

## Parallel Phases in the History of French

This talk will present new evidence from the history of French to evaluate the Parallel Phases Hypothesis. A fundamental issue in historical syntax concerns whether certain changes cluster and why. One recent proposal, the Parallel Phases Hypothesis (Poletto 2006; 2014; 2015), suggests that phases – semi-autonomous units of syntactic structure – change in a uniform fashion. Based on evidence from Old Italian, Poletto shows that head and phrasal movement are lost concomitantly at the CP,  $\nu$ P, and DP edges, providing an apparently uniform account for the loss of Verb Second, scrambling, and a number of word-order operations licensed in the Old Italian nominal expression.

This talk will assess whether the predictions of the hypothesis extend to a closely related language, French; this is a necessary first step in assessing the validity of the hypothesis as, if it holds up crosslinguistically, the hypothesis has the potential to shed light on why, in a number of languages, several major word-order patterns change quite radically in a short period of time, yielding modern languages with significantly distinct typological footprints to their early counterparts (see, for example, Walkden 2014 on early Germanic, Wolfe 2018 on early Romance, and Willis 2007 on early Celtic).

Examination of Old and Middle French data from the *Base de Français Médiéval*, supplemented with a hand-annotated corpus of Renaissance and Classical French texts reveals that – as per the predictions of the hypothesis – Verb Second-related movement to the CP, object scrambling to the  $\nu$ P edge, as well as widespread Adjective-Noun orderings and N-to-D movement to the DP edge are all lost in tandem as fully productive operations between 1400 and 1525. Moreover, the corpus data suggest that Poletto's hypothesis extends further to the discourse-pragmatic and syntactic features associated with the phrasal elements undergoing movement: while a wide range of objects can be focalised or topicalised to both the CP and  $\nu$ P edge in Early Old French, by 1225 such objects show a strong tendency to either be focal or discourse 'old'. Moreover, in Middle French texts, focal objects at both the CP and  $\nu$ P edges are heavily restricted, but QPs remain stable in both contexts. More generally, we suggest that at the CP,  $\nu$ P, and DP edge, reanalysis of a maximally general movement operation proceeds first as a movement operation restricted by discourse-pragmatic status, which in turn is reanalysed as an operation where only categories bearing particular categorial features may move (e.g. [+Focus] > [+Q]). This progression is observable in the loss of Verb Second, the loss of scrambling, and the restrictions on adjective movement to the left periphery of the extended nominal expression.

The talk will conclude with the proposal that the Parallel Phases Hypothesis can be subsumed within the Input Generalization Principle proposed by Roberts (2007). Under this approach, the acquirer – unless receiving strong evidence to the contrary – assigns similar featural makeup to syntactic heads perceived as forming a uniform class. In the case under examination the class in question is that of phase-heads.

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