Patterns of suppletion in inflectional paradigms:
What do you mean, "universals of language" and there aren't any?

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My aim here is to examine possible generalisations about the distribution of suppletive stems over inflectional paradigms. Looking at such distributions across languages, it turns out that one constraint on their complexity, call it Crossover Constraint (or, if you prefer, *ABA), cherished by some and long near to my own heart, is untenable: there are paradigms, in some languages (probably not many) at some stage of their development (perhaps not long-lastingly), where suppletion is maximally complex — like one stem of a verb being used for 1st Person Singular and 3rd Person Plural and another stem for all other person and number forms of that verb (2SG, 3SG, 1PL, 2PL), which in terms of paradigm geometry is a crossover distribution. Something like this would be an example, a verb 'to go':

	PRES INDIC		SUBJ		...
	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	e-ō	ī-mus	ea-m	eā-mus
2	ī-s	ī-tis	eā-s	eā-tis
3	ī-t	eu-nt	ea-t	eā-nt

Forget about the rest of this verb's conjugation and some form variations: what matters is that the e(V)-stem and and the ī-stem cannot be related by synchronic phonological rule. As you have almost come to expect these days, another universal of language bites the dust. It's all culture, hence relative.

Now, my ulterior aim is to deconstruct this blanket notion of "universal of language". First, to be meaningful, linguistic universals should be relativised to particular domains of mental grammars (levels of representation, structural categories). Second, and more importantly for present purposes, universals need to be distinguished as to their temporal status, namely as constraining states of mental grammars or transitions between states. Looking at a few universals whose timeless or diachronic status is not obvious, I will then argue that, while there is no timeless constraint on paradigmatic distributions of suppletion, their diachrony is yet subject to a crossover constraint, depending on how suppletion is brought about. Focusing on the first stage in its life cycle, suppletion through lexeme combination divides up paradigms in ways that must form morphological patterns; with results that are indistinguishable synchronically, suppletion through phonological differentiation of single stems doesn't or only does so coincidentally.