

Grammaticalization of Proximatives in English*

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Rhee, Seongha, & Myung, Choong-Mee 2005, Grammaticalization of Proximatives in English, *The Journal of Linguistic Science* 33, 243-266. This paper explores the grammaticalization processes, whereby three constructions of English, i.e. *be going to*, *be about to*, and *be to*, acquired the grammatical meaning of the proximative, i.e. 'on the verge of doing x' as a verbal aspectual category describing an event denoted by a verb. Drawing upon historical data it is argued that the participation of the infinitival *to* was crucially instrumental in the development because of its purpose/intention meaning. Among the semantic change mechanisms involved in the process inference is notable. Furthermore, it is shown that the genesis of the proximative from *be going to* heavily relies on the lexical semantics of *go*, i.e. a directional movement, which triggered the psychological proximity, whereas *be about to* is built on the semantics of *about*, which originally signified 'outer surface', i.e., the proximity sense was developed from the notion of 'contact'. As for the disparity in use frequency from the corpus data, it is claimed that *be to* is least frequently used because of its weak imminence meaning, whereas *be going to* is most frequently used because the proximative marking became conflated with the near-future tense-marking function for their shared semantic property of 'nearness'. The frequency increase seems to be due to the fact that the future tense-marking is a very commonly attested function across languages. It is also suggested that *be about to* has the strongest force of imminence meaning, but it is not as frequently used as *be going to*, because the

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grammatical notion of 'proximative' per se is not a conceptually salient one as compared to other more frequently encoded grammatical concepts.
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1. Introduction

Grammatical forms encode diverse grammatical concepts across languages. Some of such grammatical concepts may be unique and be rarely found for their being idiosyncratic without universal cognitive values. On the other hand, some of the grammatical concepts may seem universal, which is suspected to be based on universal human cognitive processes. What concerns us is a grammatical category called 'proximative' (König 1993, Heine 1994, Heine & Kuteva 2002, cf. 'almost-aspect' Heine et al. 1993), which is controversial in this respect. For example, Talmy (1985) includes in the list of conceptual domains not amenable to grammatical expressions the degree of realization of an event (e.g. *almost, just barely*). Romaine (1999), however, discussing the grammaticalization of the proximative in Tok Pisin, contends that it may not be so, since even young creoles have multiple ways of encoding the grammatical notion of the proximative. There have been no attempts made to exhaustively catalogue the grammatical notions attested in all languages in the world, and thus there is no conclusive decision regarding its relative degree of universality, the proximative aspect. However, it seems to be found across many, typologically different and genetically varied, languages around the world.

The proximative is a temporal phrase located close to the initial boundary of the situation described by the main verb with the meaning 'on the verge of V-ing', 'almost', 'nearly', 'be about to', etc. Since this grammatical notion inherently makes reference to futurity in the sense that the psychological reference point is located posterior to the event under discussion, it is closely related to the futurity marker, such as the future tense and the prospective aspect. On the other hand, since the focal point lies before the reference point, i.e. culmination point in the

conceptualization of progression of events, it is closely related to the so-called 'action-nearly-averted' grammatical marker (Kuteva 1998), which is confined to past contexts with the meaning 'was on the verb of V-ing but did not V' (Romaine 1999). This paper deals with the proximatives in English, focusing on the verbal proximatives, such as *be to*, *be going to*, and *be about to*.

Methodologically, we will use corpus data taken from the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (henceforth, MICASE).¹⁾ The reason for the use of a spoken corpus is that grammaticalization in general is triggered by the discourse in which meaning negotiation actively takes place, and thus, the spoken corpus more faithfully represents spontaneous language use without post-production editing by the speaker.

We will describe the source constructs and the grammaticalization processes, whereby certain constructions acquired the grammatical meaning of proximatives (§2), and discuss the issues that emerged from the general description, with special reference to the principles in grammaticalization theory (§3).

2. Grammaticalization of Proximatives

2.1 Grammaticalization of *be going to*

The periphrastic *be going to* as a futurity marker has received phenomenal attention from early grammaticalization studies (Traugott 1978, Ultan 1978, Fleischman 1982, 1983, Pérez 1990, Hopper & Traugott 2003[1993], Bybee et al. 1994, inter alia). Even though it is very common to use this periphrastic form instead of the fully grammaticalized *will*,²⁾ it still carries its aspectual quality, thus exhibiting

1) The MICASE Corpus is a web-searchable English corpus containing 152 transcripts totalling 1,848,364 words as of May 2005, developed by the University of Michigan. The data were collected from natural academic speech events recorded at the University.

2) According to MICASE, the token frequencies of the futurity markers are: *will* (2,444), and its clitic form *'ll* (3,442); *be going to V* (1,002), and its contracted form *be gonna V* (4,185),

distributional difference from the latter (Hopper and Traugott 2003[1993]: 3). Despite the functional similarities, *be going to* has distinctive semantics of the 'imminence' sense as compared to the generic *will*, and, thus, is a good exemplar of a proximative auxiliary (see discussion below). We will look into its development both on the syntagmatic and semantic dimensions.

2.1.1 Source Construction

The futurity marker *be going to* has a complex morpho-syntactic composition, consisting of *be*, *go*, *-ing*, and *to*. We are particularly concerned with the fact that this source construction is basically built on the two major grammatical constructs: progressive (as represented by *be -ing*) and purposive (as represented by *to*). Recruiting progressive brings forth a very important semantic consequence, i.e. the proximative marker's 'current on-going relevance' meaning, thus the referenced event being not only close but psychologically conceptualized even as a part of the present (or any referenced point of time depending on the tense that marks the *be*-verb). Likewise the use of purposive *to* brings forth the futurity meaning through inference, since it is the common knowledge that if we have a purpose and are on the move ('go') the realization of the intended event should be in the near future.

As a matter of fact, the purposive marker *to* is the common element participating in the development of all three verbal proximative grams, and it deserves our special attention because it seems to have been the very lexeme that was instrumental in grammaticalization of proximatives. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1991, 2nd edition, henceforth OED), *to*, in its pre-verbal position, (contra as a preposition, though evidently related), i.e. dependent on a verb in its infinitival form or on a verb of motion, had the function of indicating purpose or intention as early as the 9th century, thus rendering the construction equivalent to 'in order to' or 'for the purpose of'.

It is well known that in grammaticalization the formal reduction and semantic

suggesting that these two different types of futurity are of similar level of functionality intra-systemically (i.e. 5,886 vs. 5,187).

reduction often proceed in tandem, and this strong tendency brought forth the Parallel Reduction Hypothesis (Bybee et al. 1994). The periphrastic *be going to* seems to have started its journey on the grammaticalization path around 1482 and is slow in formal reduction, and its reduced form *be gonna* occurs around the beginning of the 20th century (Rhee 1998). Formal reduction, albeit still minimal, is attested only with this form among the three proximatives.³⁾ We shall return to this issue in the subsequent discussion.

2.1.2 Semantic Change

As shown in the preceding discussion, the construction *be going to* is composed of diverse morphemes that carry important functional and semantic properties. Its source construct can be shown in componential breakdown as in (1).

- (1) [be]: (usually current) state
go: physical movement
[be] -ing: on-going
to: purpose, direction

As seen in (1), concatenation of the meanings of the constituent elements produces 'currently be in the state of moving with a purpose to V'. This meaning seems to adequately motivate the semantic change into the imminent futurity. At the first sight, the conceptual transfer from the spatial domain of physical movement to the temporal domain of temporal lapse is apparent, and this has been often cited as a prime example of [space > time] metaphor in grammaticalization. However, Hopper and Traugott (2003[1993]) and Bybee et al. (1994) persuasively argue that we do not need to invoke the metaphor in this process. This argument is sound because human movement on the spatial dimension inevitably involves a concomitant lapse of time on the temporal dimension.

3) As shall be seen §2.1.2, the contracted form *be gonna* is used in higher proportion than the more conservative form *be going to*. See also Footnote #2.

If the physical movement is inseparable from temporal lapse, the semantic change associated with the grammaticalization of this gram truly may not have been, or does not need to be, motivated by metaphorization. The best candidate among the mechanisms proposed thus far seems to be inference, whereby the addressee, in an attempt to enrich the interpretation of the speaker utterance, supposes that the sentential subject (which is often the speaker) is capable of carrying out his or her professed intention (with an assumption that the sentential subject should be reasonable enough to be in pursuit of achievable goals), and thus the event will occur at a future time, in the absence of interruptions in the course, which is also normally assumed. The inference is triggered by the semantics of the participating morphemes in addition to human's world knowledge.

One of the interesting aspects of this proximative gram is that its imminence sets itself apart from the generic futurity marker *will*. This is evident in the following examples.

- (2) a. I will travel to Europe.
- b. I'm going to travel to Europe.

A subtle, yet distinct, property that discriminates the two sentences is that the travel may not take place in the near future in (2a), and (2b) is more amenable when it does, at least in the speaker's conceptualization (which may be different in actual time).

A notable semantic change with this newly emerged proximative is that the semantic shift from physical movement to temporal movement newly licensed the use of entities without ability for physical locomotion as the subject, i.e. inclusion of non-humans as the subject. Likewise, the semantic erosion of the property [+purpose] from *to* newly licensed the use of non-sentient entities as the subject. This is well captured in the following table (NB: the numbers are projected figures from a sub-sample of 1,000 out of 5,187 tokens).

<Table 1> Subject and Predicate of *be going to V* and *be gonna V*

		<i>be going to</i>	<i>be gonna</i>	Total
Subject	Human	645 (64%)	2,712 (65%)	3,357 (65%)
	Inanimate	357 (36%)	1,473 (35%)	1,830 (35%)
	Total	1,002 (100%)	4,185 (100%)	5,187 (100%)
Predicate	Purposive	673 (67%)	2,921 (70%)	3,594 (69%)
	Non-purposive	329 (33%)	1,264 (30%)	1,593 (31%)
	Total	1,002 (100%)	4,185 (100%)	5,187 (100%)

<Table 1> shows that even though the human subject accounts for the majority (i.e. 65%) of both *be going to V* and *be gonna V*, a fact reflective of the original source situation, as much as 35% of these periphrastic proximal uses are of inanimate subjects, suggesting that the locomotive sense associated with *go* is no longer posing a selectional restriction. Likewise, even though the purposive predicates following the proximal are the majority, accounting for 69% of the total occurrences, which is reflective of the original source construction with the purposive *to*, 31% of the total tokens occur with non-purposive predicates, such as passive constructions or non-dynamic verbal constructions (including stative verbs, psychic verbs, etc.).

Another notable state of affairs is that the proportion between the older, more conservative form *be going to* and the newer, more eroded form *be gonna* is about one to four (1,002 vs. 4,185), suggesting that, at least in a spoken corpus, the phonological erosion is pervasive, in sharp contrast with the fact that, in writing, the use of this eroded form is strongly discouraged and often censored by most word-processing programs.

2.2 Grammaticalization of *be about to*

The next proximal we deal with is *be about to*. Despite its distinctive and clear proximal meaning, this form has not received any serious attention to date, which is in contrast with *be going to* addressed in the preceding discussion. However, the imminence sense, the defining characteristic of the grammatical notion

'proximative', is strikingly clear, and even more prominent than its co-functional gram *be going to*, as shown in the following examples:

- (3) a. I'm going to travel to Europe.
b. I'm about to travel to Europe.

In the above examples, (3a) may be uttered if only the speaker is within a reasonable time frame definable by his or her intended travel, even though in physical terms the travel may be a year away, whereas (3b) suggests imminence, and the level of imminence seems to require objective validation, i.e., the time frame should be objectively recognizable by others and the speaker is truly currently situated within the time frame. We now turn to a discussion of the grammaticalization displayed by this proximative gram.

2.2.1 Source Construction

As was the case with the proximative *be going to* in the preceding discussion, this proximative gram is also composed of diverse source lexemes, such as *be*, *about*, and *to*. What immediately comes into our attention is the use of *about* in this source construction, which is an anomaly considering the normal co-occurrence pattern of this word. I.e., the function of *about* is that of a preposition, even though it may also function as an adverb at the proportion of 10 to 1.⁴) As a formant in either category *about* does not accord with this syntagmatic configuration, because as a preposition it is required to occur with a noun, and as an adverb it is required to occur with a verb that is amenable with the semantics of *about*, such as *go*, *move*, etc.

This anomaly leads us into an exploration into the historical situation of this construct. According to OED, *about* was already a complex form composed of *on*

4) Johansson and Hofland (1989), for example, shows the primary prepositional use (their 'IN' category) 1,282, and secondary prepositional use ('RB') 437, and adverbial use ('RP') 179; thus contrasting the part-of-speech difference at 1,719 vs. 179. (N.B. Unlike here, they count RB as an adverbial.)

'on/at' and *bútan/buton/buten* 'without, outside of'. Interestingly this *bútan/buton/buten* is itself a combination of *be* 'by/near' and *útan*, the locative of *út* 'out' (Rhee 2002). From the combination of three morphemes emerges the meaning of *about* as 'on or by the outside of, round'. In Old and Middle English, the prepositions and adverbs showed great inter-categorical fluidity and the only difference between them was simply the presence/absence of a referenced noun, i.e. a matter of construction instead of meaning (and even this distinction was often blurry). Therefore, we can reasonably infer from the history that *about* could occur without a noun, and could simply occur with a verb that may have to do with spatial exteriority, circumferentiality, or circuitry.

Indeed, *about* shows adverbial usage from the very beginning. With its occurrence with the motion senses and with figurative senses as early as the 11th century, its further development brings forth such meanings as 'on the move, going, moving, in action, etc.' around the 13th century. As a special construction *be about (for) to do* occurs from the 13th century, with the earliest attested in 1230, as shown in the following example from OED.

- (4) Satan is 5eorne abuten uorto ridlen þe ut of mine come!
(1230, Ancren Riwe 234)

From this construction also emerges a new construction forming a future with the infinitive, which has the meaning of 'on the point of' or 'going', an exact proximative meaning. This pattern extends to the use of the verbal substantive (a gerundival in the example) from the 18th century, as shown in the following example also taken from OED.

- (5) The season we were then about concluding.
(1793, Smeaton, Edystone Lightho)

This extended construction and the usage suggests that *about* could be used for a prepositional function, and thus the development of the two constructions *be about to*

V and *be about V-ing* was enabled by the amphibious function of *about* and by the same cognitive processes for creating the grammatical concept of the proximative.

2.2.2 Semantic Change

An investigation into the semantic change that occurred to *be about to* shows interesting aspects of human cognitive processes involved in grammaticalization. Tracing back to the oldest time of the construction of this proximative formant, we can diagrammatically present the semantic change as follows:

- (6) a. út: outside, exterior
- b. útan: at outside
- c. bútan: by outside, near outside, without, outside of
- d. abútan: at the outside of, round
- e. be about: be around
- f. be about to: be around to do something
- g. be in preparation for doing something
- h. be on the point of doing something ← Proximative

From (6), we can see that the core element of the construction is the noun with the meaning 'out, outside' from (6a). The change unto the stage (6b) and further unto (6c) shifts the focus from surface of an object to its adjacent space. This process is reminiscent of the conceptual development proposed by Heine et al. (1993) from concrete item to spatial relation, which is diagrammatically presented in Heine (1997), in whose model, the shift is from the object region to the region in contact with the object (i.e., his Stage II to Stage III change). This type of change is characterizable as generalization in the direction [from DIRECTLY NEXT TO OUTER SURFACE to ALL VICINITY] (cf. Rhee 2002).

The change into (6d) and (6e) shows extension of referenced area, whereby a simple, therefore largely partial, space is extended to all surrounding area. This development seems crucial in the development of the proximative, in that the subject

is in the relationship with the event in a more engaging manner (i.e., as if the subject is 'all around' the event, and thus in control of it), rather than simply in juxtapositional arrangement (i.e. the subject is simply located in linear proximity of the event). It is analogous to the relative distance in 'He is on it' vs. 'He is next to it'.

The change into (6f) through (6g) is triggered by the newly participating infinitive marker *to*. The action event denoted by the *to*-infinitive is viewed in direct relevance with the subject's proximal relation, and since humans have inborn propensity to attribute intention and purposiveness to all human action or states of affairs, the current state ('be') of the subject is deemed in preparation for the event.

Furthermore, the original intention or purpose meaning becomes bleached in the course of development into (6h). This semantic loss is crucial in the emergence of the proximative, because only after this stage non-sentient subjects may cooccur with the grammatical marker of proximative (cf. Rhee 2005, for an analogous situation in Korean).

Grammaticalization does not occur in one fell swoop, and there is no telling about its speed, because some grams stay the same for centuries while some grams travel faster than other 'competitors' (cf. Ahn 2005). It is for this reason that grams at any synchronic level often show indelible marks of their past. We see this state of affairs with *be about to* in MICASE, as shown in <Table 2>.

<Table 2> Subject and Predicate of *be about to*

		<i>be about to</i>
Subject	Human	33 (94%)
	Inanimate	2 (6%)
	Total	35 (100%)
Predicate	Purposive	23 (70%)
	Non-purposive	10 (30%)
	Total	35 (100%)

<Table 2> shows that *be about to* is not frequently used. Small as they may be, the data show that it is still predominantly used with the human subject, which

means that the requirement for the sentient subject licensing the intentionality with respect to the realization of the intended event has not yet been bleached. However, very interestingly, the occurrence of the non-purposive predicates, such as passives, statives, etc. is relatively more frequent. This suggests, albeit the inherent limitations with this small size of the sample, that the extension pattern seems to be of the following continuum of stages:

(7) Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
[+Human] subject	[+Human] subject	[±Human] subject
[+Purposive] predicate	[±Purposive] predicate	[±Purposive] predicate

Therefore, in terms of the predicate and subject requirement, *be about to* is in Stage II. The semantic extension on the predicate domain moves faster than that on the subject domain.

2.3 Grammaticalization of *be to*

Now we proceed to the discussion of the grammaticalization of *be to*. This proximative marker shows from its appearance that, like *be going to* and *be about to*, it contains *be* and *to*. For this reason, it expectedly shows commonalities with the other two proximatives in grammaticalization. However, it also shows certain differences.

2.3.1 Source Construction

The source construction of *be to*, though periphrastic, is relatively simpler than the other two, in that the source components are only a subset of those involved in the grammaticalization of the other proximatives.

A historical survey into the history of *be to* suggests that the development of *be to* as a proximative is closely related to the semantics of *to*. When *to* was used before an infinitive or gerund, it indicate purpose or intention from as early as the

9th century. This seems to be particularly so when the infinitive was in adjectival relation to a substantive, in which case *be to* expressed intention or appointment and further developed into futurity. This usage is attested as early as in the 11th century. It is interesting that this *be to* came to be often used in the form of infinitive passive to mean 'to be done', apparently from the 15th century.

From as early as the 13th century, the *be*-verb comes to be used with the dative infinitive, making a future of appointment or arrangement. From this construction emerge such senses as necessity, obligation or duty. The *be*-verb in this obligation sense usage, according to OED, has been largely substituted by *have*, thus the common use of *have to* in contemporary English. The usage of *be to* in this signification extends to infinitive passive from the 16th century. Furthermore, from around the 14th century the same construction becomes used in the sense of 'be proper or fit to' either with infinitive active or with infinitive passive. From these historical facts, we see that the proximative sense began very early with *be to*, around the 9th century or even before, largely due to the 'purpose' meaning of the infinitival *to*, and *be to* subsequently acquired various uses and senses along the way.

2.3.2 Semantic Change

We saw in the preceding discussion that the semantic development of *be to* crucially depends on the semantics of *to*, which was 'purpose, intention' when used with an infinitive or gerund. The historical development of the semantics of *be to* can be mapped as follows:

- (8) a. *be to*: be with a purpose/intention to do something
- b. be with an obligation to do something
- c. be in a state where something is destined to happen soon
- d. be in a state where something is possible to happen

As shown in the above, the semantic change into (8b) has been motivated by subjectification (Traugott 1982, Traugott & König 1991, Traugott & Dasher 2002,

Traugott 2003), whereby the addressee makes the intention meaning subjectified as if the intention was motivated by an obligation, even though human intention or purpose per se may not be necessarily so. The change into (8c) is again an instance of subjectification, because it suggests that the addressee subjectively infers that if someone has an obligation to do something, the event is destined to happen. Weak as it may be, this is the rudimentary semantics of the grammatical notion of proximative.

However, the change does not seem to end here. The change into (8d) is an instance of semantic bleaching, in the sense that the strength of the likelihood of an event coming about is noticeably reduced.

A quantitative analysis of the use of *be to* shows following distribution along such parameters as subject co-occurrence and semantic designation.

<Table 3> Subject, Predicate and Semantic Distribution of *be to*

		<i>be to</i>
Subject	Human	93 (68%)
	Inanimate	44 (32%)
	Total	137 (100%)
Predicate	Purposive	112 (82%)
	Non-Purposive	25 (18%)
	Total	137 (100%)
Semantics	Purposive/Intention/ Predestination	69 (50%)
	Obligation	17 (12%)
	Possibility	51 (38%)
	Total	137 (100%)

In <Table 3> we can see that the majority of the uses of *be to* is with human subjects (68%). This is in consonance with the states of affairs with the other two proximatives, i.e. 65% with *be going to*, and 94% with *be about to*. The predominance of the use of dynamic predicate also coincides with the other two proximatives.

Of our interest is the fact that, *be to* is predominantly used for the function of marking Purpose, Intention and Predestination, which are parts of, or closely related

to, the original semantics of the participating element *to*. This suggests that even though semantics may change over time, with such mechanisms as generalization, metaphorization, inference, subjectification, etc., the effect of the original semantics of the source construction can resist semantic change and remain with the gram for a considerable length of time (cf. 'persistence' Hopper 1991, Hopper & Traugott 2003[1993]).

3. Discussion

An analysis of the grammaticalization processes of the three proximatives presents a number of theoretical ramifications. They include the issues involving source lexemes, semantic change, differences and commonalities, and the layering and specialization phenomena displayed by these grams of identical or nearly identical functions.

3.1 On Source Lexemes

The first issue deals with the source lexemes of these proximatives. In grammaticalization studies, the source lexemes undoubtedly play a crucial role in determining the path and the resultant meaning of the final gram. As for the correspondence between the source meaning and the target function, the relation is well illustrated in the grammaticalization lexicons such as Heine et al. (1993) and Heine and Kuteva (2002), where the collected data show high degree of commonalities in correspondence between the source and the target. As for the correspondence between the source meaning and the grammaticalizing paths of the grams, Bybee et al. (1994), in their quantitative and cross-linguistic survey of 76 languages as regionally- and genetically-balanced representative languages for 4,000 languages, found strong tendency for this parallelism and proposed the Source Determination Hypothesis (Bybee et al. 1994: 9-12).

In present analysis we see that the grammaticalization of proximatives in English

involves three distinct, though evidently similar, sources and three different grams. They are distinct forms from the beginning, but they show commonalities in that all three of them involve the *be*-verb and the infinitival *to*. There is no determinism about the fate of linguistic forms: *be*-verb, for instance, has been attested across languages to have been developed into various grammatical concepts, such as Progressive, Passive, etc. in case of English. However, when the semantics of the *be*-verb, or any linguistic form for that matter, is combined with the semantics of other linguistic forms, a new grammatical concept may emerge, and the concepts may differ depending on the properties of the participating elements. Therefore, what matters most is the local context of the linguistic form at the incipient grammaticalizing stage, and thus the claim that what grammaticalizes, strictly speaking, is not a single element but the construction that is involved (cf. Bybee et al. 1994, Hopper & Traugott 2003[1993], contra 'polygrammaticalization') finds support. In other words, the semantics of the grammaticalizing grams contributes significantly in determining the paths and the results of the grammaticalization processes, but what matters in this context is the construction rather than the individual lexeme. This is particularly so in cases where the participating elements are already semantically general as in the cases of *be* and *to* under our present discussion.

The determinant force of the proximatives, which unraveled in the preceding discussion, comes from the semantics of *be* and *to*, the common elements in the three grams. Especially, the infinitival *to* has been decidedly instrumental because it had, from the early usage, the purpose/intention meaning. This meaning formed an unflinching bridge to link the present with the future.⁵⁾

3.2 On Semantic Change

The next issue we address is the semantic change issue. In grammaticalization of English proximatives, *be going to* heavily relies on the source lexeme *go*, a distinct

5) It has been widely attested that the futurity often develops from desiderative verbs (Heine et al. 1993, Bybee et al. 1994, Rhee 1998, inter alia).

situation as compared to the other two proximatives. As indicated earlier, *go* signifies physical movement. The semantics of *go*, per se, typically makes reference to a movement away from the deictic center, and often in any undetermined direction. The choice of a particular direction, i.e. toward future, has been motivated by the infinitival marker *to*, and by the human conceptualization of human existence and temporal lapse such as one according to the ego-moving model and time-moving model (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff & Turner 1989, Rhee 1998). This type of semantic change is best analyzed as an instance of conventionalization of pragmatic inferences roughly characterizable in the following schema.

- (9) John is going to marry.
- a. John is currently in motion.
 - b. John intends to marry.
 - c. John's marriage event will occur.
 - d. John's marriage is posterior to the present.
 - e. John's present movement is a part of the marriage event.
 - f. John's marriage is in the very near future.

As seen in the above, the emergence of the imminent future sense is through inference, but the great contributions come from the source lexemes *go* and *to*. In other words, the proximity sense directly derives from the physical approach with an intention.

On the other hand, *be about to* heavily relies on the adverbial *about*. We again pay our attention that it has complex construction basically built on the nominal *ut* 'outside, exterior', i.e. it referred to the surface of an object. Instead of going into the detail of minute semantic change, in a broader perspective, we can say that if someone is at the surface of an object, the person is in contact with the object and is likely to engage him/herself in dealing with the object. If this object is an event (cf. infinitival *to* marks a verb), the 'physical-contact' becomes the source of metaphor mapped to the target of the 'psychological involvement'. In other words, the proximity sense directly derives from the physical contact.

3.3 Intra-Systemic Comparisons

Now we compare the three proximatives in terms of frequency and semantic force.

As was seen in the tables in §2, the three proximatives show great variance in their use frequency, which can be tabulated as in the following:

<Table 4> Frequency of Three Proximatives

		<i>be going to</i> <i>be gonna</i>	<i>be to</i>	<i>be about to</i>	Total
Subject	Human	3,357	93	33	3,483
	Inanimate	1,830	44	2	1,876
	Total	5,187	137	35	5,359
Predicate	Purposive	3,594	112	25	3,731
	Non-purposive	1,593	25	10	1,628
	Total	5,187	137	35	5,359

<Table 4> shows that *be going to* is most frequently used, accounting for 97% of all proximative uses, and *be about to* is the least frequent, accounting for 0.6%. What this suggests is that *be going to* is so productively used that it is moving toward the future tense marker. Since tense is among the most frequently encoded grammatical concepts across languages, such a development should be expected to warrant frequent uses. As a matter of fact, *be going to* is more often classified as the future tense marker rather than as a proximative aspectual marker.

Another point at issue is the relative strength of the imminence sense inherent in the proximative. First of all, *be to* seems to have the weakest force, *be going to* the next, and *be about to* the strongest as can be seen in the following examples.

- (10)a. John is to go to Europe.
- b. John is going to go to Europe.
- c. John is about to go to Europe.

What we feel intuitively is that (10a) is used for a travel planned for a near yet indeterminate day; (10b) is for a travel very near from now; and (10c) is for a travel for which John may be packing up. The distinction between (10a) and (10b) may be subtle, because (10a) is sufficiently close yet not very close, and it borders on general future event without any imminence meaning on the one hand, and on the other hand, it borders on the *be going to* in which case the future event is psychologically close but physically the closeness is not warranted.⁶⁾ It is notable, however, that there is definite differences with (10b) and (10c), as shown in the following examples.

- (11)a. John is going to go to Europe tomorrow.
b. John is about to go to Europe.
b'. ?John is about to go to Europe tomorrow.

As shown in the above examples, *be about to* does not go well with time adverbial such as *tomorrow* (cf. (11b) vs (11b')). This is so because *be about to* is perceived as marking a current event, i.e. 'John's travel' is of the present moment. This definite difference in the level of imminence seems to be due to the semantics of their source lexemes. In other words, the imminence meaning of *be going to* is based on the physical movement toward a future event, i.e. the central notion here is 'direction'. On the other hand, the imminence meaning of *be about to* is based on the subject's being on 'the surface' of the event, i.e. the central notion here is 'contact'. In other words, *be going to* can be reduced to a direction, while *be about to* can be reduced to a contact. Needless to say, 'contact' encodes higher degree of proximity than 'direction'. This again shows the extent of the influence the source makes on the resultant gram.

6) Generally speaking, the intuition of the native speakers of English is such that (10a) and (10b) are close in terms of imminence, while (10b) and (10c) are farther apart, exactly as is argued here. Their judgment on the differing levels of imminence is also in consonance with what is presented here.

3.3 On Layering and Specialization

Our final issue addresses the layering phenomena with the proximatives. In contemporary English the three proximative forms we discussed form different layers. Even though it would be very difficult to determine the time when each of these proximatives began to develop, since such a task should involve a lot of insuperable theoretical and methodological issues, what we can see from the data in OED suggests that *be to* began to acquire its future-related function from very early times, i.e. around the 9th century or even prior to that, mostly due to the purpose/intention meaning of the infinitival *to*. In the case of *be about to*, the beginning may be traced back to the early 13th century, when *be about (for) to do* began to be used with the 'engagement with purpose' meaning. On the other hand, *be going to* may have started its futurity marking function, departing from the original physical locomotion sense, from around the 15th century. Then the historical depth of these proximatives may be in the order of [*be to* > *be about to* > *be going to*]. It is ironical that the order of use frequency is the reverse of the order of emergence, that is the oldest form is least frequently used, whereas the youngest form is most frequently used. This, again, suggests that what grammaticalization principles predict is the direction (cf. the unidirectionality principle), not the speed of progression.

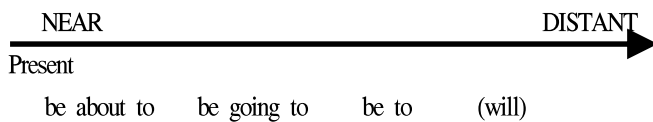
The second issue involves the specialization (Hopper 1991, Hopper & Traugott 2003[1993]). As has been touched on in the preceding discussion, *be going to* is the most frequently used proximative, which may be attributable to the fact that it carries the function of marking the near future tense, advancing into the regular future tense paradigm, where the primary member is *will*, which is unspecific as to the nearness. The unique semantic property of proximatives, i.e. 'imminence', in full force is carried by *be about to*, which, however, has a very low frequency. This suggests that the proximative, per se, as a grammatical notion, is not as prominent as other more frequently used verbal-inflectional categories. An indirect evidence to this effect is the fact that English proximatives are all periphrastic, suggesting their weak level of grammaticalization. This leads us into a claim that *be going to* is the dominant form in the proximative category in terms of the use frequency, and the use primacy is

reinforced by having the near-future-marking function conflated into the single form, probably motivated by their semantic resemblance of making reference to the 'nearness' of the event; and that unlike *be going to* and *be to*, *be about to* specializes in the unique function of proximative, i.e. marking the imminence.

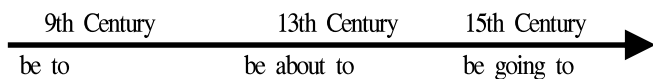
4. Conclusion

We have described thus far the grammaticalization processes, whereby three periphrastic constructions in English acquired the grammatical meaning of the proximative. In particular, we had brief survey of historical facts in conjunction with the formation of source constructs in Old and Middle English periods, and approached the syntagmatic and semantic issues with a quantitative viewpoint by analyzing the status quo of these forms as represented in a spoken corpus. Their respective signification in terms of proximity, their order of emergence, and the relative frequency can be diagrammatically presented as in the following:

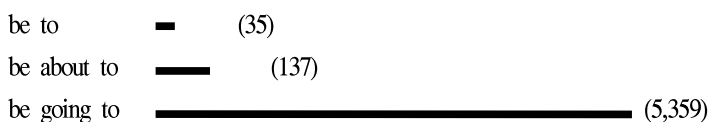
(12) Temporal/Psychological Proximity Scale (Degree of Imminence)



(13) Order of Emergence



(14) Use Frequency⁷⁾



7) This diagram is not drawn on a strict numerical scale.

From the general description and quantitative analyses of these proximatives, we discussed the theoretical implications of some of the notable aspects that emerged in the course. Of special import among these findings are those that involve the extent of influence of the source lexemes, the semantic change mechanisms, and their inter-systemic differences as to use frequency and specialization.

A more detailed analysis addressing this grammatical category from a more microscopic perspective, perhaps focusing on the data in Old and Middle English, in which diverse psychological and cognitive mechanisms come into play, or an analysis dealing with the broader picture of proximatives taking into account such adverbial proximatives as *nearly*, *almost*, *closely*, etc. should be a subject of fruitful future research to enrich our understanding of proximatives.

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