

Morphological reciprocals from Old to Classical French: a diachronic study of *entre-*

Guglielmo Inglese (Università di Torino) & Anne Wolfgruber (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Keywords: reciprocal marking, prefixation, constructionalization, Old French, Latin

Old French (OF) features a rich but yet somewhat unordered system of verbal prefixation: verbal prefixes are generally connected with the encoding of aspectual notions, but their semantics is not always clear, and they can sometimes be interchangeably used with the same verb bases with little if no semantic distinction (cf. Stéfanini 1962; Rothwell 1973; Patard & De Mulder 2015). In this respect, OF instantiates an intermediate phase within a well-known drift whereby the system of verbal prefixation, which was fully productive in Latin for the encoding of spatial, aspectual, and valency-related semantics (Haverling 2000; Pompei 2010; Pinkster 2015), shows progressive signs of decay, to the point that it becomes scarcely productive in modern Romance languages (e.g. Lüdtke 1996; 2005; Iacobini 2019).

In the OF system of verbal prefixation, a notable exception is offered by the prefix *entre-*. This prefix appears in essentially two contexts. On the one hand, it encodes a spatial meaning ‘in between, among’ or related, more abstract meanings, *aler* ‘go’ → *entre-aler* ‘travel between’. On the other hand, often when used in conjunction with the reflexive *se*, the prefix may express reciprocity, e.g. *batre* ‘strike’ → (*s’*) *entre-batre* ‘fight each other’. The two usages show striking synchronic and diachronic differences. The former historically continues the Latin prefix *inter-*, e.g. *venio* ‘come’ → *inter-venio* ‘come between’. Despite its low productivity in OF, it is nevertheless transmitted (or re-introduced in Latinate forms) to Modern French, either in its basic spatial meaning or in specific lexicalized forms, e.g. French *entresauter* ‘beat (of the heart)’, *entretenir* ‘maintain’ (the same hold for other Romance varieties, see Lüdtke 2005: 373–374; Iacobini 2019: 180). By contrast, the reciprocal use must be an OF (or better Romance) innovation, as this formation is virtually absent in Latin (data from WFL). In OF, reciprocal *entre-* is fully productive: in Anglo-Norman out of 37 intransitive verbs prefixed with *entre-*, 7 show spatial semantics while 30 instantiate the reciprocal use (data from AND). Later on, reciprocal *entre-* shows signs of decay over time (Guentchéva & Rivière 2007: 580; Mutz 2011: 247), to the point that it becomes restricted to high (literary) register in Modern French (Weidenbusch 1993: 155).

The exceptional status of reciprocal *entre-*verbs in OF has largely gone unnoticed (but see Tremblay 2008). In this paper, we aim to fill this gap and we offer a comprehensive study of *entre-*prefixed verbs in a corpus ranging from Old to Classical French (data from BFM, Frantext). First, we explore the distribution of *entre-*verbs in OF. Our goal is to achieve a fine-grained description of the types of verb bases with which the prefix combines and the semantics that it encodes, by framing our analysis within the existing typological classification of reciprocal constructions (Nedjalkov 2007; Majid et al. 2011). Second, we investigate the historical origin of this pattern: as we argue, the OF *entre-V* pattern results from the conflation of two distinct Latin patterns: the use of *inter-* as a verbal prefix, which contributes the spatial (and more abstract) meanings, and the adpositional phrase *inter se* ‘among themselves’, which is one of the means of encoding reciprocity in Latin (Revuelta Puigdollers 2017). In the case of the latter, we discuss how the preposition *inter* in the analytic V *inter se* pattern was reinterpreted as a bound verbal prefix encoding reciprocity, and how this development can best be understood in terms of constructionalization (Hüning & Booij 2014). Lastly, we sketch the history of reciprocal *entre-*verbs in later stages of French. By looking at quantitative data in a corpus from Middle to Classical French, our goal is to provide thorough empirical support to the often-mentioned decrease in type and token frequency of *entre-*verbs over time. To account for the demise of reciprocal *entre-*verbs, we also discuss the extent to which competition with other reciprocal constructions (De Smet et al. 2018; Diessel 2019), chiefly reciprocal *se* and the reciprocal pronoun *l’un l’autre* may have played a role (Guentchéva & Rivière 2007). Specifically, we discuss that reciprocal *se* was often optional with *entre* verbs in OF but becomes increasingly obligatory over time, and how this goes hand in hand with the loss of *entre-*prefixation. As we argue, this overall process can be described in terms of a linguistic cycle (van Gelderen 2013).

Resources

AND = *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, <https://anglo-norman.net/>

BFM = *Base de Français Médiéval*, <http://bfm.ens-lyon.fr/>

Frantext = <https://www.frantext.fr/>

WFL = *Word Formation Latin*, <https://lila-erc.eu/query/>

References

- De Smet, Hendrik, Frauke D'hoedt, Lauren Fonteyn & Kristel Van Goethem. 2018. The changing functions of competing forms: Attraction and differentiation. *Cognitive Linguistics* 29(2). 197–234. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cog-2016-0025>.
- Diessel, Holger. 2019. *The Grammar Network: How Linguistic Structure Is Shaped by Language Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fanelli, Valentina. 2009. *Le costruzioni reciproche nella lingua latina*. Roma: Universitalia.
- Gelderen, Elly van. 2009. Cyclical change, an introduction. In Elly van Gelderen (ed.), *Cyclical Change*, 1–14. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Gelderen, Elly van. 2013. The Linguistic Cycle and the Language Faculty. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 7(4). 233–250. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lnc3.12017>.
- Guentchéva, Zlatka & Nicole Rivière. 2007. Reciprocal and reflexive constructions in French. In Vladimir P. Nedjalkov, Emma Š. Geniušienė & Zlatka Guentchéva (eds.), *Reciprocal Constructions*, 561–608. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Haverling, Gerd. 2000. *On Sco-verbs, Prefixes and Semantic Functions: A Study in the Development of Prefixed and Unprefixed Verbs from Early to Late Latin*. Goteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.
- Hüning, Matthias & Geert Booij. 2014. From compounding to derivation The emergence of derivational affixes through “constructionalization.” *Folia Linguistica* 48(2). 579–604.
- Iacobini, Claudio. 2019. “Rapiécages faits avec sa propre étoffe”: Discontinuity and convergence in Romance prefixation. *Word Structure* 12(2). 176–207. <https://doi.org/10.3366/word.2019.0145>.
- Lüdtke, Jens. 1996. Gemeinromanische Tendenzen IV. Wortbildungslehre / Tendances communes aux langues romanes IV. Formation de mots. In Günter Holtus, Michael Metzeltin & Christian Schmitt (eds.), *Lexikon der Romanistischen Linguistik (LRL). Band II/1 Latein und Romanisch: Historisch-vergleichende Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen*, 235–272. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Lüdtke, Jens. 2005. *Romanische Wortbildung: inhaltlich - diachronisch - synchronisch*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- Mutz, Katrin. 2011. AUTO- and INTER- versus (?) SE: Remarks on interaction and competition between word formation and syntax. In Andreas Nolda & Olivier Teuber (eds.), *Syntax and Morphology Multidimensional*, 239–258. Berlin & New York: de Gruyter.
- Patard, Adeline & Walter De Mulder. 2015. La prévervation en “en”- *en* ancien français : un cas de préfixation aspectuelle ? *Lexique* (22). 85–110.
- Pinkster, Harm. 2015. *The Oxford Latin Syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pompei, Anna. 2010. Space coding in verb-particle constructions and prefixed verb. In Giovanna Marotta, Alessandro Lenci, Linda Meini & Francesco Rovai (eds.), *Space in Language: Proceedings of the Pisa International Conference*, 410–418. Firenze: EdizioniETS.
- Revuelta Puigdollers, Antonio R. 2017. Dis- compounds and reciprocal *inter se* in Latin. *Pallas* 103. 115–127. <https://doi.org/10.4000/pallas.4078>.
- Romagno, Domenica. 2008. Applicative and causative: some further reflections upon verbal prefixation in Greek and Latin. *Archivio Glottologico Italiano* 93(1). 80–88.
- Rothwell, W. 1973. Préfixation et structure de la langue en ancien français. *Romania*. Librairie Droz 94(374 (2)). 241–250.
- Stéfanini, Jean. 1962. *La voix pronominale en ancien et en moyen français*. Aix-en-Provence: Éditions Ophrys.
- Tremblay, Mireille. 2008. La préfixation en « entre- » en ancien français: Pluralité, réciprocité et valeur aspectuelle. In Benjamin Fagard, Sophie Prévost & Bernard Combettes (eds.), *Évolutions en français: études de linguistique diachronique*, 363–384. Bern: Peter Lang.