

# Grammatical blending and the conceptualization of complex cases of interpretational overlap

The case of *want to/wanna*\*

Guillaume Desagulier

Université Paris 8-St Denis / Université Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux 3

In this paper, grammatical blending is presented as an alternative to the conventional, linear overlap models of grammaticalization when it comes to conceptualizing complex cases of overlaps. The choice of the 'emerging modal' *want to/wanna* as a case study is motivated precisely by its interpretational complexity. For it appears that the grammaticalization of *want to/wanna* has been shaped by the compositional interaction of form and meaning. In this configuration, the linear model has to be modified for two reasons: being exclusively semantic, it does not take the form of the expression into account; being linear, it does not lend itself to a treatment of constructional compositionality. Grammatical blending, understood as the blend of constructions as defined in the Construction Grammar framework, is one way of altering the linear model so as to enable the representation of non-linear (i.e. compositional) constructional overlaps.

**Keywords:** blending, constructions, overlap, compositionality, language change, intermediate forms

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to set the stage for a unified, integrative representation of complex cognitive mechanisms linking form and meaning as well as synchronic and diachronic parameters. The choice of Krug's (2000) 'emerging modals' as a case study is motivated by the hybrid nature of its members. *Have (got) to/hafta/gotta, going to/gonna* and *want to/wanna* share a common transitory status on the <main verb – auxiliary> continuum (see also Okazaki, 2002). My contention is that intermediate forms are prime revealers of the mechanisms of linguistic creativity and innovation. Pride of place will accordingly be given to the treatment

of *want (to)*, whose intermediate status is particularly salient, as it is still lagging behind the other ‘emerging modals’ in terms of auxiliariation and modalization processes. Indeed modal uses of *want to* such as (1) happen to be restricted to deontic meanings (advice-giving) and are still not as widespread as modal interpretations of *have (got) to* and *going to*, which have acquired conventionalized deontic and epistemic extensions (2–5):

- (1) You want to be careful of that fellow, you know. (*Small World*, D.Lodge)
- (2) I have to [deontic] find out whether I can do it or not. (*The Guardian*)
- (3) Well, chaps it has to [epistemic] be Tony Currie. (British National Corpus)
- (4) I am going to [deontic] talk to the public. (*The Times*).
- (5) We’re going to [epistemic] have a new mum. (Coates, 1983, p. 198)

*Want to* also owes its special status to the fact that it does not have as many formal properties defining modals as *have (got) to* and *going to*, which is why it is still classified as a main verb in most descriptive studies.

In other words, the more hybrid the form, the greater the chance its analysis will bring the mechanisms of constructional extension to the fore. Mechanisms are by definition dynamic — a fact simple and obvious enough to raise the most complex methodological issues:

- how can grammar keep pace with linguistic flexibility?

The problem with grammatical categorization is that it very often fails to keep pace with the flexibility of language. This is because language evolves, and the phenomenon is gradual. The profusion of minimally different linguistic categories shows that the models that created them have failed to integrate the mechanisms of change that have given rise to apparent synchronic diversity. This is one of the reasons why new categories appear quite regularly. Instead of looking for new categories to account for linguistic changes, it seems more profitable to look for the principles that give rise to change. The problem is that categories are not dynamic, unlike language change. Hence the second question:

- what should a linguistic model integrate so as to be *dynamic*?

Taking a fresh look at an old issue, I have constructed a dynamic model integrating factors for language change that are traditionally kept apart: diachrony and synchrony on the one hand, form and meaning on the other hand. In doing this, I have followed Heine’s treatment of the indefinite articles, in which he conjures up “(...) a model that explains linguistic categories with reference to their genesis and evolution” (Heine, 1997b, p. 81) and Bybee’s valuable guideline: “(...) a model of language must include the mechanisms by which change occurs as an integral part of its architecture.” (Bybee, 2001, p. 57).

## 2. Properties of the ‘emerging modals’ in light of the paradigm of prototypical modal auxiliaries

### 2.1 The grammaticalization of the ‘emerging modals’

There is little controversy over the inventory of the prototypical modals of English. They consist of a group of five auxiliaries (*can, will, shall, may, must*), four of which have past-tense forms, also known as ‘past modals’: *could, would, should, might*. All of them share the usual properties of auxiliaries along with *do, be* and *have*, and specific features that distinguish them as *modal* auxiliaries, known as the N.I.C.E. properties: negation, inversion, code and emphasis (Huddleston, 1976, p. 333). As Coates (1983, p. 4) rightly points out, “[the N.I.C.E. properties] very clearly draw a line between auxiliaries and main verbs, a line which would be far from clear if we tried to use semantic characteristics.” Four main syntactic criteria are also commonly recognized as singling out the English modals as a class of their own in the category of auxiliaries: they do not combine with other modals, do not take the 3rd person singular <-s>, do not appear in non-finite forms and do not have imperatives. Palmer (2001, pp. 91–92) observes that modals have what he calls ‘suppletive negative forms’, i.e. “the negative forms for epistemic possibility are provided, suppletively, by the forms for epistemic possibility” — e.g. *may* vs. *cannot/can’t*. The same is true of deontic modals as regards negation but at a more complex level. Deontic possibility and necessity can each be negated in two, non equivalent ways: possible + NEG → possible not/not possible; necessary + NEG → necessary not/not necessary. Deriving from the latter principle is another property of modal auxiliaries, namely they differ in form in the marking of epistemic and deontic meanings as well as in terms of negation and tense. For instance deontic *must* has a morphologically affiliated negative form (*mustn’t*) alongside *needn’t*, which is not true of epistemic *must*, whose negative counterpart is *cannot/can’t*.

It would be wrong to presume that the characteristics described above account for a group of forms with strict, homogeneous behaviour. By the time of Middle English, the lexical verbs now known as ‘modals’ proved more difficult to classify as they came to be used as auxiliaries (Visser, 1973; Denison, 1993). Nowadays the problematic area has switched to a new set of intermediate forms. For instance, *ought* is generally followed by the *to* infinitive, but in non-assertive context — i.e. when conceived as a mere possibility — *to* can be dropped optionally, as with *dare* and *need*. Syntactically, “it can cease to constitute a before-position with respect to the event expressed by the infinitive and be followed by the bare infinitive” (Duffley, 1992, p. 114). *Need* and *dare* can function either as modal auxiliaries or as lexical verbs, unlike *can, will, shall, may, must* (Palmer, 2001, p. 100). Once again, “the modal construction is restricted to non-assertive contexts, i.e. mainly negative and interrogative sentences” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 138). Interestingly, the

semantics of *need* and *dare* influences their syntactic behaviour, which shows that the syntax-semantics interface is problematic as regards modals.

Similarly, *have (got) to*, *going to*, *want to* and their contracted counterparts (*hafta*, *gotta*, *gonna* and *wanna*) have raised a certain number of taxonomic problems. Previous accounts agree as to the intermediate nature of *have (got) to* and *going to* on the main verb-auxiliary continuum. Accordingly *have to* and *be going to* have been classified as ‘semi-auxiliaries’ (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 143) or ‘quasi-modals’ (Lightfoot, 1979, p. 112; Coates, 1983, p. 5) and *have got to* as a ‘modal idiom’ (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 137). More problematic is the status of *want to/wanna*, which is conventionally described as a main verb on syntactic grounds (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 148). In this respect it lags behind *have (got) to* and *going to* on the auxiliarization path. Yet, recent studies have pointed out that *want to/wanna* is also being grammaticalized as a modal-like element (Krug, 2000, 2001; Okazaki, 2002).

Krug’s (2000) study differs from previous accounts insofar as it goes beyond the traditional syntactic distinctions between ‘semi-auxiliaries’, ‘modal idioms’ and ‘marginal modals’ and suggests that a reconciliation of form and function in the description and formalization of *have (got) to/hafta/gotta*, *going to/gonna* and *want to/wanna* is possible. Krug paves the way for a unified treatment of those intermediate forms as he shows that they have grammaticalized from non-modal semantics and non-auxiliary forms to constructions that convey modal meaning and display some of the properties of central modals. He thus contends that those modal verbs form a category of their own, which he calls ‘emerging modals’. Nevertheless, all ‘emerging modals’ do not exhibit modal-like behaviors to the same degree.

In the wake of Sweetser (1990) a growing community of linguists contend that semantic change is from content to mental and ‘speech act’ meanings, not vice versa. The same kind of unidirectional mappings have shaped the extensions of *have*, *go* and *want* over time, though not in the same proportions (Figures 1–3). For *want to*, the final step in the semantic path is deontic whereas for *have (got) to* and *be going to* the deontic interpretation is only transitional; it precedes an epistemic stage.

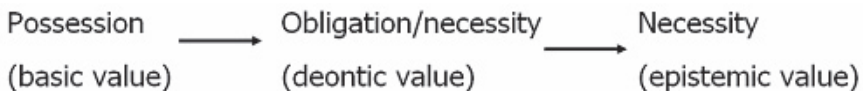


Figure 1. The semantic evolution path of *have (got) (to)*<sup>1</sup>

- (6) (...) we constantly have new immigrants. (*New York Times*, march 2002) →  
POSSESSION
- (7) we have to secure the future of new immigrants. → OBLIGATION
- (8) I guess new immigrants have to be in a difficult position. → EPIST. NECESSITY

geographic/physical movement → intention → futurity

Figure 2. The semantic evolution path of *going (to)* (the ‘Movement Path’)

- (9) Here, you know that just going to [MOVEMENT THROUGH SPACE] the corner store you’re not going to [EPISTEMIC VALUE] see some crazy altercation. (*New York Times*, March 2002)
- (10) I am going to dye my hair red. (ibid.) → INTENTION

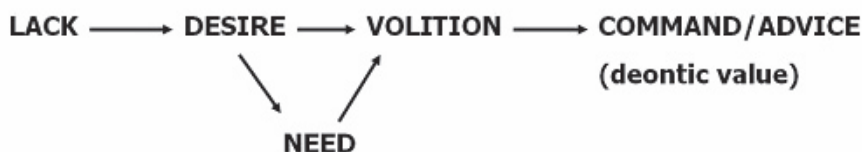


Figure 3. The semantic evolution path of *want (to)*<sup>2</sup>

- (11) there was no want of respect in the young man’s address. (Jane Austen, quot. from *American Heritage Dictionary*) → LACK
- (12) What do you want for Christmas? → DESIRE
- (13) *Your hair wants cutting, said the Hatter.* (Lewis Carroll) → NEED
- (14) I want to eat an apple. → VOLITION
- (15) You do not want to appear brash or pushy. (*The Times*) → ADVICE-GIVING
- (16) You might not want to take those drugs if you drive. → ADVICE-GIVING
- (17) Then you want to/wanna take the left lane. → ADVICE-GIVING

## 2.2 Motivations for the grammaticalization of the ‘emerging modals’:

### The semantics–pragmatics interface

Studies within the grammaticalization framework (though not exclusively, cf. Sperber & Wilson’s Relevance Theory and Papafragou, 2000) have shown that semantic changes are conditioned by pragmatic factors. For example, Traugott (1989, 1995) singled out several significant inference patterns. She argues that more concrete propositional meaning — used to describe external situations, e.g. spatial movement or location — is regularly inferred to have meanings that describe internal situations (evaluative, perceptual or cognitive), viz, intention in the case of *be going to*. That trend provides a relevant explanation for the transition from more concrete ‘lack’ to more internal, subject-centered ‘desire’ in the case of *want to*. The switch from ‘desire’ to volition and from volition to warning and advice-giving has to do with another observation: the more abstract meanings of grammatical constructions stem from more common inference patterns. Drawing on Levinson’s (1983) Inference Theory, the concept of ‘inference’ follows a series of basic steps which apply rather well to the most recent uses of the ‘emerging modals’, such as the advice-giving uses of *want to*:

(17) Then you want to take the left lane.

- a. the literal meaning and force of the utterance is computed by, and available to, the participants: *want* = agentive volition + a desired entity (object or process)
- b. there is some indication that the literal meaning/force is inadequate: *you want to take the left lane* → is volition prototypically involved?
- c. there are principles that allow us to derive the relevant indirect meaning from the literal meaning and the context: *you should desire to take the left lane since it is in your interest to do so.*

(17) is a good example of a semantic extension with loss of primary meaning and progressive decategorialization. It is difficult to say that in the driving context the speaker appeals to the hearer's volition or desire. In most dialects of English, *what if I don't want to?* would be a surprising reply on the part of the addressee, except if s/he is deliberately joking. In general, deontic *want to/wanna* is naturally interpreted as such when used in the appropriate context. What motivates the advice-giving use and interpretation of *want to* or *wanna* here is the illusory acknowledgment on the part of the speaker that the hearer (*you*) is his/her own authority (comparatively speaking, *you need to take the left lane* would sound more constraining on the part of the speaker). But in the end, it is the speaker who is the actual source of authority. This is quite in keeping with Palmer's pragmatic characterization of deontic modality: "It is for this reason that Searle (1983, p. 166) speaks of 'directives', which he defines as 'Where we try to get [others] do things'" (Palmer, 2001, p. 10). This reference to Searle tells us how significant pragmatic deduction is in the transition from volition to various degrees of command. In this respect, advice-giving uses of *want to/wanna* appear to be instances of 'indirect speech acts' defined in analytical philosophy as a speech act performed by way of another speech act, i.e. a command, a suggestion or some advice by an assertive statement. Most indirect speech acts have an idiomatic meaning based on a more literal one. Searle suggests that politeness is the main reason for indirect speech acts even though he leaves it unclear how this comes about. In fact, indirect speech acts are generally considered to leave more choices to the hearer. It is for this reason that *want to/wanna* enables the speaker to deceptively establish the hearer's will as the ultimate authority. Consequently, (1) above can be paraphrased as follows: 'you want to be careful of that fellow because it is in your interest and it is therefore natural for you to desire to be careful when in fact I want you to be careful.'

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that profiling the advice-giving frame in the case of *want to* is often a matter of argument selection. Accordingly, an advice-giving usage in discourse very often relies first and foremost on the choice of *you* as the first argument subject, as examples (15), (16) and (17) show. Yet there are cases of deontic *want to/wanna* constructions with 1pl argument subjects:

(18) It is 10:30 in the morning, so we'll want to go easy. (*San Francisco Chronicle*)

It should be noted also that, logically enough, the advice-giving interpretation for *want to/wanna* applies to declarative clauses, not to WH-constructions.

In other words, the content of grammar — currently modality and various modal extensions such as advice-giving, deontic meaning, future — arises from the very act of communication since it is one of the main features of communication to make inferences. In Bybee's words, "hearers are commonly working to infer as much as possible about the relations of narrated descriptions to the current speech situation and to the speaker's subjective evaluation of it" (Bybee, 2002, p. 11). It is clear that when the same inference pattern occurs frequently with a specific construction the inferred meaning can become part of the general meaning of that construction. If *want to* is frequently used to convey warnings or some advice, it begins to have those semantic extensions as part of its general meaning. Therefore in its modal extensions *want to* undergoes a weakening of its original semantic content in the form of 'semantic bleaching': the primary, more literal meaning is diluted in the extended set of contexts in which it is used. The same is true of *be going to*: as it has been frequently used to express intention, intention has become part of its general meaning, even though originally 'intention' was not part of its basic schematic structure.

### 2.3 Auxiliarization

Also relevant in the distribution of *have (got) to/hafta/gotta*, *going to/gonna* and *want to/wanna* is the relationship between frequency, phonological reduction, modalization and auxiliarization. Krug (2000) showed that the 'emerging modals' display signs of primary auxiliarization when used with a modal value and there is every reason to believe that *hafta*, *gotta*, *gonna* and *wanna* are the phonogrammatic consequences of the phonological reduction, morphological contraction and syntactic univerbation of the verbs and the infinitive marker *to*. The 'emerging modals' thus exemplify the regular phonological reduction process occurring with high-frequency constructions, described at length by Bybee (1994, 2001, 2002).

Even though *want to/wanna* has not gone as far as the central modals and most of the other emerging modals, since it takes 3sg agreement and do-support like *hafta*, it allows contraction more readily than other similar verbs (Pullum, 1997; Krug, 2000), as examples (19), (20) and (21) show:

(19) I didn't wanna move. (BNC)

(20) ?I didn't intenna move.

(21) ?I didn't planna move.

This idea has gained support among linguists, despite the debate on the nature of the *to*-contraction (Pullum, 1997; Krug, 2000; Boas, 2002, 2003), and is a formal

indication that *want to* has become grammaticalized as an ‘emerging modal’. It is further confirmed by the fact that in spoken discourse, owing to the increased frequency of the contracted realizations of *want to* ([‘wɒnə], [‘wʊnə] and [‘wənə]) and the advice-giving function of the whole construction, it is very likely to be pronounced [‘wɒnə], as a single, non-separable unit behaving like an auxiliary governing a bare infinitive. In some cases, the infinitive marker can even be said to have become an affix or rather a clitic. The same phenomenon can be observed for *gonna*, *hafta* and *gotta* (Okazaki, 2002).

### 3. Conceptualizing emerging properties

#### 3.1 Grammaticalization and overlap

Even if the conceptualization in terms of a succession of mappings between concepts that are distinct but related gives us a clear idea of the semantic evolution paths of the emerging modals (cf. Figures 1, 2, and 3 above), it is important to bear in mind that periods of overlap are systematic, which Heine expresses as follows:

one characteristic of [grammaticalization] is that it involves an overlap stage, where the expression concerned can be interpreted simultaneously with reference to both the source meaning and the target meaning — that is, where there is ambiguity between the two meanings. (Heine, 1997b, p. 107)

The overlap model of grammaticalization (Figure 4) stems from this principle.

Structure	Development Stage		
	I	II	III
<i>Source</i>	A	A	
<i>Target</i>		B	B

Figure 4. The overlap model of grammaticalization (adapted from Heine 1997a, p. 82)

Enlightening as it is, Heine’s concept of overlapping meaning in diachrony is not so innovative in itself. It is actually not so far from Coates’s representation of ambiguity and mergers in the field of modality by means of ‘fuzzy set diagrams’ (Coates, 1983, p. 12): “An indeterminate example is said to be ambiguous when it is not possible to decide which of two meanings is intended.” (1983, p. 15). Ambiguity implies that the two meanings are distinct but only one is chosen in the end. On the other hand, a merger differs from a case of ambiguity insofar as “it is not necessary to decide which meaning is intended before the example can be understood; with mergers, the two meanings involved are not in certain contexts mutually exclusive.” (1983, p. 17). Example (17) analyzed above illustrates quite well what Coates means by ‘merger’. The contextual indeterminacy of a merger is not an obstacle to interpretation and should be represented as part of its stored image.

### 3.1.1 *The overlap model applied to emerging modals*

The interpretational ambiguities that stem from the periods of overlap are crucial stages in the development of new constructions and it can be said that the polysemy of emerging modals reflects their diachronic evolutions.

*Have* and *go* have become almost transparent in most cases through their grammaticalizations. Yet, the various stages of grammaticalization of *be going to* and *have (got) to* did coexist significantly at some point in their evolutions, i.e. in Early Modern English for *have to*, much later for *have got to* and in Modern English for *going to*, although the change originated in the 15th century or even earlier. Remnants of those overlap stages are still to be found nowadays, as shown in examples (22–29):

– *have (got) (to)*:

(22) I **have** a book (stage I): POSSESSION

(23) I **have** a book **to** read (stage II — overlap): POSSESSION/NECESSITY<sup>3</sup>

(24) An American lady has already been complaining about her day and the fact that she **has** a train **to** catch after the show. (*The Guardian*, Thursday August 16, 2001) (stage III) : NECESSITY (no possession involved here.)

(25) I **have to** buy a book (stage III): NECESSITY + possible manifest auxiliarization (hafta)

– *going to*:

(26) We're **going to** Spain (stage I): SPATIAL

(27) We're **going** [=leaving] **to** give a paper (stage II — overlap 1): SPATIAL + PURPOSIVE

(28) We're **going to** give a paper (stage III — overlap 2): TEMPORAL + PURPOSIVE

(29) Tomorrow we're **going to** give a paper (stage IV): TEMPORAL<sup>4</sup>

In (27), overlap 1 is possible only if *going to* means 'leaving' or 'traveling' (Hopper & Traugott, 1993, p. 3), i.e. if it is used in a purposive directional construction with a non-finite complement: the agentive subject is in the process of moving somewhere with the purpose of giving a paper. Yet, there is no overlap *per se* if *going to* is construed only with a directional meaning before a locative adverb, i.e. *We're going to Spain [to give a paper]*. From stage 2 onwards, *to* loses its directional value and can be reanalyzed as infinitival *to*.

Following the overlap model scrupulously would prompt us to conclude that the earlier stages in the grammaticalization of each of the emerging modals serve as the basis for the creation of the subsequent constructions, which is true to some extent, at least as far as *have (got) (to)/hafta/gotta* and *going (to)/gonna* are concerned. But as regards *want to*, the linear overlap model does not apply that well anymore.

### 3.1.2. *Does the overlap model apply to want (to)?*

Indeed, the nature of the semantic overlap at work with *want to* is far more complex. The first reason is that the grammaticalization of *want to* has been up till now shaped by at least five development stages, which is more than what we have with *have (got) (to)* and *going (to)* — respectively three and four approximately (cf. Figures 1–3 above). The second reason is that each overlap may involve more than two development stages at a given time. In the novel from which (30) is taken, the main character — a lecturer referred to as *you* — travels around the world in search of the girl with whom he has fallen in love. She also happens to be a scholar and regularly attends international conferences. In the following example, the young man is being briefed by a colleague (the speaker) on how he can find his love. Consequently, *want to* is here endowed with an advice-giving value:

- (30) You want to cruise the various meetings, looking out for the subjects that are likely to interest her. (*Small World*)

The volitional property traditionally attached to the verbal notion of *want* is also naturally activated. But at the same time, “cruising the various meetings” is presented as a prerequisite for the success of the character’s project, and ‘necessity’ should not be ruled out, along with ‘lack’ (since conference-attending is obviously not part of the character’s original plans) and ‘desire’ (on the grounds that attending meetings conditions future benefit). It is therefore reasonable to think that here up to five among the different interpretations associated with *want to* can coexist synchronically (lack, necessity, desire, volition, advice), even if, depending on the context, one or several specific senses will predominate. A linear representation of the synchronic polysemy of *want to* in light of its evolution as depicted in Figure 5 is therefore inaccurate if one is to conceptualize frequent overlaps such as, say ABC, ACD, BD, ABCD etc.

Therefore the linear model has to be altered so as to enable the representation of simultaneous overlaps.

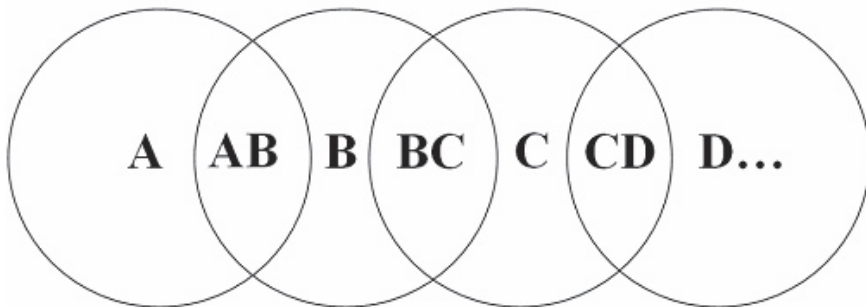


Figure 5. A linear representation of the overlap model

### 3.2 Re-conceptualizing overlap

In light of Fauconnier and Turner’s theory of Mental Spaces (Fauconnier, 1997; Fauconnier & Turner, 1996), I claim that it is possible to account for the ambiguities that stem from the complex relationship between the synchronic polysemy of the emerging modals and their diachronic evolution in terms of mental space blending. I contend that the stages in the semantic development of the emerging modals evoke a space structured by some appropriate frame, and that the synchronic meaning of the whole is a successful blending of the two spaces involved. The nature of the blend will depend on the frame profiled. Figure 6 below is an illustration of what we have when the volition frame is selected in the case of *want to*. A sentence like *Mary wants to eat an apple* might prompt us to associate the

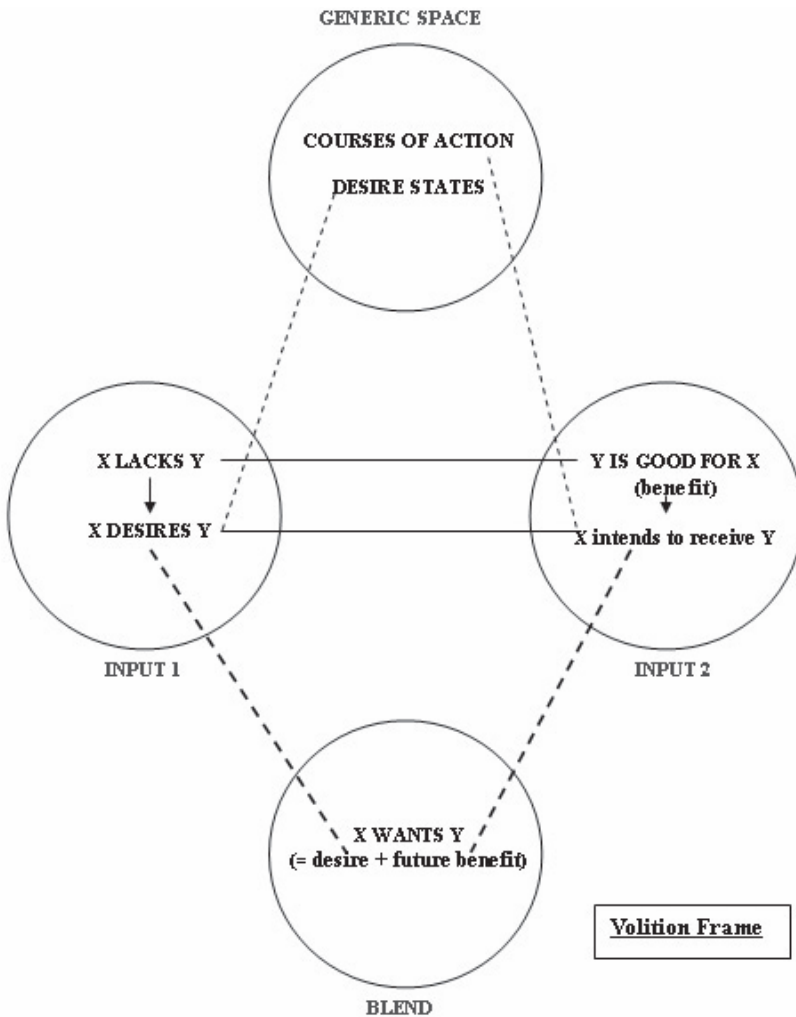


Figure 6. *Want to* (volitional) and Mental Space Blending (after Desagulier, 2004)

desire for an apple (input 1: X desires Y) — because Mary does not have an apple to eat (input 1: X lacks Y) — with the agentive realization of that desire (input 2: X intends to receive Y) — on the grounds that eating an apple is perceived by Mary as something good, hence something to benefit from (input 2). Of course, the number of zones to be activated from inputs 1 and 2 will depend on the context and the level of information that the speaker wants to convey. Note that in Figure 6 I choose to break down the composite structure of input 1 into its components. For I want to highlight the fact that input 1 is the condensed version of the blend created when the desire frame is selected (not illustrated in this paper for the sake of concision), and which itself takes part in the blend at work when the volition frame is selected.

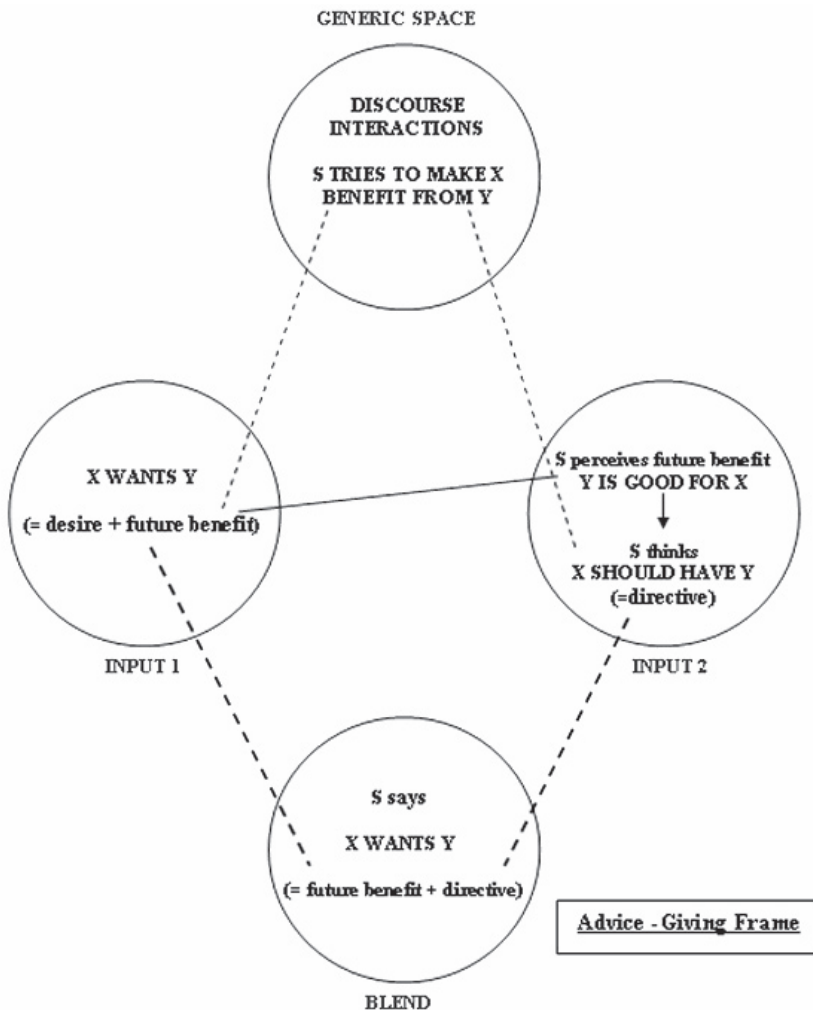


Figure 7. *Want to* (deontic) and Mental Space Blending (after Desagulier, 2004)

On the other hand, when the advice-giving frame is profiled (Figure 7) a warning such as *you want to/wanna be careful* (cf. ex. (17) analyzed above) indicates that the speaker (S) identifies the blend as described in Figure 6 with his or her own view on the situation (input 2, Figure 7).

In other words, S perceives that being careful is good for *you*, therefore *you* should be careful. Input 1 and the blend in Figure 6 together with the blend in Figure 7 represent successive stages in the semantic development of *want to*.

Since the mappings can operate across composite structures, as above, it means that blending is suited to the purpose of representing the synchronic coexistence of different development stages. It successfully conceptualizes the emerging meanings of *want to* listed in §§ 1.1., 1.2. and 2.1.2 as part of its stored image.

However the problem with the representation of mental spaces is that they fail to represent morphosyntactic blends and semantic blends within the same structure, which leaves aside the fact that contracted realizations of *want to* can be considered as blends at the morphosyntactic level. The same criticism can be addressed to the overlap model as it tackles the problems of ambiguity and polysemy from the angle of semantics exclusively. I suggest that the issues generated by the problematics of language change and more precisely by grammaticalization have to do with the pairings of form and meaning.

### 3.3 Grammaticalization and constructions

No mechanism of change associated with grammaticalization can be studied outside the context of the construction in which the grammaticizing element occurs. Bybee and Traugott tell us that the grammaticalization of lexical items takes place within particular constructions and further that grammaticalization is the creation of new constructions.

As shown above, the latest development stage of *want to* takes the form of an extension to deontic usage and the concomitant auxiliarization of the morphological sequence #wvnt# #to#. Thus, as illustrated in Figure 8 below, deontic *want to/wanna* grammaticalizes structurally in the transitive volitional construction (input 1) while receiving its new (modal) meaning from input 2. Note that the old meanings (lack, need, volition, intention) do not necessarily disappear completely in the blend, in which case they are imported from input 1.

Langacker showed that with typical deontic modals “the source of potency is no longer identified with the subject, but is implicit and subjectively construed.” (Langacker, 2000, p. 308). In other words, the source of potency is often identified with the speaker (even though it need not be). On the other hand, deontic *wanna* constructions create the illusion that the source of potency is identified with the subject, as seen in §1.2 above. The speaker’s constraint is still present, but only in the form of an indirect speech act. Such an illusion vanishes as soon as S appears at the surface level, as in *I want you to be careful. You wanna be careful* and *I want*

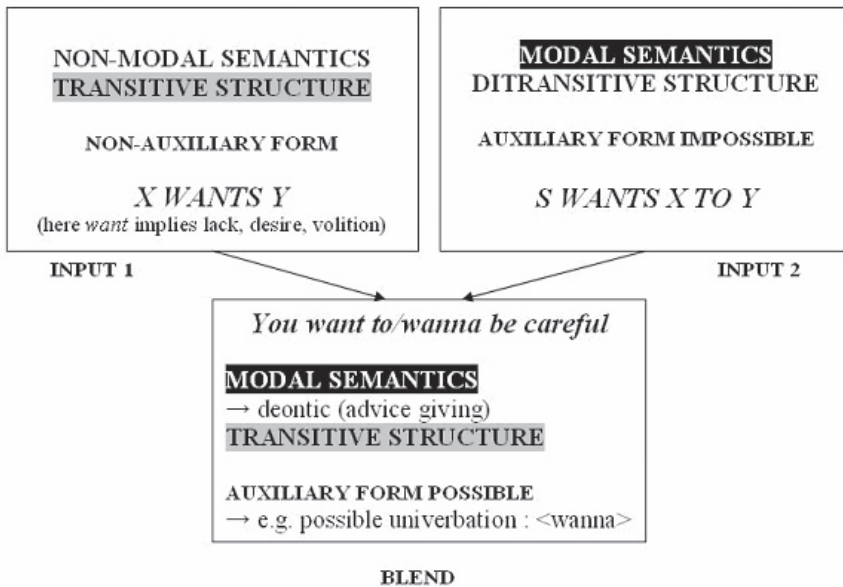


Figure 8. Constructional compositionality: *want to*

*you to be careful* are semantically equivalent, but result from different pragmatic strategies.

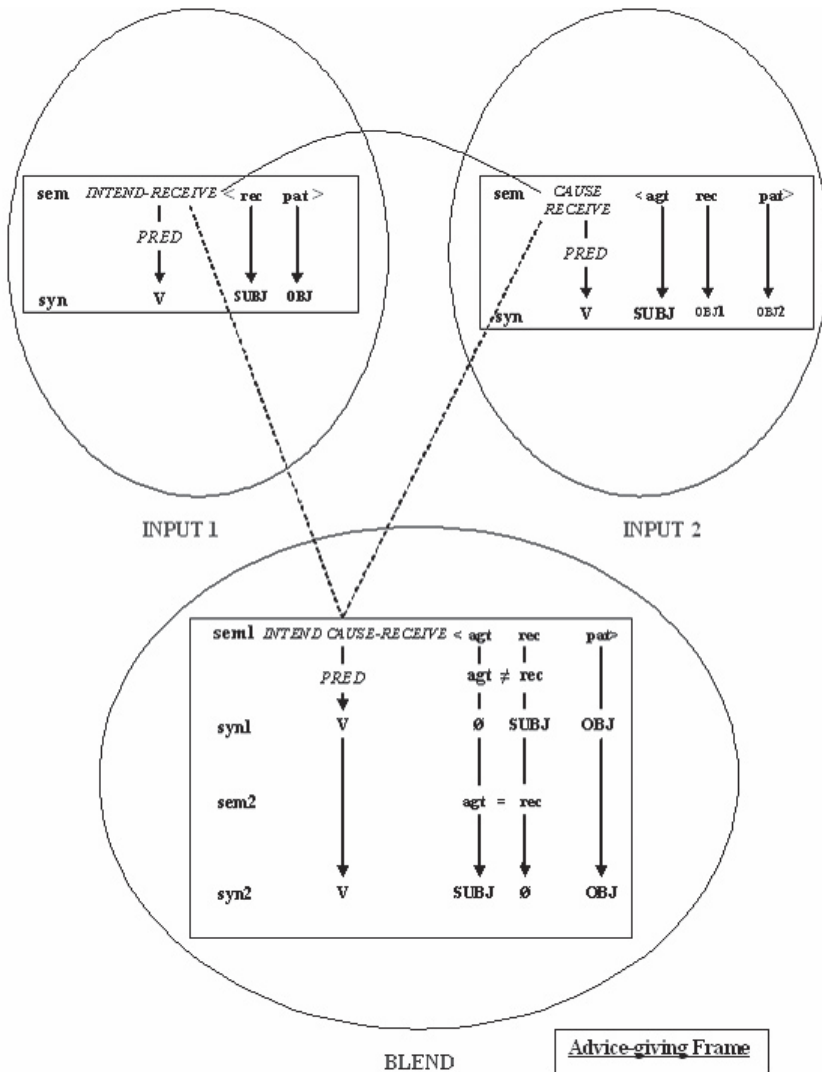
The new form-meaning pairing (transitive structure/modal meaning) is what makes the auxiliarization possible — the latter being manifest when the univerbation of *want to* yields *wanna*. What needs to be borne in mind is that the mechanisms of language creativity do not always imply complete linguistic novelties out of brand-new components. We have just seen that in the case of *want to*, the latest development stage to date consists in the new pairing of pre-existing forms and meanings. In other words, what is new in the most recent composite structure associated with *want to* is the so far unprecedented combination of ‘second-hand’ components. The blend representation is therefore made possible since both inputs are present from the start. It appears that constructional compositionality might well provide us with new perspectives in language change. In short, what is new is not the syntax or the semantics, since they already exist but the pairings of syntax and semantics that are created.

### 3.4 Grammaticalization and constructional grounding

In his 1999 dissertation, Chris Johnson reasserted the role of constructional grounding in the acquisition process. It means that young children may use one construction as the model for another in the learning process, in accordance with the theory according to which “historical change leads to a new state of language in

which two conventional signs overlap significantly in function and form.” (Johnson, 1999, p.1).

I do not want to enter the debate of whether constructional grounding is a matter of language acquisition or adult usage but it is definitely at work in forms on the make. I hope to have shown above that in the case of *want to* constructional grounding could be compositional and not merely linear, especially when a construction echoes more than one pairing of form and meaning. Figure 9, which is a



*agt ≠ rec* : *You want to be careful*

*agt = rec* : *We'll want to go easy*

**Figure 9.** Compositional constructional grounding: the case of *want to* (after Desagulier, 2004)

more fine-grained version of Figure 8, reasserts with more strength the ‘based-on relation’ between the deontic *want to* construction and older ones. It shows how a new construction grammaticalizes from older, more concrete constructions, which entails one or several periods of constructional overlap.

As explained above, the deontic *want to/wanna* construction appears to be the blend of what I call the volitional construction (of the form INTEND-RECEIVE, i.e. X intends to receive Y) and the CAUSE-RECEIVE construction (of the form S wants X to receive Y). Constructional grounding can be compositional.

#### 4. Conclusion

The phenomenon of overlap is rather easy to understand from a purely semantic perspective, and providing the semantic path under scrutiny is linear. But the implications in terms of the combination of form and meaning are generally more complex — especially in the case of *want to/wanna* which, in some examples, retains all the meanings that have shaped its evolution up to now. Our case study reveals that forms and meanings can interact in a compositional way, which means that the linear overlap model as we know it has to be modified accordingly. That is what I have tried to do here by combining the assets of blending and grammatical constructions.

I have intended to reassert the centrality of composition in language diversity and creativity by showing that mental space blending is involved in the auxiliarization and modalization of *want to*. If on the one hand the blending conceptualization is well suited to the purpose of representing the coexistence of more than two development stages at a given time of utterance, as it reveals how synchrony and diachrony intermingle in discourse, on the other hand one major problem with such a theoretical construct is that it still fails to integrate form and meaning. It is possible to make up for that structural shortcoming by integrating constructions into the blending mechanism, since one of the crucial assets of a constructional treatment is to deal with form and meaning within the same means of representation. If blending is to deal with grammar, then it should not be content with associating purely conceptual structures: form is also part and parcel of the compositional operation at work in the blending process. To some extent, ‘grammatical blending’ and ‘constructional blending’ should be treated as synonyms.

I have argued that compositional constructional grounding is the keystone of ‘grammatical blending’, as first described by Fauconnier (1997, pp. 172–176). As such, it might well be an explanation for language change. In this respect, grammatical blending is indeed powerful and creative.

## Notes

\* This article is the outcome of two talks that I gave at ICLC-8 (Desagulier, 2003) and the International Conference in Cognitive Linguistics, “Modelling Thought and Constructing Meaning: Cognitive Models in Interaction”, November 20–21 2003, Università degli Studi di Pavia, Italy.

1. One should bear in mind that, when considered on its own, *have* is involved in two other concomitant grammaticalization paths insofar as it also evolved into a marker of the perfect aspect and as a causative.

2. The tight differences in meaning between those concepts have been mentioned in Desagulier (2004):

“It seems natural for anyone to desire what one lacks or needs and to express that desire in an agentive manner by means of volition. Of course, lack does not always entail desire — one may lack and need a flu vaccine without understandably relishing at the prospect of the vaccination itself. Still, one may reluctantly go to the doctor’s and ask for the vaccination, prompted by a future benefit — e.g. being in good health — in which case volition does not have to presuppose desire. Conversely, desire does not necessarily induce volition, for we might well find an object, a person or a situation desirable — a villa on the Riviera, an expensive car, etc. — without actually wanting them.”

3. Here, ‘necessity’ is to be understood epistemically and deontically (obligation). For the sake of clarity, the two meanings are not distinguished.

4. See also Langacker’s interesting remarks on the future sense of *go* (1991b, pp. 330–333).

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### *Author's address*

Guillaume Desagulier  
Université Paris 8 — Département d'Études des Pays Anglophones,  
Bâtiment B  
2, rue de la Liberté,  
93526 St Denis,  
France  
E-mail: Guillaume.Desagulier@univ-paris8.fr

### *About the author*

Guillaume Desagulier is a Ph.D. student under the supervision of Prof. Jean-Rémi Lapaire at the University Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux 3, France. His dissertation focuses on the cognitive mechanisms of language change in an utterer-centered framework that combines Mental Spaces and Construction Grammar(s). He is currently teaching as an Attaché Temporaire d'Enseignement et de Recherches at the University Paris 8 at St Denis, France. His main research interests include language change, form-function interplays and compositionality at the level of emerging constructions.