

How domain-sensitive are existential constructions?

Evidence from Swedish and Dutch weather reports

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Structure

- I. Theoretical background
- II. Dutch weather reports
- III. Swedish weather reports
- IV. Comparison and conclusion

I. Theoretical background

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CxG and domain-specific discourse

- ❖ CxG implies a **constructional** (\Leftrightarrow projectionist) approach towards language (Engelberg 2019);
- ❖ Within domain-specific linguistics, this translates to the question whether constructions have **domain-specific manifestations**;

I. Theoretical background

Domain-specific features

❖ Cf. the valency schema's of *être* (to be) and *avoir* (to have) in **oenologic discourse** (Gautier & Bach 2019):

- (1) a. Fr.: [...] *sinon on a les Gevrey Chambertin les Sevrey de chez Olivier Juin en 2013* [...] "otherwise we have the Gevrey Chambertin les Sevrey from Olivier Juin from 2013"
- b. Fr.: [...] *donc là on est vraiment sur le fruit croquant* [...] "and so this one is more crispy and fruity"
- (1') a. *on* (subject) *avoir* WINE SORT (direct object) *de* WINE GROWER (ablative) *en* VINTAGE (temporal)
- b. *on* (subject) *être sur* AROMAS (sensory descriptor)

I. Theoretical background

A meteorological case-study

- ❖ The domain-specific hypothesis needs to be more systematically tested for constructions in various languages and LSP-oriented domains;
- ❖ We therefore propose a case-study of newspaper **weather reports** in **Dutch** and **Swedish**;

Language	Tokens	Words	Sentences
Dutch	124,301	105,120	8,265
Swedish	96,608	82,781	4,299

I. Theoretical background

Existential structures

❖ More specifically, we will look at so called **existential structures** (Bentley *et al.* 2013):

(2) (Expletive) (proform) (copula) pivot (coda)

- (3)
- a. Dt.: **Er is** geen water meer
 - b. Sw.: **Det finns** inget vatten kvar

❖ Said structures are typical for general language, but require a **holistic approach** to account for their meaning/function;

II. Dutch weather reports

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Semantic overview of the corpus

Textual level

- ❖ Main speech act: **informative**
- ❖ Main predicate: the **evolving weather situation**

Terminology

- ❖ Specific terminology: mostly **nouns** designating weather phenomena + **locatives/place names**
 - **Almost no specialized verbs** appear frequently
 - Yet high **frequent are common verbs** like *zijn* (be), *worden* (become) and *blijven* (remain)

II. Dutch weather reports

Existential structures

1) Types and number of occurrences

(i) **er is-construction** (404 attestations)

(4) Dt.: *Morgen **is er** eerst vooral richting Franse grens veel bewolking met nog wat regen [...]*

“Tomorrow there is initially a lot of cloud-cover with some rain towards France”

(ii) **het is-construction** (726 attestations)

(5) Dt.: *In het noorden en het oosten **is het** droog met brede opklaringen.*

“In the North and the East it is dry with extensive sunny spells”

(iii) **het wordt-construction** (995 attestations)

(6) Dt.: ***Het wordt** vandaag wisselend bewolkt met in de loop van de dag enkele buien [...]*

“It will be partly cloudy today with some rain showers later on”

II. Dutch weather reports

2) Form-specific features: **inversion**

(7) a. Dt.: Maandag **zijn er** afwisselend zonnige en bewolkte periodes.

“Monday there are varying sunny and cloudy spells”

b. Dt.: Aan zee **is het** met 19 graden koeler.

“At the coast it is 19 degrees cooler”

c. Dt.: Vrijdag **wordt het** zonnig met soms wat 'mooiweerwolkjes'.

“Friday it will be sunny with some nice-weather-clouds”

➤ **1603** **inversive existential structures** in total

3) Valency: **time** and **space** segments

➤ Time segments: 1250 (LC), 81 (RC)

➤ Place segments: 288 (LC), 76 (RC)

III. Swedish weather reports

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Expressen: *vara* (1054); *bli* (661); *finna* (85); *komma* (420); *skola* (137)

Dagens Nyheter: *vara* (560); *bli* (229); *finna* (44); *komma* (199); *skola* (51)

III. Swedish weather reports

Existential structures

1) Types and Number of occurrences

(i) **Det finns-construction (41 attestations)** = “there is” = “er is/zijn”

(iia) **Det blir-construction (340 attestations)** = “it will be” = “het wordt”

(iib) **Det kommer (att)-construction (139 attestations)**

(iic) **Det ska-construction (27 attestations)**

(iii) **Det är (373 attestations)** = “it is” = “het is”

III. Swedish weather reports

(i) Det finns-construction (41 attestations)

(i) Det finns

Det finns + risk + för + noun

- (8) a. **Det finns** en fortsatt risk för en hel del regn hela lördagen. (Expressen)
 “There is a continuing risk for a lot of rain during the whole Saturday”
- b. **Det finns** hopp om sol i slutet av nästa vecka. (Dagens Nyheter)
 “There is hope for sun at the end of next week”
- c. I samband med att temperaturen sjunker, **finns det** chans att solen tittar fram på flera håll. (Expressen)
 “In connection with the decline of the temperature, there is a chance that the sun will peep in some places”

III. Swedish weather reports

det blir-construction ↔ det kommer (att)

(**ia**) **det blir** = most frequent (**340 attestations**)

- (9) a. **Det blir minusgrader** ända ner i södra Sverige (Dagens Nyheter)
 “It is going to be degrees below zero all the way down the southern parts of Sweden”
- b. *Däremot är det tydligt att **det blir varmare*** (Expressen)
 „However, it is clear that it is getting warmer“

(**ib**) **det Kommer + (att)** = typical for weather prognoses (**139 attestations**)

det Kommer att + infinitive (sometimes „bli“ or „vara“)

- (10) **Det kommer att vara** mild och plusgrader ända upp till norra Norrland (Dagens Nyheter)
 „It’s going to be mild and degrees above zero all the way up the northern parts of Norrland“

III. Swedish weather reports

(iic) **det ska** = appears only twice in Dagens Nyheter (total **27 attestations**)

(11) *Helgens kallfront sträcker sig från Kiruna i norr, där det **ska vara** runt minus tio grader, till Stockholm, där **det ska bli** runt noll grader och snö.* (Expressen)

“This Weekend’s cold front ranges from Kiruna in the North, where it is going to be around minus ten degrees, down to Stockholm, where it is going to be around zero degrees and snow”.

Det är-construction

(iii) **det är**

(12) a. ***Det är kallt** nu över hela Sverige* (Dagens Nyheter)

“It is cold now all over Sweden”

b. *Men **det är** alltså **i morgon** som **de stora regnmängderna** väntas dra in **i västra Sverige**.*
(Expressen)

„But it is thus tomorrow that the heavy amounts of rain are expected to move over West Sweden.“

III. Swedish weather reports

2) Form-specific features: **inversion**

- (13)
- a. "I norra Svealand **finns det** förutsättningar för halka." (Dagens Nyheter)
"In Nord Svealand there are conditions for black ice"
 - b. På onsdagen under dagen **blir det** snöfall i Jämtland (Expressen)
"On Wednesday during the day there will be snowfall in Jämtland"
 - c. På Öland och på Gotland **är det** lite blåsig, och vindarna är riktigt kalla. (Expressen)
"In Öland and in Gotland is it a bit windy, and the winds are really cold."

433 inversive existential structures in total (47%)

III. Swedish weather reports

3) Valency: **time** and **space** segments

(14) a. *Framöver **kommer det att** fortsätta med mulet väder i hela landet* (Dagens Nyheter)
 “It will continue with overcast in the whole country.”

b. *Vädret kommer vara på den lite kallare sidan, men så **ska det** ju vara under en sportlovsvecka.* (Expressen)
 “The weather is going to be at the colder side, but that how it is during the winter holidays”

- Time segments: **112** (LC), **79** (RC)
- Place segments: **115** (LC), **131** (RC)

IV. Comparison and conclusion

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Existential constructions?

- ❖ Three arguments in favour of their possible constructions-status: (i) their **high frequency**, (ii) **their specific form**, (iii) their **valency schemas**;

	High frequency	Form-specific features	Non-canonical valency
Dutch	Yes	Inversion	TIME and SPACE arguments
Swedish	No	Inversion	TIME and SPACE arguments

IV. Comparison and conclusion

Further research

- ❖ Frame-semantics: “may be viewed as **a starting point** for the description of **the cognitive structure of the underlying domain**” (Dalmas/Gautier 2018);
- ❖ the “**weather frame**” (<https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fndrupal/>)
 - (a) **Time** [T]: This FE identifies the Time when the weather occurs.
 - (b) **Place** [P]: This FE identifies the Place where the weather occurs.
 - (c) **Specification** [Spec]: This FE identifies a further Specification of the weather conditions.

IV. Comparison and conclusion

- ❖ As said before, it also remains imperative to look at **different constructions** (i.e. motion and causative constructions) across **different LSP-domains** (i.e. political discourse, COVID-19 discourse) and within **different languages**;
- ❖ Furthermore, looking at internal variation within the domain and constructions also appears to be very promising:

(15) a. *Det finns en fortsatt **risk för** en hel del regn hela lördagen.* (Expressen)
 “There is a continuing risk for a lot of rain during the whole Saturday”

b. *Framöver **kommer det att** fortsätta med mulet väder i hela landet* (Dagens Nyheter)
 “It will continue with overcast in the whole country.”

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