

## Methodological Concerns in the Study of Diachronic Information Structure (*talk*)

There has been much interest in Information Structure and its role in diachronic syntax recently. A great deal of care must be used in this pursuit. Information Structure is an area of study notorious for inconsistency in the definition and division of its components: topic, focus, frame-setting, aboutness, givenness, and contrastiveness. Given this inconsistency, it is difficult to draw generalizations about the influence of Information Structure on linguistic change. The goal of the present paper is threefold: (1) to help clarify the confusion in nomenclature, (2) to provide a methodological framework for the identification and labeling of Information Structural elements in text languages that is explicit enough to be replicable by other researchers and (3) to decide between competing claims about the IS system of Old French. Applying this method to ~1000 sentences, we are able to present results that suggest that the syntactic realization of Information Structure (IS) in Old French patterns similarly to that of other V2 languages, both in V2 and V>2 clauses.

To begin, we make use of three major IS elements: topic, focus and frame-setting. Topics, defined generally as “what the sentence is about” (Reinhart 1981), are further subdivided into *aboutness topics*—newly established or switched to topics, *familiar topics*—a continually used topic that is coindexed with the most recently established aboutness topic, and *contrastive topics*—a topic that is specifically set in contrast to another established topic (Frascarelli 2007). Focus, understood to be the “important” or “newly relevant” information in a clause, is divided into *contrastive focus*—any focus element that is set in contrast, whether explicitly or implicitly with another non-topic element, and (*new*) *information focus*—any non-contrastive focus that provides new, important or relevant information either to the discourse or about a topic (Büring 1999). Frame-setting elements, the final major class of IS elements, serve to limit the truth-value of an utterance by situating the action temporally, locally, or with respect to previously stated information (Jacobs 2001, Speyer 2010).

In identifying topics and focus, we also make use of four features that can be thought of as being on a separate plane from the IS elements examined. These are: givenness, aboutness, definiteness and contrastiveness. The values of these features determine the IS label (topic, focus, frame-setting) when applied to the relevant XPs. For example, all topics are [+about] and [+definite] but contrastive topics must be [+contrastive], familiar topics must be [+given] and aboutness topics may be [+given] or [+accessible], depending on whether it is a new topic or if it is being returned to as an aboutness topic. Focused elements must be [-aboutness], but may, in principle, have any givenness or definiteness value and the distinction between the two types depends on the contrastiveness value.

For the sake of both interrater reliability and consistency between groups of researchers, decision trees have been created for each IS element. These trees are based upon those developed by Götze et al (2007), though with significant modification, such as the addition of multiple types of topics, the possibility ofthetic clauses and Frame-Setting as an IS element. These decisions are then recorded in tables based on those in Petrova & Solf (2009), though modified to include topic type,thetic clauses and Frame-Setting. Each table represents a sentence or matrix clause (depending on context) from the text. An example of such a table can be seen below:

Figure 1: IS coding of a sentence from *Merlin en prose* (circa 1200)

<b>OFr</b>	<b>et</b>	<b>Uitiers</b>	<b>si</b>	<b>lieve</b>	<b>sa</b>	<b>main</b>	<b>si</b>	<b>se</b>	<b>seingne</b>
<b>ENG</b>	<i>and</i>	<i>Uitiers</i>	<i>thus</i>	<i>raised</i>	<i>his</i>	<i>hand</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>REFL</i>	<i>signed</i>
<b>Info Stat</b>		given				access			
<b>about</b>		yes				no			

<b>contrast</b>		no				no			
<b>Topic</b>		aboutness							
<b>definite</b>		yes				yes			
<b>Thetic</b>									
<b>FS</b>									
<b>nif</b>						nif			
<b>cf</b>				cf					cf

Using this methodology, we have examined the IS system, as it pertains to V2, of three texts in Old French. Our results suggest that during this period, elements in the clause initial position could be of any IS value (i.e. *topic*, *focus*, *frame-setting* or non-IS), as is expected in any V2 grammar. These results support the conclusions of Labelle & Hirschbühler (2011) and are contra the claims of Rinke & Meisel (2009), who suggest that only topics are permitted phrase initially in Old French. Furthermore, our results suggest that V>2 structures, which have been taken as proof against a V2 analysis of Old French by Kaiser & Zimmermann (2010), amongst others, are used in Old French specifically to accommodate Information Structural needs. This again is similar to V2 languages like Modern German, which permit V>2 structures in pragmatically specified contexts.

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