Impersonal Constructions in English and German

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1. THE PROBLEM

The availability of impersonal constructions in general and the distribution of expletives in these constructions in particular varies a lot across the Germanic languages, as illustrated below for impersonal passives.[1]

Impersonal passives

Table 1:

	German	Norwegian (MSc)	Icelandic	Dutch	English
Impersonal passives	✓ use of Expl depends on position	✓ Expl obligatory	✓ use of Expl depends on position	✓ use of Expl depends on position	*

(1)   a.   **Es** wurde getanzt.   (German)
           Expl was   danced
           "There was dancing."/"People were dancing."

         b.   ... daß getanzt wurde.
              ... that danced was
              "... that there was dancing."/"... that people were dancing."

         c.   Gestern   wurde getanzt.
              yesterday was   danced
              "Yesterday, there was dancing."/"Yesterday, people were dancing."

(2)   a.   **Det** ble danset.   (Norwegian)
           Expl was danced

         b.   ...at **det** ble   danset.
              ... that Expl was   danced

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c. I går   ble **det** danset.
yesterday was Expl   danced

(3) a. (**það**) var dansað.   (Icelandic)
(Expl) was danced

b. ...að **það** hafi verið dansað (í gær).
...that Expl has been danced (yesterday)

b'. [?]...að í gær   hafi verið dansað.
...that yesterday has been danced

c. [?]Í gær   var dansað.
yesterday was danced

(4) a. **Er** wordt gedanst.   (Dutch)
Expl was   danced

b. ...dat (**er**)   wordt gedanst/gedanst wordt.
...that (Expl) was   danced/danced was

c. Op het schip wordt (**er**)   gedanst.
on the ship was   (Expl) danced
"On the ship, there was dancing."/"On the ship, people were dancing."

d. ....dat op het schip (***er**)   wordt gedanst/gedanst wordt.
*....that on the ship (*Expl) was   danced/danced was*
"...that on the ship, there was dancing"

(5) a. ***It** was danced.
a'. ***There** was danced.

Questions

1) How can we account for the cross-linguistic variation as regards the availability of the different impersonal constructions?
2) How can we account for the variation as regards the use of the expletive in these constructions?
3) What does this variation show wrt the syntax of these constructions, clause structure and comparative syntax in general?

2. ASSUMPTIONS

My work is based on the minimalist framework (Chomsky 1995, 1999) but I extend the number of functional projections following the cartographic approach (Cardinaletti 2002, Rizzi 2002) which proposes a specialisation of functional categories wrt features.

<u>Clause structure:</u>

C-system: (Force) (Top) (Foc) (Fin)
I-system: (Ref) (Top) (Foc) T (Aux)
V-system: v, V

– I assume a Split-CP, following Rizzi (1997).
– Brackets indicate optionality. However, the optionality of Fin is different from the optionality of the other heads. The presence or absence of Force, Top, Foc and Ref depends on semantic, interpretational, discourse-related needs, whereas presence or absence of Fin is basically a question of which language you look at (e.g.: Fin is obligatory in V2 languages while in English it is present in residual V2 constructions only).
– RefP stands for "ReferencePhrase". Definite subjects have to go into SpecRefP. (Kiss 1996, Koopman & Szabolcsi 2000)
– Scrambling is analysed as movement to TopP and FocP in the I-system.
– vP is obligatory. However, vP does not have a Spec if the verb is passive or unaccusative.
– I assume that the internal argument DP (=> direct object or derived subject) is merged in SpecVP (Hale & Keyser 1993, Roberts 2000)
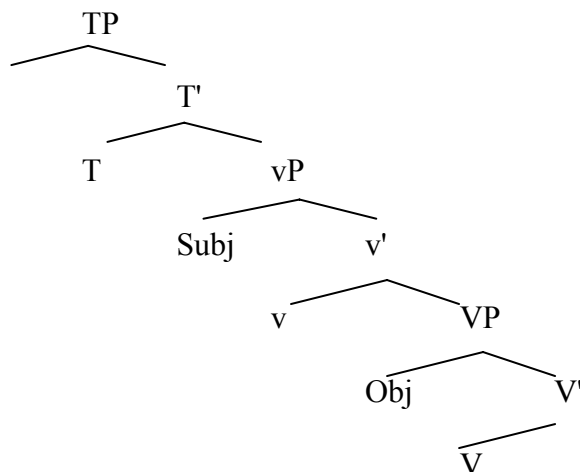
<u>Checking:</u>

• Lexical elements are associated with features which they have to check against matching features in the functional domain.
• All checking is done in head-head or Spec-head relations (looking into Spec is possible, cf. Müller 2001, 2002).
• Long-distance agree is not possible, except for checking of verbal phi-features in languages with poor verbal morphology.
• All features (except for EPP) come in a [+]- and in a [–]-version and checking means that we have to end up with a +/– pair. Neither version can survive on its own and failure to check a feature will make the derivation crash.
• If a feature on a head A is checked by movement of a head B (and not by MERGE), A's specifier has to be filled/A has to have an EPP-feature.

Some trees illustrating the main differences between English and German:

(A) English main (and embedded) clauses:

– the verb only moves from V to little v to be identified as a verb
– the subject DP moves to SpecTP to check Nom and moves on to SpecRefP (because it is
  definite)

(i)	a.	Boys luckily know the novels of Karl May.	(Kiss 1996)
	b.	^{??}Boys luckily were born.	
	c.	Luckily boys were born.	

  Kiss argues that sentence adverbs are IP-external so that in (ic) the subject sits in SpecIP
  while it has moved to SpecRefP in (ia).
– no activation of the C-system in main clauses;
  embedded clauses have exactly the same structure as main clauses except for the fact that in
  embedded clauses we add a FinP with the complementiser occupying the Fin head

(ii)   Peter read the book.
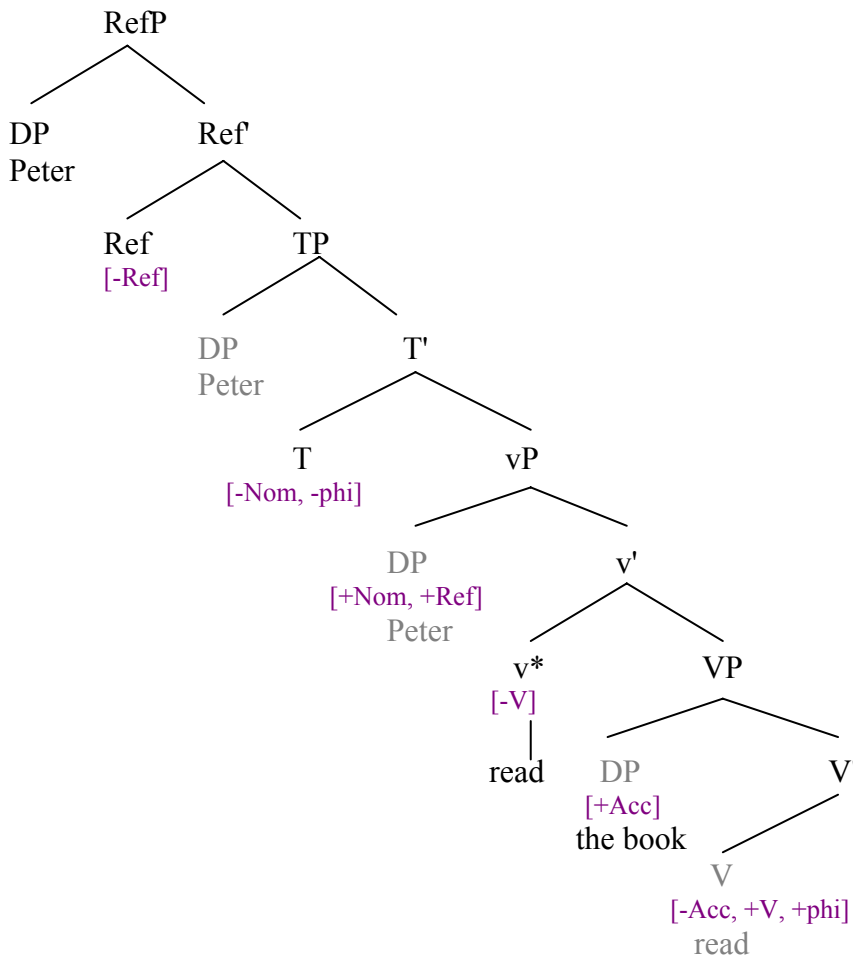
(B) German embedded clauses:

– the complete vP moves to SpecTP (in clauses with simple tenses the finite verb moves to T
and the remnant vP moves to SpecTP)[2]
Evidence for (remnant) vP-movement:
(Remnant) vP-movement to SpecTP can account for the vP-internal character of indefinite
subjects (Diesing 1992) and at the same time allow for [Nom]-Case-checking in SpecTP.

(iv) a. ...weil ja   doch Linguisten Kammermusik spielen.   (Diesing 1992)
…*since PRT PRT linguists   chamber music play*
"…since there are linguists playing chamber music."
b. …weil Linguisten ja   doch Kammermusik spielen.
…*since linguists   PRT PRT chamber music play*
"…since (in general) linguists play chamber music."

Furthermore, movement of the complete vP allows for checking of two unrelated features
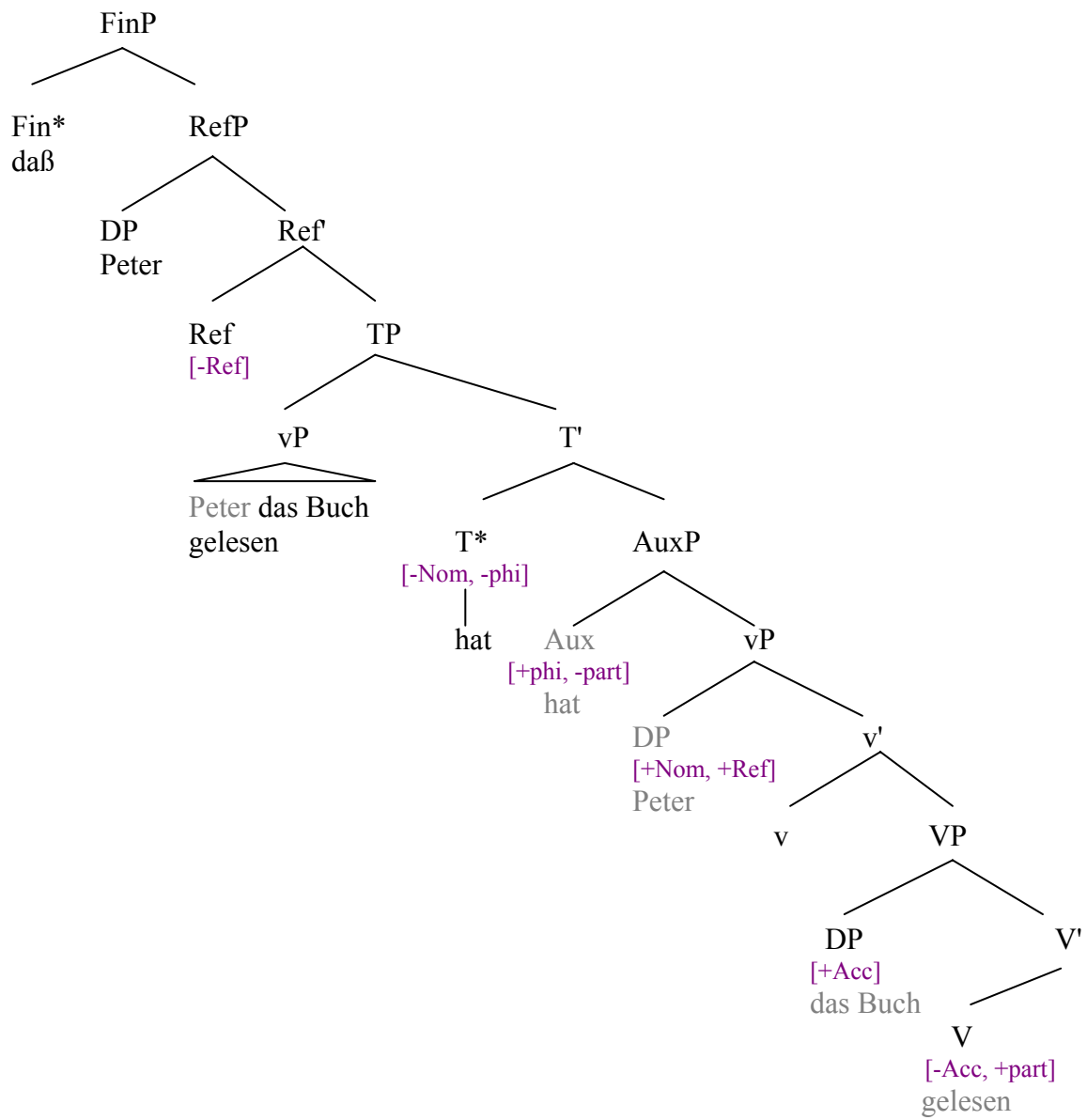([Nom] and [part(iciple)]) in a single position.
– German activates the C-system

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[2] Extraction of the definite subject out of the moved vP does not pose a problem as the Left Branch Condition
seems to be violable in certain languages.

(iii) Cuius$_i$ legis   [$_{DP}$ t$_i$ librum]?   (Latin; Roberts 1997)
whose you-are-reading book
"Whose book are you reading?"

(v) …daß Peter das Buch gelesen hat.
     …that Peter the book read   has
     "…that Peter has read the book."

FinP
├─ Fin*
│ daß
└─ RefP
   ├─ DP
   │ Peter
   └─ Ref'
      ├─ Ref
      │ [-Ref]
      └─ TP
         ├─ vP
         │ Peter das Buch
         │ gelesen
         └─ T'
            ├─ T*
            │ [-Nom, -phi]
            │ hat
            └─ AuxP
               ├─ Aux
               │ [+phi, -part]
               │ hat
               └─ vP
                  ├─ DP
                  │ [+Nom, +Ref]
                  │ Peter
                  └─ v'
                     ├─ v
                     └─ VP
                        ├─ DP
                        │ [+Acc]
                        │ das Buch
                        └─ V'
                           └─ V
                              [-Acc, +part]
                              gelesen

(C) German main clauses:

(vi)   Peter hat das Buch gelesen.
       Peter has the book read
       "Peter has read the book. "

FinP
├── DP
│   Peter
└── Fin'
    ├── Fin*
    │   [-Fin, EPP]
    │   │
    │   hat
    └── RefP
        ├── DP
        │   Peter
        └── Ref'
            ├── Ref
            │   [-Ref]
            │   │
            │   hat
            └── TP
                ├── vP
                │   Peter das Buch
                │   gelesen
                └── T'
                    ├── T*
                    │   [-Nom, -phi]
                    │   │
                    │   hat
                    └── AuxP
                        ├── Aux
                        │   [+phi, -part, +Fin]
                        │   hat
                        └── vP
                            ├── DP
                            │   [+Nom,+Ref]
                            │   Peter
                            └── v'
                                ├── v
                                └── VP
                                    ├── DP
                                    │   [+Acc]
                                    │   das Buch
                                    └── V'
                                        └── V
                                            [-Acc, +part]
                                            gelesen
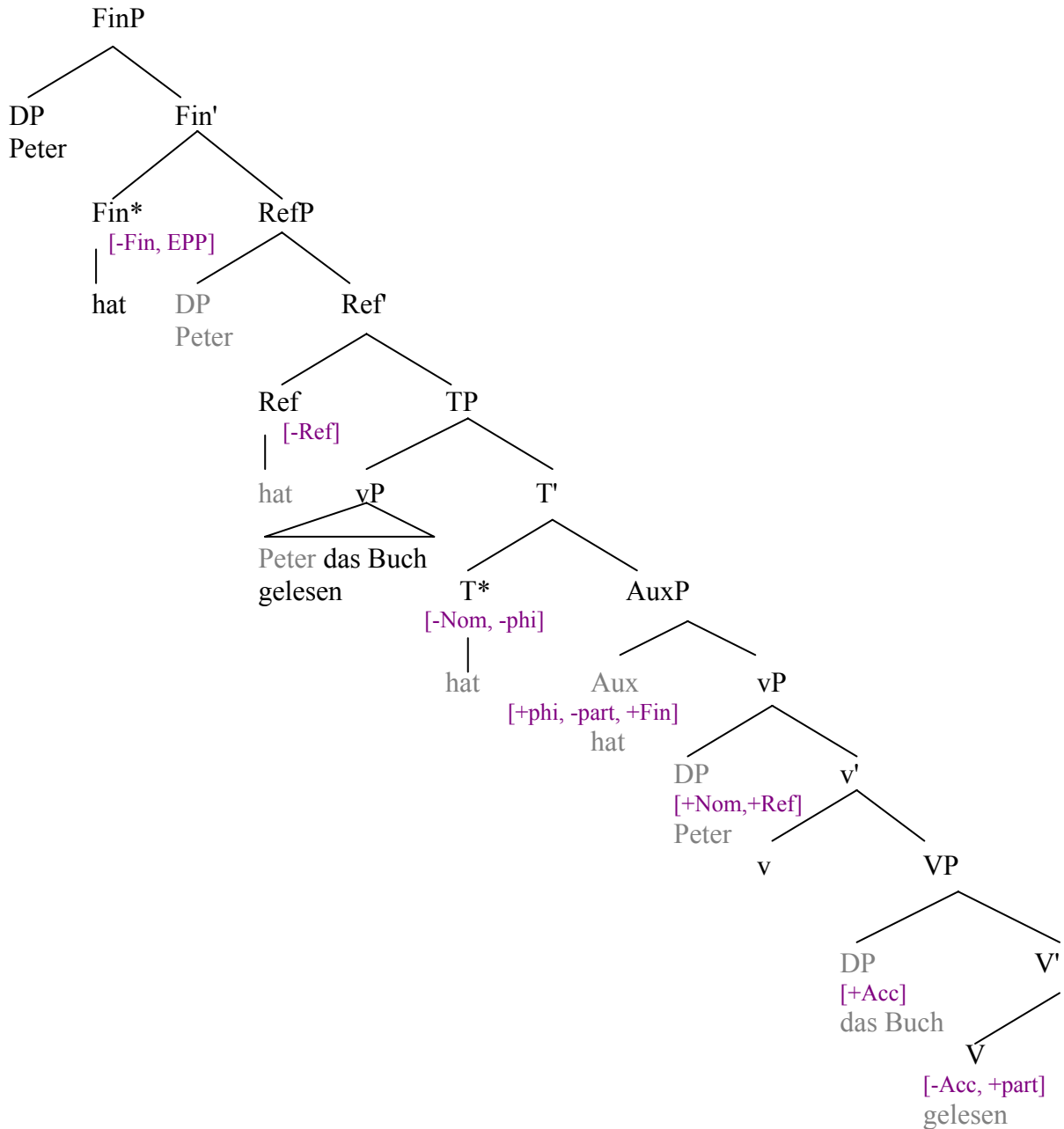
3. THE ANALYSIS OF IMPERSONAL PASSIVES

I will account for the cross-linguistic variation by means of:
• activation of the C-system or not
• realisation of a head by Merge or Move
• movement of DP to SpecTP to check Nom vs movement of (remnant) vP to SpecTP
• short V-movement to little v or V-movement to T

Impersonal passives in German have usually been analysed as involving an overt expletive that is merged in SpecIP and moves to SpecCP (1a') or an empty expletive *pro* in SpecIP (1b', c') (Cardinaletti 1990, Vikner 1995).

(1)   a'.   Es$_i$ wurde$_k$ t$_i$ t$_k$ getanzt.
          b'.   ...daß *pro* getanzt wurde.
   c'.   Gestern wurde$_k$ *pro* t$_k$ getanzt.

Cross-linguistic variation was explained in terms of how/whether the expletive-associate chain is licensed (Vikner 1995).

Problems:
• The approach heavily relies on the notion of government.
• *pro* should be an underlying object (see below)

I propose that impersonal passives have the same derivation as the active clauses discussed above. The crucial point is that impersonal passives have a null object in VP-internal position, i.e. an empty cognate object and that the expletive *es*, if present at all, is merged in SpecFinP.

(1)   a.   Es wurde getanzt.
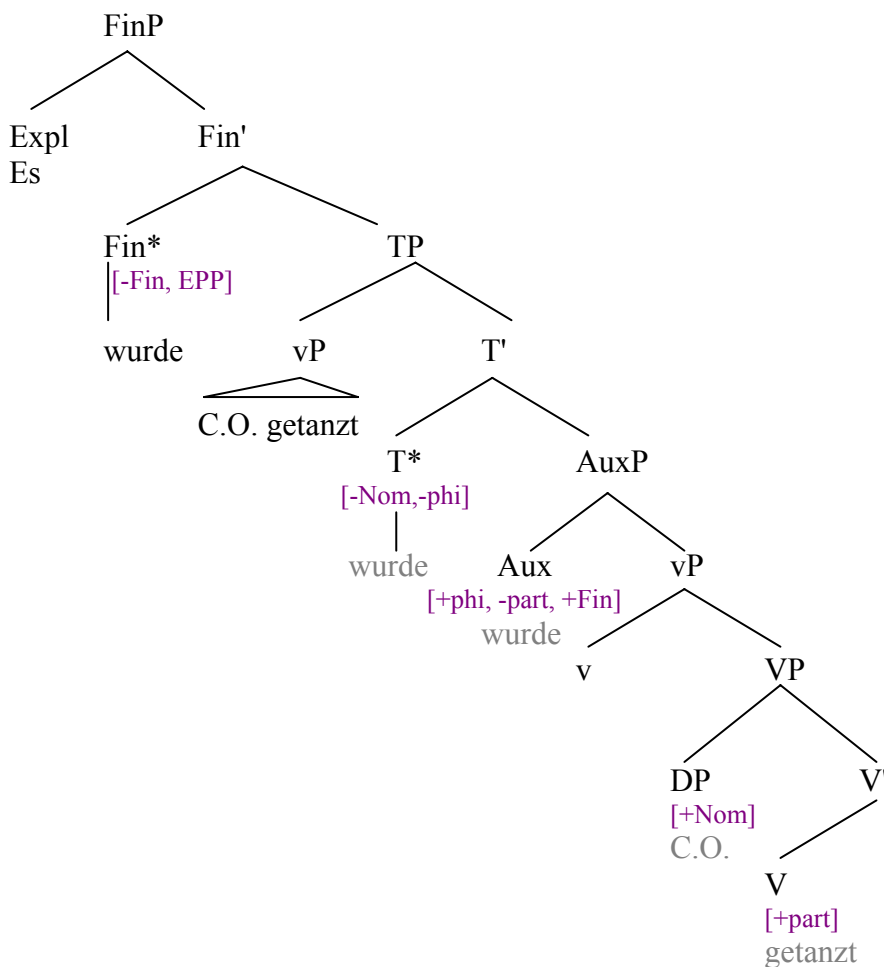
The relevant steps of the derivation:

• Merge an abstract cognate object in SpecVP
  (Following Hale & Keyser 1993 and Cabredo Hofherr 2000 I suggest that certain unergative
  verbs are associated with a cognate object (C.O.) which can be either overt or non-overt,
  e.g.:

  (i)   Er schläft den Schlaf des   Gerechten.   (German)
          he sleeps the sleep   of-the just

  (ii)   Sie lacht   ein herzliches Lachen.
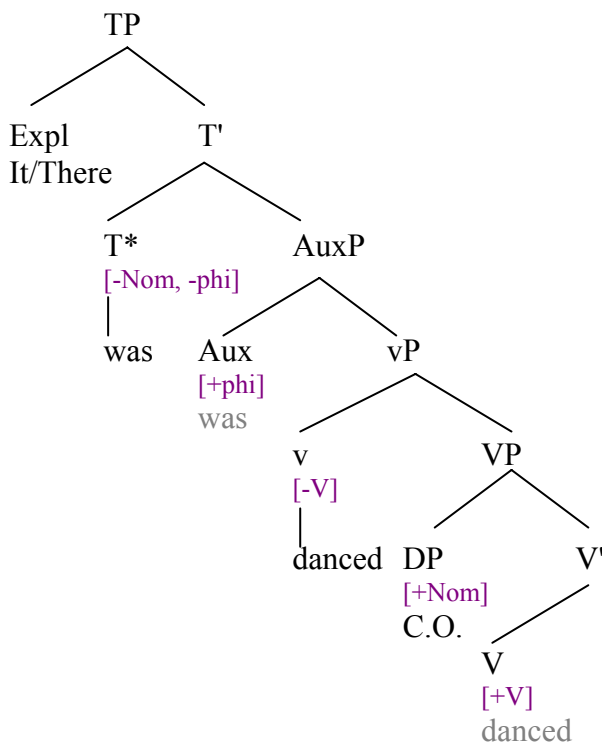   *she laughs a   hearty   laugh*

  This assumption is based on the fact that we CAN get *es* in embedded passive constructions
  but only with the interpretation *es* = derived subject (iii).

  (iii)   ...daß es getanzt wird.
           ...that it danced is
           "...that it (= e.g. the ballet) is danced."

  If we now want to assume that in clauses without an overt subject (1a) there is some empty
  element present, this empty element can only be a derived subject.)

• Move the auxiliary *werden* to T and check phi-features
• Move the complete vP to SpecTP. The C.O. checks [Nom] and *getanzt* checks [part].
• Insert expletive *es* in SpecFinP to satisfy the EPP on Fin.

(5)   a./a'.   *It/There was danced.

TP
├── Expl
│   It/There
└── T'
    ├── T*
    │   [-Nom, -phi]
    │   │
    │   was
    └── AuxP
        ├── Aux
        │   [+phi]
        │   was
        └── vP
            ├── v
            │   [-V]
            │   │
            │   danced
            └── VP
                ├── DP
                │   [+Nom]
                │   C.O.
                └── V'
                    └── V
                        [+V]
                        danced

<u>The relevant steps of the derivation:</u>

• Merge C.O. in SpecVP
• Move *danced* to little v and check [V]
• Move the auxiliary *was* to T and check phi-features
• Merge expletive *it/there* in SpecTP
=> C.O. cannot move to SpecTP[3] to check [Nom] because this position is already occupied by *it/there*
=> [Nom] remains unchecked as we cannot establish the Spec-head relation necessary for checking
=> The derivation crashes.

The situation in the other Germanic languages will be explained along the following lines.

<u>Norwegian/MSc:</u>

    (2)   a.   **Det** <u>ble</u> <u>danset</u>.   (Norwegian)
            b.   ...at **det** <u>ble</u> <u>danset</u>.
            c.   I går <u>ble</u> **det** <u>danset</u>.

• The expletive *det* carries a [+Nom] feature and therefore it is obligatorily merged in SpecTP where it checks Nom.
• The C.O. is probably associated with Partitive Case (=>is checked in VP). This assumption is supported by the fact that MSc allows for postverbal indefinite subjects

    (iv)   …at   det ble spist et eple.   (Norwegian)
             …that Expl was eaten an apple

<u>Icelandic:</u>

    (3)   a.   (**það**) <u>var</u> <u>dansað</u>.
            b.   ...að **það** <u>hafi</u> <u>verið</u> <u>dansað</u> (í gær).
            b'. $^?$...að í gær <u>hafi</u> <u>verið</u> <u>dansað</u>.
            c. $^?$Í gær <u>var</u> <u>dansað</u>.

• The C.O. moves to SpecTP and checks Nom there. The expletive, if present, is merged in SpecFinP. So we basically get the same picture as in German, differences being due to:
        - Icelandic allowing for narrative V1-constructions more easily than German (3a)
        - Icelandic having embedded V2 with an obligatory complementiser (3b)
        - the fact that although Icelandic has embedded V2 topicalisation is only marginally available (3b')
        - the fact that topicalisation of a PP is rather marginal even in main clauses (3c)

<u>Dutch:</u>

    (4)   a.   **Er** <u>wordt</u> <u>gedanst</u>.
            b.   ...dat (**er**) <u>wordt</u> <u>gedanst</u>/<u>gedanst</u> <u>wordt</u>.

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[3] Note that such a movement would probably lead to ungrammaticality as well as it violates the requirement that non-referential cognate objects be licensed *in situ* (Cabredo Hofherr 2000).

       c.   Op het schip <u>wordt</u> (**er**) <u>gedanst</u>.

       d.   ....dat op het schip (***er**) <u>wordt</u> <u>gedanst</u>/<u>gedanst</u> <u>wordt</u>.

- The same derivation as for German
- *Er* does not only feature as a pure expletive (as in (4a)) but can also refer to a non-specific group of people (≠ the complete set). In the latter case I take it to be the realisation of an optional event argument.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND OUTLOOK

<u>A) the applications</u>

Extend the analysis to other impersonal constructions as well[4], e.g.impersonal psych-verb constructions and transitive expletive constructions (TECs)[5].

Table 2:

	German	Norwegian (MSc)	Icelandic	Dutch	English
Impersonal passives	✓ use of Expl depends on position	✓ Expl obligatory	✓ use of Expl depends on position	✓ use of Expl depends on position	*
Impersonal psych-verb constructions	✓	*	✓	no data	*
TECs	✓	*	✓	✓	*

<u>Impersonal psych-verb constructions</u>

   (1)   a.   Mich <u>friert</u> (**'s**).   (German)
                me   freezes (it)
                "I feel cold."

         b.   ...weil   (**'s**) mich <u>friert</u>.
                ...because (it) me   freezes
                "...because I feel cold."

         c.   Mir   <u>ist</u> (**'s**) kalt.
                me-Dat is (it) cold
                "I feel cold."

         d.   ...weil   (**'s**) mir   kalt <u>ist</u>.
                ...because (it) me-Dat cold is
                "...because I feel cold."

    (2)   not possible in Mainland Scandinavian

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[4] I do not consider weather verbs here because they feature a quasi-argument rather than an expletive.

[5] TECs are no impersonal constructions but they feature an expletive and have a similar distribution as impersonal psych-verb constructions and are therefore included here.

(3) a. Mig <u>kelur</u>.   (Icelandic)
     me "freezes"[6]
     "I feel cold."

  b. ...af því mig <u>kelur.</u>
     ...because me "freezes"
     "...because I feel cold."

  c. Mér <u>er</u> kalt.
     me-Dat is cold
     "I feel cold."

  d. ...af því (að) mér <u>er</u> kalt.
     ...because (that) me-Dat is cold
     "...because I feel cold."

(4) no data

(5) not possible in English

- T is not necessarily associated with a [-Nom]-feature[7] (an option which is obviously not available in MSc).
- Either vP moves to SpecTP and checks the EPP on T (German) or T is realised by verbal morphology (Icelandic).
- In main clauses the experiencer argument moves to SpecFinP.

<u>Transitive Expletive Constructions (TECs)</u>

(1) **Es** <u>haben</u> einige Kinder Spinat <u>gegessen</u>.   (German)
  Expl have several children spinach eaten
  "Several children have eaten spinach."

(2) not possible in Mainland Scandinavian

(3) **það** <u>hafa</u> margir jólasveinar <u>borðað</u> búðing. (Icelandic)
  Expl have many X-mas trolls eaten pudding (Bobaljik&Jonas 1996, [16a])
  "Many Christmas trolls have eaten pudding."

(4) **Er** <u>hat</u> iemand een appel <u>gegeten</u>.   (Dutch)
  Expl has someone an apple eaten (Bobaljik&Jonas 1996, [16c])
  "Someone has eaten an apple."

(5) not possible in English

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[6] *Kala* does not exactly mean "freeze", but to lose the feeling in your body because having been in the cold for too long (Hrafnbjargarson, p.c.)

[7] This analysis only refers to the variants without an *es* in German. I take *es* to be a quasi-argument – so if it is present it is merged in SpecvP and carries a [+Nom]-feature which it checks against T.

- vP moves to SpecTP.
- If a language allows for extraction from the moved vP, we can get TECs with a definite subject (German). If this extraction is not allowed, the construction displays a definiteness effect.
- The expletive is merged in SpecFinP.

B) the technical aspect:

- reconsider the "universal" EPP on T
- justify head-movement, esp. V-movement

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