

## Back to *be going to* again: Investigating seamless semantic changes with semantic frames, features and profiling

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Many functionalist and cognitivist linguists have worked under the assumption that syntactic and semantic change is gradual by conceptualising change as a series of small-step reanalyses (e.g. Traugott & Dasher 2002; Hopper & Traugott 2003). Proposed mechanisms of semantic change such as persistence (Hopper 1991) and semantic bleaching (Sweetser 1988), however, do not merely suggest gradualness, but seamlessness: Seamlessness means that new constructions emerge from vague instances, which instantiate features both of earlier and later versions of a construction. Previous quantitative historical work has mostly focussed on larger, gradual semantic changes instead of seamless ones by looking at broadly defined semantic features (e.g. Nesselhauf 2012) or by inferring semantics from collexemes (e.g. Hilpert 2007).

In my talk, I will specifically argue for seamless semantic changes by presenting evidence from a historical corpus analysis of *be going to* (BGT) for the 1580-1700 period, when BGT first develops futural meaning (INTENTION) and starts to develop further ones (PREDICTION) (Petre 2019). The study uses a specially constructed corpus based on *Early English Books Online* consisting only of plays written by playwrights with similar biographies. Since data for 1642-1660 (Interregnum) is sparse, the data was sorted by authors' birth years (1550-1650).

The analysis uses an elaborate framework combining frame semantics (Boas 2003; Fillmore 1975), semantic features and profiling (Petré 2019; Langacker 1990). It assumes a modal conceptualisation of futurity subsuming both bouletic (intention, plan) and epistemic (prediction) futural notions. This divide corresponds to two basic frames: the bouletic frame, which predicates an entity wanting a future event to take place (director) and an entity that is to carry out the future event (agent), and an epistemic frame that predicates an entity estimating the likelihood of a futural proposition (evaluator). The bouletic frame varies regarding the expression of the director i.e. by the subject, by the speaker or by a text-external entity. It is further assumed that instances can express multiple semantic notions at the same time, with one being foregrounded (profiled) and the other being backgrounded (deprofiled).

- (1) We were arguing Pro, and Con out of Plato, and are now Going to practise his Philosophy. [intention (fg), no bg, bouletic/subject director frame] (EEBO, A18083, 1636)
- (2) my Ladies Footmen are going to dress him up like a Dominican Friar [plan (fg), no [bg], bouletic/speaker director frame] (EEBO, A36986, 1691)
- (3) Especially when, by my means, the Sun of Honour is just going to break out upon thee [prediction (fg), intention (bg), epistemic frame] (EEBO, A36979, 1688)

The assumption is that (a) frames and features that resemble the motion-with-a-purpose source construction will occur earlier than other frames and notions and drive the first increases, and (b) that new features emerge as backgrounded notions first and then as foregrounded with further secondary notions. The results confirm these hypotheses: bouletic frames with subject directors are the closest to motion BGT, as in both the subject is in control of the event. INTENTION is the closest semantic notion to motion BGT, as it implies a present state of mind much like going-for-a-purpose. These frames and notions make up 100% of futural BGT instances for pre-1630 born authors and are responsible for the significant increase of instances with post-1630 born authors. Epistemic and bouletic frames with non-subject directors only occur with post-1630 born authors. Further, PREDICTION with pre-1630 born authors is only used as a backgrounded notion. Foregrounded instances with post-1630 born authors only occur with other secondary notions (e.g. intention).

By using a novel framework allowing fine-grained semantic analysis, the investigation was able to show that the semantic changes that BGT undergoes are not merely gradual but seamless, which further informs our conceptualisation of semantic change.

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