

Clitic position in early Old French coordinated verb-first declaratives: Principled or free variation?

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This paper examines coordinated sentences in Old French (OF) in light of recent work on analogous structures in Old Occitan (OOc). In OF, after about 1200, object and adverbial clitics are systematically preverbal in verb-first affirmative declaratives introduced by *et* “and” (Simonenko & Hirschbühler 2012; De Dardel & de Kok 1996); in earlier texts, proclisis (1) and enclisis (2) are in variation. I investigate whether this variation is free or principled, for example by semantic and pragmatic-discursive factors (as recent research has claimed for OOc).

(1) Proclisis

- a. As esteilles s'en vunt e a la tenebrur, **E se sunt comandé** a Deu nostre seignur.
“*They went under the stars and through the darkness, and commended themselves to God our Lord.*” (*Becket*, v. 2034-2035).
- b. 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) Enclisis

- a. Or ne fera mes plus; top 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*, v. 1020)
- b. É il meime ceinst l'espée, é li altre. **E sewirent le bien** quatre cenz compaignuns...
“*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)

Generative approaches analyze OF (and other medieval Romance varieties) as a verb-second language (e.g., Vance, 1997; Benincà, 2006): main declaratives are CPs and evince verb raising to a head in CP (Holmberg 2015). In Benincà's (2006) analysis, clitic placement in Old Romance main declaratives depends on the saturation of SpecFocus, the leftmost position in the core of the clause per se (the traditional “first position”). Benincà observes that when SpecFocus remains empty, enclisis obtains; when SpecFocus is saturated, proclisis arises, as in prototypical verb-second declaratives and most embedded clauses.

In OF, the grammar of SpecFocus evolved: whereas prior to about 1200, SpecFocus could remain unsaturated, by 1220, saturation became obligatory (Foulet, 1928; Skårup, 1975; Simonenko & Hirschbühler, 2012), and all declaratives therefore uniformly contained proclisis if clitics were present. In earlier Old French, however, when SpecFocus was not obligatorily saturated, both proclisis and enclisis were possible (see 1 & 2).

Previous generative work suggests that coordination with *e(t)* occurs at different clausal levels in Medieval Romance. Poletto (2009), working on Old Italian, claims that *e(t)* necessarily coordinates CPs, and that enclisis arises because SpecFocus of the second conjunct is not (overtly) saturated. Simonenko & Hirschbühler (2012) for OF and Donaldson and Vance (2017) and Donaldson (2018) for Old Occitan propose coordination at two different syntactic levels: at the CP level (= enclisis when SpecFocus is empty) and at the TP level (= proclisis only).

Donaldson (2018) argued that in OOc, differences in clitic position in coordinated clauses are principled, reflecting distinct clausal architectures, rather than instances of free variation

within a single clause type. In particular, CP coordination (= enclisis) arises in instances of “rupture” (e.g., subject change between conjuncts, object change, transition from background to foreground information, sequential vs. simultaneous events, etc.), whereas proclisis appears in contexts of tight continuity between the conjuncts. In OOC, the strongest predictor of clitic position was whether the actions in the conjuncts were sequential and/or crucially ordered, as opposed to simultaneous/imperfect and not crucially ordered events.

This paper applies insights gleaned from OOC data to early OF, drawing on complete analyses of 18 11th- and 12th-century texts, yielding 478 tokens (to date; data collection is ongoing). Each token is analyzed for clause type, clitic position, preceding clause type, tense continuity between conjuncts, subject continuity, object continuity, sequentiality vs. simultaneity of events, adverbial scope, passage from background-foreground, passage from narrative to speech, and clausal polarity.

The data suggest parallels between coordination in early OF and in OOC, in that—in some early OF texts at least—there is evidence that rupture between the conjuncts triggers CP coordination (enclisis), as exemplified in the contrast between (3), in which the actions in the two conjuncts are ongoing and not crucially ordered, and (4), in which there are multiple instances of rupture between the conjuncts: sequential events, passage from direct speech to narrative, intervening clauses.

(3) Simultaneous/imperfective events, subject continuity; TP coordination --> proclisis
Venent conte e baron **e ly font** tenserie.

[as Alexander the Great conquered territories,] “Counts and barons came to him and provided aid.” (*Anglo-Norman Alexander*, v. 1085)

(4) Sequential/crucially ordered events, subject change; CP coordination --> enclisis
Respundi Samuel: ‘Si cume tu as fait mainte mere sen siz, si iert ta mere senz fiz.’ **E detrenchad le** erranment...

“Samuel responded: ‘Just as made many mothers lose their sons, so too will your mother lose her son.’ **And he slaughtered him** immediately... (*Li quatre livres des reis*; Curtius, 1911: 30)

This contrast closely resembles OOC and suggests that, at least in very early OF, the choice between CP and TP coordination reflected pragmatic-discursive and semantic factors. However, in other texts, no variation in clitic position is present, or variation occurs but does not seem principled, at least in ways discernible through the present analysis. This finding suggests that in some texts, the grammar has already evolved far enough toward (eventually obligatory) TP coordination, such that any (putative) principled distinction between CP and TP coordination is no longer visible. Instances of enclisis (CP coordination) in such texts are merely relics of the earlier grammar and no longer vary in a meaningful way with instances of proclisis.

These data of interest not only for the diachrony of French but also for comparison of medieval Romance varieties. For OF, the findings refine our understanding of changes to how the grammar treated SpecFocus and also other coordination phenomena, such as *écrasement* of a clitic. On a comparative level, the findings suggest that changes to the V2 grammar affected coordination in both OF and OOC, in each case resulting in the loss of a semantico-discursive nuance, albeit at different points in time (Old Italian, on the other hand, appears to have avoided this change altogether). Whereas the period of variation between enclisis and proclisis is well attested for OOC, the available data for OF document only the end stages of this diachronic change.