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# The evolution of constructions: The case of be about to

Joshua Mee

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**THE EVOLUTION OF CONSTRUCTIONS  
THE CASE OF *BE ABOUT TO***

**BY**

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**B.A., Linguistics, University of New Mexico, 2010**

**M.A., Linguistics, University of New Mexico, 2013**

**THESIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

In this thesis, I examine the evolution of constructions involved in the emergence of *be about to*, used to indicate an immediate future event. Using three corpora from different time periods going as far back as the Old English period, I take synchronic snapshots of the gradual change in constructions leading up to the present day usage of *be about to*. The selected corpora parallel Disney's (2009) account of the grammaticalization of *be going to* for the purpose of comparison.

It is found that the emergence of *be about to* is a complex story involving the development of multiple constructions through time. These findings demonstrate the value of examining language change in a construction grammar framework. While it is helpful to understand that constructions, not just words, undergo grammaticalization, one should also recognize that the emergence of a new construction always involves an interaction between several different constructions. Consequently, determining where the grammaticalization process begins is a complicated endeavor that requires thorough examination the complexities of the older constructions from which a new construction emerges.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Grammaticalization theory has evolved in many ways through the growing influence of construction grammar. More than 20 years ago, Traugott and König considered that 'Grammaticalization refers primarily to the dynamic, unidirectional process whereby lexical items in the course of time acquire a new status as grammatical, morpho-syntactic forms, and in the process come to code relations that either were not coded before or were coded differently.' (1991:190). Twelve years later Traugott presented a similar definition with telling changes. She argued that grammaticalization is 'the process whereby lexical material in highly constrained pragmatic and morphosyntactic contexts is assigned grammatical function, and, once grammatical, is assigned increasingly grammatical, operator-like function' (Traugott 2003: 645). Comparing these definitions may illuminate some of the ways in which construction grammar had begun to have an impact. The principle in Traugott and König's earlier definition and Traugott's later definition is essentially the same; something lexical becomes something grammatical, and then becomes more grammatical. However, the differences between these definitions are indicative of important changes that have occurred. For Traugott (2003), grammaticalizing material is no longer moving to a new position from the lexicon to some place in the grammar system, but rather material changes locally to become more grammatical in the makeup of a particular construction. Also, by referring to the starting point as lexical 'material' instead of a lexical 'item', the exact status of that which starts to grammaticalize is more ambiguous. This illustrates the fact that shifting away from a modular paradigm to a non-reductionist, construction grammar model significantly complicates specifying the origins of an emerging construction.

Of course, the concept of a ‘construction’ is not new to linguistics. Even early in the development of modern grammaticalization theory, Lehmann (1982) recognized that not just single words, but also multi-word strings can grammaticalize. Theoretical advancements since then had led to a general consensus that an accurate definition of grammaticalization should include the notion of a construction. It seems, however, that until more recently a construction in grammaticalization was mostly a syntactic component that determines how independent constituents can combine and how they are interpreted analytically. Up to the turn of the century, most, studies in language change had not really incorporated a construction grammar model beyond recognizing that larger chunks may undergo the same changes as an individual word, and that morphosyntactic context is a relevant factor in how a form changes. Many efforts had still focused on discovering how an evolving construction may find a new place in a modular linguistic system from lexicon to grammar.

In construction grammar, however, constructions are not just one component of language storage, but rather the whole system consists entirely and fundamentally of a network of surface-level, form-meaning pairs. For this reason, the principles of construction grammar are not adequately incorporated into historical linguistics by simply noting that ‘constructions’ can undergo change. A construction-based model will have different expectations for, and a different representation of language evolution. The emphasis changes from finding a construction’s path from a lexical item to a grammatical formative to focusing on how the schematic and specific elements of a whole construction emerge and evolve together and to understand how they interact with other constructions through time. Decisions as foundational as determining where a construction begins – or even what it means for a construction to begin – are completely dependent on one’s understanding of how language is structured. In the study of language

change from a construction grammar model, distinctions such as grammaticalization and lexicalization will be regarded as correlated developments rather than opposing ones. Co-occurring elements will be analyzed as potentially being part of the same form-meaning pair rather than the mere context in which a new grammaticalizing item emerges. Older constructions from which a new construction emerges will be regarded as productive, useful and complex entities at every point in time. If construction grammar is truly incorporated into grammaticalization theory, the whole framework is reorganized.

In the past decade, both construction grammarians and grammaticalization theorists have had an increasing awareness of the need to advance an approach to language change that addresses the questions of how complex constructions interact and evolve. Many historical linguists began to develop models that see lexicalization and grammaticalization as compatible sets of processes within a single construction (Wischer and Diewald 2002, Himmelmann 2004). These kinds of approaches excited interest in considering how grammaticalization theory could handle complex units with schematic and fixed parts changing together. At this same time linguists were developing approaches to grammaticalization from a construction grammar framework (Bybee 2002a&b, 2006, Heine 2002, Traugott 2003). It seems the most popular effort to synthesize these camps has come under the heading ‘diachronic construction grammar’ (Noël 2007, Bergs and Diewald 2008, Traugott 2012).

In this thesis, I analyze the development of *be about to* from a construction grammar perspective. I concern myself with questions such as: What must have happened for the words ‘*be about to*’ to ever occur in a collocation? What other schematic constructions from an older time period may have an untold story in giving opportunity for this construction to emerge? How can we determine when this construction began and in what ways are multiple constructions

related to each other in the emergence of a new construction? These are the kinds of questions that will be answered in greater detail as construction grammar continues to have a more profound influence in historic linguistics. I attempt to do so here by analyzing the emergence of *be about to*.

To begin, I will discuss a few major developments in grammaticalization theory that set the stage for the greater influence of construction grammar. Then I will give a description of major principles in construction grammar models. At that point I will describe a few recent models of language change that have sought to synthesize grammaticalization processes with construction grammar. I will then present my own model that incorporates findings in both construction grammar and grammaticalization theory as a means of understanding the complex interplay of evolving constructions throughout time. Finally I will demonstrate in a corpus-based analysis how this approach to analyzing language change is particularly beneficial in accounting for the emergence and evolution of constructions leading up to its modern usage.

## Chapter 2

### Grammaticalization

#### 2.1 Approaches to Grammaticalization

Grammaticalization is a chain of processes whereby functional or grammatical formatives are diachronically related to more concrete, lexical forms. It has been popularized as an explanation for the emergence of linguistic structure. Probably the most general proposal in grammaticalization theory is that language change follows identifiable clines. These pathways trace formal properties and functional properties. Here are two popular examples of attested clines.

##### Morphosyntactic cline:

CONTENT ITEM > GRAMMATICAL WORD > CLITIC > INFLECTIONAL > AFFIX > Ø  
(Hopper and Traugott 1993:8)

##### Semantic cline:

*movement toward a goal* → *intention* → *future* (Bybee 2003a:150)

Morphosyntactic clines trace degrees of syntagmatic and paradigmatic boundedness and the loss of independence of a form. Semantic clines are typically concerned with functional developments which occur in between a 'CONTENT ITEM' and 'GRAMMATICAL WORD'. Clines are usually sought out retrospectively. For morphosyntax, one may recognize a general association between an inflected affix and an archaic form from a more prototypical word class, i.e. a word which would pass a categorical test in the distributional method. Then intermediate 'stages' are either deduced or empirically sought out. In semantics this begins with finding an association between the function of a modern grammatical formative and an etymologically related word, then deducing from those points the flow of change in meaning and the processes involved in semantic reanalysis.

A common commitment in approaches to grammaticalization is that language change is not arbitrary. On the contrary there are clear and strong tendencies for language to change in the same way or in the same direction. It is argued that similar processes are actualized in otherwise completely independent contexts, and that these changes are generally irreversible (Givón 1971, Haspelmath 1999). This has been described as the principle of unidirectionality. For semantics, meaning will change from more concrete to more abstract, from objective to subjective (Traugott 1989), from specific to general (Sweester 1988). I will elaborate more on these processes later. In morphosyntactic change, unidirectionality indicates the tendency for a form to become less independent and more bounded. In phonological change, it is proposed that phonetic form will undergo temporal and substantial reduction, but will rarely be strengthened (Pagliuca & Mowrey 1987, Bybee 2001).

Another popular commitment in grammaticalization theory – especially in the functional tradition – is that language change is gradual. A form will not change from a lexical word to grammatical formative instantaneously, but will evolve slowly over time. Early on in the rise of grammaticalization models the commitment to gradient change encouraged efforts to specify the developments involved in a form *becoming* ‘grammatical’. One of the most widely regarded and critiqued set of grammaticalization parameters is that of Lehmann (1985).

1. *Attrition*: Semantic and phonological features gradually erode.
2. *Paradigmatization*: A form becomes part of an integrated morphological paradigm.
3. *Obligatorification*: A form moves from being optional to grammatically required.
4. *Fixation*: Syntactic ordering of signs becomes less free and rigidify.
5. *Condensation*: Multiple words become a single constituent.
6. *Coalescence*: Grammaticalizing signs will undergo phonological fusion.

Lehmann’s parameters can be categorized into syntagmatic and paradigmatic changes. The paradigmatic changes are *attrition*, *paradigmatization* and *obligatorification*. For Lehmann,

*Attrition* refers to both formal change and semantic change. He seems to treat them as two sides of the same coin. Where a sign loses semantic properties, it also loses phonological features. By *paradigmatization* a form will lose the openness and variability of a prototypical word class and become part of a more integrated grammatical class. He gives example from Latin to French in which the prepositions *de* and *a* began to mark oblique cases. He argues that paradigmaticization of these forms is movement from a larger paradigm of primary prepositions with less homogeneity to a small set of oblique case markers. By *obligatorification* a form will become a necessary part of a particular grammatical function. For instance, English past tense marking may be construed as having become obligatory. Even though an adverb may indicate a past event, the verb must be overtly marked with past tense, e.g. \**yesterday I walk*. In Lehmann's model, these parameters are with respect to the internal development of grammaticalizing construction.

The syntagmatic parameters that Lehmann identifies are fixation, coalescence and condensation. *Fixation* relates to the syntactic positioning of independent constituents. This is when a grammaticalizing form becomes more rigid in relation to other words in a clause. Lehmann describes *condensation* as the loss of combining complexity. A sign loses freedom to occur in a variety of syntactic contexts, and becomes restricted to modifying a word or stem. *Calescence* is presented as a phonological development whereby syntactic boundaries become morphological boundaries. A sign moves from juxtaposition to cliticization.

Hopper (1991) later presented another popular list of grammaticalization 'principles' that coincides in many ways with those of Lehmann. Hopper endeavors to clarify and add to Lehmann's parameters in two ways. First, he argues that Lehmann only accounts for developments that are late in the process of grammaticalization; different processes may capture

the gradient aspects of change. Other principles are intended to modify Lehmann's terminology to reflect gradience in grammaticalization. Second, Hopper was more concerned with processes of meaning change, while Lehmann focused primarily on morphosyntactic processes. Essentially, Hopper was not overtly opposing Lehmann's processes, as much as he opposed the notion that they represented 'the whole of the grammaticalization process, its parameters and associated processes with their start and end poles...' (Lehmann 1985:309). Hopper's principles are given here.

1. *De-categorialization*: Form loses morphological variability characteristic of prototypical categories such as Noun and Verb.
2. *Specialization*: A form becomes more restricted to a specific functional context.
3. *Persistence*: Semantic features of an older use of a construction will remain in the connotation or implicatures of a modern use.
4. *Layering*: Older uses along a diachronic pathway of change may persist even as new ones emerge.
5. *Divergence*: The same form of a preceding construction may result in different constructions developing simultaneously.

The first two principles in this list are presented as better alternatives to Lehmann's parameters that capture the gradience of change and the potential for the process of grammaticalization to not yet be completed in some cases. *De-categorialization* is when a form loses morphosyntactic variation and freedom as it moves away from prototypical Noun and Verb categories to something more restricted. It is similar to Lehmann's paradigmaticization, but Hopper argues that the term de-categorialization better captures changes that never come to fit into a highly homogeneous grammatical paradigm. *Specialization* is presented as a more accurate terminological alternative to Lehmann's obligatorification. He argues that many developing forms may show the same characteristics of emerging obligatory forms without ever reaching the point of becoming entirely obligatory. The movement toward an obligatory context may be



more appropriately expressed by specialization, and a form may eventually become so ‘specialized’ that it is obligatory.

Hopper’s principles emphasize semantic change rather than focusing on morphological variation. *Persistence* refers to when an emerging form does not entirely lose the semantic features of the construction from which it arose, even while it has a new function. For example, both *will* and *be going to* have developed a future event meaning, but these future uses have not completely lost features of the verbal semantics from which they came. Consider sentences (1) and (2).

(1) *I’ll take the trash out.*<sup>1</sup>

(2) *I’m gonna take the trash out.*

In (1), the sentence may be construed as an offer. The desiderative sense has persisted in this context. On the other hand, (2) is not an offer, but only serves to communicate my intention to take the trash out. There is no implicature for willingness to do something because *be going to* has developed on a semantic cline that never involved desiderative features. The distinction in connotation between these two forms is the consequence of persistence.

Another principle related to semantics that Hopper presents is *layering* in which the development of a new usage of a word does not prevent the continuance of its anterior functions. A word will become more productive by the addition of a new construction, rather than the replacement of a construction. It is argued that remnant uses of a developing construction on the same diachronic path may coexist. *Divergence* is similar but from a synchronic perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important for any theory of language structure or change to be supported by cross-linguistic evidence and, not to be formulated entirely on the analysis of one language. However, to be as accessible as possible and for the specific interest of this thesis, most of the examples in these sections are intentionally taken from English. Yet works with more extensive typological studies are cited as well.

Whereas layering indicates the tendency for different stages in a single grammaticalizing path to remain as unique constructions, divergence refers to the same item existing in different constructions on different paths of change. The phenomena that Hopper seeks to identify with both layering and divergence are very similar. To understand these two concepts consider the following uses.

- (3) *what Occupy talks about **is about** raising the same kind of criticism*  
(COCA, Denver post: 120116: A-1)
- (4) *I **am all about** focusing on between the lines.* (COCA:MAG Vol. 232, Iss. 26:34, 2008)
- (5) *What **I'm about to** tell you is not new.* (COCA:MAG Vol. 36, Iss. 12:64, 2008)

These three examples each contain *be about*, but they are not the same construction. Example (3) is a very old use of *about* as a preposition to mean ‘concerning’. It could be argued that the construction [SBJ *be all about* X] seen in (4) has directly grammaticalized from the use of *be about* in (3). These two uses exemplify *layering* according to Hopper’s principles because (3) represents the continuance of an older use along with the newer use seen in (4) that emerged from it. On the other hand, the immediate future use of *be about to* as seen in (5) has emerged in a different construction than (4). The co-existence of the uses in (4) and (5) is a case of *divergence*. The relationship between them is not really layering because they have developed in different constructions that contain *be about*. There is no cline that traces through the development of these constructions in sequence. The co-existence of (3) and (4) is considered layering because a direct pathway of change can be drawn from uses like (3) to those like (4), while the uses in (4) and (5) are contemporary constructions that diverged at some point along different pathways, and have undergone unrelated processes of change since their divergence.

One of the most important implications of these two principles is that a new development may be stored independently from constructions from which it emerges.

Hopper's 1991 article represents an early trend in functional linguistics to incorporate grammaticalization theory. Hopper presented his principles with the notion that grammaticality is analogical and gradient as opposed to being modular and discrete. Rather than looking at syntactic parts of speech as universal grammatical categories, Hopper presented a way of thinking about grammaticalization in which a construction may undergo grammaticalization processes without ever really becoming 'grammatical'. Though not exactly construction-based, this transition presented an approach to grammaticalization that deviates significantly from a traditional generative framework that sees grammar as innate and generally static to one that considers grammar to be emergent and constantly changing (cf. Hopper 1987). Although he did speak of grammar as one congruent 'system', his principles of grammaticalization were intended to highlight the existence of forms that are neither 'in' nor 'out' of that system.

Hopper's focus on semantics is also illustrative of grammaticalization becoming situated in a usage-based model in which linguistic representation is a consequence of language use. It is generally accepted that change in form is driven by change in meaning (Heine et al. 1991, Croft 2001, Traugott 2003). Consequently, morphosyntactic processes of change are contingent on semantic processes of change, and morphosyntactic change represents a late stage in grammaticalization. To discover the motivation for formal changes is to understand the processes that drive the evolution of meaning.

There are two issues to be accounted for in semantic change: how one meaning is lost and how another is gained. It is generally argued that contentful meaning in some part of a

construction becomes more abstract leaving functional properties to become more salient. One process that has been presented for meaning change in grammaticalization is *subjectification* (Traugott 1989, Langacker 1990, Traugott 1995a). Subjectification is a process whereby meaning shifts from the conceptual object to the conceptual subject. There is a shift from concrete properties to abstract properties of a concept. As a result, the more objective properties of an original usage may be lost. This loss of meaning is called *semantic bleaching* (Sweester 1988). *Pragmatic strengthening* is a process by which implied properties become primary (Horn 1985, Traugott, 1995, 2006). As salient features of a form are generalized the implicatures of that form become more important to its use. As a consequence, the form becomes useful in new contexts that are typically more functional, marking relationships between words rather than indicating more concrete conceptual categories of objects, properties and actions (cf. Croft 2003:183). An example of this is *will* (Bybee et. al 1994), which began as a desiderative verb like *want*. Volition usually implies a future event. If one says ‘*I want a new car,*’ one implicature is the possibility of having a car in the future. This implicature is even greater, if one desires *to do* something. For instance, with ‘*I want **to buy** a car,*’ a potential future event in which the speaker performing the action is conceptualized. As a form is used in more and more situations with a future event implicature, the desiderative properties may eventually become more peripheral than futurity. Eventually a construction may be used in situations where desire is not even a possible interpretation, e.g. ‘*America will not win the World Cup*’.

Changes in the function of a construction cause the elements it contains to become less associated with other constructions containing the same elements. For instance, *willan* has persisted in other constructions besides the future marker, e.g. *will and testament, against my will*. As meaning changes for *willan* in each of these constructions, their association with one

another loses relevance. Consequently their formal representations are likely to dissimilate. Hence, one can say *I'll buy a car*, but not *\*against my'll*. Therefore, the evolution of form finds its source in the evolution of function.

Another contribution that the usage-based model brought to grammaticalization studies is a means of addressing the cognitive motivations for change to occur. In the usage-based model, the competence vs. performance distinction of generative models is denied. There is not a strong distinction between how a language is stored and how it is used (Bybee 2001, 2006). On the contrary, competence is the result of performance. Language is not an independent mental faculty, but is intricately and intimately associated with conceptualization (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Johnson 1987, Langacker 1998). The observable phenomena in language are common to every aspect of cognitive function. The same processes that govern conceptualization in general govern language as well; like all perceptual experience, it is stored in memory (Langacker 2008). Language is not an *a priori* phenomenon. Complex structure can emerge out of a relatively few principles of cognitive function. Usage-based models apply these principles to discovering the motivation for change.

The cognitive basis of language gives rise to universal paths of grammaticalization. 'The true language universals are the universals of change' (Bybee 2003a:151). A large number of similar, cross-linguistic constructions can be traced back to the same semantic categories through genetically and areally unrelated languages. Many such documented developments are compiled by Bybee (2003b), who demonstrates that syntactic variation finds its roots in tendencies for certain semantic classes to undergo the same paths of change. Not everything grammaticalizes. Instead there are certain conceptual categories that lend themselves to specific implicatures becoming more salient. Body parts tend to become spatial prepositions due to the implicature of

the body being a landmark. Perceptual verbs become discourse markers. Words of strength become markers of root possibility. Verbs of desire and motion become markers of futurity.

These principles have imported ways of answering the fundamental questions that underlie morphosyntactic and semantic processes of change. Bybee (2003a) presents a set of mechanisms involved in the cognitive process of grammaticalization. She argues that language use becomes automatized, much like riding a bike or driving a car. The tendency to automate repeated procedures can account for the loss of compositionality of the constituents in a construction and a reduction in its form. The articulatory procedures of the most frequent constructions will be more automatized. The process of *automatization* adds another dimension to grammaticalization. Not only does a construction grammaticalize, but the most repeated specific instances of the construction will be motivated to grammaticalize more rapidly. Some words that co-occur within a grammaticalizing form may become more automatized than others. Thus, *be going to* in the first person present may become more automated than instances of *be going to* with other subjects because it is repeated with greater frequency. Hence *I'm going to* is often more condensed than other instances of *be going to*, e.g. [aimənə V] (Bybee 2003b:616).

Haiman (1998) presented two other important cognitive mechanisms in grammaticalization, *habituation* and *emancipation*. Habituation is a process in which an individual responds with a lower level of cognitive awareness for a repeated procedure. An obvious point at which habituation is seen in language is with ritualized text. The pledge of allegiance, [*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God with liberty and justice for all.*] may be stored as a whole chunk for many individuals by its constant repetition and thus habituation in grade school. It is argued that this same process is responsible for evolution in grammatical systems as well. As a repeated

construction becomes habitual, less attention is given when using it. Bybee (2003b) argues that habituation accounts for generalization. Much like one can learn song lyrics, maintain the practiced skill of repeating the words and eventually lose any sense of its meaning, so also with constructions, concrete semantic properties of a habitual construction lose their force. In turn the implicatures are what is most likely to be relevant.

As one construction is reanalyzed, the sign itself may become more independent of the schematic construction from which it developed. This is described as *emancipation*. There is less motivation for a new usage to resemble its parent form. More grammaticalized uses often show increasing automation and habituation resulting in more generalization of meaning and phonological reduction (Bybee 2003a). Over time, we should see changes that develop autonomously, resulting in more salient differences between the newer and older constructions. For instance, the constituent sources of *be going to* become less accessible after it is phonologically reduced to ‘*gonna*’. Consequently, a new construction becomes more emancipated from older ones.

Another important topic that the usage-based model has introduced to the grammaticalization theory is the effect of frequency and repetition (Boyland 1996, Bybee, 2003b). The melding of morphological boundaries, pragmatic inference, habituation and automatization have all been shown to depend upon the degree of token frequency of a grammaticalizing construction. It is argued that pragmatic strengthening and the development of more generalized functions result in a possible increase in relevant contexts in which a construction may occur. This, in turn, drives up the frequency of use (cf. Myhill 1988, Bybee 2003a&b). The more frequently a construction is used, the more automated it will become, thereby encouraging other processes in grammaticalization.

Thus far I have discussed important topics in grammaticalization theory. One of the main goals of in the theory of grammaticalization has been to determine the specific processes that are involved in the broader picture of how a construction gradually gets from A to B. The kinds of processes that have been recognized in grammaticalization focus on distinct aspects of language: processes involving morphosyntactic and phonological change, processes involved in semantic change, and cognitive processes that underlie both morphosyntactic and semantic change. I will now turn to discuss some of the controversies that have faced grammaticalization theory.

## **2.2 Problems in grammaticalization theory**

Grammaticalization is often defined by beginning and end points, while being described in terms of gradient changes. It refers to multiple semantic, morphosyntactic, and phonological processes of change that are jointly involved in the evolution of a specific construction from more lexical to less lexical and less grammatical to more grammatical (Traugott and Heine 1991). These distinct processes correspond to one another, resulting in the emergence of the functional parts of linguistic coding from more concrete forms. However, the effort to come up with a less vague definition of grammaticalization has lent itself to controversy.

Trying to synthesize the broad view (lexical content becoming grammatical content) with the gradient view (a chain of processes leading to more functional content) has incurred problems. Himmelmann (2004) calls these two perspectives in grammaticalization the ‘box metaphor’ and the ‘process’ metaphor. The box metaphor is depictive of the broad view of grammaticalization in which an item moves from a lexical ‘box’ to a grammatical ‘box’. In the process metaphor, the most important issues in grammaticalization are the gradient processes involved in change toward grammaticality.



The problem with the broad view is that not all grammatical formatives are grammatical in the same way. Many developments are uncontroversial. For example, the emergence of case marking from lexical content fits this definition of grammaticalization well. The emergence of modal auxiliaries is generally accepted as grammaticalization without objection. The development of derivational morphology may still fit a broad definition, but is certainly questionable. Things like emerging spatial prepositions or discourse markers are even more problematic. The broad definition cannot adequately include many of these fringe examples. Yet it is not profitable to just discard any of these developments from the conversation of grammaticalization because all of them are more functional than they once were to some degree. Also many of the same processes can be accounted for in each instance. Where do you draw the line between grammaticalization and other processes of language change? And if things that do not end up as grammatical formatives undergo the same gradient processes of change, what is the relevance of ‘grammaticalization’?

Some linguists have sought to resolve the problems that arise from the broad view of grammaticalization by specifying sets of gradient processes that define a legitimate case of grammaticalization. This has led to differing points of view on the scope of grammaticalization. Some have a more inclusive perspective, expanding their definition to contain the development of linguistic phenomena that are not typically considered to be grammar on the basis that some of the same processes are present. In this approach changes that do not result in a traditional grammatical category still undergo grammaticalization. For instance, discourse markers have been considered attested cases of grammaticalization because some of the core processes can be identified (cf. Traugott 1995b, 2004, Travis 2004). In this perspective the broad view of grammaticalization is defined by the presence of a few specific processes involved.

Others have been more conservative, opting not to expand the term grammaticalization, but rather to develop new kinds of phenomena that contain only some of the processes involved in prototypical cases of grammaticalization. This has led to the introduction of new terms for the development of specific linguistic categories. For instance, Ocampo (2006) argues that the development of discourse makers should be identified as a separate phenomenon. He compares processes involving the development of the Spanish discourse marker *claro* ‘of course’ to Lehmann’s (1985) parameters, and demonstrates that only a few can be accounted for. He then suggests that discourse markers do *not* develop through grammaticalization, but through *discoursivization*. These are seen as distinct processes with distinct sets of parameters. Ajimer (1997) takes a similar approach promoting the process of *pragmaticalization* for the development of pragmatic markers. From this perspective, the broad view of grammaticalization is defined by specific sets of parameters that are involved and different sets of processes represent different broad definitions.

The logical conclusion of becoming overly concerned with defining the appropriate set of processes in grammaticalization is quite messy. The specific pathway of change for something like a passive marker will be different than that of case marking, and case marking will be different from an auxiliary. The gradient processes realized in each emerging construction will vary to one degree or another. Therefore, if we are strict with defining specific types of emerging constructions based on different sets of processes we could come up with a new ‘ization’ for every kind of grammatical formative. To be sarcastic, one may eventually argue for things like ‘*prepositionalization*’ or ‘*caseization*’. With a bit of exaggeration you could end up with as many terms for kinds of evolving constructions as there are instances of it. I am not trying to discount

the value of understanding what specific processes occur in each developing construction, but refining our broad definitions should not be the objective of identifying specific processes.

The elusiveness of any solid definition of grammaticalization has led to a debate about whether grammaticalization as a theory has any warrant at all. Joseph (2001) calls this confusion “the process question”. He notes that there seems to be some uncertainty as to whether grammaticalization is *a* process in the broad view or a *series* of processes in the gradient view. This potential deficiency had been addressed by early proponents of grammaticalization. For instance, Hopper (1991) writes that ‘we should expect that distinctive “principles of grammaticalization” can be formulated only to the extent that regularities in language can in principle be isolated which are unambiguously grammatical” (1991:21). He later confirms that his own principles ‘are not the exclusive domain of grammaticalization, but are common to change in general’ (1991:32). In their introduction to the book in which Hopper’s article was published, Traugott and Heine emphasize that grammaticalization is a subset of language change in which many other processes are involved, but none are exclusively involved in grammaticalization. They refer to these phenomena as ‘mechanisms that make change possible, but none are restricted to grammaticalization and *all* are independent of the unidirectionality associated with grammaticalization’ (1991:7). Around the turn of the century many scholars had taken a polemical stance, arguing that if all the processes involved in grammaticalization are independent variables in language change in general, grammaticalization has no theoretical significance. (Newmeyer 1998, Campbell 2001a&b, Fischer 2007).

It seems that the combative position to discard grammaticalization theory may be based on a misunderstanding of what most scholars in grammaticalization theory have intended to accomplish. I would suggest that apart from a few linguists who have endeavored to be strict

about which set of parameters is indicative of true grammaticalization, the premise that grammaticalization is *a* process as an independent phenomenon in language change has rarely been maintained. Indeed, Traugott, one of the main proponents of grammaticalization theory, responded to the influx of critical studies around the turn of the century, reaffirming that grammaticalization is not intended to be treated as a distinct phenomenon, nor unidirectionality as absolute.

I do not want to claim that grammaticalization is a distinct phenomenon – it isn't. Broadly speaking, and in the most neutral terms possible, it's a subset of cross-linguistically recurring changes, that involve correlations across time between semantic morphosyntactic (and sometimes also) phonological changes. I also do not intend to argue that grammaticalization is irreversible – that is far too strong. My intention is to show that grammaticalization is a hypothesis about a robust tendency. (Traugott 2001:1)

She argues that the non-exclusivity of any mechanism in grammaticalization should not cause us to make a pendulum swing in the other direction so as to ignore the overwhelming propensity of certain phenomena to correlate and lead to similar results. Recognizing this mitigates the need to spend our efforts on deciding what is or is not 'real' grammaticalization or whether or not we want to call grammaticalization a phenomenon or an epiphenomenon.

The controversy around the process question is based on the assumption that if a linguist refers to grammaticalization as 'a process', they believe that it is an independent phenomenon in language change. However, this is probably not the case. I see no problem with referring to grammaticalization as *a* process. For example, moving to a new home can be called '*a* process' without denying the relevance of all of the processes that may or may not be involved in doing so. The process of moving into a new home is not going to be the same in every instance. The destination will not always be the same either. This does not deny that there are certain processes that tend to occur together (renting a truck, carrying objects, etc.). There is only a problem if one

says that ‘moving into an apartment’ is not ‘moving into a new home’ because it does not involve the process of setting up lawn equipment. The same can be said for grammaticalization and the processes involved in it. Most studies have regarded grammaticalization as an umbrella term which embodies several processes that co-occur, or are affected by one another. It is the realization of several interconnected cognitive, semantic, morphosyntactic and phonological changes on linguistic content through which the more functional parts of a language are realized. The ‘mechanisms’, ‘elements’, ‘parameters’ or ‘principles’ that are often identified in the grammaticalization process are what is actually happening, and any given instance of change will involve some of these processes, but rarely all of them.

The problem of clarifying the broad definition of grammaticalization had rightly centered upon determining the relationship between the most salient extremes: grammaticalization and lexicalization. There is merit in seeing a distinction in the processes identified with lexical change and grammatical change. Certainly the word *glass*, ‘clear solid material’ developing the meaning ‘cup’ does not have the same kind of formal changes as, say, Latin *a* and *de* becoming oblique case marking in French – the phenomenon that Lehmann (1985) used to illustrate his model of grammaticalization. If we compare these two extremes, there is little trouble in deciding which exemplifies lexicalization and which exemplifies grammaticalization. However, the difference between the use of *glass* and the use of derivational morphology like *-ing* is not as extreme as the difference between *glass* and inflectional marking like *-s* to indicate 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbs. Derivational morphemes like *post-* or *re-* lie somewhere in between *glass* and *-ing* on a scale from lexicality to grammaticality. When these kinds of developments come into the picture, coming up with either/or approaches to grammaticalization and lexicalization is not that easy.

As a consequence, many scholars have sought to develop models with lexicalization and grammaticalization as narrow general processes that occur within the same emerging construction (Wischer 2000, Lehmann 2002b, Rostila 2004, Himmelmann 2004). These approaches represent a growing trend in which constructions take center stage. Both grammaticalization and lexicalization play a role in the bigger picture of emerging constructions. The way in which one goes about interpreting these processes is contingent on the model of syntax to which one adheres. As construction grammar models have begun to have a greater presence in models of language change, grammaticalization theory has naturally begun to conform to new axioms. For this reason, I will now discuss developments in construction grammar and describe the particular tradition which, I believe, provides the most accurate representation of linguistic structure, and thus, the most beneficial grounds for analyzing language change. I will then return to the question of grammaticalization and lexicalization in the emergence and evolution of constructions according to more recent models.

### **2.3 Construction grammar**

Construction grammar models have developed in contrast to early structuralist approaches in which language is stored in discrete and minimal modules from which complex structure is formulated (cf. Fillmore et al. 1988, Noonan 1999). In structuralist models, the lexicon with maximally simple phonetic and semantic representations, along with morphological, syntactic and phonological rules, are all discrete systems that function together in order to generate linguistic expression. An unlimited number of complex sentences can be composed from a set of minimally stored lexemes which are combined in novel ways by the application of stored grammatical and phonological rules. Croft describes such models of syntax as building-block

models, in which the simplest elements are stacked together to build up complex structure (Croft 2010b).

The stage was set for construction grammar models when Fillmore et al. (1988) demonstrated that many idioms that had not been accounted for by formalist models required more attention. They note that some idioms have both fixed elements and schematic elements. For example, [X *let alone* Y] (e.g. *he can't swim let alone scuba dive*) is an idiom including the fixed element *let alone*, but it also contains open slots X and Y and a hierarchical relationship between these elements such that ‘if not X even less Y’ as seen in (6).

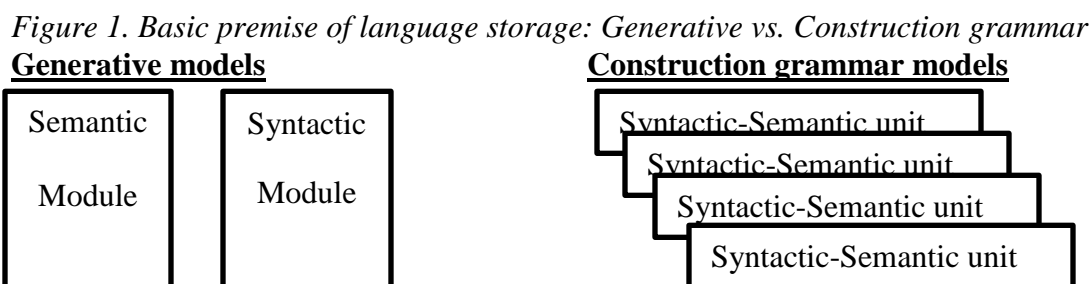
(6) *I don't eat fish, let alone sushi*  
                   X  Y

In (6), the fixed element *let alone* draws a relationship between not eating fish and not eating sushi. If I do not like eating fish, then I like eating sushi less. This ‘idiom’ uses the proposition in X as evidence for the proposition in Y. From the example of *let alone*, it was demonstrated that some idioms contain both specific and schematic elements. Fillmore et al. argue that the complex structure and productivity of idioms challenge the assumption that idioms are merely an exception to the rule. Rather, these idiomatic patterns should inform our models of how language is structured. And since such idioms represent structures that cannot fit into either the lexicon or the grammatical system, they undermine many principles of generative grammar. This pioneering study by Fillmore et al. encouraged many to take the storage of complex units of form and function for granted.

Fillmore et al. rightly noticed that there are innumerable complexities in the language that cannot be systematically accounted for by positing a broad system of ‘words’ and ‘rules’. Formally, idioms had been considered to merely be multiword units that are stored in the lexicon

like big words. But if idioms like *let alone* contain schematic elements, the implication would be that syntax is *also* stored in the lexicon just like words. What makes these idioms even more problematic is that they are not as uncommon as some might wish they were. It has been made evident that not addressing these complex anomalies will result in an enormous quantity of language being discarded into the ‘idiom’ bin, while underestimating just how productive and ubiquitous forms really are (cf. Erman and Warren 2000).

In many ways, construction grammar has been the answer to the problems addressed by Fillmore et al. (1988). It takes the composition of complex idioms to be exemplary of language structure all together. Semantic parts and syntactic parts of language are not distinct modules, but rather meaning and form are stored together in distinct units that are independent from other form-meaning pairs (cf. Goldberg 1995, Croft 2001). Figure 1 gives an extremely basic illustration of generative models and construction grammar models’ different perspectives on language storage.



In contrast to generative approaches which see all semantics stored in a distinct module and all syntactic rules to be stored in a distinct grammatical system, construction grammar sees meaning and structure to be stored together in individual units. All linguistic units are uniform in structure (Croft and Cruse 2004) Just as individual words are semiotic form-meaning pairs, syntactic patterns are paired with meaning as well. Words and syntactic patterns only differ in degrees of schematicity and idiomaticity. In place of a repository of words which are built up



through structural rules, there is a repository of constructions that contain their own syntactic procedures and functions (Goldberg 1995, 2006, Croft 2001). Langacker (1987, 2008) defines these two basic components of all constructions as a phonological pole and a semantic pole. To demonstrate the difference in interpretation between structuralist models and construction grammar models consider sentences (7) and (8).

(7) *John drove around the block.*

(8) *John drove Bob home.*

In these two sentences different things are happening. In (7) *John* has no particular destination. He simply spent time driving. Therefore, *drove* indicates managing a vehicle. However, in (8) *John* went to a particular destination for a particular purpose of transporting *Bob* to his home. In this sentence *drove* indicates transporting someone somewhere with a vehicle. If one maintains the formalist axiom that meaning is maximally compositional, these sentences pose a problem, because the verbal meaning is different in each case, despite the fact that the same verb is used. In (7) and (8) the syntactic structure seems to be contributing some meaning independent of the verb. Rather than the verb importing meaning to the sentence, the meaning of the verb is governed by the argument structure.

Some linguists account for the differences between (7) and (8) by positing a kind of sense extension in the verbal semantics which is stored autonomously for each verb that may permit certain morphosyntactic constructions, in this case *drive* permits the transitive and intransitive (cf. Pinker 1989; Rappaport Hovav & Levin 1998). It is argued that any given verb will have different senses stored for when it is in a transitive or intransitive sentence. However, proponents of construction grammar have argued that verbal meaning inadequately accounts for polysemy in varying argument structures, and it ignores the semantic similarities of all instances of particular

argument structures (Goldberg 1995). In this model the distinction in meaning between (7) and (8) is a result of meaning associated with the different *argument structure constructions* in which the verb is used. In (7) the schematic construction [AGENT MOTION LOC] is distinct from [AGENT TRANSPORT OBJ LOC]. These are independently stored units that contribute general semantic features to any verb that fills each unique schematic slot. When *drive* is used in the construction shown in (8), the action of driving is understood in a specific relationship between the slot-fillers John and Bob, namely A transporting O somewhere. What is a purely syntactic construction in formal models is a form-meaning pair. Even when different constructions fill the schematic slots, the meaning of the schema still applies, e.g. *John flew Bill to San Francisco, Sally walked her dog around the neighborhood.*

Goldberg (2006) identifies constructions as being on a continuum from highly idiomatic to highly schematic. Some constructions are more idiomatic and fixed while others are much more schematic and open. Individual words and ‘substantive idioms’, e.g. *the whole nine yards, kick the bucket* (Fillmore et al. 1988), are on the idiomatic end of the continuum. Argument structure constructions, e.g. [NP V], [A CAUSE P *to* INF] (cf. Goldberg 1995, Croft 2012) are on the opposite end of the continuum. In between these two extremes there are ‘schematic idioms’ (Langacker 1987) or ‘formal idioms’ (Fillmore 1988) like [X *let alone* Y] or [*be worth* V-ing *for*], which contain both fixed and schematic elements. The makeup of constructions along this continuum is the same. They only vary in degrees of fixedness and schematicity of the formal elements and degrees of concrete and subjective meaning that is associated with those elements.

A necessary premise in construction grammar is that the mind is much less economical than it had previously been supposed to be. A theory that posits such an elaborate model of language storage has invited some criticism, because it appears to require the cognitive load in

storing a language to be inconceivably large. Fischer (2007) addresses this issue nicely as it arises in her analogical model:

A putative disadvantage of an analogical system such as proposed here would be that one needs more fine-grained lexical categories (based on semantic and formal criteria) and more construction types or schemas. Pulvermüller (2002:192-93), however, expects that the number of lexical categories would not exceed one hundred. In his proposal of a neuronal grammar, he reckons that a few millions connections linking input units would be necessary (starting from the assumption that about 100,000 input sets are needed for lexical items), and since “most cortical neurons have above  $10^4$  synapses, the large number of connections should not constitute a problem” (p. 193). It is interesting in this connection to quote Baayen (2003: 230), who suggests that the logical-formal rule models of language (like the Chomskyan one) are a product of the fact that computers in the sixties did not have enough memory capacity, and so the linguists working with these models “elevat[ed] economy of storage to a central theorem”. (p.349)

Fischer notes that there is no neurological evidence to suggest tight limitations to the mind’s capacity to store information. The parallels that had been drawn between computer function and the mind led to models of maximum economy in neurological storage in accordance with the limitations of computer systems half a century ago. However, advancements in neurology suggest that the capacity of human memory is much greater (Pulvermüller 2002). Findings in language use conform to this. Indeed completely unique meaning is connected to formal structures with very subtle differences, e.g. *to show up* ‘arrive’ vs. *to show him up* ‘do better than him’, *to get back* ‘return’ vs. *get him back* ‘to repay’, *to hold up* ‘wait’ vs. *to hold it up* ‘rob a bank’. In each of these instances entirely different uses are indicated by simply adding an object. From a construction grammar perspective these examples represent instances in which the same fixed elements have idiomatized in different argument structure constructions. Entirely unique, holistically stored elements emerge. There is no reason to be perplexed by the complexities seen in language on the principle of economy.

That being said, the particular model of construction grammar that is maintained here is Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001, 2013) which suggests that all grammar is construction-specific, and complex structure is basic. This model conforms to findings in Gestalt psychology that the mind perceives intake holistically, independent of the compositionality of that intake (cf. Smith 1988). Gestalt theory has focused primarily of visual perception noting that people conceptualize a whole image before perceiving the elemental features of its makeup. Similarly, Croft argues for the same conceptual principle in linguistic representation. Speech events are perceived at the highest level of complexity rather than the building up from elemental features. In this approach it is incomplete to talk about grammatical formatives as existing in and of themselves. There are only grammatical formatives for specific schematic constructions, and the meaning of those individual formatives is derived from the whole of the construction.

One important concern in construction grammar is to understand how constructions are combined and to understand the relationship between morphology and syntax. For Fillmore et al., Goldberg and Croft, not only are words constructions, but morphemes like *-ing*, *-ed*, *re-* are constructions in their own right as well (e.g. Goldberg 2006:5). At every level there are constructions. While I believe she is right to note that these are form-meaning pairs, I suggest this is not the whole story. Very few words or ‘bound’ morphemes are used independent of other forms. The exception would be things like backchannels or imperatives, and in these cases independence from other forms can be perceived as a particular formal element of the construction. All bound morphemes should be understood as fixed elements connected to meaningful and structured schematic slots.

Croft and Cruse (2004) note that bound morphemes have many parallels with schematic idioms. There is little structural makeup that can distinguish the two. They argue that bound

morphemes can be understood as fixed, idiomatic elements of constructions. In that sense *-ing* is not a construction, but rather it is part of a construction. The schematic elements are just as significant as the fixed parts of constructions. A clearer representation of a construction containing the fixed form *-ing* is [V-*ing*] with a finite open slot. It is finite because the elements that fill that slot tend to be fixed verbal constructions and not just anything. It is therefore more fixed than the schematic slots of an argument structure construction like [A *be* B], where highly idiomatic constructions and even complex schematic constructions can fill the slots A and B slots, e.g. [He]<sub>A</sub> *was* [happy]<sub>B</sub> vs. [*Writing a thesis*]<sub>A</sub> *is* [*the hardest thing I have ever done*]<sub>B</sub>.

Also [V-*ing*] is a unique construction that simply marks an action as a referring expression. It fills the argument slots of other constructions. Yet this is a different construction than [SBJ *be* V-*ing*], e.g. *I am buying a dog*. While both of these have the elements V-*ing* in common, there is a unique meaning for [*be* V-*ing*] to indicate a progressive action or a future action. In this case [V-*ing*] is not really filling a slot in [*be* V-*ing*]. These are more like homophones. As [V-*ing*] filled the schematic slot of [*be* X], it idiomatized into a unique construction. This construction is stored independent of any of its elemental components, including the schema [V-*ing*] as a slot filler in other schematic construction. We see the same thing happening at all levels, from lexical words to functional prosodic patterns. So whether it be [*dog*], [*re-V*] or [NP CAUSE NP *to* INF], we have essentially the same phenomena occurring.

In summary, construction grammar represents a large shift away from generative models of lexicon and grammar. In place of a repository of lexemes and rules being built in complex ways, complex structure is basic, and individual parts are interpreted by the constructions in which they appear. Both grammar and lexicon reflect a semiological relationship between form and meaning (Langacker 1998). Representation in the phonological pole of constructions varies

on a continuum from idiomatic elements to schematic elements, and in the semantic pole on a continuum from lexical meaning to functional meaning. This perspective presents a big shift in the way language is analyzed. The extent of change needed is illustrated well in Croft's suggestions for how descriptive grammars should be organized:

Sections devoted to grammatical categories – a common way to organize grammatical descriptions – should instead be devoted to the constructions which are used to define those categories: sections on parts of speech should be replaced by sections on constructions expressing propositional acts (referring expressions, predication constructions, modifying/attributive constructions), sections on grammatical relations such as Direct Object should be replaced by sections on argument structure constructions ...sections on different types of modifiers such as Adjectives, Numerals, etc. should be replaced by sections on attributive constructions, and so on. Generalizations defined in terms of grammatical categories are replaced by distributional analysis of the units whose distribution is determined by the constructions in question. (2013:218-219)

The main purpose of this statement is to demonstrate the changes that should take place in describing a language when construction grammar is adopted. In the same way, a model of grammaticalization that truly conforms to construction grammar requires substantial modifications.

## **2.4 Grammaticalization, lexicalization or constructionalization?**

As I noted in the introduction, the notion of a construction is not new to grammaticalization. It had not only been recognized that forms involving multiple elements can change together. In addition to this, the relevance of context around a changing form was also an important axiom in grammaticalization theory early on. Lehmann's principle of *scope*, which he defines as 'the extent of the construction which [a grammaticalizing item] enters or helps to form' (Lehmann 1985:306) had captured key aspects of construction grammar before it was explicitly formulated. However, his perspective of constructions at the time seems to be more focused on the morphosyntactic patterns in which constituents combine rather than the organization of

independent units. It was primarily a syntactic principle, and not that of form-meaning pairs. Nonetheless, it demonstrates that an item undergoes the change in a particular morphosyntactic context. The notion of scope in grammaticalization affords us an explanation for the limits of grammaticalization. For example, it helps us to understand why a development of the fixed form *gonna* into a future modal was confined to *be going to*, where *go* must take a gerund inflection, followed by the *to*-infinitive marker and preceded by *be*. *\*I'm gonna the store* is likely to sound unnatural because *gonna* is not merely the phonological reduction of *going to* in any context, but only where these elements have a particular meaning in the scope of a particular context. While the notions of agglutination of multiple particles and context have been present in grammaticalization theory, the turn of the century saw an increased interest in construction grammar as a principled framework for grammaticalization theory.

For instance, Lehmann (2002a) readdresses the issue of constructions in grammaticalization, positing that grammaticalization can occur with no overt sign ever existing. One example he uses is English complementation; see (9) and (10).

(9) *Irvin apologized, He didn't hit me on purpose.*

(10) *Irvin said he didn't hit me on purpose.*

He suggests that verbs of speaking as seen in (10) have become syntactically connected to the proposition that follows as a single construction, as a result of the frequent juxtaposition of expressions similar to the ones exemplified in (9). Lehmann postulates that this association may occur without any kind of change in overt formatives. Based on such examples he argues that the grammaticalization of any particular item within a construction is a consequence of the grammaticalization of the *whole* construction. He reorganizes his model of grammaticalization

theory to accommodate both changes from schematic elements to idiomatic ones and the formation of a new syntactic pattern.

‘the term ‘grammaticalization’ is used here not (only) for the transition from the analytic to the synthetic construction, i.e. the agglutination process, but is explicitly applied to the formation of an analytic construction.’ (Lehmann 2002b:6)

Lehmann argues that new organizations of combining constituents (analytical constructions) emerge through grammaticalization in addition to independent fixed elements fusing together (synthetic construction). In this proposition, he describes analytical developments and synthetic developments as processes that happen to different constructions. While grammaticalization and lexicalization are not seen as complete opposites, they are still seen as somewhat binary processes with ‘broad view’ definitions (see section 2.2).

‘There are processes of unification which do not involve the development of one element of the combination into a grammatical formative and which are therefore not regarded as grammaticalization. Second, such processes are called lexicalization.’

(Lehmann 2002a:18)

In this perspective, if the change does not take the path to become analytical, it is only lexicalization. Lexicalization constitutes a broader set of processes that includes everything except change into a grammatical formative. Grammaticalization refers to more specific changes in which something becomes grammatical. Things like derivational morphology would not be considered cases of grammaticalization even though many of the same processes associated with grammaticalization may be observable in their development. Nevertheless, Lehmann does not see lexicalization and grammaticalization as completely dichotomous. Unlike more traditional views, these are complementary processes in that lexicalization is the precursor to grammaticalization. It creates the conditions for components to undergo grammaticalization. In



Lehmann's (2002a&b) model, lexicalization occurs without grammaticalization, but grammaticalization is always preceded by processes of lexicalization.

Himmelmann (2004) presented a similar approach to Lehmann's within a more explicit construction grammar framework. He takes a complementary view of grammaticalization and lexicalization as well. However, Himmelmann takes a more narrow view of grammaticalization and lexicalization as particular processes in the bigger picture of developing constructions. Lexicalization and grammaticalization are different aspects of change that occur in a single evolving construction. Grammaticalization is relegated specifically to scope extension or 'host-class expansion' within a construction. Lexicalization represents changes in which elements become more fixed within a construction. He argues that without a narrow definition of grammaticalization, its theoretical value falls into complete obscurity. Himmelmann presents *conventionalization* as the overarching phenomenon of evolving constructions. Constructions do not grammaticalize, nor do they lexicalize. Constructions *conventionalize*, and the elements within the construction either lexicalize or grammaticalize. Based on Himmelmann's interpretation, processes of narrowing in scope and the fusion of elements are not a result of grammaticalization but lexicalization, while grammaticalization is a process whereby a schema expands. Conventionalization will contain both. Thus, the conventionalization of constructions is the bigger picture, and it is characterized by the lexicalization and grammaticalization of specific parts within a complex unit.

The interest in bringing grammaticalization theory in line with findings in construction grammar has led to other models as well. Two significant studies that were a conduit to the formulation of diachronic construction grammar were presented by Diewald and Heine's chapters in Wischer and Diewald (2002). Though opting for different terminology, Diewald and

Heine develop similar frameworks for understanding the harmony between grammaticalization processes and constructions. The main premise of both papers is that the grammaticalization of a form is driven by changes in context types. Both models present different categories of contexts that motivate semantic change in grammaticalization. They argue that there is a particular context type in which an evolving form grammaticalizes. For Diewald this is called the *critical context*. Heine calls this the *switch context*.

In Diewald's model there are three stages of change that are enacted by three different kinds of morphosyntactic context. The initial context that precedes grammaticalization is called the *untypical context*. The untypical context presents the potential for untypical interpretations of a form. This context only sets the stage for grammaticalization. The untypical context is followed by the critical context. The critical context is the morphosyntactic situation in which multiple interpretations of a form are possible. This context marks the starting point of grammaticalization. Out of all the ambiguous readings of a form in the critical context, one will emerge as the grammaticalized construction. In Diewald's example of German modals, critical context is a specific organization of elements in which only the six different verbs that would become modals began to appear in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. No other verbs occurred in the critical context. It presents a situation in which a particular modal meaning will emerge for each modal as a distinct construction. The grammaticalization process is then completed with the rise of *isolating contexts* in which there is no longer an ambiguous reading. Only a grammatical interpretation is possible.

One significant difference between Diewald and Heine's approaches is that Diewald is concerned with the effect of context on a grammaticalizing form within the context. Heine posits similar contexts but for the grammaticalization of the whole construction. Also, Heine's contexts

are more concerned with semantic implicatures without the same emphasis on morphosyntactic fixity influencing semantic ambiguity. The concern is still on how lexical uses are lost and a grammatical use emerges through the influence of context. He describes the contexts leading to the grammaticalization as the *bridging context*. The bridging context encompasses both the untypical context and the critical context of Diewald's model. Heine is more interested in what follows the bridging context. Heine describes this as the switch context. It marks the first contexts with characteristics that do not allow an older interpretation of a form. The switch context is like the onset of the isolating context for Diewald's model. For Heine, this is the point at which a form grammaticalizes. The switch context is followed by *conventionalization* in which the new form becomes less and less like the original form.

For Diewald and Heine, 'context' is used interchangeably with 'construction'. It is important to note, however, that a construction is not merely 'context' in the sense of independent units taking on a particular organization. Consistently re-occurring patterns of forms surrounding a newly emerging formative are indicative of a unique construction that already exists in the language. Constructions are more than just the context of a form, they are structured units. One example of this is English -s marking a possession relationship. It could be argued that the 'context' of this form is the noun which it suffixes and marks as possessor with the possessum follows it. However, the form to which it is suffixed and the form that follows are not just context. They are the schematic elements of the stored entity [POSSESSOR-s POSSESUM]. Hence in expressions like [*Billy, John and Freddy's house*] or [*The guy that lives down the street's dog*] the fixed element -s is connected to the end of whatever construction fills the possessor schematic slot, and not the specific element that can be identified as the possessor. The schematic slots that occur with the fixed element -s in [POSSESSOR-s POSSESUM] are integral

parts of the phonological pole of the construction. ‘Construction’ in this sense goes beyond mere context of a grammaticalizing form. New contexts are not just driving the emergence of a new construction. New contexts *are* the emergence of a new construction. More important than understanding how new contexts affect how a particular form is know how the new ‘contexts’ ever come about.

Nevertheless, both of these studies had an impact on future construction grammar models of language change. Adopting the context models of Diewald and Heine eventually led to the notion of *constructionalization* as the process whereby a new construction emerges (Traugott 2012). Traugott builds her model under the heading ‘diachronic construction grammar’ which was presented by Noël (2007). It is argued that *grammatical constructionalization* occurs in Heine’s switch context, where older functions of a form are disambiguated. A new construction has not emerged until both semantic and formal changes have been realized. This comes about as a result of ‘micro constructions’ or individual instantiations of a construction with ambiguous interpretations in Diewald’s critical context. The micro-constructions in the critical context are ‘critical uses’ that culminate in grammatical constructionalization. Grammaticalization is divided into two categories, reduction (GRED) and expansion (GE). With these two categories, all processes that relate to coalescence and formal condensation are distinguished from Himmelmann’s (2004) notion of host-class expansion. Heine’s use of *conventionalization* is adopted as a post-constructionalization process in which a new construction becomes more unique.

Traugott argues that an evolving form cannot be considered a new construction unless there is formal evidence that all possible ambiguity of another interpretation is eliminated. Noticeable meaning change is not enough. For example, even though there are clear examples of

*be going to* for future meaning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it is argued that it has not become a new construction until there is not only a semantic criterion to prove a future use of the form, but syntactic proof as well. She argues that the earliest unambiguous syntactic evidence of *be going to* as a future marker is with existential *there* as the subject argument, thereby concluding that *be going to* has not become a construction for another 100 years, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

It seems that the push toward diachronic construction grammar recognizes a valid problem, namely that there has been too much disconnection between construction grammar and grammaticalization theory. But it seeks to resolve the problem by emphasizing fine-grained dichotomies in formal change. There is overwhelming attention placed on identifying what is happening at a stage that is almost entirely consequential to the more relevant steps in the emergence of a new construction. It still does not address the fundamentals of change in constructions. The focus has shifted to elevate the relevance of constructionalization which is explicitly detailed as a post-meaning change process (Traugott 2012:7). There is a sense in which meaning change is under-emphasized. While analogy is adopted as the primary mechanism of change, relatively little consideration is put into specifying exactly how semantic change by analogy fits into the picture, or why it should be elevated above other processes of semantic change that have already been accounted for.

Traugott's model of constructionalization is based the criterion of analyzability. This seems reasonable, considering that the most common grounds for identifying holistically stored word-strings is when the semantics of the whole string does not match the composition of the individual parts (Goldberg 1995, Bybee 2006). For instance, Lehmann posits that *want to* should not be considered part of the grammatical system on the basis that it follows the same syntactic patterning as something like *I intend to write* (2002b:121). There is no doubt that a form is

holistically stored when it cannot be decomposed. But if we only consider that which does not allow for an analytical reading to be idiomatic, we fall short of recognizing the full extent of holistically stored content. I would go so far as to suggest that anything that can rightly be identified as a collocation is, in fact, an idiomatic part of a particular construction that happens to be compositional. Often compositionality in idiomatized forms is a reflection of a construction's origin. This fact easily lends itself to the metalinguistic conclusion that it is accessed analytically. However, I suggest it is not always indicative of the conceptual processing that is actually employed in language use.

An expression like *before my very eyes* may be considered analyzable. It is a prepositional phrase with an object modified by an attributive adjective and a personal pronoun. Everything seems to fit in place. However, the collocation *very eyes* is almost always preceded by *before* and a possessor noun<sup>2</sup>. What we actually find is a construction with idiomatized parts and a semi-open slot, [*before* POSS *very eyes*]. Also the construction [*be pretty* ADJ] (e.g. *that's pretty cool*), though it may not be apparent at first glance, is probably stored as an independent construction. This can be seen by the fact that it is only used positively; it sounds strange to say something like *\*that's not pretty cool*<sup>3</sup>. These differences may only be accounted for by acknowledging the tremendous amount of idiomaticity even in analyzable constructions. I personally see no reason to believe that even complex social situations cannot be habituated and stored as conceptual whole. If it is so, even expressions like '*I was thinking the same thing.*', '*[Have you ever been to X]*' and countless other linguistic expressions that have occurred with some repetition are not accessed compositionally at all, despite the fact that they are

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<sup>2</sup> 213/222 occurrences in the COCA follow this schema. The other nine are all in prepositional phrases (e.g. *in front of their very eyes*), which also indicates a narrowing of the schematic slot to a strong exemplar for *before*.

<sup>3</sup> There are no examples of [*not pretty* + ADJ] in the COCA.

decomposable. Such expressions would fit the criterion for idioms in Fillmore et al. (1988), i.e. encoding idioms (can be interpreted by those who have never heard them) and grammatical idioms (follows a typical grammatical patterns in the language). In general, the mind stores and accesses language holistically wherever possible.

That being said, it is important to understand that something can be holistically stored and compositional at the same time. There is no need for a strong dichotomy between these two. Langacker (1987) refers to treating compositional and holistic interpretations of a construction as mutually exclusive as the rule/list fallacy. Any of the parts in one holistically stored construction can be connected with a form in another construction or a different schema. We do this with the most non-decompositional idiomatic construction in the formulation of jokes. For example, ‘*I’ve changed my mind*’, ‘*Good. I hope your new one works better than your old one.*’ (Terban 1992:54). It would not be reasonable to say that [SBJ *change* POSS *mind*] is not idiomatic simply because an analytical interpretation is possible. We should allow for such complexities in human capacity to conceptualize. Few would deny that *rings a bell* is idiomatic, and a use like *that rings a faint bell* will not dissuade anyone from that conclusion. It only demonstrates that something can be holistically stored and maintain the sense of its compositional parts at the same time.

Another concern with Diewald and Heine’s approach, and consequently Traugott (2012) as well, is the argument that context *allows* a certain meaning to be interpreted. Heine refers to it as ‘context-driven’ change (2002:83). This top-down approach does not fit with typical suppositions for the emergence of linguistic structure. Their premise subtly presupposes a model of information retrieval through syntactic procedures as discussed earlier, and is not construction-based in this respect. For instance, Diewald presents the isolating contexts as the morphosyntactic parameters that cause a grammaticalizing form to be interpreted in a certain new

way. It is argued that through new contexts separate meanings emerge. Diewald describes the isolating context as the context in which a listener has to ‘resort to inferencing procedures, to conversational implicatures, as there [is] no other way to process this structure in a routinized way’ (2002:112). This conclusion assumes that evolving constructions go through a stage of instability. Lack of clarity and ambiguity in the way a form can be interpreted are considered primary factors in the development of new meaning. This interpretation is oriented toward the listener, but it does not account for how a speaker might ever begin to *use* these patterns in the first place. Secondly, it does not explain how the new contexts ever come about. It does not seem reasonable or necessary to assume that language users in between an older construction and new one are somehow confused about the language that *they themselves* are using.

Other theoretical movements have sought to understand how grammaticalization fits with construction grammar. One such approach I have already mentioned is Himmelmann (2004). Indeed, Traugott’s (2012) model included one component of Himmelmann’s approach by adopting his specific definition of grammaticalization. However, her model does not maintain Himmelmann’s notion of conventionalization. Yet, with conventionalization, Himmelmann captures the bigger picture of evolving constructions. It deals with the issue of what it means for new ‘contexts’ to emerge. This is a more vital concern than how new contexts affect a particular form.

Some of the important features addressed by Himmelmann have also been proposed in other approaches to the grammaticalization of constructions. Bybee (1998, 2003a&b, 2006) has developed a model of grammaticalization that is based on findings in construction grammar that schemas vary in degrees of openness and are connected to fixed elements in complex form-meaning pairs. This looks beyond simple context to see complex constructions as stored entities.



She develops a definition of grammaticalization that is based entirely on the emergence of constructions, and *also* the existence of older constructions from which a new construction emerges. She defines grammaticalization as ‘the creation of new constructions out of a particular instance of an existing construction’ (Bybee 2006:716). This model explains the place of schemas and exemplar strengths that affect those schemas. Constructions emerge out of particular instances of other constructions that may have existed even before particular fixed forms of interest in a new construction were ever present.

From this model, the increase in type frequency corresponds to and increasingly strengthens a schematic slot of a construction; there is an expansion of grammatical status. On the other hand token frequency relates the increased *entrenchment* of a schema and growing fixation of specific elements. This approach addresses the relevance of constructions as complex entities at every point of change; language is seen as a productive and structured phenomenon at each stage of a construction’s evolution. Fischer (2008) adopts a similar view, suggesting that type frequency results in the strengthening and expansion of schematic slots, and token frequency results in the strengthening of idiomatic elements.

The effect of usage on the grammaticalization of constructions is modeled by an exemplar model of linguistic storage (Bybee 2001, 2006). From an exemplar perspective, the development of a specific construction’s schema is the same as the development of lexical words. Meaning associated with a particular form is the consequence of our mind’s ability to meld together previous usage events involving that form in an elaborate representation. Representations are built up from remembered linguistic experiences of form in a particular construction. The features that are most frequently experienced when a form is used will be most salient. If a form is fixed and refers to something concrete, like for instance *moon*, then the

meaning associated with the sound /*mun*/ is specific, and the construction is idiomatic. The majority of the uses of *moon* refer to one particular object in the sky. However, for an astronomer this would likely not be the case. His or her linguistic experience with *moon* would be broader, frequently referring to any object orbiting any planet. As a consequence, the most salient features, while still highly concrete, will be less concrete than if it were only used to refer on one particular object.

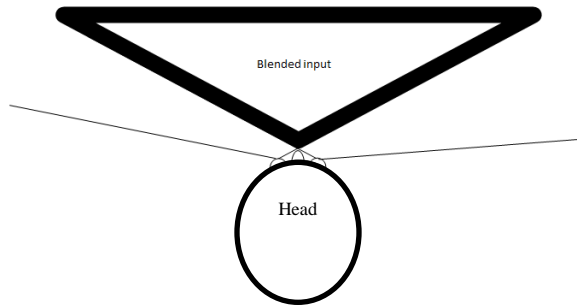
Schematic slots in constructions are built up in the same way. However, the salient features are not specific. Because there is a variety of forms that can fill the slot, the meaning associated with the form will be more abstract, and the form itself may only be a prosodic pattern connected to other elements in the construction. For example, in [V-*ed*]<sup>4</sup> the slot is generalized due the greater variation in the forms filling the V slot, but the meaning associated with that slot still emerges from the generalization of remembered usage events. The result in this case would be a highly generalized meaning connected to the schema for which the most salient properties may be ACTION. At the same time, *-ed* has emerged as a highly idiomatic form with a more specific function of marking a past event.

This blending of input experiences is an important cognitive faculty in general. I suggest that the way in which exemplars are built up is similar to how the brain handles visual input as seen in Figure 2.

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<sup>4</sup> The construction is overly simplified here for the purpose of demonstration. V-*ed* is not really a construction. It is a part of a few different constructions such as [SBJ V-*ed*] or [SBJ have V-*ed*], but may not be a whole stored unit itself.

*Figure 2. Input blending in visual perception*



The brain receives visual input from two eyes. The images in each eye overlap and are obstructed by the nose. The mind receives similar information from two input sources and conceptualizes only one image from the two. I would suggest that the mind essentially does the same thing in exemplar storage. Of the many input sources in usage events, the mind blends those experiences together into a single representation. Depending on the variability in remembered instances, it will be idiomatic or schematic, concrete or functional. In a complex construction, idiomatic and schematic exemplars will be stored together in a structured unit.

Thus, in the case of [V-*ed*] the schematic part of the construction is connected to the idiomatic element *-ed* as part of a whole entity independent of any other construction that fills the schematic slot. As a result, any sound can fill that slot and still have some meaning associated to it by the generalized meaning of the V schema. Novel uses can arise like *He cabinet~~ed~~ his kitchen* to mean ‘he installed cabinets in his kitchen’. If the variability of a schema contracts or is less variable, the result will be a schema that is more lexicalized in that the exemplar representation is likely to contain a greater quantity of outstanding features. This narrowing of variance and entrenchment of schemas is essentially what Lehmann (1985) identified as paradigmization in a construction framework.

If we are to explain lexicon and grammar as being polar ends of the same continuum, it is more appropriate to compare the emergence of fixed elements with the emergence of schematic elements, seeing that constructions are often composed of idiomatic elements and schematic slots together. What has often been neglected is that schemas are stored entities in constructions. To distinguish between the end points being a lexical form and a grammatical form is to focus mainly on the fixed elements of a construction, without much regard to the fact that both lexical words and grammatical markers are of no significance if we do not consider the schematic parts *to which* they are connected or the constructions *in which* they occur. The fact that grammatical forms elicit schematic slots has not been neglected. Yet it is just as important to understand the schematic elements surrounding constructions as far on the opposite end of the continuum as possible, like lexical words. In these instances also, one must account for the makeup of constructions which contain them.

It is important to analyze the elements around bound morphemes because the fixed form is only understood as it relates to other constructions that fill the schematic slot. But schematicity cannot be neglected when looking at more idiomatic and fixed constructions. Most lexical elements occur in particular schemas. If we ignore this fact, we will not have the full story of a particular form. Take for example the differences between *glad* and *happy*. If these are considered to be merely independent lexical constructions there is little distinction between them, and we will likely just call them synonyms. However, if we take into account the nature of the constructions in which these occur, we discover that *glad* has only persisted in English in a few specific schematic constructions. In the 500,000 word Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken English (Du Bois et. al 2000-2005), *glad* never occurs as an attributive adjective, e.g. *a glad*

*person* (0/22). In every use, it only fills particular schematic slots of the few constructions as seen in (11-13).

(11) *at first it was kind of a bummer. ... But, I'm glad I took it.* (SBCSAE 1:572)

(12) JEFF: *Are you guys having fun?*

JILL: *Yes.*

JEFF: ... (TSK) *I'm so glad.*

JILL: (TSK) *Aw,* (SBCSAE 28:45)

(13) *and Missis Wilcox said, .. well I'm so glad to see you,* (SBCSAE 23:1408)

Glad occurs in a fixed backchannel [*I'm* <DEGREE> *glad*] (12), [*SBJ be glad to X*] to indicate a willingness or excitement to do 'X' (13), and [*SBJ be glad X*] to indicate excitement about some event (11). Of all the uses of *glad* in the SBCSAE, 91% (20/22) fit these constructions. The remaining two are the adverb *gladly*. Therefore, *glad* is much more restricted in use than *happy*. *Glad* is used in fewer constructions that contain significant idiomatic structure. These properties cannot be accounted for unless the role that even the most lexical and idiomatic forms play in particular schematic constructions is identified. Based on this approach, all words have a particular place in the constructions that elicit them.

As mentioned earlier, in grammaticalization theory it is often stated that linguistic phenomena are on a continuum between lexical and grammatical content. This has been strongly supported through studies in grammaticalization which demonstrate that functional parts of language evolve from constructions, which are more lexical (cf. Traugott and Heine 1991, Lehmann 2002b, Hopper and Traugott 2003). Those elements which can be identified as being specific have been often been recognized as lexical words; the schematic elements are interpreted as morphosyntax and most everything that falls in between these is considered idiomatic.

While the analogy of a continuum is helpful for understanding the relationship between grammatical and lexical meaning in language, it can also be somewhat misleading. The problem is that it portrays the entire linguistic system along a two dimensional plane. This depiction of language can obscure much of the complexity involved in the relationship between schematic and specific parts of construction. Construction grammar would point to something more multi-dimensional.

I suggest that linguistic constructions are analogous to astronomical star formation. Large diffuse nebulae consist of very small particles that are spread over an enormous area. Within these nebulae, certain areas will begin to condense creating a greater concentration of matter that condenses exponentially and eventually leads to bright stars within the nebulae that are noticeably independent. There are countless diffuse nebulae that are independent of one another, yet within each of them, specific points begin to trigger the same kind of star formation. It is helpful to think of the highly schematic constructions in language as large diffuse nebulae and specific constructions as the stars that form within them. Schematic constructions are open with a lot of variation, but they also provide the environment for the most frequent instantiations to become automated and idiomatize into autonomously stored specific constructions. For example, [*The X-er the Y-er*] is a schematic construction which gives rise to innumerable novel propositions, (e.g. *the richer the happier, the more you study the better you get*) (cf. Fillmore et al. 1988). In this sense, it is like a unique nebula. It stands as an independent form-meaning pair with an infinite range of possibilities. Yet some of those uses will be relatively frequent and develop into holistically idiomatized constructions, like the formation of stars within a nebula, e.g. *the bigger the better, the bigger they come the harder they fall, the more the merrier*. From the evaluative construction [(*it's/thats's*) X], e.g. *it's cool, it's interesting*, idiomatic expressions

like *funny you should ask* and *nice to meet you* emerge. From [*I'm X*], *I'm afraid X* (with particular pragmatic meaning of disappointment to have to inform the interlocutor of X) or *sorry about that* emerge. Collocations like *mom and dad*, *pots and pans* and *kicks and giggles* develop within the schematic construction [*X and Y*]. Like [*The X-er the Y-er*], [*I'm X*], [*It's X*] and [*X and Y*], are all schematic constructions that create the cognitive conditions for more idiomatized constructions to develop. In that sense, there is not a two-dimensional continuum between grammatical constructions and lexical constructions, but a vast array of continua from more syntactic constructions to more idiomatic ones.

Thus schematic entities such as argument structure constructions provide the conditions for the constructions that fill the schematic slots with the greatest salience to idiomatize into new constructions. Although the relationship between lexicon and grammar can be described as polar ends of a continuum, the kinds of structure that emerges is multi-dimensional. Every new construction that emerges has some relation to other constructions in which its elements previously partook of some idiomatic and/or schematic organization. This important part of the story cannot be overlooked.

Taking this model into consideration, the fact that many mechanisms present in traditional grammaticalization are present in other areas of change is not a concern at all. As I mentioned before, Hopper (1991) expressed concern that his own principles were not exclusive to the development of 'grammar'. He does so by demonstrating that the development of *mistress* into *Miss.*, *Mrs.* and *Mr.* has undergone every one of his principles. He then asks the question 'Are such titles to be regarded as part of grammar?' (33). From this perspective, the answer is yes, in as much as it has developed from a single slot filling word into a more unique schematic construction [(*Mrs./Miss/Mr.*) NAME]. In the grammaticalization of *mistress* the argument

structure constructions became entrenched, and the condensing schema was emancipated as a highly fixed unit with only three variable slot fillers emerging. At the same time, the subjectification in meaning led to the emergence of a *new* expanding schema for human proper names in a whole new kind of modifying construction. There is a condensing of a particular slot filler of an old schema, formal reduction of the more fixed elements, and the expansion of a broad schema for human proper names.

If a few words fill a schematic slot of a construction with exceptional frequency, the exemplar cloud for these becomes denser. If repetition continues to increase this may result in the emergence of a new construction with a more specific schema involving only a few slot-fillers. If any single word becomes exceptionally salient, the increasing exemplar strength may cause it to become a fixed idiomatic part of an emerging construction. When schematic slots reduce in variability and fixed elements coalesce it is called *idiomatization*. *Older* schemas of past constructions tend to condense and become more specific. At the other end, *new* schemas elicited within an emerging construction will increase in scope. This is referred to as *schematization*.

An emerging construction has a unique meaning that develops from the composite meaning of the schematic construction and slot-filling construction that idiomatized together. As fixed forms in a construction undergo processes of meaning change through subjectification and pragmatic strengthening, a new emerging meaning may elicit new schematic elements. In the case of [(*Mr./Mrs./Miss*) NAME], the old idiomatizing schema elicited a new schema expanding schema for a proper names. Hence the NAME slot emerged and expanded after the argument slots that *mistress* filled idiomatized and contracted. In turn [(*Mr./Mrs./Miss*) NAME] is a new schematic construction in which the same process occurs resulting in things like *Miss America*.



In the evolution of constructions a schematic construction becomes more specific, while at the same time engendering new schemas that will be subject to the same processes of change in future developments. As a final point for this section, another important issue that does not receive much attention is correctly identifying the nature of a starting point. Heine (2002) notes at the beginning of his article that his interest is to understand that the transition from an early construction at point A to a new construction at point B is a continuous process. Many might suppose that the hard part is trying to figure out what happens between A and B. Yet another difficult aspect is figuring out what A and B even are. Grammaticalization change is not just change of *a* construction. It involves more than one construction in interaction. Certainly it is not enough to only consider *a* grammaticalizing form. However, point A is never *a* grammaticalizing construction either, but the interaction of multiple constructions that lead to the emergence of a new construction that differs in specificity and schematicity; constructions that contain schematically open slots with constructions that fill those schemas. With this holistic view, we can rightly analyze how schemas become increasingly fixed, fixed elements come together, and new schemas expand within unique and complete units. We must continue to advocate a theory of language change that coherently addresses the way in which idiomatic and schematic parts of constructions emerge and how one modern construction may be the consequence of multiple complex constructions evolving together throughout time. In this thesis, I will attempt to give an account for the development of *be about to* from this perspective of evolving constructions.

## Chapter 3

### The emergence of *be about to*

The motivation for studying *be about to* is three-fold. First, it relates to the development of English modal auxiliaries, which is a pervasive theme in grammaticalization theory. Secondly, its close relationship to *be going to*, both in form and function, provides opportunity to consider how different constructions in Present Day English have interacted over time. Thirdly, there is very little empirical data that has been gathered on the development of *be about to*, providing the opportunity to shed light on something of much curiosity. I will begin by looking at an important broad distinction in English auxiliaries from the perspective of evolving constructions (see Section 2.4). Then I will turn to look at work that has been done on *be about to* specifically as it fits in the bigger picture of English auxiliaries. Lastly I will detail the methods and findings of this study.

#### 3.1 Wholesale shifting in English auxiliary class?

It is generally accepted that there are two groups of auxiliaries in Modern English: those which take a bare infinitive and those which take a *to*-infinitive. Auxiliaries that take a bare infinitive are older, while auxiliaries that take *to*-infinitive are newer. Two examples of auxiliaries that take a bare infinitive are *will* and *shall*. These have evolved from the Old English verbs *willan* ‘want’ and *sculan* ‘be required to’. While these were primarily used as lexical verbs in Old English, there is nevertheless evidence of them being used as markers of futurity (cf. Wischer 2006). On the other hand, as far as I am aware, there are no attested uses of constructions like *got to*, *ought to* anywhere in Old English.

Myhill (1995) argues that there has been a shift in the modal classes in the recent history of American English. He compares the use of the modals *will*, *shall*, *should* and *must* with *have to*, *got to*, *ought to*, *can* and *gonna* in written plays from before and after the American Civil War period (1861-1865). He found that the newer modals saw a large jump in frequency in the post-Civil War plays. *Ought to* and *got to* began to be used for strong and weak deontic functions, while *must* and *should* began to shift from deontic to epistemic modality. A phenomenon of this nature could mean that modern auxiliaries must have some relationship to one another, even if they are independent constructions<sup>5</sup>. Studying any one of these emerging auxiliaries in isolation based solely on the constituent parts will not suffice.

Taking up the task of accounting for these changes, Krug (2000) argues that parallels between the new modal constructions such as *have to*, *got to* and *be going to* are part of the same evolving phenomenon. He proposes that a whole new system of modal constructions has, in many ways, undergone the same grammaticalization processes. He says, 'Grammaticalization theory helps to abstract away from a number of seemingly disparate individual developments and reveals a number of striking parallels for the items under investigation.' (Krug 2000:3). In his understanding, there is a larger common denominator that can be drawn between many of these constructions. The specific processes involved in grammaticalization occur to all of these constructions together. These do not represent the grammaticalization of different constructions along different clines; rather a whole new class of modals is emerging through the same grammaticalization process.

Krug suggest that the parallels between these constructions may be accounted for by *gravitation*. This argument is similar to analogical change in grammaticalization which has been

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<sup>5</sup> Myhill suggests that this shift in use could be due to social changes of Post-Civil War culture in addition to linguistic factors. However, he does not widely explore the impact of social changes.

adopted into diachronic construction grammar as a primary mechanism of meaning change (Fischer 2008, Traugott 2012). As a form fits a specific context, it begins to evolve in line with other forms that behave similarly causing new forms to gravitate to the class. A common pattern has been the primary motivator for change in meaning. As with Diewald's (2002) and Heine's (2002) models, Krug's approach presents context as a driving force in the emergence of new constructions.

However, this is not the only possible interpretation. I propose an alternate idea. In Old English there were two different infinitive constructions: (1) the highly productive construction with the suffix *-an* and (2) the inflected infinitive (*to*-infinitive) construction [*to* V-*ne*]. Today, the *to*-infinitive has developed most of the functions for which [V-*an*] was used in Old English, but it was not always so productive. That is to say, around the beginning of the Middle English period there was a large shift in the prominence of these infinitive constructions in which the *to*-infinitive shifted from being less extensive in OE to being extremely far-reaching in ME, while [V-*an*] went from being very extensive in OE to nearly disappearing in ME (cf. van der Gaaf 1931, Haspelmath 1987, Los 2005).

Older auxiliaries with verbs like *willan*, *sculan*, *magan* were already grammaticalizing in the OE period when the *-an* infinitive was most prominent.

- (14) *ne sceal næfre his torn to rycene beorn of his breostum acyþ-an,*  
 not must never his pain too hastily one from his breast reveal  
 'A man must never reveal his pain from his breast too hastily,'<sup>6</sup>  
 (Wanderer: 114, c. 950)

- (15) *þu þine leoda lys-an wille,*  
 you-sg your people liberate will  
 'You will liberate your people.' (The Battle of Maldon: 37, 991)

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<sup>6</sup> Old English texts were translated by myself.

In (14) and (15) we see the Old English verbs that would become the auxiliaries *will* and *shall*. In this construction the infinitive takes the inflection *-an*. As was mentioned earlier, I know of no uses of these auxiliaries with the *to*-infinitive. The *to*-infinitive was much more restricted in the constructions in which it was used, and was much lower in relative frequency throughout Early Old English. The older auxiliaries emerged as unique constructions out of a different schema, [V-*an* (*willan/sculan/magan*, etc.)]. They have not lost *to* from the infinitive. They began to grammaticalize before the *to*-infinitive construction was broadly used in the language and before it was ever closely associated with the verbal schematic slot of argument structure.

The *to*-infinitive construction began to dramatically win out in competition with *-an* infinitive construction, eventually replacing it as structural coding of actions around the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The *-an* infinitive only persisted in a few constructions including the old auxiliaries like *will* and *shall* seen in (14) and (15). In constructions in which this infinitive persisted, the fixed element eventually reduced to nothing, *-an*  $\rightarrow$   $\emptyset$ <sup>7</sup> becoming the ‘bare’ infinitive.

In contrast to the older auxiliaries, forms like *have to*, *got to*, *ought to* and *be going to* began to grammaticalize after the *to*-infinitive had already replaced most of the functions of the *-an* infinitive. The history of the new modals begins with the history of the [SBJ V *to* INTENTION] construction in which they were used (cf. Haspelmath 1989). This being considered, I would suggest that to consider any of these newer auxiliaries to be “semi grammatical” is unhelpful. The formal differences between the old and the new auxiliaries are only a consequence of the point in history and in what constructions they began to develop. In terms of the star-formation analogy presented in Section 2.4, the old and new auxiliaries were born in different nebulae.

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<sup>7</sup> Verbs of high frequency have irregular infinitive forms like *beon* ‘be’ as far back as we can see. By about the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the *-an* ending began to be unsystematically written and interchangeable with the former *-on* ending for present plural verbs (Baker 2012). This is likely due to formal reduction of the vowels and an early sign of its disappearance. While the form has disappeared, the construction did not, again pointing to the need to see schemas as being as important to constructions’ constitution and storage as fixed elements.

Therefore, I would argue that what Krug (2000) identifies as gravitation and what has been adopted by diachronic construction grammar as change by analogy is actually a consequence of forms having originated in and idiomatized from a schematic slot of the same constructions. The formal similarities between these auxiliaries do not exist because they gravitated to the same class, but rather they emerged from the same parent. I would propose that parallels in form and function often signify the emergence of idiomatic constructions away from an older schematic construction. There is actually an old schema from which they have all become and are becoming more autonomous, not a new one to which they are analogically gravitating. The same purposive construction [V *to* INF] that has given ground for the new auxiliaries to emerge has given place for *be about to* as well. It was born in the same nebula. I will now turn to look at work that has been done on *be about to* specifically.

### **3.2 Previous work on *be about to***

There is some disagreement when trying to classify *be about to*. Jirsa (1997) argues that it is tense marking based on the fact that in many uses it indicates an unambiguous temporal meaning to the predicate. Comrie explicitly states that *be about to* cannot rightly be called tense marking because it is not obligatory or fixed (Comrie 1985:95). The most general consensus is that *be about to* is a ‘quasi-modal’, ‘semi-modal’ or ‘semi-auxiliary’ (Quirk & Greenbaum 1985, Biber et al. 1999, Myhill 1995, Krug 2000); it is not a ‘full’ modal on the basis that it still consists of distinct parts that have not undergone phonological reduction or fusion, and because *be* still displays morphological distinctions.

Comrie describes *be about to* as an idiom. The main reason for this is because the remoteness distinction has not become obligatory in English. For every instance in which *about to* could be used to signify immediate future, constructions like *will* and *be going to* can also

indicate immediate future. Admittedly, the remoteness distinctions in English are not as grammaticalized as what may be observed in other languages which have a kind of ‘cutoff point’ where one form is used as opposed to the other. However, I would suggest that from a construction grammar perspective, using this parameter to determine if something is or is not part of grammar is unhelpful. Where are the lines between what can be distinguished as the development of grammar or the development of idioms? And how can one exclude forms like *be about to* from grammar even though they have developed clear grammatical usages? If there is a form-meaning pair that specifically indicates a particular temporal relationship to the verb, there is no reason to cast it aside as being less significant to the grammar of the language simply on the basis that other constructions are used for the same function. Other future auxiliaries like *will* or *be going to* can be used in more contexts because they are ambiguous in regard to remoteness. Bergs (2010) recognizes that most future constructions in English have particular pragmatic distinctions despite being used in similar situations. Based on his findings he goes so far as to question if the debate about whether or not English has future tense marking has any relevance at all.

Others would rather take a middle ground, categorizing *be about to* as a semi-auxiliary because it functions like a future auxiliary, but it has atypical formal structure for auxiliaries. This classification is based primarily on language-specific, morphosyntactic criteria comparing its structure with that of other canonical grammatical constructions, but not on the basis of function. The concern with this, for *be about to* (or any other element with functional meaning), is that it carries the implication that such a construction is less significant to the grammar of a language than other forms. The practical consequence of this conclusion is that it has led many to

exclude *be about to* from their comparative studies (Myhill 1995, Krug 2000, Bergs 2010). The relative absence of any work on *be about to* testifies to this.

However there are legitimate issues that might challenge the ‘status’ of *be about to* in English auxiliary constructions. One relates to a typological improbability. Comrie (1985) notes that asymmetrical remoteness distinctions in tense systems tend to mark only immediate past. A language with only one remoteness distinction that overtly indicates immediate future is not expected at all. If *be about to* represents a grammatical marker of immediate future, then we should expect to see a similar construction developing, or having already developed, for immediate past. One could conclude that *be about to* is not really part of grammar based on this potential irregularity.

However, if one considers the possibility that other historical developments have been neglected on the same grounds as *be about to*, one could determine that *just* has emerged as a tense marker with a remoteness distinction for immediate past as seen in (16).

(16) *I just read an article on him.* (SBCSE 2:32)

In this construction, *just* serves to place the event of reading an article in the recent past in order to communicate that the speaker’s contribution to talking about the person whom the article was written about is relevant. If this is seen as a grammatical marker, together with *be about to* there is a conceptually symmetric system for remoteness distinctions in English.

However, the construction [SBJ *just* V-past] as seen in (16) has its own issues. It probably tends to be dismissed from the analysis of auxiliaries on account of structural differences as well, but not based on the criterion of semantics. I would suggest that the temptation to treat many forms differently from others that appear to function in similar ways is due to the origin of some grammatical constructions in atypical categories. For example, it is easier to understand *be going*



*to* as a grammaticalizing auxiliary because *go* is already prototypical for predicates. Most of the inflections that *go* takes will be lost with the idiomatization of *going*. On the other hand, *just* originated in a modifying construction. Consequently, the formal structural will be quite different in this case from auxiliaries that have grammaticalized from verbs.

For instance, one could argue that *just* is not a modal because the verb still displays the tense marking *-ed*. Auxiliary constructions that have emerged from verbs can naturally lose morphological variation when as the form idiomatizes because the new verbal schema emerges from an infinitival construction which is already highly limited in morphological variation. Alternately, when tense marking evolves from a modifying expression, i.e. *just*, the verbal schema of the construction is not an infinitive, but a prototypical verb that displays more inflections. However, just because the organization of a particular construction is unlike other constructions present in the language does not make it less significant if there are functional properties associated with identifiable structure in each case.

Still another issue is that *just* is extremely frequent and apparently polysemous. It occurs 33 times per 10,000 words (1636/500,000) in the Santa Barbara Corpus of spoken English, and the majority of these uses are not for immediate past. For example:

(17) *He **just** wanted to get close to me.* (SBCSAE 2:592)

In this use, *just* is still contributing something to verbal schema, but its function is more pragmatic. It mitigates the consequences of a particular action or decision. In (17), it is used to simplify the subject's motives for doing something by pointing to an understandable desire that justifies his actions. It could be that *just* is polysemous. However, I would suggest that even though the construction in (17) looks formally identical to (16), i.e. [SBJ *just* V-*ed*], the V

schema associated with these different form-meaning pairs is not identical. For one, the immediate past construction would probably not contain many verbs that are conceptualized as stative or continual events; a verb like *want* is probably not used with any frequency in the V-schema of immediate past construction, while being very frequent in the mitigating construction. Another factor that is not accounted for here is prosody. There are likely different prosodic patterns that are associated with *[just V-ed]<sub>immediate past</sub>* and *[just V]<sub>mitigation</sub>*. Of course, empirical analysis would be necessary to really understand the distribution and structural distinctions between these constructions, but there is reason to suspect that such differences do exist.

In cases like *be about to* and *just*, the identifiable functional meaning associated with identifiable structure in unique constructions undermines the whole paradigm which dismisses many fixed elements into the ‘adverb’ bin. We should not let theoretical constraints cause us to avoid addressing the many complexities that represent a significant part of the linguistic system. When we start recognizing these functional parts that fit into a particular conceptual category, we should question the value of making a discrete systematic distinction between adverbials like *just* and auxiliaries.

This interpretation represents a large shift in traditional methodological goals. It is not a matter of discovering which forms represent true grammatical categories in the language, but to find those expressions that *do* indicate functional categories and empirically understand the complex construction that contains their use (cf. Givón 1981). Grammar is not deduced from a system. Rather we come to understand how language is structured inductively. The objective is to find how language is used to transfer meaning and accomplish goals, not to formulate a properly deduced system for which constructions are the right ones for a particular function. If meaning is expressed in language use, it is part of some construction. If a temporal distinction is

made by any element in that construction, it is a ‘tense’ marker. It is just as relevant as any other means of indicating tense in the language by the simple virtue that one can use it and understand it to mark a temporal relationship. Therefore, the goal of this study is not to determine if or when *be about to* became a real auxiliary. It is simply to recognize the nature of the constructions in which it was involved at different points in time and discover the evolution of constructions that play a part in the emergence of the *be about to* construction that we find in English today.

Apart from a few comments about the status of *be about to* in the grammatical system, there have only been a few detailed studies of *be about to*. I am aware of two studies that deal specifically with its grammaticalization, Jirsa (1997) and Watanabe (2010).

The earlier effort to address the grammaticalization of *be about to* was by Jirsa (1997). The purpose of his study was to understand what diachrony can tell us about synchronic variation. To accomplish this he identifies three distinct uses of *be about to* with meanings that cannot be recovered through the decomposition of its parts. In addition to the immediate future use, he points to variation when the predicate is negated and when *be* is in the past tense.

(18) *I'm **not** about to eat broccoli.* (Jirsa 1997:27)

(19) *He **was** about to hit me* (Quirk and Greenbaum 1985:217)

For (18), the speaker expresses an emphatic unwillingness to consume broccoli by negating *be about to*. The sentence in (19) expresses some element of futurity, but there is also a sense that the action is unfulfilled. Jirsa posits that the differences in use between these cannot be accounted for analytically.

Jirsa argues that an intention usage that developed early on in the grammaticalization of *be about to* is responsible for the meaning of *be about to* when it is negated or in past tense. For

instance, futurity does not appear to be a relevant semantic feature when *be about to* is negated, while intention clearly is. He argues that *be about to* without negation in the present tense is the only context that has developed immediate future meaning through the subjectification of intention meaning to future event. These distinctions are addressed in greater detail in Section 4.4.

Jirsa also gives a brief explanation of the early stages of the grammaticalization of *be about to* using the OED. He notes that in Old English *onbutan* is often used as a preposition meaning something like ‘around’, and that it is also frequently used with motion verbs. In (20) Ælfric describes the non-linear motion of a star in the sky.

- (20) *Ac he went **abutan** hwilon up hwilon adune,*  
 But it goes about sometimes up sometimes down  
 (Ælfric de Temporibus Anni: 9.6) c. 1000

Supposing that *about* developed its relation with motion verbs in OE, Jirsa then moves on to focus the rest of his analysis exclusively on *about* when it is used with the *be* verb. He suggests that the 13<sup>th</sup> century marks when *about* is used with *be* to indicate locative propositional meaning, as seen in (21).

- (21) *curt lincolne & berkele & oðer courtes also were aboute in ðe lond*  
 ‘Court Lincoln and Berkeley and other Courts also were about in the land.’  
 (The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester: 748) 1297

Jirsa argues that the frequent use of *about* with motion implicatures eventually lead to the form *about* adopting an intention meaning of its own, which he demonstrates with examples like (22). Occasionally a purpose clause was used with *be about* in ways that have a clearer intention interpretation than a spatial one.

- (22) *we schul be aboute to make vs clene of cotidian defautes*  
 ‘we shall apply ourselves to become clean from daily failures’  
 (Ælfrec of Rievaulx’s *de Institutione Inclusarum*, 35) c. 1300

In (22), motion in space may be part of the effort to clean one’s self of error, but intention is the much more likely interpretation. Jirsa points to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century as the time at which the ‘truly grammatical use’ of *be about to* comes onto the scene. He bases this conclusion on example (23).

- (23) *They were aboute to go for to describe the londe*  
 (Miles Coverdale Bible translation, Joshua 18:8) 1535

Jirsa’s account of the grammaticalization of *be about to* essentially ends with this example concluding that at this point the construction has grammaticalized into a immediate future marker.

These conclusions are drawn on the basis of just a few examples, and some of them are quite questionable. For example, he identifies the first immediate future use of *be about to* around the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century based on a translation, namely (23). The issue is that other translations render the same passage with no reference to immediate future meaning. Here are two examples.

- (24) *the men **hadden rise** to go, to discryue the lond,*  
 (Wycliffe Bible translation, Joshua 18:8) 1395

- (25) *the men **arose, and went their** waye.*  
 (The Bishops Bible, Joshua 18:8) 1568

No other translation after Coverdale’s expresses anything related to locating the event in the immediate future. Usually there are two distinct verbs, and the expression is construed not as a future going, but as ‘rising up’ to go which is a concrete spatial process. One may argue that

Coverdale had a different interpretation of the text, but it is also possible that Coverdale's intention was never to express immediate future with *be about to* in this context as we would interpret it retrospectively. It may be the case that he intended a more spatial interpretation with *were about to* that correlates with other translations. Whatever the case, at the very least there is a need for more concrete examples in order come to any conclusions about such an important hallmark in the process of change.

While Jirsa makes important discoveries about of the history of *be about to*, his study is not exhaustive. He gives only a few examples for each development in order to contextualize his theoretical focus on explaining the synchronic variations in modern *be about to*. Several developments are left unaccounted for. To give a few examples, there is no explanation of when or how the construction became rigidified, i.e. when *about* was consistently preceded by *be* and followed by a *to*-infinitive. Also there is still no evidence of when or how the construction became emancipated from intention to allow unambiguously non-intention uses. There is need for more extensive analysis from these time periods.

Watanabe (2010) provides another study on the grammaticalization of *be about to* using the OED just as Jirsa did. However, she comes to a different conclusion about when *be about to* grammaticalized future meaning. Her study focuses on the grammaticalization process with a quantitative analysis of *be about to* becoming a marker for immediate future from early intention uses in Early Modern English. She focuses on analyzing the frequency of hallmark features of *be about to* over time. Specifically, she calculates the token frequency of *be about to* and the frequency of uses with inanimate subjects, passive verbs and non-intention verbs at different time periods. Table 1 shows her results.

She found that inanimate subjects did not start to appear until the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. She also found that there were no uses with a non-intention verb or with passive verbs until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Following this is a large jump in token frequency at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While Watanabe sees that intentional uses developed at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, her findings lead her to conclude that *be about to* did not become a marker for futurity until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that this change was not gradual, but very rapid. This conclusion is significantly different from that of Jirsa who looks to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century as the point at which immediate future uses grammaticalized.

Table 1. Historical analysis of *be about to* (Watanabe 2010:358)

Year	Frequency		Inanim. S.		Passive		Non-int. V.	
	per 100,000	<i>n.</i>	%	<i>n.</i>	%	<i>n.</i>	%	<i>n.</i>
-1200	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1201-1300	6.5	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
1301-1400	3.1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
1401-1500	1.9	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
1501-1550	8.4	7	-	-	-	-	-	-
1551-1600	8.2	14	-	-	-	-	-	-
1601-1650	8.3	17	11.8	2	-	-	-	-
1651-1700	9.5	17	5.9	1	-	-	-	-
1701-1750	4.6	6	16.7	1	-	-	-	-
1751-1800	10.4	15	6.7	1	6.7	1	26.7	4
1801-1850	45.2	129	11.6	15	15.5	20	5.4	7
1851-1900	36.1	173	15.0	26	17.3	30	4.6	8
1901-1950	36.6	83	21.7	18	25.3	21	1.2	1
1951-	56.9	145	21.4	31	14.5	21	4.8	7

There are a few concerns, however, that may encourage one to reassess Watanabe's conclusion. The most significant is that it contradicts early intuitions. Her conclusion does not fit well with the earliest known metalinguistic observation of *be about to* as a future marker. Poole (1646) compares the use of *be about to* with the use of *be going to*.

About to, or *going to*, is the signe of the **Participle of the future** ....: as, my father when he was about [to] die, gave me this counsell. I *am [about]* or *going [to]* read.  
(Poole 1646: *Accidence* 26 [Danchev and Kytö 1994: 67; square brackets original])

I have highlighted ‘participle of the future’ to point out the Poole’s intuition for *be about to* was specifically for future meaning. This is even more evident based on the example which he provides to demonstrate *about to*. *To die* is not an intended action. On account of this example alone there is something missing in Table 1, even if we leave Poole’s intuitions aside. Of course we cannot rely on intuition alone to understand language structure. This, however, is because our intuitions are based on older uses of a form; we cannot divine what a construction will change into in the coming centuries. The fact that Poole explicitly recognizes the future event use of *be about to* around the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century is evidence enough to call for another look at Watanabe’s conclusion that it was not truly used to mark futurity for another 150 years. At the least it should cast some doubt on the conclusion that this change was rapid. Considering the relatively few tokens that nicely align these parameters in Table 1 leading up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it would not take much evidence to compel us to reassess.

Other concerns with Watanabe’s analysis are methodological. Again, if we are not attentive to the constructional makeup of the entire language system and thus language change, many aspects of a developing form may remain unaccounted for. As I mentioned earlier, although many studies focus on finding the path of change from point A to point B, the real challenge is defining what point A even is. When this challenge is underestimated, we can be lead to identify a construction in modern use, to recognize the fixed elements of that construction at the present time as being the only relevant ones, and simply trace those specific elements as far back as possible to discover the ‘origin’ of a grammaticalizing construction. This is somewhat of an issue in Jirsa’s analysis, but even more so in Watanabe’s. The *be about to* construction is analyzed by considering the original meaning of *about*, and then looking at the earliest uses of *about* with the elements *be* and infinitive *to*. While this may seem reasonable, it



does not leave room for the possibility that the elements involved in a construction at a given stage may not be the same elements present within the construction in earlier processes of change. Neither does it account for the convergence of multiple schematic constructions. If there is any chance of earlier changes in structure or function having occurred prior to the realization of the elements *be about to*, these will certainly be overlooked. Yet Watanabe explicitly leaves out all uses that are not in the exact collocation *be + about + to* based on a misapplication of the claim that constructions undergo grammaticalization (2010: 355). Not only are examples that do not include all three of these words excluded, if there is anything in between them, that token is excluded too. In her methodology, even a usage like (26) would not be considered relevant to the constructions evolution.

- (26) *The man within was inclined to give them admittance,  
and was **indeed** about to do so,* (Dickens, Barnaby Rudge)

Uses that include any content between ‘*be*’ ‘*about*’ ‘*to*’ is omitted. Not much attention is paid to the complex interplay of idiomatic and schematic details in both the preceding and emerging constructions. It is necessary to define the starting point from a construction grammar framework.

Indeed, Jirsa is right in considering that much of the semantic shift toward motion with intention is based on the frequent collocation of *about* with verbs of motion. I will demonstrate this in detail in Section 4.2. In fact most of the earliest occurrences of *about to* with intention are in a unique schematic construction, but not with *be*. However, Jirsa quickly sets aside andative uses with *about* at the first sign of the collocation *be about* shown in example (21), despite the fact that the original construction in which *about* is used with motion continued evolving in telling ways as I will show in Chapter 4.

Research on the development of *be about to* is lean, and the few studies that there are do not reach the same conclusions. Therefore further effort to account for its evolution is a useful contribution to the history of English, as well as to refining our theories of language structure and evolution.

### **3.3 Method and data**

#### **3.3.2 Approach**

To have a holistic analysis of any linguistic development, it is important to consider both diachronic and synchronic evidence. It is not sufficient to only take into account a few occurrences at different points throughout time. Neither will it suffice to deduce changes from a purely synchronic study. The goal of this analysis is to understand diachronic change with synchronic analysis of several different stages. I take synchronic snapshots of a gradual process, by analyzing as many tokens as are available at different points in time. These points in time are determined by what seem to be periods of particular importance for specific developments with an attempt to understand the continuity of change between those points.

Unfortunately, trying to give an account of any historical phenomenon has significant and unavoidable limitations. One of the major disadvantages is that tape recorders are not as old as the phenomena one would like to study. Researchers a few hundred years from now may have access to such resources as a consequence of time, but at this point we are left to examining written documents. From a usage-based perspective this is a significant setback simply because language is used with much greater frequency in spoken discourse than through writing, and we know that written and spoken language are not structured the same (cf. Biber et al. 1999). It has been argued that in order to understand a development one must examine spoken discourse

because it is the basis for usage-motivated change (Chafe 1994, Du Bois 2003). This problem may be reflected in the study of auxiliaries because 3rd person tends to be more frequent in writing, but that may not be so for spoken discourse. It may be that 1<sup>st</sup> person is more frequent in spoken discourse than in writing, in which case it would have a greater effect on exemplar representation. Another issue with this kind of study is the low number of tokens available to us. Though one may wish to draw conclusions from greater data sets, there is a limited amount of accessible language, and it is usually quite unsatisfactory. There is no real solution to these problems in the near future. We have to come to terms with these concerns and use the resources that are available with an awareness of their limitations in how we interpret them.

The most important variable that is considered here, beyond just pointing out the earliest manifestations of something, is the frequency of identifiable structure at a particular point in time. It is assumed that the frequency with which something appears in texts roughly reflects the frequency of that same phenomenon in language use in general. Frequency of use is an essential factor in the building of both schematic and fixed form. High token frequency represents idiomatized form, and high type frequency correlates with highly schematic form. By finding schematic and fixed elements that frequently recur, constructions can be identified. This is related to the methodology that Watanabe applied to her study, in which she pointed out specific features that could disambiguate possible interpretations of a particular form.

There are several features that are clear indicators that a new construction has emerged. Assuming that *be about to* developed along a cline from INTENTION to FUTURE<sup>8</sup>, the earliest token of *about to* followed by a passive infinitive (e.g. *about to be eaten*) marks a point at which the speaker is using the construction without intention even as an implicature. I think, however,

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<sup>8</sup> This is also the position of both Jirsa (1997) and Watanabe (2010).

we need to be particularly careful at this point to specify what the discovery of these kinds of features indicates. These features are usually taken to be milestones in the processes of grammaticalization. Traugott (2012) goes so far as to treat these points of syntactic permissibility as the point of constructionalization. She explicitly states that constructionalization has not occurred with *be going to* until there is a manifestation of formal changes like passive infinitive or an existential subject (Traugott 2012). These are not just taken to be *indicators* of a change, but the *origins* of it. This also appears to be the assumption that Watanabe takes in her analysis. While I certainly agree that there is profit in finding empirical evidence for context expansion and the distribution of unambiguous formal properties, I do not believe that these mark the point of a new construction, nor are they prerequisites for a construction to emerge. A new form-meaning pair may have developed prior to any of these features, and changes in *function* are the truest indicators of a new construction. Formal changes like *be about to* taking a passive infinitive or an inanimate subject are the consequence of a construction that has already begun to emerge. Therefore, I would suggest that finding new variability that would have made no sense in an older construction only tells us that *at least* by that point, change has occurred. If the limits are understood, seeking out such features empirically is valuable for recognizing change.

The features that I seek to find in corpus data are related to those which Watanabe sought out for the late chronology of *be about to*. Others are also considered, and different features will be relevant for different points in time and for the grammaticalization of different schematic constructions that participate in the emergence of [SBJ *be about to* V]. Here is a list of some of the important semantic and formal features that are considered to be indicators of a new construction.

- Adjacency of *about* and *to*-infinitive
- Temporal proximity meaning in any construction with *about*
- Intention meaning in any construction with *about*
- Non-agent oriented
- Use with non-intention action
- Use with non-desiderative action
- Use with passive infinitives
- Use with inanimate subject

The corpora that are used to examine these developments were chosen for the purpose of killing two birds with one stone. I intend to analyze *be about to* while also drawing comparisons with *be going to*. To do so, I have paralleled the corpus data in this study with Disney's (2009) work on the grammaticalization of *be going to*. He likewise takes a construction grammar approach to grammaticalization with a balance of synchrony and diachrony. For the purpose of comparison, it is profitable to base an analysis of *be about to* on the same texts which have been used to account for *be going to*.

### 3.3.3 Purpose of comparison

It is important to compare [SBJ *be about to* V] with other competing forms present within the language at different points in its evolution. By 'competing', I mean forms that may be used for similar conceptual and social experiences to meet a similar goal. As forms are used with different frequencies and in unique contexts, they will change in different ways. There are likely to be specific factors that are indicative of the distribution of competing forms in different constructions which will determine the future of their role and prominence in the linguistic system. Often the most relevant details of a construction resonate on the backdrop of other similar and parallel phenomena.

It seems as though the development of *be about to* is related to *be going to*, both in terms of form/function similarities and chronology. I have already mentioned that the close semantic

and syntactic comparisons between *be about to* and *be going to* were recognized at a very early point. At least by 1646 the future functions of both *be about to* and *be going to* were salient enough for Poole to consciously assess them as synonyms. Although his description is based on intuition, it would be rash to discount it entirely. Clearly he had recognized enough parallels between them to make any intuitive observation at all, let alone consider them synonyms. Another factor is that as far back as we can see, *about* had a strong tendency to be used with verbs of motion, and especially with *go*.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the development of *be going to* and *be about to* may be part of the same story. Indeed, Disney (2009) points out that the majority of the early uses of *go* with an intention infinitive are collocated with *about* prior to its earliest uses in the progressive. Taking these factors into account, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the emergence of *be about to* and *be going to* are related in some way.

*Be going to* as a marker of futurity is one of the most exhaustively observed developments in grammaticalization theory. The reason it is so popular is that it clearly displays many of the features often associated with grammaticalization theory. There is coalescence and fusion of the previously “independent” elements *be*, *go*, *-ing* and *to* into a phonologically reduced chunk. There is clear emancipation of *be going to* as a whole unit. It shows increased frequency and context expansion. Undoubtedly, studies on *be going to* have aided the recognition that whole constructions undergo change rather than individual words, and these studies have profoundly benefitted the progress of grammaticalization theory. I would even suggest that many of the principles of grammaticalization have been proposed as a result of studies on *be going to* in particular. Because of this, it is often the go-to construction for the analysis of grammaticalization change.

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<sup>9</sup> This is demonstrated in Sections 4.1 and 4.2.

There has been quite a bit of work comparing *be going to* with other future modals (Danchev & Kytö 1994, Myhill 1995, Krug 2000, Bergs 2010). In most cases *be about to* is not included in the data, but is only referred to as a side note. One exception to this is Wada (2000) who specifically sets out to compare *be going to* and *be about to*. She provides a synchronic comparative analysis of these two constructions in modern English. Her study is motivated by recognizing their contemporary functional similarities, but it does not address diachrony. This is interesting because Wada deals with clear similarities between their modern uses without any regard for the potential similarities between their developments, and the explanations that could arise from diachrony. In particular, she argues that *be about to*, unlike *be going to*, does not allow other temporal adverbial expressions, e.g. *\*I'm about to leave tomorrow*, and also that *be about to* implies an unfulfilled event as seen in (19) while *be going to* does not.

(19) *He **was** about to hit me* (Quirk and Greenbaum 1985:217)

Essentially she argues that *be going to* is a whole unit that combines with the subject and verb, while *be about to* is actually made up of two constituents that combine, *be* and *about to*. She argues that *was about to* is not fulfilled in the past because it does not imply motion, only a static placement prior to a situation based on the stative semantics of *be*. On the other hand, *was going to* does imply motion, and thus the event is more likely to be fulfilled even in the past tense. Similarly, *be about to* does not tend to take temporal adverbs, because it is a temporal adverb construction in a sense.

While Wada's observations may be noteworthy, I would question some of her interpretations. In regard to the future adverbial distinction, it is not hard to find examples of *be about to* occurring with temporal modifiers such as seen in (27).

(27) *Ok, I 'm about to do it **in a minute**.*<sup>10</sup> (COCA:MAG Vol 63(10):115, 2008)

The reason that examples like (27) are rare is semantically motivated. *Be about to* has developed a more specific future relationship with immediacy remaining an important component. Therefore it would be conceptually contradictory to add any temporal adverb that is not within the immanent time span that is associated with *be about to*. The speaker in (27) used this adverbial expression because *in a minute* specifies something within the already narrow space of the immediate future from that moment. Wada argues that this is not enough to explain the difference between *be about to* and *be going to* because *be going to* can also be used for immediate future and take a temporal adverb. However, this does not really pose a problem. It simply means that *be going to* is not restricted to immediate future. It is reasonable to assume that multiple constructions can be used to meet the same ends as well. Future auxiliaries other than *be about to* are more general in this respect, and, therefore, see more variation for expressions that specify a more exact moment.

There are also complications with her interpretation that the tendency for (*be*-PAST) *about to* to indicate an unfulfilled event is a result of placing *about to* in a static point in time rather than motion in time. For one, Disney demonstrates that *be going to* likewise was predominantly used for unfulfilled events during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though it clearly indicated motion before a future event and not a static position before a future event (Disney 2009:73). Also, Jirsa (1997) makes a good argument that these can be understood as developments at different points in grammaticalization. Perhaps only (*be*-PRES) *about to* has grammaticalized into an immediate future modal. (*be*-PAST) *about to* may actually be different construction that has emerged from

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<sup>10</sup> While these expressions are attested and are not hard to find, they may sound unusual to some. It certainly seems that there is still a strong tendency for temporal adverbial constructions to be omitted with *be about to*. However this could be changing.



old intentional uses of *be about to*. These differences in interpretation will be returned to later, but at this point it will suffice to say that they can be understood more clearly in terms of constructions rather than positing a complex interpretation of how the constituent parts join together.

One interesting point that Wada argues for is that *about* gets its sense as an adverbial with *be + to* INF. She argues that *about* has become fixed to the *to*-infinitive and may combine with *be*. Her analysis of these distinctions is based almost completely on the synchronic properties of each construction. This does present the need to consider if *be about* had emerged through to idiomatization of [*be to* INF]<sub>future</sub>. The questions then comes into play: at what point did *be* begin to fill the schematic slot of [SBJ V *to* INF], what made *about* move away from motion verbs, and how did [SBJ *go about to* INF] relate or compete with [SBJ *be about to* INF]? To address these questions, empirical data covering several centuries that has already been applied to the development of *be going to* is a helpful resource.

### 3.3.4 Corpora

The three corpora that are used in parallel with Disney (2009) are the diachronic section of the Helsinki corpus (Kytö 1996), the complete works of Shakespeare, and Dickens novels. I use the diachronic section of the Helsinki Corpus (DHC) for early developments. This is beneficial for understanding the earliest construction containing *about*, and for understanding how it evolved in relation to other competing constructions at the time. It is also used to analyze the development of *about* up to its earliest uses with [SBJ V *to* INF]. The DHC consists of 1.5 million words of prose from the Old English period to Early Modern English. The word frequencies and

distribution of periods are given in Table 2. The number of words in each section is a relatively equal, but the Middle English section is about 50% larger than the Old English section.

*Table 2. DHC size and period divisions*

<b>Sub period</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Words</b>
<i>Old English</i>		
OE1	–850	2,190
OE2	850–950	92,050
OE3	950–1050	251,630
OE4	1050–1150	67,380
		<b>413,250</b>
<i>Middle English</i>		
ME1	1150–1250	113,010
ME2	1250–1350	97,480
ME3	1350–1420	184,230
ME4	1420–1500	213,850
		<b>608,570</b>
<i>Early Modern English, British</i>		
EModE1	1500–1570	190,160
EModE2	1570–1640	189,800
EModE3	1640–1710	171,040
		<b>551,000</b>
<i>Total</i>		<b>1,572,820</b>

One issue that complicates identifying every token of *about* is that there is tremendous variation in the spelling of *about* in Old English to Middle English texts. Table 3 shows all of the different spellings that have been identified in the Helsinki corpus together with the time period of its earliest and latest use. The orthographic differences seem to follow a predictable chronological progression from *onbutan* to *about*, but there is significant overlap at times. Often certain spellings are preferred in specific construction developments. For example, *abuten* is used most frequently in the specific idiomatic construction *abuten ende* ‘without end’ that was typical in homilies as seen in (28) (cf. Nilsson 1990:78).

- (28) *and þere wunen mid him abuten ende.*  
 and there to live with him without end.  
 ‘and there to live with him forever.’ (Trin Hom 23)

One striking detail is that there is a massive jump in frequency that correlated with the ‘ou’ spelling for the stem vowel, likely corresponding to the Great Vowel Shift. At this point, *about* began to be used in a much greater variety of constructions, which will be shown to correspond with the loss of other competing forms. The significantly lower numbers in the Old English texts are not a result of lack of data, but rather a much lower frequency that will be shown to be a reflection of much more localized constructions in Section 4.2.

*Table 3. Orthographic variation, DHC*

Spelling	Earliest	Latest	# of tokens
<i>onbutan</i>	850-950	950-1050	9
<i>onbuton</i>	950-1050	1050-1150	5
<i>abutan</i>	950-1050	1150-1250	22
<i>abuton</i>	950-1050	1150-1250	11
<i>onbuten</i>	1150-1250	1150-1250	1
<i>anbutan</i>	1150-1250	1150-1250	1
<i>abuten</i>	1150-1250	1250-1350	35
<i>abute</i>	1150-1250	1250-1350	18
<i>abouten</i>	1250-1350	1250-1350	7
<i>aboute</i>	1250-1350	1570-1640	166
<i>abowten</i>	1350-1420	1350-1420	1
<i>abowte</i>	1350-1420	1570-1640	34
<i>about</i>	1350-1420	1640-1710	443
<i>abowt</i>	1500-1550	1570-1650	10
<i>abut</i>	1640-1710	1640-1710	2
<b>Total</b>			764

In addition to the DHC other corpora are used to examine particular points of change in detail. Disney concludes that the late 16<sup>th</sup> to early 17<sup>th</sup> century marks a point of significant grammaticalization for *be going to* where non-assertive intention uses have arisen. For this reason he uses the complete works of Shakespeare as a larger corpus to focus specifically on the semantic shift that seems to have been occurring at that time. He says ‘the Shakespeare corpus is useful for showing the process whereby the new intention use arose. For example, as noted, the first stage in this grammaticalization path of verbs of movement is that ‘movement to a place’ extends to ‘movement for a purpose.’ (2009:66). Like *be going to*, *about to* also seems to show significant developments in the [V *to* INTENTION] construction around the same time period. Even prior to examining any preceding data this assumption can be made based on Poole’s description. The Shakespeare corpus consists of about 750,000 words.

The most extensive developments of the predictive uses of *be going to* are seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Disney analyzes these advancements using Dickens novels that are about the same length as the Shakespeare data. I likewise use Dickens novels to see how *be about to* has advanced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Dickens Corpus used here contains about 850,000 words<sup>11</sup>.

Both the Dickens and the Shakespeare corpus are written by a single author in one genre. This could be a significant shortcoming because one speaker may not be indicative of the speech of the broader community. However, for the purpose of comparative analysis, using single author corpora has some benefits as well. We can see the distribution of the two constructions in a single mind. It eliminates the possibility of only accounting for the peculiar preferences of

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<sup>11</sup> The novels included were based on availability through the Oxford text archives. These include ‘The Christmas Carol’, ‘Barnaby Rudge’, ‘Dumby and Sons’ and ‘Great Expectations’. These are not the exact novels that Disney was able to access (David Copperfield, Great Expectations, Nick Nickelby and Hard Times) though corpus size is about the same.

different dialects or individuals. All of the social, geographic, genetic and genre variables are equal. The only factors that can account for the differences in use are differences in constructions in a single mind.

In summary, I will begin by looking at the schematic constructions in which *about* was used as far back as we have evidence, while considering what other forms could be in competition. I will then turn to look at the uses of *about* and other constructions that are of import to its historical development based on the data segments of the Helsinki corpus. Then I will focus more specifically on its use during the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the point which *be going to* seems to have undergone developments toward becoming a future auxiliary using the Shakespeare Corpus. Lastly I will look at the use of constructions with *about to* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century using the Dickens Corpus. Before looking at the corpora themselves, I will give a preliminary analysis detailing the whole story behind the emergence of [*be about to* V] to be presented in this thesis.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis of *be about to*

#### 4.1 Preliminary: Starting point or starting points?

Grammaticalization studies commonly focus on how the semantic value of the overt elements changes. Because *about* is the most concrete form in *be about to*, the cline would likely trace the evolution of how *about* has changed, even though one may still argue that it is not just *about* but the syntagmatic convergence of all of the forms involved. However, I would suggest that simply identifying a construction's origins is a much more complicated chore. If complex, non-reduced entities should be taken as the fundamental organization of language, then it is not really the grammaticalization of the *be about to* construction, but rather the [SBJ *be about to* V] construction. This representation is unique in that it takes the schematic slots involved in a construction to be meaningful and not just formulaic patterns. It looks at the semantic contributions of the schemas filled or elicited and the fixed elements themselves as equally important.

This holistic representation helps shed light on issues like class distinctions in modals. As I noted earlier, I have found no uses of older auxiliaries like *sculan* or *magan* with a *to*-infinitive. Of course, it would take a more exhaustive study to establish if there is any record of these older auxiliaries in a construction that involves the *to*-infinitive at any point in history. Even if there is, it was certainly never used frequently compared to uses with the *-an* infinitive. In addition to this, there are no uses of *about* with a *-an* infinitive in the DHC. With this in mind, important questions arise: In what schematic constructions was *about* used before the [V *to* INF] construction emerged? How has the [V *to* INF] construction grammaticalized? And what did *about* contribute to the V schema in its earliest uses in [V *to* INF]?

Evidence from this analysis will show that the oldest etymologically traceable uses of *about* were much more confined contexts than has been supposed, functioning most frequently in [MOTION *about*].

- (29) *Seo firmamentum tyrnð symle onbutan us under ðysserem eorðan & bufon*  
the sky (Latin) turn always around us under this earth and above  
‘The sky always **turns around** us under this Earth and above’  
(EX SCIA TEMP, R 5.4)

Schematic slot is semi-open; several different verbs were used with *onbutan*, but all of them express motion. In (29) this is seen with the verb *tyrnan* ‘turn’. *About* first increased in token frequency with intention meaning through the already prominent purposive construction [V *to* INF] which emerged through the schematization of the infinitive construction [*to* V-*ne*].

- (30) *turnynge aboute to kepe the weie of the tre of lijf.*  
‘turning about to guard the way to the tree of life’  
(Wycliffe Bible Translation, Gen 3:24, 1395)

- (31) *she went about to bewitch him* (History of Richard III, 1500-1570)

Here in (30), [MOTION *about*] fills the V slot of the purposive construction [V *to* INF]. The MOTION schematic slot in [MOTION *about*] idiomatized to [*go about*] which increased in exemplar strength as a slot filler in [V *to* INF] as seen in (31). As [*go about to* V]<sub>intention</sub> became more idiomatized, *be* began to replace *go* in restricted contexts of speaking like [*be about to* DICENDI]; see (32).

- (32) *or twice I was about to speake, and tell him plainly*  
(Shakespeare, A Winter’s Tale)

The construction [*go about to* INF] essentially died out at the same time that [*be going to* V]<sub>immediate future</sub> and [*be about to* V]<sub>immediate future</sub> both began to emerge with grammaticalized uses of

futurity. As *be going to* began to emerge as a new construction, the DICENDI schema in [*be about to* DICENDI] expanded and began to include more actions as seen in (33).

- (33) *With these feelings, he **was about to revisit** London for the last time,*  
(Dickens, Barnaby Rudge)

The evolution of semantics is significantly due to the melding of meaning between one construction filling particular schematic slots of others. As the convergence of particular constructions becomes increasingly frequent, a new representation grows more salient and idiomatizes as a fixed form. I would propose then that the semantic cline for [*be about to* V] can be displayed in two dimensions as seen here.

$$\left( \begin{array}{l} \text{MOTION} \rightarrow \text{INTENTION} \rightarrow \text{FUTURE} \\ \text{PHYSICAL PROXIMITY} \rightarrow \text{TEMPORAL PROXIMITY} \end{array} \right)$$

The evolution to a future marker follows a pathway that is widely attested from motion to future meaning being motivated by the intention feature of the construction [V *to* INF]. This development is not based on any implicatures of spatial immediacy but on the motion semantics of the early schematic construction that included *about*. The remoteness distinction is a consequence of meaning persistence from place in space to place in time. These processes occur together in the emerging complex unit leading to immediate future modality of [*be about to* V]. Having presented a preliminary explanation, I will now address each of these developments in greater depth.

## 4.2 Early constructions in OE

The etymology of *about* in modern English can be traced back to *onbutan* ‘~around’ in OE. *Onbutan* is a combination of two other OE words, *on* ‘in’ and *butan* ‘without’; see (34) and (35).



- (34) *Ond ic bebiode        **on**        Godes        naman        ðæt*  
 and I command        **in**        God-GEN        name-DAT        that  
 ‘And I command in the name of God that...’  
 (King Alfred’s Preface to Gregory’s Pastoral Care:33)
- (35) *hi    siððan    buta ðrittig geara wæron wunigende **butan** hæmede*  
 they afterward both thirty years were living        **without** intercourse-DAT  
 ‘Afterward they both lived thirty years without sexual intercourse’  
 (Life of St. Æthelthryth:30)

*Butan* is also a combination of two other forms *be* ‘about’ and *utan* ‘out’ that are semantically related to *about*. *Utan* is part of an adverbial construction in the sense that it is connected to a predicate schema to mean ‘outside’. It takes an object as a preposition in only a few idiomatized constructions as seen in (38). *Be* is used in a preposition construction to mean something like ‘by’. When combined with *utan* it is used in a predicate preposition construction (35). These words are seen in (36) and (37).

- (36) ***Be**    hire    is    awryten þæt heo wel drohtnode*  
**about**    her-DAT is    written that she well lived  
 ‘It is written about her that she lived well’        (Life of St. Æthelthryth:11)
- (37) *ond    þone    bur    **utan**    beeode*  
 and    the-ACC cottage **around**    surrounded  
 ‘and (they) surrounded outside the cottage’        (Cynewulf and Cyneheard:4)
- (38) *hu    man **utan-** **bordes**    wisdom &    lare    hieder on lond sohte,*  
 how man outside board-GEN wisdom and learning hither on land sought.  
 ‘how a man **abroad** sought wisdom and learning to this place.’  
 (King Alfred’s Preface to Gregory’s Pastoral Care:8)

In (36) *be* is very similar to the preposition construction for *about* ‘regarding’. This use does not concern any spatial relation. *Be hire* indicates that the topic of the writing is St. Æthelthryth. In (37) *utan* is used to indicate a spatial relation similar to *onbutan*. The cottage is *beeode* ‘surrounded’. *Utan* functions adverbially to indicate that the cottage is surrounded ‘outside’.

*Onbutan* is essentially a word which was formed by the collocation of all the words seen in (34) through (37).

- (39) *se deofol eower wiðerwinna færd onbutan swa saw grymetende leo*  
 The devil our adversary goes around just as roaring lion  
 ‘The devil our adversary goes around like a roaring lion.’  
 (Ælfrec on the book of Job:19)

Here in (39) *onbutan* is used adverbially. It is connected to a predicate schema with no noun referent. While *onbutan* is often considered to be originally a preposition, its context was really much more confined than this. The most recurrent feature that can be noticed is actually its association with andative verbs, in this case *faran* ‘go’. This characteristic will prove to be significant and requires more attention, but first it is important to address how the fixed form *onbutan* relates to another important form in OE.

In addition to *be* and *utan* there were other semantically competing forms as well. The most interesting of these is *ymb*. If there is any word in Old English that is comparable to the wide use of *about* in Modern English it is *ymb*. This word was used in prepositional constructions in many ways. It could indicate spatial proximity like ‘near’ or ‘around’ (40), as well as the abstract uses like ‘concerning’ (41). It is also used for numeric proximity such as time reference (42). In fact, it is also used similarly to the preposition ‘for’ as in (43).

- (40) *Ne þurfon me embe Sturmere stedefæste hælæð wordum ætwitan,*  
 Not need me **around** Sturmere stead warriors-NOM words rebuke-INF  
 ‘The steadfast warriors around Sturmer do not need to mock me.’  
 (The Battle of Maldon:241-250)

- (41) *Ic sceal forð spreca gen ymbe Grendel*  
 I shall forth speak further **about** Grendel  
 ‘I will speak more about Grendel’ (Beowulf:2069-70)

- (42) *Pentecosten ymb fiftig nihta æfter ðære gedyðan se æriste,*  
Pentecost **about** fifty nights after the celebrate the resurrection  
‘...Pentacost, about fifty nights after celebrating the resurrection’  
(IR HOM BLICK12:37)
- (43) *giorne hie wæron ægðer ge ymb lare ge ymb liornuga*  
zealous they were both **about** teaching-ACC and **about** learning-ACC  
‘they were zealous both for teaching and for learning.’  
(King Alfred’s Preface to Gregory’s Pastoral Care:33)

The vast extent of variation in known uses of *ymb* indicates that it had a much richer history than *onbutan* at the time. Based on the many subjective uses of *ymb* that mark abstract relationships, we can deduce that *ymb* is an older development with a deeper past. The greatest evidence in support of this hypothesis is that *ymb* is significantly more frequent than *onbutan*. From 850-1050 there are 492 (310 per 100,000 words) tokens of *ymb* and only 19 (10 per 10000 words) tokens of *onbutan* in the DHC.

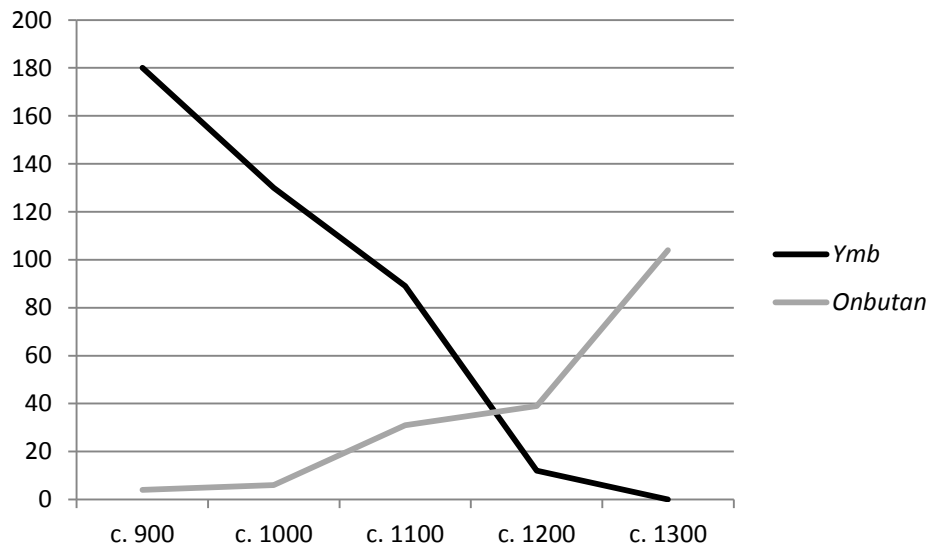
Table 4. The token frequency of *ymb* to *onbutan* in OE

	<i>ymb</i>			<i>onbutan</i>		
	Raw	Per 100k	change %	Raw	Per 100k	change %
OE1	5	<b>228</b>	--	0	<b>0</b>	--
OE2	166	<b>180</b>	-21%	4	<b>4</b>	--
OE3	326	<b>130</b>	-28%	15	<b>6</b>	30%
OE4	60	<b>89</b>	-32%	21	<b>31</b>	80%
ME1	13	<b>12</b>	-87%	44	<b>39</b>	20%
ME2	0	<b>0</b>	--	101	<b>104</b>	63%
Total	519			185		

The difference in frequency, however, is not the whole story. In the DHC there is a clear correlation between the loss of *ymb* and the rise in frequency of *onbutan*. Table 4 displays these

changes over more than 500 years from before 850 to 1350. The frequency of *ymb* decreases at a steadily increasing rate leading into the Middle English period when it disappears. On the other hand, *onbutan* never appears in the OE1 stage. Then gradually increases a larger jump in token frequency from OE3 to OE4, and another jump from ME1 to ME2. Figure 3 displays this correlation.

Figure 3. Frequency per 100k words of *ymb* and *onbutan* in OE and early ME



The OE1 period is not included in Figure 3 because the data set is so small (2190 words). The fact that there are no tokens of *onbutan* in OE1 does not mean that it did not exist at this point. It could just be a result of the small amount of data. Considering that there were only 4 tokens of *onbutan* in OE2 which is nearly 100,000 words, its frequency of less than 3000 words is not revealing. It likely did exist prior to any data we have available. Nonetheless, the correlation between these two is striking. It changes from 1 token of *onbutan* for every 45 tokens of *ymb* around 900 to being used at about the same frequency around 1150. Less than two hundred years later *ymb* has disappeared and *onbutan* has increased to be 26 times as frequent as it was around 900.

Based on the correlation between *ymb* and *onbutan*, we can see that there was some competition, and *onbutan* eventually prevailed. This is evidenced by the fact that *onbutan* would begin to take part in the emergence of new prepositional constructions to indicate the same abstract relations for which *ymb* was previously used. It began to be used for spatial reference around a landmark without motion actions (44) and apart from a predicate (45). Later, it developed into prepositional constructions to indicate numeric proximity (46) and to mean ‘concerning’ (47).

- (44) *Gyf ða Egyptiscean gehyrað, & ða ðe her eardiað **abutan**,*  
 If the Egyptians hear and those who here dwell **around**  
 If the Egyptians, and those who live around here hear.  
 (Ælfric’s Translation on Old Testament, Number 14:13, 950-1050)
- (45) *Gif friðgeard sy on hwæs lande **abuton** stan*  
 If enclosed space be in someone’s place **around** stone  
 ‘If there is an enclosure on someone’s land around a stone’  
 (STA LAW LAW11C:54, 950-1050)
- (46) *þe lengten þestrede þe sunne & þe dæi **abuton** nontid dæies,*  
 the spring be darkened the son and the day **about** ninety days  
 ‘In the Spring darkened the sun and the day about ninety days.  
 (M1 NN HIST PETERB, 1150-1250)
- (47) *writizeð & singeð ealle **abuten** him,*  
 write and sing entirely **about** him  
 ‘write and sing all about him’ (VSPD HOM 48 1150-1250)

Throughout the Old English period constructions with *onbutan* went from a very local context to rapidly spread into many different emerging constructions. This finding is important because there were many changes going on that involved *about*. There are many stories to tell, and there is not just one pathway to follow. The question then is which of those diverging constructions containing the fixed element *about* would eventually conventionalize into a marker of immediate futurity in [*be about to V*]? I would suggest that the answer to this question is much

more complicated than simply finding the first time it is used with *be*. To know which path to follow, it is important to come up with a clearer description of the earliest constructions containing *onbutan*.

As I mentioned above, *onbutan* is generally understood to have originally been a preposition that could sometimes be used adverbially. However, the earliest uses of *about* were not in a prepositional phrase construction. The structure of *on-be-utan* is really not different from *utan* as seen in (37) which is generally taken to be an adverb, and does not take an object. Interestingly enough, *butan* and *onbuntan* are not the only examples of prepositional prefixes with *utan*. In fact even *ymb* is used with *utan* as seen in (48).

- (48) *hu widgil sint wolcnum ymbutan heofones hwealfe*  
 how extensive are the skies-DAT **around** heaven's vaults  
 'how extensive are the vaults of heaven around the skies'  
 (Boethius on Fame:65)

Baker (2012) notes that the 'vaults' of heaven would have referred to celestial bodies. In this instance the stars are described as surrounding the sky. Considering this, it can be argued that the construction [SBJ V *utan*] also had a schema for certain prepositional prefixes, i.e. [V (be/ymb/etc.)-*utan*]. As exemplars for specific prepositions became denser, they would idiomatize and new schemas would emerge. Hence *butan* in (35) takes the object *hæmede* 'intercourse' whereas *utan* does not appear to have any such schematic slot. In the same way, as the fixed elements *on-butan* idiomatized, the schemas in the construction [V *on-butan* OBJ] emerged in new ways as well. However, *onbutan* idiomatized with a much more idiomatized V schema than [V *utan*] or [V *b-utan*]. It appears that *onbutan* was most frequently used specifically when the V schematic slot was filled by a motion verb. Consequently *onbutan* idiomatized with a schematic slot strongly associated with motion as seen in (49) and (50).

- (49) *Seo firmamentum tyrnð onbutan us*  
 The firmaments turn around us-PL,ACC  
 ‘The heavens turn about us’ (Ælfric’s *de Temporibus Anni*:42, c. 1000)
- (50) & *æfter ðam wendon eft abutan Penwiht*  
 and after that went-PL again around Penwiht  
 ‘And after that (they) went again about Penwiht.’ (The Saxon Chronicles:131)

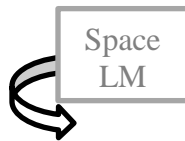
In the DHC there are 19 tokens of *onbutan* before the the first jump in token frequency sometime after 1050. Of these 19, 13 occur with motion verbs. Of the remaining six tokens, two are in the idiomatic construction *abuten ende* shown in example (29), and two others exemplify the idiomatic construction [*onbutan þære*] ‘there about’ which also increased in frequency into the Middle English period. There are only two examples of *onbutan* in a different complex construction. These two were given in (44) and (45) above and represent new uses that emerged in correlation with the loss of *ymb*. Based on this evidence, we can see that *onbutan* is not only used much less frequently than other prepositions at the time, but that its most common usage is a unique schematic construction.

Instead of seeing the earliest use of *onbuton* as an adverb or a preposition, we can better represent its earliest usage as a grammaticalized version of [V *utan*] into [MOTION *onbutan* <LANDMARK>]. I put < > around LANDMARK to indicate that this is a schematic slot that is sometimes included, but it is not always present in the construction. 6 of the 13 uses of this construction before 1050 contain a landmark.

To summarize thus far: in the earliest part of the Old English period *onbutan* was used significantly less frequently than other related forms. There are only a few schematic constructions in which it occurs. It quickly increased in frequency in direct correlation with the loss of the highly frequent and dispersed form *ymb*, emerging and diverging into many unique

constructions. To know which pathway would eventually lead to the emergence of [*be about to* V], it is necessary to indicate the most productive construction from which it originated. Based on the earliest evidence we have of the fixed form *onbutan*, it was idiomatized with a close association to motion verbs in the schematic construction [MOTION *onbutan* <LANDMARK>]. A conceptual representation of this construction is given in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Semantics of [MOTION *onbutan* <LANDMARK>]



The arrow moving around is shown as darker because this feature is the most salient. The landmark is shown lighter because it is often implied and not stated. When there is a landmark, the action is construed as occurring in close proximity to it – moving around it or in a non-linear motion through it. There are many aspects of this construction that make sense considering other evidence we have about the evolution of future markers.

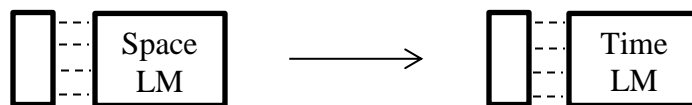
When *about* is used as a static preposition, one can anticipate the emergence of uses marking proximity to a point in time as seen in example (46). However it would not follow that *about* would develop future meaning from such a construction. Bybee (2003b) demonstrates that only a few words are really candidates for specific grammaticalization processes. Typological evidence reveals that just a few semantic classes grammaticalize into future marking and the static non-ansative uses of *about* do not fit into one of those classes. For this reason it is not surprising that the origin of *about* is in a construction connected to motion verbs.

At the same time the physical proximity meaning of *about* persists into the future construction in a different way. Traugott (1978) notes that there is a cognitive connection



between physical, spatial relationships and temporal relationships that is reflected in the way language changes. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also demonstrate that the SPACE IS TIME is ubiquitous in English. Figure 5 displays the persistence of proximity into [*be about to* V].

Figure 5. The persistence of proximity from [MOTION *onbutan*] into [*be about to* V]



While motion grammaticalized through pragmatic inferencing for intention and intention to future event, the nearness aspect of the spatial meaning of *onbutan* may have also persisted to indicate imminence at the same time. In the earliest construction, [MOTION *onbutan* <LANDMARK>], the conditions for change from motion to future and from physical proximity to temporal proximity are present. It is possible that the grammaticalization of both of these semantic features together results in immediate proximity.

Moving into the Middle English period the massive boost in token frequency of *onbutan* decreases the relative frequency of [MOTION *onbutan* <LANDMARK>]. Once *about* grammaticalizes to mean ‘concerning’, this usage becomes increasingly productive in many contexts boosting token frequency. While there is an increase in the number of uses of *about* in idiomatic constructions and prepositional constructions, [MOTION *about* <LANDMARK>] also persists and continues to evolve. The most interesting development is with *go* which has idiomatized in a particular way. Table 5 shows the tokens of [MOTION *about* <LANDMARK>] from ME4- EModE1 (1420-1570) moving into the Early Modern English period.

Table 5. [MOTION *about*] in DHC, 1420-1570

MOT Verb	TOTAL	to- infinitive	
		without	with
<b><i>go</i></b>	18	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Other</b>	31	<b>31</b>	0
<b>Total</b>	49	38	11

The first thing to note in this table is that 37% (18/49) of the tokens of [MOTION *about*] the schematic slot is filled with *go*. While in earlier periods, the motion schema of this construction was more general, it developed a particularly close relationship to *go* specifically in Middle English. *Go* and *about*, both of which would later emerge into future markers, had a tendency to be used together. Yet what is even more interesting is that *go about* has idiomatized within another construction that may help us put the pieces together for both *be about to* and *be going to*. 61% (11/18) of [*go about*] are with *to*-infinitive while no other use of [MOTION *about* <LANDMARK>] occurs with *to*-infinitive; see (51).

- (51) *Certein wer taken that **went about to** have an insurrection in Kent*  
(Journal of Edward VI:26, 1500-1570)

[*go about*] has idiomatized within a particular schematic slot of [V *to* INTENTION]. This brings us to one of the most significant emerging constructions in the Middle English period for both *be going to* and *be about to*. It is in this same time period that the *to*-infinitive eventually replaced every use of the infinitive construction [V-*an*] except for the highly frequent old modal constructions (see Section 3.1). But what is particularly important is that the *to*-infinitive developed a purposive use when it was connected to a predicate schema. In the OE section of the DHC uses of the *to*-infinitive are not typically collocated with a verb, and instances that clearly indicate purpose are relatively scarce (cf. Los 2005). By the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, [V *to* INF] had become highly productive.

To say that the *to*-infinitive is part of a purposive construction was not uncontroversial. Traditionally infinitives have been regarded as maximally unmarked and maximally meaningless forms. However, Haspelmath (1987) has demonstrated that prepositions that indicate movement toward a destination grammaticalize into purposive usages cross-linguistically. In Old English, *to* is already part of a preposition construction to mark motion toward a destination (and it still exists in Present Day English). It seems most likely that the *to*-infinitive grammaticalized out of this prepositional use. Verbs were included as an object in schematic slot in the prepositional construction [*to* OBJ] with the structural coding *-ne* as seen in (52). Even at an early stage the *to*-infinitive was sometimes used to indicate an action for the purpose of something as seen in (53).

- (52) *Gif fyr sie ontended ryt        to bærnanne*  
 If fire is kindled rightly to burn  
 ‘If fire is kindled rightly to burn..’ (Alfred’s Laws:1.27, 850-950)

- (53) *him man sēlle an half swulung        an Ciollandene*  
 him one place a half sulung (currency) in Cillendene  
*to habbanne & to brucanne,*  
 to have-ne and to enjoy-ne  
 ‘one may give him a half sulung in Cillendene to have and to enjoy.’  
 (DOC HARM 2:10, 835)

The purposive use seen here would eventually become a highly productive schematic construction and become more rigidified with the predicate. This emerging construction would become the source from which many unique auxiliary constructions would grammaticalize like bright stars in a big nebula (see 2.4). Los (2005) notes that there was a strong connection between the *to*-infinitive and modal constructions in Middle English, so much so that she argues that the *to*-infinitive is equated with modals. Fischer (2008) interprets this correlation as evidence for analogy as the primary motivation for meaning change in grammaticalization. I would argue

rather than the increasingly productive use of *to*-infinitive resulted in the idiomatization of several verbs with strong exemplars in the V slot of [V *to* INF].

What is interesting is that *go* and *about* found their place in [V *to* INF] together by the idiomatization of [MOTION *about*] as seen in Table 5. The move from motion to intention for both of these forms was bolstered by salient use in purposive *to*-infinitive construction. While there are some tokens of *about* in the *to*-infinitive construction in the Middle English Period, there was a significant jump in frequency around the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Table 6 shows all of the tokens of *about* with the *to*-infinitive.

*Table 6. Tokens of [V about to INF] in DHC*

Time	Total	V= <i>go</i>	V= <i>be</i>
1250-1350	4	2	2
1350-1420	1	0	0
1420-1500	1	0	1
1500-1570	14	11	3
1570-1640	11	8	1
1640-1710	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>

The one token from the early part of 15<sup>th</sup> century is with the motion verb *turn*. There is one other token with *turn* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century along with one token of the motion verb *send*. The most surprising finding is that following a large jump in frequency in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century of [*go about to* INF], there are no tokens of this construction between 1640 and 1710. Something happened around the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Uses with *go* see a steep increase immediately followed by a decrease in frequency. It seems the greatest idiomatization of *about* with the *to*-infinitive occurred during this time period, and it did so with a exemplar connected to *go*.

It seems that uses with *be* remain rather constant throughout the early centuries. Indeed there are nonce uses with *be* in the early sections of the DHC, but these did not see the kind of frequency increase that *go about to* does. Further back in the Old English period [*be to* INF] was quite common, and was a unique form-meaning pair that was often used to indicate obligation (cf. Baker 2012). By the Middle English period, it had become so frequent with the rise of the *to*-infinitive that an average 1 token of *be about to* per 100,000 words is an extremely low relative frequency. It seems these tokens are most likely interpreted analytically as [*be X*] *to* INF] where *about* fills the X schema. To have a clearer understanding what is happening with *be about to* and *go about to* leading into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it is necessary to have more extensive synchronic analysis for this time period.

It is important to note that *go* was used in [*V to* INF] without *about*. In the section of the DHC from 1420-1570, 59% (13/22) tokens of *go* in [*V to* INF] occur without *about*. However, when *about* is not present, the andative meaning is typically more salient. Usually there is a clear destination in mind, as seen in (54) and (55). Disney refers to this *go* as ‘Lexical + infinitive’ (Disney 2009:71). There are a few examples, however, where intention is clearly the most relevant as seen in (56).

(54) *The same went to see Hampton court*, (Daiary of Edward VI:272:28)

(55) *that went to serche the londe*,  
(Tyndale, Translation of Old Testament, Numbers 14:6)

(56) *Like as a wodman he gan to fray*, (Digby Plays:97)

*Hampton court* in (54) and *the londe* (55) are clear destinations to which the agent is going. On the other hand, in (56) the author describes the devil as one who terrifies others wherever he may be. There is no specific location in mind. Only three tokens (3/13) do not

have an identifiable location to which the agent will move to complete the intended action. On the other hand, the [*go about to* INF] do not have a clear destination in mind, and intention is the most salient semantic feature; see (57) - (59).

(57) *and so goe aboute to begile you moch*, (Ascham, E1 IS/EX EDUC:184)

(58) *she went about to bewitch him*, (Moore, History of Richard II:54)

(59) *But now ye goo about to kyll me a man that have tolde you the truthe*,  
(Tyndale, Translation of New Testament, John 8:40)

It seems with *go about to* that the intent is more important than motion. In these examples, location is not as important as the act of ‘beguiling’, ‘bewitching’ or ‘killing’. This being said, I would suggest that [*go about to* INF] has emerged as a construction for intention in a way that [*go to* INF] has not. This is further supported by the fact that in the DHC *go about to* is overwhelmingly pejorative. The infinitive is usually to cause harm or to oppose others. This semantic peculiarity further suggests the emergence of a particular construction [*go about to* INF] at this time in a way that is not observable in any other context.

This finding is important because we know that the 16<sup>th</sup> century construction was likely a precursor for both *be going to* and *be about to*, based on Poole’s (1646) remark. Indeed the latest section of the DHC *about to* had grammaticalized enough to indicate future tense without any relation to intention as seen here in (60).

(60) *Sheriff Goaler or Keeper of Prison shall forfeit and pay to such Prisoner  
soe **about to bee** discharged*. (STA LAW STAT 7:76, 1695)

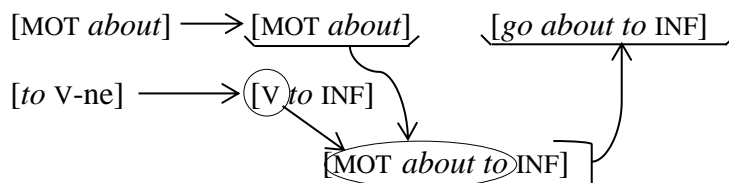
There are two significant signs of change here. First there is a passive verb in the infinitive which is clearly no longer agent-oriented. Second, *about to* is used in a modifying expression, meaning that it has developed uses outside of a predicate schema by this time.

By 1570 neither *be going to* nor *be about to* seem to occur with any frequency as independent constructions, let alone as ‘participles of the future’. Yet they are both used in the same idiomatized construction for uniquely identifiable intention meaning in [*go about to* INF]. Not only this, but *go about to* goes from relatively high frequency in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to having 0 tokens between 1640-1710, and *be* has become an important fixed element in both the *be going to* and the *be about to* as future auxiliaries. To understand how these changes have developed and to see how *go about to* evolved in relation to *be about to*, I look at the works of Shakespeare which provides a much larger corpus for the time period around the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### 4.3 The turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

Figure 6 displays the emergence of constructions from the earliest English texts up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Figure 6. Evolution of constructions pre-850-1500



The earliest identifiable construction with *about* is with motion verbs. This construction persisted throughout the Middle English period. The *to*-infinitive grew in prominence and eventually replaced *-an* infinitive taking on the same infinitival functions by the Middle English Period. At this time the purposive construction [V *to* INF] emerged as a prominent construction in which the more salient verb forms idiomatized, leading to new auxiliaries such as *ought to*, *have to*, *got to* etc. Among these, [MOTION *about*] idiomatized into *go about to* within the V schema of [V *to* INF] in a unique intention construction [*go about to* INF].

Immediately prior to the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there is little sign of *be about to* and *be going to* as independent developments in the DHC, but Poole's assessment should lead us to believe these had emerged, at least to a degree during, this time period. An enlightening finding in Disney (2009) is that the earliest grammaticalized uses of *be going to* referred to an event in the immediate future. He observed this tendency even after non-agentive uses had arisen. This helps to understand why Poole would treat *be about to* and *be going to* as synonymous and interchangeable, i.e. he uses both constructions in the same sentence. Early on, it seems these two constructions were similar not only with respect to futurity, but also remoteness.

However, there is a sense in which Poole's intuitions are somewhat surprising. It is not apparent in the data available that *be going to* has become frequent in the Shakespeare data beyond intention uses, even though it only predates Poole's assessment by 40 years. Disney suggests that this is due to the comparison of literature with the spoken language that Poole would have been observing. He appeals to Krug (2000), who argues that literature is about 30+ years behind spoken language. Thus, Disney concludes that 1600-1630 was the likely generation that really took up *be going to* as a future construction, even though there was still little evidence of purely predictive uses at the time.

While clear future uses are hard to find in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the progressive construction with *be going to* had indeed begun to appear at this time. Disney found 29 tokens (320 per 100,000 words) of *be going to*-INF as those seen here.

(61) *I was going, sir, To give him welcome. Exit* (Cymbeline 1:4)



Similarly *be about to* is used somewhat frequently in Shakespeare, but only in a very specific context. While most of these tokens are arguably more purposive rather than predictive, the introduction of this progressive construction for intention with *go* may have motivated an increase in the use of [*be about to* INF] along with [*go about to* INF]. In fact we do find that uses of *be about to* are also increasing in relative frequency at the same time as *be going to* as seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Tokens of [V *about to* INF] in Shakespeare

Preceding verb	Total
<i>be</i>	11
<i>go</i>	8 <sup>12</sup>
Other MOT verb	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

We see here that there are still other tokens of [MOTION *about*] in [V *to* INF], but *go about* is more idiomatized (8/11) than it was in the DHC. At the same time, there are actually more tokens of *be about to* than *go about to*. This coincides with the arrival of the progressive construction with *going* for intention uses. While [*go about to* INF] seems to be decreasing in token frequency in correlation to the rise [*be about to* INF], Disney notices the same correlation with the grammaticalization of *be going to*. In a footnote regarding the early tendency for immediate future uses of *be going to*, he notes:

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<sup>12</sup> The token frequency of *go about* is actually quite surprising. There are more tokens of *go about* in the EModE3 section of the DHC (189,000 words) than in the Shakespeare corpus (750,000 words). The discrepancy here is 6 tokens of *go about to* per 100,000 words in EModE3 vs. less than 1 token per 100,000 words in the Shakespeare corpus. One can only speculate about why there would be such a conflict in data. It is likely due to the preferences of one individual. Regardless, a comparative analysis of the data within the corpus is not affected by this incongruity, but it should be taken into account when comparing data from the DHC with the Shakespeare corpus.

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 19th 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). (Disney 2009:68)

There are actually 34 tokens of *about to* + V in the DHC, but the percentages are still about the same. Without taking into account the last section from 1640-1710, which postdates the Shakespeare corpus, *go about to* is used 66% of the time (21/32) while *be about to* is used about 22% of the time (7/32) (see Table 6). There is a decline in [*go about to*-INF] shortly after emerging. At the same time that there is a rise in both [*be going to* INF] and [*be about to* INF].

However, *be about to* and *go about to* are not completely equivalent. *Go about to* is still used primarily for intention, and is still typically pejorative. In fact, the infinitive is an action to harm another in 7 of the 8 tokens of *go about to*. At the same time, *be about to* seems to be very specific. In 81% (9/11) of the tokens of *be about to*, the infinitive is a *verbum dicendi* as seen here in (62) and (63).

(62) *I was about to tell you, since I heard of the good Ladies death, (As you like it)*

(63) *He does: what was I about to say? I was about say<sup>13</sup> something: where did I leave?*  
(Julius Caesar)

In these instances, it seems that intention is still a likely interpretation inasmuch as one has to intend to say something in order to say it. The subject is always human as well. However, in

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<sup>13</sup> While this second instance where *to* is omitted is interesting, I did not include it in the data counts for two reasons. One is because of its repetition with another token. The other is because there is no evidence of this as a recurring pattern at the time or at any time in the future.

these instances the pragmatic inference of imminence becomes important. The action is fulfilled, or intended to be fulfilled within the same conversation. Table 8 shows the distribution of *verbum dicendi* in tokens of *about to*.

Table 8. Verbs of speaking with ‘about to’ in Shakespeare

Verb	TOTAL	DICENDI INF	
		yes	no
<b><i>be</i></b>	11	9	2
<b><i>go</i></b>	8	0	8
<b>Other MOT</b>	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>	22	9	13

While there are no instances of [*go about to* INF] with a verb of speaking in the INT schematic slot, with [*be about to* INF] the following infinitive is a verb of speaking in all but two instances see (64).

(64) *once, or twice I was about to speake, and tell him plainly* (The Winter’s Tale)

The different verbs that are used are shown here in Table 9.

Table 9. Use of [*be about to* DICENDI]

DICENDI	Total
say	3
speak	3
tell	2
call	1

The schematic slot in [*be about to* INF] appears to be limited to just a few Verbs. On the other hand, all 11 tokens of *go about to* and MOTION *about to* have a different Verb in the infinitive. It appears that [*be about to* INF] has idiomatized in this particular context.

Yet, what is most telling is what we find with the two tokens of [*be about to* INF] that are not with *verbum dicendi*. These are the first two and the only two unambiguous instances of [*be about to* V]<sub>immediate future</sub>.

- (65) *Sir, **I am about to weep**; but thinking that we are a Queene (or long haue dream'd so) certaine the daughter of a King, my drops of teares, Ile turne to sparkes of fire.* (Hamlet)
- (66) *Peace, peace, peace, stay, hold, peace. **What is about to be**? I am out of Confusions neere, I cannot speake.* (Cymbeline)

In (65), weeping is not an intended action. It is something that is typically not desired and not within the control of the speaker, and is thus non-agent oriented. The clearest interpretation of *be about to* in this case is as a marker of futurity. In (66) the subject is not only inanimate, it is existential. The infinitive schematic slot is filled with a non-intention stative verb. The outcome is something feared and unknown, meaning that is out of the control of the speaker. Its realization in the immediate future is the only thing that is relevant. Immediate future is the only possible interpretation. Watanabe's conclusion that all immediate future uses until the 19<sup>th</sup> century were implicatures with intention uses cannot account for these tokens.

For the Shakespeare corpus there is clearly a more idiomatic context in which *be* is used rather than *go* for intention. That is to say that frequent uses with *be* had only emerged where the INF slot had idiomatized for verbs of speaking. Intention meaning grammaticalized into immediate future in the context of speech events while the DICENDI slot schematized in the new construction for immediate future in any situation. This construction had already begun to emerge at the time of Shakespeare before [*go about to* INF] significantly decreased in frequency and while [*be going to* INF] was still infrequent and limited primarily to immediate future events.

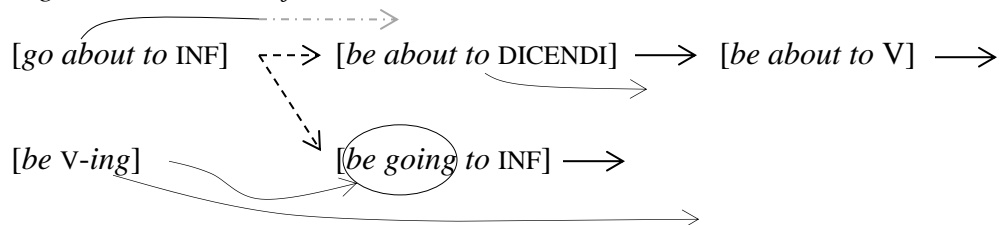
Disney found that it took about two generations from 1630 for non-agentive uses of [*be going to* INF] to arise, although it is noted that non-agentive uses are not common until as late as the mid 1900's. However, evidence that *be about to* has developed non-agentive uses following the divergence of [*go about to* INF] into [*be going to* INF] and [*be about to* INF] is very early. Shakespeare precedes the 1630 generation by at least 20 years, and there are already undeniable uses of [*be about to* INF] to mark immediate future, even by Traugott's (2012) strict standards for constructionalization with example (66). Nonetheless, I would suggest that the fact that these two constructions begin to emerge at the same time, the fact that their conventionalization correlates with the loss of [*go about to* INF], and the fact that they are so similar in both form and function are not coincidence.

To see exactly how [*be about to* INF] has changed and what has become of [*go about to* INF], I examine the use of these constructions in Dickens' novels from around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 4.4 The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century

Figure 7 displays the evolution and emergence of constructions around the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Figure 7. Evolution of constructions 1600's



The construction [*be V-ing*] idiomatizes in the semi-schematic *go* slot of [*go about to* INF] in which *about* is omitted. The reason for claiming that this emerged from [*go about to* INF] and not

just [*go to* INF] is that most of the earliest uses for this construction with intention meaning are with *about*, while instances of [*go to* INF] appear to be more analytically interpreted with lexical *go* in the more schematic purpose construction. Likewise the more idiomatic construction [*be about to* DICENDI] begins to emerge, and the relative frequency of both [*be about to* DICENDI] and [*be going to* INF] increase at the same time that the previously productive [*go about to* INF] decreases in frequency. The infinitive slot in [*be about to* INF] schematizes from immediate future in a speech event to immediate future in any situation.

As can be seen from examples like (60), (65) and (66) there is already significant evidence for a new construction having emerged at a point that coincides well with Poole's description. While Watanabe (2010) did not find any uses with passive or actions that cannot be interpreted as intention until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, around the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there are already two non-intention actions in a 750,000 word corpus and one passive use at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in a 170,000 word corpus. Even though there are only a few examples, they are neither translations nor are they ambiguous. For this reason, I would suggest that at this point idiomatization has set the stage for the newly emerging schema in [*be about to* INF]<sub>immediate future</sub> to expand and increase in frequency. If this is, in fact, occurring, we should see much more variation in the INF schematic slot at the time of Dickens' novels and a much higher relative frequency for [*be about to* INF] than [*go about to* INF] than is seen in Shakespeare.

Both of these expectations do hold in the Dickens corpus. The frequency of [*be about to* INF] has increased since the 17<sup>th</sup> century from fewer than 2 tokens per 100,000 words to 7 per 100,000 words. In addition to this, the frequency of [*go about to* INF] diminished so much that there are actually no tokens in the Dickens Corpus. Somewhat surprisingly, there are two instances of [MOTION *about to* INF] as seen here with other.

(67) *sometimes lying on the bank wrapped in our coats, and sometimes **moving about** to warm ourselves:* (Great Expectations)

(68) *But thou'd rather **drag him about** to excite charity - of course.*  
(Barnaby Rudge)

It is likely that these do not represent new developments but the continuance of older developments. In other words, both (67) and (68) have the construction [MOTION *about*] within the purposive construction [V *to* INF]. Because the relative frequency of these particular instances in the purposive construction is low, they are interpreted analytically with a blending of meaning between the schematic slots and the fixed verbal constructions that fill them. These are not new developments from an emerging construction, but rather are examples of old constructions that have persisted throughout time along with the idiomatized constructions that have emerged from them.

The fact that there are no tokens of [*go about to* INF] is quite telling. It seems this unique construction which emerged in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century did not last long, meeting its demise after the evolution of *be going to* and *be about to*. This result supports both the projected trend of change following the 16<sup>th</sup> century and also Disney's finding that *go about to* is virtually absent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century British National Corpus.

The schematic slot for speaking verbs in the earliest uses of [*be about to* INF] has expanded significantly by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, just as the few atypical tokens in the Shakespeare corpus had foreshadowed, i.e. (65) and (66). *Verbum dicendi* are still common, but much less so than other verbs. About 28% (17/60) are with speaking verbs. As with the tokens in Shakespeare the most frequent verbs are *say* (7 tokens) and *speak* (4 tokens). There are 36 other verbs that are used with no clear underlying semantic similarities. This suggests that the V

schema has extended significantly from primarily speaking, while at the same time speaking situations have retained some frequency. If the schematization of the INF slot was in fact motivated by the grammaticalization of meaning from intention to immediate future, there should be significant evidence of clear future uses of [*be about to* INF] in the Dickens Corpus.

To identify whether future uses of *be about to* have emerged, one must find the grounds for disambiguating intentionality from futurity. Disney argues that one can only be sure that the prediction meaning has become more relevant to the construction than intention when intention is not a possible interpretation. The reason for this is that intention always implies a future event in which the intended action might be realized. The way to disambiguate prediction from intention is to find uses of the construction with actions that cannot be interpreted as intention, passives or inanimate subjects. This does not mean that things like passives and inanimate subjects are the ingredients for the grammaticalization of immediate future meaning. These are, however, the only parameters for finding the tokens with future meaning that we can be sure about. The only way to completely remove speculation from the equation is with these criteria.

This non-intention category does not include non-volition uses, because one can presumably intend to do something without wanting to do it. For example:

- (69) *Susan, who is an old friend of mine, the oldest friend I have said Florence, is about to leave here suddenly, and quite alone, poor girl.* (Dombey and Sons)

In this case Susan has to move to another place, but does not want to do so. Her actions can be construed as intention, but it is much more likely that Dickens has in mind an immediate future interpretation. However these instances are not as indisputable as the criterion for non-intention. The usage of *be about to* is seen in Table 10.



Table 10. Intention vs. prediction uses of 'be about to' in the Dickens Corpus

Use	Total	%
<i>Ambiguous</i>	45	75.0%
<i>Prediction</i>	7	11.7%
<i>Non-volition</i>	8	13.3%
<i>Total</i>	60	100%

Table 10 shows the tokens of [*be about to* INF] that may be interpreted as intention (ambiguous) and those which are unambiguously immediate future (prediction) uses, and those which are likely immediate future uses (non-volition). While tokens with a possible intention interpretation are frequent, this does not mean that a future tense is not the most relevant meaning in those propositions. It only reveals the tokens that are not helpful for determining the point at which futurity has grammaticalized. Even a highly conventionalized future construction like *will* may have many uses for which intention cannot be disambiguated for future meaning, e.g. *I'll answer the phone*. What is important is that purely future uses are indeed present at this time, and they are relatively common.

There are 7 non-intention uses in Table 10 that meet at least one of the criteria (inanimate subject, passive verb or non-intention verb). All but one token have a non-intention action.

- (70) *the only other tenant of the cell, who lay, stretched at his full length, upon a stone bench, and who paused in his deep breathing as if he **were about to** wake.*  
(Barnaby Rudge)
- (71) *Then, just as it seemed that he **was about to** fall heavily to the ground from his narrow bed,*  
(Barnaby Rudge)

In both (70) and (71) the subjects are sleeping. Sleep is a state in which one cannot exercise volition. Therefore these actions cannot be interpreted as intentional. There are four tokens which also take inanimate subjects as seen here.

- (72) *the houses of two witnesses near Clare Market **were about to** be pulled down when he came away;* (Barnaby Rudge)
- (73) *These gushes of affection over, the procession **was about to** issue forth again,*  
(Dombey and Son)
- (74) *raising the forefinger of her right hand, in the air, as a stealthy signal to the concealed observer to give particular attention to what **was about to** follow.*  
(Dombey and Son)
- (75) *a quiet chat with Mrs. Varden on every- thing that had happened, was happening, or **about to** happen, within the sphere of their domestic concern;*(Barnaby Rudge)

While the Subject in (72) is an object, the subjects in (73) though (74) are more abstract concepts. Example (72) is the only occurrence of *be about to* with a passive infinitive. (75) is especially interesting, and is probably the most convincing evidence of productive grammaticalized predictive use of *be about to* during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The subject is an abstract event, the INF schema is filled with non-intentional action, and Dickens repeats the same proposition with three different tense/mood/aspect constructions to present the action in the past, present and future.

It seems that *be about to* has become indisputably grammaticalized by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is reflected in an increase in token frequency and a growing schematicity in the V slot from the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that *be going to* has conventionalized in many of the same ways. Disney uses similar parameters including passive or stative verbs and inanimate subjects to distinguish intentional uses from prediction uses of *be going to*. However, Disney classifies these tokens as ‘ambiguous’, because there were peculiar complexities in the tokens of

*be going to*. One example he gives is (76) which could be construed as intention even though it takes a passive infinitive (Disney 2009:72).

- (76) *a little chit of a miller's daughter of eighteen, who was going to be married, in three weeks' time*  
(Nicholas Nickleby: ch. 13)

The reason I have classified these as non-intention in Table 10 is because there were no such complications in the tokens for *be about to*. Disney assumes all tokens classified as ambiguous to be non-intention uses. For this reason his classification of 'ambiguous' tokens for *be going to* in Table 11 and my classification of 'non-intention' tokens of *be about to* is essentially the same.

Table 11. *Uses of be going to in the Dickens Corpus*<sup>14</sup>

Use	Total	%
Lexical + locative	92	26.4%
Lexical + Infinitive	12	3.5% <sup>15</sup>
<b><i>Intention</i></b>	<b>228</b>	<b>65.5%</b>
<b><i>Ambiguous</i></b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4.6%</b>
<i>Total</i>	348	100%

One thing to note is that the frequency of [*be going to* INF] has become much higher than [*be about to* INF]. The gap was somewhat evident in the Shakespeare Corpus in which there are about 3 uses of *be going to* INF per 100,000 words and about 2 tokens of *be about to* per 100,000 words. However, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century the gap between these has widened as [*be going to* INF] increased in frequency at a much faster rate. This is likely due to [*be going to* INF] extending to include non-immediate future events as seen in (77).

<sup>14</sup> *be going to* data taken from Disney (2009:71)

<sup>15</sup> 'Lexical + locative' and 'Lexical + Infinitive' refer to the andative uses of the verb *go*.

- (77) *"It has not, sir," rejoined the prentice. "It's going to be fitted on a ware'us-door in Thames Street."* (Barnaby Rudge)

Here the characters are discussing a piece of ironwork that one of them is preparing to hang on a door at some undetermined point in the future. It is not an imminent event. Therefore *be going to* has significantly increased in relative frequency to *be about to* as a result of its extension into grammatical contexts from which *be about to* is restricted.

While *be going to* has become more frequent, the relative frequency of tokens that are clearly non-intention is higher with *be about to* than with *be going to* (4.6% to 11.7%). Needless to say, it seems that both of these constructions began to manifest themselves around the same time, both were considered to be synonymous at an early date, and both have made similar strides toward becoming productive conventionalized future auxiliaries around the same time.

Having identified these changes, the next important step is to understand what ‘stars’ have formed within the [*be about to* V] ‘nebula’. Every emerging schematic construction will be subject to the same basic processes of change though idiomatization and schematization that produced it. As I discussed in Section 3.2, Jirsa (1997) noted that there are several different uses of *be about to* that cannot be accounted for by the mere decomposition of its elements in Modern English. He suggests that the difference in meaning when the construction is negated and when *be* is past tense is explained by their development at different points in time. He points out important distinctions, and I would agree with his conclusion. However, I would interpret his finding slightly differently. These are not variant uses of the [*be about to* V] construction. They have become different construction entirely. In other words, there is not an open slot for negation, but rather negation has idiomatized in [*be about to* INF] resulting in an autonomous form-meaning pair. The relationship between [*be-PRES about to* V] and [*be not about to* V] is,

therefore, a historical one. The identifiable similarities between them are a result of a shared recent past in the same schematic construction from which they have already begun to diverge. We can tell that they have begun to diverge by the simple fact that we can identify differences in function between them that cannot be derived from its constituents<sup>16</sup>. I am not suggesting that the individual parts cannot be retrieved nor that one cannot draw analogies between them, only that they are stored as whole, complex entities, and analogy is not primarily responsible for their formation.

All three of the distinctions that Jirsa describes are present in the Dickens corpus. There are only two occurrences of *be not about to*.

(78) *peered at him with outstretched neck, to assure him-self that he really was still asleep, and **was not about to** spring upon him when he was off his guard.*  
(Barnaby Rudge)

(79) *He **was not about to** throw himself headlong from the summit of the tottering wall.* (Barnaby Rudge)

In (78) a man is trying to pass by someone who is upset with him while he is sleeping. It appears that this is likely more of a predictive use because he is checking to make sure that he does not make a decision that he would regret. However, (79) *was not about to* does appear to indicate emphatic unwillingness to perform an action much like the modern usage. In both cases the action is something that would cause harm to the agent. It is likely that the frequent dispreference of the action in situations like (78) when the proposition is negated led to the conventionalization of emphatic unwillingness meaning in the idiomatized construction [*be not about to* V].

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<sup>16</sup> This argument is based on the claim that unique constructions are presupposed in most cases of ‘polysemy’ and the different meanings that are assumed to be polysemous are only exemplified by using the form in a different construction that disambiguate them..

The vast majority of the tokens in the Dickens corpus of *be about to* are in the past tense, 50 tokens (83%) only 10 (17%) are present tense. This likely has something to do with genre. All four novels that were used for this study are narrated in the past tense leaving uses in quoted text the only candidates for present tense tokens.

Of the 10 tokens in the present tense, two are non-intention uses and at least two others are non-volition uses. That means that nearly half of the tokens are clearly immediate future uses. Unremarkably, all of these uses are completed or complete-able events. In contrast to present uses, 82% (41/50) of past tense uses are explicitly non-completed events. 36% (18/50) uses are immediately followed by a *when* clause; see (80).

(80) *he liked her, and **was about to** show it in his own way now, **when** Paul cried,*  
(Dombey and Sons)

In these instances, the following clause indicates an event that prevented the intention from ever being performed.

It seems that another interesting development of [*be*-PAST *about to* V] is related to speech events. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century [*I was about to* DICENDI] has developed into a pragmatic device for an interlocutor to digress in discourse, when he/she wanted to say something and never got a chance to do so.

(81) *'Oh, hush if you please!' said Miss Tox. 'I **was about to** say to you, Richards,' resumed Mr. Dombey,* (Dombey and Sons)

Mr. Dombey uses this construction to return to something that he intended to share before being interrupted. Like other uses of [*(be*-PAST) *about to* V], instances like (81) imply an uncompleted

event. But in the first person with *verbum dicendi* it has begun to idiomatize into a construction with particular pragmatic function in discourse situations.

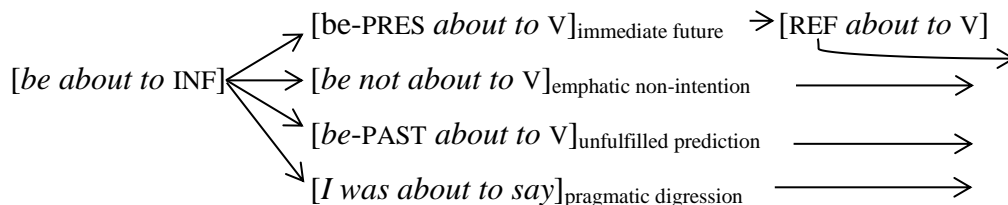
In addition to these constructions it seems that [*about to* V] has become habituated enough to become emancipated from a predicate construction to modify referring expressions, i.e. [REF *about to* V].

- (82) ‘Like a *bee*, Sir,’ said Mrs. Blimber, with uplifted eyes, ‘*about to* plunge into a garden of the choicest flowers, and sip the sweets for the first time.  
(Dombey and Sons)

Here *about to* V is describing the *bee*. It is not connected to arguments structure, but is rather an attributive expression. As I have already noted, the earliest instance of this is all the way back at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (see example (60). In Dickens there are just four other occurrences of *about to* as a modifying expression.

To sum up these points, in my interpretation several different constructions have emerged out of the same schematic construction [*be about to* INF] by the same principles of idiomatization and schematization. These developments can be seen in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Evolution of constructions by 19<sup>th</sup> century



One could argue that such a description is not completely accurate. *Be about to* does not always indicate future from the time the person utters the proposition, but rather it indicates the immediate future of a deictic center that is specified by the semi-open schematic slot *be*. The

construction is structured such that the few forms that may fill the *be* slot will also indicate tense, and *about to* will indicate the immediate future from that deictic center. This could be used as grounds to argue that *be about to* is not grammaticalizing into tense marking. However, I would argue that the semantic peculiarities that have become recognizable with systematic differences in form indicate that the semi-schematic *be* has actually idiomatized in two different constructions. [SBJ (*was/were*) *about to* V] may be a unique, stored entity than [SBJ (*am/is/are*) *about to* V] with different connotations, and only [SBJ (*am/is/are*) *about to* V] has and is grammaticalizing into an immediate future auxiliary construction.



## Chapter 5

### Wrap up

#### 5.1 Summary of *be about to*

I have sought to account for the evolution of constructions leading up to the present uses of *be about to*. I have sought out diachronic evidence for changes throughout time by analyzing synchronic data of a significant number of tokens at different points in history. The DHC shows that most of the early uses of *about* were with motion as the prepositions *on* and *be* idiomatized to *utan* in the schematic construction [V PREP-*utan*] where the V schema was frequently a verb of motion, i.e. [MOTION *onbutan*]. Correlating with the loss of preposition constructions involving the form *ymb*, *onbutan* began to emerge in many other prepositional constructions increasing dramatically in token frequency. Among these new uses the immediate future construction would also emerge. [MOTION *about*] began to occasionally fill the V slot of the purposive construction that developed in Middle English, [SBJ V *to* INF]. In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, [MOTION *about*] idiomatized to [*go about*] through frequent use in the V schematic slot of the purposive construction [SBJ V *to* INF], motivating and increasing exemplar strength for intention meaning for both *go* and *about*. Toward the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, [*go about to* INF] began to decrease in relative frequency as the progressive construction [*be* V-*ing*] idiomatized in the semi-open ‘*go*’ slot of [*go about to* INF] where *about* was not included and [*be about to* DICENDI] emerged in the fixed context of speaking events. At this point *be going to* and *be about to* began to evolve and increase in frequency while *go about to* would disappear. In this interpretation, *be about to* and *be going to* have, in a sense, emerged from the same construction in which they developed a strong association with intention together.

As the intention associated with each of these grammaticalized into futurity, the spatial location features of *about* in the earliest [MOTION *about*] construction persisted through the emergence of [be-PRES *about to* V] to specify temporal proximity. [*be about to* DICENDI] began to evolve into a marker of immediate future causing the predicate slot to schematize and extend away from purely speech events to include all actions. Consequently, it had become much more frequent and productive by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the immediate future construction, others also began to emerge like [*be*-PAST *about to* V], [*I was about to say*] and [*be not about to* V] in particular contexts resulting in the emergence of several distinct form-meaning pairs. All of these constructions have continued into Modern English.

As a final note, further analysis is needed to be sure of these conclusions. In particular, there is a need to examine more data around the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The motivation for *be about to* being used in the specific context of speaking events is not entirely clear. A more extensive study of this time period would be a valuable commodity. Such is necessary to be sure that the tendency for Shakespeare to use *be about to* with verbs of speaking is not just the anomaly of one individual. Other writings from the time could either confirm or call for a reconsideration of how frequent use in [*go about to* INF] shifted to [*be about to* INF]. Also, it would be beneficial to have a more extensive analysis of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as this study simply jumps from the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A synchronic analysis of the 18<sup>th</sup> century could help us to understand what specific semantic classes began to fill the V slot of *be about to* first as it extended away from *verbum dicendi*. It would also be valuable to have a synchronic analysis of that time period to see what has become of [*go about to* INF] and to what extent *be about to* had begun to develop into different constructions with unique semantic features in specific formal representations.

## 5.2 Concluding thoughts

In recent years, construction grammar has begun to have more influence on grammaticalization studies. In this thesis I have sought to continue in the same theoretical path. I have described the important developments in grammaticalization theory that have led to increasing efforts to reform our approaches to language change in order to account for complex structures and understand how lexicalization and grammaticalization relate to one another. I have presented a methodology which builds off of the approaches which see both lexicalization and grammaticalization as construction specific processes that are not mutually exclusive (Lehmann 2002, Bybee 2003a&b 2006, Himmelmann 2004) from a Radical Construction Grammar perspective (Croft 2001, 2013). This model sees the evolution of language structure as multi-dimensional in which the schemas of old constructions idiomatize into more fixed elements which potentially elicit new schematic slots that may extend. Lastly, I have sought to demonstrate how this approach benefits our analysis of historical developments in language by examining the interaction and emergence of constructions in the conventionalization of *be about to*.

Being careful to understand where a construction begins, from what it emerges and what content it encompasses has often been taken for granted. It seems to me that in most studies linguistic storage in an array of complex units with form and meaning joined together in a semiotic pair is rightly recognized. But there often seems to be a presupposition that those constructions somehow developed out of older linguistic system that consisted of lexical parts joined by syntactic rules, as if language were moving away from a generative structure toward a construction-based one. There is also a tendency to see developments as passing through some kind of instability and confusion as it moves from one construction to another. Here I have

attempted to apply a means of analyzing language change that intentionally dismisses both of those assumptions.

These findings demonstrate the value of examining language change from a construction grammar framework. While it is helpful to understand that constructions undergo grammaticalization, we should also be understood that the emergence of a new construction always involved the interaction between several different constructions that idiomatize together. Language has always been stored in complex form-meaning pairs that vary in degrees of schematicity and idiomaticity, and these constructions are productive and without confusion for those who used them at every moment of their evolution. None of the complexities or methodological difficulties implied this proposition should be taken for granted.

## **Key**

ACC - Accusative  
ADJ - Adjective  
ADV - Adverb  
DAT - Dative  
INF - Infinitive  
MOT- Motion  
POSS - Possessor  
OBJ – Syntactic object  
REF - Referring expression  
SBJ - Syntactic subject  
V – Verbal predicate  
VOL - Volitional

## Appendix A

### Tokens of *about* pre-1050 (DHC)

	Text	Example	LM	Motion
1	NN HIST CHRONA2	slogon monige men +at Hocneratune, & +t+ar onbutan;	Y	N
2	STA LAW LAW11	Gif fri+dgeard sy on hw+as lande abuton stan o+d+de treow o+d+de wille o+d+de swilces +anigge fleard,	Y	N
3	IR HOM BLICK6	t+ar he leofa+d & rixa+d abuton ende, on ecnesse, Amen.	Y	N
4	IR HOM BLICK17	t+ar hie motan blissian abuton ende on ecnesse.	Y	N
5	STA LAW LAW11C	& halige englas +t+ar abutan hwearfia+d	Y	N
6	XX OLDT AELFOLD	& +da +de her eardia+d abutan,	Y	N
7	NN HIST CHRONA2	& foron west onbutan +t+at hie gedydon innan S+aferne	N	Y
8	NN HIST CHRONA2	& namon +tone ceap onbutan; & +ta men aweredon	N	Y
9	NN HIST OROS	ac oftr+adlice he w+as mid hlo+tum on hi hergende, & onbutan sierwende o+t hie eft totw+made w+aron,	N	Y
10	IS SCIA BYRHTF. r:80.22	& heo +afre tyrn+d onbutan us.	Y	Y
11	EX SCIA TEMP	Seo (\firmamentum\) tyrn+d symle onbutan us under +dysse reeor+dan & bufon,	Y	Y
12	EX SCIA TEMP	on f+aste sind turnia+d onbutan mid hire.	N	Y
13	EX SCIA TEMP	& seo sunne glit onbutan be Godes gesetnysse,	N	Y
14	XX OLDT AELFOLD	seo g+a+d onbutan +d+at land +de is gehaten Euila+d,	Y	Y
15	EX SCIA TEMP. r:1.5	& heo +afre tyrn+d onbuton us swyftre +donne +anig mylenhweowul,	Y	Y
16	EX SCIA TEMP	+t+at l+assan ymbgang h+af+d se man +te g+a+d onbuton an hus,	Y	Y
17	EX SCIA TEMP	Ac he went abutan hwilon up hwilon adune,	Y	Y
18	IR HOM AELFR15	[{and{]} duru minum welerum, +tinre wearde abutan.	N	Y
19	LIVES STS 32	sum heora mid feolan feolode abutan,	N	Y

## Appendix B

### Tokens of *about* to in DHC

	Text	Time	Example	Int	pre	v	Mot
1	IR RULE AELR3	1300	we schul be <b>aboute to</b> make vs clene of cotidian defautes by meke schryfte and due satisfaccioun.	Y	be		N
2	OLDT WYCOLD	1400	and a swerd of flawme and turnynge <b>aboute to</b> kepe the weie of the tre of lijf.	Y	turn		Y
3	ROLLE PS AND COMM	1300	that when a man is ful of vertus, than is he ay <b>aboute to</b> put him in til pride.	Y	be		N
4	E1 IS/EX EDUC ASCH	1500	as, to seeke to be helped by some other booke, or to be prompted by some other Scholer, and so goe <b>aboute to</b> begile you moch, and him selfe more.	Y	go		Y
5	BOETHIUS' CONS OF PHIL,	1500	put vs out of the trewth of the thyng or matter, that we be <b>aboute to</b> talke of.	Y	be		N
6	BOETHIUS' CONS OF PHIL,	1500	whych would drye awaye yf a man go <b>aboute to</b> conuey the~ into any other places then such they be in al readie.	Y	go		Y
7	N CAVEAT	1500	when hee goeth <b>aboute to</b> haue his pleasure of the, and that shall bee "fye, for shame, fye,"	Y	go		Y
8	E1 XX BIBLE TYNDNEW	1500	devyll: who goeth <b>aboute to</b> kyll the? Iesus answered and sayde to them: I have done one worke, and ye all marvayle.	Y	go		Y
9	E1 XX BIBLE TYNDNEW	1500	Agayne they went <b>aboute to</b> take him: but he escaped out of their hondes,	Y	go		Y
10	EAR OF ESSEX, SOUTHAMP IN WESTM HALL	1600	as if I went <b>aboute to</b> saue my Lyfe: no, I despise it and am at peace w=th= god	Y	go		Y
11	EAR OF ESSEX, SOUTHAMP IN WESTM HALL	1600	Nay my Lo. (q=th= M=r= Attorney) howsoever yo=u= goe <b>aboute to</b> cloake matters, and to make a p~tence of an innocente harte,	Y	go		Y
12	E1 IS/EX EDUC ELYOT	1500	sende ye some man, whom ye best truste, with Histaspa my seruauant; and thou, Histaspa, go <b>about to</b> my frendes and shewe them that I lacke golde	na	go		Y
13	BOETH1 COLVILLE	1500	For lyke as a workeman conceyuing in his mynde the forme or fashyon of the thyng that he is <b>about to</b> make, moueth and goeth aboute theffecte of his worke	Y	be		N
14	N HISTORY RICHARD III	1500	And when he had a while laide vnto her for the maner sake, y=t= she went <b>about to</b> bewitch him, & y=t= she was of counsel w=t= # the lord chamberleyn to destroy him	Y	go		Y
15	N JOURNAL EDWARD VI	1500	Certein wer taken that went <b>about to</b> have an insurreccion in Kent upon May-day following	Y	go		Y
16	NT. TRANS TYNDALE	1500	The sicke answered him: Syr I have no man when the water is troubled, to put me into the pole. But in the meane tyme, whill I am <b>about to come</b> , another steppeth doune before me.	Y	be		N
17	NT. TRANS TYNDALE	1500	If ye were Abrahams chyl dren, ye wolde do the dedes of # Abraham. But now ye goo <b>about to</b> kyll me a man that have tolde you the truthe,	Y	go		Y
18	E2 IS HANDO GIFFORD	1500	For my part, I go not <b>about to</b> defend witches, I denie not but that the deuill worketh by them.	Y	go		Y

19	E2 IS HANDO GIFFORD	1600	I may say, the deuill worketh by them, that such as go <b>about to</b> prooue the contrarie, doe shewe themselues but cauillers.	Y	go	Y
20	E2 XX PHILO BOETHHEL	1600	They go <b>about to</b> mooue commiseration of the iudges for them that haue commytted som greate & cruell thing,	Y	go	Y
21	E2 NN HIST STOW	1600	but when they went <b>about to</b> declare out of what places, those great summes were to be leuied,	Y	go	Y
22	E2 NN TRAV JOTAYLOR	1600	and as I was <b>about to</b> make a Horse-loafe of the third loafe, I did put twelue of them into my breeches, and my sleeues,	Y	be	N
23	E2 NN BIO PERROTT	1600	As he was turning <b>about to</b> goe out of Doores, the Erle called upon hym to stay,	Y	turn	Y
25	E2 NI FICT ARMIN	1600	my lady (for it was the knight's desire to haue one) sent <b>about to</b> Boston, and all the chiefe townes, but all in vaine	na	sent	Y
26	THE AUTHORIZED VERSION.	1600	Did not Moses giue you the Law, and (^yet^) none of you keepeth the Law? Why goe ye <b>about to</b> kill me?	Y	go	Y
27	E3 STA LAW STAT7	1700	Sheriff Goaler or Keeper of Prison shall forfeit and pay to such Prisoner soe <b>about to</b> bee discharged	N	soe	N
27	E3 XX PHILO BOETHPR	1700	for this which I am now <b>about to</b> say will not seem less wonderful, but it necessarily follows from what hath been before proposed.	Y	be	N
28	E3 XX TRI OATES	1700	Mr. (^Oates^) was <b>about to</b> have made him a Priest, but it seems he hath a Wife and Children, and so is out of danger.	Y	be	N
29	CMROBGLO	1300	He bitok him sir henri is sone . to be is compainoun . Wi+t him <b>to wende aboute . to sywe</b> him vp & doun .	Y	go	Y
30	N SIRITH	1300	And for ich weste +tat he ves houte, +Tarfore ich am l-gon <b>aboute To</b> speken wi+t +te.	Y	go	Y
31	N MERRY TALES	1500	after <b>wente aboute</b> the strettys <b>to</b> sell his capons whom a pollyng	Y	go	Y
32	M4 XX CORP CPASTON	1500	and <b>they be abowte to</b> gett a lycens to fownde +te colage in a-noder place.	Y	be	N
33	E2 XX TRI ESSEX	1600	and then <b>to goe abowte to</b> blamich it, I cannot allowe:	Y	go	Y
34	E2 NN DIARY MADDOX	1600	We did also sharply rebuke Muns the master for his unloyal pryde and because he <b>went abowt to</b> discourge some of our men from the viage.	Y	go	Y

## Appendix C

### Tokens of *about to* in the Shakespeare Corpus

Text	Example	I n t	d i c	Fol v	m o t	Pre V	P e j
1 Winters tale	You (my Lords)Looke on her, marke her well: <b>be but aboutTo say</b> she is a goodly Lady, andThe iustice of your hearts will thereto adde'Tis pittie shee's not honest	Y	Y	say	N	be	N
2 Winters tale	I was not much a-fear'd: for once, or twicel <b>was about to speake</b> , and tell him plainely, The selfe-same Sun, that shines vpon his Court,Hides not his visage from our Cottage, butLookes on alike.	Y	Y	speak	N	be	N
3 Troylus and Cressida	I <b>was about to tell</b> thee, when my heart,As wedged with a sigh, would riue in twaine, Least Hector, or my Father should perceiue me	Y	Y	tell	N	be	N
4 Ivlis Caesar	It <b>was about to speake</b> , when the Cocke crew.	Y	Y	speak	N	be	N
5 Ivlis Caesar	And then Sir does he this?He does: what <b>was I about to say</b> ?I was about say something: where did I leaue?	Y	Y	say	N	be	N
6 Hamlet	Sir, I <b>am about to weepe</b> ; but thinking thatWe are a Queene (or long haue dream'd so) certaineThe daughter of a King, my drops of teares,Ile turne to sparkes of fire.	N	N	weep	N	be	N
7 Henry the 5th	That others do,(I <b>was about to say</b> ) enioy your—— butIt is an office of the Gods to venge it,Not mine to speake on't.	Y	Y	say	N	be	N
8 Cymbeline	Peace, peace, peace, stay, hold, peace. <b>What is about to be</b> ? I am out of Breath,Confusions neere, I cannot speake.	N	N	be	N	be	N
9 Anthonie and Cleopatra	within this rooffeThe enemie of all your graces liuesYour brother, no, no brother, yet the sonne(Yet not the son, I will not call him son)Of him I <b>was about to call</b> his Father,Hath heard your praises, and this night he meanes,To burne the lodging where you vse to lye,	Y	Y	call	N	be	N
10 Henry the 6th	When we needYour vse and counsell, we shall send for you.You <b>were about to speake</b> . Yea, my good Lord.	Y	Y	speak	N	be	N
11 As you like it	and I <b>was aboutto tell</b> you, since I heard of the good Ladies death,	Y	Y	tell	N	be	N
12 Winters tale	You haue of these Pedlers, that haue more inthem, then youl'd thinke (Sister.) I, good brother, or <b>go about to thinke</b> .	n a	N	think	Y	go	N
13 Winters tale	I may say, is no honest man,neither to his Father, nor to me, <b>to goe about to make methe Kings Brother in Law</b> .	Y	N	make	Y	go	Y
14 Titus Andronicus	Man is but an Asse,if <b>he goe about to expound</b> this dreame.	Y	N	expou n	Y	go	Y
15 Titus Andronicus	I wonder that thou (being as thou saist thou art,borne vnder Saturne) <b>goest about to apply</b> a morall me-dicine, to a mortifying mischiefe:	Y	N	apply	Y	go	Y
16 Ivlus Caesar	Let me see, to withdraw with you, whydo you <b>go about to recouer</b> the winde of mee, as if youwould driue me into a toyle?	Y	N	recov er	Y	go	Y
17 Ivlus Caesar	Alas Master, I am not able to stand alone: You <b>goe about to torture</b> me in vaine.	Y	N	tortur e	Y	go	Y
18 Titus Andronicus	I haue kept it my selfe; and see how <b>hee goes aboutto abuse me</b> .	Y	N	abuse	Y	go	Y
19 life of Henry the 8th	you may as <b>well goe aboutto turne</b> the Sunne to yce, with fanning in his face with aPeacocks feather: You'le neuer trust his word after	Y	N	turn	Y	go	Y
20 Titus Andronicus	and we petty menWalke vnder his huge legges, and <b>peepe aboutTo finde</b> our selues dishonourable Graues.	N	N	find	Y	pee pe	Y
21 Titus Andronicus	o my backe, my backe:Beshrew your heart for <b>sending me aboutTo catch</b> my death with iaunting vp and downe.	N	N	catch	Y	send y	Y
22 Titus Andronicus	he hath lost his fellowes,And strayes <b>about to finde</b> 'em.	Y	N	find	Y	stra y	N
23 Ivlus Caesar	And then Sir does he this?He does: what was I about to say?I <b>was about say</b> something: where did I leaue?	Y	Y	say	N	Y	N



## Appendix D

### Tokens of *about to* in Dickens corpus

Text Example			Pre	comp	Fol V	D ic	An i	Pa st	Ne g	w / R ef	I nt V	Vol
1	DS	he liked her, and <b>was about to show</b> it in his own way now, when Paul cried, and his helpmate stopped him short.	be	N	show	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
2	DS	<P>`I <b>was about to say</b> to you, Richards,' resumed Mr. Dombey, with an appalling	be	N	say	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
3	DS	if he has some temporary weakness in his system, and does occasionally <b>seem about to</b> lose, for the moment, the use of his	seem	N	lose	N	H	N	N	N	N	N
4	DS	Miss Tox, seeing that the Captain <b>appeared about to</b> do the same, interposed.	appeared	N	do	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
5	DS	<P>`Like a bee, Sir,' said Mrs. Blimber, with uplifted eyes, ` <b>about to plunge</b> into a garden of the choicest flowers, and sip the sweets for the first time.	none	Y	plunge	N	Anna	N	N	Y	Y	Y
6	DS	<P>Walter passed out at the door, and <b>was about to</b> close it after him, when, hearing the voice of the brothers again, and also the mention of his own name, he stood	be	N	close	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
7	DS	<P>`No, no, I couldn't indeed!' cried Walter, `a thousand thanks! Don't throw them away, Captain Cuttle!' for the Captain <b>was about to</b> jerk them overboard.	be	N	jerk	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
8	DS	well accustomed to a life of leisure, and to such places as that they Dombey and <b>were about to</b> visit, and having an air of gentlemanly ease about him	be	Y	visit	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
9	DS	<P>Mr. Carker, whom the lady <b>was about to</b> pass close, slinking against his tree as she crossed to gain the path, advanced so as to meet her, and pulling off	be	Y	pass	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
10	DS	not as if she were going to stop at the floor, but as if she <b>were about to</b> soar up, high, into her native skies,	be	N	soar	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	N
11	DS	she sat as though she would have shrunk and hidden from her, rather than as one <b>about to</b> love and cherish her,	none	N	love	N	H	anna	N	Y	Y	Y
12	DS	the Captain Dombey and may son perfectly understand the solemnity he <b>is about to</b> witness: for which purpose, the Captain gravely lays injunctions on his chaplain,	be	Y	witness	N	H	N	N	N	N	N
13	DS	she held the elbows of her chair as if <b>about to</b> start up, Florence saw such fierce emotion that it terrified her.	none	N	start up	N	H	anna	N	Y	N	N
14	DS	<P>`Susan, who is an old friend of mine, the oldest friend I have,' said Florence, ` <b>is about</b> to leave here suddenly, and quite alone, poor girl.	be	Y	leave	N	H	N	N	N	N	N
15	DS	Mr. Toots having put per inside, lingered by the window, irresolutely, until the driver <b>was about to</b> mount; when, standing on the step, and putting in a face that by the light of the lamp was anxious and confused	be	N	mount	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
16	DS	he sincerely believes (you will excuse the of what <b>I am about to</b> say; it not being mine) that his severe expression of opinion to his present wife,	be	Y	say	Y	H	N	N	N	Y	Y
17	DS	therefore I the more advise you to be awakened to a	be	N	say	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y

		sense of duty. And, Carker, as <b>I was about to</b> say to you,'													
18	DS	now raised his eyes, in which there was a bright unusual light. As <b>I was about to</b> say to you,' resumed Mr. Dombey, 'I must beg you,	be	N	say	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
19	DS	took this opportunity of raising the forefinger of her right hand, in the air, as a stealthy signal to the concealed observer to give particular attention to what <b>was about to</b> follow.													
		<P>'Rob,' she said, in her most coaxing tone.	be	Y	follow	N	I	Y	N	N	N	N			
20	DS	These gushes of affection over, the procession <b>was about to</b> issue forth again,	be	Y	issue	N	I	Y	N	N	N	N			
21	DS	as a great many of us had a feverish anxiety to as, in my parliamentary time, <b>I was about to</b> say, when a man had leave to let off any little private popgun,	be	N	say	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
22	GE	I saw he <b>was about to</b> come at me again, and I stopped him.	be	N	come	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
23	GE	sometimes lying on the bank wrapped in our coats, and sometimes <b>moving about to</b> warm ourselves:	m ov in g	x	warm	N	x	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
24	GE	I'm going to ask you to take a walk with me.' <b>I was about to</b> excuse myself, as being but a bad companion just then, when Wemmick anticipated me. </P>	be	N	excuse	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
25	GE	As I drew nearer, I saw it to be the figure of a woman. As I drew nearer yet, it <b>was about to</b> turn away, when it stopped, and let me come up with it.	be	N	turn	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
		for the love of him you once were.</Q>													
26	CC	<P>He <b>was about to</b> speak; but with her head turned from him, she resumed.	be	N	speak	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
27	CC	<P><Q>You <b>are about to</b> show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us,</Q> Scrooge pursued.	be	Y	show	N	H	N	N	N	Y	Y			
28	CC	and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again: <q>and therefore I <b>am about to</b> raise your salary!</q>	be	N	raise	N	H	N	N	N	Y	Y			
29	BR	after a very long whiff to keep it alight, and <b>was evidently about to</b> tell his story without further solicitation,	be	Y	tell	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
30	BR	At this discovery she became more alarmed thanever, and <b>was about to</b> give utterance to those cries of "Thieves!"	be	N	give	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	N			
31	BR	"You see,' said the other, not at all disturbed, "the advantage of being so frank and open. Just what I <b>was about to</b> add, upon my honour!"	be	N	add	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
32	BR	As this conclusion involved the necessity of their going upstairs forthwith, they <b>were about to</b> ascend in the order they had agreed upon,	be	N	ascend	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
33	BR	of doors there was a dead calm. But you were saying' -- "I <b>was about to</b> say, Heaven knows how seriously and earnestly, that you have made me wretched, sir.	be	N	say	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
34	BR	and finding there was no outlet but that by which he had entered, he <b>was about to</b> turn, when from a grating near his feet a	be	N	turn	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			
35	BR	Dolly bade her good bye, and tripping lightly down the stairs arrived at the dreaded library door, and <b>was about to</b> pass it again on tiptoe, when it opened, and behold!	be	N	pass	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y			

36	BR	which he put down on the floor in the middle of the chamber as if he <b>were about to</b> go through some performances.	be	n	go	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
37	BR	Mr Chester, "- and the mention of his name reminds me, by the way, that I <b>am about to</b> beg the favour of a minute's talk with you	be	Y	beg	N	H	N	N	N	Y	Y
38	BR	He who came upon him so unexpectedly <b>was about to</b> break his rest by thrusting him with his foot, when, glancing at his upturned	be	N	break	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	N
39	BR	you adopt such a mode of address? Good God, how very coarse!, "I <b>was about to</b> speak to you from my heart, sir,'	be	N	speak	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
40	BR	Mr Chester, raising his delicate hand imploringly, " talk in that monstrous manner. <b>About to speak</b> from your heart. Don't you know that the heart is an ingenious part of our formation	no ne	N	speak	Y	H	n a	N	Y	Y	Y
41	BR	and returning old John Willet's stately bow, as well as the parting salutation of a dozen idlers whom the rumour of a live lord being <b>about to leave</b>	be	Y	leave	N	H	N	N	N	Y	N
42	BR	while they gave loose to these and other demonstrations of their patriotic purpose; and <b>was about to</b> make some remark aloud,	be	N	make	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
43	BR	Mr Tappertit looked at him as though he <b>were about to</b> give utterance to some very majestic sentiments in reference to this act	be	N	give	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
44	BR	walks the streets in broad day - I <b>was about to</b> say, holds up his head, but that he does not - and it will be strange, and very strange, I grant you.	be	N	say	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
45	BR	She <b>was about to</b> speak, but he checked her, and went on.	be	N	speak	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
46	BR	She <b>was about to</b> answer him again, but again he stopped her.	be	N	answer	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
47	BR	The man within was inclined to give them admittance, and <b>was indeed about to do so</b> , when a stout gentleman with a long whip in his hand	be	N	do	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
48	BR	we pay enough for county institutions, damn'em. But thou'd rather <b>drag him about to</b> excite charity - of course. Ay, I know thee.'	dr ag	N	excite	N	x	Y	N	N	Y	Y
49	BR	He <b>was evidently about to</b> make a very passionate retort	be	N	make	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
50	BR	She <b>was about to</b> answer " Heaven forbid!" but checked herself	be	N	answer	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
51	BR	We have no desire or right to join in what you <b>are about to do</b> .	be	Y	do	N	H	N	N	N	Y	Y
52	BR	just as it seemed impossible that she could preserve her balance for another instant, and the locksmith <b>was about to</b> call out in an agony, to save her from dashing down upon her forehead	be	N	call	Y	H	Y	N	N	N	N
53	BR	when they informed him that they <b>were about to</b> make a slight demonstration in the streets -	be	Y	make	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
54	BR	the houses of two witnesses near Clare Market <b>were about to</b> be pulled down when he came away; another,	be	Y	be	N	H	Y	N	N	N	N
55	BR	he was -and <b>was about to</b> throw the gate open, when happening to look behind him, he exclaimed, "	be	N	throw	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
56	BR	He <b>was not about to</b> throw himself headlong from the summit of the tottering wall.	be	N	throw	N	H	Y	Y	N	Y	N A

57	BR	he stood concealed as though they <b>were about to</b> follow in his footsteps, and urge him to come back;	be	N	follow	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
58	BR	unable any longer to suppress her secret passion for himself, <b>was about to</b> give it full vent in its intensity, and to declare	be	N	give	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	N
59	BR	Mr Haredale thrust himself forward and <b>was about to</b> speak, when the fat old gentleman interposed:	be	N	speak	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
60	BR	who lay, stretched at his full length, upon a stone bench, and who paused in his deep breathing as if he <b>were about to</b> wake.	be	N	wake	N	H	Y	N	N	N	N A
61	BR	he really was still asleep, and <b>was not about to</b> spring upon him when he was off his guard.	be	N	spring	N	H	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
62	BR	Then, just as it seemed that he <b>was about to</b> fall heavily to the ground from his narrow bed, Hugh's eyes opened.	be	N	fall	N	H	Y	N	N	N	N A
63	BR	I KNOW that you anticipate the disclosure with which I <b>am about to</b> end, and that you believe this doomed man, Hugh, to be your son.,	be	Y	end	N	H	N	N	N	Y	Y
64	BR	He placed it for a moment on the coffin, when he and his companions <b>were about to</b> lower it down. There was no inscription on the lid.	be	Y	lower	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
65	BR	with Mrs Varden on everything that had happened, was happening, or <b>about to</b> happen, within the sphere of their domestic concern;	be	Y	happen	N	I	N	N	N	N	N A
66	BR	Miss Miggs <b>was about to</b> add, and had, indeed, begun to add, that, taking them in the abstract, dustmen were far more eligible matches than soldiers, though, to be sure, when people were past choosing	be	N	add	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y
67	BR	With these feelings, he <b>was about to</b> revisit London for the last time, and look once more upon the walls of their old home, before turning his back upon it, for ever.	be	Y	revisit	N	H	Y	N	N	Y	N
68	BR	observing that he had taken his pipe from his lips, after a very long whiff to keep it alight, and <b>was evidently about to</b> tell his story without further solicitation,	be	Y	tell	Y	H	Y	N	N	Y	Y

### Key to Appendix

Ani- Animate subject

Compl- Completed/completeable action

Dic- With speaking verb

Int V- With intention verb

Fol V- Following verb

LM – With a landmark

Mot – Preceding motion verb

Neg- negated proposition

Pej- Pejorative action

Pre- Verb preceding *about*

Vol- Desiderative action

W/Ref- *about to* in a modifying construction

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