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Functional Reasons
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A Quantitative Approach
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Scholars have characterized French word order in various ways depending on their breadth of diachronic perspective and on their methodological and theoretical orientation. Old French has been classified as verb-second (Frappier 1972, Einhorn 1974, vonWartburg 1934), verb-center (Kukenheim 1967, Crabb 1969), or even as having a great 'liberty' of word order (Foulet 1930). A few theories have been posited to account for Old French word order and its subsequent evolution, some based on the 'internal rhythmic structure' of the language; some claiming word order to be, at first, a purely stylistic device with increasing syntactic conditioning (Ewert 1969). Lehmann (1972) and M. Harris (1978) have suggested that Old French word order is an example of Vennemann's TVX theory (1974), claiming French to have evolved from SOV to SVO via a period where the verb moved medially (as initial position was filled by the sentence topic) and then became syntactically fixed in second position (as the most common topics, subjects, became grammaticalized in first position).¹ Most recently, Galambos (1982) has convincingly argued against Lehmann, claiming French SVO word order to be the result of the standardization of subjects in first position (being quite common and unstressed as topics by the 13th century), which evolved from a previous VSO stage (with the initial person-marked verb a natural topic in the absence of subject pronouns, and the first type of topic generalized in first position). Although Galambos' theory is appealing, it seems to overlook the fact that V-S structures in French have never disappeared; on the contrary, in certain environments, they even seem to be on the rise.

This paper will examine the role that V-S structures have played in the evolution of French and discuss their function in Modern French. Possible reasons for the decline of V-S structures in certain types of clauses and rise of such structures in new environments will be postulated, and a claim will be made that new V-S patterns can be explained at least in part by:

- 1) the change in pragmatic function of certain elements through influence by other elements with a more restricted grammatical distribution, and
- 2) the rise of complex sentence structures, which has resulted in use of V-S word order as a pragmatic device to lessen processing difficulties.

Data consists of 3500 declarative clauses in 8 French prose texts² from the early XIIIc to the XXc. The framework used in this study is a functional one, originating with Sapir's notion of language drift (1921). Data was analyzed using the variable rule program as developed by Cedergren and Sankoff (1974) and Sankoff and Labov (1979).

A look at the data shows a surprising distribution of V-S structures in French - they do not consistently decrease in application and they show an increase in application in the most modern text.

1. % of V-S Structures:

	1210	1230	1300	1389	1448	1529	1690	1981
Texts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
n=	440	861	727	265	246	323	236	284
% V-S	19	16	15	30	18	7	3	7

Assuming language to be a coherent, rule-governed system which evolves without loss of communication from one period to the next, we would hope to find that the disparate percentage figures reflect some evolutionary trends in certain grammatical structures and that the seeming inconsistency of V-S application over the periods is due to a unique interweaving of grammatical and functional patterns. Closer examination of the data does, in fact, show the emergence of certain patterns. First, there is a decline in effect of initial adverbial modifiers on V-S word order over the centuries. This is also the case with initial objects.

2. Adverbs in Initial Position:

Texts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
n=	87	132	56	82	56	46	25	54
% V-S	93	86	84	60	46	32	4	3

On the other hand, there is a surprising rise in the effect of 'et' on V-S structures in the XIVc and XVc and a rise in V-S structures out of relative and subordinate clauses after the XVc while V-S structures in main clauses show a definite decrease in application after the XIVc:

3. 'et' alone or Adverb in Initial Position:

4. Main or Subordinate Clause:

The pragmatic function of certain grammatical elements suggests a few reasons for these changes in V-S patterns.

It is a well-known fact that Old French lacked the extensive subordinating apparatus that Modern French possesses; Rychner (1970: 82) phrases this as a "rareté du passage d'une phrase à l'autre sur un rapport logique: cause, explication, concession, supposition, fin." More commonly found is a simple adverb in first position acting in a subordinating capacity by linking a clause with the preceding one, in other words, establishing the first clause as the topic of the new construction. This suggestion is supported by the fact that the types of adverbs which do not influence V-S word order are, in fact, those which do not function as topic markers (certes, sans faille, onques, neporquant, etc):

5. Maintenant li six message s'agenoillent a lor piez.
(Now the six messengers fall to their knees.)

Types of direct objects found in initial position are those having the pragmatic function of either indicating topic (like adverbs) or focus (using Kuno's definition of focus (1974) as a syntactically marked element to be rejected or accepted as a value for the variable in a presupposed predication):

6. Ceste ^{focus} promesse fist li rois.
(This promise made the king.)

To understand the seemingly strange behaviour of 'et', it is necessary to look at another element, 'si'. The distribution of 'si' as an adverb is unique from that of the other adverbs. 'si',

from Latin 'sic', has been considered by many scholars to be a 'predicative' or 'copulative' indicator. Rychner states that 'si' establishes its clauses as a predicate of the preceding clause. It is also found after subject noun phrases, often long and complex, indicating its extended use as a topic marker and creating at least one problem for verb-second supporters.

7. Li dux de Venise qui ot a nom Henris Dandole, et ere mult sages et mult prouz, si les honora mult, il et autres gens. (The duke of Venise, whose name was Henris Dandole, and was very wise and very powerful, si honored them greatly, he and others.)

Concerning V-S patterns, a comparison of the effect of 'et' alone in initial position, of 'si' alone, and of 'et' and 'si' together, suggests that 'et' may have acquired an adverbial nature and that 'si' was gradually replaced by 'et'. Contact between 'et' and 'si' is seen from the XIIIc-→ XIVc, with V-S structures occurring 11/13 times. Instead of acting solely as a coordinator, it is possible that 'et' was now being used to establish or help establish one clause as the predicate or comment of the preceding one. In her extensive study of Middle French word order (6600 sentences from 28 texts), Brown (1980) suggested that a proposition may be one of the terms of a complex proposition organized around one verb, and that the two clauses may condition each other to form only one syntactic sentence (p. 14). The present data seems to indicate that 'et' became functionally important in creating such complex propositions in the XIV and XV centuries. We also find that, whereas 'et' and 'si' both occur in main clauses, only 'et' is extensively found in subordinate and coordinate clauses, which may help to explain, at least in part, the extension of V-S structures into these clause types.

8. V-S Structures with 'et' and 'si' in Initial Position:

Texts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
% V-S 'et'	23	15	15	66	56	18	4	14
'et' alone	6/60	5/118	0/96	22/45	14/26	4/27	0/16	1/7
'si' alone	6/6	25/25	58/60	2/2	1/1	1/2	*	*
'et' & 'si' together	1/1	8/9	2/2	0/1	*	*	*	*

The pronounced rise in V-S structures in subordinate clauses is still largely unaccounted for, however. Written Modern French, besides being characterized by a wealth of subordinating conjunctions, reflects a considerable rise in complex sentence structures: relative clause embeddings are prevalent, and even the less favored center-embedded clauses can be found. We would hope that an understanding of the organization of these complex sentence structures might explain more fully the appearance of V-S structures in these environments. The difficulties in processing center-embedded

clauses was first noted by Chomsky (1961) and later treated extensively by Kuno (1974). This difficulty of comprehension, according to Kuno, is due to the "limitation on the human capacity of temporary memory" (p.120). In Tok Pisin, G. Sankoff (1980) has suggested that the particle 'ia', placed on both sides of a relative clause, functions, in part, to give the listener perceptual cues as to the limitation of the relative clause and thereby aid in processing difficulties. Slobin (1977) has indicated that languages may use a variety of devices (markers, prepositions, word order, pronouns, inflections, etc.) to aid in processibility. In Modern French, V-S structures seem to function as such a device for the processing of complex sentences with embedded relative clauses, with embedded clauses statistically significant at a .025 level in their effect on word order in text 8:

9. C'est ainsi que tous les niveaux que distingue la linguistique descriptive dans l'étude de langue sont depuis longtemps l'objet de recherches comparatives impliquant des populations défavorisées.

(It's in this way that all the levels that distinguishes descriptive linguistics in the study of language have been for a long time the object of comparative studies involving disfavored groups.)

Heaviness of NP was also statistically significant, with not one V-S structure with subject=pronoun in text 8.³

Givón (1977) has shown that certain Bantu languages evolving from VSO to SVO (i.e. Swahili, Dzamba) exhibit SVO first in main clauses and much later in subordinate and relative clauses:

10. Dzamba: oPetelo a-nyamuzi imo-koudo imu-bundaki zaki.
(Dik 1980:178) (Peter he-sold the-alligator that-caught Jack.)

Dik (1980) has suggested that this is due to the fact that relative markers/pronouns and subordinators behave like topic or focus constituents, what he calls P1 constituents, and, having these functions, are more likely to hold their preverbal position longer than other elements without these functions. Since V-S structures in Modern French subordinate and relative clauses seem to be more productive and innovative than in previous periods (at least from the XIIIc), we are less likely to hypothesize this phenomenon as the last stage of French on its way to SVO order but, rather, as a possible first sign of VSO word order. In spoken French, VSO traits are also widely attested in phonological as well as in syntactic ways, by the dropping of certain unstressed subject pronouns, the use of 'Est-ce que..?' and the existence of dummy locatives and pronouns.

By modifying either Vennemann's TVX theory or Dik's P1VSO stage to allow 'T' or 'P1' to include focus elements and even the verb (if it is functioning as topic or focus), we have a viable

description of Old French word order. As subjects became grammaticalized in first position, we find the emergence of dummy subject pronouns, the disintegration of first position to mark function and the rise of such devices as dislocation and cleft constructions to mark elements for topic and focus. At least in the written language, the rise of complex sentence structures has resulted in V-S patterns to aid processibility, indicating that the hearer must wait further for the relevant information of the sentence. At the same time, we see the emergence of new V-S patterns in subordinate and relative clauses to functionally mark the verb as the topic of its clause, or a clause the topic of another clause. The same phenomenon can also be seen in Modern Spanish:

11. ...y esta no es más que una opinión mía que no tiene usted...
(...and this is nothing more than my opinion that don't have you...) (Grosso 1974:40)
12. Compare a. Les trois recherches qui s'attachent à l'étude du langage actif comparent les sujets sous l'angle de la structure qu'ils produisent.
topic+relevant information
(The three studies concerning the study of language production compare the subjects from the perspective of the structure they produce.)
with b. Mais contrairement à l'étude du langage actif, celle du langage réceptif suppose que soit délimité à priori le répertoire d'éléments de la langue constituant les épreuves de compréhension.
(But, contrary to the study of language production, that of language reception assumes that might be delineated a priori the repertory of elements of the language making up the tests in comprehension)

In example 11, we see that whereas the subject of the relative clause is an inherently topical pronoun in sentence a. with the verb containing the more relevant information, in sentence b., the verb is much more topical than the subject noun phrase in post-verbal position.

Of course, this study is only a preliminary attempt to explain the functional role of V-S structures in French. Work using a framework involving 1) the various functions of propositions in the construction of discourse models (Pollack 1983), and 2) the notions of semantic and referential link to create discourse cohesion (Reinhart 1980), comparing both written and oral data, would be fruitful in this area. Understanding the evolution of such structures as V-S in French will help us not only to better understand how French has evolved, but also help us to understand the nature of languages in general as they constantly generalize functional structures to grammatical status and then create new or revived grammatical ways to express those same functions in the language.

NOTES

- ¹Here and throughout this paper, I will be using topic in the Chafian sense, as "an element setting the spatial, temporal, or individual framework within which the main predication holds." (1976:50)
- ²Text 1: Villehardouin, J. "La Conquête de Constantinople." 1210. ms. no. 687. Bibliothèque des ducs de Bourgogne. Reprinted in Société de l'Histoire de France. ed. M.A. Paris. Paris: Jules Renouard, 1838.
 Text 2: La Mort le Roi Artu, 1230-35. ms. no. 342 du fonds français, Bibliothèque Nationale. In Etude sur la Mort le Roi Artu. éd. J. Frappier. Paris: Droz, 1972.
 Text 3: de Clari, R. "La Conquête de Constantinople", 1300. ms. no. 487. Bibliothèque Nationale de Copenhagen. In Classiques français. ed. P. Lauer. Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1956.
 Text 4: Froissart, J. "Chroniques de France", 1389-92. In Chroniques de J. Froissart, V. 14, ed. K. de Lettenhove. Bruxelles: Victor Devaux et Cie, 1872.
 Text 5: du Clercq, J. "Mémoires", 1448-67. Bibliothèque de St. Vaast d'Assas. In Collection des Mémoires Relatifs à l'Histoire de France. Tome XI, ed. M. Petitot. Paris: Foucault, 1820.
 Text 6: Tory, G. Champfleury, 1529. British Museum. cote 60.e. 14. In Classiques de la Renaissance en France. ed. M.A. Screech. Paris: S.R. Publishers, 1970.
 Text 7: Vaugelas, C.F. Nouvelles Remarques sur la Langue Francoise. 1690. Paris: Guillaume Desprez, Reprinted: Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1972.
 Text 8: Page, M. "Problématiques des recherches comparatives sur la langue d'enfants issus de milieux différents". In Etudes sur la langue parlée des enfants québécois 1969-1980. ed. Gilles Gagné & Michel Pagé. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1981.
- ³Pronominal subjects were disfavored in all texts, supporting several other studies on word order, including Silva Corvalán's study on Mexican-American Spanish (1981), Dik (1980), and Galambos' study of Old French (1982), who all indicated the strong topic function of subject pronouns.

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