Abstract

The study highlights the transition of the temporal adverbs *always/algates*, expressing continuity in time, and *ago*, expressing remoteness in time, from their historical prototypical concept of space to that of time and beyond. In these processes both metonymy and metaphor play an important role. The data regarding *always* and *algates* suggest a gradual cline from SPACE to TIME and an array of other meanings, subsumed under the cover-term UNCONSTRAINEDNESS. The SPACE-TIME-X chain (with X standing for other more abstract meanings) seems to occur in most languages. The semantic development of these adverbs also features all the properties associated with a change like this: metonymy followed by ever increasing or proliferating metaphorization, fuzzy or non-discrete categories (mostly in the stages of transition). *Ago* owes its origin to the grammaticalization of the past participle of a verb of movement. This spatial concept is metaphorically mapped on to a new temporal prototype. As compared with *always/algates*, the temporal frame of *ago* is monosemous and marked throughout by metaphorization from ‘remoteness in space’ to ‘remoteness in time’.
0. Preamble

This paper deals with the relationship between spatial concepts and time in the history of English in terms of metonymy and metaphor, more particularly the temporal adverbs *always/algates* and *ago*. However, before addressing these particular cases of semantic change, I have to say a few words about prototype semantics in general, which is broadly the underlying methodological paradigm used in this analysis.

Prototype semantics was introduced in the mid-1970s mainly with the research of the psycholinguist Eleanor Rosch and some others, who wanted to react against the then prevailing Aristotelian binary, black-or-white approach, which had been adopted by structural and even generative semantics (Geeraerts 1977: 10–11). The main tenet of this new theory is that the semantic structure of a lexical item consists of more or less polysemous clusters of meaning, which are characterized by differences in salience: there are meanings that have a central or proto-typical status, while others tend to be rather marginal or peripheral, sometimes even ephemeral instances surrounding the proto-type. Prototype semantics also strongly stresses the fuzziness of a particular category, as contrasted with the discrete Aristotelian categories, which will prove to be of crucial importance for the semantic evolution of the time adverbs *alway(s), algate(s)*, less so for *ago*, in Middle English semantic boundaries are blurred, and so mostly not well-delineated. Again, for more details see Geeraerts (1997: 21–23), where the diachronic implications of this theory are very aptly summarized.

Let us now turn to the subject-matter of this paper: from space to time and beyond, or the SPACE-TIME-X axis.

1. Continuity in time

Languages like Dutch and French use adverbs which have to be considered as lexicalizations of phrases expressing time: so Dutch knows *altijd*, literally ‘all time’ and French employs *toujours* ‘all days’. In the history of English such phrases did occur, but they tended to be rather short-lived and do not seem ever to have occupied a central or core position in the set of time adverbs. Here is a (late) 15\textsuperscript{th} century example:

(1) a1500 (1422) *Yonge SSocr. 121/7*: *Altymes desyrynge in cryste yowre honoure*. (MED: *al-times*)

In (2) the phrase *every tyme* is apparently synonymous with *alwey*, or is some form of gradation involved here?
Typically, the English language is characterized throughout by the use of
temporal adverbs derived from phrases with an underlying spatial meaning. It
is precisely this transition from space to time that will be highlighted in the
following sections.

Middle English has adverbial compounds with way/wey and gate (in the
sense of ‘the way from one place to another’); the latter is a loanword from
Scandinavian, apparently first attested in Orm, c1200:

(3) ?c1200 Orm. (Jun 1) 12749: He wass an off þa tweggen þat comenn till þe
Laferrd Crist þær he bi gate 3ede. (MED: gate, 1a)
[‘He was one of the two who came to the Lord Christ where he went by
a path.’]

Both nouns have a dynamic potential: they suggest ‘movement in space’;
and in collocations with the quantifier all they express ‘movement from one
place to another’. Alway/alwey derives from the Old English NP ealne weg,
an accusative of extent, surviving in Southern texts as alnewei (see MED: al-wei).
I came across one interesting example in King Alfred’s Orosius, 19.33, also
quoted by Traugott (1972: 90):

(4) þæt scip wæs ealne weg yrnende under segle ...
[‘that ship was all way running under sail.’]

The form alwei(e)s, marked with the adverbial suffix -(e)s, is rare before
1400; again see MED al-wei and the OED alway. It should be noted that in
Old English this adverbial phrase can occur with a temporal meaning every
now and then; in addition there is also a syncopated form eallneg/nig; see OED
alway. These forms are most probably not related to the Middle English
occurrences involved here, seeing that the first attestations date from c1300, so
there is a gap of some three centuries. This then seems to be a case of semantic
regenesis. In the present study we shall focus on the Middle and Early Modern
English developments, leaving aside the scarce Old English data. Similarly,
Middle English also knows algate and its extended form algates.

It is worth pointing out that the Helsinki corpus only has 21 examples of
this Scandinavian “synonym” of alwei(s), from which we can infer that its
spread must have been somewhat restricted. In addition, this is a time adverb
that is virtually confined to the Middle English period; putting aside a few
regional (Northern) attestations, the last examples in the OED algate(s) date
from the 16th century.

As observed in the introductory section of this paper, prototype
semantics stresses the fuzziness of semantic categories. When verbs of
movement are involved, the prototypical meaning of the adverbial phrases *alwey(s)* and *algate(s)* normally suggests a CONTINUUM IN SPACE, as in example (4) above. However, in contexts like this the meaning can easily shade into a CONTINUUM IN TIME: the ship is sailing all the way, and so also all the time. Some other markedly “fuzzy” examples include:

(5) 1340 Ayenb. 84: þe zone .. *alneway* yernþ and ne is neure were. (MED: *al-wei*, 2.a)  
[‘The sun runs (moves) always (all the way) and is never weary.’]

(6) 1375 BARBOUR Bruce vii. 60: He ran on fut *alwayis* hym by, Till he in-till the wod wes gane. (OED: *always*, 3)  
[‘He always (all the way) ran on foot by him, until he had gone into the wood.’]

Even the quotation from Wiclif’s *De Officio Pastorali* (Sisam 1970: 118), prefixed to this paper as its motto, allows of both a spatial and a temporal reading, at least as I see it: we must follow Christ all the way in our lives, and consequently also all the time. It is the very fuzziness of these originally spatial expressions that can lead to semantic reinterpretation, or pragmatic inferencing (Hopper – Traugott 1993) and so eventually to semantic change.

The next step is the use of these adverbs with verbs that are not associated with movement or even with adjectives (10), so a spatial meaning is logically excluded. If we give a metaphorical interpretation to the verb *sue* in Wiclif’s example, only continuity in time can be involved: we must follow or imitate Christ all the time. This holds for numerous other instances:

[‘He rose from death and lived with his apostles, not always but sometimes.’]

(8) c1390 Chaucer *CT.Mel.* B284: That man that .. wole *algates* han werre shal neuere haue suffisaunce. (MED: *al-gate*, 2c)  
[‘The man who will always have war shall never have satisfaction.’]

(9) 1513 *MORE Edw.V* Ded.: Laudable custome that hath *alweies* been observed. (OED: *always*, 3).  
[‘Laudable custom which has always been observed.’]

(10) 1584 *KING JAMES VI & I Ess. Prentise Poesie* sig. D: Phoebus crowns all verses.. with Laurers *always* grene. (OED: *always*, 3)

Thus far we have only dealt with *alwey(s)* and *algate(s)* expressing a continuum in time. This meaning gives rise to another extension: repetition...
or recurrence, or from *all the time* to *at every time* or *every occasion*. Initially, this shift must have occurred in a twilight zone where continuity and recurrence tend to overlap. Items (8) and (9) are, we believe, good examples in point: here, continuity can also be interpreted as repetition within a (putative) time-span: the pursuit of war can be continuous or be realized at more or less regular intervals, and the same holds for the observance of custom. In some other contexts, however, the notion of continuity is virtually blurred, as in:

(11) ?c1225 (a1200) Ancr.

*Ye schulen allesweis*, and mid alle mihte.. wel witen þe inre & and þe uttre vor hire sake. (OED: *always*, 3).

[‘You shall at every time and with all your might well know the ins and outs for her benefit.’]

(12) c1300 SLeg.

*Ye schulen allesweis*, and mid alle mihte.. wel witen þe inre & and þe uttre vor hire sake. (OED: *always*, 3).

[‘You shall at every time and with all your might well know the ins and outs for her benefit.’]

(13) a1398 Trev.

*Some hennes haue alwey twynnes*. (MED: *al-wei*, 4)

[‘Some hens always have twins.’]

(14) a1425 (?1400) CHAUCER Romaunt Rose l.919: A bachelere, that he made alleweyes with him be. (OED: *always*, time, 1)

[‘A bachelor, whom he always ordered to be with him.’]

A last cluster of meanings that we have to account for is, at least at first sight, not related to time at all: they include ‘in any or every circumstance’, ‘in any event’ or ‘in any case’, etc.; see OED: *always* and MED: *al-wei*. Yet, it is arguable that they all originate in the notion of recurrence. To prove this let us take the following instance:

(15) 1565 JEWEL Repl.

*The Host once consecrated of the Priest, is algates to be receiued, whether of many other, or one alone.*

(OED: *algates*)

There is clearly a notion of recurrence here while, at the same time, the context suggests that the Host can be received in any circumstance, or in any case. When something can always occur or be done, there is no constraint on it, which is precisely what is expressed in (15). Let us assume that in such instances *algates* (and for that matter *always*) expresses unconstrainedness, admittedly covertly coupled with or even based on recurrence. Also the following example shows an overlap of these two meanings:
2. From space to time and beyond: metonymization and metaphorization

In what precedes we have briefly outlined the semantic paradigm of the adverbs *alway(s)* and *algate(s)* in Middle and Early Modern English. Schematically, this can be presented in the following cognitive survey, which may also have a diachronic dimension, at least in its broad outline. In other words, the data we have chosen from the OED and the MED do not
necessarily reflect a strictly chronological sequence; they seem to be simultaneous rather than consecutive, except for the concept of unconstrainedness at the top of the process of metonymization and metaphorization. On the issue of the simultaneous and consecutive dimension of semantic change see also Geeraerts (2010: 220–221).

OLD ENGLISH

MIDDLE and EARLY MODERN ENGLISH (1100–1600)

Continuity in space (?time) (4)- > (a) Continuity in time (?space) (5–6)
(with verbs of movement)
(b) Continuity in time (7–10)
(without verbs of movement)
(c) Recurrence (?continuity) (8–9)
(d) Recurrence (11–14)
(e) Unconstrainedness (?recurrence)
(15–16)
(f) Unconstrainedness (17–22)

Note that the bracketed meanings with (?) indicate possible overlaps (or non-discreteness).

These data and many more in the MED and the OED suggest a gradual cline from SPACE to TIME (continuity and recurrence) as well as a variety of other meanings, subsumed under the cover-term UNCONSTRAINEDNESS. The SPACE-TIME-X chain (with X standing for some other more abstract meanings) is by no means uncommon, as it seems to occur in most languages of the world (Heine – Claude – Hünnemeyer 1991ab). Sub alway the OED refers a.o. to MDu. allewege, MHig allewege/allewei, etc., and in the Romance languages to Anglo-Norman and OFr. tute veie(s) or tote voie(s). These were all more or less casual and short-lived expressions. By contrast, English always (algates) has become the prototypical marker of continuity in time.

In what follows we shall argue that (a) and (b) are instances of METONYMY, while (e) and (f) belong to the domain of METAPHOR, with recurrence as the go-between.

In chapter seven of his book Taylor (1997: 122–141) presents an interesting and at the same time a lucid survey of metonymy and metaphor as discussed in recent semantic studies. It should be stressed that he broadens the scope of metonymy, defined in traditional rhetoric “as a figure of speech whereby the name of one entity e1 is used to refer to another entity e2 which is contiguous to e1” (Taylor 1997: 122) to any process of meaning extension based on possible co-occurrence in a given conceptual structure. In other words, metonymy is involved whenever two cognitive domains are associated. Metaphor, by contrast, is characterized by a transfer from one domain to
another: it “consists in the mapping of the logic of one domain (usually, but not always, a more concrete domain) on to another (usually more abstract) domain” (Taylor 1997: 138). Both metonymy and metaphor have proved to be highly productive processes of semantic change in the history of English. In Dekeyser (1994) it was demonstrated that the meaning of ‘multure’ in the Old English quantifier mycel historically derives from the prototypical notion of ‘extent’; this extent-multicity schema is grounded on the association of two related domains, and so it is a classic instance of metonymy, as in mycel land ‘large piece of land’, hence much land. However, as soon as the meaning of the quantifier is transferred to other domains, metaphorical developments come into play, as in mycel wind ‘much’ or ‘strong wind’, mycel sciphere ‘large’ or ‘numerous/powerful fleet’. More recently it was argued in Dekeyser (2013: 250–253) that the semantic changes of starve ‘suffer severely or die from hunger, long for something’ from OE steorfan ‘die’ are also marked by metonymy, then followed by metaphor.

Middle English alway(s) and algate(s) provide further and hopefully new evidence of metonymy and metaphor as processes of semantic change. Prototypically, these adverbs belong to the domain of ‘space’ (way and gate). With verbs of movement (3, 5, 6) there is a natural association between spatial and temporal continuity: here semantic change clearly originates in metonymy. The (metaphorical) transfer to other domains, more loosely linked with the historical prototypical notion of ‘space’, sets in with continuity in time not connected with verbs of movement (7–10), and then with the notion of ‘recurrence’, possibly within a time span, as illustrated in (11–14) and (15–16).

When ‘unconstrainedness’ (15–16) and (17–22) is involved, full metaphorization has been reached. These data substantiate the claim that metaphorical extensions are often grounded in metonymy; see Taylor (1997: 139); also Goossens (1990) and Geeraerts (2010: 220). They also suggest that there can be a gradient from metonymy to metaphor, and that consequently these constitute “fuzzy” categories themselves: meaning (b), as presented in the Schema 2.1 above, is prerequisite for (c) and (d), and the notion of what we label ‘unconstrainedness’, (e) and (f) is typically grounded on recurrence.

3. Remoteness in time

Another facet of the SPACE-TIME axis concerns the notion of ‘remoteness or distancing in time”, expressed in Modern English with the adverb ago. As is generally known, this owes its existence to the grammaticalization of the past participle of an underlying verb of movement meaning ‘from one place
to another’: OE agan, ME ago(n). Full details about this morpho-syntactic development are to be found in a recent study by Molencki (2013).

The prototypical spatial concept is metaphorically mapped on to a new temporal prototype, in the sense of ‘movement from the present time or the time in question to the past’. Interestingly, the OED agone cites two examples which, I believe, reveal the locus of linguistic change. These are:

(23) Anglo-Saxon Chron. (Parker) anno 745: Her Danihel forþferde; þa was xlīii wintra agan sıþan he onfeng bispodome.
    ['In this year Daniel passed away; forty-three years had elapsed since he succeeded to the episcopal see. ‘]

(24) a1275 (?a1200) LAGAMON Brut (Calig.) (1963) I.: Moni yer was agan seọþpan his cun hider com.
    ['Many years had passed by/gone since his kin came to this place.’]

Another example can be found in the MED ago:

(25) c1330 (1300) Guy (I) (Auch.) 1695: It was ago fif yer þat he was last þer.

If we leave out the copula beon in (23–24) and slightly adapt the overall sentence, the structure noun + agan develops and, even more interestingly, in (25) we simply need to move ago to a postnominal position. Clearly, it is in structures like these that the past participle of go easily gives way to an adverbial interpretation. Actually, these data ideally instantiate the verb-adverb cline, which is an important aspect of grammaticalization. However, since this paper is mainly concerned with semantics, a detailed analysis is outside its scope (for details, see Molencki 2013: 250–254). In the course of Middle English both agone (26–27) and ago (28–29) occurred side by side as postposed time adverbs, but by Caxton’s time the latter form had been virtually generalized (OED ago/agone).

(26) c1405 (c1385) CHAUCER Prioress’ Tale, l.199: I sholde haue dyed, ye longe tyme agoon.

(27) a1425 (c1395) Bible (Wycliffite, L.V.) (Royal) (1850) Gen.xxi.2: As yisterdai, and the thridde dai agoon.

(28) c1350 (1333) WILLIAM OF SHOREHAM Poems (1902) 100: Naught fern (= long) ago.

(29) c1450 (c1370) CHAUCER Complaint unto Pity (Fairf. 16) (1871) l.1: Pite that I haue sought so yore (= long) ago.
In these examples and in Modern English throughout the prototypical spatial concept of gone has virtually receded into the background, so only the new metaphorical interpretation past is present in the mind of the speaker. For the sake of completeness it should be pointed out that the meaning of the whole adverbial phrase can be extended through metonymy. Instead of a temporal noun like year, month, day, or the adverb long, other nouns that can be indirectly, or more precisely metonymically associated with the concept of ‘time’ are occasionally used. So the OED moon (6) explicitly refers to many moons ago in the meaning of ‘a long time ago’. Other possible phrases include several generations ago, a few meetings/exams/chapters ago, etc. It seems that one can even use ago with some spatial nouns: You should have got off three stations/stops ago. In examples like these, which generally tend to be regarded as “creative usage”, mere remoteness is stressed, whether one is speaking of time or place. 1 Obviously, it is too early to draw conclusions, as this extension is still on the verge of putative linguistic innovation.

As compared with always/algates, the semantic structure of ago is remarkably monosemous. Indeed, it is marked throughout by a single process of metaphorization from ‘remoteness in place’ (gone/passed away) to ‘remoteness in time’ (past). Metonymy is only marginally involved and only affects the entire adverbial phrase, not the adverb ago as such.

Here it may be interesting to point out in passing that in Dutch an identical metaphorization process has been at work. Indeed, English ago literally translates as verleden, which is the past participle of a former, now obsolete verb lijden meaning ‘go’ or ‘pass away’. Let me give just one simple example to illustrate this:

(30) Zij verliet dit land tien jaar geleden.
[‘She left this country ten years ago.’ Or more literally: ‘ten years gone’.]

Contrary to the current linguistic theory (Hopper – Traugott 1993: 145–), the grammaticalized adverb is morphophonologically identical with the original past participle.

To express remoteness or distancing in time the French language uses the grammaticalized clause il y a..., literally there is...: elle arrivait ici il ya deux ans (‘She arrived here two years ago’.) This expresses an event in the past, the arriving, and at the same time the elapsing of two years: there are two years between the present and her arrival two years earlier. However, there seems to be no underlying metaphorical notion of spatial remoteness involved here, unlike in English and Dutch².
4. Looking back

In this study we have highlighted the transition of the adverbs *always* (*algates*) and *ago* from the historical prototypical concept of space to that of time, and even beyond, through metaphorization and subsidiarily metonymy. *Always* and *algates* typically feature all the properties associated with this semantic change as described in the available literature: metonymy, ever increasing metaphorization, non-discrete categories (mostly in the stages of transition).

By contrast, *ago* constitutes a remarkable deviation from the current theory: it is simply marked by metaphorization throughout, while metonymy occurs very marginally and affects the whole adverbial time phrase. As pointed out in 3.2, a further metonymical development seems to be in progress in Modern English. If this change were to become fully established, it would be an example of the sequence metaphor-metonymy, and so the opposite of what linguistics normally posits; see 2.3 above. Finally, apart from the incipient phase briefly described in 3.1 non-discreteness does not come into play here.

The PLACE-TIME-(X) axis seems to be a language universal; see 2.1 above. Here the question arises whether there are also cases of the opposite direction: TIME -PLACE? As far as I know there seem to be no established data in either English or Dutch, at least for the time being. Further research in this domain could shed some more light on this matter.

By way of conclusion I want to briefly address the semantic structure of *always* and *ago*. The semantics of these adverbs is characterized by a shifting of the prototype, more particularly from space to time. In Modern English there are even no relics whatsoever of the (historical) prototypical meaning. In addition, the modern prototype of *always* is surrounded by a number of more or less salient clusters which are the result of metaphorization. Impressionistically, I would say that prototype shifting seems to be a common process in the history of English semantics (Dekeyser 1994 and 2013). Clearly, once again research based on more extensive data is necessary to substantiate this claim.

NOTES

* The present article is an adaptation and considerably extended version of an earlier study of 1998 in *Leuvense Bijdragen*. 87: 37–44 (“*Alway(s)* and *Algate(s)* in Middle and Early Modern English: from space to time and beyond”).

1 With thanks to Brian Lowrey, Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Picardie, Amiens. In his private mail he also adds that “the extension from time to space is still under way in English.”
Also with thanks to Olivier Simonin, Professor of English at the Université de Perpignan (France)

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