A Private History of the Preposition By in English: From Instrumental to Passive Agent

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I revisit the controversial origin of the preposition by as marker of the demoted agent in the English passive construction. I claim that this use emerged from instrumental schemata which were once highly prominent in the history of English. I organize in a radial category the most relevant senses by convey, both from historical times and in PDE. This analysis is intended to represent a polysemic network of meanings which show the motivated process leading to the outcome of an agency schema to express the passive agent.

KEY WORDS: instrumentality, agency, historical linguistics.

RESUMEN

En este estudio he querido retomar el origen algo controvertido del uso de la preposición by en inglés como marcador del agente desfocalizado en la construcción pasiva. En el presente trabajo propongo que varios esquemas instrumentales, que en su día fueron relevantes en la historia del inglés, desempeñaron un papel fundamental en el surgimiento de un esquema de agencia para apresar el agente pasivo. Para ello, varios de los sentidos más relevantes de la preposición by, ya históricos como de uso actual, se organizan aquí formando una categoría con estructura radial. Este análisis pretende representar una red polisémica que ilustre los procesos que motivaron la emergencia del esquema de agencia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: instrumentalidad, agencia, lingüística histórica.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper I account for the emergence of the preposition by as a marker of agency in the English passive construction, as in the sentence the house was built by Mary. I claim that this use of by first emerged as an extension from other instrumental schemata the preposition had been rendering throughout the history of the language in a rather stable way.

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Some of these instrumental schemata have got lost in the way, having been taken over by other prepositions, namely with and through. However, they have contributed deeply to the forging of the use of by as a marker of a demoted agent.

I adopt here the cognitive approach already taken by several authors on the subject of polysemic networks, especially on preposition extensional patterns (Lakoff, 1987; Lindner, 1982; Langacker, 1991a). I array several schemata of by in the structural shape of a radial category, where nodes are linked via image-schema transformations to more central senses (Lakoff, 1987). This type of analysis stems from the belief that patterns of meaning can be accounted as motivated within a given conceptual system, and that different senses may arise from recurrent extensions elaborated via metaphorical or metonymic processes. In the present analysis I will only focus on those senses of by which play a relevant role in the emergence of the use of by as marker of a demoted agent. In this fashion, since no exhaustive analysis of the semantic net of by is intended here, other senses the preposition renders will be thus ignored.

I present historical data along the paper in order to illustrate the productivity of some of the schemata in a prior stage of the language. This is done in the belief that diachronic data are relevant to illustrate the semantic status of the network throughout history. Besides, the radial structure has evolved through time to its present state by virtue of language being a continuum, and no speaker is believed to make her language up by starting from zero, because there must be a core structure preserved and inherited. The semantic trends existing in the present radial structure were motivated at some time in the history of the continuum. Although intermediate crucial steps in the elaboration of the extensions might have got lost in the way, the actual shape of the semantic configuration itself is still preserved, and it is well available to the current speaker.

The preposition by shows in present-day English (PDE) a large variety of meanings. To illustrate this diversity consider the following examples:

1. I have a cottage by the big lake
2. Mary drove by her old family house
3. The thief came in the house by the back door
4. He cherished his lover by giving her presents
5. Perer was bitten by a strange creature coming from outer space

In (1) the preposition renders a static spatial scenario, where a cottage is allocated in the proximity of a lake. In accord with other analysts (Langacker, 1987), I will call the cottage, or the entity being located, the Trajector (TR), while the big lake, or the spatial reference, will be treated as Landmark (LM). This terminology will be kept along more abstract extensions where both TR and LM are no longer spatial. In (2) the schema is dynamic, in the sense that it construes a motion event where Mary, the figure of the motion event (Talmy, 1985), here functioning as TR of by, is taken as moving to the proximity of the LM, her old family house. There is yet the further implication of Mary not stopping at the house, but driving on. Sentence (3) is an instance of an instrumental use of by. The LM of the preposition, the back door is profiled as the place used by the thief to enter the house. This instrumental sense is also present in (4), where the LM is no longer construed as a spatial locus but as an action. In (5) we have an instance of the canonical coding of a demoted agent in the passive construction. The goal of this paper is to show how the use of by as in (5)
emerges from previous instrumental senses. The claim is further supported by the fact that this use of by results as a much later historical preference over other prepositions.

II. SPATIAL SCHEMATA

Spatial schemata will serve to provide basis for further extensions. For analytical purposes, a description to schemata and participants involved will be given in the introduction of the most relevant schemata. Spatial schemata subdivide on the one hand in those schemata which render a static spatial configuration, and on the other, those which further incorporate a temporal dimension, and render dynamic spatial configurations.

II.1. STATIC SPATIAL SCHEMATA

II.1.1. Static Spatial Schema BY (1)

Description: Static Spatial Configuration. The TR is described as located in a static fashion within a short spatial distance from the LM. Figure (1) illustrates this configuration. The formalization is done in the shape these characterizations receive in Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991a, 1991b):

![Figure (1)](image)

Sentence (1) repeated here as (6) illustrates schema BY (1):

6. *I have a corrage by the big lake*

This basic spatial configuration has been very stable throughout time, and it is widely anested in texts. Sentences in (7) illustrate the schema in different periods of the English language:

7. a. OE (971). *Pa sæt þær sum blind þearfæ be don wege*  
   "A poor blind sat in need by the path"

   b. EME (1160). *Hve sætæn be þam stronde*  
   "They sat by the beach"

   c. LME (1400). *To be laid by hir legis*  
   "Hard by this island is Ruigna"

   d. EModE (1648). *The clock may strike by us without being heard*  
   "Hard by this island is Ruigna"

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f. ModE (1881).

Where he has been buried by Chaucer and Cowley

When the LM is construed as a three dimensional (3-DIM) entity, it is often the case that it may also receive a further characterization as having sides and possible front-back and top-bottom orientation. In this case, BY (1) allocates the TR with respect to a lateral region of the LM. When the LM is a human being, the region profiled is one side of the human body. In sentences (8) and (9) below, the LM is thought to have an inherent side, for this reason, the configuration can be expressed either by means of BY (1) or with the complex expressions, [TR by the side of LM] and/or [TR by LM’s side].

8. There is a suspicious man sitting by that old lady / by the side of that old lady
10. She spent the night by him while he was sick / by his side while he was sick.

II.1.2. Static Spatial Schema ‡ BY (2)

This schema is a metaphorical extension of BY (1), and the same description can apply here. The LM is construed as a human being. The conceptual metaphor SHARING THE SAME SPACE IS BEING A COMPANION (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), allows the reading of the LM as being the TR’s companion. However the schema is no longer productive in PDE, since the preposition with has taken over to render this configuration, as shown by the modern translation to the historical sentences below:

Figure (2)

11.

a. OE Wif he bibe anum man “The woman who lives with a man”
b. OE Pa adre be him libben “The others live with him”
c. ME Heo livep be him “She lives with him”

Schema BY (2) is marginally present in PDE though. It accounts for construals where the TR is profiled in a state of solitude or doing a given action with no help of others. This reading is achieved from inferences made via a complex metaphor: being alone is thought of as being in one’s own company, hence the TR’s self is profiled as the accompanying LM with respect to which the TR is allocated. A further extension accounts for sentences (12) and (13) via metonymic inference, since being alone when involved in an activity implies performing the activity without the help of others:

12. Since they got married they have lived by themselves in the mountains
13. He wrote the letter all by himself

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The metaphor seems to have been stable in Germanic, since it is also evidenced in German *einsam sein* ‘one together’ be-INF and Icelandic *væru einn saman* to be-INF one-MASC:NOM together. Both collocations translate “be alone” or “be by oneself” (lit., “be one together”). The same is true for historical English:

14.  
   a. ME (1300).  
      He *fand his* cosin Ion, in *wilderness* him*self*  
      “He found his cousin Ion, in the wilderness by himself”  
   b. ME  
      *po heo were al in hem selve*  
      “They were then all by themselves”  
   c. EModE (1559).  
      *Weigh this matter by your self*  

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain the comitative use of *with* in PDE as emerging from the very same conceptual metaphor SHARING THE SAME SPACE IS BEING A COMPANION. This metaphor is further taken up as the source to render some instrumental configurations, where instruments are seen as companions. This phenomenon can also apply to account for the relevant instrumental reading of *by* in the historical period, treated as *BY* (5), as we will see below in section (III.1). In order to keep track of the emergence of instrumental readings, I introduce in the next section the concept of functionality of the LM.

II.2. FUNCTIONALITY OF THE LANDMARK

One of the fundamental entailments from the spatial configurations rendered by *BY* (1) is that the TR is thought to be located in an optimal proximity to the LM so that it can interact with the LM. In this sense, the LM is ascribed certain functionality if the TR is believed to make use of the LM for some purpose. This is a relevant feature of the configuration, and instrumental extensions of *by* in PDE emerge from highlighting the functionality of the LM. When the functionality of the LM is relevant enough for a given configuration, I mark it in the description of the schema at issue by saying that “the functionality of the LM is highlighted”. The LM may be further seen as having a certain space with functional property which I will call “the functional space of the LM”. This latter feature is especially useful to account for certain expressions in more static configurations, where the LM is construed as a location, and the functional space of the LM refers to the space where the TR is thought to interact. However, if there is no special functional space ascribed to the LM, *BY* (1) will profile then a mere spatial configuration within an Euclidean space. As illustration of this concept, consider the following configurations, in sentences (14) and (15):

14.  
   *The red chair is by the wooden table*  
15.  
   *Mary knew the Avon-lady was standing by her front door*  

In (14) there is no particular functional space ascribed to the LM - *the wooden table* - and consequently either side of the table would serve equally good as spatial reference to allocate the TR - *the red chair*. However in (15), the front door is ascribed a functional space by convention and refers to the space of the main entrance of a house. According to this reading, the space of the LM in (15) is not restricted exclusively to the actual Euclidean space the door frame occupies. In the contextual situation evoked by (15) the Avon-lady as

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TR could have been moving impatiently around the porch, and she would still be said to be located as "waiting by the front door". In contrast to (15), consider context in (16) below, as an illustration of a configuration where the TR is located this time with respect to a door with no such functional space, in this case, the wooden board covering the hole of the frame in the wall:

16. Mary got mad at the Avon-lady and kicked the door shut in a rage. The hinges got loose, and the door fell to the ground. This simply was too much for the poor Avon-lady, who fainted, fell, and lay down by the damaged door until she was found by the milk man.

II.3. DYNAMIC SPATIAL SCHEMATA

The preposition by renders a great variety of spatial configurations through different schemata. I will treat here only those schemata which contribute to the emergence of some instrumental sense. For this purpose consider the following sentences:

17. The suspicious truck drove by the house
18. The car drove by
19. Mr. Jones stopped by Mary's house in his way home
20. Peter came by my office and had a drink

In (17) and (18) the TRs - the suspicious truck and the car - do not stop at the LMs, the house or a reference location which is contextually known. In clear contrast, sentences (19) and (20) profile TRs - Mr. Jones and Peter - which do stop at LMs, Mary's house and my office. Sentences (19) and (20) instantiate schemata which highlight the LM as functional, the only difference being that in (20) the LM is treated as goal. I will devote the following sections to illustrate the two schemata motivating (19) and (20).

II.3.1. Dynamic Spatial Schema BY (3)

Description: The TR moves and describes a path in relation to LM by keeping to the spatial configuration of BY (1). The TR has two destination goals. The first and main destination (goal I) is located further away from the space of the LM. The LM is treated as a secondary destination (goal II). The functionality of the LM is highlighted. The LM is construed as a location - the schema does not allow human beings as functional LMs. The LM is located on the TR's path, in between the origin and the main destination. Figure (3) illustrates the schema:
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There are several entailments arising from the schema:

1. The TR starts off moving from origin
2. The TR enters the space of the LM, and achieves goal (II)
3. The TR exits the space of the LM in pursuit of goal (I)

The following sentences illustrate the schema:

21. *I went by Peter’s office on my way home*
22. *The Wise Kings went by Jerusalem on their way back to Persia*

Schema *BY* (3) highlights the functionality of the LM, since the TR is believed to interact with the LM in some way or another. As an illustration, in (21) above, the speaker moves to *Peter’s office* as to pursue some goal, namely, speak with *him* or arrange some schedule. In (22), *Jerusalem* is not thought as the mere landscape *in the Kings’ way back to their homeland, but instead it is believed as a secondary goal *in their journey.*

The schema can be further extended to cover uses when the functionality of the LM is even more relevant. This is achieved by not mentioning the main destination in the predication. This construal has however a low usage in PDE, and it is highly restricted to particular verbs, as in sentence (23) below, where the verb *come* refers to the deictic motion toward speaker. The *same* can be said for (24), where *stop profiles* the end-focus of the TR at the space of the LM. Although no even *reference* is made to the primary destination, this falls within the default interpretation of the situations referred to, since they evoke a frame of a *visit,* where the TR stays at somebody else’s space for a short while, and then sets off for some other place:

23. *He will come by my office and have a drink*
24. *We stopped by the Simpson’s last night*

When the *functionality* of the LM is *backgrounded* we get readings like sentences (17) and (18) above, where the TR *does not* stop its motion to interact with the LM. In this fashion, sentence (25) below, renders ambiguous readings. In schema *BY* (3), locations are the only LM’s to be construed as functional, human beings are hence ruled out from these configurations. This is illustrated by the *infelicity* of (26), which can only render a non-interactional spatial *configuration, alike* in sentences (17) and (18) above:

25. *She went by her office/ the house*
26. *She went by Peter*
   intended meaning: ‘she moved towards him and stopped close to him’

In historical periods there was no *constraint* to *profile* human beings as LM’s of *BY* (3). It looks as if by had become increasingly more selective with regard to types of LM’s, and had opted to favor those with a functional component:

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27. a. EME (1175). *Com bi þis fowvandede mon*
   "come next to this injured man"

b. ME (1330). *All par he came by, he robbed*
   "he robbed everyone he came close by"

d. ME (1340). *An angil come & hem forbad to wend by hym (Herod)*
   "an angel came and forbid him to go close to him"

e. EModE (1535). *Seek some means of how you may come by him*
   To come by him, where he stands.

II.3.2. Dynamic Spatial Schema BY (4)

Description: The LM is construed as a two dimensional (2-DIM) bounded entity.
prototypically, a road or a path. The TR moves and describes a path along the space of the
LM by keeping a spatial configuration defined by BY (1). The TR has a destination goal. The
destination is located further away from the space of the LM. The functionality of the LM
is highlighted. The LM is construed as the path.

![Figure (4)](image)

The following sentences illustrate the schema:

28. *She came to the city by the highway*
29. *The churches are within 4 miles of one another by the nearest road*

In sentence (28) the destination goal is overtly mentioned as the *city*. In (29), *the churches*
are construed as destinations, although there is no overt TR. The 2-DIM LM can be further
construed as not being clearly bounded. In the following sentences, the instrumental reading of the
LMs is already a salient one:

30. *She got here by land*
31. *I sent the package by sea to Singapore*

Historical data support the existence of this schema from an early period:

32. a. OE (888). *le þe læde bi dam wege*
   "I lead you on this way"

b. ME. *Pere com a preost bi de weie*
   "There came a priest by that road"

c. EME (1205). *Comen bi te & bi londe feole cunne læden*
   "People knew how to come by see and by many lands"

d. EModE (1630). *He went by water to Greenwich*
c. **ModE** (185 1). *Why nor send a parcel by rail?*

The present schema seems to be **inter-connected** with schema **BY** (3) because it helps to raise instrumental readings. The functionality of the LM is highlighted in both, although **only** in **BY** (4) as the means for the TR to achieve its destination goal. The schema has a low productivity in PDE if the goal is not profiled and thus the functionality of the LM is backgrounded. Hence, the archaic character of the following sentences:

33. *We chose to go by the scenic route*
34. *Dorothy chose to go by the yellow brick road*

In the above sentences the TR moves towards an implicit destination goal, only retrievable from contextual knowledge: (33) evokes someone in motion towards a given place, and deciding to take the road that is more scenic in order to enjoy the driving by having a good view; in (34), according to the classical tale, Dorothy is moving to the place where one of the witches is living.

**III. INSTRUMENTAL EXTENSIONS**

In PDE **by** conveys stable instrumental readings, although it does not render a canonical instrument 7. Nevertheless, some **by** schemata have succeeded through time to gain abstract instrumental semantics either via metaphor or metonymic inference. These instrumental schemata have contributed to the extension of **by** as a late marker of an agent of passive. I will claim in section (IV) that this coding emerges from viewing a demoted agent as a case of abstract instrument or intermediary in the outcome of the process treated under passive perspective.

In the mean time, I will present in following sections various schemata with relevant instrumental input. These schemata - organized in source-groups (I), (II) and (III) - are taken to shape out an abstract extension I treat as **BY** (INSTR). Besides, this absuact extension would account on the one hand for any configuration where the LM is used as the means for the TR to achieve a given goal, and on the other, it could serve to link and unify all the schemata I present below which yield instrumental nuances at some point in time. The schema I have in mind for **BY** (INSTR) could be represented as follows:

![Diagram](image)

**Figure (5)**

Schema **BY** (INSTR) would account for a wide range of data in PDE, but it may be further productive to render sub-actions with a relevant instrumental component, as illustrated by

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sentences (35) and (36):

35. The student wrote the paper by putting all his ideas together
36. Mary broke the door open by hitting it with an ax

In the above sentences, by profiles the LM as an action: the student’s putting his ideas together and Mary’s hitting the door with an ax. The TRs the student and Mary are seen as agents with an action goal, the writing of the paper and the opening (by breaking) of the door. The action profiled by the LM is treated as the means for the agent TR to achieve his/her action-goal. Similarly BY (INSTR) serves conventionally to construe transpons as means to achieve destination goals, as in (37) and (38):

37. She came by ship
38. The man arrived here by car

I proceed now to introduce the different source schemata pertaining instrumental semantics. These schemata are organized in three source-groups. PDE seems to have favored source schemata from group (11) and (111), this observation being based upon the fact that schemata from group (1) are no longer productive in the system, having been taken over by with. I will claim, however, that coding of agent in passive evolved perhaps from elaboration on schema BY (7) plus further semantic support from other instrumental schemata already active and productive in the system, including those from source-group (1).

III.1. SOURCE-GROUP (1): INSTRUMENTAL SCHEMA ↑ BY (5)

Schema ↑ BY (5) is a direct metaphorical extension from ↑ BY (2) via the metaphor AN INSTRUMENT IS A COMPANION (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). This metaphor is based on the direct experiential correlation where objects close to our space are seen as instruments in that we often make use of them to achieve a given action-goal. This schema is no longer active in PDE and the configuration it used to render in historical times has been taken over by with nowadays. This is evidenced by the translations given below to the historical data provided to illustrate the schema:

39. a. OE be hearpan singan "to sing with harp"
b. OE gif he gongan more bi stafe "if he could walk with a stick"

The instrumental semantics provided by schema ↑ BY (5) reinforces the status of by as marker of instrumental configurations throughout the system, and commute in historical times for the emergence of an abstract BY (INSTR). The schema provided structure in historical times to construe either canonical instruments or more abstract entities viewed as instrumental. Sentences in (40) below illustrate this point. More abstract instruments as in (40.c) and (40.d) can still be conveyed by means of by although these sentences sound somewhat archaic and restricted to a formal register. A difference in meaning arises however in PDE with the choice of preposition, i.e. in (40.d), by does not profile Christ’s dead as the instrument of Christ’s instruction to men, but rather the type or manner of dying:

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40.

a. OE  He leofode be hlafe ond be watere
      "He survived with bread and with water"

b. OE  Be hwilcum jingum feddes pu.pe
      "What stuff did you feed yourself with?"

c. EModE (1548).  Christe drawerh soules unto hym by his bloody sacrifice
      "Christ draws souls unto him wisely his bloody sacrifice"

d. EModE (1628).  He instructs men to dye by his example
      "He instructs men to dye wisely his example"

III. 2. SOURCE-GROUP (II): INSTRUMENTAL SCHEMA BY (6)

Description: The TR is involved in a process to achieve a certain goal. The goal of this configuration is another entity, namely a human being, conceived as a "whole", and treated as a ground. The LM is construed as a salient part of this "whole". The functionality of the LM is highlighted, because it is seen as the means for the TR to achieve the ground-goal. The TR keeps a spatial relation to LM as in BY (1). The following sentences illustrate the schema:

41. Mary took the child by the hand
42. His wife is leading him by the nose

In the above sentences, the relation between a TR and a LM is profiled with respect to a ground goal, the child in (41) and the husband in (42). In (41) the hand is the salient part of the child for Mary to take him/her under her control. Similarly in (42), the nose is comically treated as a salient part of the husband for the woman to manage to lead him. In these sentences, the LM is ascribed a marked functionality, and foregrounded as instrumental. The situation often evokes conventional frames of human interaction (in the sense "frame" has in Fillmore (1982)), as in (41) where hands are salient parts of the human bodies to grasp somebody and set that person under one's control. The schema is well supported by historical data:

43.

a. OE  Hangad swerad be smallan brade
      "Swords hang from small threads"

b. OE (1000).  Heo reh hine be his clapum
      "She drew him by his nails"

c. EME (1154).  Me henged up bi pefer
      "One would hang by the feet"

d. EModE (1526).  A hande sen downe roke me by the heer of my heed
      "A hand sent down took me by the hair of my head"

e. EModE (1667).  I did give her a pull by the nose

f. ModE (1711).  The little boy offers to pull me by the coat

In schema BY (6), the TR can be seen as involved in a mental process. The ground is treated as the goal of this mental process. The LM is thus construed as an abstract entity, a quality or property of the ground. This is illustrated by sentences (44) and (45):

III.3. SOURCE-GROUP (III):

Schemata BY (4) was first introduced in section (II.3.2) for it counts as a relevant schema within motion extensions. The schemata demands further notice here due to the instrumental inferences it provides via conceptual metonymy, namely PATH STANDS FOR MEANS. This metonymic map results from foregrounding the functionality of the path as means for the moving TR to get to the goal destination. According to this, sentences (28) and (29) repeated here as (46) and (47), present a relevant instrumental sense since the LMs are construed as means for the TRs to arrive at both the city and the churches. The same can be said of other spatial constructions of BY (4) as by land; by sea; by air; etc., since they convey various instrumental LMs:

46. She came to the city by the highway
47. The churches are within 4 miles of one another by the nearest road

Paths have a salient status as conceptual entities in the metaphorical understanding of events. Schema BY (4) is the source for more abstract instrumental readings. These readings arise in the first place from the complex conceptual mapping called the EVENT STRUCTURE METAPHOR as treated in Lakoff (1993) and Lakoff et al. (1994). According to this macro-mapping intended actions presenting a given goal, are conceived in metaphorical terms, as movements along a path where purposes are destinations. The direct experiential correlation of paths being spatial means to achieve destination goals, motivates the conceptual metonymy: PATH STANDS FOR MEANS to achieve destination goals. This metonymy will motivate via metaphor the common understanding of “means” as paths. These mappings account for the instrumental reading of expressions like by way of, as in sentence (48) below:

48. Master workmen may received instructions by way of drafts, models or frames

Sentence (48) renders a group of people as TR. This group of people is involved in a mental process. Via EVENT STRUCTURE metaphor, we conceptualize the TR as an entity moving along a path towards a destination goal, i.e.: the state of receiving instructions. The drafts, the models, and the frames are diagrams helping people to understand ideas, in this case instructions. Via the mapping MEANS ARE PATHS, these diagrams are thought as the path to the get to the metaphorical destination.

111.4. OTHER RELEVANT INSTRUMENTAL SCHEMATA

Schemata presented in this section are of special relevance for the radial category of be to extend to convey the demoted agent in the passive. It is somehow difficult to link any of these schemata to a particular schema within the semantic sources given above. I will
consider this apparent disadvantage as irrelevant for the present discussion. This situation reveals on the one hand how untangled instrumental meanings may be to the core structure of *by*, and on the other, proves how stable and song these senses are through the radial category.

III. 4.1. Instrumental Schema † *BY* (7)

Description: The LM is prototypically construed as a human being. The TR is involved in a goal-oriented process. The functionality of the human LM is highlighted since it is construed as the means for the TR to achieve the action goal.

![Figure (6)](image_url)

Schema *BY* (7) is no longer productive in PDE, since this highly instrumental configuration has been taken over by the preposition *through*, as shown in the translation of the historical sentences in (49) below. The use of *through* was also a favored pattern in Old English, but schema *BY* (7) was given preference from the late Middle Ages, and once it was favored, the schema kept stable for centuries. The following historical sentences evidence this schema, they refer to intermediaries via which a given action-goal is achieved:

49.  
   a. OE  
   "He him onseande be his cnihtum two spyan"  
   "He sent him two spears through his knights"  
   b. ME (1300).  
   "Darie hir wot by a spye"  
   "Dario came to know about it through a spy"  
   c. ME (1325).  
   "Sche greere pe wel by me"  
   "She greets you well through me"  
   d. LME (1450).  
   "Thou has herde be my moder the travaille that they hadde"  
   "You have heard through my mother the labour they had"  
   e. EModE (1622).  
   "Har he more benefite by his horse then by his Minister"  
   "He gets more benefit through his horse than through his minister"  
   f. ModE (1785).  
   "The minister could nor adminisrered jusrice in his person bur only by his judges"  
   g. ModE (1833).  
   "Send check by bearer"  
   h. ModE (1866).  
   "The lord was present either by person or by a deputy"

III. 4.2. Instrumental Schema *BY* (8)

Description: The LM is again construed as an agentive human being. The schema

profiles a frame of progeneration. Both TR and LM are the parents of a child, here treated as ground. The parent having the child is seen as TR. The LM is the beginning parent by means of whom the TR has the offspring. The following sentence illustrates the schema:

50. He had a son by his second wife

Historical data serves again as evidence for the productivity of schema BY (8) in former times:

51.
   a. OE  Be there he haue ange dohner
          "He had a daughter by that (woman)"
   b. ME (1393).  And he had fye sones by hys fureste wif
          "And he had five sons by his first wife"
   c. EModE (1576).  He begre me by Simplicitie
          "He begot me by Simplicity"
   d. ModE (1805).  A bastard child, which a young woman had had by the defendant

IV. BY AS MARKER OF PASSIVE AGENT

In this section I will treat the genesis of the use of by as a marker of the agent in the passive construction. For analytical purposes I will refer to this special schema as BY (AGENT). Langacker (1991a) treats BY (AGENT) as stemming from BY (1). This process could be summarized as follows: from schema BY (1) he proposes an extension to the domain of things created, where the semantic relation between the two participants in the frame, namely "the creator" and "the thing created", would be conceptualized in spatial terms since both entities prototypically share the spatial configuration rendered by schema BY (1), i.e.: "the thing created" is a TR allocated in relation to "the creator" as LM: the painting by Picasso, where the painting is TR and Picasso, LM. The schema of creation is highlighted, while the spatial salience motivating the application of the spatial schema remains in the shade. From this highlighted domain of creation, the schema passes onto a generic domain of activities carried out by agents. In these terms, BY (AGENT) emerges when the activity is treated as TR and conceptualized in relation to the agent as LM.

In my present analysis I will reject Langacker's view. I consider the domain of creation too restricted a frame to account for the emergence of the complex semantic structure of BY (AGENT), because agentive semantic notions cannot simply arise by metonymic inference from a single frame. Besides, by linking BY (AGENT) directly to spatial BY (1), this controversial position overlooks the relevant semantic input from the instrumental senses by conveys. In my opinion, BY (AGENT) can be better accounted as the natural consequence of extending instrumental schemata onto construing a denoted agent as the entity by means of which an event takes place.

Description: The LM profiles a denoted agent. The TR is an event, which profiles as subject the patient participant of the transitive event. The LM is construed as the means for the event TR to take place.

It is a common view in linguistic analysis nowadays to regard passive phenomena as a shift in focal perspective by means of which the patient participant is given special
prominence for pragmatic or conceptual purposes (Givón 1990; Chafe 1976). This shift is gained by backgrounding the agent to an oblique position. Languages with such passive constructions along with a viable instantiation of the agent differ in the way they treat this agentive argument so that it shows up for informative purposes as a demoted participant in the predication. English has been favoring from early modern times the treatment of demoted agents as instrumentals according to configurations rendered by by. However, this coding pattern has been competing with others, namely from, of and through. In the paragraphs that follow, I will attempt to show how a coding pattern based on by gained over its historical competitors.

In Old English dialects, the use of the preposition from was common to convey the agent in the passive construction. This coding pattern was motivated by the preference of viewing this agentive argument as the cause of the event. Sentences in (52) illustrate this pattern. In OE there was yet another coding based on the preposition of, which was motivated by the very same causal pattern as from, although it enjoyed a marginal use during Anglo-Saxon times. This causal pattern seems to have been common across Old Germanic, as modern languages still evidence: German von “of/from”; and Scandinavian, Icelandic af or Norwegian av, both “of/off” (more marginally “from”):

52.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. OE</td>
<td>He weard ofslagen from his agnum monnum</td>
<td>“He got murdered by his own men”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. OE</td>
<td>He was gelared from anum biscope</td>
<td>“He was taught by a bishop”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Middle English dialects favored however a construal based on of throughout the Medieval period. It seems that of was foregrounded as innovative while from remained more in the shade, and turned rather archaic. Sentences (53.a) and (53.b) illustrate the use of of in OE, while (53.c/d/e) show the default coding agents received in Medieval dialects:

53.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. OE</td>
<td>Æbelingas wurdon aflamen of Scidium</td>
<td>“The nobles were put to flight by Shythians”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. OE</td>
<td>Ædelstan was of Myrcum gecoren to cyng</td>
<td>“Æthelsræn was chosen king by Myrce”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. EME</td>
<td>Wel luued of the kinge and of alle gode men</td>
<td>“(he) was loved by the king and by all good men”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. EME</td>
<td>Ich wolde pet heo weren of alle holden</td>
<td>“I would like that they were kept by all”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. ME</td>
<td>Pe pepule trowiht betere perto whanne it is seyd of a maistir</td>
<td>“People believe it more when that is said by a master”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Anglo-Saxon we also find an alternative coding pattern for the demoted agent based on instrumental construals. This instrumental coding pattern was motivated from construing a backgrounded agent as a case of an instrumental agency by means of which a given event takes place. In OE, the preposition through was often used to convey these instrumental agencies, as shown by sentences in (54). These instrumental senses held rather stable throughout the Medieval period and passed onto modern times, when through was further specialized to render human intermediaries as in sentences (54.f) and (54.g):

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54. 

a. OE (1000)  
*we pat gehyrden þæþ halige bec*

b. ME  
*all þæþ sorwe and myschance schall/turne on his/himself þere/þor of þat swan*

"all that sorrow and ill-luck/turn” onto him by virtue of that stone”

c. EModE (1579). 
*Abel was slayne ... through the hundes of his brother Cain*

d. Mod (1885).  
*Every notice sent through the post in a prepaid registered letter*

e. PDE  
*A conception of politics derived through book*

f. ModE (1793).  
*The answer given to Monsieur Lesardier was through a young gentleman*

g. PDE  
*He applied for the grant through a closefrend*

The preposition *through* served as well in OE as a marginal marker of demoted agent, as illustrated by sentences (55.a) and (55.b) below. This coding choice evinces that an instrumental coding pattern was already active in the mind of Anglo-Saxon speakers. The instrumental based construal was highlighted during later Medieval times and competed with the favored causal pattern instantiated already at that time by *of*, as shown in (53) above. We still find examples of *through* as marker of a demoted agent up to the midst of the Early Modern English times, around the 16th century, as illustrated by (55.d) below:

55. 

a. OE (900).  
*Seo heryng wæs þurh Alaricum geworden*

"The ravaging was carried out by Alaric“

b. OE (971).  
*Hesjonrices duru sceal þonne þurh be awuned beon*

"The doors of the Kingdom of Heaven shall be then kindled by you“

c. ME (1425).  
*Vnnerhe he wæs I-draw vp thurh his felowe, that mych put hur by in aduentur for ro saw his lif*

"he was almost drown up by his fellows, (for) he put their lives at risk in order to save his“

d. EModE (1597).  
*The skinne beinge lift vp through some servants, or through the chmyrgiane with his piners*

As the use of *through* evinces from sentences in (55), the instrumental coding seemed to be at work from early historical times, and competed with the causal pattern realized by *of*. The process leading to the choice of *by* as optimal coding of agent in the passive seems to be derived from several factors. Schemata from *by* and *through* conveyed similar instrumental nuances during the earlier Medieval times, but in a time when the instrumental pattern was still marginal in Old English dialects, and only realized by *through*, some schemata from *by* were already active in the system as conveyors of intermediary agencies. As we have seen in section (III.4), *BY* (7) was already active in the system to render this configuration, while *BY* (8) served as well to construe the secondary agent in the frame of proggression in a rather stable way. Sentences (49.a) and (51.a) are repeated here in (56) to illustrate these uses of *by*:

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56. 
a. OE  
He him onsande be his cnihtum twa spyran  
"He sent him two spears through his knights"

b. OE  
Be dære be hæfde ane dowær  
"He had a daughter by that (woman)"

These schemata would often convey instances of possible two-fold interpretations, both as BY (7) or BY (8) and/or as BY (AGENT). Consider for this purpose the following sentences, both from OE and EME times:

57. 
a. OE  
Pa ping pe be him wcenim gewordene  
"The things that were created through/(by) him"

b. OE  
Be tham men ic eom mid childe  
"I am with a child by that man"

c. EME (1205).  
Ygærne was mid childe bi Uther  
"Ygaern was with a child by Uther"

d. ME (1382).  
Alle pingis ben maad bi him  
"All things were made through/(by) him"

Sentence (57.a) profiles a human being as the LM of by and rendered an interpretation based on schema BY (7), as in the modern reading given by through, where the construction profiles the agency of an intermediary participant. However, this sentence could also naturally get construed as an emergent schema of BY (AGENT), since the instrumental coding pattern was already active in the conceptual system of an Anglo-Saxon speaker, realized by means of through, as shown in (55.a) and (55.b) above. This is somehow clearer in sentences (57.b) and (57.c) rendered by schema BY (8). These sentences profile the pregnancy state of the TR, and this state is thought of as due to the highlighted agency of the other agentive party, LM. Sentence (57.d) comes from a latter period, and could again be ambiguous to the Medieval speaker without the appropriate context. These sentences are given here as evidence of the first sprout of BY (AGENT).

The question that remains is whether BY (AGENT) emerged in the system from inferential re-interpretation from actual contextual co-occurrence with instances of schemata BY (7) and BY (8). However, it is perhaps too venturesome to signal sentences like those in (57) as the actual pragmatic means for the spreading of the new category (cf. Traugott, 1988), where a direct contextual correlation may occur enabling inferential readings. In my opinion, semantic grounds account for the very emergence of the ambiguity, and they can as well provide conceptual motivation for the extension of the new schema. In other words, BY (AGENT) does not only result from direct inference from BY (7) (or BY (8)), since the choice of BY (7) to conceptualize agentive parties in events was not random in the first place, but responded instead, to the instrumental coding pattern already active in Old English where agencies are metaphorically seen as means for a given event to take place.

Historical documents attest schema BY (AGENT) in the very late Medieval period. The OED dates the first entry for such an agentive construal as late as 1400, see sentence (58.a) below. Literary texts of this later period normally show a more-conservative register of the dialect being represented, and one could safely posit a much earlier date for the emergence of the schema among the language of the innovative lower classes (Leith, 1983). This claim is further supported by the findings of Peitsara (1992), who has a similar position in this
respect. On the basis of evidence taken from a large corpus of different sources and genre, she demonstrates that by was already extremely common in 15th century texts, and concludes that BY (AGENT) could hardly have been rare in the preceding century.

No matter how late schema BY (AGENT) may have arisen, it was slowly fore-grounded and finally gained over through around the 16th century. It is around this time when the coding for the demoted agent based on by established itself as PDE BY (AGENT). This dynamics reminds of the preference of of over from with regard to the causal coding pattern. It is difficult though, to provide convincing explanations for the preference of by over through in this crucial period in the formation of the standard. They could perhaps be sought at a semantic level since by was gaining much ground as a marker of instrumental nuances. On the other hand, the socio-cultural pressure on the hands of Latinized grammarians for the emergence of a prestigious variety of the language as standard (Gorlach 1991) would as well have motivated a general trend to specialize grammatical markers to grammatical functions. The following are historical sentences illustrating BY (AGENT):

58.

58. a. ME (1400). be Cyte was destroyed by hem of Greece
   "The city was destroyed by those from Greece"

b. ME (1461). Assigned be the commissioners

c. EModE (1549). There was over by the wit of man so well devised

d. EModE (1587). Slaine miserable in prison be the duke Albanie

e. EModE (1682). The walls of it were built by Diocletian

f. ModE (1848). John was compelled by the Barons to sign the articles

As I have mentioned above, in later Medieval times both the ablative/causal coding pattern realized by of and the instrumental one based on by (and more marginally on through), were already competing to gain space in the system. As the data suggests the cognitive salience of instrumentality won over the causal pattern, and as a direct consequence the coding based on of ceased to be productive to encode the demoted agent of a prototypical transitive event viewed under passive perspective, but became restricted to construe the demoted agent of a mental process, as sentences in (59) illustrate. However, this later schema has also become unproductive in PDE, and predications formed on this pattern may sound rather archaic nowadays:

59.

59. a. EModE (1548). Communion, I am commanded of God, especially to move and shewth you
   The Principles of Christian Religion, to be knowen of the samefull

b. EModE (1550). I have been told so of man

c. EModE (1600). Being wamed of God in a dreame

d. EModE (1611). A wrretched stranger, and of all unknown!

e. ModE (1725). Otho was not loved of his kingsfolk in his home

V. SCHEMA BY (9) AS EXTENSION OF BY (AGENT):

The schema evokes the frame of creation where a human agent is seen as producing a given entity with an esthetic value. Under the conceptual construal of such an event the entity being created is given a prominent status and it is treated as TR. Schema BY (9) only

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profiles the relation between the creator and the creation as two nouns within a single NP, however this relation is based on conceiving the creation event as conceptually viewed from the passive perspective. Hence, the creator, or the author, is thought of as a case of demoted agent and it is thus treated accordingly via a natural extension from schema BY (AGENT). This claim is further supported by historical data, since schema BY (9) does not show up until the Early Modern period of the language, only when schema BY (AGENT) had a stable position in the system as conveyer of a demoted agent, as illustrated by sentences in (60) below. This evidence proves as further inadequate Langacker’s (1991a) views on this creation frame being the semantic precursor of BY (AGENT):

60. a. EModE (1570). The Schoolemaster by Roger Ascham
b. EModE (1673). Poems & c. upon Several Occassions by Mr. John Milton
c. ModE (1779). Can the representations of moon-light, even by Homer,
Milton, and Shakespeare, be more exquisitively finished?
d. ModE (1832). I must get Manstein’ directly, if it be by young Moskoffsky
   The picture by Picasso
e. PDE

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have accounted for the emergence of the preposition by as the marker of a demoted agent in English passive, in the shape of a schema I have treated as BY (AGENT). The analysis has been thought of as an instance of a radial network set up by means of interconnected senses. I have claimed along the paper that schema BY (AGENT) arose in by’s semantic network as a natural extension from historically prior, rather stable instrumental schemata. I have also introduced different data from different historical periods in an attempt to show how the different senses were diachronically shaping out the radial category. My present claims and analysis of the genesis of BY (AGENT) are virtually opposite to Langacker’s (1991a). He basically proposes that BY (AGENT) is an elaboration from schema BY (9) which in turn results as a direct extension from the static spatial schema I have treated as BY (1). I have argued along the paper that this solution is inadequate for it ignores both the fundamental linkage relation between instrumental senses and BY (AGENT). On the other hand, it does not regard historical data, especially on the late emergence schema BY (10). In figure (7) below, I give a representation of the way by schemata interconnect in a radial semantic structure from BY (1) all the way to BY (AGENT) and BY (9) via main instrumental extensions.

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Examples to illustrate the schemata:

BY (1): (1). I have a cottage by the big lake; BY (2): (11). OE. Wif be big be anum man “The woman who lives with a man”; BY (2'): (13). He wrote the letter all by himself; BY (3): (21). I wear by Peer's office on my way home; BY (4): (28). She came to the city by the highway; BY (4'): (48). Master workmen may received instructions by way of drafts, models or frames; BY (5): (39). b. OE giffen gangan mage bi srage “if he could walk with a stick”; BY (6): (41). Mary took the child by the hand; BY (INSTR): (36). Mary broke the door open by hitting it with an ax; BY (7): (49). b. ME (1300). Dario hir wor by a spy “Dario came to know about it through a spy”; BY (8): (50). He had a son by his second wife; BY (AGENT): (58). a. ME (1400). He Corye was destroyed by hem of Greece “The city was destroyed by those from Greece”; BY (9): (60). e. PDE. The picture by Picasso.

NOTES

1. Among the large number of schemata of by which are nor reared in this paper, most relevant perhaps are those concerning temporal extensions as in, the sleeps by night or she got to the station by five. Further minor schemata are illustrated by the following sentences: the horse won by two feet: she received letters by the thousands; she pays by the night; that's a by-road; it's fine by me; she plays by the rules, etc.


4. This schema has grammaticized in complex prepositions in PDE such as: beside, below, beneath and behind.

5. Readings with a by the side of construction may sound redundant to the modern speaker, because by alone can render a similar configuration.

6. In historical times the landmark could also be construed as a “way” for ways were still prototypical spatial configurations in the landscape. In PDE this strict spatial meaning has been lost in favor of a more abstract interpretation based on functionality.

7. I take a canonical instrument to be here an object used by the agent to achieve an action-goal, as the hammer in, Mary broke the window with a hammer.

8. Peissara (1992) explains the emergence of by over of as due to a tendency to avoid the functional overload that of already had in the Medieval system. I am thankful to one of my anonymous reviewers for pointing this reference out to me.

9. There is no apparent explanation for the reason why the instrumental pattern was the one preferred. One runs the risk of becoming too speculative if arguing for the role played by psychological values in the conception of an individual as a functional part of society, which was under great modification from a Medieval rural-oriented society towards a more city-oriented society in the Renaissance. This explanation would specially be fitted for London and the dialect spoken in the area. A similar phenomenon may also apply to the urban centers of the Netherlands where a similar instrumental coding emerges, but it leaves unaccounted the survival of causal parts in other Germanic urban dialects, like those spoken in German or Scandinavian cities.

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