Existing explanations for the external possessor sandwich suffer from an English bias

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Outline

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2. External possessors in the Germanic sandwich
3. Explanations and counterarguments
4. An alternative explanation
5. Conclusions

External possessor construction(s)

GERMAN (König & Haspelmath 1998:526)

Die Mutter wäscht *dem Kind* *die Haare.*

the mother washes the:DAT child the hair:PL

'The mother is washing the child's hair.'

External possessors: possessor and possessee are not in the same constituent

vs.

Internal possessors: possessor and possessee are in the same constituent

GERMAN (Internet)

mit einer Albanerin, welche *die Haare* *vom Kind* *abgeschnitten hat*

with an Albanian_woman who the hair:PL of_the:DAT child cut_off has

'with an Albanian woman who cut off the child's hair'

External possessor construction(s)

External possessors: different constructions (cf. Delbecque & Lamiroy 1998)

1. Dative external possessor: *Die Mutter wäscht dem Kind die Haare*.

2. Possessor splitting: *Sie beißt ihm in den Finger*

3. Implicit possessor: *Deine Mutter ist krank im Kopf*.

vs.

Internal possessors: different constructions:

4. prenominal attributive possessor: *Vaters Haare wurden grau*

5. postnominal PP possessor: *die Haare vom Kind*

6. resumptive possessive pronoun: *meinem Bruder sein Auto*

Can be seen a a continuum: (6) straddles the boundary between internal and external possession

External possessors in the Germanic sandwich

- (Dative) external possessor is not equally productive throughout the West-Germanic languages (Lamiroy 2003), but display a Van-Haeringen-pattern (E < D < G):
  - English: nearly non-existent (though see Van de Velde & Lamiroy 2015)
  - Dutch: unproductive, but survives in fixed expressions and special constructions (see disagreement Haspelmath 1999 vs. Van Pottelberghe 2001)
  - German: fairly common

  (1a) ***Ihm** schmerzt der Bauch*
  (1b) **De buik doet **hem** pijn*
  (1b') ***Mi** is den buuc so gheladen* (Middle Dutch, Burridge 1996)
  (1c) **The stomach aches **him***

  (2a) *Er wollte **mir** die Kehle durchschneiden*
  (2b) *Hij wou **me** de keel oversnijden*
  (2c) **He wanted to cut **me** the throat*

Explanations and counterarguments

- Whence the Van-Haeringen-pattern (E < D < G)?

- Whence its conspicuous absence in English?

- Common answers:
  - Due to language contact (Viking settlements, Celtic substrate)
  - A feature of Standard Average European

Explanations and counterarguments

- Language contact:
  - Vennemann (2002): substrate influence from Celtic
  - Problems:
    - Celtic used to have external possessors
    - Counterargument: Celtic was itself influenced by a (Hamito-)Semitic substrate
    - Problem with the counterargument:
      - Semitic contact theory remains controversial (Baldi & Page 2006)
      - Begs the question why Old English did have an external possessor
      - Begs the question why Spanish didn't undergo the Semitic influence
    - Does not explain why the external possessor also receded in the rest of Europe (Romance languages, Slavic languages)

Explanations and counterarguments

- Language contact:
  - McWorther (2002): influence from Viking settlements
  - Problem:
    - Vikings used to have external possessors
    - Does not explain why the external possessor also receded in the rest of Europe (e.g. Slavic languages)

Explanations and counterarguments

- Standard Average European (Whorf 1956; Haspelmath 1998, 2001; Van der Auwera 1998, 2011; Heine & Kuteva 2006)
  - Sprachbund in Europe
  - overrepresentation of cross-linguistically uncommon features
  - in a contiguous area
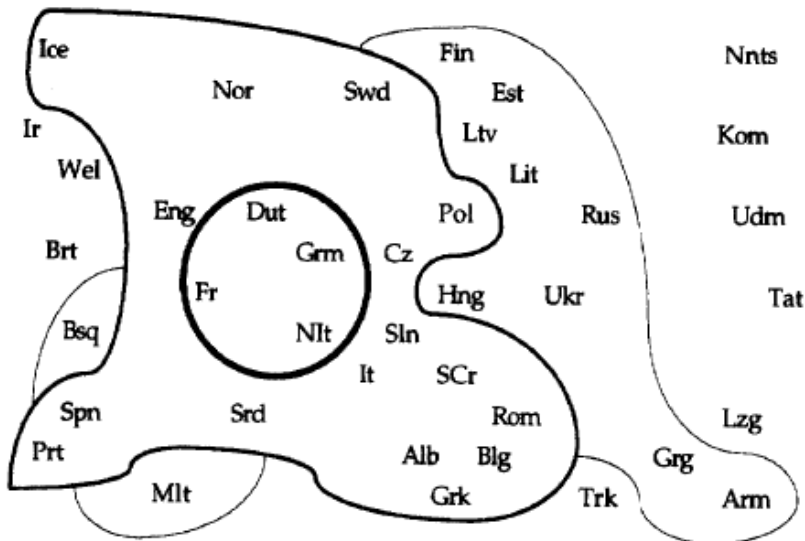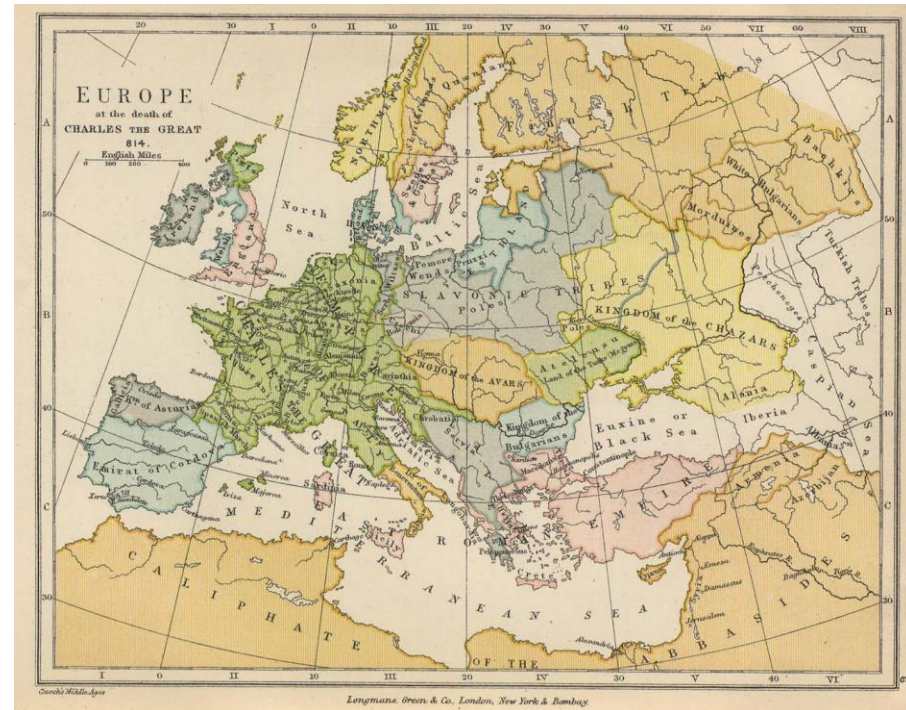 - crossing the IE vs. non-IE boundaries
 - nucleus-core-periphery

Fig. 1. Standard Average European (nucleus, core, periphery).

Haspelmath (1998:273)
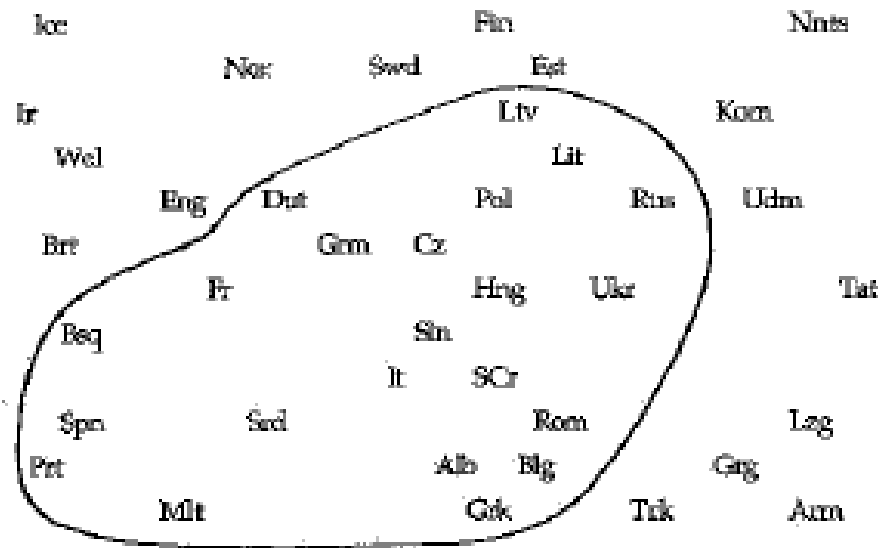
Explanations and counterarguments

1. definite/indefinite articles (H98,01)
2. have-perfects (H98,01)
3. participial passive (H98,01)
4. anticausative prominence (H98,01)
5. nominative experiencers (H98,01)
6. dative external possessors (H98,01)
7. negation and negative pronouns (H98,01)
8. particle comparatives (H98,01)
9. A-and-B conjunction (H98)
10. relative clauses (H98,01)
11. verb fronting in polar questions (H98)
12. relative based equative constructions (H01)
13. su. person aff. as strict agr. markers (H01)
14. intensifier-reflexive differentiation (H01)

Number of features

- Nine
- Eight
- Seven
- Six
- Five
- Two or less
- No information
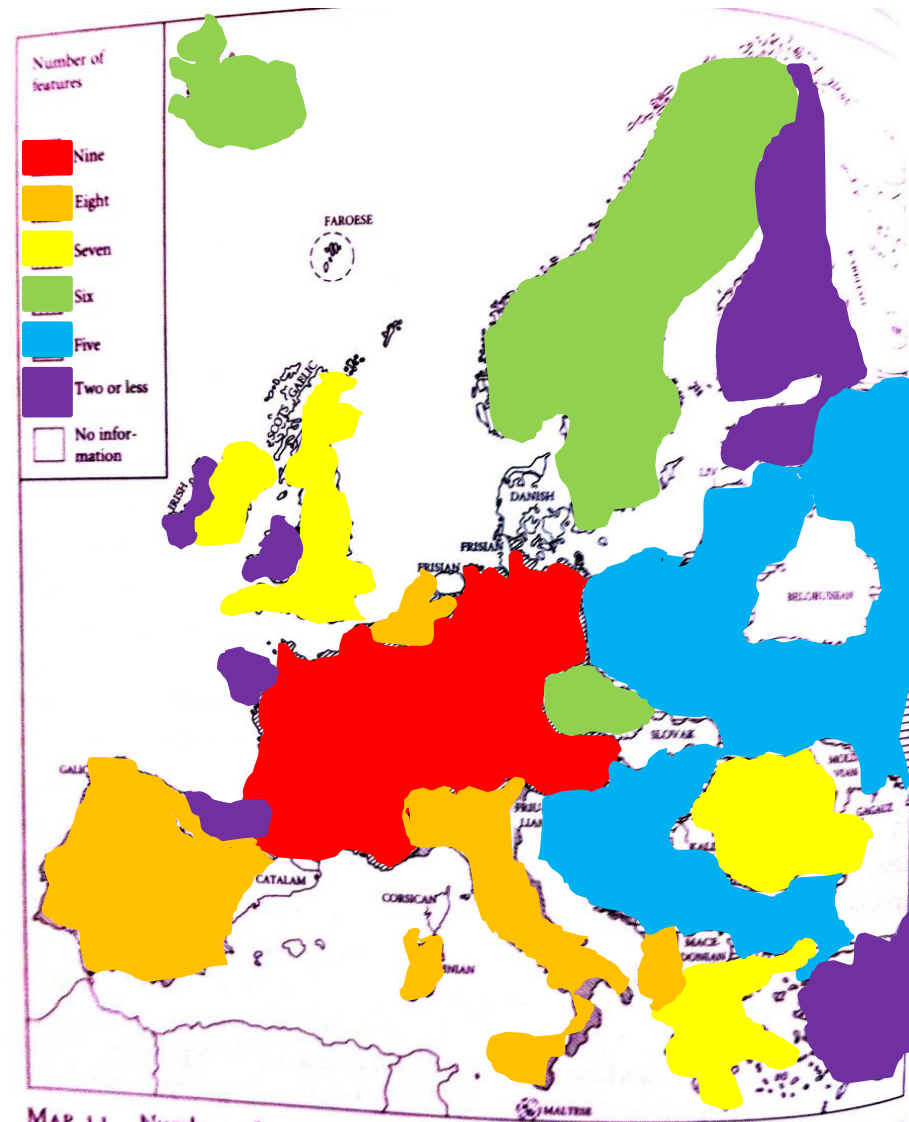
MAP 1.1. Number of morphosyntactic features found in European languages (according to Haspelmath 2001)

Explanations and counterarguments

- Dative external possessors:
  - "[T]his is a very robust example of an SAE feature." (Haspelmath 1998:278, 2001:1498)

Map 107.7: Dative external possessor

Haspelmath (2001:1498)

Explanations and counterarguments

- Dative external possessors:
  - "[T]his is a very robust example of an SAE feature." (Haspelmath 1998:278, 2001:1498)

  - It occurs in a contiguous area on the continent
  - Including non-IE languages like Basque, Hungarian and Maltese
  - Excluding peripheral IE-languages like Celtic, Scandinavian
  - The SAE account explains its absence in English as opposed to German

Explanations and counterarguments

- The SAE account faces a number of problems:
  1. Unlike other typical SAE features (articles, have perfects …), the dative external possessor is an ancient construction in the Indo-European languages (Havers 1911; Haspelmath 1998:282; Harbert 2007:11)

VEDIC SANSKRIT (König & Hqspelmath 1998:551)
á̄ te vájra m̥jaritá̄ bāvór dhāt
PT you.DAT bolt.of.lightning singer arm:DU.LOC put
'The singer put the lightning bolt in your arms.'

HOMERIC GREEK (König & Haspelmath 1998:551)
enéplēsthen dé hoi ámphō haímatos ophthalmoí
were.filled pt him:dat both blood:gen eyes
'Both his eyes were filled with blood.'

LATIN (König & Haspelmath 1998:552)
Cornix cornici numquam ocellum effodit
crow:NOM crow:DAT never eye guts
'A crow never guts another crow's eye.'

OLD CHURCH SLAVONIC (Havers 1911:306)
*brьnьe položi mьně na očiju*
clay:ACC.SG put:AOR.3SG me:DAT on eye:LOC.DU
'He put clay on my eyes'
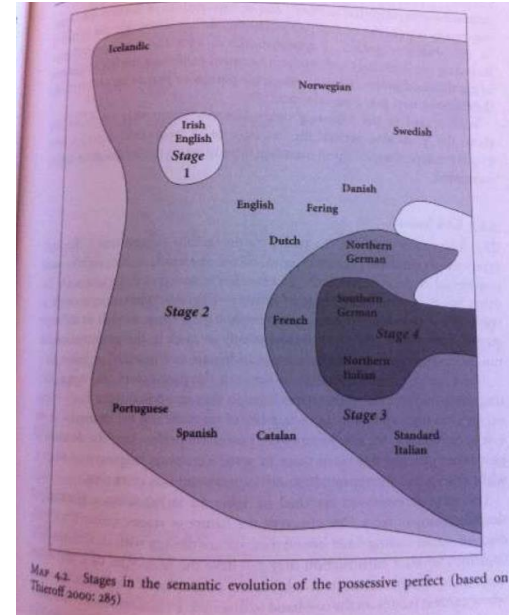
Explanations and counterarguments

- The SAE account faces a number of problems:

  2. Unlike other typical SAE features (articles, have perfects ... see Heine & Kuteva 2006:97-182), the dative external possessor is diachronically in retreat (König & Haspelmath 1997:583-584, Lamiroy 2003)

Explanations and counterarguments

- The SAE account faces a number of problems:
  3. The external possessor stands stronger in Spanish than in French (see Lamiroy 2003), which runs counter to expectation under a SAE account, as French is a nuclear SAE language, and Spanish is not. See e.g.:
     - subject person affixes as strict agreement affixes ('non-pro-drop')
     - the rise of have perfects
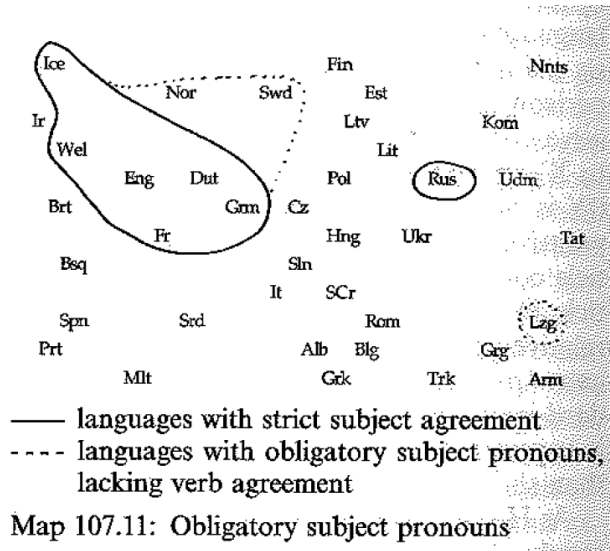
Haspelmath (2001:1500)

Heine & Kuteva (2006:149)

Explanations and counterarguments

- The SAE account faces a number of problems:

  4. In non-IE SAE languages (Hungarian, Maltese) the external possessor is not unequivocally external, as the poss. relation is also marked NP-internally:

     HUNGARIAN (Haspelmath 1999:117)
     A kutya beleharapott a szomszéd-nak a lálá-ba.
     the dog into:bit the neighbour-DAT the leg:3SG-LOC
     'The dog bit (into) the neighbour's leg.'

Explanations and counterarguments

- The SAE account faces a number of problems:
  5. The match between the absence of dative external possessors in English and its non-nuclear position in the SAE Sprachbund is less than perfect.
     - English behaves for all prominent features exactly like its continental neighbour Dutch, which is in the nucleus (according to Haspelmath 1998 and Van der Auwera 1998)
     - The argument for leaving Dutch out of the nucleus is that it does not feature intensifier-reflexive differentiation (see Haspelmath 2001), but this does not conform to the facts, as Dutch behaves like German in this respect (Dutch reflexive *zich* vs. intensifier *zelf* parallels German *sich* versus *selbst*)
     - In some respects, English is even more SAE-like than its nuclear continental neighbours (e.g. anticausative prominence)

An alternative explanation

- The distribution of dative external possessors in Germanic and Romance, see (i) and (ii) (Lamiroy 2003), cannot be due to SAE (Van de Velde & Lamiroy 2015)

  (i)   English < Dutch < German

  (ii)   French < Italian (N < S) < Spanish

- It must be due to something else:
  - Differential speed of language change (Lamiroy & De Mulder 2011)
  - Rise of configurationality of the NP (Van de Velde 2009a, b)

An alternative explanation

- Dative external possessors are attested in the oldest stages of Germanic languages

GOTHIC (John 9, 15)
Fani galagida mis ana augona
clay:ACC.SG put:PST.3SG me:DAT on eyes:ACC.PL
'He put clay into my eyes'

OLD HIGH GERMAN (Havers 1911:285)
So riuzit thir thaz herza
then mourns you:DAT the heart
'Then your heart will mourn'

OLD DUTCH (ONW s.v. fuot)
Tho bat her that min ímo an themo cruce up kerde the uóze.
then asked he that one him:DAT on the cross up turned the feet
'Then he asked that they would turn his feet up on the cross.'

OLD SAXON (Havers 1911:293)
Thiu hlust uuarð imu farhauuan
the ear was him:DAT hewn
'His ear was cut off'

OLD ENGLISH (Traugott 1992:205-206)
... him mon aslog þæt heafod of
him:DAT one cut the head off
'... they cut his head off'

An alternative explanation

- Differential speed of language change (incl. grammaticalization) in West Germanic (Van Haeringen 1956; Weerman 2006; König & Gast 2009:14; Lamiroy & De Mulder 2011)

	German	Dutch	English
Old	+	+	+
Middle	+	+	±
Modern	+	±	-

- Not just for dative external possessors, but throughout grammar (and beyond)
- Similar picture arises for Romance (see Posner 1996: 185; Lamiroy 1999, 2001; Lamiroy & De Mulder 2011)

An alternative explanation

- What drives the demise of the dative external possessor in West Germanic and Romance?

- Answer 1: deflexion

  - loss of dative ⇨ loss of dative external possessor (Haspelmath 1999:124-125; McWhorter 2002:226-228; Vennemann 2002:213-215)

  - But this account is problematic for a number of reasons:

    - Dative external possessor was lost in languages with a thriving dative case like Icelandic (König & Haspelmath 1998:583)

    - Dative external possessor is holding up well in languages with a dative / accusative syncretism like Spanish

    - Dative case is not necessary to have an external possessor construction. Other options are (i) word order, (ii) prepositions, (iii) using a locative (essive) PP. Why didn't English develop constructions like *He broke her the arm* or *He broke the arm to her* or *He broke the arm on her*?

An alternative explanation

- What drives the demise of the dative external possessor in West Germanic and Romance?
- Answer 2: greater configurationality in the NP (Van de Velde & Lamiroy 2015)
  - All kinds of modifiers get trapped in the gravitation field of the NP (Van de Velde 2009a, b).
  - Rise in configurationality of the NP (Himmelmann 1997, Luraghi 2010, Perridon & Sleeman 2011, Van de Velde et al. 2014 among others)
  - Focus on the relation between verb and participants > focus on the interparticipant relations (König 2001:973)

An alternative explanation

- Arguments:
  - Baltic and Slavic languages preserve the dative external possessor and have lower NP configurationality
  - Grammaticalization of the article (~ configurationality of the NP, see Himmelmann 1997) inversely correlates with the preservation of the dative external possessor in West Germanic and Romance
  - Grammaticalization of the article: E > D > G
    - Phonetic divergence between the definite article and the demonstrative
    - Phonetic divergence between the indefinite article and the numeral
    - Degree of specialisation for definiteness
  - Degree of 'externality' of RPP construction (E < D < G)
    - German: marked with dative case
    - Dutch: unmarked for dative case
    - English: does not use it any more (totally internalized)

Conclusions

1. Contrary to what is often claimed in the literature, the external possessor is not a typical SAE feature

2. Contrary to what is often claimed in the literature, the lack of an external possessor is not the direct result of language contact (with languages that didn't have an external possessor), but may be an indirect result of contact (see 6, below).

3. Contrary to what is often claimed in the literature, the lack of an external possessor is not due to the deflexion targeting the dative case

4. The demise of the dative external possessor is the consequence of competition with internal possessor constructions. European languages increasingly rely on NP-internal modification constructions. This push chain scenario is more plausible than drag chain scenario (see e.g. Hopper & Traugott 2003:124)

5. Looking at related languages (Romance, Germanic), we find Van Haeringen constellations, though there is no ironclad entailment from configurationality to no external possessor.

6. The differential speed in the NP configurationality and in language change in general is probably connected to language contact and demographics (Weerman 2006; Lamiroy & Van de Velde 2010; Van de Velde & Lamiroy 2015)
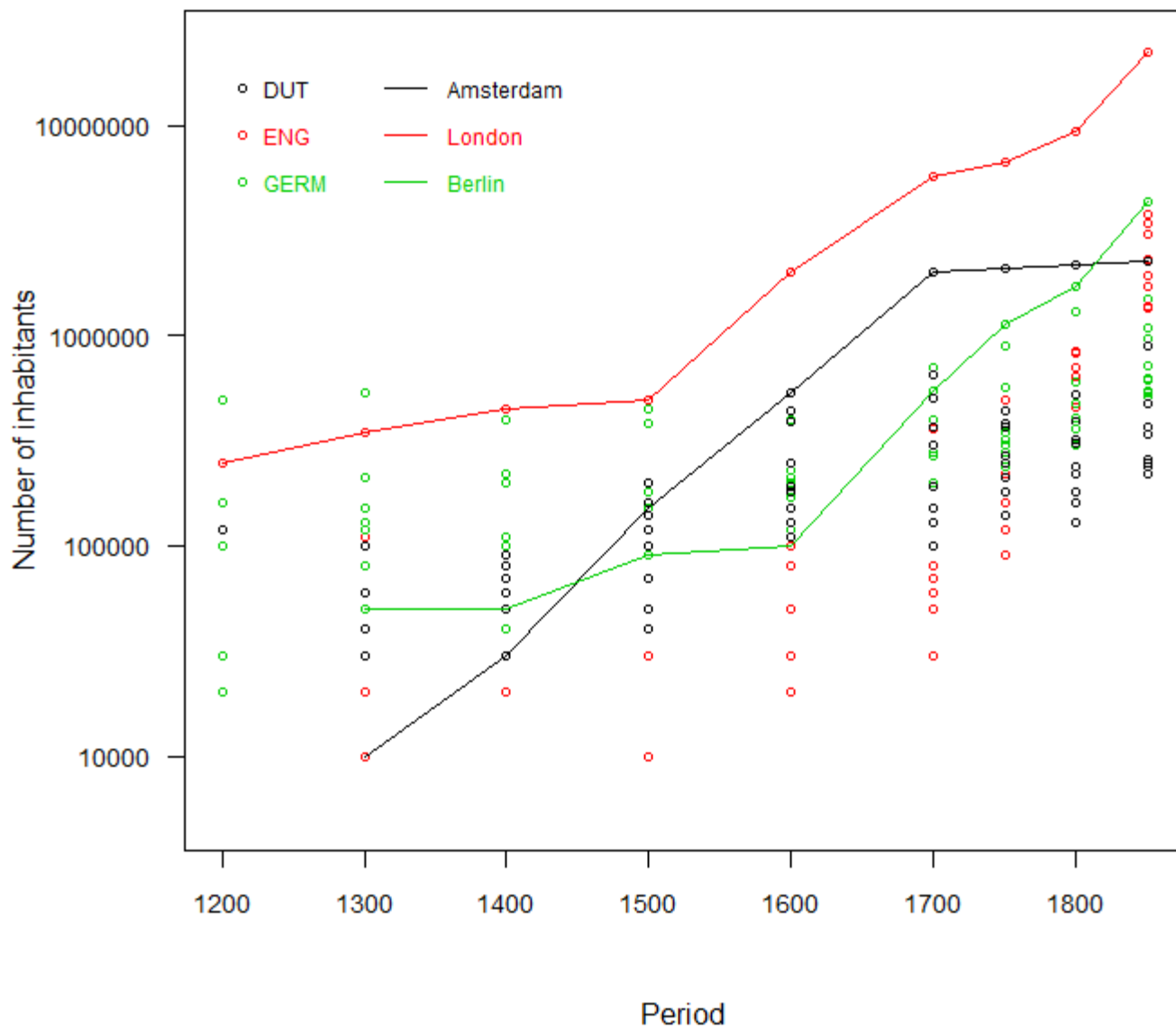
Major cities in West-Germanic Europe.
Circle size corresponds to population size
(with diachronic dimension)
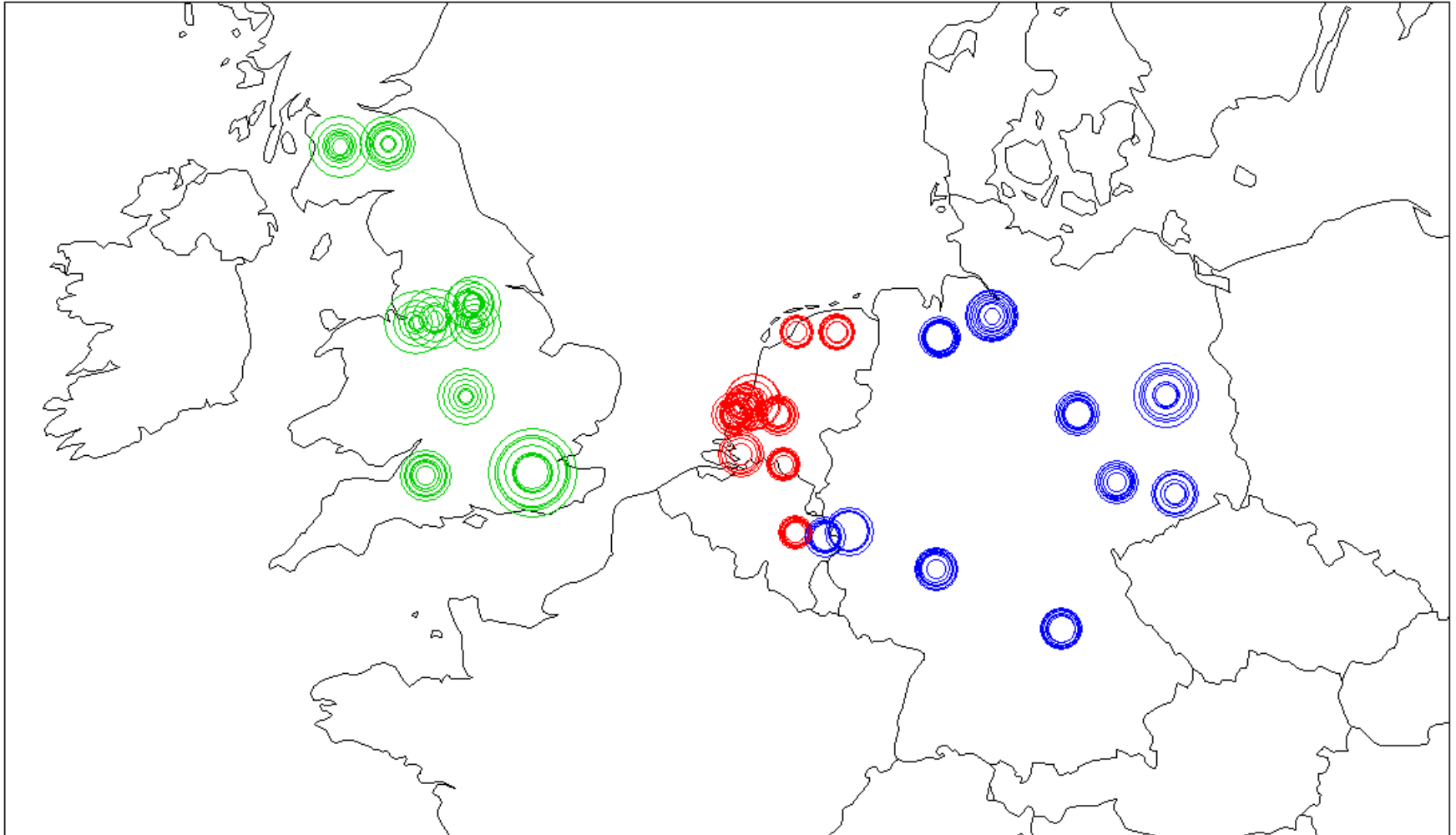
Urbanization of 10 largest cities per West-Germanic language
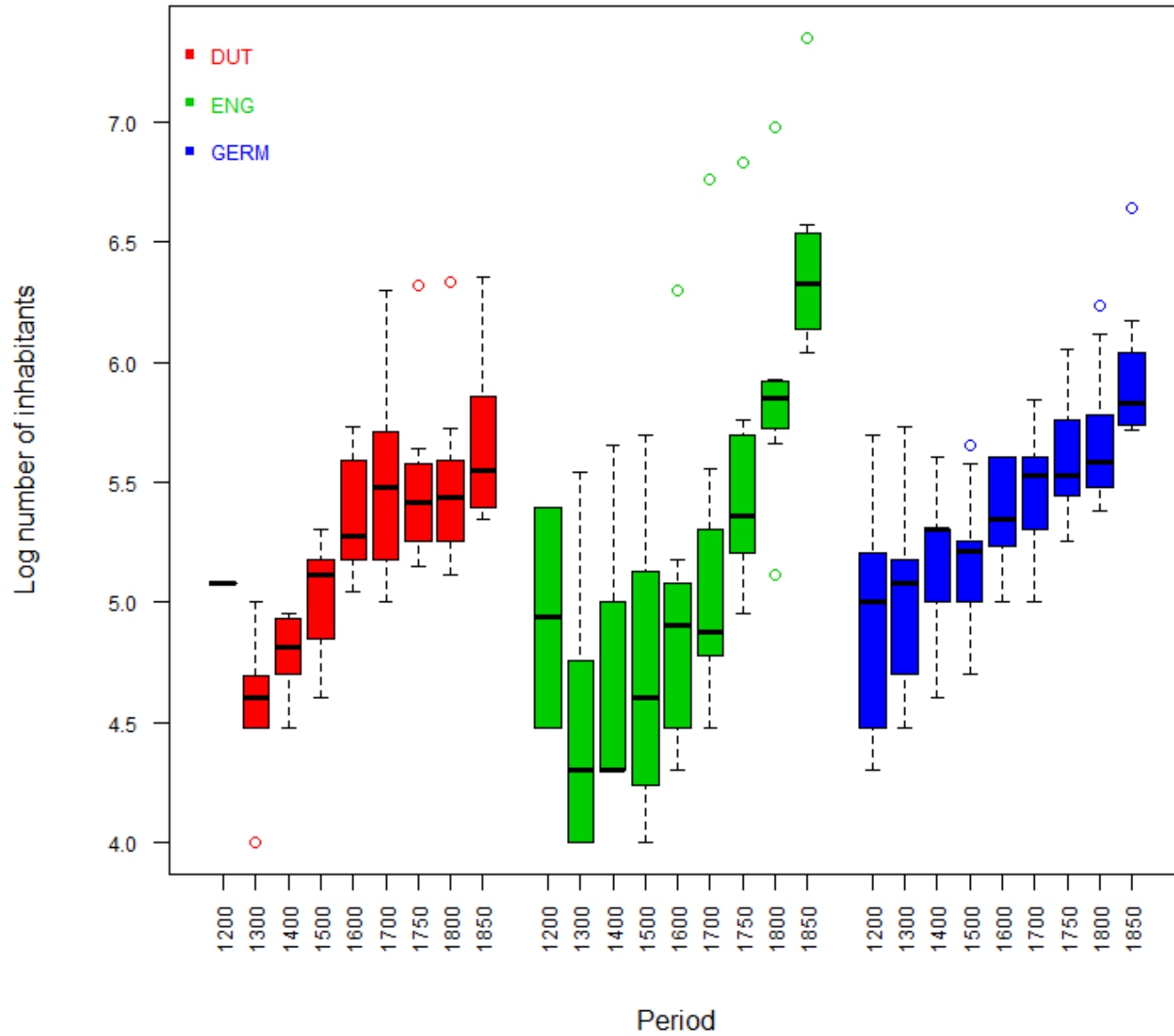
**Urbanization of 10 largest cities
per West-Germanic language**

Thank you

- Full paper: Van de Velde, Freek & Béatrice Lamiroy. Forthcoming, 2015. 'External possessors in West Germanic and Romance: differential speed in the drift towards NP configurationality'. In: Hubert Cuyckens, Lobke Ghesquière & Daniël Van Olmen (eds.), *Aspects of grammaticalization: (inter)subjectification, analogy and unidirectionality*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

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