Changing from OV to VO: More evidence from Old French

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Abstract

The change in word order from OV in Latin to VO in Old French is generally thought to have occurred early in the history of the language; for example, Marchello-Nizia (1995) finds that VO order is essentially fixed beginning in the early 13th century. The present study extends Marchello-Nizia's analysis by drawing data from two other texts and examining the order of objects with nonfinite as well as finite verb forms. We show that OV word order with nonfinite verbs is still readily attested in both texts even in the 13th century and that its loss represents a continuum of gradual change from finite to participial to infinitival verb forms, adding a crucial grammatical factor to our understanding of the change.

Keywords: Old French, OV, word order, discourse function.
Received: 28.v.2010 – **Accepted:** 25.viii.2010

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Ianua. Revista Philologica Romanica
Vol. 10 (2010): 1–18
ISSN 1616-413X
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1 Introduction

One of the more obvious syntactic changes in the development of the Romance languages involved a switch in basic word order from the Latin SOV to the Romance SVO, a change still underway in early Old Romance. In Old French (OF), for example, the fact that objects can precede their verb is well known and has been widely discussed for close to a century (e.g., see Foulet 1928 [1998]). Marchello-Nizia (1995) presents a particularly illuminating examination of the change which analyzes in depth the differences in verb-object order in two texts, the *Chanson de Roland*, a verse text dating from about 1100, and the *Queste du Saint-Graal*, a prose text dating from 1230-1240. The goal of the present study is to further develop Marchello-Nizia's in two ways: first by drawing data from two other texts, one representing 12th century verse and the other 13th century prose, and second by examining verb-object order with not only finite verbs but also nonfinite ones. We will see that this extension of Marchello-Nizia's study not only confirms her findings but allows us to develop a fuller picture of how object-verb (OV) order was lost in the history of French. Marchello-Nizia concludes that OV order is essentially gone by the early 13th century; our findings show that this is true when the verb is finite, but that OV order is still alive and well when the verb is nonfinite (a past participle or infinitive) even in the early 13th century, although it occurs less frequently in the 13th century than in the 12th and it is more frequent with infinitives than with past participles. We also find a difference in the range of discourse functions which preverbal O serves in our two texts, similar to that found by Marchello-Nizia for finite verbs. We conclude with Marchello-Nizia that phonological factors having to do with stress assignment most likely played a role in the change, but also that a grammatical factor, namely verb form, was crucially involved.

The data presented here are drawn from a close study of two OF texts written about a generation apart, *Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal* by Chrétien de Troyes and *La Conqueste de Constantinople* by Geoffroy de Villehardouin. The latter was chosen because it represents the earliest OF prose work of substantial length, dating from the first decade of the 13th century (twenty to thirty years earlier than Marchello-Nizia's *Queste*). The former is the last of Chrétien's works, composed in octosyllabic rhyming verse probably between 1181 and 1190. Both authors had the county of Champagne as their base of operations, which allows a measure of control for dialectal variation in their language. Chrétien is known to have been affiliated with the court at Troyes of Countess Marie de Champagne from 1160 to 1172, although it is not known whether he originated in Champagne. His five works, all Arthurian in theme and in octosyllabic rhyming verse, constitute some of the most highly esteemed literary works of the period. *Perceval*, the fifth and last, was left unfinished, perhaps due to the author's death; it tells the tale of Perceval, a young man of a well-born family who was raised in ignorance of his heritage. Once he learns of his past, he sets off intent on becoming a knight, eventually coming to King Arthur's court and later encountering the Grail, among many other things. Villehardouin was a minor nobleman from Champagne, born no later than 1152,

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in the vicinity of Troyes. As the vassal of Count Thibaud III of Champagne, Villehardouin served as the Maréchal of Champagne, and followed Thibaud in answering the call to the Fourth Crusade in 1199. Villehardouin's chronicle recounts the organizational difficulties encountered by the Crusaders and their political machinations, which resulted in the eventual conquest not of Moslem Jerusalem (as intended), but of Christian Constantinople. After the Crusade, Villehardouin remained in the eastern Mediterranean until shortly before his death in about 1212.

2 OV order in OF

2.1 OV order with finite verbs

2.1.1 Marchello-Nizia (1995)

Marchello-Nizia (1995) presents an in-depth study of word order in OF based on an intensive analysis of two texts, the *Chanson de Roland* (early 12th century verse) and the *Queste du Saint-Graal* (early 13th century prose). Apparently limiting her data to the order of elements occurring in matrix clauses,[1] she identifies the following as the basic components of analysis:

(1) S: noun subject
Sp: pronominal subject
O: noun object (i.e., non-pronominal)
V: finite verb or auxiliary
C: complement (any other element)

In the discussion that follows, I will conflate the two types of subject as S and use the more commonly found X instead of C.

Marchello-Nizia finds four situations in which the object precedes the verb (OV order). The first is where O is the first element in the sentence and V is the second. OF is considered by most scholars, including Marchello-Nizia, to be a verb-second (V2) language, where the second constituent in the sentence is the finite verb and first position may be occupied by any other constituent in the sentence.[2] In both *Roland* and the *Queste*, the majority of OV is of this type. In the examples which follow, O is in bold face and V is in italics:

[1] Although Marchello-Nizia does not state this overtly, all of the examples she gives occur in matrix clauses, and she at one point (p. 78) contrasts her findings with a study that examines «toutes sortes de propositions» ('all types of clauses') including embedded ones. In fn. 90, p. 78, she refers the reader to other sources for a discussion of the syntax of embedded clauses. It seems fairly clear that she herself has excluded embedded clauses from consideration.

[2] In 12th century verse, there is good evidence that V2 holds in both matrix and embedded clauses, and that other orders (V1, V3, etc.) are also possible. In 13th prose V2 is required in matrix clauses and not found in embedded ones. See Labelle (2007) and sources cited there for discussion.

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(2) OV(S)

a. **Mahumet** *sert* e Apollin recleimet (*Roland* 8; M-N, 73)
Mohammed serves and Apollin calls-upon
'He serves Mohammed and prays to Apollin'

b. **Ceste parole** *dist* Salemons (*Queste* p. 220; M-N, 80)
this word said Solomon
'Solomon said this proverb'

A second type of OV order also has O in first position but V in third position:

(3) OXV

Mult larges teres de vus *avrai*
many wide lands from you I-have
cunquises (*Roland* 2352; M-N, 74)
conquered
'I have conquered from you many vast lands'

Finally, Marchello-Nizia also finds O in second position, with V third, and either S or X first, reminiscent of Latin word order:

(4) a. SOV

Li quens Rollant **Gualter de l'Hum** *apelet*. (*Roland* 803; M-N, 75)
the count Roland Walter de l'Hum calls
'Count Roland calls over Walter de l'Hum.'

b. XOV

A voz Franceis **un cunseill** *en presistes*.[3] (*Roland* 205; M-N, 73)
to your French a counsel of-it you-took
'You consulted your Frenchmen.'

The frequencies at which these orders occur vary across orders and between the texts:

Table 1. *Frequency of OV orders in Marchello-Nizia (1995).*

	OV(S)	OXV	SOV	XOV
Roland	24,20 %	2,30 %	2,40 %	4,60 %
Queste	3,20 %	0,05 %	0,00 %	0,00 %

Although OV(S) does not completely disappear until the Middle French period, Marchello-Nizia (1995, 109) concludes that VO order is essentially fixed by the early 13th century.

[3]Clitic pronouns and the clitic negator *ne*, which precede the verb, count as part of it; hence they are italicized throughout.

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2.1.2 Word order in *Perceval* and the *Conqueste*

The data from the present study of *Perceval* and the *Conqueste* show much the same pattern of word order as found by Marchello-Nizia. This is interesting in that it also includes data from embedded clauses. In *Perceval*, as in *Roland*, all four orders are attested; the *Conqueste* shows only OV(S), SOV, and XOV:[4]

(5) OV(S)

a. **Ses felons gas**, **sa lengue male** *redotent* tuit . . . (*P*. 2809)
his wicked jokes his tongue evil fear all
'His wicked jokes, his evil tongue, everyone fears . . .'

b. . . . si que **grant pris** *l'* *en* *dona* l' on. (*C*. 168)
such that great praise to-him for-it gave the one
'. . . such that one gave him great praise for it.'

(6) OXV

les portes a bandon *ovrirent* . . . (*P*. 2438)
the gates fully they-opened
'They opened the gates fully . . .'

(7) SOV

a. Qant li fos **la parole** *antant*, . . . (*P*. 2862)
when the fool the speech hears
'When the fool hears the speech . . .'

b. Li baron **merci** *vos* *crient* de la prise de Jadres, . . . (*C*. 106)
the barons mercy you beg of the taking of Jadres
'The barons ask your forgiveness for taking Jadres . . .'

(8) XOV

a. a force **le doi** *li* *estant* . . . (*P*. 718)
with force the finger to-her extends
'He straightens her finger by force . . .'

b. Onques **nul esploit** *ne* *firent*, . . . (*C*. 229)
never no achievement NEG they-did
'Never did they make any achievement . . .'

The frequencies at which these orders occur are remarkably similar to Marchello-Nizia's, as can be seen in Table 2. Marchello-Nizia's frequencies are repeated for ease of comparison. Thus, Marchello-Nizia's conclusion that VO order is fairly well fixed by the beginning of the 13th century is confirmed by the present study.

[4] In the examples throughout, *P*. represents *Perceval* and *C*. the *Conqueste*.

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TABLE 2. *Frequency of OV orders in Roland, Perceval, the Conqueste, and the Queste.*[5]

	OV(S)	OXV	SOV	XOV
Roland	24,20 %	2,30 %	2,40 %	4,60 %
Perceval	23,00 %	3,50 %	4,60 %	4,80 %
Conqueste	7,00 %	0,00 %	0,30 %	0,40 %
Queste	3,20 %	0,05 %	0,00 %	0,00 %

2.2 OV with nonfinite verbs

However, the picture of OV's disappearance is still incomplete. While it is true that OV order, where V is finite, is dwindling in 12th century verse and virtually gone in 13th century prose, this is not the case where V is nonfinite —either an infinitive or a past participle. Orders of this sort give OF something of a West Germanic feel.

OV order is most frequent in both *Perceval* and the *Conqueste* when the verb is infinitival. Infinitival clauses commonly occur as complements of modal, perception, and causative verbs; of other verbs which may require the prepositional-like complementizers *à* and *de*; or of adjunct-introducing prepositions (*por*, *sanz*, etc.):

(9) a. . . . et au plus tost qu' il onques porent, firent **le**
and at-the most early that they ever could made the
mangier *atorner*. (*P*. 2563)
meal to-prepare
'. . . and as soon as they could, they had the meal prepared.'

b. Vaslez, ose ça nus venir por **le droit le roi**
young-man dares here no-one to-come for the right the king
maintenir? (*P*. 1086)
to-maintain
'Young man, does no one dare come here to maintain the king's right?'

c. Mais li Venisien ne porent mie **l' estor** *endurer*. (*C*. 89)
but the Venetians NEG could at-all the battle to-maintain
'But the Venetians couldn't keep up the battle.'

[5]The data from *Perceval* also include a variety of V4 orders, which are variations on S/XOV with an element occurring either between S/X and O or between O and V. They are quite rare, constituting only about 2 % of the data all together. The increase in rate of OV(S) in the *Conqueste* compared to the *Queste* may be due to the inclusion of embedded clauses in the former, since Stylistic Fronting is possible here. See Mathieu (2006) for discussion.

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d. Et sachiez que les galies n' osoient **terre** *prendre*. (*C*. 172)
and know that the galleys NEG dared land to-take
'And you can be sure that the galleys did not dare come to shore.'

The infinitive and O are usually contiguous, but they may be separated minimally by an adjunct of some sort (underlined below):

(10) a. li autre mout se traveillierent de **lor oste** bien
the others much self labored of their guest well
aeisier. (*P*. 1929)
to-ease
'The others took great pains to put their guest well at ease.'

b. . . . qu' il ne porroit **autre deduit** por rien *sofrir ne*
that he NEG could other pleasure for nothing to-suffer nor
andurer. (*P*. 3509)
to-endure
'. . . that he could not for anything suffer or endure any other pleasure.'

c. Et li message rejurerent **les lor chartres** a
and the messengers again-swore the their agreements to
tenir . . .[6] (*C*. 31)
to-keep
'And the messengers swore again to keep their agreements . . .'

In clauses with periphrastic verb forms (i.e., where V is a past participle), O readily precedes V, although somewhat less frequently than with infinitives:

(11) a. Si m' aïst Dex, fet li prodom, vos avez **grant jornee**
so me help God made the nobleman you have great journey
faite. (*P*. 1183)
made
'«So help me God», said the nobleman, «you have made a great journey».'

b. Or quiere autrui qui li recort, que cil n' i
now looks-for another who to-him tell since that-one NEG there
a **mot** *antandu*. (*P*. 897)
has word heard
'Now he looks for another who might tell him, since that one didn't hear a word of it.'

c. Li Greu avoient **le pont** *colpé* . . . (*C*. 163)
the Greeks had the bridge cut
'The Greeks had severed the bridge . . .'

[6] Pearce (1990, 252) and Martineau & Motapanyane (2000) argue that the *a* here is not a clause-introducing complementizer but a VP-adjunct.

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d. . . . se li empereres li eüst **nul tort** *fait* . . . (*C*. 285)
whether the emperor to-him had no wrong done
'. . . whether the emperor had done him any wrong . . .'

O and the participle are usually contiguous, although it is possible to separate them:

(12) a. et li chevaliers . . . avoit **la cope d' or** jus *mise* sor .i.
and the knight had the cup of gold down put on a
perron de roche bise. (*P*. 1077)
block of rock grayish
'And the knight . . . had put the gold cup down on a grayish block of stone.'

b. Puis a **main** a l' espee *mise* . . . (*P*. 1523)
then has hand to the sword put
'Then he has put his hand on his sword . . .'

c. Et dedenz cel termine aroie **ma terre** si *mise* a point
and within this interval would-have my land so put to point
que . . .' (*C*. 195)
that
'And during that time, I would have arranged my land such that . . .'

Thus, we can see that OV order is far from rare in either text, although it is much more frequent with infinitival verbs than with periphrastic verbs, as can be seen in Table 3:

TABLE 3. *Rate of OV order with nonfinite verb forms in* Perceval *and the* Conqueste.

	INFINITIVAL VERBS	PERIPHRASTIC VERBS
Perceval	60 %	43 %
Conqueste	47 %	28 %

With infinitival verbs, OV occurs more often than VO in *Perceval*, and about as often as VO in the *Conqueste*. When V is a past participle, OV order is still common in *Perceval*, but less so in the *Conqueste*. Note that in both texts, there is approximately the same difference in frequency of OV between the two types of nonfinite verbs (17–19 %). Thus, OV order appears to be lost first with finite verbs, next with periphrastics, and last with infinitives, and this process is more advanced in the *Conqueste* than in *Perceval*. I return in § 4 to consider the implications of these generalizations.

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3 The discourse function of O in OV order

In her study of *Roland* and the *Queste*, Marchello-Nizia (1995) finds not only that the two texts differ in the frequency of OV order, but also that the discourse function of O in OV is more limited in the *Queste* than in *Roland*. Interestingly, this turns out to also be the case for OV order with nonfinite verbs in *Perceval* and the *Conqueste*. I begin the discussion below with a definition of discourse function, proceed to an outline Marchello-Nizia's findings for OV with finite verbs, and conclude with an analysis of the discourse function of O in OV-nonfinite.

3.1 A typology of discourse function

The correlation between discourse function and word order has long been recognized in functional approaches to syntax, and the importance of information structure is gaining recognition in other frameworks as well. Given its long history, there are almost as many definitions of the relevant concepts as there are researchers. Petrova & Solf (2009) offer a typology designed to systematize the various notions used in the literature and to allow a more straightforward analysis of older texts. They argue for three primary distinctions in discourse function; an element in a sentence may be located in all three all at once.

The first dimension has to do with the informational status of the discourse referent (traditionally, given/new or theme/rheme). The term *given* applies exclusively to expressions referring to explicitly pre-mentioned referents, and *new* to referents introduced into the context for the first time. Between *given* and *new* lie expressions that are *accessible*. These include a range of categories that have not been previously mentioned, but are «in a certain relation of relevance either to the communicative situation as a whole or to entities already established in discourse. … they … are semi-active at the time of the utterance and are thus available for proper reference» (Petrova & Solf 2009, 146). These include:

(13) a. expressions referring to the interlocutors,
b. entities that are introduced in a certain relation to already activated referents (e.g., by a possessive determiner),
c. entities which stay in a part/whole relationship or in a relationship of analogy to an already pre-established referent,
d. entities belonging to the common knowledge of the interlocutors. (Petrova & Solf 2009, 146)

The second dimension has to do with informational relevance (focus) and identifies that part of an utterance which provides the most important information —what the audience is supposed to pay attention to and hold in memory. There are two sorts of focus, and they are not mutually exclusive. New information focus «provides 'new' information in the sense that it is either requested in a preceding wh-question or necessary to develop the discourse» (Petrova & Solf 2009, 149). Contrastive focus identifies elements of an utterance that stand in

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a relation of contrast to previously mentioned constituents. The focus domain of an utterance can be the entire utterance or a piece of it: the verb phrase, an element in the VP, a morpheme, or a syllable.

The final dimension concerns predicational separation: topic vs. comment structure. Petrova & Solf acknowledge that this category is harder to define, and often to identify, than the others. An optimal topic is one that is given or accessible and definite, is what the rest of the utterance is about (*A says about X that X* . . .), and is set off in a syntactic position associated with topicality (left dislocation, hanging topics, etc.). Not all utterances will have topic-comment structure; for example, presentational constructions are of this sort.

3.2 The discourse function of preverbal O

Marchello-Nizia's study shows that the discourse function of preverbal O in her data (i.e., with finite verbs) differs between the two texts. In the *Queste*, preverbal O serves very specific functions. It appears always to be a topic (Marchello-Nizia 1995, 7); if it represents given information (as defined above), then it is either a full («echo») or partial repetition of a noun phrase introduced in the previous (or closely preceding) utterance. If it is accessible, it falls under (13b) above and is rendered accessible by some element that ties it closely to the preceding discourse (*anaphoriquement* 'anaphorically', in Marchello-Nizia's terms): a demonstrative or possessive determiner, the adjectives *autre* 'other' or *(i)tel* 'such', or an ordinal number which ties it to items in a list. If it is new information, it is either explicitly linked to the discourse cataphorically (by a relative clause or *ainsi* 'thus'), strongly focused, or an idiom —a bare noun in combination with a *verbe support* 'helping verb'.[7] The latter, according to Marchello-Nizia, represent archaic, fixed usages of OV.

What is not found in the *Queste*, then, are definite objects which are accessible but only loosely tied to the discourse ((13c)–(13d) above) and new information that does not constitute by itself a focus domain, including indefinite noun phrases, non-idiomatic bare nouns, and name —categories that are generally used to activate new referents. All of these functions, as well as those attested in the *Queste*, are found readily in *Roland*. Here, O is also always a topic, but it can have any other function either in terms of its informational status (given, accessible, or new) or in terms of its discourse relevance (focused or nonfocused) (Marchello-Nizia 1995, 99).

What discourse functions are served by preverbal O with nonfinite verbs? In *Perceval*, the situation is identical to that found for finite verbs in *Roland*: all functions are attested, and in this case, the O does not appear to necessarily be a topic. In particular, with both past participles and infinitives, O can represent new information conveyed by indefinites or bare nouns which is not by itself focused, or accessible information only loosely tied to the discourse:

[7] These include *avoir*, *crier*, *donner*, *faire*, *mander*, *oïr*, *porter*, *prendre*, *metre*, *tenir*. See Marchello-Nizia (1995, 96).

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(14) a. Ensi li rois a Kex parloit, et li vaslez, qui
thus the king to Kay was-speaking and the young-man who
s'an aloit, a **une pucele** *veüe*, bele et gente, si la
was-leaving has a maiden seen beautiful and fair and her
salue, . . . (*P*. 1031–34)
greets

'Thus the king was speaking to Kay, and the young man, who was leaving, has seen a maiden, beautiful and fair, and he greets her . . .'

b. Bien poïst an **.iiii.c. homes** *asseoir* anviron le feu, s'
well could one 400 men to-seat around the fire and
aüst chascuns aeisié leu. (*P*. 3086–88)
would-have each comfortable space

'One could seat a good 400 men around the fire, and each would have plenty of room.'

c. Et panse que an la forest an soient li vaslet alé, por
and thinks that in the forest of-it have the young-men gone for
le pont qu' il vit avalé, **cordes et pieges**
the bridge that he saw lowered nets and traps
regarder. (*P*. 3380–83)
to-look-at

'And he thinks that the young men have gone into the forest, because of the drawbridge he saw lowered, to check some nets and traps.'

d. et au sesme jor revandrons an ceste place tuit
and to-the seventh day we-will-come-back in this place all
armé, et tu aies **le roi** *mandé* et la reïne et ses
armed and you have the king summoned and the queen and his
genz totes (*P*. 8586–89)
people all

'And on the seventh day, we will return to this place ready for battle, and you will have summoned the king and the queen and all his people . . .'

The example in (14a) involves an indefinite *une pucele* 'a maiden' whose referent has not appeared in previous discourse; the focus domain is the VP *a une pucele veüe* 'has seen a maiden', since it would answer the question «What happened as the young man was leaving?» (He *saw a maiden*). In (14b), the indefinite *.iiii.c. homes* 'four hundred men' is also brand new to the context, and here everything but *anviron le feu* is the focus domain (in answer to the potential question «How big was the fire?»). The example in (14c) contains two bare nouns that are new information, indefinite in interpretation, and not part of an idiom. The example in (14d) represents a definite noun phrase that is accessible only by common knowledge; the king referred to here is King Arthur, who has not been present in the narrative for quite some time, but who is clearly the first referent for *le roi* who comes to mind in the context of the tale.

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Other functions found in *Roland* and the *Queste* are also represented in *Perceval*, such as nouns accompanied by possessive (15a) and demonstrative (15b) determiners closely linking the O to the discourse, items in a list (15c) (both type (13b)), and idiomatic bare nouns (15d):

(15) a. Yvonet comande a descendre, que ses chevax mout duremant
Y. orders to to-dismount that his horse very severely
clochoit; cil **son comandement** *a fet*, . . . (*P*. 5628–31)
was-limping this-one his command has done
'He orders Yvonet to dismount, for his (Perceval's) horse is limping quite badly; he (Yvonet) has carried out his command . . .'

b. Je vuel, fet il, a cort aler, au roi **ces armes**
I want makes he to court to-go to-the king this armor
demander. (*P*. 883–84)
to-ask
'«I want», he says, «to go to court to ask the king for this armor.»'
(The speaker, Perceval, has just seen a knight in bright red armor.)

c. Yonez les chauces li lace, puis li a **le hauberc**
Y. the leggings to-him laces then to-him has the hauberk
vestu . . . (*P*. 1174–75)
put-on
'Yonet laces the leggings on him, then he has put on the hauberk . . .' (Perceval has never worn armor, so Yonet dresses him piece by piece.)

d. . . . ou li rois Artus **cort** *tenoit*. (*P*. 2731)
where the king Arthur court held
'. . . where King Arthur held court.'

In the *Conqueste*, the situation is different. Objects which precede past participles have the same limited repertoire of functions as Marchello-Nizia found for finite verbs. There are no definite objects which are accessible but only loosely tied to the discourse, or indefinite noun phrases, non-idiomatic bare nouns, or names that represent new, non-focused information. Objects which precede infinitives are less restricted in function, but still more so than in *Perceval*. We do find many definite objects that are only loosely tied to the discourse:

(16) a. et furent mult esmaié por ce que il ne porroient
and they-were very dismayed by it that they NEG would-be-able
la convenance *tenir* (*C*. 51)
the agreement to-hold
'And they were very dismayed because they wouldn't be able to keep the agreement'

b. Adonc conmencent li marinier a ovrir les portes des
now begin the sailors to to-open the gates of-the

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uissiers et a giter les pons fors. Et on comence **les**
ships and to to-cast the bridges out and one begins the
chevax a *traire* (*C*. 157)
horses to to-lead-out

'Now the sailors start to open the gates of the ships and to cast out the gangplanks. And they begin to lead the horses out . . .'

In (16a), *la convenance* refers to an agreement between the French army and the Venetians for the latter to supply the former with ships and supplies, which was concluded about fifteen paragraphs earlier in the story and which hasn't been referred to again since then. In (16b), the horses have not been mentioned in prior discourse, but the fact that knights have been and the common knowledge (to the interlocutors) that a *uissier* is a transport ship provide sufficient context for referents to be recoverable. Nonetheless, there are no indefinite noun phrases, non-idiomatic bare nouns, or names that represent new, non-focused information among the objects that precede infinitives in the *Conqueste*.

4 From OV to VO

We've seen above that expanding Marchello-Nizia's (1995) study to include nonfinite verb forms allows a more complex but still consistent picture of the change from OV to VO order in OF to emerge. In *Perceval* (12th century verse), OV order occurs with infinitives the majority of the time, with past participles about half and half, and with finite verbs only about a quarter of the time. In the *Conqueste* (13th c. prose), OV occurs with infinitives about half the time, with past participles about a quarter, and with finite verbs only rarely. In addition, the discourse function of O changes between the two sorts of text. In 12th century verse, there is no restriction on the function of preverbal O either at the left edge of the sentence (i.e., with finite verbs) or internal to the sentence (i.e., with nonfinite verbs), while in 13th century prose, preverbal O must be closely tied to the discourse in specific ways or reflect an archaic, idiomatic use of OV, although it is less restricted with infinitives than with past participles or finite verbs.

What prompted the change from OV to VO? Marchello-Nizia views this as part of a wider shift from a freer, discourse-function influenced word order in Latin to the relatively fixed word order of Modern French. She argues that one of the primary instigators in this change in French was the movement from word-based stress assignment in Latin to phrase-based stress assignment (specifically, on the last syllable of the phrase) in Modern French. She maintains that phrase-based stress had begun to develop by the 12th century, but word-based stress was still possible, as evidenced in the distribution of disjunctive pronouns, strong forms of demonstrative determiners (e.g., *icest* vs. *cest*), and the metric demands of poetry such as that found in *Roland*, where each line has four primary stresses:

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(17) **Car**les li **reis**, nostre empe**re**re **ma**gnes (*Roland* 1; M-N, 189)
Charles the king our emperor great
'Charles the king, our great emperor'

Because stress and focus usually coincide, a change in the way stress is assigned can trigger a change in discourse function for the various object positions in the sentence. As right-headed phrasal stress becomes the norm, focused objects will be more likely to follow their verb than to precede it, because stress is coming to be placed at the right edge of the phrase. Marchello-Nizia argues that as a result the left edge of the sentence, where it is still possible to place word-based stress, becomes a marked position, ideal for highlighting topics. As we enter the 13th century, this position becomes restricted to focus of the specific sorts that we saw in the *Queste* and *Conqueste* above; as word-based stress is lost in Middle French, this use of this position also disappears (Marchello-Nizia 1995, 187–189). It is clear that this approach will help us understand the correlation between OV loss and discourse function change for objects which occur more sentence internally (i.e., with nonfinite verbs) as well. Word-based stress would allow for stress at the left edge of not only sentences but also phrases, such as the verb phrase. But as right-headed phrasal stress takes over, the position in front of infinitives and past participles also becomes marked, and the postverbal position for objects becomes increasingly common.

There is one aspect of the loss of OV, however, which does not appear attributable to a change in stress assignment. We saw in Table 3, for both texts, that the loss of OV order is further along when V is a past participle than when it is an infinitive, and by about the same margin in each text. While it seems reasonable to suggest that stress at the left edge of the sentence (the most prominent in terms of earliest spoken) could be more marked than stress at the left edge of a sentence-internal phrase (i.e., the VP) and thus lost earlier, it is not clear how there could be a difference in markedness between the pre-participle and the pre-infinitive positions, which are often identical in terms of phonological phrasing as the parallelism between the following two examples attests:

(18) a. et si a **sa fille** *apelee*, . . . (*P*. 5398)
and so has his daughter called
'And so he has called his daughter. . .'

b. et si venez **vostre argent** *prendre*, . . . (*P*. 2546)
and so come your money to-take
'And so come take your money. . .'

In addition, we noted for the *Conqueste* that the restrictions on the discourse function of preverbal objects of infinitives were less severe than for preverbal objects of past participles, again pointing to a delay in OV change for objects of infinitives over that for past participles. In other words, OV change is also dependent on the form of the verb with which it occurs.

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The incremental change correlating with verb form that we see here is in fact very similar to other changes that spread gradually throughout a language. Research in sound change has shown that a sound change very often starts in a particular phonetic environment and gradually spreads to others. Likewise, syntactic change can diffuse throughout the language and over time in ways that show sensitivity to grammatical conditions. For example, Westergaard (2009) examines the loss of subject-verb inversion in Modern Norwegian dialects, noting that it is most advanced with the least complex question words (e.g., *ka* 'what') and verbs other than *være* 'to be'. I suggest that this type of change is at work here as well. In OF, loss of OV may be spurred by phonological change, but it works its way through the language based on a grammatical condition, namely that of verb form. The variation in rate of OV seen within each text can thus be interpreted as evidence of a change in progress.

Finally, it is tempting to also interpret the difference between *Perceval* and the *Conqueste* in the rate of OV as a change in progress over time. Such a conclusion needs to be made cautiously, however. First, the data presented here are drawn from only two texts, and we would want to see this pattern repeated in numerous texts before we conclude that it is truly reflective of change. Second, because the texts differ in genre, we must ask whether the increased use of OV in 12th century verse over 13th century prose is reflective of the demands placed on the 12th century poet by meter and rhyme, demands which 13th century prose writers would not be subject to. Clearly, poets need to use all the tools at their disposal to meet these demands, which could conceivably increase the quantity of alternate word orders attested and make the text less reflective of the language of the time than one might wish. However, poets can use only those tools which their language provides for them if they wish their audience to appreciate their work, especially the verse *romans* of the sort that Chrétien wrote, which were intended to be presented orally for entertainment. Good poets are remarkably adept at constructing a rhyme while meeting the needs of information structure and observing the grammatical requirements of their language. Furthermore, if the difference were due solely to genre, one would expect much less consistency in the rate of decrease in OV use across verb form and across the two texts. Thus, I conclude, as Marchello-Nizia does for her study, that the difference in OV usage between my two texts probably does reflect a change over time.

This conclusion finds confirmation in the fact that recent research shows many other consistent differences between 12th century verse and 13th century prose, enough to suggest that OF should in fact be subdivided into two periods, Early Old French (EOF; 12th century verse) and Late Old French (LOF; 13th century prose). First, the distribution of null subjects is distinct in the two periods (Hirschbühler 1989, 1990; Roberts 1993; Labelle 2007); they are possible in all types of embedded clauses in EOF, but not LOF. Second, the clausal subordinator *ce que* is productive in EOF, occurring with clauses acting as subject, direct object, and object of prepositions, while in LOF it becomes limited to prepositional contexts (Zaring & Hirschbühler 1997). Third, the nature of V2 clauses and the possibility of V1 and V3 clauses are distinct in the two periods

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(Rouveret 2004; Labelle 2007), and finally, the Tobler-Mussafia Law is operative in positioning clitic pronouns in EOF, but not in LOF (Rouveret 2004; Labelle & Hirschbühler 2005; Labelle 2007). The frequency and function of OV order is yet another aspect of OF which argues for this distinction.

5 Conclusion

Marchello-Nizia's (1995) influential examination of word order in OF showed that OV order has essentially disappeared by the early 13th century, as least insofar as it occurs with finite verbs. The present study confirms her conclusion, but finds that with nonfinite verbs OV order is even more common in the 12th century than with finite verbs and that it continues to be readily attested even in the 13th century. In both periods, however, OV order is less frequent with past participles than with infinitives. The discourse function of O in OV order is the same in 12th verse whether the O occurs at the left edge of the sentence (with finite verbs) or sentence-internally (with nonfinite verbs). In the 13th century, the discourse function of O in OV becomes much more limited when the verb is finite or a past participle, and somewhat more limited when the verb is infinitival. Following Marchello-Nizia, I have interpreted these facts as reflective of a change in progress in the language, probably initiated by a change from word-based stress to phrase-based stress which spurred a change in the discourse function of object positions in the sentence and an increase in VO word order. However, I have also argued that the change was sensitive to a grammatical factor, namely the form of the verb. In both texts, the change is most advanced with finite verbs, less so with past participles, and least with infinitives, suggesting that the change diffused incrementally through the grammar in this fashion. This change reflects yet another way in which the language reflected in 12th century OF verse (EOF) is distinct from that reflected in 13th century prose (LOF).

The change we see here in OF has interesting implications for understanding how the basic SOV word order of Latin changed to the SVO of the modern Romance languages. The phonological stress-based changes that occurred in OF did not occur in the other major Romance varieties, but we know that earlier stages of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese exhibited OV order which was similar to that in OF and which was also lost. For example, Martins (2002) shows that OV was possible in Old Portuguese with finite verbs, and Parodi (1995) and Poletto (2006) show that OV occurred with past participles in Old Spanish and Old Italian, respectively. It would be instructive to see what patterns of change occur in these languages with all three verb forms. Does the phonological role played by change in stress assignment in OF provide OF with a unique pattern of change, or are there similarities across all of these languages that would reflect a commonality in how Latin changed into Romance? I leave these questions open for future research.

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