

The Department of French & Italian presents a PhD Dissertation Defense

Scott Evans

Postverbal Nominal Subjects and Verb-Second in Middle French: Syntax and Information Structure

2:30 pm, Tuesday, July 16, 2024, Indiana Memorial Union Oak Room, in English
Please notify Prof. Barbara Vance (bvance@indiana.edu) if you would like to attend.

Although a growing body of research has sought to understand the relationship between word order and information structure, previous information structure (IS) analyses of verb-subject order have produced conflicting results for Medieval French, which have subsequently led to conflicting claims about the importance of IS to its word order as well as its verb-second (V2) nature. The present dissertation explores the syntax and information structure of postverbal nominal subjects in main clause declaratives, as it relates to the V2 constraint, based on an in-depth analysis of examples collected from five Middle French texts of various genres (c. 14th to 16th centuries). It is argued both quantitatively and qualitatively, based on certain IS and syntactic properties, that although the V2 constraint may be weakening (as it is eventually lost in Modern French), postverbal nominal subjects in Middle French are largely the product of a V2 grammar whether located in the high “Germanic” position (commonly said to resemble V2 languages like Germanic) or the low “Romance” position (commonly believed to occur outside the V2 constraint). In these V2 clauses, the finite verb in C° delineates different IS articulations in which the postverbal nominal subject is never the main topic (where, following Erteschik-Shir’s (1997) IS approach, the main topic is more primary than other, subordinate topics). However, the relative positioning of the nominal subject in the postverbal space is dependent on whether it is a subordinate topic or not, as is reminiscent of Germanic. It is therefore suggested that although the Germanic/Romance division for postverbal subjects in French may be informative (as to its position), this binary division is misleading, especially when applied to Medieval French where a V2 grammar is still active. Finally, the relevant IS and syntactic changes from Middle to Modern French are discussed.



Miniature from *Mémoires* by Philippe de Commines

Committee:

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