

PA2.1 – VS orders in Old Italian

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I. The form-meaning mismatch

- Old Romance VS word orders seem not to have any semantic difference from SV orders: this is a form-meaning mismatch of the 1:0 type;
- One prominent hypothesis is that they are the result of a V2 syntax [1,2], but this hypothesis is challenged by frequent V1 sentences in some varieties (Old Italian);

(1) Infirmò uno figliuolo d' uno re.
fell_ill-3.SG a son of a king
'A son of a king fell ill.' (anon., *Novellino*)

- A possible response is that a natural class of null elements can derive these word orders [3], but this forces us to revise our theory of what V2 grammars are.

Theoretical questions

- Can Old Italian V1 be understood in a coherent way that advances our understanding of V2 grammars and word order phenomena?
- Otherwise, how can we revise our theory of what word order does in Old Romance?

- Research on Old Italian lacks systematic data annotation.

Empirical questions

- What is the amount and the distribution of SV and VS constructions in Old Italian?
- Can the subject position be predicted by information structure, in a way similar to the modern variety? (see [4] for Old French)

II. Methodology and hypotheses

Methods:

- Corpus research: MIDIA (years 1200—1375);
- Annotation dedicated to test the V2 hypothesis;
- Annotation for focus, following [5].

Hypotheses:

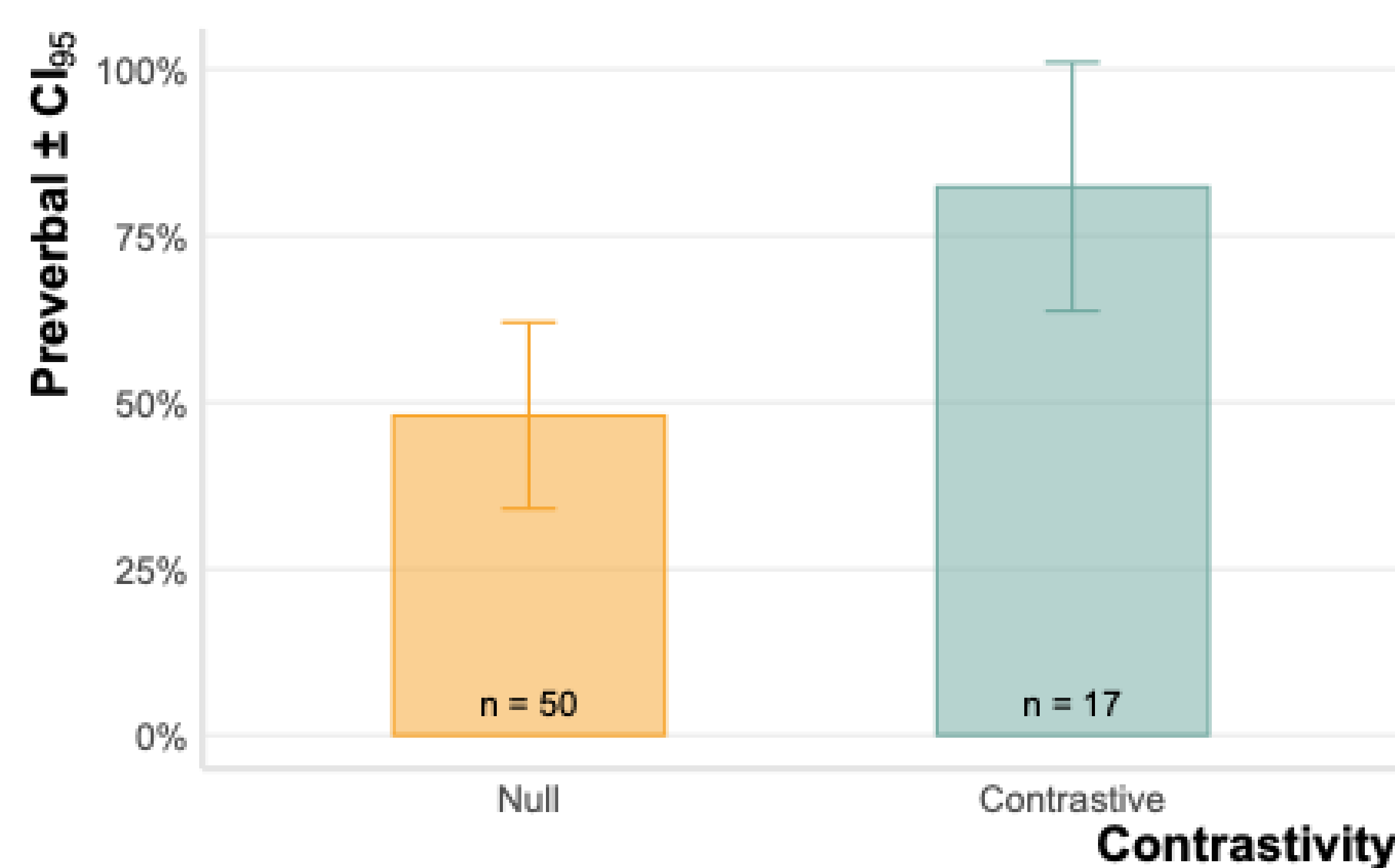
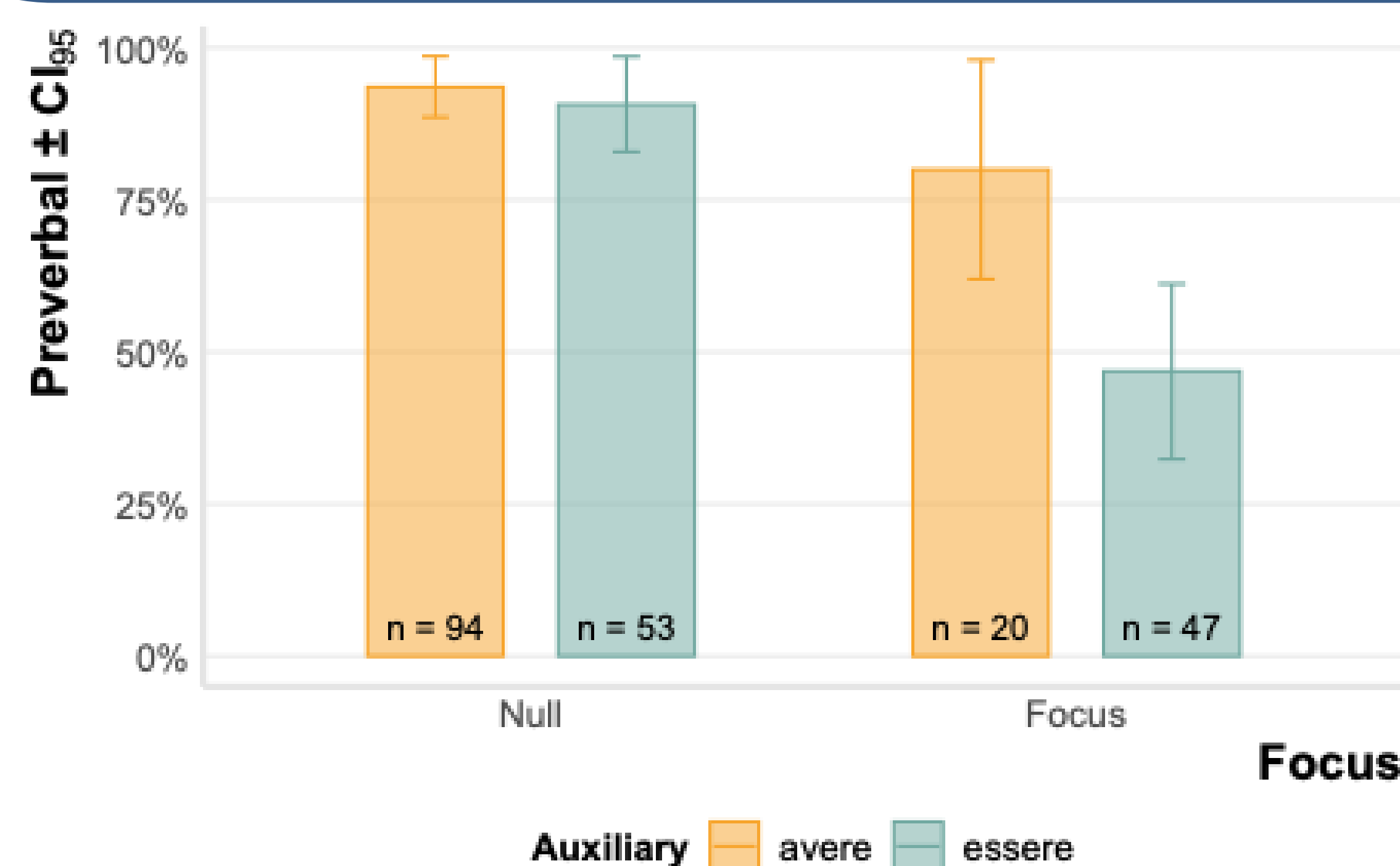
- Old Italian is not V2: it allows for multiply filled and empty pre-fields, incompatible with the V2 hypothesis;
- Word order depends on information structure (focus).

III. Results and discussion

V1 occurs with null and overt subjects, against the hypothesis by [3]. Generalizations crucial to the V2 hypothesis (pro-drop and distribution of clitics) are not supported by the data (contra [3,6]);

Old Italian is a null subject language with no V2. Subject position reflects information structure, but not in the way hypothesized by [4]:

- Unfocused subjects are preverbal;
- Contrastive focus is preverbal;
- New information focus is placed freely;
- No significant effect of auxiliary.



IV. Consequences and follow-up questions

- The project redefines the syntax of Old Italian with a mapping between information structure and word order that does not require a V2 grammar.

- How does a linearization that reflects information structure change over time to reflect narrow syntax?
- What non-truth-conditional dimensions of meaning (information structure, social meaning...) can play a role in the emergence of a 1:0 mismatch?