Workshop "Transitivity and labile verbs in typological and diachronic perspectives"
58th Annual meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea
Bordeaux, 26-29 August 2025

Towards a typology of passive lability

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Funded by
DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
German Research Foundation

Roadmap

- Introducing passive lability
- Definition and sample
- Parameters of variation
- Summary and outlook

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Introducing passive lability

- Most of the literature on the typology of valency alternations has focused on diathesis changes that are explicitly morphologically encoded in the verb.
- The phenomenon of so-called “lability” aka “ambitransitivity”, i.e. uncoded diathesis alternations, has been recognized but remained largely limited to discussions of causative/anticausative alternations.

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- The phenomenon of lability (aka "ambitransitivity" and "flexivalency", Creissels 2024), i.e. uncoded diathesis alternations, has been recognized but until recently remained largely limited to discussions of causative ~ anticausative alternations.

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Introducing passive lability

German and English:

(1) a. *Der Junge zerbrach die Vase*.
'The boy broke the vase.'

b. *Die Vase zerbrach*.
'The vase broke.'

Introducing passive lability

- English and German exemplify the so-called P-lability whereby the participant shared between the transitive and intransitive uses of a labile verb is the patientive (P) argument.
- P-lability as found in English, German and many other languages is understood as anticausative lability, which involves complete suppression of the agentive participant from the verb's argument structure.

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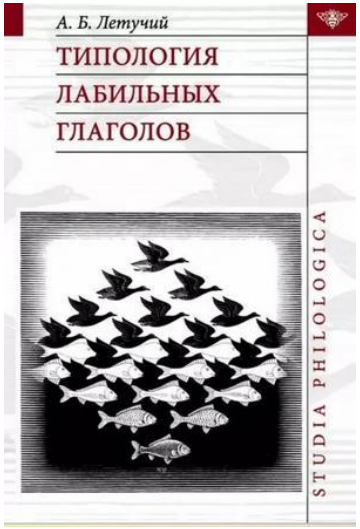
- As a first exception to this general trend, Letuchiy (2009, 2013) offered a comprehensive typology of valency alternations encoded by labile verbs in a representative sample of languages.
- In particular, Letuchiy (2013: 136-145) has a section on passive lability.



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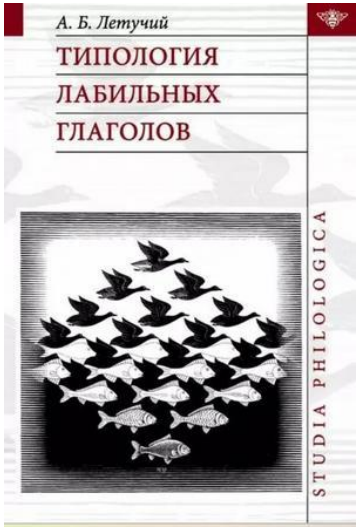
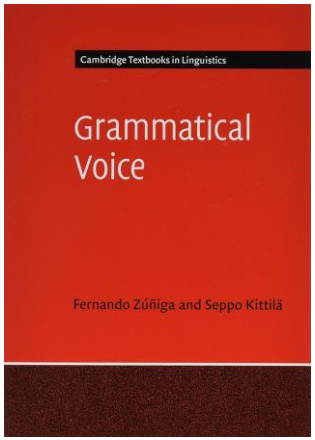
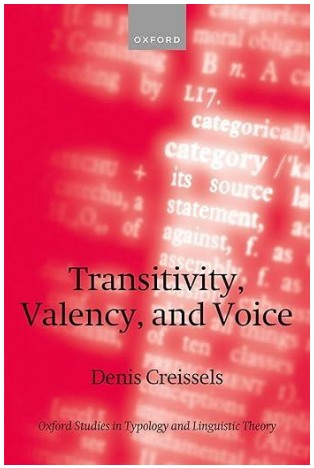


Introducing passive lability

- More recently, Zúñiga & Kittilä (2019: 178-199) and Creissels (2024: 656-696) devoted whole chapters to uncoded alternations.
- They show that among morphologically uncoded diathesis alternations one can find equivalents of every type of morphologically coded “voice” found in the languages of the world, including the passive (Zúñiga & Kittilä 2019: 188-189; Creissels 2024: 667-672).





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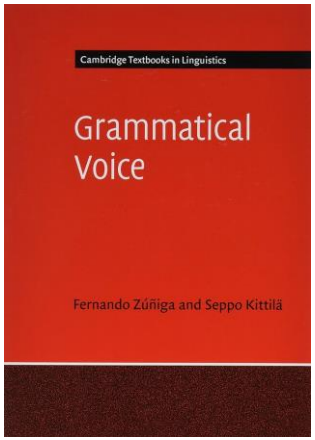
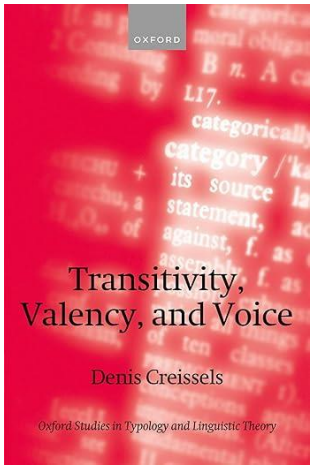
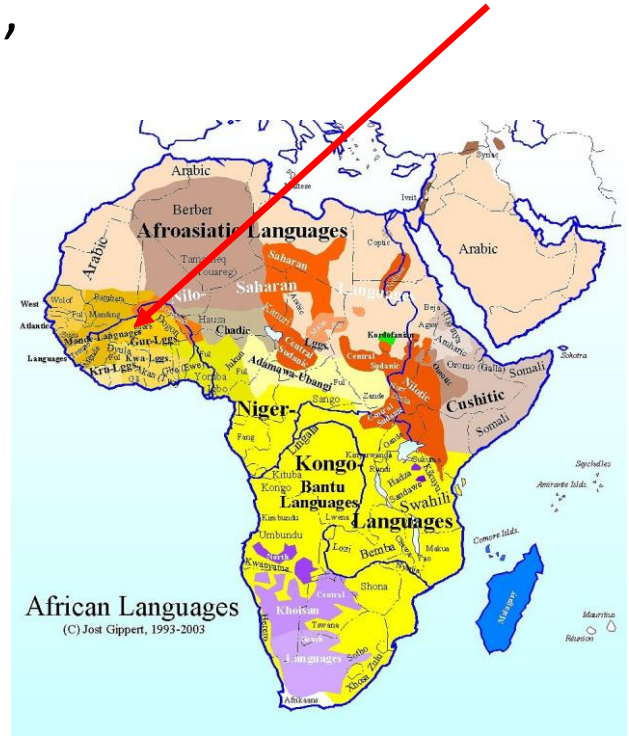




Introducing passive lability

Bambara (Mande, Mali; Creissels 2014: 920):

(2)a. *wùlu* *má* *sògo* *dún*
dog.DEF PFV.NEG meat.DEF eat
'The dog has not eaten the meat.'



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b. *sògo* *má* *dún* *wùlu* *fɛ̀*
meat.DEF PFV.NEG eat dog.DEF by
'The meat has not been eaten by the dog.'

DEF – definite, NEG – negation,
PFV – perfective

Introducing passive lability

Abaza (Northwest Caucasian, Russia; Arkadiev 2023)

(3)a. *a-phʷə́spa* *a-ŝ* *ʕa-l-ṭə́-d*
DEF-girl DEF-door CSL-3SG.F.ERG-open-DCL
'The girl opened the door.' (elicited)

CSL – cislocative, DCL – declarative,
ERG – ergative, F – feminine

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b. *sə-ŝ-kʷa* *w-zə-ṭ-ṗ*
1SG.PR-door-PL 2SG.M.IO-BEN-open-NPST.DCL
'My doors are open for you.' (textual)

BEN – benefactive, CSL – cislocative, DCL – declarative,
ERG – ergative, F – feminine, IO – indirect object,
M – masculine, NPST – non-past, PR – possessor

Introducing passive lability

- Passive lability has been known to specialists on individual languages and whole language families (in particular, Mande in Western Africa) for quite some time:
  - Mande: Cobbinah 2008, Vydrina 2011, Cobbinah & Lüpke 2012, Creissels 2014, 2015 etc.
  - Gur: Reineke & Miehe 2005
  - Jamaican Creole: LaCharité & Wellington 1999
  - Austronesian: Arka & Kosmas 2005, Donohue 2005

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Introducing passive lability

- Still, only scarcely mentioned in typological and theoretical work (see e.g. Cabredo Hofherr 2023).
- Morphological marking is built into most definitions of passives in the typological literature, cf. Dixon & Aikhenvald (2000: 7), Keenan & Dryer (2007: 327–328), Siewierska (2013), Haspelmath (2021).

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Introducing passive lability

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  “Yet we believe that in the case of zero-coded passives, the functional parallels between them and the main-stream morphologically marked ones are too important and systematic to be swept aside as being exclusively of terminological relevance or as presenting a limited number of exotic cases.”

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Introducing passive lability

- No understanding of where passive lability is found and how widespread it is in the languages of the world.
- Little awareness of the cross-linguistic variation of uncoded passives and of how they fit within the typology of voice.
- A few exceptions:
  - Letuchiy (2009: 136-145) within a broader typology of labile verbs;
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Introducing passive lability

In this talk:

- A typology of passive lability on the basis of a small cross-linguistic sample (considerably expanding the pilot study in Arkadiev 2023) and a rather limited set of parameters.

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Zúñiga & Kittilä (2019: 83): Characteristics of the prototypical passive voice:

a. Syntactic valency is one less than in the active diathesis.
b. Its subject corresponds to the nonsubject P of the active voice.
c. Its peripheral, and optional, argument (typically marked by a non-core case or adposition) corresponds to the subject A of the active voice.
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Definition and sample

Non-promotional passives: excluded

- I only consider constructions clearly involving syntactic promotion of the P of the active construction to the privileged syntactic position in the intransitive construction, as evidenced by word order, flagging or indexing.
- Reason: in the absence of formal marking it is hardly possible to distinguish putative uncoded non-promotional passives from cases of simple agent omission.

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- "in strong lability, either the only core argument of the intransitive construction is encoded differently form the argument with a similar or identical role in the transitive construction (as the vase in English *The vase broke* / The *child broke the vase*), or the two constructions differ formally in other respects than the mere absence of a nominal term".

Definition and sample

Creissels (2014: 913) proposes to distinguish between strong and weak types of lability:

- "in weak lability, the only core argument of the intransitive construction is encoded exactly like the argument with a similar or identical role in the transitive construction, and superficially, the two constructions show no other formal distinction than the presence vs. absence of a noun phrase (as in English *John drinks tea* / *John drinks*)".

Definition and sample

Godoberi (Andic < Nakh-Daghestanian; Kibrik ed. 1996: 112): weak P-lability

(4) a. *il-u-di* *mak'i* *išqa* *w-aʔa*
mother-OBL-ERG child home M-deliver.PST
'Mother brought the boy home.'

b. *mak'i* *išqa* *w-aʔa*
child home M-come.PST
'The boy came home.'

Definition and sample

Godoberi (Andic < Nakh-Daghestanian; Kibrik ed. 1996: 110): weak P-lability or agent omission?

(5) a. *im-u-di* *hamaXi* *č'inni*
father-OBL-ERG donkey beat.PST
'Father beat the donkey.'

b. Ø *hamaXi* *č'inni*
donkey beat.PST
'The donkey got beaten, they beat the donkey.'

Definition and sample

Creissels (2014: 916) on languages with “radical P-alignment” like Godoberi:

- “the predicative constructions of so-called ergative languages are frequently organized in such a way that weak lability of the passive type is in those languages trivial, and anticausative readings of transitive verbs used intransitively, if they exist, are always ambiguous with passive readings. The point is that weak lability of the passive type may be the mere consequence of P-alignment (alias ergative alignment) combined with a certain set of other typological features” (highlighting mine, P.A.)

Definition and sample

- I take into consideration only cases of strong P-lability, thus excluding cases like Godoberi, Akhwakh or Andi, discussed by Creissels (2014) and Rochant (2019).
- Likewise, even though the distinction between passive and anticausative lability is often not as clear-cut as has been assumed in the literature (see e.g. Vydrina 2011: 198-202; Creissels 2014; Rochant 2019; Daniel 2022), I am reluctant to treat as passive lability cases of P-lability where spontaneous readings clearly predominate (as e.g. the English *break*-type verbs).

Definition and sample

Agentless passives: included

- Reason: many languages with morphologically coded passives do not allow the agent to be expressed or treat agented passives as marginal or pragmatically “marked” (e.g. Keenan & Dryer 2007, but see Siewierska & Bakker 2013).

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- Reason given by Z&K (2019: 98):

"in the view espoused in the present book, voices are not defined via primary vs. secondary functions, which can be difficult to determine unambiguously, but simply as morphological[ly] expressed diatheses, which can then be parameterized according to lexical restrictions, aspectual values, etc."

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Definition and sample

Abaza vs. German:

(6) *a-qə́ŝ* *p.čə-ṗ*
DEF-window break-NPST.DCL
'Das Fenster ist zerbrochen.' = 'The window is broken.'

- If the German translation of (4) is included into the passive domain as an instance of *Zustandspassiv*, the same logic should apply to the Abaza original, too.

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Definition and sample

- Sample:
  - no genealogical stratification;
  - 45 languages representing 19 language families (including three isolates: Basque, Movima and Zuni);
  - all macroareas, with particularly high concentration in Western Africa and Caribbean (Creoles).

Definition and sample

- Africa:
  - Berber: Ghomara, Kabyle, Tarifiyt
  - Gur: Buli, Byali, Ditammari, Kaansa, Kabiye
  - Kwa: Akebu
  - Mande: Bambara, Gban, Guro, Jalonke, Kakabe, Kla-Dan, Mandinka, Mano
  - Nubian: Kadaru
  - Senufo: Minyanka, Supyire, Syer
  - Songhay: Koyraboro Senni
- Creoles:
  - Berbice Dutch, Haitian Creole, Jamaican Creole, Mauritian Creole, Sranan
- Eurasia:
  - Indo-European: English
  - Northwest Caucasian: Abaza, Abkhaz
  - Yeniseian: Ket
  - isolates: Basque, Sumerian
- Australia and Oceania:
  - Austronesian: Hoava, Manggarai, Palu'e
  - Nyulnyulan: Nyigina, Nyulnyul
  - Sepik Hill: Alamblak
  - Yam: Nama
- Americas:
  - Eskimo-Aleut: Central Alaskan Yupik
  - Yanomamic: Sanumá
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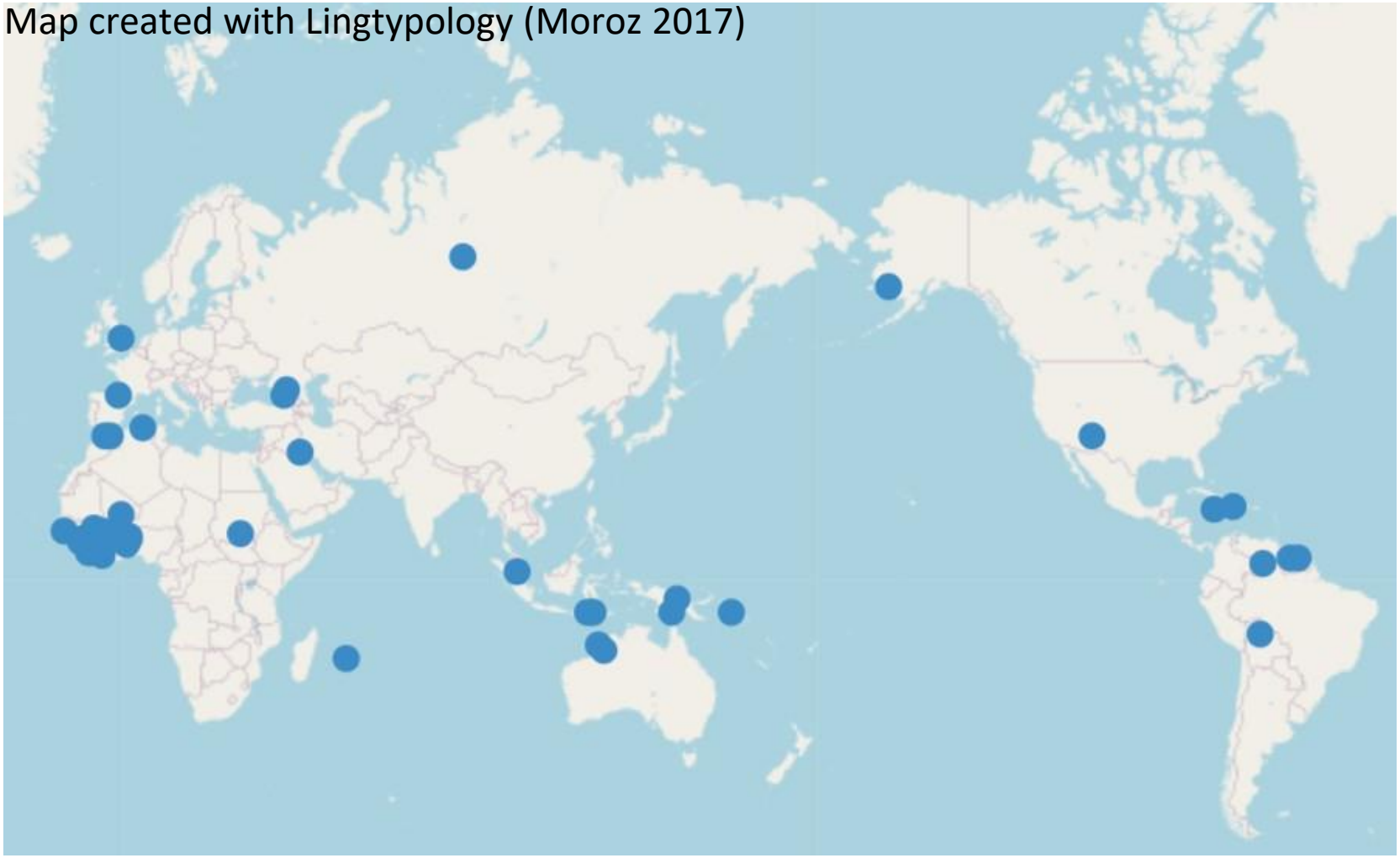

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- Basically the same as those of morphologically coded passives:
  - expression of the agent: possible vs. impossible;
  - semantics: dynamic vs. resultative/static vs. modal;
  - lexical restrictions on passive formation;
  - presence and type of extra morphology associated with transitive resp. passive constructions.

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Parameters of variation

- Expression of the agent

Possible, even if marginal: 16	**Impossible: 29**
Abaza, Abkhaz, Alamblak, Bambara, Batavia Creole, Guro, Kabyiye, Kla-Dan, Mano, Mauritian Creole, Minyanka, Nyigina, Nyulnyul, Syer, Palu'e, Manggarai, Nyulnyul	Akebu, Basque, Berbice Dutch, Buli, Byali, Central Alaskan Yupik, Ditammari, English, Gban, Ghomara, Haitian Creole, Hoava, Jalonke, Jamaican Creole, Kaansa, Kabyle, Kadaru, Kakabe, Ket, Koyraboro Senni, Mandinka, Movima, Nama, Sanumá, Sranan, Sumerian, Supyire, Tarifiyt, Zuni

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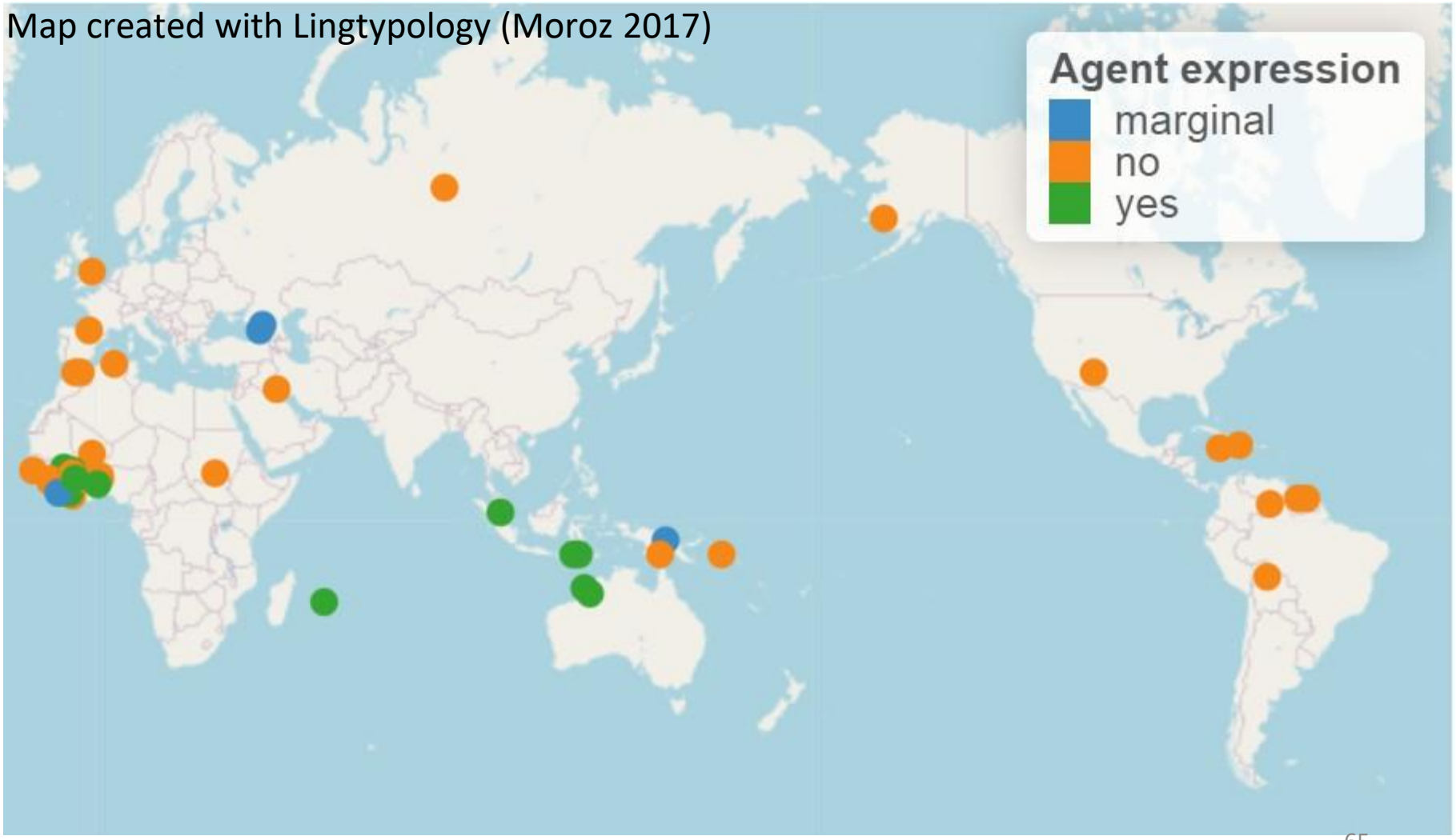

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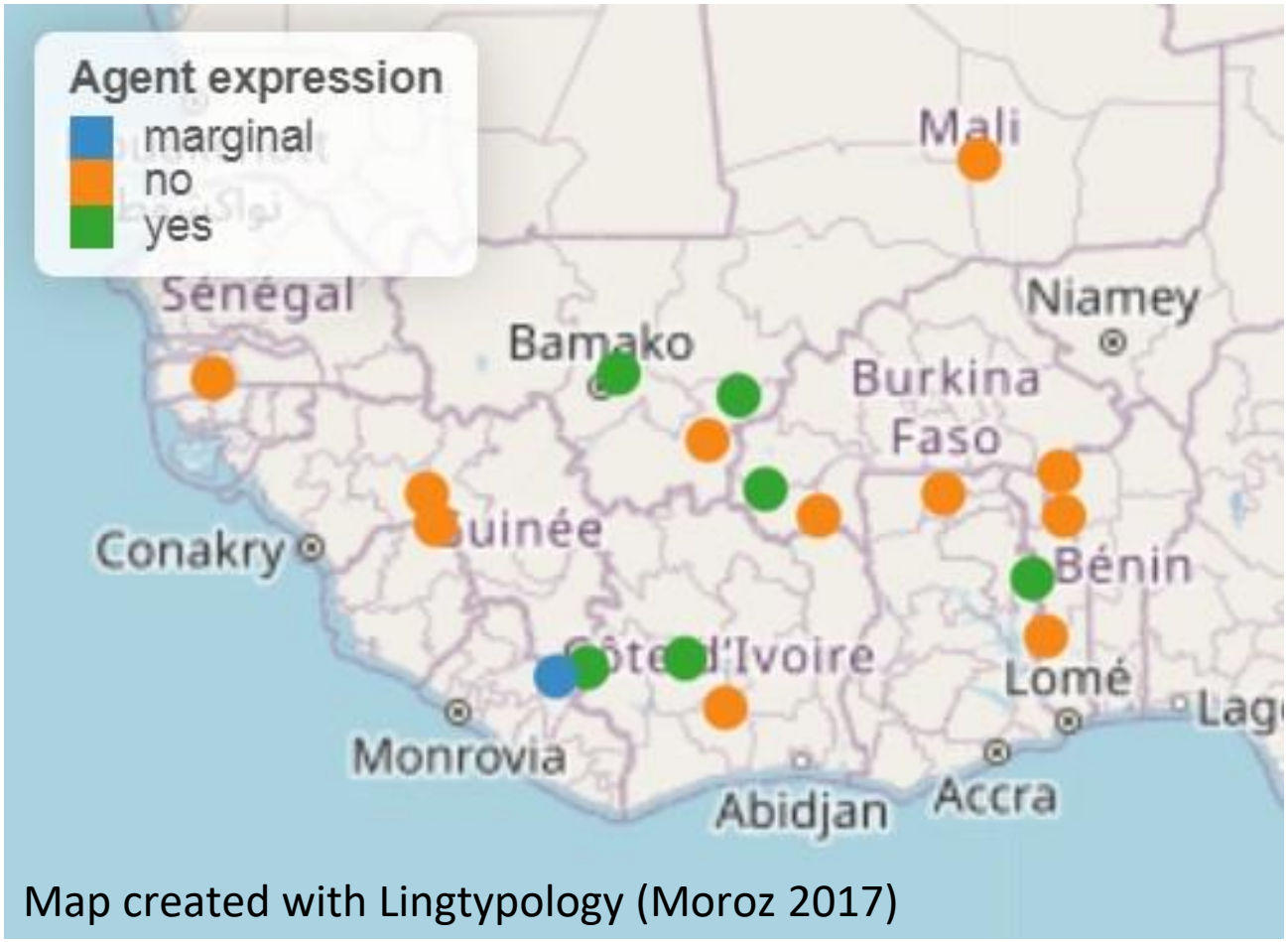

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Parameters of variation

- Expression of the agent
- Family-internal variation:
  - Mande: Bambara, Mano vs. Mandinka, Kakabe, Jalonke
  - Senufo: Minyanka, Syer vs. Supyire
  - Creoles: Mauritian Creole vs. Haitian Creol (both French-lexifier)

Parameters of variation

- Expression of the agent
- An exceptional situation in the two Austronesian languages Manggarai and Palu’e (both from the Flores Barat subgroup), where the expression of the agent is claimed to be obligatory (Arka & Kosmas 2005: 100-102; Donohue 2005).

Parameters of variation

Manggarai (Austronesian, Indonesia; Arka & Kosmas 2005: 95):

(7) a. *aku* *cero* *latung=k*
1SG fry corn=1SG
'I fry / am frying corn.'

b. *latung* *hitu* *cero* *l=aku=i*
corn that fry OBL=1SG=3SG
'The corn is (being) fried by me.'

OBL – oblique case

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Parameters of variation

Manggarai (Austronesian, Indonesia; Arka & Kosmas 2005: 95):

(7) a. *aku* *cero* *latung=k*
1SG fry corn=1SG
'I fry / am frying corn.'

b. *latung* *hitu* *cero* *l=aku=i*
corn that fry OBL=1SG=3SG
'The corn is (being) fried by me.'

OBL – oblique case

The agent phrase can be omitted if the identity of the agent is either inferrable from the context or unimportant

Parameters of variation

So-called “medioactive” constructions in Nyulnyulan languages (McGregor 1999; cf. “quasi-passive” in Hosokawa 1995):

- agent retains its ergative marking and is not omissible;
- however, it no longer triggers verbal cross-reference, the verb indexing only the absolutive patient;
- the agent is low in animacy and agency, usually being a natural force or a cause of an (adverse) physical or emotional state;
- for most languages of the family it remains unclear whether it is legitimate to treat the “medioactive” as an instance of passive.

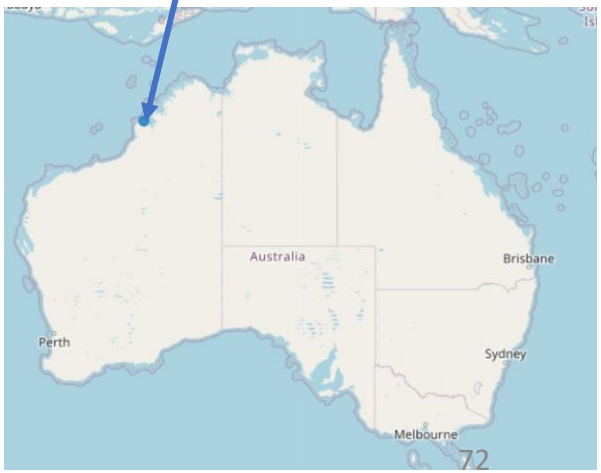
Parameters of variation

Nyulnyul (Nyulnyulan, McGregor 2011: 580-581)

(8) a. *jungk-in* *i-na-marr-in-ngay*
fire-ERG 3.SBJ-PREF-burn-PRS-1SG.OBJ
'The fire burns me.' (transitive)

b. *nga-la-marr-karr* *jungk-in*
1SG.SBJ-IRR-burn-TEMP fire-ERG
'I might get burnt by the fire.' ("medio-active")

IRR – irrealis, OBJ – object indexing, PREF – prefix,
PRS – present tense, SBJ – subject indexing,
TEMP – temporal marker



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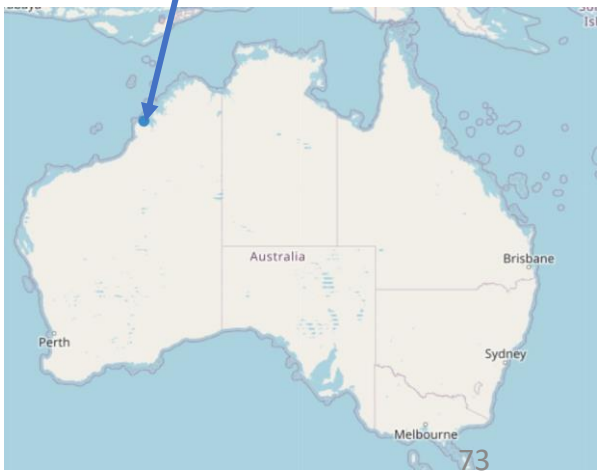

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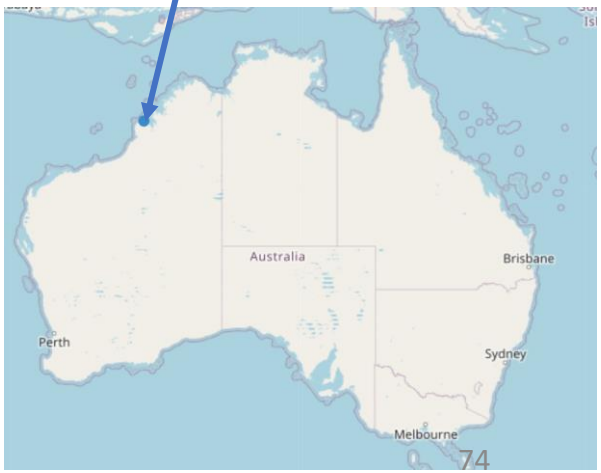
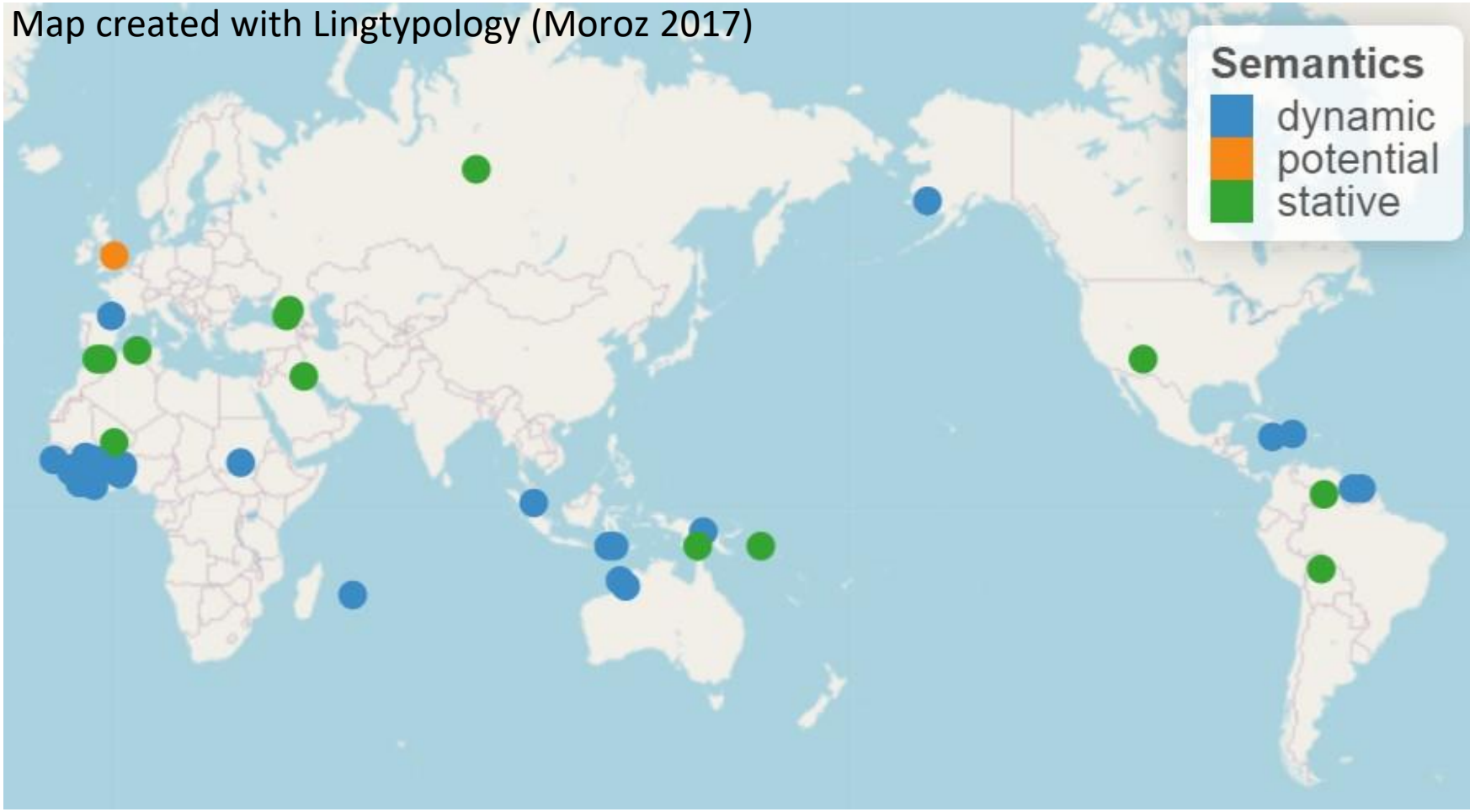


Parameters of variation

- Semantics

Dynamic: 31	Stative: 13	Modal: 1
Akebu, Alamblak, Bambara, Basque, Batavia Creole, Berbice Dutch, Buli, Byali, Central Alaskan Yupik, Ditammari, Gban, Guro, Haitian Creole, Jalonke, Jamaikan Creole, Kaansa, Kabiye, Kadaru, Kakabe, Kla-Dan, Mandinka, Manggarai, Mano, Mauritian Creole, Minyanka, Nyigina, Nyulnyul, Palu'e, Sranan, Supyire, Syer	Abaza, Abkhaz, Ghomara, Hoava, Kabyle, Ket, Koyraboro Senni, Movima, Nama, Sanumá, Sumerian, Tarifiyt, Zuni	English

Parameters of variation



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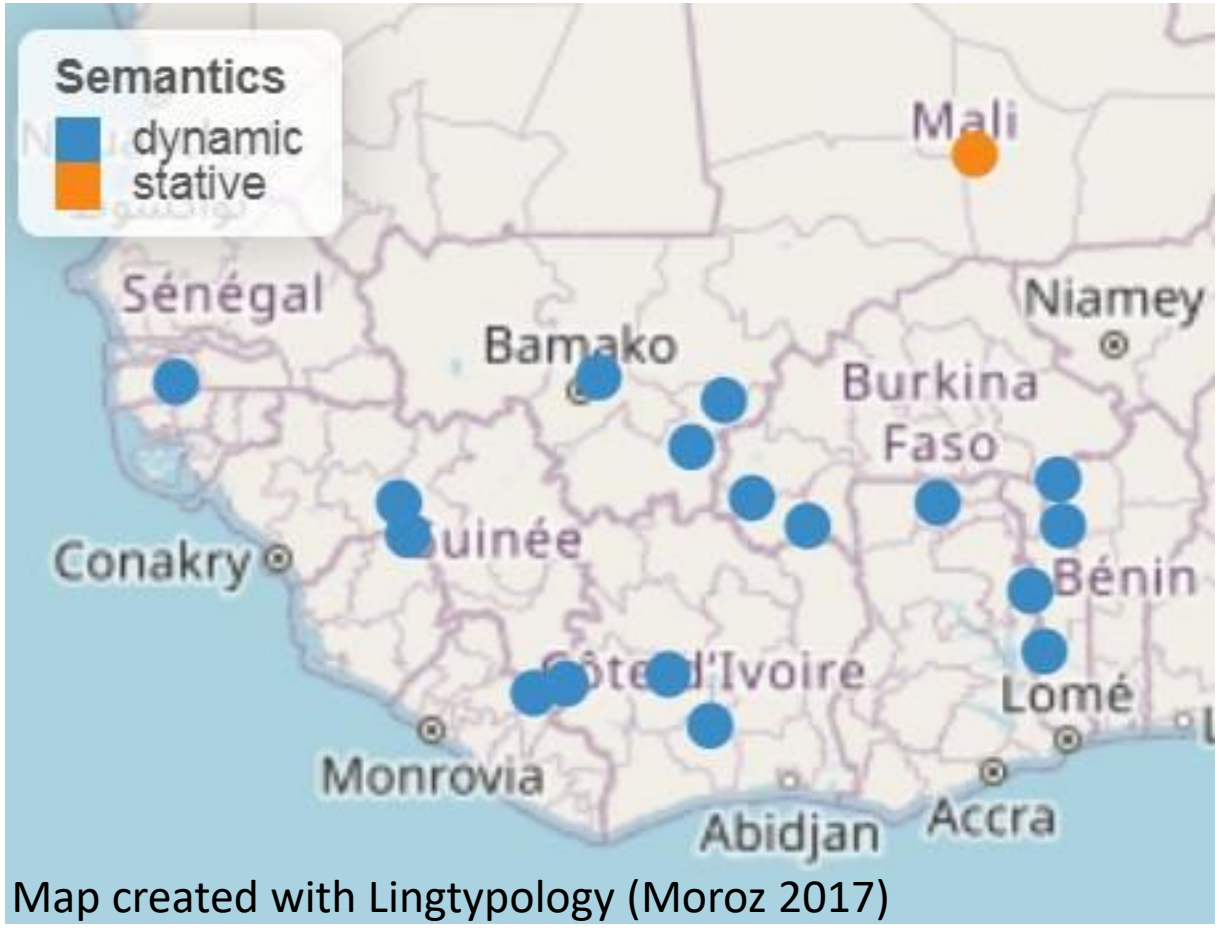

Map created with Lingtypology (Moroz 2017)

Parameters of variation

Kakabe (Mande, Guinea; Vydrina 2011: 190): dynamic

(9) a. *Fánta* *bi* *Sέεku* *kéle-la*
Fanta IPFV Seeku call-IPFV
'Fanta is calling Seeku.'

b. *Sέεku* *bi* *kéle-la*
Seeku IPFV call-IPFV
'Seeku is being called.'

IPRF – imperfective

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Parameters of variation

Koyraboro Senni (Songhay, Mali; Heath 1999: 163): stative

(10) a. *ay* *na* *kus-oo* *too* *hari*
1SG.SBJ TR jar-DEF.SG fill water
'I filled the jar with water.'

b. *bidoŋ-oo* *ga* *too* *hari*
jug-DEF.SG IPFV fill water
'The jug is full of water.'

SBJ – subject, TR – transitivity marker

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Parameters of variation

- English (Indo-European > Germanic; Keyser & Roeper 1984: 381): modal

(11) a. *Someone bribed the bureaucrats*.

b. *Bureaucrats bribe ??(easily)*.

Cf. Holvoet & Daugavet 2020, Inglese 2022 on facilitative middles and their relations to passives.

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Parameters of variation

- Modal meanings tend to arise with imperfective/habitual passives

Basque (Fernández & Berro 2022: 1040, 1050):

(12) a. *Liburu-a-k erraz idaz-ten dira.*
book-DET-PL easily write-IPFV 3PL.ABS.be.PRS
'Books are easily written.'

b. *Pakete-a-k bidal-i dira.*
package-DET-PL send-PFV 3PL.ABS.be.PRS
'The packages have been sent.'

Parameters of variation

- Lexical restrictions
  - often hard to assess since few authors discuss them explicitly;
  - still, some works provide lists of verbs admitting passive lability;
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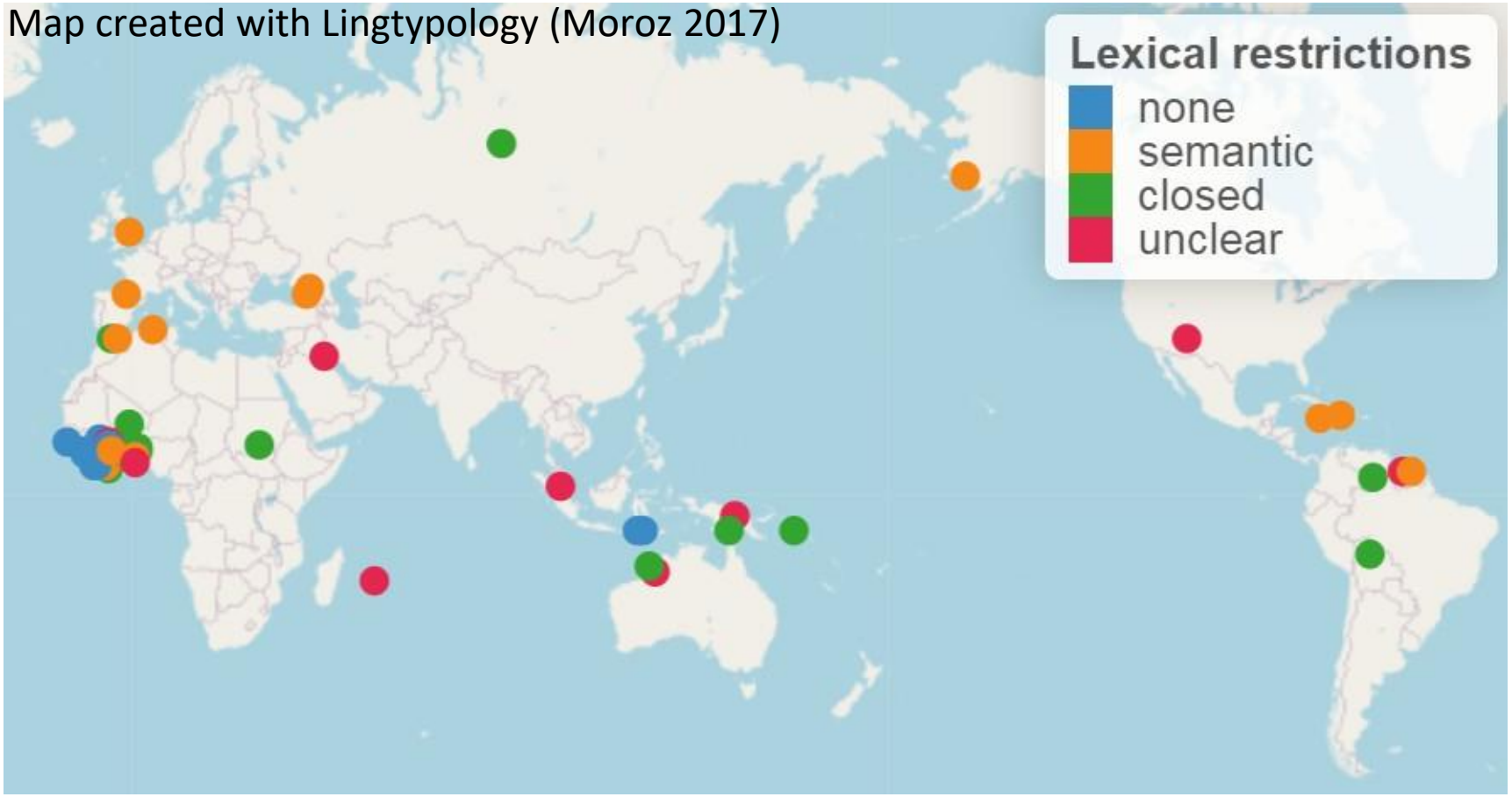
Parameters of variation

- Lexical restrictions

(Almost) no restrictions: 9	Bambara, Jalonke, Kakabe, Kla-Dan, Mandinka, Mano, Supyire, Palu'e, Manggarai
Semantic restrictions: 14	Abaza, Abkhaz, Basque, Buli, Central Alaskan Yupik, English, Guro, Haitian Creole, Jamaican Creole, Kabiye, Kabyle, Sranan, Syer, Tarifiyt
Closed class: 13	Byali, Ditammari, Gban, Ghomara, Hoava, Kaansa, Kadaru, Ket, Koyraboro Senni, Movima, Nama, Nyulnyul, Sanumá
No data or unclear: 9	Akebu, Alamblak, Batavia Creole, Berbice Dutch, Mauritian Creole, Minyanka, Nyigina, Sumerian, Zuni

Parameters of variation



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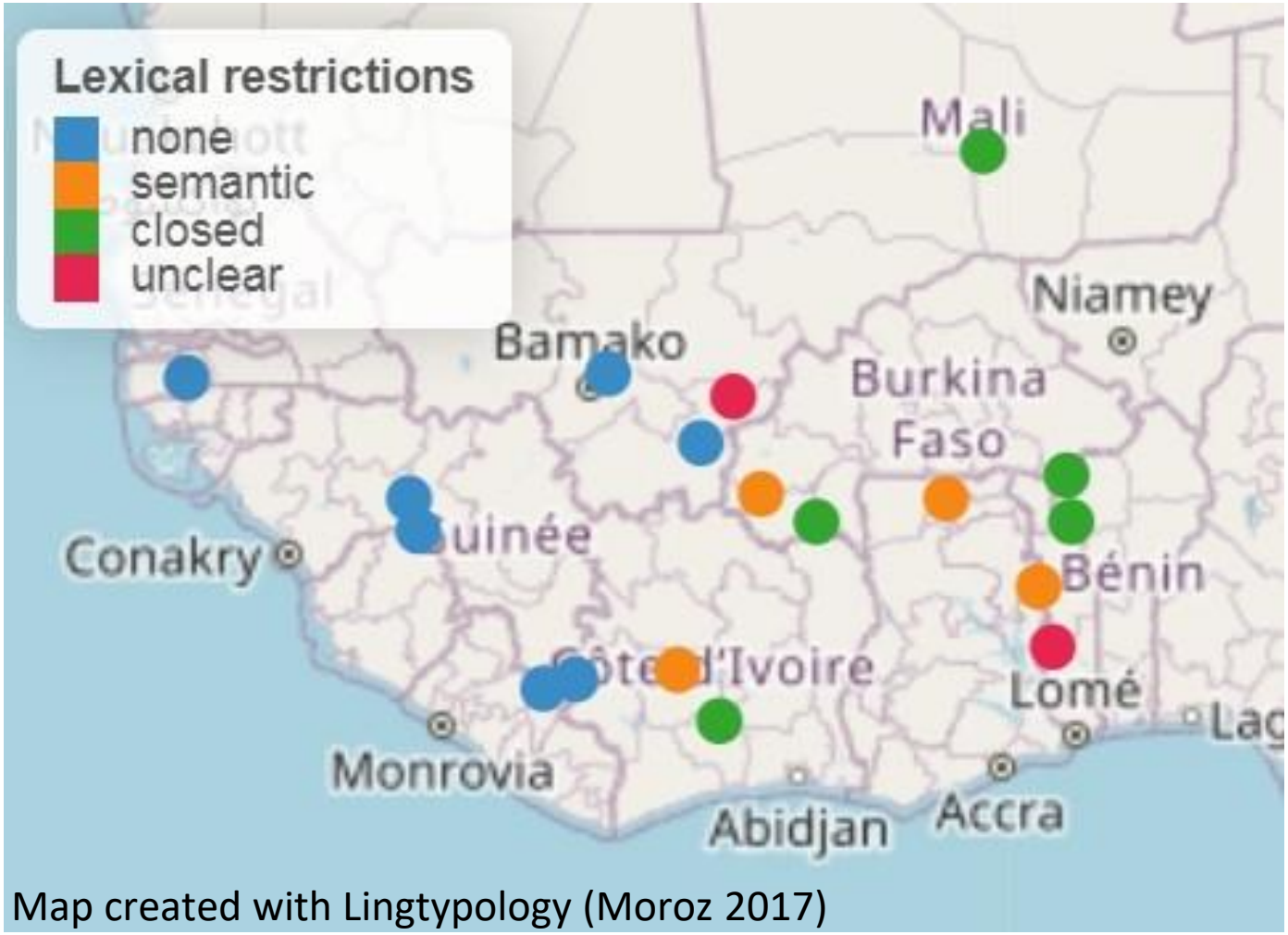

Map created with Lingtypology (Moroz 2017)

Parameters of variation

- Lexical restrictions
  - English: only agentive verbs (Keyser & Roeper 1984);
  - Abaza, Abkhaz, CAY, Kabyle: most telic transitive verbs denoting a change of state of the patient;
  - Syer (Dombrowsky-Hahn 2015: 545): “speakers avoid using the passive with verbs that denote activities which never occur spontaneously (e.g. *gbu* ‘kill’)”;
  - Ditammari (Reineke & Miehe 2005: 343-4): passivisation possible only with some verbs taking inanimate patients;
  - Sanumá (Borgman 1990: 201-202): only “certain verbs”, e.g. those denoting caused change of position (e.g. ‘lay’);
  - Koyraboro Senni (Heath 1999: 164): a small list of verbs;
  - Ket (Kreynovich 1968: 244-260): uncoded statal passive is attested with particular conjugational types of verbs.

Parameters of variation

- Concomitant morphology

Person (+transitivity): 5	Alamblak, Basque, Central Alaskan Yupik, Nyigina, Nyulnyul
Person + TAM: 5	Abaza, Abkhaz, Ket, Nama, Sumerian
TAM: 3	Bambara, Mandinka, Zuni
Transitivity marking: 3	Hoava, Koyraboro Senni, Movima
None or unclear: 29	Akebu, Batavia Creole, Berbice Dutch, Buli, Byali, Ditammari, English, Gban, Ghomara, Guro, Haitian Creole, Jalonke, Jamaican Creole, Kaansa, Kabiye, Kabyle, Kadaru, Kakabe, Kla-Dan, Manggarai, Mano, Mauritian, Minyanka, Palu'e, Sanumá, Sranan, Supyire, Syer, Tarifiyt

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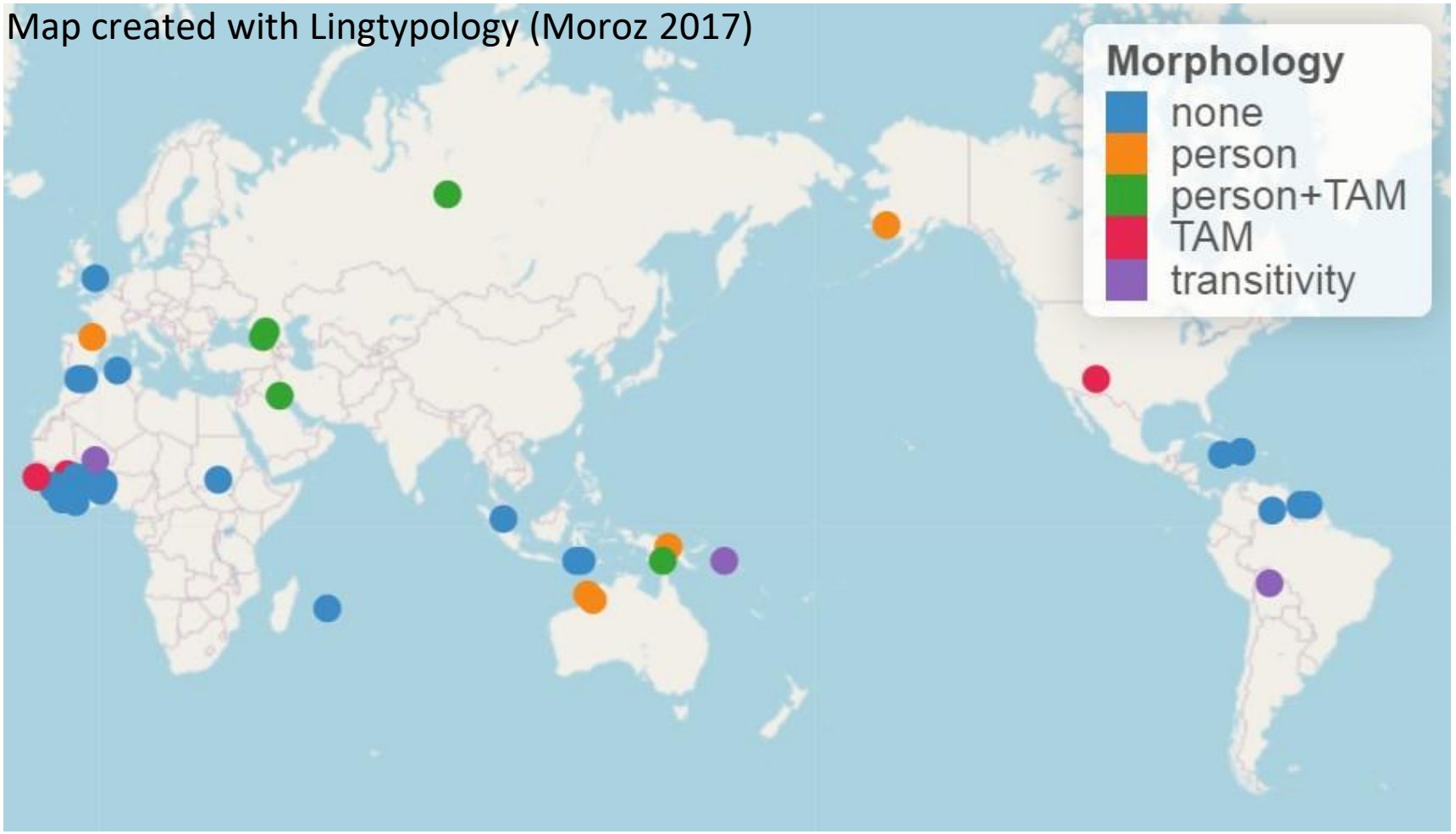

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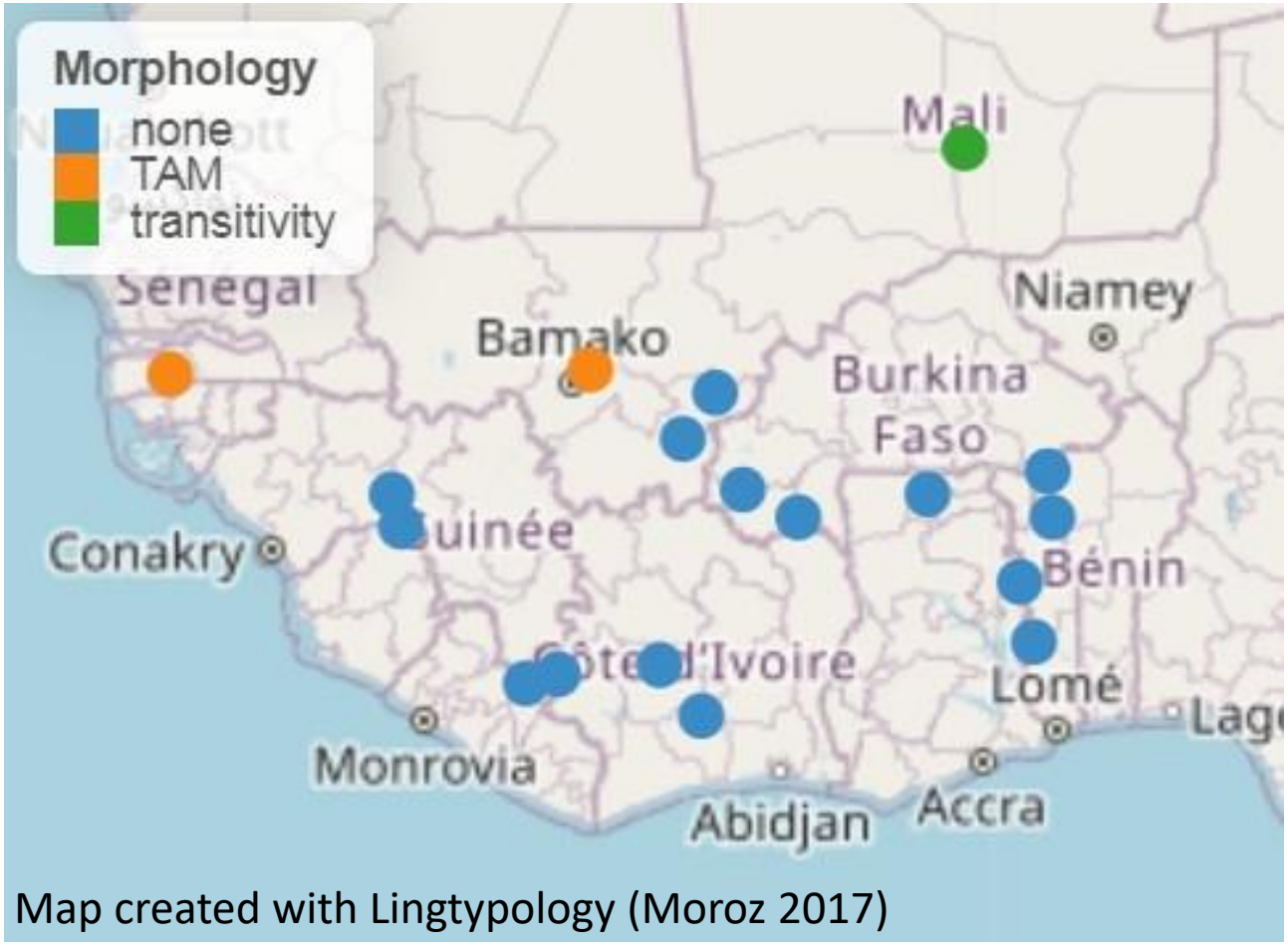

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Parameters of variation

Central Alaskan Yupik (Eskimo-Aleut, USA; Miyaoka 2015: 1177, 1184): transitivity and person marking

(13) a. *angute-m* *neqa* *ner-a-a*
man-ERG.SG fish.ABS.SG eat-TR-IND.3SG>3SG
'The man is eating the fish.'

b. *neqa* *ner'-u-q* *ak'a*
fish.ABS.SG eat-INTR-IND.3SG IAM
'The fish is/has been eaten.'

ABS – absolutive, ERG – ergative, IAM – iamitive 'already', IND – indicative, INTR – intransitive, TR – transitive

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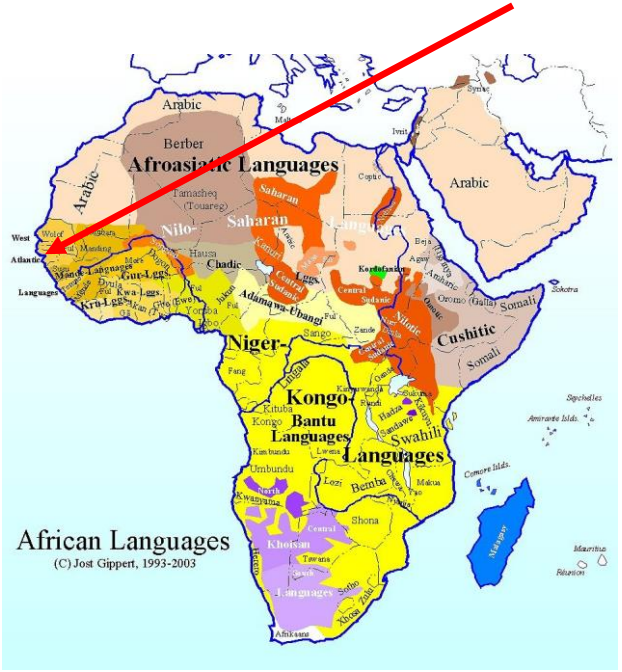
Parameters of variation

Mandinka (Mande, Senegal; Creissels 2015: 227): TAM

(14) a. *kew-ó* *te* *kúlúŋ-o* *dádáa-la*
man-DEF INCMP.NEG.TR boat-DEF repair-INF
'The man will not repair the boat.'



INCMP – incompletive, INF – infinitive,
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boat-DEF INCMP.NEG.INTR repair-INF
'The boat will not be repaired.'

INCMP – incompletive, INF – infinitive, INTR – intransitive,
NEG – negation, TR – transitive

Parameters of variation

Basque (Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina 2003: 579-581; Fernández & Berro 2022): person marking and auxiliary selection

(15) a. *Unai-k pakete-a-k bidal-i di-tu*.
Unai-ERG package-DET-PL send-PFV 3PL.ABS-have.PRS[3.ERG]
'Unai has sent the packages.'

b. *Pakete-a-k bidal-i dira*.
package-DET-PL send-PFV 3PL.ABS.be.PRS
'The packages have been sent.'

(Fernández & Berro 2022: 1050)

Parameters of variation

- *Pace* Cobbinah & Lüpke (2012: 154), who link the preference for uncoded passivisation in the languages of West Africa to “their general lack of verbal morphology”, it is clear that uncoded passives also occur in languages with rich and even polysynthetic verbal morphology.

Parameters of variation

- Possible correlations between parameters:
  - as expected, statal uncoded passives (almost) never allow the expression of agent and are always lexically restricted (either in terms of telicity/change of state, or idiosyncratically);
  - still, most dynamic uncoded passives do not allow agent expression, either, and many of them are lexically restricted in various ways.

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- Introducing passive lability
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- Parameters of variation
- Summary and outlook

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- Morphologically uncoded passives
  - are attested in quite diverse languages, especially in West Africa, but also elsewhere;
  - are sufficiently similar to morphologically coded passives and vary along basically the same dimensions;
  - should not be excluded from a comprehensive typology of passive and voice in general;
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  - highlight the crucial role of the parameter of lexical input for the study of voice phenomena.

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Summary and outlook

- Directions for further research:
  - a more representative sample;
  - more family-level comparison, also including related languages with morphologically coded passives (if any);
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  - diachronic analysis, where possible.


Thank you for you attention!
Merci pour votre attention!

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Parameters of variation

- Palu'e (Austronesian, Indonesia; Donohue 2005: 60):

(32) a. *ia* *cube* *vavi* *vaʔa*
3SG shoot pig that
'He shot that pig.'

b. *vavi* *vaʔa* *ia* *cube*
pig that 3SG shoot
'That pig was shot by him.'

ai.glossika.com

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The passive agent is marked only by word order

No mention of the possibility to omit the agent in the source

Parameters of variation

An interesting situation in Sumerian (isolate, Ancient Mesopotamia; Jagersma 2010: 304-307):

- the reconstructed oldest passive construction was unmarked and had both static and dynamic uses;
- in the extant texts it occurs only in some subordinate and modal contexts

(15) *balaʔ=ane ŋa=ʔi-ku$_5$.ř-Ø*
reign=his MOD-TAM-cut-3N.ABS
'May his reign be cut off!' (Jagersma 2010: 306)

ABS – absolutive, MOD – modal, N – non-human,
TAM – tense-aspect marker

Parameters of variation

- The unmarked passive productive in (Southern) Sumerian texts is only used statively (16a) and is opposed to the dynamic passive formed with the middle prefix (16b), Jagersma (2010: 304)

(16) a. *kišib ur.ba.ú ses=ane=ak ʔi-b-ra-Ø*
seal Ur-Bau brother=his=GEN TAM-3N.OBL-hit-3N.ABS
'The seal of his brother Ur-Bau is rolled over this.'

b. *kišib UŠ.ĝu$_{10}$=ak Ø-ba-b-ra-Ø*
seal Ushgu-GEN TAM-MID-3N.OBL-hit-3N.ABS
'The seal of Ushgu was rolled over it.'

MID – middle voice, OBL – oblique object