

The rise and fall of Occitan *be(n)* and the rise of *pla(n)*: a semantic-pragmatic cycle?

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Taking an onomasiologically informed, semasiological perspective, this contribution follows the diachronic development of Occitan *be(n)* (from Latin BĒNĒ ‘well’), from its first attestations in the 11th c., in which it displays properties of a manner adverb (1), to specific instances of its use as an affirmative particle in negative polar questions in the 15th c. (2), until its disappearance in the 17th c.¹, and the parallel development of *pla(n)* (from the Latin PLANUS ‘level, even, flat’), the form that eventually takes over as the manner adverb meaning ‘well’ (3).

- (1) [...] *Vilas ag granz e fortz castelz/ e pelz salvadgas e noelz/ et en sos dez ginnos anelz/, d’aur et d’argent **ben** faitz vaiselz.*
‘She had large estates and strong castles and furs of wild beasts and buttons and, in her fingers, precious rings, **well-made** dishes, of gold and silver’. (CSF, 11th c., 092-095)
- (2) [...] *Per que davant lo jutge tu me acusas?/ He las! no sabes **be** tu que ton mal conselh,/ Ton fastich he ton erguelh/ De Paradis te an fach tonbar?*
‘Why do you accuse me in front of the Judge?/ Wretched! **You know full well** that it was your perverse inspiration,/ your presumption and your pride/ that made you fall from Heaven!’. (JDE, 15th c., 194-197)
- (3) *Tot va plan*
all go.PR.3SG well
‘All is well’. (Modern Occitan)

Anglade’s (1921:184-185) remarks that intervocalic ‘n’ in Latin (as in BĒNĒ) had become word final and was unstable in proto-Romance in the majority of words. He adds (1921:188) that ‘En phonétique syntactique *n* finale d’un mot pouvait tomber devant un autre mot commençant par *s, f, v, m.*’ This would suggest a phonetic motivation for the alternation between *ben* and *be* that we see from the twelfth century, when along *ben* we also witness the appearance of *be*. This perhaps was the case in the earlier period, between the 12th and the 14th c. However, it is clear that in the 15th c. *ben* and *be* differentiate semantically, suggesting that the two have become distinct forms: *be* is the only one that can function as an affirmative particle. This suggests a ‘branching off’ of *be*, resulting in it displaying a more advanced level of grammaticalization than *ben* (cf. Traugott & Dasher, 2002:40). Although the corpus does not attest any later instances of modal-particles usage for *be(n)*, *be* is a clause-typing particle in modern Gascony Occitan:

- (4) *b’ ei aquò*
BE be.PR.3SG this
‘Indeed, that’s it’. (Pusch, 2002:111)

The modal-particle use of *be* is highly restricted:

- It is only found in negative polar questions (which are main clauses),
- in the position immediately following the finite verb,
- with verbs of cognition, and
- Occitan *be* is polyphonous.

All these properties strongly point to *be* being a modal particle along the model laid out by Waltereit & Detges (2007:63). Table 1 summarises the reconstruction of the trajectory followed by *be(n)* from its Latin ancestor to the 15th c. modal-particle use. Following Hansen’s (1998:128) proposal for French

¹ The investigation is based on a partly self-compiled corpus of texts broadly originating from the Languedocien area between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries, mainly consisting of plays (or texts with a high degree of dialogue. 11th c. *La Canso de Sancta Fides* (CSF); 12th c. *Roman de Jaufré* (JAU); 13th *Canso de la Crotzada* (CCA), *Flamenca* (FLA); 14th *Guilhem de la Barra* (GDB); 15th *Lo Jutgamen General* (JDE), *Mystère rouergat de l’Ascension* (MDA), *Mystère rouergat de la Passion* (MDP2); 16th c. *Petri et Pauli* (PEP); 17th c. *Jardin deys Musos Provensalos* (JMS); 18th c. *Lo Tresor de Substancioun* (TDS); 19th c. *Lou Pan dou Pecat* (PDP)).

bien, we assume that the basic use of Latin *bĕnĕ* was the manner adverb, from which, via metonymy, the use as degree adverb obtained. Via the bridging context (Evan & Wilkins, 2000) with verbs of cognition, it then expands to become a modal particle.

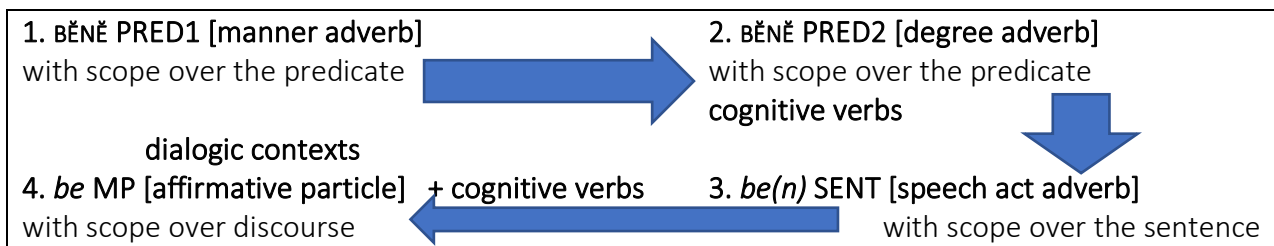


Table 1

Already in Latin, *PLANUS* could express intensity: with scope over the predicate, it could mean ‘wholly, entirely, completely’, and, in affirmative answers, it could take scope over the whole sentence and express epistemic modality, meaning ‘certainly, to be sure, exactly so’.

Pla(n) first occurs in the 12th c. as an adjective meaning ‘flat, plain, simple’, but also as a manner adverb meaning ‘gently, calmly’ (5)², and in the prepositional phrase *de plan* as a sentential adverbial meaning ‘certainly, truthfully’ (6).

- (5) *Pueis a·l ditz tot suau e plan/:*
‘Then he said to them, softly and calmly’ (JAU, 12th c., 9178)
- (6) *“Per Dieu, N’Enflat, mezel puinais/”, dis Jaufre, “ja ne·l veiretz mais/, car mortz est veramentz de plan.*
‘By God, sir puffy stinking leper’”, said Jaufre, “you will not see him again/, because he is truly dead certainly (= good and dead) (JAU, 12th c., 2699-2701)

Plan continues to express the manner adverb ‘gently, calmly’ meaning throughout the 14th and 15th c. (when it is found mainly in collocations with verbs of saying), and it is only in the early 17th c. that we finally find it meaning ‘well’ (interestingly, in Gascon, the variety in which it evolves into a modal particle, it is already recorded as the manner adverb ‘well’ from the 14th c.). The gradual pragmaticalization of *be(n)* precedes that of *pla(n)*.

Focusing on the trajectory of the development of *be(n)* and *pla(n)*, this contribution presents a close investigation of bridging and switch contexts that can be traced back to dialogical exchanges, the cooccurrence with verbs of cognition, and on the role of the hearer’s inferences. It identifies the trajectory followed by *be(n)* from manner adverb ‘well’ to affirmative particle via the application of processes of metonymy and re-analysis and compares it to the parallel development of *pla(n)*. In particular, it discusses the interaction of the two developments and identifies a close interaction between so-called semasiological and onomasiological cycles of pragmatic change (Hansen, 2020) in the loss of *be(n)* and its renewal by *pla(n)*.

References

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² From the twelfth century we also find *planamen* ‘entirely, completely’, formed by the feminine form of the adjective followed by the *-men* suffix, but this form disappears by the fifteenth century.