
PARAMETRIC STABILITY AND WORD ORDER CHANGE: THE CASE OF MIDDLE FRENCH*

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ABSTRACT This article presents a novel empirical analysis of the word-order properties of Middle French, which were analysed extensively in the 1990s but have not been discussed recently in light of the latest theoretical developments. Based on novel data, it is argued that Middle French is a form of V2 system, where the locus of V2 effects is a low left-peripheral head Fin. Whilst the evidence for V2 in the three texts examined is robust, the texts attest several changes in progress which, it is argued, eventually lead to the reanalysis of French as an SVO system. The article concludes with a discussion of why, in terms of formal parameter theory, the core V2 property remained so stable in the history of French across nearly a millennium, when it was also subject to extensive diachronic microvariation across centuries.

1 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Syntactic change in early French*

Since the late 1980s early French data have been at the centre of a number of important debates in formal diachronic syntax,¹ which have seen a resurgence in recent years (i.a. [Labelle & Hirschbühler 2005](#); [Labelle & Hirschbühler 2017](#); [Labelle & Hirschbühler 2018](#); [Labelle 2007](#); [Labelle 2016](#); [Salvesen 2011](#); [Salvesen 2013](#); [Donaldson 2012](#); [Wolfe 2017](#); [Wolfe 2018a](#); [Wolfe 2018b](#); [Wolfe 2020a](#); [Wolfe 2020b](#); [Wolfe 2020c](#); [Larrivée 2019](#); [Meklenborg 2020](#)). As

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¹ Some of the seminal works on early French include [Vance \(1987; 1988; 1993; 1995; 1997\)](#), [Adams \(1987a; 1988\)](#), [Roberts \(1993\)](#), [Lemieux & Dupuis \(1995\)](#) and [Platzack \(1995\)](#). Early comparative Medieval Romance work on Verb Second and the clitic pronominal system by [Benincà \(1983; 1995\)](#) and [Vanelli, Renzi & Benincà \(1986\)](#) also draws heavily on early French data.

regards syntactic change it is not challenging to see why French has been the subject of so much scrutiny: in formal terms early French differs markedly from Modern French in a number of significant morphosyntactic domains; to name just two of these domains, Modern French is an SVO language with V-to-T movement (Pollock 1989; Rowlett 2007: 106–107; Schifano 2018) whereas early French was a form of Verb Second (V2) grammar (Benincà 1983; Roberts 1993; Vance 1997; Steiner 2014; Wolfe 2018b), which is understood here as a language with V-to-C movement, where a C-related head also bears a movement-triggering diacritic (cf. Holmberg 2015). Similarly, Modern (Standard) French is a non-null subject language,² whereas earlier stages of French allowed null subjects under various conditions, depending on the period (Hirschbühler & Junker 1988; Roberts 1993; Hirschbühler 1995; Zimmermann 2014; Balon & Larrivé 2016; Wolfe 2016a; Simonenko, Crabbé & Prévost 2019).

Not only has large-scale typological change taken place across the last millennium, but there is also increasing consensus of smaller-scale microvariation within particular periods. To look at the two case studies mentioned immediately above, many scholars have concluded that the precise instantiation of the V2 constraint changes considerably around 1200 (Roberts 1993: 81–132; Rouveret 2004; Wolfe 2016a; Wolfe 2018a; Wolfe 2018b) and then again at the end of the 13th century, at the beginning of what is often referred to as the Middle French period (Roberts 1993: chap. 3; Vance 1995; Vance 1997: chap. 6; Platzack 1995; Muller 2005; Muller 2009). Similar claims have been made regarding the licensing of null subjects (Hirschbühler & Junker 1988; Vance 1993; Hirschbühler 1995; Wolfe 2020c). Put simply, this combination of change at the macro-, meso- and microparametric levels (see Roberts 2019 and Section 1.3 below) offers an ideal testbed on which to explore why certain properties of clausal syntax change or remain stable over an extended time period.

In this article I look at the word-order properties of French in the Middle French period. The dating of this period remains controversial (see Smith 2002), but I take it as spanning from the end of the 13th century to the beginning of the 16th. Middle French was chosen as it is frequently cited as a period of intense instability and flux in the history of the language (see Brunot 1933, Combettes & Marchello-Nizia 2008, and extensive references in Smith 2002) and the data are particularly controversial as to whether French at this period still retains the Old French ‘hallmark’ of a V2 syntax.³ Furthermore, although diachronic change in the clausal syntax of French in the Middle French period

² See Roberts (2010) for some possible modifications to this generalisation, particularly in certain north-African varieties of French (see Zribi-Hertz 1994).

³ See Vance (1997: chap. 6) and discussion in §1.2 and §1.3 on this debate.

was a major topic of interest in the 1980s and 90s, this period has been understudied in recent years.

1.2 *The classic accounts*

I do not attempt a comprehensive review of the literature on Middle French here but note the analyses and subsequent controversies which have been particularly prominent in the literature. Since some of the classic studies on word order in the early and middle of the 20th century, the major debates fall into two broad categories: (i) what kind of syntactic system is found in Middle French texts and how is it distinct from the system reported for Old French? (ii) If distinct, which factors lead to the eventual reanalysis of the previous syntactic system into the novel one?

In the first category, the most discussed issue by far is whether Middle French retains the V2 syntax found in Old French; Vance (1997: 271) reviews several approaches, opting ultimately for an account under which V-to-C movement obtains only in certain clause-types, as part of the progressive loss of V2. Her analysis is broadly similar to that offered in Roberts (1993: sec. 2.3). This differs from Lemieux & Dupuis (1995) and Hulk & van Kemenade (1995) who essentially consider Middle French a full V2 language. On the null subject system, there is more of a consensus that Middle French null subjects are licensed in a broader range of environments than was the case in Later Old French after approximately 1180 (Hirschbühler & Junker 1988; Roberts 1993: 177–186; Hirschbühler 1995; Vance 1997: 258–264; Wolfe 2021: chap. 6). This is in some sense the reversal of the shift from Early Old French (pre-1180) to Later Old French, which sees increasing restrictions on the distribution of null subjects.

Attempts at explanation for the changes attested into and during the Middle French period are arguably more heterogeneous. A classic early account links the loss of V2 to the decrease in null subjects (Franzén 1939; von Wartburg 1958); the central idea is that an increase in overt subjects in initial position gradually leads to the fixing of the preverbal field as a subject position, rather than the generalised prefield found in V2 systems (cf. Holmberg 2015; Wolfe & Woods 2020). Many of the more prominent formal accounts of the 1990s focus on ‘deviant’ non-V2-compatible V3* structures which,⁴ updating the terminology used in certain accounts, eventually lead acquirers to postulate a grammar with V-to-T movement as opposed to V-to-C (Vance 1993; Vance 1995; Vance 1997; Roberts 1993).

⁴ In keeping with conventions in the Medieval Romance literature (Benincà 2004; Benincà 2006; Poletto 2014), I use V3 here to refer to structures with two constituents before the finite verb and V3* for those with two or more.

1.3 *Recent developments*

There are several reasons why revisiting the Middle French data is timely, alongside the points made about syntactic stability and change in Section 1.1. In empirical terms, the Old French data, i.e. the period immediately before my focus here, are arguably better understood than they were in the 1990s, in light of a large body of theoretically informed work on the left periphery (Labelle 2007; Mathieu 2009; Donaldson 2012; Salvesen 2013; Steiner 2014; Labelle & Hirschbühler 2018; Wolfe 2018a; Larrivée 2019), null subjects (Sitardou 2005; Simonenko & Hirschbühler 2012; Wolfe 2016a; Simonenko et al. 2019) and other aspects of clausal word order (Zaring 2010; Zaring 2011; Wolfe 2020c). Put simply, internal variation within the syntactic system immediately preceding that of Middle French is better understood than it was previously, which may give us new insights into the trajectory of change and the factors conditioning syntactic stability where it exists.

Two major theoretical developments are also worth mentioning at the outset, as they have considerable bearing on how the Middle French data are assessed. Firstly, the advent of the cartographic enterprise (Cinque & Rizzi 2009; Shlonsky 2010) has quite radically changed analyses of the left periphery in general (Rizzi 1997; Benincà & Poletto 2004; Benincà & Munaro 2010; Ledgeway 2010) and V2 specifically (Cardinaletti & Roberts 2002; Poletto 2002; Poletto 2013; Roberts 2012; Wolfe 2016b; Hsu 2017; Wolfe & Woods 2020). This is significant, as a more nuanced picture can be developed of the exact points of distinction between Old and Middle French regarding the left periphery. The second theoretical development which may quite dramatically affect an account of the transition from Old to Middle French is a growing awareness of the importance of information structure for theories of syntactic change (Westergaard 2009; Ferraresi & Lühr 2010; Martins 2011; Bech & Eide 2014). Two distinct hypotheses have been put forward in this area to account for the loss of V2 in the history of French: Wolfe (2016a; 2018a) drawing on work by Marchello-Nizia (1995), Steiner (2014) and Labelle & Hirschbühler (2018) suggests that after 1180 the prefield in Old French is generally restricted to hosting base-generated topics and frame-setters. The absence of initial foci diminishes clear evidence for V2 and paves the way for reanalysis to a grammar where the default preverbal position is Spec-TP, i.e., a dedicated subject position. Larrivée (2019) has, however, put forward an alternative hypothesis that the preverbal field becomes progressively ‘bleached’ of an identifiable pragmatic value during the Old French period and that this undermines evidence for V2. Taken together, it is quite clear that any contemporary analysis of Middle French cannot ignore the role of information structure.

1.4 Plan for the article

In this article I make use of a 1000-clause sample of three texts to investigate the word order properties of Middle French. These are Enguerrant de Monstrelet's *Chronique* (composed 1441-1444, henceforth *Monstre*), the Roman de Jean de Paris (1494, henceforth *Jehpar*) and the first text of Philippe de Commyne's *Mémoires* (1490-1505, henceforth *Commyne*). All are, therefore, late Middle French texts and composed just before the point where V2 is assumed to be lost in the 16th century (Roberts 1993; Vance 1997; Steiner 2014).⁵

Section 2 presents a detailed empirical picture stemming from the analysis of the three texts. In Section 3 these data are then used to present a formal map of the clausal architecture of Middle French, where it is suggested that Middle French was a V2 language with the locus of V2 on Fin.⁶ Section 4 considers why, in light of the V2 property's maintenance into Middle French, the property has remained stable overall, whilst also showing finer-grained variation in its specific instantiation from century to century.

2 THE MIDDLE FRENCH LEFT PERIPHERY

2.1 Verb position

Although only one piece of evidence in favour of a V2 analysis, linear placement of the finite verb is frequently invoked in studies of Old French and Medieval Romance V2 as one factor to consider (Skårup 1975: 290; Adams 1987a: 2–3; Vance 1993: 281–6; Vance 1997; Wolfe 2016a: sec. 2; Ledgeway 2021). In all three texts verb placement was therefore investigated and the results are summarised in Table 1:

	Et-V1		V1		V2		V3		V4		V5		V6*		Total
<i>Monstre</i>	193	22.0%	17	1.9%	404	46.1%	214	24.4%	38	4.3%	8	0.9%	3	0.3%	877
<i>ar</i>	173	19.8%	0	0.0%	526	60.2%	164	18.8%	10	1.1%	1	0.1%	0	0.0%	874
<i>Commyne</i>	248	29.2%	3	0.4%	468	55.1%	118	13.9%	9	1.1%	3	0.4%	0	0.0%	849

Table 1 Matrix-clause finite verb placement

When comparing the texts side by side, the overall picture is one of continuity, with the possible exception of *Monstre* which shows a higher proportion of V1

⁵ A limitation of the current study is that it was not possible to control for genre and style of text, which I leave to future research. However, as we shall see, the texts chosen show broad continuity in the most significant areas of clausal syntax discussed.

⁶ I leave the issue of object clitics and their relationship to V2 to future research, as the relationship between clitics and verb movement is not transparent. For a discussion of object clitics in various clause types in Old, Middle, and Renaissance French, see Wolfe (2021).

and V3* orders that the other two later texts. Two points which cut across all three texts are particularly important. Firstly, we see that second position for the finite verb is the overwhelmingly preferred word-order option in all three texts (46.1-60.2%); taken alone, this is a potential indicator of continuity with late Latin (Salvi 2004: 207; Clackson & Horrocks 2007: 291–292; Ledgeway 2017: 196), Old French (Roberts 1993: sec. 2.1; Vance 1997: 38; Wolfe 2018a: sec. 1.3), and other Medieval Romance varieties (Benincà 2004; Benincà 2006; Benincà 2013; Salvi 2012: 103–105; Wolfe 2018b: chap. 2):⁷

- (1) *ce n'est pas vray semblable*
it NEG-IS NEG really similar
'it isn't really similar' (Jehpar 47)
- (2) *et aussy firent ceulz qui estoient avec elle*
and so did those who were with her
'and those who were with her did so also' (Monstre 1)
- (3) *Le chasteau tint et ne fut point assailly*
the castle held and NEG was NEG assailed
'He held the castle and it was never attacked' (Commyn 16)

However, we should also note that dominant linear V2 in matrix clauses is, all things being equal, compatible with a variety of competing hypotheses for Middle French clausal structure, including a full V2 system with V-to-C movement, a partial V2 system with V-to-C movement in certain contexts, and an SVO or T-V2 system, where V-to-T movement is found.⁸ Other indicators besides this semi-superficial one are therefore needed to decide between the competing hypotheses. Secondly, we observe that V3* orders constitute a large proportion of the data in all three texts:

- (4) *Toutesfois, je croy qu'....*
however I believe that
'However, I believe that' (Commyn 4)
- (5) *Quant vint au matin, le roy se leva*
when came to-the morning the king REFL.CL got-up
'When the morning came, the king got up' (Jehpar 23)

⁷ See Lombardi (2007), Remberger (2012) and Wolfe (2015a; 2015b) on the Old Sardinian data, which constitutes an exception to this generalisation inasmuch as VSO is the dominant pattern.
⁸ A T-V2 system would yield a symmetrical V2 grammar where Spec-TP can host a range of constituents, rather than being a specialised subject position. As we will see, this is not borne out in the Middle French data.

This is unsurprising as V3* orders have been argued to increase in both qualitative and quantitative terms in the Middle French period (Marchello-Nizia 1979; Ayres-Bennett 1996: 92; Roberts 1993: 197–204; Vance 1997: 264–279; Muller 2009: 244). As we have already noted, the specific types of V3* orders have been used as evidence in favour of various analyses of Middle French syntax and will be considered in more detail in Section 2.4 below.

2.2 *The prefield*

The structure of the preverbal field in Old French has long been a topic of interest in the literature (Thurneysen 1892; von Wartburg 1958: 103; Skårup 1975: 290; Harris 1978: 18–22), in particular due to the ways in which the left periphery of V2 Old French differs from SVO Modern French (Vance 1993: 281–286; Vance 1997: chap. 2; Roberts 1993: chap. 2; de Bakker 1997; Rouveret 2004; Salvesen 2013). We noted above that recent research has drawn attention to diachronic change in this domain within the medieval period, both in terms of the types of constituents that can appear in the left periphery (Labelle & Hirschbühler 2017) and their information-structural status (Steiner 2014; Labelle & Hirschbühler 2018; Wolfe 2018a; Wolfe 2020c; Larrivière 2019). In order to investigate the status of the Middle French left periphery, the initial constituents of all linear V2 clauses found in Table 1 appear below in Table 2.

From the outset we should note that the range of data in Table 2 is small and as such the conclusions stemming from the table should be interpreted with a degree of caution. However, a number of generalisations can be made: as is widely reported to be the case for Old French, we see that a range of initial constituents can occur in the prefield. In (6), witness the range of non-subject constituents which can occur in a V2 clause triggering inversion when the subject is overt:

- (6) a. *ce dit le roy d'Angleterre*
 it said the king of-England
 'The King of England said it' (Jehpar 46)
- b. *Et ces parolles m'a compté le roy*
 and these words me.CL=has told the king
 'And the King has told me these words' (Commyn 9)

	<i>Monstre</i>		<i>Jehpar</i>		<i>Commyn</i>	
Object DP	6	1.5%	7	1.3%	8	1.7%
Object PP	42	10.4%	10	1.9%	23	4.9%
Object Predicate	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%
Object Infinitive	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Indirect Object PP	1	0.2%	2	0.4%	3	0.6%
Subject	109	27.0%	248	47.1%	252	53.8%
Adverb	76	18.8%	76	14.4%	66	14.1%
Adverbial Phrase	72	17.8%	30	5.7%	86	18.4%
Adverbial Clause	3	0.7%	3	0.6%	5	1.1%
Circumstantial Clause	1	0.2%	2	0.4%	4	0.9%
When Clause	0	0.0%	8	1.5%	4	0.9%
Infinitival Clause	3	0.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Temporal Clause	8	2.0%	7	1.3%	8	1.7%
Absolutive Clause	2	0.5%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
If Clause	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Purpose Clause	4	1.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Resultative Clause	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Reason Clause	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Si	75	18.6%	127	24.1%	5	1.1%
Negation	0	0.0%	3	0.6%	2	0.4%
Total Count	404	100.0%	526	100.0%	468	100.0%
Total OV(S)	49	12.1%	20	3.8%	35	7.5%
Total XP _{Non-Subject} V(S)	295	73.0%	278	52.9%	216	46.2%
Total SVO	109	27.0%	248	47.1%	252	53.8%

Table 2 Preverbal Constituents in V2 Matrix Clauses

- (7) a. *Et de ce fut le Roy content*
 and of this was the King happy
 ‘And the King was happy with this’ (Monstre 3)
- b. *De ceste response rirent moult longuement les Anglois*
 of this response laughed very long.ADV the English
 ‘The English laughed for a long time at this response’ (Jehpar 42-43)
- (8) *Si fut ceste conclusion tenue*
 si was this conclusion kept
 ‘This decision was maintained’ (Monstre 7)

- (9) *Pour lors estoient les subjectz de ceste maison de*
Back then were the subjects of this house of
Bourgongne en grande richesse...
Burgundy in great wealth
'Back then the subjects of this house were very rich...' (Commyn 6)

We can readily compare the findings in Table 2 with other studies of Medieval Romance V2 varieties. Wolfe (2018b: 68) looks at the early 13th-century prose text *La Queste*, which since Vance (1993; 1995; 1997) has been interpreted as clear evidence of the V2 status of this stage in French. In this text, OV(S), XP_{Non-Subject}V(S) and SVO clauses constitute 12.84%, 53.68% and 46.32% of his sample respectively. When we compare this to our own data, we find that our earliest Middle French text *Monstre* shows a similar rate of OV(S), a higher rate of XP_{Non-Subject}V(S) and a lower proportion of SVO, thus providing even more compelling evidence for a V2 analysis. However, from this point on, we do see evidence indicative of a decline in XP_{Non-Subject}V(S) clauses (73% > 52.9% > 46.2%) and a moderately lower rate of OV(S) (12.1% > 3.8% > 7.5%).⁹ Taken with all possible caution given the moderate size of the sample, a measured conclusion would be that all three texts provide evidence supportive of a V2 analysis but that there is also evidence suggestive of a decline in the non-subject fronting associated with the V2 property and a rise in SVO.

2.3 Information structure

As noted in Section 1.3, there is a growing acknowledgement that information-structural change takes place in the Old French period, with competing hypotheses on how precisely this progresses (see Rinke & Meisel 2009, Steiner 2014 and Labelle & Hirschbühler 2018 for partially distinct views). Recently, the traditional yet still widely held view that the preverbal field increasingly hosts OLD-information Topics (Marchello-Nizia 1995; Steiner 2014; Wolfe 2016a; Wolfe 2020c) has been challenged by Larrivé (2019): he argues on the basis of a corpus of legal texts that the decline of V2 is conditioned by the loss of an explicit discourse-categorial value being associated with the preverbal field in XVS clauses. Do we find any evidence to decide between these two hypotheses in our texts? In order to do so, all (pro)nominal objects from the corpus of three texts as well as the first 100 subjects were extracted.¹⁰ All prever-

⁹ See also corpus data presented in Kroch & Santorini (2009) on the decline of object fronting in Middle and Early Modern French.

¹⁰ This relatively low number is necessary to standardise the data, as there are only 109 SVO clauses in the *Monstre* sample as noted above.

bal constituents were then tagged as to whether they were discourse-OLD or NEW, using the decision-tree from Rahn (2016: 39–40) and Larrivée (2019: 8), which takes into account (i) explicit mention in the preceding discourse, (ii) syntactic indicators of deixis or anaphoricity, (iii) set constructions and (iv) contextual use which refers to previous textual content or world knowledge. The results are summarised in Table 3:¹¹

	<i>Monstre</i>		<i>Jehpar</i>		<i>Commyn</i>	
OLD Object	5	4.7%	7	6.5%	3	2.8%
NEW Object	1	0.9%	0	0.0%	5	4.6%
OLD Subject	86	81.1%	86	80.4%	75	69.4%
NEW Subject	14	13.2%	14	13.1%	25	23.1%
Total OLD	91	85.8%	93	86.9%	78	72.2%
Total NEW	15	14.2%	14	13.1%	30	27.8%
Total Count	106	100.0%	107	100.0%	108	100.0%

Table 3 Discourse status of preverbal constituents

The majority of constituents occurring preverbally in all three texts are discourse-OLD, with many of such constituents showing clear morphosyntactic indicators of anaphoricity (10):

- (10) a. *Lesquelz nagaires avoient esté ou pays de Rethelois*
 the-which sailors had been in country of Rethelois
 ‘These particular sailors had been in the country of Rethelois’
 (Monstre 35)
- b. *Ceulx furent prins*
 they were taken
 ‘They were taken’ (Jehpar 11)
- c. *Ledict conte se mist par le champ pour rallier*
 the-said count REFL.CL put on the field to rally.INF
gens
 people
 ‘The aforementioned count went onto the field to rally people’
 (Commyn 13)

Based on these data, the clear conclusion is that the prefield is predominantly specialised in hosting discourse-OLD constituents, although this is not seen as

¹¹ One possibility, suggested by a reviewer, is that the apparently decreasing attestation of OLD subjects in Table 3 supports Larrivée’s (2019) hypothesis.

clearly in the latest text, *Commyn*, where we find examples of focal subjects such as those in (11):

- (11) *une partye des siens s'estoient ja separéz de*
a part of-the his REFL.CL-were already separated from
luy
him
'A party of his (men) were already separated from him' (*Commyn*
16)

Overall, this appears to confirm earlier work by Marchello-Nizia (1995: 99) and others (Rouveret 2004; Steiner 2014; Wolfe 2016a) that licensing of preverbal focus is progressively lost throughout the medieval period, although we consider below whether the progressive loss of V2 may lead some instances of initial NEW-information subjects to reappear.

2.4 V2 'deviations' and inversion

As noted in Section 1.2, most work on the loss of V2 in Middle French ascribed the change to a rise in 'deviant' V3* orders (Roberts 1993; Vance 1995; Vance 1997; Platzack 1995), themselves a potential reflex of the fact fewer constituents in Middle French consistently trigger inversion than in Old French. To assess the validity of these claims, we now consider the conditions under which inversion still obtains in our texts and the qualitative properties of V3* constructions.

We now consider the overall attestation of inversion, before offering a more detailed analysis of the available postverbal subject positions in Middle French and their information-structural values. From the outset, we find that inversion is still attested in the texts in a variety of environments flatly ungrammatical in Modern French.¹² Furthermore, it accounts for between 12.8% and 15.3% of our matrix-clause sample (Table 4). Pending further discussion below, a variety of inversion structures are included in Table 4, where the subject is in a TP- or *v*P-internal position, or those where its underlying position is ambiguous between these two options. Whilst looking at inversion initially from a purely surface-level perspective is not a diagnostic for V2, it does highlight the sharp differentiation between Middle French and Modern French grammar, where inversion is highly restricted (cf. Wolfe 2021: Chapter 5).

¹² For discussion of declarative-clause inversion in Modern French see Lahousse (2003).

	<i>Monstre</i>		<i>Jehpar</i>		<i>Commyn</i>	
Preverbal	526	60.0%	596	68.2%	606	71.4%
Postverbal	134	15.3%	112	12.8%	120	14.1%
Null	217	24.7%	166	19.0%	123	14.5%
Total	877	100.0%	874	100.0%	849	100.0%

Table 4 Matrix Subject Distribution

Given the null-subject status of Middle French, these figures are not directly comparable to non-null-subject V2 languages like German and Norwegian (on the latter see [Westergaard 2009](#)), but nor can they be dismissed as a marginal word-order phenomenon. Put simply, our texts are indicative of a grammar with widespread evidence that non-subjects can appear in the prefield (cf. Section 2.2) and that, furthermore, this triggers inversion of an overt subject. However, we may also see potential evidence here of a change in progress as the reflexes of a V2 grammar are lost, as the figures are marginally lower than those reported in [Wolfe \(2020c: 6\)](#) for Old French, which vary between 17% and 35.5%.

In qualitative terms, the range of prefield constituents triggering inversion is not a narrowly restricted class. Consider the following examples in (12) and (13) from our earliest and latest texts respectively, where postverbal subjects are found:

- (12) a. *et aussy firent ceulz qui estoient avec elle*
 and so did those who were with her
 ‘And those who were with her did the same’ (Monstre 2)
- b. *Ainsy et par cette manière reconquist Charles, roy*
 thus and by this manner reconquered Charles king
de France, VIIe de ce nom, la dessusdicte ville
 of France 7th of that name the aforementioned town
de Pontoise
 of Pontoise
 ‘Thus, in this way, Charles 7th, King of France, reconquered the
 aforementioned town of Pontoise’ (Monstre 12)
- c. *Et avec luy se logèrent tous ceulx de son*
 and with him REFL.CL stayed all those of his
ostel, avec aulcuns aultres
 household with some others
 ‘And all those from his household stayed with him, along with
 some others’ (Monstre 4)

- d. *Laquelle tenoit le conte de Foix*
the-which held the count of Foix
‘The Count of Foix held this (village)’ (Monstre 25)
- e. *Si y furent mors dix ou douze Anglois*
si LOC.CL were dead ten or twelve English
‘Ten or twelve Englishmen died there’ (Monstre 26)
- (13) a. *Lors vint le duc de Calabre*
then came the duke of Calabria
‘Then the Duke of Calabria came’ (Commyn 30)
- b. *A ce point leur respondi le duc Philippes*
at this point them.CL responded the duke Philip
que...
that...
‘Then Duke Philip responded that...’ (Commyn 3)
- c. *A Dieu seul appartient la perfection*
to God alone belongs the perfection
‘Perfection belongs to God alone’ (Commyn 2)
- d. *Si portoit ledict conte à tous honneur*
si brought the-said count to all honour
‘The said count brought honour to all’ (Commyn 26)

To summarise, there is some evidence that inversion is obtaining less frequently than in Old French, but the class of initial constituents triggering inversion is still broad and far larger than in Modern French.

So far, the presence of inversion has been noted, without precisely identifying the position of the postverbal subject within the clausal hierarchy. The general consensus in the literature is that there are at least two postverbal subject positions in Old French: in so-called ‘Germanic’ (G)-inversion structures the subject occupies Spec-TP, whereas in ‘Romance’ (R)-inversion structures it remains within the *v*P (Salvesen & Bech 2014; Wolfe 2020c), and thus follows infinitives, past participles, and other demarcators of the *v*P-edge (see Wolfe 2020c for further discussion). All of the postverbal subjects were tagged according to whether they were clearly instances of R- or G-inversion or ambiguous. The results appear in Table 5:

	<i>Monstre</i>		<i>Jehpar</i>		<i>Commyn</i>	
Ambiguous	30	22.4%	76	67.9%	43	35.8%
R-Inversion	42	31.3%	25	22.3%	33	27.5%
G-Inversion	62	46.3%	11	9.8%	44	36.7%
Total	134	100.0%	112	100.0%	120	100.0%

Table 5 Matrix Postverbal Subjects

As Table 5 shows, we find instances of R-inversion and G-inversion in all texts. Furthermore, as with Later Old French, the G-inversion position appears specialised in hosting unambiguously discourse-OLD nominal and pronominal subjects (14), whilst the R-inversion position does not have a specific discourse function (15) and cannot host pronominal subjects (cf. also Roberts 1993 and Vance 1997).¹³

- (14) a. *Encores n'avez vous riens ouy*
 still NEG-have you nothing heard
 'You've still heard nothing' (Jehpar 47)
- b. *Item, pour ce que lesdiz Seigneurs se doibvent*
 thus for it that the-said lords REFL.CL must
prouchainement assambler à Nevers, ont lesdiz
 soon assemble at Nevers have the-said
ambassadeurs requis au Roy que...
 ambassadors asked to-the king that
 'Thus, given that the said lords must soon assemble at Nevers,
 the said ambassadors have asked the King that...' (Monstre 17)
- (15) a. *Et de la partie des assègans fut mort ung*
 and from the party of-the besiegers was dead a
gentil homme, nommé Gauthier de Pavant...
 gentleman named Gauthier de Pavant
 'And from the party of the besiegers, a gentleman named
 Gauthier de Pavant died' (Monstre 40)
- b. *et entre autres se y estoit retyré monsr*
 and among others REFL.CL LOC.CL was left monsieur
le connestable...
 the constable
 'and the constable had left, among others' (Commyn 12)

¹³ See Salvesen & Bech (2014) for discussion and Wolfe (2020c) for some diachronic refinements to their analysis.

These findings strengthen the line of analysis so far that the three Middle French texts instantiate a V2 system. Since some of the earliest generative work on the topic (Adams 1987a; Vance 1997; de Bakker 1997), G-inversion structures have been seen as especially significant as they clearly show that the finite verb is in the C-layer and not in a position within the T-domain. It is therefore revealing that G-inversion is found in all three texts (compare this with Poletto's 2014: 62–63 discussion of Renaissance Italian). Furthermore, we find that in two texts it constitutes the majority of the unambiguous data. Further research would be needed on larger range of texts to confirm this, but it may be that the postverbal subjects found in *Jehpar* are indicative of the gradual breakdown of V2 in that ambiguous subjects make up a greater proportion of the data, whilst R-inversion also outnumbers G-inversion. Overall, we see that the discourse-pragmatic value of the postverbal subjects found in the three Middle French texts is similar to Later Old French.

Turning to our second topic, how then do V2 'deviations' differ from Old French? The situation in Later Old French is simple to describe: V1 clauses are essentially absent in matrix declaratives (Skårup 1975: 291; Marchello-Nizia 1979: 331; Vance 1997: 18–20; Rouveret 2004: 193–5; Wolfe 2018b: 75) and V3 orders are triggered by a restricted subclass of elements such as clauses, left-dislocates and scene-setting adverbials (Roberts 1993: 144; Vance 1997: 61–2; Salvesen 2013; Wolfe 2016a).

Putting aside coordinated V1 clauses for now (see Vance 1993), V1 clauses can be dealt with quite straightforwardly. Table 1 shows them to be near-absent in *Jehpar* and *Commyn* and there is good reason to believe they are not a core word-order phenomenon in *Monstre*, where they occur in a specific context where the author appears to be interpreting the preceding adverbial as part of the following clause (16); a reviewer highlights that this construction is also widely found in legal prose from approximately 1320. If we therefore put this case aside, the situation is therefore exactly comparable to Later Old French, where null subjects cannot occur in initial position of a matrix clause.

- (16) a. *Item. Ont remoustré au Roy*
 Thus have state.PTCP to-the King
 'They have thus stated to the King...' (Monstre 19)
- b. *Item. Ont dict lesdiz ambassadeurs*
 Thus have say.PTCP the-said ambassadors
 'The aforementioned ambassadors thus said...' (Monstre 23)

As has been noted by Roberts (1993) and Vance (1995; 1997), V3* clauses change qualitatively in the transition from Later Old French to Middle French. This is quite clear in several specific contexts in our corpus. Whilst we find

cases such as (17) which are widely attested in Later Old French (see examples in Wolfe 2018b: 78–9), we also find examples where multiple constituents co-occur which do not fall into this category (18) as well as examples of V4* (19):¹⁴

- (17) *Et adonc, le dessusdit seigneur de Labreth entra...*
 and thus the said knight of Labreth entered
 ‘And thus the aforementioned knight from Labreth entered...’
 (Monstre 25)
- (18) a. *A quoy le Roy fist responce*
 to which the King made response
 ‘The king responded to this’ (Monstre 29)
- b. *Pour ce je suis de vostre opinion*
 for this I am of your opinion
 ‘Because of this I agree with you’ (Jehpar 25)
- c. *L’aultre point si est que...*
 the-other point si is that
 ‘the other point is that...’ (Jehpar 24)
- (19) a. *D’aultres seigneurs, quand ils ont requis pour*
 of-other knights when they have sought for
personnes qui le val ent ès aultres offices de
 people who it.CL be-worth.3PL the other offices of
la justice du royaume, le Roy y a mis...
 the justice of-the realm the King LOC.CL has put
 ‘As for the other knights, when they sought people who were
 worthy of the other offices of the jurisdiction, the King put...’
 (Monstre 18)
- b. *et puis, par ordre je suyvoy mon propos jusques à*
 and then by order I will-follow my proposal until
l’heure que...
 the-hour that
 ‘By order, I will then follow my intention until...’ (Commyn 3)

This empirical finding is significant, and I consider its theoretical importance below. For now, note that V3 clauses such as (18) and V4* clauses such as

¹⁴ I interpret *a quoy* ‘to that’ as a prepositional phrase encoding a deictic value rather than a relative form in the texts under examination, meaning that examples (18) and (23) are considered matrix clauses.

(19) are found in Early Old French in contrast to Later Old French (Rou-veret 2004: 189–90; Labelle 2007: 296–303; Salvi 2012: 105; Wolfe 2018a: 347–349; Wolfe 2018b: 77). Furthermore, these clauses are also found in other Medieval Romance varieties considered ‘relaxed’ V2 systems in descriptive terms.¹⁵ The *si*-clause in (18 c) is particularly striking, as the co-occurrence of this V2-related particle (Fleischman 1991; Salvesen 2013; Meklenborg 2020) with a DP subject is a pattern attested in Early Old French which is typically not found in Later Old French prose (Wolfe 2018a: 341, 345).

2.5 Complement Clauses

The final piece of empirical evidence I consider here is that of complement clauses. These offer a potentially revealing key to understanding the syntactic system we find in Middle French, in particular whether the grammar is SVO or V2 and, if V2, what kind of V2 system. Previous research has suggested that differences between matrix and embedded clauses are less pronounced in Early Old French (Adams 1987b; Hirschbühler & Junker 1988; Vance 1988; Labelle 2007; Mathieu 2006), whereas clause-type asymmetries are particularly acute in Later Old French (Adams 1987a; Roberts 1993; Wolfe 2018b: 79–84). In formal terms that we discuss further below in Section 3, a lack of asymmetries in Middle French could be indicative that we are dealing with a V2 or SVO system with finite verb movement to the T-domain, such that complementisers do not show the classic ‘blocking’ effect on constituent-fronting and verb movement that we find in a number of well-known Germanic V2 systems (Koster 1975: sec. 1; den Besten 1983: 54–64; Vikner 1995; Wolfe & Woods 2020: 1–4).

First, consider the data below in Table 6 on the position of the finite verb, which can be compared to the findings presented for matrix clauses in Table 1 above.

	V1		V2		V3		V4		V5		V6*		Total
<i>Monstre</i>	0	0.0%	110	89.4%	13	10.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	123
<i>Jehpar</i>	8	6.3%	111	88.1%	5	4.0%	2	1.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	126
<i>Commyrn</i>	4	2.6%	134	88.7%	13	8.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	151

Table 6 Complement-clause finite verb placement

¹⁵ For discussion of Old Occitan see Vance, Donaldson & Steiner (2009), Donaldson (2015) and Wolfe (2017; 2018c). Consider also on Early Old Spanish Fernández-Ordóñez (2009: 21–2) and on Italo-Romance Benincà (2004), Ledgeway (2007: 124; 2008: 440), Poletto (2014: 16) and Wolfe (2015c; 2015d).

We observe that there appears to be less word-order flexibility in complement clauses than in matrix clauses, with second position the overwhelmingly preferred placement for the finite verb (20). However, a small number of clauses permit V1 or V3* orders (21), albeit under verbs known to license matrix-clause phenomena crosslinguistically:

- (20) a. *ains respondirent qu'ilz n'en feroient*
 but they-responded that-they NEG-PART.CL would-do
riens
 nothing
 'But they responded that they would do nothing' (Monstre 9)
- b. *si luy dirent ses gens que devant eulx avoit*
 si him.CL said his people that before them there-was
une compaignie de gens moult bien acoustrez
 a company of people very well readied
 'They responded to him that there was a very well prepared company before them' (Jehpar 27)
- c. *si me suis pencee que plus beau mariage ne*
 si me.CL am thought that more beautiful marriage NEG
pourroit trouver
 could find
 'I thought to myself that he could not find a more beautiful marriage' (Jephar 22)
- (21) a. *mais je vous prie que viengnez avecques moy*
 but I you.CL ask that you-come.SBJV with me
 'But I ask that you come with me' (Jehpar 33)
- b. *qu'il ne me semble pas que jamais j'aye*
 that-it NEG me.CL seem NEG that never I-have.SBJV
congneu nul prince...
 known no prince
 'that it does not seem to me that I have ever known a prince...'
 (Commyn 2)

Indeed, when we analyse further the types of constituents that can appear preverbally in complement clauses, the results stand in clear contrast to those for matrix clauses. As Table 7 shows, SVO is overwhelmingly preferred in all three texts, with SVO clauses representing between 82.9% and 93.6% of the sample, versus between 27.3% and 53.6% of the matrix sample. Furthermore, we find no examples in embedded clauses of the CP-particle *si*, which we can

take as a clear indicator that access to the left periphery is not widespread in complement clauses.

	<i>Monstre</i>		<i>Jehpar</i>		<i>Commyn</i>	
Object DP	1	0.9%	1	0.9%	0	0.0%
Object PP	1	0.9%	1	0.9%	0	0.0%
Object Predicate	1	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Object Infinitive	0	0.0%	1	0.9%	0	0.0%
Indirect Object PP	0	0.0%	2	1.8%	0	0.0%
Subject	103	93.6%	92	82.9%	123	91.8%
Adverb	3	2.7%	7	6.3%	4	3.0%
Adverbial Phrase	1	0.9%	5	4.5%	6	4.5%
Adverbial Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.7%
Circumstantial Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
When Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Infinitival Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Temporal Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Absolutive Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
If Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Purpose Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Resultative Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Reason Clause	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Si	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Negation	1	0.9%	2	1.8%	0	0.0%
Total Count	110	100.0%	111	100.0%	134	100.0%
Total OV(S)	3	2.7%	5	4.5%	0	0.0%
Total XP _{Non-Subject} V(S)	8	7.3%	19	17.1%	11	8.2%
Total SVO	103	93.6%	92	82.9%	123	91.8%

Table 7 Preverbal Constituents in V2 Complement Clauses

Finally, consider the distribution of null and overt subjects. Recall that in Later Old French there is a strong clause-type asymmetry in null-subject licensing (Adams 1987a; Roberts 1993; Vance 1997). Tentatively, we can conclude that the Middle French texts evidence the ongoing breakdown of this system: whilst our earliest text *Monstre* shows a highly statistically significant asymmetry, the asymmetry in *Jehpar* is only near-significant and only weakly significant in *Commyn* (Table 8):

		Overt	Null	P-Value
<i>Monstre</i>	Matrix	660	217	< 0.0001
	Embedded	116	7	
<i>Jehpar</i>	Matrix	708	166	0.0706
	Embedded	111	15	
<i>Commyn</i>	Matrix	726	123	0.0235
	Embedded	140	11	

Table 8 Asymmetries in subject distribution

With this small caveat on the distribution of null subjects, this corpus analysis of the embedded domain suggests strongly that there are still major asymmetries between the structure of matrix and complement clauses. I now move on to consider the theoretical consequences of this and the empirical picture emerging so far.

3 MIDDLE FRENCH CLAUSAL ARCHITECTURE

I now consider the very first question posed at the outset of this article, namely what kind of syntactic system we find instantiated in the Middle French texts.

A number of pieces of evidence reviewed in Section 2 suggest that Vance (1993; 1995; 1997) and Roberts (1993) among others are correct to claim that Middle French has a form of V2 grammar. Although it is an ambiguous piece of evidence, Table 1 shows that second position is by far the preferred one for the finite verb in matrix clauses, in keeping with all systems acknowledged to sit on the V2 typology today.¹⁶ Furthermore, this fact regarding verb-positioning is accompanied by a verbal prefield which closely resembles that reported for a range of uncontroversial V2 systems. That is to say that unlike non-V2 systems such as Modern English and Modern French, where non-subject fronting belongs to a heavily restricted class of constituents (Rizzi & Roberts 1989; Kayne & Pollock 2012; Biberauer & Roberts 2012; Sailor 2020), the Middle French facts sit with full V2 languages where the prefield is not a specialised subject position in the inflectional domain, but rather a position within the C-layer able to host a wide class of phrasal constituents (Lightfoot 1995: 40; Vikner 1995: 41; Benincà 2004: 262; Wolfe 2019: 20). A further piece of language-internal evidence which supports a V2 analysis concerns the particle *si*. Although absent from the latest of our three texts, its appearance in the earlier two is significant. Functionally oriented work has long posited a

¹⁶ For a recent review of the relevant data see Poletto (2013), Holmberg (2015) and the chapters in Woods & Wolfe (2020).

link between the V2 syntax and *si* (Marchello-Nizia 1985; Fleischman 1991; Reenen & Schøsler 2000) and more recent formal research has suggested that *si* in Old French (Ferraresi & Goldbach 2002; Salvesen 2013; Wolfe 2018a; Meklenborg 2020) and other Medieval Romance varieties (Benincà 2004; Poletto 2005; Ledgeway 2008) is a heavily grammaticalised particle which serves to satisfy the V2 constraint. Its presence in two of three of our texts is therefore a strong indicator of a V2 grammar. In specific terms, I take this evidence to mean that both the feature triggering verb movement and the EF associated with 'EPP-effects' are located in the C-domain in Middle French.

Inversion phenomena are straightforwardly linked to the above properties. The classic V2 bottleneck hypothesis (Haegeman 1996; Haegeman 2012; Roberts 1996; Roberts 2004; Cardinaletti & Roberts 2002; Holmberg 2015; Holmberg 2020; Haegeman & Greco 2018) states that, in the simplest of cases, movement of any constituent to the left periphery will block movement of any other. Therefore, more specifically, a non-subject satisfying C-head's EF will prevent subsequent movement of a subject from its position in the *v*P or TP into the left periphery. As such the subject remains in its position within the clausal core and appears in the inversion contexts that we saw in (12-15). This alone can be seen as the reflex of a V2 grammar but G-inversion structures of the type we also find in the corpus are often afforded a special importance in the Romance literature as they show unambiguously that the subject is in a TP-internal position and that the accompanying auxiliary must have moved to a C-related head (see in particular Poletto 2014: chap. 1). Since Adams (1987a), Vance (1995) and de Bakker (1997) the loss of G-inversion has been seen as a clear indicator of the loss of V2, so its attestation in all three texts is significant.

Finally, although it is now acknowledged that the very neat account of matrix/embedded asymmetries that emerged from den Besten's (1983) seminal work on V2 is no longer sustainable on empirical or theoretical grounds (Vikner 1995; Biberauer 2002; Walkden & Booth 2020), there is a general acceptance that clause-type asymmetries are the hallmark of many V2 grammars. The differences in verb placement, the structure of the prefield and general lack of verb-subject inversion we find in the complement clause sample is therefore another indicator that a form of V2 grammar is still in operation in Middle French. If, due to the blocking effect of the *que* complementiser, the embedded left periphery is often rendered inaccessible to verb movement and constituent fronting, the overwhelming preference for SVO ordering reported above finds a straightforward account. On the other hand, if we maintain that V2 is already lost by the Middle French period or indeed that V-to-T movement has already generalised, no such account of the asym-

metry is forthcoming.

With the V2 status of Middle French established, an altogether more challenging question presents itself as to what kind of V2 system is instantiated in the texts. There are at least three types of full V2 system which have been proposed in the recent literature: Fin-V2 systems, where the finite verb targets the lowest of the functional heads in the left periphery, such that a range of constituents can occupy a highly articulated verbal prefield (Ledgeway 2008; Salvesen 2013; Wolfe 2015d; Meelen 2020);¹⁷ Force-V2 systems, where the finite verb raises to a very high head within the left periphery and preverbal constituents are thus restricted to two which lexicalise the Frame-Force field (Poletto 2002; Roberts 2012; Walkden 2015; Wolfe 2015e), and hybrid systems where both Fin and Force can be the locus of V2. This latter option has been argued convincingly to be the right analysis for Dutch as regards subject- (Fin) and non-subject-initial (Force) V2 by Haegeman & Greco (2018) and Greco & Haegeman (2020).¹⁸

The Force-V2 analysis which has been proposed for Later Old French (Rouveret 2004; Wolfe 2016a; Wolfe 2018a; Wolfe 2018b; Ledgeway 2021; Van Kemenade & Meklenborg 2021) can be dismissed on a number of grounds. Firstly, as noted in Section 2.4, all three texts feature V4, which is not predicted under the Force-V2 model, where only a single optional constituent in the Frame-field can precede the V2-satisfying constituent in Spec-ForceP (Wolfe 2019: 30–31):

(22) [_{FrameP} (**Frame-Setter**) [_{ForceP} XP_{V2} [_{Force} V]...]

Secondly, it is not at all obvious that a clause such as (18a), repeated below as (23) for convenience, can be accounted for under the Force V2 model. Although exact interpretations of the function of the Frame field vary, the core notion is that this field is associated with clauses, adjuncts and sentence-level adverbials which are traditionally conceived of as being clause-external (Poletto 2002; Benincà & Poletto 2004; Haegeman & Greco 2018; Corr 2016). An indirect object selected by the verb is clearly not a fitting candidate for this characterisation:

¹⁷ For the purposes of this discussion, I take the Fin-V2 hypothesis to be broadly equivalent to the Focus-V2 hypothesis adopted in some work on Medieval Romance (Benincà 2004; Poletto 2014; Donaldson 2012; Donaldson 2016). This is not to imply that there are not minor empirical differences between the two hypotheses.

¹⁸ See also Poletto (2002) for the idea that the Fin/Force distinction can vary according to the declarative vs. interrogative distinction.

- (23) *A quoy le Roy fist responce*
to which the King made response
‘The king responded to this’ (Monstre 29)

As such, I suggest that the locus of V2 is clearly lower in the left periphery, in order to account for the occurrence of V4 and the fact that V3 is not triggered by as restricted a class of constituents, as in Later Old French. Deciding between the alternative Fin-V2 and hybrid Fin/Force-V2 model is not straightforward with a dead language; many of the grammaticality judgements that Haegeman & Greco (2018) use to motivate their analysis of Dutch and West Flemish could not be replicated on our texts. However, the hybrid model makes an interesting prediction which we can test: if, in subject-initial V2 clauses, the subject remains in Spec-FinP and does not raise higher, we predict that in all V3* clauses involving a subject it will be adjacent to the finite verb (24). Although this accounts for much of our data, the examples in (25) show this is not always the case:¹⁹

- (24) [_{FrameP} (**Frame-Setter**) [_{ForceP} [_{TopicP} (**Topic**) [_{FocusP} (**Focus**) [_{FinP} **Subject** [_{Fin} **V**]]]]]]...
- (25) a. *Et adonc les aultres François de plus en plus se*
and then the other French of more on more REFL.CL
boutèrent avant...
pushed ahead
‘And thus the Franks pushed ahead more and more...’ (Monstre 11)
- b. *Le roy d’Angleterre pour ces parolles ce print moult*
the king of-England by these words that took very
fort a rire
hard to laugh
‘These words made the King of England start to laugh very hard’ (Jehpar 39)
- c. *A quoy ledict conte de Charroloys, parplusieurs fois,*
to this the-said count of Charolais for several times
voulut respondre
wanted respond
‘The said Count of Charolais wanted to respond to this several times’ (Commyn 4)

¹⁹ Note that the schema in (24) should not be taken to imply that subjects themselves cannot also be Topics. See illuminating discussion in Rizzi (2005) on this point.

My analysis is therefore that Middle French, like Early Old French, is a Fin-V2 grammar. Although the Middle French data have not previously been discussed in light of the Fin/Force typology, note from Section 1 that this is a way to update a traditional insight: for both Vance (1993; 1995; 1997) and Roberts (1993) syntactic change in the Middle French period involves the successive loss of V-to-C in favour of V-to-Agr movement, i.e. movement to a functional head which is still higher than T/I (cf. Pollock 1989 and Belletti 1990). The major point of difference between their and my analysis is that Middle French as a Fin-V2 language is still a ‘full’ V2 system if we take this term to refer to languages where the unmarked target of verb movement is within the extended C-domain.²⁰

Finally, we consider the licensing of null subjects. Recall from Section 2.5 that the texts show evidence of a very significant asymmetry in one case, a significant asymmetry in another and a near-significant p-value in *Jephar*. How do we account for this? The fact that two of three of our Middle French texts do not show an asymmetry as strong as that for Later Old French is unsurprising. A standard analysis of null-subject licensing in V2 languages is that, as well as a head such as T or Fin associated with verbal agreement, a Topic head is also involved with the licensing of null subjects and topics (Benincà 2004: 290; Ledgeway 2008: 441; Walkden 2013; Poletto 2014: 21–23; Kinn, Rusten & Walkden 2016). Wolfe (2018b: 126–127) puts forward the specific claim that in Medieval Romance *pro* can only be licensed when c-commanded by the Topic head, which in the Force-V2 system of Later Old French correctly rules out matrix V1 clauses as *pro* will not satisfy this condition if raised to Spec-ForceP:

$$(26) \text{ [FrameP [ForceP } \mathit{pro}_{\text{Top}} \text{ [Force V] [TopicP } \mathit{pro}_{\text{Top}} \text{ [Top]} \dots$$

Furthermore, it is also in the Medieval Romance Force-V2 grammars that we observe the heaviest restrictions on embedded null subjects. This can be accounted for if we assume that by analogy with matrix-clause verbs, embedded

²⁰ A reviewer raises the significant question of whether, from a comparative perspective, the progression Fin- > Force- > Fin-V2 is universal. As yet, the Fin/Force typology has not been extended to a wide enough range of languages at different historical stages to answer this definitively. However, evidence from Germanic (Walkden 2014), Celtic (Meelen 2020) and Romance (Wolfe 2018b) strongly suggests that a Fin-V2 system is the first to emerge as a result of the reanalysis of output generated by a non-V2 grammar with low verb movement; this may be due to the fact that there are greater similarities between the output of an SOV and Fin-V2 grammar than an SOV and Force-V2 grammar (cf. Wolfe 2019). If this is the case, the same logic might extend to the loss of V2, namely that the output of a ‘relaxed’ Fin V2 grammar is more susceptible to reanalysis as consistent with a V-to-T or V-to-v grammar than the output of a ‘stricter’ Force-V2 system.

complementisers in Force-V2 systems standardly undergo Fin-to-Force movement (see also [Branigan 2011](#)), blocking access to the embedded Topic-Focus layer.

- (27) a. $[_{\text{ForceP}} [_{\text{Force}} \mathbf{V}] [_{\text{TopicP}} [_{\text{FocusP}} [_{\text{FinP}} [_{\text{Fin}} \mathbf{V}]] \dots]$ (Verbs in Matrix Clauses)
- b. $[_{\text{ForceP}} [_{\text{Force}} \mathbf{que}] [_{\text{TopicP}} [_{\text{FocusP}} [_{\text{FinP}} [_{\text{Fin}} \mathbf{que}]] \dots]$ (Complementisers in Embedded Clauses)

If the system in (27) is lost following the change to the Middle French Fin-V2 grammar, we would predict a loosening of the clause-type asymmetry as the Topic-Focus layer is now accessible, which is indeed borne out in our data: embedded null subjects are more widely licensed and V3* orders also are, which are near-absent in Later Old French complement clauses ([Wolfe 2018b](#): 79–86). It is also worth noting here that matrix-clause null subjects are in decline in this period, likely due to the independent factor of the weakening of verbal agreement ([Simonenko et al. 2019](#)). This further reduces the number of matrix-clause null subjects in Middle French, which also contributes to the levelling out of the asymmetry.

We can schematise our findings in light of recent models of the fine structure of the left periphery (see [Ledgeway 2010](#) on Romance) as follows. Finite verb movement in Middle French targets Fin, with an articulated structure above the finite verb. As we saw in Section 2.3, the preverbal field overwhelmingly hosts discourse-OLD constituents, which I take to mean that the Focus field is not activated in Middle French, in contrast to the Frame-Topic field. The Topic head within this field has a role in licensing matrix and embedded null subjects. With Fin the locus of V2, Spec-FinP hosts the particle *si*, which can optionally be preceded by constituents in the Frame-Topic field (cf. 19).

As we have seen, there are major clause-type asymmetries which suggest that the Middle French complementiser *que* can be base-generated in Fin, but V3* orders and some limited non-subject fronting suggest it can also be base-generated in Force.²¹

Turning to the clausal core, we have seen that two positions exist for inverted subjects: a Spec-TP position found in G-inversion structures specialised in discourse-OLD and pronominal subjects and a lower position, which I take to be Spec-*v*P with no specific associated discourse value.²²

21 This is now a fairly classic intuition, based on ideas first conceived in [Roberts \(2004\)](#) and then developed for Medieval Romance in [Salvesen & Walkden \(2017\)](#) and [Wolfe \(2018b\)](#).

22 In (28) I do not mark lower copies of internally merged constituents.

- (28) [_{FrameP} [_{ForceP} **Frame-Setter** [_{Force} *que*₁] [_{TopicP} **Topic** [_{FocusP} [_{FinP} **XP**_{V2} [_{Fin} **V/que**₂] [_{TP} **Subject**_{G-Inversion} [_{vP} **Subject**_{R-Inversion}]]]]]]]]]

4 MIDDLE FRENCH – STABILITY OR CHANGE?

We now turn to consider the core issue at the centre of this special collection, namely the factors determining stability and change in word order patterns.

The first point stemming from the analysis presented here is an empirical one, but with theoretical ramifications. Although many of the most well-known analyses of French V2 focus principally on 13th-century prose (Adams 1987a; Vance 1987; Salvesen 2013; Wolfe 2015f), this study confirms that a V2 system is still found at least as late as the turn of the 16th century. Given that the Strasbourg Oaths, written in 842 and surviving in a manuscript from circa 1000AD also show evidence of verb-subject inversion and particle *si* (29), along with the Early Old French texts in general which also show evidence for V2 (Labelle 2007), we are left to conclude that V2 is a defining syntactic property of French for at least half a millennium.

- (29) [_{FrameP} *d'ist* *di* *in* *avant* [_{ForceP} [_{TopicP} *in* *quant*
 from-this day in forward in so-far-as
Deus *savir* *et* *podir* *me* *dunat* [_{FocusP} [_{FinP} *si* [_{Fin}
 God knowledge and power me.CL gives si
salvarai] [_{TP} *eo* [_{vP} ... *cist* *meon* *fradre* *Karlo*]]]]]]]]]
 will-support I this my brother Charles
 ‘From this day forward, insofar as God gives me knowledge and
 power, I will support my brother Charles’ (Strasbourg Oaths)

In fact, if we consider the descriptive generalisations in Clackson & Horrocks (2007: 291–292) and recent work by Salvi (2004: 207) and Ledgeway (2017) on late Latin, we come to an even stronger conclusion that V2 has characterised French and its parent language for over a millennium.

What in formal terms could lead to this level of parametric stability? Here we can make reference to the recent theory of parametric classes proposed in Roberts (2019) and much previous work.²³ In his taxonomy, macroparameters are defined as holding across all heads of the relevant type (i.e. probes or phase heads), mesoparameters hold across all heads of a particular natural class (i.e. all nominal heads or a core functional category), microparameters hold across a small, definable subclass of functional heads (i.e. modal auxiliaries) and nanoparameters at the level of the lexical item (Roberts 2019:

²³ Consider in this regard Roberts (2014), Biberauer & Roberts (2015) and Biberauer, Holmberg, Roberts & Sheehan (2014).

76). Importantly, macroparameters are thought to be ‘highly conserved diachronically’ (Roberts 2014: 403). Turning to our specific data here, V2 sits somewhere between the macro- and meso- distinction in Roberts’ terms; on the one hand, verb-movement phenomena typically belong in the mesoparametric class (Roberts 2019: 78–80) as they concern the probing features of a particular subclass of heads.²⁴ On the other hand, V2 concerns a ‘bundle’ of at least two features [+EF, *v*V] which, under standard phase-theoretic assumptions about successive cyclic movement (Chomsky 2008), need to be associated with *v* as well as single or multiple C-heads for verbal arguments to be internally merged in the left periphery. As such, V2 affects the makeup of all clausal phase-heads, which in a Force-V2 system would consist of *v*, Fin and Force.²⁵ Its diachronic stability in Romance and indeed Germanic therefore sits comfortably within this particular taxonomy of parametric stability.²⁶

A further point concerns V2’s sheer acquisitional salience. We noted above that V2 does not typically operate in embedded clauses in Old or Middle French and data from these domains might not be analysed by the acquirer anyway if we assume some version of degree-zero learnability (Lightfoot 1989). However, it is important to note that V2 structures with XP-merger and V-to-C movement are not restricted to simple matrix declaratives but also occur in a wide variety of interrogatives (Roberts 1993: chap. 2; Salvesen 2009; Salvesen 2014) as well as in a range of other clause-types where residual V2 is still found to this day (see for a recent review Ledgeway 2020). This point is important as Biberauer (2017) has highlighted in recent work the role that both imperatives and interrogatives have had in both reinforcing and expanding the V2 grammar of Afrikaans during the acquisition process.

However, in the case of French and other V2 languages we are faced with a paradox in the domain of stability and change. Whilst V2 may have characterised late Latin and early French for as much as a millennium,²⁷ its specific instantiation during that time has not remained constant. Restricting ourselves only to points raised in this article:

24 Though see Roberts (2019: 357) for some exceptions where verb movement parameters do not hold only at the meso-level.

25 See discussion of Medieval Romance in Wolfe (2016a: 491) and a comparative discussion of V2 and scrambling in Roberts (2012).

26 See Eythórsson (1995) and Walkden (2014) for comparative discussion of the early Germanic data. Again, with the notable exception of English, a form of V2 system appears to have existed for most of the last millennium.

27 Based on work on the loss of V2 in other Romance languages, i.e. Spanish (Fontana 1993), Portuguese (Galves 2020) and Italian (Poletto 2014), stability over such a period is likely a wider phenomenon.

- (i) The locus of V2 effects changes from Fin in late Latin ([Ledgeway 2017](#)) and Early Old French to Force in Later Old French ([Wolfe 2018b](#)) before undergoing subsequent downstairs reanalysis to Fin again in Middle French.
- (ii) The distribution of the particle *siis* diachronically variable: in Early Old French it can be preceded by Frame-Setters, Topics and Foci but in Later Old French by Frame-Setters alone, due to its position in Spec-ForceP ([Wolfe 2018a](#)). In Middle French we saw above that it can be preceded by subjects in the Topic layer as well as Frame-Setters.
- (iii) Whilst in Early Old French both discourse-NEW and discourse-OLD constituents can occur preverbally, as in Later Old French, our Middle French data support the hypothesis that discourse-NEW Information Foci are no longer licensed preverbally (for certain parallels and differences see [Rinke & Meisel 2009](#); [Steiner 2014](#); [Labelle & Hirschbühler 2018](#)).
- (iv) In Early Old French *pro* can be licensed in both pre- and postverbal position and in matrix and embedded clauses, a continuation of the Latin system, whereas in Later Old French preverbal *pro* is not licensed leading to the decline of V1 clauses ([Simonenko & Hirschbühler 2012](#)). In Later Old French embedded *pro* is heavily restricted which yields an asymmetric null subject system ([Adams 1987a](#); [Roberts 1993](#); [Vance 1997](#)). Our analysis has suggested that there is still a clause-type asymmetry in Middle French but that there is evidence that this is starting to break down with *pro* licensed in matrix and embedded clauses, but to a limited extent in both.
- (v) The V2 syntax of Early Old French is more symmetrical than the system reported for Later Old French ([Labelle 2007](#); [Salvesen & Walkden 2017](#)). We have seen above that this asymmetry as regards the licensing of V2 in complement clauses persists into the Middle French period.
- (vi) In Early Old French G-inversion can be licensed where the ‘inverted’ subject is only weakly accessible as well as unambiguously discourse-OLD, whereas R-inversion subjects typically encode NEW information ([Wolfe 2020c](#)). In 13th-century prose and, as we have seen, Middle French prose, the R-inversion position appears to have generalised in terms of information structure and the G-inversion position hosts discourse-OLD constituents.

The broader significance of these points is twofold. We see that there is considerable scope for microvariation in various aspects of a V2 grammar, without affecting the macro- or meso-level parametric properties of the phase heads (Force, Fin, *v*) which form the V2 core. As such, in contrast to the core [+EF, *uV*] features on phase heads, which in the case of *v* and Fin are stable for a millennium, the distribution of the functional XP *sr* (Wolfe 2018a; Meklenborg 2020), the precise makeup of the Focus field (Steiner 2014; Wolfe 2016a: sec. 2; Labelle & Hirschbühler 2018), the features associated with the *pro*-licensing heads T and Top(ic), and the heads associated with overt subjects, T and *v*, are variable across a timespan of centuries. Crucially, none of these cases involves a naturally defined class of heads, so the relative instability fits with the predictions of Roberts' (2019) account of microparameters.

The second significant point is that the *diachronic* instability we observe in V2's instantiation in late Latin and early French mirrors the *synchronic* variability observed in V2 systems spoken today. To choose three examples in domains of diachronic instability in French, microvariation in the licensing of embedded V2 is well established in Germanic (Vikner 1995; Holmberg & Platzack 1995; Gärtner 2003; Bentzen 2005; Biberauer 2017) as is variation in the licensing of *pro* (Fuss 2004; Biberauer 2010; Axel & Weiß 2011; Sigurdsson 2010). Furthermore, it is now clear that the information-structural properties of the V2 prefield are not synchronically consistent across modern Germanic (Bohnacker & Rosén 2008; Bohnacker 2010). The basic intuition is therefore that we are dealing with stable features associated with phase-heads, but that the featural makeup of other functional heads which may affect the instantiation of V2 in a given system is both diachronically and synchronically variable.

The question then arises, if V2 at the micro-level is so inherently variable, when is the tipping point reached where acquirers reanalyse the grammar as one where the clausal phase-heads no longer have the core EF and *uV* properties? In keeping with the line of argument put forward in Poletto (2019) I suggest here that the quest for a single trigger for the loss of V2 in French is illusory. Instead, I propose that a conspiracy of factors converge which lead the child acquirer to see the input as more consistent with an SVO grammar, where the EF and *uV* feature are associated with T:²⁸

- (i) After 1180, French along with some other Medieval Romance varieties appears to no longer license new Information Focus in the left periphery.²⁹ As suggested above, there is no counterevidence to this pro-

²⁸ My proposal is in some sense the mirror image of Weerman's (1989) 'V2 conspiracy', which outlines the factors that condition the emergence of a V2 grammar.

²⁹ See Cruschina (2012) on the distribution of Information Focus in Romance.

posal for Later Old French in our Middle French texts. If we adopt the standard assumption that foci, in contrast to topics, are always moved to the left periphery (Rizzi 1997; Rizzi 2004; Benincà & Poletto 2004) this undermines one key piece of evidence for V2, specifically a moved constituent in the CP preceding a finite verb. Given that non-subjects more typically encode *NEW* information than subjects (e.g. Lambrecht 1994), this decreases the proportion of non-subjects found in the pre-field, which we noted above is a diachronic trend observable in Middle French.

- (ii) The particle *si* is widespread in Old French texts and occurs in two of our Middle French texts. Although there are occasional exceptions to this (cf. 18c) the generalisation holds that *si* rarely co-occurs with verbal arguments and after 1180 never co-occurs with those which are clearly moved rather than base generated (Wolfe 2018a). Although *si* itself is a reflex of the V2 syntax, this is likely a contributing factor, alongside the loss of CP-Information Focus, to the decline in orders where the finite verb in Force or Fin is preceded by moved constituent.
- (iii) Van Kemenade & Meklenborg (2021) put forward convincing evidence that Later Old French topics are base generated rather than moved to their position in the C-domain. If this hypothesis is still correct for Middle French, and the attestation of multiple topics in V3 and V4* configurations seen in Section 2.4 suggests it is, this will further undermine the unambiguous evidence to the acquirer that the system they are learning features EFs on clausal phase-heads which can be satisfied by internal merge of a clause-internal constituent.
- (iv) The Middle French texts show clearly that the Spec-TP position of G-inversion subjects is increasingly pragmatically specialised.³⁰ If this is the case, we predict that fewer subjects will occur in this position which unambiguously demarcates V-to-C movement and more subjects will occur in the R-inversion position which is ambiguous as regards V-to-C or V-to-T movement or in SVO configurations, which are also consistent with both a V2 and a V-to-T grammar. This trend is

³⁰ A reviewer highlights that a pragmatically specialised function for Spec-TP is at first sight incompatible with certain core assumptions of the cartographic enterprise. Whilst this is correct, the notion that clause-internal subject positions can be linked to specific discourse-pragmatic values is not a novel one (e.g., Cardinaletti 2004, 2021; Costa 2004; Rizzi 2005) and the specialisation of the Spec-TP position in the history of French is argued in Wolfe (2021) to contribute towards the reanalysis of the subject field as a more articulated layer of subject-related projections in the sense of Cardinaletti (2004).

already observable in Later Old French (Wolfe 2020c) and we have observed it for Middle French.

Taken together, this non-exhaustive list shows a number of observable changes which (a) undermine clear input that the target for verb movement is in the CP (i.e. Fin and/or Force are μV) and (b) undermine the input that the pre-field is in the C-layer and is a non-specialised position for a range of moved constituents (i.e. Fin and/or Force are +EF), as opposed to Spec-TP which hosts subjects and subject-like expressions. Although none of these points in and of themselves is sufficient to undermine the overall V2 grammar, a tipping point was clearly reached at some point after the turn of the 16th century where the input was no longer sufficient for the grammar to be reanalysed as V2.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article I hope to have shown that the Middle French data are deserving of a reappraisal in light of recent theoretical and empirical developments. The finding that the core V2 property, likely inherited from late Latin (Ledgeway 2017), is still clearly the dominant characteristic of French grammar until c.1500 is significant in demonstrating the property's stability, which I have suggested is due to the fact that its featural makeup affects an acquisitionally salient class of clausal phase-heads. However, the fact that there is also discontinuity when the Middle French data are compared against the better understood Later Old French data shows that sub-parts of V2 system are intrinsically variable at the micro-level.

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