

**“Sure I’m after seeing him not five minutes ago” (J. Joyce)**

## **The *After-Perfect* Construction in Hiberno-English**

*Mariachiara Berizzi e Silvia Rossi*

(Università di Padova)

### **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

“Hiberno-English” (henceforth HE), the variety (or varieties) of English spoken in Ireland, is characterised not only by very distinctive phonetic/phonological features—as would be expected—but also by a significant degree of morpho-syntactic variation. Much of this variation is to be observed in the verbal system, and more specifically, in the highly specialised aspectual system of the spoken varieties.<sup>2</sup>

However, a peculiar aspectual construction seems to be common to all the varieties of HE, so much so it can be found in the written language as well. This is the *After Perfect* construction (henceforth AFP, Filppula 1999), exemplified in (1):

- (1) She is after breaking the window. (*DHE*, s. v. *after*, p. 3)  
*She has just broken the window.*

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<sup>2</sup> The most relevant aspectual constructions attested cross-dialectally are: a general use of the *simple past*; the use of habitual and punctual *do*; the habitual iterative construction *do be + -ing* form; and, the durative iterative construction *be/bees + -ing* form (cf. Figini 1996).

As (1) shows, the AFP is formally made up of a copular structure followed by the preposition *after*, which is in turn followed by the verb in the *-ing* form. As to its aspectual value, the AFP has a perfective value of the “hot-news” kind (Harris 1984)—or “retrospective” in Cinque’s (1999) terms—and it is usually rendered in Standard English (henceforth SE) with *have just* + past participle, even though many speakers consider this only a close approximation to its real meaning.

The present article is aimed at defining this real meaning from a syntactic perspective. For this purpose, we give a general description of the AFP, considering its diachronic development, its contexts of use and its semantics (Section 2). In Section 3.1., we present the traditional view according to which the AFP originated as a direct calque on a perfective construction of the Irish language. Yet, we would like to leave aside this question in order to analyse its syntactic nature in Section 3.2. since we believe that such an analysis should be preliminary to any discussion on its possible origins in HE. Moreover, we also believe that our analysis does not question the traditional view: it rather adds some new elements for considering this topic from a different perspective. Section 3.3. presents some further evidence in support of our hypothesis. Section 4 concludes.

The data of the following sections are taken from:

- extant linguistic literature on the subject;
- dictionaries, in particular the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, Joseph Wright’s *English Dialect Dictionary (EDD; Wright 1898-1905)* and the *Dictionary of Hiberno-English (DHE, Dolan 2006)*;
- questionnaires and spontaneous speech of two distinct varieties, the one spoken in Dublin and the other spoken in County Clare (western Ireland);
- online material, mainly national newspapers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Blogs and/or forums have been excluded for obvious reasons: clearly, there is no way of assessing whether examples of AFP found in such sources have been produced by native speakers of HE.

## 2. The *After-Perfect*: historical development, contexts of use and semantics

### 2.1. Diachronic Development of the *to be after –ing* construction.

The *to be after –ing* construction with perfective value is first attested in 1698:

- (2) Deare Catolicks, you shee [see] here de cause dat is after bringing you to dis plaace.  
(John Dunton, *Report of a Sermon*; Bliss 1979:183)

However, Bliss (1979)—among others—claims that in its first records, the AFP had more frequently a future value (see examples in (3) from Bliss (1979: 300)), and that the present-day perfective value starts to be found only from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards:

- (3) a. You vill be after being damn'd.  
(Thomas Shadwell, *The Lancashire Witches*, 1681/1682)
- b. I'll be after telling dee de Raison, de Irish Brogue carry de ill smell.  
(John Michelburne, *Ireland Preserved*, 1705)
- c. Well, fat [what] will you be after Drinking?  
(John Durant Breval, *The Play is the Plot*, 1718)

We notice though that the examples of AFP with such future value—not only those in (3) but also many others reported in the literature—occur with the modal verb *will*. Consequently, we suggest that there is no need to postulate a change in the aspectual reading—from future to perfective—of the same construction, but, more simply, that even in these first records the AFP had already a perfective meaning which could take on a future reading because of the presence of *will*. As indirect evidence in favour of this interpretation, it should be noted that in the present-day varieties of HE, the use of *will* with the AFP is not available for many speakers and for those who accept it, it requires a further specification of time against which the event described by the AFP can be set:

- (4) I will be after finishing my work tomorrow by the time you arrive.  
(Clare)

The example in (4) shows the only context in which some of the modern varieties permit the use of *will* with the AFP, that is, in cases of “future in the (perfective) past”. This leads us to suppose that the difference between the first examples in (3) and the modern one in (4) should be attributed to the development of a general restriction on the use of the modals with the AFP.

## 2.2. *Contexts of use and semantics*

The AFP, though being a linguistic phenomenon that pervades all the varieties spoken in Ireland, seems to have some variety- and/or speaker-specific restrictions in both its contexts of use and semantic values. In what follows, we provide a list of the most relevant characteristics of the AFP, commenting more at length on those that are of direct importance to our analysis.

a) The AFP occurs with all persons and also with the expletives *it* (5a) and *there* (5b):

- (5) a. It's after raining not so long ago.  
([www.homepage.eircom.net/~ceindreadh/ceindreadh/roadtrip4.htm](http://www.homepage.eircom.net/~ceindreadh/ceindreadh/roadtrip4.htm))

- b. There's after being a sea change.  
(André Lyder, *Pushers Out. The Inside Story of Dublin's Anti-Drugs Movement*, 2006)

b) It occurs in both polar (6) and *wh*-questions (7):

- (6) a. Is she after doin' somethin' to herself?  
(Doyle, *The Van*, 60 in *DHE*, s.v. *after*, p 3)

- b. What are you after doing?  
(Dublin)

Notice that the AFP occurs also in dependent interrogatives:

- (7) I wonder if she's after forgetting to meet us.  
(Dublin)

c) As far as negation is concerned, the only contexts of the AFP in the negative form that our informants have recovered are all *pragmatically marked* like the following:

- (8) a. A. You're after breaking the window!  
      B. I'm NOT after breaking the window!  
      b. I'm not after breaking the window, am I?  
      c. Tell me I'm not after breaking the window!

In the above examples, *not* negates the truth value of the whole assertion in (8a)A and the speaker's presupposition in (8b-c). Notice that it is not the aspectual content of the AFP that is negated since, even intuitively speaking, it does not seem possible to negate an aspectual category.

To illustrate this further, consider the following examples from Spanish (9) which has a retrospective aspectual construction comparable to the AFP:

- (9) Acabo de comer.  
End-1sg from/of to-eat.  
"I have just eaten/I finish eating"

Consider now what happens with the negated version of (9) given in (10):

- (10) No acabo de comer.  
Neg end-1sg from/of to-eat.

The Spanish verb *acabar* can have a retrospective aspectual value with the preposition *de* but it also has a lexical meaning of its own, i.e., "to finish, to take to an end" as in *Acabo la comida* ("I finish my meal"). In (10) then, it is this lexical meaning that is negated: (10)

means something like “I will not/cannot finish eating”. In other words, (10) is grammatical only when the negation applies to the lexical verb and not to the aspectual meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Further evidence that it is not possible to negate aspect comes from Italian in which it seems possible for the negation to occur with the retrospective aspect, but only in pragmatically marked sentences with a clear intonational pattern (recall (8a)):

- (11) A. Ma fai il bagno?  
But make-2sg the bath  
B. Sì, NON HO appena mangiato!  
Yes Neg have-1sg just eaten.  
“What, are you going for a swim?”  
“Yes, I HAVE NOT just eaten!”

In this case though, the negation does not apply to the lexical verb but to the truth value of the whole sentence, so that (11) means “It is not true that I have just eaten”.<sup>5</sup>

The same thing happens with other aspectual categories. Consider the following sentences in English (12a) and Italian (12b) with the progressive aspect (P. Benincà p.c.):

- (12) a. I’m not reading a book  
b. Non sto leggendo un libro  
Neg stay-1sg reading a book.

(12a,b) mean “I’m doing something which is not reading a book”, i.e., the negation has scope over the lexical meaning of the verb and not over the aspectual construction.

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<sup>4</sup> Another example of this are cases like the following:

- (i) No acabo de llegar que ya me llaman.  
Neg. finish-1sg of/from to-come that already me call-3pl

Here, once again, the meaning of *acabar de* is not aspectual but lexical. For the sake of completeness though, our informant states that (i) improves significantly with a past tense as in (ii):

- (ii) No abía acabado de llegar que ya me llamaban.  
Neg had-1sg finished of/from to-come that already me called-3pl  
“I had hardly arrived when people started calling me”

<sup>5</sup> In Spanish, *No acabo de comer* is very marginally acceptable with such a pragmatic interpretation. The negation of the truth value of the sentence in these cases has to be overtly realised, for example with the periphrasis *No es verdad que...* “It is not true that ...” (B. Arbulu, p.c.).

Going back to the AFP, Kallen (1991: 72) quotes another instance of the negation co-occurring with the AFP, reported here in (13), that does not seem to be pragmatically marked:

(13) It's not after makin it any better.

Notice though that the presence of the negation is required by the indefinite adverbial *any better*, as the ungrammaticality of (14) shows:

(14) \*It makes it any better.

Moreover, the picture is further complicated by the fact that this might be yet another example in which *not* negates the truth value of the sentence so that (13) may be rephrased as “It is not true that it's after making it (\*any) better”.

d) The AFP occurs also with tenses other than the present, in particular in the future with the modal *will* (see Section 2.1.) and in the past with the copula in the *simple past* (15):

(15) a. I was after finishing my work before you arrived.  
(Joyce 1910: 85)

b. I was in the market, and I was after buyin' a load of strawberries.  
(Dublin: M. L; Filppula 1999: 99)

Exactly as for the instances of *will* + AFP, the instances of AFP in the past require the expression of a second point in the time line against which the event described by the AFP can be set. This second point can be overtly present within the sentence or recoverable from the context.

e) The AFP occurs rather infrequently with the modals; the few cases we have come across involve epistemic modals of the *irrealis* type (16):

(16) a. The simple fact is that you can come off the field after scoring three or four points, but, your man might be after doing a lot of harm.  
(*Irish Examiner* online: [archives.tcm.ie/irishexaminer/1999/06/19/shead.htm](http://archives.tcm.ie/irishexaminer/1999/06/19/shead.htm);) )

- b. He might be after falling asleep already when I get back.

(Figini 1996: 115)

f) It can occur with temporal adverb(ial)s that in SE occur with the *present perfect*, for instance, *just* or *already*, but also with other adverb(ial)s that in SE can occur only with the present or with the *simple past*, like *now* or *ago*:

- (17) Jaysus, have you heard what Ryanair are after doing now?

*Irish Independent* online:

<http://www.independent.ie/lifestyle/state-policy----the-herod-way-1818029.html>)

- (18) I'm only after sleeping three hours.

(Dublin)

g) According to Kallen (1991) and Figini (1996: 117), the only verbs that cannot occur in the AFP are stative verbs, in particular verbs of perception like *dislike* and *desire*, and verbs of relation like *own* and *need*. This has also been confirmed by our informants.

After this outline of the morpho-syntactic contexts of the AFP, let us turn to its semantics. As was already pointed out, the AFP expresses perfective aspect, or more precisely, “retrospective”, that is, it refers to an event that was concluded but a while ago or that is being concluded at the moment of utterance:

- (19) a. I'm after breaking up with my boyfriend.

(Dublin)

- b. Are you sure Mary left yesterday?

I'm after seeing her five minutes ago.

(Clare)

As we have already pointed out, the AFP can occur with the adverb *just* (20):

- (20) a. Mystery Jets are just after finishing a short run of gigs in the States.

(*Galway Independent*, 25/02/2009, [www.galwayindependent.com](http://www.galwayindependent.com))



- b. Joss as you know is married and he's just after having his first child.  
([www.headfort.com/old\\_pupils.html](http://www.headfort.com/old_pupils.html))

In the above examples, *just* does not modify the retrospective aspect proper but rather, it draws the event of the AFP even closer to the moment of utterance.

It is possible to set up the temporal scale in (21) on which *just*, *after* and *just after* are distributed with respect to their temporal distance from the moment of utterance:

(21) just > after > just after > UTTERANCE.

When it occurs with the *present perfect*, *just* is the furthest in time: this is the reason why for many speakers of HE *just* + *present perfect* is close but does not entirely capture the real meaning of the AFP.

Lastly, some speakers seem to prefer the AFP in pragmatically charged contexts, more precisely with those that involve “disapproval”:

- (22) a. Are you after hitting your brother?!  
(Dublino)
- b. You're after breaking the gate!  
(Kallen 1991: 66)

### **3. A calque on Irish?**

#### *3.1. The Irish Construcion tar éis + Verbal Noun*

As already mentioned above, the AFP is traditionally considered a direct calque on an Irish retrospective construction which is composed of the following elements:

- a form of the copula *bi* “to be there” (usually *tá*);
- the compound preposition *tar éis* “after”;
- a verbal noun (VN) after the preposition;

Here are some examples of the *tar éis* construction with a transitive (23a) and an unaccusative verb (23b):

- (23) a. *Tá Mairéad tar éis amhrán a chasadh.*  
COP M. after song PRT singing-VN  
Margaret has just sung a song.
- b. *Tá sí tar éis imeacht.*  
COP her after leaving-VN  
She's just left

The correspondence between the elements of the *tar éis* construction and the English elements of the AFP is easily detectable. This clear correspondence and the fact that the AFP is found only in HE<sup>6</sup> are considered by most scholars the main evidence in support of the origin of the AFP for direct influence of the Irish substratum (Figini 1996: 113).

In our analysis of the AFP we would like to leave aside the rather complex question of the influence of the Celtic substratum since we think that it does not tell us much about the syntactic structure of this construction. We would like to draw attention instead to the fact that the AFP is made up, first of all, of elements of the English language, which—thanks to their syntactic and semantic characteristics—can legitimate the existence of such construction alone. In what follows, we will take a look “inside” these elements in order to put forward a strictly syntactic analysis of the AFP.

### 3.2. *A syntactic approach to the AFP.*

The starting point of our syntactic analysis of the AFP is the difference between the interpretation given by HE native speakers and that given by native speakers of British

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<sup>6</sup> The AFP is attested in other varieties of English, among these Newfoundland English and some Scottish varieties. These varieties however have a close relation to HE.

English (henceforth BrE).<sup>7</sup> Here follows an extract from the *DHE* (s.v. *after*, p. 3) that illustrates clearly—and quite amusingly—this difference:

An Englishman who had settled in Ireland once related to me a conversation which he had with an Irish servant. “Mary,” he said, “will you please light the fire in my study?” “I’m just after lighting it.” she replied. “Then do it at once,” he said. “Don’t I tell you, sir,” she said, “that I’m just after doing it?” (Birmingham, George, *The Lighter Side of Irish Life*, London and Edinburgh: Foulis 1912, p. 170)

The misunderstanding arises from the fact that the BrE speaker takes the AFP to mean “I’m going to”, i.e., he gives it a “prospective” or “future-intentional” interpretation (“I’m going to do it/it is my intention to do it”), an interpretation which is in fact “completely unavailable in Hiberno-English” (Cottell 2003:2: fn. 3).

As a first and still rather unrefined attempt to translate this into syntax, we propose that the two different interpretations (HE retrospective vs. BrE prospective) are the result of two different underlying parsing processes. HE speakers parse the AFP as in (24):

(24) [I am] [**after** lighting it]

while BrE speakers parse it as in (25):

(25) [I am **after**] [lighting it]

In other words, we propose that the parsing underlying the HE retrospective interpretation is made up of a form of the verb *to be* (non-copular) and a PP in which the verb in the *-ing* form is the object of the preposition *after*. On the other hand, the parsing of the BrE prospective interpretation is made up of a verbal complex involving a particle and a verb in the *-ing* form which can be considered the direct object of the verbal complex.

Let us try now to analyse this in more formal terms. In line with the Cartographic Approach as developed by Cinque (2010) and Svenonius (2010) among others, we take the

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<sup>7</sup> However, this is not restricted to BrE: native speakers of American English give to the AFP the same interpretation given by BrE speakers (C. Tortora, p.c.).

internal structure of the PP to be articulated in a number of functional projections, here simplified in (26) for the purposes of this article:

(26) [PP<sub>dir</sub>[PP<sub>stat</sub> AT [DP<sub>place</sub> [AxPartP [PP P [NP<sub>place</sub> [PLACE]]]]]]]]]]

The higher portion of this structure is the functional area of the PP where directionality and stativity are encoded. More precisely, directionality is encoded in the higher projection PP<sub>dir</sub>, which can be realised as PP<sub>source</sub>, PP<sub>goal</sub> or PP<sub>path</sub>. Stativity or stative location is encoded in PP<sub>stat</sub> (Place in Svenonius’s (2010) terms) by the null preposition AT, which is always present, also in directional PPs (cf. *under the table* should be AT *under the table*). AxPartP hosts ‘axial prepositions’, that is, prepositions “which define a place by projecting vectors on one of the possible axes (front/back, up/down, etc.), which depart from the object that provides the reference point” (Cinque, 2010: 8). This object is the Ground, that is hosted in NP<sub>place</sub>.

Notice however that this fine structure has been proposed for *spatial* Ps while the meaning of *after* in the AFP is temporal. In order to apply such a structure to the *after*-PP of the AFP we have to show that *after*—and consequently the whole PP—has a spatial meaning and, more precisely, that it can express stative location. A first piece of evidence in this direction comes from the observation that in many languages of the world, spatial stative Ps are used to express punctual time, for instance *at* and *on* in English, *a* “to/at” in Italian, *an* “on” in German etc.

Secondly, exquisitely temporal Ps like *after* and *before* are etymologically locative: *after* for instance comes from Old English *æfter*, which is a compound of a form of *of* “from” (*apo-* in Greek, *ab* in Latin, *off* in Modern English) designating origin/provenience plus the IE comparative element *\*-ter-*. *After* thus originally meant “more away than, further off than”, a meaning that is not only spatial but indeed, and most importantly for us, stative.

Moreover, Roy & Svenonius (2008) have applied this structure of spatial Ps to temporal and causal Ps, noticing that the “difference between the spatial dimension and the temporal dimension is the switch from three dimensions to one.” (Roy & Svenonius 2008:4-5).

Lastly, evidence that *after* can be spatial (both stative and directional) is given by the archaic or dialectal uses of this preposition reported by both *OED* and *EDD*. In (27) *after* is stative and assumes the meaning of *behind*:

- (27) I left him after me.  
(Ireland: *EDD*, s.v. *after*, 2; cfr. SE “I left him *behind* me”)

It is important to point out though that according to the *OED* the stative use of *after* is now obsolete, and indeed, a sentence like the one in (28), when not idiomatic (see below), gets the interpretation of “I am the next”, for example in a queue:

- (28) I am after you.

Furthermore, sentences in which *after* has the meaning of *behind*—and is thus undoubtedly stative—are ungrammatical in Modern SE (Tyler & Evans 2003:173):

- (29) a. \*The road is after the house.  
b. \*Sarah is after the tree.

As far as the directional/*path* meaning of *after* is concerned, (30) has the meaning of “following the course of, alongside of” and (31) has the figurative meaning of “following, in accordance with, according to”:

- (30) a. Go arter (after) the hedge.  
(North Hampshire: *EDD*, s.v. *after*, 1)
- b. You’ll find the path after the hedge.  
(Gloucestershire: *EDD*, *ibid.*)<sup>8</sup>
- c. That merciless ghost that walks the sea after our ship for ever.  
(1816, Wilson, *City of Plague*, I. ii: 271; *OED* s. v. *after*, B *prep.* 1.a.)
- (31) a. He said his peace wo’d for wo’d efter th’ book.  
(North Lincolnshire: *EDD*, s. v. *after*, 1)

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<sup>8</sup> Wright (*EDD*, s. v. *after*, 1) gives this as an example of *after* with the meaning of “following the course of, alongside of. Also figuratively, following, in accordance with”. This example is then to be rephrased as “You’ll find the path (that goes/runs) after the hedge”.

- b. After our lawe he ought to dye.  
(1535, Coverdale, *John* xix. 7; *OED* s. v. *after*, B *prep.* IV 12 a.)
- c. The oath of office was administered after the Scotch fashion.  
(1855, Macaulay, *Hist. Eng.* III. 292; *OED* s. v. *after*, B *prep.* IV, 13 a.)

In the light of what has been shown so far, we can rephrase an instance of AFP (32) as (33):

- (32) She's after breaking the window.
- (33) She's AT THE PLACE THAT IS after THE PLACE OF breaking the window  
(= She's AT THE PLACE THAT IS more away/farther off than THE PLACE OF breaking the window.)

On the basis of (33) we propose that the structure of the *after* PP in the AFP is as follows:

- (34) [PP<sub>dir</sub>[PP<sub>stat</sub> **AT** [DP<sub>place</sub> [AxPartP **after** [PP P [NP<sub>place</sub> NP [PLACE]]]]]]]]

That is, the PP which hosts *after* is a prepositional argument of stative location selected by the verb *to be* by virtue of its existential lexical meaning (“to be there”, cf. *Mary is AT in the garden*). This argumental *after*-PP has a stative meaning because of the silent AT in PP<sub>stat</sub> introducing the DP<sub>place</sub><sup>9</sup> headed by a null PLACE, which is in turn the possessee of the Ground, i.e., in the case of the AFP, of the deverbal NP (“breaking the window” is the

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<sup>9</sup> For the sake of simplicity, we assumed here that AT takes a DP<sub>place</sub> modified by *after* as its complement but the question is more complex than that. As the rephrased version in (33) shows, it is possible that AT takes a null PLACE as its complement that is then modified by a reduced relative (THAT IS) which has the DP<sub>place</sub> as its complement. *After* would then modify the second null PLACE.

Ground in (32)).<sup>10</sup> *After* acts thus as a modifier of the DP<sub>place</sub>, defining the portion of space—of the time-line—in relation to the Ground. As such, it is hosted in SpecAxPartP.<sup>11</sup>

Let us now consider what happens to the preposition *after* when the AFP is interpreted by BrE speakers. Recall that we attributed the BrE prospective reading of the AFP to the different way in which BrE speakers parse the HE construction (see (24) vs. (25)). (24) and (25) were a rather rough attempt to show that in the HE AFP *after* is part of the PP while in the BrE interpretation *after* seems to be external to the PP and to form instead a verbal complex with the verb *to be*, that does not seem to have a lexical/existential meaning. The prospective interpretation of the AFP, we propose, is to be due to the fact that BrE interpret *after* as the *after* in the verbal complex exemplified in (35):

- (35) a. She's after your money.  
b. The policeman's after him.  
(Cheshire: *EDD*, s. v. *after*, 7)

Thus, we propose that (25) is the result of applying the syntactic structure that lies under (35).

The next question to be addressed is where BrE speakers locate *after* in the PP when it is part of the verbal complex *to be after*. Recall that *after* has a directional/path meaning that comes out very clearly with verbs of motion (36). It seems to us that this directional/path meaning is retained also in cases like (35), as we have already seen, and in those phrasal verbs and/or verbal complexes in which *after* means *in pursuit of*, passing into the meanings of “*in order to overtake, learn, obtain, get, have.*” (*OED*, s. v. *after*, B *prep.* 5)<sup>12</sup>:

- (36) a. Mary's looking after the kids.  
b. We're not going after civilian targets.  
c. Mary asked/inquired after you.

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<sup>10</sup> We consider the gerundive form of a verb (*-ing* form) to be a verbal noun (nominal in nature but closer to a verb syntactically, cf. *Reading (\*of) books is a good way to learn a language*).

<sup>11</sup> Cinque (in press) defines “complex prepositions” as modifiers of the Ground and as such they are Specifiers rather than Heads (contra Svenonius, in press).

<sup>12</sup> Examples in (36d-f) are no longer productive in SE, *after* having been replaced by other prepositions such as *at* or *for*.

- d. He after honour hunts, I after love  
(1591, Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I. i. 63: *OED*, s. v. *after*, B *prep.* 5 d.)
- e. He shouted after me down the street.  
(*OED*, s. v. *after* B *prep.* 5 c.)
- f. Because I endeavoured after peace, therefore I fall.  
(1800, Coleridge, *Wallenstein*, II. iii.: *OED*, s. v. *after* B *prep.* 5 e.)

On the basis of this evidence and since the stative meaning of *after* is no longer available in BrE, we assume that for BrE speakers *after* cannot be in PP<sub>stat</sub>, but only in PP<sub>dir</sub>, more precisely, in PP<sub>path</sub>:

(37) [PP<sub>path</sub> **after** [PP<sub>stat</sub> AT [DP<sub>place</sub> [AxPartP [PP P [NP<sub>place</sub> NP [PLACE]]]]]]]]

In this position, *after* receives a directional interpretation which is responsible for the above intentional meaning and consequently, for the “prospective” interpretation of the AFP.

The picture we have outlined so far is in fact an oversimplification of a much more complex situation: it should be remembered that we are dealing with an aspectual construction in the case of the AFP, and with a verb-particle construction in the case of the verbal complex *to be after*. This means that the two constructions differ not only with respect to the position of the preposition inside the PP but also, and more importantly, with respect to the nature of the relation established between the verb and the preposition (or particle). This is certainly a topic of the most importance that we leave to future research.

In conclusion, we have shown that different interpretations of the same superficial string *to be + after + -ing* form depend on the complex semantics of the preposition *after* and on the different positions that it can occupy in the syntactic structure. Cross-linguistically, this behaviour is to be observed also in other prepositions sharing the same semantic and syntactic complexity. In particular, this is true of the preposition *drio* (“behind/along”, < Lat. *de retro* “to the back”) in the north-eastern Italian varieties of the Trevisan-Feltrino-Bellunese group. Berizzi and Vedovato (2009) have shown that *drio* is characterised by a semantic complexity which partly corresponds with that of *after*: *drio* can mean “behind”, “following”, “along”. “according to” and “after”. In addition to that, they also show that *drio* appears in the same kind of constructions in which *after* appears: *drio* is found in a number of verb particle constructions like *andar drio*, “to follow” (cf. *to go after*) and *andar/essar drio* “to go/be



behind” meaning “to look after”, and, most importantly to us, in the aspectual construction *essar drio far* “to be behind/along doing” to express progressive aspect.

3.3. *Some final remarks on the BrE interpretation of the AFP.*

In order to confirm our hypothesis that different interpretations of the AFP depend on different structural positions of *after*, we submitted the instance of AFP in (38) to two non-HE native speakers of English (one of BrE, London, and one of American English, New York).

(38) I’m after telling her the truth.

Both could accept it exclusively with the interpretation in (39):

(39) I’m going to/it is my intention to tell her the truth.

It should be noted however that we are dealing with acceptability judgements: to our informants, the construction as such—i.e. (38) to express (39)—sounds obsolete and they would not produce it in spontaneous speech.

Further evidence for a different syntactic parsing underlying the two interpretations of the AFP comes from tests with the negation *not* and the adverb *just*. As already shown above, the AFP does not occur with negation in unmarked contexts and when it occurs with *just*, the adverb only reduces the span of time between the conclusion of the event described in the AFP and the moment of utterance, that is, *just* is still an adverb of time.

On the contrary, our BrE informant accepts (40), again with the interpretation of “I am not going to/It is not my intention to”).

(40) I’m not after telling her the truth.

As to the adverb *just*, he also accepted (41) with the interpretation of “It is *only* my intention to/ I am *simply* going to”, in which, crucially, *just* is not temporal.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Our AmE informant provided the same judgements. She also added that if in (41) *just* has a temporal meaning the sentence will be ungrammatical while it is perfectly acceptable if *just* has the meaning “only”.

(41) I'm just after telling her the truth.

Similarly, also the verbal constructs *to be/to go after* can be modified by the negation and the adverb *just*, yielding exactly the same interpretation just described for (40) and (41). One possible line of thought that could be further investigated is the hypothesis that these verbal constructs could have a silent verb in its *-ing* form as in (42):

(42) She's after GETTING your money.

#### 4. Conclusions

On the basis of the interpretation that BrE speakers give to the HE AFP, we have shown that different interpretations of the same superficial construction correspond to different positions occupied by the preposition *after* within the PP. More specifically, in the HE AFP *after* is hosted in the projection AxPartP under a silent stative preposition AT, conferring to it a “stative” meaning (chiefly temporal). On the other hand, in the BrE interpretation of the AFP, *after* is hosted in PP<sub>path</sub>, thus giving it a locative, more precisely directional/*path* meaning, from which the “intentional” or “prospective” reading of the whole construction is originated.

As regards the origin of the AFP as a calque on the Irish *tar éis* construction, we believe that our syntactic analysis of the phenomenon can provide new elements in order to better understand the nature of the relation between the two constructions. We leave this most interesting topic for future research.

Finally, we showed that the syntactic behaviour of *after* is coherent with that of other prepositions with similar characteristics, for instance with that of the preposition *drio* in the north-eastern dialects of the Veneto region.

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