The distribution of bare nominals in Old French :
a quantitative analysis of two 12th century texts
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1. Introduction For some authors (e.g. Longobardi 1994), nouns are essentially predicates (type <e,t>), while for others (e.g. Baker 2003), nouns are inherently arguments (type <e>). Strict bare argument languages (e.g. Latin) provide evidence in favor of the first hypothesis, while languages with obligatory determiners (e.g. French) argue in favor of the latter. Languages where bare nouns are part of the paradigm (i.e. limited to indefinites (Brazilian Portuguese), to plural indefinites (English), or plural indefinites in object position (Italian)) highlight the semantic and syntactic conditioning of bare nouns. In this paper, we argue that the emergence of determiners in Old French (OF) provides additional evidence in favor of an analysis of nouns as predicates.

2. Bare nominals in Old French Old French freely permits both singular and plural bare nominal arguments; illustrative examples are given in (1).

(1)a. ***Hom*** *qui traïst altre, nen est dreiz qu'il s'en vant*   BARE singular N
    'A man who betrays his fellows should not boast of it.'
    (Foulet 1928, cited in Boucher 2005)

  b. ***Galois*** *sont tuit par nature plus fol que bestes an pasture*   BARE plural N
    'Gauls are all naturally crazier than beasts let out to pasture.'
   (Foulet 1928, cited in Boucher 2005)

Old French has a dedicated definite D, an emerging singular indefinite D *un*, but no clear plural indefinite D. Argument bare Ns are compatible with indefinite existential construal (2a), generic reference (2b), abstract nouns (2c), and mass nouns (2d) (Boucher 2005, Mathieu 2009)

(2)a. *Donez moi* ***armes*** *por le besoing qu'abonde.*
    'Give me weapons because the need is pressing.'
    (La *Prise d'Orange,* end of 12th century, line 964)

  b. ***Cocodrille*** *est uns animaus a .iiij. piez et de jaune color.*
    'The crocodile is a four-legged animal and is yellow.'
    (Li *livres dou tresor,* year 1260-1267, V, *Dou cocodrille,* p.184, cited in Mathieu 2009)

  c. ***Envie*** *lor fait grant contraire*
    'Envy is not good for them.'
    (Eracle, year 1180, line 1061, cited in Mathieu 2009)

  d. ***Mirre*** *e* ***timonie*** *i Wrent alumer*
    'They burnt myrrh and incense.'
    (Epstein 1995, cited in Boucher 2005)

Both singular and plural definite count nouns require the presence of the definite determiner, which agrees in gender, case and number with the noun, although focus and metric have been argued to favor the definite (Mathieu 2009).

3. Methodology Our study relies on two Anglo-norman texts from the 12th century: *Le voyage de St-Brendan* (circa1106-21) and *Les lais de Marie de France* (circa1154-1189). These two texts, from the corpus *Les voies du français*, are entirely tagged and parsed with Corpus Search. We considered only definite and indefinite arguments in subject and object position. Therefore, all arguments inside a PP, predicate nominals (including complex predicates), possessive and demontrative DPs, and QPs were excluded. Moreover we did not take into account indefinite pronominals or quantifiers such as *on/hum, autre, rien…* All instances of *un* were considered determiners, and not numerals.

4. Results   As shown in table 1, definite determiners with count nouns are well established in subject position in Saint Brendan and are almost categorical 50 years later in Marie de France.
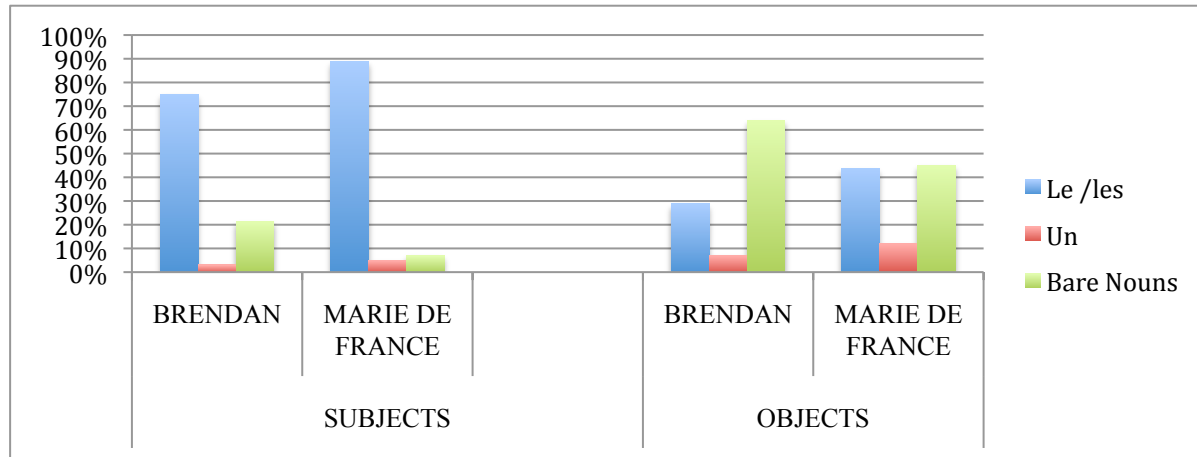
Mass nouns and abstract nouns appear without a definite determiner 50% of the time, accounting for the presence of bare nouns in subject position (with an increase in definite determination between St-Brendan (40%) and Marie de France (60%)). Plural indefinites are categorically bare in both texts (the partitive *des* not being reanalyzed as a plural indefinite determiner until Middle French), but singular indefinites show a slight increase of the determiner (20%). OF shows no subject/object asymmetry (unlike Italian) and the distribution of bare nouns in subject position does not seem to be restricted to postverbal position (unlike Spanish).

5. Analysis   In OF, definiteness is a predictor for D, which is consistent with treating definiteness as a primitive feature. (In)definiteness is an active contrast for count nouns, but not for mass and abstract nouns, which are progressively licensed definite expletives (Zubizaretta & Vergnaud). Within count nouns, the asymmetry between definiteness and indefiniteness (definites vs. plural indefinites) is consistent with the emergence of number marking as a licensor for bare nouns.

6. Conclusion   The expression of determiners in OF is linked to the morphological changes that occurred in the system (subject/object, case/number, singular/plural). These changes yielded ambiguous nominal structures resulting in an obligatory phonological realization of the determiner. The progressive morphologization of the determiner and the regression of bare nouns are indications that there is a null D morpheme in OF, as predicted by the N=predicate analysis.

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