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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

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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:

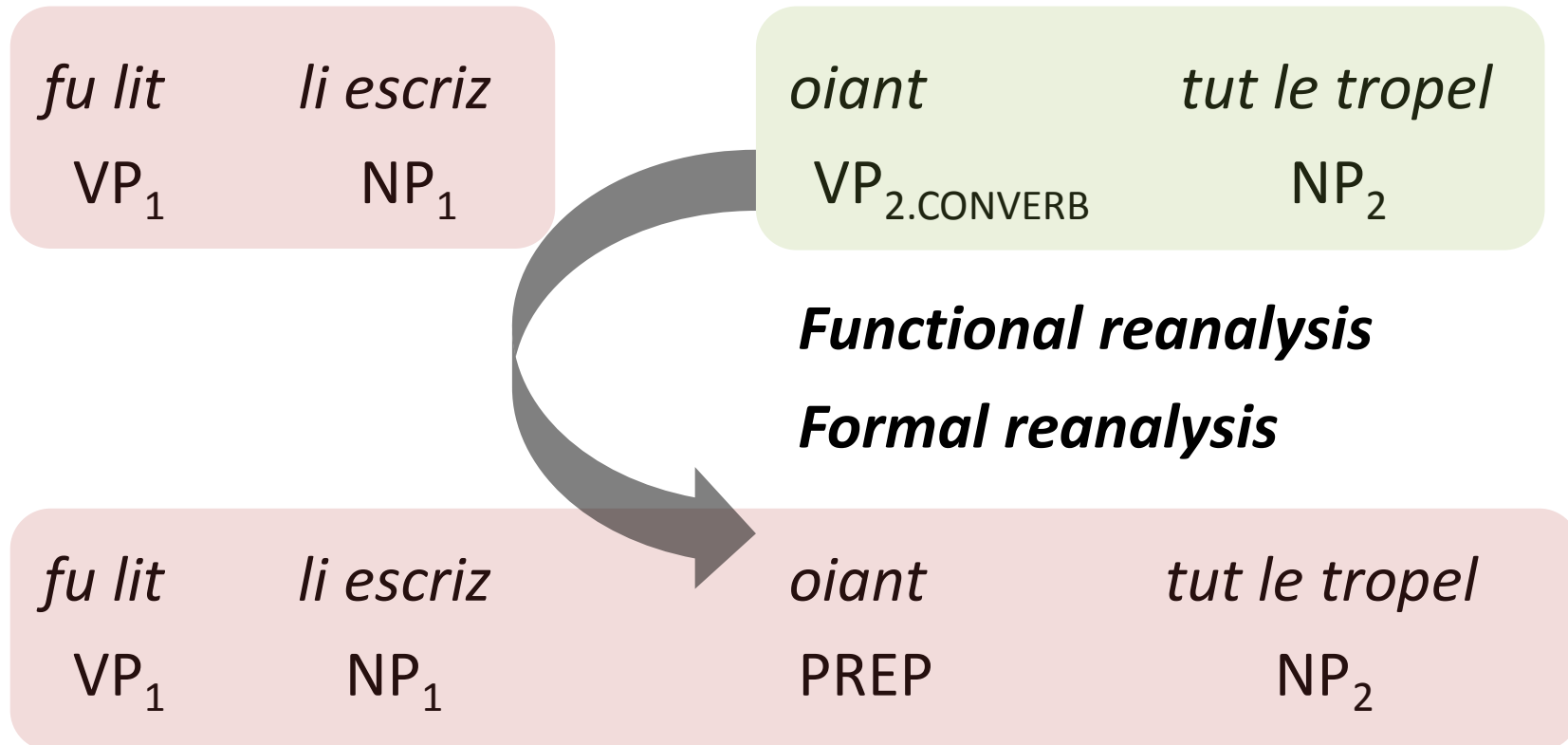
Some instances of *oiant/voiant* have a prepositional rather than a converbial status.

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

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VP_{2.CONVERB} - **NP**₂

- 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 [...].

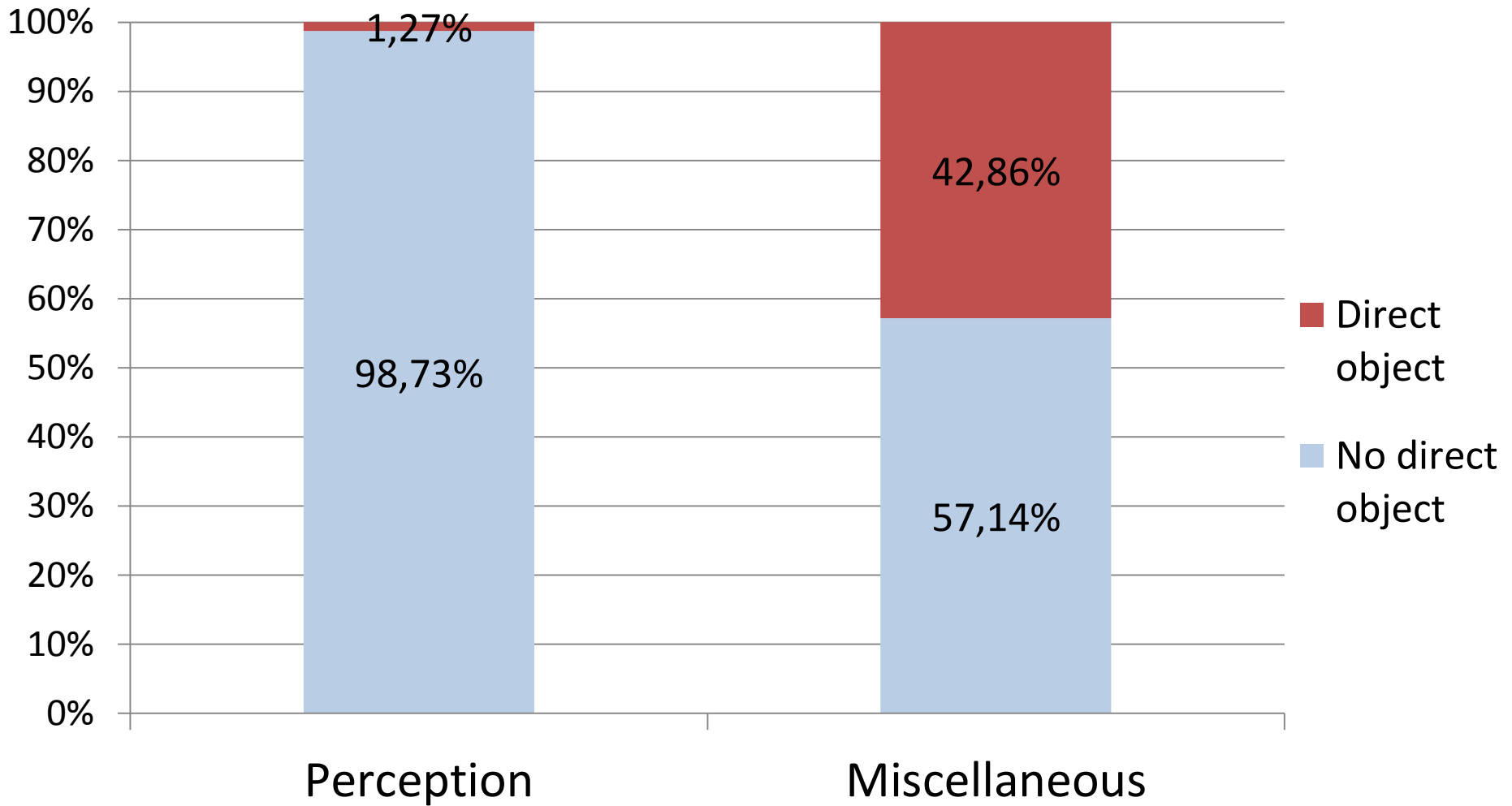
(*Yvain*, v. 4166-4167)

‘who had killed many gentlemen before their eyes’

=> inanimate NP₂

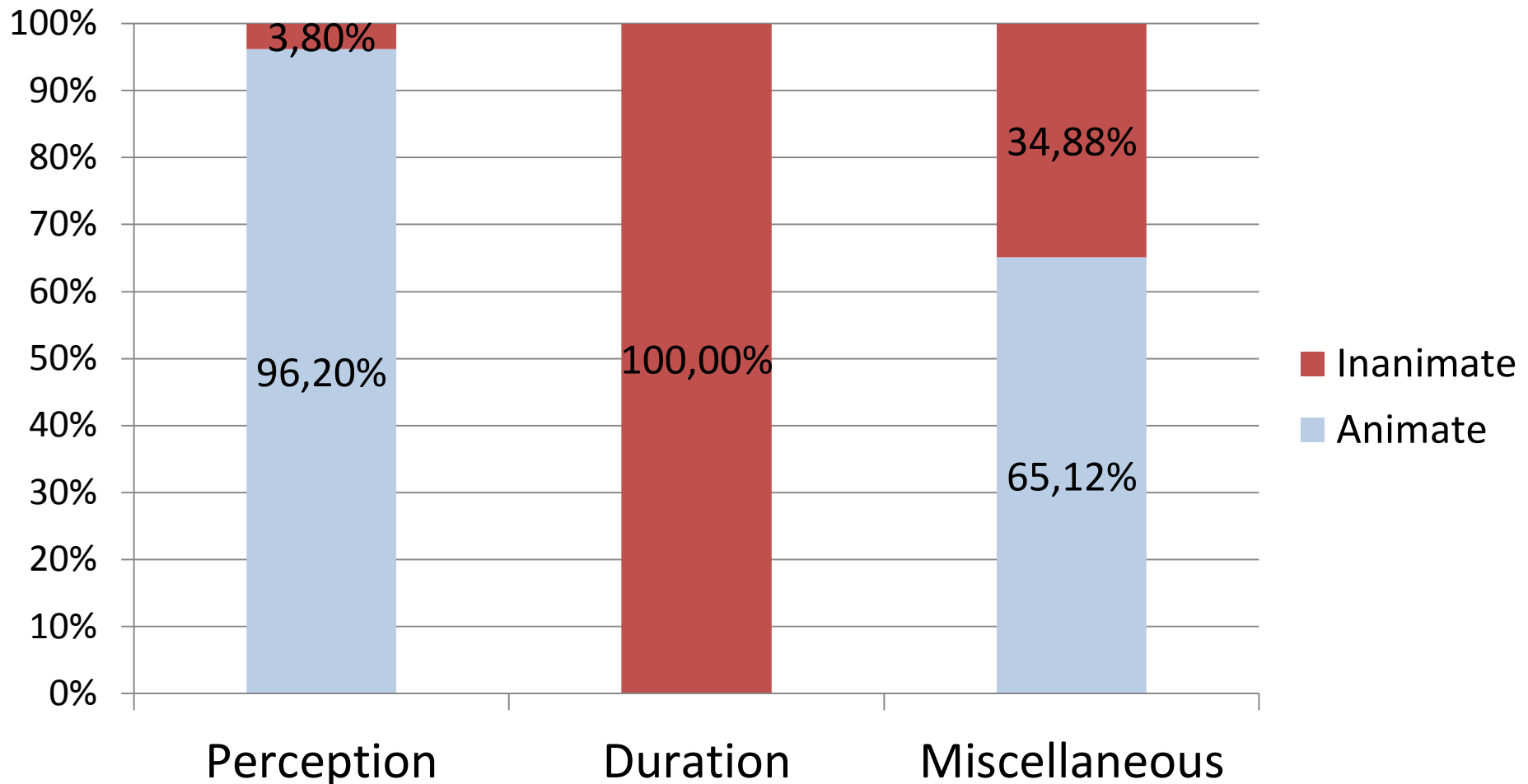
Decategorization

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



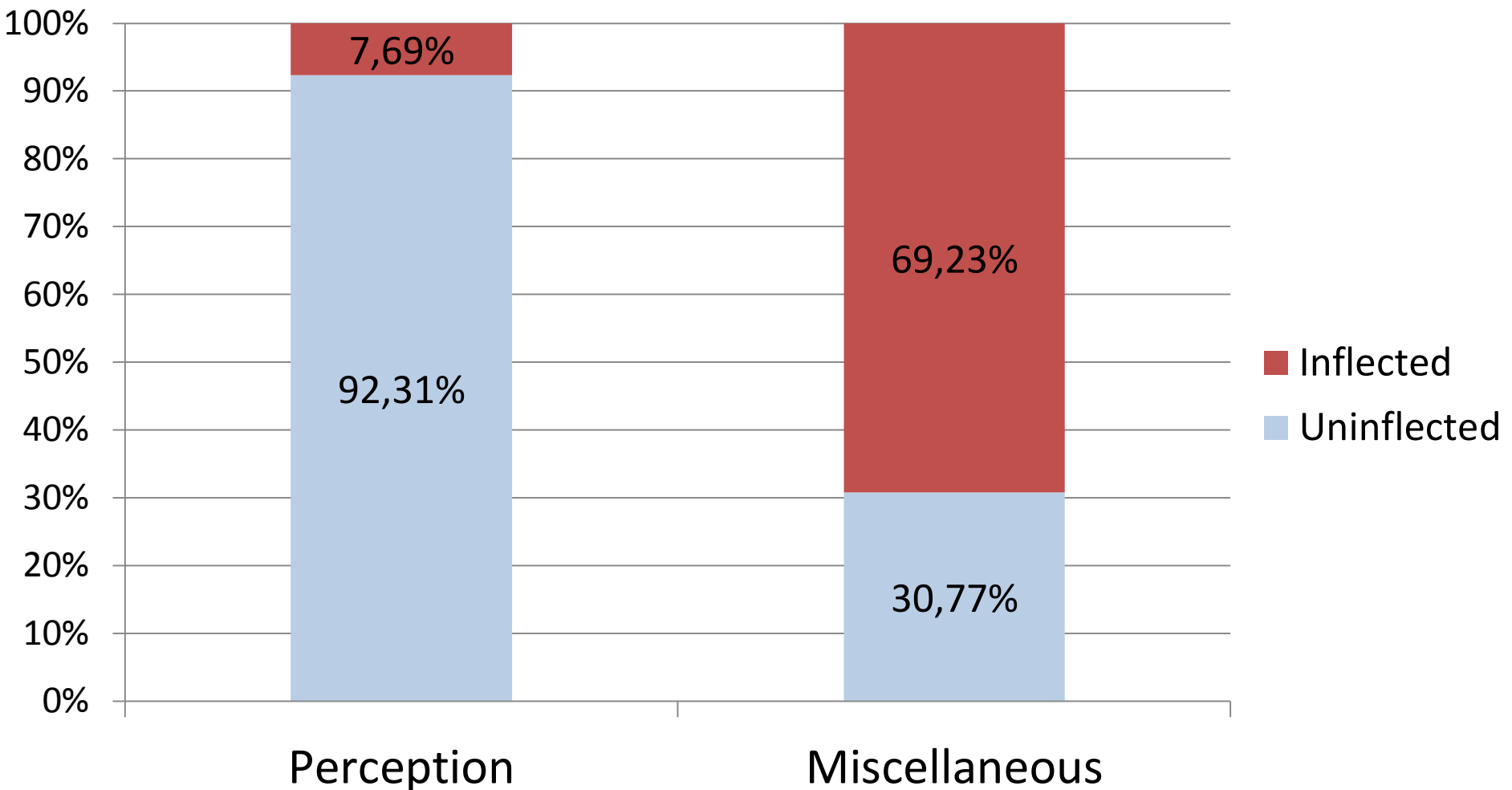
Decategorization

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)

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VP_{2.CONVERB}

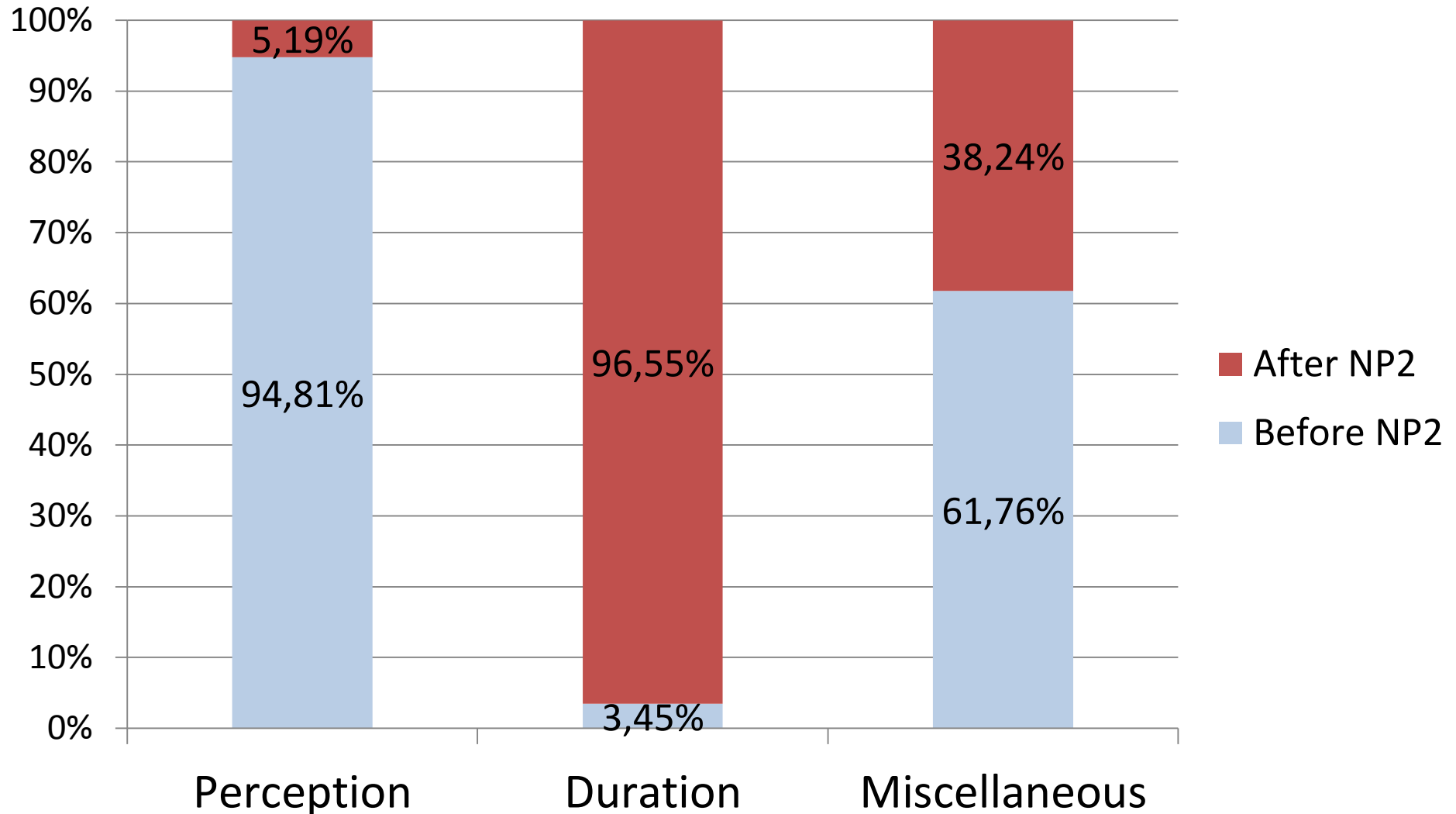
- Desemanticization (Heine 1993)
- Decategorization (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Heine 1993)
- Recategorization (Hopper & Thompson 1984, Heine 1993)

VP_{2.CONVERB} - NP₂

- Word order (Lehmann 1982)

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?

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