

The *Erikativ* Form and the Nature of the German Base

1 Introduction

The *Erikativ* is a new, productive verb form in German that, in many cases, is distinct from any other form in the verbal paradigm or elsewhere in the language. The behavior of the *Erikativ* can, therefore, be taken to be a reflection of the present-day German speaker's grammatical interpretation of the base. The base is generally agreed to be predictive or informative in the derivation of other paradigm members, but its precise definition is not always consistent.

In this paper, I will use the *Erikativ* to examine the German base (in various forms) as well as the underlying structure of German word order. In Section 2, I will give some background into the evolution and basic pattern of the *Erikativ*. Section 3 will consider evidence for (and against) the imperative as the verbal base, while Section 4 will show evidence that the base is, instead, the infinitive, following Albright's (2002) framework of Maximal Informativeness. In Section 5, I will explore morphosyntactic and semantic issues related to the *Erikativ*, and show that these issues are not only in line with the notion of the *Erikativ* having a close relationship to the infinitive, but also suggest, surprisingly, that the *Erikativ* inherits features from the infinitive form.

2 Background

The German *Erikativ* construction (also known as the *Inflektiv*¹ (Teuber 1998)) is a phenomenon that existed prior to the mid-twentieth century, but first developed widespread prominence through the German-language translations of Disney comics during the 1950's. The translator, Erika Fuchs, used this form to describe sounds and actions of the characters (not unlike English *crash!* or *pow!*); eventually, these words evolved beyond onomatopoeic use, expanding to phrases like *stare*

¹ It should be noted that Teuber (1998, p. 8) describes the *Inflektiv* as a verb form that is non-inflected (German: *nicht-flektiert*); therefore, the German term *Inflektiv* should be translated into English as "Uninflective". To avoid the confusion this causes, I shall use the alternative term, *Erikativ*.

(*starr*) or *dancing while sitting* (*sitzen dtanz*). Unlike onomatopoeias, these new forms followed a predictable pattern.

Below is an example of the *Erikativ* as it originally appeared in Disney comics (from *Deutsche Sprache — Fragen und Antworten*, <http://faql.de/sonstiges.html>):

(1) a. Original English text:



b. German translation:



In (a), we see the original English text with the sound effect *ROAR* to describe the sound of a flood of water. The lexical category of *roar* in this context may be nominal or verbal; this can more easily be ambiguous due to the sparse inflectional morphology of English. The German translation uses the early *Erikativ* form, *GRUMMEL* ('grumble'), to express this sound. It is important to note that *grummel* is not the nominal form of the verb *grummeln* (which would be *das Grummeln*); it is a newly created form.²

Later on, the *Erikativ* form then began to enter common usage with the dawn of Usenet³, bulletin board systems (BBS), and Internet Relay Chat (IRC), where communication of visual and auditory cues now had to be done verbally (Schepelmann 2004). With the rise in popularity of the Internet, these *Erikativ* forms have become commonplace in German chat rooms, web forums, and text messages over the past fifteen years. The impersonal nature of Internet and phone communication means that the *Erikativ* (as well as emoticons) can be used to compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues—by verbalizing them. As such, its application has expanded further, making nearly any verb, or even an entire phrase, a candidate for the *Erikativ* form.

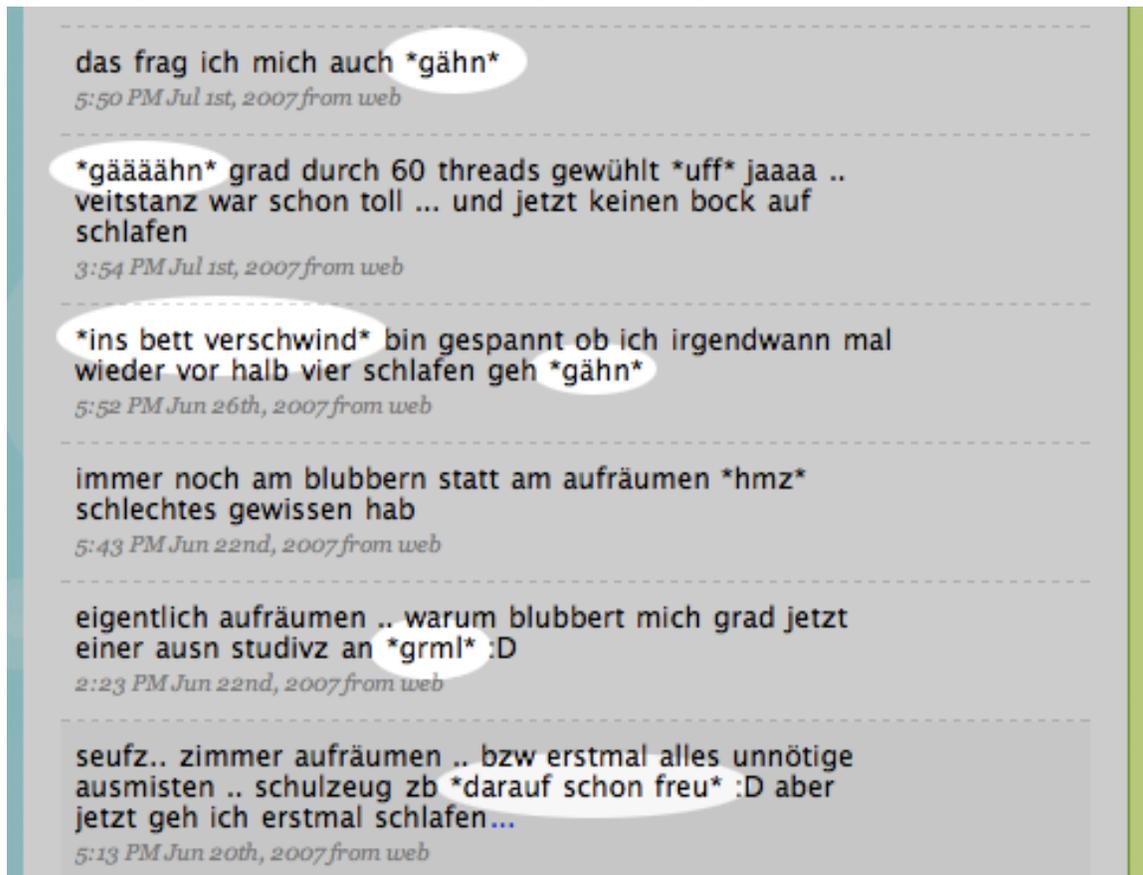
² In some cases, the *Erikativ* form may be identical to an existing lexical noun form; however, verbs are productively nominalized in German such that they are identical to the infinitive (e.g. *grinsen* 'to grin' → *das Grinsen* 'the grin').

³ Usenet is distributed Internet discussion system, created in 1979.

The *Erikativ* is strictly a written phenomenon; on the Internet, each usage is typically indicated by circumfixing asterisks around the word or phrase⁴:

(2)	Erikativ	Meaning
a.	*platsch*	'splash!'
b.	*brumm*	'vroom!'
c.	*krach*	'crash!'

(3) Example of *Erikativ* use in Twitter (twitter.com)⁵:



In (3), the *Erikativ* forms are interspersed among normal sentences and phrases. However, they do not interact syntactically with the words around them.

⁴ Alternate forms of *Erikativ* indicators include various types of brackets, e.g. <gähn>

⁵ Translation of *Erikativ* forms above: *yawn*, *disappears into bed*, *yawn*, *grumble* (abbreviated), *already looking forward to it*

Schepelmann (2004) describes the metaphorical uses of the *Erikativ*, observing that the *Erikativ* is increasingly used online as part of what she calls “Pretend Play” activity. Though the *Erikativ* construction fundamentally describes sounds and actions in the presence of the writer that the reader can neither see nor hear, in the context of “Pretend Play”, one can describe actions that need not be literally taking place, and that can involve both the writer and the reader.

- (4)
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| NickName1: *railgunauspack* | 'gets out railgun' |
| NickName2: *baseballschlägerzück* | 'flashes a baseball bat' |
| NickName1: *abdrück* | 'shoots' |
| NickName2: *aushol* | 'lunges out' |
| NickName2: muha | |
| NickName2: *dasnasenbeinzertrümmer* | 'breaks (reader's) nose' |
| NickName1: aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa | |

Hentschel and Weydt (1994) categorized the *Erikativ* as an interjection in their *Handbuch der deutschen Grammatik*, rightly drawing a link between the environments in which *Erikativ* forms and interjections are used. However, the *Erikativ* form is ultimately concluded to be “abbreviated” verb form that constitutes a “pre-grammatical expression”. From this perspective, the *Erikativ* would not have a legitimate place as a member of the German verbal paradigm.

Teuber (1998) argues convincingly that the *Erikativ* is a true verb form, as it has semantic and morphological restrictions that distinguish it from the freeform nature of interjections. Noting the common similarity between the *Erikativ* form and the verbal stem, he coins the term *Inflektiv* ('uninflective') to describe its lack of overt inflection. He also claims that the *Erikativ* should be interpreted as the unmarked candidate for the base of the verbal paradigm. In the sense of base that I will use here, this claim is too strong; certainly a child acquiring German does not interpret an almost exclusively written phenomenon as the base from which other members of the paradigm are derived.

Schlobinski (2001) notes that the subject is not overt in *Erikativ* constructions, and the speaker is taken to be the default subject. He also categorizes the various types of illocutionary acts that the *Erikativ* can communicate: expressive-emotive (**traurig guck**, 'looks sad'), regulative-phatic (**viperknuddel**, 'cuddles a viper'), regulative-volitive (**fotosehenwill**, 'wants to see the photo'), assertive-descriptive (**guterschauspielersei**, 'is a good actor'), assertive-narrative (**Kite unter Wassertunk**, 'dips the kite underwater'), and assertive-evaluative (**schonoksei**, 'is just fine').

As we can see in (5) below, the usage of the *Erikativ* spread from onomatopoeia to concrete and even abstract actions, as well as syntactically more complex notions like ‘go to bed’. With this in mind, there are few limitations on what concepts can be expressed in the *Erikativ*, making this formation a highly productive process in the language today.

3 The *Erikativ* and the imperative

Determining the lexical category of the *Erikativ* is not entirely trivial. Its use as a single entity unto itself is similar to an interjection, such that it cannot be tested in the context of words or a phrase around it. As mentioned above, some have indeed categorized the *Erikativ* as a type of interjection, due to the similar (and sometimes overlapping) domains in which it is used. However, the internal syntactic structure of the *Erikativ* differs from most interjections, as its structure is systematic, while the structure of interjections tends to be generally less restricted than verbs, particularly in German.

(5)	Infinitive	Gloss	Erikativ	Imperative (sg)
a.	lächeln	‘to smile’	→ *lächel*	lächel
b.	zwinkern	‘to wink’	→ *zwinker*	zwinker
c.	seufzen	‘to sigh’	→ *seufz*	seufz
d.	gähnen	‘to yawn’	→ *gähn*	gähn
e.	staunen	‘to be amazed’	→ *staun*	staun
f.	rot werden	‘to blush’	→ *rotwerd* ⁶	werde rot
g.	ins Bett gehen	‘to go to bed’	→ *insbettgeh* ⁶	geh ins Bett
h.	darauf schon freuen	‘to look forward’	→ *darauf schon freu*	freu (schon) darauf

When juxtaposed with the imperative forms in (5), the *Erikativ* appears to be closely related to the imperative form of the verb. Indeed, in (a-e), the imperative and *Erikativ* are identical. However, in (f-g), we see some complications. Word order is different in (f-g); the verb comes first in the imperative but last in the *Erikativ*. Further, (f) also has morphological variation between the imperative and *Erikativ* in the verb, *werden*.

⁶ *Erikativ* forms made up of two or more words can, by convention, be orthographically joined together or, sometimes, written separately (e.g. *rot werd* and *ins Bett geh*), or with capital letters separating each word (e.g. *InsBettGeh*).

In this section, we will explore the relationship between the *Erikativ* and the imperative form in the German verbal paradigm, revealing four key problems with the premise of the imperative as the German base:

- i) While the imperative is attractive as a potential base in the regular paradigm because it is a surface form with a subset of features of all other members, these properties do not hold for the imperative in irregular forms (such as so-called *wechselflexion* verbs).
- ii) The *Erikativ* form differs unpredictably from the imperative in irregular paradigms, and yet, all *Erikativ* forms are predictable.
- iii) If the *Erikativ* form is to be taken as reflective of a more general process of paradigm leveling (following Optimal Paradigms (McCarthy 2005)), then the 2nd and 3rd person singular forms should also exhibit leveling, but this does not occur.
- iv) Modal verbs, lacking an imperative form in the paradigm, nonetheless have *Erikativ* forms.

3.1 Standard German Paradigm

As a starting point, let us first take a look at the regular verbal paradigm (present and past tenses) in German:

(6)	lernen		'to learn'	
	Present		Past	
	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1	lerne	lernen	lernte	lernten
2	lernst	lernt	lerntest	lerntet
3	lernt	lernen	lernte	lernten
	Imperative (sg.):	lern		
	Imperative (pl.):	lernt		
	Erikativ:	*lern*		

If we assume that the base form is completely regular, then we can structure a template in the following way, where the base is equal to the stem (the same in this case being *lern-*), and the stem never undergoes any phonological change:

(7)	BASE-en (infinitive)			
	Present		Past	
	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1	BASE-e	BASE-en	BASE-te	BASE-te-n

2	BASE-st	BASE-t	BASE-te-st	BASE-te-t
3	BASE-t	BASE-en	BASE-te	BASE-te-n
	Imperative (sg.):	BASE		
	Imperative (pl.):	BASE-t		
	Erikativ:	*BASE*		

In this template, the imperative singular and *Erikativ* are identical. The bare base form of the verb surfaces in the imperative, and this base form is clearly accessible in the production of the new *Erikativ* form.

Kager (1999) defines “base” in rather restrictive terms (p. 282):

(8) *Definition of ‘base’:*

- a. The base is a free-standing output form — a word.
- b. The base contains a *subset of the grammatical features* of the derived form.

The strongest implication of (8)a is that one’s grammar can only analyze as a base those morphemes that surface as *standalone words* elsewhere. If, for example, *seufz* is to be the base of the verb *seufzen*, then there must be an instance where *seufz* surfaces as a word (and it does in this case, as the imperative). When we limit ourselves to the structure of regular verbs in the paradigm in (6) and (7), Kager’s assertion seems to hold. However, this breaks down quickly when we consider the irregular verb forms.

The *Erikativ* form diverges from the imperative form if the imperative undergoes a stem change (known in German as *wechselflexion*):

(9)	<i>sprech-en</i>	‘to speak’		
	Present		Past	
	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1	sprech-e	sprech-en	<u>sprach</u>	<u>sprach-en</u>
2	<u>sprich-st</u>	sprech-t	<u>sprach-st</u>	<u>sprach-t</u>
3	<u>sprich-t</u>	sprech-en	<u>sprach</u>	<u>sprach-en</u>
	Imperative:	<u>sprich</u>		
	★ Erikative:	*sprech*		

The underlined members in (9) do not match with the *sprech* stem in the rest of the paradigm. This pattern presents two problems for the hypothesis of the imperative as the surface form of the base. First, the imperative no longer seems to have a subset of the grammatical features of all of the other forms in the paradigm, as stated in (8)b; *sprich* could only serve as a base for the first-person and second-person singular forms. Secondly, if we take *sprech* to be the base form, we now are lacking any instance of the base form as a surface word in any part of the paradigm (aside from the *Erikativ*). This means that we are not able to define a base using Kager's (1999) definition from which the *Erikativ* form can be derived.

Let us take a more in-depth look at the *Erikativ* forms as they relate to other *wechselflexion* verbs. In the table in (10), I have selected three members of the paradigm along with the infinitive to illustrate the pattern.⁷

(10) Other irregular and *Erikativ* forms:

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>1p sing.</i>	<i>Imper.</i>	<i>1p past</i>	<i>Erikativ</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
a. brechen	to break	breche	brich	brach	*zusammen brech *	*smash*
b. fressen	to gorge	fresse	friss	frass	*mich voll fress *	*gorges myself*
c. essen	to eat	esse	iss	ass	*satt ess *	*eats (my) fill*
d. geben	to give	gebe	gib	gab	*adresse geb *	*gives address*
e. helfen	to help	helfe	hilf	half	*dir helf *	*helps you*
f. lesen	to read	lese	lies	las	*buch les *	*reads book*
g. nehmen	to take	nehme	nimm	nahm	*platz nehm *	*sits down*
h. sprechen	to speak	spreche	sprich	sprach	*monoton sprech *	*speaks monotone*
i. sterben	to die	sterbe	stirb	starb	* sterb *	*dies*
j. vergessen	to forget	vergesse	vergiss	vergass	*alles vergess *	*forgets everything*

⁷ In the gloss for the *Erikativ* forms, I attempted to approximate the meaning; the most natural English equivalent to the *Erikativ* often uses a verb inflected for 3rd person singular (e.g. *looks down*).

The new imperative form in (12) corresponds directly with the *Erikativ* form. If *nehm* is evolving into the form of the imperative as the grammar evolves, then the production of a new *Erikativ* form ought to correspond to this new imperative form as a base, if they are indeed related. Alternatively, since this new imperative form is still geographically restricted in its use, perhaps the imperative change in progress is instead a reflection of a reanalysis of the German base because of the widespread introduction of the *Erikativ* form (however it might have originated).

McCarthy (2005) provides a possible analysis for this change. His Optimal Paradigms (OP) framework incorporates rankable constraints on resemblance between forms in a paradigm that interact with more traditional phonological constraints. These constraints do not elevate one form (or group of forms) such that other paradigm members correspond to it; instead, all members correspond to each other symmetrically. The appearance of *nehm* in the *Erikativ* form alongside the development of *nehm/nehme* in the imperative could be reflective of just such a leveling of the paradigm. The verb *nehmen* is a *wechselflexion* verb that undergoes a phonological process of vowel raising to [i] in certain members of the paradigm, indicating that the constraint (or constraints) governing this process is ranked above an OP-style paradigm faith constraint. The imperative change from *nimm* to *nehm* means that the paradigm faith constraint has been re-ranked above the phonological constraint(s). Such a change predicts that paradigm members undergoing identical *wechselflexion* changes would also level as a result of this re-ranking. However, leveling does not occur across the paradigm; the 2nd and 3rd person singular members retain the same irregular form (*nimmst, nimmt*).

There is no clear explanation for the leveling of the paradigm to be restricted only to this subset of the verbal paradigm while ignoring other nearly identical members with the same irregularity. The co-occurrence of the change in the imperative is, therefore, unlikely to be related to the *Erikativ*.⁹

3.3 Modal verb gap

The imperative hypothesis has one other significant setback; there are a small number of German verbs that have a gap in the imperative form, namely the modal verbs.

⁹ See the Appendix for a possible explanation for the new imperative form that is related to the subjunctive.

(13)	wollen	'to want'	
		<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
	1	will	wollen
	2	willst	wollt
	3	will	wollen
	Imperative:	<none>	
	Erikativ:	*woll*	(from *weg woll* 'wants to leave')

The modal, such as *wollen* above, lacks an imperative form in the paradigm, yet we see in (13) that speakers do produce an *Erikativ*. Furthermore, this *Erikativ* form, **woll**, is not identical to any other form in the paradigm. The form that provided the base for the *Erikativ* form is unclear based on the theories we have used thus far.

4 The *Erikativ* and the infinitive

In (13), we encountered an example of an *Erikativ* that had no obvious candidate for its base form. Albright (2002) provides a different type of framework for analyzing the base that can account for such cases. Albright suggests that the member (or group of members) of the paradigm that preserves the most contrasts and that can most productively predict the most members of the rest of the paradigm is “maximally informative”.¹⁰ The maximally informative member serves the function of the base, replacing the traditional notion of the base as a single morpheme with a minimal amount of features. In fact, the candidate that preserves the most contrasts in a given paradigm may even be an inflected form; Albright’s analysis will choose this candidate if this is the case.

Under the Albright framework, forms that are the most “ambitious” and accurate are the most heavily weighted as strong potential base forms. Thus, a form that can be generalized in a very high number of cases may win out over a candidate that is completely accurate but unambitious in its scope of application; likewise, a candidate with similar breadth to another candidate might be optimal because it has a higher level of predictive accuracy. I will consider frequency in general terms as a strong factor in determining the most likely informative member in a paradigm.

¹⁰ My thanks go to Youngran An for suggesting this approach.

4.1 Neutralizations that affect German verb forms

As mentioned in Section 3, the imperative was a likely candidate on the surface to consider for the base form, but it was found to have problems that cannot thus far be reconciled. However, there are a few phonological processes in German that cause other important types of variation, even in the so-called regular forms, which seem to narrow the field of potential candidates even further. Let us look at how coda neutralization of voicing plays a role in (14) and (15):

(14)	<u>[zakə]</u>		'to sink'
		<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1	<u>[zakə]</u>		<u>[zakən]</u>
2	[zakst]		[zakt]
3	[zakt]		<u>[zakən]</u>
	Imperative:	[zak] (singular)	
		[zakt] (plural)	

(15)	<u>[zagə]</u>		'to say'
		<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1	<u>[zagə]</u>		<u>[zagən]</u>
2	[zakst]		[zakt]
3	[zakt]		<u>[zagən]</u>
	Imperative:	[zak] (singular)	
		[zakt] (plural)	

The forms that differ between (14) and (15) have been underlined; every other member of (14) is phonologically identical to its corresponding member in (15), due to coda neutralization in German. If we take these forms as representatives of all German verbs, only the underlined forms (namely 1st singular/plural, 3rd plural, and infinitive) remain as optimal candidates that can predict all other members of the paradigm, and are therefore maximally informative. In fact, Albright (2002) shows this to be the case:

Figure 2.1 from Albright (2002, p. 31)

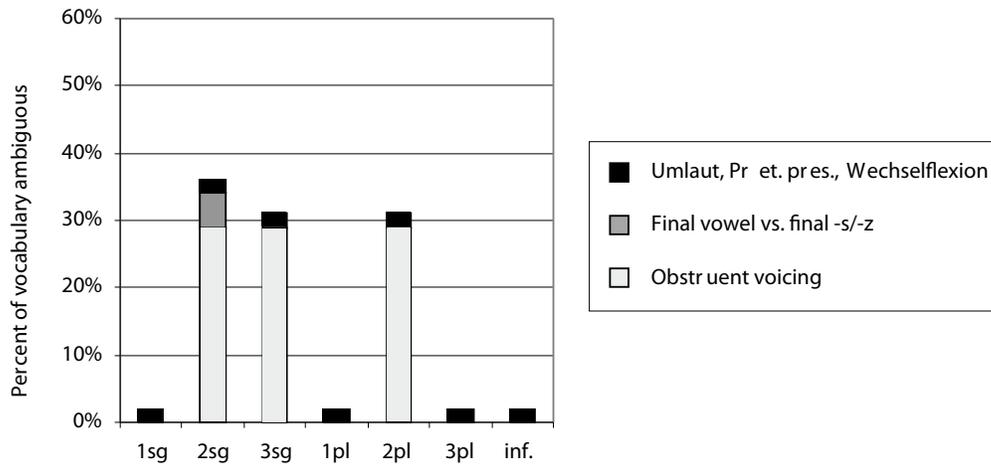


Figure 2.1: Summary of neutralizations affecting German verb forms

Above, we see that obstruent voicing (i.e. effects from coda neutralization) alone causes most ambiguity in German verb forms. A small portion of the ambiguity is also caused by *wechselflexion*, as well as stem-final *s/z* ambiguity in 2nd person singular (e.g. *hast* ‘have’ and *hasst* ‘hate’ are phonologically identical). Albright does not include the imperative in Figure 2.1; however, the same coda neutralization effects would affect the imperative in nearly all cases where it would affect 2nd sg., 3rd sg., and 2nd pl., making the imperative a suboptimal base under the Albright system.

Albright concludes that 1st singular, 1st /3rd plural, and the infinitive are the maximally informative verb forms in German. This is consistent with the regular and irregular forms we have seen thus far, with the exception of (13), *wollen*. However, *wollen* is a modal verb, which follows a slightly different pattern.

The modal verbs (*können*, *wollen*, *mögen*, *dürfen*, *müssen*, *sollen*, etc.) represent an exceptional group, which exhibits an irregular 1st person singular form (*kann*, *will*, *mag*, *darf*, *muss*, and *soll*, respectively). As most modals are forms of very high token frequency (*können*, *müssen*, *sollen*, *wollen* are all in the top 11¹¹ (Jones & Tschirner 2006)), this puts the 1st person singular at a slight disadvantage in maximizing informativeness in the general verbal paradigm; this factor is not specifically addressed by Albright. If we eliminate the 1st person singular from consideration based on this fact, we can still predict the *Erikativ* form, **woll**, from 1st /3rd plural or infinitive (which are all identical).

¹¹ Ranking: 4. *können*, 5. *müssen*, 10. *sollen*, 11. *wollen*, 142. *dürfen*, 151. *mögen*

In effect, this means that the *Erikativ* must be formed by truncation of one of these informative verb forms (of the form <stem>-en).

4.2 *Erikativ* and the most frequent verb: *sein*¹²

Nearly all *Erikativ* forms in German exhibit regular behavior that does not distinguish the infinitive from the 1st or 3rd person plural forms. However, there is an irregular form that can potentially shed some light into the derivation of the *Erikativ*, and that is the most frequent verb: *sein* (Jones & Tschirner 2006).

(16)	<u><i>sein</i></u>	'to be'	
		<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
	1	bin	<u>sind</u>
	2	bist	seid
	3	ist	<u>sind</u>
	Imperative:	sei	
	Erikativ:	*sei*	(from *frohsei* 'is happy')

Here, the 1st/3rd person singular forms (*sind*) do not match the infinitive (*sein*). But rather than a gap (or variation) in the *Erikativ*, we have *sei* as the clear, unique winner. If we are no longer considering the imperative as a viable candidate for reasons we have seen earlier, and if we, therefore, only consider the paradigm's three maximally informative options, then the infinitive *sei* must be derived from the infinitive; the other two forms cannot apply the same truncation process to create the *Erikativ* form. The fact that *sein* is the copula in German makes it particularly important, because its extremely high token frequency should have a strong impact on the paradigm. The influence of this particular word eliminates the 1st person plural and 3rd person plural as equally informative members: the infinitive is predictive whenever the 1st and 3rd person plurals are predictive, but it is also predictive with *sein*, one of the most frequently occurring verbs in the language, while the 1st and 3rd person plurals are not.

¹² Some words, such as *sein* and *wollen*, have been attested to also have some form of variation in the *Erikativ* form (sometimes taking the 3rd person singular form). However, I believe this may be indicative of a variant mode of expression that is outside of the *Erikativ*; in either case, this is a matter for future investigation.

5 Syntax, semantics, and the infinitive

Having narrowed the field of the German base candidates to the infinitive, I will now examine properties of *Erikativ* syntax and semantics that seem to be in line with this hypothesis. In fact, we will see evidence in this section that certain morphosyntactic properties of the *Erikativ* are directly inherited from those of the infinitive.

5.1 Syntactic Structure

Determining the default word order is less straightforward in German (and related languages) than other languages, due to the V2 effect in German. In main clauses, the verb is always the second element of the clause, while in subordinate clauses and infinitive forms it tends to be verb final. German word order has long been asserted as having an underlying SOV order (Bach 1962). The verb-final order in the infinitive has also been taken as evidence for SOV to be the default order; the morphosyntax of the *Erikativ* form shows evidence that the SOV word order remains a productive part of German grammar.

In more complex, multi-word constructions of the *Erikativ*, the word order is always verb-final. Compare (a) with (b-d) below:

- (17) a. *sonnenscheininpaketpack* (Erikativ)
 Sonnenschein in Paket **pack**
 sunshine in(to) package pack.ERIK
 'packs sunshine into package'
- b. Sonnenschein **pack-t** er in ein Paket (indicative,
 sunshine pack-s he in(to) a package focused)
 'He packs SUNSHINE into a package.'
- c. In ein Paket **pack-t** er Sonnenschein (indicative,
 in(to) a package pack-s he sunshine focused)
 'He packs sunshine INTO A PACKAGE.'
- d. **Pack** Sonnenschein in ein Paket! (imperative)
 pack sunshine in(to) a package
 'Pack sunshine into a package.'

In (17), the *Erikativ* form in (a) contrasts with standard constituent fronting, such as that of (b-c), which are subject to V2 effects. The imperative form in (d) requires the verb to come first. Examples (b-d) contrast with the infinitive construction in (18):

- (18) Sonnenschein in ein Paket packen (infinitive)
 sunshine in(to) a package pack
 'to pack sunshine in a package'

Here the word order is identical to the *Erikativ*; both are verb-final. This structure resembles adjectival and nominal formations, which also exhibit similar verb-final effects:

- (19) a. Inge **geht** mit Hunger jetzt ins Bett. (verbal)
 Inge **goes** with hunger now in bed
 'Inge is now going to bed hungry.'
- b. mit Hunger jetzt ins Bett **gehende** Inge (adjectival)
 with hunger now in bed **going** Inge
 'Inge, now going to bed hungry (hungry-now-to-bed-going Inge)'
- (20) a. Er **geht** zu Fuß. (verbal)
 he goes to foot
 'he walks'
- b. Fuß**gänger** (nominal)
 foot-goer
 'walker', 'pedestrian'

In (19) and (20), the adjectival and nominal forms of *gehen* ('to go') show verb-final word order.¹³ While many nominal forms such as (20)b are derivational, the adjectival form in (19)b is not.

The *Erikativ* form can be constructed in increasingly complex structures without any change in the verb position:

- (21) *imfallvonerkältunglieberteemitwhiskynehm*
 im Fall von Erkältung lieber Tee mit Whisky **nehm**
 in case of cold rather tea with whisky **take**.ERIK
 'in case of a cold, preferably takes tea with whiskey'

Verb-final word order is also maintained in *Erikativ* forms where there are internally conjoined phrases:

¹³ This productive verb-final ordering contrasts with modern English, where there may be a tendency away from certain verb-final constructs:

(i) the quicker **picker-upper** (instead of *up-picker*)

- (22) a. *buch**nehm** und weg**werf***
 book-**take**.ERIK and away-**throw**.ERIK
 ‘takes book and throws away’
- b. *zusammen**brech** und weiter**lach***
collapse.ERIK and continue-**laugh**.ERIK
 ‘collapses and keeps laughing’

The verb-final word order in these new *Erikativ* forms supports the idea that the underlying word order, like the infinitive, is verb-final. This suggests that the *Erikativ* has inherited the syntactic properties of the infinitive, as the infinitive is the only other verb form that exclusively exhibits OV word order; this means that features may be, surprisingly, carrying over from the base to a derived form.

5.2 Anaphoric Ambiguity

While the *Erikativ* always refers to events taking place with respect to the speaker, there is evidence that the syntactic reference of an anaphor in an *Erikativ* is somehow ambiguous or variable to the speaker, as we can see below:

- (23) a. *mich**setz*** (the speaker sits himself down)
 myself-sit
- b. *sich**setz*** (the speaker sits himself down — same as (a))
 oneself-sit

This is not possible in similar constructions:

- (24) a. Ich setze mich hin.
 I sit myself there
 ‘I sit down.’
- b. * Ich setze sich hin.
 I sit oneself there

Since *mich* and *sich* are both reflexives, they are clearly associating with the subject (who is always the speaker). Without changing the interpretation of the agent of the event, we see that both 1st and 3rd person reflexives are possible.¹⁴

The variation allowed in (23) suggests that the expression grammatical person of the *Erikativ* is not concrete in the interpretation of the reader/listener, though semantically it is understood. Thus, the speaker is seemingly able to interpret the *Erikativ* form as a 3rd-person narrative, or a 1st-person account.

¹⁴ It is unknown at this time whether or not there is intraspeaker variation.

The *Erikativ* refers to actions that the speaker is involved in, so the 1st person perspective is conceivable, but what about the 3rd person? In fact, this connection is not uncommon. The German infinitive construction has syntactic traits that relate it to the 3rd person; by default, generic possessive pronouns and reflexive pronouns are always in 3rd person in the infinitive, as *sein* and *sich*:

- (25) a. auf **seine** Rechnung kommen (infinitive form)
to **one's** check come
'to get one's money's worth'
- b. **sich** frisch machen (infinitive form)
oneself fresh make
'to freshen up'

This variation in the *Erikativ* could, then, be a sign of a conflict between the semantic personhood in the mind of the speaker and the grammatical personhood forced by the particular syntactic construction.

In English, a similar type of ambiguity is possible in the following construction¹⁵:

- (26) a. I_i am the kind_j of person [who_j always finishes **my**_i plate]. (i=j)
b. I_i am the kind_j of person [who_j always finishes **his**_j plate]. (i=j)

Like (23), both sentences are grammatical and have identical interpretations. Because first-person *I* is semantically identical to third-person *kind*, the grammar allows variability in the binding, depending on the speaker.

Also closely related is the use of status updates on the social-networking site, *Facebook* (facebook.com):

(27)

- a. A screenshot of a Facebook status update. On the left is a small profile picture of a woman. To the right, the text reads: "Helen Gilbert: just shared tomatos from my garden with smokey - days off are heaven". Below the text, it says "2 hours ago · Comment · Like".

¹⁵ Note that this ambiguity has the inverse properties of constructions such as the following:

- (ii) John_i showed Bill_j pictures of himself_{i/j}.

Here the anaphor remains constant but the antecedent can be interpreted in multiple ways.

- b.  **Mark Lindsay** wonders if any of my errors should have been correlated to increase fit? Oh well too late now and I don't have the software on my computer.
2 hours ago · Comment · Like

Status updates begin with the writer's name and are written in third-person for this reason. In (27), we see that 1st person pronouns can be paired fluidly with this 3rd person narrative structure inherent in status updates, in the same way as the *Erikativ*.

Both of these English examples suggest that the ambiguity is caused by speaking about oneself in the third person; like German, there are no examples of a sentence having a first-person subject allowing this variability, such as (28):

(28) * I_i make sure to always finish his_i plate. (*his* referring to *I*)

Thus, if the variation in the German *Erikativ* reflexive is similar to these English constructions, then the syntactic third-personhood inherent in the infinitive is causing the variability in the *Erikativ*. Again, this strongly suggests that the *Erikativ* is inheriting properties from the infinitive base form.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, the new, productive *Erikativ* form was used to determine the nature of the base of the German verbal paradigm. We examined forms in the paradigm that surface as words (following Kager 1999), focusing on the most likely candidate, the imperative. Certain discrepancies in the *wechselflexion* verb paradigm could not be explained by corresponding surface forms alone. A seemingly related dialectal shift was also considered with respect to McCarthy's (2005) Optimal Paradigms, but this shift was also insufficient to support the imperative as the German base form.

Next, we expanded our candidate pool to the infinitive by adopting Albright's (2002) framework for determining maximally informative members in a paradigm. Due to neutralizations that occur in certain forms in the verbal paradigm, as well as irregular forms in high frequency words (including modals), certain candidates from this pool could be eliminated. The 1st and 3rd person plurals, as well as the infinitive, then surfaced as maximally informative across the German verbal paradigm. However, the verb with the highest frequency, *sein*, was used to further eliminate the 1st and 3rd person plurals, because the infinitive shows consistency with the *Erikativ* across all verbs, including *sein*. Although the infinitive is an inflected form and does not contain the fewest features in the paradigm, it is the strongest candidate for the German base.

Lastly, we looked at other syntactic and semantic factors that arise from the *Erikativ* form. The internal morphosyntax of the *Erikativ* is consistently verb-final, and as such, supports the notion that German is an underlyingly OV language, as well as the claim that the *Erikativ* has evolved from the infinitive base form. We also saw that the *Erikativ* exhibits a conflict between the semantic understanding of relating 1st person information and the 3rd person grammatical construction that is imposed by the morphosyntactic structure. A related phenomenon seems to occur in English under similar circumstances: when a speaker is using a 3rd person grammatical structure to speak about himself, and when 3rd person syntax is obligatory in, for example, Facebook status updates. I showed that this 3rd personhood is the cause of the ambiguity in English. I also showed that the 3rd person singular is the default person of the infinitive; therefore, the existence of a 3rd person *Erikativ* form in addition to the 1st person form further strengthens the connection between the *Erikativ* and the infinitive: the *Erikativ* seems to have adopted features of the infinitive. This particular point is the most surprising, and worthy of more careful investigation in the future.

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Sources for *Erikativ* forms:

Erikativ	URL
zusammenbrech und weiterlach	http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:1DGxymCv9rAJ:www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3Dz_2IBnmHtH8+*zusammenbrech*&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=3&gl=us&client=safari
mit keksexn vollfress	http://www.chaoscompany.net/?forum-showposts-19-p1&sid=c6e84aec7aa3bb7d0a2323408eb336e3
sattess	http://forum.worldofplayers.de/forum/archive/index.php?t-34614.html
adressegeb	http://dict.leo.org/forum/viewGeneraldiscussion.php?idThread=475446&idForum=9&lp=ende&lang=de
dirhelf	http://www.parents.at/forum/archive/index.php/t-31542.html
buchles	http://animexx.onlinewelten.com/forum/?forum=2&kategorie=221&thread=131588&tseite=6
buchnehm und wegwerf	http://forums.wow-europe.com/thread.html;jsessionid=BAAB1D644EB925BF4F5DA6498A6F5498.app09_01?topicId=1726842847&sid=3&pageNo=11
monotonsprech *normalsprech*	http://kerzenburg.nightisforum.de/showthread.php?t=3788&page=16
sterb	http://www.finjablog.de/?p=950
allesvergess	http://72.14.205.104/search?q=cache:6a38y421nxwJ:www.schatzenlande.com/niederosterreich.htm+allesvergess&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us&client=safari
rotwerd	http://forum.worldofplayers.de/forum/archive/index.php?t-34614.html
mit keksexn vollfress	http://72.14.205.104/search?q=cache:0USobg4aWrQJ:www.chaoscompany.net/%3Fforum-showposts-19-p1%26sid%3Dc6e84aec7aa3bb7d0a2323408eb336e3+vollfress&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=10&gl=us&client=safari
wegwoll	http://www.fotocommunity.de/pc/pc/cat/3115/display/6577376
ach schon wegmuss	http://forum.dragonballz.de/showthread.php?p=2895812
sehenmag	http://www.parents.at/forum/showthread.php?t=115583
frohsei	http://zuenderforum.zeit.de/index.php?id=18&view=single_thread&cat_uid=26&conf_uid=17&thread_uid=201
insbettgeh	http://forums.wow-europe.com/search.html;jsessionid=5146ABAD732C048E1B101DF264E05396.forum03?forumId=11114&characterId=808710785&sid=3

8 Appendix

The change in the imperative that we see in Section 3.2 may not be due to paradigm leveling at all; instead, this could be an exclusive semantic or pragmatic shift associated with the subjunctive form:

(29)	Subjunctive I	<i>nehmen</i>	'to take'
		<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
	1	nehme	nehmen
	2	nehmest	nehmet
	3	nehme	nehmen

In the subjunctive paradigm, the base appears to be *nehme*, without any vowel alternation. As with English, it is possible to construct an imperative statement in the subjunctive in German:

(30) *English:*

You might take the bus. (polite, indirect version of 'Take the bus.')

(31) *German:*

a. Man nehme den Bus.
 one take.SUBJ the bus.ACC
 'One might take the bus.' (indirect)

b. Nimm den Bus!
 take.IMP the bus.ACC
 'Take the bus.' (direct)

In both English and German, the subjunctive can be utilized as a more polite form of an imperative. Rather than paradigm leveling, what we may, in fact, be seeing in German is a shift semantically, such that the "more polite" subjunctive form replaces *nimm*, the traditional imperative, in certain environments. Such a change would be similar to the Spanish 2nd person plural formal form, *ustedes* (and corresponding verb conjugations), completely replacing the informal form, *vosotros*, outside of Spain (Beatriz Fontanella de Wienberg 1999).

If this is the case, then the variation between *nehm* and *nehme* in the dialectal imperative could be analogous to the phonological variation that occurs in the 1st singular verb forms: *gehe/geh*, *mache/mach*, *habe/hab*, and so on. It would then be unlikely that the differences between the imperative and *Erikativ* forms in the *wechselflexion* verbs could be reconciled based on the dialectal shift alone.