Unattested A-B-A Patterns

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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-A (regular):
   (i) schlecht – schlechter – am schlechtesten
   (ii) fine – finer – finest

b. A-B-B (suppletive):
   (i) bad – worse – worst
   (ii) gut – besser - am besten

c. A-B-C (doubly suppletive):
   (i) bonus – melior – optimus

d. *A-B-A (unattested):
   (i) *gut – besser – am gutsten
   (ii) *bad – worse – baddest

e. *A-A-C (unattested for comparative suppletion):
   (i) *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 / (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:
$[_{\mathrm{VP}} \ldots \mathrm{V}]$

b. Past Participle:
$[_{\mathrm{PartP}} \ldots [_{\mathrm{VP}} \ldots t_V\ ]\ \text{V-Part}_{[\mathrm{past}]}]$

c. Finite Past Tense:
$[_{\mathrm{TP}} \ldots [_{\mathrm{VP}} \ldots t_V\ ]\ \text{V-T}_{[\mathrm{past,fin}]}]$

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. /sproch/ ↔ /__{[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 Verbalablauts im Gegenwartsdeutschen. Ms., IDS Mannheim. www.ids-mannheim.de/gra/personal/wiese.html.