Expletive *do/da* 'there, then' and the rise of V2 in German

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Abstract

Across the Germanic languages, we can observe a systematic correlation between a rigid V2 syntax and the existence of C-related expletives, which occupy the clause-initial position (the so-called *Vorfeld*) e.g. in existential and presentative sentences:

(1) a. **Es** ritten drei Reiter durch das Tor hinaus. (German)
   EXPL rode three riders through the gate out
 b. **Það** voru blöð, blek og pennar á borðinnu. (Icelandic)
   EXPL were paper ink and pens on table
 c. **Det** er løver i Afrika. (Norwegian)
   EXPL are lions in Africa
 d. **Er** is hier veel sneeuw. (Dutch)
   EXPL is here much snow

This correlation seems to be contradicted by diachronic facts from the history of German. More precisely, there seems to be a chronological gap between the development of a rigid V2 syntax (end of the Old High German period, 11th/12th century, cf. Lenerz 1984, Axel 2007) and the grammaticalization of the Vorfeld-expletive *es* (in the Middle High German period, 13th/14th century; cf. Brugmann 1917, Behaghel 1923, Lenerz 1985, Abraham 1993).

This paper claims that the close connection between V2 and the existence of Vorfeld-expletives can be maintained, arguing that in German, the rise of a rigid V2 syntax was accompanied by the development of a C-related expletive *do/da* via a reanalysis of the discourse-anaphoric adverbs *tho/do* 'then' and *thar/da* 'there'. The expletive *do/da* was later replaced by the new expletive *es*, but is still found in dialectal varieties of German such as Bavarian which make only sparse use of the Vorfeld-*es* (cf. Weiß 1998):

(2) **Do/*Es** is gsunga und gtanzt worn.
   EXPL is sung and danced been
   'There was singing and dancing.'

Focusing on presentative and existential constructions, the paper discusses the distribution of expletive *do/da* in current (dialectal) and historical varieties of German and proposes a new theoretical explanation for the correlation between C-related expletives and a rigid V2 syntax.