Disentangling Universals from History

Or:

What you see is ***not*** what you will get

Michael Cysouw

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig

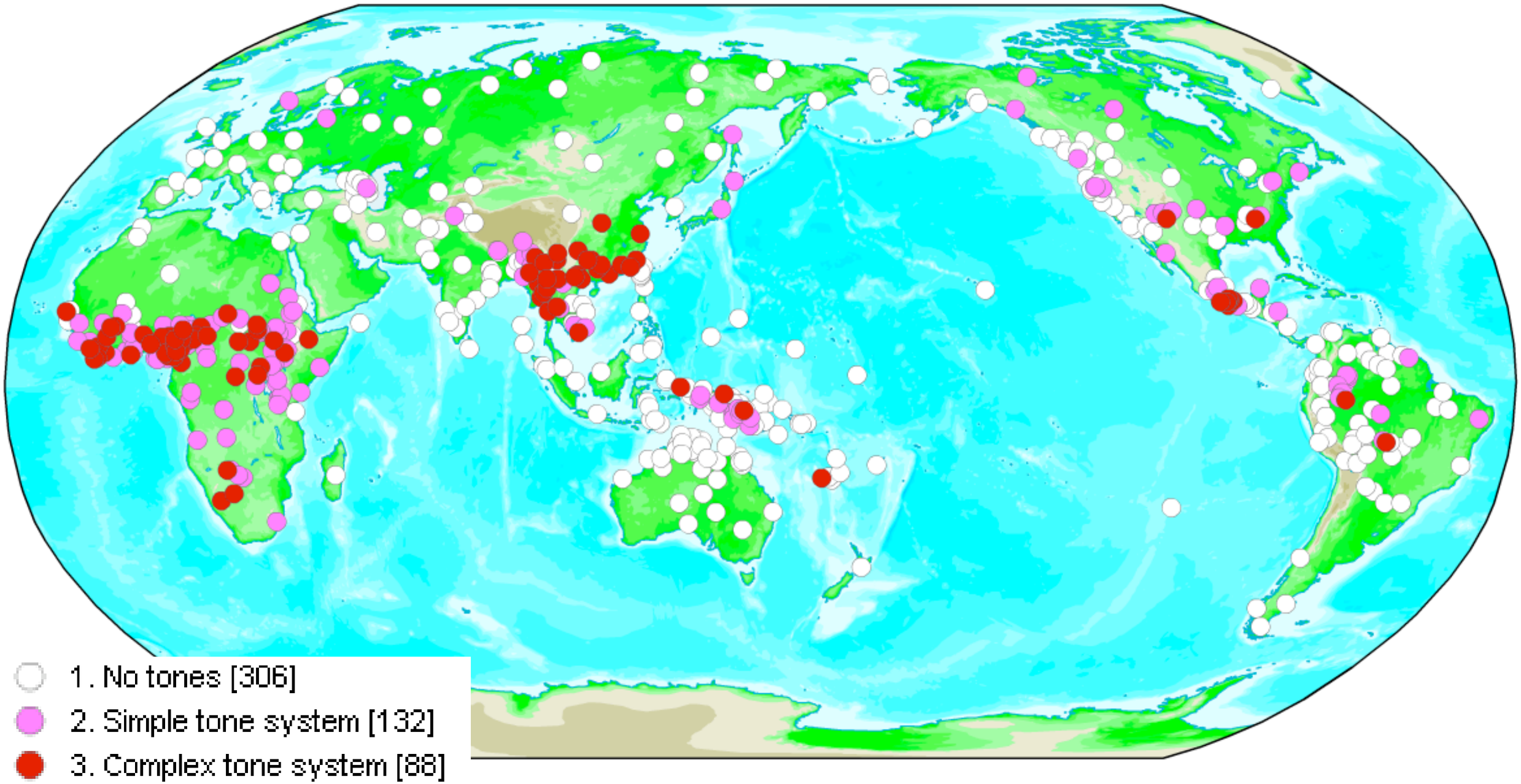
Or:

A plea for *"genealogical biased"* sampling

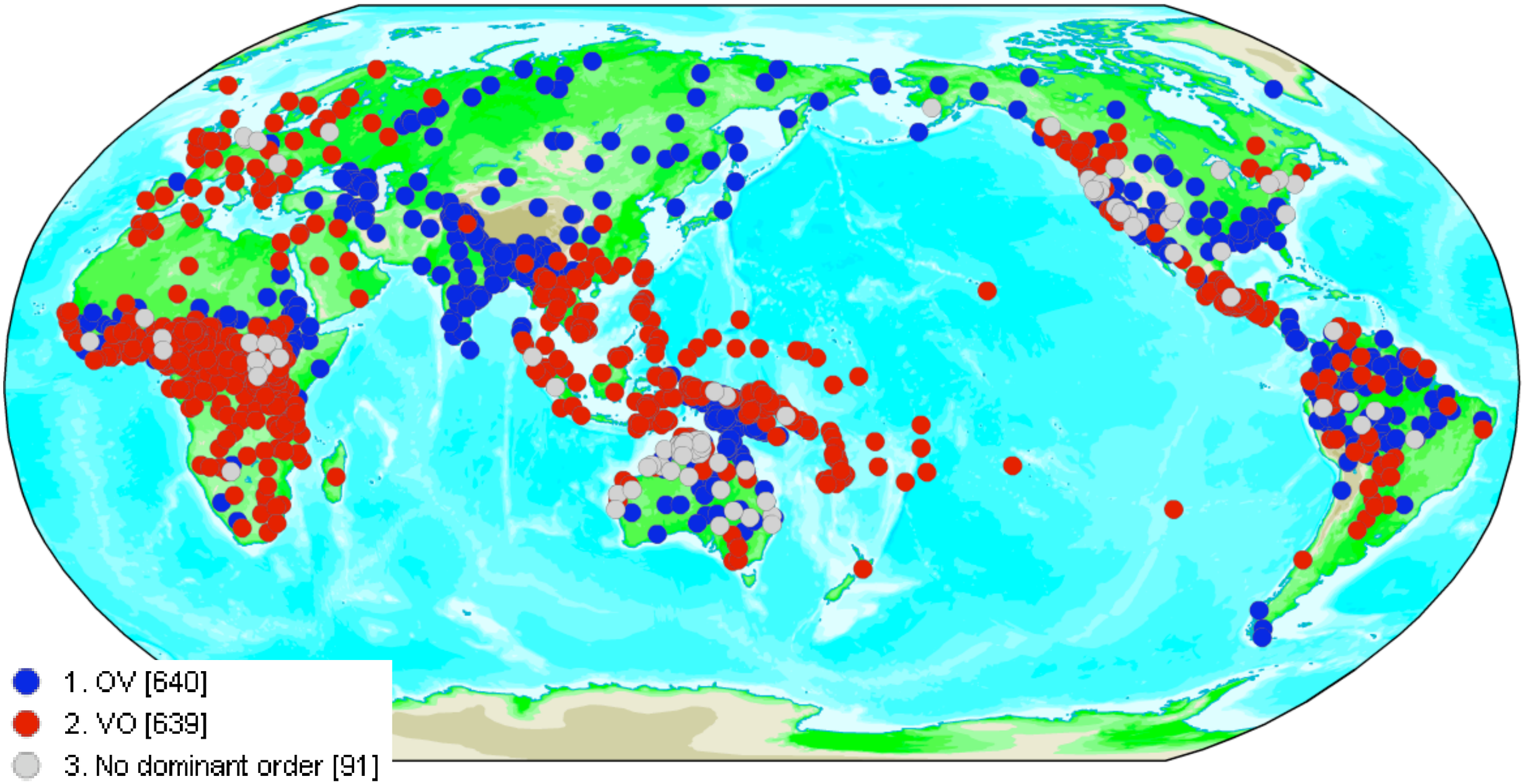
Michael Cysouw

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig

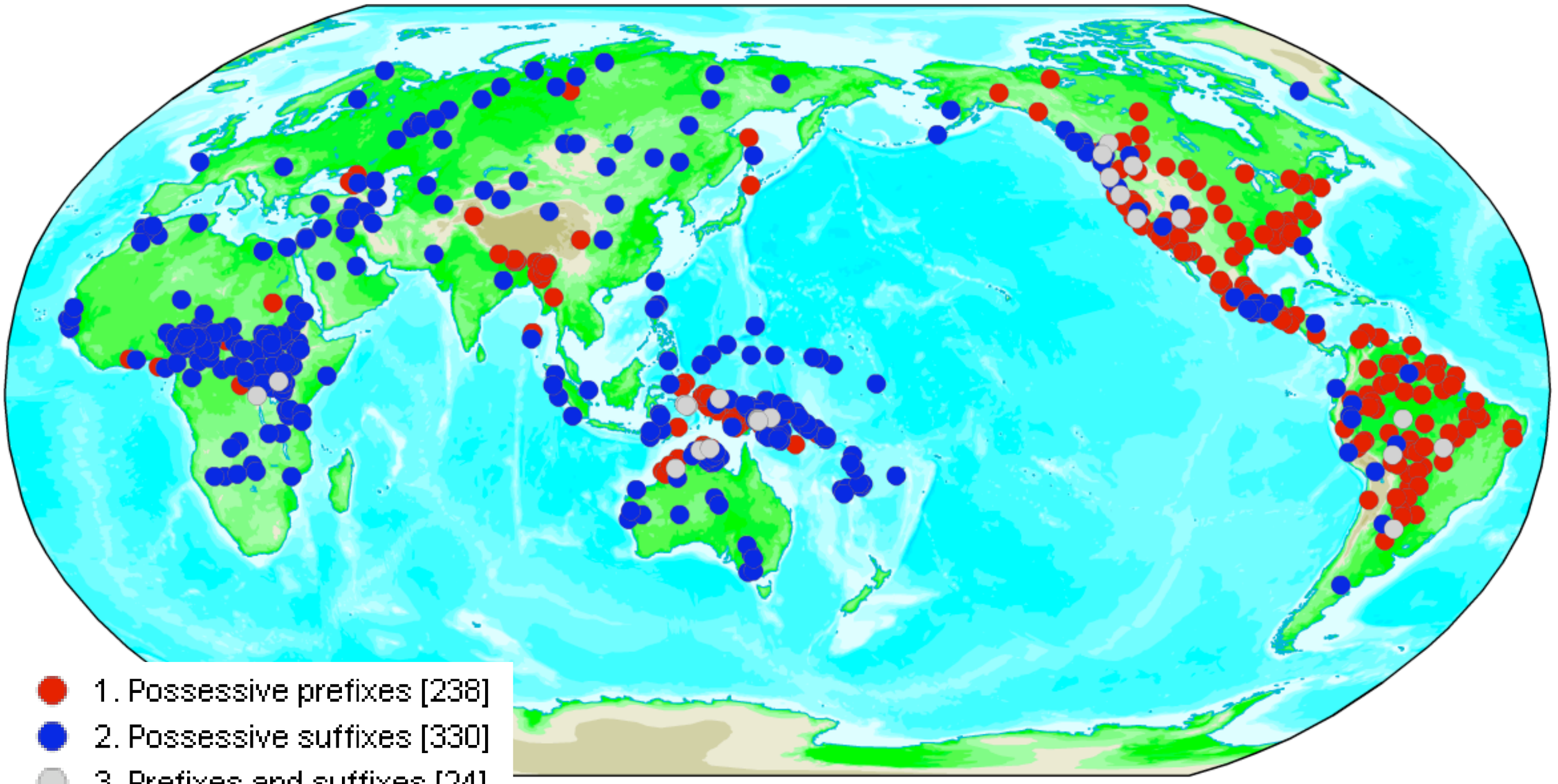
Tone
(Ian Maddieson)



Order of Object and Verb (Mathew Dryer)



Position of pronominal possessive affixes (Mathew Dryer)



Reactions to *Large Areal Consistencies*

- Matthew Dryer (starting from 1989):

  Problem for universals !

- Johanna Nichols (starting from 1992):

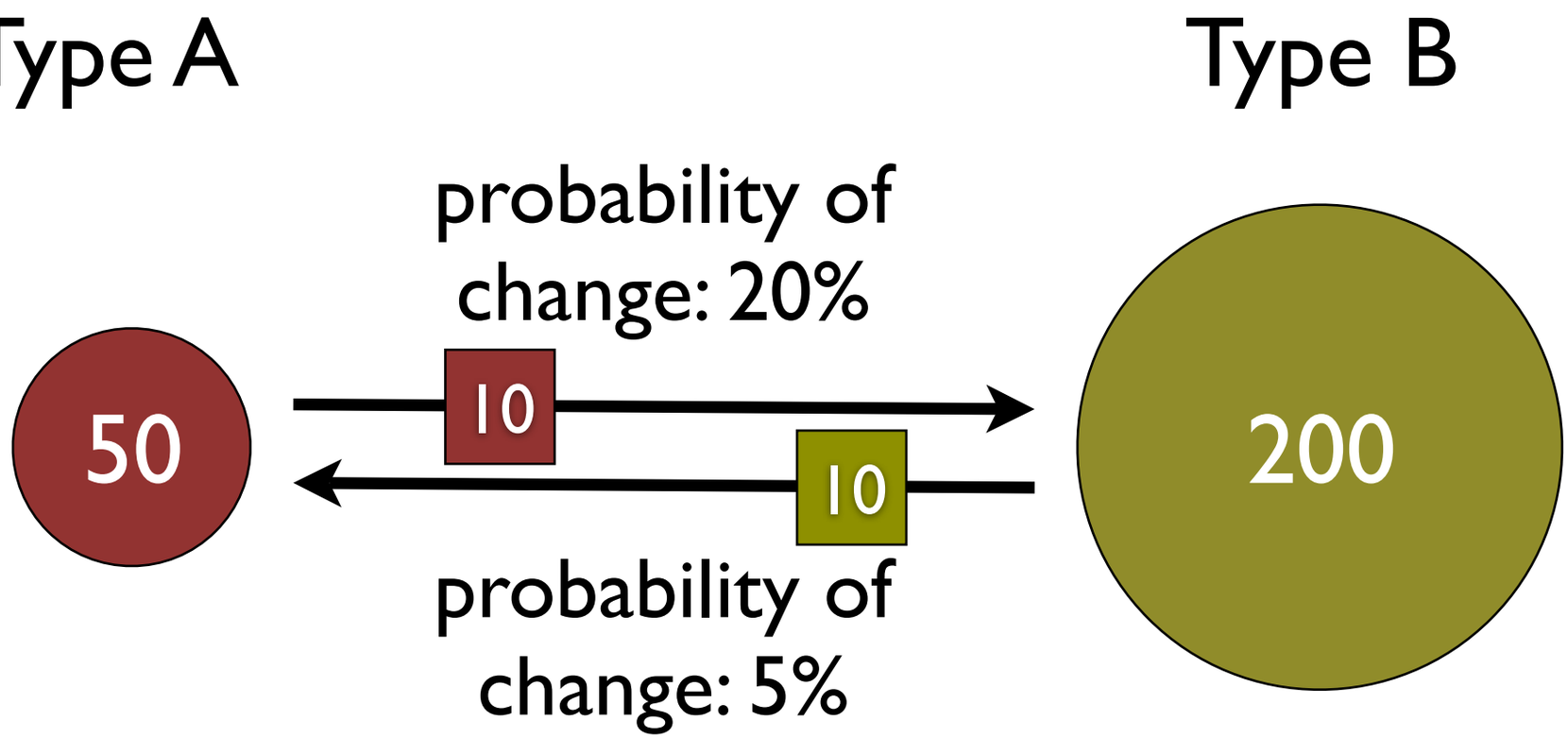
  Great for investigation of history !

- Elena Maslova (starting from 2001):

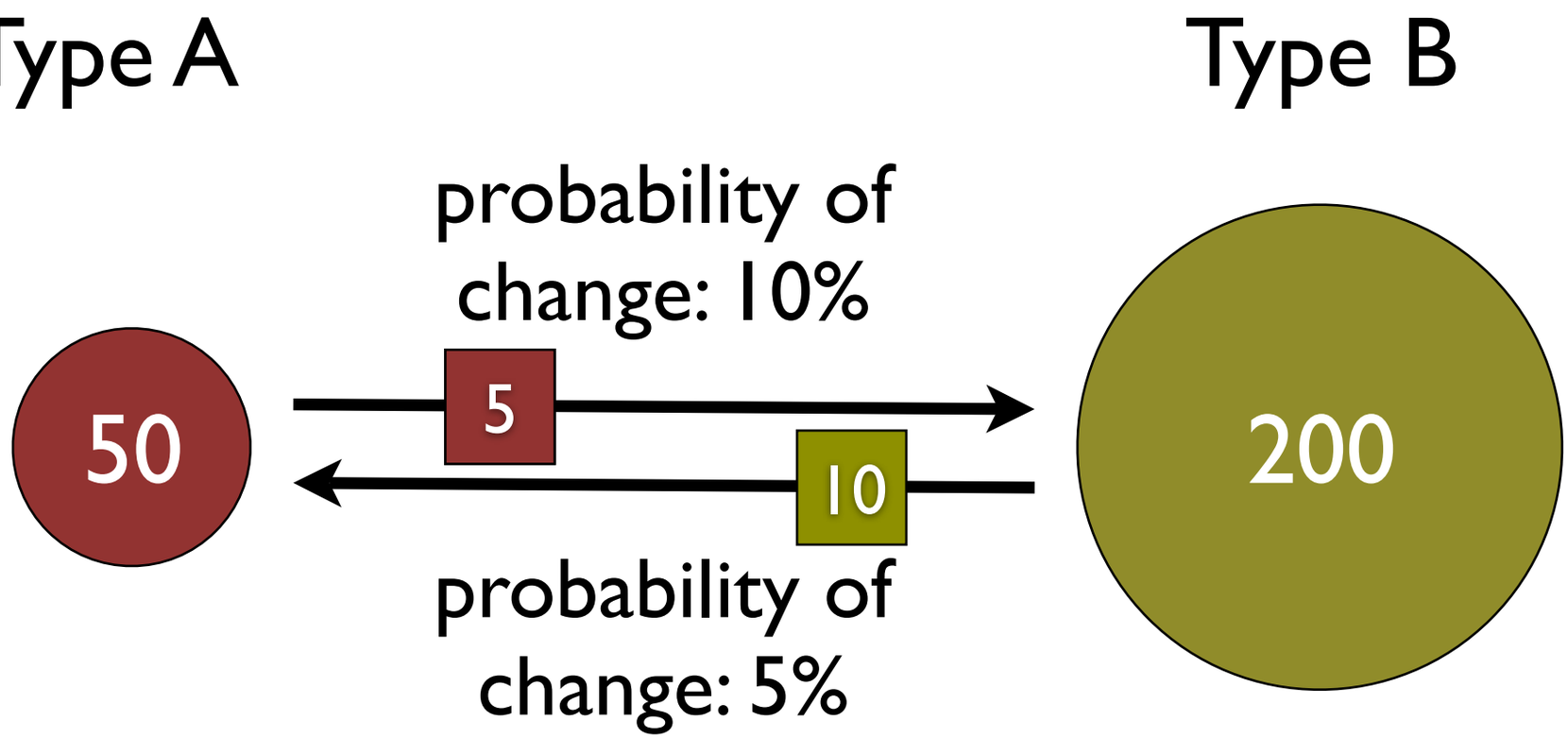
  How strong is the historical influence ?

Dynamic Typology

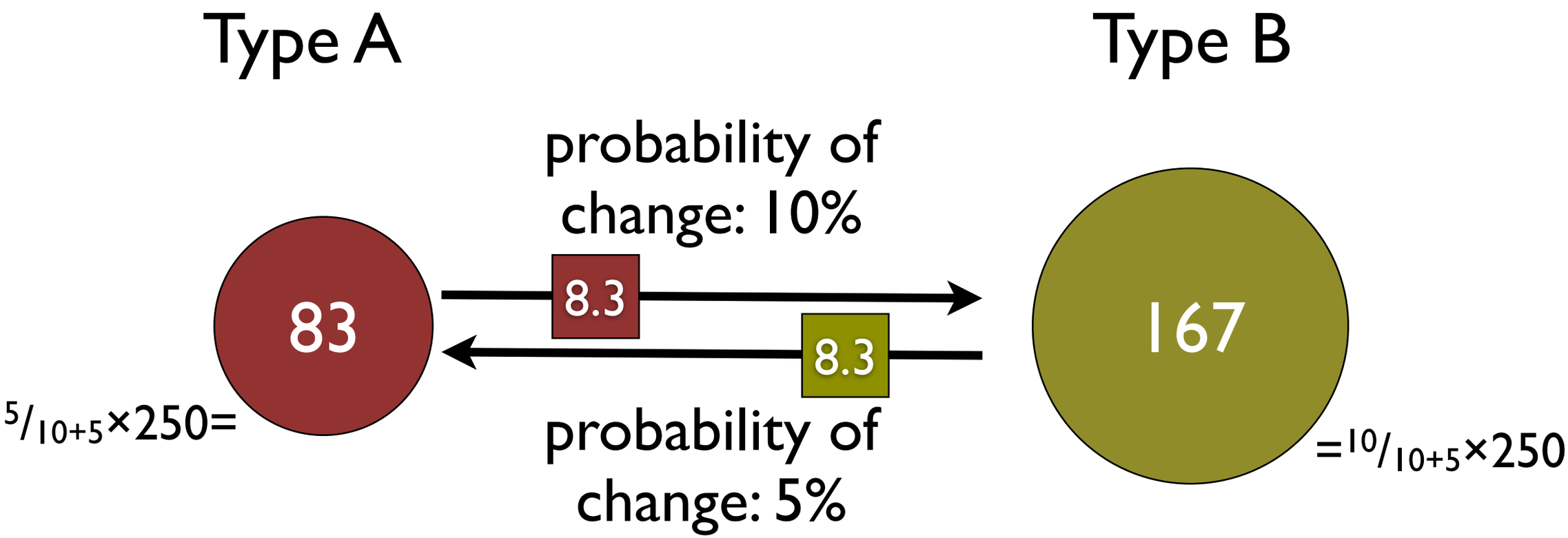
- It is not the actual frequencies that matter
- It is the stable distribution that matters
  - A stable distribution is a situation in which just as many languages change from A to B as change from B to A.
  - The extent to which the actual is different from the stable situation signals an effect of history



Stable distribution



Instable distribution



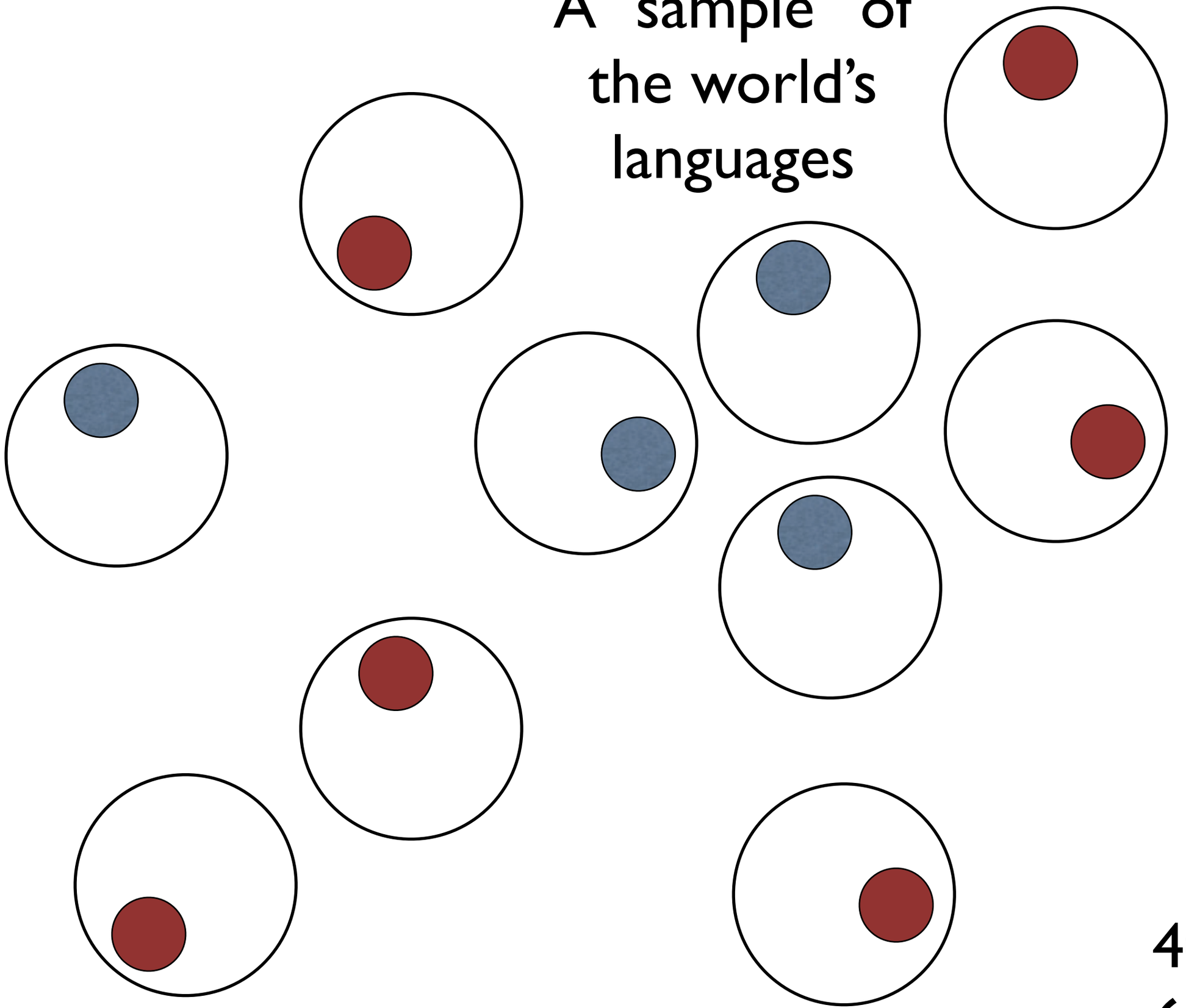
Expected stable distribution

Estimating Transition Probabilities

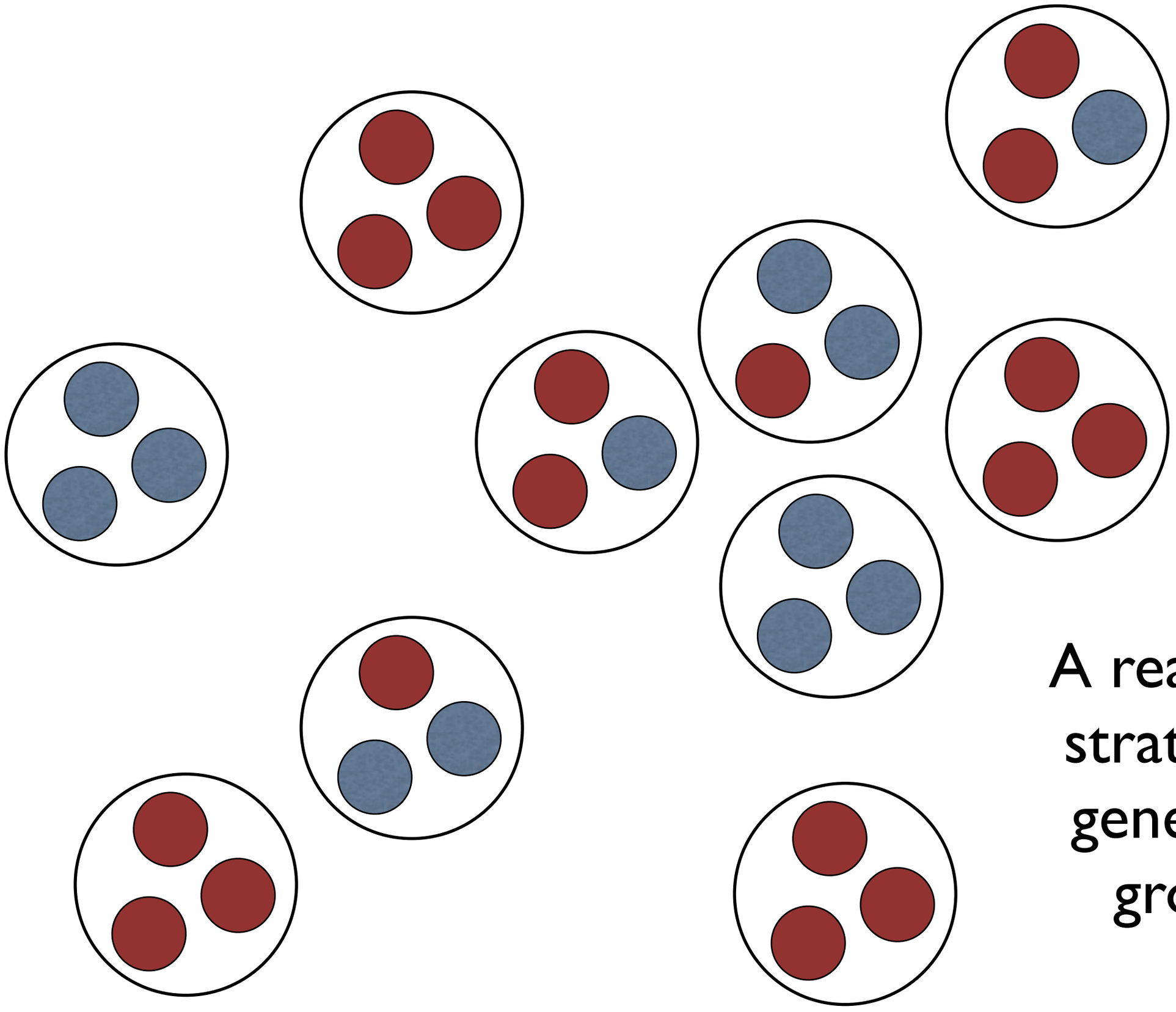
- Are transitions probabilities measurable at all ?
- If yes: use group internal variation of many groups
- For example:
  - Instead of 100 genealogically unrelated languages
  - take 25 groups of 4 closely related languages

The world's genera

A "sample" of the world's languages

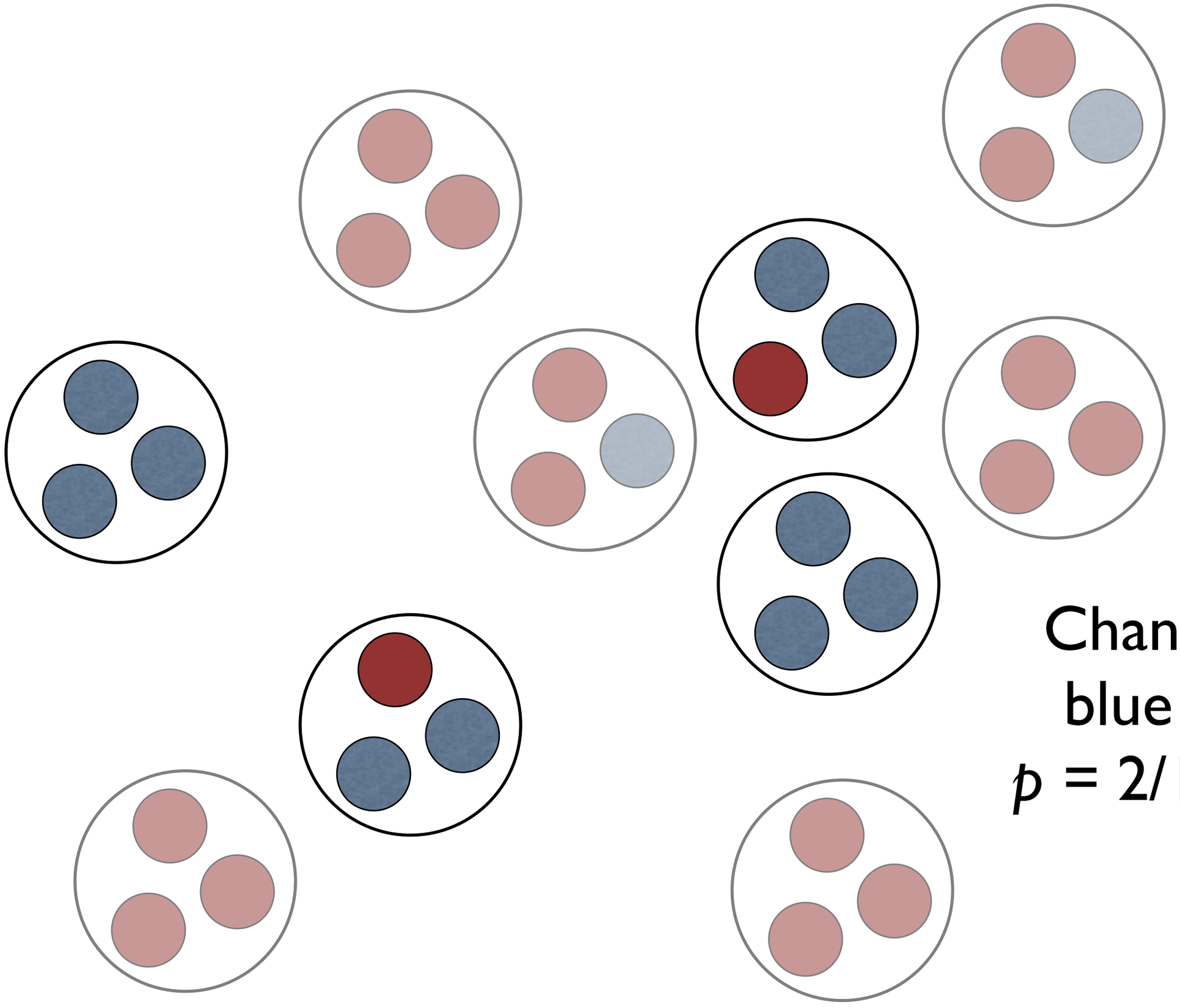


40% blue
60% red

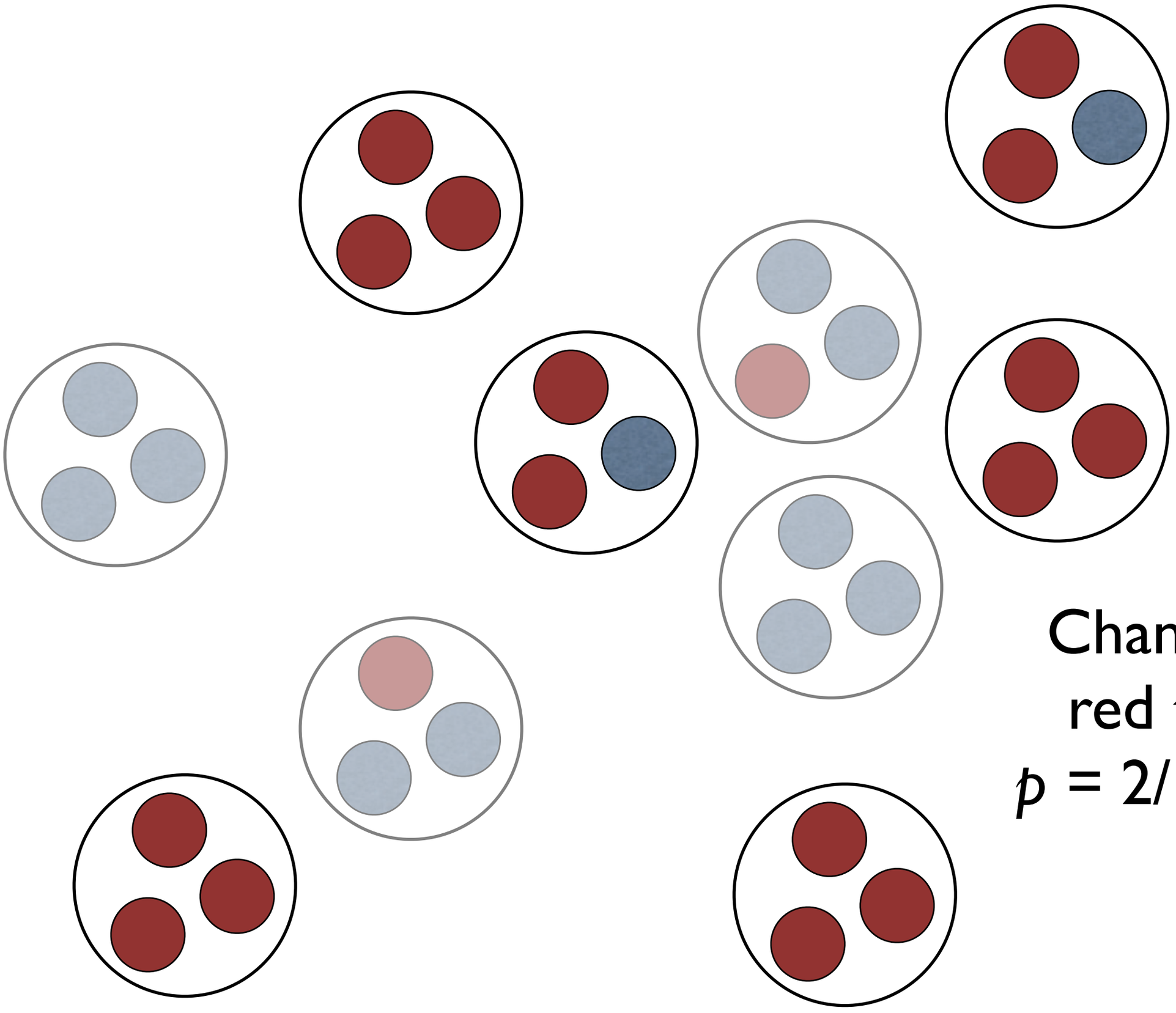


A real sample stratified for genealogical grouping

How to get probabilities of change ...

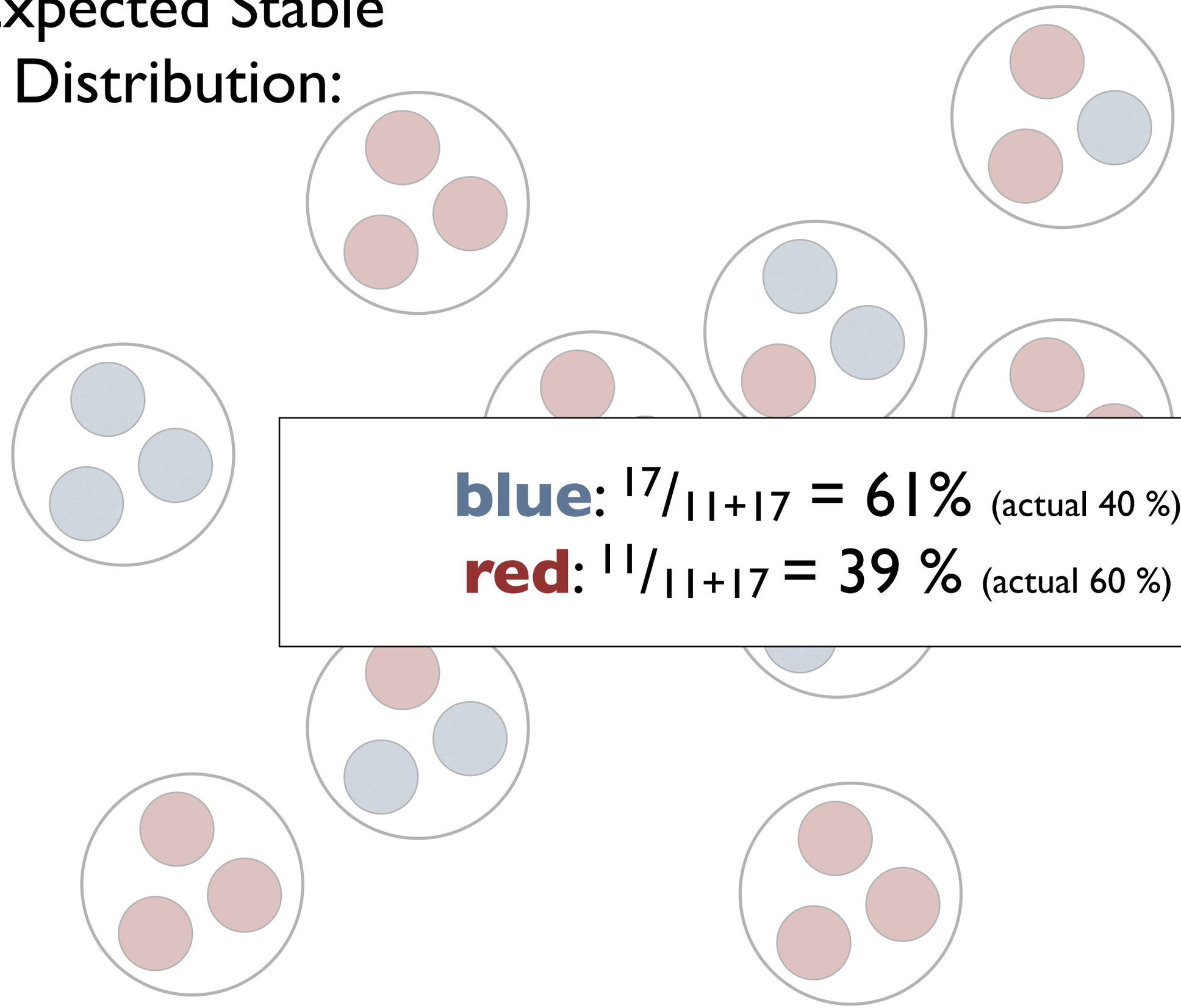


Change from blue to red:
p = 2/12 = 17%



Change from red to blue:
p = 2/18 = 11%

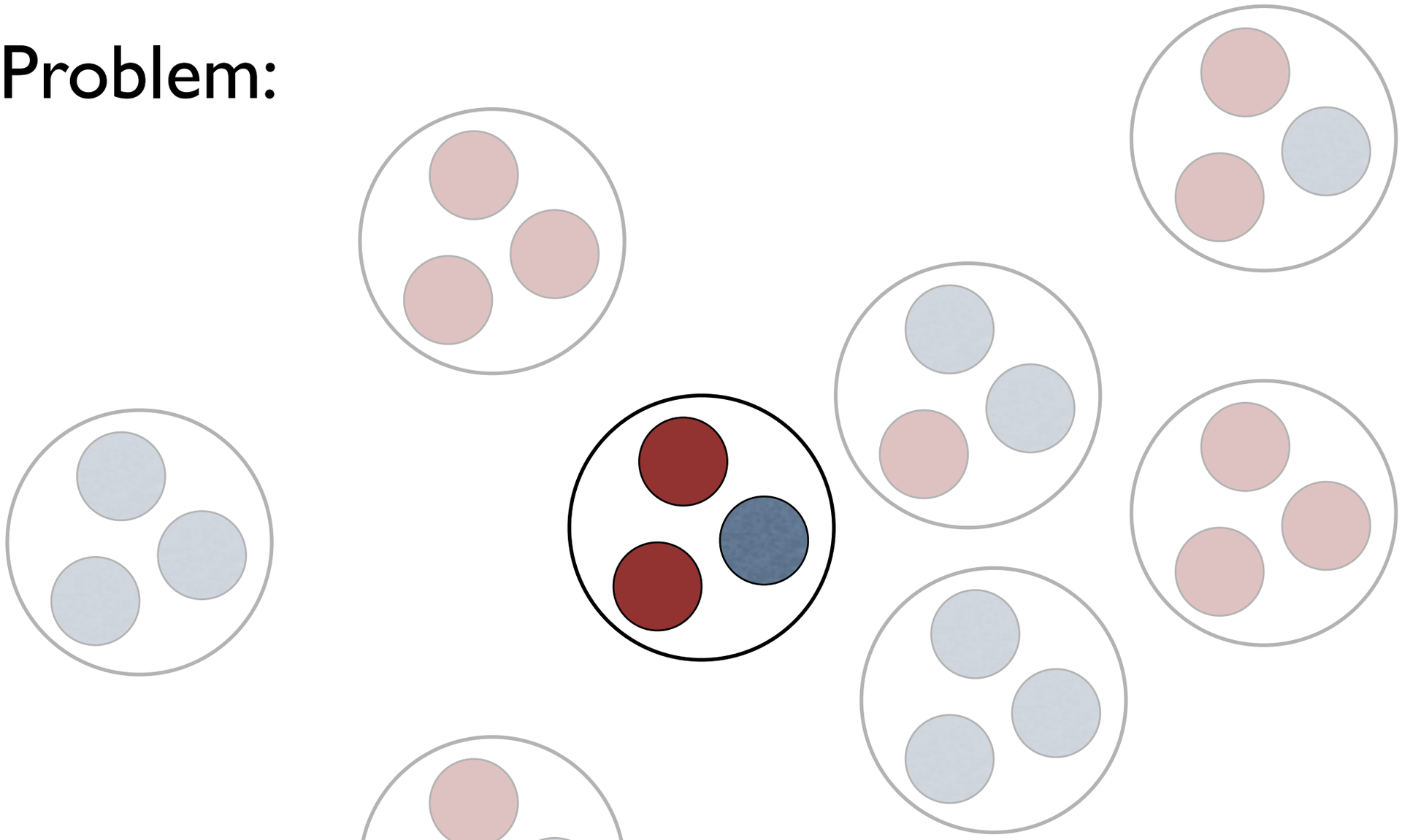
Expected Stable Distribution:



blue: $^{17}/_{11+17}$ = 61% (actual 40 %)

red: $^{11}/_{11+17}$ = 39 % (actual 60 %)

Problem:



- Originally **red** with one change to blue ?
- Originally **blue** with two changes to red ?

Elena Maslova's breakthrough

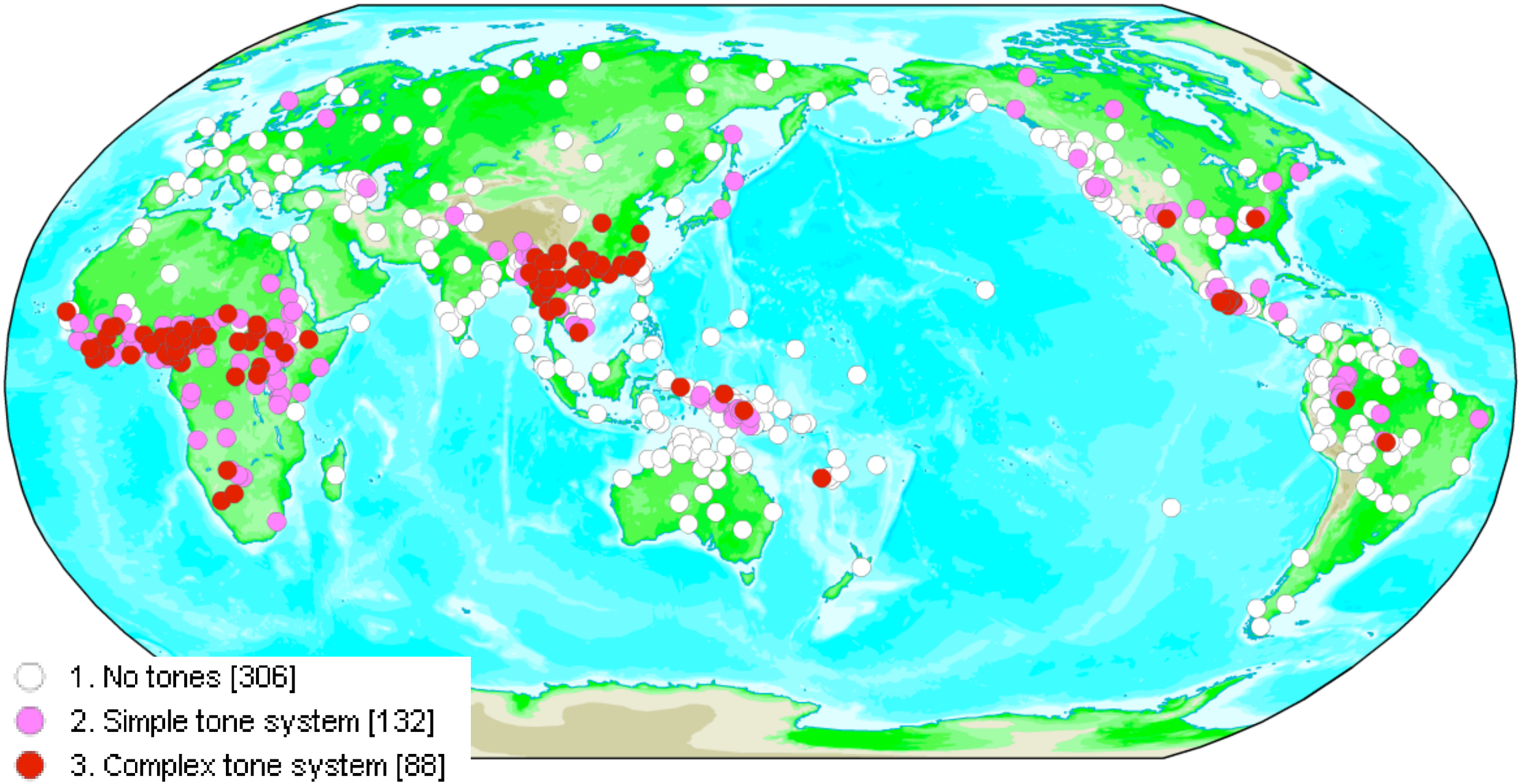
probability of **any** change happening $= \alpha \cdot \text{frequency (blue)} + \beta$

For groups of three languages:

$\alpha = 3 \cdot (p_{\text{blue}\to\text{red}} - p_{\text{red}\to\text{blue}})$

$\beta = 3 \cdot p_{\text{red}\to\text{blue}} \cdot (1 - p_{\text{blue}\to\text{red}})$

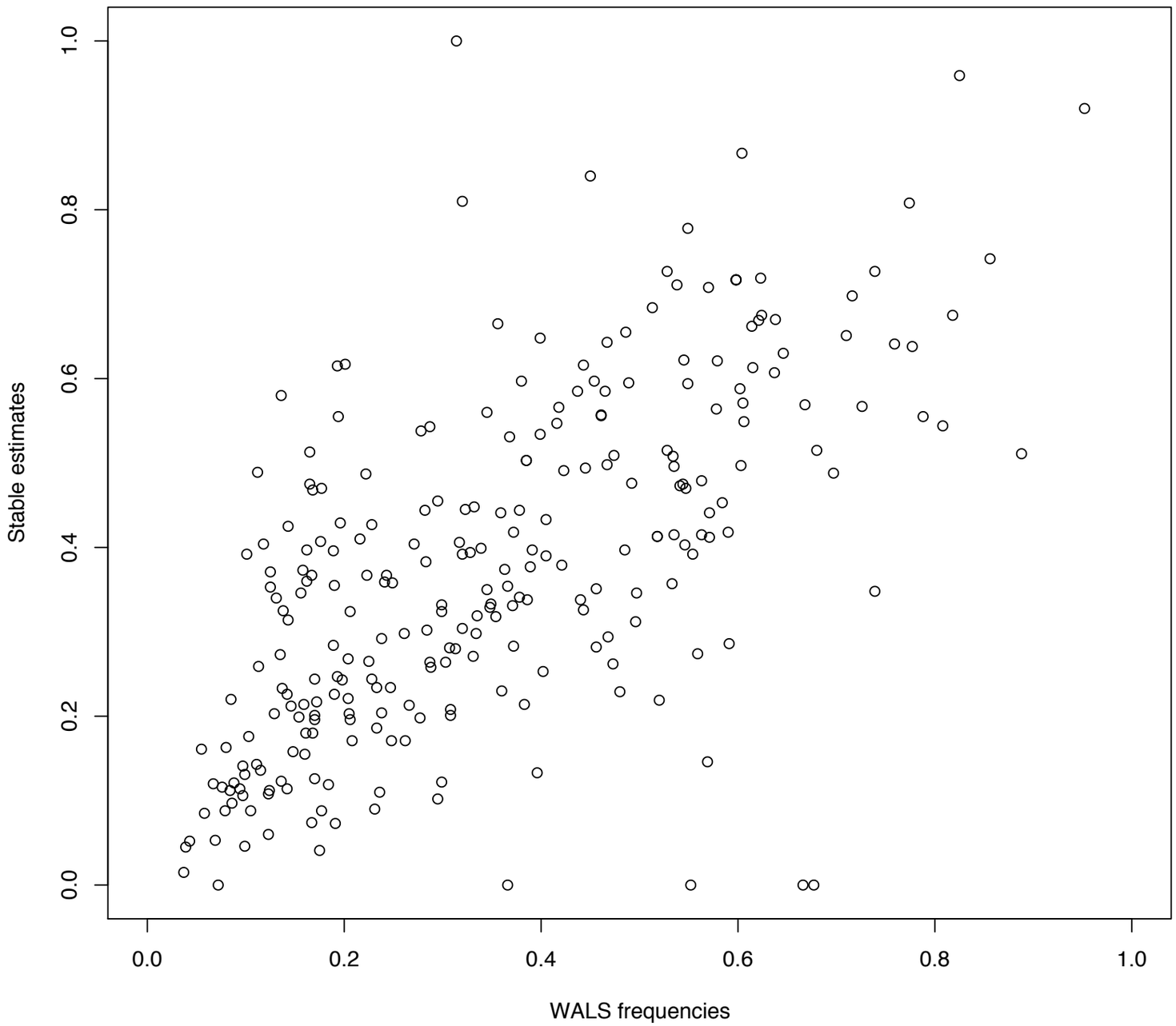
Tone
(Ian Maddieson)



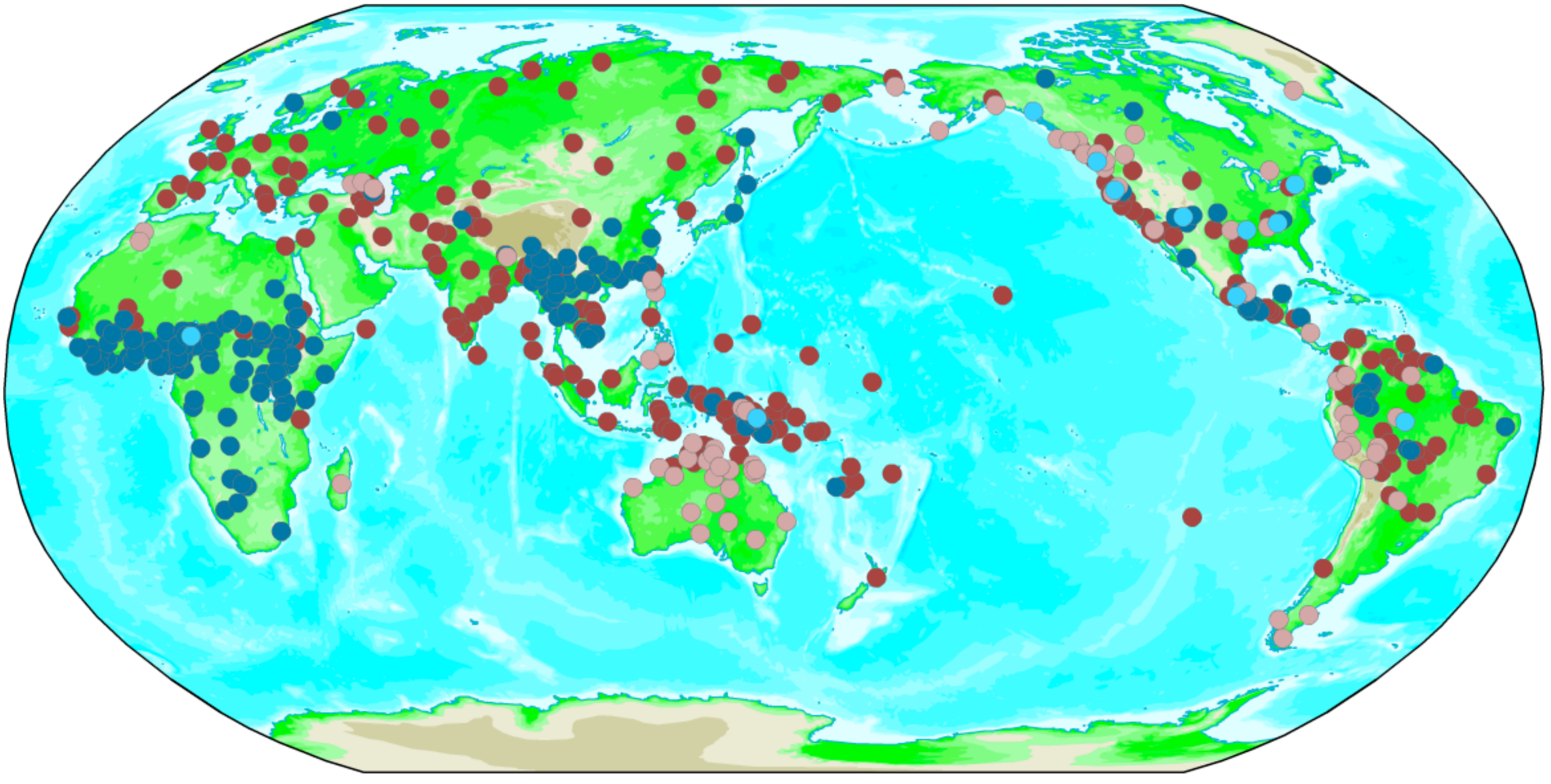
Stable or not ?

	WALS frequency	Expected stable distribution
No tones	306 (58 %)	29 %
Simple tone system	132 (25 %)	21 %
Complex tone system	88 (17 %)	42 %

All characteristics in WALS



Cross-section of tone and vowel inventory (Ian Maddieson)



Traditional Typological Interpretation

	No tone	Tone
Few vowels (<5)	75	11
Many vowels (≥5)	231	206

Tone → Many vowels

Statistical Interpretation

	No tone	Tone
Few vowels (<5)	75 (+25)	11 (-25)
Many vowels (≥5)	231 (-25)	206 (+25)

Fisher's Exact $p = 7 \cdot 10^{-10}$

Tone ~ Many vowels

Dryer's (1992) test

	Africa	Eurasia	SE Asia & Oceania	N. Guinea & Australia	North America	South America
Tone & Large	109	7	41	14	21	14
Tone & Small	1	0	0	1	8	1
No Tone & Large	14	73	44	33	32	35
No Tone & Small	2	3	7	25	21	17

Dryer's (1992) test

	Africa	Eurasia	SE Asia & Oceania	N. Guinea & Australia	North America	South America
Tone & Large	109	7	41	14	21	14
Tone & Small	1	0	0	1	0	1
No Tone & Large	0.88	0.96	0.86	0.57	0.60	0.67
No Tone & Small	2	3	7	25	21	17

0.99 1.00 1.00 0.93 0.72 0.93

Dryer's (1992) test

	Africa	Eurasia	SE Asia & Oceania	N. Guinea & Australia	North America	South America
Tone & Large	109	7	41	14	21	14
Tone & Small	1	0	0	1	8	1
No Tone & Large	14	73	44	33	32	35
No Tone & Small	2	3	7	25	21	17
p	.042	n.s.	.016	.013	n.s.	.053

Expected Stable Distribution

Stable	No tone	Tone
Few vowels (<5)	44	66
Many vowels (≥5)	172	241

Fisher's Exact p = .83

Conclusions

- Actual frequencies can be deceptive
- Expected stable frequencies can be estimated
- We need real samples for this
  (i.e. more than one language per group)

MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT