



HAL
open science

Categoriality in language change: The prepositionalization of perception converbs in Old French

Jasper Vangaever

► **To cite this version:**

Jasper Vangaever. Categoriality in language change: The prepositionalization of perception converbs in Old French. Grammar in Focus, May 2019, Gand, Belgium. hal-03973090

HAL Id: hal-03973090

<https://hal.science/hal-03973090v1>

Submitted on 3 Feb 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Categoriality in language change:

The prepositionalization of perception converbs in Old French

JASPER VANGAEVER

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

NP₁

VP₁

le pere et la mere vivant

NP₂

VP_{2.CONVERB}

Introduction

VP_{2.CONVERB} 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

VP₁

li escriz

NP₁

oiant

VP_{2.CONVERB}

tut le tropel

NP₂

Introduction

VP_{2.CONVERB} 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

NP₁

oiant

PREP

tut le tropel

NP₂

Aspland's (1968) hypothesis

Synchrony:

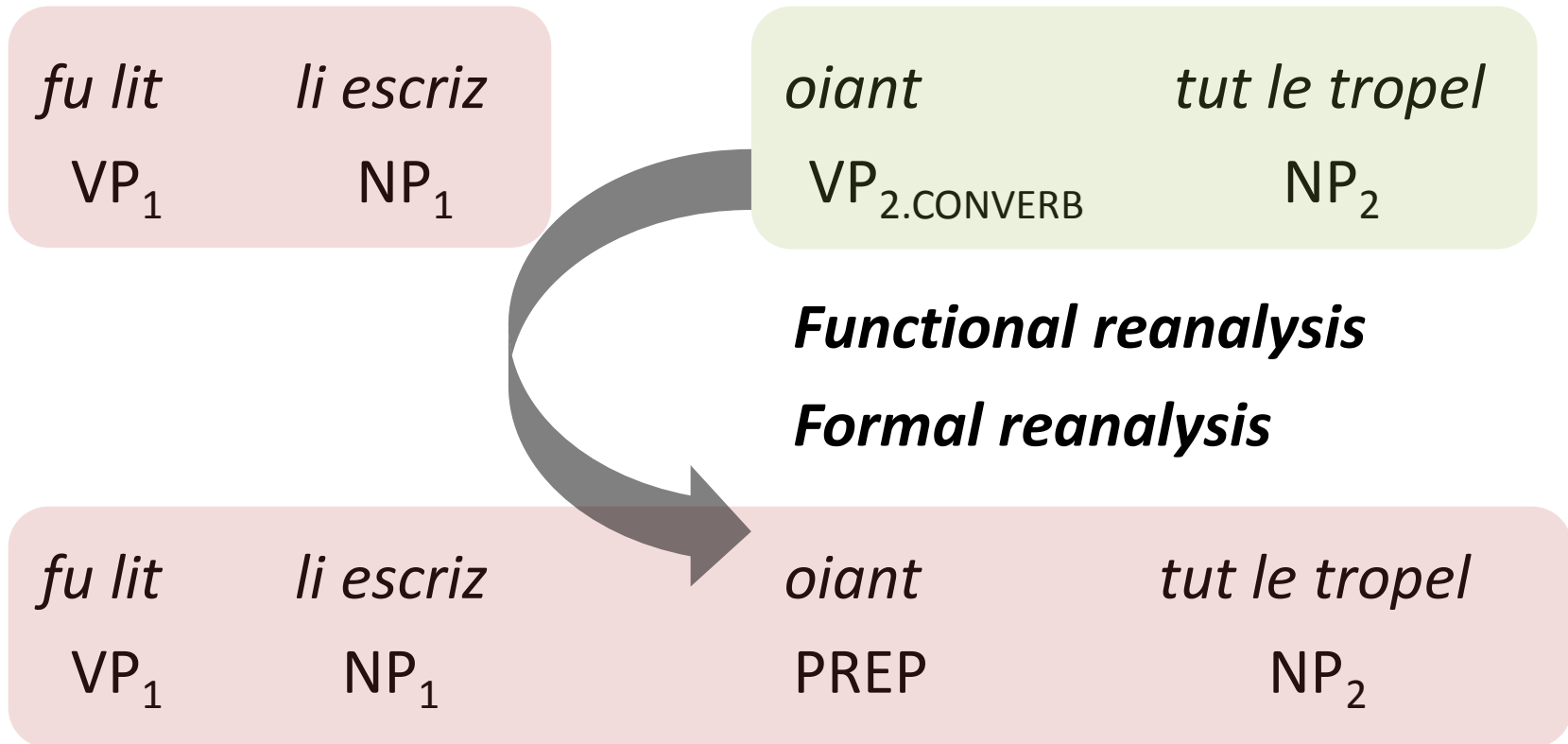
Some instances of *oiant/voiant* have a prepositional rather than a converbial status.

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):



Research question(s)

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

VP_{2.CONVERB}

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

VP_{2.CONVERB} - NP₂

- 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
	1 201 205

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
	79	29	43	151

Research question(s)

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

VP₂.CONVERB

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

VP₂.CONVERB - NP₂

- 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)

SOURCE MEANING	Perception of P_1 by NP_2	'So the document had been read while the whole crowd was listening'
TARGET MEANING	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

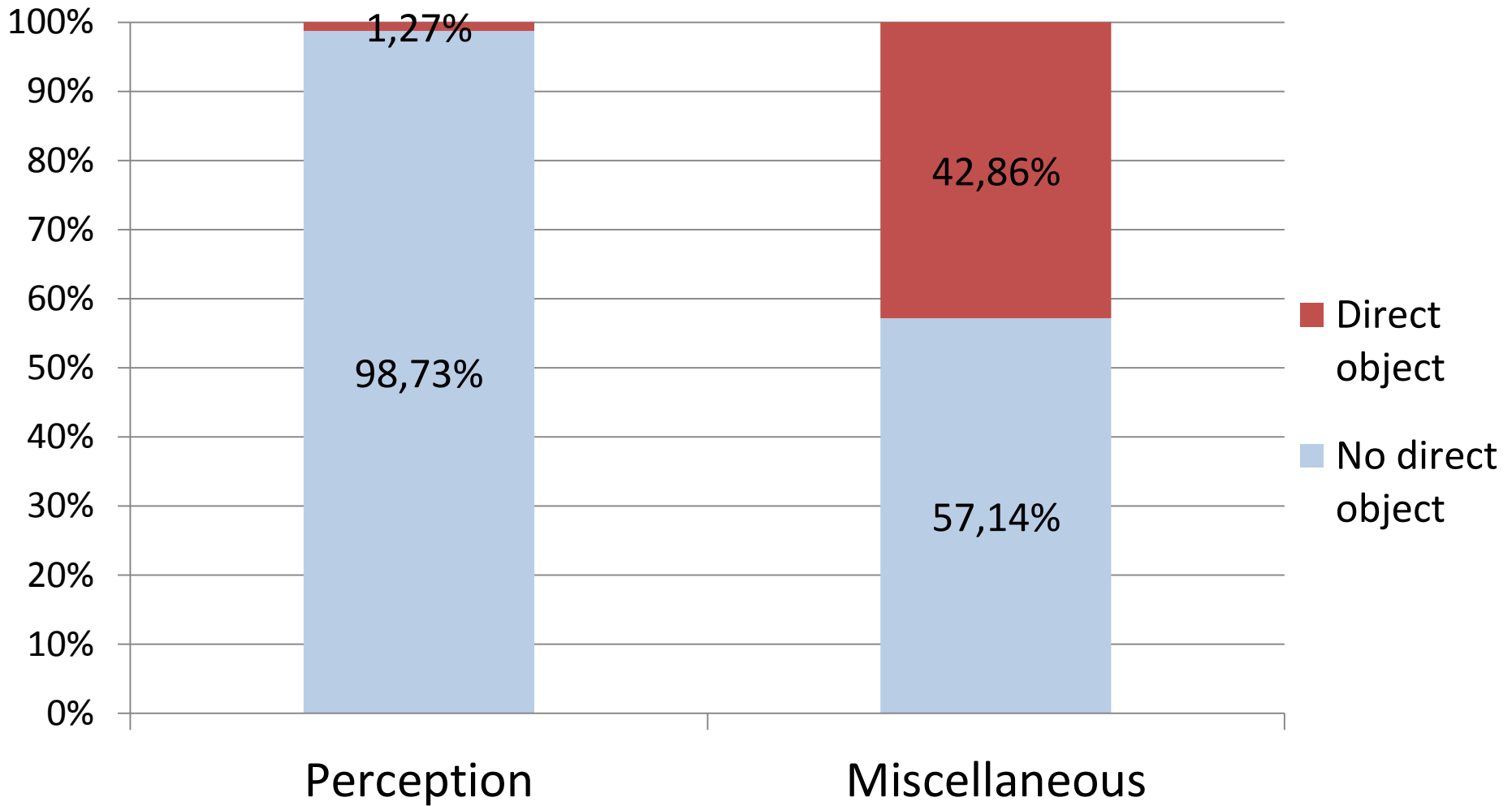
(4) [...] Qui avoit maint prodome ocis / Veant lor ialz [...].
(*Yvain*, v. 4166-4167)

'who had killed many gentlemen before their eyes'

=> inanimate NP₂

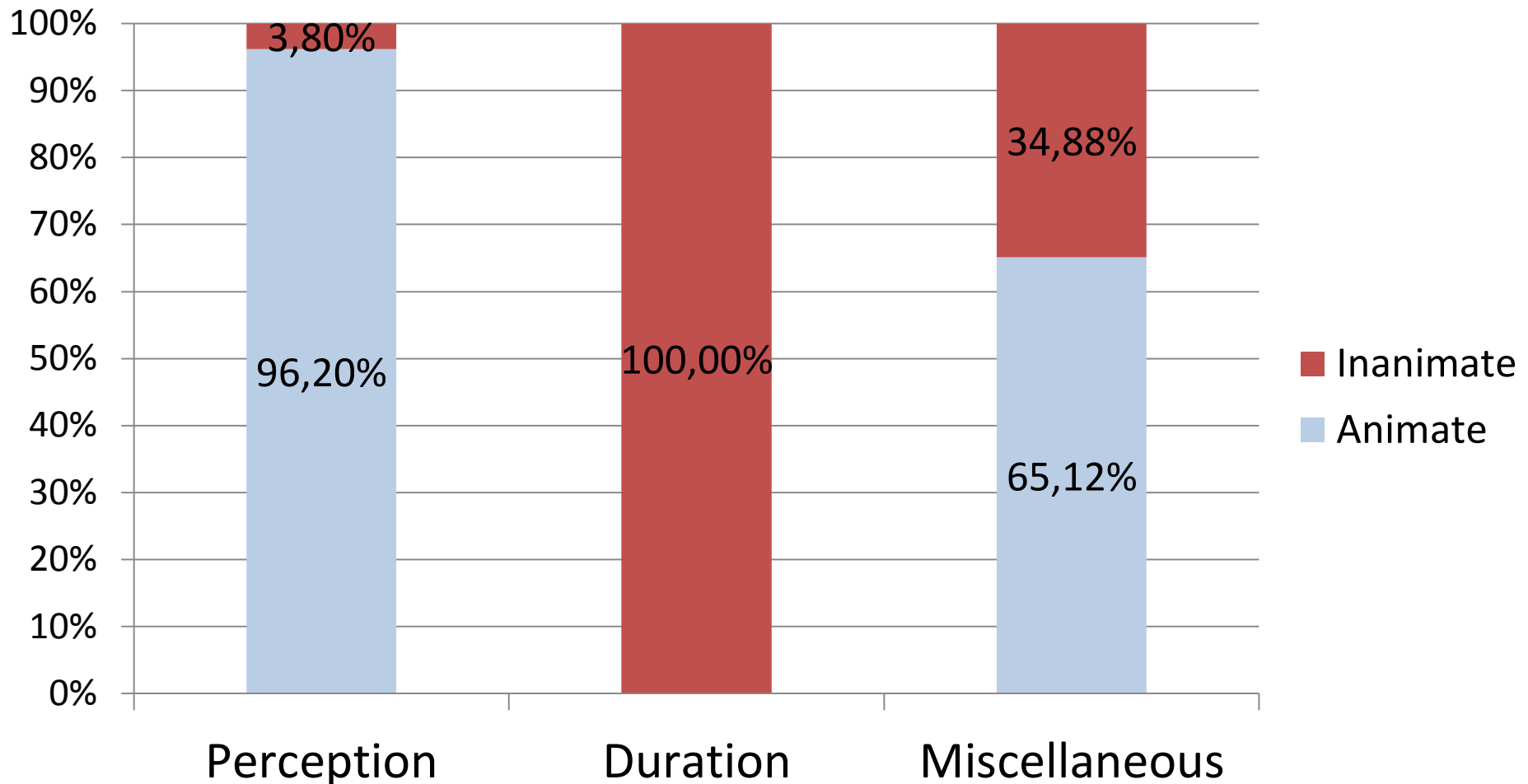
Decategorization

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



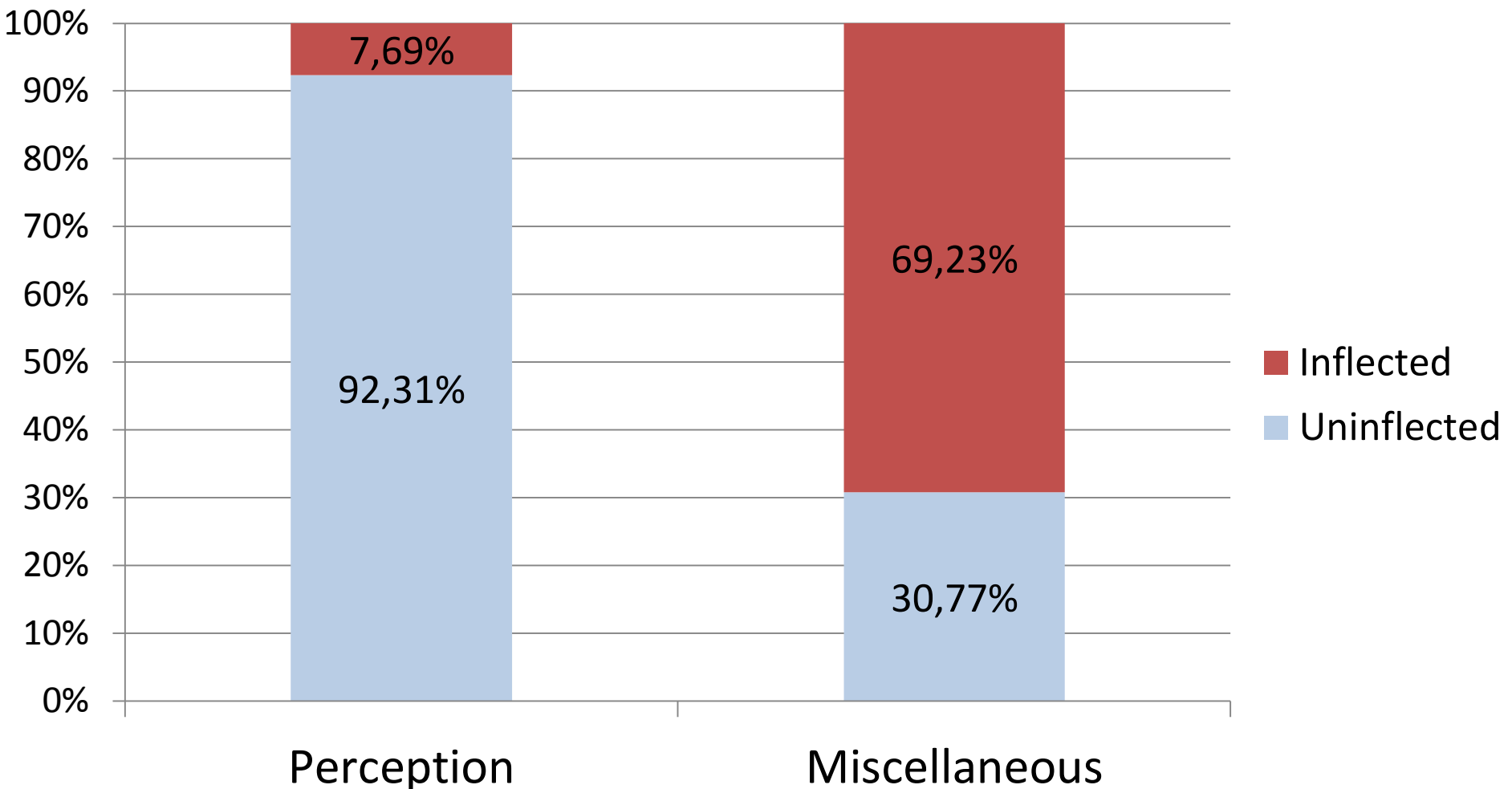
Decategorization

2. Loss of selectional restrictions on NP₂ (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Hopper 1991, Heine 1993):



Recategorization

1. Morphological variation of plural NP₂ (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?

VP₂.CONVERB

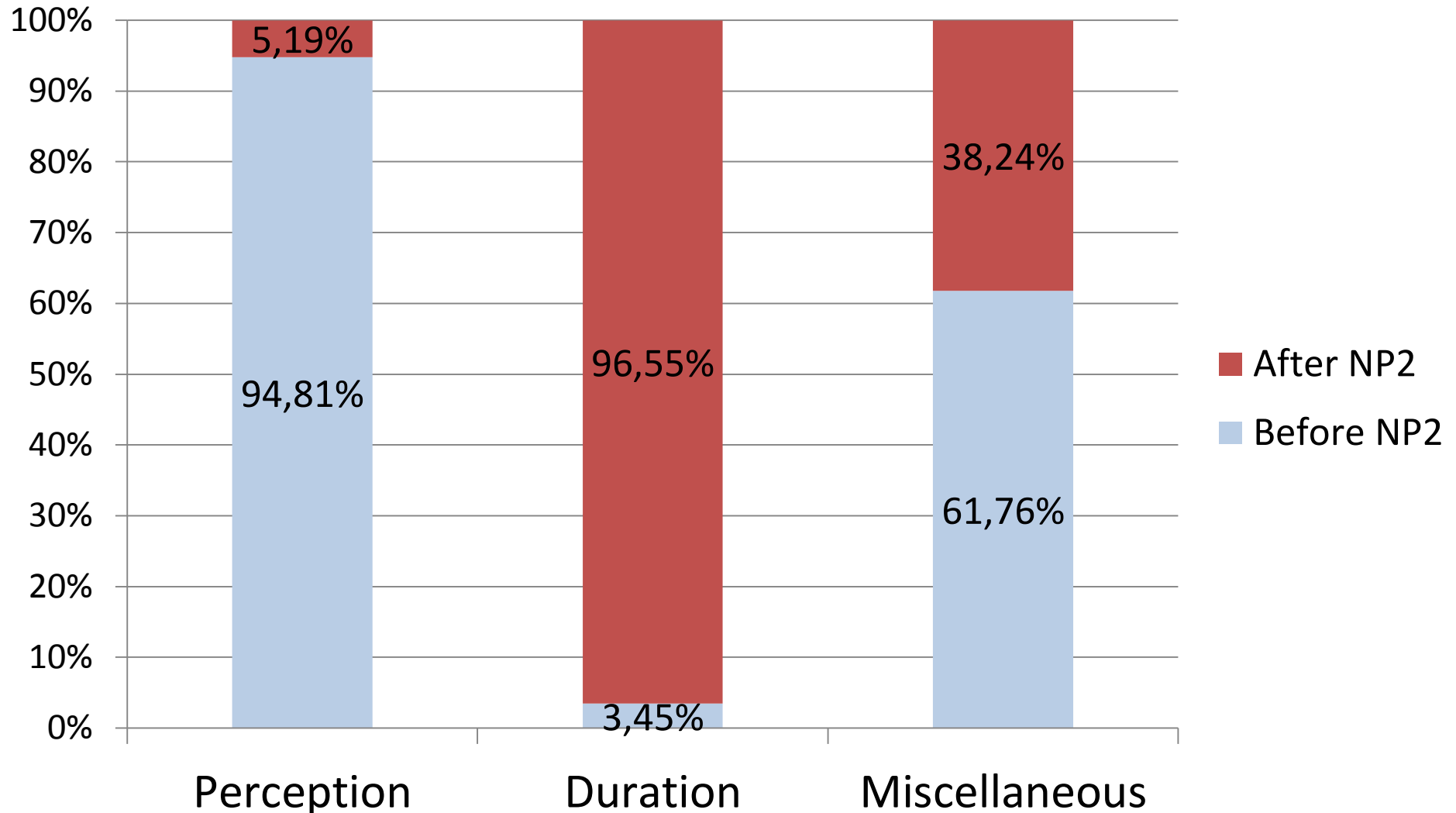
- Desemanticization (Heine 1993)
- Decategorization (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Heine 1993)
- Recategorization (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Heine 1993)

VP₂.CONVERB - NP₂

- 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 (> persistence of sensory value)	Unconstrained
Spatial meaning	Conventionalized inference (+ 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?

References

- Aspland, C. (1968). 'The So-Called Absolute Construction in Old French: Types - *Voiant toz*, *Oiant toz*', *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, 30, 151-168.
- Buridant, C. (2000). *Grammaire nouvelle de l'ancien français*. Paris: SEDES.
- Heine, B. (1993). *Auxiliaries, Cognitive Forces and Grammaticalization*. Oxford: OUP.
- Heine, B. (2002). 'On the Role of Context in Grammaticalization'. In I. Wischer & G. Diewald (Eds), *New Reflections on Grammaticalization*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 83-101.
- Himmelman, N. (2004). 'Lexicalization and Grammaticization: Opposite or Orthogonal?'. In W. Bisang, N. Himmelman & B. Wiemer (Eds), *What Makes Grammaticization? A Look from its Fringes and its Components*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 21-42.
- Hopper, P. (1991). 'On some Principles of Grammaticization'. In E. Traugott & B. Heine (Eds), *Approaches to Grammaticalization*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 17-36.
- Hopper, P. & S. Thompson (1984). 'The Discourse Basis for Lexical Categories in Universal Grammar', *Language* 60 (4): 703-772.
- Hopper, P. & E. Traugott (1993). *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Lehmann, C. (1982). *Thoughts on Grammaticalization*. Munich: LINCOM EUROPA.
- Weerenbeck, B. (1927). *Participe présent et gérondif*. Paris: Champion.