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Variation and Change in Old French Word Order: The case of *si*

Background: Although many unanswered questions still remain, large-scale changes in the evolution of French word order have been at the centre of much research within historical syntax (cf. Roberts 1993, Vance 1997, Labelle 2007, Labelle & Hirschbühler 2017). Crucially for the purposes of this workshop, Information Structure changes have been viewed *both* as crucial triggers and as effects of such changes in both descriptive and more formally oriented work on the history of French (Skårup 1975, Marchello-Nizia 1999, Fournier 2001, Zaring 2011, Salvesen 2013, Wolfe 2016). This presentation will focus on one seemingly small-scale feature of earlier French varieties which sets them apart from the contemporary language, the presence of the particle *si* (< Latin SIC 'thus'). The analysis, based on a new hand-annotated corpus of seven Old French texts, shows that the numerous and frequently contradictory claims in the literature regarding *si* can often be reconciled under an account where its formal characterisation, discourse-pragmatic value, and interaction with other areas of core clausal syntax varies markedly both synchronically and diachronically within the period conventionally referred to as 'Old French'. This permits a new analysis of the diachronic progression of the particle and its wider effects on the evolution of French syntax.

Previous Approaches: Whilst reaching adequate descriptive generalisations and a formally satisfying analysis of *si* remains elusive, the particle has amassed an enormous literature (cf. Marchello-Nizia 1985, Fleischman 1991 and Ledgeway 2008 for overview). However, none of the present accounts is unproblematic. Accounts of *si* as a simple adverb (Foulet 1928; Moignet 1973; Skårup 1975; Jensen 1990) fail to account for *si*'s sheer abundance across early French textual records and are a weak fit for cases such as (1) where *si* occurs after an initial clause, a pattern becoming near-systematic in the 13th century. This account likewise does not account for why *si* regularly occurs in conjunction with other adverbials expressing precisely the value of temporal succession adverb *si* allegedly encodes (cf. 2) (Fleischman 1991:263):

- (1) Et quant cil oïrent, si s'escrierent tuit a une voiz
and when they hear.3PL.PST SI REFL.CL=cry.3PL.PST all at one voice
'And when they heard, they all cried together...' (*Villehardouin* 66, 1)
- (2) quant a sa proie devoree, donc si s'endort gole bae
when has.3SG its prey devour.PTCP thus SI REFL.CL=sleep.3SG mouth open
'When it has devoured its prey, it then goes to sleep with its mouth wide-open' (*Eneas*1, 489-490)

The most prevalent analysis in the literature, that *si* is a marker of Topic continuity (Diez 1882; Van Reenen & Schøsler 1992, 1993, 2000; Fleischman 1991; Benincà 1995; Buridant 2000), will be shown to account for much of the data collected. However, we argue this analysis struggles to account for cases such as (3) where *si* co-occurs with a readily accessible thematic Subject or co-occurs with an informationally new postverbal Subject (4):

- (3) Souffrance si est semblable a esmeraude qui toz jorz est vert
suffering SI be.3SG similar to emerald which all days be.3SG green
'Suffering is similar to emerald, which is always green' (*Graal* 189c, 18)
- (4) E si i furent e Gerin e Gerers
and SI LOC.CL=be.3PL.PST and Gerin and Gerers
'And Gerin and Gerer were there' (*Roland* 107)

The final account which we argue is potentially promising is that of *si* as a last-resort element to satisfy the V2 constraint (Adams 1987 et seq.) operative in the early French period (Vance 1995; Salvesen 2013; Wolfe 2016). However, we suggest that the notion of 'last-resort' must be defined and any account along these lines must also address the clear discourse-pragmatic characteristics identified as being associated with *si* in much other work.

Data: Approximately 300 clauses were analysed and tagged for 15 syntactic and pragmatic variables from the *Base de Français Médiéval: Roland* (c.1100), *Thèbes* (c. 1150), *Eneas* (c.1155), *Charrette* (c. 1177-1181), *Villehardouin* (1199-1213), *Clari* (c. 1205), *Graal* (1225-1230). The main empirical findings are as follows: (i) There is a concomitant fall in *si*-initial clauses and rise in clause + *si* configurations; (ii) There is a diachronic increase in *si*'s co-occurrence with overt postverbal subjects, with informationally new

subjects most numerous in 12th century texts and informationally OLD subjects in 13th century texts; (iii) Indirect Object + *si* configurations are only attested in *Roland*, *Eneas* and *Charrette* but not in the latest texts, the same pattern is attested with Direct Objects; (iv) Scene-Setting or Speech-Act Adverbials co-occur with *si* across all texts whilst VP-adverbs are only attested co-occurring with *si* in *Roland*; (v) Configurations where *si* is preceded in the left periphery by two or more constituents show a moderate decline chronologically (2.99% of clauses in *Roland* vs. 0.33% in *Graal*).

Analysis: The analysis proposed is that the diachronic progression of *si* is a classic case of a particle with a strong discourse-pragmatic value that through grammaticalisation becomes progressively bleached through upwards reanalysis (Roberts & Roussou 2002) but that additional factors are also at play. **Stage 1:** In the *Roland* *si* has undergone a small-scale change from Latin *sic* in that it no longer encodes only temporal succession but also Topic continuity. The high occurrence of *si*-initial clauses is expected as *si* can act as the ‘default Topic’ in V2 main clauses and the low co-occurrence of overt pre- or post-verbal subjects is predicted as *si* typically resumes an existing accessible Topic. Although rare, the CLAUSE + *si* configuration occurs in the *Roland*. We suggest here that in the presence of a base-generated clause which does not satisfy V2, *si*’s structurally high first-merge position as a temporal deictic adverbial within the T-layer makes it the closest Goal to satisfy the V2-related Edge Feature on Fin in clauses where it occurs:

(5) [Frame Clause [Force [Topic [Focus [Fin *si* [Fin° V] [T... *si* [SubjP... [vP... [VP...]]]]]]]]]]

Stage 2: The marked decline in VP-ADVERB/DIRECT OBJECT/INDIRECT OBJECT + *si* clauses, the rise of CLAUSE + *si* configurations (3.98% in *Roland* vs. ~20% in *Thèbes*, *Eneas*, *Charrette*) and the fact *si* is now only compatible with ‘high’ CP-adverbials (6) suggests *si* is first-merged in SpecFinP in 12th century texts to satisfy the V2 constraint:

(6) et nequedant si s'an **gardot**...
and however SI LOC.CL look.3SG.PST
‘however, he looks at it...’ (*Eneas* 9255)

Whilst *Villehardouin* will be argued to instantiate a transitional stage, both *Clari* and *Graal* instantiate **Stage 3.** *Si* at this stage seemingly has no role in encoding Topic continuity, evidenced by the fact that the majority of overt postverbal subjects attested in *si*-clauses are discourse NEW. In line with recent work suggesting that the locus of V2 effects in French switches from a low to a high left-peripheral head (from Fin to Force) c.1200 (Rouveret 2004; Wolfe 2016), we argue that *si* as a V2-related expletive is reanalysed as a ForceP expletive in both *Clari* and *Graal*. Evidence for this comes from the fact that *si* in these texts is near-exclusively preceded by initial clauses or Scene-Setting adverbials and *si*-third clauses are hardly attested.

Consequences: The data show clearly that the texts from the period conventionally referred to as ‘Old French’ attest extensive synchronic and diachronic variation in clausal syntax and the syntax-Information Structure mapping. In this particular case, *si* offers a case-study of a particular area of Old French’s syntactic system where informational status seemingly loses value as the particle becomes increasingly associated with a narrow syntactic purpose of satisfying V2. Nevertheless, we conclude in the final part of the presentation that *si*’s effects on French’s discourse-pragmatic/syntax mapping are wide-reaching throughout its history. Firstly, *si*’s prevalence in Old French texts in contexts where in other Medieval Romance varieties we would find a Null Topic may have contributed towards the diminishing evidence confronting the acquirer that French was a Null Subject Language, leading to the eventual loss of the Null Subject property (cf. Roberts 1993). Secondly, we argue that *si*’s increasing incompatibility with moved elements in the left periphery may well have had another unnoticed effect, namely the general decrease in constituents reaching the left periphery via internal merge, yielding the relatively impoverished left periphery attested in most contemporary French varieties (cf. Rowlett 2007). Overall, although *si* may seem like a relatively ‘parochial’ area of Old French syntax, its importance in shaping core clausal syntax cannot be underestimated.

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