CP-expletives in the history of German: The grammaticalization of a form-meaning mismatch

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Pleonastic pro-forms such as English *there*, Swedish *det* and German *es* 'it', which act as syntactic placeholders (marking a position that must be obligatorily filled), can be considered typical examples of form-meaning mismatches in that they apparently do not contribute much to the (truth-conditional) meaning of the clause. Arguably, this mismatch is even more apparent in the case of CP-related 'prefield' expletives, which occupy the clause-initial position in V2 languages and do not realize a syntactic function, in contrast to subject expletives. While there is a bulk of literature dealing with expletives in the present-day languages, many aspects of their historical development are still under-researched. This assessment applies in particular to the emergence of CP-related expletives in the history of the Germanic V2 languages. Focusing on German, this paper seeks to shed new light on the diachrony of CP-expletives by combining new historical evidence gathered from a range of corpus studies with observations on the distribution and inventory of CP-expletives in present-day dialects.