Chapter 3

Expletives and speaker-related meaning

Ciro Greco
Ghent University

Liliane Haegeman
Ghent University

Trang Phan
Ghent University/University of Hai Duong

In our paper, we investigate a set of pronominal forms that have lost their referential meaning and might at first sight be analyzed as expletives. First, we discuss the case of Finnish, which, though a pro-drop language, displays an element *sitä* with expletive function; and the case of Dominican Spanish, another pro-drop language which seems to have an expletive *ello* but in which, unlike Finnish, the expletive conveys a speaker-related meaning. In addition, we also examine the case of Vietnamese, a radical pro-drop language which also seems to deploy an expletive *nó* with discourse value, and the case of the Flemish element *tet*, which has lost its referential value and also has a discourse function. From these data it emerges that independently of the satisfaction of formal EPP-requirements, some languages can employ expletive or expletive-like elements for discourse-related reasons in those contexts where regular expletives are required in languages like English. The data discussed here lead to a more complex picture of the nature of expletives and their function in the grammar.

1 Introduction: expletives as formal devices

1.1 Characterizing expletives

Traditionally, expletives have been defined as elements inserted at some point in the structure to satisfy purely formal requirements, such as, for instance, the

EPP, which requires subject position to be filled in finite clauses (Chomsky 1981; 1995). Under this conception, expletives are a *last resort* device deployed whenever no regular (overt) subject is available to satisfy the formal requirement in question, either because there is no overt subject argument, as with weather or impersonal constructions, or because the relevant argument fails to attain the canonical subject position, as in existential and presentational sentences. Some patterns for English are illustrated in (1–3): in each example set, the (b) sentence illustrates the pattern in which the contentful subject argument does not reach its canonical position and an expletive element is inserted: in the existential patterns in (1b) and (2b) the expletive is *there*, with an extraposed clausal subject in (3b) the expletive is *it*:

(1)   a.   *Many students are arriving from Italy.*
       b.   *There are now many students arriving from Italy.*

(2)   a.   *A workable solution to this problem does not exist.*
       b.   *There does not exist a workable solution to this problem.*

(3)   a.   *That the students accepted the new regulations is surprising.*
       b.   *It is surprising that the students accepted the new regulations.*

From the literature it emerges that cross-linguistically, canonical expletives share a number of properties. (i) Being inserted to satisfy a formal requirement, they are obligatory in the relevant contexts because, in their absence, the specific formal requirement would not be satisfied, leading to ungrammaticality. For instance, in English omission of the expletive subjects in the (b)-examples above leads to ungrammaticality because the canonical subject position has to be filled in English, i.e. SpecTP, or SpecSubjP in a cartographic approach (Rizzi & Shlonsky 2007). (ii) Though expletive elements usually have the form of an existing contentful element (e.g. 3rd person pronoun, locative adverb), expletives are taken to be semantically empty, at least when deployed as formal devices satisfying subject-related grammar requirements. For instance, though originally a locative adverb, English *there* in (1b) and (2b) does not contribute any locative or other semantics.[1] Being semantically empty, expletives cannot be focused or contrasted. For instance, they typically are prosodically reduced, and cannot receive focal stress. Moreover, expletives do not undergo A'-movement to the left

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[1] Weather expletives might differ from other types of expletives with respect to their semantic content (Bolinger 1977). For a (controversial) example of a meaningful use of an expletive, *er*, in Dutch, see Mohr (2005).

periphery since this type of movement is specialized for the encoding of scope-discourse functions.[2]

(iii) The picture outlined above leads to a crosslinguistic prediction: pro-drop languages should not display overt expletives, because in these languages the EPP can be satisfied through some alternative mechanism (for proposals see, a.o. Rizzi 1982; Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 1998; Holmberg & Roberts 2009). Thus, the contrasts between English and Italian illustrated in (4–5) have been traced back to the availability of an alternative way to satisfy the EPP in Italian, which is unavailable in English, and have led to a view in which the presence of expletives is related directly to the pro-drop parameter:

(4)   a.   * *(It) rains.*
      b.   *Piove.*   (Italian)
         rains

(5)   a.   * *(There) have arrived three girls.*
      b.   *Sono arrivate tre   ragazze.*   (Italian)
         are   arrived three girls

1.2 Exceptional expletives

The predictions that follow from the characterization of expletives above are broadly speaking correct in that, typically, (i) expletives are not optional, (ii) they lack semantic content, and (iii), pro-drop languages do not display expletives as extensively as non-pro-drop languages do (Newmeyer 2005), confirming the hypothesis that their presence correlates with the negative setting of the null subject parameter.

However, additional research reveals that even in languages which allow non overt subjects there are occurrences of what seem to be expletive elements, suggesting that the correlation with a negative setting of the pro-drop parameter is not categorical. Apparent expletive elements have been attested in Finnish, Dominican Spanish and Vietnamese. The distribution and the properties of the 'expletives' in question closely resemble those of canonical subject expletives: typically, they are pronominal elements without referential value and occupying a position in the higher portion of the inflectional layer.

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[2]There arises a conceptual tension with respect to Rizzi & Shlonsky's (2007) assumption that expletives formally satisfy the subject criterion, itself a condition implying a semantic component. We will not try to solve this issue here.

Since the customary function of expletives (namely, to satisfy a subject-related EPP requirement) can be fulfilled differently in pro-drop languages, the question is what function these elements perform in these systems. Do they also serve to satisfy some formal requirement or can they be employed for other purposes and, if the latter, do they make any semantic contribution?

In what follows we will examine such cases in more detail. We will discuss the cases of Dominican Spanish and Vietnamese, two pro-drop languages. Our analysis will reveal that the relevant expletives are fully optional devices which convey a speaker-related meaning.

In particular, we will show that in Vietnamese, the relevant expletive element appears to be allowed only in those contexts where regular, semantically vacuous expletives are required in non-pro-drop languages, like English. This suggests that even though the expletive does not fulfill the function of being a subject place holder, it maintains some connection with the subject position. We will then turn to West Flemish, a non pro-drop language, in which an expletive-like element appears in a position in the high IP-layer and conveys a speaker-oriented meaning.

The expletive-like elements which we examine seem to be distributionally alike: they all occupy a high position in the IP layer. However, we will show that, unlike Vietnamese, West Flemish expletive-like elements are not restricted only to the constructions that require expletives in non-pro-drop languages. We will suggest that this difference can be captured by the articulation of high IP-layer into specialized subject positions (Kiss 1996; Rizzi & Shlonsky 2007; Cardinaletti 2004) and optional discourse-related positions (Uriagereka 2004; Grohmann 2000).

This paper is organized as follows: §2 and §3 discuss *sitä* in Finnish and *ello* in Dominican Spanish respectively: we will see that, unlike Finnish *sitä*, the expletive *ello* conveys a speaker-related meaning. §4 illustrates the expletive-like element *nó* in Vietnamese, a radical pro-drop language. We will show that *nó* also seems to encode discourse meaning. In §5 we turn to *tet* in Flemish, a non pro-drop language. *Tet* is a pronominal element which has lost its referential value, has a discourse function and again it is located in the high IP-area.

2 Expletives in pro-drop languages: Finnish *sitä*

Holmberg & Nikanne (2002) have shown that correlating the presence of expletives with a negative setting of the pro-drop parameter is an oversimplification: Finnish, a pro-drop language, displays what look like overt expletives in a subset of cases where expletives are expected in non-pro-drop languages.

Holmberg & Nikanne (2002) show that Finnish can be classified as a pro-drop[3] language with referential null subjects (6a) and with null subjects with weather verbs (6b). However, some expletive elements can (and sometimes must) appear in pre-verbal position, precisely in those contexts typically requiring expletives in non-pro-drop languages. As is the case for the canonical expletives, Holmberg & Nikanne (2002) argue that the relevant expletives do not contribute to the interpretation of the sentence. One such expletive is the element *sitä*,[4] a partitive form of the 3ʳᵈ person singular non-human pronoun. (6c) illustrates the use of *sitä* in presentational sentences:[5]

(6) (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002: 75) (Finnish)

    a.   *Olen   väsynyt.*
        be.1SG tired
        'I'm tired.'

    b.   *Sataa (vettä).*
        Rains (water)
        'It is raining.'

    c. * *(Sitä) leikkii lapsia   kadulla.*
        SITÄ play   children in.street
        'There are children playing in the street.'

Sitä immediately precedes the inflected verb or auxiliary, as in (6c), and follows left-peripheral focalized constituents, as in (7). Holmberg & Nikanne (2002) argue that *sitä* does not occupy the specifier of TP, but rather the specifier of the topmost topic-related functional projection in the inflectional domain; the specifier of this projection is filled by an argument with the feature [-Foc]. When no suitable argument with the feature [-Foc] is available, *sitä* is inserted:

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[3]Finnish is classified as a *partial null-subject language* in the typology in Holmberg & Roberts (2009). This implies that null referential subjects are restricted to 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ person, while 3ʳᵈ person subjects can only be null when bound by a higher argument (Holmberg 2005; 2010).

[4]For the sake of completeness, we add that Finnish has a second expletive, *se,* the nominative pendant of *sitä* (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002: 100, note 3), which is inserted as the subject of weather verbs and in constructions with an extraposed clause. For reasons of space, we cannot discuss this element.

[5]Holmberg & Nikanne (2002: 81–83) also discuss verb-initial sentences without expletives. We cannot go into these here for reasons of brevity.

(7) (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002: 93) (Finnish)

    a. *NAMA LAPSET sitä olisivat oppineet uimaan.*
        these children SITÄ have.COND.3PL learn to.swim

        'THESE CHILDREN would have learned to swim.'

    b. * *Sitä NAMA LAPSET olisivat oppineet uimaan.*
        SITÄ these children have.COND.3PL learn to.swim

On the basis of distributional facts such as those above, Holmberg & Nikanne (2002) conclude that expletive *sitä* satisfies a formal EPP-requirement, associated with a topic projection in the inflectional domain that dominates the projection encoding subject agreement; they suggest that the relevant projection might be the high functional projection 'FP' postulated by Uriagereka (2004) for Romance and that its availability is related from the general properties of Finnish as a Topic-prominent language (see Kiss 1995).

The patterns discussed by Holmberg & Nikanne (2002) provide evidence that, although it is generally true that languages that can dispense with overt subjects do not require expletives in the same way as non null-subject languages like English do, pro-drop systems may still feature expletives. The behavior of *sitä*, thus, reveals that the correlation between the distribution of expletives and the null-subject parameter is more complex than originally thought. At the same time, *sitä* appears to be employed to fulfill a function similar to that fulfilled by prototypical subject expletives, namely that of satisfying a formal EPP-requirement of some kind.

3 Expletives and Discourse Functions: *ello* in Dominican Spanish

As highlighted above, one implicit assumption in the literature is that the prototypical expletive is inserted for formal reasons and lacks interpretive effects. However, this generalization has also been challenged. For a number of Romance pro-drop languages, neuter strong pronouns and demonstratives have been reported to act as optional expletive subjects (see Bartra-Kaufmann 2011 for an overview); a number of these have been claimed to contribute to the discourse interpretation of the sentence. One such case is the expletive use of the pronoun *ello* reported for Dominican Spanish (DS).

The pronoun *ello* occurs in configurations which in the non-pro-drop languages typically require an expletive, such as impersonal and weather construc-

tions and with unaccusative post-verbal subjects (Bullock & Toribio 2009; Martí-
nez Sanz 2011; Muñoz Pérez 2014; Gupton & Lowman 2014):

(8) (Muñoz Pérez 2014: 156)   (DS)

    a. ***(Ello)** tiene   que haber otro   paso.*
       ELLO should that to be other path

       'It should be other paths.'

    b. ***(Ello)** no   está lloviendo aquí pero allá   sí.*
       ELLO not is   raining   here but   there yes

       'It is not raining here, but it is there.' (Bullock & Toribio 2009: 57)

    c. ***(Ello)** casi   no ha pasado ni u vehicolo.*
       ELLO almost not has passed no a vehicle

       'Almost no vehicle has passed.'

This use of *ello* is incompatible with an overt pre-verbal subject (Martínez Sanz
2011: 65). Because of its complementary distribution with a pre-verbal DP sub-
ject, the position of *ello* has been equated with the canonical subject position, i.e.
SpecTP:

(9) (Martínez Sanz 2011: 65)   (DS)

    * ***Ello   yo** no sé   por qué mi papá me puso   Almeida.*
     ELLO I   not know why   my dad   me called.3sɢ Almeida

    'I don't know why my dad named me Almeida.'

To all intents and purposes, DS *ello* has the properties of an expletive: it is for-
mally like a pronominal element, it lacks referential content, it occupies a high
IP-position, it occurs in the contexts that display expletives in the non-pro-drop
languages. Unlike regular expletives, though, *ello* is optional. In line with the gen-
eralization that pro-drop languages typically lack expletives, Muñoz Pérez (2014)
points out that the pronominal system of DS is currently changing as speakers
tend to produce more overt pronouns than European Spanish speakers (Otheguy
et al. 2007), suggesting that in fact DS is losing its pro-drop properties. In this sce-
nario, the occurrence of an overt expletive would no longer be unexpected and
rather than complicating the picture it would indeed corroborate the hypothe-
sis that the presence of overt expletives correlates with a negative setting of the
pro-drop parameter (however formulated).

As mentioned, *ello* lacks referential content and, in this respect, appears to be
like a regular expletive. However, exploring observations in Martín Zorraquino

& Portóles Lázaro (1999) and Hinzelin & Kaiser (2007) signal that, while indeed non-referential, dislocated uses of DS *ello* encode *point of view*. They identify the pronoun as a left-peripheral discourse marker conveying the speaker's commitment to the proposition:

(10)   (Hinzelin & Kaiser 2007: 173)   (DS)

  Ello... así decían.
  ELLO so say.IMP.3PL
  'Well, that's how they were saying it.'

While Hinzelin & Kaiser (2007) focus on dislocated *ello* (10), Gupton & Lowman (2014: 344–345) extend the analysis of *ello* as a *point-of-view* discourse marker to IP-internal expletives. They also argue that DS does not behave like partial null-subject languages or non-null-subject languages, but is more like archaic Romance pro-drop languages such as European Portuguese and Galician in that it has the other identifying properties such as (sporadic) finite-verb enclisis, clitic tripling, and personal infinitives.

Pursuing Uriagereka's (2004) proposal, Gupton & Lowman (2014) propose that *ello* occupies the specifier position of a projection FP dominating TP which encodes the speaker's point of view. Observe that the position assigned to *ello* by Gupton & Lowman (2014) is similar to that associated by Holmberg & Nikanne (2002) with Finnish *sitä*, but while the latter is not associated with any semantic content, DS *ello* conveys speaker-related meaning.

The conclusions in Gupton & Lowman (2014) are tentative and further work is needed to substantiate their analysis and explore its impact for other similar pronominal elements in Romance but, if their interpretation of the role of DS *ello* is correct, it supports the idea that expletives can be associated with interpretive content.

4 Vietnamese *nó*

Like many East Asian languages (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Thai), Vietnamese is a radical pro-drop language (Huang 1984) without agreement marking on the verb and in which arguments can be freely omitted: (11a) illustrates subject omission, (11b) object omission:

(11)   a.   *Mary thích Tom. Và   Ø cũng thích Peter.*   (Vietnamese)
          Mary like   Tom and Ø also   like   Peter
          'Mary$_i$ likes Tom. She$_i$ also likes Peter.'

b. *Mary thích Tom. Nhưng Peter không thích Ø.*
Mary like Tom but Peter NEG like Ø
'Mary likes Tom_i. But Peter does not like him_i.'

Surprisingly then, in spoken Vietnamese, in addition to its referential use, the pronoun *nó* optionally appears in contexts typically displaying expletive subjects in non-pro-drop languages (Nguyen & Nguyen 2011; Dao 2012). Like prototypical expletives, Vietnamese *nó* is formally related to a pronoun, it lacks referential content and it cannot be focused. In (12a), *nó* appears to be the subject of a weather predicate, in (12b) it occurs with an existential predicate, and in (12c–12e) it occurs with unaccusative predicates. In all these cases, *nó* is non-referential:

(12) a. *(**Nó**) mưa bây-giờ đấy.* (Vietnamese)
NÓ rain now PRT
'It is about to rain now.'

b. *(**Nó**) không có cái bút nào.*[6]
NÓ NEG exist CLF pen any
'There are no pens.'

c. *(Nó) ngã thằng bé.*
NÓ fall CLS boy
'A/the boy fell.'

d. *(Nó) chết cá tao.*
NÓ die fish mine
'My fish died.'

e. *(Nó) cháy cái nhà kho.*
NÓ burnt CLF house store
'A warehouse burned.'

4.1 The interpretation of nó

In contrast with Finnish *sitä*, but in line with some proposals concerning DS *ello,* Vietnamese *nó* does contribute to the interpretation of the clause. Specifically, inserting *nó* narrows down the contexts in which the sentence is appropriate in terms of speaker-related epistemic specificity (Greco et al. 2017).

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[6](12b) is ambiguous between the existential and a possessive interpretation with *nó* interpreted as a referential subject pronoun '(S)he doesn't have any pen'. We only discuss the existential reading.

We first illustrate the interpretive effect brought about *nó* in existential patterns. Existential sentences like (13) are ambiguous between being either generic statements asserting (or denying) the existence of an entity in general or being contextual statements about the existence of an entity in a specific situation: (13) either denies the existence of ghosts in general or it denies the presence of ghosts in the context of utterance (while not excluding their existence as such):

(13)   a.   *Không có   ma.*   (Vietnamese)
            NEG   exist ghost

       b.   Generic: 'Ghosts do not exist.'

       c.   Contextual: 'There are no ghosts speaking of a certain place/time.'

Inserting *nó* restricts the domain of validity of the assertion that 'there are no ghosts' to a specific context, thus narrowing down the contextualization potential of the containing sentence.

(14)   a.   ***Nó** không có   ma.*   (Vietnamese)
            NÓ NEG   exist ghost

       b.   # Generic: 'Ghosts do not exist.'

       c.   Contextual: 'There are no ghosts speaking of a certain place/time.'

The 'contextualizing' effect of *nó* is also found in sentences with post-verbal unaccusative subjects (12c–12e). These structures are thetic sentences whose semantic contribution is to assert the existence of an eventuality of a certain kind (Ladusaw 1994). Typically, these sentences can be uttered out of the blue and they can be used as answers to questions like '*What happened*?'. In a thetic sentence, the subject is represented as part of the predicative nucleus (e.g. as a mere participant of an event). (15) asserts the existence of an event of burning involving a warehouse as the main participant. In thetic sentences, *nó* contributes the implication that the eventuality expressed in the clause is specifically identifiable in or anchored to a given context:

(15)   *(Nó) cháy cái nhà   kho.*   (Vietnamese)
       NÓ burnt CLF house store

       'A warehouse burned.'

This contextualization effect of *nó* appears to be speaker-related: in thetic sentences *nó* is only felicitous in contexts in which the speaker disposes of sufficient background information to report on a specific event. (16) and (17) illustrate the speaker-anchoring achieved by *nó*.

Context 1: After meeting a friend who told him that there had been a fire in New York last week and that a warehouse burned down, the speaker utters (16) as a report.

(16) *(**Nó**) cháy cái nhà kho rồi*   (Vietnamese)
NÓ burnt CLF house store already
'A warehouse burned.'

In this context, information available to the speaker allows him to supply specific spatial and temporal coordinates for the eventuality he's referring to. In this context *nó* is appropriate, although not obligatory.

Context 2: The speaker has seen on the television that there had been a fire and that a warehouse has burned down but lacks any further information about this event such as its temporal and locative coordinates. All he knows is that an event of burning took place. In this context, the speaker may utter (16), but, crucially, inserting *nó* would be infelicitous:

(17) *(#**Nó**) cháy cái nhà kho rồi*   (Vietnamese)
NÓ burnt CLF house store already
'A warehouse burned.'

Though space prevents a fuller discussion of this point, the crucial requirement for the insertion of the expletive nó appears to be the possibility of the speaker having a specific event in mind (see Greco et al. 2017). In this respect, the discourse-related meaning of *nó* can be conceived of as related to some form of speaker-oriented epistemic specificity (Hellan 1981; Farkas 2002).

Even when the conditions for its use are met, *nó* is never obligatory, since the contextualization effect can be conveyed implicitly in the context of utterance: inserting *nó* restricts the felicitous contexts of the utterance to a subset of the contexts available without the expletive.

4.2 The syntax of nó

The Vietnamese IP-domain displays a rigidly ordered array of functional morphemes, such as pre-verbal temporal and aspectual markers (Duffield 2013; Phan 2013), the topmost of which is the future marker *sẽ.* In what looks like its expletive use, the pronoun *nó* occupies a position dominating this element: (18) illustrates the relevant pattern with the weather verb *mưa* ('rain'), (19) illustrates the existential pattern and (20) illustrates unaccusative *ngã* ('fall'):

(18)   a.   *Nó sẽ   mưa bây-giờ đấy.*   (Vietnamese)
              NÓ FUT rain now   PRT
              'It will rain now.'

        b.   **Sẽ nó   mưa bây-giờ đấy.*
              FUT NÓ rain now   PRT
              'It will rain now.'

(19)   a.   *Nó sẽ   không có   cái bút nào.*
              NÓ FUT NEG   exist CLF pen any
              'There will be no pens.'

        b.   **Sẽ nó không có   cái bút nào.*
              FUT NÓ NEG   exist CLF pen any
              'There will be no pens.'

(20)   a.   *Nó sẽ   ngã thằng bé.*
              NÓ FUT fall CLF   little
              'A/The boy will fall.'

        b.   **Sẽ nó   ngã thằng bé.*
              FUT NÓ fall CLF   little
              'A/The boy will fall.'

Vietnamese also displays left peripheral scope-discourse markers. For example, *thì* and *là* are associated with topicalized constituents. Following Rizzi (1997), we analyze these markers as the heads of projections whose specifiers host topicalized constituents:

(21)   a.   *Thằng Nam thì/là   sẽ   ăn cái này đấy.*   (Vietnamese)
              CLF   Nam TOP/TOP FUT eat CLF this PRT
              'As for Nam, he will eat this thing.'

        b.   *Cái này thì/là   thằng Nam sẽ   ăn đấy.*
              CLF this TOP/TOP CLF   Nam FUT eat PRT
              'As for this thing, Nam will eat it.'

        c.   *Lúc khác thì/là   thằng Nam sẽ   ăn cái này đấy.*
              time other TOP/TOP CLF   Nam FUT eat CLF this PRT
              'At another time, Nam will eat this thing.'

As illustrated in (22), in its expletive use, *nó* remains lower than the left-peripheral markers *thì* and *là*:

(22) a. *(*nó) Trên bàn (*nó) thì/là (nó) sẽ không có cái bút nào*
          NÓ   On   table NÓ   TOP/TOP NÓ   FUT NEG   exist clf pen any
                                                              (Vietnamese)

    'On the table, there will be no pens.'

In addition, *nó* cannot occur to the left of overt pre-verbal subjects, be they referential DPs or personal pronouns:

(23) **Nó thằng Nam/tao/mày sẽ gặp Hòa ngày-mai.*   (Vietnamese)
      NÓ CLF Nam/I/you   FUT meet Hòa tomorrow

    'Nam/I/you will meet Hòa tomorrow.'

From the distributional data, we conclude that *nó* occupies a position in the highest portion of the inflectional layer, immediately dominated by the left-peripheral topic projection:

(24) thì$_{[Topic]}$ > là$_{[Topic]}$ > $\underline{nó}$ > sẽ$_{[Future]}$ > đã$_{[Perfect]}$ > đang$_{[durative]}$ > VP

Assuming that *nó* occupies a high position in the inflectional domain, two avenues can be envisaged to identify the nature of its position: one explores the subject properties of *nó,* the other explores its speaker-related discourse properties. We discuss these in turn.

The specificity effect of *nó* and the fact that it anchors the proposition to the speaker's context provides additional empirical support that, while non-referential, expletives can encode speaker-oriented meaning. Pursuing this line of thinking, *nó* could be associated with a high discourse-related functional projection in the IP domain which encodes *point of view.* This conclusion would be close to that reached for DS *ello* by Gupton & Lowman (2014). It also implies that a high projection in the IP-layer may convey discourse-related functions that are otherwise instantiated in the left periphery.

However, any account of the syntactic position of *nó* has to capture the fact that, besides the semantic contribution, *nó* is in complementary distribution with pre-verbal subjects, as illustrated in (23). This suggest that *nó* retains some subject properties and could be related to the hypothesis that there is a specialized subject position in the inflectional domain with a subject of predication feature. This projection attracts referential subjects in a number of cases, yielding a structure like (25):

(25) $[_{IP} \ldots DP_{i\,[+subject-of-predication]} \ldots [_{vP} \ldots t_i \ldots]]$

In a number of languages, however, thetic predicative structures leave the subject in-situ, without attracting it to the high IP-field. To capture the complementary distribution of pre-verbal subjects and *nó*, one might propose that *nò* appears only in thetic structure where the referential subject is either absent or left in-situ and that in these structures *nó* occupies the pre-verbal position, namely the position occupied by the referential subject in structures like (25).

Rizzi (2006) relates the 'subject of predication' property in (25) to a specialized projection for the subject, SubjP, reinterpreting the EPP feature standardly associated with T in terms of a Subject Criterion. One might then propose that *nó* is located in SubjP and assume that in Vietnamese Subj may encode specificity (in a way that is reminiscent of Kiss 1996 and Cardinaletti 2004).

5 West Flemish *tet*

In this section we turn to another non-referential element which is formally related to a pronoun and which might at first sight be labeled as 'expletive': pleonastic particle *tet* in West Flemish (WF), which is not a pro-drop language. Like Finnish *sitä*, DS *ello* and Vietnamese *nó*, the element will be shown to occupy a high position in the inflectional domain and, like DS *ello* and Vietnamese *nó*, it will be shown to convey discourse-related meaning.

In contrast with Vietnamese *nó,* however, WF *tet* does not show a complementary distribution with any type of overt subjects: it is compatible with all finite clauses[7] and can co-occur with both lexical subjects and the existential expletive *er.* As illustrated by (26), in finite sentences with a full DP subject, *tet* can be inserted to the immediate left of the canonical subject position. In all instances, *tet* is optional. In the contemporary WF dialect described here, the form *tet* does not have any referential use.

(26) a. *Morgen   goa (tet) Valère niet kommen.*   (WF)
          Tomorrow goes TET Valere not come

          'Tomorrow Valère is not coming.'

      b. *... dat (tet) Valere nie goa kommen*
          ... that TET Valère not goes come

          '...that Valère isn't coming.'

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[7]For detailed discussion see also Haegeman 2008. *Tet* is compatible with infinitival clauses that allow an overt nominative subject. For reasons of space we cannot discuss this here.

The nature of the form *tet* is unclear but it merits some discussion. De Vogelaer (2005: 209–210) speculates that it may derive from a strong masculine or neuter pronoun (see De Vogelaer & Devos 2008). Instead of *tet*, other Flemish dialects and the regional variety of Flemish referred to as the *tussentaal* (De Caluwe et al. 2013) deploy a strong form of the nominative masculine pronoun *hij*, a form which definitely has a clear co-existing referential use (De Vogelaer & Devos 2008; Guéron & Haegeman 2012). For reasons of space, these alternative forms are not discussed in this paper but for completeness'sake we illustrate the use of *hij* with some examples attested in the informal spoken language by a Brabant speaker (27a) and a Ghent speaker (27b):

(27) a. *We moeten wij uitprikken en   dat   telt   hij niet mee.*   (WF)
          we must   we logout   and that counts *hij* not with.
          'We have to log out and that does not count.'

      b. *Dat kan hij later ook.*
          that can *hij* later too
          'We can do that later too.'

Our discussion focuses on the use of *tet* in the WF dialect of Lapscheure. §5.1 discusses its syntactic position. §5.2 turns to its interpretive effect. §5.3 discusses the syntax of *tet* and §5.4 briefly turns to its development.

5.1 The distribution of *tet*

West Flemish is not a pro-drop language in the standard sense[8] and the language systematically deploys expletive subjects. (28a) illustrates weather verbs, (28b) illustrates extraposed subject clauses, (28c) and (28d) illustrate existential patterns. As a generalization, indefinite subjects in WF cannot occupy the canonical subject position and expletive insertion is obligatory, including in transitive patterns (28d):

(28) a. *Vrydag goat = t regenen.*   (WF)
          Friday goes   it rain
          'It is going to rain on Friday.'

      b. *T'is nie woar dat ze   vrijdag moet werken.*
          it is not true that she Friday must work
          'It is not true that she must work on Friday.'

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[8]If subject clitics are the spell out of agreement features on C or on V (Bennis & Haegeman 1984), one might argue that WF has a null subject.

c. *kpeinzen dat=ter   veel   volk   goat kommen.*
   I think   that there much people will come

   'I think that many people will come.'

d. *kpeinzen dan=   der   veel   studenten dienen boek goan kopen.*
   I think   that.PL there many students that   book will buy

   'I think that many students will buy that book.'

The element *tet* can be inserted in all finite clauses, in embedded clauses (29a,b), in non-subject-initial V2 root clauses (29c,d) and in subject-initial V2 root clauses (29d):

(29) a. *Ik peinzen dat tet Valere vrydag moet werken.*   (WF)
         I think   that TET Valere Friday must work

         'I think that Valery must work on Friday.'

      b. *Oa tet Valere vrydag moet werken...*
         if TET Valere Friday must work...

         'If Valery must work on Friday...'

      c. *Woar   is tet   menen paraplu?*
         Where is TET my   umbrella

         'Where is my umbrella?'

      d. *Vrydag moet tet Valere werken.*
         Friday must TET Valere work

         'On Friday Valery must work.'

      e. *Valère moet tet   vrydag werken.*
         Valère must TET Friday work

         'Valery must work on Friday.'

The distribution of *tet* is not sensitive to the nature of the subject, in particular it can co-occur with a DP subject (29), with a clitic subject (30a), with a clitic subject doubled by a full pronominal subject (30b), in sentences with expletive subjects with weather verbs (30c), in extraposition patterns with expletive *t* (30d), as well as in existential sentences with expletive *der* (30e). In the dialect described (cf. De Vogelaer & Devos 2008), *tet* cannot itself take on the function of the expletive, omission of the expletives in (30c–e) systematically leads to ungrammaticality:

(30) a. *Oa=ze tet   vrydag moet werken ...*   (WF)
         if=she TET Friday must work

   b. *Oa=ze tet   zie vrydag moet werken …*
     if=she TET she Friday must work

     'If she must work on Friday…'

   c. *oat=*(t) tet   vrydag regent …*
     if=it   TET Friday rains

     'if it rains on Friday…'

   d. *oat=*(t) tet   woar is dat=ze   vrydag moet werken …*
     if=it   TET true is that=she Friday must work

     'If it's true that she must work on Friday…'

   e. *oat=*(der) tet   veel   volk   komt…*
     if=there   TET much people comes…

     'If there are many people coming…'

The occurrence of *tet* is independent of the nature of the predicate, it is compatible with all types of predicates including, for instance, transitive patterns with subjects in the canonical subject position:

(31)   *dat tet Valère dat niet gezeid eet*   (WF)
       that TET Valère that not said   has

Linearly, *tet* occupies a fixed position: it follows the (agreeing) complementizer and any subject (or object) clitics that may have adjoined to that, and it immediately precedes the canonical subject position. Importantly, apart from the object clitics *t, ze* and *der, tet* is the only constituent that can separate the complementizer from the definite subject. Interjections and discourse particles or adverbial adjuncts cannot be inserted in this position:

(32)   a. * *Oa toch Valere moet werken…*   (WF)
          if   PART Valere must work…

     b. * *Oa vrydag Valere moet werken…*
          if   Friday Valere must work…

Nor can such elements separate *tet* from the complementizer (33a,b) or from the canonical subject (33c,d):

(33)   a. * *Oa toch/vrydag tet Valere moet werken…*   (WF)
          if   PART/Friday TET Valere must work…

     b. * *Oa tet   toch/vrydag Valere moet werken…*
           if   TET PART/Friday Valere must work…

In root clauses, *tet* immediately follows the inflected verb from which it can only be separated by clitics. In non subject-initial V2 (34a) *tet* precedes the definite DP subject, to which it is adjacent. In subject-initial V2 sentences (34b) *tet* follows the finite verb (see van Craenenbroeck & Haegeman 2007 for the relevance of these data for the analysis of V2):

(34) a. *Vrydag moet (*toch) tet (*toch) Valere werken.* (WF)
          Friday must (*PART) TET (*PART) Valere work

          'Friday, Valère has to work.'

      b. *Valere moet (*toch) tet (toch) vrydag werken.*
          Valere must (*PART) TET (PART) Friday work

          'Friday, Valère has to work.'

5.2 The interpretation of *tet*

The element *tet* lacks referential content and co-occurs with any kind of subject (Haegeman 2008). Unlike Finnish *sitä*, but like DS *ello* and Vietnamese *nó, tet* makes an interpretive contribution to the clause by narrowing down the contextualization possibilities for the utterance. However, the semantic contribution of *tet* is not identical to that of *nó*. While the Vietnamese expletive relates to the speaker's epistemic state, *tet* introduces speaker-related emphasis and contrasts the containing utterance with the discourse. By inserting *tet,* the speaker signals that the propositional content of the utterance containing *tet* conflicts with some contextually salient assumptions. For example, the *wh*-question in (35a) asks for the identity of a person. The unmarked answer to (35a) is (35b). (35c), with *tet,* will be a felicitous answer to (35a) if, for some reason, Valère's presence is unexpected to the speaker and conflicts with his discourse background:

(35) a. *Wien is dadde?* (WF)
          who is that

          'Who's that?'

      b. *Dat is Valère.*
          that is Valère

          'That's Valère.'

      c. *Dat is tet Valère!*
          that is TET Valère

          'That's Valère!'

Recall that *tet* is never obligatory. The conflict in contextualization need not be encoded, or the speaker may achieve the effect differently, for instance by stressing *Valère* in (35b).

(29c), repeated here as (36), illustrates the same point: without *tet*, it is a neutral question about the location of the speaker's umbrella, with *tet* the question is appropriate if the umbrella is unexpectedly missing:

(36)   *Woar   is (tet) menen paraplu?*   (WF))
       where is TET my   umbrella
       /glt 'Where is my umbrella?'

Given its discourse function, one might be inclined to assimilate *tet* to discourse-related adverbs, particles, or interjections. However, as we have discussed, such elements are distributionally different.

5.3 The syntax of *tet*

Because *tet* to some extent alternates with focal stress, one might associate it with the left peripheral FocP (Rizzi 1997). This is not plausible, though, because *tet* occurs in *wh*-questions (36). If the *wh*-constituent *woar* ('where') occupies the specifier of the root FocP, the position of *tet* must be lower than the left-peripheral FocP. *Tet* follows the complementizer and it precedes the definite subject DP. These data suggest that *tet* occupies a high IP-related functional position. If definite DP subjects occupy the canonical subject position (i.e. the specifier of TP or SubjP), the functional projection hosting *tet,* FP, must immediately dominate the projection hosting the subject. The fact that *tet* occurs to the right of clitic subjects follows if these are cliticized to the C-domain, as is commonly assumed. (37) is a schematic representation:

(37)   [CP [C da] [FP tet [F] [TP Valere vrydag moet werken]]]

All V2 clauses are derived by finite V movement to C (van Craenenbroeck & Haegeman 2007). It follows from (37) that in V2 clauses *tet* will be adjacent to the finite verb in V2 sentences, from which it can only be separated by those clitics that can themselves right-adjoin to the finite verb in C.[9] In line with van Craenenbroeck & Haegeman (2007), van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen (2012);

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[9]An alternative is that the relevant projection in the low left periphery, but this approach would have important ramifications. In particular, if *tet* is in a left-peripheral projection, the complementizer *dat* and the finite verb in V2 patterns must themselves occupy a higher left peripheral position, the nature of which would need to be clarified.

Guéron & Haegeman (2012) propose that FP is Uriagereka's FP, (Uriagereka 2004; Carrilho 2008), and following Grohmann (2000) they reinterpret the projection as one encoding Point of View:

(38)   CP > FinP > PovP > TP

5.4 Cross-speaker variation and the nature of *tet*

Though, informally speaking, *tet* appears to be located somewhere in a 'subject zone' of the clause, and is sandwiched between the clitic subject and the full pronominal subject (30b), *tet* cannot be assimilated to the expletives which satisfy a formal requirement because such expletives in fact co-occur with *tet*.

Note that the wide distribution of *tet* or its analogue *hij* in some varieties of Flemish, including that described here, is not shared by all speakers. Based on a native speaker questionnaire, De Vogelaer & Devos (2008: 272, 278) speculate that the current distribution of *tet*/*hij* is a recent extension which has taken it beyond its original doubling function. The strong pronouns originally served as 'topic markers' used to double third person clitic subjects, including expletive subjects. At this stage, the doubling pronoun matched the clitic pronoun in gender and number. The pronouns could also be used to double an expletive clitic subject. In their extended use, the elements *hij, (t)jij* or *tet* have come to be used more liberally and co-occur with all subjects, regardless of their gender and number. With the extension, the restriction by person and number features postulated for the topic marking function of the doubling pronouns has been lost. We speculate that it is at this point that the pronominal elements lost their phi features, i.e. their nominal properties. With the loss of the nominal properties, then, the element has acquired a new discourse function and a wider distribution.

6 Recycling expletives as discourse particles

In this paper we started out from the fairly standard view of expletive elements as pronominals which have lost their referential content and have become place holders for the subjects in contexts in which a formal requirement imposes the presence of a subject and in which no suitable DP subject can fulfill the requirement. The standard view on expletives leads to a set of generalizations: (i) they are generally unexpected in pro-drop languages, (ii) they are semantically vacuous, (iii) they are not optional.

In our paper, we investigate a set of pronominal forms that have lost their referential meaning and might at first sight be analyzed as expletives. The data

discussed lead to a more nuanced view of the nature of expletives, in which the generalizations outlined above seem to be challenged. With respect to the correlation between the availability of expletives and the pro-drop nature of a language, there are cases, like Finnish *sitä*, where a pro-drop language may still employ expletive elements in a subset of contexts, if needed because of EPP-requirements.

In addition, the case of DS *ello* illustrates a class of expletives or expletive-like elements without referential content which, though retaining the distributional properties of expletives, seems to have acquired a discourse-related meaning. Pursuing this point, we have discussed two additional instances of pronominal forms that have lost their referential meaning and seem to have acquired a discourse function.

Vietnamese *nó* is a pronominal form without referential content that has acquired some discourse-related meaning: *nó* serves to narrow down the contextualization properties of the utterance that contains it. WF *tet* originates as a strong pronominal form, it has lost its referential value and it has the discourse function of constraining the contextualization of the containing utterance to those contexts where the utterance's propositional content conflicts with the speakers' prevalent assumptions.

Since it is in complementary distribution with lexical subjects and is restricted to certain predicate types, we proposed that Vietnamese *nó* is located in a dedicated subject projection that encodes specificity and which is otherwise occupied by lexical subjects. Differently, WF *tet,* while originating as a strong pronominal doubler of, among others, an expletive subject clitic, and while being located in what appears to be the subject portion of the clause, never takes on any subject function and never competes with a subject constituent for the same position. We propose that *tet* appears in an optional position encoding *point of view* which is not subject-related.

The data we have discussed here lead to a more complex picture of the nature of expletives and their function in the grammar. The elements we have discussed here all share the property that they are pronominal forms having lost referential value, the hallmark of the prototypical expletive, but while the prototypical expletive has a purely formal function, DS *ello,* Vietnamese *nó* and Flemish *tet* are pronominal elements which, having lost their referential meaning, seem to have acquired discourse-related functions.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

Abbreviations used in this article follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules' instructions for word-by-word transcription, available at: https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf.

The non-standard abbreviation used:

PRT Particle

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