

Origins and functions of future formations in the world's languages

Proposed workshop at SLE 2025 (Bordeaux)

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ABSTRACT SUBMISSION: Please send abstracts (up to 300 words excluding references) to Gilles Authier (gilles.authier@gmail.com) and Steven Kaye (stevenjkaye@gmail.com) by **15th November 2024**. If the workshop proposal is accepted, presenters will be required to submit a 500-word abstract in EasyChair by 15 January 2025.

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Future marking has a curious place within verbal morphology and language use in general, and remains “undoubtedly one of the most elusive parts of grammar” (Lambert et al. 2017). It has been widely observed that the very notion of future as a tense value is problematic, owing to the real-world asymmetry which distinguishes the inherently unknowable future from states of affairs known to obtain in the present and past; as a result, future reference is rarely separable from the expression of modality. Alongside those languages which have no dedicated future marker, many other languages thus have not one but multiple futures, whose characterization involves modality no less than their temporal opposition to the present and past, and often stands in a complex relationship with other categories such as aspect or polarity, or syntactic status such as subordination. Dahl (2000: 303) draws attention to the especially complex “distribution of labour between temporal, modal and aspectual elements” observed in the meaning of future grams.

Both synchronic and diachronic aspects of this conceptually challenging domain have been explored in some depth in those languages most familiar to linguistic scholarship – especially languages of Europe with a written standard and some level of political authority, thanks to the long tradition of individual descriptions in this region as well as broader surveys of tense-aspect-mood(-evidentiality-polarity...) systems, notably *EUROTYP* (Dahl et al. 1992). Works with an explicitly global scope, such as the *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization* (Kuteva et al. 2019), give a sense of the riches that remain to be explored more fully. With the St. Petersburg school (Xrakovskij & Malchukov 2021), we recognize that the study of grammaticalized futures should be conceived in terms of the network of variable but recurrent interactions that situate them in paradigmatic systems. These interactions with other verbal categories appear highly unpredictable typologically, which brings into question the universal relevance of our (generally Eurocentric) descriptive and analytical models.

The workshop proposed here will bring together researchers working on topics in the synchronic behaviour and/or diachronic trajectory of future formations in lesser-studied, non-European or non-standard European languages, to showcase the typological and theoretical

contributions that futures from relatively underexplored parts of the linguistic world have to offer. The workshop is primarily typological and descriptive in its focus. We particularly welcome presentations which involve the detailed treatment of language-specific phenomena, including any potential dialectal/diatopic complexities and diachronic, comparative or areal perspectives they open up.

A selection of relevant issues is provided below, but potential contributors should feel free to submit an abstract on any topic addressing the general theme of the workshop.

Future vs non-future as a basic opposition. We commonly take for granted that the present and future can be thought of together as the ‘non-past’, standing in opposition with the past – and with good reason, as this association of the future with the present is cross-linguistically widespread. However, languages are also found that instead show a primary split between future and non-future domains, a phenomenon apparently rare in Europe. Where the future is granted special status in this way, what effects make this apparent, and at what linguistic levels?

Sources of future formations, with and without grammaticalization. Kuteva et al. (2019) identify as many as twelve distinct sources that grammaticalize into futures: CHANGE-OF-STATE, COME TO, GO TO, LOVE, B-NECESSITY (i.e. intention), D-NECESSITY (i.e. obligation), H(AVE)-POSSESSIVE, TAKE, THEN, TOMORROW, VENITIVE, WANT. Do any more pathways remain to be added to this list? What is their distribution? Does the synchronic usage of future forms tend to correlate with their diachronic origins, as suggested by Dahl (2000)? By contrast, Haspelmath (1998) draws attention to a scenario “without grammaticalization” whereby the incursion of progressive formations into the basic paradigm restricts pre-existing non-past forms to more peripheral meanings, including futurity. Is there more to be uncovered here?

Multiple futures. It is common to find that a given language possesses several types of future (Bybee et al. 1994: 243). How do distinctions of temporal distance in the future resemble or diverge from distinctions of temporal distance in the past? What other kinds of difference can be observed between one future and another? How fine-grained can the system become? For example, Korn & Nevskaya (2017) highlight the fact that Turkic languages regularly contain a pair of future formations, one more categorical/prospective with relevance to the speech situation, and one more general and potentially modal in nature. Such distinctions raise the general issue of:

Relations with other verbal categories. The categories concerned include at least the following. What can be said about the dynamics of these relationships?

- **Aspect.** It is hard to envisage an event as an entirety while simultaneously anchoring it to the present. As a result, languages exist (famously including Slavic) in which the inflectional formation that ‘ought’ to realize the present perfective gives future forms in practice.
- **Debitive and volitive modality.** While auxiliaries *shall* and *will* are largely interchangeable in contemporary English, they preserve slightly different relationships with debitive and volitive modality, e.g. (soliciting approval) *Shall/*will I open a*

window? Meanwhile, some languages such as Kryz (East Caucasian) tend to neutralize the present/future opposition in the interrogative paradigm.

- **Person.** Spanish *ser* ‘to be’ notably preserves the Latin future in its *present* paradigm, and in one form only – the 2nd person singular *eres*. Volitive paradigms tend to vary in person, while debitives do not: does this impact the evolution of future tenses?
- **Irrealis modality.** Forms with broadly irrealis value (e.g. subjunctive, optative, counterfactual) share with the future the semantic property of situating events in something other than the actual world, and this connection can have diachronic effects: for example, the ancestral subjunctive lies behind future formations in various Indo-European branches.
- **Polarity.** Considerations about ‘reality’ may also lead us to expect asymmetries between affirmative and negative futures. Are such asymmetries found, and what form do they take?

Lexically/grammatically conditioned use of non-future formations with future value. In Modern Persian, future value is expressed by a periphrastic formation (‘want’ + infinitive), or else by present tense forms. However, in the specific context of *bælke* ‘perhaps’, future reference is achieved by the simple past form. Better known are wider phenomena whereby subordinate contexts permit/require non-future expression of future meanings, e.g. English *when he arrives*, French *s’il vient*. What drives these patterns?

Suppletion targeting the future. The French verb *aller* ‘go’ has a fully suppletive future stem *ir-*, alone continuing the ancestral verb ‘go’; this inflectional pattern is lexically isolated within the language. Cross-linguistically, are particular verb meanings liable to show such anomalous behaviour, and why? Are there languages in which the future inflection is systematically suppletive?

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