Let's try and figure out why we can't inflect these verbs

I analyze the *try and* construction in English, and gives a morphosyntactic account of the restriction that both verbs involved lack overt inflection. The resulting analysis is extended to other similar constructions.

The *try and* construction (hereafter TA) is instantiated in English sentences like (1).

(1) Did you try and get some flour? (2) Alex went and got some flour.

This has been compared to the better-studied *go and* construction (GA) (2). Both constructions are often lumped under the category of *pseudo-coordination* (PseCo), with GA being the more canonical example (De Vos 2004, 2005; Ross 2013; *i.a.*). However, TA differs from GA morphosyntactically in that for most speakers, TA is incompatible with any overt tense/aspect or agreement morphology (3), and it differs semantically in that TA does not entail its own second conjunct, i.e. a 'yes' answer to (1) does not entail that the answerer actually got some flour, whereas (2) does entail that Alex got some flour.

(3) a. %Mia tried and won the game. b. %Jim tries and eats a bug daily.

For those speakers who accept the examples in (3), they act like GA not just morphosyntactically, but also semantically. That is, they entail that Mia did indeed win the game and that Jim actually does eat a bug daily. For speakers who do have the bare morphology requirement, there is no consensus on how it is derived.

The defective null head analysis. One possibility, advocated by De Vos (2005), is that *try* is coordinated with a null functional head, forming the structure in (4).

(4) $[_{TP}$ T $[_{FP}$ $[_{F_0}$ try and F] *v*P]]

Since *try* and the null F are in the same complex head, they will receive the same inflectional features from T and other higher sources, as is the case generally with head-coordinated verbs. However, De Vos claims that F, as a null head, is defective, and will crash the derivation at spellout if it has any features that require overt inflection. Thus *try* cannot receive any such features, since they would also be present on F. Meanwhile, the lower verb, in the complement of this complex head, is in no position to receive any inflectional features.

The *go get* construction, as in (5), is examined by Bjorkman (2016).

(5) I'm going to go get some flour.

This construction comes with the same restriction on overt morphology as *try and*. Syncretism between the simple present and perfect forms of *come* allow us to show that the restriction is morphological in nature, rather than purely syntactic.

(6) a. *Mia has gone shut the door. b. Mia has come shut the door.

When both verbs have the relevant syncretism, the construction is possible. When one of them has overt inflection, it is not. Using a modified version of Wurmbrand's (2012) reverse Agree wherein a valued uninterpretable feature can be given additional values as long as there is no intervening interpretable feature, Bjorkman proposes that the *go* and *come* in this construction bear a feature called [*u*INFL: DIRECT], which is also found in imperatives. This is copied to the lower verb. Since the feature is uninterpretable, it does not block both verbs from copying another [INFL] feature from a higher head (e.g. T or Perf). This process is shown by (7).

(7) a. $[_{TP}$ Mia T $[_{PerfP}$ has$_{[i\text{INFL: PERF}]}$ $[_{VP}$ come$_{[u\text{INFL: DIRECT}]}$ $[_{VP}$ shut$_{[u\text{INFL: _}]}$ the door]]]]

b. $[_{TP}$ Mia T $[_{PerfP}$ has$_{[i\text{INFL: PERF}]}$ $[_{VP}$ come$_{[u\text{INFL: DIRECT}, u\text{INFL: PERF}]}$ $[_{VP}$ shut$_{[u\text{INFL: DIRECT}, u\text{INFL: PERF}]}$ the door]]]]

Each feature places some requirement on the verbs' forms. If it is possible for both verbs to fulfill both requirements, they do so, but if it is not, then the conflict leads to ungrammaticality. [*u*INFL: DIRECT] requires that the verb bearing it take its bare form, so the other feature must permit this. This always happens in the case of the present indicative when the subject is not 3SG, as well as in nonfinite clauses, but it can also occur with other features that cause both verbs to take bare forms due to syncretism. In (6b), both *come* and *shut* have syncretism between the present indicative and past perfect forms, which rescues the configuration.

The DIRECT analysis. We can analyze TA in a way similar to how Bjorkman analyzes *go get*. That is, the *try* in TA has a [*u*INFL: DIRECT] feature. This feature is copied to the second verb, and both verbs receive another inflectional feature from a higher head. Thus the other inflectional feature must be compatible with both verbs taking their bare forms, or we get ungrammaticality (and note that unlike *come*, *try* has no special syncretism). This has several advantages over the defective null head analysis. **First**, there is no a priori reason to expect that a null head gaining a feature that generally requires explicit morphology would cause

the derivation to crash. Generally, when a null head gains a feature that would otherwise have an explicit realization (e.g. assigning case to *pro* in many languages), the feature is simply not expressed; the derivation does not crash. **Second**, Faroese has TA constructions, but allows them to be either imperative (in which case they agree with the subject in number and are either bare (SG) or take a suffix (PL)), or infinitive (in which case they take a different suffix), but the verbs cannot take any other form.

(8) a. Tú mást royna og lesa bókina.
You must try.INF and read.INF book.DEF
'You must try and read the book.'

b. Royn-(ið) og les-(ið) bókina!
Try.IMP-(PL) and read.IMP-(PL) book.DEF
'Try and read the book!'

c. *Hann roynir og lesur bókina.
He try.3SG and read.3SG book.DEF
Int.: 'He tries to read the book.'

(Heycock & Petersen 2012:31)

If there is a null V head, it doesn't seem to have a problem taking overt infinitive (8a) or imperative plural (8b) morphology. Thus, the ungrammaticality of (8c) cannot be because there is a null V head that cannot take any features that would cause overt morphology. Rather, there must be a problem with the specific combination of features. Snorrason (2024) argues for the DIRECT analysis for Faroese, and posits that there are specific vocabulary insertion rules for combinations of [*u*INFL: DIRECT] and a number feature, which explain the acceptability of (8b), with the *-a* ending as the elsewhere case when [*u*INFL: DIRECT] is present. **Third**, there exists a *try get* construction in Hawaiian English (9), which has the same morphological restriction as TA.

(9) {%We'll try get / *We tried got} some coffee. (Tanaka 2020)

On the surface, this is minimally different from TA; it simply lacks *and*. It is therefore desirable to give the two constructions similar analyses. However, coordination with a null V is untenable for *try get* because that construction does not contain a conjunction. We might consider the possibility of a null conjunction, but *try* get is also very similar to *go/come get*, so we want those to have similar analyses. A null conjunction and null V is even less viable for *come get* because that construction's acceptability in the past perfect depends on the syncretism pattern of the lower verb, which is not possible under a defective null head analysis.

The structure of TA. The DIRECT analysis, as currently laid out, only tells us two things about the syntactic structure of TA: *try* must at some point c-command the other verb to give it [*u*INFL: DIRECT], and both verbs must be c-commanded by the same head that gives them other inflectional features. This leaves several possible structures. We might suppose that *try* selects an &P that is missing its left conjunct (or has an entirely null VP there), which would give us a structure somewhat like that of an ordinary *try to* sentence. However, the supposed &P does not pass constituency tests, e.g. it cannot itself be coordinated (10).

(10) *Try [$_{\&P}$ [$_{\&P}$ and smile] and [$_{\&P}$ and be polite]].

Another option is that *try* is head-coordinated with the other verb. However, this would mean that the lower verb does not form a constituent with its argument(s). Empirically, we see that it does (11).

(11) Try and [[$_{vP}$ go to the store] and [$_{vP}$ buy flour]].

Furthermore, head coordination typically requires both heads to be able to select the same type of argument. This is not the case in most TA examples, including (1). Thus, the constituency structure of a TA construction must have *try* and *and* in one subtree and the embedded VP in another. My proposed analysis is that *try* is in a coordinate head. However, rather than being coordinated with a verb like *get*, I take it to be coordinated with a null V head, giving us the structure in (12).

(12) [$_{TP}$ T$_{[i\text{INFL: F}]}$ [$_{VP}$ [$_{V^0}$ try$_{[u\text{INFL: DIRECT}]}$ and V] [$_{vP}$ get$_{[u\text{INFL: _}]}$ some flour]]]

The *try* here is the same as the one in (9) in its semantics and in that it selects a *v*P. All speakers with TA have it in their lexicon, but for most it is somehow constrained to appear only in coordinate heads with null V. This is quite similar to De Vos's structure (4). However, I do not assume that the null V head cannot handle features that would create overt inflection. Indeed, it may not have an unvalued inflectional feature at all. Rather, I propose that the [*u*INFL: DIRECT] feature from *try* percolates up to V^0, from which it can spread to the lower explicit verb via Agree.

Conclusion. TA is more closely related to constructions like *try get* and *go get* than to *go*-type psuedo-coordination. The account presented here improves on previous analyses empirically, by being extensible to cover Faroese TA, and theoretically, by avoiding assumptions about attempts to inflect null heads. This raises the question of whether we should consider TA to be a type of pseudo-coordination at all.