

Dative Experiencer Psych Verbs in (Old) French

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Psych Verbs (PV) are verbs that express mental or emotional concepts and have an argument bearing the theta role Experiencer. PV represent a phenomenon that has been discussed for decades (cf. Hirsch 2018 for an overview) as they are a heterogeneous verb class with an unstable argument structure and different syntactic constructions. There are large differences within the (Romance) languages, synchronically as well as diachronically. According to Belletti/Rizzi (1988), the Dative Experiencer Psych Verbs (Dat.Exp.PV) form one of three classes of PV. This class is characterised by the fact that the dative objects can occupy a preverbal position. This non-canonical use is possible in Latin and Romance Languages, e.g. in Spanish, as in (1):

- (1) **A Ana** le **gusta** el chocolate.
 DAT.EXP CL.DAT like.3SG the chocolate
 “Anna likes chocolate.”

In Old French, the preverbal Dat.Exp can also be found (cf. Mathieu 2006: 2), as in (2):

- (2) Et bien set qu’ **a sa mere plect** que [...]
 And well know.3SG that DAT.EXP like.3SG
 “And she knows well that it is her mother's will that [...]”

In Modern French, this structure is ungrammatical: the Dat.Exp can occupy the preverbal position only by topicalisation or dislocation with doubling (cf. Fischer 2019), as in (3):

- (3) **A Marie,** la musique classique lui **plaît.**
 DAT.EXP the music classic PRN.DAT like.3SG
 “Marie likes classic music.”

In Old French, however, the non-canonical use of Dat.Exp.PV is common (cf. Mathieu 2006), which raises the question why it has disappeared.

The talk opens a new perspective in the debate on Dat.Exp.PV linking language change to principles of language acquisition. My hypothesis is twofold, assuming two parallel developments of Dat.Exp.PV that together lead to its gradual loss – with a few exceptions where the Experiencer is grammaticalised in object position. The first part of my hypothesis is based on markedness in terms of structural complexity: it is assumed that the structure of Dat.Exp.PV is more complex than non-PV verb classes and not acquired easily. The second part of my hypothesis is based on computational efficiency and the assumption that during first language acquisition, rules and exceptions are organised to optimise linguistic

processing. Assuming the Tolerance Principle (cf. Yang 2016), it is argued that preverbal Dat.Exp have not been acquired as a productive rule due to the amount of exceptions to this rule.

On the one hand, it is argued that the Old French PV did not undergo the expected developments towards intransitivity and stativity, which are generally considered to be the properties of less marked argument and event structures (cf. Van Gelderen 2014, 2019; Batllori et al. 2019). Preverbal Dat.Exp can be regarded as a marked input because of the irregular theta-role mapping (cf. Scontras et al. 2015). Language acquisition research shows that marked options are acquired later (cf. Roberts 2007, among others) and Schmitz (2006) argues that dative case is more difficult to be acquired than other cases. On the other hand, I will show that the fixation of French word order from OV to VO during the 12th century led to a low frequency of Dat.Exp in subject position. I will argue that this is the reason why Dat.Exp grammaticalised in object position. This process will be explained by referring to the Tolerance Principle, which has already been applied to Middle English PV and their argument structure (cf. Trips/Rainsford 2022). I will suggest that Old French language learners could not maintain a productive rule which provided a preverbal and a postverbal position for Dat.Exp. Since preverbal Dat.Exp were not as frequent in the PLD as postverbal Dat.Exp, the learners hypothesised as the productive rule for Dat.Exp only the postverbal position.

These hypotheses will be tested by examining two Old French corpora (*MCVF-PPCHF* and the *Nouveau Corpus d'Amsterdam*). Frequencies of both preverbal and postverbal Dat.Exp will be gathered and their argument and event structure will be analysed. A first pretest analysing the PV *plaire* in the *MCVF-PPCHF* showed 268 occurrences of this verb with a Dat.Exp, of which 115 are preverbal and 153 are postverbal. Further results – also concerning the event and argument structure of different Dat.Exp – will be presented in the talk.

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