Filling the historical gap

Situating prepositional complementation in early New Zealand and early Australian English in its historical and contemporary context

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Background

- Prepositions and prepositional phrases are an integral part of Present-Day English verb complementation patterns (e.g. phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs)

Variation & change observed
- **diachronically** in the history of British English from variability between VP+NP vs VP+PP in Old English to largely VP+PP in PDE
- **synchronically** in World Englishes with a predilection of post-colonial ESL varieties to form novel complementation patterns ([1, 2, 3, 4])

The PEAS project (2018-2022)
- PEAS = **P**repositions in **E**nglish **A**rgument **S**tructure (across time and space)
- systematic and longitudinal account of PP verb complementation in the history of English and in World Englishes

This account needs to…
- …focus on the PP-system as a whole
- …use corpora and
- …use bottom-up and top-down approaches
- …**and zoom in on historical World English varieties**

…to provide **historical depth** for the study of language contact in World Englishes and
…to **unify** the history of (Standard British) English with World Englishes

> "While Schneider (2004) does not explicitly relate corpus-linguistic results to evolutionary stages in the dynamic model, the study nevertheless sets the methodological tone for future corpus-linguistic applications of his evolutionary model; in particular the assumption that – in the absence of authentic historical corpus data – synchronic corpus-linguistic cross-varietal differences can be interpreted as structural representations of diachronic change in World Englishes." (Gries et al., 2018: 249)

- comparison of historical data and World Englishes data frequently calls reports on 'innovations' into doubt (see case study on *talk*)

Why and how to fill the "gap"?

British E.
Middle English
PPCME (1150-1500)
Early Modern English
PPCEME (1500-1720)
Late Modern English
PPCMBE (1722-1914)

WORLD ENGLISHES
IndE, AusE, CanE, IrE…
International Corpus of English

Corpus data

Corpus of Oz Early English (COOEE)[8]
- contains 2 mio. words of written early Australian English
- 1353 samples of texts produced in Australia, New Zealand or Norfolk Island, or by native Australians on travels
- **time period**: 1788-1900
- **registers** included: speech-based, private & public writing, government English

Corpus of Early New Zealand English (CENZE)[9,10]
- contains ca. 280,000 words of written early New Zealand
- 10 samples ~ 2,000 words per period and register (following ARCHER 3.2)
- **time period**: 1840s-1960s
- **registers** mirror ARCHER 3.2: fiction, newspaper, scientific writing, private letters

Procedure

1. Normalise spelling variation in COOEE & CENZE (see Corpus data).
2. PoS-tag and parse data with part-of-speech tagger and syntactic parser. [6]
3. Extract 2000 random tokens with search query (VP-PP).
4. Delete tokens that are clearly adjuncts rather than complements (e.g. temporal or locational).
5. Create a verb list based on random subsample.
6. Extract all VPs with those verbs.
7. Annotate for complementation pattern (NP, PP, ..?).
8. Calculate attraction between the VP and complement with collocate measure.

Case study 1: EModE vs. World Englishes

- focus so far on historical British English and on (modern) WE
- Preliminary analysis of EModE period (1500-1720) indicates increase of PP complementation versus adjuncts over time and no increase of PP vs NP attachment.
- no shift in complementation patterns between EModE and PDE from NP-complementation towards PP-complementation with verbs of communication

> 1. (a) …that in a public house he should **talk such things**NP (BURNETCHA-E3-P1,2,172.285)
>   (b) …you must try not to loose your temper and try to **talk pleasant things**NP all the time. (ICE-SL, W2b-026)
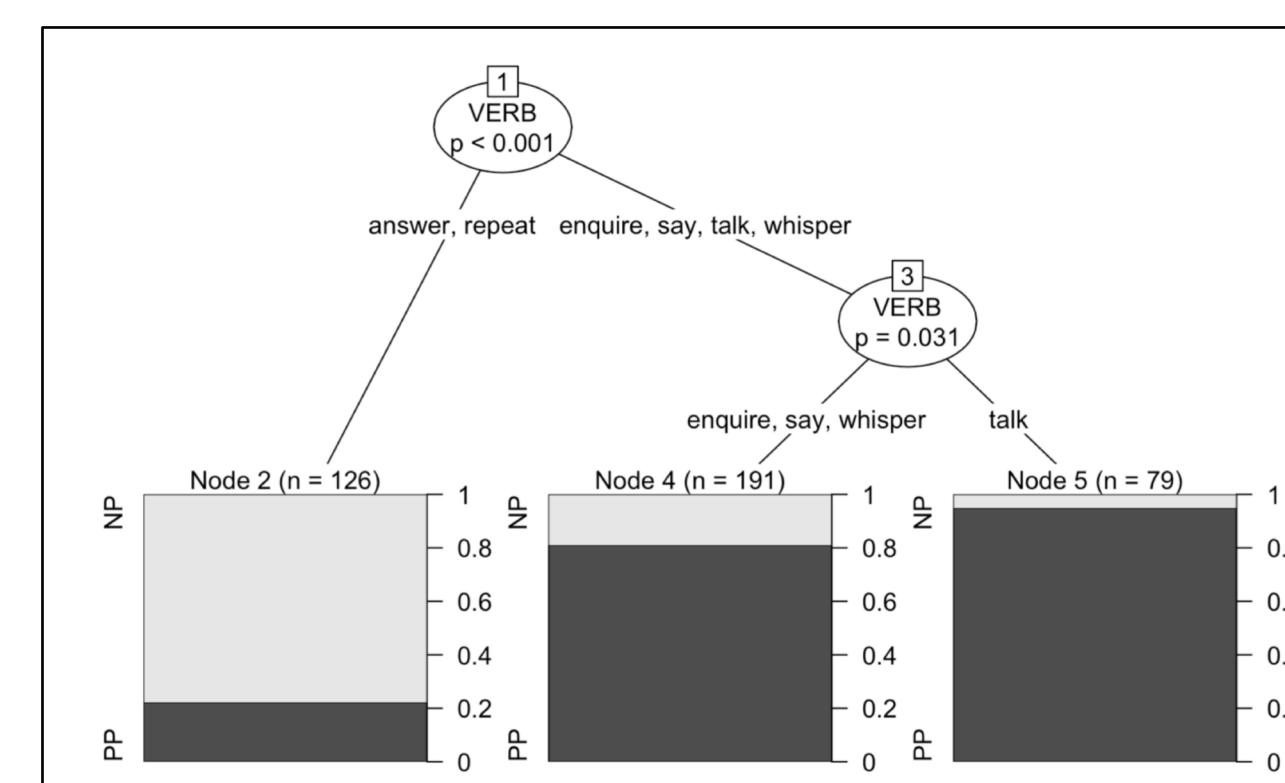

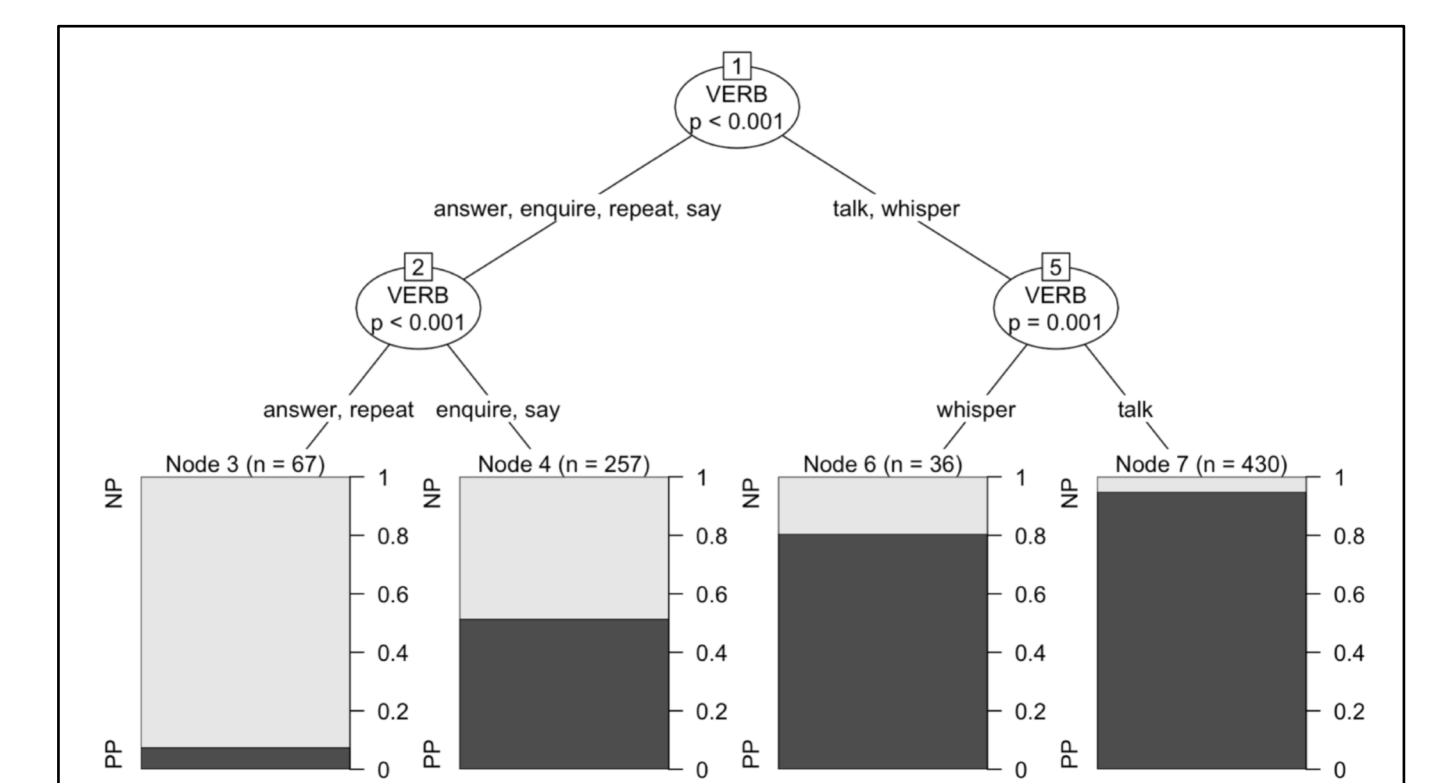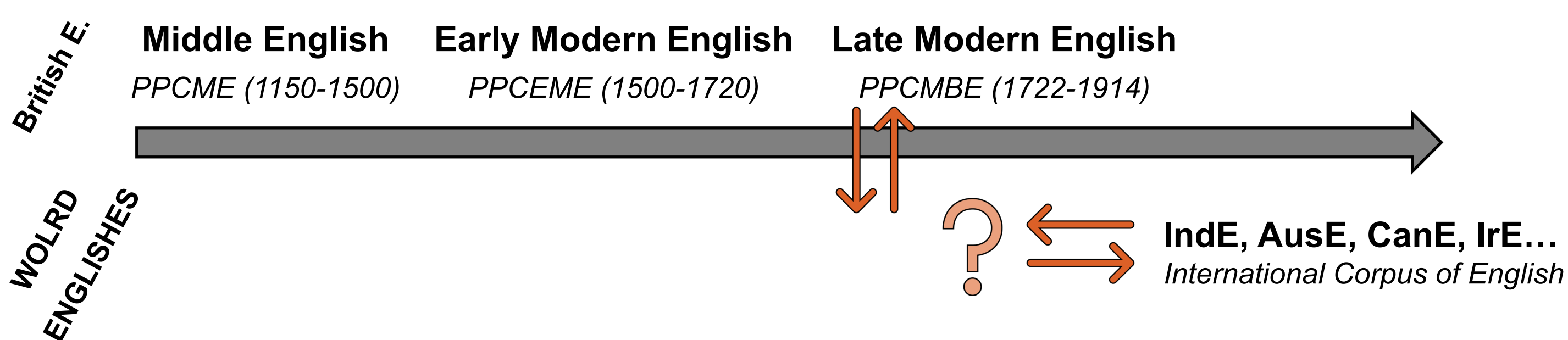Figure 1. Conditional inference tree for PP vs. NP complementation with verbs of communication in **PPCEME**, E1-E3. [7]

Figure 2. Conditional inference tree for PP vs. NP complementation with verbs of communication in 5 ENL and 8 ESL varieties (**ICE**). [7]
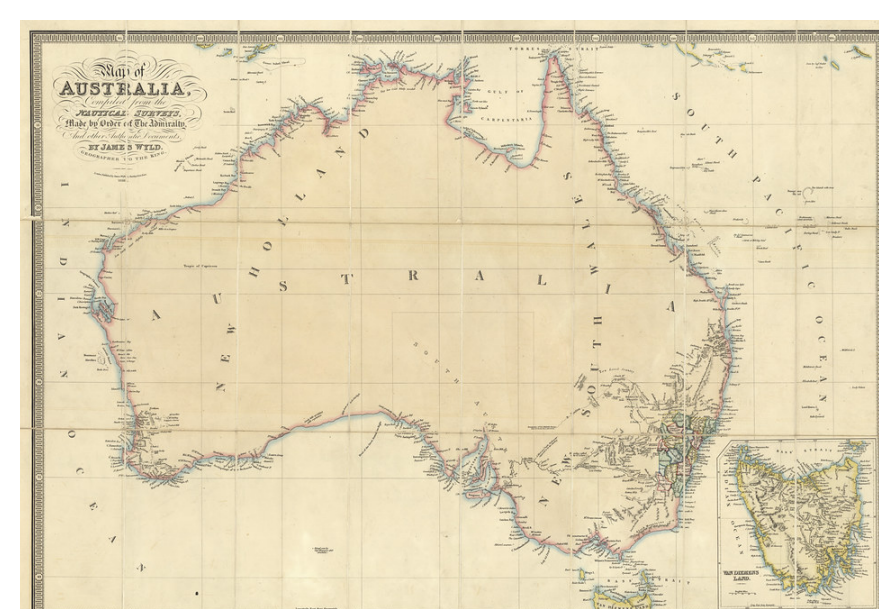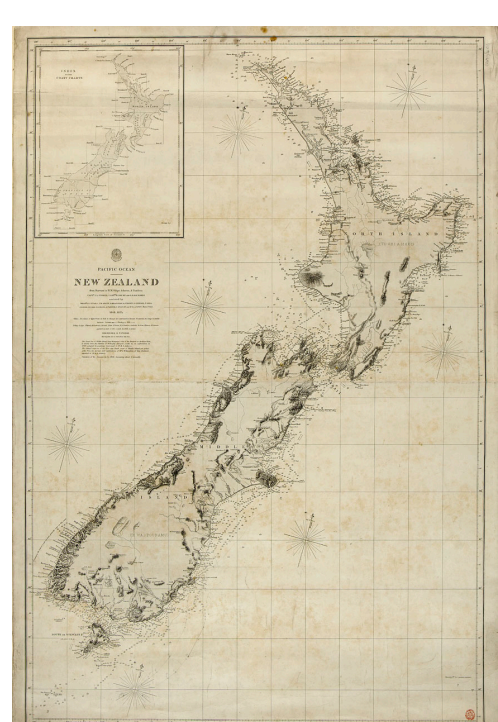
Case study 2: LModE vs historical AusE

- Case study: Verb complementation patterns of *talk*
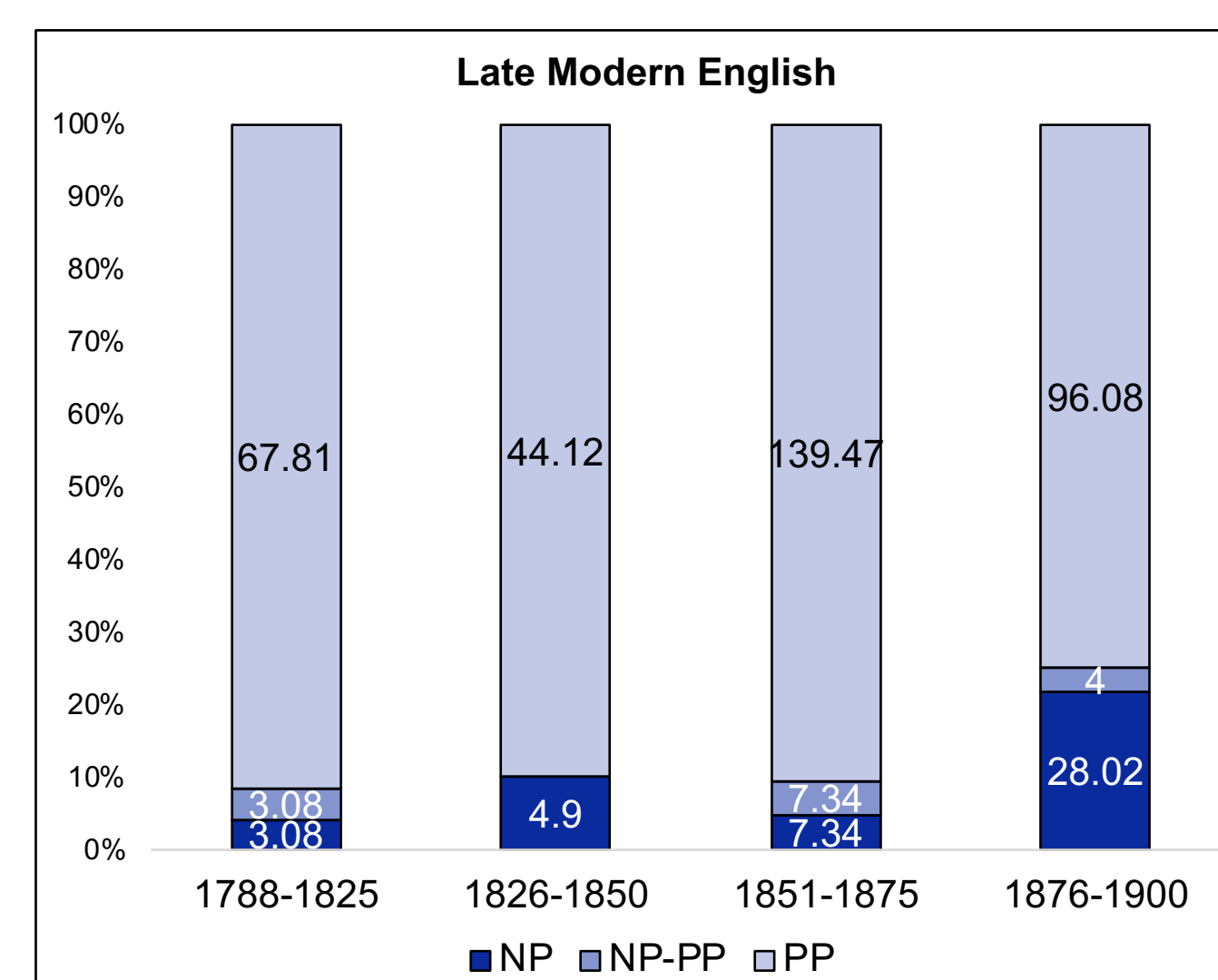- NP attachment and PP attachment similar in both varieties

Figure 3. Normalized frequencies of NP vs PP complementation in PPCMBE by 500,000 words
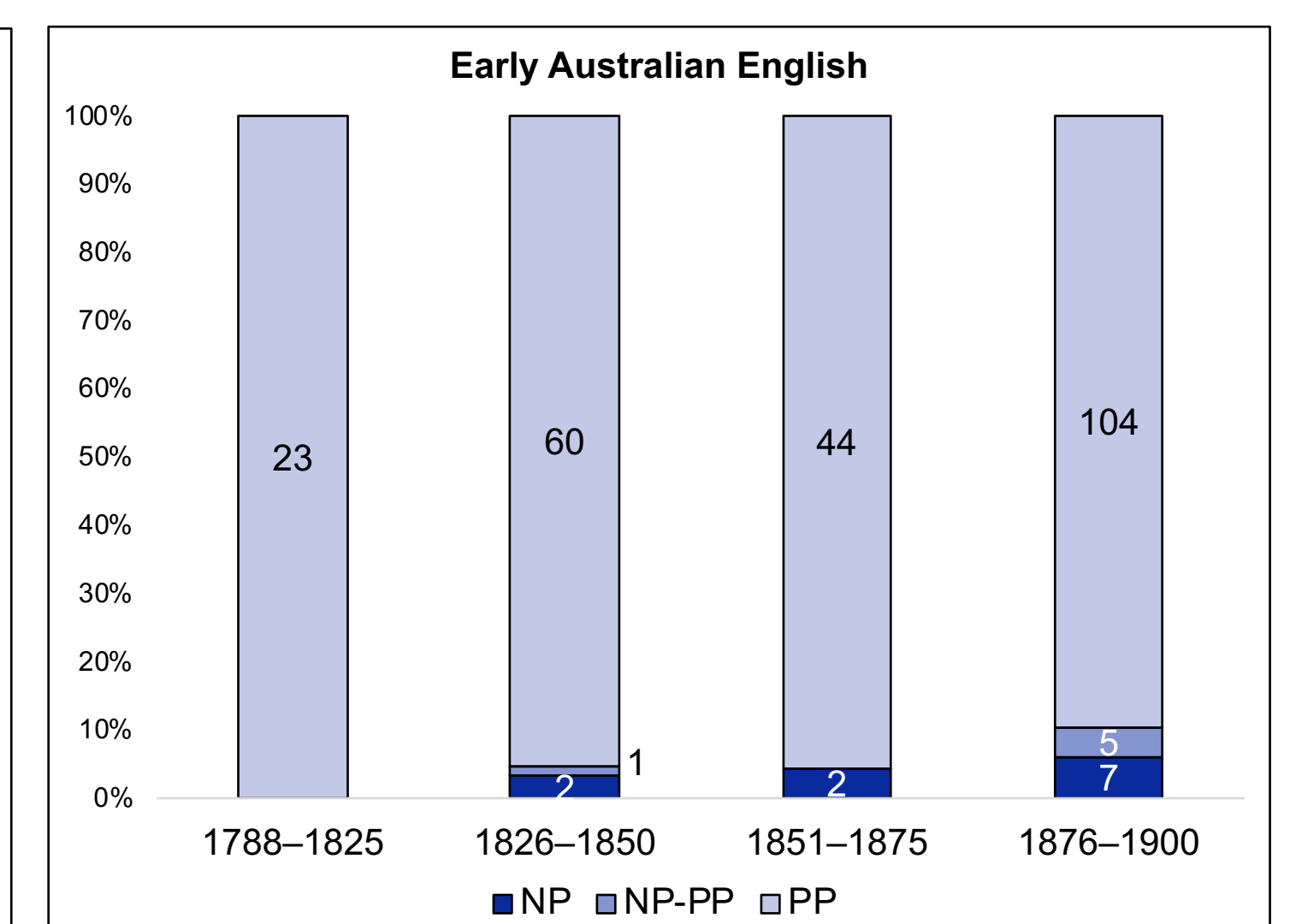

Figure 4. Frequencies of NP vs PP complementation in COOEE by period (each period = 500,000 words)

- **Examples of Late Modern English NP complementation**

> 2. (a) *talk* LANGUAGE: *half the people talked some French or other* (PPCMBE, HAYDON-1808)
>   (b) *talk* SUBJECT: *talks scandal with his friends.* (PPCMBE, READE-1863)

- **Examples of Early Australian English NP complementation**

> 3. (a) *talk* LANGUAGE: *We found that he could talk a little English, …* (COOEE, 2-206)
>   (b) *talk* SUBJECT: *… he'd been sacked for talking union to the men.* (COOEE, 4-271)

References

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[6] Schneider, Gerold. 2008. *Hybrid long-distance functional dependency parsing*. PhD Thesis, University of Zurich, Switzerland
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