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## The Clitic Group as a Prosodic Category in Old French

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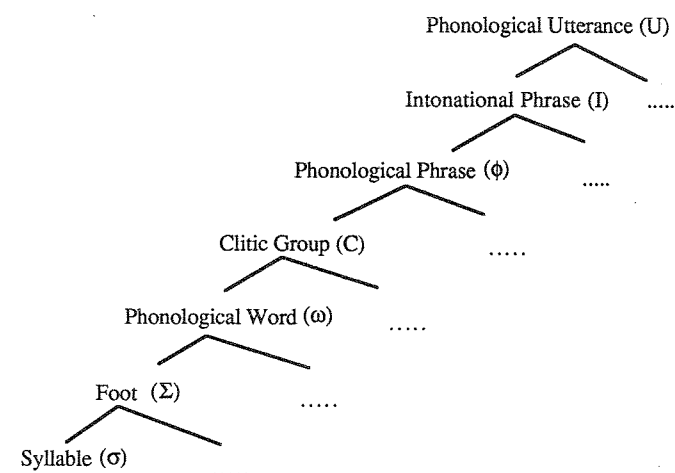
### Abstract

Data are presented from Old French which motivate the independent status of the clitic group as a prosodic category at this stage of the language. Not only is the clitic group characterized by a specific stress pattern different from that of words and phonological phrases, but also, a process of syncope (shwa deletion) is seen to have as its domain the clitic group.

### INTRODUCTION

In Nespore & Vogel 1986 the organization of postlexical phonology can be represented as in the hierarchy in (1):

(1)



In this model, each prosodic constituent constitutes the domain of application of specific phonological rules and phonetic processes. Of these constituents, perhaps the most controversial is the clitic group (C). It is not present, for

example, in Selkirk's 1980 model. The position of the clitic group in the hierarchy reflects, according to Nespor & Vogel the hybrid nature of clitics. It is commonly the case that clitics are treated either as belonging to the phonological word, in which case they are analyzed as affixes, or as belonging to the phonological phrase, in which case they are classified as independent words (see e.g. Booij 1983, Zwicky 1984). Thus in the hierarchy in (1), the clitic group is placed between the phonological word – which groups affixes with stems – and the phonological phrase – which groups words with other words.

According to Nespor & Vogel 1986:154-55, clitic groups are constructed according to the principles in (2):

## (2) Clitic Group (C) Formation

### I. C domain

The domain of C consists of a  $\omega$  (phonological word) containing an independent (i.e. nonclitic) word plus any adjacent  $\omega$ 's containing

- a. a DCL (directional clitic, i.e. those dependent on an element to the left or right), or
- b. a CL (i.e. clitic *tout court* which may find its host to the right or left) such that there is no possible host with which it shares more category membership.

### II. C construction

Join into an n-ary branching C all  $\omega$ s included in a string dominated by the definition of the domain of C.

The inherent stressless nature of clitics makes them interesting from a phonological point of view. Because they have to be grouped into units with other items that have stress, it is to be expected that the resultant group would be a relevant unit for describing stress assignment. For example, Nespor & Vogel 1986 point to Latin where clitic groups had their own stress pattern. Compare, e.g. (3a) and (3b):

- (3) a. *fēmina* 'the woman (nom.)'
- b. *femináque* 'and the woman'
- \**femínaque*

Whereas the regular Latin stress rule would assign stress to the antepenultimate syllable in (3a) since the penultimate is short, this does not happen in the clitic group in (3b). It would thus appear that a special rule applies in clitic groups assigning stress to the syllable preceding the clitic.

Vogel 1989:142 notes that "if it turns out that the C is particularly relevant for stress related phenomena, this would constitute even stronger evidence for its role as a constituent in phonology". That is to say, if the clitic group is relevant for defining the domain of other phonological rules that depend on stress, then this would constitute a strong argument for the existence of that constituent. In what follows, we will present data from Early Old French (ca. 850 - ca. 1100) that show that these two conditions are met in the proclitic group. That is to say, the clitic group in Old French is characterized by a stress pattern that is different from that of phonological words and phrases. Furthermore, a process of syncope (shwa deletion), a stress dependent phenomenon, has as its domain in Old French the clitic group.

## STRESS AND SYNCOPE IN LATE LATIN

An interesting fact about the proclitic group in Old French is that it shows the same stress pattern as the Latin phonological word. Moreover, the process of synchronic syncope alluded to above which has as its domain the clitic group in Old French also occurred as an historical process in words in the Late Latin spoken in Gaul (Gallo-Roman). Thus the clitic group is an historical hybrid in Old French in the sense that its primary stress is that of the French host word, which differs from that of Latin, but it also exhibits a secondary stress on the initial syllable inherited from the Latin word stress pattern. In order to better understand the French data, we will first review the Late Latin stress rules and examine the process of syncope that deleted certain word internal unstressed vowels in Gallo-Roman.

The syncope process is generally described as involving the deletion of vowels other than *a* in 'pretonic' or rather 'intertonic' open syllables, the pretonic unstressed syllable in this case standing between the secondary stressed 'countertonic' syllable and the 'tonic' syllable. Deletion of the vowels was effected slowly over a long period of time (4th - 7th century) and was constrained by the phonotactics. In words with two pretonic syllables, it was the vowel in the first syllable that underwent syncope if its deletion would not violate any phonotactic constraints. If this condition was not met, the vowel in the second of the two pretonic syllables was deleted provided it also met the same conditions (see Fouché 1969). Examples of this historical syncope of

Gallo-Roman *i* (< Latin *ī*), *e* (< Latin *ē, ĩ*), *u* (< Latin *ū*), and *o* (< *ō, ū*) are given in (4):

- (4) a. *Words with one pretonic syllable*  
 bōnitāte > bonte(t) 'kindness'  
 līberāre > livrer 'deliver'  
 mānducāre > mangier 'to eat'  
 lēporāriu > levrier 'greyhound'
- b. *Words with two pretonic syllables*  
 sūbitamēnte > sotement 'suddenly'  
 āntecessóre > ancessor 'ancestor'  
 aūctoricāre > otreiier 'to concede'  
 ārcuballīsta > arbaleste 'crossbow'

In segmental terms, the deletion process can be formulated as in (5):

- (5) *Syncope*:  $V \rightarrow \emptyset / \# C_0 V C_0 (X) \_\_\_$   
 $\left[ \begin{array}{l} -\text{low} \\ -\text{stress} \end{array} \right] \quad [2 \text{ stress}]$

We can assume that the process applied from left to right, constrained by phonotactic restrictions, so that X in the rule refers to any syllable whose nucleus deletion would violate the phonotactic constraints of Old French (see Home 1976 and Walker 1981 for a discussion of these restrictions).

As the syncope rule in (5) indicates, the initial syllable in the affected words carried a secondary stress. This secondary stress was present in all words of more than one syllable where main stress fell on a later syllable (see Pope 1934:101). It can thus be assumed to be assigned by a process of stress retraction such as that formalized as in (6):

- (6)  $V \rightarrow [2 \text{ stress}] / C_0 \_\_\_ (C_0 V C_0)_1 C_0 V$   
[1 stress]

Main stress in Gallo-Roman was, in the majority of cases, predictable; it fell on the penultimate syllable in words of two or more syllables. Monosyllables were stressed on their only vowel. In segmental terms, the rule can be stated as in (7) (see Walker 1975:15):

- (7)  $V \rightarrow [1 \text{ stress}] / \_\_\_ C_0 (V C_0) \#$

In metrical terms the stress assignment rules in (6) and (7) can be interpreted as foot formation rules; (6) can be expressed as in (9) and (7) can be reinterpreted as the foot formation rule in (8). Feet are further joined into a word according to the convention in (10):

*Foot formation:*

- (8) At the right edge of the word, construct a binary branching foot. Label nodes *s w*.  
 (9) At the left edge of the word, construct an unbounded left-headed foot.

*Word-tree construction:*

- (10) Incorporate feet into a right-headed word tree.

Following (8) to (10), the derivation of the stress pattern in *bonitate* and *subitamente* would thus proceed as in (11):

- (11)
- bonitate*

*subitamente*

Rules 8,9

Rule 10

In metrical terms, the syncope process in (5) can further be described as the deletion of a vowel in a weak syllable preceded by a strong syllable. As in (5), the parenthesized constituent represents a syllable whose vowel deletion would lead to a violation of phonotactic restrictions. The domain of the process is the phonological word:

- (12) *Syncope*:  $V \rightarrow \emptyset / [ [ \dots ] (X) [ \dots \_\_\_ \dots ] \dots ]$   
 $\omega \sigma_s \quad \sigma_w \quad \sigma_w$

## STRESS IN OLD FRENCH

Stress in Old French differs from that in Gallo-Roman in that it falls for the most part on the final vowel instead of the penultimate vowel since all final vowels except *a* (>ə) were deleted during the Gallo-Roman period. Moreover, the secondary stress that was characteristic of Gallo-Roman is not present in Old French words. Initial syllables of words are weak at this stage. Evidence for this is the observation that syllable-initial vowels, at least those in open initial syllables weakened in Old French (Pope 107-8): *ɔ* and *o* moved up to *u* (*ɔ* > *o* > *u*) and *ε* and *e* gradually reduced to ə (*ε* > *e* > ə). Examples of this weakening of initial syllables in Old French are given in (13):

(13)	<i>Gallo-Roman</i>	>	<i>Old French</i>	
	nepotem	>	neveu	'nephew'
	debere	>	devoir	'to have to'
	dolorem	>	duleur	'sorrow'
	moriri	>	murir	'to die'

Thus it can be assumed that Old French lacked the foot formation rule in (9) as far as phonological words are concerned. Word stress was assigned by a modified form of rule (8): the final syllable was stressed unless it contained a shwa, in which case the penultimate syllable was stressed. In metrical terms this would be expressed as in (14):

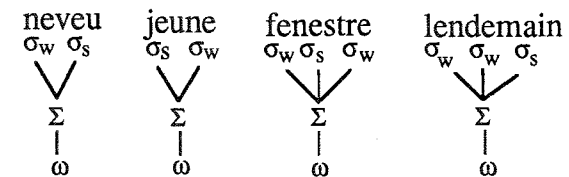
(14) *Foot formation (Old French)*

Construct an unbounded right headed foot beginning at the right edge of the word.

*Restriction:* Syllables containing ə cannot be *s* but rather are joined as *w* members of the adjacent foot.

Examples of word stress patterns for *neveu* 'nephew', *jeune* 'young', *fenestre* 'window', and *lendemain* 'Saturday' resulting from the application of (14) are given in (15):

(15)



As can be seen from the trees in (15), the foot in Old French has become isomorphic to the phonological word, i.e., there is only one strong syllable in each word.

## CLITIC GROUPS IN OLD FRENCH

Clitic groups in Old French differ from phonological words in that they retained the initial secondary stress characteristic of Gallo-Roman words (i.e. the foot formation rule (9) applies to these constructions). Not only that, but also the process of syncope that took place within words in Gallo-Roman took place in clitic groups but not in words in Old French. That is to say, clitics containing shwa, e.g. definite articles *le*, *les* ([ləs] in unstressed position (Melander 1928:166)) and pronouns *me*, *te*, *le*, *se*, *les* underwent syncope just as word internal syllables containing a weak vowel in Gallo-Roman (see Melander 1928:67). Following in (16) are examples of a) clitic + noun and b) clitic + verb constructions exhibiting shwa deletion (see Melander 1928:24-6, 28). In the former constructions, deletion of shwa was categorical (see Foulet 1967:47) and eventually resulted in restructuring (*de+le>du*, *de+les>des*, *a+le>au*, *a+les>aux*, *en+les>ès*); in the latter case, the process was more of a variable nature:

(16) a)	de le cor	'of the horn'
	/dè lə kór/	→ [dèlkór]
	de les cors	'of the horns'
	/dè ləs kórs/	→ [dèlškórs]
	a le mur	'to the wall'
	/à lə múr/	→ [àlmúr]
	a les murs	'to the walls'
	/à ləs múrs/	→ [àlsmúrs]
	en le vin	'in the wine'
	/èn lə vín/	→ [ètvín]

en les vins	'in the wines'
/ɛn ləs vɪns/	→ [ɛ̃lsvɪns]
de le cor	'of the horn'
/dɛ lə kɔr/	→ [dɛlkɔr]
de les cors	'of the horns'
/dɛ ləs kɔrs/	→ [dɛlskɔrs]
b) ne me vidrent	'they did not see me'
/nɛ mɛ vɪdrɛnt/	→ [nɛmvidrɛnt]
jo te vi	'I saw you'
/ʒɔ tɛ vi/	→ [ʒɔ̃tvi]
qui se plaint	'who complains'
/ki sɛ pláint/	→ [kɪspláint]
jo le pert	'I saw you'
/ʒɔ lə pɛrt/	→ [ʒɔ̃lpɛrt]
ne les veient	'they do not see them'
/nɛ ləs véiant/	→ [nɛlsvéiant]

In these clitic constructions, the nouns in a) and the verbs in b) carry main stress and the initial clitic bears a secondary stress. The pronominal clitics preceding the main stressed host word thus had the same prosodic status as pretonic syllables in Gallo-Roman words. Furthermore, in clitic constructions with two pronominal monosyllabic clitics intervening between the initial secondary stressed clitic and the main stressed host, it was, just as in the case of Latin words, the first syllable which underwent syncope if it did not contain *a* (Fouché 1969:477, Schwan & Behrens 1932:66):

(17) ne le te dit	'I do not tell it to you'
/nɛ lɛ tɛ dí/	→ [nɛltɛdí]
se les te donet	'if he gives them to you'
/sɛ lɛs tɛ dúnəθ/	→ [sɛl̩stɛdúneθ]

Like the Gallo-Roman cases, the process of syncope was sensitive to phonotactic restrictions so that deletion of shwa did not take place if an unacceptable consonant cluster would arise as in the examples in (18):

(18) vòs me vedéz	'you see me'
/vòs mɛ veðéts/	→ *[vòsmveðéts]
nòs le punissóns	'we punish him'
/nòs lə pünisúns/	→ *[nòslpünisúns]

Since the sequences *-smv-* and *-slp-* cannot be broken up into occurring syllable final and/or initial clusters, syncope is blocked in these cases.

Rule (12), syncope, can thus be considered to be present in unchanged form in Old French. The foot formation rule (9) is also to be characterized as a persistent rule surviving into Old French, but its domain of application is now restricted to the Clitic Construction:

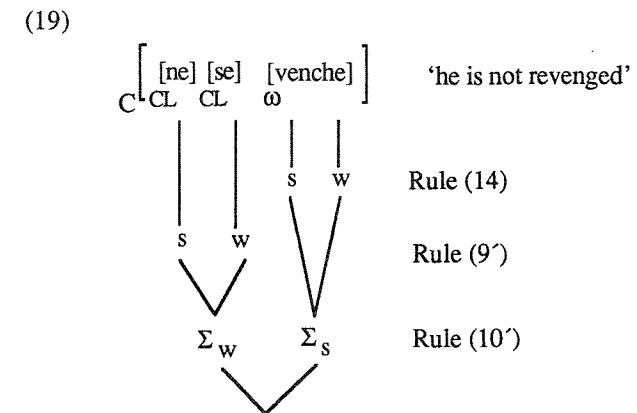
(9') At the left edge of a C, construct an unbounded left-headed foot over clitics (CL).

Furthermore, the word-tree construction rule in (10) is now also restricted to the clitic group:

(10') *Clitic-tree construction:*

Incorporate feet into a right-headed clitic-tree.

In (19) is presented the derivation of the stress pattern in the Clitic Group *ne se venche* 'he is not revenged' according to rules (10), (14), and (19):



It is necessary to specify that the unit to which rule (9') applies is a clitic; otherwise the pretonic syllables of phonological words would be subject to it. There is no evidence, however, that they were. Shwa in words such as those in (20) did not undergo syncope in Old French due to the fact that the initial syllables in these cases were *w* (see also (13) for this assumption):

(20)	pechæur	'sinner' (<pecc+atore)
	diəmanche	'Sunday'
	bêlément	'bleat(ing)'
	aləbastre	'alabaster' (Modern French <i>albâtre</i> )
	esprit	'mind' (Modern French <i>esprit</i> )

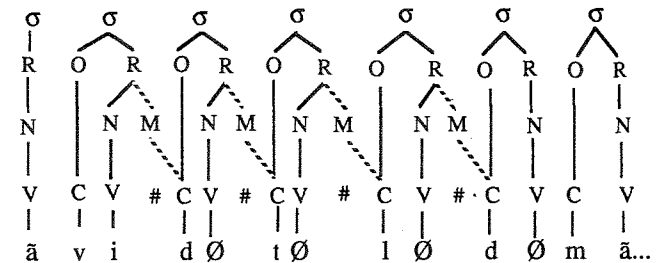
#### SHWA DELETION AT LATER STAGES OF FRENCH

The internal shwas in (20) were, according to the sources we have (see Thurot 1966), deleted from around the beginning of the 16th century, but the process can no longer be motivated as a stress related phenomenon. Remaining shwas in other positions were also deleted from this time, e.g. those in initial and final syllables. It is during this period, Middle French, that one speaks of a change in the prosodic character of French: from being a relatively more 'stress-timed' language, it became gradually more of a 'syllable-timed' language. According to Dauer 1983, this classification is mainly related to patterning in a given language's syllable structure (greater vs. restricted number of syllable types), extent of vowel reduction/centralization (more vs. less) and domains of stress (presence vs. absence of lexical stress). The stress-timed features that were lost in French include the flattening of the foot structure from Gallo-Roman to French resulting from the loss of the initial secondary stress and the gradual change over from word stress to phrase stress. The concomitant deletion of weak syllables was also a contributing factor in creating the new prosodic character.

The syncope (shwa deletion) that took place in Middle French and is still characteristic of Modern French functions, according to Dauer 1983 to "reestablish the evenness of successive syllables by eliminating an inherently short syllable (e.g. *chez le garçon* → /ʃel.gar.sɔ̃/)". When shwa is realized in Modern French, moreover, it is identical to the vowel [œ], i.e. a non-centralized vowel. This is in accordance with the general character of syllable-timed languages which do not have centralized variants of vowels in unstressed position. Thus from being a stress-related phenomenon in Old French, shwa deletion has now the character of a syllable-structure related

phenomenon. This would, moreover, appear to be the position taken by Anderson 1982 in his treatment of shwa in Modern French. He assumes that syllables with shwa have, in fact, empty nuclei in underlying representations. The data are accounted for by assuming a number of syllabification principles whereby the consonants of shwa syllables are associated with adjacent syllables. Thus the phonological representation of *envie de te le demander* 'desire to ask you it' is as in (21). Any of the reassociations indicated by the broken lines can be made (e.g. *envie d(e) te l(e) demander*, *envie de te l(e) demander*); should the consonant not be reassociated, the vowel in the empty nucleus is realized as [œ]:

(21)



#### THE CLITIC GROUP IN MODERN FRENCH

In Modern French, there would not appear to be any strong evidence for the clitic group as an independent prosodic category. It is at this stage isomorphic with the phonological phrase at least as far as stress is concerned, i.e. the stress in clitic groups falls on the final word (even if the only vowel in the word is a shwa, e.g. *donnez-lé*). As the data from Old French show, the existence of the clitic group as an independent prosodic category would appear to be somewhat transitory. It is an historical remnant in early Old French, caught between two language stages where it still maintains part of the word stress pattern from an earlier stage (i.e. syllable-initial stress). The loss of the initial stress was later affecting clitic groups than words. One can perhaps interpret this as indicating that historical changes are implemented in stages moving up the prosodic hierarchy from smaller to larger constituents. Thus the flattening of foot structure leading to the syllable-timed character of French as far as stress-related phenomena are concerned occurred gradually: first in words, then in clitic groups and finally in phonological phrases.

## CONCLUSIONS

The data examined here from Early Old French paint a picture of the clitic group as an historical prosodic hybrid, but its existence as an independent category would appear to be nevertheless motivated. In order to account for the stress patterns of the language at this stage, a clitic group constituent is needed, since the foot structure of clitic groups is not the same as French phonological words nor phonological phrases, i.e. it maintains the syllable-initial stress characteristic of Late Latin words in addition to the main stress assigned to the host word. Furthermore, the process of syncope that was discussed, a stress-related phenomenon in Old French, was seen to have as its domain a unit corresponding to the clitic group.

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