

Keeping movement motivated: optionality without the tears*

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Optionality in movement operations is widely held to be fundamentally incompatible with a feature-driven approach to displacement in which movement must be triggered and triggered movement is obligatory. We argue that semantically-vacuous alternations in surface order are not an imperfection of the language system but fall out on principled grounds once movement is viewed as internal merge. Minimalist economy principles are then predicted to allow for indeterminacies in the application of movement operations in exactly the same way as they do for external merge: as long as the relevant formal trigger is motivated, the grammar cannot discern between two (or more) legitimate options for satisfying it, yielding the effect of ‘true optionality’. We demonstrate the validity of this prediction with two case studies from the empirical domain of EPP-satisfaction in Germanic: optional verb movement in Afrikaans embedded clauses, and optional