Differential object marking in sign languages

Author: Carl Börstell

Anna Klezovich
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DOM before SLs

Bossong 1985 - discovery

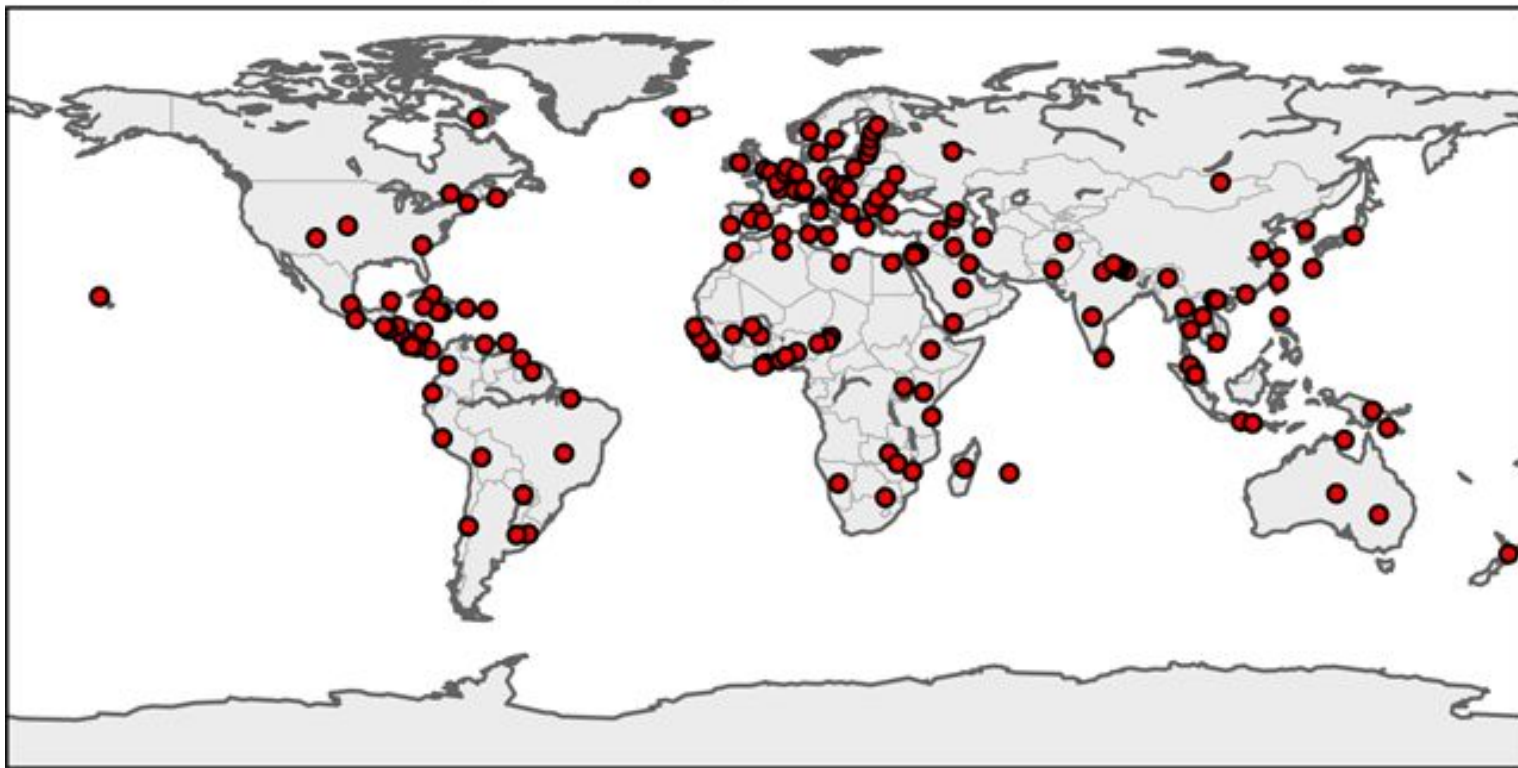At least 300 spoken languages have DOM

Можете ли Вы привести пример ДОМ в каком-нибудь известном Вам языке?

Examples of DOM

- definite/indefinite object (Hebrew)
- animate/inanimate object
- person

Introduction, again

Sign languages in the world

Word order

How to deal with simultaneity

SVO & SOV as most frequent

In some sign languages word order depends on "human-first" principle (Meier et al 2017)

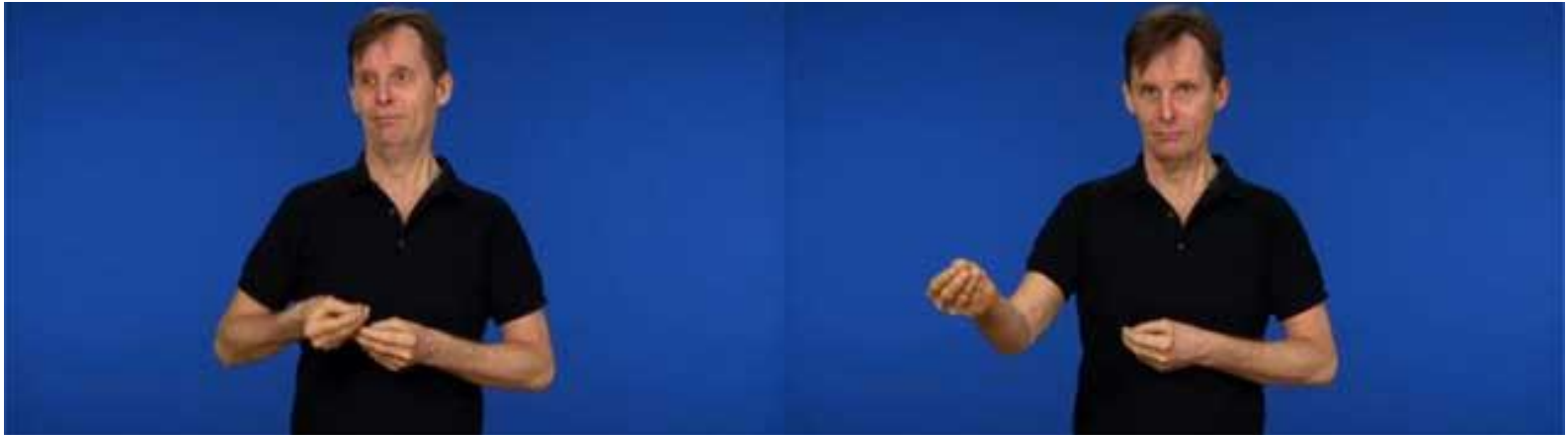Word order can also depend on the complexity of verb modification

Verb modification

2 types of modification:

- directionality
- classifiers

Verb modification, directionality

$_1$GIVE$_3$ ('I give him/her') -- SSL

Verb modification

Different alignments:

- Directionality often targets transitive P and ditransitive R arguments.
- Classifier handshapes target transitive P or ditransitive T arguments.

Verb modification

Directionality from typological perspective:

- mostly used with **animates**
- usually object is more marked than subject

- directionality that indicates the object appears to be preferred with 1st & 2nd **person** rather than 3rd (BSL)
- 1st person forms of certain directional verbs are irregular, hence being treated differently from any non-1st person form (ASL)

But DOM is mostly about (case) marking on the arguments,

and here we have flagging on verbs

or rather - **indexing**

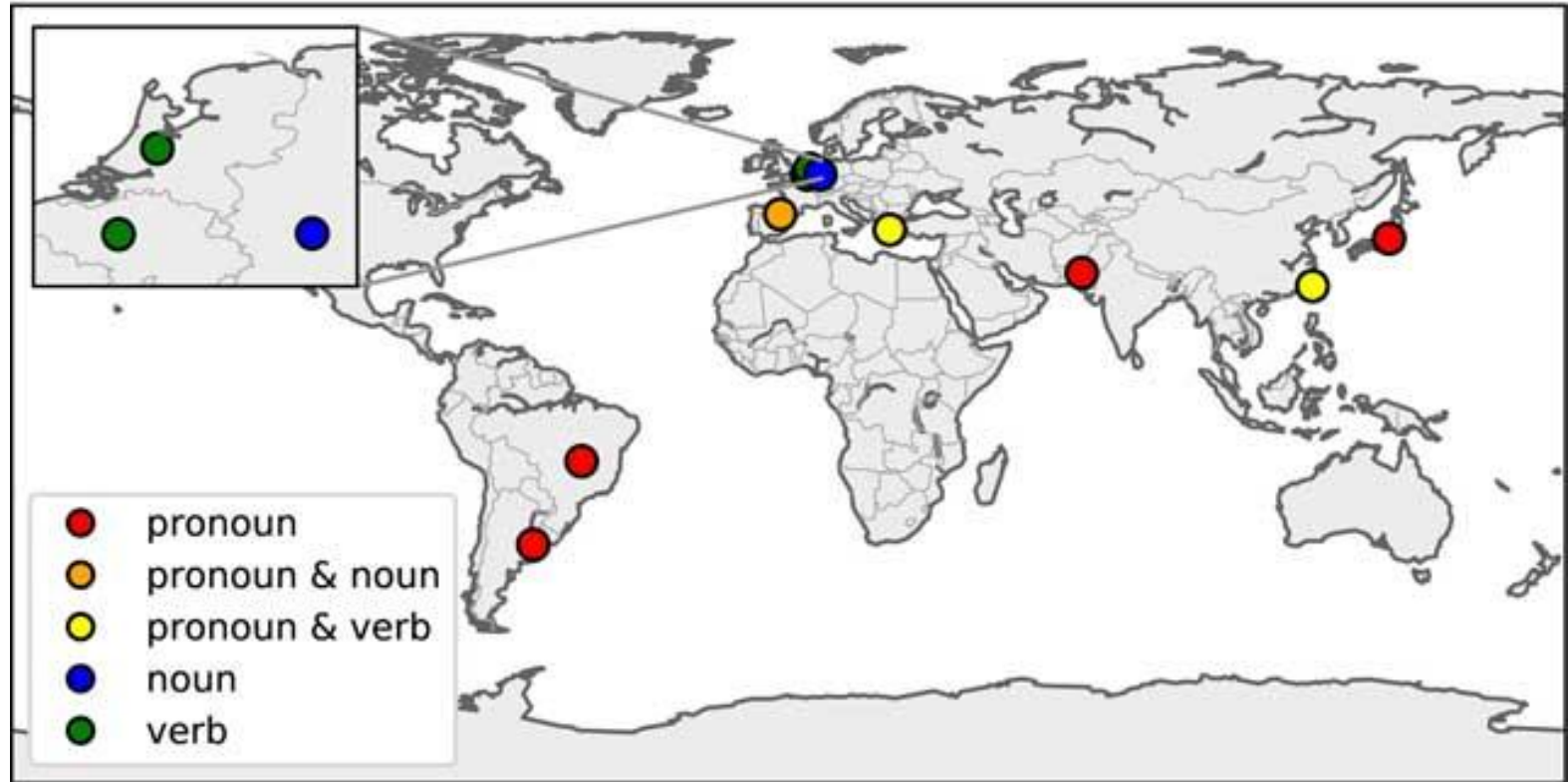*differential object indexing* **(DOI) Vs. DOM**

Auxiliary verbs and argument markers

Agreement auxiliaries:

are used usually with plain verbs and show agreement by means of directionality

Auxiliary verbs and argument markers

Auxiliary sources

pronoun
pronoun & noun
pronoun & verb
noun
verb

Auxiliary verbs and argument markers

Main grammaticalization paths for auxiliaries:

- pronominal pointing signs
- directional verbs (e.g., GIVE or GO-TO)
- sign PERSON   (DGS, Spanish SL)

German Sign Language (Rathmann 2003: 182; adapted glossing)

HANS$_{3a}$ $_{3a}$PERSON$_{3b}$ MARIE$_{3b}$ LIKE

Hans$_a$ AUX.3$_a$>3$_b$ Marie$_b$ like
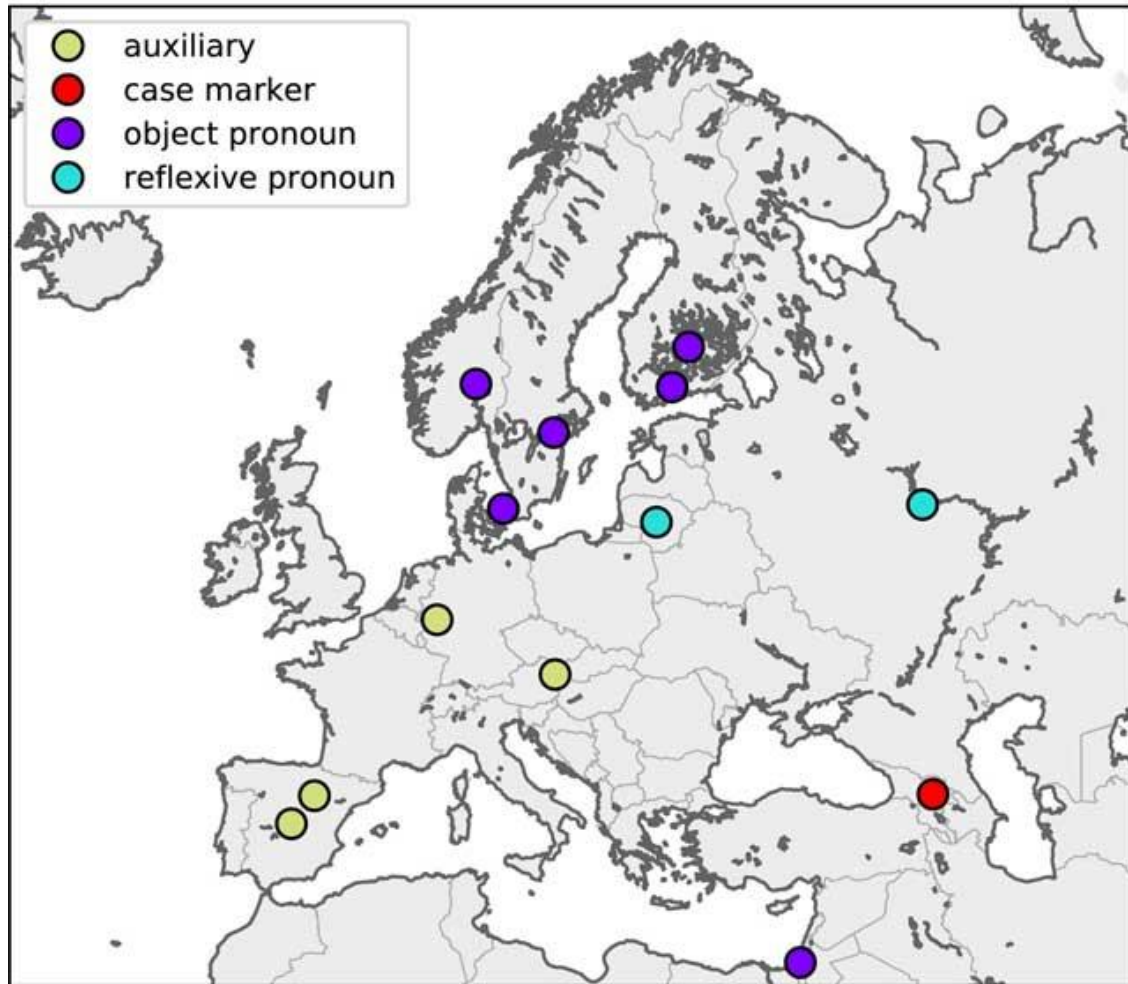
'Hans likes Marie.'

Auxiliary verbs and argument markers

In general: no argument flagging

Some rare exceptions with dedicated object signs: Israeli SL

derived from sign PERSON which looks the same in most SLs

Auxiliary verbs and argument markers

PERSON derivations

DOM in Swedish Sign Language

- dedicated object pronoun
- [+human] only (for both P and R roles)
- no restriction to specific verb domains
- object marking is restricted to pronominals
- object pronoun can be modified to plural form unlike other SLs

DOM in Swedish Sign Language

- *Swedish Sign Language* (**Mesch et al. 2012: SSLC01_085, S010**)

  POINT$_{3a}$ KILL   PERSON$_{3b}$

  3_a kill   3.OBJ$_b$

  'They killed him.'

- *Swedish Sign Language* (**Börstell 2017: 150**; adapted glossing)

  POINT$_{3a}$ KILL   POINT$_{3b}$

  3_a kill 3_b

  'He killed him/that one.' (pointing to a physically present body)

DOM in Swedish Sign Language

Comparison with spoken Swedish:

1. restriction to [+human] referents in Swedish SL
2. lack of a 3rd person plural form in the object pronoun in Swedish Sign Language

So Swedish SL *does* have DOM, while spoken Swedish *doesn't* !!

DOM in Swedish Sign Language

Formal criteria for postulating DOM here:

- The sign is restricted to object functions.
- The sign is restricted to [+human] referents.
- The sign is restricted to 1st and 2nd person forms in the plural.

POINT₁ LOVE PERSON₂ ('I love you')

Conclusions

- Animacy influences SLs' argument structure
  - especially prominent for objects
- Consequences of above:
  - word order preferences
  - verb modification (directionality and classifiers)
  - grammaticalization of dedicated object markers
- dedicated object markers (auxiliaries and pronouns)
- multiple uses of PERSON

DOM is an important phenomenon in language regardless of modality

References

- **Börstell, C. (2019). Differential object marking in sign languages.** Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics, 4(1), 3. DOI: http://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.780
- All other references are taken from (Börstell 2019)