

# Suffixing Preferences: Psycholinguistic effects on historical change?

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## Introduction

Suffixes are more common than prefixes in the world's languages (Dryer 2011b)

| Type               | # of lgs |
|--------------------|----------|
| Little Affixation  | 141      |
| Strongly Prefixing | 59       |
| Weakly Prefixing   | 94       |
| Equal              | 147      |
| Weakly Suffixing   | 124      |
| Strongly Suffixing | 406      |

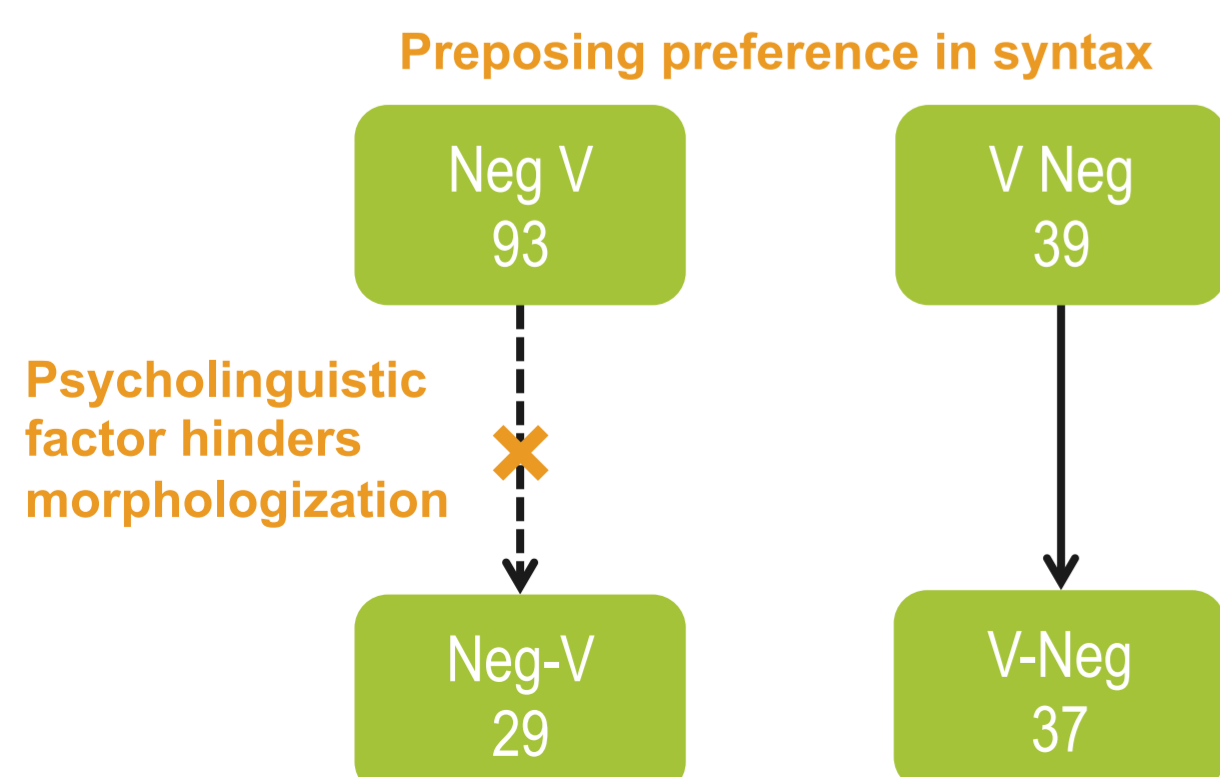
Psycholinguistic accounts such as Hawkins and Cutler (1988) predict that suffixes are preferred in general

However, there are grammatical categories **without suffixing preferences**:

- Noun:
  - POSSESSIVE
- Verb:
  - PERSON-MARKING (SUBJECT)
  - PERSON-MARKING (OBJECT)
  - NEGATION
  - VOICE

(Hawkins and Gilligan 1988)

Combination of historical and psycholinguistic factors could explain the difference among grammatical categories (Dryer 2011a)



## Procedure

Compares the numbers of non-bound and bound forms for each grammatical category

| Syntax   |       | Morphology |       |
|----------|-------|------------|-------|
| Prep N   | 84 W  | Case-N     | 3 W   |
| N Prep   | 121   | N-Case     | 84    |
| Def N    | 86 D  | Def-N      | 13 D  |
| N Def    | 86    | N-Def      | 48    |
|          |       | Gender-N   | 5 G   |
|          |       | N-Gender   | 13    |
| Plural N | 32 D  | Plural-N   | 42 D  |
| N Plural | 83    | N-Plural   | 217   |
| Indef N  | 57 D  | Indef-N    | 5 D   |
| N Indef  | 66    | N-Indef    | 16    |
| Gen N    | 122 W | Poss-N     | 36 W  |
| N Gen    | 96    | N-Poss     | 70    |
| Aux V    | 304 D | Tense-V    | 8 G   |
| V Aux    | 219   | V-Tense    | 21    |
|          |       | Asp-V      | 10 G  |
|          |       | V-Asp      | 18    |
|          |       | Mood-V     | 5 G   |
|          |       | V-Mood     | 20    |
| Caus V   | 45 D  | Caus-V     | 110 D |
| V Caus   | 34    | V-Caus     | 226   |
| S V      | 229 W | Subj-V     | 157 D |
| V S      | 35    | V-Subj     | 165   |
| O V      | 117 W | Obj-V      | 106 D |
| V O      | 144   | V-Obj      | 133   |
| Neg V    | 93 W  | Neg-V      | 29 W  |
| V Neg    | 39    | V-Neg      | 37    |

Data sources

W: chapters of WALS (Dryer and Haspelmath 2011)

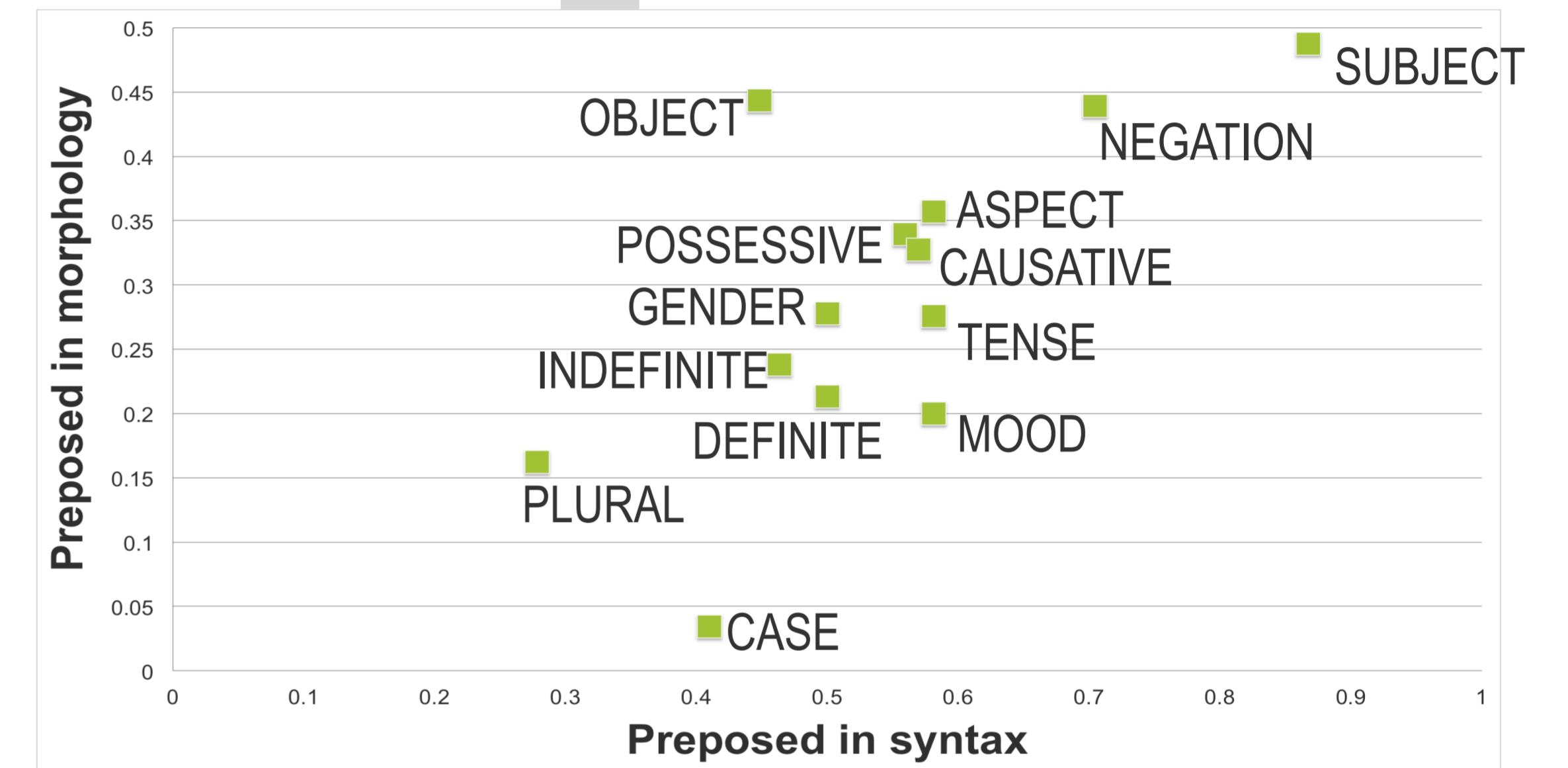
- Randomly chosen subset in which no pair of languages belongs to the same genus

D: Matthew Dryer (p.c.)

G: Gilligan (Hawkins and Gilligan 1988)

Voice and Valence omitted due to scarceness of data

## Results



## Discussion

The results largely confirmed:

- The dominance of postposing in morphology
- Correlation between syntax and morphology

In particular, it explains weaker suffixing preferences for SUBJECT and NEGATION, and stronger suffixing preference for PLURAL

### CASE:

- Suffixing preference too strong
- OV languages more likely to develop case markers? (Hawkins 2002)

### OBJECT:

- Suffixing preference too weak
- Does not reflect past word order? (Enrique-Arias 2002)

## Conclusion

The combination of the general psycholinguistic preference and historical origins can explain differential suffixing preferences among grammatical categories

## References

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