The art of disruption: the periphrastic future in the verbal system of French.
Carmen L. LeBlanc, Carleton University

The gradual extension in the use of the periphrastic future (PF), often at the expense of the simple future, is a well-attested development in many languages. So far, the focus has been largely on the grammatical function of PF. As far as Canadian French is concerned, it has been documented as a marker of tense (Poplack & Turpin 1999), aspect (LeBlanc 2009) and modality (Chevalier 1994). In this presentation I will draw from different lines of evidence and concentrate on the form itself.

I studied the use of PF in habitual and hypothetical contexts using corpora of French spoken in Québec. Recently, I revisited my original results and data in an attempt to better understand the global structure of the verbal system. First, I will present a variationist study stating clearly how the delexification of the verb go has reached completion (Lehmann 1995). Not only has the PF developed a phonetically reduced form (Heine 1993), but it may also be used along with all types of verbs (e.g. stative, atelic, of movement) and inanimate subjects (Hopper & Thompson 1991). I then will compare the distribution of PF, according to the different factor groups, with that of older and more recent data in support of a stable grammar interpretation. In the last part, I will present the absence of variation in the placement of negatives, adverbs and object pronouns for all exponents of the present temporal reference (modals, simple forms, periphrastic and periphrases). The main difference lies with the internal arguments when it takes the form of a pronoun. These results demonstrate that the incursion of PF in the temporal reference domain is a challenge for the traditional divisions and the study of French grammar. Indeed, as opposed to other compound tenses with the be or have auxiliaries and the past participle, the go form is considered a semi-auxiliaire like modals despite its clear grammatical participation in the system of verbal tenses. This is due to the fact that go appears with the infinitive form. The label is no better indication, as PF is rarely mentioned in the discussion on periphrases verbales (Gougenheim 1929), which are supposed to convey an aspectual or modal nuance and not tense. Based on empirical evidence, the complete disappearance of the simple future from in Canadian French is foreseeable. Possibly for the first time in the development of the language, a sector of the temporal references would not be expressed by the traditional and historical means of simple and compounded tenses.