OLD FRENCH QUIRKIES

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Quirky subjects are subjects surfacing with non-nominative case. They have long been observed in Icelandic (Andrews 1976, Zaenen, Maling & Thráinsson. 1985 and Sigurðsson 1989) and have also been claimed to exist in Old English (Lightfoot 1979, Fischer & Van der Leek 1983, Allen 1986, Kemenade 1997), as well as in older stages of Mainland Scandinavian languages (Barðhal 1997). As for Romance languages, Spanish is one language that has recently been the centre of much attention (Masullo 1993, Fernández-Soriano 1999, Rivero 2004).

The aim of this paper is to show that Old French makes great use of quirky subjects. Dubbed 'impersonal constructions' in the traditional literature, such structures typically involve an empty subject position that a dative, accusative or genitive XP comes to fill. This, I show, very much resembles the operation called Stylistic Fronting (SF, henceforth) which is clearly available not only in Icelandic (Holmberg 2000), but also in Old French (Mathieu, to appear). More generally, a connection for Old French is made between the availability of quirky subjects, SF *and* V3 structures (see Fischer 2004 for the same generalization made with respect to Scandinavian languages, old and new).

The OF example in (1) illustrates a prepositional (oblique) phrase XP appearing in the subject position while (2) involves a dative-marked XP. The example in (3) is the equivalent of (2), but with a clitic subject. This pattern has been traditionally treated as thematically based, i.e. the dative is an inherent case intrinsically linked to the role of Experiencer. The weak dative pronoun is often replaced by a strong ('emphatic') pronoun of the same case as illustrated in (4). Quirky subjects can also surface in the accusative form. However, the dative form comes to replace the accusative very often not only across texts, but also in some cases within the same texts as (5) and (6) illustrate (both examples are from *Le Chevalier à la Charrette*). This process is well-known from Icelandic and has been referred to as Dative Sickness (Eythórsson 2000) for that language. Finally, genitives in subject position are not common in OF, but are attested in Icelandic. One typical feature of quirky subjects is that, unlike other (nominative) subjects, they do not agree with the verb, a feature which is well-known for Icelandic. In (7) the verb takes the 3rd person singular while the subject is 3rd person plural. In (8) the verb also appears with 3rd person singular whereas the subject is 1st person singular.

First, I show that quirky subjects in Old French have all the properties of subjects (the case of Icelandic, Andrews 1976, Zaenen Maling & Thráinsson. 1985, Sigurðsson 1989), and not of so-called I-nominals (the case of German, Moore & Perlmutter 2000). The standard tests in the literature are: (i) reflexivisation; (ii) subject-verb inversion (in V1 and V2 environments); (iii) raising; (iv) control (i.e. being a controllee); (v) conjunction reduction; (vi) subject position in ECM infinitives. Although the search was not easy, I was able to find conclusive examples for (i)-(v), except for the remaining property. Then, I concentrate on the agreement patterns found in quirky subject constructions and on the way nominative case is assigned. It is shown that in OF it is Tense rather than agreement that is responsible for the licensing of nominative case (there is thus no need to claim that agreement has nevertheless taken place in the syntax, as has been popular of late). Next, I show that the operation SF is very productive in OF. Then, I make a connection between StylFronted elements and oblique subject XPs. Both types of elements target a special Topic position above TP dubbed TopP+. I argue that when a dative or accusative pronominal form is used rather than a full XP, the pronominal, which at first sits in Spec-TP, affixes to its host (via a process of lowering between Spell-Out and PF as in the framework of DM, Halle & Marantz 1993; Embick & Noyer 2001). Thus, the canonical subject position (Spec-TP) is free for an SFronted XP to proceed through that position to then raise further to Spec-Top+.

(1)   Et   bien   set   qu'a   sa   mere plest
         and   well know.3SG   that-to his   mother please.3SG
         Que   rien   a   feire ne   li   lest
         that   nothing   to   do.INF not him.DAT   remain.3SG

(1) Et bien set qu'a sa mere plest
and well know.3SG that-to his mother please.3SG
Que rien a feire ne li lest
that nothing to do.INF not him.DAT remain.3SG
'And she knows well that it is her mother's will that she shall leave nothing undone for him.' (*Le Chevalier au Lion* 5437-5438)

(2) Et se Deu plaist, outre s'en passera
and if God-DAT please.3SG others self-of.it go.FUT.3SG
'If such is the will of God, he will force the passage.'
(*Aliscans*, 1099, in Buridant, 322)

(3) Si li plest, el l'amera
if him.DAT please.3SG she him.ACC-love.FUT.3SG.
'If it pleases him, she will love him.' (*Lais*, Milun 28)

(4) Si lui plaist
if him.DAT please.3SG
'If it pleases him.'
(*La Chanson de Roland* 519, *Le Chevalier à la Charrette* 2585)

(5) Car desfandre le covenoit,
thus defend.INF him.ACC necessitate.PAST.3SG
'thus it was necessary for him to defend (himself).'
(*Le Chevalier à la Charrette* 1182)

(6) Qu'a remenoir li covenoit
that-to remain.INF him.DAT necessitate.PAST.3SG
'that he had to stay.' (*Le Chevalier à la Charrette* 3760)

(7) Tous les estuet morir
all them.ACC.3PL necessitate.3SG die.INF
'It was necessary for all of them to die.' (*Joseph* 630, in Pearce 1990:182)

(8) Kar mei meïsme estoet avant aler
Since me.DAT.1SG myself.1SG necessitate.3SG ahead go.INF
'Since I myself alone should go ahead.' (*La Chanson de Roland* 2858)

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