



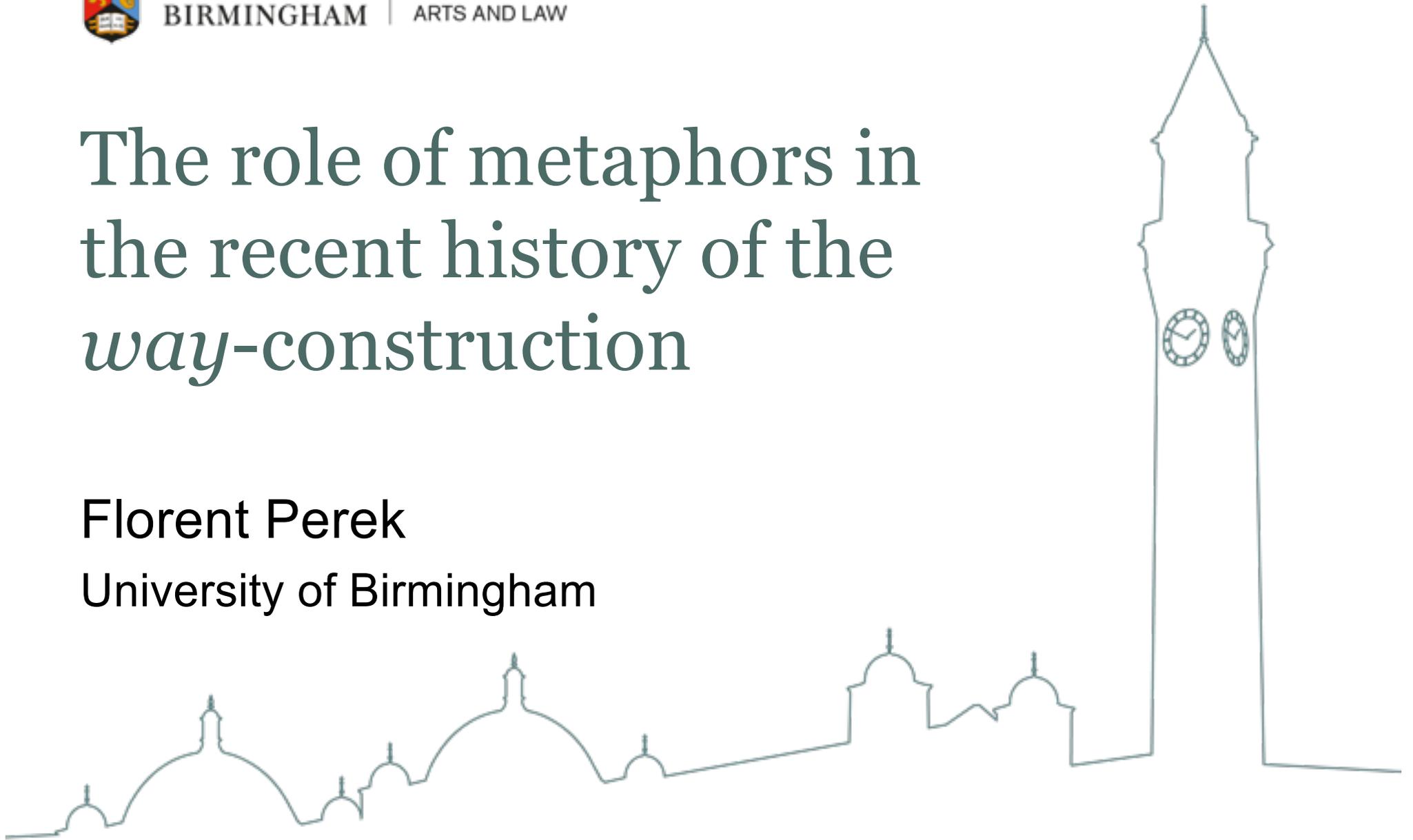
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# The role of metaphors in the recent history of the *way*-construction

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# Overview

- Study in diachronic construction grammar
- Schematicity and productivity of the *way*-construction
- Role of metaphors in constructional change

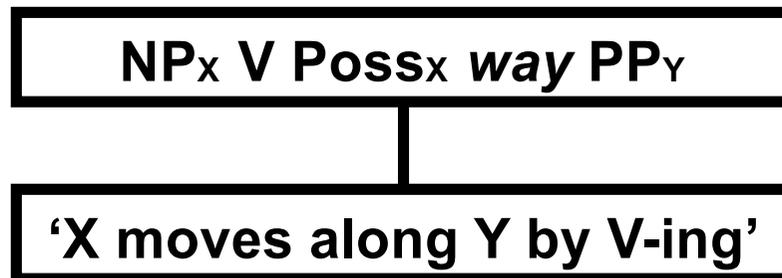


# Diachronic construction grammar

- New approach to language change (Traugott & Trousdale 2013)
- Grammar seen as inventory of form-meaning pairs, aka constructions (Goldberg 1995 *inter alia*)
- E.g., the *way*-construction

*They hacked their way through the jungle.*

*We pushed our way into the pub.*



Goldberg, A. (1995). *Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Traugott, E. & G. Trousdale (2013). *Constructionalization and Constructional Changes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

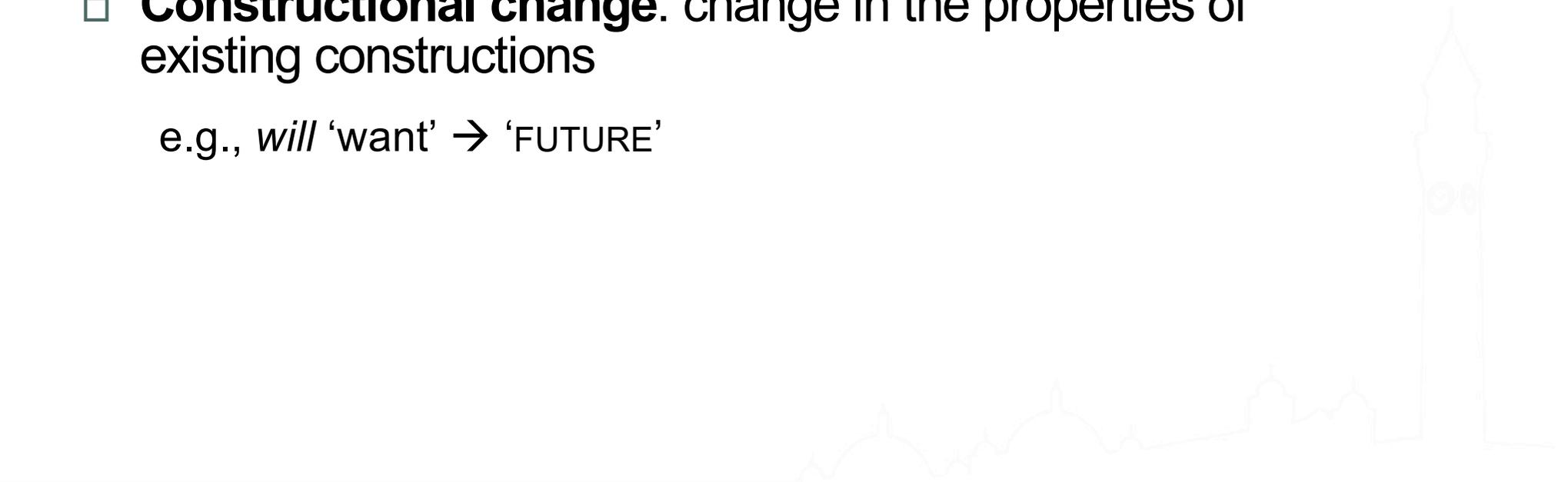
# Two types of change in DCxG

- **Constructionalisation:** creation of a new form-meaning pair, usually from instances of existing constructions

e.g., [*a lot*<sub>head</sub> *of* N] 'set of N' → [ [*a lot of*] N<sub>head</sub>] 'many N'

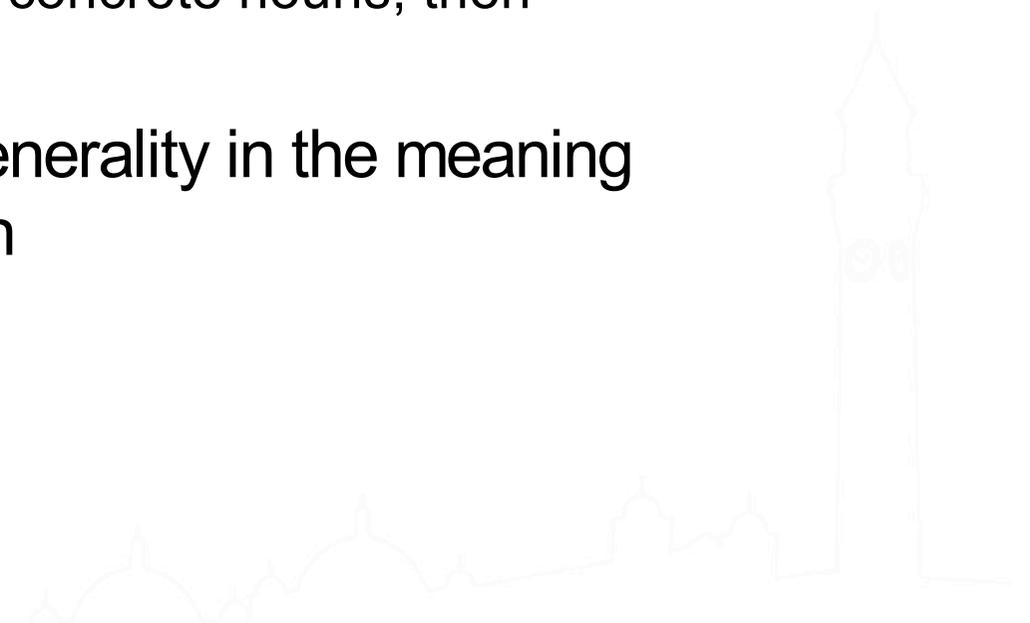
- **Constructional change:** change in the properties of existing constructions

e.g., *will* 'want' → 'FUTURE'



# Constructional change

- Two aspects of constructions are often discussed: productivity and schematicity
- **Productivity** = the range of lexical items used in the slots of a construction
  - e.g., quantifier *a lot of* N: initially concrete nouns, then increasingly abstract ones
- **Schematicity** = the level of generality in the meaning contributed by the construction
  - e.g., *will* 'want' → 'FUTURE'



# Productivity and schematicity

- Commonly thought to be interrelated (Barðdal 2008)
- A more schematic meaning can be applied to a wider range of situations
- Hence, more items are compatible with the schema
- Conversely, the occurrence of new types may contribute to schema extension
- If a new type is not covered by the schema, the latter can be adjusted (coercion)

# The case of the *way*-construction

- Focus on path-creation uses
  - The verb refers to an action that enables motion
  - As opposed to ‘manner’ uses, e.g., *They trudged their way through the snow*
- Originates from transitive uses of verbs with the noun *way*, to convey the literal creation or maintenance of a path
- Motion along that path is initially an implicature
- Constructionalisation: path-creation and motion are directly paired with “V *one’s way* PP” (Traugott & Trousdale 2013)



# The case of the *way*-construction

- Construction initially centered on physical verbs, in line with the diachronic origin (Israel 1996, from OED data)

*pave, smooth, cut, etc.* (17<sup>th</sup> century)

*bridge, hew, sheer, plough, dig, clear, etc.* (18<sup>th</sup> century)

- More abstract types are attested later, especially from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards

*smirk, spell, write* (Israel 1996), *joke, laugh, talk, bully* (Perek aop)

- Same findings in Perek (aop) in 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> American English (from COHA)

Israel, M. (1996). The way constructions grow. In A. Goldberg (ed.), *Conceptual structure, discourse and language*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications, 217-230.

Perek, F. (ahead-of-print). Recent change in the productivity and schematicity of the *way*-construction: a distributional semantic analysis. *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory*.

# The case of the *way*-construction

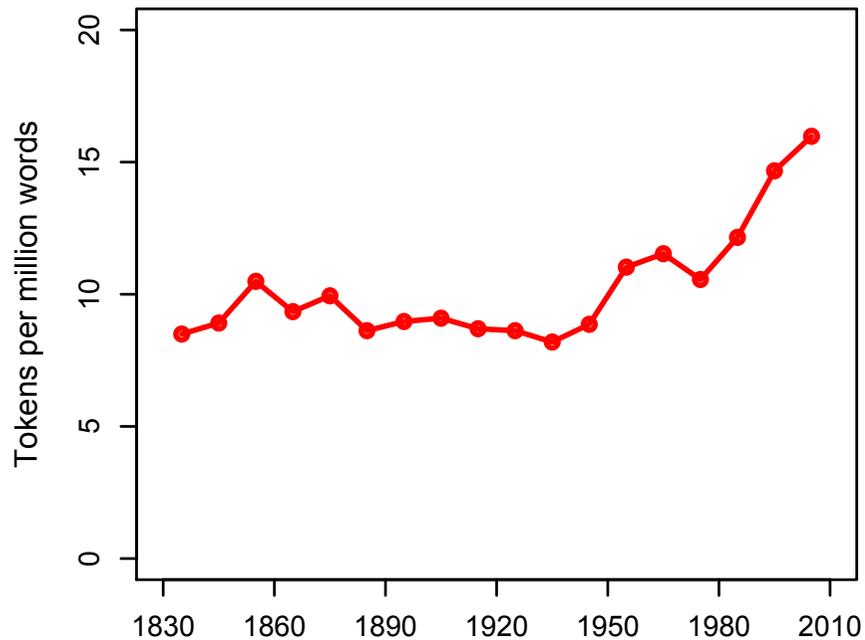
- How to account for this change in DCxG?
- Increase in productivity, but is there also a change in schematicity?
- Many new verb classes also correspond to unusual ways to cause motion: interaction, commerce, cognition, etc.
- More likely to involve abstract, metaphorical motion, e.g.:
  - [T]hey talk about Uncle Paul having **bought his way into the Senate!**
  - I sit and watch [...], **grazing my way through a muffuletta.**
- Possible explanation: the construction has become more open to encoding abstract motion



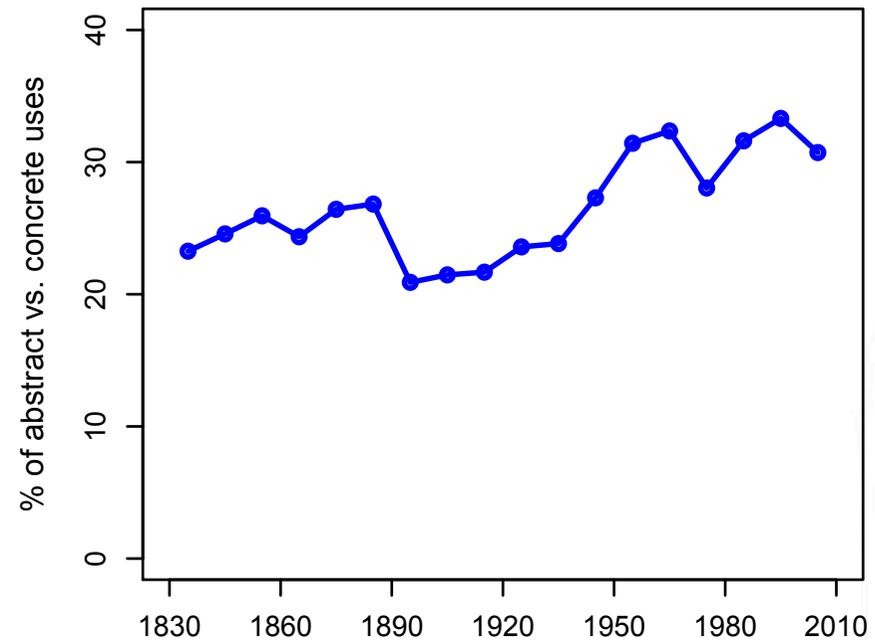
# Abstract uses of the way-construction in the COHA (Davies 2010)

- Have abstract uses become more frequent?

Token frequency of abstract uses (per million words)



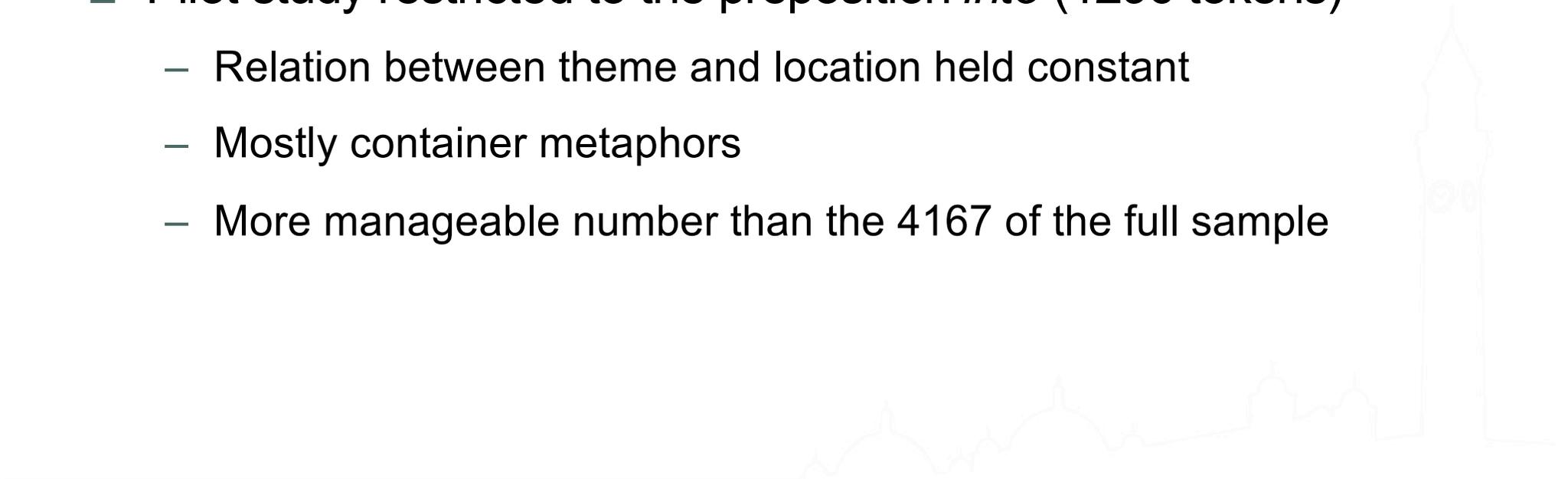
Proportion of abstract uses



- Limited quantitative evidence: no drastic increase compared to concrete uses

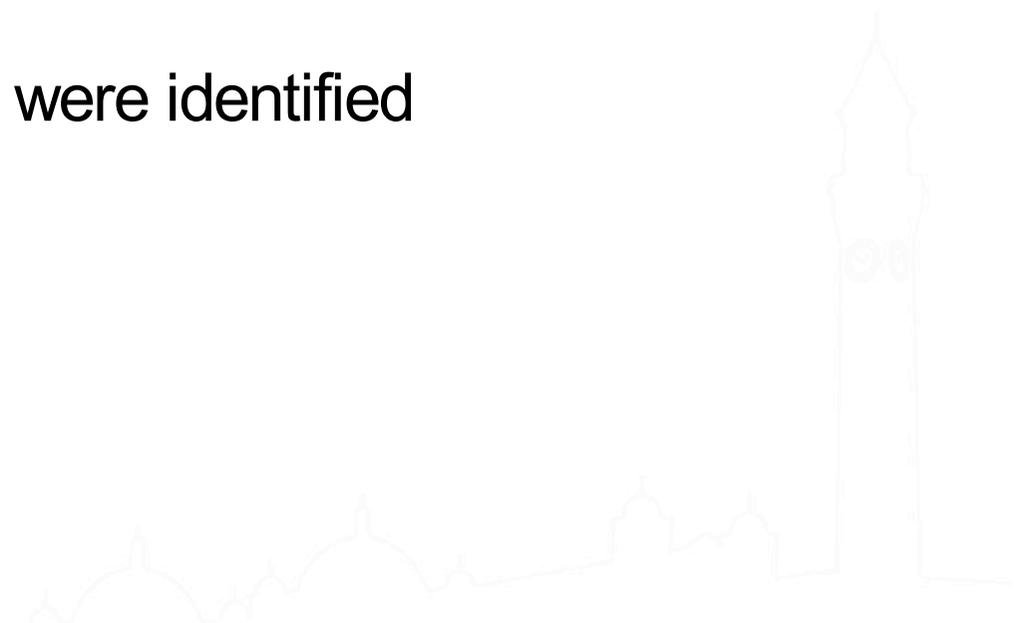
# Qualitative change?

- Abstract uses have not increased in frequency, but have they become more diverse?
- I.e., increase in the range of situations conceptualised as motion in uses of the construction
- Pilot study restricted to the preposition *into* (1296 tokens)
  - Relation between theme and location held constant
  - Mostly container metaphors
  - More manageable number than the 4167 of the full sample



# Metaphors in the *way*-construction: pilot study

- Categories of abstract uses were identified in the early periods: 1830s, 1840s and 1850s (139 tokens)
- Related to different conceptual metaphors (loosely defined)
- Uses had to occur at least twice to count as a category; otherwise labeled as “other”
- 12 categories of abstract uses were identified
- 11 “other” tokens (7.9%)



# Abstract uses in the 1830s-1850s

## □ The Mind is a Container for Ideas

The conception of vice has hardly found its way into Ophelia's mind.

Its point seemed slowly to find its way into his brain.

## □ The Heart is a Container (for Emotions, Feelings, ...)

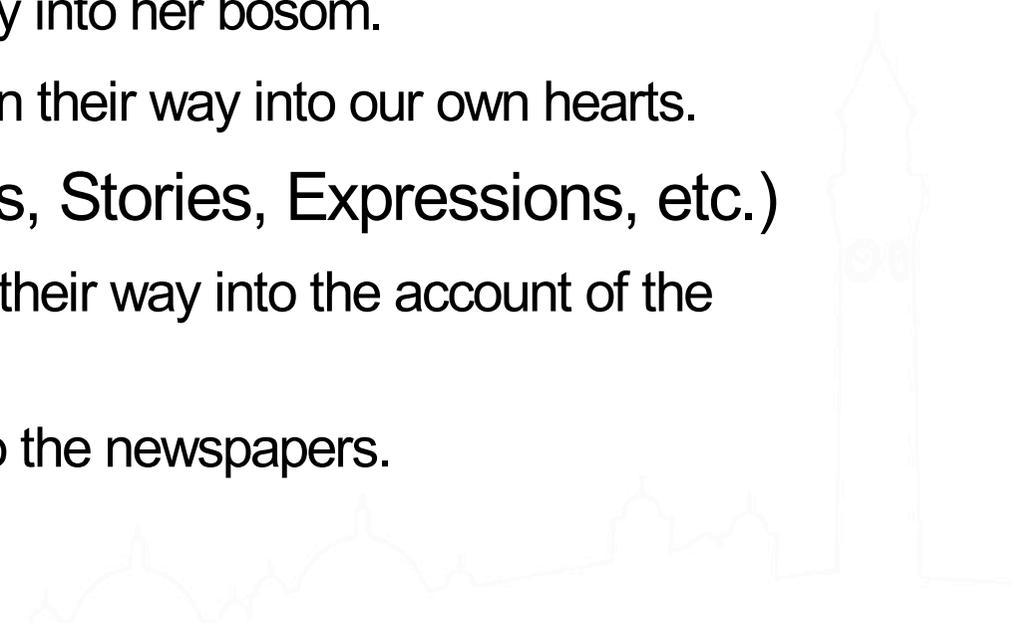
But a silent sorrow had made its way into her bosom.

We parted from friends who had won their way into our own hearts.

## □ Texts are Containers (for Ideas, Stories, Expressions, etc.)

Their prejudices and feelings found their way into the account of the voyage of Lord Byron in the Blonde.

The anecdote has found its way into the newspapers.



# Abstract uses in the 1830s-1850s

## □ A Group of People is a Container for its Members

One could always cut his way into the patrician ranks by the sword.

He has forced his way into good society.

## □ States are Containers

He fought his way into notice by a duel with one of the Rutledges.

The Antiquary [...] was more slow in making its way into favor.

## □ Change of Possession

I'm glad the money finds its way into the pockets of the like of him.

This edition of Cooper will [...] find its way into the hands of every person of taste.

Many a comfortable donation [...] found its way into the parish treasury.



# Abstract uses in the 1830s-1850s

## □ A Whole is a Container for Parts

The black currant should always find its way into every garden.

Tennyson's May Queen [...] has found its way into most of our anthologies for the young.

Where metal finds its way into domestic utensils it is usually in the form of tin water-bottles and ewers.

## □ Subject, Area of Expertise, etc.

The learned pressed their way into the field of metaphysics.

... the presumptuous men who first forced their way into midwifery



# Abstract uses in the 1830s-1850s

## □ Ideas are Moving Entities

In 1811 this new branch of Industry made its way into France.

The declension of vital piety has so found its way into the churches that God does not deign to visit them.

The improvements of civilization are finding their way into their midst.

## □ Sound/light/diseases are Moving Entities

... the brightest sunlight that ever found its way into a kitchen

It was not long before a strange voice made its way into the darkness.

The cholera had made its way into these fastnesses of nature.

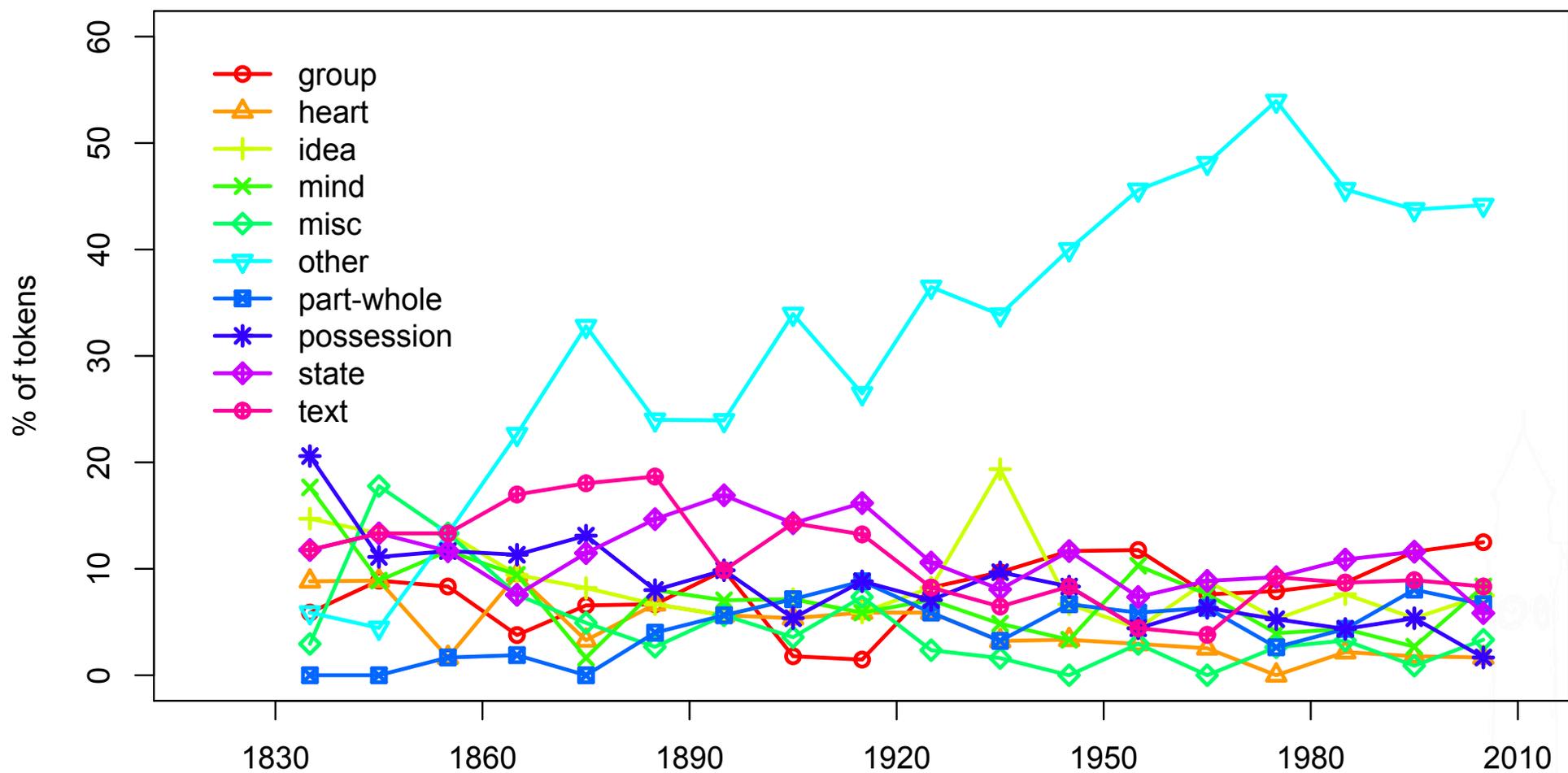


# Metaphors in the *way*-construction

- How well do these early categories cover the later periods?
- The rest of the data (1860 to 2009) was annotated following these twelve categories
- Anything not fitting any category was labeled “other”



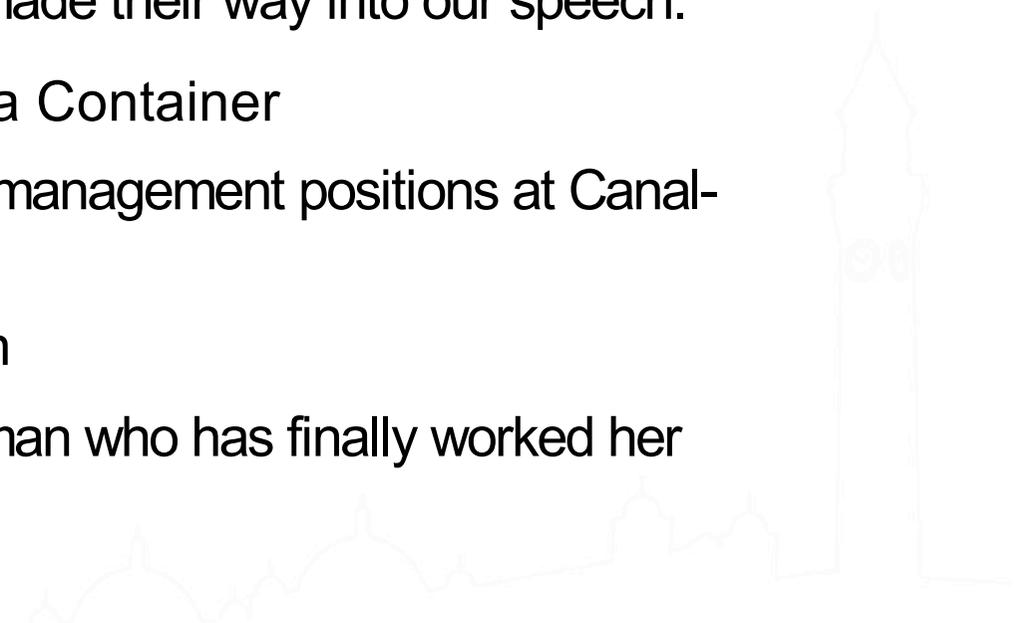
## Distribution of metaphors in the abstract uses of the way-construction



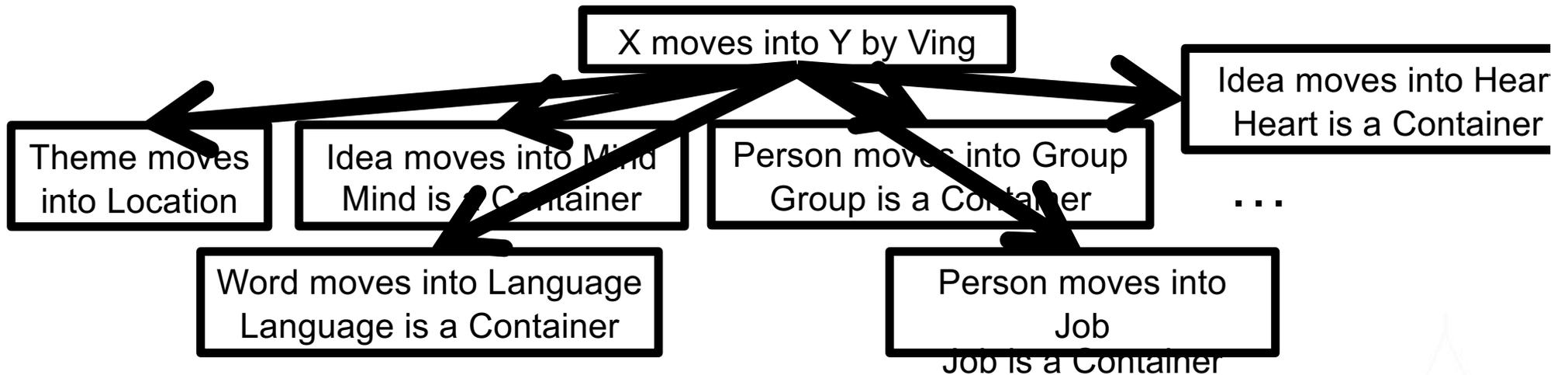
# Metaphors in the *way*-construction

- The increase of the category “other” indicates diversification of the abstract uses
- Some new types:
  - Language is a Container for Words, Expressions, etc.  
Words from that quarter have made their way into our speech.
  - A Role, Job, Function, etc. is a Container  
He has forced his way into top management positions at Canal-Randolph.
  - Joining an Institution is Motion  
... a 39-year-old New York woman who has finally worked her way into college

...



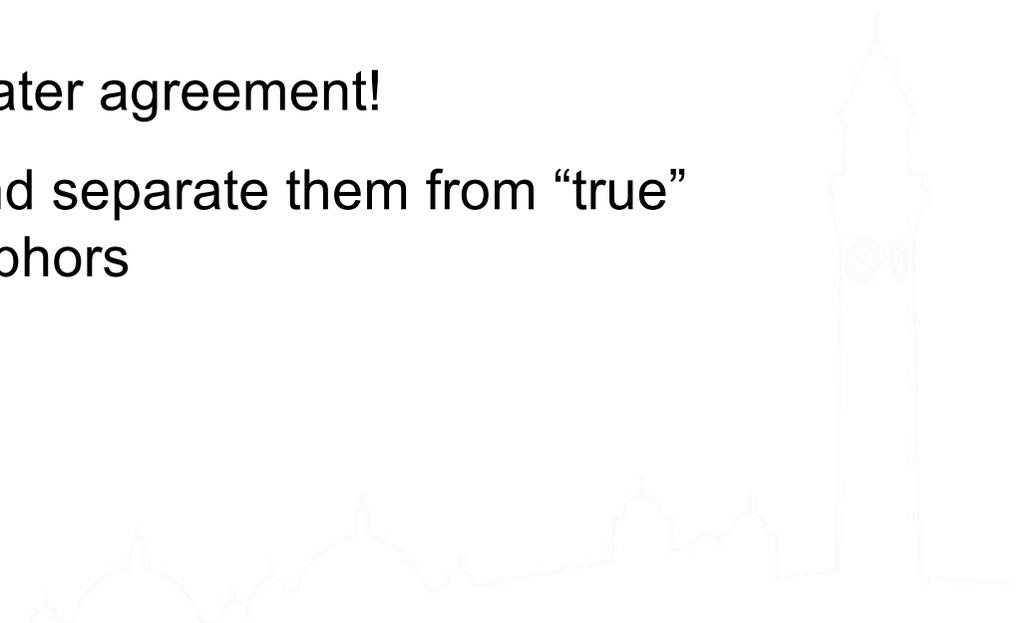
# A usage-based recent history of the *way*-construction



- Increase in schematicity: the creation of new abstract uses reinforces the more schematic node
- This reinforcement in turn invites the creation of more abstract uses

# Summary

- Increased range of source domains metaphorically conceptualised as motion in uses of the *way*-construction
- Evidence for an increase in schematicity, explaining the increase in productivity
- Still work in progress; to-do:
  - Get double coding and inter-rater agreement!
  - Identify the new categories and separate them from “true” creative uses and novel metaphors
  - Look at the other prepositions





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# Thanks for your attention!

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