

# Dative Experiencer Psych Verbs in Old French – The Role of the Preposition *à*

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**Abstract** This paper investigates the omission of the preposition *à* with some dative Experiencer psych verbs in Old French. In order to answer the question what the omitted *à* tells us about the verb and the object, the semantic meaning of the psych verbs is taken as point of departure, since meaning – among other things – determines a lexical entry. The qualitative data analysis clearly shows that the use of *à* does not only depend on the psych meaning of a psych verb, as there are several cases where it is omitted although the psych interpretation is straightforward. For these cases, I have identified possible reasons for the omission of the preposition. This suggests that *à* does not indicate dative case in a reliable way.

**Keywords** Psych verbs. Old French. Preposition *à*. Argument structure. Semantics.

**Index** 1 Introduction. – 2 Some Remarks on Old French and the Preposition *à*. – 3 Analysis of Old French PVs. – 4 Summary and Discussion. – 5 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

Psych verbs<sup>1</sup> (PVs) are verbs that express mental or emotional concepts showing an argument encoding the theta role EXPERIENCER. This verb group includes verbs of perception (*hear, see, ...*), cognition (*believe, know, ...*), and verbs of emotion (*love, like, ...*). For a long time, PVs have been controversially discussed concerning many languages from a synchronic as well as from a diachronic perspective, and in many different frameworks.<sup>2</sup> PVs show synchronic and diachronic variation within one language and across languages.

Since Belletti and Rizzi's (1988) seminal work, PVs have usually been divided into three classes according to the argument which realizes the EXPERIENCER. This paper deals with Belletti and Rizzi's 3<sup>rd</sup> class examining data from Old French, where the dative object is the EXPERIENCER and the nominative subject encodes the STIMULUS. The particularity of this class in Old French is the fact that the dative object<sup>3</sup> may still occupy a preverbal position (1), which is also possible in other Romance languages, e.g. Modern Spanish as in (2):

- (1) *A l'abé e a monies plut mult sa conpaignie*  
 to the abbot.OBJ<sup>4</sup> and to monks.OBJ please.3SG much his company  
 'The abbot and the monks liked his company a lot.'  
 (1173-BECKET-BFM-R,117.2989)

**1** I am very thankful to the anonymous reviewers who helped to improve this paper with their suggestions.

**2** For early works, cf. von Steffens-Montag 1984; Pesetsky 1987; Sigurðsson 1989; Belletti, Rizzi 1988; etc. For (Old) Germanic languages, cf. Barðdal 1997; Barðdal, Eythórsson 2003; Bayer 2004; Fanselow 2002, Fischer, Laszczak 2001; Fischer 2004; etc. For (Old) Romance languages, cf. Masullo 1993; Arteaga 1994; Fernández-Soriano 1999; Rivero 2004; Kailuweit 2005; Mathieu 2006; Fischer 2010, 2019; Alexiadou, Iordăchioaia 2014; Fábregas, Marín 2015; Jiménez-Fernández, Rozwadowska 2016; Giusti, Iovino 2019; etc.

**3** The grammatical status of dative Experiencers is discussed: The question is whether they are subjects or rather indirect objects that are moved to a sentence-initial position. These theoretical discussions are not addressed here. However, it shall be noted that dative Experiencers pass certain subjecthood tests in some languages, e.g. in Icelandic (cf. Barðdal 2023 for a novel summary), but not in German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Romanian (cf. Kagan 2020 for a short overview, referring especially to Bayer 2004 and Rákosi 2006). For a discussion of the availability and properties of oblique subjects in Old Germanic and Old Romance languages cf. Fischer 2010. She compares Old French oblique subjects to Modern Icelandic oblique subjects because they pass relevant subject tests.

**4** For convenience, the examples in this paper are not entirely glossed. The glosses only indicate the syntactic function of the (Experiencer) object and morphological information for relevant pronouns and verbs, that is, case and number. Tense and mood are adapted only in the English translation. Also, French elements that do not exist as such in English (partitive or plural indefinite article) are marked.

- (2) **A** **Ana** *le* **gusta- $\emptyset$**  *el* *chocolate*.  
 to Anne.OBJ CL.DAT like-3SG the chocolate  
 ‘Anne likes chocolate.’

In contrast to many other Romance languages, Modern French lost the possibility of placing the Experiencer object preverbally.<sup>5</sup> Nowadays, the Experiencer may occupy the preverbal position only by topicalization marked by a prosodic break, in (3) illustrated with a comma, or by dislocation with doubling (Fischer 2019, 111):

- (3) **A** **Marie,** *la* *musique* *classique* *lui* **plaît**.  
 to Mary.OBJ the music classic she.DAT like.3SG  
 ‘Mary likes classic music.’

A closer look at Old French PVs reveals the fact that the preposition *à* is sometimes omitted when the Experiencer occupies the preverbal position, as in (4):

- (4) *Et* **la** **dame** *couvint* *morir*.  
 And the lady.OBJ be.necessary.3SG die.INF  
 ‘And the lady had to die.’  
 (127X-CASSIDORUS-PENN-P,4.29\_1)

Focusing on this particular finding, this paper carries out a semantic analysis of the Old French PVs *chaloir*, *convenir*, *estouvoir*, *faillir* and *loisir* found in the MCVF-PPCHF corpus (*Modéliser le changement: Les voies de français and Penn-BFM Parsed Corpus of Historical French*). In this corpus, the objects of these PVs are annotated as dative objects. This annotation is quite obvious, as these verbs provide an impersonal or/and intransitive argument structure allowing a dative object – only *faillir* additionally has a transitive argument

<sup>5</sup> The phenomenon that the dative Experiencers have lost the possibility of occupying the preverbal position is taken up as research question in my PhD thesis *Dative Experiencer Psych Verbs in (Old) French* (Figura in prep.).

structure allowing an accusative object.<sup>6</sup> Further evidence comes from Buridant (2019, 108 f.) who defines these PVs as verbs requiring dative case. For these reasons, this paper starts from assuming a dative Experiencer and not an accusative Experiencer.

In order to answer the question what the omitted *à* tells us about the verb and the object, the semantic meaning of PVs is taken as point of departure, since meaning – among other things – determines a lexical entry. Simply put: A specific meaning requires a certain argument structure which allows for a certain theta role and hence, a certain case.<sup>7</sup> The study of these five PVs will illustrate that some of the apparent PVs also provide a non-psych meaning reflected in their differing argument structures. It will be shown that contrary to previous studies (e.g. Troberg 2013) one cannot directly connect the psych meaning with the preposition *à*, as in some contexts dative Experiencers occur without *à* although the psych meaning is clearly intended.

The aim of this paper is a qualitative analysis of the above-mentioned PVs in order to clarify why they sometimes appear with the preposition *à* and sometimes without. The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 makes some observations on relevant characteristics of Old French, including the role that the preposition *à* played in this period. In Section 3 the data analysis is carried out, its results are discussed in Section 4. Section 5 concludes.

## 2 Some Remarks on Old French and the Preposition *à*

In order to better understand the phenomenon that will be investigated in this paper, I will give a brief overview of some relevant syntactic features of Old French. After that, the preposition *à* will be examined in more detail.

<sup>6</sup> According to Beatrice Santorini (p.c.), for the annotation also the type of clitic of a verb was used to determine its object: if the verb occurs with dative clitics elsewhere in the corpus, the object was annotated as dative, correspondingly for the accusative. This also holds for bare objects which were coded as datives if the verb occurred with dative clitics. The problem with this idea is that sometimes the same verb occurs with dative clitics, and sometimes with accusative clitics. Until now no satisfactory solution has been found. Checking the distribution of accusative and dative clitics of the PVs analyzed in this paper shows for all of them that the dative predominates. This aspect is open for further research. Nevertheless, I need to rely on the annotation of the corpus for the scope of this paper, that is, I run search queries asking for objects annotated as dative. However, in Section 3 I will also point out cases where the annotation seems to be wrong.

<sup>7</sup> PVs are challenging for theories of linking that assume that case selection is determined by thematic roles – another reason that has given rise to the high number of different syntactic and semantic approaches (see above).

## 2.1 A Sketch of Some Syntactic Properties of Old French

The Old French period is assumed to last until around 1300 (Trips, Stein 2019, 241).<sup>8</sup> There are several characteristics in which Old French differs from Modern French.<sup>9</sup> All these facts are strongly debated.

Old French has been described as a null subject language. It has been assumed that null subjects have decreased in the thirteenth century and that the null subject property has been lost at the end of the sixteenth century (Arteaga 1994). According to Balon and Larrivé (2016), however, Old French has lost the null subject option as early as 1200. Old French is claimed to be a symmetric V2 language (Roberts, Roussou 2003). Regarding word order, the decrease in V2 and increase in SVO in the history of French has often been considered the characteristic feature of Middle French (see the discussion in Smith 2002, 434 f.). Although, also this hypothesis has been controversially discussed (e.g. Rinke, Meisel 2009), it has been agreed more and more that French was a V2 language (Cardinaletti, Roberts 2002) until at least the fifteenth century (e.g. Labelle, Hirschbühler 2018). Old French distinguishes between nominative case (*cas sujet*) and oblique case (*cas régime*). However, it is morphologically only marked in masculine nouns. Pronouns – like in most Romance languages – show a distinction between the direct object (DO) and the indirect object (IO).

The disintegration of the two-case system (in favor of the extension of the *cas régime*) can be described as a movement taking place regionally and diachronically. It goes westwards around 1200 and ends in the northeast after 1300, with northern France maintaining the use of the two cases until the fourteenth century (Buridant 2019, 87).<sup>10</sup>

Having briefly outlined the linguistic environment in which PVs have to be discussed, different views on the preposition *à* in Old French will be depicted in what follows.

<sup>8</sup> For a critical view on periodization, cf. Wolfe 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Such general trends of the language should be considered in potential follow-up studies. For example, Wolfgruber (2017, 72) noted for Medieval French a tendency for transitive patterns caused by the developing stability of SVO and the abundant use of *on*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Marchello-Nizia et al. 2020, 649 for slightly diverging indications, according to which the disintegration of the two-case system is evident from the earliest texts written in Western dialects, while it is maintained in Northern and Eastern dialects until the Middle French period.

## 2.2 The Preposition *à* in Old French

The *Grande Grammaire Historique du Français* questions whether there are already “des emplois grammaticaux” (Marchello-Nizia et al. 2020, 867) of prepositions in Old French. On the one hand, some uses show affinities with those of Modern French, where these prepositions are regarded as grammatical. On the other hand, these same uses are far less fixed in Old French. There is a considerable variability in these contexts that also concerns IOs (Marchello-Nizia et al. 2020, 867):

[L]e complément d’objet second n’est pas toujours introduit par *à*: en AF, on peut encore trouver des constructions du type *dona le roi un cheval* ‘il donna un cheval au roi’ où le complément d’attribution n’est marqué que par le cas (régime), comme en latin (*dare alicui aliquid* ‘donner quelque chose à quelqu’un: litt. quelqu’un<sub>DATIF</sub> quelque chose<sub>ACCUSATIF</sub>’).

Although the authors refer to IOs as secondary complements, one can assume that IOs occurring as single complements are also concerned: Marchello-Nizia et al. (2020, 869) indicate that the systematic *à*-marking of IOs and the use of IOs as secondary complements can only be observed for Middle French. During this period, the different uses of the preposition *à* become more grammaticalized.

Referring to the Old French two-case system, Jensen (1990, 28) discusses the unmarked dative as “accusative in dative function” and claims that the accusative may assume the role of an indirect object in Medieval Gallo-Romance, when it is used without a preposition.<sup>11</sup> However, he also mentions that absolute datives are generally found with verbs that take the dative case, that is, verbs or locutions of giving, lending, pleasing, harming, ordering, and communicating. Listing some more PVs, Jensen (1990) assigns unmarked datives to many impersonal verbs and states that the unmarked dative is quite often represented by a pronoun. According to him (and against Foulet 1935), the position of the absolute dative in relation to the verb is not constrained in any way.

However, the corpus study of Trips and Stein (2019) presents a different picture. They explore the syntactic realizations of the dative complements of *plaire* ‘please’ and *donner* ‘give’ in the SRCMF (*Syntactic Reference Corpus of Medieval French*) and MCVF corpora.

<sup>11</sup> Jensen (1990) compares the unmarked (or absolute) dative to the genitive juxtaposition, with which important characteristics are shared: unmarked datives are used only with proper nouns or with common nouns designating human beings, the nouns have the singular form and refer to different individuals (they never refer to a class or a category).

In these corpora, the absolute dative occurs infrequently in the oldest texts. Trips and Stein (2019, 241) thus claim that it is uncommon in Old French:

[t]he common realisation of the former dative argument is either a PP (*à*+NP or *à*+PRO) or a pronoun (PRO), i.e. it was formally distinguishable from the direct object.

For *plaire* they indicate only two cases of NPs without preposition, whereas the pronoun appears in the SRCMF in 121 cases and in the MCVF in 62 cases without preposition. This finding is complemented by my analysis in Section 3 showing that more PVs are used with ‘bare’ pronouns and NPs as dative.

Roberge and Troberg (2007, 301) analyze thematic IOs in Modern French and claim, taking a controversial point of view, that

there is no clear evidence that dative *à* behaves any differently, structurally speaking, than locative or neuter *à*, or lexical prepositions for that matter.

Therefore, their analysis treats all IOs as PPs.<sup>12</sup> Troberg (2013) shows how dative Experiencer PVs in Modern French can be incorporated into this structural analysis. The question arises as to whether this is also true for Old French PVs and if so, how a missing preposition would affect Troberg’s analysis. Of course, the different positions (only postverbal in Modern French vs. preverbal or postverbal in Old French) need to be considered. According to Troberg (2013), the preposition *à* could mean both ‘at’ and ‘to’ in Medieval French.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it encodes both a directional and a locative meaning, as many simple prepositions in Old and Middle French do. The author argues that it was the directional meaning ‘to’ that licensed the IO of a particular group of verbs (called “the verbs of helping and hindering”). Her data illustrate that

**12** The authors put forward the idea of a transitivity restriction on thematic IOs which is considered to be structural. They pursue the generalization that “there is no thematic IO without DO” (Roberge, Troberg 2007, 305) and treat PVs as a subclass of unaccusatives whose object becomes the grammatical subject whereas the optional IOs can be merged elsewhere.

**13** In her work on Medieval French, Troberg (2013) provides an account of the shift in the expression of certain objects from dative, that is, an IO with the preposition *à*, to accusative, that is, a DO without preposition.

when *à* loses this directional meaning in the latter half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a DO replaces the IO of verbs of helping and hindering. (Troberg 2013, 4)<sup>14</sup>

If a similar development were to be observed for PVs, this would possibly explain the omission of the preposition.

This short overview of some positions and findings in the literature gives a somewhat diverging picture of the Old French preposition *à*.<sup>15</sup> In terms of a temporary working hypothesis, though, it allows for the following thoughts: If *à* can be seen as a dative marker, and dative is connected to the theta role EXPERIENCER, and PVs go hand in hand with the EXPERIENCER because of their psych notion, one can be tempted to ask where there is the interruption in the chain. Certainly, one answer could be that the whole chain was not triggered yet in Old French – even if *à* was already connected with dative in general – simply because there was no need for a prepositional dative marker due to the morphological case marking (see above and Marchello-Nizia et al. 2020). The situation and the development of the Old French case marking system is very complex (see Buridant 2019 for very detailed explanations). Against this background, this reasoning is perhaps not the most obvious. However, the analysis in the next section shows certain instances where it is not ruled out. Another answer could be that the polysemous semantics offered by some PVs trigger different argument structures and therefore, they do not always occur with dative case. As the analysis in Section 3 shows, there are PVs that may also occur with non-psych meanings. In other words, one could assume that the use of *à* together with dative Experiencer depends on if the PV is intended with its psych meaning or not. The following analysis shows that this is not the case, as there are several occurrences where *à* is omitted although the psych interpretation is straightforward.

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**14** Crucially, she argues that Path is structurally derived. This contrasts the traditional view that Path is attributed to the inherent meaning of the preposition and, hence, that this notion is eroded over time (cf. Dufresne et al. 2001; Goyens et al. 2002; Kilroe 1989; and Martineau 2002). Troberg (2013, 161) contends that despite the apparent meaning of the preposition as ‘to’ in some contexts, *à* only provides the sense of ‘at’ and is thus a Place function in Modern French. According to her, the seemingly directional meaning of *à* is derived from other elements in the context: Lexical properties of verbs like ‘to come’ provide the sense of direction, implies that Marie receives the flowers, and come implies that Paul will change his location

**15** For an extensive overview on the preposition *à* and its functions, cf. Buridant 2019, 693 f.

### 3 Analysis of Old French PVs

In this section<sup>16</sup> the preverbal IOs of the PVs *chaloir*, *convenir*, *estovoir*, *faillir*, and *loisir* found in the MCVF-PPCHF<sup>17</sup> corpus are discussed.<sup>18</sup> The data collection has been carried out using CorpusSearch for search queries looking for dative objects of these PVs. As mentioned in the introduction, Buridant (2019, 108 f.) defines these verbs to require a dative object. According to him, they have an underlying “adjectif attribut”, so that for example *abelir a aucun* ‘to beautify someone’ is reanalyzed as *estre bel* ‘to be beautiful’. Buridant even cites several PVs without the preposition *à*, but this finding is only descriptive.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the following analysis tries to find an explanation considering meaning and argument structure of each PV.

First, the meanings and possible argument structures of the PVs are given, based on the DEAF (*Dictionnaire Étymologique de l’Ancien Français*, Etymological Dictionary of Old French), the AND (*Anglo-Norman Dictionary*)<sup>20</sup> and the TL (*Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, Old French Dictionary by Tobler-Lommatzsch). The definitions and examples are quoted as they appear in the corresponding dictionary entries. Then three examples of each PV are analyzed: One example with preverbal IO with *à*, one example with preverbal IO without *à*

**16** The aim of this paper is a qualitative analysis of certain PVs. Quantitatively, the data relies on a comparatively small number of examples, so that far-reaching theoretical conclusions cannot be drawn on this basis. The character of this analysis is descriptive and is intended as a sketch, zooming in on a point in time during an ongoing change.

**17** MCVF (*Modéliser le changement: Les voies de français*) and PPCHF (*Penn-BFM Parsed Corpus of Historical French*) are two unified and morphosyntactically annotated corpora of Old and Middle French, which together contain over 1.6 million words of running text. The included texts date from around 842-1585 and represent various genres. A potential follow-up study should take into account the influence of versification which also causes null subjects (Buridant 2019, 637), so an effect on the use of *à* cannot be ruled out. Generally, it has been shown that translation practices and text type related peculiarities are more relevant than previously thought (e.g. Wolfgruber 2017).

**18** *Plaire* ‘to please’ is often cited as the prime example for PVs and it is one of the most frequent ones throughout the MCVF-PPCHF. However, it is not comparable to the PVs discussed here not only due to its high frequency but also because of the particular set phrase *si Dieu plaît*. Here, the dative Experiencer occurs always in a preverbal position without *à*. These facts require a statistical consideration, which is not part of this paper, so that *plaire* has been excluded.

**19** At least for ditransitive constructions, the author mentions versification as a possible reason for omitting *à* (Buridant 2019, 107). However, the examples considered in the following analysis are from various text genres.

**20** The term ‘Anglo-Norman’ is commonly used for the variety of French spoken in Britain between 1066 and the middle of the fifteenth century. According to Rothwell (2006), “‘Anglo-French’, or ‘The French of England’, perhaps better reflects the reality of the situation”. This variety “shared with the medieval French of the mainland the majority of its vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation”. Due to its quality as a reliable reference for Old French it is included here.

and one example including another complement. IOs can be lexical, pronominal or a quantifier.<sup>21</sup>

The five PVs analyzed in this section can be grouped according to two interrelated properties, namely their semantics and their argument structure. As mentioned above, I assume that the argument structure of a verb depends on its semantics, which is the point of departure in the following analysis. Therefore, the number of possible meaning is the first characteristic feature to think of to groups: *chaloir* and *estouvoir* have only one semantic interpretation, whereas *loisir* shows two and *faillir* and *convenir* offer a larger variety of meanings. Importantly, only *faillir* and *convenir* include semantics that do not share psych notions. Second, the PVs differ in terms of their possible argument structures: again, *chaloir* and *estouvoir* can be grouped together, as both display an impersonal argument structure. For both of them, the intransitive structure is available. *Loisir* only provides an impersonal construction. *Convenir* is indicated to be intransitive, reflexive, or impersonal, and *faillir* may be used transitively, intransitively, reflexively, and impersonally. All PVs analyzed here have an impersonal argument structure, which has already been analyzed by (Mathieu 2006).<sup>22</sup> These characteristics will be discussed for each verb in what follows.

One could assume that the preposition *à* only occurs within the psych meanings and is dropped whenever the non-psych meaning is intended: The preposition is strongly connected to the psych meaning, as it licenses the EXPERIENCER which is itself connected to dative case. However, it will be shown that this assumption is too simple and cannot be maintained. The analysis shows that in some contexts dative Experiencers may occur without *à* although the psych meaning is clearly intended. For these cases, the missing *à* can be explained by other reasons.

**21** Clitics have been excluded because they generally appear – due to their status as clitic elements – in a preverbal position in Old French as well as in Modern French. Furthermore, this paper does not consider the omission of *à* with postverbal dative Experiencers. The preverbal dative Experiencers are an interesting object of investigation as they get lost over time. A comparison of preverbal with postverbal dative Experiencers would require a broader and especially a quantitative analysis.

**22** According to von Steffens-Montag (1983, 524), impersonal constructions with Experiencers are very productive in encoding PVs in many languages. More generally, this type of “affective impersonal construction” may be categorized as “lexical impersonal construction” (Creissels 2019, 7). The impersonal expression seems to reflect the unvolitional or uncontrollable aspect. Von Steffens-Montag (1983, 535) indicates for French that there has been a tendency for referential (or human) nominative subjects instead of dummy subject constructions from the seventeenth century onwards.

### 3.1 *Chaloir*

According to the DEAF, *chaloir* only has a psych meaning: “avoir de l’intérêt pour qn, être sujet de souci, importer” (‘to be of interest to sb, to be of concern, to matter’). The TL indicates that it is an intransitive verb which is often used in an “impersonal and subjectless”<sup>23</sup> construction. It describes the meaning of *chaloir* in a more concrete way, depending on the sentence type (imperative, question) and mentioning uses with *de* or *en* as “*Cui chaut de ce?*” ‘Who cares about this?’, *cui* being used for the *cas régime*. Also, the AND defines *chaloir* as an impersonal verb, meaning “to matter, be of importance, concern”. Next to impersonal constructions with and without the pronoun *il*, the AND cites questions as “*quin chalt?*” (‘who cares?’). The AND entry for *quin* underlines the interpretation of dative, indicating its meaning as “(as an indirect object) to, for (etc.) whom, which person?” and giving a similar example with the verb *chaloir*.

All these observations are confirmed by the data in the MCVF-PPCHF. However, there are only three IOs, all are in a preverbal position and all of them are part of an impersonal construction with a null subject. Interestingly, they stand in contrast to the five cases with different complements found in the corpus, which belong to impersonal constructions with realized subjects. Some of these cases are discussed in what follows.

*Chaloir* with preverbal IOs with *à*:

Two of the three preverbal IOs show the preposition and are both represented by a lexical element, as the one cited in (5):

- (5) *mes a la dame n'en chault de tout cela.*  
 But to the lady.OBJ not PTV matter.3SG about all this  
 ‘But the lady does not care about all this.’  
 (1450-XV-JOIES-MCVF-P,52.1381)

In this example, the dative Experiencer *la dame* is mentioned next to the quantifier *tout cela* representing the STIMULUS. The preposition *de* is doubled by the adverbial partitive clitic *en*.

**23** As the TL is written in German, all given quotations are my English translation.

*Chaloir* with preverbal IOs without *à*:

In this example from a Picard author, the IO is represented by a pronoun and does not display the preposition:

- (6) *Moi ne caut u nous aillons, [...]*  
 I.DAT.OBJ not matter.3SG where we go.1PL  
 ‘I do not care where we go, [...]’  
 (122X-AUCASSIN-MCVF-M,27\_verse.745)

The pronoun *moi* represents the EXPERIENCER, the PP *u nous aillons* is the STIMULUS. Considering the Old French use of strong and weak object pronouns, there are two developments which might favor the omission of *à* in these cases. First, according to Kaiser (1992) and shown earlier by Brunot (1905) and Foulet (1935), as early as the thirteenth century stressed object pronouns increasingly appear in the function of a subject.<sup>24</sup> As the subject pronouns do not bear the preposition *à*, Old French speakers may have been confused. Second, a competition with regular impersonal patterns including the weak object pronoun like *me caut* might increase this confusion. Interestingly, Buridant (2019) explains the use of the strong pronouns by listing several PVs. He cites examples where the preverbal strong object pronoun appears without *à*, similar to the one in (6), defining them as null subject impersonal constructions. This supports the view of interpreting *moi* as dative object and not as subject. Buridant (2019, 667) identifies this construction as “[...] une construction épisodique, en concurrence des formes faibles [...], avec l’impersonnel quand il se présente sans sujet au regard de *il* ou *ce* saturant la zone préverbiale”. Being episodic suggests that the construction in (6) was not very common.

*Chaloir* with other complements:

What stands out for some of the constructions of *chaloir* with other complements is the introduced theta role MEASURE<sup>25</sup> by e.g. *plus* (as in *Vous en avez bien d’ autres dont il vous chault plus que de moy* – ‘You have many others [women] who are more important to you than me’

<sup>24</sup> Brunot and Bruneau (1965, 276) give a broader time span “[...] dès la fin du XIIIe siècle, moi est le sujet d’un verbe. Au XIVe siècle, Froissart écrit indifféremment : « il et ses gens » ; « lui et ses gens »”. According to von Wartburg (1965), forms derived from the nominative are preferred for emphasis to those derived from the accusative and “[d]ès le 14e s. on hésite entre *il* et *lui* comme nominatif accentué”.

<sup>25</sup> Arguments with the theta roles MEASURE or AMOUNT indicate amount, length, duration, cost, etc., that is, extensions along a dimension.

146X-CNNA-MCVF-P,71.1597). The dative IO in these cases only appears as a clitic pronoun, which does not occur with a preposition and was not included in my analysis. More relevant are questions asking for the Experiencer where the *à* is omitted, as in (7):

- (7) - *Cui*                    *chalt?*  
 Who.DAT.OBJ    matter.3SG  
 ‘Who cares?’  
 (1155-ENEAS2-BFM-R,85.1943)

According to Buridant (2019, 1003 f.), though, *cui* generally can be employed with or without preposition. The author adds that this *wh*-pronoun is used for the *cas régime* with animate referents, whereas the form *qui/ki/chi* is valid for the *cas sujet*. This not only confirms the dative Experiencer, it also is in line with the fact that case marking can be the reason for omitting the preposition (see above and Marchello-Nizia et al. 2020).

### 3.2 *Convenir*

According to the DEAF, there are two meanings available for *convenir*: The first one includes “*s’assembler, se réunir; venir avec qn; tomber d’accord au sujet de, reconnaître la vérité de; déterminer qch. par un accord mutuel; etc.*” (‘to assemble, to meet; to come with sb; to agree about, to acknowledge the truth of; to determine sth. by mutual agreement’). ‘To assemble, to meet’ clearly does not contain any psych notion. ‘To agree, to acknowledge’ can be considered less straightforward, as some sort of mental action takes place. However, it has an agentive and volitional character, not an experiencing one. This first meaning of the DEAF contrasts with the second meaning of *convenir* that includes “*être nécessaire; falloir*” (‘to be necessary; to have to’), where the psych component of an experience becomes clearer: there has to be someone who experiences a necessity and is aware of it, otherwise one would not claim something to be necessary. The TL adds the notions of “to fit” and “to be suitable”. The AND indicates three possible argument structures for *convenir* and connects them to more or less diverging semantics: the intransitive argument structure implies the meanings “to come together, convene, to come to, make an agreement, agree, do what one can, be fitting / right, to have to, be necessary”. For the impersonal argument structure, it lists “to be agreed, to be necessary, to befall”. The reflexive verb is connected to the semantics of “to need”. These entries show a certain overlap which suggests that the argument structure does not seem to indicate the different

meanings in a reliable way.<sup>26</sup> Thus, one can expect the EXPERIENCER in both intransitive and impersonal structures found in the MCVF-PPCHF. The TL mentions the use of the dative argument as agents with *que* or without any complement, but also accusative structures with infinitives representing agents.

In the MCVF-PPCHF, 49 constructions with only IOs can be found next to 21 constructions with other complements, 9 out of them are DOs of the transitive use of *convenir*. There are a few cases where *convenir* appears with two complements in the same sentence. There, the IO is always a clitic<sup>27</sup> and the second complement often indicates the MEASURE (as for example in *mais sousfrir lor convint tant que pour celle fois*, ‘but it suited them to bear [it] this one time’ 1374-FROISSART-5-MCVF-P,561.2257). In 29 cases the IO is used without preposition *à*, out of which 11 cases show the dative Experiencer in a preverbal position. Here, the IO can be represented as a pronominal or lexical element whereas the subject is always annotated as an omitted impersonal pronoun, as in (8). As mentioned above, the PVs analyzed here are impersonal verbs (Mathieu 2006). With this type of verbs, it is particularly common to drop the impersonal subject pronoun (Buridant 2019, 638). This underpins the annotation in these cases. Interestingly, the corpus shows constructions with realized impersonal subject pronouns only when the dative Experiencer is postverbal.

*Convenir* with preverbal IO with *à*:

(8) is one out of only three examples where the IO is in a preverbal position with *à* in the corpus. The subject is an omitted impersonal pronoun, the personal pronoun *toi* represents the dative Experiencer:

- (8) *a toi ne couient pas abstenir quar et*  
 to you.DAT.OBJ not must.3SG not abstain.INF because and  
*ge sui poruec enuoiez*  
 I be.AUX.1SG for this send.PTCP  
 ‘You should not evade because I have been sent for this, [...]’  
 (1190-DIALGREG2-BFM-P,58.148)

<sup>26</sup> Maybe this difficulty in connecting the different semantic meanings to different argument structures made Mathieu (2006) identify the dative/accusative alternation erroneously as Dative Sickness, a process replacing accusative Experiencers by dative Experiencers (Eythórssón 2000, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Accusative as well as dative clitics can be found. This suggests that especially for verbs with different semantics such as *convenir*, a broader study including clitics may be revealing.

The psych notion of the verb in terms of an obligation is clearly indicated here.

*Convenir* with preverbal IO without *à*:

(9) is an impersonal construction with a null subject, the STIMULUS is represented by the main clause the conjunction *que* refers to. The EXPERIENCER is represented by the proper name *Lapsus*.

- (9) *La se sont si entr'encontré d++es lances que*  
 There REFL be.AUX.3PL so meet.PTCP INDF.ART spears that  
*Lapsus couvint cheoir a terre*  
 Lapsus.OBJ must.3SG fall.INF to ground  
 'Then, spears collided so that Lapsus had to fall to the ground.'  
 (127X-CASSIDORUS-PENN-P,26.619)

The context of example (9) reports a fight which forces the psych reading: being involved in a fight almost implies any kind of physical or emotional experience. The cited clause then describes the moment during the fight when Lapsus falls to the ground as a consequence of the collision of the spears, indicated by *si ... que*. This collision seems to trigger an uncontrollable hard blow because of which Lapsus experiences the movement of falling down (probably falling off a horse). Thus, the psych meaning is clearly given, even though the dative Experiencer *Lapsus* is not marked with *à*. This is a very interesting and puzzling finding.

*Convenir* with other complements:

The following example shows quite clearly the non-psych meaning 'to agree', where some kind of mental action, but no real experience takes place (see above):

- (10) *Et convint le roi d'Engleterre, ensi que je fui*  
 And agree.3SG DEF.ART king.SBJ of England as that I be.AUX.1SG  
*enfourmés, enprunter a Jaquemon d'Artevelle [...] chienqante mille*  
 inform.PTCP, borrow-INF to Jaquemon d'Artevelle.OBJ five hundred thousand  
*mars*  
 mars.OBJ  
 'And the King agreed, as I was informed, to borrow five hundred thousand  
 mars to Jaquemon d'Artevelle [...].'  
 (1372-FROISSART-4-MCVF-P,450.2203)

According to the annotation, there is an omitted impersonal subject pronoun and *le roi d'Engleterre* represents a DO. However, this annotation seems to be wrong: *le roi d'Engleterre* is better interpreted as subject of the clause and as the agent of 'to agree'. Evidence for this is given by the context: first, the whole text passage can be characterized as report, a fact which is also underlined by the insertion *ensi que je fui enfourmés*. It is reported in a neutral way that different nations served the king at their own expense so that the question about payment is discussed. Reporting about an agreement on this question fits in this neutral description, rather than an evaluation like being necessary. Second, later in the text the king's act is referred to as promises, which fits the meaning of 'to agree':

Et qant li rois d' Engleterre remonstroit ces proumesses a son conseil que Jaques d' Artevelle et li pais de Flandres de bonne volenté li offroient [...]. (1372-FROISSART-4-MCVF-P,450.2210)<sup>28</sup>

Despite the semantic overlap in the impersonal and intransitive argument structure of *convenir*, the examples discussed above suggest that there might be a slight difference concerning the distribution of the preposition *à*: Example (10) for *convenir* without *à* could be interpreted with a non-psych meaning 'agree'. Example (8) with the preposition can be more readily associated with the psych meaning 'be necessary'. The examples cited by the AND confirm this tendency. Intransitive uses of *convenir* with the non-psych meaning 'come together, convene, agree' do not show *à*. Among the impersonal examples, connected with the psych meaning 'be necessary, befall', there are some that display the preposition. However, (9) constitutes a considerable counterexample, which perhaps the historical consideration to classify it as a transition example, can rectify. When arguing from an etymological perspective, the development of *convenir* and its possible argument structures seems to be quite obvious: people have to 'come together', that is, to 'con-vene' in order to 'agree' on something. Facts that are 'agreed on' are 'necessary'. Therefore, one can assume that the intransitive argument structure is basic and then the impersonal one is added, as impersonal constructions with EXPERIENCERS are very productive in encoding PVS in many languages (von Seeffranz-Montag 1983, 524).<sup>29</sup> Such changes

<sup>28</sup> 'And when the King of England demonstrated theses promises to his consul that Jaques d'Artevelle and the country of Flanders offered him with pleasure [...].'

<sup>29</sup> However, according to the AND, the earliest attestations of each argument structure do not show significant differences: The few examples date around 1100-1150. However, this may also be due to the geographic restriction of the AND. Generally, this idea needs to be verified on the basis of more data.

in meaning and argument structure are observed by Blank (1997): He describes the transfer into the cognitive domain, from verbs of action to verbs of perception, as typical for the general change from concrete to abstract.<sup>30</sup> Once such a change with respect to the core meaning has taken place, changes in the theta roles and in the argument structure are the consequence (Blank 1997, 188 f.). This kind of development can probably be assumed for many PVs because they all denote an abstract emotion or perception. This observation by Blank (1997) mainly concerns metaphors. Concerning *convenir*, though, one should rather assume a metonymy: In contrast to metaphor, it is essential for metonymy to come about that the underlying aspects actually are in a relation with each other (Blank 1997, 235 f.).<sup>31</sup>

This reasoning could locate (9) right at some kind of transition point of the semantic change of *convenir*, that is, being in between the non-psych and psych meaning and that is the reason why it does not show *à*. Also, as mentioned above, *à* possibly expressing Path could play a role here. The original meaning ‘come together’ would include Path, but not EXPERIENCER, whereas the later developed psych meaning would have the EXPERIENCER, but not Path.

### 3.3 *Estouvoir*

According to the DEAF and the TL, there is just one meaning available for *estouvoir*: “falloir, être nécessaire” (‘to have to’, ‘to be necessary’). The AND additionally adds the similar meanings of “to be indispensable” and “to be inevitable (to)” and characterizes the verb as impersonal. The TL describes the argument structure as intransitive and impersonal with possible infinitival uses for accusative and dative, but also mentions reflexive constructions.<sup>32</sup>

In the MCVF-PPCHF, all IO and DO show infinitives. Buridant (2019, 638) indicates *estouvoir* as a special case in his section on the

**30** Klein and Kutscher (2005) argue that the vast majority German PVs had a non-psych, i.e. a physical, reading in earlier stages of the language. They define this kind of polysemy as characteristic for PV, and claim that the non-psych reading determines the case selection of these verbs.

**31** The associative-psychological basis of metonymy is contiguity in terms of temporal, spatial or other conceptual interrelatedness of two concepts in our knowledge of the world (Blank 1997, 235 f.).

**32** Furthermore, constructions with elements denoted as nominative subjects are indicated in the TL, as in “Uns d’els i estoveit morir” (‘One of them had to die there’). Such cases are intricate as they have to be interpreted based on the morphological appearance as well as on the context. For example, the indefinite article *uns* can be singular in *cas sujet* and plural in *cas régime*. The verb form of *estouvoir* indicates the former option.

omission of Old French subject pronouns: the frequent absence of the subject pronoun with *estouvoir* is mentioned next to the omission with auxiliaries and *il y a*-constructions. This fact is confirmed by the data found in the MCVF-PPCHF. The corpus displays constructions with either only DO or only IO. All of the 13 IO constructions are annotated as impersonal constructions where the impersonal pronoun is omitted. Even though the TL cites cases of nominal datives with the preposition (e.g. “A Guillaume estut enprunter”), none of the constructions in the MCVF-PPCHF includes the preposition *à*.

*Estouvoir* with preverbal IO without *à*:

In four constructions, the IO is annotated as a pronoun or as a quantifier, the latter shown in (11):

- (11) *se a Cartage sordoit guerre, chascun conte*  
 if at Carthage crop.up.3SG war every count.OBJ  
*estovroit server et [...]*  
 must.COND.3SG serve.INF and  
 ‘If in Carthage a war broke out, every count would have to serve and [...].’  
 (1155-ENEAS1-BFM-R,15.301)

The declension of the IO *chascun* confirms that it is the dative Experiencer and not the subject: the singular form *chascun* is only available for the *cas régime*.<sup>33</sup> In the *cas sujet* it marks the plural form, which is ruled out here due to the verbal conjugation. Again, it seems to be the case marking that makes *à* superfluous.

Interestingly, overtly realized impersonal subject pronouns can only be found when the IO is represented by a clitic, as in *il m’ estuet dormir* (‘I have to sleep’ 1279-SOMME-ROYAL-PENN-P,1,47.1259). The impersonal pronoun cannot be omitted here in order to avoid the weak form at the beginning of the clause.

*Estouvoir* with other complements:

(12) shows parallels to constructions mentioned for *chaloir* with a certain type of optional complement, introducing the theta role

**33** Certainly, the *cas régime* generally includes dative as well as accusative objects, but as mentioned above, the accusative object is ruled out here because of the argument structures that are available for the psych meanings.

MEASURE indicated by *un poi*. In the corpus, it is annotated as DO of *s'estut*, the determiner *un* turns it into a noun:<sup>34</sup>

- (12) *Un poi s' estut pur Deu preier.*  
 INDF.ART bit.OBJ REFL must.3SG for God pray.INF  
 'One has to pray to God a bit.'  
 (1183-ADGAR-BFM-R,266.3495)

The meaning can be interpreted as impersonal, by which – according to the TL – those uses of reflexive *se* seem to be accompanied. In the few cases similar to this one, no IO is annotated. What stands out is the fact that uses with a reflexive pronoun as (12) can be found only here.

### 3.4 *Faillir*

According to the DEAF, *faillir* is a transitive verb with the semantics of “faire défaut, manquer” (‘to fail’, ‘to miss’, ‘to lack’). The entries of the AND and the TL are more complex: The TL completes this meaning by e.g. “to go wide”, “to lose”, “to break”, “to destroy”, “to refute”, or “to convict”. The AND confirms the meanings listed for the transitive use of *faillir* and adds “to lack, miss, be short of; to lose, “to fail to supply”, “(of an argument) to destroy, contradict, refute”, and “(of an agreement, a promise, etc.) to break”.

The TL also mentions the transitive meanings “to refuse to serve someone, to be rejected”, which are completed by the AND that defines many semantic notions for the intransitive form:<sup>35</sup>

- to be wanting, lacking, absent; to be wanting, lacking, absent to (someone, something); to be missed, be forgotten; (of money) to be outstanding, (over)due
- to let down, disappoint; to be unfaithful, disloyal to
- to fail, be unsuccessful, not succeed; to be faulty, malfunction, not work properly; to fail to live a good life, to sin; to collapse, fail, be invalid; to collapse, fail, be invalid
- to fail (of harvest, crop, etc.); to be barren, not produce any fruits; to be unprofitable
- to miss a target

<sup>34</sup> An alternative syntactic analysis could be to interpret *un poi* as adverb fronted to the empty subject position, because the impersonal pronoun *il* is not overtly realized.

<sup>35</sup> According to the AND website, the “entries are organized on the basis of semantic principles: the core sense is always the first sense”. Additional senses or subsenses which may be more specific to a certain context are also indicated (<https://anglo-norman.net/help/>).

- to fail to happen, take place
- to wane, diminish, become less; to weaken, faint; (of wind) to drop, wane; to be failing in health, to be dying
- to cease, stop, come to an end; to run out
- to break, disintegrate
- to be wrong, to be mistaken, to err; to falter; to deceive, lie

Furthermore, the AND identifies a reflexive meaning with “(of harvest, crop) to fail; to cease to be productive”; “to collapse, break”, “to be necessary, befitting” and an impersonal use with “(something, someone) is lacking; it is necessary, befitting”.

Although the semantic notions for the intransitive argument structure are very fine-grained, one can detect a certain overlap in the meanings across the four different types of argument structure for *faillir*. This fact makes this verb similar to *convenir*. Another similarity to *convenir* can be seen in the metonymic interpretation. Here, mainly some of the transitive meanings listed above are concerned, e.g. ‘to destroy’. Crucially, exemplifying this meaning, Royo (2020, 375) explains that “non-psych causative verbs become a PV by means of a metaphorical extension of the semantics, as in “Al Xavier el destrossa aquesta tensió contínua - lit. ‘To Xavier this constant tension is destroying’”.

In the MCVF-PPCHF, 21 IO and 11 other complements which are all DO are attested. 4 of the 21 IO are preverbal, 3 of them with the preposition *à*.

*Faillir* with preverbal IO with *à*:

The context of the following example is that King Henry heard that he could stay in a certain place forever. Therefore:

- (13) *Ne a lui ne a++s suens nule rien ne failli*  
 not to he.DAT.OBJ not to DEF.ART his.OBJ none nothing not lack.3SG  
 ‘Neither he nor his relatives missed anything.’  
 (1173-BECKET-BFM-R,113.2911)

Here, the verb is used with the meaning of ‘to be lacking’, typical for intransitive and impersonal structures: The King and his relatives are experiencing that nothing is lacking.

*Nule rien* is annotated as the quantifier subject of the clause. The two parts of the coordinated IO, the dative Experiencer, *lui* and *suens* are each introduced by the preposition. This contrasts the only case where the IO is preverbal without *à*:

*Faillir* with preverbal IO without *à*:

According to the annotation of the MCVF-PPCHF, (14) shows a dative IO that is not marked by the preposition. This annotation seems to be wrong. Probably, the PV is employed here with the transitive argument structure of ‘to be rejected’ and hence, presents an accusative object that is not marked by the preposition. Also, the psych interpretation is not straightforward, as ‘to reject’ mainly is a communicative act which does not automatically trigger a negative emotion of the rejected person (and/or the rejecting person). The subject, again, is annotated as an omitted impersonal pronoun. The context of the clause describes clothes intended for a trip to Sudan. Someone gives this particular type of clothing to anyone who comes to them as a messenger. Then it is said:

- (14) *N' onque messages n' i failli.*  
 Not ever messenger.OBJ not there reject.3SG  
 ‘No messenger was ever rejected there.’  
 (137X-PRISE-MCVF-R,,3398)

The transitive psych meaning seems to fit well for this statement. The EXPERIENCER represented by the lexical item *messages* is thus better analyzed as an accusative object.

*Faillir* with DO:

The following example shows a typical transitive non-psych meaning of the verb, ‘to break’, referring to the theme *li tretié*, the singular form of *cas régime* and annotated as DO. *Li signeur* is the plural form of *cas sujet* and the postposed subject of the clause, showing agreement with *fallirent*:

- (15) *Et pour ce fallirent li tretié, et retournerent*  
 And for this break.3PL DEF.ART.SG treaty.OBJ.SG and go.back.3PL  
*li signeur en France.*  
 DEF.ART.PL lords.SBJ.PL to France  
 ‘And because of that the lords broke the treaty and went back to France.’  
 (1372-FROISSART-4-MCVF-P,366.169)

In the corpus, transitive uses of this verb like the one in (15) never include the preposition *à*.

As for *convenir*, the examples of *faillir* discussed above suggest a distribution of *à* according to the argument structure despite

the semantic overlaps: If *faillir* is used as a PV requiring dative, it occurs with *à*. If it is used as a PV in a transitive structure or in its non-psych meaning, *à* is omitted. Historically, according to the AND the first attestation of the transitive construction is comparatively late, in 1319. The first intransitive argument structure with the meaning is already attested for 1113-19.<sup>36</sup> These dates fit with the identified argument structure in (13), (14), and (15) respectively. These examinations show that the possibility of *à* to express Path does not play a role here, because the omission of *à* can be explained by other reasons.

### 3.5 *Loisir*

The DEAF gives the meaning of “être permis” (‘to be allowed’). The AND adds “to be entitled”, “to be lawful” and as a second meaning “to please”, identifying the verb as impersonal. The TL describes the semantics by “to be possible, to be an opportunity”. These meanings do not clearly evoke a typical psych interpretation and therefore, the corresponding IO might not be immediately recognizable as EXPERIENCERS. However, *loisir* has been discussed as impersonal verb with Experiencer argument (von Seeffranz-Montag 1984, 532). This can be due to the fact that one can associate a mental or emotional experience while perceiving a permission instead of a ban.<sup>37</sup>

There are no occurrences of preverbal IO without the preposition *à* in the MCVF-PPCHF.

**36** This fact does not seem to be evident when looking at the etymological origin lat. *fallere* ‘to fail, to cheat’: the first meaning would require an intransitive argument structure, the second one a transitive argument structure. Therefore, one might expect the two to coexist with different case markings and different theta grids from the very beginning.

**37** According to an anonymous reviewer, the meaning of ‘to be allowed’ rather suggests the theta role BENEFACTIVE. It is correct that one can certainly benefit from a permission. However, the definitions of theta roles often show overlaps. This is one of the reasons why the theoretical discussion about which theta roles should be adopted is still ongoing. Kagan (2020, 58) points out that the unification of the dative functions on a very abstract level is observed in the literature: the term ‘goal’ can cover (next to spatial GOALS) RECIPIENTS, BENEFACTIVES and EXPERIENCERS. It has also been proposed to subsume these thematic roles under a single macro-role, for syntactic reasons.

*loisir* with preverbal IO with *à*:

There are six occurrences of IO,<sup>38</sup> two of them preverbal and only these ones are accompanied by an omitted impersonal pronoun, as in (16).

- (16) *et a moi covaitant morir leüst endroit a jesir,*  
 and to I.DAT.OBJ desire.GERUND die.INF allow.3SG place to lie.INF  
 ‘And to me, desiring to die, a place to lie buried was allowed.’  
 (1200-DIALAME-BFM-P,281.185)

Here, the psych meaning is given and the dative Experiencer is represented by a personal pronoun.

*loisir* with other complements:

When *loisir* is employed in a differing structure from the one with IO, it often displays the theta role MEASURE, as already noted for other PVs above. In (17), it is *en combien* indicating the amount:

- (17) *et si ministrat a lui en combien il liut.*  
 And so serve.3SG to he.DAT.OBJ as much it please.3SG  
 ‘And so he served him as much as it pleased.’  
 (1190-DIALGREG2-BFM-P,57.122)

The context of this clause, describing an altar server helping to prepare a mass, allows for both meanings of *loisir* as ‘to be allowed’ and ‘to please’. The AND cites for the meaning “to please” the same source (*Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great*): “Li maufé li apparut Ramposnant lui tant com li lut” (‘The devil appeared to him and insulted him as much as he liked’). This interpretation supports the same semantic interpretation for *loisir* in (17), showing a similar

**38** Three of the six IO are relative clauses as in “<< O Dyeuesse [...], A qui il loist par les debrisemens D+ +es cieulx aller” (133X-PERCEFOREST-PENN-P,76.241). Relative clauses can support the argumentation put forward in this paper because in Old French it was possible to omit the preposition here, forming a “construction absolue” (Buridant 2019, 862).

impersonal argument structure. However, the meaning ‘to be allowed’ is not ruled out here.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4 Summary and Discussion

In Section 2.2, I have depicted different views on the preposition *à* in Old French. According to Troberg (2013), the preposition *à* encodes both a directional and a locative meaning. She argues that when the preposition lost the directional meaning, a DO replaced the IO of a certain group of verbs. Troberg (2013, 170) claims that the interpretation of Path is inherent to the preposition and does not depend on the meaning of a verb. If this were true, dative Experiencers could not be affected by the loss of the directional meaning for two reasons: First, dative Experiencers are triggered by the semantics of the PVs. Second, Troberg (2013) characterizes the EXPERIENCER as location of the feeling. That is, even if the loss of the directional notion of *à* already started in Old French, the group of PVs should not have been affected. However, this reasoning might be less convincing in cases of less clear semantics, i.e. etymologically ambiguous cases or metonymic / metaphoric uses of verbs. Crucially, the argument structure of verbs can change according to a metaphoric change in their semantics (Blank 1997). I have argued that an etymological consideration of the complex semantics of *convenir* and *faillir* – displaying several argument structures together with psych and non-psych meanings – contributes to explain their different shapes. A metaphoric change is a shift where PVs can be observed at some kind of transition point. That is, they can be located in between the non-psych and psych meaning and that is the reason why they do not show *à*. As I have shown in Section 3, *faillir* can be used intransitively or impersonally with an Experiencer, but also transitively with or without Experiencer. Consider for instance its use in the sense of ‘to break’. Only if it is employed metaphorically, *faillir* would occur with an (accusative) Experiencer in this case. However, both of its meanings would not imply Path. *Convenir* in its original meaning of ‘to come together’ would include Path, but no EXPERIENCER, whereas the later developed psych meaning would have the EXPERIENCER, but no Path. All this suggests that the loss of the directional meaning of *à* argued by Troberg does not seem to explain the omission of the preposition with PVs.

<sup>39</sup> The form *liut* in (17) is not straightforward in its interpretation. Searching *liut* in the DEAF, the dictionary indicates *lire* and *loisir*. *Lire*, though, can be ruled out from the context. Checking the conjugations for both verbs in the AND, none indicates *liut*. This form is most similar to the indicative past forms of *loisir*: “leust, liçt, lise, list, lit, lite, loist, lust, lyst”.

The detailed examination of *convenir* and *faillir* has shown semantic overlaps between their different argument structures. The analysis has suggested that there might be slight differences concerning the distribution of the preposition *à* depending on the argument structure. However, cases of *convenir* like (9) show that there are dative Experiencers that are not marked by *à*, although the psych meaning is evident. Similar to *estouvoir*, this proves that a psych meaning is not a sufficient criterion for the use of *à* and thus, that the preposition cannot be considered a reliable dative marker.

*Loisir* always shows the preposition together with its dative Experiencers in this corpus. *Chaloir* and *estouvoir* can only bear a psych meaning. Despite this fact, dative Experiencers of these verbs occur without the preposition *à*. For *chaloir* in (6) it has been claimed that the arising subject function of the stressed object pronoun plays a role. As subject pronouns do not occur with the preposition *à*, speakers could have been unsure about the use. Also, it seems as if the constructions in (6) are not very common which might increase the confusion with subject pronouns. Furthermore, morphological case marking on the object seems to sometimes make the use of *à* superfluous. This also seems to hold for *estouvoir*. For *estouvoir*, no occurrence with the preposition *à* is attested in the MCVF-PPCHF, though they have been reported from other corpora. In any case, it indicates that the psych meaning cannot be interpreted as the unique reason to display *à*.

The historical perspective has shown that meanings diverging a lot at first glance are in fact very close to each other. Even non-psych notions can be attributed to a psych meaning via metaphoric extension. In the end, it is possible that all the different meanings become more and more alike over time and thus, different types of argument structure may align. This can be observed when we look at Modern French: *convenir* and *falloir* (<*faillir*) got reduced in semantics and valency.<sup>40</sup> In terms of linguistic efficiency this only makes sense (see Schmitz 2012 comparing the economy of lexical entries of PVs and their possible reanalysis). In contrast, *chaloir*, *estouvoir* and *loisir* disappeared completely.

The analyzed data in Section 3 clearly show that the use of *à* does not only depend on the psych meaning of a PV, as there are some cases where it is omitted although the psych interpretation is

<sup>40</sup> *Le Petit Robert* mentions the impersonal form for *convenir*, but defines it as “verbe transitif indirect” or “verbe pronominal”, with the meaning “être approprié à (qqch.), être agréable ou utile (à qqn), reconnaître la vérité de, faire un accord” (‘to be suitable for (sth.), to be pleasant or useful (to sb.), to recognize the truth of, to make an agreement with’). *Falloir* is defined as “verbe impersonnel”, meaning “manquer, être l’objet d’un besoin / d’une nécessité ou d’une obligation” (‘to lack, to be the object of a need / of a necessity or of an obligation’).

straightforward. This is true not only for PVs with only one meaning bearing the psych notion, but also for verbs with both a psych and a non-psych meaning. For such cases, I have identified possible reasons for the omission of *à*. The evidence suggests that *à* does not indicate dative case in a reliable way.

As this paper only focuses on Old French, little can be said about the diachronic development of the preposition in these constructions or about the reasons for Middle and Modern French to make it obligatory. It should be mentioned, though, that one could argue with the general drift strengthening the analytic character of French which includes an extension of prepositions (Buridant 2019, 111).

Generally, the analysis also makes clear a methodological challenge: In the MCVF-PPCHF, some objects of PVs with several argument structures are identified as IO, although they are a DO. The object of e.g. *faillir* in (15) is a DO of its transitive use, and therefore, it is not used with the preposition *à*. This suggests that the annotation of the MCVF-PPCHF is not always reliable in this respect – a finding which makes possible follow-up studies more challenging.

## 5 Conclusion

I have discussed five Old French dative Experiencer PVs regarding their use with the preposition *à*. Since I have analyzed only some examples, no final conclusions can be drawn yet. However, my investigation allows the assumption that the use of the preposition *à* in some PV contexts is independent of its psych meaning and thus, independent of its argument structure. In previous studies, this was claimed to be decisive since *à* is assumed to license the EXPERIENCER in the dative case, generally indicated by the preposition. My data analysis has shown that psych meaning is not a sufficient criterion for the use of *à*. Consequently, *à* cannot be considered a reliable dative marker in Old French. These findings should be verified in larger studies including more PVs. Also, the Middle French period should be included in order to explain the diachronic development to Modern French, where the preposition *à* cannot be dropped anymore. Beyond that, my investigation suggests that the annotation of corpora is still in need of a more careful and detailed consideration of PVs with complex semantics.

## Abbreviations

AND = *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*

DEAF = *Dictionnaire Étymologique de l'Ancien Français*

DO = direct object

IO = indirect object

MCVF-PPCHF = *Modéliser le changement: Les voies de français and Penn-BFM Parsed Corpus of Historical French*

PV = psych verb

SRCMF = *Syntactic Reference Corpus of Medieval French*

TL = *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* by Tobler-Lommatzsch

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