Illusions of transitive expletives in Middle English

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Received: 31 August 2016 / Accepted: 28 July 2018 / Published online: 25 September 2019
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Abstract
This paper examines a type of existential there sentence found in Middle English that has been argued to have a structure similar to transitive expletive constructions (TECs) in other Germanic languages, or to follow from the presence of NegP below T during the relevant period. Based on an exhaustive analysis of the 74 examples of this construction found in the PennParsed Corpora of Historical English (out of a total of over six thousand sentences from 1125 to 1913 containing there coded as expletive), we observe that 67 contain both a modal verb and clausal negation licensing a negative associate, unlike TECs found in other Germanic languages, and that the construction is found only between 1390 and 1600. We argue that the availability of this construction was due to a transitory alignment of three syntactic properties in this stage of the language: (i) modals were still main verbs merged within vP, but took a reduced complement consisting of only an inner clausal phase, and did not take a thematic external argument; (ii) English still had negative concord; (iii) Voice and viewpoint Aspect shared a single syntactic projection. The confluence of these three factors provided a non-thematic specifier position, [Spec, vP], into which there could merge. Before the late 14th century, modals were full verbs taking a thematic external argument and full clausal complements, and after about 1600, they were merged directly in T, occurring in a monoclausal rather than a (reduced) biclausal structure. At no point did the English monoclausal spine have the structural room to accommodate a true Germanic TEC.
Keywords Middle English · There · Modal existential construction · Modals · Negation · Transitive expletives

1. Introduction

In Present-Day English, existential *there* (also referred to as ‘presentational’ or ‘expletive’ *there*) is possible in several clause types other than the existentials from which its name derives. Much has been made, for example by Chomsky (1981, 1995), of its availability with unaccusative main verbs; less often discussed is the fact that *there* can also occur with transitive or unergative verbs, though only in passive or progressive clauses, as illustrated in (1) and (2).

(1) Transitive:

a. Thousands of satellites orbit the Earth.

b. * There orbit thousands of satellites the Earth.

c. There are thousands of satellites orbiting the Earth.

   (progressive)

d. * There have thousands of satellites orbited the Earth.

   (perfect)

e. * There will thousands of satellites orbit the Earth.

   (modal)

f. There have been thousands of satellites orbiting the Earth.

   (perfect progressive)

g. There were thousands of satellites launched.

   (passive)

(2) Unergative:

a. Children played outside.

b. * There played children outside.

c. There were children playing outside.

   (progressive)

d. * There have children played outside.

   (perfect)

e. * There will children play outside.

   (modal)

f. There have been children playing outside.

   (perfect progressive)

This restriction is absent in some other Germanic languages, including German, Yiddish, Dutch, Frisian, Icelandic, and at least one dialect of Faroese (which Jonas 1995 calls Faroese I), all of which allow an existential expletive subject with simple transitive and unergative verbs.¹ Clauses with this type of expletive subject are known

¹ The mainland Scandinavian languages, by contrast, resemble English in barring expletive subjects with transitive and unergative verbs. Since there is no direct equivalent of the English progressive construction in these languages, the exceptional availability of transitive expletives in the progressive, seen in (1) and (2), cannot be replicated. For a discussion of passives, which we expect should generally pattern with unaccusatives, see Holmberg (2002).
as Transitive Expletive Constructions (TECs: Jonas 1995; Bobaljik and Jonas 1996; Bobaljik and Thráinsson 1998); a characteristic example from German appears in (3).

(3) German (Bobaljik and Jonas 1996, 209):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Es essen einige Mäuse Käse in der Küche.}
\end{align*}
\]

\textit{Explain eat some mice cheese in the kitchen}

‘There are some mice eating cheese in the kitchen.’

The standard generative view of transitive expletive constructions has been that they involve an extra IP-level functional head, or a functional head that parametrically licenses a specifier. \(^2\) This extra specifier position and the ordinary subject position are filled at the same time; the higher position contains the expletive, and the lower position contains the nominal that would otherwise have been the subject—the associate. In this view, both the expletive and the associate appear in the Infl domain of the clause. The availability of transitive expletives has thus been linked to the richness of a language’s Infl system: under this view, languages that permit transitive expletives are proposed to have a richer structure in the Infl system than do languages that lack them.

For most of its history, English has lacked transitive expletive constructions. However, in Middle English and at the beginning of the Early Modern English period, sentences can be found that look very much like examples of this construction. Such sentences are not found in Old English, and they disappear in the early 17th century. An example from Tanaka (2000) is shown in (4).\(^3\)

(4) “Sire,” said Ector, “for God will have it so, for ther shold never man have drawen oute this swerde but he that shall be rightwys kynge of this land.”

“Sire,” said Ector, “because God will have it so, for no man could have drawn out this sword but him who shall rightfully be king of this land.”’ (Malory, Le Morte Darthur, a. 1470)

In this paper we propose a novel analysis based on a thorough examination of the expletive constructions found in the Penn Parsed Corpora of Historical English (Kroch and Taylor 2000; Kroch et al. 2004, 2010). Though they did not exhibit the restriction found in Modern English to progressive and passive clauses, they were instead limited, in all but a handful of cases, to clauses containing both a modal and a negative element. Given the central role of both modality and negation in the distribution of \textit{there} with transitive and unergative predicates in Middle English, we refer to this as the \textit{negative modal existential construction} (NMEC).\(^4\)

\(^2\) Though see Rezac (n.d.) for a different view.

\(^3\) We take \textit{never} here to be a non-temporal negative quantifier or negative determiner, as suggested by Görász (2006, 9).

\(^4\) This label combines von Fintel’s (1992) label of “modal-existential” (adopted from a brief mention in Ball 1991), and Ingham’s (2003) term “Expletive Negative.”
Though little theoretical attention has previously been paid to this construction, a handful of authors have suggested treatments of it. Tanaka (2000) suggests that it has the same structure as TECs in other Germanic languages, proposing an extra specifier position to which there is merged; contra Tanaka, we argue that despite superficial similarities, NMECs attested in Middle English are not in fact the same as TECs in other Germanic languages. The connection between this construction and negation was explored in detail by Ingham (2003) in the context of a broader investigation into the history of English clausal negation (Ingham 2000, 2006, 2007; Haeberli and Ingham 2007); he suggests that the availability of the construction derives from the position and licensing of English clausal NegP during the relevant period. While the syntax of negation plays an important role in our account as well, we argue that the structure of modal predicates is also crucial, as previously noted by von Fintel (1992).

NMECs were briefly possible in Middle English, we argue, in part because during this period modal sentences had a particular kind of biclausal structure, which, together with the syntax of negation at the time (specifically the syntax of negative concord), provided a position in which there could merge. Following work such as Deal (2009) and Bjorkman and Cowper (2015), we assume that at all stages of English there originates in a low structural position, in the lower phase of a clause, where it must be local to an indefinite associate argument. While it can be merged as the second specifier of a head, it is incompatible with an externally merged thematic specifier of the same head, due to a general ban on two externally merged specifiers in a single projection.

In Middle English, modals were true raising predicates—verbs with no thematic external argument—which therefore had room for there to merge in their specifier. The syntax of negative concord, meanwhile, required negative associates to move into the modal clause where they could be licensed by clause-mate negation, and where they could also serve as a local associate for there. The availability of NMECs in English thus coincided with the relatively brief period during which modals were still verbs inserted in v, but their lexical meaning had been sufficiently bleached that they consistently permitted raising. Around the beginning of the 17th century, modal sentences came to be monoclausal, with modals merged directly in a functional head in the Infl system (Roberts 1985, 1993; van Kemenade 1992; Warner 1993; Cowper and Hall 2017; Cowper et al. to appear). Once that happened, NMECs ceased to be possible. We develop this analysis within a framework that situates parametric variation in the (functional) lexicon (Borer 1984; Chomsky 1995, 2013; Baker 2008; etc.). Under this approach, the properties of specific functional heads, and the set of heads in a language, can change over time.

We begin in Sect. 2 with a discussion of the data to be analyzed and how it was selected, before turning, in Sect. 3, to a brief review of previous work on negative modal existentials in Middle English. In Sect. 4, we discuss the theoretical accounts of expletive constructions in general, and of the status of modals in Middle English, which form the basis for our account. Section 5 gives the proposed analysis for negative modal existentials in late Middle English, and Sect. 6 discusses why the construction disappeared around 1600.
Table 1 Distribution of modals and negation in apparent transitive expletives in Middle English

|                | Modal | %  | No modal | %  |
|----------------|-------|----|----------|----|
| Negative       | 67    | 91 | 4        | 5  |
| Affirmative    | 3     | 4  | 0        | 0  |

2. Data, methodology, and findings

Our data come from the PennParsed Corpora of Historical English (PPCHE), including the Penn–Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English, 2nd ed. (PPCM2; Kroch and Taylor 2000), the Penn–Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English (PPCEME; Kroch et al. 2004), and the Penn–Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Modern British English (PPCMBE; Kroch et al. 2010). We extracted all sentences containing any word tagged as EX (‘existential there’). There were 6634 tokens, with dates ranging from 1125 to 1913.

These records were manually coded for the properties listed in (5):

(5) a. Valency of main verb
   (ditransitive / transitive / unergative / unaccusative / copular)
   b. Definiteness of associate
   (definite / strong indefinite / weak indefinite)
   c. Polarity of associate
   (positive / negative)
   d. Presence of auxiliaries
   (modal, perfect have, progressive be, passive be)
   e. Position of associate relative to auxiliaries and main verb

We began by identifying all the tokens that fit the basic profile of a transitive expletive construction: that is, clauses coded as having an expletive there subject, no passive or progressive auxiliary be, and a transitive, ditransitive, or unergative main verb. There were 111 of these in total, of which 74 were ultimately determined to constitute genuine examples of potential transitive expletives. The remaining 37 were excluded as irrelevant for a variety of reasons: 29 as outside verbals (Milsark 1974; Banerjee 2015), three as having a verb that was not unambiguously unergative, four as having a plausibly locative parse for there, and one as lacking any overt associate for there. The excluded tokens are discussed in detail in Appendix A.

The dates of the remaining 74 potential transitive expletives range from 1390 to 1636, and in fact only two examples are from later than 1600. They thus cover a considerably narrower temporal range than the corpora they are drawn from, which span 1150 to 1914.

Of these 74 sentences, 67 contain both a modal and negation. Another three contain a modal but no negation, and a further four negation but no modal. This distribution is summarized in Table 1, highlighting that though the association with negation and modality is not categorical, in 91% of cases the presence of there with a transitive or unergative main predicate indeed involves both clausal negation and a modal.
In (6)–(8) we give representative examples of the core pattern of negative modal existentials, where *there* co-occurs with both negation and a modal.

(6) Transitive, both modal and negation:

a. for *ther* **shold never man** have drawn oute this swerde…
   *for there should never man have drawn out this sword…* (CMMALORY, 9.252, a. 1470; see (4))

b. for *þer xal no wedyr ne tempest* noyin *þe*
   *for there shall no weather nor tempest trouble thee*
   ‘for no weather or storm shall trouble you’ (CMKEMPE, 96.2189, ca. 1475)

c. Certeyn *þer* **can no tonge** telle the ioye and the reste whiche is in
   *certain there can no tongue tell the joy and the rest which is in*
   Abrahams bosom
   *Abraham’s bosom*
   ‘Certainly no tongue can tell the joy and the rest which is in Abraham’s bosom.’ (CMAELR4, 24.731, a. 1450)

d. ther **may no man** doute that ther nys som blissfulnesse that is
   *there may no man doubt that there is some blissfulness that is*
   sad, stedefast, and parfyt
   *constant steadfast and perfect*
   ‘No man can doubt that there is some bliss that is constant, steadfast, and complete.’ (CMBOETH, 432.C1.134, ca. 1380)

e. He ordeyned *þere schul no man* say masse before *þat* he had seid *þe*
   *he ordained there should no man say Mass before that he had said the*
   ters, *þat* is to sey, ‘*Legem pone terce that is to say* [Lat.: law.acc.sg lay.down.2sg.imp]*
   ‘He ordained that no man should say Mass before he had recited the [text for the canonical hour of] terce, i.e., “Legem pone” [Psalm 119:33, “Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes”]’ (CMCAPCHR, 52.616, a. 1464)

(7) Ditransitive, both modal and negation (only one instance found):

but ther **could no man** shew me which was your ground
   *but there could no man show me which was your ground*
   ‘but no man could show me which was your ground’ (GPOOLE-1500-E1-P2, 181.57, 1500)

(8) Unergative, both modal and negation:

a. but ther **myghte none** prevaille
   *but there might none prevail*
   ‘but none could prevail’ (CMMALORY, 10.290, a. 1470)
b. *I wolde þow wer closyd in an hows of ston þat þer *schuld no man

*I would thou were closed in an house of stone that there should no man

speak with thee

‘I wish you were shut up in a house of stone, so that no man would be able
to speak with you’ (CMKEMPE, 27.604, ca. 1475)

c. *Ther shuld no poure peple crye after worldly good aboute thy selle

*there should no poor people crye after worldly good[s] about thy cell

‘No poor people would cry for worldly goods around your cell.’

(CMAELR4, 2.44, a. 1450)

Seven tokens occur with either a modal or negation, but not both. All of these are
given in (9) and (10).

(9) Modal only \((n = 3)\):

a. *but when he come þrogh any cyte, þer *schuld a man stond by hym

*but when he came through any city there should a man stand by him

in þe chariot

‘But when he came through any city, a man should stand by him in the
chariot’ (CMMIRK, 116.3176, ca. 1415)

b. *but rather than I sholde be dishonoured, there wolde som good man take

*but rather than I should be dishonoured there would some good man take

my quarrel

my quarrel

‘but rather than that I should be dishonoured, some good man would take
up my quarrel’ (CMMALORY, 36.1143, a. 1470)

c. *it may be there may some have occasion hereafter

*it may be there may some have occasion hereafter

‘It may be that some may have occasion hereafter’ (PROUD-1630-E2-P1,
120.11, 1636)

(10) Negation only \((n = 4)\):

a. for the lawe seith that þer maketh no man himselven riche, if he do

for the law says that no man shall make himself rich if he does harm to another creature’ (CMCCTMELI, 233.C1.630, ca. 1390)

b. *for itt is so secrete þat þer wote no man lyvynge without revelation

*for it is so secret that there knows no man living without revelation

whether þat he be signett þer-with or no

‘for it is so secret that no man alive knows without revelation whether he
is marked with it or not’ (CMROYAL, 258.328, ca. 1450 / ca. 1425)
c. ‘[er knowi]b no man withowte reuelacion whe]ur ]at he be marked there knoweth no man without revelation whether that he be marked with he signett of grace or no’ – predestinatus 
with the sign of grace or no [Lat.: predetermined.MASC.NOM.SG]
“no man knows without revelation whether he is marked with the sign of grace or not” – predestinatus’ (CMROYAL, 258.330, ca. 1450 / ca. 1425)

d. there hath no man taken this oath all redy more gladly than I wolde doe
‘no man has previously taken this oath more gladly than I would do’ (MROPER-E1-P1, 516.17, 1534)

Thus all 74 transitive expletive constructions in the PennParsed Corpora contain a modal, a negative associate, or, most frequently, both. The same prevalence of modals and negation appears to hold of examples from sources other than the PPCHE. As discussed in more detail below, ten of the eleven relevant examples given by Breivik (1983) have this property. A preliminary investigation of the Parsed Corpus of Middle English Poetry (PCMPE, Zimmermann 2015) turned up 166 sentences containing words tagged as EX, of which 5 have active transitive or unergative verbs.5 All five contain modals, and all but one have negation. Two of the examples with both modal and negation are given in (11).

(11) a. Ther wold no man sey nay
   there would no man say nay
   ‘No man would say no’ (“Sir Cleges,” ca. 1395)

   b. Ther myght no ]ing so moche me queme / As robbe, or see an abbey
   there might no thing so much me please as rob or see an abbey
   burnt
   ‘Nothing could please me so much as to rob an abbey or see it burnt.’
   (“The bird with four feathers,” ca. 1400)

The fifth example, which lacks negation, is given in (12), with two lines of context before and after the relevant line. Although it is tagged as containing an existential there, it seems more plausibly to be a locative:

(12) “Havelok the Dane,” ca. 1296; translation from Wyatt (1889, 41)
   And lopen forth so he weren wode
   and leapt forth as if they were mad
   ‘and leapt forth as if they were mad’
   To he laddes, ßer he stode,
   to the lads, where they stood
   ‘to the lads, where they stood’

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5 We are very grateful to Richard Zimmermann for bringing this corpus to our attention and making it available to us.
And yaf hem wundes swiþe grete;  
*and gave them wounds very great*

‘and gave them wounds very great’

**Der mithe** men wel se boyes bete,  
*there might one well see boys fight*

‘there could one well see boys fight’

And ribbes in here sides breke,  
*and ribs in their sides break*

‘and break ribs in their sides’

And hauelok on hem wel wreke.  
*and Havelok on them well avenge*

‘and avenge Havelok well on them.’

Similarly, Tanaka (2000) cites examples of potential transitive expletives from several sources, including the OED, and all but two contain both a modal and negation. Some of his examples are given in (13).

(13) From Tanaka (2000, 479–80):

a. withoute these … Ther may no kyng lede grete lordship  
*without these no king may lead great lordship*

‘without these, no king may lead great lordship’ (Robert Grosseteste, “The Castle of Love,” 14th century)

b. the[r] schall no man bete ne bynde a messyng  
*no man shall beat or bind a messenger*

‘no man shall beat or bind a messenger’ (Proverbs in MS Douce 52, 15th century)

c. þere couþe no man it aquenche wiþ no craft  
*no man could quench it with any skill*

‘no man could quench it with any skill’ (John of Trevisa’s translation of Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon*, 1387)

In fact, Tanaka (2000, 482–3, fn. 12) mentions that a reviewer noted the preponderance of examples with negation, and supplies the two non-negated examples in response, reproduced in (14). Strikingly, however, one of these does contain a modal.
Table 2 Negative modal existentials in the previous literature

|                | Modal + Negation | Modal only | Negation only | Neither | Total |
|----------------|------------------|------------|---------------|---------|-------|
| PCMEP          | 4                | 1          | –             | –       | 5     |
| Jacobsson (1951)| 5                | 1          | –             | 1^6     | 7     |
| Breivik (1983) | 10               | –          | 1             | –       | 11    |
| Ball (1991, 301–302) | 8                | 1          | –             | –       | 9     |
| von Fintel (1992)| 12               | –          | 1             | 1^6     | 14    |
| Tanaka (2000)  | 15               | 1          | –             | 1^7     | 5     |
| Ingham (2000)  | 4                | –          | –             | –       | 11    |
| Ingham (2003)  | 11               | –          | –             | –       | 11    |

(14) a. Peter, knowing … that there would some Jews reprove this his doing

   ‘Peter, knowing that some Jews would reprove this action of his’ (Nicholas Udall, *The first tome or volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus vpon the Newe Testamente*, 1548)

b. so that ere the morning, from three of the clocke the day before, there had

   ‘so that before morning from three o’clock the day before fifteen different warships had assailed her’ (Sir Walter Raleigh, “A report of the truth of the fight about the Iles of Açores, this last Sommer, betwixt the Reuenge, one of her Maiesties Shippes, and an Armada of the King of Spaine,” 1591)

The distribution of modals and negation in apparent transitive expletives in other published sources appears in Table 2. These reflect the distribution in our own results from the PPCCHE, with the overwhelming majority of examples involving both a modal auxiliary and negation.

The preponderance of modals and negation that we find with apparent transitive expletives in Middle English is not reflected in the transitive expletive constructions found in modern Germanic languages, a representative selection of which appears in (15).^8^

(15) Transitive expletive constructions in other Germanic languages

a. Yiddish (Bobaljik and Jonas 1996, 209):

   ‘Someone has eaten an apple.’

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6 The same example of a potential transitive expletive with neither negation nor a modal, (14b), appears in all three of Jacobsson (1951), von Fintel (1992), and Tanaka (2000).

7 This example is cited in a footnote as the only non-negative example found. It is also unusual in that the associate is definite.

8 But see Christensen (1991), who describes a pattern of transitive expletive constructions in mainland Scandinavian languages that requires both a negative associate and an auxiliary verb, though not necessarily a modal.
b. Frisian (Bobaljik and Jonas 1996, 209):
   Der lêst ien in boek.
   *There reads somebody a book*
   ‘There is someone reading a book.’

c. Dutch (Zwart 1992):
   i. Er kocht een man een huis.
      *there bought a man a house*
      ‘A man bought a house.’
   ii. Er danste een paar.
      *there danced a couple*
      ‘A couple danced.’

d. Icelandic (Hrafnbjargarson 2004, 155):
   Það hefur kona lesið bókina.
   *there has woman.INDEF read book.DEF*
   ‘A woman has read the book.’

e. Faroese I (Bobaljik and Jonas 1996, 209):
   Tað bygdu nakrir íslendingar hús í Havn.
   *there built some Icelanders houses in Torshavn*
   ‘Some Icelanders built houses in Torshavn.’

Under the standard account of transitive expletives, applied by Tanaka to the historical English data, the preponderance of modals and negation found in Middle English would be coincidental—as would the fact that transitive expletive constructions disappeared at exactly the time that modals underwent a significant categorial change from raising verbs to inflectional elements in Infl. In this article we instead propose an analysis in which ongoing changes in the structure of both modals and negation were implicated in the appearance of transitive expletives in Middle English, and later in their loss.

What this account will not immediately explain are the seven transitive expletives that contain either a modal or negation, but not both. This amounts to almost 10% of the total, an order of magnitude greater than is to be expected if the exceptions are to be counted as errors (Kroch 1989; Santorini 1992). For the moment, however, we set those cases aside, and first develop an account for the predominant pattern, i.e., those examples containing both a modal and a negative word below the modal. We return to the seven exceptions in Sect. 5.3.

### 3. Previous work on negative modal existentials

There is comparatively little work on the history of this construction in English. Sentences of the type we discuss here are mentioned in Jacobsson (1951), Toda (1982), Breivik (1983, 1989), and Visser (1963–73); generative analyses are presented in von Fintel (1992), Tanaka (2000), and Ingham (2003), while Christensen (1991) discusses a parallel construction in the Scandinavian languages.

Jacobsson (1951, 206–212) observes that Middle and Early Modern English used expletive *there* in a wider range of constructions than Present-Day English (PDE),
and notes in particular the prevalence of negative subjects, but does not propose any formal theoretical explanation. He does, however, suggest a parallel between the earlier English examples and contemporary American dialectal ones like (16), writing that “it is significant [...] that all the modern examples, and most of the earlier ones, represent the sequence (there) + auxiliary + negative subject + verb” (Jacobsson 1951, 210).

(16) It just breaks down little by little and there don’t nobody know what makes them.  
(John Steinbeck, *The Wayward Bus*, 1947)

Jacobsson’s (1951) discussion of these constructions focuses on possible prosodic or information-structural motivations for their use, rather than on what makes them syntactically possible or impossible in any given stage or dialect of the language. Here, we will be concerned with the syntactic differences between Standard PDE and earlier stages, leaving for future research the structure of sentences like (16) in varieties of PDE that permit them.

The focus of much of the generative literature on English *there*-constructions has been on expletive sentences of all sorts, with little focus specifically on NMECs, though Breivik (1983, 302, 318) reports finding 29 examples of what look like this construction between 1225 and 1550. Of the 12 examples he gives, ten have both a modal and a negative associate, and one of the remaining two has a negative associate but no modal. The twelfth is analyzable as a different construction (an “outside verbal” in the sense of Milsark 1974, which we discuss in Appendix A).

While Breivik does not discuss the preponderance of modals and negation in this construction, von Fintel’s (1992) account crucially connects modals and negation with the possibility of *there* with transitive and unergative predicates. Von Fintel (1992) proposes to account for sentences like (17) in terms of Haegeman and Zanuttini’s (1992) Neg Criterion.

(17) Why dredist ðe? Ðer schal no man don non harm to ðe.  

\[\textit{why fear you there shall no man do no harm to you}\]

‘Why are you afraid? There shall no man do no harm to you.’

He suggests that the modal carries a [+neg] feature, which agrees with and licenses the negative associate under head government. He is the only author we know of who connects the possibility of apparent transitive expletives to the presence of a modal in the clause, albeit in a somewhat \textit{ad hoc} manner, in that he provides no independent motivation for the presence of the [+neg] feature on the modal, or for why only modals and not other auxiliary verbs are marked as [+neg]. He suggests that the negative modal existential construction occurs only with modal verbs because of their semantics: these verbs, unlike all others, take semantic scope over the whole clause, and the use of an expletive subject allows this scope to be reflected in surface structure. Our account similarly builds on the observation that modals are required for NMECs in Middle English, but we argue that this is for syntactic rather than semantic reasons.

Tanaka (2000) takes a very different tack, treating the negative modal existential construction along the lines of the analysis of transitive expletive constructions of
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Icelandic in Thráinsson (1996). Following van Kemenade (1987, 1997b), and Hulk and van Kemenade (1997), he proposes that in late Middle English, the clause contained two projections—AgrP and TP—whose specifiers could host a structural subject. Around 1600, the loss of verbal morphology eliminated any evidence for separating AgrP and TP, and the clause was reanalyzed as containing a single IP projection. The disappearance of the second structural subject position, according to Tanaka, is what led to the loss of transitive expletive constructions. The primary, and for us fatal, problem with Tanaka’s approach is that it makes no connection whatsoever between the Middle English data and either modals or negation, thus wrongly predicting that the negative modal existential construction should pattern similarly to the transitive expletive constructions found in other Germanic languages.

The most thorough investigation of the construction we know of is that of Ingham (2000, 2003, 2007) and Haeberli and Ingham (2007). Like all of the other accounts so far mentioned, Ingham’s analyses treat there as simply an expletive inserted in the surface subject position, focussing rather on the placement of the negative associate immediately after the auxiliary.

In the context of a significant body of research on the history of English clausal negation, Ingham (2003) argues that late Middle English was a negative concord language, with NegP projected below T in the clausal spine. By late Middle English, the head of NegP was phonologically null, bearing an uninterpretable Neg feature that had to be licensed by a negative element in its specifier. Changes in the mechanism of case assignment to the structural subject made it possible for the subject to remain in [Spec,NegP] and receive Case there, rather than moving higher, to [Spec,TP]. Negative subjects thus remained in [Spec,NegP], licensing the phonologically null Neg head, and the higher subject position, [Spec,TP], was thus available to host the expletive. As for the loss of the construction in Early Modern English, Ingham (2007) argues that when English ceased to exhibit negative concord, the NegP projection itself was lost, eliminating the position occupied by the negated subjects and causing the loss of the expletive negative construction.

This account has certain aspects in common with the one to be proposed here, with one crucial difference: Ingham’s account makes no mention of the importance of modals. While his analysis correctly predicts that the negative modal existential construction should be possible only when there is an auxiliary verb in the clause, the only requirement is that the auxiliary be finite. We will argue that in late Middle English, the position occupied by the negated subject in a negative modal existential is provided not by NegP, but rather by the modal verb.

In several respects, our analysis builds on the proposals of von Fintel (1992) and Ingham (2003). Like both of them, we argue that negative concord played a key role in licensing apparent transitive expletive constructions in Middle English, though we pursue a somewhat different theoretical view of how this licensing takes place, adopting the Agree-based approach to negative concord advanced by authors such as Zeijlstra (2008, 2012) and Haegeman and Lohndal (2010). Like von Fintel (1992), we

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9 See also Frisch (1997), who places NegP above T but below AgrP, with similar effect.
10 This account seems closer to the mainland Scandinavian transitive expletive pattern discussed by Christensen (1991), where non-modal auxiliaries are also possible.
further argue that modal verbs play a key role in licensing this construction, though in contrast to his semantic analysis we argue that it is the syntax of modals as raising predicates that created a syntactic position in which *there* could occur. We further depart not only from von Fintel (1992) and Ingham (2003) but also from Tanaka (2000) in assuming that *there* originates low in the structure of a clause, at the edge of the inner phase (Deal 2009; Bjorkman and Cowper 2015), subject to several conditions that interact with the syntax of both modals and negation in accounting for the full distribution of the negative modal existential construction.

4. Background to the analysis

4.1 The syntax of modals in Middle English

Our analysis of the modal existential construction builds on a fairly standard view of the history of modals, one of the better-studied topics in the history of English syntax. We highlight those points that are most important to our account of the negative modal existential construction. For descriptive convenience, we use the term “premodals” (Lightfoot 1979) to refer to the set of verbs in Old and Middle English that became the Present-Day English modals.

In Old English, the premodals were lexical verbs whose meanings happened to have modal semantics (Lightfoot 1979; Roberts 1985; Allan 1987; Warner 1993). However, they did not generally have epistemic meanings (Fischer 1992, though Warner 1990 and Denison 1993 give some counterexamples). They thus could be analyzed as lexical verbs taking either nominal arguments or infinitival complements—primarily control structures.11

Clear and consistent evidence for modals as raising verbs arises only in late Middle English (Warner 1993, Chapter 6), at which stage the premodals also increasingly had epistemic uses. For example, the number of citations of epistemic modals in Visser (1963–73) jumps dramatically after the mid-15th century. However, in the 15th century English modals were still categorially verbs; they became fully established as inflectional elements only in the 16th century (Warner 1993; Roberts and Roussou 2003; Cowper and Hall 2017, among many others). Throughout Middle English, the premodals increasingly functioned as raising verbs, taking no external argument. By and large, they had only finite forms, and exhibited no aspectual or voice alternations.

11 Warner (1993, 123) assumes a raising account of Old English sentences like (18), where the embedded verb does not take a nominative subject, and the higher, modal verb is transparent to this property.

(18) hine sceal on domes dæg gesceanian bevoran gode
    he.ACC shall on doomsday shame.INF before god
    ‘he [lit.: him] shall at Doomsday be ashamed before God’ Wulfstan (Napier 1883 [1967])
We hypothesize that Middle English modals, while still categorically verbal, did not appear in the full range of structures available to other verbs. Rather, they appeared only as the immediate complement of (finite) T. They could not be selected by Perf, the head that underlies the temporal perfect, nor could they be selected by a (progressive) Voice/Aspect head. They were thus dominated by a reduced set of inflectional categories compared both to ordinary lexical verbs and to the premodals in Old English. In addition, during this period the syntactic complement of modals became smaller, in a manner reminiscent of Wurmbrand’s (2004) restructuring predicates. Specifically, we propose that the complements of modal verbs came to consist of only the inner phasal domain, rather than a full nonfinite clause. We identify the lower phase head as VAsp, following Cowper and Hall’s (2013) proposal that Voice and viewpoint Aspect occupied a single projection in Middle English and Early Modern English.

The reduced structure, both above and below the modal verb, set the stage for the reinterpretation of the modals as inflectional heads—but it is crucially only before this final reanalysis that the NMEC was available.

4.2 The syntax of negation in Middle English

The second key component of our analysis is the syntax of negation—specifically negative concord—in Middle English, and its position in the clausal spine. It is generally agreed that Middle English exhibited negative concord (Fischer 1998; Ingham 2006, 2007; Kallel 2007), which means that it had a NegP in the clausal spine (Zeijlstra 2008). There is less consensus on exactly where NegP appears, and whether its position changed over the course of time. Most authors agree that in Old English, NegP was high, above TP (van Kemenade 1997a, 1999, 2000; Fischer et al. 2000; Ingham 2007); Ingham argues that the high Neg head, spelled out as no and later as ne, attracted the verb, giving what is known as NegV1 order, as in (19).

(19) Ne gesomniu ic gesomnunge heara.
   NEG assemble I meetings them.GEN
   ‘I shall not assemble their meetings.’ (Vespasian Psalter 15,4, cited in Ingham 2007, 367)

(20) Ne mihte þer nan wiðstonden…
   NEG might there none withstand
   ‘None might withstand’ (CMLAMBX1, 131.1304, a. 1225)

By the time of Middle English, the negative particle ne had been lost, making the status and position of NegP less obvious. For Zeijlstra (2008), the persistence of negative concord is evidence that the projection still exists at this stage. Neg-words in the clause are in an Agree relation with the phonologically null Neg head, licensing

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12 This is essentially a structural restatement of the fact that, by late Middle English, modals took only finite form.

13 Harwood (2013) argues that Asp is the highest head of the inner phase; building on this, Bjorkman and Cowper (2015) argue that it was the division of the earlier VAsp projection into separate Voice and Asp heads that allows there to occur with transitive and unergative predicates specifically in the progressive in Present-Day English.
Clausal negation. For Ingham (2000, 2007), late Middle English sentences like (21) provide evidence that NegP is no longer above TP, but now sits below T, with the negated object moving to its specifier.\(^{14}\)

\[(21) \quad \text{I may no leysour haue.} \]

\[\text{I may no leisure have} \]

‘I may have no leisure.’ (Paston D 182,48, cited in Ingham 2007, 368)

Ingham’s (2007) account explains why negated objects, but not other objects, could appear in this position; only negated objects were attracted by the phonologically null Neg head. For Ingham, this is also the position of the associate in the negative modal existential construction. The loss of that construction corresponded to the disappearance of negative concord, which, following Zeijlstra (2008), entailed the loss of the NegP projection.

However, as stated earlier, in Ingham’s (2007) account of negative modal existential constructions, the presence of a modal plays no role, leaving the overwhelming preponderance of examples with modals unexplained. For that reason, we pursue a different tack, placing NegP above T at all stages, from Old English to the present day. We assume that while the Old English clause-initial *ne* may have been part of the C system, Neg is the highest head in the Infl system from Middle English on. We follow Zeijlstra (2008, 2012) and Haegeman and Lohndal (2010) in assuming that in negative concord languages, neg-words like *no man* or *never* probe upwards to find a licensing Neg head. For us, the loss of negative concord in (standard) Modern English does not entail a change in the position of NegP, but only the loss of this licensing requirement.

### 4.3 There in Present-Day English

We take as a starting point the account of Present-Day English *there* constructions proposed in Bjorkman and Cowper (2015), which builds on earlier work by Deal (2009). Assuming the maximal inflectional structure shown in (22), Bjorkman and Cowper argue that *there* originates in the specifier position of the highest projection of the inner phase of a clause.\(^{15}\) External arguments are merged in [Spec, VoiceP]. Thus, in (active) transitive and unergative clauses, Voice has an externally merged specifier, while in passive and unaccusative clauses, it does not.

\(^{14}\) Van Kemenade (1999) also argues for two NegP projections, one above T and the other below.

\(^{15}\) Following Harwood (2013) and Wurmbrand (2013), among others, we assume a dynamic theory of phasehood, in which phasal properties are exhibited in a given structure by the highest head present in that phasal domain. For PDE, progressive Asp defines the upper limit of the inner phase. In (22) and elsewhere, phases are enclosed, where relevant, in rounded boxes.
(22) _Kate may have been being watched._

Bjorkman and Cowper (2015) identify four important properties of _there_, of which the last two are relevant here. First, _there_ must bind an individual variable in the associate, which must therefore be a weak indefinite (cf. Milsark’s 1974 E-rule). Second, _there_ must also bind a temporal variable, whose presence depends on the aspectual properties of the clause.\(^\text{16}\) Stage-level predicates have such a variable, while individual-level ones do not. This is what accounts for the well-known contrast in grammaticality between (23) and (24).

(23) Stage-level:
   a. ✓ There is a unicorn in the garden.
   b. ✓ There are people available.

(24) Individual-level:
   a. * There is a unicorn gracile.
   b. * There are people altruistic.

Third, and more importantly for our account of the Middle English data, _there_ must merge with a head whose DP argument positions are already saturated. It can therefore merge with a passive or unaccusative VoiceP, but not with an active transitive or unergative one.

\(^{16}\) See also É. Kiss (1996, 135), who suggests that _there_ might be the spellout of an eventuality argument.
(25)  a. ✓ There gradually emerged a consensus. (unaccusative)  
b. ✓ There were many stories told. (passive)  
c. * There told many people stories. (transitive)  
d. * There danced a couple. (unergative)  

Fourth, there must merge below T and Perf; i.e., in the lower phase of the clause, because it must originate in the same phase as the associate (Deal 2009).  
Keeping the third and fourth requirements in mind, let us now consider why there can occur with active transitive and unergative clauses in Present-Day English, provided they are progressive. Recall from (22) that progressive aspect is represented in an Asp head above VoiceP but still below the TP domain. As argued by Harwood (2013), the progressive aspect head is the highest head in the lower phase of the clause. The specifier of AspP thus provides a possible merge position for there, as shown in (26).\(^{17}\)

(26) There will be some children watering the flowers.

\(^{17}\) Deal (2009, 300, fn. 28) demonstrates that in Present-Day English, progressive transitive expletives cannot be analyzed as reduced relative clauses, contra Moro (1997) and others.
Looking more closely at the auxiliary sequence, we can also observe that the associate surfaces in [Spec,AspP]. This is shown more clearly in (27), in which all auxiliary positions are instantiated, and in the structure in (28). The only grammatical position for the associate is between the perfect auxiliary *been* and the progressive auxiliary *being*.$^{18}$ As shown in (28), this means that the associate must have moved to [Spec,AspP].

(27)  
- a. *There will have been being eaten *cake*.  
- b. *There will have been being *cake* eaten.  
- c. ✓ There will have been *cake* being eaten.  
- d. *There will have *cake* been being eaten.  
- e. *There will *cake* have been being eaten.

(28)  
\[
\text{MoodP} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{there} \\
\text{Mood} \\
\text{will} \\
\text{TP} \\
\text{T} \\
\text{have} \\
\text{PerfP} \\
\text{be-en} \\
\langle \text{there} \rangle \\
\langle \text{cake} \rangle \\
\text{AspP} \\
\text{Asp} \\
\text{PROG} \\
\text{be-ing} \\
\langle \text{cake} \rangle \\
\text{VoiceP} \\
\text{Voice} \\
\text{PSV} \\
\langle \text{cake} \rangle \\
\langle \text{cake} \rangle \\
\text{vP} \\
\langle \text{v} \rangle \\
\langle \text{eat} \rangle \\
\langle \text{eat-en} \rangle
\end{array}
\]

It seems from these examples that both the associate and *there* occupy specifier positions in AspP, which raises the question of why sentences like those in (29) cannot be derived. Here, the associate and *there* both occupy specifier positions in VoiceP, which is the highest projection in the lower phase. If AspP permits multiple specifiers hosting both *there* and the associate, as it does in (28), why should VoiceP behave any differently when it is the highest projection in the lower phase?

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$^{18}$ The grammaticality judgments in (27) are those of the authors as native speakers of PDE, and are also reported by Harwood (2012, 221) and Ramchand (2017, 246). A reviewer notes that while (27d) and (27e) do seem to be consistently judged ungrammatical, there are some speakers who find (27a) and (27b) at least marginally acceptable. While an understanding of exactly what determines the acceptability of (27a) and (27b) must await further research, the generalization nonetheless holds that the associate must appear—and thus that *there* must merge—in the inner phase of the clause.
The answer, Bjorkman and Cowper (2015) argue, lies in the fact that though in both structures *there* is the second specifier of a projection also including the external argument, only in (29) do both specifiers originate in the same projection (i.e., both *there* and the external argument are externally merged to [Spec, VoiceP]). Bjorkman and Cowper propose that while multiple specifiers are in general possible, a head can host no more than one externally merged specifier, so that when an external argument is merged in [Spec, VoiceP], *there* cannot also merge to the same position.\(^{19}\)

To sum up, the following three assumptions are relevant to the structure of *there*-constructions, in Middle English as well as in Present-Day English. First, the clause is divided into two phasal domains demarcated by the head associated with aspect (as noted above, in Middle English we identify this head as VAsp). Second, *there* merges as the highest specifier of the lower phasal domain, but because a given syntactic head may have at most one externally merged specifier, *there* cannot merge in the same phrase that thematically introduces the external argument. Third, *there* must be local (i.e. phase-mate) to an indefinite associate argument (setting aside Milsark’s 1974 “outside verbals,” where the associate can be definite, also discussed in Banerjee 2015).

5. *There*-sentences in Middle English

5.1 The basic distribution of *there*

We maintain that in Middle English, as in Present-Day English, *there* merges in the lower phase of the clause, as a specifier of VAsp, but that it cannot merge if a thematic external argument of VAsp has already merged in that position. Canonically, *there* thus appears in unaccusative, passive, and copular clauses, in both Middle English

\(^{19}\) A limit of one externally merged specifier per projection seems to follow from the approach to labelling in Sheehan (2013); see also Rezac’s (n.d.) MultipleSpecifier Theorem.
and Present-Day English. However, the special property of Middle English, we believe, was that modals, on their path to reanalysis as functional elements, were raising verbs, and thus projected an additional vP layer, creating a position in which there could potentially merge.

To illustrate this basic analysis of there, we begin with a simple there-sentence with an unaccusative verb and no auxiliaries.

(30) And oppon a tyme there come a faire bachiler

‘And upon a time there came a fair bachelor’ (CMBRUT3, 57.1660, ca. 1400)

In this sentence, since the verb is unaccusative, its argument merges within vP. In the structure shown, VAsp is the inner phase head. Since VAsp does not introduce a thematic external argument, there can merge as its specifier, and subsequently move to [Spec,TP]. Alternatively, if unaccusative clauses do not project Voice (Alexiadou et al. 2006; Ko 2009, a.o.), the lower phase would consist only of vP. Since an unaccusative vP does not have a thematic specifier, there could merge in [Spec, vP], which is sufficiently local to the indefinite associate.

5.2 Negative modal existentials in Middle and Early Modern English

We now turn to our main question: Why are modals and negation so preponderant in Middle English modal existential clauses? We propose that the modal and the negation

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20 The status of progressive clauses is complicated by the fact that progressive aspect in Middle English shares a syntactic head with voice. We thus set progressive clauses aside for the purposes of this discussion, since the presence of progressive aspect at this stage implies no additional structure, though it does in PDE.

21 The arguments in the literature about the presence or absence of VoiceP in English unaccusative clauses pertain to Present-Day English, where voice and aspect occupy separate projections. We have not yet explored the consequences for these arguments of a single VAsp projection; suffice it to say that at least some unaccusative clauses in earlier English exhibit progressive or resultative aspect, and will thus have to contain a VAspP.
each contribute a structural ingredient essential to the derivation of these constructions. The modal, as a raising verb without a thematic specifier, provides a position where there can merge. Clausal negation, crucially above the modal vP, triggers movement of the negative associate to a position local to where there is merged.

As stated above in Sect. 4.1, we assume that modals in Middle English were raising verbs, taking a reduced complement consisting only of an inner clausal phase; i.e., an embedded VAspP. As outlined in Sect. 4.2, Middle English was also a negative concord language, in which negative arguments required licensing by a negative operator within the same clause.

The structure in (31) shows the derivation of a transitive expletive construction with both a modal and a negated associate. Because the lower clause is transitive, the thematic subject no man merges in [Spec, VAspP]. Since that subject is a neg-word, it probes upwards for a licensing Neg head. It fails to find one locally, and moves to the edge of the next phase; i.e., to the matrix [Spec, vP], from which it can be licensed by Neg in the outer phase. Because no man was moved to [Spec, vP], rather than internally merged in that position, there can merge as a second [Spec, vP] as shown in the tree in (31). Having done so, there then raises to the main clause subject position.

\[(31) \quad \text{þere schul no man say masse (as in (6e))}\]

In the absence of either a negative associate or a modal, the derivation with there would not converge. The structure in (32) shows what happens when the first of these conditions is not met; that is, when the sentence contains a modal, but the associate is not a neg-word. Apart from the positive associate and the concomitant absence of NegP above TP, the structure is identical to the well-formed example in (31), and we predict that it should be ruled out.

\[22\quad \text{As mentioned earlier, we adopt Wurmbrand’s (2013) dynamic approach to phasehood. In the absence of a dominating VAspP, the } v \text{ head containing the modal determines the inner phase of the matrix clause.}\]
Here, since the associate is not a neg-word, it has no need to be licensed by a higher Neg head. It thus remains in its initial merge position in \([\text{Spec}, \text{VAspP}]\). Since VAspP has an externally merged specifier, \textit{there} cannot merge as a second specifier. It could, in principle, merge as the sole specifier of the higher vP, but in that position it would not be in the same phase as the associate. A transitive expletive construction is thus impossible in this instance. 23

The structure in (33) shows what happens when the second condition is not met, when a clause contains a negative associate but no modal. Again, the structure differs minimally from the well-formed example in (31), but is ruled out on our account because there is no position in which \textit{there} can licitly merge.

23 It is crucial to our account of why examples like (32) occur rarely that positive associates do not in general move to the matrix \([\text{Spec}, \text{vP}]\)—if they did, then \textit{there} could merge as the second specifier just as it does in (31). Yet it seems that this movement must be possible for the subjects of ordinary modal clauses, of the form \textit{A man schul say masse}. Here there is no expletive, and so the subject of the embedded predicate must ultimately raise to the subject position of the matrix modal clause (on our assumption that modals were raising verbs at this stage). The phase impenetrability condition predicts that this movement would have to proceed via the edge of the matrix vP, just as (for example) long distance \textit{wh}-movement must proceed via the edges of intervening non-interrogative CPs—but this is exactly the movement that must be ruled out, to account for the fact that \textit{there} does not freely occur with positive associates. The generalization seems to be that non-negative subjects cannot \textit{remain} in matrix \([\text{Spec}, \text{vP}]\)—perhaps because their movement to this position is predicted only as an intermediate step on the way to matrix \([\text{Spec}, \text{TP}]\), while negative subjects are independently motivated to move to this position, in order to receive clause-mate licensing from a higher Neg head. While we do not have an explanation for this pattern, note that it is formally parallel to the question of how to allow \textit{wh}-items to move to the specifiers of intervening non-interrogative CPs, without thereby allowing them to remain in those positions should a higher interrogative C not later be merged. Whatever analysis is given of those cases should extend to the data discussed here.
Without a modal, there is no higher vP, and the sentence is monoclausal. The inner phase is determined by VAspP, as indicated by the box, and the outer phase by NegP. Since no man is externally merged as the thematic specifier of VAspP, there cannot merge as a second specifier in the lower phase. The neg-word no man probes upward, and finds Neg in its search space. It can thus remain in [Spec, VAspP]. Since þere must merge in the same phase as the associate, there is nowhere in (33) for it to merge. Again, a transitive expletive construction cannot be derived.

This is our analysis of the main pattern of negative modal existentials in Middle English, which create the illusion that English once exhibited a transitive expletive construction of the type still found in other Germanic languages. It was a particular confluence of structural conditions that allowed there to surface with transitive and unergative main predicates. First, the premodsals were still verbs, but acted as raising predicates whose complements were reduced clauses, consisting only of an inner phase. Second, since Middle English was a negative concord language, a negative associate probed upwards to find a licensing Neg head, and the absence of negation in the search domain could trigger movement into a higher domain.

As a result of these factors, transitive expletives could be derived, provided that there was a modal verb in a negative matrix clause with no thematic subject, taking as a complement a VAspP with a neg-phrase as an external argument. The modal verb, determining the lower phase of its clause, provided just enough structure between the negative associate and the Neg head to force the associate to move to the specifier of the modal vP. And the modal’s lack of an external argument of its own made its specifier available as a landing site for the associate, and as a merge position for there.

The account so far has focused only on the core pattern of negative modal existentials; i.e., those containing both a modal and a negative associate. We now turn to the
examples we had previously set aside, the minority of cases that contain only a modal or negation, but not both.

### 5.3 There without negation or without modals

Of the 74 occurrences of expletive *there* with a transitive or unergative predicate in our data set, recall that seven did not contain both a modal and negation (Table 1). Similarly few exceptions can be found in examples from other sources (Table 2). Our analysis predicts this association, since it is the union of the argument structure of modals and the licensing of negative concord that makes *there* possible in these clauses. This account might appear to be too strong, however, given that the data are not categorical. In this section we propose that the remaining seven exceptions are not fatal to the core analysis, but may instead be attributable to grammatical variation.

Three of the exceptions included a modal but not negation. These all appear in (34), repeated from (9).

(34) a. But when he come progh any cyte, per schuld a man stond by hym

\[
\text{but when he came through any city there should a man stand by him}
\]

in the chariot

‘But when he came through any city, a man should stand by him in the chariot’ (CMMIRK, 116.3176, ca. 1415)

b. but rather than I sholde be dishonoured, there wolde som good man take

\[
\text{but rather than I should be dishonoured there would some good man take}
\]

my quarell

my quarrel

‘but rather than that I should be dishonoured, some good man would take up my quarrel’ (CMMALORY, 36.1143, a. 1470)

c. it may be there may some haufe a casion heare after

\[
\text{it may be there may some have occasion hereafter}
\]

‘It may be that some may have occasion hereafter’ (PROUD-1630-E2-P1, 120.11, 1636)

Recall that in ruling out (32), it was crucial that a positive associate had no motivation to move into the matrix [Spec,vP]. To the extent that such movement could happen for some independent reason, we would expect that positive associates would then pattern with their negative counterparts. We suggest that in this minority of cases, the positive associate may have some other motivation to move, perhaps for information-structural reasons that are difficult to detect in texts.24

It is more difficult to account for the cases that lack a modal, because here there is no structural position in which we predict *there* could merge, whether or not it is

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24 As Hedde Zeijlstra (p.c.) has pointed out, our analysis predicts that other kinds of movement, such as *wh*-movement, might make transitive expletives possible with modals in the absence of negation at the relevant stage, though the fact that *wh*-movement is to an A′-position might complicate matters. We have not been able to confirm this prediction.
sufficiently local to its associate. Our data contain four such examples, all of which have a negative associate. These appear in (35), repeated from (10).

(35) a. for the law seith that ‘ther maketh no man himself riche, if he do harm to another wight’
   ‘for the law says that no man shall make himself rich if he does harm to another creature’ (CMCTMELI, 233.C1.630, ca. 1390)

b. for it is so secrete that no man lyvynge without revelation whether that he be signett therewith or no
   ‘for it is so secret that no man alive knows without revelation whether he is marked with it or not’ (CMROYAL, 258.328, ca. 1450 / ca. 1425)

c. ‘ther knowiþ no man withowte reuelacion wheþ he be marked with the sign of grace or no’ – predestinatus
   ‘no man knows without revelation whether he is marked with the sign of grace or not’ – predestinatus’ (CMROYAL, 258.330, ca. 1450 / ca. 1425)

d. there hath no man taken this oath already more gladly than I wolde doe
   ‘no man has previously taken this oath more gladly than I would do’ (MROPER-E1-P1, 516.17, 1534)

A possible analysis of these four examples exploits the fact that clausal negation was required in order to license neg-words, and occupied a head above T. This would not, by itself, allow merge of there in the system we have developed in the previous section, but the presence of Neg above TP does provide some additional structural space above the merge position of the associate in [Spec,VAspP]. Suppose that no man moved to [Spec,TP], and that ther merged as a second specifier of TP, subsequently moving to [Spec,NegP]. If the verb then moved beyond T to occupy the head of NegP, the word order in (36) could be derived.25

25 Such a derivation would involve treating NegP rather than TP as the EPP-hosting Infl head; moving the verb to Neg would essentially be an instance of what is normally called V-to-T movement.
Illusions of transitive expletives in Middle English

This derivation is not well-formed according to our analysis, since the associate does not surface at the edge of the inner phase, and *ther* merges, not in the inner phase, but above it. However, we tentatively suggest that such a derivation may nonetheless be what underlies the presence of the four tokens in (35). There are only three authors involved, and two of the examples are almost identical, coming from the same document. It is not implausible that this small set of authors may have had a slightly more liberal grammar with respect to the distribution of *there*, resulting in this small class of exceptions.

There are thus no examples in our data of a possible TEC with neither negation nor a modal that cannot be analyzed as outside verbals. Only one such example has previously been reported in the literature, by Jacobsson (1951), von Fintel (1992), and Tanaka (2000), repeated from (14b) in (37).

(37) so that ere the morning, from three of the clocke the day before, there had fifteene severall Armados assailed her

This example can be analyzed along the same lines we propose above for the examples with a negative associate but no modal, since, as in those cases, there is a second projection in the higher phase of the matrix clause. In connection with (37), von Fintel (1992) suggests that the presence of the aspectual auxiliary *had* may be relevant: while for him this is because aspectual auxiliaries resemble modals in being scope-taking elements, for us what is relevant is that the head associated with the perfect may provide a specifier position to which the subject could move, allowing *there* to merge as a second specifier before moving onwards to [Spec,TP]. While all
the examples discussed in this section deserve more attention, only (37) lacks both negation and a modal.

Before moving on to the loss of the negative modal existential construction, let us return to Ingham’s (2000, 2007) evidence for a low NegP in late Middle English. Crucial to his argument is what he calls the Neg Movement construction, exemplified in (38).

(38)  

(a) I wyl no thyng grawnt with-out the vnder-shreves assent.
     *I will no thing grant without the undersheriff’s assent.* (PL 59, 15 (1461), cited in Ingham (2000, 20))

(b) I may no leysour haue.
     *I may no leisure have*  
     *‘I may have no leisure.’* (Paston D 182, 48 (1465), cited in Ingham (2007, 368))

This construction appears in late Middle English, in the same period as the negative modal existential construction we have been discussing, and interestingly, all five of the examples cited in either Ingham (2000) or Ingham (2007) contain a modal. In fact, Ingham (2000, 21) explicitly states that “Negated OV never occurred with a simple verb group.” As with the negative modal existential construction, Ingham proposes that the fronted negated object has moved to [Spec,NegP].

We propose that the structure proposed above to account for the negative modal existential construction can also explain Neg Movement. The difference is that in this construction, it is the object that probes upward and moves first to an outer [Spec,V AspP] position, and then to the specifier of the modal vP to be licensed by the higher Neg head, while the subject moves in the ordinary way to the EPP position in [Spec,NegP] above TP, as shown in (39).

(39)
6. The loss of negative modal existentials in Early Modern English

Having presented our account of the factors involved in the licensing of negative modal existentials in Middle English, we turn now to the factors that contributed to their disappearance at later stages.

Around 1600, the modals were reanalyzed as fully functional elements. Instead of projecting a vP taking a clausal complement, they merged directly in Infl—either in a separate Mood head above T, as we have shown for PDE in examples such as (22), or in T itself. From this time on, sentences with modals were monoclausal, with the modal in the outer phase of the clause.

Until the late 18th century, voice and aspect continued to share a single VAsp projection, which demarcated the inner phase of the clause. In active clauses with transitive or unergative verbs, VAspP had an externally merged specifier, and thus could not serve as a merge position for there. There was thus no possible merge position for there in the lower phase of such clauses. Nor could there merge in the specifier of a higher projection such as TP or MoodP, because it would not be local to the associate: with the loss of negative concord, the associate no longer needed to be local to Neg, and in any case, it would no longer have had to move to achieve this locality, because the modal no longer headed a phasal vP. With no possible merge site for there, a sentence like (40) could thus no longer be generated.

(40) *There could no man say mass.

In unaccusative and passive clauses, however, VAspP had a non-thematic specifier position where there could merge, and to which the associate could move. Whether or not the clause contained a modal, expletive constructions were straightforwardly derived, as shown in (41).

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26 It is not crucial to our account which of these possibilities is correct for this specific stage in the history of the English modals; what matters is that modals ceased to head vPs and became part of the Infl system.
27 It is unclear whether the associate moves in unaccusative clauses, since the verb moves to a higher position. In PDE, unaccusatives do not exhibit movement of the associate.
(41) There was a mass said.

7. Conclusions

We conclude that the brief appearance of transitive expletive constructions, or rather NMECs, in the history of English was due to a transitory situation with three properties. First, modals were in the process of changing from full verbs to inflectional elements, but were still verbs merged in $v$. Their complement consisted of only an inner phase (VAspP or $vP$), and they did not take a thematic external argument. Second, English was still a negative concord language. Third, voice and aspect shared a single syntactic projection. The loss of any one of these properties would spell the end of NMECs, and around 1600, that is what happened: modals were reanalyzed as fully inflectional elements merged in the outer phase of a monoclausal structure. English transitive expletive constructions were thus consistently biclausal; at no point did English have the richer clausal superstructure found in Icelandic, German, Frisian, and Faroese I, with two subject positions that could be simultaneously filled in a single clause.

Our account crucially relies on two assumptions, both of which require further attention. We assume that $there$ must be merged very close to its associate—at least in the same phase, and possibly as a term of the same syntactic category. We also assume that a given syntactic head can have multiple specifiers, but at most one externally merged specifier. In addition, further work must be done to properly understand the seven examples that had either a modal or negation, but not both. If the analyses sketched in Sect. 5.3 are on the right track, traces of these different structures should be discernible in other data from the same writers.

Acknowledgements We are grateful to the members of the Syntax–Semantics Project at the University of Toronto, the participants at ICHL 22, particularly Richard Zimmermann and Hedde Zeijlstra, the participants at the Workshop on Parameters in Diachronic Syntax at SLE in Leiden, and three anonymous reviewers.
Appendix A: Discussion of excluded tokens

As noted in Sect. 2, the PPCE yielded 111 clauses in which an instance of *there* tagged as expletive occurred with a potentially transitive or unergative main verb. Of these, 37 were excluded from our analysis on the grounds that they did not appear to constitute genuine examples of potential transitive expletive constructions. In this appendix we discuss the excluded categories in more detail.

Twenty-nine of the 111 tokens were excluded as what Milsark (1974) terms *outside verbals*. In this construction, the associate typically appears at the end of the sentence, after the direct object, modifying adverbs and PPs, etc. 28 Frequently, the associate is definite. And crucially, this construction is found in Present-Day English with transitive and unergative predicates. Some examples are given in (42), with the associate enclosed in brackets.

(42) a. There escapyd hym [not one worde of goddis preceptes].
   *there escaped him not one word of God’s precepts*
   ‘There escaped him not one word of God’s precepts.’ (CMFITZJA, A4R.53, 1495)

b. and at Saynt Albons ther mette with the kynge [a grete hoost of the North].
   *and at Saint Alban’s there met with the king a great host of the North.*
   ‘And at Saint Alban’s there met with the king a great host of the North.’ (CMMALORY, 6.164, a1470)

c. At the gate their receved her [the duke of Northumberland great master, and the treasurer and controller and th’ erl of Penbroke, with all the sewers and carvers, and cupberears, to the nombre of thirty].
   *sewers and carvers, and cup-bearers, to the number of thirty*
   ‘At the gate she was received by the Duke of Northumberland, great master, and the treasurer and controller and the Earl of Pembroke, with all the sewers, carvers, and cup-bearers, numbering thirty altogether.’ (EDWARD-E1-H, 363.278, 1550–1552)

d. and accordingly there met there [a great number of workmen], (RYDER-1716, 174.401, 1716)

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28 In (42f), which we have added to this category at the suggestion of a reviewer, the associate is not sentence-final, but does follow the adverb *oones* ‘once’. The direct object in this example is a direct quotation consisting of a series of questions and answers, of which only the first question is included in (42f); there would really be no way for the associate to follow it.
e. Vpon the .vi. daye Skyrmysshed **there** togyder [an Henauder l and an upon the sixth day skirmished **there** together an Hainuyer and an Englysshe Eqyuer named Wylm Porter].

*English esquire named William Porter*

‘On the sixth day a man from Hainaut and an English squire named William Porter skirmished together.’ (FABYAN-E1-H, 173V.C2.181, 1516)

f. And ther seyde onnes [a clerk] in two vers, ‘What is bettre than gold?’ and **there** said once a clerk in two verses what is better than gold

‘And a clerk once said in two verses, “What is better than gold?”’ (CM-CTMELI.221.C2.168, 1390)

Following Rochemont and Culicover (1990), Jayaseelan (2001), and Banerjee (2015), we assume that outside verbals are a focalization construction distinct from ordinary expletives, and set them aside accordingly.

Second, there were four examples in which the verb is arguably unaccusative despite having initially been coded as unergative. One of these had been independently excluded as an outside verbal, leaving the three listed in (43), all of which involve the main verb **ride**.

(43) a. ‘Sir knyght,’ seyde Arthure, ‘for what cause abydist thou here that there may no knyght **ryde** thys way but yf he juste with the?

‘Sir Knight,” said Arthur, “why do you wait here so that no knight may ride this way without jousting with you?”’ (CMMALORY, 39.1258, a1470)

b. there **rode** four knyghtes aboute hem

‘four knights rode with him’ (CMMALORY, 182.2513, a1470)

c. and on the other sye**de** the queene, and the cardnall afore her, with a cross caryed afore hym,

‘And on the other side rode the Queen, and the Cardinal before her, with a cross carried before him.’ (MOWNTAYNE-E1-H, 209.258, c1555)

**Ride** has independently been observed to pattern with unaccusatives in other respects, such as allowing locative inversion (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995; Mendikoetxea 2006). Like other unaccusative verbs of motion, intransitive **ride** could formerly take be as the auxiliary in the perfect (OED, s.v. *ride*, v., I.1.b). We thus assume that the three tokens in (43) should properly be grouped with the unaccusatives, and we excluded them on that basis.

Third, there were four examples, listed in (44), in which **there** can plausibly be construed as locative rather than expletive, and we have treated it accordingly in our translations. In each of these cases, the preceding context suggests a specific location for **there** to refer to. These examples also have definite subjects, which means that
even if *there* is not locative, they would be better understood as outside verbals than as TECs.\(^{29}\)

\((44)\) a. **There** dined also my Lord Lucas Lieutenant of The Towre, & The *there* dined also my lord Lucas lieutenant of the tower and the Bish: of St. Asaph &c. *bishop of St. Asaph etc.*

‘Lord Lucas, Lieutenant of the Tower, and the Bishop of St. Asaph, etc. also dined there’ (EVELYN-E3-P1, 919.402, 1688-1689; *there* = ‘at dinner with the Marquis of Carmarthen’) 

b. and **ther** supyd my lord mare and my lord treysorer and dyvers of the *and there supped my lord mayor and my lord treasurer and divers of the consell and dyvers aldermen*

‘And there supped the Lord Mayor and the Lord Treasurer and various council members and aldermen.’ (MACHYN-E1-P1, 205.460, 1553-1559; *there* = ‘at the mercers’ supper’)

c. and **ther** dyd pryche master doctur Smyth at ys masse. *and there did preach master doctor Smyth at his Mass*

‘and Dr. Smyth preached there at his Mass’ (MACHYN-E1-P2,68.89, 1553-1559; *there* = ‘at the funeral of James Sutton’)

d. and **ther** dyd pryche doctur Smyth; *and there did preach doctor Smyth*

‘and Dr. Smyth preached there’ (MACHYN-E1-P2, 71.165, 1553-1559; *there* = ‘at the funeral of George Medley’)

Finally, one example was excluded on the grounds that it entirely lacks an overt associate for *there*. This example appears in \((45)\).

\((45)\) I am also, Margaret, of this thinge sure youngh, that of those holy doctours *I am also Margaret of this thing sure enough that of those holy doctors and saintes, which to be with God in heaven long ago no Christen man and saints which to be with God in heaven long ago no Christian man douteth, whose bookes yet at this day remayne here in mens handes, there doubteth whose books yet at this day remain here in men’s hands there thought in some such thinges, as I thinke now.*

thought in some such things as I think now *(?) ‘I am also, Margaret, sure enough of this: that some of these holy doctors and saints (who have long been with God in Heaven, as no Christian doubts) whose books are still extant thought as I do about these things.’ (MROPER-E1-P2,528.53, 1534)

Once these examples are excluded from the data set, we were left with the 74 apparent transitive expletive constructions discussed in the main text.

\(^{29}\) Example \((42e)\), excluded above as an outside verbal, could also be locative; its context supports a reading in which *there* is understood as meaning ‘at Smithfield’. 
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