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STEPHEN J. DISNEY



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## The Grammaticalisation of “Be Going To”

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### Abstract

This paper examines the development of BE *going to* + infinitive and its present day (PDE) uses, a classic example of a grammaticalised verb of motion taking on a future meaning. This is a common and well documented cross-linguistic development (Bybee et al. 1994, Croft 2000, Heine & Kuteva 2002). The paper briefly traces the history of the construction, from Old English to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The precise difference between the uses is not clear cut and I describe here a semantic continuum with a fuzzy boundary between the different senses. This is illustrated using examples taken from various sources, including the Helsinki corpus, Shakespeare and Dickens. The history of the construction as it changes to an intention use, e.g. (1), is well described. The current paper summarises this research, with some original discussion to highlight some of the issues involved.

- (1) I *am going to take* a course in syntax.

The construction exists in PDE in all its older forms, but has developed a new use where it contrasts with *will* based on whether or not the existence of evidence can be inferred for a future prediction. This ‘evidential’ use is arguably the difference between (2a) and (2b):

- (2)
- a. It *is going to be* a beautiful day tomorrow.
  - b. It *will be* a beautiful day tomorrow.

A speaker is likely to use (2a) when they have clear evidence for the fact, like a red sky at sunset, and (2b) when they are expressing a belief or opinion that is not based on evidence but merely on opinion. This evidential function is not described as such in the theoretical work to date, although EFL teaching materials often describe the distinction when teaching ‘prediction’ type future reference. The current paper concludes by tracking the semantic path of change that has led to this development.

### 1. A common path of change

Accounting for the development of form/meaning pairings over time is often more problematic than the description. Many researchers hold that the marking for a particular feature is a result of a process of ‘grammaticalisation’, described as:

That part of the study of language change that is concerned with such questions as how lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions or how grammatical items develop new grammatical functions. (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 1)

The future uses of the English verb *go* are said to have grammaticalised from the lexical verb *go*, to the extent that it is ‘usually analysed as an auxiliary’ (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 1, also Quirk et al. 1985).<sup>1</sup> The path so described is from andative (3) through purposive (4) to future intention uses (5).

- (3) *I am going to* the market-place. (Coriolanus Act III.ii)
- (4) “Isn’t Boston a long way for a kid like you to be going?” he asked. She looked at him directly with her cool grey eyes. “I’m *going to meet* my family,” she said quietly. (FNT 30)<sup>2</sup>
- (5) You should be pleased. We’re *going to celebrate* your getting well.’ (AD9 61)

As a general comment on this path of change, Bybee et al. (1994: 130) say of BE *going to* that such a development is common with verbs of movement cross-linguistically and that it is based on a MOTION = FUTURE mapping from a TIME is SPACE metaphor (ibid.: 25) i.e. that ‘motion in space’ is generalised to the more abstract ‘motion through time’. This reflects the view that during grammaticalisation constructions typically become more abstract and less concrete. The BE *going to* construction is widely cited in grammaticalisation literature, showing that it is particularly suited to such a treatment (e.g. Bybee et al. 1994, Croft 2000: 156, Hopper & Traugott 2003). The fact that this path is very frequent cross-linguistically is central to the view that there is a universal conceptual space that is reflected in language-specific meanings of constructions.

More specifically, for the uses (3)-(5) above, the subject is an agent and the complement verbs in (4)-(5) have agentive readings. Leech (2004: 59) says of this that uses expressing intentions are ‘found chiefly with human subjects, and with ‘doing’ (or agentive) verbs which imply conscious exercise of the will.’ This is perhaps unsurprising as human subjects and their actions are the most common topics anyway. In contrast to this is a newer, non-agentive use, e.g. (6), variably described as being the ‘future result of a present cause’, (Leech 2004) or a ‘prediction’ (Fischer 2005, Declerck 2006: 338).

- (6) I know from past experience, that creating that mailing list *is going to take* approximately sixteen hours of my time. (K6V 304)

To make the distinction between the readings clearer, (7) and (8) are an invented pair showing an agentive intention use and a non-agentive prediction use respectively:

- (7) John *is going to fail* the exam. (*because he doesn’t want to go to military school*)
- (8) John *is going to fail* the exam. (*because he hasn’t worked hard enough*)

<sup>1</sup> Further, grammaticalisation commonly co-occurs with a reduction in phonological form, reflected here by BE *going to* in its more grammaticalised uses being realised as /gʌnə/, orthographically *gonna*.

<sup>2</sup> Data cited thus herein has been extracted from the British National Corpus Online service, managed by Oxford University Computing Services on behalf of the BNC Consortium. All rights in the texts cited are reserved.



- (10) At ðe nyhte from ðe sonne *goynge to reste* til in ðe morwe at ðe sunne risinge  
 ‘At night from sunset until the following day at sunrise.’  
 (Rule Minoreesses 94/2 cited by Perez 1990: 8)

In the 15th and 16th century there are also some non-movement ‘intention’ uses found. These seem to be nonce examples having been translated at the time from (11) (from Latin) (Danchev and Kytö 1994: 62) and (12) (from French), the latter of which is ambiguous between a purposive and intentional use:

- (11) Therefore while thys onhappy sowle by vycторыse pompys of her enmyes *was goyng to be broughte* into helle for the synne and onleful lustys of her body.  
 (1482, The Revelation to the Monk of Evesham, p. 43)
- (12) ‘sir’, quod Gerames, ‘we be Frenchmen, pylgrmes, & *are goyng to offer* at ye holy sepulcre.  
 (1534, Huen of Burdeux, p. 191)

Pertejo (1999: 136) notes that it is difficult to ascertain whether the early examples were ‘influenced by the paraphrasing of the original or whether the translator made use of a form already known in the language of that time’. The conclusion most researchers draw is that BE *going to* + inf. is rarely found at all outside translated texts until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. On texts that were written in English and not translated, Jespersen (1933: IV, 217) says it is ‘not frequent’ up to 1600, while Elsness (1994: 18), on examining the Helsinki corpus, says that there are no recorded instances in Period I (1500-1569) and only one in Period II (1570-1639), (13) below.

- (13) *I am going to bid* Gossips for your child Sir

However, any claim that this use is non-spatial and merely signalling an intention is highly debatable due to the high prominence of an ‘intention to move’ found in the extended context and indeed only eleven lines earlier the same speaker says ‘*I’ll goe bid Gossips presently my selfe*,’. If this contrast is compared with the PDE distinction between *will* and *going to* as in (14) and (15) below, both of which could answer the same request, it would be easy to classify the historical instances similarly.

- (14) I will do it tomorrow. (*decision at the moment of speaking*)  
 (15) *I’m going to do* it tomorrow. (*previously decided plan*)

However, due to the motion implied in the extended context, I believe that such an analysis would be mistaken for (13). Clearly, however, that this distinction did emerge is understandable given the potential for ambiguity in such cases.

It would then seem a fair conclusion that BE *going to* + inf. either with or without an intention meaning was not in wide use at that time, at least outside of translated texts. An examination of the complete works of Shakespeare supports this conclusion, revealing only 29 instances (=32 per million words). However, the Shakespeare corpus is useful for showing the process whereby the new intention use arose. For example, as noted, the first stage in this grammaticalisation path of verbs of movement is that ‘movement to a place’ extends to ‘movement for a purpose’. The

Shakespeare data shows that by the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century there appears to be evidence of this as an established change.

- (16) I am *going to visit* the prisoner. Fare you well. (Measure for Measure III.ii)  
 (17) PISANIO: I *was going*, sir, *To give* him welcome. *Exit* (Cymbeline I.iv)

Analysis of each instance reveals that at that point (c.1600) there are only locative and purposive uses, e.g. (16-17), although it needs the extended context to reveal that these are not ‘intention’ uses i.e. ‘Fare you well’ in (16) and the stage direction ‘exit’ in (17).

## 2.2. Non-spatial (intention) uses

Standard grammaticalisation theory claims constructions typically become less concrete and more abstract over time. Bybee et al. (ibid: 269) say on the developmental path of *go* that:

When one moves along a path toward a goal in space, one also moves in time [...] When the speaker announces that s/he is going to do something, s/he is also announcing the intention to do that thing. Thus intention is part of the meaning from the beginning, and the only change necessary is the generalisation to contexts in which an intention is expressed, but the subject is not moving spatially to fulfil that intention.

The stages in the grammaticalisation path to find for BE *going to* therefore extend a ‘movement’ use to an ‘intended purpose’ use to a ‘non-movement’ intention use. However, it is not possible to decide even from the extended context whether some instances are best described as lexical purposive BE *going to* + inf. or a more grammaticalised BE *going to* + inf. that marks only the intention and not the spatial movement. The problem is due to the indeterminacy or ambiguity typical in semantic change. This means that finding the point in the history of BE *going to* + inf. at which the spatial movement aspect of the meaning no longer surfaces in given instances is extremely difficult. Worse, it may easily be influenced by researcher bias. For example, from a PDE perspective, where an intention reading is readily available, (18) would appear to be an intention use, with little implied meaning of ‘movement’, but this is not proof that such was the case at that time.

- (18) Sir, the Germans desire to have three of your horses; the Duke himself will be to-morrow at court, and they *are going to meet* him.  
 (The Merry Wives of Windsor IV Sc III)

However, the time reference in (18) is clearly a more remote *future*, and not, as in the other examples hitherto, either in progress or imminent. In fact, around this time the corpora show that where the action is imminent, an actor’s intention is very often expressed with *about to* + V, about which Poole says ‘About to, or going to, is the sign of the participle of the future.’ (1646: 26). Poole’s claim is interesting because today we have no data at all that reflect such an established BE *going to* use this early. However, it is possible to fairly clearly date the time when the change must have taken place, if

some facts about change are aligned with some historical dates.<sup>4</sup> Krug (2000: 196) shows that when a change occurs in speech there is something like a 30+ year lag before it appears in any written examples. He also claims (ibid.) that there is a very short lag between informal speech and drama, hence his focus on the ARCHER corpus in his description of the ‘emerging modals’.

Regrettably, the Shakespeare corpus ends some 40 years prior to Poole’s grammar, but some logic can be used here. If this similarity were noticed by Poole, an intention use, if not a non-agentive use, must have been established before 1646. Assuming that Poole (born 1615) was writing from his native speaker intuitions, and given that it does not appear in the Shakespeare corpus, which suggests it had not caught on before c. 1600, then the 1600-1630 generation are the people who are probably responsible for making the use mainstream. That it does not appear in the available written samples this early suggests that this new use may have been a stigmatised form, as rapid changes sometimes are.

On examining data from the time after Poole’s analysis (the Helsinki (III) (1640-1710) corpus) Elsness (1994: 18) concludes that ‘intention’ readings of the construction display ‘a very sharp increase’, citing eight instances. However, given the volume of texts and the time span, it seems rather ambitious to claim that an increase in use from one, the disputed (13) above, to eight is ‘very sharp’. Further, it is actually not impossible to argue away some of his claims. For example, in (19) it seems to me that Mr. Ennis is not *going to try* anything at all this coming week. In fact, the *going* is happening in the current week and the *trying to live* only once he arrives in America. This instance of BE *going to* must therefore be given an intended movement meaning:

- (19) Worthy Mr Ennis ... *is* this weeke *going to* try whither he cannot more quietly live among ye heathens in America ...

Another possible strong contender for an ‘intention’ use from the Helsinki corpus is (20), from 1688. However, here it would seem the woman is being forced to reveal the name against her will, which can hardly be considered an ‘intention’ on her part and is in fact a synonym of *about to*, i.e. it signals an imminent act, not really an intention. The ‘intention’ meaning is backgrounded:

- (20) (The King) commanded her to lay aside her mantle, and suffer her self to receive his caresses, or, by his gods he swore, that happy man whom *she was going to name* shou’d die.

The problem here for the researcher is that imminence uses are unlikely to appear in written data. A further problem for the analysis is a general inconsistency in tense use, e.g. (21) below from 1684, which is clearly expressing a current motion towards:

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<sup>4</sup> This similarity with *about to* is worthy of further study, but is beyond the scope of this paper, further than to mention that there is an interesting and significant collocation between *about to* and lexical GO. In fact, in the Helsinki corpus, 72% (16 of 24= 9# per million) of instances of the string *about to* + V are purposive GO e.g. [GO *about*] [*to do*]. This started to decline around the same time that BE *going to* extended its non-movement intention uses. It occurs only once in the BNC outside a few texts that are set in or quoted from the 19<sup>th</sup> C. In contrast, only 16% (2.3 per million) of the Helsinki Corpus tokens are the intentional BE *about to* +V, while this is very common in the BNC (46 per million).

- (21) Well forsooth, I *go*, but pray make haste.

In contrast to the above, the Helsinki corpus does throw up five clearer examples, with (22) as the earliest. Dating from 1703, in (22) there is clearly no spatial meaning and only an intention to act is being expressed by BE *going to* + infinitive:

- (22) The council sat upon it, and *were going to order* a search of all the houses about the town.

### 2.3. Beyond the intention uses: a non-agentive use?

The grammaticalisation path to this point is fairly uncontroversial, however, other scholars make further claims about specific details of the BE *going to* construction, e.g. Strang (1982: 438, cited by Pertejo 1999: 136) says that it is ‘much better established by 1700 than BE + *-ing* in general’. In stark contrast to the Helsinki Corpus, there are 300 instances of *going to* from the c.5.6 million words of the 18<sup>th</sup> C section of the EEBO corpus.<sup>5</sup> Of these, 47.5% express an intention with no spatial meaning. The construction with a non-spatial intention meaning must therefore be considered relatively well established, although only around 25 per million words, at this time and the move from no examples (Shakespeare c. 1600) to near parity with movement uses (EEBO c. 1700) took place in a relatively short space of time. In the EEBO, the change can be seen reflected in the written data from around the late 1680s, supporting the view that it is likely to be the 1600-1630 generation that were the early adopters of the new use. Allowing for the overlap and ambiguity inherent in all analyses of this type, the most interesting points to emerge from the EEBO corpus is that some prediction uses are in fact observable even as early as 1700; there are ten examples that seem to be clearly non-intentional e.g. (23-24), 5 of which are from the same drama text c.1700.

- (23) As she *was going to breath* her last, she saw me grieve as much as if I had been her own Sone. (EEBO a62309)
- (24) I think nothing can be more impertinent, equally when a man has a virtuous wife, as I *am going to have*. (EEBO a62309)

In (23), the woman cannot intend to breathe her last, so this has an ‘about to’ reading, and in (24), the speaker already knows who his wife to be is, so he is aware of her virtues rather than intending to seek one that is virtuous.

While these early examples are problematic for a view that claims that the prediction use, e.g. (8) ‘grammaticalised’ from the intention use, e.g. (7), it does support the view from Croft (2008) that variation is ubiquitous. The cross-linguistic data on the other hand support the grammaticalisation view (e.g. Haspelmath 1989). A semantic analysis that argues that levels of meanings are stripped away also supports the view that the latter developed from the former. For example, what is left of future reference

<sup>5</sup> See Disney (2009) for an analysis based on the 15<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> C sections of the Early English Books Online (EEBO) corpus, which supports these points in more detail than space here allows. There is also one incomprehensible example in these data.

after the intention meaning disappears is a ‘prediction’. Basically, these uses are non-volitional, or rather, non-agentive. It must therefore be assumed that if the one use did extend into the next then when people adopted the intention use, it only took as little as one or two generations for the non-agentive uses to arise, but that these were restricted to immediate, or imminent events. It may even have been almost simultaneous, given Poole’s comments on the synonymy with *about to*, which can also take non-agentive complements. However, the paucity of the data prevents this claim from being effectively investigated and indeed the fact that the frequencies are low could simply be an artefact of the data itself, or it could be due to a slower rate of extension in complement verbs in a predictive sense as opposed to the intention use. Clearly, however, the form/meaning pairing “BE *going to* + infinitive = prediction based on evidence” is clearly not in any sense conventionalised to this point and indeed it takes another 150 years or so before a future prediction use becomes more widespread rather than just nonce cases such as (23) and (24).

#### 2.4. The relationship between BE *going to* and the progressive aspect

The goal here is to attempt to account for the way in which the BE *going to* + inf. intention construction expanded in scope to express non-intention future meanings. For Leech, the difference depends on whether ‘the train of events leading to the future happening is already under way’ (2004: 59) giving *She’s going to have twins* as an example of a ‘present cause’ use. This is classified thus because the subject is already pregnant. However, one could make the point that with getting married there is also present cause or evidence; a ring, a venue, a date, perhaps even ‘love’<sup>6</sup> and that this distinction is not as unproblematic as it first appears. In fact, this is the case with the present progressive in general; arguably, if I have an appointment, then seeing the doctor the following day is a continuing train of events that includes feeling ill and calling the surgery. The appointment may be written in my diary, and if I refer to this at a future time, this is clearly the same sort of evidence as a bulging midriff on a pregnant woman and I would say (25a) or (25b) rather than (25c), where the time refers to the seeing, not the going):

- (25)
- a. I am seeing the doctor at half past two tomorrow.
  - b. I am going to the doctor at half past two tomorrow.
  - c. I *am going to see* the doctor at half past two tomorrow.

The concept of an ‘event train’ is then clearly not restricted to ‘present cause’ uses of BE *going to*; it covers intention uses too, i.e. in (38c), there is an event train in motion and it is impossible to claim there is no intention involved. In fact, it may be true to say that the ‘event train’ notion is inherent in the progressive meaning as a whole (38

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<sup>6</sup> In passing, there actually seems little, if any, difference between ‘going to be married’ and ‘getting married’ or ‘going to have a baby’ and ‘having a baby’. It is perhaps just convention that we say the former in some contexts and the latter in others, and this awaits a corpus study. However, the progressive uses have their own inherent ambiguity to further muddy the waters; they could be interpreted as happening as the speaker is speaking, whereas using ‘going to’ clearly marks the event as ‘future’. Introspection suggests to me that if e.g. a month or date were also mentioned, the progressive would be used and the combination with ‘going to’ would not ‘sound right’.

a-b), and indeed Leech does accept the fuzzy nature of the boundary (p.c. 2008) between the present intention/present cause dichotomy. The ‘event train’ therefore covers intention uses, as well as both locative and infinitive of purpose uses, because the semantics of the present progressive uses of ‘going’ imply a change in place or state due to ‘movement in space / time’. It is in response to this type of analysis, and its problems, that Bybee et al. (1994: 17) write:

...it is not worthwhile to search for the one abstract meaning of each gram, the least common denominator that underlies all its uses, but rather it is better to study the different uses of grams as though they were links on a chain, one having given rise to another.

### 3. Main analysis: BE *going to* + inf. in Dickens

In order to trace this next ‘link in the chain’ in more detail, a corpus of Dickens’ novels amounting to 976,000<sup>7</sup> words, similar in size to the Shakespeare corpus, has also been analysed for the BE *going to* string and its different semantic nuances. The same issue that was noted above for Shakespeare’s catalogue holds for any single genre, single author corpus. The issues raised below focus more on the changing semantic scope of the BE *going to* + inf. string, and especially as its use extends to non-dynamic and non-agentive verbs. It must be noted at the outset that the relative token rates are clearly not to be considered in any sense as representative of the English spoken in the wider community at that time.

There are 348 instances of the string *going to* in the Dickens corpus used, equating to 356.5 per million words, roughly in line with the total PDE BNC results (337 per m.). Of the total tokens of the string *going to*, 92 (26%) are unambiguously non-infinitive lexical *going to* + place. This is over twice the rate of the Shakespeare corpus, while in the BNC, such uses account for only around 16%. Table 1 shows that the vast majority of the tokens are intention uses, plus 12 that are clearly ‘infinitive of purpose’ uses, a clear change in distribution from the Shakespeare data. There are then 244 ‘non-lexical’ instances of BE *going to* in a more grammaticalised epistemic use and all but 16 (6.5%) are clearly expressing an intention.

**Table 1. Distribution of BE *going to* in the selected Dickens corpus**

<i>Use</i>	<i>total tokens</i>	<i>%</i>
Lexical + locative	92	26.4%
Lexical + Infinitive	12	3.5%
Intention	228	65.5%
Ambiguous/prediction??	16	4.6%
<i>Total</i>	348	100%

<sup>7</sup> The books used were selected at random from Project Gutenberg free electronic versions of; *Hard Times* (HT), *Nicholas Nickleby* (NN), *Great Expectations* (GE), and *David Copperfield* (DC). The in-text examples use these abbreviations and chapter numbers, as the versions used do not have page numbers.

There was little patterning in collocation that could not be attributed to topic or style; only four books were examined, two were written in 1<sup>st</sup> person and two in 3<sup>rd</sup> and all contain long stretches of both narrative and dialogue. Almost all of the tokens in the Dickens data occur in either the speech of the characters or in the first person narrator’s voice. Of the 228 intention tokens, 105 are in past tense form; only one of these is a negative declarative and there are only two past tense interrogatives. This difference between present and past tenses is unremarkable. Past uses report an action someone intended to do, but did not, and there are unlikely to be many occasions when this is a negative or is questioned; it is merely a narrative device. On the other hand, future intentions are often negative and one’s intentions are frequently questioned. An intention use of BE *going to* + inf. occurs with all subjects, as a passive, as a complement clause, in reported speech and the past perfect. The unambiguous ‘intention’ examples are nearly all declaratives, often subordinated, e.g. (26), with 17 negatives and 12 interrogatives, clear evidence that the structure with an ‘intention’ meaning is fully integrated into the tense and aspect system at this time, in contrast to the Shakespeare data.

- (26) ‘...But it is so very strange! You’ll hardly believe what I *am going to tell* you. I could hardly believe it myself, if you told me.’ (GE ch.47)

If we are expecting, as Bybee et al. claim (1994: 300), some intermediate stage, where interrelations between the source use and the ‘new’ use are blurred, or that they overlap, then we need to find instances that are ambiguous. Table 2 shows there are 16 cases found in the Dickens selection that can be analysed for evidence of any ‘non-intention’ uses.

To this point, the intention uses contain the volitional notion immanent in the locative use. Now, however, the analysis needs further elucidation as there begin to appear in the data some non-volitional complements combining with non-agentive subjects. Leech (2004: 59) says that intention uses are ‘found chiefly with human subjects, and with ‘doing’ (or agentive) verbs which imply conscious exercise of the will.’ It follows that if the agent role is removed, i.e. in a passive or a stative, it is then more problematic to categorise. For example, the passive complement in (27) means ‘if someone intended to string me up’. It is not the subject’s own intention that is at issue here, but that of some other, unnamed, agent; nonetheless, this is clearly an intention use:

- (27) I’d do that, if I *was going to be* strung up to that there gallows. (GE ch.3)

Much of the indeterminacy is, of course, partly due to the PDE analysts’ ready availability of a ‘prediction’ interpretation, but clearly, just because it seems to me that a token has a given meaning does not necessarily mean that that is an interpretation an analyst 150 years ago would have given. In fact, I am unable to find any 19<sup>th</sup> C grammar that makes a reference to non-intention uses, and none at all until Jespersen (1933). However, while it is always best to find some independent linguistic evidence to support a given position, given their formal similarity there is no other way to resolve the indeterminacy other than through introspection. In order to do this in a fairly robust way, it is necessary to sharpen the categorisation criteria, and examples (28-29) below demonstrate some of the issues. Since the overwhelming usage was for some actor to

signal an intention to carry out some action, a paraphrase using some form including the semantic equivalent of agent + ‘intend’ was used in categorising uses.<sup>8</sup>

Even so, sometimes, a fairly loose meaning of an ‘intention’ is used to assign the interpretation, but still this is the best interpretation available. This is necessary in some cases, as clearly an event such as a marriage is rather more than an intention, once a date is fixed; it is of course a fixed plan, rather like the progressive future. In support of this view, Leech (2004: 62) says ‘the difference between an arrangement and an intention is a very slight one’, and classifies (28) (*ibid.*: 58), which is similar to my (29), as an intention use.

(28) They’re *going to get* married in a registry office.

(29) a little chit of a miller’s daughter of eighteen, who *was going to be* married, in three weeks’ time... (NN ch.13)

In addition, there is clearly an agentivity issue with these examples, i.e. as both of these are passive constructions there is no overt agent. A further problem in the analysis is that it is not always a simple task to determine who the agent is even when one does exist. For example, in (30), the BE *going to + inf.* use can be glossed as ‘I have no intention of allowing any...’ i.e. despite the plural subject including the addressees, the agent is the speaker alone. It is cases such as this that are the ‘intermediate stage’ in the developmental path.

(30) I won’t hear of it. You are to be a proctor. We’re *not going to have* any knockings on the head in THIS family, if you please, sir.’ (DC ch.35)

As noted above, this analysis of the Dickens data discusses those instances that are not clearly classifiable as ‘intention’. In order to err on the side of caution, the null hypothesis here is to assume that for a given ambiguous token there is *not* a non-intention interpretation and that it does express an agent’s intention unless it can be demonstrated otherwise; i.e. rather than attempt to find a hypothetical construct, it is preferable to attempt to classify instances under an established category and see what does not ‘fit’. When it appears not possible to assign an intentional meaning, only then can an alternative interpretation be sought. It is with this in mind that the following analysis of the data has been carried out.

### 3.1. The indeterminate tokens

One of the problems for an analysis of this type is highlighted by Bybee et al. (1994: 7) who say that ‘As the gram loses more and more of its original semantic content, its interpretation is more and more dependent on the meaning contained in the context’, i.e. it becomes increasingly subjectivised. This is a problem, as the context beyond the text is not available to the modern researcher, and indeed, the text itself may contain other ambiguities and difficulties.

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<sup>8</sup> It is noted that using ‘intend’ may not make true paraphrases as it removes part of the future reference (Leech 2004: 59). However, it is certainly close enough a paraphrase to distinguish between an instance that involves an agent that has an ‘intention’ or not and it is this that appears to be the crucial distinction.

In light of this, as noted above, there are 16 cases in the Dickens data used here where neither an intention nor infinitive of purpose interpretation was clear and where further discussion is necessary. The pattern that emerges from the analysis is that BE *going to* + inf. is either in a construction that is some sort of expression of cognition or it appears on its own. The latter are considered first.

There are three parallel instances of what appears to be the wife predicting, on the basis of what she knows or can see, her husband's imminent behaviour towards her. However, he is shown to pre-plan his approaches to her when he has some criticism of her and given this the interpretations, taken from the wider context of their relationship, are best described as intention uses, although the interpretation is hindered by the fact that he is also the 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. In (31) he seems to contradict her view of his likely behaviour by stressing that being cross is not his intention.

- (31) 'You have been silent for a long time, and now you *are going to be* cross!' said Dora. 'No, my dear, indeed! Let me explain to you what I mean.' (DC ch.48)

Example (32) is concerned with a change in the emotional state of an entity and hence lends itself to a prediction reading:

- (32) 'Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'I *am going to astonish* you.' 'Yes, sir?' returned Mrs. Sparsit, interrogatively... (HT ch.16)

Such a reading is, from a PDE perspective, certainly possible, yet an 'intention' interpretation is clearly also possible. This is the best example so far of the sort of ambiguity that arises as meanings generalise and the root meanings are stripped away.

Of the 12 remaining examples that could be classified as non-intentional / non-agentive, in 11, the BE *going to* clauses appear as dependent clauses to some construction related to 'cognition'. The 'cognition' constructions are of two types. Firstly, BE *going to* + inf. appears as a subordinate clause to a mental state predicate verb and secondly, in an *as if* construction. Both are also used with intention readings in the same data.

There are six cases where BE *going to* + inf. is a subordinate clause to a 'thought' type verb and where an intentional meaning is not so obvious e.g. (33). Here the future event, a marriage, is fixed and planned, but the complement verb BE is not agentive and the subject 'it' is not volitional. This weakens the likelihood for an 'intention' reading:

- (33) I am in a dream, a flustered, happy, hurried dream. I can't believe that it *is going to be*. (DC ch.43)

As it is clearly a planned event, this example is similar to the present progressive as used for fixed events e.g. (34), but there is a constraint on the use of lexical BE with this use, meaning we can not say (35) and must use '*is going to be*' instead. It should probably therefore be classified with the 'future as a result of a present intention' cases as the speaker is arguably integral in bringing about the event.

- (34) I can not believe that I *am going* home tomorrow.  
 (35) \*I can't believe that it *is being*.

The difference in the form of expression referring to the planned marriages of (27) and (33) is the expression of cognition, i.e. ‘I can’t believe that...’. In this case, this refers to the speaker’s knowledge of the *fixedness* of the event from a current perspective, and not to the occurrence of the actual event itself. This combination of clauses, while not a ‘new’ use, as it is merely following the present progressive pattern, would appear to be the first case in these data in which a different meaning can be shown. At this point BE *going to* can combine with intransitive, non-agentive copular BE. In the search for evidence of early non-intentional uses of BE *going to* + inf., this is a beginning. This is therefore one of the small changes in scope that is common in grammaticalisation, but, crucially, the meaning was still there all along.

Indeed, that the author himself may have been aware of this transitional stage is shown in (36a) as he exploits this very ambiguity to good effect. Here there is the notion of inevitability or certainty about the future event, rather than an intention:

(36)

- a. ‘I say, I think I *am going to find out* something.’ ‘And what may that be?’ returned Nicholas, smiling at this odd communication. ‘I don’t know what it may be, I don’t know what it may not be,’ said Newman; ‘it’s some secret in which your uncle is concerned, but what, I’ve not yet been able to discover’ (NN ch51)
- b. I *am going to find out* something.
- c. Maybe I *am going to find out* something.

In (38a) it is the addition of the cognition clause that encourages a non-intention interpretation here, i.e. one cannot really ‘think’ they ‘intend’ to do something of this kind, compare (38b) where an intention reading is primary.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, in (38c) the effect is very similar to the use of the cognition verb in (38a), where a lack of volition is implied by the certainty reducing adverbial. It should be noted that one only claims to think such a thing if one has evidence for it.

Langacker’s (1998: 80) analysis of this intermediate stage is to claim that ‘... the subject no longer *intends* to carry out the infinitival process but is nonetheless attributed a certain amount of responsibility in this regard.’ In (37) the speaker is overtly claiming responsibility for the future event, yet again there is the clearly salient nuance of inevitability.

(37) Now, I know I’m *going to break* your hearts, but I am forced to leave you. (DC ch.22)

Langacker (1998: 80) describes the next of the small changes as ‘... a further attenuation of the subject’s role’, in that the subject plays no part in the realisation of the future event. One example of this is (38) below where the subject ‘what’ is not animate and the complement verb is not agentive; an ‘intention’ interpretation is therefore not possible. However, unlike in the earlier examples, where the main clause expresses the speaker’s attitude towards the *fixedness* of the event, the claim in (38) is of a *lack* of knowledge about the future event itself, and hence there is no involvement of the subject in the future event.

<sup>9</sup> The reading of this example depends to a large extent on the placement of the nuclear tone, i.e. whether on *out* or on *some*.

(38) ‘But I did not know then what *was going to happen*.’ (HT book 2 ch.8)

In terms of Leech’s ‘event train’ the explanation for the use of BE *going to* here lies in the speaker’s perspective, i.e. Langacker’s ‘conceptualiser’. In (38), while an ‘event train’ may have started from the point of view of the speaker at the time of his reported ‘not knowing’, it is only apparent from the perspective of the speaker in the present and for whom the event is now a fixed part of the past, i.e. it is inevitable and the speaker now has knowledge of the event. So while the choice of BE *going to* + inf. and not some other future marker like ‘would’ still seems to be linked to the progressive notion of it being ‘fixed’ and ‘inevitable’ from the speaker’s perspective, now, the notion of it having been *planned* has disappeared entirely. Langacker says of this (1998: 81) that while there may be no change in the subject itself ‘its additional roles – with respect to motion, intention and responsibility- are successively stripped away until none are left.’

In the examples discussed so far, it would appear that non-intentional uses have been discovered, although where the subject is also the speaker, there is the possibility of an intention reading. Bearing in mind the null hypothesis that non-intention cases must be proved before a new use can be defined, the analysis can now move on.

As more non-agentive verbs are used as complements, and where 3<sup>rd</sup> person subjects are used, an ‘intention’ reading becomes less likely and there is always an element of guesswork about another person’s intentions anyway. It follows that for the speaker to be making claims about a non-intentional future event of which they are not a participant, the projection into the future that they are making must be defined as some sort of ‘prediction’. Further, prediction uses are a cross-linguistically attested change of constructions of this type, and they are shown to exist in the 20<sup>th</sup> C data. The fact that the new ‘prediction’ uses are based on some evidence is the reason this construction must be included under accounts of evidentiality in English. I show elsewhere (Disney forthcoming 2010) how future prediction uses of BE *going to* contrast with WILL predictions, i.e. with BE *going to* there is an implication of the existence of evidence, and with WILL there is not, (see below). This is similar to, but narrower than, the ‘present causes’ distinction that Leech (2004) makes.

### 3.2. Evidence for the evidential ‘prediction’ use

So far in these data, there has been no clear reference to, or inference of, the existence of any ‘evidence’ or ‘knowledge’ on which a prediction is based, only to the lack of any. Such a reference would give a clearer picture and is perhaps found in (39). Clearly the speaker must have grounds on which to base their assertion, i.e. they must have evidence.

(39) ‘Yes, ma’am,’ I said, to stop her, for I was afraid she *was going to cry*.  
(GE book 2 Ch.3)

It is not possible to classify this as an intention use as one cannot ‘intend’ to cry. Neither is it likely that Langacker’s (1998) ‘responsibility’ stage is applicable as it is not something that is ‘in the subject’s sphere of influence’. Because the speaker and the subject of BE *going to* + inf. are not the same entity, and considering the non-volitional

semantics of the verb, (39) is closer to PDE ‘prediction’ uses and is the clearest example so far of a reference to a future event based on an inference from a current state or current knowledge.

The situation is similar to the second type of cognition expression found with ambiguous cases. There are four ambiguous occurrences of BE *going to + inf.* in the Dickens sample which appear as dependent clauses of ‘as if’ constructions. In each of these cases, a situation or state is described that can be thought of as the evidence or implicational basis upon which a ‘prediction’ about a future event is based. The ‘*as if*’ construction exists to show that there is a mental process occurring that leads to the conclusion in the dependent clause and it is important to note that these uses are all concerned with immediately occurring events. First, in (40) the swelling can be considered the evidence of an imminent event, although it is not clear if there is an intention meaning or not.

- (40) ... he left Mr. Bounderby swelling at his own portrait on the wall, as if he *were going to explode* himself into it; (HT ch.11)

In example (41), the attributes of a clock are mapped onto a person and it is this blend that is the subject of the BE *going to + inf.* clause. It is possible that the volition of a human could be mapped onto the clock as part of the blend, making this an intention use, but this is stretching the point rather.

- (41) Something clicked in his throat as if he had works in him like a clock, and *was going to strike*. (GE book 1 ch.3)

The main point here is that the ‘clicking’ mentioned can clearly be viewed as a sort of ‘evidence’ for the imminent occurrence of the striking. In (42), from 1861, a reference to evidence is also clearly mentioned:

- (42) I observed the coachman beginning to get down, as if we *were going to stop* presently. And stop we presently did... (GE ch.20)

Yet even here, an intention meaning is not impossible if the subject is changed, i.e. ‘as if the coachman intended us to stop’. Further, in (43) the speaker has experiential evidence (a feeling) for the imminent, clearly non-volitional, event about to occur, so this example contains both types of cognition expression considered here:

- (43) My eyes were full, and I felt as if I *were going to tumble* down. (DC ch.3)

In sum, if the change in meaning or scope is indeed conventionalising in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> C, then there appear to be constraints; i.e. an overt marker of cognition is also used. In contrast, the final example (44) is the only one of the possible non-intention uses that is not a subordinate clause to a verb of cognition.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> As noted above (Leech 2004: 59) intention uses mostly have human subjects and agentive verbs. It is noted that the verb ‘change’ can qualify as ‘agentive’ so an intention interpretation may be possible, but only if the notion of ‘volition’ is applied in an anthropomorphic sense. This is not such an unusual notion given idioms around ‘lady luck’, but this is considered here to be an issue best left alone for the present.

- (44) ‘Luck changes,’ says Compeyson; ‘perhaps yours *is going to change*.’  
(GE ch.12)

This ‘prediction’ use is clearly still overtly mediated through the speaker, because it is modified to a subjective epistemic value of ‘possibility’ by the adverbial ‘perhaps’.

### 3.3. Passim on BE going vs. WILL

It is after this period that a massive increase in use of the construction is reported to have occurred (Krug 2000, also Potter 1969, cited by Mair 1997: 1539) taking over the functions of another construction, e.g. WILL. In the final example from the Dickens data (44) there is no clear ‘current situation’ or ‘evidence’ and there would appear to be little difference between the original (44) and the adapted (45).

- (45) ‘Luck changes,’ says Compeyson; ‘perhaps yours *will change*.’

Space prohibits detailed discussion on this, but it is noted that the prediction use of BE *going to* is semantically restricted compared to WILL. Where it is not overtly supplied, the existence of some evidence can be inferred with BE *going to* but not usually with WILL. That this can be seen as having a clear evidential function is further pursued in Disney (forthcoming 2010), however it is worth noting here that, for example, Nichols (1986: 255) offers a “tentative universal” that if a language has one evidential distinction that it will be “inferential-immediate”. This is exactly in line with the data described above for the development of BE *going to* + inf. in its non-locative, non-intentional uses. It developed from a ‘present action’ to an action ‘about to’ take place to a non-agentive prediction based on evidence, an inference about the future. The claim here is not that BE *going to* is any sense ‘an evidential’, only that during its grammaticalisation path from progressive to (semi) modal it can be seen to have picked up evidential functions and that this forms the conceptual basis of its paradigmatic contrast with WILL for predictions. Similarly, BE *going to* contrasts with WILL for intentions, where the former is a planned intention and expressions with WILL are made at the moment of speaking. This is blurring, particularly in US English, but again lack of space prohibits further discussion here.

### 3.4. BE going to +inf. in the early 20<sup>th</sup> C

It is beyond the scope of the current paper to give analyses of data beyond this time period, and it is accepted that even the data presented here are severely limited. However, other authors have looked in similar detail elsewhere with Perez (1990) claiming of ‘The Great Gatsby’ (published in 1925) that it has six instances of spatial movement and 39 instances of intention. He counts two which do not have human subjects so clearly there still has not been a great change in frequency to this point. Perez (1990: 10) says of these two instances that:

... 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.

It is probably not coincidence that these two examples are in line with the data presented above: one is a subordinate clause of an evidential cognition expression ‘it seems’ and the other is in an *as if* construction. Of course F. Scott Fitzgerald was an American writer and thus not entirely comparable to his British counterparts, but nonetheless, the data are compelling.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has traced the history of the BE *going to* construction, attempting to add some detail to the grammaticalisation path described in the literature. It has also attempted to highlight some of the issues involved in this sort of research. It has been my intention only to identify the points at which enough ambiguity or indeterminacy existed for a possible meaning change to arise through generalisation and analogy. It has concluded that before the ‘prediction’ use increased in frequency in the 20<sup>th</sup> C that similar uses existed in ‘speaker-mediated’ constructions i.e. in complement clauses in either mental state predicate constructions or *as if* constructions and these give BE *going to* + inf. ‘evidence based prediction’ readings. I note (for more detail see Disney forthcoming 2010) that this grammaticalisation path is consistent with the models of evidential conceptual space described in Anderson (1986) and Van de Auwera and Plungian (1998).

The mediated uses seem to have helped ‘pave the way’ for non-intentional uses to become more acceptable to the speakers of the time. As they did so, the hypothesis is that the need for them to be overtly mediated by the speaker was replaced by the possibility for the mediation to be assumed, and hence that the need for the mediation part of the construction lessened over time. This results in a PDE prediction use like (8) where the hearer will assume that it is based on evidence. This is therefore a subjectivised and conventionalised pairing of the form BE *going to* + inf. and an evidential meaning.

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*Steve Disney*  
*Department of English Language and Linguistics*  
*Lancaster University*  
*Bailrigg*  
*Lancaster*  
*LA1 4YW*  
*United Kingdom*

*s.disney@lancs.ac.uk*