



The competition between present conditional and prospective imperfect in French over the centuries

Jacques Bres, Sascha Diwersy, Giancarlo Luxardo

► To cite this version:

Jacques Bres, Sascha Diwersy, Giancarlo Luxardo. The competition between present conditional and prospective imperfect in French over the centuries. Dalila Ayoun, Agnès Celle, Laure Lansari. Tense, Aspect, Modality and Evidentiality: Cross-linguistic perspectives, 197, John Benjamins, pp.65-82, 2018, Studies in Language Companion Series, 9789027200969. hal-01828414

HAL Id: hal-01828414

<https://hal.science/hal-01828414>

Submitted on 3 Jul 2018

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Bres J., Diwersy S. & Luxardo G., 2018, “The competition between present conditional and prospective imperfect in French over the centuries”, in Ayoun, Dalila, Celle, Agnès, Lansari, Laure (éd.), *Tense, Aspect, Modality and Evidentiality: Cross-linguistic perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 65-80.

Abstract

While a significant number of works are known about the competition over the centuries between the synthetic future and the periphrastic prospective present, the parallel competition between the present conditional and the periphrastic construction with the prospective imperfect has received less attention. We focus here on the latter competition, limiting our study of the two forms to their temporal uses in discourse. We describe the uses for each form according to their order of appearance: imminence, subjective ulteriority and objective ulteriority. The two forms compete with each other in the expression of both subjective and objective ulteriority. We give an assessment of the diachronic evolution of the ratio *present conditional* / *prospective imperfect* in the expression of subjective ulteriority.

Keywords: prospective, subjective ulteriority, objective ulteriority, grammaticalization

The Competition between the Present Conditional and the Prospective Imperfect in French over the Centuries: first results

JACQUES BRES, SASCHA DIWERSY, GIANCARLO LUXARDO
Praxiling, UMR 5267, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3

1. Introduction

Extensive work has been carried out in the area of French grammar about the competition over the centuries between the synthetic future (*partira*, ‘leave-FUT-3SG’) and the periphrastic construction with the prospective present (*va partir*, ‘go-PRS-3SG leave-INF’) (e.g. Damourette & Pichon 1970 [1911-1936]; Fleischman 1982; Poplack & Turpin 1999; Poplack & Dion 2009; Vettters & Lière 2009; Lindschouw 2011; Abouda & Skrovec 2015). The main subjects of these analyses are (i) the diachronic evolution of the grammatical forms, i.e. the cycle of future tenses (analytical form → synthetic form → analytical form) and (ii) the illustration of the grammaticalization process of a movement verb into a temporal auxiliary.

Much less attention has been paid to the parallel competition between the present conditional (*partirait*, ‘leave-COND-3SG’) and the periphrastic construction with the prospective imperfect (*allait partir*, ‘go-IMP-3SG leave-INF’), certainly because these forms occur less frequently.¹ Indeed, whereas different namings have been given to the construction *va partir* (e.g. *futur proche*, *futur périphrastique*, *futur immédiat*), nothing similar had occurred for *allait partir* ‘go-IMP-3SG leave-INF’. Fleischman (1982), for instance, devoted a number of pages to the distinction between *partira* ‘leave-FUT-3SG’ and *va partir* ‘go-PRS-3SG leave-INF’, but none to the distinction between *partirait* ‘leave-COND-3SG’ and *allait partir* ‘go-IMP-3SG leave-INF’.

The focus of this chapter is on the relationship between the two forms, the present conditional and the prospective imperfect, in their temporal uses. We first provide an explicit account of the uses in discourse of each form according to their diachronic appearance: a) subjective ulteriority (10th century) and objective ulteriority (19th century) for the conditional; b) imminence (15th century), subjective ulteriority (16th century) and objective ulteriority (late 18th century) for the prospective imperfect. The two forms compete with each other in the expression of both *subjective* and *objective* ulteriority. Choosing to only address the question of diachronic evolution of the ratio *present conditional* / *prospective imperfect* in the expression of subjective ulteriority, we describe our corpus and the methodology we used (*i.e.* text retrieval and hierarchical clustering) for the experiment. Finally, we present and discuss the results of the study, including quantitative data and charts.

Preliminary comments should be made about the choice of the terms ‘prospective present’ (*présent prospectif*: *va partir*) and ‘prospective imperfect’ (*imparfait prospectif*: *allait partir*). This choice is based on the fact that the current denomination ‘periphrastic future’ appears problematic for two reasons: first, it cannot be applied to *allait partir* as the auxiliary is in the *imperfect*; second, for both forms (present and imperfect), the denomination is relevant only for one meaning effect (admittedly frequent), *i.e.* ulteriority, while the periphrasis also produces *imminence* as another meaning (cf. *infra* 2.2). We will use the term *prospective*, proposed by Benveniste (1959 / 1966: 245) or Comrie (1976: 64), which allows us to group the various meanings produced by the periphrasis.

2. Uses in discourse of the present conditional and the prospective imperfect

Although both the present conditional and the prospective imperfect are likely to have either aspecto-temporal or modal uses (Bres, Azzopardi & Sarrazin 2012), we will only focus on the former.

2.1 The present conditional

The present conditional may have two types of temporal uses in discourse, subjective ulteriority and objective ulteriority, which are diachronically very distant:²

Table 1: conditional

<i>Conditional</i>	subjective	→	objective
	ULTERIORITY		ULTERIORITY
<i>Stages</i>	(a) (10 th)		(b) (19 th)

2.1.1 Stage (a) - subjective ulteriority

Already in early texts from the 10th century, the conditional is used to actualize an event as ulterior with respect to a past utterance. This past utterance may be explicit – indirect discourse as exemplified in (1) – or implicit – free indirect discourse as illustrated in (2).

(1) *cil jurerent sus sainz lealment que il **iroient** ('go-COND-3PL') par les destroiz de Marroth.* (Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, 1208)

‘they swore on the gospel saints that they would go loyally through the straits of Morocco.’

(2) *Il s'allongea, les yeux au plafond. Il **remonterait** ('go back up-COND-3SG') là-haut à la nuit tombante.* (J. Carrière, *L'Épervier de Maheux*, 1972)

‘He laid down, with his eyes to the ceiling. He would go back up there at dusk.’

Because ulteriority is assessed from an utterance, the process may then be realized or not: it falls within the scope of *branching time* (Kripke 1963; Rescher et Urquhart 1971; Gardies 1975; Martin 1981). The past, as it is irrevocable, has a linear structure, whereas the future, because it falls under what is possible, has a ramified structure. The Crusaders in (1) either

went through the straits of Morocco or they did not; similarly, the character in (2) either went back up or he did not.

2.1.2 Stage (b) - objective ulteriority

Starting from the 19th century, due to a decline in subjective mediation, the conditional may indicate an event as being ulterior to another one in the objective unilinearity of the past (Damourette & Pichon 1970 [1911-1936], Nilsson-Ehle 1943, Bres 2012)³. This use of the conditional is not frequent. In this case, it may be glossed with a simple past as in (3) and (4):

(3) *La morale devait ensuite se trouver de plus en plus affectée par le discrédit croissant qu'allait nécessairement subir une théologie qui, désormais rétrograde, **deviendrait*** ('become -COND-3SG') *enfin radicalement antipathique à la raison moderne.* (A. Comte, *Discours sur l'esprit positif*, 1844)

'Morality then became more and more affected by the growing discredit that would necessarily undergo a theology, which, henceforth retrograde, would finally become radically disagreeable to modern reason.'

(4) *Soulagée de se voir marcher assez droit, Gloire **préfèrerait*** ('prefer-COND-3SG') *rentrer à pied plutôt que de prendre un taxi.* (J. Echenoz, *Les Grandes blondes*, 1995)

'Relieved to be seen walking straight enough, Glory would prefer to return on foot rather than to take a taxi.'

In these two previous uses, the conditional is in competition with the prospective imperfect, and therefore it may be replaced by it (*remonterait* / *allait remonter*; *préfèrerait* / *allait préférer*).

2.2 The prospective imperfect

Aller is a prototypical instance of the grammaticalization of a spatial lexical unit into a grammatical unit indicating tense (e.g. Fleischman 1982; Heine & Kuteva 2002; De Mulder 2002; Bres & Labeau 2013a) according to the "verb-to-affix cline", thus summarized by Hopper & Traugott (1993 :108): "full verb > auxiliary > clitic > affix". In the present case, it is the first step (auxiliary). The movement verb *aller*, stage (a), is grammaticalized into an auxiliary of imminence, stage (b); then into an auxiliary of subjective ulteriority, stage (c);

and finally, into objective ulteriority, stage (d), according to a development path that may be represented as follows:

Table 2: Prospective imperfect

Aller	MOVEMENT	→	IMMINENCE	→	subjective ULTERIORITY	→	objective ULTERIORITY
Stages	(a)		(b) (15 th)		(c) (16 th)		(d) (late 18 th)

Two other development paths of the grammaticalization for *aller* should be pointed out: first, the *narrative* use (Gougenheim 1929, Bres & Barceló 2007), found as early as the 13th century as exemplified in (5), and second, the *allure extraordinaire* (since the 15th) (Damourette & Pichon 1970 [1911-1936], Bres & Labeau 2013b) as instantiated in (6):

(5) *Sur ces propos, feirent leur accord, et, en regardant le lieu le plus propre pour faire ceste belle oeuvre, elle **vat dire** ('go-PRS-3SG dire-INF') qu'elle n'en sçavoit poinct de meilleure ne plus loing de tout soupson, que une petite maison qui estoit dedans le parc, où il y avoit chambre et lict tout à propos.* (M. de Navarre, *L'Heptaméron* 1550)

‘About this subject, in agreement, and while searching for an appropriate place to do this beautiful work, she told him that she didn’t know a better or further one from suspicion, than a small house in the park where there was a suitable room and bed.’

In this example of narrative use, *vat dire* (go-PRS-3SG say-INF) competes with the *passé simple* (preterit). This construction, attested between the 13th and 17th centuries, is grammaticalized as a periphrastic preterit only in Catalan and a few Occitan dialects.

(6) *elle oblya tellement son honneur et conscience, qu'elle **alla aymer** ('go-PRET-3SG love-INF') un jeune homme.* (M. de Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, 1511)

‘She forgot her honor and conscience to such an extent that she loved a young man.’

The *allure extraordinaire*, which is constructed with all tenses, has spanned over the centuries and is today quite alive.

2.2.1 Stage (a) - *movement*

Aller, as a *verb*, means the displacement of an animated agent towards a destination, which will be reached at the end of this movement, therefore at a later stage than this very

movement (*Corinne allait*, ‘go-IMP-3SG’) à Sète, ‘*Corinne was going to Sète*’). This *destination* may be a process in the infinitive, which is realized at the end of this displacement, as in (7). This use, which is found in Vulgar Latin, is realized at all times.⁴

(7) *Et Tronc lez mist en prison, et lez **alloit** (‘go-IMP-3SG’) visiter moult songneusement*
(anonyme, *Ysaïe le Triste*, 1400)

‘Tronc put them in prison and went to visit them with care.’

2.2.2 Stage (b) - *imminence*

The movement creates a spatial gap – the process is reached at the end of this gap – which implies a temporal gap. By metonymy, one gets from the spatial gap to the temporal gap, to indicate the stage immediately preceding a process, namely, its imminence (as early as the 15th century), as in (8) and (9):⁵

(8) *Je m'en voys à la ville ; car je sçay bien que je trouveray tout prest à monter à cheval et mes gens aussi ; car le cappitaine de Crathor les **alloit tous faire habiller** (‘go-IMP-3SG dress-INF’), quant je suis sailly icy avec vous.* (Jean de Bueil, *Le Jouvencel*, 1461)

‘I’m leaving for the city; for I know that I would find my men ready to mount their horses. The captain Crator was about to dress them when I left with you.’

(9) - *Il a des qualitez qui me le font vanter.*

- *Il ne les auroit pas s’il n’**alloit heriter** (‘go-IMP-3SG inherit-INF’).* (P. du Ryer, *Les Vendanges de Suresne*, 1636)

‘- He has qualities that make me praise him.

- He wouldn’t have them if he wasn’t about to inherit.’

Allait + inf. represents the pre-processual phase, and may be glossed by « *était sur le point de* ». Therefore « s’il n’alloit hériter » ≈ « s’il n’était sur le point d’hériter », ‘he wasn’t about to inherit’.

The imminence may be *avertive* (Henry 1952, Kuteva 1998), in that the right co-text means that the process is not realized, as in (10):

(10) *Elle m’**allait traiter** (‘go-IMP-3SG treat-INF’) en auteur du forfait,/ Mais ma fuite a rendu sa fureur sans effet.* (P. Corneille, *La Veuve ou le Traître trahi*, 1634)

‘She was about to treat me as the perpetrator of the crime. But my escape rendered her fury useless.’

2.2.3 Stage (c) - *subjective ulteriority*

From the representation of the *pre-processual* phase, one gets into the representation of ulteriority of the *processual* phase. And this is realized with an important enunciative modification: in order to produce the meaning of subjective ulteriority, the process must be in indirect speech, as shown in (11):

(11) *Il est parti soudain après votre amour sue, /A trouvé tout aisé, m'en a promis l'issue, / Qu'il allait y pourvoir* ('go-IMP-3SG provide-INF') *et que vers la minuit /Vous fussiez toute prête à déloger sans bruit.* (P. Corneille, *L'Illusion comique*, 1639)

'He left suddenly as soon as he knew that you loved him, he promised me that he was going to find a happy exit, and that around midnight you would be ready to leave silently.'

In (11), the prospective imperfect is in a complement clause and the ulteriority is thus assessed from the utterance (*promettre*) of an agent set in the past. The process will then be achieved or it will not: it falls into the scope of branching time.

2.2.4 Stage (d) - *objective ulteriority*

Starting from the end of the 18th century, the prospective imperfect in an independent clause may, as a sign of the fading of the utterance of an agent, inscribe an event as subsequent in the linearity of the past.

(12) *Je ne m'étais jamais crue si près de la mort ; hélas ! Elle allait pourtant s'offrir* ('go-IMP-3SG happen-INF') *à moi sous un aspect encore plus réel. Roland revient, il me sort du cercueil.* (Sade, *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu*, 1791)

'I had never thought to be so close to death; alas! It was going to happen to me under an even more real appearance. Roland comes back, he gets me out of the coffin.'

In this case, the prospective imperfect may be glossed by a simple past (*passé simple*) or by a present perfect (*passé composé*):

(12a) *Je ne m'étais jamais crue si près de la mort ; hélas ! Elle s'offrit / s'est offerte* ('happen-PRET-3SG' / 'be-PRS-3SG happen-PTCP-PST') *pourtant à moi sous un aspect encore plus réel.*

'I'd never thought to be so close to death; alas! It happened to me under an even more real appearance.'

The prospective imperfect actualizes an event which has taken place. It is fully inscribed in the objective unilinearity of the past.

With regard to this development path, it is worth mentioning that:

- (i) the new meanings do not eliminate the former meanings, but add up with them;
- (ii) the transition may be seamless: for instance, some occurrences may perfectly be relevant both to imminence and subjective ulteriority.

The competition between the prospective imperfect and the present conditional occurs in examples in stages (c) and (d): cases that do not represent the process in its pre-processual phase, as in stage (b), but in a processual phase referenced as ulterior, either subjectively (stage (c)) as in (11) or objectively (stage (d)) as in (12).

In order to follow diachronically the competition of the two forms, we now focus on subjective ulteriority, previously illustrated for the present conditional by examples (1) and (2), and for the prospective imperfect by (11). As a consequence, since its use for both forms lies within the context of finite complement clauses and is introduced by the conjunction *que* (*propositions complétives*), these clauses can easily be retrieved in large amounts in a text corpus (with respect to other uses).

3. An experiment with a multi-genre diachronic corpus of annotated texts

Our study is based on the large body of texts gathered within the framework of the *PRESTO* project (ANR-DFG program). This project produced a corpus of 545 text samples (monographs, collections, etc.) from the 16th to the 20th centuries, belonging to various discursive genres (narrative, poetry, theatre, treatise, correspondence, etc.) - a part of these samples having been selected from well-known archives: *Frantext*, *Épistémon*, *ARTFL*, *CÉPM* (Corpus Électronique de la Première Modernité) and *Gallica* - (for details on the processing of the *PRESTO* corpus, cf. Diwersy *et al.* 2015).

The whole corpus is categorized and lemmatized by means of a part-of-speech tagger (*TreeTagger*), which applies a linguistic annotation model designed and developed as part of the *PRESTO* Project. *Table 3* gives an outline of the corpus we used.

Table 3: Text samples comprising the PRESTO corpus

Sample	Period	Genres	Texts	Words
PRESTO_16s	16 th century	narrative, poetry, theatre, treatise	50	3,048,984
PRESTO_17s	17 th century	narrative, poetry, theatre, treatise, correspondence	106	7,042,386
PRESTO_18s	18 th century	narrative, poetry, theatre, treatise, correspondence, encyclopedia	128	7,762,787
PRESTO_19s	19 th century	narrative, poetry, theatre, treatise, correspondence, press	150	8,592,846
PRESTO_20s	20 th century	narrative, poetry, theatre, treatise, press	111	8,692,270
<i>Total</i>			545	35,139,273

In order to retrieve the clauses relevant to our study, we first ran a set of automated queries against the corpus (based on *CQP* - Corpus Query Processor, cf. Evert & Hardie 2011), targeting sequences composed of the conjunction *que* followed by a verbal form in the present conditional or prospective imperfect. We then randomly selected 50% of the sequences matching the query, keeping the relative proportions per century. Then, the selected sequences were searched for instances meeting the requirement of subjective ulteriority in a finite complement clause. As a result, we were able to build a concordance comprising 3,067 lines, which was submitted to statistical processing and is presented in the following section.

4. Evolution of the competition between conditional and prospective

Table 4 shows the relative proportions per century of the present conditional and the prospective imperfect with respect to the occurrences observed in our concordance.

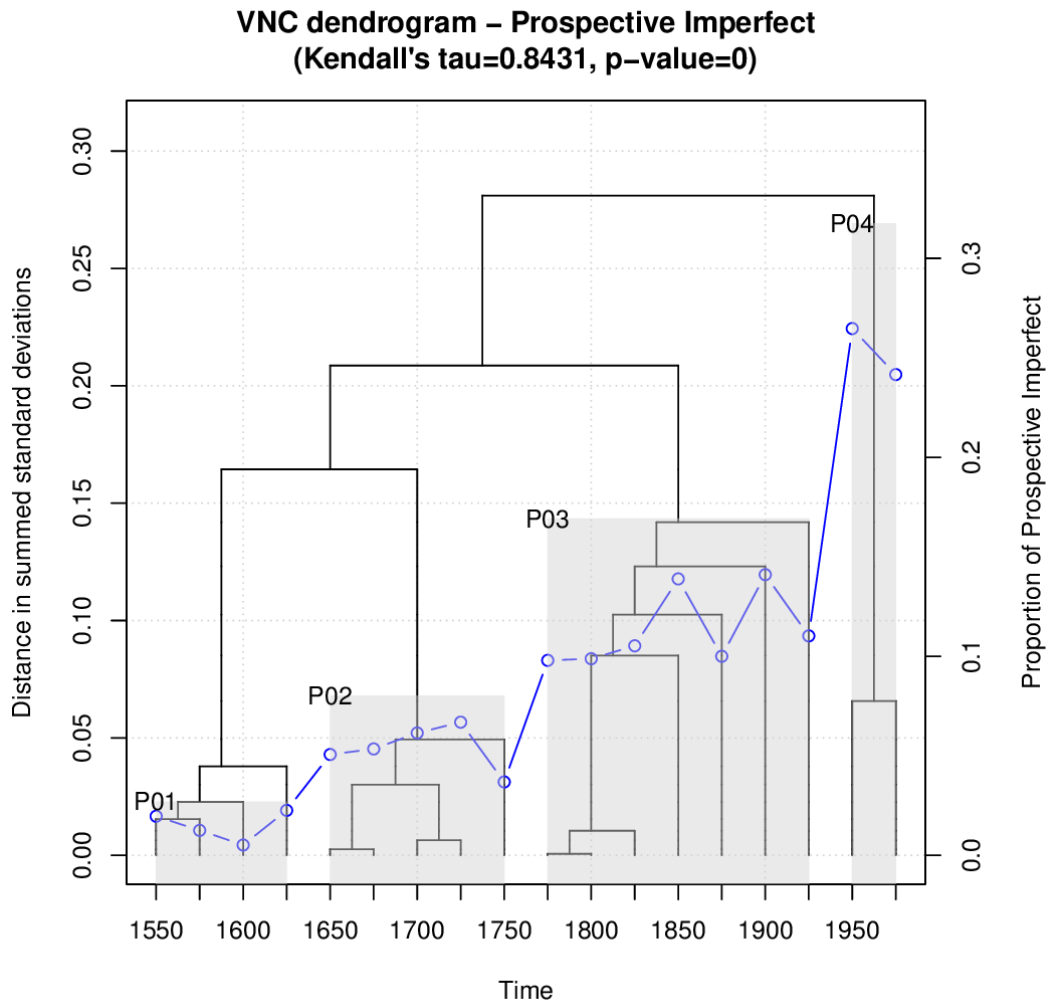
Table 4: Distribution of the two forms per century

Verbal form	16th	17th	18th	19th	20th	<i>Total</i>
ALLAIT + INF	3	22	58	54	158	295
Conditional	210	727	819	438	578	2772
<i>Total occurrences</i>	213	749	877	492	736	3067
ALLAIT + INF (ratio)	1,41 %	2,94 %	6,61 %	10,98 %	21,47 %	9,62 %
Conditional (ratio)	98,59 %	97,06 %	93,34 %	89,02 %	78,53 %	90,38 %

In the following paragraphs, we focus our observations on the prospective imperfect form, since it is the one that starts to compete with the conditional and since the calculations related to the two forms are complementary. The previous figures reveal a steady increase of its proportion from the 16th up to the 20th century.

In order to examine more finely the changes occurring in each century, we reprocessed the results shown in *Table 4* and analyzed them as a series of observations based on 25-year intervals. Such chronological series may be analyzed according to a procedure called *Variability-based Neighbor Clustering* (VNC), introduced by Gries & Hilpert (2008; 2012) and already implemented for the study of diachronic corpora. *Figure 1* shows the VNC dendrogram for our data on the prospective imperfect, overlaid with a line plot representing the chronological evolution of its observed proportion in each of the 25-year intervals.⁶

Figure 1: Variability-based Neighbor Clustering



A close examination of this hierarchical clustering leads to the highlighting of four adjacent areas (displayed in gray in the figure), representing four successive stages in the evolution of the prospective imperfect (see *Table 5*). The dendrogram has to be analyzed from the top:

- a first split appears on the year 1950, indicating the main tipping point (isolating stage P04 on the right),
- in the cluster on the left, the year 1775 marks a second split (revealing stage P03),
- the last split is around the year 1650 (between P01 and P02).

If *Figure 1* is read following the line of chronological evolution, two additional observations may be drawn from this figure:

throughout period P03 (and in particular between 1850 and 1950), the increase of the proportion of the prospective imperfect is characterized by some fluctuation;

the transition from P03 to P04 (second half of the 20th century) marks a neat quantitative shift in the progression of the prospective imperfect.

Table 5: Four stages in the evolution of the prospective imperfect

Period		Cumulative proportion (by period)
P01	1500 – 1649	1,49 %
P02	1650 – 1774	5,56 %
P03	1775 – 1949	11,00 %
P04	1950 – 1999	25,05 %

Having established these trends of periodization, let us now turn to the linguistic features that might be involved in the selection of the prospective imperfect or the present conditional when used to express subjective ulteriority. We choose as a starting point for further investigation the semantic category of the word (verb, noun or adjective) that takes the subordinate clause as its complement. Close inspection of the retrieved concordance shows that we are dealing with two major classes: (a) words expressing the mediation of perception and thought (class P, as illustrated in (13)) and (b) words expressing the mediation of communication (class C, as illustrated in (14)).

(13) *À l'angle de la petite allée qui conduit à la maison, il s'arrêta. On parlait dans la cuisine. Il **sentit** ('feel-PRET-3SG') que le souffle allait lui manquer. Ses jambes s'étaient remises à trembler. Il avança pourtant, l'oreille tendue.* (B. Clavel, *Les Fruits de l'hiver*, 1968)

'In the angle of the small alley that leads to the house, he stopped. Somebody talked in the kitchen. He felt like the breath was going to leave him. His legs had started to tremble again. Yet he moved, listening carefully.'

(14) *après avoir bien disputé, on se sépara sans convention & sans accommodement : sur cela on **ordonna** ('order-PRET-3SG') que les actes de la conférence seroient supprimés, & qu'on garderoit le silence sur les matieres contestées.* (D. Diderot & J. d'Alembert (s.l.d.), *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Tome 7, 1757)

‘after having a discussion, they separated without agreement: on this, it was ordered that the conference proceedings be erased and that silent be kept on the contested materials.’

Testing the association between these two classes and the prospective imperfect in each of the diachronic stages, which we have identified, yields the following results if the log-likelihood ratio is chosen as statistical test⁷ (in *Table 6*, the number of asterisks indicates different levels of significance, viz. in decreasing order *** : highly significant, ** : very significant, * : significant). Positive values indicate attraction, whereas negative ones indicate repulsion⁸ :

Table 6: Semantic categories in the four stages

	C (communication)	P (perception and thought)
PROSPECTIVE IMPERFECT (P01: 1500-1649)	-15.72***	15.72***
PROSPECTIVE IMPERFECT (P02: 1650-1774)	-16.8***	16.8***
PROSPECTIVE IMPERFECT (P03: 1775-1949)	-7.93**	7.93**
PROSPECTIVE IMPERFECT (P04: 1950-1999)	-3.95*	3.95*

These figures show that throughout all the stages there is a significant attraction of the prospective imperfect to the class of words expressing the mediation of perception and thought. In the last stage, however, this attraction is maintained in a barely significant way (lower values indicate less attraction).

In other words, there is evidence that in the earlier stages of its evolution, the prospective imperfect is co-textually more dependent on the semantic category of the words that govern the complement clause in which it appears; whereas in the most recent stage (which corresponds more or less to contemporary French), it tends toward more autonomy, which might indicate a certain kind of generalization of its subjective use. The questions remain then as to (a) why the prospective imperfect is more likely to be found in complement clauses that represent reported perception and thought than in clauses that represent reported

communication, and (b) whether a more fine-grained classification would reveal particular associations between the prospective imperfect and some subclasses (such as terms denoting perception in contrast to terms denoting cognition or emotion).

Besides testing the effects of a more fine-grained semantic classification, this analysis should be pursued with the inclusion of additional variables, but also with the observation of more than one variable at a time (multivariate analysis), which may provide new findings on the uses of these competitive forms. For now, we simply make note of the fact that, since the beginning, the ratio of the prospective imperfect has been constantly growing with respect to the present conditional, and that this evolution goes hand in hand with the balancing of the distribution that holds between the two major semantic classes of the words governing the complement clause in which the prospective imperfect appears.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we elucidated the temporal uses in discourse of the *present conditional* and the *prospective imperfect* according to their diachronic appearance and their competition in the expression of ulteriority. Firstly, we have outlined in detail the specific configurations underpinning this competition, and in a second step, we have chosen to primarily address the question of the diachronic evolution of the relationship between the *present conditional* and the *prospective imperfect*, in the expression of subjective ulteriority within the scope of finite complement clauses introduced by the conjunction *que* (*propositions complétives*). The data we extracted in this regard from a large corpus of text samples ranging from the 16th to the 20th century suggest that the proportion of *prospective imperfect* forms is steadily increasing over time and that this upward trend involves four successive stages. With respect to these four diachronic periods (ranging from 1500 to 1649, from 1650 to 1774, from 1775 to 1949 and from 1950 to 1999 respectively), we have then finally considered the influence of another variable, the semantic category of the introductory term, likely to impact the competition between *present conditional* and *prospective imperfect*, and we have shown that this variable had some significance, at least in the early stages of the competition.

It is our intention to test possible correlations with other variables, such as the discursive genre or the sociolinguistic dimension. So far, we have not been able to find evidence to support these hypotheses (the distribution of discursive genres found in the corpus studied here is related to the period of time).

Future steps of investigation may include the following questions:

Whereas both forms mean ulteriority, they are morphologically different: a synthetic form for the present conditional (which stems from the grammaticalization as an affix of *avoir* in the imperfect) and a periphrastic form for the prospective imperfect (which stems from a less advanced grammaticalization of the verb *aller* as an auxiliary). Does this morphological difference translate into a semantic difference when it comes to uses in discourse? In the corpus, is there a distribution of occurrences between the two that would be explained by a difference of temporal or enunciative representation of the process? Because of its derivation from the meaning of *imminence*, is the prospective imperfect initially (i.e. 16th and 17th centuries) used to signify imminent ulteriority? If so, has it loosened the instruction of imminence over the centuries, in order to more widely signify the ulteriority in the past and clearly compete with the conditional present? Is the difference at the enunciative level, as the prospective imperfect means the ulteriority of a process originating at the moment of a reported enunciation act, based on the analysis by Fleischman (1983: 190), of the present prospective as “express[ing] the speaker’s subjective view at the moment of utterance”?

Is the competition in the expression of objective ulteriority similar to the competition in the expression of subjective ulteriority?

Does the competition affecting the temporal uses of the conditional also affect some of its modal uses?

Is the competition *present conditional* / *prospective imperfect* similar to the competition *synthetic future* / *prospective present*? Are both competitions based on the same semantic difference between the synthetic form and the periphrasis?

To what extent does a new narrative construction, developed in the 20th century (Bres & Labeau 2013c) and exemplified by (15) and (16), revive the old construction (5) or rather derive from the construction of ulteriority, both in the present and in the imperfect?

(15) *Teddy Pendergrass est remarqué par Harold Melvin, leader du quintette vocal The Blue Notes. Il rejoint alors la formation, qui **va enchaîner** (‘go-PRS-3SG go on-INF’) une succession de tubes. En 1976, Teddy Pendergrass décide de mener une carrière solo et quitte les Blue Notes. Il **va régulièrement occuper** (‘go-PRS-3SG occupy-INF’) les premières places des meilleures ventes de disques aux USA. (Le Monde, Obituaire de T. Pendergrass, 27 .1. 2010)*

‘Teddy Pendergrass is noticed by Harold Melvin, leader of the vocal quintet The Blue Notes. He joins the group, who would go on to have a series of hits. In 1976, Teddy

Pendergrass decides to start a solo career and leaves the Blue Notes. He would go on to regularly occupy the top of the best-selling discs in the USA.'

(16) *Le ballon frisait le montant d'un Buffon qui paraissait battu (9e). Le défenseur de l'Inter, peu à la fête jusqu'à présent, allait néanmoins se racheter* ('go-IMP-3SG redeem-INF'). (*Le Figaro*, 09/07/2006)

The ball grazed the goalpost of Buffon who appeared beat (9th). The defender of Inter, not really at the party up until now, would go on to nevertheless redeem himself. (*Le Figaro*, 09/07/2006)

What happens to the competition *present conditional* / *prospective imperfect* in other Romance languages, which have grammaticalized "go" as a temporal auxiliary (e.g. Spanish or Portuguese)?

References

- Abouda, Lotfi & Marie Skrovec. 2015. "Du rapport entre formes synthétique et analytique du futur. Étude de la variable modale dans un corpus oral micro-diachronique". *Revue de Sémantique et Pragmatique* 38. 35-57.
- Benveniste, Émile. 1959. "Les relations de temps dans le verbe français". *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique*, LIV, fasc. 1. Reprint in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. 1966. Paris: Gallimard. 237-250.
- Bres, Jacques. 2012. "Conditionnel et ultériorité dans le PASSÉ : de la *subjectivité* à l'*objectivité*". *Actes du 3^{ème} Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française (CMLF)*, Lyon. SHS Web of Conferences 1. 1719-1730.
<https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20120100037>.
- Bres, Jacques, Sophie Azzopardi & Sophie Sarrazin. 2012, "Le conditionnel en français : énonciation, ultériorité dans le passé et valeurs modales". *Faits de langues* 40. 37-43.
- Bres, Jacques & Gerard Joan Barceló. 2007. "La grammaticalisation de la forme *itive* comme *prospectif* dans les langues romanes". *Combat pour les langues du monde/Fighting for the world's languages: Hommage à Claude Hagège* ed. by Jocelyne Fernandez-Vest. Paris: L'Harmattan. 91-104.
- Bres, Jacques & Emmanuelle Labeau. 2013a. "Aller et venir : des verbes de déplacement aux auxiliaires aspectuels-temporels-modaux". *Langue française* 179. 13-28.

- Bres, Jacques & Emmanuelle Labeau. 2013b. “*Allez donc sortir des sentiers battus! La production de l’effet de sens extraordinaire par aller et venir*”. *Journal of french language studies* 23:2. 151-177.
- Bres, Jacques & Emmanuelle Labeau. 2013c. “The narrative construction *va + infinitive* in Contemporary French: A linguistic phoenix rising from its medieval ashes?”. *Diachronica*, 30:3. 295-322.
- Bybee, Joan L., Revere Perkins & William Pagliuca. 1994. *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Comrie, Bernard. 1976. *Aspect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Damourette, Jacques & Édouard Pichon. 1970 [1911-1936]. *Des mots à la pensée : essai de grammaire de la langue française*. Tome V. Paris : d’Artrey.
- Detges, Ulrich. 1999. “Wie entsteht Grammatik ? Kognitive und pragmatische Determinanten der Grammatikalisierung von Tempus Markern”. *Reanalyse und Grammatikalisierung in den romanischen Sprachen* ed. by Jürgen Lang & Ingrid Neumann-Holzschuh. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag. 31-52.
- De Mulder, Walter. 2002. “Grammaticalisation, métaphore et métonymie: le cas d’aller”. *Verbum* 24:3. 229-246.
- De Mulder, Walter. 2008. “Grammaticalisation, métonymie et pertinence”. *Actes du 1^{er} Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française (CMLF), Paris*. EDP Sciences. 359-365. <https://doi.org/10.1051/cmlf08323>.
- Diwersy, Sascha, Achille Falaise, Marie-Hélène Lay & Gilles Souvay. 2015. “Traitements pour l’analyse du français préclassique”. *Actes de la 22^e conférence sur le Traitement Automatique des Langues Naturelles (TALN’2015), Caen (France)*. Association pour le Traitement Automatique des Langues. 565-571. http://www.atala.org/taln_archives/TALN/TALN-2015/taln-2015-court-037.pdf
- Evert, Stefan & Andrew Hardie. 2011. “Twenty-first century Corpus Workbench: Updating a query architecture for the new millennium”. *Proceedings of the Corpus Linguistics 2011 conference*, University of Birmingham, UK. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-artslaw/corpus/conference-archives/2011/Paper-153.pdf>
- Fleischman, Suzanne. 1982. *The future in thought and language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Fleischman, Suzanne. 1983. "From Pragmatics to Grammar: Diachronic reflections on Complex Pasts and Futures in Romance". *Lingua* 60. 183-214.
- Gougenheim, Georges. 1929. *Etude sur les périphrases verbales du français*. Paris: Nizet.
- Gardies, Jean-Louis. 1975. *La logique du temps*. Paris: PUF.
- Gries, Stefan Th. & Martin Hilpert. 2008. "The identification of stages in diachronic data: variability-based neighbour clustering". *Corpora* 3:1. 59-81.
<https://doi.org/10.3366/E1749503208000075>.
- Gries, Stefan Th. & Martin Hilpert. 2012. "Variability-based neighbor clustering: a bottom-up approach to periodization in historical linguistics". *The Oxford handbook of the history of English* ed. by Terttu Nevalainen, & Elizabeth Closs Traugott. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 134-144.
- Heine, Bernd & Tania Kuteva. 2002. *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Henry, Albert. 1952. "Du subjonctif d'imminence contrecarrée à un passage du *Tristan* de Bérout". *Romania* 73. 392-407.
<https://doi.org/10.3406/roma.1952.333010.3406/roma.1952.3330>.
- Hilpert, Martin & Stefan Th. Gries. 2009. "Assessing frequency changes in multistage diachronic corpora: Applications for historical corpus linguistics and the study of language acquisition". *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 24:4. 385-401.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/lc/fqn012>.
- Hopper, Paul J. & Elizabeth Closs Traugott. 1993/2003. *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kripke, Saul A. 1963. "Semantical Considerations on Modal Logic". *Acta Phil. Fennica* 16. 83-94.
- Lindschouw, Jan. 2011. "L'évolution du système du futur du moyen français au français moderne : la réorganisation comme un cas de régrammation". *Revue de Linguistique Romane* 75 (297). 51-98.
- Kuteva, Tania. 1998. "On Identifying an Evasive Gram: Action Narrowly Averted". *Studies in Language* 22 :1. 113–160. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sl.22.1.05kut>.
- Martin, Robert. 1981. "Le futur linguistique : temps linéaire ou temps ramifié ? (à propos du futur et du conditionnel en français)". *Langages* 64. 81-92.
- Nilsson-Ehle, Hans. 1943. "Le conditionnel "futur du passé" et la périphrase *devait* + infinitif". *Studia neophilologica* 16. 50-88.

- Poplack, Shana & Danielle Turpin. 1999. "Does the *Futur* have a future in (Canadian) French?". *Probus* 11. 133-164.
- Poplack, Sh. & N. Dion. 2009. "Prescription vs. praxis: The evolution of future temporal reference in French". *Language* 85:3. 557-587.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/prbs.1999.11.1.133>.
- Rescher, Nicholas & Alasdair Urquhart. 1971. *Temporal logic*. Vienna, New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Sarrazin, Sophie & Sophie Azzopardi. 2012. "L'alternance du conditionnel et de la périphrase itive à l'imparfait dans des corpus oraux espagnols et français". *Studia UBB Philologia*. LVII:3. 57-68.
- Vetters, Carl & Audrey Lière. 2009. "Quand une périphrase devient temps verbal : le cas d'*aller* + infinitif". *Faits de langue* 33. Paris: Ophrys.

¹ To the best of our knowledge, only Sarrazin & Azzopardi (2012) have so far addressed this issue (contrastively in French and Spanish), on oral contemporary corpora.

² We borrow the adjectives *subjective* (\approx non-factive) and *objective* (\approx factive) from Nilsson-Ehle, 1943.

³ From subjective constructions to objective constructions, the variation is modal, but it is limited to the scope of the aspecto-temporal value of ulteriority.

⁴ E.g. in the *Vulgate* by Jerome (382): *Veniunt adorare eum*, "ils viennent l'adorer".

⁵ According to Detges (1999), followed by De Mulder (2008) (and in agreement with Bybee *et al.* 1994, according to whom the grammaticalization of a form as future goes through a development step, in which an intention is expressed), an *intentionality step* appears as soon as the 13th century, therefore before the *imminence step*, by inference starting from the displacement meaning: the agent moves *with the aim of* doing this or that. We must recognize not being convinced by the examples proposed by Detges and De Mulder to validate the hypothesis of an autonomous intentionality step: the intentionality is assumed as soon as the first step, and we have not found any occurrence for which the intentionality does not go along with displacement.

⁶ *Figure 1* includes in its main title the value yielded by Kendall's Tau rank correlation coefficient, which indicates a significant upward trend throughout the whole period of investigation. The use of Kendall's Tau for analyzing global trends in diachronic data has been suggested by Hilpert & Gries (2009:389-390).

⁷ The log-likelihood ratio is used here as a statistical test to estimate the correlation between the two variables (semantic category and time): since the logarithm of the

likelihood ratio yields a value different from 0, the null hypothesis (i.e. the independency of the two variables) may be rejected.

⁸ As we are dealing with a configuration of two variables with two levels each, the calculated scores are exactly the opposite in terms of attraction and repulsion.