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Assessing the Results of French Terminological Development Efforts: A Corpus-Based approach

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French Government and Language

- “The vision of a legislature deliberately manufacturing a language for its own people may appear peculiar, if not futile, to English eyes” (Munday 1985:222)
- Recommendation of French equivalents of English technical terms that non-specialists could encounter
- Do these recommendations lead to the terms being used more frequently?
 - Uncertain, due to lack of research

French Government and Language

- Ministerial Terminology Commissions (1972-1995)
 - “Establishing, within a given sector, an inventory of lacunae in French vocabulary” (Prime Ministerial Decree 72-19)
 - “Proposing terms necessary for the designation of new realities or replacing undesirable borrowings from foreign languages” (Prime Ministerial Decree 72-19)
- Specialised and General Commissions for Terminology and Neologisms (1996-2015)
- Colleges of Experts (2015-present)

French Government and Language

- 8000 + terms defined and recommended since 1972
- 1000 + terms recommended in the domain of space science and technology
- Domain where influence of English is acutely felt due to the influence of the American Space program
- Corpus based study of the terms actually used to denote selected concepts, based on Quirion (2003a, b)

Corpora: Description

- First corpus : PhD theses (PhD corpus)
- 360 PhD theses written in French, in France
- Theses in relevant subjects defended between 01/01/2010 and 31/12/2015
- \approx 20 million tokens

Corpora: Description

- Second corpus : Popular science magazines
- 265 issues of 11 popular science magazines written in French, in France
- *Pour la science, La Recherche, Journal du CNRS, du CNES Mag*
- Published between 01/01/2010 and 31/12/2015
- \approx 10 million tokens

Terminological corpus

- 206 concepts defined and with recommended terms, published between 2008 and 2017
- EN terms : *Cosmic microwave background, CMB*
- FR terms: *rayonnement fossile, fond diffus cosmologique, FDC*
- Other designations: *fond diffus cosmique, rayonnement de fond diffus, rayonnement du fond diffus cosmologique, rayonnement à 3K...*
- Other designations found in specialised and general dictionaries, documentation produced/examined by Commissions, corpora

Results: Overview

- 277 of 960 denominations attested
 - 29% of all denominations
- 277 terms denote 119 concepts
 - 58% of the 206 chosen concepts

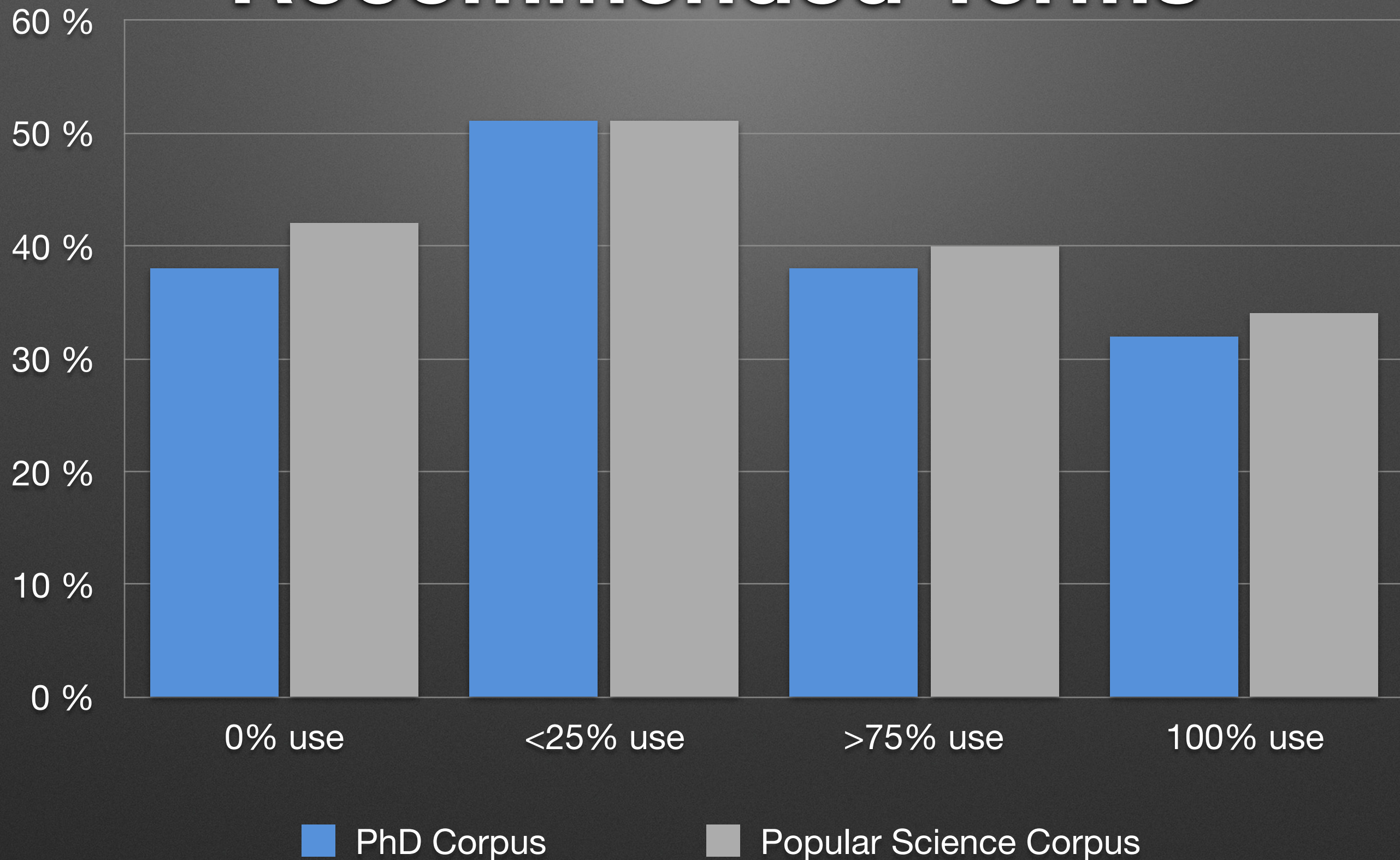
PhD corpus

- 87 concepts evoked in PhD corpus
- 2381 cases where recommended terms were used
- 4535 cases where competing terms were used
- Recommended terms used in 40% of cases

Popular science corpus

- 83 concepts evoked in popular science corpus
- 639 cases where recommended terms were used
- 799 cases where competing terms were used
- Recommended terms used in 45% of cases

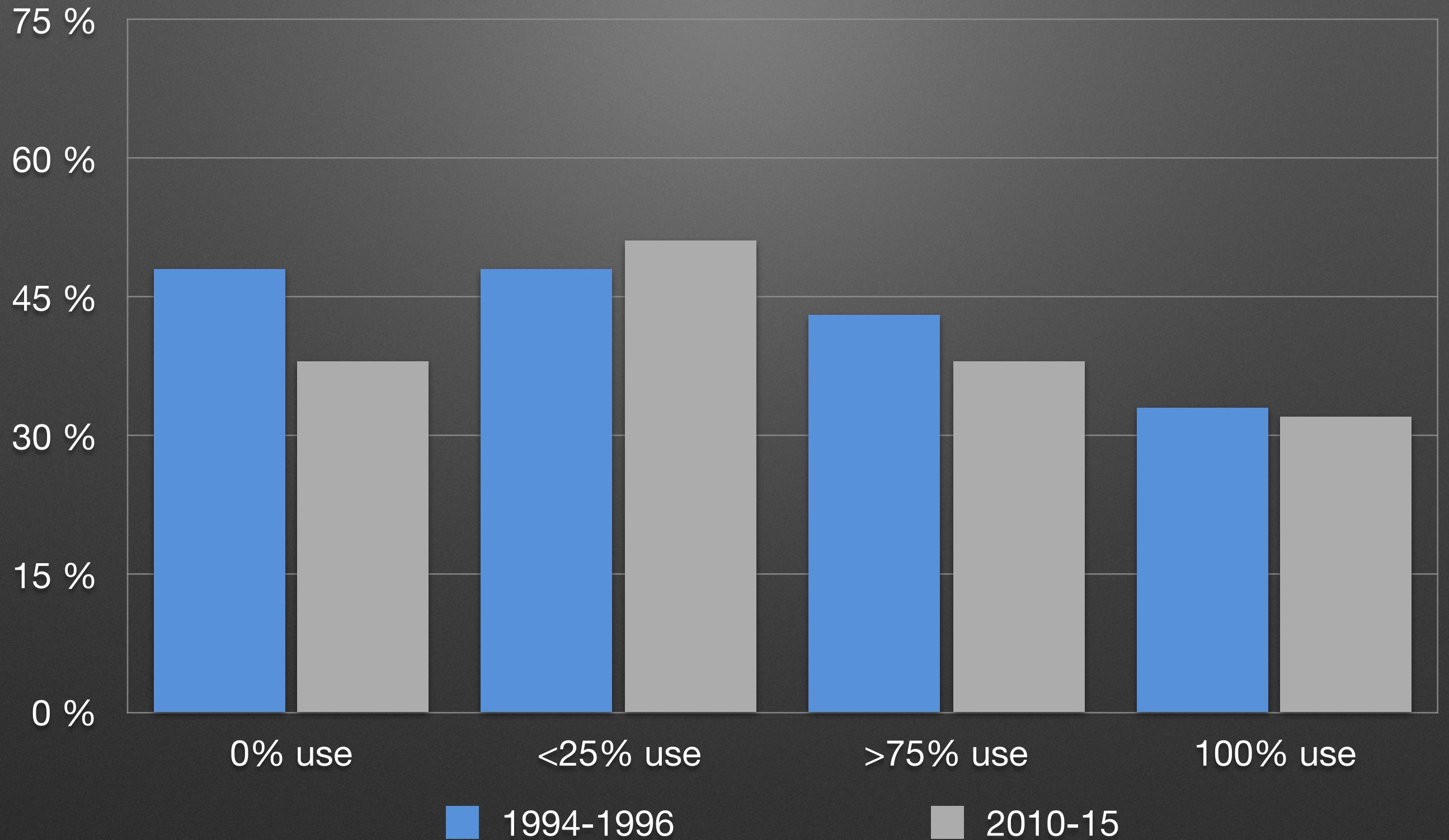
Implantation of Recommended Terms



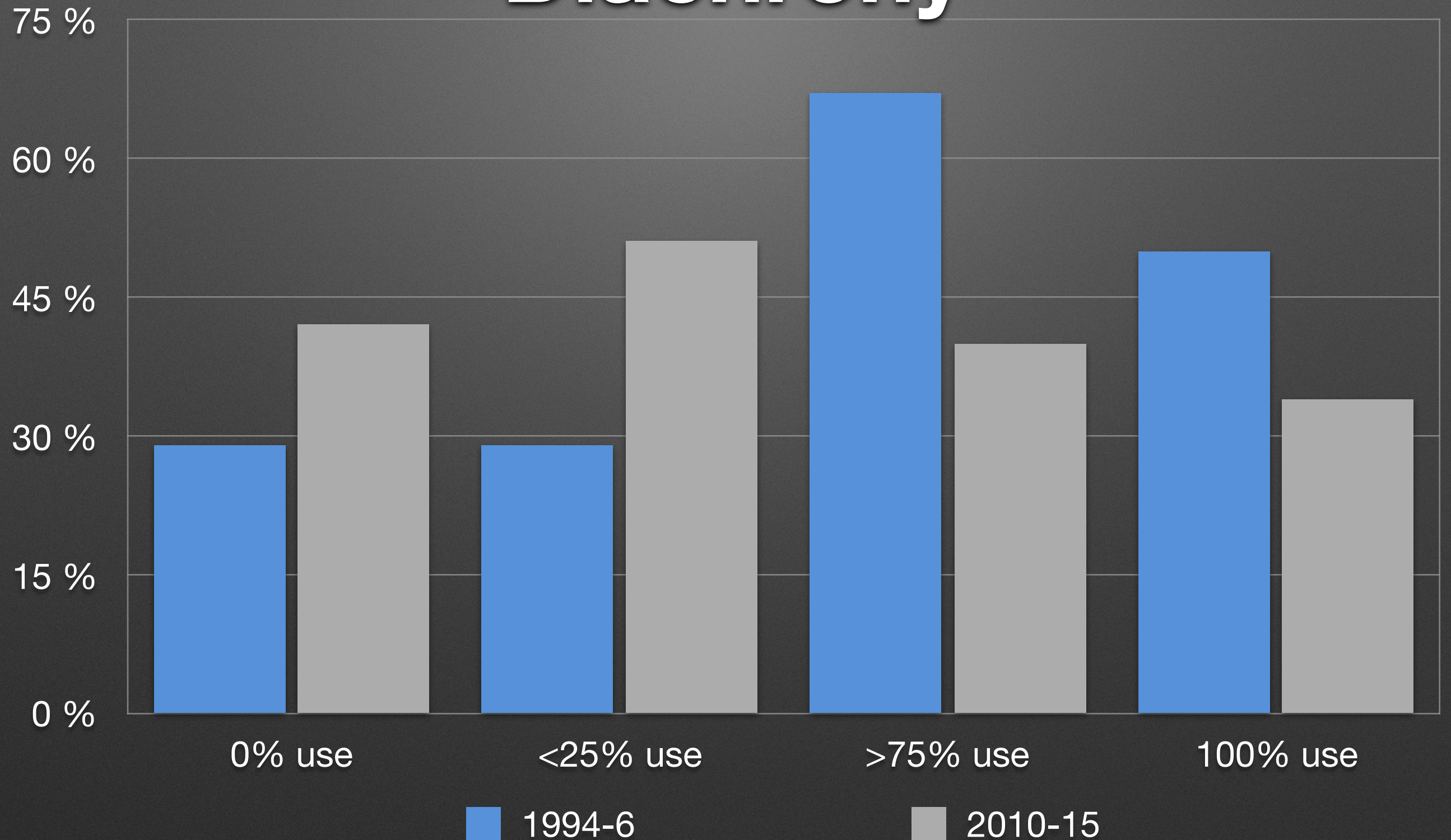
Comparison Corpora

- Period: 1994-1996
- PhDs defended in French, in France
 - 2.9 M tokens in 49 theses
- Popular science magazines published in French, in France
 - 1.9 M tokens in 24 issues of 3 magazines

PhD Corpus in Diachrony



Popular Science Corpus in Diachrony



(Some) Influencing Factors

- Formal proximity to English term
- Semantic proximity to English term
- Relative brevity
 - Entrenched Initialisms
- Technicality of terms
- Neological formation process
- Integration into paradigms/series

Considerations

- Measuring success is difficult because either:
 - Established usage is sanctioned, which leaves little discernable trace in diachronic corpora
 - Real need of a recommendation?
 - Established usage is deemed undesirable and in need of rectification
 - Recommendation \neq requirement

Conclusions

- Usage is stable in PhD corpora
 - Little impact of recommendations on specialists' use
 - Not the target text, but specialists are the ones who make use these sorts of terms
- Usage is less frequent in Popular Science corpora
 - These are the target text
- Lesson for other languages without global footprint of French:
 - Lack of clear benefit for users prolongs established usage

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