

Running title: The pragmaticalization of *bon*

Sociolinguistic factors and the pragmaticalization of *bon* in contemporary spoken French

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The multifunctional nature of discourse-marking bon (well) is well-attested in the literature (Auchlin, 1981; Winther, 1985, Hansen, 1998a and b, Jayez, 2004). Its adverbial and interjective uses can, according to Hansen (1998a), be related to its canonical adjectival use (as in ‘C’est bon’ ‘It’s good’), its discourse-marking and hedging uses being more peripheral extensions of this.

Beeching (2007c) charts the remarkable increase in rates of bon usage in both real and apparent time from 1968-2002. The present paper establishes the extent to which bon is pragmaticalizing by investigating its sociosituational variation and distributional frequency in the Corpus de Référence du Français Parlé. The rise in frequency of the compound expressions mais bon and parce que bon suggests a shift towards increased intersubjectivity¹.

Introduction

¹ “Intersubjectivity” is defined by Traugott and Dasher (2002: 22) as “the explicit, coded expression of SP/W’s attention to the image or “self” of AD/R in a social or an epistemic sense”. SP/W = Speaker/Writer; AD/R = Addressee/Reader.

This chapter explores the relationship between synchronic and diachronic variation drawing, by way of illustration, on an analysis of the relative distributional frequencies of the senses or functions of the pragmatic particle *bon* in contemporary spoken French, either as an end-marker or as a hesitation marker. In addition to describing the senses of *bon* and its sociosituational variation, the chapter hopes to contribute to the literature on historical semantic change and the relative impact of cognitive factors, considerations to do with politeness and the pragmatic factors alluded to in Traugott and Dasher's (2002) Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change.

The chapter is structured in the following way: after outlining the main theoretical strands, an overview is given of existing literature on the meanings and functions of *bon* and compounds of *bon* and how these may best be accounted for, integrating new corpus data within this account. The results of a qualitative and quantitative analysis of *bon* and compounds of *bon* in balanced extracts from the *Étude Sociolinguistique d'Orléans* (ESLO) (1968) Corpus, the Beeching (1988) Corpus and the *Corpus de Référence du Français Parlé* (2002) are then reported, followed by some tentative conclusions.

Theories of Semantic Change

Sweetser (1990), along with a number of other cognitive linguists (see Panther and Thornburg, 2003), argues that universal cognitive principles such as metaphor and metonymy can account for regularities in three important linguistic domains: polysemous relationships, lexical semantic change and pragmatic ambiguity. A number of fundamental relations of a

metaphorical/metonymic type, such as concrete-abstract (grasp physically>grasp mentally (understand), root-epistemic modality ('must' obligation> 'must' deduction)) are to be found universally across languages. Traugott and Dasher (2002) posit a process whereby M1 > M1/M2 [> M2] such that chronologically the anterior meaning of a lexical item (M1) comes to coexist in polysemy with a second meaning (M2). This second meaning originates as an invited inference drawn pragmatically in situated utterances and this second meaning becomes routinized². What often happens is that contexts arise in which the lexeme is used in a way which permits both interpretations (M1 and M2), in other words it is pragmatically ambiguous. Evans and Wilkins (2000: 550) refer to such situations as 'bridging contexts'. M1 and M2 may also continue to exist polysemously and be employed in different contexts. If M1 subsequently disappears (and this is the exception rather than the rule), the semantic change is complete and M2 replaces M1. Though there has been some dispute over Traugott's (1982: 257) claim for unidirectionality (see Brinton, 1996), meaning change in early grammaticalization appears to progress from a propositional meaning to a textual one and then towards increased expressiveness or (inter)subjectivity. Once the strong lexical meaning of a word is loosened, it may be used in a number of contexts, enriched by pragmatically motivated inferences in context.

Sociolinguistics and Language Change

Wheeler (1994) and Beeching (2005, 2007a) argue that sociolinguistic factors, particularly speakers' concerns to be polite and to attend to the niceties of social interaction and the management of face, play a role in both the innovation and propagation of meaning change. A

² For a detailed discussion of the order of Particularized and Generalized Conversational Implicature, see Hansen and Waltereit, 2006.

sustained increase in the distributional frequency of M2 leads, by metonymy (contiguity in the syntagmatic chain, see Waltereit, 2001), to routinization. Wheeler (1994: 160) comments on the question raised by Milroy (1992: ix-x) as to why changes in the prestige norm seem to originate in ‘lower-status’ varieties, rather than in élite ones. Wheeler argues that speakers adopt a casual style in order to implement Positive Politeness : “To do otherwise would be to invite the hearer to infer that the speaker evaluated the relationship as less than satisfactorily solidary”. As there is a payoff in terms of social approval in being slightly more informal (than one’s hearer, than one’s parents, than the norm), a positive feedback loop is created whereby innovatory devices are created to mark intimacy. Wheeler goes on to suggest (1994: 145) that working class cultures are differentiated from middle-class cultures (in the U.K., at least), tending to favor positive and negative politeness, respectively. Following Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness is considered here to be the behavior adopted by speakers who wish to flatter their interlocutor’s face by, amongst other things, giving compliments and treating them as a friend, whilst negative politeness does so by showing deference and respect for the views of others, by hedging claims or rejoinders, for example. Beeching (2007b and 2007c) provides substantiation, for French, for the runaway positive feedback loop with respect to positive politeness and casual speech described by Wheeler (1994): rates of stigmatized post-posed *quoi* rose dramatically between 1968 and 2002 and working class and middle class rates converged during this period, suggesting a relative democratization of French society – at least symbolically. One of the aims of the current study is to test the hypothesis that a politeness-induced non-prestige usage of *bon* follows a similar pattern.

Functions of bon

Jayez (2004: 2-3) reviews the literature on *bon* which has been analyzed from a number of different perspectives. He extracts the following recurring facts from these analyses: *bon* is non-propositional, has a discourse-structuring role (e.g. Winther (1985), can provide an end or delimiting point (see Winther 1985 and Saint-Pierre and Vadnais 1992), is an acceptance marker (Duprey, 1979; Hansen, 1998), can have a modulating function (amongst others Hansen, 1998; Brémond, 2003, 2004) and can be proactive or retroactive.

Hansen (1998a: 253) remarks that “the discourse marker *bon* is, of course, derived from the corresponding adjective”. It is equally clear that the two are synchronically distinct items; the discourse marker functions adverbially and is invariable (is not inflected for gender and number). Hansen argues that the adjective *bon* indicates a positive evaluation of some phenomenon and that the discourse marker similarly “marks acceptance in a rather wide sense of the word”. She provides exemplification (1998a: 253-254) of interjective uses of *bon* and turn-internal *bon* which may be interpreted in this light. Jayez (2004 : 3-4) has a number of difficulties with Hansen’s analysis, one is its circularity with respect to what Hansen calls “undesirable” – the acceptance has to do with a state of affairs which is potentially undesirable (non-pertinent, false, intrusive, threatening and so forth). A virtually identical argument is proposed by Carlson (1984: 29 ff.) with respect to *well* in English. Jayez argues that everything may be presented as potentially undesirable. Also, there are cases where there is nothing which is clearly undesirable.

Jayez proposes a unifying interpretation of *bon* which he describes as follows (2004: 4):

The utterance of *bon* by an actor *a* carries the following conventional implicature : *a* believes or desires that a process in progress is or should be terminated.

Textual and expressive functions of bon

In a very large number of examples in the CRFP material studied as part of the current project, *bon* does indeed play a structuring or textual role, marking a stopping or staging point in the unfolding tale. Jayez' (2004) « *bon* : le mot de la fin » ('*bon*: the last word') interpretation, though satisfyingly unificatory, does not account convincingly in my view, for the many cases in spontaneous spoken data where *bon* is used, not to bring things to a close but either, as Brémont says, (2004: 9) with "a pro-active 'action marker' function" or as a hesitation marker or hedge. Hansen (1998b:245) suggests that, in such cases, *bon* "expresses some kind of reservation on the part of the speaker with respect to either the applicability of a certain term, or the truth value of a proposition." Jayez also includes examples of this (2004: 14), describing them as usages associated with a hesitation or self-repair (in de Fornel and Marandin's (1996) definition). A key example given by Jayez is:

- 1) Oui alors **bon** oui je **bon** ma fille a **bon** elle a pas poursuivi ses études pour la bonne raison c'est qu'on l'a foutue dehors à l'âge de seize ans.

'Yes so **well** yes I **well** my daughter did **well** she didn't pursue her studies for the good reason that we chucked her out when she was 16'.

In a situation where the utterance is syntactically incomplete *bon* serves to ‘finish’ the syntactic construction underway and to introduce a correction or reformulation of the phrase. In this sense, *bon* functions as a means of stopping and allowing the speaker to restart. However, the hesitation associated with such usages of *bon* confers a cloak of uncertainty on talk. Hansen (1998b: 246) suggests that “it is hard to think of any functional or syntactic category, other than that of hedges, into which this use of *bon* would fit naturally but as the use appears to be a very marginal one anyway, we may perhaps leave the question open”. My argument in this paper is that the hedging use of *bon* has become far less marginal in recent years and that the manner in which such a usage develops from a propositional through a textual to an intersubjective one reflects a particular type of regular semantic change, induced by considerations of politeness and face, which is universal. *Bon* has become a great deal more frequent overall (see Beeching, 2007c) and this in itself is an indication of semantic change (semantic bleaching/ pragmatic enrichment).

Brémond (2004) examines conversational exchanges in three different speech situations: televised debates, a cookery programme and ordinary everyday conversation. In the televised debate, *bon* is used by the TV host to mark a change of speaker, ending one sequence and beginning another and controlling turns at talk in this manner. In the cookery programme, different steps or stages in the cooking process are marked with *bon*. In ordinary everyday conversation, however, *bon* is frequently employed as a marker of negotiation. Brémond (2004: 7) notes that the very frequent use of *bon* in spoken exchanges rarely indicates total agreement. It seems rather to offer a surface ‘nod’ to “intersubjective heterogeneity” and to play a role in the cooperative management of the exchange. She invokes the notion of diaphony (Roulet et al.,

1985), whereby a speaker may concede, or bear in mind, some other argument than the one currently being projected. She argues that in situations where *bon* is used, it may mark a partial agreement which is followed by *mais* (but). Roulet et al. (1985: 82) specifically raise the question of the usage of *bon* in such contexts, extending the notion of diaphony from one in which the discourse of the interlocutor is incorporated into the speaker's own to one in which "the speaker includes in his speech a counter-argument which has not necessarily been uttered by the addressee, or which at any rate does not appear in the co-text – and which he then rejects".

Examples of a restrictive, concessive or contrastive use of *bon*, followed by *mais* are commented upon by Hansen (1998b: 237) and are also to be found in the *Corpus de Référence du Français Parlé*.

Further support may be adduced for arguments concerning the universality of the process whereby an adjective or adverb expressing positive attributes (good, well) can come to mean demurral or only semi-acceptance by referring to other languages (see Jucker, 1997 on *well* in English). Wang et al. (2005) note a similar use of *hao* (good, well) in Chinese:

(Pre-)closing signals such as *hao* may be regarded as a sub-variety of mitigating expressions used in conversation, that is, the desire to agree or appear to agree with the addressee, which leads to mechanisms for pretending to agree (Brown and Levinson, 1987 p. 113). Such expressions serve the twofold function of keeping the conversation going in a systematic manner while allowing the conversationalists to preserve either the reality or the appearance of cooperation. (Wang et al. 2005: 231).

In everyday conversation, *hao* like *well* and *bon* “can also function as a concession marker, conveying the speaker’s restricted and limited acceptance of or agreement with a speech that is attributed to an interlocutor, which is an extension of *hao*’s function of agreement” (Wang et al. 2005: 236).

In both monologic and dialogic situations, then, there is a mitigating aspect to *bon* which is not entirely accounted for by either the ‘acceptance’, or the ‘*mot de la fin*’ analysis (though some, like Wang et al., and Hansen, 1998a and b, consider this to be a peripheral extension of the agreement function of *bon/hao*).

Returning now to Wheeler’s (1994) notions of ‘lower-status’ varieties, it can be argued that the hesitatory, self-repair, concessive, demurring or hedging usages of *bon* (employed to mediate *negative* politeness) are associated with informal contexts. *Bon* can thus assume the role of a politeness marker, suggesting solidarity and creating a sense of intimacy. The ‘endiness’ of *bon* is gradually lost, the syntagmatic metonymic implicature of *bon* collapsing into a generalized marker of negative and positive politeness in the runaway positive feedback loop described above.

Crucially, neither the *mot de la fin* nor the acceptance unifying interpretation accounts for the type of polysemous M1/M2 configuration which is a key feature of semantic change. In more formal contexts (radio or TV shows where the host controls and structures proceedings), *bon* functions as a means of managing transition from one speaker to the next or from one topic to the

next. In informal contexts, however, where speakers self-repair, *bon* has a tendency to become a marker of solidarity and intimacy. The runaway positive feedback loop ensures that this usage becomes more frequent in ordinary everyday interaction.

Hansen (1998b: 247) quotes Lichtenberk (1991: 506) who claims that “semantic/functional change proceeds by minimal steps”. She continues “as the uses of *bon* ... on the whole only appear in relatively spontaneous speech, a diachronic study is hardly feasible”. However, since recorded and transcribed spoken corpora have now existed for over 40 years, starting with the ESLO Corpus in 1968, we are in the fortunate position of being able to begin to trace such developments diachronically in “speakers’ grammars” (Croft, 2000:4).

Compound forms

Bon frequently occurs in collocation with other markers or forms, in compounds such as *bon ben*, *enfin bon*, *mais bon*, *bon mais*, *parce que bon* and even *bon ben voilà quoi* and *en fait bon effectivement*³. The question arises as to whether such forms should be included in an analysis of *bon* or excluded on the grounds that they constitute fully fledged independent lexical items. Waltereit (2007: 97) considers that the semantics of the lexicalised combination *bon ben* (‘well OK’ or ‘OK well’) differs little from the non-lexicalised *bon*, *ben* and concludes that “the reanalysis of *bon*, *ben* as *bon ben* does not involve semantic change; it consists only of the creation of a new lexical entity which combines the two senses of *bon* and *ben*.” This suggests that occurrences of *bon* in the compound form *bon ben* should be included in the analysis of *bon*

³ Discourse markers are notoriously difficult to translate: an approximation in English might be: *well OK (but)*, *well OK*, *but well*, *OK but*, *because well* and even *well there we are then* and *in fact well actually*

(as *bon* maintains the sense of *bon*, albeit juxtaposed with that of *ben*). The apparent contradiction in combining *bon* (agreement) with *ben* (demurral) allows a speaker either to mitigate the potential face-threat inherent in *ben* or to combine contradictory or nuanced comments, creating a coherent piece of discourse. This can produce “a special self-effacing effect” (Waltereit, 2007: 97). Waltereit considers that in combination with *ben*, *bon* plays a secondary role, smoothing the abruptness of *ben* and that *bon ben* is in fact a variant of *ben* rather than *bon*. Nonetheless, and in particular given the frequency of *bon ben*, I have decided to include *bon ben* and other compound forms in the analysis of uses of *bon*.

Waltereit (2007: 94) suggests that *bon ben* may be viewed as a lexicalized DM because there are no occurrences of its reverse form, *ben bon*, in either FRANTEXT or in the Beeching corpus.⁴ Applying the same ‘test’ to *mais bon* (‘but well’), and *parce que bon* (‘because well’) along with *bon ben* in the CRFP, we find that these terms are lexicalized to different degrees; there are 150 occurrences of *mais bon* but only 9 occurrences of *bon mais* and similarly there are 111 occurrences of *bon ben* but only 1 occurrence of *ben bon*. This suggests that these are compound or lexicalizing colligates which are employed as pre-fabricated chunks by speakers at the ends or beginnings of stretches of speech. Occurrences of *parce que bon* and *enfin bon* are less frequent (61 and 53, respectively) but more frequent than *bon parce que* (3 occurrences) and *bon enfin* (9 occurrences).

⁴ In any sequences of *ben bon* which Waltereit did find, *bon* is always an adjective. He argues that, in these cases, *ben bon* may be also be lexicalized but this time not as a compound DM but as an adjective preceded by a modifying adverb.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis of *bon* in the CRFP, with some references to the ESLO (1968) Corpus and the Beeching (1988) Corpus

Table 1 provides background information about the corpora studied and shows the number of occurrences of discourse-marking *bon* in the CRFP⁵ (private interviews only), ESLO⁶ and Beeching⁷ Corpora. Rates of occurrence of DM *bon* almost tripled in the 20 years separating the ESLO and the Beeching corpora and almost quadrupled in the period between 1968 and 2002. Although it may certainly be the case that the corpora differ in their level of formality (tape-recorded interviews being somewhat less everyday in 1968 than in 2002), the genre of these texts is very similar; in all cases, an interviewer posed questions about an interviewee's job, interests and so on.

Table 1 Increasing rates of *bon*-usage between the ESLO (1968) and CRFP (1988) Corpora

Corpus	Number of speakers	Number of words in the corpus	Number of occurrences of <i>bon</i>	Rate per 10,000 words
CRFP (2002)	82	287,482	1,368	47.58
Beeching (1988)	95	154,605	540	34.93
ESLO (1968)	24	303,357	392	12.92

Speakers in the older ESLO and Beeching Corpora and the older generation in the CRFP Corpus tend to use *bon* in the structuring *mot de la fin* manner described by Jayez (2004).

⁵ Available via a concordancer at <<http://www.up.univ-nrs.fr/delic/crfp>>

⁶ Available at <<http://bacharts.kuleuven.ac.be/elicop>>

⁷ Available at <<http://www.uwe.ac.uk/hlss/llas/iclru/corpus.pdf>>

The 1,368 occurrences of DM *bon* employed by the 82 speakers in the CRFP were analyzed, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The qualitative analysis of the use of *bon* by a 98 year-old speaker (CRFP PRI-BEL-2) revealed that, though it may be used to introduce a correction or reformulation, it is fundamentally a text-structuring device. The interview with a 20 year-old woman (CRFP PRI-PNE-1) abounds by contrast in uses of the compound forms '*mais bon*', '*parce que bon*' and '*et puis bon*' ('but well', 'because well' and 'and then well'). It is noticeable that, when *bon* is used on its own, it is rarely used as a structuring device to signal the beginning, end or transitional points in the account but as a means of flagging a transitory acceptance or concession which is then followed up by *mais bon* (but well), as we can see in example 2):

- 2) + j'aimerais travailler euh **bon** pas pas faire toute ma carrière là-bas **mais** au moins faire cinq dix ans + * en en espérant que ça me plaise **parce que bon** c'est toujours pareil je j'imagine ça on voit les films on voit ceci on voit cela c'est l'idée euh + c'est le rêve américain **mais bon** ça se trouve ça va pas me plaire du tout + mais euh + si ça me plait j'aimerais travailler là-bas euh + une dizaine d'années + pour voir euh puis pour **bon** pour avoir aussi une euh + une expérience quoi **parce que bon** rester en France **bon** la France c'est bien **mais bon** c'est c'est un style de travail + c'est une /idé-, idée/ une idéologie et c'est pas c'est différent dans tous les pays +

CRFP PRI-PNE-1

‘+ I would like to work euh **well** not not to make my whole career over there **but** at least to do five ten years + * hoping that I like it **because well** it’s always the same I I imagine it you see films you see this you see that it’s the idea euh + it’s the American dream **but well** it may be that I don’t like it at all + but euh + if I like it I’d like to work over there euh + for about ten years + to see euh and also to **well** to have a euh an experience sort of **because well** staying in France **well** France is fine **but well** it’s a way of working + it’s an /idee, idea/ an ideology and it’s not it’s different in different countries +’

The speaker continually hedges her speech with concessions to a potential objection either in her own mind or supposed in that of her interlocutor. This diaphony is often marked with *bon*.

The two examples of *parce que bon* in the passage also illustrate the use of *bon* as an expressive rather than textual device, or at least as ambiguously expressive-cum-textual: in the first example, the young woman talks of going abroad *parce que bon* because well, it’s still the same, the vision you have from the movies, the American dream.... *bon* serves as a means both of hesitating before launching into the subordinate clause introduced by *parce que* and as a means of downplaying the assertiveness of her statement, illustrating the self-effacement commented upon by Waltereit with respect to *bon ben* and distancing herself slightly from her words. Hansen (1998b: 244) suggests that, “in the collocation *parce que bon*, the causal relation is usually to be found on the epistemic or speech-act level, rather than on the level of content”. This is not entirely borne out in the empirical data from the *CRFP*. The first of the two examples in (2) appears to function at the speech act level: the speaker hopes she will enjoy New York

parce que bon (I say that because...) “although I may have idealistic notions about the American dream, I may not like it at all”. The second, however, arguably works on the content level: ‘I’d like to work there for about 10 years because (though France is fine) it’s good to see another way of doing things.’ On the one hand, content-level interpretations of causality are not excluded and, on the other, it may be that a large number of uses of *parce que* in spontaneous speech are on the epistemic and speech-act level and, as discourse-marking *bon* is to be found only in spontaneous speech, it is for this reason that the two co-occur.

The speaker in (2) nuances her argument about the American dream by conceding *mais bon*, but well, she may not like it after all. A further use of *bon* occurs in the ensuing succession of hesitations: *pour voir euh pour bon pour avoir aussi une euh + une expérience*. The function of *bon* here could be described as a pause filler, as marking a syntactic transition point, or indeed as a marker of diffidence or uncertainty. In the second occurrence of *parce que bon* in the extract, the young woman begins an utterance in which she defends her decision to go abroad *parce que bon* because well, staying in France... she hesitates and backtracks to make the concession about France being a good place to be *mais bon* but well, it’s good to see other ways of doing things.

Bon appears to be used increasingly by younger speakers, either on its own or in conjunction with *mais* or *parce que* to create a nuanced and self-effacing mode of speech which admits opposing points of view, contradictions and potential negotiation.

A speaker can downplay the forcefulness of a remark by inserting *bon* and it is thus a powerful tool in mediating politeness, managing face and creating a floor for negotiating meaning. It could be argued that young people talking about their plans or their future might well adopt a more tentative and nuanced manner of speech than older, more self-assured speakers talking about their past, in other words, that the perceived increase in more expressive usages of *bon* reflects age-grading, rather than semantic change. However, the real-time data presented from both the ESLO (1968) and the Beeching (1988) corpora suggest the contrary.

Table 2 provides a quantitative overview of the compounds of *bon* investigated in the three corpora. Though there is some imbalance in the numbers of speakers and sampling from each age-group in the corpora and the data must therefore be interpreted with caution, there is sufficient evidence here to suggest a gradual increase in real time in the distributional frequency of these compound forms from 1968 to 2002; *bon ben* is particularly popular in the Beeching Corpus while *mais bon* is favored in the CRFP.

Table 2: Compound forms with *bon* in the ESLO (1968), Beeching (1988) and CRFP (2002) Corpora:

	Tokens			Rate per 10,000 words		
	ESLO	Beeching	CRFP	ESLO	Beeching	CRFP
	1968	1988	2002	1968	1988	2002
<i>mais bon</i>	1	17	150	.032	1.09	7.1

<i>bon ben</i>	60	102	111	1.9	6.5	5.2
<i>parce que</i>	2	17	61	.065	1.09	2.8
<i>bon</i>						
<i>enfin bon</i>	1	14	53	.032	.89	2.5
<i>Bon voilà</i>	3	1	9	.098	.57	0.4

There is a gradual increase in real time in the distributional frequency of these compound forms from 1968 to 2002; *bon ben* appears to have been the first to establish itself, with *mais bon* rushing into the lead in the CRFP.

We can also explore this phenomenon in apparent time by comparing the different generations of speakers in the CRFP, which is sub-divided into three age-groups: 1=18-30 years; 2= 31-64 years; 3= 65+ years. Table 3 shows rates of *bon* in these age-groups.

Table 3: Rates, per 10,000 words, of *bon*, *bon ben*, *mais bon* and *parce que bon* in the CRFP broken down according to age-group :

	Age group		
	18-30	31-64	65+
	years	years	years
<i>bon</i> rate	54.33	47.19	34.72
<i>bon ben</i> rate	3.85	4.37	1.68

<i>mais bon</i> rate	9.48	4.25	1.15
<i>parce que bon</i> rate	4.68	1.21	.23

When we compare the 18-30 year-old group with the 65+ year-olds, rates of *bon* have increased overall, to a statistically significant degree ($Z=-2.302$; Asymp. Sig.=.021). Much of this increase is attributable to higher rates of *mais bon* and *parce que bon* in the younger speakers ($Z=-3.773$; Asymp. Sig. = .000 and $Z=-3.284$; Asymp.Sig = .001 respectively). Indeed, when *mais bon* and *parce que bon* rates are subtracted from the total number of occurrences of *bon*, there is little difference between the three groups and no statistical significance. This confirms the fact that increases in rates of occurrence of *bon* are indeed due to the rise in *mais bon* and *parce que bon*.

A linguistic change led by female speakers?

Table 4 displays rates of *bon* broken down according to both age and sex.

Table 4: Rates of *bon*, *bon ben*, *mais bon* and *parce que bon* per 10,000 words in male and female speakers in the CRFP, sub-divided according to age.

Age-group		Male	Female
18-30 years	<i>bon</i> rate	41.33	62.53
	<i>bon ben</i> rate	4.41	3.49

	<i>mais bon</i> rate	7.90	10.48
	<i>parce que bon</i> rate	2.48	6.07
31-64 years	<i>bon</i> rate	40.98	55.62
	<i>bon ben</i> rate	4.87	3.69
	<i>mais bon</i> rate	3.10	5.81
	<i>parce que bon</i> rate	.92	1.61
65+ years	<i>bon</i> rate	34.02	37.16
	<i>bon ben</i> rate	1.78	1.34
	<i>mais bon</i> rate	1.48	.00
	<i>parce que bon</i> rate	.30	.00

Rates of *bon* are higher, to a statistically significant degree, in female than in male speakers ($Z=-2.698$; Asymp.Sig=.007). Compounds with *bon* are rarely used by the older speakers, but it is noticeable that the rate of compound form usage is higher in the 65+ males than in the females. *Bon ben* is used slightly more by the men than the women in all three age-groups but the real difference between the sexes is in the rates of *mais bon* and *parce que bon*. The scope of the paper does not permit lengthy discussion of this issue (see Beeching, 2007b: 147, concerning the rise in female usage of post-rhematic *quoi*); briefly, the finding conforms to that of other studies where women were shown to be in the vanguard of linguistic change or are, at least, early adopters of a change-in-progress; women may be more tentative and oriented

towards consideration of the view-points of others (discussion in Beeching, 2002: 1-46 and passim).

Conclusion

Rates of discourse-marking *bon* have increased over time, in particular in the lexicalizing compound forms *mais bon* and *parce que bon*. The data presented here lend support to Traugott's (1982) hypothesis that meaning change moves from a propositional through a textual and thence to an expressive phase and that, though M1 and M2 co-exist in polysemy, an invited inference from the canonical 'good' or 'acceptance' function appears to have developed in everyday spoken discourse whereby *bon* can indicate 'good so far' (textual) and thence 'good up to a point' (expressive, open to negotiation). Possible bridging contexts for the transition from positive evaluation to the hedging or negotiating sense include: use as a transition (rather than end) marker, as a reformulation or concession marker, as a hesitation marker or in combination with *ben* in *bon ben*.

Wheeler's (1994) notion that more informal spoken uses create a runaway positive feedback loop is also relevant here: if a speaker opens the door to negotiation, this is likely to be viewed as a solidary act and expressive uses will spread. It may also be the fact that cultural scripts (Evans and Wilkins, 2000: 586) have changed in Europe, that the rules of politeness have shifted to include more solidary modes – this would encourage increased frequency in the less formal and more hedged usage of *bon*.

In situations where $M1 > M1/M2$ [$>M2$], the boundary between pragmatic side-effects and an emergent lexical sense is blurred in the co-existing $M1/M2$. A new, hedging, sense of *bon* is emerging from its pragmatic functions in context, an evolution which is also seen in both English *well* and Chinese *hao* (good), suggesting a universal tendency. As *bon* comes to acquire the notion of partial acceptance, the salient sense of the particle shifts to partial rather than acceptance and it is this which confers upon it its hedging qualities.

There are many situations in which *bon* is used textually to structure talk, either in the case of a talk-show host controlling speaker turns or in marking transitions from one stage to another in extra-linguistic events or in narration. The *mot de la fin* interpretation and acceptance interpretation, whereby hedging usages are relegated to a peripheral or marginal role, are, however, increasingly difficult to sustain as unifying accounts in the face of evidence for expressive usages found in contemporary conversational spoken data.

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