

## Changes at the syntax-semantics interface: from Latin to Modern French

Contemporary studies in diachronic syntax have produced detailed quantitative studies demonstrating that the time course of the diffusion of a linguistic replacement typically follows an S-shaped curve (Denison 2003; Kroch 1989). Change tends to proceed slowly in the beginning, then dramatically picks up momentum to finally slow down as the last vestiges of the older form linger on. If one adopts the point of view that syntactic alternations during the period of change reflect the coexistence of competing grammars in a population (Kroch 1989 and subseq.), then it appears to be an empirical fact that such coexistence does not last long. Studies in this area tend to focus on word-order changes and have been analyzed as the reflex of a change in a morpho-syntactic feature responsible for movement of some kind.

The present study asks whether the same principle holds for changes that involve the expression of events at the syntax-semantic interface. Such changes have been little explored from a diachronic point of view and differ in two crucial ways from word-order changes. First, the syntactic expression of events involves features related to event composition within the vP as opposed to word order changes that concern categories and features in the extended IP and CP domains. Second, it is widely accepted that changes involving event structure occur gradually over very long periods of time. A gradual drift occurring over many centuries, even millennia, would contrast with the time course observed for word-order changes and would be at odds with formal theories that claim that events involving result are derived in the syntax via discrete functional heads.

Our investigation of this question involves the changes occurring in the expression of resultative secondary predication from Latin to Modern French. Latin is considered a “satellite-framed” (s-framed) language (Talmy 1989, 2000) in that it productively uses directional prefixes to express result (1), while Romance languages like Modern French are considered to be “verb-framed” (v-framed) since they are generally limited to using inherently directional verbs or pragmatic inference to the same end (2). The prevailing assumption has been that as Latin evolves into French, it passes gradually from a s-framed language to a v-framed language (Acedo-Matellán 2010; Iacobini & Fagard 2011; Talmy 2000), yet such claims overlook Old French, which presents a surprising intermediate stage in this shift, allowing a cluster of related s-framed constructions found neither in Latin nor in Modern French: directional verb particles in (3a) (see Burnett & Tremblay 2009); goal of motion constructions in (3b) (see Troberg 2011); and adjectival resultative constructions in (3c) (see Burnett & Troberg 2012).

- (1) *Caprarum-que uberibus advolant.*  
goat.GEN.PL-and udder.DAT.PL to.fly.3PL  
‘And they fly onto the udders of the goats’  
(Plin. *Nat.* 10, 115, in Acedo Matellán 2010, 100)
- (2) a. #*L’oiseau a volé sur la branche* (only bizarre atelic locative interpretation)  
the.bird AUX flown on the branch  
b. *L’oiseau s’est posé sur la branche*  
‘The bird alighted on the branche’
- (3) a. *le mers reportoit le nef ariere*  
the sea re.bring the ship back  
‘the sea pushed the ship back’  
(Clari, p.74, in Dufresne, et al. 2003)  
b. *il vole sur les rainceaulx ou sur les branches.*  
he flies onto the branches or onto the branches  
‘he flies onto small tree limbs or branches.’  
(*Le Menagier de Paris*, c.1392-1394, 163, in DMF2009)  
c. *Que tricherie abat jus plate.*  
that deception beats down flat  
(Pizan, *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*, 1400, t.2, 29, in DMF2009)

In order to measure how resultative secondary predication evolves, we track the loss of directional verb particles in the history of French, revealing a similar time course to that of other more well-studied

syntactic changes. There are two empirical challenges to the analysis. One resides in the fact that the Old French directional verb particle merges with verbs of movement as a secondary predicate to express result, but when it is lost, there is no syntactic alternative, no obvious analogous replacement form whose frequency will increase as the particles are lost. The other challenge is linked to the fact that these particles only occur with directional verbs, so the number of tokens is necessarily limited. Since the goal of the study is to quantify as best as possible a formal change, we chose verb + particle combinations for which the verb and the particle have the same directional denotation: *entrer* + *ens* ‘to enter into’, *issir* + *hors* ‘to exit out’, *descendre* + *aval/contreval/jus* ‘to descend down’, *monter* + *amont/contremont/sus* ‘ascend up’. These choices ensure that the contribution of the particle is not a necessary element to the description of the core schema. We thus expect that a given event in Medieval French, described using a verb + particle combination will later be described by the simple use of the directional verb (see Kopecka 2009). Table 1 summarizes the frequency of the verb particle constructions from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**TABLE 1:** FREQUENCY IN % OF VERB + PARTICLE OUT OF ALL OCCURRENCES OF VERB

	<i>entrer</i> + part	<i>issir</i> + part	<i>descendre</i> + part	<i>monter</i> + part
12th c.	2	7	5	6
13th c.	3	7	7	6
14th c.	2	8	5	3
15th c.	1	3	2	3
16th c.	0	0	0	2

In roughly the space of 100 years, particles go from playing a predominant role in describing motion events (Buridant 2000; Kopecka 2009) to being entirely absent from them. Following Kroch’s Constant Rate Hypothesis, we also demonstrate that these changes are related by virtue of having

similar rates of change. The four-verb study is further corroborated by an additional study that tracks the replacement of the particles *arrière* ‘back’ and *avant* ‘forward’ by the PPs *en arrière* and *en avant* in directional contexts. Of all the novel resultative secondary predication structures in Old French, the particles are the only ones that lend themselves to a quantitative study, so a comparison with goal of motion and adjectival resultatives is not available to us. We nevertheless see a strong presence of these latter constructions up until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward however, we find no occurrences of the goal-of-motion construction; the last complex adjectival resultative construction identified in our corpus is written by François Villon, born in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This impressionistic evidence thus correlates with the solid evidence from the particle studies.

The picture that emerges does not therefore demonstrate the gradual unfolding of a v-framed language from a s-framed one, but rather an evolution punctuated by a new system in Medieval French, which then disappears rather abruptly during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Such a time course of change corresponds to an analysis that attributes the possibility of directional verb particles (along with adjectival resultatives and goal of motion constructions) to the presence of a discrete functional head that encodes result. Our claim is therefore that changes at the syntax-semantics interface proceed in much the same way as they do in the IP or CP domains; the reanalysis or the non instantiation of a functional head may entail the same kind of dramatic reflex(es) regardless of the type of grammatical head it is. Moreover, a fine-grained analysis of the grammatical formatives involved in event composition can account for the development of systems that fall outside traditional typological descriptions. **References:** ACEDO-MATELLAN, V. 2010. Argument Structure and the Syntax-Lexicon Interface. Doctoral dissertation. U. de Barcelona; BURNETT, H. & M. TREMBLAY. 2009. Variable-behaviour Ps and the Location of PATH in Old French. *Romance languages and linguistic theory 2007*. Benjamins. KOPECKA, A. 2009. Continuity and change in the representation of motion events in French. In *Crosslinguistic Approaches to the Psychology of Language*. Psychology Press; Kroch, A. 1989. Reflexes of Grammar in Patterns of Language Change. *LVC* 1: 199-244; Talmy, L. 2000. TALMY, L. 2000. *Toward a Cognitive Semantics*. MIT Press. TROBERG, M. 2011. Directed motion in Medieval French. In *Romance Linguistics 2010. Selected papers from the 40<sup>th</sup> LSRL*. Benjamins.