

A Probabilistic Approach in Historical Linguistics

Word Order Change in Infinitival Clauses: from Latin to Old French

Dissertation Defense: Olga Scrivner

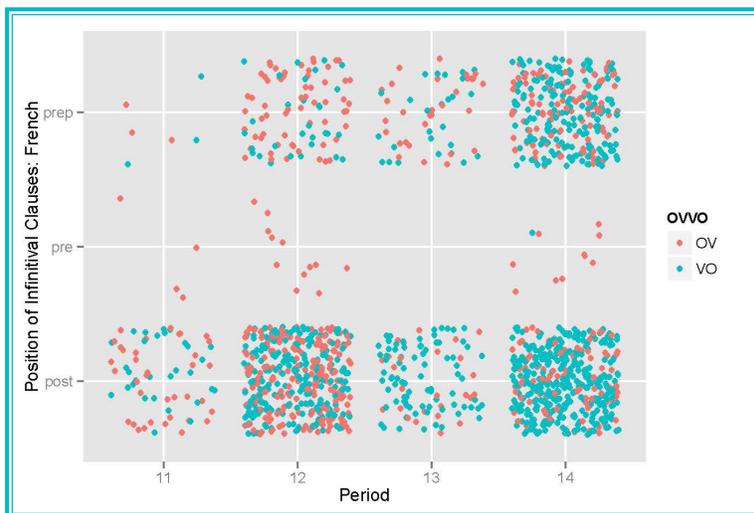
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Distinguished Alumni Room, Indiana Memorial Union



This thesis investigates word order change in infinitival clauses from Object-Verb (OV) to Verb-Object (VO) in the history of Latin and Old French. By applying a variationist approach, I view word order change as a diachronic variation, which is probabilistically influenced by internal and external language contexts. That is, I examine a synchronic word order variation in each stage of language change, from which I infer the character, periodization and constraints of diachronic variation. I also show that in discourse-configurational languages, such as Latin and Early Old French, it is possible to identify pragmatically neutral contexts by using information structure annotation, a recent method developed for historical texts. I further argue that by mapping pragmatic categories into a syntactic structure, we can detect how word order change unfolds.

For this investigation, the data are extracted from annotated corpora spanning several centuries of Latin and Old French (PROIEL, LDT, MCVF and NCA) and from additional resources created by using computational linguistic methods. The data are further codified for various pragmatic, semantic, syntactic and sociolinguistic factors. This study also evaluates previous factors proposed to account for word order alternation and change. I show how information structure and syntactic constraints change over time and propose a method that allows to differentiate a stable word order alternation from alternation indicating a change. Finally, I present a three-stage probabilistic model of word order change. Given these findings, my results from infinitival clauses can be applied to word order change in general.



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