

Participle fronting and clause structure in Old and Middle French

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Between 1090 and 1527, in French, the percentage of fronted participles dropped from about 20% of the clauses with an auxiliary and a participle, to 0%.

- (1) sil fiert en l'elme, ki gemmet fut a or; (1100, ROLAND-V,170.2306)
struck him on the helm, that jewelled was with gold

Since the work of Maling (1990), participle fronting has been much discussed for Icelandic, as an instance of Stylistic Fronting, and has been attested in ancient Scandinavian and in Romance: Italian (Cardinaletti 2003), Sardinian (Egerland, 2011), Old Florentine (Franco 2012), Old Catalan (Fischer, 2010), Old Spanish (Fontana, 1993), Old French (Cardinaletti & Roberts, 1991/2002, Mathieu 2006). Previous studies have pointed to intralinguistic (Hrafnbjargarson & Wiklund, 2009; Molnár, 2010) and crosslinguistic pragmatic and syntactic variation. For example, it has been argued that the fronted constituent is focussed in Romance, contrary to Icelandic (e.g. Egerland 2011). The stylistically fronted element may be preceded by a full subject in Italian (Cardinaletti, 2003), Old English & Old Catalan (Fischer 2010), while this is excluded in Scandinavian. The fronted participle tends to front as a head in Icelandic but as a phrase in Sardinian (Egerland, 2011). The position of the fronted participle is a matter of debate: whether it targets Spec,TP, or a head or specifier position within the left periphery: FinP (Hrafnbjargarson & Wiklund, 2009), ModP (Franco, 2012a,b), TopP+ (Mathieu, 2006), FocP (Hrafnbjargarson, 2004). We study the construction in Old and Middle French, concentrating on the following three aspects: the position of the participle in the clause, the pragmatic effect of fronting and the nature of the fronted constituent.

i) In main clauses, postverbal weak pronominal subjects are attested. Since pronominal subjects occupy the highest position in IP (cf. Vance, 1988), the participle in (2) is within the left periphery, checking the V2 head. Indeed, most of the examples are of type: “loué soit il” (blessed be he) which have volitive force. (Cf. also 5a, with a focus interpretation).

- (2) Oit avons nous nombre dix manieres de pechiez de langue;
Heard have we numbered ten manners of sin(ning) with tongue
(1279, SOMME-ROYAL-P,1,66.1796)

In embedded clauses, postverbal pronominal subjects are not attested even though definite nominal subjects are widely attested. Instead, until 1267 we find the order PronSubj-Participle-V (3a). As this word order also occurs with full subjects (3b) (see Fischer, 2010), it does not result from the fact that the subject would have cliticized on the complementizer (contra what Mathieu 2006, Platzack 1988, Cardinaletti & Roberts 2002 proposed for (3a)).

- (3) a. la gravance que il fait avoit a l'empereor ... (127x, CASSIDORUS-P,674.4619)
the wrong that he did had to the emperor
(3) b. Eüstaces mot n' en savoit De ço que Dex sauvé avoit ses effanz ...
E. word not knew of-the-fact that God saved had his children
(1212, EUSTACE-FISHER-R,31.370)

We argue that the subject checks a D feature in a position adjacent to Fin and that the verb checks a T feature in a lower head, the participle being scrambled between the two heads (cf. Cardinaletti & Roberts 2002, Labelle, 2007). After 1267, the PronSubj-Participle-V word order is replaced by Participle-PronSubj-V, with the pronominal subject adjacent to the verb: the D and T features are now checked on the same head. This word order is found only in subordinate clauses (except for one late example in verse, dating from 1370).

ii) In many cases, there is no pragmatic effect to participle fronting (4), but in other cases, the participle is focused (5). We discuss the data in reference to Frey (2006)'s view that pragmatically neutral participle fronting results from Formal Movement, while contrastive fronting is A' movement.

- (4) Bel sire reis, fait m'avez un grant dun. (1100, ROLAND-V,70.840)
Good Sire King, (you) made me have a great gift

- (5) a. ...avoit il recovree sa terre que Tholomers li voloit tolir, et tolue li eust il se ...
 he recovered his land that T. wanted to take from him, and taken would-have he if...
 (1225, QUESTE-P,113.2974 (2731-2734))
- (5) b. Se fuiit s' en est Marsilies, Remés i est sis uncles Marganices....
 If fled has M. , stayed is his uncle M.
 (1100, ROLAND-V,143.1937)
- iii) We argue that there is evidence of V⁰ movement when the participle is extracted out of a coordination; in (6a) the participle's complement is stranded, and in (6b), the modifier:
- (6) a. Si ne voloient qu' afolez Fust des Crestiens ou defoulez;
 PRT did not want that hurt be from the Christians or trampled
 (137X, PRISE-R,3365)
- (6) b. ...s' en ala veoir sa mere Et son mari, qui deshaitiez Estoit forment & mal traitiez.
 ...went see his mother and her husband who distressed was much & badly treated
 (137X, PRISE-R,4514)

VP fronting is also attested, notably when a complement immediately follows the participle. This word order is attested in Sardinian but is said to be impossible in Old Catalan.

- (7) a. e lunges vait Ainz que [trovét nule rien] ait. (1120, BRENDAN-R,70.1085)
 and long-time goes until [found any thing] had.
- (7) b. ... furent [...] ruet jus li Hainnuier, et ceuls qui [accompagniet avoecques euls] estoient.
 ... were [...] thrown down the H. and those who [accompanied with them] were
 (1373, FROISSART-P,436.8913)

The fronted participle phrase has the OV_{part} word order twice as often as the V_{part}O word order illustrated in (7). VO, attested as early as 1120 (7a), becomes relatively more frequent during the 14th c. We argue that, in the OV_{part} order (apart from sentences with a verb final base, which do not result from participle fronting), the O has moved to the left of the participle, as this word order is also attested after the finite auxiliary.

We discuss the combinations of factors that lead to participle fronting, both diachronically and crosslinguistically, comparing French with Romance and Scandinavian languages.

References

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