

**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***

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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:

*Haec 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