Impersonal constructions in German and Mainland Scandinavian

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In this paper I will offer an account of why the distribution of the "expletive" element in German impersonal passives differs from that of the "expletive" in Mainland Scandinavian (MSc) impersonal passives, and why German allows for TECs, while MSc does not.

1. The data

Impersonal passives:

(1) a.　　*(*Es*)　*wurde getanzt*.　　　　　　　　　　　　(German)
　　　　　　Expl[1] was　danced
　　　　　　"There was dancing."/"People were dancing."
　　b.　　… *dass* (**es*[2]*)　getanzt wurde*.
　　　　　　… that　Expl danced was
　　　　　　"… that there was dancing."/"… that people were dancing."
　　c.　　*Gestern　wurde* (**es*) *getanzt*.
　　　　　　yesterday was　　Expl danced
　　　　　　"Yesterday, there was dancing."/"Yesterday, people were dancing."

(2) a.　　*Det ble danset*.　　　　　　　　　　　　(Norwegian)
　　　　　　Expl was danced
　　　　　　"There was dancing."/"People were dancing."
　　b.　　… *at det ble danset.*
　　　　　　… that Expl was danced
　　　　　　"… that there was dancing."/"… that people were dancing."
　　c.　　*I går　　ble det　danset*.
　　　　　　yesterday was Expl danced
　　　　　　"Yesterday, there was dancing."/"Yesterday, people were dancing."

• In German the "expletive" can only ever show up in the sentence-initial position of a declarative main clause, while in MSc it always has to show up, i.e. also in clause-internally.

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[1] I gloss all expletives and expletive-like elements as Expl, no matter whether I really analyse them as expletives.
[2] The presence of *es* can be grammatical, namely if *es* is a referential pronoun standing for e.g. *das Ballett* 'the ballet'. This case, however, is not considered here.

Presentational sentences:
a) TECs

    (3)   *Es   haben einige Kinder Spinat gegessen.*   (German)
                Expl have   several children spinach eaten
                "Several children have eaten spinach."

    (4)   **Det har någon   ätit   ett äpple*.   (Swedish)
                 Expl has someone eaten an apple
                "Someone has eaten an apple."

• TECs are possible in German, but not in MSc.
• It has often been claimed that TECs are subject to a Definiteness Effect wrt to the subject. This is not true for German, see (5), but it does hold for Icelandic, a Scandinavian language that does allow for TECs.

    (5)   *Es   hat soeben der Kanzler die Bühne   betreten.*   (German)
                Expl has just   the chancellor the platform entered
                "In this moment, the chancellor has mounted the platform."

    (6) a.   *Það lesa margir stúdentar bækur eftir Chomsky.*   (Icelandic)
                Expl read many   students books by   Chomsky
                "Many students read books by Chomsky."
        b.   **Það lesa stúdentarnir bækur eftir Chomsky.*
                 Expl read students.the books by   Chomsky
                 "The students read books by Chomsky."

b) similar constructions featuring either *be* (i.e. existential constructions) or an unaccusative verb or an intransitive verb plus a locative element

    (7)   *Es   ist jemand im   Garten.*   (German)
                Expl is someone in.the garden
                "There's someone in the garden."

    (8)   *Det har kommet tre   menn.*   (Norwegian)
                Expl have come   three men
                "There arrived three men."

    (9)   *…at der har danset nogen   in haven.*
                ... that Expl has danced someone in garden.the
                "…that someone has danced in the garden."
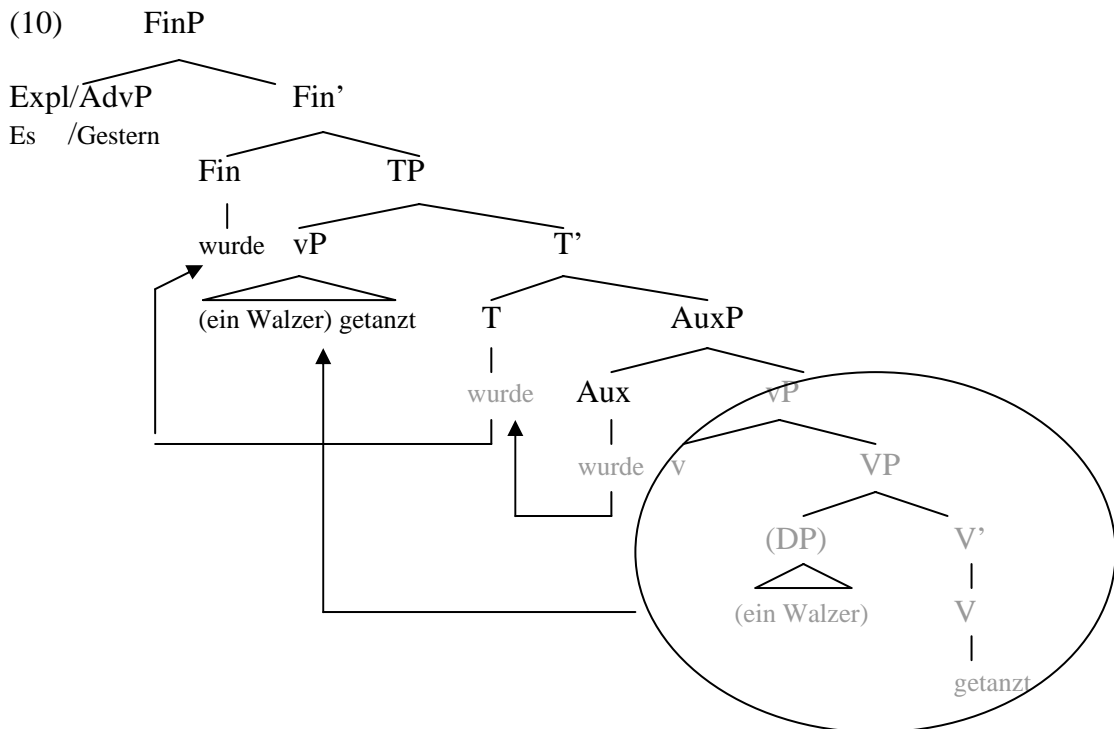   (Danish; Vikner 1995: 203, (82e))

• the number of arguments seems to be crucial in presentational sentences
→ differences are traditionally put down to
    -   whether a language has V-movement
    -   and/or whether it licenses several subject positions, resulting in enough positions for the expletive, the subject DP and the object DP (e.g. Bobaljik & Jonas 1996)
→ my suggestion: differences are rather due to the type of "expletive" a language employs

2. The analysis of German impersonal constructions

2.1. General assumptions
• in German, we either get no V-Movement at all or we have long V-Movement → it is always the (remnant) vP[3] that moves to SpecTP after movement of the auxiliary or of the lexical verb to T has taken place (cf. my other talk)
• in V2 clauses the finite V/Aux moves to Fin, requiring immediate creation of SpecFinP (see New Extension Condition)

2.2. The derivation of impersonal passives

(10)   FinP

Expl/AdvP   Fin'
Es   /Gestern

      Fin   TP

     wurde   vP   T'

    (ein Walzer) getanzt   T   AuxP

              wurde   Aux   vP

                  wurde   v   VP

                         (DP)   V'

                    (ein Walzer)   V

                               getanzt

• The vP, which optionally contains a kind of cognate internal argument (which turns into a derived subject once it reaches SpecTP) and the passive participle, moves to SpecTP to make the head-movement to T pass the Extension Condition.
• Once the auxiliary has moved on to Fin, SpecFinP has to be created → either an adverb or *es* will be merged in SpecFinP
• *Es* is a true expletive element that checks the sop-feature on Fin if there is no real subject of predication available[4]
(• in the case of an embedded clause, the complementiser *dass* will be merged in Fin and there will be no position in which one could merge expletive *es* and what is more, there is no position that needs to be filled)

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[3] When an AuxP is present it is probably the AuxP that moves to SpecTP but in order not to complicate the description I stick to calling everything vP.
[4] Both (i) and (ii) cannot be uttered as out-of-the-blue sentences.

    (i)   *Ein Walzer wurde getanzt.*   (German)
            A   waltz   was   danced.
    (ii)   *Getanzt wurde* (*und ansonsten   passierte gar   nichts.*)
            danced   was   and apart.from.that happened absolutely nothing
            "People were dancing (and apart from that absolutely nothing happened."

2.3. The derivation of TECs

(11)
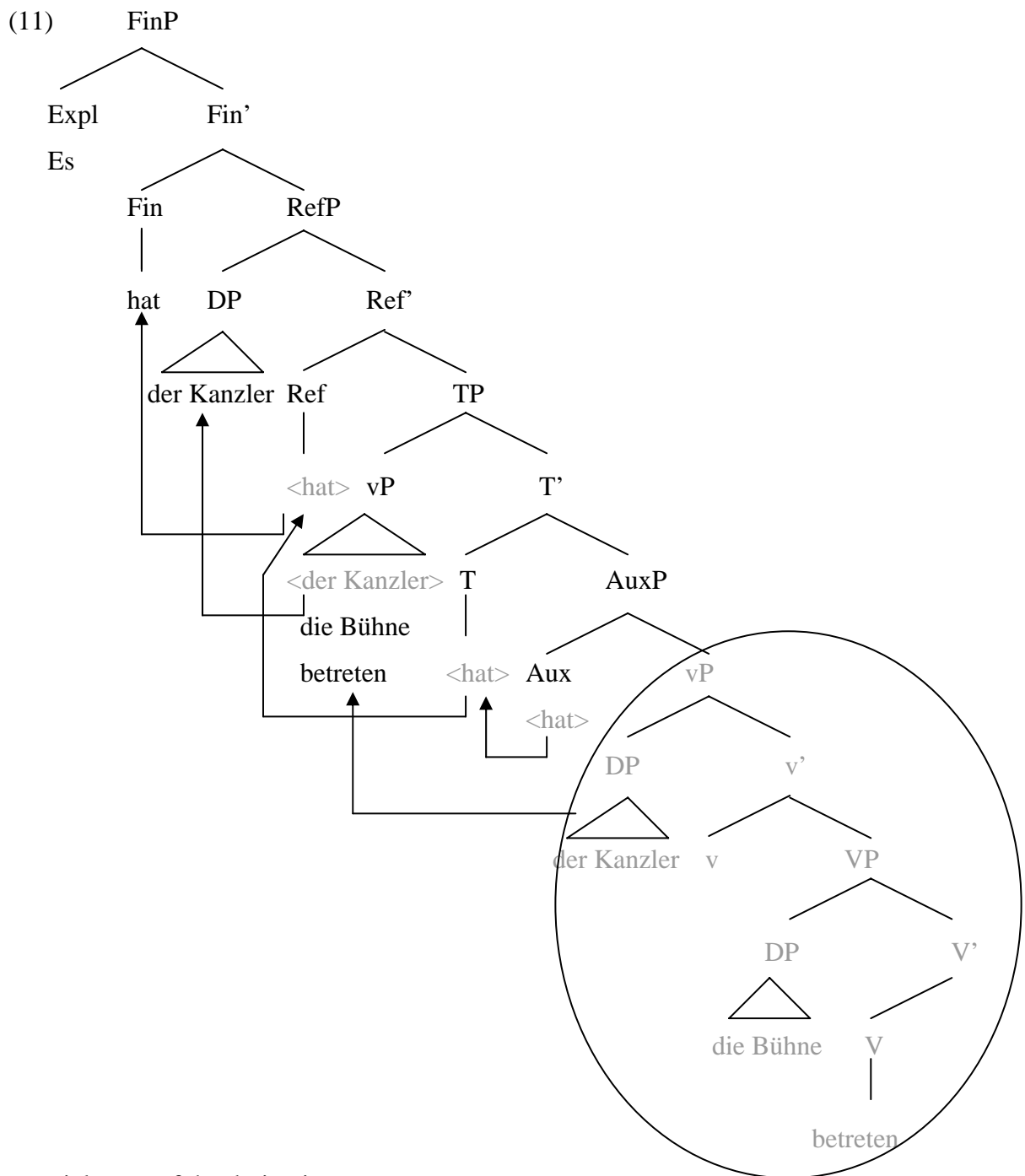
The crucial steps of the derivation:

• again, the full vP moves to SpecTP

• then the definite subject moves out of the (moved) vP to SpecRefP, the designated position for definite subjects

• as in presentational sentences no argument is singled out as the subject of predication, none of the XPs present will move to SpecFinP (after movement of the finite auxiliary to Fin)

• the true expletive *es* will be merged in SpecFinP to check the sop-feature and save the derivation

➔ no Definiteness Effect as expletive *es* is only merged in SpecFinP and SpecRefP is thus available for the definite subject DP

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(The only restriction is that the referent of the subject DP has to be uniquely identifiable in out-of-the-blue contexts, which is the reason for why (12) is possible only in a very special context.

> (12)　　# *Es   hat der Mann die Bühne betreten.*　　　　　　(German)
> 　　　　　Expl has the man　the stage　entered
> 　　　　　"The man has come on the stage.")

• Dutch, however, displays a DE. This is illustrated by the ungrammatical Dutch equivalent (13b) of (5)/(11).

> (13) a.　*Er   heeft zo-even een Amerikaan het toneel   betreden.*　　　(Dutch)
> 　　　　Expl has　just　　an American　the platform entered
> 　　　　"In this moment, an American has mounted the platform."
> 　　　b.　* *Er   heeft zo-even de kanselier het toneel   betreden.*
> 　　　　　Expl has　just　　the chancellor the platform entered
> 　　　　"In this moment, the chancellor has mounted the platform."

→ I assume that Dutch *er* is not a true expletive but an event argument or, more appropriately phrased, a locative or temporal proform (Cardinaletti (2004) calls it a location-goal argument) which is [+specific] and therefore has to be merged in SpecRefP, leading to a DE wrt to the subject (cf. Mohr 2004, 2005).

3. The analysis of Mainland Scandinavian impersonal constructions[5]

3.1. recalling the facts

• in MSc we get short verb movement of the lexical verb to v (except in main clauses with a simple tense, where we get long V-movement) → (remnant) vP movement is not possible in these cases, instead the subject DP has to move to SpecTP
• in impersonal passives the "expletive" is obligatory
• TECs are ungrammatical, no matter whether the subject is definite or not

3.2. possible explanations

3.2.1. Det *is an event argument/a temporal or locative proform*

arguments in favour of this assumption:
• *det* does not only occur in sentence-initial position but also in the I-system, possibly even in the vP
• *det* can obviously move from a structurally lower position to a higher one
→ *det* could be an event argument that is – unlike Dutch *er* – obligatory

arguments against this assumption:
• *det* is neither of locative nor of temporal origin

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[5] I will mainly refer to Norwegian and sometimes to Swedish as Danish poses some problems (see section 4). I group Norwegian and Swedish together although the two languages have different verb patterns. Swedish (like Danish, see Mikkelsen 2001) has, in addition to the analytic passive (*bli* + past participle), the so-called *s*-passive. Impersonal passives require the *s*-passive (Ramge 2002, p. 206), while "normal" passives can feature either type of passive.

• a topicalised PP cannot be taken up by *det* but asks for a true locative proform, namely *der* (14a); a focussed PP, which does not have to be taken up again, however, can occur together with *det* (14b)

(14) a. *På stasjonen, der har   tre   menn ankommet.*   (Norwegian)
        at station.the there has/have[6] three men arrived
        "At the station, three men have arrived there."

     b. *På STASJONEN   har   det   ankommet tre   menn.*
        at STATION.THE has/have Expl arrived   three men
        "At the STATION there arrived three men."

• if *det* were an event argument base-generated in SpecRefP one couldn't explain why the MSc languages do not allow for TECs (cf. Dutch)

3.2.2. Det *is a real expletive*

argument(s) in favour of this assumption:
• *det* seems to be semantically empty

arguments against this assumption:
• *det* does not show up in only one position, e.g. SpecFinP; instead, it is obviously base-generated fairly low in the structure and moves up, if necessary up to SpecFinP
• *det* is of pronominal origin (Vikner 1995) and therefore has to check Nominative Case in SpecTP and a [+specific]-feature in SpecRefP

3.2.3. Det *is a quasi-argument*

arguments in favour of this assumption:
• in some constructions Swedish *det* is preferably translated as *man* 'one' (plus an active clause) in German (Ramge 2002) → *det* seems to be more like an argument → *det* is a quasi-argument (as in weather verb constructions) and is thus merged in SpecvP
• if *det* is a quasi-argument it is clear why it is obligatory
• the analysis of *det* as a quasi-argument can explain why TECs are ungrammatical
→ in TECs both a subject DP and an object DP are present
→ the subject/external argument and the quasi-argument compete for the same base-position (SpecvP) → if the subject DP is merged in SpecvP there's no position left for the quasi-argument, and vice versa[7]

(15)   **Det har någon   ätit ett äpple.*   (Swedish)
          Expl has someone eaten an apple
          "Someone has eaten an apple."

→ Mikkelsen (2001) points out that Danish does allow for a thetic construction with two arguments – provided that neither of the arguments is an external one, i.e. if one is a Bene-factive and one a Theme as in (16)[8]

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[6] It is not clear whether we get subject-verb agreement in these constructions as MSc does not have verbal agreement.
[7] I do not assume multiple specifiers.
[8] Mikkelsen claims that these constructions display a DE with respect to the theme argument but not with respect to the benefactive.

The grammaticality of such constructions is predicted by my analysis.

(16)   *Der ventede mig en unbehagelig aften   hjemme.*
         Expl awaited me an unpleasant   evening at.home
         "An unpleasant evening awaited me at home."

<div align="right">(Danish; Mikkelsen 2001, (18a))</div>

• that *det* is a quasi-argument also holds for thetic constructions with an unaccusative verb as in (17), thetic constructions with an intransitive verb plus a locative element (18), and for all passive clauses with *det*, i.e. not only for impersonal passives but also for passives with a postverbal subject as in (19) [derivations, see below]

(17) a. *Det har   kommet tre   menn.*   (Norwegian)
         Expl has/have come   three men
         "There arrived three men."
     b. **Det har presidenten   kommet.*
          Expl has president-the come
         *"There arrived the president."

(18)   *…at der har danset nogen   in haven.*
         ... that Expl has danced someone in garden.the
         "…that someone has danced in the garden."

<div align="right">(Danish; Vikner 1995: 203, (82e))</div>

(19) a. *… at det ble spist et eple*.   (Norwegian)
         … that Expl was eaten an apple
         "… that an apple was eaten."
     b. **… at det ble spist eplet*.
          … that Expl was eaten apple.the
         "… that the apple was eaten."
     c. **… at det ble bitt   meg [av en hund]*.
          ... that Expl was bitten me   by a   dog
         "… that I was bitten by a dog"

(i) **Der ventede mig den unbehagelige aften   hjemme*.   (Mikkelsen 2001, (19a))
     Expl awaited me the unpleasant   evening at.home
     "The unpleasant evening awaited me at home."

I argue that these facts follow from the thetic nature of these sentences and from the requirement that the referent of the DP be uniquely identifiable (cf. Mohr 2004, 2005 for an account of the restricted DE wrt the subject in German TECs). While the first person personal pronoun is uniquely identifiable, the theme DP is not. The same effect can be reproduced for German as in (iia). However, as soon as the theme DP is modified in a way that makes it identifiable the DE disappears (iib).

(ii) a. **Es   erwartete mich das Unbehagen.*   (German)
          Expl awaited   me   the uneasiness
         "The uneasiness awaited me."
     b. *Es   erwartete mich das wohlbekannte Unbehagen.*
         Expl awaited   me   the well-known   uneasiness
         "The well-known uneasiness awaited me."

<div align="center">7</div>

• there must be something special about Scandinavian passives (perhaps this also has to do with the fact there's a synthetic passive, the *s*-passive) → suggests that these passives can select for a quasi-argument[9]

→ following Burzio's generalisation this analysis predicts that the internal argument can be marked for Accusative Case

→ this prediction is confirmed by examples that contain a pronoun (pronouns are the only Case-marked DPs in MSc)

→ although (19c) is ungrammatical, the pronoun would definitely not be Nominative in such a construction (Arne Martinus Lindstad, p.c) and the clause is only ruled out because of the Definiteness Effect

→ Mikkelsen (2001) shows the same for Danish:

    (20)   *Der var kun ham/*han tilbage.*   (Danish)
                  Expl was only him/ he left
                  "Only he was left."

• Due to the lack of verbal agreement morphology it is, unfortunately, not possible to determine whether the verb agrees with *det* (as I'd predict) or with the postverbal DP.

• the Definiteness Effect can be explained as follows:
Being a quasi-argument *det* carries both a Nominative Case feature and a [+specific]-feature and therefore has to pass through SpecTP and SpecRefP in the course of the derivation.
As the quasi-argument is merged in SpecvP and moves to SpecTP it will always be closer to SpecRefP than the internal argument which is merged in SpecVP.
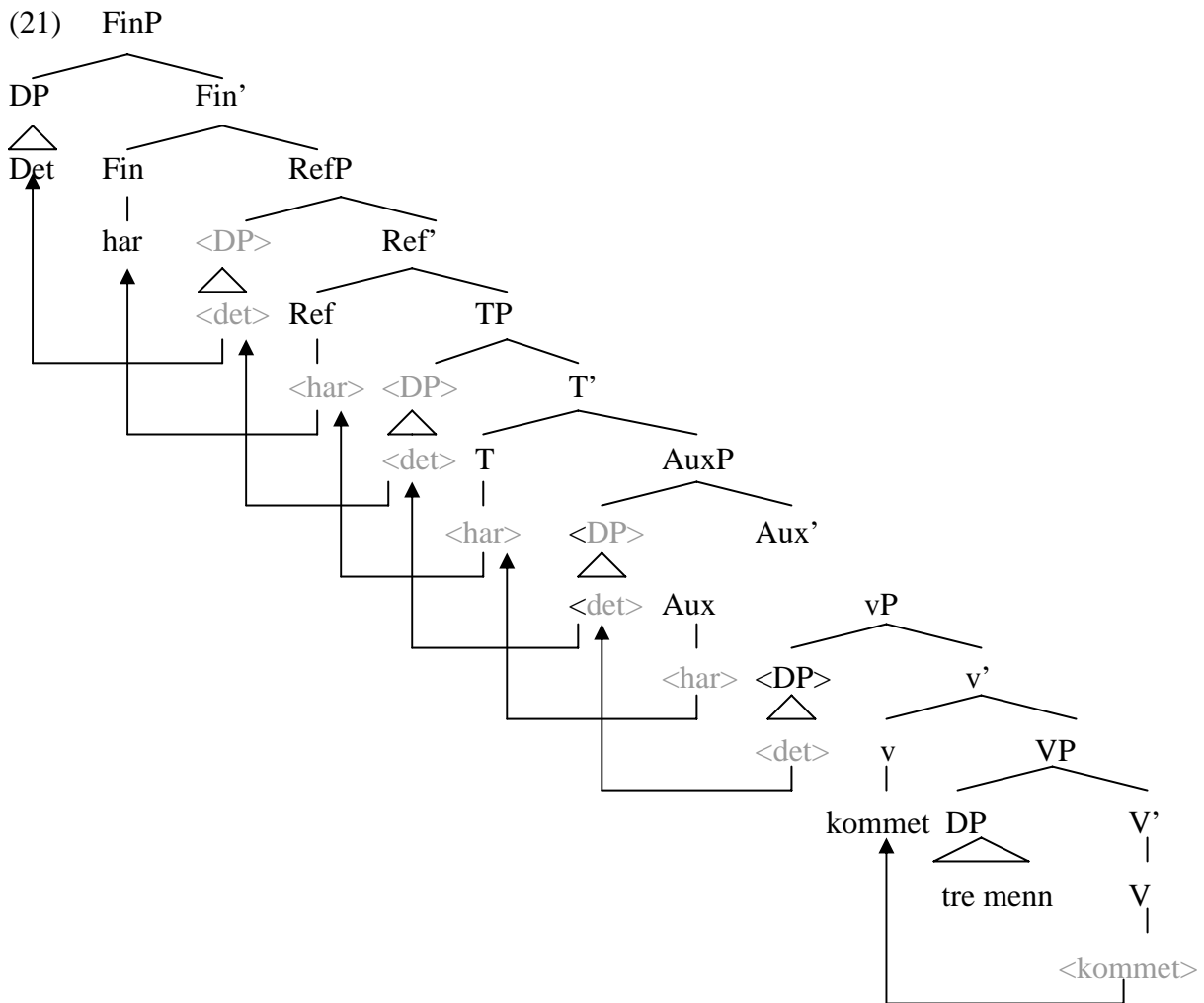Locality requires that it is always the quasi-argument that moves to SpecRefP and thus prevents that the internal argument can check a [+specific] feature. Therefore the internal argument is subject to a Definiteness Effect.
→ in (17a/21) the indefinite DP *tre menn* (which carries Acccusative Case) stays in SpecVP and *det* moves via SpecTP and SpecRefP to SpecFinP

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[9] These findings are reminiscent of a construction that has recently been developing in Icelandic, discussed by Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) and called the 'new impersonal' construction by them.

    (i)   *Það var lamið   stúlkuna   í klessu.*   (Icelandic; M&S 2002: 98, (2))
         it$_{EXPL}$ was hit-neut.sg. the.girl-f.sg.ACC in a.mess
         "The girl was badly beaten. "

This construction, though morphologically passive, features an Accusative object DP and no agreement with the postverbal DP (differently from 'normal' passives). In addition, the construction does not allow for a *by*-agent and shows no DE with respect to the postverbal DP. The latter characteristics do not apply to the Norwegian construction.

(21)

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                    FinP
                   /    \
                 DP      Fin'
                 /\     /    \
              Det    Fin      RefP
               |      |      /    \
              har  <DP>    Ref'
                    /\    /    \
                <det>  Ref     TP
                        |     /  \
                     <har> <DP>  T'
                           /\   /  \
                       <det>  T    AuxP
                               |   /    \
                            <har> <DP>  Aux'
                                  /\   /    \
                              <det>  Aux     vP
                                     |      /   \
                                  <har> <DP>    v'
                                        /\     /  \
                                    <det>    v    VP
                                             |   /    \
                                          kommet DP    V'
                                                 /\    |
                                            tre menn   V
                                                       |
                                                  <kommet>
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→ in (17b), the DP *presidenten* is Accusative as well but has to check a [+specific]-feature in SpecRefP – this position, however, is blocked by the quasi-argument and thus the sentence is ungrammatical

→ in (18), the DP *nogen* and the PP *i haven* form a Small Clause that is merged in SpecVP (cf. my other talk); the participle undergoes short V-movement and *der* is merged in SpecvP and moves up to SpecRefP

• some remarks on word order in our example (14), repeated here as (22):

    (22) a.   *På stasjonen, der har   tre   menn ankommet.*   (Norwegian)
               at station.the there has/have three men arrived
               "At the station, three men have arrived there."
        b.   *På STASJONEN   har   det ankommet tre   menn.*
               at STATION.THE has/have Expl arrived   three men
               "At the STATION there arrived three men."

In (22a) there's no quasi-argument (but a locative proform) → therefore the internal argument cannot be Accusative → instead it carries a Nominative Case feature and has to move to SpecTP → that's why it precedes the participle

In (22b) the presence of the quasi-argument allows for the internal argument to be Accusative and hence to stay in its base-position → therefore the DP follows the participle (which undergoes short V-movement to v)

4. Danish

• *problem*: Danish has two expletives, *det* and *der*. *Der* is used in impersonal passives and thetic constructions, while *det* is used in contexts that are traditionally considered to feature quasi-arguments (e.g. weather verbs).

For this reason and because *der* is of locative origin (Vikner 1995), an analysis of *der* as quasi-argument does not seem plausible at first sight – it rather looks like an event argument/a locative proform

• on the other hand, Danish *der* behaves exactly like Norwegian and Swedish *det*
  - *der* is obligatory
  - also in Danish, TECs are ungrammatical – a fact that one would not expect if *der* were a (Caseless) event argument/locative proform merged in SpecRefP
  - Mikkelsen (2001) and even Vikner (1995), who assumes that *der* is of locative origin, deduce from the behaviour of *der* in raising constructions (23) that *der* is Case-marked for Nominative[10]

(23) a.　　… *at　der$_i$　faktisk　ser　ud　til t$_i$ ikke at blive danset til festen.*
　　　　　　… that Expl actually sees out to   not to be   danced at party.the
　　　　　　"… that there actually seems not to be any dancing at the party."
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Danish; Vikner 1995: 186, (37a); Mikkelsen 2001, (16a))
　　　b.　　*… *at　det faktisk　ser　ud　til der ikke at blive danset til festen.*
　　　　　　… that it   actually sees out to Expl not to be   danced at party.the
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Vikner 1995: 186, (37b); Mikkelsen 2001, (16b))

  - in constructions with *der*, the internal argument is Case-marked for Accusative (cf. (20))

➔ Despite the existence of another quasi-argument (*det*) and despite the (apparent) locative origin of *der* I assume that *der* is a quasi-argument which is merged in SpecvP and carries both a Nominative Case feature and a [+specific]-feature ➔ *der* is obligatory and has to occupy at least SpecTP and SpecRefP in the course of the derivation, the latter leading to a Definiteness Effect

➔ Why Danish has two different "expletives" which both seem to be quasi-arguments and why the seemingly locative *der* is Case-marked are questions that are left for future research

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[10] Holmberg (2000) also points out that „expletive" *der* is historically related to the locative proform *der* and nevertheless carries Nominative Case.

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