Object Clitic Placement in Old Occitan Texts: Effects of Genre and Information Structure

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An intriguing but still poorly understood feature of Old Occitan (OOc) syntax is the placement of object pronouns in verb-second (V2) and verb-third (V3) affirmative main clauses. These pronouns are clitics on the finite verb (OCLs) but may either precede (1) or follow (2) the verb:

(1) Fors el palaiz **vos attendrem**
    'We will **wait for you** outside the palace'
    (*Flamenca*, line 42)

(2) E Turpi **disx li**: De cal part vengron?
    'And Turpin **said to him**: From where will they come?'
    (*Gesta Karoli Magni*, lines 744-5)

The choice of preverbal vs. postverbal OCL placement in V2 clauses has been treated from various perspectives (cf. e.g. Benincà 2004; Donaldson 2015, 2016; Hinzelin 2007; Mériz 1978; Vance 2014), and a number of factors are clearly involved. To test the effect of genre in particular, we designed an exploratory study based on two strikingly opposite texts: *Gesta Karoli Magni* and *Flamenca*. The former – a prose text – was found to have mostly postverbal placement, while the latter – a verse text – contained almost exclusively preverbal object clitics. To further test this factor, we added a second prose text – *Damiette* – and a second verse text – *Jaufré*. All four texts are from the Languedoc region and date to about 1250. A robust correlation between prose texts and postverbal OCLs, and between verse texts and preverbal OCLs, was not confirmed by this larger sample, but including a number of other factors in our analysis revealed effects of information structure as well as genre.

In addition to genre, we coded for information structure value and syntactic category of the preverbal constituent, individual preverbal constituents known to trigger either preverbal or postverbal placement, style (conversation vs. narration) and subject matter of the passage, and possible influence of meter or rhyme (cf. Mériz 1978, pp. 152–3). 'Information structure' refers here to topic and focus, as defined by Erteschik-Shir (1997). Preliminary results reveal that while genre does correlate in some cases with OCL placement, information structure is the best overall predictor. More specifically, if the preverbal constituent

expresses focus, the OCL is likely to be preverbal – even in prose texts – as the following example (3) illustrates. This is in line with Benincà's 2004 findings for Medieval Romance more generally.

(3)   **Aytal privilege** vos do et a totz vostres successors, que no siatz sotzmeses a nulh arcevesque. . .
'I give you and all of your successors **this privilege**, that you will not be beholden to any archbishop. . .'
(*Gesta Karoli Magni*, lines 1270-2)

   While other studies have looked at specific instances of OCL placement with respect to information structure in OOc (cf. Donaldson 2015, 2016, on SV clauses, 2021, on coordinated V1 contexts), the present study investigates this question in V2 and V3 clauses more broadly.

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