On the semantics and pragmatics of negation and their effects on the structure of negatives in a cross-linguistic perspective

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Abstract

Cross-linguistic typological work on negation has paid most attention to standard negation, i.e. the negation of declarative verbal main clauses (Dahl 1979; Payne 1985; Dryer 2013a,b,c; Miestamo 2005, 2013). Other aspects of negation that have received at least some attention in large-scale typological studies include the negation of imperatives (van der Auwera & Lejeune 2013), the negation of stative (nonverbal, existential, etc.) predications (Croft 1991; Eriksen 2011; Veselinova 2013), the negation of indefinite pronouns (Haspelmath 1997, 2013; Van Alsenoy 2014), abessives (Stolz et al. 2007), the effects of negation on the marking of NPs (Miestamo 2014), and negative replies to questions (Holmberg 2015) – for a recent overview of typological work on negation, see Miestamo 2017. Currently, typological work is underway on various aspects of the typology of negation: e.g., Veselinova's work on negative lexicalizations and the relationship between negation and TAM, Miestamo & Koptjevskaja Tamm's work on antonyms, Van Olmen's work on negative imperatives, and Mauri & Sansò's work on anticircumstantial clauses as well as Miestamo, Shagal & Silvennoinen's work on negation in dependent clauses.

   In typological work, explanations for cross-linguistic generalizations are most often sought in the functional properties of the phenomenon under study. Such explanations include, for example, economy-based explanations of cross-linguistic markedness patterns, e.g. explaining the markedness of the plural by its lower text frequency as compared to the singular. In this talk, instead of first presenting typological generalizations on the structure of negatives and then discussing their possible functional explanations, I will turn the perspective around, start from the functional properties (semantics, pragmatics, processing etc) of negation and see what kinds of negative structures they may give rise to. I will discuss ways in which negation differs from affirmation in its semantics and pragmatics, paying attention for example to the discourse context of negation, and how such differences can be seen as motivating various cross-linguistically recurring structural patterns in negatives. This shift of perspective will help us to see connections between different typological properties of negatives that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Outline

- Background

- The discourse context of negation

- Stativity and dynamicity

- Reality status

- Frequency

Background

The domain of negation

- Clausal negation
  - standard negation
  - negation in non-declaratives
  - negation of stative predications
  - negation in non-main clauses
  - negative lexicalizations.

- Non-clausal negation
  - negative replies
  - negative indefinites and quantifiers
  - negative derivation, case marking and adpositions

- Other aspects of negation
  - scope of negation
  - negative polarity
  - marking of NPs in the scope of negation
  - reinforcing negation
  - negation, coordination and complex sentences
  - Further: neg-raising, contrastive negation, metalinguistic negation, diachrony, etc.

For an overview, see:
Miestamo, Matti. 2017. Negation. In Alexandra Aikhenvald & R.M.W. Dixon (eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Typology*, 405-439. Cambridge: CUP.

This is also the structure of the Questionnaire for describing the negation system of a language. Available online via http://tulquest.huma-num.fr/fr/node/134.

Standard negation

- Informally: The basic means a language has for negating declarative main clauses with a verbal predicate..

- Definition (comparative concept):

  "A standard negation construction is a construction whose function is to modify a verbal declarative main clause expressing a proposition p in such a way that the modified clause expresses the proposition with the opposite truth value to p, i.e. ~p, or the proposition used as the closest equivalent to ~p in case the clause expressing ~p cannot be formed in the language, and that is (one of) the productive and general means the language has for performing this function." (Miestamo 2005: 42)

Standard negation

- *King Arthur was barking on the balcony.*

- *King Arthur was not barking on the balcony.*

- *King Arthur barks on the balcony.*

- *King Arthur does not bark on the balcony.*

Large-scale typological work on negation

- Standard negation
  - Dahl 1979; Payne 1985; Forest 1993; Honda 1996; Dryer 2013a,b,c [2005, 2011a,b]; Miestamo 2005, 2013[2005]; Miestamo & van der Auwera 2011.

- Negative imperatives (prohibitives)
  - van der Auwera & Lejeune 2013[2005]; van Olmen ongoing.

- Stative predications
  - Croft 1991; Eriksen 2011; Veselinova 2013, 2015.

- Negative indefinites
  - Kahrel 1996; Haspelmath 1997, 2013[2005]; Van Alsenoy 2014.

- Abessives
  - Stolz et al. 2007.

- Effects of negation on the marking on NPs
  - Miestamo 2014.

- Negative replies to questions
  - Holmberg 2015.

Symmetric and asymmetric negation (Miestamo 2005)

- In symmetric negation, negatives do not differ structurally from affirmatives except for the presence of the negative marker(s).

- In asymmetric negation, there are structural differences, i.e. asymmetry, between affirmatives and negatives in addition to the presence of the negative marker(s).

- Symmetry and asymmetry can be observed in constructions and paradigms.

- Asymmetric negation can be further divided into subtypes.

Symmetric constructions

Negatives differ from their corresponding affirmatives by the mere presence of negative markers.

Taba (Bowden 1997: 388)
a. *n-han*   *ak-la*
   3SG-go ALL-sea
   'She's going seawards.'

b. *n-han*   *ak-la*   *te*
   3SG-go ALL-sea NEG
   'She's not going seawards.'

Washo (Jacobsen 1964: 603, 604–605)
a. *lᵉ-íme?-hu-i*
   1-drink-PL.INCL-IMPF
   'We are drinking.'

b. *lᵉ-íme?-éˑs-hu-i*
   1-drink-NEG-PL.INCL-IMPF
   'We are not drinking.'

Symmetric paradigms

The correspondences between the members of the paradigms used in affirmatives and negatives are one-to-one.

Romanian (Indo-European, Romance)

a.	(a) cânta 'to sing'	PRS		b.	(a) cânta 'to sing'	IMPF
	AFF	NEG			AFF	NEG
1SG	cânt	nu cânt			cântam	nu cântam
2SG	cânţi	nu cânţi			cântai	nu cântai
3SG	cântă	nu cântă			cânta	nu cânta
1PL	cântăm	nu cântăm			cântam	nu cântam
2PL	cântaţi	nu cântaţi			cântaţi	nu cântaţi
3PL	cântă	nu cântă			cântau	nu cântau

(constructed examples)

Asymmetric constructions

Negatives differ from their corresponding affirmatives by something else than the mere presence of negative marker(s).

Diola Fogny (Sapir 1965: 33)
a. *pan-i-maŋ*
   FUT-1SG-want
   'I will want.'

b. *lɛt-i-maŋ*
   FUT.NEG-1SG-want
   'I won't want.'

Makah (Matthew Davidson, p.c.)
a. *weʔič-(b)u-°i*   *łaˑx̣uk-°iq*
   sleeping-PST-IND.3SG   man-ART
   'The man was sleeping'
b. *wikiˑ-(b)u-°i*   *weʔič*   *łaˑx̣uk-°iq*
   NEG-PST-IND.3SG sleeping   man-ART
   'The man was not sleeping.'

Asymmetric paradigms

Burmese (Sino-Tibetan, Burmese-Lolo)

a.   *θwâ-dé*

    go-ACL

    'goes, went'

b.   *θwâ-mé*

    go-POT

    'will go'

c.   *θwâ-bí*

    go-PRF

    'has gone'

d.   *ma-θwâ-bû*

    NEG-go-NEG

    'does/did/will not go, has not gone' (Cornyn 1944: 12–13)

> The correspondences between the members of the paradigms used in affirmatives and negatives are not one-to-one.

FORM
(linguistic
structure)   Affirmative ➡️ Negative

FUNCTION
(semantics,   Affirmation   Negation
pragmatics)

(Adapted from Miestamo 2005)

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FORM
(linguistic
structure)

Affirmative → Negative

FUNCTION
(semantics,
pragmatics)

Affirmation
- reality
- stativity/dynamicity
- neutral context
- high frequency
- etc

Negation
- non-reality
- stativity
- (pre)supposed context
- low frequency
- etc

(Adapted from Miestamo 2005)

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Performance–Grammar Correspondence Hypothesis (PGCH)

- Grammars have conventionalized syntactic structures in proportion to their degree of preference in performance, as evidenced by patterns of selection in corpora and by ease of processing in psycholinguistic experiments. (Hawkins 2004: 3)

The discourse context of negation

The discourse context of negation

- Negatives typically occur in contexts where the corresponding affirmative is supposed or at least somehow present.

  A: *Oh, King Arthur didn't bite anyone!*

  B: *Erm... why... does he usually do that?*

- Givón 1978, cf. Tottie 1991, Thompson 1998

Effects of the discourse context of negation: neutralization

- With the corresponding affirmative present in the context, there is less need to specify the temporal, aspectual or modal properties or the participants in the negative than in the affirmative.

- Discourse preference in languages in general, and in many languages, it has grammaticalized as neutralization of grammatical distinctions in negatives.

- The discourse effect is being tested in our ongoing work (Miestamo, Shagal & Silvennoinen).

Amele (Roberts 1987: 224–225)

a. f-ec 'to see'

	TDPST	YDPST	RMPST	NEG.PST
1SG	fi-g-a	fi-g-an	fe-em	qee + fe-l-em
2 SG	fa-g-a	fa-g-an	fe-em	fe-l-em
3 SG	fe-i-a	fe-i-an	fe-n	fe-l
1DU	fo-w-a	fo-w-an	fo-h	fo-lo-h
2/3DU	fe-si-a	fe-si-an	fe-sin	fe-le-sin
1PL	fo-q-a	fo-q-an	fo-m	fo-lo-m
2/3PL	fe-ig-a	fe-ig-an	fe-in	fe-l-ein

(Subtype A/Cat/TAM/Neutr in Miestamo 2005)

Hunzib (van den Berg 1995: 76–77)

a. *čax* 'write'

	AFFIRMATIVE	NEGATIVE
PRETERITE	*čáx-er*	*čax-ís*
PRESENT 1/2 PERSON	*čáx-čo*	*čax-č-át'*
PRESENT 3 PERSON	*čax*	*čax-át'*
AORIST	*čax-ǻ*	–
FUTURE	*čax-ǻr*	*čax-óys*

b. *-ê̌ƛ'e* 'go'

	AFFIRMATIVE	NEGATIVE
PRETERITE	*ê̌ƛ'e-r*	*ê̌ƛ'-ís*
PRESENT 1/2 PERSON	*ê̌ƛ'e-č*	*ê̌ƛ'e-č-át'*
PRESENT 3 PERSON	*ê̌ƛ'e*	*ê̌ƛ'-át'*
AORIST	*ê̌ƛ'-ǻ*	–
FUTURE	*ê̌ƛ'-ǻr*	*ê̌ƛ'-óys*

(Subtype A/Cat/TAM/Neutr in Miestamo 2005)

Harar Oromo (Owens 1985: 66)

   a. 'go', PST.AFF

      1SG   *deem-e*

      2SG   *deem-t-e*

      3SG.M *deem-e*

      3SG.F *deem-t-e*
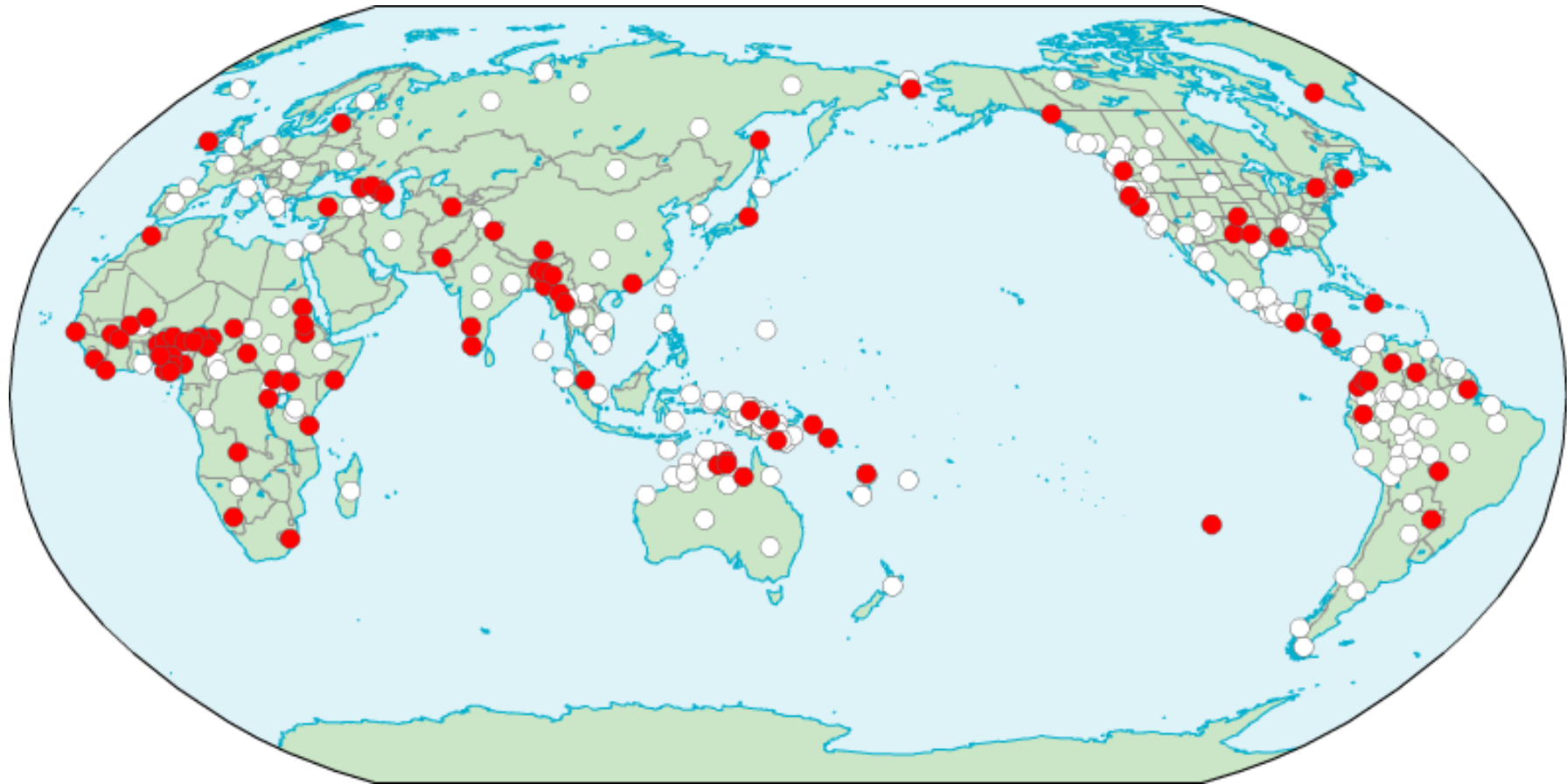
      1PL   *deem-n-e*

      2PL   *deem-t-ani*

      3PL   *deem-ani*

   b. 'go', PST.NEG

      ALL PERSONS *hin-déem-n-e*

(Subtype A/Cat/PNG/Neutr in Miestamo 2005)

Subtype A/Cat/TAM

○ 1. [201] Not-A/Cat/TAM
● 2. [96] A/Cat/TAM

NB! Not all of these involve neutralization. Neutralization of TAM categories (A/Cat/TAM/Neutr) found in 19% of the sample languages, neutralization of PNG categories (A/Cat/PNG/Neutr) is rare, just 2 % of the sample languages.

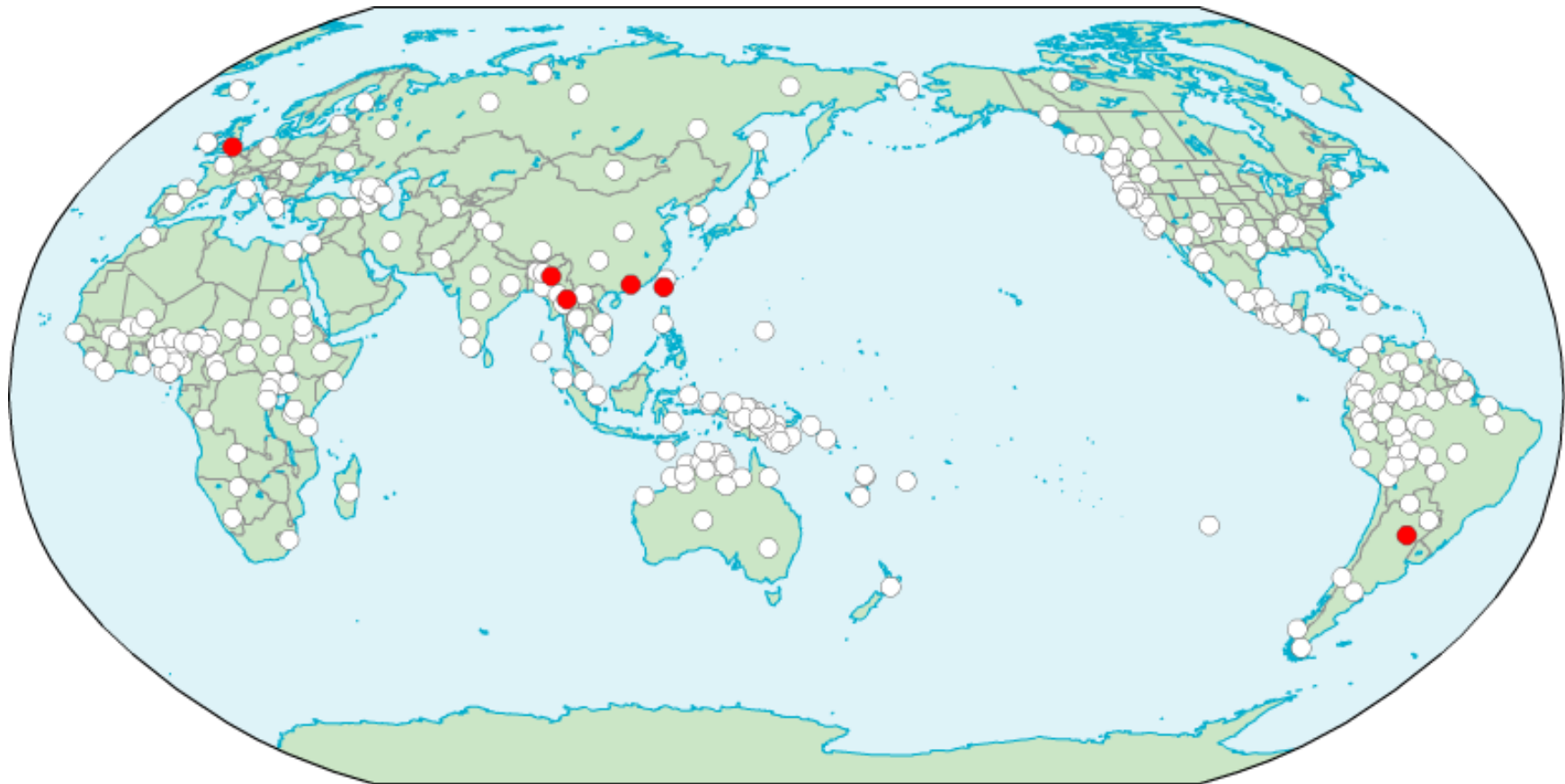# Effects of the discourse context of negation: emphasis

- In its typical discourse-context, negation involves contrast with something (pre)supposed in the context and as an abrupt speech act therefore often needs reinforcement.

- Discourse preference for emphasising negation may grammaticalize as

  ➡ emphatic marking in standard negation

  ➡ double/multiple negator constructions via Jespersen Cycles.

Meithei (Chelliah 1997: 133, 228)

a. *təw-í*   b.   *təw-e*

     do-NHYP   do-ASS

     '(She) does.'   '(Yes, she) has.'

c. *əy fotostat*   *təw-tə-e*

     I   photostat   do-NEG-ASS

     'I haven't made copies.'

(Type A/Emph in Miestamo 2005)

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Type A/Emph

Double/multiple negators

French (constructed example)

Elle	ne	viendra	pas.
3SG.F	NEG	come.FUT.3SG	NEG

'She will not come.'

Nese (Crowley 2006: 70)

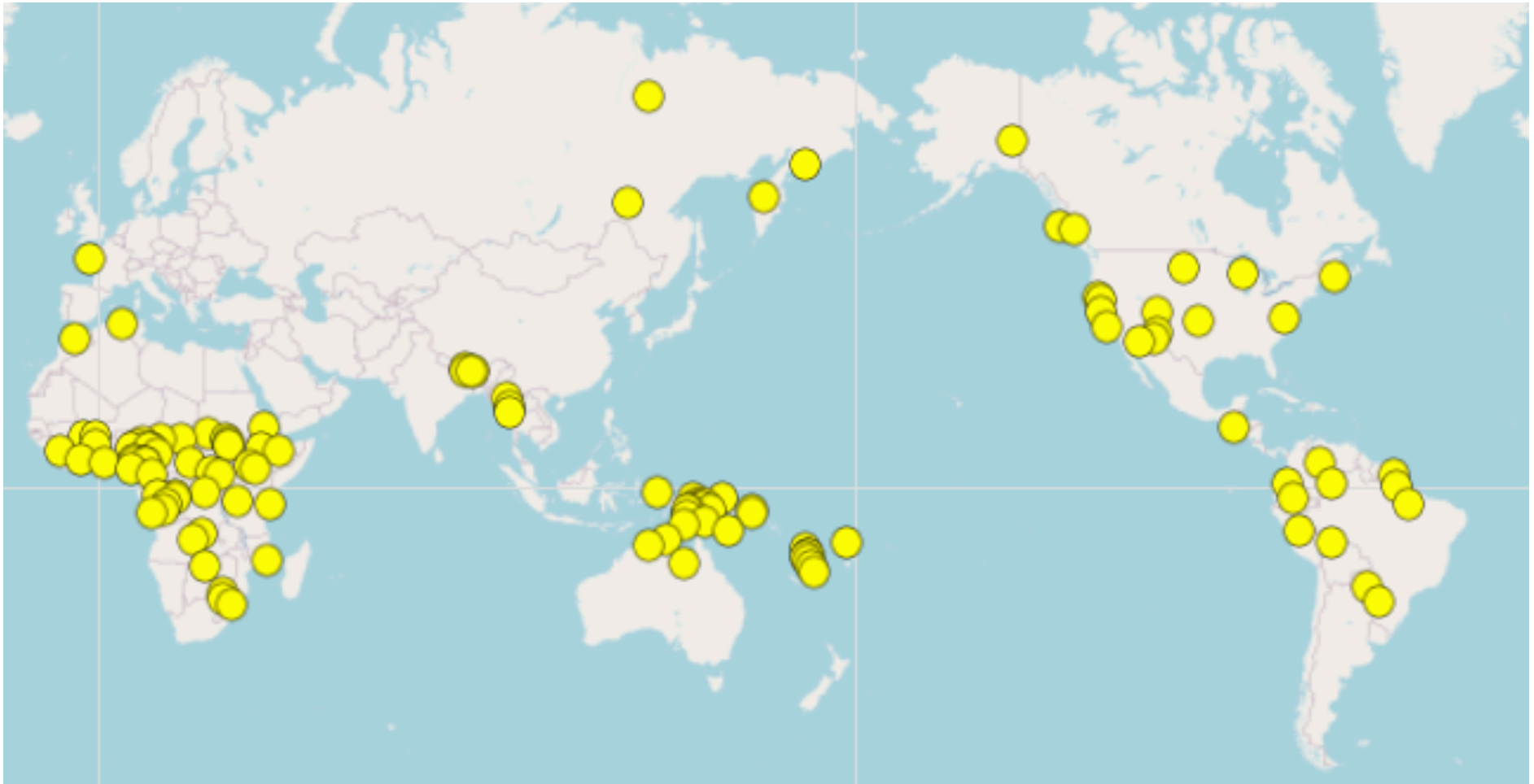∅-se-be-yes-te

3SG.R-NEG-NEG-walk-NEG

'(S)he did not walk.'

Lewo (Early 1994: 405)

pe-re	a-pim	re	poli
NEG-NEG	3PL.S-R.come	NEG	NEG

'They didn't come.'

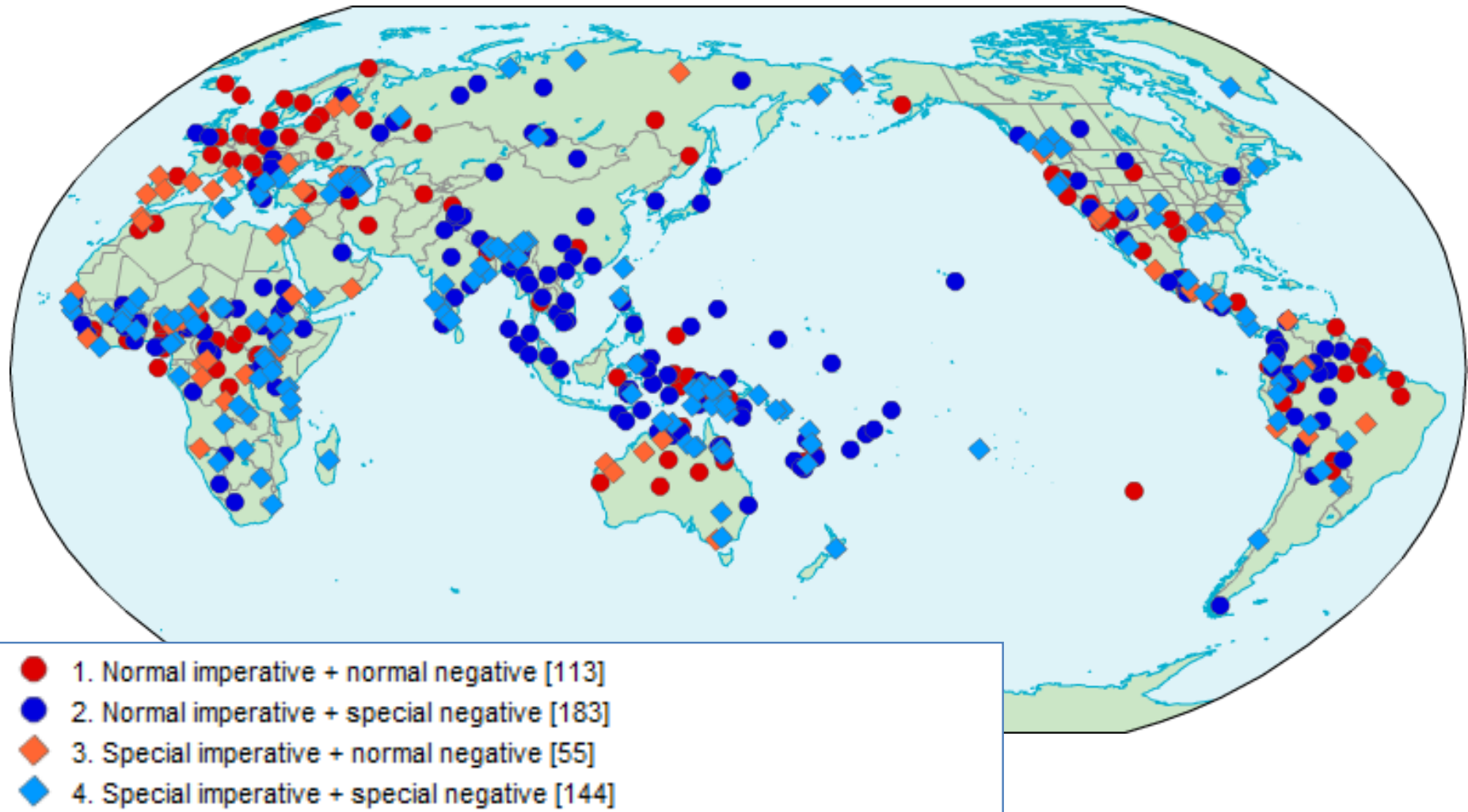# Languages with double/multiple negators: 119/1157 (Dryer 2013)

Effects of the discourse context of negation: emphasis

- Perhaps also:

  ➡ prohibitives as a special speech act also partly related to emphasis (cf. van der Auwera 2006)

  ➡ Neg-First partly motivated by emphasis, important to express negation early in the sentence (cf. MaOP, Hawkins 2004)
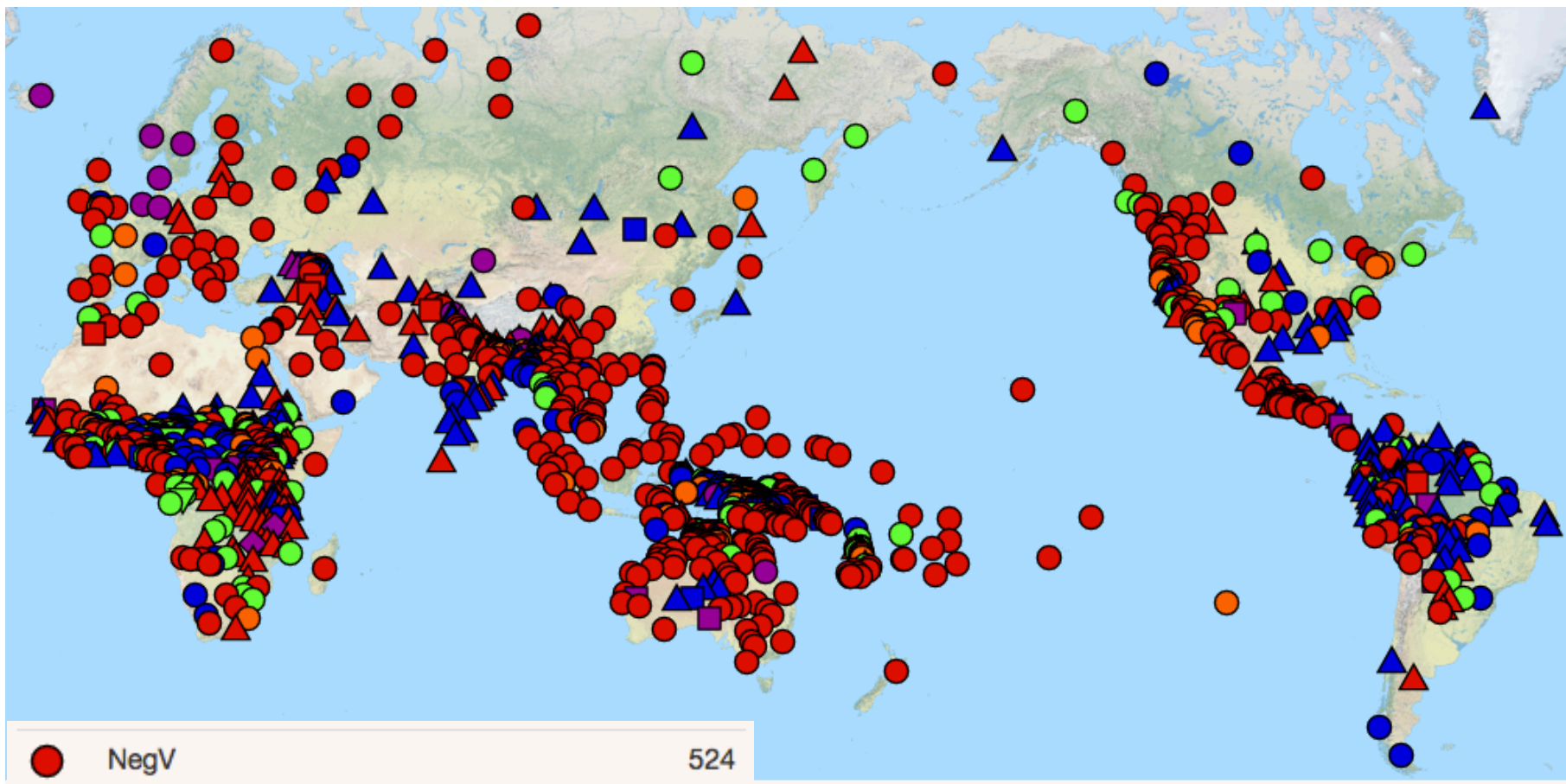
Negative imperatives
(van der Auwera & Lejeune 2005)

- ● 1. Normal imperative + normal negative [113]
- ● 2. Normal imperative + special negative [183]
- ◆ 3. Special imperative + normal negative [55]
- ◆ 4. Special imperative + special negative [144]

Position of negative marker

(Dryer 2013b)

●	NegV	524
●	VNeg	171
▲	[Neg-V]	162
▲	[V-Neg]	202

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Effects of the discourse context of negation: referentiality

- Negation and referentiality (Givón 1978: 72)

  John met a girl yesterday   *John didn't meet a girl yesterday*

  ... and Fred met one too   *... and Fred didn't meet one either*

  ... and Fred met her too   **... and Fred didn't meet her either*

  – Negative sentences are not used to introduce new referents to the discourse. Referential objects are first introduced in affirmatives and appear as definite in negatives.

- Some languages have grammaticalized this discourse preference in their grammars.

NPs under negation

Araki (Alex François, p.c.)

a. *nam les-i-a   jau   lo lepa*
   1SG.R see-OBJ.REF-3SG coconut.crab LOC ground
   'I've seen the/a coconut crab on the ground.'

b. *nam les-i-a   jau   mo-hese lo   lepa*
   1SG.R see-OBJ.REF-3SG coconut.crab 3.R-one LOC   ground
   'I've seen a coconut crab on the ground.'

c. *nam je les re   jau   lo lepa*
   1SG.R NEG see PART coconut.crab LOC ground
   'I haven't seen any coconut crab on the ground.'

d. *nam je les-i-a   jau   lo lepa*
   1SG.R NEG see-OBJ.REF-3SG coconut.crab LOC ground
   'I haven't seen the coconut crab on the ground.'
   [but not *'I haven't seen a coconut crab.']

NPs under negation

Araki (Alex François, p.c.)

a. *nam je les-i-a jau mo-hese lo leǯa
   1SG.R NEG see-OBJ.REF-3SG c.crab 3.R-one LOC ground
   *'I haven't seen a coconut crab on the ground.'

b. *nam les re jau lo leǯa
   1SG.R see PART coconut.crab LOC ground
   *'I have seen any coconut crab on the ground.'

c. na pa han re jau
   1SG.IRR FUT eat PART coconut.crab
   'I will eat a/some coconut crab.'

d. na pa han-i-a jau
   1SG.IRR FUT eat-OBJ.REF-3SG coconut.crab
   'I will eat the coconut crab.'

NPs under negation

French (constructed examples)

a. *je vois un chien*
   I   see.1SG INDEF dog
   'I see a dog.'

b. *je ne vois pas de chien*
   I   NEG see.1SG NEG PART dog
   'I do not see a dog.'

c. *il y a un livre sur la table*
   EXIST INDEF book on DEF table
   'There is a book on the table.'

d. *il n'y a pas de livre sur la table*
   EXIST.NEG PART book on DEF table
   'There is not a book on the table.'

NPs under negation

Finnish (constructed examples)

a. *söin*   *banaani-n*
eat.PST.1SG banana-GEN
'I ate {a/the} banana.'

b. *söin*   *banaani-t*
eat.PST.1SG banana-PL.NOM
'I ate the bananas.'

c. *söin*   *banaani-a*
eat.PST.1SG banana-PART
'I {ate some / was eating {a/the}} banana.'

d. *söin*   *banaane-j-a*
eat.PST.1SG banana-PL-PART
'I {ate (some) / was eating {(some)/the}} bananas.'

Finnish (constructed examples)

a. *en*   *syönyt*   *banaani-a*
NEG.1SG eat.PST.PTCP banana-PART
'I {didn't eat / wasn't eating} {a/the} banana.'

b. *en*   *syönyt*   *banaane-j-a*
NEG.1SG eat.PST.PTCP banana-PL-PART
'I {didn't eat / wasn't eating} (the) bananas.'

NPs under negation

Xhosa (Taraldsen 2010: 1526)

  a. *ndi-bon-a*   *aba-fundi*
     1SG-see-FV 2-student
     'I see the/some students'

  b. *a-ndi-bon-i*   *ba-fundi*
     NEG-1SG-see-FV 2-student
     'I don't see any students'

  c. *a-ndi-ba-bon-i*   *aba-fundi*
     NEG-1SG-2-see-FV 2-student
     'I don't see the students'
     'There are some student I don't see.'

Cf. work on Nguni languages by Miestamo & al. (2019); Bloom Ström & Miestamo (forthcoming).

NPs under negation
Changes in marking, Miestamo 2014:

Partitive/genitive case used	Finnic: Finnish, Estonian, Votic, Liv, etc.; Baltic: Lithuanian, Latvian; Slavic: Russian, Ukrainian, Polish; Basque
Non-specific (partitive) determiner used	Araki, Maˇvea, Samoan and various other Polynesian languages; French
Omission / restrictions on use of article	Albanian; Hungarian; Nambikuára
Absence of default determiner possible	Kita Maninka; Bantu: Xhosa, Zulu, Bemba, Bobangi, Kinyarwanda, Luganda
Class marker obligatory	Nunggubuyu
Absence of referentiality marker on verb	Hdi
Partitive marker on verb	Paamese
Effects on focus marking	Aghem; Kanuri; Lavukaleve
Effects on alignment	Northern Ge: Kayapó, Canela, Apinayé; Yimas

Stativity vs. dynamicity

Stativity vs. dynamicity

- The situations reported by negative statements are stative (b,d), but affirmatives can describe both stative (a) and dynamic (c) situations.

    English (constructed examples)

    a. *chris knows the song*

    b. *chris does not know the song*

    c. *chris drank the coffee*

    d. *chris did not drink the coffee*

- Negatives construed as stative predications in many languages (Type A/Fin in Miestamo 2005).
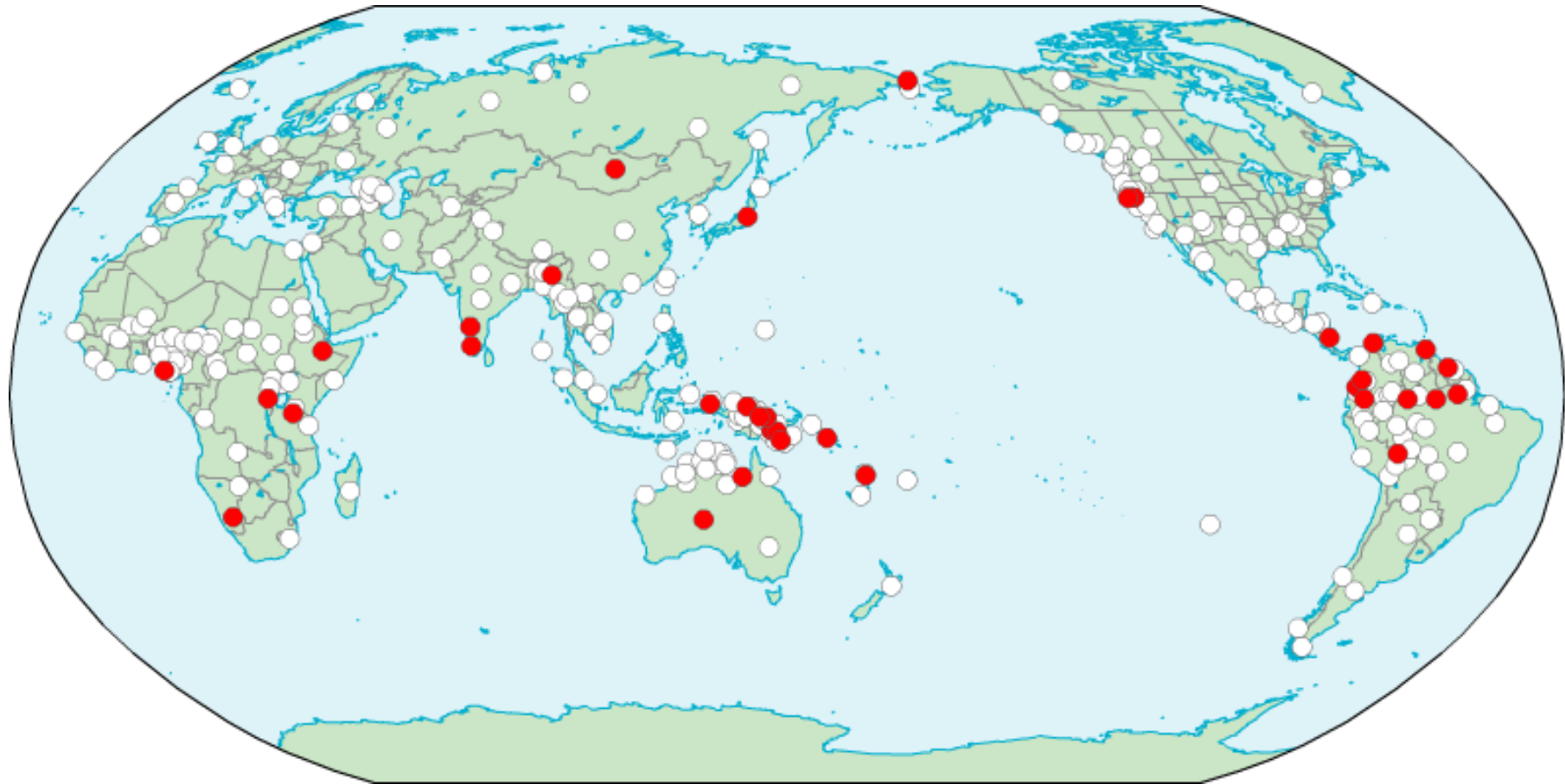
Apalaí (Cariban)

a. *isapokara*   [Ø]-*ene-no*
     jakuruaru.lizard   [1>3]-see-IMPST
     'I saw a jakuruaru lizard.' (Koehn & Koehn 1986:64)

b. *isapokara*   *on-ene-pyra*   *a-ken*
     jakuruaru.lizard   3-see-NEG   1-be.IMPST
     'I did not see a jakuruaru lizard.' (Koehn & Koehn 1986:64)

Sentani (Hartzler 1994: 52–53)

a. *neyœ* *u-eu-ne*
    he   say-3SG.SUBJ.R-3SG.OBJ
    'He is saying to him.'

b. *o-boro-i*
    NEG-hear-NTMP
    'I/you/he/she/we/you/they
    didn't/do(es)n't/won't hear.'

(Subtype A/Fin/Neg-LV in Miestamo 2005)

Subtype A/Fin/Neg-LV

○ 1. [262] Not-A/Fin/Neg-LV
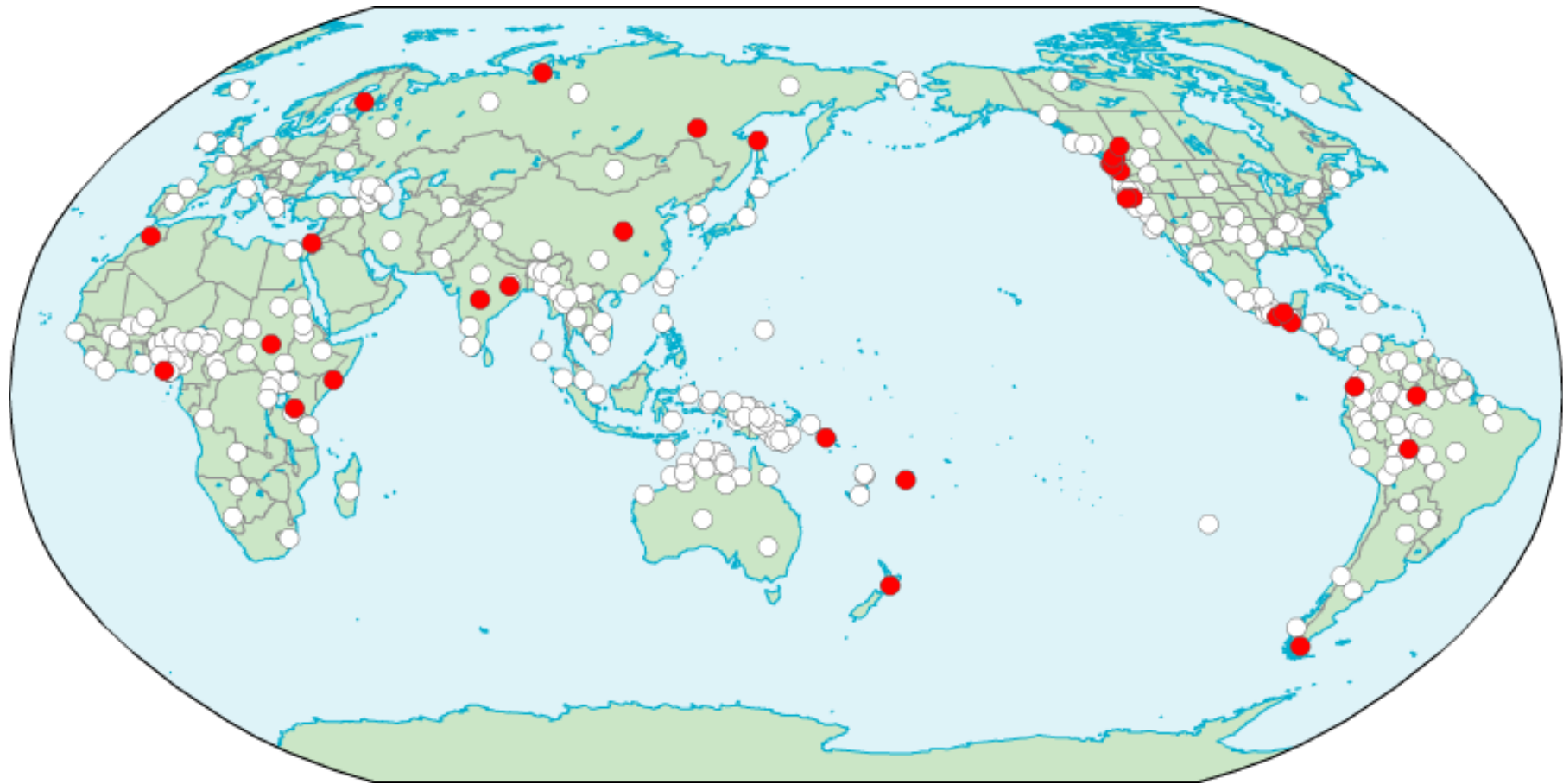● 2. [35] A/Fin/Neg-LV

Evenki (Tungus)

a. *nuŋan min-du purta-va bū-che-n*
    he   1SG-DAT knife-ACC give-PST-3SG
    'He gave me the knife.' (Nedyalkov 1994: 2)

b. *nuŋan min-du purta-va e-che-n   bū-re*
    he   1SG-DAT knife-ACC NEG-PST-3SG give-PTCP
    'He did not give me the knife.' (Nedyalkov 1994: 2)

Finnish (constructed examples)

a. *King Arthur   haukku-u Zorbakselle.*
    King Arthur   bark-3SG   Zorbas.ALL
    'King Arthur is barking at Zorbas.'

b. *King Arthur   ei   hauku   Zorbakselle.*
    King Arthur   NEG.3SG   bark.CNG   Zorbas.ALL
    'King Arthur is not barking at Zorbas.'

(Subtype A/Fin/NegVerb in Miestamo 2005)

Subtype A/Fin/NegVerb

○ 1. [266] Not-A/Fin/NegVerb
● 2. [31] A/Fin/NegVerb

Reality status

Reality vs. non-reality

- Semantically, negation belongs to the realm of the non-realized whereas affirmation belongs to the realized.

- In many languages, this has grammaticalized as irrealis/non-indicative marking in realis/indicative negatives (Type A/NonReal in Miestamo 2005).

  - The semantic maps of the non-realized categories in question extend to declarative negation.

Maung (Capell and Hinch 1970: 67)

a. *ŋi-udba*
   1SG > 3-put
   'I put.'

b. *ni-udba-ji*
   1SG > 3-put-IRR.NPST
   'I can put.'

c. *marig ni-udba-ji*
   NEG   1SG > 3-put-IRR.NPST
   'I do not [/cannot] put.'

Jaqaru (Hardman 2000: 102, 106)

a. *ill-w-ima-wa*
   see-PST-1 > 2-PK
   'I saw you.'

b. *isha-w ill-w-ima-txi*
   NEG-PK see-PST-1 > 2-NEG/Q
   'I didn't see you.'

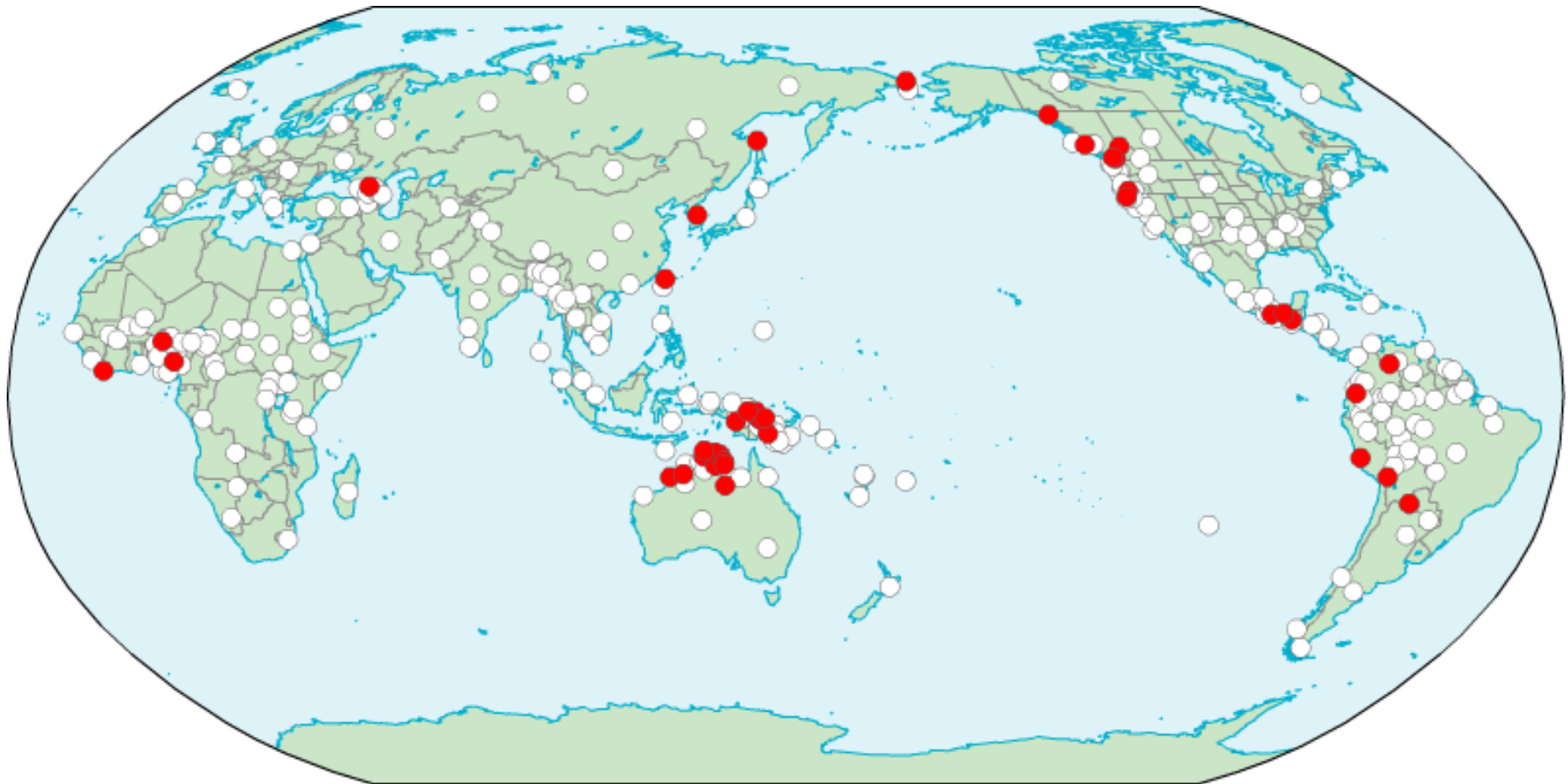c. *ill-w-ima-txi*
   see-PST-1 > 2-NEG/Q
   'Did I see you?'

d. *isha-txi   ill-w-ima*
   NEG-NEG/Q see-PST-1 > 2
   'Did I not see you?'

(Type A/NonReal in Miestamo 2005)

Type A/NonReal

Frequency

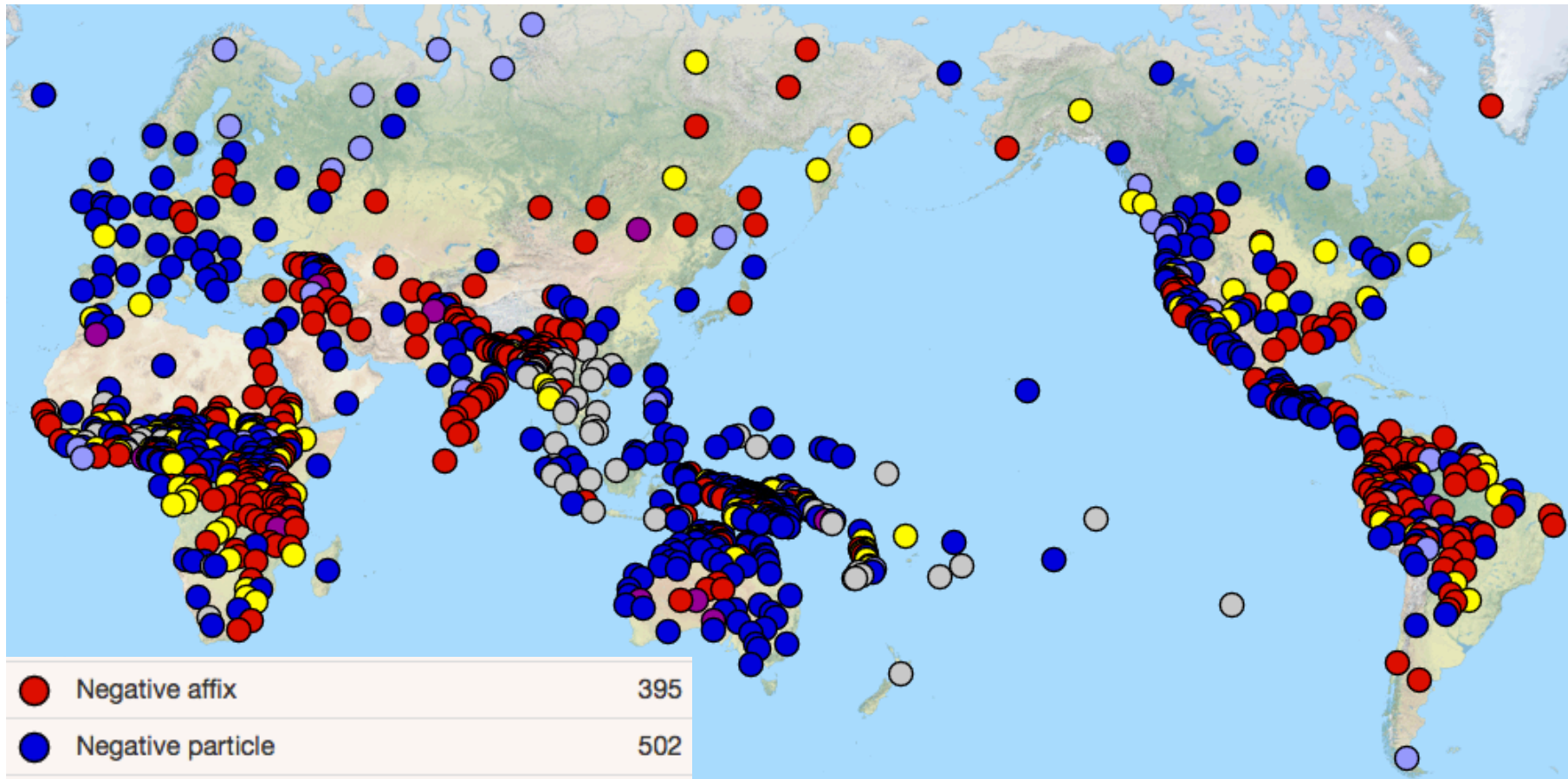# Textual frequency of negatives vs. affirmatives

- Finnish declarative clauses (n=9772), 91 % affirmative, 9 % negative in the corpus data of Hakulinen & al. (1980: 120–121).

- English sentences (n=263), 90 % affirmative, 10 % negative in Givón's counts (2001: 373).

Textual frequency of negatives vs. affirmatives

- Frequency as an economy explanation for markedness (Greenberg 1966, Croft 2003, Haspelmath 2006)
  - overt coding
  - behavioural potential.

- Overt coding: Negatives are universally overtly coded, affirmatives zero coded

- Behavioural potential: paradigmatic neutralization under negation
  - cf. discourse-context explanation – converging multiple motivations
    - (cf. lower degree of neutralization in polar questions, Miestamo 2007)

Type of negative marker

(Dryer 2013a)

🔴	Negative affix	395
🔵	Negative particle	502
🟣	Negative auxiliary verb	47
⚪	Negative word, unclear if verb or particle	73
🟤	Variation between negative word and affix	21
🟡	Double negation	119

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Thanks for your attention!

References

[Some items mentioned on the slides list may be missing; please ask me for any missing references you are interested in.]

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Abbreviations

1 first person, 2 second person, 3 third person, ABS absolutive, ACC accusative, ACT actual, ADEL adelative, ADJ adjective, AFF affirmative, ALL allative, ART article, ASS assertive, AUX auxiliary, CERT certitive, CLT clitic, CMPL completive, CNG connegative, CONT continuative, COP copula, CVB converb, DAT dative, DECL declarative, DEF definite, DUR durative, EL elative, ERG ergative, EX existential, EXCL exclusive, F feminine, FOC focus, FUT future, GER gerund, GND gender, HAB habitual, HYP hypothetical, IMP imperative, IMPF imperfective, IMPST immediate past, INCL inclusive, IND indicative, INDEF indefinite, INF infinitive, IRR irrealis, LOC locative, M masculine, N neuter, N~ non~ (e.g. NPST = nonpast), NEG negation/negative, PART partitive, PERF perfect, PFV perfective, PL plural, POT potential, PRES present, PST past, PTCL particle, PTCP participle, R realis, RS relativized subject, SBJN subjunctive, SG singular, SUBJ subject, SURP surprise mood, T theme, V verb.