

# Future tense<sup>[\*]</sup>

Björn Lundquist

*UiT The Arctic University of Norway*

## 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.











- (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.

## References

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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.