Postma (1993) has observed that throughout languages, the past participle of 'to be' tends to select either an auxiliary from the paradigm of 'to be', but with a different verbal stem, or an auxiliary of a different paradigm, like 'to have'. In Frisian a different observation can be made: both 'to have' and 'to be' can have an auxiliary function with the past participle of 'to be', but whenever two forms of 'to be' with identical stems would turn up in adjacent position, a strong tendency to select the 'have' auxiliary is manifest.

In our paper we will interrelate the above-mentioned observations by deriving both from a general Principle of Distinctivity (and OCP-like principle). This extra-grammatical principle describes a strategy to create as much distinctively between adjacent elements as the linguistic system allows for. Both the superficial form and the grammatical category of those elements may serve to create the type of similarity the Principle of Distinctivity seeks to aberrate from.

The Principle of Distinctivity may serve to account for a range of observations, like the ban on 'geweest wezen' in Dutch, French superlative formation, changes in the auxiliary selection of Old Frisian and numerous other.