

# The narrative construction *va* + *infinitive* in Contemporary French: A linguistic phoenix rising from its medieval ashes?<sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract

In Old and Middle French (12th centuries), *va* [“goes”] + INF was used in narrations in the past. A similar usage seems to have reappeared and be spreading today. However, the old construction combined with past tenses whereas the new one is found only with forms anchored in present and future. We argue that the contemporary construction derives not from the old one, but from a metanarrative construction. On the basis of its future interpretation, *va* + INF aids the organization of the narration, announcing subsequent events through a hypernymic process. The periphrasis thus approaches a narrative value through projecting the time of events onto that of narration. With the disappearance of all deictic markers, the GO-periphrases are no longer hypernyms: they appear on the same temporal line of events as the neighboring situations and are understood as fully completed.

## 1. Setting the stage

Typological studies (Hagège 1993, Bybee *et al.* 1994, Dahl 2000, Bourdin 2008, among others) have consistently shown that spatial markers (such as movement verbs) tend to grammaticalize into temporal markers. The French itive and ventive forms (*aller* and *venir*),<sup>1</sup> as auxiliaries followed by an infinitive or participle (present, less frequently past), have developed throughout the history of French into no fewer than eleven grammaticalized interpretations (Bres & Labeau 2012). We focus on the construction we call *narrative*, following Larreya (2005) and Lansari (2009). The construction was found in Old and Middle French (12th-16th centuries) (1) and it seems – for potentially different reasons – to be spreading in Contemporary French<sup>2</sup> (2):

- (1) *Sur ces propos, feirent leur accord, et, en regardant le lieu le plus propre pour faire ceste belle oeuvre, elle **vat dire** 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. Le gentil homme, qui n'eust trouvé nul lieu mauvais, se contenta de cestuy-là.* (Navarre M. de, *L'Heptaméron*, 1550)  
“Upon those words, they agreed and while looking for the best-suited place to do that beautiful work, she **said (go-PRES-3SG say-INF)** that she did not know any better or freer of any suspicion than a small house that was in the park, where a room and a bed

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<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Damourette & Pichon (1911-1936/1970), Gougenheim (1929), Pérez Saldanya (1998), Detges (1999), De Mulder (2002, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> We use this term to refer to post-World War II French, as distinct from Modern French (1789-World War II).

were conveniently to be found. The gentleman who would not have found any place bad, contented himself with that one.”

- (2) *C’est le producteur Rob Fusari qui va trouver le nom de lady Gaga, en s’inspirant de Radio Gaga, une chanson du groupe Queen. Dans cette logique, la créature Lady Gaga claque la porte du rock pour ouvrir celle de la dance musique, dans le sillage de Madonna.*

*Avant de réussir à vendre 14 millions d’albums et 35 millions de singles en pleine crise du disque, Lady Gaga a puisé son inspiration dans le monde de la nuit new-yorkaise en se produisant avec la DJ Lady Starlight, qui va l’orienter vers l’exubérance esthétique.*

*Dès lors, Lady Gaga va pousser la culture gay à son paroxysme .... (Le Monde 16-17 May 2010)*

“Producer Rob Fusari was the one who **found** (go-PRES-3SG find-INF) the name Lady Gaga, inspired by Radio Gaga, a song by Queen. As a result, the Lady Gaga creation slammed the door of rock to open that of dance music, in the wake of Madonna. Before managing to sell 14 million albums and 35 million singles in the middle of a record industry crisis, Lady Gaga drew her inspiration from the world of New York nightlife in performing with DJ Lady Starlight who **steered** (go-PRES-3SG her orientate-INF) her towards aesthetic exuberance. From then on, Lady Gaga **would go on pushing** (go-PRES-3SG push-INF) gay culture to its paroxysm.”

We begin by describing how this construction works: the *aller* auxiliary in the present signifies a prospective orientation towards the initial boundary of the event expressed by the following infinitive that is ‘aspectually’ understood as having reached its final boundary. At a ‘textual’ level, that process introduces a new reference point in the diegesis<sup>3</sup> and contributes to the progression of the narration. At a ‘cotextual’ level, i.e. at the level of linguistic context, it refers to an event located before the moment of narration — that is to say in the past. It works ‘anaphorically’ and not deictically: the prospective movement originates in the situation that precedes it rather than in the moment of speech. We note an important ‘cotextual’ difference between the old and contemporary constructions. In (1) *vat* + INF is surrounded by past tenses (past historic: *feirent*[do-PS-3PL], *se contenta* [be happy with-PS-3SG]; imperfect: *sçavoit* [know-IMP-3SG], *estoit* [be-IMP-3SG], *avoit* [have-IMP-3SG]) ; in (2), the periphrasis is found together with the present (*claque la porte* [slam the door- PRES-3SG]).

The narrative construction in (2) needs to be distinguished from – among other things – the construction in which *va* keeps its full meaning of movement verb (3), as well as from the grammaticalized construction in which *va* participates in the periphrastic future (initially with a proximal interpretation) from the 15th century onwards (4):

- (3) *Alcandre voulut faire d'une pierre deux coups, et employer ses amis plustost à son amour qu'à sa vengeance. Il va voir un jeune gentilhomme bien fait et vaillant, qui s'appelloit Meronte, et le pria de le servir et de l'aider à m'enlever dans le temps qu'il croyoit se battre. (Pure M. de, La Prétieuse ou le Mystère des ruelles, 1656)*

“Alcandre wanted to kill two birds with one stone and use his friends for his love rather than for his revenge. He **went** (go-PRES-3SG see-INF) to see a young gentleman

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<sup>3</sup> From the French *diégèse*, which Genette (1972:72) defines as narrative contents, and likens to *histoire*.

well built and strong, who was called Meronte, and begged him to serve him and to help him kidnap me while he expected to be fighting.”

- (4) *Vous serez bien étonnée, Madame, en apprenant que je pars de chez vous aussi précipitamment. Cette démarche va vous paraître bien extraordinaire ; mais votre surprise va redoubler encore quand vous en saurez les raisons.* (Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, 1782)  
“You will be very surprised, Madame, upon hearing that I so hurriedly leave our house. That behavior **will appear** (go-PRES-3SG appear-INF) to you extraordinary, but your surprise **will intensify** (go-PRES-3SG intensify-INF) further when you know the reasons for it.”

In (3), *va* means that the subject *il* moves in physical space towards another character (*un gentilhomme*); in (4), *va* works deictically: it positions *paraître* and *redoubler* as futures (proximal) in relation to the moment of speech. A substitution test shows those differences: in narrative contexts (1, 2), *va* + INF can be replaced by a present tense (a narrative present) without any major semantic change, while this is not the case for the movement (3) and future (4) constructions:

- (1a) *Elle va dire* ≈ *elle dit* / “she goes to say ≈ she says”  
(2a) *Dès lors, Lady Gaga va pousser la culture gay à son paroxysme* ≈ *Dès lors, Lady Gaga pousse la culture gay à son paroxysme*. “From then on, Lady Gaga would go on pushing [go-PRES-3SG push-INF] gay culture to its paroxysm ≈ From then on, Lady Gaga pushes gay culture to its paroxysm.”  
(3a) *Il va voir un jeune gentilhomme* ≠ *Il voit un jeune gentilhomme*. “He went to see a young gentleman ≠ he sees a young gentleman.”  
(4a) *Cette démarche va vous paraître bien extraordinaire* ≠ *Cette démarche vous paraît bien extraordinaire*. “That behavior **will appear** to you very extraordinary ≠ that behavior **appears** to you very extraordinary.”

Observe that the future construction allows the insertion of the adverb *probablement*, while the narrative construction does not, since the narrative construction refers to past events that are attested, making the introduction of an adverb conveying doubt semantically problematic:

- (4b) *Cette démarche va probablement vous paraître bien extraordinaire*. “That behavior probably **appears** to you very extraordinary.”  
(2b) \* *Dès lors, Lady Gaga va probablement pousser la culture gay à son paroxysme*. / “\* From then on, Lady Gaga probably **pushes** gay culture to its paroxysm.”

How are we to explain that a narrative interpretation of *aller* that developed in Old and Middle French (as in 1) and disappeared in early Modern French seems to be rising from its ashes in Contemporary French (as in 2)? Are we dealing with a simple resurrection of the old construction<sup>4</sup> or with an innovation that only superficially resembles it? We will argue that the old narrative function became extinct and that the contemporary narrative function derives in fact from the future reading of the *go*-periphrasis.

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<sup>4</sup> This would contradict widespread claims about the irreversibility of grammaticalization and the impossibility for the source of a grammaticalized element at some point on the cline to be restored (Norde 2009: 59).

We first offer a diachronic sketch of the old usage from its emergence until it faded by 1630 or so (§2). We will then see how from that time onwards a metanarrative construction developed (§3), which we consider the origin of the contemporary narrative construction (§4).

## 2. Rise and fall of the “old” narrative construction

The origins of the old narrative construction have been described in depth (Brunot 1905, Bourciez 1923, Gougenheim 1929, among others), so we cover only the most striking points. From Old French onwards, a narrative construction in *va* + INF (and less frequently, *s'en va* + INF) sporadically appears, for instance in *Orson de Beauvais*, a 12th century epic, or in the *Roman de la rose* (13th century). That usage is not restricted to French: it also occasionally appears in Catalan and Occitan,<sup>5</sup> in narrative texts such as epics, adventure novels, comments on Scripture and translations of Latin texts, though not in poetry. In that usage, the subject is always animate; the infinitive carries a telic lexical aspect and the texts involved belong to the ‘plan d’énonciation de l’histoire’<sup>6</sup> [“level of histoire utterance acts”] (Benveniste 1959/1966).

In these three languages, the construction developed between the end of the 13th century and the 16th century: it alternated with synthetic preterits<sup>7</sup> and worked essentially as a complementary stylistic device to the narrative present (Gougenheim 1929: 97, Bres & Barceló 2007: 95) to make the story more dynamic:

- (5) (Catalan): *E com se raonassen ensems d’alscunes coses, lo maligne esperit va prendre aquel seu fil petit e lançà’l al foc, e aquí matex de continent arrancà-li la ànima.* (Sant Gregori, *Diàlegs*, 1340, quoted by Pérez Saldanya 1998: 267).  
“And as they argued among themselves about certain things, the evil spirit **seized** (go-PRES-3SG **seize**-INF) that small son of his and threw him on the fire and killed him immediately and snatched his soul.”
- (6) (Occitan): *Can viron doas ves aquell miracle, non pogron contrastar, mais, per reverencia de la sancta e de sa promession, van lo recebre a l’orde* (Philippine de Porcelet, *Vida de la benaurada sancta Doucelina*, 1297)  
After they had twice seen [lit. they saw] that miracle, they could not resist and out of reverence for the saint and her promise, they **received** (go-PRES-3SG **him receive**-INF) him in the order.
- (7) (French): *Ils vinrent à mon logement: / Lors se va dire un gros paillard, / “Par la morbieu voilà Clément, /Prenez-le, il a mangé le lard.”* (Marot, *L’Adolescence clémentine*, 1538)  
“They came to my lodgings; then a fat bawdy man **said** (go-PRES-3SG **say**-INF), ‘By the death of God, here comes Clement, take him, he ate the bacon.’”

<sup>5</sup> According to Colon (1976: 103), there are only a few hints of the periphrasis’ narrative functioning in Old Castilian and Old Portuguese.

<sup>6</sup> On the basis of the redundant expression of past as *passé simple* (*il fit*) and *passé composé* (*il a fait*), Benveniste (1966) hypothesized that the French verbal system was split into two distinct complementary systems, of *discours* and *histoire*. Texts belonging to historical enunciation are typically in the 3rd person, and not grounded in the here and now of the moment of speech.

<sup>7</sup> In all three languages, *aller* / *anar* can be found in the preterit (Badia i Margarit 1951: 327, Lafont 1967: 198, Gougenheim 1929: 95, Juge 2008: 28).



boundary. If *vat dire* means a move towards the initial boundary of *dire*, the situation in the following clause, namely *se contenta*, presupposes that the act of saying actually took place. For the gentleman to be happy with the little house as a future place for his canoodling with the maid, not only is an orientation of the subject towards the act of saying needed, but that act must be completed, namely the maid needs to have told him the place. One can see how the aspectual value of this narrative construction is progressively built in context. In addition to the move towards the initial boundary of the situation expressed by the infinitive, the construction came to mean, through contextual inference, that the final boundary of that situation had been reached. This accounts for the impossibility of combining the adverb *probablement* (2b) with this type of sentence.

- From a temporal point of view, the events that are retold belong to the past. Given its systematic textual association with that type of context, *va* + INF — initially a stylistic device — grammaticalizes into a tense marker and comes to be perceived as indicating the past as a periphrastic preterit, which it has become in Catalan, but failed to in French.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is only in Catalan<sup>11</sup> that the uses of the narrative periphrasis *va* + INF widened as restrictions were lifted at different levels (the need for an animate subject, for a telic verb and for narrative texts belonging to *histoire*). It therefore turned, as centuries went by, into a periphrastic preterit which has become fully integrated into the verbal system and which tends to eliminate the synthetic preterit in contemporary Catalan,<sup>12</sup> at least in spoken language, so that the only possible utterance nowadays is:

(8) *Ahir vaig dormir tota la tarda*  
 “Yesterday I slept (go-PRES-1SG sleep-INF) all afternoon.”

In French (and in most Occitan varieties), *va* + INF remained linked solely to the sporadic narration of past events and, as such, disappeared in the first half of the 17th century (Gougenheim 1929: 96) due to competition with the use of *aller* as a periphrastic future marker (Flydal 1943:16).<sup>13</sup> That future construction developed later (*supra* (4)) and spread in the 15th century in more popular texts than those in which the narrative construction appeared, among others in dialogues.<sup>14</sup>

In the 15th-16th centuries, both the narrative and future interpretations can be found:

<sup>10</sup> Colon (1976: 137) suggests that the 17th-century grammarians fought against periphrases and ambiguity, which the GO-periphrasis with its two values epitomized. This may have had an influence on literary practice and led to the disappearance of the more semantically complex interpretation in French. Catalan on the other hand could not have undergone such censorship as literature from 16th to 19th century was in Spanish.

<sup>11</sup> This also holds for some Occitan varieties from Gascony and in the isolated area of Guardia Piemontese in Calabria (Berchem 1968).

<sup>12</sup> One of our reviewers mentions that this tendency is not found in Valencian, Balearic Catalan and the Catalan of l’Alguer in Sardinia (cf. Wheeler *et al.* 1999: 301-302).

<sup>13</sup> ‘Mais la plus grande vitalité de cette dernière valeur [comme expression de l’imminence et de la futuration] de la périphrase a amené la disparition de la première [valeur comme expression d’un passé], car il était impossible que la même expression puisse garder à la longue deux sens aussi opposés que celui du passé et celui de l’imminence ou de la futuration’ [but the greater vitality of this latter interpretation [as an expression of imminence and future] of the periphrasis led to the disappearance of the first [interpretation as a past], because it was impossible for the same expression to keep for long two meanings so opposed as that of past and that of imminence or future].

<sup>14</sup> The first grammarian to mention that construction is Ch. Maupas, in the second edition of his *Grammaire et syntaxe française*, 1625 (Gougenheim 1929: 99).

- (9) *Le maistre de ceans [...] lui va dire*: “Viens ça, Morthemmer, je te **vas faire un marché**” (Nicolas de Troyes, *Le Grand parangon des nouvelles nouvelles*, 1535, cited by Gougenheim 1929: 99).  
The host [...] **told (go-PRES-3SG say-INF)** him: “Come, Morthemmer, I **will make (go-PRES-1S make-INF)** a deal with you.”

These constructions show a systematic distribution: the narrative usage for the narration in the 3rd person (*le maistre de ceans lui va dire*); the future usage for reported dialogues (*je te vas faire un marché*). However, in the 17th century, the future construction steadily increases in frequency, is standardized and ousts the narrative construction that is confined almost exclusively to popular texts in the first third of the 17th century (10) and finally becomes archaic in the 18th century (11):

- (10) *Un des françois, revenu de sentinelle, se jetta sur le lict de bois pour se reposer: ce genevoisien estoit auprès. Advint qu'en dormant le françois va faire un pet ; sur quoy l'autre se va escrier: " au diantre soit la couvaye ; le chancre la puisse ronger ! Ils disent qu'ils sont cy venus pour l'evangile, et ils petent comme poirs, "c'est-à-dire pourceaux.* (Béroalde de Verville, *Le Moyen de parvenir*, 1610)  
“One of the Frenchmen, back from sentry duty, threw himself on the wooden bed to rest: that citizen of Geneva was nearby. It happened that while sleeping the Frenchman **farted (go-PRES-3SG fart-INF)**; upon which, the other **cried out (go-PRES-3SG cry out-INF)**: where on earth is the clutch; may the canker gnaw it! They say they have come here for the gospel and they fart like pigs.”
- (11) *Un matin qu'elle étoit dans son lit, et que je lui rendois compte de quelque chose, elle me va dire: tu vois, Guillaume, que j'ai beaucoup de confiance en toi ; j'espère que tu ne me trahiras pas comme ce fripon d'Evrard. Oh ! Pour cela non, madame, ce lui fis-je, car il faudroit que je fusse un grand misérable ; et là-dessus je lui baise la main d'un bras qu'elle avoit hors du lit.* (Caylus A.-Cl. de, *Histoire de Monsieur Guillaume, cocher*, 1737)  
“One morning when she was in her bed, and I was accounting for something, she **told (go-PRES-3SG tell-INF)** me: you see, Guillaume, that I have a lot of trust in you; I hope that you won't betray me like that rascal Evrard. Oh! As for that, no, Madame, I told her, as I would need to be a great scoundrel; and upon this, I kiss the hand of her arm that she had out of the bed.”

The narrative form is thus ousted from French during the 17th century, as noted by grammarians such as Damourette and Pichon who mention that “the expression of a past by the go-auxiliary followed by the infinitive [does not hold] any position anymore in the Northern regions” (1911-1936: 117).

In Romance, the grammaticalization of the itive form has therefore produced, from the aspectual prospective movement, two separate tenses — one belonging to the past and the other to the future — and they have seemingly failed to cohabit. Either the grammaticalization of the periphrasis into a periphrastic perfect has happened, preventing the development of a periphrastic

future,<sup>15</sup> as in Catalan; or the development of the periphrastic future has eradicated the narrative interpretation, as in French. However, if that narrative interpretation indeed disappeared during the 17th century,<sup>16</sup> how can the use of *va* + INF in (2) be explained? Is it conceivable that 20th-century French “resurrected” the old form (Larreya 2005: 349)?

We start by examining the period separating the death (17th century) and the alleged resurrection (20th century) of the narrative interpretation. Research in Frantext<sup>17</sup> (an online database containing about 4000 texts in the areas of sciences, arts, literature, techniques that spans five centuries 16th-21st centuries) reveals that the medieval usage has indeed disappeared but that another narrative interpretation, derived from the future construction, seems to be emerging. We retrace its origins and development.

### 3. From a metanarrative usage...

The future interpretation of the periphrasis allows, from the 17th century onwards, a usage in discourse that – as far as we are aware – has not been listed. It can go unnoticed, and we will call it ‘metadiscursive’ inasmuch as it helps organize the narrative act itself. Let us start with occurrences in which the periphrasis, expressing a future, structures the subsequent discourse by introducing forthcoming events:

- (12) *La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure:*  
*Nous l'allons montrer tout à l'heure.* (La Fontaine, *Fables*, 1668)  
“Might is always right (lit. The reason of the strongest is always the best), as we **will show (go-PRES-1PL show-INF)** in a moment.”

That metadiscursive construction develops in narrative contexts where it announces the continuation of the story:

- (13) *Encore n'est-il pas bien certain si Camille cette année n'étoit pas plutôt censeur que tribun militaire. Quoi qu'il en soit de ces différentes opinions, on va voir par la suite de l'histoire que ces deux magistrats eurent la principale gloire de cette guerre.* (Vertot R. de, *Histoire des révolutions arrivées dans le gouvernement de la république romaine*, 1719)  
“It is not yet entirely clear whether or not Camille that year was a censor rather than a military orator. Whatever the conflicting opinions about that, we **will see (go-PRES-3SG to see)** in the remainder of the story that those two magistrates got the main glory from that war.”

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<sup>15</sup> In some dialects of Catalan, there is a tentative emergence of a proximal future supported by the preposition *a* (Radatz 2003: 70) (*vaig a donar-te una notícia*, “I am about to tell you a piece of news”), that may be calqued on the Spanish construction (*voy a darte una noticia*). However, the simple future is by far the most frequently used (*et donaré una notícia*, “I will give you a piece of news”).

<sup>16</sup> Oudin, (1640:161), in his *Grammaire françoise rapportée au langage du temps*, characterizes the narrative use of *va* + INF as popular: “*il luy va dire* [go-PRES-SG3 say-INF] is used in colloquial language for *il luy dit* [say-PS]”.

<sup>17</sup> Searches were conducted on strings made of *aller* in the present (all forms) followed by the infinitive of the following verbs: *avouer* “confess”, *montrer* “show”, *voir* “see”, *faire* “do, make”. Metanarrative uses were manually selected within the list of generated results.

In *on va voir*, the subject can referentially be equivalent to *vous* ( $\approx$  *vous allez voir*) as much as to *nous* ( $\approx$  *nous allons voir*), with which it alternates in (12). In both cases, the focus is on the narrator-addressee, the one revealing to the other what will be shown. However, this is sometimes expressed in such a way as to make its metanarrative import explicit:

- (14) *Les Hermondures ne se contentans pas de la victoire qu'ils obtinrent sur les Cattes, firent encore passer par le fil de l'espée tout ce qui se sauva de la bataille, sans pardonner ny à hommes ny à chevaux. Mais Rome nous va faire voir un spectacle encor plus horrible que tout cela, veu que Neron ne voulant plus differer l'execution du parricide qu'il avoit resolu en son ame, mit en oeuvre toutes sortes d'artifices, et enfin eut recours à la violence ouverte pour faire mourir sa mere Agripine.*

(Coëffeteau, *Histoire romaine*, 1646)

“The Hermondures, not being satisfied with the victory they won against the Cattes, also put to the sword all who escaped from the battle, sparing neither men nor horses. But Rome **will make us see** (go-PRES-3SG make-INF see-INF) an even more horrible sight than all this, given that Nero, no longer willing to postpone carrying out the parricide he had settled upon in his soul, displayed all kinds of tricks, and finally used open violence to bring about the death of his mother Agripine.”

The sentence *Rome nous va faire voir* combines the past reference with the events retold and the viewpoint of their immediate narration. The causative structure *faire voir* presents as subject actor of the factitive *faire* an actor of the period recalled, *Rome*, and as complement of the governed verb (*voir*) a *nous* that refers to the narrator and addressee(s) of the narrative act. An event of the past narrated time is projected onto the time of narration unfolding at the moment of speech, in an environment of past tenses: before and after that metanarrative intervention, the narration unfolds with a series of verbs in the *passé simple* (*obtinrent, firent passer // mit en œuvre, eut recours*). This weaving together of two times – of events and of narration — is not restricted to the verb *voir* that is relevant for the time of narration; it also occurs with events referring to the time of narrated events:

- (15) *Matt XXI, 33 jusqu'à la fin ; Marc XII jusqu'au 10 ; Luc XX 9 jusqu'au 20. Ecoutez encore cette parabole. Dans la précédente parabole, Jésus avoit fait sentir aux sénateurs, aux docteurs et aux pontifes leur iniquité ; il leur va faire avouer ici le supplice qu'ils méritent, car il les convaincra si puissamment qu'ils seront eux-mêmes contraints de prononcer leur sentence. Ecoutez encore cette parabole: c'est à nous qu'il parle aussi bien qu'aux juifs.* (Bossuet, *Méditations sur l'Évangile*, 1704)

“Matt. XXI, 3 to the end, Marc XII up to 10; Luc 9 up to 20. Listen also to this parable. In the former parable, Jesus had made the senators, doctors and pontiffs feel their iniquity: he **will make them admit** (go-PRES-3SG admit-INF) here the torture they deserve, because he will convince them so powerfully that they will be themselves forced to pronounce their sentence. Listen also to that parable: it is speaking to us as well as to the Jews.”

Thanks to the periphrastic form, *faire avouer* — that belongs to the time of narrated events and the subject of which is an actor of that time, *Jésus* — is projected on the time of the narration presented as future. The mixture of both times is emphasized by the comparison: *c'est à nous qu'il parle aussi bien qu'aux juifs* “it is speaking to us as well as to the Jews”, which refers to a

double addressee of *parler* despite some eighteen centuries of distance, *nous* with *les Juifs*. Let us make it clear that, in these structures, *va* + INF retains its future interpretation and its deictic markers:<sup>18</sup> *faire avouer* is fictitiously presented as ulterior to the moment of speech, which is confirmed by the following synthetic futures: *convaincra* “convince-FS-3SG”, *seront* “to be-FS-3PL”.

This projection of the events’ past time onto the present time of their narration is even stronger when the narrative present – which allows for a blurring of both periods – appears in the neighboring clauses. Such neutralization of temporal distance for the purpose of religious persuasion is found in Bossuet:

- (16) *D'où me vient ce regret de passer? Quoi, je suis encore attaché à cette vie? Quelle erreur me retient dans ce lieu d'exil? Vous allez passer, mon sauveur, et résolu que j'étois de passer avec vous, quand on me dit que c'est tout de bon qu'il faut passer, je me trouble, je ne puis supporter ni entendre cette parole. Lasche voyageur, que crains-tu? Le passage que tu vas faire est celui que le sauveur va faire aussi dans notre évangile: craindras-tu de passer avec lui?* (Bossuet, *Méditations sur l'Évangile*, 1704)

“Where does this regret of not lasting come to me from? What, am I still attached to this life? What mistake keeps me in this place of exile? You **are about to die (go-PRES-2PL die-INF)**, my savior, and as determined as I was to die with you, when I am told that I have to die once and for all, I become flustered, I cannot stand nor hear those words. Cowardly traveller, what do you fear? The Crossing you are about to make is that which the Savior is about to make (**go-PRES-3PL make-INF**) in our gospel: will you fear to cross with him?”

The situation expressed by *va* + INF, referentially past but presented as future in the narrative process, is frequently of a *hypernymic*<sup>19</sup> type: in other words, it is not positioned on the same event line as the situations that precede and follow it, and it functions as a summary of events that are about to be told, as in (14) and the example below:

- (17) *On fut chez le lieutenant-civil... je passe tous les détails, qu'on va comprendre. Nous en sommes à une époque terrible, qui va faire connaître à Sara sous quel point de vue elle était regardée par ses amants. Par une suite de ma faiblesse, je la voulus voir, pour savoir le jour de son mariage.* (Rétif de la Bretonne, *Histoire de Sara*, 1796)

“We went to the civil lieutenant. I spare you all the details, which will soon be understood. We have come to a terrible period that **will make Sara know (go-PRES-3SG make-INF Sara know-INF)** how she was considered by her lovers. As a consequence of my weakness, I wanted to see her to know the day of her wedding.”

<sup>18</sup> This is confirmed by the spatial deictics *ici*: “il va leur faire avouer *ici* ...”.

<sup>19</sup> Hypernymy refers to a relation of inclusion between a general term (hypernym) and one or more specific ones (hyponyms), for instance a seat would be a hypernym and a chair, an armchair, a bench etc. would be hyponyms. In its metadiscursive function developed in §3, *va* + INF works as a hypernym in that it encapsulates the sequence of situations (hyponyms) it announces.

The narrated events — which come before the periphrasis (*On fut chez le lieutenant* “one be-PS-3S]) and after it (*je la voulus voir*[I her WANT-PS-1S to see) — tell in the past historic the succession of past events. *Va faire connaître* is not located on that time line but on the hypernymic line of their summary, which seems to us to confirm the metanarrative import of the periphrasis.

We therefore suggest that a metanarrative construction of *va* + INF, based on the increasingly standard future interpretation, emerges in the 17th century. Unlike in the previous period where the periphrasis made events – the timeline of the story – progress, it makes the narration (as an act) of events unfold; the time of the narration progresses by projecting imaginarily the time of the past events onto the time of their narration. In its medieval usage, the periphrasis contributed anaphorically and implicitly to showing events prospectively in *ascendance* (cf. *Supra* 2) in ‘historical enunciation’. From then on, it explicitly organizes the act of narration itself by putting some situations in the future perspective of the narration (with among other things, 1st and 2nd person pronouns, referring to the participants in the narrative interaction). This metanarrative dimension is confirmed in that the situation introduced by *va* is most often a hypernym.

Let us say that the metanarrative interpretation endures in the 19th and 20th centuries, as shown by examples (18-19). As before, occurrences are built on *voir* with, as subject, the pronoun *on* referring to the narrator/addressee (18) (cf. (13)) and, in a more advanced metanarrative meaning, a hypernymic noun phrase summarizing an event from the narrated time (*l'affaire italienne* in (19)):

- (18) ... *on était parvenu à résoudre le problème, cru par ma grand-mère insoluble, de la navigation aérienne et de la télégraphie sans fil. Mais on va voir que ce désir de faire partager à ma grand-mère les bienfaits de notre science sembla bientôt encore trop égoïste à ma mère.* (Proust M., *À la recherche du temps perdu*)  
 “The problem – believed by my grandmother to be insoluble – of air navigation and wireless telegraphy had been solved. But we **will see (go-PRES-3SG see-INF)** that the desire to make my grandmother share in the beneficial effects of our science would soon seem [lit. seemed] still too selfish to my mother.”
- (19) *Cependant, l'organisation du pouvoir, telle qu'elle avait été arrêtée le 31 juillet, ne pouvait subsister que si la subordination du commandement au gouvernement était acquise sans équivoque au-dedans et au-dehors. L'affaire italienne va faire voir que ce n'est pas le cas.*  
*Le 3 septembre, Badoglio, qui avait pris depuis plusieurs semaines des contacts secrets avec les anglo-saxons, capitule entre leurs mains par le truchement d'une délégation envoyée à Syracuse.* (De Gaulle Ch., *Mémoires de guerre*, 1956)  
 “However, the organization of power, as it had been established on 31st July, could only remain if submission to the government was obtained without ambiguity from insiders as well as from outsiders. The Italian episode **will show (go-PRES-3SG make-INF see-INF)** that it was not the case. On the 3rd of September, Badoglio, who had been conducting for many weeks secret contacts with the Anglo-Saxons, would capitulate [lit. capitulates] to them via a delegation sent to Syracuse.”

On the basis of its future interpretation, *va* + INF explicitly or implicitly allows narration as an act to anticipate what is about to be told, to announce it through a hypernymic process. That metanarrative interpretation is especially obvious in past contexts:

(20) *Lorsque plus tard elle renonça sans réserve à posséder quoi que ce fût en propre, elle trouva moyen de conserver le cher manteau de son pauvre père jusqu'à sa mort. Elle le légua alors, comme son plus précieux bijou, à une amie. Il fut depuis conservé avec le plus grand soin comme une relique doublement sainte par les chevaliers teutoniques à Weissenfels, au diocèse de Spire. ...*

“When later she gave up possessing anything at all of her own, she managed to keep the beloved coat of her poor father until her death. She then bequeathed it, as her most precious jewel, to a friend. From that moment onwards, it was kept with the utmost care as a doubly holy relic by the Teutonic knights in Weissenfels, in the diocese of Spire ...”

(20') *C'est à l'ombre de cette bannière qu'Elisabeth **va recueillir** dans le secret de son âme les forces requises pour remporter plus tard sur le monde et sur son propre coeur les victoires éclatantes que Dieu lui réserve; ce sera désormais unie par un lien intime et filial à l'homme séraphique qu'elle **va faire** de nouveaux pas dans cette voie étroite et épineuse qui conduit à l'éternelle gloire, et qu'il lui faudra franchir en si peu d'années.*

“Under that banner, Elisabeth **goes on gathering** (go-PRES-3SG gather-INF) in her heart of hearts the needed strength to later win, over the world and her own heart, the striking victories that God holds for her: from then on, united by an intimate and filial cord to the seraphic man, she will take new steps on that narrow and thorny path that leads to eternal glory and that she will have to cross in so few years.”

(20'') *Cependant, à peine âgée de dix-sept ans, elle vit s'éloigner son confesseur franciscain, le père Rodinger, qui avait guidé ses premiers pas sur la trace de saint François. (Montalembert Ch. de, Histoire de sainte Elisabeth de Hongrie, 1836)*

“Nonetheless, at only seventeen, she saw her Franciscan confessor Father Rodinger, who had led her first steps in those of St Francis, become estranged from her.”

The narration, before and after the paragraph containing *va* + INF, unfolds in the past historic: *renonça*, etc. / *vit s'éloigner*. The situations *va recueillir* and *va faire* are hypernyms that are demarcated from the level of the events retold in the past historic; they are associated with future verbs (*sera* “be-FS-3SG”, *faudra franchir* “be necessary-FS-3SG cross-INF”).

This is a typical metanarrative comment clause: the narrator thinks ahead of the narration – Genette (1973: 105) would call this a ‘prolepsis’ – and gives a global preview of the next installment before coming back to the line of events narrated in the past historic. We have identified (1a-2a) the narrative construction by its ability to be replaced by a narrative present without any significant semantic change, contrary to what happens with the future interpretation. What about the metanarrative construction? The instances containing *on va voir* (12, 13, 18) could not be put in the present:

(18a) *Mais on **va voir** que ce désir de faire partager à ma grand-mère ... ≠ ? Mais on voit que ce désir de faire partager à ma grand-mère ...* “But we will see that the desire to

make my grandmother share in. ... ≠? But we see that the desire to make my grandmother share in ...”

Instances that have as their subject an actor from the time of narrated events (14-16, 19, 20) seem to better tolerate the replacement, but not without a small yet significant change in meaning:

(20a) *C'est à l'ombre de cette bannière qu'Elisabeth va recueillir dans le secret de son âme les forces requises ... ≠ C'est à l'ombre de cette bannière qu'Elisabeth recueille dans le secret de son âme les forces requises.* “Under that banner, Elisabeth goes on gathering in her heart of hearts the needed strength ... ≠ Under that banner, Elisabeth gathers in her heart of hearts the needed strength.”

The narrative present shows the situation in its realization rather than its positioning as future in relation to the moment of speech, which is in itself possible but would be problematic for the coherence of the right context, as repeated below:

(20b) \**C'est à l'ombre de cette bannière qu'Elisabeth recueille dans le secret de son âme les forces requises. Cependant, à peine âgée de dix-sept ans, elle vit s'éloigner son confesseur franciscain, le père Rodinger, qui avait guidé ses premiers pas sur la trace de saint François.* “\*Under that banner, Elisabeth gathers in her heart of hearts the needed strength. Nonetheless, at only seventeen, she saw her Franciscan confessor, Father Rodinger, who had led her first steps in the steps of St Francis.”

*Cependant* “however” indicates in (20) the change from the metanarrative to the narrative level, so it is no longer relevant in (20b); putting *recueille* and *vit* on the same temporal line is problematic. In this type of metanarrative construction, we have a form which – if it has not yet reached the narrative level – approaches it through the projection of the time of the events onto the time of the narration: *probablement*, which we used as a criterion for the periphrastic future (4b), is no longer really possible.

(20c) ?*C'est à l'ombre de cette bannière qu'Elisabeth va probablement recueillir dans le secret de son âme les forces requises.* / ? “Under that banner, Elisabeth probably gathers in her heart of hearts the needed strength”

#### 4. ... to the contemporary narrative construction

The metanarrative interpretation, which still endures today<sup>20</sup>, seems to have provided the ground from which the contemporary narrative construction has developed. Before analyzing it, let us give two prototypical examples that we reproduce in full. (21) is an obituary (see the online appendix for another, more extensive illustration):

(21) *Abdelhalim Jean-Loup Herbert: disparition d'un intellectuel converti à l'islam*  
*Il est mort le 6 janvier dernier. Anthropologue, professeur à l'école d'architecture de Saint-Étienne, il résidait dans l'unité d'habitation Le Corbusier à Firminy. Son aura était internationale.*

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<sup>20</sup> This provides an instance of ‘layering’ as ‘the rise of [the] new marker is not contingent on the loss or dysfunction of its predecessors’ (Bybee et al. 1994:21).

“Abdelhalim Jean-Loup Herbert: death of an intellectual convert to Islam. He died on the 6th of January. Anthropologist, professor at the School of Architecture in St Etienne, he lived in the Le Corbusier housing unit in Firminy. He had an international aura.”

- (21’) *Curieux parcours que celui de cet homme qui vient de s’éteindre à l’âge de soixante ans. C’est en Amérique du Sud que Jean-Loup Herbert commence à se battre, dans les années soixante-dix, défendant les thèses guévaristes et les droits des Indiens. Son tiers mondisme va évoluer vers l’islam. Lors d’un voyage en Iran, il va se convertir et devenir un “intellectuel musulman” d’une stricte orthodoxie sunnite mais dialoguant avec les soufistes. Dans un premier temps, il va s’enthousiasmer pour la révolution khoméniiste mais ne sera jamais tenté par l’islamisme politique.*

“This man who has just died aged sixty had a strange personal development. In South America, Jean-Loup Herbert started fighting in the 1970s, defending Guevara’s theses and the Indians’ rights. His support for the Third World **evolved (go-PRES-3SG to evolve)** towards Islam. During a stay in Iran, he **converted and became (go-PRES-3SG himself convert-INF and become-INF)** a “Muslim intellectual” of a strict Sunni orthodoxy although entering into dialogue with Sufis. At the beginning, he **got (go-PRES-3SG himself enthuse-INF)** enthusiastic about Khomeyni’s revolution but he was never tempted by political Islam.”

- (21’’) *L’architecture devient l’une des autres passions de Jean-Loup Herbert. Ex-élève de l’institut d’études politiques de Lyon, il devient professeur de l’école d’architecture de Saint-Étienne. Il pousse l’amour de cette discipline jusqu’à habiter l’unité d’habitation Le Corbusier à Firminy où l’anthropologue avait installé sa famille. En 2004 il avait organisé un colloque sur l’architecte suisse. Ses proches gardent de lui l’image “d’un grand frère humble, dévoué, disponible, sincère, conscient des problèmes des musulmans de France, acceptant la critique mais toujours prêt au dialogue”.*

“Architecture was to become [become-PRES-3SG] one of Jean-Loup Herbert’s other passions. A former student of the political science institute in Lyon, he became [become-PRES-3SG] a professor in the architecture school in St Etienne. He was devoted enough to that discipline to live in the Le Corbusier housing Unit in Firminy where the anthropologist had settled his family. In 2004, he organized [organize-PQP-3SG] a conference on the Swiss architect. His close friends retain of him the image of ‘a humble big brother, devoted, available, sincere, aware of the challenges facing Muslims in France, welcoming criticism but always open to a dialogue’.”

- (21’’) *Ses engagements l’emmenaient très souvent à l’étranger. Il fut à l’origine de la création de la revue mensuelle Médina. Abdelhalim Jean Loup Herbert est mort le 6 janvier des suites d’un cancer. Il a été enterré selon le rite des funérailles musulmanes dans le carré musulman au cimetière de Saint-Etienne. (Le Progrès, 20 janvier 2005)*

“The causes he espoused took him abroad very often. He was responsible for the launch of the monthly journal *Medina*. Abdelhalim Jean Loup Herbert died on the 6th of January of cancer. He was buried in accordance with Muslim funeral rites in the Muslim square of St. Etienne cemetery.”

How is this a narrative construction? If we compare it with the metanarrative occurrences previously described, we see the disappearance of all the markers of the narrative act, such as its personal, temporal and spatial deictics. There are no 1st or 2nd person pronouns referring to the

narrator and their addressees, no temporal or spatial adverb (such as *ici* in (15)) relating back to the current unfolding narration, no projection of the time of the events on the time of narration: the impression is that we have before us here only the line of events. In addition, the situations expressed by *va* are no longer hypernyms: they are part of the same sequence of events as the neighboring situations in the present. Last but not least, they are understood as being fully completed. Take as an example the extract in (21') above. As in the old usage (1, 7), the auxiliary in *va évoluer* presents the story prospectively ~~in~~ *aseendane*: from the previous process in the present (*commence à se battre*), it explicitly points towards the initial boundary of the following process, while making it possible to presuppose, through the cotext and the narrative context, that *évoluer* has reached its final boundary. Finally, the GO-construction appears to tell past events in the 3rd person. *Va* + INF can be replaced by a narrative present (21a) and the use of *probablement* is clearly impossible (21b).

- (21a) *Lors d'un voyage en Iran, il se convertit et devient un 'intellectuel musulman'.*  
 “During a trip to Iran, he converted [lit. converts] and became [lit. becomes] a ‘Muslim intellectual’”
- (21b) \* *Lors d'un voyage en Iran, il va probablement se convertir et devenir un “intellectuel musulman”*  
 “\* During a trip to Iran, he will probably convert and become a ‘Muslim intellectual’”

But we are not witnessing the resurrection of the old usage. The main difference is this: if the contemporary turn of phrase is used for past events as in the medieval usage, the tenses with which it is used in the foreground of the narration and by which it can be replaced are only tenses usually linked to the moment of speech (*present, future, passé composé*). Indeed in (21), *va évoluer* “go-PRES-3SG evolve-INF” is preceded by *commence à se battre* “begin-PRES-3SG fight-INF” and is followed — apart from the other periphrastic forms *va se convertir et devenir* “go-PRES-3SG himself convert-INF and become-INF”, *va s'enthousiasmer* “go-PRES-3SG himself enthuse-INF” — by a simple future *sera tenté*.

*Va* + INF is never combined with *passés simples*, as was the case in the old construction where, for instance for (1), a succession was established: *feirent* < *vat dire* < *se contenta*. We note that if there is a *passé simple* at the end of the obituary in (21), it is textually separated from *va s'enthousiasmer* with which it is not linked at the narrative level (the *passé simple* is used to refer to a different domain of the deceased's interests): there is no temporal progression *va s'enthousiasmer* < *fut*. As a result, *va* + INF appears to be a dependent non-autonomous narrative form, which we attribute to its origins in the future. If it only appears in present and future contexts, we may assume that it is because, while presenting events that refer to the past, *va* + INF still undergoes the influence of the future value from which it originates.

Let us underline a fact that might seem paradoxical: in a metanarrative interpretation, the periphrasis could appear in past cotexts (see (17, 20)). How can we explain that it is no longer possible in the narrative construction? In metanarrative usage, as mentioned earlier, a set of deictic markers ensured a prospective future interpretation; the periphrasis in *va* + INF appeared as a comment clause from the narrator, a switch-over within the narration from the past tenses. The shift to the narrative usage happens through the disappearance of those deictic markers. That integration is nonetheless not total: *va* + INF has not freed itself from the temporal constraints we

have described: it cannot combine with *passés simples* even in an obituary such as (21) where the life story of the deceased is retold as an *histoire* (Benveniste 1959/1966).

We have given a linguistic explanation of this extension from a metanarrative to a narrative construction. Are we now able to date a shift which, we repeat, is not a substitution as the metanarrative construction remains? First of all, let us mention how difficult this is inasmuch as – contrary to what our analysis might suggest – the shift from one to the other was certainly gradual. From the second part of the 19th century onwards, ‘intermediate’ usages emerge, for example:

- (22) *L’armée prussienne, en pleine retraite, avait, en se retirant par sa gauche, démasqué l’armée anglaise, qui se trouvait alors la plus avancée. Napoléon, pour l’empêcher de se rallier, détache après elle Grouchy avec 35 000 hommes, lui ordonnant de la presser jusqu’à ce qu’elle fasse tête. Mais Grouchy va faire, à son tour, la même faute que Ney: seulement, les conséquences en seront terribles.* (Dumas, *Napoléon*, 1840)  
“Prussian army, in the midst of retreat, had, while withdrawing its left flank, exposed the English army, which was at the time the furthest forward. To prevent it from rallying, Napoleon dispatched Grouchy with 35,000 men, ordering him to press forward until they faced them head on. But Grouchy **was to make**<sup>21</sup> (**go-PRES-3SG make-INF**) the same mistake as Ney: except that the consequences in this case would be terrible.”

In this narrative extract, *va faire* can perfectly well be replaced by a present:

- (22a) *Mais Grouchy va faire, à son tour, la même faute que Ney* ≈ *Mais Grouchy fait, à son tour, la même faute que Ney* “but Grouchy **made** (**go-PRES-3SG make-INF**) in turn the same mistake as Ney” ≈ “but Grouchy **make-PRES-3SG** the same mistake as Ney.”

We conclude that the periphrasis is a full narrative form here, especially because the subject NP is an actor from the time of events (*Grouchy*) and there is no deictic marker. Note the comparative syntax of the utterance, though (*à son tour, la même faute que*): the narrator links both facts, instead of “acting” as if “les événements sembl(ai)ent se raconter eux-mêmes [Events seem to be telling themselves]”<sup>22</sup> (Benveniste 1959/1966: 241). We are still dealing with a metanarrative comment clause, but the construction is nonetheless far advanced on the path leading to a full narrative use.

Our corpus<sup>23</sup> highlights the two converging facts below:

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<sup>21</sup> We chose ‘was to make’ instead of ‘will make’ as the sentence acts as a prospective summary of the events, rather than as an ulterior stage in the narration.

<sup>22</sup> According to Benveniste, there is no narrator in the history system, which gives the impression that ‘events are told by themselves’.

<sup>23</sup> In addition to examples from reading, our corpus contains occurrences from (1) a diachronic corpus of obituaries (1905-2005, Labeau 2009), (2) biographical or historical television programs (*Légende: Lady Di*, Personnel et confidentiel: Mike Brant, *laisse-moi t’aimer*, *Charles de Gaulle: Le rebelle*, Labeau 2007), (3) \*scientific programs for the general public (*L’Odyssée de l’espèce, Il était une fois l’homme*), (4) \*academic expositions on the history of the French language, (5) excerpts from history books (Labeau & Holyoak 2007). Corpora marked with an \* were transcribed thanks to funding from the Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France granted to Emmanuelle Labeau for academic year 2009-2010.

– Shortly before the middle of the 20th century, clearly narrative constructions are increasingly found in a range of genres:

- (24) *A partir de 1745, la question de l'origine des animalcules va entrer dans une phase toute nouvelle, à la suite des expériences réalisées par un prêtre irlandais fort habile en micrographie, Jean Turberville Needham.* (Rostand J., *La Genèse de la vie*, 1943)  
“From 1745 onwards, the question of the origin of small animals **would enter / entered (go-PRES-3SG enter-INF)** a brand new phase, following experiments made by an Irish priest who was very skilled in micrography, Jean Turberville Needham.”

Let us focus on the temporal indication *à partir de 1745* “from 1745 onwards”: prospection is indicated anaphorically, on the basis of a temporal element from the story, and not on the moment of speech as was the case in the metanarrative usage. *Va entrer* means, from that dating, not only an orientation towards the initial boundary of *entrer* but also hints at the full completion of the situation.

– In a diachronic corpus of obituaries over a century (1905-2005)<sup>24</sup> (Labeau 2009), the potential for a narrative interpretation of *va* + INF appears first in 1965. From that diachronic part of our corpus, we could hypothesize that the first uses of this narrative construction emerge around the mid-20th century. Nowadays, the construction has infiltrated (almost) all textual genres – oral and written – that deal with narrative textuality, where it alternates with narrative presents and historic futures. Let us give an example of it in some of those genres: history (of science), historical television programs, oral summary, scientific explanation in a narrative sequence, etc. This penetration of the narrative field, as widespread as it is, is not complete. Two genres resist: literary fiction (novels, short stories, etc.) and interactive oral narration (i.e. spontaneous oral production). In our readings and our searches in Frantext on *va dire*, *va entrer*, *va faire*, *va répondre* in literary fiction from the 19th to the 21st century, as well as in our 250 passages from oral interactions, we have not identified a single instance of a narrative *va* + INF.

The different avenues that we have explored have not allowed us to account for these generic restrictions. It could be argued for instance that in interactive oral narration, the absence of *va* + INF is linked with the 1st person that would make the narrator adopt a retrospective view from the deictic center (i.e. me-here-now) when retelling past events; that retrospective narrative stance is inconsistent with the prospective thrust carried by the periphrasis. However, this does not explain why in oral narration of jokes or tales for example, *va* + INF is not used while there is no 1st person anchoring. As for fiction, it could be argued that the absence of the periphrasis results from the competition from other tenses such as *passé simple*. However, that would not explain why other tenses are preferred to the periphrasis that has penetrated other genres, such as scientific expositions or sports reports where the competition is as prevalent.

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<sup>24</sup> The corpus consists of obituaries collected over January, in three sections: (a) a diachronic corpus of obituaries published in *Le Figaro* from 1905 to 2005 (62) and in *Le Monde* from 1945 to 2005 (173); (b) a Parisian corpus of articles collected in January 2005 in *L'Humanité* (19), *La Croix* (20), *Le Monde* (57), *Le Figaro* (23) and *Le Parisien* (6) and (c) a regional corpus: newspapers from the North (*La Voix du Nord* [19]), from the East (*Le Bien Public* [10], *Le Progrès* [27] and *Le Journal de Saône et Loire* [12]), from the South (*Le Midi Libre* [36]), from the South-West (*Sud-Ouest* [58]), from the West (*Le Télégramme* [25]) and from the center (*La Nouvelle République du Centre-Ouest* [29]).

We do not know why fiction and oral interaction currently exclude a narrative interpretation of *va* + INF, and would claim that the key to this construction may be in that exclusion.

We cannot offer a full description of this contemporary usage, for instance of the syntactic forms and textual loci in which it is found, but we compare the periphrasis with other narrative tenses that complement it or compete with it: the prospective imperfect, the narrative present, the historic future.

– Prospective narrative imperfect: in a past context, a corresponding prospective form in which the auxiliary is in the imperfect (*allait* + INF) has developed:

- (24) *Restée en Belgique durant la seconde guerre mondiale, elle allait vivre les soubresauts de “L’affaire royale” qui déchira la Belgique après que son père, Léopold III, eut décidé, en mai 1940, de rester à Bruxelles, alors qu’un gouvernement en exil, considéré comme le pouvoir légal par les alliés, s’installait à Londres. Seule l’accession au trône de Baudouin, en juillet 1951, à l’issue d’une longue crise et d’une consultation populaire, allait apaiser la situation.* (Nécrologie, *Le Monde* 2005: 29).

“Left behind in Belgium during the second world war, she **experienced** (go-PAST-IMPERF-3SG live-INF) the jolts of the “Royal question” that tore apart Belgium after her father, Leopold III, had decided, in May 1940, to stay in Brussels while a government in exile, considered as the legal power by the Allies, went and stayed in London. The situation **would** only be **settled** (go-PAST-IMPERF-3SG appease-INF) with the accession to the throne of Baudouin, in July 1951, at the end of a long crisis and a popular consultation.”

In interaction with past tenses (*déchira, eut décidé*), the prospective imperfect (*allait vivre, allait apaiser*) plays the same narrative role as *va* + INF in a present cotext. This was not the case in Old French, when that *allait*+ INF construction was not prevalent. Here, then, is another difference between the old (1, 7) and modern (2, 21, 22, 24) constructions of *va* + INF.

– The historic future, which competes with *va* + INF is not subject to the same restrictions: it is found in present (26) as well as past (27) cotexts:

- (25) *En novembre 1942, le Figaro suspend sa publication ; elle reprendra à Paris au lendemain de la libération [...] (Le Monde 1965, 2)*  
“In November 1942, The Figaro stopped [lit. stops] its publication; it **would resume** (FUT-3SG) in Paris after the Liberation.”
- (26) Sa maman était là, qui le *serrera* longuement dans ses bras à la fin. ... (1<sup>ère</sup> phrase de l’article, *L’expiation publique calibrée du golfeur Tiger Woods (Le Monde, 22. 2. 2010)*  
“His mum was there and **held** (FUT-3SG) him in her arms for a long time at the end.”

We might wonder why this contextual constraint, which regulates the functioning of *va* + INF, does not apply to the historic future with which the periphrasis often works in narrations (see (21)). We argue that the future appears in a past context because, while *va* + INF has a parallel past prospective form *allait* + INF, the future is hardly in competition with the form that expresses ulteriority in the past, namely the conditional:

(26a) *Sa maman était là, qui le serrerait longuement dans ses bras à la fin.*

“His mum was there and **would hold** (COND-3SG) him in her arms for a long time at the end.”

– The narrative present:<sup>25</sup> The narrative present, which appears as early as the 11th century, is compatible with past as well as present contexts and is not subject to the restrictions on *va* + INF pertaining to genre. It is found in all narrative genres and it does compete with *va* + INF on its own territory, for instance, in obituaries (21).

We would say that the narrative usage of *va* + INF competes in narrative texts with complementary narrative tenses (prospective imperfect) or more appropriate ones inasmuch as they undergo fewer restrictions: ‘historic’ future, narrative present, without forgetting the past historic and the compound past. We have just linked *va* + INF and other tenses, among them narrative present and historic future. We certainly do not consider these forms to be equivalent, and plan a future paper showing their syntactic and textual distributions.

It suffices to underline here, as a conclusion, some macro-features of its use in discourse as they emerge from our corpus:

- As in medieval usage, the contemporary narrative construction of *va* + INF is sporadic, at least in written narration, where it is a stylistic device in competition with other tenses. We do not have for instance an obituary, a *fait divers* (short news items) or a *portrait* (“profile”) entirely written with *va* + INF.
- The periphrasis is much more frequent in televised historical programs such as *De Gaulle, l'éternel défi* (Labeau 2007) than in history books (Labeau & Holyoak 2007), which may indicate an influence of the medium and an affinity with spoken language. Similarly, the construction is widespread in scientific programs or discussions for the general public, as it is in oral expositions. Sociolinguistic factors might account for the fact that, in the competition between periphrastic and synthetic futures, the former still appears more colloquial. That hypothesis, which might explain why the construction is not used in literary narrations, does not explain, however, why it is absent from interactive oral narrations.
- The periphrasis is widespread in television programs of a biographical nature narrated by an external narrator (in our corpus, the programs devoted to Princess Diana and General de Gaulle), but not in the ones narrated by eye-witnesses (the program on Mike Brant). This supports our claim about the absence of *va* + INF in interactive oral narrations even if it does not explain it.

## 5. Conclusion

The contemporary narrative *va* + INF construction is not the resurrection of an extinct linguistic form – there is no return, but a new form, slowly emerging since the 17th century, of the grammaticalization of *aller* as an auxiliary for periphrastic future. The medieval narrative construction (12th-16th centuries) preceded the future construction (15th century onwards) that ousted it when it developed (17th century). However, by some ironic linguistic twist, the future construction became the ground from which an offspring (first metanarrative then narrative), still infrequent, emerged. That offspring appears today with distinct patterns:

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<sup>25</sup> A reviewer asks about the comparison between the narrative readings of the present and the *va*-periphrasis, something we hope to discuss in depth in another article.

- On the one hand: it is very sporadic in writing: sequences of several situations in *va* + INF are rare. Two narrative exceptions remain: written narrative fiction and interactive oral narration;
- On the other hand, in some media or scientific genres the construction appears with regularity and continuity to arrange a set of situations prospectively according to the moving-ego perspective.

So goes the narrative construction of *va* + INF. while we have been able to explain where it comes from, we could not say where it is going ... . How can these French adventures of the itive periphrasis shed light on linguistic evolution in general? First, our analysis seems to support a monosemist approach: the wide variety of usages in *discours* can be derived from one original value in *langue*. Second, this paper contributes to discussions about whether grammaticalization paths can be reversed or not (Campbell 2001, Traugott 2001, Prévost 2003). We have shown that, to some extent, *va* + INF in Contemporary French may APPEAR to have gone back in time but, if it reverted to its medieval narrative function, it did so in a different verbal environment. Finally, we suggest that a structure can adopt different and even seemingly diametrically opposed grammaticalization paths, even in closely related languages.

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### Résumé

En ancien et en moyen français (12e -16e siècles), *va + INF.* était utilisé dans les narrations passées. Un emploi similaire semble être réapparu et se répand aujourd'hui. Toutefois, l'ancienne construction se combinait avec des formes du passé alors que la nouvelle ne côtoie que des formes ancrées dans le présent et le futur. Nous soutenons ici que la construction contemporaine ne dérive pas de l'ancien usage narratif, mais d'une construction métanarrative. En effet, sur la base de son interprétation future, *va + INF.* permet l'organisation de la narration, annonçant les faits suivants par un procès hyperonymique. La périphrase s'approche ainsi d'une valeur narrative en projetant le temps des événements sur celui de la narration. Avec la disparition de tous les marqueurs déictiques les périphrases en *aller* cessent d'agir comme hyperonymes : elles apparaissent sur la même ligne temporelle que les situations voisines et s'interprètent comme complètement réalisées.

### Zusammenfassung

Im Alt- und Mittelfranzösischen (12.-16. Jahrhundert) wurde *va + INF.* in Erzählungen in der Vergangenheit verwendet. Allerdings wurde die alte Konstruktion mit Vergangenheitstempora kombiniert, während die neue nur zusammen mit im Präsens und Futur verankerten Formen auftritt. Wir argumentieren, dass die gegenwärtige Konstruktion nicht nur von der alten abgeleitet ist, sondern von einer metanarrativen Konstruktion. In der Tat erlaubt *va + INF.*, basierend auf ihrer futurischen Interpretation, die Organisation der Erzählung, indem nachfolgende Ereignisse durch einen hypernymischen Prozess organisiert werden. Die Periphrase erreicht deshalb einen narrativen Wert durch eine Projektion der Zeit der Ereignisse auf diejenige der Erzählung. Mit dem Verschwinden aller deiktischen Marker sind die *geh*-Periphrasen keine Hyperonyme mehr: sie erscheinen als Nachbarsituationen auf derselben temporalen Ereignislinie und werden als vollständig realisiert verstanden.

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