

# *Wannabe* approximatives: creativity, routinization or both?

Muriel Norde (Humboldt University Berlin)

Francesca Masini (University of Bologna)

Kristel Van Goethem (F.R.S.-FNRS & Université catholique de Louvain)

Daniel Ebner (Humboldt University Berlin)

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*AG1: Dynamics at the lexicon-  
syntax interface: creativity  
and routine in word-formation  
and multi-word expressions*



Approximative  
morphology



Research questions



Contrastive corpus-  
based study of *wannabe*



Conclusions



Outlook

# Outline



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# Approximative morphology

# Approximative morphology

- Following Masini & Micheli (2020: 384f.), we understand **APPROXIMATION** as a complex functional domain – within evaluative morphology – comprising values like **FAKENESS**, **IMITATION**, **RESEMBLANCE**, and **VAGUENESS**.
- **Recent research:** e.g., *Approximo discontinuous workshop*
  - 📖 Special Issue on *Approximation in Morphology* (Masini, Norde & Van Goethem forthcoming in the *Journal of Word Formation*)
- **Main sources of approximative morphemes:**
  - words meaning ‘fake’ (e.g., Greek *pseudēs* ‘false’, adopted in many other languages as the neoclassical combining form *pseudo-*)
  - **spatial proximity items** such as English *near-* (*near-identical*)
  - **degree and quantity items** such as *quasi-* and *semi-* (*quasi-particle*, *semi-official*)
  - **similative items** such as English *-like* (*prefix-like*) or Dutch *-achtig* (*groenachtig* ‘green-ish’)

# From modality to approximation

- But also: **modality!**
  - epistemic adverbs
    - English *maybe* in *a maybe-incident*
    - Italian *forse* in *forse-fidanzato* 'maybe-boyfriend'
  - volitional expressions
    - English *wannabe* in *wannabe popstar*
    - German *möchtegern* 'would very much like to' in *Möchtegern-Schriftsteller* 'wannabe author'
    - Italian *vorrei-ma-non-posso* '(I) would like but (I) can't' in *boutique vorrei-ma-non-posso* 'wannabe boutique'
- conceptual step from an assessment of the truth value of a proposition (epistemic modality) or an aspiration to attain a specific property/state (volitional modality) to APPROXIMATION
- **Focus of this study:** corpus-based study of *wannabe* in English and five recipient languages *wannabe* has been borrowed into (Danish, Dutch, French, Italian and Finnish)

# Wannabe approximatives

- **English *wannabe*:**
  - Univerbation of *wanna* (< *want to*) and *be*
  - Categorical status?
    - OED: *wannabe* is a noun when used independently (1) or when it follows another noun (2), but an adjective when preceding another noun (3)
      - [1] *Anyone planning this show would come up with a parade of talentless **wannabes**.*
      - [2] *This **Elvis wannabe** finally meets his dream girl.*
      - [3] *The guy was a **wannabe-gangster***
    - However, also compound-like or even affix(oid)-like uses:
      - [4] *yet another piece of **Hollywood-wannabe** rubbish (cf. Hollywood-like)*
  - Semantics: usually depreciative in meaning (“phoney” or “fake”)



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# Research questions

- **RQ1:** How are the different construction types with *wannabe* distributed across each language?
- **RQ2:** What are the formal and semantic properties of *wannabe* collocations?
- **RQ3:** How creative are *wannabe* collocations?

We see **creativity in word-formation** as “intentional manipulation of linguistic structure” (Bergs 2018: 290), whereby the hearer can discriminate between creative use, i.e. breaking *conventions*, and errors, i.e. breaking *rules* (Uhrig 2020: 1).

Our data will show that there is a **thin line between creativity and routinization.**



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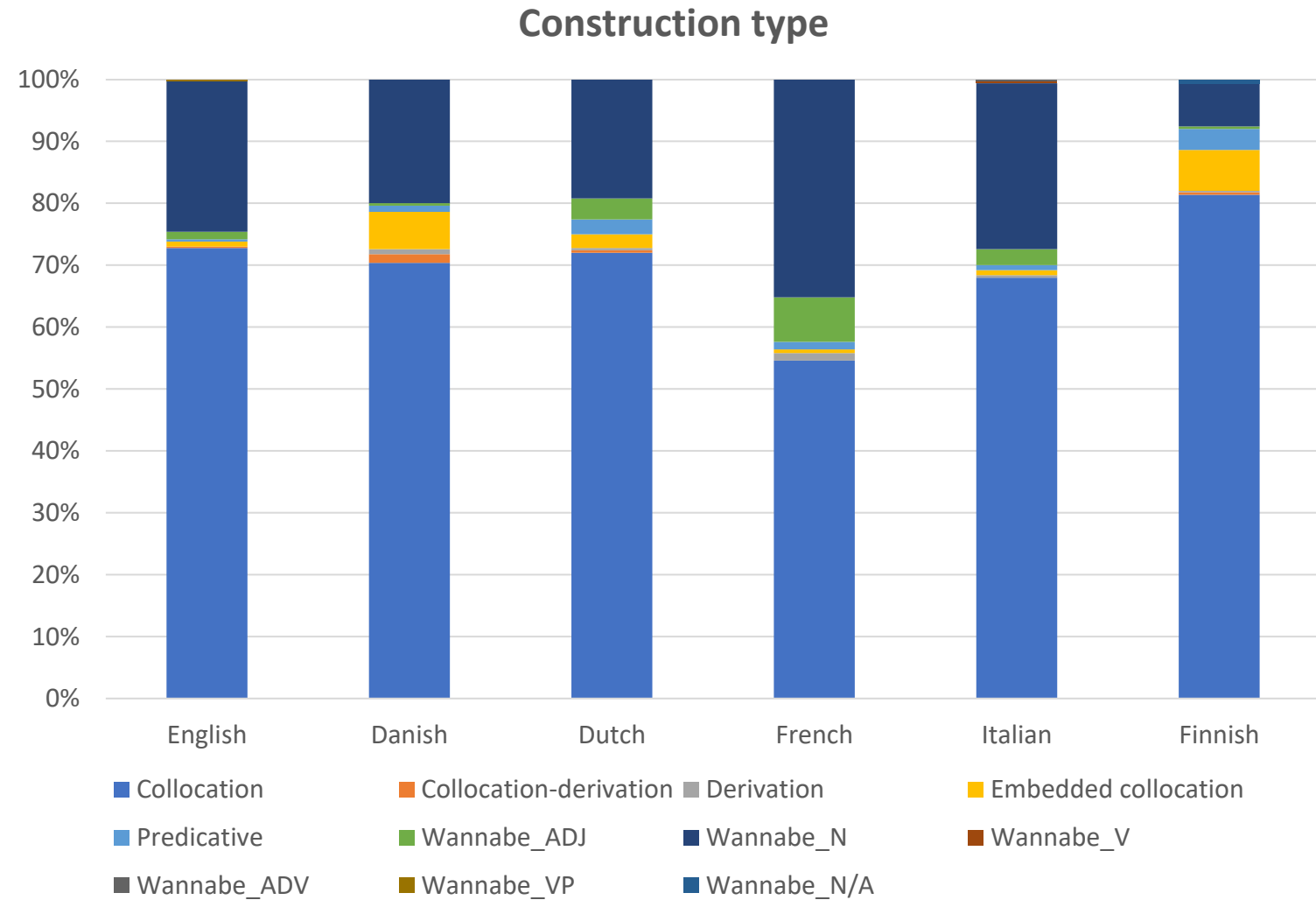
# Contrastive corpus-based study

# Data and methods

- Corpus-based study of *wannabe* formations in **English, Danish, Dutch, French, Italian and Finnish**
  - We extracted **500-token samples per language** from the **TenTen web corpora** at Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014)
  - All occurrences were annotated for their **orthographic, morphological and semantic properties**:
    - Orthographic bonding (free, bound, hyphen, hybrid)
    - Construction type (noun, adjective, collocation, derivation, ...)
    - For 'collocation' type:
      - Collexemes: POS (N, A, NP, AP, V, Adv, Pron, ...)
      - Collexemes: lemma
      - Word order (*wannabe-X*, *X-wannabe*, *X-wannabe-X*)
    - Presence of inflection on *wannabe*
    - Semantics (human, animate, inanimate)
- This talk: **Focus on the collexemes in the 'collocation' type**

**RQ1:** How are the different construction types with *wannabe* distributed across each language?

# Construction types

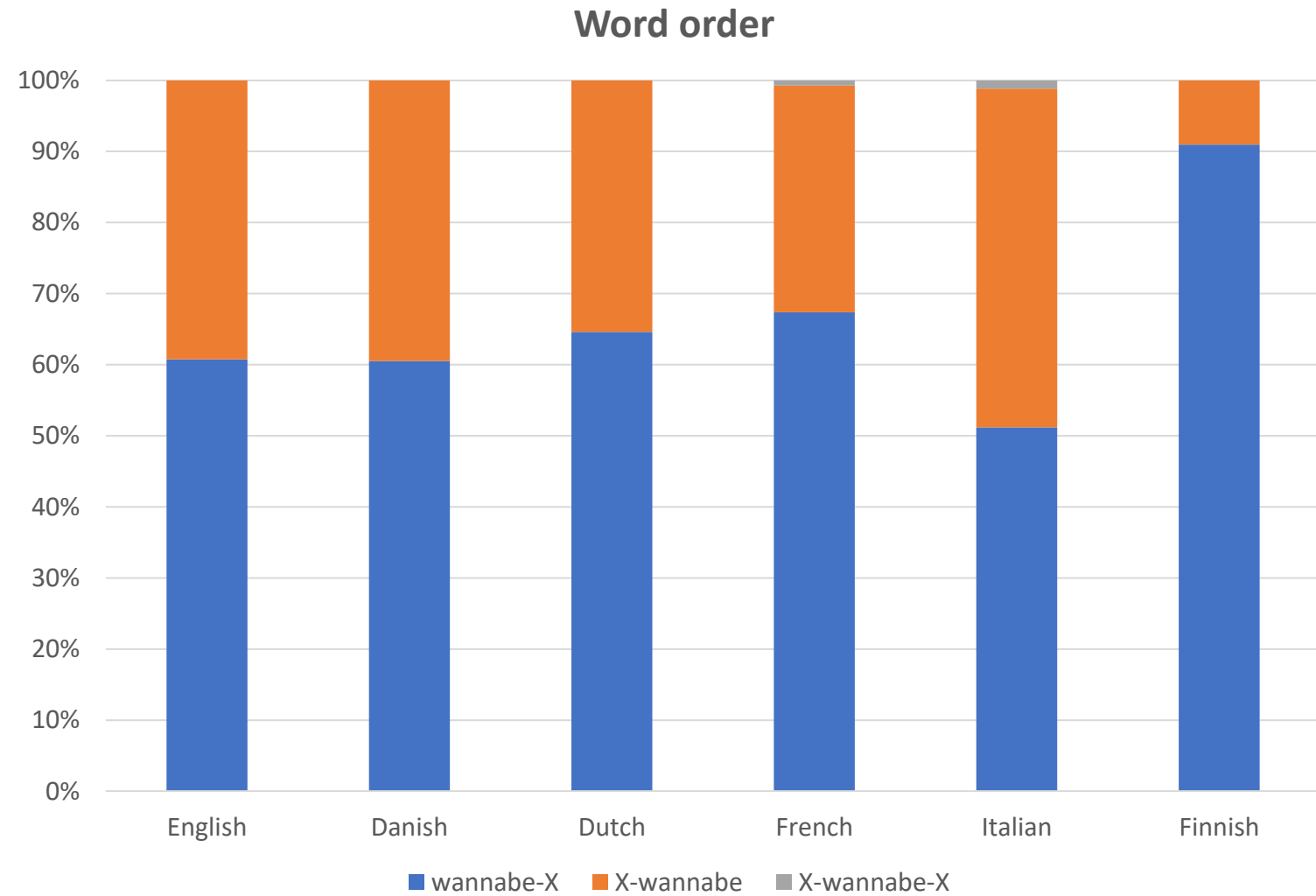


# Construction types

- **A great variety of construction types!**
- **English:** almost exclusively *wannabe* collocations and nominal use
  - [English] *I am a **wannabe rocker** trapped in folky singer-songwriter schtick.*
- More variety in the **recipient languages** (less in Dutch)
  - More analytic use as N or A in Romance languages
    - [French] *D'entrée de jeu, oubliez tout de suite la selfie prise à bout de bras dans le salon. Ça fait **très wannabe** et vous ne voulez pas ça!*  
'Forget about the arm's length selfie in the living room. It looks **very wannabe** and you don't want that!'
  - More synthetic use in Danish and Finnish: e.g. embedded collocations
    - [Danish] (...) *og derfor er det ikke så underligt, at Cage denne gang er ude i en **Elvis Presley wannabe-frisure**.* 'and therefore it is not so remarkable that Cage this time is sporting an **Elvis Presley-wannabe-haircut.**'

**RQ2:** What are the formal and semantic properties of *wannabe* collocations?

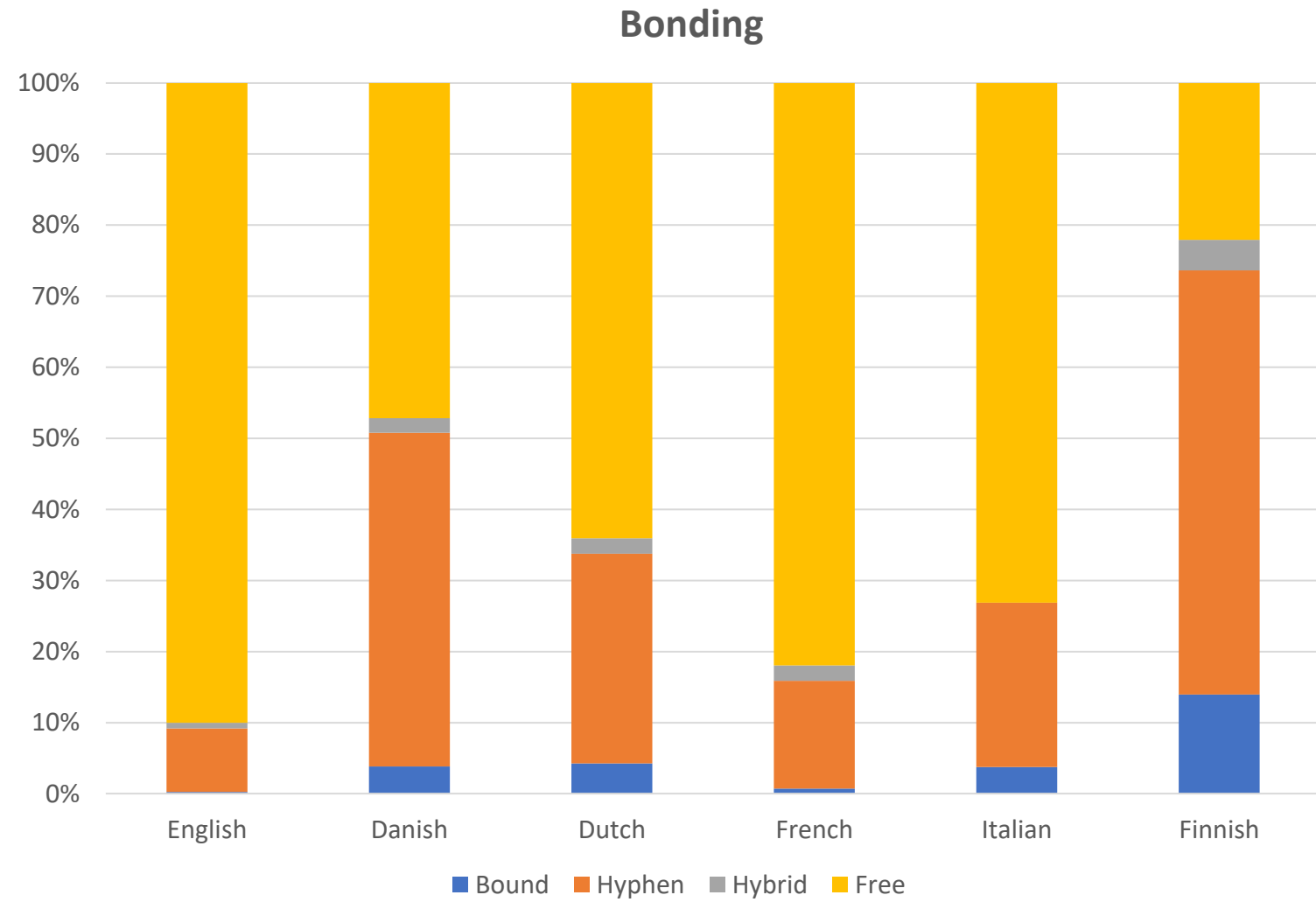
# Word order in *wannabe* collocations



# Word order in *wannabe* collocations

- [*wannabe*-X] expected in **Germanic languages** (Modifier-Head), but also [X-*wannabe*] with *wannabe* as Head or approximative suffixoid?
  - [English] *Some have described Departed as feeling like a **Scorsese-wannabe** created it*
- [*wannabe*-X] predominant in **Finnish**
  - [Finnish] (...) *onko tää joku median neuvo **wannabejulkiksille** että jos tahdotte saada huomiota niin provosoikaa mahdollisimman paljon.* '(...) is this some media advice to **wannabe celebrities** that if you want to get attention, provoke as much as possible'
- Inverse order [X-*wannabe*] expected in **Romance languages**, but French and Italian also show 'pattern borrowing' (Gardani 2020) of the English word order pattern
  - [French] *Il n'est plus un **Vador-wannabe**, il est Kylo Ren.* 'He is no longer a Vader-wannabe, he is Kylo Ren.'
  - [French] *Kylo devient définitivement le **wannabe Vador** Fucky Ryan* 'Kylo definitely becomes the wannabe Vader Fucky Ryan'
- [X-*wannabe*-X] also marginally attested
  - [Italian] *Kiefer Sutherland [...] in questo film interpretava un **vampiro-wannabe-biker** (...).* 'Kiefer Sutherland [...] in this film played a **vampire-wannabe-biker** (...)'
- **Our data show initial routinization of word order (more later...)**

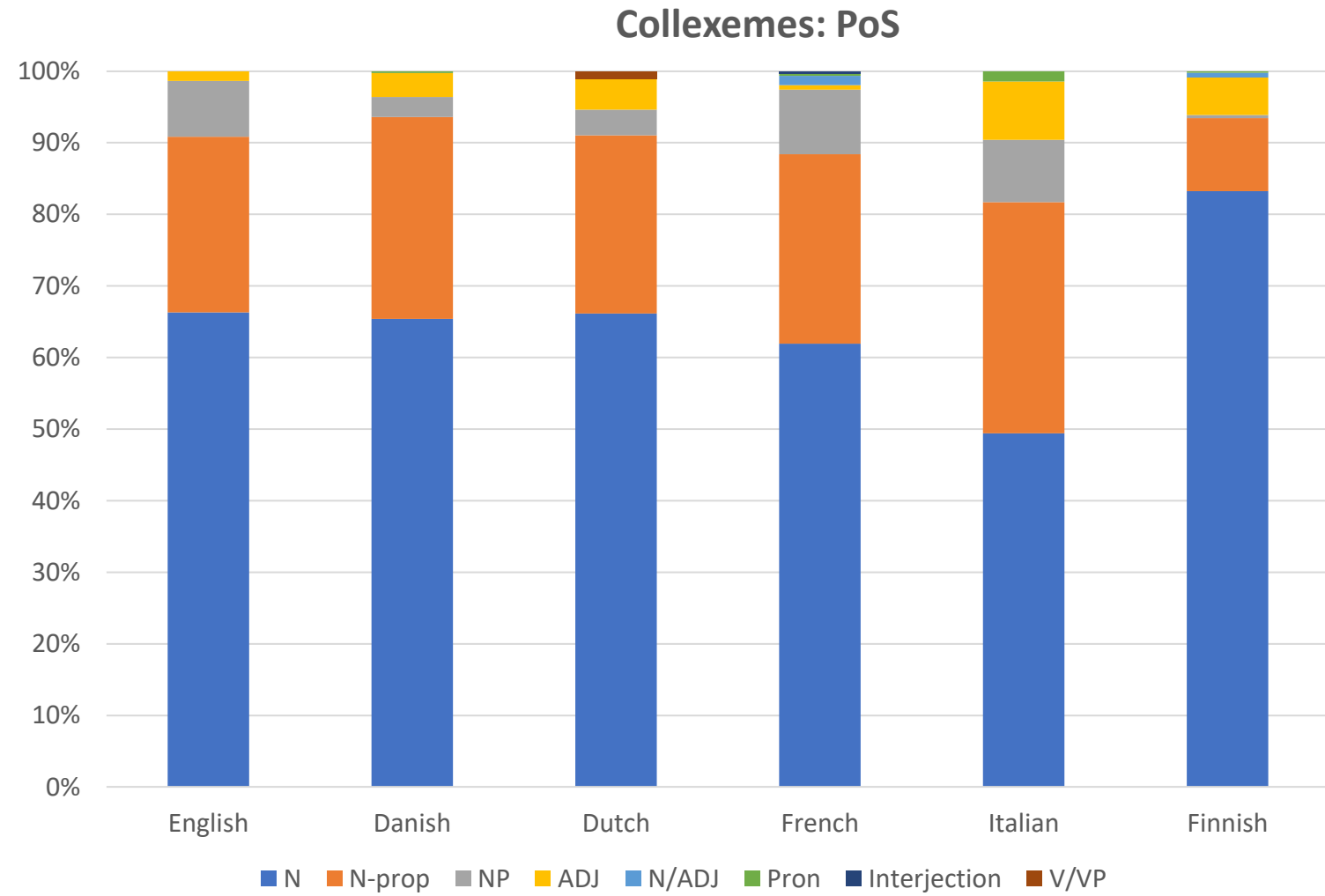
# Orthographic bonding



# Orthographic bonding

- No clear routinization in this field!
- Some tendencies:
  - More free uses in English and Romance
    - [French] *Soufron, vous n'êtes même pas un bobo, vous êtes ce que j'appelle un **wannabe bobo**.* 'Soufron, you are not even a bobo, you are what I call a **wannabe bobo**.'
  - More bound and especially hyphenated cases in Germanic and Finnish
    - [Danish] *Musikken lyder måske mest som hvis nu Robbie Williams' sangskriverteam havde skrevet en **wannabe-Oasis-sang**.* 'The music sounds perhaps mostly as if Robbie Williams' song-writing team had written a **wannabe-Oasis-song**.'

# Collexemes: PoS

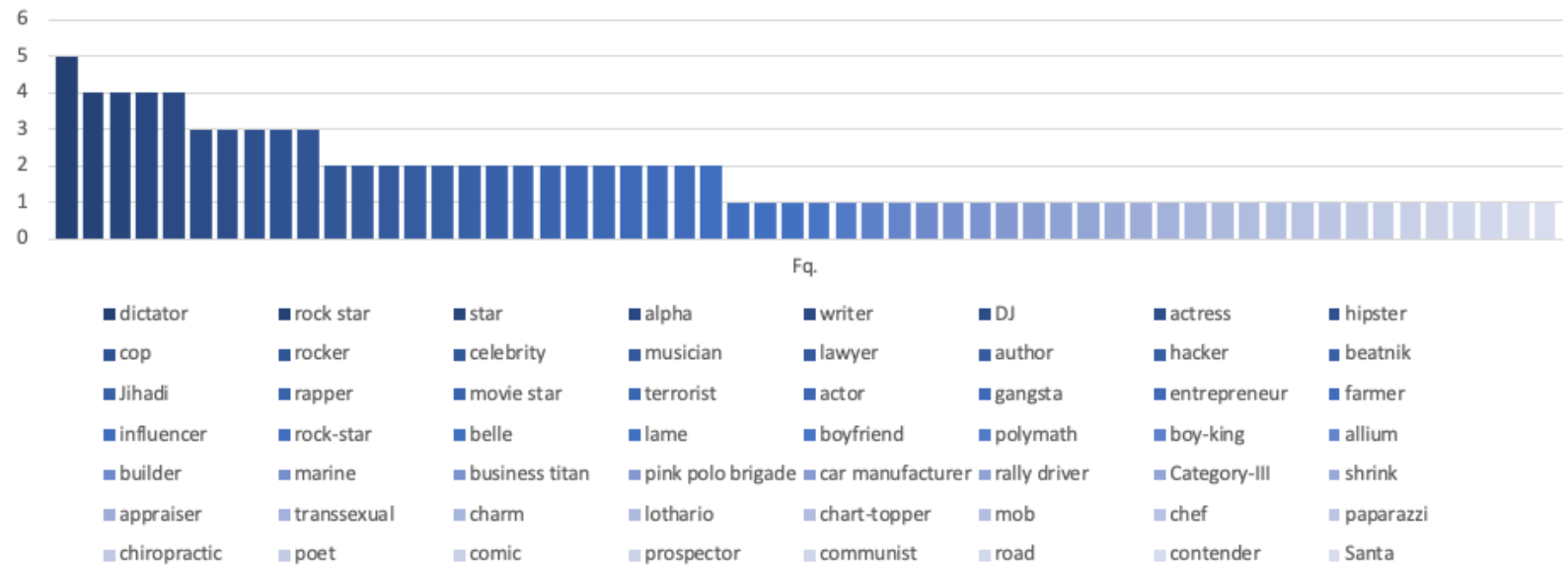


# Collexemes: PoS

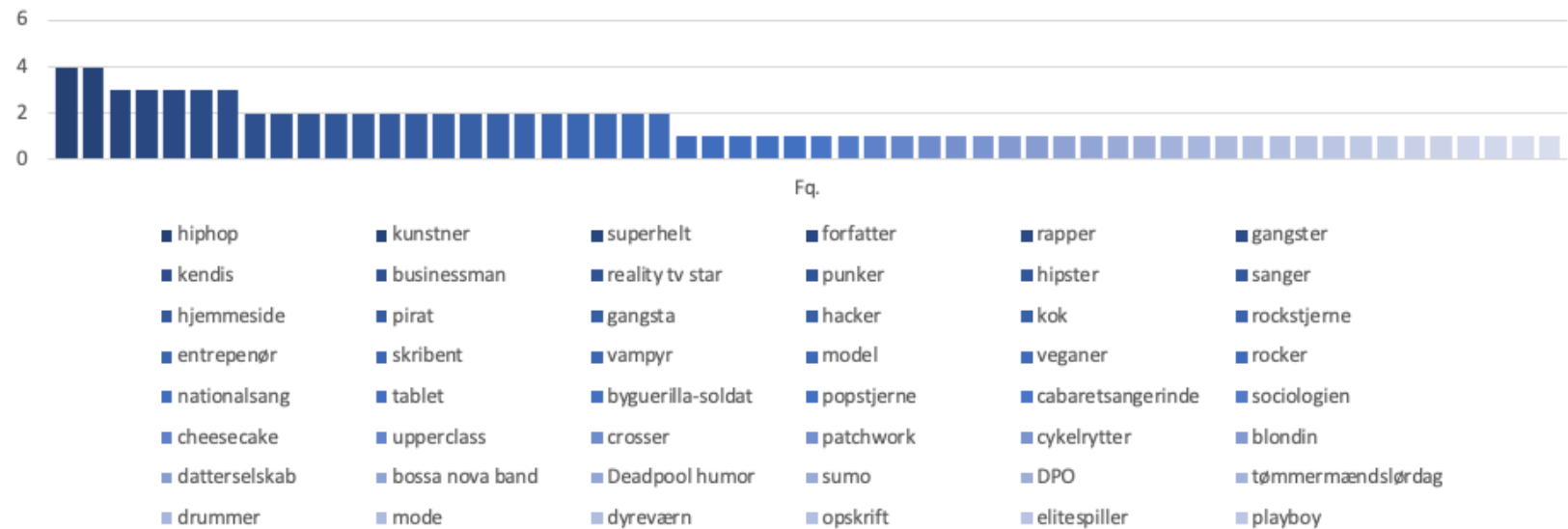
- **English:** almost exclusively **nominal collexemes** (N, Proper N, NP)
  - [English] *You can find the **Britney Spears-wannabes** in Jakarta malls and on Indonesia TV screens.*
- **Creative expansion to unexpected categories in the recipient languages:**
  - **Adj** – [Italian] *Gli attori dietro gli imbarazzanti personaggi sono altrettanto allucinanti, specialmente considerando una trama **wannabe impegnata** con risvolti drammatici nelle vite di ognuno.* ‘The actors behind the awkward characters are equally terrible, especially considering a **committed-wannabe** plot with dramatic implications in everyone's lives’
  - **Pron** – [Italian] *Da anni ormai infatti la kermesse cinematografica fa da vetrina a una pletora di attori, cantanti, celebrità e **wannabe tali**, (...).* ‘For years now, in fact, the film festival has served as a showcase for a plethora of actors, singers, celebrities and **wannabe such**, (...)’
  - **VP** – [Dutch] (...) *hij wordt een dagje ouder en T is natuurlijk volop in zijn **wannabe man zijn** periode* ‘(...) he's getting a day older and is obviously fully into his **wannabe manhood** ‘lit. wannabe being man’
- **Routinization of proper names** in all languages, but to a lesser degree in Finnish

# Collexemes: Word frequencies

Word frequencies for English (partial)

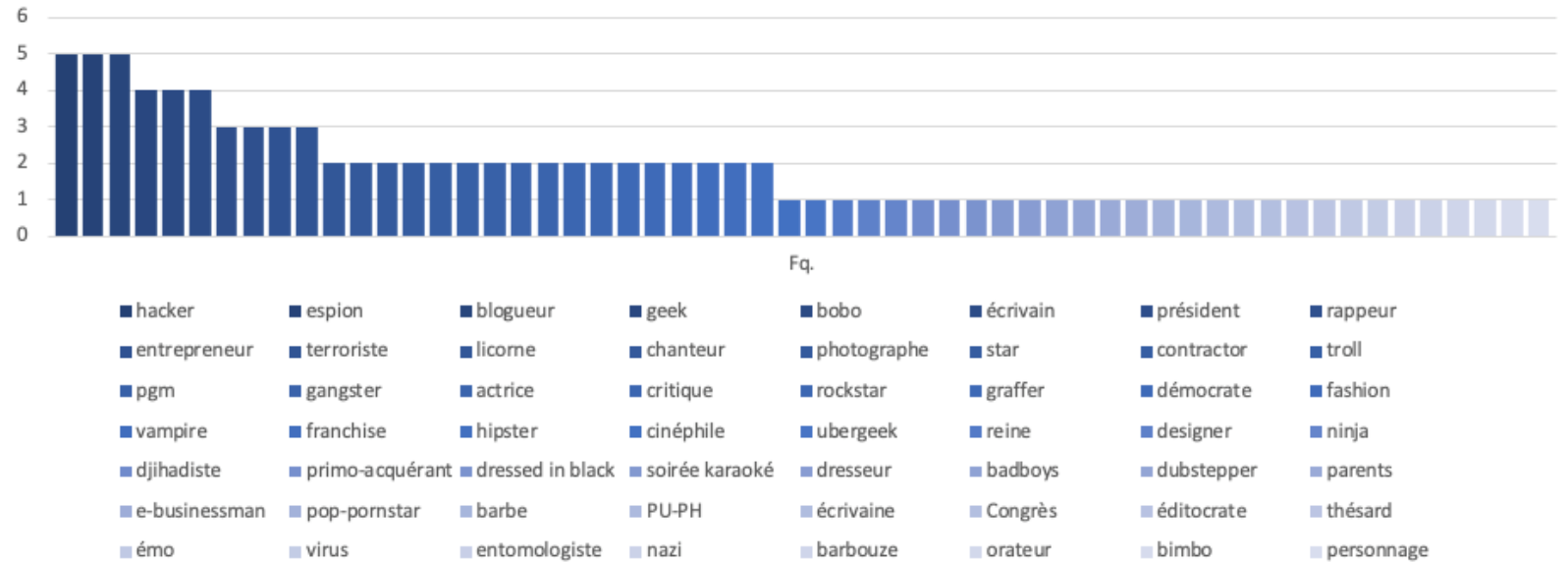


Word frequencies for Danish (partial)

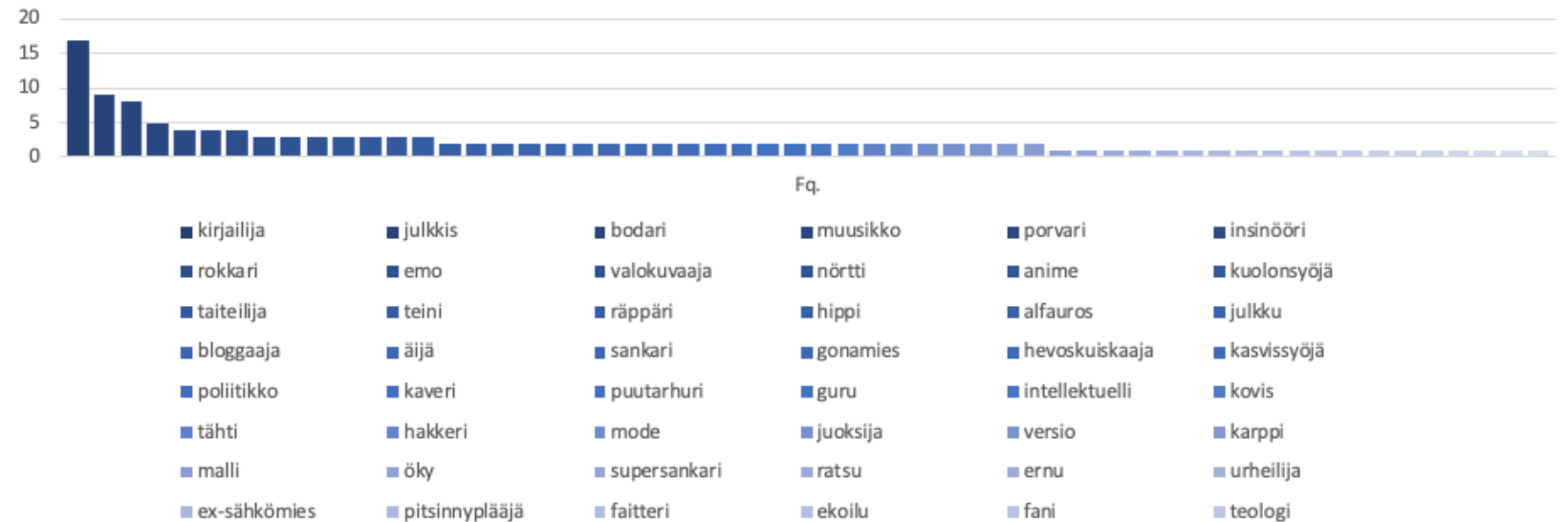


# Collexemes: Word frequencies

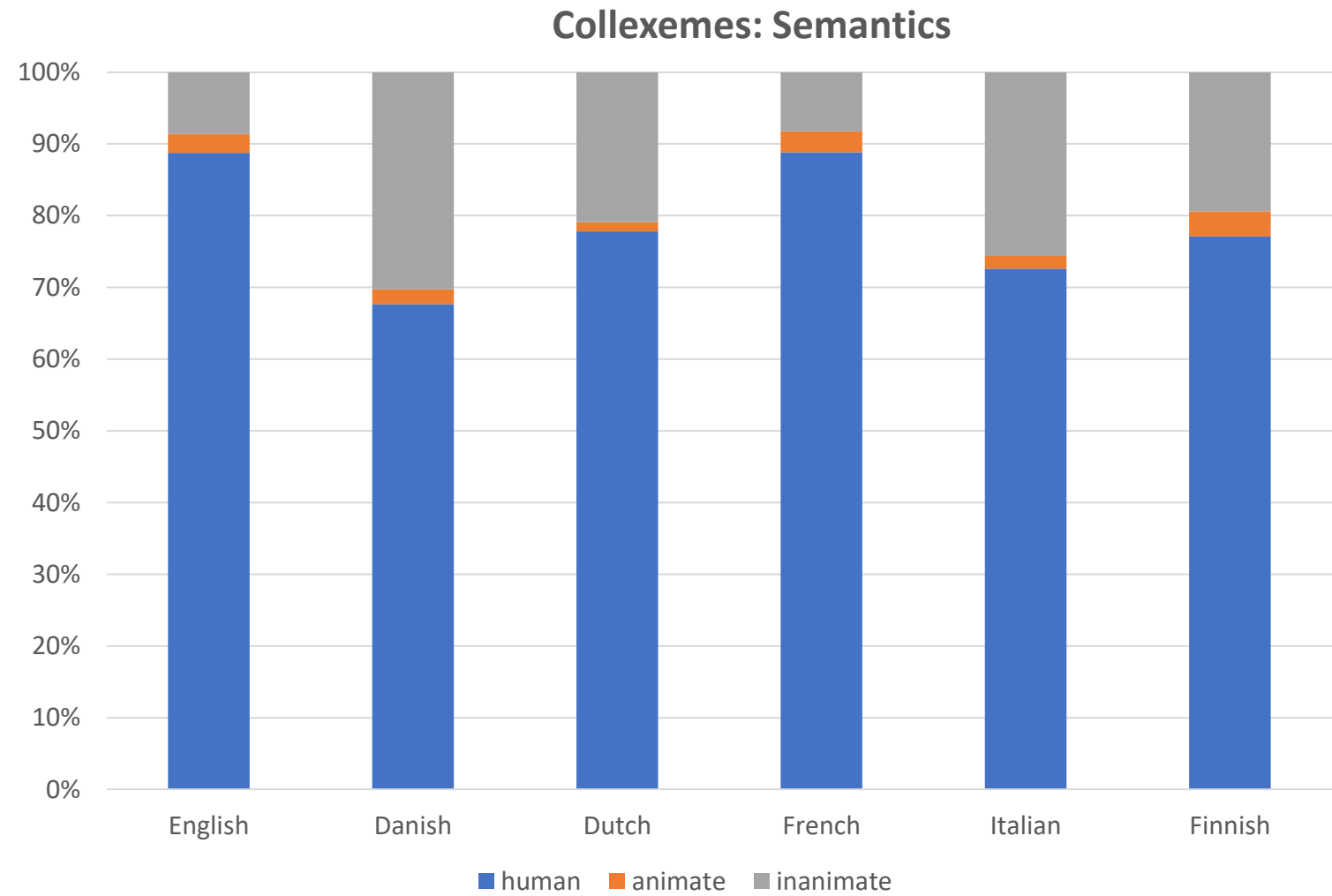
Word frequencies for French (partial)



Word frequencies for Finnish (partial)



# Collexemes: Semantic categories



# Collexemes: semantic categories

- **English:** predominantly **human** collexemes (occupations, celebrities, ...)
  - *But I don't agree with the suggestion that every **wannabe-blogger** must opt for Aweber.*
- **Creative extension to inanimate collexemes** in the recipient languages (except French!)
  - Recurring categories: food items, movie and series titles, (video) games, brand names (phones, cars), ...
  - [Dutch] *Een zweetdruppel loopt langs mijn **wannabe-bakkebaarden** en een andere teistert mijn linkerwenkbrauw (...)* 'A drop of sweat runs down my **wannabe sideburns** and another plagues my left eyebrow (...)'
  - [Danish] *Total bagedag, nu også med **marmorkage-wannabe**.* 'A full baking day, now including a **marble cake wannabe**.'
  - [Italian] *Journey è un **mario64 wannabe**, si salta in giro però è lento, scomodo e non succede una cippa* 'Journey is a **mario64 wannabe**, you jump around but it is slow, uncomfortable and nothing happens'

# Summary: English vs recipient languages

- Significance levels for associative statistics comparing English to the other languages

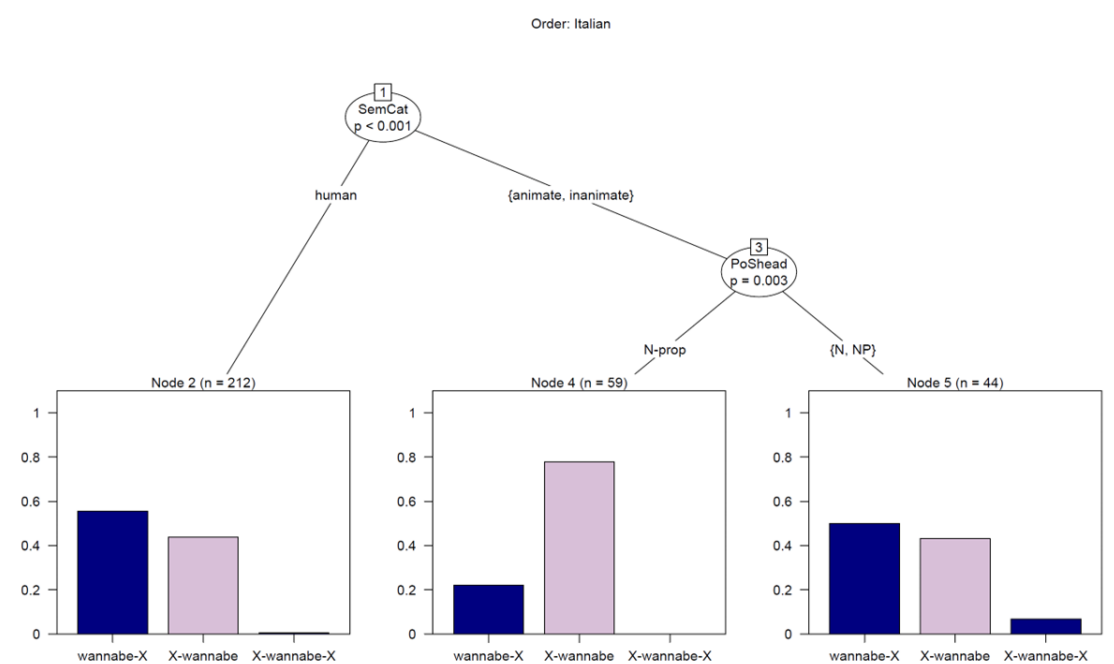
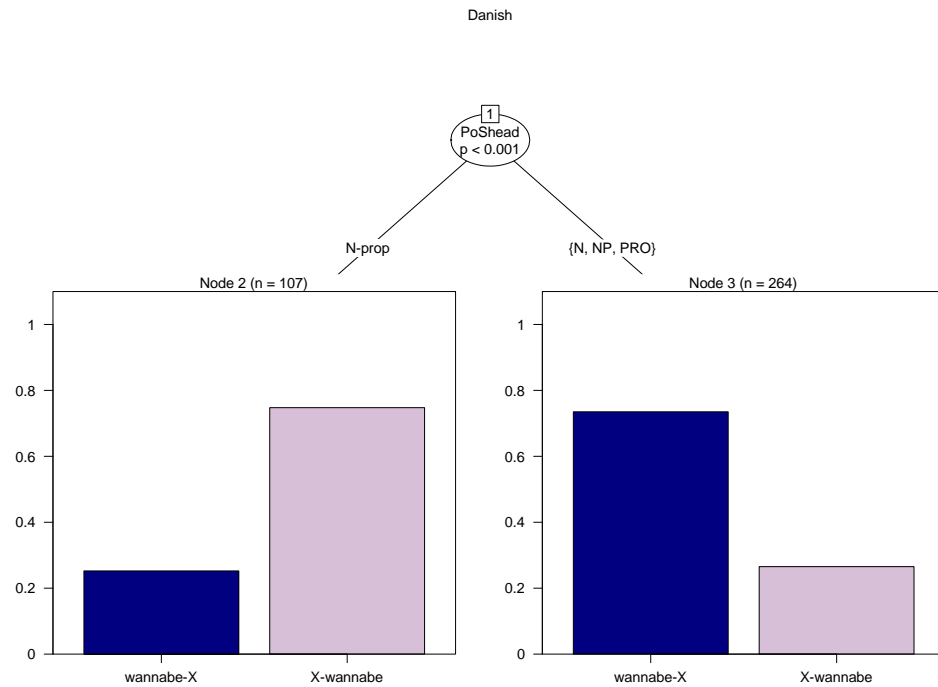
→ French is most similar, Finnish is least similar

	Danish	Dutch	French	Italian	Finnish
<b>Construction</b>	***	***	***	ns	***
<b>Bonding</b>	***	***	*	***	***
<b>PoSHead</b>	**	**	ns	***	***
<b>Order</b>	ns	ns	ns	*	***
<b>SemCat</b>	***	***	ns	***	***

**RQ<sub>3</sub>:** How creative are *wannabe* collocations?

# Creativity and routinization

- **Creativity in all languages**, reflected by the high proportion of hapaxes
- **Creativity in the recipient languages:**
  - Expansion to new construction types in all languages, but less in Italian
  - Extension to new semantic types (inanimates) in all languages, but less in French (humans)
  - New combinations with native words, less in e.g. French/Italian (e.g. 32-33% English loans)
  - Unexpected variation in word order patterns
- **Thin line between creativity and routinization!**
  - e.g. *wannabe* food items are novel, but also establishing themselves as a routine
- Some patterns however suggest **incipient routinization:**
  - Semantic “niches”: celebrities, occupational nouns, fantasy characters (games, movies), food items, etc.
  - Semantic bleaching in Danish: general pejorative meaning (e.g. *wannabe-hovedstad* ‘wannabe capital’ (referring to Stockholm))
  - Partitioning trees show that distribution of word order is not random



# What are the predictors for word order?

For **Dutch and Danish**, the only explanatory variable is the **PoS**: proper names vs. the rest

For **French and Italian**, the main explanatory variable is **Semantics** (human vs. the rest) with a further partitioning for PoS in Italian (again proper nouns)

For **Finnish**, the only explanatory variable is **Bonding**



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- **RQ1: Construction types**

- Overall, *wannabe* in both English and recipient languages is used either as an **independent N/ADJ** or as the non-head component in (compound-like) collocations where it tends to acquire an **approximative** (often derogatory) meaning

- **RQ2: Collexemes**

- Whereas in English *wannabe* collocates almost exclusively with **nominal** collexemes (N, Proper N, NP), in the recipient languages we found creative expansions to **unexpected categories** (Adj, V, Pron)
- Whereas in English *wannabe* mainly has **human** collexemes (typically VIPs, celebrities or desirable jobs), in the recipient languages we found creative expansions to **inanimate** collexemes
- We witness a **routinization of proper names** in all languages except Finnish, whereas there is **no clear routinization of word order**

- **RQ3: Creativity (vs. routinization)**

- The role of *wannabe* as an approximation marker is **in the making**, although we can identify some areas of routinization (proper names) in all languages, and some creative expansions especially in the recipient languages



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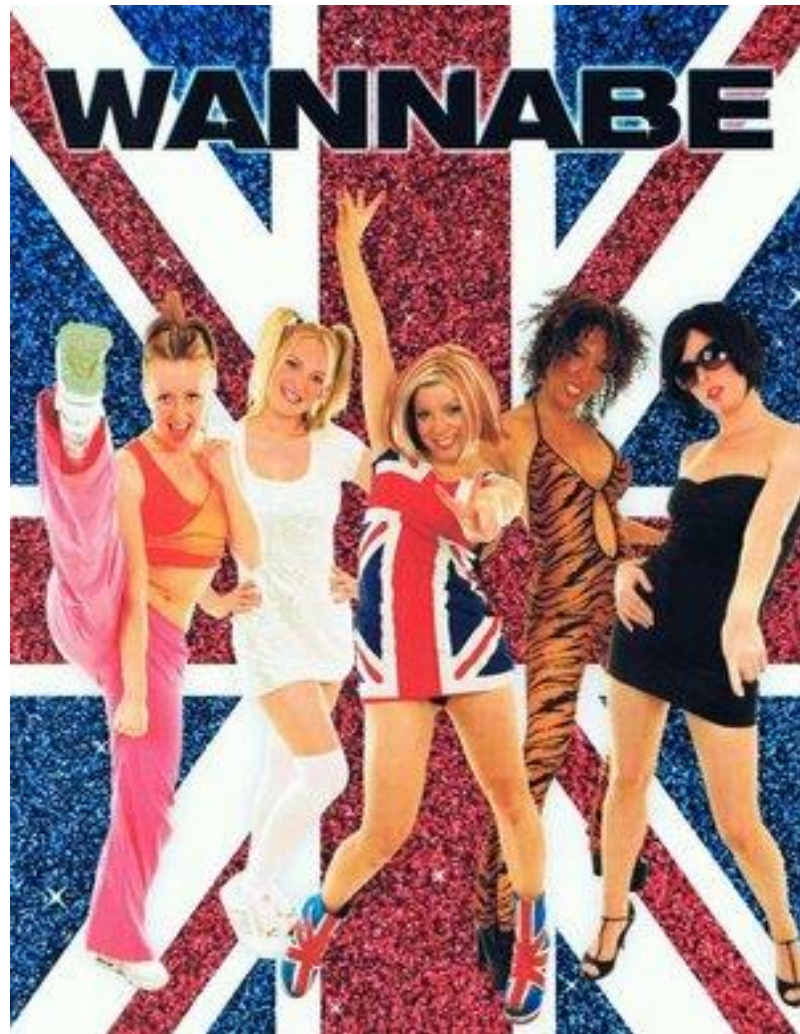


Outlook

# Outlook

# Food for future thought

- **Semantics**
  - The meaning of *wannabe* collocations needs to be further explored
- **Competition**
  - A thorough intralinguistic comparison with other (morphological) markers of approximation (from the same modality source and from different sources) is desirable
- **Methodological value**
  - Large-scale contrastive corpus studies allow to draw a picture of the development of cognate formatives in different languages, thus testing both generalizations and the impact of language-specific factors (e.g., synthetic vs. analytic tendency)
  - Emerging phenomena like *wannabe* are especially interesting to be "photographed" to unveil the possible paths of variation in both creativity and routinization processes



# Vielen Dank!

Comments welcome!

[muriel.norde@hu-berlin.de](mailto:muriel.norde@hu-berlin.de)

[francesca.masini@unibo.it](mailto:francesca.masini@unibo.it)

[kristel.vangoethem@uclouvain.be](mailto:kristel.vangoethem@uclouvain.be)

[daniel.ebner@hu-berlin.de](mailto:daniel.ebner@hu-berlin.de)



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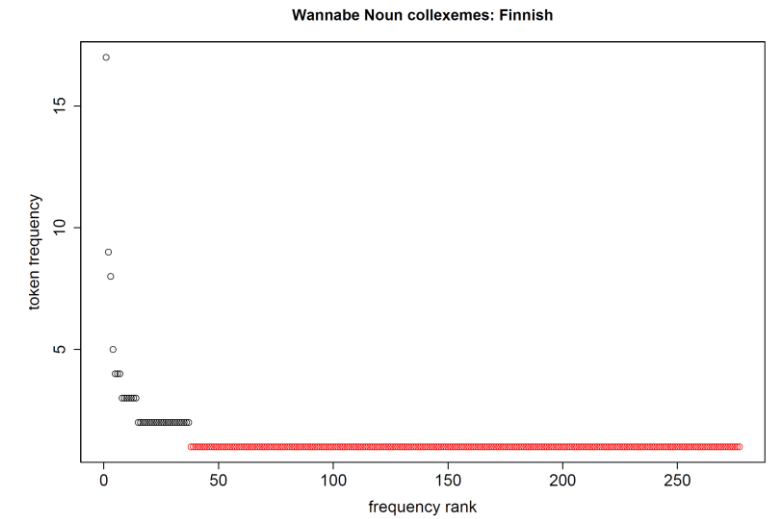
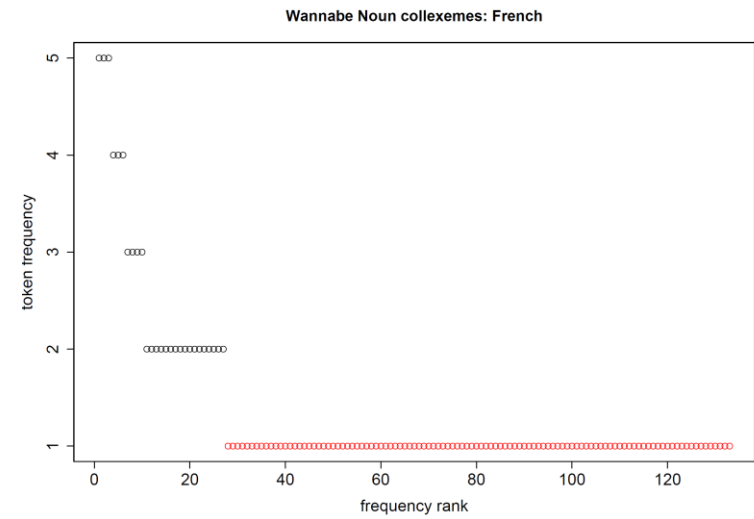
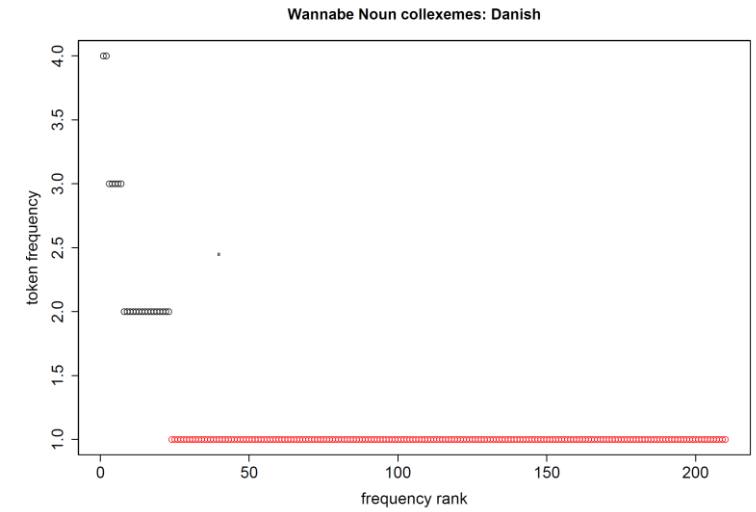
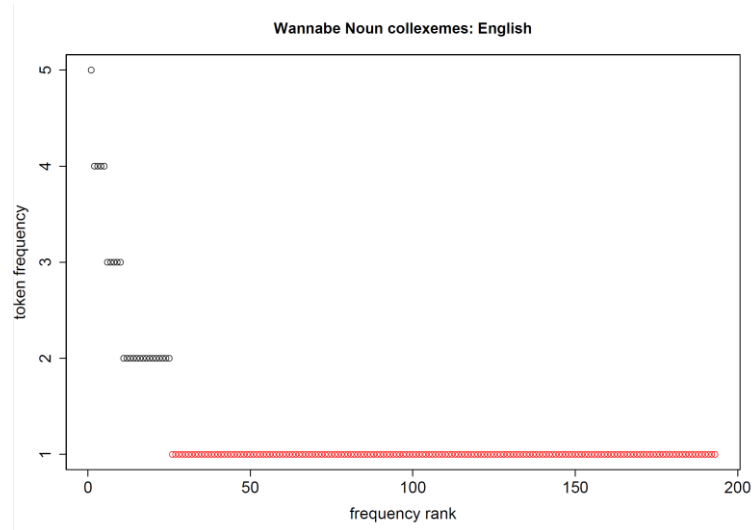
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# Evaluative morphology

- **Evaluative morphology** is by now a well-established domain of investigation (e.g. Bauer 1997, Grandi & Körtvélyessy 2015) which can count on large-scale typological studies (Körtvélyessy 2015)
- However:
  - **In-depth contrastive studies** that aim at comparing specific formatives in different languages are still scarce
  - Most studies focus on **diminution** and **augmentation**, and their pejorative or ameliorative connotations (e.g. Dressler & Barbaresi 1994, Bakema & Geeraerts 2000)
  - Other crucial functions such as the **expression of 'approximation'** (in a broad sense) have been well studied in various subfields of linguistics (in particular pragmatics and discourse studies), but only recently has it gained attention in morphology (Masini & Micheli 2020)...

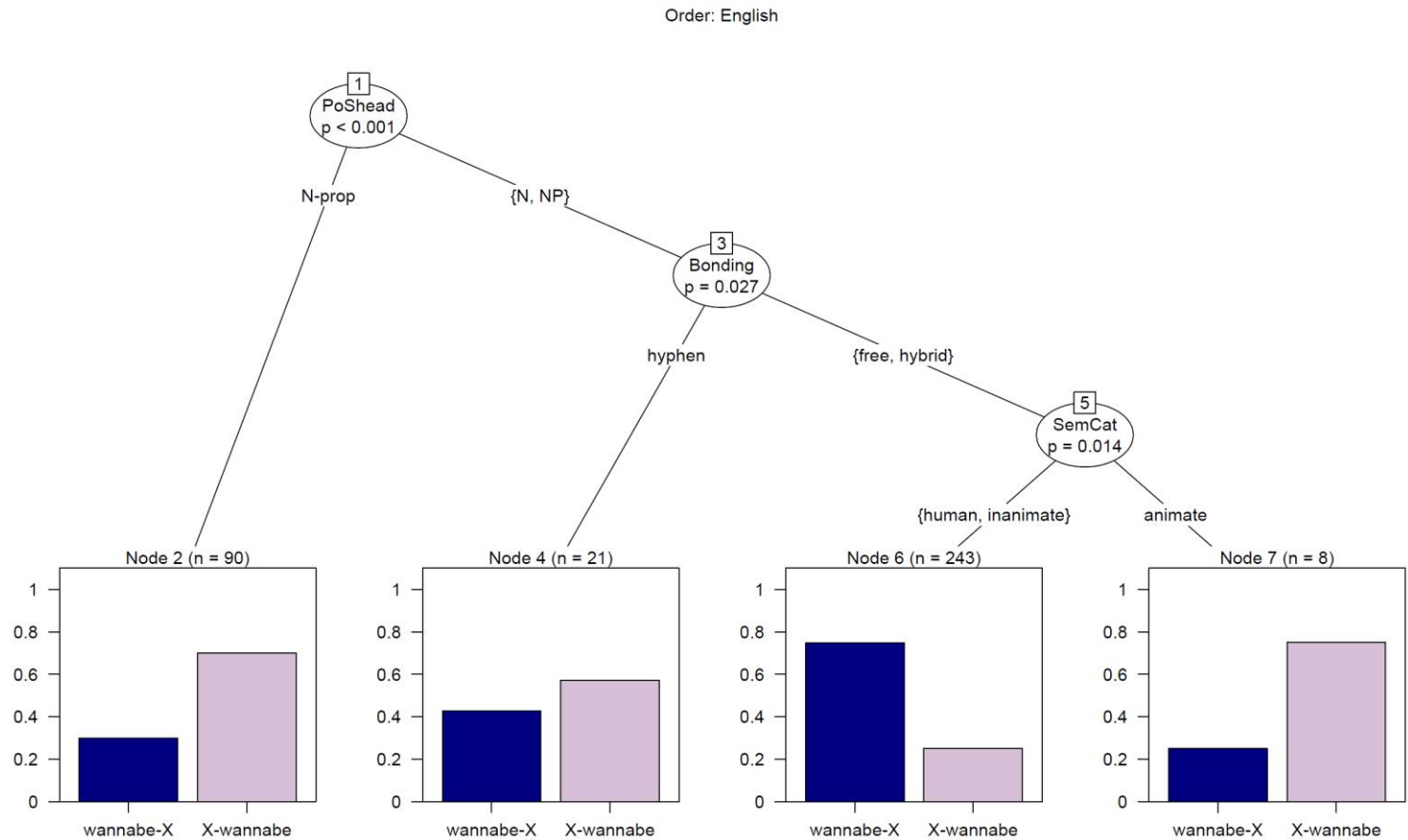
# Collexemes: Frequency distributions



# What are the predictors for word order?

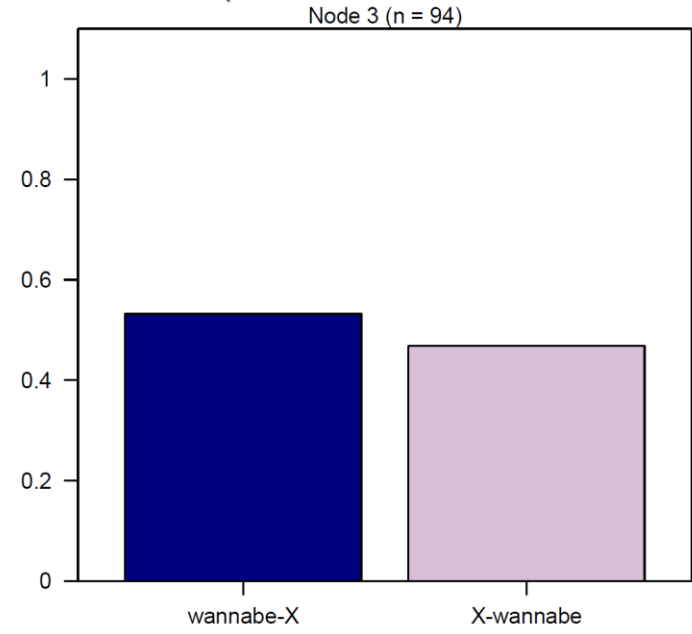
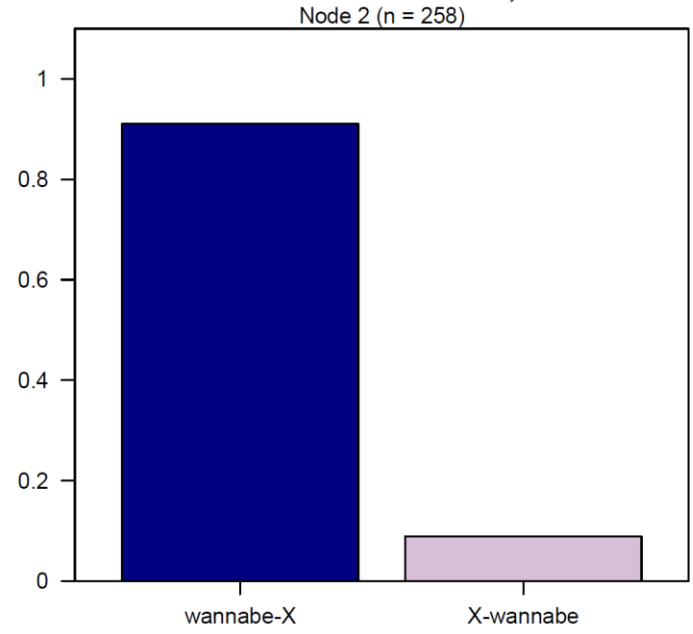
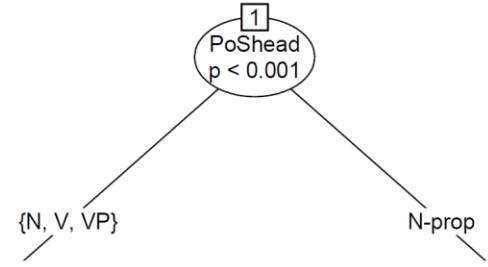
- **Explanatory variables: PoS, Semantics, Bonding**
- **English:** all variables are predictors, with PoS (proper names vs. the rest) as the most important one
- **Dutch and Danish:** the only explanatory variable is the **PoS:** proper names vs. the rest
- **French and Italian:** the main explanatory variable is **Semantics** (human vs. the other two) with a further partitioning for PoS in Italian (again proper nouns splitting off from the others)
- **Finnish:** the only explanatory variable is **Bonding**

# English

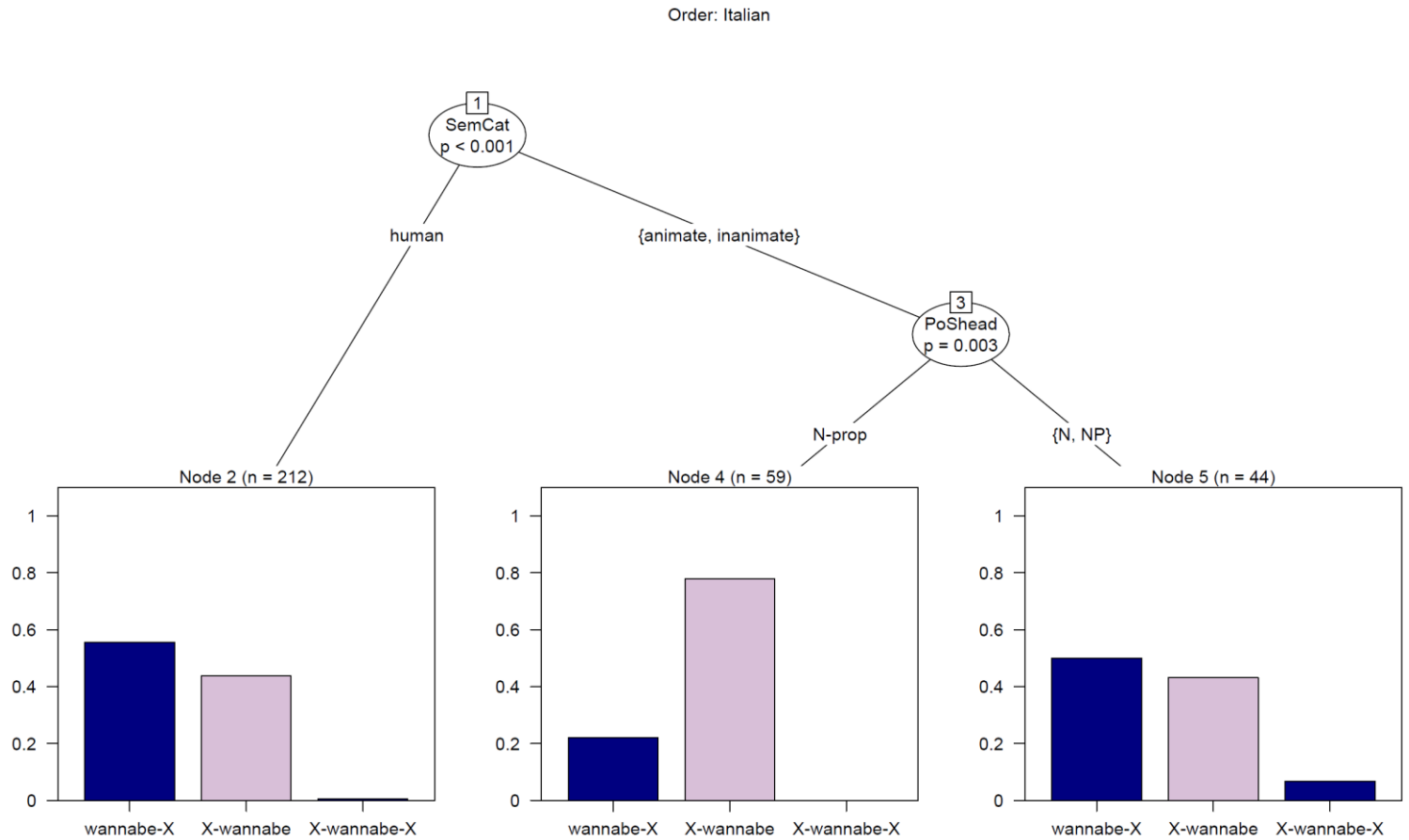


# Dutch

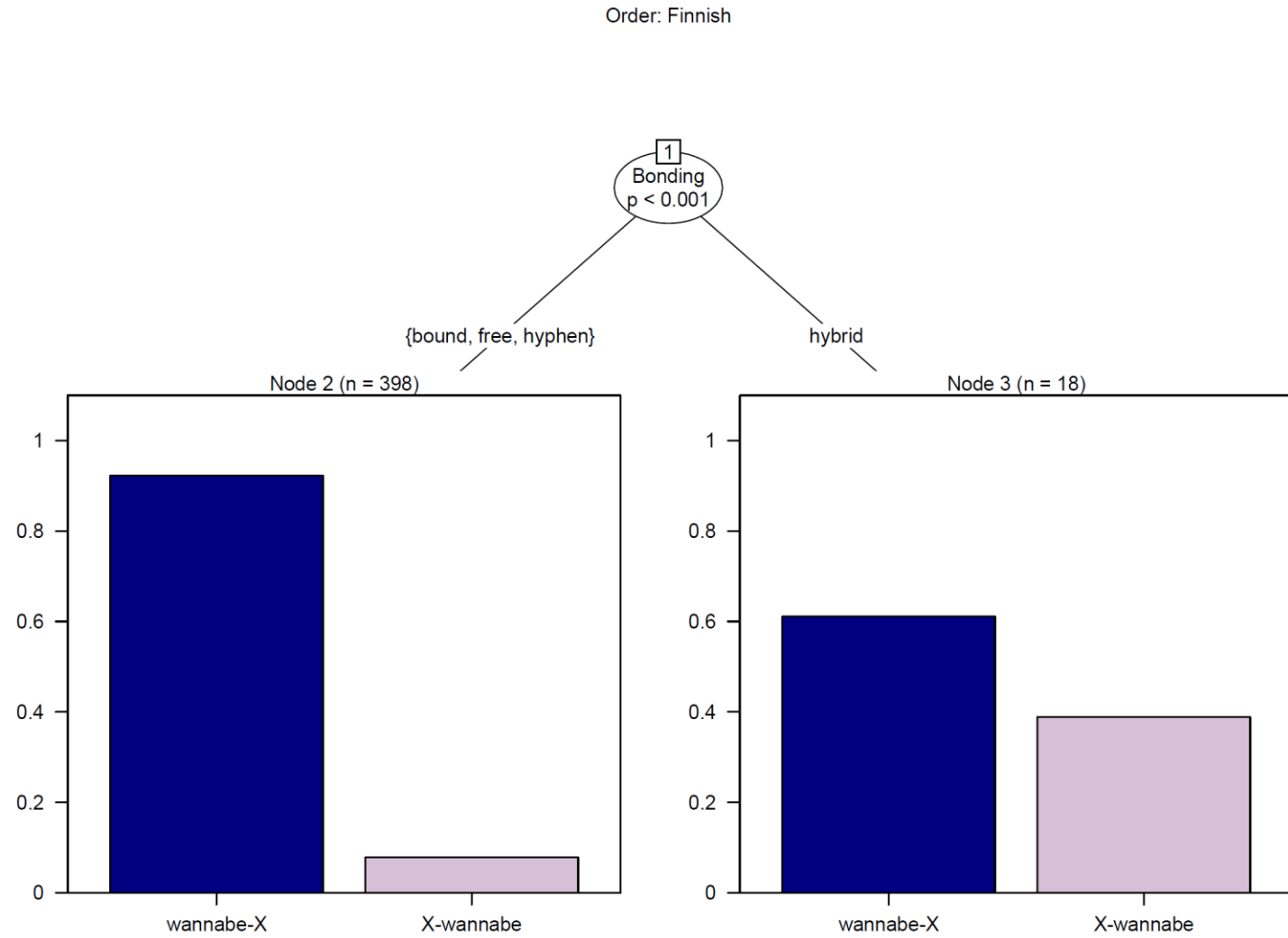
Order: Dutch



# Italian



# Finnish



## *Wannabe* as approximative marker

- *Wannabe* acts as an **approximative marker in collocations**
- Cf. **Pleonastic structures** and **paradigmatic series** with other approximative morphemes:
  - [Dutch] *Het ding ziet er uit als een **wannabee-Ferrari-imitatie**, zo eentje die is gemodelleerd met heel veel purschuim en een laagje polyester aan de buitenkant.* 'The thing looks like a **wannabe-Ferrari imitation**, one of those that was modeled with lots of polyurethane foam and a layer of polyester on the outside.'
  - [Italian] *e ci sembra sospetto che un medio gruppo **simil-Foals, wannabe-National**, scialbo tipo i peggiori Doves, sia stato nella nicchia di Bristol per cinque anni e poi abbia buttato fuori un disco molotov come Brutalism* 'and it seems suspicious that an average **Foals-like wannabe-National** band, (which is) dull like the worst Doves, has been in the Bristol niche for five years and then publishes a molotov record like Brutalism'