

Losing OV the French way

Pierre Larrivée
(Université de Caen Normandie)

Keywords: Language change, Syntax, French, Object, OV

The passage of OV to VO is well attested in Indo-European (e.g. Struik 2023 on Germanic, Poletto 2015 on Romance), and beyond (Kiparsky 2023). The decline of OV in the history of French has been described by a relatively small number of studies (see Marchello-Nizia *et al* 2020, Wolfe 2021). Leaving aside clitics which remain largely preverbal throughout, the overall situation is one in which preverbal DP objects are lost early on, followed by pronominal objects, and retained only with a couple of short quantifiers (*Il a tout fait / Il n'a rien fait*). The type of verbs also influences the development, and non-finite forms allow preverbal objects longer than finite verbs, as shown by Zaring (2010).

The causes for the pattern of change remains to be explained, which is the objective of this paper. This is achieved by first confirming the chronology of OV decline in French, and then identifying the morphosyntactic types of object and verbs that remain available in OV configuration through time. The investigation is based on two sets of syntactically annotated data. One series is chronicles from the 13th to the 19th century from the Normandy region (*Chroniques* corpus). The other is procedure styles, explaining the conduct of a trial, distributing between the 13th to the 16th, and from the same region (selected from the MICLE corpus). The calibration by prose style, text type, and region is expected to reduce non-structural variation.

The extracted occurrences are manually examined and analyzed to identify in a bottom-up way the morphosyntactic types of objects and verbs. For verbs, these categories relate to finite simple verbs, non-finite verbs as part of a compound verb phrase, and non-finite verbs on their own. For objects, they are DPs (whether headed by a determiner, a deictic determiner or a quantifier), bare nouns, deictic pronouns or quantifiers. These distinction are instrumental in demonstrating that each of the two morphosyntactic categories undergo the same cline of development, from DPs to bare nouns, to deictic pronouns, and finally only to quantifiers, lost first before finite verbs, to be maintained with compound non-finite verbs, and finally with isolated non-finite verbs.

The cause for this development of object types is sought in the interface with prosody. Drawing inspiration from Hinterhölzl (2017; see also van Kemenade, Hinterhölzl and Struik In press), we suggest that OV is lost gradually as preverbal objects are increasingly unable to bear phrasal stress. As Medieval French is changing to final phrasal stress (Rainsford 2011), full DPs OV are lost, as they would have to be stressed before the VP is, interrupting the verb phrase stress. Shorter elements that can be integrated into the VP phrasal stress are retained. The deictic pronoun *ce*, which has historically lost the ability to bear stress, can occur in later OV, and so can monosyllabic *tout* and *rien*. On the other hand, strong pronouns, which generally bear stress, are not admissible in later OV constructions. Why OV is maintained longer with non-finite verbs will be speculated upon.

The kind support of the *Agence Nationale de la Recherche* and of the *Région Normandie* are hereby gratefully acknowledged.

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