

Infinitive fronting as a transparency effect in Old and Middle French

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Abstract

In this article, we present a novel analysis of infinitive fronting in Old and Middle French (9th-16th century). We find that in sentences with modal verbs and clitic climbing, the infinitive may either follow the main verb or precede it. When the subject of the main verb is overt and the infinitive is fronted, the order is SUBJ-VINF-VFIN. Moreover, we find that the object of the fronted infinitive either cliticises onto

the main verb (i.e. clitic climbing) or moves as a full DP with the infinitive, in which case the order is SUBJ-OBJ-VINF-VFIN. We compare our data to Stylistic Fronting, and we show that infinitive fronting in Old and Middle French is a different mechanism. Our analysis takes infinitive fronting to be ν P-movement to Spec,TP, an operation which patterns alongside other Transparency Effects. Therefore, infinitive fronting provides further evidence for monoclausal restructuring in earlier French.

Keywords: infinitives, clitic placement, Old French, restructuring, stylistic fronting.

1. Introduction

In Old and Middle French (9th-16th century), embedded infinitives can be fronted to the left of finite modal verbs, an environment where clitic climbing is very productive.¹

- (1) Old French, *Lois de Guillaume*, 39:1
 S'=il **aleier** ne =se =pot.
 if=he go.INF NEG=REFL=can.3SG
 'If he cannot go.'
- (2) Middle French, *Actes Royaux du Poitou*, CCXLV
 Et disoit que **faire** le =devions.
 and said.3SG that do.INF CL.ACC.3SG=should.1PL
 'And he said that we should do it.'

In this paper we show that this phenomenon can be analysed alongside other Transparency Effects (e.g. clitic climbing, auxiliary switch and long object movement), which are typically taken as evidence of monoclausal restructuring (Rizzi 1982, Cinque 2004).

The article is organised as follows: we present the construction in section 2, and we show that infinitive fronting in the history of French is a phenomenon spanning over seven centuries. In section 3, we provide a review of the main proposals that have been put forward to account for infinitive fronting. We do so in three steps: first we present Stylistic Fronting as discussed in the literature on Icelandic, which we then use to review studies of infinitive fronting in Old Catalan, Old Spanish and Old Italian. Finally, we turn to infinitive fronting in Old French, which is associated with a debate on whether it shows genuine Stylistic Fronting (as proposed by Mathieu 2006, 2009) or not (Labelle and Hirschbühler 2014, 2017). We will argue for the latter. In section 4, we show that infinitive fronting in Old and Middle French is only found in restructuring clauses, and can therefore be analysed alongside other Transparency Effects, such as clitic climbing whereby elements from

¹ Our focus in this paper is on infinitive fronting, yet a series of elements can be fronted in earlier French, notably past participles (Labelle and Hirschbühler 2014), or adverbs, adjectives, DPs and PPs (Mathieu 2006). Crucially, only infinitive fronting is limited to restructuring clauses.

the embedded infinitival clause can appear in the main clause domain. We present our formal proposal of infinitive fronting in Old and Middle French in section 5, where we argue that the operation involves ν P fronting to a position within TP. We conclude that infinitive fronting in the diachrony of French is a Transparency Effect and involves monoclausal restructuring.

2. Data

The data we analyse in this paper is composed of two main elements: we review and include data from the literature, using examples from Mathieu (2006), Salvesen (2011, 2013), and Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014, 2017). Additionally we include data collected by Olivier (2022a).² From the latter, we select texts spanning from the mid-12th to the mid-17th century. As we discuss in more detail below, the diachronic path of the construction has been captured quantitatively in several studies (Labelle and Hirschbühler 2014, 2017, Olivier 2022a), therefore our contribution is to consider all of this data in parallel and to provide a (synchronic) formal analysis of infinitive fronting as it is found in earlier French.

As pointed out by Olivier (2022a) (and Balsemin et al. 2024, for Old Italian), infinitive fronting is an optional operation which is less frequent than the non-fronting option. This is important since fronting is clearly not the result of an operation which is needed for the derivation to converge (e.g. Holmberg 2000 and Stylistic Fronting as an EPP triggered movement). Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014) report 6.1% of infinitive fronting in embedded clauses between the 10th and the 16th centuries. Focusing on all XV sentences in their corpus, Labelle and Hirschbühler (2017) report 72/525 (13.71%) of infinitive fronting to the right of the subject in embedded clauses, which is the context we analyse. Olivier (2022a) focuses on clauses with clitic climbing and reports 47/836 (5.62%) instances of infinitive fronting in Old French, and 14/578 (2.42%) in Middle French. From a diachronic standpoint, Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014, 2017) find evidence for infinitive fronting until the 15th century, and Olivier (2022a) until the 16th century. The two studies converge in showing that this phenomenon was more active in Old French than in Middle French,³ therefore the majority of our examples comes from the earlier period. Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014) find that infinitive fronting is more common in verse than in prose, which they claim can be useful for versification – in turn, this may account for the lower percentages in Olivier’s (2022a) legal corpus. As pointed out by Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014), whilst the percentage of infinitive fronting is generally low, the number of occurrences is non-negligible.

² This dataset brings together several corpora, notably the Corpus ConDÉ (Larrivé and Goux, 2021), SCRIPTA (Bauduin, 2010-2016), Corpus Philippicum, and Actes Royaux du Poitou. It comprises of 17 legal texts which together form a database of 625,691 words. Our examples taken from the secondary literature are cited as such (Mathieu 2006, Salvesen 2011, 2013, Labelle and Hirschbühler 2014, 2017), whereas the data we collected from Olivier’s (2022a) database are referenced by their text-source.

³ The diachrony of infinitive fronting differs crosslinguistically, as Balsemin et al. (2024) find no occurrence of this order in Old Italian before the 14th century, but report a peak in the 16th century.

Having briefly discussed the general picture, let's now look at some specific examples. Infinitive fronting occurs in embedded clauses introduced by *que* 'that', *qui* 'who', *quant* 'when', *si/se* 'if' and *cum* 'as/since'. Generally the subject is null although this is not a requirement⁴ (earlier French was a *pro*-drop language, see Adams 1987, Balon and Larrivé 2016):

- (3) Old French, *Roman de Brut*, v.12242
 E tant cum **amener** en =porent
 and much as bring.INF CL.PART=could.3PL
 'and as much as they could bring.'
- (4) Old French, *Ferri III*, p. AD54
 ...auroient païei la soume d'=argent desus
 would.have.3PL paid the sum of=money above
 dite se **païer** la voloient.
 said if pay.INF CL.ACC.3SG=wanted.3PL
 '...would have paid the abovementioned sum had they wanted to pay it.'
- (5) Old French, *Grand Coutumier*, Seq. 154
 ie ou autre pour moi qui **ferre** le =puisse & doie.
 I or other for me who do.INF CL.ACC.3SG=could.3SG and should.3SG
 'I, or someone else who can and should do it on my behalf.'
- (6) Middle French, *Lettres de Rémission*, fol. 82r, n° 121
 Thiebaut Gonnee si yvre que **soustenir** ne = se =povoit
 Thiebaut Gonnee so drunk that stand.INF NEG=REFL=could.3SG
 'Thiebaut Gonnee, so drunk that he could not even stand straight'

Importantly, when the subject is overt, it systematically precedes the fronted infinitive:

- (7) Old French, *Lois de Guillaume*, 14
 E si il **aver** nes = pot ...
 and if he have.INF NEG.REFL=can.3SG
 'And if he cannot have them ...'
- (8) Old French, *Roman de Brut*, v.14591
 Quant vus **destruire** nes =osez
 when you destroy.INF NEG.3PL=dare.2PL
 'When you do not dare destroy them.'

⁴ An anonymous reviewer asked for some elaboration on this point, given that this is not what seminal previous literature has reported (cf. Adams 1987). In our corpus, in the contexts we are investigating, the subject is dropped 54 times and is overt 9 times. Although this creates a more complex picture of the variation between main and embedded clauses than previously thought and hence something worth of mention, we do not feel that we are able to draw any substantial conclusions from it, given the absolute numbers we are dealing with. Therefore, we need to leave this issue open for future research.

- (9) Middle French, *Terrien*, preamble
 entant que le cas **permettre** l'=a peu.
 given that the case allow.INF CL.ACC.3SG=has.3SG could
 'given that the case could allow it.'

When the infinitive has a full object (i.e. not a clitic), they are both fronted and we systematically find the order OBJ-VINF:⁵

- (10) Old French, Salvesen (2011: 325)
nul mot dire ne =pouoie.
 none word say.INF NEG=could.1SG
 'I could not say a word.'
- (11) Middle French, Salvesen (2011: 331)
 ce que **pas faire** ne =devez.
 this that NEG do.INF NEG=should.2PL
 'what you should not do.'
- (12) Old French, Salvesen (2011: 329)
une chose dire vous =vueil
 one thing say.INF CL.DAT.2PL=want.1SG
 'I will tell you one thing'
- (13) Old French, Mathieu (2006: 234)
 (...) qui **avoec lui aler** devoient.
 who with him go.INF must.3PL
 '(...) who should have gone with him.'

It is worth pointing out that this construction is present from the earliest texts. Consider the following examples, taken from *Strasbourg Oaths*, notably the oldest text written in what is considered French, and dating from 842 – despite the brevity of the source, it contains three instances of infinitive fronting. As (16) shows, it is possible for the infinitive and its object to be fronted together in presence of an overt subject:⁶

- (14) Early Old French, *Strasbourg Oaths*
 si jo **returnar** non l'int =pois
 if I dissuade.INF NEG CL.ACC3SG.PART=can.1SG
 'if I cannot dissuade him from it'

⁵ In (11) we take *pas* to be generated in the lower vP. Until the Middle French period, *pas* is an adverb, and it was reanalysed as a Neg-head towards the late 16th century (see Hirschbühler and Labelle 1994 and Olivier 2022a: 270-271).

⁶ The clitic *int* (from Latin *inde*) in example (15) is the earlier form of the partitive clitic *en*.

- (15) Early Old French, *Strasbourg Oaths*
 ne jo ne neuls cui eo **returnar** int =pois.
 neither I nor anyone who I dissuade.INF CL.PART=can.1SG
 ‘Neither I nor anyone, whom I couldn’t dissuade from it.’
- (16) Early Old French, *Strasbourg Oaths*
 si come on **par dreit son fredre salver** deit.
 thus as one per right one’s brother protect.INF must.3SG
 ‘as one ought to protect one’s brother.’

In summary, the examples systematically show fronting of an infinitive to the left of a finite verb, and if an overt subject is present then the infinitive follows it. When the object of the infinitive is not cliticised onto the finite verb, it appears between the subject and the infinitive. Descriptively the word order is represented in (17). The order is not displaying V2 (Roberts 1993, Vance 1997, Salvesen and Walkden 2017, Labelle and Hirschbühler 2017, de Andrade 2018, Wolfe 2018, 2021, Klævik-Pettersen 2019). Optional elements are shown in parentheses.

- (17) C (SUBJ) (OBJ) VINF (NEG) (CLITIC) VFIN

Furthermore, we note that the finite verb is systematically a modal verb, and if the infinitive has a clitic object the latter always cliticises on the modal. From a diachronic perspective, we attest infinitive fronting in French from the 9th to the 16th century.

3. Is it Stylistic Fronting?

One obvious question is whether the fronting data we present above is a case of Stylistic Fronting as first introduced by Maling (1990). Indeed Mathieu (2006) initially argued that the word order under focus shows Stylistic Fronting. More recently Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014, 2017) have cast doubt on this analysis.

Stylistic Fronting was first described in the literature on Scandinavian languages, particularly Icelandic (Maling 1990, Holmberg 2000). In general terms, Stylistic Fronting involves moving an element (such as an adverb, adjective, prepositional phrase, negation, noun phrase, past participle, or verbal particle) to the left of the main verb when the specifier of TP is empty. Although there are parametric differences between Scandinavian and Romance languages, this phenomenon has also been observed in Old Romance (Fischer and Alexiadou 2001, Mathieu 2006, Franco 2009, 2017).

Given that the syntax of Old French shows a certain freedom of word order and is V2 (Wolfe 2021), the literature on the language has accumulated a variety of formal treatments for this type of fronting (Mathieu 2006, 2009, 2013, Labelle 2007, 2016, Salvesen 2011, Labelle and Hirschbühler 2014, 2017). Our contribution here is

focused on infinitive fronting, therefore we will leave aside the fronting of other elements.⁷

In the following subsections, we draw upon empirical generalisations regarding (infinitive) fronting and discuss several formal approaches. We begin by reviewing genuine cases of Stylistic Fronting in Icelandic and then proceed to examine fronting in Old Romance, before focusing on the central issue of the paper: infinitive fronting in Old French.

3.1. Stylistic Fronting in Icelandic

The literature on Stylistic Fronting in Scandinavian is vast (Maling 1990, Jónsson 1991, Holmberg and Platzack 1995, Holmberg 2000, Ott 2009, Ingason and Wood 2017), yet we will remain concise and draw the necessary empirical and theoretical background to further characterise our study. It is worth mentioning that Stylistic Fronting did not sustain in the diachrony of Scandinavian: whilst the phenomenon was present in Old Scandinavian, it is now restricted to Icelandic and Faroese (Holmberg 2000).

The analysis of this optional phenomenon started with Maling (1990), who distinguished Topicalisation from Stylistic Fronting on the grounds that the latter is subject to a series of constraints, notably (i) the necessity for a subject gap, (ii) the fact that the fronted element cannot cross any clausal boundary, and (iii) the Accessibility Hierarchy (18), in which only the highest element in the hierarchy can be fronted.

(18) negation & adverbs > adjective > verbal elements

According to (18), if the sentence is negated then Stylistic Fronting of an adjective or a verbal element is not available.⁸ Similarly, if the sentence is not negated but contains both an adjective and a past participle, then only the adjective can undergo Stylistic Fronting. Topicalisation, on the other hand, does not require any subject gap, can front an element from an embedded clause to the main clause and is not subject to the Accessibility Hierarchy.

The Icelandic construction is formally characterised by Holmberg (2000) who, assuming the same constraints as Maling (1990), proposes that Stylistic Fronting involves an EPP-triggered movement of an element in the specifier of IP. According to Holmberg (2000), once this operation has taken place the moved element effectively serves as an expletive – and supporting evidence for this proposal stems from the alternation between Stylistic Fronting and the presence of the

⁷ Mathieu (2006, 2009) and Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014) show that other elements may be fronted, but in what appears to be a different context. When an adverb or an adjective is fronted, the main verb can be any lexical verb and the fronted element is generated within the same clause. In the case of past participles, the finite verb is generally the auxiliary. Crucially, only with infinitive fronting do we observe fronting from an embedded clause (although we claim that it is monoclausal), with the requirement that the finite verb be a modal verb.

⁸ Our dataset does not allow us to test the Accessibility Hierarchy in Old French, yet see Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014) who show that the hierarchy was not present in French.

expletive *það*. Consider Stylistic Fronting of a past participle (19) and of an adjective (20):

- (19) Icelandic, Maling (1990: 74)
 Honum mætti standa á sama, hvað **sagt** væri um hann.
 him might stand on same what said was about him.
 ‘It might be all the same to him what was said about him.’
- (20) Icelandic (Maling 1990: 75)
 Hann raulaði þá vísuna sína nokkuð hærra en **venjulegt** var.
 he hummed then tune his somewhat louder than usual was
 ‘Then he hummed his tune somewhat louder than usual.’

Importantly for us, Holmberg (2000) observes that Stylistic Fronting of an infinitival embedded clause (21b), or of an infinitive (21c), yields ungrammatical results.

- (21) Icelandic, Holmberg (2000: 470-471)
 a. sá sem reyndi [að lyfta steininum]
 he who tried to lift.INF the-stone
 b. *sá sem **að lyfta steininum**_i reyndi *e*_i
 c. *sá sem **lyfta**_i reyndi [að *e*_i steininum]

According to him, the ungrammaticality of (21b) is due to the fact that VP and IP cannot undergo Stylistic Fronting, whilst the infinitive in (21c) cannot move across the subordinator *að*. Critically, Ingason and Wood (2017) have since showed that this formal description fails to account for the ungrammaticality of (22), where the causative selects a bare infinitive, yet Stylistic Fronting of the infinitive remains prohibited.

- (22) Icelandic, Ingason and Wood (2017: 531)
 *Þetta er maðurinn sem **brenna**_i lét *e*_i allar bækurnar.
 this is the.man who burn.INF made all the.books
 ‘This is the man who made (someone) burn all the books.’

Nevertheless, Ingason and Wood (2017) show that restructuring predicates can allow Stylistic Fronting of an infinitive (23), although this order is subject to varying degrees of acceptability. Crucially, the presence of the subordinator *að* yields ungrammatical results, which, they claim, indicates a monoclausal structure.

- (23) Icelandic, Ingason and Wood (2017: 536)
 ?sá sem **lyfta**_i reyndi (*að) *e*_i steininum gafst upp.
 he who lift.INF tried (*to) the.stone gave up
 ‘The one who tried to lift the stone gave up.’

In sum, in the literature starting with Maling (1990) an operation of fronting that is different from topicalization is identified and initially discussed in relation to Scandinavian languages. This operation has several properties (crucially a subject gap), including the tendency to disallow the movement of the infinitive, which is not allowed in Icelandic, apart from some restricted cases as in (23) above. We now turn

to Old Romance varieties (Catalan, Spanish and Italian) where infinitive fronting is attested.

3.2. Infinitive fronting in Old Romance

Before looking at Old French in more detail, let us briefly consider the crosslinguistic picture in Old Romance, where the fronting of infinitives has gained a considerable and sustained interest. Starting with Old Catalan, Fischer and Alexiadou (2001) analyse infinitive fronting as a case of Stylistic Fronting (see (24)). They claim that it is a clause-bounded head-movement operation, thus similar to Maling's (1990) treatment of Icelandic.

- (24) Old Catalan, Fischer and Alexiadou (2001: 119)
 qui **demanar** li = vengés
 who ask.INF CL.DAT.3SG=came.3SG
 'Who came to ask him'

Importantly, they note that the subject gap is not a requirement for the element to be fronted in Old Catalan. As a direct consequence, fronting in Catalan cannot be an operation to check the EPP (unlike what Holmberg 2000 proposes for Icelandic). Building on Fischer (2000), Fischer and Alexiadou (2001) argue that a functional projection, namely Σ P, is sandwiched between CP and IP and hosts the fronted element. They analyse Stylistic Fronting as head-movement to Σ , which bears an emphatic feature, thus they consider Stylistic Fronting to be an operation that contributes to the information structure of the sentence.

Fischer (2014) pursues further the assumption that Stylistic Fronting is an information structuring device and hence has a semantic/pragmatic impact, using data from Old Spanish. This assumption fits in with the general observation that Old Romance is discourse-oriented (Fischer 2012, Sitaridou 2012), and it thus considers Stylistic Fronting as an operation taking place in the narrow syntax (contra Valduvı́ 1992). According to Fischer (2014), fronting of the infinitive contributes to the information structure in (25).

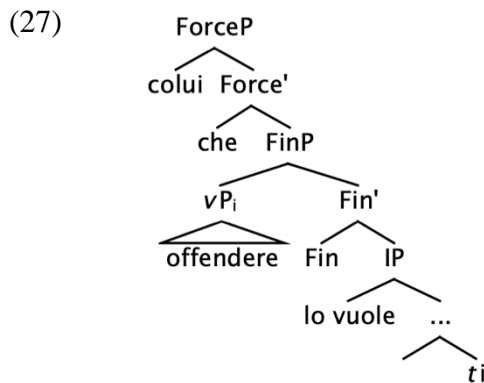
- (25) Old Spanish, Fischer (2014: 59)
 Con vuestro connsejo **bastir** quiero dos archas
 with your advice build.INF want.1SG two arches
 'With your advice I want to build two arches.'

Similarly to the analysis given to Old Catalan above, Fischer (2014) argues that Stylistic Fronting in Old Spanish is a feature-driven operation to a Foregrounding Phrase (FP) between CP and TP, and the fronted element sits in Spec,FP to check the features of the functional head. Importantly, she differentiates two types of Stylistic Fronting: fronting of XPs to Spec,FP, and fronting of heads to F, which she claims is possible in the absence of a subject gap.

Franco (2017) analyses the phenomenon in Old Italian and observes that Stylistic Fronting of infinitives is available in non-root clauses only (26).

- (26) Old Italian, Franco (2017: 128)
 a colui che **offendere** lo =vuole.
 to who that offend.INF CL.ACC.3SG=want.3SG
 ‘to the one who wants to offend him’

In a similar vein to Fischer and Alexiadou’s (2001) proposal for Old Catalan, Franco (2009, 2017) analyses Old Italian Stylistic Fronting as a semantic/pragmatic requirement, involving vP -movement of the embedded infinitive to a position directly above IP, within the CP-domain. Specifically, she argues that the fronted vP lands in the specifier of FinP to value Fin’s feature of SUBJECT OF PREDICATION. The derivation of (26) is explicitly given in (27), a monoclausal structure (c.f. Cinque 2004) with Stylistic Fronting as remnant vP -movement to Spec,FinP and further extraction of the subject *colui* ‘the one’ to Spec,ForceP.



In summary there is agreement in the literature on Old Romance that the fronting of infinitives is available and it involves Stylistic Fronting of an element (that may be either a head or a phrase) to a position above the IP-domain to check some kind of semantic/pragmatic feature.

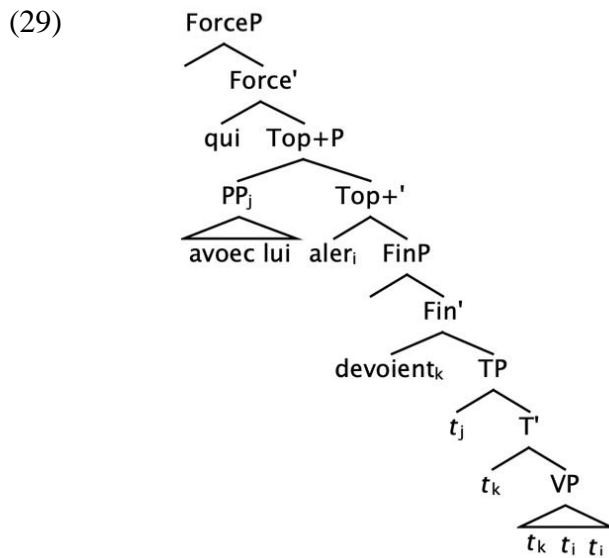
3.3. Infinitive fronting in Old French

From Cardinaletti and Roberts’ (2002) study onwards, there is a general (though not unanimous) assumption that Old French also shows Stylistic Fronting, since we find the same operation as the one discussed above for other Old Romance varieties. The first treatment of Stylistic Fronting in Old French is Mathieu’s (2006), who identifies that up to two elements may be fronted in the same embedded clause as long as they are not both XPs or both Xs – and importantly, the XP must precede the X:

- (28) Old French, Mathieu (2006: 234)
 (...) qui [**avoec lui**] **aler** devoient.
 who with him go.INF must.3PL
 ‘(...) who should have gone with him.’

According to him, infinitive fronting is head-movement. Structurally, Mathieu (2006, 2009) argues for a Top+P projection situated between ForceP and FinP that hosts the fronted elements, which must be understood as background topics (*contra* the analyses given to the other Old Romance languages mentioned above). A

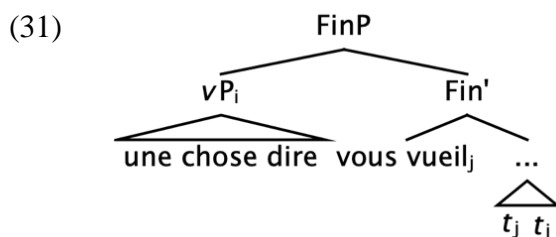
split EPP-feature distributes a feature on Top+ that serves as a trigger to Stylistic Fronting.



Recall that Holmberg (2000) argues that the fronted element moves into Spec,TP and satisfies the EPP; in Mathieu’s (2006, 2009) proposal, the subject gap enables the fronted phrase to move through Spec,TP on its way to Spec,Top+P. Crucially, he argues that, when a subject is present, heads may still undergo Stylistic Fronting to Top+ without passing through Spec,TP, whereas XPs cannot.

Salvesen (2011, 2013) argues for another analysis of the fronting of an XP and an X in Old French, namely remnant movement. In a similar vein as Franco (2009, 2017) for Old Italian, Salvesen (2011) argues that the remnant vP that undergoes Stylistic Fronting lands in Spec,FinP (31).

- (30) Old French, Salvesen (2011: 329)
[une chose] dire vous =vueil
 one thing say.INF CL.DAT.2PL=want.1SG
 ‘I will tell you one thing’



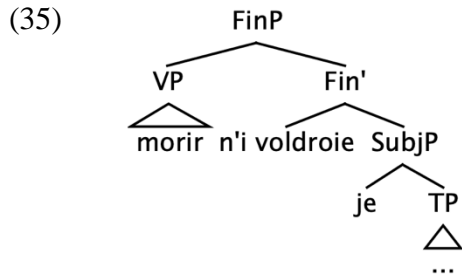
The example in (30) shows a further issue in that the fronted constituent word order is OV rather than the standard VO order (see Zaring 2010, 2011 and Wolfe 2021 on the OV-VO transition in Old French). Salvesen (2011) provides a solution in proposing that complements can be moved to the left edge of the vP in Old French, with scrambling (Martins 2011). Wolfe (2021) provides a similar account, although he assumes that the scrambled vP moves to the TP-layer.

The assumption that Old French shows genuine Stylistic Fronting comparable to the Icelandic phenomenon has been challenged by Labelle (2007) and Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014, 2017) on the grounds that the Accessibility Hierarchy is not present in their data, and that the subject gap condition does not hold (as we have shown in section 2). Furthermore, they show that whilst Icelandic Stylistic Fronting of a past participle leaves behind the complement, the infinitive and its complement are fronted together in Old French (c.f. the analyses using remnant movement above). Labelle and Hirschbühler (2017) argue that what Mathieu (2006) identifies as Stylistic Fronting essentially regroups three distinct constructions: V2 (32) (identified with a postverbal subject), and two types of Leftward Stylistic Displacement (LSD), namely LSD_{RIGHT} (33) (the fronted element is to the right of the subject) and LSD_{LEFT} (34) (the fronted element is to the left of the subject). They report that LSD_{RIGHT} is more frequent than LSD_{LEFT} in their corpus. In (33), we have indicated where the null subject is based on Labelle and Hirschbühler's (2017) description.⁹

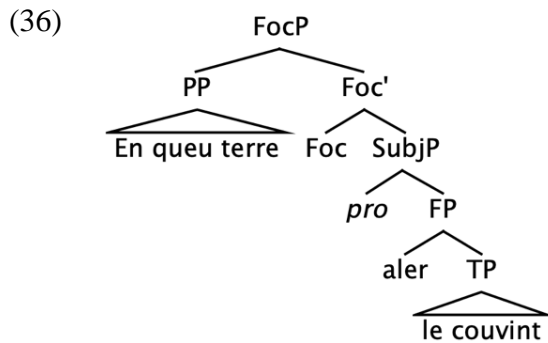
- (32) Old French, Labelle and Hirschbühler (2017: 162)
morir n'i voldroie je mie
 die.INF NEG=LOC=would.want.1SG I NEG
 'I would not want to die there.'
- (33) Old French, Labelle and Hirschbühler (2017: 163)
 [**En queu terre**] *pro* aler le =couvint
 in which land go.INF CL.DAT.3SG=was-needed.3SG
 'in which land he had to go.'
- (34) Old French, Labelle and Hirschbühler (2017: 166)
 [...] que [**point**] mener il n'=en =pooient
 that NEG bring.INF they NEG=PART=could.3PL
 'That they could not take them.'

They propose that cases of double fronting involve a combination of (i) short scrambling (cf. Martins 2011, Salvesen 2011, Wolfe 2021), which accounts for OV_{INF} constructions, and (ii) remnant movement of the VP. Their analysis goes as follows: in V2 clauses, the embedded VP is fronted to Spec,FinP and the finite verb targets Fin. We ignore negation to simplify the structure.

⁹ An anonymous reviewer asks whether the strength of the C-domain in Old French, as evidenced by V-to-C movement, interacts with infinitive fronting – in particular since both fronting and V2 are lost in Modern French. We do not see any connection between infinitive fronting and (the loss of) V2. This conclusion is mostly motivated by the fact that the finite verb is not always in second position in clauses with infinitive fronting (for instance when an overt subject is present, as we discuss in Section 2). Further, we analyse infinitive fronting as movement to a position below the CP-domain (see Section 5), unlike the traditional accounts of genuine V2.



For sentences showing LSD_{RIGHT} as in (33), they argue that a SubjP projection (c.f. Rizzi and Schlosky 2007) is present just above the TP to host the subject. They propose that the XP *en queu terre* is fronted to Spec,FocP, whilst the VP containing the infinitive *aler* occupies a functional projection sandwiched between SubjP (where *pro* is) and TP.



The last construction, namely LSD_{LEFT}, is simply analysed as VP-movement to Spec,FocP or Spec,TopP. Further, whilst Stylistic Fronting is reported to have an effect on the information structure, either foregrounding (Fischer 2014) or backgrounding (Mathieu 2006, 2009), the analysis put forward by Labelle and Hirschbühler (2017) argues that the fronted element in LSD constructions does not have any informational role.

3.4. Interim summary

We have shown that Stylistic Fronting is a phenomenon that is particularly well understood in the context of Icelandic, and it allows fronting of a wide range of elements when there is a subject gap. Rarely only, it involves infinitive fronting. Contrarily, the literature on Old Romance shows that infinitives can be fronted whilst the subject is overt. For this language family, most studies argue that the fronted infinitive targets a functional projection sandwiched between CP and TP (Fischer and Alexiadou 2001, Fischer 2014, Labelle and Hirschbühler 2017), or targets FinP (Mathieu 2006, 2009, Salvesen 2011, 2013, Franco 2017), whilst Wolfe (2021) argues that the fronted element lands in TP. The main differences between the two language families are reported in Table 1.

In the rest of the paper, we consider Old French data and argue that infinitive fronting involves movement to TP. The following section introduces evidence that the element that moves is a *vP*, even in cases where the infinitive moves alone. Importantly, the evidence points toward the fact that infinitive fronting is a Transparency Effect, which allows us to identify a restructuring environment.

Table 1. Scandinavian Stylistic Fronting versus Old Romance infinitive fronting

	Scandinavian Stylistic Fronting	Old Romance infinitive fronting
Requires a subject gap	✓	
Obeys the Accessibility Hierarchy	✓	
Is clause-bounded	✓	✓
Fronts heads	✓	✓
Fronts phrases		✓
Can front infinitives		✓
Can front infinitives with their complement		✓
The main verb is a modal verb		✓
Allows clitic climbing	N/A	✓
Allows embedded complementizers		

4. Is it restructuring?

We have seen earlier that there is a general agreement that infinitive fronting is a clause-bounded phenomenon (Fischer 2004, Mathieu 2006). A crucial empirical generalisation seems to have been left unnoticed in the literature on Old French, namely that infinitive fronting is necessarily found in clauses where the main verb is a modal or an aspectual verb. This observation has nonetheless been made for Icelandic (Ingason and Wood 2017: 537) and Old Italian (Franco 2017: e132). In our view, the clause-boundedness described in all the aforementioned studies is not different from the type of monoclausality typically associated with restructuring (Rizzi 1982, Cinque 2004, Wurmbrand 2004).¹⁰ Crucially the main verb in all the examples of infinitive fronting reported in the literature is always a restructuring verb. If our analysis is on the right track, then infinitive fronting can be analysed as a Transparency Effect. In the following sections we discuss the relationship between infinitive fronting and restructuring in Old and Middle French.

4.1. No fronting with subordinators

Romance infinitives may be introduced by subordinators deriving from Latin prepositions AD and DE (Ledgeway 2012), but fronting is not found in their presence.¹¹

¹⁰ A biclausal analysis of restructuring has also been proposed, see Kayne (1989, 1991, 1994), Martineau (1990), Roberts (1997), Solà (2002), Paradís (2018).

¹¹ Clitic climbing is generally not found in the presence of intervening complementizers either, yet De Kok (1985), Martineau (1990) and Olivier (2022a) all report instances from the history of French, particularly in Middle French. This observation holds for Italian (which allows climbing with *finire di* ‘finish’, for instance) and Catalan (see Paradís 2018). Importantly, these occurrences are not as common in Old French (a stage where complementizers in restructuring contexts are generally null), and the intervening

- (37) *Chanson de Roland* p.54, v.426
 Par grant saver cumencet a parler.
 by great knowledge started.3SG AD speak.INF
 ‘He started to speak with great knowledge.’

Standardly, these subordinators have been analysed as C-heads (Kayne 1991), or Fin-heads (Rizzi 1997). In restructuring clauses (cf. (37)), they have been analysed as I-heads analogous to English *to* (Martineau 1990, Kayne 1999), or light Functional heads occupying a position directly above *vP* (Olivier et al., 2023). In the latter environment, the subordinator introduces the infinitive, rather than an embedded clause. Crucially these elements are always taken to project a phrase outside the *v/VP*-domain.

Recall that Stylistic Fronting of an infinitive in the presence of the infinitival complementizer *að* yields ungrammatical results in Icelandic, which Ingason and Wood (2017) take as evidence for the monoclausality of Stylistic Fronting (see example (23) above). Within the context of Old Italian, Franco (2017) also reaches the conclusion that infinitive fronting only takes place in monoclausal restructuring clauses. Crucially, all the examples reported in the literature on infinitive fronting in Old French fit this picture (Cardinaletti and Roberts 2002, Mathieu 2006, Salvesen 2011, Labelle and Hirschbühler 2014, 2017, Olivier 2022a) – we also extend this observation to the literature on other Old Romance languages (Fischer and Alexiadou 2001, Fischer 2010, Franco 2017), and to example (23) for Icelandic. Our dataset does not show cases of fronting of [AD infinitive] to the left of the main verb. Where the environment is biclausal, this is expected [_{CP} AD ... [_{vP} infinitive]]. In monoclausal restructuring clauses however, we take the subordinator to be a light functional head (crucially, not a C-head) that introduces the infinitive [_{FP} AD [_{vP} infinitive]]. As pointed out in footnote 11, this is an environment where clitic climbing is found. The infinitive, however, cannot move to the left of the main verb, neither with nor without the subordinator (the infinitive cannot be fronted in a preposition-stranding type of configuration *[_{XP} infinitive_i ... [_{FP} AD [_{vP} e_i]]]). Whilst the motivations for the unavailability of [AD infinitive]-fronting are not clear, this observation enables us to identify that the fronted element cannot be bigger than *vP*.

4.2. Infinitive fronting as a Transparency Effect

The series of phenomena associated with restructuring are traditionally called Transparency Effects (Rizzi 1982, Cinque 2004). These are clitic climbing (38), auxiliary switch (39)¹² and long object movement (40),¹³ which have been discussed in Italian, but are all found in earlier French as well (Pearce 1990, Olivier 2022a):¹⁴

element does not behave like a genuine complementizer (see Martineau and Motapanyane 2000, Olivier et al., 2023).

¹² Auxiliary switch is a construction where the auxiliary of the finite verb is selected by the infinitive. This phenomenon is described as a traditional Transparency Effect involving a switch from *have* to *be*, and never the other way round (Rizzi 1982, Cinque 2004), although Parry (2022) provides evidence that a shift from *be* to *have* is possible in Piedmontese/Ligurian.

- (38) Olivier (2022a: 187)
 Bertrans ne =le =volt randre.
 Bertrans NEG=CL.DAT.3SG=want.3SG give-back.INF
 ‘Bertrans does not want to give it back.’
- (39) Middle French, *Commyn* p. 68
 Il ne =s’=estoit voulu bouger
 he NEG=REFL=was.3SG wanted move.INF
 ‘He had (‘was’) not wanted to move.’
- (40) Old French, Pearce (1990: 18)
 Car amors ne =se =puet celer
 for love.NOM NEG=REFL=can.3SG hide.INF
 ‘for love cannot be hidden’

To date, infinitive fronting in Old Romance has never been considered a Transparency Effect of the type shown above. Nevertheless, the distribution of infinitive fronting patterns together with that of clitic climbing as both occur with modal verbs: consider the examples below with *vouloir* ‘want’ (41), *pouvoir* ‘can’ (42), and *devoir* ‘should’ (43).

- (41) a. Old French, Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014: 209)
 qui Dex aïdier weult
 who God help.INF want.3SG
 ‘who God wants to help.’
 b. Old French, Olivier (2022a: 187)
 Bertrans ne =le = volt randre
 Bertran NEG=CL.DAT.3SG=want.3SG give-back.INF
 ‘Bertran does not want to give it back.’
- (42) a. Dupuis (1988: 54)
 et si ne sait que faire puisse.
 And thus NEG=know.3SG what do.INF could.3SG
 ‘and thus he does not know what he could do.’
 b. Olivier (2022a: 187)
 et ou il le =pouet faire
 and where he CL.ACC.3SG=could.3SG do.INF
 ‘and where he could do it.’

¹³ Long object movement is a phenomenon whereby the object of the embedded infinitive is promoted to subject position of the matrix verb.

¹⁴ These three effects are also found in Italian, whereas Spanish and Catalan do not show auxiliary switch due to the fact that in these languages compound tenses are systematically formed with *have*.

- (43) a. Middle French, Salvesen (2011: 331)
 ce que pas **faire** ne =devez.
 this that NEG do.INF NEG=should.2PL
 ‘that which you should not do.’
 b. Middle French, Olivier (2022a: 223)
 car il **la** =doibt payer
 for he CL.ACC.3SG=must.3SG pay.INF
 ‘for he must pay it.’

We argue that there is a clear interaction between the two phenomena, and we draw the following generalisation: sentences that allow infinitive fronting also allow clitic climbing. Thus, we propose that infinitive fronting is a Transparency Effect, in the sense that it is a construction that is found in restructuring clauses.

4.3. Infinitive fronting and clitic placement

When the fronted infinitive has a clitic object, the latter systematically cliticises on the finite verb as we see in typical clitic climbing environments (we come back and provide a formal analysis of clitic climbing in section 5 below): the object of the infinitive cliticises onto the modal/aspectual verb.

- (44) Old French, Mathieu (2006: 230)
 Li quex est ce, **savoir le** =vuel
 the which is this know.INF CL.ACC.3SG=want.1SG
 ‘Which one of you is it, I want to know [...]’
 (45) Old French, Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014: 206)
 en sarraguce sai ben qu’**aler m’**=estoet
 in Zaragoza know.1SG well that go.INF CL.1SG=is-necessary.3SG
 ‘I know well, that I must go to Zaragoza.’

As we have mentioned in section 2, cliticisation never occurs on the fronted infinitive. This is clear when the finite verb is negated:¹⁵

- (46) Early Old French, *Strasbourg Oaths*
 si jo **returnar non l’**=int =pois
 if I dissuade.INF NEG CL.ACC.3SG=PART=can.1SG
 ‘if I cannot dissuade him from it’
 (47) Old French, *Lois de Guillaume*, 14
 E si il **aver nes** =pot
 and if he have.INF NEG.3PL=can.3SG
 ‘And if he cannot have them’

¹⁵ See Olivier (2022b) for a discussion of enclisis on infinitives in Old French.

- (48) Old French, *Lois de Guillaume*, 39:1
 S'=il **aleier** ne =se =pot.
 if=he go.INF NEG=REFL=can.3SG
 'If he cannot go.'

Crucially, unlike what is found in contemporary Italian, Spanish, Catalan and European Portuguese, clitic climbing was not optional in pre-16th century French (Foulet 1919, Martineau 1990, Roberts 1997, Olivier 2022a). This naturally accounts for the absence of cliticisation on the infinitive in our data, as the clitic always climbs to the finite verb. Thus, clitic placement where infinitive fronting is found provides additional empirical evidence that these sentences must be treated as restructuring clauses.

5. Position of the fronted infinitive

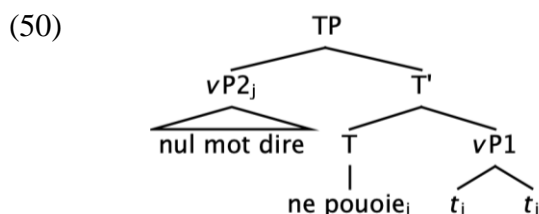
In this section we propose a formal analysis of infinitive fronting. So far, we have provided evidence that infinitive fronting involves optional leftward movement of a constituent no bigger than vP (section 4.1) in a monoclausal restructuring environment. Recall that Labelle and Hirschbühler (2017) argue against the availability of Stylistic Fronting in Old French and instead in the cases where the infinitive has moved they distinguish three constructions depending on subject placement (section 3.3): the construction we focus on shows the order that they dub LSDRIGHT, that is the fronted infinitive is between the subject and the finite verb (section 2).

One question that remains is whether the fronted element is undergoing XP or X movement. Following Salvesen (2011), we propose that infinitive fronting is vP movement. Within that vP , the object of the infinitive is either scrambled to the left of the infinitive or cliticises on the main verb – we discuss each case below. In this regard, the Old French data differ structurally to genuine Stylistic Fronting, which is a case of head-movement (Maling 1990, Fischer 2014).

In earlier French embedded clauses, the main verb targets T, and our data show that when an overt subject is present, it is higher than the fronted infinitive. We adopt Wolfe's (2021) view that the fronted vP does not leave TP, notably because we do not find semantic/pragmatic motivations for this operation.

We assume the following structure, adapted from Olivier (2022a) for the restructuring clause: when the object of the infinitive does not cliticise on the main verb, we observe a clear case of vP movement (50). We ignore NegP for simplicity, and we take the modal verb to be a v -head (Roberts 2010).

- (49) Salvesen (2011: 325)
nul mot dire ne =pouoie.
 none word say.INF NEG=could.1SG
 'I could not say a word.'



Whilst Mathieu (2006)'s analysis involves movement through Spec,TP, we remain closer to Holmberg's (2000) original proposal that the fronted vP moves into Spec,TP.

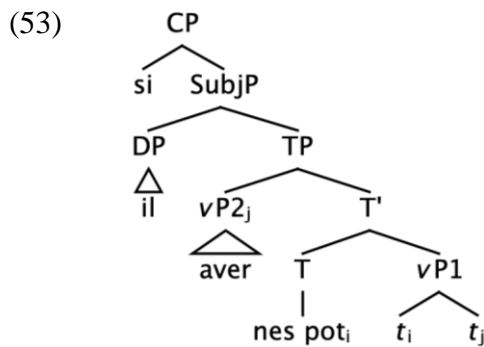
We have noted that when the object is fronted with the infinitive, the order systematically yields OV at a time when the syntax of French has fully transitioned to VO (Zaring 2010, 2011). Salvesen (2011) and Wolfe (2021) both argue that short scrambling takes place in such occurrences (see also Labelle and Hirschbühler 2017 for short scrambling in Old French):

- (51) a. [ne pouoie [vP dire nul mot]]
 b. [ne pouoie [vP nul mot [vP dire ~~nul mot~~]]

An alternative analysis is the one proposed by Balsemin et al. (2024) for Old Italian. Based on Cinque (2023), they argue in favour of OV being the merge order (with the object in Spec,VP), and they propose that OV_{INF} -fronting involves movement of the whole VP to a higher position (Spec,GroundP in their analysis) without resorting to scrambling.

Turning to sentences where an overt subject is present, we follow Labelle and Hirschbühler (2017) and posit that it is extracted to a position directly above TP (Rizzi and Schlonsky 2007):

- (52) *Lois de Guillaume*, 14
 E si il **aver** nes =pot
 and if he have.INF NEG.3PL=can.3SG
 'And if he cannot have them'



It is not easy to determine whether examples like (53) show XP or X movement. We argue that the only difference between (50) and (53) is that the object has left the vP in the latter to cliticise onto the modal, in which case it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish XP movement from X movement. Nonetheless, we have seen in section 3 that some authors argue that bare infinitives move as heads (Fischer and Alexiadou 2001, Mathieu 2006, 2009). In the eventuality that this is correct, we assume that bare infinitives would target a head in the TP domain. Holmberg and Platzack (1995) originally proposed (in the context of Scandinavian) that the fronted element adjoins to a functional head of TP in languages where T is rich. Under the assumption that a rich T also licences null-subjects (Roberts 2014), we note that some instances of *pro*-drop remain present in French until the 16th century (although its loss predates, see Balon and Larrivé 2016), which is also when

we find the last examples of infinitive fronting. It would be interesting to investigate the relationship between null subjects and bare infinitive fronting, but this is something we have to leave open for future research.

In (53), the clitic object of the infinitive has climbed to the main verb (and it forms a cluster with the negative clitic *ne*). We argue that the higher *v*-head possesses an unvalued ϕ -feature that triggers clitic climbing (as proposed in Roberts 2010). Within this proposal, clitics are analysed as ϕ -heads (Dechaine and Wiltschko 2002) and clitic climbing is an operation of AGREE with *v*. Although much of the literature argues that Stylistic Fronting in Old Romance contributes to the informational value of the clause (Mathieu 2006, 2009, Fischer 2014, Franco 2017), our analysis does not support this view. Transparency Effects are not reported to have any semantic impact: for instance, whether the clitic climbs or not in Spanish and European Portuguese has been shown to interact with the level of formality of the context (see Davies, 1995 for Spanish and de Andrade, 2010 for European Portuguese), but it does not affect meaning. Thus, if our analysis of infinitive fronting as a Transparency Effect is on the right track, we reach the same conclusion as Labelle and Hirschbühler (2017) that this fronting operation does not have any information structure value.¹⁶

Our analysis of infinitive fronting in Old French is similar to Franco's (2017) proposal on Stylistic Fronting in Old Italian, with the difference that the fronted *vP* does not reach the CP-layer. As we mentioned above, Transparency Effects have no pragmatic or semantic effect, therefore there is no motivation to involve an operation to the information structure.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we argued that infinitive fronting as found in Old French is a type of Transparency Effect, and it is due to restructuring. This raises a number of questions in terms of the diachrony of restructuring in French and beyond. We know that French underwent a number of changes in terms of clause union: Olivier (2022a)

¹⁶ We acknowledge that this is a highly controversial issue and one that is hard to prove with data when dealing with a dead language. Data mining becomes challenging in such cases, and the legal nature of the texts we investigate adds an additional layer of complexity: diagnosing discourse effects is more straightforward in dialogues compared to legal texts. Crucially our hypothesis centres around the claim that infinitive fronting is a transparency effect. The latter do not stem from discourse motivations, therefore if our analysis is on the right track, we should not expect the construction to be discourse motivated. It is worth noting that the discourse motivation of this type of fronting remains a subject of ongoing debate in the literature: while it is clear that some authors argue that this type of fronting is discourse motivated (e.g. Mathieu 2006, 2009, Fischer 2014, Franco 2017), this analysis extends beyond infinitive fronting to various elements (fronting of negation, adverbs, etc.), a perspective that we do not explore. Consequently, given that these authors do not consider infinitive fronting differently from adverb fronting, their conclusions may differ from ours. Interestingly, Labelle and Hirschbühler (2014, 2017) also restrict their analysis of fronting to non-finite verbs and also reach the conclusion that this operation does not have an informational value. In summary we do not exclude the possibility that fronting of non-verbal elements are discourse-motivated and we cannot provide independent data to support our claim.

shows that infinitive fronting was lost some time in the 16th century, that clitic climbing was lost later in the late 18th century, whilst long object movement is the one Transparency Effect that has persisted in Modern French. If our analysis is on the right track and infinitive fronting is indeed another evidence for restructuring in Old and Middle French, then these divergent diachronic paths raise an important question, namely, why did infinitive fronting get lost before clitic climbing, given that, by analysis, they are both connected to the restructuring nature of French clauses with modals and aspectuals? While we cannot provide a full answer to this, we can offer some initial thoughts. Infinitive fronting appears to be an instance of phrasal movement, unlike clitic climbing which is an instance of head movement. Perhaps, phrasal movement as a “heavier” kind of movement involving more syntactic material is lost first, while “lighter” movement of heads can persist longer. This reasoning would in turn explain why long participial agreement, as an instance of Agree and not Move, persists even longer and is indeed still present in Modern French. Another possibility is that infinitive fronting was lost because the position that it targeted became unavailable to *v*P movement, but we would need further investigation to fully support this hypothesis. In general, the paper shows that studying restructuring should be done by focusing on more phenomena than clitic climbing, because it is only through the holistic investigation of all these different cases of transparency that we can really understand what restructuring is and how it manifests crosslinguistically.

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