Despite the enormous progress that has been made in the field of syntactic variation research in recent years (see e.g. Wasow 2002), yielding a better insight into the factors that guide the choice between syntactic alternatives, some types of word order alternation remain a hard nut to crack. The present study will focus on such a case of word order variation that is known for its inextricable tangle of interacting forces, viz. the variability in Dutch bipartite clause final verbal clusters:

$$\text{[...]} \text{dat hij de afwas gedaan heeft / heeft gedaan.}$$

$$\text{[...]} \text{that-COMP he-SUBJ the dishes-OBJ done-PART has-AUX/ has-AUX done-PART.}$$

$$\text{[...]} \text{that he has done the dishes.}$$

Both word order variants *gedaan heeft* and *heeft gedaan* are equally grammatical, and do not seem to have any obvious semantic-pragmatic consequences. The present study aims at identifying the underlying mechanisms that guide the choice of word order. We will therefore analyze the effect of 10 explanatory variables, which can be both language-internal (structural and semantic) and language-external (sociostylistic). The results of the analysis, built on a large-scale representative corpus of contemporary Dutch, and verified statistically (a.o. logistic regression analysis), show that these 10 explanatory variables are able to explain and predict the lion’s share of the variation. The theoretical importance of the research resides in the intricate interplay between the different types of variation (language-internal and language-external).

References: