

Author: Lynn Wales
Institution: University of Queensland
Email: wales@uq.edu.au

Title: *Modal functions of future tenses in French*

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Abstract

Two related claims have been influential in the Romance Linguistics literature.

1. The first is that the synthetic future tenses in spoken Western Romance are now rivalled as temporal functors by the more recently developed GO futures (Fleischman (1982), Harris (1988), Posner (1996)). Bybee et al (1994) use this claim in support of a more general theory about the provenance of future tenses.

2. Fleischman and Harris have also claimed that the synthetic futures in spoken Romance languages now have a modal rather than a temporal role. Fleischman (supported by Bybee (1985)) sees this postulated development as part of a cycle of diachronic change in which initial analytic verb forms expressing modal or aspectual values take on a temporal value, that of future reference, which is coincidental with their becoming morphologically synthetic. Once established as future tenses the synthetic forms can then take on new modal meanings consistent with their future tense status, and these eventually supplant the temporal meanings, which are taken up by new analytic forms.

Challenges to the theory that future tenses end their days as moods rather than tenses have been raised, eg by Wales (1982), Jeanjean (1988) and Gobert & Maisier (1995). The evidence is of two sorts: one is positive - that future tenses in spoken Romance continue to be used with temporal meaning; and the other is negative - that evidence of modal usage for these forms is lacking.

Building on earlier work involving native speaker judgements of future tense meanings, this study examines verb data from a daily broadsheet to compare relative occurrence of modal and temporal meanings, and to see in particular if there is evidence to support the claim that modal uses of the synthetic future tense are more productive in contemporary French than temporal uses.

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