

PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE TENSE IN ROMANIAN

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ABSTRACT. *Perceptions of the Future Tense in Romanian.* The most recent linguistic discussions concern *the future tense* in relation to the category of mood and aspect. With the intention of returning to the problem in successive stages, first, we reconstruct the functional way of the perceptions concerning this, nonetheless, verbal tense, then, we verify these perceptions by referring to the diatopic varieties and texts in which the diversity of the construction is well established.

Keywords: *Futur Tense, Romanian, Latin, diatopic, diachronic*

REZUMAT. *Percepții ale viitorului în română.* Abordări recente prezintă viitorul în raport cu categoriile de mod și aspect. Propunându-ne să revenim asupra acestei probleme în etape succesive, refacem întâi un parcurs al percepțiilor cu privire la acest, totuși, timp verbal, verificăm aceste percepții prin raportarea lor la varietățile diatopice și la textele în care diversitatea construcției este probată.

Cuvinte cheie: *timp viitor, română, latină, diatopic, diacronic*

1. The method

In this paper, we propose a description of the future tense in Romanian from a diatopic, diachronic, and synchronic perspective. This description will serve the following working hypothesis: from Latin to Romanian, from the imbalance of a system, the Latin one, to the balance of a new language, in expressing the future, the subjunctive compensated for the absence of a grammaticalized form for this tense. First of all, we will follow the various perceptions of the temporal subsystem under consideration in Romanian grammar books written in French. We will emphasize the evolutions from Latin to Romanian in the process of reconstruction of the future tense. We will then focus on the diatopic variance of this structure, and on the reason or reasons why, in chrestomathies of old Romanian texts, the position of this time realization does not come down only to the indicative mood. Instead of a conclusion, we will sum up by enumerating the most important hypotheses, in favour of which, we wish to argue, step by step and stage by stage.

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We discuss this aspect first, because the future is one of the tenses which suffered the biggest changes¹ in the Romance verbal system, and then, because the auxiliary that the Romanian language uses to form the future was presented, either in connection with the Romance periphrases that expressed temporal values at the demise of the Latin synthetic future, or in connection with an inflexion model of Greek or Albanian origin.

2. The starting point: the perception of the future in grammars of French expression

The need for such a description finds its expression in the way this tense was perceived in grammars written in French, especially in the second part of the 20th century. It is curious that Sever Pop² believes that the literary language makes use of two sorts of future: ‘le futur prochain’ and the anterior future. Le futur prochain (i.e. the simple future) is, according to Sever Pop, a tense of the indicative which designates an action that will begin in the future but whose end is undefined, as in *voiu face* ‘je ferai’. The anterior future expresses an action completed at some point in the future, as in *voi fi făcut* ‘j’aurai fait’.

The first type, of those presented by Sever Pop, is for Alf Lombard³, purely and simply, the future tense, and “it is formed in four different ways”, according to the auxiliary employed. Two other types of future are formed with an auxiliary derived from *a vrea/a voi* (to want/will), without the initial *v-*; the third type has the invariable zero auxiliary, which, in Lombard’s view, “was originally⁴ a verbal form meaning ‘il faut’ (must)”. According to Lombard, there are three types of future tenses that are synonyms. The fourth type is formed with the present indicative of the auxiliary verb *a avea* (to have) and the present subjunctive of the verb to conjugate, as in *am să jur* (I have to swear), “j’ai à jurer”. For Lombard, this type of future “often takes on a meaning of necessity”. The distinction between the different types of future also concerns the language register in which one or the other is used. For Lombard, the future with the auxiliary *a voi* is characteristic of the formal language, while the other types, and especially the future that uses the auxiliary *a avea*, “belong to the informal language”.

¹ See W. Meyer-Lübke, *Grammaire des langues romanes*, II, 1895, p. 151, where it is stated that, instead of the extinct verbal forms, “the Latin daughter languages also introduced a series of innovations; they are the simple future and the anterior future, the periphrastic perfect and the passive, and a few other isolated tenses, specific to one or the other of the Romance languages”. All quotations are translated from French or Romanian into English by Dana Nora Nașca-Tartièere. Special thanks for assistance with the English translation to Dana Nora Nașca-Tartièere and Mihai Zdrenghea.

² Sever Pop, *Grammaire roumaine*, 1948.

³ Alf Lombard, *La langue roumaine*, 1974.

⁴ From its description, we understand that, for Lombard, this auxiliary has its origins in a form meaning *il faut* (must), other than *a voi*.

As stated by Alain Guillerrou⁵, the distinction between the different types of future opposes the standard language form to a form proper to the informal and the poetic language, and to another form, proper to the everyday language. The prototype of the future tense in Romanian is, for Alain Guillerrou, the one constructed with an auxiliary, with gender and number agreement, derived from the verb *a voi* (to will), taking the following forms: *voi, vei, va...*

The *voi, vei, va* auxiliaries, with the initial consonant removed or with altered vocalism, occur in the future tense construction, in informal and poetic language⁶. For Guillerrou, the auxiliary *a avea* yields a form of future encountered only in everyday language, not in formal language, while the auxiliary *a voi* has a variable form for the standard language and a form invariable in number and gender, for the everyday language.

The present description of the future tense in Romanian, also found in the grammar books under discussion, cannot and has no intention to offer a complete insight into its structural and semantic diversity.

3. Romance developments

In order to understand the subsystem of the future tense in Romanian, we have to mention the two developments present in all Romance languages, which isolate the Romanian language from all the other Romance languages:

a) an evolution that begins with the Latin synthetic future⁷, passes through the popular Romance analytic future, and reaches a modern synthetic future originating in the analytic future;

b) an evolution that also starts with the Latin synthetic future but ends up with an analytic future, in the case of the Romanian language⁸.

⁵ Alain Guillerrou, *Manuel de langue roumaine*, 1953.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 110.

⁷ For the disappearance of the Latin simple future, see W. Meyer-Lübke, *Grammaire des langues romanes*, II, p. 151.

⁸ Here, we must keep in mind that the same periphrases generate in Romanian the conditional, formed in its diatopic variants of *voleo* followed by the infinitive, and, in the standard variant of *habeo* followed by the infinitive, of course, for those who accept that *aș, ai, ar* come from *a avea* (to have). About the origin of this auxiliary for the optative mood in Romanian, see W. Meyer-Lübke, *Grammaire des langues romanes*, II, p.154: "Romanian is the only language to possess the optative mood. It is formed with *aș, ari, are, am, ați, are* and the infinitive. In the contemporary usage, *ari* was replaced by *ai* and *are* simplified into *ar*. Among these forms, which clearly relate to *a avea*, it is difficult to explain the 1st person singular *aș*, formerly *ași*. Whatever the interpretation we could give to *are*, of which *ari* is only a derivative (cf. § 238), *aș* is still surprising, because a form **ha(bui)ssi* supposes a too violent a contraction. We cannot help thinking of the Greek mood *ᾴς*, which also entered the Albanian language; only, in this case, there is another difficulty: we should admit that the final *-i* was borrowed from the strong perfect tenses." For an explanation of *ăs*, see Capidan, *Meglenoromâni*, I, p. 168, who considers this to be a form combining *ă* and *si*.

Thus, in agreement with Bourciez and Meyer-Lübke, we have to mention that in the Latin spoken during the imperial era (Late Latin), a series of periphrases⁹ managed either to render the idea of passive voice or express certain temporal nuances. Certain periphrases arrived either “to render the idea of passive or to express certain temporal nuances. The idea of the future was gradually and analytically¹⁰ obtained”.

On one hand, “a periphrasis [*habeo* with the infinitive] used to indicate, initially, the possibility¹¹ (in Cicero) and then, the necessity (in Seneca)”.

On the other hand, a periphrasis of [*volo* with the infinitive], quite similar to the future, began to manifest itself from the classic age¹². The two periphrases consisting in a verb and an infinitive, which began, towards the end of the Empire, to express the idea of the future, have spread widely, but the various regions decided among themselves¹³. In the Balkan Peninsula, the periphrasis [*volo* with the infinitive] was preferred (under the influence of the Byzantine Greek¹⁴). In Italy and in all the countries where the Latin culture was present, the infinitive with *habere* became the equivalent of the future. Romance languages have lost the Latin synthetic future constructed with suffixes and inflexions. After a long process¹⁵, the Romance languages, except the Romanian, transformed the analytic future [infinitive with *habeo*] into a modern synthetic form.

4. The diatopic variants of the future

The dialectal variants show that Romanian recreated¹⁶ only one type of future tense, the one in: [*voleo* ± preposition + infinitive]. Apart from the form developed from this periphrasis, in Romanian, in diatopy, diachrony, and synchrony, we can find future tense forms constructed as follows:

- a. [*voleo* + subjunctive]
- b. or [*habeo* + infinitive].

These future forms are considered subsequent to the other forms, because both *voleo* and *habeo* do not show signs of grammaticalization¹⁷ in Romanian; semantically speaking, the two verbs display the same values as in their occurrences without an infinitive or subjunctive with which they would form a periphrasis.

⁹ W. Meyer-Lübke, *Grammaire des langues romanes*, II, p. 152: “To form the future, we use six types separated by time and space and whose Latin translation would be: *cantare habeo, habeo cantare, volo cantare, habeo ad cantare, debeo cantare, venio ad cantare.*”

¹⁰ E. Bourciez, *Éléments de linguistique romane*, Paris, Librairie C. Klincksieck, p. 116.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 118.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 269.

¹⁴ W. Meyer-Lübke, II, p. 153-154, Sandfeld, *Linguistique balkanique*, 1930, p. 180-181.

¹⁵ Lars-Göran Sundell: *Le temps futur en français moderne*, Uppsala, Stockholm, 1991, p. 11.

¹⁶ Caragiu Marioțeanu, *Compendiu de dialectologie română*, p. 114.

¹⁷ Meyer-Lübke, II, p. 152, believes that the old Romanian had a future tense consisting of *a avea* (to have) followed by the infinitive. Sandfeld, p. 185, considers that the presence of a future with *a avea* and the infinitive is not unusual, knowing the importance of this structure to the Romance world.

Diatopically speaking, the three Romanian dialects south of the Danube make use of different patterns in order to form the future tense.

Two of the three dialects form the future tense with the help of the subjunctive; only one dialect forms the future tense with the infinitive of the verb to conjugate.

In the Aromanian dialect¹⁸ we also find a complex future structure formed by:

[va ± s(i) + subjunctive]

or by:

[vai + subjunctive¹⁹]

Thus, in order to build the future tense, Aromanian uses an invariable affix, either in the form *va* or *vai*.

Obviously, the affix used in Aromanian comes from *voleo*. It is a fixed affix, meaning that it can be placed only before the subjunctive marked or not by *s(i)*

as in:

va (s) cântu, va (s) cântsi, va (s) cântă

or

*vai cântu, vai cântsi, vai cântă*²⁰

In Megleno-Romanian we come across two structures: one with a normal frequency and the other with an extremely low frequency.

The normal frequency structure of the future tense in Megleno-Romanian is reduced to:

[si + subjunctive]

Thus, in Megleno-Romanian the future comprises a verbal form identical to that of the present subjunctive²¹. It is believed that this dialect is at a stage where the affix for the future tense in Aromanian, in the form *va* or *vai*, was lost²², as in:

*si bat, si baț, si bată*²³ (*voi bate, vei bate, va bate...*)

(I will beat, you will beat, he/she will beat...)

¹⁸ Caragiū Marioțeanu, *Compendiu de dialectologie română*, 1975, p. 250.

¹⁹ As far as Aromanian is concerned, more specifically Macedo-Romanian, M.Gaster, *Chrestomathie roumaine*, I, 1891, shows evidence of the existence of a future with the infinitive of the verb to conjugate, preceded by the same affixes, but also by a variable affix, like *voiu* (will).

²⁰ For examples, see Capidan, *Aromânii*, 1932, p. 466.

²¹ Capidan, *Meglenoromânii*, 1925, p. 168: the function of the future, though different from that of the subjunctive, might often be confusing and can only be understood from the context of the utterance: : *Io si va 'ncurun napcum si fațuț fâmeal'* (*Eu vă voi cumuna pentru ca iarăși să nașteți copii*) (I will wed you so that you give birth again) 39/40 *Taț mul'ari, ca si ti tures ăn vali* (*Taci muiere, că o să te arunc în vale*) (Shut up, woman, or I'll throw you down the valley into the river).

²² *Ibidem*, p. 167.

²³ Capidan, *Meglenoromânii*, 1925, and Caragiū Marioțeanu, *Compendiu de dialectologie română*, 1975; for examples, see Capidan, 1925, p. 168.

In addition to this structure, homonymous with the subjunctive, Megleno-Romanian²⁴ sporadically builds the future from:

[invariable affix in the form *ăș* or *ă si* with the indicative of the verb to conjugate],
as in: *ăș bat,ăș baț,ăș bată (voi bate,vei bate,va bate...)*

or: *ă si bat,ă si baț,ă si bată (voi bate,vei bate,va bate...)* (I will beat, you will beat, he/she will beat ...)

The two structures have no semantic differences. The second structure is important in order to attest the presence of the *voleo* auxiliary, used to form the future in all Romanian dialects.

If, in order to express the future, the Aromanian and the Megleno-Romanian use the subjunctive, the Istro-Romanian, the Daco-Romanian and the standard Romanian call for the indicative. The Istro-Romanian places, before or after the infinitive, an affix variable in number and person, derived from *a vrea/a voi* (to want/will).

The position of the affix is related to the presence or absence of an emphasis on the pronoun subject²⁵. Thus, if the affix obtained from *a avea* (to have), in the forms:

(v)oi, (v)er, va, ren, (v)eț, (v)or (will)

is postposed to the infinitive (*veri-va : va veni*) (will come), the future form obtained focuses on processuality, because, in Istro-Romanian, word order is reversed in objective constructions.

Obviously, if the variable affix precedes the infinitive (*voi auzi: voi auzi*) (will hear), the focus is on the subject.

Concerning the evolution of *voleo* from Latin to the Romanian language variants, it is interesting that, while the present of *voleo* followed by an infinitive forms the future tense, the imperfect of *voleo* in the forms, *reș, rei, re, ren, reț, re* constructs the present conditional. The Istro-Romanian utterances containing such structures express restrictions²⁶ with or without formulating the condition. From here, the idea that this mood should be called the restrictive mood instead of the conditional mood.

5. Is it a tense of the indicative mood?

Is the future exclusively assigned to the indicative mood in Romanian?

If, in order to express the future, in two out of the three diatopic variants mentioned, an affix derived from *voleo* followed by an infinitive or a subjunctive is used, Romanian texts from the 16th, 17th, and even 18th centuries seem to offer a different perspective.

²⁴ Capidan, *Meglenoromânii*, 1925, p. 168.

²⁵ Caragiu Marioțeanu, *Compendiu de dialectologie română*, 1975, p. 205.

²⁶ Pușcariu, *Studii istroromâne*, 1926, believes that the term *restrictive* is more suitable for the conditional mood. He identifies in Istro-Romanian a present restrictive formed with the imperfect of *a voi* (to will), a perfect restrictive formed with the same affix followed by the participle of *a fi* (to be), and a future restrictive constructed with the radical of the participle, the suffix *-r-* and the personal gender inflexions.

If we take into consideration the grammatical study that accompanies the most important chrestomathy of Romanian texts²⁷, namely the one we owe to M. Gaster, then the future is a tense belonging to the indicative, subjunctive and infinitive.

Among the tenses of the indicative, this study comprises five future forms. The five forms are not named, but marked with an index (a Roman number with or without a letter).

I is the future form constructed with the present indicative of the auxiliary *a voi* (to will) and the infinitive (*voiu avea, vei avea, va avea...*) (will have), and it corresponds to the simple future.

IIa is the future form made of the future of the auxiliary *a voi* (to will) and the participle (*voi fi avut*) (will have had), and it corresponds to the anterior future.

IIb as the future of the present indicative of the same auxiliary followed by the gerund (*voiu fi având*), which corresponds to a mood created in Romanian, i.e. the present presumptive.

IIIa a future form constructed with the anterior future of *a voi* (to will) followed by the gerund (*voi fi fost având*) present in the language, but non-existent in the grammar books.

IIIb is a future form of the indicative, constructed with the anterior future of the auxiliary of *a voi* (to will) and the participle of the verb to conjugate (*voi fi fost avut*), also non-existent in current grammars. It is a future in the past that marks the anteriority, but rarely found even in the spoken language.

Among the tenses of the subjunctive, we can find, in the same chrestomathy, a future form, formed with the present of the auxiliary *a voi*, followed by a subjunctive: *voiu să am, vei să ai, va să aibă*. The infinitives to which the suffix *-(i)tor (fiitor)* was attached, are considered by Gaster future forms of the participle.

The historical Romanian grammars include the future among the indicative tenses. But the fact that Gaster extends the inventory of the future forms from the indicative to other verbal moods is still of interest. On one hand, the model proposed by Gaster indicates a grammaticalization stage of *voleo* in its combinations with the forms of the different verbal moods. On the other hand, if the semantic content of these combinations with *voleo* is perceived as a future, one could say that Gaster's chrestomathy indicates a development stage where the future is still in search of a place in the modal and temporal system of the language.

Instead of a Conclusion

The conclusions derived from comparing the future tense structure in the dialectal variants, old Romanian chrestomathies, and standard language, are concerned with the role of the verb *a avea* (to have), that of the verb *a vrea/voi* (to want/will), the role of the subjunctive, and the main semantic feature generated by the presence of the conjunction *si* in the formation of this tense.

²⁷ We refer to M. Gaster, *Chrestomathie roumaine*, I, 1891.

The verb *a avea*, according to Matilda Caragiu Marioțeanu's description of the dialects of the South of the Danube, is irrelevant to the formation of the future in Aromanian.

The priority of the verb *a voi* in combination with the infinitive and the subjunctive seems undisputable. Three out of four dialects use the verb *a voi* to form the future; only one dialect shows frequent occurrences of the verb *a avea*, as an auxiliary; statistical studies will clarify the rivalry between the two auxiliary verbs.

The comparison of the dialectal variants also indicates that the auxiliary *a voi* has evolved from invariable to variable, in the structure of the future tense. In its invariable form *va*, this verb represented only a temporal marker in Aromanian.

If we take into consideration the fact that two out of four Romanian dialectal variants contain in the future structure the conjunction *și*, we can consider that, as far as the evolution of the content of this tense in Romanian is concerned, the feature *unreal* has played a major role.

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