This paper is intended, if possible, for the workshop “Comings and goings of the come- and go-periphrases in Romance languages”

**Il convient de + inf.: a weak periphrasis for a weak form of necessity**

The phenomenon which this paper addresses has to do with ventive motion, prefixation and deontic modality. Sociative *cum-* is one of the prefixes with which Latin *venire* can combine. The resulting verb initially denoted convergence in space of a number of people coming from different locations. It evolved, presumably early, into a verb denoting physical or cognitive congruence:

_Hae fratri mecum non conveniunt._

‘On these points my brother does not agree with me.’
(Terence, _Adelphi_ 1.1.32-4; tr. by H. Th. Riley)

There is a notional kinship between congruence and the values of propriety and suitability which *convenire* came to encode, also at an early stage, in the form of a unipersonal modal:

_Haud convenit una cum amica ire imperatorem in via._

‘It is not a proper thing for a general to be walking in the street with a mistress.’
(Terence, _Eunuchus_ 3.2.41; tr. by H. Th. Riley)

While reflexes of deontic *convenit* are featured in all the daughter languages, a significant degree of variation is also to be found, both formally and semantically. Thus, in contrast to _il faut + inf._ and to Italian _conviene + inf._, _il convient de + inf._ disallows a dative argument:

*Il nous convient de partir dès demain.*

The purpose of this paper is threefold.

I propose to delineate the formal properties of _il convient de + inf._ in contemporary French with a view to locating it on the “periphrastic gradient”. This involves contrasting it with other deontic exponents, whether they be unipersonal (_il faut + inf._, _il importe de + inf._, _il vous appartient (incombe, revient) de + inf._) or not (_devoir + inf._, _se devoir de + inf._).

A semantic characterization of _il convient de + inf._ is offered that draws on the mapping of modality à la Van der Auwera and Plungian (1998). I attempt to explain, _inter alia_, why _il convient de + inf._ behaves like _il faut + inf._ and _devoir + inf._ with respect to counterfactual morphology and like _il vous appartient de + inf._ and _il vous incombe de + inf._ with respect to Neg-raising. I also propose to touch on the semantics of _il convient de + inf._ at earlier stages in the history of French.

Constructions involving _prosēkei_ in Classical Greek, _it becomes_ in Middle English and _det tillkommer_ in Swedish are evidence that Romance languages are not alone, within Indo-European, in having grammaticalized into unipersonal deontics verbs that are the product of piecing together a verb of coming with a prefix. In none of the three above-mentioned languages, however, does the prefix carry the sociative meaning associated with *cum-*; neither, for that matter, does re- in _il vous revient de + inf._. This suggests that it may be the schematic meaning of ventive verbs that enables them to take this particular grammaticalization pathway, irrespective of the semantics of the prefix. An account is offered, for which facts in Scottish Gaelic and in two non-Indo-European languages (Finnish and Estonian) are adduced.

ventive
deontic
prefixation
grammaticalization
French
Romance