From agent noun to future tense:
Grammaticalization in Vedic Sanskrit

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In late Vedic Sanskrit, a periphrastic future evolved out of an agent noun and a copula in the present tense. Since the grammaticalization path from agent noun to future tense is unique – I am not aware of any other language in which this type of change occurred – it seems worthwhile looking in greater detail into the preconditions and a possible scenario for the actuation of this development. I start by giving an account of the semantics of the agent noun in Early Vedic. I show that its participle-like semantics allows for bridging contexts which lend themselves to an interpretation of the agent noun as futurate. Thus, the scenario I give is based on semantic reanalysis. The change emerges from the interaction of speakers and listeners in language use. The speakers intend an interpretation for their utterances which is in total compliance with the original semantics of the agent noun. However, in certain contexts such utterances allow for slightly divergent interpretations within the confines of a felicitous discourse. If the listener opts for such a reanalysis, it may go unnoticed. But once s/he turns speaker, it leads to new uses beyond the original scope of the agent noun and finally to its morphosyntactic reanalysis as a finite verb. As I hope to demonstrate, the case of the Sanskrit periphrastic future is further evidence that grammaticalization is triggered by the same mechanisms that actuate phonological change.