

Inconsistent governors and challenging complements: a generative perspective

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Being responsible for “brand-marking” properties like c(omplement)-selection and case assignment, lexical verbs (Vs) are undoubtedly the most commonly cited members of the (putative) class of governors. In the context of Government and Binding (GB) theory, Vs were i.a. specifically said to theta- and Case-govern their complements, suggesting that the traditional notion of ‘government’ may usefully be decomposed, with semantic/thematic and purely formal properties like abstract Case assignment being thought of as distinct properties of V-governors. As nouns are not able to assign Case, it is clear that governors cannot be a homogenous class; similarly, Vs selecting clausal complements are not typically thought to be Case-assigners. This raises questions such as whether it is meaningful to postulate a typology of governors, what role traditional government-related properties like selection and case assignment actually have in facilitating insight into the behaviour of governors, and, particularly for minimalistically oriented generativists, whether an extended formal notion of ‘government’ as assumed during the GB era is in fact independently meaningful. The purpose of this talk is to look more closely at the behaviour of Vs subcategorising for clausal complements of different types against the background of extensive typological research as the basis for (re)considering these questions. Specifically, the focus will be on the crosslinguistic distributional properties of finite CP-complements (introduced by subordinators like *that*, *if*, *whether*, etc.), and the morphosyntactic properties of non-finite complements that exhibit the typologically rare 231 order in a restricted set of West Germanic varieties (notably, Afrikaans, Swiss German and West Flemish).