This paper investigates synthetic and periphrastic alternations in French. Like most Romance languages, the French expresses futurity in two ways: the synthetic (1a) and periphrastic future (1b).

\[(1)\]
\[
a. \text{Elle} \text{ partir}^a. \\
   \text{she} \text{ leave-FUT-3SG} \\
   \text{‘She will leave.’}
\]
\[
b. \text{Elle} \text{ va partir}. \\
   \text{she} \text{ go-PRES-3SG leave-INF} \\
   \text{‘She is going to leave.’}
\]

The synthetic future in Romance descended from a Latin periphrastic future of the form infinitive + habere ‘have’, e.g. amare habeo ‘I will love’. The lexical verb habere meaning ‘to own’ was reanalysed as a future auxiliary habere. Synchronically, the Romance synthetic future is widely assumed to be composed of a future stem + agreement affix (< habere) (Fleischman 1982 for French; Arregi & Oltra-Massuet 2005 for Spanish; Roberts & Roussou 2002 for Romance generally).

The periphrastic future is clearly composed of the modal aller ‘go’ + infinitive. Notice, however, that the constructions in (1) have two striking similarities: they share (i) the same infinitive-like form of the lexical verb: partir ‘to leave’ and (ii) the same agreement morphology on the inflected verb: –a. Evidence from acquisition and change suggest that speakers indeed analyse the synthetic future as having an infinitive (Grégoire 1947, Fouché 1967, Hoekstra & Hyams 1998). The synthetic and periphrastic futures are also used interchangeably (Poplack & Dion 2009).

I propose that the synthetic and periphrastic French futures are morphological spell-outs of the same modal head + infinitive construction (2), cf. Abusch’s (1985) analysis of English will.

\[(2)\]
\[
\text{Structure and features of the French future}
\]

I propose that both futures are composed of a Modal head with feature specification [modality], which takes an infinitival complement and is anchored to [present] Tense. The lexical infinitive may stay low or raise to become a future stem. [modality] is spelled out as the Modal verb aller in the absence of a lexical verb stem, resulting in an aller + infinitive construction. I show that this analysis can be extended to the French conditional by combining [modality] with [past].

Analyses of Spanish (Oltra-Massuet & Arregi 2005) and Italian (Calabrese 2012) within Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993) have only examined synthetic verb forms. This paper is the first to explicitly consider the synthetic and periphrastic futures in a Romance language.
References