

## A History of Dislocations in French

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**MAIN CLAIMS:** This paper aims to provide an account of the history of dislocations in French, connecting the Old and Modern French constructions and providing novel data on the development of dislocations in the intermediary period. I combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, alongside historical sociolinguistic techniques to trace the development of dislocations through the history of French. I argue that both left and right dislocations can be found at every stage of the history of French and that, while their functions have changed over time, the structures nonetheless have a continuous history which can be traced from Old to Contemporary French.

**BACKGROUND:** This study focuses on left and right dislocations, exemplified below:

- (1) a. enfin I' école à aires ouvertes c' est une école expérimentale  
in fact the school with air open it is a school experimental  
“Well, the open air school, it’s an experimental school” (Left Dislocation)
- b. on le kiffait bien le troisième  
we it liked well the *troisième*  
“We liked the *troisième*” (Right Dislocation)

For our purposes we will only focus on dislocations with a clitic resumptive found in declarative main clauses. These structures have been studied extensively in Contemporary Spoken French (Ashby, 1982, 1988; Auger, 2003; Delais-Roussarie, Doetjes & Sleeman, 2004; de Cat, 2007). Additionally, the presence of similar structures has been noted throughout the history of French (Marchello-Nizia, 1998; Troberg, 2004; Engel, 2009). Marchello-Nizia (1998) argues, based on differing information-structural functions, that Old French dislocations are a different construction to those found in Contemporary French, Engel (2009) also notes some subtle differences in Middle French. However, Troberg (2004) finds dislocations with a comparable function in Middle French texts and modern grammars attest to the presence of dislocations in Early Modern French (Gougenheim, 1973; Fournier, 2001), suggesting that there may be some continuity.

**METHODOLOGY:** In the current study I take a mixed approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. For Old French and Middle French period I track the rates of dislocations in the MCVF + Penn Supplement corpus, using the CorpusSearch program to search for frequencies of dislocations across the texts. I find that both left and right dislocations can be found throughout the period, although both are rare, right dislocations especially so. Due to the lack of annotated corpora, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, I have manually collected frequency data from a variety of texts. From this period, I also begin to take a historical sociolinguistic approach, utilising a variety of private texts from less educated authors, taken primarily from Ernst (2019), so as to account for the effects of prescriptivism. As well as these core texts, I examine several metalinguistic texts from grammarians and commentators of the time to discern the popularity of these structures and the potential of prescriptive influence on our data.

**FINDINGS:** I find that both left and right dislocations are present throughout the history of French and that there is continuity from the Old French to Modern French structures. While Old and Middle French do allow non-topical dislocations, by Early Modern French only topicalised dislocations are permissible, I argue that this represents a narrowing of function rather than a discontinuity. Sociolinguistic factors historically do not appear to have an effect, a finding which is further supported by metalinguistic texts, which scarcely comment on the structures but do not condemn them. It is only from the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the rates of dislocations begin to increase to their current rates.

**Keywords:** dislocations, syntax, historical sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, French

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