

# Unattested A-B-A Patterns

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SoSe 2006

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# Introduction

Topic: **Systematic Stem Alternations**

Lit:

- Bobaljik (2006)
- Wiese (2005)

(1) **Comparative-Superlative Generalization** (CSG; Bobaljik):

If the comparative degree of an adjective is built on a suppletive root, then the superlative will also be suppletive.

(2) Patterns:

- A-A-A (regular):
  - schlecht – schlechter – am schlechtesten
  - fine – finer – finest
- A-B-B (suppletive):
  - bad – worse – worst
  - gut – besser – am besten
- A-B-C (doubly suppletive):
  - bonus – melior – optimus
- \*A-B-A (unattested):
  - \*gut – besser – am gutsten
  - \*bad – worse – baddest
- \*A-A-C (unattested for comparative suppletion):
  - \*bad – badder – worst

# Bobaljik's Explanation for the Absence of A-B-A Patterns

Idea:

Pattern \*A-B-A is unstatable. Any rule (i.e., vocabulary item insertion context) referring to the comparative also picks out the superlative, unless the superlative is bled by a more specific rule.

Three assumptions:

- 1 Word structure: [[Adj-Compr]-Superl]
- 2 Suppletion as contextual allomorphy:  
 $\alpha \leftrightarrow B / [\_COMPR]$   
 $\leftrightarrow A / (\text{elsewhere})$
- 3 Subset Principle (incl. Specificity Condition)

# Ablaut in German

Wiese: German Ablaut is fully systematic from a synchronic perspective. This is evident when one changes the usual order of verb forms: “geben – gegeben – gab” vs. traditional “geben – gab – gegeben”.

## (3) Patterns:

- a. A-A-A (regular):
  - (i) arbeiten – gearbeitet – arbeitete
- b. A-B-B (suppletive):
  - (i) schreiben – geschrieben – schrieb
  - (ii) giessen – gegossen – goss
- c. A-B-C (doubly suppletive):
  - (i) werfen – geworfen – warf
  - (ii) sprechen – gesprochen – sprach
- d. \*A-B-A (unattested):
  - (i) \*werfen – geworfen – werf(te)
  - (ii) \*schreiben – geschrieben – schreib(te)
- e. A-A-C (attested):
  - (i) geben – gegeben – gab

# Wiese's Explanation for the Absence of A-B-A Patterns

The feature specification for finite past forms is a proper superset of the feature specifications for past participles.

## (4) Feature specifications

infinitive forms		
past participle forms	[past]	
finite past tense forms	[past]	[fin]

Note:

Assuming that one want to assimilate this approach to Bobaljik's analysis, this may suggest syntactic structures of the type in (5).

- (5)
- a. Infinitive:  
[VP ... V]
  - b. Past Participle:  
[PartP ... [VP ... t<sub>V</sub>] V-Part<sub>[past]</sub>]
  - c. Finite Past Tense:  
[TP ... [VP ... t<sub>V</sub>] V-T<sub>[past,fin]</sub>]

# Wiese's Explanation for the Absence of A-B-A Patterns 2

## Conclusion:

Any rule referring to the past participle automatically also refers to the finite past tense. Therefore, the finite past tense cannot differ from the past participle **and still be identical to the infinitive**.

In what follows, some **vocabulary items** are listed for stem positions, with the insertion contexts referring to contextual features.

## (6) SPRECH

- a. /sprech/ ↔ /\_\_{{ [ ] }}
- b. /sprach/ ↔ /\_\_{{ [past] }}
- c. /sprach/ ↔ /\_\_{{ [past,fin] }}

## (7) GIESS

- a. /gieß/ ↔ /\_\_{{ [ ] }}
- b. /goss/ ↔ /\_\_{{ [past] }}

## (8) GEB

- a. /geb/ ↔ /\_\_{{ [ ] }}
- b. /gab/ ↔ /\_\_{{ [past,fin] }}

# References

- Bobaljik, Jonathan (2006): On Comparative Suppletion. Ms., University of Connecticut.  
((WoTM 1 Talk, Universität Leipzig).
- Wiese, Bernd (2005): Unterspezifizierte Stammparadigmen: Zur Systematik des Verbalablaufs im Gegenwartsdeutschen. Ms., IDS Mannheim.  
[www.ids-mannheim.de/gra/personal/wiese.html](http://www.ids-mannheim.de/gra/personal/wiese.html).