



Syntax & Semantics WS2019/2020

Lecture 3: Basic Concepts II

25.10.2019, Christian Bentz



Overview

Section 1: Recap of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Determining the Head

Arguments and Adjuncts

Section 3: Valence

Tesnière's Valence Conception

Interlude: Valence and Predicate Logic

The Passivization Test

Section 4: Grammatical Functions

Subject Criteria

The Cross-Linguistic Perspective

Section 5: Recent Research

Exercises

References



Section 1: Recap of Lecture 2



Constituency

tree
NOUN

big [tree]
ADJ [NOUN]

a [big [tree]]
DET [ADJ [NOUN]]

sees [a [big [tree]]]
VERB [DET [ADJ [NOUN]]]

Kim [sees [a [big [tree]]]]
PROPN [VERB [DET [ADJ [NOUN]]]]

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

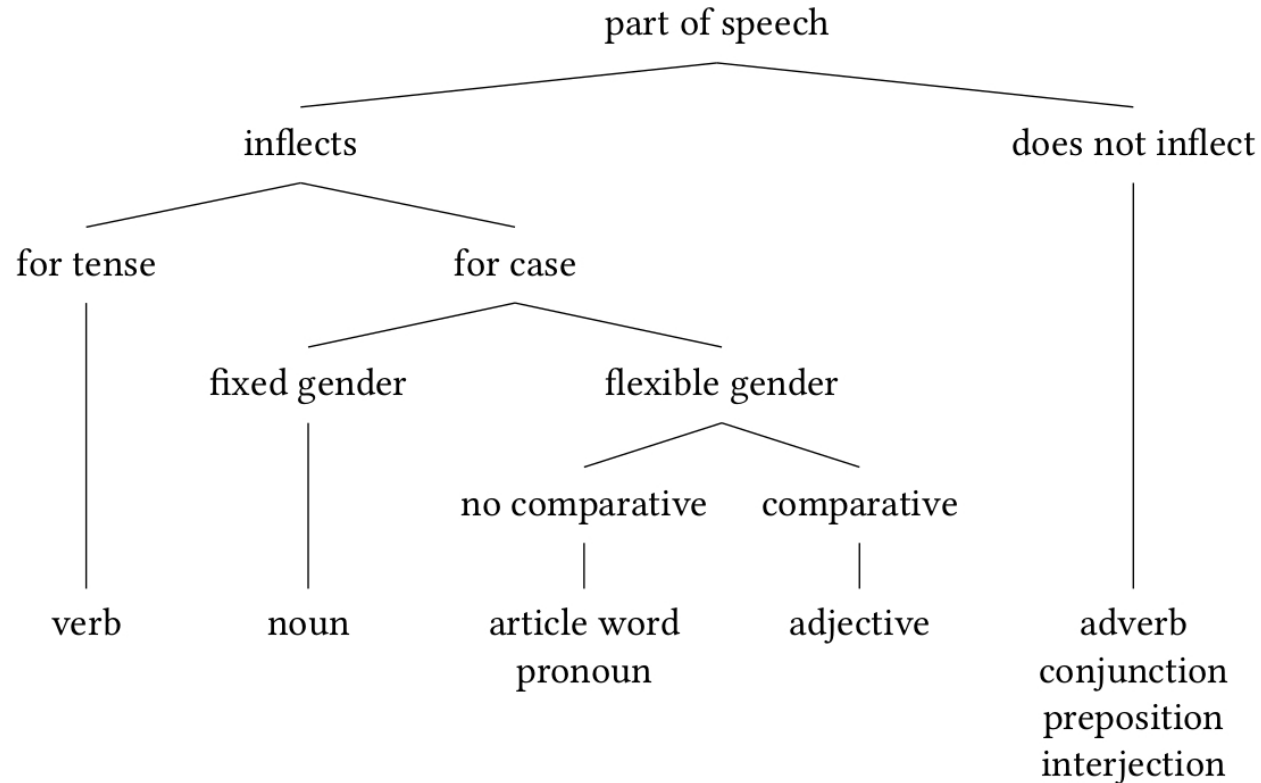
Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Decision Tree



Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 24.

Based on Duden Grammar by Eisenberg et al. (2005).



Section 2: Heads



Definition

“The **head** of a constituent/phrase is the element which determines the *most important properties* of the constituent/phrase. At the same time, the head also determines the *composition of the phrase*. That is, the head requires certain other elements to be present in the phrase.”

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 28.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

Example:

Ayacucho Quechua (quy, Quechuan)

(1) wayna runa mikuy-ta yanu-n
young man.NOM.SG food-ACC cook-PRS.3SG

“The young man cooks the food.”



Determining the Head

The head of a phrase is the element that provides the “grammatical scaffolding”:

(2) _ _-ta **yanu-n**
 _.NOM.SG _-ACC cook-PRS.3SG
 “_ cooks _.”

Imagine we only hear/read “... yanun”, and the rest of the information of the sentence is lost. We can still determine from this partial information that there has to be a *cooker* and a *cooked*,¹ that the cooker has to be *third person singular*, and that the cooked has to be marked for *accusative case*. In a sense, from *yanun* we can predict the occurrence of *-ta*.

¹I make the assumption here that *yanun* is not used with a single participant like in “he cooks” in English.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Determining the Head

Why is *wayna runa* “young man” not the head?

- (3) **wayna runa** _-n
 young man.NOM.SG _-PRS.3SG
 “young man _.”

Imagine we only hear/read “*wayra runa ...*”, and the rest of the information of the sentence is lost. We can still determine from this partial information that in order to build a complete and grammatical sentence there has to be a finite verb marked with *-n*. So *wayra runa* predicts *-n*. However, apart from this we don’t know anything about the structure of the sentence. It could be:

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Examples:

- ▶ ***wayna runa ri-n***
“The young man goes/walks.” (1 participant)
- ▶ ***wayna runa mikuy-ta yanu-n***
“The young man cooks the food.” (2 participants)
- ▶ ***wayna runa warmi-man mikuy-ta apamu-n²***
“The young man brings food to the woman.” (3 participants)
- ▶ etc.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

²With dative or allative case *-man*.



Determining the Head

Why is *mikuy-ta* “food-ACC” not the head?

(4) _ **mikuy-ta** _
 _ food-ACC _
 “_ the food.”

Imagine we only hear/read “ ... *mikuy-ta* ...”, and the rest of the information of the sentence is lost. We can still determine from this partial information that in order to build a complete and grammatical sentence there has to be a finite verb³ and another participant. However, apart from this we don’t know much more about the structure of the sentence. It could be:

³Note that in this case *-ta* does not predict *-n*, since there is no number agreement between the case marker and the finite verb in Ayacucho Quechua. The accusative case marker is always *-ta* regardless of number and person.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Examples:

- ▶ *wayna runa mikuy-ta yanu-n*
“The young man cooks the food.” (2 participants)
- ▶ *wayna runa warmi-man mikuy-ta apamu-n*
“The young man brings food to the woman.” (3 participants)
- ▶ *wayna runa-kuna warmi-man mikuy-ta apamu-nku*
“The young men bring food to the woman.”⁴ (3 participants)
- ▶ etc.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

⁴-*kuna* is the plural marker on the noun, and *-nku* the third person plural marker on the verb.



Summary: Verb Phrases

Arguably, the occurrence of the finite verb restricts the space of possible sentences more than the occurrence of the individual participant(s) in the scene. If a finite verb occurs, it is generally considered to be the **head** of the phrase. Hence, complete sentences are mostly **verb phrases**.

In our example above, the finite verb **yanu-n** “he/she/it cooks” determines:

- ▶ that there have to be **two participants** in the scene: cooker (*wayna runa*), cooked (*mikuy*);
- ▶ that these participants have **particular cases**: NOM, ACC (*-ta*);
- ▶ that the cooker has to be in the singular **number**.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Exception: Copular Clauses

“Copular clauses are a minor sentence type in which the **contentful predicate is not a verb**, but some other category like AP, NP or PP. In some languages there is no verbal element at all in these clauses; in other languages there is a *verbal copula* joining the subject and the non-verbal element.”

Mikkelsen (2011). Copular clauses, p. 1805.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

Thai (tha, Tai-Kadai)

- (5) khāw **pen** nág:rian:
he COP student
“He **is** a student.”

Pitjantjatjara (pjt, Pama-Nyungan)

- (6) wait nglayayala
man doctor
“The man **is/was** a doctor.”

Examples from Stassen (2013). Zero copula for predicate nominals.



Noun Phrases: Adjectives and Nouns

Nouns determine the inflections of adjectives. For example, in languages where adjectives inflect for gender (e.g. Italian), the noun determines by its biological or grammatical gender also the grammatical gender of the adjective. Hence, it is generally assumed that nouns are the heads of phrases which involve an adjective and a noun, i.e. these are **noun-phrases** (not adjective-phrases).

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

Amharic (amh, Afro-Asiatic)

(7) addis abäba
new flower

(8) addis bet
new house

Italian (ita, Indo-European)

(9) fiore nuov-**o**
flower new-M.SG

(10) casa nuov-**a**
house new-F.SG



Noun Phrases: Determiners and Nouns

The case of determiners and nouns is controversial (see Müller, 2019, p. 29). For example, we could ask, do determiners determine the gender of nouns or the other way around? If the former is the case, then we would consider the examples below as **determiner phrases**, otherwise they would be **noun-phrases**.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

Amharic (amh, Afro-Asiatic)

(11) **addis-u** abäba
new-ART flower
“the new flower”

(12) **addis-u** bet
new-ART house
“the new house”

Italian (ita, Indo-European)

(13) **il fiore** nuov-o
ART.M flower new-M.SG
“the new flower”

(14) **la casa** nuov-a
ART.F house new-F.SG
“the new house”



Noun Phrases: Possessor Noun-Phrases

In phrases involving two nouns (sometimes also involving a preposition) that are linked via a **possessor/possessee** relationship (also known as *genitive construction*), the **possesse** is generally assumed to be the *head* of the possessor noun phrase. This is because the *possessee* (rather than the possessor) determines the basic properties of the phrase, whereas the *possessor* is an adjunct, e.g. “the girl’s cat” is a cat, not a girl.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

Finnish (fin, Uralic)

- (15) tytö-n kissa
girl-GEN cat
“the girl’s cat”

Dryer (2013). Order of genitive and noun.



Adjective Phrases

While phrases involving a noun modified by an adjective are normally considered to be headed by the noun, and hence constitute *noun phrases*, adjectives are sometimes considered to head phrases if the other elements of the phrase depend on them.

Examples:

- (16) Karen drives [_{AP} very fast]
- (17) I figure [_{AP} that's loud]
- (18) I am [_{AP} louder than you are]⁵
- (19) I am [_{AP} pretty disillusioned about syntax]

⁵Note that Müller (2019), p. 74 gives “He is proud” as an example of an adjective phrase. This suggests that he considers the adjective to be the head of the phrase rather than the pronoun *he*, though it is unclear which morphosyntactic arguments this is based on. Also, since this is overall a copular clause, *louder* is not considered an adverb modifying the verb, but an adjective. If the sentence was: “He sings louder than me”, then *louder* would be an Adverb.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Prepositional Phrases: Preposition and Noun(-Phrase)

In some languages (e.g. Polish, German), prepositions determine the case of the noun-phrase they form a constituent with (via so-called lexical case). Hence, phrases involving a preposition are generally considered **prepositional-phrases**.

Polish (pol, Indo-European)

(20) miast-**o**
town-NOM.SG

(21) do miast-**a**
to town-GEN.SG
“into town”

(22) przeciw miast-**u**
against town-DAT.SG
“against the town”

(23) z miast-**em**
with town-INS.SG
“with the town”

(24) przy **mieście**
by town.LOC.SG
“by the town”

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Definition

“The combination of a head with another constituent is called a **projection of the head**. A projection which contains all the necessary parts to create a well-formed phrase of that type is a **maximal projection**. A sentence is the maximal projection of a finite verb.”

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 29.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Arguments

The head of a phrase requires certain other elements to be present in order to form a *maximal projection*. These *strictly required* elements are called **arguments** of the head (sometimes also called *dependents* of the head, though the term dependent normally also includes adjuncts).

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 30-34.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

(25) _ _-ta **yanu-n**
 _.NOM.SG _-ACC cook-PRS.3SG
 “_ cooks _.”

In our Ayacucho Quechua example from above, the finite verb is the head, and it requires *at least* two further elements in the empty slots of the grammatical “scaffolding” (represented by underscores) in order to become a maximal projection: e.g. *wayna runa* and *mikuy-ta*.



Adjuncts

Beyond the obligatory arguments, there are also *optional* elements that might be used to further modify the utterance. These are called **adjuncts**. Typical adjuncts are adjectives, adverbials and prepositional-phrases.⁶

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 30-34.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

- (26) (wasi-pi) _ _-ta **yanu-n**
house-LOC _.NOM.SG _-ACC cook-PRS.3SG
“_ cooks _ (in the house).”

For example, *wasi-pi* “in the house” can be added to the sentence to further specify where the cooking happens, but it is not required to form a maximal projection of the head-verb *yanu-n*.

⁶Müller 2019, p.34) points out how in some cases these are also obligatory, e.g. with the German reflexive verb *sich befinden* “to be located”, which requires a prepositional phrase, e.g. *in der Stadt* “in town” to form a grammatical sentence.



Section 4: Valence



Chemical Valency/Valence

H



H

Compound: H_2 (Hydrogen)

Valencies: Hydrogen (1)

C



H H H H

Compound: CH_4 (Methane)

Valencies: Carbon (4), Hydrogen (1)

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

“In chemistry, the valence or valency of an element is a measure of its combining power with other atoms when it forms chemical compounds or molecules.”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valence_\(chemistry\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valence_(chemistry))



Valence in Linguistics

“The concept of valence was applied to linguistics by Tesnière (1959): a head needs certain arguments in order to form a stable compound [i.e. a maximal projection]. Words with the same valence – that is which require the same number and type of arguments – are divided into valence classes.”

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 31.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Valence according to Tesnière

“Nous avons vu qu’il y avait de verbes sans actant, des verbes à un actant, des verbes à deux actants et des verbes à trois actants.”

Tesnière (1959). Éléments de syntaxe structurale, p. 238.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

	Verb	V	V	V	V
				/ \	/ \
	Arguments	—	A	A A	A A A
Sentence Type:		impersonal sentence	intransitive sentence	transitive sentence	ditransitive sentence
Valency:		avalent (0)	monovalent (1), one-place predicate	bivalent (2), two-place predicate	trivalent (3), three-place predicate

Note: Müller states that the pronouns in expletives (e.g. *it rains*) should be considered obligatory arguments of the verb, while Tesnière explicitly calls them “sans actant”.



Valence according to Tesnière

“Nous avons vu qu’il y avait de verbes sans actant, des verbes à un actant, des verbes à deux actants et des verbes à trois actants.”

Tesnière (1959). Éléments de syntaxe structurale, p. 238.

Section 1: Recap of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

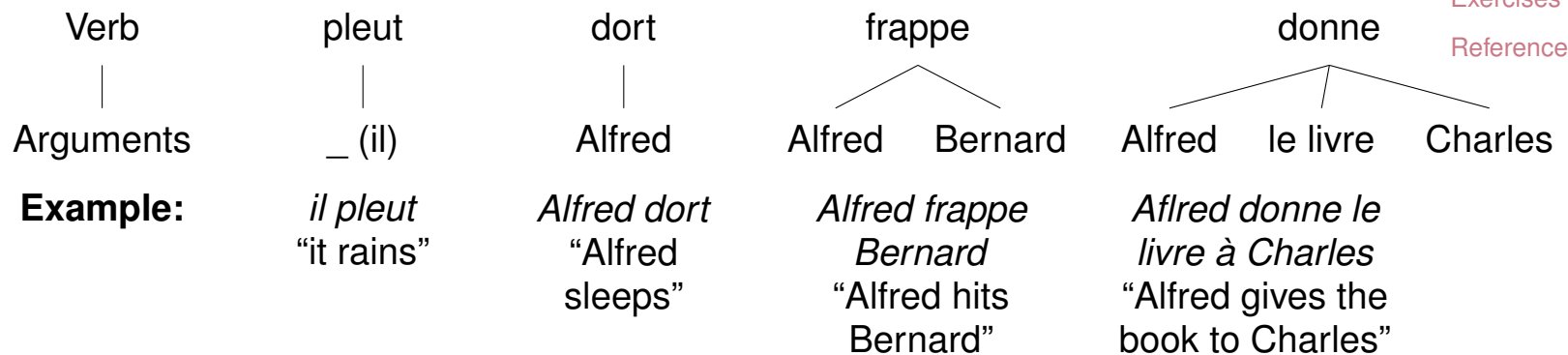
Section 3: Valence

Section 4: Grammatical Functions

Section 5: Recent Research

Exercises

References





Interlude: Valence and Predicate Logic

“The *syntactic arguments* of a head correspond for the most part to their *logical arguments*. We can represent the meaning [...] using predicate logic.”⁷

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 30.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

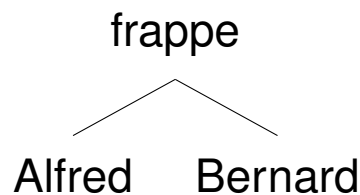
Exercises

References

Example:

Alfred frappe Bernard.

Valence tree:



Predicate logic:

frapper' (alfred', bernard')

⁷We here use the the notation by Müller (2019). In Kroeger (2019), the equivalent formulation would be: FRAPPER(a,c). Also, note that in predicate logic the verb is represented in its infinitive form, not the inflected form. Predicate logic abstracts away from inflectional changes.



Beware: Terminological Confusion

“The classic division describes all verbs which have an object which becomes the subject *under passivization* as *transitive*. Examples of this are verbs such as *love* or *beat*. *Intransitive* verbs, on the other hand, are verbs which have either *no object*, or one that *does not become the subject* in passive sentences.”

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 42.

Beware: According to this classic division two-place predicates (requiring two arguments for a maximal projection) are not necessarily considered transitive verbs.
i.e. *two-place* \neq *transitive*

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Passivization Test

Alfred hits Bernard → **passivization** → *Bernard was hit (by Alfred)*

Conclusion: *hit* requires two arguments, and is a genuinely *transitive* verb.

Alfred weighs seventy kilograms → **passivization** → **Seventy kilograms were weighed (by Alfred)*

Conclusion: *weigh* requires two arguments (**Alfred weighs*), but is not a *transitive* verb according to the passivization test.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Section 4: Grammatical Functions



Subject and Object

“In some theories, grammatical functions such as **subject** and **object** form part of the formal description of language (see Chapter 7 on Lexical Functional Grammar, for example). [...] it is by no means a trivial matter to arrive at a definition of the word subject which can be used cross-linguistically.”

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 35.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Grammatical Functions: Subject

The following syntactic properties defining a subject are cited by Müller:

- ▶ agreement of the finite verb with it
- ▶ nominative case in non-copular clauses
- ▶ omitted in infinitival clauses
- ▶ optional in imperatives

Müller (2019). Grammatical theory, p. 35.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Valence and Grammatical Functions

“If we can be clear about what we want to view as a subject, then the definition of *object* is no longer difficult: objects are all other arguments whose form is directly determined by a given head. [...] it is commonplace to talk of *direct objects* and *indirect objects*. The direct object gets its name from the fact that – unlike the indirect object – the referent of a direct object is directly affected by the action denoted by the verb.”

Müller (2019), p. 38.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References

	Verb	V	V	V	V
				/ \	/ \
	Arguments	—	A	A A	A A A
Gramm. Functions:		None or SUBJ	SUBJ	SUBJ, OBJ	SUBJ, DOBJ, IOBJ
Valency:		avalent (0)	monovalent (1)	bivalent (2)	trivalent (3)

Notation: DOBJ (direct object), IOBJ (indirect object)



The Cross-Linguistic Perspective

“The terms *subject* and *object* are used here in a rather informal semantic sense, to denote the more agent-like and more patient-like elements respectively. Their use here can be defined in terms of the notions S, A, and P, where the S is the single argument in an intransitive clause, the A is the more *agent-like argument* in a transitive clause, and the P is the more *patient-like argument* in a transitive clause. ”

Dryer (2013). Order of subject, object and verb.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

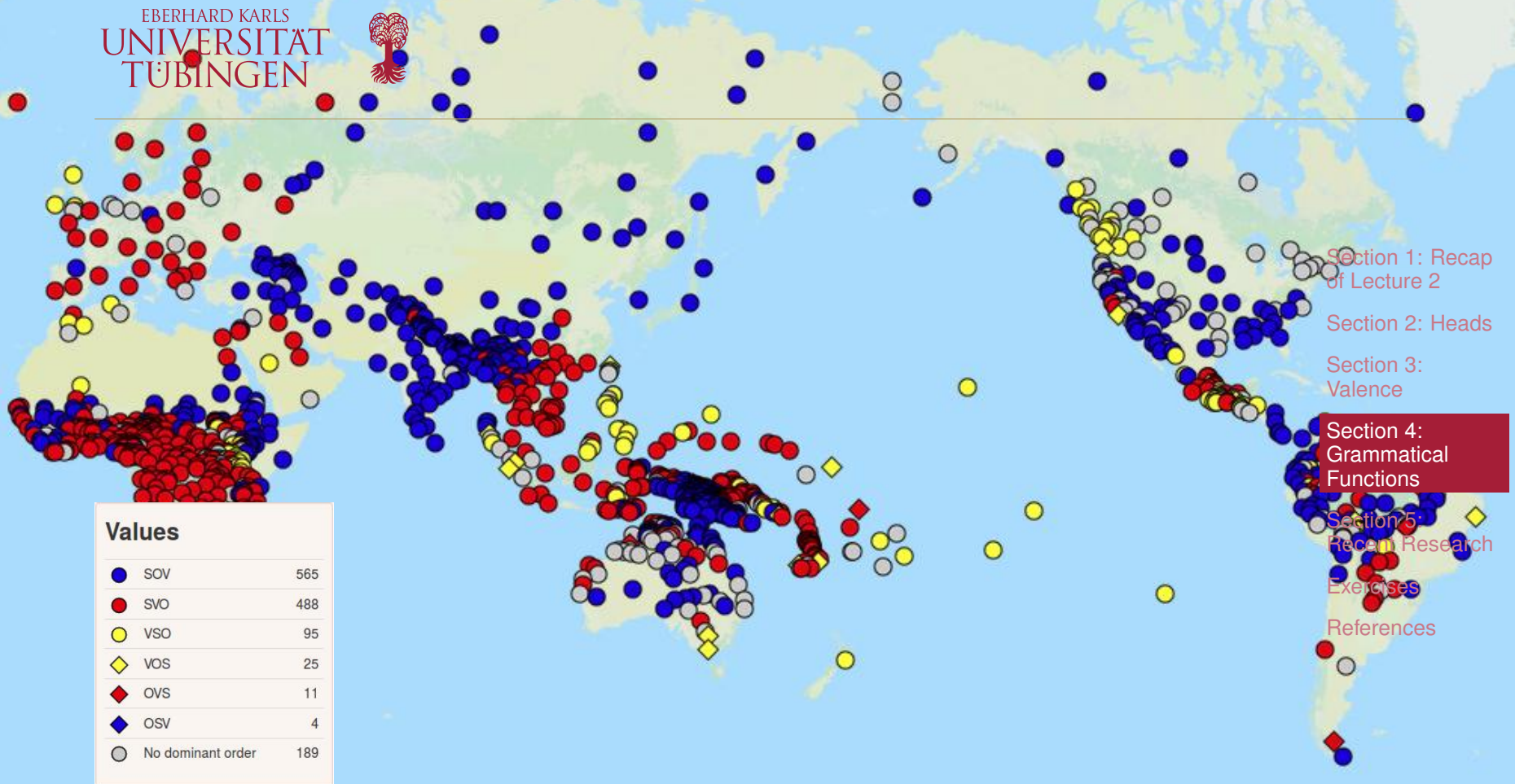
References

Intransitive Example:

(27) Alfred dort.
S V
“Alfred sleeps.”

Transitive Example:

(28) Alfred frappe Bernard.
S(A) V O(P)
“Alfred hits Bernard.”



WALS Chapter 81

Basic order of Subject, Object and Verb for 1377 languages

source: <https://wals.info/chapter/81>



The Six Possible Orders

SOV

(29) Ainu (Isolate: Japan)

kamuy aynu rayke
bear person kill

“The bear killed the person.”

SVO

(30) Matuumbi (Niger-Congo)

abɥnwaásj aachéngjte ñɥúmba
PN he.built house

“Abumwas built a house.”

Velupillai (2012). An Introduction to Linguistic Typology, p. 285.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



The Six Possible Orders

VSO

(31) Irish (Indo-European)

tógann Máire an cat
lift.PRES PN ART cat

“Mary lifts the cat.”

VOS

(32) Cèmuhî (Austronesian)

ε ālī-hĩ ā-li mwà ɔ pā-li āpūlīp
3SG see-TR ART:NEUT-DEF house SUBJ ART:NF-DEF man

“The man saw the house.”

Velupillai (2012). An Introduction to Linguistic Typology, p. 285.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



The Six Possible Orders

OVS

(33) Hixkaryana (Carib)

toto y-ahosi-ye kamara
man 3:3-grab-distant.pst jaguar

“The jaguar grabbed the man.”

OSV

(34) Warao (Isolate: Venezuela)

erike hube abun-ae
PN snake bite-PAST

“A snake bit Enrique.”

First example: Dryer (2013). Order of subject, object and verb.

Second example: Velupillai (2012). An Introduction to Linguistic Typology, p. 285.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

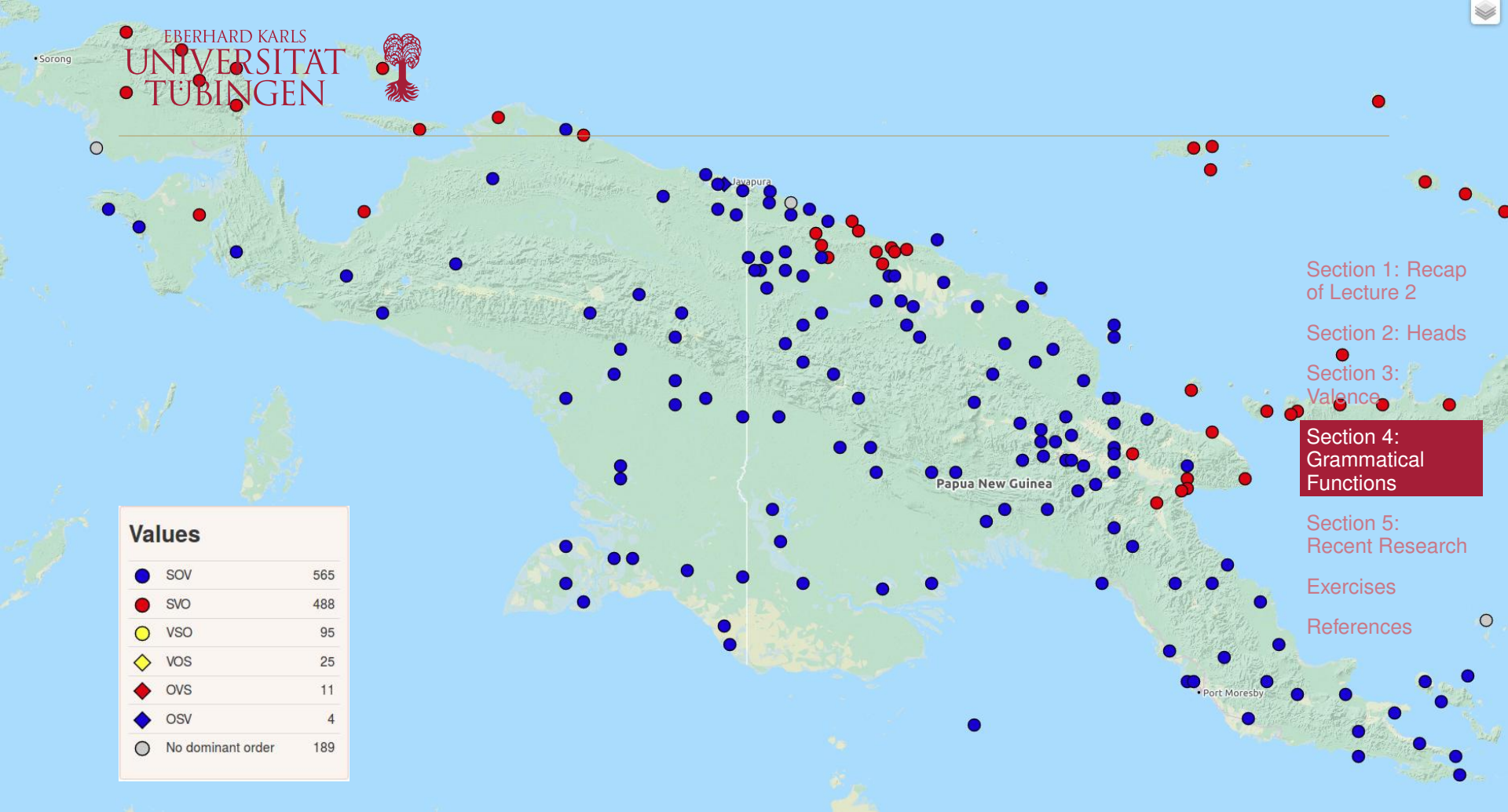
Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

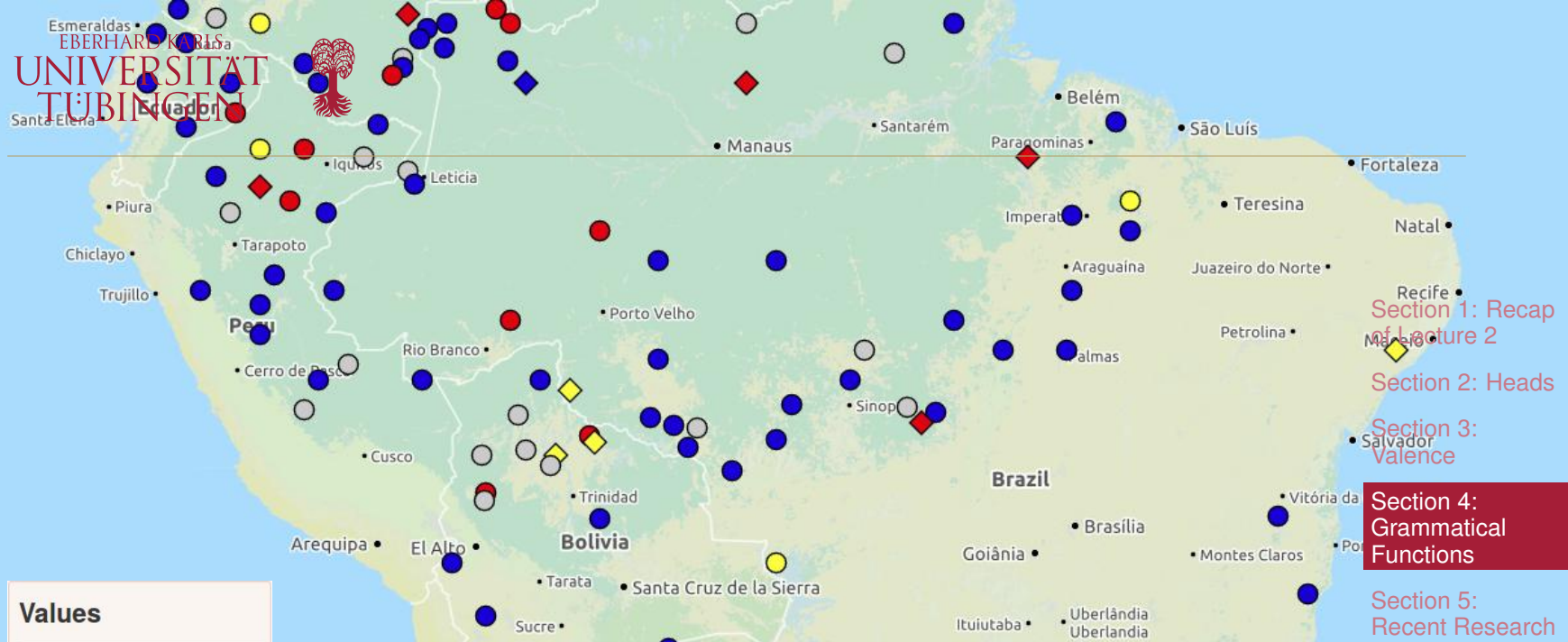
Exercises

References



WALS Chapter 81 Papua New Guinea

A linguistic puzzle: Why are some areas diverse in languages but homogeneous in word orders? ...



Section 1: Recap of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3: Valence

Section 4: Grammatical Functions

Section 5: Recent Research

Exercises

References

WALS Chapter 81

South America

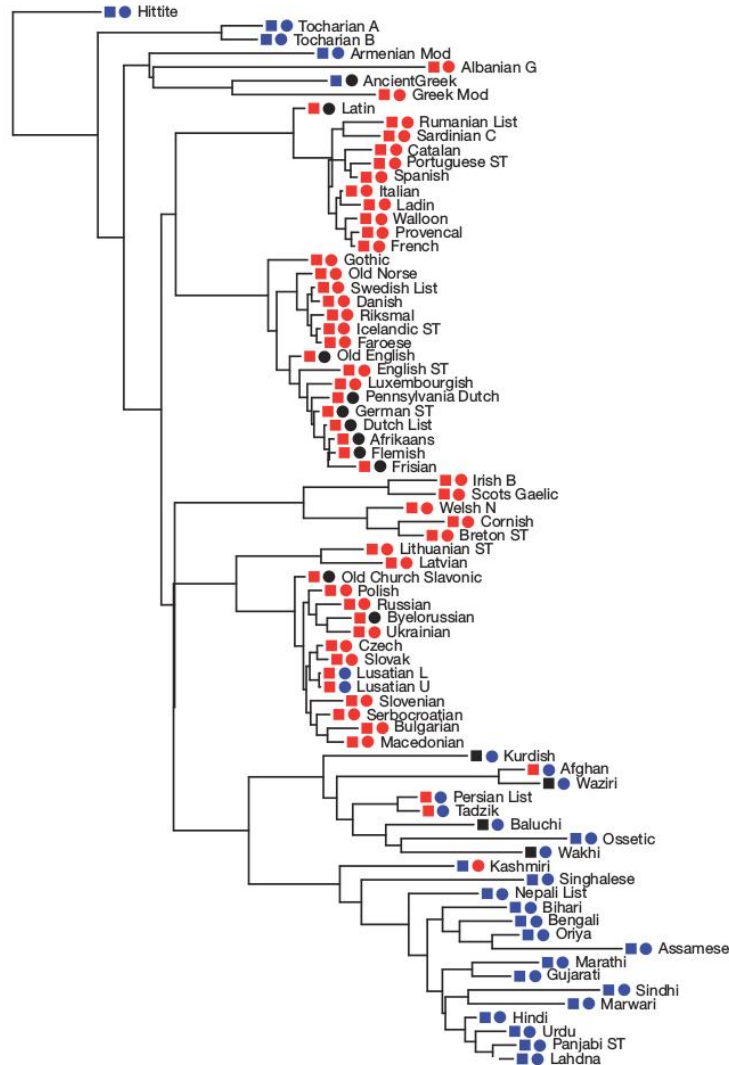
... While others are diverse in languages *and* word orders?



Section 5: Recent Research



Indo-European



- : VO order
- : OV order
- : no dominant order

Dunn et al. (2011). Evolved structure of languages shows lineage-specific trends in word-order universals.

Section 1: Recap of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

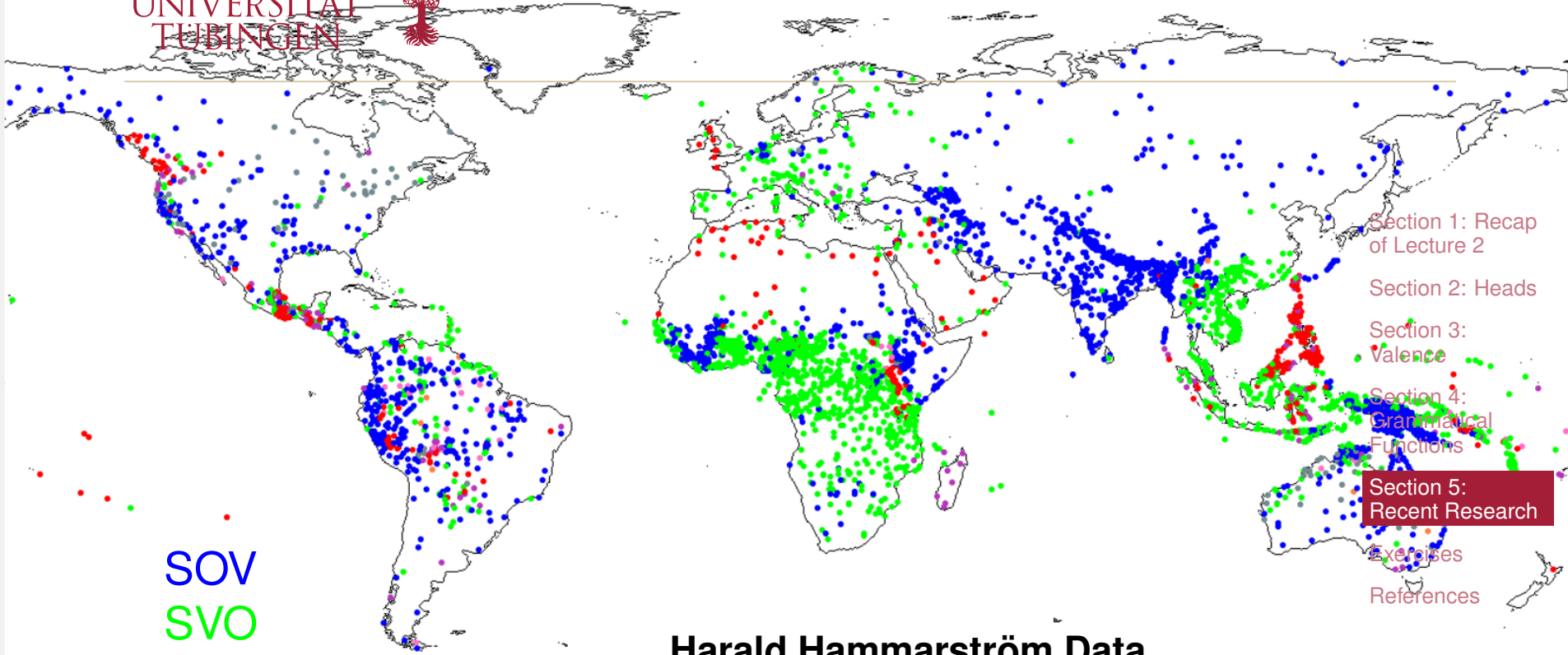
Section 3: Valence

Section 4: Grammatical Functions

Section 5: Recent Research

Exercises

References

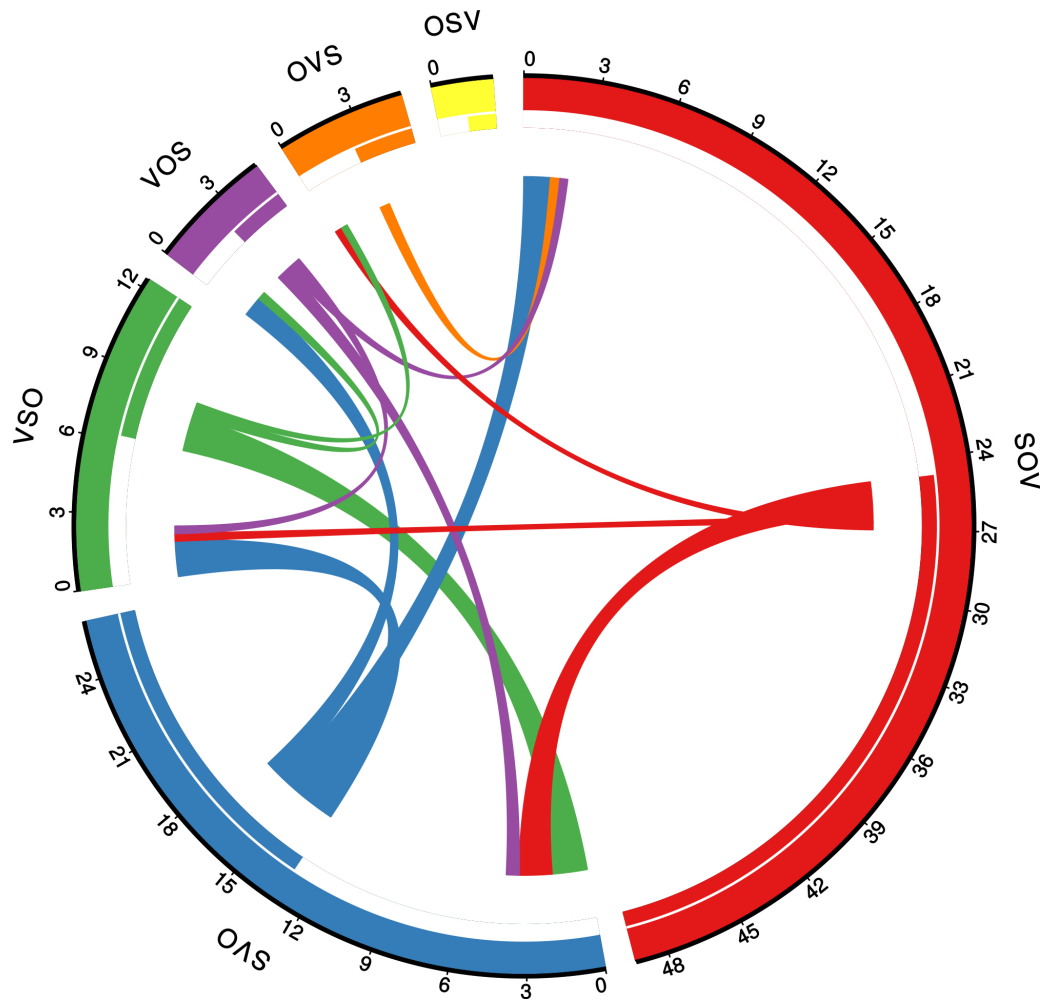


- SOV
- SVO
- VSO
- VOS
- OVS
- OSV

No Dominant Order

Harald Hammarström Data

Basic order of Subject, Object and Verb for more than 5000 languages (not yet available online)



Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

**Section 5:
Recent Research**

Exercises

References

Jäger et al. (forthcoming).



Exercises: Tutorial Week 2



Exercise 1: Determine the Heads

Consider the following example sentence from a Rapanui story:

Rapanui (rap, Austronesian)

- (35) Ku ngaro te rū'au ki roto ki te māhina.
PRF disappear ART old_woman to inside to ART moon
“The old woman disappeared into the moon.”

Adopted from: Kieviet (2017). A grammar of Rapa Nui.

Tasks:

- ▶ Determine the heads for the following phrases of the English translation: *the old woman disappeared*; *the old woman*; *old woman*; *into the moon*; *the moon*. Therefore, prepare a table giving the phrase in the first column, the type of phrase in the second column, and the head of the phrase in the third column.
- ▶ Now do the same for the corresponding phrases in the Rapanui original.
- ▶ Discuss the problems that arise.

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Exercise 2: Valence

Consider the following example sentences from an Imonda story:

Imonda (imn, Border (Papua New Guinea))

- (36) atha ne-n-b.
sugarcane eat-PST-DUR⁸
“He ate sugarcane.”
- (37) nne sobsaba fi-ni-n-b.
food cut do-BEN-PST-DUR
“They cut garden food for her.”
- (38) ka toad-m lōl-nòg
1 boys-GL talk-in.vain
“I talked to the boys in vain.”

Adopted from: Seiler (1985). Imonda, a Papuan language.

⁸Glosses: DUR (durative marker, i.e. marking an ongoing event); PST (past tense); BEN (benefactive marker, i.e. somebody is receiving sth.); 1 (first person); GL (goal marker, i.e. sb. is the goal of some action).

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Exercise 2: Valence

Tasks:

- ▶ Give the arguments, the type of sentence (transitivity), and the valency for the English translations. Therefore, prepare a table with this information in the columns.
- ▶ Compare this to what you would infer about valency (considering the glossing) in the original sentences in Imonda. Which problems arise?

Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



*Exercise 3: The puzzle of word order distributions

Tasks:

- ▶ Discuss in class which factors might influence the uneven distribution of word order diversity. I.e. why do we find consistent SOV word order across Papua New Guinea, while in the Amazon we find all six possible word orders?
- ▶ Discuss in class what might be the factors that drove the split between (S)VO word order and (S)OV word order within the Indo-European phylogeny.

Section 1: Recap of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3: Valence

Section 4: Grammatical Functions

Section 5: Recent Research

Exercises

References



References



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Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



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Section 1: Recap
of Lecture 2

Section 2: Heads

Section 3:
Valence

Section 4:
Grammatical
Functions

Section 5:
Recent Research

Exercises

References



Thank You.

Contact:

Faculty of Philosophy

General Linguistics

Dr. Christian Bentz

SFS Wihlemstraße 19-23, Room 1.24

chris@christianbentz.de

Office hours:

During term: Wednesdays 10-11am

Out of term: arrange via e-mail