

**“We must be born with it ... maybe ... are we?”**  
**A case study in morphological constraint acquisition**

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The English serial verb construction *go-VERB* (*Go get the nurse!*, *Let's go have lunch*, *You should go see a doctor*) has a peculiar morphological property: it cannot occur with inflections (*\*She went saw the doctor*, *\*He goes gets the paper in the morning*). Since there are no immediately obvious functional-semantic clues as to why *go-VERB* is subject to the restriction, the constraint seems arbitrary and thus explicable only within formal frameworks with recourse to innate parameters. However, a usage-based perspective proposes that the constraint is functionally conditioned, ultimately the historical result of *go-VERB*'s semantics (as non-assertive, hortative) and the English morphological paradigm (since means to encode non-assertiveness are synchronically all bare). Following a corpus-based analysis of this narrow adult use, we will take a closer look at acquisition data and track how children, who initially show a compositional and fully inflectional use of the construction, approach the restricted use of adults. It argues that constraint acquisition is a long-term process contingent on the children's mastering of morphology in general. Methodologically, a distributional *syntactic co-location* perspective is proposed which infers constructional meaning from the syntactic environment of collective use ('from above') that is not obvious from investigating *go-VERB* at the level of the individual token ('from below'). It adopts a well-known Firthian principle from lexical semantics as 'You shall know a *construction* by the company it keeps'. Using simple yet revealing operationalization and visualization, it seeks to contribute to the question of how we, as speakers and learners, (get to) know constructions and their properties.

*Everyone is cordially invited!*