

## Chapter 13

# Expletive passives in Scandinavian – with and without objects

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Holmberg (2002) proposes an account for the variation concerning expletives, participial agreement and word order in periphrastic passives in the Mainland Scandinavian languages in terms of parameters. In this short article, the predictions of Holmberg's proposal are evaluated against a corpus study of expletive passives. It turns out that only Norwegian 1 (*bokmål*) behaves as expected given Holmberg's parameter settings; it lacks participle agreement and only displays the PCP DO word order, with few exceptions. Danish, which has the same parameter settings as Norwegian 1, is shown to have had the DO PCP order in earlier stages and this order is still used in many dialects. Norwegian 2 (*nynorsk*) and Swedish are predicted to allow both the PCP DO order and the DO PCP order, but it is shown that Norwegian 2 uses the same order as Norwegian 1, PCP DO, whereas Swedish – to the limited extent that the periphrastic passive is actually used in expletive passives – uses the DO PCP order. In both Danish and Swedish, the DO PCP order is facilitated by an incorporated negation in the DO, just as in active clauses, a fact that should presumably be reflected in the analysis.

## 1 Introduction

The interplay between agreement and word order in expletive passive constructions in Mainland Scandinavian has received considerable attention starting with Christensen & Taraldsen (1989). At first glance, the pattern seems quite clear: when the direct object (DO) precedes the participle (PCP), the latter shows agreement, but when the PCP precedes the DO, the form of the PCP is consistently neuter singular, as shown by the Swedish examples in (1).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I follow Holmberg (2002: 104) in glossing the expletive subject as EX and non-agreeing participles simply as PCP. Agreeing participles are glossed as C for common gender singular, N for neuter singular. The gender distinction is neutralised in the plural, glossed PL.



(1) Swedish (Holmberg 2002: 86)

- a. *Det blev skrivet / \*skrivna tre böcker om detta.*  
EX became written.N / written.PL three books about this  
'Three books were written about this.'
- b. *Det blev tre böcker \*skrivet / skrivna om detta.*  
EX became three books written.N / written.PL about this  
'Three books were written about this.'

In his detailed study of these constructions, Holmberg (2002) proposes several parameters in order to account for the variation. One parameter determines whether or not the expletive and the participle have  $\phi$ -features.<sup>2</sup> In Swedish, both the expletive *det* ('it', neut. sing.) and the participle are assumed to have  $\phi$ -features. Consequently the participle can agree either with the expletive or with the DO and both orders are possible, as shown in (1). In Danish, both the expletive *der* ('there') and the participle lack  $\phi$ -features and only the PCP DO order should be possible, see (2) (cf. Holmberg p. 104). Norwegian displays more variation; the *bokmål* varieties (Holmberg's Norwegian 1) use *det* as expletive and lack participle agreement (3), whereas the *nynorsk* varieties (Holmberg's Norwegian 2) have agreeing participles (4) and hence are predicted to allow the order DO PCP.<sup>3</sup>

(2) Danish (Holmberg 2002: 104)

- a. *Der blev skrivet tre bøger om dette.*  
EX became written.PCP three books about this  
'Three books were written about this.'
- b. *\*Der blev tre bøger skrivet om dette.*  
EX became three books written.PCP about this

(3) Norwegian 1 (cf. Holmberg 2002: 104)

- a. *Det ble skrevet tre bøker om dette.*  
EX became written.PCP three books about this  
'Three books were written about this.'
- b. *\*Det ble tre bøker skrevet om dette.*  
EX became three books written.PCP about this

<sup>2</sup>See the helpful survey in the Appendix (Holmberg 2002: 125f).

<sup>3</sup>In addition Holmberg identifies a third variety, Norwegian 3, which uses the locative expletive *der* but has participle agreement. He also notes that there is actually more dialectal variation in Norway. This is confirmed in a recent study by Aa et al. (2014).

(4) Norwegian 2 (cf. Holmberg 2002: 104)

- a. *Det vart skrive / \*skrivne tre bøker um dette.*  
 EX became written.N / written.PL three books about this  
 ‘Three books were written about this.’
- b. *Det vart tre bøker \*skrive / skrivne um dette.*  
 EX became three books written.N / written.PL about this  
 ‘Three books were written about this.’

Another parameter proposed by Holmberg (2002: 106f) is whether the Participle Phrase (PrtP) is a phase or not, in the sense of Chomsky (2001).<sup>4</sup> In Norwegian 2 and Swedish, where PrtP is assumed to be a phase, the participle is “formally stronger” and the PrtP is “more sentence-like” than in Danish and Norwegian 1. If the PrtP is not a separate phase, examples like (3a) in Norwegian 1 will consist of a single array with the expletive merged with VP, shown in (5a) before spell-out and spelled out as (5b).

(5) Norwegian 1 (Holmberg 2002: 106)

- a. C [TP det T [AuxP bli [PrtP t Prt [vP V DP]]]]
- b. *Det ble skrevet mange bøker.*  
 EX became written.PCP many books  
 ‘Many books were written.’

If PrtP is a separate phase, as in Swedish, the lexical array is divided into two subarrays, according to Holmberg (2002: 106). One contains C, T and the auxiliary and the other contains the participle, V and the DP. The expletive may belong to either array, which accounts for the two word orders. If the expletive belongs to the second subarray, the derivation will be as in (5), but if it belongs to the first subarray, the DP object has to move to SpecPrtP in order to satisfy the EPP-feature on the head. Holmberg’s illustration is given in (6) (cf. the Swedish example in (1b)).

(6) Swedish (Holmberg 2002: 107)

- a. C [TP det T [AuxP t bli [PrtP DP Prt [vP V t]]]]
- b. *Det blev många böcker skrivna.*  
 EX became many books written.PL  
 ‘Many books were written.’

<sup>4</sup>This parameter is necessary in order to account for the word order and agreement patterns in corresponding structures in English and Icelandic, see Holmberg (2002: 105).

In this article I show that the pattern of variation is more complex than assumed by Holmberg and that other factors need to be taken into account, in particular whether or not the object has an incorporated negation.

## 2 Transitive expletive constructions, word order and agreement

Before discussing to what extent the patterns shown in (1)–(4) reflect the ways expletive passives are used, a few words about the distribution of the two passive forms in Mainland Scandinavian are in order, viz. the periphrastic and the morphological passive. For obvious reasons, Holmberg (2002) limits his discussion to periphrastic passives, i.e. passives formed with an auxiliary and a participle, as shown in (1)–(4).<sup>5</sup> The morphological passive is formed by adding *-s* to the infinitive or the tensed form of the verb. The choice of passive form – periphrastic passive or *s*-passive – depends on several factors such as genre, tense, mood, animacy of the subject, control, event structure and to some extent lexical preferences (see Sundman 1987, Engdahl 1999; 2006 and Laanemets 2012: 47–61 for overviews and De Cuypere et al. 2014 for a multivariate statistical analysis). The data in the next three subsections come from the extensive corpus study in Laanemets (2012), complemented by some specific searches for impersonal passives.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1 Swedish

In Swedish there is a clear preference for the *s*-passive in general; *s*-passive is used in 97% of all passive verb phrases in written texts (newspapers and novels) and in 85% of all passive phrases in informal conversations (Laanemets 2012: 92). This also applies to transitive expletive passives; only 1–3% are *bli*-passives, varying somewhat with genre.<sup>7</sup> This means that Holmberg's examples in (1) are rather unusual. The normal way of conveying this message in Swedish would be with an *s*-passive as in (7).

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<sup>5</sup>In Danish, Norwegian 1 and Swedish, the auxiliary is *bli* 'become' (*blive* in Danish); in Norwegian 2 and some Swedish dialects, the preferred auxiliary is *varda* 'become'.

<sup>6</sup>Laanemets (2012) extracted *s*- and *bli(ve)*-passives from comparable written and spoken corpora in Danish, Norwegian (*bokmål*) and Swedish and annotated around 11 300 passive examples.

<sup>7</sup>Hedlund (1992: Chapter 3) discusses *bli*-passives without mentioning their limited distribution. Periphrastic passives with *få* 'get' are discussed in Larsson (2012).

(7) Swedish

*Det har skrivits tre böcker om detta.*

EX has written.s three books about this

‘Three books have been written about this.’

Among the 3176 Swedish passive examples analysed by Laanemets, there were 108 impersonal passives with expletive subjects and of these only three were transitive *bli*-passives. One example from spoken Swedish is shown in (8).

(8) Swedish, spoken (Laanemets 2012)

*men jag har en känsla av att det blir inte någonting gjort där*

but I have a feeling of that EX becomes not something done.N there

*ändå*

still

‘but I have a feeling that still nothing gets done there’

All three examples had the word order DO PCP. They resemble the authentic examples in (9).

(9) Swedish (Engdahl 1999: 31)

a. *Det blev inte så mycket sagt kanske.*

EX became not so much.N said.N maybe

‘Not much was said, maybe’

b. *Men då blev det ingenting gjort.*

but then became EX nothing.N done.N

‘But nothing got done then.’

The examples in (8) and (9) sound quite natural, unlike (1). Note that they all contain a negative element, either the negation *inte* ‘not’ or *ingenting* ‘nothing’. In order to find a wider range of examples, Anu Laanemets and I carried out a search in an 800 million subcorpus of *Korp*, looking for instances of this pattern, i.e. *det*, followed or preceded by a form of the lemma *BLI*, with an optional adverb or negation, a quantifying pronoun or numeral, a noun and a participle.<sup>8</sup> The search produced 283 examples which gives us a relative frequency of 0.4 per

<sup>8</sup>We searched in newspapers, novels and blogs using the schematic search string in (i):

(i) {det BLI | BLI det} [ ]{0,1} {INGEN | MYCKEN | MÅNGEN | NÅGON | artikel | pronomen | grundtal } [ ]{0,1} PCP ej-NN

See Engdahl & Laanemets (2015a) for details about the corpus searches.

million words. This can be compared to transitive expletive *s*-passives as in (7) which were used around 50 times per million words in the same corpora, i.e. a hundred times more often.

Some representative examples from the corpus search are given in (10).<sup>9</sup> The participle agrees with the preceding DO, as predicted.

(10) Swedish (*Korp*)

- a. *Det blev ingen post utdelad alls igår.*  
EX became no post.c distributed.c at-all yesterday  
'No post whatsoever was distributed yesterday.'
- b. *Jag sitter där vid datorn och ska skriva, jag vet vad jag ska göra men det blir ändå inget gjort.*  
I sit there by computer.DEF and shall write I know what I shall do but EX becomes still nothing.N done.N  
'I sit there in front of the computer, about to write, I know what I should do, but still nothing gets done.'
- c. *Utan deras försörjning och rimliga villkor, blir det inga filmer gjorda, inga böcker skrivna, inga låtar komponerade.*  
without their support and reasonable conditions become EX no films made.PL no books written.PL no songs composed.PL  
'Without their support and reasonable conditions, there won't be any films made, books written or songs composed.'

This type of expletive passive is used primarily when an expected result does not occur: about two thirds of the hits are negated. The construction is also used to emphasize that a result was obtained, (11a), often with a numeric specification, as in (11b,c), cf. (1b).

(11) Swedish (*Korp*)

- a. *“så hit med en skyffel så det blir något gjort.”*  
so here with a shovel so EX becomes something.N done.N  
'Hand me a shovel so that something gets done.'
- b. *I går blev det bara två mål insläppta,*  
yesterday became EX only two goals let-in.PL  
'Yesterday only two goals were let in.'

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<sup>9</sup>The whole dataset with our annotations is available: [https://svn.spraakbanken.gu.se/sb-arkiv/pub/engdahl/Opersonlig\\_passiv](https://svn.spraakbanken.gu.se/sb-arkiv/pub/engdahl/Opersonlig_passiv).

- c. *Allt som allt blev det fem hus byggda.*  
 all as all became EX five houses built.PL  
 ‘Altogether there were five houses built.’

We also searched for the order PCP DO and found one example, see (12a), where the participle is in the neuter singular form.

(12) Swedish (*Korp*)

- a. *Så det blev inte skrivet någon berättelse om loppet.*  
 so EX became not written.PCP any story.C about race.DEF  
 ‘So no story about the race was written.’
- b. ? *Så det blev ingen berättelse om loppet skriven.*  
 so EX became no story.C about race.DEF written.C
- c. *Så det blev ingen berättelse skriven om loppet.*  
 so EX became no story.C written.C about race.DEF

This example is actually quite similar to Holmberg’s (1a); note the complex noun phrase placed after the participle. Placing the entire noun phrase before the participle is less felicitous (12b), whereas splitting it up is OK (12c), just as in Holmberg’s (1b).

We can conclude that practically all the authentic examples in Swedish have the DO PCP order and that the DO is very often negated. The opposite order is grammatical, but used very sparingly, primarily when some other factor such as weight influences the word order. One way of integrating this finding with Holmberg’s analysis would be to assume something along the following lines: whether the expletive belongs to the first or the second subarray depends on the complexity of the DP and whether or not there is a negation present.

### 3 Danish

In Danish, the *blive*-passive and the *s*-passive are distributed more evenly than in Swedish. *s*-passive is primarily used in the present tense and with infinitives, especially following modal verbs. The periphrastic *blive*-passive dominates all the other tenses. Heltoft & Falster Jakobsen (1996) claim that the choice of passive form reflects a mood distinction in Danish; *s*-passive is used in objective statements whose validity is independent of the speaker, whereas *blive*-passive is preferred when the speaker makes a subjective judgment about some event that

s/he has first hand knowledge about.<sup>10</sup> Among the 4765 Danish passive examples analysed by Laanemets (2012), roughly 10% (474) were impersonal passives and of these 185 were transitive *blive*-passives, as illustrated in (13).

- (13) a. Danish, spoken (Laanemets 2012)  
*der bliver næsten ikke optaget nye elever*  
EX becomes almost not admitted.PCP new pupils  
‘Hardly any new pupils are admitted.’
- b. Danish, written (Laanemets 2012)  
*Der er blevet produceret flere terrorister i de sidste år*  
EX is become produced.PCP more terrorists in the last years  
*pga. den politik,*  
because-of that policy  
‘More terrorists have been produced in recent years because of that policy.’

All of these examples had the word order PCP DO, without participle agreement, as expected on Holmberg’s analysis. In order to find out if the DO PCP order is used at all, we carried out a similar search to the one in Swedish in the 56 million word corpus *KorpusDK*. We found altogether eleven examples, eight of which were negated, see (14b,c).

- (14) Danish (*KorpusDK*)
- a. *Hver gang der bliver en ny indlagt, skal man sætte sig*  
every time EX becomes a new admitted.PCP shall one put REFL  
*ind i patientens journaler.*  
into in patient.DEF.POSS notes  
‘Every time a new patient is admitted, one has to familiarize oneself with his/her notes.’
- b. *Der blev ingenting sagt, før det ringede på døren,*  
EX became nothing said.PCP before EX rang on door.DEF  
‘Nothing was said before the door bell rang.’
- c. *Ifølge SAS blev der ingen fejl fundet på nogle af*  
according SAS became EX no fault found.PCP on any of

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<sup>10</sup>This view is also put forward in the Danish reference grammar (Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 747ff). See Laanemets (2012: 101ff) for a critical assessment.



*flyene,*

planes.DEF

‘According to SAS, no fault was found on any of the planes.’

These examples resemble the Swedish ones except that the participles lack agreement. The DO PCP order is also used in spoken Danish, as shown in (15). The examples come from the *Nordic Dialect Corpus* (NDC).

- (15) a. Danish (NDC, østjylland2)

*der blev inte noget gjort ved det\_der*

EX became not anything done.PCP with that

‘Nothing was done with that.’

- b. Danish (NDC, fyn2)

*klokken fem om morgenen der blev der én skudt ned*

clock.DEF five in morning there became EX one.C shot.PCP down

‘At 5 o’clock in the morning one person was shot down there.’

According to Pedersen (2017), the DO PCP order is, or has been, possible in all Danish dialects and is still the preferred order in Sønderjylland (North Schleswig) as shown in (16).

- (16) Danish, Sønderjylland (K. M. Pedersen, p.c.)

*da blev der en stor gryde grød kogt hver dag*

then became EX a large pot porridge.c cooked.PCP every day

‘Then a large pot of porridge was cooked every day.’

Note that the participle has the neuter singular form even when placed after a non-neuter object in (15b) and (16). In older Danish, when the DO PCP order was more common, agreeing participles were used, as shown in the following examples from Høysgaard (1752[1979]), supplied by K. M. Pedersen (e-mail, April 2015). Later grammars such as Mikkelsen (1894; 1911[1975]) do not have any examples with agreeing participles.

- (17) Danish (Høysgaard 1752[1979]: 327)

*Der blev en sølvske staaen.*

EX became a silverspoon.c stolen.c

‘A silver spoon was stolen.’

- (18) Danish (Høysgaard 1752[1979]: 345)

Der **blev** en Død **udbaaren**.

EX became a dead.c out-carried.c

‘A dead person was carried out.’

In contemporary Danish, only the dialect spoken in the island of Bornholm has agreeing participles, see the example in (19).<sup>11</sup>

- (19) Danish, Bornholm (K. M. Pedersen, e-mail, April 2015)

Dær **ble** ejnj værja **tesatter**.

EX became a sword.MASC added.MASC

‘A sword was added.’

We conclude that although the dominant word order pattern in modern Danish is PCP DO, the DO PCP order, without participle agreement, is available for many dialect speakers and is often used with quantified, especially negated objects like *ingenting*. It would be interesting to look closer at the diachronic development of the modern Danish system.

## 4 Norwegian

The distribution of *s*- and *bli*-passive in Norwegian *bokmål* (Holmberg’s Norwegian 1) resembles the situation in Danish. *S*-passive is only used in the present tense and infinitives. Among the 3096 examples analysed by Laanemets (2012), 238 were impersonal passives, of which 87 transitive *bli*-passives, see the examples in (20).

- (20) Norwegian 1 (Laanemets 2012)

a. for **det ble bygd** veldig mye akkurat den tida  
because EX became built.PCP very much exactly that time.DEF  
‘because a lot was built right at that time’

b. Det **ble ikke funnet** tekniske bevis i kvinnens  
EX became not found.PCP technical evidence in woman.DEF.POSS  
*leilighet*.  
flat

‘No technical evidence was found in the womans flat.’

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<sup>11</sup>Pedersen (2013) shows that the use of *s*-passive in Bornholm also resembles the Swedish pattern.

All the examples in Laanemets (2012) had the order PCP DO, again as expected, and quantified objects were common. Using the same procedure as for Swedish and Danish, we investigated if the word order DO PCP is used in Norwegian 1. We searched in a 41.4 million word subcorpus of *Leksikografisk bokmålskorpus* (LBK) but only found a few examples.

(21) Norwegian (LBK)

a. *Dermed blir det mye vanndamp fordelt på hver*  
 with-this becomes EX much steam distributed.PCP on every  
*dråpe.*  
 drop

‘This way a lot of steam is distributed over each drop.’

b. *Ifølge Amnesty International ble det 5.000 uskyldige*  
 according Amnesty International became EX 5000 innocent  
*drept.*  
 killed.PCP

‘According to Amnesty International, 5000 innocent people were killed.’

We did not find any examples with negated pronouns or other quantified expressions, like *ingenting*, before the participle, i.e. Norwegian counterparts to (10) in Swedish or (14b) in Danish. This is presumably linked to the fact that Norwegian speakers are much less likely to prepose negated objects than Danish and Swedish speakers (see below).

With respect to *nynorsk*, Holmberg’s Norwegian 2, there is variation in the choice of expletive and whether or not the participle shows agreement, but apparently not much variation with respect to word order (see Åfarli 2009; Aa et al. 2014: 218ff). The order PCP DO dominates strongly, just as in Norwegian 1. Only one example with a preposed negated DO was found in the Oslo corpus of *nynorsk* (3.8 million words), see (22). It is not possible to tell whether the participle agrees with *det* or *ingenting*, since both are neuter.

(22) Norwegian 2 (Oslo corpus)

*Ei lang stund vart det ingenting sagt.*  
 a long while became EX nothing.N said.N

‘For a long while nothing was said.’

This resembles the examples found in Swedish and Danish. However, speakers of Norwegian 2 are less willing to accept preposed objects with numerical attributes,

as in (11b,c) and (21b). The fact that Norwegian 2 speakers accept the DO PCP order when the DO is negated distinguishes them from Norwegian 1 speakers, but more informant studies are clearly needed here.

#### 4.1 The NEG-DO PCP order

We have seen that when a direct object precedes the participle in expletive transitive *bli(ve)*-passives in Swedish and Danish, it is very often negated. This pattern is also used with active participles in Danish and Swedish, see (23).

- (23) a. Danish (Engels 2012, example (6))  
*Manden havde måske ingenting sagt.*  
man.DEF had maybe nothing said.PCP  
'Maybe the man hadn't said anything.'
- b. Swedish (Engels 2012, example (6))  
*Mannen hade kanske ingenting sagt.*  
man.DEF had maybe nothing said.PCP  
'Maybe the man hadn't said anything.'

This word order is often described as stylistically marked and reserved for formal and literary genres. However, Engels (2012) found that it is used both in spoken language and in blog texts on Google. She investigated the positioning of negated objects with five frequent verbs (the Scandinavian counterparts of *say*, *hear*, *see*, *get* and *do*) and found that 33% preceded the participle in Danish and 15% in Swedish, compared to 0% in Norwegian (see Engels 2012: Table 1).<sup>12</sup> It thus seems that one additional factor that affects the word order options is whether the language allows for incorporated negative objects to precede the participle. In Swedish, where *bli*-passives are unusual, they are primarily used with negated objects. In Danish, where expletive transitive *blive*-passives normally have the

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<sup>12</sup>In Swedish, preposing of negated objects is also possible in *s*-passive.

- (i) *Det har ingenting sagts (\*ingenting) om detta.*  
EX has nothing said.s about this  
'Nothing has been said about this.'
- (ii) *Det har (??mycket) sagts (okmycket) om detta.*  
EX has said.s much about this  
'Much has been said about this.'

word order PCP DO, most of the exceptions involve negated objects. And in Norwegian 1, where preposed negated objects are rare, we hardly find any deviations from the PCP DO order.

## 5 Double object constructions

Holmberg (2002) also discusses the word order options in double object constructions. For Swedish, he gives examples where either both objects follow the participle (24a) or where the indirect object (IO) precedes and the direct object follows the participle, (24b) .

- (24) a. Swedish (Holmberg 2002: 87)  
*Det blev givet pojken presenter.*  
 EX became given.N boy.C.DEF presents  
 ‘The boy was given presents.’
- b. Swedish (Holmberg 2002: 114)  
*Det blev inte många barn givna presenter den julen.*  
 EX became not many children given.PL presents that  
 Christmas.DEF  
 ‘Not may children were given presents that Christmas.’

The orders shown in (24) are grammatical, but hardly used. It is somewhat more common for both objects to precede the participle, especially if the indirect object is a pronoun, as also pointed out in Börjars & Vincent (2005). In that case the participle agrees with the direct object.

- (25) Swedish (Teleman et al. 1999: 4:387)
- a. *Det skulle bli oss en belöning tilldelad.*  
 EX should become us a reward.c awarded.c.  
 ‘We were supposed to receive an award.’
- b. *Det blev oss inte mycket anförtrott.*  
 EX became us not much.N confided.N  
 ‘Not much was confided to us.’
- c. *Det blev ingen särskilt mycket anförtrott.*  
 EX became nobody very much.N confided.N  
 ‘Not much was confided to anybody.’

Note that the pronominal indirect object is shifted across the negation in (25b). In (25c) the negation is incorporated into the indirect object *ingen* ('nobody').<sup>13</sup> In both Norwegian 1 and 2, it seems that only the order PCP IO DO is used, see (26).<sup>14</sup>

(26) Norwegian 2 (Faarlund et al. 1997: 845)

*Det blei nekta oss adgang.*

EX became denied.PCP us admittance

'We were denied admittance.'

Also in Danish, the preferred order is PCP IO DO, as in the following examples from *KorpusDK*.

(27) Danish (*KorpusDK*)

a. *Jeg skulle være naturlig, der blev ikke pålagt mig*

I should be natural EX beccame not imposed.PCP me

*noget.*

anything

'I was supposed to be natural, nothing was imposed on me.'

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<sup>13</sup>In this respect, the expletive double object passives differ from active versions. Whereas negated direct objects can be preposed, as shown in (23b), preposing a negated indirect object is not felicitous in Swedish.

(i) ?\* *Vi har ingen anförtrött särskilt mycket.*

we have nobody confided very much

Intended: 'We have not confided very much to anybody.'

This was brought to my attention by Björn Lundqvist (e-mail, May 2016) who mentioned a similar observation concerning Norwegian in Lødrup (1989: 22).

<sup>14</sup>The order IO PCP is found in Norwegian *bli*-passives with extraposed clauses, as shown in (i).

(i) Norwegian (*LBK*)

*Det blir meg ofte fortalt at israelske soldater scorer så høyt på motivasjon.*

EX becomes me often told.PCP that Israeli soldiers score so high on motivation

'I am often told that Israeli soldiers score high on motivation.'

Engdahl & Laanemets (2015a) argue that this type should not be analysed as expletive passives, one reason being that they are grammatical in English, (ii), where expletive passives are ungrammatical (cf. Carnie & Harley 2005).

(ii) It has to be said that the budget proposal is unlikely to pass.

- b. *Der bliver pålagt børn et alt for stort ansvar i dag.*  
 EX becomes imposed.PCP children a too for big responsibility in  
 day  
 ‘A too big responsibility is imposed on children today.’

Our corpus searches also produced some examples with IO preceding PCP, as in the examples in (28).

(28) Danish (*KorpusDK*)

- a. *De udførte blot de opgaver, der blev dem pålagt af folketingset,*  
 they carried-out just the tasks that became them imposed.PCP by  
 parliament.DEF  
 ‘They only carried out the tasks that had been imposed on them by the parliament.’
- b. *Vent og se, hvem der bliver dig tildelt.*  
 wait and see who that becomes you assigned.PCP.  
 ‘Wait and see who is assigned to you.’

However, these are not expletive transitive constructions but ordinary passives where the DO has been relativized or questioned. In modern Danish, the expletive pro-form *der* is also used as relativizer (‘that’) in subject relatives and questions. Consequently examples may be ambiguous between an expletive and a personal passive, as discussed in Engdahl & Laanemets (2015b). An example is given in (29a) which can be analysed as a relative clause with either an expletive passive (29b), or a personal passive (29c).

(29) Danish (Engdahl & Laanemets 2015b: 314)

- a. *Det er det forlig, der bliver refereret til.*  
 EX is this settlement DER becomes referred.PCP to
- b. *Det er det forlig<sub>i</sub>, [ CP [Ø]<sub>[IP der bliver refereret til e<sub>1</sub> ] ]</sub>*  
 ‘It is this settlement there are references to.’
- c. *Det er det forlig<sub>i</sub>, [ CP [ der ]<sub>[IP e<sub>1</sub> bliver refereret til ] ]</sub>*  
 ‘It is this settlement that is being referred to.’

## 6 Concluding remarks

Of the investigated language varieties, Norwegian 1 (*bokmål*) stands out as the only one that behaves as expected given Holmberg's parameters; it lacks participle agreement and only displays the PCP DO word order, with few exceptions. Danish, which has the same parameter settings as Norwegian 1, apparently had the DO PCP word order in earlier stages and this still shows up in many dialects. The assumed parameter settings for Swedish and Norwegian 2 (*nynorsk*) predict that these languages should allow both word orders. Nevertheless, there is very little evidence for this in actual use. The languages differ furthermore in which pattern is preferred; the PCP DO order is hardly used in Swedish, but is the preferred order in Norwegian 2, just as in Norwegian 1.

Although expletive *bli*-passives are very infrequent in Swedish compared with expletive *s*-passives, corpus studies have revealed a characteristic pattern where a quantified, often negated, DO precedes the participles, as illustrated in (10). The same type of DO occasionally appears preceding the participle in Danish which suggests that there may be a correlation between the availability of NEG-DO PCP order in expletive passives and in active clauses.

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## Corpora

*Korp*: <http://spraakbanken.gu.se/korp/>

*KorpusDK*: <http://ordnet.dk/korpusdk>

*Leksikografisk bokmålskorpus*: <http://www.hf.uio.no/iln/tjenester/kunnskap/sprak/korpus/skriftsprakskorpus/lbk>

*Nordic Dialect Corpus* <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/>

*Oslo Corpus of Tagged Norwegian Texts* <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/norsk/nynorsk/index.html>



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