

# On reading late modern intentions

a corpus-based analysis of the late modern  
English subjectification of *be going to*

Sara Budts & Peter Petré

*Université de Lille 3 / University of Leuven*

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# Introduction

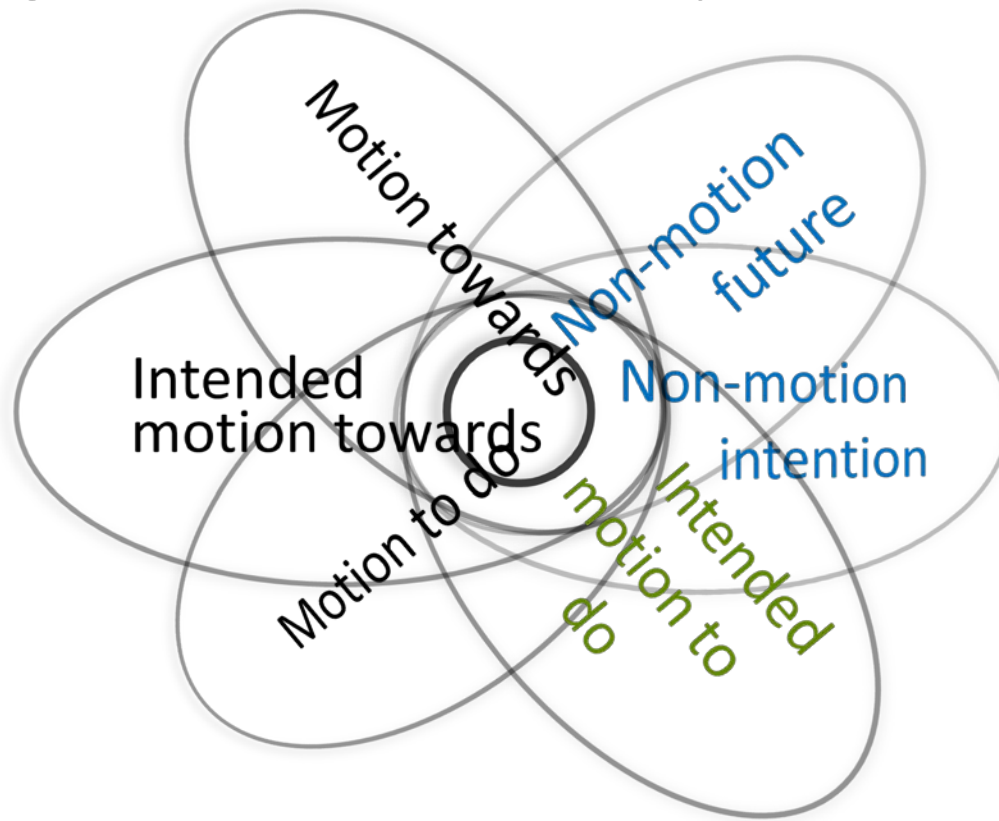
- *Be going to*: classic in grammaticalisation studies
- [BE *going*] + [*to* inf] = motion + purpose
  - > [BE *going to*] + inf = future
- motion > intention thoroughly investigated (e.g. Pérez 1990, Pertejo 1999, Bybee 2006, Traugott 2011, 2012, Garrett 2012, Petré 2013)
- What happened afterwards?

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# From intention to prediction (Disney 2009)

- [BE *going to*] has several semantic layers



# From intention to prediction (Disney 2009)

- Grammaticalization = lexical core stripped out of these layers
  - Intention > prediction in clauses with 3rd person subjects
    - Always contain amount of guesswork
      - (1) I am going to meet her > They are going to meet
  - Intention > prediction relates to lowering of degree of agentivity
    - (2) He is going to kill you > He is going to astonish you
  - Loss of intentionality eased by embedding cognition expressions
    - (3) I observed the coachman beginning to get down, as if we were going to stop presently. (1861)

# Birth of future semantics (Traugott 1989)

- *Will* and *shall*: deontic meaning > future semantics
- Shift smoothed by
  - stage of relative future = holds irrespective of time of utterance  
(4) *þa Darius geseah þæt he oferwunnen beon wolde, ...*  
‘When Darius saw that he would be defeated’ (c925. Or 3)
- Shift from relative to absolute future = subjectification:
  - absolute = speaker taken as (temporal) reference point  
(5) *Peter, Wel i þe icnowe; þou wolt fur-sake me þrien ar þe coc him crowe.* (c1250 Judas (Trin-C B.14.39): 36)  
‘Peter, I know you well. You will forsake me thrice ...’

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# Hypothesis

- *Be going to* underwent subjectification
  - Intentions of the subject > extent to which the speaker can assess these intentions
- The new epistemic layer leads to
  - weakening of underlying intentional layer
  - broadening of range of possible subjects and infinitives
- Development similar to future auxiliaries *will/shall*

# Four factors

1. More contexts where it is harder for the speaker to assess the intentions of the subject
  - shift from first to third person subjects
  - decrease in imminence of the infinitival complements
2. More markers of this increased speaker effort
  - increase in markers of the speakers' (un)certainty
  - increase in questions
3. Result: epistemic layer dominates intentional layer
  - decrease in agentivity of the subject
4. Shift to absolute future via stage of relative future:
  - decrease in past tenses

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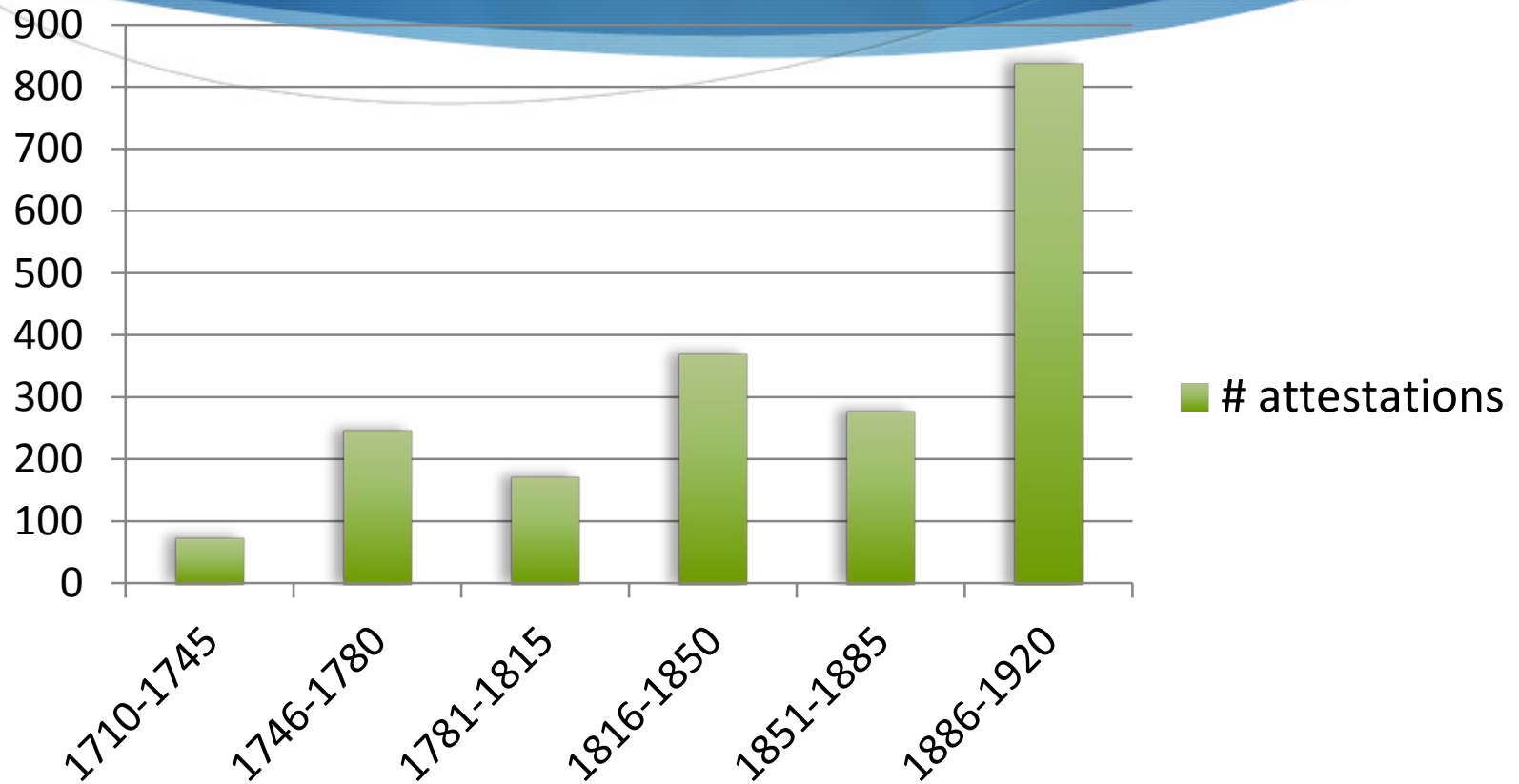


# Data

- CLMET3.0 (De Smet, Diller & Tyrkkö, 2011):
  - 1710-1920
  - 34 million words
  - natively divided in 3 periods of 70 years each
  - we divided in 6 periods, covering 35 years each
- 4375 instances of *be + (3) + (a)going + (3) + to* retrieved
  - for each period half of them analysed

# Data

Number of attestations per period



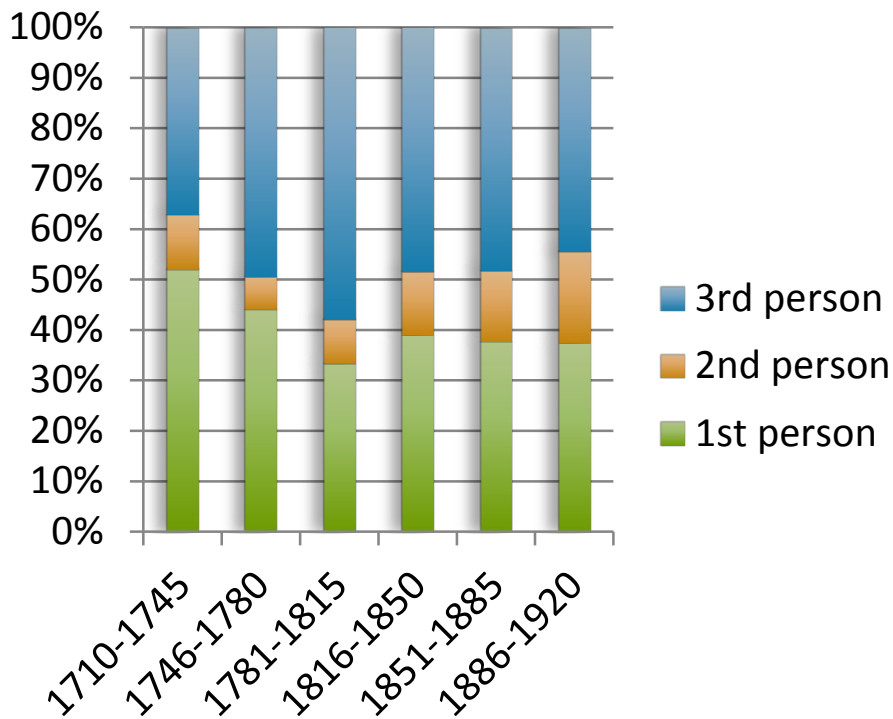
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# Hypothesis 1.1

“Third person subjects lose ground to first person subjects”

## Person



- 18th-century: *be going to* used to express intentions of others
  - strengthens subjectivity
- 19th century: share of second person subjects increases:
  - appearance in questions and directives

# Hypothesis 1.2

“There is an increase in non-imminent infinitival complements”

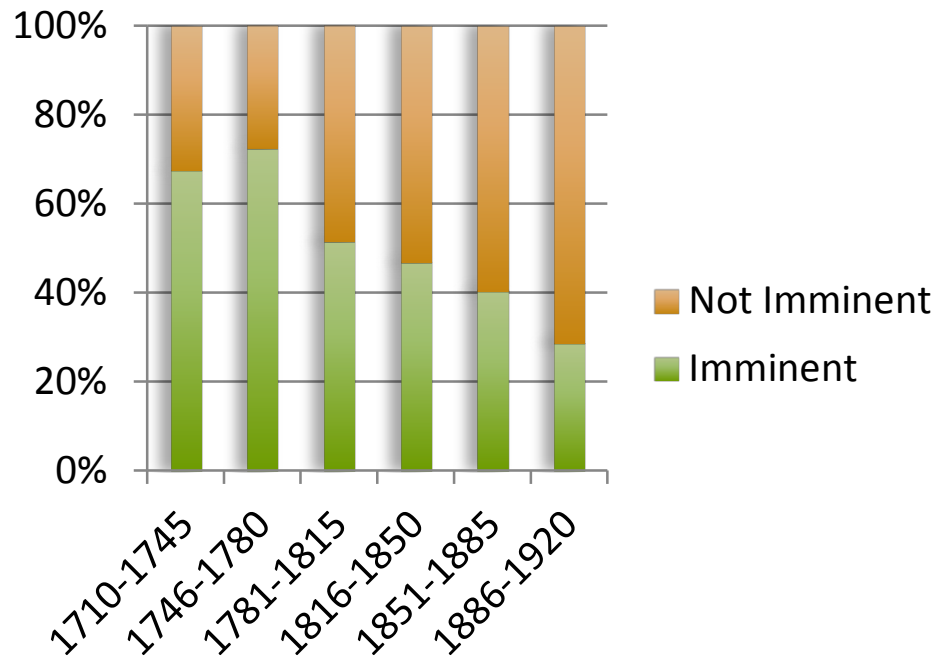
- Imminence
  - action or event of the infinitival complement is about to begin
  - preparations have been made
- Imminent (6) vs non-imminent (7):
  - (6) When he put her down she was afraid she **was going to** cry, so she began to laugh (...) (1886-1920)
  - (7) In future, I'm **going to** be very careful what articles of your dress I praise (1886-1920)



# Hypothesis 1.2

“There is an increase in non-imminent infinitival complements”

## Imminence



- Strong association with verbs of communication:  
(8) But as she **was going to answer** me, a still greater solemnity took possession of her charming features. (1746-1780)

# Preliminary summary (1)

Throughout 18th century:

- 3rd person subjects > 1st person subject
- imminence declines

By the beginning of the 19th century:

- more contexts that require more speaker effort

→ increase in epistemic marking ?

# Hypothesis 2.1

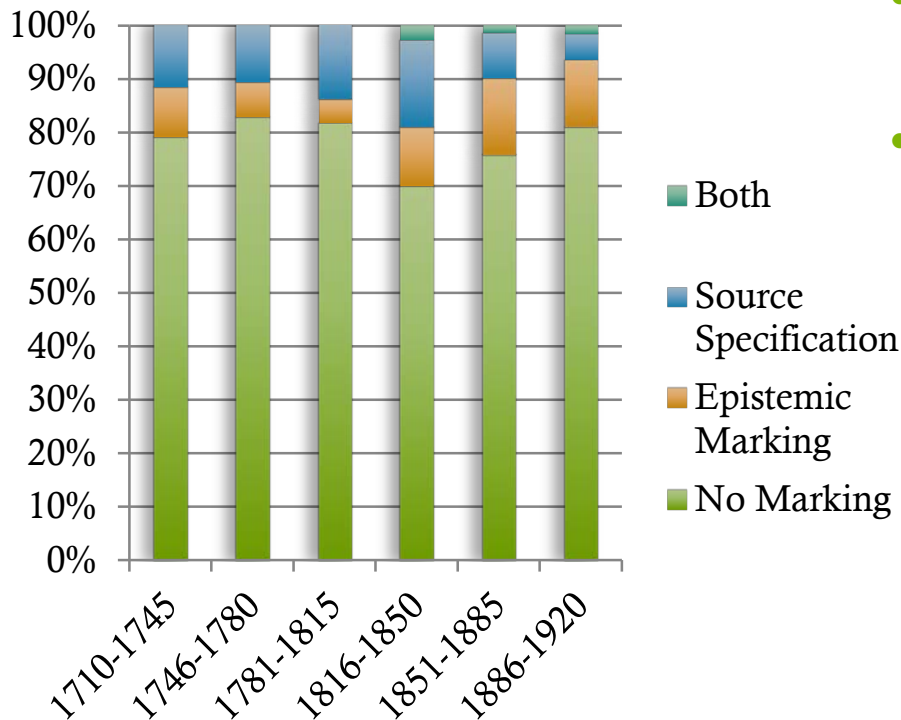
“There is an increase in epistemic marking and source specification”

- Epistemic marking: all sorts of marking that indicate that the speaker is (un)certain about his proposition
  - (9) **Surely**, I said, "you don't think that you are going to die because you dreamed you saw your old father (1886-1920)
- Source specification: evidence underwriting the speaker's proposition (including hearsay)
  - (10) Some time ago **it was all over our town** that he was going to be married to the parson's youngest daughter (1746-1780)
- Smaller dataset (N=1250)

# Hypothesis 2.1

“There is an increase in epistemic marking and source specification”

**Epistemic Marking and Source Specification**

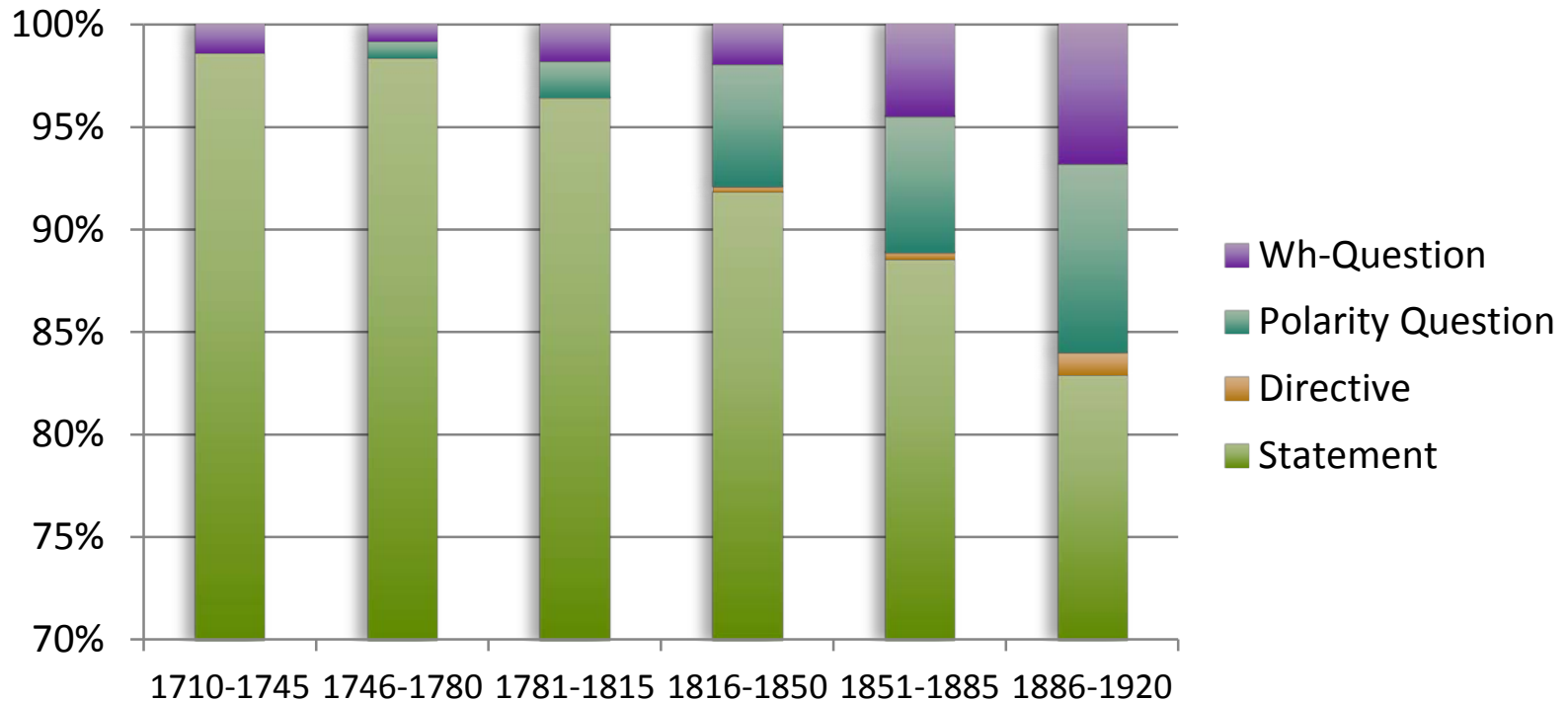


- Increase in marking in first half of 19th century
- Significant cross-dependencies with
  - 3rd person subject ( $p < 0.001$ )
  - non-imminence ( $p < 0.0001$  for epistemics /  $p = 0.023$  for source spec.)

# Hypothesis 2.2

“There is an increase in questions”

**Sentence Types**



# Preliminary summary (2)

Throughout 18th century:

- 3rd person subjects > 1st person subjects
- imminence declines

By the beginning of the 19th century:

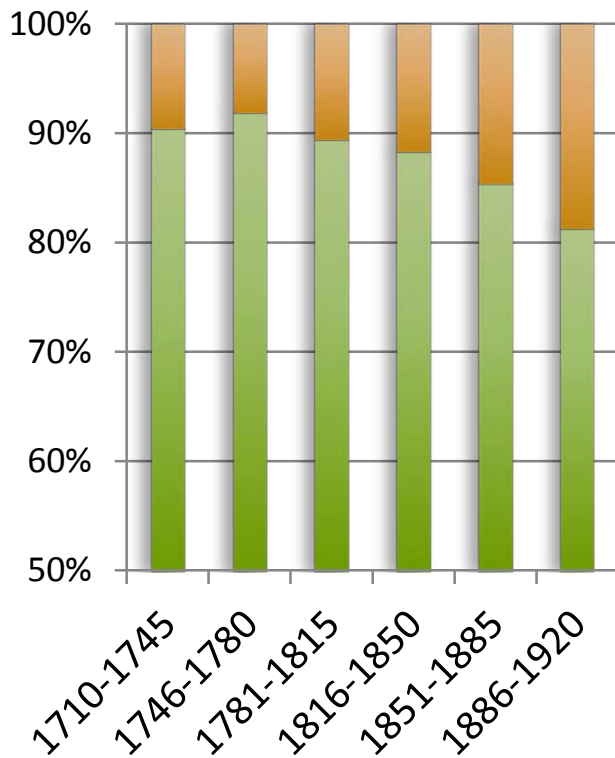
- more contexts that require more speaker effort
- visible in increase in questions and markers of (un)certainty

→ decrease in agentivity of the subject

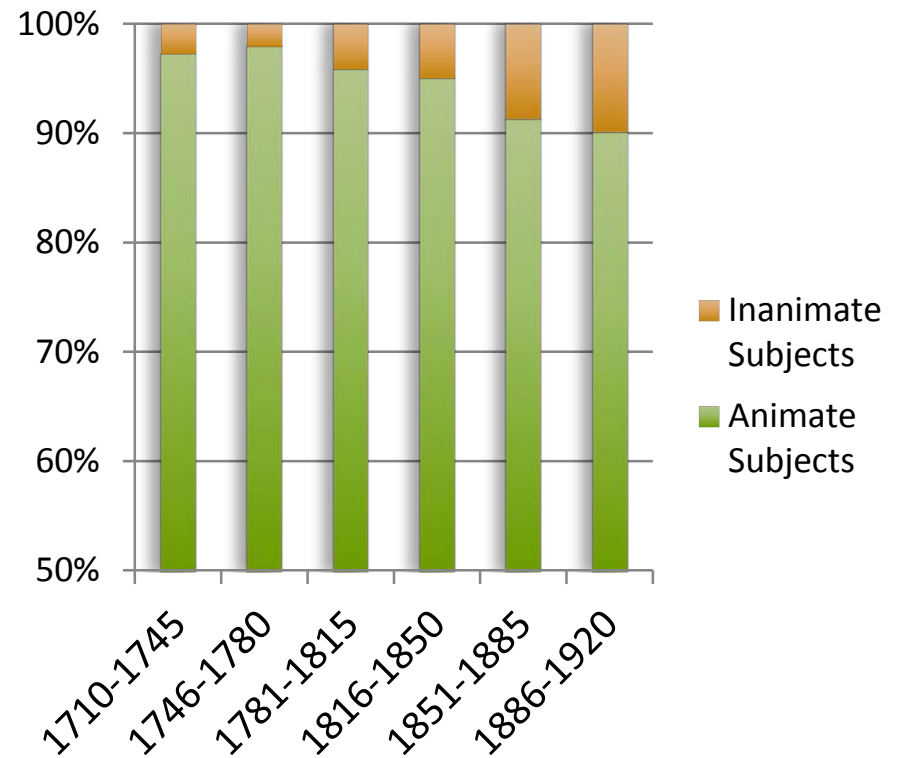
# Hypothesis 3

“There is an increase in the range of non-agentive infinitival complements and subjects”

## Intention



## Animacy



No Intention  
Intention

Inanimate Subjects  
Animate Subjects

# Preliminary summary (3)

Throughout 18th century:

- 3rd person subjects > 1st person subject
- imminence declines

By the beginning of the 19th century:

- more contexts that require more speaker effort
- visible in increase in questions and markers of (un)certainty

Emphasis on speaker allows intentionality to weaken:

- increase in inanimate subjects
- decrease in intentional subjects

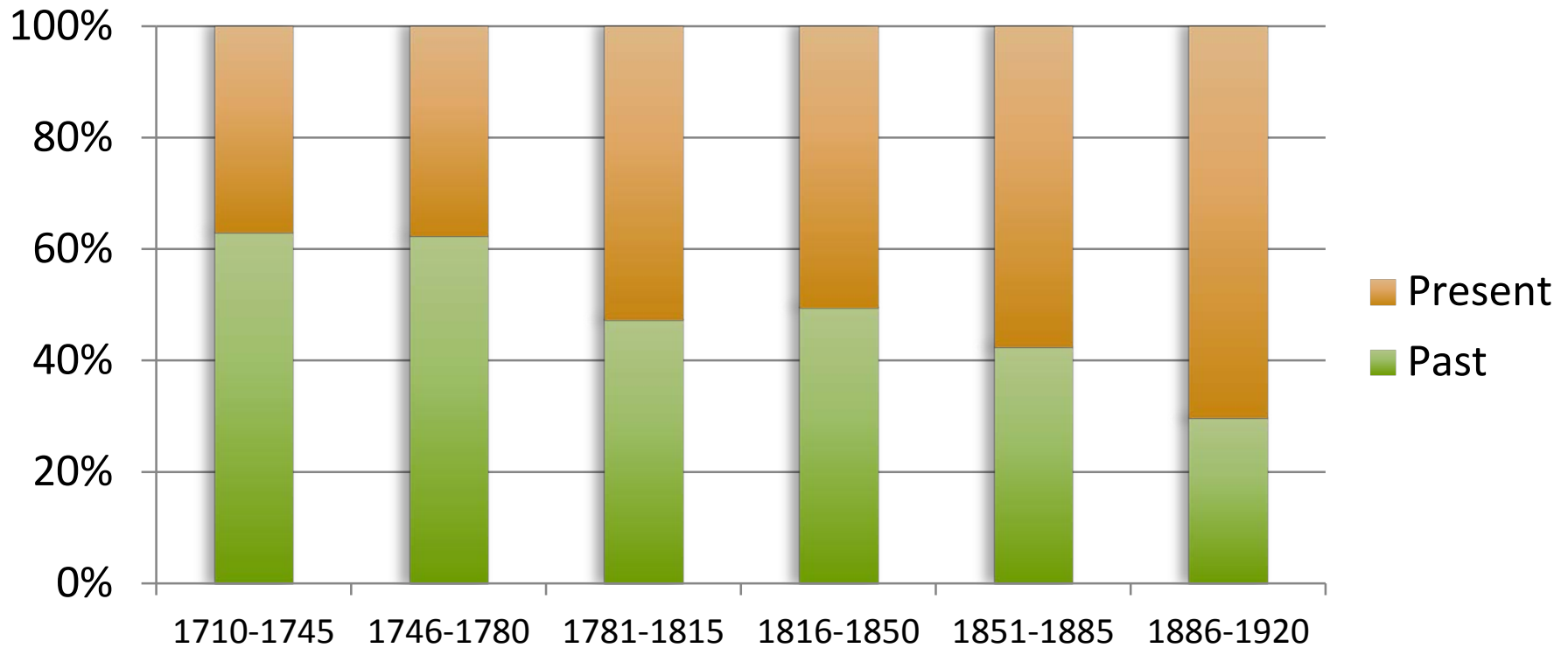
Intermediate stage of relative future?



# Hypothesis 4

“There is a decrease in the number of past tense forms of *be going to*”

## Tense



# Hypothesis 4

“There is a decrease in the number of past tense forms  
of *be going to*”

- 2 usage contexts:
  - Relative past:

(11) As the war was then carried on between the French and Italians with the utmost inhumanity, **they were going** at once **to perpetrate** those two extremes, suggested by appetite and cruelty. (1746-1780)
  - Near-actualisation:

(12) Take that, said she, (...) and **was going to** hit him a great slap; but he held her hand. (1710-1745)

    - really common with verbs of communication and (highly) transitive verbs

# Preliminary summary (4)

Throughout 18th century:

- 3rd person subjects > 1st person subject
- imminence declines

By the beginning of the 19th century:

- more contexts that require more speaker effort
- visible in increase in questions and markers of (un)certainty

Emphasis on speaker allows intentionality to weaken:

- increase in inanimate subjects
- decrease in intentional subjects

Number of past tenses declines:

- intermediate stage of relative future
- general process of subjectification

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# Conclusion

- ◆ *Be going to* undergoes subjectification process:
  - ◆ emphasis moves from subject to speaker
  - ◆ new epistemic meaning causes intentionality to weaken
  - ◆ from relative to absolute future
  - ◆ parallel to other auxiliaries of future tense

# Thank you!

Sara Budts

[sara.budts@student.kuleuven.be](mailto:sara.budts@student.kuleuven.be)

Peter Petré

[peter.petre@univ-lille3.fr](mailto:peter.petre@univ-lille3.fr)

[www.uantwerpen.be/mind-bending-grammars/](http://www.uantwerpen.be/mind-bending-grammars/)

