Old French *Si*: Syntax and Function in Diachrony

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MAIN CLAIMS: This paper aims to provide a full diachronic analysis of the syntax and function of the Old French (OFr) discourse particle *si* utilising substantial new data from the 12th to early 14th centuries. With regards to its syntax, I claim that *si* is a phrasal constituent and that, throughout the OFr period, it occurs immediately preverbally, in the specifier of the head occupied by the verb, although this position changes during the period in question. With regards to its function I argue that *si* initially acts as a marker of topic continuity, before, in the 13th century, developing a variety of further functions as a resumptive, Verb Second (V2) expletive alongside conventionalised functions reflecting uses of Latin *sic*. I argue that *si* is fundamentally polyfunctional, with these functions varying and changing over time and between individual texts.

BACKGROUND: The OFr discourse particle *si*, descended from Latin *sic*, has been the source of much debate in the study of historical French linguistics, with Fleischman (1991:251) referring to it as a "mystery particle". Both *si*'s function and syntax have been the subject of much debate. With regards to function, *si* has been analysed as a clausal conjunction (Stammerjohann, 1988), affirmative marker (Marchello-Nizia, 1985), topic-continuity marker (Fleischman, 1991, 1992; van Reenen and Schosler, 2000; Wolfe, 2018), resumptive (Meklenborg, 2020) and V2 expletive (Fleischman, 1991, 1992; Ledgeway, 2008; Wolfe, 2018). With regards to syntax, *si* has been analysed as a phrasal constituent (Wolfe, 2018), a head (Ferraresi and Goldbach, 2003; Ledgeway, 2008) or both (Meklenborg, 2020). *Si*'s position relative to the verb in these analyses varies wildly. It has been described as occurring in the specifier of the head occupied by the verb (Wolfe, 2018), as occurring higher in the left periphery (Ferraresi and Goldbach, 2003), or even in the head usually occupied by the verb (Ledgeway, 2008). For our purposes, *si* represents an intersection of the discourse pragmatic and syntactic, and allows us to probe both the pragmatic and syntactic systems of OFr and our theoretical models of them. The central goal of this study is to show which of these syntactic and functional analyses is preferable and what ramifications such analyses would have for our broader understanding of OFr.

CURRENT STUDY: Building on this rich literature on *si*, I have gathered a total of 2016 examples of *si* from ten OFr texts ranging from the 12th to 14th centuries. For each case of *si* I have noted its position in the clause and what material precedes and follows it so as to diagnose its syntactic position. I have also noted the information-structural relationship of the clause to the previous discourse. Following van Reenen and Schosler's (2000) narrow definition of topic continuity as a 'series of same subjects in main clauses' (van Reenen and Schosler, 2000: 63), I focus on the relationship of the subject in a given *si*-clause to that of previous clauses. With regards to function I show that, while in 12th-century texts *si* functions as a topic continuity marker (1a), it develops a wide variety of further functions in the 13th century, including Meklenborg's (2020) resumptive function (1b), alongside a variety of conventionalised uses derived from Latin *sic* (1c) such as '*si dist*' 'they spoke thus' and '*si avint*' 'it happened thus', becoming a polyfunctional discourse marker. During the late 13th and early 14th century, the resumptive function also declines, and the V2-filler function (1d), suggested in Fleischman (1991, 1992) and Wolfe (2018) becomes dominant.

(1) a. il   vait   avant, **si** la   salue
    he   goes   ahead *si* her   salutes
    'He goes ahead and salutes her'
    Eneas l. 722

b. Quant li   rois   l' oï,   **si** saut
    When the   king   it heard *si* jumped
    'When the king heard it, he jumped'
    Récit d'un Ménestrel de Reims, p. 3

c. Si avint   que...
    Si happened that…
    'Thus it happened that…'
    Récit d'un Ménestrel de Reims, p. 1

d. si sachiez   que...
    si know.IMP   that
    'Know that...'
    Roman de la Rose l. 7312

With regards to syntax, I find that *si* almost always occurs immediately pre-verbally, with only clitics intervening[1]. As such, I argue that *si* is a phrasal constituent occupying the specifier of the head position which hosts the verb in the left periphery, supporting Wolfe's (2018) analysis. To model this position, I utilise the cartographic model of the left-periphery as initially developed by Rizzi (1997). This model has been elaborated in a wide variety of ways, however, the specific version that I shall focus on is that of Ledgeway (2010) (adapted from Wolfe, 2018:335):

(2)   [$_{Frame}$ Hanging Topic, Adv$_{Frame-Setting}$ [$_{Force}$ Comp$_1$ [$_{Topic}$ Left Dislocation, Aboutness Topic [$_{Focus}$ Focus$_{Contrastive}$, Quantifier$_{Indefinite}$, Focus$_{NewInformation}$ [$_{Fin}$ Comp$_2$ [$_{TP}$ . . .]]]]]]

Using pre-*si* left-peripheral constituents to diagnose the position of *si* and the verb in the left periphery, I find that the position occupied by the verb is Fin in 12th and early 13th century OFr. However, in 13th-century prose texts, this position shifts to Force, a view supported by Rouveret (2004), and Wolfe (2018), while in verse texts, the older Fin-V2 grammar is maintained.

References:

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[1] There are 8 cases of intervening material in our corpus, 0.4% of our data, for our purposes here I take these data to be anomalous.