

The development of expletive subjects in Norwegian

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Modern Norwegian requires an overt subject in Spec-IP or Spec-CP, and in some sentences the expletive (sometimes quasi-argumental) pronouns *det* or *der* are used to satisfy this condition. In Old Norse the subject was not obligatory, and there were no expletive subjects. In my talk, I will discuss the development of expletive subjects in Norwegian. Referring to Middle Norwegian data, I will be arguing that the development of expletive subjects was not caused by the loss of subject-verb-agreement, as has been suggested by Holmberg and Platzack (1995 and other works). I will also be arguing that expletive subjects did not arise through reanalysis of so called expletive topics, whose distribution is limited to Spec-CP (cf. Faarlund (1990)). I will suggest that an alternative approach based on reanalysis of the invisible pronoun *pro* is worth exploring (cf. Faarlund (2009, to appear), Kinn (2010)).

According to Falk (1993), expletive *det* in Swedish was initially a pragmatic marker of the existential construction, which has the function of introducing new referents in the discourse. My data do not suggest that this was the case in Norwegian. However, I will point out that the properties of the introduced referent have changed in an interesting way: In Old Norse the new referent may be called a subject, even though subjects prototypically are pragmatic topics and do not contain new information (Lambrecht, 1994:132). In Modern Norwegian the expletive has taken the subject position, while the introduced referent is a syntactic object. This makes the sentence structure similar to that of a topic-comment sentence, where the subject is topic, preceding the comment, which contains new information. As this structure is regarded unmarked (Lambrecht, 1994:132), it seems possible that information structure may have contributed to the development of expletive subjects. This could be a topic for further research.

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