Feature Inheritance as a Reflex of Diachronic Change:
Evidence from Transitive Expletive Constructions in the History of English

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Theoretical Issue: Chomsky (2008) assumes that tense and φ-features originate in the phase head C and are passed down to the nonphase head T, as in (1). This is known as Feature Inheritance (FI). Richards (2007) defends its conceptual necessity by arguing that FI is inevitable for the simultaneous occurrence of Valuation and Transfer and thus, a phase head (P) requires a nonphase head (N), as in (2). However, given the richly articulated functional structure revealed by Rizzi (1997) inter alia, it follows that UG should allow certain range of variation regarding which category receives which uninterpretable feature (uF), as schematically represented in (3). I maintain in this paper that the distribution of uFs among nonphase heads is subject to parametric variation and the situation in present-day English has resulted in the course of its diachronic change.

Puzzle: English once allowed transitive expletive constructions (TECs), as in (4). However, according to Tanaka (2000) inter alia, this construction was observed only from Late Middle English (LME) through Early Modern English (EModE) but neither before nor after that. The question is why.

Proposal: On the basis of the clausal architecture in (5), I claim that (i) from Old English (OE) through Early Middle English (EME), uninterpretable number and person features were hosted by Top and Fin, respectively; (ii) from LME through EModE, these features were collectively carried by Fin; and (iii) Late Modern English (LModE) onwards, they are located on T along with the tense feature. The relevant structures are delineated in (6). With an additional assumption that the finite verb raises to the head immediately below the highest one that bears an inflectional feature, these stages correspond to the V2, V-to-T, and the V-to-v periods in the history of English. The parametric shift from (6a) to (6b) was caused by the decline of the verbal inflection –*en* expressing plural agreement and the one from (6b) to (6c) by the loss of agreement in general except for –*s* (see (7a–c)).

Analysis: As regards the derivation of (transitive) expletive constructions, I assume the following. First, potential insertion sites of the expletive *there* are Specs of functional heads with tense and/or φ-features. Second, the external argument must raise out of vP to obtain a discourse-related interpretation. Third, *there* is intrinsically specified as [third person, ± singular]. The last is intended to capture the fact that the associate of *there* is restricted to the third person but can be either singular or plural. Given this, the derivations of TECs in the three stages in (6) can be represented as in (8), where the arrows indicate the relation of Agree. In (8a), *there* cannot be inserted in Spec-Top nor Spec-T; the former is incompatible with the expletive interpretation of *there* and the latter should be reserved for the raised subject. Then *there* in Spec-Fin enters into Agree with the [$u$number] feature on Top, but the derivation will crash at the sensorimotor interface (SM) because the [± singular] value copied onto Top cannot be appropriately realized in Morphology. In contrast, this problem does not occur in (8b), where *there* resides outside the search domain of the uFs; hence, TECs are successfully derived. In (8c), *there* can only be inserted in Spec-T, which forces the subject to stay in situ, leading the derivation to crash at the conceptual-intentional interface (C-I). The above puzzle is thus solved.

Further Issues: It is predicted that the availability of TECs is controlled by the feature specification of expletive subjects and the way uFs are inherited from C. I will investigate the validity of the

mechanism proposed by comparing English with other Germanic languages with and without TECs.

(1) $[_{CP}$ C$_{[\varphi][tense]}$ $[_{TP}$ T$_{[\varphi][tense]}$ … $]]$ (Chomsky (2008))

(2)   a. * P—P—P—P
      b. √ P—N—P—N   (Richards (2007))

(3)   P$_{[uF]}$ … N$_{[uF]}$ … N$_{[uF]}$ … N$_{[uF]}$

(4)   þer   schal non of þe wardeyns make none newe statutes
      there shall none of the wardens   make no   new   statutes
                                       (BLE London Guilds III:87/Breivik (1983: 302))

(5) $[_{CP}$ C $[_{TopP}$ Top $[_{FinP}$ Fin $[_{TP}$ T … $]]]]$

(6)   a. OE–EME: $[_{CP}$ C $[_{TopP}$ Topic/Pron. Top$_{[unumber]}$ $[_{FinP}$ **Fin**$_{[uperson]}$ $[_{TP}$ Subj. T$_{[tense]}$ $[_{vP}$ v …$]]]]]$
      b. LME–EModE: $[_{CP}$ C $[_{TopP}$ Topic Top $[_{FinP}$ Fin$_{[unumber, uperson]}$ $[_{TP}$ Subj. **T**$_{[tense]}$ $[_{vP}$ v …$]]]]]$
      c. LModE–: $[_{CP}$ C $[_{TopP}$ Top $[_{FinP}$ Fin $[_{TP}$ Subj. T$_{[unumber, uperson, tense]}$ $[_{vP}$ **v** …$]]]]]$
                                            (finite verbs located in the bold-faced positions)

(7)

a. OE–EME

	Pres.		Past	
	Sg.	Pl.	Sg.	Pl.
1	-e	-en	-de	-den
2	-st	-en	-dst	-den
3	-th	-en	-de	-den

b. LME–EModE

	Pres.		Past	
	Sg.	Pl.	Sg.	Pl.
1	-e	-e	-de	-de
2	-st	-e	-dst	-de
3	-th	-e	-de	-de

c. LModE–

	Pres.		Past	
	Sg.	Pl.	Sg.	Pl.
1	-∅	-∅	-d	-d
2	-∅	-∅	-d	-d
3	-s	-∅	-d	-d

(8)   a. * $[_{TopP}$ Top$_{[unumber]}$ $[_{FinP}$ there$_{[3rd\ person, \pm singular]}$ Fin$_{[uperson]}$ $[_{TP}$ Subj. T$_{[tense]}$ $[_{vP}$ v …$]]]]$ ☞ uninterpretable at SM

      b. √ $[_{TopP}$ Top $[_{FinP}$ there$_{[3rd\ person, \pm singular]}$ Fin$_{[unumber, uperson]}$ $[_{TP}$ Subj. T$_{[tense]}$ $[_{vP}$ v …$]]]]$

      c. * $[_{TopP}$ Top $[_{FinP}$ Fin $[_{TP}$ there$_{[3rd\ person, \pm singular]}$ T$_{[unumber, uperson, tense]}$ $[_{vP}$ Subj. v …$]]]]$
                                            ☞ uninterpretable at C-I

References

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