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(1) On ways of being on the way: lexical, complex preposition and aspect marker uses

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On ways of being on the way: lexical, complex preposition, and aspect marker uses

Abstract
This article presents a case study of a set of constructions containing the related way-nouns way, road, track and route, exemplified by (i) the farm road to the house, (ii) A senior Soviet official is on his way to the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, (iii) In 1951, spies Burgess and Maclean escaped from Britain en route to Moscow. (iv) Maresa (...) may be on her way to getting her man at last. These distinct constructions are the synchronically co-existing layers resulting from processes of lexicalization and grammaticalization. In the source construction illustrated in (i) the way-noun is a fully lexical noun. In the reanalysed constructions, the way-noun is incorporated into respectively a composite predicate (ii), a complex preposition (iii) and an aspectual marker (iv). We will argue that these three constructions challenge the view of decategorialization as mere loss of nominal features such as determiners, as the way-noun is preceded by a determiner in the majority of cases. Composite predicate and aspectual marker often even have a possessive determiner referring to their subject. We argue that the emergent layer of aspectual markers adds complex and fine-grained meanings to the paradigm of English aspectual markers, thus considerably enriching it. Finally, we show on the basis of qualitative and quantitative corpus analysis that the structural variants display an interesting case of specialization in relation to the four way-nouns under consideration.

Keywords
composite predicate – complex preposition – aspectual marker – grammaticalization – lexicalization

1. Introduction
In Present-day English, the ‘way-nouns’ way, road, track and route do not in the majority of their uses refer to a way that leads from one place to another, as in the fully lexical use of road illustrated in (1). More often, they are part of larger units that do not function in NP structure but in VP structure, as in (2) and (4), or in complex preposition phrases, as in (3). The lexical noun use can be assumed to be the source construction of the other three constructions, which represent different degrees of grammaticality and grammaticalization.

(1) Surprisingly she heard the sound of a distant car on the farm road to the house. (CB, ukbooks)
(2) The Soviet envoy on the Gulf crisis is on his way to Baghdad (...). (CB, bbc)

* Peter Petré, who took the initiative for this study, and Kristin Davidse are joint first authors. They double-coded the corpus data. Tinne Van Rompaey contributed crucial arguments and recognition criteria for the characterization of the distinct constructional layers. We offer very sincere thanks to the two anonymous referees for their extremely helpful feedback. Their generous suggestions and insightful comments suggested many extra dimensions to the study in comparison with the first version. We also thank Michaela Mahlberg and Fanie Tsiamita for their helpful handling of the editorial process. This research was made possible by the postdoctoral mandate granted to Peter Petré by FWO-Flanders Research Foundation (Project number 3H110274), by the Interuniversity Attraction Poles programme (Belgian Science Policy Office, project P6/44) Grammaticalization and (Inter-)Subjectification and by the GOA-project 12/007, The multiple functional load of grammatical signs, awarded by the Leuven Research Council.
In 1951, spies Burgess and Maclean escaped from Britain en route to Moscow. (CB, today)

And the only person with any determination was clearly Maresa, (...) who, it seems, may be on her way to getting her man at last. (CB, today)

In (2) is on his way constitutes the whole VP, with the composite predicate be on one’s way roughly meaning ‘go to’, ‘head for’. At the same time, it has an inherent aspectual meaning, which is revealed by the fact that, when replaced by a simple lexical verb, it takes the progressive form, e.g. The Soviet envoy on the Gulf crisis *is heading* for Baghdad. We will argue that these composite predicates are situated on a gradient in between lexicalization and grammaticalization (cf. Brinton & Traugott 2005:130-2). *En route to* in (3) is a complex preposition indicating a relation of ‘direction’, which can also be expressed by *to*. The large and ever expanding class of complex prepositions is generally accepted to be on the borderline between closed and open classes (Quirk et al 1985:670)\(^1\). We view them as primarily involving grammaticalization (cf. Hoffmann 2004, 2005), but with elements of lexicalization. Finally, *is on her way to* in (4) is, in contrast with (2), only a part of the VP. It imposes a specific aspectual construal on the lexical predicate following it, as shown by the possibility of substitution with an aspectual expression such as *be going to*. As aspectual markers are viewed as being well within the grammatical system, these can be said to represent the highest degree of grammaticality and grammaticalization of all the way-constructions.

It is generally accepted that decategorialization plays a role in the three reanalyses being considered here. Decategorialization of nouns in composite predicates has not received much attention yet, but it has been noted that in the lexicalization of periphrastic expressions the internal relations may “become irregular and get lost” (Lehmann 2002:13).

The reanalysis of ‘preposition + NP\(_1\) + preposition + NP\(_2\)’ into ‘complex preposition + NP\(_2\)’ has been treated as a paradigm case of grammaticalization correlating with decategorialization (Hopper & Traugott 2003:106-111, Schwenter & Traugott 1994, Hoffmann 2004, 2005). With its incorporation in a complex preposition, noun\(_1\) is expected to lose the typical morphosyntactic properties of its class. The main morphosyntactic features that may be shed are

- normal range of determiners, e.g. *in his front*
- regular singular-plural alternation, e.g. *in fronts of*
- determiners as such, e.g *in the spite of*
- adjectival modifiers, e.g. *by high side*
- occurrence as separate word, e.g. *in stead of*
- second preposition, e.g. *beside of*

It is usually assumed that sequences in which the noun has lost most of these features have grammaticalized most, e.g. *instead of* and *beside*, in which the noun is determinerless and has coalesced morphologically with the preposition.

It has also been noted that periphrastic aspectual markers may result from incorporation into the VP of strings such as *be in the middle/ midst of* (Koops 2001, Van Rompaey & Davidse 2008) and *be on the verge/ brink of* (Navalpotro-Gómez 2000, Vanden Eynde 2004), which have complex preposition uses besides these verbal

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\(^1\) Robins (1980: 175) even states that “prepositional phrases (word groups substitutable for prepositions, like *in the neighbourhood of*, grammatically substitutable for *near or at*) are open”. 

3
uses. However, little attention has gone so far to the expected symptoms of decategorialization in such periphrastic auxiliaries.

The way-nouns are used with the following structural variation:

(i) \( P \times N P \) or \( P (x) Ns P \) (with \( x \) an article and/or an adjective): on a road to / on a direct route to / on (certain) routes to

(ii) \( P \) the \( N P \): on the road to (distinguished from (i) for reasons set out below)

(iii) \( P \) one’s \( N P \), e.g. on their way to

(iv) \( P N P \): on track to

According to traditional decategorialization criteria, the structure with the preceding the way-noun (variant ii) cannot be regarded as highly grammaticalized, and even less so the structure with a possessive determiner (variant iii). Yet, as we will see, the majority of complex preposition uses in our data have the and the majority of aspectual markers have either the or a possessive determiner. In view of this, reconsideration of the decategorialization issue is necessary. As stressed by Traugott (2010), grammaticalization does not just involve ‘de-constructive’ processes such as decategorialization and desemanticization but also ‘re-constructive’ processes such as reanalysis and reparsing. In this respect, we will discuss the collocational reclustering of the complements of the different constructions, the specialization of the structural variants, and the functional reinterpretation of the possessive determiner in composite predicates (example 2) and grammatical aspectual markers (example 4).

We adhere to the functional-structural notion of ‘constructions’, which defines them as a pairing of meaning and form and which stresses that schematic constructions are not primarily defined by the grammatical classes of their elements, but crucially involve the meaning-construing syntagmatic relations between these elements, such as head – complement or head – modifier relations (e.g. Langacker 1991:153, Croft & Cruse 2004, Boye & Harder 2007). Construction grammar approaches such as found in Goldberg (1995) and Israël (1996) have rightly stressed that constructions may be largely schematic while also containing a specific substantive (lexical) item or larger routinized unit, which is not processed compositionally anymore. It is against this general theoretical background that we will develop our analysis of the various way-noun constructions.

This article will be structured as follows. Section 2 describes the corpus data analysed for this study. In section 3, we characterize the different constructional layers with their semantic and formal recognition criteria. In section 4 we will, on the basis of qualitative and quantitative corpus study, consider the distribution of the structural variants over the four way-nouns studied, showing that they present specialization. In section 5, we will reconsider the issue of decategorialization in relation to the findings of the previous sections.

2. The data
The corpus used for this article is the 56,000,000 word Collins WordbanksOnline English corpus (henceforth Cobuild or CB). From this corpus, all strings were extracted that consisted of on (or en) followed by way(s)/road(s)/route(s)/track(s) to and with zero to four words intervening between the first preposition and the noun. The exact queries used\(^2\) were:

\(^2\) We specified ‘track|tracks’ to avoid tracking.
The extraction thus included the variants with way-nouns preceded not only by nothing or by a determiner, but also by an intervening lexical item, as in (1). In view of the phenomena being investigated, the queries were formulated so as to net the source construction with simple preposition + NP to NP, as in (1), as well as the reanalysed uses in which the way-noun is part of a larger unit and can be followed not just by a noun, but also by a verb, as in (4). This resulted in 1720 instances of the constructional layers this study focuses on, distributed over the four way-nouns as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOUN OF CONSTRUCTION</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>way</td>
<td>1251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>road</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>route</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>track</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1720</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. The four constructional layers: semantic and grammatical recognition criteria

In this section we will characterize the different constructional layers with reference to their grammatical relations and their functional semantics. An important part of the characterization will be formed by the collocational selection restrictions imposed by the different elements of structure containing the way-noun in each construction.

3.1 Lexical head

The source construction has simple preposition on or en complemented by a binominal NP, with the way-noun as head followed by a nominal postmodifier introduced by to. The two nouns are used with full categorial and lexical value, and hence can take a variety of determiners and, potentially, modifiers, as illustrated in (5)-(8).

(5) *The fattoria is on the spectacular mountain road to Cortona.* (CB, times)

(6) *The children’s school was on his direct route to work.* (CB, ukbooks)

(7) *This area was also convenient for work - she was a set dresser and art director in films and commercials - as it's on a direct route to many central film studios.* (CB, ukmags)

(8) *Our mountain bus climbs precipitously to 16,000' on the narrow track to Leh.* (CB, ukephem)

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3 Instances of superficially similar, but different constructions were discarded from the data collection, such as the following example in which way means ‘manner of doing something’: *All parties to the conflict would get together at the UN and decide on the best way to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict.* (CB, npr)
The binominal construction is parsed as: det (+ mod) + lexical head/ way-noun + postmodifier/ (to + NP2). In the vast majority of cases (90%), the way-noun refers to an actual road or trajectory linking two places.

These prepositional phrases can always be probed with interrogatives like where or on what road/way/track? The preposition phrase as a whole can be part of a clause which locates an entity on the road in question, e.g. (5)-(7). The stative situation designated by the VP is inherently unbounded, i.e. without beginning or end. Alternatively, the clause represents the dynamic motion of an entity on a road, as in (8). The preposition phrase then indicates a spatial extent, but the entity’s progression on it is construed as unbounded, without beginning or end. In all these cases, the postmodifier of the way-noun designates the spatial endpoint of the road, like Cortona (5) or Leh (8). In (6), the deverbal noun work potentially evokes the activity of working, but this is backgrounded by the coercive effect on it of the spatial semantics of the prepositional phrase. That is, there is a “resolution of the conflict between the construction and the lexical requirements” (Ziegeler 2006:7-9) and work primarily indicates the spatial endpoint of the route.

In a small number of cases (9%), the way-noun is used metaphorically, describing ‘progress’ not in the spatial realm, but in other domains such as political processes. In (9) peace describes the aimed for state-of-affairs. As we will see, most examples with way-nouns followed by nouns depicting states-of-affairs express a specific aspectual construal (see section 3.4). In examples like (9), however, the source domain of the metaphor, and with it, the lexical source construction, is reactivated by the context, viz. not destroy the goddam road (to peace).

(9) ‘Air should be used to move the blocks on the road to peace - not destroy the goddam road,’ reads one. (CB, today)

Table 2 represents the distribution of the types of nouns used as postmodifiers in the lexical head construction. Spatial NPs predominate with 90%. They reflect the original collocational constraints imposed by the literal spatial meaning of the way-nouns. The spatial endpoints of roads and trajectories are not affectively coloured, i.e. their semantic prosody (Sinclair 1991) is neutral. In the few metaphorically used prepositional phrases we find nouns designating actions, states or events, which we will refer to as ASE-NPs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPATIAL NPS</th>
<th>ASE NPs WITH COERCED SPATIAL MEANING</th>
<th>ASE NPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=83 90%</td>
<td>n=1 1%</td>
<td>n=8 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>examples:</td>
<td>examples:</td>
<td>examples:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the South of France, your shed, Australia, Dunkirk and Ostend, major airports and holiday destinations</td>
<td>work</td>
<td>peace, recovery, the Olympic Games</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Composite predicate

A first functional-structural reanalysis of the source construction in 3.1 yields composite predicates such as be on (x) way/road to, be en route to in examples (10)-(14), which basically mean ‘go to’, ‘head for’. In contrast with the lexical head uses illustrated in (5)-(9), the composite predicates do not function as adjunct in a clause (Quirk et al 1985:505-510), but constitute the ‘clausal head’ (Langacker 1991:Ch.5). They may have the internal structure of ‘light verb’ (Brinton & Traugott 2005:160), typically be, as in examples (10), (12), (13) followed by on + one’s/the + way-noun. Composite predicates of this form account for 279 tokens, or 35%, of the composite predicate uses. More commonly, the predicate uses occur in ‘absolute’ clauses that are not linked by a form of be to the matrix clause, as in (11) and (12), viz. in 518, or 65%, of cases. They either have an overt subject, as in (10), (14), or presuppose one from their matrix, as in (11), (12), (13).

(10) As Britannia was en route to Australia fighting broke out in the Middle East state of South Yemen. (CB, today)
(11) In 1987, on my way to Tibet, I lunched with friends in Kathmandu. (CB, usbooks)
(12) I (...) accompanied him anyway, pleased to be on the road to whatever it was we were going to see. (CB, ukbooks)
(13) On your way to work, pull over at a bus stop and ask if anyone would like a lift. (CB, sunnow)
(14) May-Alice (Mary Mcdonnell) (...) is on her way to a leg waxing when she is paralysed in a car accident. (CB, ukmags)

The composite predicates are always complemented by adjuncts of direction. In the majority of cases, viz. 625 examples, or 78%, these are spatial goals. Most have a neutral semantic prosody, but a handful describe positively coloured holiday destinations such as the glamour resort of St Tropez. In 172 examples, or 22%, they are ASE goals, as in (13)-(14). The coercion effect noted for example (6) of the lexical head use applies to these ASE nouns as well. Due to the directed motion semantics of the whole clause, they primarily convey spatial goals towards which the subject is heading. The idea that the subject will work (13) or be waxed (14) is backgrounded. The semantic prosody of the ASE nouns is also mostly neutral. Table 3 indicates the distribution of the complement types and lists some typical examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPATIAL NP</th>
<th>ASE NP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=625 78%</td>
<td>n=172 22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

examples: Acapulco, Athens, another examples: work (35), lunch (6), the Earth
It has been pointed out by a number of authors (Halliday 1994:147, Brinton & Traugott 2005:130) that composite predicates exploit the structure associated with the nominal(ized) coding of the action to express finer verbal semantics. In 510 instances, or 64%, of the composite predicates with way-noun, it is preceded by a possessive determiner or genitive. The possessive has a very different semantic function here than in the lexical head construction, where it occurs only occasionally, as in (6) above, which we repeat here with more context.

(6) \textit{As the children's school was on his direct route to work he would drop them off but if the traffic was heavy this would result in him being a few minutes late.} (CB, ukbooks)

In the lexical use, the possessive determiner need not be co-referential with the subject of the clause, which is \textit{the children's school} in (6), while \textit{his} links the route to the subject of the main clause. By contrast, in composite predicates the way-nouns are modified by a possessive in a great number of cases, and if they are not, a possessive can always be added, as in

(12') \textit{I (...) accompanied him anyway pleased to be on my road to whatever it was we were going to see.} (CB, ukbooks)

The way-noun nominally codes the action of 'going' and the possessive determiner or genitive adds to it the (re-)expression of the subject that is doing the 'going'. Goldberg (1995:199-218) makes a similar point about the 'Verb one's way'-construction. She observes that, while a possessive pronoun as such does not convey motion, if it is left out, the idea of motion is no longer present, as illustrated by the contrast between (15) and (16).

(15) Frank found his way to New York.

(16) Frank found the way to New York.

Another characteristic of the predicate \textit{be on one's 'way' to} that is similar to the 'Verb one's way'-construction studied in Goldberg (1995) and Israel (1996) concerns the referentiality of the possessive, which in both is always co-referential with the subject of the matrix clause. When this condition is not met, as in (17), the idea of motion again is no longer conveyed.

(17) She was standing on his way to the car. (http://m.fanfiction.net/s/6463686/4/)

Brinton & Traugott (2005:130-132) have pointed out that composite predicates with a deverbal noun often convey aspectual meaning which is absent from the corresponding simple predicates. For instance, \textit{have a bath}, conveys telic aspect in contrast with the simple verb \textit{bathe}, because the NP \textit{a bath} represents the activity as “individuated, countable” (Brinton & Traugott 2005:130). In fact, composite predicates with deverbal noun became productive only after the development of the article system in Middle English. The simple verbs corresponding to composite predicates with way-nouns such as \textit{go + spatial goal} already have telic lexical aspect: they tend to an inherent point of completion. Predicates such as \textit{be on one's way to} + spatial goal are also...
inherently telic. However, they differ from simple verbs like go in that they convey *progressive* aspect. This is revealed by the fact that they can be systematically substituted by the progressive *(be +) verb-ing* form of the corresponding simple predicates, e.g.

(10)’ *As Britannia was heading for/going to* Australia (...) 
(11)’ *In 1987, while I was heading for* Tibet, (...) 

As well, they often depict a background action to the action that is foregrounded in the complex sentence, e.g. (10), (11), (13), (14), which is very typical of progressive aspect (Comrie 1976:30). 

This construal of progressive aspect results from the metaphorization of the notion of ‘way’ in the composite predicate, which depicts the subject negotiating his or her trajectory (cf. Goldberg 1995:206). A simple predicate such as *go* + spatial goal is perfective, i.e. its internal structure consists of different component states (Langacker 1991:21), which begin with the departure and end with the reaching of the goal. It takes the progressive *be V-ing* form to remove the beginning and endpoint from its semantics and render it unbounded. By contrast, composite predicates with way-nouns are inherently imperfective. They do not profile the beginning or endpoint, but designate ‘spatial progress’ beyond the starting point and heading for an endpoint. They take “an internal view” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:117) of the action, which is explicitly signalled by the possessive used as subject marker. The action is represented “as something ongoing, in progress” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:117). All these features are constitutive of progressive aspect. In sum, the nominal(ized) features of the composite predicate express grammatical aspectual meaning. It is for this reason that Brinton & Traugott (2005:131-132) view the formation of composite predicates with deverbal nouns as a process of grammaticalization. 

Whilst recognizing this grammaticalization dimension, we view the formation of these composite predicates as primarily lexicalization in the basic sense of contributing new items to the lexicon discussed in Himmelmann (2004). In our view, they behave essentially as lexical items in that they impose collocational constraints on the collocates they co-occur with. As rightly stressed by Sinclair (1991, 2004), lexical meaning does not reside solely in the lexical ‘node’. Rather, the semantic structure of a lexical item is determined by its coselection of specific (sets of) collocates. This distributional view of lexical meaning, according to which the corpus environment is diagnostic of a lexical item’s meaning, is currently informing advanced work in corpus-based lexical semantics, in which, for instance, (partial) synonymy is established in terms of similarity between collocate clouds (e.g. De Deyne, Peirsman & Storms 2009). Composite predicates with way-nouns clearly behave as lexical items in imposing the co-selection of spatial goals or coercing this meaning onto ASE-goals. What is more, as is typical of (largely) synonymous lexical items, they share many collocational restrictions while still displaying distinct preferences in their selection of collocates (Carter 1987:53). *Be on the road to* co-occurs mainly with names of towns, e.g. Mandelay, Engon (69%) and with the fixed phrase *road to nowhere* (25%). This can be explained by the persistence of *road*’s very concrete lexical meaning of “An ordinary line of communication used by persons passing between different places” (OED). This collocational distribution contrasts with that of *be on the / one’s way to*, which has only 78% of spatial nouns, which may, however, be towns, countries or continents, or
landmarks such as the airport, the coast. The remaining 22% is made up of ASE-nouns such as a party, a picnic, work, etc. This more diversified distribution of collocates seems to be motivated by the more abstract meaning of way, viz. “course of travel or movement” (OED).

3.3 Complex preposition

A second functional-structural reanalysis of the source construction in 3.1 leads to complex prepositions expressing ‘direction’, which can be substituted by to, towards or for. Their formal realization is on + zero/the + way-noun + to. In our data, complex prepositions are found in roughly three types of structural environment. Firstly, the complex preposition + complement can be an obligatory adjunct (Quirk et al 1985:505) of verbs such as run or go, as in (18). Secondly, just as simple prepositions may fuse with the verb, forming ‘phrasal’ verbs, an instance like sets off on the road to in (19) seems to incorporate the complex preposition, conveying a meaning much like ‘set off for’ stardom. Thirdly, the complex preposition phrase may postmodify NPs with nouns such as step, staging post, etc., as in (20)-(21). In all three environments, a notion of ‘motion’ or ‘progress’ is expressed by the element the complex preposition structurally associates with. To this idea of motion, the complex preposition adds the relation of ‘direction’.

(18) (...) the old trade route, after all, ran right through Kathmandu on the way to Nyalam (or Kuti, as the Nepalese called it) and thence to Tingri and Lhatse. (CB, usbooks)

(19) Extremely amusing Australian success that takes dirty dancing to the ballroom, as young rebel-with-a-spangly-jacket Scott (Mercurio) sets off on the road to ballroom superstardom and controversy. (CB, ukmags)

(20) The INDEPENDENT describes the moves as a decisive step on the road to German unification. (CB, bbc)

(21) The whole process is the first step on the road to re-using the 1.4 million cars which are scrapped in Britain each year - 16,000 of them bmws. (CB, today)

The reanalysis of on + binominal NP into complex preposition + NP involves the following semantic and grammatical dimensions (Quirk et al:1985:669-673). Reference is no longer to an entity – neither an actual road nor the nominalization of the act of going. As a result of semantic generalization and reanalysis, on (the) way/road/route to indicate a relation vis-à-vis the entity denoted by the following NP. More specifically, they indicate either a spatial relation of ‘direction’ to a spatial goal, or of goal-directedness in time to a state-of-affairs. The extension to states-of-affairs as goals is motivated by the inference that motion in a spatial direction implies progress through time. Spatial goals, which have a neutral semantic prosody, take up only 25%. State-of-
affair goals predominate, with most expressed by ASE NPs but some also by gerunds. Importantly, they have a predominantly positive colouring (91 tokens or 90% of cases), depicting typically desirable actions, states or events.

Table 4. Complement types of the complex preposition construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPATIAL NP</th>
<th>ASE NP</th>
<th>GERUND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=33</td>
<td>n=93</td>
<td>n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
examples:  | examples: | examples: |
| Lochinver, Moscow, Kakadu and Darwin, Northern Norway, the mall | peace (5), recovery (4), fame (2), success (2), true equality, wealth, unity | being the ‘biggest’, raising living standards, having a child of their own |

Syntactically, the complex preposition distinguishes itself from its source by distinct syntactic behaviour with regard to topicalization, negation and substitution of NP1. Whereas all of these are possible with simple prepositions followed by a binominal NP they are marginal to impossible with the uses in (18)-(21). On the other hand, the strings in (18)-(21) can be replaced by a simple preposition.

Table 5. Distinctive syntactic tests for complex prepositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEST</th>
<th>LEXICAL HEAD USE</th>
<th>COMPLEX PREPOSITION USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>topicalization of P NP1</td>
<td>e.g. The fattoria is on the spectacular mountain road to Cortona.</td>
<td>e.g. The old trade route ran right through Kathmandu on the way to Nyalam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negation or substitution of NP1</td>
<td>Where is the fattoria? On the spectacular mountain road to Cortona.</td>
<td>? Where did the old trade route run? – On the way to Kathmandu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>substitution of P NP1 to</td>
<td>The fattoria is on the spectacular mountain road, not on the highway, to Cortona.</td>
<td>* The old trade route ran right through Kathmandu not on the way, but on the dirt track, to Nyalam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* The fattoria is towards Cortona.</td>
<td>The old trade route ran right through Kathmandu towards Nyalam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Aspectual marker

As we saw in 3.2, the composite predicate uses describe telic motion on which progressive aspect is imposed. The aspectual marker uses we will discuss in this section represent a different semantic and structural constellation. The (be) on (+ x) + way-noun string expresses only aspect, i.e. “the internal temporal constituency of a situation” (Comrie 1976:3) viewed from the speaker’s vantage point. The state-of-affairs on which aspect is imposed is designated by the following complement, which may be either a NP, as in (22), or a VP, viz. V-ing, as in (23), or infinitive, as in (24).
(22)  (...) as far as I was concerned I was on the road to recovery. (CB, ukbooks)
(23)  By the early '70s, however, Japan was well on its way to becoming an economic superpower. (CB, npr)

(24)  It’s a fantasy detour for a young songwriter named Dell who’s on his way to meet a record producer. (CB, npr)

In comparison with the composite predicate construction, a fundamental reparsing of the verbal complex has taken place, driven by a pragmatic-semantic reinterpretation and entailing a reconfiguration of foreground and background (Hopper & Traugott 2003:207-9). The composite predicate designates spatial progress, from which the aspectual marker abstracts the features of telicity and progressiveness into purely aspectual meaning. We will call this the **telic-progressive** aspectual construction. It often contains a possessive in front of the way-noun (cf. Goldberg 1995:199-218), as in (23)-(24), which reiterates the subject in the very unit conveying aspectual meaning, conveying the perspective ‘from within’ on the evolving situation.

With the loss of its lexical meaning, the (be) on (+ x) + way-noun string also loses what Boye & Harder (2007) refer to as its ‘primary’ usage in discourse. Clauses with composite predicate are ‘about’ directed motion, but those with aspectual marker are about the action, state or event they describe. The former, e.g. (14) above, can hence be probed by elliptical Is she on her way?, but not the latter. This is because the composite predicate is on her way in (14) is central to the ‘addressable’ propositional content (Boye & Harder 2007:578). By contrast, the aspectual marker is not addressable in its own right, because, as a grammatical operator, it is ‘secondary’ to the propositional material. It also defines a ‘host class’ (Himmelmann 2004:32) which is fundamentally different from the spatial complements taken by the composite predicates. It excludes the purely spatial goals, and instead includes congruently used ASE-nouns, i.e. ones that really evoke actions, states and events, as well as, crucially, verbal predicates describing states-of-affairs.

The telic-progressive marker can, by way of recognition test, always be replaced by aspectual be going to and in many cases by the morphological progressive be V-ing, as illustrated in (22)’-(24)’. For this test to be applicable to an original with nominal complement as in (22), the noun has to be replaced by a verb, as in (22)’.

(22)’  as far as I was concerned, I was recovering / going to recover.
(23)’  By the early '70s, Japan was becoming / going to become an economic superpower.
(24)’  Dell’s meeting / going to meet a record producer.

However, the aspectual meaning conveyed by the way-noun string is neither simply progressive nor fully equivalent to be going to. Whereas be going to denotes immediate future or premeditated intention (Declerck 1991:112), the construction with on (x) way-N to indicates that the realization of the future or of the future intention has already started. The situation is already ongoing and in this respect these constructions resemble the regular progressive.

---

5 Taking the grammaticalization of demonstratives into definite articles as typical case, Himmelmann (2004) talked about ‘host class expansion’. Definite articles indeed modify the same types of noun as demonstratives as well as different ones such as proper names and singletons like the sun, the pope, etc. However, in the case of grammaticalization discussed here, the two constructions are distinguished from each other by two fundamentally different classes. Diachronically, this may, of course, have come about by gradual extension of collocates via bridging contexts.
Besides expressing telic-progressive meaning, a specific subset of aspectual markers with way-nouns focus on the inception of the situation and add the notion of causation by incorporating verbs such as put, set, help, etc. We will refer to this subset as expressing causative-inceptive meaning. The complements describing the actions, states or events can be either a NP (25), a V-ing form (26), or an infinitive (27). If a possessive is used, it is co-referential with the object of the matrix clause, as in (25).

(25) Outstanding forward Eddie McCormack set them on their way to this deserved win. (CB, sunnow)

(26) China was set on the road to joining the world's great nations. (CB, ukbooks)

(27) The cut puts Britain on track to join the euro. (CB, sunnow)

All types of aspectual marker exploit, like the composite predicate, the nominal structural features associated with the way-noun to express verbal semantics, i.e. finer shades of aspectual meaning. The periphrastic nature of the aspectual marker allows it to incorporate adverbial degree modifiers such as well (found in 12% of cases). Example (23) above, for instance, conveys that Japan, while still striving to become a superpower, has already made some progress towards that accomplishment. Such grading of aspectual meaning cannot be expressed by the morphological progressive or be going to: *Japan was well becoming/ well going to become an economic superpower.

In some – relatively marginal – cases (3.5%), the aspectual marker still contains a prenominal modifier, as in (28)-(29).

(28) (...) be angry, hostile, and over-sensitive, and you may be on the fast track to death. (CB, bbc)

(29) These are ambitious goals, but a positive outcome on May 22 will set us on the high road to their achievement. (CB, sunnow)

Mostly, these adjectives modify the ‘durative’ and ‘evolving’ features of the progressive meaning. In her discussion of the ‘Verb one’s way’ construction, Goldberg (1995) similarly observes that the noun way can still be modified.

(30) the goats wending their familiar way across the graveyard

In her view, the possibility of modifying way shows that [POSS way] is still an analysable NP and not merely a syntactic marker to transform a verb with a particular valency into a verb selecting for a goal-argument (Goldberg 1995:214). She argues that, even though the construction still preserves a number of semantic and formal features of a regular NP, it expresses motion grammatically and belongs to the verbal group and, hence, has to be viewed as a grammatical construction and part of English grammar. This reasoning certainly applies to the aspectual marker uses which are dedicated to the expression of aspectual meaning. However, we also want to situate the aspectual markers with residual nominal features in a bigger picture viewing grammaticalization as a gradient phenomenon. Gradients of grammaticality can be distinguished both for the aspectual marker itself and for its complement. In the next paragraphs, we will discuss the distribution over the telic-progressive (Table 6) and causative-inceptive (Table 7) of the complement types, their collocational patterns and semantic prosody.
Table 6. Telic-progressive aspectual construction: complement types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASE NP</th>
<th>GERUND</th>
<th>INFINITIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=322</td>
<td>n=136</td>
<td>n=112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pos: n=274</td>
<td>neg: n=38</td>
<td>neut: n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pos: victory (4), recovery (6), higher office; neg: war, recession, death; neut: replays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pos: saving your life, becoming cool, winning the Cup; neg: losing 3-1; neut: producing its ultimate situations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pos: achieve; neg: struggle with yet another woman; neut: see a doctor, deliver his address</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Causative-inceptive aspectual construction: complement types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASE NP</th>
<th>GERUND</th>
<th>INFINITIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=114</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pos: n=109</td>
<td>neg: n=4</td>
<td>neut: n=1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pos: victory (12) fame (6), peace (3); neg: extinction, damnation; neut: privatisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pos: becoming one of the great sports marques, learning the truth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pos: be a record-breaker, top 6000 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most striking pattern to emerge from these tables is that complements with positive semantic prosody predominate strongly with all subtypes, except for the infinitives of the telic-progressive marker, to which we will return later. In this respect, the aspectual constructions resemble the complex preposition construction in which the ASE complements also had a predominantly positive semantic prosody. This drives home the point that positive semantic prosody has been an important factor in the shift towards grammatical meaning. In the grammaticalization of the spatial lexical constructions (3.1 and 3.2), the notion of ‘progress’ towards positive, desirable states of affairs was clearly a crucial element. The importance of a marked semantic prosody in
triggering grammaticalization is confirmed by Vanden Eynde’s (2004) study of the imminential aspectual markers *be on the brink / verge / edge of* + V-ing. On the basis of study of historical data, she found that *be on the brink of* and *be on the verge of* grammaticalized earlier (beginning of the 18th c.) than *be on the edge of* (late 19th c.) and currently have a much bigger proportion of aspectual uses. She explains this difference by the fact that lexical *brink* and *edge*, in contrast with *edge*, refer to the ’extreme edge’ of landmarks with a typically steep descent such as cliff, precipice, pit. The feature of ‘danger’ attaching to these collocates was transformed and transferred to the grammaticalized uses, whose states-of-affairs are typically ‘non-desirable’, e.g. *on the brink of death, destruction, ruin, bankruptcy; on the verge of despair, starvation, suicide*. Some strongly positive complements also occurred, e.g. *on the brink of certainty; on the verge of discovery, bliss*. In the original OED-entry for *be on the brink of*, Murray et al (1933:1110) explicitly note that it is used of “momentous or perilous” states of affairs. In sum, the grammaticalization of *be on the brink/verge of* appears to have been facilitated, even triggered, by the marked affective prosody of their complements. Vanden Eynde (2004) also notes that in Present-day English, and particularly with the emergence of verbal complements, their semantic prosody has shifted to a neutral one. This is in keeping with Lorenz’s (2002) point that advanced grammaticalization manifests itself in the ultimate lifting of semantic prosody and preference for specific collocate types. One important conclusion to be drawn is that it is not necessarily the source items with the most general meaning that grammaticalize first, as has often been assumed (cf. Heine 1993:47). Grammaticalization is often motivated by the need for strongly expressive meaning (Hauskemath 1999), and if this can be served by more semantically specific source items that attract marked semantic prosodies, they are the ones that will grammaticalize first.

In their lexical uses, the way-nouns do not have any ‘dramatic’ semantic components and take ordinary spatial collocates. It is all the more striking, then, that their grammaticalization is set in motion by a marked, positive, semantic prosody which often attaches to important achievements. In this respect, it is revealing to compare the collocational patterns of *on + det + way to* and *on + det + the road to* respectively. For this purpose, we looked at a span of three words following *to* each time. Table 8 shows the results of the application to these data of an LLR-test (generalized log-likelihood ratio test; see Dunning 1993). By applying the test to a span of words to the right of two alternate constructions and omitting all other text from the input, it is possible to directly compare the collocates of two nodes with each other. The p-value indicates the probability that the particular distribution of a collocate between strings with the two node words is due to coincidence. Normalized frequencies are per 10,000 occurrences. Among the fifteen words with respect to which both constructions differ most, whose distribution is hence highly unlikely to be coincidental, there are nine indicating unambiguously positive abstract goals (*recovery, peace, fame, reform, success, freedom, riches, glory, stardom*). All of them are typical collocates of road, rather than way. This seems to link up with the different distribution of construction types over road and way (see section 4.1 below), which results in distinct collocational profiles. A large proportion of *to be on one’s/the way* is made up of composite predicates with spatial

---

6 Brems (2010) also points out that in the grammaticalization process a marked, negative, semantic prosody was established by quantifiers a load of and a bunch of.

7 We thank Dirk Speelman for pointing this out to us.
collocates or neutral ASE collocates. Of way’s ASE-collocates, 260 out of 446, or 56%, have a positive semantic prosody. By contrast, road has only a small proportion of composite predicates. Its ASE-collocates are strongly associated with the grammaticalized constructions, of which 189 out of 211, or 90%, have a positive semantic prosody.

Table 8. Comparison of following context of on + det + way to vs. on + det + road to (sorted by p-value)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>token</th>
<th>n (way)</th>
<th>relative frequency</th>
<th>n (road)</th>
<th>relative frequency</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>recovery</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>380.9</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>1167.9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>488.0</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peace</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>130.9</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nowhere</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fame</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>130.9</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reform</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>119.0</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basra</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riches</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stardom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winning</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>&lt; 0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3733</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>840</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 6 and 7 also contain some distributional patterns which suggest that the telic-progressive marker has grammaticalized most. First and foremost, it has verbal complements in 43% of cases. In a proportion not too far removed from half, its structure can thus be analyzed as that of a periphrastic auxiliary. Its complementation pattern is like that of generally accepted auxiliaries such as be on the point of, which are still found with nominal complements, e.g. be on the point of tears, but are viewed as part of the English system of aspect (Declerck 1991, Huddleston & Pullum 2002). By contrast, the causative-inceptive marker has verbal complements in only 9% of cases. To the extent that it has started taking infinitives, it has also started, in Bolinger’s (1980: 297) words, “down the road of auxiliariness”. However, structurally, it is still predominantly nominal.

Secondly, some collocational patterns point to the telic-progressive as more grammaticalized. Its infinitival complements have a predominantly neutral semantic prosody: 61 (54%) neutral versus 32 (29% positive) and 19 (17%) negative. With this shift towards a neutral semantic prosody for its most verbal constructional subtype, it seems definitely set on a path towards advanced grammaticalization (cf. Lorenz 2002). The causative-inceptive marker, then, can contain, rather than one schematic verb like be in the telic-progressive marker, a number of verbs, viz. put or set (out/off), less frequently help, get, go, send, start and marginally bid back, climb, embark, jump, launch, take, transport. Combinations like help to put and get started are also found.
This suggests that the causative-inceptive markers are still somewhere in between lexicalization and grammaticalization. By being part of a causative VP, the strings with way-nouns are also more central to the propositional material of the utterance, i.e. more ‘primary’ in Boye & Harder’s (2007) terms.

4. Strings with way-nouns: a case of specialization

4.1 Way-nouns and specialization

**Paradigmatization** has been defined by Lehmann (1985:307) as the “integration of a linguistic element into an increasingly small, homogeneous paradigm”. In the incipient stages of grammaticalization, paradigmatization will manifest itself as **specialization** (Hopper 1991). In this section we will offer a detailed description of the gradient grammaticalization and specialization displayed by the four way-nouns.

In the first place, the way-nouns specialize in different lexical and grammaticalized constructions, as shown by Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>way</th>
<th>road</th>
<th>route</th>
<th>track</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEXICAL HEAD</td>
<td>n=26</td>
<td>n=45</td>
<td>n=19</td>
<td>n=1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPOS. PRED.</td>
<td>n=685</td>
<td>n=19</td>
<td>n=93</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPL. PREP.</td>
<td>n=50</td>
<td>n=72</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELIC-PROGRES.</td>
<td>n=444</td>
<td>n=73</td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>n=29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAUS.-INCEPT.</td>
<td>n=46</td>
<td>n=69</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td>n=1251</td>
<td>n=278</td>
<td>n=154</td>
<td>n=37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the four nouns, *road* has kept the largest proportion of lexical head uses (15%), in which it designates a concrete path. It also has the largest proportion of complex preposition uses (25%). *Route* comes second for lexical head uses (12%) and its main reanalysed use is the composite predicate (61%). *Way* has few lexical head uses left (2%) but its main reanalysed use is also the composite predicate (55%) with a high token rate (685). Within the grammaticalized uses, *track* has the largest proportion of telic-progressives (78%), with *way* coming second (35%), again with a high rate of 444 tokens. *Road* is the way-noun that specializes most in the causative-inceptive construction with a proportion of 25%.

As indicated in the introduction, we are particularly interested in the form decategorialization takes in the grammaticalization – and lexicalization – of the way-noun expressions. The following sections discuss for each way-noun the strings with the determiner and modifier options that are the most relevant from the point of view of decategorialization:

(i) ‘free’ string on (x) + way-noun to
X can be one or more adjectives or a determiner plus adjective(s). X can also be the indefinite article a or the zero-article if the noun is plural, since these signal the choice of marking discourse referents as ‘unidentified’.

(ii) string with the only
(iii) string with possessive

This string can contain a possessive determiner like her, his, its or a genitive determiner, e.g. Gary Speed’s road to fame.

(iv) string without determiner.

4.2 Strings containing the noun way

4.2.1 Free string on (x) way(s) to

There was not a single instance of this syntagm in our sample. Of course, a casual search on the Internet will turn up examples, e.g. a bumpy way, but even there the pattern a/the + adjective + road is far more frequent. This shows that the constructions with way have moved away furthest from the source construction, which accounts for only 2% of its uses, as shown by Table 9. This can probably be explained by the fact that way underwent more processes of semantic abstraction than the other way-nouns, yielding polysemous meaning such as ‘means’, ‘approach’, ‘facility’.

4.2.2 On the way to

Of the string on the way to, there are 406 relevant instances in our sample. Table 10 crossclassifies the construction types it realizes with its complements types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SPATIAL NP</th>
<th>ASE NP</th>
<th>GERUND</th>
<th>INF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lexical head</td>
<td>n=26 6.4%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>composite predicate</td>
<td>129 31.8%</td>
<td>n=40 9.8%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complex preposition</td>
<td>n=23 5.7%</td>
<td>n=19 4.7%</td>
<td>n=6 1.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telic-progressive</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n=71 17.5%</td>
<td>n=59 14.5%</td>
<td>n=7 1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causative-inceptive</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n=22 5.4%</td>
<td>n=4 1.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is only in the lexical head uses, 6.4%, that the definite article signals the identifiability of a real path. In all the other construction types, it no longer has its original function and is, in this sense, decategorialized. The composite predicate construction takes up 41.6%, followed by the telic-progressive (33.7%). Infinitival expression of the latter’s complement is still rare (1.7%).

4.2.3 On one’s way to

This string is roughly twice as frequent as on the way to, occurring 826 times. It is wholly dedicated to the expression of verbal meanings: 61.7% composite predicates, 35.9% telic progressives, 2.4% causative-incepitives. Possessives with way are thus exclusively used as subject markers. Regarding complement types, infinitives are slightly more frequent than gerunds with the telic-progressive, which suggests a considerable degree of grammaticalization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SPATIAL NP</th>
<th>ASE NP</th>
<th>GERUND</th>
<th>INF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lexical head</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.4 On way to

In our data, there are 19 instances of the string on way to, occurring in all types of reanalysed constructions. All these examples come from newspapers, or magazines or. With most of them, the absence of a determiner can be explained because they appear in environments that take telegram style, such as titles, e.g. Liz collapses on way to her comeback party, or by extension, newspaper or magazine prose.

4.3 Strings containing the noun road

4.3.1 Free string on (x) road(s) to

Unlike on (x) way(s) to, this string is attested in our data with 33 tokens. The biggest proportion (81.9%) is taken up by lexical head uses, as in (1) above. Of all the way-nouns studied, road is the one most commonly used to refer to an actual ‘path’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>spatial NP</th>
<th>ASE NP</th>
<th>gerund</th>
<th>inf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lexical head</td>
<td>n=9 27.3%</td>
<td>n=5 15.2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>composite predicate</td>
<td>n=3 9.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complex preposition</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telic-progressive</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n=12 36.4%</td>
<td>n=1 3.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causative-inceptive</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n=3 9.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the aspectual markers containing a prenominal modifier discussed in section 3.4 above are found with the noun road, as in the earlier example (29) a positive outcome on May 22 will set us on the high road to their achievement. This is a case of what Breban (2009) termed structural persistence, the survival of structural properties of the source construction after grammaticalization.

4.3.2 On the road to

On the road to is the third most frequent string in the corpus with 228 relevant instances. It specializes strongly in the complex preposition construction (30.3%) and the causative-inceptive construction (28.5%). These two grammaticalization paths are less productive with the other way-nouns. Telic-progressives, which are the predominant grammaticalization path with way, come third here, but with a sizeable portion of 22.9%.
In the three grammaticalized uses, ASE-complements are strongly predominant, testifying to the structural persistence of the nominal source construction. The variable idiom in which step or a related word is followed by on the road to, is a productive pattern, as in (20)-(21) above. The 28 most common nouns are: step (18 occurrences), steps (3), milestone (3), stage (2), station (2). Many of these are further modified by first (10 occurrences), which activates an inceptive meaning component in these uses.

4.3.3 On one’s road to
The string with possessive determiner is extremely with road. It is limited to 1 occurrence in a causative-inceptive and 2 occurrences in telic-progressive constructions.

4.3.4 On road to
There are 14 instances spread over the construction types. All are either from newspaper headlines or other registers promoting telegram style, which suggests that the loss of the determiner is mainly due to stylistic considerations.

4.4 Strings containing the noun route

4.4.1 Free string on (x) route(s) to
This string, e.g. on (+ det) direct route to, is found only in lexical uses (16 occurrences) with strictly spatial goals, most of which refer to itineraries of aeroplanes, ships or trains. Route has a very specific sense, viz. “course of (esp. regular) travel or passage from one place to another” (OED).

4.4.2 On the route to
This string occurs only 4 times spread over all construction types except the causative-inceptive.

4.4.3 On one’s route to
This string is an extremely rare variant, with 2 occurrences of lexical head, e.g. on my route to school.

4.4.4 En route to
This construction has three orthographic realizations: en route to, en-route to and on route to, of which the first is the most frequent. Since they are all pronounced as /on ruːt/, they will be treated together, amounting to 138 instances in total. Unlike the nouns
way and road, route predominantly occurs in constructions without any determiner or possessive. At first sight, this could signal a higher degree of grammaticalization, fitting into the prototypical pattern of a complex preposition as proposed by, amongst others, Hoffmann (2004, 2005). However, closer inspection suggests that this is due to its French origin. As shown by Table 13, the strings with en route to are the least grammaticalized, with only 28% of grammaticalized uses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction types and complements of en route to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPATIAL NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lexical head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>composite predicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complex preposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telic-progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causative-inceptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concomitantly, they have the largest proportion of spatial goals (65.2%), most of which complement the composite predicates. As regards the verbal construction types, en route to has the smallest proportion of uses preceded by a verb (either be or a causative verb), viz. 13.7%.

4.5 Strings containing the noun track

4.5.1 Free string on (x) track(s) to
There are 11 instances of this string, 8 of on x fast track to, 2 of on the right track to and 1 of on the narrow track to. Only one is a lexical use, viz. example (8) above, while the others are progressive telic constructions, as in (28) above.

There are no occurrences of either on one’s track to or on the track to.

4.5.2 On track to
With 26 occurrences, the bare PNP string on track to is more common than the free string. It is generally confined to American English, which explains its relatively low frequency in the whole sample, as American English accounts for only c.10% in WordbanksOnline. The aspectual markers with on track to (21 telic-progressive, 5 causative-inceptive) have grammaticalized to a high extent: 25 of the 26 occurrences have an infinitival complement, while the twenty-sixth has a gerund. Strikingly, they have a 100% positive semantic prosody and often describe important achievements such as be No.1, win a world championship.

4.6 Specialization: conclusion

If we set out the frequencies of the four different strings in relation to the four way-nouns as in Table 15, it becomes clear that each way-noun specializes in a specific use, coinciding with a particular structural variant.

Table 15. Distribution of the different strings over the way-nouns
The string with possessive is strongly associated with *way* (828 tokens, 66.0%). All instances specialize in verbal constructions of which the possessive marks the subject: composite predicates, telic-progressives and causative-inceptives. The telic-progressive fairly frequently takes a gerund or infinitive, which suggests that it has progressed considerably on the way to auxiliation. The fact that, besides animate and volitional subjects, it can also have inanimate subjects, as in (23) above, is also a sign of progressive grammaticalization.

The string with definite article is strongly favoured by *road* (233 tokens, 82%). 27 instances are lexical head constructions in which the signals identifiability. The lexical head use of *road* has remained the strongest of all way-nouns, and there is noticeable structural persistence of the NP-structure in the other constructions. The aspectual markers take predominantly NP-complements. Of the four way-nouns, *road* has most instances of the causative-inceptive construction, which was found to have remained closer to the nominal source structure in section 3.4.

*Route* occurs without determiner in the majority of cases (134 tokens, 85.9%), which, as noted above, is due to its being borrowed as a fixed unit from French. It specializes in the lexical constructions - noun and composite predicate - that are followed by concrete spatial goals.

*Track* is also most common without determiner, but it specializes in telic-progressives. The unit *on track to* followed by a state-of-affairs seems to be found mainly in American English.

### 5. Conclusion

Our data-based description of the *on* (x) + way-noun + *to* strings has revealed that they are part of different constructional layers that came into being by various mixes of lexicalization and grammaticalization. It has been recognized that both lexicalization and grammaticalization may involve decategorialization of its core constituent. Loss of the determiner by nouns incorporated into complex prepositions has been advanced as a paradigm case of decategorialization, but determiner drop has also been observed in composite predicates (Brems & Davidse 2010). Unequivocal cases of determiner drop turned out to be very rare in the various way-noun constructions, including the complex preposition. Yet, in all reanalyzed constructions the way-noun no longer has its discourse function of signalling the identifiability of a path. Accordingly, the normal determiner and modifier options were shown to be much reduced in them. Thus, barring a few debatable cases of zero, the complex preposition construction has *the* as only filler.
of the determiner slot, an option recognized for complex prepositions by Quirk et. al (1985:670). We have argued that *de*-categorialization can also involve functional re-
interpretation of elements of the source structure. The earlier internal structure is
preserved to a certain extent and pressed into service to express finer meanings
associated with the new construction. This applies to the possessive, functionally
reinterpreted to refer to the subject in both composite predicates and aspectual markers.
Because of their specific internal make-up, the aspectual markers with way-nouns can
express two types of aspectual meaning that are not available in the paradigm of
established auxiliaries, viz. telic-progressive and causative-inceptive. The aspectual
system of English is currently being reshaped and semantically enriched by its
recruitment of periphrastic auxiliaries of which the emergent ones with way-nouns are
just one example.

Our analysis of the *on* (x) + way-noun + *to*-constructions also confirms some of the
claims made in constructionist approaches to grammar. A point particularly relevant to
this study is Goldberg’s (1995) claim that constructions may be grammatical to a certain
degree without complying to the traditional characteristics of grammatical categories.
The various constructions with way-nouns show that there is a multidimensional cline
from fully lexical to fully grammatical, along which all kinds of points may be taken.
This sort of thinking is currently being developed in theory-formation on lexicalization
and grammaticalization such as Brinton & Traugott (2005) and Trousdale (forthc.)

The present case studies may also have further implications for construction
grammar. There are as yet few constructionist studies that have studied in detail
constructional networks of closely related constructions like the group of *on* (x) + way-
noun + *to*-constructions. What our study may add to the existing literature is the
observation that there are not only prototypical and less prototypical functions of each
of the constructions belonging to this group, but also, that prototypical functions of one
construction may also be encoded by another construction. For instance, the causative-
inceptive function is typically encoded by *CAUSATIVE OBJ* *on the road to*, but may
occasionally be encoded by a similar construction with the noun *way* instead. This
phenomenon may itself be explained in two ways, which differ from each other in
important respects. A first explanation posits that in a previous stage, the various
constructions with the individual way-nouns were not yet specialized in a particular
function, but each of them competed in each of these functions. This implies a first
stage in which the constructional patterns were still fully compositional. Alternatively,
one might assume that a limited number of specific, substantive constructions such as
*on one’s way to*, *on the road to* and *on track to* started to develop particular
predicational or aspectual meanings, and only at a later stage contaminated each other.
For the ‘Verb *one’s way*’-construction, Israel (1996) has argued that it is the second
scenario that applies. As the present study is a synchronic one, we cannot determine
with any certainty how the development proceeded in this case. In any case, it has
become clear that in this development a central role has been played by the extension
from the spatial collocates of the lexical way-noun constructions to the action-state-
event-collocates with positive semantic prosody of the grammaticalized constructions.
In general, our case study provides food for thought about the way closely related
constructions, which can be more or less idiomatic or grammaticalized, continue to
interact with each other, even after they have started on the road to specialized usage.
References


