Universität Bremen

Universität Bremen
Fachbereich 10
Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaften

Toponyms vs. common nouns

The morphosyntax of spatial relations in cross-linguistic perspective

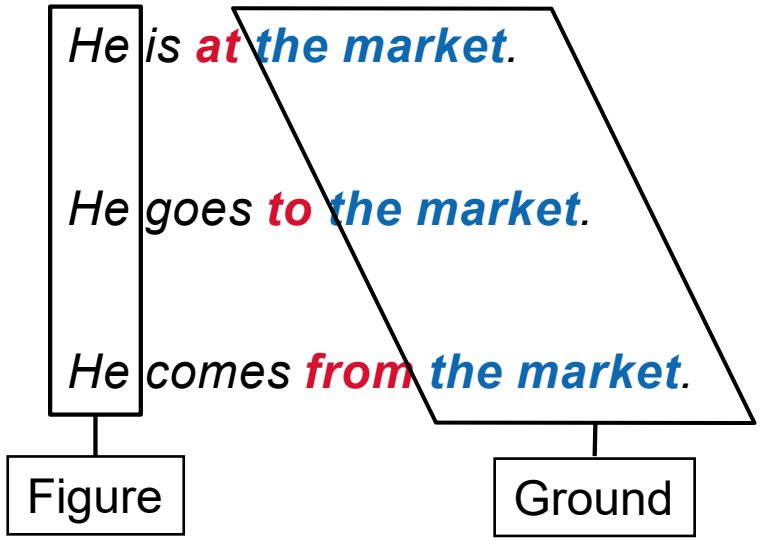
59th Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea

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Osnabrück

Introduction

	Common noun (COMM)	**Toponym (TOPO)**
Place:	*He is **at** **the market**.*	*He is **in** **Osnabrück**.*
Goal:	*He goes **to** **the market**.*	*He goes **to** **Osnabrück**.*
Source:	*He comes **from** **the market**.*	*He comes **from** **Osnabrück**.*



→ **Toponym-Specific Grammar (TSG)**

Morphosyntactic rules that apply to TOPOs, but not to (inanimate) COMMs

Introduction

→ **Zero-marking**

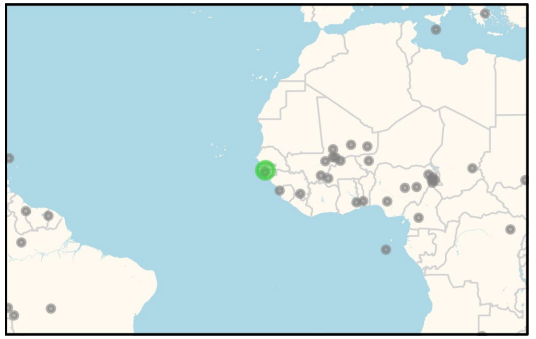
(1) Balanta [Atlantic-Congo, Bak]

a. COMM / Goal (Fudeman 1999: 216)

Sin *bɔ* *mada* *to* ***a-loptan***
road CL3.PROX be.able go **LOC-hospital**
'This road goes **to the hospital**.'

b. TOPO / Goal (Fudeman 1999: 353)

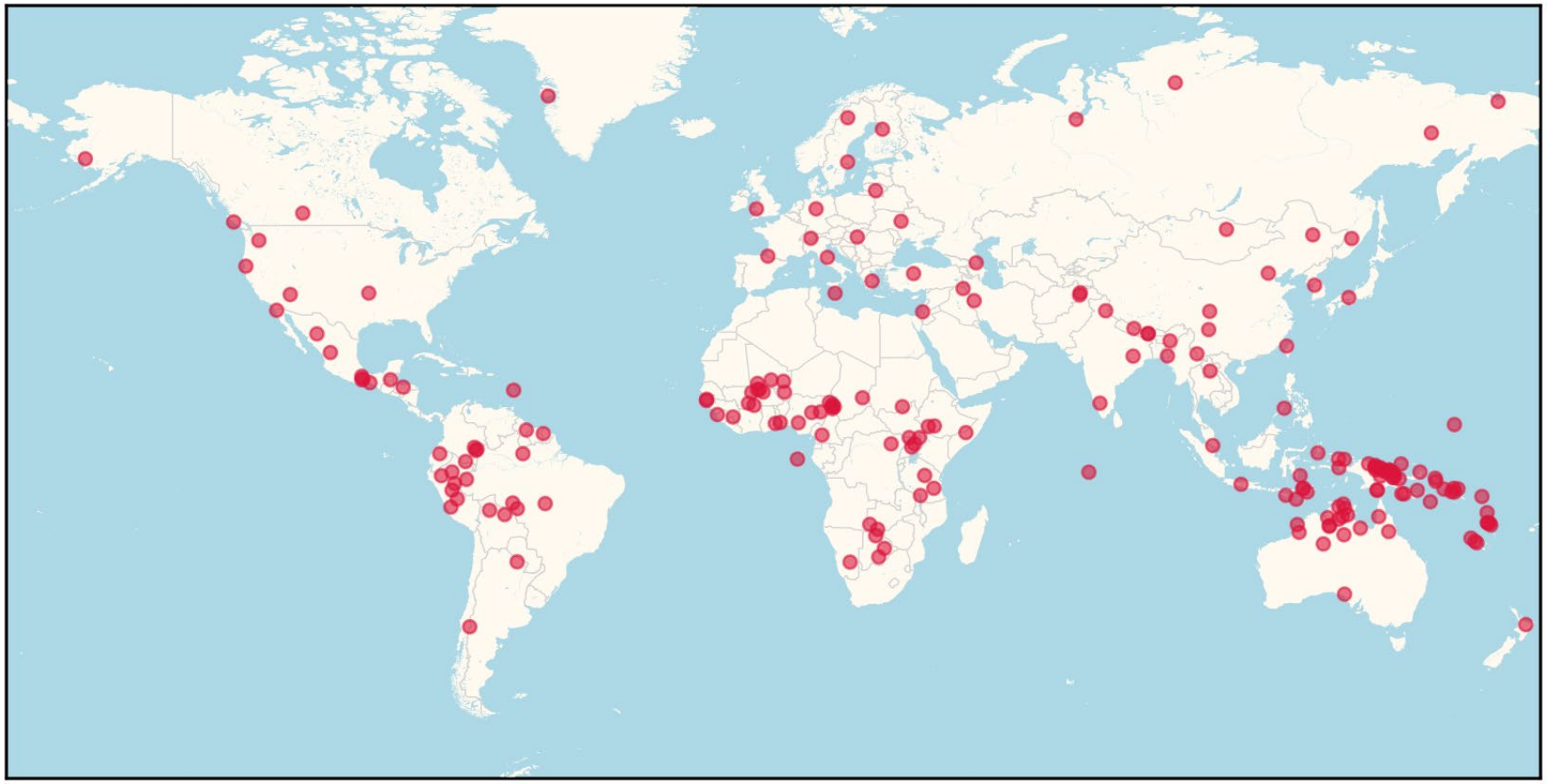
ma *bi-tʃɛd* *hatide* *hoto* *to* ***Ø-Gambia***
CONS 3PL.SUB-take again car go **Ø-Gambia**
'And they again rented a car to go **to Gambia**.'



Map 1: Balanta (Guinea-Bissau).

3 = 3rd person, CL3 = noun class 3, CONS = consecutive, LOC = locative, PL = plural, PROX = proximal, SUB = subject

The sample



Map 2: Sample languages.

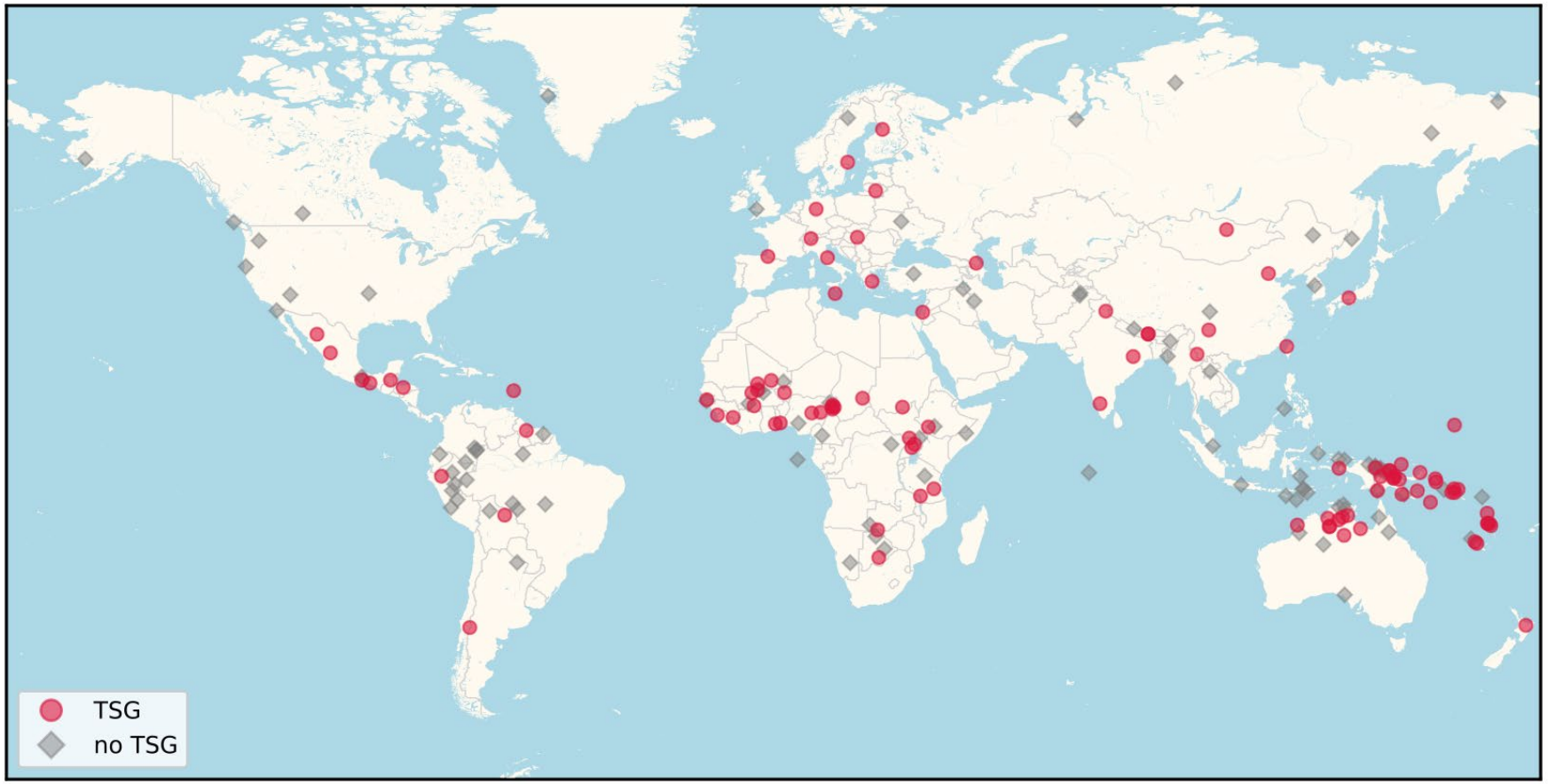
- → 202 languages
- → 80 different language families
- → 6 creoles
- → 11 isolates

- → Africa: 45
- → Australia: 17
- → Eurasia: 44
- → North America: 18
- → Papunesia: 55
- → South America: 23

- → Purpose-built variety sample
- → Quantities should not be taken as fully representative, but as descriptive of the distributions within the present sample and as indications of recurring cross-linguistic tendencies

TSG in the sample languages

→ **Hypothesis 1 (H1)**
TSG is geographically widespread and attested in all macro-areas. Although its frequency may vary, none of these regions is entirely devoid of TSG.



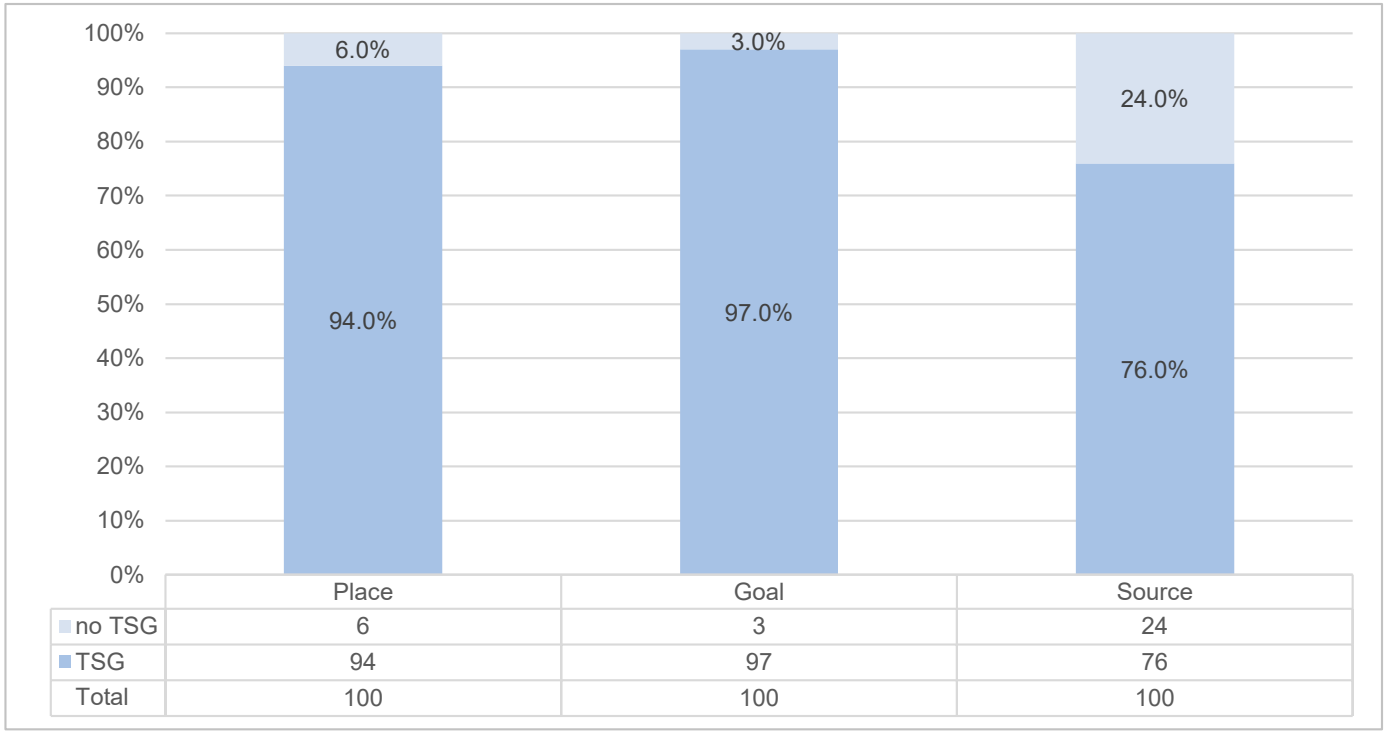
Map 3: TSG in the sample languages.

→ 100 languages (49.5%)
→ 43 different language families
→ 2 creoles
→ 6 isolates

→ Africa: 27 (60%)
→ Australia: 9 (53%)
→ Eurasia: 23 (52%)
→ North America: 7 (39%)
→ Papunesia: 30 (55%)
→ South America: 4 (17%)

TSG across the three relations

→ **Hypothesis 2 (H2)**
TSG occurs less frequently in the Source relation than in the Place and Goal relations, while no substantial differences are expected between Place and Goal.



	Place	Goal	Source
no TSG	6	3	24
TSG	94	97	76
Total	100	100	100

Figure 1: Distribution of TSG across spatial relations.

Overt vs. zero contrasts

→ Zero-marking

(1) Balanta [Atlantic-Congo, Bak]

a. COMM / Goal (Fudeman 1999: 216)

Sin bɔ mada to ***a-loptan***
road CL3.PROX be.able go **LOC-hospital**
'This road goes **to the hospital**.'

b. TOPO / Goal (Fudeman 1999: 353)

ma bi-tʃɛd hatide hoto to ***Ø-Gambia***
CONS 3PL.SUB-take again car go **Ø-Gambia**
'And they again rented a car to go **to Gambia**.'

→ Zero morpheme

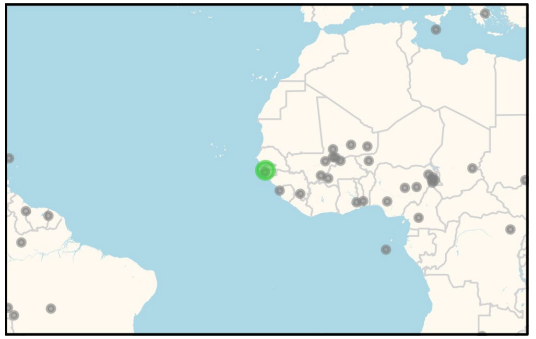
(2) Moloko [Afro-Asiatic, Chadic]

a. COMM / Goal (Friesen 2017: 113)

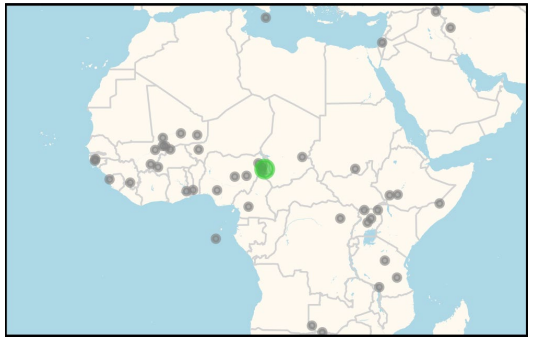
ɛgɪnɛ nɔ́-lɔ ***a kɔsɔkʷɔ ava***
today 1SG+IPFV **at market in**
'Today I will go **to the market**.'

b. TOPO / Goal (Friesen 2017: 172)

ɔ̀-lɔ ***a Marva Ø***
3SG+PFV-go **at Maroua Ø**
'He/she went **to Maroua**.'



Map 1: Balanta (Guinea-Bissau).



Map 4: Moloko (Cameroon).

1, 3 = 1st, 3rd person, CL3 = noun class 3, CONS = consecutive, IPFV = imperfective, LOC = locative, PFV = perfective, PL = plural, PROX = proximal, SG = singular, SUB = subject

Different markers

→ COMMs and TOPOs are marked with different spatial markers in the same construction

(3) Tayap [Isolate]

a. COMM / Goal (Kulick & Terrill 2019: 53)

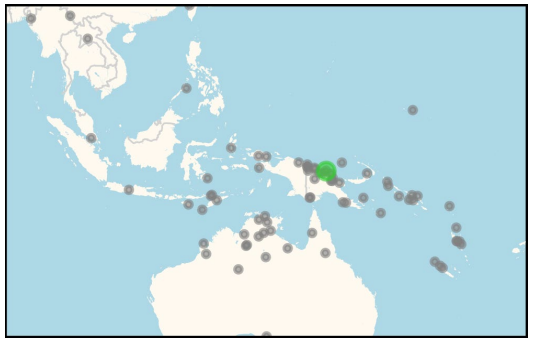
ŋgu ***mɨri=nɨ*** *wok*
3SG.F **rainforest=LOC** go.3SG.F.REAL
'she went **to the rainforest**'

b. TOPO / Goal (Kulick & Terrill 2019: 124)

ŋa ***Merew=re*** *mbot*
1SG **Sanae=LOC** go.SG.M.REAL
'I'm going **to Sanae** (village)'

c. TOPO / Goal (Kulick & Terrill 2019: 126)

[…] ***Ndurur=Ø*** *mbok*
Ndurur=Ø go.1PL|1SG.F.REAL
'[…] we went **to Ndurur**'



Map 5: Tayap (Papua New Guinea).

1, 3 = 1st, 3rd person, F = feminine, CONS = consecutive, LOC = locative, M = masculine, PL = plural, REAL = realis, SG = singular

Marker restriction

→ TOPOs are used only with a subset of the spatial markers available to COMMs

(4) Qaqet [Baining]

a. COMM / Place (Hellwig 2019: 282)

se=gel=ama… *a=sinepki,* ***men=ama=kaina-ki*** *[…]*
to=near=ART NM=Sinepki **at=ART=water-SG.F**
'on to… Sinepki, **in the water** […]'

b. COMM / Place (Hellwig 2019: 265)

de *kia=lu* *ma=sirini* ***met=ama=guleng-ka***
CONJ 3SG.F.SBJ=see.NCONT ART.ID=Sirini **in=ART=malay.apple-SG.M**
'and she saw Sirini **in the malay apple tree**'

c. COMM / Place (Hellwig 2019: 258)

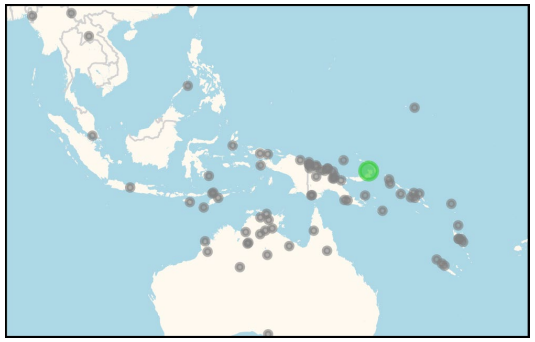
pe=aa=avet-ki**=a,** ***pe=ma=qerleng***
PLACE=3SG.M.POSS=house-SG.F=DIST **PLACE=ART.ID=fallow.garden**
'**in his home** there, **in the old garden**'

d. COMM / Place

i=ama=nat ***pet*** ***gia=sleng***
SIM=ART=taro **on/under** **2SG.POSS=garden**
'(about) the taro **in your garden**'

e. TOPO / Place

kurli-ut=iara ***pet*** ***ma=rlaunsepna***
leave-1PL=PROX **on/under** **ART.ID=Raunsepna**
'we stay here **in Raunsepna**'



Map 6: Qaqet (Papua New Guinea).

1, 3 = 1st, 3rd person, ART = article, ART.ID = article (inherently identifyable), CONJ = conjunction, DIST = distal, F = feminine, NCONT = non-continuous, M = masculine, NM = noun marker, PL = plural, POSS = possessive, PROX = proximal, SBJ = subject, SG = singular, SIM = simultaneous conjunction

Different distribution of markers

→ COMMs and TOPOs take the same spatial markers, but follow different rules in their distribution



Map 7: Hungarian (Hungary).

(5) Hungarian [Uralic, Hungaric]

set	case	TOPOS		COMM
		Szeged	*Debrecen*	*kör* 'circle'
interior	inessive	---	*Debrecen-ben* 'in Debrecen'	*kör-ben* 'in the circle'
	illative	---	*Debrecen-be* 'to Debrecen'	*kör-be* 'into the circle'
	elative	---	*Debrecen-ből* 'from Debrecen'	*kör-ből* 'out of the circle'
superior	superessive	*Szeged-en* 'in Szeged'	---	*kör-ön* 'on the circle'
	sublative	*Szeged-re* 'to Szeged'	---	*kör-re* 'onto the circle'
	delative	*Szeged-ről* 'from Szeged'	---	*kör-ről* 'off the circle'

Table 1: Hungarian spatial cases (see Stolz & Nintemann 2024: 115).

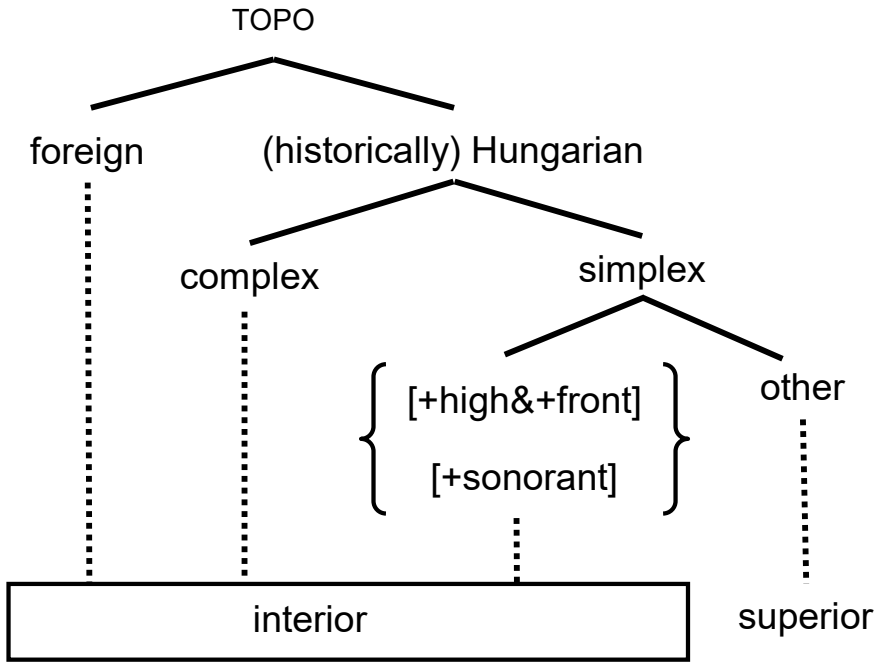
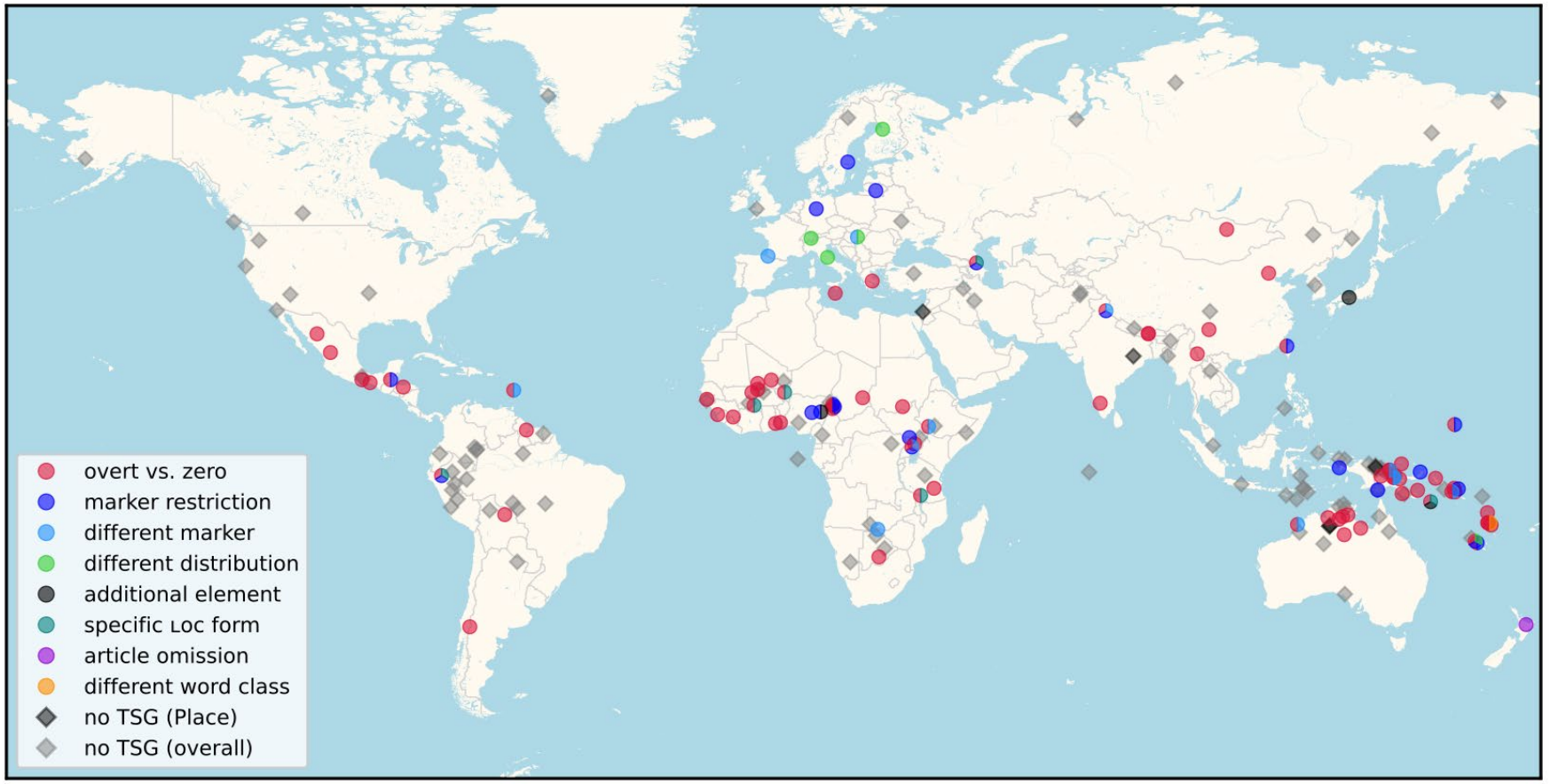


Figure 1: Hierarchy of conditions determining the use of spatial cases with TOPOs in Hungarian (Stolz & Nintemann 2024: 120)

Distribution of TSG patterns

Place

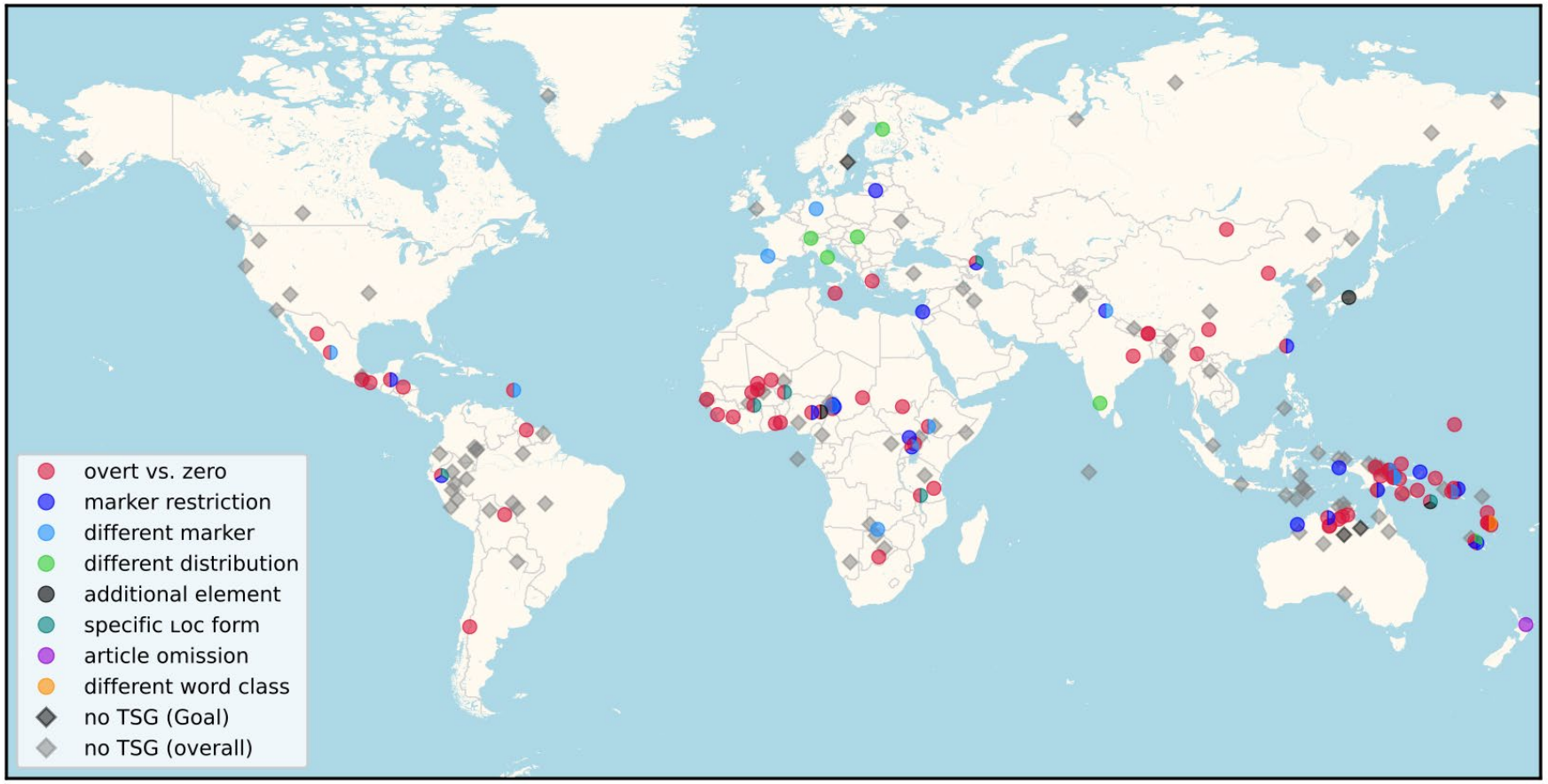


Map 8: Geographical distribution of TSG patterns in the Place relation.

- → overt vs. zero: 75%
- → marker restriction: 21%
- → different marker: 12%
- → different distribution: 5%
- → additional element: 3%
- → specific LOC form: 6%
- → article omission: 1%
- → different word class: 1%
- → no TSG (Place): 6%

Distribution of TSG patterns

Goal

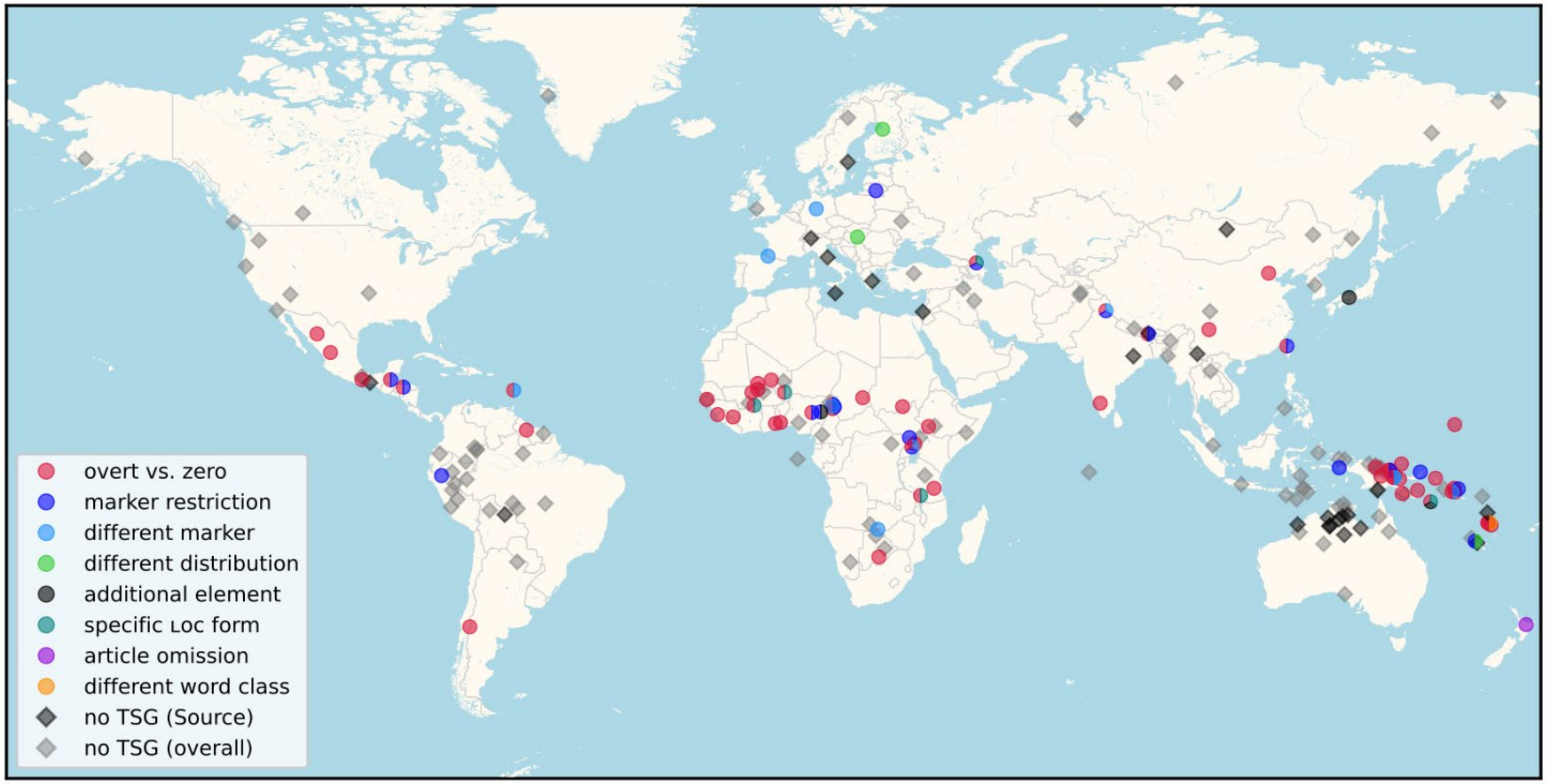


Map 9: Geographical distribution of TSG patterns in the Goal relation.

- → overt vs. zero: 78%
- → marker restriction: 20%
- → different marker: 13%
- → different distribution: 6%
- → additional element: 3%
- → specific LOC form: 6%
- → article omission: 1%
- → different word class: 1%
- → no TSG (Goal): 3%

Distribution of TSG patterns

Source



Map 10: Geographical distribution of TSG patterns in the Source relation.

- → overt vs. zero: 59%
- → marker restriction: 19%
- → different marker: 10%
- → different distribution: 3%
- → additional element: 3%
- → specific LOC form: 5%
- → article omission: 1%
- → different word class: 1%
- → no TSG (Source): 24%

Construction length and complexity

→ Haspelmath's (2019: 319) Universal 2:
"If a language has asymmetric differential coding of place in common nouns and place names, the place-name marker will be shorter."

→ **Hypothesis 3 (H3)**

a. The **mean length** of TOPO markers is expected to be lower than the **mean length** of COMM markers in terms of **segments** and **syllables** across languages that exhibit DPM between COMMs and TOPOs for Place, Goal, or Source.
b. At the level of individual languages, TOPO markers are expected to be **shorter than or equal in length** to COMM markers, rather than longer.

→ **Hypothesis 4 (H4)**

a. The **mean number of morphemes** of TOPO markers is expected to be lower than the **mean number of morphemes** of COMM markers across languages that exhibit DPM between COMMs and TOPOs for Place, Goal, or Source.
b. At the level of individual languages, TOPO markers are expected to contain **fewer morphemes than or the same number of morphemes** as COMM markers, rather than more.

Construction length and complexity

Number of segments

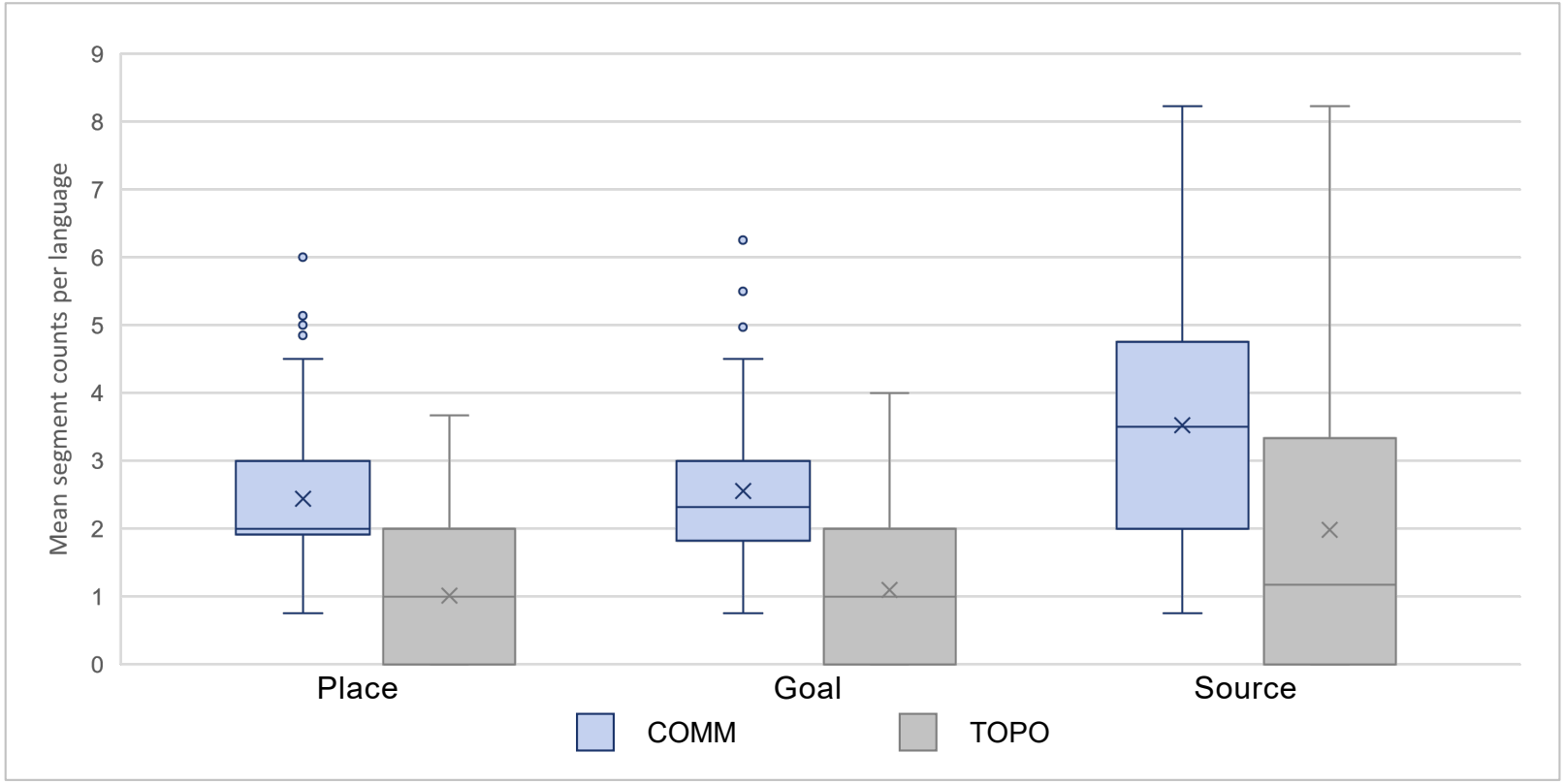


Figure 2: Segment counts of COMM and TOPO markers in Place, Goal, and Source constructions.

Construction length and complexity

Number of syllables

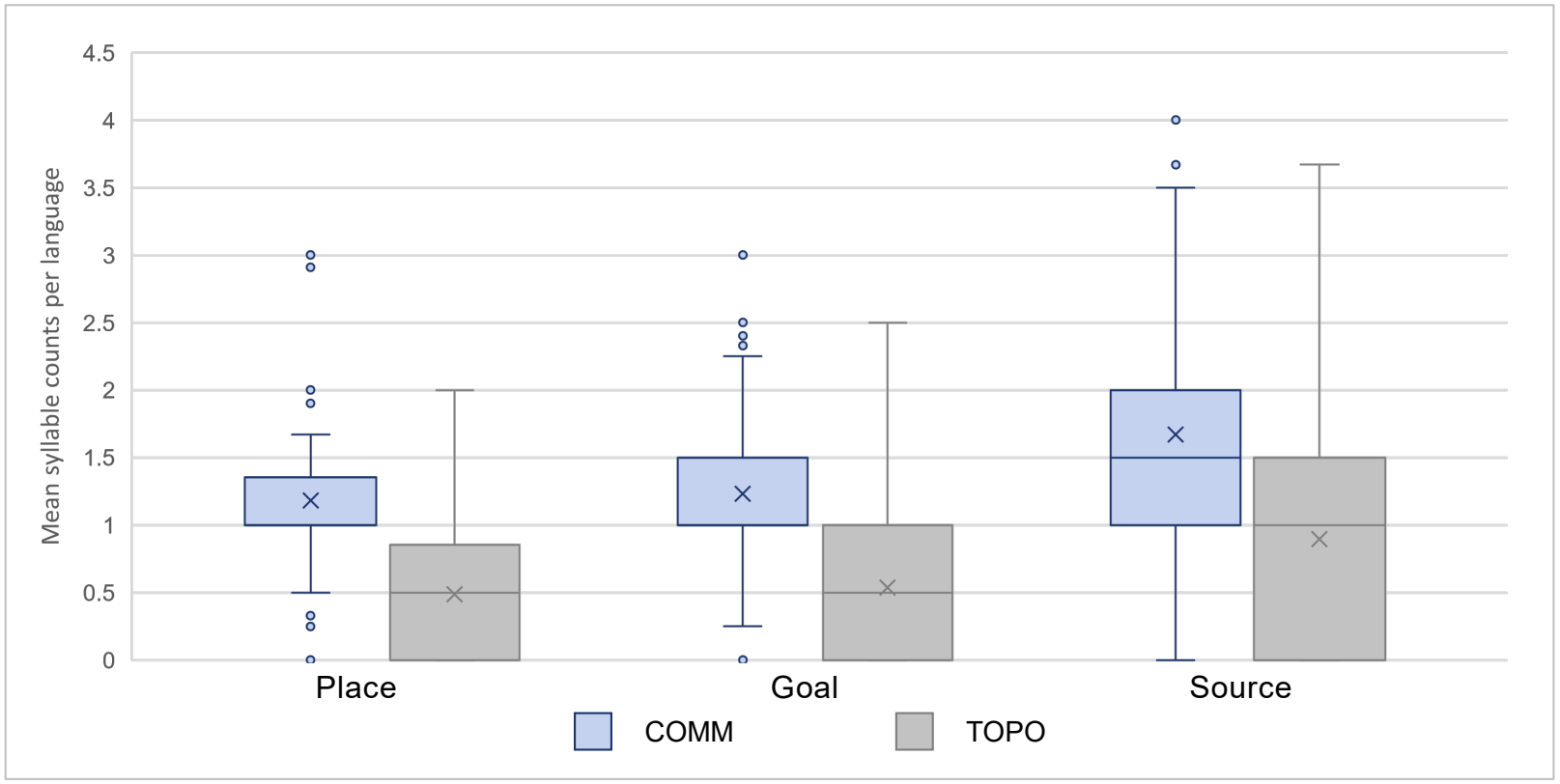


Figure 3: Syllable counts of COMM and TOPO markers in Place, Goal, and Source constructions.

Construction length and complexity

Number of morphemes

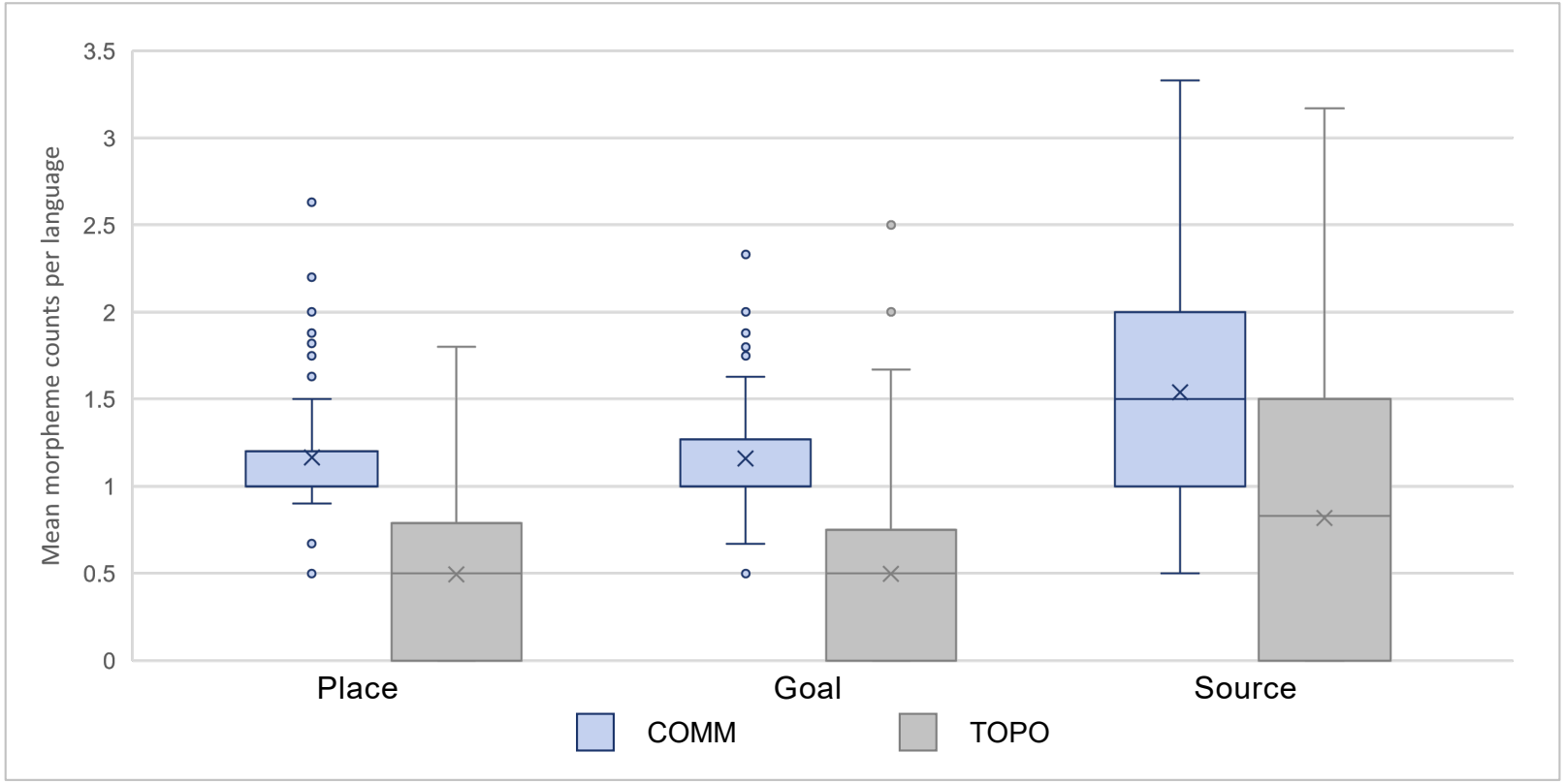


Figure 4: Morpheme counts of COMM and TOPO markers in Place, Goal, and Source constructions.

Construction length and complexity

→ Real counterexamples are very rare, but do exist:

- German [Indo-European, Germanic] Goal markers: *zu* with COMMs vs. *nach* with TOPOs
- Fwe [Atlantic-Congo, Bantoid] noun classes 17 and 18: *ku-* and *mu-* with COMMs vs. *kwa-* and *mwa-* with TOPOs
  (However: *kwa-* and *mwa-* with all proper names, including personal names)

→ Haspelmath's (2019: 319) Universal 2:
"If a language has asymmetric differential coding of place in common nouns and place names, the place-name marker will be shorter."

→ Strong cross-linguistic tendency rather than an absolute universal

Syncretism

→ “the formal identity of the expressions employed for two or more categories” (Stolz et al. 2017: 11)

Option	Place	Goal	Source	Pattern
I	X	Y	Z	P≠G≠S
II	X	X	Z	P=G≠S
III	X	Y	Y	P≠G=S
IV	X	Y	X	P=S≠G
V	X	X	X	P=G=S

Table 2: Logically possible syncretism patterns.

(6) Auwe [Border] (Seiler 1985: 216)

a. ***iof-ia*** *aia-f*
house-LOC stay-PRS
‘She is (**at**) **home**.’

b. ***iof-ia*** *ga* *si-f.*
house-LOC 1SG go-PRS
‘I am going (**to**) **home**.’

c. ***iof-ia-ni*** *ga* *puk-f*
house-LOC-SRC 1SG come-PRS
‘I am coming **from the house**.’

→ II: P=G≠S

(7) Zialo [Mande] (Babaev 2010: 187, 89, 96)

a. *Tíyá* *lɔ́* *ná* *zéy-nì* ***gátébà-y*** ***zù***
3PL.FOC COP now sit-PRET **REF\gathering-DEF** **in**
‘They were now sitting **at the gathering**.’

b. *gè* *wɔ̀* *lì* ***dɔ́bɔ́-y*** ***zù*** *lìnà*
1SG PROSP go **REF\bush-DEF** **in** tomorrow
‘I will go **to the bush** tomorrow.’

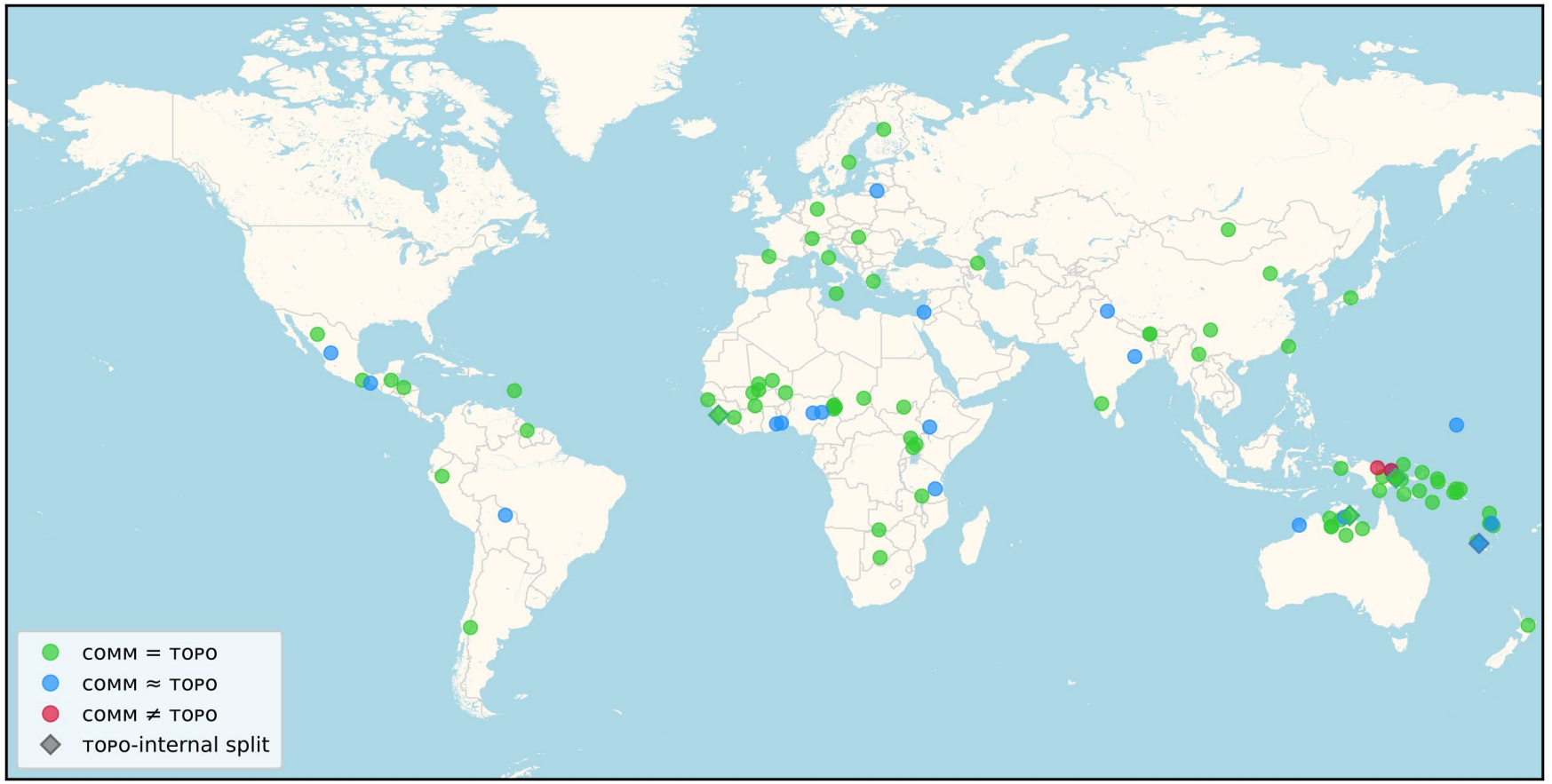
c. *tíyá* *nàtɔ́* *gúlá* ***kpáálá-y*** ***zù***
3PL.FOC PROG return **REF\field-DEF** **in**
‘They are returning **from the field**.'

→ V: P=G=S

→ **Hypothesis 5 (H5)**
Within a language, syncretism patterns are generally stable when comparing constructions with COMM and TOPO Grounds. In most languages, the same set of syncretism patterns is attested with both types of Ground.

1, 3 = 1st, 3rd person, DEF = definite, FOC = focus, COP = copula, LOC = locative, PL = plural, PRET = preterite, PROG = progressive, PROSP = prospective, PRS = present, REF = referential SG = singular, SRC = source marker

Syncretism



→ COMM = TOPO: 79%
→ COMM ≈ TOPO: 19%
→ COMM ≠ TOPO: 2%

Map 11: Geographical distribution of similarities and differences between the syncretism patterns in constructions with COMM and TOPO Grounds.

Syncretism

→ Syncretism patterns mostly consistent in a language
→ TSG shows the importance of treating different types of Grounds separately for the determination of syncretism patterns in a language

(7) Zialo [Mande] (Babaev 2010: 187, 89, 96)

a. *Tíyá lɔ́ ná zéy-nì **gátébà-y** **zù***
3PL.FOC COP now sit-PRET **REF\gathering-DEF** **in**
'They were now sitting **at the gathering**.'

b. *gè wɔ̀ lì **dɔ́bɔ́-y** **zù** lìnà*
1SG PROSP go **REF\bush-DEF** **in** tomorrow
'I will go **to the bush** tomorrow.'

c. *tíyá nàtɔ́ gúlá **kpáálá-y** **zù***
3PL.FOC PROG return **REF\field-DEF** **in**
'They are returning **from the field**.'

→ V: P=G=S

(8) Zialo [Mande] (Babaev 2010: 162, 82)

a. *ɛ̀nì nè-ɓòlá-y ɣɛ́-ní **Màsàdà** **Ø***
if 1SG.POSS-friend-DEF be-PRET **Macenta** **Ø**
'If my friend were **in Macenta**…'

b. *gè lìì-gɔ̀ **Màsàdà** **Ø***
1SG go-AOR **Macenta** **Ø**
'I went **to Macenta**.'

c. *sótá-gì-tì tátá gúlá **Màsàdà** **Ø***
REF\foreigner-DEF-PL 3PL.IPFV return **Macenta** **Ø**
'The foreigners return **from Macenta**.'

→ V: P=G=S

1, 3 = 1st, 3rd person, AOR = aoriste, DEF = definite, FOC = focus, COP = copula, IPFV = imperfective PL = plural, PRET = preterite, POSS = possessive, PROG = progressive, PROSP = prospective, REF = referential SG = singular

Syncretism

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a. *Tíyá lɔ́ ná zéy-nì gátébà-y zù*
3PL.FOC COP now sit-PRET REF\gathering-DEF in
'They were now sitting **at the gathering**.'

b. *gè wɔ̀ lì dɔ́bɔ́-y zù lìnà*
1SG PROSP go REF\bush-DEF in tomorrow
'I will go **to the bush** tomorrow.'

c. *tíyá nàtɔ́ gúlá kpáálá-y zù*
3PL.FOC PROG return REF\field-DEF in
'They are returning **from the field**.'

(8) Zialo [Mande] (Babaev 2010: 162, 82)

a. *ɛ̀nì nè-ɓòlá-y ɣɛ́-ní Màsàdà Ø*
if 1SG.POSS-friend-DEF be-PRET Macenta Ø
'If my friend were **in Macenta**…'

b. *gè lìì-gɔ̀ Màsàdà Ø*
1SG go-AOR Macenta Ø
'I went **to Macenta**.'

c. *sótá-gì-tì tátá gúlá Màsàdà Ø*
REF\foreigner-DEF-PL 3PL.IPFV return Macenta Ø
'The foreigners return **from Macenta**.'

→ II: P=G≠S

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Syncretism

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'I will go to the bush tomorrow.'

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3PL.FOC PROG return REF\field-DEF in
'They are returning from the field.'

(8) Zialo [Mande] (Babaev 2010: 162, 82)

a. *ɛ̀nì nè-ɓòlá-y ɣɛ́-ní Màsàdà Ø*
if 1SG.POSS-friend-DEF be-PRET Macenta Ø
'If my friend were in Macenta…'

b. *gè lìì-gɔ̀ Màsàdà Ø*
1SG go-AOR Macenta Ø
'I went to Macenta.'

c. *sótá-gì-tì tátá gúlá Màsàdà Ø*
REF\foreigner-DEF-PL 3PL.IPFV return Macenta Ø
'The foreigners return from Macenta.'

→ III: P≠G=S

1, 3 = 1st, 3rd person, AOR = aoriste, DEF = definite, FOC = focus, COP = copula, IPFV = imperfective PL = plural, PRET = preterite, POSS = possessive, PROG = progressive, PROSP = prospective, REF = referential SG = singular

Conclusions

→ The data support all five hypotheses.

- H1: TSG is a recurrent phenomenon worldwide, albeit to different degrees.
- H2: TSG occurs less often in the Source relation, while there is no substantial difference between Place and Goal.
- H3/H4: TOPO markers are mostly shorter and less complex than COMM markers.
- H5: Syncretism patterns are mostly stable within a language.

→ Two implications:

1. If a language exhibits TSG in the Source relation, it also exhibits TSG in the Place and/or Goal relations.

$$\text{TSG(Source)} \supset [\text{TSG(Place)} \vee \text{TSG(Goal)}]$$

2. If COMMs can be zero-marked in a language, TOPOs can also be zero-marked.

$$\text{COMM } \varnothing \supset \text{TOPO } \varnothing$$

→ Spatial systems within a language may be subject **to Ground sensitivity**, not only between COMMs and TOPOs, but possibly also between other Ground types, e.g., human nouns, spatial adverbs, spatial interrogatives, or pronouns.

→ To fully grasp the spatial system of a language, different Ground types need to be investigated separately.

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Danke, dass Sie ***nach*** ***Osnabrück*** *und* ***zu*** ***mein-em*** ***Vortrag*** *ge-komm-en* *sind.*
thanks that 2.POL **to** **Osnabrück** and **to** **1SG.POSS-DAT.M** **talk** PTCP-come-PTCP be.2.POL
'Thank you for coming **to Osnabrück** and **to my talk**.'