

# Word order difficulties in narrative discourse produced by Danish children with SLI

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- Do difficulties with verb-second (V2) word order characterize Danish children with SLI ?
- Do word order difficulties correspond to use of nonfinite verbs in finite contexts as predicted by the EUCC account?

Danish has verb-second (V2) word order; the finite verb must appear in second position of the sentence:

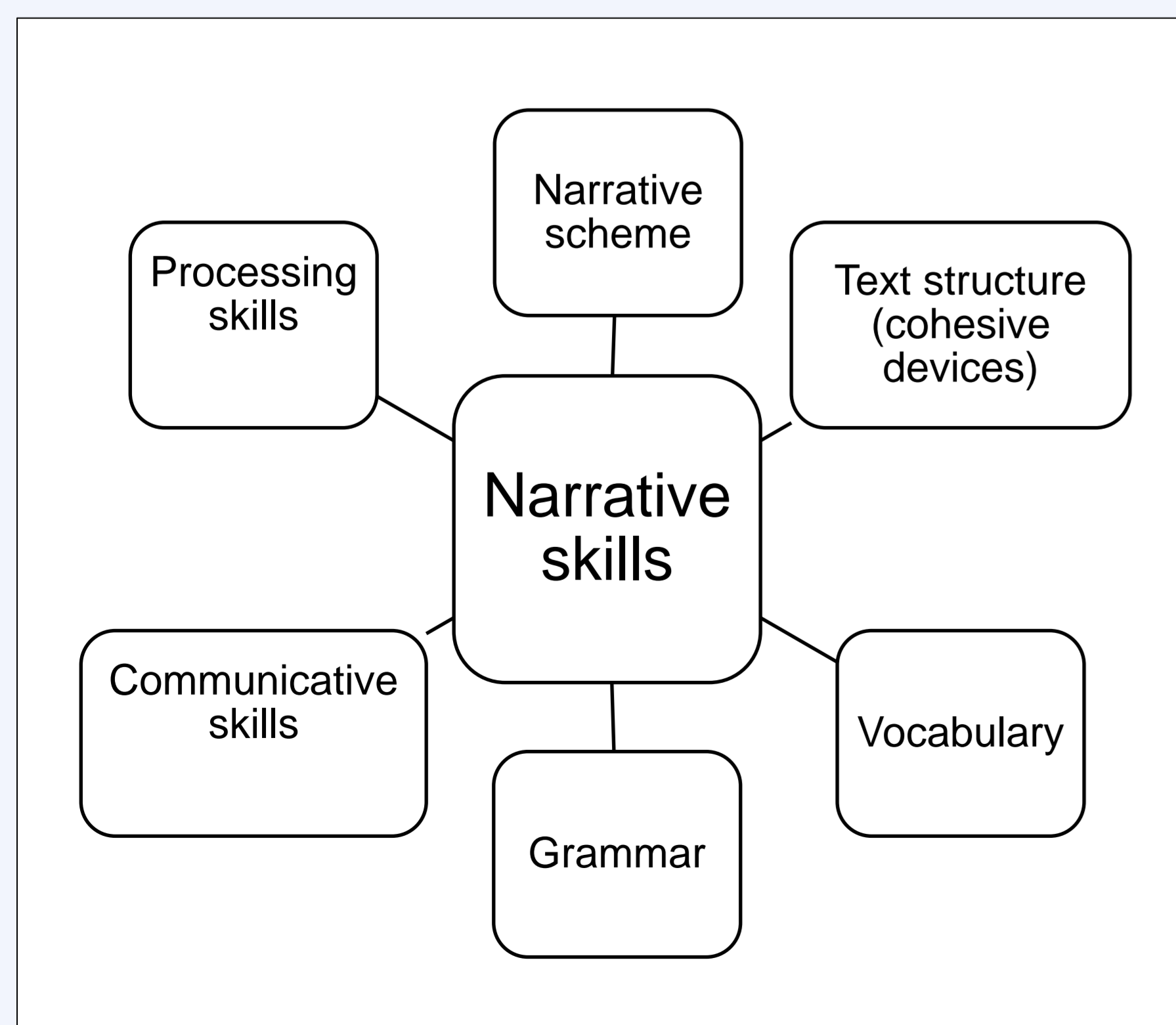
SVO: Anna spiser is ( <i>Anna eats ice cream</i> )
XVS: nu spiser Anna is ( <i>now eats Anna ice cream</i> )
XVS: hvor skal Anna spise is? ( <i>where will Anna eat ice cream?</i> )

Difficulties with word order have been found in SLI in V2 languages such as Swedish and German.

### Narrative discourse

Sentence initial connectives (*then, suddenly* etc.), are common in narratives; a cohesive device with consequences for word order in Danish due to V2.

Complex – but ecologically valid and useful in a wide age-range.



## Method

### Participants

	Children with SLI (SLI)	Age-matched controls (TDA)	Language-matched controls (TDL)
<i>n</i>	10	10	10
Age	6;1 5;2 – 7;11 <sup>(1)</sup>	6;1 5;2 – 7;9	<b>4;2</b> <b>3;8 – 5;7</b>
Expressive vocabulary	27.5 17 – 38	<b>40.0</b> <b>22 – 43</b>	28.0 22 – 35
Number of utterances in narrative	41.5 30 – 85	45.5 26 – 71	37.0 24 – 78
MLU <sub>w</sub> in narrative	4.80 3.47 – 5.73	<b>6.25</b> <b>5.44 – 6.81</b>	5.03 4.24 – 7.19

<sup>(1)</sup> Median and minimum - maximum. Values differing significantly from SLI values are made bold.

### Story generation task : Frog, Where are you? (Mayer, 1969)



<b>Severin</b> (SLI, 7;11)	så han kalder på frøen ( <i>then he calls for frog<sub>def</sub></i> )
<b>Alvin</b> (TDA, 7;9)	og så råbte de ud efter den ( <i>and then yelled they out for it</i> )
<b>Laurits</b> (TDL, 5;7)	så gik han ud i skoven langt langt og råbte på frøen ( <i>then went he out in forrest<sub>def</sub> far, far and yelled for frog<sub>def</sub></i> )

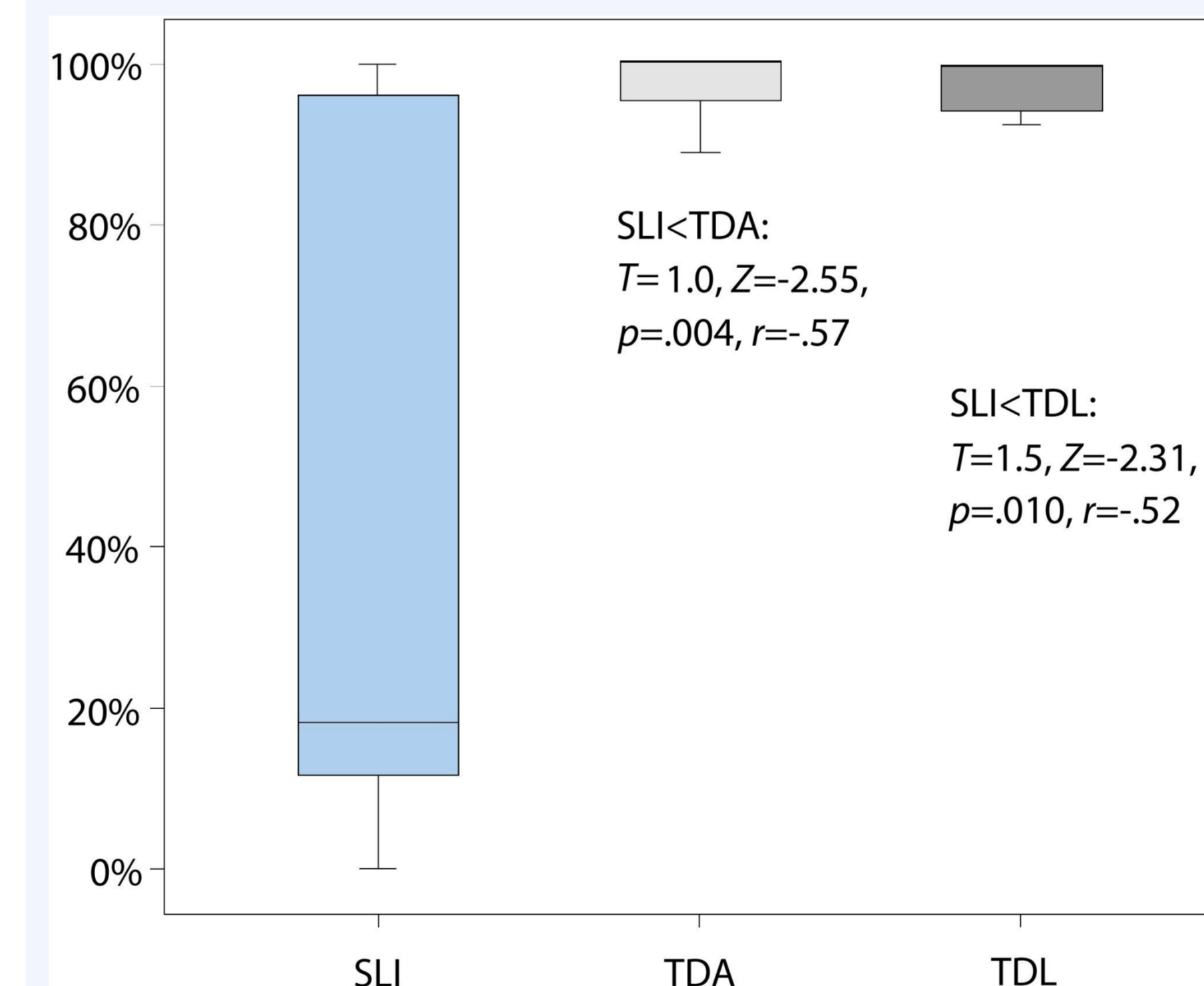
## Results I

Some Danish children with SLI clearly have difficulties with V2. Instead, they use rigid SV order resulting in XSV utterances.

XVS constructions (typically 'then' or 'wh'-word initially)

	SLI	TDA	TDL
Percentage XVS of all utterances	56.9 2.1 – 74.1	54.8 50.9 – 76.9	51.4 7.1 – 77.8

### Percentage XVS accurate



4 children with SLI above 90% XVS accurate

**Sam** (6;11) nu råbe de i hul  
(*now yell<sub>inf</sub> they in hole*)

6 children with SLI at or below 20% XVS accurate

**Severin** (7;11) så hjorten se  
(*then deer<sub>def</sub> see<sub>inf</sub>*)

	SLI	TDA	TDL
XSV, i.e. inaccurate XVS, with finite verb	3 0 – 22 (53)	0 0 – 3 (7) <sup>(2)</sup>	0 0 – 1 (2)

<sup>(2)</sup> Median and range plus number of occurrences for the group in ( ).

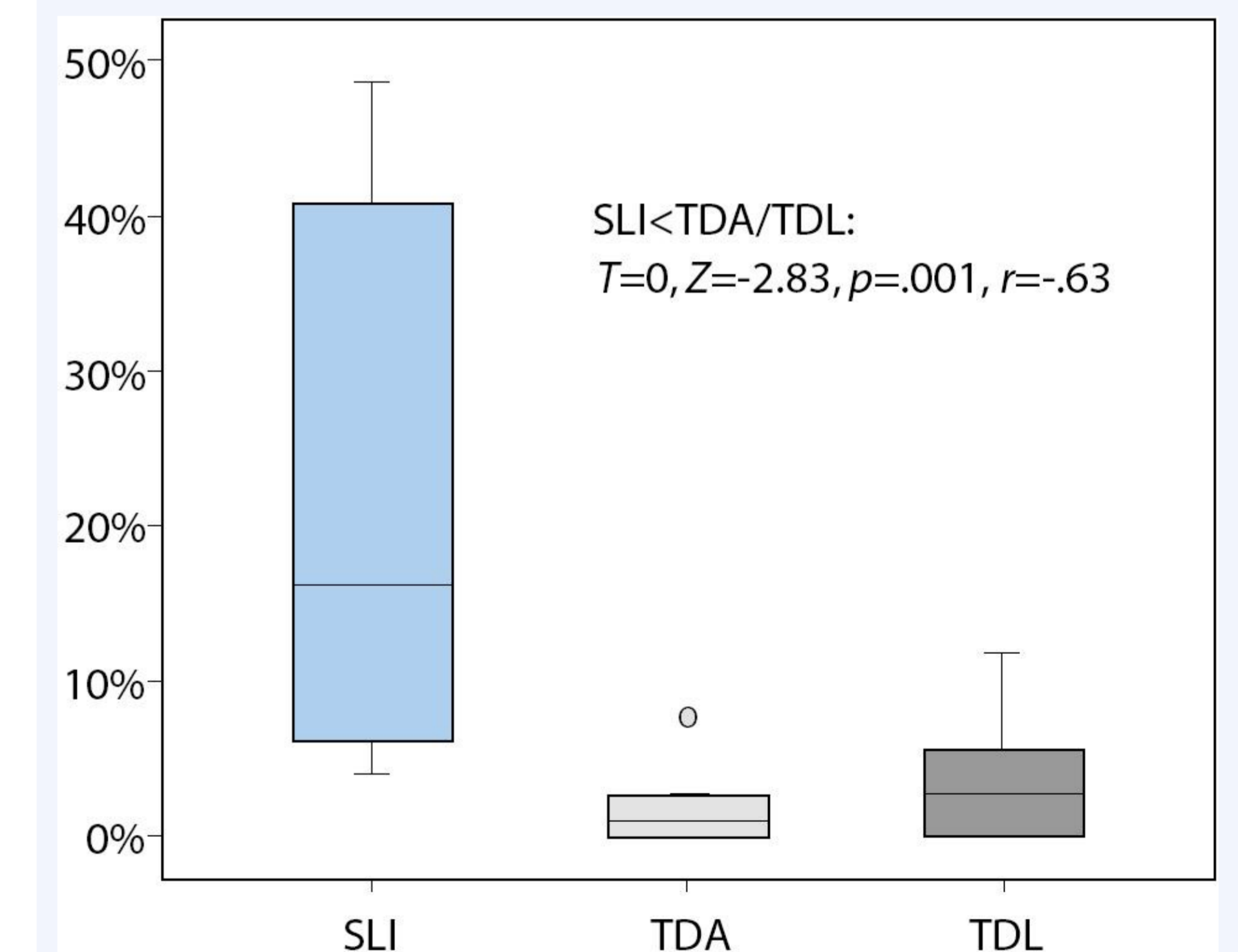
## Results II

No direct relation between the (in)accuracy of word order in XVS constructions and the use of nonfinite verbs in finite contexts.

### Nonfinite verbs (infinitive or participle) in finite contexts

	SLI	TDA	TDL
Number of nonfinite verbs	5.0 1 – 20 (87)	0.5 0 – 2 (6) <sup>(2)</sup>	1.0 0 – 2 (9)
Nonfinite verbs in inaccurate XVS	1.0 0 – 3 (11)	0	0 0 – 1 (1)
Nonfinite verbs in accurate XVS	0 0 – 6 (13)	0 0 – 1 (2)	0 0 – 1 (3)

### Percentage nonfinite for finite verbs



Correlation between occurrences of accurate XVS and non-finite verbs:  
Children with SLI:  $r_s = -.055$ ,  $p = -.88$

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