Based on the realization of the preverbal Information Structure, French of the 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} century appears to show reflexes of a Verb Second grammar, whereas it does not in the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that Verb Second is achieved via the movement of the finite verb to Fin\textsubscript{0} and filling SpecFin with any XP (Poletto 2002; Roberts 2004). The filling of SpecFin serves to satisfy an EPP feature on FinP (Haegemann 1997, 2012; Poletto 2002; Roberts 2004). In addition to filling the preverbal position, EPP also effectively blocks movement beyond SpecFin. This limits access to projections in the Left Periphery above FinP for additional preverbal constituents, resulting in the traditional features of V2 grammar (i.e. the verb is preceded by one and only one constituent).

The presence of EPP also impacts the realization of Information Structure preverbally in V2 languages, due to the nature of the Left Periphery. The cartography of the Left Periphery assumed here is that of Benincà (2004, 2006):

\[ \text{[Force[Frame[Topic [Focus [Fin ]]]]]} \]

The specifiers of TopP, FrameP, and FocP may only be occupied by the corresponding Information Structure elements (e.g. SpecFrame may only be filled by a frame-setter). SpecFin, on the other hand, is not restricted to certain IS elements. In a V2 language, SpecFoc cannot be occupied, as it can only be filled via Move, which is blocked by EPP. SpecTop and SpecFrame, on the other hand, may both be filled, as they are occupied via Merge rather than Move (Poletto 2002; Roberts 2004; Benincà 2004, 2006).

Given that SpecFin is not restricted with respect to Information Structure, in a V2 language the immediately preverbal position is not restricted with respect to Information Structure (Bohnacker & Rosen 2006; Kaiser & Zimmermann 2010). Additionally, any V\textgreater{}2 clauses (i.e. clauses with more than one preverbal constituent) that do appear in V2 languages should be either Topic or Frame-Setting initial, as these constituents are able to bypass the EPP roadblock at SpecFin by directly Merging in the appropriate specifier positions. On the other hand, non-V2 languages, which lack the EPP feature on FinP, would not be restricted in this way.

The above predictions for preverbal Information Structure were tested for French by examining 8 prose texts from the 13\textsuperscript{th} to the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. During this period, we find an increasing frequency of V\textgreater{}2 clauses, with the statistically significant jump occurring between the 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} centuries (18.3\% to 28.2\%, \( z=4.0319, p<0.01 \)). However, the V\textgreater{}2 clauses in the
14th century closely resemble those of the 13th century as far as the Information Structure make-up of the preverbal constituents. During these centuries, V>2 clauses are either Topic or Frame-Setter initial, and not Focus initial. From the 14th to the 15th century, the increase in frequency of V>2 clauses is not significant (28.2% to 31.5%, z=1.2619, p=0.20766). Unlike during the previous two centuries, we find a significant increase in the frequency of Focus initial V>2 clauses (from 11/600 to 41/600 sentences, z=4.2534, p<0.001). This suggests that EPP, which is taken to be a key feature of V2 grammar, was still active in 14th century French, despite the relatively high rate of V>2 clauses, but does not appear to be active after the 15th century.

References: