What is the future of texting?  
Future temporal reference in text messages from Belgium and Québec  
Mireille Tremblay\(^a\), Emmanuelle Labeau\(^b\), Hélène Blondeau\(^c\)  
\(^a\)Université de Montréal, \(^b\)Aston University, \(^c\)University of Florida

**Introduction**  
The use of future temporal reference has generated a lot of attention in variationist sociolinguistics and has been widely studied across spoken French varieties. The three main variants at play are the synthetic future, the analytical future and the futurate present. The synthetic future has proven to be favored in negative context in Quebec French (Emirkanian & Sankoff 1986, Poplack & Turpin 1999, Wagner & Sankoff 2011, among others) while other studies have shown evidence of a temporal distance effect in hexagonal and in Acadian French (King & Nadasdi 2003, Roberts 2013) in line with the prescriptive claims offered by grammarians.

While spoken French has been the main focus of sociolinguistic inquiries, there is a pressing need to explore the variable in other contexts, in particular in relation with the supposed ‘innovative’ effect of the new media technology on language. We thus complement the previous research by providing a variationist analysis of futur temporal reference (FTR) in two corpora of text messages (SMS) from Belgium (Fairon et al. 2006) and Quebec (Langlais et al. 2012).

**Results**  
Our analysis reveals different patterns of use: while Québec strongly favors the futurate present (49%) followed by the analytic future (32%) and the synthetic future (19%), Belgium shows an preference for the synthetic future (40%) and the futurate present (40%). On one hand, despite these differences in distribution, the factors conditioning the use of the futurate present are strikingly similar: in both varieties: morphological verb type, adverbial specification, and contingency are good predictors, while polarity and temporal are not significant. On the other hand, the factors conditioning the choice of the synthetic future vs. the periphrastic future show distinct configurations: 1- while polarity is the strongest factor in Québec, it is not significant in Belgium; 2- non-specific adverbs strongly favor the presence of the synthetic future in Belgium, but not in Québec. However, temporal distance is significant in both varieties, with the analytic future being favored by proximal future events. Finally, both varieties are sensitive to the morphological complexity of verbal paradigms: all types of irregular verbs favor the synthetic variant, while regular verbs favor the analytic future.

**Conclusion**  
Our study contributes to the developing field of inquiry on the morphosyntax of text messages in French (Stark 2011, 2012; Blondeau et al. 2014; Labeau 2014, among others), and documents the hybridity of this form of communication. On one hand, text messages are not exempt from the influence of written French, as shown by the use of synthetic future forms in positive environments and the influence of a temporal distance effect in the Quebec corpus. On the other hand, our results show patterns of use that are in line with oral/conversational corpora as reflected by the dialectal variation observed. Finally, some deviations from the standard norm are observed since some of the forms correspond to phonic French and reflect different implicit norms of pronunciation in Quebec and in Belgium.
References


Labeau, E. 2014, 'Quand l’analytique se fait synthétique:: les formes verbales périphrastiques dans le texto' Studii de lingvistica, vol. 4, pp. 131-144.


