

Polarity as a factor in the evolution of future tense constructions

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This study explores the cross-linguistic interaction between future and modality with respect to polarity differences. That is, affirmative future constructions may be fundamentally different from negative future constructions. This can be clearly observed in languages of the Northwestern South-Central (“Kuki-Chin”) subbranch of Trans-Himalayan. While negative future is expressed through a minimally varying, easily reconstructable negator+copula construction, when it comes to expressing affirmative future we find five different constructions. A particularly common construction is one that can be reconstructed to reported speech, a grammaticalization pathway also attested in Central Eastern Bantu (Botne 1998) and Benue Congo (Aron 1996). Among Trans-Himalayan, this grammaticalization path has apparently not been previously attested. In addition to the reported speech source, other future constructions include a recurrent immediate future constructions involving the element *ra(ŋ)*; constructions based on a marker *ŋai* or a marker *si(k)*; as well an apparent analogue to the negative future construction, which similarly also includes a copula as well as an element *bo*, which takes the slot of the negator. What is of further interest is the distribution of the five affirmative constructions across the Northwestern South-Central subgroup. On the one hand, several languages show person splits, such that the construction depends on the person of the subject. For example, in Saihriem, 1st and 3rd person occur in the construction that originates in reported speech, while 2nd person occurs in the *ŋai* construction (Haokip 2018). On the other hand, languages typically have different affirmative future constructions at their disposal to express degrees of (un)certainly. In Ranglong, for example, the immediate future constructions with *ra(ŋ)* expresses the highest degree of certainty that the future event will take place, while the construction originating in reported speech indicates less certainty, and the *bo* + copula construction indicates the least certainty (Haokip 2018).

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