

# TIME IN MOTION

## Grammaticalisation of the *be going to* construction in English<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present a history of the grammaticalisation of the English construction *be going to* from a movement based (andative) construction (*I'm going to town*) to one that also acts as a future marker (*I'm gonna drive to town*). The ability for this construction to develop in such a way lies in the components that form it (*to go*, the progressive, the preposition *to*), and their combination into a construction that develops along a universal channel of grammaticalisation from movement > intention > prediction (Bybee, Pagliuca and Perkins, forthcoming). Of the three stages in this continuum in English, the first stage movement > intention takes the longest time to be completed. It is only in the accomplishment of a progressive with the meaning of “movement away from the speaker to a pre-determined location/goal” that the second stage of “intention” can be adopted. The properties that consolidated into the andative construction did not do so with any regularity until the seventeenth century, but from this point onwards the development towards a future marker (in comparison to the length of time so far taken) was very rapid indeed.

The body of this paper deals with the development of *be going to* along this continuum. It incorporates the background of the main semantic component *go* in Old English (as spoken around 500 - 1100 A.D. — henceforth OE) as well as the progressive construction which in Middle English (1100 - 1500 A D — henceforth ME) fell from popularity. The history of the progressive construction becomes difficult to trace at this time the locative gerund construction is claimed by some to be the source of the progressive, but it is not frequently used during this time either. However, characteristics from both the OE progressive and ME locative gerund are found in the progressive andative in Early New English (1500 - 1700 A.D. — henceforth ENE). Its Modern English use as a marker of intention and prediction/future conclude its history. Before tracing the history of this construction, I will first present some of the characteristics of grammaticalisation in order to relate them to the processes that have occurred and are still occurring in the development of *be going to* into *gonna*. I will then conclude by presenting some current and comparative uses of the *going to/gonna* construction.

### 2. Grammaticalisation

Grammaticalisation is basically a cover term for a group of connected historical processes. It is traditionally defined as an evolutive process that shifts either a phrase, word, or morpheme (henceforth referred to as the item being grammaticalised, or just the “item”) from a predominantly lexical function into a more grammatical function in a language.<sup>2</sup> Grammatical markers can be inflectional morphemes which express concepts of tense, aspect, modality, number and person on a verb as well as case, number, and gender on nouns. Within the sentence, grammatical items include markers such as negatives, interrogatives, adpositions and connectives. This list is not meant to be an exhaustive one. In fact, any item which shifts

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<sup>2</sup> Here, “more grammatical” is not referring to notions of well-formedness, but to the degree to which an item functions in a non-lexical (i.e. grammatical) role.

from a less grammatical to a more grammatical role is said to have grammaticalised. It has long been recognised that traces of the lexical meaning can remain in the existing grammatical meaning (Fries 1927:90 quotes it as “glimmering through”). These original meanings can often provide an additional subtlety to the grammatical use; for example, the future marker in English *will* can be used to express a future action that involves volition on the part of the agent. This is the direct result of its original lexical function as the Old English verb *willan* “to want, wish”. The more research that is undertaken in this field, the more conclusive is this pattern both throughout the languages of the world, and as a recurring pattern within one language.

However, the notion of a shift to a more grammatical role is more accurately described as the acquisition of a grammatical meaning (in the above example — “future”) which coincides with the weakening or loss of lexical meaning (“wish, want”). While the exchange between lexical and grammatical content forms the core of grammaticalisation, it can be preceded by a change in lexical content only, or followed by a change in grammatical content only. When placed in sequence, an item may first change only its lexical semantic content (for example, it may undergo a change of class, as in noun > adjective, or acquire a metaphorical use) before that content then goes on to weaken and a grammatical meaning is adopted. Lastly, the grammatical meaning may itself be replaced by another (more) grammatical one. While early work in grammaticalisation (Meillet 1912) dealt primarily with the second stage listed above, most work in this area today (Lehmann 1982, 1985; Traugott 1982; Heine and Reh 1984; Bybee, Pagliuca, and Perkins 1988, forthcoming) has now been extended to include the final stage also — “expansion”. A final extension has seen the inclusion of the first stage — “metaphorisation” (see, for example, studies by Sweetser 1988 and Traugott 1988). This is perhaps a more controversial extension, as there is no inclusion of a grammatical meaning and therefore arguably no “grammaticalisation” as such.

A crucial factor in identifying an item that is grammaticalising in stages one and two of the continuum, then, is the item’s change in semantic content. While this only involves a weakening or extension in semantic content in metaphorisation, the semantic shift in the second stage of grammaticalisation is more significant. This loss of lexical content here has been referred to as “desemanticisation” or “bleaching”, amongst other terms. It is also possible to perceive this loss of lexical content as either a generalisation or abstraction of the lexical meaning of the item. Thus, after desemanticisation the item will have a less concrete, more abstract meaning that can be applied more generally and in a wider range of contexts than the original lexical meaning. For example, if we consider the development of the future marker *gonna*, we find that when it was used in its original sense of a progressive of movement it only occurred with an animate subject (usually human) — *He’s going to meet the king*. As its meaning generalised from movement to intention and then to prediction, it began to appear with non-animate subjects, as in the sentence *The ladder’s gonna fall*.

However, grammaticalisation is a process which affects all aspects of language. In particular, there is some form of physical reduction of the grammaticalising item which may affect the phonology, morphology and syntax of that item and the construction in which it occurs. Thus, we find that where a word boundary existed prior to grammaticalisation, it can be reduced through grammaticalisation to a morpheme boundary, and finally to an indivisible fused form (e.g. *going to* > *gonna*) or to total loss of the item altogether. While the loss of physical form usually occurs in conjunction with desemanticisation, it is feasible for either of these two processes to occur alone; that is, for there to be a loss or weakening of meaning with no significant change in the form of the item (except perhaps in a loss of stress), or for there to be a further reduction in the form of the item without any subsequent loss of meaning. These

two processes clearly motivate and reinforce one another, but this is no guarantee that they will occur simultaneously or at a constant and comparable rate of change.

This reduction, particularly in morphology, was recognised in the nineteenth century (Von Humboldt in 1836) and labelled *Agglutinationstheorie* — items that were once free-standing morphemes were observed to reduce and eventually become affixes on stems. Associated with this change is a change in the status of an item within the language generally; that is, it typically changes from a freely moving, autonomous morpheme to one that is less autonomous and in a fixed position. Where it may have combined freely with other items prior to grammaticalisation, subcategorisation restrictions apply following grammaticalisation. Other changes to the item as a result of grammaticalisation involve a move from an open word class to a closed word class, the shift from being an optional element to one that is obligatory, from productive to non-productive, and a change from being a modified element to that of a modifier (see Lehmann 1982 for detailed examples).

Many of the changes described above have been noted by scholars for many years (for example; Rask in 1818 and Von Schlegel in 1808). However, the recognition of grammaticalisation as being a culmination of these factors was not acknowledged until this century (Meillet 1912), and only discussed in greater depth in the last decade. A particularly recent development of grammaticalisation has been its universal application (Bybee, Pagliuca and Perkins, forthcoming). This has shown that there are paths of change in the grammaticalisation cycle which occur across many language families; for example, verbs such as go and come frequently develop into future markers, such as English *be going to/gonna* and the French “*futur proche*” construction, *venir de* from the verb *venir* “come”.

What is even more interesting, and warrants further investigation, is that within the one language the same grammaticalisation paths can be travelled more than once — as one item gains a grammatical meaning and loses its lexical meaning, the new lexical item that comes to replace it can often follow its predecessor’s path of grammaticalisation. Thus, a progression such as verb indicating “want, wish” > volition > intention > prediction > probability, which has occurred with Old English *willan* > Modern English *will*, could easily occur again to the Modern English construction *want to* (which has already shown phonological reduction to *wanna*). This cyclic nature of grammaticalisation (Lehmann 1985; Heine and Reh 1984), together with the patterns of grammaticalisation discovered in many different and unrelated languages of the world (Bybee, Pagliuca and Perkins, forthcoming) further suggests the existence of universal channels of grammaticalisation.

### **3. A history of *be going to***

There are two forms of future expression using verbs of movement: the andative based future (movement away from the speaker), using a form of a verb meaning “go”, as in the English *be going to*; and the venitive based future (movement towards the speaker), using a form of a verb meaning “come”, as in the French *futur proche* — “immediate future” construction *venir de*. Of these two forms, research by Bybee, Pagliuca and Perkins (1988) suggests that both are equally represented in the languages of the world. However, it must be acknowledged that while the andative construction is widely found, almost half of the venitive constructions come from the Niger-Congo languages and hence, may not be as commonly found as the *go* derived constructions. In this paper I will only be examining the English construction *be going to*, and in this section I propose to trace its history from Old English through Middle English and Early New English. I will conclude by considering the present day use of *be going to* and its possible future development.

Before proceeding, it is worth considering the question of why *go* (and *come*) should be the most common movement verbs susceptible to grammaticalisation into a future marker. As Bybee, Pagliuca and Perkins (forthcoming, Ch 1:4) have stated, these two verbs are unmarked for manner of movement; that is, in comparing the verb *go* with *plod*, *stroll*, *walk*, *run*, *stalk*, *wander*, etc. which all carry a sense of movement, only *go* contains no restrictions on the type of movement which is involved, and consequently, the type of subject that can perform the activity. In this way, it is already inherently more general than other movement verbs, hence making it more easily extended into other semantic domains. In particular, we find that the notion of movement in space is often extended into movement in time. Thus where *be going to* initially signifies that the subject is starting out from a present position in space towards a physical goal, it acquires, through the notion of intention, the meaning of starting at a present point in time and travelling towards a future goal.

With the history of this construction we also see the culmination of four individual components into a fixed construction: *be going to*. The first is the verb *go* which contains the main semantic component. Combined with this are two components that form the progressive aspect: the suffix *-ing*, and the auxiliary verb *be*. The remaining component consists of the preposition *to*. In particular, I would like to concentrate on the suitability of each of these individual components to combine into a form that can be grammaticalised into a future marker. It should be pointed out that Bybee Pagliuca and Perkins (1988:16) have found in their cross-linguistic survey that the verb of motion “go”, the progressive and the preposition indicating motion, “to/towards”, are necessary ingredients for the development of an adative based future. Once these components have combined and begin to be used as an auxiliary, rather than full verb, it is possible for a future meaning to develop. While this initial combination was met in Old English (OE) and Middle English (ME), the next (auxiliary) stage — which leads to the semantic use of the construction to express intention — did not appear until Early New English.

### 3. 1 Setting the scene: Old English

While much of the earlier history of *go* relies on reconstructed forms and hypothesis, there always seems to have been a close connection between this verb and a sense of immediacy and futurity. While we may contribute this nuance to the likely ancestor of *go*, OE *gān*, it is also interesting to note that a second OE verb meaning “go”, *gangan*, also came from a source with a similar sense of immediacy (see discussion below on the significance of this).

The existence of these two OE verbs, *gān* and *gangan*, which are similar in form and share the meaning “to go, walk” is a highly interesting, but (strangely) overlooked feature of OE. Descriptions of OE classify *gān* as an anomalous verb, and place *gangan* in a class of strong verbs (class VII) that are often described as “reduplicating verbs” (see Quirk and Wrenn 1957:53). It seems the distinguishing feature for the class VII strong verbs is the presence of the vowel *ō* in the preterite form: i.e. *gangan* - *gēōng/geng*. Incidentally, the verb *gān* also has the vowel *ēō* in its preterite forms. These similarities in form and meaning could have produced a confusion between *gān* and *gangan* that is likely to have contributed in some way to the development of modern-day *go*.

One possibility is that the relationship between *gān* and *gangan* is simply one of reduplication; that is, *gangan* may be a lengthened form of *gān* for added emphasis (Barney, 1985). Alternatively, *gān* may be a shortened form of *gangan* based on an analogy with *standan/stand*, i.e. *stand-stā-stai-*: *gang-gā-gai-*. One might account for the analogy on the basis of the fact that both verbs express complementary meanings of motion and non-motion (cp. also Old High German *gēn* and *stēn* which may be variants of *gangan* and *stantan*). On the basis of the use of these verbs in recorded documents both analyses, it seems, are feasible.

k, However, as the other Germanic languages also have two cognates for the verb *go* (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989), and it is possible to reconstruct two separate etymologies, there may well be no connection between these two verbs at all. It may simply be that *gān* and *gangan* are related only in the extraordinary similarity in their infinitive forms, which in itself would contribute to the two verbs becoming confused (see Middle English Dictionary, Vol 7:235).

The two separate etymologies, then, as proposed by the OED are as follows:

- (1) \**gǣ-/gai-* > *gān*
- (2) \**gaŋgan* > *gangan*

*Gān* is derived from a stem with two forms from Proto-Germanic: \**gǣ-* and \**gai*, probably meaning “to go”, although I will have more to say on that below. The second verb, *gangan* is from the Proto-Germanic \**gaŋgan* meaning “to stride”, which was possibly a cognate to Sanskrit *jānghā* meaning “the lower part of the leg”. The etymology of (1) is supported by Quirk and Wrenn (1957) and Shipley (1967). The former state that the lengthened vowel in OE *gān* is the result of a second vowel which has been absorbed following the loss of an intervocalic [h]. Thus we can reconstruct (3) as an extended form of (1) above:

- (3) \**gahin* > \**gǣ-/gai-* > *gān*

Shipley (1967:396) also suggests that *go* is derived from \**gahi* in Proto-Germanic meaning “quick, lively” (perhaps related to Modern English *gay*; akin to Modern German *jāhe* “swift, headlong”, but this etymology appears to be controversial; see OED 1989, Vol. VI:409).

If these etymologies are correct, then we see here the start of a channel of grammaticalisation (via metaphorisation) from the notion of quick movement to the expanded notion of unqualified movement. This original meaning is not completely lost. The modern construction used to express the future; that is, *gonna* provides the same sense of immediacy/inevitability (see later discussion in section 4). While the exact connection between *gān* and *gangan* will probably always remain uncertain, the fact that both OE verbs were so similar would serve to reinforce this notion of immediacy that *go* has inherited, even though in its (non-past) forms, Modern English *go* derives solely from only one of the verbs; namely, *gān*. We could therefore propose that the establishment of a grammaticalisation channel from “quick, lively” > *go* results in the verb *go* still containing some of the aspectual properties of its past.

Further evidence of the notion of immediacy inherent in *go* comes from the history of past tenses from this verb form. The OE preterite forms of *gān* have the stem *eod-*: *eode*, *eodest*, *eodon*, etc. These are supplied by a lost Germanic verb (possibly related to the Latin verb *ire* “to go” and found in the Gothic preterite form of *gaggan* “to go” — *iddja* “I went”, OED 1989, Vol. VI: 409). The interesting fact is that this verb did not remain as the past form of *gān* beyond the fifteenth century, when it was replaced by the past tense of the verb *wend* (from OE *wendan* “to wind, turn”) — *went*. It seems that by ME, *wend* had become synonymous with *go* and its infinitive and present tense had ceased to be in frequent use (OED 1989, Vol. VI:617). Thus, in English, the verb *go* is itself quite compatible with the notions of the progressive and that of the immediate future, but not, it seems with the past. Verbs used for activities of some duration; i.e. ongoing activities like walking, running, going etc. because of their inherent aspect more easily appear in non-past forms (see also Bavin, this volume:20). It is therefore not surprising that the preterite forms of the verb *go* show

such an unstable history, taking forms from other verbs with a similar meaning but not with the same inherent aspectual properties.

In moving on to the progressive construction we are reinforcing these semantics; that is, an ongoing action. While the exact origin of the Modern English progressive is much debated (see Scheffer 1975 for a comprehensive coverage), we do know that there existed in Old English two structurally different constructions both of which could have played a role in the development of the modern progressive. The construction labelled the OE progressive was more adjectival than its modern counterpart, and consisted of a combination of the verb “to be” (either *bēon* or *wesan*) with the verb stem and suffix *-ende*; for example, *hie wæron blissiende* “they were rejoicing”. The other construction, a locative construction, consisted of an auxiliary verb, the preposition *on*, a verbal noun identified by its derivative suffix *-ung*, and the object either in the genitive case, and/or preceded by the preposition *of*, for example, *hie wæron on huntung of hwales* “they were hunting whales”. While the data to compare the frequency of the two constructions are limited, it seems to me that the progressive is the more common in OE. Although it continues well into the ME period, the *-ing* locative gerund construction proves to be the more popular at this time.

However, this is by no means clear and language historians have argued convincingly from a number of angles on the origins of the constructions. Bybee, Pagliuca, and Perkins (forthcoming:Ch. 5), for example, argue that on the basis of predictable grammaticalisation paths and current progressive meaning, the modern-day progressive represents a continuation of the locative construction. Others (like Scheffer 1975) argue that the modern progressive developed independently of the gerund and that *-ing* in fact replaced *-ende* (perhaps through phonological weakening and then later reinforced by the *-ing* of the locative gerund construction). Just to complicate the issue, there is even another possibility; namely, that the modern progressive construction is a borrowing and represents a calque of the original Celtic (cp. the Welsh *yr wyf yn myned* “(I) am in going / (I) go” which shows a similar locative structure to the one described above; see Lockwood 1968:105). It may well be that all hypotheses have an element of truth and the English progressive is in fact the outcome of a network of different (but mutually reinforcing) sources. Nonetheless, its interesting but controversial history is not really an issue here, although we do return to it briefly in section 3.2. It would seem, then, that as the ENE progressive construction contains both progressive and gerund qualities, it bears the influence of both constructions.

In turning to some data on the *be going to* construction, its appearance with the preposition *to* in Old English is not at all frequent, despite the fact that the combination *be going* + any preposition is extremely common. Of the 24 examples of *gan* in the progressive that Scheffer (1975) has gleaned from OE texts we see 13 examples with the preposition prefixed to the verb itself: *ut-gangan* - go out/exit (7), *in-gangan* - go in/enter, (4) *upp-gangan* - go up/rise (1), *fore-gangan* - go before/precede (1). The remaining 11 examples of *gangan* also occur with a preposition: *gangende in* - going in (6), *gangandefram* - going from (1), *gangende ðiðer* - going thither (2) and *gangende to* - going to (2). Clearly, at this stage it is not possible to establish a meaning of intention derived from the sense “movement to a predetermined space in order to X”, as the direction of movement is variable. There are only two examples with *to*, which are presented in (4) and (5):

- (4) *ðu oferfærest ðone sæ 7 bist gangende to Romesbyrig*  
 you cross-2-sg the-acc sea-acc & be-2-sg going towards Rome-gen-city  
 “You’ll be crossing the sea and going to Rome” [c 855]  
 (Gregory’s Dialogues, C p13 line 30)

- (5) *ða sume dæge wæs he to ðam baðe gangende*  
 then some day was he to the-dat bath-dat going  
 “Then one day as he was going to the bath ...” [c 855]  
 (Gregory’s Dialogues, C p3 line 4)

Both examples are typical of the OE progressive as an ongoing action, which was to become the major function of this construction in later centuries. In the case of (4), however, it could also be construed in an adjectival sense, as “going” is merely a manner of travel, and as such qualifying the verb in the sentence, *bēōn (bist)*. (In the OE system of only present and preterite tenses, *beon* is the only one acknowledged as having a special future form, which explains the use of the future tense in the gloss; see discussion in Mitchell and Robinson, 1986:108). Interestingly, a later manuscript translating the same text uses the simple present rather than the progressive, and the verb *faran* to go/travel rather than *gangan*:

- (6) *witolidce in to Rome ðu becymst ofer sæ ðu færst.*  
 truly in to Rome you come-2-sg over sea you go-2-sg  
 “Truly, you will come to Rome. You will cross the sea.” [1050-1100]  
 (Gregory’s Dialogues, H p132, line 29)

Thus, in OE there is no equivalent of the auxiliary *be going to* construction with a sense of intention/prediction. Where it does exist as a progressive, it indicates an ongoing movement, although at this stage it does not appear to be used frequently to indicate direction towards; that is, the construction appears with a variety of prepositions, and the preposition *to* is not especially common. Thus, from a minor function of the OE use of *bēōn/wesan gangende* we have an adequate setting for the development of the ENE progressive meaning “to be in the action of going from A to B”. As mentioned above, however, from this time on, the history of the construction is complicated by the disappearance of the OE *-ende* progressive construction and the confusing appearance of the *-ing* as a progressive marker.

### 3.2 Selecting the Cast: Middle English

We have seen that in Old English, the participle *gangende* was used as part of the progressive construction. In Middle English, the equivalent form is *going*, although its relationship to either the OE progressive, or the gerund construction is by no means certain. It does not appear in the data I have examined as part of a progressive construction or as part of a locative gerund<sup>3</sup> and wider analyses like Scheffer (1975:270) cite only very few examples of it as a progressive. As Scheffer concludes, *be going to* “is extremely rare at first ... [ becomes slightly more frequent in the 16th century” (p. 270). Certainly, in Shakespeare’s works the progressive construction becomes better established (see 3.3 below).

We find that the few early examples of *be going to* in ME, are similar to the bulk of later examples in ENE — they indicate a progressive action of movement from a place in the present to a pre-conceived goal. The earliest of Scheffer’s examples (given as 7 below) occurs late in the ME period, but even this example is doubtful, as it depends on interpreting *ðe* as a form of the verb *ðeon* “to thrive”:

- (7) *Philip (...) was going too ðe ouer Greece* (Alisaunder of Macedoine, line 901)

<sup>3</sup> If the locative gerund did indeed give rise to the progressive form, then it is surprising that we find no examples of a locative gerund with *going*. Furthermore, *going* should be the reflex of an OE gerundive form *gangung*. However, there is no evidence of such a form in OE (of course, in both these instances we may simply have a gap in the data).

Despite the lack of locative gerunds and sparse examples of the progressive, there are many instances of going which show it occurring as a noun; for instance, in examples (8) and (9) taken from Chaucer:

- (8) *And I herde goyng, bothe up and doune* (Book of the Duchess line 348)

and it is used particularly often with the possessive pronouns:

- (9) *My going graunted is by parliament* (Troilus and Criseyde, bk 4:line 1297)

which is a use that is still prominent in Shakespeare's writing.

However, while the "progressive" part of the modern construction was not seen to be developing at this time, the combination of *going* + *to* was developing along with many other prepositions. In particular, there is an interesting point in the distribution of the nine examples of *going to* listed in the *Middle English Dictionary* (1963, henceforth MED). They all fall in only four categories of the nine meanings distinguished for "going". Half of the examples convey the meaning of "the commencing or carrying on of an activity; entry into a state or condition" (MED:221). Thus, once again an imperfective/durative meaning is being associated with a part of the *be going to* construction. The following examples are from this selection:

- (10) *ðe abbas reseruid to her selfe ðe goinge a-geine to all quarell  
ðat she had bi-fore a-geinste him.*

"The abbess vowed not to repeat the quarrels she had had with him before"

(MED - 1475. Godstow Reg. 13217)

- (11) *To abide in prison ... without goyng to bayle, baston, or main prise,  
by the space of xii monethes.*

"To remain in prison without being granted bail, or even release to a warden or guardian for the term of twelve months."

(MED - 1450. RParl . 5.201a)

The *going to* construction in ME in the remaining examples shows the other important semantic element that would play a part in its later development: that of motion towards:

- (12) *Oure .subgettes ... having hereafter fre comyng and goyng to Gene  
yay of Gene desire to have in to oure reaume of England.*

"Our subjects from hereafter have free entry and departure from Gene as those from Gene wish to have into our realm of England."

(MED - 1419. Proc. Privy C. 2.256)

- (13) *At ðe nyhte from ðe sonne goyng to reste til in ðe morwe at ðe sunne risinge*

"At night from sunset until the following day at sunrise."

(MED - a 1500. Rule Minresses 94/2)

which when referring to the manner of going can also be attributed the meaning of "a sense of purpose":

- (14) *Bote God gyve [hem] grace her goyng to amende*

"But may God give grace to her for amending the situation"

(MED - c1400. PPLC. (Hnt) 11.303)

- (15) *ðai shal giffe a gracious going to ðe vser to ðe hiyte of worship and of wynnynng*

"They shall reward the user with the utmost acclaim and success"

(MED - c1425. Arderne Fistula 8/23)

Therefore, by Early New English (ENE) we have met with all of the components of the *be going to* construction; namely, *go* + progressive + *to*. However, the absence of the construction as a whole in the data I have examined suggests that the components haven't combined into a frequently used construction. Until this happens, grammaticalisation into a future marker is not possible.

### 3.3 The Curtain Rises: Early New English

In the Early New English period, the form indicating travel towards somewhere/someone that is constructed with an NP complement is the dominant form. This use can be seen in the following three examples taken from Shakespeare:

- (16) *There are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings* (Henry IV, Part I:i 2 140)  
(17) *...and I am going with instruction to him* (Measure for Measure:ii 3 38)  
(18) *...Then was I going prisoner to the Tower* (Richard III:iii 2 102)

As the last example shows, *go* could take a complement phrase to indicate manner/travel; that is, *going as a prisoner*. By this stage, we can see that the newly emerging progressive is reflecting both the verbal properties of the OE progressive and the nominal properties of the ME gerund. The construction now appears regularly with the verb *to be* and in combination with the preposition *to*. These developments enable the construction to become an indivisible phrase, *be going to* rather than a combination of auxiliary verb + present participle + preposition. Also, with the phrase considered as a single unit, it is more likely to be used as an auxiliary verb.

The next stage in the development of this construction involves the extension of its complement to include the infinitive as well as a noun phrase complement. Thus, in example (19), we see an extension from “travelling to a place”, to “travelling to perform an action”: that is, the infinitive implicitly involves intention:

- (19) *Letters to my friends, And I am going to deliver them* (Two Gentlemen of Verona:iii 1 54)

However, this use with the infinitive is not very frequent and only accounts for seven uses of *be going to* out of the twenty-seven used in Shakespeare's complete works. With the growth of the *be going to* construction with an infinitive verb, it would then just be a matter of extending the activity into a future time-frame for *be going to* to develop into a marker of the future tense. This is beginning to happen as early as the seventeenth century with many of these examples carrying an implicit meaning of intention. The point at which the implicit meaning of intention becomes explicitly conveyed is difficult to distinguish, as seen in example (20) when trying to separate the meaning of physical motion from that of intention:

- (20) *The duke himself will be to-morrow at court, and they are going to meet him.* (Merry Wives of Windsor:iv 3 3)

Examples of this kind are intermittent in the literature, but no doubt provided an ambiguity that would eventually lead to change. While the notion of intention in *be going to* may have existed for several centuries, that of prediction is indeed a very late meaning.

### 3.4 The Show Goes On: Modern English

Because the meaning of intention and the meaning of movement is such a fuzzy area, it is hard to say how long the form *be going to* has been used to express future prediction. However, a sure indicator that the meaning of motion is not implied is found in the co-occurrence of the *be going to* construction with the verb *go* or the verb *come*. The former is

found in the following example from the novel *The Life and Times of Martin Chuzzlewit* by Charles Dickens (1844, in Potter 1969:124):

- (21) *He [Mr Pecksniff's horse] was full of promise, but of no performance.  
He was always, in a manner, going to go, and never going.*

It is difficult to find further examples in the literature of this time (there are only two instances in Lord Tennyson's works of *be going to* + infinitive verb). Since the turn of the century, however, its appearance in the written language has increased remarkably, as any examination of texts will quickly show. Potter (1969:125), for example, states that the use of *be going to* to express the future (I presume as opposed to *will* and *shall*) has increased from 4% in Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* (1837) to over 30% in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1962). In the same way, I have compared the two texts of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) with Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). While the former has only three examples of *be going to* + infinitive verb, e.g. *They were going to run an over-sea empire...*, *Gatsby* has forty five examples. However, we must be wary of data based on a limited literary style, where stylistic and social considerations are not taken into account. For example, any written work with more dialogue, especially if it involves younger speakers, is likely to use newer forms of expression such as *gonna* to a higher degree (see Coates, 1983:203). Nevertheless, the results are telling and it certainly seems that over the last 400 years, there has been an increase in this construction's use, along with the general increase in the use of the progressive (see Scheffer 1975:272-73 for a count of the construction's frequency).

In particular, we find that *Gatsby* now has more instances of *be going to* meaning "intention" (39 instances), than there are those meaning "movement towards" (only 6). Of the examples indicating intention/future, all but two show human subjects capable of movement. In the case of these two exceptions, one involves the earth which is an inanimate object capable of movement anyway: *It seems that pretty soon the earth's going to fall into the sun*. The second is the most interesting — here the subject is fruit: *... as if all sorts of fruit were going to fall into your hands*. This lapse in the restrictions on the type of subject occurring with *be going to* is a common feature of grammaticalisation that occurs as the item is generalising in meaning. Corresponding to this is a decrease in the use of the *be going to* construction in its original sense of "motion towards". From *The Great Gatsby* there are only six examples out of eleven which indicate motion with the preposition *to*, many being a repetition of the phrase *we're going to town*. Clearly in this work, the more popular form is that of *be going to* plus an infinitive verb, rather than with an NP complement.

In sum, the grammaticalised construction taking an infinitival verb is appearing more frequently than its older construction with an NP object. As is to be expected, we also find together with these changes a concomitant loss of restrictions on the type of subject to occur in this construction — subjects are no longer confined to animates capable of physical movement. Thus, as the construction shifts from a directional meaning to one of purpose and intention, it is increasing in its abstraction; that is, movement in time rather than movement in space. Finally, out of the meaning of intention, it has developed the future use signifying prediction.

In the next section I will examine the four components of this construction in their current use, to see in particular, whether there exist two forms of the preposition *to* which differ in the direction and intention uses of *be going to*. I will also look further into the grammaticalisation of this form by examining the phonological reduction of *be* and the reduction of *to*.

#### 4. Current and comparative uses of *be going to*

As we have seen in the previous section, the *be going to* construction has evolved out of an expression of movement. Vital to its development is the co-occurrence of *go* with the progressive, which incorporates the auxiliary verb *be*, and a marker of direction towards, *to*. All these factors add emphasis to the sense of progression away from the speaker to a preconceived goal. Perhaps the most important factor in this movement is that at the moment of speech some condition must exist that suggests the subject is already moving towards that goal. Thus, in comparing the two sentences *She's going to have a baby* and *She will have a baby*, only the first implies that she is already pregnant, that the subject has met at the time of speech any necessary conditions for the event that is implied in the verb.

The notion of satisfying a condition forms one of the major distinctions between the two future expressions *will* and *be going to*. A sentence with *will* relies on a condition evident in the context that will enable the proposition to take place. Thus, if I say *She will die*, then the listener would presume that some unmentioned condition, such as her swallowing poison, has already been understood as the context in which the utterance is being mentioned. When isolated from its context, the sentence seems unfinished, or elliptical in its content (see Binnick, 1971, 1972 for a full discussion on ellipsis). That there exists a causal relationship between the predicate and the context of the proposition is further attested by the preference for *will* over *be going to* in conditional clauses (see discussion below).

In contrast to this, we find that *be going to* is rarely elliptical. This is evident in the fact that it has as a prerequisite the condition that something has already occurred to set the verb into motion; it has a cause which acts as the context in which the action is set. This is often referred to as a current orientation (Palmer, 1979:121) or present orientation (Bybee and Pagliuca, 1987) or as an action nascent in the present (Harris, in Binnick, 1971).

Both Palmer (1979:121) and Hageman (1989:300) point out that this current relevance is like a mirror-image of the perfect construction in English. In the case of the perfect, there is usually a resultant state in the present tense that has been caused by the action; that is, in a past situation, *I've broken the window*, the current relevance is that the window is still broken. With *be going to*, a future event has a current relevance in that its cause (rather than result) is situated in the present. The relationship between the perfect and the past tense mirrors that between *be going to* and *will* in discourse also. Hageman (1989:300) draws a parallel between texts which begin in the perfect construction and then continue in the past tense, with those that begin with *be going to* and continue with *will*. In both instances, the speaker is commencing with the form that has current relevance to the moment of speech, before s/he shifts to the more distant form. Work which I have begun on spoken Australian English, however, suggests that this is not a discourse strategy which is used by many Australian speakers, although my findings at this stage remain preliminary — further work may reveal results which are more supportive of Palmer and Hageman in this regard.

Another aspect of the *be going to* construction is that it represents an immediate future. This idea would seem to be tied in with that of current relevance, as it is generally, but certainly not always, the case that something with relevance to the present is not likely to be at too distant a point in the future: for example, *The ladder's gonna fall* which implies that it is beginning to do so as I speak, compared to *The ladder will fall*. The sense of immediacy, as shown in section 3.1, is also possibly a retention of the original lexical meaning of *go*, as a subject is already heading towards a situation, which is further enhanced by the sense of the progressive.

I also mentioned above, that due to its elliptical nature, *will* is often found exclusively in conditional sentences. Leech (in Hageman 1989:299) also points out that *be going to* is

incompatible with conditionals, giving the following contrasting pair of sentences (Leech's judgements are quoted):

(22) *If you accept that job, you 'll never regret it.*

(23) \**If you accept that job, you 're never going to [gonna] regret it.*

One initial problem with using *be going to* in conditional clauses, is that it already has an inherent present context which conflicts with the presence of a future condition in these sentences. However, if the condition in these sentences is actually a present one; that is, it conforms with the notion of current relevance that occurs in *be going to*, then the conditional sentence becomes acceptable. Hageman (1989:299) gives the following example from Leech (1971:56):

(24) *We're going to find ourselves in difficulty if we carry on like this.*

in which *carry on like this* has a definite grounding in the present. Given the notion that *be going to* is acquiring a meaning of prediction, however, I imagine that this restriction will be slackened and conditional sentences with future, predictive conditions will become more common. In fact, I (like Hageman) find that example (23) is perfectly acceptable in the right context (especially if it is read with the fully grammaticalised form *gonna*). Our willingness to accept these sorts of sentences is revealing in that it suggests that, where *be going to* was largely used to indicate intention, it is now moving into the realms of prediction. I expect that sentences such as (23) will become more acceptable as *gonna* grammaticalises further.

There is little written on the negative and interrogative use of the *be going to* construction. With regard to the interrogative, it seems that the sense of the immediate future is at its strongest in this form, as invariably the speaker is questioning the next possible action. Coates (1983:200) also suggests that there is often some aspect of premeditation involved in the use of *be going to*, in that the questioner expects there to be a solution. She quotes, for example, "*Well — what are you going to do about it?*" which implies that the subject has already given some thought to a possible plan of action. Here, we see once again, the notion of context coming into play. The implication that there is an inherent context is accepted, and it is more the issue of revealing it, rather than what it is that is being questioned. A comparative sentence using *will*, for example "*Now, what will you do?*" suggests that the subject has no better idea than the speaker as to what the next course of events will be. Clearly the answer in this case will reveal the context. The preference for an immediate future in questioning has also been indicated in preliminary findings from a survey I have conducted of Australian speakers, where there is a preference to use *be going to* over *will* in future interrogative sentences.

I have left until last, discussion of the phonological changes that have occurred in the process of *be going to* > *gonna*, as these changes are recorded as being the most recent (although of course the absence of any earlier written evidence does not prove conclusively that these changes haven't existed for a longer time). While there was some confusion in general during the ME period between *going* and *goin* this was not restricted to just this verbal form, but to all verbal forms, and even to nouns ending in either *-ing* or *-in* (Aitchison, 1981:80 cites Shakespeare's use of *javeling* for *javelin*, and Swift's use of *fitting* to rhyme with *spit in*). As I suggested earlier, this confusion between all forms (verb and noun) with an *-ing* ending may well have provided the opportunity for the confusion of the *-ende* (weakened to *-in*) and *-ing* endings and the subsequent reanalysis of *-ende* to *-ing* (see earlier discussion). No doubt the *goin* form continued up until this century, however the restrictions of the prescriptive era prevented it from appearing frequently in the literature. The examples that do exist are usually in direct speech, where the character represents a speaker of a non-standard dialect of

English (for example, this is the case with Tennyson, who provides such examples as, *An' whin are ye goin' to lave me?*).

Evidence for the reduction of *be going to* as opposed to just *going* is not available until this century. A likely progression in its phonological change is probably from [gouɪŋ tu > [goʊntʌ] > [gɔnʌ], all of which can be heard in various styles and dialects of English today. It is interesting to note that when the form *gonna* appears it is invariably with the reduced form of the verb *be*; that is, *I'm gonna*, *You're gonna*, *She's gonna* and would require special stress to be acceptable as *\*I am gonna*, *\*You are gonna*, or *\*He is gonna*. The entire construction reduces in form, with *go*, the progressive *-ing* and the preposition becoming a single unanalysable unit.

On closer inspection of the use of *to* in various *be going to* forms, it seems to me that we are actually dealing with a number of different forms of this word, depending on the degree of grammaticalisation. In the following examples it is possible to distinguish one of direction (+d) and one of intention (+i). In its original form, *to* is a marker of direction, either followed by a location, or less commonly today by a verb, e.g. *I am going to town* (+d, -i), *He's going to meet her there* (+d, +i) (i.e. *He's going in order to meet her there*). Alternatively, there is the prediction form, where *to* has lost the original meaning of direction and generalised even further to a meaning of intention (+i), e.g. *I'm going to/gonna try it on* (-d, +i), which only occurs with an infinitival verb following. I follow Bybee's (personal communication) lead here in suggesting that *to* in the last case is not an infinitive marker, but has followed the grammaticalisation path of direction marker > infinitive marker > intention marker > Ø. This is further supported by the fact that out of all these examples, it is only this last one which can be reduced: *I'm gonna try it on*. The first form is obviously not plausible, *\*I'm gonna town*, and the second one, *\*He's gonna meet her there* instantly takes on an intention/predictive sense, rather than the original one of motion. However, I should point out that in Australian English, at least, the phrase, *I'm goinnā town* is plausible if we consider the stressed nasal flap *nā* to be an assimilated replacement for *ta* (derived from *to*, as in the progression described above).

## 5. Summary

In tracing the history of the *be going to* construction, we see that there are two major factors that contribute to its ultimate use as a future marker: the fact that the components that constitute the construction are ideally suited towards its use as a future marker; and its entry into and development along a regular path of grammaticalisation from that of a movement verb, to a construction indicating intention, and finally to a future tense marker.

The probable connection between both OE verbs meaning *go* (*gān* and *gangan*) and lexical items containing the property of "speed" ("quick" and "stride" respectively) may account, at least in part, for the fact that the verb *go* retains a nuance in its grammaticalised meaning; namely a sense of immediacy/inevitability. This is further reinforced by the progressive aspect, which can be found expressing an ongoing activity as early as Old English and in the Middle English form *going* when combined with the preposition *to*. When the entire *be going to* construction finally appears in Early New English it has combined the above into its meaning of a sense of motion away from the speaker to a preconceived location. In the construction's development over the last few centuries this meaning has generalised, so that the phrase takes an infinitive as well as a locational phrase, enabling the construction to express an intention of performing an action as its complement.

Its modern use as a future marker, therefore, displays in its nuances the above history of its development. Its use as a future marker with current relevance; that is, as an immediate

future, and/or one with its conditions already partly satisfied at the moment of speech, are a result of its development from a sense of immediate progression away from the speaker to a preconceived location. In achieving this end, we find that the *be going to* construction has travelled a path of development which appears to be repeated within the same language and amongst different languages of the world. This latter fact is now being quantified in studies that incorporate many unrelated languages of the world (see Bybee, Pagliuca, and Perkins 1988; forthcoming).

In grammaticalising, the *be going to* construction has moved from a verb phrase of lexical content to an auxiliary verb with grammatical meaning. In this process of grammaticalisation from “movement” to “future marker” we see many features common to a grammaticalising item. There is phonological reduction and loss of word boundaries evident in the change *going to* > *gonna* and the affixation of the reduced forms of *be* to the subject: *I’m gonna*, *John’s gonna*, *they’re gonna*, etc. Accompanying this shift from full verb > auxiliary is also a change in status from open > closed class and the fixation of the construction into an obligatory pre-verbal slot in the sentence.

Further evidence of the desemanticisation from a verb of movement to a future marker is evident in the combination of *be going to* with the verb *go*, for example: *I’m gonna go to town*. The fact that this use exists side by side with the older movement construction *I’m going to town* indicates that the changeover is still in progress, and furthermore, that it is not necessary for the original lexical source to be lost completely. The development from that of “movement” to “future” construction has been made easier via an intermediate stage expressing the notion of “intention”. Towards the most grammaticalised end of the continuum, the expression of prediction and possibility is common to all future markers, whether they have been derived from movement verbs, verbs of wishing/wanting, or verbs of obligation. Thus, it is often possible to interchange *gonna* with *will* and *shall* when expressing a “pure future” and not change the meaning of the phrase at all. However, we find that in the earlier stage that expresses intention, these future markers still retain some of their earlier meaning. Hence, there is a notion of “desire” in the use of *will*, one of “obligation” in that of *shall*, and a sense of “progression towards a determined goal” in *be going to*.

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