

Passive participle agreement in Norwegian dialects*

Tor A. ÅFARLI
NTNU Trondheim

1. Introduction

The passive participle in periphrastic passives shows agreement properties in some Norwegian dialects, but not in others. In addition, while some dialects allow two types of expletive subjects in impersonal periphrastic passives, others allow only one type of expletive subject in such passives. It seems that there is an interesting interaction between the agreement properties of the passive participle and the particular type of expletive subject that occurs in the sentence. The main purpose of this article is to try to penetrate into the theoretical complexity of this interaction, and at the same time I will be presenting passive data from a number of Norwegian dialects.

I will use generative syntax of the Minimalist variety (see Chomsky 1995, Adger 2003, Radford 2004) as my theoretical tool. One particular claim that I would like to advance, is that syntactic representations in a given language contain abstract verbal agreement (*phi*) features only if such features are morphologically visible. Thus, the relevant projection may contain agreement features in one language, but not in another, depending on the presence or absence of visible subject–verb agreement or subject–participle agreement. I will show that this assumption has several positive consequences through the analysis of expletive subjects and participle agreement in impersonal passives in Norwegian dialects, as well as through the analysis of expletive subjects and verbal agreement in English.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the relevant data from Norwegian. Section 3 introduces a more or less standard analysis of expletives and verbal agreement in English in order to set the stage for an analysis of the Norwegian data. Then, in section 4, the Norwegian data are analysed, and some important consequences of the analysis are further discussed in section 5. Section 6 speculates on possible solutions to some remaining problems, and section 7 concludes the article.

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2. Norwegian data

There are two main types of passives in Norwegian: first, a periphrastic passive, which consists of an auxiliary verb and a passive participle, and second the *s*-passive, which consists of the reflexive form of the verb (see Åfarli 1992). Both types have personal and impersonal passive versions. In this article, I investigate the periphrastic type only.

Concerning the personal periphrastic passives, Norwegian dialects can be divided into two groups depending on the agreement properties of the passive participle (see Faarlund et al. 1997: 518; Sandøy 1988). In one group, the passive participle shows no agreement inflection and occurs invariably in the singular neuter form (i.e. the invariant non-inflected form). These are the dialects that, on the whole, correspond to the *Bokmål* written variety. The dialects of the *Oslo* area and the dialects in northern Norway exemplify these non-agreeing dialects. The other group comprises the dialects which roughly correspond to the *Nynorsk* written variety, and which are exemplified by the rural dialects in the western parts of Norway, and also by many dialects in the eastern and southern parts of Norway. In these dialects, the passive participle is inflected in agreement with the subject (depending on verb class) with regard to gender and/or number (see Sandøy 1988 for a detailed description of the various agreement subsystems). Active participles, on the other hand, are never inflected in either group and invariably occur in the invariant singular neuter form.

The two dialect groups are exemplified below. For simplification, I only show a masculine / neuter gender opposition in the examples, although Norwegian dialects also have a feminine gender that in some dialects has a designated agreeing participle form.

Dialects with non-agreeing participle:

- (1) (a) Elgen ble **skutt**. (subject is m, sg)
the elk was shot
(b) Dyret ble **skutt**. (subject is n, sg)
the animal was shot
(c) Elgene/dyrene ble **skutt**. (subject is m/n, pl)
the elks/the animals were shot

Dialects with agreeing participle:

- (2) (a) Elgen vart **skoten**. (subject and participle are m, sg)
the elk was shot
(b) Dyret vart **skote**. (subject and participle are n, sg)
the animal was shot
(c) Elgane/dyra vart **skotne**. (subject and participle are m/n, pl)
the elks/the animals were shot

As the above examples illustrate, the participle agrees with the subject in the agreeing dialects, but not in the non-agreeing dialects. I will, henceforth, concentrate on the agreeing dialects beginning with some introductory remarks on Norwegian impersonal passives.

Impersonal passives are quite common in all Norwegian dialects. The dialects can be divided into two groups according to the type of expletive subjects that they allow. One group allows *det* 'it' only, whereas the other group allows both *det* 'it' and *der* 'there' (as well as *her* 'here'). The geographical distribution of the two dialect groups is as follows: Both subject types are used in the southernmost part of Norway (*Sørlandet*) and most of western Norway (*Vestlandet*), and also in the southern part of northern Norway, whereas only the *det* 'it' type is used in eastern Norway, in the far northern part of western Norway, and in the northern part of northern Norway (Sandøy 1992: 101; Dahl 1974). Notice that the classification of dialects according to the agreeing/non-agreeing participle property, on the one hand, and the expletive subject types that are allowed, on the other hand, crosscuts each other so that there are both agreeing and non-agreeing dialects that show only one or both of the expletive subject types.

Expletive subjects do not only occur in impersonal passives, but also in the other kinds of impersonal constructions. Dialects which allow only the *det* 'it' type, have this expletive subject in all types of impersonal constructions. Furthermore, dialects that allow both types of expletive subject, generally allow both types in most impersonal construction types, at least in the three main types that I will mention here, namely meteorological sentences, presentational sentences, and impersonal passive sentences (Dahl 1974: 82). However, there are considerable variations between the dialects that allow both types, and one of the subject types may be more frequent than the other in a certain construction type in some dialects.

The general situation, namely that all dialects that in principle allow both subject types, also allow both types in all the three main types of impersonal constructions, is illustrated by the data in (3)–(8) below from the *Stavanger* dialect located in the southern part of western Norway. Notice that the examples with participles show no agreement, thereby indicating that the *Stavanger* dialect, being an urban dialect, belongs to the non-agreeing type. All data from the *Stavanger* dialect are taken from Aksnes (2003).

Meteorological sentences:

- (3) (a) **Det** reggne i Hunnedalen.
it rain in Hunnedalen
(b) **Der** reggne i Hunnedalen.
there rain in Hunnedalen
- (4) (a) Snør **det** i Sirdalen?
snow it in Sirdalen
(b) Snør **der** i Sirdalen?
snow there in Sirdalen

Presentational sentences:

- (5) (a) **Det** komme mange te oss på nyttårsaften.
it come many to us on New Year's Evening
(b) **Der** komme mange te oss på nyttårsaften.
there come many to us on New Year's Evening

- (6) (a) **Det** e komt ein nye film om James Bond på kino.
it is come a new film about James Bond on cinema
(b) **Der** e komt ein nye film om James Bond på kino.
there is come a new film about James Bond on cinema

Impersonal passive sentences:

- (7) (a) I går blei **det** stjåle ein bil på Madla.
yesterday was it stolen a car at Madla
(b) I går blei **der** stjåle ein bil på Madla.
yesterday was there stolen a car at Madla
- (8) (a) På konserten i går blei **det** sunge ein fine sang.
at the concert yesterday was it sung a nice song
(b) På konserten i går blei **der** sunge ein fine sang.
at the concert yesterday was there sung a nice song

The examples shown in (3)–(8) indicate that *det* ‘it’ and *der* ‘there’ are more or less in free variation in the *Stavanger* dialect. A similar conclusion is reached in Johnsen (1962: 7ff.) for the *Kristiansand* dialect located in the far southern part of southern Norway. As already mentioned, I take this to be the general pattern for dialects allowing both subject types, but with one very crucial exception that I will come back to in section 4.

Now, consider participle agreement in impersonal passives in agreeing dialects. The relevant data were given in (2) and are repeated here for convenience.

- (2) (a) Elgen vart **skoten**. (subject and participle are m, sg)
the elk was shot
(b) Dyret vart **skote**. (subject and participle are n, sg)
the animal was shot
(c) Elgane/dyra vart **skotne**. (subject and participle are m/n, pl)
the elks/the animals were shot

Those agreeing dialects that only allow *det*-type expletive subjects, as a rule show agreement with the expletive subject. In other words, since the expletive *det*-subject is the singular neuter form of the corresponding pronoun, the participle is also in the singular neuter form. Thus, these dialects show the pattern in (9) alongside the pattern in (2).

- (9) (a) Det vart **skote** ein elg. (subject and participle are n, sg)
it was shot an elk
(b) Det vart **skote** eit dyr. (subject and participle are n, sg)
it was shot an animal
(c) Det vart **skote** fleire elgar/dyr. (subject and participle are n, sg)
it was shot many elks/animals

On the other hand, the dialects that allow both *det*- and *der*-type expletive subjects, seem to show agreement with the expletive subject if *det* is used, just like the dialects that allow only *det*-type expletive subjects, but they show agreement with the post-

verbal noun phrase if *der* is used. This is shown in (10) and (11), where (10) just repeats the pattern of the *det* only dialects shown in (9) above.

- (10) (a) Det vart **skote** ein elg. (subject and participle are n, sg)
it was shot an elk
(b) Det vart **skote** eit dyr. (subject and participle are n, sg)
it was shot an animal
(c) Det vart **skote** fleire elgar/dyr. (subject and participle are n, sg)
it was shot many elks/animals
- (11) (a) Der vart **skoten** ein elg. (participle is m, sg)
there was shot an elk
(b) Der vart **skote** eit dyr. (participle is n, sg)
there was shot an animal
(c) Der vart **skotne** fleire elgar/dyr. (participle is m/n, pl)
there were shot many elks/animals

This general characterization of the dialects that allow both types of expletive subjects, is based on the investigations of the *Stryn* dialect (situated in the middle part of western Norway) reported in Christensen & Taraldsen (1989), and also on remarks about an older variety of the *Stavanger* dialect reported in Aksnes (2003: 106). Notice, however, that there is considerable variation among dialects regarding the co-variation between subject type and agreement (see Sandøy 1988), and some dialects seem to show unstable agreement patterns. However, until further empirical investigations are done, I take what is shown in (10) and (11) to be the basic pattern.

The dialects that allow expletive subjects of both the *det*-type and the *der*-type, are (superficially) similar to English, which is a language that also allows two types of expletive subjects (*it/there*). Moreover, English has subject – finite verb agreement, which is partly similar to the subject – participle agreement shown by the participle agreeing Norwegian dialects. I will, therefore, take a look at the relevant data from English, since they may provide a clue as to the theoretical analysis of the Norwegian *det*-/*der*-alternation.

3. Analysis: English

Consider the expletive subjects *it* and *there* in English. Obviously, the distribution of *det/der* in (3)–(8) is very different from the distribution of *it/there* in the corresponding English sentences, even though the etymologies of *det/der* and *it/there* are parallel. In addition to their uses as expletive subjects, English *it* and Norwegian *det* may also be used as 3. person referential pronouns, and English *there* and Norwegian *der* may both be used as locative adverbs. Therefore, it seems reasonable to take the analysis of the English expletive subjects *it/there* as a point of departure in trying to develop an analysis for the corresponding Norwegian expletive subjects *det/der*.

The basic facts concerning expletive subjects in English are very clear. That is, if the expletive subject has no postverbal associate DP, the expletive subject shows up as *it*. If, however, there is a postverbal associate DP, the expletive subject shows up as *there*. This is shown in (12a–b) and (12c–d), respectively.

- (12) (a) It is raining outside.
(b) It snows heavily today.
(c) There is rain outside.
(d) There is snow in the mountains.

I will suggest an analysis of this distribution, adopting a primitive mechanism of valued and unvalued features (see for instance Adger 2003, Radford 2004). More specifically, I will make two assumptions. First, since English has subject – finite verb agreement, there are unvalued agreement features (Number-u, Person-u) in finite T that must be valued.¹ Second, the expletive subject *it* contains inherently valued Number and Person agreement features (Number-sg, Person-3), whereas the expletive subject *there* does not contain any agreement features at all. Similar assumptions, *mutatis mutandis*, are made in Groat (1995).

Consider the facts in (12) with these assumptions in mind. In (12a–b), unvalued T can only be valued by the expletive subject, since there are no other candidates around that can possibly value T. Therefore, the expletive subject must be of the type that has inherently valued agreement features, namely *it*. If *there* is chosen as expletive subject, T cannot be valued since *there* does not contain any agreement features, leading the derivation to crash, as in (13a–b)

- (13) (a) *There is raining outside.
(b) *There snows heavily today.

Turning now to (12c–d), *there* cannot value unvalued T, and therefore a postverbal associate DP is required to value T. The examples in (14) and (15) indicate that agreement on T is valued by the postverbal associate DP. The only role played by the expletive subject *there* is, thus, to satisfy the EPP.²

- (14) (a) There is rain outside.
(b) There are raindrops outside.
- (15) (a) There is a dog in the street.
(b) There are some dogs in the street.

One problem with this analysis is why *it* cannot be (optionally) used as an expletive subject even in examples like (12c–d). Why is *there* preferred to *it* when a postverbal associate DP is present? In other words, why are examples like (16a–b) ungrammatical?

¹ In contemporary generative syntax, T is the head of the T(ense)-projection. T accommodates the tense feature of the clause, as well as other features like agreement. The T-projection is situated above the verb phrase, and the verb relates to T either by movement or by some other mechanism like the probe – goal relation that associates the finite verb with the relevant features, see Adger (2003), Radford (2004).

² The EPP or the Extended Projection Principle is the requirement that a clause must have a subject, see Adger (2003), Radford (2004).

- (16) (a) *It is rain outside.
(b) *It is snow in the mountains.

This is a difficult problem, especially when comparable Norwegian data are taken into account. I will suggest a solution to the problem posed by (16a–b) in section 6, after the relevant Norwegian data have been discussed.

4. Analysis: Norwegian

It is clear that the Norwegian expletive subjects *det/der* (at least in the *Stavanger* and *Kristiansand* dialects) do not behave like the English counterparts *it/there*, as evidenced by comparing the English patterns in the preceding section with the *Stavanger* data in (3)–(8). To exemplify, the meteorological sentences from the *Stavanger* dialect are repeated for convenience.

- (3) (a) **Det** reggne i Hunnedalen.
it rain in Hunnedalen
(b) **Der** reggne i Hunnedalen.
there rain in Hunnedalen

The crucial difference is that Norwegian meteorological sentences allow both *det* and *der* as expletive subjects, whereas comparable sentences in English only allow *it*. Tentatively assuming that T in Norwegian is like T in English in containing unvalued agreement features that have to be valued (an assumption that will be revised below), the a-version in (3) is as expected. However, the grammaticality of the b-version is unexpected. If Norwegian *der* is like English *there* in lacking agreement features altogether, T cannot be valued, and the derivation should crash for the same reason that the derivations of English (13a–b) crash.

One possible solution to this problem could be to assume that Norwegian *der*, as opposed to English *there*, does contain agreement features, i.e. that the two expletive subjects in Norwegian have the same feature specification. That would explain why the two subjects are in free variation in (3); both subjects would be equally good at valuing the unvalued agreement features that, for the time being, are assumed to be situated in T.

However, the assumption that *det* and *der* have the same feature specification in Norwegian raises a serious problem, since, in certain cases, the expletive subjects *det* and *der* do not seem to be in free variation in the Norwegian dialects that otherwise allow both subjects, contrary to the general pattern described in section 2. Specifically, they are not in full free variation in clauses with subject – participle agreement. The *Stavanger* dialect has very little subject – participle agreement (but see below), but the *Stryn* dialect reported in Christensen and Taraldsen (1989) has a well-developed system of subject – participle agreement, as illustrated in (17)–(18). These examples are adapted from Christensen and Taraldsen (*op. cit.*), where corresponding examples with presentational sentences are given.

- (17) Der [Ø] er nett **skotne** [m, pl] (*skote) **nokre elgar** [m, pl].
there is just shot some elks

- (18) **Det** [n, sg] er nett **skote** [n, sg] (*skotne) nokre elgar [m, pl].
it is just shot some elks

Here, (17) shows that if the expletive subject is *der*, participle agreement is obligatory with the postverbal associate DP. However, if the expletive subject is *det*, participle agreement is obligatory with the expletive subject. This clearly suggests, among other things, that *der* has no agreement features, like *there* in English, whereas *det*, like *it* in English, is specified for agreement features. Moreover, the data also indicate that the participle has unvalued agreement features that are valued by the postverbal associate DP in (17), and by the expletive subject in (18).

As for the parallel to English, notice that the participle – associate DP agreement in (17) resembles the finite verb – associate DP agreement found in English, whereas the grammaticality of (18) is unexpected from an English perspective, cf. (16) in section 3. Thus, the data from the *Stryn*-type dialect shown here are interestingly parallel to the English data to some extent (agreement with the associate DP), but there are crucial differences as well (the grammaticality of (18) versus the ungrammaticality of (16)).

The task now is to develop an analysis of the Norwegian data, both from *Stavanger* and from *Stryn*, that can also be extended to the English data. As for the apparent *Stavanger* – *Stryn* contrast (*det/der* in free variation contra *det/der* co-variation with participle agreement), one possible approach that could be imagined, would be to assume that the expletive subject *der* has different feature specification in the *Stavanger* dialect as opposed to the *Stryn* dialect, namely that it has the same specification as *det* in the *Stavanger* dialect (accounting for free variation), whereas it has no agreement features in the *Stryn* dialect (accounting for the fact that *der* implies participle agreement with a postverbal associate DP). However, I will not follow this approach, first, because it has a stipulative flavour to it, and second, because it can be argued even for the *Stavanger* dialect that *der* has no agreement features.

The *Stavanger* dialect generally has invariant non-agreeing participles (i.e. the singular neuter form), and, as expected, *det* and *der* are in free variation with these non-agreeing participles, as illustrated in (19) (now assuming different feature specifications for *det* and *der*). Notice that *Gen* and *Num* are abbreviations for the agreement categories gender and number, respectively.

- (19) (a) **Bilen** [Gen-m, Num-sg] blei stjåle.
the car was stolen
(b) **Det** [Gen-n, Num-sg] blei stjåle ein bil.
it was stolen a car
(c) **Der** [Ø] blei stjåle ein bil.
there was stolen a car

However, some older speakers still use an agreeing participle, as illustrated in (20a), in which case the participle has unvalued agreement features that must be valued. Importantly, the choice of expletive subject does not appear to be free for these speakers. For instance, if the masculine singular form of the participle is used in an impersonal construction, only *der* seems to be allowed as an expletive subject, not *det*, as shown in (20b) vs. (20c), see Aksnes (2003: 106). Notice that the feature

specifications in square brackets indicate features associated with the items themselves (u = unvalued), and that the feature specifications in round brackets are the specifications assumed to be acquired by the participle as a result of valuation.

(20) (a) **Bilen** [Gen-m, Num-sg] blei stjålen [Gen-u, Num-u].
(Gen-m, Num-sg)
the car was stolen

(b) ??Det [Gen-n, Num-sg] blei stjålen [Gen-u, Num-u] **ein bil** [Gen-m, Num-sg].
(Gen-m, Num-sg)
it was stolen a car

(c) Der [Ø] blei stjålen [Gen-u, Num-u] **ein bil** [Gen-m, Num-sg].
(Gen-m, Num-sg)
there was stolen a car

This is exactly the situation found with agreeing participles in the *Stryn* dialect, as shown in (17) and (18). It must therefore be concluded that the featural make-up of *der* (no agreement features) is the same in the *Stryn* and *Stavanger* dialects.

What are the theoretical ramifications of these facts? Actually, what the patterns discussed above show, is that the rigid distributions of *it/there* in English and of *det/der* in Norwegian are correlated with the presence of unvalued agreement features elsewhere in the structure. Given that situation, a reasonable hypothesis is that free variation as to the type of expletive subject allowed in many instances in Norwegian is correlated with the absence of unvalued agreement features elsewhere in the structure. Following this idea, I will assume that finite T in all Norwegian dialects, as opposed to finite T in English, does not contain unvalued agreement features (or any agreement features at all for that matter), see Åfarli (1998) for an earlier version of this idea. This assumption is supported by the existence of visible subject – finite verb agreement in English and its non-existence in Norwegian. My basic assumptions concerning finite T and agreement are given in (21).

- (21) (a) Finite T in a given language/dialect may or may not contain (unvalued) verbal agreement features.
(b) Finite T contains verbal agreement features only if such features are morphologically visible in the language (as a type).
(c) Unvalued verbal agreement features in finite T must be valued by the agreement features of a DP.
(d) The agreement features of DPs are inherently valued.
(e) *Det/it* has agreement features, whereas *der/there* does not.

Furthermore, I assume that passive participles contain unvalued agreement features in some Norwegian dialects (including at least the *Stryn* dialect and older varieties of the *Stavanger* dialect), which is indicated by the presence of visible agreement morphology on the participle in these dialects. I will now consider some interesting consequences of these assumptions.

5. Some consequences

The theoretical assumptions made in (21) above have the following consequences. First, consider English very briefly. Since English has visible subject – verb agreement with finite verbs, there are unvalued agreement features in T that must be valued by the inherent features of a DP, either an expletive *it* DP or a postverbal associate DP. This yields the facts in (12)–(15), but notice that (16) is still a problem (to be tackled in the next section).

As for Norwegian, there is generally no visible subject – verb agreement with finite verbs, so Norwegian has no agreement features in T. That means that the featural make-up of the expletive subject has no consequences, and therefore *det* (with inherent agreement features) and *der* (with no agreement features) are in free variation, as seen e.g. in the *Stavanger* dialect, cf. (3)–(8). My assumptions are also compatible with the possibility that a given dialect may use only one of the expletive subjects as its favoured expletive, a possibility that is realised in the many Norwegian dialects that allow only *det* as an expletive subject.

Turning to dialects, like the *Stryn* dialect, that have both types of expletive subject as well as participle agreement, we have noticed that *det* and *der* are not fully in free variation in sentences with participles, since the choice of expletive subject co-varies with the agreement morphology on the participle, cf. (17)–(18). How should this co-variation be explained?

Recall that visible agreement morphology on the participle is taken as an indication that the participle is associated with unvalued agreement features that must be valued by the inherent features of a DP, either an expletive *det* DP or a postverbal associate DP. This is similar to the situation in English (except that in English it is T that has the unvalued features).

Let us now take a closer look at the data from the *Stryn*-type dialect and try to explain the patterns, exploiting the machinery that has been assumed. Consider first the ungrammatical (22) with *der* as expletive subject and a non-agreeing participle. Recall that that the feature specifications in round brackets are the specifications assumed to be acquired by the participle as a result of valuation.

- (22) ***Der** [Ø] er **skote** [Gen-u, Num-u] **nokre elgar** [Gen-m, Num-pl]
(Gen-n, Num-sg)
there is shot some elks

In (22), since *der* does not contain any agreement features, only the postverbal DP can possibly value the unvalued features of the participle, but since the participle doesn't in fact agree with the associate DP, proper valuation evidently has not taken place and the derivation crashes. (23), on the other hand, is identical to (22), except that the participle in fact agrees with the associate DP, and therefore proper valuation must have taken place and the derivation converges.

- (23) **Der** [Ø] er **skotne** [Gen-u, Num-u] **nokre elgar** [Gen-m, Num-pl]
(Gen-m, Num-pl)
there is shot some elks

Furthermore, consider the same structures with *det* as expletive subject instead of *der*. (24) is grammatical, and evidently the participle has been valued by *det* (both *det* and the participle are specified as Gen-n, Num-sg), which is of course possible since *det*, as opposed to *der*, has inherently specified agreement features.

- (24) **Det** [Gen-n, Num-sg] er **skote** [Gen-u, Num-u] **nokre elgar** [Gen-m, Num-pl]
 (Gen-n, Num-sg)
 It is shot some elks

In the approach followed here, only unvalued features must be valued/checked, so the inherent features of the associate DP need no checking. However, as shown in (23), the features of an associate DP are in principle capable of checking the unvalued features of the participle in Norwegian. Therefore, since the inherent features of *det* need no checking (by the same logic as the inherent features of the associate DP need no checking), *det* and the associate DP compete for valuing the participle when both are present. Therefore, both (24), with the participle valued by *det*, and (25) below, with the participle valued by the associate DP, should have been grammatical. However, (25) is ungrammatical, which must mean that *det* somehow has priority over the associate DP in cases where the two DPs compete for valuation of the participle.

- (25) ***Det** [Gen-n, Num-sg] er **skotne** [Gen-u, Num-u] **nokre elgar** [Gen-m, Num-pl]
 (Gen-m, Num-pl)
 it is shot some elks

Notice, however, that my own preliminary investigations of other Norwegian dialects that employ both *det* and *der* as expletive subjects as well as passive participles of the agreeing type, indicate that these other dialects in fact allow the type in (25) alongside (24), see also Sandøy (1988: 109f.). Investigation of these dialects belongs to future work, and for the time being I will stick to the *Stryn*-type dialects, which seem to show the judgement pattern in (24)–(25).

Even though the analysis developed so far explains most of the English and Norwegian data, we are still left with two important puzzles. First, why should *det* have priority over the associate DP when it comes to valuation of the participle in *Stryn*-type dialects, as shown in the grammatical (24) vs. the ungrammatical (25)? Second, given the situation in English, why is even (24) grammatical? In fact, among the structures (22)–(25), only (23) should have been grammatical from the viewpoint of English.

This now relates to our unsolved problem from section 3, which was why the examples in (16) are ungrammatical. These examples are repeated here for convenience.

- (16) (a) * It is rain outside.
 (b) *It is snow in the mountains.

In other words, the ungrammaticality of (16) contrasts with the grammaticality of (24). This contrast is unexpected since both English and the *Stryn*-type dialects have two comparable types of expletive subject and both languages/dialects have unvalued verbal agreement features that may in principle be valued by the *it/det* type expletive subject or by a postverbal associate DP. Nevertheless, regarding the actual valuation patterns, the relevant Norwegian dialects are more permissive than English in allowing the type in (24).

6. Puzzles and problems: toward a solution

I will now take a closer look at the reason why the *Stryn*-type Norwegian example in (24) is grammatical at all, given the ungrammaticality of the English examples in (16) specifically. I will also take a closer look at the reason why the *Stryn*-type Norwegian example in (25) is ungrammatical.

Notice first that among the Norwegian dialects that allow only *det* as expletive subject, there are dialects that have agreeing participles. This is the case for the dialect in *Halsa* in the far northern part of western Norway. In that dialect (22) and (23) are of course excluded (since the dialect lacks *der* as a possible expletive subject). Moreover, (25) is also excluded, and (24), with the participle agreeing with *det*, is the only possibility. In other words, we have here a dialect with unvalued participles, and in an impersonal structure with a postverbal associate DP and with *det* as the only possible expletive subject, the expletive subject must value the participle, even though the postverbal DP is in principle available. This suggests two things. First, the postverbal associate DP in an impersonal sentence is fully licensed on its own (e.g. without being involved in the valuing of the participle). Second, the expletive subject has priority over the postverbal associate DP when it comes to valuation of the participle.

The fact that the expletive subject has priority over the postverbal associate DP regarding valuation of the participle can be explained by assuming that the expletive subject is closer than the associate DP to the site of the unvalued agreement features at the relevant point in the derivation. The relevant notion of closeness can be established on an analysis where the site of the unvalued agreement features is a designated functional projection that has the participle as its complement, and with the expletive subject generated as a specifier of that functional projection. On such an analysis, the subject is always closer to the unvalued features of the participle than the postverbal associate DP is. Therefore, if the subject has inherent agreement features, it will have priority over the postverbal associate DP as to valuation. In other words, it is only in cases where the expletive subject lacks inherent agreement features that the postverbal associate DP can value the participle. This explains why (24) is grammatical and (25) is ungrammatical both in the *Stryn*-type dialect and in the *Halsa* dialect. However, this analysis still leaves the ungrammaticality of the English examples in (16) as a real puzzle, a problem that I will turn to now.

One thing that is similar in English and Norwegian is the following: If the finite verb or the participle unambiguously agrees with a postverbal associate DP, then the expletive subject must be of the type without inherent agreement features, i.e. the adverb type *there/der*. This is directly predicted by the analysis in the preceding paragraph. However, a crucial difference between English and Norwegian is that English disallows the *it*-type expletive if there is a postverbal associate DP

present in the structure, hence the ungrammaticality of (16), whereas Norwegian allows the *det*-type expletive even if there is a postverbal associate DP (as long as the participle agrees with the expletive), hence the grammaticality of (24). Why is there a difference between the two languages in this regard?

Another way to state the difference is to say that English, unlike Norwegian, requires agreement with an associate DP, if such a DP is contained in the structure. I take this to mean that an associate DP in English cannot be licensed unless it agrees with T. Thus, if *it* is chosen as an expletive subject in structures like (16), the expletive subject is forced to agree with T because it is the closest element, and the postverbal DP will not be involved in valuation, and it will therefore not be licensed. Hence, structures like (16) must be ungrammatical in English. In other words, in structures like (16), the presence of *there* is obligatory in order to force the unvalued agreement features of T to be valued by the associate DP so that the associate DP can be licensed. In Norwegian, on the other hand, a postverbal associate DP is licensed without being involved in agreement licensing (as suggested above), so there is no requirement that an associate DP must take part in agreement valuation in Norwegian. This explains the otherwise puzzling difference between English (16) and Norwegian (24).

The proposed difference between English and Norwegian in the licensing requirements of postverbal associate DPs is stipulated as a parametric difference in this analysis. However, notice that Norwegian is far more permissive than English in allowing postverbal associate DPs in impersonal construction than English is. This may be connected to the difference in licensing requirements proposed here. A fuller investigation of these matters belongs to future work.

7. Summary and conclusion

English has unvalued T, and therefore English shows subject – finite verb agreement. Further, an associate DP in an impersonal construction must be licensed by valuing unvalued T in English. This is the reason why *there* is obligatory as an expletive subject if the structure contains an associate DP. This solves the problem posed by the ungrammaticality of (16) in English.

Norwegian has T without any (unvalued) agreement features, and thus, as far as T is concerned, *det* and *der* are in free variation in dialects that have both subject types. This situation is also compatible with the fact that many dialects only allow *det*. However, many Norwegian dialects have passive participles with unvalued agreement features. In these dialects, *det* and *der* co-vary with agreement morphology on the passive participle such that the presence of *det* forces agreement with *det*, whereas the presence of *der* forces agreement with the postverbal associate DP (only the first option is allowed for dialects that allow only *det*, but still have participle agreement). The first option is allowed since in Norwegian, as opposed to English, postverbal associate DPs are licensed independently of agreement valuation.

Apart from having proposed a unified analysis of the Norwegian and English data under consideration, I have also proposed certain quite far-reaching theoretical innovations whose ramifications have barely been mentioned. One of these is the idea that agreement features inherent to an item are not checked, even though they may take part in the valuation of unvalued functional agreement features. Pursuing this idea belongs to future work.

Also belonging to future work is the further empirical and theoretical investigation of the fascinating variation and complexity shown by Norwegian dialects as regards the phenomena that I have delved into in this article.

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Tor A. Åfarli,
INL, NTNU,
N-7491 Trondheim,
Norway

tor.aafarli@hf.ntnu.no