



Clitic placement with infinitives in the diachrony of French

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Clitic placement with infinitives in the diachrony of French

Background: Although clitic placement with finite verbs in the diachrony of French has been extensively analysed (Labelle and Hirschbühler, 2005), the changes in the position of clitics in non-finite contexts remain understudied. French changes radically in this aspect of its grammatical system. In a nut shell, we observe enclisis in Old French (1) (similar to other canonical Romance languages) and proclisis in Modern French (2).

(1) Tu m'oblige a fere **le**.
 you me-force to do.INF **it**
 'You force me to do it.'

(2) Tu m'oblige à **le** faire.
 you me-force to **it** do.INF
 'You force me to do it.'

Additionally, it is well known that clitic climbing was available in earlier French (3). It is not possible in Modern French anymore (4).

(3) Et ou il **le** pouet faire.
 and where he **it** can do.INF
 'And where he can do it.'

(4) Et où il peut **le** faire.
 and where he can **it** do.INF
 'And where he can do it.'

The issue that arises from the diachrony of French therefore is twofold:

- (a) How/why was clitic climbing lost from the history of French?
- (b) Why did French move to obligatory proclisis in finite and infinitival clauses alike?

Present study: This paper presents new data from clitic placement with infinitives in the diachrony of French. We have created a digitalised corpus of French selecting texts from one register (legal), one region (Normandy), and over a period of 700 years (from 1150 to 1856). To this day, there is no quantitative study of clitic placement with infinitives available for Old and Middle French, and no analysis of this radical shift in the history of the language within a generative framework. We have analysed two contexts: (i) infinitives as bare complements of verbs [V_{FIN} Inf], and (ii) infinitives introduced by a conjunction, a preposition or a subordinator [(V_{FIN}) X Inf].

Findings: A total of 3,546 constructions have been analysed. In context (i), clitic climbing such as (3) is frequent (99%) until the mid-16th century. From then on, a few occurrences of proclisis are found. They foretell a change that accelerates during the 17th century: between 1650 and 1750, proclisis increases until clitic climbing becomes unavailable at the turn of the 19th century.

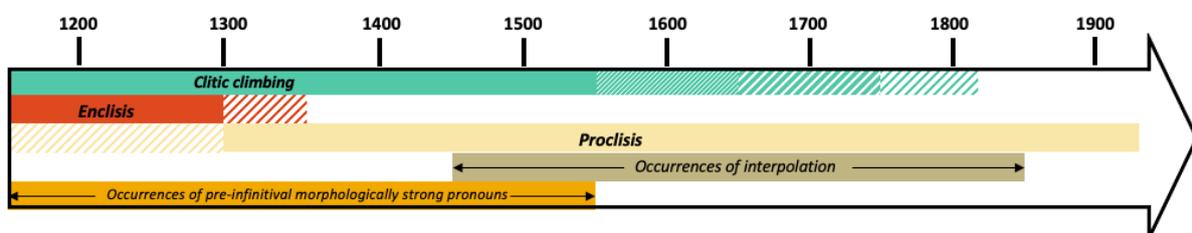


Figure 1. Clitic placement in the diachrony of French

In context (ii), enclisis (91%) is more frequent than proclisis (9%) in Old French. The situation evolves rapidly: proclisis is on the rise from 1300, and enclisis is not found anymore by 1350.

Between 1450 and 1850, we observe instances of interpolation: an element Y intervenes between the clitic and the infinitive [(V_{FIN}) (X) Cl Y Inf].

Discussion: The diachrony of French shows three successive systems (Table 1). Crucially, we do not interpret Middle French as a transition period from a system that has clitic climbing and enclisis (like Standard Italian and Spanish) to a system with generalised proclisis for two reasons. First, there is a 400 year gap between the loss of enclisis and the loss of clitic climbing. The loss of the latter is not a direct reflex of the loss of enclisis. Second, the system in Middle French resembles the one found in some Romance languages which have clitic climbing and proclisis (e.g. Occitan, Francoprovençal, Sardinian).

	Context (i)	Context (ii)
Old French (1100-1300)	Clitic climbing	Enclisis
Middle French (1300-1700)	Clitic climbing	Proclisis
Modern French (from 1700)	Proclisis	Proclisis

Table 1. Clitic placement in Old, Middle and Modern French

Additionally we show that the loss of enclisis overlaps with a series of changes reported in Figure 2. Towards the end of the 12th century, the language becomes VO with infinitives. The V2 grammar and pro-drop weaken, whilst morphological case disappears. Following Kayne (1991) and Roberts (2010), we assume that infinitives could leave the VP and target a functional head higher than the clitic, inducing enclisis. From 1300 on, infinitives must stay in situ (Pollock 1989), yielding proclisis.

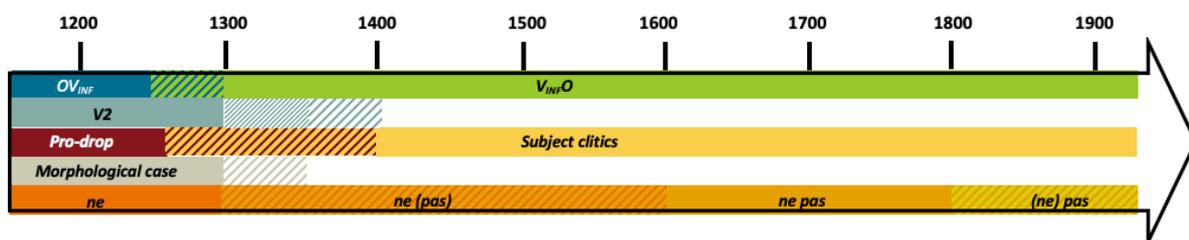


Figure 2. Major changes in the diachrony of French

The loss of clitic climbing is more gradual and takes place when the language is more stable, although it coincides with the strengthening of the post-verbal negator *pas*.

Conclusion: Enclisis was more productive in Old French than previously thought. It is lost early on, presumably indicating the loss of movement of the infinitive. Clitic climbing is frequent in our corpus: it is the only ordering attested in context (i) until the mid-16th century. Its decline spreads over more than 200 years. In Modern French, contexts (i) and (ii) both have proclisis. Our findings show that the relationship between clitic climbing and enclisis is not obvious, and the shifts to proclisis in the two contexts must be accounted for separately.

Selected references:

Kayne, R. S. (1991), 'Romance clitics, verb movement and PRO', *Linguistic Inquiry* 22(4), 647–686. * Labelle, M. and Hirschbühler, P. (2005), Changes in Clausal Organization and the Position of Clitics in Old French, in 'Grammaticalization and Parametric Variation', Oxford University Press, pp. 60–71. * Pollock, J.-Y. (1989), 'Verb Movement, Universal Grammar, and the Structure of IP', *Linguistic Inquiry* 20(3), 365–424. * Roberts, I. (2010), *Agreement and Head Movement: Clitics, Incorporation, and Defective Goals*, MIT Press, Cambridge.