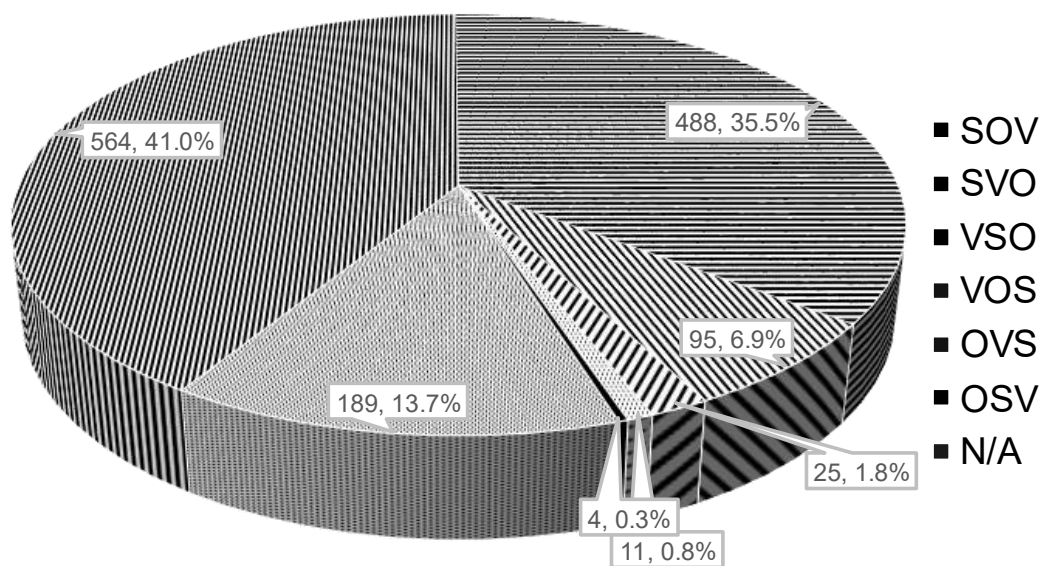


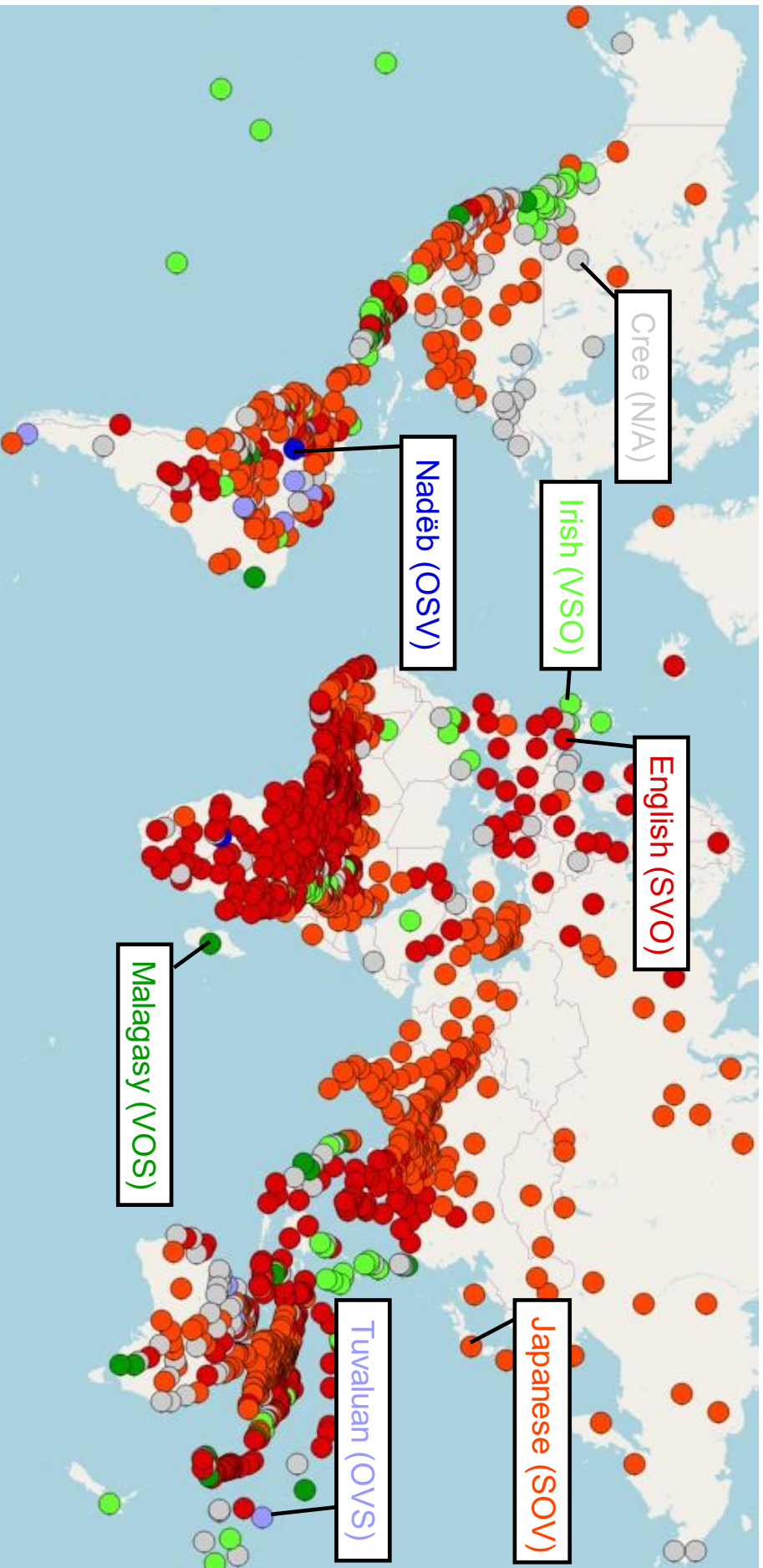
Language Awareness for Key Stage 3

15: Word Order

Key Terms	Optional Terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word Order • Subject • Object • Adposition • Head • Phrase • Dependant • Agreement • Syntax 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postposition • Speech Act

- Introduction: Word Order
 - Today we will look at word order and how languages arrange words in different ways
 - We will see different orders that languages use for subjects, objects and verbs
 - We will look at different word orders for adjectives and adpositions (prepositions/postpositions, e.g. *on*)
 - We will also look at how word order can vary within a single language and how languages use different word orders
 - We will see how word order patterns can tell us about the structure of language in general
- Word Order
 - You may remember from our first lesson that different languages have different orders for subject, object and verb
 - Subject–Verb–Object (SVO): I saw them
 - Subject–Object–Verb (SOV): I them saw
 - Verb–Subject–Object (VSO): Saw I them
 - Verb–Object–Subject (VOS): Saw them I
 - Object–Verb–Subject (OVS): Them saw I
 - Object–Subject–Verb (OSV): Them I saw
 - Some of these language types are much more common than others





Map adapted from [WALS](#)



- Most languages show a preference for having the subject before the verb, and having the subject before the object
- The evidence suggests that these types of language are somehow ‘easier’
- However, we don’t yet have enough data to say what makes this easier, or in what way
- The order of subjects, objects and verbs is not the only thing that can vary from language to language
- You may remember that languages have different types of adpositions
- Some languages have prepositions, which come before the noun
 - in Japan (English)
 - from Tokyo
- Others have postpositions, which come after the noun
 - Nihon ni (Japanese)
 - Tokyo kara
- Likewise, in some languages adjectives come before the noun, while in others they follow it
 - black coffee (English)
 - schwarzer Kaffee (German)
 - kuroi kōhī (Japanese)
 - café noir (French)
 - caife dubh (Irish)
 - coffi du (Welsh)
- There are patterns in this variation in word order
 - For example, languages with the verb before the object tend to have prepositions before the noun
 - Languages with the object before the verb are more likely to have nouns followed by postpositions
- However, there are exceptions to some of these patterns
 - For example, languages with the verb before the object often place nouns before adjectives, as in Irish
 - However, in English the verb comes before the object, but adjectives come before the noun
- Why do these patterns exist at all?
- They can be seen as different applications of the same general principles
- For example, verbs have the same sort of role in regard to their objects as prepositions do
- Verbs and prepositions specify the type of relationship that exists, and the objects specify what the relationship is to
 - A hedge surrounds the garden
 - There is a hedge around the garden
- We can say that in relation to their objects, verbs and prepositions are both heads
- The verb and the object that depends on it form a single unit, the verb phrase, with the verb as the head of the phrase
- The same is true for prepositions and prepositional phrases
- The patterns that we see in word order can then be expressed as a single statement:
 - In any given language, heads will tend to have the same order with respect to their dependants
 - Head + Dependant = Verb + Object, Preposition + Noun...
 - Dependant + Head = Object + Verb, Noun + Postposition...
- So far, when we have talked about word order we have only been looking at a single, “basic” word order for each language
- However, many languages allow you to vary this basic word order for different reasons

- You may remember that languages in which subjects and objects are clearly marked using case endings can be very flexible about word order
- For example, in Latin there are six different ways of saying ‘John saw Mary’
 - Johannes Mariam vidit
 - Johannes vidit Mariam
 - Vidit Johannes Mariam
 - Vidit Mariam Johannes
 - Mariam vidit Johannes
 - Mariam Johannes vidit
- What good are all these different orders?
- One use for them is to change the emphasis
- In Latin, the normal order is subject–object–verb
 - Johannes Mariam vidit
‘John saw Mary’
- By rearranging the sentence, you can focus on different words
 - Mariam Johannes vidit
‘As for Mary, John saw her’, ‘It was Mary that John saw’, etc.
- As you can see, changing the emphasis in English often results in a more complex structure
- Even in English, you can sometimes add emphasis just by changing the order of words
 - Mary’s alright, but John I hate
- Questions and Other Speech Acts
 - One very common use for different word orders is to distinguish different types of speech act
 - Mary is so happy. (statement)
 - How happy is Mary? (question)
 - How happy Mary is! (exclamation)
 - Moving the verb before the subject is a very common way of forming questions in Indo-European languages
 - Is Mary happy? (English)
 - Ist Maria froh? (German)
 - ¿Está Maria feliz? (Spanish)
 - However, there are also other ways of forming questions
 - Another way to form questions is by leaving the words in the same order and just using a different tone of voice
 - In English, this sort of question is often used to echo a previous statement
 - Mary’s happy.
 - She’s happy?
 - Some languages make much more extensive use of questions that leave the words in the same order
 - This is the most common sort of question in informal French
 - Est-elle heureuse? (formal)
‘Is she happy?’
 - Elle est heureuse? (informal)
‘She’s happy?’
 - In other languages, this is the only way of asking questions
 - In Amharic (spoken in Ethiopia), all questions have the same word order as statements
 - Mariyami desitenya nati
‘Mary is happy’
 - Mariyami desitenya nati?
‘Is Mary happy?’

- Sentence Structure
 - So far we have only been looking at the order of words
 - But word order is inseparable from other aspects of language
 - For example, word order can have an effect on agreement
 - You may remember from the last lesson that verbs agree with their subjects
 - However, agreement can be affected by word order
 - In Arabic, subjects can appear before or after the verb
 - L-tullaabu wasaluu
'The students have arrived'
 - Wasala l-tullaabu
'The students have arrived'
(literally, 'Has arrived the students')
 - When the verb comes first, it no longer agrees with the subject
 - The verb is singular, but the subject is plural
 - However, this does not happen in most languages that allow multiple word orders
 - Hoi mathētai aphíkonto (Greek)
'The students have arrived'
 - Aphíkonto hoi mathētai
literally, 'Have arrived the students'
 - As you saw earlier, word order has no effect on agreement in Latin either
 - What do these differences mean?
 - Even though we see the same word orders in Arabic and Greek, the similarities are just on the surface
 - There's a sense in which the verb in Arabic is actually in a "different" place from Greek, even if all you can see on the surface is that they are both before their subjects
 - It almost seems that in Arabic the verb is somewhere where the subject can't "reach" it
 - Studying these sorts of similarities and differences between languages can let us see patterns that exist "below the surface" of language
 - When we look at these things, we are studying syntax
 - Syntax is the system of rules that a language has for combining words into sentences
 - In the next lessons we will see more examples of these patterns
- Conclusion
 - Today we have seen how different languages have different rules for arranging the words in a sentence
 - We have seen how specific differences that seem arbitrary can be expressed in terms of more general rules
 - We have looked at the use of special word orders for special purposes such as questions
 - We have seen that in some languages word order can affect agreement
 - This is an example of how languages can seem the same on the surface but be different underneath