It is customary in the literature to speak of language variation in terms of (1) or (2).

1) **Competing grammars** Diachronic change = replacement of a grammatical process by another.

2) **Optionality** Diachronic variation is stable between grammatical processes.

However, Wallenberg (2013) and Fruewald and Wallenberg (2013) propose (3) instead:

3) **Hypothesis Fruewald-Wallenberg** All variation, grammatical optionality included, is the result of competing grammars.

This makes an interesting prediction: all cases of variation or optionality are one of the following cases: a) Variation (apparent optionality) between two grammatical forms is diachronically unstable (change in progress – true competition leading to complete change); b) Specialization in progress (specialization of different forms leading to complete change); c) Optionality = stable variation: variants have partially specialised on a continuous dimension, e.g. style, prosodic weight, etc. This means that language change is due to external constraints.

This is completely compatible with (4), (5) and (6)

4) **Borer-Chomsky hypothesis** All parameters of variation are connected with features of lexical items (in particular, those of functional heads).

5) **Invariance hypothesis** A large part of traditional parameters are external to syntax, conditioned only by the interfaces (LF or PF).

6) **Three factors in language design**
   a) Innate principles (uniform, species uniqueness)
   b) Experience (leading to variation)
   c) Third factor: non-specific to the Language Faculty

On this view, UG is invariant (it contains only universal principles, non-parametrizable, such as argument structure, phrase structure, c-command, scope, etc.): variation is reduced to external factors (Newmeyer 2005, Chomsky 2005, 2007, 2008, Kandybowicz 2009, Berwick and Chomsky 2011, Boeckx 2012).

The aim of this presentation is to give examples of stable variation/optionality in Old French and show that 1) this optionality stems from specialized variants; 2) that these specialized variants are external to the syntax.

Reviewing previous work and adding data and arguments, I will focus on three case studies: 1) Bare nouns and articles; 2) Stylistic Fronting; 3) Wh movement and wh in situ. 1) will be shown to be a case of optionality with (pragmatic) specialization/a morpho-phonological external constraint that leads to linguistic change (loss of final consonants). 2) will be shown a case of optionality with (semantic or phonological/prosodic) specialization that leads that linguistic change. 3) will be shown to be a case of optionality with (semantic) specialization/prosodic constraint that leads to linguistic change (loss of final accent, displacement of accent).

**Case study 1**: My specific proposal is that the use of determiners in Old French was tied to discourse properties such as focus/emphasis, on the one hand, and phonological/metric requirements, on the other. This explains why determiners were optional for so long (between the 10th and the 16th century). The choice between the use of a bare noun and the use of a noun with a determiner was not free, but created a one to one mapping between form and function. I argue that determiners became obligatory in Modern French because Old French nominals lost their
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interpretable φ-features (lost final consonants), a crucial feature for a language to have bare nouns (cf. Delfitto & Schroten 1991). I use Cyclic Agree to derive this fact.

**Case study 2**: Stylistic fronting in Old French is shown to involve movement to a special Topic position so that the stranded element is focalized. The SFronted constituent is a shifted defocalized element with the semantics of an asserted background topic: it cannot be contrastive or presupposed. This is a focus/prosodic constraint that has nothing to do with a core grammatical principle. In addition, Stylistic Fronting is shown to happen in many cases so that the metrical system is kept regular. This is a PF constraint with an effect devoid of truth-conditional semantic effects.

**Case study 3**: de Boer (1926) argues that the development of questions in French is tied to the change in prosody from Old French to Middle French. Yes-no questions with est-ce que started to develop (in the 16th c. according to Foulet 1921, Marchello-Nizia 1997, Buridant 2000) to compensate for the lack of initial stress: part votre père? disappeared because the verb could no longer be stressed. Questions such as pourquoi est-ce que, qui est-ce que, etc. lost their emphatic connotation: est-ce que was used in lieu of stress. I propose that the appearance of wh in situ in French is directly linked to the earlier change of accent. Whereas it is often claimed in the literature that wh in situ in French is a recent development (Thévenot 1976: 164), I argue that the construction is old, that it must have developed when the stress change cycle was complete. Wh in situ is rare in French texts, presumably because it has always been considered non-standard (even today). It is even absent from 19th century novels with dialogues from the working class, cf. Hugo and Zola). However, one example is attested as early as 1784 (from Diderot’s Le Rêve de d’Alembert) and many examples start to surface at the beginning of the 20th century.


**Boeckx, C. 2012. Considerations pertaining to the nature of logodiversity, or How to construct a parametric space without parameters. Universitat de Barcelona: lingBuzz/001453.**


