The status of French in Medieval England: Evidence from the use of object pronoun syntax

Cet article se penche sur la syntaxe des pronoms personnels compléments d’objet direct en Anglo-Normand. À partir d’un examen de textes allant du XIIe au XIVe siècles, il est démontré que l’Anglo-Norman a étroitement suivi l’évolution du français en ce qui concerne la place des pronoms clitiques dans les propositions infinitives. A également été respectée la place du pronom c. o. d. dans les propositions à auxiliaire fléchi, ainsi que dans les impératives. L’influence de la syntaxe du moyen anglais ne s’est fait aucunement sentir dans ces domaines. Cette analyse rejoint une perspective selon laquelle l’Anglo-Normand faisait partie d’un continuum dialectal francophone, au lieu d’en être coupé par son statut de langue seconde. Le problème est posé de la transmission de ces compétences linguistiques, soit par l’enseignement soit par d’autres moyens.

The special status of Anglo-Norman (AN) in relation to continental French has recently been subject to renewed debate, one perspective emphasising its sui generis status as a second language in England (Kibbee 2000), and another that it was part of the medieval French dialect continuum (Trotter 2003a, b). This study presents evidence that syntactically AN was not an isolated variety, but closely reflected ongoing internal systemic change within continental French in the syntax of object pronouns, which is known to be vulnerable in the acquisition of French as a second language. An extensive sample of Anglo-Norman texts datable between the mid 12th and the mid 14th centuries is examined. Object pronoun use in four contexts is analysed: finite clauses with auxiliaries, non-finite clauses, V1 imperative clauses, and V2 imperative clauses. In all these contexts Anglo-Norman usage with respect to object pronoun morphosyntax very closely paralleled continental French, and did not reflect different object pronoun positions in Middle English. In finite clauses with auxiliaries, object pronouns continued to precede a tensed auxiliary. In non-finite clauses, clitic pronouns underwent a switch towards preceding an infinitive after about 1320, as in continental French. Pronouns preceded verbs in V2 imperatives but not in ordinary V1 imperatives. English offered no model for such accurate positional discrimination across these differing contexts. It is concluded that, for this outcome to be observed, AN must have retained close ties with continental French linguistic developments. The issue is raised of how such linguistic competence was transmitted, whether by instruction or by other means.

1 I should like to thank Andres Kristol for the thought-provoking observations that encouraged me to undertake this investigation, Anne Curry and Gwilym Dodd for helpful advice on AN parliamentary petitions, and David Birdsong for his insightful and challenging comments on a later stage of this enquiry. All factual errors and misinterpretations here remain entirely my own, however. The assistance of the Anglo-Norman Hub in searching two of the texts is also acknowledged.

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The extent and nature of the use of French in medieval England has provoked lively debate over many years (Suggett 1946, Legge 1950, 1980, Berndt 1972, Rothwell 1976, Richter 1979, Clanchy 1993, Kibbee 1991, 2000), focusing on how long it continued to be a spoken vernacular after the Norman Conquest. According to Suggett 1946: 79 «The French used in England was a true vernacular whose roots had penetrated deeply into all classes of English society who could read and write», and Legge 1980 contended that Anglo-Norman was a spoken variety of French, «absorbed naturally» in a communicative setting. However, Rothwell 1976: 44 considered that by the 13th century «French was no more a vernacular than was Latin», while Kibbee 1996: 7-11 emphasised the «essential difference» between Anglo-Norman (henceforth AN) and continental French in this respect, drawing attention to AN gender errors and «special syntactic constructions that reflect English rather than French». Contemporary awareness of these differences is documented in Brereton 1939, who showed that continental French scribes corrected AN manuscripts on grammatical points such as the use of a les for aux, de les for des, and que for qui as a subject relative pronoun.

Nevertheless, it is also quite common to find scholars such as Rothwell 1996 drawing attention to the often high standard of accuracy and fluency with which many later Anglo-Norman writers used French. The notion sometimes entertained that in the later medieval period French in England was no more than a «half-understood jargon» must clearly be rejected. Trotter 2003a: 239 drew attention to the extensive use of AN by English merchants for international correspondence in the 14th century, describing it as «a perfectly acceptable variety of the Middle Ages’ second international language, after Latin». He presented grounds for viewing AN as one part of a medieval Francophone dialect continuum, which included Gascony, Flanders and other North-Eastern regions of what is now France. Völker’s 2003 analysis of 13th century texts from the county of Luxembourg showed that the use of French in this region showed grammatical variation comparable with that of more central regions of the medieval Francophonie.

Little work on grammatical variation has been done for AN: its syntax has been particularly poorly explored (Wilshere 1993), which is regrettable, for at least two reasons. Certain aspects of ordinary clausal syntax are now fairly well-studied with respect to diachronic developments in Old French (see e.g. Vance 1997, Labelle/Hirschbühler 2005), and therefore allow fruitful comparisons to be made between the development of AN and continental usage to a much greater extent than previously. Secondly, formal syntactic contrasts, especially those lacking a clear semantic rationale, are known to be particularly vulnerable in second language learning (see e.g. van Boxtel et al. 2005). If, as claimed by advocates of the «essential difference» position, AN was «clearly a language learned at school» (Berndt 1972: 354), we might expect evidence of some difficulty in acquiring formal syntactic properties, taking the form of errors influenced by English, as indeed
Kibbee 1996 and others have claimed. Since we do not have direct access to how AN was pronounced (pace Pope 1934), we cannot be sure how far the phonology of AN diverged from that of Continental French, but the AN textual record provides ample opportunity to assess how far the formal systemic level of syntax did so.

We seek to take this issue further by investigating the performance of AN writers in a domain of French grammar which is known to be vulnerable in second language learners: the morphosyntax of object pronouns, in particular their status as clitics rather than syntactically independent items. The difficulty posed to contemporary learners of French\(^2\) by clitic pronouns has been well documented, e.g. by Gundel/Tarone (1983)\(^3\). Given that Old French object pronoun morphosyntax (see section 2) was in key respects more complex than the modern system, non-native-like performance might be expected at higher levels of proficiency than those at which errors with modern French are found. Such an outcome, if obtained, would surely argue in favour of the «essential difference» position as regards the status of Anglo-Norman. Indeed, Kibbee 1996 has already drawn attention to the tonic versus clitic object pronoun distinction as a point of difficulty mentioned in a late 14\(^{th}\) century didactic treatise produced for use in England, the French version of the Orthographia Gallica (Johnston 1987)\(^4\).

In order to see what light can be shed on the psycholinguistic status of AN by this particular syntactic variable, we first analyse some of the major AN sources from the 12\(^{th}\) century, and then turn our attention to the later 13\(^{th}\) and 14\(^{th}\) centuries. We follow Pope 1934: 424 who distinguished an earlier period in which Anglo-Norman was «a living local form of speech, handed down from generation to generation» and a later «period of degeneracy in which insular French was cut off from its base and . . . gradually became a dead language that . . . always had to be taught.» If it is true that the status of French in England became that of a language taught in a classroom (see also Berndt 1972), evidence of increasing difficulty may be forthcoming as regards the abstract grammatical rules acquired by native speakers fairly early in childhood, such as those relating to verb finiteness and clitic versus non-clitic pronoun behaviour mentioned above. In a second language learning scenario, it would be normal to suppose that L1 English could have influenced the patterns of object pronoun use, since the languages differed in the morphosyntax of object pronouns, in ways presented in the next section.

\(^2\) Clitic object pronouns are also particularly vulnerable in French Specific Language Impairment (Paradis et al. 2005/06).

\(^3\) However, White’s 1996 study of child L2 learners of French, who were Anglophone Canadians placed in an immersion context at around age 5, showed that they acquired clitic object pronouns after two years or so from initial exposure to the language.

\(^4\) The rule — shown as F42 in Johnston 1987: 35 — was presented by the author of the French-version Orthographia Gallica as a matter of using the clitic series as the object of a verb and the tonic series as the object of a preposition, which clearly does not suffice as a formulation of the Old French patterns with verbs: see section 2.
2. Object pronoun forms in Old French and Middle English

Old French object pronouns were governed by rules that depended on abstract syntactic factors involving verb finiteness and structural position. There were two series of direct object pronouns\(^5\), tonic forms and clitic forms, as shown in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>1st sing.</th>
<th>2nd sing.</th>
<th>3rd sing.</th>
<th>3rd pl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clitic</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>te</td>
<td>le, la</td>
<td>les</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonic</td>
<td>mei</td>
<td>tei</td>
<td>lui, li</td>
<td>eus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 1st and 2nd plural forms *nos* et *vos*, which figured in both series, were designated «pronoms indifférents» by Buridant 2000 and as such were not considered in the present study.

When an object pronoun stood adjacent to a finite verb in a declarative clause, use of the clitic form was normally obligatory; a clitic pronoun had to precede the finite verb, even in an auxiliated clause. When an object pronoun appeared in a non-finite clause, a member of either series could be used, with the proviso that the weak form could follow, but not precede, the non-finite verb, e.g.:

(1a) ... por donner le au chien

(1b) Je avois appris a veoir les sovent

DitsSQ P, 108 (Buridant 2000: 443)

Graal 17, 10-12 (Foulet 1930: §182).

The respective distributional possibilities in declarative clauses were thus as follows (adapted from Buridant 2000: 447, spelling modernised):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>object pronoun in clause with finite auxiliary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2a) Il le peut voir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2b) *Il peut le voir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2c) *Il lui peut voir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2d) *Il peut lui voir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>object pronoun in non-finite clause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3a) *Il vint por le voir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3b) Il vint por voir le</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3c) Il vint pour lui voir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3d) Il vint pour voir lui</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The system of Old French object pronoun morpho-syntax was clearly a matter of considerable complexity: in finite declarative clauses, even those with an auxiliary, an object pronoun had to stand before the finite verb, as in (2a), but in non-finite

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\(^5\) In this study we have not considered indirect object pronouns, which raise similar but not identical issues of comparability with continental French. An additional complication here is that an indirect object pronoun could be replaced by a prepositional phrase, e.g. *a eus*, *a li*, cf.:

(i) ... et encore les vouent constraindre a rendre a euls ou nom du roy tous les profit (Lettre d’une dame de Cassel, Pir. 1900: 199)
clauses there was considerable, though not complete, flexibility, as in (3b-d) In imper-ative clauses, complexity took a different form. In V1 imperatives, i.e. imperative clauses without an initial sentence constituent, 1st and 2nd person objects took the tonic form, while 3rd person objects took the clitic form. In V2 imperatives the object pronoun had to stand before the imperative verb, and be in the clitic form in the singular and 3rd plural. These differences are illustrated in the following ex-

amples:

(4b) Pursiu les *Li quatre livre des reis 58, 8* (Hirschbühler/Labelle 2001)
(4d) Car m’eslisez un barun de ma marche. *Roland, 275* (Hirschbühler/Labelle 2001)

The rather intricate distributional possibilities needing to be acquired by a learner of Old French in declarative and imperative clauses are summarized in Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Syntax of Old French object pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>declaratives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clitic pron. precedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clitic pron. follows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonic pron. precedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonic pron. follows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>imperatives</strong></th>
<th>V1 imperative</th>
<th>V2 imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person sing.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clitic pronoun precedes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clitic pronoun follows</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonic pronoun precedes</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonic pronoun follows</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person sing.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clitic pronoun precedes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clitic pronoun follows</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonic pronoun precedes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonic pronoun follows</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person sing. &amp; plur.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clitic pronoun precedes</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clitic pronoun follows</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonic pronoun precedes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonic pronoun follows</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since formal alternatives within the system of Old French object pronoun syntax would have had relatively low perceptual salience and limited communicative value, they would have been vulnerable to imperfect second language acquisition,
thus giving rise to outcomes in individual learners that might be incomplete or divergent (Sorace 2003) with respect to the assumed target grammar. Furthermore, the system was vulnerable to errors produced by influence from the L1 English system. In early Middle English (c. 1150-1300) declarative clauses, object pronouns could stand before a finite verb/auxiliary (5), before a non-finite verb (6a-b), or after a non-finite verb (7a-b):

(5) & te lundenissce folc hire wolde tæcen
    and the London-ish people her wanted take-INF
    ‘and the people of London wanted to take her’

(6a) . . . āt na gastlich cunfort ne mei hire gleadien
    that no spiritual comfort NEG may her console-INF
    ‘that no spiritual comfort may console her’

(6b) . . . āt ping se feble as flesch is . . . schal him ouerstihen
    that thing so weak as flesh is . . . shall him surpass-INF
    ‘. . . that a thing so weak as flesh is . . . shall surpass him’

(7a) . . . ðat he uuolde iüen heom up Wincestre
    that he would give-INF them up Winchester
    ‘. . . that he would surrender Winchester to them’

(7b) . . . al ðat he cuthe axen him
    all that he could ask-INF him
    ‘all that he could ask of him’

In imperative clauses, however, Middle English (ME) positioned the verb uniformly before object pronouns in both V1 and V2 imperatives:

(8) Wassheðow hwar se neod is
    wash-IMP you where the need is
    ‘Wash yourselves as necessary’

(9) Wið þeawfulen schurteðow to gederes
    with instructive tales divert-IMP you together
    ‘Entertain yourselves together with instructive tales’

Thus English influence, if present, might show up in AN texts as a tendency to give either or both of the French pronominal series the free distribution in declaratives

6 ME texts of different periods and regional origins display considerable variation in terms of positional preferences, but object pronouns in declaratives seem not to have followed fixed rules governing the distribution of two sets of pronoun forms, as they did in Old French.
and the fixed position in imperatives as English object pronouns had. If so, errors would be expected along the lines illustrated by the following (spelling modernised):

*Declarative*

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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10a)</td>
<td>*Il lui doit voir</td>
<td>(10b)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Imperative*

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10d)</td>
<td>*Vois lui!</td>
<td>(10e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10g)</td>
<td>*Or moi vois</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In this study we enquire whether distributional patterns of object pronouns in AN texts diverged from the continental norm towards Middle English, displaying some or all of the above potential errors in declarative and imperative clauses. First, however, we note that during the period covered by this study Continental French usage itself underwent a change with respect to the syntax of object pronouns in non-finite clauses which must be taken into account.

### 3. The evolution of object pronoun use in Continental French

Marchello-Nizia’s (1997: 248-49) study of Middle French pronoun morphosyntax observed a shift towards preposing weak forms before the non-finite verb that made itself felt from the mid-14th century onwards. The process took some time to complete, with the strong forms *moy*, *toy* and *soy* surviving longer in preverbal position than *lui*, *li/elle* and *euls*. Further examination of continental French that we have conducted using non-literary texts concords with her analysis. Around 1300, texts still generally show the older patterns. The tonic forms were used before a non-finite verb, e. g.:

<p>| | | | |</p>
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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(11a)</td>
<td>Que elle le lairoit aler et soi pourchacier</td>
<td>(11b)</td>
<td>(... comme il les vorront faire deviser des dittes cozes a entendre) et eaus tenir sans damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11c)</td>
<td>(... et de lui allier au roy, ensi comme ses peres i fu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11d)</td>
<td>Et ont recue la davant dite Hauuy en serour de lor ordre et por li encevelir a la-mort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where clitic pronoun forms occurred in non-finite clauses, they followed non-finite verbs, e. g.:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>Et voir le nous convenra autrement que de paroles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By the mid-14th century, as in the *Correspondance* of Charles V, clitic object pronouns regularly appear preverbally in a non-finite dependent clause, e.g.:

(13) Qui y auront este a le mener en noz dis greniers
    Charles V, p. 14 (1364)

The later Middle French preference for placing object pronouns in non-finite clauses before the non-finite verb probably began in late Old French. In the later 13th century *Coutumes du Beauvoisis*, of Philippe de Beaumanoir, it makes an occasional appearance, e.g.:

(14) ... qui sont mis es garnisons ... pur les garder
    B 57

Mostly however, Beaumanoir still displayed the Old French patterns, e.g.:

(15a) S’il n’a especial comandement de son seigneur de fere le.
    B 31
(15b) ... grant peine metre en li maintenir sagement et loialment en l’office la u il est
    B 57
(15c) Il se doit presenter ... et soi ofrir contre cex a qui ...
    B 61

It seems that the later 13th and early 14th centuries were a period of transition between Old and Middle French, in this as in other syntactic respects (see e.g. Vance 1997). A consequence of this development was that the target for Anglo-Norman writers seeking to follow continental practice with clitic pronouns had changed somewhat by early Middle French. In non-finite clauses a clitic pronoun could now appear before the infinitive, though it could still not do so in finite auxiliated clauses.

4. Anglo-Norman data sources

Most surviving texts from the earlier AN period are in verse, whereas in the later period French became used for a much wider range of administrative and other purposes. The grammar of the earlier period appears to show little or no divergence from continental Old French, but thereafter the standard of French, in terms of how well AN observed continental grammatical norms, is supposed to have declined, according to e.g. Kibbee 1991. To the best of our knowledge, however, very few methodical investigations have been carried out to demonstrate in what respects this decline can be assessed as regards grammatical accuracy. Assuming

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7 Chapple 1938: 146 briefly mentioned object pronouns in the mostly 14th century *Correspondence of the City of London*, but appears from the following statement to have misunderstood the situation as regards certain targetlike forms in Old French: «The strong forms of the pronouns are used occasionally where the weak are expected: ... *pur lui esbaignier* , ... *et lui justicier.*» These strong forms are, on the contrary, entirely to be expected if AN writers were following Old French non-finite clause norms.
such a development took place, one would expect it to take the form of a decline in the extent to which French was acquired in a nativelike fashion. Abstract syntactic rules such as those for Old French object pronouns presented in section 2 would be prime targets for imperfect learning, and thus constitute linguistic variables allowing us to address the hypothesis that the quality of French in England declined as a result of its having become an imperfectly learned second language. We know this was to be the outcome in later Law French, where by the later 15th century we find usage that clearly diverges from continental norms, such as:

(16a) …issint quil nauera vnques eux [sc. a hen or a capon] arrere SCEC 124 (c. 1456)8
(16b) Le chaunceler adiourne eux en leschekere Chambyr SCEC 147 (c. 1458)
(16c) leo ne barre luy pur cee mater SCEC 151 (c. 1458)
(16d) …sicome le Roy graunt a moy toutz lez finez et amercimentz deinz vne certeine lieu coment que le Roy voille pardoner eux SCEC 146 (c. 1458)

Here, non-contrastive uses of strong form pronouns are placed after the finite verb as in (16a-c), and after the non-finite verb as in (16d). These are the positions in which pronouns were regularly found in the corresponding English sentences by the later 15th century. In this study, Anglo-Norman sources of the 13th and 14th centuries are examined for evidence that this trend indicative of L1 influence was already underway at that time.

We sought to compare object pronoun use in texts from Pope’s period I, which lasted roughly into the early decades of the 13th century, and from period II, which ran from the mid-13th to the later 14th centuries. 1362 was chosen as a later cut-off point, since in that year court hearings were officially required to be held in English, which amounts to formal recognition that some people of importance did not speak French9. 1250 was designated as a fairly arbitrary starting point for period II, but one which corresponds roughly to the time from which it was claimed by Rothwell 1976 that French was being acquired in conditions of second language instruction.

Since the study undertook a diachronic analysis of object pronoun syntax in AN, as compared with continental French, it was important to use only texts where the date of composition is reasonably well-established, and where the manuscript evidence is not compromised by a later re-working of an earlier text. The bigger the gap between date of composition and the date of the manuscript, the more opportunity there is for this to have occurred. Unfortunately, many AN works are difficult to date, particularly those of a literary nature. We therefore preferred for this purpose to opt for non-literary data sources, which tend to be easier to date,
notably correspondence, which is most often internally dated. For the 1250-1352 period, these criteria were met, but for the earlier time-period, this was less straightforward. However, seven verse texts that can be dated to the 12th century or early 13th were identified: Clemence of Barking’s *The Life of St. Catherine*, Hue de Rotelande’s *Ipomedon* and *Protheselaus*, Jordan Fantosme’s *Chronicle, Le Mystère d’Adam, Le Petit Plet*, and *La Seinte Resureccion*.

Ideally speaking, it would have been preferable to use the same genres of text for both earlier and later periods, but this was simply not feasible in terms of the data sources available. As already mentioned, most pre-1200 AN material is in verse form, whereas AN was much more rarely used in verse in the C14. To exemplify period II we examined several sets of AN correspondence10 (*Litterae Cantuarienses*, Royal correspondence of Henry III, Peckham’s *Register*, letters of Walter of Wenlok, *Correspondence of the City of London*, for the period 1320-62), as well as administrative texts (*Oak Book of Southampton*, c. 1300, responses of the King’s council to parliamentary petitions 1314-62), late 13th century treatises on husbandry (*Walter of Henley*, etc.) and law (*Britton, Placita Corone*), a later 13th century prose chronicle (*Livere de reis de Engleterre*), three religious works (*Jerarchie, Holkham Bible Picture Book*, and Henry of Lancaster’s *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*), and early 14th century moral fables (*Bozon*).

5. Data analysis

5.1 Imperative clauses

5.1.1 Period I: 1150-1230

A total of 35 object pronouns in imperatives were identified in our Period I data sources. They showed almost complete accordance with continental models, cf. Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-V</th>
<th>Post-V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1 imperative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2 imperative</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1 (tonic)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V1 imperatives always placed the object pronoun after the verb; 3rd person pronouns were always clitic form, as required in Old French:

10 However, letters from and to royal personages themselves were excluded, on the basis that the court is known to have been French-speaking throughout the period under study, and indeed kings of England appear to have acquired French as a native language. For us, the question was whether French was used in other circles in England in a way that approximated continental French.
(17a) Manje le \hspace{1cm} \textit{Ad.} 165
(17b) Guard les, Sire, d’aversitez \hspace{1cm} \textit{CB} 2575
(17c) Apelez les \hspace{1cm} \textit{SR}, ms. P.84
(17d) Mandez les sempres ca a nus \hspace{1cm} \textit{Prot.} 535
(17e) Maintenez-le \hspace{1cm} \textit{Pet. Pl.} 1661
(17f) Guardum la \hspace{1cm} \textit{JF} 1230

1\textsuperscript{st} person pronouns were likewise targetlike in using the tonic form in V1 imperatives:

(18a) Di mei que li oisel ferunt \hspace{1cm} \textit{CB} 1343
(18b) Baillez mei ca cel uinnement \hspace{1cm} \textit{SR} ms. P.251
(18c) Mes dites mei \hspace{1cm} \textit{Pet. Pl.} 464

In V2 imperatives, the object pronouns were nearly always placed preverbally, e. g.:

(19a) A Adam le done \hspace{1cm} \textit{Ad.} 263
(19b) Pois la me faites amener \hspace{1cm} \textit{CB} 2039
(19c) Mais or les alum assaillir \hspace{1cm} \textit{Prot.} 1234
(19d) Sun cors me donez pur enterer \hspace{1cm} \textit{SR} ms. C.90
(19e) Si me cuntez de cel effroi \hspace{1cm} \textit{Pet. Pl.} 92
(19f) Tel kunseil me dunez \hspace{1cm} \textit{JF} 489

The single case of syntactic divergence from Old French norms shown in Table 2 occurred in Jordan Fantosme’s \textit{Chronicle}, and placed the object pronoun postverbally:

(20) Or veez mei ci \hspace{1cm} \textit{JF} 334

The \textit{Petit Plet} twice uses a tonic form in a V2 imperative, which is untargetlike – cf. (10g) above – but still places the pronoun pre-verbally, as required:

(21a) Ore mei metez en en bon espeir \hspace{1cm} \textit{Pet. Pl.} 616
(21b) Ore mei dites \hspace{1cm} \textit{Pet. Pl.} 1541

This is the only indication in the period I data of the use in AN of tonic forms in clitic contexts in the singular pronoun paradigm.

5.1.2 Period II: 1250-1362

In our period II data, imperative clauses continued to follow the Old French rule according to which an object pronoun stood after the verb in a V1 imperative, but before it in a V2 imperative:

(22a) Maunde le moy \hspace{1cm} \textit{LC} II 108
(22b) E alowet les donc \hspace{1cm} \textit{Walter} c. 62
(22c) Dite lur ke . . . \hspace{1cm} \textit{Rules} xxiii
(22d) Veiez le la \hspace{1cm} \textit{Plac. Cor.} 25
In period II, no cases of postverbal pronouns in V2 imperatives analogous to the English model in (8)-(9) occurred, such as *Donc laissez-les en paix. The single un-targetlike example (20) noted in period I thus does not herald the collapse in Anglo-Norman of the Old French positional distinction. Where AN writers permitted themselves variation in the position of pronouns with V1 imperatives, it was just in those cases where continental Old French itself showed variation (LABELLE/HIRSCHBÜHLER 2005), first where an imperative clause was modified by an initial subordinate proposition, as in (24 a-b), and secondly after the connector et, as in (24c-d):

(24a) E si vos devez estor acheter, le achetez entre la Paske e la Pentecoste
(24b) Si vus trouvez nul qe ne seient mye seyn, les remuez
(24c) Et le merciez moulte de sa lettre
(24d) Et les fetez arder

On the assumption that AN was an instructed second language, it is interesting to note the absence of analogical errors in AN that might have been produced as a result of second language learners’ confusion arising from surface syntactic similarity across two different constructions, et with an imperative clause, and et introducing a subjectless indicative clause. When et was followed by an indicative verb governing an object pronoun in Old French the pronoun always preceded the verb. The AN data observed this restriction without exception:

(25a) Et la remaunderoms a vous
(25b) Vynt un venour . . . od un mot des chienz e les descoupla al gopil
(25c) qui . . . trop poyz des cheveux ad a la teste e les veot ennoyter

Pope (1934: 482) discussed the analogical generalisation in AN of various verbal morphological forms in the 12th century and later. On the basis of examples such as those in (25) as regards object pronoun use, it seems that analogy played no role in the syntactic constructions studied here. The rules governing the placement of object pronouns were faithfully respected by AN writers, and were not extended to inappropriate contexts.
5.2 Object pronouns in non-finite clauses

5.2.1 Period I

All object pronouns\(^\text{11}\) preceding the infinitive in non-finite clauses were tonic in period I, e. g.:

\[(26a)\] Por ceo ne sevunt nule mesure de mei empeirer \quad Pet. Pl. 774/5
\[(26b)\] Od vos aler lui despendre \quad SR ms. P. 204
\[(26c)\] Pur els maintenir \quad JF 1111
\[(26d)\] Il vindrent pur li escharnir \quad CB 1219

Of 24 examples of object pronouns depending on non-finite verbs, 22 took the tonic form and stood before the infinitive. Two stood after the infinitive, one tonic in form, the other clitic; all of these possibilities were grammatical in Old French. It is not clear why the data showed such a strong preference for the position preceding the infinitive, but it may be that metrical factors lie behind this, given that the period I sample consisted entirely of verse.

5.2.2 Period II

To anticipate, the period II data shows the maintenance of the Old French object pronoun system in non-finite clauses very strongly until about 1320. For purposes of presentation, we have accordingly divided our discussion of the data into two sub-periods, before and after that date. In the sub-period up to 1320 object pronouns preceding the non-finite verb were in almost every case strong form, e. g.:

\[(27a)\] Il ad un angle [sc. ange] ki entent a li garder \quad Jerarchie 87, 27 (c. 1285)
\[(27b)\] Nus sumes pourveu de cydre pur eus emplir \quad Wenlok 294, 10 (c. 1299)
\[(27c)\] Repentaunce . . . de sey amaunder et lesser ses folies \quad Peckham II 489 (1282)
\[(27d)\] . . . qe aucun des jurours est procuré a ly dampner \quad Britton 5, 32 (c. 1290)

In this subperiod, a single example of a preposed clitic pronoun form occurred:

\[(28)\] Il iert tenuz de les rendre . . . \quad Britton II, 2,4 (c. 1290)

In other words, when clitic object pronouns were encountered, they almost always followed the non-finite verb, e. g.:

\[(29a)\] . . . chasteaus le rei garder et sustenir les \quad Burt. 479, 6 (1259)
\[(29b)\] Metez peine d’estorer la \quad Walter c. 31 (c. 1285)

\(^{11}\) In this and subsequent analyses we assumed that a pronoun such as me/moy etc. governed by a verb was a direct object if that verb's normal valency in continental Old French was transitive. For this reason, examples with forms of Mod. Fr. aider were excluded, since 13th century Old French texts show some uses of aider as a verb taking the preposition à + Noun Phrase.
Altogether, out of 25 clitic object pronouns in non-finite clauses identified in texts dating between 1250-1319, 24 obeyed the Old French pronoun rules described in section 2 and stood after the non-finite verb, the sole exception being (28) above. A further twenty items were strong form, of which all except three stood before the non-finite verb.

In the second subperiod, 1320-62, we find frequent examples of the modern pattern, e.g.:

(30a) Et de le returner  
Rot. Parl. 436, 27 (1325)
(30b) Et la mettre en bone fyn  
CCL p. 305 (1327)
(30c) De les enjoyndre de par nostre seigneur le roi  
NR p. 407 (1359)

Out of a total of 55 clitic object pronouns in this sub-period, 32 were now placed before the non-finite verb. Almost all were 3rd singular or plural personal pronouns, conforming to the findings of Marchello-Nizia that in continental Old French change took place first with these forms: only a single case of *se* and none of *me* preceding non-finite verbs were noted. Strong object pronoun forms continued to be used both before (N: 39) and after (N: 5) non-finite verbs. The trend as compared with the first sub-period seems clear, and very closely follows continental developments, in which the late Old French/Middle French innovation was the ability of clitic pronouns, especially third person personal pronouns, to precede a non-finite verb. In this respect, AN behaved as would be expected of a francophone dialect in touch with mainstream developments.

5.3 Finite clauses with auxiliaries

We turn next to the syntax of object pronouns in finite clauses with auxiliaries. In Old French, the object pronoun preceded the tensed auxiliary accompanying the infinitive of which it was the logical object, as in (2a) above. In later Middle French, as already mentioned in section 3, this began to give way to the modern pattern, but as of the early 14th century this had not yet happened, so the placement of object pronouns in other positions in auxiliated clauses would have been untarget-like, and potentially a sign of English influence, cf. the examples in (6)-(7). We searched the period II texts\(^\text{12}\) in order to see whether the syntax of object pronouns

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\(^\text{12}\) Corresponding period I data was not analysed, as the almost total uniformity of the Period II results made it highly unlikely that those from Period I would yield an interesting outcome indicating a departure from the Old French norms.
in finite auxiliated clauses underwent change. If it did, this would clearly constitute a major divergence from continental French, which saw no change here during the period of enquiry.

In the texts analysed, the syntactic position of object pronouns in AN finite auxiliated clauses was almost entirely targetlike in standing before the finite auxiliary, e.g.:

(31a) ... qu vous me voutriext prendre en vostre protection  \(LC\ I, 444\ (1332)\)
(31b) Il les deust quere meismes  \(LC\ I, 488\ (1332)\)

Clitic pronouns never stood immediately before the non-finite verb in such clauses, despite the potential L1 model for this structure afforded by English, e.g. (6a-b) above.

In a scattering of cases in each sub-period, a tonic pronoun form was used instead of a clitic before a finite auxiliary. The use of a tonic pronoun preceding the finite element is well-known as a later AN idiosyncrasy (Pope 1958), and a couple of cases were noted above with imperatives in le Petit Plet. The nature of such departures from the CF norm is nevertheless worthy of comment. As shown in Table 3 below, they never involved the replacement of les by eux, or of la by elle, cases where the tonic and clitic forms were phonologically very distinct. They were found with soi for se and lui for le, where the greater phonological similarity of the forms might have been responsible for the confusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Object pronouns in clauses with finite auxiliaries 1250-1362</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-period 1, 1250-1319</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me/moi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le/lui/li</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>li/ele (li)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>les/eux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se/soi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 A single non-targetlike case was found where an atonic pronoun followed the non-finite verb:

(ii) Eissi ke les seignurages mes ne pussent destriendre les par tel achesun
     (ita quod domini postea non possint distringere propter illam occasionem) Burt. 472,
     IV, 9 (1259)

This was from a text consisting of a series of regulations translated from Latin, though it is not clear whether that fact had any role in the occurrence of this example. The absence of an object pronoun in the Latin source means that the syntax of the source text cannot have influenced the Anglo-Norman in this respect.
Table 3: Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-period 2, 1320-62</th>
<th>tonic</th>
<th>clitic</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>me/moi</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le/lui</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la/elle(li)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se/soi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>les/eux</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>129 (97.0%)</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relative rarity in both sub-periods of strong form pronouns preceding a finite auxiliary verb is interesting. The use of strong form pronouns preceding finite verbs has often been commented on, as a feature of later AN texts, yet it seems to have been a very uncommon lapse from continental norms, and did not grow in frequency up to the mid-14th century, on the evidence presented here\(^{14}\), where AN writers continued to follow CF morphosyntax over 95% of the time. Whether this particular syntactic context, or these particular texts, were in some way unrepresentative may be a matter for further enquiry.

6. General discussion

The overall generalisation is that in each context studied, and in each time period studied, object pronoun use in AN very closely conformed to the syntactic patterns of continental French. Clear «interference errors», i.e. non-targetlike performance caused by the influence of L1 English on L2 French, were conspicuous by their absence. In Period I (later 12th to early 13th centuries), the distribution of the clitic object pronoun almost entirely respected the positional possibilities of Old French; in Period II (1250-1362), it underwent the same change as took place in Continental French, at first preserving the Old French pattern, until around 1320, and then shifting towards the Middle French pattern in just the same parts of the personal pronoun paradigm as on the continent. In short, with respect to this variable at least, AN was evolving very much as we should expect a dialect of French to do\(^{15}\). The dialect continuum position of Trotter (2003) thus receives support from this finding. In line with his conclusion that AN lexis was mostly simply French, rather than being peculiarly insular, we would argue that in the period studied AN grammar, in this respect at least, was essentially the grammar of French: it closely observed the

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\(^{14}\) It should, however, be noted that about 45% of the datapoints from subperiod 2 in Table 3 were contributed by Lanc., and all the strong forms occurred in other sources.

\(^{15}\) Note that later AN syntax, if this particular syntactic variable is anything to go by, differed from phonology, where, according to Pope (1934: 429) «in the later period . . . the influence [of] contemporary Continental changes was superficial only». 

distinctions that continental French made, and evolved in much the same way that continental French evolved. Because this syntactic variable, in common with much else, appears to have been little studied in continental French dialects other than Central French, it is unfortunately impossible to state in the present state of our research just how similar AN was to them in the nature and timing of this evolution. Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that if the AN texts we have been using as sources had been produced on the other side of the Channel, their object pronoun syntax would hardly provoke comment. This strongly contrasts with the grossly untarget-like pronoun usage in later Law French illustrated by (16) above, and suggests that the divergence of insular French grammar from the mainstream of continental varieties should be seen principally as a fifteenth century development.

An often-noted issue in AN studies is the heterogeneity of the source material available: how far is the pattern of usage in the texts analysed here general and typical of insular French? It might be thought that a respect for changing continental usage would have affected chiefly official users of AN, who – perhaps by their position at the seat of government, with its institutional links with France, or perhaps by special training – might have been in closer contact with current linguistic developments on the European mainland than other users. Now it is true that clitic forms preceding the infinitive in non-finite clauses, the new development in the 1320-62 subperiod, were found chiefly in administrative texts, such as the responses to parliamentary petitions. However, a shift from the postverbal to the preverbal pattern in non-finite clauses can also be seen in AN correspondence sent from religious houses, and in other authors, as illustrated by the contrast between (32a-d) and (33a-d):

(32a) Metez peine d’estorer la
(32b) ... as chasteaus le rei garder et sustenir les
(32c) Len a mester de prendre le
(32d) ... pour eslire les draps et carier les a Cantorberis

Walter c. 31 (c. 1285)
Burt. 479, 6 (1259)
Sen c. 41 (c. 1285)
LC I 40 (1318)

(33a) ... de les retenire
(33b) Nous fumes la prest ... de les recevire
(33c) ... li meisme de la tenier
(33d) ... de ensi le faire

LC II 182 (1338)
LC II 228 (1340)
LC II 274 (1344)
Lanc. p.29 (c. 1354)

The new pattern illustrated by (33) was thus not restricted to the work of government clerks, and achieved some diffusion within AN. That said, it undoubtedly remains desirable, in future work on later AN, especially post-1320, to establish a much richer evidential database than we have been able to do in this initial study, and one representing central government and regional users of the language in a more balanced way.\(^{16}\)

\(^{16}\) Only the Council’s responses to the pleas were used for this investigation, since it was not known whether the pleas as enrolled were written in the petitioner’s locality, or re-written by central government scribes.
We have so far emphasised the targetlike performance of AN writers analysed, yet some small incidence of tonic pronouns used in pre-finite position did occur (see Table 3). This is well-known as a later AN feature, and was identified as non-targetlike by contemporary authorities. Here, the morphosyntax of AN was undoubtedly divergent from the continental norm; the question is how to interpret this low level of non-targetlike performance. It is not clear that the source of the error was confusion over the grammatical distinction between tonic and clitic forms per se. Where the tonic and clitic forms were phonologically distinct, as with *les/eux, no such divergent uses of the tonic form ever occurred. The source of the errors may thus have been that spoken Anglo-Norman was tending to merge the tonic and clitic forms with e.g. *le and *luy, *me and *moy (Pope 1934), so that the writer’s task in such cases amounted to maintaining a syntactic distinction between different spelling forms, rather than preserving a true morphological distinction. Even measured in this fashion, AN writers displayed a very high degree of success: The (graphemic) clitic form remained overwhelmingly the majority variant in finite auxiliated clauses (Table 3).

Even the low level of errors noted above was entirely absent in an area where grammatical confusion could have arisen, i.e. between the syntactic position of the object pronouns in auxiliated clauses and in non-finite clauses, both of which featured a non-finite verb form. Yet, albeit that usage was tending towards the Obj$^{\text{Pro}}$ – V$^{\text{inf}}$ order in nonfinite clauses, no overgeneralisation of this pattern to finite auxiliated clauses was observed, along the lines of *il poèt le/lui veir. It is surely significant that where analogical errors independent of phonological form were conceivable, as here, they did not occur.

The procedure adopted in this study was to investigate a single rather tightly circumscribed syntactic area, and our findings on this point naturally cannot provide a definitive account of the linguistic status of later Anglo-Norman. The variable chosen was nevertheless, we feel, a revealing one. Abstract syntax, such as clitic pronoun positioning, is generally considered to be below the level of first language metalinguistic awareness and a source of difficulty to second language learners; it is therefore, we believe, a valid diagnostic of the unmonitored syntactic competence of language users, such as the AN writers sampled here. Native-like performance, which is largely the result we obtained on the target variable, even in the later period, is strong evidence of non-divergence from the continental mainstream, at least on the basis of the sample. The practitioners of AN using this highly targetlike grammar of object pronouns seem to have participated in that linguistic mainstream, and closely followed its evolution. How they acquired this near-nativelike, if not nativelike, competence is an intriguing issue. The existence in medieval England of pedagogical mentors linguistically equipped to formulate and teach the complex rules of Old French object pronouns may reasonably be doubted: certainly their quite inadequate formulation in the French version of the *Orthographica Gallica*, as mentioned in footnote 4, is not encouraging in this regard.
This being so, it is all the more curious that later AN is prone to what appear to be frank elementary grammatical errors, e.g. with noun gender or verb conjugation, as has often been noted. How this state of affairs can have comported with the high degree of syntactic accuracy displayed in the data we have analysed is an issue that goes well beyond the confines of this study, but one which we feel will be important for a better understanding of the nature and transmission of French in later medieval England. It may well be (Legge/Holdsworth 1934) that they largely concern phonologically determined traits and perhaps thus indirectly testify to its transmission as a spoken variety, though in circumstances rather different from those in which L1 English was passed on in medieval England.

7. Conclusion

The overall implications of this study may now be stated. The results sit well with a view of AN in which it maintained close contacts with continental models of French, perhaps by means of personal travel and correspondence with continental users of French, and by new infusions of native speakers as language tutors. If AN had been a linguistic backwater, we would not have expected the French users sampled here to shadow so closely the linguistic usage of the continent. In the domain studied, the syntax of object pronouns, it is particularly striking that no effect of English influence is perceptible, even in the latest subperiod investigated (1320-62). This suggests that conceptualising the 14th century as that of the onset of the «final decline» of French in England (cf. Berndt 1972) should not be seen in qualitative terms, pertaining to the level of French proficiency of its practitioners, but perhaps more as a matter of receding use. Even then, for much of the 14th century there seems to be evidence for increasing use of French. As pointed out by Lusignan (2004: 216-17), it was during 14th century that French had the most impact on the linguistic life of England, prompting the question as to whether we should not be at least as much concerned with its status at this time, when the attractiveness of French was at its greatest, as with the question of when French ceased to be spoken in England as a native language.

However this may be, those who continued to employ French in England in the 14th century were capable, it seems, of mastering an abstract syntactic system as it underwent change on the continent, and accurately reproducing its formal exponents in just the appropriate contexts. At the same time those exponents, such as the morphological forms of pronouns, had been undergoing considerable phonological change within the insular context, and this may explain why writers in French on occasion used some, though not all, tonic forms in clitic contexts. Such an outcome suggests that directions for research into the transmission of AN should consider ways in which this intriguing combination of local change and adherence to a supralocal linguistic mainstream interacted.

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Richard Ingham
Middle English


Continental French

F-B: Funck-Brentano, F. 1896: Philippe le Bel en Flandres, Paris
B: Beugnot, A. (ed.) 1842: Les coutumes du Beauvois de Philippe de Beaumanoir, Paris

Law French


AN verse

Ad.: Studer, P. (ed.) 1918: Le Mystère d’Adam, Manchester
SR: Jenkins, T. A. et al. (ed.) 1943: La Seinte Resureccion, London

AN Prose

CCL: Chapple, G. 1938: Correspondence of the City of London, unpublished University of London PhD thesis
Jerarch.: Legge, M. D. 1942: «John Pecham’s Jerarchie», MAe 11: 77-84
NMP: Fraser, C. M. (ed.) 1966: Ancient Petitions Relating to Northumberland, Durham
NR: Raine, J. (ed.) 1873: Historical papers and letters from the northern registers, London
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