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# Categoriality in language change:

## The prepositionalization of perception converbs in Old French

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GHENT/LANCASTER WORKSHOP *GRAMMAR IN FOCUS*

GHENT, 10 MAY 2019



# Introduction

**In Old French, the converb can function as the predicate of a free adjunct clause (Aspland 1968, Buridant 2000):**

(1) Quant aucuns en porte eritage le pere et la mere vivant [...].

(*Coutumes de Beauvaisis*, §481)

‘When someone takes some realty while his father and mother are still alive’

Bi-clausal construction:

*aucuns en porte eritage*

NP<sub>1</sub>

VP<sub>1</sub>

*le pere et la mere vivant*

NP<sub>2</sub>

VP<sub>2.CONVERB</sub>

# Introduction

**VP<sub>2.CONVERB</sub> can also be instantiated by a verb of perception:**

(2) Dunc fu lit li escriz oiant tut le tropel. (*Becket*, v. 1006)

‘So the document had been read while the whole crowd was listening’

Analysis 1: free adjunct clause in bi-clausal construction

(Weerenbeck 1927):

*fu lit*

VP<sub>1</sub>

*li escriz*

NP<sub>1</sub>

*oiant*

VP<sub>2.CONVERB</sub>

*tut le tropel*

NP<sub>2</sub>

# Introduction

**VP<sub>2.CONVERB</sub> can also be instantiated by a verb of perception:**

(2) Dunc fu lit li escriz oiant tut le tropel. (*Becket*, v. 1006)

‘So the document had been read while the whole crowd was listening’

Analysis 2: PP in a mono-clausal construction (Aspland 1968, Buridant 2000):

*fu lit*

VP

*li escriz*

NP<sub>1</sub>

*oiant*

PREP

*tut le tropel*

NP<sub>2</sub>

# Aspland's (1968) hypothesis

## Synchrony:

Some instances of *oiant/voiant* have a prepositional rather than a converbial status.

## Diachrony:

The prepositional use of *oiant/voiant* has emerged from their converbial use.

# Aspland's (1968) hypothesis 2.0

**Grammaticalization process (Lehmann 1982, Hopper 1991, Heine 1993, Hopper & Traugott 1993, Himmelmann 2004):**

*fu lit*      *li escriz*  
VP<sub>1</sub>      NP<sub>1</sub>

*oiant*      *tut le tropel*  
VP<sub>2.CONVERB</sub>      NP<sub>2</sub>

***Functional reanalysis***

***Formal reanalysis***

*fu lit*      *li escriz*  
VP<sub>1</sub>      NP<sub>1</sub>

*oiant*      *tut le tropel*  
PREP      NP<sub>2</sub>

# Research question(s)

**To which extent can *oiant/voiant* be considered prepositions in Old French?**

## **VP<sub>2.CONVERB</sub>**

- Desemanticization (Heine 1993)
- Decategorization (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Heine 1993)
- Recategorization (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Heine 1993)

## **VP<sub>2.CONVERB</sub> - NP<sub>2</sub>**

- Word order (Lehmann 1982)



# Methodology

## Comparison between:

- 1) Perception converbs (< prepositions): *voir, ouïr*
- 2) Duration converbs (< prepositions): *durer, pendre*
- 3) Miscellaneous (= converbs): *dire, dormir, aller, témoigner, juger, prendre, pleurer, ...*

# Corpus

**PALAFRAFRO-V2-2 (> Base de français médiéval) :**

| Period                        | # tokens         |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Very Old French (9th-11th c.) | 46 335           |
| Old French (12th-13th c.)     | 1 154 870        |
|                               | <b>1 201 205</b> |

# Dataset

| Century | Perception | Duration  | Miscellaneous | Total      |
|---------|------------|-----------|---------------|------------|
| 9th     | 0          | 0         | 0             | 0          |
| 10th    | 1          | 0         | 0             | 1          |
| 11th    | 0          | 0         | 0             | 0          |
| 12th    | 54         | 0         | 28            | 82         |
| 13th    | 24         | 29        | 15            | 68         |
|         | <b>79</b>  | <b>29</b> | <b>43</b>     | <b>151</b> |

# Research question(s)

To which extent can *oiant/voiant* be considered prepositions in Old French?

## **VP**<sub>2.CONVERB</sub>

- Desemanticization (Heine 1993)
- Decategorization (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Heine 1993)
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## **VP**<sub>2.CONVERB</sub> - **NP**<sub>2</sub>

- Word order (Lehmann 1982)

# Desemanticization

**Rise and conventionalization of a pragmatic inference (Heine 1993, 2002):**

(2) Dunc fu lit li escriz oiant tut le tropel. (Becket, v. 1006)

|                       |  |   |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| <b>SOURCE MEANING</b> | Perception of $P_1$ by $NP_2$                              | 'So the document had been read while the whole crowd was listening' |
| <b>TARGET MEANING</b> | Presence of $NP_2$ in the spatio-temporal setting of $P_1$ | 'So the document had been read in the presence of the whole crowd'  |

# Desemanticization

## Evidence:

(3) [...] je le vos dirai voiant toz cels de ceste place. (Graal, §17)

‘I will tell it to you in the presence of anyone of this place’

=> synaesthesia

(4) [...] Qui avoit maint prodome ocis / Veant lor ialz [...].

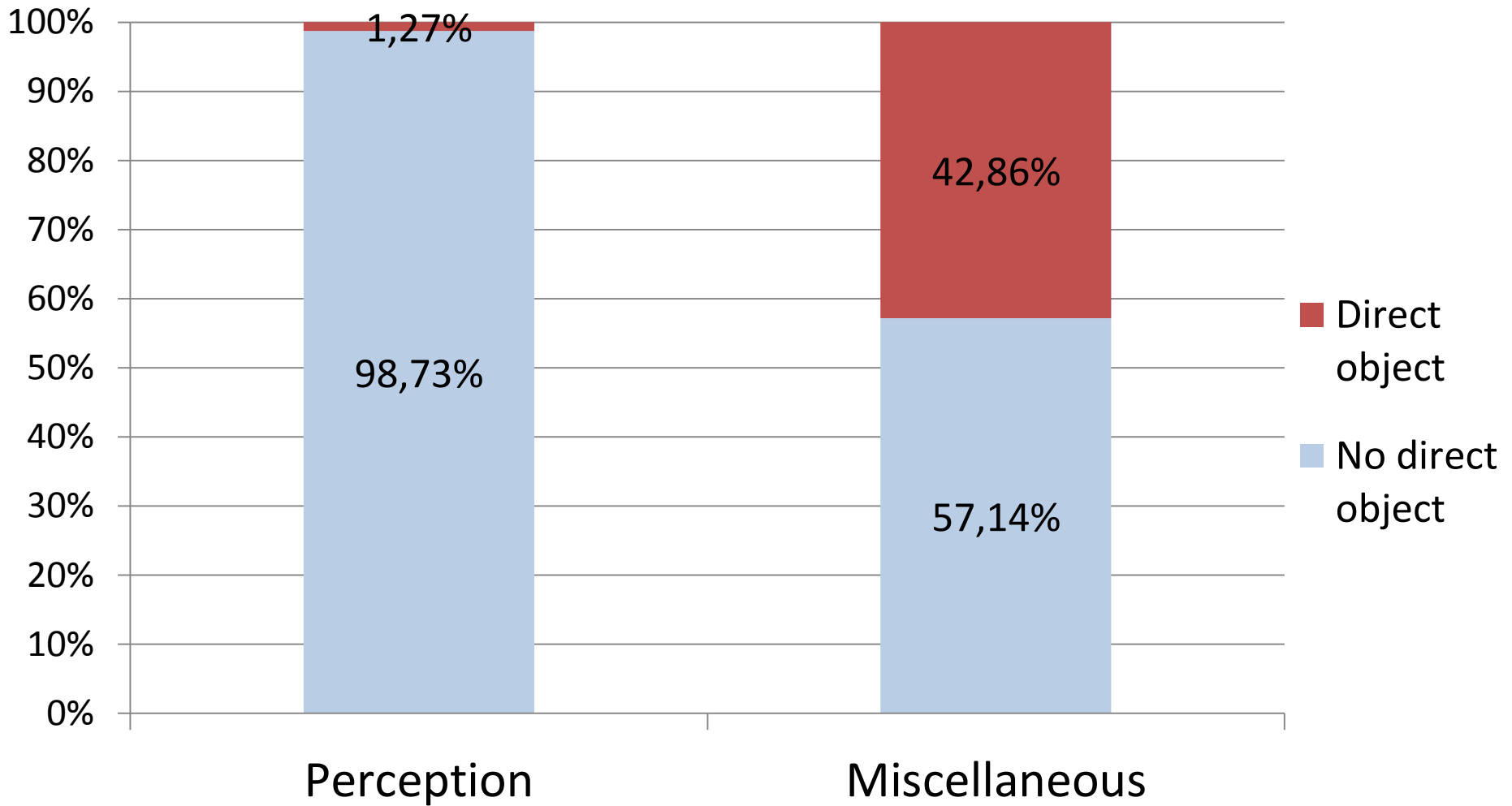
(*Yvain*, v. 4166-4167)

‘who had killed many gentlemen before their eyes’

=> inanimate NP<sub>2</sub>

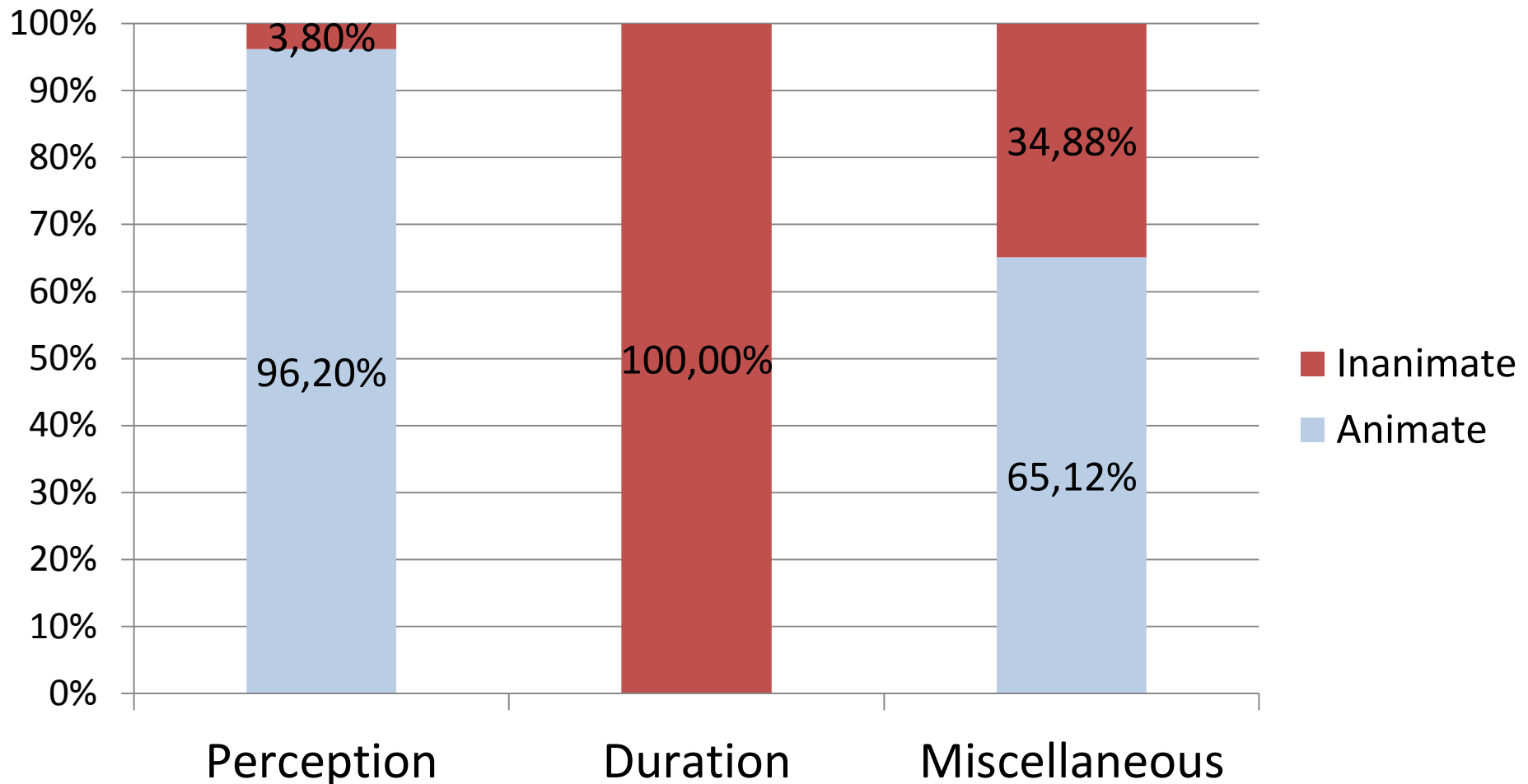
# Decategorization

**1. Loss of argument structure (Hopper & Traugott 1984, Hopper 1991, Heine 1991):**



# Decategorization

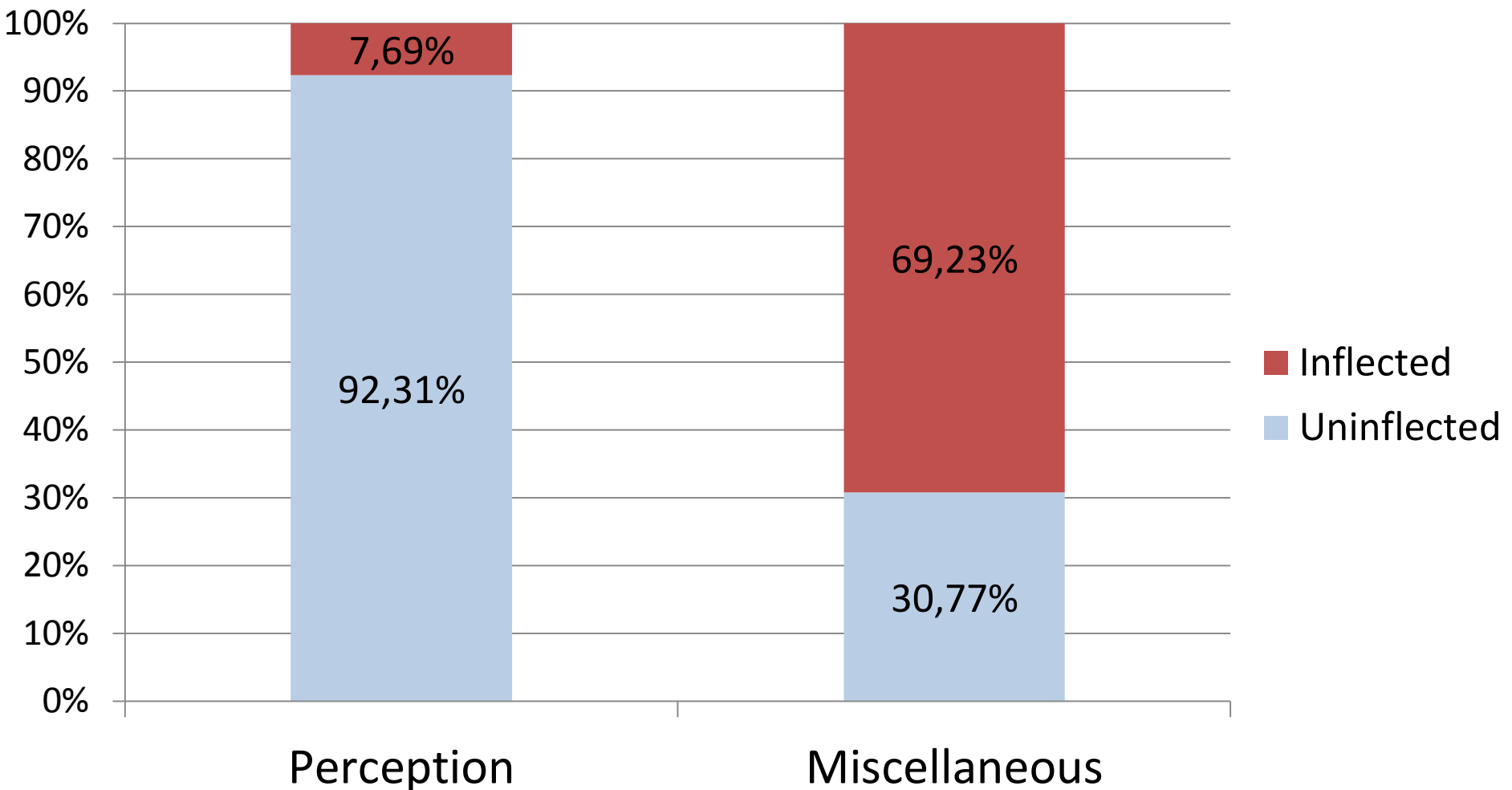
## 2. Loss of selectional restrictions on NP<sub>2</sub> (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Hopper 1991, Heine 1993):





# Recategorization

## 1. Morphological variation of plural NP<sub>2</sub> (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Hopper 1991, Heine 1993):



# Recategorization

## 2. Coordination with PP (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Hopper 1991, Heine 1993):

(5) Sovent vienent a parlement / Et a celé et voiant gent.

(*Tristan*, v. 577-578)

‘They often come to the parliament, both in secret and in public’

# Research question(s)

To which extent can *oiant/voiant* be considered prepositions in Old French?

## VP<sub>2.CONVERB</sub>

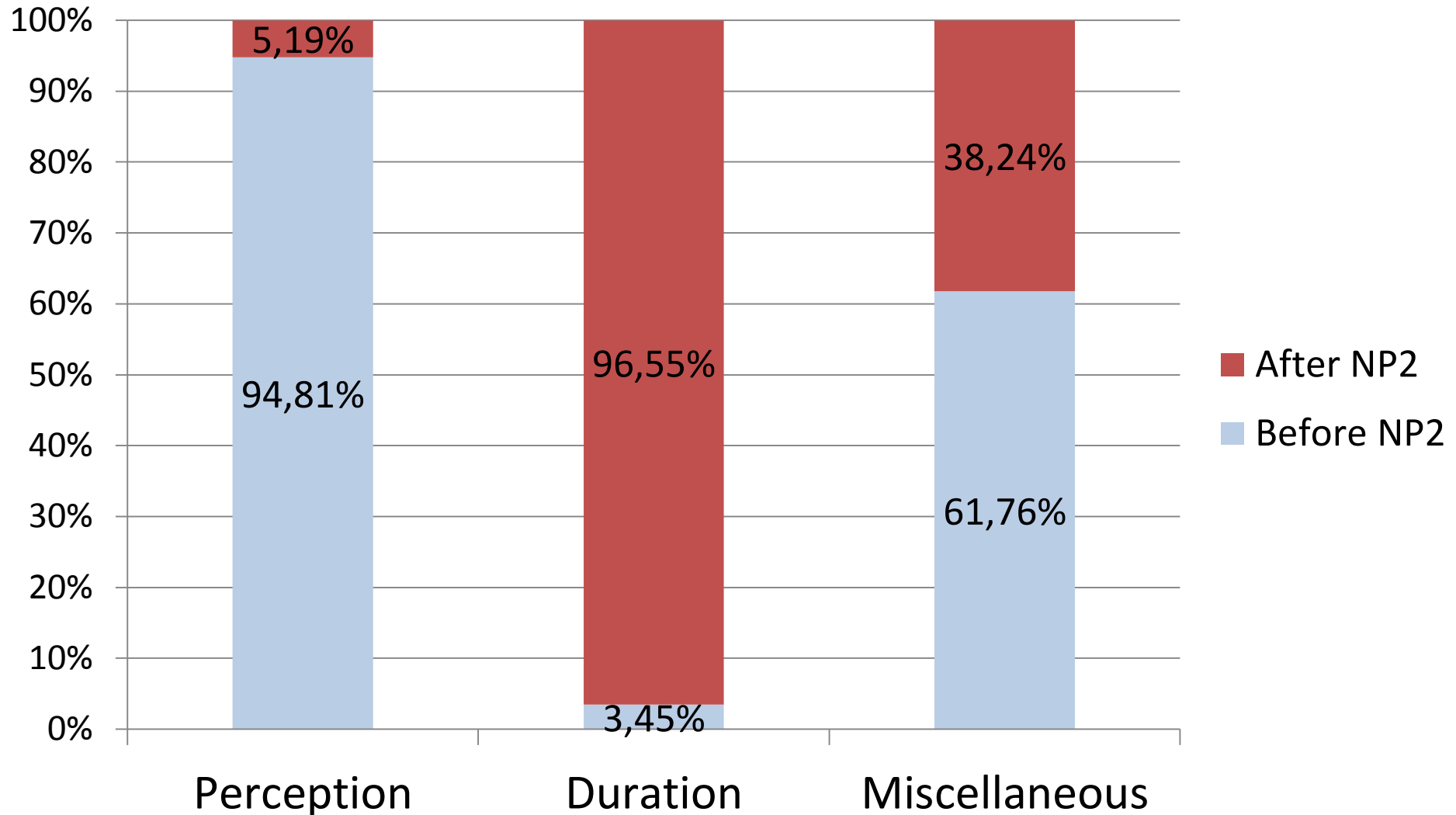
- Desemanticization (Heine 1993)
- Decategorization (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Heine 1993)
- Recategorization (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Heine 1993)

## VP<sub>2.CONVERB</sub> - NP<sub>2</sub>

- Word order (Lehmann 1982)

# Word order

## Fixation (Lehmann 1982):



# Conclusions

## *Oiant/voiant as prepositions:*

- ✓ Desemanticization
- ✓ Decategorization
- ✓ Recategorization
- ✓ Fixation of word order

# Conclusions

**12th > 13th c.: frequency fall and eventual disappearance of prepositional *oiant/voiant*:**

> functional competition with *devant* (Aspland 1968):

|                       | <i>Oiant/voiant</i>  | <i>Devant</i> |
|-----------------------|--|---------------|
| Semantic distribution | Mostly animate NPs<br>(> persistence of sensory value)         | Unconstrained |
| Spatial meaning       | Conventionalized inference<br>(+ persistence of sensory value) | Coded         |

=> The language has kept the form with the largest distribution and the most explicit meaning.

*Thank you for your attention!*

Questions/remarks?

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