

Clause structure and illocutionary force in Medieval Gallo-Romance:
Clitic position in Old Occitan and early Old French verb-initial conjuncts

Bryan Donaldson
University of California, Santa Cruz

This paper examines the variable position of clitic (weak, atonic) object and adverbial pronouns in coordinated affirmative verb-first declaratives in two closely related medieval Gallo-Romance varieties, early Old French (prior to ca. 1200), and Old Occitan. In early Old French, these clitics appear either before the finite verb, as in (1) and (2), or after the finite verb, as in (3) and (4).

- (1) *É li poples ápluvéit de tutes parz é fud é se teneit od Absalon.*
“And people came in large numbers from everywhere and were with **and stood with Absalom.**” (*Li quatre livre des reis*, Curtius, 1911: 86)
- (2) *Si l’adoba et le fist chevalier.*
“He dubbed him **and made him a knight.**” (*Coronemenz Looïs* 1650 ms. B)
- (3) *É il meime ceinst l’espée, é li altre. E sewirent le bien quatre cenz cumpaignuns...*
“And he himself put on his sword, as did the others. And a good four hundred men followed him.” (*Li quatre livre des reis*, Curtius, 1911: 50)
- (4) *Or ne fera mes plus; trop a avant alé, E pesot li que tant en aveit trespasé.*
“From now on, he will not do more; he went too far, **and he regretted** having gone that far.” (*Becket* 1020)

Old Occitan shows the same type of variation, as in (5) and (6):

- (5) *Adonc lo baiza e l’abrassa.*
“Then she kissed him **and embraced him.**” (*Flamenca* 2961)
- (6) *Illí l’anet esgardar e trobet lo passat.*
“She went to look at him **and found him** deceased.” (*Douceline*; Gout 1927: 46)

In Old French, this variation is lost by about 1200, when this type of clitic appears only in preverbal position in all declaratives (including coordinated declaratives; Simonenko & Hirschbühler 2012; De Kok 1985). However, in Old Occitan, the variation in (5) and (6) is attested all through the medieval period (Hinzelin 2007). For early Old French, other than author (2019), no study to the best of my knowledge has attempted to pinpoint the semantic, discursive, or other factors that determine whether the clitic appears before or after the finite verb in verb-first coordinated declaratives, as in (1) through (4). For Old Occitan, earlier studies have treated the variation in (5) and (6) as random (Jensen 1994; Romieu & Bianchi 2002) or simply regional in nature (Hinzelin 2007). Only Mériz (1978) points to semantico-discursive factors distinguishing (5) from (6): for Mériz, in order for clitics to be preverbal in the second conjunct, “the actions linked by *e* must in some way be related” (p. 298). This observation is fundamentally correct but begs for refinement as well as a link to linguistic theory.

In this paper, I appeal to properties of the verb-second grammar of medieval Gallo-Romance (Wolfe 2019), to clausal structure (Labelle & Hirschbühler 2005; Benincà 2006), to discourse coherence (Asher & Vieu 2005; Hobbs 1985; Kearns 2006; Lascarides & Asher 1993), to the behavior of *verba dicendi* (Reis 1995; Marchello-Nizia 2012), and to abstract Force operators (e.g., Rizzi 1997; Ross 1970) to argue that the position of object and adverbial clitics was not random in early Old French and Old Occitan, and that it reflected semantico-discursive principles tied to illocutionary force.

Data from 20 early Old French texts (yielding 312 tokens) and 5 Old French texts (yielding 1507 tokens) support the hypothesis that sentential coordination occurred at two different levels of the syntax in these two languages, entailing two different clausal architectures,

and that the choice of coordination level reflected the presence of one versus two acts of assertion in the two conjuncts. Clitics are preverbal in the second conjunct when this clause represents a (verb-initial) TP and when the two conjuncts constitute a single act of assertion—a “conjunctive package” in Kearns’ (2006, p. 468) terms—united under a single operator of illocutionary force. On the other hand, clitics are postverbal in the second conjunct when this clause is a (verb-initial) CP. In this case, each of the two conjuncts represents an act of assertion, and as a result, each conjunct possesses its own operator of illocutionary force.

The results refine early observations by Mériz (1978) and shed light on an incompletely understood case of word order variation in early Old French and Old Occitan. They also reveal subtle grammatical and semantic-discursive similarities between two neighboring varieties of medieval Gallo-Romance. The proposal offers a theoretical account for variation in the choice of sentential coordination structure, which in turn determines the position of clitics.

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