

Thema: The Development of the Case System in French

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1. Introduction

In the course of time, French has alienated itself from its highly analytic ancestor language Latin. It developed from a synthetic into an analytic language by abandoning flexions in favour of particles and word-order (cf. Ewert 1967: 123).

This process had already begun in the period of 'Vulgar Latin' with the emergence of a considerably simplified flexional system, which was generally maintained in OF (cf. Ewert 1967: 126). It has to be noted that the term 'Vulgar Latin' is ambiguous, as it does not designate a homogenous language. In effect, the forms of Latin spoken after the 2nd century B.C. onwards varied widely, depending on geographical and chronological factors. Contrary to Classical Latin, there was no uniform style of language. However, the term Vulgar Latin is commonly used in the literature. In this paper, it will be referred to as the spoken Latin of northern Gaul, as "the popular speech of everyday life as it had been developing for centuries among different social groups" (Rohlf's 1970: 20). This language displayed a wide range of regional varieties and thus formed a clear opposition to Classical Latin, the literary language.

This paper is aimed at examining the development of the case system in French. An overview of the declension classes of nouns in Old French will be included insofar as this might help to cast some light on how they derived from Latin. Also, the development of the case system of personal pronouns shall be investigated. Other pronouns, e.g. the possessive, demonstrative, relative etc. will not be dealt with, since they resemble the substantives in only maintaining the nominative and the accusative.

The function and usage of the nominative and the oblique in Old French shall be indicated and illustrated with examples. The main question that this paper is concerned with is how case reduction occurred and how it could be explained, which will be dealt with in detail in the following chapter. Furthermore, reasons will be given why it was the oblique case that survived, not the nominative.

The following abbreviations will be used:

OF = Old French; MidF = Middle French; ModF = Modern French; VL = Vulgar Latin; CL = Classical Latin; NS = NS; NP = nominative plural; OS = oblique singular; OP = oblique

plural; sg. = singular; pl. = plural, subj. = subject; dir. obj. = direct object; indir. obj. = indirect object; unstr. = unstressed.

2. From Latin to Modern French

The term OF was rather a "a series of more or less distinct stages of several highly differentiated dialects" (Kibler 1984: xxiii) than a uniform language.

In the development from CL to ModF, six periods can be distinguished (cf. Einhorn 1974: 1). The first period was that of VL, as a result of the period of expansion of the Roman Empire. In Gaul, the military, political and linguistic impact of the Roman Empire began between 125 and 121 B.C., with Roman troops invading 'Transalpine Gaul', i.e. the territory that today is known as France. They founded the Provincia Narbonensis that covered the area from Toulouse to the Alps. Caesar added the rest of Gaul, Brittany and Flanders, to the Roman Empire in the Gallic War of 58-51 B.C. Celtic, the language that was spoken by the former population, probably died out by the fifth century A.D., giving way to Romanization in every sphere (cf. Price 1984: 2-3).

The variety of VL that was spoken in Gaul and had already been modified over the centuries underwent further rapid changes as a result of the Germanic invasions in the fifth century A.D. It developed into a new language with numerous dialects. These dialects could be assigned to two main groups: the Langue d'Oïl which was spoken in the north and centre, and the Occitan dialects, the Langue d'Oc, in the south, which derived their names from their word for yes, *oïl* resp. *oc* (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 13). This second period, called the Gallo-Roman period, lasted from the end of the fifth century to the middle of the ninth (cf. Einhorn 1974: 1).

The first linguistic document that could be said to mark the beginning of the OF period are the Strasbourg Oaths in 842. Along with the other retained text from the ninth century, the Sequence of Eulalia (ca. 881), it still shows strong resemblance with spoken Latin in its syntax and lexicon, and it certainly did not mirror the vernacular, which consisted of numerous dialects (cf. Kibler 1984: xxiii). One of them was Francien, the dialect of the Ile-de-France that later on emerged as the basis for modern standard French. The period of Early OF lasts until the end of the eleventh century.

The first heyday of French literature was reached in the twelfth century, and a number of valuable linguistic material dates back to that time. This is also the first period from which significant works in the vernacular have survived (cf. Kibler 1984: xxiii). This "twelfth-century renaissance" (Kibler 1984: xxiii), which extended roughly from 1100 to 1285, produced texts that are notably homogenous in their syntax and morphology. Although they account for different dialects, they shared common features that allow to classify them as OF, e.g. the existence of a two-case declension system for nouns, adjectives, and articles (cf. Kibler 1984: xxiii). The Later OF period also embraces the whole thirteenth century, despite some modifications and changes in language usage that had already occurred.

Since the early thirteenth century, Francien was becoming increasingly dominant as a kind of standard language for political and practical reasons: By that time, Paris had turned into the political and economic centre. The need for a widely intelligible language arose, and Francien seemed to be suitable for this purpose, as it showed only very few idiosyncrasies concerning its phonological, morphological, and lexical features (cf. Kibler 1984: xxiv-xxv). However, none of the earliest French texts that are known today is in Francien (cf. Price 1984: 10-11). By the fourteenth century, with the accession of the Valois, the MidF period had set in, displaying clear differences in pronunciation, flexions and syntax from the classical usage of the preceding centuries (cf. Ewert 1967: 2). Its most distinctive feature is the complete loss of the two-case system (cf. Kibler 1984: xxiii). The MidF period, i.e. the time between the fourteenth until the early seventeenth century, was less productive of imaginative literature than the preceding period. This might be put down to the unsettled social conditions that were also a result of the Hundred Years' War (1335 to 1453) (cf. Price 1984: 12).

The period of ModF starts with the seventeenth century, when various attempts were made to 'purify' the language of the non-classical elements added to the vocabulary in the 16th century and that were condemned because they did not meet the requirement of being intelligible to all. Apart from trying to codify 'good usage', efforts were made to regulate the syntax of the language. Concerning its grammatical structure, today's modern literary French is basically the same that was systemized and codified in the 17th century (cf. Price 1984: 15-17).

3. Nouns

3.1 Case Forms and how they developed

The CL system of six cases and five declensions was first reduced in the varieties of Latin spoken in the post-classical period. The six-case system of CL was reduced to two or in some instances three cases in VL. It was already during the VL period in Gaul that the genitive, dative, ablative and vocative vanished (cf. Ewert 1967: 125). The use of the accusative was extended to replace the functions of these cases (cf. Rohlfs 1970: 27). In OF, only two cases and three declensions were left.

There are three masculine and three feminine declension classes in OF. First traces of disintegration of this flexional system can be found in texts produced during the twelfth century (cf. Ewert 1967: 129). The following changes occurred:

1. By analogy with the first declension class, masculine nouns of the second class increasingly add an -s in the NS.
2. The masculine nouns of the third declension are sometimes declined as Class I nouns: -s might be added to the NS, e.g. *sires*, or the oblique form replaces the NS either with or without an -s ending, e.g. *seignor(s)*.
3. Proper nouns belonging to the first masculine class of declensions increasingly drop flexional -s in the NS, e.g. *Tristran* for *Tristrans*.
4. Proper nouns of the third masculine class add or omit final -s in the NS in accordance with masculine proper nouns of the first declension class. Double forms occur, e.g. NS *Gui(s)*, *Pierre(s)* (cf. Einhorn 1974: 19).

These modifications became more frequent in the thirteenth century, although the written texts still tried to maintain an intact case system when it was already lost in the vernacular (cf. Kibler 1984: xxiii). By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the process of the

breakdown of the case system was completed; only the distinction between singular and plural remained (cf. Ewert 1967: 131).

The main characteristic of all declensions is the s-ending, with -s being in fact the only inflexion found in the declension of nouns. There is very little variation: apart from the third masculine and feminine declensions, which show stem alternations, no declension class has more than two distinct paradigmatic forms (cf. Plank 1979: 624).

CL disposed of a much larger variety of case forms than OF: up to five different forms in the singular and up to four more in the plural could be found, with dative and ablative being always identical in the plural (cf. Price 1984: 93). The reduction of the case system in OF can be illustrated by the noun *murus*. The variety of different case forms in the CL declension of *murus* (-i, -o, -um, -o; *muri*, -orum, -is, -os, -is) was reduced to only two forms each for singular and plural: *murs*, *mur*: *mur*, *murs*. ModF retains only one form, with the plural -s being merely graphical: *le mur*; *les murs* (cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 150).

The cases were gradually reduced in number, and at the beginning of the OF period, only two were left: the cas-régime or nominative, and the cas-sujet or oblique, that is generally regarded as being derived from the Latin accusative. However, it seems more adequate to consider it a fusion of the accusative and the ablative, at least in the singular (cf. Price 1984: 94). Concerning its morphology, the Latin accusative clearly is the main historical source for the oblique in OF (cf. Plank 1979: 624).

3.1.1 Masculine declension classes

Most nouns in OF fall into the first masculine declension class, which was derived from the second Latin declension, the o-declension. The relationship to Latin can be seen easily. This is the class that displays the highest degree of variation in case inflection in OF.

NS CL *murus* (nom.) > VL *muros* > OF *murs*

OS CL *murum* (acc.) > VL *muro* > OF *mur*

NP CL *muri* (nom.) > VL *muri* > OF *mur*

OP CL *muros* (acc.) > VL *muros* > OF *murs*

(cf. Price 1984: 94; Wolf and Hupka 1981: 95).

It is interesting to note that the NS takes an s-ending, while the corresponding plural form has none. This contrasts with ModF, where the s-ending is the most distinctive feature of most plural forms.

The second masculine declension class includes a few masculine nouns ending in *-re*. It drew on both the second and the third Latin declension, i.e. on the Latin o- and i-declensions. In contrast to the first OF declension, it shows only one instance of case variation, consisting of an -s being added to the objective plural case, whereas the other forms seem invariable.

NS CL (nom.) liber > VL liber > livre

OS CL (acc.) librum > VL libro > livre

NP CL (nom.) libri > VL libri > OF livre

OP CL (acc.) libros > VL libros > OF livres

(cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 95).

In this class, the nominative plural has no final -s, despite the -s in CL. This might be ascribed to the influence of the first declension (cf. Price 1984: 95).

The third OF declension class is built on the VL third declension (cf. Plank 1979: 629). It contains mainly proper names or names referring to persons that due to their high animacy are often used as subjects in a sentence. The form of the NS differs considerably from the other three forms. This is functionally reasonable, as this type of noun, i.e. personal and proper names, most urgently requires a reliable encoding of the subject-direct object distinction (cf. Plank 1979: 632).

The plural forms are derived from the oblique stem, which is in line with later changes that also saw the oblique as the dominant form.

NS CL comes > VL cómes > OF cuens

OS CL comitem > VL cóm(i)te > OF conte

NP CL comiti > VL cóm(i)ti > OF conte

OP CL comites > VL cóm(i)tes > OF contes

(cf. Kibler 1984: 46; Wolf and Hupka 1981: 96).

Apart from the NS form, this declension is identical with the first declension class. From the twelfth century onwards, the stem alternation of the first person singular is levelled out, and this declension class falls together with the first declension class. Due to this, some grammars do not list it as a separate class (cf. Ewert 1967).

3.1.2 Female declension classes

Like the masculine nouns, female nouns in OF fall into three declension classes. The first class of female declension is built on the first Latin declension (a-declension). Most feminine nouns belong to this class, namely all those ending in a weak *-e*, e.g. *la letre*, *la rose* (cf. Einhorn 1974: 16).

	CL	VL
OF		
NS	(nom.) porta	
		porta
		porte
OS	(acc.) portam	
NP	(nom.) portae	
		portas
	portes	
OP	(acc.) portas	

(cf. Price 1984: 95; Wolf and Hupka 1981: 97).

Due to phonetic changes the nominative and the oblique case fell together in the singular. As the *-m* in the end was not pronounced any longer from the VL period on, the former oblique form *portam* assumed the same spelling as the nominative. Hence there was no morphological distinction between the nominative and the oblique cases in the singular or plural. Only a singular-plural distinction remained. It could thus be said that there was no true declension system for nouns of this type from the period of VL onwards (cf. Bonnard/Régner 1995: 20).

The second class comprises nouns from the third Latin declension (i-declension); they end on a consonant. Almost all feminine nouns which do not end in a weak *-e* fall into this class. Similar to the first masculine declension class, it displays different case forms in the

singular. The influence of masculine substantives of the first declension may account for this (cf. Ewert 1967: 128).

	CL	VL	OF
NS	pars	partis	parz
OS	partem	parte	part
NP	partes	partes	parz
OP	partes	partes	parz

It has to be mentioned that the declensional -s-ending was modified by preceding sounds. In this case, *t* combined with -s was pronounced as [ts], but written z (cf. Einhorn 1974: 22).

During the twelfth century, the second feminine declension class was aligned with the first feminine declension class (cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 98).

The third feminine declension class corresponds to the third masculine class. The NS likewise has a different stem isolating this form from the others.

	CL	VL	OF
NS	soror	soror	suer
NO	sororem	sorore	serour
NO	sorores	sorores	serours
OP	sorores	sorores	serours

(cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 98).

The third feminine and masculine classes show the clearest distinction between the nominative and the OS, which is in accordance with semantic requirements: the third classes contained only nouns with the highest degree of animacy, namely personal and proper names, that were most likely to occur both as agents and as patients (cf. Plank 1979: 636-637).

3.1.3 Indeclinable Nouns

A large number of nouns in OF are invariable, namely those whose OS ends in -s or -z. Most of these nouns originate from Latin first declension neuters (cf. Kibler 1984: 39). Both masculine and feminine nouns fall into this category.

Masculine Nouns

NS li vis
OS le vis
NP li vis

OP les vis

Feminine Nouns

NS la foiz
OS la foiz
NP les foiz

OP les foiz

(cf. Kibler 1984: 39).

4. Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns in OF agree in gender, number and case with the noun they replace. Some pronouns developed two forms, depending on whether they are stressed or unstressed, e.g. *toi/te*. Others, e.g. *nos*, *vos* are used in both instances (cf. Einhorn 1974: 63). The unstressed pronouns function as both direct and indirect objects in close association with a verb, while the stressed pronouns are required whenever the pronoun is syntactically independent of the verb (cf. Kibler 1984: 74, 87).

In general, pronouns prove to be more conservative than nouns concerning the maintenance of the CL flexional system. As Blake points out, Latin pronouns show stronger case distinctions than nouns, since their marking often consists of changing the stem, not only of attaching suffixes (cf. Blake 1994: 181).

Yet between Latin and OF, and between Old and ModF, the number of forms was constantly reduced, some forms assuming the functions of others (cf. Price 1984: 142). It has to be mentioned, however, that there is still enough variation in ModF to allow a relatively free word order, which is a characteristic of the spoken colloquial language. Ambiguity is avoided by using "not a set of nominal case affixes as in Latin but a complex system of preverbal affixes derived from earlier conjunctive [i.e. unstressed] pronouns" (Harris and Vincent 1988: 236). For example, the most common SVO order *moi, j'aime Marie* could show the following

variations: *je l'aime, moi, Marie* (S before O) and *je l'aime, Marie, moi* (O before S) (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 235).

The Latin forms of the dative were in part preserved in OF (*cui, lui, li*) (cf. Ewert 1967: 155). The stressed form of the third person singular, masculine and feminine, derived from the dative, but all the other stressed forms stem from the Latin accusative:

	Latin		OF
	ModF		
Acc.	me, te		moi, toi
	moi, toi		
	nos, vos		nos, vos
	nous, vous		
	illos, illas		els > eus, eles
	eux, elles		
Dat.	masc.: illi > VL illui		lui
	lui		
	fem.: illi > VL illaei		li
	lui		

(Cf. Bonnard/Régnier 1995: 41).

In ModF, the declensional system that has long since been dropped for nouns is still partly maintained for the pronouns. It is the third person plural masculine with its four different forms that shows the greatest variety of case forms (*ils, les, leur, eux*), whereas the first and second persons plural only have one form covering all functions (*nous, vous*) (cf. Price 1984: 141). The pronouns in the place of the direct and indirect object are only differentiated in the third person masculine and feminine. In the singular, only the unstressed forms are different: *Raous la voit* [direct] *et li* [indirect] *done la letre.* = Raoul sees her and gives her the letter (cf. Einhorn 1974: 64). In the plural, both the accented and the unaccented forms differ: *Dieus beneïe eus et eles* [direct, stressed] = God bless them (M) and them (F); *Car les lor donez!* [direct, indirect unstressed] = Do give them to them! (Cf. Einhorn 1974: 64).

The use of personal pronouns, that in CL were only used for emphasis, was becoming increasingly more common in OF from the twelfth century onwards. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, verbs had to be preceded by the corresponding personal pronoun (cf. Sergijewski 1997: 119). In contrast to this, tense, mood, number and person were sufficiently indicated by the combination of verb stem and ending at earlier stages of the OF period; there was rarely cause for confusion. Later on, however, the pronunciation of the

consonants began to weaken, which could easily lead to confusion (cf. Kibler 1984: 74). In addition, owing to the development towards an analytic language that was accompanied by a gradual loss of flexional case endings, this was also required for reasons of clearness. Therefore, in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, personal pronouns became regular adjuncts to the verb (cf. Ewert 1967: 158). As the verb endings in OF gradually developed into homophones with only graphical distinctions, personal pronouns preceding the verb became necessary. In Latin, the flexional endings of the verbs differed considerably, they sufficed to designate person and number, e.g. *amo, amas, amat...*(cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 159). However, in OF the personal pronoun in front of the verb was still usually omitted in inversions, even after the twelfth century: *Or chanterai* = Now I will sing (cf. Einhorn 1974: 64).

4.1 First and Second Person

First Person

	CL		OF	
	Mod. Fr.			
			<i>stressed</i>	<i>unstr.</i>
	<i>stressed</i>		<i>unstr.</i>	
Sg.	<i>nom.</i> ego	NS	gié/je	jo/je
	<i>subj.</i> moi		je	
	<i>acc.</i> me	OS	moi/mei	me
	<i>dir.obj.</i> moi		me	
	<i>dat.</i> mihi			
	<i>indir.obj.</i> moi		me	
	CL		OF	
	Mod. Fr.			
			<i>stressed</i>	<i>unstr.</i>
	<i>stressed</i>		<i>unstr.</i>	
Pl.	<i>nom.</i> nos	NP	nous	nos
	<i>acc.</i> nos	OP	nous	nos
			nous (all forms)	
	<i>dat.</i> nobis			

(cf. Price 1984: 141-143; Ewert 1967: 156; Wolf and Hupka 1981: 121).

The three forms in OF for the first person NS are derived from Latin *eo*, which is verified for the sixth century (cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 121).

Second Person

CL		OF	
Mod. Fr			
	<i>stressed</i>	<i>stressed</i>	<i>unstr.</i>
	<i>unstr.</i>	<i>unstr.</i>	
Sg.	<i>nom.</i> tu	NS tu	te
	<i>subj.</i> toi	tu	
	<i>acc.</i> te	OS toi/tei	te
	<i>dir.obj.</i> toi	te	
	<i>dat.</i> tibi		
	<i>indir.obj.</i> toi	te	
Pl.	<i>nom.</i> vos	NP vous	vos
	vous (all forms)		
	<i>acc.</i> vos	OP vous	vos
	<i>dat.</i> vobis		

(cf. Price 1984: 141-143; Ewert 1967: 156).

In the twelfth century, *mei* and *tei* were alternative forms for the accented forms of *moi* and *toi*. The unaccented forms were retained in a number of dialects, for instance in Anglo-Norman (cf. Einhorn 1974: 70).

In the first and second persons singular and plural, the Latin dative forms vanished. The corresponding accusative forms took their place. (Price 1984: 142-143).

The accented nominative forms *je*, *tu* are replaced by the accusative forms *moi*, *toi* (c'est moi/toi) before the OF period ends. In ModF, *je* and *tu* are always unaccented (cf. Ewert 1967: 156).

4.2 Third Person

Masculine

		CL	OF	
Mod. Fr.				
	<i>str.</i>	<i>unstr.</i>	<i>str.</i>	<i>unstr.</i>
Sg.	<i>nom.</i>	ille	il	il
	lui	il		
	<i>dat./gen.</i>	illi	lui	li
	lui	lui		
	<i>acc.</i>	illum	lui	lo > le
	lui	le		
		CL	OF	
Mod. Fr.				
	<i>str.</i>	<i>unstr.</i>	<i>str.</i>	<i>unstr.</i>

PI.	<i>nom.</i>	illi	il	il
		eux	ils	
	<i>dat./gen.</i>	illorum	lour/leur	
		lor/lour	eux	leur
	<i>acc.</i>	illos	els > eus	les
		eux	les	

Feminine

		CL	OF	Mod. Fr.
			<i>str.</i>	<i>unstr.</i>
	<i>str.</i>	<i>unstr.</i>		
Sg.	<i>nom.</i>	illa	ele	ele
		elle	elle	
	<i>dat./gen.</i>	illi	li	li
		elle	lui	
	<i>acc.</i>	illam	li	la
		elle	la	
Pl.	<i>nom.</i>	illae	eles	eles
		elles	elles	
	<i>dat./gen.</i>	illarum	lour/leur	lor
		elles	leur	
	<i>acc.</i>	illas	eles	les
		elles	les	

(cf. Hupka und Wolf 1981: 120, 122; Ewert 1967: 156-157; Price 1984: 141).

The OF third person pronouns are derived from the Latin demonstrative pronoun *ille*. It has to be noted that the OF nominative plural *eles* does not stem from the corresponding CL nominative, but from the accusative *illas*. This accounts for the same tendency that can also be found in VL feminine nouns, where the plural form derived from the CL accusative (cf. 3.1.2, female declension classes).

From the end of the thirteenth century, the accented datives *lui*, *leur* start to take the place of the unaccented datives *li*, *lour*.

In MidF, an -s is added to the masculine plural *il* (cf. Ewert 1967: 157). In front of a word starting with a vowel, it is pronounced as [iz], thus it serves to denote the plural clearly.

In ModF, both dative and accusative of the third person singular are retained, though only in the third person:

	CL	OF	ModF
Acc.	illum, illam	le (lo), la	le, la

Dat. illi li lui

(cf. Price 1984: 143).

5. Function and Usage of the Cases

5.1 Nominative Case

The nominative was in general far less used than the oblique. Its main function was to denote the subject of the verb, e.g. *Li chevaliers en tel maniere s'en part* (cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 150). It also marked the attribute to the subject: *Rices hom fud* = He was a rich man (cf. Bonnard/Régnier 1995: 195); *Charles est vieuz* = Charles is old (cf. Einhorn 1974: 16). It was also used for words qualifying or in apposition to nouns in the nominative case, e.g. *Je sui ses fiuus, il est mes pere* (cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 150); *Charles, li rois* = the king (cf. Einhorn 1974: 16).

Besides, it was a mode of address, a vocative case, for example in the Chanson de Roland: *U estes vos, bels nies?* 'Where are you, my fine nephew?' (cf. Price 1984: 97); *Ha! sire Damoisiaus, bevés!* (cf. Hupka and Wolf 1981: 150). The nominative could therefore be said to be the marked form that indicates specific functions (cf. Price 1984: 97).

There is much evidence for the frequent use of the inappropriate case in OF (cf. Price 1984: 96). It was more often the accusative that was wrongly used in the place of the nominative than vice versa. The following quote from the Chanson de Roland may exemplify this: '*Dreiz emperere,*' *dist Rollant le barun*. This oblique form was needed to rhyme with the preceding lines, the correct nominative *li ber* would not have fitted (cf. Price 1984: 96). By the second half of the twelfth century, the oblique was also frequently used instead of the nominative for proper names: *Et Erec un autre apela* - And Eric called for another (squire) (cf. Kibler 1984: 49).

5.2 The Oblique Case

The oblique, being considerably more often used than the nominative, was the neutral or unmarked form that indicated no particular function (cf. Price 1984: 97), being used for everything that was not in close relation with the grammatical subject (cf. Queffélec and Bellon 1995: 228).

In CL, the relationship between two nominals could be marked either by a case suffix or by a preposition. This was likewise possible in VL and OF, but the second gradually ousted the first, as flexions were increasingly replaced by prepositional phrases (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 228). Despite this tendency the oblique case appeared frequently and served various other functions. It was used for the direct object of a transitive verb: *La mere voit Aymon* = The mother sees Aymes (cf. Einhorn 1974: 16).

Occasionally, it was also used for the indirect object: *Li numz Joiuse l'espée fut dunét* = "The name of Joyeuse was given to the sword"; *Di ton nevo* = Tell your nephew (cf. Price 1984: 96-97). The oblique usually referred to persons in the singular: *Porte Aymon la letre!* = Carry the letter to Aymes! (Cf. Einhorn 1974: 17). If there were several oblique pronouns in one sentence, the direct object preceded the indirect object: *Car le me pardonez!*, which literally means: Do forgive it to me! (Cf. Einhorn 1974: 68).

The oblique was the prepositional case: *Por Charlon* = For Charles. (Cf. Einhorn 1974: 17). With the preposition *de*, it could express an objective or partitive genitive: *plaignoms ensemble le duel de nostre ami* = let us deplore our friend's pain; *de sun avoir vus voelt asez duner* = he wants to give you much of his belongings (cf. Sergijewski 1997: 56).

Beyond that, it fulfilled the function of the Latin ablative in absolute constructions: *pro Deo amur* = pour l'amour de Dieu (cf. Bonnard/Régnier 1995: 198). Stressed oblique pronouns could also be used in an absolute sense: *lui oiant* = him hearing (= in his hearing) (cf. Einhorn 1974: 67).

Also, it took over adverbial functions. It was used with verbs of motion to express place, direction or manner (*Tant chevalchierent e veies e chemins*, Rol. 405; *Son petit pas s'en torne chancelant*, Rol. 2227) (cf. Ewert 1967: 143). *Tantost li chevaliers s'an part les granz galos* = the knight sets off at a great gallop (cf. Bonnard/Régnier 1995: 199=; *E vint i Carlemaignes tut un antif sentier* = Charlemagne came [along] an ancient path" (cf. Price 1984: 97). *Charles chevauche grant oirre* = Charles rides (at a) high speed (cf. Einhorn 1974: 17).

The oblique case also denoted time, duration, measure, and price (cf. Ewert 1967: 143). *Chascun jor* = each day; *quatre sols vaut* = it is worth four sous (cf. Price 1984: 97). In this usage, it comes close to some functions of the genitive in CL (cf. Plank 1979: 619).

Possession is often indicated by the oblique case of proper names or of substantives denoting persons. It could thus assume genitive function: *li Deo inimi* (Sequence of Saint Eulalia, l. 3. (Cf. Ewert 1967: 143); *L'autrui joie prise petit* = The joy of another he scarcely esteems (cf. Kibler 1984: 141); *Pur Deu merci* = by God's mercy (cf. Rohlf's 1970: 114).

The oblique was also used with nouns relating to family relationship, e.g. *li filz Marie* = the son of Mary; *la niece le duc* = the duke's niece; *la meson son pere* = his father's house (cf. Price 1984: 97); *L'église Nostre Dame* = The church of Our Lady (cf. Einhorn 1974: 17). These prepositionless attributive constructions were only possible with substantives denoting persons; in other cases, prepositions like *de* and *a* had to be used (cf. Plank 1979: 622). In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, this usage was gradually replaced by constructions with the preposition *de*. Despite that, there are some instances of the oblique case being used without any preposition, bearing both genitive and to a smaller degree dative meaning. This usage was common until well into the thirteenth century, and it mainly occurred with animate or personified referents, e.g. *la nièce le duc* (duc is in the oblique case), which means the niece (of) the duke (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 217). The following example dates back to the twelfth century: *mon neveu erent delivrees/de ma terre trois cenz livrees* = my nephew will be delivered of my land three hundred poundsworth (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 217). This construction can also be found in fixed locutions: *le feu Saint-Antoine*, *la Fête-Dieu*; in place names: *La Ferté-Milon*, or *Pont-l'Evêque*, literally 'bridge the bishop' (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 217).

Also, the oblique occurred in the conjunction of first name and family name, e.g. *Jean Latour* (cf. Ewert 1967: 143). A similar construction appears in names of streets, institutions and firms, e.g. *place Gambetta*, *gare Saint-Lazare*, *l'affaire Dreyfus*, *style Louis XV* (cf. Ewert 1967: 143). Interestingly, there are also new formations following this old model, for instance in commercial language (e.g. *les pneus Michelin*) (cf. Ewert 1967: 143). As Harris points out, this shows that "the loss of distinctive case suffixes did not of itself necessitate, for some considerable time at least, the use of explicit prepositional structures to mark certain semantic or grammatical relationships." (Harris and Vincent 1988: 217).

The oblique could also be found in exclamations, e.g. *quel peciè!* = What a pity! (Cf. Price 1984: 97).

It is important to note that the CL case system was better preserved in the OF pronouns than in the nouns. Apart from the accusative, there was also another oblique case form that fulfilled genitive and dative functions. For example, the indirect object was often used as an "ethic dative" (Einhorn 1974: 68) which referred to the person or persons concerned. In this usage, it often replaced a possessive adjective: *L'escut li fraint*. (Rol. 1270) = He shatters him the shield (=his shield) (cf. Einhorn 1974: 68).

In ModF, there are still separate forms for pronouns when they are used as direct, i.e. accusative, or as indirect, i.e. dative objects. Case distinction still exists with the use of *à* + tonic pronoun as an accented dative, but this is far more restricted in modern usage, as it is only possible if it is preceded by the atonic form: *il me semble, à moi* (cf. Ewert 1967: 159). However, there are still a few verbs whose unaccented dative is expressed by *à* + tonic pronoun, e.g. *il songe à moi*. Yet the number of these verbs decreased considerably in the course of time, and in OF, a prepositional construction was not necessarily required. For instance, it was possible to say *il me semble*, which is the only grammatically correct form today, *il moi semble*, or *il semble à moi* (cf. Ewert 1967: 159).

In ModF, if the accusative object is a personal pronoun of the first or second person, the indirect object is expressed by *à* + tonic pronoun, e.g. *je me fie à vous; il m'a présenté à elle* (cf. Ewert 1967: 159).

The word order in OF was not as fixed as it is in ModF: the pronoun object, whether tonic or atonic, could either precede or follow the verb, whereas today the atonic form always has to come first (cf. Ewert 1967: 160).

6. Case Reduction: how and why?

The main function of the case system in OF consists of permitting a clear distinction of subject and object (cf. Schøsler 1973: 255). However, as Schøsler argues, noun declension was only one factor among a number of others to ensure unambiguity, so its disappearance did not inevitably lead to confusion as long as the others were retained. Even though case endings could have stood on their own to indicate relations in a sentence, it more frequently combined with other factors (cf. Schøsler 1973: 259-260).

These other factors that enabled the language to maintain case function without morphological marking were for example a different number in subject and object, which requires different forms of the verb that indicate the number, as in *la pucele voient les vaches*; the combination of an indeclinable noun and a declinable (pro)noun, the transitiveness of a verb, and the juxtaposition of an animate and an inanimate noun, e.g. in the sentence *la fille mangea le fruit* (cf. Schøsler 1973: 244), and prepositions. However, these other relational coding devices need to be well developed before case inflections can be dropped. According to Plank, "case syncretism affecting the A form, especially *vis à vis* the S form, has to be avoided unless a language has already developed reliable other means (analytic or synthetic ones) to tell an A from its heads." (Plank 1979: 618).

These elements were by no means "dispositions d'urgence" (Schøsler 1973: 260), but they co-operated with the case system to grant the unequivocal meaning of an utterance (cf. Schøsler 1973: 260).

The only case-marker was the *-s*, which could easily bring about confusion, as it could mark the nominative as well as the accusative in both singular and plural function. It marked at the same time number and case (cf. Stanovaia 1993: 175). For instance, the noun *murs* can be either NS or oblique plural. Functional definiteness could only be obtained by predeterminants, e.g. the direct article, which would have been *li* for the NS and *les* for the oblique plural (cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 99). The first sign of case loss was the uncertainty in the use of this flexional *-s*-ending. Therefore, the distinction between the nominative and the oblique forms became blurred, which consequently led to confusion. First signs of the breakdown of the case system appeared particularly in Anglo-Norman texts from the twelfth century onwards: the OS form was more and more often used for the NS as well (cf. Einhorn 1974: 19).

The loss of flexional case distinctions began in the course of the twelfth century, that is at a relatively early stage in the history of the French language. It probably began in the west, spread to the centre before it reached the north, where an intact case system seems to have been maintained the longest (cf. Kibler 1984: 51). The disintegration of the case system was due to various factors, and different approaches have been made to explain this phenomenon. As Ewert points out, the early disintegration of the flexional system might be due to the fact that "it had been in some measure artificially maintained" (Ewert 1967: 129). It had been characteristic of the literary language only, not so much of the spoken language.

In colloquial speech, the case system was not rigorously adhered to, which had an impact on the written language (cf. Einhorn 1974: 19).

According to Schøsler, the linguistic approaches to account for the disappearance of the case system in OF can be divided into two groups: one of them sees the influence of other – namely Germanic – languages as the crucial factor, the other searches the reason for the case loss within the language itself, with no impact of other languages (cf. Schøsler 1973: 242).

The first group argues that it was the influence of Germanic languages that was responsible for the emergence of a case system, which was abolished when this Germanic influence came to an end. Schøsler refutes this theory by giving the example of the Old Provençal Language that also had a declension system without any Germanic impact (cf. Schøsler 1973: 242).

The other approach sees the cause for case loss as lying in the language itself, with no outward influence playing a major role in this process. Phonetic changes that already occurred in VL were probably an important factor: different endings became homophones, for example, final *-m* was not pronounced (cf. Ewert 1967: 125). The accusative singular with its word-final *-m* thus lost its audible markedness. Equally, from the eleventh century onwards, *-s* in final position tended to become mute when followed by a word beginning with a consonant (cf. Schøsler 1973: 246). Thus flexional distinctions were reduced or even eliminated. According to Zink, the OF case system was eventually ruined by these phonetic changes in the thirteenth century: "l'effacement phonétique des consonnes finales devant une initiale consonantique fait disparaître la marque *-s* au moins une fois sur trois dans la chaîne (acc.) parlée." (Zink 1994: 36).

The silencing of final *-s* is often considered a "powerful cause of hastened case-breakdown" (cf. Laubscher 1921: viii). Schøsler disagrees: The silencing of final *-s* could only have had a fatal effect on the declension system when it occurred in nouns and verbs. Before the thirteenth century, she states, this happened very sporadically, whereas the disintegration of the case system was already at an advanced stage in the twelfth century and therefore could not possibly have been influenced by this phonetic change (cf. Schøsler 1973: 246-247): "A cause de ces faits de chronologie, l'amuïssement de */s* ne suffit pas à expliquer la disparition des cas" (Schøsler 1973: 247).

Other linguists, however, see the chronology differently. According to Kibler, the case system was still reasonably intact until the fourteenth century in the northern, eastern, and central dialects. It was only in the western dialects that the two-case noun declension system started to disintegrate around the end of the twelfth century (cf. Kibler 1984: 22). Similarly, Bruneau sees the beginning of the disappearance of the case system in Paris not before the end of the thirteenth century, and it survived even longer in the Picardy and in Lorraine (cf. Bruneau: 1966: 98).

As to the phonetic developments, it is of course even more difficult to determine when exactly a particular phonetic change occurred, and consequently there are many differing views. Most linguists assume the opposite chronological order to Schøsler; they highlight the silencing of the *-s* as a factor that contributed largely to case loss (cf. e.g. Laubscher 1921: viii:). Other than Schøsler, they argue that the disappearance of case endings was at least partly the result of the phonetic changes mentioned above (cf. Plank 1979: 613). Schøsler however admits that the silencing of the *-s* might have played a role in the disintegration of the case system (cf. Schøsler 1973: 247, 255).

The quality of vowels were also subject to phonetic changes, which influenced the case system as early as the VL period. In the first three centuries of this era, the distinction between short *ǎ* and long *ā* was lost in unstressed syllables, which led to homophony of *portǎ*, *portam* and *portā*. Therefore, the pronunciation of the nominative, accusative and ablative of the first declension singular became alike (cf. Blake 1994: 177). Similarly, *ǔ* and *ō* fell together, abolishing the distinction between *murǔm* and *murō*, which were pronounced *muro* (cf. Price 1984: 94).

To avoid confusion, an analytical solution was pursued: particles such as prepositions and determiners were brought in, not new case-endings. As Ewert points out, the usage of prepositions also offered the chance to make the language more expressive and explicit, "or to make finer distinctions than could be made by case-endings alone" (Ewert 1967: 124). For instance, the use of the preposition *de* became widespread and replaced genitive constructions: the CL version which made distinctions by different case endings, e.g. *librum Marco* (dat.) *dedit* would be translated as *il a donné le livre a Marc* in ModF (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 217).

Accordingly, dative constructions gave way to the preposition *ad*. The tendency to employ prepositions could already be observed in Late Latin *da librum ad patrem* for *da librum patri*, (cf. Price 1984: 94). According to Plank, analytical coding devices such as the prepositions *de*, *ad*, and *ex* "were competing with synthetic genitives of all declensions already in CL, and were steadily gaining ground from the first century A.D. onwards, chronologically certainly prior to the onset of large-scale Nominative Singular – Genitive Singular levelling." (Plank 1979: 618). In the late Latin dialects, however, prepositions did not supplant synthetic encoding devices; there was still a general oblique case that continued to be used (cf. Plank 1979: 618).

Plank assumes that there might be a universal rule underlying the fact that possessive relations prove to be very resistant against being replaced by analytical means, e.g. prepositions: "in transitions from synthetic to analytic encoding, it is possessive relations of the whole variety of semantic relations underlying attributive constructions that remain longest within the synthetic domain of case inflection and perhaps agreement/cross-reference." (Plank 1979: 619). In VL and in the early Romance dialects, there was still a distinctive genitive case retained to indicate possession, but it disappeared after a transitory stage with three cases, falling victim to the process of case reduction. As Plank remarks, this forms an interesting contrast to the analytic development in English, where the genitive turned out to be the most resistant case (cf. Plank 1979: 622).

At the same time, the increasing use of particles made further flexional case distinctions redundant, following the general tendency towards an analytical language.

In accordance with this drift towards an analytical language, there was also a tendency towards a fixed word order. At an early stage of OF, word order was quite flexible, as the form of the noun, i.e. its case ending, and the verb clarified subject-object relations, e.g. *Or fierent chevalier paiens* = Now the knights strike the infidels (cf. Einhorn 1974: 19). When the word order became more fixed in the course of the fourteenth century, case endings became superfluous, as the function of a noun was indicated by its position (cf. Price 1984: 98). Sergijewski sees this development towards a fixed word order as being closely related to the abolishment of the two-case-system (cf. Sergijewski 1997: 116). Schøsler disagrees: taking into account a great number of statistics concerning the word order in OF, she concludes that "pendant toute la période de l'ancien français, l'ordre des mots v-s a

constitué 2/3 à 3/4 des prop. princ. Il n'est donc pas possible de prétendre que la fixation de l'ordre des mots ait provoqué l'élimination de la déclinaison casuelle" (Schøsler 1973: 253).

Additionally, Schøsler argues that word order alone is normally not sufficient to grant an unequivocal distinction between subject and object. Therefore, as already mentioned, various factors determining relations in a sentence have to come in to avoid ambiguity (cf. Schøsler 1973: 244, 254). She derives from this that word order cannot have contributed to the elimination of the case system (cf. Schøsler 1973: 254). Schøsler's line of argumentation is not entirely satisfactory in a number of aspects, as she contradicts herself by admitting that all the elements each of which she at first disproves as being a cause for case loss at all might have combined and thus led to the disintegration of the case system:

Nous croyons donc avoir prouvé qu'aucun des éléments linguistiques présentés comme cause unique (phonétique, morphologique ou syntaxique) n'a pu expliquer l'évolution casuelle. Or, il nous semble probable que la cause consiste en un jeu combiné de ces éléments.
(Schøsler 1973: 255).

An important reason mentioned by various linguists why the case system was abolished was the functional overstraining of the various cases in CL. This is clearly visible in the case of the genitive, where distinctions were made between *genitivus possessivus*, *subjectivus*, *objectivus*, *explicativus*, *qualitatis*, *partitivus*, *pretii* (cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 93). Moreover, there were also prepositions to compete with the flexional case-ending system to express the same relation. Prepositions became increasingly dominant, since they seemed to be more expressive and easier to use, being followed by no other case than the accusative (cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 93). Thus the genitive was ever more frequently replaced by the preposition *de*, the dative by *ad*, both of which were followed by the the accusative (cf. Sergijewski 1997: 6).

Also, as already mentioned, there are various instances of inappropriate case use in OF (cf. Price 1984: 96). This might account for a certain degree of confusion concerning the function and usage of case, which matches the theory that cases had been overstrained. Or it might equally show that there were no definite grammar rules to adhere to, as the first attempt to compose a grammar of French was made not before the Renaissance. Thus the usage might vary even in the same text from one line to the other: For instance, in a text dating back to the late twelfth century, the following lines show an inconsistency in case use:

Riche homme furent et mananz
Et chevaliers preuz et vaillanz. (1:5-6)

Rich men (they) were and powerful
And knights bold and brave.

(Cf. *Le Fresne* by Marie de France quoted in Kibler 1984: 3)

Riche homme is correctly used as a predicate nominative to the verb *to be*, (here: preterite form *furent*). In the second line, however, *chevaliers* and the adjectives are incorrectly given oblique forms, although they have exactly the same function (cf. Kibler 1984: 3).

Likewise, the oblique stressed forms of the personal pronouns (*moi, toi, lui, li, eus, eles*) were sometimes used instead of the corresponding nominatives. This can be exemplified by the following line from a 13th-century text: *quant moi et li la mer passames* = when she and I crossed the sea (cf. Price 1984: 145). This became even more common in MidF. At the same time, the original unstressed subject forms *je, tu*, etc., continued to be occasionally used as stressed forms until the 16th century. Today, the formula *je sousigné* = *I the undersigned* is a remnant of this construction (cf. Price 1984: 144).

Double gender of a large number of nouns was another source for confusion which watered down the declension system, as both masculine and feminine agreement were possible for the same word, and variations could be found in the same author. Examples of this are: *li images, la image; li signe* (masc. pl.) - *les signes* (fem. pl.) (cf. Laubscher 1921: 4-5). This seriously impaired the uniformity of declension (cf. Laubscher 1921: 108). A similar kind of laxity could be found in many verbs and prepositions that were followed by varying cases. For instance, the verb *sembler*, because of its value as a verb of being, in OF could take both the nominative and the oblique: *Ce ne semblaist mie droiz* (nom.) – *Car folie sanble et anui* (objective case) (cf. Laubscher 1921: 51).

Beyond this, the number of invariable nouns greatly increased by the end of the twelfth century. This might be regarded as a catalyst for the shift towards an analytic language with a stable word order, where the function of a noun is determined by its place rather than by its flexional ending (cf. Kibler 1984: 40).

In general, the case system itself was only very weakly developed in OF, as compared to CL: for instance, the majority of feminine nouns had no distinctive case system at all. However, Schøsler warns against seeing this as a reason for the disappearance of case distinctions:

L'argument systémologique disant qu'une partie importante des substantifs se soustrait à la déclinaison ne réussit pas, sans l'indication d'un facteur démarreur, à expliquer ni pourquoi le système casuel était maintenu malgré ces irrégularités dont la plupart ont subsisté dès le premier siècle de notre ère, ni pourquoi la réduction a fini par se produire à un moment donné.

(Schøsler 1973: 243-244.)

At any rate, this weakness inherent to the declension system puts the importance of OF case distinctions into question. Up to fifty per cent of all nouns might have been indeclinable, but they could fulfill the same functions as the declinable nouns and did not impede understanding, as Schøsler argues.

7. Why is it the oblique case that has survived?

ModF substantives are generally derived from the OF oblique case, which was far more often used than the nominative. With the oblique being the unmarked form, it seems only logical that it became the predominant form, as "any pressure on the system would be likely to result in the disappearance of the marked rather than of the unmarked form" (Price 1984: 97).

It can thus be said that as a rule, it was the accusative case that has survived (cf. Ewert 1967: 130). For example, the corresponding OF word for Latin *infans* (nom.) was *enfes*, while the Latin accusative *infantem* gave *enfant* in OF. This form has survived as the ModF expression for child, whereas the subject form has not been retained (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 217).

In addition, the oblique could be considered the more stable form, as it displayed a constant relation between singular and plural concerning the use of -s: There was no -s in the singular form, but always an -s-ending in the plural. This regularity was inherited from the Latin accusative case (cf. Price 1984: 102).

Sg. Pl.

mur murs
pere peres
porte portes

(cf. Price 1984: 97).

The nominative, however, showed a very irregular singular-plural relationship concerning the -s:

Sg. Pl.

murs mur
pere(s) pere
porte portes

(cf. Price 1984: 97).

As Price argues, here again, that case form that offered a constant relationship between its singular and plural forms would necessarily be preferred and had greater chances to survive if there were any pressure on the system (cf. Price 1984: 98).

These assumptions have proved to be true, although there are a few OF nominative forms that have stood the test of time. As could be assumed, these are terms that were typically used as subjects or vocatives, namely personal and proper names. Most of them come from the third OF declension class:

OF Nom.	OF Obl.	ModF
prestre	provoire	prêtre
ancestre	ancessor	ancêtre
peintre	peintor	peintre
traître	traïtor	traître
suer	seror	soeur

(cf. Price 1984: 98).

In some cases, both the nominative and the accusative forms have survived:

OF Nom	Mod. Fr.	OF Obl.	Mod. Fr.
compain	copain	compaignon	compagnon

garz	gars	garçon	garçon
sire	sire	seignor	seigneur

(cf. Price 1984: 98; Ewert 1967: 130).

Also, the ModF pronoun *on* reflects the nominative use of *om* in OF: it can only be used in subject function. The other modern form of this stem is *homme*, which derives from the OF oblique *ome* (cf. Price 1984: 98).

8. Conclusion

In ModF, there are only few remnants of the case system of its ancestor language Latin. As M. Harris puts it, "As far as noun morphology is concerned, French has dramatically simplified the five-declension, five-case, three-gender system it inherited." (Harris and Vincent 1988: 216). It is important to remark, however, that the case system was retained in French longer than in any other Romance language except Rumanian. OF still distinguished nominative and oblique case in many nouns until about the thirteenth and fourteenth century, when the oblique case became more and more the general form (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 216).

In ModF, nouns have merely one form each in singular and plural; no variation in form corresponding to their function in the sentence occur. Contrary to English, where a special form for indicating possessive function is retained, e.g. *girl/the girl's dog*, French nouns do not display distinctions in this way. For example, the noun *fille* remains unchanged whether it functions as subject (*la fille est arrivée*), as direct object (*je vois la fille*), or after a preposition (*de la fille*) (cf. Price 1984: 93).

The case system is still relatively preserved in ModF pronouns. In effect, when the declension began to disappear in nouns, the use of personal pronouns was rendered increasingly necessary to allow the clear distinction of subject and object, which had been the most prominent feature of the declensional system (cf. Schøsler 1973: 261). Apart from that, the use of the article, which was unknown in CL, was introduced as another means to denote subject-object relations (cf. Schøsler 1973: 261).

There are still some words other than pronouns that are remainders of the once-existing case system in French. For instance, some of the names for the days of the week reflect the

genitive singular forms of CL that they are based on: e.g. *jeudi* (CL *Iovis die*, OF *juesdi*); *mardi* (CL *Martis die*, OF *marzdi*); *vendredi* (CL *Veneris die*, OF *vendresdi* (cf. Regula 1956: 13). The Latin ablative or locative are only retained in some place names, e.g. CL *Aquis* > *Aix*; *Andegavis* > OF *Angiers*, ModF *Angers*; *Aurelianis* > *Orléans*; (*in*) *Pictavis* > *Poitiers*; *in Remis* > *Reims* (cf. Regula 1956: 14).

Likewise, the ablative singular survived in the adverbial suffix *-ment* (*mente*) (cf. Ewert 1967: 125).

The OF two-case system has never been a permanent, consistent structure that could persist unchanged for centuries, but it rather "appears as a momentary stabilization of the process which tended naturally to the complete elimination of flexions and to the development of a purely analytic language" (Ewert 1967: 125). Its key function consisted of denoting subject-object relations, but there were various other elements in the sentence that served the same function, e.g. word order, animateness or inanimateness, transitivity of the verb, which reduced the case system to being only "un facteur parmi d'autres" (Schøsler 1973: 260). Case distinctions could eventually be given up when alternative coding devices had become strong enough to compensate for the loss of morphological variation (cf. Plank 1979: 619; Queffélec and Bellon 1995: 226).

When exactly the loss of flexional case distinctions in French occurred is difficult to determine. For instance, the *Chanson de Roland* shows considerable signs of case disintegration as early as in the first decades of the twelfth century. On the other hand, it is very well preserved in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, which were written in the third quarter of the same century (cf. Kibler 1984: 22). Enormous differences can be observed even within a single dialect (cf. Kibler 1984: 23).

The abolishment of the declension system resulted from the combination of various factors: syntactic and phonetic changes brought about a development that made the persistence of the OF case system increasingly difficult and also superfluous. Therefore, the "distinction of form gradually gives place to a distinction which depends entirely on the place of the words in the sentence and upon auxiliary devices, such as prepositions" (Ewert 1967: 130). It is evident that a tendency towards a fixed word order accompanied the progress of disintegration of the declensional system. To illustrate this, the word order in the Latin sentence *mater puellam vocat* could be changed without any semantic consequences. In ModF, it can only be translated as *la mère appelle la fille*. Exchanging the position of *mère*

and *fille* would invert the meaning (cf. Wolf and Hupka 1981: 186). Blake describes ModF as a "subject-verb-object (SVO) prepositional language" (Blake 1994: 160) that encodes grammatical relations solely by word order.

Also, the function of the cases gradually became unclear, as some cases, e.g. the genitive in Latin, showed a huge variety of usages, which led to confusion.

It has to be emphasized that none of these factors alone could have brought about the drift towards an analytic language; it was the combination of various elements. It should also be stressed that the disintegration of the case system was not a fast and abrupt process, as linguistic changes occur only slowly and successively (cf. Stanovaia 1993: 176).

After case distinction had ceased to exist around the fifteenth century, there was only the singular-plural distinction left. At this stage, -s in final position had already become mute, thus in the spoken language, there were no audible distinctions between the various case forms. Today this final -s is purely orthographic in the vast majority of instances. A clear differentiation can only be found in substantives whose final consonant before -s is modified (e.g. *travail-travaux*), or in case of *liaison* when the following word begins with a vowel (cf. Ewert 1967: 131). Distinction of form is only retained in spelling. The vestigial remains of Latin inflectional noun morphology in ModF lies in the use of the -s-ending (resp. -x as an orthographic variant) to indicate the plural, which derives directly from the -s of the Latin accusative plurals -as, -os, and -es (cf. Harris and Vincent 1988: 217). This also shows that it was the oblique form that became generalized, being the unmarked form that was used in most instances.

To conclude, it could be said that the process of case abolishment had to be accompanied by the reinforcement of other elements in the sentence that fulfilled the same function as the case system, i.e. the clear distinction of subject-object relations (cf. Schøsler 1973: 261). These functional markers were the fixation of word order, the use of prepositions, articles, and of personal pronouns.

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