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### ***Venir de* (+ infinitive): An immediate anteriority marker in French<sup>1</sup>**

It is well known that, in many languages, *itive* and *ventive*<sup>2</sup> verb forms (Eng.: *go/come*, Fr.: *aller/venir*, Sp.: *ir/venir*) tend to grammaticalise into temporal, aspectual and modal auxiliaries (a.o. Lamiroy 1983, Hagège 1993, Bybee *et al.* 1994, Dahl 2000, Bourdin 2008, Heine and Kuteva 2002; and for French: a. o. Gougenheim 1929/1971, Bres and Labeau 2013). *Come*-periphrases are used for instance to express *anteriority* in various languages;<sup>3</sup> and most specifically, *immediate anteriority* in French-

This paper will focus on *venir de + inf.* in French. That periphrasis has been the subject of much attention (a.o. Gougenheim *op. cit.*; Flydal 1943; Damourette and Pichon 1911-1936 / 1970; Dominicy 1983; Vettters 1989, 2010; Bourdin 1999, 2005; Havu 2005; De Mulder 2010). The present paper both (i) complements those works and (ii) offers a different analysis of the *venir de + inf.* structure:

(i) the grammaticalization of the *venir* verb into an auxiliary, while assumed by Vettters (1989, 2010) and De Mulder (2010), is not precisely described by them. Our paper, while not bringing anything new on the grammaticalization phenomenon in itself, describes fairly precisely the diachronic evolution of the *venir* verb into a *venir* auxiliary, and how it has become on this path an *anterior* and not a *perfective*.<sup>4</sup>

(ii) Flydal 1943, Damourette and Pichon 1911-1936 / 1970, Dominicy 1983, Vettters 2010, Bourdin 1999, 2005, Havu 2005, De Mulder 2010, in different ways, support the

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<sup>1</sup> We are very grateful to the editor-in-chief and the anonymous reviewers whose insightful comments have helped us to improve our work.

<sup>2</sup> *Andative /venitive* (Bybee *et al.* 1994, Dahl 2000, Heine and Kuteva 2002) are also found in literature. We will follow a.o. Hagège's (1993: 103) choice of *itive* (Latin *ire*, supine *itum*) and *ventive* (Latin *venire*, supine *ventum*).

<sup>3</sup> "Among the movement verbs that develop into anterior grams, the most common seem to be 'come' and 'come from'." (Bybee *et al.* *op. cit.*: 56).

<sup>4</sup> We use the notions of *anterior* and *perfective* as defined by Bybee *et al.* 1994: "Anteriors (or "perfects" as they are often called) (...) signal that the situation occurs prior to reference time and is relevant to the situation at reference time" (p. 54). "Perfectives signal that the situation is viewed as bounded temporally" and are used "for narrating sequences of discrete events in which the situation is reported for its own sake, independent of its relevance to other situations" (*ibid.*).

traditional approach (Gougenheim 1929) according to which *venir de + inf.*, would express *recent past* and so would be a *temporal* auxiliary. As for us, we analyze it as an *aspectual* auxiliary of *immediate anteriority*. On the basis of the (revised) Reichenbachian model (the three constructs: *E* (= event point), *S* (= speech point) and *R* (= reference point) (1947/1966), we show that *venir de + inf.* bears upon the relationship between *R* and *E* (that is to say *aspect*) and not on the relationship between *R* and *S* (that is to say *time*). That analysis allows us to offer a solid explanation of a fact that – even though it had been mentioned by all those scholars – had remained unexplained: why *venir*, in this periphrasis, is defective (i.e. why *venir* cannot be conjugated in the *passé simple*, nor in any compound tense).

We start by describing the diachronic grammaticalization path of *venir* as an aspectual auxiliary of immediate anteriority in the construction *venir de + inf.* (section 1.). We then consider whether it has turned into a *perfective* (section 2) before relating *venir de + inf.* with the grams of anteriority, bis-anteriority, and immediate ulteriority in French (section 3.). We conclude by comparing the French periphrasis with the options adopted by other Romance languages in order to express immediate anteriority (section 4.).

For this purpose, we rely on a corpus of 4,600 authentic tokens from various sources and genres: Frantext (a database of literary texts ranging from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century): 2,250 oc. ; Google (contemporary and mostly non-literary written sources: 2,000 oc. ; Europress (written press: 250 oc. ; sociolinguistic interviews (corpus CFPP 2000)<sup>5</sup>, daily conversation and television programmes): 100 oc.

## 1. *Venir de (+ inf.)*: an aspectual auxiliary of immediate anteriority

Let us consider the following occurrence:

- (1) Mon copain *vient de rompre* et j'arrive pas à l'accepter (teemix.aufeminin.com, 2008 ; accessed 2013/7/7)  
My boyfriend come-PRES-SG3 'DE' to break up-INF and I manage-PRES-SG1 not to it accept.  
"My boyfriend has just ended our relationship and I can't accept it."

*Vient de rompre* shows the event of *rompre* not only as *anterior* to the moment of reference simultaneous to the moment of speech, but also *immediately* anterior. Immediacy corresponds to a degree of remoteness that can be measured in days, possibly in months according to the meaning of the event (cf. 2.1.). We will come back to this point in 1.4. For now, suffice to say

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<sup>5</sup> The *Corpus de Français Parlé Parisien* (CFPP 2000) offers sociolinguistic interviews of inhabitants of several Parisian areas in free access: <http://cfpp2000.univ-paris3.fr/>.

that the speaker in (1) does not specify the time interval between the event and the moment of speech: *vient de* (+ *inf.*) indicates that she perceives this interval as short and the event as still relevant at the moment of speech.

*Venir de* (+ *inf.*) has been in use since the 16<sup>th</sup> century as an *aspectual auxiliary* indicating *immediate anteriority*. In the following sections, definitions of each of these terms will be provided: *auxiliary* (section 1.1.), *aspectual* (section 1.2.), *anteriority* (section 1.3.), *immediacy* (section 1.4.).

### 1.1. Grammaticalization of movement verb *venir* into an *auxiliary* in the *venir de* + *inf.* construction

*Venir*, in the *venir de* + *inf.* construction, is a prototypical example of the grammaticalization of a lexical indication of space into a grammatical marker of time: the movement verb – here combined with the preposition *de* and followed by an infinitive – has become an auxiliary of anteriority in accordance with the development path from the lexical source ‘come’ represented below in Bybee *et al.* (1994: 105) as:

‘come’ → ANTERIOR → PERFECTIVE/SIMPLE PAST

On the basis of Gougenheim (1929/1971) and Wilmet (1970) for the diachronic data and Heine’s (2003) four-staged model for the description of the grammaticalization process, the following diachronic evolution can be established:

(i) *Initial stage*: In the Middle Ages, *venir de* + *inf.*, with a [+ human] subject, means that the subject moves towards an (implicit) destination from an origin (the place where the event in the infinitive takes place) introduced by the preposition *de*, or it means that the subject has reached the destination by moving from that origin:

- (2) Pirus *vient de deporter*, /(...) / Vait en la chambre, couche soi. (*Pyramus, La vie seint Edmund le Rei, late 12<sup>th</sup>- early 13<sup>th</sup> century, apud Gougenheim 1929/1971: 122*)  
 Pirus come-PRES-PSG3 back from to hunt-INF go-PRES-SG3 in the room, put-to-bed-PRES-SG3 himself.  
 “Pirus comes back from hunting ( ...) goes in the room, and lies down.”
- (3) Chevaliers sui d’estranges terres / *De tournoïier vieng* pour conquerre. (Recueil général de *fabliaux* du XII<sup>ème</sup> et XIV<sup>ème</sup>., *apud Gougenheim 1929/1971: 122*)  
 Knight be-PRES-SG1 from foreign lands from to-take-part-in-a-tournament-INF come-PRES-SG1 to conquer.  
 “I am a knight from foreign lands / I come from taking part in a tournament to conquer.”

The subject agent is presented as coming back or as “*de retour après avoir accompli telle ou telle action*” [“back after completing such and such an action”] (Gougenheim 1929/1971: 122): *deporter* in (2), *tournoïier* in (3). *Revenir* carries the same meaning:

- (4) Quand il  **furent revenu de cachier**  ches Grius (...) (Robert de Clari, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, XIII<sup>ème</sup>, *apud* Gougenheim, *ibid.*)  
 When they-M be-PAST-PERF-PPL3 come-PP-MPL from hunt-INF among-the Greeks.  
 “When they had come back from hunting among the Greeks.”

(ii) *Bridging context*: the grammaticalization of *venir* does not specifically display that second stage of Heine’s (2003) model, where an ambiguous context emerges and allows the inference of a new semantic value. From the initial stage onwards, the move in space implied by *venir* (+ *de*) presupposes that the origin of the movement – the events conveyed by the infinitive - *deporter, tournoïer* – is anterior to the move: the temporal connotation of anteriority is implied by the spatial move from the very first occurrences. Besides, between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this notion – only implied to start with – takes an increasing importance, and *venir de* (+ inf.) in sentences such as (5) can mean temporal anteriority as well as a spatial move:

- (5) Quant vient que le pouvre homme est venu,  **qui vient de pourvoier vitaille**  (...) (Anonymous, *Les quinze joies de mariage*, 1390)  
 When come-PRES-SG3 that the poor man be-PRES-SG3 come-PP, who come-PRES-SG3 from provide-INF food-supplies.  
 “When the poor man arrives, who has just got / come back from getting food supplies.”

(iii) *Switching context*: in the 16<sup>th</sup> century *venir* can be used in a context that is incompatible with stage 1: its subject may be [- animate] such as ‘*cinq heures*’ in (6) which prevents an interpretation as a spatial move and / or it may be followed by a verb that refers to an activity from which the subject agent could not have come back, such as *perdre la vie* in (7):

- (6) Quand je vous ay rencontré, cinq heures  **venoient de sonner** . (Larivey P., *Le Morfondu*, 1579)  
 When I you have-PRES-SG1 meet-PP, five o’clock come-PAST-IMPERF-PPL3 ‘DE’ ring-INF  
 “When I met you, five o’clock had just struck.”
- (7) THESEE.  
 Pren courage, et me dy, sans ton ame troubler, / Quel desastre nouveau vient mon mal redoubler.  
 MESSENGER.  
 Hippolyte (ô regret !)  **vient de perdre**  la vie. (GARNIER R., *Hippolyte*, 1585)  
 THESEE  
 Take-IMPER-SG2 courage and me say- IMPER-SG2 without your soul trouble-INF which disaster new come-PRES-SG3 my trouble double-INF  
 MESSENGER  
 Hyppolite (o regret!) come-PRES-PSG3 ‘DE’ lose-INF his life.  
 “THESEE  
 Take courage and tell me without troubling your soul which new disaster comes to intensify my misfortune  
 MESSENGER  
 Hyppolite (o regret!) has just lost (his life).”

It is obvious that the initial constraints that weighed on the choice of the subject as well as on the verb have by now been lifted. This typical process of grammaticalization accompanies a

semantic shift: the spatial value of movement is overshadowed by a temporal value of immediate anteriority. More precisely, the agent does not move in space anymore, but the *conceptualizer* moves in an “abstract motion” (Langacker 1986). Because of the preposition *de*, the abstract motion of the *conceptualizer* moves towards the origin (the verb in the infinitive) from the destination in a *retrospective movement* that entails the understanding of anteriority.

This semantic change comes with a syntactic reanalysis of [*venir* + *de* + inf.] into [(*venir de*) + inf.] by which, *venir de* becomes - by abstraction - merely an auxiliary. This imposes a constraint on word order: *venir* must necessarily precede the infinitive while it could be postponed in the spatial use as in (3): « *De tournoier vieng pour conquerre* ». The emergence - as well as the spread of that new structure - is independent on the discursive genre: it can be found in comedies as well as in tragedies, in poetry as well as in direct reported speech.

Yet, it is still possible in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to use *venir* as a movement verb (with of course an implication of temporal anteriority):

- (8) Guillot (...) , caché derriere un buisson, au soir, attend Marion qui **vient de querir** ses vaches, douteux si elle luy refusera ce dequoy elle a esté par luy souventesfois importunee. (DU FAIL Noël, *Les Propos rustiques de Maistre Leon Ladulfi champenois*, 1547)  
 Guillot (...) hide-PP-MSG behind a bush in-the evening, wait-PRES-SG3 Marion who come-PRES-PSG3 from seek-INF her cows, doubtful if she him refuse-FS-SG3 what by-what she have-PRES-SG3 be-PP by him many-times bother-PP-FSG.  
 “Guillot (...) hidden behind a bush, in the evening waits for Marion who comes back from fetching (come-PRES-PSG3 from seek-INF) her cows, wondering whether she will refuse him what he has many times bothered her about.”

In (8), *venir de* keeps a full spatial meaning: it can easily be replaced by *revenir de*: « Marion qui **vient de querir** ses vaches » ≈ Marion qui **revient de querir** ses vaches. The human agent Marion comes back from performing an action, i.e. fetching her cows.

(iv) *Conventionalisation*: in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, *venir de* is only ever used as a temporal auxiliary:

- (9) Cratesiclea. Est-il donc mort mon fils?  
 Pheax. Il **vient de rendre** l'ame. (MONTCHRESTIEN A., *Les Lacènes*, 1604)  
 Cratesiclea. Be-PRES-PS3 he thus dead my son ?  
 Pheax. He come-PRES-PSG3 'DE' give-INF back the soul.  
 “Cratesiclea. Is my son thus dead?  
 Pheax. He has just expired”

This example cannot mean a physical move away from an event.<sup>6</sup> This meaning is from this point onwards conveyed by *revenir de*:

- (10) 1er ARCHER  
Il **revient de chercher** d'un autre coté, et rapporte les deux pièces de l'épée rompue de Rosidor. (Corneille P., *Clitandre ou l'Innocence délivrée*, 1632)  
He come-PRES-PSG3 back from seek-INF of another side and bring-back-PRES-SG3 the two pieces of the sword break-PP-FSG of Rosidor.  
“He comes back from seeking elsewhere () and brings back the two pieces of Rosidor’s broken sword.”

New contexts emerge from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards and confirm beyond any doubt the grammaticalization of *venir* into an auxiliary. Let us mention two of them. On the one hand the impersonal construction that completely deprives *venir* of an agent (11), inasmuch as it only has as its grammatical subject the impersonal pronoun *il*:

- (11) Il **vient de me souvenir** que certains demy-çavans ont remarqué que les personnages de ma Tragi-comédie y parlent des Dieux en pluriel. (SCUDÉRY G. de, *Ligdamon et Lidias ou la Ressemblance*, 1631)  
It come-PRES-PSG3 ‘DE’ me remember-INF that some half-learned-people have-PRES-PL3 notice-PP that the characters of my tragi-comedy there speak-PRES-PL3 of-the Gods in plural.  
“I just happen to remember (that some half-educated people have noticed that the characters of my tragi-comedy speak of Gods in the plural within it.”

On the other hand, the ‘proof by anachrony principle’ (Hagège 1993: 200-202) refers to the possibility of applying the grammaticalised construction to the lexical verb, in other words the construction *venir de venir*:

- (12) Nous sommes en grande apprehension du bruit qui **vient de venir** de la rupture du traicté de la paix. (PEIRESC N., *Lettres à M. D'ANDILLY*, 1622)  
We be-PRES-PL1 in great fear of-the noise that come-PRES-PSG3 ‘DE’ come-INF of the breaking of-the treaty of the peace.  
“We are in great fear of the news that has just come of the breaking of the peace treaty.”

Criticized by purists, recognised as ‘familiar’ by the French Academy in 1740, *vient de venir* later enters literature (13) and can even be found much later in chats of contemporary internet sites (14):

- (13) Un juge, un commissaire, un magistrat, je ne sais de quelle espèce, **vient de venir**. Je lui ai demandé ma grâce en joignant les deux mains. (HUGO V., *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné*, 1829)  
A judge, a police-officer, a magistrate, I not know-PRES-SG1 of what type come-PRES-PSG3 ‘DE’ come-INF. I to-him have-PRES-SG1 ask-PP my pardon in joining the two hands.  
“A judge, a police officer, a magistrate of whatever type has just come. I have asked him for pardon with clasped hands.”
- (14) Il était une fois un ado de 13ans qui a voulu sortir avec une nouvelle, qui **venait de venir** d'un autre établissement public. ([www.jeuxvideo.com/2010](http://www.jeuxvideo.com/2010), accessed 10/10/2013)  
It was one time a teen of 13 who have-PRES-SG3 want-PP go-out with a new-FSG who come-PAST-IMPERF-PSG3 ‘DE’ come-INF from another school public.

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<sup>6</sup> This is different from what is found in Spanish for instance as that language does not use *venir* to express immediate anteriority (cf. yet see section 4) and keeps using that verb in front of an infinitive to convey a meaning of movement: *vengo de ver a mi novia* (“I come back from visiting my fiancée”).

“Once upon a time, a teenager of 13 wanted to go out with a new girl who had just come from another state school.”

The fact that the sequence of both uses of *venir* does not prove problematic for users is the most obvious sign of the grammaticalization of *venir de* as auxiliary.

## 1.2. *Venir de* as an aspectual auxiliary

*Venir de + inf.* is most commonly referred to as ‘recent past’. That name, suggested by Gougenheim (1929) and adopted a.o. by Veters (2002), Havu (2005) and De Mulder (2010) focuses on the temporal side but obliterates the aspectual side.<sup>7</sup> While that label is relevant for occurrences such as (1) in which *venir* is in the present, it does not apply when *venir* is in the imperfect (15), in the future (16) or in the conditional (17), as far as the indicative mood is concerned:

- (15) L'autre jour, elle m'a parlé d'un type qu'elle **venait de rencontrer**, à la faculté. Il est fascinant, dit-elle. (Perrut D., *Patria o muerte*, 2009)  
The other day, she me have-PRES-SG3 speak-PP of a guy that she come-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 ‘DE’ meet-INF at the university. He be-PRES-SG3 fascinating, say-PRES-SG3 she.  
“The other day, she told me about a guy she had just met at university. He is fascinating, she says.”
- (16) On verra Mathieu tout jeune et sûr de lui, il **viendra de plaquer** une bonne femme parce qu'il avait peur qu'elle n'en voulût à sa liberté. (Sartre J.-P., *Lettres au Castor*, 1940-1963)  
One see-FS-SG3 Mathieu all young and sure of himself, he come-FS-SG3 ‘DE’ dump-INF a good woman because he have-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 fear that she NEG ‘EN’ want-SUBJ-IMP-SG3 to his freedom.  
“Mathieu will be seen very young and self-assured, he will have just dumped a woman because he feared she would try to deprive him of his freedom.”
- (17) Elle s'est habituée à dormir seule. Mais elle aurait bien aimé dormir à Roscoff avec un inconnu, le coeur en bandoulière, que sa femme **viendrait de quitter** pour un ouvrier arabe. (LANGE M., *Les Cabines de bain*, 1982)  
She herself be-PRES-SG3 use-PP-FSG to sleep alone. But she have-COND-SG3 well like-PP sleep-INF in Roscoff with an unknown-M, the heart in shoulder-strap, that his wife come-COND-PS3 ‘DE’ leave-INF for a manual-worker Arab.  
“She had become used to sleeping alone. Yet she would have liked to sleep in Roscoff with a stranger with his heart on his sleeve whom his wife would have just left for an Arab manual worker.”

A purely temporal approach of *venir de + inf.* proves even more irrelevant for atemporal moods (Guillaume 1929) such as the subjunctive (e. g. 18 and 19), the participle (e.g. 20), and the infinitive (e.g. 21):

- (18) Bien qu'**elle vienne de fêter** ses soixante-dix ans –et pas une ride!-, la reine de la soul n'est pas prête à céder sa couronne. (<https://fr.news.yahoo.com/aretha-franklin/>, accessed 2014/08/05)

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<sup>7</sup> The construction has also been referred to as expressing *récence* (introduced by Flydal 1943, and taken up a.o. by Bourdin 1999, 2005 ; and Bres and Labeau 2012), *précédence* for Damourette and Pichon (1911-1936), who thereby avoid our criticism of the designation of ‘*passé récent*’.

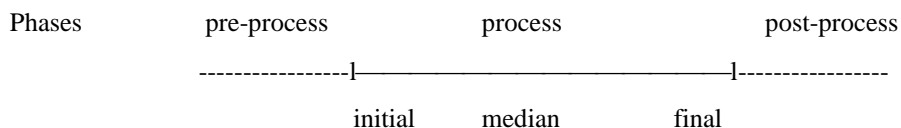


Even that she come-SUBJ-PRES-PSG3 ‘DE’ celebrate-INF her sixty-ten years – and not one wrinkle -, the queen of the soul NEG be-PRES-SG3 NEG ready to give-up-INF her crown.  
 “Although she has just celebrated her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday – and still no wrinkles! – the queen of soul is not ready to give up her crown.”

- (19) C'est que je venais de l'entendre rire. Et ce rire évoquait aussitôt les roses carnations, les parois parfumées contre lesquelles il semblait qu'il *vînt de se froter* (PROUST À *la recherche du temps perdu*, 1913)  
 This be-PRES-PSG3 that I come-IMP-PSG1 ‘DE’ him hear-INF. And this laugh evoke-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 straightaway the pink complexions, the wall-partitions perfumed against which he seem-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 that he come-SUBJIMP-SG3 ‘DE’ himself rub-INF.  
 “I just had heard him laugh. And that laugh immediately evoked the pink complexions, the perfumed wall partitions against which it seemed he had just rubbed himself.”
- (20) Si tous les hommes *venant de se faire plaquer* et ayant un manque sexuel finissaient aux abords des routes, il y aurait du monde non? (*forum.psychologies.com* > ... > *Paroles d'hommes*, 7<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2007, accessed 2014/08/05)  
 If all the men come-PPRES ‘DE’ themselves make-INF dump-INF and have-PPRES a lack sexual end-PAST-IMPERF-PL3 on-the neighbourhoods of-the roads, it there have-COND-PS3 of-the crowd no?  
 “If all the men having just been dumped and feeling a sexual frustration ended up on the street, there would be a crowd, wouldn’t there?”
- (21) Il partait en direction du château sans avoir rien dit, mais quelque chose semblait *venir de mourir* en lui. (*mutinlutin.forum-actif.net/t249p15-cauchemar*, accessed on 2014/08/05)  
 He leave-PAST-IMPERF in direction of the castle without have-INF nothing say-PP, but some thing seem-PAST-IMPERF (come-INF ‘DE’ die-INF) in him.  
 “He was going away towards the castle without having said anything, but something seemed to have just died in him.”

If *venir* can be used in all the moods and in various tenses, it is because it is an *aspectual* auxiliary, which we will now demonstrate on the basis of the following theoretical arguments. *Grammatical aspect* refers to the range of ways by which a language can represent the *internal time* (Comrie 1976) of an event in the various phases of its development. It is distinguished from *lexical aspect* that relates to the type of event (‘state’, ‘activity’, ‘accomplishment’ and ‘achievement’ according to Vendler 1967).

An event can be comprehended according to three phases (*a.o.* Dik 1989, Tournadre 2004, Gosselin 2011) pre-process, process (further split into initial, median and final phases), and post-process, as illustrated below:



**Figure1**

French indicates grammatical aspect in two ways:

- (i) For the process phase: as verbal affixes, in what grammar categorizes as *simple tenses*. For the indicative: *présent*, *passé simple*<sup>8</sup>, *imparfait*, *futur simple*, *conditionnel*

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<sup>8</sup> The uses of *passé simple* have substantially shrunk over the centuries (cf. *infra*, 3.1.). In contemporary usage, it tends to be restricted to written language, in historical enunciation (Benveniste 1959/1966), in texts in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person that are cut from the moment of speech.

*présent*. The *passé simple / imparfait* dichotomy allows the distinction between a *perfective* representation of the process phase (*il plut – it rain-PAST-PERF-PSG3*) and an *imperfective* representation (*il pleuvait – it rain-PAST-IMPERF-PSG3*). The present, future and conditional tenses are underspecified and do not convey that aspectual distinction (Barceló and Bres 2006);<sup>9</sup>

(ii) For the post-process phase: as auxiliaries that carry the same affixes as the verb in the process stage, which means they are conjugated and followed by the verb in the past participle or the infinitive. They include a) the *être* and *avoir* auxiliaries with the past participle forming the *compound tenses* (for the indicative mood: *passé composé, passé antérieur, plus-que-parfait, futur antérieur, conditionnel passé*);<sup>10</sup> b) the *venir de, ne faire que de, sortir de* auxiliaries (+ inf.).<sup>11</sup>

*Venir de* belongs to the post-process phase: whatever its mood or tense, it posits the reference interval (*infra* 1.3.) at close distance beyond the final border of the process phase. This meaning of immediate anteriority will now be formally described and more precisely defined.

### 1.3. *Venir de* as an aspectual auxiliary of anteriority

Reichenbach (1947/1966) describes English verbs by means of three constructs: *E* (= event point), *S* (= speech point) and *R* (= reference point). *E* and *R* on the one hand, and *R* and *S* on the other hand can be articulated by two ordering relations of anteriority (-), and simultaneity (.). The relation between *E/R* is of an aspectual nature; that between *R/S* is temporal. In order to provide a precise description of the *venir de + inf.* construction, we suggest supplementing this analysis on four accounts:

(i) The anteriority relation between *E* and *R*, contrary to what is implied by Reichenbach's model, can be not only *qualitative* but also *quantitative* (Vetters 2002: 115-118), and indicate various degrees of remoteness (Dahl 1983: 111, Comrie 1985: 83-101). This applies to French with a relation of close anteriority between *E* and *R* that we suggest representing by <, which allows the distinction between tenses where the post-process phase is indicated by *être/ avoir + p. passé* from those where it is indicated by *venir de + inf.* That

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<sup>9</sup> Linguists do not agree on this. Some analyze the present as offering, like the imperfect, an imperfective presentation. However, that disagreement has no impact on the explanation developed under 1.3 of why the construction is defective.

<sup>10</sup> This does not take into account *surcompound tenses* (*a eu plu*, etc.), cf. *infra* 3.1.

<sup>11</sup> The *aller, être sur le point de, être en passe de* auxiliaries should also be mentioned, for the pre-process phase; and, *être en train de, être à* for the process phase.

is, if we take for instance the distinction between *passé composé* (22) and ‘*passé récent*’ (22a):

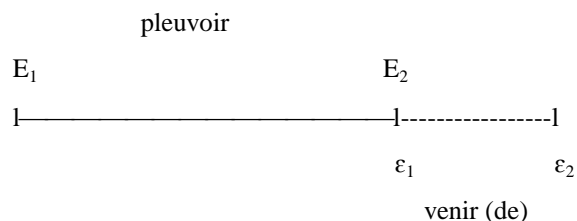
(22) Il a plu: E-R,S (E is anterior to R, that is simultaneous to S)

(22a) Il vient de pleuvoir: E<R,S (E is immediately anterior to R, that is simultaneous to S)

(ii) Taking the three constructs E, R and S as points does not allow the representation of the aspectual dimension of the event, inasmuch as a point cannot be represented under various aspects. Klein (1994) and Gosselin (1996) have suggested in distinct theoretical frameworks analysing them as intervals. In their wake, we postulate an interval for E ( $E_1$ - $E_2$ ), for R ( $R_1$ - $R_2$ ) and for S ( $S_1$ - $S_2$ ). That is:

(22a) Il vient de pleuvoir:  $E_1$ - $E_2$ < $R_1$ - $R_2$ , $S_1$ - $S_2$  (the final border  $E_2$  of the E interval is immediately anterior to the R interval, that is simultaneous to the S interval)

(iii) The description suggested in (22a) is nonetheless not yet satisfactory: it postulates an event interval  $E_1$ - $E_2$  for the verb (*pleuvoir*), but not for the auxiliary *venir*, that is only represented as a reference interval. Yet, if *venir* can be conjugated in different tenses (with restrictions that will be commented upon below), this means it can be represented under different viewpoints, in other words, according to a range of relations between reference interval and event interval.<sup>12</sup> We will admit that *venir*, along with *être* and *avoir*, as auxiliaries resulting from the grammaticalization of processes referring to events, have an event interval (represented by  $\epsilon_1$ - $\epsilon_2$ ). This interval  $\epsilon_1$ - $\epsilon_2$  of *venir*, as we deal with a post-process auxiliary, is close to the  $E_1$ - $E_2$  interval of the *pleuvoir* event, which implies that the initial border  $\epsilon_1$  of *venir* coincides with the final border  $E_2$  of the infinitive ( $\epsilon_1$ , $E_2$ ). So the intervals of *pleuvoir* and *venir (de)* could be represented as follows:



**Figure 2**

<sup>12</sup> When, further down the grammaticalization path, the auxiliary turns into an affix – as is the case for the periphrases *cantare habet* /*cantare habebat* that became synthetic future and conditional *chantera* /*chanterait* in Romance – it does not have access anymore to a process interval: its phonological reduction is coupled with a semantic whittling away.

(iv) To Reichenbach's relations of simultaneity ( $\cdot$ ) and anteriority ( $-$ ), we add a relation of *inclusion* ( $\subset$ ) that allows the distinction between the *passé simple* (*perfective* representation) and the *imparfait* (*imperfective* representation):

(22b) il plut:  $E_1-E_2, R_1-R_2$ ;  $R_2-S_1$ . (The R interval is simultaneous to that of E and anterior to the interval of S)

(22c) il pleuvait:  $R_1-R_2 \subset E_1-E_2$ ;  $R_2-S_1$  (The R interval is included within that of E and anterior to the interval of S)

This reworking of Reichenbach's model including the introduction of relation of proximal anteriority ( $\leftarrow$ ) and inclusion ( $\subset$ ) between E and R, the replacement of the E, R, S constructs by intervals, and the addition of an interval  $\varepsilon_1-\varepsilon_2$  for *venir* – allow for the resolution of an enigma that, as far as we are aware, has not been elucidated until now, namely the defective nature of *venir* as a marker of immediate anteriority that cannot be conjugated in the *passé simple* (as far as the indicative mood is concerned) (22d) nor in any compound tenses (22e):

(22d) \* Il vint de pleuvoir

“It come-PAST-PERFECT-PS3 ‘DE’ rain-INF.”

(22e) \* Il est venu de pleuvoir, \*être venu de pleuvoir, etc.

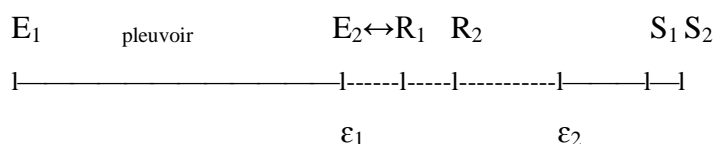
“It is-PRES-PSG3 come-PP-MSG ‘DE’ rain-INF.”

*Il vient de pleuvoir* presupposes a small temporal gap between the reference interval, here conflated with the speech interval and the time when the rain fell (event interval). We hypothesize that some tenses, thanks to their aspect or in other words the relation between the reference interval and the event interval, allow the expression of this small anterior gap, while other tenses forbid it. In the present case, this shows in that *venir* can be used in the *imparfait* but not in the *passé simple* nor any compound tense.

*Il venait de pleuvoir*: thanks to its imperfective aspect, the *imparfait* includes the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$  within the process interval  $\varepsilon_1-\varepsilon_2$  in such a way that  $\varepsilon_1$  is closely anterior to  $R_1$  ( $\varepsilon_1 < R_1$ ), which, given the proximity between the intervals of *pleuvoir* and *venir*, leaves a gap between  $E_2$  and  $R_1$  ( $E_2 < R_1$ ) that complies with the requirements of a representation of immediate anteriority:

(22f) Il venait de pleuvoir:  $R_1-R_2 \subset \varepsilon_1-\varepsilon_2$ ;  $E_2 < R_1$ ;  $R_2-S_1$  (the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$  is included within the process interval *venir*  $\varepsilon_1-\varepsilon_2$ ; the final border  $E_2$  of *pleuvoir* is immediately anterior to the initial border of the reference interval  $R_1$ ; the final border of the reference interval  $R_2$  is anterior to the initial border  $S_1$  of the speech interval)

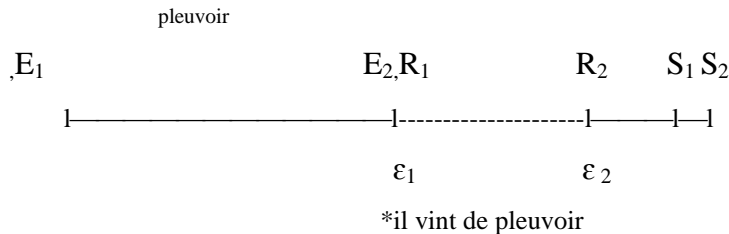
This can be represented as follows:



**Figure 3**

*\*il vint de pleuvoir*: the perfective aspect of the *passé simple* results from the coincidence of the reference interval with the event interval. Conjugating *venir* in the *passé simple* would make the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$  and the event interval  $\varepsilon_1-\varepsilon_2$ , coincide which, given the proximity of the event intervals for *pleuvoir* and *venir (de)*, would amount to making the initial border  $R_1$  of the reference interval coincide with the final border  $E_2$  of *pleuvoir*, and would leave no space between  $E_2$  and  $R_1$ , as required for representing proximal anteriority:

(22d) *\*Il vint de pleuvoir*:  $R_1-R_2, \varepsilon_1-\varepsilon_2$ ;  $R_1, E_2$ ;  $R_2-S_1$  (the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$  would be simultaneous to the event interval *venir*  $\varepsilon_1-\varepsilon_2$ ; the initial border  $R_1$  would be simultaneous to the final border  $E_2$  of *pleuvoir*, and the final border  $R_2$  would be anterior to the initial  $S_1$  of the speech interval)



**Figure 4**

The restrictions on compound forms can be explained in a similar way. Let us just consider the participle *venant de pleuvoir*: like the *imparfait*, the present participle carries an imperfective aspect so it can be applied to *venir* for the same reasons that allowed the *imparfait*. The only difference comes from the fact that the participle is an atemporal mood, which implies that the speech interval is not needed for its description. We thus have:

(22g) *Venant de pleuvoir*:  $R_1-R_2 \subset \varepsilon_1-\varepsilon_2$ ;  $E_2 < R_1$  (the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$  is included within the event interval of *venir*  $\varepsilon_1-\varepsilon_2$ ; the final border  $E_2$  of *pleuvoir* is immediately anterior to the initial border of the reference interval  $R_1$ )

*\*Étant venu de pleuvoir*: the compound form bears upon the post-process phase and shows the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$  after the final border of the event interval. Conjugating the compound form of the present participle (*étant venu*) would place the interval  $R_1-R_2$  beyond the final border  $\varepsilon_2$ , and therefore would move it away from the final border  $E_2$ . The gap indicating anteriority between  $E_2$  and  $R_1$  would be expanded, which goes against the meaning of proximal anteriority:

(22h) \*étant venu de pleuvoir:  $\varepsilon_2.R_1$ ;  $E_2.R_1$  (the process interval *venir*  $\varepsilon_1.\varepsilon_2$  would be anterior to the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$ , which would increase the gap between the final border  $E_2$  of *pleuvoir* and the reference interval)

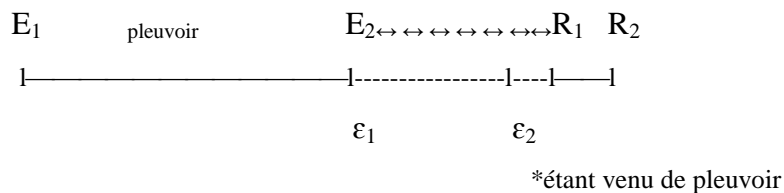


Figure 5

The description of *venir de + inf.* periphrasis outlined above seems confirmed by the tenses to which *venir* is defective: it is indeed the aspectual relation between the reference interval and the event interval  $\varepsilon_1.\varepsilon_2$  of *venir* in its relation with the event interval for the infinitive that permits the use of some tenses but not of others. *Venir (de)* can be conjugated in all the simple tenses of all moods (except the *passé simple* in the indicative). Most of its occurrences are in the present and the imperfect of the indicative mood. Indeed, out of 4,600 authentic tokens in our corpora, 67% are in the present and 26% in the imperfect of the indicative.

Let us mention that *venir de* acts as an auxiliary of anteriority for the four aspectual classes suggested by Vendler (1967), but they are not evenly distributed. The percentages below were calculated on the basis of the first 100 occurrences of *venir de + inf.*, in all tenses, for each of the four centuries (17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>) covered in Frantext:

States	Activities	Accomplishments	Achievements
0.5%	6.5%	17%	76%

Table 1: Distribution of aspectual classes

*Venir de*, as an auxiliary of the post-process phase, presupposes that the event is over; therefore, it combines ideally with telic events (achievements, accomplishments) that imply an intrinsic endpoint, less so with atelic events and not at all with unbounded states. There are few occurrences of bounded states (non-permanent) such as *être malade* (23), but none of unbounded states (permanent), p. ex. *être la fille de* (24):

- (23) Tout à l'heure, je ne sais pas si je dormais, vous savez, quand on **vient d'être malade**, on est faible, on a des rêves, j'entendais des musiques dans l'air. (HUGO Victor, *Mille francs de récompense*, 1866)  
 Earlier on, I NEG know-PRES-SG1 NEG if I sleep-PAST-IMPERF-SG1, you know-PRES-SG2, when one come-PRES-PSG3 'DE' be-INF ill, one be-PRES-SG-3 weak, one have-PRES some dreams, I hear-PAST-IMPERF some music-tunes in the air.  
 "Earlier on, I don't know whether I slept, you know when one has just been ill (), one is weak, one has dreams, I was hearing melodies in the air."
- (24) \*Mary **venait d'être** la fille du prince.  
 Mary come-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 'DE' be-INF the daughter-of-the prince.  
 "\*\* Mary had just been (come-IMP-PSG3 from be-INF) the daughter of the prince."

It is difficult, even impossible, to represent *être la fille du roi* as immediately anterior to another event inasmuch as that state does not have an intrinsic endpoint.

#### 1.4. *Venir de* as an immediate anterior

How can it be explained that *venir de* conveys a meaning not only of anteriority, but of immediate anteriority? When used as a movement verb, *venir* can combine with a place of origin that is far away from the place of destination: *mon copain vient de l'autre bout du monde* [“my boyfriend comes from the other side of the world”]. How come, when *venir* is an anteriority auxiliary, the time gap between the origin expressed by the infinitive and the reference interval is minimal? For instance in (1), the time gap between *rompre* and the reference interval R that coincides with the speech interval can be defined by adverbials such as *ce matin* [this morning], *la semaine dernière* [last week], *le mois dernier* [last month] (cf. *infra* 2.). The combination is less natural with *il y a six mois* [six months ago], and becomes problematic with *il y a 2 ans* [2 years ago]:

- (1b) Mon copain vient de rompre *ce matin / la semaine dernière / le mois dernier*? *il y a six mois / \*il y a 2 ans*<sup>13</sup>

Our hypothesis, as tentative as it may be, is the following: French resorts to compound forms (*avoir / être + participe passé*) to indicate that the event is anterior to a moment of reference (E-R), without specifying the distance between both intervals: for instance in (1), if “*mon copain vient de rompre*” is replaced by “*mon copain a rompu*”, *rompre* is presented as anterior, but without any specification of the distance from the speech interval. Indicating with another auxiliary (*venir de*) – in other words a grammatical component bearing upon the verb – the anteriority of the event is relevant only if that anteriority is minimal (E<R). This proximity is not required for spatial distance where *venir* works as a *verb*. That hypothesis is supported by two facts: the other Romance languages specify the anteriority of the event as immediate and not remote (see below 4); Heine and Kuteva (2002: 72-73) give ‘*come from*’ as a source of near past, or of perfect in a range of languages.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The event type as well as its meaning contribute to the variations in immediacy. Vetter (2002: 120) appropriately speaks of *proportionnalité*.

<sup>14</sup> Yet Bybee et al. refer to ‘come’ and to ‘come from’ only as anterior grams (1994: 56).

In section 1, we have explained in turn the four features that make *venir de + inf.* an aspectual auxiliary of immediate anteriority. Hopper and Traugott (1993: 108) summarize as follows the grammaticalization cline from full verb to affix: full verb > auxiliary > clitic > affix. *Vient de + inf.* is thus at stage 2 (*auxiliary*). Can an evolution towards stages 3 (*clitic*) and 4 (*affix*) be conceived? While we cannot make infallible predictions, we feel that evolution unlikely for the following reason: *être* and *avoir*, on which all French compound tenses are built and that have grammaticalized into auxiliaries well before *venir*, have not gone any further down the grammaticalization cline towards clitics and affixes, unlike what happened for the future and the conditional (see note 11) in which the periphrases *cantare habet /cantare habebat* became synthetic future and conditional *chantera /chanterait*. Therefore, it seems that French stops the grammaticalization cline at the auxiliary stage when that auxiliary is placed before the verb, as it is the case for *venir de + inf.*, (and indeed of *aller + inf* in its temporal meaning of immediate ulterior, cf. infra 3.3.), but lets it go further down when the auxiliary is placed after the verb as in the cases of the future and the conditional.

In the next sections, three questions will be discussed: has *venir de + inf.* not come to be used as a perfective as centuries have gone by (section 2.)? How is anteriority conveyed without any specification of the degree of remoteness (section 3.)? Which solutions have been adopted by the other Romance languages to express immediate anteriority (section 4.)?

## **2. On the road to perfectivity?**

Let us remember (see note 3) the difference between *anterior* and *perfective* highlighted by Bybee *et al.* 1994: “Anteriors signal that the situation occurs prior to reference time and is relevant to the situation at reference time” (p. 54). “Perfectives signal that the situation is viewed as bounded temporally” and are used “for narrating sequences of discrete events in which the situation is reported for its own sake, independent of its relevance to other situations” (*ibid.*). Has *venir de + inf.* increasingly become since the 17<sup>th</sup> century a *perfective*, as suggested by Veters (1989, 2010) on the basis of few occurrences? We have measured that hypothesis against 4,000 occurrences from our corpus, applying three tests by which a perfective can be distinguished from an anterior: the possibility to be combined with an adverbial, to tolerate a *when*-question, and to be used in narrative progression (Givon 1982).

### **2.1. *Venir de + inf.* + temporal adverbial**



– Frantext: we have collected the occurrences of *venir de* in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of the *présent* and the *imparfait* (inputs *vient/venait de + inf.*, as they are the most frequent) on the 10 following verbs (or verbal phrases): *apprendre* [to learn], *arriver* [to arrive], *avoir lieu* [to happen], *décéder* [to decease], *épouser* [to marry], *se marier* [to get married], *naître* [to be born], *quitter* [to leave], *rencontrer* [to meet], *trouver* [to find]– for a total of 2,079 oc. – and set apart those followed by a temporal adverbial:

	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Followed by a temporal adverbial</i>
vient de + inf.	1127	23
venait de + inf.	952	26
total	2079	49

Table 2: Proportion of periphrases followed by a temporal interval in Frantext

The proportion, in a corpus of around 1,000 occurrences for each tense, is low and comparable for both *présent* and *imparfait*: only 2% of occurrences for *vient de + inf.* and 2.79% for *venait de + inf.* are followed by a temporal adverbial.

From a diachronic point of view, the 49 occurrences in which *vient/venait de + inf.* are followed by a temporal adverbial and distributed as follows:

	16 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup>	18 <sup>th</sup>	19 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>
vient de + inf.	0	3	2	11	8
venait de + inf.	0	0	2	13	10
total	0	3	4	24	18

Table 3: Occurrences followed by a temporal adverbial by century

This allows us to draw some observations (provided that our corpus – amounting to 6% of the 33,400 occurrences of *venir de + inf* in the Frantext database - is representative):

- (i) No occurrence of adverbial is found in the 16<sup>th</sup> century;
- (ii) The sporadic presence of the adverbial, attested since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century, somewhat develops in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but does not increase further in the 20<sup>th</sup>;
- (iii) That evolution is accompanied by a wider range of adverbials, the temporal scope of which widens through centuries:

Anteriority	17 <sup>th</sup>	18 <sup>th</sup>	19 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>	Total
Immediate	3	2	6	3	14
Hodiernal.	0	1	6	7	14
Prehodiernal/day	0	1	5	3	9
Prehodiernal/month	0	0	1	3	4

Prehodiernal/year	0	0	1	1	2
Datation	0	0	1	0	1
Anaphoric reference	0	0	2	1	3
Indefinite	0	0	2	0	2
T	3	4	24	18	49

Table 4: Distribution of temporal adverbial types in diachrony

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, only adverbials of immediate past (*à l'instant même* [“right now”], *tout à l'heure* [“earlier on”]) can be found. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, hodiernal (*la nuit même* [“that very night”]) and prehodiernal (anteriority counted in days: *il y a quelques jours* [“a few days ago”]) appear, although they are isolated attempts. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, adverbials indicating degrees of remoteness in months (*depuis deux mois* [“for the last two months”]), even years (*deux ans auparavant* [“two years before”]) appear, as well as other types of temporal information: dates (*en 1677*), anaphorical reference (*au sortir du couvent* [“upon leaving the convent”]) or undefined reference (*dernièrement* [“lately”]). The diversification is confirmed, but not increased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

(iv) Contrary to prejudices, the construction is not (completely) resistant to *depuis x temps* [“since x time”] that appears in 9 oc. / 49, all from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, that introduce degrees of remoteness ranging from immediacy (25) to a temporal distance measured in days (26), months (27), even years (28):

- (25) C'est le seul être au monde qu'il connaît et elle va le laisser dans un monde inconnu où elle **vient d'arriver** depuis cinq minutes ! (Dolto F., *La Cause des enfants*, 1985)  
 It is the only being in-the world that he know-PRES-SG3 and she go-PRES-SG3 him leave-INF in a world unknown where she come-PRES-PSG3 'DE' arrive-INF  
 “She is the only being in the world he knows and she is going to leave him in an unknown world where she has arrived five minutes before.”
- (26) [...] cette région du printemps où le voyage de notre demeure, errant à travers les saisons, **venait depuis trois jours de l'arrêter** sous un ciel clément, [...]-(PROUST Marcel, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 1913)  
 That region of-the spring where the travel of our abode, err-PPRES across the seasons come-IMP-PSG3 since three days 'DE' it stop-INF under a sky fair.  
 “That region of spring where the travel of our abode, erring across seasons had stopped it for three days under a fair sky.”
- (27) [...] un jeune homme bien mis, efféminé, [...] il **vient d'arriver** depuis deux mois et « il me souhaite bien du plaisir ». (Lagarce J.-L., *Journal*, 2007)  
 A young man well dressed, effeminate [...] he come-PRES-PSG3 'DE' arrive-INF since two months and “he me wish-PRES-SG3 a lot of pleasure”.  
 “A well dressed and effeminate young man [...] he has just been around for 2 months and ‘he wishes me good luck.’”
- (28) Admiratrice de la maxime: Diviser pour régner, elle **venait d'apprendre**, depuis douze ans, à opposer constamment une force à une autre. (BALZAC H. de, *Sur Catherine de Médicis*, 1846)  
 Admirer of the maxim: Divide-INF for reign-INF, she come-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 'DE' learn-INF, since twelve years, to oppose constantly one force to another.  
 “Admirer of the maxim: Divide and rule, she had just learned over the last twelve years, to constantly oppose one power with another.”

The construction *venait de + inf. + depuis x temps* may nonetheless not feel very natural and even awkward to a writer such as Hugo who avoids it by coordinating it with a clause within which the adverbial bears on *être*:

- (29) Il fit cela avec une promptitude de tigre ; mais quelqu'un fut plus prompt encore. Ce fut un homme à cheval qui **venait d'arriver** et qui **était** là *depuis quelques instants*, sans qu'on eût fait attention à lui. (HUGO V., *Quatre vingt-treize*, 1874)

He do-PAST-PERF-SG3 with a promptness of tiger; but someone be-PAST-PERF-SG3 more prompt event. It be-PAST-PERF-SG3 a man on horse who come-PAST-IMPERF-PSG3 'DE' arrive-INF and who be-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 there since some instants, without that one have-SUBJ-IMP do-PP attention to him.

“He did it with the quickness of a tiger but someone was even quicker. It was a man on a horse who had just arrived and had been there for a few moments, without anyone noticing him.”

(v) It is obvious that, even in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the adverbials indicating immediate and hodiernal past are the most frequent: both categories represent across centuries 28/49 occurrences, or 57%. The proportion steadily decreases then when prehodiernality is calculated in days (9 oc., 18.3%), months (4 oc., 8.1%), years (2 oc., 4.2%). Let us mention that in the latter case, the statement comes across as very marked (*supra* (28)).

– Are these trends confirmed on Google? We worked on the 100 first occurrences for the ten selected verbs and the results are remarkably similar:

	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>With postponed adverbial</i>
vient de + inf.	1000	19
venait de + inf.	1000	25
total	2 000	44

Table 5: Occurrences with postponed adverbials on Google

1.9% of occurrences of *vient de + inf.* are followed by a temporal adverbial, as are 2.5% of occurrences in *venait de + inf.* Those 44 oc. are distributed as follows:

Anteriority	
Immediate	15
Hodiernal.	8
Prehodiernal/day	8
Prehodiernal/month	2
Prehodiernal/year	0
Datation	0
Anaphoric reference	0
Indefinite	11
Total	44

Table 6: Distribution of occurrences followed by a temporal adverbial

As in the Frantext corpus, the adverbials indicating immediate past and hodiernal past are the most frequent totalling 23 / 44 oc., or 52%. No occurrence of adverbial indicating anteriority in years has been found. Moreover, in all those cases, the adverbial comes after the periphrasis. While anteposition is perfectly possible with a perfective such as a *plus-que-parfait* (30a), it is difficult with *venir de + inf.* (30b):

- (30) Le 16 juillet 2009, il a tué son ex-compagne, Natacha Holleville – elle **venait de le quitter** 13 jours auparavant – en lui tirant dans le dos avec un fusil de chasse. (*La Voix du Nord*, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2014)  
 The 16 July 2009, he have-PRES-SG3 kill-PP his former partner, Natacha Holleville – she come-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 ‘DE’ him leave-INF 13 days before – in to-her shoot-PPRES in the back with a gun of hunting.  
 “On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2009, he killed his former partner, Natacha Holleville – she had just left him 13 days before – by shooting her in the back with a hunting gun.”
- (30a) Le 16 juillet 2009, il a tué son ex-compagne, Natacha Holleville – 13 jours auparavant elle **l’avait quitté**.  
 The 16 July 2009, he have-PRES-SG3 kill-PP his former-partner, Natacha Holleville – 13 days before she him have-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 leave-PP.  
 “On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2009, he killed his former partner, Natscha Holleville – she had left him 13 days before.”
- (30b) ??Le 16 juillet 2009, il a tué son ex-compagne, Natacha Holleville – 13 jours auparavant elle **venait de le quitter**.  
 The 16 July 2009, he have-PRES-SG3 kill-PP his former-partner, Natacha Holleville – 13 days before she come-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 ‘DE’ him leave-INF.  
 “On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2009, he killed his former companion, Natacha Holleville – 13 days before she had just left him.”

Let us note however that anteposition cannot be completely ruled out: we found two instances of it in the general corpus, both from the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

- (31) Le 2 décembre, Pitt tint le même langage à Maret ; *la veille, il venait de convoquer* la milice. (LEFEBVRE G., *La Révolution française*, 1963)  
 The 2 December, Pitt held-PAST-PERF-SG3 the same language to Maret; the day-before, he come-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 ‘DE’ summon-INF the militia.  
 “On 2<sup>nd</sup> December, Pitt told the same thing to Maret; only the day before, he had summoned the militia.”
- (32) Jusqu’à présent, vous avez vu une femme entourée de soins et de tendresse, se préoccuper de ses tisanes et de ses dentelles, mais *depuis longtemps* je **viens d’abandonner** mes manies. (GENET J., *Les Bonnes*, 1959)  
 Up to now, you have-PRES-PL2 see-PP a woman surrounded of cares and of tenderness, worry-INF of her infusions and of her laces, but since a-long-time I come-PRES-PSG1 ‘DE’ forsake-INF my odd-habits.  
 “Until now, you have seem a women surrounded by care and tenderness worry about her infusions and her laces, but I have just forsaken my odd habits a long time ago.”

As has been shown, this first test only brings minimal support to the hypothesis about the perfective nature of *venir de + inf.*: the temporal adverbial appears on a sporadic basis, its anteposition is hardly acceptable and it can only very rarely express an anteriority that spans over years.

## 2.2. *Venir de + inf.* and *when-question*

In a statement such as (30):

- (30) Le 16 juillet 2009, il a tué son ex-compagne, Natacha Holleville – elle *venait de le quitter* 13 jours auparavant – en lui tirant dans le dos avec un fusil de chasse. (*La Voix du Nord*, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2014)

the adverbial *13 jours auparavant* specifies the time of the parting, from the moment when *venir de + inf.* is used to indicate preodiurnal anteriority, in other words when it cannot specify any more by itself the exact time of the event and needs to rely on an adverbial. In these types of occurrences, *venir de + inf.* can indeed be seen as on the road to perfectivity. Yet it is still far from having reached its destination if when-questions are taken into account. While a past perfective can always be elicited by a when-question:

- (33) Quand l'avait-elle quitté?  
When him have-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 she leave-PP?  
“When had she left him?”

A sentence using *venir de + inf.* cannot (Dominicy 1983: 343, Lebaud 1992: 168):

- (33a) \*Quand *venait-elle de le quitter*?  
When come-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 she 'DE' him leave-INF?  
“When had she just left him?”

Our corpus does not include any such occurrence, which can be explained by the fact that *venir de* already provides temporal information of immediate anteriority, so it would be difficult to ask a question about an element that is already available.<sup>15</sup> *Venir de + inf.* therefore struggles to pass that perfectivity test.

### 2.3. *Venir de + inf.* and narrative sequence

Unlike *passé simple*, *passé composé* or *present*,<sup>16</sup> *venir de + inf.* is very rarely used to express narrative sequence: only one occurrence in which two successive clauses in *venir de + inf.* imply narrative sequence has been found in the whole corpus:

- (34) Je *viens de trouver* ta lettre sur la table et je *viens de finir* de lire tes paroles. On va bientôt manger mais je commence quand même à t'écrire. (CASTEL H., *Retour d'exil d'une femme recherchée*, 2009)  
I come-PRES-SG1 'DE' find-INF you letter on the table and I come-PRES-SG1 'DE' finish-INF of read-INF your words. One go-PRES-SG3 soon eat-INF but I start-PRES-SG1 anyway to you write.  
“I have just found your letter on the table and I have just finished reading your words. We are about to eat but I start to write to you anyway.”

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. the question playfully asked to children: “*De quelle couleur était le cheval blanc d'Henri IV?*” (what was the colour of Henry IV's white horse?).

<sup>16</sup> On the compatibility of tenses and narration, see Bres 2009.

However, it is unlikely that the narration be continued with other occurrences of *je viens de + inf.* This could be attributed to the fact that the temporal regression expressed by *venir de* goes against the temporal sequence of a narration. Yet, that explanation would not suffice: a tense such as the *plus-que-parfait*, that most frequently expresses regression (Damourette and Pichon, tome 5, § 1790; Kamp and Rohrer 1983: 256), can very well express progression:

- (35) Jacques regarda sa montre, vit qu'il était quatre heures déjà ; et, il se hâta de retourner à l'impasse d'Amsterdam. Jusqu'à midi, Séverine *avait dormi* profondément. Ensuite, réveillée, surprise de ne pas le voir là encore, elle *avait rallumé* le poêle ; et, vêtue enfin, mourant d'inanition, elle *s'était décidée*, vers deux heures, à descendre manger dans un restaurant du voisinage. Lorsque Jacques parut, elle venait de remonter, après avoir fait quelques courses. (Zola, *La Bête humaine*)  
 Jacques watch-PAST-PERF-SG3 his watch, see-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 four o'clock already; and he himself hurry-PAST-PERF-SG3 of return-INF to the cul-de-sac of Amsterdam. Up to midday, Séverine have-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 sleep-PP deeply. Then, wake-up-PP, surprise of NEG NEG him see-INF there yet, she have-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 relight-PP the stove; and clothe-PP finally, die-PPRES of inanition, she herself be-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 decide-PP, around 2 o'clock, to go-down-INF eat-INF I a restaurant of-the neighbourhood. When Jacques appear-PAST-PERF-SG3, she come-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 'DE' ascend-INF, after have-INF do-PP some shopping.  
 "Jacques had a look at his watch, saw it was already four, and he hurried to go back to the Amsterdam cul-de-sac. Until midday, Séverine was fast asleep. Then, awake and surprised not to see him around, she relit the stove; and with her clothes finally on, dying from inanition, she decided around 2 to go down and eat in a nearby restaurant. When Jacques appeared, she had just gone back up after having done some shopping."

The pluperfect in « Séverine *avait dormi* » turns back time from the preceding *passé simple* « il *se hâta* ». However, the two following *plus-que-parfaits* indicate a progression: *elle avait dormi - elle avait rallumé - elle s'était décidée*. They may not be replaced by *venir de + inf.*:

- (35a) \*Jusqu'à midi, Séverine *venait de dormir* profondément. Ensuite, réveillée, surprise de ne pas le voir là encore, elle *venait de rallumer* le poêle ; et, vêtue enfin, mourant d'inanition, elle *venait de se décider*, vers deux heures, à descendre manger dans un restaurant du voisinage.  
 "Until midday, Séverine come-IMP-PSG3 'DE' sleep-INF deeply. Then, awoke, surprised of NEG him see there yet, she come-IMP-PSG3 from relight-INF the stove; and clad finally, she come-IMP-PSG3 from herself decide-INF, around 2 o'clock, to go down to eat in a restaurant of the neighbourhood."

*Venir de + inf.* cannot be used in a narrative sequence because it lacks autonomy: it can only indicate the anteriority of an event in relation to another one yet; unlike the *plus-que-parfait*, it cannot indicate a progression from an event to another.

*Venir de + inf.* can hardly meet the requirements for perfectivity: while it may be combined with temporal complements, it is rare and they come almost exclusively after the verbal form; it cannot be used in a when-question; it cannot be used to express narrative sequence. Therefore, against Veters' claim, we suggest that *venir de + inf.* remains at heart a marker of immediate anteriority. On the grammaticalization path, its evolution towards a perfective,

subtly hinted at in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is not confirmed in contemporary daily written language and its use with this meaning remains extremely restricted.

### 3. Immediate anteriority, anteriority, bis-anteriority, immediate ulteriority

In this section, we will discuss the relation of *venir de + inf.* with the grams of anteriority, bis-anteriority, and immediate ulteriority.

#### 3.1. Immediate anteriority, anteriority, bis-anteriority

As we have already seen, *venir de (+ inf.)* as well as *être/avoir (+ pp)* are aspectual auxiliaries that account for the post-process stage. Yet, unlike *venir de + inf.*, *être/avoir + pp* imply no mention of the degree of remoteness. Let us compare (1) and (1a):

- (1) Mon copain ***vient de rompre*** et j'arrive pas à l'accepter. (teemix.aufeminin.com, 2008)  
 (1a) Mon copain ***a rompu*** et j'arrive pas à l'accepter.  
 My boyfriend have-PRES-SG3 break-off-PP and I cannot accept it.  
 "My boyfriend has broken off and I don't manage to accept it."

The *passé composé* shows the event interval *rompre* as anterior to the reference interval, but unlike *vient de*, it does not specify a temporal distance between both intervals:

*vient de rompre*:  $R_1-R_2 \subset \varepsilon_1.\varepsilon_2$ ;  $E_2 < R_1$ ;  $R_1-R_2, S_1.S_2$  (the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$  is included within the interval of the *venir*  $\varepsilon_1.\varepsilon_2$  process, the final limit  $E_2$  of the *rompre* event is **immediately anterior** to the initial limit  $R_1$ ; the reference interval and the speech interval coincide).

*a rompu*:  $R_1-R_2 \subset \varepsilon_1.\varepsilon_2$ ;  $E_2 - R_1$  et  $R_1-R_2, S_1.S_2$  (the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$  is included within the interval of the *venir*  $\varepsilon_1.\varepsilon_2$  process, the final limit  $E_2$  of the *rompre* event is **anterior** to the initial limit  $R_1$ ; the reference interval and the speech interval coincide)

The distinction is confirmed in that, unlike *vient de rompre*, *a rompu* combines without any problem with an anteposed adverbial indicating a prehodiernal distance going back to years:

- (1b) Il y a deux ans, mon copain ***a rompu*** et j'arrive (toujours) pas à l'accepter  
 There-is two years, my boyfriend have-PRES-SG3 and I manage (still) not to it accept.  
 "Two years ago, my boyfriend finished our relationship and I (still) don't manage to accept it."  
 (1c) ?Il y a deux ans, mon copain ***vient de rompre*** et j'arrive (toujours) pas à l'accepter.  
 Two years ago, my boyfriend come-PRES-PSG3 from break-off-INF and I (still) don't manage to accept it.  
 "Two years ago, my boyfriend has just finished our relationship and I (still) don't manage to accept it."

At a morphological level the following correspondences can be found:

Immediate anteriority

Anteriority

Vient de rompre	a rompu (passé composé)
Venait de rompre	avait rompu (plus-que-parfait)
Viendra de rompre	aura rompu (futur antérieur)
Viendrait de rompre	aurait rompu (conditionnel passé)
∅	eut rompu (passé antérieur)

The *avoir* + *p. passé* paradigm is not defective. In particular, it includes the *passé antérieur*, namely an anterior to the *passé simple*, while this tense is impossible for *venir de*, as shown before:

- (36) Dès qu'il **fut sorti**, elle fut reprise par la même impatience de le revoir que tout à l'heure. (DURAS Marguerite, *Les Impudents*, 1946) (\*dès qu'il **vint de sortir**)  
 As soon as he be-PAST-PERF-SG3 go-out-PP, she be-PAST-PERF taken-again-PP by the same impatience of him see-again-INF as earlier.  
 "As soon as he was out, she was filled with the same impatience to see him as she had been earlier."

We have explained the defectivity of *venir de* in the *passé simple* and in compound forms by the fact that the tenses that combine with *venir* cannot create a space between  $E_2 \leftrightarrow R_1$ . *Etre* and *avoir* (+ *pp*) are not required to clear that space and can therefore be conjugated in the *passé simple* as in (36). That is:

*Il fut sorti*:  $R_1-R_2, \varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2$  et  $R_1, E_2$  et  $R_2-S_1$  (the reference interval  $R_1-R_2$  coincides with the event interval *être*  $\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2$ ; the initial limit  $R_1$  coincides with the final  $E_2$  of the *sortir* event, and the final limit  $R_2$  is anterior to the speech interval)

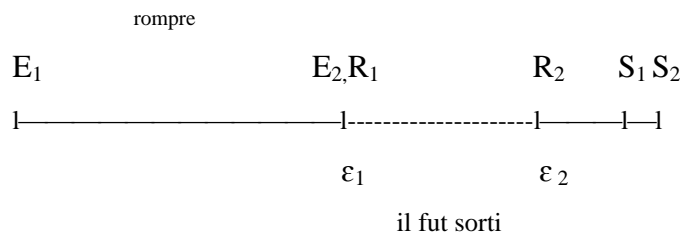


Figure 6

Let us add one issue regarding the *passé composé*:

Is the grammaticalisation of *venir* into an auxiliary, that was stabilized in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, linked with the evolving *passé simple* / *passé composé* dyad? That hypothesis is perfectly conceivable on the basis of the famous 24-hour rule suggested by Henri Estienne (1569), adopted by the Port Royal Grammar (Lancelot and Arnaud 1660), and still accepted today by linguists such as Comrie (1985: 93), or Bybee *et al.* (1994: 101). According to that rule, the *passé composé* is reported to have been used in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries solely to convey events that had taken place on the day of speech, while the *passé simple* was required for pre-hodiernal events. That temporal distribution of *passé simple* and *passé composé* evolved at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> / 18<sup>th</sup> centuries when the *passé composé* became able to refer to events that



had taken place before the day of speech, As a result, it would be reasonable to suggest that the acceptance of *venir de + inf.* as an *immediate* anterior in the 17<sup>th</sup> century came from the progressive rejection of the hodiernal constraint by the *passé composé*, that created a need for another form for expressing immediate anteriority. However, we reject that hypothesis for a number of reasons:

- Studies by Wilmet (1970), Fournier (1998), and Liu and Caron (1999) show that the 24-hour rule did not reflect linguistic usage. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the *passé composé* was used for any event including the speech interval; otherwise, the *passé simple* was needed. Mme de Sévigné wrote:

(37) Il prit dix coffres et est parti pour Chantilly. (*Lettres*, 1725)  
He take-PAST-PERF-SG3 ten chests and be-PRES-SG3 go-PP to Chantilly.  
“He took ten chests and went off to Chantilly.”

using, after a *passé simple*, the *passé composé* for a pre-hodiernal event because the agent is still in Chantilly at the time of writing. The *passé composé* was not hodiernal and could be combined with any adverbial such as *aujourd’hui* [“today”], *cet été* [“this summer”], *cette année* [“this year”], etc. but not with *hier* [“yesterday”], *la veille* [“the day before”], etc. That is: *cette année, il a beaucoup plu* [“this year it rained a lot”] but *hier il plut* [“yesterday, it rained”]. The distinction between *passé simple* / *passé composé* was not of a temporal nature, but of an enunciative nature. That enunciative difference intensified from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards: increasingly, the PS could not be used anymore with a deictic adverb such a *hier* (*hier il plut*), and it was replaced by a PC (*hier il a plu*). The emergence of the periphrastic structure to express an immediate anterior could not be linked to the fact that the PC lost its hodiernal dimension, given that the PC was not hodiernal.

- The potential link between the periphrastic structure and the evolution of the PC may be valid for the contemporary period: *il vient de pleuvoir/ il a plu*. Yet, the structure appears in the imperfect– *il venait de pleuvoir* – and it could not be linked with the evolution of the *plus-que-parfait*.

- If there was a link between the periphrastic structure and the evolution of the *passé composé*, we would expect *vient de + inf.* to compete extensively with the PC for the expression of recent past. Yet, this is not the case: unlike the periphrastic future (*Pierre va venir demain*) that fiercely competes with the synthetic future (*Pierre viendra demain*), *vient de + inf.* has remained sporadic since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. To retell a recent event, the PC or the present are used, not *vient de + inf.* because, as seen in 2., the periphrasis expresses an anterior, not a perfective;

- Finally, if there were a causative link between the periphrastic construction and the evolution of the PC in French, we would expect the immediate anterior of Catalan (*acaba de ploure*) and Spanish (*acaba de llover*), to work differently than in French, given that their compound past does not share the values of the French *passé composé*. However, this is not the case, the immediate anterior works in similar ways in all three Romance languages.

Therefore, for all those reasons, we do not find it appropriate to link the emergence of *venir + inf.* with the evolving competition between *passé composé/passé simple* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Besides, let us mention that *venir de* is defective in compound forms, unlike *être/avoir + pp* that benefit from a surcompound paradigm:<sup>17</sup>

<b>Immediate anteriority</b>	<b>anteriority</b>	<b>bis-anteriority</b>
Vient de rompre	a rompu	a eu rompu
Venait de rompre	avait rompu	avait eu rompu
Viendra de rompre	aura rompu	aura eu rompu
Viendrait de rompre	aurait rompu	aurait eu rompu
∅	eut rompu	eut eu rompu

Without analysing the meaning of surcompound forms (*i. a.* Wilmet 2009, Apothéloz 2012), let us note that in addition to a meaning of *bisanterior* (38) (Damourette and Pichon § 1775 et sq.), the Franco-Provençal and the Francitan use the *passé surcomposé* to express remote anteriority (39):

- (38) Il a repris un peu de ses sens quand Parapine lui **a eu fait** sa piqûre de morphine. (CÉLINE L.-F., *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, 1932)  
 He have-PRES-SG3 take-back-PP a bit of his senses when Parapine him have-PRES-SG3 have-PP make-PP an injection of morphine.  
 “He came back to his senses a bit after Parapine gave him an injection of morphine.”
- (39) **J’ai eu parlé** patois // mais maintenant plus (conversation, Montpellier, 2008)  
 I have-PRES-SG3 have-PP speak-PP dialect but now not-anymore  
 “I used to speak dialect but now I don’t anymore.”

French has thus at its disposal, beside *venir de + inf.*, which is a gram of immediate anteriority, grams of anteriority made of *être/avoir + p. passé* that do not indicate any degree of remoteness. It also has grams of bis-anteriority that, in some varieties of French, can also indicate remote anteriority: these surcompound forms made of the compound form of the auxiliary *p. passé*, are little used, with the exception of the *passé surcomposé*.

<sup>17</sup> Surcompound forms have been attested since the Middle Ages, were described as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century and called as such in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Wilmet 2010: 193, § 184).

### 2.3. Other grams of immediate anteriority

Two other grams of immediate anteriority developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: *ne faire que de + inf.*, and *sortir de*:

- (40) Despesche-toy de descendre et de m'ouvrir la porte si tu veux sauver ta vie et l'honneur de ta maistresse ! Car je te puis assurer que Dame Louyse **ne fait que de partir** d'icy. (TURNÈBE O. de, *Les Contens*, 1584)  
Hurry yourself to come-down-INF and to me open-INF the door if you want-PRES-SG2 save-INF your life and the honour of your mistress. Because I you can assure that Dame Louise NEG make-PRES-SG3 only 'DE' leave-INF.  
"Hurry to come down and to open the door for me if your want to save your life and the honour of your mistress. Because I can assure you that Lady Louise has only just left this place."
- (41) Je **sortais de voir** au Pitti la Simonetta, maîtresse fameuse du magnifique, peinte par Botticelli. (BARRÈS Maurice, *Un homme libre*, 1889)  
I come-out-PAST-IMPERF-SG1 from see-INF at-the Pitti the Simonetta, mistress famous of-the magnificent, paint-PP-FSG by Boticelli.  
"I had just seen at the Pitti la Simonetta, famous lover of the Magnificent, painted by Botticelli."

Far less frequent than *venir de + inf.*, these grams never really posed a threat and actually became obsolete in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, only one of these grams remains in the popular expression *sortir d'en prendre* ["to have just undergone sth"]:

- (42) - Pourquoi cette rage à paraître plus lâche que vous n'êtes?  
- Plus lâche? Oh ! Là là, ne remettez pas la conversation là-dessus, voulez-vous? Je **sors d'en prendre**. (BERNANOS G., *Un mauvais rêve*, 1948)  
- Why that rage to look-INF more coward than you 'NE' be-PRES-PL2?  
- More coward? Oh! Là là, NEG bring-back-IMPER-PL2 NEG the conversation there-upon, want-PRES-PL2 you?  
"- Why that rage to appear more coward than you are?  
-More coward? Oh dear, don't bring the conversation back on this, will you? I have taken a beating [I come out from of something take-INF]."

Let us note that another gram that can also be found from the 16<sup>th</sup> century through to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it becomes obsolete, is the expression *ne venir que de*, that can be analysed as mixing *ne faire que de* and *venir de* (Dominicy 1983: 344):

- (43) On prétend que ce mariage étoit fait il y a déjà quelques mois, mais on **ne vient que de l'apprendre** ici par les lettres de Hollande et de Flandre. (DANGEAU Philippe de, *Journal*, 1713)  
One claim-PRES-SG3 that that marriage be-PAST-IMPERF do-PP there is already several months, but one NEG come-PRES-SG3 only of it learn here by the letters of Holland and Flanders  
"It is claimed that the marriage took place already a few months ago but we have only just heard about it here through letters from Holland and Flanders."

In the same way as *venir de* and for the same reasons, these structures were defective: they cannot be conjugated in the *passé simple* in the indicative mood nor in any compound tenses irrespective of the mood.

### 3.3. Immediate anteriority and (immediate) ulteriority

It is customary to parallel the immediate anteriority resulting from the grammaticalization of the movement verb *venir* with the immediate ulteriority resulting from the grammaticalization of the movement verb *aller*: *il vient de pleuvoir / il va pleuvoir*. Without exposing all the similarities and differences between both structures (Gougenheim 1929, Damourette and Pichon 1911-1936, Havu 2005), let us focus here on their aspectual dimension and their feature of immediacy.

- Contrary to what is too often claimed, *aller* in this structure is not a temporal auxiliary but an aspectual auxiliary: while *venir* (+ *de*) relates to the post-process phase, *aller* relates to the pre-process phase and, according to the tense used, this can mean ulteriority in the present (*il va pleuvoir*) or in the past (*il allait pleuvoir*).<sup>18</sup>

- The structure in the present (*va pleuvoir*), sporadic in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, spreads in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with a meaning of immediate ulteriority. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it has increasingly freed itself – at least in part – from this meaning of immediacy and it has grammaticalised from a proximal ulterior into a future (Fleischmann 1983: 193): nowadays, it is in fierce competition with the simple future – it is able to combine with an adverbial expressing remoteness – and the difference expressed by the periphrastic form has less to do with “la proximité chronologique de l’événement” [“the chronological proximity of the event”] than with the “point de vue présent dont on considère cet événement! [“the present point from which the event is viewed”] (Damourette and Pichon § 1768):

- (44) Mais arrête ! *dans dix ans* tu *vas* encore t’*occuper* de moi comme si j’étais un bébé ! (conversation, un adolescent de 13 ans à sa mère, 2000)  
But stop-IMPER-SG2 ! in ten years you go-PRES-SG2 still yourself occupy-INF of me as-if I be-PAST-IMPERF-SG1 a baby!  
“But stop! In ten year time you will still look after me as if I were a baby.”

Unlike the ulteriority gram *va + inf.* that is in strong competition with the future (at least in its temporal meanings) because it has dissociated itself from immediacy, *venir de + inf.* remains an immediate anterior at heart: in its use in the present (*vient de + inf.*), it does not really compete with the *passé composé*.

## 4. Immediate anteriority in French and in other Romance languages

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<sup>18</sup> *Va + inf.* is more defective than *venir de + inf.*: in the indicative, it can only be conjugated in the *présent* and *imparfait* while it only admits simple tenses in the other moods.

Let us underline the (relative) distinctiveness of French within Romance languages by examining the resources used by them on the basis of a translation of example (1) “mon copain vient de rompre”:

- *Occitan* is the only one to convey immediate anteriority with the ventive form (1d):

(1d) Mon companh *ven de copar* (Occitan)

- *Italian* has attempted that structure (1e), before it was condemned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>19</sup> as a gallicism:

(1e) Il mio ragazzo *viene di mollarmi* (Italian until 18th century)

Nowadays, Italian expresses immediate anteriority with an adverb (*appena*, (1f)) combined with the compound form of the verb as does Romanian (*tocmai* (1g)):

(1f) Il mio ragazzo mi *ha appena mollato* (Contemporary Italian)

(1g) Prietenul meu *tocmai m-a parasit* (Romanian)

This way of expressing immediate anteriority is akin to what is found in Germanic languages: *just* (English), *gerade* (German) + *perfect* (Tovena et Shaden 2009). Let us mention that it is also possible in French mainly in the syntactical structure of correlation *être/avoir à peine + p. passé que P*:

(45) Elle sanglota toute la route en retournant à la ferme, *et elle était à peine revenue* que son maître *l'appela* dans sa chambre. (Maupassant G., *Histoire d'une fille de ferme*, 1881)  
She sob-PAST-PERF-SG3 all the road in go-back-PPRES to the farm, and she be-PAST-IMPERF-SG3 only-just come-back-PP  
“She sobbed all the way back to the farm and she had only just come back when her master summoned her to his room.”

- The Ibero-Romance languages – Catalan, Spanish, Portuguese – have in the same way as French, opted for the auxiliary followed by the *de* preposition but from the grammaticalization of *acabar* [“complete”, “finish”]:

(1h) El meu novio m'*acaba de deixar* (Catalan)

(1i) Mi novio *acaba de dejarme* (Spanish)

(1j) O meu namorado *acaba de deixar-me* (Portuguese)

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<sup>19</sup> Beauzée (1767, *apud* Gougenheim 1929: 125) mentions the pervasiveness of the French structure in Italian in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: “depuis quelque temps, on dit en italien, *io vengo di lodare, io venivo di lodare*, etc., cette expression est un gallicisme, qui a été blâmé par M. l'abbé Fontanini ; mais l'autorité de l'usage l'a enfin consacré dans la langue italienne qui se trouve ainsi pourvue, comme la nôtre, des préterits prochains” [“for some time now, it is said in Italian *io vengo di lodare, io venivo di lodare*, etc., this structure is a Gallicism that has been criticised by Abbott Fontanini; however the power of usage has finally established it within the Italian language that as a result has at its disposal, like French, proximal preterits”].

Unlike that of ventive forms, the development path of a dynamic verb such as *finish* leads to anteriority through a completive stage (Bybee *et al.* 1994: 105) that can always remain:

‘finish’ → completive → ANTERIOR

*Acabar de* is ambiguous when it is followed by an activity or an accomplishment as it can mean ‘finish doing sth’ (completive) or ‘have just done sth’ (anterior):

- (46a) Cat.: Rosa acaba de preparar l’arrós  
 (46b) Sp.: Rosa acaba de preparar l’aroz  
 (46c) Port.: A Rosa acaba de cozinhar o arroz.

In all three languages, this sentence can mean ‘Rosa finishes preparing the rice’ rather than ‘Rosa has just prepared the rice’. To avoid ambiguity, the completive meaning is often conveyed by the progressive in Catalan and Spanish:

- (48d) Cat.: Rosa esta acabant l’arrós  
 (48e) Sp.: Rosa esta acabando l’aroz

Spanish is increasingly using *terminar* to express immediate anteriority:

- (47) *Terminamos de llegar mi familia y yo de Morella.* ([http://www.toprural.com/Victor-Martin/opini%C3%B3n-Apartamentos-Rojo-Y-Naranja\\_veinticuatro0149\\_o.html](http://www.toprural.com/Victor-Martin/opini%C3%B3n-Apartamentos-Rojo-Y-Naranja_veinticuatro0149_o.html). Consultado el 18/04/2014) (apud Martínez-Atienza, in press).  
 We finish-PRES-PL1 of arrive-INF my family and I from Morella.  
 “We have just arrived my family and I from Morella.”

Besides, it must be noted that the *venir de + inf.* construction, stigmatized as a Gallicism, is currently developing in contemporary Asturian, Galician and in several areas of Hispanoamérica (Argentina, Uruguay),<sup>20</sup> particularly in sports reports. In the following occurrence, the immediate anteriority of the process *proclamarse* is indicated in the title by *venir de* and within the article by *acabar de*:

- (48) El deportista guardés Damián Alonso Alonso *viene de proclamarse* campeón europeo de remo ergómetro ([www.todoremo.com](http://www.todoremo.com), 28. 1.2013)  
 The athlete Damián Alonso Alonso come-PRES-SG3 ‘DE’ be proclaimed-INF champion European of rowing indoors.  
 “The athlete Damián Alonso has just been proclaimed European champion for indoor rowing.”  
 Damián Alonso, que en la actualidad ejerce de entrenador en nuestro club, *se acaba de proclamar* campeón europeo de remo ergómetro.  
 Damián Alonso, who in the actuality, acts as coach in our club come-PRES-SG3 ‘DE’ be proclaimed-INF champion European of rowing indoors.  
 “Damián Alonso, a coach in our club, has just been proclaimed European champion for indoor rowing.”

<sup>20</sup> We are grateful to S. Azzopardi, C. Garabato and S. Sarrazin for bringing that emerging usage to our attention.

Let us note that *acabar* as immediate anterior can be conjugated in the present and the imparfait but not in the *passé simple* nor in the *passé composé*. In those tenses, it can only be interpreted as a *completive*:

- (49) Aguirre *acabó de beberse* su café y pagamos. Nos despedimos en la Rambla. (Cercas J., *Soldados de Salamina*, 2001)  
 Aguirre finish-PAST-PERF-DG3 'DE' drink-himself his coffee and pay-PAST-PERF-PL1. Us part-PAST-PERF-PL1 on the Rambla.  
 "Aguirre finished drinking his coffee and we paid. We parted on the Rambla."
- (50) Personalmente no me considero una mujer que quiera volver a trabajar sólo porque *ha acabado de criar* a sus hijos. (*Diario de León.es.*, 2004-09-05)  
 Personally NEG me see-PRES-SG1 a woman who want-PRES-SG3 turn-INF to work-INF because have-PRES-SG finish-PP 'DE' raise her sons.  
 "I don't personally see myself as a woman who wants to find employment because she has finished raising her children."

It would then seem that Romance languages all express immediate anteriority but in ways that are distinct from French: by an adverb (Italian, Romanian), by the grammaticalization in an auxiliary not of *venir* but of *acabar* (Catalan, Spanish, Italian). There seems to be no link between the compound past in those languages and the expression chosen to express immediate anteriority: Italian that has a PC close to the French PC expresses immediate anteriority by an adverb (*appena*) in the same way as Germanic languages (*just*, *gerade*); Spanish and Catalan have PC that work differently from the French one but they express immediate anteriority by a periphrasis made of a verb turned into an auxiliary (*acabar*).

## Conclusion

We summarize the main contribution of our paper : while analysing the grammaticalization of *venir* in diachrony, we have shown that *venir* in *venir de + inf.* was an aspectual auxiliary of immediate anteriority, and we have given an account for its defectivity. Our study has then shown that *venir de + inf.* is not far advanced on the grammaticalization path from anterior to perfective as it has only sporadically been combined with a preodiernal adverbial since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as the trend has not been further favoured in Contemporary French. Alternating with markers of anteriority, *venir de + inf.* does not compete with them unlike what has happened for immediate ulteriority. Indeed. *aller + inf.* has progressively distanced itself from the meaning of immediacy, which has allowed especially in the *présent* (*il va pleuvoir*) an increasing competition with the *futur* (*il pleuvra*) since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, when comparing *venir de + inf.* with structures used in other Romance languages to express immediate anteriority, the French structure has come across as quite specific – only shared

with Occitan –, even if Italian attempted to develop it in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it emerges nowadays in some Ibero-Romance languages.

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