THE WELSH OF JESUS AND JOB: VERB-SECOND IN MIDDLE WELSH

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However, in Middle Welsh, positive declarative main clauses normally show verb-second order with a phrase of some kind commonly interpreted as a topic before the finite verb.

This may be a subject,

(1) A ['r guyrda] a doethant y gyt.
and the nobles PRT come.PAST.3PL together
'And the nobles came together.' (PKM 90.27)

a complement,

(2) a ['r llall] a adawd yghyfeir y vorwyn.
and the other PRT leave.PAST.3SG for the maiden
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(All examples are taken from Willis 1998 or Meelen 2016, and the primary text is given in brackets.)

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As Meelen (2016: 1) notes, quoting Evans (1990), the result was that

[t]o many people in Wales it was utterly embarrassing to hear “Jesus and Job speaking ‘bad Welsh’”.

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They also note that a similar verb-second requirement survives in Modern Breton (as discussed e.g. in Borsley and Kathol 2000).

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Thus, such sentences are doubly abnormal.

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Here, there is no agreement even though the initial NP, which is understood as a subject, is a pronoun. The default third person singular form of the verb appears.

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(6) A hynny ny thygywys idaw.
And that NEG avail.PAST.3SG to.3SGM
'And that didn't work for him.' (PKM 11. 2)

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Assuming Middle Welsh is the same, negative and interrogative examples like (5) and (7) have a finite verbal constituent in clause initial position.

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Some other apparent exceptions to the ban on sentence initial finite verbs will be discussed later.

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- Why do verbs agree with a preceding subject which is a topic in an abnormal sentence?
- Why do verbs not agree with a preceding subject which is focused in a mixed sentence?

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An English example like the following shows that the two terms of an identity predication can differ in person and other properties:

(10) I am the author of the paper.

Hence, there is no reason within this approach for the gap within the second constituent to have the same properties as the initial constituent and no reason to expect agreement.

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(11) Nyt y dyn a doeth.
NEG the man PRT come.3SG
'It was not the man who came.' (Meelen 2016: 200)

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(12) Ys mi a ’e heirch.
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It seems, then, that the identity interpretation originally stemmed from a lexical element but subsequently became a property of the construction.

The mixed/cleft sentence in (4) can be assigned the following structure:

(13)

$$\begin{bmatrix} cleft-cl \\ \text{LOC} \begin{bmatrix} \text{CAT } [1]\text{S}[fin] \\ \text{CONT} \begin{bmatrix} \text{QUANTS } < \begin{bmatrix} the-rel \\ \text{INDEX } [2] \\ \text{RESTR } \{[3]\} \end{bmatrix} > \\ \text{NUCL} \begin{bmatrix} identity-rel \\ \text{ARG1 } [4] \\ \text{ARG2 } [2] \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{SLASH } \{\} \end{bmatrix}$$

HD-DTR

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{LOC} \begin{bmatrix} \text{CAT NP} \\ \text{CONT [INDEX [4]]} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{WH } \{\} \end{bmatrix}$$

Mi

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{LOC} \begin{bmatrix} \text{CAT [1]} \\ \text{CONT [3]} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{BIND } \{[5]\} \\ \text{SLASH } \{[5][npro[\text{INDEX } [2]]]\} \end{bmatrix}$$

a’e heirch

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The single member of the BIND and SLASH sets is non-pronominal. This ensures that the gap is non-pronominal and hence does not trigger agreement.

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(14) [Pa dyn] a gwyn yn y maendy hwnn?
which man PRT lament.PRES.3SG in the prison this
'Which man laments in this prison?' (CO 914)

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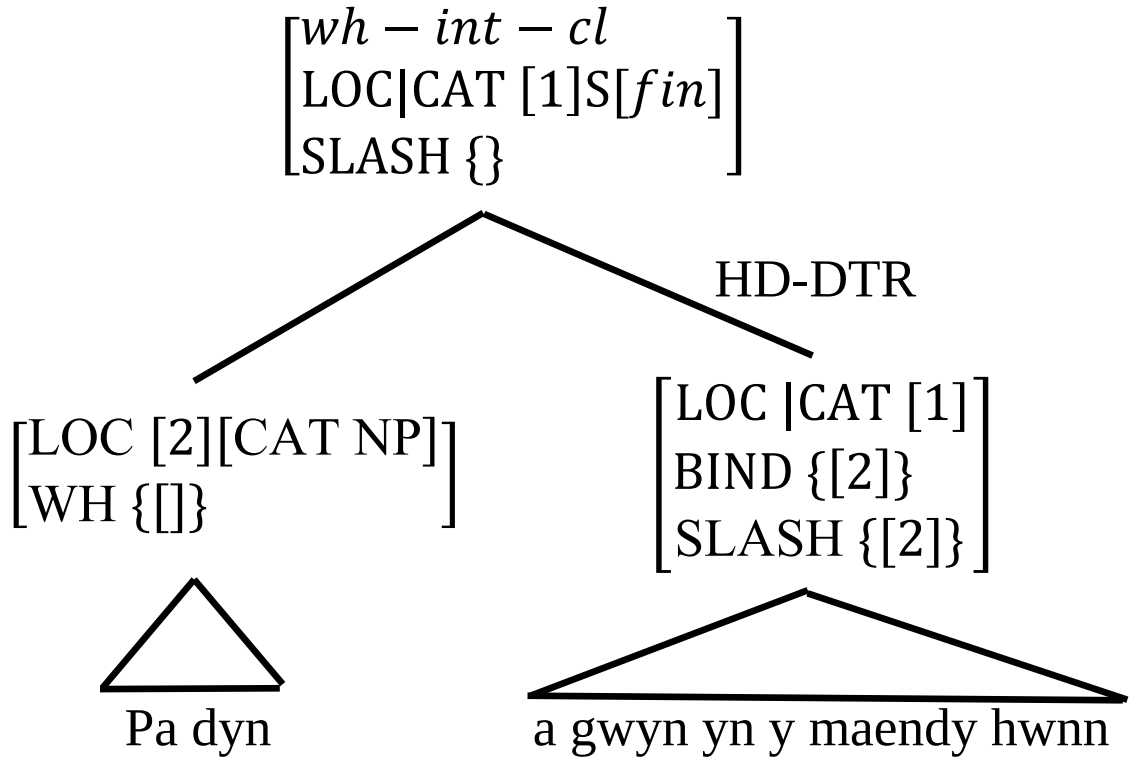

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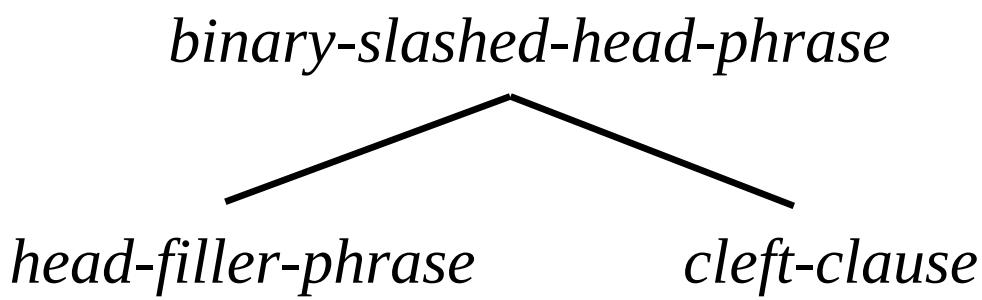

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(17) *binary-slashed-head-phrase* $\Rightarrow$

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SS}\left[\text{SLASH}\ [1]\right] \\ \text{HD}-\text{DTR}\ [2] \\ \\ \text{DTRS} < [] > \ \oplus\ < [2] \left[\begin{array}{l} clause \\ \text{SS}\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{BIND}\ \{[3]\} \\ \text{SLASH}\ \{[3]\} \cup [1]\end{array}\right]\end{array}\right] > \end{array}\right]$$

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This ensures that a binary-slashed-head phrase has two daughters and that the second is a head which is a clause with one SLASH set member which is not part of the SLASH set of the mother.

This will be simplified later.

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This requires first daughter to be a filler with a LOCAL value identical the single member of the BIND set of the second daughter.

For clefts, we can propose this constraint:

(19) *cleft-clause* $\Rightarrow$

$$\left[\begin{array}{l}
\text{SS|LOC}\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{CONT}\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{QUANTS} < \left[\begin{array}{l}the-rel\\ \text{INDEX}\,[1]\\ \text{RESTR}\,\{[2]\}\end{array}\right] > \oplus\ \text{L}\\ \text{NUCL}\ \left[\begin{array}{l}identity-rel\\ \text{ARG1}\,[3]\\ \text{ARG2}\,[1]\end{array}\right]\end{array}\right]\end{array}\right]\\
\text{DTRS} < \left[\text{SS|LOC|CONT}\left[\text{INDEX}\,[3]\right]\right],\\
\qquad\left[\text{SS}\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{LOC}\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{CAT|HEAD|VFORM}\ fin\\ \text{CONT}\,[2]\end{array}\right]\\ \text{BIND}\,\{[\text{CONT}\ npro[\text{INDEX}\,[1]]\}\end{array}\right]\right] >
\end{array}\right]$$

This ensures (a) that a cleft clause has two daughters interpreted as the two terms of an identity predication and (b) that the second daughter has a non-pronominal NP in its BIND set, and hence that any gap is non-pronominal and does not trigger agreement.

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or it agrees with a subject gap and that agrees with the visible subject.

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It is not obvious how a verb could be made to agree with a preceding topic just in case it is interpreted as its subject.

This suggests that the verb agrees with a subject gap.

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We can do this by assuming that these clauses are not head-filler-phrases but the realization of another subtype of *binary-slashed-head-phrase*, which we can call *nominal-topic-clause*.

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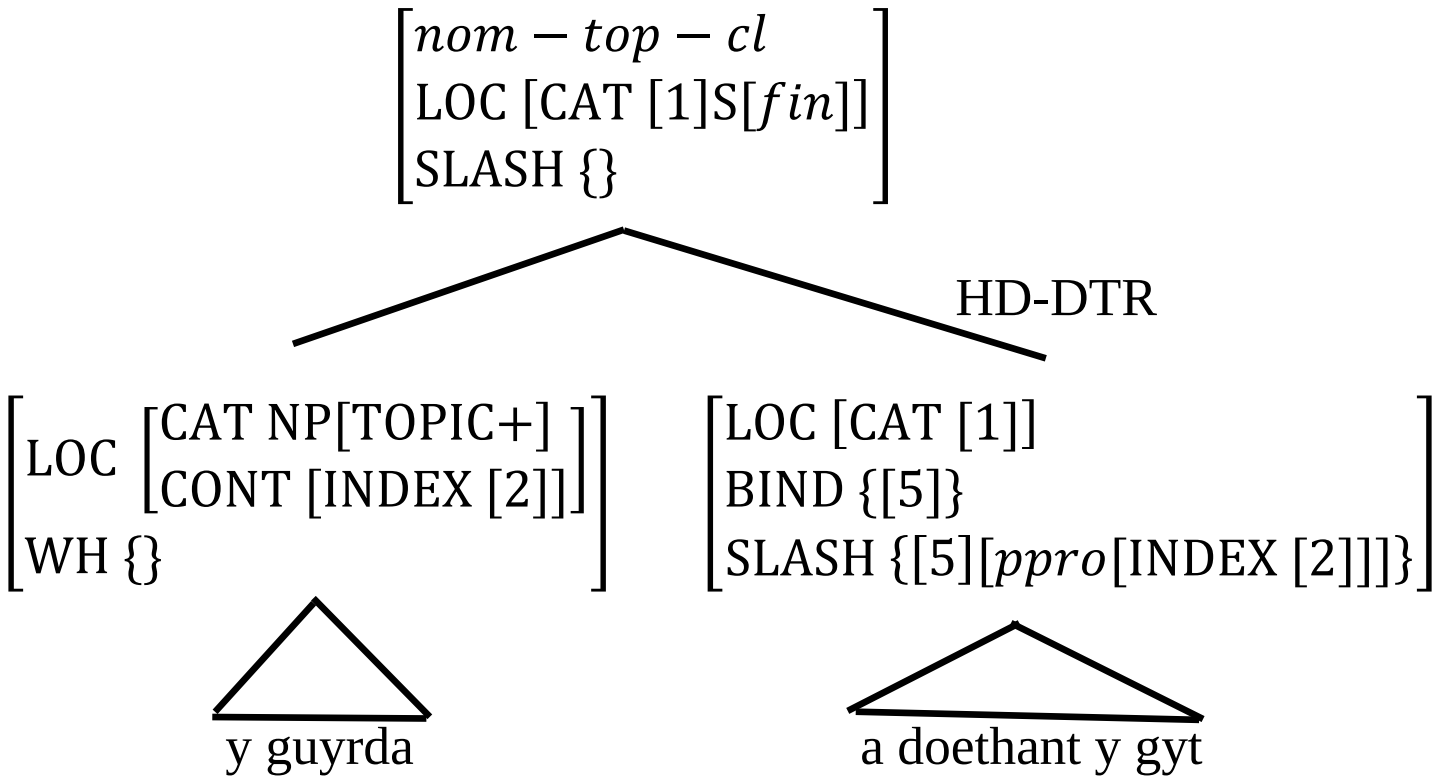

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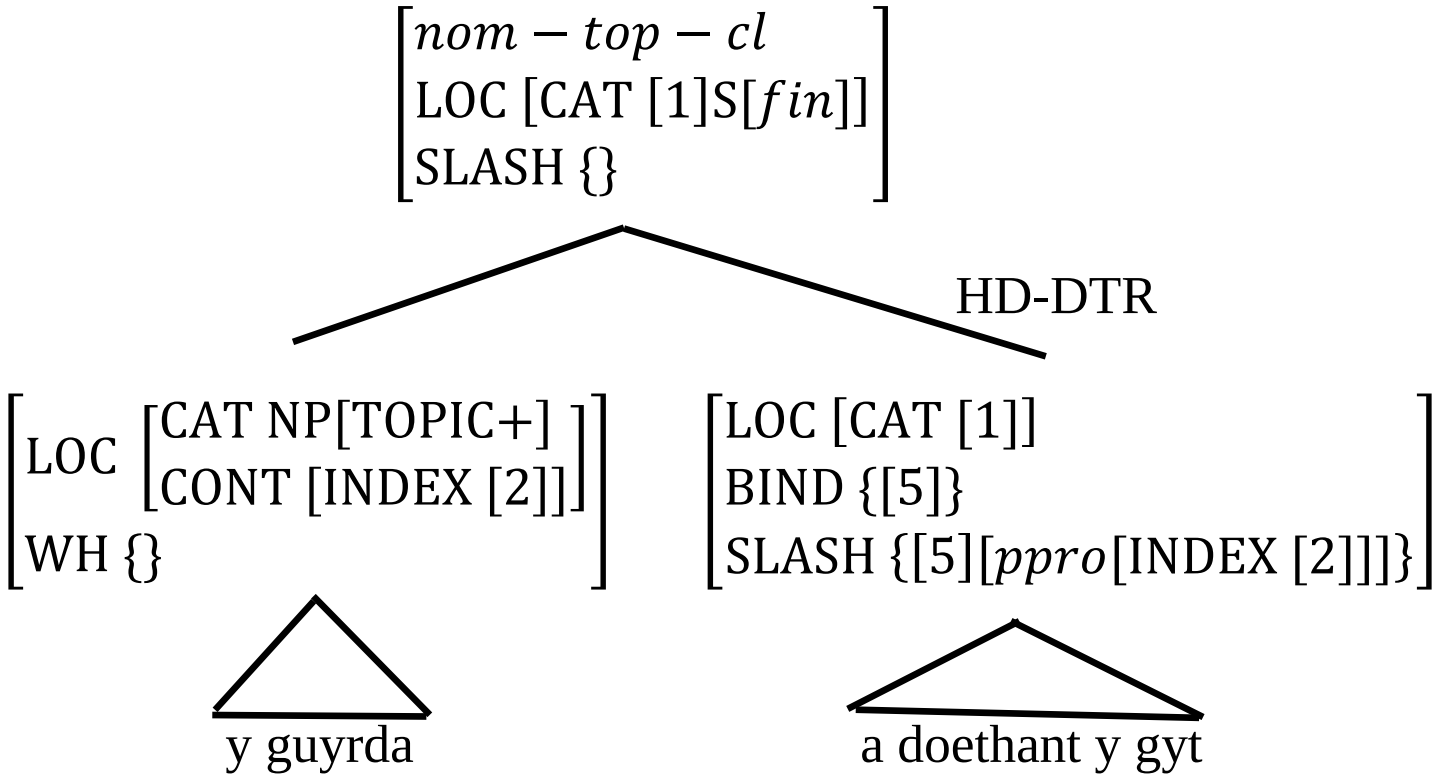

The first daughter is a topic NP and is coindexed with a pronominal SLASH value in the second daughter.

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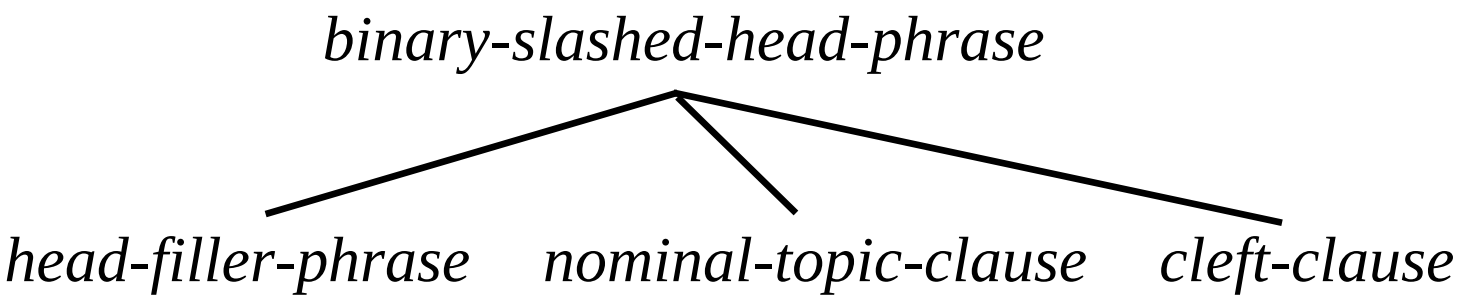

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If the first daughter is pronominal, the topic and the coindexed pronominal will be identical in every respect, but if it is non-pronominal, they will differ in one respect. In either case, a gap will be pronominal, and if it is in subject position, there will be agreement.

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Both mixed and abnormal sentences involve an unbounded dependency, and on fairly standard HPSG assumptions, this means that the highest verb has a non-empty SLASH value.

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One might suppose that the Middle Welsh verb-second requirement is a requirement that certain clauses contain a filler.

But the initial constituent in a mixed sentence is not a filler, and nor is a nominal topic in an abnormal sentence. Hence, this idea is untenable.

Both mixed and abnormal sentences involve an unbounded dependency, and on fairly standard HPSG assumptions, this means that the highest verb has a non-empty SLASH value.

Hence, one might propose that a finite verb other than the copula heading a positive declarative main clause must have a non-empty SLASH value.

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But two sorts of example pose problems for this approach.

Firstly, there are examples with an initial non-finite verb separated from its complement, such as the following from Willis (1998: 52).

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summon.INF PRT do.PAST.3SG Arthur soldiers the island this
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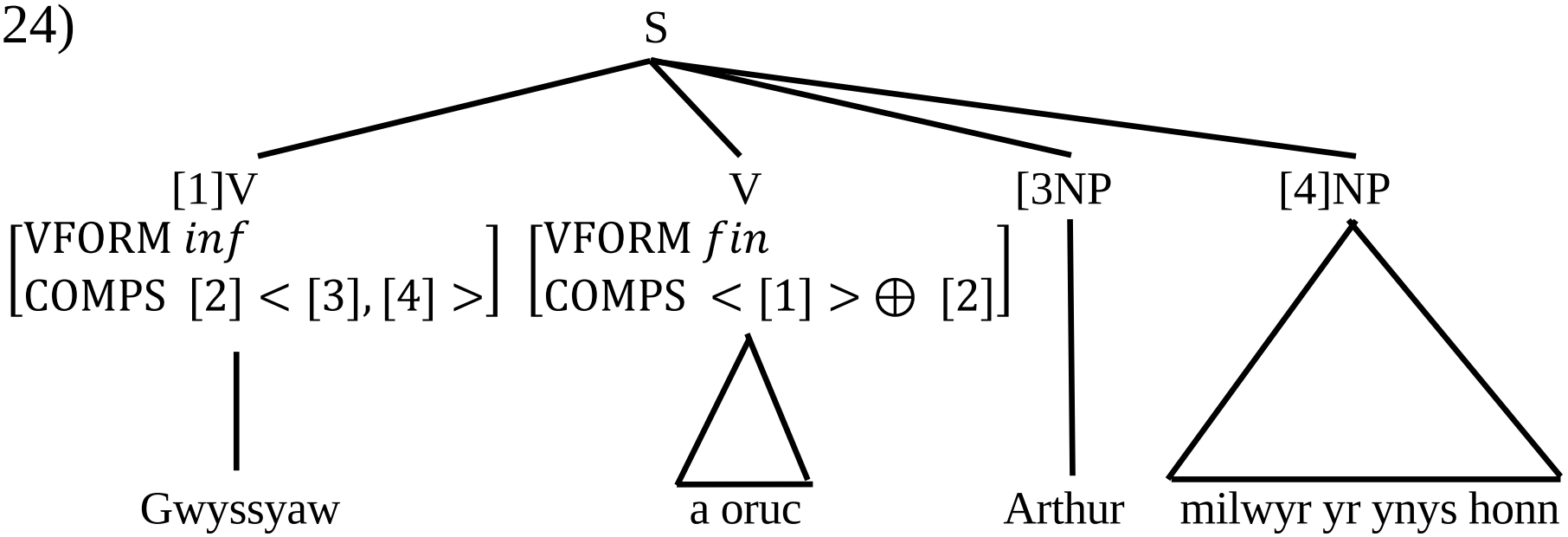
As with similar examples in Modern Breton (Borsley & Kathol 2000), there is no reason to think that these involve an unbounded dependency.

Rather, it is plausible to analyse the initial non-finite verb as a lexical argument in an argument composition structure, giving a structure like the following:

(24)


S
[1]V
V
[3NP
[4]NP
[VFORM inf
COMPS [2] < [3], [4] >]
[VFORM fin
COMPS < [1] > ⊕ [2]]
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Arthur
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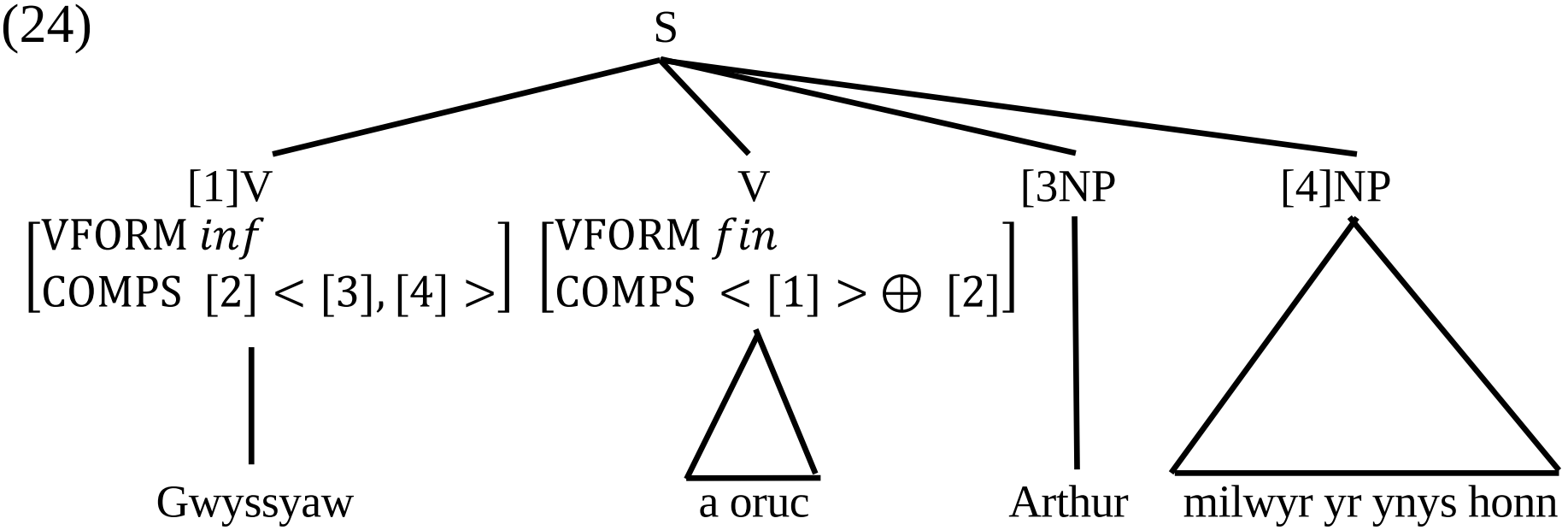
(24)



If this is right, the finite verb will not have a non-empty SLASH value.

Secondly, there are examples with an expletive pronoun in initial position, such as (25).

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(25) Ef a daw glaw gwaet …
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‘There will come a rain of blood …’ (BB 125.5)

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'There will come a rain of blood …' (BB 125.5)

Initial expletives are rare in early texts and restricted to unaccusative contexts, but common in later texts and not restricted in this way (Willis, 1998:128).

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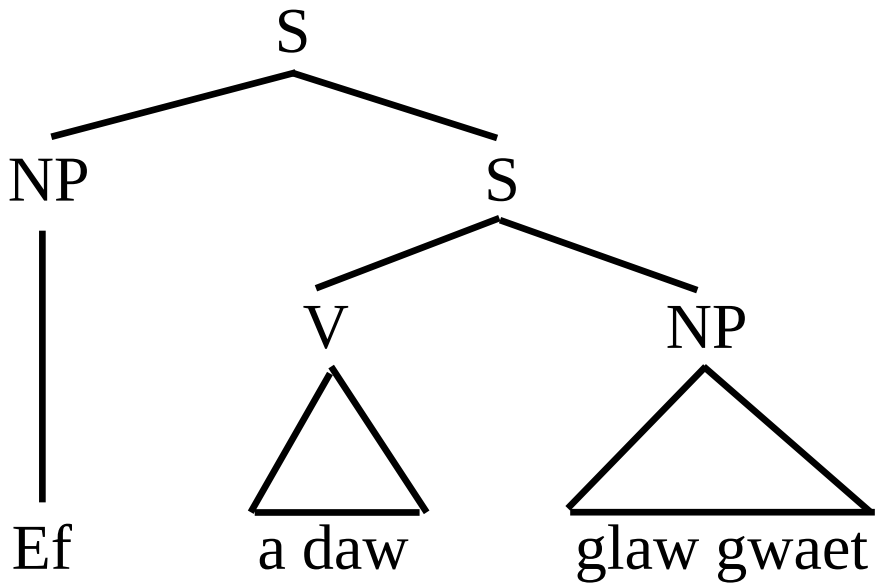
(26)



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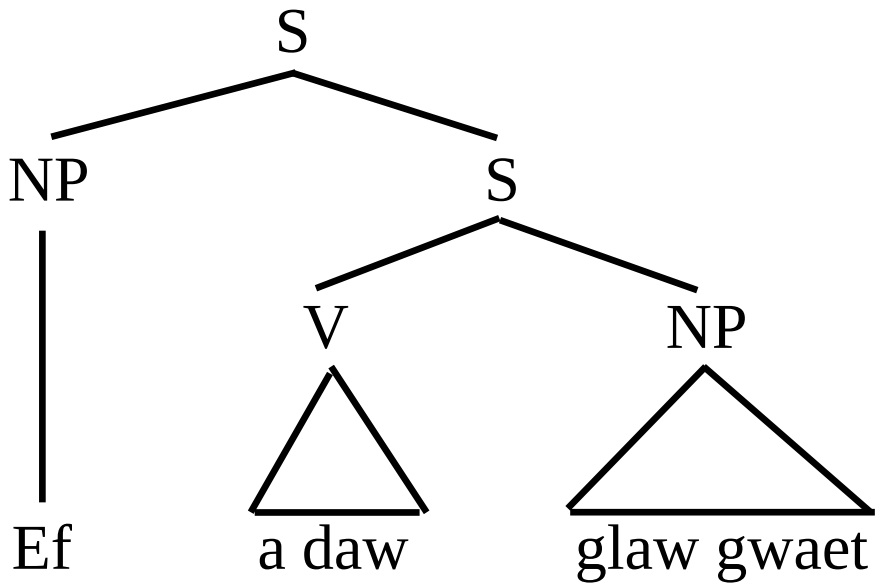

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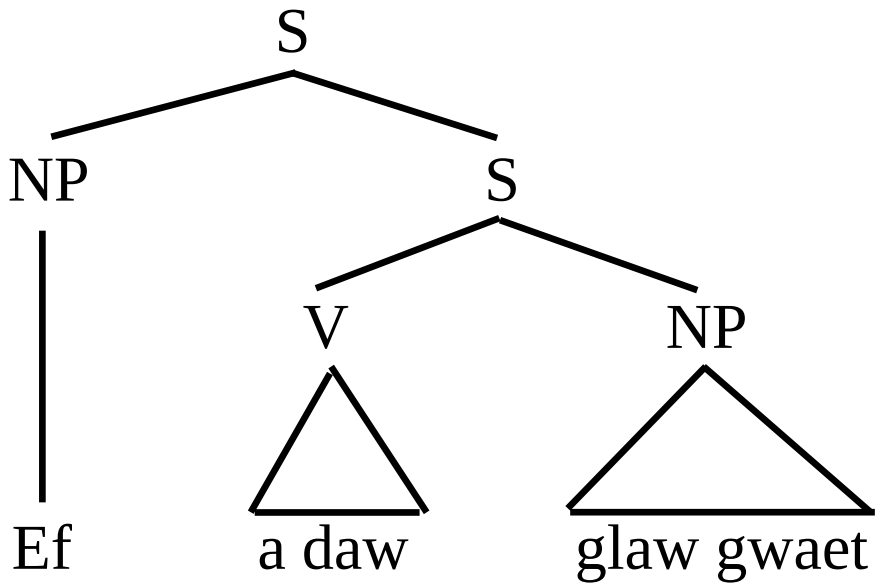

Again, there is no reason to think that there is an unbounded dependency here, and so no reason to think that the finite verb has a non-empty SLASH value.

This suggests that a different approach is required.

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- A finite verb other than the copula cannot appear in initial position in a positive declarative main clause.

- A finite verb other than the copula must appear in second position in a positive declarative main clause.

The second description is not easy to formalise. It would be easy enough if the expression that precedes the finite verb was always a sister, but while this may be the case in examples like (23) above with an initial non-finite verb, it is clearly not the case in abnormal sentences and mixed/cleft sentences as analysed above, and it is presumably not the case either in examples like (25) with an initial expletive.

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Following Bonami *et al*. (2016) and Borsley (2019), I assume a feature LID whose value is unique to each distinct lexeme, the words that realize it, and the phrases that they head and that *standard-verb* is a supertype of the LID values of all standard verbs while the copula is [LID *copula*].

If we assume that main clauses are [ROOT +] and positive clauses [POL(ARITY) *pos*(*itive*)] and that the order of elements in the DTRS list of a clause corresponds to the observed order, we might propose the following constraint for Middle Welsh:

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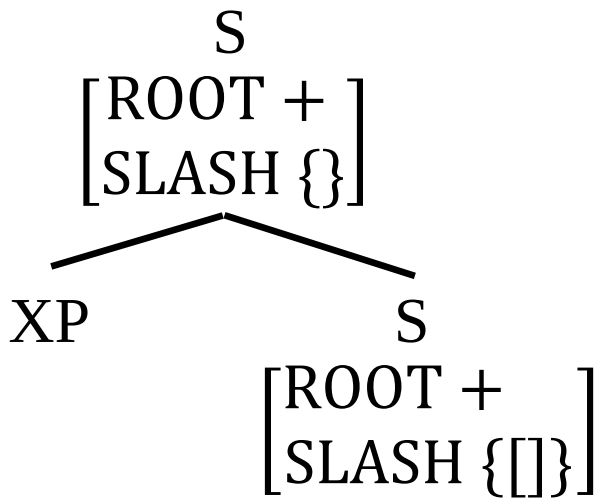

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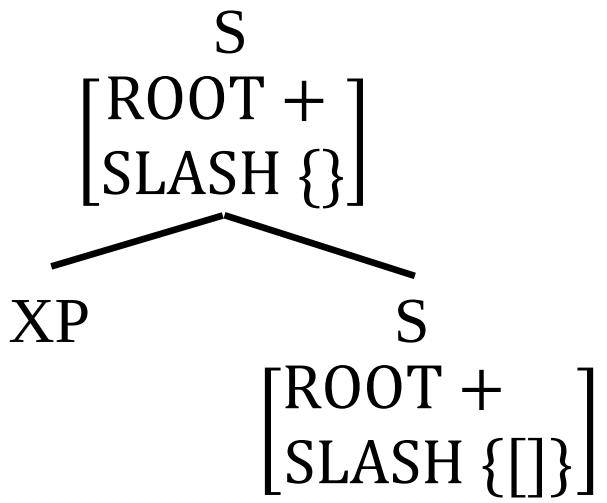

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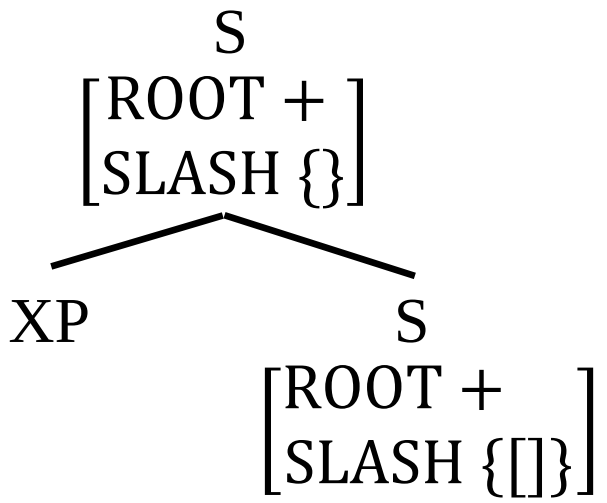

In both types of clause, the lower S is a head and hence, on standard assumptions, is [ROOT+] like the higher S.

But clearly the lower S can and normally will have a finite verb as its first daughter.

One response to this problem would be to stipulate that the head in such clauses is always [ROOT –]. But this is only possible in a version of HPSG assuming a default Head Feature Principle.

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An alternative is suggested by Bonami *et al*. (2016), who propose that Modern Welsh has not a two-way distinction between main and subordinate clauses, but a three-way distinction between simple main, simple complement, and unbounded dependency clauses, encoded as the value of a feature STATUS.

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For Middle Welsh we can propose that the third type is not unbounded dependency clauses, but extended clauses in which a basic clause combines with a preceding sister of some kind. This will include both unbounded dependency clauses and clauses with an initial expletive.

This gives structures like (29) instead of structures like (28).

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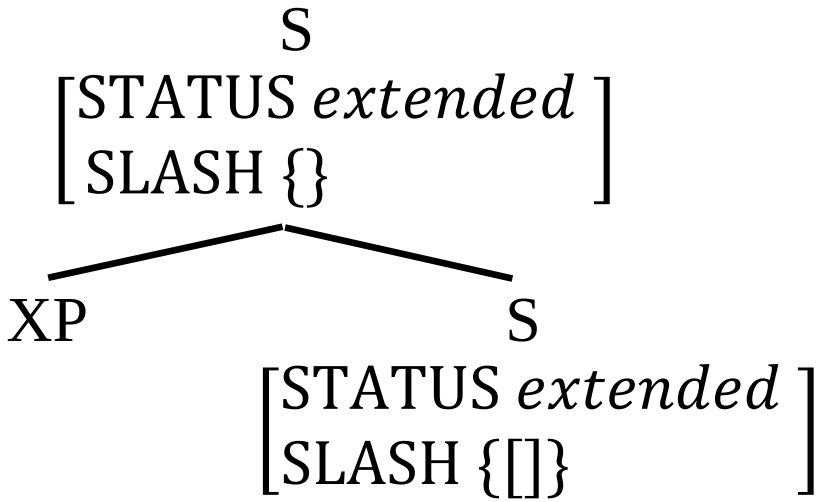
(29)



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This says that the first daughter of a simple finite positive declarative main clause may not be a finite standard verb.

It will rule out a finite standard verb in initial position in simple finite positive declarative main clauses, but have no effect on the second daughter in (29) because it is [STATUS *extended*].

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It will allow a finite copula in initial position in simple finite positive declarative main clauses and will allow a finite verb in initial position in negative declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives.

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(31) … ac yna y kyuodes sabot ac [a elwis ar bown]
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'And then Sabot arose and called on Bown …' (YBH 2825-8)

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Bown
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However, Willis (1998) argues that such clauses involve an unexpressed topic and an unbounded dependency of some kind.

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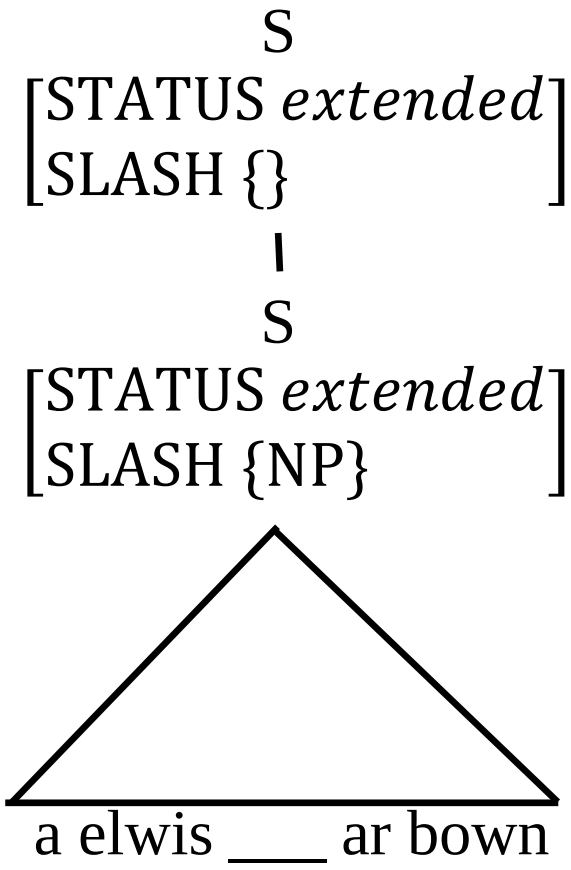
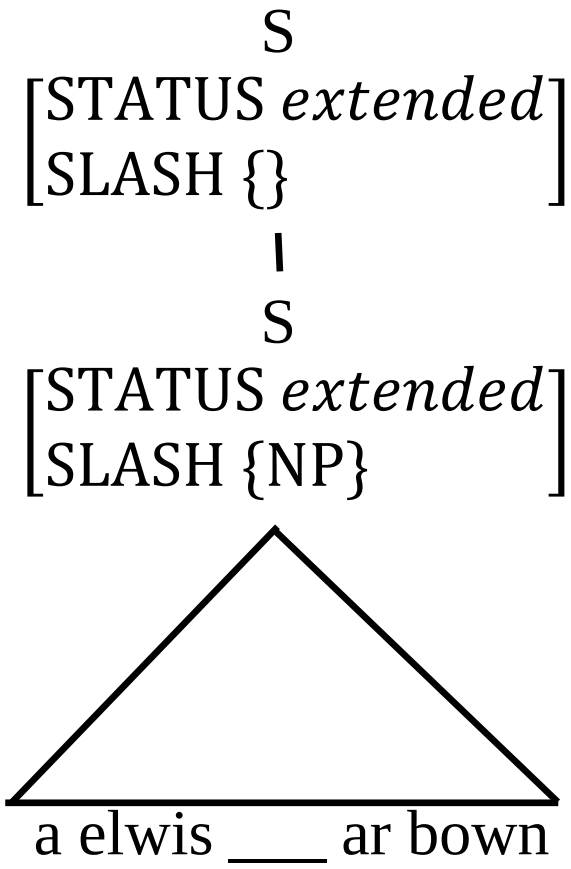
But following Müller's (2014: 101) analysis of similar German 'topic-drop' sentences, one can analyse them as involving a unary branching structure in which an S[SLASH {}] has a single daughter, which is an S[SLASH {NP}].

(32)


S
[STATUS extended
SLASH {}]
S
[STATUS extended
SLASH {NP}]
a elwis ___ ar bown

(32)



Since this structure is [STATUS *extended*], it will be unaffected by the constraint in (30).

This structure can be assigned to a type *unexpressed-topic-clause*. Apart from having just a single daughter (which is a head), this will be similar to the type *binary-slashed-head-phrase* introduced above. The similarities can be captured by treating them as two subtypes of a type *slashed-head-phrase*.

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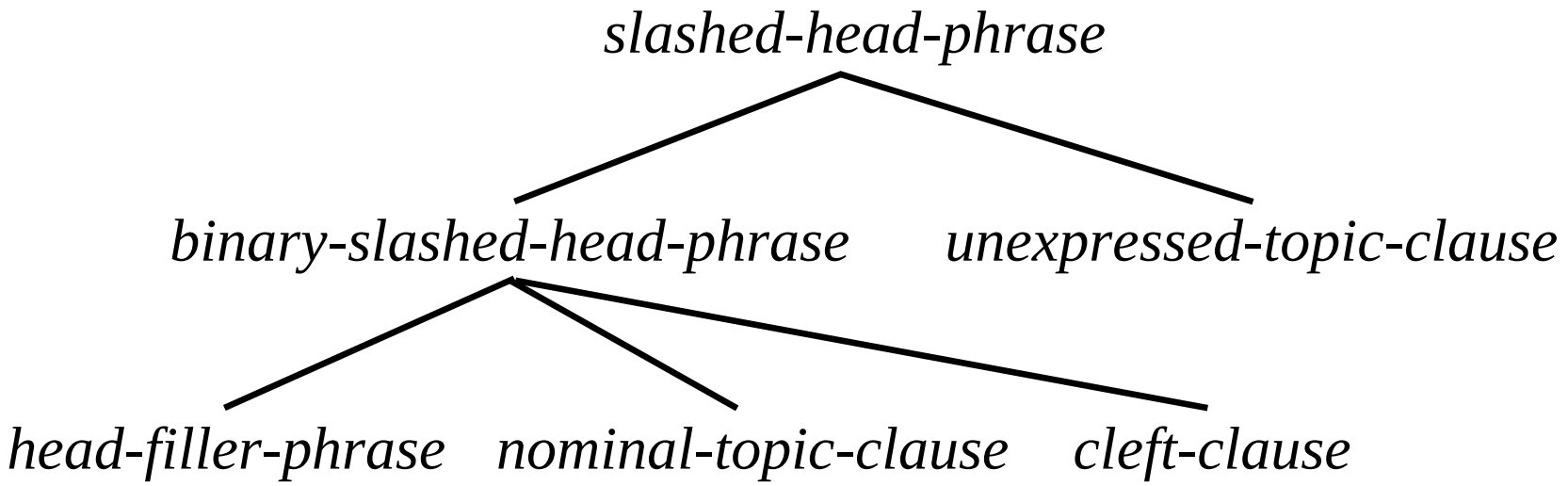

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(34) *slashed-head-phrase* $\Rightarrow$

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SS}\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{LOC}|\text{CAT}|\text{HEAD}[\text{STATUS } \textit{extended}] \\ \text{SLASH } [1]\end{array}\right] \\ \text{HD}-\text{DTR } [2] \\ \\ \text{DTRS L} \oplus < [2] \left[\begin{array}{l}\textit{clause} \\ \text{SS}\left[\begin{array}{l}\text{BIND } \{[3]\} \\ \text{SLASH } \{[3]\} \cup [1]\end{array}\right]\end{array}\right] > \end{array}\right]$$

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This ensures that a slashed-head phrase is [STATUS *extended*] and has a head daughter which is a clause with one SLASH set member which is not part of the SLASH set of the mother.

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(35) *binary-slashed-head-phrase* $\Rightarrow$ [DTRS $<$ [*phrase*] $>$ $\oplus$ $<$ [] $>$]

This ensures that a binary-slashed-head phrase has two daughters (the second of which is a head as a result of the constraint on *slashed-head-phrase*).

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(36) *unexpressed-topic-clause* $\Rightarrow$ [DTRS $<$ [] $>$]

This ensures that an *unexpressed-topic-clause* has a single daughter (which is a head as a result of the constraint on *slashed-head-phrase*).

A full constraint will also need to ensure the appropriate semantics with an unexpressed topic.

Conclusion

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With appropriate types and constraints, it is not too difficult to account for the complexities of Middle Welsh verb-second.

Primary texts

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BB = *Brut y Brenhinedd: Cotton Cleopatra Version*, ed. John Jay Parry (Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America 1937)

CO = *Culhwch ac Olwen: An Edition of the Oldest Arthurian Tale*, ed. Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 1992)

Dewi = *Buched Dewi* 'The Life of St David'

Per = Peredur *Historia Peredur vab Efrawc*, ed. Glenys Witchard Goetinck (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1976)

PKM = *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, ed. Ifor Williams (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1930)

WM = *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans with introduction by R. M. Jones, (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1973)

YBH = *Ystoria Bown de Hamtwn*, ed. Morgan Watkins (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1958)

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