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## Dutch *er* revisited\*

**Abstract.** This paper focusses on impersonal passives and transitive expletive constructions (TECs) in German and Dutch, which have traditionally been analysed as featuring an expletive pronoun. I argue that differences between the two languages with respect to these constructions can easily be accounted for if Dutch *er* is not analysed as an expletive but as the overt instantiation of an event argument. This assumption is supported by the fact that *er* is not semantically empty and that its presence is determined by discourse requirements. In addition, the definiteness effect with respect to the subject found in Dutch TECs can be explained if event arguments and definite subjects compete for the same structural position.

**Key words:** definiteness effect, event argument, expletive pronoun, impersonal passive, optionality, transitive expletive construction

### 0. Introduction

This paper focusses on impersonal passives and transitive expletive constructions (TECs) in German and Dutch, which have traditionally been analysed as featuring an expletive pronoun.

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At first glance these constructions look very similar in the two languages; on closer inspection, however, they display differences that call for an explanation.

As regards impersonal passives, German and Dutch vary considerably concerning the distribution of the expletives *es* and *er*, respectively. While German *es* is allowed only in sentence-initial position (1), the presence of Dutch *er* is much less restricted (2). In fact, apart from the sentence-initial position where it is obligatory, *er* seems to be completely optional.

- (1) a. \*(Es) wurde getanzt. (German)

*Expl was danced*

There was dancing./People were dancing.

- b. ... daß (\*es)<sup>1</sup> 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. \*(Er) wordt gedanst. (Dutch)

*Expl<sup>2</sup> is danced*

There is dancing./People are dancing.

- b. ... dat (er) wordt gedanst/gedanst wordt.<sup>3</sup>

*... that Expl is danced/danced is*

... that there is dancing./... that people are dancing.

- c. Op het schip wordt (er) gedanst.

*on the ship is Expl danced*

On the ship, there is dancing./On the ship, people are dancing.

The difference concerning TECs in the two languages is much more subtle than the presence/absence of the expletive in impersonal passives. At first sight TECs in German and Dutch look identical. They vary, however, in one important respect. In Dutch, we can observe a definiteness effect (DE) with respect to the subject of a TEC, i.e. only indefinite subjects are allowed, whereas no such DE is found in German TECs (contrary to what has often been claimed, cf. Cardinaletti 1990). The only requirement in German is that the subject be rather specific – *der Mann* ‘the man’ instead of *der Kanzler* ‘the chancellor’ in (3b) would be highly marginal.

- (3) a. Es haben einige Kinder Spinat gegessen. (German)  
*Expl have several children spinach eaten*  
 Several children have eaten spinach.
- b. Es hat soeben der Kanzler die Bühne betreten.  
*Expl has just the chancellor the platform entered*  
 The chancellor has just mounted the platform.
- (4) a. Er heeft iemand een appel gegeten. (Dutch)  
*Expl has someone an apple eaten*  
 Someone has eaten an apple.
- b. \*Er heeft zo-even de kanselier het toneel betreden.  
*Expl has just the chancellor the platform entered*  
 The chancellor has just mounted the platform.
- c. Er heeft zo-even een Amerikaan het toneel betreden.

*Expl has just an American the platform entered*

An American has just mounted the platform.

In this paper I argue that both the differences observed with respect to impersonal passives as well as those found in TECs can be accounted for if *er* is not analysed as an expletive pronoun but as the overt instantiation of an event argument.

In the next section I present some assumptions about clause structure, especially assumptions about subject positions in the Split-IP domain which are necessary as background knowledge for the ensuing discussion of Dutch *er* as an event argument and for the consequences that follow from this analysis. Section 2 deals with expletives in general and in German in particular. In section 3 I show that Dutch *er* cannot be an expletive but should be analysed as the overt instantiation of an event argument instead (section 4). The latter section also contains the implications of such an analysis for the distribution of *er* and for the interaction between *er* and certain types of subjects. Section 5 provides some model derivations to highlight the structural differences between German and Dutch before I conclude this paper asking whether German, too, might have an event argument or, in other words, asking what the nature of German *da* is (section 6).

## **1. Preliminary remarks – some assumptions about subject positions**

Before I actually discuss impersonal passives and TECs in German and Dutch, some very general information concerning my analysis of Verb Second (V2) clauses and concerning my assumptions about subject positions is necessary.

Following Vikner (1995) I assume that the sentence-initial XP of V2 sentences uniformly occupies the SpecCP position.<sup>4</sup> This means that (i) in subject-initial V2 clauses the subject moves through (an) IP-internal position(s) to SpecCP and (ii) if no other XP is merged in or moves to SpecCP, this position has to be filled by an expletive. Furthermore, I suggest that C carries a subject-of-predication feature in V2 languages. Therefore the sentence-initial XP of a V2 clause has to be the subject of the predication.

SpecCP owes its nature as an optional subject position only to the V2 requirement. There are, however, specifier positions in the Split-IP that are universally associated with a certain class of subject DPs.

Assuming that the complex adverb *schon immer* ‘always’ occupies a fixed position,<sup>5</sup> the examples in (5) show that there are two subject positions in the *Mittelfeld*, one above the adverb and associated with definite subjects (and marginally with indefinite and quantified subjects) and one lower than the adverb and associated with indefinite and quantified subjects, but never with definite subjects.

- (5) a. Diesen Satz haben schon immer alle Studenten gehaßt. (German)  
*this sentence have already always all students hated*  
 This sentence, all students have always hated.
- b. \*Diesen Satz haben schon immer die Studenten gehaßt.  
*this sentence have already always the students hated*
- c. <sup>?</sup>Diesen Satz haben alle Studenten schon immer gehaßt.  
*this sentence have all students already always hated*
- d. Diesen Satz haben die Studenten schon immer gehaßt.  
*this sentence have the students already always hated*

Diesing's (1992) observation that bare plurals that precede the adverb have a generic reading, while bare plurals that follow the adverb have an existential reading can be reproduced in these sentences as well.

- (6) a. Diesen Satz haben Studenten schon immer gehaßt.  
*this sentence have students already always hated*  
 This sentence, students (in general) have always hated.
- b. Diesen Satz haben schon immer Studenten gehaßt.  
*this sentence have already always students hated*  
 There have always been some students who have hated this sentence.

For reasons that become clear when I discuss the derivation of sentences in German and Dutch in general (see section 5), I propose that both of these subject positions are vP-external; the lower position is SpecTP and the higher position SpecRefP (following Kiss 1996). More precisely, all subjects<sup>6</sup> move to SpecTP and definite subjects have to move on to SpecRefP. This analysis results in SpecRefP being the designated position for definite subjects. Therefore a DE always arises when a definite subject cannot move to SpecRefP because this position is occupied by some other element. In section 4, I argue that this is what happens in the Dutch clauses that feature *er*.

## 2. Expletives

### 2.1. Types of expletives

In traditional accounts like those of Cardinaletti (1990) and Vikner (1995) – which are based on an unsplit IP – impersonal passives and TECs are analysed as always featuring expletive pronouns. They claim that in addition to the overt versions *es* and *er*, there are also non-overt instantiations of the expletive whenever the subject DP apparently sits in a lower position or there is no subject DP present at all. Overt expletives are merged in SpecIP and thus satisfy the EPP. If they are spelt out in SpecCP, they have moved there from SpecIP so that SpecIP is occupied by a trace of the expletive.

- (7)  $Es_i$  wurde  $t_i$  getanzt. (German)  
*Expl was danced*  
 There was dancing./People were dancing.

In the case of TECs this analysis implies that the subject remains vP-internal and thus accounts for the DE, according to Cardinaletti – the only problem being that German does not display such a DE (see section 2.2.).

- (8)  $Es_i$  haben  $t_i$  einige Kinder Spinat gegessen. (German)  
*Expl have several children spinach eaten*  
 Several children have eaten spinach.

If there is no overtly realised expletive at all as in (9), the presence of an empty expletive *pro* has been postulated. Again, this *pro* is merged in SpecIP to satisfy the EPP.

- (9) ... daß *pro* getanzt wurde. (German)  
 ... *that danced was*



... that there was dancing./... that people were dancing.

In addition, Vikner (1995) distinguishes between expletives of pronominal origin and those of locative origin. In such a system *es* is considered to be of pronominal origin as it is identical to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular neuter personal pronoun, whereas *er* is of locative origin as it is historically related to the distal demonstrative *daar*. Hoekstra & Mulder (1990) similarly classify *er* (as well as the *there* of the English *there*-construction with unergative verbs) as a locative but crucially not as an expletive element. This restriction is central to the analysis of Dutch *er* that I propose in section 4.

## 2.2. *Against empty expletives and the consequences of this assumption for the analysis of German*

As Chomsky (1995) postulates that the numeration contains only elements that have an effect on the output, the existence of empty expletives has to be questioned. Being an empty element, expletive *pro* cannot have an effect on PF. In the Minimalist framework *pro* is not needed for Case- or phi-feature-checking either because checking can be done at long distance by means of Agree. In view of these facts, Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou (1998) point out that the presence of an expletive *pro* should have some kind of semantic effect, e.g. lead to a DE with respect to the ‘associate’. In German, just as in the VSO-orders investigated by A&A, however, one cannot find any such semantic effect. The absence of a DE can not only be observed in German TECs but also in impersonal passives, which allow for a ‘cognate object’ and even for a definite ‘cognate object’.

(10) ... daß schon der letzte Tanz getanzt wurde.

(German)

... *that already the last dance danced was*

... that people danced the last dance already.

Hence we do not have any evidence for the existence of expletive *pro* nor do we seem to have a position available for *pro*.

Therefore I argue against the existence of empty expletives and redefine the notion of ‘expletive’ in the following way. Expletives are semantically empty elements that are merged only if a certain specifier position is obligatory and there is no other XP that could realise this specifier position. In general, specifiers are optional in Bare Phrase Structure and therefore we do not have to assume the presence of an empty element in every specifier position for which we do not have any overt evidence. On the other hand, there is the semantic requirement that we predicate over something and this means that C, the head associated with the subject-of-predication feature in V2 languages, has to have a specifier.

In addition, the expletive is merged directly in the position where it is spelt out, i.e. an expletive can under no circumstances be merged lower down in the structure, check a feature in passing and move to its ‘surface’ position. This restriction is due to the fact that an expletive is really just a filler not associated with any formal or semantic features and can only check the subject-of-predication feature as a repair mechanism if there is no ‘real’ subject of predication around.

With respect to German, I stick to the assumption that the *es* we find in TECs and impersonal passives is an expletive.<sup>7</sup> According to the new definition of ‘expletive’ and contrary to the traditional ‘expletive approach’, this assumption implies that *es* is merged directly in SpecCP, the sentence-initial position, to satisfy the V2 requirement (provided that no other XP is merged in or moves to SpecCP). In other words, the expletive is inserted if the clause does not contain a subject of predication as is typically the case inthetic and out-of-

the-blue sentences. Impersonal passives without any locative or temporal adverb (11) and TECs (12), in which the whole event is the predicate, are prototypical examples of clauses that do not feature a subject of predication and hence require the presence of an expletive in SpecCP.

(11) Es wurde getanzt. (German)

*Expl was danced*

There was dancing./People were dancing.

(12) Es hat soeben der Kanzler die Bühne betreten.

*Expl has just the chancellor the platform entered*

The chancellor has just mounted the platform.

If *es* is confined to SpecCP in the way just described it is not surprising that *es* is not available in (13a), where SpecCP is not projected at all, and (13b), where SpecCP is filled by the adverb *gestern* ‘yesterday’.

(13) a. ... daß (\*es) getanzt wurde. (German)

*... that Expl danced was*

... that there was dancing./... that people were dancing.

b. Gestern wurde (\*es) getanzt.

*yesterday was Expl danced*

Yesterday, there was dancing./Yesterday, people were dancing.

These restrictions, however, do not only follow from my theoretical assumptions about expletives. They are also supported by the clausal architecture I use here and by empirical observations. In section 1 I have argued that SpecIP, the merging site of the (empty) expletive in the traditional approaches, is split into at least two subject positions, SpecTP and SpecRefP. In German – and in Dutch –, SpecTP is always occupied by the (remnant) vP (for detailed derivations see section 5) and therefore does not qualify as a merging site for expletive *pro*. Furthermore, SpecRefP is obviously available for a definite subject in German since there is no DE with respect to the subject. Hence SpecRefP must not be occupied by an empty expletive either.

Here I have to specify my statement about the absence of a DE in TECs in German. It is certainly true that TECs do not tolerate just any definite DP. As mentioned above, (12) would be on the verge of ungrammaticality if *der Kanzler* ‘the chancellor’ was replaced with *der Mann* ‘the man’, and pronominal subjects are not possible either. I suggest that these restrictions, however, are not due to any syntactic constraints but solely to the presentational nature of these sentences. Asthetic sentences can be uttered out of the blue, they must not contain any DPs, such as pronouns, that require aforementioned material for their interpretation. In addition, the referent of the subject DP has to be uniquely identifiable even if there is no context except for the situation in which the sentence is uttered. This requirement is definitely met by the DP *der Kanzler* but not by *der Mann*. In the following it becomes even more evident that the possibility of identification is the crucial aspect that decides whether a certain DP is acceptable or not. Imagine a couple of people watching a movie or a play that features only a man and a woman and someone explaining the scenes for their blind friend. All of a sudden *der Mann* becomes acceptable in (12) because *der Mann* is uniquely identifiable as we just have the contrast man/woman. This variation shows that the

restricted DE cannot be due to a syntactic constraint, such as the presence of an (empty) expletive in SpecRefP.

Last but not least, agreement facts support my claim that expletives cannot be merged in the I-system in V2 languages. Example (3a), repeated here for convenience, shows that the finite verb or auxiliary, respectively, agrees with the subject DP and not with *es*, contrary to what one would expect if *es* were merged in SpecTP.

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

### 3. *Er* cannot be an expletive

Unlike German *es*, the *er* of impersonal passives and TECs cannot be an expletive because it is not semantically empty as can be seen in (15) where the impersonal passives with and without *er* vary in interpretation.

- (15)   De voorstelling kwam maar heel stroef op gang.                                 (Dutch)  
           *the show           came only very slowly on going*  
           The show got off to very grinding start.
- a.       Maar op het laatst werd gelachen.  
           *but   on the last   was laughed*  
           But in the end the audience laughed.
- b.       Maar op het laatst werd er   gelachen.

*but on the last was Expl laughed*

But in the end there were some people who laughed.

The implicit agent of impersonal passives without *er* as in (15a) is a contextually known or inferable entity (here: the audience of the show), while the presence of *er* restricts the implicit agent to an indefinite subset of that entity (here: some people in the audience of the show). In other words, *er* requires the implicit agent to be indefinite and thus leads to a kind of DE. Hence *er* is obviously not semantically empty and therefore cannot be an expletive.<sup>8</sup>

The attempt to translate (15) into German and especially to reproduce the semantic effect of *er* fails in a way that is revealing.

(16) a. Aber letztendlich wurde (doch) gelacht. (German)

*but in the end was (after all) laughed*

“But in the end people/the audience laughed (after all).”

b. \*Aber letztendlich wurde es (doch) gelacht.

*but in the end was Expl (after all) laughed*

c. Aber letztendlich wurde da (doch) gelacht.

*but in-the-end was DA<sup>9</sup> (after all) laughed*

“But in the end there were some people who laughed.”

(16a), without any “expletive”, can be translated exactly like (15a) although a partitive reading of the implicit agent might be favoured. This preference, however, is determined by the context (it is not likely that everyone who was disappointed first will be convinced in the end) and not due to syntactic constraints. The (b)-example with *es*, on the other hand, is completely ungrammatical because expletive *es* must not show up in the *Mittelfeld*.

With *da*, however, German has another expletive-like item at its disposal. *Da* has a distribution which very much resembles that of Dutch *er* as can be seen in (17).

- (17) a. Da wurde getanzt. (German)  
           *DA was danced*  
           There was dancing./People were dancing (there).
- b. ... daß (da) getanzt wurde.  
           ... *that DA danced was*  
           ... that there was dancing./... that people were dancing (there).
- c. Gestern wurde (da) getanzt.  
           *yesterday was DA danced*  
           Yesterday, there was dancing./Yesterday, people were dancing (there).

Since *da* is not restricted to the sentence-initial position of main clauses, (16c) is perfectly grammatical and, just like (15b), refers to a subset of the audience.

In view of these facts it is likely that Dutch *er* and German *es* are not the same kind of element and, in addition, that *er* is not an expletive. The question that remains to be answered is what it is then. One thing is clear – any analysis of Dutch *er* should account for its distributional properties (such as its optionality and the fact that it can not only occupy the sentence-initial position of main clauses) as well as for its semantic properties (restricting the implicit agent of impersonal passives to an indefinite subset of the known or inferable entity and inducing a DE in TECs).

#### 4. *Er* as an event argument

#### 4.1. *Previous accounts ofthetic sentences*

The idea for the analysis proposed here comes from the structures that have been suggested forthetic sentences, i.e. for answers to the question *What happened?* and out-of-the-blue sentences.

The characteristic property ofthetic sentences is that they report on events. Therefore all arguments of the verb are introduced as event participants and no argument can be singled out as subject of the predication. Cardinaletti (2002) now argues thatthetic sentences can optionally contain a location-goal argument, as for example *there* in (18), to check an optional EPP-feature.

(18) There arrived three men.

Cardinaletti (2002) claims that this location-goal argument occupies a position higher than the position of indefinite subjects but she does not specify the position of the location-goal argument any further.

Kiss (1996) argues more from a semantic point of view, focussing on the function of an event argument and proposes the following with respect to the *there*-construction as an example of athetic construction.

*There* constructions always predicate about a specific point in space and time: about ‘here and now’, or ‘there and then’. *There* may then be the spelling out of the deictically or contextually bound event argument referring to the given point in space and time, in which case it is expected to have the feature <+specific>.



Elaborating on Kiss (1996) and Cardinaletti (2002), I propose that Dutch can optionally feature such an event argument and that this event argument is realised by *er* and carries a feature [+ specific].

#### 4.2. *TECs –thetic sentences*

TECs are typical examples of thetic sentences because the complete event is the predicate, i.e. no argument can serve as subject of predication. Instead – as mentioned above – it has been suggested that thetic sentences can optionally contain an event argument. In Dutch, however, TECs obligatorily require such an event argument. To be more precise, there is no other way to derive a structure that contains *er* and a transitive predicate because there is no expletive *er* in Dutch (see sections 3 and esp. 4.3.). In fact, TECs should be called TEACs (transitive event argument constructions) in Dutch rather than TECs.

The event argument *er* is merged in SpecRefP, the position associated with definiteness and specificity, because it carries the feature [+ specific] and then it moves to SpecCP to satisfy the V2 requirement and check the subject-of-predication feature (if any other XP moved to SpecCP the sentence could not have a thetic reading any more). Since SpecRefP is occupied by the event argument at some point of the derivation, this position is not available for the subject DP and therefore we can only have indefinite subjects in TECs. Hence the definiteness effect is accounted for. If *er* were an expletive, i.e. merged in SpecCP, the DE could not be explained.

Another property of thetic sentences is that they convey novelty of the situation. This means that (i) the subject has usually not been introduced yet, this novelty being reflected by

the DE and (ii) only a certain point in space and time, namely the context of the situation, is given. This context is encoded by the event argument (cf. Kiss 1996). The analysis of *er* as an event argument that spells out the ‘here and now’ or ‘there and then’ (Kiss 1996) or, in Cardinaletti’s (2002) terms, as a location-goal argument is further supported by the fact that *er* is historically derived from the distal locative demonstrative *daar* ‘there’ (Dutch actually still has a reduced locative demonstrative *er* as well, cf. footnote 11).

#### 4.3. Impersonal passives

I suggest that the *er* that can apparently optionally show up in impersonal passives is an event argument as well. Being an event argument and therefore carrying the feature [+ specific] (cf. Kiss 1996) *er* is merged in SpecRefP, the designated position for definite subjects. Hence the implicit agent of the impersonal passive with *er* (leaving aside the question of how the implicit agent actually gets its interpretation) can only have an indefinite interpretation, i.e. the implicit agent can only refer to an indefinite subset of the contextually known or inferable entity as in (15b) repeated here as (19a). On the other hand, the specific interpretation of the implicit agent is only available if *er* is absent from the structure as in (19b).

- (19) a. Maar op het laatst werd er gelachen. (Dutch)  
*but on the last was Expl laughed*  
 But in the end there were some people who laughed.
- b. Maar op het laatst werd gelachen.  
*but on the last was laughed*  
 But in the end the audience laughed.

This analysis shows that in embedded clauses and in main clauses where some other XP occupies SpecCP, the distribution of *er* is not optional but determined by discourse requirements. The presence/absence of *er* depends on the interpretation that is to be conveyed by the sentence.

In main clauses where no other XP occupies SpecCP the situation seems to be less clear because *er* is obligatory and therefore looks like an expletive. However, as (20) only has an indefinite interpretation, I conclude that also in this case *er* is an event argument merged in SpecRefP. The only difference is that in this case the presence of the event argument is obligatory because it also assumes the function of an expletive.

(20) Er werd gedanst. (Dutch)

*Expl was danced*

Some people (at the party) were dancing., **not:** All people (at the party) were dancing.

In other words, if the event argument *er* is not present and no other XP can satisfy the V2 requirement, the derivation will crash because there is no expletive *er* that could be merged directly in SpecCP (and which would therefore allow for a definite interpretation of the implicit agent).<sup>10</sup>

The assumption that *er* is an event argument is also supported by ‘normal’ passives with *er*. First, as these passives do contain a subject the presence of an expletive, e.g. to satisfy the EPP, is implausible. Second, these passives with *er* are only grammatical if the subject is indefinite as is predicted if *er* is an event argument merged in SpecRefP, the designated position for definite subjects.<sup>11</sup>

- (21) a. ... dat er een boek gelezen werd.  
           ... *that Expl a book read was*  
           ... that a book was read.
- b. ??...dat er het boek gelezen werd.  
           ... *that Expl the book read was*  
           ... that the book was read.

## 5. Structural analysis

Having discussed the theoretical assumptions about expletives and event arguments and their effects on both syntax and semantics, I present derivations of some prototypical examples in this section. The derivation of German main clauses is illustrated with the slightly modified example (3b) repeated here as (22). The (a)-structure always illustrates the derivation of a sentence featuring a synthetic tense, whereas the (b)-structure illustrates the derivation if we have an analytic tense.

- (22) a. Es betrat der Kanzler die Bühne. (German)  
           *Expl entered the chancellor the platform*  
           The chancellor mounted the platform.
- b. Es hat der Kanzler die Bühne betreten.  
           *Expl has the chancellor the platform entered*  
           The chancellor has mounted the platform.

Following Hale & Keyser (1993) and Roberts (2000), I assume that the internal argument is merged in SpecVP. The external argument is merged in SpecvP. Contrary to Chomsky (1998), I assume that vP is obligatory and that passive and unaccusative verbs only lack SpecvP.<sup>12</sup> In OV-languages (like German and Dutch) the finite verb moves to T and the (remnant) vP moves to SpecTP. To be more precise, if the lexical verb is finite it leaves the vP/VP and moves to T. Then the remnant vP moves to SpecTP. In the case of an analytic tense, the finite auxiliary moves to T and the complete vP moves to SpecTP.

- (i) a. [TP [vP der Kanzler die Bühne <betrat>] betrat <vP>]  
 b. [TP [vP der Kanzler die Bühne betreten] hat [AuxP <hat> <vP>]]

These first steps are same for both main and embedded clauses in both German and Dutch. Therefore I do not repeat them when discussing embedded clauses and the derivation of Dutch sentences.

If the subject is definite/specific it moves to SpecRefP. In this case, the finite verb moves to Ref in main clauses as illustrated in (ii). (If the subject is indefinite it stays in the vP that has moved to SpecTP. Therefore we have the impression that we have to do with a vP-internal subject and yet the indefinite subject occupies the lower of the two subject positions in the Split-IP.) Finally, the finite verb moves to C and some XP moves to SpecCP or expletive *es* is merged in SpecCP as in (iii).

- (ii) a. [RefP [DP der Kanzler] betrat [TP [vP <der Kanzler> die Bühne <betrat>]  
 <betrat> <vP>]]  
 b. [RefP [DP der Kanzler] hat [TP [vP <der Kanzler> die Bühne betreten]  
 <hat> [AuxP <hat> <vP>]]]

- (iii) a. [CP Es betrat [<sub>RefP</sub> [DP der Kanzler] <betrat> [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> <der Kanzler> die Bühne <betrat>] <betrat> <vP>]]]]  
 b. [CP Es hat [<sub>RefP</sub> [DP der Kanzler] <hat> [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> <der Kanzler> die Bühne betreten] <hat> [<sub>AuxP</sub> <hat> <vP>]]]]]

With respect to embedded clauses, the (c) examples of steps (ii) and (iii) always illustrate the derivation with a synthetic tense, while the (d) examples are associated with an analytic tense.

- (22) c. ... daß der Kanzler die Bühne betrat. (German)  
 ... *that the chancellor the platform entered*  
 ... that the chancellor mounted the platform.  
 d. ... daß der Kanzler die Bühne betreten hat.  
 ... *that the chancellor the platform entered has*  
 ... that the chancellor has mounted the platform.

Building on (ia, b) the derivation continues as follows. If the subject is definite/specific it moves to SpecRefP; the finite verb, however, stays in T in embedded clauses (ii). (If the subject is indefinite, nothing happens.) In a last step the complementiser, e.g. *daß*, is merged in C as illustrated in (iii).

- (ii) a. [<sub>RefP</sub> [DP der Kanzler] Ref [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> <der Kanzler> die Bühne <betrat>] betrat <vP>]]  
 b. [<sub>RefP</sub> [DP der Kanzler] Ref [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> <der Kanzler> die Bühne betreten] hat

[<sub>AuxP</sub> <hat> <vP>]]]

- (iii) a. [<sub>CP</sub> daß [<sub>RefP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> der Kanzler] Ref [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> <der Kanzler> die Bühne  
<betrat>] betrat <vP>]]]]
- b. [<sub>CP</sub> daß [<sub>RefP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> der Kanzler] Ref [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> <der Kanzler> die Bühne  
betreten] hat [<sub>AuxP</sub> <hat> <vP>]]]]]

Turning to Dutch now, the structure of main clauses is exemplified by deriving the TEC (4a), repeated here as (23) and that of embedded clauses by means of the impersonal passive (2b), repeated as (24).

(23) Er heeft iemand een appel gegeten. (Dutch)

*Expl has someone an apple eaten*

Someone has eaten an apple.

The assumptions about the structure of VP and vP, including movement of the finite verb to T and movement of the (remnant) vP are the same as for German. Therefore the first steps of the derivation result in the following structure.

(i) [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> iemand een appel gegeten] heeft [<sub>AuxP</sub> <heeft> <vP>]]

As we derive a TEC, the finite verb obligatorily moves to Ref and the event argument *er* is merged in SpecRefP, cf. (ii). Since the event argument occupies SpecRefP, the subject cannot move to this position and hence has to be indefinite (DE). The finite verb then moves to C and the event argument to SpecCP.

- (ii) [RefP *er* heeft [TP [vP *iemand een appel gegeten*] <heeft> [AuxP <heeft> <vP>]]]
- (iii) [CP *Er* heeft [RefP <*er*> <heeft> [TP [vP *iemand een appel gegeten*] <heeft> [AuxP <heeft> <vP>]]]]]

Also in embedded clauses the finite verb moves to T and the vP moves to SpecTP so that (i) represents the first steps of the derivation of (24).

- (24) ... dat (*er*) gedanst wordt.  
 ... *that (Expl) danced is*  
 ... that there is dancing./... that people are dancing.

- (i) [TP [vP *gedanst*] wordt [AuxP <wordt> <vP>]]

The next step of the derivation depends on the reading that is to be conveyed by the sentence, i.e. on whether an event argument is required in the structure or not. If an indefinite reading of the implicit agent is intended, the event argument *er* is merged in SpecRefP as shown in (ii). If *er* is absent from the structure, RefP is probably not projected either.<sup>13</sup> In any case, the finite verb stays in T. To complete the derivation of the embedded clause, the complementiser *dat* is merged in C (iii).

- (ii) [RefP *er* Ref [TP [vP *gedanst*] wordt [AuxP <wordt> <vP>]]]
- (iii) [CP *dat* [RefP *er* Ref [TP [vP *gedanst*] wordt [AuxP <wordt> <vP>]]]]]



## 6. German again ... and open questions

In view of an analysis of *er* as an event argument one might wonder whether German *da*, which is equally of locative origin and whose distribution resembles that of *er* as illustrated in (25), can be analysed as an event argument too.

- (25) a. ... daß da getanzt wurde. (German)  
 ... *that DA danced was*  
 ... that there was dancing./...that people were dancing (there).
- b. Gestern wurde da getanzt.  
*yesterday was DA danced*  
 Yesterday there was dancing./Yesterday people were dancing (there).
- c. Gestern, da wurde getanzt.  
*yesterday DA was danced*  
 Yesterday, there was dancing./Yesterday, people were dancing (then).

The true nature of *da* is, however, hard to determine. Only one thing is clear: *da* cannot be an expletive because it is not devoid of meaning. As indicated in the translations of (25a, b), *da* still has a locative flavour, although it might also restrict the interpretation of the implicit agent like an event argument. Hence *da* is probably being reanalysed but has not (completely) undergone the step from being a locative to being an event argument yet.

If *da* cooccurs with a(nother) locative, it is either interpreted as a distal demonstrative as in (26a) or has a resumptive nature as in (26b).

- (26) a. Auf dem Schiff da wird getanzt.

*on the ship DA is danced*

On the ship over there there is dancing./On the ship over there people are dancing.

- b. Auf dem Schiff, da wird getanzt.

*on the ship DA is danced*

On the ship, there is dancing./On the ship, people are dancing (there).

In (26a) *da* resembles the French *-là* as in *ce bateau-là* ‘that boat over there’, whereas in (26b) *da* takes up the PP *auf dem Schiff* ‘on the ship’ again. However, the readings are hardly ever clearly distinguished in the spoken language. Similarly, *da* cannot only take up a locative but also a temporal adverb as illustrated in (25c). This fact suggests that *da* indeed spells out the ‘there and then’ of the event, i.e. assumes the function that Kiss (1996) attributes to event arguments.

The fact that *da* can occur together with a definite subject (even in constructions that look exactly like TECs), however, suggests that *da* cannot be an event argument merged in SpecRefP.

- (27) Da hat der Ministerpräsident eine mitreißende Rede gehalten.

*DA has the prime minister a rousing speech held*

The Prime Minister gave a rousing speech.

The interpretation – and therefore the translation – of this example constitutes yet another problem. On the one hand, (27) can express appreciation – especially if we insert the particle *aber* and use the appropriate intonation (*Da hat der Ministerpräsident aber eine mitreißende Rede gehalten!* roughly to be translated as ‘Wow! The Prime Minister has given a rousing

speech.’). On the other hand, *da* can simply spell out ‘there and then’ like the event argument identified by Kiss (1996) and can hence be translated as ‘On that occasion, the Prime Minister gave a rousing speech.’. If *da* really functions as an event argument here, we have to rethink our structural analysis because we cannot have both an event argument *da* and a definite DP competing for one and the same position, namely SpecRefP. The event-argument-like interpretation of *da* in (27) might, however, also be simply due to the locative nature of adverbial *da*. In that case *da* can be merged directly in SpecCP without interfering with the definite subject in SpecRefP.

Nevertheless, there are also examples that support the idea that *da* is an event argument. When we insert *da* in a structure in which *er* was identified as an event argument, *da* all of a sudden does lead to a DE, just like *er* in Dutch.

- (28) a. \*Ich gebe ab, weil da der Kanzler die Bühne betreten hat.  
*I give away because DA the chancellor the platform entered has*  
 I’ll stop here because the chancellor has mounted the platform.
- b. Ich gebe ab, weil da ein Amerikaner die Bühne betreten hat.  
*I give away because DA an American the platform entered has*  
 “I’ll stop here because an American has mounted the platform.”

Last but not least there are other instances<sup>14</sup> in which *da* seems to behave like an event argument in that it restricts the reference of the agent to an indefinite set. As context for the examples in (29) we can, for example, imagine a teacher standing in front of a class and uttering the following sentences.

- (29) a. Wer hat gelacht? (German)

*Who has laughed?*

- b. Wer hat da gelacht?

*who has DA laughed*

roughly: Who has dared to laugh?

In (29a), the teacher asks for the name(s) of the student(s) who laughed – without any other semantic or pragmatic implications. So the question without *da* requires a definite referent as an answer. In (29b), on the contrary, the teacher does not necessarily ask for names; instead, this question is more or less a reproach which implies that some student(s) laughed, thus referring to an indefinite number of students out of a definite set of students.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that impersonal passives and TECs in German and Dutch, which look very similar at first sight, in fact involve fairly different structures in the two languages. The German constructions are argued to feature an expletive pronoun *es* as has traditionally been assumed, even though the notion ‘expletive’ that is employed in this paper crucially differs from that of the traditional analyses. Most importantly, *es* can only show up in the sentence-initial position of main clauses because it is assumed to be merged directly in SpecCP as a kind of repair mechanism if no other XP can satisfy the V2 requirement.

The analysis of Dutch *er* as an expletive, however, is rejected because *er* is not semantically empty. Instead, I proposed that *er* is an event argument that is merged in SpecRefP, the designated position for definite/specific subjects, because it carries a feature [+specific] (cf. Kiss 1996). Such an analysis easily accounts for why Dutch TECs display a

definiteness effect with respect to the subject. Last but not least, the presence of the event argument *er* affects the interpretation of the implicit agent of impersonal passives and hence offers an explanation for the apparent optionality of the presence of *er* in impersonal passives. Its distribution is simply determined by discourse requirements.

While German *es* and Dutch *er* represent clear-cut cases of an expletive and an event argument, respectively, the nature of German *da* is less clear. *Da* is certainly not an expletive but it has characteristics of both a locative adverb and an event argument. In addition, at least some of the features that make *da* look like an event argument can also be explained by its locative nature. Therefore I suggested that we probably witness the locative adverb *da* being reanalysed as an event argument.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> I always gloss *er* as ‘Expl’ (expletive), no matter what its actual nature is, because *es* and *er* are standardly referred to as expletives.

<sup>3</sup> I assume that *gedanst wordt* (i.e. the word order we also find in German) represents the order derived in narrow syntax, while *wordt gedanst* is due to reordering at PF because the choice of word order is solely determined by prosody (Hans Kamp, p.c.).

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of simplicity I use CP here. I assume, however, that we actually have a Split-CP (Rizzi 1997) with sentence-initial subjects and certain sentence-initial adverbs usually occupying SpecFinP, whereas sentence-initial objects have to occupy either SpecFocP or SpecTopP.

<sup>5</sup> Among many others Pollock (1989) and Vikner (1995) assume that these adverbs mark the left edge of vP and they use this fixed position of adverbs as a means for determining whether a language has V-movement (i.e. movement of the finite verb out of vP, hence across the adverb) or not.

I do not make any assumptions about the actual position of these adverbs here. Note, however, that there are definitely several adverb-related positions available in the Split-IP as *soeben* ‘just’ in (3b) precedes the definite DP.

<sup>6</sup> I am aware of the fact that, e.g. in Mainland Scandinavian, subjects can follow the lexical verb even in clauses where we do not have verb movement as in (i).

- (i) ... at der har danset nogen i haven (Danish; from Vikner 1995, p. 203, (82))  
 ... *that Expl has danced someone in garden-the*  
 ... that someone has danced in the garden.

These constructions certainly call for another analysis that is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. Mohr 2004).

<sup>7</sup> In constructions where *es* is obligatory throughout, as e.g. in weather verb constructions, I suggest that *es* is not an expletive but a quasi-argument. As such it is merged in SpecvP like a ‘normal’ external argument and is able to move through the whole clausal structure and check Case-and phi-features.

- (i) ... daß \*(es) gestern geregnet hat.  
 ... *that it yesterday rained has*  
 ... that it rained yesterday.

<sup>8</sup> Not all speakers of Dutch get this differentiation. For an account of this fact see footnote 10.

<sup>9</sup> I gloss *da* as ‘DA’ because I do not want to commit myself to a classification yet. *Da* seems to be an expletive-like element but could also simply be a locative adverb ‘there’ (cf. section 6).

<sup>10</sup> Jeroen van Craenenbroeck and Jan-Wouter Zwart (p.c.) object to this interpretation pointing out that (i) is perfectly fine.

- (i) Er werd door iedereen gedanst. (Dutch)  
*Expl was by everyone danced*  
 “Everyone was dancing.”

In view of this remark it might be the case that it is the dancing event itself that is only a “subevent” (i.e. people did something else in addition to the dancing) and therefore kind of indefinite rather than the implicit agent (which must not depend on SpecRefP for being allowed a definite interpretation then).

In addition, Henk van Riemsdijk (p.c.), who does not share the intuitions about impersonal passives described in the text either, points out that also in clauses where *er* seems to be optional (i.e. embedded clauses and main clauses with some other XP in sentence-initial position) *er* can only ever be absent if it is replaced with a locative. In that case, Dutch obviously obligatorily requires the presence of an event argument in impersonal passives. This event argument, which specifies the ‘here and now’ or ‘there and then’, can be realised either by the default form *er* or by a more specific adverb/PP. See also Hoekstra & Mulder (1990) who suggest that locatives and *er* should be treated alike.

<sup>11</sup> Note that sentences like (i) with a definite subject and *er* can be grammatical but only if *er* is a reduced locative demonstrative.

- (i) ... dat het boek er gelezen werd.  
 ... *that the book there read was*  
 ... that the book was read there.

<sup>12</sup> This assumption is not relevant with respect to the derivation of German and Dutch clauses; it is, however, crucial when it comes to the derivation of clauses of VO-languages such as English and Mainland Scandinavian. I propose that in these languages the lexical verb has to undergo V-to-v movement. The explanation of the reasons for this difference between OV- and VO-languages, however, is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. Mohr 2004).

<sup>13</sup> If the interpretation of the implicit agent should depend on the presence of RefP, this phrase has, of course, to be projected.



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<sup>14</sup> Admittedly, these examples involve constructions completely different from the ones discussed so far. They can, however, easily be related to TECs. If we think of a person commenting on the scene, this person probably replies to (29a) uttering sentence (i), while the situation referred to by (29b) is most adequately described by the TEC in (ii).

(i) Martina und Andreas haben gelacht. (German)

*Martina and Andreas have laughed.*

(ii) Es hat jemand gelacht.

*Expl has someone laughed*

Someone has laughed.