English Language and Linguistics (2025), **29:** 851–856
doi:10.1017/S1360674325100543

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

SQUIB

Going + COMP projects PP, not AdvP: a reply to Silvennoinen (2025)

Brett Reynolds[1,2]

[1]English Language Centre, Humber Polytechnic, Toronto, Canada and [2]Department of Linguistics, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada
Email: brett.reynolds@humber.ca

(Received 22 August 2025; revised 5 September 2025; accepted 15 September 2025)

Abstract

Silvennoinen (2025) analyzes the stored sequence *going forward* as an adverb that inherits adverb-class morphosyntax. This reply challenges that categorization on empirical grounds. The construction fails the key distributional test for adverbs: it cannot occur in integrated-medial position between subject and verb (**We going forward will prioritize replication*), the diagnostic slot for core adverbs (*We certainly will prioritize replication*). Analysis of Silvennoinen's corpus (n = 1,517) confirms this restriction – apparent 'medial' tokens prove either to be NP-internal modifiers or parenthetical supplements, never integrated clausal constituents. Instead, *going forward* patterns with PP adjuncts, occurring clause-initially, clause-finally, or as supplements. Internally, deverbal *going* heads the construction and licenses a directional complement *forward*(*s*), parallel to established deverbal prepositions like *according* [*to* …] and *depending* [*on* …]. The construction thus projects PP, not AdvP, aligning with *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*'s flexible-complement analysis of prepositions. This case demonstrates that storage and semantic specialization do not force categorical reanalysis.

Keywords: *going forward*; preposition phrase; complement licensing; distribution; construction grammar

1. Framing the disagreement

Silvennoinen (2025) presents a careful corpus study of *going forward*, tracing its rise from business jargon in the 1970s to widespread use across registers by 2019. Taking a Construction-Grammar (CxG) approach, his central claim is that *going forward* is a phonologically fixed stored sequence. He treats it 'as a whole' as bearing the lexical category ADV; the construction, in his view, inherits the morphosyntactic behaviour of the adverb class. He briefly considers the option of an intransitive preposition and declines it (fn. 7), chiefly on the ground that this 'extends the notion of preposition' and that 'the majority of linguists do not seem to have adopted' the analysis.

Those are sociological and terminological reservations, not empirical diagnostics; the question isn't who adopts which labels, but which expressions occupy which slots. The flexible-complement view of prepositions – allowing them to take various complements or

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674325100543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

none – is developed in Jespersen (1924: 87–90) and Huddleston & Pullum *et al.* (2002: §7.1, 610–17, §5.1, see also 58, 272; henceforth *CGEL*) and recurs across frameworks including Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (Sag, Wasow & Bender 2003), Lexical Functional Grammar (Bresnan *et al.* 2015) and CxG (Michaelis 2017), as catalogued by Reynolds (2025).[1]

Working within Silvennoinen's CxG assumptions, I agree that *going forward* is entrenched and listed. I separate storage from external category and internal headedness. Externally, the construction patterns with PP adjuncts rather than with clausal adverbs: it's systematically unavailable in the integrated-medial adverb slot and surfaces clause-initially or clause-finally (see section 2). Internally, *going* heads the construction as a deverbal preposition licensing a directional complement *forward*(*s*); complement drop is disfavoured in the futurate adjunct use, aligning the item with established deverbal prepositions such as *according* [*to* ...], *owing* [*to* ...] and *depending* [*on* ...] (see section 3). On this basis, the inheritance prediction fails: a construction that neither occupies core adverb slots nor forgoes head–complement structure isn't well analyzed as ADV; it projects PP headed by *going.*

Storage isn't category; category isn't storage. The analysis therefore turns on two diagnostics – external distribution and internal complement licensing – and on their convergence.

2. External distribution: integrated medial vs. PP-like positions

Like typical PPs, *going forward* occurs only as a supplement clause-initially (1a) and clause-finally (1d), and in the subject–auxiliary corridor. The corridor position is truly ambiguous between a clausal supplement (1b) and an NP-internal supplement (1c).

(1) (a) **Going forward**, our approach will prioritize replication. [clause-initial]
(b) Our approach, **going forward**, will prioritize replication. [clause-medial]
(c) [Our approach, **going forward**,] will prioritize replication. [NP-internal]
(d) Our approach will prioritize replication, **going forward**. [clause-final]

The same is not true with *going forward* as an integrated modifier. The seeming ambiguity of (2c) dissolves under the pronoun probe – replacing a lexical head noun with a pronoun blocks NP-internal modification, forcing a clausal reading:

(2) (a) Our approach **going forward** will prioritize replication. [apparently ambiguous between NP-internal & clause-medial]
(b) *It **going forward** will prioritize replication. [clause-medial shown impossible]
(c) [Our approach **going forward**] will prioritize replication. [in fact NP-internal]

Under Silvennoinen's coding, 59 of 83 'medial' tokens are ambiguous between clause-medial and NP-internal readings. Under the pronoun probe, these resolve as NP-internal post-head

[1] *CGEL* defines prepositions as heads that license complements (NP, PP, clause, etc.), often allowing complement drop; adverbs don't license complements with rare exceptions (e.g. *fortunately for me*; see ch. 6 §6.1). Most apparent 'adverbs with complements' are therefore analyzed as prepositions, including intransitives with no overt complement. The motivation is that, across categories – verbs, adjectives, many nouns, and even adverbs – we diagnose lexeme-specific complement licensing. Traditional accounts restrict prepositions to NP objects. The flexible-complements view drops that restriction and defines prepositions descriptively by other factors.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674325100543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

modifiers. The remaining 24 tokens represent an upper bound on corridor supplements – at most 1.6 per cent of all tokens or 1.9 per cent of clausal tokens.[2]

The key finding: what Silvennoinen codes as 'medial' conflates two distinct constructions – NP-internal post-head modifiers and clausal corridor supplements. Once separated via the pronoun probe, no clear cases of integrated clause-medial *going forward* remain. The construction patterns with PP adjuncts rather than with core adverb positions.

3. Internal structure: complement licensing and headedness

CGEL distinguishes prepositions and adverbs in part by complementation: prepositions commonly license an obligatory or optional complement; adverbs normally don't (Huddleston & Pullum *et al.* 2002: 610–17). In the construction at hand, *going* licenses a selected obligatory complement.

(3) (a) We need to think [about this] [**going forward**].
(b) *We need to think [about this] [**going**].

Beyond *forward*, the same head occasionally combines with other directional complements in the same clause-adjunct frame.

(4) The challenges **going back** were manageable. [constructed]

(5) **Going back**, there were so many nonfiction writers. [COCA[3]]

(6) Paytm said that **going ahead** there will be no more cash burn in the business. [Reuters[4]]

These alternants differ in frequency and in conventionalized discourse use (e.g. managerial/policy-commitment), but they share the same structural profile: *going* as head, a directional complement, and adjunct extensionality. The availability of a small paradigm supports a head–complement analysis rather than a fused adverb.

Adverbs that license complements are exceptional, and when putative adverbs appear to take complements, they are generally better analyzed as prepositions under the flexible-complement view (see fn. 2), which countenances prepositions with a range of complements or none at all. The deverbal class is well established: *according* [*to* ...], *owing* [*to* ...], *depending* [*on* ...], *barring* OBJ, *concerning* OBJ, *regarding* OBJ, among others (Kortmann & König 1992; Huddleston & Pullum *et al.* 2002: 610–16). *Going* aligns with this group in licensing a complement and in disallowing complement drop in the construction under discussion.

4. Subsidiary diagnostics and potential counterarguments

Before examining the theoretical implications, I briefly address several potential objections and subsidiary diagnostics that, while less probative than external distribution and complement licensing, merit discussion.

[2] Silvennoinen reports 1,517 tokens total. With 83 'medial' tokens (59 ambiguous, 24 potentially corridor supplements) and approximately 12 per cent unambiguously NP-internal (182 tokens), plus the 59 reclassified ambiguous cases, the clausal denominator is approximately 1,517−182−59=1,276, yielding 24/1,276≈1.9 per cent for corridor supplements among clausal uses.

[3] *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (Davies 2008–).

[4] Nayak 2022.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674325100543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

4.1. *Status of* forward *and a neutral XP label*

Nothing in the argument requires taking *forward* to be a PP head. Some traditions treat it as an intransitive preposition; others label it an adverb. I use a neutral XP label for the complement inside the construction and keep the theoretical weight on *going* as the head that licenses a complement. The contrast that matters for external category is between PP and AdvP at the level of the whole construction, not between alternative internal labels for the complement.

For expository clarity:

(7) (a) [PP going [XP forward]]
(b) [PP according [PP to the report]]

The structural parallel in (7) shows how a deverbal preposition can select a complement and project PP without committing to a particular inner label for the complement in (7a).

The category decision is made at the level of the stored construction: *going* heads a PP that selects a directional complement, and the internal label for *forward* (P vs. Adv) is orthogonal to the argument, which turns on external distribution and complement licensing rather than sublabels.[5]

4.2. *Coordination and NP-internal occurrence*

Going forward coordinates naturally with undisputed temporal adjuncts of a variety of categories, providing no clear evidence one way or the other.

(8) in 2013 and **going forward** [PP & construction]

(9) retrospectively and **going forward** [AdvP & construction]

(10) next year and **going forward** [NP & construction]

NP-internal post-head uses exist, as Silvennoinen notes. That distribution is also compatible with either analysis, since English allows both PPs and (much more rarely) AdvPs in post-head modifier position (Payne, Huddleston & Pullum 2010).

(11) (a) the use **temporarily** of Australian troops [AdvP post-head; Payne, Huddleston & Pullum's (16)]
(b) the use **for a time** of Australian troops [PP post-head]

The fact that *going forward* occurs post-head in NPs is therefore not probative for AdvP over PP, though on a frequency basis, PP is clearly favoured in this position.

4.3. *Orthography and intervenability*

Orthography does not diagnose category, but the spacing behaviour of lexicalized expressions often tracks resegmentation. Items that have lexicalized as single words or tight compounds tend toward fused or hyphenated spellings in running prose. *Going forward* overwhelmingly appears as two words, with hyphenation largely confined to attributive uses such as *on a going-forward basis.* This aligns with the retention of internal structure under storage and sits comfortably with the present analysis.

[5] In very restricted cases, prepositions license AdvP complements, such as *until recently* and *before long* (Huddleston & Pullum *et al.* 2002: 640).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674325100543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Intervenability is likewise weak evidence on its own. Clear futurate readings with modifiers between going and forward are rare, though they can be found.

(12) He talked about an interim scheme which goes on to the end of this financial year, but also about full payments being made **going further forward**. [UK parliament[6]]

The rarity is compatible with either a strongly selected complement inside a PP or a fused adverbial unit; the other diagnostics carry the load here.

5. Why adverbial inheritance is not supported

Silvennoinen's claim that the construction, 'as a whole, has the lexical category of adverb' and 'inherits the morphosyntactic behaviour of this wider category' predicts robust access to core adverb slots and no need for head–complement structure. Neither prediction holds: externally the integrated-medial slot is unavailable beyond supplements, and internally deverbal *going* selects a directional complement.

6. Consequences for the analysis of prepositions and constructional change

Under complement-based diagnostics and the flexible-complement view of prepositions, the present analysis requires no category extension beyond independently motivated deverbal prepositions. It meshes with constructional approaches in which expressions become entrenched and stored as multi-word units while preserving their internal syntactic structure, rather than fusing into single lexical items like *nevertheless* or *nowadays* (Croft 2001; Goldberg 2006; Traugott & Trousdale 2013). The case study therefore supports two broader claims. First, external distribution is a better guide to category than category assumptions inherited from the adverb schema; diagnostics must target the slots a category actually occupies. Second, constructionalization frequently yields stored, semantically specialized phrasal units whose internal headedness remains visible and whose external distribution aligns with their heads.

7. Conclusion

This reply accepts that *going forward* is a stored construction with conventionalized futurate meaning. It rejects the claim that the stored unit, as a whole, has category ADV and *inherits* adverb-category morphosyntax. Two diagnostics drive the result: one targeting *going forward*'s external functions and one its internal properties.

The target article canvasses a *CGEL*-style prepositional alternative but declines it chiefly based on terminological and uptake considerations. The present case turns instead on distributional slots and complement licensing; on those diagnostics, *going forward* patterns with PP adjuncts. The prepositional analysis is independently standard across frameworks; what is at issue is the diagnostics, not uptake.

Predictions follow. (i) True clause-medial tokens should remain unattested beyond supplements; and (ii) close neighbours (*moving forward*, *looking ahead*) will show the same external profile when used as futurate adjuncts. Larger corpora can test these directly.

The case confirms that storage does not determine category, just as category does not require storage – a construction can be entrenched as PP without collapsing into ADV.

[6] *Infected Blood Compensation Scheme* 2024.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674325100543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Acknowledgements. I used ChatGPT o3 (OpenAI, Apr 2025) and Claude 4.1 (Anthropic, Aug 2025) extensively in drafting this article. I reviewed, edited and approved all the material and take full responsibility for the final text and conclusions.

References

Bresnan, Joan, Ash Asudeh, Ida Toivonen & Stephen Mark Wechsler. 2015. *Lexical-functional syntax*, 2nd edn. Oxford, UK, and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119105664

Croft, William. 2001. *Radical construction grammar: Syntactic theory in typological perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davies, Mark. 2008–. *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)*. www.english-corpora.org/coca/ (accessed 4 September 2025).

Goldberg, Adele E. 2006. *Constructions at work: The nature of generalization in language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Huddleston, Rodney & Geoffrey K. Pullum *et al.* 2002. *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Infected Blood Compensation Scheme. 2024. House of Commons Hansard, vol. 750; contribution by Dame Angela Eagle; reply by Paymaster General John Glen. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-05-21/debates/8A74600F-6D18-4E73-A4C3-DFB1E59ED659/InfectedBloodCompensationScheme (accessed 4 September 2025).

Jespersen, Otto. 1924. *The philosophy of grammar*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Kortmann, Bernd & Ekkehard König. 1992. Categorial reanalysis: The case of deverbal prepositions. *Linguistics* 30(4), 671–98. https://doi.org/10.1515/ling.1992.30.4.671

Michaelis, Laura A. 2017. Meanings of constructions. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.309

Nayak, Siddhi. 2022. *Paytm CEO says there will be no more cash burn.* www.reuters.com/business/finance/indias-paytm-ceo-says-therewill-be-no-more-cash-burn-2022-12-21/ (accessed 4 September 2025).

Payne, John, Rodney Huddleston & Geoffrey K. Pullum. 2010. The distribution and category status of adjectives and adverbs. *Word Structure* 3(1), 31–81. https://doi.org/10.3366/E1750124510000486

Reynolds, Brett. 2025. Prepositions in (English) dictionaries. *Dictionaries: Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America* 46(1), 31–60. https://doi.org/10.1353/dic.2025.a963324

Sag, Ivan A., Thomas Wasow & Emily M. Bender. 2003. *Syntactic theory: A formal introduction*, 2nd edn. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.

Silvennoinen, Olli O. 2025. *Going forward* as an adverb. *English Language and Linguistics* 29(2), 336–61. https://doi.org/10.1017/S136067432500019X

Traugott, Elizabeth Closs & Graeme Trousdale. 2013. *Constructionalization and constructional changes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cite this article: Reynolds, Brett. 2025. *Going* + COMP projects PP, not AdvP: a reply to Silvennoinen (2025). *English Language and Linguistics* 29, no. 4: 851–856. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674325100543

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674325100543 Published online by Cambridge University Press