



# L'irrégularité morphologique et géographie linguistique

## Morphological irregularity and linguistic geography

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## Un mot en français

Cette conférence sera présentée en anglais.

Il y a trois raisons pour notre choix de langue de présentation:

- 1) Les degrés de compétence en français varient beaucoup (y compris compétence zéro) dans notre groupe de recherche.
- 2) Le projet dans lequel cette recherche s'encadre utilise l'anglais comme langue de travail.
- 3) Nous avons l'intention de publier les actes de ce colloque chez Akademie Verlag à Berlin où on n'accepte que des textes en anglais.

Nous espérons néanmoins que vous trouverez intéressant ce que nous irons vous présenter.

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## Aims and goals

In this pilot-study, we check whether or not certain phenomena which instantiate morphological irregularity can be correlated to areal factors.

To this end, we have picked out suppletion within the system of adjectival comparison in the languages of Europe.

We look at the distribution of quantitative and qualitative aspects of suppletion over the linguistic map of Europe.

## Working hypothesis

To make things more interesting, we assume that the number of adjectives which attest suppletion in a given language is not random but depends (among other things) on the geographic location of this language.

In accordance with observations made by proponents of the *SAE-sprachbund*, we hypothesize that suppletion will turn out to reflect a west-to-east cline.

## General background

Two projects in one go:

- a) „grand design“ – a comprehensive geolinguistic stocktaking of (ideally) all those phenomena which have not made it into the research program of EUROTYP in order to determine which linguistic phenomena are subject to „areality“.
- b) „by-product“ – an empirically well-founded appraisal of morphological irregularity.

## Predecessors

Many (i.e. Heine 1994,  
Haspelmath 2001,  
Heine/Kuteva 2006) – but  
hardly anybody has looked at  
the phenomenon at hand.

# Technicalities

- **Europe:** We focus on phenomena attested within the boundaries of Europe
- **Sample:** at present 100 languages (mostly standard varieties) of all autochthonous phyla and isolates on European soil
- **Sources:** descriptive/prescriptive grammars
- **Adjectives:** only attributive (including gradable quantifiers)
- **Comparison:** only positive comparative/superlative of superiority
- **Orientation:** strictly synchronic
- **Methodology:** functional-typological (with its areal-linguistic implications)
- **Theory:** inspired by Natural Morphology



## Basic concepts

- paradigm size – ternary distinction
  - Positive: ***young***
  - Comparative: ***young-er***
  - Superlative: ***young-est***
- } regular
- 
- Positive: ***bad***
  - Comparative: ***worse***
  - Superlative: ***worst***
- } irregular

## Excluded cases

- EQUATIVE – Welsh *hardd-ed*, 'as handsome'
- EMPHATIC – Hungarian *leges-leg-erős-ebb*, 'absolutely strongest'
- ELATIVE – Portuguese *fraqu-íssimo*, 'very weak'
- ATTENUATIVE – Kalmyk *kīt-cr*, 'somewhat colder'

## What counts as irregularity?

- traditional – largely impressionistic (i.e. ill-defined) concept in philology and linguistics;
- Our point of view:
  - Regularity and irregularity are interconnected gradual properties – between the extremes of absolute regularity and absolute irregularity, there is a continuum of sub-regularities/sub-irregularities;
  - regular is the comparison of those adjectives whose paradigms contain exclusively predictable word-forms.



## A crude definition

Morphological irregularity applies if at least one of the three slots of an adjective's paradigm is filled unpredictably.

## Defective paradigm

\* A slot remains empty

- Swedish - regular:

POSITIVE **billig** ‚cheap‘ → COMPARATIVE

**billigare** ‚cheaper‘ → SUPERLATIVE **billigast**  
‚cheapest‘

- Irregular = defective:

POSITIVE **små** ‚small‘ → COMPARATIVE **smärre**  
‚smaller‘ → SUPERLATIVE xxx (‚smallest‘)

## Deponency

- A word-form which is normally associated with function X is used to fulfil function Y
- Georgian – regular:  
 POSITIVE ***didi*** ‚big‘ → COMPARATIVE ***upro didi*** ‚bigger‘ → ELATIVE ***u-did-es-i*** ‚very big‘
- Irregular - deponency:  
 POSITIVE ***kargi*** ‚good‘ → COMPARATIVE ***u-~~k~~et-es-i*** ‚better‘ < ELATIVE of ***k~~e~~tili*** ‚good‘

# Suppletion

- Suppletion comes in two shapes:
  - a) weak suppletion: two forms of a paradigm which are clearly related diachronically can no longer be derived the one from the other by synchronic phonological rules
  - b) strong suppletion: two word-forms the lexical morphemes of which are diachronically independent of each other combine to form a common paradigm

## Weak suppletion

German (hoch ‚high‘)

- Positive **hoch** [ho:x]
- Comparative **höh-er** [hø(h)ə]
- Superlative **höch-st** [hø:çst]
- alternation [x] ~ [ç] regular – phonologically conditioned
- [h] ~ 0 in the comparative impredicatable



## Strong suppletion

### Basque

- |                | regular          | suppletive    |
|----------------|------------------|---------------|
| • Positive:    | <i>txiki</i>     | <i>on</i>     |
| • Comparative: | <i>txiki-ago</i> | <i>hobe</i> ! |
| • Superlative: | <i>txiki-en</i>  | <i>on-en</i>  |
|                | ‚small‘          | ‚good‘        |

## In among the irregular forms

In the grammar of the North-Frisian variety of Bökingharde (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany), sixteen instances of irregularly construed comparatives/superlatives are reported.

Only two of these cases are fully-fledged examples of strong suppletion. Weak suppletion clearly dominates although some of the paradigms are bordering on strong suppletion already (owing to multiple sound changes blurring the etymological relation between positive and other forms).

<b>positive</b>	<b>comparative</b>	<b>superlative</b>	<b>meaning</b>
<i>ärj</i>	<i>eere</i>	<i>eerist</i>	bad
<i>eeder</i>	<i>iir</i>	<i>jarst</i>	early
<i>blüch ~ blöög</i>	<i>blööger</i>	<i>blöögest</i>	shy
<b><i>foole ~ maning</i></b>	<b><i>mör</i></b>	<b><i>mååst</i></b>	<b>many</b>
<b><i>gödj ~ gou</i></b>	<b><i>bääder ~ bäärer</i></b>	<b><i>beest</i></b>	<b>good</b>
<i>hillj ~ hill</i>	<i>hiller</i>	<i>hillst</i>	whole
<i>kölj ~ koul</i>	<i>kouler</i>	<i>koulst</i>	cold
<i>lääs</i>	<i>lää(s)er</i>	<i>leest</i>	late
<i>lait</i>	<i>maner</i>	<i>manst</i>	few
<i>lung</i>	<i>långer</i>	<i>långst</i>	long
<i>lüüs ~ luus</i>	<i>luuser</i>	<i>luusest</i>	loose
<i>näi</i>	<i>näre</i>	<i>näist</i>	near
<i>rüch ~ röög</i>	<i>rööger</i>	<i>röögest</i>	rough
<i>snüüs ~ snuus</i>	<i>snuuser</i>	<i>snuusest</i>	pretty
<i>üülj</i>	<i>åler</i>	<i>ålst</i>	old

# Languages without suppletion

Indo-European	Non-Indo-European
Albanian, Armenian, Arumanian, Bulgarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Romanian, Zazakî	Abkhaz, Abaza, Adyghe, Archi, Avar, Azeri, Bashkir, Budukh, Chechen, Chuvash, Crimean Tatar, Cypriot Arabic, Godoberi, Hunzib, Icarî Dargwa, Ingush, Kabardinian, Kalmyk, Karachay, Karay, Kazakh, Khinalug, Komi, Kryts, Lezgian, Maltese, Mari, Mordvin, Rutul, Saami, Shahpur, Svan, Talysh, Tatar, Tsakhur, Tsova-Tush, Turkish, Udi, Udmurt, Yurak
<p><b>9</b> (of 52 = 17%)</p>	<p><b>40</b> (of 48 = 83%)</p>
<p><b>49</b> (of 100 = 49%)</p>	

## An expected result

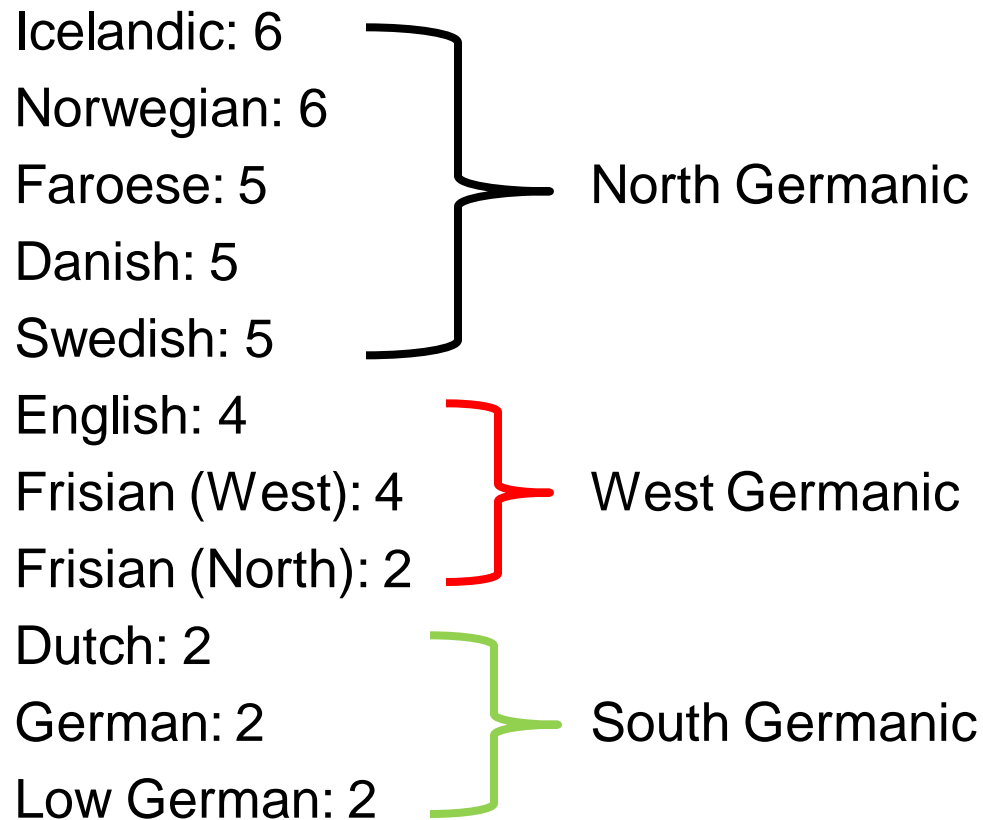
In Europe, suppletion within the paradigm of adjectival comparison is overwhelmingly an Indo-European feature.

**51 languages of 100 attest to suppletion (= 51%).**

**Of these 51 languages, 43 (= 84%) belong to different Indo-European phyla (expected share ~50%!).**

Since non-Indo-European languages are more numerous in the east, we expect a decrease of suppletion the further eastward we go.

# Germanic phylum: quantities



all members of the  
phylum attest suppletion

## Germanic phylum: qualities

	GOOD (11)	MANY (11)	BAD (7)	LITTLE (7)	OLD (5)	BIG (2)	
Icelandic	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Norwegian	X	X/X	X	X	X		5
Danish	X	X	X	X	X		5
Swedish	X	X	X/X	X	X		5
Faroese	X	X/X/X	X/X/X	X	X		5
English	X	X	X	X			4
Frisian (West)	X		X	X		X	4
Frisian (North)	X	X					2
Dutch	X	X					2
German	X	X					2
Low German	X	X					2

# Romance phylum: quantities

Italian: 6

Portuguese: 6

Occitan: 6

Catalan: 4

Ladinian: 4

French: 3

Spanish: 3

Rumansh Grishun: 2

Sardinian: 2

Friulan: 1

Romanian: 0

Arumanian: 0



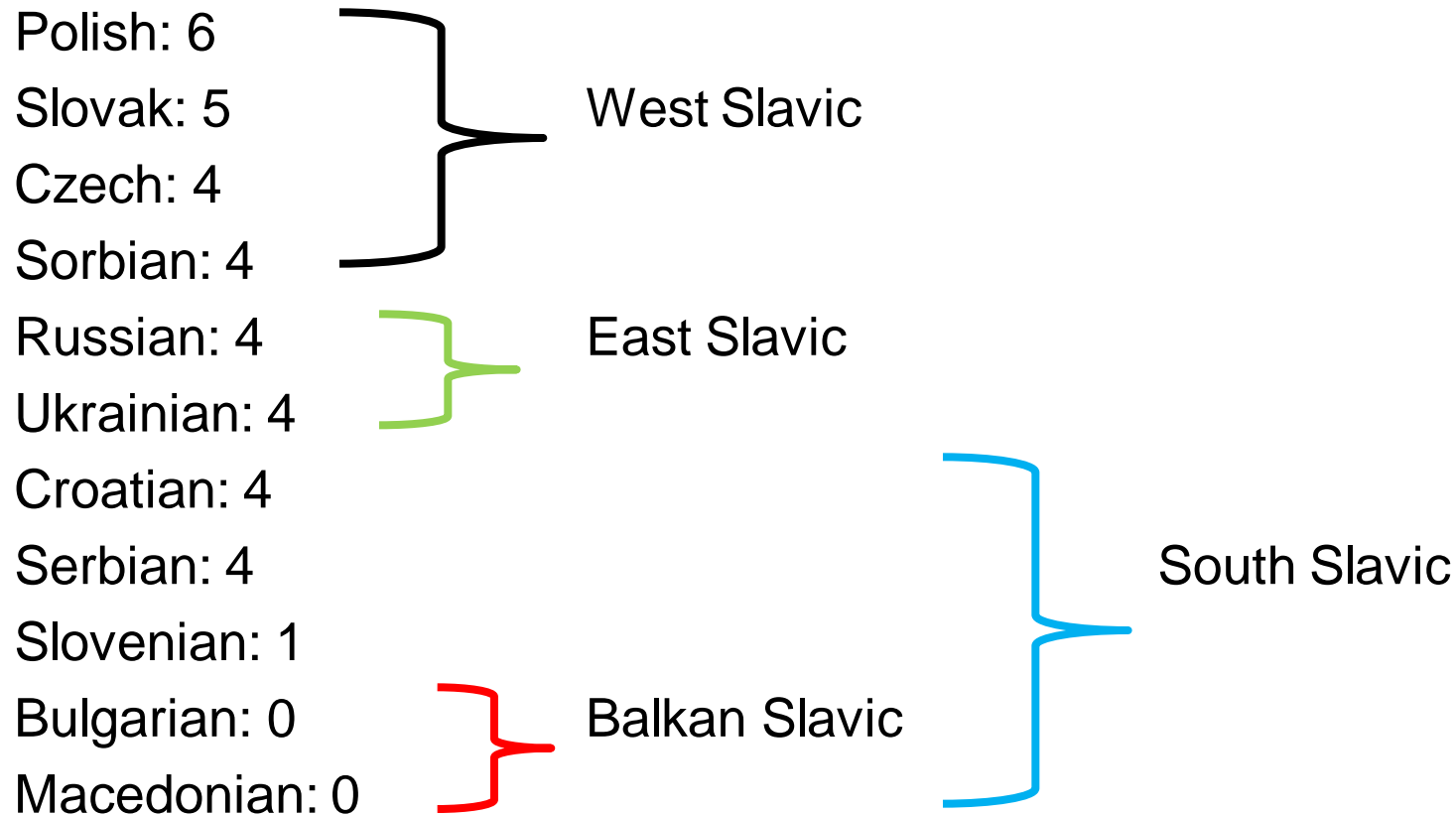
Balkan Romance



# Romance phylum: qualities

	GOOD (10)	BAD (9)	LITTLE (6)	BIG (6)	HIGH (3)	LOW (3)	
Italian	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Portuguese	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Occitan	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Ladinian	X	X	X	X			4
Catalan	X	X	X	X			4
French	X	X	X				3
Spanish	X	X		X			3
Sardinian	X	X					2
Rumansh	X	X/X					2
Friulan	X						1

## Slavic phylum: quantities



## Slavic phylum: qualities

	GOOD	BAD	BIG	LITTLE	EASY	HIGH	MANY	
Polish	X	X	X	X	X	X		6
Slovak	X/X	X	X	X			X	5
Czech	X	X/X	X	X				4
Sorbian	X	X	X	X				4
Russian	X	X	X	X				4
Ukrainian	X	X	X	X				4
Croatian	X	X	X	X				4
Serbian	X	X	X	X				4
Slovenian	X							1
	9	8	8	8	1	1	1	

## Sundry Indo-European languages: quantities

Welsh: 8	}	Celtic phylum
Scots-Gaelic: 7		
Irish: 4		
Greek: 4	}	Indo-Iranian phylum
Breton: 3		
Kurmancî: 3	}	Baltic phylum
Romani: 1		
Ossetic: 1		
Zazakî: 0		
Armenian: 0		
Albanian: 0		
Latvian: 0		
Lithuanian: 0		

*Note: A dashed arrow points from the Celtic phylum group towards the Indo-Iranian phylum group.*

## Sundry Indo-European languages: qualities

	GOOD	BAD	MANY	LITTLE	BIG	NEAR	LONG	SWIFT	SHORT	STRONG	EASY	
Welsh	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				8
Scots-Gaelic	X	X		X	X				X	X	X	7
Irish	X	X	X	X								4
Greek	X	X	X	X								4
Breton	X	X	X									3
Kur-mancî	X		X		X							3
Ossetic	X											1
Romani	X											1
	8	5	5	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	

# Non-Indo-European languages: quantities

Georgian: 4

Basque: 2

Estonian: 2

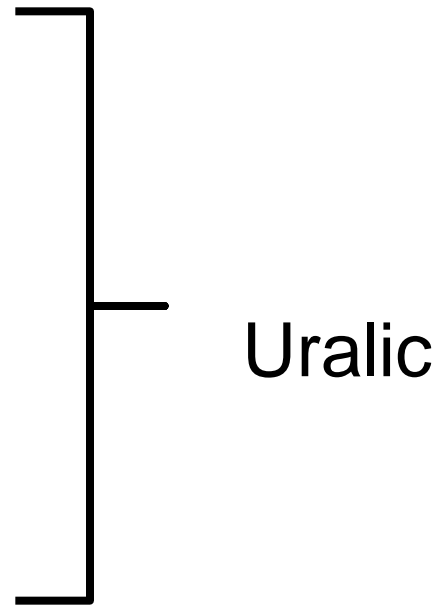
Finnish: 2

Karelian: 2

Livonian: 2

Votic: 1

Hungarian: 1



# Non-Indo-European languages: qualities

	GOOD	MANY	BAD	LITTLE	
Georgian	X	X	X	X	4
Basque	X	X			2
Finnish	X	X			2
Karelian	X	X			2
Estonian	X	X			2
Livonian	X	X			2
Votic	X				1
Hungarian		X			1
	7	7	1	1	

# Summary

	Germanic	Romance	Slavic	Sundry	Non-IE	
GOOD	11	10	9	8	7	43
BAD	7	9	8	5	1	30
LITTLE	7	6	8	4	1	26
MANY	11		1	5	7	24
BIG	2	6	8	3		19
OLD	5					5
HIGH		3	1			4
LOW		3				3
EASY			1	1		2
	6 types	6 types	7 types	11 types	4 types	

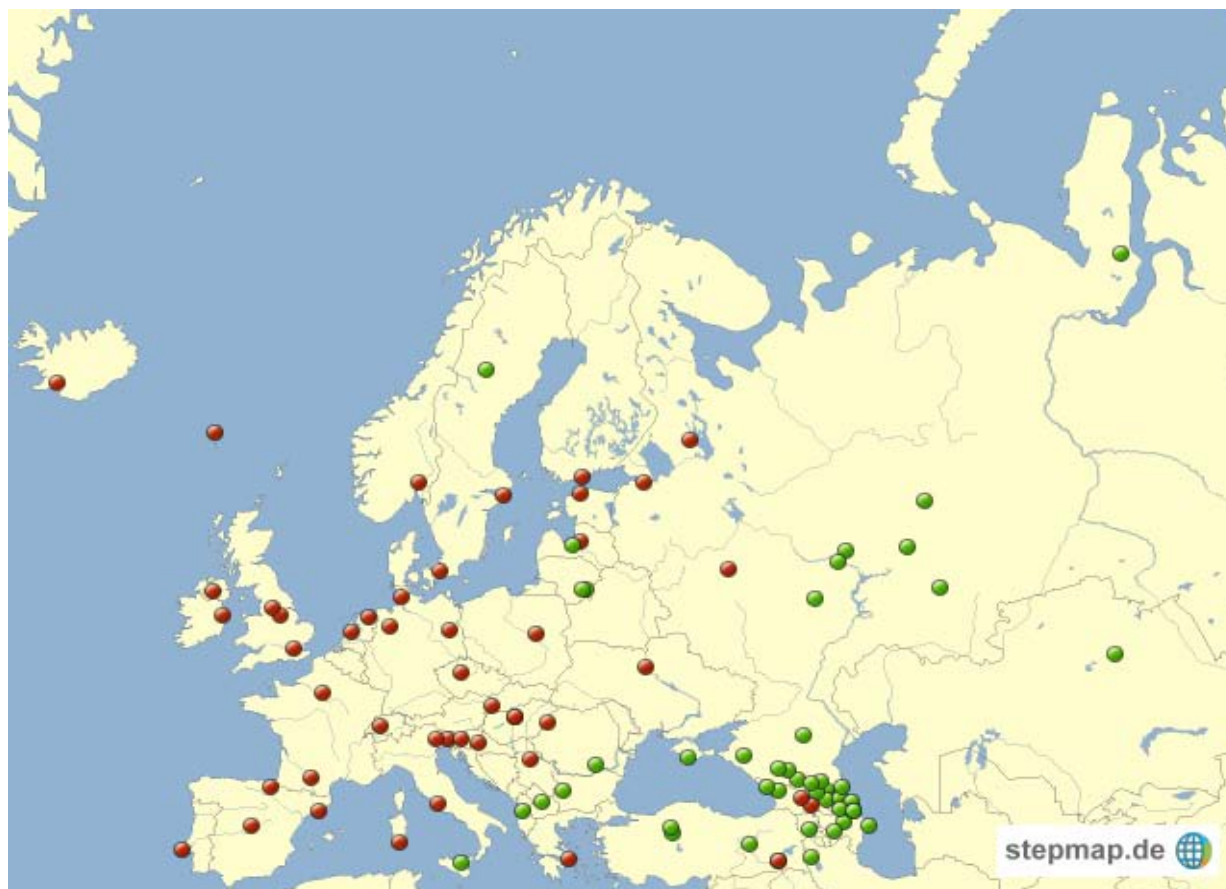


## Conclusions

- Implications (probability):  
EASY → BIG → BAD → GOOD
- There is an areal asymmetry:
  - suppletion is strong in the west (Celtic fringe!)
  - suppletion is weak in the east (Caucasia)
  - contact zones:
    - Uralic meets Indo-European (Uralic languages display suppletion with the unmarked member of the implicational chain)
    - Balkan areas (Indo-European languages give up suppletion)



# I Suppletive languages vs. non-suppletive languages



■ suppletive languages  
■ non-suppletive languages



# Outlook

What needs to be done in the future

- complement sample with non-standard varieties
- include instances of weak suppletion
- look beyond Europe
- check sundry categories of adjectival comparison
- integrate evidence from further word-classes
- derive hypotheses for areal typology and morphological theory



Thank you for your attention!



### III Isogloss: GOOD

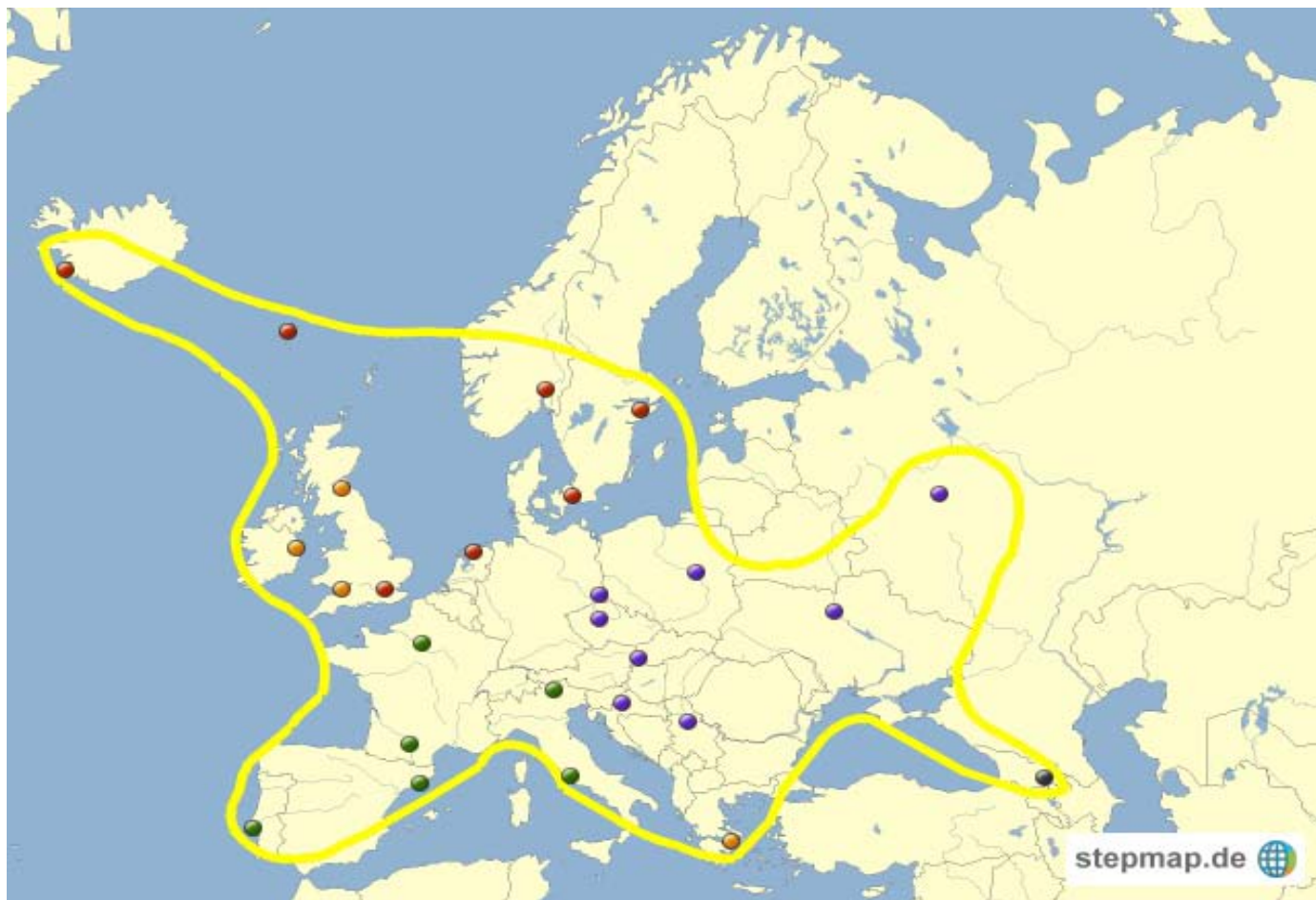




### III Isogloss: BAD

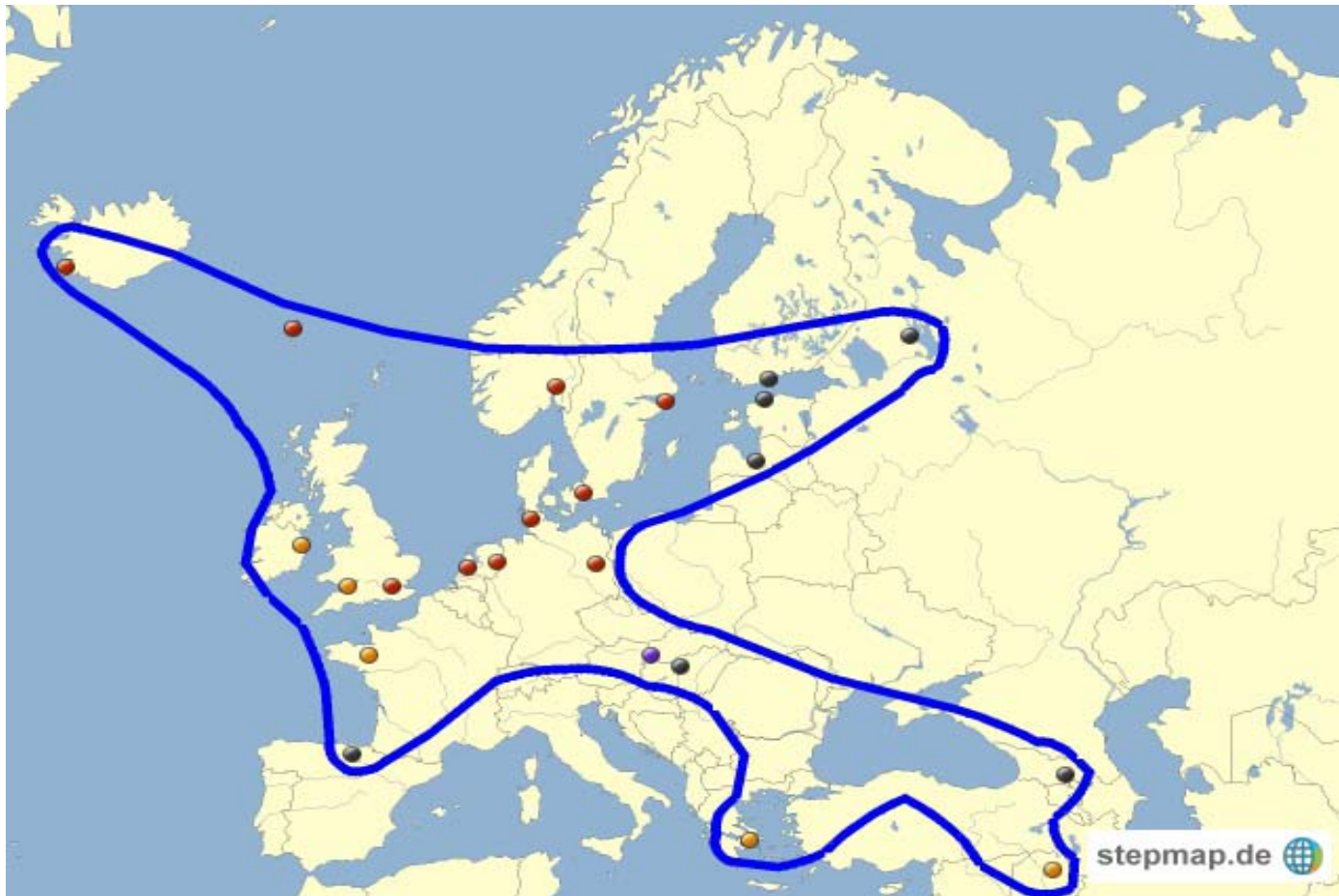


### III Isogloss: LITTLE



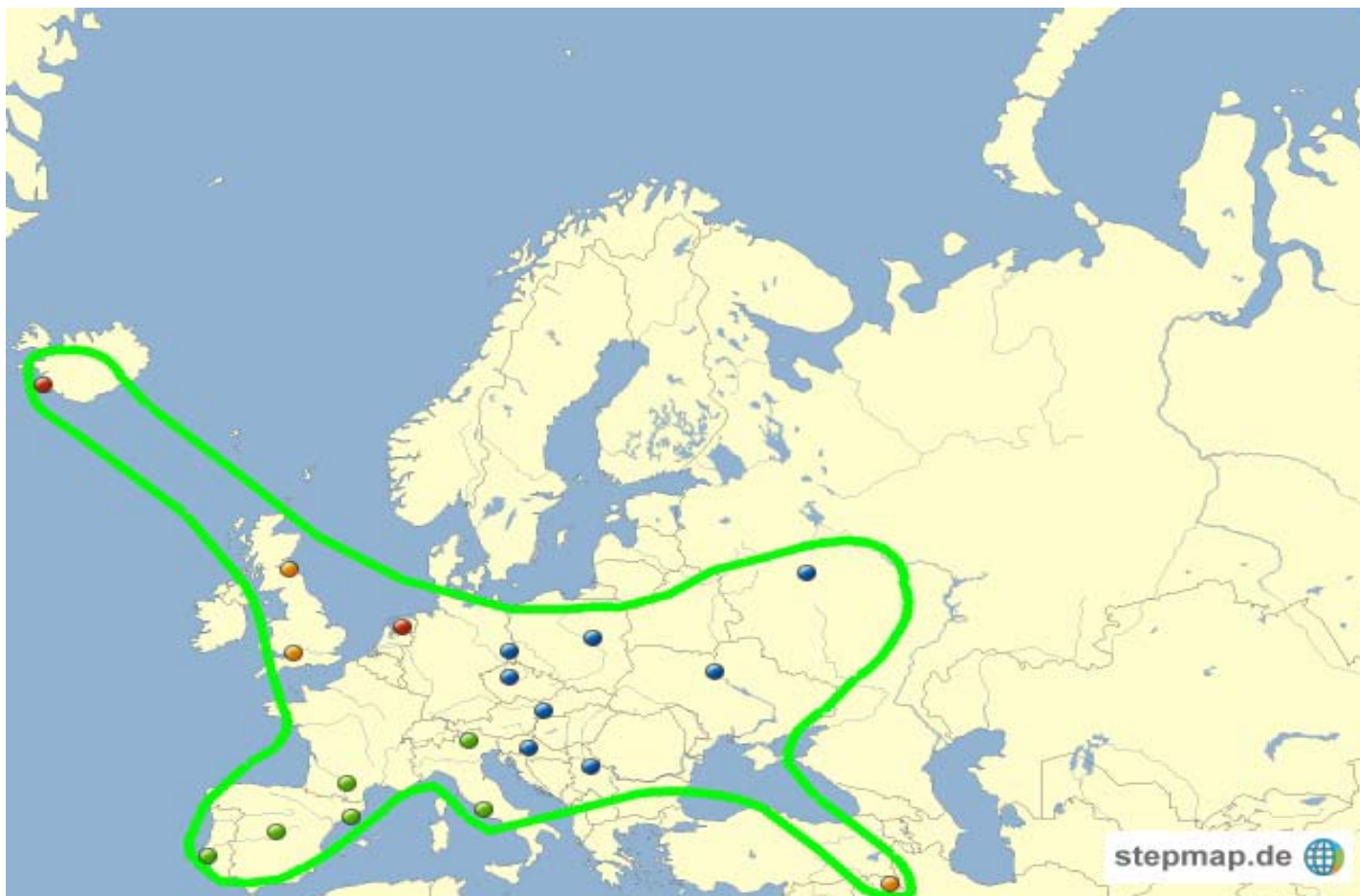


### III Isogloss: MANY

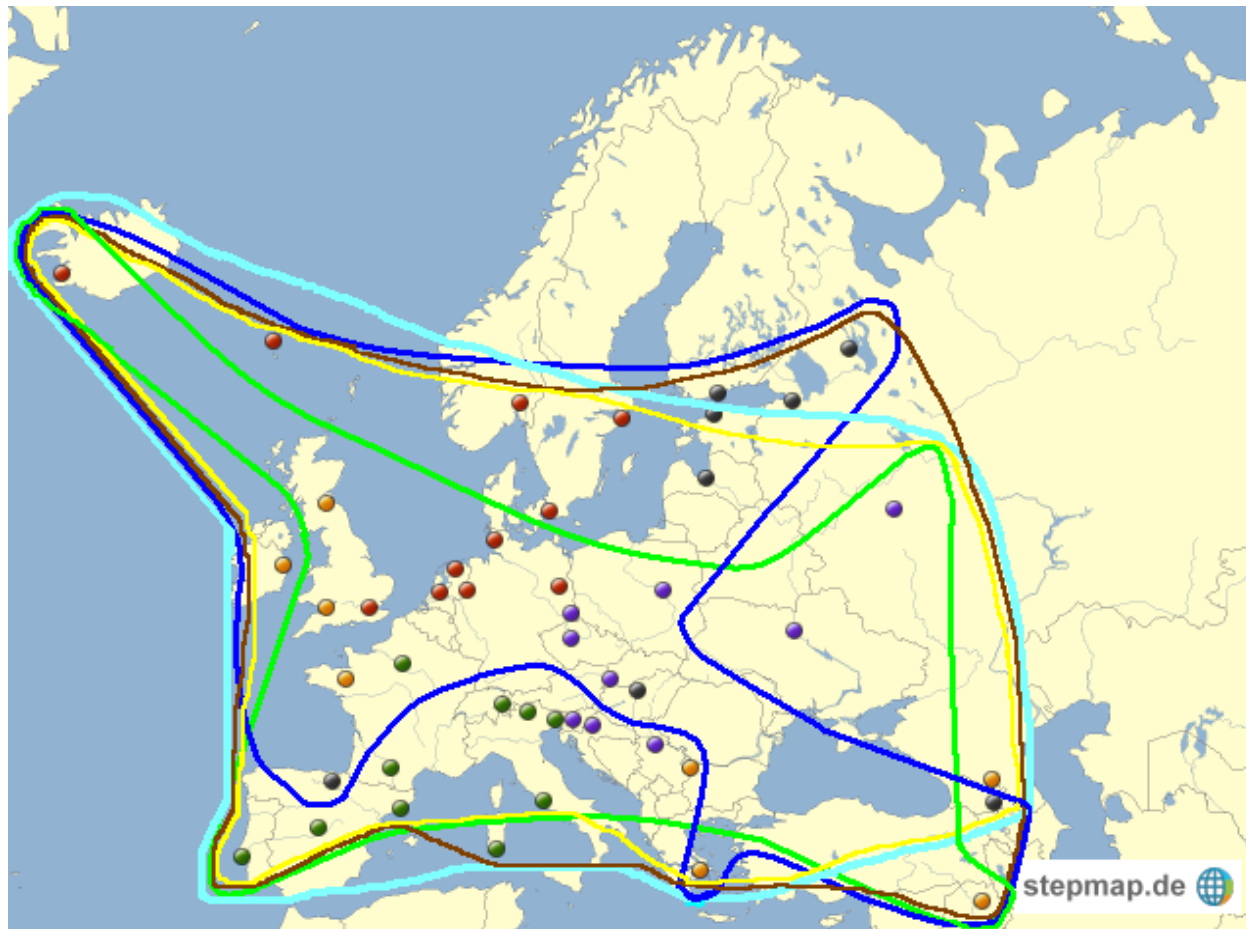




### III Isogloss: BIG



# Clustermap



- GOOD
- BAD
- LITTLE
- MANY
- BIG