

Old French SI: Syntax and Function in Diachrony

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1 Introduction

- SI is an Old French (OFr) particle, reflex of Latin SIC "thus, in this way".
- SI is extremely frequent throughout the Old French period it "occurs in virtually every French text from the ninth-century... through the fourteenth century" (Fleischman 1992: 434)
- SI is immediately preverbal (Skårup, 1975) and has an unusual distribution. It is extremely rare in negative and subordinate clauses and cannot occur at the immediate beginning of a thematic paragraph. Additionally, wh-words and VP-elements such as *mult* cannot precede it (Meklenborg, 2020).
- SI's function and syntax remain debated. It has been considered a "mystery particle" (Fleischman, 1991: 251)
- Purpose of the current study:
 - A large scale quantitative approach to SI aiming to resolve previous debates with a focus on testing the popular topic continuity analysis (Fleischman, 1991; 1992; van Reenen and Schøsler, 2000; Wolfe 2018b)
 - Findings:
 - * SI is a phrasal constituent which occurs immediately preverbally, in the specifier of the head occupied by the verb.
 - * SI is polyfunctional, fulfilling different functions across the OFr period.

1.1 Structure of the Talk:

- Section 2: Theoretical Assumptions.
- Section 3: Review of the literature on SI.
- Section 4: Methodology of the current study.
- Section 5: Findings of the current study.
- Section 6: Concluding remarks.

2 Theoretical Assumptions

- OFr is a Verb Second (V2) language¹. I.e. there is verb movement to the C domain with the specifier of the head hosting the verb obligatorily filled.
- In order to analyse the position of SI relative to the verb as well as the verb's position in the C domain, I utilise Rizzi (1997)'s cartography of the left periphery.
- Here I use Ledgeway's (2010) model (adapted from Wolfe (2018a:3)):
 - (1) [_{Frame} Hanging Topic, Adv Frame-Setting [_{Force} Comp₁ [_{Topic} Left Dislocation, Aboutness Topic [_{Focus} Focus_{Contrastive}, Quantifier_{Indefinite}, Focus_{NewInformation} [_{Fin} Comp₂ [_{TP}...]]]]]]]]
- Benincà (2004: 70) also suggest that List Items (LIs) lexicalise the lowest point of the Topic field, a view I take up here.
- For our purposes only a minimal definition of topics and foci is required although many other fine-grained distinctions are possible. "Topics are [...] considered active (or at least identifiable), while foci express new information" (Cruschina, 2012: 10)².

Hanging Topic (HT):

- (2) et **cil**, cum ils les virent, si descendirent de lor chevaus et alerent encontre
and those, when they them saw, si descended from their horses and went to meet
'And those ones, when they saw them, descended from their horses and went to meet them'
Villehardouin's Conquete de Constantinople § 116

¹Thurneysen (1982), Adams (1987), Roberts (1993), Vance (1997), Rouveret (2004), Labelle (2007), Donaldson (2012), Wolfe (2018a,b); pace Rinke and Meisel (2009), Sitaridou (2012)

²see also Lambrecht (1996) on the complexity of the topic-focus typology.

Left Dislocated Topic (LD)³:

- (3) **De cele estoire** si fu chevetaines Johans de Neele
of this army si was leader Johans of Neele
'Johans of Neele was the leader of this army'
Villehardouin's *Conquête de Constantinople* § 48

New Information Focus (NIF):

- (4) **Bengabér en Ramath Galáád** si out la cited de Anothiair
Bengaber in Ramath Galaad si had the city of Anothiair
'Bengaber in Ramath Galaad had the city of Anothiair'
Quatre Livres des Reis p. 65

Contrastive Focus (CF):

- (5) **Eurus** si feri qui tost les remist a la voie
Eurus si was who all them put back to the sail
'It was Eurus who put them all back to sail'
Histoire Ancienne Jusqu'à César §606.7

List Items (LI):

- (6) **Li uns des ars** si fu d'un bois
The first of the arts si was of a wood
'The first of the arts was from a wood'
Roman de la Rose (First Continuation) l. 910

3 Previous Work on SI

Analyses of Function:

- Foulet (1930) - a simple adverbial.
- Kibler (1984) - a conjunctive adverb.
- Stammerjohann (1988) - a clausal conjunction acting at the discursive level.
- Marchello-Nizia (1985) - a marker of the speech act of assertion.
- **Fleischman (1991, 1992); van Reenen & Schøsler (2000); Wolfe (2018a)**
 - **Topic Continuity Marker.**
 - It should be noted that Fleischman (1991, 1992) discusses topic continuity alongside the notion of "same subject" marking. Similarly, van Reenen and Schøsler's notion of Topic Continuity is defined as "[a] series of same subjects in main clauses" (van Reenen and Schøsler, 2000: 63)
- Ledgeway (2008) - V2 expletive
- Meklenborg (2020) - Adverbial resumptive of fronted material; conjunctive adverb.

³See Benincà and Poletto (2004) for details on distinguishing LDs and HTs

Syntactic Analyses:

- There is substantial debate as to whether SI should be analysed as a head (Ferraresi and Goldbach, 2003; Ledgeway, 2008), phrase (Wolfe, 2018a) or even both (Meklenborg, 2020)
- Thus, SI's relationship with V2 is debated. Most head analyses take SI to not fulfill the V2 requirement. Phrasal analyses on the other hand have used SI to identify the position of the verb in the left periphery (Wolfe, 2018b).

Why another work on SI?

- There is still no consensus in the literature on the function or syntax of SI.
- SI is uniquely positioned to allow us to probe the syntax of the left periphery and the information structural system of OFr (assuming there is some truth to the topic continuity analysis).
- Previous work on SI has been qualitative, treated SI as a peripheral phenomenon or suffered from data issues.

4 Methodology

Text Selection:

Title	Abbreviation	Verse Prose	Text-Type	Dating	Dialect	Total Tokens
Eneas	Eneas	Verse	Roman	c. 1155	Norman	196
Conte du Graal	Graal	Verse	Roman	c. 1185	Champenois	249
Quatre Livres des Reis	QLR	Prose	Biblical	c. 1190	Anglo-Norman	249
Villehardouin's Conquête de Constantinople	Villehardouin	Prose	History	c. 1205	Champenois/ Unclear	252
Histoire Ancienne Jusqu'à César	HA	Prose	History	c. 1211 -1225	Parisian	242
Roman de la Rose (first continuation)	RR1	Verse	Roman	c. 1225	Orléanais	162
Recit d'un Menestrel de Reims	Menestrel	Prose	History	c. 1260	Champenois	247
Roman de la Rose (second continuation)	RR2	Verse	Roman	c. 1269 -1278	Parisian	245
Roman de Fauvel	Fauvel	Verse	Roman	c. 1310	Norman	74
Chartes de l'Abbaye de Magloire	Magloire	Prose	Charters	c. 1330 -1345	Parisian	10
Grandes Chroniques de France IX	Chroniques	Prose	History	c. 1340	Parisian	42

Table 1: List of primary sources

- In order to overcome past data issues, I have included both verse and prose texts and endeavoured to minimise text type variation.
- 2016 clauses in total were gathered from across these texts, aiming for 250 per text, or as many as could be found.

- Each clause was marked for its subject's relation to previous clauses, following Fleischman (1991, 1992) and van Reenen and Schøsler's (2000) notions of topic continuity, I have devised 4 annotation categories.
 - Subject Continuity (SC): Subject is the same as the previous main clause
 - (7) il vait avant, si la salue
 he goes ahead SI her greetss
 'He goes ahead and greets her'
 Eneas l. 722
 - Discourse Subject Switch (DSS): Subject switches to one explicitly mentioned in the recent discourse.
 - (8) Quant li rois l' oi, si saut
 When the king it heard SI jumped
 'When the king heard this he jumped'
 Menestrel p. 3
 - Old Subject Switch (OSS): Subject switches to one mentioned in older discourse or strongly inferrable (e.g. 1st and 2nd person subjects).
 - (9) si n' i feist riens Avarice
 SI NEG *i* did anything Avarice
 'Avarice did not do anything'
 RR1 l. 296
 - New Subject Switch (NSS): Subject switches to an entirely new referent.
 - (10) Li dux de Venise, qui ot a nom Henris Dandole, et ere mult sages et mult prouz, si les honora mult
 The duke of Venice who had as name Henry Dandole and was very wise and very brave SI them honored much
 'The duke of Venice, who was called Henry Dandole and was very wise and very brave, honored them greatly'
 Villehardouin § 15
- For syntactic analysis the elements preceding SI and its position relative to the verb were marked.

5 Findings

5.1 Function

5.1.1 Subject Continuity

Text	SC (%)	DSS (%)	OSS (%)	NSS (%)	Expl (%)	Total (%)
12th century						
Eneas	139 (71.3)	37 (19.0)	8 (4.1)	7 (3.6)	4 (2.0)	195 (100)
Graal	184 (70.5)	49 (18.8)	12 (4.6)	8 (3.8)	7 (2.7)	261 (100)
QLR	186 (75.0)	41 (16.5)	10 (4.1)	6 (2.4)	5 (2.0)	248 (100)
13th century						
Villehardouin	127 (50.4)	81 (32.1)	22 (8.7)	18 (7.1)	4 (1.6)	252 (100)
HA	189 (78.7)	27 (11.3)	8 (3.3)	11 (4.6)	5 (2.1)	240 (100)
RR1	109 (62.6)	28 (16.1)	20 (11.5)	5 (2.9)	12 (6.9)	174 (100)
Menestrel	82 (33.2)	145 (58.7)	7 (2.8)	1 (0.4)	12 (4.9)	247 (100)
RR2	122 (47.7)	65 (25.4)	28 (10.9)	19 (7.4)	22 (8.6)	256 (100)
14th century						
Fauvel	20 (40.6)	16 (21.6)	12 (16.2)	12 (16.2)	4 (5.4)	74 (100)
Chroniques	12 (20.7)	26 (44.8)	7 (12.1)	10 (17.2)	3 (5.2)	58 (100)

Table 2: SI and IS-types across texts

- Subject Continuity appears to be the primary function in the 12th century, although even then it is not categorical.
- The higher frequency of Discourse Subject Switch compared to Old Subject Switch, New Subject Switch and Expletive clauses suggests that a more general topic-continuity, discourse-pragmatic function may be present.
- In the 13th century, across all text types and across the verse-prose distinction, the Subject Continuity function declines.
- Yet SI's frequency remains relatively high through the 13th century texts, suggesting that it must have some function.

5.1.2 Meklenborg's (2020) Resumptive approach

- Resumptive SI will necessarily be preceded by fronted material.
- If resumptive SI is in competition with Subject Continuity SI we would expect pre-SI material to be more common in those texts with lower rates of Subject Continuity SI.

Text	Pre-SI material (%)	of which non-SC (%)
Eneas	36 (18.4)	20 (55.5)
Graal	36 (13.8)	22 (61.1)
QLR	25 (10)	16 (64.0)
Villehardouin	110 (43.7)	91 (82.7)
HA	16 (6.6)	15 (93.8)
RR1	15 (8.6)	9 (60.0)
Menestrel	137 (55.2)	126 (92.0)
RR2	36 (14.1)	18 (50.0)
Fauvel	31 (41.9)	27 (87.0)
Chroniques	3 (5.2)	2 (66.7)

Table 3: Pre-SI material and non-SC clauses

- *Villehardouin* and *Menestrel*, two of the 13th century texts with the lowest rates of Subject Continuity SI, show some of the highest rates of pre-SI material.
- Two examples of resumptive SI are given in (11) and (12).
 - (11) Li dux de Venise, qui ot a nom Henris Dandole, et ere mult sages et mult prouz, si les honora mult
 The duke of Venice who had as name Henry Dandole and was very wise and very brave SI them honored much
 'The duke of Venice, who was called Henry Dandole and was very wise and very brave, honored them greatly'
 Villehardouin § 15
 - (12) Quant li rois l' oi, si saut
 When the king it heard SI jumped
 'When the king heard this he jumped'
 Menestrel p. 3

- A possible bridging context?

(13) Et passa al port de Marseille et quant ele vint a Acre si n' i ot gaires este que...
 And passed to.the port of Marseille and when she came to Acre SI NEG there had scarcely been that...
 'And she passed to the port of Marseille and when she came to Acre she had scarcely arrived when...'
 Villehardouin § 317

5.1.3 V2 Expletive *si* and the decline in Frequency

- There remain some texts where *si* has no clear function. Namely, the two continuations of the *Roman de la Rose*, *Magloire* and *Chroniques*.
- We might account for its uses in these texts as the V2-expletive function claimed by Ledgeway (2008) and Wolfe (2018b). With all other functions bleached, *si* may act as a last resort to fulfill the V2 requirement.
- *Si* is also used in several set expressions such as *si dist* "He spoke thus" *si avint* "It happened thus" *si est-ce que* "so it is that". I suggest that *si*'s survival into later centuries is predominantly as a remnant in these fixed expressions.

5.1.4 Interim Summary

- *Si* is fundamentally polyfunctional with the most common of these functions varying over time and between texts.
- In the 12th century, the Subject Continuity function is standard though not categorical.
- In the 13th century the Subject Continuity function survives in some texts (e.g. the HA), while a resumptive function develops in others and some seem to show a loss of all functions.
- By the end of the 13th century *si* begins to develop into a V2 expletive and many of its other functions are lost before its frequency drops in the 14th century.

5.2 Syntax

5.2.1 Head or Phrase?

- *Si* is immediately preverbal, except for 8 anomalous cases in my data (0.04%). Most head analyses would expect intervening material to be possible.
- In most head analyses *Si* would not fulfil the V2 requirement and pre-*si* material would be common. However, even in texts with resumptive *si* pre-*si* material is found in less than 60% of the clauses.

5.2.2 The Position of the verb in the clause

- For each text, I have marked which kinds of left-peripheral material are found before SI so as to diagnose its position in the left-periphery.
- I will be making use of the map of the left periphery in (1), reprinted in (13) to diagnose the position of SI and the verb.

(14) [*Frame* Hanging Topic, Adv Frame-Setting [*Force* Comp₁ [*Topic* Left Dislocation, Aboutness Topic
[*Focus* Focus_{Contrastive}, Quantifier_{Indefinite}, Focus_{NewInformation} [*Fin* Comp₂ [TP...]]]]]]]

Text	Adverb	Frame-Setter	HT	LD	LI	Focus
12th century						
Eneas	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	?
Graal	✓	✓	?	?	X	✓
QLR	✓	✓	?	✓	X	✓
13th century						
Villehardouin	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	?
HA	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓
RR1	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓
Menestrel	✓	✓	?	?	X	X
RR2	✓	✓	✓	?	X	✓
14th century						
Fauvel	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	?
Chroniques	X	✓	X	X	X	X

Table 4: Pre-SI material across texts

- Pre-SI content is found in every text, so SI cannot cut off the left-periphery, it must be in Spec-Force at the highest.
- Once we distinguish verse and prose, two patterns become apparent: one for all verse texts and prose texts until the mid 13th century and one for late prose texts.

- Verse and Early Prose:

- All types of left peripheral material can be found pre-SI, suggesting that the verb is in Fin with SI in its specifier.
- While not all of these texts have all the lower left-peripheral items, all have one of foci, unambiguous Left Dislocate topics and List Items. Given the presence of foci in some texts and the unstructured variation between these two patterns, I assume here that a single pattern is at play.

- Left Dislocate Topic:

- (15) **a lui** si tret
 at him SI shot
 'He shot at him'
 Eneas l. 5428

- List Item:

- (16) **Li uns des ars** si fu d'un bois
 The first of the arts SI was of a wood
 'The first of the arts was from a wood'
 RR1 l. 910

- Focus:

- (17) **Bengabér en Ramath Galáád** si out la cited de Anothiair
 Bengaber in Ramath Galaad SI had the city of Anothiair
 'Bengaber in Ramath Galaad had the city of Anothiair'
 QLR p. 65

- Proposed Bracketing:

- (18) [*Frame* [*Force* [*Topic* a lui [*Focus* [*FinP* si [*Fin'* [*Fin* tret] [*TP*...]]]]]]]]]
 Eneas l. 5428

- Late Prose:

- In our data, only shown in *Menestrel* and *Chroniques*.
- Only Adverbs, Frame-Setters and Hanging Topics are permissible. I.e. only Frame is open in our left-peripheral map.
- As such it seems that there is a shift from V2 operative in Fin to operating in Force, as found by Rouveret (2004) and Wolfe (2018b) ⁴.
- The relative rarity of lower left peripheral material even in earlier texts gives a potential reason for this reanalysis.

⁴See also Labelle and Hirschbühler (2018: 276-7) and Zaring (2018: 300) on shifting V2 restrictions; Labelle (2007) on embedded clause shifts in 13th century OFr and Poletto (2002) on cross-linguistic data on "high" and "low" V2 in Raeto-Romance.

– Adverbs:

- (19) Et **l'endemain**, quant on sot que la roine ot ce fait, si en fu mout loee
 And the next day when one knew that the queen had this done SI CL was much praised
 'The next day, when they knew that the queen had done this, she was much praised'
 Menestrel p. 8

– Frame-Setters:

- (20) **Quant le roi d'Angleterre oy dire que les Escoz venoient si asprement**, si fu moult troublé en cuer
 When the king of England heard say.INF that the Scottish came so suddenly SI was much troubled in heart
 'When the king of England heard it said that the Scottish had come so suddenly he was very troubled in his heart'
 Chroniques p. 5

– Hanging Topics?:

- (21) et **il** si avoit
 And he SI had
 'And he had it'
 Menestrel p. 14

– Proposed Bracketing:

- (22) [*Frame* il [*ForceP* si [*Force'* [*Force* avoit] [*Topic*...]]]]

• Issues with this Analysis:

- There are no examples of multiple DPs occurring pre-SI, as we might expect in an analysis where multiple topic and foci slots are available.
- We only have two texts with relatively limited data from the second period. Further data on this specific syntactic issue are required.

6 Concluding Remarks

- SI is an extremely complex discourse particle, it is polyfunctional and taking into account a wide variety of possible functions is central to this analysis.
- SI's functional variation is not linked to any formal variation, it seems to be consistently immediately pre-verbal across all functions and, even in a resumptive function, the material which occurs before it is not inconsistent with an analysis in which SI fulfils the V2 requirement.
- SI can be used as a diagnostic for the V2 system of OFr. We have shown that the V2 system becomes more strict in prose texts of the late 13th century. This supports the findings of Rouveret (2004) and Wolfe (2018b). These results are also mirrored by findings that the left periphery becomes more restricted over OFr (see Labelle and Hirschbuler 2018: 276-7; Zaring, 2018) and that embedded clauses undergo a shift in 13th century OFr (Labelle, 2007).
- SI's function is highly idiosyncratic depending on the text and an approach which focuses on the language use within each text individually is useful.
- Shortcomings:
 - The exact nature of the resumptive function and other secondary functions have not been explored here.
 - While I have proposed some analyses for the left-peripheral syntax of OFr, I have not explored the fundamental mechanisms of the left periphery here.

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