Change of Object Expression in the History of French

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This study is a significantly revised version of my doctoral dissertation. While the core data and central conclusions remain, the contribution is enriched through the integration of new research and some modifications to the approach. Parts of this study have appeared elsewhere; namely in *Diachronica* (cf. Troberg 2011b) and in the *Selected Papers from the 40th Linguistics Symposium on Romance Languages* (cf. Troberg 2011a). I gratefully acknowledge the love and support of my family, who allowed me the time to see this project through.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A small change in a language can sometimes reveal an abstract change in the grammar that has far-reaching effects, exposing dependencies and relationships among structures that are not obvious from a synchronic point of view. This study is about such a change. In establishing the cause of change affecting the argument realisation of a small class of verbs in French (what I call "verbs of helping and hindering"), a number of other related syntactic changes in French are predicted and confirmed. I propose that the cluster of changes, which involve the object of verbs of helping and hindering and a number of resultative secondary predication constructions, is a result of an abstract change in the prepositional system; before the 15th century, simple prepositional elements encoded the sense of "path" or "transition", while they do not after this period.

The principle aim of this study is to provide a full account of a small but often-noted change in the history of French: the shift in the expression of certain objects from "dative", i.e., as an indirect object with the preposition *à*, to "accusative", i.e., as a direct object with no preposition. In Medieval French, helping and hindering verbs occur with dative indirect objects (henceforth IO) for which *lui*, *leur*, and *y* are the corresponding clitic pronouns. Beginning in the 16th century, these IOs were seamlessly and systematically replaced by an analogous direct object (henceforth DO) whose corresponding clitic pronouns are *le*, *la*, *l'*, and *les*.

The change is exemplified below by the verb *aider* "to help". In Old and Middle French, *aider* was most often followed by an indirect object; (1a) shows the full nominal form of the IO, and (1b) and (1c) illustrate the object as a pronoun. Broadly speaking, animate referents are associated with the pronouns *lui* and *leur* and inanimates with the pronoun *y*. Although less frequent, direct objects were also used with *aider* in Medieval French, shown in (1d) and (1e). Furthermore, it was not uncommon for a single author to alternate between a direct and an indirect object within the same text, illustrated by the examples in (1a) and (1d) taken from Villehardouin's early 13th century chronicle of the Fourth Crusade.

(1) a. *Et Nostre Sires demonstra ben ke il voloit aider* ***à nostre gent.***
"And our lord indeed showed that he was willing to help our people."
(Villehardouin, *De la conqueste de Constantinople*, c.1207, §566, in Nyrop 1930, 186)

b. *les Romains ne* ***leur*** *aideroient point en leurs afferes*
"the Romans didn't help them at all in their engagements"
(Simon de Phares, *Recueil des ... astrologues*, c.1494-1498, f° 93 v°, in DMF2009)

c. *la chrestienté enseigne que la foy et le salut est par l'ouye, et que la veuë y nuict plus qu' elle n'****y*** *ayde.*
"Christianity teaches that faith and salvation are attained through the ability to hear, and that sight is more detrimental than it is helpful to these ends."
(Charron, *Sagesse, Trois Livres,* 1601, p.89, in Frantext)

d. *Si les envoia en la terre de Romenie por aidier* ***cels d'Andrenople.***
"He sent them into Byzantium to help the people of Adrianopolis."
(Villehardouin, *De la conqueste de Constantinople*, c.1207, §404, in Ménard 1976, 124)

e. *Or puet dire a son Dieu que il* ***le*** *viengne aidier*
"He is able to ask his God to come and help him"
(Jehan de Saint-Quentin, 14th c., 128, in Herslund 1980, 52)

In contrast, *aider* is followed by a direct object in Modern Standard French, shown in (2a) and (2b). Note however, that some action nouns can still occur as an IO (2c).[1]

(2) a. *Mon fils a aidé* ***Jean/ l****'a aidé dans ses travaux.*
"My son helped Jean/him with his work."

b. *si cet ordre,* […] *a un but, c'est d'aider* ***le libre progrès***
"if this order, […] has a goal, it is to facilitate free progress"
(J. Michelet, *Le Peuple,* 1846, p.359, in TLFi)

c. *Ces mesures pourront aider* ***au rétablissement de l'économie***.
"These measures will help towards the recovery of the economy."
(*Le Petit Robert*)

Importantly, the change in object expression is not correlated with a change in the meaning of the verbs or with any obvious change in the selectional restrictions imposed on the internal argument, illustrated in Chapter Two. All of the verbs listed in (3) are identified as having undergone this systematic change of valence and I argue in Chapter Three that they form a natural class.[2] The semantic characterisation that relates these verbs does not, unfortunately, lend itself well to a short name for the class and so for simplicity, I refer to them as "verbs of helping and hindering" since a number express this general meaning.

(3)

aider	"to help"
applaudir	"to applaud"
assister	"to assist"
commander	"to command, have authority"
congratuler	"to congratulate"
contrarier	"to annoy, thwart"
contredire	"to contradict, refute"
dominer	"to rule, command, dominate"
empêcher	"to trouble, hinder"
ennuyer	"to annoy, bore, put out"
épargner	"to spare, save"
favoriser	"to show favour, support"
insulter	"insult"
offenser	"to offend"
persuader	"to persuade"
prier	"to pray, beg, beseech"
secourir	"to aid, assist"
servir	"to serve"
supplier	"to beseech"

A number of studies have remarked on this change, but it has almost always been treated as a random, low-level lexical change driven by analogy of one kind or another. One of the central results of this study is that this view is incorrect; the change of valence is restricted to a natural class of some twenty verbs in the history of French, during the same

period and following the same time course. Such facts strongly suggest an analysis whereby an abstract change in the grammar underlies the shift in the expression of the internal argument. Specifically, I argue that a change in the meaning of the preposition *à* triggers the valency change in these verbs and that the change in *à* is part of a broader change affecting the possible meanings of a number of simple prepositions.

With novel data, I demonstrate that many simple prepositions in Old and Middle French could encode both a directional and a locative meaning. The preposition *à* for example, could mean both "at" and "to" in Medieval French, and it was the directional "to" meaning that licensed the IO of the verbs in (3). When *à* loses this directional meaning in the latter half of the 15th century, a DO replaces the IO of verbs of helping and hindering.

Following recent theories of the extended functional projection of prepositional elements, such as that proposed in Svenonius (2010), this meaning change is analyzed as structural, and as a result, it affects an entire class of prepositions and has consequences extending well beyond the valency change. My claim is that Medieval French speakers acquire a phonologically null preposition that lexicalises the functional head Path adding a layer of meaning to simple locative prepositions like *à* "at" and allowing them to express a sense of directionality or transition. It is for this reason that *à* "at" could also mean "to" in Medieval French, that *sur* "on" could also mean "onto", that *dans* "in" could also mean "into", and so on. From a typological point of view, the presence of this extra layer of meaning available to prepositional elements often correlates with various types of resultative secondary predicates, such as the goal of motion construction, the adjectival resultative construction, and directional particles and affixes. The prediction is thus that such structures are likely present in Medieval French. Directional particles and prefixes are well-known features of the earlier stages of French, but I show with novel data that both goal of motion constructions and adjectival resultative constructions are also productive in the language. Furthermore, there is a strong correlation in the loss of these syntactic possibilities. When the DO begins to replace the IO of helping and hindering verbs at the beginning of the 15th century, we also see the wholesale loss of the resultative secondary predicates.

While the analysis brings to light a change in the grammar of French with broader consequences, the conclusions drawn from the valency change itself are revealing on their own. They tell us that changes in the expression of grammatical functions do not have to be accompanied by changes in meaning, which is to say that grammatical functions are not

necessarily endowed with special meaning. A corollary of this is that internal arguments realised as *à*-phrases in French do not all hold the same syntactic relation with respect to other participants in the proposition. Such implications challenge work that argues for a tight correlation between form, meaning, and syntactic relations. Further, establishing this in the diachronic domain raises interesting questions for diachronic syntax, which has traditionally concerned itself relatively little with argument structure, tending to focus instead on word-order change, grammaticalisation, and category changes. Only recently has there been a serious focus on argument structure in diachrony; see for example Allen (1995), McFadden (2002), and Barðdal and Chelliah (2009).

In sum, the present study aims to understand some of the mechanisms involved in a distributional change within the system of Medieval French, where part of the functional domain of one case (expressed by the indirect object) is taken over by another (expressed by the direct object). Recent studies that address changes in case marking through time have obvious relevance for the present study, but unlike those that treat morphological case marking, where changes in the system are linked to phonological erosion, word order changes, polysemy, and frequency effects, the present study illustrates a syntactic change brought about by a discrete semantic change in the prepositional system. Interestingly, although the meaning change affecting *à* has structural underpinnings, the way it changes bears some resemblance to morphological change; diffusion of the change is sensitive to the frequency of the verb and to the form of the object, whether it occurs as a clitic pronoun or a full nominal. Finally, the results of the study are exciting in view of the fact that many details of the valency change, which escape previous analyses, can now be accounted for.

1.1 Method and Organisation of the Study

This study, which seeks to understand a rather modest change in the history of French, was undertaken on the premise that however small the change may be, if it is systematic, it should reveal an important underlying difference between two stages of French, how this difference arises, and how it spreads. Three main questions therefore guide the description and explanation of the valency change: *what* changed, *how* did it change, and *why* did it change *when* it did?

In Chapter Two, I address *what* changed. In order to answer this question, I examine some 50 bivalent verbs that present a change in their indirect object. From these, a class of 19 verbs emerges, all of which

underwent an identical change involving no shift in meaning as the IO is replaced by a DO. Some of the verbs that do not conform to this change are taken up in later chapters.

Chapter Three continues to define exactly *what* changed, this time by exploring what sets the 19 helping and hindering verbs and their object apart from other verbs that occur with an IO in French. The analysis identifies three properties, which, in combination, distinguish our verbs of helping and hindering from all others.

The first property is syntactic; verbs of helping and hindering denote dynamic activities, and the IO is replaced by a DO when these verbs occur with only one object. This syntactic property sets helping and hindering verbs apart from trivalent verbs that take IOs such as *donner* "to give", and all non-agentive verbs that take IOs like the unaccusative achievements (e.g. *arriver* "to arrive") and the statives (e.g. *plaire* "to please/appeal").

The second property is lexical; verbs of helping and hindering do not imply directed action.[3] I take this notion up in detail since it describes the crucial meaning difference that distinguishes bivalent activity verbs like *parler* "to talk", *penser* "to think", and *résister* "to resist", which imply directed action, from verbs such as *aider* "to help", *commander* "to command/have authority over" and *empêcher* "to hinder", which do not. The analysis draws on Jackendoff's (1990) description of directed action along with Talmy's (2000) related notion of force dynamics.

The third property concerns the denotation of the object. Among the bivalent activity verbs that do not imply directed action, only those whose object can be a first order object in the sense of Lyons (1977) undergo the valency change. This is the property that allows us to distinguish in a principled way between such similar verbs as *aider* "to help", which is targeted by the change, and *remédier* "to remedy", which is not. By effectively defining the helping and hindering verbs from others that take an IO, the conditioning environment of the change is identified.

Chapter Four seeks to answer *how* the change occurs by tracking the time course of the replacement of the IO by a DO in eight of the most commonly occurring verbs of helping and hindering. Drawing on electronic databases such as Frantext and the DMF2009, I show that the valency change affects all of the verbs at approximately the same time period: during the 16th century and slightly into the 17th. The shift of valence is punctual, yet it shows some sensitivity to frequency effects and pronominal forms, supporting the hypothesis of a unified analysis involving a change in the abstract grammars of speakers. Importantly, the quantitative study provides solid evidence against previous analyses suggesting the change consists of random, low-level lexical changes.

Equipped with a definition of the conditioning environment of the change and quantitative evidence for a cause involving an underlying change in the abstract grammar, Chapter Five proposes *why* the change happened *when* it did. Following Svenonius's (2010) extended projection of the prepositional phrase, I argue that first order IOs occurring with helping and hindering verbs were licensed in Medieval French by a functional head Path, which adds a layer of meaning to the preposition *à*, giving it the meaning of "to". From the 16th century onward, this functional head is no longer available to the derivation of a prepositional phrase and as a result, *à* can only ever express the locative meaning of "at". Since locative *à* cannot semantically license first order IOs, those that do not receive semantic licensing via other means are replaced by an alternative form of the object. In the case of verbs of helping and hindering, the replacement is a DO.

In order to explain the *why* of the change, I adopt a theoretical framework developed for the study of syntactic change within a generative grammar perspective, specifically Lightfoot's (1999, 2006) "cue-based" approach. This theoretical approach is deductive in nature, allowing us to formulate hypotheses couched within the general theory and then to test them against more data. I make predictions about what children needed to hear in the ambient linguistic environment in order to acquire a morpheme that instantiates Path, and I predict other syntactic structures that should have also been permitted and consequently affected by the loss of such a morpheme in the grammar. My predictions are born out as there is a strong correlation between the loss of productive directional/aspectual verb prefixes (the "cue" or "trigger" of the change), verb particle constructions, goal-of-motion constructions, and complex adjectival resultative constructions in the history of French. The valency change is thus linked in a principled way to various other dramatic structural changes affecting the expression of verbs and their arguments in 15th and 16th century French.

1.2 Theoretical Assumptions: Language Change

1.2.1 Grammatical change and language change

A fundamental distinction in a generative grammar approach to language change is the difference between one's biological grammar and language. The former is understood to be the abstract system that develops in an individual according to genetic principles and to the linguistic environment to which he or she is exposed as a child. It characterises an

individual's linguistic knowledge and, in conjunction with other cognitive functions, generates grammatical linguistic forms in the mature speaker. Language, on the other hand, is something external to individuals, a social object consisting of norms and conventions. A language like French, English, or Swahili is, in a very general sense, the non biological product of a community of speakers. The generative grammar enterprise takes an individual's internal grammar as its object of study, and so as it is for synchronic linguistics, this approach to diachronic linguistics also takes the grammar to be its proper object of study.[4]

Within a research program concerned with the grammar of individual speakers, "change" can only mean the "set of differences" between the grammar characterised by mature speakers and that of a newly acquired grammar (Hale 1998, 3). *Grammatical change* therefore happens at the time of acquisition and has no temporal value. Following Lightfoot (1979, 1991, 1999, 2006), grammatical change is based on two fundamental assumptions; first, each child possesses an inherent language faculty comprised of the computational principles applicable to any language (Universal Grammar, or UG). This linguistic knowledge comes for free; it is not acquired in the course of a child's development. Second, particular grammars develop in children based on what they hear (the Primary Linguistic Data, or PLD) in conjunction with the innate computational system. Accordingly, children have no direct access to the grammar of any other individual and certainly not to an idealised grammar of preceding generations. Rather, they develop their own grammars independently and abductively. The grammar of a speaker of one generation (Grammar_1) produces the PLD for a speaker of the next and is thus discontinuous from the new grammar (Grammar_2). Following Andersen (1973, 767), the transmission of language from one generation to the next is schematised in the following way:

(4) $\text{Grammar}_1 \rightarrow \text{Primary data}_1$

$\text{Grammar}_2 \rightarrow \text{Primary data}_2$

Since no two children are exposed to the exact same PLD, grammars vary slightly from one speaker to another in a linguistic community just as a child's grammar differs from that of an adult. Any number of prosodic, phonetic, cultural or pragmatic factors, including innovation, can affect the utterances produced by adults and thus the PLD to which child learners are

exposed. Linguistic environments are rarely ever stable and input data for one generation will not be the same as that for the next. In this sense, grammatical change is inevitable. Grammatical change becomes interesting when the PLD shifts in some critical way so that learners exposed to the new PLD form grammars which end up generating new structures not produced by the grammars of preceding generations, or conversely, they no longer generate structures produced by the grammars of preceding generations. What begins as the reanalysis of one grammatical hypothesis for another in a small number of speakers ends up transferring to subsequent generations of speakers. This is what one perceives as *language change.* Language change is the diffusion of a grammatical change, and in contrast to grammatical change, it has temporal properties.

Grammatical change is therefore not only contingent on particular shifts in the linguistic environment, but also on the way in which children acquire linguistic knowledge. This latter point, the way in which PLD determines an abstract grammatical system, involves the identification of the cue(s), or trigger(s) for a particular structural phenomenon along with the role of frequency in acquisition. What constitutes a cue and how many times a child must hear it before the underlying structure associated with it is acquired are ongoing questions in the field. The historical linguist can suggest the most likely cue associated with a specific set of structures based on careful examinations of the data and correlations with other changes. This may then be compared to relevant studies in first language acquisition.

The way in which syntactic change is conceived within the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001) is very specific, and follows from the basic assumption that the computational system is invariant and that differences among grammars is limited to the lexical inventory and the general properties of the lexical items within it, explicitly stated in Chomsky (1995, 169-170).

> The standard idealized model of language acquisition takes the initial state S_0 to be a function mapping experience (primary linguistic data, PLD) to a language. UG is concerned with the invariant principles of S_0 and the range of permissible variation. Variation must be determined by what is "visible" to the child acquiring language, that is, by the PLD. It is not surprising, then, to find a degree of variation in the PF component, and in aspects of the lexicon: Saussurean arbitrariness (association of concepts with phonological matrices), properties of grammatical formatives (inflection, etc.), and readily detectable properties that hold of lexical items generally (e.g., the head parameter). Variation in the overt syntax or LF component

> would be more problematic, since evidence could only be quite indirect. A narrow conjecture is that there is no such variation: beyond PF options and lexical arbitrariness (which I henceforth ignore), variation is limited to nonsubstantive parts of the lexicon and general properties of lexical items. If so, there is only one computational system and one lexicon, apart from this limited kind of variety. Let us tentatively adopt that assumption – extreme, perhaps, but it seems not implausible – as another element of the Minimalist Program.

Longobardi (2001, 277-8) interprets these basic Minimalist notions, specifying that "*syntax*, by itself, is diachronically completely inert." What this means is that syntactic change is construed as a change in some property of a particular lexical or functional item which has structural repercussions on the set of possible utterances. The locus of so-called syntactic change is thus the abstract features of individual lexical items, the elements that ultimately dictate syntactic realisation. In Longobardi's words:

> […] syntactic change should not arise, unless it can be shown to be *caused* – that is, to be a well-motivated consequence of other types of change (phonological changes and semantic changes, including the appearance/disappearance of whole lexical items) or, recursively, of other syntactic changes. (Longobardi 2001, 278)

Lightfoot sums up grammatical change as internal, local and abstract. By internal it is meant that it occurs in the biological grammar of individuals, distinct from language as a social construct. By local, he means that principles of history or principles of UG are not explanatory forces of language change. Language changes because cues in PLD change. By abstract, it is meant that the locus of change is found in the abstract grammatical system itself—in lexical features. Grammatical change describes *what* changed; this is the primary focus of my analysis. On the other hand, shifts in the linguistic environment which affect the PLD for subsequent generations are external, which is to say that they occur in language, the social phenomenon. They tell us about *why* a grammatical change arises and why it happens *when* it does.

This Minimalist, cue-based approach to language variation and change guides my examination of valency change. By identifying the property that changed in the abstract grammatical system of French speakers, I can then relate it to the valency change in a well defined group of bivalent verbs. Finally, by linking the abstract change to a specific shift in the linguistic experience of a particular generation of speakers, we are able to arrive at

an explanation of why the change occurred, and why it did at a particular period in time and no other.

1.2.2 Methodological issues in historical linguistics

A central methodological problem to most historical study, in linguistics as in other domains, resides in the limited amount of available data. For linguistics in particular, experiments cannot be undertaken in order to verify hypotheses or to broaden the range of data. Information obtained by eliciting acceptability judgements from informants, a method central to synchronic grammatical analysis within a generative framework, is also unavailable.

The difficulties that diachronic syntax faces are therefore significant, but not impossible to overcome if one makes two reasonable assumptions, as outlined in Kroch (1989, 200). The first assumption, the uniformitarian principle, is not limited to historical linguistics, and was originally advanced in order to account for the geological evolution of the Earth. It allows for the analysis of past phenomena by using knowledge of the present. For the historical linguist, it means that the general principles that hold for living languages should equally hold for languages that are no longer spoken. Principles believed to be universal such as Merge, Binary Branching, and the Single Complement Hypothesis thus hold equally for Modern French as they do for Old French, Latin, and Proto-Indo-European.

The second assumption pertains to what constitutes an unacceptable utterance in an obsolete language. For simple and relatively common constructions, if a certain type of construction does not appear in a large corpus, it is reasonable to assume that it is not grammatical in the language of that corpus. This last assumption can be problematic in so far as absences in a corpus depend on a great number of things, such as the well-known differences between written and oral grammars, corpora limited to specific contexts, etc. However, since the present study examines common verb-complement constructions over a large and varied corpus, this assumption does not weaken the analysis.

Faced with the natural limitations imposed on historical linguistics, it seems reasonable to ask what real interest it holds in a theory of grammar when synchronic studies of living languages and studies in acquisition already provide extremely rich data to work with. Yet, given that the very nature of language acquisition entails grammatical change, it is important to identify what changes and why. Otherwise, structural change can be attributed to any number of external changes or predetermined principles

that are entirely removed from the abstract notion of one's grammar, the mechanism that generates utterances to begin with (see Lightfoot 1999, Ch.2, for an in-depth discussion of this topic). In Hale's words, "explanatory adequacy requires us to account for *all* acquisition—this includes the acquisition of grammars that diverge from their sources (i.e., change) as well as that of fully convergent grammars" (Hale 1998, 1). Kroch (1989, 200) reminds us that historical linguistics presents a type of information that is necessarily absent from synchronic data and thus offers a unique contribution to a general theory of grammar.

> [...] perturbing a complex system and observing its subsequent evolution is often an excellent way of inferring internal structure. In addition, since the features of any language at a given point in time are the result of a complex interweaving of general principles of language and particular historical developments, knowledge of the historical process by which a language has reached a given state may be important to the proper assignment of responsibility to historical and general factors and so to the proper formulation of linguistic theory.

1.3 Previous Studies

Changes in argument expression in French, particularly the replacement of the dative object of verbs like *aider* by an accusative, have inspired a number of accounts of the change involving a variety of approaches, from rule-based analogical change to functional reanalysis. They suffer however, either for lack of resources or for the implementation of an approach that lacks explanatory potential.[5] For example, none of the proposals in the literature can account for the group of verbs that underwent the valency change to the exclusion of all other verbs that take an IO in Medieval French, and none are able to offer principled reasons for *why* the change happened *when* it did.

1.3.1. Analogy

Variation and change in the expression of verbal arguments easily lend themselves to explanations based on the force of analogy. Within a Neo-grammarian framework, analogy is considered to underlie most grammatical change and in this sense it is seen as a unifying cause. Yet the cause is not unified in a local sense; in so far as valency changes are concerned, each verb or small group of verbs would be susceptible to a different analogical force, making the local causes of change different. For example, according to Brunot and Bruneau, all changes of valence brought

about by analogy are based on similarity of meaning, summed up in their *Précis de grammaire historique* (1969, §272):

> Les changements de construction, amenés par l'analogie, sont extrêmement fréquents [...]. Le mécanisme est le suivant: par analogie, 'il se rappelle *de quelque chose*' apparaît et se développe à côté de 'je me souviens *de quelque chose*'. C'est que les verbes sont groupés dans l'esprit *suivant leur sens*: les verbes peu communs tendent à adopter la construction des verbes plus usités.
>
> [Changes in construction, brought about by analogy, are extremely frequent ... The mechanism is the following: by analogy, 'il se rappelle *de quelque chose*' appears and develops along side 'je me souviens *de quelque chose*'. This is because verbs are grouped in the mind according to their meaning. Less common verbs tend to adopt the construction of more commonly used verbs.]

Nyrop, in his *Grammaire historique* (1899-1930) draws upon analogy to explain why some French verbs no longer have the same argument realisation as their Latin cognates. The citation below illustrates just how enduring the 19th century approach to the study of language change was at the turn of the century; the French language is clearly considered to be an entity unto itself, separate from its speakers, and influenced by its predecessor, Latin. Note also that analogy as a cause of irregularity in a system is so common that no explanation is needed. When the case marking of an object ceases to pattern like its Latin ancestor, then some sort of analogical rule particular to French must have applied to it.

> La construction française reproduit parfois celle du latin; on dit *nuire, obéir, plaire à qn*, parce qu'on disait primitivement *nocere, obedire, placere alicui*. Dans d'autres cas, il s'agit sans doute d'un développement français dû à une analogie quelconque. (Nyrop 1930, vol.6, 185)
>
> [French verb constructions sometimes follow from the Latin; one says *nuire, obéir, plaire à qn*, because one originally said *nocere, obedire, placere alicui*. In other cases, it is undoubtedly a question of a development particular to French due to analogy of some sort.]

Analogy can be seen as either random or systematic. In the former case, the force of analogy operates on individual verbs more or less randomly, as Brunot and Bruneau suggest for *rappeler*, depending on the relative frequency of near synonyms. It can be considered systematic when, for instance, an analogical rule applies to a number of verbs at once. Lüdi's (1978, 1983) examination of the verbs *prier*, *supplier*, *requérir* and

aider proposes just this. He argues that the dative complements of these four verbs used to pattern by analogy of meaning with dative benefactors. Benefactors are non-core participants in an event who benefit from the event described by the verb: *Jean **lui** a ouvert la porte* "Jean opened the door **for him**".[6] Lüdi reasons that the object of *aider* is analyzed as a dative benefactor in Medieval French in that it accomplishes an activity by virtue of the help or instigation of the subject. He argues that in Modern French on the other hand, *aider* is subject to structural analogy with predicates like *amener* "to bring, to cause" and *conduire* "to lead", which take a direct object followed by an infinitive clause, pointing out the structural similarities between *amener/conduire quelqu'un à faire quelque chose* "to lead someone to do something" and *aider quelqu'un à faire quelque chose* "to help someone to do something". What has changed in the course of the history of French is an underlying tendency or analogical rule; semantic analogy, which had precedence for certain verbs in Medieval French, has been replaced by structural analogy.

There are two drawbacks to Lüdi's proposal. Theoretically, it is difficult, if not impossible, to define the nature of these underlying tendencies and analogical rules. Where do they come from and what causes them to change? This is a longstanding problem for the Neo-grammarian approach to language change, and the reader is referred to Lightfoot (1999, ch. 2) for an in-depth discussion of the issue. Empirically, Lüdi's analysis can only account for a subset of the verbs identified as undergoing the same valency change. It cannot account for verbs that do not occur with infinitive clauses such as *applaudir*, *assister*, *contrarier*, etc.

1.3.2 IO/DO ambiguity and random evolution

Goyens (1998) examines the evolution of the valence of six verbs from Latin to Modern French, each showing a different pattern of change: *obéir* "to obey", *ressembler* "to resemble", *mentir* "to lie", *prévenir* "to prevent, avert", *empêcher* "to trouble, hinder", and *contredire* "to oppose, contradict". Drawing mainly upon historical grammars and dictionaries, Goyens makes two main observations: first, the form that each object takes today (either an IO or a DO) does not necessarily correspond to the case it took in Latin, and second, in Old and Middle French, the complement of all six verbs alternates between a prepositional and non-prepositional object before evolving towards its present form.

Goyens proposes that the availability of the double object construction in Old French lies at the heart of the valency change. Following Herslund

(1980), two different derivations are available to bivalent verbs such as *aider*, *ennuyer*, *mentir*, etc.: a derivation involving an IO with an overt preposition and one where the IO occurs without a preposition; both are indirect objects, although one looks like a DO. The two derivations are assumed to parallel those available to trivalent verbs of transfer in Medieval French. Compare the expression of the object of *aider* with that of the recipient argument of *donner* "to give", first as a prepositional dative (5a), then as a non-prepositional dative (5b).

(5) a. *donner* X **à Y**/ *aider* **à Y**
"give X to Y/ help *à* Y"

b. *donner* **Y** X/ *aider* **Y**
"give **Y** X / help Y"

Goyens suggests that the prepositional/non prepositional dative alternation in bivalent verbs created a certain amount of ambiguity for speakers making it unclear whether the non-prepositional object of a given bivalent verb was a simple DO or whether it was a dative IO realised without the preposition *à* (5b). This speaker uncertainty would eventually entail a permanent valency change. Some bivalent verbs that originally governed a dative complement would have been mistaken as governing a DO (the case for *aider* and *contredire*, for example). Conversely, verbs governing a DO might have been reanalysed as governing an underlying dative complement (perhaps the case for *ressembler* and *mentir*). Various other factors may have also determined the current case marking of the object complement: the influence of Latin case marking, verbal prefixation, the increasing grammaticalisation of the preposition *à*, and verbal semantics are suggested as possibilities. The result is an essentially random evolution toward the form these complements take today.

According to this account, one would expect to see DO/IO alternations in *all* bivalent verbs taking a DO or an IO, but this is not at all the case. A careful examination of the facts reveals that DO/IO alternations are in fact restricted to a small number of verbs and do not appear to be random.

Given that Goyens examines a small number of verbs each presenting a different kind of valency change rather than focusing on verbs showing the same kind of change, her preliminary claim that the changes are random and essentially unrelated is not surprising. In fact, Goyens notes that to draw any firm conclusions about the changes, an examination of more verbs and the use of a more extensive database would be required. This is precisely what I propose for the present study. Both qualitative and

quantitative analyses of over 50 verbs demonstrate that the replacement of certain IOs by an analogous DO is indeed a systematic change. Cases that appear to move in the opposite direction are not counter examples, but can be explained independently.[7]

1.3.3 Grammaticalisation of the S-V-IO construction

Within a constructionist framework, Schøsler (2003, 2008, 2009, 2010) claims that the shift of the indirect object of verbs such as *aider*, *assister*, *secourir*, and *servir* to a direct object is due to the increasing interpretation of single dative objects as Experiencers. She observes that the dative object of bivalet verbs in Modern French often expresses the role of Experiencer, as in *plaire à quelqu'un* "to please/appeal to someone". This observation leads her to propose that the S-V-IO_{DAT} construction has become increasingly specialised in French based on the frequency of the occurrence of the dative argument with psych verbs (e.g. *Ce garcon* ***lui*** *plaît* "**He/she** likes this boy") and the dative benefactor of impersonal constructions (e.g. *Il* ***lui*** *est arrivé un malheur* "something dreadful has happened **to him**"). In fact, it is claimed that the construction has become so specialised that the S-V-IO_{DAT} construction itself has become grammaticalised, expressing a psychological relation between the animate object on the one hand and the subject on the other.

Schøsler suggests that a consequence of this frequent pairing of form and meaning is an incompatibility of the pattern with verbs that do not express a psychological relation. One piece of evidence Schøsler uses to support her case is the valency change in verbs meaning "to help" such as *aider*, *assister*, *secourir*, and *servir*. She reasons that because verbs of helping do not express the psychological state of the object, they are no longer mapped to the meaningful S-V-IO_{DAT} pattern. This is meant to explain their shift towards an S-V-DO pattern, a default construction in Modern French according to Schøsler, which expresses no particular meaning.

There are a number of problems with Schøsler's analysis. First, the S-V-IO_{DAT} pattern does not capture a structural generalisation in French strong enough to initiate any kind of change. Psych verbs only constitute a small proportion of the bivalent dative verbs in French; many verbs with the same superficial structure are clearly not object-experiencer verbs (eg. *parler* "speak", *répondre* "answer", *ressembler* "resemble", *survivre* "survive", *succéder* "succeed", *appartenir* "belong", among many others). Schøsler attributes a few of these cases to fossilization (Schøsler 2009, n.13), but in reality, there are more "exceptions" than there are psych verbs

that fit the S-V-IO_{DAT} pattern. In addition, it is unclear how grammaticalisation of a construction could in effect exclude verbs that no longer conform to the meaning it conveys. Rather, the change Schøsler describes should behave something like morphological levelling. One would actually expect to see an increased number of object-experiencer verbs adopting the S-V-IO_{DAT} pattern (e.g. *effrayer* ***quelqu'un*** "to frighten someone" moving towards *effrayer* ***à quelqu'un***) and no necessary change in high frequency verbs like *aider*. No such changes are attested.

1.3.4 Functional reanalysis

In his influential book *Le Problème de la transitivité en français moderne* (1960), Blinkenberg proposes a unified functional definition of transitivity. He claims that in French, transitivity—the mutual determination between the verb and its object—is expressed by both direct objects and indirect objects introduced by the preposition *à*. Central to his argument is the well-known variation and change in argument realisation observed in Latin and French verbs. The author claims that the apparent free variation between DOs and IOs illustrates that the two forms have the same function. Verbs such as *aider* and *insulter*, which show both synchronic and diachronic alternation between an IO and a DO without any appreciable meaning difference, indicate, he argues, an absence of any functional distinction between the two forms.

This seeming vacillation between an IO and a DO in the history of French is reduced to one cause: the general evolution towards a syntax centred around the notion of transitivity for which the phrase is the basic syntactic unit of meaning as opposed to the word. One consequence of this evolution is that the functional meaning once expressed by case marking is now specified in the lexical content of the verb. This implies a mutual dependency between the verb and its object without any need for special marking on the object. The preposition *à* that heads the IO is thus essentially redundant, making the IO interchangeable with a DO.[8]

In order to account for the fact that certain verbs still take IOs in French, Blinkenberg (1960, 48) suggests that many IOs are vestiges of an earlier time when case marking expressed distinct functions (early Latin, for example):

> Un groupe important d'objets indirects introduits par *à* provient évidemment de la substitution commencée dans le latin tardif de *à* + acc. à l'ancien datif et continue ainsi dans un moule nouveau une très vieille tradition répartissant les objets en plusieurs groupes principaux. Cette tradition avait connu longtemps un affaiblissement sensible, qui est facile à

> constater en latin et encore davantage en ancien français.
>
> [A large group of indirect objects introduced by the preposition *à* clearly comes from the substitution, beginning in Late Latin, of the former dative by *à* + acc., and so continues in a new mould the very old tradition separating objects into several main groups. This tradition has undergone for some time now a significant weakening, which is easy to see in Latin and still easier in Old French.]

Blinkenberg proposes that other IOs that do not correspond to the Latin dative, such as that of *applaudir* (p.184), would have initially been introduced as a circumstantial complement of a sentence in which the verb is used intransitively. He speculates for instance, that speakers adjoined a circumstantial complement headed by the preposition *à* to the verb *applaudir* in order to specify – after the fact – what they were applauding. The evolution from a circumstantial complement to a verbal complement would have followed once the PP constituent was interpreted to be part of the verb's meaning and once *à* no longer had the semantic content required of a circumstantial. Reanalysis of the circumstantial PP as the object complement of the verb would have gone as follows: *applaudir* → *applaudir, à quelque chose* → *applaudir à quelque chose.*

Blinkenberg's explanation of the directionality of the change – the fact that the IO of verbs like *aider, insulter* and *applaudir* has evolved into a DO in Modern French – follows from his central claim that the direct object is the ultimate expression of transitivity, the mutual determination between the verb and its object. In order to account for the many exceptions to this evolution, Blinkenberg (1960, 49) invokes analogy. IOs of bivalent verbs that are neither vestiges from Latin case marking nor originally circumstantial complements, would have likely arisen through analogy to the latter; exceptions beget more exceptions.

> Nous pensons qu'il faut attacher une plus grande importance à un autre facteur de variations dans la forme de la transitivité, à savoir l'affinité de sens entre verbes à transitivité différente. Dans de tels cas en effet, le sens du verbe peut amorcer une analogie qui change la forme de la transitivité; une synonymie complète ou partielle amène une contamination syntactique.
>
> [We think that a greater importance must be attributed to another factor in the variation of the transitive form, namely affinities of meaning between verbs with different transitivities. In such cases, the meaning of the verb can, in effect, initiate an analogy that changes the transitive form. Complete or partial synonymy leads to syntactic contamination.]

Functional equivalence between the IO and DO coupled with the forces of analogy predict massive variation in valence and random distribution of IOs and DOs among verbs, described in Blinkenberg (1960, 49-50).

> S'il est naturel de supposer à l'origine de l'opposition ancienne entre un objet à l'accusatif et un objet au datif une différence de sens, reposant sur les valeurs spécifiques des deux cas, dans la mesure où de telles valeurs soient arrivées jamais à une complète consistance, il faut avouer que pour la partie de l'évolution que l'histoire éclaire il est difficile de rendre compte de la répartition entre les deux groupes de cas par des critères sémantiques évidents. On trouve aussi bien en latin qu'en français des verbes qui sont apparentés pour le sens et dont cependant les régimes adoptent des formes différentes.
>
> Une conséquence directe de cette répartition en apparence capricieuse des régimes est le nombre de changements de régime constaté par la grammaire latine. Apparentés par le sens, sans distinction autre que la distinction lexicale dans les emplois absolus, ces verbes sont facilement victimes d'une 'erreur' de construction...
>
> [If it is natural to assume that a difference in meaning is at the origin of the former opposition between an object in the accusative case and an object in the dative case based on the specific values of the two cases, in so far as such values have ever arrived at complete consistency, one must admit that for the part of evolution on which history sheds some light, it is difficult to account for the division between the two cases by obvious semantic criteria. Verbs which have related meanings but for which their objects have different forms are found both in Latin and in French.
>
> A direct consequence of this apparently random distribution of object case marking is the number of changes that Latin has undergone. Related by meaning, without any distinction other than the lexical distinction they have in intransitive uses, these verbs are easily victims of a construction 'error'...]

In light of the facts however, Blinkenberg's explanation of variation and change in argument realisation in French is difficult to maintain. First, he claims that since Early Latin, verbal objects have been susceptible to free variation between dative and accusative case without any appreciable meaning difference. Yet this is not the case. First, there is no evidence of widespread free variation between the dative and accusative object in French. Second, the DO/IO alternations that I examine only appear to be semantically motivated before the 15th century; one form is not interchangeable with the other (see Chapter Two). In so far as the helping and hindering verbs go, we see free variation between the DO and the IO

only when the change of valence is taking place (such free variation is explained in Chapter Four in terms of competing grammars). To support his thesis, Blinkenberg emphasizes the amount of verbs that allow DO/IO alternations in Modern French, while downplaying the semantic differences between a verb used with a DO and the same one used with an IO. I believe however, that the meaning differences are too salient and too numerous to ignore.[9] Indirect objects in French are encoded as a point of reference in space, a Place. They do not undergo any physical change brought about by the action, and depending on the verb they occur with, the IO tends to have a certain degree of autonomy in the event. In this respect, they are distinct from direct objects, which are often more affected and have less autonomy in the event; some even undergo a physical change.

Another fact not mentioned in Blinkenberg's work is that DO/IO alternation is generally unidirectional. The sole DO of a verb may alternate with an IO, but the opposite is not true. For example, *toucher* "to touch" is primarily transitive, but it can occur with an indirect object to yield a slightly different meaning. A verb like *parler* "to speak/talk" however, which occurs with an indirect object, does not alternate with a direct object. This asymmetry should not exist within a theory that posits functional equivalence between the IO and the DO. According to Blinkenberg's thesis, any IO should, in principle, be susceptible to variation and change, yet this is clearly not so. Most verbs never vary between a DO and an IO complement. The IO of directed action verbs such as *parler* "to speak/talk", *répondre* "to answer", and *resister* "to resist", for example, and of verbs of comparison such as *correspondre* "correspond" and *préexister* "pre-exist" among many others are never in free variation with a DO. Furthermore, the claim that this apparent free variation between a dative and accusative object is in fact the slow and gradual evolution involving datives becoming accusatives could not account for the rather sudden and uniform change from an IO to a DO observed for the verbs of helping and hindering.

While I do not agree that DOs and IOs are functionally equivalent in French, I concede that some examples of them may appear so due to the broad range of semantic roles that the direct object may express, some of which can overlap with properties expressed by the IO; an excellent example of this is the seamless replacement of the IO of *aider*-type verbs by a DO during the course of the history of French. One might ask then: if the DO can satisfy the same function as the IO, why is it that all IOs are not becoming DOs? My answer to this is that the valency change is conditioned; it only occurs in certain environments. Essentially, the IO is

maintained as long as it is licensed. If licensing is lost in a given context, certain IOs may be replaced by a DO if the DO can express the semantic role of the IO, while others may be replaced by a PP headed by a different preposition.

Finally, I agree with Blinkenberg that the loss of lexical content in the preposition *à* plays a central role in valency change. Where I differ from this author is how the loss of directionality in *à* affected the status of the IO in French. Blinkenberg proposes that the inherent semantic value of the preposition *à* is reanalyzed as belonging to the verb with the consequence that *à* becomes completely devoid of meaning, semantically unnecessary, and is eventually omitted.[10] The drawback to this claim is that it predicts massive variation with gradual change toward a DO, probably by lexical diffusion, exceptions due to analogy not withstanding.[11] This of course, does not correspond to the actual empirical facts. The change from an IO to a DO is abrupt and highly selective.

1.3.5 Loss of inherent dative case

Van Peteghem (2006) argues that dative arguments in Modern French are introduced into a syntactic configuration that necessarily includes a direct object. In her terms, dative arguments are structurally licensed. She claims that this hasn't always been the case and that in earlier stages of the language dative objects could be licensed solely by the semantics of the governing verb via inherent dative case. Invoking the evolution of the verb *aider* and the variable form of its object, VanPeteghem proposes that during the course of the history of French, there was some alternation between structural and inherent case, but that in Modern French, structural case is preferred. Since the IO of *aider* is no longer semantically licensed, it is replaced by a DO.[12]

Van Peteghem offers a number of compelling arguments in favour of treating many dative objects in Modern French as being structurally licensed within a small clause relation, but notes that bivalent verbs like *causer*, *mentir*, *sourire*, *parler*, and *téléphoner* pose a problem for her hypothesis since the presence of a direct object is not immediately obvious. These so-called exceptions however, are too numerous to overlook. In Chapter Three, section 3.1.2.2, I offer a considerable but non-exhaustive list of dynamic bivalent verbs that take an IO in French; these would be serious counter examples to such a unified treatment of the IO. Moreover, why does the IO of *aider* undergo a change, while that of so many other verbs does not?[13]

A unified treatment of IOs in French is not, I contend, a fruitful hypothesis to pursue. IOs in French can be licensed in various ways: some are licensed by the meaning of the verb, some are licensed within a small clause relation, and in Medieval French, some IOs are licensed by the directional meaning of the preposition *à*. Each of these licensing environments is subject to change, be it a change in the meaning of the verb, structural reanalysis, or a change in the status of *à*. The present study argues for the effects of a semantic change in *à* and the specific valency change that ensues.

1.4 Theoretical Assumptions: Argument Structure

The change of valence in helping and hindering verbs is conditioned; it only occurs in one specific structural environment. In what follows, I define in some detail my basic assumptions about argument structure – the elements that constitute the verb phrase and how they may combine. The theory then permits a typology of verbs that occur with an indirect object in French (Chapter Three), and from this emerges a clear picture of the structure that is targeted by the valency change.

As outlined in section 1.1.1, the formal analysis assumes a Minimalist approach to grammar, where the grammar is considered to be purely computational. The most basic elements that enter the computation to form structures are referred to here as roots. They are situated in the lexicon, a kind of reservoir of vocabulary items and can be either lexical items, which express real-world concepts (*livre* "book", *amour* "love", *marcher* "to walk", *dans* "in", etc.), or functional items, which express grammatical notions such as tense, event type, number, etc. Each root exists as an entry in the mental lexicon and can be understood as the arbitrary pairing of sound and meaning. This is the most basic information that distinguishes a particular root from others.

The computational system is the mechanism that combines the various elements of a sentence to create grammatical utterances. From a generativist point of view, this aspect of the language faculty comes for free; it is innate. Sometimes referred to as the syntax, the computational system is invariable, so that when one speaks of syntactic change, one is not speaking of a change to the system itself, but rather to a lexical property that permits a set of syntactic derivations.

The most fundamental operation in the computation is Merge as defined in Chomsky (1995, 226): "The simplest syntactic operation takes a pair of syntactic objects (SO_i, SO_j) and replaces them by a new combined syntactic object SO_{ij}." This operation is responsible for the recursive