

The comparative evolution of word order in French and English: a progress report

Anthony Kroch and Beatrice Santorini
University of Pennsylvania
January 2010

Summary I

1. In the period 1100-1500, both English and French show a large and steady decline in the frequency of direct object topicalization but not in the frequency of PP or adverb preposing.
2. During this period both languages lose V2 word order as a general pattern.
3. In French, direct object topicalization is entirely lost and is replaced by clitic left-dislocation, while, in English, topicalization continues to be used, though at a much lower rate.

Summary II

4. Despite the superficial similarity in the evolution of French and English, the underlying grammatical changes in the two languages may be different.
5. In English, the decline in topicalization appears to result from the interaction between the loss of V2 word order and an unchanging constraint on prosodic wellformedness that makes a certain common sentence type unusable.
6. In French, by contrast, the loss of topicalization may have resulted from a change in the principles of sentence accentuation which renders the Spec,CP position unavailable to referential topic noun phrases.

French Data Sources

France Martineau, et. al. *Corpus MCVF*, “*Modéliser le changement: les voies du français.*” University of Ottawa.

Six Old French texts:

- Brendan
- Le chanson de Roland
- Yvain
- Nicolette et Aucassin
- La queste de la sainte Graal
- Le somme le roi

Five Middle French texts:

- Chroniques de Froissart
- La Prise d’Alexandrie
- Cent N. N. Anonymes
- XV Joies de Mariage
- Commynes

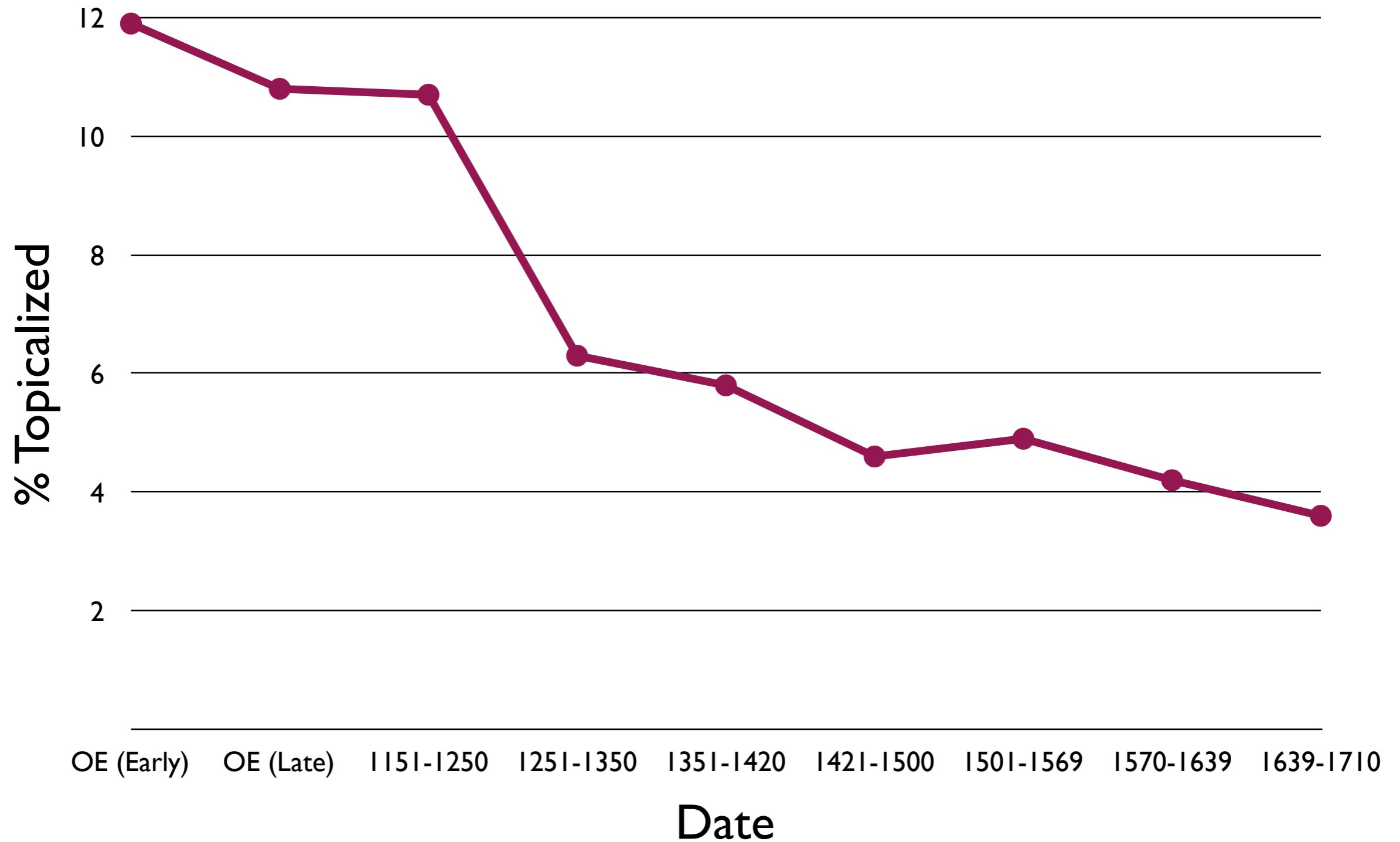
Two Early Modern French texts:

- Étaples Bible translation
- letters of Marguerite de Valois

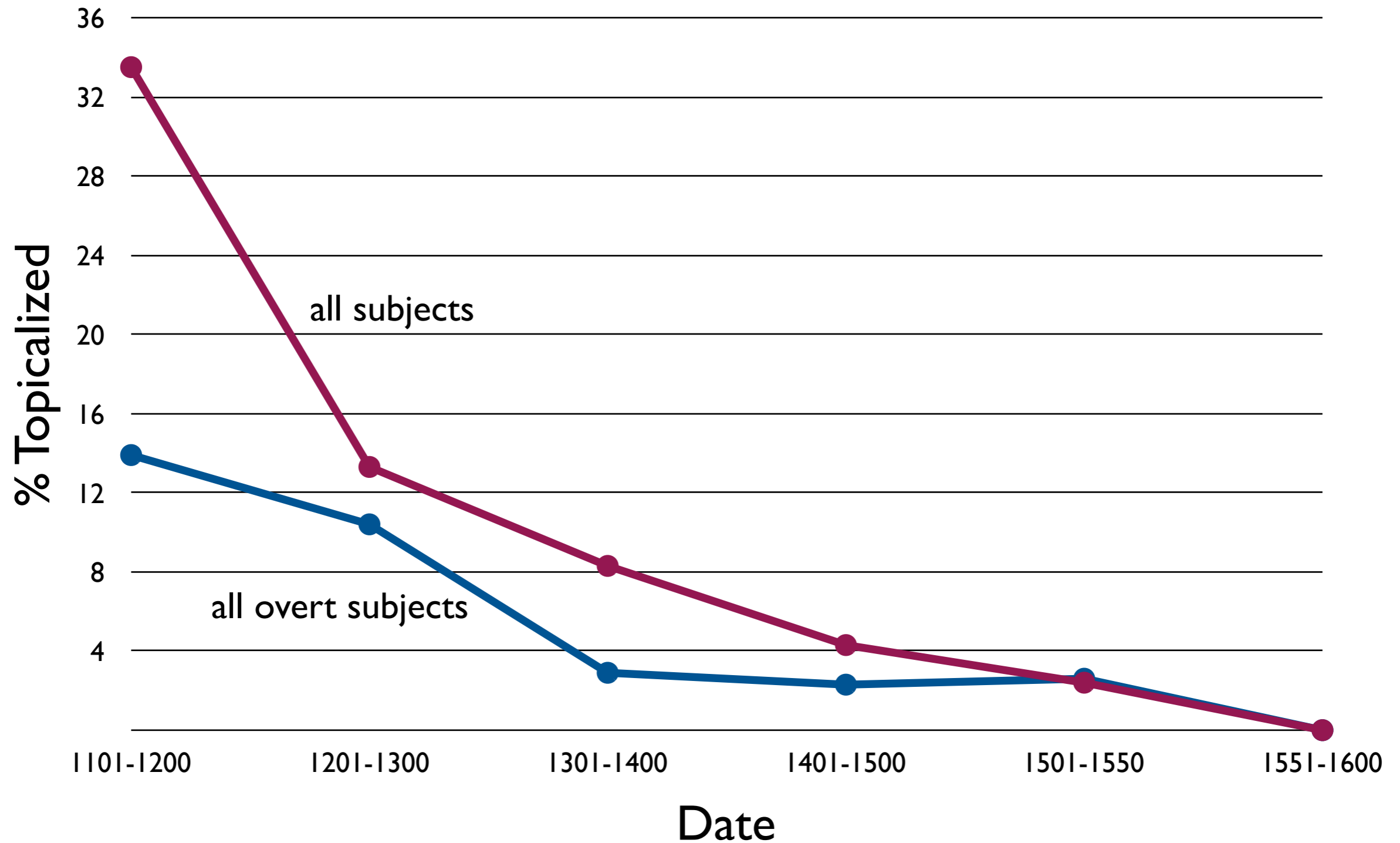
English Data Sources

- Anthony Kroch and Ann Taylor. *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English, second edition*. CD-ROM, second edition, 2000.
- Ann Taylor, Anthony Warner, Susan Pintzuk, and Frank Beths. *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose*. Oxford Text Archive, first edition, 2003.
- Anthony Kroch, Beatrice Santorini, and Lauren Delfs. *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English*. CD-ROM, first edition, 2004.
- Ann Taylor, Arja Nurmi, Anthony Warner, Susan Pintzuk, and Terttu Nevalainen. *Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence*. Oxford Text Archive, first edition, 2006.

Decline of direct object topicalization in English



Decline of direct object topicalization in French

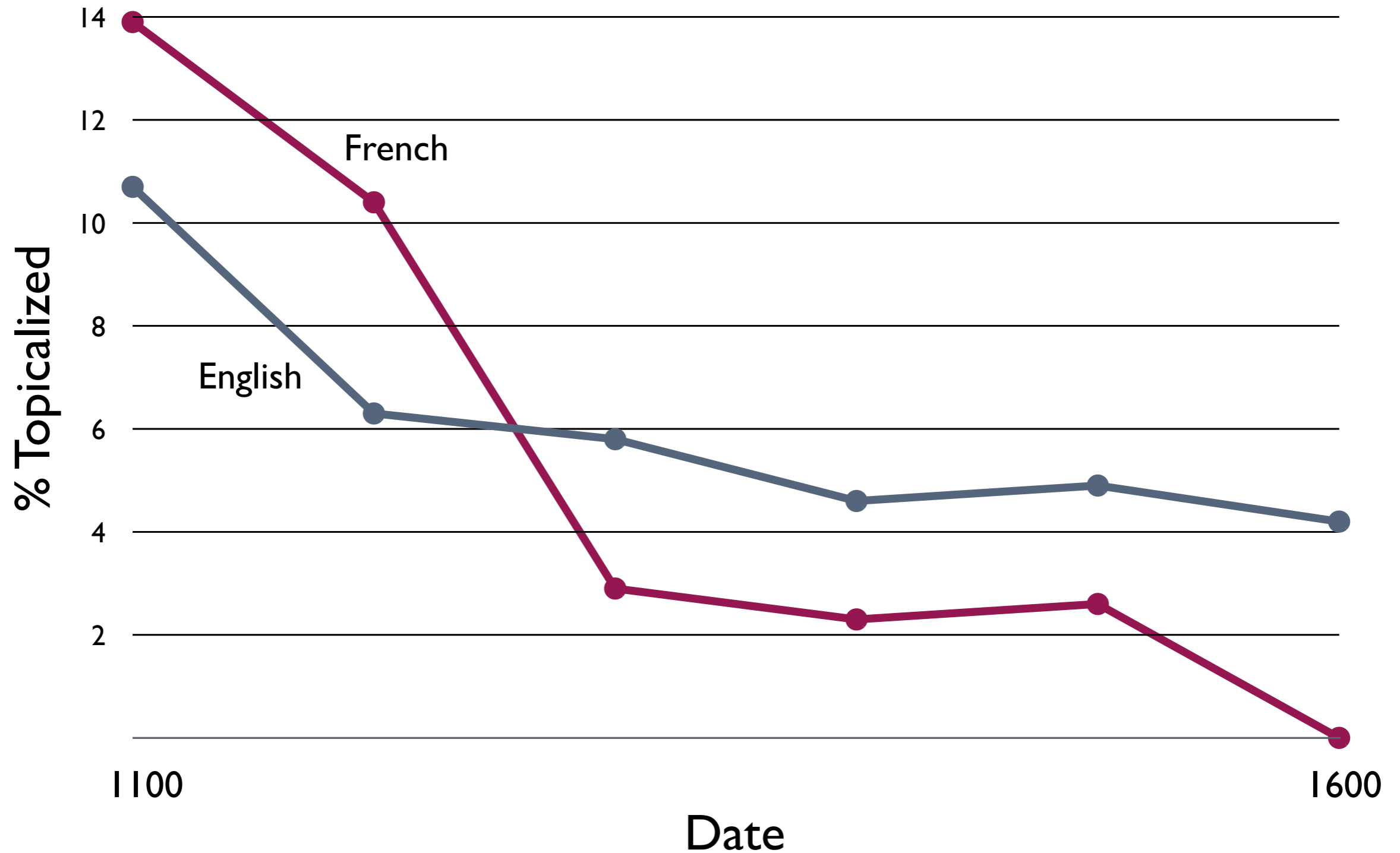


Frequency of direct object topicalization in modern spoken Dutch (Bouma 2008)

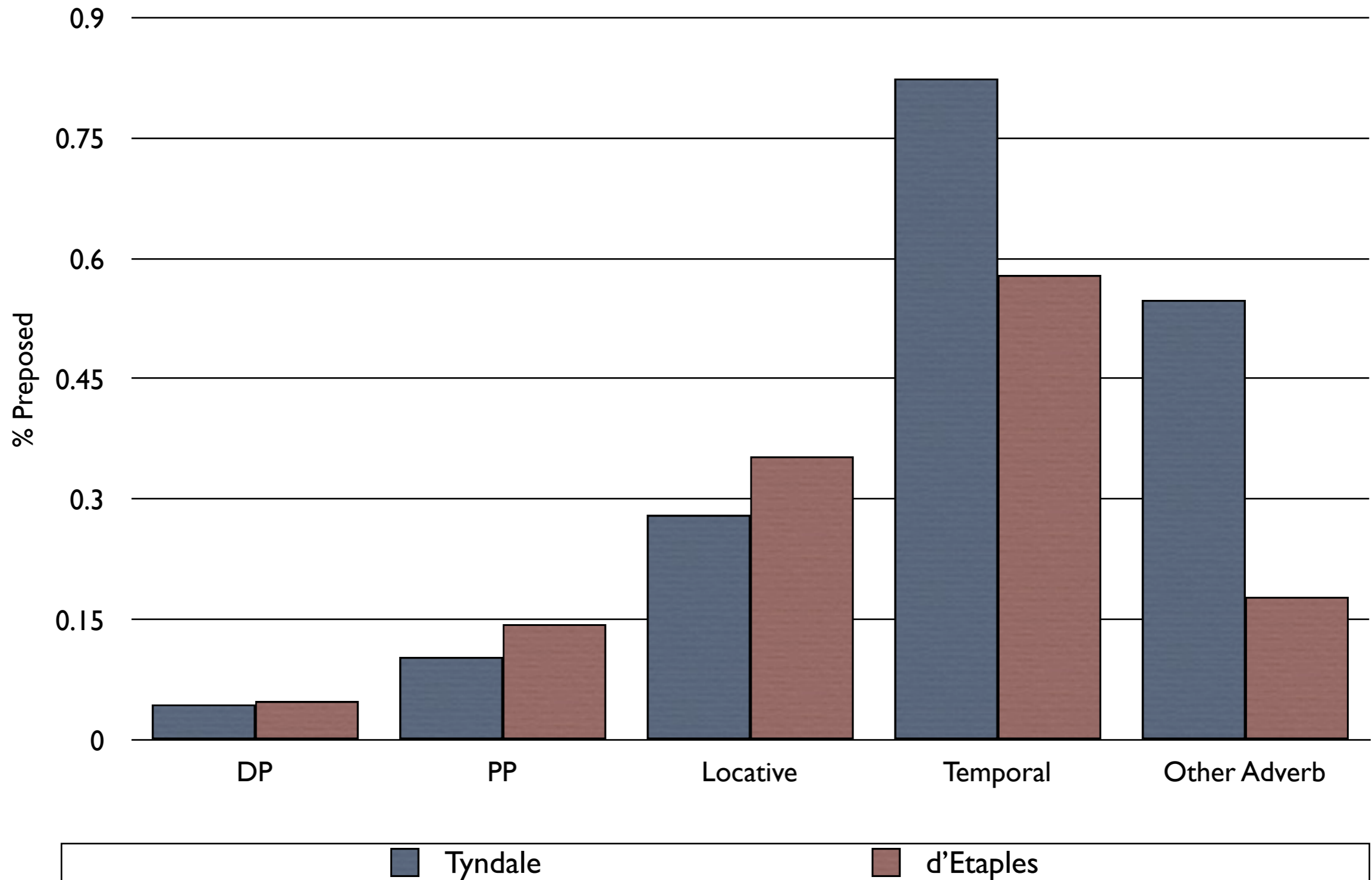
Table 4.2: Summary of Vorfeld occupation of arguments.

Argument	Vorfeld		Prop est (%)
	yes	no	pt
subject	43 523	18 597	70.1
direct object	3 418	20 432	14.3
indirect object	38	815	4.5

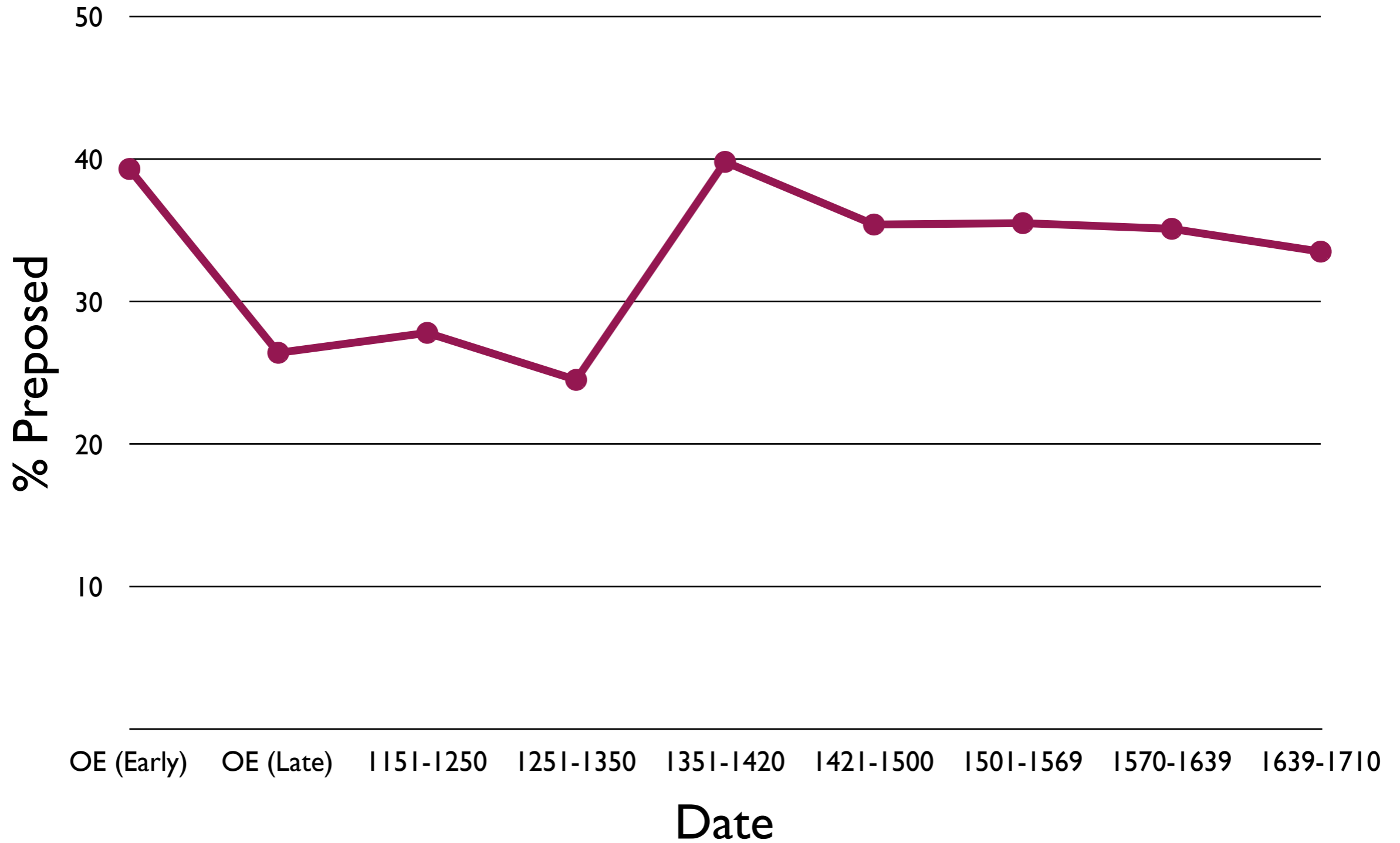
Decline of object topicalization in English and French (sentences with overt subjects)



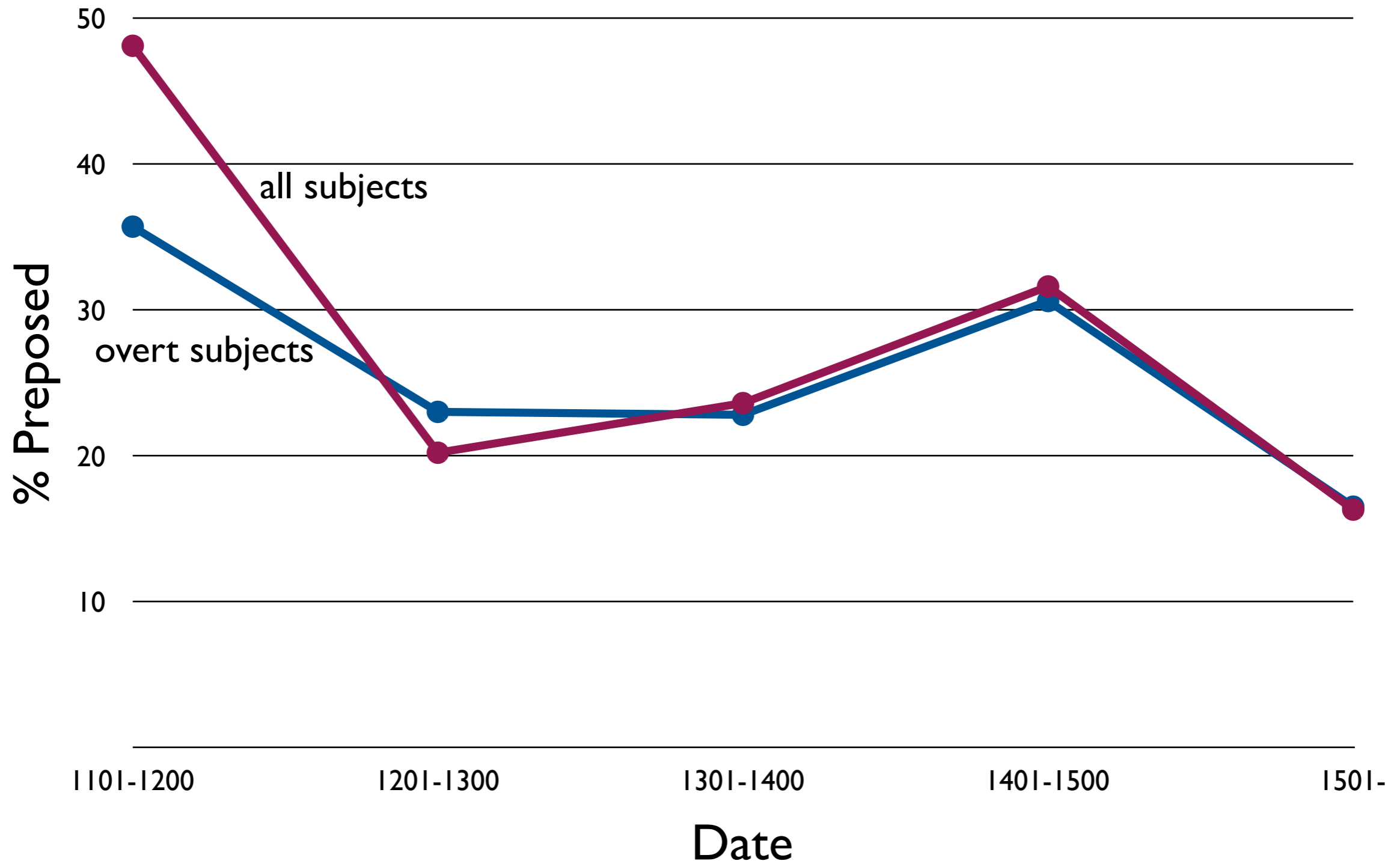
Frequency of preposing in early 16th century bible translations (Tyndale versus Lefevre d'Étaples)



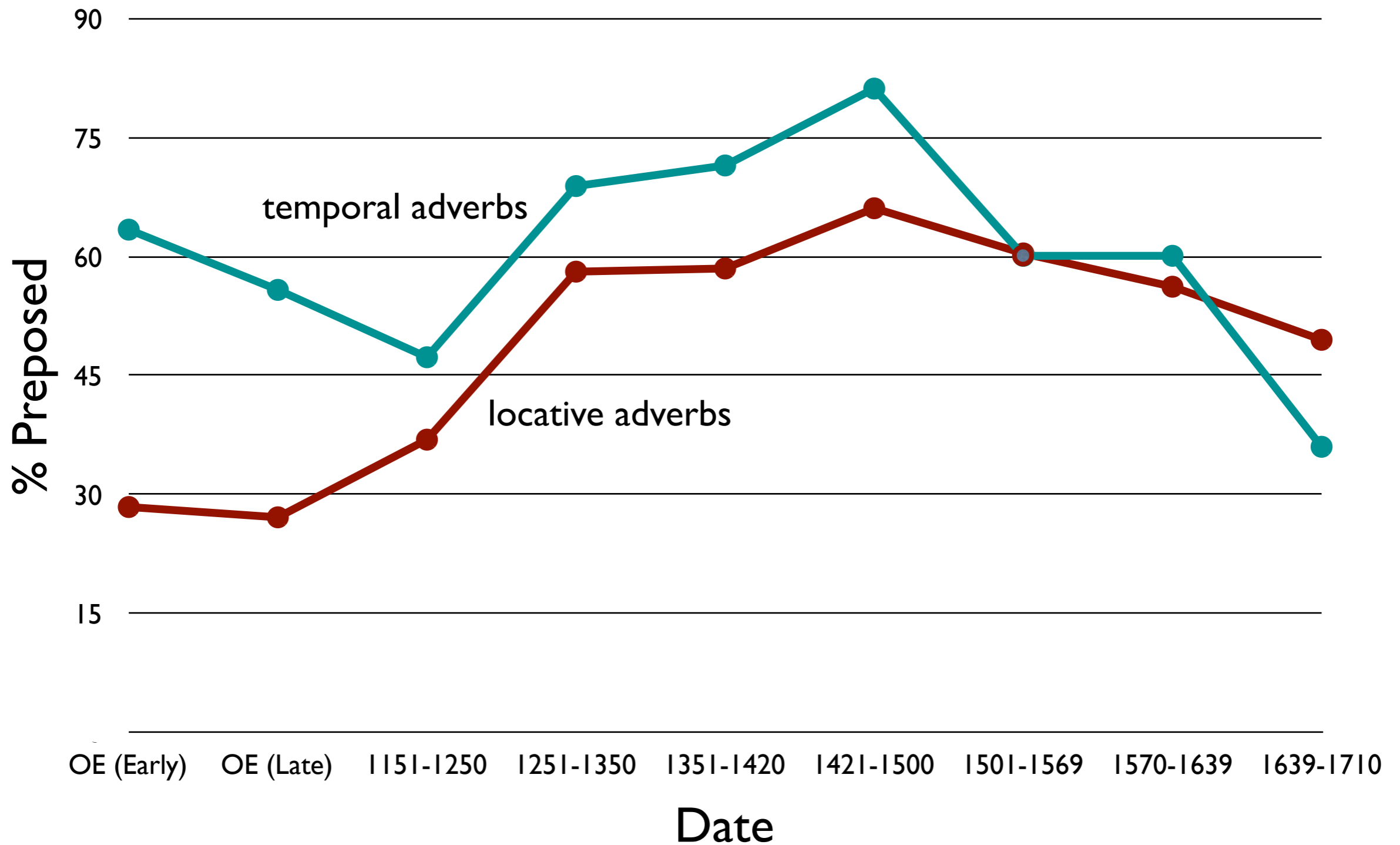
Evolution of PP preposing in English



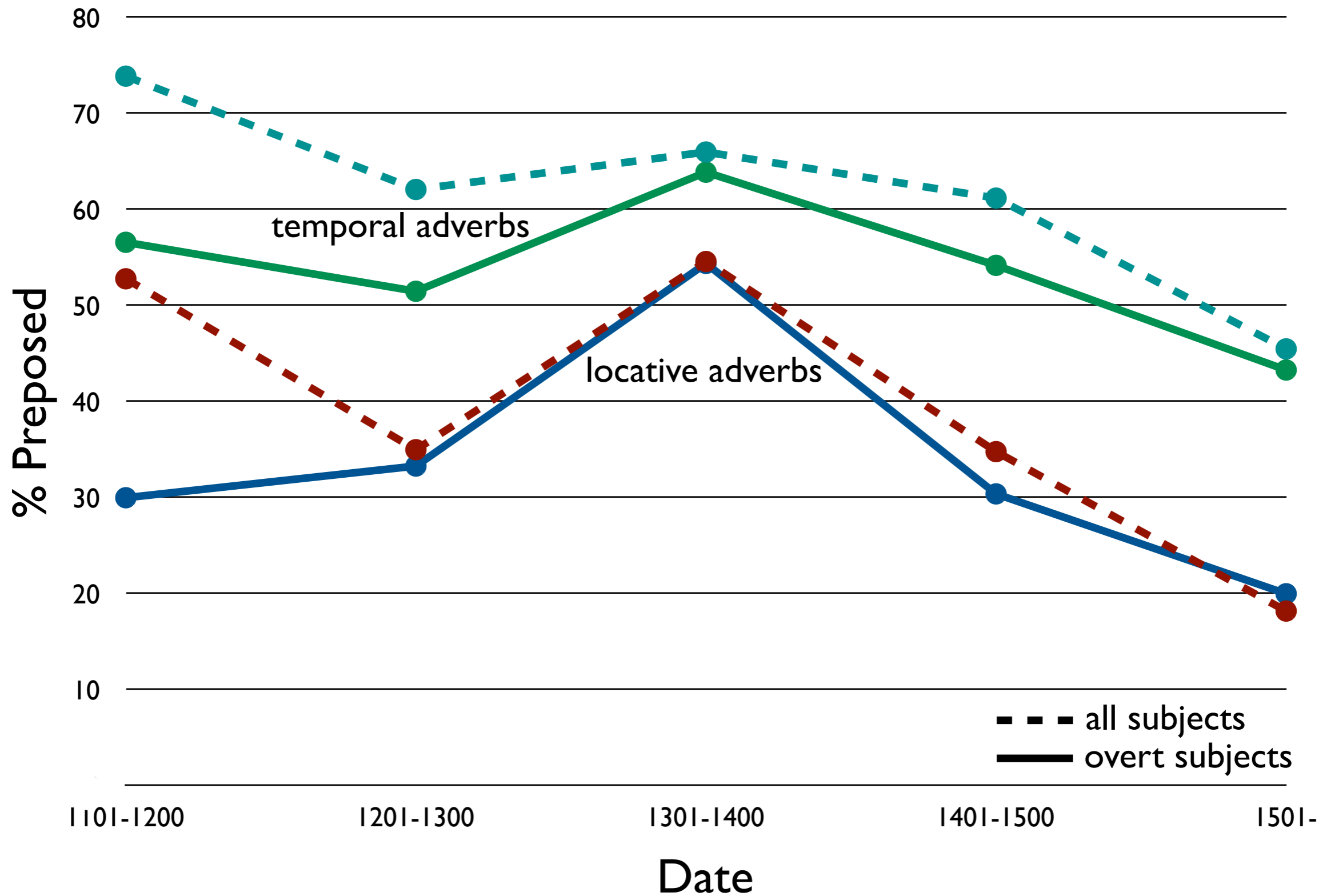
Evolution of PP preposing in French



Evolution of adverb fronting in English



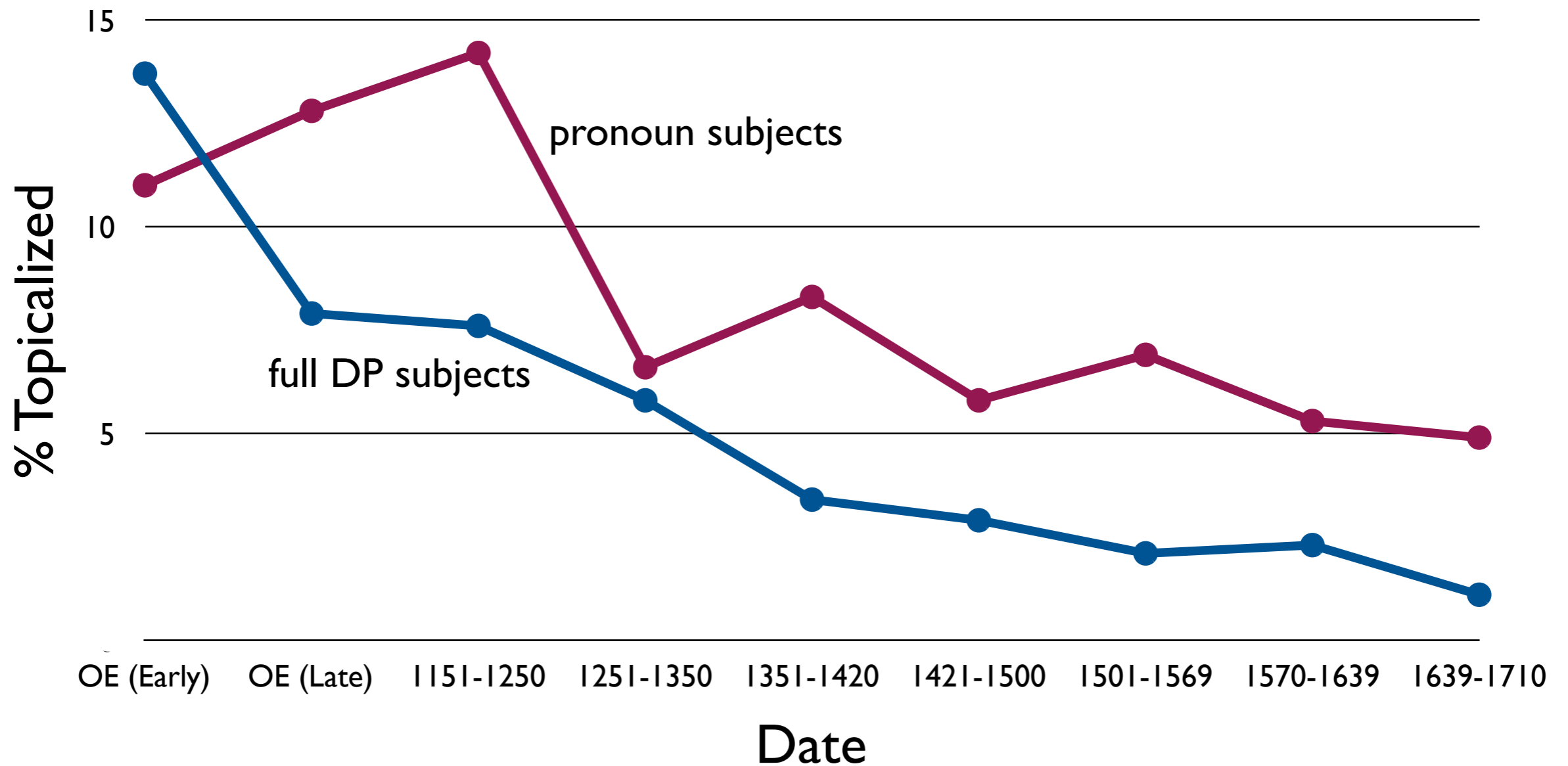
Evolution of adverb fronting in French



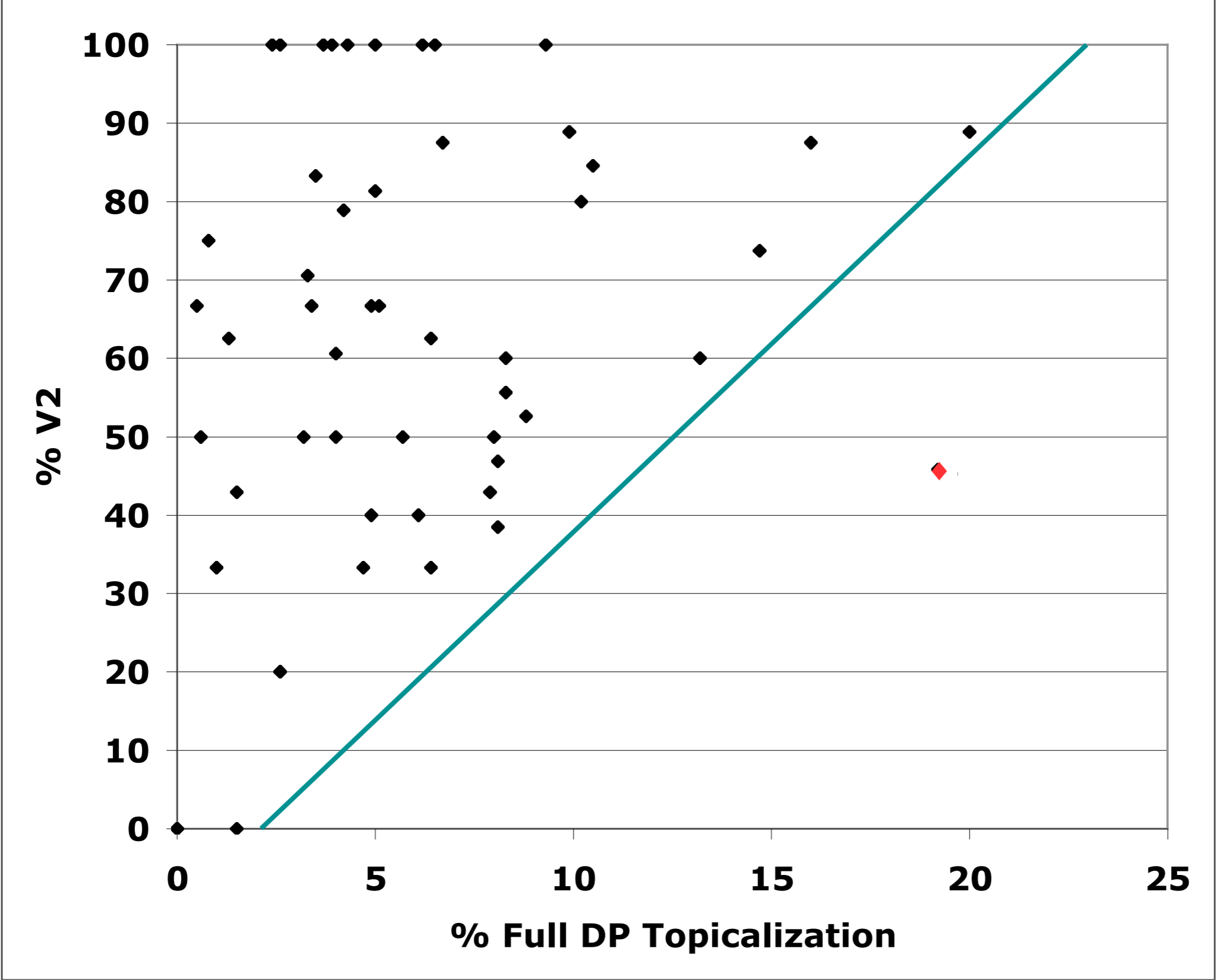
The history of topicalization in English (Speyer 2008)

- Why does topicalization decline in Middle English but not disappear? If the change a parametric one, it should go to completion. Otherwise, topicalization, a clear case of stylistic variation might be expected to be stable in frequency over time.
- This question has answer in the specific interaction between parametric settings and stylistic variation in the history of English.

Decline of direct object topicalization in English by subject type



Correlation between frequencies of object topicalization and of V2 in Middle English texts (Wallenberg 2007)



Distribution of subject types in a corpus of topicalized and non-topicalized sentences in natural speech

personal pronoun	demonstrative pronoun	full noun phrase
140	20	142
46.4	6.6	47.0

Subject type in sentences with *in situ* objects

personal pronoun	demonstrative pronoun	full noun phrase
181	2	17
90.5%	1%	8.5 %

Subject type in sentences with topicalized objects

Clash avoidance

- The type of topicalization that declines:
 - (1) The **nèwspaper** **Jóhn** read; the **nòvel** **Máry** did.
(Compare: The **nèwspaper** read **Jóhn**.)
- The type of topicalization that doesn't:
 - (2) The **nèwspaper** I **réad**; the **nòvel** I **dídn't**.

Translating German topicalized arguments into English in three modern German novels [by Böll, Dürrenmatt and Grass]

Topicalized to topicalized:

G: **Mahlkes Haupt** bedeckte dieser Hut **besonders peinlich**.

E: **On Mahlke's head** this hat made a **particularly painful impression**.

Topicalized to non-topicalized:

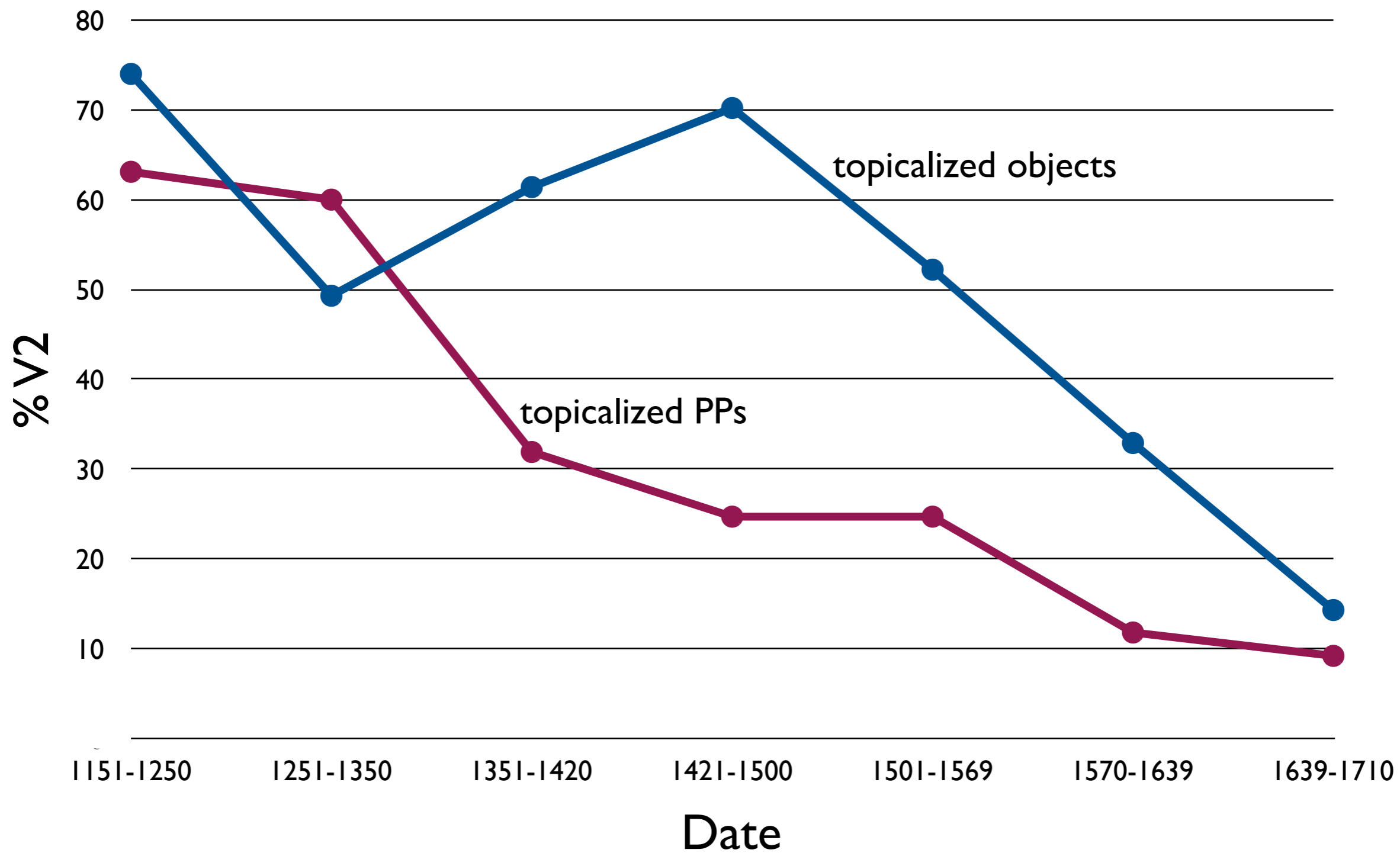
G: **Zu den sechs** kamen noch **drei weitere**.

E: **Three others** joined **these six** in the afternoon.

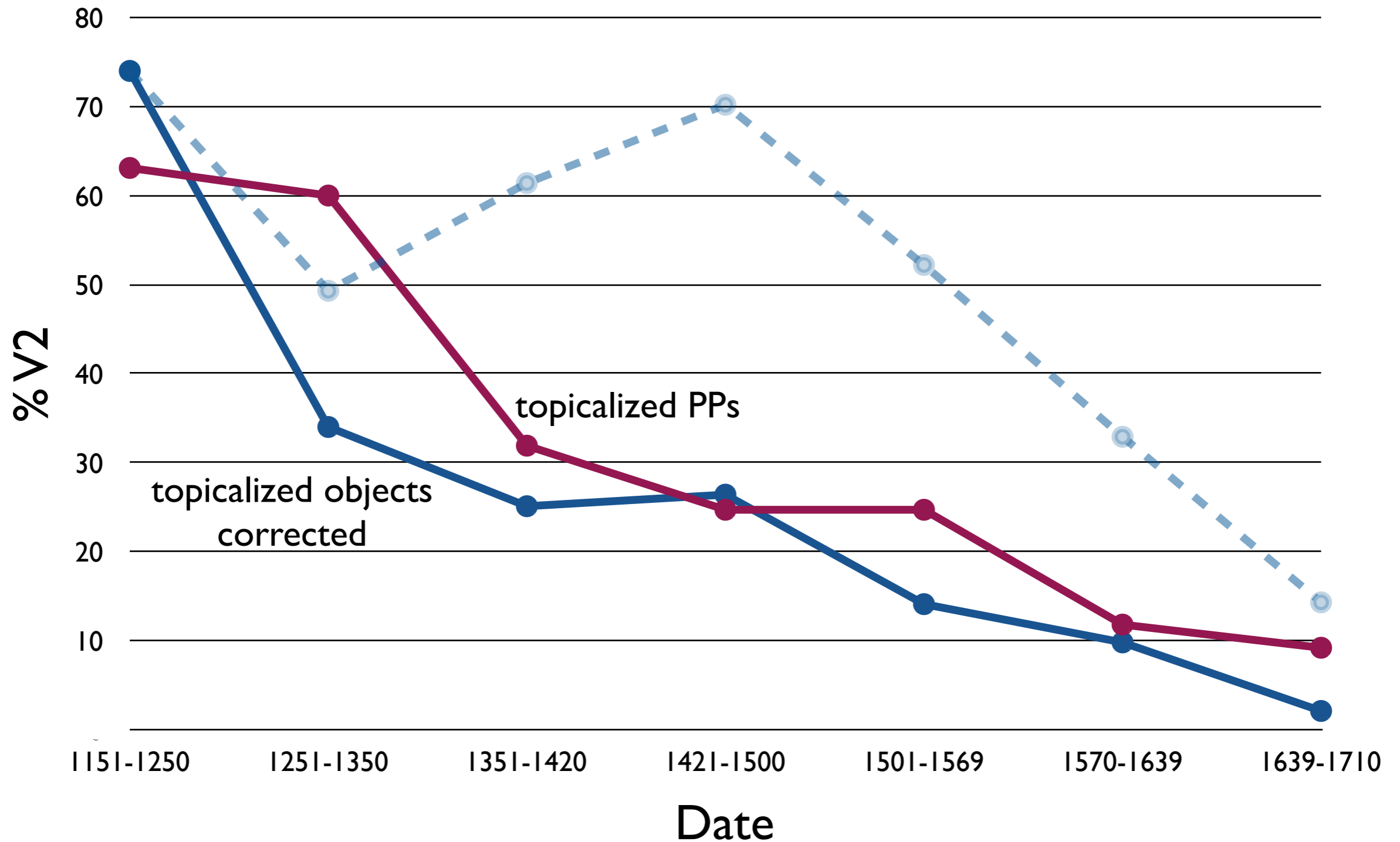
Accent placement and topicalization frequencies in translating German topicalized arguments into English

	2nd accent on the German subject	accent elsewhere
topicalization in the English translation	0	31
no topicalization in the English	25	100

Rate of V2 loss in English with topicalized objects and PPs



Rate of V2 loss in English corrected for clash avoidance



Object topicalization with V2 in Old and Middle French

- (1) **l'estreu** **li** tint **sun uncle Guinemer**
the stirrup him held his uncle Guinemer
Roland 27.329
- (2) **messe e matines** ad **li** **reis** escultet
mass and matins has the king heard
Roland 11.139
- (3) **une chose** ont-**ilz** asez honneste
one thing have-they enough honest
Commynes, 120.1634

Object topicalization with V3 and pronoun subjects in Middle French

- (1) **aultre remyde** je n'y voy
other remedy I not there see
XV Joies, 111v.1209
- (2) **deux chose** je diray de luy
two things I will-say of him
Commynes, 38.478
- (3) **nul enfant** il n'ot onques eu de sa fenme
no child he not-had ever had of his wife
Froissart, 462.6477

Frequency of V2 in main clauses with topicalized XPs in Old French

	pronoun subject	full DP subject
XVS	40 [.98]	146 [.97]
XSV	1	4

Topicalized objects

	pronoun subject	full DP subject
XVS	40 [.67]	286 [.78]
XSV	20	81

Topicalized PPs

The temporal evolution of V2 with full DP subjects for all types of preposed XP

	sentences with an auxiliary verb	sentences with a single verb
Old French	0.85 [218]	0.83 [2163]
Middle French	0.69 [402]	0.70 [3633]
Modern French	0.27 [33]	0.22 [160]

The temporal evolution of Germanic and Romance inversion in V2 sentences with topicalized XPs and full DP subjects

	frequency of Germanic inversion	frequency of Romance inversion	Romance + Germanic inversion
Old French	0.50 [108]	0.36 [78]	0.86 [186]
Middle French	0.32 [127]	0.37 [149]	0.69 [276]
Modern	0.03 [1]	0.24 [8]	0.27 [9]

An independence result

	Romance + Germanic inversion	sentences with a single verb
Old French	0.86	0.83
Middle French	0.69	0.70
Modern French	0.27	0.22

Frequency of V2 in main clauses with topicalized XPs in Middle French

	pronoun subject	full DP subject
XVS	21	64 [.93]
XSV	26	5

Topicalized objects

	pronoun subject	full DP subject
XVS	58	422 [.61]
XSV	438	274

Topicalized PPs

Frequency of V2 in main clauses with topicalized XPs in Middle French

	pronoun subject	full DP subject
XVS	21 [.45]	64 [.93]
XSV	26	5

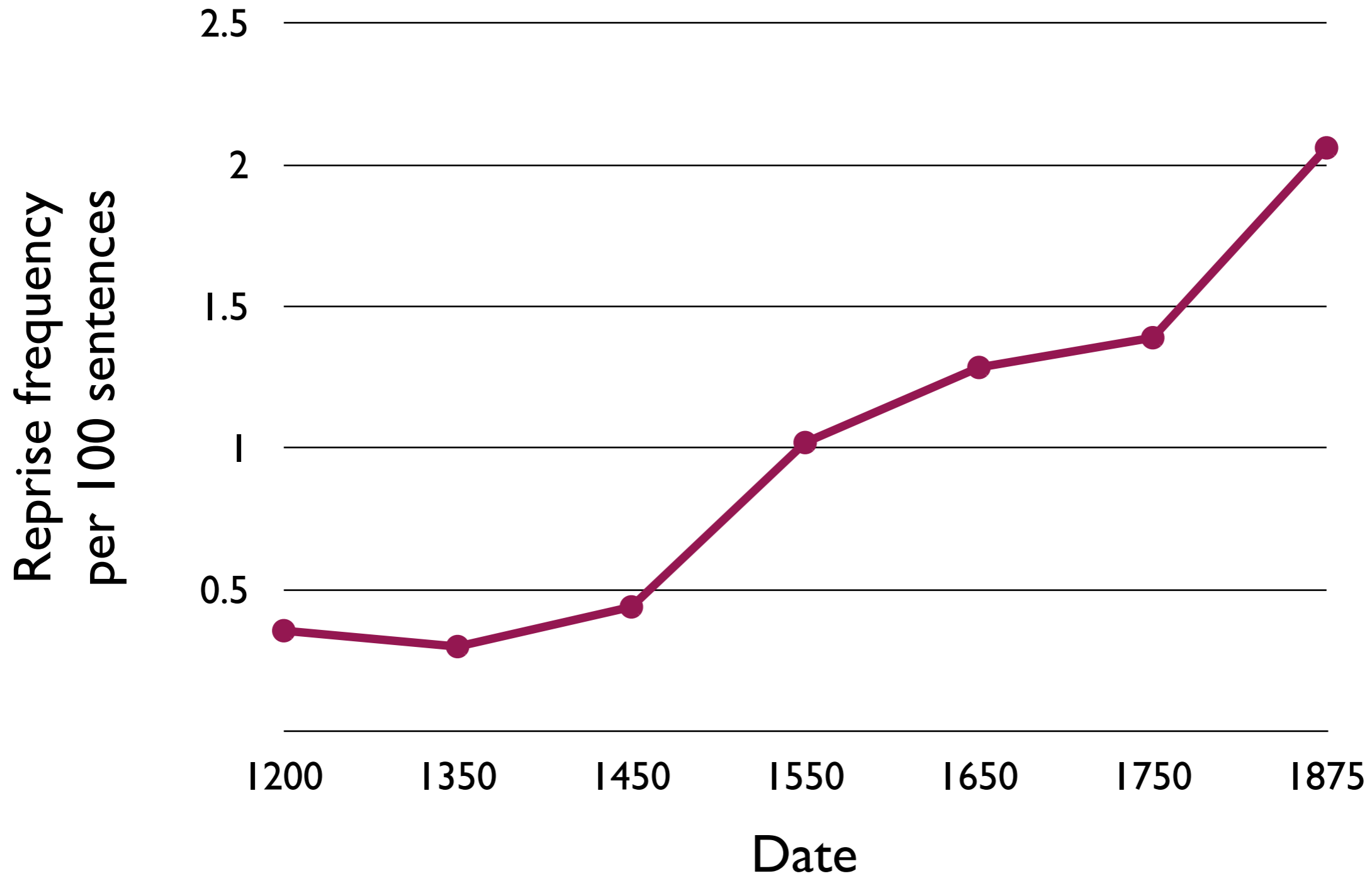
Topicalized objects

	pronoun subject	full DP subject
XVS	58 [.12]	422 [.61]
XSV	438	274

Topicalized PPs

**Why does French completely lose
object topicalization?**

Rise of clitic left-dislocation and loss of topicalization (Priestley 1955)



“Adjunction to CP” in French

- (1) ... **de priere** **aide** li font **les dames**
of prayer help him do the ladies
Yvain, 137.4788
- (2) ... **puis** **si** chevalchet od sa grant ost **li** **ber**
then so rides with his great army the baron
Roland, 179.2438
- (3) ... **aussi** **telle** **oppinion** tiennent **les Angloys**
also such opinion hold the English
Commynes, 26.279

Adjunction to CP in Modern French / English

- (1) **Jean sûr elle/Marie** l'aimera bien (mais Pierre pas)
John sure she him-will-like well
- (2) **sûr Jean elle/Marie** l'aimera bien (mais Pierre pas)
- (3) **sure John you** will like (him) (but you won't like Bill)
- (4) **John sure you** will like *(him)

Clitic left dislocation in Middle French

(1) **le tant peu que ce fut_i, si l'_i avez vous** forfait
the little bit that it was still it have you forfeited
(CNNA, 420.6403)

(2) **qui là vaillans ne sera_i, jamais honneur ne l'_i amera**
who there valiant not will-be never honor not him will-love
(Prise, .2855)

Clitic left dislocation in Modern French

(1) *Le Figaro*_i, Jean *(le_i) lit tous les jours.
The Figaro John it reads every day

(2) *Ma femme*_i elle_i travaille à la Bibliothèque Nationale.
My wife she works at the library national

The temporal evolution of subject and object left dislocation frequencies per thousand sentences

	frequency of subject left dislocation	frequency of object left dislocation	number of matrix clauses
Old French	2.6	2.2	12022
Middle French	3.8	1.8	24634
Early Modern	28	4.3	3514

Cleft sentences in Modern French

- (1) C'est *Le Figaro*_i que Jean lit t_i tous les jours.
It's *The Figaro* that John reads every day
- (2) C'est *ma femme*_i qui t_i travaille à la BN.
It's my wife that works at the BN
- (3) Il y a *un an*_i qu'elle travaille à la BN t_i.
It's one year that-she works at the BN

The temporal evolution of cleft sentence frequencies per thousand sentences

	frequency of temporal clefts	frequency of subject and object clefts	number of matrix clauses
Old French	1.2	0.25	12022
Middle French	0.41	0.61	24634
Early Modern	0.56	5.4	3514

The end