

# Left-dislocation and pragmatic functions in Old French and Middle English: Evidence for language contact?

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Much descriptive work since the end of the nineteenth century supports the view that language contact between Old French (OF) and Middle English (ME) must have been intense and led to massive structural borrowing. In this vein, [Orr \(1962, v\)](#) points out "... how much of the most apparently homespun in the fabric of our language is in reality of French texture." However, surprisingly few papers have thoroughly investigated this claim from a generative, syntactic perspective (cf. [Haeberli, 2010](#)), let alone considered the comparative dimension (cf. [Cinque and Kayne, 2008](#)).

In this paper, we contribute to filling this gap by providing a comparative study of the correlation between information-structural properties of syntactic constructions like "topicalisation" and object left-dislocation, word order and prosody. The challenge consists of mapping empirical evidence to phenomena which are hard to come by in written corpora, like intonation, or which can at best be inferred from context, like discourse functions. More precisely, we will show that object left-dislocation structures in OF and ME had the same information-structural properties, e.g. the dislocated constituent could express both old and new information, which is no longer possible in both languages today. The following examples of left-dislocation show topic continuity (OF: (1), ME: (2)) as well as contrastive focus (OF: (3), ME: (4)):

- (1) je voai une fois a Dieu, **et ce veu** je l' ai tousjours tenu en secré ... (Froissart,165.2781, 14th c.)  
*I vowed once to God, and this vow I it have always kept sacred*
- (2) and slonked her in so hungerly that he lefte neyther flessch ne bone / nomore but a fewe fethers  
**the smal fethers** he slange them in wyth the flessch (CMREYNAR,53.337-8 )  
*the small feathers he swallowed them in with the flesh*
- (3) Mais **vos barons** en sa ballie S' il les trovout nes vilonast... (Tristan/Béroul v.1106ss, 13th c.)  
*But your barons in his realm if he them found them would mistreat...*
- (4) and of on þei put oute his eyne, **þe opir** þei broke his bak (CMCAPCHR,249.4166-7)  
*and of one they put out his eye, the other they broke his back*

We will correlate these and other functions of this construction to the function of object topicalisation and claim that object left-dislocation structures will always replace object topicalisation structures, which will gradually lead to the loss of Verb Second (for Verb Second in French and similar observations see e.g. [Adams, 1988](#); [Kroch, 1989](#); [Roberts, 1993](#)).

Since this development has also been brought into connection with changes in the intonation pattern of OF, the question of how to obtain evidence for the information-structural properties of constituents on the level of prosody is of particular methodological interest. A first indicator could be the study by [Marchello-Nizia \(1995\)](#): in OF two competing intonation patterns seem to have coexisted, one of which deviated from the Romance metrical pattern in that it was not strictly based on the total number of syllables but on the number of stressed syllables, following the Germanic pattern, which only occurred in Anglo-Norman verse. Further evidence will be taken from Palsgrave's teaching manual of (Middle) French ([Palsgrave, 1530](#)) to gain insights into this development which will then be compared with findings for ME. Since historical stages of languages are only attested in written speech and hence intonational properties of languages are hard to prove, other diagnostics must be taken into account as well, e.g. the occurrence and properties of discourse markers.

Our comparative study of object topicalisation and object left dislocation structures and their development will be based on work with annotated corpora for Old and Middle French (MCVF, Ottawa; SRCMF, Stuttgart), and Old and Middle English (YCOE and PPCME2, UPenn).

While our primary concern is the comparison and development of these structures in OF and ME, from a theoretical point of view our findings can be analysed in accord with [Kiparsky \(1995\)](#) or work based on a more elaborate left periphery (e.g. [Holmberg and Platzack, 1988](#); [Cinque, 1993](#); [Rizzi, 1997](#); [Poletto, 2000](#)).

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