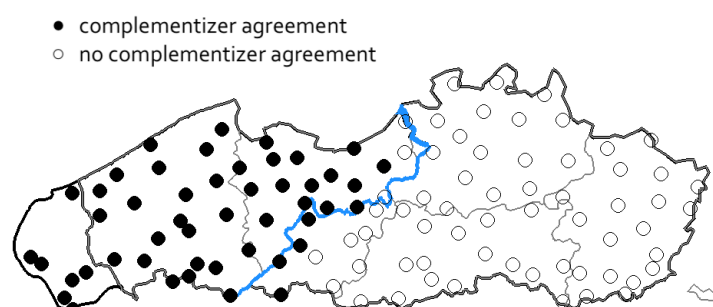


Figure 4: Complementizer agreement in 3PL (Barbiers et al. 2005:35)

This concludes my overview of the Belgian Dutch dialect data. Not only do these dialects recreate on a microscale the central expletive-related dichotomy we encountered cross-Germanically (i.e. the one between locative specTP-expletives and pronominal specCP-expletives), that split turned out to also correlate with a number of additional properties. They are summarized in Table 2.

	C-dialects	T-dialects
type of expletive	pronominal specCP	locative specTP
obligatory expletive in inversion	yes	no
strong locative form as expletive	no	yes
complementizer agreement	yes	no

Table 2: C- vs. T-dialects in Belgian Dutch

Dialects with a specCP-expletive (C-dialects) have an obligatory locative expletive in inverted main clauses, cannot use the strong locative form as an expletive pronoun, and display complementizer agreement, while in dialects with a specTP-expletive (T-dialects) the locative expletive is optional in inverted main clauses, the strong locative form can be used as an expletive pronoun, and complementizer agreement is absent. In the next section, these correlations will form the basis for a new analysis of specCP-expletives.

## 4 A new analysis of specCP-expletives

### 4.1 Introduction

In this section I present my analysis of the data outlined above. The main focus will be on specCP-expletives, for which I suggest an analysis that substantially differs from previous accounts. This section is organized

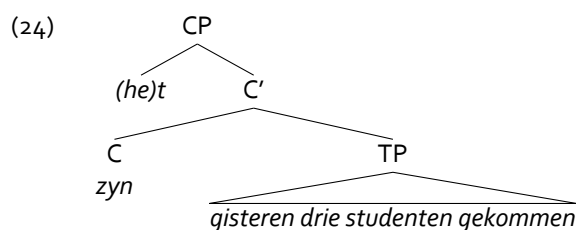
as follows. The next subsection presents the new analysis of specCP-expletives and in its wake, subsection 4.3 introduces the parametric difference that I propose is responsible for the split between C- and T-dialects. In subsection 4.4 I show how the empirical generalizations uncovered in the previous section follow from this one parametric difference. Subsection 4.5 concludes.

## 4.2 SpecCP-expletives as main clause complementizers

Consider again a basic example of a specCP-expletive in a C-dialect in (23) (repeated from (16a)).

- (23) T zyn gisteren drie studenten gekomen.  
 it are yesterday three students come  
 'Three students came yesterday.' Lapscheure Dutch, Grange and Haegeman (1989:163)

The traditional—though mostly implicit—account of this construction assumes that *t* is a reduced form of the third person neuter pronoun *het* 'it' which is base-generated in—or obligatorily moved to—specCP (Haegeman 1986, Grange and Haegeman 1989, Vikner 1995). As a result, it cannot occur in inverted main clauses (where specCP is occupied by another constituent) or embedded clauses (where specCP is unavailable for independent reasons, cf. Hoekstra and Zwart 1994, 1997). The structure in (24) provides a schematic representation of this analysis.



As it stands, however, this account faces a number of substantial problems. First of all, the claim that the unstressed (and unstressable) third person neuter pronoun (*het*) occupies specCP in (23) seems directly contradicted by the fact that other instantiations of this same pronoun are categorically disallowed from occurring in specCP (Zwart 1993, 1997). For example, when used as an object, (*het*) cannot occur clause-initially:

- (25) \*T eenk nie gezien.  
 it have.I not seen  
 INTENDED: 'I haven't seen it.' Lapscheure Dutch, based on Haegeman (1993:62)

The fact that (*het*) is generally disallowed in specCP raises the question of whether the *t* we are seeing in (23) is the same as the one in (25), or put differently, whether the *t* in (23) is indeed a reduced form of the third person neuter pronoun *het* 'it'.

A second reason to doubt the analysis in (24) concerns the fact that the expletive element cannot be replaced by the demonstrative pronoun *da* 'that'. As pointed out by Grange and Haegeman (1989), expletive(-like) occurrences of (*het*) can generally be replaced by its demonstrative counterpart. This is illustrated in the following examples for weather *it* (26), extraposition *it* from object position (27), extraposition *it* from subject position (28), the impersonal subject of certain experimenter verbs (29), and the impersonal subject of evaluative adjectives (30).

- (26) dat et/da regent.  
 that it/that rains  
 'that it is raining.' Lapscheure Dutch, Grange and Haegeman (1989:160,162)
- (27) Ze aanveerden et/da nie da se werkt.  
 they accept it/that not that she works  
 'The don't accept that she has a job.' Lapscheure, Grange and Haegeman 1989:160,162)
- (28) T/Da 's Valère nie die da gezeid oat.  
 it/that is Valère not REL that said had

- 'It isn't Valère who said that.' Lapscheure Dutch, Grange and Haegeman (1989:166)
- (29) Et/Da bevalt men ier.  
it/that pleases me here  
'I like it here.' Lapscheure Dutch, Grange and Haegeman (1989:165)
- (30) Et/Da was spytig van dat ongeluk.  
it/that was regrettable of that accident  
'Too bad about that accident.' Lapscheure Dutch, Grange and Haegeman (1989:167)

There is only one context in which a reduced version of the third person neuter pronoun cannot be replaced by a demonstrative, and that is when it is used as a specCP-expletive like in (23). Note that the fact that this element is argued to occupy specCP makes this gap even more striking: if there is any position in the clausal structure where replacing the reduced form (*het*) with the stronger demonstrative *da* would make sense, it would be precisely in specCP.<sup>8</sup> This once again raises serious questions about the analysis in (24): the element *t* in (23) simply does not behave like other instantiations of the same pronoun.

A third and final problem concerns the phonology of the specCP-expletive. While the phonological reduction of the pronoun *het* from [ət]<sup>9</sup> to [t] is normally completely optional, this phonological variation is absent in the case of the specCP-expletive, which is always and only spelled out as [t]. Consider in this respect the following minimal pair from the West Flemish dialect of Blankenberge:

- (31) (E)t regent.  
it rains  
'It is raining.' Blankenberge Dutch, K. Vanaudenaerde p.c.
- (32) (\*E)t staan drie mannen in den hof.  
it stand three men in the garden  
'There are three men standing in the garden.' Blankenberge Dutch, K. Vanaudenaerde p.c.

Weather *it* in (31) allows for both the reduced and the unreduced form (as do all other instantiations of the third person neuter pronoun), but the specCP-expletive in (32) does not. This fact has not gone unnoticed in the traditional dialectological literature either. Vanacker (1978:618) notes in this respect "that no informant inserted a vocalic element before the *t*." and he concludes: "We (...) assume that *t* in the sentence *There were five prizes* cannot be interpreted as a form of *het*."<sup>10</sup> In light of the evidence presented above, I concur with Vanacker's conclusion: the specCP-expletive in (23) is not a phonologically reduced version of the third person neuter personal pronoun *het*.

This negative conclusion of course raises the question as to what *is* the correct analysis of the specCP-expletive in (23). While specCP-expletives are typologically rare, there are other elements in natural language that show clear distributional similarities with them, and I want to use those parallelisms as a first step towards providing an analysis for specCP-expletives in C-dialects. The elements I will focus on in particular are clause-initial particles in Breton and Welsh of the type illustrated in (33) and (34) (Jouitteau 2005, 2008, 2011, Borsley et al. 2007, Willis 1998, 2007).

- (33) **Bez'** e-ra glav.  
PRT Fin-does rain  
'It rains.' Breton, Jouitteau (2011:5)
- (34) **Fe** glywes i'r cloc.  
PRT heard.1SG the clock  
'I heard the clock.' Welsh, Jouitteau (2008:168)

I will now proceed to show that there are striking parallelisms between Breton *bez* and Welsh *fe* on the one hand and West-Flemish *t* on the other. A first observation that points in this direction concerns the

<sup>8</sup>Note in this respect that replacing *t* by a demonstrative in (25) would render the example grammatical.

<sup>9</sup>The initial /h/ is typically silent in West Flemish dialects, cf. Taeldeman (2013).

<sup>10</sup>My translation. The original quote runs as follows: "We nemen zelfs dat *t* in de zin *Er waren vijf prijzen* (...) niet mag worden geïnterpreteerd als een vorm van *het*. In de eerste plaats valt het op dat voor die RND-zin nergens een vokalisch element vóór *t* wordt opgegeven."

fact that all three are disallowed in postverbal position:

- (35) \*Zyn t gisteren drie studenten gekomen?  
are it yesterday three students come  
INTENDED: 'Did three students come yesterday?' Lapscheure Dutch, L. Haegeman p.c.
- (36) \*Glav bez a-ra.  
rain PRT Fin-does  
INTENDED: 'It rains.' Breton, Jouitteau (2008:170)
- (37) \*Brynodd fe Elin dorth o fara.  
buy.PAST.3SG PRT Elin loaf of bread  
'Elin bought a loaf of bread.' Welsh, based on Borsley et al. (2007:11)

Secondly, when *bez*, *fe*, and *t* occur in preverbal position, no other element can do so. This is illustrated for Lapscheure Dutch and Welsh in (38) and (39) respectively, and for Breton Jouitteau (2011:5) notes that "bez is in mutual exclusive distribution with any other pre-Tense element".

- (38) \*Gisteren t was veel volk ip die feeste.  
yesterday it was much people on that party  
INTENDED: 'There were many people at the party yesterday.' Lapscheure Dutch, L. Haegeman p.c.
- (39) \*Hwyrach fe fydd rhaid i chi aros.  
probably PRT be.FUT.3SG necessary to you wait.INF  
INTENDED: 'You'll probably have to wait.' Welsh, Borsley et al. (2007:124)

Thirdly, all three elements are disallowed in embedded clauses. For the specCP-expletive *t* this is illustrated in (40), while for Breton, Jouitteau (2011:6) points out that "[i]n embedded domains, *bez* is only licit in structures that independently allow for embedded V2 orders". Similarly, "[o]ccurrence of the *miffe* particles in Welsh is restricted to matrix sentences" (Jouitteau 2008:168).

- (40) \*dan t gisteren drie studenten gekomen zyn  
that it yesterday three students come are  
INTENDED: 'that three students came yesterday' Lapscheure, L. Haegeman p.c.

Fourthly, none of the three elements under consideration here interfere with  $\phi$ -agreement between T and the postverbal thematic subject: in all three of the examples in (41)–(43) the verb shows regular  $\phi$ -agreement with a postverbal DP.

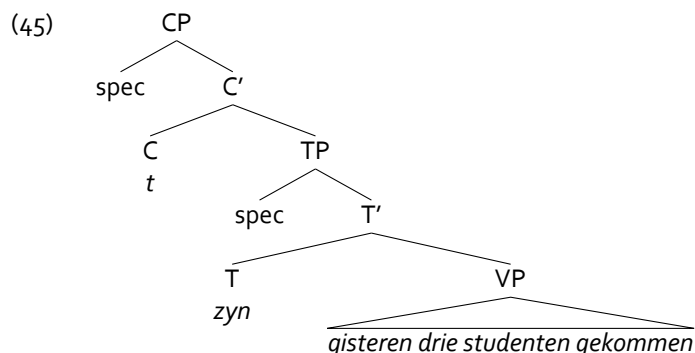
- (41) T zyn gisteren drie studenten gekomen.  
it are.PL yesterday three students.PL come  
'Three students came yesterday.' Lapscheure Dutch, Grange and Haegeman (1989:162)
- (42) Bez'e-prenis eul leor d'am breur deh.  
PRT Fin-bought.1SG a book to.my brother yesterday  
'I've bought my brother a book yesterday.' Breton, Jouitteau (2011:6)
- (43) Fe glywes i'r cloc.  
PRT heard.1SG the clock  
'I heard the clock.' Welsh, Jouitteau (2008:168)

Fifthly, and specifically for Welsh, there are diachronic/etymological parallelisms as well. Willis (2007) shows that main clause complementizers like *fe* "emerged from earlier preverbal subject pronouns that satisfied a V2-constraint in SpecCP" (Willis 2007:432). The Welsh particle *fe* diachronically derives from the third person singular pronoun *ef* 'he/it', which in Middle Welsh was used as a specCP-expletive. It was later reanalyzed as occupying C rather than specCP.

Summing up, the specCP-expletive found in C-dialects shows remarkable parallelisms with clause-initial particles in Breton and Welsh distributionally, in terms of the agreement relations found in the clause, and diachronically. I want to hypothesize that these similarities are not coincidental, but that

they point to a shared structural analysis. The standard account of Breton *bez* and Welsh *fe* holds that they are main clause complementizers, i.e. they are the overt realization of a C-head (Jouitteau 2005, 2008, 2011, Willis 1998, 2007, Borsley et al. 2007, Roberts 2005). I propose to extend this account to the specCP-expletive *t* found in C-dialects: it too spells out a C-head. This means that an example like (41) (repeated below as (44)) now receives the structural analysis in (45).

(44) T zyn gisteren drie studenten gekomen.  
 it are.PL yesterday three students.PL come  
 'Three students came yesterday.' Lapscheure Dutch, Grange and Haegeman (1989:162)



The reasoning goes as follows: when the subject does not raise to specTP (and in Lapscheure Dutch indefinite subjects never do, cf. Haegeman 1986), the scene-setting adverb *gisteren* 'yesterday' is not fronted, and no other phrase (A'-)moves into the C-domain, C-dialects have the (Last Resort) option of spelling out C as *t* in order to satisfy V2.<sup>11</sup> Note that this requires a (re)conceptualization of V2 along the lines proposed by Jouitteau (2005, 2011). In her own words:

"I reconsider the typological classification of languages and propose that all the languages mentioned above [i.e. V2, SVO and VSO, jvc] are subgroups of the type X(P)-VSO. In all of these languages the predicative head has moved into the inflectional head, which creates a word order in which the finite verb is fronted. This finite verb has to be preceded by a phrase XP or a head X<sup>0</sup>, leading to XP-VSO and X<sup>0</sup>-VSO as licit word orders (hence the overarching classification as X(P)-VSO). Variation within the group of X(P)-VSO-language is due to their

<sup>11</sup>Note that this implies that the so-called Definiteness Effect that we see in these expletive constructions is essentially an epiphenomenon. Put differently, it is not the expletive (construction) that somehow forces the subject to be indefinite. On the contrary, the fact that the subject is indefinite allows—or in the case of Lapscheure Dutch: forces—it to stay low, which means that the verb risks becoming sentence-initial, which in turn leads to the insertion of the expletive, i.e. the spell-out of a C-head. This kind of approach seems corroborated by the fact that different languages with specCP-expletives impose different definiteness restrictions on their associate DPs:

- (i) a. \*T stond alleen Valère in den lochtink.  
 it stood only Valère in the garden  
 b. \*T stoan al de studenten vuo de deure.  
 it stand all the students in.front.of the door  
 Lapscheure Dutch, L. Haegeman p.c.
- (ii) a. \*það hefur aðeins Jón ekki lesið þessa bók.  
 it has only Jón not read that book  
 Icelandic, Boeckx (2001:47)  
 b. það hafa allir kettir alltaf verið í eldhúsinu.  
 it have all cats always been in kitchen.the  
 Icelandic, Thraínsson (2007:319)
- (iii) a. Es hat nur der Hans dieses Buch nicht gelesen.  
 it has only the Hans that book not read  
 German, Boeckx (2001:47)  
 b. Es has heute jede Maus den Käse verschmäht.  
 it has today every mouse the cheese disdained  
 German, Haider (2010:2)

What these examples show, then, is not variation that is inherent to the expletive (construction) as such, but rather variation as to what type of subjects can surface in a position lower than the highest (or canonical) subject position (see also Moro 1997, Boeckx 2001, Vangsnes 2002, Thraínsson 2007).

lexical inventory. For example, German doesn't have a matrix complementizer. As a result, only an XP will be able to precede the verb in matrix clauses, and the classical V2-word order ensues." (Jouitteau 2005:xvii–xviii, my translation)

Put differently, the V2-constraint, however implemented and probably more aptly called the X(P)-VSO-constraint, prohibits the finite verb from being leftmost in the clausal phase (Jouitteau 2011:10). This constraint can be satisfied in one of two ways: either by (internally or externally) merging an XP in a specifier preceding the finite verb, or by spelling out a higher head. Breton *bez*, Welsh *fe*, and specCP-expletives in C-dialects like *t* in (45) are examples of this second option.

One additional question that is raised by the analysis in (45) concerns the morphological shape of the complementizer. In declarative embedded clauses, the complementizer is spelled out as *dat* (often reduced to *da* through a phonological process of t-deletion, see Goeman 1999). If I am right in proposing that specCP-expletives are main clause complementizers, one might expect them to be realized as *da(t)*, contrary to fact. The key to understanding the difference in spell-out between the embedded clause complementizer and its main clause counterpart, I want to argue, lies in the morphological decomposition of the element *dat*. Just as has been suggested for its homophonous demonstrative counterpart (see Leu 2008, Rooryck 2003), I propose that *dat* should be decomposed into two morphemes, with the *da*-element expressing anaphoricity and the *t* finiteness (see also Postma 1997 for a highly comparable proposal). The anaphoric portion of the complementizer (i.e. *da*) is only present when the tense domain it heads is c-commanded by (i.e. anaphoric on, cf. sequence-of-tense) another tense domain, i.e. in embedded contexts (cf. Pesetsky and Torrego 2001:411n41, Postma 1997:3). Given that the main clause complementizer in (45) carries no such anaphoric meaning and only expresses finiteness, we correctly predict it should be spelled out as *t*.

Summing up, in this section I have proposed a radically new analysis of specCP-expletives in Dutch dialects, whereby these elements are not expletives at all, but rather spell-outs of a C-head and hence main clause complementizers. One thing I have not yet addressed, is why this option of spelling out C as *t* is available in only some of the dialects of Dutch-speaking Belgium, i.e. the difference between C- and T-dialects that was introduced in section 3. This is what I now turn to.

### 4.3 C- vs. T-dialects: a parametric difference

I want to argue that the empirical differences between C- and T-dialects can be reduced to a single parametric difference between the two dialect groups (see also van Craenenbroeck and van Koppen 2016). It can be formulated as follows:

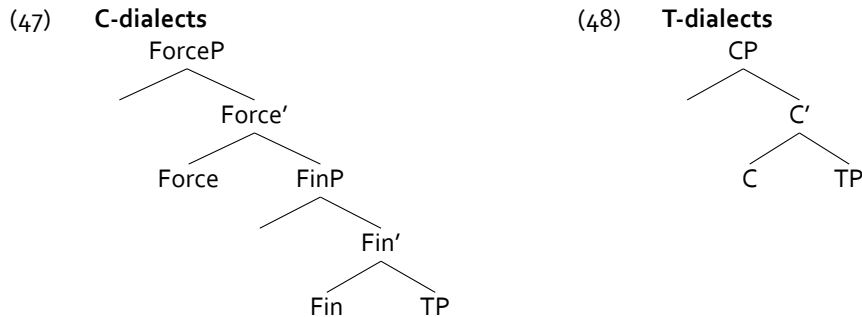
(46) **The split-CP parameter:**

The CP-domain {is/is not} split up into separate projections.

T-dialects instantiate the negative setting of this parameter, while C-dialects represent the positive version. Put differently, C-dialects have a split CP-domain, but T-dialects do not. The tree structures in (47) and (48) illustrate this. For concreteness' sake, I use Rizzi (1997)'s labels ForceP and FinP to refer to the various CP-projections in C-dialects, but nothing much will hinge on the precise nature of these projections.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Note that while the hypothesis in (46) is explicitly formulated in terms of a split vs. an unsplit CP, other implementations are possible and possibly compatible with the analysis proposed here. For example, it could well be that both dialect types feature a split CP, but that C-dialects correspond to what Wolfe (2016) calls Fin-V2 languages, while T-dialects represent Force-V2 systems. I leave a full comparison of both approaches as a topic for further research.



One aspect of the analysis left implicit both in the formulation of the parameter in (46) and in the tree structures in (47) and (48), is the assumption that these two dialect groups also differ in the derivation of their V2-structures. Assume that in main clauses in V2-languages like Dutch and its dialects, the finite verb always moves into the C-domain. In T-dialects, there is only one possible landing site, namely the unique C-head, while in C-dialects, the verb could move either to Fin or to Force. I want to exploit this difference by proposing that in T-dialects all main clauses, whether they be subject-initial or not, have the same syntactic structure, while in C-dialects subject-initial clauses are smaller than non-subject-initial ones. Put differently, and adapting terminology from Postma (2011a,b), while C-dialects are Zwart-type languages, T-dialects are Den Besten-type languages. In the latter, all V2-sentences are CPs, and the finite verb always occupies C, but the position of the subject is variable (specTP or specCP) (Den Besten 1989). In Zwart-type languages on the other hand, subject-initial V2-sentences are FinPs, and the finite verb is either in Fin or in Force, but the subject is always in specFinP (Travis 1984, Zwart 1993, 1997). The representations in (49) and (50) illustrate this difference.

- (49) **Den Besten-type languages**
- subject-initial: [CP SUBJECT [C VERB [TP t<sub>subject</sub> [T t<sub>verb</sub> ] ...
- inverted: [CP XP [C VERB [TP SUBJECT [T t<sub>verb</sub> ] ...
- (50) **Zwart-type languages**
- subject-initial: [FinP SUBJECT [Fin VERB ] ...
- inverted: [ForceP XP [Force VERB [FinP SUBJECT [Fin t<sub>verb</sub> ] ...

With this as background I now return to the analysis of expletives, and focus in particular on the empirical correlations discussed in section 3.

#### 4.4 Revisiting the empirical correlations

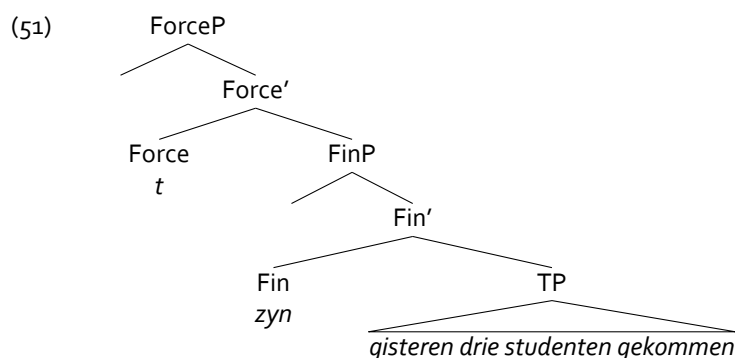
Recall from Table 2 on p.9 (repeated below as Table 3) that we uncovered four empirical differences between C- and T-dialects: they differ in the type of expletive they have, in whether or not they require a locative expletive in inversion contexts, in whether they allow the strong form of the locative to be used as an expletive, and in whether they display complementizer agreement. In this subsection I show how all four of these properties can be derived from the parametric difference in (46), in combination with the complementizer analysis of specCP-expletives presented in subsection 4.2.

	C-dialects	T-dialects
<b>type of expletive</b>	pronominal specCP	locative specTP
<b>obligatory expletive in inversion</b>	yes	no
<b>strong locative form as expletive</b>	no	yes
<b>complementizer agreement</b>	yes	no

Table 3: C- vs. T-dialects in Belgian Dutch

Before we can analyze these four properties in detail, we first need to update the analysis presented in

(45) in light of the hypothesis in (46) and the tree structure in (47):



As this structure makes explicit, the so-called specCP-expletive is in fact the spell-out of the higher C-head (called Force here), with the finite verb occupying the lower one (Fin). Other than that, the reasoning remains the same as in subsection 4.2: the subject is indefinite and therefore does not raise into the canonical subject position (specFinP), no other XP A'-moves into the CP-domain (which would have triggered further verb raising to Force, see (50)), and so in order to satisfy the verb second requirement, the Force-head is spelled out by the main clause complementizer *t*.

Before proceeding with the main line of argumentation it is worth highlighting the similarities between the analysis in (51) on the one hand and two other recent accounts of phenomena found in C-dialects on the other. While it might be non-standard to propose that a syntactic head can serve to lexicalise the position preceding the finite verb in a Germanic V2-language, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that at least for some such languages this option is available. The first additional indication is provided by De Clercq and Haegeman (2018)'s analysis of what they call pleonastic *die* in constructions like the following, that are found in C-dialects (De Clercq and Haegeman 2018:3):

- (52) *Vroeger, die bakten wij vier soorten brood.*  
 formerly that/those baked we four types bread  
 'We used to bake four kinds of bread.' Gijzenzele Dutch

While this construction at first glance looks like a run-of-the-mill case of contrastive left dislocation, the lack of agreement between the alleged left dislocate (*vroeger* 'formerly') and the resumptive demonstrative pronoun (*die* 'that/those') suggests that it is not—and see De Clercq and Haegeman (2018) for extensive additional argumentation that (52) is not a case of contrastive left-dislocation. Interestingly, though, the analysis De Clercq and Haegeman (2018) end up proposing is one whereby the element *die* is a root complementizer that spells out Force, while the verb has raised to Fin. Concretely, the analysis of the example in (52) is as in (53) (De Clercq and Haegeman 2018:14).

- (53) [<sub>ForceP</sub> *Vroeger* [<sub>Force</sub> *die* ] [<sub>FinP</sub> *vroeger* [<sub>Fin</sub> *bakten* ] [<sub>TP</sub> *wij vier soorten brood* ]]]

Although there remain differences between the analysis in (53) and the one in (51)—for one, there is an additional XP that precedes the complementizer+verb in (53) but not in (51)—the parallelisms are striking, suggesting that the overall approach might be on the right track.

Another instance where the finite verb is preceded by a syntactic head in C-dialects concerns subject-initial main clauses with deficient subjects. An example from the dialect of Lapscheure is given in (54) (van Craenenbroeck and van Koppen 2019:269).

- (54) *Ze goa zie.*  
*she<sub>deficient</sub> goes she<sub>strong</sub>*  
 'She's going.' Lapscheure Dutch

There has been some debate in the literature, specifically between Van Craenenbroeck and van Koppen (2002, 2007) and Haegeman (1990, 1992, 2004), as to the status of the deficient pronoun in clause-initial position in examples like (54), with Van Craenenbroeck and Van Koppen claiming it is a weak pronoun,



and Haegeman arguing that it is a clitic. After reviewing all the evidence, Van Craenenbroeck and van Koppen (2019) conclude that Haegeman is right, and that, in C-dialects, a deficient pronoun in clause-initial position can be a clitic. However, given that clitics are heads and not phrases (Cardinaletti and Starke 1999), this implies that in (54) the finite verb is preceded not by an XP, but by a head. Needless to say, this conclusion could be straightforwardly implemented in the analysis outlined in (51):<sup>13</sup>

(55) [ForceP [Force Ze ] [FinP [Fin goa ] [TP zie ]]]

Summing up, while it might seem unorthodox to reanalyze what is traditionally considered to be a specCP-expletive as a main clause complementizer, closer inspection reveals that this analysis fits in with a growing body of work suggesting that in C-dialects the position preceding the finite verb in main clauses can be occupied both by heads and by phrases. With this as background, we can now return to the four properties listed in Table 3.

#### 4.4.1 Type of expletive

In the analysis presented in this paper, so-called specCP-expletives are the spell-out of a C-head in order to prevent a V2-violation, whereby V2 is conceptualized as a ban on having the finite verb be first within the clausal phase. In C-dialects, this ban can be avoided either by (internally or externally) merging an XP in a specifier preceding the verb—thus yielding a ‘regular’ V2-structure—or by spelling out the Force-head while the verb remains in Fin. T-dialects on the other hand have an unsplit CP-domain—recall the structure in (48)—and as a result the finite verb is always located in the highest—in fact, the only—C-head and the only way to avoid the ban on a phase-initial finite verb is by (internally or externally) merging an XP in specCP. In other words, the parametric difference in (46) correctly predicts specCP-expletives to be absent in T-dialects.

In addition, the analysis correctly accounts for the distribution of specCP-expletives across sentence types. Recall that *t* is disallowed in inverted main clauses and embedded clauses:

(56) \*Zyn *t* gisteren drie studenten gekomen?  
 are it yesterday three students come  
 INTENDED: ‘Did three students come yesterday?’ Lapscheure Dutch, L. Haegeman p.c.

(57) \*da-n *t* gisteren drie studenten gekomen zyn  
 that-PL it yesterday three students come are  
 INTENDED: ‘that three students came yesterday’ Lapscheure Dutch, L. Haegeman p.c.

These facts now follow without further stipulation from independent properties of complementizers and verbs. Example (56) is ruled out because the finite verb has raised into Force and as a result, this head cannot be independently spelled out at *t*.<sup>14</sup> The embedded clause in (57) on the other hand is ill-formed because the Force-position is already spelled out by *dat* (reduced to *da* due to *t*-deletion here) and so cannot be spelled out a second time by *t*. The analysis presented in the two previous subsections thus not only accounts for the difference between the two types of dialects, but also for the distribution of the expletive within one group.

#### 4.4.2 Complementizer agreement

Another consequence of the two structures in (47)/(48) concerns the degree of independence of C and T, particularly in their use as  $\phi$ -probes. In T-dialects, the finite verb always moves to (the unique) C(-head) in main clauses, while in C-dialects the finite verb moves at least as high as Fin, but not necessarily all the way to Force. Given that they are always part of the same complex head, it seems highly unlikely that T and C should be able to independently act as  $\phi$ -probes in T-dialects—and to the extent that they could,

<sup>13</sup>The fact that specFinP remains empty even though the subject is not indefinite might suggest that *ze* first XP-moves to specFinP and then cliticizes to Force from there. In fact, this is precisely the analysis proposed by Haegeman (1990, 1992), albeit in a pre-split-CP framework.

<sup>14</sup>What is illustrated here, then, is the traditional observation that fronted finite verbs and overt complementizers are in complementary distribution in Dutch (Den Besten 1989). It should be clear, though, that under the analysis proposed in this paper, that generalisation does not hold across all types of main clauses.

one would expect the result to be a single Agree relation, with one and the same Goal. In C-dialects on the other hand, Force and (Fin+)T have a much higher degree of independence and as a result would be expected to be independently available as  $\phi$ -probes.

The hypothetical situation just sketched is precisely what underlies complementizer agreement. As argued extensively by Van Koppen (2005, 2017), complementizer agreement should be analyzed as Agree triggered by an unvalued  $\phi$ -probe on C, a probe that is independent from the  $\phi$ -probe on T. The independence of these two probes can be demonstrated most clearly in cases where they target a different goal. Relevant examples are given in (58) and (59).

- (58) Ich dink de-s doow en ich ôs treff-e.  
 I think that-2SG you.SG and I ourselves.PL meet-PL  
 'I think that you and I will meet.' Tegelen Dutch, Van Koppen (2005:40)
- (59) omda-n die venten tun juste underen computer kapot was.  
 because-PL those guys then just their computer broken was.SG  
 'because then the computer of those guys just broke down.' Lapscheure Dutch, Haegeman and van Koppen (2012:4)

In (58) the finite verb *treffe* 'meet' agrees with the first person plural coordinated subject *doow en ich* 'you and I' (which is further corroborated by the presence of the first person plural anaphor *ôs* 'ourselves'), while the complementizer *des* 'that' only agrees with the first conjunct of the coordination, namely the second person singular pronoun *doow* 'you'. This clearly shows that the  $\phi$ -specification on C is not a copy of or otherwise dependent on the  $\phi$ -features of T (pace e.g. Chomsky 2005). Instead, there are two independent  $\phi$ -probes active in this example, one on C and one on T, and they each target a different Goal. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the example in (59), which represents a case of possessor raising in West Flemish. The  $\phi$ -probe on C targets the raised (plural) possessor *die venten* 'those guys', while the finite verb (and hence T) agrees with the (singular) head noun of the subject, namely *computer* 'computer'.

We now understand why complementizer agreement occurs in C-dialects, but not in T-dialects: due to the presence of a C-head that is independent from T (i.e. Force) in C-dialects, C and T can have an independent  $\phi$ -specification, and complementizer agreement becomes possible. In T-dialects on the other hand, C is never independent from T and as a result, complementizer agreement is not an option.

#### 4.4.3 Obligatory expletive in inversion

The third empirical difference between C- and T-dialects concerns the obligatory presence of a locative expletive in inverted main clauses. The central contrast is repeated in (60)–(61) below.

- (60) Zittn \*(dr) ier nievers geen muzn?  
 sit there here nowhere no mice  
 'Aren't there any mice here?' Torhout Dutch, Barbiers et al. (2006)
- (61) Zittn (dr) ie nievest gin mozjn?  
 sit there here nowhere no mice  
 'Aren't there any mice here?' Wambeek Dutch

In C-dialects, the presence of the locative expletive is required, while in T-dialects it is optional. Note that in (61) the optional expletive pronoun is itself followed by a 'true' locative, namely the proximate adverb *ie* 'here'. As such, this example echoes an observation that is occasionally found in the literature on Dutch expletives (see for example Bennis 1986:214, Zwart 1992, Lightfoot 2002:95n4) and that was recently picked up and worked out by Klockmann et al. (2015), namely that for some speakers of Dutch the locative expletive pronoun can be left out when it is followed by a locative expression. Klockmann et al. (2015) propose that in such cases it is the locative expression itself that raises to specTP, thus rendering the expletive superfluous (see also van Craenenbroeck 2019 for detailed discussion). This means that the contrast between (60) and (61) is not so much one of optionality of the expletive, but rather of whether locative adverbs can raise into the canonical subject position.

This reframing of the data in (60)–(61) brings us closer to providing an analysis for it. Recall from subsection 4.3 that C- and T-dialects differ in what they consider to be the canonical subject position. In C-dialects this position is specFinP: this is the position occupied by the subject in all sentence types. In T-dialects on the other hand, the canonical subject position is arguably specTP: this is the position occupied by the subject in inverted main clauses and embedded clauses, while in subject-initial main clauses the subject has moved to a higher position in the CP-domain. Bringing this insight to the data in (60)–(61), this means that (60) shows that a locative adverb cannot raise into specFinP, while in (61) such an element successfully raises into specTP. This accords well with Klockmann et al. (2015)’s analysis of locative raising in varieties of Dutch. They follow Ritter and Wiltschko (2009) in assuming that INFL crosslinguistically encodes coincidence between the event and the utterance. This coincidence can be expressed in terms of temporal relations, location, or person. Crucially, however, a language can be of one type and still show agreement for another type. For example, English is an INFL<sub>tense</sub>-language, but it also shows person agreement. Klockmann et al. (2015) apply the same kind of reasoning to Dutch: it is an INFL<sub>tense</sub>-language, but in those varieties that allow locative raising into specTP, T is also endowed with a locative feature.<sup>15</sup> In other words, locative raising is a consequence of the feature specification of T. This immediately explains why such raising is absent in C-dialects: the canonical subject position is specFinP, and unlike T the lower C-head Fin is not endowed with any locative features. As a result, locative raising is not an option and expletive insertion is obligatory.

#### 4.4.4 Strong locative form as expletive

The difference in subject position is also what lies at the heart of the fourth empirical contrast between C- and T-dialects under consideration here, i.e. the fact that while in the latter the strong form of the locative pronoun can be used as an expletive, this is not possible in C-dialects:

- (62) Dui leit ie nen brief op tuifel.  
 there.STRONG lies here a letter on tabel  
 ‘There’s a letter over here on the table’ Wambeek Dutch
- (63) \*Doa ligt ier nen brief ip tafel.  
 there.STRONG lies here a letter on tabel  
 ‘There’s a letter over here on the table.’ Lapscheure Dutch, L. Haegeman p.c.

Recall that one of the central differences between Zwart- and Den Besten-type languages concerns the position of the subject in a subject-initial main clause. In a Zwart-type language such a subject is in its unmarked, neutral, canonical position, i.e. the position it occupies in all clause types. In a Den Besten-type language on the other hand, a clause-initial subject is in a marked left-peripheral position. The hypothesis I want to put forward is that the use of the strong/emphatic form of the locative pronoun as an expletive originates in precisely those dialects where a clause-initial subject occupies such a marked specCP-position. There are two pieces of evidence in support of this. The first concerns the diachronic development of locative expletives in Dutch. As discussed by Van der Horst (2008:969), in Middle Dutch, when the use of locative expletives was on the rise, there was a clear division of labor between the strong and the weak forms of the locative pronoun. The former was used in sentence-initial position, while the latter was used in all other positions:

- (64) Doe seid-er een monic: ...  
 then said-there.WEAK a monk  
 ‘Then a monc said: ...’ Middle Dutch
- (65) Daer is een verrader onder ons.  
 there.STRONG is a traitor among us  
 ‘There’s a traitor among us.’ Middle Dutch

I take this to mean that while the strong form occupied the marked specCP-position, the weak form was

<sup>15</sup>Klockmann et al. (2015) specifically propose that it is a [Dist(al)]-feature, but the precise details of their analysis do not matter for our present concerns.

used as a filler for specTP. Such a division of labor is only possible, however, in a variety that distinguishes between two types of subject positions, i.e. in T-dialects. This is further confirmed by the distribution of strong and weak expletives within T-dialects. As shown in (66)–(68), even in present-day T-dialects there is a preference to use the strong form in sentence-initial position and the weak form in all other positions (see also van Craenenbroeck 2019 for additional discussion). This accords well with our analysis of (subject positions in) these dialects: in initial position the expletive is in specCP and so a strong form is preferred, while in the other sentence types the expletive occupies specTP and a weak form is more natural.

- |      |  |           |    |        |       |       |              |               |
|------|--|-----------|----|--------|-------|-------|--------------|---------------|
| (66) | Dui/?D'r   | leit      | ie | nen    | brief | op    | tuifel.      |               |
|      | there.STRONG/there.WEAK                          | lies here | a  | letter | on    | table |              |               |
|      | 'There's a letter lying on the table here.'      |           |    |        |       |       |              | Wambeek Dutch |
|      |  |           |    |        |       |       |              |               |
| (67) | dat ?dui/d'r                                     |           | ie | nen    | brief | op    | tuifel leit. |               |
|      | that there.STRONG/there.WEAK                     | here      | a  | letter | on    | table | lies         |               |
|      | 'that there's a letter lying on the table here.' |           |    |        |       |       |              | Wambeek Dutch |
|      |  |           |    |        |       |       |              |               |
| (68) | Leit ?dui/d'r                                    |           | ie | nen    | brief | op    | tuifel?      |               |
|      | lies there.STRONG/there.WEAK                     | here      | a  | letter | on    | table |              |               |
|      | 'Is there a letter lying on the table here?'     |           |    |        |       |       |              | Wambeek Dutch |

Summing up, the fourth and final empirical difference between C- and T-dialects can also be accounted for under the assumption that the CP-domain is split in the former but not the latter.

## 4.5 Conclusion

In this section I have outlined my analysis of specCP-expletives in dialects of Dutch. Based on a comparison with clause-initial particles in Welsh and Breton, I have proposed that these expletives are in fact the spell-out of a main clause complementizer. This in turn led to a parametric account of the difference between C- and T-dialects, whereby the CP-domain is split up into ForceP and FinP in the former, but not in the latter. Finally, in subsection 4.4 I have shown how such an account can make sense of the additional empirical differences between the two types of dialects that were introduced in section 3.

## 5 Extending the analysis: German and Icelandic

### 5.1 Introduction

In this section I explore to what extent the analysis of specCP-expletives proposed for Dutch dialects in the previous section can be extended to other Germanic languages that are known to possess such expletives (see section 2), in particular German and Icelandic.<sup>16</sup> The discussion in this section will be more exploratory in nature than that in the preceding sections, but what I hope to be able to show is that at least some of the insights gleaned from the Dutch dialect data can be carried over to other Germanic languages.

### 5.2 German

In subsection 4.2 I presented several arguments against analyzing the *t*-element in C-dialects as a personal pronoun occupying specCP: it cannot be replaced by a demonstrative, it is obligatorily phonologically reduced, and weak third person pronouns are otherwise excluded from occurring in specCP. In this subsection I show that those same arguments apply to German—albeit with a number of caveats—suggesting that the Dutch analysis of specCP-expletives proposed above can potentially be applied to this language as well.

<sup>16</sup>I do not know enough about Yiddish to say anything meaningful about it at this point. Interesting, though, is the fact that Prince (1988:176) cites Zaretski (1929:168) as referring to the specCP-expletive *es* as a “prefix” on the verb. This accords well with my analysis of these elements as spelling out a head position to the left of the finite verb.

The first argument concerns the question of whether the pronoun can be replaced by a demonstrative. As shown in (69) and (70), this is possible for the *es* 'it' that occurs in the subject position of weather verbs.<sup>17</sup>

- (69) Es regnet.  
it rains  
'It is raining.' German
- (70) Das regnet.  
that rains  
'The rain is coming down in buckets!' German, Mohr (2005:175n208)

With the *es* 'it' occurring as a specCP-expletive, however, the judgments are different:

- (71) Es sind zwei Männer im Garten.  
it are two men in.the garden  
'There are to men in the garden.' German
- (72) \*Das sind zwei Männer im Garten.  
that are two men in.the garden  
INTENDED: 'There are two men in the garden.' German, S. Mohr p.c.

This constitutes a first indication that the clause-initial element in an example like (71) is not a run-of-the-mill personal pronoun. A second parallelism with the dialect Dutch data concerns the fact that in spoken German the clause-initial *es* is always reduced to [s]. Using the full form [ɛs] sounds "stilted" (S. Mohr, p.c.).

- (73) (??E)s sind zwei Männer im Garten.  
it are two men in.the garden  
'There are to men in the garden.' spoken German

The argument carries less force in German than it did in dialect Dutch, however, in that the same reduction also seems to be preferred with other cases of clause-initial *es*:

- (74) (??E)s regnet.  
it rains  
'It is raining.' spoken German

Thirdly, just as was the case in dialect Dutch, the personal pronoun *es* in German is typically banned from specCP (see (75)), thus rendering unlikely an analysis whereby this element is specialized for this position.

- (75) \*Es hat Bernd auf den Tisch gelegt.  
it has Bernd on the table laid  
'Bernd (has) put it on the table.' German, Meinunger (2007:554)

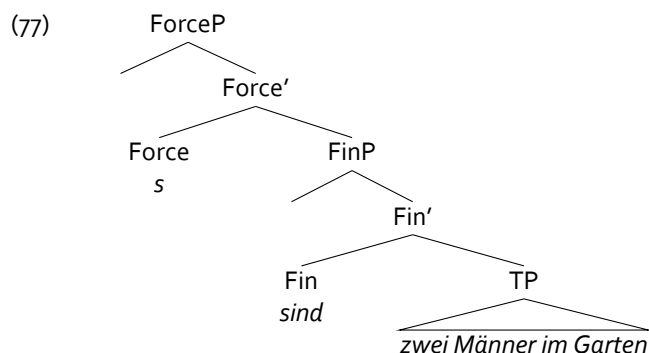
Once again, we need to make a caveat: as discussed by Meinunger (2007), not all instances of *es* are equally excluded from occurring in clause-initial position:

- (76) Es hat zum Glück niemand gefunden.  
it has to.the luck nobody found  
'Luckily, nobody found it.' German, Meinunger (2007:559)

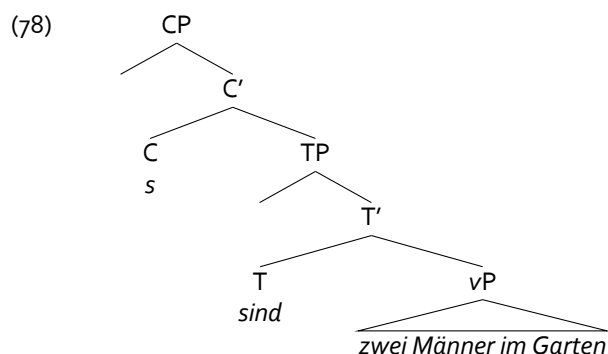
It is not entirely clear, though, how strong this objection is: Meinunger points out that contexts like (76), in which a non-subject *es* occupies the sentence-initial position, bear a close resemblance to the contexts in which the specCP-expletive *es* shows up, to the extent even that the grammaticality of the latter might create the "illusion of grammaticality" in the case of the former (Meinunger 2007:556n2, citing one of the reviewers of his paper). Like Meinunger, though, I have to leave this as a topic for further research here.

<sup>17</sup>As indicated in the translation of (70) there is a certain emphaticness associated with the use of the demonstrative. My intuition is that the same holds for the Dutch examples, but I leave this as a topic for further research.

Summing up, even though the German evidence is not as strong as its dialect Dutch counterpart, the facts in (69)–(76) are suggestive nonetheless, and I think it could a fruitful avenue of inquiry to explore to what extent the German specCP-expletive *es*—or rather, *s*—can be reanalyzed as a main clause complementizer, more specifically as a morphological subpart of the default declarative complementizer *daß*. Note that this hypothesis is logically independent from the parameter in (46) that distinguishes the C- from the T-dialects in Dutch. Specifically, there are two scenarios in which *es* can spell out a C-head: one in which the German CP-domain is split and one in which it is not. In the former case, the example in (73) is analyzed in a manner completely parallel to the Lapscheure example in (51):



The so-called specCP-expletive *es* in German is the spell-out of the Force-head, which is realized only when no other material is spelled out to the left of the finite verb in Fin. Alternatively, the CP-domain is not split in German and *es* spells out the unique C-head:



Which of these two analyses is on the right track depends on additional, independent evidence in favor of splitting up the CP-domain in German. This is a topic the scope of which extends far beyond that of the present paper, but it is worth highlighting Frey (2004) in this context, in that the analysis he proposes of the German clausal left periphery seems highly compatible with the structure in (77).

### 5.3 Icelandic

Icelandic is another Germanic language that prominently features a specCP-expletive, namely *það*. There are two respects, though, in which this element differs from its German and dialect Dutch counterparts. First of all, *það* is less severely positionally restricted than German *es* or dialect Dutch *t*. While the latter two only occur in main clause initial position and are hence excluded from embedded clauses and inverted main clauses, Icelandic *það* can occur in initial position in both main clauses and embedded clauses, and is only disallowed in inverted main clauses:

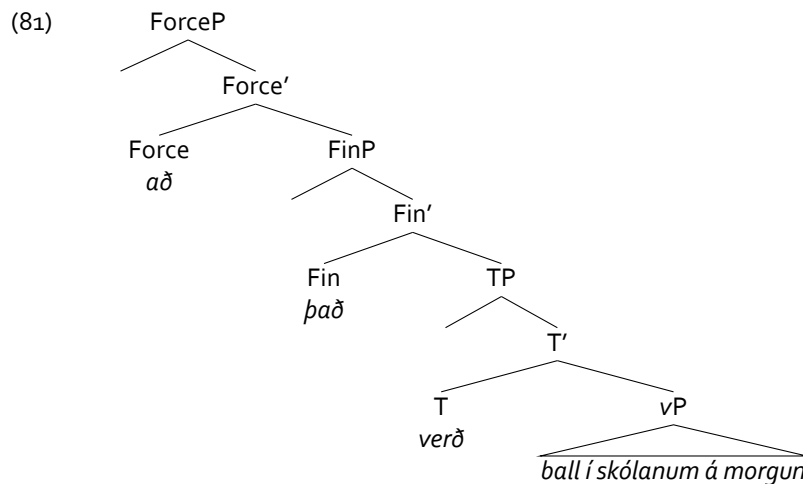
- (79) a. Það eru mús í baðkerinu.  
 it are mice in bathtub.the  
 'There are mice in the bathtub.'

- b. \*Eru það mys í baðkerinu?  
are it mice in bathtub.the  
INTENDED: 'Are there mice in the bathtub?'
- c. að það verð ball í skólanum á morgun.  
that it will.be dance in school.the tomorrow  
'that there will be a dance in the school tomorrow.' Icelandic, Thráinsson (2007:310, 312, 329)

Secondly, while German *es*—especially when reduced to *s*—and dialect Dutch *t* could be argued to be a morphological subpart of the declarative complementizers *daß* and *dat* respectively, no such argument can be constructed for Icelandic. If anything, the specCP-expletive seems to be a morphophonological superset of the declarative complementizer, rather than a subset:

(80)	specCP-expletive	complementizer
dialect Dutch	<i>t</i>	<i>dat</i>
German	<i>s</i>	<i>dass</i>
Icelandic	<i>það</i>	<i>að</i>

This means that the analysis presented above for German and dialect Dutch cannot be carried over wholesale to Icelandic. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that the reanalysis of specCP-expletives as the spell-out of a C-head advocated for in this paper can provide a fruitful new perspective on Icelandic as well, one that accords well with Thráinsson (1979:481)'s original description of specCP-expletives in Icelandic as "some kind of surface adjustment particles, inserted, say, to satisfy the so-called verb-second (V-2) constraint". The key to reconciling the current analysis with the data in (79) and (80), I want to argue, lies in adopting a split-CP approach for Icelandic, and having *að* and *það* spell out different C-heads. The structure in (81) illustrates this for the example in (79c).



The declarative complementizer *að* is base-generated in Force, while *það* spells out the Fin-head when no other element precedes the verb in T. One suggestive piece of supporting evidence for this analysis comes from the distribution of the complementizer *að* within Icelandic. As shown in (82), this element occurs both in finite and in non-finite clauses. This insensitivity to finiteness seems to confirm that it is not the spell out of Fin, and accords well with an analysis whereby it spells out Force instead.

- (82) a. Hann sagði að María hefði lesið bókina.  
he said that Marie had read book.the  
'He said that Mary had read the book.' Icelandic, Thráinsson (2007:444)
- b. Þau lofuðu ekki að borða aldrei graut.  
they promised not that eat never pudding  
'They didn't promise never to eat pudding.' Icelandic, Thráinsson (2007:451)

As was the case for German, however, additional investigations into the Icelandic CP-system will have to determine to what extent the split-CP analysis proposed here is viable (see Jónsson (2010) and Larsson (2014) for suggestive evidence that it might be) and this is not a task I can undertake within the confines of this paper.

## 6 Summary and conclusions

Let me conclude the paper by revisiting the three properties of Germanic expletives I started out with: the presence or absence of positional restrictions, the morphology/etymology of the expletive element, and the agreement properties of expletive constructions. Recall from section 2 that these three properties are systematically interrelated across Germanic: (1) positionally restricted expletives never govern verbal agreement, (2) positionally restricted expletives are never locative in nature, and (3) locative expletives never govern verbal agreement. The first two of these properties now follow straightforwardly from my reanalysis of specCP-expletives as main clause complementizers, i.e. as the spell-out of a C-head: on the one hand complementizers are never suitable Goals for Agree, while on the other complementizers in Germanic are always pronominal in nature and never locative. The third generalization has not featured prominently in the paper, although the analysis of locative raising to specTP sketched in subsection 4.4.3 might provide the beginning of an account: locative elements can check the locative features on T, but they leave the  $\phi$ -features unvalued, thus leading to agreement with the associate DP.

Within the dialects of Dutch spoken in Belgium, the complementizer analysis of specCP-expletives led to an understanding of what differentiates the western from the eastern dialects, with the former having a split CP-domain and the latter an unsplit one. This allowed for a unified account not only of the expletive data, but also the presence or absence of complementizer agreement, and the morphology and distribution of locative expletives in these dialects.

The analysis was then further extended to German and Icelandic, two other Germanic languages that are known to possess specCP-expletives. Although the evidence was less direct in these cases, I argue that it might nonetheless be a fruitful avenue for future research to explore the complementizer analysis of specCP-expletives for these languages as well.

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