

Syntax

Expletives as Arguments: Germanic Existential Sentences Revisited

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We propose an analysis for expletive-associate constructions within the minimalist framework outlined by Chomsky (1991, and later). Specifically, we argue that the expletive is an argument expression that must raise to the (most) external subject position in order to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle and check nominative case, while number agreement is checked by the associate. We present evidence against the assumption that the associate is assigned inherent or structural partitive by the verb, and instead suggest that it receives default case. In conjunction with the Kratzer/Diesing theory of indefinites, our analysis is shown to account for some well-known semantic restrictions on existential sentences, as well as for the relatively weaker definiteness effects observed in transitive expletive constructions.