The evolution of the (in)definite future markers *POU* and *VA* in 20th century Mauritian Creole

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Abstract

Following a series of articles about the status of Mauritian’s future markers in the 1993 edition of *Études Créoles* (Baker 1993; Hazaël-Massieux 1993; Touchard & Véronique 1993) there has been little debate about the division of labour between *POU* and *VA* in the domain of future marking. With the exception of the article by Hazaël-Massieux (1993), literature on the distinction between *POU* and *VA* in Mauritian exhibits a strong consensus that the choice of marker depends on whether the context constitutes a definite or indefinite future (Adone 1994 : 40; Baker 1972: 109; Henri & Kihm 2015: 261 amongst many others). This article gives a detailed description of how these markers have evolved and interacted over time; more specifically, it shows that the label ‘indefinite’ does not adequately capture the complex nature of *VA*. Attempts to explain an ‘indefinite’ future in the literature until now are at best vague and at worst inadequate. This paper suggests an alternative way of addressing the issue, following Corbett’s (2007) canonical typological approach, which breaks down meanings into ‘features’ based on assumptions and propositions in the previous research.

**Key words:** future expression, TMA markers, Mauritian Creole, indefinite future, canonical typology

Résumé


**Mots-clés :** l’expression du futur, les marqueurs TMA, le créole mauricien, le futur indéfini, la typologie canonique
1. Introduction

With the exception of an article by Hazaël-Massieux (1993), literature on the distinction between *POU* and *VA* in Mauritian Creole exhibits a strong consensus that the choice of marker depends on whether the context constitutes a definite or indefinite future (Adone 1994: 40; Baker 1972: 109; Henri & Kihm 2015: 261 amongst many others). Although it is now 45 years old, Baker’s (1972) ‘Kreol: A description of Mauritian Creole’ is still highly regarded and was the first substantial grammar since Baissac (1880). In it, Baker (1972, 109) claims that *a* (VA variant) is an aspectual \(^1\) marker denoting ‘indefinite’ future, pointing out that no definite plans have been made, and that “English ‘may’ sometimes provides an adequate translation”:

1) Baker (1972)

mo a get li pli tar

1sg VA see 3sg.OBJ more late

‘I may see her later on’

2) Baker (1972)

mo ava aste en pul

1sg VA buy INDEF chicken

‘I’ll buy a chicken (perhaps)’

*Pu* (POU variant), on the other hand, is a definite future, which “corresponds closely to ‘will’ + infinitive” (Baker 1972, 110):

3) Baker (1972)

mo pu lakaz dime

1sg POU home tomorrow

‘I will be at home tomorrow’

This article looks at the development of Mauritian Creole’s two future markers, firstly by outlining the first attestations and early developments of the markers, before focussing on 20th century examples of future expression from Soulsobontemps [1925]\(^3\), Le Juge de Segrais (1976) {1939 & 1954}, Baker (1972) {1970}, and Virahsawmy (2019) {1972}. The analysis for the 20th century data (when the (in)definite distinction is assumed to hold) is based on Corbett’s Canonical Typology approach, which breaks concepts down into features to establish ideal, or ‘canonical’ usage (Corbett 2007, 8).

Future time reference has received considerable attention in the literature due to its unavoidable modal nature and common morphological asymmetry with past and present marking (Bochnak 2019, 2). Cross-linguistic studies investigating future expression, among others, include Bybee et al. (1994) and Dahl (2000), which show what strategies are possible. Regarding French-based Creoles, Hofherr (2018) surveys a number of semantic traits of Haitian’s future markers, some of which (e.g. imminence, intention & certainty) are investigated as features in this study into Mauritian Creole’s future marking. A canonical approach has not yet been used to explore this issue. I therefore restrict myself to this approach to examine to what extent it can account for differences between *POU* and *VA*.

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1 I use the variants as they are cited, but in my own work I use *POU* to refer to any variant derived from *pour*, and *VA* to stand for *a*, *va* or *ava*.

2 Whether these markers constitute tense, mood or aspect is disputed, but not directly relevant to the discussion here.

3 Dates in square brackets (e.g. [1925]) refer to texts in Baker & Fon Sing’s (2007) collection of *textes anciens*, also available online: ([http://concordancemmc.free.fr](http://concordancemmc.free.fr)). Dates in curly brackets (e.g. {1939}) refer to the date a text was written, rather than published.
The features considered for an ‘indefinite’ future, following assumptions in the literature, include:

- **time-related features** (proximal, imminence, present relevance)
- **speaker-oriented features** (control, certainty)
- **agent-oriented features** (intention)
- **situational features** (probability, depends on agent)

In the tables from section 3.11 onwards, the features are coloured as above. These features are then compared across time and conclusions are drawn about the nature of an ‘indefinite’ future expressed by VA.

The main research question I seek to address is:

a) Can the definite/indefinite distinction account for differences between POU and VA and if so, which elements make up ‘indefinite’?

Since we are dealing with the diachronic evolution of future marking, it is important to consider theories of language change and emergence. Bybee et al. (1994: 254) hypothesise that all futures go through a stage of intention and Detges (2000: 137) points out that speakers “try to confer credibility to their [future] actions” with emerging future markers since there is no proof that their actions will happen. Commissives (promises and threats) are prime contexts for developing into future expression, as “speaker’s intentions play a crucial role” (ibid, 137).

The lexical sources which develop into futures also tend to offer proof that the speaker is sincere (ibid, 137). For example, VA comes from a verb of movement, showing that the speaker is already moving to complete the action and POU’s source meanings of ‘pre-destination’ or ‘purpose’ imply the action is likely to occur.

It is commonly cited that Mauritian’s future markers are direct continuations of the French periphrastic expressions être pour and va + infinitive (Chaudenson 1981, 208-209). French va + infinitive seems a very likely source for Creole VA since it already arrives in the language with a grammaticalized future meaning. However, while it is certainly likely that être pour was used in early colonial Mauritius and contributed to the development of POU, I believe we should be more cautious about assuming a straightforward development. Unfortunately, the scarcity of texts in Mauritian Creole from the 1700s make it very difficult to draw any hard conclusions about the extent to which pour would have been used with a future or even posterior meaning in the early formation of Mauritian Creole, as it is absent until 1818. I will resume this discussion below when discussing some of the early attestations.

2. Early developments

I first offer an overview of the development of the two future markers from their first appearances in the 18th and 19th centuries. A better understanding of where the markers have come from and how they have developed alongside each other will be helpful when analysing their subsequent development in the 20th century when it is assumed that indefiniteness can distinguish the two markers.

The earliest written attestation of a future marker is from [1777] in the Affaire du Chevalier de la Poëze (Baker & Fon Sing 2007, 4) and can be seen in example 4. It details an incident with a male slave who becomes aggressive when questioned about why he was bothering a female slave. He responds in a mixture of French and Creole before threatening the person who questioned him:

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4 Other features for future expression in general were analysed, but not reported here as they are not directly relevant.
This first attestation of *VA* constitutes a commissive situation (a threat) and a clear intention from the speaker to make the interviewer pay for his questioning, which, as mentioned above, constitutes an apt situation for the continued development of future expression with *VA*.

The form of *VA* is assumed to have developed from the French *va* + infinitive. In 17th century French, ‘je vas’ was the prestige form; it was not until later that ‘je vais’ became standard (Chaudenson 1981: 208). This means /va/ would have been more frequently heard in 18th Century Mauritius (in 1st, 2nd and 3rd person singular forms) than it is in French today. By the 18th century, *VA* was already well established as an auxiliary with the infinitive to express a near future in spoken French (Gougenheim 1971: 102). *VA* was likely borrowed directly from French in this grammaticalized form, so may not have gone through any intermediate ‘movement’ stage before expressing futurity in Mauritian Creole. However, a lack of attestations in the very early texts [1734]-[1777] means nothing is certain.

*POU* appeared much later in the texts, so it seems that *VA* was the only possible overt form for expressing futurity in the early stages of Mauritian Creole. Unlike *VA*, however, *POU* is and has always been multi-functional. As in French, it functions as a preposition, conjunction and complementiser.

The following example is often cited as the first instance of *POU* as a future marker [1818] (Baker 1993: 88; Syea 2006:-: 275). However, this is dubious due to its past narrative context. The story starts with a slave telling people to listen as he situates the narrative in space (Grand-Rivière) and in time, with *té* (French *été*/*était*) indicating past tense. He then gives some background about what he was doing:

```
 4) Baker & Fon Sing (2007) [1777]
  toi     va      paye     moi     ça
  2sg    VA  pay   1sg OBJ  that
'you’ll pay for that'
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```
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```
 5) Baker & Fon Sing (2007) [1818]
  L’her     solé     lève,     mo     pour     alle     prend     mon     poste     au    pavé
  the hour  sun     rise,     1sg     POU     go      take     1sg.POSS post on the route
'when the sun rose, I was destined/on my way/it was my purpose to stand guard on the route'
```

Given the above context, there is no way this instance of *POU* can be pure future expression. It is however in the correct structural position between the subject and verb to be a TMA⁵ marker. Past tense is not explicitly marked, since this was established with *té* in the previous sentence. This is why, out of context, this example has been interpreted as a future by some linguists. Instead, the *POU* in this sentence retains its source meaning of ‘purpose’ or ‘pre-destination’, and due to its structural position and forward-looking meaning, it can be considered the first stage of future development. The notion of posteriority can already be seen in this early usage of *POU*, despite it being anchored in the past, since the action of going to stand guard happened after the sunrise. The first unambiguous instances of future *POU* occurs in [1867] but is rare (6%) compared to *VA* (94% of overt future marking).

Returning to the issue of the contribution of the French periphrastic expression *être pour* to *POU*’s development, two issues make me cautious about attributing a continuous development from French. Firstly, the expression was

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⁵ Stands for Tense, Mood and Aspect. TAM can also be found in the literature, but I use TMA for the simple reason that this is the order in which the markers usually appear if they co-occur in Mauritian Creole, although there are exceptions.
diminishing at the time of colonization (Gougenheim 1971: 119). Although this likely referred to written rather than spoken language, the Creole that was recorded from this time represented the spoken variety, since no written standard existed. Secondly, slaves were assumed to have even less contact with native French after the early stages of contact because as slave numbers increased, Creole became the target language for new slaves (by 1773) and only domestic slaves would have had regular contact with the slave-owners and their families (Baker & Corne 1982: 249; Maurer 2014: 91). Therefore, I find it surprising that even in the mid-1800s when there are longer available texts of around 7,000 words (e.g. Lolliot 1855) that POU does not occur at all with any posterior or future meaning (see Table 1.1 below). If the expression was commonly used orally in the early colonization period when slaves and slave-owners had more contact, why did this usage take so long to become established? It is only from 1865 that pour is used more regularly to refer to posterior or future events. It is, of course, possible that pour simply was not recorded in the relatively few texts which survived, but I do not believe there is enough evidence to assume direct continuation from the French periphrasis être pour. Language-internal development from a source meaning of ‘purpose’ through ‘imminence’ to use as a future TMA marker is not necessarily reliant on an already partially-grammatical periphrastic expression in French, although it likely helped it along the way. By the end of the 19th century, POU was used consistently to refer to the future. My analysis of future expression in Baissac’s (1888) folktales shows that POU was used in 26.36% of future instances with overt markers6. Regarding the features outlined in section 1, every instance of POU in the Old Mauritian texts had ‘present relevance’ (cf. Detges 2000: 144). A lack of ‘present relevance’ in 91% of VA examples showed that this feature was closely related to POU-usage. As well as having ‘present relevance’, almost all POU marking involved ‘speaker certainty’. This reflects Detges’ (2000, 137) assumption that a newer future marker is often used to confer credibility to the situation because the speaker’s certainty could mean the situation is more likely to occur. The situations themselves were judged to be likely to occur from the context in all but two instances of POU and the ‘proximal’ feature was a relatively good predictor of POU (3 exceptions). Features for VA were much harder to isolate because VA was the dominant marker, used in the majority of future contexts. Having given a basic historical overview of the development of POU/VA as future markers, we can now move on to how (in)definiteness came to be seen as a guide to their usage in the 20th century.

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6 Zero marking is also possible in Mauritian Creole to express future notions. However, due to the difficulty of identifying all instances of zero-marked futures, only overt markers are considered in detail for this analysis.
3. 20th Century POU and VA

Throughout the 20th century, VA begins to lose its dominant status as frequencies between the two future markers equal out. In the second half of the century, POU takes over as the main marker as VA becomes more restricted. In order to track changes in frequencies, the number of instances of POU and VA in a selection of texts throughout the 20th century was counted and can be seen in table 1.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text size</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Narratives</td>
<td>Narratives</td>
<td>Narratives</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future markers</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POU</td>
<td>15 55.56%</td>
<td>21 42.86%</td>
<td>21 61.76%</td>
<td>43 89.58%</td>
<td>65 92.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>12 44.44%</td>
<td>13 26.53%</td>
<td>5 14.71%</td>
<td>1 2.08%</td>
<td>5 7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0 0.00%</td>
<td>15 30.61%</td>
<td>8 23.53%</td>
<td>4 8.33%</td>
<td>0 0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA and A</td>
<td>12 44.44%</td>
<td>28 57.14%</td>
<td>13 38.24%</td>
<td>5 10.42%</td>
<td>5 7.14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Frequencies of future markers in five 20th Century Mauritian texts

In order to make the texts as comparable as possible, they are roughly the same size and style. All of the texts tell a story and have a strong oral component as the narratives and play are (originally) performative, despite being written down. The narratives in De Segrais (1976) and Baker (1971) are oral transcriptions, it is unclear whether Soulsobontemps [1925] is written or transcribed and Virahsavmy (1972) is an original play.

There appears to be a correlation between the frequency of the markers and their meanings which we shall see in the subsequent sections. As POU increases in frequency, it expands into the domains of future meaning originally expressed by VA, whilst VA becomes increasingly restricted to subjective contexts, which we might potentially refer to as a subset of ‘indefinite’ meaning.

3.1. ‘Indefinite’ VA

In Baker (1972: 109), it is claimed that a is an aspectual marker denoting ‘indefinite’ future and pu an aspectual marker denoting ‘definite’ future. In general, there has been little justification or in-depth analysis of this definite/indefinite distinction, despite being widely cited. Moreover, the concept of an ‘indefinite’ future does not appear to be defined adequately (or defined at all in many articles: cf. Adone 1994: 42).

An intuitive understanding of ‘indefinite’ future could be ‘uncertain’, however extensive co-occurrence of lexical items denoting uncertainty such as pa sir ‘not sure’ or kitfwa ‘maybe’ with the ‘definite’ marker POU suggest it is a more complex situation. Detges (2000) does not overtly define ‘(in)definite’, but cites Schlupp (1997, 81) who refers to (non-)specific time reference such as tomorrow for ‘definite’ and later as ‘indefinite’, which is quite a different concept from (un)certainty.

The issue is examined in more detail in three articles in the journal Études Créoles (1993), in which Hazaël-Massieux (1993) expresses some doubts about the assumption and Baker (1993) strongly argues that VA is used in ‘indefinite’ future contexts. Hazaël-Massieux (1993) analyses a number of texts from the 1850s until the 1990s and suggests that by the 1990s VA is marginal and hardly used. When it does seem to have a separate semantic
function, Hazaël-Massieux notes that this is often in texts written by intellectuals, who may try to preserve an older form of the language as “patrimoine littéraire ancien” (Hazaël-Massieux 1993:70).

Baker (1993, 93) is compelled to defend the (in)definite distinction, providing examples and further explanation about what he means by ‘indefinite’. He explains that the use of a in the text *Tohtoh Bak e Kohper Renar* shows the speaker did not intend to carry out the actions, implying that ‘lack of intention’ triggers an ‘indefinite’ future.

In the story, the fox tricks the goat into getting into a pool of water they cannot both get back out of. The fox then explains what they will do:

6) Baker (1972) [1970]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mo a gayh miray- la [...] mo a lev twa osi lao 1sg VA get on wall DEF 1sg VA pull 2sg also up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ‘I’ll get onto the wall’ \* ‘I’ll pull you up too’. \*

Whilst it is true that the fox does not intend to pull the goat up, he does fully intend to get out himself. Baker (1993, 93) admits this, but does not provide any alternative explanation for why the ‘indefinite’ marker and not *POU* is used in the second part of the sentence. Following this, Baker (1993, 93) claims that even in earlier texts such as *Soulsofbontemps* [1925], the ‘indefinite’ future is used in situations where it is not in the speaker's power/control to ensure the action is completed. This certainly holds for parts of the story, however, in the following example, neither lack of control nor intention can explain *VA* usage since the agent has full control over getting his boat fixed and there is nothing to suggest he does not intend to do it.

7) Baker & Fon Sing (2007) [1925]

| L'heire pour tourner li va guetté qui manière bisoin The hour to return 3sg VA look what way need |
| bouce troux dans pénice seal holes in boat |
| ‘When it is time to return, he’ll see how he can seal the holes in his boat’ |

Based on these and numerous other counterintuitive uses of *VA*, I believe the situation to be infinitely more complex than suggested by the definite/indefinite distinction. One way of being more systematic about exploring the contexts in which the markers are used is to break down the concept of an ‘indefinite’ future into features and establish a canonical or ideal ‘indefinite’, following Corbett (2007).

Baker (1993, 93) claims that ‘lack of intention’ and ‘lack of speaker control’ are relevant for *VA*. Taking previous research into consideration, I hypothesise that an ‘indefinite’ future *VA*-usage may consist of the following features:

- non-proximal (Detges, 2000)
- lack of present relevance (Detges, 2000)
- non-specific time/date (Detges, 2000)
- lack of speaker control (Baker, 1993)
- lack of speaker certainty (Baker, 1993; Detges, 2000)
- lack of agent intention (Baker, 1993)
- low situation probability (Baker, 1972; Baker, 1993; Detges, 2000; Adone, 1994)
- a situation which does not depend on the agent (Ministry of Education & Human Resources, 2011)

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7 Translation is literally “old literary heritage”
8 The name of the story translates as: Uncle Goat and Friend Fox.
9 Since I refer to features in the table in the positive form, but expected ‘indefinite’ features are in the negative, these features should be absent (0) in typical *VA*-usage.
3.1.1. Comparison of “The fox and the goat”

The story of the fox and the goat appears in both De Segrais {1939} and Baker {1970}. A comparison of these two texts can be useful to examine differences in future usage. Below are some basic details about the texts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/transcriber:</th>
<th>Xavier Le Juge De Segrais</th>
<th>Philip Baker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about storytellers</td>
<td>Although written down by Le Juge de Segrais, his stories are based on oral narrations from his cook and servant, the latter of which was said to be particularly eloquent, despite being illiterate (Lionnet 2014, 93)</td>
<td>Creole man aged 24 years old. First language was Creole, but also spoke French and a little English. He had a clerical role on a sugar estate in the south of Mauritius at the time (Baker 1972, 212)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>537 words</td>
<td>587 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>Record of an oral folktale</td>
<td>Transcription of an oral folktale recorded in 1970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the low token frequencies, these two texts, shown in table 1.2, reflect the same frequencies as in the sample of 20th century texts in table 1.1, where the first half of the 20th century had an almost 50/50 split between the markers, whilst by the 1970s, there was already a strong preference for POU.

A strategy which has not been studied in detail is the lack of any marker to express future, known as a zero marker (Ø). This could simply be present expression, although the utterance clearly refers to future time. It is used in De Segrais to narrate the part of the story which is somewhat disputed:

8) De Segrais {1939} (CS9)
   promier d'abord, mo Ø monte lors to lédos
   ‘Firstly, I'll climb onto your back’

9) De Segrais {1939} (CS10)
   second, lors to cornes
   ‘Secondly, onto your horns’

10) De Segrais {1939} (CS11)
    dernier mo Ø saute dehors lors laterre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of future markers</th>
<th>De Segrais {1939} – The goat and the fox</th>
<th>Baker {1970} – The goat and the fox</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POU</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA &amp; A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2: Frequencies of future markers in De Segrais {1939} and Baker {1970}

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10 These stories can be found in: Le Juge de Segrais (1976:4) and Baker (1972:211).
Lastly, I'll jump out onto the ground

11) De Segrais {1939} (CS12)
après moi Ø donne toi la main sourti
‘After, I'll give you a hand to get out’

This same section appears in Baker (1970) as follows:

12) Baker {1970} (CB4)
La mo pu moht lor tolake
There 1sg POU climb on 2sgPOSS tail
‘Then I'll climb onto your tail’

13) Baker {1970} (CB5)
Mo pu sot lor to ledo
1sg POU jump on 2sgPOSS back
‘I'll jump onto your back’

14) Baker {1970} (CB6)
Mo a gayh miray-la
1sg VA get on wall-DEF
‘I'll get onto the wall’

15) Baker {1970} (CB7)
Apre mo a tyom pu twa
After 1sg VA hold on for 2sg
‘After I'll hold onto you’

16) Baker {1970} (CB8)
Mo a lev twa osi lao
1sg VA pull 2sg also up
‘I’ll pull you up too’

The sequence of events is very similar in both accounts. Overall, the same lexical items are used, but not always in the same combinations. For example, both versions use the verbs monte ‘to climb’ and sote ‘to jump’, yet in Baker {1970}, the fox climbs on the goat’s tail before jumping onto its back whilst in De Segrais {1939} it climbs onto the goat’s back before jumping onto the ground. Oral folktales can be considered mid-way between spontaneous spoken and planned written language (Ludwig 1989: 235) and are transmitted from generation to generation orally. This can explain the slight difference in vocabulary and content, as the re-teller must rely on their memory, so different versions will naturally vary to some extent. However, this does not explain the different TMA marking strategies.
The eight ‘indefinite’ features posited above were formulated in negative terms to describe an indefinite future (i.e. the absence of a feature: e.g. non-proximal). For comparison with POU, which would be expected to have the opposite features (i.e. proximal), all the features are written in positive terms. Table 1.3 shows the features which are present (1) or absent (0) for each example. For instance, example 13 (CB5) constitutes a proximal situation so has a 1, but is not relevant to the present, so ‘present relevance’ receives a 0. These eight features which are considered relevant for an (in)definite future are coloured green or orange. It is expected that these features will be absent (0) for VA, and POU is expected to have a positive value (1). The examples which adhere to this expectation are coloured green, whilst those which are unexpected are coloured orange. Example 14 (CB6) shows a number of features which would be expected for POU rather than VA, and are therefore coloured orange.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Marker</th>
<th>Proximal</th>
<th>Present relevance</th>
<th>Specific date/time</th>
<th>Speaker control</th>
<th>Speaker certainty</th>
<th>Agent intention</th>
<th>Situation probability</th>
<th>Situation depends on agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CB5 (13)</td>
<td>PU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB6 (14)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/？</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>CB7 (15)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB8 (16)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3: Feature analysis for examples CB5-CB8

The initial ‘la’ ‘then’ in 12 (CB4) is significant because it introduces a temporal anchoring which can be interpreted as ‘from this moment onwards’. Then, in 15 (CB7) apre ‘after’ appears, showing posteriority, which could explain the use of VA rather than POU, as it shows that it is a step further into the future than the initial utterances following la.

However, the problematic case is example 14 (CB6). In all the previous examples of future expression in Baker [1970], POU is used, but suddenly there is a change to VA, although apre comes later in 15 (CB7), and there is no change in the features nor the properties of narration between examples 13 (CB5) and 14 (CB6).

If ‘speaker certainty’, ‘agent intention’ or ‘situation probability’ were driving the choice of marker, as posited in the literature, one would expect example 14 (CB6) to be POU and the change to VA to occur in 15 (CB7), which has more indefinite features. Since 14 (CB6) has exactly the same features as 13 (CB5), the use of VA in 14 (CB6) is unexpected, as can be seen from the orange cells.

My contact could not think of a reason for the change of marker but said it would not sound right with POU instead of VA (Parmessur p.c. 2018). I assume the speaker in the story is confident and certain about what he says, but it could be that the use of VA indicates some uncertainty about being able to get onto the wall. In De Segrais [1939], Ø is used throughout this section and the point at which the fox says something he does not intend to do does not result in a change in marker.

Contrary to Baker (1993, 93), I conclude that ‘lack of agent intention’ cannot explain the choice of future marker in this passage. It was initially assumed that the speaker was certain about the events he intended to carry out, but upon further consideration, it could be that the speaker was less sure of his ability to get onto the wall from the goat’s back. Apart from this tentative explanation, no other features can explain the change in marker. The role of ‘speaker certainty’ will therefore be examined in subsequent texts.

---

11 However, there is a linguistic difference between these sentences. In CSI2, the objective/emphatic pronoun moi, rather than mo is used; it could be that this pronoun is being used by the fox to distance himself from what he says.
3.1.2. Soulsobontemps: Bonnefemme Magon – Mrs Magon [1925]

It was thought until recently that Soulsobontemps was the first non-Franco-Mauritian whose writing we had access to. However, it turns out Soulsobontemps is the pen name of a Franco-Mauritian born in 1893 (Baker & Fon Sing 2007, 58) who wrote down the narrative folktale of ‘Bonnefemme Magon’. It tells the story of two young lovers.

3.1.2.1. Features of future markers in Soulsobontemps

There were fifteen instances of POU and twelve instances of VA to mark futurity in this story. Since the focus of this article is on an ‘indefinite’ future, I concentrate solely on the features of the examples in which VA is used. At a first glance, the examples seem to constitute situations which would intuitively be considered uncertain. For example:

17) Soulsobontemps [1925] (D2)
   to va madame eine firmie
   2sg VA wife INDEF farmer
   ‘You’ll be the wife of a farmer’

18) Soulsobontemps [1925] (D12)
   nous va zoindre trou dans caverne
   1pl VA find hole in cave
   ‘We’ll find the hole in the cave’

Table 1.4 below shows the features that each of the VA examples contain. The time-related features (red) for this story are largely absent for VA. As in the previous section, the table should be interpreted as 0 showing the absence of a feature and 1 the presence of a feature, with the expected indefinite features coloured green and unexpected ones orange. Interestingly, none of the expected ‘indefinite’ features are 0 in every example, showing that no one feature applies to all VA examples. This emphasises the necessity of regarding ‘indefinite’ as a complex notion, made up of multiple time-, speaker-, agent- and situational features, which do not make sense in isolation.
I dismiss ‘situation which does not depend on agent’ as a relevant factor for determining $VA$-usage as the situation in all but one example does depend on the agent. Disregarding this feature, all of the $VA$ examples have between four and six of the seven postulated ‘indefinite’ features, although none have all of them. Note that ‘speaker certainty’, which was considered in the previous section cannot be the main feature determining $VA$-usage, since most of the features are relevant for the majority, but not all examples with $VA$.

Examples 17 (D2), 18 (D12), 19 (D5) and 20 (D6) constitute examples which contain all but one of the features one would expect of an ‘indefinite’ future. 19 (D5) and 20 (D6) illustrate this ‘indefinite’ usage well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Marker</th>
<th>Proximal</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>relevance</td>
<td>date/time</td>
<td>control</td>
<td>certainty</td>
<td>intention</td>
<td>probability</td>
<td>depends</td>
<td>on agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2 (17)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5 (19)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D6 (20)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D9</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D10</td>
<td>VA</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D11</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D12 (18)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D15</td>
<td>VA</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D21</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D22</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D28 (21)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4: Expected ‘indefinite’ features for $VA$ examples

19) Soulsobontemps [1925] (D5)
Bon Dié $va$ pini zote
God $VA$ punish 3pl
‘God will punish them’

20) Soulsobontemps [1925] (D6)
Bon Dié $va$ béni toi
God $VA$ bless 2sg.OBJ
‘God will bless you’

Bonnefemme Magon is the speaker and utters these sentences as Iderce comes to her rescue after she is attacked by some youths because they think she is a witch. She assures him that “God will punish them” (19(D5)) and “God will bless you” (20(D6)). Obviously, the speaker has no control over this, although she expects it to happen, yet is not certain. Whilst Bonnefemme Magon assumes the agent (God) has control, she cannot be sure whether this is his intention. ‘Situation probability’ is hard to judge, but considering the cultural and religious context, it can be assumed that everyone involved in this story, including the characters, narrator and listeners, would consider the situation likely.

Example 21 (D28) has the most unexpected features of all the sentences (although ‘situation depends on agent’ does not appear to be relevant):
This is the very last instance of future marking in the story; the speaker is the narrator explaining that it has gone dark and they should get back to work otherwise Marie-Jeanne will be angry with him. It is very common for Creole stories to end with the narrator coming back to the present moment in their function of storyteller. It has the features ‘proximal’ (tà l'heire ‘later/soon’) ‘present relevance’ (the situation will happen as a result of not getting back to work now) and the situation has a high probability of happening. Due to these factors one might expect POU marking, although it does have four other indefinite features. It seems that the adverb tà l'heire ‘later’ carries more meaning than simply expressing proximity. It introduces an ‘indefinite’ timeframe, and allows for hypothetical utterances, which is an ideal context for VA.

The canonical approach taken so far enables a finer-grained and more flexible approach to understanding future expression. All VA examples have at least four out of seven of the expected ‘indefinite’ features and a combination of the features ‘non-proximal’, ‘non-specific time/date’, ‘lack of speaker control’ and ‘lack of speaker certainty’ can account for most VA instances in the 20th century texts examined so far.

3.1.3. De Segrais A: Femmes are ène secret: ‘Women with a secret’ {1939} and De Segrais B: Voleirs are Bourique: ‘Theives and a donkey’ {1952}

I now examine two stories from Xavier Le Juge de Segrais’ collection of folktales. The first is from his initial twenty stories published in 1939, and the second from the twenty further stories published in 1952. He was also Franco-Mauritian and was born in Mauritius in 1871 (Lionnet 2014; Moonien 2008).

3.1.3.1. Features of future markers in De Segrais {1939} and {1952}

In this text, there were only eight markers; four VA and four POU. One of the VA examples which did not seem intuitive is the following:

22) De Segrais {1939} (E5)
Mo promette toi Zéphirin, qui jamais personne
1sg promise 2sg.OBJ ZEPHIRIN, COMP never no one
va conne ça
VA know DEM

‘I promise you Zephirin, that no one will ever know that’

A context with ‘never’ seems like a ‘definite’ situation, yet what has been labelled as an ‘indefinite’ marker is used. However, the fact that following this utterance the whole village ended up knowing about the secret, it could be that it was never meant sincerely in the first place.
Let us examine the features that this sentence has in table 1.5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Marker</th>
<th>Proximal</th>
<th>Present relevance</th>
<th>Specific date/time</th>
<th>Speaker control</th>
<th>Speaker certainty</th>
<th>Agent intention</th>
<th>Situation probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5 (22)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6 (23)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.5: Features of VA markers in De Segrais {1939}

Despite the linguistic definite marking with ‘never’ and ‘no one’, the context for this example (E5(22)) actually has more expected ‘indefinite’ features than all of the others. It is not ‘proximal’, does not have ‘present relevance’, no ‘specific time/data’ is mentioned, we know from the continuation of the story that the speaker is uncertain that no one will ever know about the secret and the situation is improbable as well. The speaker, however, does have full control over her actions. This shows how our intuitions about what ‘indefinite’ is do not necessarily correspond with the features that have been identified as contributing to an ‘indefinite’ context.

Additionally, it is important to consider the lexical aspect and other elements of the sentence. The combination of the vagueness of VA along with the performative verb ‘promise’, and the negative polarity items of ‘never’ and ‘no one’ all contribute to the overall context and interpretation of this utterance. It seems that the features alone are not enough to fully understand VA’s usage.

At the other extreme, example 23 (E6) has none of the expected ‘indefinite’ features except lack of specific time/date:

23) De Segrais {1939} (E6)

Mo a dire toi Miceline, mais faudrait
to say 2sg.OBJ Miceline, but necessary
to garder so secret
2sg keep 3sgPOSS secret

‘I’ll tell you, Miceline, but you’ll have to keep it a secret’

It is something which will happen soon, is relevant to the present moment, the speaker has control over and is sure it will happen, the agent intends to tell Miceline the secret and the situation is likely to happen. VA is unexpected in this context as it has most of the features one would expect for POU.

Rather than relying on these features, we must again use the entire context to interpret the meaning. In 23) the presence of a modal faudrait ‘necessary’ sets up a context of requirement to show that the speaker’s decision to tell her friend is conditional upon her not telling anyone. Therefore, the speaker does not wish to commit to telling her friend, so uses VA.

There do not appear to be any strong tendencies regarding features for VA markers in this text (unexpected ‘orange’ features abound), unlike in Soulsobontemps [1925], where VA was rarely used in ‘proximal’ contexts and had many of the expected ‘indefinite’ features. Although the small number of instances could potentially explain this, it could be that the distribution of POU and VA in this text is not determined by any of these factors. If there was
The features of *VA* seem to be more stable and tendencies more clearly visible in De Segrais’ second text {1952}, as can be seen in table 1.6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Marker</th>
<th>Proximal</th>
<th>Present relevance</th>
<th>Specific date/time</th>
<th>Speaker control</th>
<th>Speaker certainty</th>
<th>Agent intention</th>
<th>Situation probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E11</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E12</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E13</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E14 (24)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E15</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E17</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.6: Features of *VA* markers in De Segrais {1952}

Unlike in De Segrais {1939}, these instances of *VA* are never used in ‘proximal’ contexts or with ‘present relevance’ and the number of instances with ‘speaker certainty’ or ‘situation probability’ is very low, as expected from an ‘indefinite’ future. Example 24 (E14) has all of these expected ‘indefinite’ features:

24) *De Segrais* {1952} (E14)

Maybe it won’t take us long to find a cart for the same price’

All other *VA* instances in {1952} have at least five of the seven expected ‘indefinite’ features, showing a clear difference from future marking in {1939}.

Hazaël-Massieux (1993, 67) claimed that De Segrais’ writing is not representative of the time, but more closely resembles an older style. Firstly, the features in the above texts and frequencies for {1939} and {1952} differ considerably from each other, so it is not a case of one variety of writing, but language which is evolving. Secondly, future marking in neither {1939} nor {1952} resembles the Old Mauritian data. Even if his style may ‘sound’ old-fashioned, his use of future markers is not.

3.1.4. Virahsawmy: *Li* ‘Him’ {1972}

In this final section for 20th Century Mauritian, I examine the instances of *VA* in Virahsawmy’s play *Li*, published in 1972. Virahsawmy is an Indo-Mauritian writer, linguist, politician and intellectual born in 1942. He wrote this play while he was in prison. It was banned by the government in 1976 until it won first prize in the Radio France International competition in 1981 (Kiltir.com 2006). The play is set in a political prison and tackles the issue of freedom through the differing views of the police officers.
3.1.4.1. Features of \( V_A \) markers in Virahsawmy \{1972\}

In the entire play, there are just five instances of \( V_A \), which make up 7.15% of the future markers; \( POU \) is used consistently throughout. The examples are listed below, with their features in table 1.7:

25) Virahsawmy \{1972\} (F1)

\[
\text{Non, les li, sa moi mo } v_a \text{ fer}
\]

No, leave 3sg.OBJ DEM 1sg 1sg \( V_A \) do

‘No, leave it, I'll do that’

26) Virahsawmy \{1972\} (F2)

\[
\text{Enn zour, si nou rezouenn, mo } v_a \text{ explik toi}
\]

INDEF day, if 1pl meet, 1sg \( V_A \) explain 2sg.OBJ

ki bizin fer pou arrive dan lavi

what must do for arrive in life

‘One day, if we meet again, I'll tell you what you have to do to get somewhere in life’

27) Virahsawmy \{1972\} (F3)

\[
\text{Enn zour mo } v_a \text{ dir toi}
\]

INDEF day 1sg \( V_A \) tell 2sg.OBJ

‘One day I'll tell you’

28) Virahsawmy \{1972\} (F4)

\[
\text{Kikfoi mo } v_a \text{ ouver enn } ti \text{ laferm}
\]

Maybe 1sg \( V_A \) open INDEF little farm

‘Maybe I'll open a little farm’

29) Virahsawmy \{1972\} (F5)

\[
\text{To kapav ale. Mo } v_a \text{ al donn li so dite}
\]

2sg can go. 1sg \( V_A \) go give 3sg 3sgPOSS tea

‘You can go. I'll go and give him his tea’

Just from these examples, it can be seen that examples 26 (F2), 27 (F3) and 28 (F4) have clear ‘non-specific time’ reference (\( enn \ zour \ ‘one day’ \)) or adverbs denoting uncertainty (\( kikfoi \ ‘maybe’ \). Let us examine the features in more detail in table 1.7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Marker</th>
<th>Proximal relevance</th>
<th>Specific relevance</th>
<th>Specific date/time</th>
<th>Speaker control</th>
<th>Speaker certainty</th>
<th>Agent intention</th>
<th>Situation probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1 (25)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2 (26)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3 (27)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4 (28)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5 (29)</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.7: Features of \( V_A \) in Virahsawmy \{1972\}
Like in \{1952\}, \(VA\)-usage does not appear to be associated with the time-related features at all. ‘Lack of intention’ and ‘lack of speaker control’, which would be expected to play a role, do not seem to, although ‘speaker certainty’ and ‘situation probability’ are relevant in the majority of these examples. Example 29 (F5) is somewhat puzzling as it has none of the non-time-related features often associated with an ‘indefinite’ future, but instead appears to constitute a situation in which the speaker has full control and the agent intends to carry out the action. My contact confirmed my intuition that the situation seems highly probable (Parmessur p.c. 2018).

A number of examples which seem inexplicable have been identified throughout this analysis. These highlight the importance of taking a canonical approach, which will be illustrated below.

### 5.1.1. Canonical 20\(^{th}\) Century Mauritian \(VA\)

I now concentrate on \(VA\) with the aim of formulating what can be considered a canonical ‘indefinite’ future. Taking all of the examples for the 20\(^{th}\) Century Mauritian texts, few tendencies arise. However, by grouping the texts into pre-1950 and post-1950 examples, more can be said about the data. This cut-off point actually straddles the two editions of De Segrais’ publications (1939 and 1952). It may be odd to assume a distinction between texts by the same author, however, there are clear differences in \(VA\)-usage between these texts, which also reflect differences in frequency. The 1939 texts had a larger proportion of \(VA\) marking (57%), and its usage was much less restricted, whilst \(VA\) was used 38% of the time in the 1952 texts (almost 20% difference) and appears in more specific contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indefinite feature</th>
<th>pre-1950</th>
<th>post-1950</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>non-proximal</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no present relevance</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-specific date/time</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no speaker control</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no speaker certainty</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no agent intention</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low situation probability</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.8 summarises all seven ‘indefinite’ features in pre- and post- 1950 texts. Contrary to Baker’s (1993, 93) claim about ‘no agent intention’, this feature only accounts for 50% of \(VA\)-usage in pre-1950 texts and just 33% in post-1950 texts, so cannot be considered a major factor determining the choice of marker. ‘No speaker control’, however, changes significantly across time periods; it accounts for \(VA\) in 78% of instances in pre-1950 texts, but just 13% in post-1950 texts. ‘Low situation probability’ shows the opposite trend; pre-1950 it accounts for just 28% of \(VA\) instances, while after 1950s this increases to 80%. The intuitive understanding of ‘indefinite’ as ‘uncertain’ then, appears only to be relevant to post-1950 data.

Corbett (2007) presents canonical features with a ‘greater than’ (\(>\)) sign to indicate a certain feature being more canonical than its counterpart. Based on the 20\(^{th}\) century examples examined in this analysis, the top five canonical ‘indefinite’ features for pre-1950 \(VA\) consist of:

- Non-specific date/time > specific date/time (exceptions = 1)
- No speaker certainty > speaker certainty (exceptions = 4)
- No speaker control > speaker control (exceptions = 4)
- Non-proximal > proximal (exceptions = 5)
- No present relevance > present relevance (exceptions = 6)
In the second half of the 20th century, *VA* is more restricted in its usage and therefore easier to describe:

- No present relevance > present relevance (exceptions = 0)
- Non-specific date/time > specific date/time (exceptions = 0)
- Low situation probability > high situation probability (exceptions = 3)
- Non-proximal > proximal (exceptions = 3)
- No speaker certainty > speaker certainty (exceptions = 4)

*VA* never occurred with ‘present relevance’ nor with mention of a ‘specific time or date’. Notice, also, the increased role of ‘low situation probability’ and ‘lack of speaker certainty’; features which reflect the widespread assumptions in the literature that *VA* is used as an ‘indefinite’ future.

Throughout the 20th century analysis, I have focussed on seven expected ‘indefinite’ features. As can be seen above, five of these could account for *VA* to quite a high degree. Since the features associated with *VA*-usage differ considerably over time, rather than talking of a canonical ‘indefinite’ future, it would make more sense to simply talk instead of canonical pre-1950 *VA*-usage and post-1950 *VA*-usage. Although the small number of examples from each time period may contribute to exaggerated differences between pre-1950 and post-1950 texts, the fact that these differences also coincide with changes in the frequency of *POU* and *VA* lends some support for making this distinction.

The features identified above can be taken as canonical features for these time periods and further research will investigate whether these features continue to be used with *VA* in modern texts. As Corbett (2007) notes himself, real examples may or may not resemble the canon; in fact, canonical instances are indeed rare (Corbett 2007: 9), so it is unsurprising that many of the examples differ to a greater or smaller extent from the canonical features that have been identified during this analysis. However, I have been able to use tendencies from the examples and previous research to guide and establish what canonical *VA*-usage looks like throughout 20th century. The hypothesis regarding the potential ‘indefinite’ features partially holds. ‘Situation does not depend on agent’ was disregarded immediately, however the remaining features apart from ‘lack of agent control’ were taken as criteria for a canonical *VA*-usage and together, can account for the most 20th century *VA* examples.

4. Conclusions and further developments

To return to my initial research question about whether the definite/indefinite distinction can account for differences between *POU* and *VA*, I conclude that the way it has been addressed in this article (comprising ‘indefinite features’) can account for *VA*’s usage to some extent. It seems that there is a clearer distinction between *POU* and *VA* in post-1950 texts, and five of the features can account for the majority of these *VA* examples.

After the 1970s, *VA* continued to decline in frequency and its status today is extremely variable. It does not occur once in 100,000 words of political newsletters (Lalit 2019), yet is still used by some speakers in restricted contexts. Simply due to the fact that *VA*’s frequencies have ranged from being used in around 50% of all future marking in 1920-1950s texts, to consistently less than 10% in all texts after 1970s and 0% in some modern texts, it would be strange to assume that the same concept of ‘indefinite’ can account for its usage over time. As noted above, it is clear the frequency of the markers corresponds with their changing meaning over time.
Despite considerable attention, the status and distribution of the two future markers is far from resolved and none of the previous research sufficiently explains the concept of an ‘indefinite’ future. Even the more fine-grained approach taken here to an ‘indefinite’ future cannot account for all $VA$ instances and in addition to the seven ‘indefinite’ features examined in this article, adverbs and lexical aspect must also be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, this approach has contributed to clarifying a concept which was constantly in flux throughout the 20th century.

In further research, I investigate the continued development of $VA$ in modern written texts, as well as modern spoken and elicited data, to examine whether the ‘indefinite’ features examined here still apply to $VA$ today. I analyse the findings from a grammaticalization perspective to test widely held views about the cross-linguistic development of future expression and explore to what extent proposed grammaticalization paths are able to account for the Mauritian data.
Bibliography
