

Split-S: an endangered alignment type?

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Split-S languages

- E.g. Central Pomo (Mithun 1991:518–9):

– Agentive:

ʔa· q^hadé·č'

1SG.AGT fight

“I fight”

– Patientive:

to· ló·ya

1SG.PAT fell

“I fell”

Research question

- Is the split-S type endangered?
- No ...

Talk outline

(1) Split-S languages are rare

→ but ...

(2) Individual split-S languages are often endangered ...

→ but ...

(3) Split-S systems may be diachronically unstable ...

→ but ...

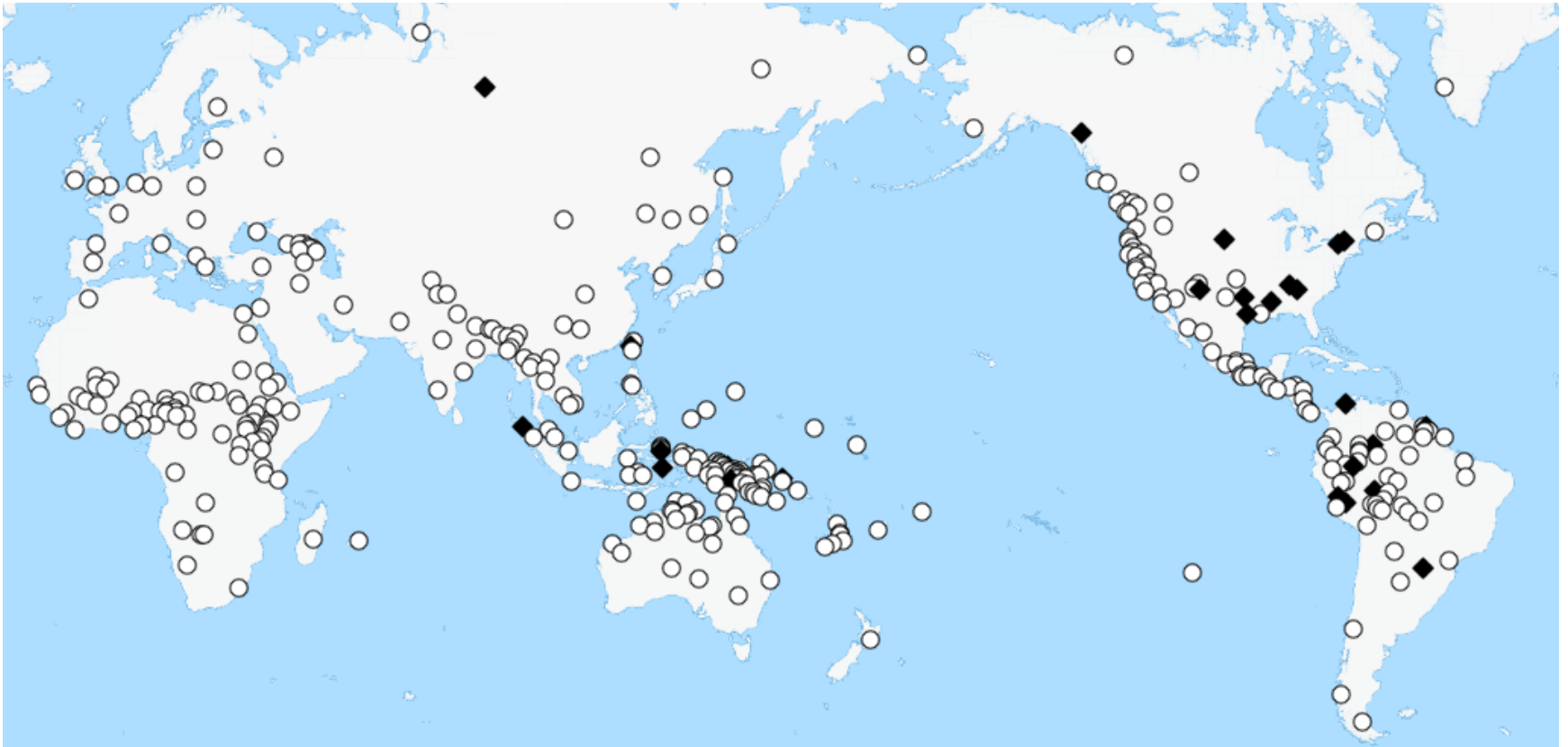
(4) Split-S type is not endangered. However ...

The rarity of split-S languages

The rarity of split-S systems

- *World Atlas of Language Structures:*
 - Alignment of **verbal person marking**: 26/380 languages have split-S systems – **6.8%** (Siewierska 2013)
 - Alignment of **case-marking of full noun phrases**: 4/190 languages have split-S systems – **2.1%** (Comrie 2013a)
 - Alignment of **case-marking of pronouns**: 3/172 languages have split-S systems – **1.7%** (Comrie 2013a)

Agreement alignment



(Siewierska 2013)

Case alignment



(Comrie 2013a)

Rarity of split-S languages

- But typological rarity does not *by itself* mean the split-S type is necessarily endangered

Endangered split-S languages

Endangered split-S languages

- Note high concentration of split-S languages in the Americas: where ~80% of languages are endangered ([Whalen & Simons 2012](#)).
- Endangered split-S languages include e.g. the Pomoan languages (California), Caddo (Oklahoma), Tariana (Brazil), several NE Caucasian languages ...

But ...

- Many split-S languages not endangered; some have large numbers of speakers (data from Lewis et al. 2016):
 - Hindi (258 million L1 speakers)
 - Guaraní (4.6 million speakers)
 - Georgian (4.3 million speakers)
 - Tibetan (1.1 million speakers)

Endangered split-S languages

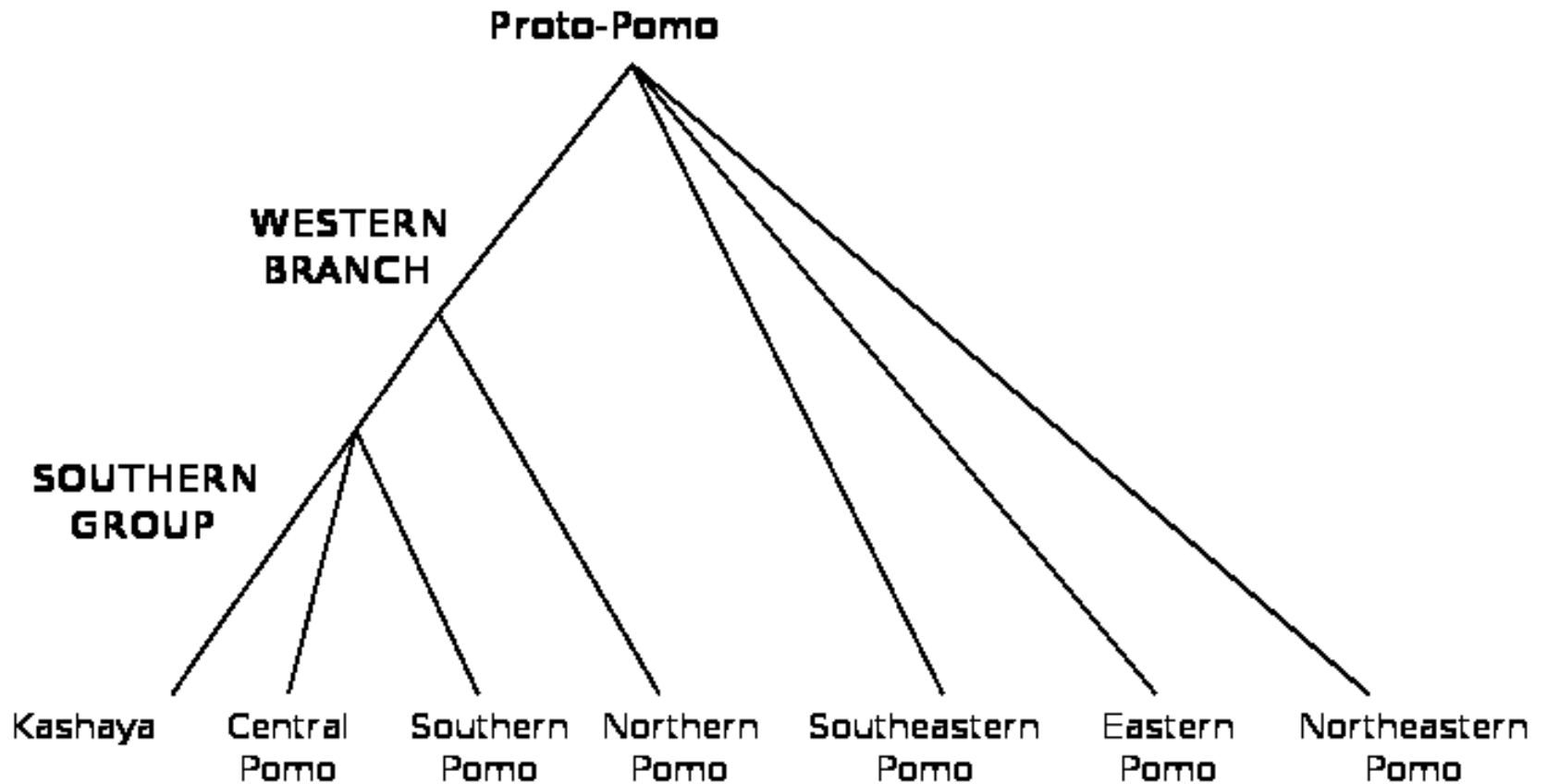
- Many split-S languages are endangered, but by no means all of them
 - split-S type is not obviously endangered as a whole

Are split-S languages
diachronically unstable?

Are split-S languages diachronically unstable?

- If yes, split-S type could die out because all split-S languages shift to other alignment types ...

Pomoan languages



Pomoan languages

- **Northern Pomo, Kashaya:** split-S (Deal & O'Connor 2010, Mithun 1999)
- **Central Pomo, Eastern Pomo:** fluid-S (Mithun 1991, McLendon 1978)
- **Southeastern Pomo:** nominative-accusative (Moshinsky 1974)
- **Northeastern Pomo, Southern Pomo:** ???
- **Proto-Pomo:** split/fluid-S?
- Split-S lost in at least one daughter

Pomoan languages



Basque

- Split-S is much more restricted in some dialects than others ([Aldai 2009](#)):

	Souletin	Labourdin	Guipuzcoan
<i>go, come</i>	ABS	ABS	ABS
<i>grow, die</i>	ABS	ABS	ABS
<i>fly</i>	ABS	(ERG)/ABS	ABS
<i>fight</i>	ABS	ABS	ERG/ABS
<i>dance</i>	ABS	(ERG)/ABS	ERG/ABS
<i>play</i>	ABS	ERG/ABS	ERG/ABS
<i>jump</i>	ABS	ERG/ABS	ERG/ABS
<i>travel</i>	ABS	ABS	ERG
<i>run</i>	ABS	ERG/ABS	ERG
<i>fish</i>	ABS	ERG/ABS	ERG
<i>have lunch, have dinner</i>	ABS	ERG	ERG
<i>glow, boil, last</i>	ERG	ERG	ERG

Basque

- Does this mean split-S is dying out?
- No: dialects with more ERG marking are innovative (Creissels & Mounole 2012, Berro 2012).

Northeast Caucasian

- Split-S systems reported in: **Ingush, Tabassaran, Tsova-Tush, Udi, Budukh, Lezgian.**
- But not universal to the family, e.g. erg:abs case + agreement in **Tsezic languages** and **Lak; Hunzib** is reported to have erg:abs case and nom:acc agreement.
- These languages have lost an ancestral split-S system??

(for full references see Baker 2016)

Kartvelian

- Kartvelian family: Georgian, Laz and Svan are (partially) split-S, but Mingrelian is fully nominative-accusative (Harris 1985).
- Mingrelian has undergone a shift from split-S to nom:acc?

Kartvelian

- Mingrelian has undergone a shift from split-S to nom:acc?
 - Yes, but Harris (1985) argues that the family's split-S system is itself an innovation from an ergative-absolutive system in Proto-Kartvelian.

New split-S systems

- Split-S systems have also arisen in recent times in:
 - Hindi (descended from nom:acc Sanskrit);
 - Tibetan (descended from erg:abs Classical Tibetan) ([Denwood 1991: 266](#)).

New split-S systems

- Argument from diachronic instability does not hold water.
- Even if many split-S languages die out or shift to another alignment pattern, we can predict that new split-S systems will continue to arise.

Interim conclusion

- The split-S type as a whole is *not* endangered.
- However ...

Variation in conditioning factors

Variation in conditioning factors

- **Control/volition:** Koasati ([Kimball 1991](#)), Eastern Pomo ([McLendon 1978](#)) ...
- **Performance/effectedness/instigation:** Lakhota ([Mithun 1991](#))
- **Eventivity/stativity/dynamicity:** Baniwa do Içana ([Danielson and Granadillo 2008](#)), Galela ([Creissels 2008](#)) ...
- **Change/states vs. others:** Chol ([Coon 2010](#)), Georgian?, ~Basque

Variation in conditioning factors

- Multiple factors may interact, e.g.
 - **control and perspective** in Northern Pomo ([Deal and O'Connor 2010](#));
 - **control, eventivity and affectedness** in Central Pomo and Caddo ([Mithun 1991](#)).

Variation in conditioning factors

- Variation is often quite subtle:
 - recall Basque dialects from earlier;
 - also compare closely related Georgian, Laz and Svan:
 - very similar patterns overall but e.g. *come* occurs with both ERG and ABS in Laz, ABS only in Svan;
 - *roll, travel* occur with ERG in Georgian, ABS in Laz;
 - and other, similar cases.

Variation in conditioning factors

- The diversity of variation in conditioning factors is threatened by the endangered status of many split-S languages.

Conclusion

- The split-S type as a whole is *not* endangered.
- But many individual split-S languages *are*:
 - this may threaten the observable variety within the split-S type.

Thank you for listening