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The Lithuanian mirative present

Further Perspectives on the Baltic Verb

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The topic

- Lithuanian has several verbal constructions based on the present active participle, sometimes with the auxiliary 'be', sometimes without it.
- The most widespread is the one with the past tense of the auxiliary 'be'. It is dealt with in Arkadiev (2019). Its main function is **avertive** (a form denoting an event that was about to occur at some point in the past but failed to occur due to external circumstances, a change of mind etc.). However, Arkadiev found it can have proximative and progressive functions as well.
- The construction interesting us here has no auxiliary (it consists of a mere participle), but it can be described as a present-tense form (more on this later). It expresses surprise and can thus be characterised as a **mirative present**.
- Lithuanian grammars describe it as part of the system of evidential forms. The Lithuanian evidential combines reportive, inferential and mirative functions.
- However, we will argue the mirative present stands apart from the evidential forms, is probably of different origin and is an instance of the mirative as a *sui generis* category.

The progressive-proximative-avertive

- Arkadiev (2019) describes the progressive-proximative-avertive construction on the basis of corpus data:

Buvau be-si-pilanti sau trečiq
be-PST.1SG CNT-RFL-pour.PPRA.NOM.SG.F self.DAT third.ACC.SG
taurę šampano,
glass.ACC.SG champagne.GEN

[*kai staiga Zuzana suriko vairuotojui stabtelėti.*]

‘I was about to pour myself a third glass of champagne, [when suddenly Zuzana shouted ordering the driver to stop.]’ (cited from Arkadiev 2019)

- The prefix *be-* is glossed CNT = continuative, as its basic function is to mark continuation of an event or situation in spite of expectations that it might have been discontinued (now only in combination with the negation). When combined with converbs and participles, it usually has progressive function:

be-kalbė-dam-as

CNT-talk-CVB-M.SG ‘while talking’

Treatment in the grammars

- Lithuanian grammar describes the mirative present as part of the **oblique mood**—the evidential system.
- All other forms, containing *be-* + PRS.PART.ACT with some form of the auxiliary ‘be’ are described in Lithuanian grammars as belonging to a system of **inceptive forms** (in the latest English-language grammar: **continuative forms**) denoting “an action started some time before another action starts or is taking place”. In other words, a system of progressive/continuous tenses.
- In practice, only the past-tense variety (progressive-proximative-avertive) is relatively frequent. Other forms are rare, such as

bus begulįs/begulinti ‘will be lying’ (future)

būtu begulįs/begulinti ‘would be lying’ (conditional)

būdavo begulįs/begulinti ‘used to be lying’ (past habitual)

The Lithuanian evidential

- The forms interesting us here is described as belonging to the **evidential** system. Lithuanian has a system of evidential constructions consisting in **the use of active and passive participles instead of finite verb forms**. They are described in the grammars as having **reportive, inferential** or **mirative** meaning (a cluster of meanings also found in the Balkan languages). The following is reportive:

Žmonės kalbėjo, kad Strumskys su visa
people.NOM.PL speak.PST.3 that PN.NOM with whole.INS.SG.F
šeima gulį ant krosnies ir
family.ins.sg lie.PPRA.NOM.SG.M on oven.GEN.SG and
valgą dešras su „baronkomis“.
eat.PPRA.NOM.SG.F sausage.ACC.PL with bagel.INS.PL

(Vitas Areška, CCLL)

‘People said that Strumskys together with his whole family **was lying** on the oven and **eating** sausages with *baronkos* (bagels).’

- Participles in such evidentials may contain the prefix *be-* just as finite verb forms can, but they are then not construction-specific, whereas it is in the mirative present, where it is obligatory.

The origin of the Lithuanian evidential

- There is no generally accepted view of the origin of the Baltic evidential, encoded by the use of participles instead of finite verb forms.
- Two views have been put forward:
 - it developed from the perfect (where a past participle without auxiliary acquires evidential function, as in the Balkan languages)
 - it spread from participial complementation with verbs of saying etc.

The corpus data

- We have gone through the data of the Corpus of Contemporary Lithuanian (DLKT) and the morphologically annotated subcorpus at corpus.vdu.lt.
- We conducted a search for present active participles with the prefix *be-* and manually selected the forms corresponding to Jablonskis' category of 'inceptive tenses', filtering out
 - adnominal participial phrases,
 - participial phrases as secondary predicates with verbs like 'remain', e.g. *liko bestovįs* 'remained standing'
 - evidential constructions in which *be-* has its basic continuative function (or sometimes that of an approximate negator)
 - participial complements with *pasirodyti* 'turn out' and a few other verbs

The corpus data

<i>buvo + be-PPRA</i>	1056
<i>be-PPRA</i>	269
<i>yra be-PPRA</i>	9
<i>bus be-PPRA</i>	12
<i>būtų be-PPRA</i>	10

The past-tense
progressive-
proximative-avertive
construction

Our construction – the
mirative present

The present-tense
construction with
overt auxiliary

The corpus: present-tense forms

- Alongside present-tense forms consisting of a mere participle with *be-*, there is a variety with overt auxiliary ‘be’. Its function seems to be purely progressive, without any trace of mirative meaning.

[*Taip vertinant mūsų dabartinę būklę,*]

galima *sakyti, kad* *esam* *beprarandą*
possible.N say.INF that **be.PRS.1PL** CNT-lose.PPRA.NOM.SG.PL
sąmonę.

consciousness.ACC

‘[When thus assessing our present situation,] we can say we are on our way towards losing our (national) consciousness. (R. Ozolas, 2002, CCLL)

- These forms should therefore be set apart from the mirative present. They could be viewed as occasional extensions from the progressive construction whose principal variety is the progressive-proximative-avertive past tense.

The corpus: conditionals

- The conditional is purely progressive:

Gerai, kad tu senas. Būtum paskui
good.ADV that 2SG.NOM old.NOM.SG.M be.COND.2SG after
tą mergaičiukę belakstąs . . .
that.ACC.SG.F girl.ACC.SG CNT-run.PPRA.NOM.SG.M
'It's a good thing you're old, [otherwise] you **would be running** after that
chit of a girl.' (Juozas Aputis, 2004, CCLL)

The corpus: future-tense forms

- The infrequent future-tense forms are of two kinds. One subtype has future meaning and is purely progressive:

Kai darbą jau bus bebaigią
when work.ACC.SG already be.FUT.3 CNT-finish.PPRA.NOM.PL.M
ar net pabaigę,
or even finish.PPA.NOM.PL.M

[*kai jau, vieną akį primerkę, žiūrės į tą savo kūrinį, tik kyšt iš vieno žodžio klaida.*]

‘When they **will already be completing** their work, or will even have completed it, [when, screwing up one eye, they will be looking at their achievement, a mistake will suddenly peek out from behind some word.]’
(Henrikas Algis Čigriejus, 1995, CCLL)

The corpus: future-tense forms

- The other subtype has no progressive meaning (the lexemes occurring in it are not of the kind lending itself to progressive use) but seems to combine inferential with mirative meaning: the speaker suddenly realizes the likelihood of a certain state of affairs and is at the same time surprised at this sudden realization:

[*Nelyja, gražu, jau po pusiaudienio.*]

Tai jie bus be-norį
then 3.NOM.PL.M be.FUT₃ CNT-want.PPRA.NOM.PL.M

pasidairyti, pasiklausyti smagių vieversių.
look_about.INF listen.INF merry.GEN.PL skylark.GEN.PL

‘[It’s not raining, the weather’s fine, it’s already past noon.] So they probably want to have a look about and listen for a while to the merry skylarks.’

(Juozas Kralikauskas, 2002, CCLL)

Conclusions from the corpus search

- There is not really a paradigm of inceptive tenses.
- There are two robust constructions based on *be*-PPRA—the progressive-proximative-avertive past-tense construction and the mirative present.
- Apart from that, there are occasional extensions into the domains of the present, future and conditional
 - The progressive meaning, basically past-tense, occasionally extends into present tense, future and conditional
 - The mirative present has an inferential-mirative future-tense extension.

Diachrony

- The diachronic part of our investigation has been slightly disappointing because of the exceedingly small number of attestations of the constructions relevant to us, and, in particular, the mirative present.
- 16th-century texts suggest the occasional use of progressive constructions with *be*-PPRA and the auxiliary 'be' in different tense forms; in the present tense the copular could be zero:

Saka *ghiems* *fu* *dzauxmu* *didzu /*
tell.PRS.3 3.DAT.PL.M with joy.INS.SG great.INS.SG.M
Iog *eft* *begulis* *edzofu*
That be.PRS.3 CNT-lie.PPRA.NOM.SG.M manger[PL].INE
Kudikis *pilns* *wargu*
babe.NOM.SG full.NOM.SG.M sorrow.GEN.PL
'He tells them with great joy that a babe full of sorrow **is lying** in a manger.'
Mažvydas, G I C7v(193),11

Diachrony

- With zero auxiliary:

Amšina *Tewa* *funelis /*
eternal.GEN.SG.M father.GEN.SG son.NOM.SG
Edzofu *nu* ***begulis.***
manger[PL].INE now CNT-lie.PPRA.NOM.SG.M
‘The little son of the eternal Father **is now lying** in a manger.’
Mažvydas, G I C1v(181),5

- The oldest instances of what we can identify as the mirative present occur in Chylinskis’ Bible translation (1660). They point to the relevance of a **presentative** construction with *štai* and a participial construction adjoined to the noun.

[*O Anjeļas WIESZPATIES pasirode jam liepšņoy ugnies iļz widuries kiatmo: ir dabojos,*]

o *sztey* *kiatmas* ***bedegas*** *ugniy*
and behold bush.NOM.SG CNT-burn-PPRA.SG.M fire.INE.SG
‘and, behold, the bush **burned** with fire’

Diachrony

- It is conceivable that the rise of the mirative present involved reanalysis in a construction with a presentative particle like *štai*.

- Presentative particles like *štai* may introduce a **noun phrase** or a **clause**:

Sztey *ugnis,* *ir* *małkos,*
behold fire.NOM.SG and firewood[PL].NOM
'behold the fire and the wood'

a *sztey* *ziame* *iździuwo.*
and behold earth.NOM.SG dry.up.PST.3
'and, behold, the face of the ground was dry'

- Cf. also the presentative constructions in Romance (but with a relative strategy for the clausal construction):

French *voilà le facteur*, Italian *ecco il postino* 'there's the postman'

French *le voilà qui arrive*, Italian *eccolo che arriva* 'there he's coming'

Diachrony

- Our hypothesis: a presentative construction with a noun phrase and a postnominal modifying participle was reanalysed as one in which the presentative particle introduces a clause. The participle thereby becomes main clausal predicate:

štai kelmas / bedegqs ugnij ← postnominal modifier

‘behold, a bush, burning with fire’

→ *štai / kelmas bedegqs ugnij* ← the participle now functions as main clausal predicate

‘behold, a bush is burning with fire’

Diachrony

- These presentative constructions were probably not the only source for the mirative present: the progressive construction could also have played a role in it.
- At any rate the obligatory presence of the prefix *be-* suggests a diachronic connection with the progressive and the presentative construction.

About miratives

- Mirativity is often discussed in the context of evidentiality; in Lithuanian, it is also part of the cluster of functions of evidential forms.
- But since DeLancey (1997) it has been widely recognised that mirativity also occurs as a *sui generis* grammatical category, independently of the evidential.
- Such a dedicated mirative is basically present-tense: miratives presuppose a short time distance between the act of knowledge acquisition and the speech act (Rett & Murray 2013)
- Miratives are therefore not directly compatible with past tense except in the case of an indirect information source (DeLancey 2001).
- So while the Lithuanian evidential past tense can also be mirative, the dedicated mirative is only present tense.

About miratives

- It can, however, also have past-time reference because it can be used as a **narrative device**, in describing unexpected events:

Priešais be-einąs pats
opposite CNT-walk.PPRA.NOM.SG.M very.NOM.SG.M
didžiausias to laiko poetas.
greatest.NOM.SG.M that.GEN.SG.M time.GEN.SG poet.NOM.SG
Jis buvo gerai nusiteikęs
3.NOM.SG.M be.PST.3 well disposed.NOM.SG.M

‘And behold the greatest poet of those days was approaching from the other side. He was in a good mood [...].’
(Juozas Aputis, 2004, CCLL)

- In this use the mirative present is one of a series of verbal forms that (unlike the historical present, a relatively neutral narrative form) are used in narration to mark an unexpected turn of events. The same can be said about the narrative future (cf. Nicole & Birutė’s talk) and about most narrative imperatives (often mirative in origin as argued in Holvoet 2018).

Conclusion

- So Lithuanian belongs to the languages that have a dedicated (non-evidential) mirative construction.
- It coexists with a system of evidential forms that may also assume mirative function.
- This development is only Lithuanian: it is not shared by Latvian.



Thank you!

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