

# Describing Direct Speech in the Syntactic Reference Corpus of Medieval French (SRCMF)

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We present the way direct speech or thought representation (Marnette 2005) is handled in SRCMF. Our main issue is a methodological one: what should be encoded about this kind of enunciative construction in a purely syntactic corpus?

## 1 SRCMF Project and Direct Speech

**Main Goal of SRCMF.** Each of the three functional components of language (grammatical, semantic and enunciative, Hagège 1999) should be encoded separately in order to guarantee their mutual independence. Hence, in SRCMF,

Annotation is as genuinely syntactic as possible

- SRCMF enhances the *Base de Français Médiéval* (Guillot et al. 2007) and the *Nouveau Corpus d'Amsterdam* (Stein/Kunstmann 2007)...
- with dependential syntactic annotation layer;
- SRCMF focuses on dependents of the verb.

**Direct Speech Representation Issue.** *Dicendi* verbs are functional tools that introduce direct speech. From an enunciative point of view, it is clear that utterances can be nested but...

...Lack of grammatical markers means grammatical dependencies cannot be assessed.

## 2 Utterance Hierarchy: Enunciative Perspective

From an enunciative perspective, *dicendi* verbs and direct speech are **nested utterances** (Ducrot 1984), where **deictics and vocatives** are common grammatical clues.

Et Tristan dit: “Sire, g’en voīs [...]” [“And T. said: ‘Lord, I am leaving’”] (Béroul, v. 596)

Nevertheless, in SRCMF,

**Principle 0** – The relationship between the utterances is described from an enunciative point of view, rather than a syntactic one.

Moreover, quoted speech sequences can become long narratives, where deictics are not present any more...:

et li dit: “Sire vos me demandastes ore la senefiance de ceste aventure [...] Quant li peres des cielx vit qu’il avoit en terre si grant durté [...] il envoya son fil [...]” [“and he said: ‘Lord, you asked for the meaning of this event... When The Father saw that cruelty was on the Earth, he sent his son’”] (Queste, 168c, 38)

## 3 Utterance Hierarchy: Syntactic Perspective

**Structures lack formal markers.** There are no observable grammatical tool linking the verb and direct speech in our first example:

Et Tristan dit: “Sire, g’en voīs [...]”

Hence, there are two equally valid ways to analyse it:

- Either *Sire, g’en voīs* **depends** on *dit* (Iordanskaja/Mel’čuk 2009; Van Raemdonck 2004) [T. → dit ← [Sire, g’en voīs]]
- Or *Et T. dit* and *Sire, g’en voīs* are two **independent** sentences (Tesnière 1965; Wilmet 2003) [T. dit] | [Sire, g’en voīs]

**The Valency Problem.** Linguistic competence is not properly available.

- risk that interference from the MF spoken by the annotators causes an incorrect assessment of the valency of verbs (respondre “answer”, crier “cry”, etc.);
- better not to state an erroneous analysis.

**No Syntactic Dependency.** Hence, we do not state syntactic dependency here, leaving this field open for further investigations.

**Principle 1** – There is no dependency between direct speech and preceding *dicendi* verbs.

## 4 Quotative Parenthesis

**General Presentation.** *Dicendi* verb can interrupt the syntactic structure of quoted speech and form a “quotative parenthesis”:

Sire, fet li preudons, por quoi le demandez vos? [“Lord”, says the good man, “why do you ask?”] (Queste, 166b, 40)

Three analyses are possible:

- the parenthesis actually depend on the quoted speech (traditional approach, Grevisse/Goosse 1993);
- the parenthesis and the quoted speech are independent (Tesnière 1965) and position is not syntactically relevant;
- the quoted speech depends on the verb of the parenthesis (Van Raemdonck 2004).

For SRCMF, the **specific position is a grammatical mark**:

**Principle 2** – Quotative parenthesis is a dependency of the verb of the quoted speech.

**Pleonastic Cases.** Quotative parenthesis can be pleonastical:

\*leur dist: “Seigneur, fit il, nous serons tenu pour malvais” [“He said to them: ‘Lord, said he, we’ll be taken to be evil’”] (Clari, XII, 12)

Following principles 1 and 2 solves the problem on a syntactic point of view.

**Dealing with Uncertainty.** Nevertheless, quotative parenthesis happen to appear at the very end of the direct speech:

“Ce verroiz vos bien”, fet ele [“‘You will see it for sure’, she says”] (Queste, 160a, 10)

This kind of construction leads to the same question as previously: is there a dependency? Second position of the verb could be seen as a grammatical mark, but *dicendi* verbs are possible at the beginning of a sentence (Moignet 1988).

**Principle 3** – When direct speech does not surround the quotative parenthesis, there is no dependency.