1. Introduction

A growing body of work explores the role of Information Structure (henceforth IS) on word order variation and change. The cartographic approach to syntactic structures (e.g. Cinque 2002; 2006; Cinque and Rizzi 2008; Rizzi 1997; 2004), despite its shortcomings (Craenenbroeck 2009), has shown that specific positions in the clause appear to be dedicated to topic and focus constituents (Belletti 2004; Benincà 1999; 2006; Benincà and Poletto 2004; Benincà and Munaro 2010), and a growing number of authors argue that changes in word order reflect changes in how a language expresses these notions (e.g. Benincà 2006; Roland Hinterhölzl 2009; Hinterhölzl and Petrova 2009; 2010; Laenzlinger 2006; Kroch and Santorini 2009; and the various papers in Batllori and Hernanz 2011). The present paper centers on Old French (OF) V1 and V2 structures with the aim of bringing to light the possible correlations between the informational role of phrases and their position.
Since the end of the 19th c., it has been observed that the Old French finite verb tends to be found in second position in main clauses (Thurneysen 1892; Foulet 1928; Skårup 1975).

(1) messe e matines ad li reis escultet
    mass and matins has the king heard
    ‘The king has attended mass and matins’
    (1100, Roland 11;139)

This verb-second, or V2, property is well documented in German and other Germanic languages. Within the Principles and Parameters’ approach of the 1990’s, V2 was analyzed as having the verb under C and some constituent in Spec,CP, this position corresponding to Skårup (1975)’s place du fondement, or German’s Vorfeld (Adams 1987; 1988; Platzack 1995; Roberts 1993; Vance 1995). This is represented schematically in (2) (using the copy+delete representation of move):

(2) $[CP \underline{messe \ e \ matines} \ ad \ [IP \ li \ reis \ ad \ escultet \ \underline{messe \ e \ matines}]]$

A number of authors have recently challenged the V2 analysis of Old French, in part based on the argument that V1 and V3 constructions are more frequent in Old French than in either modern German (Ferraresi and Goldbach 2002; Kaiser 2000; 2002; Kaiser and Zimmermann 2011; Rinke and Meisel 2009) or Middle High
German (1050-1350) (Elsig 2009). Among these, Rinke and Meisel (2009) claim, on the basis of a study of two early 13th c. texts (Villehardouin and Les 7 sages de Rome), that in Old French the preverbal position is a Topic position. In declaratives, the verb would surface under Tense; the preverbal position (Spec,TP) would be a Topic position, and the VP would contain the Information Focus portion of the clause.

(3)  \[ TP \ XPTop \ V \ [VP \ldots ]_{Foc} \]

For the authors, this means that

1)  subject-inversion would be “contingent on the topicalisation of a non-subject constituent” (p. 112)\(^2\), and

2)  subjects would move to the preverbal position to avoid their being interpreted as Information Focus or as part of a thetic sentence (“An incompatibility of the post-verbal subject with an interpretation as information focus or as part of a thetic sentence would cause the subject to move to the pre-verbal position.”, p.109).

In this perspective, OF contrasts with contemporary German, where the informational role of the preverbal position is not restricted to Topics, but may also be occupied by a Focus or an adverb that is neither Topic nor Focus. On the other hand, OF turns out to be similar to Old High German if, as argued by Hinterhölzl and
Petrova (2010; 2011), the OHG verb served to separate the aboutness Topic from the comment (for these authors, the evolution to modern German would result from a neutralization of the information structural specialization of the sentence-initial position). According to Rinke and Meisel, in being a Topic-initial language, OF would have a grammar similar to that of contemporary Romance null subject languages like Italian, Spanish or Portuguese (but see Remberger 2010 for evidence that Focus elements may be initial in these languages).

In the research presented here, we study Old French V1 and V2 constructions from the perspective of these information structural accounts. On the basis of previous research, we expect early 12th c. texts to allow preverbal Focus constituents (Marchello-Nizia 1995; 2009; Rickard 1962) (this research is discussed below under 5.2). However it may be that the language passed through a transitional Topic-initial stage (TVX) before becoming SVO (see Fleischman 1992: 463). The purpose of the present paper is therefore to test the hypothesis that the Old French grammar passed through a stage corresponding to Rinke and Meisel’s characterization, in which:

1) The preverbal position is reserved for Topics.

2) Subjects move to the preverbal position in order to avoid being interpreted as part of the Focus.
We will provide arguments against both claims. It is important to realize that the second claim does not necessarily follow from the first one, since there may be more than one topical constituent in a clause. Thus, Speyer (2010) showed that, in German, when two or three of the following types of topical constituents are present in a clause, (1) Information Topic, (2) Scene-setting Topic, (3) element standing in a poset relation to some discourse set, the competition for the vorfeld position is resolved according to the following ranking: scene-setting >> poset >> I-topic; the other topic(s) are realized postverbally. A similar competition may occur in a language where the verb is in second position and the preverbal position is reserved for a Topic. If the ranking observed in German for the vorfeld applies to a TVX language, we expect to observe sentences with a Scene-setting Topic in preverbal position and a postverbal subject fulfilling the role of Information Topic. In such a language, 1) would be verified, but not 2). If, however, the Old French verb marks the boundary between Topic and Focus constituents, we would expect the verb to appear in third position whenever there are two topical constituents in the clause, and in fourth position if three topical constituents are present.
2. Information structure – Definitions

Notions like Topic and Focus are notoriously complex. In the present paper, the following operational definitions are adopted:

**Information Topic**: “The Topic constituent identifies the entity or set of entities under which the information expressed in the comment constituent should be stored in the [Common Ground] content.” (Krifka 2008) As formulated by Krifka, this definition applies specifically to the entity which is the subject of discourse, i.e. the Aboutness topic (Reinhart 1982) or Information Topic (I-Topic). An I-Topic may co-occur in a clause with other types of topics, like frame-specifying topics, which are generally clause-external and have different functions (cf. Andréasson 2007; Nikolaeva 2001). An I-Topic is typically a definite constituent, referring to an entity given in the discourse or accessible in the Common Ground (this corresponds to Valduvi 1993’s *link*).

**Information Focus**: The Information Focus (I-Focus) is linked to the pragmatic principle of Progression (e.g. Charolles 1978) which states that if a sentence is to be informative, it must contain material that is new in relation to previously known information (the background). The I-Focus of the sentence is the new information that should be stored in the Common Ground.
According to Gundel & Fretheim (2004), these notions of Information Topic and Information Focus correspond to *relationally given/new information* respectively, and are equivalent to the notions of *Theme/Rheme*, or *Topic/Comment*. However, it has been pointed out that the Comment is not always equivalent to the I-Focus, since it may contain an informative part (the I-Focus per se) as well as background (uninformative, relationally given) information. For example, in (4), from Krifka (2008: 42, ex. 41), *married her* in sentence B is background information within the comment (Büring 2007: 5; Vallduví 1993’s *tail*).

(4)  
A: When did [Aristotle Onassis]_{Topic} marry Jacqueline Kennedy?  
B: [He]_{Topic} [married her [in 1968]_{Focus}]]_{Comment}

*Thetic* sentences are all-focus. This is the case with the second sentence in a dialog like: *What happened? The telephone rang*.

**Contrastive Focus**: A Contrastive Focus (C-Focus) is defined by Gundel & Fretheim (2004) as being “material which the speaker calls to the addressee’s attention, thereby often evoking a contrast with other entities that might fill the same position.” The notion of contrast is also present in Krifka’s (2008) definition of Focus as indicating the presence of alternatives. Contrastive Focus may be marked by prosody or by expressions like *even, only, also.*
Contrary to the I-Focus, a C-Focus may be part of a Topic, as in the following example:

(5) A: What do your siblings do?
    B: [My [Sister]_{Focus} [studies MEDicine]_{Focus}, and
        [my [BROther]_{Focus} is [working on a FREIGHT ship]_{Focus}.

Krifka (2008: 44) talks of Contrastive Topics in that case (a Contrastive Topic being defined as an aboutness Topic containing a Focus). (On the difference between I-Topics and C-Topics, see Lipták 2010).

With these notions in mind, let us turn to our study.

3. The Corpus

The data are extracted from the MCVF corpus of Old French parsed texts (Martineau et al. 2010, and Penn supplement). We selected the 19 texts dated between 980 and 1309. From these texts, we extracted all positive declarative matrix clauses with a full DP subject. We report here our analysis of V1 and V2 clauses (V3+ clauses were kept for later investigation).

One characteristic of the corpus in its present state is that the 12th c. texts are all in verse except for the Quatre Livres des Rois (1170). This is due to the lack of 12th c. prose texts, all surviving texts of
some length being in verse. Conversely, all of the 13\textsuperscript{th} c. texts in the corpus are in prose, with the unfortunate consequence that there is (near) conflation of the text genre and time variables. In the figures to be presented, both the date and the text genre will be indicated.

4. V1 clauses

If the OF verb marks the boundary between Topic and Focus constituents, we would expect the post-verbal subjects in V1 clauses to correspond to the I-Focus. In order to verify this prediction, we selected strict V1 clauses (i.e. not introduced by a coordinator, since coordinated V1 declaratives may have their own characteristics, Labelle and Hirschbuhler 2005).

Let us first consider sentences other than those where the verb introduces direct discourse. Taking the context into account, we coded the subjects in all these sentences as being I-Topics, I-Focus, or Unclear (see Cook and Bildhauer 2011 for a discussion of the difficulties facing the coding of information structure). The results are displayed in Table 1. While there is a dominance of I-Focus (rhematic) subjects, the fact that over a third of the postverbal subjects were coded as I-Topics confirms Rouveret (2004: 196)’s comment that “It does not seem that the postverbal position in [OF] V1 sentences is pragmatically specialized.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I-Focus</th>
<th>I-Topic</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.5%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Informational role of postverbal subjects in V1 declaratives

The following examples illustrate subjects that were coded as being Topics:

(6) Curecerent s’en les princes des Philistiens
got-angry REFL GEN the princes of-the Philistians
‘The princes of the Philistians got angry at this.’

(1170; QLR1-2;1332)

(7) Cunuit Brandans a l’air pluius
knew Brendan from the air rainy
Que li tens ert mult annūus.
that the weather was very worrysome
‘Brendan knew from the wet wind that the weather was worrysome’

(1120; Brendan, 56;675)

Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of V1 declaratives over time (the numbers indicated at the bottom of the graph correspond to the total number of relevant examples in the texts). In Roland (1100), the
large majority of postverbal subjects were coded as being Focus, but in Brendan (1120) and the Quatre livres des Rois (1170), they were more often Topics. The construction dropped out of the language at the beginning of the 13th c. when the language became more strictly V2. This is why there are few examples after 1170; three texts of the corpus dated between 1205 and 1267 do not appear in the figure because they contain no V1 declarative. After 1267, V1 declaratives re-appear. They contain no clear Topic subject, but there are only 7 examples.

Let us now turn to verbs introducing direct discourse. Here V1 declaratives alternate with V2 declaratives, some of type SV(X), and some of type XVS. The three constructions are illustrated schematically in (8-10). We did not consider parentheticals and cases where the verb of saying follows the direct discourse, since
there is no word order variation in these cases (the subject is always postverbal).

(8) Dit Roland: « ... » = VS
    ‘Says Roland: ….’

(9) Roland dit: « ... » = SV
    ‘Roland says: ….’

(10) a. Ça dit Roland: « ... » = cataphoric object VS
    ‘This says Roland: ….’

    b. Donc dit Roland: « ... » = adverb VS
    ‘Thus says Roland: ….’

As far as we could see, the subject has the same informational function in the three constructions: it signals a new speaker or a change of speaker. In the three constructions, the subject is almost always definite (there are 7 indefinite subjects out of 580 V1 declaratives, distributed across the 3 constructions). With the disappearance of VS declaratives at the beginning of the 13th c., we may ask the following question: by which construction are VS declaratives replaced? If the postverbal position of the subject in VS declaratives was due to its informational role, we would expect VS sentences to be replaced by XVS sentences. However, Figure 2 shows that between 1177 and 1225, VS sentences, which drop to
zero percent, are replaced by SV(X) sentences more often than by XVS sentences.

This suggests that the VS order in declaratives resulted from a desire to place the verb first, and not from a desire to place the subject in postverbal position. When speakers started to avoid placing emphasis on the verb in declaratives, a V2 construction was used instead, and subjects were largely preferred over either objects or adverbs to fill the preverbal position (cf. Labelle and Hirschbuhler 2005 for an analysis).

5. V2 clauses

Let us now turn to V2 clauses. Two questions are addressed in this section: Firstly, do postverbal subjects belong to the comment or are the I-Focus of the clause? Secondly, what is the informational role of preverbal constituents?
5.1 Subjects

Since definite subjects tend to be topics while indefinite subjects make bad topics & are often found in thetic sentences, we may ask ourselves whether there is a marked tendency to find definite subjects preverbally and indefinite subjects postverbally. We therefore coded the nature of subjects in non-coordinated V2 sentences. Figures 3a and 3b show that both preverbally and postverbally, subjects are overwhelmingly definite.

Figure 3
If we concentrate our attention on the 192 indefinite subjects, we find a small tendency to place indefinite subjects postverbally, but clearly no exclusion of indefinite subjects from the preverbal position: 44.7% of indefinite subjects are found preverbally in verse texts (12th c.) and 43% in prose texts (1170 and 13th c.). The following examples show that these indefinite preverbal subjects may be I-Focus.

(11) (Une forest aveit entur, Trente liwes ot de lungur.)
(There was a forest about, It was thirty leagues long)
Un seinz hermites i maneit
A saint hermit LOC lived
‘A saint hermit lived there’
(1180; Marie de France, Eliduc 182; 3715)

(12) Une musteile vint curant,
A weasel came running
‘A weasel came running’
(1180; Marie de France, Eliduc 187; 3815)

(13) Doi gentil homme du païs,
two gentlemen of-the country,
qui pas ne l’amoient,
who not NEG him liked
saillirent hors a un trespas,
jumped out at a passage

‘Two gentlemen of the country, who didn’t like him, jumped out at a passage’

(1267; Cassidorus, 643; 4056)

Considering only texts containing more than ten indefinite subjects, we observe a small decrease in the tendency to place indefinite subjects in preverbal position (Figure 4), but the percentage of preverbal indefinite subjects at the end of the period is still 35%. Therefore, it does not appear that there is a constraint against rhematic (I-Focus) subjects in preverbal position.

To summarize, the distribution of definite vs indefinite subjects in the corpus does not support the hypothesis that preverbal subjects are always Topics or that postverbal subjects always part of the comment or Information Focus of the clause. The following
sections will provide examples of overt postverbal subjects which are 1-Topics.

5.2 Preverbal constituents distinct from a subject

Recall that Rinke & Meisel claim that, while in German the constituent in the prefield may be a Topic, an Informational Focus, a Constrastive Focus or an adverb that is neither topic nor focus, in Old French the preverbal constituent would always be a Topic or an adverb linking with the preceding discourse, which Rinke & Meisel consider as a type of Topic. In the present section, we consider XVS sentences with the aim of determining whether the preverbal position is a Topic position, and whether the postverbal subject is always interpreted as being part of the information Focus portion of the clause.

**Contrastive Focus.** Let us first observe that a contrastive focus may occupy the preverbal position.

(14) Meïsmes a l’empereour sont les lermes venues
    even to the emperor are the tears come-PRT
    aus yex,
    to-the eyes
    ‘even to the emperor, the tears came to the eyes’

    (1267; Cassidorus, 664;4447)
Rickard (1962, 19) provides many other examples of clause-initial C-Focus constituents in Old French texts, like the following, where vaincu in the second clause contrasts with mort in the previous clause:³

(15) Vous m’avez mort sans recouvrer,
    You me have dead without recourse,
    mais vaincu ne m’avez vous mie.
    but defeated NEG me have you not
    ‘You killed me without recourse,
    but you have not defeated me.’

    (Merlin in prose, ii. p. 52)

In addition, if we are correct in considering that, in (16)-(18), the information conveyed by the preverbal subject is the new information conveyed by the sentences (here of type SV(X)) , these examples provide further confirmation that a preverbal constituent may be a contrastive focus.

(16) Meïsmes la pucele y fu
    even the girl LOC was
    ‘even the girl was there’

    (1267; Cassidorus, 149;1211)

(17) Sul David é Jonathas le sourent.
    only David and Jonathas it knew
'only David and Jonathan knew it'

\[ (1170; \text{QLR1-2;757}) \]

(18) Nes li oisel s’ an istront fors;

even the birds REFL GEN go-FUT away

tend to be more often rhematic (I-Focus) than thematic (I-Topic) (pp. 99-100). By contrast, the OV(S) order is more restricted in the Queste, where it serves mainly to thematize the object; when the object is rhematic, the OVS order is marked and is found mainly in idioms of type *mander saluz* (send greetings) (19), or when O is either strongly focused or cataphorically linked to the discourse.\(^4\)

(19) Saluz vos mande li bons chevaliers

Greetings you send the good knight

‘The good knight sends you his greetings’

\[ (\text{Queste, p. 30, in Marchello-Nizia, 1999: 44}) \]
The change in the informational role of the preverbal object is confirmed in our corpus. Taking into account the context, we coded all preverbal objects in V2 sentences as being Topic, Focus or Unclear. As shown in Figure 5, a preverbal object tends to be the I-Focus of the clause before 1205 but the I-Topic after 1225. It is important to realize, though, that OVS with a preverbal Focus object is grammatical until the end of the period studied; at the end of the period this construction still makes up twenty to forty percent of preverbal objects.

![Figure 5](image)

In the present corpus, when the preverbal object is an I-Focus, the postverbal subject is generally interpreted as the Topic. This situation is illustrated in (20)-(23).

(20) .XX. escheles ad li reis anumbrees.

 twenty columns has the king counted

‘the king has counted twenty columns’

(1100; Roland, 112;1459)
et divers chanz chantoit chacuns;
and various songs sang each-one’
‘and they all sang various songs’

La main destre leva adonques la dame,
The hand right raised then the lady
‘Then the lady raised the right hand’

La maniere comment il pristrent la cite de Baudas
The manner how they took the city of Baudas
and the caliph us told the merchants
‘The merchants told us how they took the city of Baudas and the caliph’

This means that the particular analysis of Rinke and Meisel according to which the subject moves to the preverbal position to escape being interpreted as part of the information Focus is incorrect. In Old French, a postverbal subject may be the I-Topic while the preverbal position is occupied by an I-Focus. In other
words, the verb does not mark the boundary between Topics and Focus constituents.

**Preverbal predicates and quantifiers.** Let us now turn to other types of preverbal constituents. The preverbal field may contain constituents that are not candidates to topichood and that must be interpreted as being part of the comment. These include quantifiers, non-finite verbs, adjectives and other predicates. Examples are given in (24-27); the postverbal subject was coded as being the I-Topic of the clause.

(24) Mut est Lanval en grant esfreie! =QP
    much is Lanval in great fright
    ‘Lanval is greatly afraid’
    (1180; Marie de France, Lanval, 196; 78.1592)

(25) Trenchet li ad li quens le destre poign, = NF-V
cut-PRT him has the count the right hand
‘The count has cut his right hand’
    (1100; Roland, 142; 1926)

(26) Malade ot geü longuemant la pucele, = Adj
    sick has laid a-long-time the girl
    ‘The girl had been sick for a long time’
    (1177; Yvain, 177; 6235)

(27) Male chose est murmure, =Pred. NP
bad thing is whisper

‘Whispering is a bad thing’

(1279; Somme Royal, 1,64;1758)

Such constituents were always rare in preverbal position compared to adverbials and PP’s. Table 2 shows that their percentage is higher in verse texts (12th c.) than in prose texts (mainly 13th c.). This might suggest that the preverbal position is indeed more frequently rhematic in 12th c. texts than in 13th c. texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Non Fin. Verb</th>
<th>Pred.NP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Distribution of adjectives predicative NP’s and non finite verbs in preverbal position

Adverbials and PPs. We coded the informational status of subjects in V2 sentences introduced by an adverbial (in which we included temporal DP’s like le lendemain (the next day), le jeudi (on Thursday)). Figure 6 presents the results of this analysis. It can be shown that the postverbal subject is generally a Topic, and that no observable change is apparent within the period considered.
Preverbal adverbials may be locative or temporal. In that case, they are generally frame setting (Hanging Topics or Scene Setting Topics in Benincà and Poletto (2004)’s terms). In that function, they are topical, but do not constitute the I-Topic of the clause, i.e. the “entity or set of entities under which the information expressed in the comment constituent should be stored in the [Common Ground] content.” Indeed, when the preverbal field is filled by a Scene Setting Topic and the clause contains a postverbal full DP subject, this subject is generally the I-Topic of the clause, as in the following examples, which illustrate the type of situation described by Speyer (2007) for German.

(28) La fist Cassidorus plus d’ armes

There made Cassidorus more (feats) of arms

que onques Achilles ne fist devant Troies.

than ever Achilles NEG made in-front-of Troy

‘There, Cassidorus made more feats of arms than Achilles ever made in front of Troy’
(29) Le jour de la saint Marc me dit le roy

The day of the Saint Marc me told the king

que a celi jour il avoit esté né;

that at that day he had been born

‘On Saint Marc’s day, the king told me that he was born that day’

(1309; Joinville,305;3574)

In the majority of cases where the postverbal subject is coded as I-Topic, the preverbal adverb is *lors, puis, après, donc, adont*, a temporal adverbial which links with the previous discourse without being clearly scene-setting or topical. The particle *si* may also occupy the preverbal position:

(30) Dont sot Ydoines vraiment que Diex l’amoit,

Then knew Ydoine truly that God her loved

‘Then Ydoine truly knew that God loved her.’

(1267; Cassidorus,351;3031)

(31) Apres assegia Karles Cordis.

After assieged Karl Cordis

‘After that, Karl assieged Cordis’

(1220; Pseudoturpin-2,285;422)

(32) Si demora laienz Perceval avec s’antain.
‘Thus, Perceval stayed there with his aunt’

(1225; Queste, 107;2806)

As for PP’s, when they are preverbal, they generally link with the previous discourse without constituting the I-Topic of the clause. In the following examples, the postverbal subjects constitute the I-Topics.

(33) Por ce panse mes sire Yvains qu’ il l’ ocirra

For this thinks my lord Yvain that he him kill-FUT

premieremant;

first

‘For that reason, my lord Yvain thinks that he will kill him first’

(1177; Yvain,102;3563)

(34) Del colp chancelad li gluz

At-the blow faltered the giant

‘The giant faltered at the blow’

(1170; QLR1-2,.470)

In rare cases, the preverbal PP clearly provides new information (is I-Focus). This is illustrated below. In these examples, the postverbal subject again constitutes the I-Topic.

(35) Au geu de la verté l’ a prise Lunete,
At the game of the truth her has taken Lunete molt cortoisemant.
very curteously
‘Lunete has led her into the game of truth, very curteously’

(1170; Yvain, 201; 7046)

(36) En grant effrei erent amdui.
In great fright were both
‘Both of them were greatly afraid’

(1180; Marie de France, Guigemar, 476; 359)

(37) En sa main destra tient l’imagre una clef
and in its hand right holds the statue a key
que nus ne li puet tolir.
that no-one NEG it-DAT can take
‘and the statue holds a key in its right hand, that nobody can
steal from it’

(1220; Pseudoturpin-1, 269; 151)

To summarize, in sentences of type XVS, the postverbal subject
may be the I-Topic of the clause; the preverbal constituent may be
topical, or it may be (part of) the I-Focus of the clause. We
conclude that throughout the 12th and 13th c.,

1) the verb does not delimit the boundary between Topic
constituents to its left and Focus constituents to its right;
2) the preverbal constituent may be an I-Focus, contrary to the hypothesis that the language became TVX during the period;

3) there is no rule that forces subjects to raise to preverbal position in order to avoid being interpreted as part of the Focus.

6. Comparison with other Germanic languages

Before concluding, let us compare the distribution of preverbal constituents in Old French and in Germanic languages.

Bohnacker and Rosén (2007, 34 & 36) compare the prefilds in German and Swedish, and they arrive at the figures in Table 3. Commenting on these figures, the authors observe that both Swedish and German tend to start declaratives with a subject, to let the subject coincide with the theme and topic, and to place the theme before the rheme. But Swedish has a stronger tendency to place the rheme after the verb, to start with an element of low informational value and with a phonologically light element (e.g. expletive, det, så), and to use few fronted objects. Although the constructions with a heavy rhematic object found in German are considered grammatical in Swedish, they are dispreferred. Swedish typically fronts objects that are themes. This explains the difference in the percentages of fronted objects in German (about 7%) and in Swedish (about 3%).
The corresponding figures in our data are given in Table 4. It can be seen that the percentages of the various types of preverbal constituents in the two Tables are of the same order of magnitude. The comparison reinforces the conclusion that during the 12th and 13th c., OF was a V2 language of the Germanic type.
Considering the percentage of preverbal objects, it is similar in verse texts (12th c.) to what is found in German, while the corresponding percentage in prose texts (mainly 13th c.) is similar to what is found in Swedish. This observation, compounded with the fact that, as we saw, (1) fronted preverbal objects tend to be rhematic in verse texts and are more often thematic in prose texts, (2) the percentage of “other” constituents like predicates and nonfinite verbs is lower in prose texts, and (3) there is a small decrease in the tendency to find indefinite subjects preverbally, suggests that the use of the preficld in OF V2 sentences may have evolved from a use more typical of that of contemporary German to one more typical of that of contemporary Swedish. These changes might indicate a change towards a preference for keeping focal constituents in postverbal position. It is clear, however, that Topics are not restricted to the preverbal position during the period considered.

7. Conclusion

The present research leads to the conclusion that, from an information structure viewpoint, OF is very similar to a V2 language of the Germanic type until the end of the 13th c. As in German, the preverbal position of an Old French sentence could be filled by an I-Focus, by a C-Focus, by an I-Topic, by a distinct type
of topic, like a scene-setting topic, or by an adverb that was neither topic nor focus. Clearly, Old French was not strictly Topic initial at any point during the period considered, even though, just as in Germanic languages, the preverbal position tended to be filled by a topical constituent. In addition, nothing prevented postverbal subjects from being interpreted as the Topic of discourse.

However, a change is observed in the use of the left periphery. The 12th c. grammar is statistically closer to German and the 13th c. grammar, closer to Swedish. This change might indicate a change in progress towards a grammar where focal constituents remain in postverbal position.

8. References


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Speyer, Augustin. 2010. “Filling the Vorfeld in Written and Spoken Discourse.” In Discourses in Interaction, ed. Sanna-Kaisa


List of Old French texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Approx. Date</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>ALEXIS</td>
<td>1090</td>
<td><em>La vie de saint Alexis</em>, éd. par Christopher STOREY, Genève : Droz (TLF, n° 148), 1968, 157 p. Penn Supplement to MCVF.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROLAND</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td><em>La Chanson de Roland</em>, éd. par Gérard MOIGNET, texte établi d’après le manuscrit d’Oxford ; traduction, notes et commentaires, 3e édition revue et corrigée, Paris : Bordas (Bibliothèque Bordas), 1969, 320 p. MCVF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLR</td>
<td>1170</td>
<td><em>Li Quatre Livre des Reis</em>, éd. par Ernst Robert CURTIUS, Dresde/Halle : Max Niemeyer (Gesellschaft für Romanische Litteratur, n°9), 1911, xcv + 244 p. Supplement to MCVF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YVAIN</td>
<td>1177</td>
<td>Chrétien de Troyes, <em>Le Chevalier au lion (Yvain)</em>, éd. par Mario ROQUES, Paris : Champion (CFMA, n°89), 1960, xxx + 266 p. MCVF.</td>
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<tr>
<td>QUESTE</td>
<td>1225</td>
<td><em>La Queste del Saint Graal, roman en prose du XIIIe siècle</em>, éd. par Albert</td>
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<td>PAUPHILET</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>PAUPHILET, Paris : Champion (CFMA, n° 33), 1923, 301 p. MCVF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMME</td>
<td>1279</td>
<td>FRERE LAURENT, La Somme le roi, éd. par Édith BRAYER et Anne-Françoise LABIE-LEURQUIN, Paris/Abbeville : Société des anciens textes français / Paillart, 2008, 596 p. et un cahier d’illustrations en couleurs. Penn Supplement to MCVF.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 References to OF examples contain first the approximate date of the text, then the abbreviated name of the text, followed by a page, verse, or section number (according to the text), followed by the phrase structure number in the corpus.
In the present paper, as in Rinke and Meisel (2009), postverbal subjects include subjects described as of the Germanic as well as of the Romance inversion type.

The focal nature of the preverbal contrastive constituent comes out clearly in (1), a sentence with a null subject:

(1) Del tranchant, non mie del plat, le fiert ...

‘with the cutting edge, not with the flat side, (he) hits him’

(1177; Yvain, 128.4433)

Zaring (2010) studied the OV order with (non-initial) non-finite verbs, in two different texts (Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal by Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1185) and La Conqueste de Constantinople by Geoffroy de Villehardouin (c. 1205)), and found the same evolution. It thus seems that what changes is not the nature of the clause-initial position but more generally what allows an object to precede the verb.