

# Proximate futures in English and Turkish: An analogy between spatial and temporal proximity<sup>1</sup>

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## 1 Overview

**Proximate futures** express that an eventuality will hold at a time in the future that is close to the reference time (RT) from tense.

In **English** and **Turkish**, proximate futures are realized via an infinitival form of a verb appearing beneath the morpheme *about* or *üzere*, respectively (1).

- In English (1a), this verb can either be perfective (Wurmbrand, 2014) or marked as imperfective.
- In Turkish (1b), imperfective marking is not possible under *üzere*.

(1) a. Daphne **is about to** sit/be sitting.  
b. Defne {otur-mak} / {#otur-uyor ol-mak} **üzere**.  
Defne {sit-INF} / {sit-IMPF be-INF} **PROX**  
'Defne **is about to** sit.'

Beyond temporal closeness, how do proximate futures like (1) differ semantically from other future expressions, such as English *WOLL/be going to* or Turkish *-AcAk*?<sup>2</sup>

Past work on the semantics of future expressions has primarily focused on the contrast between *WOLL* and *be going to* (e.g., Copley, 2002; Klecha, 2014).

- However, a number of interpretive differences have been identified between these futures and *be about to* (Hill, 2025), which I expand on in §2.

### What still remains to be seen:

- (i) The precise semantic contribution of proximate futures like *be about to* and/or *üzere*.
- (ii) The extent to which the meaning of proximate futures varies cross-linguistically.

To answer this question, in §3, I draw attention to the observation that in addition to **temporal closeness**, both *about* and *üzere* can be used in other contexts to express **spatial closeness** (2).

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<sup>2</sup>Throughout this talk, I will use the term *WOLL* to refer to an untensed form of the future expression *will* (e.g., Abusch, 1997).

(2) a. Glass was scattered **about** the room.  
 b. Zarf masa-nın **üzerinde**-ydi  
 envelope table-GEN **on**-PST  
 ‘The envelope was on the table.’

The common thread I draw between the temporal and spatial forms is as follows, akin to Iatridou (2014) for the perfect aspect:

- Like the spatial intervals introduced by their prepositional counterparts, **proximate futures in English and Turkish introduce a temporal interval whose boundaries are restricted.**
- This restriction results in temporal closeness.

I then argue in §4 that **this temporal interval serves as a reference time (RT) and is a parallel of the perfect time span (PTS)** (McCoard, 1978; Dowty, 1979; Iatridou et al., 2001).

My proposal thus positions proximate futures as a mirror of the “hot news” perfect in (3) (McCawley, 1971):

(3) The Phillies have (just) won!

- Proximate futures and “hot news” perfects are similar in that they come with an additional restriction of **proximity to the RT from tense**.
  - “Hot news” perfects: Recent past.
  - Proximate futures: Near future.
- Proximate futures differ by lacking the added pragmatic component of the eventuality being noteworthy (e.g., Portner, 2003).

#### Roadmap of sections:

§2 Temporal properties of proximate futures in English and Turkish

§3 An analogy between temporal and spatial proximity

§4 Future shifting as high aspect

§5 Formal analysis of proximate futures

§6 On the (non-)modality of proximate futures

§7 Conclusion

## 2 Temporal properties of proximate futures in English and Turkish

Proximate futures require the upcoming eventuality to hold at a time that is close to the RT from tense.

What counts as temporally close is **context-dependent** (Hill, 2025).

- In (4), a six year time interval is sufficiently close within the context to render *be about to* felicitous.

(4) When the American Revolution ended in 1783, France **was about to** undergo their own revolution, which began in 1789.

Beyond temporal closeness, I now discuss an additional temporal property of proximate futures in English and Turkish that any semantic account will need to derive:

- Under a proximate future, the described eventuality **cannot have started yet** in typical contexts (§2.1).
  - An exception to this generalization will be discussed in §4.2.

## 2.1 The start of the eventuality

Both *be about to* (Hill, 2025) and *üzere* require that **the eventuality in question has not been instantiated already** (5).

(5) *Context: It's almost noon, and you've been tirelessly working at your desk all day. You plan to continue doing so throughout the afternoon. Your colleague asks what you'll do when it hits 12PM.*

- a. I will/am going to/#am about to work.
- b. I will/am going to/#am about to be working.
- c. (Ben) {çalış-acağ-ım} / {#çalış-mak üzere-yim}  
1.SG {work-FUT-1.SG} / {work-INF PROX-1.SG}  
'I will/#am about to work.'

- Under the context in (5), the proximate future can only be used if the speaker hasn't started working.
  - *WOLL, be going to, and -AcAK*, in contrast, are all acceptable in (5).
- In English, this judgment holds both when the infinitival form is aspectually bare infinitive (5a) and when it's marked with *-ing* (5b).

Next, in §2.1.1 and §2.1.2, I demonstrate that this requirement is the source of the infelicity for proximate futures with **predicates of personal taste** and **objective individual-level predicates**.

### 2.1.1 Predicates of personal taste

Many speakers find proximate futures **infelicitous with predicates of personal taste (PPTs)** (6).

(6) a. The bread will/is going to/%is about to be tasty.  
     b. Ekmek lezzetli {ol-acak} / {%ol-mak üzere}  
         bread tasty {be-FUT} / {be-INF PROX}  
         'The bread will/%is about to be tasty.'

- In both English and Turkish, speakers vary in whether they accept the proximate futures in (6).
- Some speakers find them fully unacceptable, while others find them appropriate in contexts where a future change of state is expected: e.g., a special ingredient will be added to the bread dough that improves its taste.

In contrast, other future expressions (*WOLL, be going to, -AcAk*) are not only acceptable with PPTs, but also **obviate the acquaintance inference of PPTs** (e.g., Pearson, 2013; Klecha, 2014; Ninan, 2014; Anand & Korotkova, 2018; etc.).

- Because epistemic modals (e.g., English *must*) also obviate the acquaintance inference, examples like (7) have been used to argue that future expressions are modal operators (Klecha, 2014).

(7) *Context: Your friend just gave you a loaf of bread. You've never tried their baking before, but you're confident it'll taste delicious when you try it.*

- a. This bread **will** be tasty.
- b. #This bread **is** tasty.
- c. Bu ekmek lezzetli **ol-acak**  
DEM bread tasty **be-FUT**  
'This bread will be tasty.'
- d. #Bu ekmek lezzetli  $\emptyset$   
DEM bread tasty **be.PRS**  
Intended: 'This bread is tasty.'

Given this, the infelicity of English *be about to* with PPTs has been taken as evidence that it is non-modal (Hill, 2025).

However, I point out that this pattern cannot be traced to its (non-)modality:

- If *be about to* were non-modal, PPTs would still be expected to be felicitous, but they would generate an acquaintance inference like the simple present sentences in (7b, 7d).

Additionally, **complex PPTs** in English, which have been argued to be stage-level rather than individual-level (Pearson, 2022), don't result in the same degraded judgments under *be about to* (8).

(8) a. Her tattoo **is about to** look beautiful, but she hasn't gotten it yet.  
b. %Her tattoo **is about to** be beautiful, but she hasn't gotten it yet.

Like with other future expressions, the acquaintance inference is obviated with *be about to* in (8a).

- This suggests that the meaning of *be about to* involves a modal component, akin to *WOLL* and *be going to*.
- I will return to the (non-)modal status of proximate futures in §6.

### 2.1.2 Individual-level predicates

In addition to PPTs, proximate futures are also **infelicitous with objective I-level predicates (ILPs)** (9).

- Like the PPT examples in (6), the ILPs in (9) are only accepted under proximate futures when they are accommodated as stage-level (see Hill, 2025).

(9) a. The bread will/is going to/%**is about to** be organic.  
b. Ekmek organik {ol-acak} / {%**ol-mak üzere**}  
bread organic {be-FUT} / {be-INF PROX}  
'The bread will/%**is about to** be organic.'

What leads to the degraded judgments for I-level predicates (both subjective and objective) with proximate futures (6, 9)?

- I propose that because of proximate futures' requirement that the eventuality cannot have started yet, ILPs are rendered infelicitous by virtue of their denoting **permanent properties** (e.g., Carlson, 1977; Magri, 2009; etc.).
- I formalize this requirement in §5.

## 2.2 Interim summary

The data discussed in §2 support the following generalizations:

- **First**, proximate futures encode temporal closeness.
- **Second**, in both English and Turkish, proximate futures are infelicitous with eventualities that already hold at the RT introduced by tense.

These generalizations lead to the following question:

- How do we develop a semantics for English *be about to* and Turkish *üzere* that can capture their shared semantic properties?

## 3 An analogy between temporal and spatial proximity

In addition to expressing proximity in time, the forms *about* and *üzere* also appear as **locative prepositions** in other sentential contexts (10, repeated from 2).

(10) a. Glass was scattered **about** the room.  
 b. Zarf masa-nın **üzerinde**-ydi  
 envelope table-GEN **on**-PST  
 ‘The envelope was on the table.’

In several other languages beyond English and Turkish, proximate future forms similarly lead double lives as spatial: Spanish *a punto de* (lit., ‘at the point of’), Japanese *suru tokoro da* (lit., ‘be at the place of doing’), etc.

A **common semantic core** between the prepositions in (10):

- For both *about* and *üzereinde* ‘on’ in (10), it is entailed that the relevant objects are (spatially) close to the entity scoping beneath the preposition.

To illustrate, a semantics for *on* is given in (11).

(11)  $\llbracket \text{on} \rrbracket = \lambda A. \lambda v. \text{EXT}(v, A) \ \& \ |v| < r_0$   
 where  $r_0$  is a small positive number s.t.  $r_0 \approx 0$

(from Zwarts & Winter, 2000)

- Under a vector-based semantics for spatial reference (e.g., Zwarts & Winter, 2000), spatial proximity for prepositions is encoded by restricting the length of the relevant vector.
- $\text{EXT}(v, A)$  denotes a vector  $v$  that extends outward from the boundary of a set of points  $A$ .
- The length of  $v$ ,  $|v|$ , is restricted by a contextually-dependent resource variable  $r$ .

**The analogy I draw between temporal and spatial proximity:**

- Proximate futures introduce a future time interval whose boundaries are contextually restricted, resulting in temporal closeness.
- Their prepositional analogues restrict the boundaries of  $v$ , resulting in spatial closeness.

Iatridou (2014) draws a similar comparison between times and space for the perfect, demonstrated by the data in (12).

- Both (12a) and (12b) introduce an interval (temporal or spatial)  $i$  and assert the absence of an object within  $i$ : either a seizure-having event, or a painting by Vermeer.

(12) Adapted from Iatridou (2014):

- In the last five years, she hasn't had a seizure.
- In her living room, she doesn't have a Vermeer.

If this analogy is common to both proximate futures and the perfect aspect, do they share other semantic similarities?

- In §4, I substantiate my analysis empirically and show that the answer is “yes.”

## 4 Future shifting as high aspect

In recent work on the semantics of the future, its temporal contribution has been traced to **the high aspect PROSP** (Mucha, 2016; Pancheva & Zubizarreta, 2023).

- **Viewpoint aspect:** Relates an RT to the time of the eventuality (e.g., Klein, 1994).
- **High aspect:** Relates an RT to another RT.

A typical semantics of PROSP is given in (13).

- Here, PROSP introduces a succession relation between the RT from tense  $t$  and another RT  $t'$ .

(13)  $\llbracket \text{PROSP} \rrbracket = \lambda p. \lambda t. \lambda w. \exists t' [ t < t' \& p(t')(w) ]$

While PROSP in (13) and the perfect are both high aspects, PROSP does not specify any information about the boundaries of  $t'$ .

This differs from XN-theoretic analyses of the perfect (14), where the right boundary of the PTS is set as the RT from tense (e.g., McCoard, 1978; Dowty, 1979; Iatridou et al., 2001; Pancheva, 2003; etc.).

(14) a.  $XN(t, t') =: t$  is the final subinterval of  $t'$   
 b.  $\llbracket \text{PERF} \rrbracket^{g,c} = \lambda p. \lambda t. \exists t' [ XN(t, t') \& p(t') ]$

In this section, I motivate **a high aspect semantics for proximate futures** where the **left boundary** of the RT they introduce is specified.

- In this way, the current account combines insights from previous work on the semantics of **the prospective** (Mucha, 2016; Pancheva & Zubizarreta, 2023) and **the XN theory of the perfect** (McCoard, 1978; Dowty, 1979; Iatridou et al., 2001).

**I show that for both the perfect aspect and (proximate) future expressions:**

- In both English and Turkish, certain adverbials (e.g., *for*-adverbials) are ambiguous w.r.t. where they attach: either (i) at the eventuality-level, or (ii) at the level of high aspect (§4.1).
- In English, where both imperfective and perfective marking are available under (proximate) futures and the perfect, different readings arise (e.g., UNIVERSAL, EXPERIENTIAL, etc.) (§4.2).

## 4.1 Eventuality-level versus high aspect-level adverbials

Under the perfect aspect, it is ambiguous where certain adverbials (e.g., *for*-adverbials) attach: they can either be eventuality-level or perfect-level (Dowty, 1979; Vlach, 1993; Iatridou et al., 2001).

(15) Maryam has lived in Massachusetts for five years.

Perfect-level vs. eventuality-level temporal adverbial readings (15):

- **Perfect-level:** The adverbial *for five years* modifies the perfect time span (PTS) s.t. its duration is five years.
  - **Perfect-level reading of (15):** The PTS is an interval spanning from 5 years ago until now, and throughout the PTS, Maryam lives in Massachusetts.
- **Eventuality-level:** The adverbial *for five years* modifies the time of the eventuality s.t. its duration is five years.
  - **Eventuality-level reading of (15):** The PTS is an interval spanning from, e.g., the start of Maryam's life until now, and within the PTS, there is a 5-year-long eventuality of Maryam living in Massachusetts.

Proximate futures show a similar ambiguity between eventuality-level and high aspect-level readings:

- In (16-17), the *for*-adverbial can either modify the time interval introduced by the proximate future or the time of the relevant eventuality.

### Adverbial ambiguity with English *be about to* (16):

(16) a. *Context: Eli was holding in his laughter for 5 minutes. Suddenly, he remembered something depressing, and his mood soured.*

Eli **was about to** laugh for five minutes.

b. *Context: I am a clairvoyant comedian, and I know how long people will laugh when I tell a joke. I almost told Eli a joke that would've made him laugh for 5 minutes, but I was suddenly interrupted.*

Eli **was about to** laugh for five minutes.

### Adverbial ambiguity with Turkish *üzere* (16):

(17) a. *Context: Ali was holding in his laughter for 5 minutes. Suddenly, he remembered something depressing, and his mood soured.*

Ali **beş dakika boyunca gülmek üzere-ydi**  
Ali five minute throughout laugh-INF **PROX-PST**

‘Ali **was about to** laugh for five minutes.’

b. *Context: I am a clairvoyant comedian, and I know how long people will laugh when I tell a joke. I almost told Ali a joke that would've made him laugh for 5 minutes, but I was suddenly interrupted.*

Ali **beş dakika boyunca gülmek üzere-ydi**  
Ali five minute throughout laugh-INF **PROX-PST**

‘Ali **was about to** laugh for five minutes.’

## 4.2 Beyond the perfect: different readings with high aspect

It is well-known that the perfect can give rise to **different readings**, modulated by temporal adverbials and viewpoint aspect (e.g., Iatridou et al., 2001; Pancheva, 2003).

- The **UNIVERSAL perfect** in (18a) entails that the eventuality holds at the RT introduced by tense.
  - An **imperfective** viewpoint aspect (along with an *ever since*-adverbial) results in a U-perfect.
- The **EXPERIENTIAL perfect** in (18b) does not entail that the eventuality holds at the RT introduced by tense.
  - A **perfective** viewpoint aspect results in an E-perfect.<sup>3</sup>

(18) a. It has been raining ever since 5pm, #but it isn't raining anymore. (UNIVERSAL)  
b. It has rained since 5pm, but it isn't raining anymore. (EXPERIENTIAL)

I show that in English, where both imperfective and perfective marking are available under the (proximate) future, **the same difference in readings emerges**.

Under **WOLL**, imperfective versus perfective marking results in different entailments about whether the eventuality holds at the RT from tense (19):

<sup>3</sup>Unlike *ever since*-adverbials, *since*-adverbials do not enforce a particular perfect reading (e.g., Iatridou et al., 2001).

(19) a. **It'll be raining** until 5pm, #but it isn't raining yet.  
 b. **It'll rain** until 5pm, but it isn't raining yet.

However, can this observation be extended to proximate futures?

- Proximate futures typically do not allow the eventuality to overlap with the RT (§2), even when it has imperfective marking (20a).
- Further, even under the perfect, the imperfective does not always result in universal readings (20b) (e.g., Iatridou et al., 2001; Pancheva, 2003).

(20) a. **It is about to** be raining until 5pm, but it isn't raining yet.  
 b. It has been raining since Monday, but it finally stopped.

That being said, a **similar contrast in entailments** can be seen in specific contexts with *be about to* that involve **impending verification of the prejacent proposition**.

- Here, where it is contextually entailed that Dawn is asleep at the RT from tense, **the imperfective is felicitous** (21a) and **the perfective is infelicitous** (21b).

(21) *Context: You are bringing your friend over to your apartment at 10pm. You know that every night, your roommate Dawn is already fast asleep well before this time. Right before entering the apartment, you say to your friend:*

- a. Watch this — Dawn's **about to** be sleeping.
- b. #Watch this — Dawn's **about to** sleep.

- When it is instead contextually entailed that Dawn is not asleep at the RT from tense, **the imperfective is infelicitous** (22a) and **the perfective is felicitous** (22b).

(22) *Context: You are bringing your friend over to your apartment at 10pm. You know that every night, your roommate Dawn goes to sleep just after this time. Right before entering the apartment, you make a prediction to your friend:*

- a. #Watch this — Dawn's **about to** be sleeping.
- b. Watch this — Dawn's **about to** sleep.

I briefly note that I have not seen these “watch this” contexts pointed out elsewhere in the literature.

- I believe a deeper investigation of these “watch this” contexts is warranted, as they also have interesting interactions with other future expressions, like **WOLL**.
- English **WOLL** has been claimed to have an anti-abductive requirement (Winans, 2016) where it can only be used in cases of non-abductive/*modus ponens* reasoning (Peirce, 1955).
- Abductive reasoning: If *p*, then *q*. *q*. Therefore, *p*.
- Yet, in a “watch this” context where there is an abductive inference (23), the infelicity of **WOLL** is seemingly ameliorated.
  - In (23), the smelling of paint triggers an inference about its cause, which is Frida's painting.

(23) *Context: Your neighbor, Frida, often paints in her studio with the window open. Whenever this happens, a strong scent of paint wafts from her window. While walking with your friend outside, you both smell paint. You bring your friend to Frida's window, and before you both look inside, you say:*

- a. Watch this. Frida **will** {#paint / be painting}.
- b. Watch this. Frida **is going to** {#paint / be painting}.
- c. Watch this. Frida **is about to** {#paint / be painting}.

## 5 Formal analysis of proximate futures

In (24), I give my proposed semantics for the temporal meaning of PROX (see 6 for a discussion of their modality).

- Under (24), proximate futures introduce a future time interval  $t''$  whose left boundary (LB) is the RT.
- This temporal relation mirrors **PERF** in (14): rather than introducing a PTS whose right boundary is equivalent to the RT,  $t''$  instead **extends forward into the future**.
- A contextual resource variable  $r_{CLOSE}$  restricts  $t''$  s.t. it is proximal to  $t'$ .
  - Thus, like the “**hot news**” **perfect**, the interval introduced by the proximate future cannot extend far beyond the RT from tense.

(24) a.  $LB(t,t') =: t$  is the initial subinterval of  $t'$   
      b.  $\llbracket PROX_{ENG} \rrbracket^{g,c} = \lambda p. \lambda t'. \exists t'' [ LB(t',t'') \& t'' \subset r_{CLOSE} \& p(t'') ]$   
       where  $r_{CLOSE}$  is a temporal interval whose duration is short within the context  
      c.  $\llbracket PROX_{TUR} \rrbracket^{g,c} = \lambda p. \lambda t'. \exists t'' [ LB(t',t'') \& t'' \subset r_{CLOSE} \& p(t'') ]$   
       where  $r_{CLOSE}$  is a temporal interval whose duration is short within the context

### 5.1 Aspectually bare infinitives under proximate futures

Let's walk through how this semantics derives the expected truth conditions for the sentence in (25).

(25) Daphne is about to sit.

Following Wurmbrand (2014), I treat the infinitive *to sit* as **perfective**, the semantics of which are given in (26).

$$(26) \llbracket PRFV \rrbracket^g = \lambda P. \lambda t. \exists e [ \tau(e) \subseteq t \& P(e) ]$$

The fact that the eventuality has not yet begun results from the **perfective's containment relation**:

- Because  $\tau(e)$  in (27) must fall within the interval  $t''$ , it cannot have started at a time preceding it.

(27)  $\llbracket [Daphne is about to sit] \rrbracket^{g,c} = \exists t' [ t' = t_c \& \exists t'' [ LB(t',t'') \& t'' \subset r_{CLOSE} \& \exists e [ \tau(e) \subseteq t'' \& sit(e, Daphne) ] ] ]$   
      where  $r_{CLOSE}$  is a temporal interval whose duration is short within the context

## 5.2 Imperfective-marked infinitives under proximate futures

Now, let's consider a case where the infinitive has imperfective morphology, like (28).

(28) Delilah is about to be crying.

Imperfective-marked infinitives also typically require the eventuality to have not yet started under proximate futures (5b).

With this in mind, I treat infinitives with progressive morphology as having a **“neutral” imperfective aspect** in (29).

- Originally proposed by Smith (1991), “neutral” imperfectives have been proposed for experiential readings of the perfect with statives and progressive-marked participles (Pancheva, 2003).
- **Consequence of (29):** Overlap between the LB of the interval introduced by PROX and the eventuality is disallowed.

(29)  $\llbracket \text{IMPF}_{\text{NEUT}} \rrbracket^g = \lambda P. \lambda t. \exists e [ t \cap \tau(e) \neq \emptyset \& P(e) \& \exists t' [ t' \in t \& t' \notin \tau(e) \& \forall t'' [ t'' \in \tau(e) \rightarrow t' < t'']]]$   
 $\tau(e)$  overlaps with  $t$ , and there is an initial subinterval of  $t$  where  $\tau(e)$  does not hold.

While a “neutral” imperfective is not unproblematic, the availability of experiential-like readings for imperfective-marked eventives and statives is a problem also faced by existing accounts of the perfect.

- See Altshuler (2014) for an alternative to “neutral” aspects.

The relevant truth conditions are given in (30).

(30)  $\llbracket \text{Delilah is about to be crying} \rrbracket^{g,c} = \exists t' [ t' = t_c \& \exists t'' [ \text{LB}(t', t'') \& t'' \subset r_{\text{CLOSE}} \& \exists e [ t'' \cap \tau(e) \neq \emptyset \& \text{cry}(e, \text{Delilah}) \& \exists t''' [ t''' \in t'' \& t''' \notin \tau(e) \& \forall t'''' [ t'''' \in \tau(e) \rightarrow t''' < t'''']]]]]$   
where  $r_{\text{CLOSE}}$  is a temporal interval whose duration is short within the context

A comment on the **“watch this” contexts from §5.2:**

- While I've set aside the precise derivation of examples like (21-22) for the current talk, I point out that one way they could be captured is by assuming **an ambiguity between  $\text{IMPF}_{\text{NEUT}}$  and  $\text{IMPF}$** .
- A semantics for  $\text{IMPF}$  is shown in (31).
- The presence of (31) would then allow the RT to overlap with  $\tau(e)$ .
- In fact, such an ambiguity between  $\text{IMPF}_{\text{NEUT}}$  and  $\text{IMPF}$  has been claimed for imperfective eventives and statives under the perfect (Pancheva, 2003).
- If an ambiguity between  $\text{IMPF}_{\text{NEUT}}$  and  $\text{IMPF}$  is present here, an open question:
  - Why do certain contexts lead to the availability of one reading versus the other for imperfective-marked verbs?

(31)  $\llbracket \text{IMPF} \rrbracket^g = \lambda P. \lambda t. \exists e [ t \subset \tau(e) \& P(e) ]$

## 6 On the (non-)modality of proximate futures

Until now, I have set aside the (non-)modality of proximate futures and focused on their temporal semantics.

While the PPT data from §2.1.1 points towards a modal treatment of proximate futures, their behavior across other diagnostics for modality is not uniform.

- Existing accounts of *be about to* thus analyze it as non-modal (Hill, 2025).
- Further, the appropriate modal semantics for the future is a source of great debate:
  - A long-standing debate concerns whether or not the semantics of the future is necessarily modal due to the inherent uncertainty of future eventualities (see Bochnak, 2019 for an overview).
  - Even the future is modal, proposals for the modal base of **WOLL** vary: **metaphysical** (Condoravdi, 2002), **circumstantial** (Abusch, 2012), and **epistemic** (Giannakidou & Mari, 2018).
- Different future expressions are also argued to vary in their modal meaning within individual languages.
  - For example, Matthewson et al. (2022) treats progressive futures in Gitksan as instead having an **inertial** modal base.

In light of this, before concluding, I discuss the (in)felicity of proximate futures under modal subordination (§6.1) and their displacement (§6.2) (Klecha, 2014; Hill, 2025).

However, I leave a formalized derivation of their modal contribution to future work.

### 6.1 Modal subordination

Despite both expressing the temporal proximity of a future eventuality, ***be about to* in English and *üzere* in Turkish pattern differently in triggering modal subordination** (Roberts, 1989; 1996):

- Evidence that English **WOLL** and *be going to* are modal operators is their ability to trigger modal subordination (Klecha, 2014).
- However, despite both being modal, **WOLL** and *be going to* differ in whether they obligatorily trigger modal subordination (Klecha, 2011; Matthewson et al., 2022).
- English *be about to* and Turkish *üzere* also differ w.r.t. modal subordination, despite both expressing proximate futurity.

English *be about to* is **felicitous** as a trigger for modal subordination in contexts like the one shown in (32a).

(32) *Context: You're talking with your friend about how their roommate, Eylül, is taking a flight today. Her flight is boarding soon, but neither of you know when she left for the airport. You have an in-depth geographical knowledge of the route she's taking.*

- a. If Eylül left the house 30 minutes ago, then she's almost at the airport now. She's **about to** take an exit off the highway.

b. If Eylül left the house 30 minutes ago, then she's almost at the airport now. #She took an exit off the highway.

In contrast, Turkish *üzere* is **infelicitous** in contexts like (33a).<sup>4</sup>

- To remedy (33a), it is necessary to include a modal element like the epistemic *olmalı* “must be”.

(33) *Context: See (32).*

a. Eylül ev-den 30 dakika önce ayrıldıysa, neredeyse havaalanı-nda şu an.  
 Eylül home-ABL 30 minute ago leave-PST-COND almost airport-LOC this moment  
 #Otoyol'-dan çıkış-mak **üzere**.  
 highway-ABL exit-PROX  
 Intended: ‘If Eylül left the house 30 minutes ago, then she's almost at the airport now. She's **about to** take an exit off the highway.’

b. Eylül ev-den 30 dakika önce ayrıldıysa, neredeyse havaalanı-nda şu an.  
 Eylül home-ABL 30 minute ago leave-PST-COND almost airport-LOC this moment  
 #Otoyol'-dan çıkış-tı.  
 highway-ABL exit-PST  
 Intended: ‘If Eylül left the house 30 minutes ago, then she's almost at the airport now. She took an exit off the highway.’

I point out that like *üzere* in Turkish, English **be on the verge/brink of** are **degraded** and **variable** in the relevant modal subordination context (34a), as is the **progressive** (34b).

- Note that while the progressive is typically analyzed as modal (e.g., Dowty, 1979; Portner, 1998; Arregui et al., 2014), this behavior persists.

(34) *Context: See (32).*

a. If Eylül left the house 30 minutes ago, then she's almost at the airport now. %She's **on the verge/brink of** taking an exit off the highway.

b. If Eylül left the house 30 minutes ago, then she's almost at the airport now. %She's **taking** an exit off the highway.

## 6.2 Displacement

When in the **past tense**, English *be about to* and Turkish *üzere* involve **displacement**, where evaluation is shifted away from the actual world.

- In (35), PROX( $\phi$ ) does not entail  $\phi$ .
- Similar displacement is shown by past tense forms of modal operators like *woll* and *be going to* (Klecha, 2014), as well as with the well-known imperfective paradox (e.g., Dowty, 1979).

<sup>4</sup>While I mark (33a) with a #, one of the Turkish speakers consulted did find this modal subordination example acceptable. Such an inter-speaker difference is not unsurprising given that in Turkish, syntactic and semantic judgments have a tendency to be variable across regions/dialects. Therefore, it is possible that (33a) is available in some Turkish speakers' grammars.

(35) *Context: After hearing a funny joke, you almost let out a laugh. However, you suddenly remembered something depressing and didn't end up laughing.*

- a. I **was about to** laugh.
- b. (Ben) **gülmek üzere-ydi**  
1.SG laugh-INF PROX-PST  
'I **was about to** laugh.'

Given that both *be about to* and *üzere* show the same displacement behavior, a modal analysis of both appears warranted.

But what, then, is the cause of the infelicity of Turkish *üzere* or English *be on the brink/verge of* as triggers of modal subordination?

## 7 Conclusion

In summary, the current proposal contributes to our understanding of the semantics of proximate futures by:

- Deriving the semantic properties of English *be about to* and Turkish *üzere*, while formally differentiating them from other futures (WOLL, *be going to*, -AcAk).
- Contributing a parallel between temporal and spatial semantics via the future, compatible with existing work on the perfect (Iatridou, 2014).
- Motivating an analysis of proximate futures as high aspect where, in the reverse of the perfect, they introduce a time interval whose LB is the RT from tense.

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