On reading late modern intentions
a corpus-based analysis of the late modern English subjectification of be going to
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• *Be going to*: classic in grammaticalisation studies

• \([\text{BE going}] + [\text{to inf}] = \text{motion} + \text{purpose}\)
  • \(> [\text{BE going to}] + \text{inf} = \text{future}\)


• *What happened afterwards?*
Introduction
Previous Research
Hypotheses
Corpus
Results
Conclusion
From intention to prediction (Disney 2009)

• [BE going to] has several semantic layers
Grammaticalization = lexical core stripped out of these layers
- Intention > prediction in clauses with 3rd person subjects
  - Always contain amount of guesswork
    1. I am going to meet her > They are going to meet
- Intention > prediction relates to lowering of degree of agentivity
  2. He is going to kill you > He is going to astonish you
- Loss of intentionality eased by embedding cognition expressions
  3. I observed the coachman beginning to get down, as if we were going to stop presently. (1861)
Birth of future semantics (Traugott 1989)

- *Will* and *shall*: deontic meaning > future semantics
- Shift smoothened by
  - stage of relative future = holds irrespective of time of utterance
    (4) *þa Darius geseah þæt he oferwunnen beon wolde,* ...
    ‘When Darius saw that he would be defeated’ (c925. Or 3)
- Shift from relative to absolute future = subjectification:
  - absolute = speaker taken as (temporal) reference point
    (5) *Peter, Wel i þe icnowe; þou wolt fur-sake me þrien ar þe coc him crowe.* (c1250 Judas (Trin-C B.14.39): 36)
    ‘Peter, I know you well. You will forsake me thrice …’
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Hypothesis

- *Be going to* underwent subjectification
  - Intentions of the subject > extent to which the speaker can assess these intentions

- The new epistemic layer leads to
  - weakening of underlying intentional layer
  - broadening of range of possible subjects and infinitives

- Development similar to future auxiliaries *will/shall*
Four factors

1. More contexts where it is harder for the speaker to assess the intentions of the subject
   • shift from first to third person subjects
   • decrease in imminence of the infinitival complements

2. More markers of this increased speaker effort
   • increase in markers of the speakers’ (un)certainty
   • increase in questions

3. Result: epistemic layer dominates intentional layer
   • decrease in agentivity of the subject

4. Shift to absolute future via stage of relative future:
   • decrease in past tenses
Data

- CLMET3.0 (De Smet, Diller & Tyrkkö, 2011):
  - 1710-1920
  - 34 million words
  - natively divided in 3 periods of 70 years each
  - we divided in 6 periods, covering 35 years each

- 4375 instances of \textit{be} + (3) + (a)\textit{going} + (3) + \textit{to} retrieved
  - for each period half of them analysed
Number of attestations per period

- 1710-1745: 0
- 1746-1780: 100
- 1781-1815: 200
- 1816-1850: 300
- 1851-1885: 400
- 1886-1920: 700

# attestations
Hypothesis 1.1

“Third person subjects lose ground to first person subjects”

- 18th-century: *be going to* used to express intentions of others
  - strengthens subjectivity
- 19th century: share of second person subjects increases:
  - appearance in questions and directives
Hypothesis 1.2

“There is an increase in non-imminent infinitival complements”

• Imminence
  • action or event of the infinitival complement is about to begin
  • preparations have been made

• Imminent (6) vs non-imminent (7):
  (6) When he put her down she was afraid she was going to cry, so she began to laugh (...) (1886-1920)
  (7) In future, I'm going to be very careful what articles of your dress I praise (1886-1920)
Hypothesis 1.2

“There is an increase in non-imminent infinitival complements”

- Strong association with verbs of communication:

(8) But as she **was going to answer** me, a still greater solemnity took possession of her charming features. (1746-1780)
Throughout 18th century:
  • 3rd person subjects > 1st person subject
  • imminence declines

By the beginning of the 19th century:
  • more contexts that require more speaker effort

→ increase in epistemic marking?
Hypothesis 2.1
“There is an increase in epistemic marking and source specification”

• Epistemic marking: all sorts of marking that indicate that the speaker is (un)certain about his proposition
  
  (9) **Surely**, I said, "you don't think that you are going to die because you dreamed you saw your old father (1886-1920)

• Source specification: evidence underwriting the speaker’s proposition (including hearsay)
  
  (10) Some time ago **it was all over our town** that he was going to be married to the parson’s youngest daughter (1746-1780)

• Smaller dataset (N=1250)
Hypothesis 2.1

“There is an increase in epistemic marking and source specification”

- Increase in marking in first half of 19th century
- Significant cross-dependencies with
  - 3rd person subject ($p < 0.001$)
  - non-imminence ($p < 0.0001$ for epistemics / $p = 0.023$ for source spec.)
Hypothesis 2.2

“There is an increase in questions”
Throughout 18th century:
  - 3rd person subjects > 1st person subjects
  - imminence declines

By the beginning of the 19th century:
  - more contexts that require more speaker effort
  - visible in increase in questions and markers of (un)certainty

→ decrease in agentivity of the subject
Hypothesis 3

“There is an increase in the range of non-agentive infinitival complements and subjects”
Throughout 18th century:
  • 3rd person subjects > 1st person subject
  • imminence declines

By the beginning of the 19th century:
  • more contexts that require more speaker effort
  • visible in increase in questions and markers of (un)certainty

Emphasis on speaker allows intentionality to weaken:
  • increase in inanimate subjects
  • decrease in intentional subjects

Intermediate stage of relative future?
Hypothesis 4

“There is a decrease in the number of past tense forms of be going to”
Hypothesis 4

“There is a decrease in the number of past tense forms of be going to”

2 usage contexts:

• Relative past:

  (11) As the war was then carried on between the French and Italians with the utmost inhumanity, they were going at once to perpetrate those two extremes, suggested by appetite and cruelty. (1746-1780)

• Near-actualisation:

  (12) Take that, said she, (...) and was going to hit him a great slap; but he held her hand. (1710-1745)

- really common with verbs of communication and (highly) transitive verbs
Throughout 18th century:
  • 3rd person subjects > 1st person subject
  • imminence declines

By the beginning of the 19th century:
  • more contexts that require more speaker effort
  • visible in increase in questions and markers of (un)certainty

Emphasis on speaker allows intentionality to weaken:
  • increase in inanimate subjects
  • decrease in intentional subjects

Number of past tenses declines:
  • intermediate stage of relative future
  • general process of subjectification
Conclusion

- *Be going to* undergoes subjectification process:
  - emphasis moves from subject to speaker
  - new epistemic meaning causes intentionality to weaken
  - from relative to absolute future
  - parallel to other auxiliaries of future tense
Thank you!

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