

Distance, evidentiality and counter-argumentation: Concessive future in Spanish



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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the connection between Spanish concessive future and evidentiality. More specifically, it is argued that concessive future does not merely represent a contextual variant of conjectural future (Escandell, 2010) but a new use (Squartini, 2012) which is restricted by the *activated* status of the proposition (Dryer, 1996). Unlike conjectural future, concessive future does not have an inferential purpose; instead, it plays a role within the (counter) argumentation process. It actually develops a *déréalisant* function (Ducrot, 1995). Therefore, although conjectural use and concessive use share the deictic value of future, they are the projection of this value over different levels of meaning. More generally, this paper shows that future in Spanish may intersect with several semantic and discourse categories, including – but not limited to – evidentiality.

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1. Introduction

From Bello ([1847] 1970: 221) to *Nueva Gramática de la Real Academia Española* (2009: 1767–1768), Spanish traditional grammar has regarded future as a mark of tense; more precisely, it has been defined as a verb morpheme expressing tense. Tense is a particular expression of linguistic time and, since it is grammaticalized as morphological information inside the verb, it constitutes a grammatical category.

However, tense is a very special grammatical category indeed, since it inherently fulfills a referential or contextual function through which it becomes a deictic category (Benveniste, 1966; Comrie, 1976, 1985). In fact, tense links the situation denoted by the verb to the now of the speaker, and that happens due to three primary time references: anteriority (1); simultaneity (2); and posteriority (3).¹

(1) Fuimos_{past} a Madrid.

[We went to Madrid]

(2) Estamos_{pres.} en Madrid.

[We are in Madrid]

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¹ Situations may be directly oriented toward the now of the speaker, as it happens with future tense (*Iremos_{fut} a Madrid*), or they may have an indirect orientation; that is, situations may be oriented toward an intermediate point which is in turn oriented toward the now of the speaker. This is what happens with conditional –also described as future of the past– (*Al día siguiente iríamos_{cond} a Madrid*). The difference between absolute and relative tenses becomes clear in the light of these examples (Comrie, 1985).

(3) Iremos_{fut.} a Madrid.
[We will go to Madrid]

Future places the situation denoted by the verb after the now of the speaker and consequently invokes scenes which have not happened yet. As a result, it usually relates to speculation and to different modal values, which somehow depend on context. Thus, when future appears with the first person, it is generally associated with a promise or with the speaker's commitment to the action expressed by the verb (4); however, its use with the second person may lead us to interpret it as an order, a piece of advice or a prohibition (5); if the subject is a non-volitional third person, future may be related to a clear predictive value (6); and when it denotes general situations and appears with an undetermined subject, it may even trigger a categorical or necessity-related reading (7).

(4) Este fin de semana te *ayudará*_{fut.} con los deberes.
[I will help you with your homework this weekend]

(5) Esta tarde *limpiarás*_{fut.} tu habitación.
[You will clean your bedroom this afternoon]

(6) Mañana *lloverá*_{fut.} en Alicante.
[It will rain in Alicante tomorrow]

(7) Todos *moriremos*_{fut.} algún día.
[Everyone of us will die someday]

In spite of the modal values contextually triggered in examples (4) to (7), future still plays a time-related function in all of them: it still places the situation after the “now” of the speaker.

Nevertheless, future in Spanish may be used to denote situations which are not located after the point of reference or the moment of speech. When this happens, future is utilized to convey that the proposition reflects a conjecture or a speaker's calculation (Bello [1847], 1970: 236):

(8) -¿Qué hora es?
[What time is it?]
-*Serán*_{fut.} las cuatro.
[It must be (*be*_{fut.}) four]

In these cases, the temporal form is extracted from its natural context (posteriority), which justifies the fact that some linguists consider it a case of *dislocation* (Rojo, 1974; Rojo and Veiga, 1999). This use of future has been traditionally related to epistemic modality – and more specifically, to probability –, since it may be rephrased using a present tense form and an adverb of modality:

(9) En estos momentos *serán*_{fut.} las cuatro.
[In this moment, it must be (*be*_{fut.}) four]
> *Probablemente son*_{pres.} las cuatro.
[It is probably four]
(Rojo and Veiga, 1999: 2912).

Cases such as (10B) are usually included to exemplify a contextual variation of this conjectural or epistemic future:

(10) A: Juan es muy simpático.
[Juan is very nice]
B: *Será*_{fut.} muy simpático, pero a mí nunca me saluda.
[He may be (*be*_{fut.}) very nice, but he never says hello to me]

The behavior of future in (10) has been labeled in European Spanish as *concessive*, and has been characterized by a number of recurrent features: it is frequently followed by *pero* conjunction²; it commonly occurs in replies; and it is quite similar to a concessive move – in fact, it very much resembles the *aunque* + subjunctive construction in meaning: *Aunque*

² Concessive future may also be followed by any other contrastive conjunction or discourse marker which discursively works in a similar way to *pero*. Gili Gaya actually suggests a structure followed by the discourse marker *sin embargo* as an example of concessive future: *-Fulano es un sabio; -Lo será*_{fut.}; *sin embargo, se ha equivocado muchas veces* ([1951] 1993: 166) [So-and-so is a wise man; – He may be (*be*_{fut.}); however, he has made mistakes many times]. Note that *sin embargo* is used to cancel the conclusion toward which the previous argument is oriented (Martín Zorraquino and Portolés, 1999: 4115). Despite the differences that *pero* and *sin embargo* may reveal, both could develop a similar counter-argumentation function on some occasions.

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