

Content Interrogatives

towards a typology

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Wer, wie, was?

Der, die, das!

Wieso, weshalb, warum?

Wer nicht fragt, bleibt dumm!

(From the introduction of
German *Sesame Street*)

Morphological typology

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- Quasi-simplex
- Transparent

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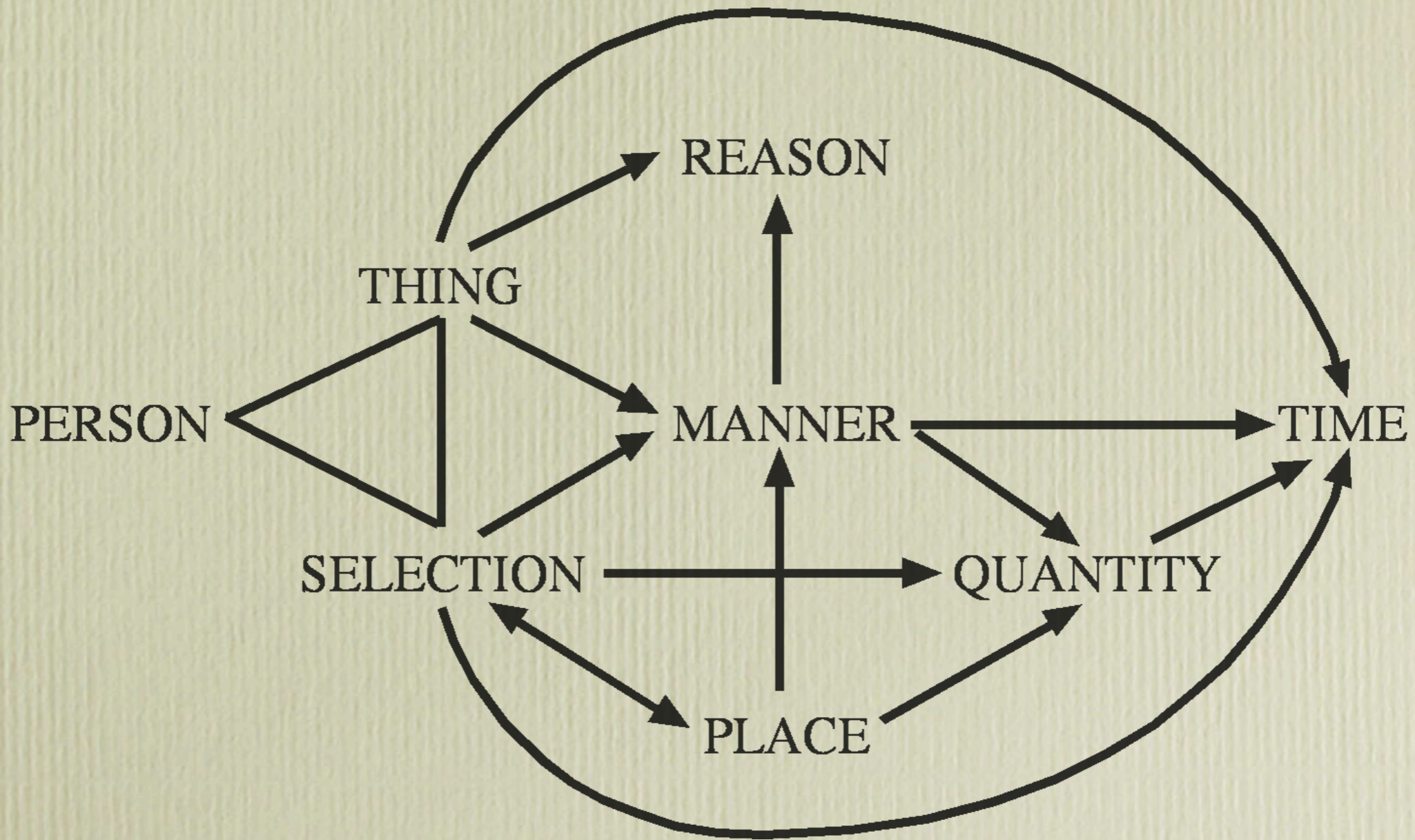
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 - synchronically derived (e.g. *how much*)
 - identical word for different meanings (e.g. *how are you* vs. *how big*)

Simplex meanings cross-linguistically

category	example	% simplex (appr.)
PERSON	<i>who</i>	95
THING	<i>what</i>	95
PLACE	<i>where</i>	90
SELECTION	<i>which</i>	60
QUANTITY	<i>how much</i>	60
MANNER	<i>how</i>	40
TIME	<i>when</i>	40

All other meanings fall below 10%

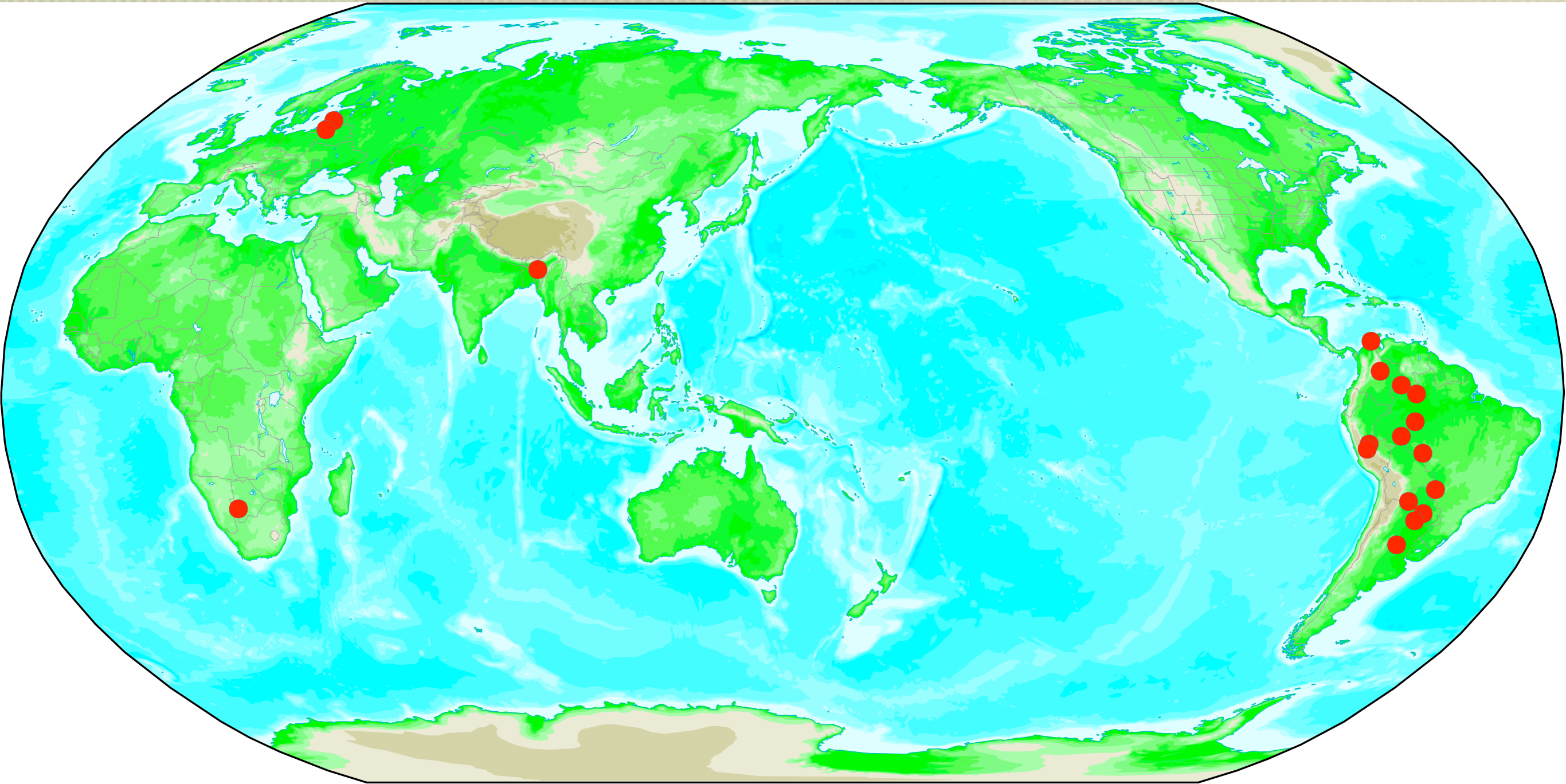
Non-simplex derivations



Some findings on derived content interrogatives

- All languages have transparent interrogatives
- ‘Pure’ transparency is extremely rare
- Ambiguities between major categories are rare

who = what



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- ‘Complete’ ambiguity is not attested

The End