

The Final-over-Final Constraint and West Germanic verb clusters

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Structure of the talk

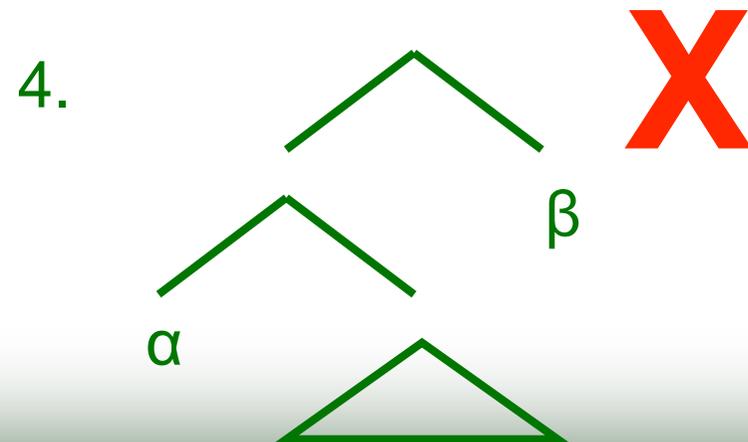
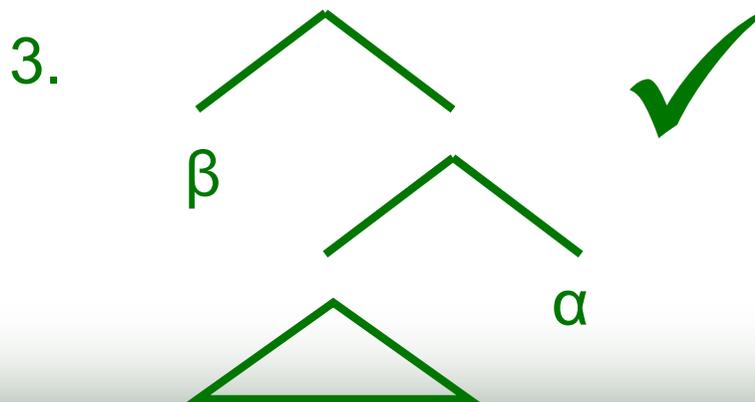
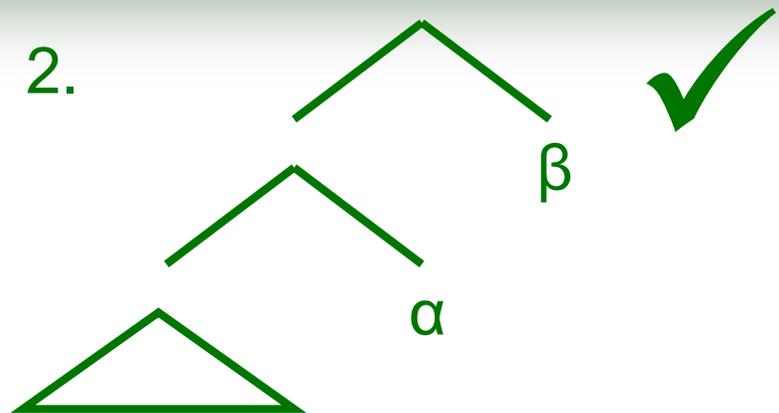
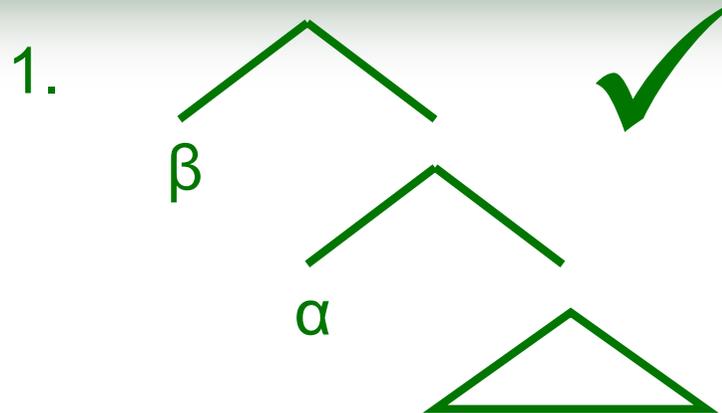
1. The Final-over-Final Constraint
2. West Germanic verb clusters
3. The West Flemish problem

The Final-over-Final Constraint

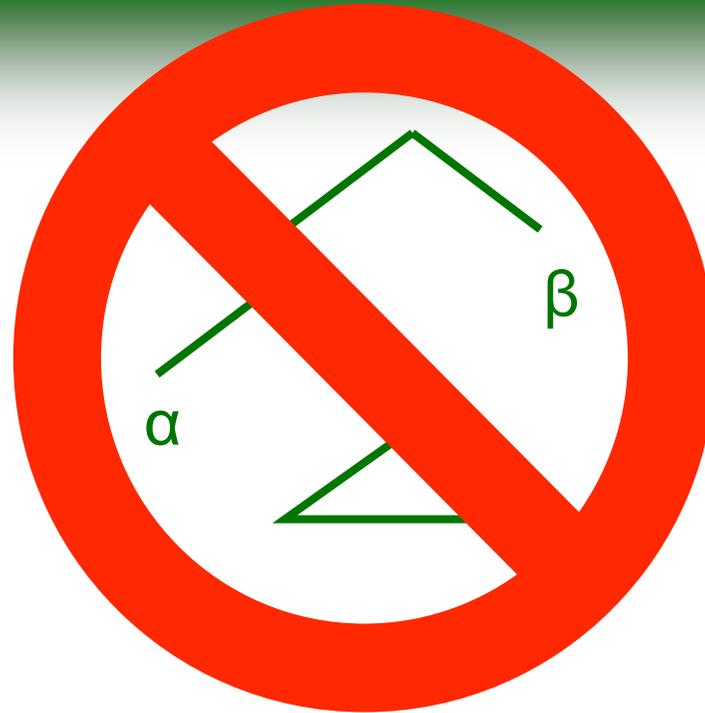
The Final-over-Final Constraint (**FOFC**):

- Descriptive generalisation about word order patterns
- If we assume that syntactic trees are binary branching, there are four logical possibilities:

The Final-over-Final Constraint



The Final-over-Final Constraint



- **Strong FOFC:**

‘If α is a head-initial phrase and β is a phrase immediately dominating α , then β must be head-initial.’ (Holmberg 2000: 124)

The Final-over-Final Constraint

Why is FOFC interesting?

- We want to know if it's true that “languages could differ from each other without limit and in unpredictable ways” (Joos 1957: 96)
- Is there anything in language that is *logically* possible but *unattested*?
- FOFC describes a potential example

The Final-over-Final Constraint

- This constraint is intended as an *absolute* principle...
- ...and it does seem to hold most of the time: Basque and Finnish do not allow orders that violate it (Biberauer, Holmberg & Roberts 2007: 5)
- However, some exceptions do exist! These will be discussed later...

West Germanic verb clusters

Why West Germanic verb clusters?

- Well, they can come in a whole variety of orders, so they provide a good testing ground for a generalisation like FOFC.
- For my purposes, West Germanic = the West Germanic languages spoken in Continental Europe: essentially, German, Dutch and their dialects.

West Germanic verb clusters

What are verb clusters?

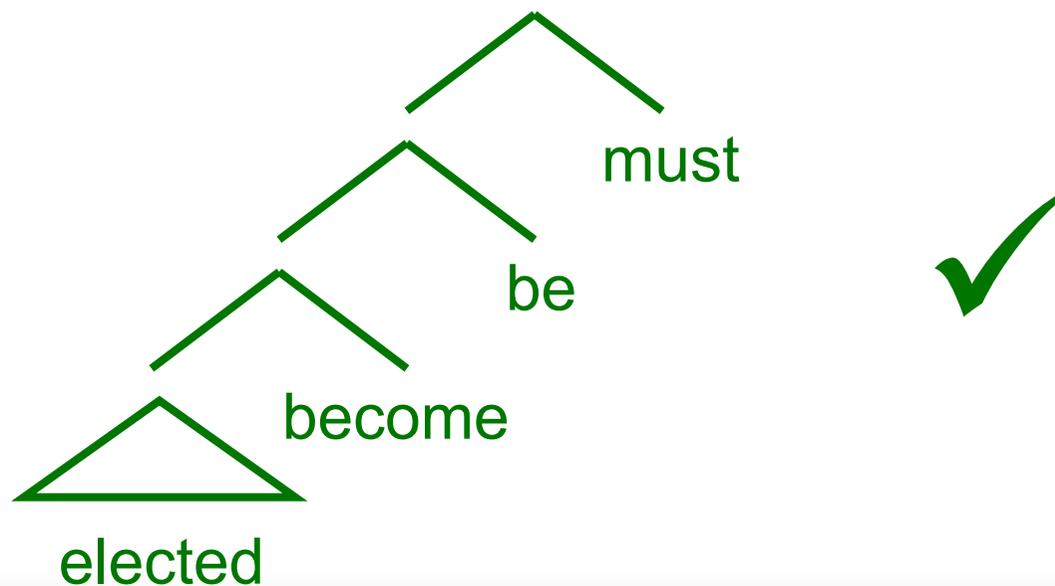
- In these languages, when you have lots of verbal elements in an embedded clause (modals, auxiliaries etc.), they all cluster together towards the end.

German:

dass *Hans gewählt* *worden* *sein* *muss*
that Hans elected (4) become (3) be (2) must (1)
“that Hans must have been elected” (Wurmbrand 2005: 2)

West Germanic verb clusters

- So from the point of view of FOFC, verb clusters in German are well-behaved:



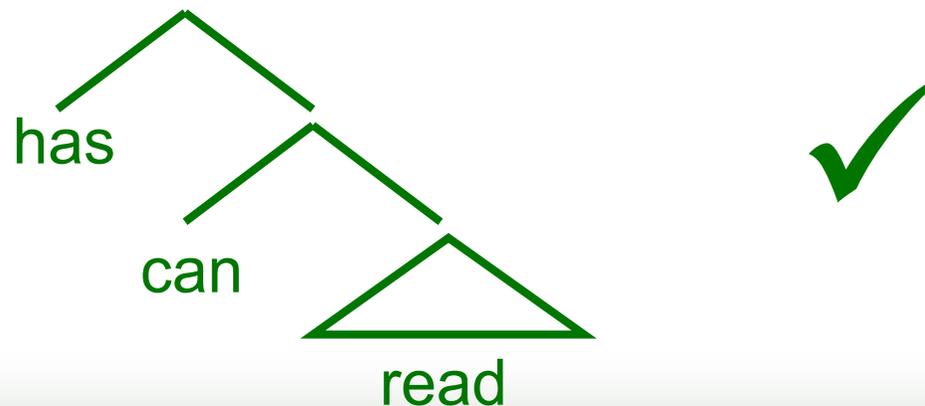
West Germanic verb clusters

- Verb clusters in Dutch are well-behaved, too:

dat Jan het boek heeft kunnen lezen

that Jan the book has (1) can (2) read (3)

“that Jan has been able to read the book” (Wurmbrand 2005: 5)

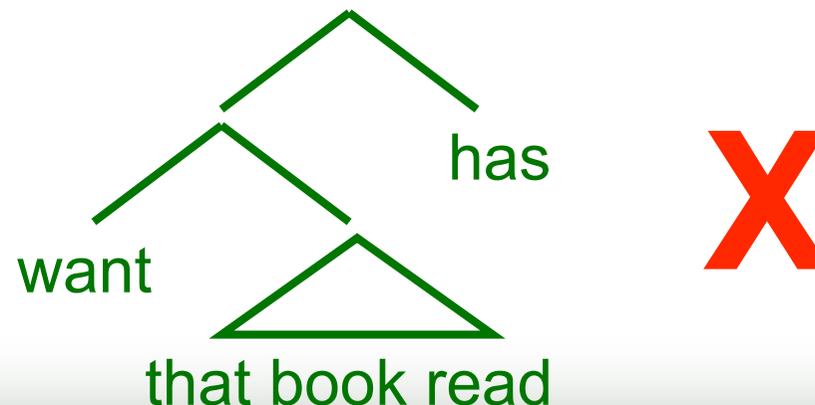


West Germanic verb clusters

- But what about West Flemish?

da Valère willen dienen boek lezen eet
that Valère want (2) that book read (3) has (1)

“that Valère has wanted to read that book” (Haegeman 1998b: 634)



The West Flemish problem

- West Flemish as described here is spoken in a village called Lapscheure in Belgium, with only 400 inhabitants (Haegeman 1992: 41)
- But if we want to maintain FOFC as an absolute universal, then *no* grammar *anywhere* should be able to create an order that violates it

The West Flemish problem

So we now have two options:

1. We can argue that there *is* no absolute constraint, and that FOFC is purely statistical
2. We can argue that exceptions to the strong version of FOFC fall into specific types

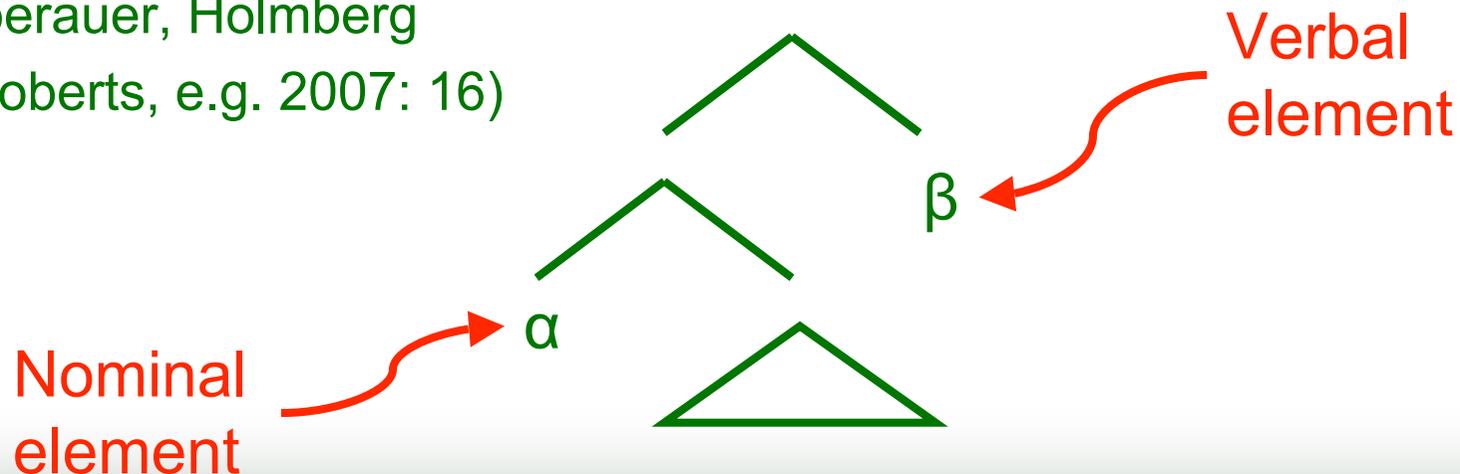
I will look at two attempts to argue the latter.

The West Flemish problem

Hypothesis A:

All exceptions to the strong version of FOFC involve *categorial distinctions*.

(Biberauer, Holmberg
& Roberts, e.g. 2007: 16)



The West Flemish problem

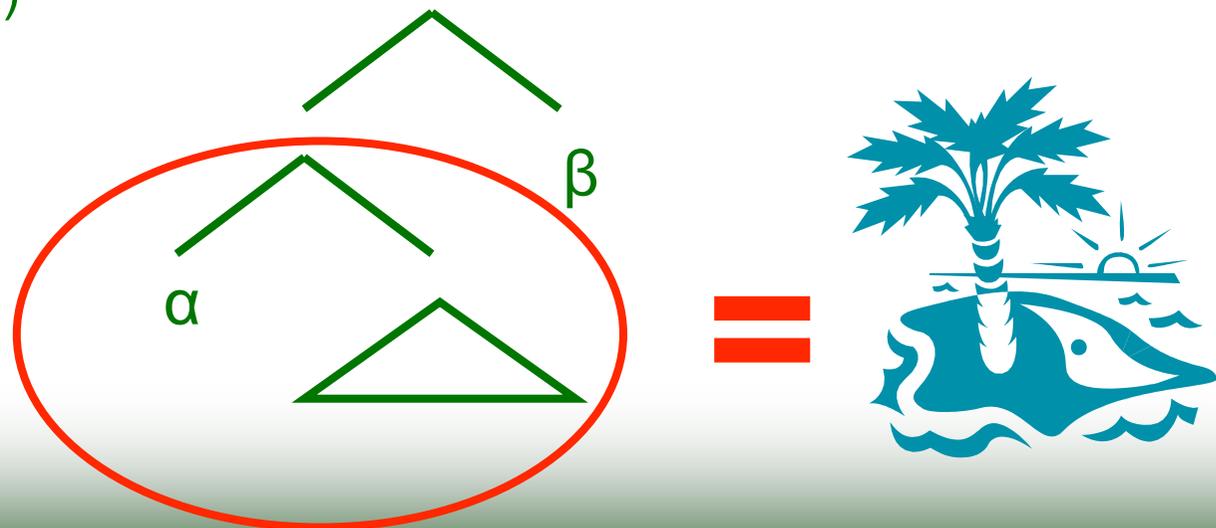
- This doesn't solve the West Flemish problem:
 - *eet* “has” is blatantly verbal
 - The infinitive *willen* “want” could be seen as a nominal element, but it doesn't behave like one in any way. It behaves just like infinitives in every other West Germanic language.
 - If we were to say that infinitives are nominal, we would be predicting that FOFC wouldn't hold of verb clusters in *any* of these languages.

The West Flemish problem

Hypothesis B:

All exceptions to the strong version of FOFC involve the lower element being an *island*.

(Sheehan 2008: 44)



The West Flemish problem

- This doesn't solve the West Flemish problem:
 - Elements can be moved out of the constituent
willen dienen boek lezen:



wa zei Jan da Valère willen lezen eet
what said Jan that Valère want (2) read (3) has (1)
“What did Jan say that Valère has wanted to read?”

(Liliane Haegeman, p.c.)

Conclusion?

- **West Flemish verb clusters are a problem for the FOFC generalisation.**
- If we want to maintain FOFC as an absolute universal constraint, we may need a new theory of why certain exceptions to the strong version are allowed.

Thank you for your attention!

References

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Appendix: possible orders

(table from Wurmbrand 2005: 8)

Table 75.2 Verb clusters with three verbal elements

Language	Mod-Mod-V	Aux-Mod-V	Aux-Mod-V	Mod-Aux-V	Aux-Aux-V
	Fin-Inf-Inf	Fin-Inf-Inf	Fin-IPP-Inf	Fin-Inf-Part	Fin-Part-Part
Afrikaans	1-2-3 ✓	1-2-3 ✓	2-3-1 X	1-3-2 ✓ 3-1-2 ^a ?	N/A ✓
Dutch	1-2-3 ✓	1-2-3 ✓	1-2-3 ✓	1-2-3 ✓ 3-1-2 1-3-2 ✓ [3-2-1] ✓	?3-1-2 ? ?1-3-2 ✓ [?Others]
Frisian	3-2-1 ✓	3-2-1 ✓	3-2-1 ✓ [1-2-3] ^b ✓	3-2-1 ✓	3-2-1 ✓
German (Standard)	3-2-1 ✓	3-2-1 ✓ 1-3-2 ✓	1-3-2 ✓	3-2-1 ✓	3-2-1 ✓
German and Austrian dialects	3-2-1 ✓ 1-3-2 ✓	3-2-1 ✓ 1-3-2 ✓ 3-1-2 ?	1-3-2 ✓ 3-1-2 ? 3-2-1 ✓ [1-2-3] ✓	3-2-1 ✓ 1-3-2 ✓	3-2-1 ✓
Swiss dialects	1-2-3 ✓ 3-2-1 ✓ 1-3-2 ✓ 3-1-2 ?	N/A ✓	1-2-3 ✓ 1-3-2 ✓ 3-1-2 ?	1-3-2 ✓ 3-2-1 ✓ 3-1-2 ?	3-2-1 ✓
West Flemish	1-2-3 ✓		1-2-3 ^c ✓ 2-3-1 ^c X	1-3-2 ✓ 3-1-2	3-2-1 ✓ 1-3-2 ✓

Appendix: more data you may enjoy

da Valère willen Marie dienen boek geven eet
that Valère want (2) Marie that book give (3) has (1)
“that Valère has wanted to give Marie that book” (Haegeman 1998a: 260)

da Valère Marie nog weten dienen brief schryven eet
that Valère Marie still remember (2) that letter write (3) has (1)
“that Valère remembers Marie writing the letter” (Haegeman 1998a: 273)

dan ze toch moesten willen Marie dienen boek geven een
that they yet should (1) want (3) Marie that book give (4) have (2)
“that they still should have wanted to give Marie that book” (Haegeman 1998b: 636)

* *dan ze toch moesten een willen Marie dienen boek geven*
that they yet should (1) have (2) want (3) Marie that book give (4)
“that they still should have wanted to give Marie that book” (Haegeman 1998b: 636)

Willen en us kuopen een was en misse
want a house buy have was a mistake
“It was a mistake to have wanted to buy a house” (Haegeman 2001: 214)

??* *da Valère willen dienen boek lezen oat*
that Valère want (2) that book read (3) had (1)
“that Valère had wanted to read that book” (Haegeman 1998b: 634)