 OBJECT EXPERIENCERS AND IMPERSONAL EXPLETIVES  
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1 Introduction

Expletive constructions, such as clefts, (1a), (in)transitive expletive constructions, (1b), and impersonal passives, (1c) are widespread in Scandinavian.

(1)  

a. Det var Johan som tappade nycklarna. (Swedish)  
   *it was Johan that lost keys-the*

b. Det stod en man i trädgården.  
   *there stood a man in garden-the*

c. Det dansas hela Midsommarafont.  
   *there is.danced whole Midsummer.evening*

This project proposal concerns the typology and syntactic analysis of expletive constructions of a specific kind; those that involve two postverbal arguments, see e.g. Platzack (1983, 2005), Maling (1988), Lødrup (1995), Vikner (1995), Engdahl (1999, 2000), Holmberg (2002), and Åfarli and Lutnæs (2001):

(2)  

EXPL Verb \[ \text{ARG} \text{1 DP} \] \[ \text{ARG} \text{2 DP/CP} \]

I believe that these may be crucial in the identification of possible verbal frames/argument structures in the Scandinavian languages. The construction type can roughly be divided in two groups. The first involves an expletive passive and will henceforth be referred to as the *expletive passive double object construction* PDOC, see (3). The second involves an object experiencer (with verbs such as *förekomma* ‘seem’ and *möta* ‘meet’) and will henceforth be referred to as the *expletive object experiencer construction* OEC, see (5) ((5b) is from Google, 30.11.2008).

(3)  

Expletive constructions involving two postverbal arguments

Passive Double Object = (4) Object Experiencer = (5)

(4)  

a. Det blev givet pojken presenter. (Swedish)  
   *EX was given-SG the-boy presents*

b. Det gavs pojken presenter.  
   *there was.given-SG the-boy presents*

(5)  

a. Det mötte honom en rungande applåd. (Swedish)  
   *there met him a roaring apload*

b. Det förekommer mig att jag har läst / hört att det var i 1963 ...  
   *it appears me that I have read heard that it was in 1963*

PDOCs show an agreement restriction in Swedish depending on the position of the DP; the predicate never shows agreement with postverbal DPs. In this sense, Swedish differs from Icelandic, where agreement is obligatory with postverbal nominative DPs:¹

¹Constructions with dative subjects and nominative objects are an exception here since agreement is not obligatory for all speakers in such constructions, and in fact ruled out if the nominative object is 1³/2³ person.
Below, I review some of the questions that an investigation of (4) and (5) has to address.

2 Expletive passive double object constructions

PDOCs are impersonal passives which involve two postverbal DPs, usually an experiencer or a recipient, and a theme, as in (4) above. Holmberg (2002) reports that Icelandic differs from Swedish with respect to the availability of these:

(8) *Það voru gefnar stráknum gjafir.
   (Icelandic)
   EX were given-PL the-boy presents.

In terms of a theory assuming Agree, Holmberg (2002) claims that the problem with (8) is that the indirect object intervenes between the participle and the nominative gjafir. The proposal is that in Swedish and the other Mainland Scandinavian languages, the direct object need not be licensed by Agree due to the absence of morphological Case in these languages. This is why PDOC is available in Swedish but not Icelandic, (4) vs. (8).

On a closer inspection, however, the proposal cannot be correct. Some of the so-called new passive constructions (see e.g. Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002) appear to qualify as PDOC (the examples were found on Google, 20.02.2008).

(9) a. það var gefið okkur medalíu og bikar
   (Icelandic)
   there was given-SG us medal and trophy

b. Við komum þarna og það var gefið okkur yndislegan mat.
   we came there and there was given-SG us lovely food.

The examples in (9) are interesting for at least two reasons. Firstly, the participle does not show agreement with any of the postverbal arguments, which makes them parallel to the Swedish example in (4a) but different from the ungrammatical Icelandic example in (8). In both (9a) and (9b), the participle shows the default form (neuter singular) instead of the expected neuter plural or masculine singular respectively. Secondly, neither of the postverbal arguments are marked for nominative, the indirect object is dative, and as (9b) shows, the direct object is unambiguously accusative (nom. yndislegur matur - acc. yndislegan mat - dat. yndislegum mat).²

Taking this new observation into consideration, Swedish PDOCs must be reanalyzed in light of the Icelandic data. This is one of the aims of the present project. In particular, the data indicate that the absence of agreement in Swedish PDOCs is less unexpected than perhaps previously assumed. More generally, the importance of Case morphology in Scandinavian has to be revalued. Syntactic differences between Swedish and Icelandic cannot always be derived from morphological differences.

²In example (9a), medalíu ‘medal’ is non-nominative, either accusative or dative, whereas bikar ‘trophy’ ambiguously marked for either nominative, accusative or dative.
3 Expletive object experiencer constructions

Object experiencer constructions (OECs) are constructions that involve either two postverbal DPs or one postverbal DP and a clausal argument. The higher DP is usually an experiencer, the lower DP/clause a theme:

(10) Object experiencer constructions
   a. EXPL hända ‘happen’ DP_{EXPERIENCER} DP_{THEME} = (12a)
   b. EXPL förefalla ‘seem’ DP_{EXPERIENCER} CP_{THEME} = (22)

The verbs that select two postverbal DPs, roughly corresponding to an indirect and a direct object, belong to a construction type that I label the possessive experiencer construction for reasons that will become clear shortly, see (12a).

(11) Possessive Experiencer Constructions

This construction can contain a true expletive, best exemplified by Danish, which distinguishes between the true expletive der and the quasi argument det, (12b).

(12) a. Det har hänt mig en olycka. (Swedish)
    there has happened me an accident

b. Der har hændt mig et uheld. (Danish)
    there has happened me an accident

The indirect object is usually a pronoun.3 According to Maling (1988) constructions such as (12) are missing in Icelandic because of the interaction of an indefiniteness effect and a thematic hierarchy.4 Mailing’s claim can, however, not be correct because there are a few verbs that participate in a construction identical to the one in (12). Even the verb henda ‘happen’, a cognate of Swedish hända and Danish hænde, does, see (13b). What is characteristic for the Icelandic verbs is that many of them occur with DPs marked for genitive, see (13).5 In Greek too, the DP corresponding to the indirect object may be marked for genitive, see (14).

(13) a. Það beïð min óvent uppákoma þegar ëg kom heim. (Icelandic)
    there awaited me-GEN unwaited surprise when I came home

b. Það henti mig slys í ger.
    there happened me-ACC accident yesterday

(14) Tu sinevi ena atixima xtes. (Greek)
    Cl-MASC.GEN happened-3SG an accident-NOM yesterday

The realization of a genitive in the Icelandic and Greek constructions in (13a) and (14) may indicate that the construction involves some kind of possession. One of the aims of the present project is to find out whether this also holds for Mainland Scandinavian (i.e. Danish, Norwegian, etc.)

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3Maling (1988: 171) claims that these sentences are equally grammatical with full NPs in place of the dative pronouns. My Swedish informants disagree with this description.

4Vikner (1995) provides arguments against Maling’s analysis. See also Lødrup (1995) for a different analysis of similar constructions in Norwegian.

5The genitive subject/object verbs include bíða ‘await’, geta ‘be mentioned’, gæta ‘look after’, minnast ‘remember, commemorate’ njóta ‘enjoy’, and sakna ‘miss’. The verb henda ‘happen’ is not one of these verbs.
and Swedish), where such a relation is not necessarily morphologically encoded. If so, it is possible to draw a parallel between possessive experiencer constructions, (15a), and intransitive expletive constructions, (15b).

(15)  

| a. Det hände mig en olycka (Swedish) |
| there happened me an accident |
| b. Det stod en man i trädgården |
| there stood a man in garden-the |

Both of these can be argued to involve small clauses. The difference would be that the small clause in the former contains a silent verb HAVE (Swedish HA), indicating possession, whereas the small clauses in the latter contain a silent verb BE (Swedish VARA), indicating existence, cf. Hoekstra and Mulder (1990):

(16)  

| a. det hände [mig HA en olycka] |
| b. det stod [en man VARA i trädgården] |

With respect to OECs, the present project will focus on microparametric variation within the Scandinavian languages. All microparametric investigations must, however, also take into consideration a wider perspective of comparison to different languages and language groups. For instance, the above sketched analysis makes the prediction that possessive experiencer constructions are not possible in languages that do not have a transitive verb have (see Harves and Kayne 2008 for a recent related discussion of have). A preliminary pilot study shows that this prediction is borne out. Scottish Gaelic and Russian, for instance, do not have a transitive (possessive) verb have and as illustrated in (17) and (18), neither of the two languages has the possessive experiencer construction. With verbs like tachair ‘happen’ in Scottish Gaelic and sluchat’sja ‘happen’ in Russian, the argument that corresponds to the indirect object has to be contained within a PP.

(17)  

| Thachair *mi / dhomh tubaist mòr. (Scottish Gaelic) |
| Happened I to-me accident big |

(18)  

| *Menja’ / So mnoj sluchilos’ neschastje. (Russian) |
| me-ACC/GEN with LINSTR happened accident |

It seems as if there are verbs in Russian that can participate in the possessive experiencer construction, see (19). As with many Icelandic (and Greek) verbs, the higher argument is marked for genitive. It remains to be investigated whether the set of verbs that can participate in this construction in Russian is equally restricted as in Icelandic.

(19)  

| Menja zhdal bolshoj sjurpriz. (Russian) |
| 1.GEN waited big surprise |

Turning to Bulgarian, which is one of the Slavic languages that does have a transitive (possessive) verb have, see Harves and Kayne (2008), we find possessive experiencer constructions of the type in (20). Unlike Scandinavian, Bulgarian does not have overt expletives but similar to Icelandic and Greek, the predicate shows agreement with postverbal arguments marked for nominative.

(20)  

| a. Ochakvaha me dve iznenadi. |
| waited-3PL I-ACC two surprises |
b. Sluchi mi se neshtastie. (Bulgarian)

happened-3SG I-DAT REFL accident

To sum up, the hypothesis that the possessive experiencer construction involves a small clause that contains a silent possessive \( \text{HAVE} \) seems to be supported by data from Scottish Gaelic, Russian, and Bulgarian. The construction is impossible in languages that do not have a transitive \( \text{have} \), e.g. Scottish Gaelic and Russian, but it is possible in languages that do have a transitive \( \text{have} \), e.g. Scandinavian and Bulgarian.

The other group of object experiencer construction verbs, i.e. the ones that select a clausal argument instead of a DP, belong to a construction type that I label \( \text{ergative experiencer constructions} \):

\[
\text{Object Experiencer Constructions}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Possessive Experiencer} &= (12) \\
\text{Ergative Experiencer} &= (22)
\end{align*}
\]

These arguably do not involve an external argument, but two internal arguments, see e.g. Vikner (1995).\(^6\) The verbs that occur in this construction include raising verbs such as \textit{förefalla} ‘seem’. Other verbs in this construction either denote physical condition (e.g. \textit{kvälja} ‘torture’), emotional experience (e.g. \textit{förvåna} ‘surprise’, \textit{glädja} ‘make happy’, \textit{skrämma} ‘frighten’), or mental perception (e.g. \textit{synas} ‘seem / appear’), see e.g. Sundman (1985). Likewise, the verb \textit{slå} ‘hit’ participates in this construction.\(^7\) They all have in common that they embed facts (the examples in (22) were found on Google, 20.02.2008 and 30.11.2008).

\[
\begin{align*}
(22) & \quad \text{a. Det förefaller mig att saken har någonting med det att göra. (Swedish)} \\
& \quad \text{It seems me that case-the has something with it to do} \\
& \quad \text{b. Det förvånar mig att du inte kan se den skillnaden.} \\
& \quad \text{It surprises me that you not can see the difference} \\
& \quad \text{c. Det slår mig att jag inte skrivit något på ett tag.} \\
& \quad \text{it hits me that I have not written anything on a while}
\end{align*}
\]

According to Åfarli and Lutnæs (2001), the Norwegian counterpart of the ergative experiencer construction may be split into two groups. The first group includes verbs like \textit{forekomme} ‘seem’, which allow the overt realization of a postverbal quasi argument, (23a). The second group includes verbs like \textit{irritere} ‘irritate’ and \textit{skremme} ‘frighten’, which do not allow the overt realization of a postverbal quasi argument, (23b). According to Åfarli and Lutnæs (2001), the difference between (23a) and (23b) comes from the status of the clausal argument. In (23a), the clausal argument is the indirect object of the verb. In (23b), it is the subject. The Swedish counterpart of (23b), however, patterns differently. Verbs like \textit{skrämma} ‘frighten’ require a postverbal quasi argument, see (24).

\[
\begin{align*}
(23) & \quad \text{a. Meg forekommer det at han kan ha gjort det. (Norwegian)} \\
& \quad \text{me seems it that he may have done it}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^6\)Unlike the possessive experiencer constructions mentioned above, these constructions contain a quasi argument, which can be seen in Danish, where it is realized as \textit{det}.

\(^7\)The Icelandic counterparts involve the same classes of verbs. Here the experiencer is typically marked for accusative, with the exception of verbs of mental perception, where it is marked for dative.
Icelandic seems to pattern in yet another way, since postverbal quasi arguments are disallowed in both groups. Quasi arguments are usually not possible with verbs such as virðast or sýnast ‘seem’ (at least not if the subject is definite/specific), see (25). Verbs such as hraeða ‘frighten’, however, require a quasi argument which can only surface in initial position, see (26).

(24) Mig skrämmer *(det) att han kan ha gjort det. (Swedish)
me frightens it that he may have done it

(25) Mér sýnist (*það) að málið sé leyst. (Icelandic)
me-DAT seems-3SG it that case-the is solved

(26) a. Það hraeðir mig að hann skuli hafa gert þetta. (Icelandic)
it frightens me-ACC that he should have done this
b. *Mig hraeðir (það) að hann skuli hafa gert þetta.
me-ACC frightens it that he should have done this

In light of Áfarli and Lutnæs’ analysis, the patterns in (24), (25), and (26) raise the question of what the status of the clausal argument is in the Swedish and Icelandic ergative expletive construction, a question that will be dealt with in the present project.

4 Summary
In brief, the present project aims to investigate the syntactic properties of expletive constructions involving two postverbal arguments in Scandinavian. I have shown in this proposal that these constructions can be roughly divided into two groups, one of which may be divided into two sub-groups:

(27) Expletive constructions involving two postverbal arguments

- Passive Double Object
  - givas = (4)
- Object Experiencer
  - Possessive Experiencer
    - hända = (12)
  - Ergative Experiencer
    - forekomme = (23a) / irritere = (23b)

Although such constructions have been investigated previously in some detail, it is far from clear that the proposals made can be maintained in light of the data presented in this project proposal. In general, the proposal put forth here indicates that we are forced to reconsider the importance of case morphology and its interaction with agreement in Scandinavian.

5 Relevance to NORMS and research plan
A study of the restrictions of the variation will help identify possible microparametric variation in natural language. The two groups of constructions described above form a well defined domain of investigation in syntax and the construction type is relevant to a number of other construction types, including clefts, transitive expletives, presentational constructions, and passives. The results of the proposed study will therefore be of relevance to other research domains, such as for example the structure of the left periphery, argument structure, subject-object asymmetries, the syntax of agreement, the relation between case and syntactic structure, and factors
determining verb movement, to name a few. The work done in the project will be relevant to the following thematic groups: The syntax of the left periphery, Argument structure, and Subject types.

6 Project plan
The project will be placed at the Centre for Languages and Literature (SOL), Lund University, Sweden. The choice of institution is not a coincident. The project will fit naturally into the research group GRIMM (Grammar in My Mind), where there is a long tradition in for the investigation of impersonal constructions, expletives, and argument structure, in both the Scandinavian (North Germanic) and the Romance languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First semester:</th>
<th>Formulation of tests to enable identification of the variation restrictions, focusing on OECs. Preparation of article drafts to be submitted to working paper journals.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second semester:</td>
<td>Formulation of tests to enable identification of the variation restrictions, focusing on PDOCs. Testing hypotheses on the structure of OECs and PDOCs. Preparation of article drafts to be submitted to international journals. Workshop presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third semester:</td>
<td>Identification of relevant microparameters determining the variation. Publication of final results (journal/monograph). Conference presentations.</td>
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References