

Expletives in competition: diverging pathways of change in English and Icelandic

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ICHL24, July 2019

1 Introduction

1.1 Types of expletive in existentials/presentationals

- All present-day Germanic languages have an expletive which is available in existentials/presentationals.
- In certain languages this is formally identical to the locative adverb 'there' (THERE):

- (1) a. **There** came *a man* into the garden. (English)
b. **Er** kwam *een man* de tuin in (Dutch)
THERE come.PST a man the garden in
'There came a man into the garden.'
c. **Der** kom *en mand* ind i haven. (Danish)
THERE come.PST a man in in garden.DEF
'There came a man into the garden.'

- In others this is formally identical to the neuter pronoun 'it' (IT):

- (2) a. **Það** kom *maður* inn í garðinn. (Icelandic)
IT come.PST man.NOM in in garden.ACC.DEF
'There came a man into the garden.'
b. **Es** kam *ein Mann* in den Garten. (German)
IT come.PST a.NOM man.NOM in DEF.ACC garten
'There came a man into the garden.'
c. **Det** kom *en man* in i trädgården. (Swedish)
IT come.PST a man in in garden.DEF
'There came a man into the garden.'

- Present-day English does not allow IT in existentials/presentationals:

- (3) ***It** came *a man* into the garden.

- Present-day Icelandic does not allow THERE:

- (4) ***Þar** kom *maður* inn í garðinn.
THERE come.PST man.NOM in in garden.ACC.DEF
'There came a man into the garden.'

1.2 Historical context

- But English and Icelandic each had a historical stage in which both **THERE** and **IT** were available in existentials/presentationals (Breivik 1983:257-9 and Pfenninger 2009:54-6 on English; Booth 2018 on Icelandic):

(5) **hit** wæs *an geleafa & an hiht on þa halgan þrynesse* ær Cristes tocyme. (OE)
IT be.PST one belief and one hope in the holy trinity before Christ.GEN coming
'There was one belief and one hope in the Holy Trinity before Christ's coming.'

(Blickling Homilies 81: 26-7, taken from Breivik 1983:257)

(6) **Þar** var *gnægð grjóts og viður* hér og þar við sjávarströndina... (Ice, 1650)
THERE be.pst abundance stone.GEN and wood here and there with sea-beach.DEF
'There was an abundance of stone and some wood here and there by the beach...'

(IcePaHC: Illugi.563)

- Each language stage also allows for V1 existentials/presentationals which lack an expletive:

(7) Com þa to lande *lid-manna helm* (OE)
come.PST then to land sailors.GEN protector
'There came then to the shore the protector of the sailors'

(Beowulf 1623, taken from Hinterhölzl & Petrova 2010:315)

(8) Verður nú *mannfall ógurligt*. (Ice, 1480)
become.PRS now man-loss awful
'There now comes to be an awful loss of life.' (IcePaHC: Jarlmann.381)

- So we have a situation of competition between three variants (**THERE**, **IT**, \emptyset), which has scarcely been studied.¹

- Variation between **THERE** and **IT** has been observed elsewhere in Germanic, including:

- Historical Norwegian (Faarlund 1990:70-2; Kinn 2011).
- Present-day Norwegian dialects (Larsson 2014).
- Historical German (Light 2015).
- Present-day German (Bayer & Suchsland 1997; Richards & Biberauer 2005; Hartmann 2008).

- Moreover, in comparison English and Icelandic present a story of diverging pathways of change:

- English loses **IT** and retains **THERE**.
- Icelandic loses **THERE** and retains **IT**.

1.3 This talk

- We focus on the competition between **THERE** and **IT** and the divergence story.

- Questions:

- Which features interact with the choice of **THERE/IT**?
- Why did English go the **THERE**-direction, and Icelandic the **IT**-direction?
- How can this shed light on the nature of syntactic competition/optionality in syntax?

¹We use \emptyset descriptively for identical constructions which lack an expletive; not to be interpreted as a theoretical position on 'null' expletives.

- Comparative corpus-based study of historical English and historical Icelandic.

- The constructions in question (existentials/presentationals):

- A sentence which introduces a discourse-new referent in the form of a particular structural configuration:

(9) THERE/IT/∅ – V_{finite} – (...) – NP_{discourse-new}

- We refer to the postfinite NP as the ‘pivot’ (Milsark 1974; Beaver et al. 2005; Zaenen et al. 2017):

(10) THERE/IT/∅ – V_{finite} – (...) – NP_{discourse-new}
pivot

- This comprises both existentials (with BE) and presentationals (other predicate types):

(11) **There** is *no justice* in the world. (existential)

(12) All of a sudden, **there** came *a stranger* into the bar. (presentational)

- Not always a clear distinction by predicate type: existentials and presentationals are semantically overlapping sets with some shared instances (e.g. Milsark 1974; Lambrecht 1994:179):

(13) **There** was *a stranger* in the bar. (existential/presentational)

- We recognise that there is a cline in terms of how grammaticalised THERE is (see Breivik 1989; Pfenninger 2009, 2013 on Early English):

(14) a. I went to [a party]_i. **There**_i I met an old friend. (anaphoric)

↓

b. **There**_i were many swimmers [in the lake]_i. (potentially cataphoric)

↓

c. **There** is no time like the present. (neither anaphoric nor cataphoric)

- A similar grammaticalisation cline has been shown for the development of IT in Icelandic (Booth 2018):

(15) a. [Þetta andlit]_i, ég hafði einhvern tíma séð það_i áður... (anaphoric)
 DEM.ACC face.ACC I.NOM have.PST one time see.PST.PTCP IT before
 ‘This face, I had seen it before one time...’ (2008, Ofsi.258)

↓

b. Það_i er sagt [að Bárður bóndi átti sætur]_i. (potentially cataphoric)
 IT be.PRS say.PASS.PTCP COMP Bárður farmer own.PST mountain-pastures
 ‘It is said that Bárður the farmer owned mountain pastures.’

(1350, Finnbogi.636.641)

↓

c. Það var dansað alla nóttina. (neither anaphoric nor cataphoric)
 IT be.PST dance.PASS.PTCP all night.DEF
 ‘It was danced all night.’ (Thráinsson 2007:266)

- Moreover, it is not always easy to pinpoint a historically attested THERE/IT on these clines.

2 Methodology

- For each language, we examine the timeframe in which both *THERE* and *IT* are attested (= period of competition):
 - Old and Middle English, plus sporadic instances in Early Modern English (Breivik 1983:257-61, 324; Pfenninger 2009:49-56).
 - Icelandic: c.1400–1900 (Booth 2018); we expand this to the whole IcePaHC corpus (1150-2008).
- Corpora:
 - Penn family of corpora for historical English (<https://www.ling.upenn.edu/hist-corpora/>).
 - Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus (IcePaHC, Wallenberg et al. 2011).
 - Unfortunately much more corpus data available for historical English than historical Icelandic.
- Data collection: automatic extraction via CorpusSearch queries (Randall 2000, 2005).
 - But for YCOE this is not straightforward, since *THERE/IT* does not have a special POS tag in existentials/presentationals; our evidence is mainly qualitative here.
 - Matrix declaratives only.
- Manual work:
 - We check that sentences qualify as existentials/presentationals as per (9); erroneous examples excluded.
 - We exclude examples where *THERE/IT* is clearly anaphoric.
 - We include examples where *THERE/IT* could be cataphoric, but recognise the clines in (14) and (15).
 - We tag the refined data for properties relevant to our research questions:
 - * Position of *THERE/IT*
 - * Predicate type
 - * Negation
 - * Properties of the pivot:
 - Quantification
 - Animacy
 - Weight
 - * Locative adverbial
 - We randomly sampled for later periods in the Middle English corpus (ME3, ME4) to make the data comparable with the Icelandic data; 1 in 4 resulting in sample sizes of 100 examples.

- Overview of the (main) datasets; frequency of existentials/presentationals per 1,000 matrix sentences.

– Icelandic, 1150-2008 (IcePaHC, Wallenberg et al. 2011):

Time period	Existentials/ presentationals	Total matrix sentences	Freq./1,000 matrix sentences
1150-1350	54	19,771	2.7
1351-1550	97	15,785	6.1
1551-1750	87	12,090	7.2
1751-1900	80	12,357	6.5
1901-2008	80	11,703	6.8
All periods	398	71,706	5.6

Table 1: Existentials/presentationals in IcePaHC, 1150-2008

– Middle English, 1150-1500 (PPCME2, Kroch & Taylor 2000):

Time period	Existentials/ presentationals	Total matrix sentences	Freq./1,000 matrix sentences
1150-1250	180	9,819	18.3
1251-1350	139	7,144	19.5
1351-1420	660	25,702	25.7
1421-1500	505	16,496	30.6
All periods	1,484	59,161	25.1

Table 2: Existentials/presentationals in PPCME2, 1150-1500

3 The status of the expletive

- We investigate the status of the expletive in existentials/presentationals across the relevant language stages:
 - Relative frequencies of the three options (THERE, IT, \emptyset).

3.1 Icelandic (1150-2008)

- The IcePaHC data allows us to trace the full switch:
 - From a stage where only THERE is an option (1150-1350) to a stage where only IT is an option (1901-2008).
 - Relatively long period of competition.
 - No expletive (\emptyset) is an option throughout all periods.

Time period	THERE		IT		Ø		All	
	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	%
1150-1350	9	17%	0	0%	45	83%	54	100%
1351-1550	12	12%	5	5%	80	82%	97	100%
1551-1750	17	20%	9	10%	61	70%	87	100%
1751-1900	4	5%	37	46%	39	49%	80	100%
1901-2008	0	0%	31	39%	49	61%	80	100%
All periods	42	11%	82	21%	274	69%	398	100%

Table 3: Expletive status in existentials/presentationals in IcePaHC, 1150-2008

- Individual texts exhibit all three options:

– Reflecting inter-speaker variation?

- (16) a. **Þar** bjó í Kaupinhavn einn slátari sá er Kristján hét... (THERE)
 THERE live.PST in Copenhagen one butcher DEM. REL Kristján be-called.PST
 ‘There lived in Copenhagen a butcher, he who was called Kristján...’
 (1661, Indiafari.35.258)
- b. **Það** eru margir kimar niður við sjómálið... (IT)
 IT be.PRS many bilges down by high-waterline.DEF
 There are many bilges down by the high waterline.’ (1661, Indiafari.73.1287)
- c. Varð svo glaumur og gaman úr öllu. (Ø)
 become.PST so merriment and delight out everything
 ‘So there came merriment and delight from everything.’ (1661, Indiafari.54.794)

- Choice of expletive in sentences where an expletive is present (Ø examples excluded):

Time period	THERE		IT		All	
	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	%
1150-1350	9	100%	0	0%	9	100%
1351-1550	12	71%	5	29%	17	100%
1551-1750	17	65%	9	35%	26	100%
1751-1900	4	10%	37	90%	41	100%
1901-2008	0	0%	31	100%	31	100%
All periods	42	34%	82	66%	124	100%

Table 4: Choice of expletive in existentials/presentationals in IcePaHC, 1150-2008

3.2 Early English

- In Old English (850-1150), both **THERE** and **IT** are already an option, alongside \emptyset (data from YCOE, Taylor et al. 2003):

- (17) a. *Ða wearð hit swa micel ege fram þam here þæt man ne mihte geþencan 7 ne then become.PST IT so much terror from the army COMP one NEG could conceive.INF and NEG asmeagan hu man hi of earde adrifan sceolde oþþe ðisne eard wið hi consider.INF how one them from country drive-out.INF should or this country against them gehealdan... protect.INF*
 ‘Then there was so much terror from the army that one could not conceive nor consider how one should drive them out of the country or protect this country against them...’
 (cochronC,ChronC [Rositzke]:1006.30.1415)
- b. & *hit wæs ða wundorlic smylnes þære lyfte and IT be.PST then wonderful tranquillity DEM.GEN air.GEN*
 ‘And there was then a wonderful tranquillity of the air.’
 (cogregdC,GDPref-and-3-[C]:15.208.18.2755)
- (18) a. *Þær wearð ða geworden micel smylnys ðære heofenan. THERE become.PST then become.PST.PTCP great tranquillity DEM.GEN sky.GEN*
 ‘There had then become a great tranquillity of the sky.’
 (cocathom2,+ACHom-II,-22:195.162.4318)
- b. *Þær wæs eac sum arleas preost, Arrianus gehaten, of Alexandrigan byrig... THERE be.PST also some wicked priest Arian called, of Alexandria.GEN city*
 ‘There was also a wicked priest, called Arian, of the city of Alexandria...’
 (colwstan1,+ALet-2-[Wulfstan-1]:54.97)

- In Middle English (1150-1500), all three options are maintained throughout all subperiods (data from PPCME2):
 - Increase in frequency of **THERE**.
 - Decrease in frequency of **IT**.
 - Decrease in frequency of \emptyset .

Time period	THERE		IT		\emptyset		All	
	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	%
1150-1250	43	25%	14	5%	114	67%	171	100%
1251-1350	92	71%	8	6%	29	23%	129	100%
1351-1420	419	64%	20	3%	217	33%	656	100%
1421-1500	436	87%	4	1%	60	12%	500	100%
All periods	990	68%	46	3%	420	29%	1,456	100%

Table 5: Expletive status in existentials/presentationals in PPCME2, 1150-1500

- As in Icelandic, individual texts exhibit all three options:

- Reflective of inter-speaker variation?

- (19) a. ... but **there** is *no frend.* (THERE)
 but THERE be.PRS no friend
 ‘...but there is no friend.’ (CMCTPARS, 292.C1.168)
- b. ... but certainly **it** is *greet doute.* (IT)
 but certainly IT be.PRS great doubt
 ‘...but certainly there is great doubt.’ (CMCTPARS, 288.C2b.21)
- c. ... but in helle is *noon honour ne reverence.* (Ø)
 but in hell be.PRS no honour nor reverence
 ‘...but in hell there is no honour nor reverence.’ (CMCTPARS, 291.C2.144)

- And different manuscripts of the same text also exhibit THERE/IT/Ø variation (Breivik 1983:261-263 on various manuscripts of *Cursor Mundi*):

- (20) a. þat tyme was **þer** *but o langage/* Ebrew þe furste þat Adam spak. (THERE)
 that time be.PST THERE but one language Hebrew, the first REL Adam speak.PST
 (Trinity 2210-11)
- b. þat time **it** was *bot a langage/* Hebru þe first þat adam spac. (IT)
 that time IT be.PST but one language Hebrew, the first REL Adam speak.PST
 (Cotton 2210-11)
- c. þat time **it** was *bot a langage/* Ebru þe first þat adam spac. (IT)
 that time IT be.PST but one language Hebrew the first REL Adam speak.PST
 (Göttingen 2210-11)
- d. þat time was *bot an langage/* hebreu þe first at adam spac. (Ø)
 that time be.PST but one language Hebrew the first REL Adam speak.PST
 (Fairfax 2210-11)

- Choice of expletive in sentences where an expletive is present (Ø examples excluded):

- THERE dominates in all periods.
- THERE increases in frequency at the expense of IT.
- IT only has a sizeable share in 1150-1250.
- Main period of competition is Old English - Early Middle English (pre-1250).

Time period	THERE		IT		All	
	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	%
1150-1250	43	75%	14	25%	57	100%
1251-1350	92	92%	8	8%	100	100%
1351-1420	419	95%	20	5%	439	100%
1421-1500	436	99%	4	1%	440	100%
All periods	990	96%	46	4%	1036	100%

Table 6: Choice of expletive in existentials/presentationals in PPCME2, 1150-1500

- Early Modern English, 1500-1710 (data from PPCEME, Kroch et al. 2004):

- IT is scarcely attested.
- THERE is now overwhelmingly dominant; continues to increase at the expense of Ø.

Time period	THERE		IT		Ø		All	
	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	%
1500-1569	301	77%	4	1%	85	22%	390	100%
1570-1639	195	82%	4	1%	38	16%	237	100%
1640-1710	216	87%	2	1%	31	12%	249	100%
All periods	712	81%	10	1%	154	18%	876	100%

Table 7: Expletive status in existentials/presentationals in PPCEME, 1500-1710

- Comparative findings for English and Icelandic cast doubt on the the claim that emergence of IT in Icelandic is due to contact with English (Eythórsson & Sigurðardóttir 2016):

- By the time of the first instances of IT in Icelandic presentationals/existentials (c.1475), IT is already on its way out in English in these contexts (see Table 6).
- THERE is already available as an expletive in existentials/presentationals in Old Icelandic (see Table 2).
- A positionally restricted expletive-like IT is already present in certain types of impersonal constructions in Old Icelandic, e.g. (15-b) (Booth 2018).
- Borrowing an expletive is an extreme case of structural borrowing, which typically requires intense contact between speaker populations (e.g. Thomason & Kaufman 1988). This is not documented for the period.

4 Investigation of features

- We investigate:

- Which features interact with the choice between THERE/IT?
- Do Icelandic and English differ in how a feature interacts with the expletive choice?

4.1 Cross-linguistics similarities

- The corpus findings show that Icelandic and English behave similarly in terms of how the following features interact with the choice between THERE/IT:

- Negation
- Quantification of the pivot
- Animacy of the pivot
- Locative adverb

- Despite these cross-linguistic similarities, we still get divergence between the languages over time.
- To investigate the reasons behind this divergence, we focus on the features where the languages differ in how a feature interacts with expletive choice.

4.2 Positional distribution of THERE/IT

- In the present-day languages, there is a difference between Icelandic and English in the positional distribution of the existential/presentational expletive:

- Icelandic IT is positionally restricted to the clause-initial prefinite position; not permitted in clauses with a fronted adjunct (Sells 2005; Sigurðsson 2007; Vikner 1995):

- (21)
- Það** voru *mýs* í baðkerinu.
IT be.PST mice in bathtub.DEF
'There were mice in the bathtub.'
 - Í gær voru (***það**) *mýs* í baðkerinu.
yesterday be.PST IT mice in bathtub.DEF
'Yesterday there were mice in the bathtub.'
 - Í gær (***það**) voru *mýs* í baðkerinu.
yesterday IT be.PST mice in bathtub.DEF
'Yesterday there were mice in the bathtub.'

- English THERE can occur in both the clause-initial position and later in a clause with a fronted adjunct:

- (22)
- There** were *mice* in the bathtub.
 - Yesterday **there** were *mice* in the bathtub.
 - *Yesterday were **there** *mice* in the bathtub.

- Earlier stages of English exhibit V2 (e.g. van Kemenade 1987; Los 2009), so we tag the historical data in terms of pre- versus postfinite.

- Moreover, position has been claimed to play a part in the general emergence of expletives in Germanic:²

(23) **Prefinite First Hypothesis**

Prefinite expletive > subject expletive
(pre- and postfinite)

- What is the positional distribution of THERE/IT in the diachrony of each language and how does this interact with the ultimate survival or loss of the expletive form?
- Historical Icelandic:
 - IT is virtually restricted to the prefinite position, as today.
 - THERE is somewhat freer: both pre- and postfinite (though dominantly prefinite).

expletive type	prefinite		postfinite	
	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total
THERE	30	71%	12	29%
IT	132	99%	2	1%

Table 8: Expletives and positional distribution in IcePaHC, 1150-2008

²Breivik (1983) and Ingham (2001) on English; Lenerz (1985) on German; Falk (1993) on Swedish; Faarlund (1990) on Norwegian; plus cross-Germanic accounts by Haiman (1974) and Richards & Biberauer (2005).

- (24) a. Þar var gnægð grjóts og viður hér og þar við sjávarströndina með
 THERE be.PST abundance stone.GEN and wood here and there with sea-beach.DEF with
 björgunum.
 cliffs.DEF
 ‘There was an abundance of stone and some wood here and there by the beach with the cliffs.’
 (1650, Illugi.563)
- b. Að sönnu er þar gnægð endurlausnarinnar hjá honum...
 of course be.PRS THERE abundance redemption in he.DAT
 ‘Of course there is an abundance of redemption in him...’ (1630, Gerhard.492)

• Middle English:

- THERE and IT have a similar positional distribution.

expletive type	prefinite		postfinite	
	n	% of total	n	% of total
THERE	298	86%	48	14%
IT	38	88%	5	12%

Table 9: Expletives and positional distribution in PPCME2, 1150-1500

- (25) a. þa com þer an helendis .Mon
 then come.PST THERE one foreign man
 ‘Then there came a foreign man.’ (CMLAMB1,79.104)
- b. Of alle ða edmodnesses ðe godd behet on his spelle, nis ðar non swo
 of all the christian-virtues REL god promise.PST in his gospel, NEG-be.PRS THERE none so
 heih swa is ‘ðe is clene-hierte’.
 great as is REL be.PRS clean-heart
 ‘Of all the Christian virtues that God promised in his gospel, there is none so great as that
 “which is pure of heart”’ (CMVICES1,125.1549)
- c. Ða wearð hit swa micel ege fram þam here þæt man ne mihte geþencan 7
 then become.PST IT so much terror from the army COMP one NEG could conceive.INF and
 ne asmeagan hu man hi of earde adrifan sceolde oþþe ðisne eard
 NEG consider.NOM how one them from country drive-out.INF should or this country
 wið hi gehealdan...
 against them protect.INF
 ‘Then there was so much terror from the army that one could not conceive nor consider how
 one should drive them out of the country or protect this country against them...’
 (cochronC,ChronC [Rositzke]:1006.30.1415)

- Some indication that both forms have more postfinite examples in earlier stages:

- * In ME1 (1150-1250): 25 prefinite and 18 postfinite examples for THERE.
- * 17 examples of a postfinite IT in YCOE (850-1150).
- * All examples have either þa (‘then’) or ne (NEG) in prefinite position

- The decrease in postfinite expletives is likely an effect of the loss of V2; expletives can now be non-clause-initial and prefinite:

- (26) a. [And whenne the kynge come to Londyn Brygge] there was made a towre.
 and when the king come.PST to London bridge THERE be.PST make.PASS.PTCP a tower
 ‘And when the king came to London Bridge, there was made a tower.’ (CMGREGOR,173.1056)

- b. ... but [certainly] **it** is *great doute*.
 but certainly IT be.PRS great doubt
 ‘...but certainly there is great doubt.’ (CMCTPARS, 288.C2b.21)

• Conclusions:

- Possible that the interaction with V2 (lost in English but retained in Icelandic) played a role in the divergence.
- Findings for both Icelandic and English challenge the Prefinite First Hypothesis (23); earliest stages already show expletives with mixed positional distribution (see also Axel 2007 on early German; Kinn 2011 on Middle Norwegian).

4.3 Predicate type

- Previous observation: the emergence of expletives is sensitive to predicate type:
 - Expletives typically emerge first in existentials/presentationals with BE as a predicate, before emerging with other predicate types, e.g. unaccusatives, transitives (e.g. Falk 1993: on Swedish).
- How does the choice of expletive interact with predicate type in the diachronic data?
- In historical Icelandic:

expletive type	BE		other predicate	
	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total
THERE	38	90%	4	10%
IT	82	61%	52	39%

Table 10: Expletives and predicate type in IcePaHC, 1150-2008

- THERE overwhelmingly occurs with BE; only sparse examples with other predicate types (*n*=4):

- (27) a. **Þar** kom og *boðskapur herra Jóns erkibiskups* í hverjum orðum, er
 THERE come.PST also order.NOM lord.GEN Jón.GEN archbishop.GEN in every word when
 hann eggjaði biskupana að....
 he.NOM urge.PST bishops.DEF to
 ‘There came also an order from Lord Archbishop Jón in each word, when he urged the bishops to...’ (1325, Arni.487)
- b. **Þar** kom *hungur og harmkvæli mikið* yfir allt Egyptaland og
 THERE come.PST hunger.NOM and torment.NOM great.NOM over all Egypt and
 Kanansjörð.
 Canaan.
 ‘There came hunger and great torment over all Egypt and Canaan.’ (1540, Ntacts.248.331)
- c. Og **þar** skeði *rödd* til hans: "Statt up, Péter".
 and THERE occur.PST voice.NOM to he.GEN stand.IMP up Péter
 ‘And there occurred a voice to him: "Stand up, Péter."’ (1540, Ntacts.257.622)
- d. **Þar** bjó í Kaupinhavn *einn slátari sá er Kristján hét*...
 THERE live.PST in Copenhagen one.NOM butcher.NOM DEM.NOM REL Kristján be-called.PST
 ‘There lived in Copenhagen a butcher, he who was called Kristján...’ (1661, Indiafari.35.258)

– IT is robustly attested with a range of predicate types, beyond just BE:

- (28) a. **Það** er komin upp *Sturlungaöld* að nýju í landi voru... (unaccusative)
 IT be.PRS come.PST.PTCP up Sturlung-Age anew in our land
 ‘There has arisen a new Sturlung Age in our land...’ (1882, Torfhildur.740)
- b. **Það** fór um hana *hrollur*... (unergative)
 IT go.PST about she.ACC shudder
 ‘There went a shudder through her...’ (1888, Vordraumur.683)
- c. **Það** hafði reyndar *enginn lifandi maður* í þeim sóknum séð Bjarna... (transitive)
 IT have.PST in fact no living man in DEM parish see.PST.PTCP Bjarni
 ‘There had in fact no living man in that parish seen Bjarni...’ (1888, Vordraumur.38)
- d. **Það** selst *allt* betur með útlenskum nöfnum. (middle)
 IT sell.PRS.MID everything better with foreign names
 ‘Everything sells better with foreign names.’ (1985, Marg saga.303)

• In Middle English:

- IT is virtually restricted to constructions with BE.
- THERE most frequently occurs with BE, but is found with a wider range of predicates.

expletive type	BE		other predicate	
	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total
THERE	233	69%	105	31%
IT	48	94%	3	6%

Table 11: Expletives and predicate type in PPCME2, 1150-1500

- (29) a. sodeynly **þere** cam *a wind* (unaccusative)
 suddenly THERE come.PST a wind
 ‘Suddenly there came a wind.’ (CMCAPCHR,98.2027)
- b. but **there** myghte *none* prevaille. (modal)
 but THERE might none prevail.INF
 ‘But none may prevail’ (CMMALORY,19.578)
- c. **there** wille never *good knyght nor good man* see our tombe (transitive)
 THERE will never good knight nor good man see.INF our tomb
 ‘Never will a good knight nor a good man see our tomb’ (CMMALORY,69.2358)
- d. and þere was *þe prophecye of Merlyn* fulfillid (passive)
 and THERE be.PST the prophecy of Merlin fulfil.PASS.PTCP
 ‘And Merlin’s prophecy was fulfilled.’ (CMCAPCHR,128.2965)

• Moreover, the YCOE data for Old English also shows variation for THERE:

- We looked at all examples of THERE in initial position.
- 19/38 examples occur with BE/WEOÐAN.
- 19/38 examples occur with other predicates.

- (30) **Þær** lagon þa forþi on þam foresædum porticum *fela untrumra manna mislice*
 THERE lie.PST then therefore on the foresaid porch many ill.GEN men.GEN variably
gebrocode,blindra and healtra...
 afflicted, blind.GEN and lame.GEN

‘Therefore there lay then on the aforementioned porch many ill men...’ (coaelhom,+AHom-2:24.254)

- Conclusions:
 - Icelandic and English are the mirror image of each other:
 - * In Icelandic, IT is more frequently attested with predicates other than BE; IT survives.
 - * In English, THERE is more frequently attested with predicates other than BE; THERE survives.
 - So this could be a factor in the change.
 - Suggestion: the more predicate types an element can occur with, the more likely it is to survive.
 - Causality problem: hard to tell whether the element is lost *because* it is not yet established with a range of predicate types, or whether it is lost for independent reasons, before it has chance to spread to other predicate types.

5 Conclusions

- Differences between Icelandic and English:
 - Period of competition differs: Icelandic exhibits a long period of variation, but real variation for English is restricted to early stages (up until 1250).
 - Competition takes a different shape: Icelandic exhibits the full switch; Old English already has both THERE and IT from 850, with THERE more frequent from the start.
- Explaining factors:
 - Loss or retention of V2 probably plays a role in determining which form survives, and in turn the divergence story (to be investigated further!)
 - For both languages: some indication that the element with the more varied use has the best chance of ‘winning competition’.

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