

***Be going to*: an exercise in grounding¹**

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This paper investigates the semantics of *be going to*, starting from a schematic definition which interprets temporal meanings in terms of referential and epistemological attributes. The analysis is framed within the model of cognitive grammar, taking deictic syntactical constructions as instances of grounding predications and differences between them as triggered by aspects of construal and profiling. On the basis of corpus material from American and British English texts, it is concluded that *be going to* features a paradoxical but pragmatically plausible interpretation of the future as non-given yet present, with a pending event's being signaled or announced at the time of speaking.

I. INTRODUCTION

It was argued in Brisard (1997) that a thoroughly semantic characterization of *will*, one of the grammatical markers of futurity in the English verb paradigm, needs to be done in terms of a schematic definition that is not exclusively based on temporal features. Instead, it was investigated how the notional category of the future came to have so much in common in English with the class, denoted by *will*, comprising states of affairs that do indeed refer to the future, but also to epistemic predications about the present and even the past (with *have*), to modal predications of volition and willingness, to evaluative and/or predictive predications in the realm of so-called general validity statements, and, as a final case of grammatical conventionalization, to the apodosis of open conditionals. The answer to this conceptual salad bowl, it was suggested, lies in the compatibility of epistemological features originally ascribed to the verb *will* by virtue of its historical meanings on one hand, and a commonplace interpretation of the notional future as following from premises that are already given in the world as we know it, on the other. Thus, by using the schematic definition given below, it is possible to reduce the often arbitrarily connected aspects of *will*'s semantic range, usually classified into denotations and a non-essential residue of connotations, to one, fully motivated meaning for the whole of the category. This schematic

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meaning does not focus so much on *will*'s referential/temporal properties as, rather, on the interpretive conditions enabling an act of reference (to the future).

FUTURE: NON-GIVEN, NON-PRESENT

WILL: NON-GIVEN, NON-PRESENT, but based on premises that are +G and +/-P

As for the use of *will* to refer to the future, it is claimed that a distinction needs to be made between the future as a heterogeneous assembly of all possible states of affairs that are not yet in existence, and a notion of the future as a heuristic tool allowing the pragmatically relevant prediction of more or less likely states of affairs, such that the use of *will* is generally reserved for the latter type. The features given in the schematic definition above, then, pertain to very basic psychological aspects of information processing and identify the cognitive status that can be given to a state of affairs (or rather, to its prediction). Thus, an approximate judgment can be attained regarding the epistemic value of a prediction (with what certainty it is made and on which experiential basis), which is exactly what will differentiate the forms *will* and *be going to*. For both *will* and *be going to*, we will assume that GIVENNESS expresses the construal of information as both 'old/familiar' (and thus somehow recoverable) and presumably 'shared' (with the limiting case of a speaker who is in the middle of negotiating a piece of information as shared). The notion of PRESENCE should be understood quite literally in terms of the accessibility of a (clausal) referent, i.e., the extent to which the speaker supposes that her statement can be checked more or less directly (through perception or other means of verification). The temporal interpretation of this term, as referring to the 'present', is but an inference of this more basic notion, though quite understandably one that has assumed a privileged status in the analysis of temporal expressions. Together, the features for *will* 'yield the conceptual realm of projected reality, involving a strong commitment to epistemic certainty as conveyed by most instances of epistemic and evaluative *will*' (Brisard 1997: 280). The notion of PROJECTED REALITY is derived from Langacker (1991a: 278) and points to a possible path into the future, starting from the present moment, that can be anticipated with a high degree of confidence in that it is expected to follow dynamic lines that have already been set out in actual reality.

In the sense discussed here, the categorization of states of affairs achieved by *will* is, first and foremost, an act of INTERPRETATION and not so much of reference (alone). This perspective will also be adopted for the description of *be going to* that I intend to propose in the following pages. The best method, in my view, of constraining the semantic proliferation inherent in many of such highly grammaticalized temporal forms is by finding the epistemological basis for the meaning of a particular construction, on which subsequent semantic distinctions and specializations, including acts of pure reference,

can be built without the need to derive them from pragmatic, and therefore contingent, specifications. For this, we must go back to a general characterization of the future, as an undifferentiated category, and discover which ‘parts’ of it are selected by the construction in question, assuming that the markers of futurity in English (*shall/will, be going to, be (about) to, be gonna* as well as the present tense and its progressive variant) tend to focus on slightly differing aspects of the future. Such varying foci, the hypothesis goes, should reflect the lexical origins of the construction at least to a certain extent, if these origins are not fundamentally at odds with the general conception of the future as $-G$ and $-P$.

The case of *be going to*, then, probably represents one of the more interesting examples in this respect, as I am about to maintain that its meaning can best be described in terms of the following schema:

BE GOING TO: NON-GIVEN, PRESENT

Out of all the possible permutations of these two binary notions, givenness and presence/absence, the combination of $-G$ and $+P$ is the only one which does not intuitively conform to any of the (naïve) characterizations of the basic-level timeframes.² In fact, it overtly contradicts one of the conditions for being able to talk about a future state of affairs at all, viz., its location on the timeline, which is not supposed to coincide with the present but follow it. This apparent paradox will constitute the main subject of this paper, and at the same time it will serve as one of the most important arguments in favor of an approach to the grammaticalized expression of time that is not exclusively nor essentially temporal in nature. Finally, the account proposed should allow us also to characterize the specific meaning of *be going to* without taking recourse in principle to mechanisms of metaphorical extension. These have more often than not been invoked to explain grammatical instances of *go* futures (or, for that matter, of *come* pasts, and vice versa) solely on the basis of their lexical origins evoking a general, conceptual metaphorical frame for the interpretation of time (more precisely, the TIME IS MOTION complex of metaphors, with the spatial notion of a

[2] If the present is defined as $+G$ and $+P$, the past is interpreted as $+G$ and $-P$. As indicated, the general notation for the future is $-G$ and $-P$, which relates to our understanding that the future is not actual and certainly not (perceptually or otherwise) present at the time of speaking. All of these configurations, however, need to be refined as soon as they are applied to concrete constructions that have been, in some way or other, taken as grammatical markers of these frames. In the present analysis, these features primarily relate to the speaker’s construal of a predication’s contents. No implication should be derived from this, however, that the cognitive grammar account developed here takes the individual speaker/conceptualizer as the original and exclusive locus of linguistic meaning. The features, like any other explicit or implicit component of meaning, are fundamentally negotiable between discourse participants and can consequently be subject to all possible manifestations of variability at any given moment in interaction.

path receiving a temporal interpretation). For *go* futures, the standard argument goes, instead of moving through space to initiate an infinitival process, the subject is re-conceptualized as moving through time (for a critique of this move to metaphor, see section 4.2).

In the following sections, I will provide a characterization of *be going to* within a cognitive grammar framework. First (section 2), a concise account of previous studies into *be going to* (2.1) is followed by detailed descriptions of data drawn from a corpus (2.2). The analysis made on the basis of this corpus material presents this polysemous construction as principally indicating an intention or an assumption that some event will in fact occur. These meanings are consequently related to contexts in which a feeling of inevitability or imminence is conveyed, as well as to the use of the construction in conditional environments. Section 3, then, presents a discussion of the differences between *be going to* and *will*. The analysis is theoretically framed in section 4.1, where it is shown how cognitive grammar offers a semantic approach to so-called clausal grounding predications (tense and modal expressions in a finite clause). The implications of this model for the empirical patterns that emerge from the corpus analysis are examined in section 4.2.

2. SOME OBSERVATIONS

2.1 *Describing the scenery*

The status of *will* as the default marker of future states of affairs in contemporary English (and, thus, as the nearest approximation to the future tense English lacks) has been consolidated in much of the literature on tense, modality, and the interface between these categories. At the same time, however, there is no denying that, especially in American English, *gonna* (and to a lesser extent *be going to*) is on the way to supplementing, if not wholly substituting, this temporal function of *will*. In fact, if we look at spoken English and the frequency with which *be going to* and its phonological variants appear in it, we might suggest that this construction is gradually securing a position as one of the markers of futurity closest to the default role hitherto claimed by *will*. This does not imply, however, that *be going to* should be seen as a neutral way of indicating or predicting an event's future realization, no more than *will* functions as an objective rendering of future states of affairs. Even real (that is, non-modally formed) future tenses in other languages arguably select specific perspectives on the undifferentiated timeframe we call the future and, accordingly, it would make very little sense, and be even less of an explanation, to claim that constructions like *be going to* should be analyzed as a 'colorless way of prophesying', as proposed by Joos (1968: 134). Such defeatism in the face of a vast range of future markers has colored many a linguist's interpretation of (specifically) *be going to*, even if,

as in Palmer's case, earlier statements to this effect – 'In most cases there is no demonstrable difference between *will/shall* and BE GOING TO though many scholars have looked without success for one' (Palmer 1974: 163) – are later on withdrawn (Palmer 1979).

Descriptive accounts of *be going to* have been put forward by a number of linguists in the past, including McIntosh (1966), Joos (1968), Wekker (1976), Palmer (1979) and Coates (1983). Most of these do not share Joos' outlook, in which the construction is presented as a type of periphrastic future tense hardly worthy of a profound semantic analysis. This is probably why they have chosen to focus on those properties that distinguish *be going to* from other expressions of futurity, notably *will*. All of them seem to agree, on the other hand, that *be going to* displays a central feature which is responsible for the majority, if not the totality, of its 'connotations'. This feature has been formulated most clearly by Leech, who, on analogy with the present perfect's calling upon the notion of CURRENT RELEVANCE, makes a stab at establishing a proto-schematic definition for the entire semantic spectrum associated with *be going to*: 'if there is one general meaning that can be attached to this construction, it is FUTURE FULFILMENT OF THE PRESENT' (Leech 1971: 54). Palmer (1979: 121) acknowledges this description when he paraphrases it in terms of 'current activity leading to a future event'.

But the contribution of the 'present' as presenting the preparatory conditions needed for the realization of a future state of affairs needs to be refined. Indeed, Leech (1971: 54) adds to his schematic definition a distinction between present INTENTIONS and present CAUSES, leading to the 'future fulfillment' referred to above. On the one hand, there is a class of mental predispositions responsible for the enactment of a future state of affairs, which can cover intentionality and volition and which is conceptually linked to the original lexical meanings of so-called verbs of wanting, like *will*, that turned into future markers. On the other hand, there is the amalgam of material conditions present in the situation of speech (or rather, in the speaker's conception of it), which may physically bring about a predicted event, as in (1).

- (1) This **is going to** be your death.
 (2) It's **going to** rain.

The demonstrative pronoun in (1) can refer to any act on the part of the hearer, or any other material event, that might (either indirectly or directly) cause her actual or symbolic demise. But the concept of causation does not exhaust the range of material phenomena that can trigger the use of *be going to*. If I observe a formation of rain clouds and subsequently utter (2), there is no implication that I believe that these clouds will actually 'cause' the anticipated shower. More appropriately, we might say that the clouds signal whatever we can expect to happen next. Accordingly, both (individual or collective) intentions and (physical) causation belong to a broader category

which covers all elements of the speech event that lead a speaker to make a fairly confident prediction about the future on the basis of a concrete (perceived or conceptualized) SIGNAL.³

A feeling of present orientation seems to lie at the heart of many analyses, even though authors disagree on the level of ‘determinism’ that can be allowed to slip into this concept. As indicated, some find it easier to restrict the semantic range of *be going to* to instances of direct causation, whether physical or mental, whereas others, like Wekker (1976), prefer to open up the notion of orientation and include all types of indexical material signaling the likely realization of a future event. Nicolle (1997) goes on to distinguish a number of basic usage types which I will simply adopt here as part of a working hypothesis for the corpus analysis presented in the next section. A first characterization is indicated by the concept of PRIOR INTENTION, and its workings can be illustrated in contrast with a comparable futurate use of *will*:

- (3) Can somebody visit John tomorrow?
 (a) I’m **going to** visit him.
 (b) I’ll visit him.

In (3a), the speaker implies that she intended to *visit John* before the request was made. (3b) does not carry this implication and simply expresses the commitment to *visit John*, possibly as a direct result of the request.

The second category distinguished by Nicolle relates to the notion of IMMINENCE, which combines the impression of near futurity conveyed by many uses of *be going to* and the less tangible intimation of an event’s pending actualization, expressed with a degree of certainty that rules out, for all practical purposes, the potential non-realization of the event:

- (4) (a) I’m **going to** be sick.
 (b) I’ll be sick.

Due to its emphasis on an event’s location in the near future, this usage probably captures the more temporal meaning aspects of the construction most directly. Example (4a) denotes a state of affairs that must be about to occur and that does not rely on the fulfillment of additional conditions. Its counterpart in (4b) is presented as highly conditional, somehow presupposing an implicit protasis or otherwise relying on contextual knowledge about the event(s) that might give rise to the subject’s *being sick*.

[3] The only author treating *be going to* who explicitly acknowledges such a ‘hermeneutic’ characterization is Wekker (1976: 124–126). In his survey of the meanings of *be going to*, he concludes that ‘its implication is loosely that there are INDICATIONS in the present that something will happen’ (Wekker 1976: 124, my emphasis). This indexical paraphrase, however, is not backed by considerations of a more theoretical reach.

Finally, Nicolle's third category points to the suggestion of INEVITABILITY accompanying certain uses of *be going to*:

- (5) (a) Don't go near that parcel! It's **going to** explode!
 (b) Don't go near that parcel! It **will** explode!

The absence of any conditional character is what this use of *be going to* shares with the imminence category. Example (5a) states that the parcel's explosion is just a matter of time and, crucially, that it does not depend upon the hearer's *going near* it. This usage type does not, however, imply that the parcel's explosion necessarily lies in the near future, so that the temporal location of the event is kept vague. Example (5b), in contrast, has the parcel's explosion depend upon the hearer's action: it will only go off if the hearer goes near it.

These three usage types constitute something of a complex core meaning that can be attributed to *be going to* as a grammatical construction. They do not exhaust its semantics but form the basis of the categorization I will propose in the following section, where I present my own corpus work. Next, theoretical proposals regarding the contrast between *will* and *be going to* are presented by three authors, two of whom (Haegeman 1989 and Nicolle 1997) frame their analyses within relevance theory, while the older contributions, by Binnick (1974a, b), though included in a volume on generative grammar, form a theory-neutral yet not merely descriptive presentation of the meanings of *will* and *be going to*. In particular, Binnick explores how differences in the usage of these two constructions transcend the levels of style or rhetoric, assuming that they are indeed semantic and cannot be reduced to matters of (inconsequential) connotation. His formulation of the problems involved as semantic in nature sets the stage, for the first time in the contemporary history of non-descriptive grammar, for a serious investigation into some of the contextual patterns determining the choice between *will* and *be going to*. This endeavor was, curiously enough, only followed up by researchers in the tradition of relevance theory.

Haegeman wants to claim that 'at the level of sentence meaning *be going to* and *shall/will* are equivalent, and that the difference between them is to be found in the constraints they impose on the processing in context of the utterance in which they occur' (Haegeman 1989: 291). Nicolle (1997: 372–374), on the other hand, argues that certain overtones associated with the use of *be going to* (but not with *will*) contribute meaning to the proposition and are therefore explicatures of utterances expressing such propositions. Both authors thus disagree on the exact status (in terms of processing types) that is assigned to *be going to*, a discussion which, in relevance theory, is framed in terms of the construction presenting CONCEPTUAL vs. PROCEDURAL information. Taken together, however, theirs is a fundamentally pragmatic account, not in the sense that a distinction is

made between the construction's basic, presumably temporal, meaning and secondary, non-essential connotations (derived from context), but rather through the observation that many grammatical expressions do not strictly encode meaning aspects such as distinguished above but prompt them, possibly, through explicatures.

Unlike Haegeman, who insists on the procedural status of *be going to*, Nicolle follows Klinge's (1993) analysis of *be going to* as encoding an abstract semantic feature which is paraphrased as REALIS POTENTIAL (as opposed to *will*'s IRREALIS POTENTIAL; see Nicolle 1997: 369–372) and from which specific meanings are derivable. Both Klinge's and Nicolle's accounts attribute a conceptual core of semantic material to *be going to* that is very similar in spirit to the type of schematic definition articulated in the present paper. And so, if *will* and *be going to* resemble each other in the presentation of a state of affairs as potential (non-actual or –G), they can be said to differ in their respective assignments of that content to other cognitive DOMAINS. The latter move, made by Nicolle, is inspired by Langacker's (1987) discussion of domains and links both constructions with the issue of a predicted state of affairs' verifiability (unverified for *will* and verified for *be going to*).

2.2 *Be going to/gonna: usage types*

I have analyzed 421 tokens⁴ featuring *be going to* and *gonna*. To categorize their uses, I refer to the three labels presented by Nicolle (1997), supplemented with three extra semantic classes which will be discussed below. The frequency count and relative percentages per category are displayed in table 1. As they go, the percentages presented in the table will not be used as a quantitative basis for the analysis that follows. No statements are made concerning the prototypicality or peripheral nature of any of the categories distinguished, as the analysis proposes a unified picture of all usage types for *be going to* without considering their hierarchical status within some type of polysemy network.

The first category, INTENTION, is schematic both for instances where a relative emphasis on prior intention is entirely relevant and indeed crucial for

[4] The analysis is based on a corpus of written English compiled by Ludo Lejeune at the University of Antwerp (U.I.A.). A 'reasoned' database was put together, consisting of a representative sample of instances of *be going to* and *gonna* as they occur in the Brown corpus (American English) and in the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (British English). The database is reasoned because it respects the organization of the original corpora into fifteen subcategories (genres) and attributes the same weight to both donor corpora. The token selection from the corpora was constrained by the need to represent corpora and genres proportionately but was otherwise blind.

	Absolute frequencies	Relative percentages
INTENTION	149	35 %
ASSUMPTION	119	28 %
INEVITABILITY	66	16 %
IMMINENCE	50	12 %
CONDITIONAL (PROTASIS)	19	5 %
CONDITIONAL (APODOSIS)	18	4 %
Total	421	100 %

Table 1

Categorization and distribution in percentages for *be going to/gonna*

demonstrating the contrast with intentional uses of *will* that do not imply such a relation of conceptual precedence (see section 2.2.1), and those where the mere intention to perform an action is expressed in a way very similar to corresponding uses of *will* (Brisard 1997: 277). The second category in the table, ASSUMPTION, comprises those instances of *be going to* that construe an event in the future as assumed, if not determined. It is taken for granted that the event will occur, even though at the time of speaking it is still non-actual. This category differs from IMMINENCE and INEVITABILITY in the absence of any predictive force. While imminent or inevitable events are predicted, with a high degree of certainty, assumptions of states of affairs situated in the future are already part of the speaker's conception of (the future construed as) reality. Binnick (1974a: 119) gives the following example:

- (6) Most Congressmen are dubious about what **is going to** happen to money in local hands.

The members of Congress worrying about the fate of shared revenues in local contexts presuppose, in the construal suggested by *be going to*, that the money is in fact going to the local authorities, whereas the same sentence featuring *will* would be neutral in its presuppositional structure. Although this category is most easily detectable in subordinates, it also appears, and quite frequently as we will see, in main clauses.

Finally, there are two categories covering the use of *be going to* in conditional contexts, either as part of the protasis or as the main verb of the apodosis. Identifying the latter subclass is less plausible for certain theorists (such as Leech 1971: 56), in that it seems to violate the rather stringent restrictions on verb forms sanctioned in English open conditionals (the prescriptive pressure, that is, on having *will* as the default and one of the few valid options in the main clause), yet in our corpus *be going to* appears as

frequently here as it does in the protasis. We will discuss this conditional use of *be going to* mainly in light of the ELLIPSIS hypothesis proposed by a number of authors for *will* (Binnick 1974b, Haegeman 1989).

As indicated above, the following subsections do not make any claims regarding the frequency or central/marginal position of the usage types that are distinguished. Therefore, the less than univocal status of certain tokens in terms of which category they should be assigned to does not strike me as particularly problematic, since the major goal of this study is to cover as many variations and contexts as possible without conjuring up the ghost of one hegemonic temporal category, constituting a kind of pure reference to futurity. Attention has been paid to formal characteristics wherever possible (as for the two conditional categories) as well as to wider contextual information (in the form of adverbial modifications that can betray certain meaning nuances, accompanying matrix verbs for subclauses, the ‘objective’ temporal location of a state of affairs, etc.). Still, we will encounter instances where the choice of categorization is not resolvable in principle. When this is so, the ambiguity is explicated and, if relevant, used as a pretext for discussing conceptual overlaps between categories.

2.2.1 *Intention*

In line with the lexical origins of the construction (as a temporal idiom) and the inherent structure of intentionality, we expect this category to comprise mainly tokens of first and second person verb forms. However, the relative distributions of the various paradigms in this usage type show that the third person (singular and plural) actually occupies the topmost position, covering 42% of all intentional uses, immediately followed by first person forms (38%, of which 35% singular and 3% plural). Now, unlike Leech’s (1971: 55) contention that many third person forms of *be going to* convey something of a displaced agent, as in the passive sentence *This wall is going to be painted green* (where it is the referent of an implied *by* phrase which is supposed to produce a hint of intentionality), examples of third person forms in the corpus are systematically instances of reported intentions, presumably known by the speaker or presented as such:

- (7) When 51st Street was reached, Robinson related, he stopped the bus and told the youths he **was going to** call the CTA supervisor.

Thus, intentionality is construed rather purely in this usage type and relates primarily to what can be paraphrased as someone’s ‘planning’ or ‘being prepared’ to perform an action. It is not to be confused with Leech’s ‘wall’ example, which belongs more to the category of assumptions, since the speaker, probably due to her knowledge of how she or someone else ‘wants’ it painted, presents the resulting state in the future as a *fait accompli* that is not in need of any further discussion. Furthermore, these intentional uses are

not to be taken as disguised expressions of ‘willingness’ either, a function often associated with *will* in future contexts:

(8) **Aren’t you going to** say hello?

The speaker of (8) is not really interested in the hearer’s willingness to say hello. Rather, the utterance is an indirect exhortation to do so, regardless of the hearer’s mental disposition, and it is typically used in situations where the speaker has some authority over the hearer (as in a parent-child context). Its counterpart, *Won’t you say hello*, is acceptable and quite established but not in these same contexts, and its meaning is therefore distinctly divergent from that of (8), more closely resembling that of a real question informing about an aspect of the hearer’s state of mind. It does not, in any case, imply the rather strong expectations (regarding the activity at issue) that the speaker seems to be communicating in (8). Incidentally, the second person paradigm, which comprises 20% of the data, is most firmly established in such interrogative contexts (affirmative and negative), especially when *gonna* is being used. In all these cases, the utterance functions either as an indirect exhortative, as in (8), or as a question about the hearer’s plans, assuming, as is usual for *be going to*, that they are indeed going through and focusing on the way in which this will take place:

(9) ‘What **are you going to** do about Sarah?’ she asked.

First and second person uses of intentional *be going to* frequently function as (positive) promises or threats or (negative) refusals. Many of these carry a performative aspect, as uttering the sentence is taken as performing the speech act associated with it at the same time:

(10) ‘I**m going to** make you lick that card clean,’ said Durieux.

(11) ‘I**m going to** have your guts for a tie,’ he told Rossi.

Example (10) is construed as a threat whose very expression entails the actualization of its performative force (though not, of course, of the action to be performed, described in the complement phrase). The utterance of a threat equaling the threat itself, it therefore qualifies as a much stronger threat than if *will* had been used. The force with which (10) is uttered is also a function of the knowledge that the speaker can realize his threat through sheer physical strength, so that here an intention goes together with the possibility of acting upon it. In (11), however, the hyperbolic nature of the utterance results in a proposition which will probably not be true in its literal sense and which thereby somehow weakens the performative aspect, turning the sentence into a ‘prediction’ with a high degree of certainty (still with threatening overtones), much like an alternative and equally strong variant of the same sentence featuring *will*.

To the extent that both these utterances presume the actual status of the propositions they express, they can also be seen as announcing a state of

affairs. Sentence (12), in which a writer lets her audience in on the structure of the following text, is a more typical example of such announcements.

- (12) I **am going to** write about Border Canaries, but part of the lesson may be applied to other varieties.

2.2.2 Assumption

Assumptions are most easily detected when they occur in subclauses, because subclauses mainly carry backgrounded and, correlated with this, known information. A straightforward example of the use of *be going to* in the context of an assumption can be found in (13). The fact that the government is supposed to, and does indeed, take care of housing and educational programs is taken for granted, and the only matter of debate concerns the way in which such programs will be implemented:

- (13) It's not for the government to decide how it's **going to** house people and educate children.

Still, this should not be taken as implying that assumptions are far more current in subclauses. In fact, 58% of all tokens in this category show up in main clauses. Many of them behave as modal assertions, very much acting like imperatives disguised as predictions:

- (14) You're not talking to Guy now. You're **going to** turn that caravan around and head back out of here.

As in (14), this use of *be going to* has much in common with similar contexts in which the present progressive appears and is, in fact, highly interchangeable with it. Its imperative force derives primarily from the presentation of a state of affairs as virtually (instead of actually, or not at all) given. If this interpretation prevails, there is not much choice left for the hearer but to accept the utterance at face value and construe it as a strongly formulated order. Since turning a caravan around requires an act of intention, to flatly ascribe this intention to someone at the time of speaking is to deprive her of the possibility of making up her own mind about this. The same mechanism, by the way, is responsible for utterances that do not take on an imperative force but construe a state of affairs as assumed and therefore as no longer open for discussion:

- (15) Because do you know why, Frank? Because we're not **going to** be parted.

The assertive force accompanying (15) at the same time presents a situation, or rather its non-occurrence, as a fact and deprives an implied agent (we are dealing with a passive sentence identical in spirit to Leech's 'wall' example, section 2.2.1 above) of the ability to intentionally part the speaker and hearer.

Assumptions embedded in subclauses generally bring along a specific set of matrix verbs qualifying the cognitive status of the subclause. Verbs like *inform*, *suspect*, *learn*, *think*, *be sure*, *imagine* and *predict* can give us some idea of the conceptual domain(s) in which this use of *be going to* is preferred. The notions denoted by these verbs are basically concerned with epistemology, that is, with finding out how certain we can be of a proposition or how the knowledge of a state of affairs' occurrence can be acquired. It can be gathered from the following exchange that the category of knowledge is crucial for an understanding of this usage type:

- (16) She studied his profile for a moment, before she said: 'You're **going to** make a lot of unnecessary trouble, Mr. Roan.' 'No, I'm **not going to** make any trouble. All I'm **going to** do is build a cabin, a barn, some corrals, and try to live in peace. If there's trouble it won't be me that starts it.'

In this short passage, the first speaker presents a future situation as 'factual' based on the assumed knowledge of her interlocutor's personality. This assumption, however, is explicitly denied by Mr. Roan himself. He is presuming that the first speaker's prediction is based on her self-declared ability to read, and thus know about, his thoughts. Rejecting this epistemological bias, rather than the prediction that follows from it, constitutes the real focus of his answer and serves as a strong refutation of the first speaker's assertion. The tokens of *be going to* figuring in Mr. Roan's answer, therefore, belong to the category of intentionality, making a statement about his present state of mind and only indirectly about the future state of affairs pictured in the preceding turn.

2.2.3 *Inevitability*

Tokens falling under the heading of inevitability can roughly be divided into those expressing root modality (mostly deontic, 23%) and others revealing a high degree of certainty in their predictive capacity (epistemic modality, 77%). Let us start with some instances of root modality, which appear most frequently in (*wh*-) questions:

- (17) Now listen, Wop, and listen well. You're **going to** do this job for me without any more argument.
 (18) Now! Here it is! How **am I going to** live? What **am I going to** do?

Sentence (17) clearly has imperative force and, in this respect, it resembles similar occurrences encountered in the previous category. The nearest paraphrase of what *be going to* contributes to the semantics of the proposition is provided by such modals as *must* or *have to*, or indeed by the imperative mood. The meaning is slightly different, however, in contexts like (18), where the deontic force reveals more of what 'should' happen, of what

is supposed to occur, or of what would be the right thing to do (compare a paraphrase of sentence (8) as *Shouldn't you say hello*). Given the course of reality up until the present moment (and what is known about its structural qualities), people may venture into declarations of what they expect to happen, not so much as 'neutral' predictions of future reality but as biased renditions of an idealized future. This is a conception of moral (or social) reality, and the statements expressing it differ from other types of prediction in the epistemic realm in the particular domain they instantiate. In other words, both usage types deal with what is deemed inevitable, but for the epistemic type the prediction in question is based on our knowledge of what usually occurs as a matter of fact. The deontic type, in contrast, concentrates on our knowledge of what people expect to occur as a matter of duty, which is a moral/social fact, whether applied to individuals or to reality as a whole.

A typical example of (epistemic) inevitability is given in (19).

- (19) 'Let's get away fast,' said Brassnose, shaking water from his mop of bleached hair. 'That tub **is going to** explode all at once.'

Here, the world is presented as inevitably evolving towards a point in time at which the anticipated event will occur. Whether this event is projected in the near future, as in (19), or taken as further removed from the time of speaking is really immaterial within the present category, because the notion of inevitability is not *per se* sensitive to matters of temporal distance but concentrates on the 'force' with which an upcoming event is announced. This use of *be going to* is also unconditional, in that it does not depend on the realization of preparatory conditions which need to be fulfilled before the predicted state of affairs can itself come into existence. This emphasis on the course of reality and its preferred ways of evolving towards the future is typical of the force-dynamic meanings characterizing modal auxiliaries, epistemic or deontic. It also explains why the tokens contained in the present category represent a stage of semantic development in which grammaticalization has proceeded furthest. Consequently, examples can be found for which present intentions are no longer relevant and can indeed be contrary to the expected course of reality, as in (20).

- (20) 'Aren't you ever **going to** go home?' – 'It sure as hell doesn't look like it, does it?'

The question in (20) does not concern the respondent's intentions, for we can assume, from the context, that she is quite eager to get home. At the same time, however, both interlocutors realize that this is not going to be the case, due to factors that lie beyond their control. These factors, which do not have to be physical but can also be plainly social or psychological, constitute the 'evolutionary momentum' of reality that Langacker refers to in the context of his ELABORATED EPISTEMIC MODEL, as well as in one of its conceptual variants, the DYNAMIC EVOLUTIONARY MODEL (Langacker 1991a: 275–281),

which was specifically designed for the analysis of epistemic modality (see section 4.1 below).

It is in the present category that we also find tokens of one of *be going to*'s more prototypical uses, namely, that of predicting a future event with a high degree of certainty based on indications or signs that are present at the time of speaking:

(21) Singh said, 'I think there **is going to** be a storm.'

Here too, the prediction in fact relies upon the speaker's interpretation of the expected course of reality, but he is significantly aided in this by reality itself providing him with signs that may be held to announce the predicted event. But let us not be fooled, by this example, into thinking that the signs indicating a future event are necessarily of an objective (physical) nature, as they belong to reality itself. It is always a subjective conceptualization of reality that is at stake, and therefore the world of the mental is to be seen as fully integrated in such a model of reality. This is also why intuitions or irrational premonitions can serve as the basis of predictions about which the speaker feels, despite everything, quite certain.

2.2.4 *Imminence*

The tokens in this category come closest to the fairly neutral, 'colorless' depiction of a future state of affairs. That is to say that the function of this category is best described as an essentially temporal one, restricted, moreover, to that part of the future which is nearest to the time of speaking. This notion of the NEAR FUTURE is mainly what distinguishes the present category from the others we have reviewed, although it should be noted that specific usage contexts for *be going to* in other categories can also produce the same feeling of imminence as a side effect of the interaction between context and the construction's various core meanings. Thus, some overlap is bound to be noticed, in the discussion of imminence, with those other categories.

The necessary condition for including tokens in the present category holds that an anticipated event should, according to the prediction, take place almost immediately after the time of speaking or not at all:

(22) He looked as if he **was going to** keel over.

(23) I'm **going to** give you a drink and then I'll take that clip from your handbag.

While (22) counts as a straightforward example of predicting an imminent state of affairs, the next sentence hovers on the borderline between the category of imminence and that of intention. In fact, the sentence can also be construed as presenting the first action as a (temporal) prerequisite for the ensuing series of events and, thus, as a backgrounded fact that is conceptually close to the type of assumption discussed in section 2.2.2. The occurrence of

be going to in backgrounded portions of narratives or, locally, within the background portions of sentences is, as it so happens, a recurring feature across the various categories we have distinguished (remember the use of *be going to* in subclauses for assumptions). It is also manifested quite clearly in (23), where the background featuring *be going to* introduces a ‘setting’ for the subsequent scene, which then focuses on those events that contribute to the actual evolution of the narrative (consequently denoted by *will* in the remainder of that scene). The same observations hold for a whole number of contexts where temporal *be going to* is included in *when* clauses.

2.2.5 Conditionals

It is practically ruled out, or catalogued as a performance error, that speakers of English select *will* for the protasis of conditionals, even though the meaning of this modal is conceptually quite compatible with the functioning of either part (protasis or apodosis) of a conditional and despite the observation that *will* does in fact regularly occur in the subclause of conditionals (Brisard 1997: 276), especially in spoken English. This attitude may eventually lead to a theory-driven decision to restrict the range of possible uses of future markers in conditional (sub- and main) clauses to those where a ‘pure’ future is being expressed (see especially Declerck 1984 in this respect). Haegeman & Wekker (1984) resort to a similar strategy when they propose that the differences in syntactic behavior between conditional protases with and without *will* must be attributed to a typological distinction between peripheral and central construction families, ultimately failing to unify the analysis of future markers in conditional contexts (see also Declerck & Depraetere 1995 for a comparable move, if put in a totally different framework). Yet this purity of temporal reference is but an artifact of *a priori* orientations and does not reflect empirical findings, which show that all clause types in conditionals can accommodate non-temporal uses of future markers, including modal/epistemic ones. A notable exception to this analytical trend is Dancygier (1993: 422), who analyzes certain occurrences of *will* in the protasis as ‘a use of a predictive assumption in a non-predictive construction’.

The same grammatical intolerance seems to hold for attestations of *be going to* in conditionals. If the construction is used in the apodosis of open conditionals, it is in conflict with an expected *will* form. Leech (1971: 56) points out a restricted number of contexts in which this use is nevertheless sanctioned in English, as when the protasis mentions ‘present circumstances’ rather than future contingencies. Thus, **If you accept that job, you’re never going to regret it* is ruled out because the eventuality described in the protasis lies in the future, while the protasis in an acceptable utterance like *We’re going to find ourselves in difficulty if we carry on like this* indicates a state of affairs that is already going on in the present. (This line of argumentation is

also followed and worked out by Haegeman (1989), as will be indicated below.) If, on the other hand, *be going to* appears in the protasis, it is subject to the same logical reasoning allegedly ruling out *will* in that position (namely, that the protasis presents preparatory information that is not part of the conditional ‘prediction’ and should therefore not allow tenses or modal constructions with predictive connotations). The data from our corpus, however, show that *be going to* is used in both parts of conditionals, not frequently but commonly enough to consider it a fact of English instead of a performance error. (Tokens have been assigned to the conditional categories on the basis of the formal occurrence of conditional markers – *if*, but also non-temporal *when* and inversion – overruling other meaning aspects that might simultaneously be present in particular uses.)

The most relevant observation used to explain, if negatively, this phenomenon has been formulated by Binnick (1974b), who points to the elliptical nature of *will* when compared to *be going to*:

(24) The rock’ll fall.

According to Binnick (1974b: 131), ‘[a] sentence containing a *will* which refers to the future is often felt to be “elliptical” in the sense that the sentence is incomplete as it stands, some part of it being “understood”’. In (24), the sentence in isolation is hard to process and felt to be incomplete. What it lacks, according to the ellipsis hypothesis, is relevant information that explicates the conditions under which the rock will in fact fall. Such conditions can be formulated within the hypothetical template of the conditional construction, as in (25).

(25) The rock’ll fall if you pull the wedge out from under it.

Other contexts do not need this kind of explicitness, provided the hearer is aware of the conditions that apply:

(26) You’ll wake up the baby.

The fact remains that the implicit information in (26) can be formulated in the form of a conditional, like ‘if you go on making so much noise you will wake her up and then the consequences will be ...’ (Haegeman 1989: 307).

For *be going to*, no such ellipsis is felt to be present, even implicitly, which corresponds to the intuition that the interpretation of *be going to* relies on indexical cues or signs that are readily available or accessible at the time of speaking, either in the immediate physical surroundings of the situation of speech or in the interlocutors’ conception of the conversational present (as a representative instance of the actual structure of the world). Thus, there is no ambiguity when it comes to identifying the conditions leading to the realization of the predicted event. The sentence *The rock is going to fall* is complete in its own right, that is, as the contextualized expression of an event the indications of which are thought to be accessible to speaker and hearer.

From the elliptical nature of *will*, it follows that the construction lends itself ideally to the expression of conditional apodoses. But this does not exclude the possibility that *be going to* also appears in such contexts, assuming that its use is limited to conditionals whose protases contain present tenses, as Haegeman does. This is based on the argument that a ‘future antecedent [protasis] would imply a contradiction in the processing instructions, *be going to* directing the hearer to a present time context and the future antecedent fixing a future context’ (Haegeman 1989: 307).

- (27) (a) ?You’re **going to** be fired if you ever go near his computer.
 (b) You’ll be fired if you ever go near his computer.
 (c) You’re **going to** be fired if you go on like this.

(27a) is odd in comparison with both other sentences because its protasis, containing the temporal adverb *ever*, suggests a future context, which is perfectly acceptable if it is added to an apodosis with *will* (27b). On the other hand, since the protasis in (27c) refers to a present situation, Haegeman would claim, the use of *be going to* in the apodosis is allowed. This analysis is confirmed by what we can find in the corpus data, where *be going to* does not occur in constructions of the type figuring in (27a).

Notice, as an illustration of the value that *be going to* can contribute to the apodosis, that the question in (28) is a rhetorical one, implying that the answer is known although the addressee’s married life is still in the future:

- (28) ‘If he behaves like this now what **is** your married life **going to** be like? Hell.’ Doc answered for her.

This is compatible with the remarks on *be going to* presented in the preceding sections. Still, one modification needs to be made to Haegeman’s account, in that the present tense in the protasis does not always refer to present-time situations but can also be used generically, as in (29), where I interpret *when* as conditional rather than temporal.

- (29) Secondly, the VA physician knows that when the patient leaves the hospital, he **is** no longer **going to** have a chance to visit his patient.

This does not seem to alter Haegeman’s point, however, presumably because generic statements can be interpreted as having a rather fixed ‘ground’ in the present of the time of speaking, which is why the present tense can be selected to express them in the first place. Likewise, Nicolle’s (1997: 368–369) comments on Haegeman’s analysis acknowledge that there is a problem with a sentence like (27a), but not because its protasis necessarily refers to the future. Rather, the adverb *ever* in the protasis can be paraphrased as ‘at any time’, the meaning of which comes close to the generic value of (29) and stresses the POTENTIALITY of the described event. Here, the conflict between the use of *ever* in the protasis and that of *be going to* in the apodosis, as

Nicolle states it, is not over time but over the epistemic status – in terms of actuality versus potentiality – of the propositions.

3. A COMPARISON WITH *WILL*

There exists a clear-cut distinction between *will* and *be going to* in their most obvious uses. In (30a), *be going to* is used because the speaker has access to one or several signs that are taken to announce the event in question, while (30b) is elliptic in the sense that it needs to be accompanied by an elaboration of the conditions under which the event will occur.

- (30) (a) It's **going to** rain.
(b) It'll rain.

We have also witnessed discursive differences between the two forms. In section 2.2.4, the use of *be going to* in backgrounded portions of narratives is related to the construction's emphasis on information of which certain salient aspects are, if not actually given, at least (latently) present in the interlocutors' mindset at the time of speaking. Many times in discourse, *be going to* sets up a scene by describing what is already perceptually visible (or cognitively accessible), thus functioning not so much as a prediction but as an assumption based on present beliefs. After such scene-setting *will* introduces the topical phase of that same scene:

- (31) 'My God!' the judge cried out. 'The boy **is going to** try to make a landing on the weather side of that pier! He'll wreck!'

In (31), *will* and *be going to* are not mutually substitutable, because they perform specific functions in the construction of the scene that is described. One might want to take *be going to* as the expression of an intention on the part of the grammatical subject (*the boy*), which it certainly is as well, but that would be missing the more general point that such discursive uses give rise to the establishment of specialized functions in the context of coherent narratives that can no longer be reduced to basic psychological meanings, like volition, intentionality, or other 'agent'-related notions. If intention was all there was to it, *will* might have been used in the first sentence as well (*The boy will try to make a landing ...*). After all, the expression of intentionality, next to that of volition, is an important facet of *will*'s semantics and therefore not incompatible with the 'objective' content of that first sentence. Nevertheless, discursively speaking, the two variants (with *will* and *be going to*) are NOT totally parallel; they would only be if abstraction were made of the sentence's position within the discourse.

Of course, there are many differences between *be going to* and *will*, some of them more consequential than others. Brisard (1997: 276ff.) motivates

systematic meaning aspects of *will* in terms of its schematic definition as expressing a prediction on the basis of known premises. Generic uses of *will*, the description of people's habits or of their typical features, its use in scientific discourse to express laws or law-like regularities, and its frequent combination with adverbs like *always* and *(n)ever* all point to the importance of this analytical notion of a premise, which indicates instances of past experimentation or experience on whose basis highly probable predictions can be made. In this capacity, *will* offers a 'conceptual link between the various (volitional and evaluative) categories [which] directly relates to the availability of given premises from experience and/or experimentation' (Brisard 1997: 279).

The reason for the absence of *be going to* in these domains pertains to the conceptual difference between a SIGN, as the experiential basis for most of *be going to*'s attested usage types, and a PREMISE. Strictly speaking, a sign does not *per se* imply any regularity or systematic pattern, nor does it intimate structural aspects of reality that can be exploited to predict future states of affairs. The sign is essentially contingent in this respect and cannot in itself serve as a basis for the extrapolation or generalization of event types from specific tokens, which, in contrast, characterizes many of *will*'s 'general validity' readings. One cannot say *?Water is going to boil at 100° Celsius* or *?He's going to do that (he's that kind of guy)*, both of which are acceptable with *will*. But one can utter a sentence like (30a) as soon as storm clouds appear in the sky. (30a), then, is limited in its scope to the situation in which it is uttered, since signs, due to their indexical nature, are token-oriented and non-generalizable. This constitutes the main difference between *will* and *be going to*, one that is non-trivial in its motivation of the various meaning extensions that affect both constructions. In the end, this distinction will prove to be intimately linked with the two conceptions of futurity instantiated by these constructions: the future as the more or less expected outcome of structural forces operating on reality (projected reality, *will*), versus the future as informed by the apprehension of contingent preparatory conditions that are present at the time of speaking (evoked reality (see section 4.2 below), *be going to*).

4. A COGNITIVE GRAMMAR ACCOUNT

4.1 *Grammaticalization, subjectification, grounding*

In cognitive grammar, grounding is treated as the conceptual underpinning of a phenomenon that is traditionally subsumed under the heading of deixis (Langacker 1987: 126–128). The mechanism of grounding, whether it occurs in the nominal or in the clausal realm, always involves a reference to the GROUND, which is defined as comprising the speech event as well as the setting in which it occurs. As such, the situation of speech includes all of its material

constituents (speaker, hearer, their positions in space and time, etc.), together with the respective spheres of knowledge associated with (some of) these elements. GROUNDING PREDICATIONS, then, are those constructions which specify the epistemic status of an entity with respect to the ground because the grammar requires such specifications, in order to distinguish finite clauses (i.e., full verb phrases) from nonfinite ones and nominals (i.e., full noun phrases) from simple nouns. They include tense and mood, grounding a verb, and (in)definite determiners in nominals.

For true grounding predications, the ground is only obliquely addressed, in contrast with lexical (deictic) expressions that directly refer to it, like *I*, *here*, *now*. In finite clauses, the grammatical class of grounding predications is characterized by a form of oblique reference to the ground, because the relationship between a temporally construed process (a verb) and its ground figures subjectively within the scope of the grounded predication. That is to say that grounding predications maximize the role of the ground as a reference point for the finite clause that needs grounding, while its role as an object of observation/conceptualization in its own right is kept minimal. Again, this contrasts straightforwardly with lexical expressions of deixis, which present the ground as a fully substantial and, above all, focal part of their meanings (Langacker 1987: 128–132). Thus, the present tense, as a grounding predication, does not precisely topicalize the notion of the present but construes it rather as a subjective (temporal) frame. Through this frame we look at the ‘objective content’ made up by the grounded clause, which is strictly speaking not ‘about’ the present as such. An adverb like *now*, on the other hand, introduces the notion of the present into the very scope of the proposition in which it figures and, consequently, puts the temporal coordinates specified by the adverb *onstage*.

Technically, clausal grounding predications, like tense markers and modals, are schematic VERBS whose content is elaborated by the fully elaborated verb form with which they combine. Specifically, what tenses contribute to the resulting finite clause is the indication of a relationship between the process designated by the lexical verb and the time at which the clause containing that verb is uttered. Accordingly, the process that is profiled (or designated) by the lexical verb can be construed as taking place ‘before’, ‘after’ or ‘during’ the time of speaking, in the simplest scenarios. Modals perform more or less the same task, differing primarily in the interpretation assigned to the grounding relation. Instead of expressing temporal orientations, those modal auxiliaries that are truly grounding (that is, that do not merely express deontic or other types of root modality) focus on the epistemic status of the grounded predication within the interlocutors’ working model of reality.

In the course of the processes of grammaticalization to which many clausal grounding predications have been subjected, their semantic import underwent an important shift in the way in which it is taken to contribute to the

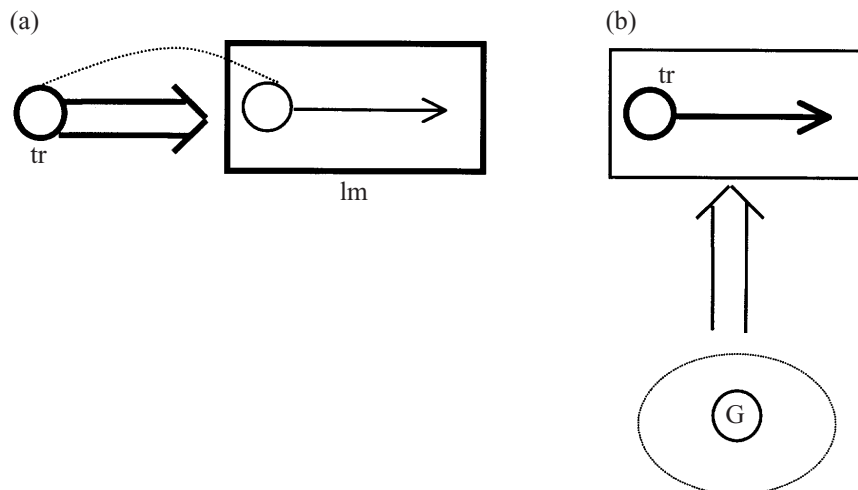


Figure 1

From lexical meaning to full grounding (Langacker 1991a: 270)

meaning of the clause as a whole. The starting point for this evolution takes a lexical construal in which the content of such predications remains wholly objective, as part of an objective scene which, in itself, does not make reference to the ground. Subsequently, the pressures of grammaticalization result in a qualitatively altered construal for that same predication, whereby the ground is ultimately included within the scope of the predication without however being directly designated by it. Concretely, in the English modal paradigm, to which an expression like *will* belongs, this change starts out from a specified meaning of the root of that modal (say, the volitional meaning of *will*). The modal's original meaning defines the relationship between a trajector (subject) and a landmark (object) without conjuring up the ground, as in the case of any other lexical verb.

Figure 1(a) depicts such a situation, where, for *will*, the trajector 'wants' to do something. The volitional aspect is rendered by the double arrow, and the action that the trajector wishes to take (the landmark) is given as a schematic process whose own trajector is identical to that of the main verb *will*, at least in cases of what used to be called equi-NP deletion. This schematic process is the site of elaboration for *will qua* 'wanting', and its content will be filled in by whatever infinitival verb form is to follow. In this initial stage, the ground is completely absent, because a lexical verb does not generally incorporate any reference to the situation in which it is used as part of its own semantic makeup. This is exactly why, in order to become a full-fledged finite clause, it needs a grounding predication to combine with. For verbs, including those that will eventually form the class of modal auxiliaries in English, this means that tense markers can still be applied, because tenses are grounding predications in

their own right and supply the link with the ground that is grammatically required for each finite clause. As soon as a verb reaches the status of a full-blown modal, however, such tense markings may ultimately wither away (or even disappear altogether), since the grounding relation which a modal has incorporated intrinsically satisfies the criterion of grammaticality for finite clauses. Thus, a number of modals have come to ground themselves. Those tense distinctions that remain formally marked on fully developed modals adopt other than temporal (realis) functions, such that a past tense form (in the modal paradigm as it currently stands in English) may merely express a degree of epistemic or deontic attenuation with respect to the corresponding force displayed by its present counterpart (Goossens 1996) and not serve any temporal function at all.

Figure 1(b) shows the fully modal meaning of contemporary *will*, the outcome of a process of grammaticalization whereby the infinitive (the content verb) that follows *will* takes on full profiling and thus imposes its own specifications as exhausting the semantic profile of the resulting finite clause. In this configuration, the trajector is identified as belonging to the figure-ground organization of that same content verb (and not of *will* proper), so that it is the argument structure of this content verb which now determines that of the higher 'verb phrase'. Thus, the original distinction, in figure 1(a), between the roles associated with *will* and those belonging to the content verb becomes blurred and will disappear. In figure 1(b), *will* is no longer in need of grounding, as it has turned into a grounding predication itself and presents the relevant link with the ground for the ensuing content verb.

If verbs are necessarily relational in the sense of indicating a link between their arguments, this aspect needs to be preserved after grammaticalization has occurred, since grounding predications are still qualified as schematic verbs. And indeed it has been, as, in figure 1(b), the relational orientation is redirected from the objective axis (horizontal, between the arguments originally specified by *will* as a lexical verb) to a vertical one, which subjectively binds a process to the ground. It is this reorientation which explains why instances of GRAMMATICALIZATION, at least when they affect what will eventually become grounding predications, are at the same time instances of SUBJECTIFICATION, generating a different conceptual status or construal for a given verb's meaning configuration. For *will*, the configuration that profiles, as a matter of objective conceptualization, the interaction between a subject and the object of her 'desire' figures in 1(a). It is replaced in figure 1(b) by a non-profiled relation between the ground and the complementing verb, focusing on the objective content of that complement and relegating *will*'s own configuration to a subjective level of conceptualization that contributes nothing to the global meaning (or designation) of the finite clause as such. And so the implications of this

relational component, which all verbs must display, are different for figures 1(a) and 1(b). The concrete semantics of volition, for one, will be lost or seriously ‘bleached’ in the course of grammaticalization, only to produce a schematic conception which concentrates on how the designated process (of the grounded verb) relates to the time of speaking. On this analysis, the emerging futurate meaning of the *will* construction is still partly motivated by the verb’s original meaning, in that wanting a state of affairs implies that it is not actual (–G) and that it is expected to be realized at a subsequent point in time (–P).

As a corollary to the subjectification of *will*’s semantic components, the process of grammaticalization substantially alters the type of POTENCY⁵ that is involved. This potency no longer defines a relation that holds between a participant in an objective scene and a target (as in figure 1(a), where it is the trajector who ‘wants to do’ something and thus exerts if only an imaginary force that should result in the realization of the relevant event). But in its grounding capacity, *will* identifies the link that can be established, at the time of speaking, between such an objective scene, now entirely given by the semantics of the following content verb, and (a model of) reality. In other words, it is reality itself, as represented in the ground, which is to exert the force leading to the realization of a non-actual event, through its own momentum. In the course of the grammaticalization process, then, the locus of potency, which identifies the possible sources for bringing about the actualization of an event, is no longer reserved for concrete, often human and individual, trajectors, as in the original configuration for *will*. After grammaticalization has taken place, *will* still specifies a potency relation directed at a non-actual state of affairs, only no longer starting from a subject ‘wanting’ this state of affairs. Pointing out the ‘force’ with which reality’s ‘momentum’ can allow or preclude the future realization of an event is, of course, another way of framing our working definition of modal *will* as specifying a non-given state of affairs based on premises that are given at the time of speaking.

For modals that behave as grounding predications, the source of a force that can cause the realization of an event lies within the structure of the world as we construe it, not with any individual actor or collective institution (the latter configuration holding for deontic and other non-epistemic uses of those same modal forms). This relation is indicated by the vertical double arrow in figure 1(b), which is not profiled, in contrast with 1(a) (profiling is indicated by a heavy line, unprofiled parts are lighter). Genuine grounding predications allow the relation between a (verbal) process and the ground to

[5] Potency (Langacker 1991a: 270) refers to ‘a physical or mental force that, when unleashed, tends to bring about an occurrence of [a] process’. It is related to the concept of ‘potentiality’, since processes at which it is directed are by definition non-actual and thus potential or non-given.

be backgrounded, though still included in the predication's scope, in favor of a more salient act of designation which concentrates on the content of the grounded verb itself. Whether or not to profile the relation between the ground and a process in a configuration such as 1(b) is a choice which does have observable grammatical consequences. It explains the contrast between fully developed grounding predications (modals like *will* and tense markers) and so-called periphrastic constructions (Langacker 1991a: 271), which may have more or less the same function as their full grounding counterparts without sharing all of their construal properties. Periphrastic constructions, of which *be going to* is a nice example, do not conform to all the formal demands posited for grounding predications (a provisional list of these mainly morphological criteria is given in Langacker 1991a: 240), such that their status as grammatical items is a hybrid one. These periphrastic constructions might well be in an intermediate stage of grammaticalization, at which full grounding has not yet been achieved.

In terms of meaning, grounding predications are essentially INTERPRETIVE, that is, they assess how a propositional content is to be inserted into our knowledge of the world. While the referential component of finite clauses is provided by the profiled part of the content verb's configuration, schematic grounding predications do not contribute to this act of designation. Instead, they evaluate it. What allows an interlocutor to identify the referent of a finite clause is, first of all, the TYPE of state of affairs that is being predicated, as indicated by the semantics of the content verb (including its specified arguments). Only then can INSTANCES of states of affairs be identified. They can be located in time, for example, but this is just one of several formats that the assessment expressed by grounding predications may take. In sum, grounding predications do not contribute referential material to the finite clause as a whole but modulate the information contained therein and thereby offer a conceptual link that allows interlocutors to keep track of the positioning of this material within a (discursive and/or real-world) context. This may seem an odd thing to say about a deictic category, but it is perfectly illustrated by the convention in cognitive grammar not to profile the relationship to the ground that grounding predications signify (and thus not to treat their functioning as an act of designation). The interpretive mode in which grounding predications find themselves is an epistemological one, in that it frames the knowledge status that can be attributed to the grounded process in terms of its relation to a model of reality. In tense semantics, Langacker's (1991a: 243–249) elaborated epistemic model voices this concern with epistemology through its resolution to avoid the paradoxes that a referential (time-based) approach brings with it.⁶ It achieves this by moving

[6] This model is prompted by the finding that exclusively temporal approaches to tense cannot capture the apparent irregularities which the English tense system exhibits, with its

to a schematic level of analysis where propositions are assessed with respect to the place they occupy in the conceptualizer's realization of reality in its entirety, and not just of its temporal dimensions.

Time, as the prototypical dimension in which tense meanings figure, can be fitted into this epistemic model by treating it as an indicator of the 'modality of the givenness' ascribed to a temporal object (a process, as designated by a verb). In this sense, the feature $+/-G$ used in the schematic definitions for grammatical markers of time (listed in section 1) corresponds to a phenomenological conception of grounding as an act of epistemological interpretation. The future, for instance, is non-given by virtue of any future state of affairs' non-actual character (more particularly, by virtue of its inclusion in the domain of non-reality, which is by definition unknown). Referential concerns are, of course, not completely absent from the meaning configurations of grounding predications, if only because it turns out that general modes of givenness correlate roughly with an archetypal division of time into past, present, and future intervals or frames. Thus, particular configurations of the givenness of a state of affairs will also correlate, if not absolutely, with acts of locating states of affairs within these temporal domains. But also the notion of the presence/absence ($+/-P$) of a state of affairs within the directly perceivable/knowable situation of speech is one that is intimately linked with that state of affairs' referential status. Assessing the accessibility of a temporal object, after all, boils down to checking how hard it is to verify the epistemic status that is ascribed to it. Obviously, this criterion too correlates more or less (though in a way more than in the case of givenness) with that object's location in time, implying some sort of scale where the degree of accessibility (or presence) systematically decreases as we move from the present, over the past, into the future. (Iconically, this move away from the default position of 'direct presence' is signaled by the increasing morphological complexity of grammatical markers on this very scale.) Nevertheless, an epistemic model of grounding aims at explaining temporal meanings of grammatical items, whether tense markers or modal/periphrastic constructions, in terms of their compatibility with very specific configurations of the features givenness and presence/absence, rather than the other way around. In addition, an epistemic model aspires to comprehensiveness in analyzing both temporal and non-temporal meanings of such constructions and does not install a hierarchy between these meaning types solely on theoretical grounds, so that temporal meanings are not necessarily seen as embodying the 'essence' of tenses or other grammatical markers of time.

allocation of various notional timeframes to tenses that are typically reserved for one specific portion of the timeline. Concretely, 'deviant' temporal meanings of the past or present tense cannot be characterized solely in terms of the analytical labels ('past' and 'present', respectively) ascribed to them, not to mention the many modal and epistemic uses that can be made of these tenses in different contexts.

4.2 *Implications for be going to*

In this section, I will show how cognitive grammar can account for a significant portion of the observations presented in sections 2 and 3, without relying on specialized grammatical mechanisms that focus only on the internal workings of the verb paradigm and fail to produce a unified picture of grounding phenomena (in nominals and finite clauses). In particular, the analysis is framed within a perspective on grammaticalization, resisting the idea that an account in terms of METAPHOR should suffice to capture all of the meaning particulars that result from *be going to*'s shift from the spatial to the temporal domain. It also acknowledges the procedural perspective on the meanings of modal and tense markers that is generally adopted within relevance theory, without losing track of the important qualification that *be going to* is not as fully grammaticalized as the items to which this perspective is usually applied. As a result, an undifferentiated procedural account alone cannot do the job of explicating every meaning nuance involved, and conceptual ('encoded') information is needed to spell out the common basis underlying the construction's range of usage types, suggesting a strictly monosemistic approach to the problem of *be going to*'s DESCRIPTIVE polysemy. Concretely, the cognitive grammar analysis presented here provides semantic features that are attached to schematic representations of the various components involved in the construction as a whole (the tensed auxiliary *be*, the unit *be going to* itself, and the infinitival complement).

Differences between specific grounding predications, especially when they tend to cover the same or overlapping domains (such as 'the future'), will most likely relate to subtle distinctions of construal, that is, of the orientations of the potency relations involved and of the way in which a domain like the future is conceptualized (and compartmentalized) via the respective constructions. As for the contrast between *will* and *be going to*, variations in construal should also correspond to the differing schematic definitions proposed in section 1 for the two expressions.

WILL: NON-GIVEN, NON-PRESENT
BE GOING TO: NON-GIVEN, PRESENT

Both markers generally locate states of affairs in the future. One does this through the use of a modal verb with an originally volitional meaning, the other through a periphrastic construction. Pragmatically speaking, it is also plausible that both constructions select similar portions of non-reality, namely those paths into the future that are bound to occur with a fairly high degree of probability, given a knowledge of past and present realities. It would not make much sense to talk, *in vacuo*, about a potential state of affairs without having any reason to believe that this state of affairs has some likelihood of occurring. But how can we accomplish a differentiated characterization of these constructions without merely asserting that their

denotation (referring to the future) is identical, and that they differ only in the modal connotations accompanying their use?

Will still possesses aspects of the volitional meaning it started out with in certain present-day usage contexts, such as tags attached to imperatives and certain commissives and requests in the first and second person paradigm. *Be going to*, in contrast, developed from a gradually idiomatized expression of spatial motion, especially when followed by an infinitive – as in *I'm going to close the door*, a sentence which has become ambiguous between a purely spatial reading (meaning something like ‘I’m going to the door (in order) to close it’) and an expression of intention. According to Wekker (1976: 29), the periphrastic construction finds its origins in Middle English (the first OED reference for it is from 1482), when the present progressive of the verb *to go* combines with an infinitive whose subject is identical to that of *go*. From about the seventeenth century onwards, the construction gains in frequency and starts to acquire a conventionalized futurate meaning that is progressively less likely to be confused with any spatial reading (see Scheffer (1975: chapter 24) for a detailed discussion of this historical evolution).

At first blush, this emergent futurate use of *be going to* seems a perfect candidate for a metaphorical explanation. In that line of thinking, the temporal meaning of the construction developed directly out of its original spatial one, which still focuses on the feature of intentionality (implying full subject agency). Subsequently, through metaphor, an unaccusative extension might have motivated the use of the construction with non-agentive subjects, via a move that could be described as going from an equi to a raising construal. However, the reason why such an explanation is unsatisfactory (compared to the machinery borrowed from the study of grammaticalization) is that the space-to-time transfer cannot be the only change involved. For one thing, as Langacker (1991b: 330) points out, it does not motivate why inanimate subjects came to be sanctioned in the construction’s futurate readings, when such entities cannot be seen as endowed with the faculty of intentionality required for their meaningful interpretation. If we wish to explain the occurrence of sentences like *It's going to rain*, we will need more than the generalization that *go* futures exploit the spatial image of a present conceptualizer moving in time, away from the past and into the future. A typical temporal reading of *be going to* does not have to carry any implication of intentionality at all and tends to focus, instead, on a generalized conception of imminence and/or predictability, as we have seen. The difference between these two modes (the predication of intentions versus prediction *pur sang*) relies precisely on the process of subjectification described in section 4.1 above, whereby it is no longer the (objective, typically animate) subject of the sentence that initiates a future event, but rather the (subjective) speaker, as part of the ground, who is foretelling an event’s future occurrence. As a direct result of this, a ‘raising’ construal becomes in fact possible for temporal uses of *be going to*, but merely acknowledging the

change in terminology needed to talk about spatial and temporal *be going to* does not provide an explanation of how this shift can conceptually come about (see Langacker 1995 for a more comprehensive cognitive grammar account of so-called raising constructions). Moreover, as noted by Langacker (1991b: 331), a sentence like *An earthquake is going to destroy that town* does not imply that the *earthquake* is coextensive with the process that leads up to the town's destruction, as it would if the sentence were analyzed as indicating a subject that moves along a (metaphorically conceived) temporal path. The earthquake is supposed to coincide exactly with the destruction predicated by the following infinitive (that is, with the endpoint of such a process), and 'its span of EXISTENCE is not construed as extending from the moment of speaking until the future time at which the destruction occurs' (ibid.; my emphasis).

An alternative to the metaphorical account of temporal *be going to* can be found in the cognitive mechanisms that accompany grammaticalization. In the spatial configuration, the trajector, as part of an objective scene, follows a path – *I'm going* – to arrive at a point where an action can be performed – *to close the door* – for which it functions again as the trajector. In the temporal configuration that results from the process of grammaticalization, in contrast, the grammatical subject is immediately and exclusively identified as the trajector of the construction's complement (the infinitive). Since the subject of a sentence containing temporal *be going to* is not the trajector of the *go* predication, it need not satisfy the condition of being able to move along a (spatial) path. The potency relation, now, becomes one between the profiled process (of the complement) and the ground, stipulating that the process in question should be construed in relation to an implied ground – as following it in time. Thus, we understand how the construction can acquire a futurate meaning in the first place by referring to general principles of grammaticalization and subjectification, which will have some validity for similar constructions in other languages as well.

The periphrastic construction *be going to* is not nearly as grammaticalized as *will*. This can be seen, for instance, in the use of the construction with other markers than the present tense (*I was going to close the door*, as the expression of a past intention, is possible, though perhaps not quite as idiomatic for certain kinds of future-in-the-past reading that are generally restricted to *would*).⁷ At such an intermediate stage, one would expect that its meaning as a marker of the future lies fairly close, conceptually, to the original meanings of future markers in general, before grammaticalization applied. We see this reflected in the configuration proposed for *be going to*,

[7] *Be going to* can be used in combination with *will* and retain its futurate meaning, even though spatial interpretations of such sentences become more likely. With *gonna*, grammaticalization has reached a further stage, as tokens where this form is used with *will* are absent in present-day English.

featuring $-G$ and $+P$, which means that the event talked about is not realized (non-actual), although some aspect or phase of it is seen as ‘present’ in the situation of speech. I call this setting of the future events grounded by *be going to* EVOKED REALITY. In its epistemic orientation, this domain is unmistakably part of non-reality (again, $-G$). But at the same time it is contrasted with potential and projected reality (section 1) due to its insistence on the present accessibility, if not of the whole future event, then at least of those initiatory phases that signal its pending realization ($+P$).⁸

Any sign announcing the actualization of an event needs to be perceptually or conceptually accessible, according to this definition, within the confines of the ground. The predicted event is thus indexically evoked at the time of speaking. Importantly, it is not some magical act of prediction itself which makes the predicted event symbolically present in the ground. Rather, the use of *be going to* presupposes a REAL presence of signs that are naturally (not conventionally) linked to the anticipated state of affairs. Also, the accessibility of such signs is expressly not restricted to the modality of perception, because, as with nominal antecedents that are ‘on the counter’ (see footnote 8), the preceding (local and global) discourse can also function as a pool from which to select relevant indices. While *It’s going to rain* works well within a perception-oriented analysis (stressing the physical presence of possible indicators of rain), the interpretation of *They are dubious about what is going to happen to money in local hands* (example (6) above) cannot rely on such an account, since, strictly speaking, the ‘antecedent’ of this assumption (any indication that it can safely be expected that something dubious is in fact going to happen) is not necessarily one that can be readily identified in the physical constitution of the ground. In the latter case, we have to presume, instead, that the sentence implicitly refers to signs that are manifest in ‘talk about’ the financial plans at issue, that is, in preceding discursive formulations on the topic that are taken to be cognitively accessible at the time of speaking.

If the speaker knows about someone’s (including her own) intention or desire to do something, or if she at least assumes this knowledge, she can predict the event’s occurrence with more confidence than if she were kept in the dark about such mental facts. The concepts of volition and intention,

[8] I use the term ‘evoked’ by analogy with its application in the literature on definite reference, anaphora, and the discursive management of linguistic information flows. It appears in, among others, Chafe (1976) and especially Prince (1981), where it labels referents that are neither new nor inferable but rather semi-active, that is, non-given yet in principle accessible as they are already ‘on the counter’ (see Lambrecht 1994: 94ff.). The philosophical question here is where an event starts and stops. I consider it more relevant, however, to analyze how interlocutors exploit what looks like a philosophical given. They can negotiate received boundaries of events, for example by situating ‘part’ of an upcoming event in evoked reality (through the use of *be going to*) and thus somehow stretching its apparent limits.

therefore, are two of the more frequently encountered starting points for the evolution of grammatical markers of futurity (Ullian 1978, Bybee et al. 1994), and for these very same reasons they are bound to figure in the meanings of other future markers as well. It is quite obvious that typical complements of ‘wanting’ or ‘intending’ are situated in the future and that verbs of ‘wanting’ or ‘intending’ can develop in the course of grammaticalization to focus almost exclusively on this temporal implication. However, we also need to ask why these particular types of mental states are included so readily in the semantic range of future markers which do not feature such meanings in their original configurations, as is the case for *be going to*. A notion like intentionality, which is also prominently present in contemporary uses of *be going to* (section 2.2.1), cannot appear out of the blue and is certainly not directly motivated by the construction’s basic spatial meaning. It must then be regarded as intrinsically related to the expression of futurity, regardless of the lexical origins of any given future marker. I suggest, in line with Fries (1927), that it is the signaling function associated with (knowing about) a person’s mental predisposition which accommodates this phenomenon.

The appearance of (modal or periphrastic) markers of the future often involves the conflation of two distinct facets making up the original semantic configuration of such a marker. This configuration usually posits a state (mental for *will*, physical for *be going to*) as fully situated in the present and presents the elaboration of that state’s processual landmark (the content of the complementing verb) as future. The change from this lexical meaning to a grammatical (temporal) one can be followed in figure 2. When grammaticalization occurs, the focus is no longer on the relation between a present trajector (involved in an action that corresponds to the marker’s original meaning, like *go*) and a future landmark (the event denoted by the complement), but rather between the present ground and that landmark.

Figure 2(b) offers a view of the meaning of periphrastic constructions like *be going to*, which, in contrast to the grounding predication *will* (figure 1(b)), continues to profile the potency relation inherited from its spatial origin. Translated into our schematic features, this means that the ground, representing the present of the utterance, receives full attention through its profiled status and thereby codetermines the semantics of the construction as a whole. The landmark remains non-given due to the specifications expressed by the grounding relation, which suggests its future construal. (The specifications are not indicated in figure 2(b).) As opposed to a configuration where a trajector acts as the source of a potency relation (figure 2(a)), this source has shifted in figure 2(b) to a model of reality, mediated through the conception of the ground at the time of speaking.

What we end up with is a blend of features belonging to the two (horizontally aligned) portions in the original configuration (figure 2(a)), with *be going to* (figure 2(b)) inheriting +P from the source of the potency relation (the original trajector) and –G from the landmark process. This

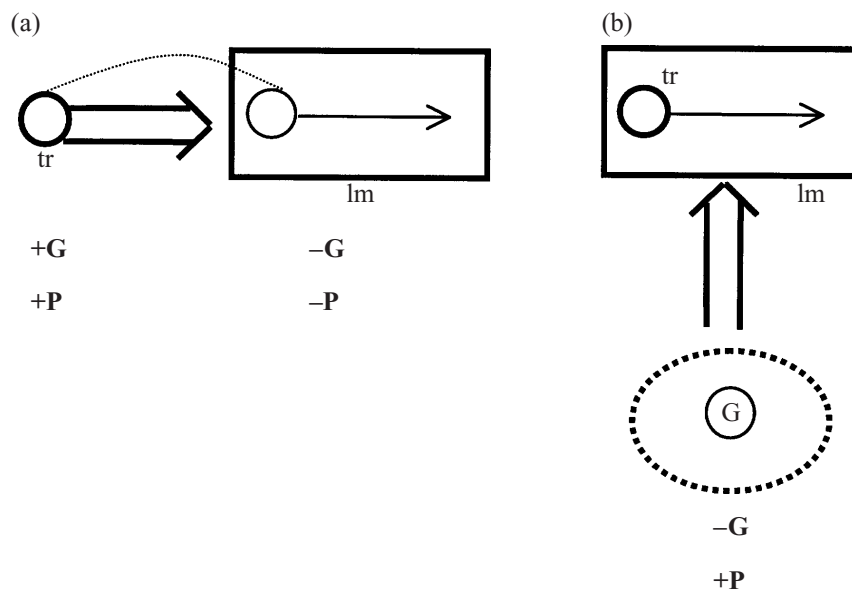


Figure 2

From lexical meaning to periphrastic grounding (based on Langacker 1991a: 270)

should be contrasted with the non-blending nature of *will* (figure 1(b)), which focuses entirely, as grounding predications do, on the features of the originally non-profiled landmark ($-G, -P$). Incidentally, the present analysis accounts for the non-trivial grammatical observation that *be going to* is itself grounded through the auxiliary *be*, which can take the present tense (or the past tense, in which case the vantage point changes but the internal configuration remains the same). In a way, then, we can speak of two mutually enveloped acts of grounding, whereby the present tense grounding the construction in the strict sense of the term produces the feature $+P$, and the periphrastic construction as a whole ‘grounding’ the subsequent verb (the landmark of *be going to*) triggers an interpretation of the actually profiled process as $-G$.

Instead of the emphasis on mental or physical states of the trajector in the original meanings of modal or periphrastic future markers, an abstract configuration emerges for the intermediate stage of grammaticalization that characterizes contemporary uses of *be going to*. In this configuration, potential sources or causes of predicted events include the speech participants situated in the ground (all of them indeed bearing witness to their own mental states), but also any material (that is, non-mental) condition that may be relevant for the prediction of the landmark’s actualization. This actualization can therefore be seen as signaled by just about any facet of the ground (or any element contained in the conceptualizer’s model of the

situation of speech) that might give rise to the event's coming into existence. Notions like intentionality and volition (section 2.2.1) remain highly salient in these intermediate stages of grammaticalization, because they pertain to aspects of the ground (typically, the speaker or the hearer in first and second person uses of periphrastic constructions) that figure prominently in the conceptualizer's model. On top of them, however, other material signs (visual, auditory, etc.) present in the ground and announcing the realization of an event can be exploited, and this is what the speaker does when she chooses *be going to* to predict that event's occurrence. As a prototypical example, the utterance *It's going to rain* will ultimately depend on the speaker's ability to detect these signs, such as a formation of storm clouds hanging over her head, as well as on the expectation that her interlocutors are equally able (or can be led) to do so. Usage types displaying a hint of inevitability or imminence (sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4) are bound to exploit the presence of such signs within the current ground, while the category of assumptions (section 2.2.2) focuses more on knowledge of the structure of reality at the time of speaking than on the predictions this leads to. Finally, the cognitive processes underlying such acts of prediction are, as in the case of *will*, made explicit in conditional uses of *be going to* (section 2.2.5), with the protasis featuring the (real) premise on which a non-given conclusion/prediction is based.

Evoked reality ($-G/+P$) serves as a shortcut to conjure up the conceptual shades distinguished in this and the previous sections. By virtue of its characteristic (be it schematic) definition, it captures the very idea that a conceptual underpinning is necessary for describing the semantics of *be going to*, and that an explanation of its meaning cannot be left to a model which provides only procedural instructions (much less so if the model merely orients to the construction's temporal 'instructions'). The use of *be going to* is not exclusively about identifying locations in time, and qualifications of a modal nature, absent or backgrounded in many previous analyses of the construction, should also enter the picture. In this respect, the present analysis follows Klinge's (1993) and Nicolle's (1997) suggestion that *be going to* is concerned with potentiality, adding to it the crucial observation that the construction, in its semi-grammaticalized capacity, is itself grounded by the present tense and should reflect this in its use. Thus, the grounding of evoked reality within a conception of the present, as limited by the time of speaking, leads to a natural account of the epistemic force of the construction, which is typified by a strong commitment to the actualization of an anticipated event. This can only be motivated by the privileged epistemic status that the concept of the present itself appears to have in English, exhibiting an intrinsic association with the notion of certainty that is grammatically reflected in a range of related temporal expressions (notably, the use of the English present tense and its function in expressions of direct perception, general validity, conditionals, and so on).

5. SUMMARY

It is impossible to discuss grammatical markers (grounding predications) that exhibit a considerable overlap in their temporal reference from the perspective of temporal organization alone. The model I use adopts a phenomenologically inspired stance on the activity of interpreting time and applies this to the grammatical expression of temporality.

Concretely, the forms *will* and *be going to* have been calibrated on a semantic continuum, comprising both degrees of givenness and of (perceptual or conceptual) presence/absence as the main coordinates along which temporal denotations are plotted. *Will*, it is claimed, covers the realm of projected reality, where events are neither given nor present but based on premises that are necessarily given (a meaning very much apparent in the open conditional), whereas *be going to* concentrates on states of affairs that are non-given yet present with respect to an original or shifted deictic center (evoked reality). The latter definition, though seemingly at odds with intuitive beliefs about the structure of the future, takes into account the grammatical form of the construction, which figures the verb *be* in the present (or past) tense, and aims at harmonizing this grammatical fact with the obvious temporal force of *be going to*.

The notion of evoked reality is primarily built upon the observation of present signs announcing a pending event in the future, and its analytical thrust shows most affinities with Wekker's (1976) schematic definition for *be going to*. The analysis presented here also respects Wekker's (1976: 19–20) three arguments for not regarding *be going to* as a tense auxiliary. Accordingly, while describing *be going to* as a marker of futurity, I have consistently avoided characterizing the construction as a tense marker. Explanations of the various meanings of the construction are formulated in terms of the pragmatic need, on the part of the language user, to constrain the inherent indeterminacy in referring to states of affairs situated in the future, whereby the future is seen as taking part in the more extensively construed realm of non-reality.

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