A corpus study of periphrastic prospective constructions in West Germanic

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Roadmap

1. **What is prospective aspect?**
   - Definitions
   - German and Dutch

2. **Metaphorical mapping**
   - Frames
   - Deriving Adverb Effects

3. **Broadening the scope**

4. **Corpus study**
   - Types of adverbials
   - Telicity of embedded verb
   - Synchronic proxy measures

5. **Conclusion**

(bonus topics: futures vs. prospectives, syntax, and the effect of negation)

What is prospective aspect?

Here's a classic example: (1) *The ship **is about to** sail*   (Comrie 1976:64)

"temporal phase located close before the initial boundary of the situation […] with (crucially) no implication about whether the situation actually occurred or not"

(Kuteva et al. 2019:859)

Hill (in press): PREP(*e, e′, w*) and CLOSE(*e, e′*)

PREP(*e, e′, w*) "relation which states that at world *w*, *e* is a preparatory state for *e′* such that *e* causes *e′* (p.6)

CLOSE(*e, e′*)   "relation that […] asserts *e′* is temporally close to *e*"   (p.6-7)

Bogaards & Fleischhauer (in press): PRE-STATE and IMM(*x*)

PRE-STATE   state prior to *x* (*x* does not hold)

IMM(*x*)   state such that at any point sampled from it, *x* could obtain (possibility)   (p.12)

German and Dutch

(2) *Er* **stand/war** *kurz* **davor** *zu* *fliehen.*
he stood/was short in.front.of to flee

(3) *Hij* **stond** **op** **het** **punt** *om* *te* *vluchten.*
he stood on the point COMP to flee

'He was about to flee.'

| matrix verb |
| metaphor |
| adverb |

Kurz 'short': temporal closeness, imminence—cf. Dutch *net/juist* 'just', *bijna* 'almost'

Bogaards & Fleischhauer (in press): Sharp distributional difference

Table 11. Number of close-in-time modifiers.

	German	Dutch
Close-in-time modifiers	764 (92.4%)	9 (1.1%)
No close-in-time modifiers	66 (7.6%)	845 (98.9%)

‣ Derivable from **matrix verb**?

matrix verb	close-in-time modifiers
'stand'	92.4%
'be'	99.3%

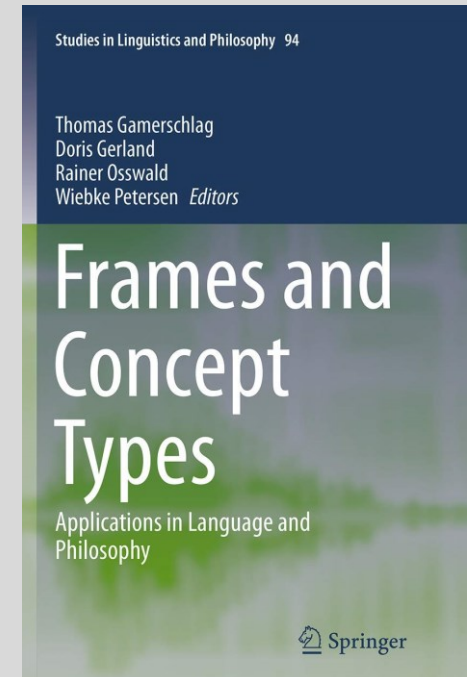‣ Derivable from **metaphor**?

Frames

Frames are a cognitively plausible format for representing conceptual and lexical knowledge (Barsalou 1992)

Frames describe their referents in terms of typed recursive attribute-value structures (e.g., Löbner 2014, 2021)

Attributes are functional and assign a unique value to the bearer of the attribute

▸ Compositional approach

Studies in Linguistics and Philosophy 94

Thomas Gamerschlag
Doris Gerland
Rainer Osswald
Wiebke Petersen *Editors*

Frames and
Concept
Types

Applications in Language and
Philosophy

Springer

Spatial prepositions: A frame analysis
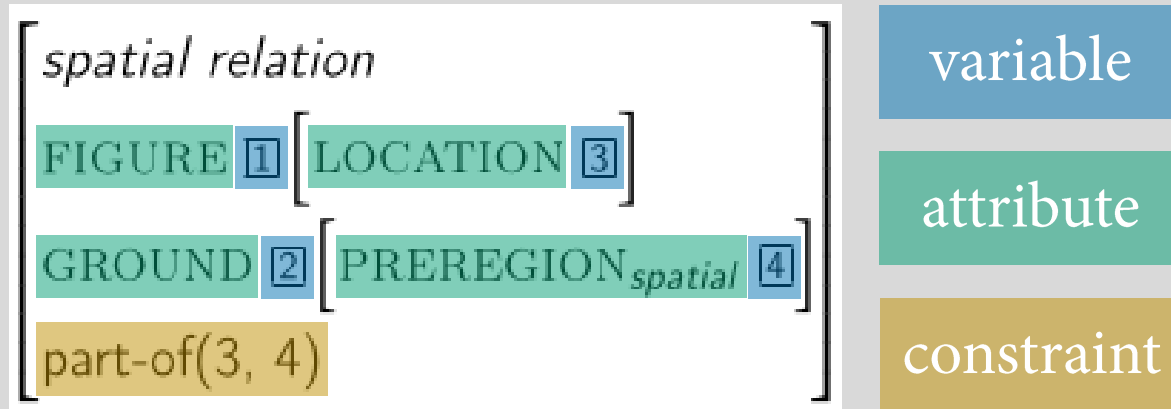

Fig. 1   Frame representation of German spatial *vor*.
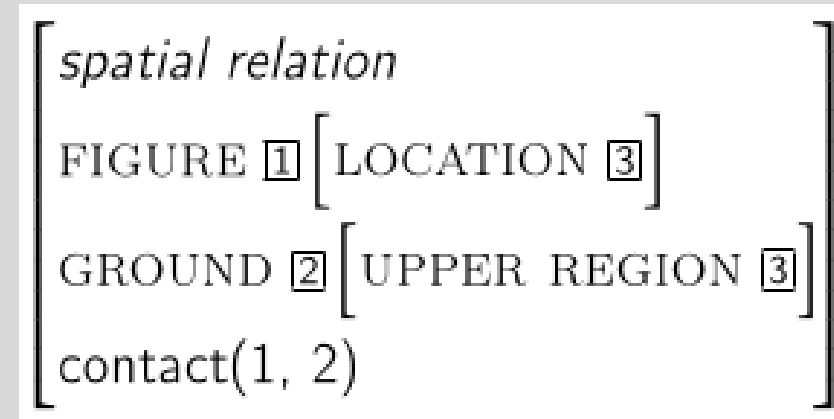
Fig. 2   Frame representation of Dutch spatial *op*.

op het bed staan : A frame analysis

Fig. 2   Frame representation of Dutch spatial *op*.

Fig. 3   Frame representation of Dutch *De hond staat op het bed* 'The dog is standing on the bed'

▶ Frame unification

Metaphorical mapping

We derive the metaphorical interpretation of the spatial prepositions by a **structure preserving** of the spatial attributes onto corresponding temporal attributes.

Fig. 4 Prospective *vor* (German).
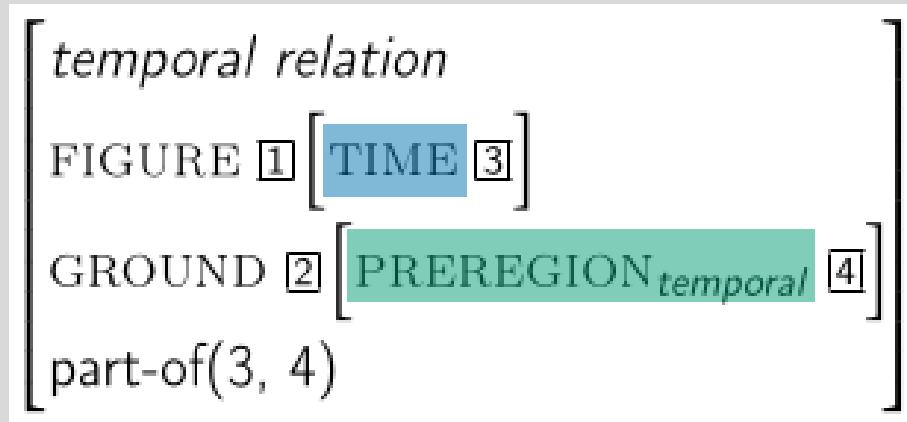
LOCATION → TIME

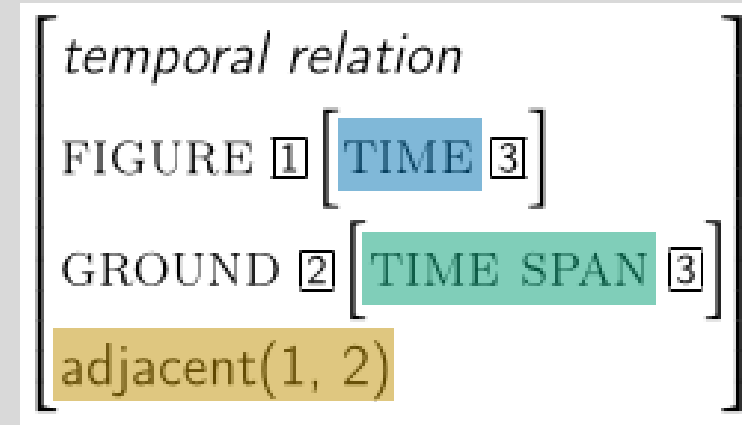PREREGION$_{spatial}$ → PREREGION$_{temporal}$

Fig. 5 Prospective *op* (Dutch).

LOCATION → TIME

UPPER REGION → TIME SPAN

contact(1,2) → adjacent(1,2)

Deriving Adverb Effects

Fig. 4 Prospective *vor* (German).
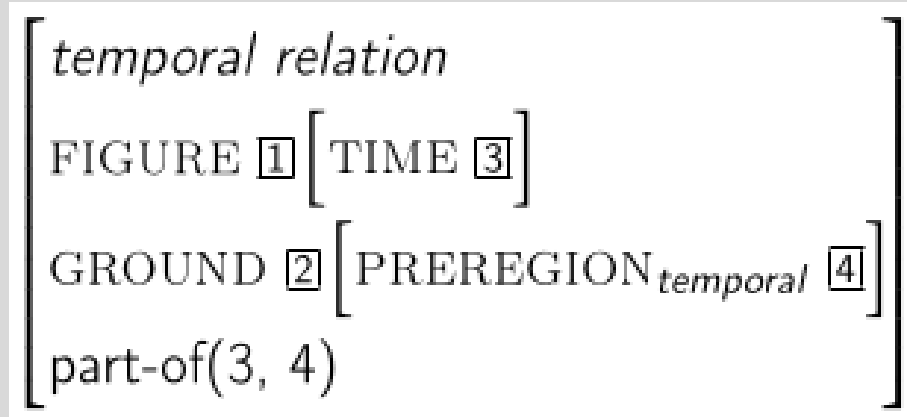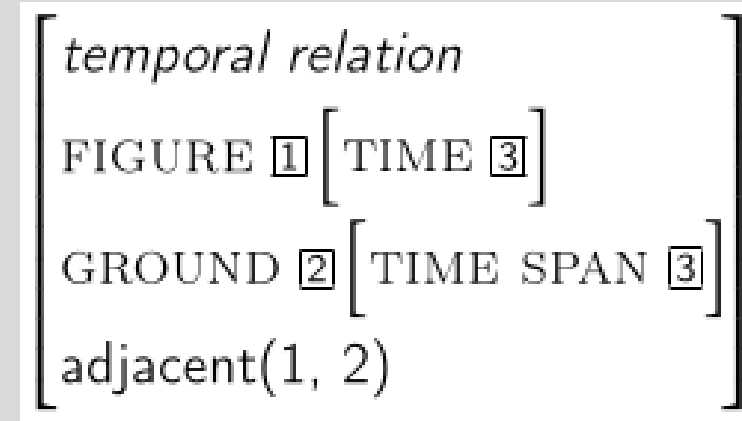

Fig. 5 Prospective *op* (Dutch).

Temporal preregion (DE) vs. Adjacency constraint (NL) ▸ *kurz* 'short' modifies PREREGION

Cf. Dik (1997:240): Prospective vs. Immediate Prosp.

ASPECT	LOCATIVE METAPHOR
Prospective	X before SoA
Imm. Prosp.	X on brink of SoA

A bit more abstractly: Adverbs designating Discrete vs. Non-discrete Intervals

Deriving Adverb Effects

Temporal preregion (DE) vs. Adjacency constraint (NL) ▸ *kurz* 'short' modifies PREREGION

A bit more abstractly: Adverbs designating Discrete vs. Non-discrete Intervals

Discrete

(2) *Er   stand/war   **kurz**   davor   zu   fliehen.*
he   stood/was   short   in.front.of   to   flee

(3′) *Hij   stond   **net**   op   het   punt   om   te   vluchten.* ▸ **redundant**
he   stood   just   on   the   point   COMP   to   flee   (statistically infrequent)
'He was just/right about to flee.'

Non-discrete

(4) *Die Soldaten seien **nur zwei Sekunden** davor   gewesen, auf die Flugzeuge zu feuern* […]
the   soldiers   were   only two   seconds   in.front.of been   on   the   airplane   to   fire
[RHZ06/NOV.08660 Rhein-Zeitung, 10.11.2006; Franzosen bedroht]
'The soldiers were two seconds away from shooting at the airplane.'

(5) *De   soldaten   stonden   (*twee   seconden*)   op   het punt om   te   schieten.* ▸ **incompatible**
the   soldiers   stood   two   seconds   on   the point COMP to   shoot   (categorically excluded)
'The soldiers were (*two seconds) about to shoot.'

Deriving Adverb Effects

German type

$$\begin{bmatrix} \textit{temporal relation} \\ \text{FIGURE} \; \boxed{1} \begin{bmatrix} \text{TIME} \; \boxed{3} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{GROUND} \; \boxed{2} \begin{bmatrix} \text{PREREGION}_{\textit{temporal}} \; \boxed{4} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{part-of}(3, 4) \end{bmatrix}$$
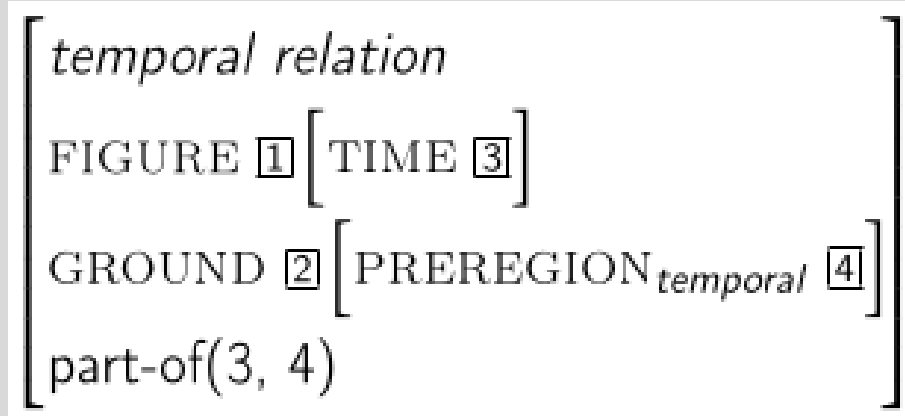
Adverbs

Discrete
- ▸ reduce interval
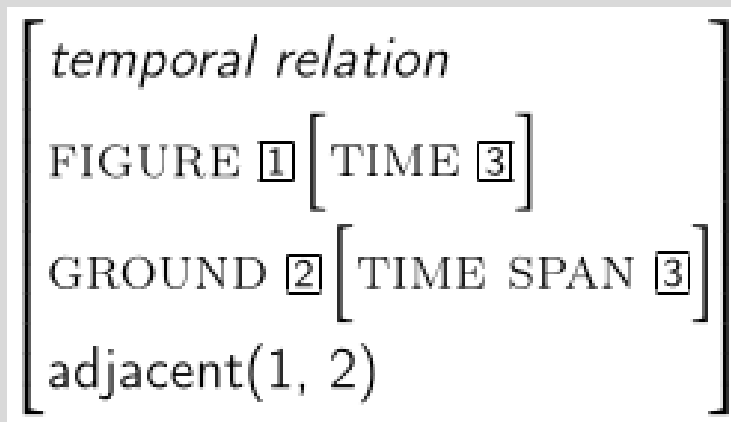
Non-discrete
- ▸ quantify over interval

Dutch type

$$\begin{bmatrix} \textit{temporal relation} \\ \text{FIGURE} \; \boxed{1} \begin{bmatrix} \text{TIME} \; \boxed{3} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{GROUND} \; \boxed{2} \begin{bmatrix} \text{TIME SPAN} \; \boxed{3} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{adjacent}(1, 2) \end{bmatrix}$$

Discrete
- ▸ **redundant** (statistically infrequent)

Non-discrete
- ▸ **incompatible** (categorically excluded)

Deriving Adverb Effects

Adverbs

German type

Discrete
▸ reduce interval

Non-discrete
▸ quantify over interval

Dutch type

Discrete
▸ **redundant** (statistically infrequent)

Non-discrete
▸ **incompatible** (categorically excluded)

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Do these predictions hold for a broader set of data?

Broadening the scope

Afrikaans

Hy was/het op die punt gestaan om te vlug.

Dutch

Hij stond op het punt te vluchten.

Hij stond op vluchten.

English

He was on the verge/brink/cusp/point of fleeing.

He was about to flee.

German

Er stand/war kurz davor zu fliehen.

Die Arbeiter stünden/sein kurz vor der Rente.

'on the point' type

'in front of' type

?

Broadening the scope

Afrikaans

*Hy **was**/het **op die punt gestaan** om te vlug.*

Dutch

*Hij **stond op het punt te** vluchten.*

*Hij **stond op** vluchten.*

English

*He **was on the verge/brink/cusp/point of** fleeing.*

*He **was about to** flee.*   compare... *She's **about** 1m70 tall*
*I'm just **about** done*

German

*Er **stand/war** kurz **davor zu** fliehen.*

*Die Arbeiter **stünden/sein** kurz **vor** der Rente.*

Spatial

'on the point' type

'in front of' type

Non-spatial

approximative type

Broadening the scope

Afrikaans

*Hy **was**/het **op die punt gestaan** om te vlug.*

Dutch

*Hij **stond op het punt te** vluchten.*

*Hij **stond op** vluchten.*

English

*He **was on the verge/brink/cusp/point of** fleeing.*

*He **was about to** flee.*

German

*Er **stand**/war kurz **davor zu** fliehen.*

*Die Arbeiter **stünden**/sein kurz **vor** der Rente.*

Spatial

Non-spatial

'on the point' type

'in front of' type

approximative type

▸ check for (non-) discrete temporal adverbials in several corpora

Afrikaans Language Commission Corpus

Dutch SoNaR Corpus

English British National Corpus

German Reference Corpus (DeReKo)

Corpus study

Dutch

ADVERBIALS ▸	discrete	non-discrete	none
op het punt staan	9 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	845 (98.9%)
op…staan	4 (1.5%)	0 (0%)	848 (99.5%)

German

ADVERBIALS ▸	discrete	non-discrete	none
davor stehen zu	764 (92.4%)	3 (3.6%)	63 (7.6%)
stehen vor	513 (32%)	5 (3.1%)	1085 (67.7%)

Two components:

1. Non-redundancy of imminential (discrete) adverbial (contrast NL vs. DE)

2. Conventionalization of *kurz* as part of *davor*-construction (contrast within DE)

▸ Frame analysis, in principle, accounts for both outcomes

Corpus study

NL

ADVERBIALS ▸	discrete	non-discrete	none
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DE

ADVERBIALS ▸	discrete	non-discrete	none
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Afrikaans

ADVERBIALS ▸	discrete	non-discrete	none
op die punt staan	11 (4.7%)	0 (0%)	221 (95.3%)
op die punt wees	3 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	69 (95.8%)

(6) *Hy is **net** op die punt om te loop toe sy om die hoek van die gebou verskyn.*
he is just on the point COMP to walk when she around the corner of the building appear

[Taalkomissiekorpus]

'He's just about to walk when she appears from around the corner of the building.'

(6′) *Hy is (***twee sekondes**) op die punt om te loop …*
he is two seconds on the point COMP to walk …

▸ Afrikaans patterns with Dutch, in line with Frame account

Corpus study

English

ADVERBIALS ▸	discrete	non-discrete	none
be on the *verge* of			
be on the *brink* of			
be on the *cusp* of			
be on the *point* of			
be about to			

NL

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AF

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'on the point' type

'in front of' type

Corpus study

English

ADVERBIALS ▸	discrete	non-discrete	none
be on the **verge** of	4 (1.4%)	0	278 (98.6%)
be on the **brink** of	3 (3%)	0	97 (97%)
be on the **cusp** of	0	0	2 (100%)
be on the **point** of	4 (2.3%)	0	171 (97.7%)
be about to			

NL

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(7)   (…I was likely to make a major mistake.) I think I was **just** on the verge of making one.

[BNC, Written books and periodicals]

(7′) I think I'm on the verge of making a mistake (***in two seconds***).

▸ English 'point' type constructions pattern with Afrikaans/Dutch

Corpus study

English

ADVERBIALS ▸	discrete	non-discrete	none
be on the verge/ brink/cusp/point of	11 (2%)	0	548 (98%)
be about to	245 (6.4%)	0	3607 (93.6%)

NL

ADVERBIALS ▸	discrete	non-discrete	none
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[BNC, Written books and periodicals]

(7′)   I think I'm on the verge of making a mistake (***in two seconds***).

(8)   she was **just** about to go back to her room when she heard Mr Sandy the receptionist in the back room talking to her assistant

[BNC, Spoken demographic]

(8′)   she was about (***two seconds***) to go back to her room (***in two seconds***)

▸ English 'approximative' type patterns with 'point' type

Corpus study

NL

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'on the point' type

'approximative' type

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Corpus study

	'on the point' type	'approximative' type	'in front of' type

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Findings

▸ only 'in front of' type accepts non-discrete measures: PREREGION as prerequisite (rather than ADJACENCY or APPROXIMATION as blocker)

▸ redundancy of discrete (imminential) measures not just for 'on the point' type but also approximative *about to*: APPROXIMATION entails ADJACENCY? (more research on approximative prospectives needed)

▸ big gap in discrete (imminential) measures between 'in front of' constructions: [*kurz davor stehen zu*] as conventionalized pattern (PREREGION ▸ ADJACENCY) vs. optionality for [*stehen vor*]

Corpus study

'on the point' type	'approximative' type	'in front of' type

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- big gap in discrete (imminential) measures between 'in front of' constructions: [*kurz davor stehen zu*] as conventionalized pattern (PREREGION ▸ ADJACENCY) vs. optionality for [*stehen vor*]

- Broader set of (corpus) data supports our Frame-semantic formalization

Corpus study 2: Telicity

Related issue: Telicity of embedded verb—Does this also follow from metaphorical mapping?

Possible expectation for spatial metaphors:

'on the point' type	'in front of' type	'approximative' type

- ADJACENCY — *to* telic transition
- PREREGION — *of* (a)telic event
- APPROX. — ?

TRANSITION ▸	telic	atelic	unclear
AF *op die punt wees*			
NL *op het punt staan*			
NL *op…staan*			
DE *davor stehen zu*			
EN *be about to*			

(restricted to patterns with only verbal complements)

(sample of 300~400, except AF: 232 total hits)

Corpus study 2: Telicity

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Possible expectation for spatial metaphors:

'on the point' type	'in front of' type	'approximative' type

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NL *op het punt staan*	292 (77.9%)	70 (18.7%)	13 (3.5%)
NL *op…staan*	296 (98.7%)	2 (0.7%)	2 (0.7%)
DE *davor stehen zu*	300 (78.7%)	59 (15.5%)	22 (5.8%)
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(9)   *We staan op het punt om   te eten.*
we stand on the point COMPL to eat

'We're about to eat.'

(10) **We staan op eten.*
we stand on eat

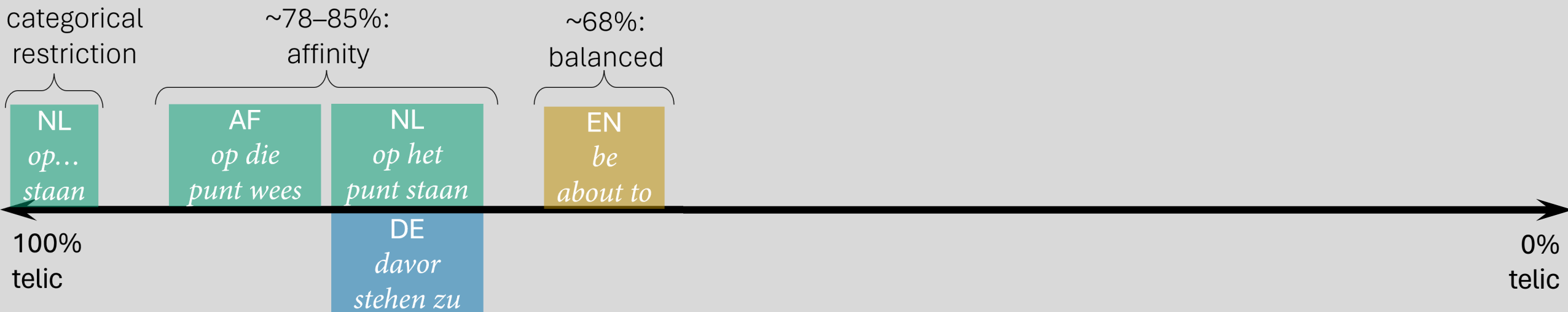(Intended: 'We're about to eat.')

Corpus study 2: Telicity

Related issue: Telicity of embedded verb—Does this also follow from metaphorical mapping?

Possible expectation for spatial metaphors:

- ADJACENCY — *to* telic transition
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▸ Three types, independent of metaphorical mapping:

categorical restriction

~78–85%: affinity

~68%: balanced

NL *op… staan*

AF *op die punt wees*

NL *op het punt staan*

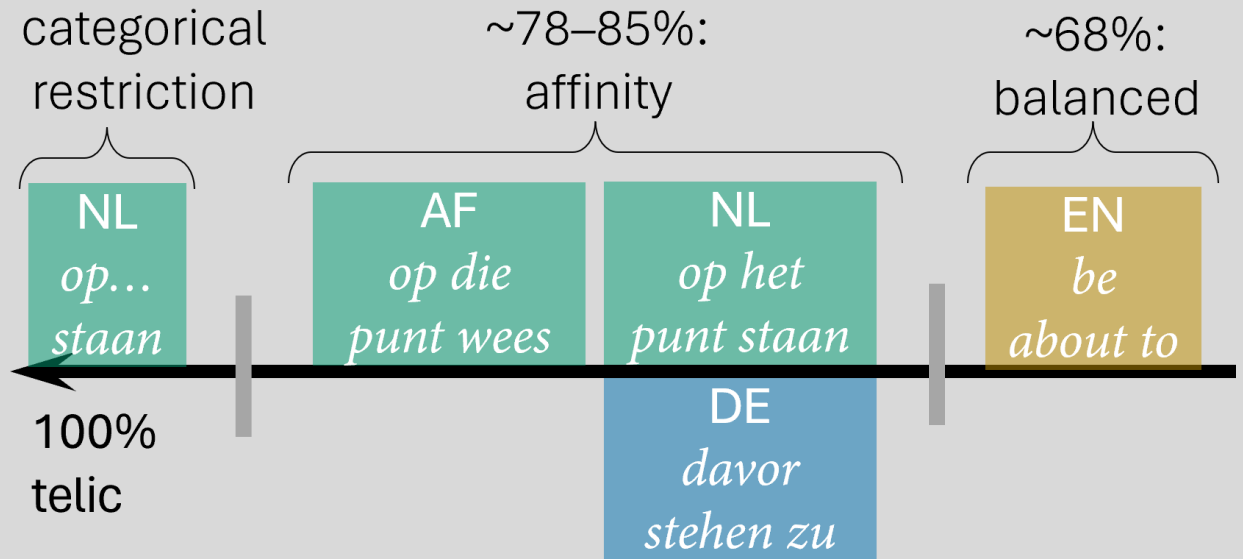EN *be about to*

DE *davor stehen zu*

100% telic

0% telic

Corpus study 2: Telicity

Alternative explanation:
Grammaticalization/Productivity?

Synchronic proxy measures:
▸ Type Frequency—here: TTR
  (Bybee 2003; Van Olmen & Mortelmans 2009)
▸ $\mathcal{P}$ = Hapaxes/Tokens
  (Baayen & Lieber 1991; Baayen 1993)

categorical
restriction

~78–85%:
affinity

~68%:
balanced

| NL | AF | NL | EN |
| *op…staan* | *op die punt wees* | *op het punt staan* | *be about to* |

DE
davor stehen zu

100%
telic

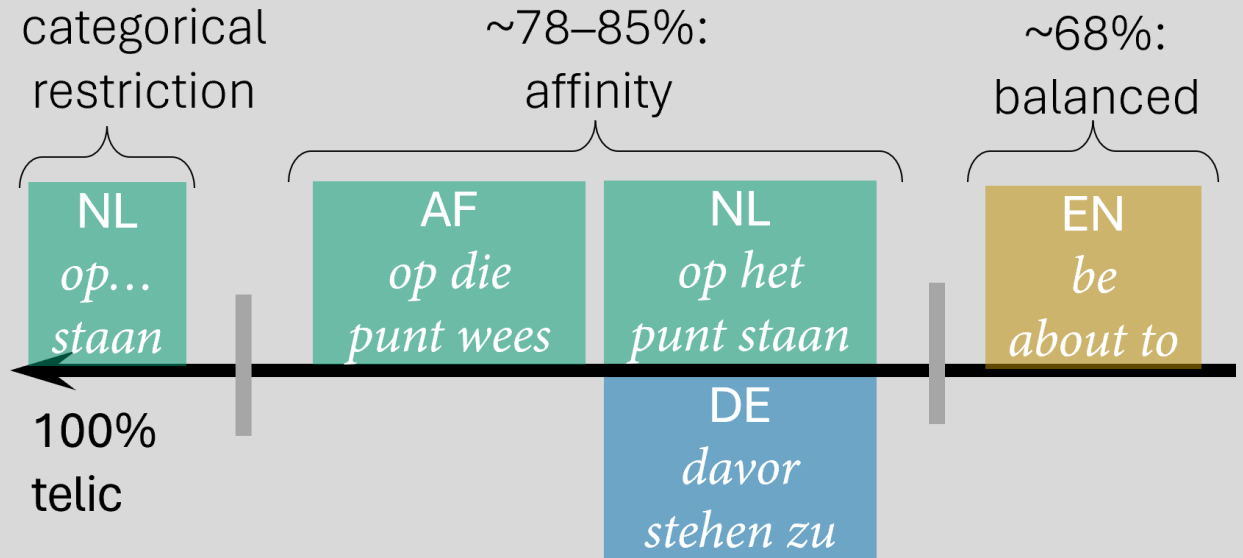| PROXY MEASURES ▸	TTR	$\mathcal{P}$
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(sample of ~854, except AF: 232 total hits)

Corpus study 2: Telicity

Alternative explanation: Grammaticalization/Productivity?

Synchronic proxy measures:
- ▸ Type Frequency—here: TTR
  (Bybee 2003; Van Olmen & Mortelmans 2009)
- ▸ $\mathcal{P}$ = Hapaxes/Tokens
  (Baayen & Lieber 1991; Baayen 1993)

PROXY MEASURES ▸	TTR	$\mathcal{P}$
NL *op…staan*	64/852	34/852
AF *op die punt wees*	148/232	110/232
NL *op het punt staan*	375/854	244/854
DE *davor stehen zu*	381/854	253/854
EN *be about to*	331/854	200/854

Corpus study 2: Telicity

Alternative explanation:
Grammaticalization/Productivity?

Synchronic proxy measures:
▸ Type Frequency—here: TTR
      (Bybee 2003; Van Olmen & Mortelmans 2009)
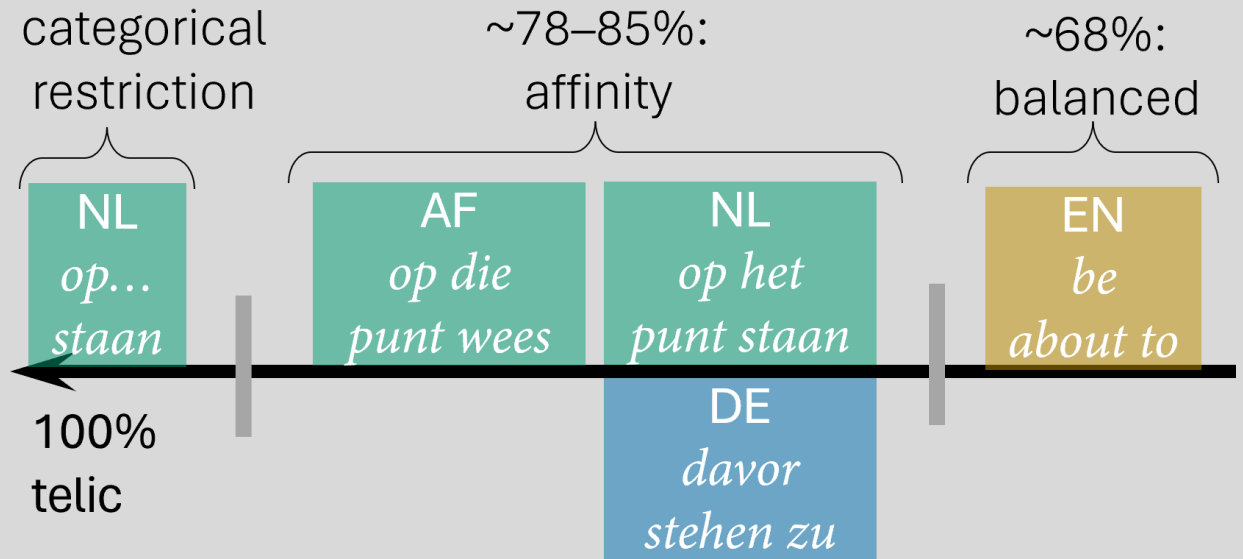▸ $\mathcal{P}$ = Hapaxes/Tokens
      (Baayen & Lieber 1991; Baayen 1993)

categorical restriction

~78–85%: affinity

~68%: balanced

NL *op… staan*

AF *op die punt wees*

NL *op het punt staan*

EN *be about to*

DE *davor stehen zu*

100% telic

PROXY MEASURES ▸	TTR	$\mathcal{P}$
NL *op…staan*	7.5%	4%
AF *op die punt wees*	64%	47%
NL *op het punt staan*	43%	29%
DE *davor stehen zu*	45%	30%
EN *be about to*	39%	24%

Corpus study 2: Telicity

Alternative explanation:
Grammaticalization/Productivity?

Synchronic proxy measures:
‣ Type Frequency—here: TTR
  (Bybee 2003; Van Olmen & Mortelmans 2009)
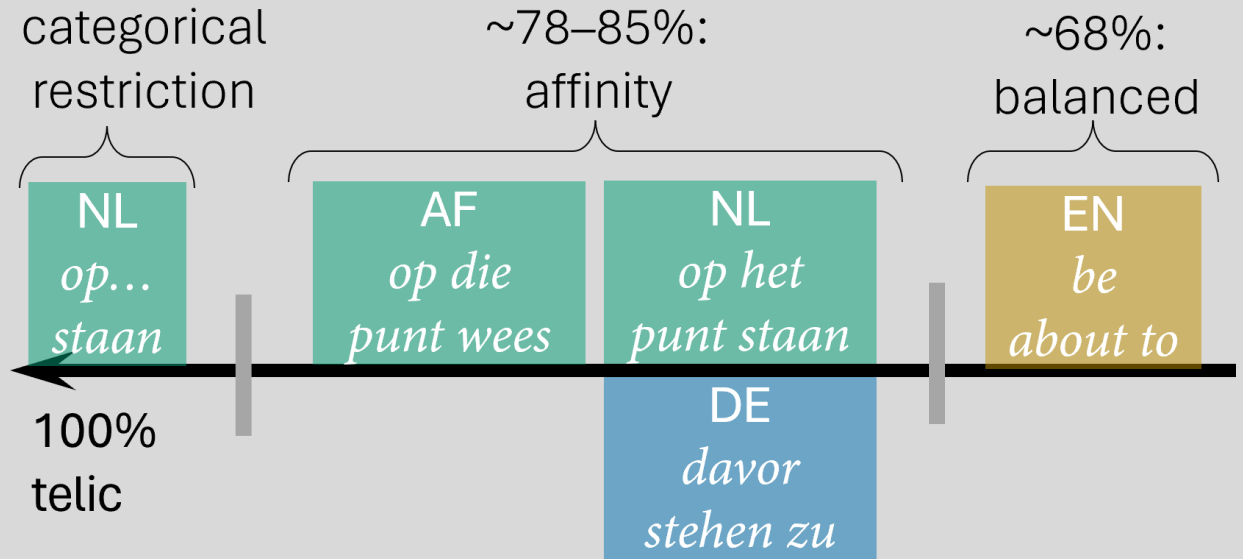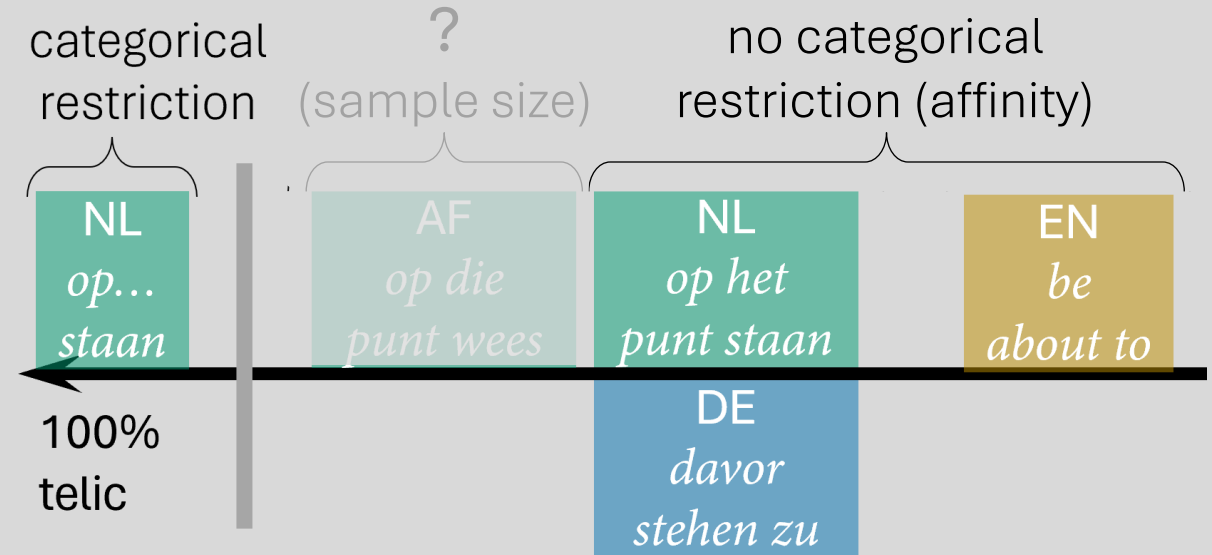‣ $\mathcal{P}$ = Hapaxes/Tokens
  (Baayen & Lieber 1991; Baayen 1993)

categorical
restriction

~78–85%:
affinity

~68%:
balanced

NL		AF	NL		EN
op…		*op die*	*op het*		*be*
staan		*punt wees*	*punt staan*		*about to*

DE
*davor
stehen zu*

100%
telic

PROXY MEASURES ‣	TTR	$\mathcal{P}$
NL *op…staan*	7.5%	4%
AF *op die punt wees*	64%	47%
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DE *davor stehen zu*	45%	30%
EN *be about to*	39%	24%

sample size?

Corpus study 2: Telicity

PROXY MEASURES ▸	Types	$\mathcal{P}$
NL *op…staan*	7.5%	4%
AF *op die punt wees*	64%	47%
NL *op het punt staan*	43%	29%
DE *davor stehen zu*	45%	30%
EN *be about to*	39%	24%

categorical restriction

?
(sample size)

no categorical restriction (affinity)

NL *op… staan*

AF *op die punt wees*

NL *op het punt staan*

EN *be about to*

DE *davor stehen zu*

100% telic

▸ Proxy measures support only two types:
Categorical Restriction vs. No Categorical Restriction

▸ Independent from metaphorical mapping

▸ Are there 'in front of' and 'approximative' type constructions which pattern with NL [*op…staan*]?

Conclusion

Prospectivity and Imminence as separable notions (cf. Dik's 1997 prosp. vs. imm.prosp.)
   drawing on metaphorical mappings in Frame-Semantic model

Discrete vs. non-discrete temporal measures (e.g., *just* vs. *(in) two seconds*)
   follow from Frame-Semantic formalization

(A)telicity doesn't follow from our model:
 ▸ independent from **'point'**, **'in front of'** and **'approximative'** types (but: possible syntactic story)

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Thank you!

Roné Wierenga

Maarten Bogaards
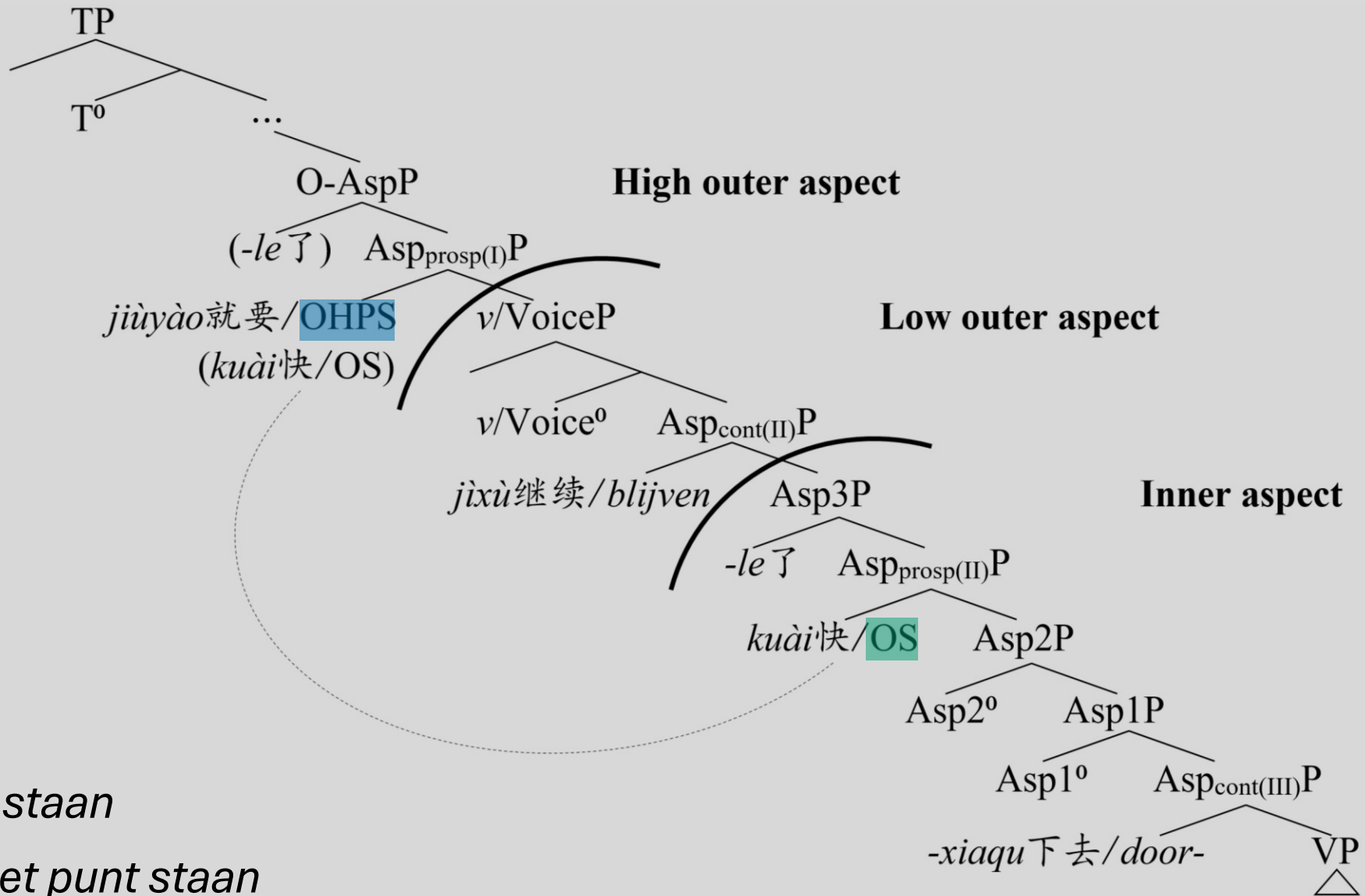
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(bonus topics: futures vs. prospectives, syntax, and the effect of negation)

Syntax

TP

T⁰ …

O-AspP **High outer aspect**

(-*le*了) Asp_prosp(I)P

*jiùyào*就要/OHPS   *v*/VoiceP   **Low outer aspect**

(*kuài*快/OS)

v/Voice⁰   Asp_cont(II)P

*jìxù*继续/*blijven*   Asp3P   **Inner aspect**

-*le*了   Asp_prosp(II)P

*kuài*快/OS   Asp2P

Asp2⁰   Asp1P

Asp1⁰   Asp_cont(III)P

-*xiaqu*下去/*door-*   VP

OS = *op...staan*

OHPS = *op het punt staan*

Negation

Be about to gets a special interpretation under negation:

(11)   a. *I haven't smoked my entire life and…*   **I'm not about to start.** ≈ "I have no intention of starting."

EN   b.   # *I'm not on the brink/cusp/point/verge of starting.*

AF   c.   # *Ek is nie op die punt om te begin nie.*

NL   d.   # *Ik sta niet op (het punt om te) beginnen.*

DE   e.   # *Ich stehe nicht davor, damit anzufangen.*

I'm not about to start now. ≈ I'm not going to start now.

Be about to patterns with near future (*be going to*)

Speculation: Is *be about to* an intermediate category between prospective and future?

Be about to vs. *be going to*

about to-type	bgt-type	epistemic future
The company's *about to* be sold. But I'm sure it won't in the end. The company's *on the verge/brink/cusp/point* of being sold. But I'm sure it won't in the end.	The company's *going to* be sold. #But I'm sure it won't in the end.	The company *will* be sold. #But I'm sure it won't in the end.
Hij *staat op het punt* z'n bedrijf te verkopen. Maar ik weet zeker dat het uiteindelijk niet doorgaat.	Het bedrijf *gaat* verkocht worden. #Maar ik weet zeker dat het uiteindelijk niet doorgaat.	Het bedrijf *zal* verkocht worden. #Maar ik weet zeker dat het uiteindelijk niet doorgaat.
Die maatskappy *is/staan op die punt* om verkoop te word. Maar ek weet dit sal nie gebeur nie.	Die maatskappy *gaan* verkoop word. #Maar ek weet dit sal nie gebeur nie.	Die maatskappy *sal* verkoop word. #Maar ek weet dit sal nie gebeur nie.
Die Firma *steht davor verkauft zu werden.* Aber ich bin sicher, dass sie letztlich nicht verkauft werden wird.		Die Firma *wird* verkauft werden. #Aber ich bin sicher, dass sie letztlich nicht verkauft werden wird.

This is consistent with IMM() as possibility; not with PREP() as causation

(Fleischhauer & Bogaards in press)   (Hill in press)