

PA8.1 – Null objects in medieval French and medieval Italian

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I. The form-meaning mismatch

- Anaphoric null objects (ANOs) = 0:1 relation between form and meaning
- The object complement of a verb is left unpronounced but its referent is still easily recoverable from the context
- ANO = empty category in syntax

(1) *ricoverò lo 'mperio e ridusse ___i (Olt)*
recovered.3SG the empire and returned.3SG
in buono stato
in good state
'he recovered the empire and returned (it) to a good state'
(*Cron.*, III, 6)

(2) *la tenez en vostre main sanz alumer ___i (MidF)*
it.F.ACC hold.2PL in your hand without light.INF
'you hold it in your hand without lighting (it)' (*Quen1*, 3,40)

Empirical questions

- What are the contexts which licence ANOs in MedF and MedIt?
- How do ANOs compete with overt object clitics?
- How does their distribution evolve over the medieval period?

- ANOs are frequent in Classical Latin (Luraghi, 1997; Johnson, 1991) but no longer attested in (standard) Modern French / Italian
- Medieval varieties still allow them, seeming closer to Latin than to their modern counterparts.

Theoretical questions

- Do all instances of missing objects involve ANOs? What is the nature of the ANO (trace, *pro*, ellipsis)?
- What are the conditions (e.g., semantic or syntactic) which licence ANOs in both languages?

II. Methodology and hypotheses

- Methods:
 - Corpus research on narrative prose texts between 13th and 15th centuries. Medieval French = Picard, medieval Italian = Florentine → Manual parsing and annotation
- MedF and MedIt were expected to show the transition between a system with ANOs (Latin) and systems without (Modern French, Modern Italian) through a loss of frequency of ANOs.

III. Results and discussion

- Not all contexts of missing objects involve ANOs, e.g.:
 - Many instances of coordination at the V⁰-level:
- (3) [_v I' [&_v *abbracciò e baciò*]] (*Dec.*, II, 6)
'he embraces and kisses her' (example of MRC1)
- reduction of 3rd person clitic clusters = post-syntactic clitic omission (*contra* Arteaga, 1998; Donaldson, 2013)
- (4) *et tolu^e (~~la~~) li eust il* (*Graal*, 113)
'and he would have taken.F (it.F) from him'

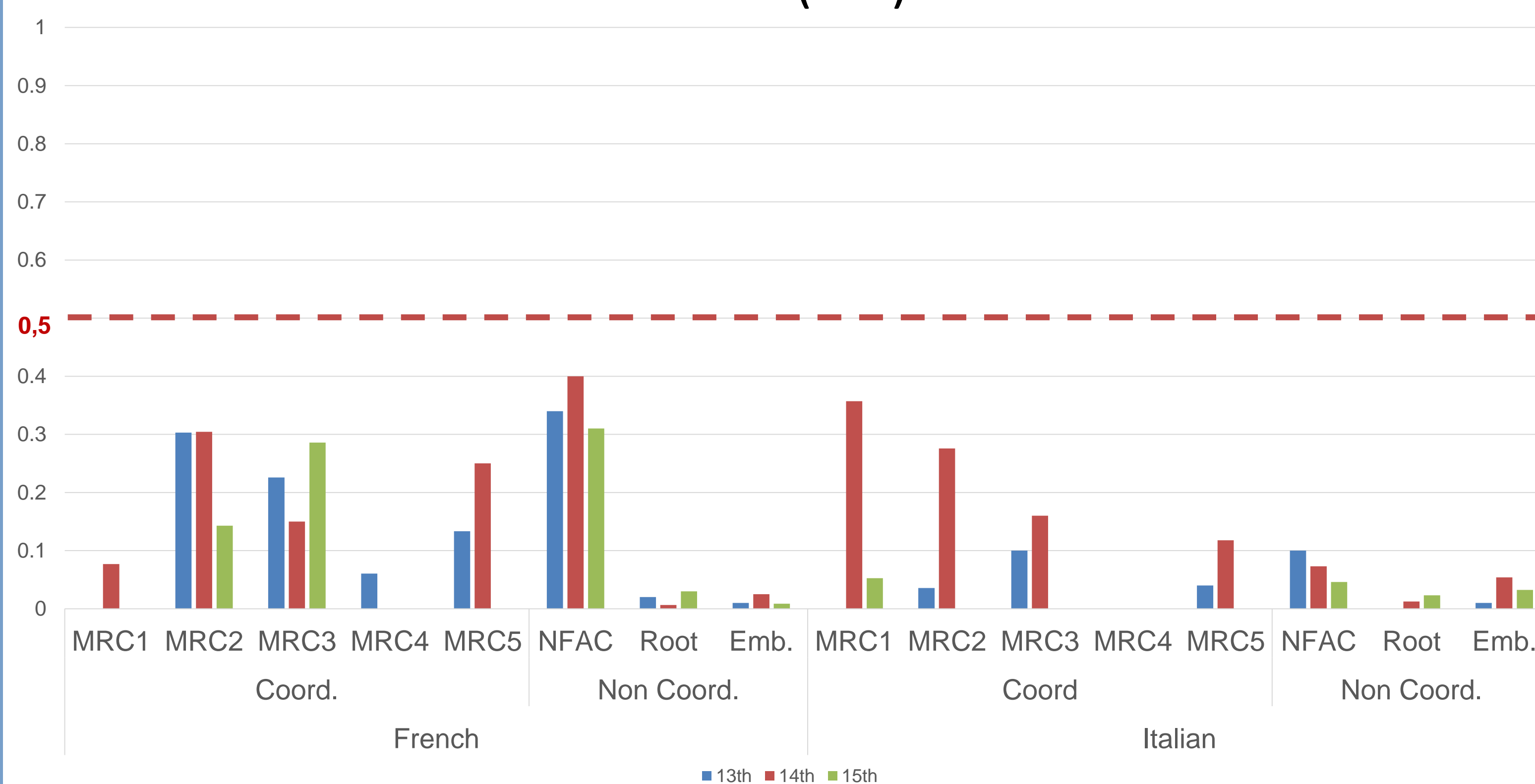


Figure 1: Distribution of ANO tokens in MedF and MedIt in diachrony (relative frequency compared with overt objects)

- Medieval Romance Coordination (MRC) = heterogenous phenomenon (5 structures)
- NFAC: non-finite adjunct clauses, see ex. (2)
- ANOs = *pro*, licenced syntactically or contextually
- Syntactically-licensed ANOs most robust type (i.e. more frequent) in diachrony.

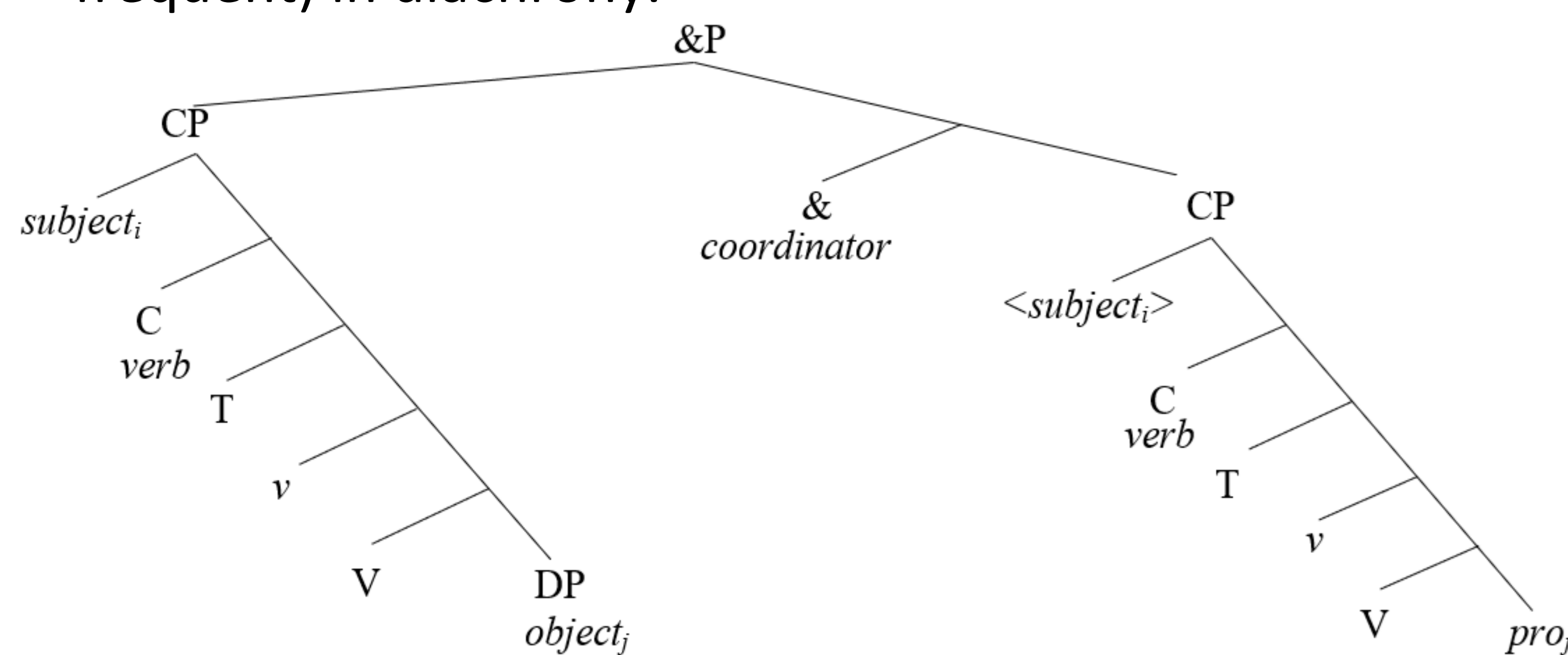


Figure 2: Abstract tree for a coordination structure with an ANO with an object DP antecedent (cf. ex. (1))

IV. Consequences and follow-up questions

- ANOs and clitics appear in free distribution in MedF and MedIt.
- The project shows that, when a 1:1 match is available, the 0:1 mismatch is generally dispreferred.
 - How does pro-drop relate to other types of deficient categories?
 - How do clitics arise in diachrony?
 - What governs the distribution of null and overt arguments?