

Future tense^[*]

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1. Introduction

There are several ways to express future tense in Nordic languages. Commonly, the simple present tense form is used to express future tense, as shown for Icelandic in (1):

- (1) *María kemur á morgun* (Ice.)
María come.PRES tomorrow
 'Maria will come tomorrow.'

We also find future tense auxiliaries that select for a bare infinitive verb (i.e., an infinitive without an infinitival marker). For example, *skal/ska* 'shall' is used in Norwegian (*skal*), Danish (*skal*), Swedish (*ska/skall*), Faroese (*skal*) and Icelandic (*skal*), and *vil* ('will', 'want') is used in Danish and Norwegian. This is exemplified in (2) for Swedish:

- (2) *Jag ska åka hem i morgon.* (Swe.)
I will.PRES go.INF home tomorrow
 'I will go home tomorrow.'

There are also future auxiliaries that select for a non-bare infinitive. Most notable are *komme (til) å* 'come to' in Norwegian (*komme til at/å*), Danish (*komme til at*), Swedish (*komma att/å*) and Faroese (*koma at*, mainly younger speakers), *ætla að* 'intend to' in Icelandic and *fara at* 'go to' in Faroese. This is exemplified in (3) for the Faroese form *fara at* (example from Thráinsson et al. 2004):

- (3) *Hann fer at skriva eina bók um føroyskt.* (Far.)
He go.PRES INF.M write.INF a book.INF about Faroese.
 'He is going to/is about to write a book on Faroese.'

The choice of future tense marking is often influenced by the modal and aspectual interpretation of the clause, see Christensen (1997) for detailed discussion. Note that none of the North Germanic languages has a special inflectional future tense form.

In the ScanDiaSyn survey, two phenomena related to the future tense were tested in Norway: (1) the use of *bli* 'become', 'be' as a future auxiliary, both in the present and past tense with different types of subjects, and (2) the past tense use of the auxiliary *komme*. In the discussion part, I will compare the Norwegian data with data from the other Nordic languages from other sources.

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntactic Database (NSD)

Three future tense sentences were tested in the ScanDiaSyn-survey, but only in Norway. The first sentence has a future tense construction with the auxiliary *bli* in the present tense:

- (4) *Æ trur det blir å regne til natta.* (#993) (Nor.)
I believe_{PAST} it bli.PRES INF.M rain.INF to night.DEF
 'I think it will rain tonight.'

The results are shown in Map 1 below:



Map 1: *Bli* 'become' as a future auxiliary
 (#993: *Æ trur det blir å regne til natta* 'I think it will rain tonight.')

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

The map above clearly shows that *bli* is accepted as a future auxiliary only in Northern Norway. This result is in accordance with previous descriptions of the use of *bli* as a future auxiliary, see Iversen (1964, 1996) and the discussion below.

The following sentence was also tested:

- (5) *Vi blei ikke å dra til Oslo allikelvel.* (#994) (Nor.)
we bli.PAST not INF.M go.INF to Oslo after.all
 'We ended up not going to Oslo after all.'

Here, the auxiliary is in the past tense, and the subject is referential, as opposed to the expletive subject in (4) above. As will be discussed below, the nature of the subject has been claimed to influence the grammaticality of sentences with *bli* as a future auxiliary (see Vannebo 1996, and the discussion below). In the ScanDiaSyn-survey, the sentence with a past tense *bli* with a referential subject was not tested in some locations where sentence (4) was not accepted. It should be noted that the past tense *bli*-construction is not interpreted as a future in the past (as in e.g. 'I was going to leave the following day'). Rather, the past tense *bli* seems to add either aspectual information or information about the subjects intention or control over the event. As seen in the translation line in (5) above, the past tense *bli* is best translated as 'end up'. The results for sentence (5) are shown in the map below:



Map 2: Past tense of future auxiliary *bli* 'become'
 (#994: *Vi blei ikke å dra til Oslo allikevel. 'We ended up not going to Oslo after all.'*)
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

Comparing the two maps, we see that the isogloss for past tense *bli* with a referential subject (Map 2) is drawn slightly further north than the isogloss for present tense *bli* with a non-referential subject (Map 1). We have reasons to suspect that it is the tense rather than the nature of the subject that is the source of this small difference in isoglosses.

In the locations where (5) was tested, the following sentence was also tested:

- (6) *Vi kom ikke til å dra til Oslo allikevel.* (#995) (Nor.)
we BLI.PAST not to INF.M go.INF to Oslo after.all

'We ended up not going to Oslo after all.'

The results are shown in Map 3 below:



Map 3: Past tense of auxiliary *komme* 'come'
 (#995: *Vi kom ikke til å dra til Oslo allikevel. 'We ended up not going to Oslo after all.'*)
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

Komme til in (6) is not interpreted as a future auxiliary, but rather as an aspectual auxiliary, just like the past tense of *bli* in (5). As will be discussed below, speakers all over Norway use *komme* in the present tense to express regular future tense, but also the past tense of *komme* for expressing "future in the past", at least in embedded contexts. Map 3 also shows that the aspectual use of past tense *komme* is accepted at the measure points in south-eastern Norway close to the Swedish border, and also at various measure points along the coast.

3. Discussion

bli and *komme* are discussed separately, *bli* in 3.1 and *komme* in 3.2.

3.1. *Bli* as a future auxiliary

The use of *bli* as a future auxiliary in Northern Norwegian was first noted and discussed by Ragnvald Iversen (1954, 1996). Iversen proposed that this construction was borrowed from the

Saami languages, where future tense can be expressed with the help of a *bli*-like auxiliary followed by an infinitive. According to Iversen, the construction was found from Salten in the south to Alta in the North. As we see in Map 1 above, the construction is now judged grammatical all the way up to the Norwegian-Russian border, and all the way down to Mo i Rana which is in the district adjacent to Salten in the south.

As discussed by Vannebo (1996), the future construction with *bli* can be split into three different types, with different regional distribution. The three different types differ in the nature of the subject, as shown in (7)-(9):

- (7) Eg blir å reise i morgon. (Nor.)
I BLI.PRES INF.M travel.INF tomorrow.
 'I will leave tomorrow.'
- (8) Båten blir å gå i morgon. (Nor.)
boat.DEF BLI.PRES INF.M go.INF tomorrow.
 'The boat will go tomorrow.'
- (9) Æ trur det blir å regne til natta. (Nor.)
I believePAST it BLI.PRES INF.M rain.INF to night.DEF
 'I think it will rain tonight.'

Sentence (7) has an intentional, human subject, (8) has an inanimate subject and (9) has a pleonastic subject. According to Vannebo, the construction with future *bli* with a human subject is more widespread than future *bli* with an inanimate subject, which in turn is more widespread than future *bli* with a pleonastic subject. In the ScanDiaSyn survey, only (9) was tested, and as Map 1 above shows, it was found acceptable by almost all speakers in Northern Norway (from Mo i Rana to Kirkenes). We have no evidence that sentences (7) and (8) would be judged as generally better than (9), as claimed by Vannebo, though it cannot be ruled out.

In the Nordic Dialect Corpus, several instances of future *bli* are found, all from Northern Norway, both with animate and inanimate subjects. One speaker from Sømna in southern Nordland (south of Mo i Rana), utters the subjectless question *blir ikke å gjøre det heller?* lit. 'becomes not to do it either', 'will you/she not do it either?', which probably should be analyzed as an instance of the relevant construction (with the omitted subject interpreted either as a second or third person pronoun). However, across Mainland Scandinavian there is an impersonal *bli*-construction, exemplified in (10) (from NDC, young male speaker from Selbu, Sør-Trøndelag), which also has a future interpretation (at least in the present tense):

- (10) Det bli(r) väl å få utdanning (Selbu_01YM.)
it BLI.PRES PART INF.M get.INF education.
 'I will presumably get an education.'

This construction has an expletive subject, and the speaker, or possibly the hearer, is interpreted as the logical subject of the sentence. Note that the sentence in example (6)/(9) above does not have an implicit logical subject, and therefore differs substantially from the sentence in (10). The type of construction exemplified in (10) is widespread, at least in Sweden and Norway, and Vannebo speculates that this construction is the source of the Northern Norwegian future *bli*-construction. Note that the impersonal construction is available with the regular copula *vara* as well (as in *då är det väl bara att gå hem då* 'well, then it's just to go home then'), though *vara* cannot take a personal subject and an infinitive complement.^[1] With the exception of the construction in (10), *bli* is not used as a future auxiliary in Sweden at all, as far as I am aware.^[2]

3.2. *Komme* as a future auxiliary

As mentioned in the introduction, *komme/komma* is used as a future auxiliary in Mainland Scandinavian and Faroese, but not in Icelandic. In Standard Swedish, future *komma* most commonly takes an infinitival complement with an infinitival marker (*att/å*), but in contemporary spoken language, the infinitival marker is often dropped, especially among younger speakers (see Olofsson 2008 for discussion). In some more archaic dialects, *komma* can also be followed by *till att* and an infinitive (see Hagren 2007), but it is hard to tell whether *komma* in this case should be seen analyzed as an aspectual auxiliary or a future auxiliary (see Christensen 1997 for an extensive discussion).

Komme is used all over Norway as a future auxiliary. In the northern parts *komme* exists alongside *bli* as a future auxiliary. We can see this in the Nordic Dialect Corpus, where we find several instances of future *komme* from Northern Norway (from e.g. Hammerfest, Kirkenes, Narvik and Bodø). In both Norwegian and Danish, the auxiliary *komme* is followed by *til å* + infinitive, though there are some indications of dialectal variation. As noted already by Aasen (1864), *te* (dialectal version of *til* 'to') is used as an infinitival marker in many dialects in mainly western Norway, and in these dialects, we do not see a "doubling" of *te*, but only one instance. In the Nordic Dialect Corpus, many instances of *til* are followed directly by an infinitive verb (both after *komme* and other verbs), without the standard infinitival marker *at/å*. We can thus assume that *til* is still used as a regular infinitival marker in parts of Norway (or at least by some speakers in parts of Norway), instead of, or in addition to, the standard infinitival marker *at/å*. Today, *til* seems to be most productively used as an infinitival marker in southwestern Norway, most notably Rogaland, where many examples from both younger and older speakers can be found in the Nordic Dialect Corpus (especially from Gjesdal, Karmøy, Sokndal, and Time), but also in the neighboring counties Vest-Agder and Hordaland, and to some extent Sogn og Fjordane (older speakers), Telemark and the inland counties Buskerud (older speakers) and Oppland. The following example is from Tinn, Telemark:

- (11) det kommer til skje noe her (Tinn_04OW.)
it come.PRES INF.M/TO happen.INF something here.
 'Something will happen here.'

In Faroese, *koma at* (without *til*) has recently been imported from Danish, and is mainly used among the younger speakers (Majbritt Pauladóttir, p.c.). In Icelandic, *koma* is not used at all as a future auxiliary.

In the ScanDiaSyn survey, the auxiliary *komme* was tested only in the past tense, and only in parts of Norway (mainly in the parts that uses *bli* as a future auxiliary). Note that the relevant reading that was tested is not a "future in the past"-reading (e.g. 'he was going to see the show yesterday') but a certain aspectual reading that probably is best translated as 'ended up doing X'. As can be seen in map 3, the construction is in general not accepted, with some exceptions. Interestingly, it is fully accepted in the three measure points close to the Swedish border in southern Norway (Enebakk, Nes och Rena). In Swedish, and Danish, this construction is in general accepted (see Christensen 1997 and Falk 2002 for discussion of Swedish). Falk (2002) argues that the future auxiliary *komma* developed out of an aspectual use of *komma* during the 17th century (the aspectual use is first attested in the early 16th century). The fact that the aspectual use of *komma* is absent in at least parts of Norway suggests that the future auxiliary *komme* was borrowed as a fully developed future auxiliary into Norwegian from Swedish or Danish. Interestingly, the past tense of the auxiliary *komme* has a "future in the past"-interpretation in Norwegian, and this interpretation is crucially not available in Swedish (and probably not in Standard Danish either). The following Norwegian examples are from the Nordic Dialect Corpus:

- (12) hann var spennte på ka hann bestefar kåmm te å tjøbe te hann (Hjemeland_OM.)
he was excited on what he grandfather come.PAST to INF.M buy.INF to him
 'He was excited about what his grandfather would buy for him.'

- (13) va de ikje de eg sa, at du kãm te å læupe a me æin fannt? (Åseral_OM.)
was it not it I said. it that you come.PAST INF.M run.INF off with a hobo.
 'Wasn't that what I told you, that you would run off with a hobo?'

The future in the past reading only seems to be available in embedded contexts, when the embedding verb is in the past tense, i.e. it looks like a Sequence of Tense-phenomenon. If this difference between Norwegian and Swedish/Danish reflects a deeper difference in the temporal system, or just a difference in the behavior in one lexical item is still an open question, which deserves further investigation.

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Web sites:

Nordic Atlas of Language Structures (NALS) Journal: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nals>

Nordic Dialect Corpus: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>

Nordic Syntax Database: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>

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[1] *Vara* 'be' can marginally take a referential subject and an infinitival complement if the subject originates as a direct object or prepositional object of the infinitival verb, as in *han är inte att skratta åt* 'he is not to laugh at', meaning roughly 'take him seriously (don't laugh at him)'. The implicit logical subject of the infinitive has a generic interpretation. We do not know to which extent this construction is productively used in Scandinavia today, but it seems to be more alive in Norwegian than in Swedish. According to the Norwegian reference grammar this construction also exist with *bliva* in Norwegian, with a future interpretation.

[2] Googling for the string *jag blir nog att* (I will probably to) gives a handful of relevant hits. 3 out of 6 hits come from speakers in southern Dalarna, which suggests that this could be a dialectal feature.