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Origin and development of French parenthetical verbs

Abstract: Regarding the emergence of parenthetical verbs, three possible sources have been proposed in the literature: superordinate clauses, subordinate clauses, and juxtaposed sentences. This contribution analyses their validity with respect to parenthetical verbs derived from *croire* ‘believe’, *cuidier* ‘believe’, *espérer* ‘hope’, *penser* ‘think’ and *sembler* ‘seem’ in Old, Middle and Renaissance French texts composed between the 9th and the 16th century. According to the results of the analysis, the least probable source for modern parentheticals are subordinate clauses, followed by superordinate clauses as a likelier origin, while juxtaposed sentences seem to offer the most plausible explanation.

Keywords: Epistemic parenthetical verb, superordinate clause, subordinate clause, juxtaposed sentence, French

1 Research question and outline

This contribution* examines epistemic parenthetical verbs1 in Old, Middle and Renaissance French texts, that is, in texts that were composed between the 9th and the 16th century. Regarding the emergence and development of parenthetical verbs, three possible sources or paths have been proposed in the literature: superordinate clauses, subordinate clauses, and juxtaposed sentences (cf. Schneider 2011). The hypotheses have been advanced to explain the origin and

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1 With this choice, we do not want to suggest that only epistemic verbs have a parenthetical use in French neither that all parenthetical verbs have an epistemic value. We merely choose to concentrate on verbs that are well known to have a parenthetical use in modern French (cf. Blanche-Benveniste 1989; Blanche-Benveniste and Willems 2007; Schneider 2007).
development of English parentheticals (cf. Thompson and Mulac 1991a, 1991b; Brinton 1996, 2008; Fischer 2007). The present paper intends to review and discuss their validity with respect to parenthetical verbs in Old, Middle and Renaissance French.

In Old, Middle and Renaissance French, as in Modern French and other languages, parenthetical verbs are items that occur with some frequency even in written language. However, their precise definition and delimitation poses some difficulty. Even the denomination *parenthetical verb* is far from uncontroversial in contemporary linguistics (cf. Schneider 2007: 3–7). The issue cannot be solved satisfactorily within the scope of the present study. For the time being, we basically follow the characterisation of *reduced parenthetical clauses* adopted in Schneider (2007). This paper thus deals with short detached or unintegrated clauses containing a finite verb that are capable of interrupting fundamental constituents of the host. The focus is on those clauses that have no connective and that lack one of the arguments required by their verbs (the valency requirements of the parenthetical verb being satisfied by the host). However, in order to be able to fully trace the development of these items, we occasionally take into account elements with a connective or with all arguments present.

Although present in Vedic, Sanskrit, Avestan and Old Persian texts, the major development of parenthesis took place in the classical Greek and Latin literary and non-literary language, where it represented a common stylistic technique (cf. Hofmann 1926: 114–119; Schwyzer 1939: 14–19). Parenthesis was a figure of thought frequently employed in Greek and Latin and has been thoroughly described in the works of classical rhetoric (cf. Lausberg 1960: 427f.). Schwyzer (1939: 40) mentions the use of parenthetical verbs and cites as examples Classical Greek *dokô* ‘I believe’ and Latin *puto* ‘I reckon’. Furthermore, he draws attention to the weakening and reduction processes that short sentences of this type might undergo when used parenthetically (e.g., Classical Greek *dokô moi* → *dokô*). Of course, *puto* was not the only Latin verb to appear as parenthetical. Hofmann (1926: 106f.) also mentions *credo* ‘I believe’, *opinor* ‘I opine’, and *censeo* ‘I deem’. Some occurrences of the verb *credo* are, for example, found in Cicero’s letters to members of his family:


[...] non poteram, *credo*, ante hiemem [...]  
not I.could I.believe before winter  
‘I couldn’t, I believe, before winter’
Hence, we can safely say that this communicative strategy and the associated constructional template existed in informal written Latin. This leaves us with two options. The first one, which seems far more plausible, is that this template had always been available in informal written language and in spoken language, from Latin to Gallo-Romance, Proto-French, Old French and so forth, and had found its way into written texts later on. If this is the case, the template is not an innovation coming from spoken and written Old French. The second option, which seems less plausible, would be that the Latin constructional template had been completely lost during the long period of transition and had to be reinvented in Old French.

Even if the constructional template were available, it had to be filled with the new verbs and syntactic constructions that evolved during the various historical periods. In addition, due to the profound structural changes of French throughout the period under examination, the syntactic features of the construction underwent a continuous process of adaptation. For these reasons, the period comprises several crucial points in the development of French parenthetical verbs. In a nutshell, we concentrate on the emergence of certain parenthetical verbs, their structural features and their evolution throughout the period and do not specifically look at the origin and rise of a communicative strategy and a constructional template.

The paper is structured as follows: In the next section, we describe the three possible sources of parenthetical verbs. In section 3, we present the analysed texts and verbs, i.e. *croire*, *cuidier* (both meaning ‘believe’), *espérer* ‘hope’, *penser* ‘think’ and *sembler* ‘seem’. The following section contains an overview of the parenthetical constructions\(^2\) in which these verbs can be found. In section 5, the three aforementioned sources of parenthetical verbs are then evaluated in the light of French data. The results and their implications are discussed in the final section.

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\(^2\) We use *construction* as a general term for a set of elements and the relations between these elements and not in the specific sense it has in Construction Grammar.
2 Three possible sources of parenthetical verbs: superordinate clauses, subordinate clauses and juxtaposed sentences

Thompson and Mulac (1991a, 1991b) propose superordinate clauses as source of parenthetical verbs in English. The parenthetical use of *I think* and other epistemic verbs originates from contemporary complex sentences through an intermediate stage of asyndetic complementation. In spoken American English, *I think* occurs as superordinate clause with or without *that* and as medial or final parenthetical (cf. Thompson and Mulac 1991b: 313):

(2) *I think* that we’re definitely moving towards being more technological.
(3) *I think* exercise is really beneficial, to anybody.
(4) It’s just your point of view you know what you like to do in your own spare time *I think*.

The frequent omission of the complementizer *that* leads to a reanalysis of the superordinate clause that causes syntactic ambiguity. In fact, (3) can be analysed either as [VERB [XYZ]CLAUSE]SENTENCE or as [VERB XYZ]SENTENCE. Eventually, the second interpretation predominates and VERB may appear in any position within the sentence. The whole process can be summarised as follows:

(5) [VERB [COMP XYZ]CLAUSE]SENTENCE
    ↓
    [VERB [XYZ]CLAUSE]SENTENCE
    ↓
    [VERB XYZ]SENTENCE
    ↓
    [XYZ VERB]SENTENCE

Hence, unlike the generative sentence lifting (*slifting*) analysis proposed by Ross (1973), the process hypothesised by Thompson and Mulac (1991a, 1991b) implies the lowering of a clause. A key role is taken by the intermediate stage [VERB [XYZ]CLAUSE]SENTENCE. Following Evans and Wilkins (2000: 550), we can call it the bridging context. Since [VERB [XYZ]CLAUSE]SENTENCE opens the possibility of reanalysis, the construction is syntactically ambiguous (cf. Waltereit 1999: 21).

The diachronic scenario described above is supported by data from other languages. These data are of two types: the first type supports both the scenario above and the scenario which assumes paratactic sentences as source for paren-
theticals, the second type supports unambiguously the scenario described above. Thompson and Mulac (1991b: 318) mention the Afrikaans epistemic adverb glo ‘allegedly, presumably’, which has evolved from the Afrikaans verb glo ‘believe’. Boye and Harder (2007: 591) observe that, contrary to parenthetical I think, glo in its adverbial use has even lost the pronominal subject ek ‘I’. In addition, Thompson and Mulac (1991b: 327) refer to an epistemic adverb [atın] ‘maybe’ in Tok Pisin, Bislama and Salomons pidgin that has been derived from English I think (cf. also Keesing 1988: 101). It is clear, however, that the source of these epistemic adverbs could also have been an autonomous paratactic or juxtaposed sentence rather than a superordinate clause. In the second type of data, there can be no doubt that the epistemic adverb derives from a superordinate clause because it contains a trace of the former complementizer. The evidential adverb dizque ‘supposedly’, which can be found in American Spanish, derived from dice que ‘he/she/one says that’ (cf. Company Company 2006: 107–110). Note that the adverb may even occur sentence-finally, although the former complementizer is clearly recognisable. Quite similarly, in several Sardinian varieties, we find the evidential adverb nachi, nanchi, naca or nanca. It stems from the univerbation (cf. Brinton and Traugott 2005: 48–50) of the third person singular or third person plural of the verb narrere ‘tell, say’ (from Latin narrare ‘tell, say’) followed by the complementizers chi (from Latin quid) or ca (from Latin quia) (cf. Pitau 1972: 90, 181; Blasco Ferrer 1984: 258). Chruschina (2010) discusses several Sicilian modal adverbs (e.g., dicica ‘it is said’, parica ‘it seems, apparently’, penzica ‘probably’) that are formed with a verb and the complementizer ca. Other examples of this type are Romanian parcă ‘it seems, apparently’ (from se pare că ‘it seems that’) and cică (from se zice că ‘it is said that’) (cf. Iliescu and Popovici 2013: 326; Zafiu 2013: 582) and Latin forsitan or forsan ‘maybe’ (from fors sit an ‘may it happen that’) (cf. Bodelot 2009: 92–95).

A second source of parenthetical verbs could be subordinate clauses. Brinton (1996, 2008) states that Thompson and Mulac’s (1991a, 1991b) hypothesis is not confirmed by Old English and Middle English data and proposes a different developmental path. According to Brinton (1996: 239–253, 2008: 44f.; cf. also Fischer 2007: 300–305), the starting point is represented by Old English clauses with þæs. This particle, corresponding roughly to contemporary so or thus, introduces adverbial clauses. Brinton (2008: 45) refers, e.g., to the following example:

(6) (Old English, Beowulf, v. 270-272, Krapp and Dobbie 1931-1952)

/ [...] ne sceal þær dyrne sum / wesan, þæs ic wene [...] /

nor shall there secret anything be so.of.this I think

‘nor shall anything there be secret, so I think’
Adverbial clauses following this pattern can also be found in Middle English, although with a different introductory particle (as and occasionally so). Since the particles þæs, as and so do not have the same origin, the continuity from Old to Middle English concerns a constructional template, not a particular expression. Brinton (2008: 45) observes that the verbs occurring in these adverbial clauses are also found in constructions without introductory particle, occasionally in the very same Middle English text:

(7) (Middle English, Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, B. NP 3453-3454, Benson 1987)
Thee were need of hennes, as I wene
You.Dat was need of hens as I think
‘you have need of hens, as I think’

(8) (Middle English, Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, E. Cl. 1173-1174, Benson 1987)
I wol with lusty herte, fresh and grene, / Seyn you a song to glade you, I wene
I will with lusty heart fresh and green say you a song to gladden you I think
‘I will with lusty heart, fresh and green / say to you a song to gladden you, I think’

This fact leads Brinton (1996, 2008) to propose adverbial clauses introduced by þæs (Old English) and as or so (Middle English) as the origin of parenthetical verbs.

We interpret and summarise the diachronic development hypothesised by Brinton (1996, 2008) in the following way:

(9) [XYZ [CONN VERB]CLAUSE]SENTENCE
   ↓
   [XYZ [VERB]CLAUSE]SENTENCE
   ↓
   [XYZ VERB]SENTENCE

Brinton (1996, 2008) does not mention the issue of bridging contexts, but according to our interpretation such a context could only be represented by (8), where I think can be analysed either as clause or as single adverb.

Brinton (1996, 2008) does not refer data from other languages supporting her hypothesis and, in fact, historical data and research on epistemic adverbials following the model of as I think are scarce. The only additional information we can provide is that such adverbials are also attested in Old Italian:
Referring to a similar example, Bazzanella (2003: 253) notes that *sì come (io) credo* ‘so as I believe’ is used in Old Italian instead of modern *credo* ‘I believe’.

The third possible source of parenthetical verbs is represented by sentences juxtaposed to other sentences. According to Fischer (2007: 310f.), the parenthetical use of certain verbs has a long tradition in English, probably dating back to Old English. *I think* and similar items were used as formulaic tokens, therefore undergoing lexicalization rather than grammaticalization. Originally, they were not part of a complex sentence, neither as superordinate constituents, as proposed by Thompson and Mulac (1991b), nor as subordinate constituents, as proposed by Brinton (1996). According to Fischer (2007: 311), epistemic expressions like *I think* were used either as independent sentences (in oral language) or as superordinate clauses (in written language):

They probably occurred both in independent clauses and with complement clauses from the very beginning, the former being most frequent in spoken, the latter in written discourse.

The two uses existed side by side, without any direct historical relationship, that is, the independent use did not derive from the superordinate use. Fischer (2007) proposes a possible developmental path, but does not go into details. We can hypothesise the following scenario: In the initial stage, the sentence with the epistemic verb precedes another sentence. The epistemic sentence may contain a cataphoric pronoun referring to the sentence to follow, similar to *this I think* or *so I think*. At the next stage, the epistemic sentence is postposed, due to a reorganisation of the information structure of the whole sequence. The sentence with the epistemic verb is short and invariable, which contributes to its transformation into a formulaic expression, so that at the end of the process it loses its sentential status. Once the pronoun no longer has its referential function, the position of the formulaic expression is relatively free; even the sentence-medial position is possible. Eventually, the pronoun is omitted. The development can be summed up in the following way:
If this scenario is correct, the bridging context is represented by [XYZ]SENTENCE [PRO VERB]SENTENCE, which can also be interpreted as [XYZ PRO VERB]SENTENCE.

It is not clear, though, whether parenthetical verbs similar to modern *I think* existed in Old English. Brinton (1996: 239–242) is convinced that the few examples of sentence-initial epistemic verbs without complementizer do not provide sufficient evidence for the conclusion that there were medial and final epistemic parentheticals. Fischer (2007: 311), on the other hand, assumes that it is likely that medial and final epistemic parentheticals already existed in Old English. Both authors base their positions on data from Gorrell (1895), which can be interpreted in either sense.

The data from other languages cited by Thompson and Mulac (1991b) to back their hypothesis could also serve as evidence for the paratactic origin of epistemic parentheticals. Other examples that are compatible with both scenarios are English *maybe* and French *peut-être* ‘maybe’ (cf. Van Bogaert 2011: 303). In general, it appears plausible to assume that adverbs, particles and connectives stem from former juxtaposed main clauses.

### 3 Analysed texts and verbs

The texts in Old, Middle and Renaissance French were analysed with the following online databases: Base de français medieval 2012 (<txm.bfm-corpus.org>), Dictionnaire du moyen français (<www.atilf.fr/dmf>), and Frantext (<www.frantext.fr>). For a more fine-grained analysis, we subdivided the three historical stages into five centuries (before 1200, 1200–1300, 1300–1400, 1400–1500, 1500–1600). For each century, similar amounts (between 225,000 and 271,000 words) of text in verse and prose were examined, so that each century is documented by two comparable subcorpora. The total corpus amounts to approximately 2,500,000 words.

The analysed texts cover different subjects, e.g., literature, history, religion, and a wide variety of verse or prose, e.g., epic poetry, romances, chronicles,
dramas, miracles, sermons and others. Some text types change or even disappear in the course of the analysed period, e.g., miracles (short religious dramas) no longer exist in Middle French. The use of verse and prose also changes. In the early period, prose is not so frequent and restricted to some text types, mainly religious (psalters, sermons, Bible translations) or didactic texts (e.g., *Li Dialoge Gregoire Lo Pape*). In Middle French and Renaissance texts, on the other hand, the use of verse becomes less frequent and mostly restricted to poems and dramas.

The texts were searched for forms\(^3\) of the verbs *croire*, *cuidier* (both meaning ‘believe’),\(^4\) *espérer* ‘hope’, *penser* ‘think’ and *sembler* ‘seem’\(^5\). These are basically epistemic verbs, either directly referring to the mental state of belief (*croire*, *cuidier*, *penser*) or including an evaluative component (*espérer*) or indirectly referring to belief by expressing a perception (*sembler*). It is well known that in Modern French these verbs can, in the first person singular (*croire*, *cuidier*, *espérer*, *penser*) or in the third person singular preceded by a personal pronoun (*sembler*) of the indicative present, be used as parenthetical verbs, with the pragmatic function of mitigating the proposition expressed in the host sentence (cf. Blanche-Benveniste 1989; Blanche-Benveniste and Willems 2007; Schneider 2007). As explained in the first section, we took into account parenthetical occurrences with and without connectives and with and without object pronoun. The search yielded 301 parenthetical occurrences: *sembler* ‘seem’, with 40% of the occurrences, is the most frequent one; *croire* ‘believe’ accounts for 28% of the occurrences, *cuidier* ‘believe’ for 19%, *espérer* ‘hope’ for 10% and *penser* ‘think’ for merely 3%.

As most research in historical linguistics and especially in historical pragmatics, our study has to cope with a fundamental difficulty: the data used is written literary language, but basic assumptions and considerations regarding parenthetical verbs derive from research on contemporary spoken language. Although written language has its origin in spoken language, heuristically it makes sense to consider written texts and spoken texts as separate, independ-

\(^3\) We searched the forms *crei*, *croi*, *croy*, *croys*, *cuid*, *quid*, *quide*, *cuide*, *quides*, *cuides*, *cuis*, *quis*, *cuit*, *quit*, *semble*, *sembler*, *semble*, *semblant*, *espeir*, *espeire*, *espoir*, *espoire*, *suppose*, *pense*, *panse* and excluded afterwards the non-corresponding results. The BFM corpus platform TXM also includes a lexical tool to verify that no graphical variant has been forgotten.

\(^4\) The verb *cuidier* (from Latin *cogitare* ‘think’) is frequent in Old French, where it takes a great part of today’s occurrences of *croire*. After 1300, it starts to disappear (cf. Shirt 1975: 353; Féron 2005: 15). It therefore has no direct equivalent in contemporary French.

\(^5\) We also looked for the verb *supposer* ‘suppose’ in the corpus, but the search produced only three parenthetical occurrences in Middle French.
ent entities with their specific regularities (cf. Söll 1974: 12). On the one hand, written language is not a perfect norm that spoken language tries to emulate with more or less success; spoken texts are not reductions or elliptical implementations of written templates (cf. Maas 2010: 117). On the other hand, it would be problematic to see written texts as mere transcriptions of oral language. Due to historically inherited conventions and traditions and because of particular conditions of use, written language is partly governed by its own set of rules. Hence, written language is conditioned both by its specific regularities and by contemporary spoken language. In the debate on the emergence of parenthetical verbs, the distinction between oral and written language often gets blurred, occasionally calling into question the validity of assumptions and conclusions. This is particularly evident in the explanation proposed by Thompson and Mulac (1991a, 1991b). Although their hypothesis is meant to explain the synchronic origin of the parenthetical use of I think and other epistemic expressions in spoken American English, they adopt as starting point the structure I think that p ([VERB [COMP XYZ]CLAUSE]SENTENCE). However, as shown by their own researches and by Kärkkäinen (2003), the complementizer that after I think is almost absent from spoken language.

The distinction between the actual mode of transmission (phonic vs. graphic) on the one hand and the intended use (spoken vs. written) on the other hand (cf. Söll 1974: 11–23; Koch and Oesterreicher 2011: 3) reveals the main difference between the two types of literary texts in our corpus. Both verse and prose texts are transmitted to us in the graphic mode; their intended use, however, is not the same. During most of the historical period considered, the texts in verse were partially, if not exclusively, composed for oral presentation (often by persons distinct from the author) before a small audience, occasionally accompanied by music, whereas the texts in prose were intended for individual reading (cf. Ayres-Bennett 1996: 59; Rohr 1998: 22–27). Therefore, we can assume that the texts in verse, in spite of the limitations imposed by meter and rhyme, contain traces that reveal their intended use as spoken language.

The analysed data for the Old French period suggest that parenthetical verbs occur more often in verse than in prose (126 occurrences in verse compared to 17 in prose; cf. also Féron 2005: 19) and more often in romances (verse and prose) and miracles (verse and prose), with 74 occurrences in romances and 42 occurrences in miracles compared to 27 occurrences in all the remaining texts types. In the Middle French texts, we find the same asymmetry between verse and prose: 96 parenthetical verbs occur in verse and only 19 in prose. This tendency, however, does not continue in the Renaissance texts, in which we registered 15 parenthetical verbs in verse and 28 in prose.
4 Parenthetical constructions

Concerning the verbs croire, cuidier, espérer and penser, we identified five constructions of parenthetical usage. The construction called ce+V contains the demonstrative pronoun ce ‘it, this’ in the function of a direct object and occurs without a subject pronoun and without a connective. This construction is no longer found after 1500, due to the obligatory presence of an overt subject. The second construction, ce+V+je, includes both the demonstrative pronoun ce and the postposed subject pronoun je ‘I’. In our corpora, this construction appears only after 1400. The next construction, je+V, has the same form as the parenthetical constructions in Modern French: no connective, no object pronoun but a subject pronoun. This construction appears in all periods in our corpus. In Old French and Middle French the subject pronoun is not always expressed, therefore there is also V as fourth construction type. The fifth construction, comme+je+V, comprises a connective. If this construction type includes an object pronoun, it is the anaphoric pronoun le ‘it, him’ and never the demonstrative one. Occasionally, the subject pronoun je ‘I’ may not be expressed. The five constructions are representative of the evolution of the French verb phrase: from the non-obligatory expression of the subject pronoun in Old French (but with the verb being unacceptable in sentence-initial position) to its obligatory expression during Middle French and Renaissance French and to the position before the verb, with the object at the same time moving to the position immediately after the verb (cf. Marchello-Nizia 1995). The evolution is accompanied by a decrease in the use of the demonstrative ce as object pronoun (cf. Brunot and Bruneau 1956: 247).

Tables 1–4 show the constructions and their respective occurrences for the four verbs in each period:
The verb _croire_ ‘believe’ occurs in all construction types. As mentioned earlier, the _ce+V_ construction is no longer found after 1500, whereas _ce+V+je_ appears very late. The _comme+je+V_ construction is well represented across all periods. In the first period, it occurs as often as the _ce+V_ construction.

The verb _cudier_ ‘believe’ disappears rapidly after the Old French period, which explains the low number of occurrences after 1300. However, it is used a lot in Old French and presents more parenthetical constructions for this stage than _croire_. Interestingly, the _comme+je+V_ construction is less important than for the other verbs and the _je+V_ construction is the most frequent one during the 1200–1300 period.
The verb *espérer*, although common in Modern French, does not appear very often in our data. The occurrences mainly come from the types $V^6$ and $\text{comme+je+V}$.

The parenthetical occurrences with the verb *penser* appear only after 1400, although this verb does exist in the earlier period in other constructions. Due to their specific syntax, the constructions with the verb *sembler* ‘seem’ have been classified separately. We identified three constructions:

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6 For Marchello-Nizia (personal communication), the form *espoir* should be interpreted as an adverb in the 12th century.
In the first construction, *ce+me+V* (which includes two cases of *ce semble* occurring after 1400), there is the demonstrative pronoun *ce* ‘it, this’, in the function of the subject of the impersonal verb, and the indirect object pronoun *me* ‘to me’ (where it occurs). In these cases, like in the constructions *ce+V* for the other verbs, there is no connective, but there is the demonstrative pronoun before the parenthetical, which may be interpreted as an anaphoric (or cata-
phoric) reference to the host sentence. Within the second construction, *me+V*, without demonstrative pronoun, we also included a single occurrence with the impersonal subject pronoun *il* ‘it’, although it is doubtful whether the other occurrences actually are results of the omission of *il* or of *ce*. The third construction, *comme+il+me+V*, comprises the structures introduced by a connective, with or without an overt subject pronoun (before 1300, there is only one occurrence with *il*). When the subject pronoun is overt, it is always the impersonal pronoun *il*, never *ce*. Furthermore, the first person pronoun always occurs as tonic *moi* ‘me’ in Old French and partly in Middle French, too, except in occurrences with an overt subject pronoun.

It is relevant to mention that the subject pronoun found in our data is usually *ce*, and not *il*. The pronoun *il* can appear with impersonal verbs in other constructions. In Old French, the same verbs may appear with *il* or *ce* as subject, but *ce* is usually considered preserving its demonstrative value, whereas *il* is considered to be a ‘real’ impersonal pronoun (cf. Buridant 2000: 140 and Mazziotta et al. 2012: 52).

Summing up, there are two constructions, *ce+V* for *croire, cuidier, espérer* and *penser* and *ce+me+V* for *sembler*, which have no connective, but whose

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7 We took into account only the first person singular pronoun, but the verb also appears with other personal pronouns.
8 We distinguish between connectives such as complementizers or conjunctions that join clauses within a complex sentence and anaphoric or cataphoric referring devices such as personal pronouns.
demonstrative pronoun (object or subject) indicates an anaphoric (or cataphoric) reference (see section 5.3). Then, there is a construction *ce+V+je* that might represent a stage in the development towards the obligatory expression of the subject (also see section 5.3). The constructions *V, je+V* and *me+V* are similar insofar as they appear without a connective and without a demonstrative pronoun (see section 5.1). Finally, we identified the constructions *comme+je+V* and *comme+il+me+V*, which have a connective (see section 5.2).

5 The three possible sources in the light of the data

5.1 Superordinate clauses

In Old French, asyndetic subordination is quite common. It can be found with different verbs, persons and tenses (cf. Glikman 2009: 182–193, 196–225). Therefore, it is possible to find epistemic verbs that may occur as superordinate clauses with or without complementizer and as medial or final parentheticals (cf. Franzén 1939; Glikman 2009: 158–163, 182–193, 2012: 74f.):

(12) (Old French, *Tristan en prose*, p. 69, Ménard 1987)
    Si m’aït Diex, fait li vallés, je cuit que vous le desfendrés
    If me.helps God says the young.man I think that you him will.defend
    encore hui mout plus mauvaisement que vous ne quidiés!
    still today much more worse than you not think
    ‘With the help of God, says the young man, I think that you will defend him still
today much worse than you think!’

    Se Diex m’aït, je cuit mar ne la vielt herbregier li doyens.
    If God me.helps I think unfortunately not her wants to.house the senior
    With the help of God, I think the senior unfortunately does not want to house her

    Li cuens n’avoir, je cuit, que sis Chevaliers avoec lui laiens.
    the count not.had I think than his knights with him there
    ‘The count only had, I think, his knights with him there’
The examples above stem from the same period and illustrate the coexistence of different developmental layers (see the *layering* principle in Hopper 1991: 22-24). As in Thompson and Mulac (1991b), example (13) represents the intermediate stage that provides the bridging context. The absence of the complementizer in the example enables the reanalysis and syntactic ambiguity of the superordinate *je cuit*.

Thompson and Mulac (1991a, 1991b) repeatedly refer to quantity as evidence for their hypothesis. Thompson and Mulac (1991a: 244) compare the use of *think* and *guess*, the two most frequent epistemic verbs in their data, with and without *that*: 91% of the occurrences of *think* and even 99% of the occurrences of *guess* are without the complementizer *that*. These proportions are never reached in our French data. In the Old French data, 49% out of a total of 351 occurrences of the forms *ce cuit*, *je cuit*, *ce croy*, *je croy* (including the constructions with a nominal complement) are followed by the complementizer *que* (35% before 1200, 55% from 1200 to 1300). Most importantly, the cases providing the bridging context as in (13) are not very frequent: in the Old French data, we registered only 30 cases in which *ce/je cuit/croi/espeir* or *il/ce me semble* occur in sentence-initial position without complementizer, compared to 187 cases with complementizer (*ce/je cuit/croi/espeir que* or *il/ce me semble que*). In the Middle French data, even 67% out of a total of 227 occurrences of *je croy* ‘I believe’ are followed by the complementizer *que*. We are of course aware of the fact that the data in Thompson and Mulac (1991a, 1991b) stem from spoken contemporary English, whereas our data stem from, mostly literary, written old stages of French, but the differences in the proportions are certainly remarkable.

In Middle French and Renaissance French, however, complementizer omission is highly exceptional or even excluded, which means that there is no bridging context anymore. Moreover, our data clearly show a phenomenon that has been mentioned repeatedly (cf. Shirt 1975: 353; Féron 2005: 15): after 1300, the verb *cuidier* disappears (with the form in the first person singular starting the process; cf. Moignet 1959: 556). In Modern French, asyndetic subordination is not impossible in spoken language. No corpus studies exist on this topic, but the omission of the complementizer seems to vary according to the variety; e.g., it seems more common in Canadian French than in French spoken in France (cf. Martineau 1988; Schneider 2007: 174; Avanzi 2012: 272–290).

### 5.2 Subordinate clauses

As can be seen in tables 1–5, the French constructions *comme*+*je*+*V* and *comme*+*il*+*me*+*V* are attested throughout the whole period and for all verbs
under examination. Zink (1997: 179) confirms their existence in Middle French texts of the 14th century. In our data, their percentages of the respective totals of parentheticals vary from 30% in the period before 1200, to 17% in the period 1200–1300, to 30% in the period 1300–1400, to 25% in the period 1400–1500, and to 48% in Renaissance French. There is therefore a marked increase of their frequency in the period 1500–1600. So from the beginning, comme+je+V and comme+il+me+V play a consistent role, although they represent the dominant constructional pattern only at the end of the period considered. Moreover, data from another study suggest that they have not yet reached the peak of their development. The phenomenon is particularly evident in the case of croire ‘believe’: in a corpus of French travel journals, diaries and letters from the 17th and 18th centuries, the parentheticals with comme je crois ‘as I believe’ occur three times more often than those with je crois ‘I believe’ (cf. Schneider 2012: 93). In the following centuries, however, the use of comme je crois diminishes rapidly; today this parenthetical is almost absent from spoken and written French (cf. Schneider 2012: 97).

Throughout the period studied, the comme+je+V and comme+il+me+V constructions manifest a considerable variety and do not reach the fixation and formulaic character of the other constructions. Before 1200 and between 1200 and 1300 we mostly find parentheticals similar to si cum ie croi ‘so as I believe’ and si con moi samble ‘so as it seems to me’, with an exceptional aïnsi comme il me samble, which also has the meaning ‘so as it seems to me’. In the Middle French period between 1300 and 1500, the parentheticals following the models comme je croy and comme il me semble are as frequent as those with si comme. In addition, there are some parentheticals of the type aïnsy comme je croy ‘so as I believe’ and an elaborate comme certainement je croy ‘as certainly I believe’. In the Renaissance period, the construction seems to have found its definitive form. Except for two cases, the introductory aïnsi or si has been eliminated. All comme+je+V and comme+il+me+V parentheticals follow the same model. Summing up, one gets the impression that throughout the period under consideration the construction passes through a phase of instability with several variants being used interchangeably before the repertoire is narrowed down to one variant.

Analysing the data separately for each verb and taking into account their various forms, one notices that the periods in which the same form appears in both constructions (je+V and comme+je+V, me+V and comme+il+me+V) vary considerably. Only croire ‘believe’ occurs in both constructions consistently for a long period, that is, from 1200 to 1600. In the case of cuidier ‘believe’, the time of co-occurrence lasts mainly from 1200 to 1300. According to tables 1–5, espérer ‘hope’ seems to appear in both constructions for a certain period. The analysis
of its forms, however, shows that in the *comme*+*je*+*V* construction the verb takes a subject pronoun (e.g., *si cum je espeir*), whereas it occurs without subject pronoun in the *V* construction (e.g., *espoir*). That means that the simple omission of *si cum* would not be sufficient to derive the parenthetical *espoir*. For *penser* ‘think’ there is practically no co-occurrence of *je*+*V* and *comme*+*je*+*V*, if one excludes a single attestation of *je pense* in the Renaissance period. Finally, in the case of *sembler* ‘seem’, the *me*+*V* construction does have limited importance: we found three attestations for *me semble* and only one for *il me semble* distributed over the entire period studied, compared to 24 attestations of *comme*+*il*+*me*+*V*. Moreover, here too, the *comme*+*il*+*me*+*V* construction has a subject pronoun, whereas the *me*+*V* construction occurs mostly without the subject pronoun *il*. In brief, only for *croire* and *cuidier* there are periods in which the same verb form consistently occurs in both constructions.

As is the case with Middle English, there have not been any studies and consequently there is no data concerning the possibility to omit *comme* ‘as’ in epistemic adverbial clauses. Summing up, there are some reasons why it seems unlikely that the *je*+*V* construction developed from *comme*+*je*+*V* and the *me*+*V* construction from *comme*+*il*+*me*+*V* by the omission of *comme* ‘as’.

### 5.3 Juxtaposed sentences

Tables 1–5 show that from before 1200 until 1600 there are parentheticals with the pronoun *ce* ‘it, this’. Buridant (2000: 756) and Glikman (2009: 118, 122, 158, 166) mention the use of the pronoun *ço* (from Latin *hoc* ‘this, that’) and later *ce* in Old French parentheticals. According to Zink (1997: 87–92), the pronoun *ce* is also common in Middle French parentheticals. Féron (2005: 19) examined the texts in verse from the period before 1200 in the *Base textuelle de l’ancien français* (<atilf.atilf.fr/marchello.htm>) and found 64 parentheticals with *ce cuit* and *ce croi* compared to 7 parentheticals with *je cuit* and *je croi*. In the texts from the first half of the 13th century the share of parentheticals without *ce* increases: these texts contain 17 cases with *ce cuit* and *ce croi* and 24 with *je cuit* (but no case with *je croi*).

In our data, the proportion of the three constructions *ce*+*V*, *ce*+*V*+*je* and *ce*+*me*+*V* of the total of parentheticals is always very high, but it decreases slightly during the period under scrutiny: 57% in the period before 1200, 52% in the period 1200–1300, 44% in the period 1300–1400, 53% in the period 1400–1500, 40% in Renaissance French. There are, however, notable differences between the five verbs under examination: for *penser* ‘think’ and *espérer* ‘hope’ the construction is either non-existent or marginal, with *croire* ‘believe’ and
cuidier ‘believe’ it plays a significant role, for sembler ‘seem’ it is by far the most frequent construction. After 1500, the importance of the construction diminishes markedly: except for two cases of ce croy je by the same author in the same text, there are only examples with sembler. In fact, the parenthetical ce me semble continues to be used until the end of the 19th century (cf. Schneider 2012: 97). So, the constructions with ce play a prominent role throughout the whole period considered, but, contrary to the constructions comme+je+V and comme+il+me+V, they seem to have already reached the peak of their development and are slowly losing ground.

Throughout the period studied, the form of the constructions with ce remains essentially stable. Before 1200 and between 1200 and 1300, they do not exhibit any variation at all. In the Middle French period between 1300 and 1500, the variation is limited to a case of ce croy bien ‘this I believe well’, a case of ce que je croy ‘this that I believe’ and two cases of ce semble ‘this seems’. In the Renaissance period, there is again no variation, apart from a single case of ce semble. Comparing ce+V with ce+V+je, only croire ‘believe’ is attested in both constructions, the other verbs are restricted to one construction. In the case of croire, the construction ce+V+je appears only after 1400, which is why the construction seems to be later than ce+V.

Regarding the stage [PRO VERB] SENTENCE [XYZ] SENTENCE of the hypothesised scenario, there is at least one attestation in the texts before 1200, which suggests that such a structure could have existed. In the example (with our translation), ce crei ‘I believe’, preceded by two forms of address, only serves as epistemic introduction to the following sentence:

(15) (Old French, La Chanson de Roland, v. 1006, l. 79, Segre 2003)

/ Dist Oliver: “Sire cumpainz, ce crei, / De Sarrazins purum bataille aveir.”/ says Oliver Sir companion this I believe of Saracens we could have battle have

‘Says Oliver: “Sir companion, this I believe, from the Saracens we could have battle.”’

The pronoun ce clearly cataphorically refers to De Sarrazins purum bataille aveir. The stage [XYZ] SENTENCE [PRO VERB] SENTENCE, in which the verb with the pronoun paratactically follows a sentence, is still recognisable in the following Middle French example:

(16) (Middle French, Guillaume de Machaut, Le dit dou lyon, p. 164, Hœpffner 1911)

/ Et si joliment couvert / D’un fin drap de soie tout vert
and so beautifully covered by a thin cloth of silk all green
Qu’on ne porroit mieus souhaitier, / Ce croy, se Dieus me puist aidier. /
that one not could better wish / this I believe if God me could help
‘and so beautifully covered by a thin green cloth of silk that one could not better
wish, this I believe, with the help of God’

Whereas the pronoun ce anaphorically refers to the preceding sentence (or sentences), the autonomy of ce croy is underlined by the fact that it has the formulaic expression se Dieus me puist aidier depending on it.

The constructions with the pronoun ce share a certain period of coexistence with the constructions je+V and me+V. But again, there are considerable differences between the single verbs. In the case of croire ‘believe’, this period lasts from 1200 to 1600, in the case of cuidier ‘believe’, the coexistence lasts until 1300. For espérer ‘hope’ and penser ‘think’ there is practically no coexistence, if we exclude one example of ce espeir bien in the texts before 1200 and a single attestation of je pense in the Renaissance period. As we have seen before, in the case of sembler ‘seem’, the me+V construction is not significant: there are three occurrences of me semble and only one for il me semble distributed over the entire period under examination, compared to 93 occurrences of ce+me+V. Hence, only for croire and cuidier there are periods in which the two constructions coexist with fairly numerous examples.

### 6 Conclusion

Our search in Old, Middle and Renaissance French texts yielded 301 parenthetical tokens with five verbs. The parenthetical occurrences of the verbs croire, cuidier, espérer and penser can be assigned to five constructions: ce+V, ce+V+je, je+V, V and comme+je+V. The examples involving the fifth verb analysed, sembler, were assigned to three constructions: ce+me+V, me+V and comme+il+me+V. In summary, there are ce-parentheticals, comme-parentheticals and parentheticals identical or similar to those found in Modern French, which for convenience we call modern parentheticals. Ce-parentheticals by far outnumber the others, comprising 50% of all instances, comme-parentheticals account for 27% and modern parentheticals for 23%. There are, however, important differences between the verbs, the aforementioned disproportion being largely due to the fact that ce-parentheticals with sembler continue to play an important role even during the Renaissance period.

As far as their chronological distribution is concerned, there is a reversal in the proportions: in the period before 1200, ce-parentheticals account for 57% of
the total, comme-parentheticals for 30% and modern parentheticals for 13%; in the Renaissance period, ce-parentheticals account for 40% of the total, comme-parentheticals for 48% and modern parentheticals for 12%. So, whereas in the early period, ce-parentheticals are the dominant constructional frame, in the Renaissance period, comme-parentheticals are dominant. The reversal in the relative importance of ce-parentheticals and comme-parentheticals is even more evident if we exclude those with sembler: in the early period, ce-parentheticals account for 55% of the total, comme-parentheticals for 32% and modern parentheticals for 13%, in the Renaissance period, ce-parentheticals account for 10% of the total, comme-parentheticals for 76% and modern parentheticals for 14%.

As is clear from the percentages above, in general the three types of parentheticals coexist throughout the whole period. They also coexist within each of the five historical periods defined. There are, however, some important specifications to be made. First of all, the V construction, without the subject pronoun je ‘I’ (e.g., croy ‘I believe’), is no longer used in Renaissance French since the expression of the subject pronoun has become obligatory⁹. Secondly, for the ce+V+je construction, we found data only for the period after 1400. Moreover, as mentioned repeatedly, the verb cuidier practically disappears after the Old French period. Finally, for the verb sembler, modern parentheticals play a marginal role during the whole period.

In the period before 1200, comme-parentheticals coexist with ce-parentheticals and co-occur in the works by the same author. In the period 1200–1300, ce-parentheticals, comme-parentheticals and modern parentheticals all occur in the texts by the same author. In the period 1300–1400, the three types of parentheticals also occur interchangeably in the works by the same author (e.g., Eustache Deschamps uses ce croi, ce semble, si com j’espoir, si com moy semble and je croy). During the period 1400–1500, the three parentheticals co-occur, albeit in more restricted ways: those authors employing all of them only use ce me semble as ce-parenthetical. Interestingly, ce-parentheticals and modern parentheticals with croire ‘believe’ co-occur during the periods 1300–1400 and 1400–1500 in the texts by the same author (e.g., Christine de Pizan writes ce croy, ce croy je, croy and je croy). During the Renaissance period, the three types of parentheticals all occur, but never simultaneously in texts by the same author. To cite an example, Du Bellay uses comme je croy, ce croy je and ce me semble, but not modern parentheticals.

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⁹ The fact that parenthetical verbs appear with subject pronouns during the same time in which subject pronouns are becoming obligatory in general suggests that the parenthetical verbs in this period behave like other verbs.
Concerning the emergence and development of modern parentheticals, we considered three developmental paths or sources: superordinate clauses (see section 5.1), subordinate clauses (see section 5.2) and juxtaposed sentences (see section 5.3). The last two sources can roughly be equated with comme-parentheticals and ce-parentheticals. As a first option, we took into account superordinate clauses. As shown in section 5.1, in Old French, the verb forms examined may occur in sentence-initial position without the complementizer que. Most of the time, the superordinate clauses indeed comprise forms like je croi or je cuit that lead directly to the forms of modern parentheticals. The hypothesis has to cope, however, with two difficulties. Firstly, in Old French, the forms we examined are considerably less frequent in sentence-initial position without the complementizer que than their Modern English equivalents: 30 cases without complementizer compared to 187 cases with complementizer. Even if we bear in mind that the data cited by Thompson and Mulac (1991a, 1991b) are from spoken language, whereas ours are from written language, the difference in the proportions remains huge. Secondly, there is a chronological difficulty: modern parentheticals already occur in median position in the 13th century (55% of all parentheticals during the period 1200–1300). The transition from the superordinate clause to the parenthetical clause must then have occurred much earlier.

Our data do not support the hypothesis that modern parentheticals derive from subordinate clauses by deletion of the connective comme ‘as’. From the early period onward, comme-parentheticals play an important role, although they represent the dominant constructional pattern only at the end of the time considered. Comme-parentheticals show considerable constructional variation and never become as fixed and formulaic as the other parentheticals. In fact, during the period examined, this construction is also common with a third person pronoun (e.g., comme il lui semble ‘as it seems to him’), which never developed into a parenthetical item. Moreover, there are modern-style parentheticals (espoir, me semble) which cannot be derived from the corresponding comme-parentheticals by the mere omission of comme. Finally, there are no data indicating the possibility of omitting comme ‘as’ in epistemic adverbial clauses.

Another possible source of modern parentheticals are juxtaposed sentences. According to our data, ce-parentheticals have their origin in juxtaposed sentences. These parentheticals are of course well represented, especially with ce croi, ce cuit and ce me semble. The data show how this type of parenthetical progressively moves from its original position at the periphery of the host sentence into a sentence-medial position: in the period before 1200, 57% of its occurrences are in initial or final position, compared to only 31% in the period 1200–1300. This suggests an integration of a former juxtaposed sentence. But if
ce-parentheticals originated modern parentheticals we have to explain the transition from ce croi to je croi. Both types of parentheticals co-occur from the early period. In the corpora examined there are no clues indicating an evolution through intermediate states as the following: ce croi → ce croi je → je ce croi → je crois. The construction je ce croi is not attested. Hence, the direct replacement of ce with je seems more plausible. In general, the transition from ce croi to je croi fits in well with what we know about the preferred argument structure of Old and Modern French. Old French is a language with optional subject and obligatory object (cf. Detges 2009; Rouquier and Marchello-Nizia 2012), whereas in Modern French the object is optional and the subject must be expressed.

It certainly is too early for a solution of the riddle. Further studies that include other parenthetical verbs and constructions need to be undertaken. These should include direct speech parentheticals (cf. Marchello-Nizia 2012). Furthermore, a more detailed analysis of the differences between texts in verse and texts in prose might also provide new insights. We can, however, evaluate the probability of the three hypotheses in the light of our current knowledge: subordinate clauses provide the less probable source for modern parentheticals, superordinate clauses are more probable as source, while juxtaposed sentences seem to offer the most plausible explanation.

References

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