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Microvariation and Change in the Romance Left Periphery

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Abstract: Despite the vast literature which has accrued on the fine structure of the Romance left periphery, there exists no diachronic account of the emergence of the considerable microvariation between Romance varieties today. Focussing in particular on the syntax of French and Venetan varieties, this article suggests that certain northern Romance varieties have diverged maximally from an Early Medieval Romance norm in which each left-peripheral Head attracts a wide variety of suitable Goals for movement, unlike the ‘innovative’ Romance grammars which emerge in the post-medieval period where the suitable class of Goals becomes restricted along categorial or information-structural grounds. The account predicts that the most ‘conservative’ Modern Romance grammars allow widespread argument fronting via movement, whereas their most ‘innovative’ counterparts show heavy restrictions on such operations.

Keywords: left periphery, French, Venetan, focus, topic

1 Background and Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This article offers a diachronic perspective on the evolution of the left periphery in Romance, with a particular focus on the precise mechanisms through which structural homogeneity in the early medieval period has given way to extensive microvariation in Modern Romance. The proliferation of cartographic studies since Rizzi’s (1997) seminal work has led to a wide range of empirically rich research on both standard and non-standard Romance varieties. In the historical-diachronic domain, many studies of Romance left-peripheral syntax also exist, particularly on the Medieval Romance V2 property and its correlates (Benincà 2004, 2006; Ledgeway 2008; Salvi 2012; Wolfe 2018a). Despite these facts, two

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significant issues remain under-explored: firstly, the extent to which successive reanalyses in the diachronic domain can be tracked to understand the evolution of the left periphery in a particular language and, secondly, the degree to which the rich patterns of microvariation between Modern Romance varieties can be linked to changes already taking place within earlier periods. This article seeks to profit from a growing body of work on the left periphery of both historical and present-day Romance varieties to address both of these issues, with a particular focus on French which is argued to show properties which diverge quite markedly from the Romance norm in the domain of left-peripheral syntax (Figures 1 and 2).

1.2 Background

1.2.1 The Rich ‘Romance’ Left Periphery

The basic tent of cartography that the clausal spine contains a rich array of hierarchically ordered functional projections, each directly mapping syntax to semantics, remains a constant in approaches within the Romance sphere (Belletti 2008; Benincà and Munaro 2010; Benincà 2013; Cardinaletti 2004, 2021; Cinque 2006; Kayne 2005; Rizzi 2004a, 2006, 2010, 2013; Schifano 2018). Although approaches vary, there is – for example – general consensus that the highest portion of the CP contains projections which are associated with base-generated constituents modifying the entire speech act, encoding pragmatic-semantic features which may pertain to speaker attitude or be thought of as having a ‘background’ or ‘scene-setting’ function (Benincà and Poletto 2004; Borreguero Zuloaga 2014; Giorgi 2015; Haegeman 2006, 2012; Haegeman and Hill 2013), whereas the lower portions host internally merged constituents which may function as either topics or foci (Benincà 2001; Cruschina 2012; Rizzi 1997, 2004b, 2010, 2017, 2018). Whether the topics or foci are merged in contiguous layers or there are multiple topic projections ‘sandwiching’ the focus field is an area of disagreement between Rizzi (1997, 2001, 2010, 2017) on the one hand, and Benincà (2001) and Benincà and Poletto (2004) on the other. For the purposes of this analysis, I adopt the Benincà and Poletto (2004) approach of assuming a dedicated set of focus projections low in the CP and multiple topic projections above them; nothing significant hinges upon this assumption and it is adopted primarily for ease of exposition given that it has become standard in work on Medieval Romance varieties (cf. e.g. Fernández Ordóñez 2009; Donaldson 2012; Salvesen 2013; Poletto 2014; Wolfe 2018a). With this established, I outline the

following map of the Romance left periphery which is the starting point for the analysis to come.

- (1) Frame/HT > Force > Topic > Focus_{Contrastive} > Q_{uantifier} > Focus_{Information} > Fin

Leaving aside detail which is not necessary for our analysis here, the basic generalizations are that new information foci (2a), quantified phrases (QPs) (2b) and contrastive foci (2c) occupy dedicated functional projections low in the left periphery, whereas distinct sub-types of topics – minimally LD and HT – are higher (3).¹ The Fin and Force heads – as discussed in Rizzi (1997) and much subsequent work – ‘sandwich’ the Topic-Focus projections in Romance and are both able to host complementizers, something most clearly visible in recomplementation structures where both the Fin and Force heads are filled (4).²

- (2) a. Un libbru ci detti
a book him.CL give.1SG.PST
‘I gave him a book’ (Modern Sicilian, Cruschina 2012: 54)
- b. IL TUO LIBRO ho letto, (non il suo)
the your book have.1SG read.PTCP NEG the his
‘YOUR BOOK, I read (not his)’ (Modern Italian, Rizzi 1997: 286)
- c. Moltes revistes deu llegir
many magazines must.3SG read.INF
‘He must read many magazines’ (Modern Catalan, Quer 2002: 256)
- (3) [_{HT} Giorgio, [_{LD} ai nostri amici, [..._{TP} ... non parlo mai di
Giorgio to-the our friends NEG speak.1SG never of
lui]]]
him
‘Giorgio, to our friends, I never speak of him’ (Modern Italian, Benincà and Poletto 2004: 65)
- (4) A Teeja a credda che a Maria ch’ a
the Teresa SCL.3SG believe.3SG that the Mary that SCL.3SG
parta
leave.3SG
‘Teresa believes that Mary is leaving’ (Modern Ligurian, Paoli 2007: 1279)

¹ Note that HTs are assumed to be higher than scene-setting adverbials and clauses, though this is the topic of some debate (cf. Benincà and Poletto 2004 vs. Poletto 2002).

² For discussion of Italo-Romance recomplementation see Paoli (2003), alongside Villa-García (2012; 2019) and Corr (2022) on Ibero-Romance.

Given the wide array of cartographic studies focussing on Romance left-peripheral syntax, the notion of a very rich functional structure is often explicitly or implicitly linked with Romance languages as a whole family, as opposed to one particular language. For certain phenomena it is true that the picture is relatively homogeneous; consider, for example, the distribution of clitic left dislocation, which has accrued an enormous literature, and appears to be licit across a very wide range of Romance varieties today (Cinque 1990; De Cat 2009; Frascarelli 2017; Rizzi and Bocci 2017):

- (5) a. Il libro, l'ho letto
 the book it.CL = have.1SG read.PTCP
 'The book, I read it' (Modern Italian)
 b. El libro, lo leí
 the book it.CL = read.1SG.PST
 'The book, I read it' (Modern Spanish)
 c. Le livre, je l'ai lu
 the book I it.CL = have.1SG read.PTCP
 'The book, I read it' (Modern French)

However, it is important to stress that such homogeneity does not apply across the whole of the left periphery: a particularly revealing case study is the Focus field. Whilst new information focus – as discussed most prominently in Cruschina (2008, 2011, 2012) – is widely licensed in Modern Sicilian, its distribution is more restricted in Modern Sardinian (6) and shows a high level of microvariation within other Extreme and Upper Southern Italian Dialects (7).³

- (6) Unu mariane appo vistu
 a fox have.1SG see.PTCP
 'I have seen a fox' (Modern Sardinian, Jones 1993: 353)
 (7) 'O pato songh'io
 the father be.1SG-I
 'I'm the father' (Modern Neapolitan, Ledgeway 2009: 789)

Turning to the situation in Ibero-Romance, Spanish is typically not reported to permit new information focus (Zubizarreta 1998; Zagana 2001), but this finding is questioned by Jiménez-Fernández (2015a, 2015b) who shows that examples such as (8) are licit in some varieties of Southern Peninsular Spanish:

³ See, for further discussion, Remberger (2010), Mensching and Remberger (2010), and Paoli (2010) on Italo-Romance.

- (8) Pasta está comiendo
 pasta be.3SG eat.PROG
 ‘He’s eating pasta’ (Modern Southern Peninsular Spanish, Jiménez-Fernández 2015a: sec. 3)

QP fronting, although more widely attested than new information focus (Ambar 1999; Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2009; Quer 2002), is also an area of microvariation with orders such as (2c) acceptable in Catalan and certain Italo-Romance varieties (9) but not most Gallo-Romance varieties or Modern French (10):⁴

- (9) a. Quaccheccóse am’ a fà
 something have.1PL to do.INF
 ‘We’ll do something’ (Modern Barese)
 b. Qualcosa faremmo
 something do.1PL.FUT
 ‘We’ll do something’ (Modern Triestino)
- (10) * Quelque chose nous ferons
 something we do.1PL.FUT
 ‘We’ll do something’ (Modern French)

Finally, note that although contrastive focus is the most widely licensed sub-type of focus in Romance, left-peripheral contrastive foci – although found in certain areas of the north of Italy (11a) – are illicit in a number of Northern Italian Dialects, (11b) and dispreferred in certain Northern Regional Italian varieties (12), where the *vP*-periphery is exploited (cf. Belletti 2004). They are generally considered unacceptable to speakers of Modern French (13), aside from very formal varieties:

- (11) a. NANI è vedù mi, no Toni
 Nani have.1SG see.PTCP I NEG Toni
 ‘I saw NANI, not Toni’ (Modern Lamonat, De Cia 2018: 137)
 b. Gioann a l’ha catà IL GELATO, nen la
 John SCL SCL-have.3SG buy.PTCP the ice-cream NEG the
 torta
 cake
 ‘John bought ice-cream, not the cake’ (Modern Torinese, Paoli 2003: 163)

⁴ Thank you to Luigi Andriani for discussion of the Barese example and Sandra Paoli for Torinese.

- (12) a. UNA MARGHERITA Sandra voleva, non una quattro
 a margherita Sandra want.3SG.PST NEG a quattro
 stagioni
 stagioni
 ‘Sandra wanted a Margherita pizza, not a quattro stagioni’ (Southern
 Regional Italian, Ledgeway and Roberts Forthcoming)
- b. Sandra voleva UNA MARGHERITA, non una quattro
 Sandra want.3SG.PST a margherita NEG a quattro
 stagioni
 stagioni
 ‘Sandra wanted a Margherita pizza, not a quattro stagioni’ (Northern
 Regional Italian, Ledgeway and Roberts Forthcoming)

Leaving aside a number of important details, the basic generalization is that whilst all Romance varieties show evidence of a richly articulated left-peripheral structure, it is not the case that individual functional projections are exploited consistently across the family. The bulk of this article will centre on how certain resetting of parameter values historically has led to this varied picture, with reference to a range of left-peripheral phenomena.

1.2.2 From SOV to V2 to SVO

Although this article will focus on the functional hierarchy of projections within the left periphery specifically, some basic generalisations regarding clausal word-order as a whole are necessary background for our discussion. The single most significant syntactic change in the history of the Romance languages has been the transition from a head-final to a head-initial grammar (Bauer 1995, 2009; Ledgeway 2012a, 2012b). This change should not be conceptualised as a binary split between ‘head-final Latin’ and ‘head-initial Romance’, but rather affects the featural makeup of different functional heads at different stages in the history of Romance (Ledgeway 2012a; Vincent 1999). As such, the idea that archaic and Classical Latin are SOV languages is potentially a useful shorthand but masks a considerable degree of variation between functional categories. The simple SOV label also glosses over a considerable amount of word-order flexibility (Danckaert 2012; Devine and Stephens 2006; Ledgeway 2012a), much of which can be conceived of as involving the left periphery (Polo 2005; Salvi 2005), whereby an underlying SOV order can give way to a range of word-order patterns as a result of topicalisation and focalisation; we return to this issue below.

The important point to note for our purposes is that whilst certain varieties of Latin may – with the caveats outlined above – be characterised as SOV, this is not

the case for Medieval Romance varieties, nor potentially for certain colloquial or late Latin varieties: since at least Benincà (1983b) some or all of the Medieval Romance languages have been analysed as V2 languages. Whilst the formal implementation of V2 in Romance, and elsewhere, has been diverse in the last four decades,⁵ the basic intuition across accounts is that the V2 constraint involves head movement of the finite verb to a left-peripheral head and that this same head or a distinct one bears a movement-triggering diacritic (EF, EPP, *, ^) which requires merger of a phrasal constituent (Cardinaletti and Roberts 2002; Holmberg 2015; Vikner 1995; Wolfe and Woods 2020).

Whilst the effects of the V2 property in the Medieval Romance languages are well established, more recent work has suggested that V2 effects may not be an early Romance innovation but rather a feature inherited from Latin. Focussing just on late Latin, various scholars have suggested that it features a ‘full’ V2 grammar or an incipient form of the V2 constraint (Clackson and Horrocks 2007; Ledgeway 2017; Salvi 2004). Ledgeway (2017), for example, argues that late Latin features consistent V-to-Fin movement in matrix clauses, with optional phrasal movement to the left periphery. The significant point for our purposes is to note that the genesis of V2 is undoubtedly a pre-Romance phenomenon and that verb movement into the left periphery therefore characterises the Romance syntactic type for much of its history. When individual Romance varieties lost consistent left-peripheral verb movement has not been fully investigated for all varieties, but a reanalysis towards an SVO grammar with V-to-T movement appears to have taken place in the 15th century in Italian (Poletto 2014: 61–66; Poletto 2019), between the 15th and 16th centuries in Spanish (Fontana 1993: 230–259), in the first quarter of the 16th century for French (Wolfe 2021a: chap. 4), and as late as the 17th century in Portuguese (De Andrade and Galves 2019; Galves and Paixão De Sousa 2018; Galves 2020). As such we note as our point of our departure that a progression from SOV, to V2, to SVO is a broadly accurate shorthand but masks considerable variation.

1.2.3 Parametric Change

In this article I follow the recent approach to parametric variation developed by Roberts (2019) and colleagues. Under this taxonomy of parametric variation, the presence of the relevant feature on a single functional head will yield micro-parametric variation, whilst the presence of this feature on a progressively larger class of heads will yield meso- and macro-parametric variation; variation at the level of a particular lexical item – by contrast – would constitute nanoparametric

5 For a thorough review of the literature see Wolfe (2018a: chaps. 1–2).

variation. Consider in this regard the schema in (14) (Biberauer and Roberts 2012: 268):

- (14) For a given value v_i of a parametrically variant feature F:
- a. Macroparameters: all heads of the relevant type, e.g. all probes, all phase heads, etc., share v_i ;
 - b. Mesoparameters: all heads of a given natural class, e.g. [+V] or a core functional category, share v_i ;
 - c. Microparameters: a small, lexically definable subclass of functional heads, e.g. modal auxiliaries, subject clitics, share v_i ;
 - d. Nanoparameters: one or more individual lexical items is/are specified or share v_i .

The important point for our purposes is that the fine-grained syntactic variation found within Modern Romance and its diachronic correlates does not need to be captured in terms of dichotomies concerning the ‘presence’ or ‘absence’ of a property, but rather the fine-grained featural distinctions between particular functional heads.

1.2.4 Aims and Structure

In this article I hope to show how the concepts of innovation and conservatism can productively be applied to the Romance left periphery, by comparing the points of continuity found in the left-peripheral syntax of Medieval Romance, with subsequent changes seen in French and Northern Italian Dialects in particular. Section 2 is comparative in nature and focusses on Medieval Romance in general, before a more focussed discussion in Section 3 deals with French and Northern Italian Dialects. The broader empirical and theoretical consequences of the analysis are outlined in Section 4.

2 The Early Romance Norm

2.1 A Note on Latin

The primary purpose of this article is not to discuss the Latin data (for a detailed discussion see Danckaert 2012; 2017, Ledgeway 2012a and Spevak 2010), however as context for the Romance-focussed discussion that follows it is important to highlight a number of points. Almost all scholars working in formal approaches to Latin syntax adopt a highly articulated left-peripheral structure to account for the extant data (Danckaert 2012, 2017; Devine and Stephens 2006; Ledgeway

2012a; Polo 2005; Salvi 2004). Within this structure, there is evidence that each of the major layers of left-peripheral structure identified in §1.2.1 are active: contrastive focus, QP-fronting (15a), and new information focus (15b) can be licensed in the left periphery (Danckaert 2012: 122; Pinkster 1991: 70; Salvi 2004: 50; Spevak 2008: 124), left-peripheral topicalisation is extremely widespread (16) (Bortolussi 2017; Ledgeway 2018: 265), and Danckaert (2012: 107) presents compelling evidence that the subordinators *cum*, *si*, and *ut* are plausibly analysed as occupying Fin (17), as they are consistently preceded by topics and foci:

- (15) a. *nihil* *te* *omnino* *fefellit*
 nothing.NOM you.ACC absolutely escape.3SG.PST
 ‘Nothing whatever escaped your notice’ (Latin, Cic. Fam. 9.2.2, Salvi 2005: 439)
- b. *Gaiumque* *Gallonium*, *equitum* *Romanum* *familiarem*
 Gaius.ACC-and Gallonius.ACC equestrian Roman.ACC relative.ACC
 Domiti ... oppido Gadibus praefecit ...
 of-Domitius town.DAT Gades.DAT put-in-charge.3SG.PST
 ‘and he put-in-charge of the town of Gades Gaius Gallonius, a Roman equestrian, a relative of Domitius’ (Latin, Caes. Civ. 2.18.2, Spevak 2010: 41)
- (16) *Quintum* *fratrem* *cotidie* *expectamus*
 quintus.ACC brother.ACC everyday expect.1PL
 ‘We expect brother Quintus back any day’ (Latin, Cic. Att 1.5.8, Pinkster 1991: 75)
- (17) *Eum* *cum* *uidero*, *Arpinum* *pergam*
 that.ACC when see.FUT.1SG Arpinum.ACC proceed.FUT.1SG
 ‘When I have seen him, I’ll move on to Arpinum’ (Latin, Cic. Att 9.15.1, Danckaert 2012: 108)

The basic point for our purposes is that the activation of each of the articulated fields identified in Rizzi (1997) and subsequent work is not a Romance innovation. Rather, the major Romance innovation is that previously optional movement to the topic-focus fields becomes obligatory due to the emergence of ‘full’ V2.

2.2 The Early Medieval Romance Left Periphery

In this section we will see evidence for a simple empirical claim that the left-peripheral syntax of Early Medieval Romance texts from prior to c.1225 is

strikingly uniform; the focus is on Italo-, Ibero- and Gallo-Romance. However, in §2.3 we will revisit aspects of this hypothesis, suggesting that certain features of the Medieval Romance left periphery are more diachronically variable than often assumed.

Firstly, consider the makeup of the Focus field. Despite this being an area of considerable variation in Modern Romance varieties, the licensing of new information focus is widespread across Early Medieval Romance texts (18), as is QP-fronting (19). Contrastive focus, as discussed by Cruschina (2011), is more challenging to diagnose, though examples are reported for Latin and a number of Medieval Romance varieties, suggesting that licensing of left-peripheral contrastive focus was a pan-Medieval Romance property.

- (18) a. *fios de ankilla de juigi sunt*
 children of slave of iudice be.3PL
 ‘They are children of a slave of the iudice’ (Old Sardinian, SMDB 25)
- b. *Un eisemple direm d’un bon hom qui ot*
 an example tell.1PL of-a good man who have.3SG.PST
tres amis
 three friends
 ‘We now discuss an example of ‘a good man who had three friends’ (Old Piedmontese, Sermoni f.146r)
- c. *Al rey de Valençia enbiaron con mensaje*
 to-the king of Valencia send.3PL.PST with message
 ‘They send for the King of Valencia with a message’ (Old Spanish, Mio Cid 627)
- d. *Perte avas fete*
 loss have.2SG.PST make.PTCP
 ‘You have lost’ (Old Occitan, Aigar et Maurin 48)
- e. *un filz lur dunet*
 a son them.CL give.3SG.PST
 ‘He gave them a son’ (Old French, Alexis 28)
- (19) a. *Tantos moros yazen muertos*
 so-many moors lie.3PL dead
 ‘So many moors lie dead ...’ (Old Spanish, Mio Cid 785)
- b. *mout a argent et mout a or*
 much have.3SG silver and much have.3SG gold
 ‘He has a lot of silver and a lot of gold’ (Old French, ROman de Thèbes 46, 1451)

The core observation is therefore that a layered Focus field is active across Early Medieval Romance varieties (cf. also Salvi 2004; Benincà 2004; Benincà 2006; Ledgeway 2008; Wolfe 2016a; Batllori and Sitaridou 2020); this is unsurprising given the activation of the Focus field in Latin (see §2.1) and also tallies with much of the literature on individual varieties.⁶ As noted above, however, the earliest Romance texts pattern distinctly from many Modern Romance languages which do not permit the fronting of a very wide array of foci and thus highlight a point we return to below, that changes in the parametric makeup of the Focus field have contributed considerably to the syntactic isoglosses separating Romance speaking varieties today.

Secondly, topicalisation without a resumptive pronoun or clitic is uniformly found across varieties, in part as a result of the V2 constraint (Adams 1987; Benincà 1983a: 196; Fontana 1993; Labelle and Hirschbühler 2005; Labelle and Hirschbühler 2018; Ledgeway 2007: 128–131; Ribeiro 1995; Roberts 1993: 85–87; Salvi 2004: 65–67; Vanelli, Renzi and Benincà 1986: 53–56; Wolfe 2018a: chap. 2);⁷ I illustrate here with examples from Old Italo-, Ibero- and Gallo-Romance (20).

- (20) a. Custu deit cun voluntate d’onnia fiio suo
 this give.3SG.PST with agreement of-all child his
 ‘He gave this with agreement of all his children’ (Old Sardinian, SMDB 18)
- b. Esto me an buolto míos enemigos malos
 this me.CL have.3PL do.PTCP my enemies bad
 ‘My evil enemies have done this to me’ (Old Spanish, Mio Cid 9)
- c. El boscal d’Aimert al Pas donero Matfres
 the thicket-wood of-Aimert al Pas give.3PL.PST Matfre
 Bec e sos fraire ellor maire
 Bec and his brother and-their mother
 ‘Matfre Bec, his brother and their mother donated the thicket wood of
 Aimert al Pas’ (Old Occitan, Chartes 20)
- d. Ço dist li reis
 this say.3SG the king
 ‘The King says this’ (Old French, Roland 327)

In sharp contrast to many of the Modern Romance languages, there is no requirement for a resumptive to be used, even though clitic left dislocation is also

⁶ For a detailed comparative discussion of the Medieval Romance focus field see in particular Benincà (2004; 2006) and Wolfe (2018a).

⁷ Within Germanic and Romance, it appears that V2 languages consistently permit satisfaction of the V2-related movement diacritic with a topic but that there is more variation concerning whether foci can be fronted to the left periphery. Eastern Armenian may be a rare example of a language where foci alone can satisfy V2 (Giorgi and Haroutyunian 2020).

found across the Medieval Romance varieties to a greater extent than was once thought (Benincà and Poletto 2010; Bouzouita 2014; de Bakker 1997: 66; Lombardi and Middleton 2004: 556; Labelle 2007; Mathieu 2012: 342–344).

- (21) a. El espada e la cabeça aduxo-la a Jerusalém
 the sword and the head bring.3SG.PST = it to Jerusalem
 ‘The sword and the head, he brought to Jerusalem’ (Old Spanish, *Fazienda Sam* 17:54, Bouzouita 2014: 33)
- b. Ceste bataille veirement la ferum
 this battle truly it deliver.1PL.FUT
 ‘Truly, this battle, we will wage’ (Old French, *Roland* 882)

As has been noted in numerous works on Medieval Romance (Fontana 1993: 111–115; Salvi 2004: 65–67; Ledgeway 2007: 128–131; Poletto 2006: 261–264; Poletto 2014: 2–11; Salvesen 2013; Wolfe 2015: 10–13; Wolfe 2018a: chap. 2), multiple topics can co-occur in the left periphery and topics can also co-occur with foci, yielding what Benincà (2004: 275) refers to as the ‘multiple accessibility’ of the left periphery. As highlighted in Wolfe (2016a: 468–469), some of the very earliest Romance texts attest to this pattern, which provides yet further evidence for an articulated left-peripheral structure. Note, for example, the co-occurrence of a topic and focus in (22a, b) and the co-occurrence of a topic and the FinP expletive *SI* in (22c) (cf. for discussion of *SI* Ledgeway 2008, Salvesen 2013, and Wolfe 2018b):

- (22) a. [Topic Ego iudice Torbini de Lacon, [Focus
 I iudice Torbini de Lacon
 potestando parte de Arborea cun donna Ana
 govern.PROG part of Arborea with donna Ana
 de Zori e regina coiube mmia ... [Fin
 de Zori and queen consort my
 facemus [TP ista carta a Gostantine d’Orrubu
 make.1PL this carta to Gostantine d’Orrubu
 fratile meu ed amabile meu]]]
 brother my and friend my
 ‘I Iudice Torbini de Lacon, governing part of Arborea with my wife
 and queen consort Ana de Zori, make this recording [of a donation]
 to Gostantine d’Orrubu, my brother and friend’ (Old Sardinian, *Carta
 Arborense*, Merci 1978: 370)
- b. Sao ko [Topic kelle terre per kelle
 know.1sg that those lands for those
 fini, que, ki, contene[Focus trenta anni [Fin le

- confines that that contain.3SG thirty years them.CL =
 possette[_{TP} parte sancti Benedicti
 possess.3SG.PST part saint.OBL Benedict.OBL
 ‘I know that those lands, within those borders which are contained
 here, have belonged to the part of the monastery of St. Benedict for
 thirty years’ (Old Italo-Romance, Placito 1, Ledgeway 2011: 215)
- C. [Frame D’ist di in avant, [_{Topic} in quant
 from- this day in forward in so-far
 Deus savir et podir me dunat [_{Fin} si
 God knowledge and power me.CL give.3SG SI
 salvarai [_{TP} eo]]]]
 support. 1SG.FUT I
 ‘from this day forward, insofar as God gives me knowledge and power, I
 will support ...’ (Old French, Strasbourg Oaths)

Finally, we should note the behaviour of complementizers in the earliest Romance texts, with two types of system attested. The first class of system features multiple complementizers with distinct phonological forms, with these dual or triple complementizer systems attested in various Italo-Romance (Colasanti 2017, 2018; Ledgeway 2005; Ledgeway and Lombardi 2014; Munaro 2015) and Ibero-Romance varieties (Corr 2022: sec. 8.2), and characteristic of many of the earliest texts from the 9th to 13th centuries. As argued convincingly by Ledgeway (2005: 364–376), such systems entail complementizers which are base-generated in a low left-peripheral position – likely *Fin* – moving to a higher head position, where they are spelled out distinctly. Thus, in (22b) the fact that the form *ko* ‘that’ surfaces as opposed to *ca/ka* ‘that’ is a reflex of *Fin*-to-*Force* movement and thus instantiation of a structurally high complementizer.⁸

8 Numerous later examples from Southern Italian Dialects show both kinds of complementizer co-occurring as in (i). See Ledgeway (2005; 2011) in particular for further discussion:

- (i) Et èy manifesta cosa **che** homo che se ave a
 and be.3SG abundantly clear that man that REFL.CL have.3SG to
 defendere a la patria soa intre li amici e li
 defend.INF to the country his among the friends and the
 canussienti suoy **cha** ave a chesta parte gran prerogativa
 acquaintances his that have.3SG to this part great privilege
 e gran avantayo
 and great advantage
 ‘And it is abundantly clear that, a man who has to defend himself in his own country
 among his friends and acquaintances, has in this respect considerable privilege and
 advantage’ (Old Neapolitan, Troya, 126.2–4)

(23) [Force [Force CHE] [Topic TOPIC [Focus FOCUS [FIN [FIN CA/CHE] [TP ...]]]]]

However, other Early Medieval Romance varieties which lack ‘true’ dual or triple complementizers, also show evidence that complementizers can move within the left periphery. Consider in this regard the examples in (24) which are found in varieties which lack dual complementizers such as Occitan and French. In a parallel fashion to the Old Italo-Romance examples, we observe evidence that the *QUE* complementizer can ‘Sandwich’ the topic-focus layer in so-called recomplementation structures (Wanner 1987: 421; Salvesen 2014: 57–62; Wolfe 2018a: 79–85; Wolfe 2021a: chap. 3). Thus in (24a), the topical *if*-clause (Munaro 2005) appears between two instantiations of the complementizer *que* ‘that’:

- (24) a. ... car bien seust il **que** s’il
 since well know.3SG.IMPV.SBJV he that if-he
 i aloit, **qu’il** n’iroit plus avec lui
 LOC.CL go.3SG.IMPV that’he NEG-go.3SG.COND more with him
 ‘Since he knew well that if he went he wouldn’t go with him anymore’
 (Old French, Clari 99)
- b. [Force [Force QUE] [Topic TOPIC ... [FIN [FIN QUE][TP ...]]]]]

As suggested by both Salvesen (2014) and Wolfe (2018a, 2021a), such structures should be analysed as having a complementizer *que* which is base-generated in Fin and moves to Force.⁹ There is therefore a striking parallelism across the Early Medieval Romance languages both with and without surface dual complementizer systems: despite the morpho-phonological reflexes of Fin-to-Force movement being distinct between Italo- and Ibero-Romance dual or triple complementizer systems on the one hand and Gallo-Romance varieties on the other, both license movement of low complementizer to a high head – Force – within an articulated left-peripheral structure.

In conclusion, a bundle of properties is found across the Early Medieval Romance varieties, which thus appear strikingly homogeneous and permit us to sketch a map of the left periphery which we can consider a pan-Early Medieval Romance norm. Starting in the highest Frame field, which I have not dealt with in this section for reasons of space, scene-setting adverbials and clauses as well as structurally high base-generated topics are widely found across the earliest

⁹ I do not exclude here the possibility that this movement may also take place via Top(ic), as suggested by Ledgeway (2005) and Munaro (2015) amongst others.

texts;^{10,11} they precede the highest complementizer position in Force, which we saw can host a complementizer which has been moved from Fin, where it may (Italo-Romance, Ibero-Romance) or may not (Gallo-Romance) take a distinct phonological form. Below Force, sit the Topic-Focus fields, with preverbal topics, contrastive foci, QPs, and new information foci uniformly licensed preverbally in the very earliest texts:¹²

- (25) [Frame Topic, Adverbial_{Scene Setting}, Clause_{Scene Setting} [Force [Force QUE/CHE]
[Topic Topic [Focus Focus_{Contrastive}, QP, Focus_{Information} [Fin SI [Fin QUE/CA/CHE,
V_{Finite}]]]]]]

Although our focus in this section has not been principally on the V2 property, we should note that the locus of V2 until approximately 1200 is Fin across Medieval Romance (Wolfe 2016a). The consequences of this for the schema in (25) are that the full range of left-peripheral projections is accessible above the landing site of the finite verb and that, furthermore, as a result of Fin's EF, a constituent is systematically merged in a specifier within the Topic or Focus field, or in Spec-FinP itself.

10 Unlike in the schema in (1), I do not differentiate in (26) between HT and a lower Topic position; this is principally because many of the classic tests which we can use to differentiate between these two classes of topics cannot be directly applied to text languages. See Bouzouita (2014) for discussion of this problem in relation to Old Spanish and Van Kemenade and Meklenborg (2021) for Old French.

11 Evidence for a higher frame field above the lower topic layer comes from two main areas in Medieval Romance: the fact that clauses and scene-setting adverbials consistently precede topical argumental DPs as in (i) and the fact that such clauses and scene-setting adverbials are the only V3-triggers in Force-V2 systems where the second XP plausibly sits in Spec-ForceP (Wolfe 2016b) (ii):

- (i) [Frame Quant cil a Rome sont ensi repairié [Topic li cuens
when those to Rome be.3PL thus left-again.PTCP the count
Guillelmes [Focus sor un perron [Fin s'assiet [TP]]]]
Guillaume on a rock REFL.CL-sit.3SG.PST
'When they returned to Rome, the count Guillaume sat down on a rock' (Old French, Coronemenz Looïs 1352–3, Donaldson 2012: 1038).
- (ii) [Frame Unde [Force Brat levà ... [TP ... la ma(n)]]]
thus Brat raise.3sg.pst the hand
'Brat then raised his hand' (Old Venetian, Lio Mazor 51)

12 For full discussion of the relevant facts concerning *si*, see amongst others Ledgeway (2008; 2021) and Salvesen (2013). Following earlier work (Wolfe 2016a; 2018b; 2021b), I assume that it is first-merged in Spec-FinP in Early Medieval Romance and conservative Later Medieval Romance varieties.

3 Divergent Paths in Diachrony

3.1 The Late Medieval Romance Split

Whilst the features discussed in §2.1 are uniformly found across the Early Medieval Romance languages prior to 1200 and persist in many beyond this point, there are indications from the 13th century of changes affecting the left periphery in certain varieties which map directly onto syntactic isoglosses in the Modern Romance languages; these ‘innovative’ varieties broadly correspond to those spoken in the North. I focus principally on French in this section but note supporting evidence from Venetan that suggests the relevant changes are not restricted to French alone in the period from 1200 to 1500.

In the 13th to 15th centuries, the Medieval Romance languages still present compelling evidence of a V2 syntax.¹³ However, just as we can observe in the Rhaeto-Romance (Casalicchio and Cognola 2020) and Germanic (Bohnacker 2010; Holmberg 2015; Wolfe 2019) V2 systems spoken today, there is clear micro-variation in the structure of the left periphery between varieties. One of the most significant splits already identifiable by the 13th century concerns the licensing of preverbal information focus: whilst evidence of a preverbal new information focus projection is widespread in 13th–15th century Southern Italian Dialects, Occitan varieties, and certain and certain Ibero-Romance varieties (Fernández Ordóñez 2009; Cruschina 2011; Lombardi and Middleton 2004; Ledgeway 2008; Vance, Donaldson and Steiner 2009), this is not the case across all extant Romance texts for this period.

A number of scholars have noted that from 1200 to 1500 onwards, the preverbal field in French predominantly hosts topicalised constituents (26) (Labelle and Hirschbühler 2018; Marchello-Nizia 1995: 99; Steiner 2014; Wolfe 2016a: 480), although preverbal QPs (27a, 27b) and contrastive foci (27c) are still licensed (Wolfe 2021a: chap. 3). Turning to Venetan varieties, the structure of their left periphery is not entirely homogeneous, in keeping with a degree of heterogeneity in the focus properties of Northern Italo-Romance varieties today (Paoli 2010). Two of the principal Venetan texts analysed in Poletto and Wolfe (Forthcoming) – *Lio Mazor* for Venetian and *Serapiom* for Paduan – show no or limited evidence for preverbal information focus in the 14th century, with discourse-old constituents predominantly occupying the preverbal field (28).

¹³ See, for example, Ledgeway (2008) on 14th-century Neapolitan, Wolfe (2015) on 14th-century Sicilian, Fontana (1993) on 14th-century Spanish, and Benincà (1983a) and Poletto and Wolfe (Forthcoming) on 14th- and 15th-century Venetan.

- (26) Ceste aventure veïstes vos aucune foiz
 this event see.2PL.PST you some time
 ‘You have sometimes seen this event’ (Old French, *La Queste* 152.22)
- (27) a. Grant piece parlerent de ceste chose ...
 great amount speak.3PL.PST of this thing
 ‘They spoke a great amount about this thing’ (Old French, *La Queste* 4.37)
- b. Autres en y a qui sont si bons
 others PART.CL LOC.CL have.3SG who be.3PL so good
 ‘There are others who are so good ...’ (Middle French, *Mémoires* 27)
- b. Meïsmes la pulcele y fu
 even the girl LOC.CL be.3SG.PST
 ‘Even the girl was there’ (Old French, Cassidorus, Labelle and Hirschbühler 2018)
- (28) a. La cera se fa biancha in questo mudo
 the wax REFL.CL do.3SG white in this way
 ‘Wax is made white in this way ...’ (Old Paduan, *Serapiom* 15)
- b. (E) co dis-el plusor fiade
 and this say.3SG.PST = he often
 ‘And he said this often’ (Old Venetian, Lio Mazor 19)

In keeping with this decline of focus movement to the left periphery, in the period after 1200 we see increasing evidence of a rise in left dislocation structures involving a resumptive clitic in French, which are attested in the early medieval period (cf. 21) but rare; this has been demonstrated quantitatively by Kroch (1989, 2001) among others.

- (29) Et le premier homme qui mourut, ce fut
 and the first man that die.3SG.PST that be.3SG.PST
 luy et ses gens
 him and his men
 ‘And the first man that died, that was him and his men’ (Middle French, *Mémoires* 9)

Parallel left-dislocation structures are found in a range of Northern Italian Dialects in the late medieval period (Benincà 2004: 268–269), as they are today (e.g. Poletto 2000), though the absence of tagged Venetan corpora makes it impossible at present to pinpoint when they increase in frequency and whether this follows a similar trajectory to French. However, supporting evidence that a large subclass of

constituents reaches the left periphery via base-generation rather than internal merge in the late medieval period comes from the distribution of the particle *si*. In certain 14th-century texts such as *Serapiom*, *si* frequently precedes the verb but follows a subject constituent (30):

- (30) e questo si è lo absenço montan
 and this si be.3SG the absinthe mountainous
 ‘and this is mountain absinthe’ (Old Paduan, *Serapiom* 18)

Given *si*’s presumed last-resort function in satisfying V2 in Spec-FinP in Medieval Romance varieties (Salvesen 2013; Wolfe 2021b), data such as (30) strongly suggest that the preverbal topic is not a V2-satisfier, which falls out naturally if we assume that it is first-merged in the topic field and thus necessitates the merger of another constituent at the V2 landing site.

We noted above in §2.2 widespread evidence across Early Medieval Romance for orders where multiple topics or topics and foci co-occur. Whilst such deviations from a strict ordering, where the finite verb is in second position, persist into the 13th century, they show greater restrictions. The systematic pattern from the 13th century onwards in French and the pattern observable in more innovative Venetan texts is that a base-generated constituent in the Frame field may co-occur with a topic, contrastive focus, QP, or the particle *si* satisfying the V2 constraint, which has been argued to be operative on Force rather than Fin in these varieties (Wolfe 2016b, 2018a). However, the possibility of moved topics and foci co-occurring or multiple topicalisation appears to be ruled out, whilst such structures persist in many Ibero-Romance varieties, Central and Southern Italian Dialects, and more conservative Venetan texts (Fernández Ordóñez 2009; Ledgeway 2008; Poletto 2014; Wolfe 2015). The pattern for French and certain Venetan varieties is exemplified in (31) and schematised in (32):

- (31) a. (E) siando là, lo ditto Pero (e) Çulia(n)
 and be.PROG there the said Pero and Çulian
 bra(n)chà lo viger
 snatch.3SG.PST the hatchery
 ‘And whilst there the aforementioned Pero and Çulian grabbed the [fish]
 hatchery’ (Old Venetan, Lio Mazor 59)
 b. puis si se departirent
 then si REFL.CL leave.3PL.PST
 ‘Then they left’ (Old French, Clari 4, 2)

- (32) [Frame Adverbial_{Scene Setting}, Clause_{Scene Setting} [Force *si*, TOPIC(LD),
 FOCUS_{Contrastive}, QP [Force V_{Finite}] ...]]

Finally, we should note the behaviour of complementisers in French and Venetan varieties in the later medieval period. Whilst dual complementiser systems are not found in French or Venetan texts, French continues to license widespread recomplementation until approximately 1400 (33a), after which it is sporadically attested. Cases of recomplementation in Venetan texts are rare even in the 13th and 14th centuries, being absent, for example, from the frequently discussed Venetian text *Lio Mazor*, though there is some limited evidence that structures such as those in (33b) are found sporadically, suggesting Fin-to-Force movement of the complementiser can obtain (33c).¹⁴

- (33) a. et croy **que**, s'il eust passé oultre
 and believe.1SG that if-he have.3SG.PST.SBJV pass.PTCP over
 deux traictz d'arc, **qu'il** eust esté
 two, shots of-bow that-he have.3SG.PST.SBJV be.PTCP
 prins comme aucuns autres qui chassoient devant luy
 taken like some others that drove.3PL.PST before him
 'and I believe that if he had passed over two rounds of arrows, he would
 have been captured like some others who pressed ahead of him' (Middle
 French, *Mémoires* 13)

- b. el convien **che** vui lo eriedo de questa
 it be-appropriate.3SG that you the heir of this
 donna a nui **que** llo renderé
 woman to us that it.CL give.2SG
 'It is appropriate that you, the heir of this woman, give it to us'
 (Old Venetan, *Tristano* 20, 66, 33)

- c. [Force [Force QUE/CHE] [Topic TOPIC [Focus [Fin [Fin QUE/CHE]]]]]

However, indications that Fin-to-Force movement is not only optional but becoming increasingly systematic, comes from the distribution of embedded V2, which shows heavy restrictions in non-root environments, despite having had a more widespread non-root distribution in the earliest Medieval Romance texts. Following insights in Roberts (2004) and Branigan (2011), Wolfe (2018a) analyses the restrictions on embedded V2 in Later Old French and Later Old Venetan as a result of Force probing Fin and attracting the complementiser, which has a blocking effect on embedded movement to the Topic-Focus fields (34).

- (34) [Force [Force QUE/CHE] [Topic [Focus [Fin [Fin ~~QUE/CHE~~]]]]]

¹⁴ Thank you to Cecilia Poletto for bringing this example to my attention. It is notable that the *Tristano* is generally a more conservative text in other aspects of its syntax, which may account for why recomplementation is attested here but is not more widespread in late medieval Venetan texts.

As such, Fin-to-Force movement of the complementiser obtains systematically from 1200 onwards in both French and Venetan; akin to other movement operations cross-linguistically (Corver and Nunes 2007), both copies of the complementizer can be spelt out in recomplementation structures such as those found in (33) – a widespread pattern in Later Old French, but found only sporadically in Later Old Venetan or Middle French – or the tail can be deleted at PF, as in (34); the latter option is found after 1200 in both languages as part of their V2 grammar.

To summarise the discussion, I have suggested that in French and certain Venetan varieties a distinct left-peripheral system emerges from approximately 1200 onwards. The relevant changes entail a marked decrease in the licensing of new information focus, an increase in left dislocation structures involving clitic resumption or merger of the particle *si*, a decrease in the possibility for multiple topics or a topic and focus to co-occur, and the fact that previously optional Fin-to-Force movement of complementizers becomes systematic.¹⁵ This system is schematised in (35).

- (35) [Frame ADVERBIAL_{Scene Setting}, CLAUSE_{Scene Setting} [Force SI, TOPIC(LD),
FOCUS_{Contrastive}, QP [Force V_{Finite}, QUE/CHE] ... [Fin [Fin ~~QUE/CHE~~, QUE/CHE]]]]

In the case of Venetan, this map of left-peripheral syntax, modulo the V2 property, is indicative of what is attested in many modern varieties: like many Northern Italo-Romance varieties, left-peripheral contrastive focus is licensed for some speakers, but information focus is not (cf. 36);¹⁶ left-dislocation structures show a wide distribution as is typical across Romance (Ledgeway and Roberts Forthcoming; Poletto 2000); and recomplementation is near-entirely absent, as the absence of examples in the *Atlante Sintattico d'Italian* (ASIt) database reveals.¹⁷

- (36) NA MARGHERITA la volea la Sandra nò na quatro
a margherita SCL want.3SG the Sandra NEG a four
stagioni
seasons
'Sandra wanted a Margherita pizza, not a quattro stagioni' (Modern
Paduan)

¹⁵ See discussion in Bidese (2008) for a Cimbrian parallel to some of the changes in the Northern Romance focus system analysed here.

¹⁶ Thank you to Silvia Rossi for this example.

¹⁷ See <http://asit.maldura.unipd.it>.

However, we will now see that additional reanalyses have differentiated French left-peripheral syntax from even innovative Venetan and Northern Italo-Romance varieties.

3.2 French from the Renaissance to the Present Day

In this section I wish to outline further reanalyses which have given French a typological profile in its left-peripheral syntax which is distinct even from Venetan and syntactically similar Northern Italo-Romance systems. It will be suggested that the ability for constituents to reach the left periphery via internal merge has been massively restricted in the past half-millennium.

3.2.1 The 16th to 18th Centuries

A significant mesoparametric change occurs in the first quarter of the 16th century when French loses the V2 property: an increasing proportion of subjects in the preverbal field, a decline in verb-subject inversion, and a decline in sharp matrix/embedded asymmetries all suggest that neither Fin nor Force bear the EF or *uV* feature which triggers merger of a left-peripheral constituent and verb movement in all matrix clauses.¹⁸ As such, from the 16th century onwards, French is an SVO system where the locus of ‘EPP-effects’ and verb movement is the T-layer and merger of a constituent in the left periphery is optional (37).

- (37) Ma force m’abandonne
 my strength me.CL = abandon.3SG
 ‘My strength is leaving me’ (Classical French, Phèdre 3, 154)

However, it is not the case from the 16th century onwards that all focus-fronting is lost from the system. Rather, what we observe in this period and after is a range of increasingly specialised micro- or nanoparametrically constrained triggers for movement. Primary textual analysis in Wolfe (2021a: sec. 3.2.4) and other secondary sources suggest that informationally focussed direct objects cannot move to the left periphery from the 16th century onwards, but that QP direct objects remain until the 17th century (cf. also Fournier 2007):

¹⁸ See Wolfe (2021a: sec. 3.4.4) for quantitative data supporting this conclusion, alongside Roberts (1993) who also dates the loss of V2 to the 16th century.

- (38) a. *Peu de prudence eurent les pauvres gens*
 little of prudence have.3PL.PST the poor people
 ‘The poor people had little caution’ (Classical French, La Fontaine, Fournier 2007: 35)
- b. *Autre chose ne me sceut il dire*
 other thing NEG me.CL know.1SG.PST he say.INF
 ‘He couldn’t tell me anything else’ (Classical French, Biard 96, (Combettes 2003: 180))

From the 16th to 18th centuries, predicative adjectives (39) can consistently be focalised to the left periphery (Fournier 2007: 37–38; Gougenheim 1973: 229; Marchello-Nizia and Prévost 2020: 1905), as can a wider range of spatial and temporal adverbials than is the case in Modern French varieties (40).

- (39) *Possible n’est pour le present*
 possible NEG-be.3SG for the present
 ‘It is not presently possible ...’ (Renaissance French, Rabelais 4, 35, Gougenheim 1973: 229)
- (40) *Mais maintenant crioit-elle fermement que*
 but now believe.3SG.PST resolutely that
 ‘But now she believed resolutely that ...’ (Renaissance French, Heptaméron 3, 1, 44, Gougenheim 1973: 230)

Unlike informationally focussed objects, topicalised objects without clitic resumption are marginally attested in the language of this period, despite left dislocated objects with clitic resumption being far more common (Kroch 1989); non-resumed topics are consistently discourse-old, with numerous scholars noting the ‘anaphoric’ nature of the constituents (Combettes 2003: 175–176; Marchello-Nizia and Prévost 2020: 1094).

- (41) *Ceste region dit Herodian estre feconde*
 this region say.3SG Herodian be.INF fertile
 ‘Herodian says that this region is fertile’ (Renaissance French, Thevet f5, r, Combettes 2003: 175)

Turning to the embedded domain, we note a major point of distinction with the previous V2 stage of the language, namely that multiple constituents can be embedded under the complementiser (41). This fact, alongside the absence of recomplementation after the mid-17th century (Spillebout 1985: 262), strongly supports the conclusion that the complementiser *que* is base-generated in Force from c.1650 onwards (42).

- (42) ... lesquelz afferment que veritablement ledict
 the-which affirm.3PL that really the-said
 Hurtaly n'estoit dedans l'Arche de Noë
 Hurtaly NEG.CL-be.3SG.PST inside the-ark of Noah
 'who affirm that the said Hurtaly really was not inside Noah's Ark'
 (Renaissance French, Rabelais 28)

- (43) [Force [Force QUE] ... [Fin ...]]

To summarise, this period sees a major mesoparametric change in that neither Fin nor Force bear V2-related features, but microparametric change also extends to the precise makeup of other functional projections. In the Topic field, we see another rise in clitic left dislocation, whilst moved topics are increasingly specialised to explicitly anaphoric constituents. Meanwhile, predicative adjectives and adverbials form a subset of the previously wider class of informational foci which could undergo left-peripheral focalisation. Finally, complementisers do not undergo Fin-to-Force movement, but are base-generated directly in Force:

- (44) [Frame ADVERBIAL_{Scene Setting}, CLAUSE_{Scene Setting} [Force [Force QUE][Topic TOPIC_{LD}, Topic_{Anaphoric} [Focus FOCUS_{Contrastive}, QP, FOCUS_{Adj/Adv} [Fin ...]]]]]

3.2.2 Modern and Colloquial French

In contrast to earlier stages of the language and many other Modern Romance varieties the focus field is far less active in Modern French, where clefting is the overwhelmingly preferred strategy for marking focus (Belletti 2008, 2015; Dufter 2008). However, this does not mean that functional projections in the Focus field are not available at all in French (pace Zubizarreta 1998: 184), but rather that the Focus field's activation is heavily constrained, and its activation is subject to sociolinguistic variation.

Whilst new information focus is not found in French varieties today, a heavily restricted class of non-contrastive constituents can be focalised, although the class is even more minimal than found in the 16th and 18th centuries, spanning a lexically defined class of adverbials (45) (Guimier 1997: 43–45; Lahousse 2015), a lexically defined class of monosyllabic adjectives (46) (Marchello-Nizia and Prévost 2020: 1167), and certain Prepositional Phrases (47), and thus constitutes nanoparametric variation in the terms of Roberts (2019):

- (45) Peut-être viendra-t-il
 maybe come.3SG.FUT-he
 'Maybe he'll come' (Modern French, Rowlett 2007: 208)

- (46) Tel est mon avis
 such be.3SG my view
 ‘Such is my view’ (Modern French, Wagner and Pinchon 1962: 519)
- (47) A ça vous n’avez pas pensé
 to that you NEG-have.2PL NEG think.PTCP
 ‘You haven’t thought of that’ (Modern French, (Wagner and Pinchon 1962: 530)

Crucially, none of these structures are associated with colloquial French varieties and there are strong arguments that cases such as (48) – found in colloquial registers above all – should not be analysed as cases of initial foci but rather left dislocation, as they show an intonational break between the left-peripheral constituent and clausal core (Kroch 2001: 712; Rowlett 2007: 183):

- (48) 10F, ce truc m’a coûté
 10F this thing me-have.3SG COST.PTCP
 ‘This thing cost me 10F’ (Modern French, Rowlett 2007: 183)

Moving upwards in the left periphery, the Frame and Topic fields are active in all French varieties today. Unlike earlier stages of the language, however, by far the most productive topicalisation strategy is left dislocation as in (49) (on which see in particular (De Cat 2009). For our purposes, an important point to note is that a wide range of evidence supports the conclusion that left dislocation of this type is derived through base-generation (Cinque 1990; De Cat 2009: 149–155; Haegeman 2012: 104; Rowlett 2007: 178), unlike the originally V2-related topicalisation strategy widely employed until the 17th century, derived via internal merge/movement.

- (49) Le garçon, il attend devant la porte
 the boy he wait.3sg in-front-of the door
 ‘The boy, he’s waiting in front of the door’ (Modern French, (Lambrecht 1981: 61)

Turning to complementisers, note that Rizzi (1997) assumes that French *que* ‘that’ occupies Force, a finding supported by the fact that left-dislocated topics can be embedded across French varieties today (De Cat 2009: 158–159) (50). Furthermore, unusually within a comparative Romance context, French has lacked recomplementation structures since the 17th century (Salvesen 2014; Wolfe 2021a: chap. 3), although such structures are present in child French (Roehrs and Labelle 2003); this provides another indirect piece of evidence that the base-generated position of *que* ‘that’ is Force and not Fin.

- (50) Tu veux que moi, je le dessine
 you want.2SG that me I it.CL draw.1SG.SBJV
 ‘Do you want me to draw it?’ (Modern French, De Cat 2009: 158)

Schematising the data on the French left periphery today, it is necessary to differentiate between two systems, one of which is associated with more standard, formal varieties and another with more ‘innovative’ colloquial varieties. In the former, a lexically defined class of adverbials, adjectives, and PPs can undergo focalisation, whilst in the latter this is not the case. In both systems, however, the complementiser *que* ‘that’ is base-generated in Force:

- (51) a. [_{Frame} ADVERBIAL_{Scene} Setting, _{CLAUSE}Scene Setting [_{Force} [_{Force} QUE][_{Topic} TOPIC_{LD} [_{Focus} FOCUS_{Adj/Adv}, FOCUS_{PP} [_{Fin} ...]]]] (Modern French)
 b. [_{Frame} ADVERBIAL_{Scene} Setting, _{CLAUSE}Scene Setting [_{Force} [_{Force} QUE][_{Topic} TOPIC_{LD} [_{Focus} [_{Fin} ...]]]] (Colloquial French)

4 The Romance Left Periphery in Synchrony and Diachrony

4.1 Schematising the French and Venetan Data

The important generalisation emerging from our discussion is that a maximally active articulated left periphery was present in the very earliest Romance varieties, but subsequent reanalyses have altered the featural makeup of left-peripheral heads such that the class of XPs which are able to move to the left periphery has been increasingly restricted; French is the clearest case-study of this kind of parametric change and has diverged considerably from what we can think of as an ‘Early Medieval Romance norm’, whereas Venetan varieties constitute a transitional system by the 14th century, where a subclass of topics and foci can reach the left periphery via internal merge, but not as large a class as in many varieties.

The much discussed mesoparametric distinction between Classical Latin and Modern Romance, on the one hand, and Late Latin and Medieval Romance varieties until the renaissance, on the other, is the presence of a V2-related EF and verb-movement-triggering Probe on Fin or Force.¹⁹ Beyond this point, however, there is extensive microvariation in the makeup of other left-peripheral fields:

¹⁹ For discussion of the diachronic progression of left-peripheral verb movement in the history of French, see Roberts (1993), Vance (1997), and Wolfe (2018a: chap. 4; 2021a: chap. 4).

we noted that French and Venetan varieties prior to 1200 made extensive use of focalisation and topicalisation operations via internal merge and suggested that this was likely a continuation of the syntactic system found in Latin (cf. Danckaert 2017; Ledgeway 2018; Wolfe 2021a: chap. 3.2).²⁰ After 1200, we observe increasing restrictions on the types of constituents which can occupy a left-peripheral position, with both new information and contrastive focus becoming restricted from this date onwards in some Venetan texts and the majority of French texts. French sees further innovations in its left-peripheral syntax: QPs and a small number of other syntactic categories can undergo focalisation until the 18th century, but only a class of lexical exceptions of non-quantified constituents permit focalisation, such as a specific class of adjectives and adverbials. In Modern French, by contrast, QPs cannot consistently focalise, but a further restricted class of adjectives, adverbials, and PPs can do so in formal registers. This contrasts with colloquial French which typically disallows focus or QP fronting of any kind. We should note that this progression in terms of suitable Goals for focus-movement neatly maps onto the meso- > micro- > nano-parametric approach to syntactic change outlined in Roberts (2019), with the class of constituents which can undergo focalisation first becoming microparametrically restricted in terms of category (e.g. +Q) before undergoing further restrictions to be nanparametrically constrained by lexical item:

Our discussion of the Topic field follows a strikingly similar trajectory albeit with slightly different datings, whereby all categories of XP are suitable Goals for

Can Focus Heads attract all XPs to the left periphery?

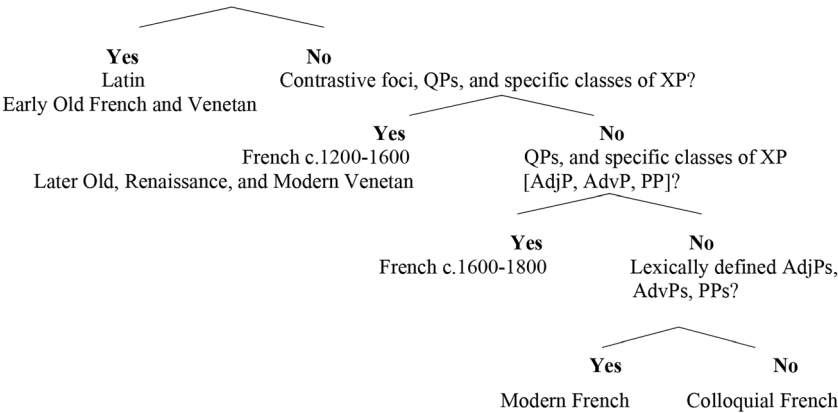


Figure 1: A parameter hierarchy for focus movement in French and Venetan.

20 See also Roberts (2012a; 2021) for the proposal that a highly articulated left-peripheral structure entailing widespread movement operations is also a common Indo-European inheritance.

topic-related movement in Latin and French until approximately 1525, after which topicalisation obtains when a constituent is categorically discourse-old or ‘anaphoric’. Textual analysis has not yet taken place on Renaissance Venetan to permit us to evaluate whether the same system was attested in the transition between the Old Venetan V2 system with extensive topicalisation via movement and the present-day system where such topicalisation is heavily restricted. However, Modern French and Venetan have in common that Clitic Left Dislocation via base-generation is the overwhelmingly preferred topicalisation strategy (cf. on this analysis for French Cinque 1990; De Cat 2009: 149–155; Rowlett 2007: 178; Haegeman 2012: 104):

Can Topic Heads attract all XPs to the left periphery via internal merge?

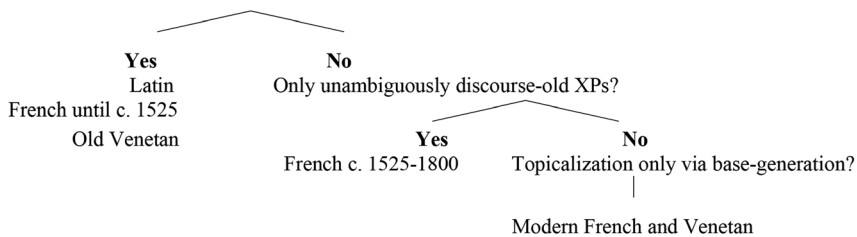


Figure 2: A parameter hierarchy for topicalisation in French and Venetan.

Finally, the history of French and Venetan complementisers is also one of a decline in movement, albeit movement within rather than to the left periphery. The output of a grammar featuring a base-generation site in Fin – observed in Latin – is reanalysed as consistent with a grammar featuring Fin-to-Force movement in French until c. 1525 and Venetan until the 14th century, after which a further reanalysis takes place towards a grammar still observable today where finite complementisers are base-generated in Force and cannot thus appear in recomplementation structures. Note that this state of affairs is strikingly similar to what Roberts and Roussou (2002) observe in cases of so-called upwards reanalysis in grammaticalisation: an innovative movement pattern emerges targeting a position higher in the functional structure than the original base-generation site, after which this movement is reanalysed as base-generation at the higher site (cf. also Roberts 2012b).

Viewed under this lens, the history of the left periphery of these Romance varieties is one of a decline in Probe-Goal Agree operations resulting in internal merge/movement in favour of base-generation strategies.

4.2 Conservatism and Innovation in the Romance Left Periphery

Whilst in §4.1 we have seen that syntactic archaism and innovation can be tracked in the history of the French and Venetan left periphery, I would like to suggest here

that – preliminarily – the same diagnostics can be applied to situate other Modern Romance varieties within a broad left-peripheral typology. Taking as our point of departure the pan-Early Medieval Romance schema in (25), we see that certain varieties show broad continuity with this syntactic system, aside from the notable absence of the V2 property. We noted in §1.2.1 that Modern Sicilian, Sardinian, and Extreme and certain Upper Southern Italian Dialects permit extensive focus-fronting operations, QP-fronting, topicalisation via internal merge, and allow complementisers to lexicalise both Fin and Force, frequently with a distinct phonological form (Cruschina 2006, 2012; Damonte 2010; Ledgeway 2005, 2010; Manzini and Savoia 2003; Remberger 2010); in this respect the left-peripheral syntax of Early Old French – modulo the V2 property – matches very closely that of these varieties, which have deviated least from the Early Medieval Romance left-peripheral norm and can thus be considered the most conservative.

However, Central Italo-Romance and many Modern Ibero-Romance varieties are typically more restrictive in licensing information foci only in a restricted set of contexts, although many still license QP-fronting, left-peripheral contrastive focalisation, and a subset of topicalisation structures involving movement (Benincà 2001; Benincà and Poletto 2004; Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal 2009; Paoli 2003; Poletto 2000; Quer 2002). Furthermore, this ‘transitional’ group of varieties show evidence of recomplementation structures, and thus Fin-to-Force movement (González i Planas 2014; Paoli 2003, 2007; Villa-García 2019). Note that the synchronic characterisation of the left-peripheral syntax of these varieties matches what was observed for French and Venetan varieties from the 13th to 15th centuries in (34), although, once again, the absence of V2 in the Modern Romance languages means that focalised and topicalised XPs do not move to Spec-ForceP but rather dedicated projections in the Topic-Focus fields unlike in (34).

In some more innovative Northern Italo-Romance and Occitan varieties, we observe the absence of recomplementation²¹, heavy restrictions on topicalisation via movement, and the licensing of contrastive focalisation in certain restricted contexts (Ledgeway and Roberts Forthcoming; Ledgeway 2020; Oliviéri and Sauzet 2016; Paoli 2003; Cecilia Poletto p.c.); they thus constitute the closest counterpart to the most conservative and formal registers of Modern French, where left-peripheral contrastive focus is marginally licensed (cf. 13) yet recomplementation is absent. Colloquial French, with the possible exception of Torinese (Paoli 2003), constitutes the variety which has departed the furthest from the Early Medieval Romance norm in generally disallowing any class of XP from reaching the left periphery via internal merge. Although the left-peripheral syntax of Modern Romance varieties shows such extensive variation that

²¹ On the general absence of recomplementation in the Veneto, see the *AsIt: Atlante Sintatico d'Italia*, <http://asit.maldura.unipd.it>.

the exposition here is simplified and intended as an invitation for further research, the core proposal is that successive stages in diachrony – here illustrated for simplicity from the history of French – broadly map onto degrees of conservatism and innovation observable in Romance varieties synchronically (cf. Table 1):

Table 1: Innovation and conservatism in the Romance left periphery.

	'Conservative' Romance (ESIDs, USIDs)	'Transitional' Romance (CIDs, Ibero-Romance)	'Innovative' Romance (Certain NIDs, Occitan)	'Ultra- Innovative' Romance (Certain NIDs)
Early Old French and Venetan	All XPs Goals for Focus Heads All XPs Goals for Topic Heads Fin-to-Force Movement of Complementisers			
French c.1200- 1800 Later Old Venetan		Widespread CFoc and QP-Fronting, Microparametric Constraints on IFoc All XPs Goals for Topic Heads, Widespread Left Dislocation Fin-to-Force Movement of Complementisers (Only some Later Old Venetan varieties)		
Modern French and Venetan			Micro- or Nanoparametric Constraints on CFoc, QP-Fronting or IFoc Micro- or Nanoparametric Constraints on Topicalisation, Widespread Left Dislocation	

Table 1: (continued)

	Complementisers Base-Generated in Force
Colloquial French	No Internal Merge of Topics/Foci in the CP Periphery Widespread Left Dislocation Complementi- sers Base- Generated in Force

5 Conclusion

The basic argument of this article is that the rich microvariation observable synchronically in the left-peripheral syntax of Romance varieties can be accounted for in terms of ‘innovative’ departures from an Early Medieval Romance norm. This norm entails each of the major functional heads in the Topic and Focus fields being able to attract a maximally general array of Goals, in contrast to the more innovative Romance varieties in the later medieval, renaissance, early modern, and modern period, which see increasing micro- and nanoparametric restrictions on the class of constituents which can act as appropriate Goals for Topic and Focus heads. The proposal is that there is clear directionality in the reanalyses away from maximally general internal merge operations to more specialised operations, such that it is appropriate to refer to ‘conservative’ and ‘innovative’ Romance varieties in terms of left-peripheral syntax. The latter group either show heavy restrictions on movement to the left periphery or, in the most notable cases such as colloquial French, the absence of such movement. In theoretical terms, the analysis suggests that both diachronically and synchronically the hierarchically ordered articulated structure assumed since Rizzi (1997) is a significant theoretical tool in modelling continuity and variation in the Romance left periphery, but that the featural makeup of individual fields and individual functional Heads can show extensive variation.

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