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SYNTACTIC CONDITIONING OF CASE MARKING LOSS: A LONG TERM FACTOR BETWEEN LATIN AND ROMANCE?

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1. THE ROLE OF SYNTACTIC FACTORS IN THE COLLAPSE OF DECLENSION SYSTEMS

1.1. *Introduction*

The impact of syntactic factors on linguistic change is one of the most complex and controversial issues of diachronic linguistics. It is not clear whether such factors play a fundamental role in linguistic change, for example whether in diachrony they should be conceived as autonomous or dependent on other structural levels (i.e. phonetic, morphologic). Moreover the very possibility of determining their role in historical developments may be questioned. An interesting theoretical principle, which has often resurfaced under various formulations, is that syntactic factors are diachronically inert in that they are involved in linguistic change merely as side effects of morphologic and especially phonetic factors: it is these latter that should be considered the true dynamic triggers of diachronic processes.

1.2. *The Latin and Romance Declensions*

1.2.1. The changes undergone by both the Latin and Gallo-Romance declensions form a domain of research which is particularly interesting to the reflection on the impact of syntactic factors on diachrony. Two questions seem of special import in this respect: (1) to what extent such changes have been induced or favoured by the position occupied by Nouns (or Adjectives) in the sentential configuration; (2) to what extent the argument structure of the predicate may have determined phenomena that – at least *prima facie* – seem to be irregularities in Case inflection. These questions have long been debated in both Latin and Romance linguistics. As to Latin, it suffices here to mention Herman's interesting study of apparent Accusative instead of Nominative forms in a few oaths of the *Tabulae Defixionum* published by Audolent (1904, Tabb. 275-284). The syntactic context of these seemingly odd forms shows NPs that are ungoverned by the verb.

Then predicates are either intransitive (*cadat, cadant*) or intranativized (*vertat, frangat*) verbs with an optative modality. They are preceded by proper Nouns with a *-u* ending, which belong to the II declension, and by proper Nouns with an *-e* ending, which belong to the III declension. Although the morphosyntactic analysis of these Nouns is far from being uncontroversial, the forms with *-u* endings could make it plausible to think that they are Accusatives⁽¹⁾. Even this conclusion, however, is not indisputable. Here are a few examples:

Epafu Victore cadant, Lydeu cadat, Elegante cadant ... Securu Mantineu Prevalente cadant (Audollent 1904, 278A, 3-6)

Superstianu russei qui et Naucelliu cadat vertat (Audollent 1904, 283A, 2-4)

The assignment of Grammatical Relations to the Nouns in these structures is problematic, the more so in that the dubious Case forms certainly complicate the analysis. As Herman himself observes, it is not clear whether the Nouns in question are to be considered Subjects or mere phrases within an enumerative sequence that is unconnected to the following verb. The latter description would be consistent with Nouns in the Accusative in enumerative sequences, a kind of structure which is rather common in Latin texts of various periods, especially agricultural or veterinary treatises, recipe books, cooking instructions, etc. Whatever be the choice in this respect, Herman (1987) made two claims that call for special attention: (1) the Accusative proper Nouns in the *Tabulae Defixionum* are in extra-syntactic position; (2) like enumerative structures, such extra-syntactic positions were possibly the locus of some kind of functional alternance of Nominative and Accusative (see also Löfstedt 1928-1933, 2: 331-332). Although Herman circumscribes the range of application of his two claims to the end of the II century A.D. and to the most thoroughly romanized parts of Africa, his conclusion seems of considerable historical and theoretical import. He maintains that the drop of the *-s* ending in the Nominative Singular was related to "une alternance morpho-syntaxique liée à un conditionnement plus complet et plus profond que les modifications phonétiques" (Herman 1987: 102).

1.2.2. Morphological irregularities in Case endings have also been detected in Old French texts of various areas and periods in connection to special syntactic contexts. Of particular interest are the Anglo-Norman texts, which – as is well known – abound in Noun forms that do not comply with the expected paradigmatic correspondence of morphological form and grammatical function. Let us consider the following lines from the *Chanson de Roland*:

Li empereres apelet ses niés Rollant (l. 783)

« Dreiz emperere », dist Rollant le banun (l. 766)

(1) HERMAN (1987) endorsed this opinion.

In l. 783 a form with Subject Case (*niés*) is used in Direct Object function. Here one would have expected the Oblique Case form *nevald* (*nevald*). On the other hand, in l. 766 an Oblique Case form (*banun*) is used as an epithet of the Name *Rollant*, which is the Subject of the verb. To the extent that an epithet can be considered a type of apposition to the Noun, it would be legitimate to assume that the relevant Noun Phrase (henceforward NP) has the same Case mark as the Noun to which it is juxtaposed. Obviously, l. 766 contradicts this principle. It is evident that assonance may have influenced the choice of this deviant form, but the fact itself that the form *banun* could occur in a syntactic context like that of l. 766 immediately poses the problem of admitting that – at least in the position of a phrase juxtaposed to the Subject Noun – there might be a certain freedom to choose between different Case allomorphs. A similar conjecture could also be extended to other types of contexts in which Case irregularities are detected. As we shall see, this is a non-negligible point for the problem investigated in this work.

Irregularities like those mentioned above have been crucial to the understanding of the linguistic facies of Anglo-Norman texts. They have been studied with special attention to the *Chanson de Roland* in a few important articles by Guiraud (1962) and Woledge *et alii* (1967-1969). These scholars have followed different theoretical and methodological approaches. Guiraud has centred his analysis on the category of 'virtual' as opposed to that of 'actual' and has claimed that many apparently irregular examples can be explained in terms of Nouns which have the 'virtual' feature. The two categories can be defined at both the semantic and the syntactic level. The NPs that are 'virtual' Subjects would characteristically be without the article and more generally – the clause to which they belong would lack any modality marker. Their structure would be devoid of an « assiette grammaticale », as in:

Soleill n'i luist, ne blet ni poet pas creistre (v. 980)

On the other hand, the NPs with the 'actual' feature would have the article and would be in the Subject Case form, as in:

Bels fut li vespres e li soleilz fut cler (v. 157)

Guiraud's model is based on the theory of utterance actualization, which has long been circulating in various versions. According to this theory, there are various degrees of utterance strength in relation to the presence or absence of actualization markers, like the mood / modality and tense exponents of the Verb, the Noun determiners, the position of the NP in the clause structure. The following structures would be typical 'virtual' Subjects: the Subject Noun of a non-finite clause, in that this has no modal and temporal determinants, a generic Noun, which characteristically has no determiner, a Subject Noun postposed to the Verb. On the other hand, the

Subject Noun of a finite clause with modal and temporal determinants, a Noun with a determiner and a pre-verbal Subject Noun would all be 'actual' Subjects.

The notions of 'actual' vs 'virtual' Subjects are not exempt from problems. First, the relationship between the formal and the semantic properties of the two types is not clearly defined and seems rather circular: is the virtual value the cause or the effect of the absence of the actualization markers? Secondly, the description of the morphological structure is at odds with the facts: to describe the Oblique Case of the virtual elements as devoid of an "assiette grammaticale" is not true for imparisyllabic Nouns, for Plural forms, for Feminine Nouns and for Nouns like *jum*, *escut*, *banc*, *cheval* ⁽²⁾. Thirdly, the actualization markers which have been considered seem to be too disparate: what is the relationship between the postposed Subject Nouns, which tend to favour the Oblique Case marking, the lack of determiners in the NP and the absence of modal and temporal markers in the clause? However, apart from these difficulties, the decisive point seems that neither the alternance of the Subject vs Oblique Case nor the supposedly parallel presence vs absence of the Noun determiner is fully explained by Guiraud's model (cf. WOLEDGE *et alii* 1967-1969).

Woledge's theoretical and methodological approach is different. He and his co-workers have examined the declension patterns of all the nominal lexical types that occur in the Oxford manuscript with particular reference to their syntactic context. Their results point to the fact that there are syntactic structures that tend to favour the occurrence of the Oblique Case. These are:

- (a) Clauses with *jamais* + the Verb 'be' in the Future tense;
- (b) Comparative clauses introduced by *plus que* (*mielz que*) and *cume*;
- (c) Structures following the order V...S ⁽³⁾.

Yet, not all the lexemes that have been scrutinized behave in a uniform way in the syntactic environments mentioned above. Woledge underlines the existence of more conservative lexemes, like *Emperere* and *Reis*, which always keep the Subject Case (= Nominative) when they are Subjects, and innovative lexemes, like *Colp* and *Escu*, which often deviate from the regular alternance of Subject and Oblique Case (cf. WOLEDGE *et alii* 1967-1969, 168-169). This difference could obviously be explained by the well-known distinction of [+Animate, +Human] Nouns and Nouns with negative values of these semantic features. The situation is further complicated by the different behaviour of the various morphological classes: (a) the imparisyllabic Masculine Nouns conform more regularly to the expected alternance of

Subject and Oblique Case, a fact that can be explained by the rules of versification; (b) the Nouns of the *Murs* type show irregularities in ca. 25% of the tokens, while the percentage of parisyllabic Nouns with the -e ending and Feminine Nouns that derive from the Latin III declension have significantly higher percentages of deviations (WOLEDGE *et alii* 1967-1969, especially 169).

The studies by Woledge and his co-workers are firmly based on accurate descriptions of the morphological, syntactic and lexical properties of the Nouns investigated, and of the correlations of all these factors to the irregularities in declension. Perhaps inevitably, however, the problem of finding wider generalizations is left unsolved, although here and there a few considerations of theoretical import are presented. Among these, of special interest seems Woledge's notion of «choice» or grammatical freedom (see the discussion here in 3.).

An examination of the structural similarities of the various types of syntactic contexts involved in the declensional irregularities has been attempted by Moignet (1966). By returning to Guiraud's analysis and presenting a more articulated range of syntactic structures from a larger sample of Old French texts, he lists the following set of types of syntactic contexts in which the expected Oblique Case is substituted by the Subject Case ⁽⁴⁾:

- (a) Appositions to the Subject;
- (b) NPs that follow the verb 'be' in the structure *Ce est X*;
- (c) NPs that are Subjects of impersonal Verbs (*faillir*, *venir*);
- (d) NPs that are postposed Subjects;
- (e) Comparative structures with the complementizers *come*, *tant... que*.

Moignet analysed these structures adopting a «psycho-systematic» model. He postulates the existence of two systems. In the first one, the morphological markers of the «Nominative» (i.e. Subject) and «Accusative» (i.e. Oblique) Cases would reflect a mental representation of functions in which the Agent is opposed to the Patient. In the second system, the morphological markers would be organized according to a representation in which the function of «initial Theme» (i.e. the Subject) is opposed to that of «concluding Theme» (i.e. the Object). Both the initial and the concluding Themes are defined in terms of a process that is expressed by the Verb. According to Moignet, the first system – which he considers less abstract – would be the conceptual structure underlying the Nominative/Accusative system of Classical Latin and the «regular» two-Case declension of Old French. The second system – which he considers more abstract and typical of the modern languages – would have become manifest in the history of French precisely with the irregularities in Case markers that have been mentioned above. Moignet maintains that the whole history of the nominal

⁽²⁾ This observation has rightly been pointed out by WOLEDGE *et al.* (1967-1969, 151).

⁽³⁾ Guiraud's hypothesis has only been partially confirmed by the research carried on by the British scholars. As to the presence vs absence of the determinative article see for example WOLEDGE *et al.* (1967-1969, 167-168).

⁽⁴⁾ Cf. MOIGNET (1966, 318-319).

inflection from Latin to Old French could be explained by such a development. The connection or «synopsis» of the two Cases, which characterizes the passage from Old to Middle French and thereafter to Modern French, is conceived as the outcome of «un phénomène de compensation, qui implique la découverte d'affinités capables de l'emporter en pensée sur les différences» (MOIGNET 1966, 352). These ideas could be rephrased with a more recent terminology saying that the functions underlying the Nouns (or the Attribute of the Copula) in constructions (a)-(e) have been reinterpreted as similar to a Second Theme or Object.

Whatever version of this theory is accepted, it presents various problems. First, the structural justification of why types of constructions which are so different should have induced a peculiar declensional behaviour of Nouns is not fully clear. The structural properties of Nouns (Adjectives) in constructions (a)-(c) are obviously different. For example, the Nouns or the Adjectives with the function of nominal predicates have a configurational position which could be considered equivalent to that of an Object. Clearly, this property differs from that of the Nouns which appear in verbless exclamatory clauses or in verbless subordinate clauses. All these in turn differ from the configurational property of Nouns in Vocative function and that of Nouns which are the only argument of impersonal verbs. Moignet tried to reduce the various syntactic properties of constructions (a)-(c) to the notion of «lack of government», but such a notion cannot generally hold for all the syntactic types that have been considered. Moignet's model seems purely speculative, in that it leaves little space for a careful and detailed historical and philological analysis of texts. Consequently, the diachronic development that has been sketched does not seem very convincing, especially in that it presents hypotheses which are not verified by the available historical data (see further on).

2. CASE ALLOMORPHY IN THE *CHANSON DE ROLAND*

2.1. The *Chanson de Roland* shows a state of the two-Case declension which is of particular interest for an attempt at determining – from a diachronic perspective – the critical points of the Old French Case system and for a reflection on the impact of syntactic factors on these developments. In this paper a study of the Case and Number allomorphy of a few lexemes in the *Chanson de Roland* will be presented⁽⁵⁾. The following morphological variants of the chosen lexemes have been selected:

- 1. SG. Amiral / Amiral
- 2. SG. Arcevesque / Arcevesque
- 3a. SG. Bar / Bar / Baron / Barun
- 3b. PL. Baron / Barons / Barun / Baruns
- 4a. SG. Chevalier / Chevaliers
- 4b. PL. Chevalier / Chevaliers
- 5a. SG. Cheval
- 5b. PL. Cheval / Chevals
- 6a. SG. Cumpaign / Cumpainz / Cumpaignun
- 6b. PL. Cumpaign / Cumpainz / Cumpaignuns
- 7a. SG. Quens / Cunte
- 7b. PL. Cunte / Cunes
- 8. SG. Fins / Fin
- 9. SG. Empereor / Empereur / Emperere / Empereres
- 10. SG. Jurz / Jur / Jurn
- 11a. SG. Nies / Nevold / Nevuld
- 11b. PL. Nevolz
- 12a. SG. Hoem / Hom / Hum / Home / Hume
- 12b. PL. Hume / Humes
- 13a. SG. Paiens / Paien
- 13b. PL. Paien / Paiens
- 14a. SG. Sire / Seignor / Seignur
- 14b. PL. Seignur / Seignurs / Seignors

2.2. Each variant has preliminarily been considered a one-to-one mapping of form and function of Number, i.e. it has been assigned either a Singular or a Plural value. Thus for example the variants *Baron*, *Barun* in 3a and 3b, though identical in form, have been classified as distinct according to the Number specification. Besides, for each variant that has been so defined the syntactic function of each of its tokens has been analysed. In particular, for each token the following properties have been considered:

- (a) The Case function;
- (b) The Voice of the Verb that carries the predicate function (if the token has the Subject function);
- (c) The syntactic structure of the clause.

Moreover a few linear properties have been considered:

- (d) The position of the token in the clause;
- (e) The relative order of Subject and Verb (if the token has the Subject function).

In the following sections we shall discuss a few results concerning the properties (a), (b) and (c).

⁽⁵⁾ I have identified the tokens of the variants of the selected lexemes following Duggan's Concordances (DUGGAN 1969) and then checking their broader contexts in Segre's edition of the Oxford manuscript of the *Chanson de Roland* (SEGRO 1989).

2.2.1. As to the property (a), the tokens of the variants considered are found in the following range of functions:

- Subject
- NP with a predicate function (in sentences in which the NP follows the verb 'be' or 'seem')
- Direct Object
- Indirect Object
- Complement to N (i.e. Adnominal Complement) or to V (i.e. Locative / Directional Complement governed by V) in structures (Prep) + N
- Topic [...Pro (S)...]
(as for example in l. 1188 *Li nies Marsilie, il ad num Aelroth*)
- Topic [...Pro (O)...]
(as for example in l. 3374 *Li mien baron, nurril vos ai lung tens* ⁽⁶⁾)
- Apposition
- Vocative

After all tokens of each variant have been classified with respect to the functions mentioned above, they have been grouped in classes of «proximate» functions, which are represented as follows:

Group I: Functions belonging to the Prototype of the Subject
Subject, Predicative NP

Group II: Functions belonging to the Prototype of the Object
Direct Object, Indirect Object, Complement to N or V

The identification of a unique and clear-cut prototype is more problematic for a third set of functions. A first analysis – which seems to be preferred – would cluster together the functions that are external to the proper sentence domain or that have a lower degree of integration to it. If belonging to the sentence domain is defined in terms of the structural property whereby a constituent has the argument status, the constituents with the external or non-integrated functions can be defined as non-arguments of the sentence domain. According to this analysis we should have the following representation:

Group III: Non integrated or weakly integrated Functions
Topic [...Pro (S)...], Topic [...Pro (O)...], Apposition, Vocative,
Subjects of Small Clauses

⁽⁶⁾ In this analysis the phrase *Li mien baron* has been assigned the function of a Topic which is resumed in the proper sentence domain by a pronoun. An alternative interpretation could consider the phrase as having a Vocative function. However, this is just an example of the difficulties of the structural and function analyses of sentences in texts like the *Chanson the Roland*.

However, if – instead of argumentality – the proximity of function is chosen as the critical parameter, alternative groupings could be conceived. Topic [...Pro (S)...] and Apposition to S could be assigned to Group I (i.e. the Group of the Prototype of Subject), while Topic [...Pro (O)...] and Apposition to O could be assigned to Group II (i.e. the Group of the Prototype of Object). The Vocative function could be also assigned to Group I (think of the typological evidence from Case systems whereby the Vocative may be found related to Subject with respect to Case markers). In this paper the first analysis of the functions in question will be adopted, although this is not without problems (see 2.2.2.).

2.2.2. As to property (b), Verbs have been classified in Intransitives, Pseudo-Intransitives, Reflexives, Transitives, Passives. Accordingly, the Subject function has been subclassified as Subject of an Intransitive Verb, Subject of a Pseudo-Intransitive Verb, Subject of a Reflexive Verb, and so on. As to property (c), clause structures have been classified in Main and Subordinate; among the latter, special importance has been given to the verbless subordinate clauses, the so-called «small clauses» (as an example, consider the type *cume her* in l. 1967), in that their structure poses interesting problems of functional representation. In addition to the Voice properties specified above, other structural properties of the predicate have been considered for the analysis of both main and subordinate clauses, which seem relevant to the study of Case morphology in Old French. Therefore the selected variants have also been examined with respect to two types of contexts that seem to favour peculiar choices of Case, i.e. the Equative/Identifying and the Locative/Existential structures (for the first, cf. *Ço est l'arcevesque* [l. 2238]; for the latter cf. the construction *(i) ad*, as in *Noble baron ad ai* [l. 467]).

2.3. A few lexemes show variants with the same Number value but with no overlapping in syntactic functions. In other words, each of these variants has a unique syntactic function, for example it occurs only as a Subject or only as an Object or an Apposition, etc. This is characteristic of the lexeme *Fin(s)*:

Fin Sing. (Function = Apposition)
Fins Sing. (Function = Subject) ⁽⁷⁾

Other lexemes show variants with the same Number value which are found in more than a single syntactic function. These variants, however, are characterised by the fact that their functions are always proximate, in other words they have functional overlapping only within the range of each functional prototype. The lexeme *Quens / Cunte*, for example, has the Singular

⁽⁷⁾ However, as this lexeme has a low frequency in the text, the specialization of its functional values is less interesting.

variant *Quens* (with frequency index = 84) occurring only as a Subject or an Apposition to the Subject, while the Singular variant *Cunte* (with frequency index = 15) occurs only as a (direct or indirect) Object or as a Complement to the Preposition in a structure (Prep) + N. The Singular variant *Amiralz* of the lexeme *Amiralz* / *Amirail* poses some problems. It occurs 21 times as a Subject and twice as a Vocative. Although in the model adopted here the Vocative has been assigned to a different prototype from that of the Subject, we have already observed that there could be reasons for considering the Vocative a proximate function to Subject. Vocative could in fact be classified as a borderline function between those of Group I and Group III.

The situation described for the lexeme *Quens* / *Cunte* is evidence of the fact that each allomorph has undergone a conspicuous specialization with respect to syntactic function and Case. In the last example, there is symmetry in the distribution of the two variants: *Quens* only occurs in the functions of the prototype of the Subject, *Cunte* only in the functions of the prototype of the Object. In this case, we can say that the distributions of the two variants are compartmentalized or totally disjunct with respect to functional prototypes.

Other lexemes, however, show an asymmetrical relationship of their variants, in other words the distribution of at least one of these has a variable range of functional overlapping with the distribution of other variants with the same Number value. For example, the Singular form *Paiens* only occurs in Subject function, while the Singular form *Paien* covers a wide range of functions which belong to different Groups (Subject, Object, Complement of Preposition, Vocative).

This situation is characteristic of a majority of lexemes in our corpus. Here it seems of particular interest to examine the overlapping of functions that are non-proximate, and in particular the overlapping of the functions of the Subject and Object prototypes (Groups I and II).

2.4. The following forms show overlapping of the functions of the prototypes of the Subject and of the Object (the variants with high percentages of functional overlapping are in bold):

2.4.1. Syncretic variants with Singular value

	Relative Frequencies	Absolute frequencies
AMIRAILL	(Subj 50%, Obj 50%)	(Subj 6, Obj 6)
ARCEVESQUES	(Subj 75%, Obj 25%)	(Subj 6, Obj 2)
ARCEVESQUE	(Subj 65%, Obj 35%)	(Subj 20, Obj 11)
BARON / BARUN	(Subj 21%, Obj 79%)	(Subj 4, Obj 15)
CHEVALER	(Subj 75%, Obj 25%)	(Subj 6, Obj 2)
CUMPAIGNUN	(Subj 17%, Obj 83%)	(Subj 1, Obj 5)
EMPERERE	(Subj 97%, Obj 3%)	(Subj 56, Obj 2)
EMPEREUR / EMPEREUR	(Subj 27%, Obj 73%)	(Subj 3, Obj 8)

HOM / HONE / HONE	(Subj 84%, Obj 16%)	(Subj 21, Obj 4)
HUMI	(Subj 12%, Obj 88%)	(Subj 2, Obj 14)
JURZ	(Subj 77%, Obj 23%)	(Subj 10, Obj 3)
NHS	(Subj 86%, Obj 14%)	(Subj 6, Obj 1)
NEVOID / NIVUID	(Subj 8%, Obj 92%)	(Subj 1, Obj 11)
PAIEN	(Subj 45%, Obj 55%)	(Subj 5, Obj 6)
SEIGNUR	(Subj 12%, Obj 88%)	(Subj 1, Obj 7)

2.4.2. Syncretic variants with Plural value

	Relative Frequencies	Absolute Frequencies
BARONS / BARUNS	(Subj 11%, Obj 89%)	(Subj 2, Obj 17)
CHEVALER	(Subj 57%, Obj 43%)	(Subj 4, Obj 3)
CHEVALERS	(Subj 12%, Obj 88%)	(Subj 2, Obj 15)
CUNTES	(Subj 17%, Obj 83%)	(Subj 1, Obj 5)
HUMES	(Subj 12%, Obj 88%)	(Subj 2, Obj 14)
PAIEN	(Subj 94%, Obj 6%)	(Subj 46, Obj 3)
PAIENS	(Subj 24%, Obj 76%)	(Subj 4, Obj 13)

2.5. As can be seen from the above figures, there are variants with a greater or smaller proportion of overlapping of non-proximate functions. In some cases the total occurrences of a given variant are too few (see, for example, *Empereor*)^(*) and therefore no serious examination of its functional properties can be attempted. In other cases, however, a given variant has a sufficient frequency for its functional behaviour to be investigated.

A first notable difference concerns the variants with Singular or Plural value. Among the first, several variants have overlapping percentages that are higher than 25% (see *Amirail*, *Arcevesques*, *Arcevesque*, *Empereor* / *Empereur*, *Paien*). Among the latter, only *Chevaler* has an overlapping value higher than this threshold. This could lead one to think that the morphological paradigms of the Plural are more stable than those of the Singular. Yet such a hypothesis cannot be seriously considered on the scanty evidence of our corpus. Another factor that suggests caution is the conspicuous range of idiosyncratic differences in the syntactic behaviour of the selected lexemes. Besides, there are other specific factors that may have influenced the results obtained. An obvious morphological factor concerns the inflectional paradigms to which nouns were traditionally assigned. *Amirail* / *Amiralz*, *Arcevesque(s)* and *Paien(s)* belong to the paradigm of the 1st Masc. Declension, while the imparisyllabic nouns *Empereur* / *Empereor*, *Hom* / *Hume*, *Sire* / *Seignur*, belong to other declensional classes. Although the declension classes set up by grammarians might be considered in a way artificial constructions, it

(*) This form has only two tokens, one in Subject (l. 942) and the other in Object (l. 954) function.

is a proven fact that the lexemes traditionally assigned to different morphological paradigms have diverging historical paths of declension (for the *Chanson de Roland*, cf. WOODGE *et alii* 1969). It may not be fortuitous, for example, that in our corpus three out of four nouns with high percentages of functional overlapping belong to the 1st Masc. Declension.

Semantic factors like Indefiniteness may also play a role, though in a less regular way. For example, the Singular variant *Paien*, which has an Oblique form, often occurs in Subject function with the [+Indefinite] (or [+Generic]) feature⁽⁹⁾. Yet this factor, which was of paramount importance to Guiraud's argumentation seems to have an impact which is only limited to a few lexemes. It is not clear to me at the moment to what extent it may hold as a general rule.

Some forms occur with considerably high frequency in the function that one would expect to be related to their etymology. For example, the Singular forms *Arcevesques*, *Hom*, *Jurz*, *Emperere*, which are expected to be related to the Subject Case, show in fact a clear prevalence of tokens in the Subject function, while the Singular form *Seignur*, which is expected to be associated to the Oblique Case, prevailing in fact appears in the Object function. Likewise, the Plural Oblique form *Cuntes* is mainly found in the Object function.

2.5.1. Such situations are in no way general. Some forms with apparently Oblique morphology have a remarkable degree of polyfunctionalism, as they are found in various functions of all the three Groups. Other forms occur in the Subject (or Subject-proximate) function with high percentages, but they also have non-negligible frequencies of tokens in Object (or Object-proximate) function. The traditional grammars of Old French interpreted this situation as evidence of a replacement of the Subject by the Oblique Case. It seems clear, however, that such a shift did not affect entire paradigms but only single lexemes, in a way that to some scholars seemed rather irregular and even chaotic.

We shall now discuss under what syntactic conditions the variants with an Oblique form occur in the functions of the prototype of the Subject and in those of the prototype of Topic and other detached functions.

2.5.1.1. The following list is of the syntactic contexts of Oblique forms in the functions of Group I. The contexts have been clustered according to the construction types.

⁽⁹⁾ A different situation is that of the noun *Hom*. The Indefiniteness feature seems in various ways involved in all the contexts where the lexeme variants occur. I intend to analyse this case at a more advanced stage of this research.

SINGULAR

AMIRAILL

Intr. *Dist l'amirail* (ll. 3408, 3509), *L'amirail chevalchet* par cez oz (l. 3214). **Predic.** *Ço est l'amirail*, le viel d'antiquitet (l. 2615). **Trans.** *Li amirail ad en Espagne dreit* (l. 2747), *L'amirail ad sa barbe tors mise* (l. 3520)

ARCEVESQUE

Intr. *Dist l'arcevesque* (ll. 799, 1280, 1349, 1876, 2144, 2182, 2221. This construction is always followed by direct speech), *E l'arcevesque lur dist de sun semblant* (l. 1514), *Li arcevesque i fiert de sun espiet* (l. 1682), *Li arcevesque ne poet muer n'en plurt* (l. 2193), *U est l'arcevesque e li quens Oliver?* (l. 2403), *quant l'arcevesque chiet* (l. 2082). **Predic.** *li arcevesque est mult bon chevalier* (l. 1673), *Ço est l'arcevesque* (l. 2238), *Li quens Rollant fut noble guerreier / Gualter del Hum est bien bon chevalier / li arcevesque prozdom e essaiet* (ll. 2066-2068). **Trans.** *Li arcevesque cumencet la bataille* (l. 1487), *e l'arcevesque de Deu les ad seigneur* (l. 1141), *e l'arcevesque de Deu les beneist* (l. 1137), *e l'arcevesque l'ad asols e seigneur* (l. 2205), *E l'arcevesque lor ocist Siglorel* (l. 1390), *Li arcevesque ne l'amerat ja mie* (l. 1481)

Other variants show a predominance of the Object (or Object-proximate) function and a sporadic occurrence of the Subject (or Subject-proximate) function. The contexts with the Subject function are listed below:

BARON / BARUN

Predic. *Li amiralz ben ressemblet barun* (l. 3172), *s'il fust leials, ben ressembblast barun* (l. 3764). **Trans.** *Baron i fait la peine!* (l. 1790), *per uns e uns les ad pris le barun* (l. 2190)

CHEVALER

Intr. *n'est remes chevalier* (l. 2797). **Predic.** *De vasselage fut asez chevalier* (l. 25), *Li arcevesque est mult bon chevalier* (l. 1673), *Gualter del Hum est bien bon chevalier* (l. 2067), *Li quens Rabels est chevalier hardiz* (l. 3352). **Trans.** *Itel valor deit avoir chevalier* (l. 1877)

CUMPAIGNUN

Trans. *sun cumpaignun apres le vait sivant* (l. 1160)

EMPEREOR / EMPEREUR

Trans. *L'empeoreur ad tort* (l. 1942), *tuz premereins l'ad dit l'empeureur* (l. 2424), *l'empeureur li cumandet a garder* (l. 2527)

HUME

Trans. *Hume nel veit ki mult ne s'esspoant* (l. 1433), *ne l'orrat hume ne te tienge por fol* (l. 2294)

NEVULD

Intr. *ne ben ne mal ne respunt sun nevuld* (l. 216)

PAIEN

Intr. *En la citez nen ad remes paen* (l. 101), *Apres i vint un paen*, Climorins (l. 627), *desur c'asiet li paen Baligant* (l. 1253), *De l'autre part est un paen*, Valdebrun (l. 1562), *De l'autre part est un paen*, Grandones (l. 1613)

SINGULAR

Pass. *Le seigneur d'els est apelet Oedun* (l. 3056)

PLURAL

BARONS / BARUNS

Intr. *Franceis barons en plurent* (l. 3722), **Trans.** *Baruns franceis nel deivent ublier* (l. 2509)

CHEVALERS

Intr. *Idunc plurent .C. milie chevalers* (l. 3870), **Pass.** *Tuz sunt ocis cist Franceis chevalers* (l. 1688)

CHEVALS

Pred. *nos chevaux sunt e las e ennuiez* (l. 2484), *e lur chevals sunt curanz e aates* (l. 3876)

CUNTES

Trans. *E quatre cuntes l'estreu li unt tenu* (l. 2820)

HUMES

Intr. *C. mil humes i plurent*, *kis esguardent* (l. 3882), **Pass.** *ja sunt vencuz noz humes* (l. 3642)

PAIENS

Intr. *devant Rollant si s'en fuient paiens* (l. 1875), *Quant Carles veit que tuit sunt mort paiens* (l. 2476), **Trans.** *Paiens recleiment un lur deu*, *Tervagant* (l. 2468), *Il nen est dreiz que paiens te baillissent* (l. 2349)

The total number of the contexts listed here is 61. They present the following distribution of the predicate properties:

	SG	PL	Total
Intransitive Predicates	24	5	29
Reflexive Predicates	1	/	1
Passive Predicates	1	2	3
Transitive Predicates	16	4	20
Predicates with a Predicative NP	6	2	8
Total	48	13	61

These data could be rearranged in terms of the Predicate – Argument model⁽¹⁰⁾ as follows:

One-argument structures (of various types)	41 (67%)
Transitive (and more generally two-argument) structures	20 (33%)

As we shall see in 3., this result – which does not seem to be fortuitous – deserves further comment.

⁽¹⁰⁾ For a discussion of the relationships among the various classes of one-argument predicates, see SORNICOLA 2006.

2.5.1. Let us now examine the contexts where Oblique forms occur in the functions of Group III. They are related to the following structures: Topic NP, apposition to Subject, small clause, exclamatory and / or vocative NPs.

Structures with Topic NP

Sun cumpaignun, *cum il l'at encuntrét*, *si l fiert amunt sur l'elme a or gemét* (ll. 1994-1995)

Nos cumpaignuns, *que oumes tant chers / or sunt il morz*, *ne s i devuns laiser* (ll. 2178-2179)

Francs e paiens, *as les vus ajustez* (l. 1187)

In lines 1994 and 2178 the Oblique nominal forms in the NPs in initial position could be justified by interpreting the NPs as dependent upon the Verb of the adjacent subordinate clause. These phrases in fact could be represented as if they had been «attracted» as Objects in the domain of the subordinate clause, although they can also be interpreted as Subject functions of the respective main clauses. Multiple relationships of this kind, which hold within complex sentences, are potential sources of Case irregularities in various texts and various languages (think of the so-called «attraction inversa» in Latin). Linear relationships of proximity vs distance may take over governing relationships which are internal to the sentence domain, so that the closest predicate assigns syntactic functions and Case. However, it would be possible to consider an alternative analysis. The structures in question strikingly resemble the so-called «Accusativus pendens», a structure which occurred in Latin texts of all times and was particularly frequent in Late Latin (cf. HAVERS 1931). In this structure a NP in the extreme periphery of the sentence, which is more or less detached from the proper sentence domain, could be marked either with the Nominative or the Accusative Case. The analysis discussed above would also fit the structure of l. 1187, which is obviously different from the ones of the lines 1994 and 2178. This structure in fact has a NP that could be represented as a dislocated argument of the morpheme *as*, whose function is that of a presentative predicate (note that the NP is co-referential to the pronoun *les*, also governed by *as*).

Appositions to Subject

Dist Rollant le barun (l. 766)

Par le camp vait Turpin, li arcevesque (l. 1605)

Note that these two examples show a context with the presence of both mono-argumentality and detachment factors.

Small Clauses

- Et il les plaist *cum* chevalier gentil (l. 1853)
 e il li ad *cum* chevalier mustree (l. 1369)
 ...*cume* hune (ll. 2525, 3424)

Exclamatory and / or Vocative NPs

- Deus ! quel *baron*, s'oüst chrestientét ! (l. 3164)
 E! gentilz hom, *chevalier* de bon aire, / Hoi te cumant al Glorius celeste !
 (ll. 2252-2253)

As for Vocatives, in particular, out of 96 contexts where a lexeme of our corpus appears with this function, 62 (65%) show variants with an Oblique form, while only 34 (35%) have forms in the Subject Case.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The data described so far show that about two thirds of the Oblique nominal forms used in the functions of the Subject prototype are related to one-argument predicates (41 out of 61). On the other hand, a considerable part (72 tokens) of the Oblique nominal forms of our corpus that are not associated to the functions of the Object prototype occurs in functions with a weak or null degree of syntactic dependency in the proper sentence domain (i.e. the functions of Group III). In total, 85% (113 out of 133) of all the Oblique forms that are not related to the functions of the Object prototype appear in contexts that can *en gros* be defined of « Absolute Theme ». This result cannot be accidental. It seems to confirm the hypothesis that in the erosion of the Old French two-Case declension a syntactic principle was at work whereby the Subject function was downgraded to that of Theme (in the sense of the modern theories of absolutes). This conclusion is further supported by the fact that slightly less than half of the Oblique forms that are at odds with this property, i.e. the forms that occur in the function of Subject of a transitive Verb, are gathered in the lexical types *Amirail* and *Arcevesque*. This might be due to idiosyncratic lexical factors.

It seems rather attractive that the syntactic contexts of the Absolute Theme which may have played a role in the erosion of the Old French declension are similar to those that seem to have been concomitant to the weakening of the Latin declension system (in addition to Löfstedt's and Herman's works referred to in 1.2.1., see also DE CARVALHO 1985). It has been observed in fact by several scholars that at various stages of Post-classical and Late Latin enumerative, appositional, exclamatory ⁽¹⁾ and topicalization structures appeared as characteristic contexts with recurrent

(1) Exclamatory NPs, however, were marked in Accusative already in Classical Latin.

Case perturbation. In these circumstances it is possible to add predicative NPs and more sporadically LTP, that are Subjects of intransitive or passive predicates ⁽²⁾.

However, the parallelism between Latin and Old French that has been sketched here may open more problems than it can solve. The first problem concerns the fact that, although the observed phenomena occur in significant percentages, they have a somewhat irregular shape. This difficulty was lucidly pointed out by Brian Woledge and his co-workers, who developed a conceptual framework that today has not lost its interest. They maintained that in order to describe the linguistic situation of medieval French one has to abandon the notion of « rule » and to move towards the idea of Old French as « une langue où les règles étaient relativement peu nombreuses ». In their opinion, « il faut se figurer des locuteurs et des écrivains ayant assez souvent le choix entre différentes constructions » (WOLEDGE *et alii* 1967-1969: 161). Although this freedom was far from being absolute, « le choix jouait un rôle beaucoup plus grand qu'il ne joue dans le français moderne, ou sans doute dans d'autres langues de civilisation moderne » (WOLEDGE *et alii* 1967-1969: 165). It might be good to keep in mind this view as a preliminary to every investigation into the history of the Old French two-Case declension and – more generally – into the history of declension systems. Clearly, however, such a perspective complicates the analysis.

A second difficulty concerns the theoretical treatment of the structures with the so-called « Absolute Theme ». Although the syntactic types involved (NPs in enumerative structures, appositional NPs, Vocatives, Topics, NPs Subjects of one-argument predicates) may have some kind of similarity or structural proximity which appears intuitively clear, the problem of how to represent it at a theoretical level remains open.

Finally, and this is perhaps the thorniest problem, we must ask ourselves the significance and the implications for diachrony of the fact that recurrent similar syntactic patterns appear associated to the erosion of both the Latin and Old French declensions. Does this mean that the syntactic conditions have been independently created at different linguistic stages? Or are they the effect of continuities that have shaped the transformation of various registers of Late Latin into the Romance vernacular? And can such continuities have been re-enforced by diglossic situations? I must confess to be inclined to give a positive answer to the latter two questions. But whatever the answer, the implications of these problems should not be underestimated. Let me mention here just one of them. Moignet (1967) maintained that the irregularities in the Old French declension – in syntactic contexts like those investigated here – were characteristic of the passage from Old to Middle French. Moignet is not entirely explicit on this point, but he seems to think that the declensional irregularities of many Anglo-Norman texts,

(2) I shall discuss this point in more detail in a work in preparation.

and in particular of the *Chanson de Roland*, were due to the imperfect acquisition and learning of the French language by the British writers and scribes. Like other scholars he seems to imply that the Anglo-Norman texts anticipated a weakening of the declension on the Continent which would have taken place later on in a pervasive way. But what are the diachronic consequences of this model for the parallelism between Latin and Old French which has been discussed here? One answer could be found in the idea of a resurfacing of factors that were possibly latent at various times. It would not be absurd after all to admit the possibility of «errors» induced by various syntactic structures with a single NP, in which the Case marking of N was less relevant or simply not relevant at all.

Yet a different scenario could be considered. If, as Herman seems to think, a kind of free alternance of Nominative and Accusative might have been possible under particular syntactic conditions in some linguistic norms or traditions of Late Latin, can we think of the existence of similar norms or traditions in Old French and especially in Anglo-Norman? Surely in this case we should not associate the notion of linguistic tradition to rules in the sense defined by the modern grammarians, but rather we should conceive it in terms of stylistic options that were culturally and socially accepted and that writers and scribes had at their disposal. In this perspective to suppose a parallel but independent recreation in Old French of a linguistic tradition does not seem very plausible. Similar cultural traditions are rarely polygenic. Rather, another hypothesis suggests itself: is it possible that the authors of the Oxford manuscript of the *Chanson de Roland* were used to a certain freedom in the choice of Case variants not because of their poor knowledge of French, but because they followed models that had been typical of some Late Latin registers? Perhaps this scenario cannot be ruled out.

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