



# Language Diversity *friend or foe?*

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# Lessons from worldwide language diversity

A world map with a light blue and green color scheme. Numerous semi-transparent colored circles of various sizes and colors (including blue, orange, yellow, purple, and white) are scattered across the map, representing different languages or linguistic groups. The circles are more densely packed in certain regions, such as Europe, Africa, and Australia.

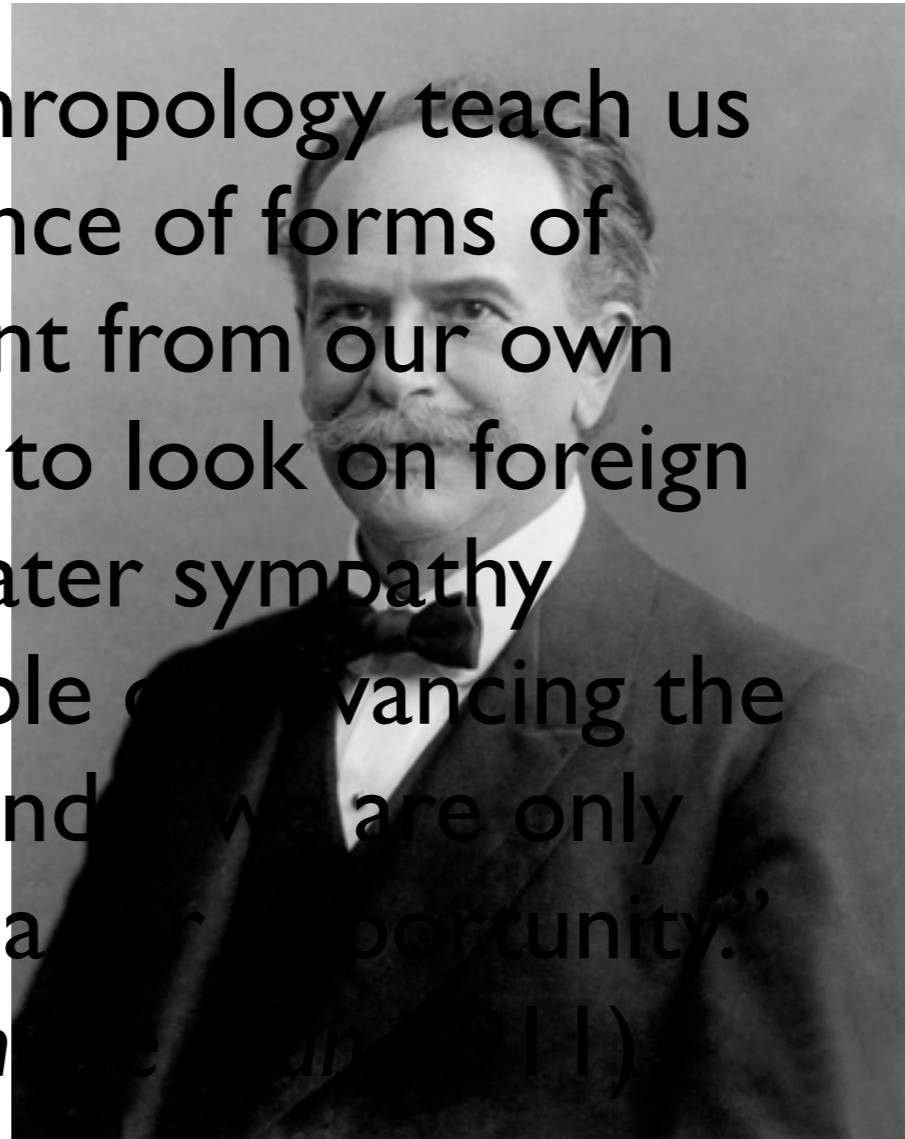
- Possible vs. impossible languages
- Universal categories
- The problem of comparing languages

# Lessons from worldwide language diversity

- **Possible vs. impossible languages**
- Universal categories
- The problem of comparing languages

# Franz Boas

“... the data of anthropology teach us  
a greater tolerance of forms of  
civilization different from our own  
... we should learn to look on foreign  
races with greater sympathy  
... they will be capable of advancing the  
interests of mankind, we are only  
willing to give them a fair opportunity.”  
*(The Mind of Primitive Man, 1911)*



# Universalist Dogma

- After Boas, all language started to become accepted as equally important for the study of human language
- This turned slowly in a dogma that all languages are equal
- Which clearly paved the way for the strong hypothesis of universals of language

# Possible vs. Impossible

- Traditional hope: some structures are possible, other are impossible in human language
- This idea cannot be maintained
- Assumed impossible structures always turn up after the investigation of more languages



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Features

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Languages

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## Feature 81A: Order of Subject, Object and Verb



This feature is described in the text of chapter 81 [Order of Subject, Object and Verb](#) by [Matthew S. Dryer](#) [cite](#)

You may combine this feature with another one. Start typing the feature name or number in the field below.

× 81A: Order of Subject,  
Object and Verb

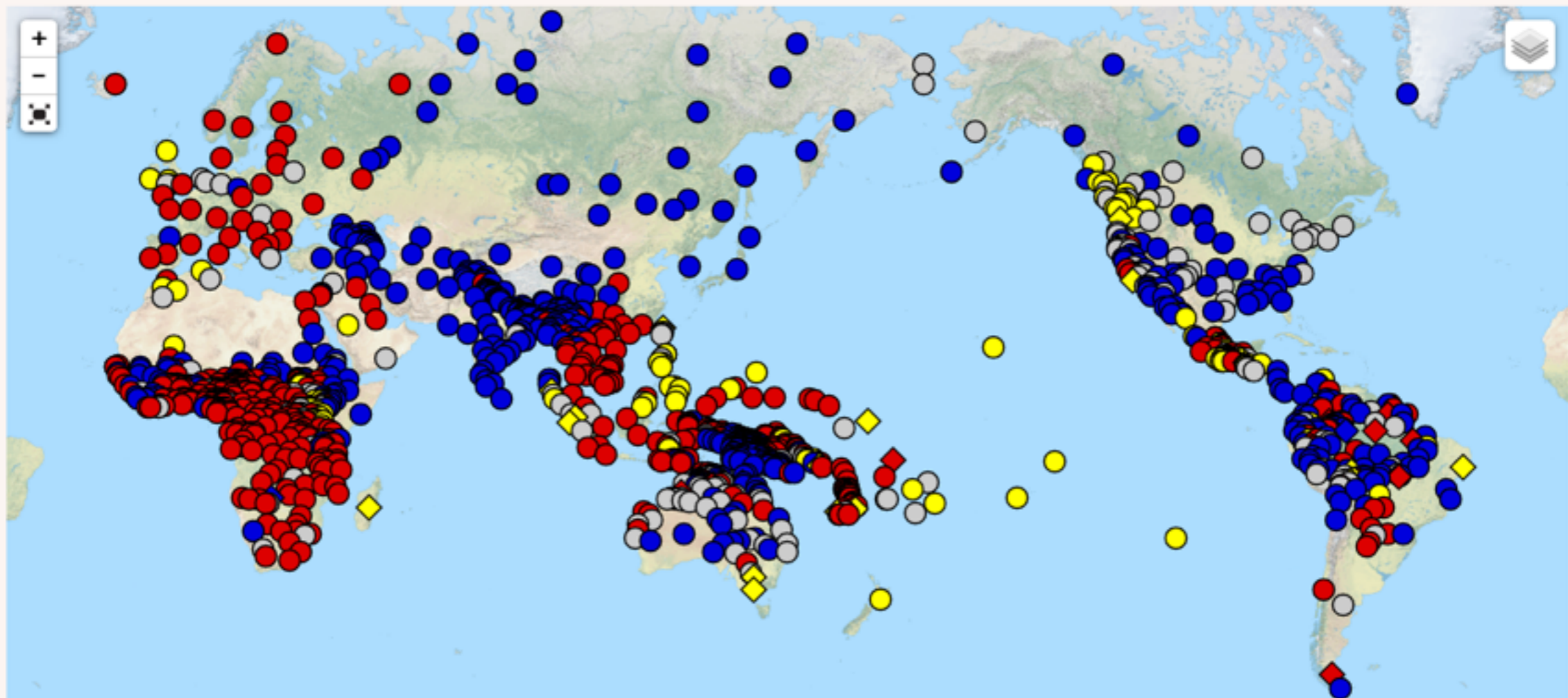
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### Values

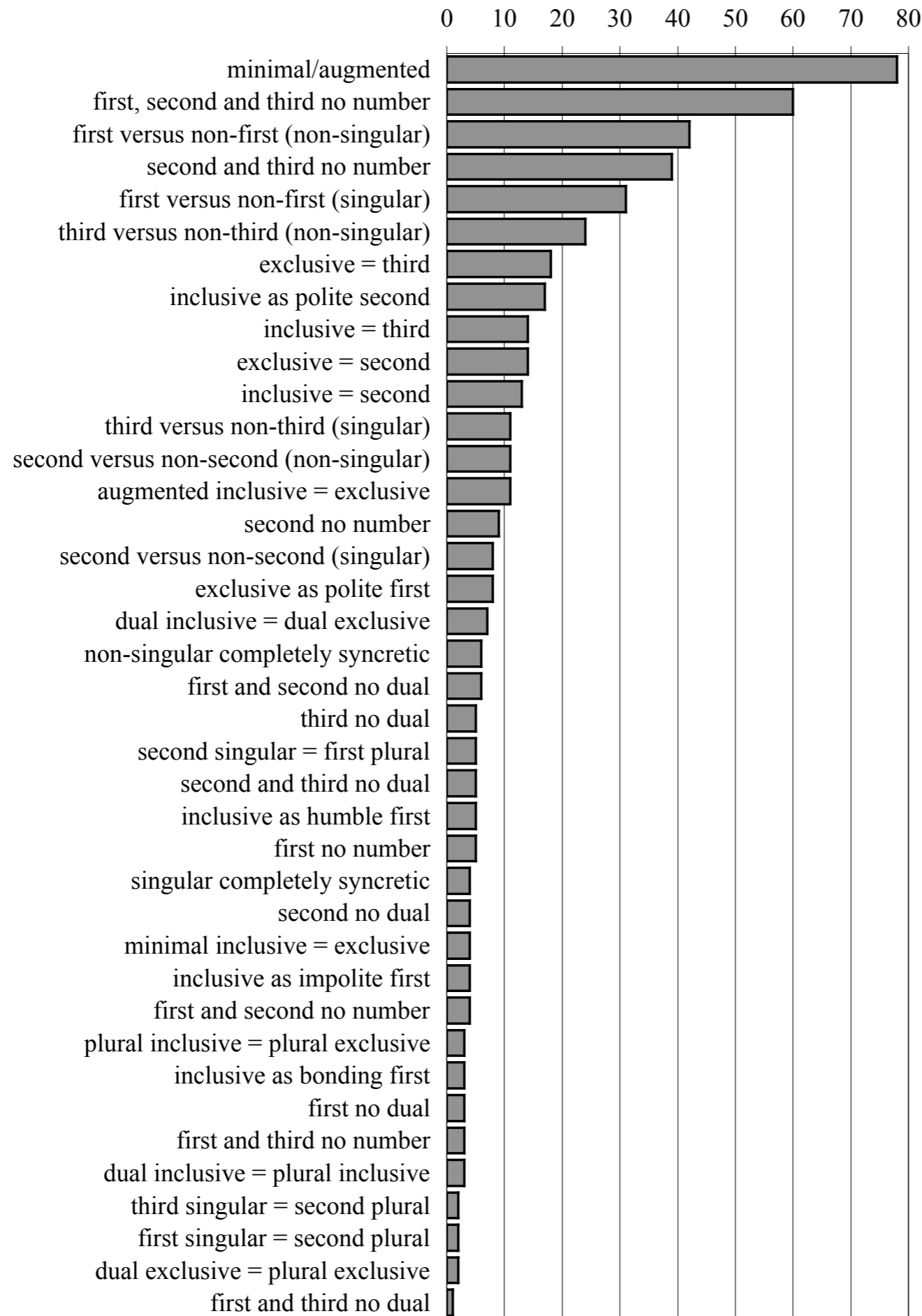
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<span style="color: red;">●</span>	SVO	488
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	VSO	95
<span style="color: yellow;">◆</span>	VOS	25
<span style="color: red;">◆</span>	OVS	11
<span style="color: blue;">◆</span>	OSV	4
<span style="color: gray;">○</span>	No dominant order	189

Legend ▾ Icon size ▾  Show/hide Labels

GeoJSON ▾



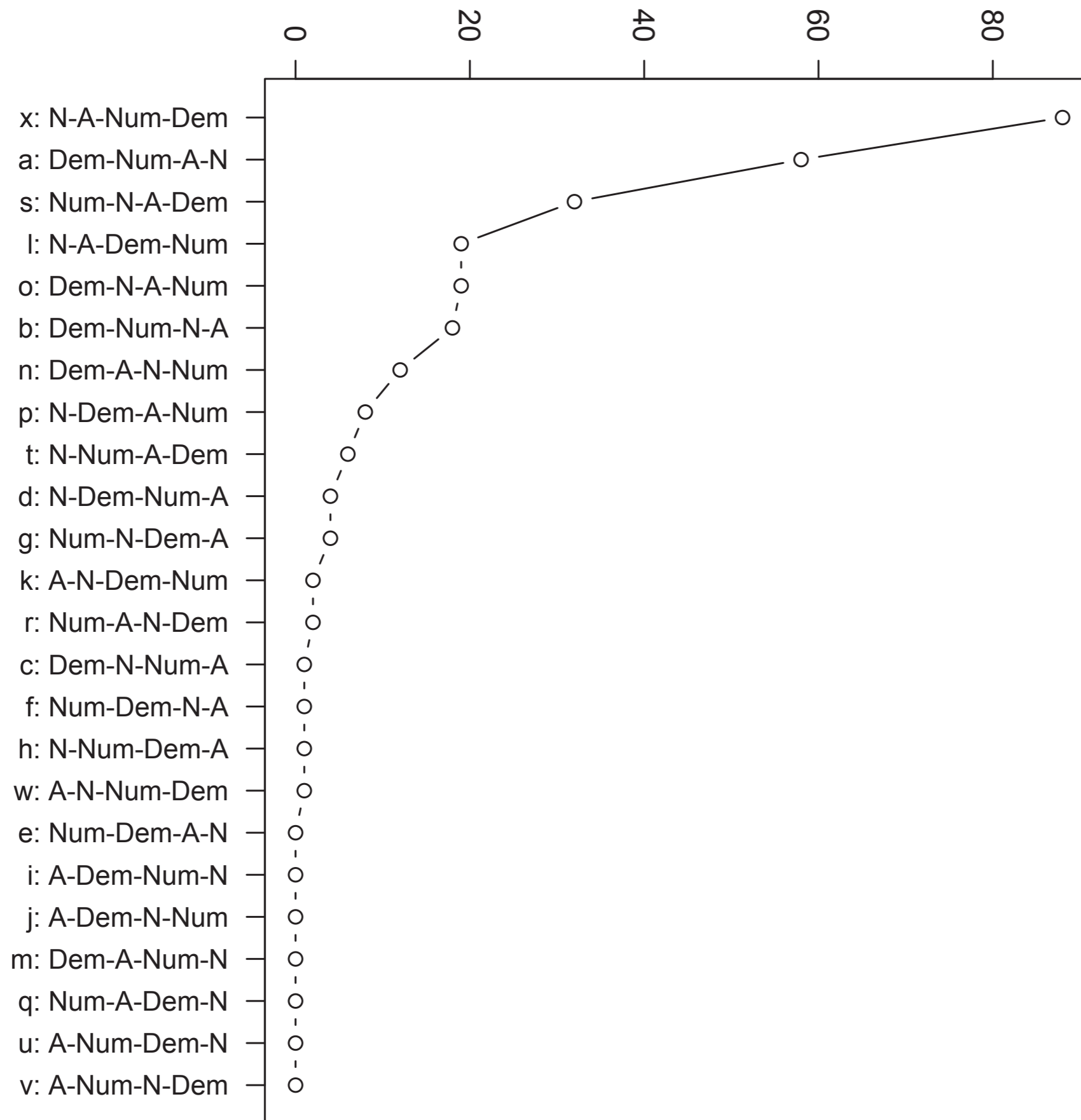
# Person marking Paradigms



Cysouw, Michael. 2005. What it means to be rare: the variability of person marking. In Zygmunt Frajzyngier, Adam Hodges & David S Rood (eds.), *Linguistic Diversity and Language Theories*, 235-258. (Studies in Language Companion Serie). Amsterdam: Benjamins.



# Frequency



# Word Order within NP

Cysouw, Michael. 2010. Dealing with diversity: towards an explanation of NP word order frequencies. *Linguistic Typology* 14(2). 253-287.



## Feature 96A: Relationship between the Order of Object and Verb and the Order of Relative Clause and Noun



This feature is described in the text of chapter 96

Relationship between the Order of Object and Verb and the Order of Relative Clause and Noun by Matthew S. Dryer

cite

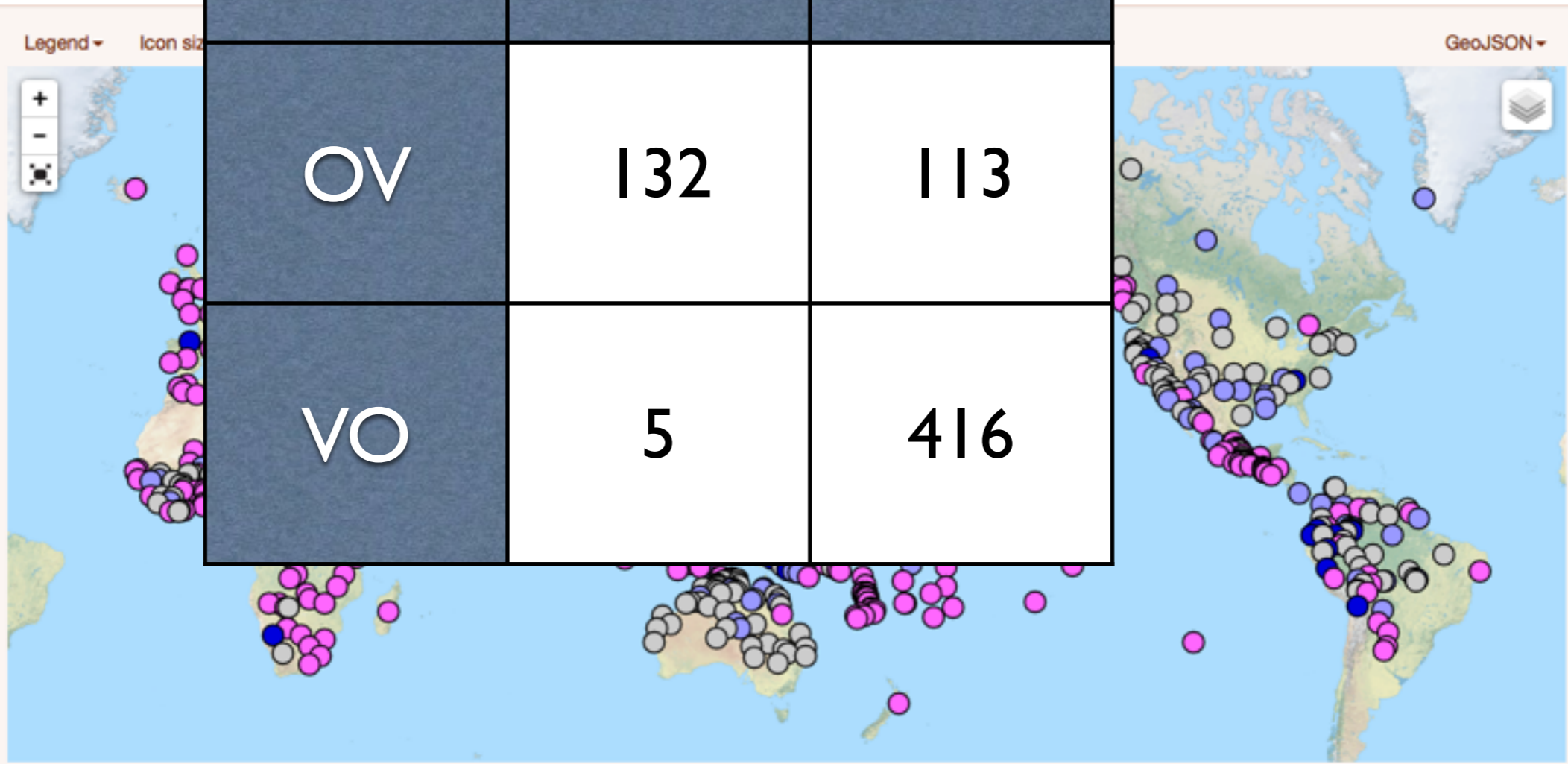
You may combine this feature with others. Start by clicking the feature name in the field below:

x 96A: Relationship between the Order of Object and Verb and the Order of Relative Clause and Noun

### Values

<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	OV and RelN	132
<span style="color: lightblue;">●</span>	OV and NRel	113
<span style="color: red;">●</span>	VO and RelN	5
<span style="color: magenta;">●</span>	VO and NRel	416
<span style="color: gray;">●</span>	Other	213

	ReIN	NRel
OV	132	113
VO	5	416





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You may combine this feature with another one. Start typing the feature name or number in the field below.

x 96A: Relationship between the Order of Object and Verb and the Order of Relative Clause and Noun

Submit

### Values

<input type="radio"/>	OV and RelN	132
<input type="radio"/>	OV and NRel	113
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	VO and RelN	5
<input type="radio"/>	VO and NRel	416
<input type="radio"/>	Other	213



# Possible vs. Impossible

- The difference between attested and unattested is not a very robust observation
- Different samples will lead to different boundaries between 'possible' and 'impossible'
- It is better to focus on the frequent phenomena: whether something is frequent or not is a much more robust observation

# Lessons from worldwide language diversity

- Possible vs. impossible languages
- **Universal categories**
- The problem of comparing languages

# Franz Boas

The necessary categories  
to describe a language  
“depend entirely on the  
inner form of each language”  
(*Handbook of American Indian  
languages*, 1911:81)

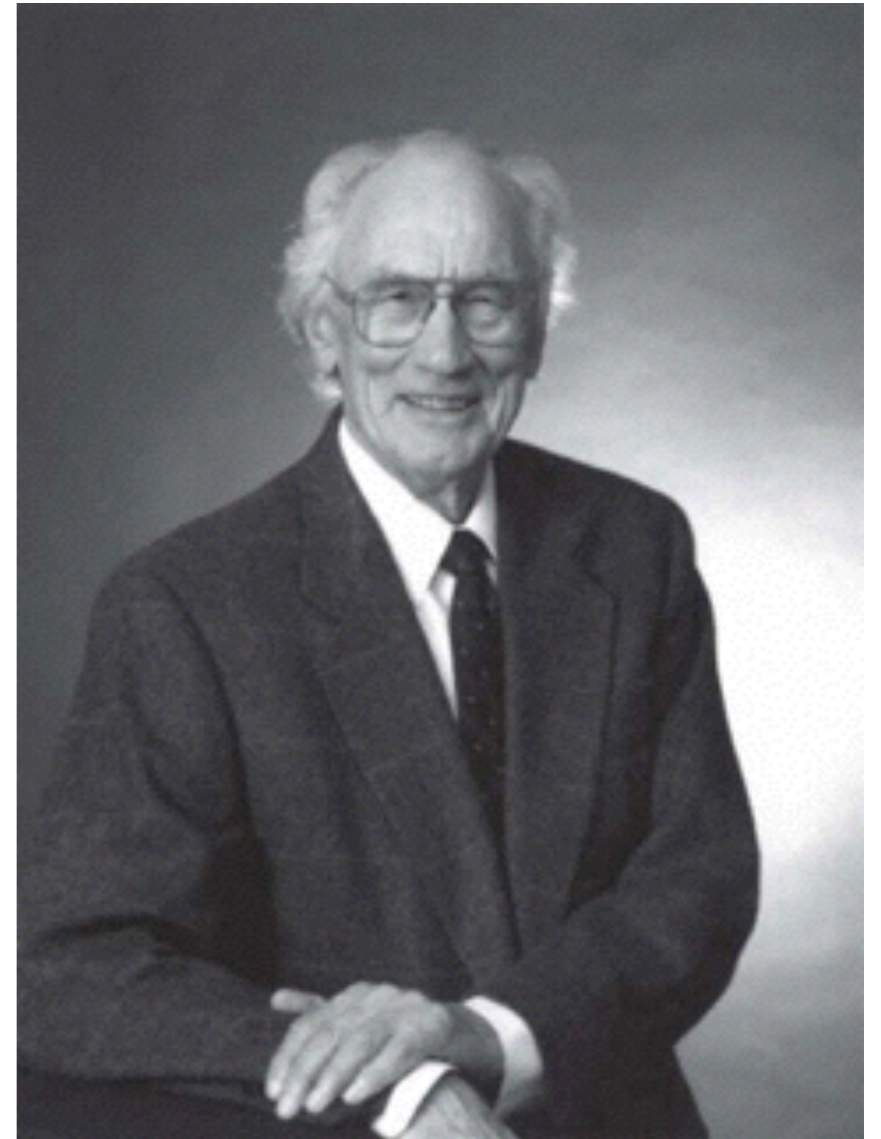


# Kenneth Pike

**Etic - Emic distinction**  
**(phonetic - phonemic)**

**etic: universal/comparative level**

**emic: language-specific level**



# Be aware when naming things!

- etic ~ comparative concepts
  - ▶ use lower-case (“the perfect”)
- emic ~ descriptive categories
  - ▶ use upper-case, like names (“the Perfect”)
  - ▶ add language names (“the German Perfect”)

Comrie, Bernard. 1976. *Aspect: an introduction to the study of verbal aspect and related problems*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Haspelmath, Martin. 2010. Comparative concepts and descriptive categories in crosslinguistic studies. *Language* 86(3). 663-687.



- Claim about the world's languages, e.g.
  - ▶ *“In all languages with a dative and an accusative case, the dative case marker is at least as long as the accusative case marker.”* (Haspelmath 2010: 665)
- Needs **etic** definition, e.g.
  - ▶ *“A dative case is a morphological marker that has among its functions the coding of the recipient argument of a physical transfer verb (such as ‘give’, ‘lend’, ‘sell’, ‘hand’), when this is coded differently from the theme argument.”*
- This includes:
  - ▶ German Dative, Russian Dative
  - ▶ Finnish Allative, Tsez Lative
- This does not include:
  - ▶ Nivkh Dative-Accusative  
(used e.g. in causative constructions)

# Lessons from worldwide language diversity

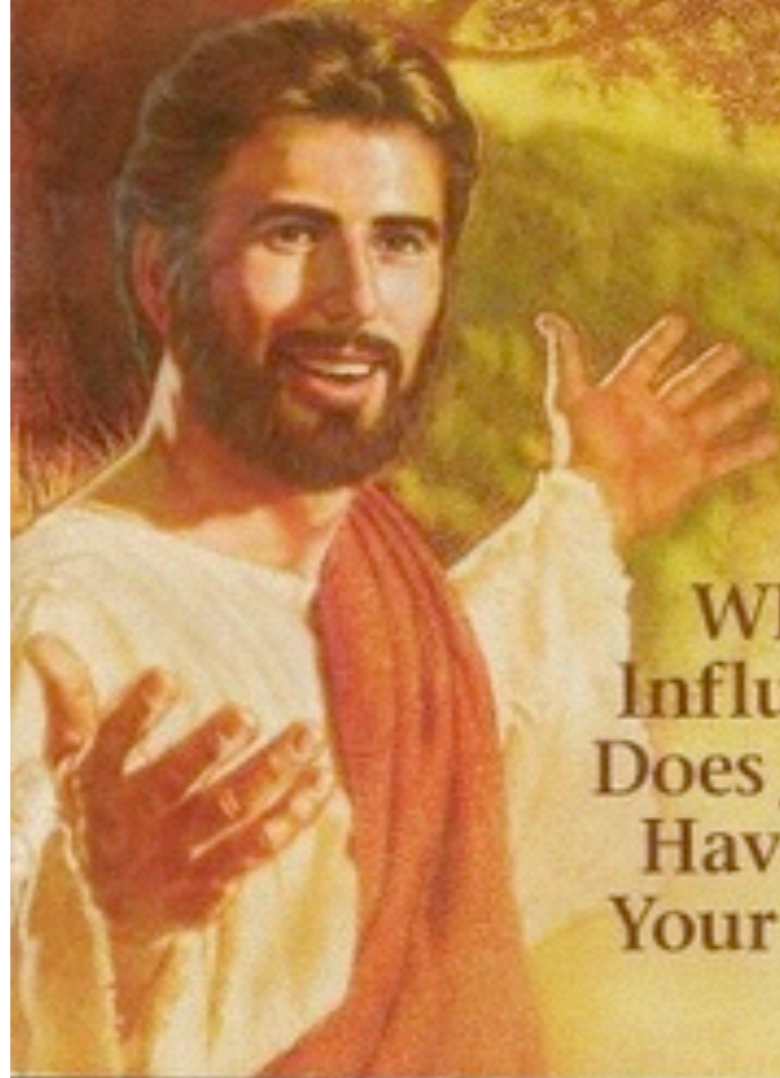
- Possible vs. impossible languages
- Universal categories
- **The problem of comparing languages**

# How to compare languages

- How to compare like with like ?
  - ▶ Solution:  
use **etic definitions**
  - ▶ Extreme etic:  
use **contextually situated utterances**
  - ▶ To get the same contexts in many languages:  
use **parallel data**

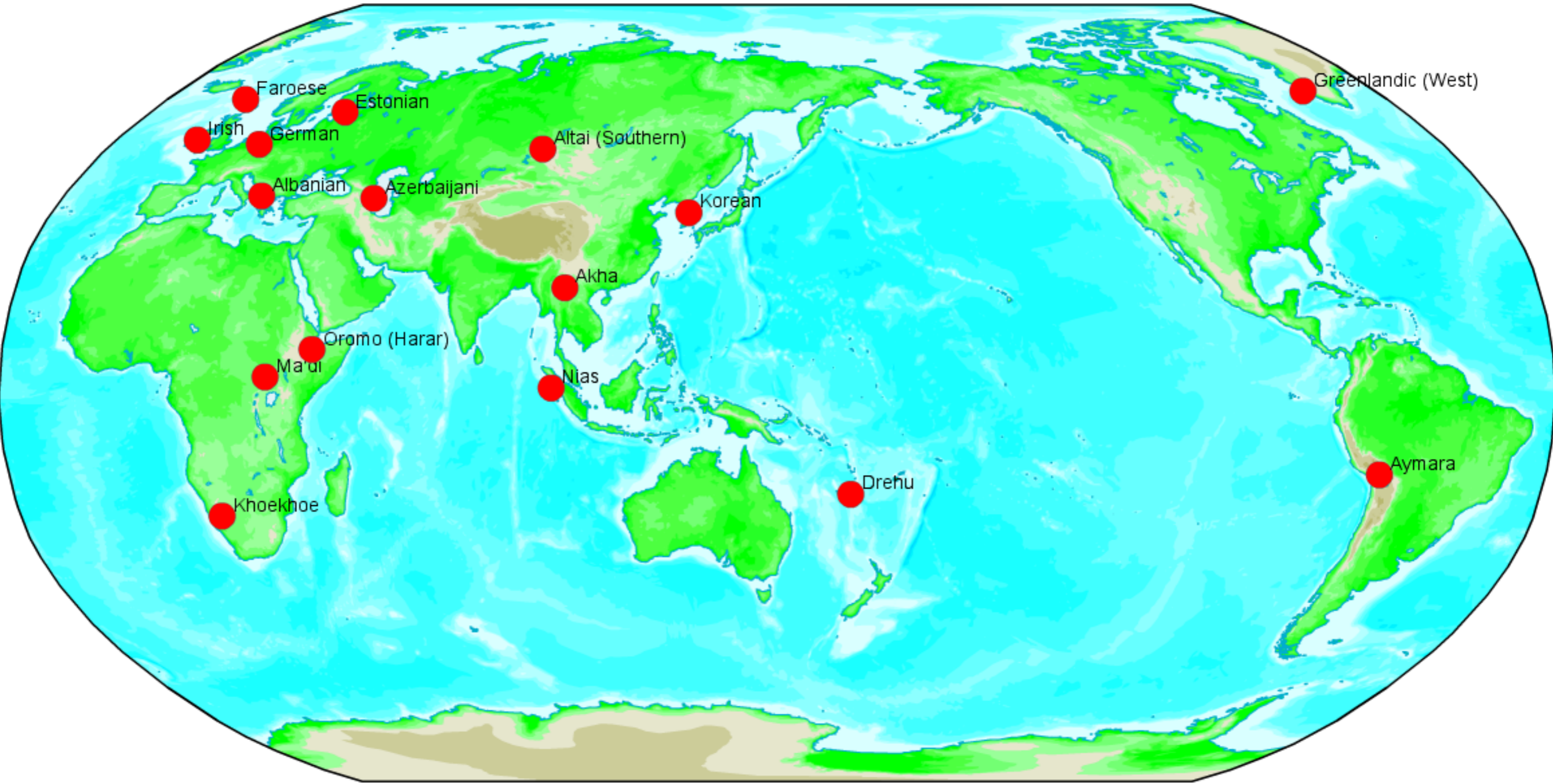
DECEMBER 1, 2011

THE **WATCHTOWER**  
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



What  
Influence  
Does **Jesus**  
Have on  
Your Life?

- 1 What important information is contained in the Bible?
- 2 Who is the Bible's author?
- 3 Why should you study the Bible?
- 4 The Bible is a precious gift from God.
- 5 The Bible alone tells us what we must do to please God.
- 6 The Bible was written by some 40 different men over a period of 1,600 years, beginning in 1513 B.C.E.
- 7 So God in heaven, not any human on earth, is the Author of the Bible.
- 8 God made sure that the Bible was accurately copied and preserved.
- 9 More Bibles have been printed than any other book.
- 10 Not everyone will be happy to see you studying the Bible, but do not let that stop you.
- 11 But the Bible tells us that there is only one TRUE God.
- 12 But when the Bible was written, the name Jehovah appeared in it some 7,000 times
- 13 God is a Spirit, says the Bible.
- 14 The Bible reveals Jehovah's personality to us.
- 15 The Bible tells us that he is also merciful, kind, forgiving, generous, and patient.
- 16 We learn about God from creation and from the Bible.
- 17 Another way we can learn about God is by studying the Bible.
- 18 By disobeying God's command, the first man, Adam, committed what the Bible calls sin.
- 19 This is what the Bible refers to as the ransom.
- 20 Some of your loved ones may become very angry because you are studying the Bible.
- 21 What is the Bible's view of separation and of divorce?
- 22 The Bible says that a husband is the head of his family.
- 23 Parents need to spend time with their children and study the Bible with them,
- 24 When marriage mates have problems getting along together, they should try to apply Bible counsel.
- 25 The Bible urges us to show love and to be forgiving.
- 26 But God does not approve of them if they come from false religion or are against Bible teachings.
- 27 The only two birthday celebrations spoken of in the Bible were held by persons who did not worship Jehovah.
- 28 The Bible teaches that only a few people are on the narrow road to life.
- 29 The Bible foretold that after the death of the apostles, ...
- 30 True Christians love one another, respect the Bible, and preach about God's Kingdom.
- 31 Another mark of true religion is that its members have a deep respect for the Bible.
- 32 They try to live by the Bible in their everyday life.
- 33 The Bible is the basis for what is taught.
- 34 By now you have learned many good things from the Bible.



- Faroese
- Estonian
- Irish
- German
- Albanian
- Azerbaijani
- Altai (Southern)
- Korean
- Akha
- Nias
- Khoekhoe
- Oromo (Harar)
- Maui
- Drehu
- Aymara
- Greenlandic (West)

Albanian	Faroese	Estonian	Greenlandic
<i>bibla</i> Nominative	<i>biblian</i> Nominative	<i>piibel</i> Nominative	<i>biibilip</i> Ergative
<i>biblën</i> Accusative	<i>bibliuna</i> Accusative	<i>piiblit</i> Partitive	<i>biibli</i> Absolutive
<i>biblës</i> Genitive/Dative	<i>bibliunnar</i> Genitive	<i>piibli</i> Genitive	<i>biibilmik</i> Instrumental
...	<i>bibliuni</i> Dative	<i>piiblis</i> Inessive	<i>biibilmi</i> Locative
	...	<i>piiblist</i> Elativ	...
		...	

Context	Albanian	Faroese	Estonian	Greenlandic
1	bibla	bíbliuni	piibel	biibili
2	biblës	bíbliunnar	piibli	biibilimik
3	biblën	bíbliuna	piiblit	biibili
4	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibili
5	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibilip
6	bibla	bíbliuna	piibli	biibili
7	biblës	bíbliunnar	piibli	biibilimut
8	bibla	bíblían	piiblit	biibilip
9	bibla	NA	piiblit	biibili
10	biblën	bíbliuna	piiblit	biibilimik
11	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibilimili
12	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibilili
13	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibilimi
14	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibilimi
15	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibilimi
16	bibla	bíbliuni	piibli	biibililu
17	biblën	bíbliuna	piiblit	biibilimik
18	bibla	bíblían	piiblis	biibilip
19	bibla	bíblían	piiblis	biibilimi
20	biblën	bíbliuna	piiblit	biibilimik
21	NA	bíblían	piibel	biibilimi
22	bibla	bíbliuni	piibel	biibili
23	biblën	bíbliuna	piiblit	biibilimillu
24	biblike	bíblían	piibli	biibilimi
25	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibilimi
26	biblës	bíbliunnar	piibli	biibilimi
27	bibla	bíblían	piiblis	biibilimi
28	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibilimi
29	bibla	bíblían	piibel	biibilimi
30	biblën	bíbliuna	piiblist	biibilimik
31	biblën	bíbliuni	piibli	biibilimik
32	biblës	bíbliuni	piibli	biibili
33	bibla	bíbliuna	piibel	biibilimik
34	bibla	bíbliuni	piiblist	biibilimeersunik

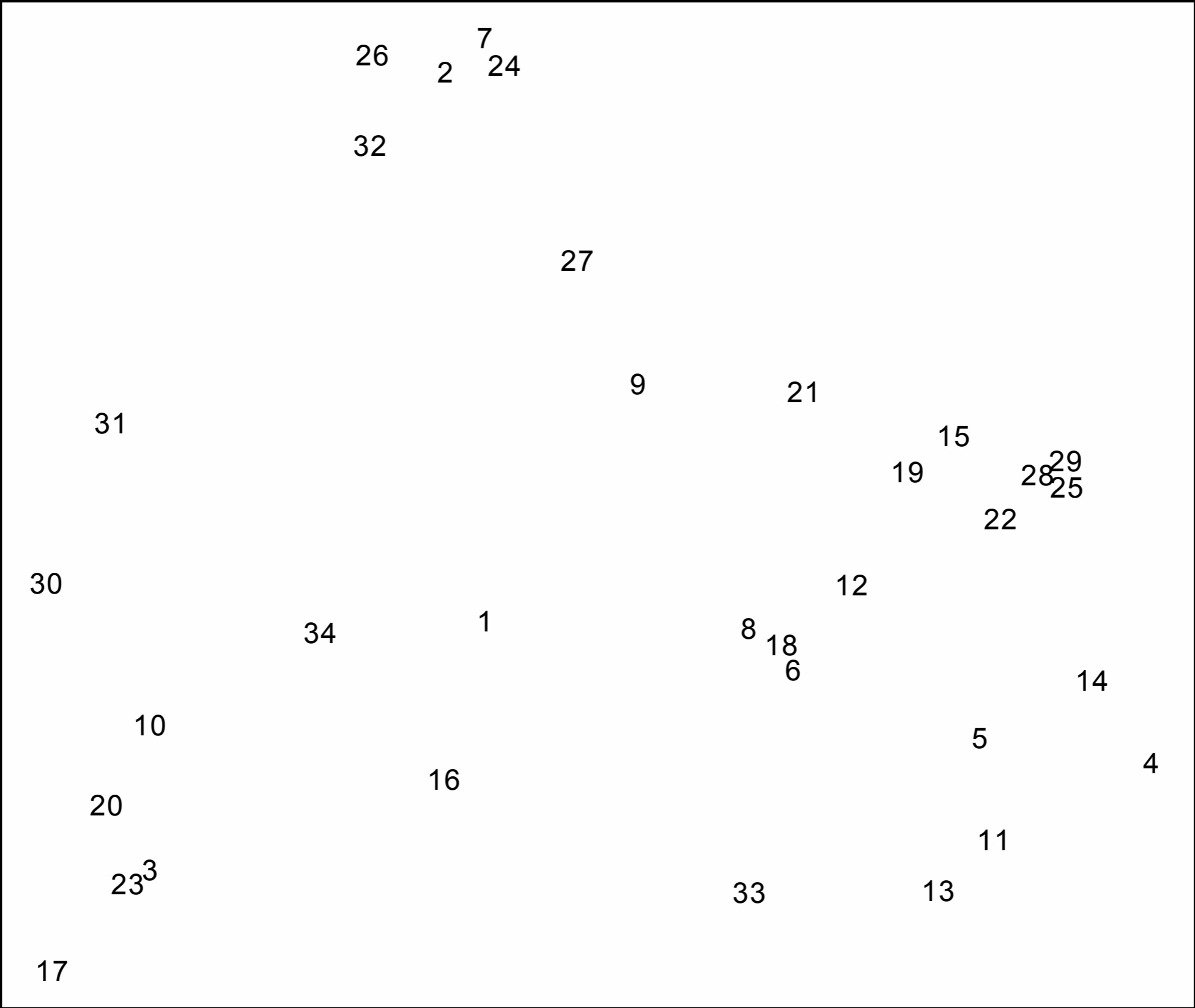




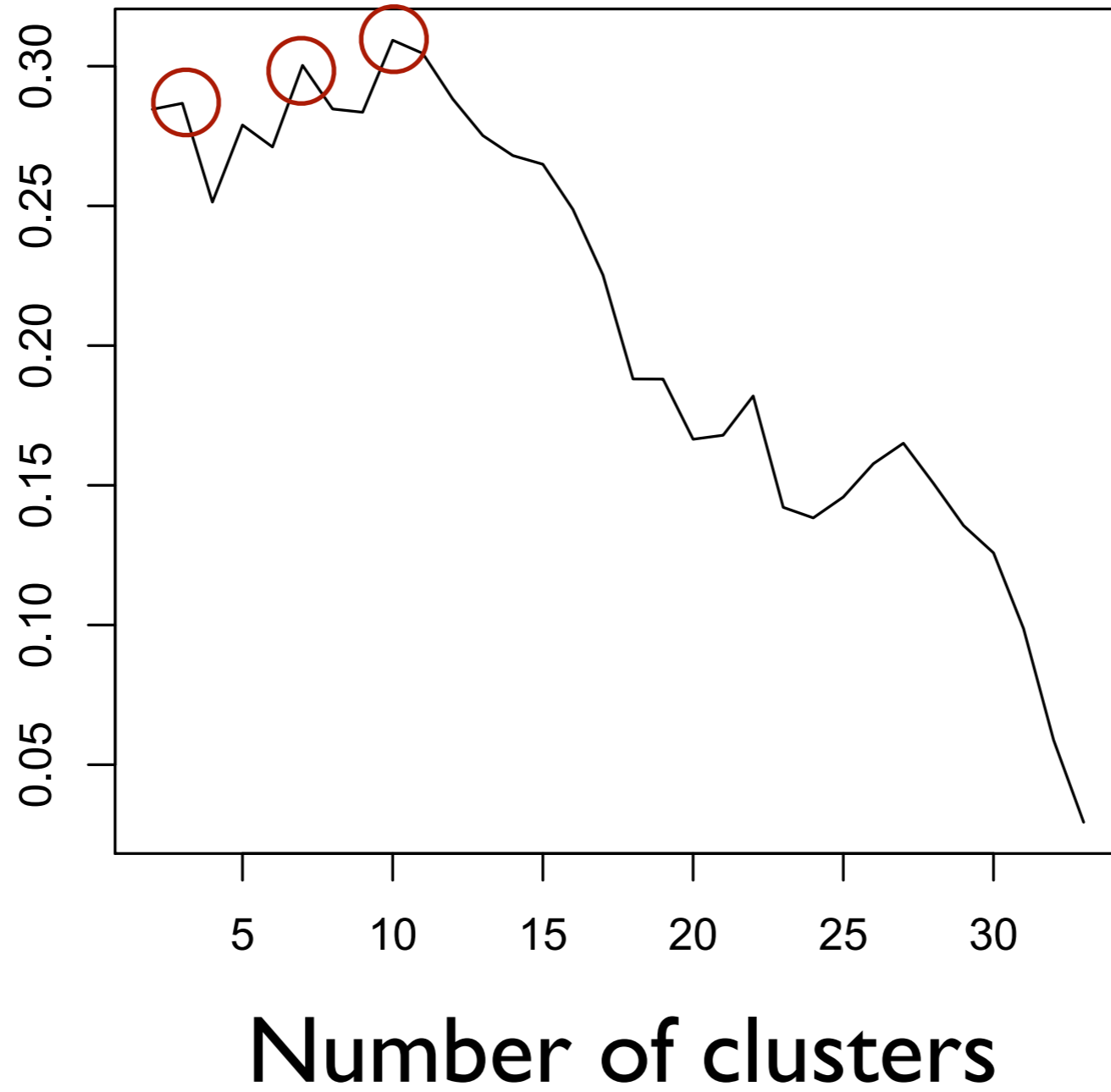


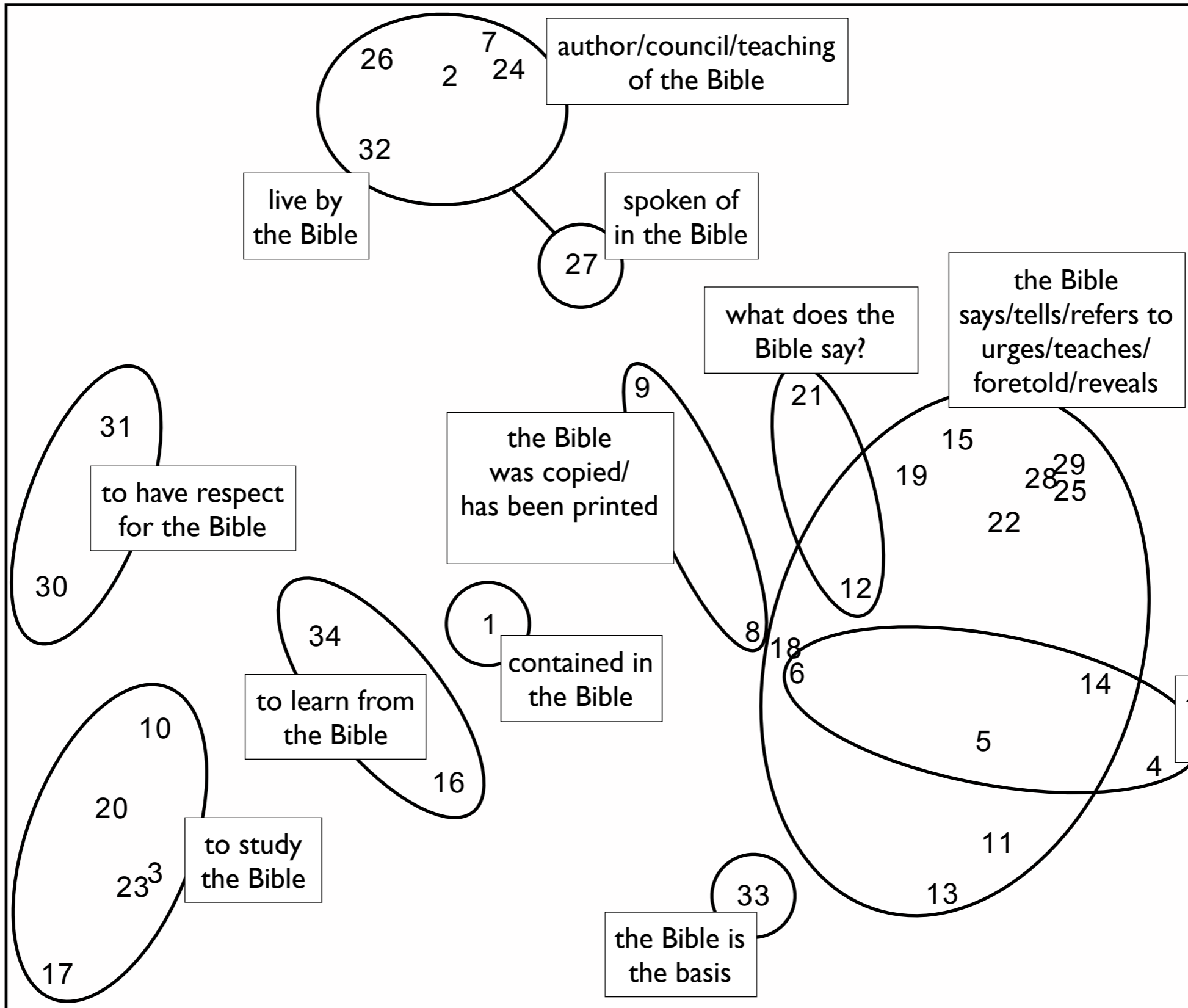


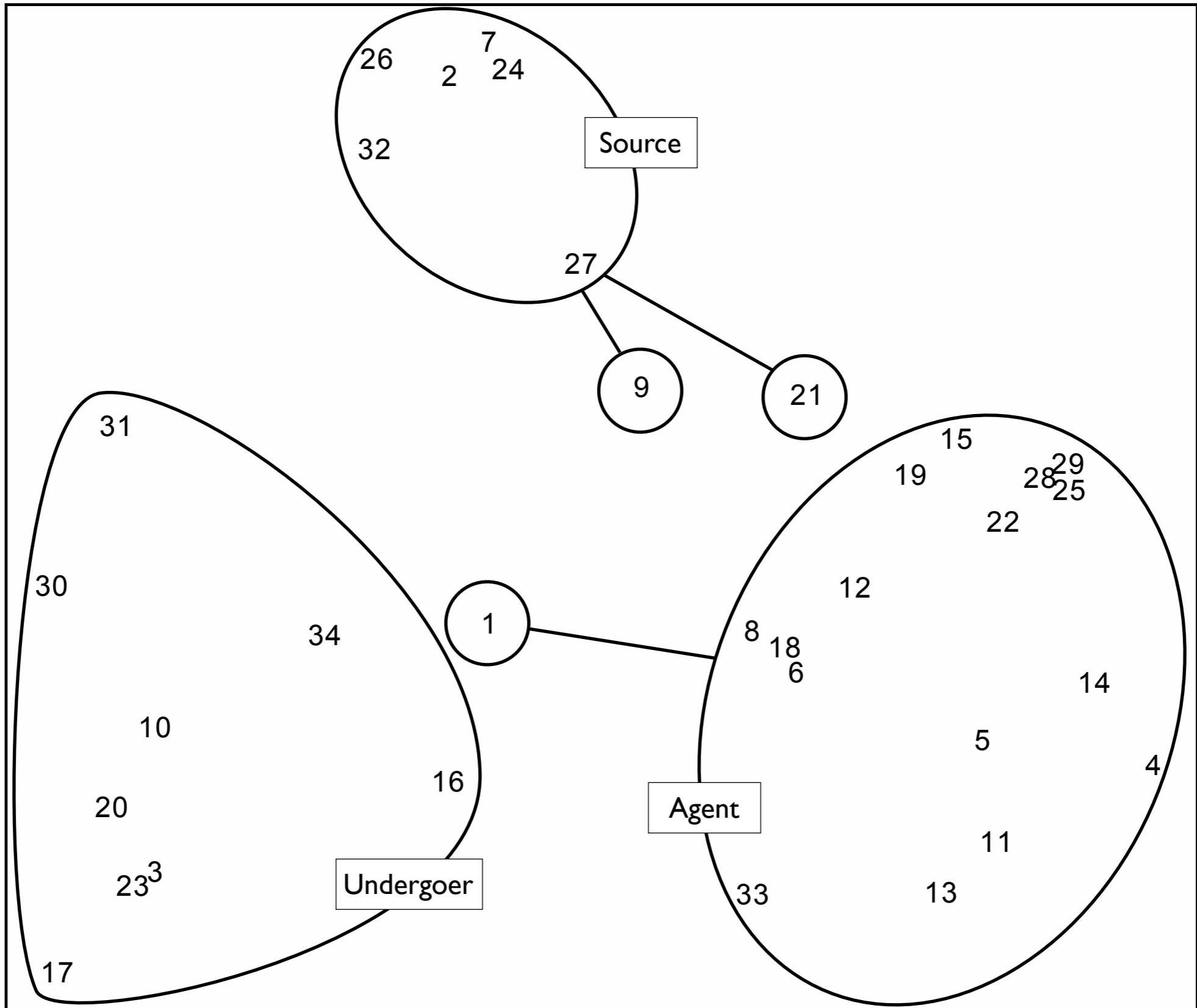




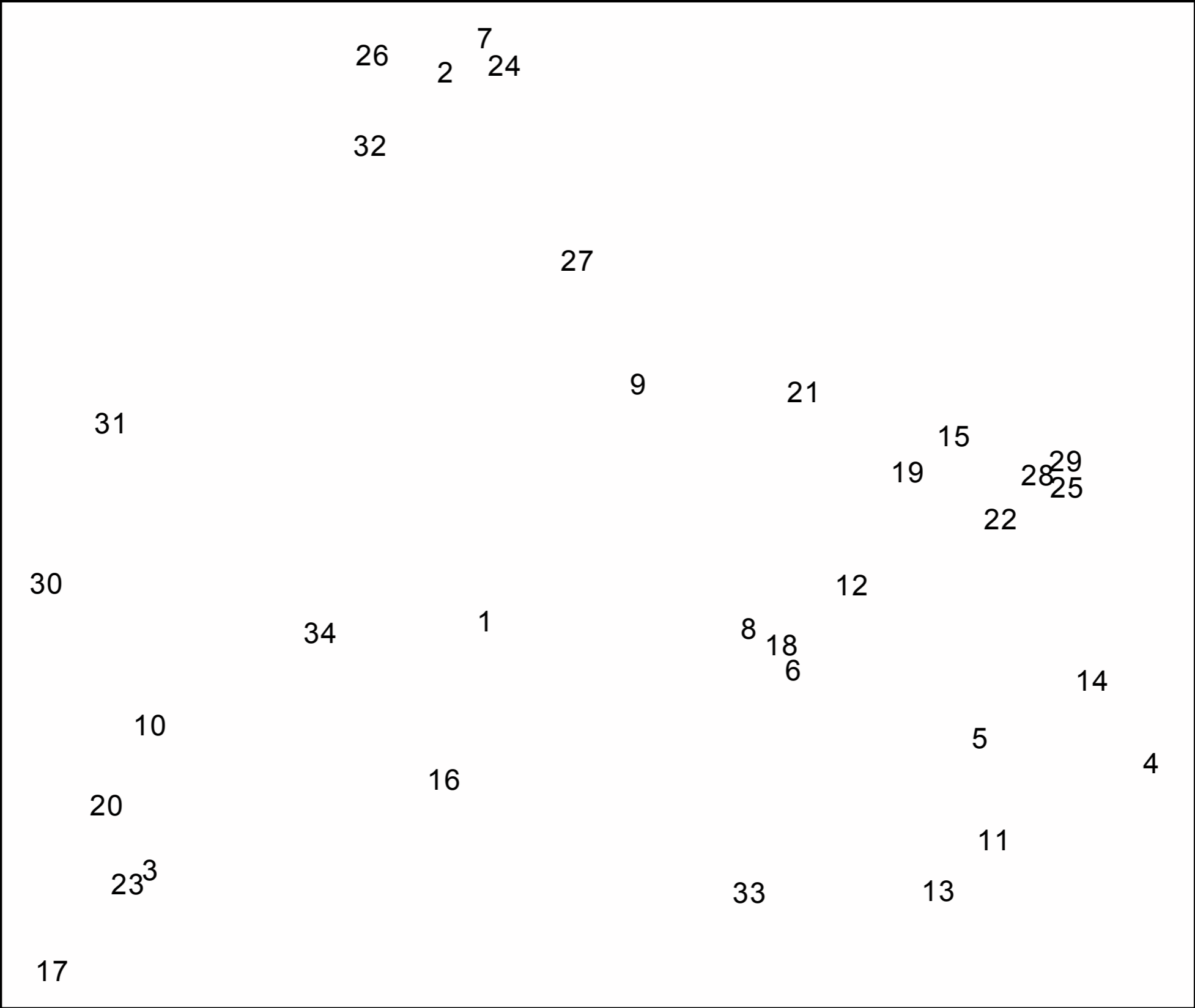
**“Fit” of clustering**









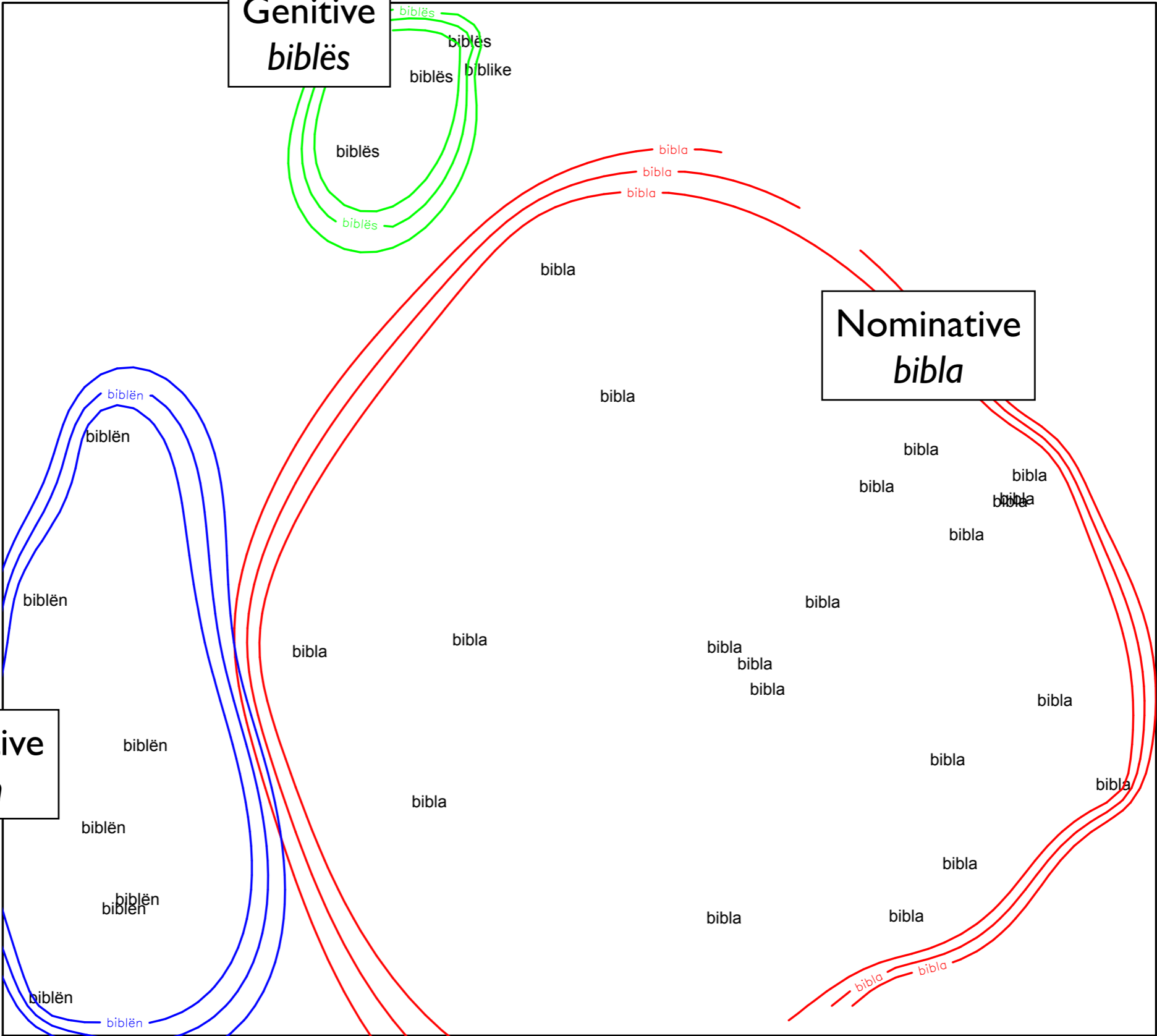


albanian

**Genitive**  
*biblës*

**Nominative**  
*bibla*

**Accusative**  
*biblën*



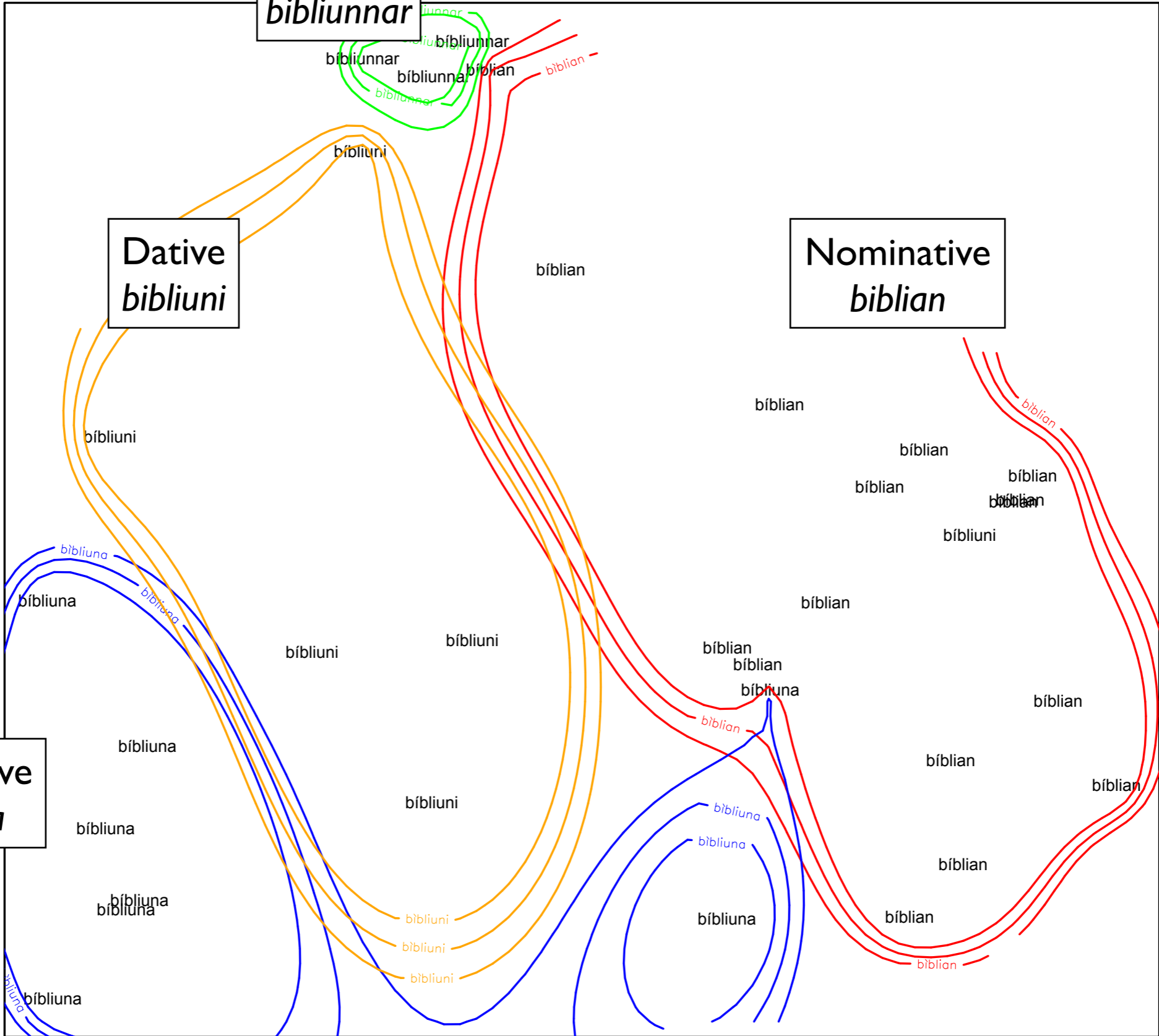
# faroese

Genitive  
*bibliunnar*

Dative  
*bibliuni*

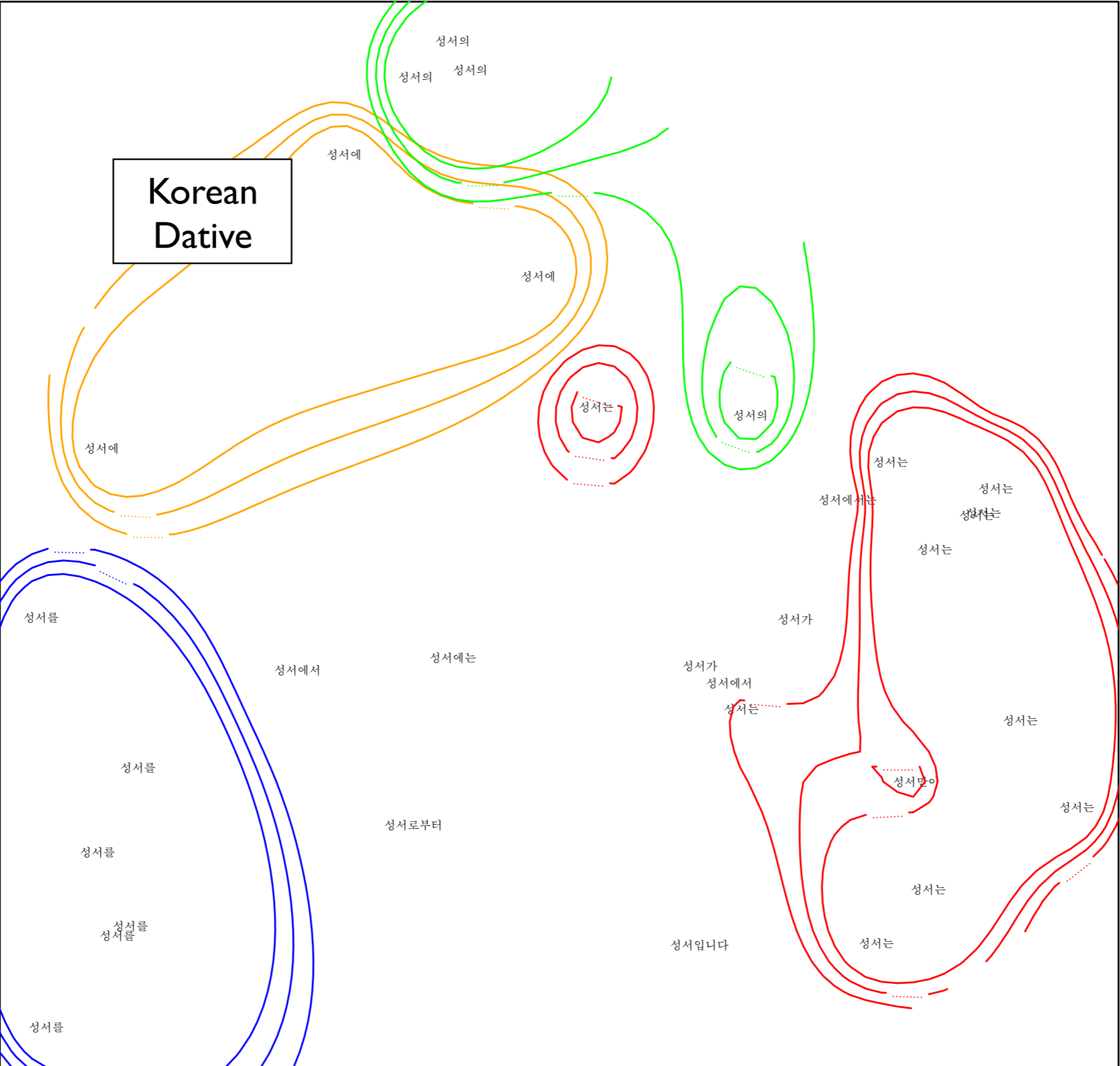
Nominative  
*biblian*

Accusative  
*bibliuna*





# Korean Dative



# How to compare like with like?

- Translations offer a suitable approach to selected *etically* similar data
- *Contextually Situated Roles* are the most basic level of grammatical roles
- *Translations in different languages* can be used to derive similarity between roles

**Language Diversity  
is your friend !**

**(But don't expect the answers to be easy)**