Does the *Futur* have a future in (Canadian) French?¹

SHANA POPLACK AND DANIELLE TURPIN

Abstract

The hospitality of the future temporal reference sector to multiple exponents is well exemplified by French, where the inflected future currently competes with both periphrastic future and futurate present forms. Most scholars contend that the variant expressions are selected according to distinctions in the way the speaker envisions the future eventuality and/or the semantic and/or pragmatic import s/he wishes to convey. Curiously, however, there is little agreement as to what that import is nor which of the variants is capable of expressing it. Making use of a variationist approach, in this paper we return to the question of the function and meaning of the major exponents of futurity in spoken French through systematic analysis of thousands of contexts of future temporal reference in natural speech. We show that although the variant forms continue to divide up the work of expressing posteriority, they are rarely selected by speakers in accordance with the values commonly attributed to them in either the descriptive or prescriptive literature. This is because basically all reference to future states or events is made by periphrastic future, which has ousted inflected future from virtually all contexts of productive usage but one, while futurate present has made only incipient incursions into another. We suggest that failure to attain consensus on the set of meanings or functions distinguishing the variants is the product of an epistemological problem stemming from difficulty in reconciling the form-function polyvalence characteristic of inherent variability with the (distributional) linguistic enterprise of ascribing a unique function to every form.

¹ The research reported here forms part of a larger project investigating the effects of contact with English on the grammar of French, generously funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grants to Poplack. We are grateful to Paul Hirschbühler, Jacques Moeschler, David Sankoff, Pierrette Thibault, Co Vet, Doug Walker and the audience at LSRL 27 for helpful suggestions and discussion, as well as to Dawn Harvie and James Walker for aid in preparing the manuscript. The usual disclaimers apply.
1. Introduction

The future temporal reference sector is particularly hospitable to multiple exponents, and nowhere is this better illustrated than in French. The reflex of Vulgar Latin canturē haben, which eventually gave rise to the contemporary synthetic future, chanterai, was rivalled from its earliest stages of development by a number of periphrases, including aller + infinitive, on which we focus here. First used as a transparent verb of motion, as early as the thirteenth century the periphrasis was well embarked on its trajectory of grammaticization to future marker, having already begun bleaching of its original meaning of movement towards a goal. By the fifteenth century it was in productive (colloquial) use to express prediction, and was admitted into literary and polite discourse in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Fleischman 1982: 82). As in other languages, like English, the periphrastic future (PF) has been gaining ground ever since. Today empirical research, including that which we report here, concurs in showing it to have eclipsed the inflected future (IF) as the major exponent of futurity in many if not most varieties of contemporary spoken French, though it is still subject to competition from both the IF and the futurate present (P) forms. These are exemplified, with data from Canadian French, in examples 1 to 3.

(1) PERIPHERASTIC FUTURE (PF)

Bien demain, tu vas aller (PF) au bingo, tu vas well tomorrow, you go to-go to-the bingo, you go gagner (PF).
to-win
"Tomorrow you’re going to go to bingo and you’re going to win."
(06S/2301)²

(2) INFLICTED FUTURE (IF)

J’ai dit, “laisse faire, on ira (IF) à messe demain I-have said, “let make, one will-go to Mass tomorrow manger.”
"I said, “forget it, we’ll go to Mass tomorrow morning.”"
(070/686)

(3) FUTURATE PRESENT (P)

Il dit, “J’y vas (P) demain matin chez he says, “I-there go tomorrow morning at-the-house-of you”.
you”

2. Codes refer to speaker number and line number in the Corpus du français parlé à Ottawa-Hull (Poplack 1989). Examples are reproduced verbatim from speaker utterances.

‘He says, “I’m going to your house tomorrow.”’ (119/861)

Qualified as the most “fortunate” of French tenses (Gougougen 1971: 110), PF has been imbued with multiple expressive and affective values, not least the opportunity it purportedly affords of envisaging the future eventuality in a more engaged, immediate, certain, committed and affective way than its inflected counterpart (Confail 1995; Deshais and Laforge 1981; Fleischman 1982; Franckel 1984; Gougougen 1971; Imbs 1968; Leeman-Bouix 1994).³ In fact, the precise role of the exponents of futurity have been the subject of much controversy in the field. The distinctions between PF and IF have been variously related to: (a) the distance between speech time and the future eventuality, (b) the degree of speaker interest, engagement and certainty vis-à-vis the eventuality and (c) stylistic variation (Vet 1993b: 204).

Even casual inspection of the vast literature on the topic reveals that, on balance, the majority of scholars, regardless of descriptive or prescriptive persuasion, favour scenario (b): the different variants are selected according to distinctions in the way the speaker conveys the future eventuality and/or the semantic and/or pragmatic import s/he wishes to convey. Curiously, however, there is little agreement as to what that import is nor which of the variants is capable of expressing it. As we detail below, many of the values ascribed by some to PF are attributed by others to IF.

Making use of a variationist approach, in this paper we return to the question of the function and meaning of these exponents of futurity in spoken French through systematic examination and analysis of thousands of contexts of future temporal reference in natural speech. We show that although the variant forms continue to divide up the work of expressing posteriority, they are rarely selected by speakers in accordance with the values commonly attributed to them in either the descriptive or prescriptive literature. This is because basically all reference to future states or events is made by PF, which has ousted IF from virtually all contexts of productive usage but one, while P has made only incipient incursions into another. We suggest that failure to attain consensus on the set of meanings or functions distinguishing the variants is the product of an epistemological problem stemming from difficulty in reconciling the form-function polyvalence characteristic of inherent variation with the (distributional) linguistic enterprise of ascribing a unique function to every form.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: In section 2 we sketch the historical facts that gave rise to the current situation. In section 3 we review some of the explanations offered for the alternation among forms. Section 4 outlines a variationist perspective on the problem. Section 5 describes the corpus of spontaneous Canadian French from which the data were culled and details the way they

³. See, e.g., Colman (1975) and Jeanjean (1988) for the opposing view that IF expresses certainty.
were coded and analyzed. Section 6 offers an empirical test of the major factors proposed to condition the choice among variants, and section 7 concludes with some reflections on the state of the future temporal reference sector in contemporary French.

2. The evolution of PF

The periphrasis alter + infinitive was apparently identified with immediate or proximate future early on, though only officially ratified as such by Maupas in 1625 (Gougenheim 1971: 99). Hampered in their quest for a corresponding Latin expression (Gougenheim 1971: 100), by 1660 Port Royal grammarians had succeeded in linking it to the Greek pastōpōst futūrum, and thereby distinguishing it from IF, though they had not yet dignified it with a name. This fell to Abbé Antonini, who a century later, in his Principes de la grammaire française, pratique et raisonnée (1753), dubbed it the futur prochain. The new form soon became an official participant in verb conjugation tables and was eventually widely accepted as an auxiliary of (proximate) future time. The influence of his nomenclature, well-motivated or not, has been so pervasive that many still refer to the PF as futur proche, and to this day proximity continues to figure among the meanings ascribed to it by many educators and prescriptive grammarians (Battey and Hintze 1992; Grevisse 1986; Leeman-Bouix 1994). As we shall see, however, the proximity reading of PF remains quite controversial (as indeed, do many of the other readings associated with it), and most linguists in fact reject any such association in contemporary usage. We return to this observation below.

Perhaps because alter + infinitive began grammaticizing to future marker so early, it apparently escaped adverse reaction and ensuing stigma.4 It is thus all the more puzzling that from its earliest uses, the PF was employed only rarely in written texts, despite its abundance in the spoken language. Fifteenth and sixteenth century writers apparently reserved PF for their characters while eschewing it themselves (Gougenheim 1971: 98). Five centuries later, this discrepancy still obtains. PF continues to outrank IF in the spoken language (Bauheze 1929; Chevalier 1994; Deshaies and Lafarge 1981; Emirkhanian and Sankoff 1985; Lorenz 1989; Pfister 1976; Söll 1983; Wales 1983; Zimmer 1994; and section 6 below), while the ratios are reversed in written texts (Gagnon 1990; Lesage 1991; Lesage and Gagnon 1992; Stavlovskova 1977; Sundell 1991). The near categorical reversal in proportions of PF vis-à-vis IF reported in some sources (compare Deshaies and Lafarge 1981; Emirkhanian and Sankoff 1985; and Gagnon 1990; with Lesage 1991; Lesage and Gagnon 1992; and Zimmer 1994 on spoken and written Québecois French, for example) recalls the split between the comparable synthetic/periphrastic pair along the past-tense axis (the passé simple having been

4. In striking contrast to its now defunct periphrastic counterpart, s’en alter.

3. The meaning of PF, IF and P

The temporal category of future, like the irrealis sector more generally, has traditionally been associated with a variety of nonfactive modalities, i.e., speaker attitudes toward the propositional content of the utterance. As a result, even an apparently objective statement describing a future eventuality licenses a variety of readings, depending on the analyst’s interpretation of the speaker’s conviction, participation, interest or personal involvement in the event, or the degree to which s/he views it as relating to the state of affairs at speech time. Colmán (1975), Confais (1995), Fleischman (1982) and others stress the subjective or psychological nature of the distinctions; many of them reside only in the speaker’s certainty that the predicated event will come to pass. As we shall see in what follows, herein lies the crux of the centuries-old controversy over the meaning and function of the different exponents of futurity.

We first review some of the interpretations typically associated with the forms.

3.1. Periphrastic future

Among the nuances commonly ascribed to PF are immediacy orproximity, intentionality, inception, imminence (Confais 1995), conviction that the future eventuality will take place (Confais 1995; Vet 1993a), a sense of the unavoidable (Confais 1995), speaker involvement in the event (Fleischman 1982; Leeman-Bouix 1994), a present state preparatory of the future eventuality (Vet 1993a), and the aforementioned psychological link with speech time, present relevance or prospective aspect (Blache–Benveniste 1990; Fleischman 1982; Jeanjean 1988). PF communicates the speaker’s subjective view of the event at the moment of utterance, explaining its ability to mark events located even in the remote future.

3.2. Inflected future

IF, on the other hand, is seen by many as more “neutral and psychologically detached”. It conveys neither personal involvement nor a perception that the future event is a prolongation of the situation at speech time (Confais 1995: 398; Fleischman 1982). It is used only to refer to future eventualities, not to their preparatory phases at speech time (Vet 1993a). Predication of a future eventuality with IF suggests that the speaker has no proof that the future eventuality will come to pass; its realization and/or its truth value are doubtful, hypothetical, explaining why only
IF can express a supposition about the future (Confaxs 1995: 399). The notions of inference and imagination (Reid 1955), rupture with the present, conjecture, indeterminacy, injunction and attenuation (both polite and "prudent" (Imbs 1968)) are also associated with IF.

3.3. Future present

Interpretation of the futurate present variant, where acknowledged, is rather similar to that of PF. P provides a guarantee of the truth of the proposition (Confaxs 1995: 397): the future eventuality has been initiated; the speaker is confident of the outcome (Imbs 1968). P is preferred when the future eventuality is determined or planned; the (necessary and sufficient) conditions for its realisation have already been fulfilled at speech time (Vet 1993b: 75).

The presumed capacities of the exponents of futurity to express epistemic modalities in addition to posteriority have led some scholars (e.g., Fleischman 1982: 154) to claim that an erstwhile future tense is developing (or has already developed) into a mood. The "subjective" character of IF and the more "objective" character of PF are said to be related to the particular modalities associated with each (Confaxs 1995: 402). But many of the functions or readings claimed to distinguish one of the variants have also been attributed to the others. Compare some of the nuances ascribed to IF – command, invitation, suggestion, wish, plea, polite attenuation, "prudent" attenuation, probability (e.g., Imbs 1968: 50; Stavinichová 1977: 119) – with those Gougenheim (1971: 108) claims are "marked" by PF, including command and invitation, as well as impatience, indignation and threat, ironic or otherwise.

But even this plethora of modal values does not succeed in accounting for all of the contexts in which the forms are interchangeable. For this, suggests Confaxs (1995: 400), the pragmatic attitude of the speaker with regard to the role of his utterance must be taken into account (v. also Helland 1995). In this context it is instructive to compare Confaxs’ account of IF with modalities of PF given above:

From this perspective the IF functions less as a vehicle of the speaker’s conviction with regard to the non-verifiable content of his utterance than as a sign of his engagement vis-à-vis his utterance, which is thus more action-oriented. […] The IF is used more to “interest” the interlocutor, to reassure, promise, give instructions, etc. […] “evokes more a preparation for an event than the event itself” […] This is why there are so many more perlocutionary uses [of IF] than PF. (Confaxs 1995: 401, translation ours)

Another is that there is considerable conceptual overlap among the proposed meanings. Indeed, despite ever more refined and sophisticated efforts to associate each form with a mutually exclusive set of meanings or distributional contexts (Blanche-Butenfreund 1990; Jeanjean 1988; Sundell 1991), usage data fails to reveal such boundaries.

3.4. Form-function asymmetry

Sankoff (1988) describes in some detail how disagreements occasioned by form-function asymmetry arise. Where a difference in function (or lack of substitutability) between forms is suspected, proponents of unique form-function relationships attempt, first, to define the distinction, and then to link it to categorical contextual co-occurrences. Where this fails, as we have seen to be the case for future temporal reference, the alternating forms themselves are said to be the sole bearers of the proposed functional, semantic or pragmatic distinction. And the nature of this distinction, in the absence of categorical surface correlates, is strictly a matter of individual interpretation. Hence the controversy over the function and meaning of PF, IF and P.

4. A variationist perspective on the alternation

Although the existence of a context set of contexts in which IF, PF and P are interchangeable is beginning to be acknowledged by some non-variationists (e.g.,

5. Interestingly, many of the meanings ascribed to the exponents of futurity are also traditionally attributed to the French subjunctive. This is another round “mood” whose choice empirical analysis has shown to be morphosyntactically, rather than semantically motivated in spoken Canadian French (Poplack 1992; Poplack 1997), as well as in other dialects of French empirically studied.

6. Ironically, this confusion of context and form was not lost on Imbs himself. Asserting that the volitive future (IF) expresses “all nuances of will, from the most brutal order to the simple suggestion”, he adds, “it is the tone of voice […] that normally contributes the volitive meaning” and later, “the tone alone can suffice” (Imbs 1968: 50, translation ours).
4.1. Paul se marie

We illustrate such neutralization with a reanalysis of the favored “evidence” that the exponents of futurity are not interchangeable. This concerns the “undeniable” difference in meaning between Paul va se marier and Paul se mariera (e.g., Con- fais 1995; Fleischman 1982; Imbs 1968). From the perspective of biunique form-function relationships, selection of PF would mean that the speaker has an objective means of justifying his proposition (i.e., a fiancé), while IF would render the future realization purely hypothetical (Confais 1995: 399).

In critiquing a similar analysis of the same examples by Imbs (1968), Söll (1983) had already (aptly, in our view) observed that invocation of the engagement, the fiancé, etc. was reminiscent of a novelist’s omniscience vis-à-vis his characters. He cautioned that what the author (or speaker) was thinking when writing (or uttering) the sentence could no longer be recovered, especially by the linguist’s introspection. Nor, in Söll’s view, is the analyst’s interpretation particularly relevant to the problem. Rather, he suggests, it is more useful to know what (untrained) speakers think, or even better, how they express the same idea. This can be ascertained by examining their spontaneous discourse, as we do in section 6 below.

The virtual absence from actual linguistic usage of any of the “key” contexts for resolving controversies about the meanings embodied by certain forms has hindered the quest for corpus-based confirmation of the theories that every form has
which their respective selection will be shown (section 6) to be nearly categorical, regardless of other considerations, viz. negative contexts, as in (7), and specific time adverbials, as in (5). The favored variant in the more hypothetical contexts is clearly PF (55 percent), contra claims in the literature. We take these results as a first suggestion that the constraints conditioning variant use for speakers need not coincide with those proposed by linguists.

The results of Table 1 justify the assumption of neutralization in discourse underlying the study of syntactic variation (cf. also Vet 1980). Sankoff (1988: 154) observes, however, that most scholars subscribing to strict isomorphy between form and function would contest this assumption. The notion therefore remains a hypothesis, as perforce does its antithesis — that at every use of a form its full complement of distinctions is brought into play by either speaker or hearer.

In this paper we test these hypotheses by means of systematic analysis of the distribution and conditioning of IF, PF, and P in spontaneous spoken French. We will demonstrate that within the domain of future temporal reference — their preferential locus of occurrence — IF, PF, and P are classical variants of a linguistic variable. Within this variable context, though each of the variants will be observed to co-occur in each subcontext we have succeeded in operationalizing, selection among them is neither free nor idiosyncratic. Rather, we will show that the three variants continue to divide up the work of expressing futurity, albeit rather differently from what is generally claimed in the literature. Though these conclusions are based on a variety of French spoken in Canada, there is reason to believe that they are applicable to other varieties as well.

5. Methodology
5.1. Data

The data on which this study is based were extracted from the Corpus du français parlé à Ottawa-Hull (Poplack 1989), a massive compendium (over 3.5 million words) of highly informal (“verbal”) conversations with native francophones resident in the national capital region of Canada. The corpus, gathered using standard sociolinguistic techniques, contains thousands of examples of spontaneous usage of future morphology and reference to future eventualities, but no judgments or responses to questions regarding this usage. A corpus of this nature is ideally suited to addressing the question of how the exponents of futurity are employed unreflectingly, both because of the vast amount of speech data it contains and the possibility it affords of situating the data in social context. The transcribed interviews of a representative subsample of 60 speakers, stratified according to gender, age, educational level, occupation and proficiency in English were exhaustively searched, and every verb form I) making unambiguous reference to future time and/or 2) featuring future morphology was extracted, for an initial total of 6376 tokens.

5.2. Circumscribing the variable context

A first perusal of the data quickly revealed that much of the controversy surrounding the distribution, use and meaning of the exponents of future in French stems not only from the widespread, if implicit, assumption of isomorphy between form and function, but also from failure to distinguish temporal from other uses. The systematic study of competing forms requires that not only the forms, but also the contexts in which differences among them are neutralized, be identified. The recurrent questions of whether variant forms are interchangeable or even whether one is ousting another cannot be meaningfully addressed without reference to the various contexts in which they typically do and do not occur. This was already eloquently pointed out by Söll (1983: 16), who decried the lack of information on relative frequencies of forms in like contexts.

This study differs from most others characterizing the literature in taking as its point of departure, not the forms under investigation, but rather the future temporal reference sector itself. By examining the distribution and use of forms across the different configurations of contexts constituting this temporal sector, we can ascertain not only which of the variants are used preferentially in each, but also the precise nature of the factors promoting or inhibiting their selection. This requires that the locus of variation be defined. We thus begin by circumscribing the “variable context” (i.e., the context(s) in which all variants may co-occur): any and all unambiguous reference to a state or event occurring prior to speech time.

Analysis of variant choice within the variable context entails removing from the quantitative (though not from the linguistic) analysis described below both “false” futures (featuring future morphology but not referring to future time), as well as true futures displaying frozen (or invariant), rather than productive, behavior. Approximately a third of the tokens initially extracted fell into one of these categories, either because they involved non-future uses, largely habitual, as in (8), or possible spatial movement, as in (9).

9. Many of these consisted of “defective” variants with limited distributions, whose inclusion in the
Des fois ils vont changer (PF) des affaires parce que ça sometimes they go to-change the affairs because that plaira (IF) par au monde des fois. will-please not to-the world sometimes
’Sometimes they change things because people don’t like them sometimes.’ (001/365)

(9) Viens, on va chercher (PF) Adelaide pour jouer au come, one goes to-find Adelaide for to-play the piano.

‘Come, let’s go find Adelaide and play the piano.’ (048/2944)

Other occurrences may be argued to refer to future time, but either do not admit all the variants (e.g., protases of conditional si-complexes, as in 10a and b, which preclude IF), or show no variation, i.e., are realized categorically as one or the other form. This is the case of a certain number of frozen expressions, like que c’est tu voudras in (c), sayings, songs or proverbs, as in (d), and quotations from literary sources, as in (e). These and other non-productive uses (e.g., metalinguistic commentary, as in f), as well as ambiguous uses (e.g., between habitual and future reference) were not counted in ensuing calculations. We retain for this study a total of 4533 tokens of verbs making unambiguous reference to future time.

5.3. Coding

Each of the tokens retained for analysis was coded according to a series of factors capturing motivations ascribed in the prescriptive and/or descriptive literature to the choice between PF, IF and P, as well as our own observations of variant usage. In this way we test claims about the uses of the exponents of future temporal reference against the way they are actually employed unreflectingly by speakers. Although not directly related to observations made in the linguistic literature, we show that factors of an extralinguistic nature are also relevant to our understanding of the current role of the variant expressions of future in the verbal paradigm of French.

5.3.1. Operationalizing distinctions. The subjective, intuitive, psychological nature of the semantic and/or pragmatic distinctions among variant expressions so frequently invoked in the literature makes them exceedingly difficult, if not outright impossible, to operationalize. They thus lend themselves with difficulty to empirical test. For example, the contributions of intention, typically associated with choice of PF, or of hypotheticality, often associated with IF, cannot be objectively assessed unless the speaker offers some overt clue as to her attitude vis-à-vis the future predication. In a review of two quantitative distributional analyses of
6. Results

6.1. Overall distribution of variants

Though reference to future events or states was made from the vantage points of present, as in (11), past (12), and anterior (13), and by means of numerous variants, including *être pour*, as in (12), *m’as* (restricted to 1p.sg.), as in (14), subjunctive (restricted to the temporal complementizer *maisque*) as in (15), and bare verbs, as in (16), virtually all future reference (i.e., 97 percent) is anchored in speech time, and expressed by means of three unequally distributed variants: PF, IP and P (Table 2). It is on these that we focus in what follows.

Does the Futur have a future in (Canadian) French?

(11) Si jamais demain je meurs, *j’emmène* (P) mon souffle avec moi.

(12) Je demandais à Sainte Vierge pour voir si j’étais pour mourir (E)

(13) Quand vous allez avoir fait (A) votre sieste, *bon là* when you go to have made your nap, good there

(14) Il dit, “*M’as (M) te prouver que ça ment, la Bible.*”

(15) Maisque *j’allle* (S) travailler, ça sera (IF) pas mon catéchisme

(16) Ô Falloor je me lève encore pour te montrer.

The overall distribution of the three major variant forms of future expression is given in Table 2. The table shows that PF is by far the preferred means of expressing future time, accounting for nearly ⅔ of the data, while the inflected variant occurs no more than 20 percent of the time. With the exception of P, whose use has not been empirically investigated on other corpora of spoken language, this distribution basically corroborates empirical reports on other varieties of spoken Canadian French, such as those of Deshaies and Lafarge (1981), Emirkanian and Sankoff (1985) and Zimmer (1994), and to a lesser extent those of spoken French more generally (Gougenheim 1964; Jeanjean 1988; Pfister 1976; Söll 1983). On the other hand, it diverges sharply from analyses of written lan-
Table 2. Distribution of major variant expressions of future temporal reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Periphrastic (PF)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflected (IF)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present (P)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>3594</td>
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</table>

guage, such as those of Lesage (1991), Gagnon (1990), and Sundell (1991), which show a reversal, reporting an oftentimes vast majority of IF.

The overwhelming preference for PF in the spoken language raises the question of what motivates a speaker to select IF or P. We view variant selection as the product of a complex series of considerations resulting from the simultaneous contribution of a variety of now competing, now coinciding environmental factors, such as those listed in section 5.3.1 above. To model the choice mechanism, we analyze the data by means of Goldvarb, a variable rule application for the Macintosh (Rand and Sankoff 1988). Variable rule analysis determines which of the factors contribute statistically significant effects to variant choice when all are considered simultaneously, as well as the relative magnitude of effects vis-à-vis each other (expressed in Tables 3 and 4 by the *range*). This type of analysis is thus particularly well-suited to the problem of future time expression in French. Among the factors initially investigated, clause type, animacy of the subject, lexical stativity and tense sequencing proved not to be explanatory of the variation, and will not be discussed further here. The results of the analyses of linguistic and social factors are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

6.2. Variable rule analysis of the contribution of linguistic factors to variant choice

Table 3 displays the results of three independent variable rule analyses of the contribution of linguistic factors selected by the stepwise multiple regression procedure incorporated in the variable rule program as significant to the choice of PF, IF, and P, respectively. The higher the figure, the greater the probability that the variant under investigation will be selected in the environment under consideration. Comparison among analyses affords a graphic view of the role of each variant in future reference.

6.2.1. Temporal distance. We first consider the factor originally posited to account for the choice of PF and still espoused by many prescriptive grammarians: temporal distance between speech time and the future eventuality. PF has tradi-

Table 3. Three variable rule analyses of the contribution of linguistic factors selected as significant to the probability that the INFLECTED (IF), PERIPHRASTIC (PF), and FUTURE PRESENT (P) variants will appear in future temporal reference contexts. Independent factor effects displayed in bold. Brackets indicate that the factor was not selected as significant by the stepwise multiple regression procedure.

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>IP</th>
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<td>Corrected mean</td>
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<td>727</td>
<td>052</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total N (variant)</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>2627</td>
<td>242</td>
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<td>TEMPORAL DISTANCE</td>
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<td>Contingency</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Immeinance</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Negation</td>
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favored in proximal contexts. In this they contrast with P, apparently favored in
distal contexts, contra the widely held assumption in the literature. Not only does
the hierarchy of effects fall to go in the predicted direction, but we also note that
the relative importance of temporal distance, as assessed by its range, is negligible
for each of the variants, in comparison with the robust effects of some of the other
factors. Actually, temporal proximity turns out to be highly correlated with another
factor, type of adverbial specification, such that contexts coded as proximal happen
to co-occur with non-specific adverbs, while those coded as distal tend to co-occur
with specific adverbs. This factor exerts a much stronger, and opposing, effect on
variant choice than temporal distance, as we shall see in the next section. We
provisionally conclude, along with Reid (1955), Harris (1978), Fleischman (1982),
and Confais (1995) among others, that distance between the eventuality and speech
time does not play a systematic role in variant choice.

6.2.2. Type of adverbial specification. Preference for IF and PF has been found
by Emirkanian and Sankoff (1985), Benveniste (1990), Jeanjean (1988), Flydal
(1943), Helland (1995), and Sundell (1991) to differ according to type of adver-
bial modification. Table 3 confirms that this factor contributes a robust and statisti-
cally significant effect to the choice of each of the three variants. IF is promoted
in the context of a non-specific adverbial, as in (18a), although the other variants
are frequent here as well (18b and 18c), while P is associated with specific time
adverbials, as in (18d). (These associations were also noted in Québécois journal-
istic prose (Lesage 1991), although P appears to be limited in the written texts to
specifically proximate time adverbials.)

Table 3 shows that temporal distance does exert a small but significant effect
on variant choice. But this factor does not distinguish PF from IF, since both are

(17) PROXIMAL

a. À quatre heures et demi on s’en va (P).
   At four hours and half one REFL-of-it goes
   ‘At 4:30, we go.’ (119/1834)

b. Ce soir, on va te ramener (PF) puis tu y
   this evening, one goes you to-bring-back and you there
   alleras (IF) à soir à cinq heures.
   will-go at evening at five hours
   ‘Tonight, we’ll bring you back and you’ll go there tonight at 5:00.’
   (071/584)

DISTAL

c. C’est (P) sa fête samedi, elle va avoir (PF) huit
   that-is her birthday Saturday, she goes have eight
   ans.
   years
   ‘It’s her birthday on Saturday, she’ll be eight.’ (080/71)

d. Peut-être dans 6 mois ils vont être (PF) séparés.
   can-to-be in 6 months they go to-be separated
   ‘Maybe in six months they’ll be separated.’ (117/1892)

e. Dire que dans quatre cents ans d’ici il va
   to-say that in four hundreds years from here it goes
   avoir (PF) encore des Asselin pus ils vont encore
   to-have still the Asselin then they go still
   parler (PF) français.
   Qu’ils parleront (I) pas l’anglais.
   that they won’t speak English.
   ‘To think that 400 years from now, there will still be Asselins, and
   they’ll still speak French. That they won’t speak English.’
   (004/3611)

(18) a. Tôt ou tard ils reviendront (IF),
   soon or late they will-return
   ‘Sooner or later they’ll come back.’(023/659)

b. Plus tard je pense qu’il va en avoir (PF) de la
   more late I think that-he goes of-it to-have of the
difficulté. Je pense que tout le monde va en
   difficulty I think that all the world goes of-it
   avoir (PF) à un moment donné.
   to-have at a moment given
   ‘Later I think he’s going to have trouble. I think everyone is going
to some time or other.’ (098/684)

c. Je sais qu’un jour, si je travaille là longtemps,
   I know that-one day, if I work there long-time,
   j’ai (P) de l’avenir.
   I-have PART the-futu-re
   ‘I know that one day, if I work there long enough, I’ll have a future’.
   (074/2110)
The effect of adverbial specification on PF appears to be a functional or disambiguating one, since the absence of an adverbial could confer an habitual reading to the unmarked statement; the association of IF with non-specific adverbials may be viewed as an avoidance of this eventuality. In this context, PF, favored in contexts with no adverbial complement, appears as the default option. 10 We are now in a position to understand the apparent (and counter-intuitive) associations of temporal distance and PF on the one hand, and temporal proximity and IF on the other. The former is masking the effect of a specific adverbial context; the latter, of a non-specific adverbial context.

6.2.3. Imminence. Among the various components of present relevance, prospective or phasal aspect considered determinant of the PF/IF distinction (e.g., Blanche-Benveniste 1990; Fleischman 1982; Jeanjean 1988; Vet 1993a), we have operationalized the notion of imminence, here defined (after Vet) as a state of affairs at speech (or reference) time preparatory of the future eventuality, a state at which the eventuality is impending. This is illustrated in (19).

(19) Tu bouges ta dent, çà veut dire tu es à veille you move your tooth, that wants-to-say you are at eve de perdre ta dent. Tu vas la perdre (PF). of to-lose your tooth you go it to-lose

‘You move your tooth, that means you’re about to lose your tooth. You’re going to lose it.’ (004/2232)

Table 2 shows that the factor of imminence has no effect either on the choice of IF, as expected, or of PF, contrary to predictions in the literature. Non- imminence contexts, on the other hand, favor PF, while imminence contexts disfavor it strongly. Indeed, from Table 3, it would appear that the factor of imminence accounts for most of the variability associated with choice of P, with a range of 41. However further analysis shows this too to be an epiphenomenon of the effect of adverbial specification described above. Although PF and IF occur liberally in both imminence and non-imminent contexts, P is virtually eschewed in the former (N=3). Instead, nearly all tokens of IF happen to occur in non-imminent contexts, and further (coincidentally), to co-occur in these contexts with specific time adverbials, a context we have already noted to favor this variant highly. We conclude that the factor of imminence does not contribute an independent effect to variant choice.

6.2.4. Contingency. The notions of doubt, conjecture, indeterminacy and hypotheticality have also been cited as possible influences on variant realization (e.g., Conrais 1995; Deshaies and Lafortune 1981; Reid 1955, among others), with IF reserved for contexts of strong hypothetical value. To capture the effect of hypotheticality, we adopted Fleischman’s (1982) distinction between contingent and assumed event, as in (20a–d). In (20a–b), the realization of the future eventuality is dependent upon fulfillment of a condition, hence their presumably more hypothetical value. Where the unconditional validity of the assertion is assumed, the eventuality was coded as assumed (20c–d). Assumed events would be predicted to co-occur with PF. The examples show, once again, that both IF and PF occur in each context, and Table 3 shows that this factor has no effect on the realization of PF, or for that matter, P. On the other hand, IF is apparently favored for expressing contingent events, consistent with claims in the literature, though we point out that the magnitude of this effect is very slight, with a range of only 6.

(20) CONTINGENT

a. Si tu t’arranges bien avec, il sera (IF) pas if you REFL-get-along well with, he will be not sèveré. strict

‘If you make a deal with him, he won’t be strict.’ (001/1340)

b. Je vas le voir (PF) si je vis assez vieille. I go him to-see if I live enough old

‘I’ll see him if I live that long.’ (071/1152)

ASSUMED

c. On sait que c’est changé puis que ça va one knows that that is changed then that goes changer (PF) encore. to-change again

‘We know that it’s changed and that it’s going to change again.’

(048/354)

d. On reviendra (IF) certainement pas une crise comme on one will-see-again certainly not a crisis like one a vu. has seen

‘We certainly won’t see another crisis like [the one] we saw.’

(106/457)
6.2.5. Grammatical person and number of the subject. In consideration of claims that PF is more subjective, occurring preferentially in the context of 1st person subjects, we examined our data according to grammatical person. No particular association of variant with 1st, 2nd or 3rd p. pronouns, full NPs or other types of subject, singular or plural, was detected (contra Soll 1983; Sundell 1991). We did note, however, a distinct increase in IF in the context of the formal pronoun of address vous, exemplified in (21a). We therefore divided the subjects into formal vous and others (21b). The variable rule analysis shows that in fact, IF is highly favored in the presence of the formal subject, while PF is correspondingly disfavored here. We take this as an indication of the formal nature of the inflected variant. Choice of P remains unaffected by stylistic considerations.

(21) FORMAL ‘VOUS’

a. Il dit, ‘Monsieur Rémillard, on est douze, vous he says, ‘Mister Rémillard, one is twelve, you-PL passerez (IF) pas’.
will-pass not

‘He says, “Mr. Rémillard, there are 12 of us. You won’t get by.”’ (082/196)

OTHER SUBJECTS

b. On se faisait dire que le diable va venir (PF) one REFL did to-say that the devil go to-come

‘They used to tell us that the devil is going to come get you if you did this or that.’ (038/1121)

6.2.6. Negation. We turn finally to the factor that contributes by far the greatest effect to the choice between IF and PF in Ottawa-Hull French: negation of the future eventuality. Table 3 reveals that IF is overwhelmingly preferred in negative contexts, as in (22a), with a probability of .99, while PF and P are correspondingly dispreferred here, although they may occur in this context as well, as can be seen in (22b) and (22c) respectively.

(22) NEGATIVE

a. Mais tu paieras (1) plus de taxes.
but you will-pay no-more of taxes

‘But you won’t pay taxes anymore.’ (078/1435)

b. Puis ils vont pas fournir (PF) d’autobus.
and they go not-to-provide of-bus

‘And they’re not going to provide a bus.’ (062/228)

6.2.7. Other factors

6.2.7.1. Lexical type. Some of the empirical literature on future expression (e.g., Blanche-Benveniste 1990; Jeanjean 1988; Pfister 1976; Soll 1983; Sundell 1991) alludes to the fact that some verbs show a special propensity to co-occur

c. Moi j’y vas (P) pas parce que j’ai un ouvrage.
me I-there go not because I-have a job

‘I’m not going there because I have a job.’ (025/2841)

The spectacular contribution of negation to the selection of IF, consistently highlighted in quantitative analyses (e.g., Lesage 1991; Sundell 1991), especially of spoken language data (e.g., Chevallier 1994; Deshaies and Laforge 1981; Emikanian and Sankoff 1985; Lorenz 1989; Zimmer 1994) remains, with the notable exceptions of Frankel (1984) and Vet (1993a), either unknown, unacknowledged or merely noted in passing elsewhere (e.g., Blanche-Benveniste 1990; Jeanjean 1988; Soll 1983). Indeed, no association of future morphology with negative contexts was attested in the 67-language GRAMCATS sample used by Bybee et al. (1994) to study the expression of future (Bybee p.c.). Those who have acknowledged the effect have variously ascribed it to the propensity of tenses to neutralize in negative contexts (Givón 1975), the increased hypotheticality of negative contexts (Deshaies and Laforge 1981), and the “categorical” nature of IF (Soll 1983). Vet (p.c.) suggests that the rarity of PF in negative contexts reflects the rarity at speech time of precursor or preparatory event/states announcing the absence of a future event/state. While such explanations may indeed be consistent with the meanings their proponents ascribe to IF, they fail to explain why other contexts which are theoretically equally propitious, semantically and/or pragmatically, to IF usage, currently show little or none.11 The developments culminating in the reduction of domains appropriate to IF selection to negative contexts constitute an interesting question for further research. Whatever their nature, we stress that negative contexts, which themselves account for less than 10 percent of the data, are the only remaining loci in which IF is currently used productively in spoken Canadian French.

We noted earlier that certain apparent effects in Table 3 could be shown on further analysis to be epiphenomena of the effect of adverbial specification. When the highly influential negative contexts are removed from the data set, only two factors (displayed in bold in Table 3) are seen to contribute an independent effect to the choice of IF: co-occurrence with a non-specific adverb, and use in formal speech styles and situations.

11. Moreover, we note that the subjunctive, equally imbued with meanings of non-assertion and hypotheticality, is practically nonexistent in negative (subjunctive-selecting) contexts (Poplack 1992).
with a particular morphological form. Such an association, albeit for the most part weak, is also clearly detectable in Ottawa-Hull French between the IF and a small class of lexical verbs. Interestingly, many of these are the very ones found elsewhere (Poplack 1992; Poplack 1997) to be associated with the (otherwise non-productive) selection of subjunctive morphology in the same corpus: the set of highly frequent and/or morphologically irregular verbs, in particular vouloir (77 percent IF), pouvoir (50 percent), savoir (37 percent), revoir (37 percent), être (23 percent), avoir (22 percent), faire, dire aller, voir each co-occur with IF 15 percent or less of the time. As was also found for the subjunctive (ibid.), other lexical verbs abhor the IF, co-occurring with it rarely or never. Among them are partir (4 percent), mourir (3 percent), commencer (2 percent), falloir (1 percent), manger (0 percent), montrer (0 percent), s'asseoir (0 percent), and curiously, the eponym for IF, chanter (0 percent)!

For Jeanjean and Blanche-Benveniste, the inherent characteristics of the verbs they claim to be associated with IF (stative, prospective aspect) are consistent with the semantic interpretation they give IF. In our data, as noted in section 6.1 above, lexical stativity plays no distinguishing role in variant choice. In addition, with the exception of vouloir (a very frequent constituent of frozen expressions with IF, as in (10c) above) and pouvoir, the associations we report all fall well below the 50 percent mark. Moreover, even these figures are contaminated by the overriding effect of negation. When the effect of negation is factored out, the number of verbs co-occurring with IF 15 percent of the time or better falls to five. We therefore tend to agree with Soll and others who ascribe the preference for IF to text frequency and morphological salience of the resulting form. The propensity of only some lexical types to receive IF adds to the accumulating evidence that it does not function productively as a future tense marker in spoken French.

6.2.7.2. Expressive content of the proposition. Although we have seen the inflected future to be selected exceedingly rarely in general, there is one class of proposition in which IF is the norm: those in which it is seen as an “immutable” part of the utterance. This is the case of direct quotations of God or Jesus, as in (23), which are always rendered with IF (in contrast to lesser beings, who are quoted in IF only 13 percent of the time), as well as prayers, psalms and other quotations from the Bible (24); songs, proverbs (104) and nursery rhymes (25), and fixed expressions, as in (26).

(23) a. Le Bon Dieu a dit, ‘Tu ne tueras (IF) point.’
the Good God has said, you NEG will-kill not

‘The Good Lord has said, “Thou shalt not kill.”’ (107/1637)

12. The marked formality of (23a) is further evidenced by the rare presence in it of the negative particles ne and point.

b. Dieu a toujours dit, ‘Aide-toi et le ciel
God has always said, help-you and the heaven
t’aidera (IF).
you-will-help

‘God has always said, “Heaven helps those who help themselves.”’
(113/855)

(24) La Bible elle mentionne justement qu’à la fin des
the Bible she mentions justly that at the end of the
temps […] la fausse religion sera (IF) détruite.
times […] the false religion will-be destroyed

‘In fact, the Bible mentions that at the end of time, false religion will be destroyed.’ (092/626)

(25) Faut pas dire, ‘Fontaine, je boirai (IF) jamais de ton
must not to-say fountain, I will-drink never of your
eau.
water

‘You shouldn’t say “never say never.”’ (115/888)

(26) a. S’il vient une crise là, si c’est comme … ce
if it comes a crisis there, if that-is like … this
sera (IF) pas des farces
will-be not the jokes

‘If a crisis comes, it’s like … that won’t be a joke.’ (048/518)

b. Je le sais pas, on voira (IF) bien ça.
I it know not, one will-see well that

‘I don’t know, we’ll see.’ (040/3515)

The frozen, often archaic, nature of these preferred uses of IF is of course consistent with its preponderance in formal vous contexts reported above, and adds further support to its largely formulaic nature in spoken French.

Summarizing, we have seen that the linguistic contexts in which IF pordures include first and foremost, negated propositions, and to a lesser extent, contexts with non-specific temporal modification. Formal speech style (reflected in citations of biblical and literary sources as well as in choice of the relatively rare and highly marked formal pronoun of address vous) also favors IF. Note that the contexts propitious to IF are not only “marked” syntactically and/or pragmatically, but are also relatively rare in sustained discourse. The “markedness” of IF may also be adduced from its reduced total N as well as its associated “corrected mean” (i.e., overall propensity to occur) of only .145 in Table 3. The numerous corresponding unmarked contexts (i.e., those lacking adversial specification, or any nuance of formality) promote PF. This bolsters our hypothesis that PF is functioning as a generalized default option for signaling posteriorty, while IF is retained in nega-
tive, formal and formulaic contexts. P remains unaffected by most of the factors that constrain the choice between the inflected and periphrastic variants. This variant, though rarely selected (Tables 2 and 3), is encroaching on the future temporal reference sector via contexts modified by specific adverbials.

The configuration of factors selected as significant to the probabilities of variant choice, and their associated constraint hierarchies displayed in Table 3, suggest that the three exponents of futurity have each appropriated their preferred portion of the future temporal reference sector, although there remains some overlap (i.e. variability) among them. IF is selected in negative and non-specific adverbial contexts, as well as in formal and formulaic speech styles. P is preferred in contexts modified by specific time adverbials. PF is the norm elsewhere, apparently regardless of semantic or pragmatic considerations. These findings are bolstered by the results of variable rule analyses of the contribution of social factors, to which we now turn.

6.3. The social context of variant usage

Although none of the theories of variant choice reviewed here hinges on factors of an extralinguistic nature, as noted earlier, corpus-based research permits us to situate our linguistic findings in community context. We next examine the contribution of standard sociolinguistic factors (age, gender, educational attainment and occupational grouping) to the probability that each of the exponents of futurity will be selected. Because the region under study is massively bilingual, it is often suggested that the patterns exhibited are due to contact with English. Analysis of the Corpus du français parlé à Ottawa-Hull, which was constructed with the specific aim of measuring the effect of language contact on French, enables us to verify the possibility of contact-induced change by examining the distribution of data according to speakers’ rating on an English Proficiency Index (Poplack 1989). No correlation between variant use and level of bilingualism was found.

The results of variable rule analysis, shown in Table 4, reveal other extralinguistic effects to be sparse as well, consistent with our (informal) observation that none of the major exponents of futurity is particularly stigmatized (or prestigious). Indeed, only one extralinguistic factor is selected as significant to the choice of PF and IF: speaker age. Both variants may be seen to be participating in (gradual) change in progress: IF is retained most among older speakers, while PF is increasing among the younger. Such change was also reported by Emirkanian and Sankoff (1985) and Zimmer (1994) for Montréal French, Chevalier (1994) for New Brunswick French and B. Lorenz (1989) for Paris French. No other extralinguistic effect is significant to the choice of any of the variants. This social scenario is entirely consistent with the linguistic findings we have just reviewed. In other words, unlike the case for bona fide sociolinguistic markers in this community, notably the subjunctive (Poplack 1992; Poplack 1997) and the conditional (LeBlanc 1998) for future temporal reference it makes no social difference which variant is selected. With the exception of the few contexts favoring IF and P respectively, there is little reason to believe it makes much linguistic difference either. We suggest that this is because IF is participating in a change which is much closer to completion.

Table 4. Three independent variable rule analyses of the contribution of social factors selected as significant to the probability that the INFLECTED (IF), PERIPHRASTIC (PF), and PRESENT (P) variants will be selected in future temporal reference contexts.

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<th>PF</th>
<th>P</th>
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<td>0.065</td>
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<td>242</td>
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13. In contrast, subjunctive morphology, although not used in modal functions in Ottawa-Hull French,
7. Discussion

Making use of standard variationist methodology, we have put to empirical test a number of hypotheses about the nature of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors conditioning the choice among the major exponents of futurity in spoken Canadian French. Consideration of the factors revealed to be significant to this choice, as well as their relative magnitude via-à-via each other, lend scant support to the prevailing ideas that factors of a temporal, modal, semantic or pragmatic nature are major determinants of the alternation between periphrastic, inflected and future present forms.

On the contrary, we have shown that PF, far from being reserved for the expression of some marked future eventuality, functions instead as the basic default future marker in spoken (Canadian) French. It has not only penetrated, but occurs preferentially in every one of the contexts we have succeeded in operationalizing: lexical, syntactic, semantic and discursive, though a few of these also show (minor) associations with one of the other variants. The only exception is negative contexts, indisputably the domain of IF. The linguistic results, taken in conjunction with the finding that the variant forms are currently participating in change in progress, not only in Ottawa-Hull but wherever else this has been explicitly investigated (Montréal, New Brunswick, Paris), has led us to suggest that negative propositions, along with certain frozen, formal and formulaic expressions, in fact constitute the last bastion of productive IF use in the future temporal reference sector of spoken French. PF, on the other hand, is on the increase, with (sparse) inroads from P, which is holding stable across generations. It may be objected that the standard variationist practice of excluding tokens which do not form part of the variable context effectively obscures any productive role IF may play elsewhere in the grammar. In this context we stress that the overwhelming majority (85 percent) of the excluded tokens involves, not IF, but PF. Indeed, despite its rarity in future temporal reference contexts, IF is actually employed four times more often for this purpose than for any other. This should allay any suspicion that IF fulfills a major grammatical role outside the future temporal reference sector. 14

These results, taken together, suggest that the future temporal reference system of French has undergone reorganization, with PF occupying a default position signaling “colorless” future, and P a serious option only in temporally specified future contexts. With the exception of a number of fixed uses, IF, whose productive use does not exceed 6 percent, is more appropriately characterized as a negative polarity item and/or a marker of formality than a future marker in spoken French.

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14. PF, on the other hand, is used nearly as often for non-future reference, largely in habitual contexts.

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15. On the other hand, the theoretically naive but uncannily accurate Québécois writer Michel Tremblay correctly represents not only the association but also its magnitude (1) in his characters’ dialogue. Even more surprising, the ongoing linguistic change reported here and elsewhere is discernable therein as well (Bélanger and Pépin 1997, Haggins-Daines et al. 1997).

The situation we describe here, independently confirmed for all varieties of Canadian French using like methodology, is at least incipient, if not already well under way, in spoken European French as well, to judge by the results of the few studies available (Blanche-Benveniste 1990; Jeanjean 1988; Lorenz 1989; Soll 1983). Meaningful comparison between spoken Canadian and other varieties of French, however, must await systematic study of the latter using comparable methods of data collection, sampling and analysis.

The results of this study bring further evidence that quantitative patterns of occurrence and co-occurrence of variant forms are relatively inaccessible to introspection or even testing methodology. This is why francophones (including linguists) we queried about the overall rarity of IF or about its association with negation were entirely unaware of them, despite the overwhelming nature of these effects in their own French.
Fleischman (1982: 85) and others that in early uses, *aller* + infinitive tended to co-occur with temporal adverbs signalling futurity. Through frequent collocation, that sense was eventually transferred to the periphrasis itself, paving the way for PF to appear without a supporting time adverbial, and to assume, at least in terms of temporal distance, an equivalent role to IF. If in turn has largely vacated its erstwhile position as future tense marker to take on new, largely non-temporal (or modal), meanings. The former place of PF is being usurped by P, which is infiltrating the temporal reference sector via the same contexts as its predecessor: specific time adverbials, providing testimony to the cyclical nature of future time expression (e.g., Anderson 1979; Fleischman 1982; Reid 1955).16

These synchronic data on French future temporal reference thus afford us a rare glimpse of the final stages of linguistic change, although we cannot predict with certainty whether it will go to completion. Indeed, on the model of the preverbal negation marker *ne*, which despite occurring in fewer than 1 percent of negative contexts in both Montréal (G. Sankoff and Laberge 1980) and Ottawa-Hull French, continues to fulfill an important stylistic function, IF may yet perdure as a marker of highly formal speech, and/or a negative polarity item in irrealis contexts. *Qui vivra verra.*

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References


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16 Interestingly, English appears far more conservative than French in the expression of future temporal reference: the variant corresponding to IF (*will*) continues to predominate, though PF is gaining ground in some non-standard and regional varieties (Poplack and Tagliamonte 1995; 1996).

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