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**A typology of pronouns:  
The parameters of boundness and  
tenacity**

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# Abkhaz

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- *i-rə-l-tejt'*  
it-them-she-gave  
'She gave it to them'
  
- *i-č'k<sub>o</sub>'ənc<sup>o</sup>a*    *d-rə-pxyan*  
his-sons        he-them-called  
'He called his sons'

# Latin

Quintus Horatius Flaccus, Satires, Book 1, Chapter 5

c = Cicirrus, s = Sarmentus

- rogaba-t      denique      cur      umquam      fugisse-t,  
ask.impf-3sg   finally      why      sometime flee.plpf.conj-3sg
- cui      satis      una      farr-is      libra      fore-t,  
who.dat   enough   one      grain-gen.sg   pound   be.impf.conj-3sg

'Finally he (Cicirrus) asked why he (Sarmentus) had ever fled,  
he to whom one pound of grain would have been enough'

# English

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- Du Bois et al. 2000, conversation SBC0001 "Actual Blacksmithing"
- (H) **this girl's** been .. in this f=errier,
- ... uh,
- **she's** going to an actual .. ferrier college.
- (H) They have a lo=t of those around.
- .. a lo=t.
- (H) And **she's** going to one of em,
- and **she's** been going for,
- .. like nine months.
- .. to this one,
- and **she's** still got [a lot more=],

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# Questions

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- What kinds of referential devices are found across languages?
- How are they distributed in terms of frequency, geography, and genealogy?
- What performs the discourse act of reference in each case?
- Is Abkhaz different from Latin in how it handles reference?
- How does reference operate when there is both a full NP and a reduced (pronominal) device in the same clause? (cf. "argument type parameter")

# Why are these questions important?

## 1. Reference is an overwhelming phenomenon in language use

- Biber et al. 1999: 230-232

- **A:** Well I thought you were going to talk to me about Christmas presents..

- **B:** I have spoken to you about Christmas presents. I've told you about all I can tell you. Why don't you, why don't you sit down and tell me what you want for Christmas. I mean that would be useful.

- **A:** Well thought were going to talk to about .

- **B:** have spoken to about . 've told . Why don't , why don't sit down and tell . mean would be useful.

# Why are these questions important?

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2. There are many contradictory and partial accounts of referential phenomena (including in linguistic typology), and there is a need for a general, integrated account
3. Linguistic typology must go beyond sentence and address discourse phenomena



# Referential devices

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- Full vs. reduced
- Three basic types of reduced referential devices (**refs**)
  - Free pronouns
  - Bound pronouns
  - Zero refs
- This talk: mostly third person reference

} Overt refs

# Zero refs

- Yidiny (Dixon 1977: 514)
- ∅ gali:n/ ∅ wawa:liɲu/ bama ɲabi ɲinaɲunda/  
go.past look.going.past person.abs many.abs sit.dat.  
subord

<...>

- ∅ ∅ wawa:liɲu/  
look.going.past
- bama:l ∅ wawa:l/  
person.erg see.past

'They went, went and saw lots of people sitting there <...> They went up and looked at them. The people saw them.'

# Free pronouns

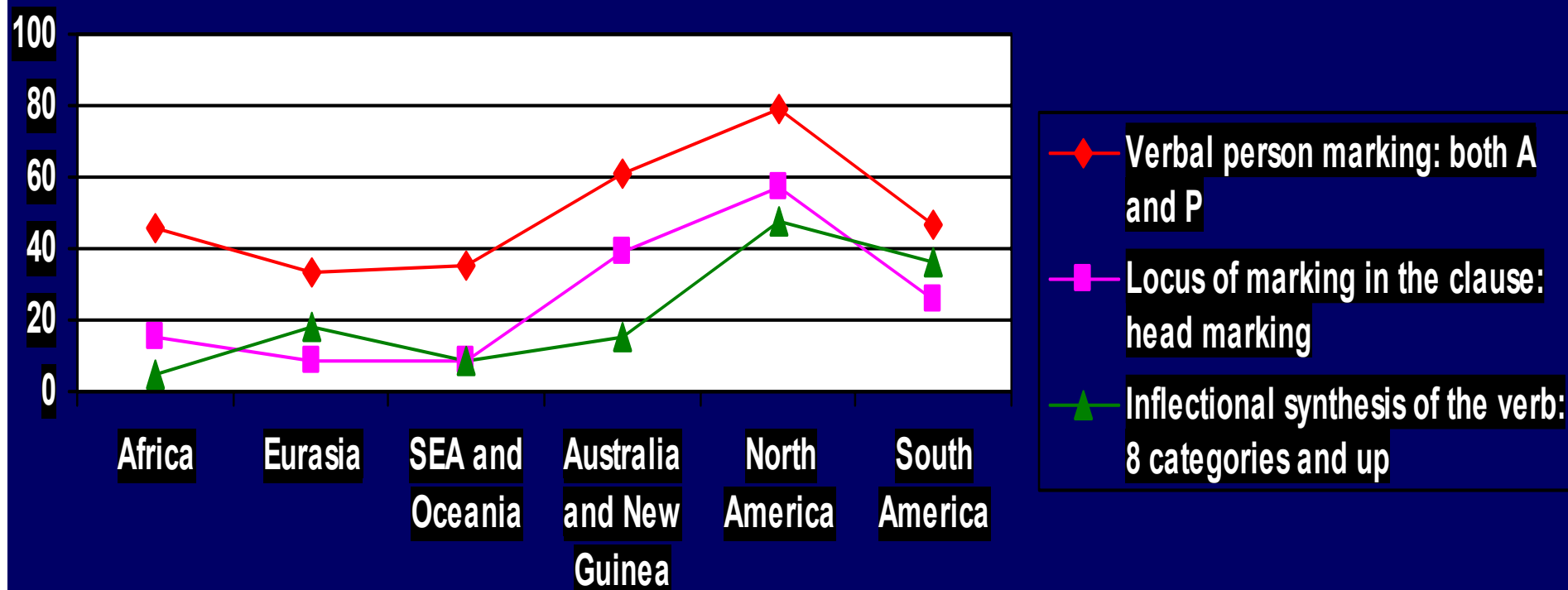
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- Free (weak) pronouns are clitics
- Example: English
- A cleaner example: Lyélé (Southern Gur, Burkina Faso)
- Geographical and genealogical distribution (inferring from Dryer 2005):
  - West Africa (Gur, Mande, western Benue-Congo)
  - northern Europe
  - parts of western Oceania (Austronesian)
  - some Pama-Nyungan
- Clearly minor on the world-wide scale
- Syntax-centered character of grammar

# Bound pronouns

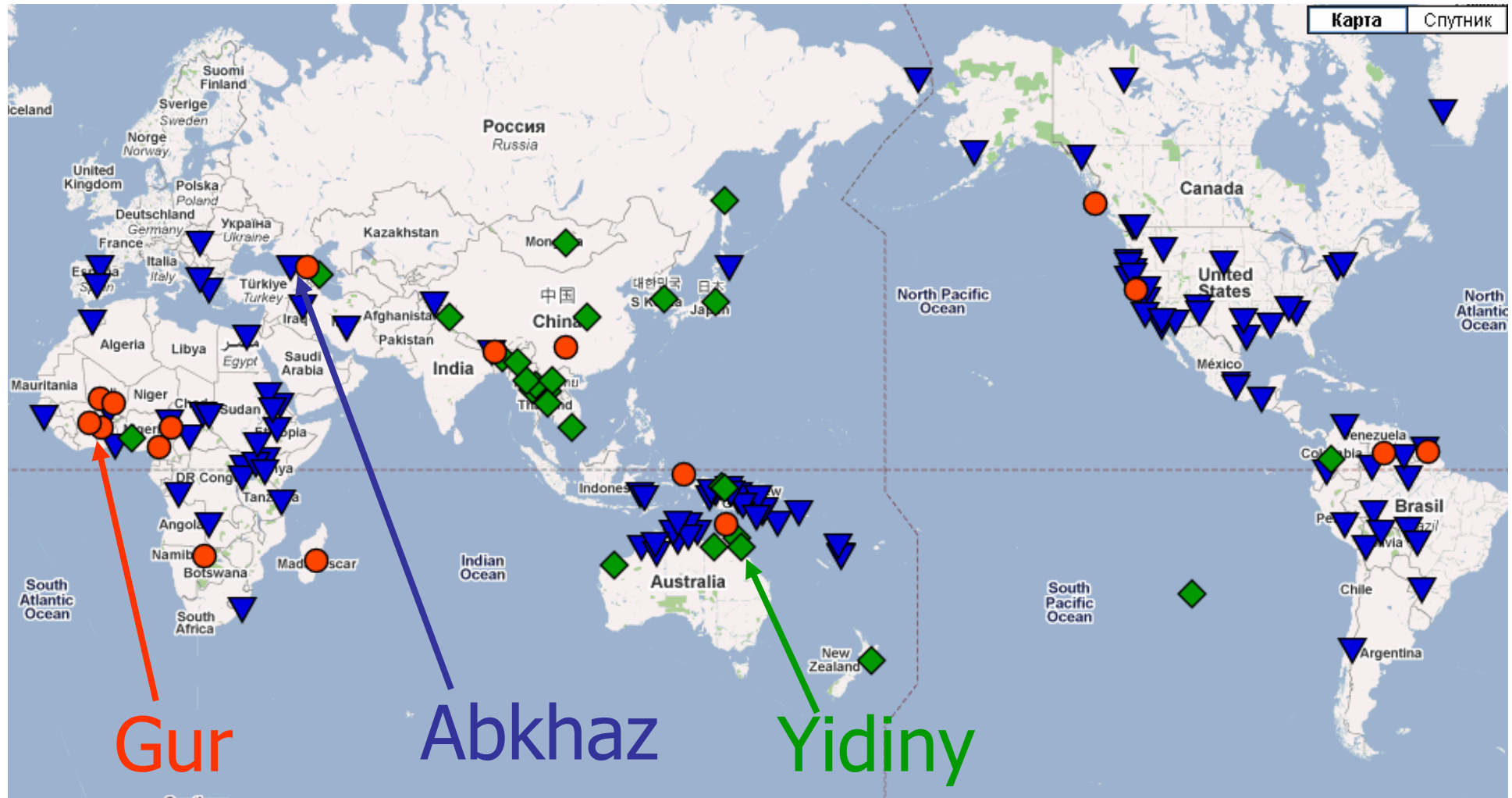
- Bound pronouns are affixes, primarily verbal
- Example - Abkhaz
- Geographical and genealogical distribution:
  - North America
  - Parts of South America
  - New Guinea and some other parts of western Oceania
  - Northern Australia
  - Central Eastern Africa (Bantu, "Nilo-Saharan")
  - Restricted parts of Eurasia
- Clearly the dominant pattern world-wide
  - Dryer 2005: 409 out of 674 languages in sample
- Morphology-centered character of grammar
- Correlation with polysynthesis, head-marking

# Comparison of three WALS studies



- Siewierska 2005, Nichols and Bickel 2005, and Bickel and Nichols 2005

# WALS composer: Dryer and Siewierska



- Consistent languages: free, bound, zero

# Tenacious vs. recessive pronouns

- **Recessive pronouns**: a complementary distribution with coreferential NPs in the same clause
  - Example: English
- **Tenacious pronouns**: cooccur with coreferential NPs in the same clause
  - Example: Abkhaz
- Recessiveness correlates with freeness
- Tenacity correlates with boundness
- However...

# Free tenacious pronouns

- Spanish “clitic doubling”
- Comajoan 2006:73

■ y la chica pues le da-∅ le quita-∅  
and the girl then 3sg.dat hit-pres.3sg 3sg.dat seize-  
pres.3sg

al chico al niño el sombrero  
to.the boy to.the boy the hat

‘And the girl then takes the hat from the boy ...’



# Free tenacious pronouns

- Bilua (a Papuan language of Solomon islands;  
Obata 2003:115, 30)
- Omadeu taku sike tamania ke=beta e=ke.  
one time five brother&sister 3pl.nom=cont stay-hist  
'Once upon a time, there were five brothers and sisters living.'
- Sai vo=a ziolo  
there 3sg.m.nom=lig devil  
  
ke=papue=v=e jari topi.  
3pl.nom=sit=3sg.m.acc=rmp copra.house on.top  
'There, they sat the devil on the copra house.'

# Bound recessive pronouns

- Upper Kuskokwim (Athabaskan)

- **yi**-ne-łʔ anh

**3.acc**-pref-(3.nom)look

‘S/he is looking at **it/him/her**’

- **guga**?      ne-łʔ anh

**baby**      pref-(3.nom)look

‘S/he is looking at **the baby**’

# Both free recessive and bound tenacious pronouns

- South Efate (Austronesian, Vanuatu; Thieberger 2006: 269, 113-114)

- Ra=pitlak                  tesa                  nmatu                  iskei.  
3du.real.nom=have          child                  girl                  one  
'They had a daughter.'

I=skot-i-r    to.  
3sg.real.nom=be.with-trans-3pl.acc                  stay  
'She stayed with them.'

- Ale,                  ntuam                  i=na                          i=to <...>  
then                  devil                  3sg.real.nom=want                  3sg.real.nom=stay  
'Then the devil stayed <...>'

# Boundness and tenacity

- The parameters “free vs. bound” and “recessive vs. tenacious” are in fact independent
- Frequency cline:
  - bound tenacious  
v
  - free recessive  
v
  - free tenacious  
v
  - bound recessive

# Tenacity and argumenthood

- Abkhaz
- *i-č'k<sub>o</sub>'ənc<sup>o</sup>a d-rə-pxyan*  
his-sons he-them-called  
'He called his sons'

What are the arguments of this clause?

# Variant 1: NPs

- $\emptyset$      *i-č'k<sub>o</sub>'ənc<sup>o</sup>a*     *d-rə-pxyan*  
                his-sons                                  he-them-called  
                'He called his sons'

agreement

## Variant 2: Bound pronouns

- *i-č'k<sub>o</sub>'ənc<sup>o</sup>a* *d-rə-pxyan*  
his-sons he-them-called  
'He called his sons'

adjunct

# Variant 3: Bound pronoun > NP

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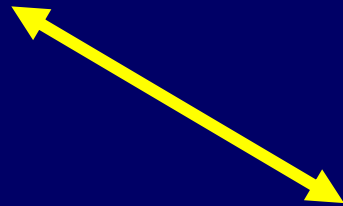
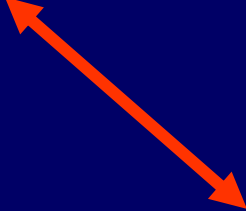
- *i-č'k<sub>o</sub>'ənc<sup>o</sup>a* *d-rə-pxyan*  
his-sons he-them-called  
'He called his sons'

agreement



# There is no need to choose: distributed argumenthood

- *i-č'k<sub>o</sub>'ənc<sup>o</sup>a* *d-rə-pxyan*



- Kibrik 1988
- Mithun 2003
- Siewierska 2004
- Corbett 2006

his-sons            he-them-called  
'He called his sons'

# Sensitivities

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- Consistent languages
  - Free recessive pronouns - Lyélé
  - Bound tenacious pronouns – Abkhaz
- Inconsistencies/sensitivities:
  - Clause participant position
  - Construction type
  - Referent's level of activation
  - Referent's definiteness, specificity, etc.

# Clause participant position

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- Latin
  - Subject: bound tenacious pronouns
  - Object: free recessive pronouns
- Gela (Oceanic Austronesian, Solomon Islands, Crowley 2002)
  - Subject: free tenacious
  - Object: bound tenacious
- ...most other combinations attested as well...

# Clause participant position + construction type

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- English:
  - High degree of propensity to free pronouns
  - However, free pronouns yield to zero reference in some special contexts, in particular:
- subject position of non-first coordinate clauses

# Abkhaz vs. Latin

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- How are the Abkhaz and the Latin patterns different?
- Both use bound pronouns
- The only difference is in sensitivity:
  - Abkhaz: all pronouns are bound and tenacious → pronouns are insensitive
  - Latin: pronouns are bound and tenacious only in the subject pronouns → there is an important sensitivity along the lines of clause participant position

# What all this is good for?

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- For profiling individual languages' referential systems
- After profiles of a significant number of languages is available, for the construction of a fully-fledged typology of referential systems

# Framework for a description of a language's referential system

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- Preferred type of ref: zero vs. free pronoun vs. bound pronoun
- Pronouns: recessive vs. tenacious
- Sensitivities:
  - Whether the language is consistent or not
  - What bases for sensitivities are attested
  - What options are used depending on sensitivities

# Profiles of several of the world's major languages

Language	Primary ref	Presence and kind of sensitivity
English	FRP	—
Spanish	BTP; FTP	Clause participant position: subject; object
French	BTP; BRP	Referential properties: definite; indefinite
Russian	BTP; FRP+BTP; FRP	Clause participant position and degree of activation: maximally activated subject; activated subject; object
Japanese	Zero	—
Mandarin	Zero; FRP	Degree of activation: higher; lower



## On a sad note

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- In this domain – one of the worst misnomers in linguistics,
- picked up by linguists of various theoretical views with a surprising ease
- Pro-drop

# Which languages are pro-drop?

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- Those that use zero reference, such as Yidiny or Japanese
- Those that use insensitive bound pronouns, such as Abkhaz
- Those that use bound pronouns, sensitive to clause participant position, such as Latin
- Those that use sensitive free pronouns, such as Mandarin or Russian
- In other words, all unEnglish languages

# The parameter of Englishness

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- Siewierska and Bakker 2005
  - A sample of 428 languages
  - 96.2% of languages are “pro-drop”
- This “parameter” completely fails to account for the diversity of unEnglish languages
- Plea: **DROP PRO-DROP!**

# Conclusions

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- Overt refs (=pronouns) can be typologized with the help of two major parameters:
  - Free vs. bound
  - Recessive vs. tenacious
- Language-internal variation in pronouns can be accounted for through a network of sensitivities
- When profiles based on these principles is available for many languages, a fully-fledged typology of referential devices can be constructed