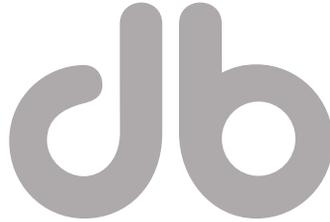


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# The rise and fall of morphological schemas

## A diachronic account of *entre*-prefixation in French

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The paper explores the origin and development of the [*entre*-V] construction in the history of French. By means of quantitative corpus data, it is shown that the [*entre*-V] construction, particularly in its reciprocal function, is productive in earlier stages of French and progressively disappears over time. We argue that this decrease in productivity is connected to the change in availability of the more abstract [PREF-V] construction. While Old French still shows residual stages of Latin prefixation, this system dissolves in the history of French. As speakers have less access to the [PREF-V] construction, this also engenders numerous changes in the constructional network of the [*entre*-V] construction.

**Keywords:** reciprocity, prefixation, constructional networks, French, Latin

### 1. Introduction

Old French (henceforth OF) features a rich yet somewhat unorderly system of verbal prefixation (or *préverbation*, Rousseau 1995): verbal prefixes are often connected with the encoding of aspectual notions, but their use is not always transparent. Historically, the OF situation instantiates an intermediate phase within a well-known drift that leads from the rich and fully productive system of Latin verbal prefixation to the scarcely productive prefixation pattern attested in modern Romance languages (Lüdtke 2005; Iacobini 2019).

Within the OF system of verbal prefixation, the prefix *entre-* stands out for several reasons.<sup>1</sup> We adopt here a Construction Morphology perspective and describe *entre-* as occurring in two main constructional schemas. Those cases in

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1. *Entre-* may also derive nouns, adjectives, and adverbs (Van Goethem 2009a: 123–132). We leave these usages out of consideration.

which *entre-* adds to a base verb a spatial meaning component such as ‘in half’ or ‘in between’, e.g. *poser* ‘place’ > *entre-poser* ‘interpose’, or where it expresses a partially completed event, e.g., *voir* ‘see’ > *entre-voir* ‘glimpse’ instantiate one schema. The second schema involves the use of *entre-* as a marker of reciprocal verbs, often in conjunction with reflexive pronouns, as in *amer* ‘love’ > *s’entre-amer* ‘love each other’. In addition, *entre-* occurs in lexicalized combinations with verb bases with which its contribution is no longer detectable, e.g. *dire* ‘say’ vs. *entredire* ‘forbid’. We return to the diachronic connection among the various meanings of *entre-* in Section 4, but it is already important to observe that some of these meanings, chiefly the reciprocal one, must constitute Romance innovations, as they are absent in its Latin precursor (Inglese 2023).

The paper aims at shedding light on the peculiarities of the [*entre-V*] construction by exploring its Latin origins and its subsequent development in a diachronic corpus of French. A number of scholars (e.g. Van Goethem 2009b) have argued that *entre-* has emerged as a prefix in the diachrony of French via grammaticalization. In this paper, we challenge this view and argue that the multifunctionality of the [*entre-V*] construction is the result of the merger of a number of distinct sources. In this respect, the study of the diachrony of *entre-* prefixation contributes to our understanding of the relevance of multiple source constructions in language change more generally (see De Smet, Ghesquière & Van de Velde 2015). Our results also show that the [*entre-V*] construction, especially in the reciprocal and some of the non-reciprocal usages, is productive in earlier periods of French (OF – around 1645) but its productivity starkly declines thereafter and nowadays the reciprocal schema is almost exclusively found in high and literary registers. We link this decline in productivity to the change in availability of the [*PREF-V*] construction in the transition from Latin to French.

The history of the French [*entre-V*] construction offers an ideal viewpoint to address a number of issues pertaining to (Diachronic) Construction Morphology (see the Introduction to this special issue). In particular, it will allow us to get a better understanding of the nature of (morphological) schemas and how they change over time, both in terms of their individual productivity and in their mutual relations, which we understand as changes in constructional networks (Sommerer & Smirnova 2020).

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 offers an introduction to the diachrony of French prefixation. Section 3 presents the results of the corpus study (Section 3.1). The semantics of the [*entre-V*] construction in OF is the focus of Section 3.2, while Section 3.3 discusses the diachronic changes in the distribution of the [*entre-V*] construction. Section 4 discusses the main findings and their diachronic implications for the [*entre-V*] construction. Section 5 features a conclusive summary.

## 2. The diachrony of French verbal prefixes

The verbal prefixes found in Modern French originate from two main diachronic sources. They either represent (i) continuations of a Latin prefix (e.g. Lat. *dis-puto* > Fr. *disputer* ‘discuss, argue’) or (ii) French innovations, e.g. *sur-* or *avant-*. The latter are usually assumed to be grammaticalized from prepositions (see Van Goethem 2009a; Amiot & De Mulder 2015).

A number of authors have argued that *entre-* falls within the second category, as its prefixal usage is the result of the grammaticalization of the corresponding original preposition *entre* (Van Goethem 2009a: 143). In support of this scenario, one may observe that, when it encodes reciprocity, *entre-* seems to be an OF innovation, as Latin lacks a corresponding reciprocal prefix. We believe that this view is problematic and, as we discuss in Section 4, we argue that French *entre-* in fact continues multiple Latin sources, namely the forms *intrō* and *inter* (and partly *intrā*), which already in Latin functioned as prefixes. Specifically, we claim that a continuation of the Latin system with extension of the constructional network based on analogy seems to be a more suitable scenario to explain the evolution of French *entre-*.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the system of prefixation found in Latin and its development into OF. As is typical of spatial morphemes in ancient Indo-European languages (Cuzzolin, Putzu & Ramat 2006), Latin had a variety of items that could be used in three constructions: either as independent adverbs, as adpositions, or as verbal prefixes. In the latter usage, they could convey spatial and non-spatial (chiefly aspectual) meanings (see Haverling 2003: 113–116). For example, in Early and Classical Latin, prefixes are used to highlight spatial features of motion verbs, as in (1a), to express telicity (typically co-occurring with the suffix *-sc-*), as in (1b), or the effective completion of an action, as in (1c).

- |        |                   |                         |
|--------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) a. | <i>eo</i>         | → <i>trans-eo</i>       |
|        | ‘go’              | ‘go across’             |
| b.     | <i>dormio</i>     | → <i>con-dorm-isc-o</i> |
|        | ‘sleep’           | ‘fall asleep’           |
| c.     | <i>suadeo</i>     | → <i>per-suadeo</i>     |
|        | ‘try to persuade’ | ‘persuade’              |

Already in Late Latin, however, this system shows signs of erosion. The semantic oppositions between prefixed and unprefixed verbs become increasingly hazy and there is also confusion as to the functional spectrum of individual prefixes. The dissolution of the system is noticeable from the 3rd century CE already. For example, the *Versio Vulgata* (4th century CE) attests to a confusion between *suadeo*

meaning ‘persuade’ and *persuadeo* ‘try to persuade’, in a reverse pattern with respect to the Classical Latin one in (1c).

The decay of the system found in Late Latin proceeds in early stages of the Romance languages, which show oscillations in the use of prefixed/unprefixed verbs similar to what is found in Late Latin. Overall, early Romance varieties witness a stark decrease in productivity of the use of verbal prefixation inherited from Latin (excluding newly grammaticalized prefixes): the spatial usage of prefixes can only be found up to the 14th century CE (Iacobini 2019: 189), whereas in Modern Romance the pattern remains virtually limited to the encoding of repetition or negation (see also Lüdtke 2005).

OF varieties exhibit similar signs of confusion in the use of prefixes (see Dufresne, Dupuis & Tremblay 2008; Patard & De Mulder 2015). Some of the prefixes are still semantically transparent and add a specific semantic component to the verb. These include evaluative prefixes, as *fol-* in (2a), and repetitive prefixes like *re-*, in (2b). Prefixes that occur with higher frequencies, conversely, show more fluctuations. These include, e.g., *a(n)-*, *en-*, *es-*, and *des-*. With these, a distinct meaning component can sometimes be detected: for example, *en-* may underscore the telicity of the event, as in (2c), thus similarly to Latin in (1b).

- (2) a. *penser* ‘think’ → *fol-penser* ‘think foolishly’  
 b. *tapir* ‘hide’ → *re-tapir* ‘hide again’  
 c. *voler* ‘fly’ → *en-voler* ‘take off’

However, in many cases prefixed and unprefixed forms are used interchangeably and no difference in meaning can be detected, even in cases in which two (or more) prefixes are stacked, as in *de-cevoir* and *en-de-cevoir* ‘disappoint’ or *de-tenir* and *en-de-tenir* ‘possess, detain’ (Rothwell 1973: 243).

In the landscape of OF prefixation *entre-* stands out as particularly productive (Tremblay 2008). For example, among the 866 prefixed intransitive lemmas listed in the AND (*Anglo-Norman Dictionary*), one finds 96 *entre-*verbs (11% of the total), while other transparent prefixes such as repetitive *re-* only covers 7% of the types, and evaluative prefixes less than around 1% each. The next sections are thus dedicated to shedding more light on the nature and dynamics of the use of *entre-* in the history of French.

### 3. The [*entre-V*] construction in the history of French

In French one finds several prefixed verbs instantiating the [*entre-V*] construction, which is itself a sub-schema of a more general pattern of verbal prefixation that can be represented as a more abstract [*PREF-V*] construction. As anticipated

in Section 1, verbs that instantiate the [*entre-V*] construction do not form a semantically uniform class, as they include reciprocal items, such as *entre-tuer* ‘kill each other’, and verbs with no reciprocal semantics at all, e.g. *entreprendre* ‘undertake’. To better understand the nature and history of the [*entre-V*] construction in French, we have undertaken a systematic study of *entre*-prefixed verbs in a diachronic corpus. After discussing our corpus in Section 3.1, we explore the semantics of the [*entre-V*] construction, and discuss how this construction is in fact embedded in a wider constructional network that includes nodes with higher schematicity as well as a number of sub-schemas (Section 3.2), and we then turn to discuss how the productivity of individual sub-schemas varies over time (Section 3.3).

### 3.1 The corpus

This study is based on the diachronic corpus *Frantext*, to which data from the *Base de Français Médiéval* has been added to cover the earliest phase of documentation. The choice of this corpus presents an obvious register bias, as most of the included texts belong to the high written register. While this means that the corpus is not representative of register variation, it makes the corpus relatively uniform regarding the featured textual genres, which improves the comparability across different chronological layers (Gaeta & Ricca 2006: 64).

The corpus can be divided into six main chronological stages, each featuring a different amount of texts (and words). For each period, we have extracted all verb forms beginning with *entre-* (and spelling variants for OF such as *antre-*).<sup>2</sup> Table 1 reports on the date and the word count for each sub-corpus, as well as the raw token and type frequency and the number of *hapaxes* of the [*entre-V*] construction.

### 3.2 The [*entre-V*] construction in OF

Before we turn to its diachronic developments, we begin by assessing the features of the [*entre-V*] construction in the OF corpus (I (*ancien*) corpus in Table 1). We review its semantics (Section 3.2.1), discuss its relationship to the reciprocal meaning (Section 3.2.2), and illustrate its morphosyntactic properties (Section 3.2.3).

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2. We extracted all forms starting with “entr:\*” excluding the verbal forms of the verb *entrer* ‘enter’ and other false positives, etc., as well as occurrences of the [*entre-V*] construction in unclear contexts. Besides native *entre-*, in the history of French verbs with *inter-* have been reintroduced from Latin, e.g. *intercomprendre* (Iacobini 2019: 200–201). Given the learned nature of these forms, we have excluded them from our study.

**Table 1.** Token, type and hapax counts of the [*entre-V*] construction in the Frantext corpus (number in brackets refer to normalized frequencies per 10,000,000 tokens)

Sub-corpus	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Date	<i>ancien</i> (origin–1300)	<i>moyen</i> (1300–1549)	<i>préclassique</i> (1550–1649)	<i>classique</i> (1650–1799)	<i>moderne</i> (1800–1979)	<i>contemporain</i> (1980–now)
Total word count	4,447,673	10,427,886	14,827,775	43,635,170	150,123,440	43,493,885
Tokens	1,364 (3,067)	2,017 (1,934)	5,449 (3,675)	11,736 (2,689)	25,436 (1,694)	6,778 (1,558)
Type*	138 (310)	115 (110)	159 (107)	90 (21)	125 (8)	30 (7)
Hapaxes	62 (139)	39 (37)	64 (43)	23 (5)	44 (3)	4 (1)

\* As we discuss in Section 3.2, especially in the I (*ancien*) corpus, individual *entre*-verbs may instantiate more than one subschema, e.g., *entremettre* ‘place in between’ and *sentremettre (de)* ‘intervene, undertake’. In these cases, each subschema is counted as a distinct type. While this artificially increases the number of types, it does not alter the quantitative data, as this concerns only 17 verbs.

### 3.2.1 The semantics of the [*entre-V*] construction in OF

Earlier studies have already showcased the variety of meanings that *entre*-prefixed verbs display in Old and Modern French (Hanoset 1964; Weidenbusch 1993; Guentchéva 2003; Tremblay 2008; Van Goethem 2009a, b). Here, we argue that this multifunctionality reflects the articulation of the [*entre-V*] construction in a number of sub-schemas: (i) reciprocal/pleonastic, (ii) in turns/in half, (iii) into/in between, (iv) partially.

First, *entre*- may occur with reciprocal verbs. These encode situations in which the participants involved typically perform both the roles of Agent and Patient, e.g. *the dogs bite each other*. Among the various parameters relevant for the typology of reciprocal constructions, in this paper we only focus on the distinction between grammatical vs. lexical reciprocals. The former are transparently created from an otherwise non-reciprocal (bivalent) verb (e.g., *hit* → *hit each other*), while the latter inherently lexicalize a symmetric situation (e.g., *fight*, *mix*; Knjazev 2007).

Examples of *entre*- with grammatical reciprocals are found right from the beginning of the OF period. An example is *amer* ‘love’ > (*s*)*entramer* ‘love one another’ in (3) (one also finds indirect reciprocals such as *donner* ‘give’ > (*s*)*entre-donner (coups)* ‘give each other (blows)’; see *GHHF* 2020: 1307).

- (3) *Li grant desir par qu' il s' entrainment*  
 the grand desire by which they REFL ENTRE.love.PRS.3PL  
 'The grand desire by which they love each other.' (tdechamp, p.128, v. 14, BFM)

OF examples with lexical reciprocals include spatial verbs, such as *mêler* 'mix' > *entre-mêler* 'mix' in (4), and non-spatial ones, e.g., *combatre* 'fight' > *entre-combatre* 'fight' in (5).

- (4) *et s' entremeslerent li un aus autres*  
 and REFL ENTRE.mingle.PST.3PL the one to other.PL  
 'And they mixed with one another.' (menreims, p.13v, BFM)
- (5) *mainte foiz s' entrecombatoient*  
 many time.PL REFL ENTRE.fight.PST.3PL  
 'Many times they fought each other.' (roseme2, p.42, v. 9566, BFM)

It is admittedly not easy to single out the specific semantic contribution of *entre-* with grammatical and lexical reciprocal verbs, but, as we discuss in more detail in Section 3.2, there are a number of reasons why we prefer to treat the two patterns as two distinct sub-schemas. We refer to the former as the  $[(s')\textit{entre-V}]_{\text{RECIPROCAL}}$   $\leftrightarrow$   $[\text{SEM}_1 \textit{each other}]$  schema and to the latter as the  $[\textit{entre-V}]_1 \leftrightarrow [\text{SEM}_{1,\text{SYMMETRIC}}]$  schema, which for convenience we label *pleonastic*.<sup>3</sup>

The  $[\textit{entre-V}]$  construction is also associated with several non-reciprocal meanings. Partly building on the existing literature, we have identified several non-reciprocal schemas in our corpus. Specifically, *entre-* may express a number of spatial meanings, including 'in between', as in *poser* 'place' > *entre-poser* 'place in between' in (6), 'into' as in *duire* 'lead' > *entre-duire* 'lead into', 'in half' as in *rompre* 'break' > *entre-rompre* 'break in half', and 'at intervals' as in *couper* 'cut' > *entre-couper* 'interrupt, punctuate'. In addition, *entre-* may also add the meaning 'partially', as in *luire* 'shine' > *entre-luire* 'shine (dimly)'. We return to the diachronic connections that exist between these various meanings in Section 4.

- (6) *Ne jur entreposer Entrë icel saint jur E la vigile jur*  
 nor day ENTRE.place.INF between this holy day and the vigile day  
 '(Man must not doubt) nor interpose a day between this holy day and the day before.' (comput, p.30, v. 2223, BFM)

Beside these, one also finds a wealth of verbs to which *entre-* does not add a specific meaning component but instead creates a verbal form which is holistically

3. In sporadic occurrences *entre-* adds a sociative meaning, e.g., *rire* 'laugh' > *entre-rire* 'laugh together'. Given their semantic proximity to the reciprocal meaning (see Nedjalkov 2007: 33–37), we do not analyze these occurrences as a distinct schema.

interpreted as expressing a distinct situation and whose meaning is unpredictable from the semantics of the simplex verb. We treat these idiosyncratic [*entre-V*] constructions as *lexicalized* (in the sense of Hilpert 2019). Examples include *prendre* ‘take’ > *entreprendre* ‘undertake, start’ but also ‘attack’ or ‘fix, decide on’ specifically in earlier stages, as in (7), or *dire* ‘say’ > *entredire* ‘forbid’.

- (7) *Par prouee entreprent sa perte et son damage*  
 by braveness fix.PRS.3SG his loss and his damage  
 ‘With braveness he fixes his loss and his damage.’

(Roman d’Alexandre, branche 2, A110, FRANTEXT)

The various meanings associated with *entre-* in OF can be arranged as distinct nodes in a network. There are a number of reasons to treat the different meanings of the [*entre-V*] construction as separate nodes and not merely as a single polysemous construction (see Sommerer & Smirnova 2020: 4–9). Each node can be thought of as a generalization made by the speaker based on shared semantic components among the verb types that instantiate each schema. In particular, we group the various meanings illustrated above into four basic schemas: these are semantically distinct and cannot easily be derived from one another. The meanings ‘in half/in intervals’ and ‘in between, into’ are associated with the two schemas [*entre-V*]<sub>SPATIAL\_1</sub> and [*entre-V*]<sub>SPATIAL\_2</sub>, respectively, the specific semantics of which results from the semantics of individual verbs as well as from contextual clues.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the [*entre-V*]<sub>PARTIALLY</sub> and the [*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> (and the pleonastic) schemas appear to be semantically independent. In addition, the autonomy of the [*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> schema is further evidenced by its association with reciprocal *se* (Section 3.2.2) as well as by a number of other specificities (Section 3.2.3).

Concerning the lexicalized *entre-*verbs, we argue that a more abstract [*entre-V*]<sub>LEXICALIZED</sub> schema cannot be postulated and that each of them is directly linked to the general [*entre-V*] construction. In fact, with these verbs it is impossible to generalize over individual instances, which do not share any obvious semantic component. Evidence that lexicalized *entre-*verbs are stored independently also comes from the fact that these display a high token frequency at all language stages (notably, none of these is a *hapax* in stages later than *moyen*), and highly frequent items are more likely to be stored independently (Bybee 2007). A peculiarity of OF is that a number of verbs display a reciprocal usage of *entre-* besides the lexicalized one, as in e.g., *entrevenir* ‘arise’ and ‘go at each other’. This

4. As already remarked by Weidenbusch (1993: 156), in some cases it is not easy to tease apart the meanings ‘in half’ and ‘in intervals’, and ‘in between’ and ‘into’.

pattern becomes rarer over time, as in later stages individual verbs tend to select only one schema.

It is also important to note that, alongside the prefix *entre-* French also features a corresponding preposition *entre* meaning ‘among, between’, which can also be used in combination with personal (non-reflexive) pronouns to express reciprocity, e.g., *entre eulx* ‘among them’ (see also Van Goethem 2009b: 150–154). Notably, given their formal and semantic proximity, (horizontal) links can be established between the [*entre* N] construction and the [*entre-V*]<sub>SPATIAL\_2</sub> and [*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> schemas. The network of the [*entre-V*] construction in OF is summarized in Figure 1 (for graphic reasons, only the link between reciprocal [*entre* N] and [*entre-V*] schemas is indicated).

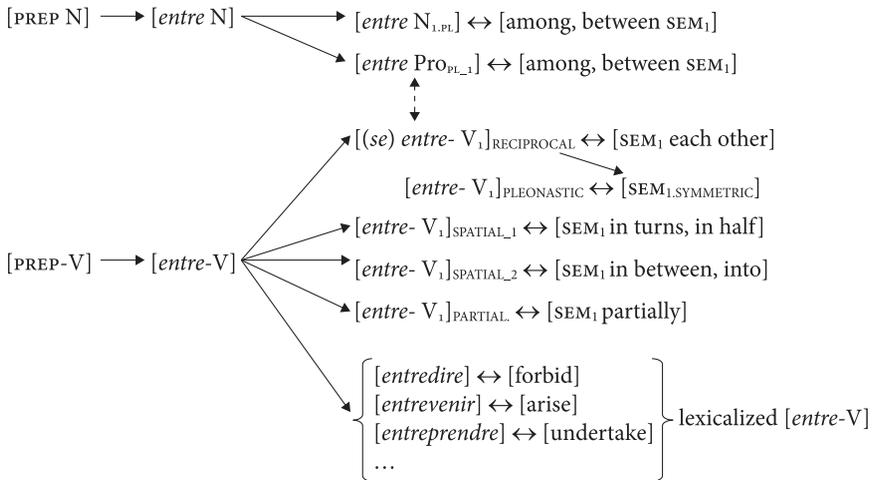


Figure 1. The network of the [*entre-V*] construction in Old French

3.2.2 Reciprocal *entre-* in OF: Where is the reciprocal meaning encoded?

The use of *entre-* as a reciprocal verbal prefix illustrated in Section 3.2.1 must be understood in the broader picture of the encoding of reciprocity from Latin to French. Latin had a number of strategies to encode reciprocity, including the use of the bipartite pronoun based on *ali-* or *alter* ‘other’, and the use of the preposition *inter* ‘between’ combined with the reflexive pronoun *se* (Fanelli 2009). Remarkably, reflexive pronouns alone typically do not express reciprocity in Latin. In the transition from Latin to the Romance languages, the reciprocal domain is affected by far-reaching restructuring processes, whereby the original reciprocal constructions disappear and are replaced by newly created ones (on Modern French reciprocal constructions see Guentchéva & Rivière 2007).

OF tends to code grammatical meanings by resorting to multiple exponents for certain categories and this tendency also concerns reciprocity. This makes it at times difficult to point out the specific contribution of *entre-* in individual contexts. In particular, *entre-* often co-occurs with additional analytic markers of reciprocity, including *entre els/eu(l)x* ‘between them’, *andui/anbedex* ‘both’ and *les ungs sur les aultres* ‘one another’, the latter shown in (8) (Nkollo 2013, 2016: Chapter 3).

- (8) *qu’ ilz s’ entrefraperent les ungs sur les aultres*  
 that they REFL ENTRE.STRIKE.PST.3PL the one.PL on the other.PL  
 ‘That they struck each other one upon the others.’  
 (Ulenspiegel, R944, FRANTEXT)

Nevertheless, the main co-occurrence pattern, shown in example (8), as well as in (3) to (5), concerns the [*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> construction and the reflexive pronoun *se*. As is well known, *se* can be combined with a bivalent verb (and typically also with a plural subject) to encode reciprocity at all stages of French. Tremblay (2008: 373, 381) and Mutz (2011: 247, 252) observe that in fact reciprocal *entre-*verbs obligatorily occur with *se*, and argue that *se* encodes the reciprocal meaning, whereas *entre-* essentially serves to intensify/disambiguate the reciprocal interpretation (thus parallel to *auto-* ‘self’ with reflexive verbs, Mutz 2011). Crucially, this function would likewise be at play with grammatical and lexical reciprocal verbs, where the reciprocal component is already marked by *se* (besides being inherent with the lexical ones).<sup>5</sup>

We do not fully share Mutz’s (2011) position since our corpus data supports the need to distinguish between verb bases that are not inherently symmetric (grammatical reciprocals) and those that lexicalize a symmetric event (lexical reciprocals), which is also confirmed by the fact that the two groups historically show a distinct behavior (see Section 3.3).

Specifically, in our corpus one finds occurrences in which grammatical reciprocal *entre-*verbs occur without *se*.<sup>6</sup> These occurrences are admittedly scarce (37 in the entire corpus out of 2830 reciprocal tokens, most of which in the I (*ancien*) and II (*moyen*) corpora), and they mostly concern non-finite or compound verb forms (which notoriously show a tendency to omit reflexive marking, see Jensen 1990: 172–173). Nevertheless, they attest to contexts in which *entre-* can be regarded as a marker of reciprocity itself, as in (9) (also Van Goethem

5. We do not discuss further the role of *entre-* in disambiguating ambiguous occurrences of *se*, which goes beyond the scope of this paper.

6. In some cases, it is difficult to decide whether a reflexive marker occurs in a given context, as occasionally non-reflexive pronouns could be used in reflexive (and reciprocal) function in OF (Waltereit 2012).

2009a: 146–147; Nkollo 2013: 20–22). We take this as evidence that *entre-* could express grammatical reciprocity in OF, and did not merely (and always) serve as an intensifier.

- (9) *k' anbedex sont entrabatus*  
 that both be.PRS.3PL ENTRE.beat.PTCP.PL  
 ‘They both have fought each other.’ (atrper, p. 41, v. 1292, BFM)

### 3.2.3 Morphosyntactic properties of the [*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> schema

Another reason to analyze the [*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> construction as an autonomous sub-schema of the more abstract [*entre-V*] construction is that there is morphosyntactic evidence pointing to a greater autonomy of *entre-* within this schema.

First, in OF one may observe several spelling variants in which *entre-* is not written together with the verb stem: possible spellings include *antr'amer*, *entre-amer* but also *entre amer*, with the two items clearly separated.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, reciprocal *entre-* seems to undergo conjunction reduction: in a sequence of two reciprocal verbs, *entre-* may be omitted on the second one, as in (10):

- (10) *ilz s' entreacolerent et baiserent*  
 they REFL ENTRE.embrace.PST.3PL and kiss.PST.3PL  
 ‘They embraced and kissed each other.’ (cnn, p. 114, BFM)

Finally, the most compelling piece of evidence comes from the fact that one finds several instances in which, when used in compound verb forms, *entre-* is not attached to the lexical verb base but to the auxiliary, as in (11) (thus partaking in the behavior of clitic climbing; Roberts 2016: 800):

- (11) *ilz s' entrefurent destruis*  
 they REFL entre.be.PST.3PL destroy.PTCP.PL  
 ‘They had destroyed one another.’  
 (Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune T.3, o203, FRANTEXT)

The prefix-climbing behavior is prevalently attested in earlier phases of the language and disappears later on (I (*ancien*): 12, II (*moyen*): 5, III (*préclassique*): 7, IV (*classique*): 1).

Notably, cases such as (10) and (11) mostly concern grammatical reciprocal verbs (23/25 of the occurrences, the other two featuring *entre-guerreyer* ‘fight’ and *entre-voire* ‘glimpse’). A similar distribution is encountered with the omission of the reflexive discussed in Section 3.2.2., which only concerns one occurrence

7. As a thorough study of the spelling of prefixes in OF is yet lacking, this evidence cannot be evaluated properly (also Van Goethem 2009b: 143, fn. 1)

of *entrecombattre*, while all other tokens involve grammatical reciprocal verbs. We take this as further evidence that the  $[(s')entre-V]_{\text{RECIPROCAL}}$  and the  $[entre-V]_{\text{PLEONASTIC}}$  schemas should be kept distinct.

### 3.3 The $[entre-V]$ construction over time: A quantitative approach

Scholars have already observed that in Modern French *entre-* is less frequently used than in earlier stages of the language and that nowadays *entre-* prefixation is restricted to higher registers (Weidenbusch 1993: 155; Mutz 2011: 246–248; *GGHF*: 1307–1308). Data on the frequency of *entre-*verbs over time in our corpus largely confirms these observations and match earlier results by Stéfani (1962). Figure 2 and 3 show the normalized token and type frequency (over 10,000,000 words) of *entre-*verbs across time. As Figure 2 shows, there is a peak in the overall token frequency of *entre-*verbs in the III (*préclassique*) era, with a subsequent decrease down to VI (*contemporain*). This decrease becomes even more evident when one considers the types in Figure 3, which show a strong downfall trend over time (Kendall  $\tau$   $-0.97$ ).<sup>8</sup> Note that this is not only the case of types in general, but also of first attestations: as Figure 3 shows, one finds consistently less new types in each sampled period.

The peak of tokens in the III (*préclassique*) period may be explained by the stark “Ausbau” (Kloss 1978) of the French language in several scientific and technical areas at that time (*GGHF*: 1307). In many cases, these are *hapaxes* that pertain to literary registers or the emerging “non-fiction”. Note that the decrease in token frequency does not affect all sub-schemas of the  $[entre-V]$  construction in the same way. This becomes evident when one compares the frequency of the reciprocal and the pleonastic *entre-*verbs with the non-reciprocal ones (the latter including the spatial schemas ‘in half, in turns’ and ‘in between, into’, the ‘partially’ schema, and all lexicalized *entre-*verbs, see Section 3.2.1).<sup>9</sup> Specifically, as shown in Figure 2, one finds that non-reciprocal  $[entre-V]$  sub-schemas together remain more frequent than the reciprocal and pleonastic ones at all language stages.

The decrease in type frequency shown in Figure 3 can be regarded as evidence of the decreasing *realized productivity* of the  $[entre-V]$  construction. Realized productivity is however only one among the various corpus-based metrics of morphological productivity proposed in the literature (see Baayen 1993; Gaeta

8. The reduction of the number of types over time is partly linked to the generalization of a single stem for verbs that showed more than one prefixed variant in OF (see Section 2.2). This phenomenon is well-known from other Romance languages (Malkiel 1941).

9. A detailed historical study of the individual sub-schemas goes unfortunately beyond the space limitations of the present paper.

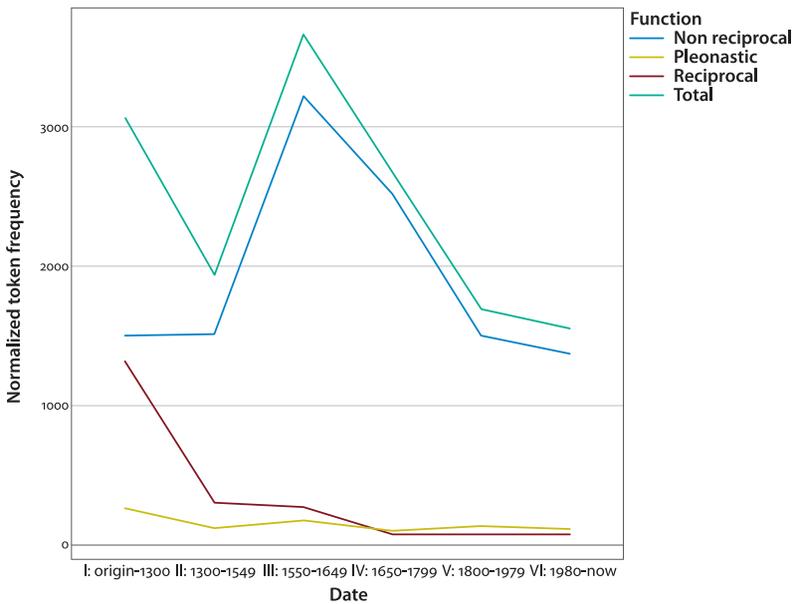


Figure 2. Normalized token frequency of *entre*-verbs

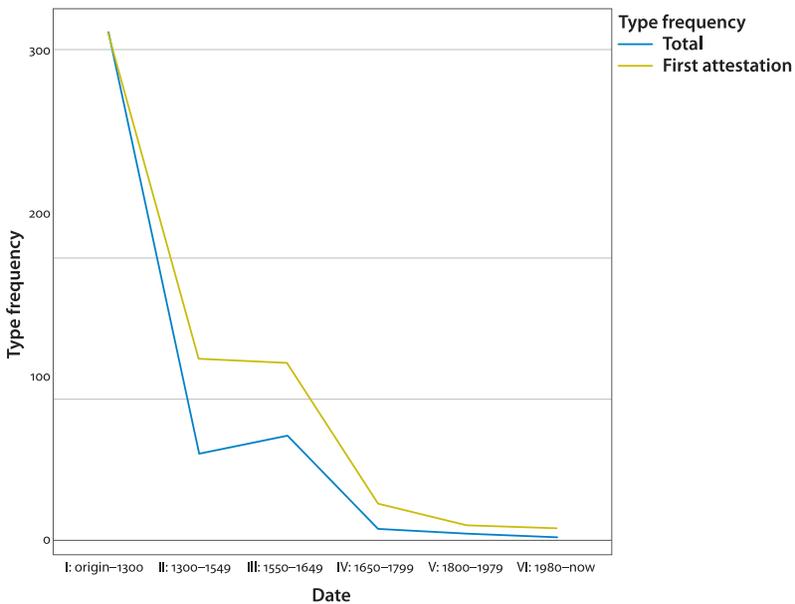


Figure 3. Normalized type frequency of *entre*-verbs

& Ricca 2006; Hilpert 2013: 127–133). Two other relevant measures, which focus instead on the role of *hapaxes* as cues to productivity, are *potential productivity* and *expanding productivity*. Here, we focus on whether the  $[entre-V]_{\text{RECIPROCAL}}$  construction behaves differently over time with respect to the other sub-schemas. In Figure 2, we have shown that non-reciprocal  $[entre-V]$  constructions remain more frequent than the reciprocal one at all language stages. The picture becomes much more interesting when we consider data on potential and expanding productivity of these constructions.

Figure 4 illustrates the potential productivity (measured by dividing the number of *hapaxes* in each group for the corresponding tokens) over time of the  $[entre-V]_{\text{RECIPROCAL}}$  schema and the non-reciprocal ones.<sup>10</sup> Potential productivity measures “the probability of encountering new types of the construction” (Hilpert 2013: 129). While the general trend is that of a decreasing productivity of the  $[entre-V]$  construction as a whole, its sub-schemas offer a more nuanced picture: the  $[entre-V]_{\text{RECIPROCAL}}$  pattern shows an increasing productivity from I (*ancien*) to III (*préclassique*,) followed by a progressive decline up to VI (*contemporain*). This is in line with earlier remarks in the *GGHF* (p. 1308), where III (*préclassique*) is pointed out as the phase of major productivity of reciprocal *entre-*. By contrast, all other sub-schemas show a much lower potential productivity at all language stages, and, in addition, display a constant downfall trend (Kendall  $\tau$   $-0.86$ ). Note also that the pleonastic schema shows a distinct profile from the reciprocal one, much closer to the lower productivity of non-reciprocal schemas: this evidence supports the need to distinguish between the two patterns (Section 3.2.1).

The data on potential productivity suggests that, despite its lower token frequency, the  $[entre-V]_{\text{RECIPROCAL}}$  schema is actually more productive than the other ones. This result is further confirmed by the expanding productivity of the  $[entre-V]_{\text{RECIPROCAL}}$  schema, which provides an indication of the contribution of a construction to the “overall vocabulary growth of a language” (Hilpert 2013: 130). Expanding productivity rates are measured by dividing the *hapaxes* of the  $[entre-V]_{\text{RECIPROCAL}}$  schema for the total amount of *hapaxes* of the  $[entre-V]$  construction per time period. As the results in Figure 5 show, despite its decreasing token frequency, the  $[entre-V]_{\text{RECIPROCAL}}$  construction is the only sub-schema that increases its expanding productivity over time, unlike the other schemas, for which, by the *contemporain* period, one does not find any new *hapaxes*.

To sum up, in this section we have shown that the  $[entre-V]$  construction as a whole loses ground in the history of French, as it consistently shows a decreasing token frequency, as well as a declining realized productivity (less types over time) and potential productivity. However, within this general decline, the

10. The data on which Figures 4 and 5 are based can be found in the Appendix.

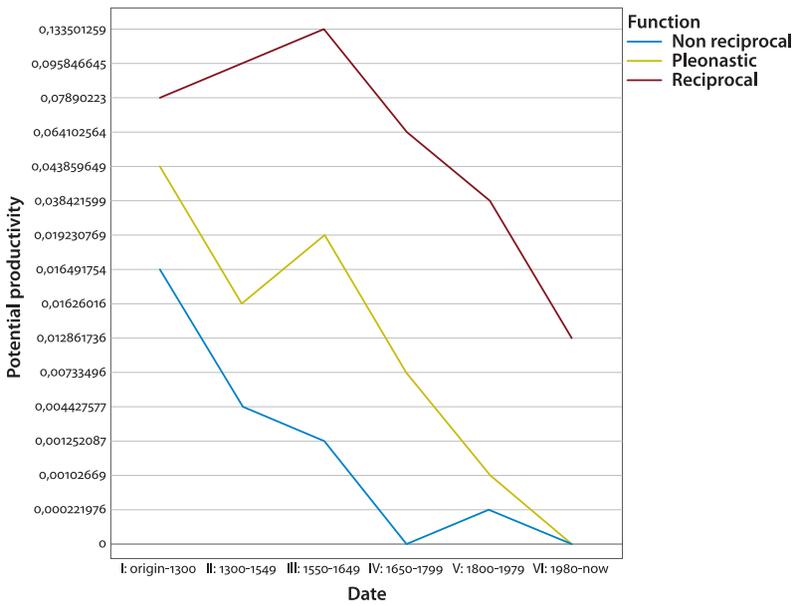


Figure 4. Potential productivity

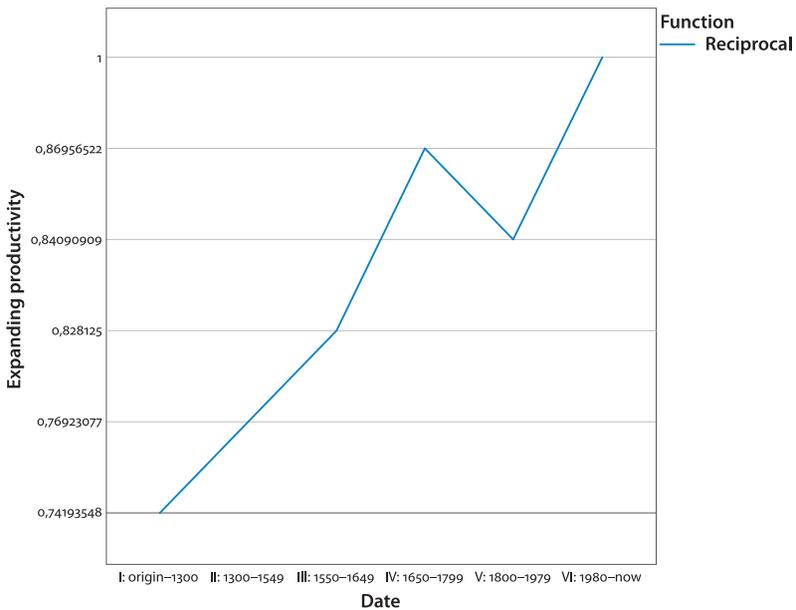


Figure 5. Expanding productivity

[*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> schema shows a neatly distinct profile: despite being less frequent than other *entre*-verbs at all language stages, its potential productivity is higher than that of other schemas at all language stages and, quite surprisingly, it even shows an increase in productivity from *ancien* to *préclassique*. Furthermore, its expanding productivity rises with time, to the point that in Modern French it is the only productive schema left. The productivity of the reciprocal schema is also illustrated by cases in which a new reciprocal *entre*-verb is created alongside an already well-established lexicalized one. For example, besides the verb *entredire* ‘forbid’ (likely the adaptation of a Latin loan *interdico* ‘interdict’ in the legal language, *FEW s.v.*), a more transparent form *entredire* ‘say to one another’ is created in OF. In the next section, we frame this chronological data in a more encompassing diachrony of the [*entre-V*] construction.

#### 4. Discussion

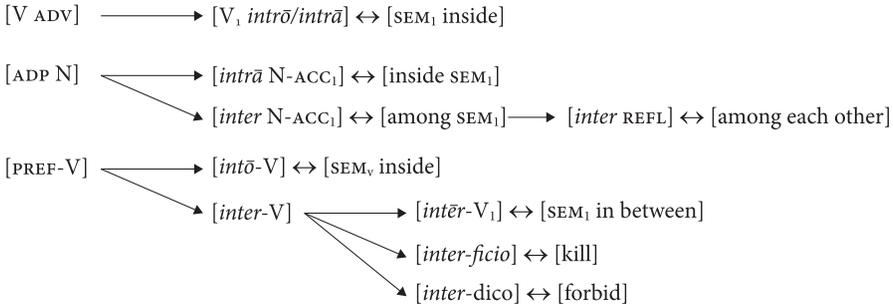
From a diachronic perspective, there are a number of questions that the data presented in the Sections 3.2 and 3.3 raise. First, how has the [*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> schema, which was absent in Latin, emerged in the Romance languages? Has the rise of the [*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> schema altered the network of the [*entre-V*] construction as a whole? How has the network of the [*entre-V*] construction evolved over time? We will address these questions in the following sections.

##### 4.1 The origin of the French [*entre-V*] construction

###### 4.1.1 *The Latin sources of French entre-*

While the majority of the French [PREF-V] constructions continue the Latin prefixation schema, a peculiarity of the [*entre-V*] construction is that it stems from a multiplicity of source constructions (De Smet, Ghesquière & Van de Velde 2015), that is, the Latin items *intrā*, *intrō*, and *inter*. As mentioned in Section 2, these forms occur in different contexts. *Intrā* either functions as a preposition, e.g., *intrā muros* ‘within the walls’, or as an adverb ‘inside’, whereas *intrō* is used either as an adverb or as a prefix with the meaning ‘inside’, e.g., *duco* ‘lead’ → *intrō-duco* ‘lead inside’. *Inter* occurs either as a preposition or as a prefix (adverbial usages are sporadic). As a preposition, its basic spatial meaning is ‘in between, among’, e.g., *inter Gallos* ‘among the Gauls’. In addition, its combination with the reflexive pronoun yields a reciprocal reading, following the BETWEEN > RECIPROCAL semantic shift (Heine & Miyashita 2008: 181). As a prefix, *inter-* maintains the basic meaning ‘in between’, e.g. *pono* ‘place’ → *inter-pono* ‘place (smth.) in between’, but the mean-

ings ‘in half’ and ‘in intervals’ are also attested, e.g., *inter-seco* ‘cut in half’ and *inter-lego* ‘pluck here and there’. Moreover, already in Latin, we find a wealth of lexicalized verbs, e.g. *dico* ‘speak’ → *inter-dico* ‘forbid’. The constructions in which *intrā*, *intrō*, and *inter* are used in Latin are summarized in Figure 6.



**Figure 6.** The constructional networks of Latin *intrō*, *intrā*, and *inter*

#### 4.1.2 The emergence of French [*entre-V*]

In the transition from Latin to French (and partly to other Romance languages), the constructional network in Figure 6 underwent radical changes. Formally, in the Romance languages *intrā* started being used in the [PREF-V] construction, thereby ousting *intrō*. In addition, in French the inherited Latin [*inter-V*] and [*intrō-V*] and the newly created Romance [*intrā-V*] constructions merged into a single [*entre-V*] schema. On the semantic side, new meanings arose: (i) the new [*intrā-V*]<sub>1</sub> construction became associated with the meaning [SEM<sub>1</sub> partially] (see e.g., Italian *intra-vedere* ‘glimpse’); (ii) the [*inter-V*] construction acquired a reciprocal meaning.

These changes brought about a restructuring of the network in Figure 6. The new network is centered around the newly created [*entre-V*] construction, shown in Figure 1. From a network perspective, the changes affected both nodes and their connectivity (Sommerer & Smirnova 2020). First, the network undergoes reduction, as out of the three Latin nodes only a single [*entre-V*] node survives. As a result, the network of [*entre-V*] expands: the sub-schemas associated with its Latin sources are re-linked to the more general [*entre-V*] schema, which is also enriched with the newly nodes represented by the ‘partially’ and ‘reciprocal’ schemas.

Notably, the merger between the Latin [*intrō/intrā-V*] and [*inter-V*] constructions is not the outcome of regular phonological changes, but results from a progressive overlap between *inter* and *intrā/intrō* taking place already in Late Latin (see *FEW* IV: 748). Evidence of this overlap comes from variation among the pre-

fixes *entre-/entro-* in OF: compare innovative *entre-duire* ‘lead in between’ alongside conservative *entro-duire* ‘lead into’ < Lat. *introduco*. We propose that this merger was triggered by *constructional contamination* (Pijpops & Van de Velde 2016): the realization of the [*intrō/intrā-V*] construction is affected by the contaminating [*inter-V*] construction, possibly on account of their formal similarity and of their semantic proximity in specific verb pairs: after all, to ‘place something in between’ (*entreposer*) is semantically similar to ‘place something inside (two things)’.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Where does reciprocal [*entre-V*] come from?

The Latin data discussed in Section 4.1.1. challenges the idea that the prefix [*entre-V*] emerged via grammaticalization of the preposition *entre-* in the history of French (e.g. Van Goethem 2009b), because most of the meanings associated with the [*entre-V*] construction (Section 3.2), directly continue the Latin [*inter-V*] construction. Only the ‘partially’ and the reciprocal schemas constitute true innovations.

How exactly the [*entre-V*]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> emerged remains an open question. Either one assumes a grammaticalization pathway leading from the reciprocal preposition *entre* to the prefix *entre-*, the latter being identical to the inherited prefix *entre-* < Lat. *inter-/intrō*, or, alternatively, the already existing [*entre-V*] construction might have been enriched with a new reciprocal meaning. This new meaning could have been analogically modeled on the preposition *entre*: based on the model of existing pairs of [*entre N*] and prefixal [*entre-V*] constructions with the same spatial meaning, speakers could have established a new [*entre-V*] reciprocal schema on the model of prepositional [*entre PRO*] (see *GGHF*: 1307). From the perspective of the constructional network, analogy can be understood as a way to enhance symmetry in the construction, since the encoding of reciprocity is the only missing horizontal link between sub-schemas of the [*entre N*] and the [*entre-V*] constructions. In support of this scenario, one might add that pleonastic uses with spatial lexical reciprocal verbs existed already in Latin, e.g. *misceo* = *inter-misceo* ‘mix’. These verbs, directly continued in French, e.g. *entre-mêler*, could have provided the model for grammatical reciprocals of the type *entre-aimer* ‘love one another’, without assuming independent grammaticalization of the preposition *entre-*.<sup>12</sup>

11. In fact, languages often colexify the meanings ‘between’ and ‘center’ (see [https://clics.clld.org/graphs/infomap\\_92\\_HALF](https://clics.clld.org/graphs/infomap_92_HALF)).

12. Another question is why the rise of reciprocal *inter-* did not occur already in Latin. Thurneysen (1882: 523) suggests that its emergence in French might have been driven by contact with Gaulish, which had a reciprocal prefix *ambi-*. We cannot further pursue this hypothesis here.

#### 4.2 The decline of the French [*entre-V*] construction

The historical data presented in Section 3.3 shows that the [*entre-V*] construction progressively fell out of use, to the point that it is only very marginally used in Modern French. In all likelihood, this also involves a further change in the constructional network of the [*entre-V*] construction from OF to Modern French. Besides those OF verbs that continue Latin patterns (including several lexicalized verbs), e.g. Lat. *introduco* > OF *entreduire* ‘lead inside’, several types constitute genuine Romance creations, attesting to the productivity of the non-reciprocal [*entre-V*] schemas in OF. However, this productivity dramatically diminishes over time.

Table 2 reports all the non-reciprocal *entre*-verbs found in the VI (*contemporain*) corpus. Leaving aside the lexicalized verbs, the verbs *entreposer*, *entre-couper*, *entrebailler* and *entrevoir* continue schemas that were productive in OF. However, given that in Modern French there are only one/two types per function, it is doubtful whether they are still productively formed by speakers on the basis of abstract intermediate schemas, or whether they are rather all stored independently as lexicalized instances of the [*entre-V*] construction. If anything, following Jackendoff & Audring (2016: 472), at this stage one could regard these as relational schemas only. If indeed Modern French speakers parse *entrevoir* in the same way as *entreprendre*, this might hint at the fact that as speakers are confronted with less types of a given schema, they lose the ability to generalize an abstract subschema over these types, leading to the loss of an abstract schema and to consequent restructuring of the network.

**Table 2.** Non-reciprocal *entre*-verbs in *contemporain*

Base verb	<i>entre</i> -verb	Classification
<i>bâiller</i> ‘open’	<i>entrebâiller</i> ‘half open’	PARTIALLY
<i>mettre</i> ‘put’	<i>entremettre</i> ‘mediate’	LEXICALIZED
<i>prendre</i> ‘take’	<i>entreprendre</i> ‘act, start’	LEXICALIZED
<i>poser</i> ‘place’	<i>entreposer</i> ‘store’	SPATIAL1_INSIDE
<i>couper</i> ‘cut’	<i>entrecouper</i> ‘punctuate’	SPATIAL2_INTERVAL
<i>tenir</i> ‘hold’	<i>entretenir</i> ‘maintain’	LEXICALIZED
<i>voir</i> ‘see’	<i>entrevoir</i> ‘glimpse’	PARTIALLY

It remains to be explained why the [*entre-V*] construction declined over time. The answer to this question perhaps lies in the increasing unavailability and more general demise of the [PREF-V] construction in the history of French:

as the [PREF-V] construction was becoming less productive in French, the sub-schemas dependent on this construction, including the [entre-V] construction in all its manifestations, likewise declined. This decreased productivity also affected the [entre-V]<sub>RECIPROCAL</sub> schema, which, as we discussed in Section 3.3, was particularly productive in earlier stages of French, with a peak in the *préclassique* era (Figure 4). In this case, it is likely that the emergence of new and more productive reciprocal constructions, including the increasing obligatorification of *se* with *entre*-verbs (see Section 3.2.2) and the development of the bipartite pronoun *l'un l'autre* (Nkollo 2016: Chapter 3), further contributed to the waning of this schema (Tremblay 2008: 380). While appealing, this hypothesis should be more rigorously tested on historical corpus data focusing on competing reciprocal strategies over time.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper we have described the multifunctionality of the [entre-V] construction in the history of French. Historical data shows that the exceptional multifunctionality of this pattern is the result of the historical merger of distinct Latin spatial source items, that is, *intrā*, *intrō*, and *inter*. In this respect, our study contributes to showcasing the variety of language change mechanisms that may alter constructional networks over time: these include node creation/loss, changes in connectivity, and constructional contamination. The extensive quantitative analysis presented in this paper has also evidenced that the [entre-V] construction, particularly in its reciprocal function, is productive from the earliest stage until around 1645, but that its productivity conspicuously decreases afterwards. In contemporary French, the [entre-V] schema is scarcely found in literary texts and is virtually confined to lexicalized verbs. We have argued that the stark decrease in productivity might be connected on the one hand to the decay of the inherited [PREF-V] construction as a whole, and, on the other hand, regarding the reciprocal schema, to the competition with more productive reciprocal constructions, including reflexive *se* and the bipartite pronoun *l'un l'autre*.

## Funding

Open Access publication of this article was funded through a Transformative Agreement with Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

## Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of this work have been presented at the 25th ICHL conference in Oxford (August 2022) and at the *Diachronic Construction Morphology* workshop. We would like to thank the audience of both events, as well as Muriel Norde, Graeme Trousdale, Livio Gaeta, Richard Waltereit, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and constructive criticism. All remaining shortcomings are our own. For academic purposes, Guglielmo Inglese is responsible of Sections 4 and 3.3, whereas Anne C. Wolfsgruber is responsible of Sections 2, 3.1 and 3.2. Sections 1 and 5 have been written jointly.

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## Digital resources

*Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (AND): <https://anglo-norman.net/>

*Base de Français Médiéval* (BFM): <http://txm.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/bfm>

*Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (FEW): <https://lecteur-few.atilf.fr/>

## Appendix

Below we report the data on which Figures 4 and 5 have been built. The complete list of *entre*-verbs taken into account in this study with their classification and their token frequency per time period can be found online in the supplementary material.

**Table 1.** Potential productivity

Corpus	Pleonastic	Reciprocal	Non reciprocal
I: origin-1300	0.04385965	0.07890223	0.01649175
II: 1300–1549	0.01626016	0.09584665	0.00442758
III: 1550–1649	0.01923077	0.13350126	0.00125209
IV: 1650–1799	0.00733496	0.06410256	0
V: 1800–1979	0.00102669	0.0384216	0.00022198
VI: 1980-now	0	0.01286174	0

**Table 2.** Expanding productivity

Corpus	Reciprocal
I: origin-1300	0.74193548
II: 1300–1549	0.76923077
III: 1550–1649	0.828125
IV: 1650–1799	0.86956522
V: 1800–1979	0.84090909
VI: 1980-now	1

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## Publication history

Date received: 1 December 2022  
Date accepted: 6 July 2023