

Preferred Argument Structure in Mapudungun Narratives

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Context: Ergativity

- Ergative-absolutive alignment: S is expressed the same way as P
- Popular topic in the 1970s and 80s
- Source of nominative-accusative alignment:
Grammaticalization of agent+topic => “subject”
- Source of ergative-absolutive alignment: ?

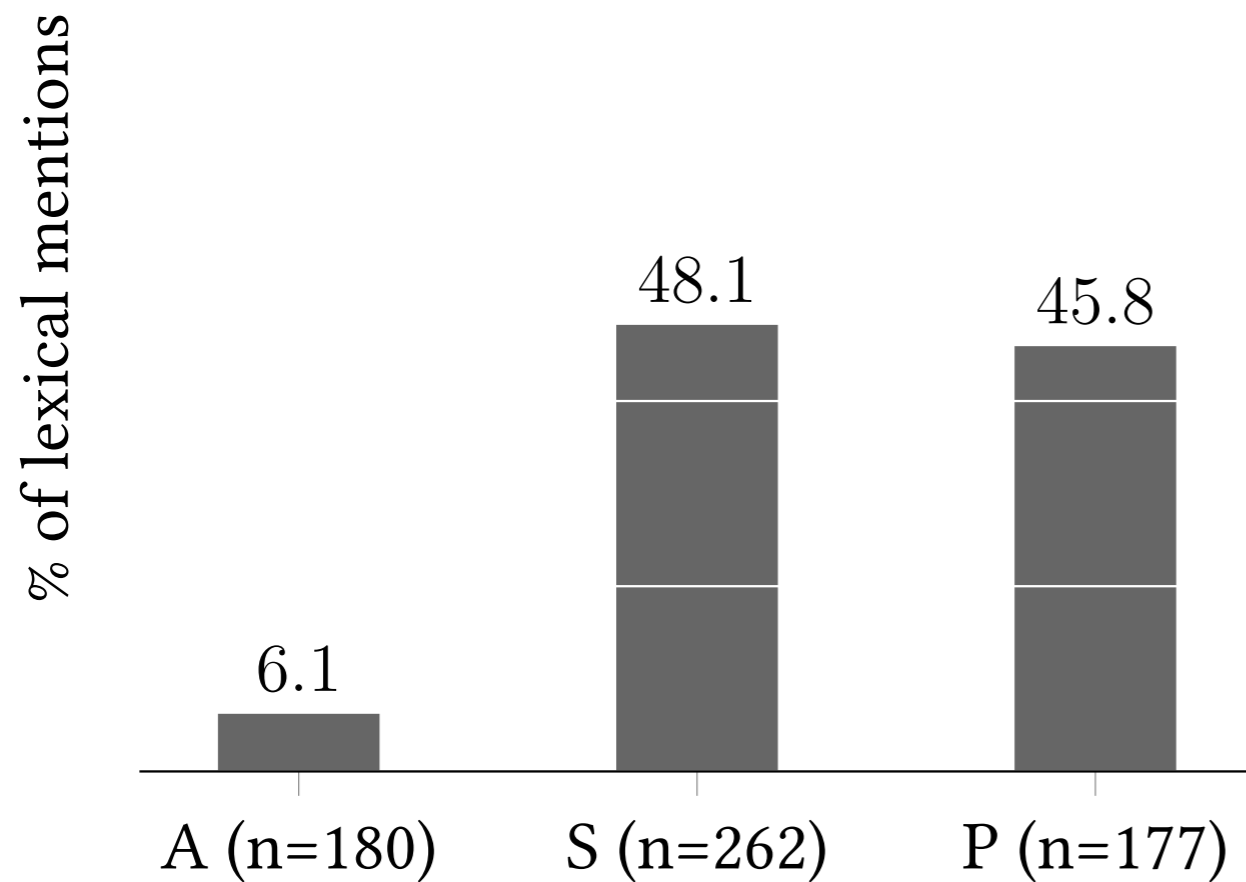
Information flow

- Information new to the listener is usually “packaged” together with already known information
- New information tends to be lexically expressed, whereas old information *can* be expressed pronominally or affixally

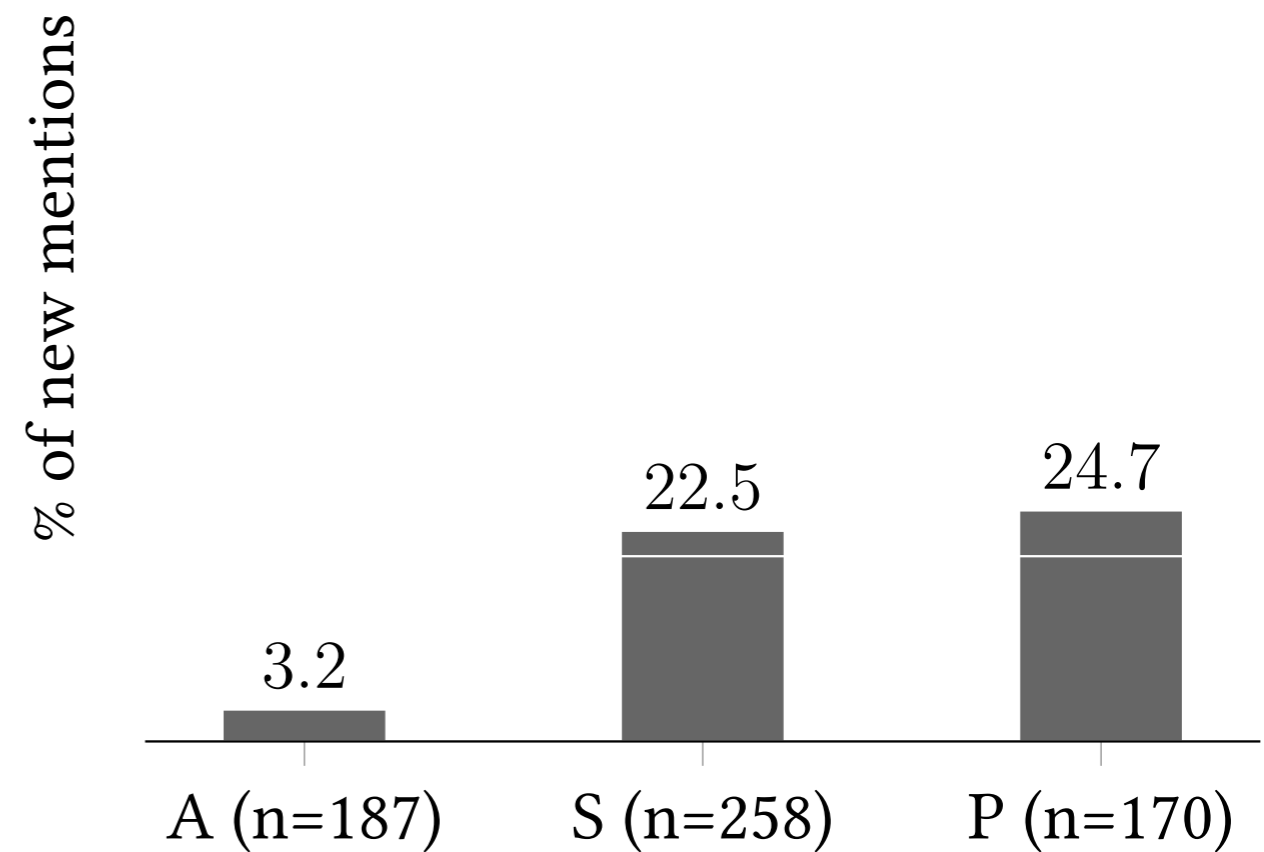
PAS: Preferred Argument Structure

- Du Bois (1987): Sakapultek (Mayan) “Pear film” corpus shows ergative patterning for ratios of lexically expressed and newly introduced referents in different syntactic roles
- S and P have high ratios of new/lexical referents, A has low ratios.
- Statistical preference for this distribution possible explanation for ergative alignment (“Discourse basis of ergativity”)
- Focus on third person arguments/texts (SAP usually not expressed lexically, high salience of referents in conversations)

Ergative patterning in Sakapultek discourse



(a) Ratio of lexical mentions in core roles



(b) Ratio of new mentions in core roles

Du Bois' constraints

	Grammar	Pragmatics
Quantity	One lexical argument	One new argument
Role	No lexical A	No new A

- These describe P[referred] A[rgument] S[tructure], which results in an ergative patterning of lexical/new mentions

Motivation for PAS

- Du Bois' explanation: Referent tracking is cognitively demanding on the listener
- Communication facilitated if listener “knows” where to preferably expect newly introduced referents
- Points of introduction are S and P, because of the constraints operating on A

PAS literature

- Sizable body of literature examining PAS in different languages (Du Bois et al. 2003 and sources therein)
- Du Bois' constraints seem to hold for various languages around the world
- PAS – a universal? Language-independent explanation for emergence of ergativity

Critics

- Haspelmath (2006), Everett (2009), Haig & Schnell (under review)
- **Alternative explanation for pattern: Human referents tend to be topical (→ non-lexical) and agentive (→ in A position)**
- Studies taking animacy into account show that **animacy is a better predictor for lexicality**
- Many studies don't really show $A \neq S = P$ in terms of newness/lexicality, but **$A < S < P$**
- Introductory role of S does not seem to hold
- Constraints are not needed / epiphenomenal

Competing explanations for differences between A / S / P

- Du Bois: Syntactic roles have cognitive constraints, preferring introduction of new referents in S or P role, leading to uneven distribution of new/lexical mentions across syntactic roles.
- Critics: Humans are typically topical, hence non-lexical, and agentive, hence A has lower ratio of lexical mentions.

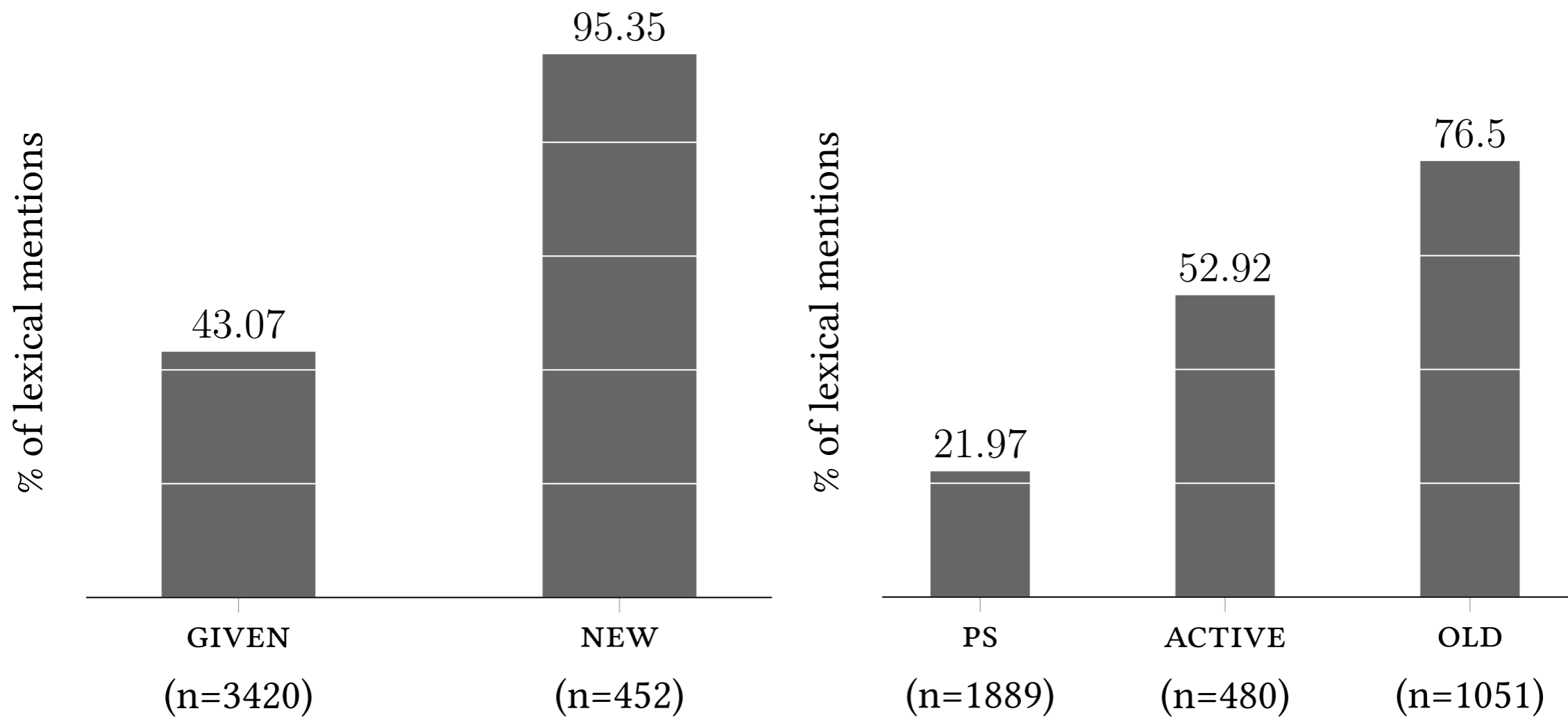
Method

- Corpus of 25 Mapudungun folk narratives: 2997 clauses, 4180 mentions/arguments (12 texts from 1910, 13 from 1991)
- Every mention of a referent categorised according to
 - syntactic role (S, A, P, T, R, OBL)
 - formal expression (lexical, pronoun, \emptyset)
 - animacy (human, animate, inanimate)
 - information status (previous subject, active, old, new) (after Arnold 2003)
 - semantic role
- **In many studies often only lexicality considered, information status ignored (lexical = new)**

Results: PAS

- No 1-to-1 correlation of lexicality and newness
- Quantity constraints not independent of quality constraints
- S intermediate between A and P for lexicality and newness
- A and S have high, P low proportions of humans
- Not many new humans, but relatively high lexicality of humans
- S shows higher lexicality for human referents than A

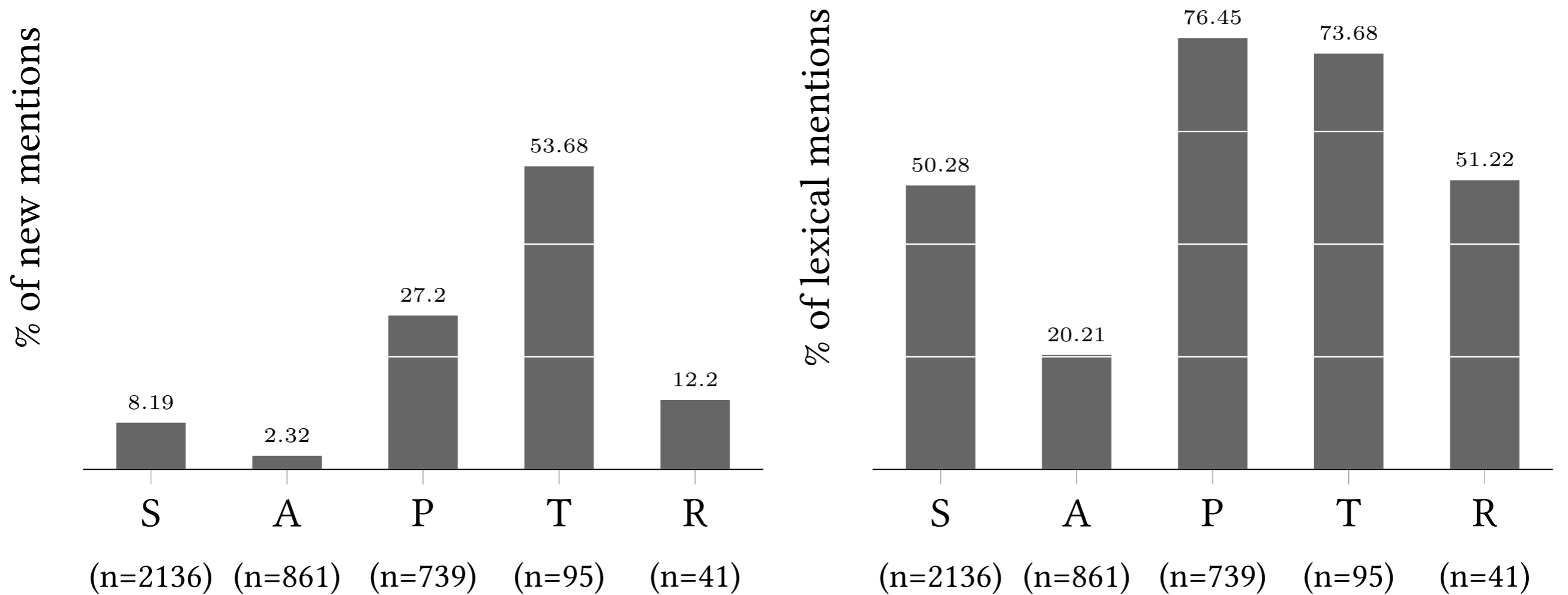
Results: Information status & lexicality



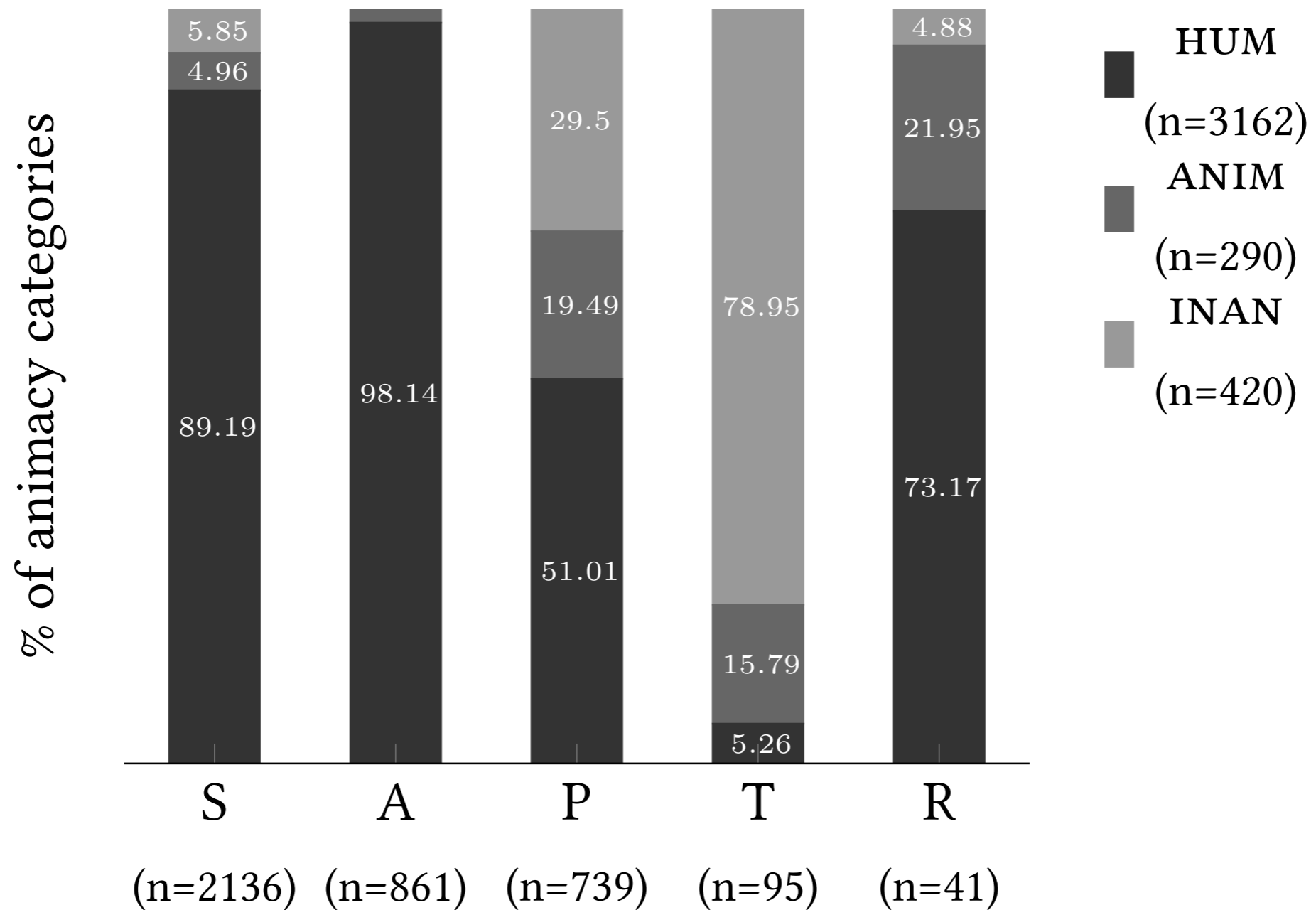
(a) Lexicality of given and new core arguments

(b) Lexicality of given core arguments with different salience

Results: $A < S < P$



Results: Animacy and roles



Results: human/non-human S

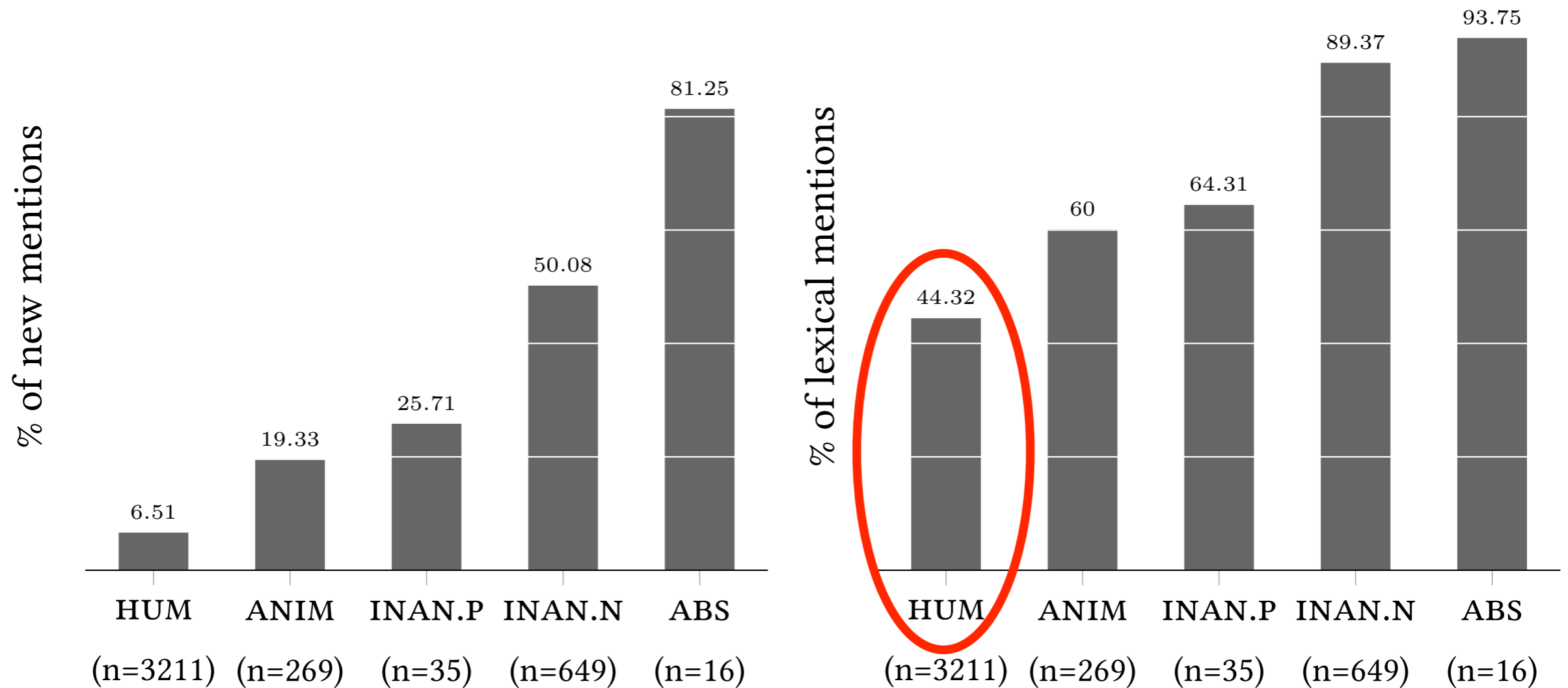
	New	Given	Total	%
A	20	614	861	2.32%
[+hum] S	111	792	1905	5.83%
[-hum] S	64	72	231	27.71%
P	201	174	739	27.20%

(a) Newness

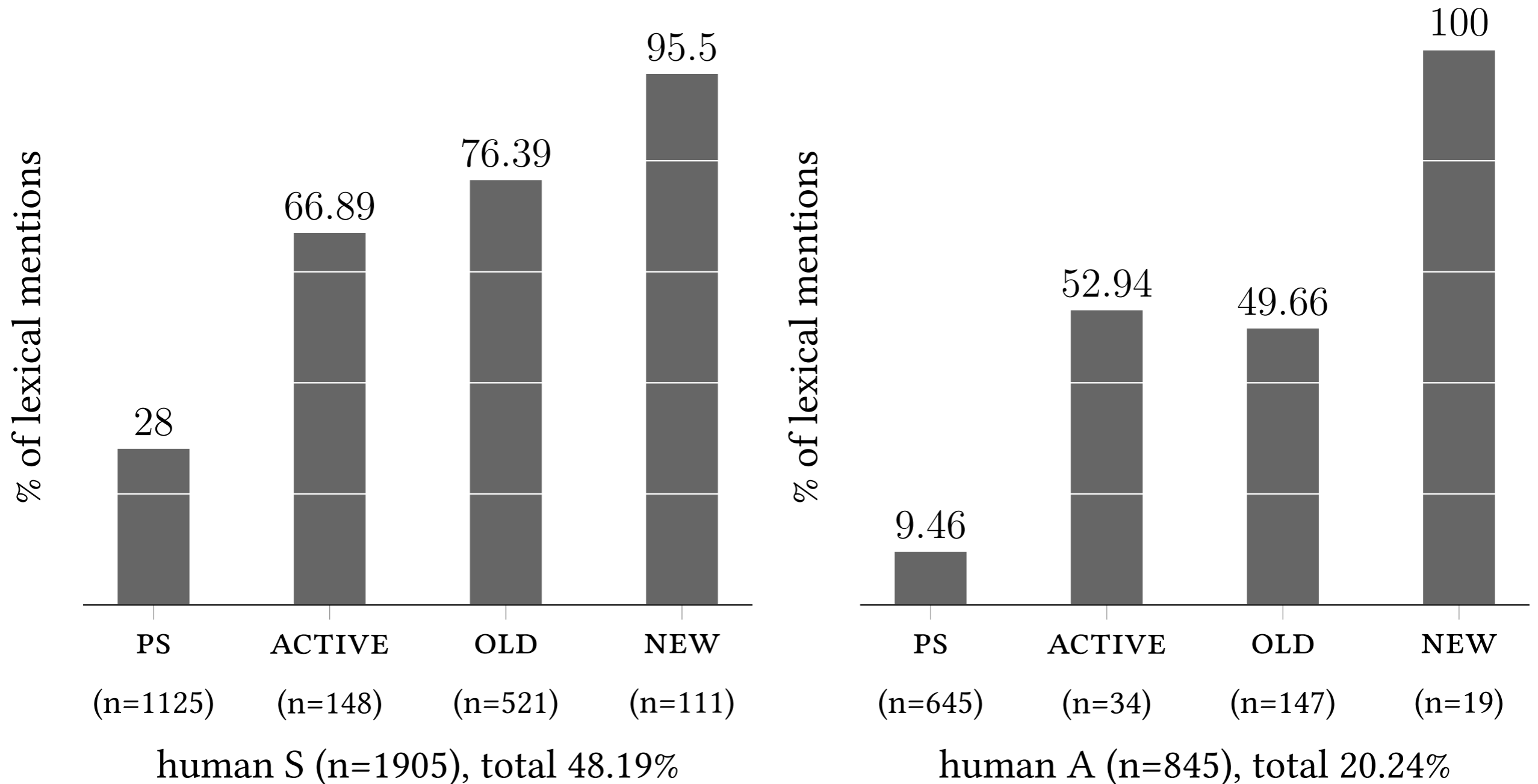
	Lexical	Zero	Total	%
A	174	687	861	20.21%
[+hum] S	918	987	1905	48.19%
[-hum] S	156	75	231	67.53%
P	565	174	739	76.45%

(b) Lexicality

Results: Animacy and newness/lexicality



Results: Human S's high lexicity



Discussion: PAS

- Humanness indeed good predictor for lexicality, as suggested by critics of PAS.
- However, (human) S has high lexicality (compared to A) regardless of information status – syntactic roles do seem to play a role
 - Cannot be explained by introductory role of S in information management.
 - But no alternative explanation found.
- Important to consider information status in this type of study.

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Everett, Caleb (2009). “A reconsideration of the motivations for preferred argument structure”. In: Studies in Language 33.1: 1–24.

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The discourse basis of ergativity revisited.

Haspelmath, Martin (2006). “Preferred Argument Structure: Grammar as Architecture for Function (Review)”. In: Language 82.4: 908–912.