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Towards a new future in (West and East) Slavonic?

This article demonstrates that the rule according to which perfective verbs are incompatible with the future auxiliary 'be' in West and East Slavonic languages is less strict than has been claimed in scholarship. In colloquial Polish and in less standard varieties of Upper and Lower Sorbian, as well as in Australian Russian, the 'be' auxiliary may be combined with perfective verbs. Such future perfective constructions with the 'be' auxiliary arise because of analogical pressures, language internal and/or external. The Polish perfective future with 'be' instantiates furthermore an analogy-driven SVC – an additional fourth source of SVCs across languages.

Keywords: Slavonic languages, Polish, morphosyntax, future tense, aspect, serialization

1. Background

Slavonic languages, specifically the members of the Eastern and Western Slavonic branches, have two types of future constructions: a synthetic perfective future and an analytical imperfective future built around the auxiliary 'be' (De Bray 1980a; 1980b; Sussex & Cubberley 2006). This is attested in Russian (Timberlake 1993: 849; 2004: 423–425; Andrews 2001: 88, 90; Wade 2002: 109; Wade et al. 2020: 266–267), Belarussian (Mayo 1993: 913), Ukrainian (Shevelov 1993: 966, 971; Danylenko & Vakulenko 1995: 46–47), and Ruthenian/Rusyn in the East (Anonym. nd. 38, 46; Magocsi 1979: 94, 97; Fejsa 2018: 372); and in Sorbian (Stone 1993a: 635–637, 424, 429–430), Kashubian (Stone 1993b: 776), Czech (Short 1993a: 481; Janda & Townsend 2002: 33; Naughton & von Kunes 2020: 180–181), Slovak (Mistrič 1988: 76, 88; Short 1993b: 554), and Polish in the West.¹

¹ Polabian, an extinct member the West Slavonic branch, is an exception. In this language, the analytical future was built around the present form of the auxiliary 'want' (i.e., *cq*) rather than a 'be'-type

Polish exemplifies the above-mentioned phenomenon excellently (Laskowski 1999a; 1999b; Swan 2002: 270; Sadowska 2012: 398; Błaszczak et al. 2014). The synthetic perfective future constitutes formally the present or non-past form of a perfective verb – compare the future *zrobię* ‘I will do’ with the present *robię* ‘I do / am doing’. The analytical imperfective future consists of the future form of the auxiliary verb *być* ‘be’ (e.g., *będę* ‘I will be’ in 1st person singular) and the infinitive of the main imperfective verb (e.g., *robić* ‘do’). The resultant combination for 1st person singular is *będę robić* ‘I will do / I will be doing’ (Laskowski 1999a: 178, 262; Swan 2002: 216, 256; Sadowska 2012: 399–401; Błaszczak et al. 2014).² As can be inferred from the discussion above, the distribution of these two futures is complementary: the synthetic construction is used with perfective verbs, while the analytical construction is used with imperfective verbs (Laskowski 1999a; 1999b; Swan 2002: 216, 256, 270; Bańko 2002: 92–93; Sadowska 2012: 399–401; Błaszczak et al. 2014).

This complementary perfective/imperfective distribution is viewed as fundamental in the future system of Polish, as is also the case in all the above-mentioned East and West Slavonic languages, and results in the following rule: **in the future tense “perfective verbs are incompatible with the future auxiliary”** (Janda & Townsend 2002: 33) and, thus, **“the auxiliary *być* may not under any circumstances be combined with perfective verbs”** (Swan 2002: 257; in both citations, the emphasis is mine).³

2. Observation

While the above-mentioned incompatibility rule is certainly valid in all standard varieties of the East and West Slavonic languages, including Polish, where it fully operates in written language and an (educated) spoken variety, there is evidence that its “law” may be looser in less “careful” registers.

future auxiliary (Polański 1993: 815; 2010: 123). Other types of future tenses used alongside the ones mentioned above are also attested, for instance in Ukrainian (Danylenko & Vakulenko 1995: 47) and Polish (see Footnote 2 below).

² In Polish, there is another variant of the analytical imperfective future. This future is absent in East Slavonic and West Slavonic languages except for Polish and some non-standard Ukrainian varieties (it is however attested in South Slavonic, e.g., Slovene, Croatian, and Serbian; Błaszczak et al. 2014). This future is built around the auxiliary ‘be’ (*być* in Polish) and so-called *t* participle, currently indistinguishable from the 3rd person past (e.g., *robił* ‘he did’). The resultant form is *będę robił* ‘I will do’. Regarding the semantic and pragmatic differences between the two analytical imperfective futures in Polish (the infinitival and the participial) and their possible diachronic origin, consult Mönke (1971), Mikos (1985), and Proeme (1991).

³ The synthetic future (formally a perfective present) and the two analytical futures (the infinitival and the participial) may also differ in meaning in certain contexts (for detail consult Błaszczak et al. 2014).

A few months ago, as a native speaker of Polish – although hyper-multilingual and living outside Polish speaking areas for several decades – I produced an expression *Tak, będę to zrobię* ‘Yes, I will do it’ (literal gloss: yes be.FUT.1.SG this do.PFV.FUT.1.SG). In this construction, the future form of the auxiliary *być* ‘be’ (i.e., *będę*) – which, as explained in the previous section, should only appear with imperfective verbs – cooccurs with a perfective verb, specifically its synthetic future form (i.e., *zrobię* ‘I will do’). Intrigued by this “error”, I decided to verify whether similar constructions are attested in online discourses. After examining blogs, tweets, and posts on chatrooms, I have collected more than a hundred instances of such future tenses, which violate the rule of the incompatibility of the future auxiliary ‘be’ with perfective verbs. Four of these instances are exemplified in (1–4) below. The collected constructions are not only quantitatively significant – they are also qualitatively diverse. That is, they attest to different persons (see 1st person in (1) and (3) and 3rd person in (2) and (4)), numbers (see singular in (1), (2), and (3) and plural in (4)), valency patterns (see a transitive usage in (1) and (3) and an intransitive usage in (2)), and polarity values (see affirmative clauses in (1) and (2) and a negative one in (3)).

- (1) *Obiecałem* *sobie,* *że* ***będę*** ***zrobię***
promise.PFV.PST.1SG.M REFL.DAT that be.FUT.1SG do.PFV.FUT.1SG
wszystko
everything
‘I promised to do everything’
- (2) *Gdańsk* ***będzie*** ***pójdzie*** *z* *torbami*
PN be.FUT.3SG go.PFV.FUT.3SG with bags
‘Gdańsk will lose’
- (3) *Nie* ***będę*** ***kupię*** *słodyczy* *podczas [...]* *zakupów*
not be.FUT.1SG buy.PFV.FUT.1SG sweets while shopping
‘I won’t buy sweets while shopping’
- (4) *Później* *jak* *będzie* *potrzeba* *to* ***będą***
later if it.will.be necessity then be.FUT.3PL
zrobią *weryfikację* *osób* *najbardziej* *aktywnych*
do.PFV.FUT.3PL verification of.people the.most active
‘Later, if it is necessary, they will check the most active people’

3. Explanation

Sentences in (1–4) and other similar examples undoubtedly entertain a peripheral status in Polish. All of them are ill-formed from a normative perspective and were indeed perceived as ungrammatical by the five native speakers of Polish whom I consulted. Nevertheless, the noticeable presence of such examples in online material, their range of morphosyntactic variants, and the use in what otherwise are well-formed utterances suggest that the future auxiliary of *być*, previously strictly limited to the imperfective future and imperfective verbs, may have (begun to) spread, at least marginally, to the perfective future and perfective verbs. As a result, compliance with the incompatibility rule seems to be less strict.

This spread of the future auxiliary *być* to the perfective future and perfective verbs and the concomitant relaxation of the incompatibility rule can be explained in terms of analogical pressure – one of the most potent mechanisms governing linguistic change (Kuryłowicz 1949; 1958; Mańczak 1980; Fischer 2013), including the development of future tenses (see Heine, Kuteva & Narrog 2017). That is, the analytical pattern of the imperfective future (i.e., [FUT.AUX + INF.IPFV]) influences the synthetic pattern of the perfective future (i.e., [PFV.PRES]), resulting in the perfective future “borrowing” the most evident exponent of the futurity found in the analytical future variant, namely, the future ‘be’ auxiliary.⁴ This yields a blended structure (i.e., [FUT.AUX + PFV.PRES]) (see Figure 1 below).⁵ As is common across languages, the analytical structure constitutes the aggressive pattern, and its most regular unbound element is transferred to the synthetic pattern, which lacks such a fully regular and transparent marker.

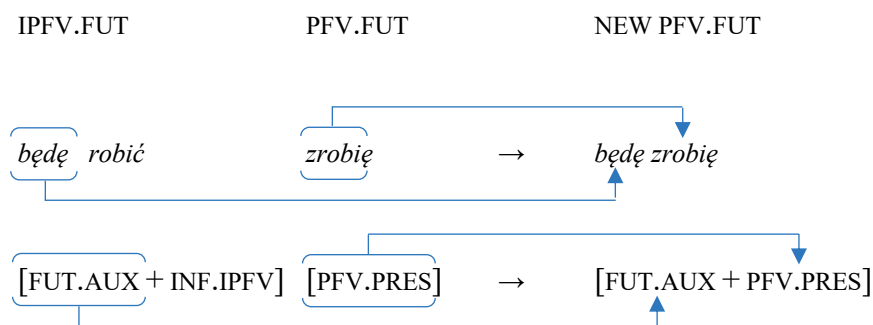


Figure 1: The analogical source of the new perfective future in Polish

⁴ The future auxiliary (e.g., *będę* ‘I will’ in Figure 1) derives from the perfective present of the verb *być* ‘be’ (Błaszczak et al. 2014; see also van Schooneveld 1951 and Whaley 2000).

⁵ Arguably, we deal here with some type of double marking similar to what we observe in the Icelandic plural noun *mennir-nir* ‘men’ (lit. man.PL-DEF.ART.PL) or the Gambian English word *child-ren-s* ‘children’ (lit. child-PL-PL).

A comparable – although not identical – phenomenon of expanding the use of the auxiliary ‘be’ in future constructions to perfective stems is attested in non-standard varieties of other East and West Slavonic languages. As in Polish, this expansion is generally explained in terms of an analogical process.

In Australian Russian (i.e., a Russian variety spoken by Russian immigrants in Australia), the future of the auxiliary *быть* ‘be’ has become grammatical with the infinitives of perfective verbs (Kouzmin 1982). The extent of this has been such that the original synthetic perfective future “is largely lost below a certain level of competence” (Sussex 1993: 1019). This spread of the ‘be’ imperfective future to perfective stems is attributed to English influence and the analogy with the future built around the auxiliary *will* (see Kouzmin 1982; Sussex 1993).

Similarly, in Upper and Lower Sorbian, the ‘be’-type auxiliary, respectively *być* or *byś*, may be used with the infinitives of perfective verbs to form a future tense. The resultant constructions for 1st person singular are *ja budu napisać* ‘I will write’ in Upper Sorbian and *ja budu napisas* ‘I will write’ in Lower Sorbian (Stone 1993a: 637). These new forms are viewed as pattern borrowing from German – specifically, the replica of the future with *werden*. For two centuries, this usage – typical of colloquial registers or “popular speech” (De Bray 1980: 430) – has been regarded as incorrect from the normative perspective of the literary language (Stone 1993a: 637). However, towards the end of the 20th c., it was permitted in the Upper Sorbian standard language “if the infinitive, for the sake of emphasis, is placed in first position in the clause” (ibid.; see Faßke 1981: 253).⁶

4. Implication

The emergence of this new analytical perfective future tense in Polish not only contributes to the relaxation of the rule of strict incompatibility of the future auxiliary ‘be’ with perfective verbs in the West and East Slavonic linguistic branches – it also has certain, in my view, important implications for general linguistic theory.

The new Polish future *będę zrobić* ‘I will do’ (lit. be.FUT.1SG do.PFV.FUT.1SG or I.will.be I.will.do) exhibits various characteristics (mono-event, mono-predicative, and mono-clausal) of a serial verb construction (SVC) (cf. Aikhenvald 2018; Andrason 2018a; 2019; Andrason & Aikhenvald 2022).⁷ It is built around two finite

⁶ Although the emergence of the new future tenses in Australian Russian and (Upper and Lower) Sorbian has been attributed to the analogy with external language systems (i.e., English and German, respectively), language-internal analogical mechanisms may also have been at play. As in Polish, the analytical imperfective pattern seems to have expanded over the area previously reserved for the synthetic pattern, i.e., perfective verbs.

⁷ In contrast, the novel constructions in Australian Russian and Upper and Lower Sorbian do not instantiate the SVC category even minimally.

verbs V_1 and V_2 that can be used outside this bi-verbal sequence; the two verbs are inflected in the same person and number with their subject referents obligatorily coinciding; the two verbs are also inflected in the same TAM category (i.e., future tense), and, more importantly, jointly express a single event; the construction has a uniform polarity value (i.e., either positive or negative) with a single negator operating over the two verbal elements, and exhibits a unitary argument structure, thus disallowing duplicate objects; similarly, any adjuncts (temporal, locative, manner, etc.) operate jointly over the two verbs and thus belong to the entire construction; and the two verbal components are not connected by markers of syntactic dependency (e.g., conjunctive coordinators, subordinizers, complementizers), occupy an adjacent and unalterable position (i.e., their order cannot be inverted), and are not separated by a pause but rather attest to a conjunctive type of prosody.

Consequently, apart from asymmetrical SVCs built around motion verbs (e.g., *pójsć, iść, chodzić*), the ‘take’ verb (*wziąć*), and modal verb (*musieć*) (Andrason 2018a; 2018b; 2019; 2023; Gębka-Wolak & Moroz 2021; Andrason, Gębka-Wolak & Moroz 2022), Polish would be in the process of developing a new type of SVC built around a ‘be’-type verb. The fact that Polish is a relatively rich serializing language and widely tolerates diverse patterns of verbal serialization (Andrason 2023) may have contributed to the emergence of the new analytical-perfective future tense.

Evidence from Polish and the new serializing future tense would in turn attest to an alternative fourth source of SVCs in the languages of the world – thus far, largely ignored in scholarship – namely, analogy. That is, apart from clause combining, concurrent grammaticalization, and verbal modification (Aikhenvald 2018; Andrason & Aikhenvald 2022), SVCs may emerge due to language-internal and/or language-external analogical pressures (cf. Andrason et al. 2022: 271). At least in Polish, such an emergence could be viewed as *catastrophic*:⁸ it results from a sudden or abrupt upgrading of the inflected auxiliary to the status of a minor verb in an SVC due to its transposition from one pattern (the analytical future) to a different pattern (the synthetic future).⁹

⁸ I use the term ‘catastrophic’ as opposed to ‘gradual’.

⁹ However, the serializing construction with *być* ‘be’ that I described in this section seems problematic with other TAM categories, e.g., present and past tenses: ***jestem piszę* lit. be.IPFV.PRES.1SG write.IPFV.PRES.1SG (intended meaning ‘I am writing / I write’) and *?**byłem pisałem* lit. be.IPFV.PST.1SG write.IPFV.PST.1SG (intended meaning ‘I was writing / I wrote (usually/habitually)’). The form *byłem pisałem* is not incorrect *per se*. It constitutes one of the variants of the pluperfect, which is currently perceived as archaic and rarely used. Originally, only one verbal element in the pluperfect could be inflected for person, i.e. either the auxiliary *być* ‘be’ (i.e., *писаł byłem / byłem писаł*) or the main verb (i.e., *писаłem был*) (see Łoś 1927: 300; Bańko 2002: 93; Długosz-Kurczabowa & Dubisz 2006: 309). The forms *писаłem byłem* and *byłem писаłem* in which both verbal elements are inflected for person developed later due to analogical pressures (Długosz-Kurczabowa 2009). All of this suggests that the constructional pattern found in the new future in Polish is not a canonical SVC. Nevertheless, the determination of the

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the rule according to which perfective verbs are incompatible with the future auxiliary ‘be’ in West and East Slavonic languages should not be regarded as strict as has been claimed. At least in colloquial Polish and in less standard varieties of a few other languages, the ‘be’ auxiliary may – more or less commonly – be combined with perfective verbs. Such future perfective constructions with the ‘be’ auxiliary arise because of analogical pressures, language internal (in all cases, including Polish) as well as language external (in Sorbian and Australian Russian). The Polish perfective future with ‘be’ is particularly interesting as it instantiates an analogy-driven SVC – an additional fourth source of SVCs across languages.

Abbreviations

AUX – auxiliary; DEF.ART – definite article; FUT – future; INF – infinitive; IPFV – imperfective; M – masculine; PFV – perfective; PL – plural; PN – proper noun; PRES – present; PST – past; REFL.DAT – reflexive dative; SG – singular.

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canonicity degree of the “*być* SVC” requires a detailed and principled study that expands beyond the scope of the present article.

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PREMA NOVOJ BUDUĆNOSTI U (ZAPADNIM I ISTOČNIM) SLAVENSKIM JEZICIMA?

Ovaj rad pokazuje da pravilo prema kojem su perfektivni glagoli nespojivi s pomoćnim glagolom 'biti' u budućem glagolskom vremenu u zapadnim i istočnim slavenskim jezicima nije tako strogo kao što se tvrdilo u prijašnjim istraživanjima. U kolokvijalnom poljskom jeziku, kao i u manje standardnim varijantama gornjolужиčkosrpskog, donjolужиčkosrpskog i australskog ruskog, pomoćni glagol 'biti' može se kombinirati s perfektivnim glagolima. Takve perfektivne konstrukcije u budućem glagolskom vremenu s pomoćnim glagolom 'biti' nastaju zbog unutarjezičnih i/ili vanjskih analoških pritisaka. Poljska perfektivna budućnost s 'biti' predstavlja serijsku glagolsku konstrukciju vođenu analogijom – dodatni četvrti izvor serijskih glagolskih konstrukcija u svjetskim jezicima.

Ključne riječi: slavenski jezici, poljski, morfosintaksa, buduće vrijeme, glagolski vid, serijska konstrukcija

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