

Future Tenses in Xhosa

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Xhosa has two Future tenses which are marked by infixing *-za ku-* or *-ya ku-* between the Subject Marker and the Verb root. The fact that the two markers have a ventive and itive origin is evident; The infixed markers consist of *-za* (‘come’) or *-ya* (‘go’) in combination with the Infinitive prefix *ku-*. In the traditional literature (Bennie 1939, McLaren 1936, etc.) the semantic difference between the two tenses is defined as one of remoteness: *-za ku-* being the Immediate, and *-ya ku-* being the Remote Future tense. However, a more recent, influential account by Botne & Kershner (2000) argues that *-za ku-* is part of the here-and-now reality (P-domain), whereas *-ya ku-* marks that the event is dissociated from the present reality (D-domain). The present study uses corpora to analyse and review the exact semantics of the two tenses.

The Future forms have been collected from corpora. Each selected form was replaced by its *-za ku-* or *-ya ku-* counterpart, and native speakers of Xhosa were asked to assess whether and how the meaning changed in the form’s original context. The results show that a majority of the analysed Remote Future forms denote readings with gnomic (and/or habitual) readings in which no specific entities and no specific event is being referred to, e.g. in (1). Replacement of *-ya ku-* with *-za ku-* renders the meaning of (1) as referring to a concrete future event. The other attested meaning differences concern the possibility of the (concrete) event to actualise itself at present. No ventive or itive readings have been attested in the sample.

The study confirms and further defines Botne & Kershner’s (2000) view: the two markers have developed a modal meaning that regards conditionality. At the same time, it shows that their originally ventive and itive readings have been lost.

- (1) U-gqirha wa-kho **u-ya=ku-bhal-a** i-ngxelo
 AUG-1a.doctor POSS.1-2SG SM.1-REMFUT-write-FV AUG-9.report
 ye-zonyango ng-oko ku-khubazek-a.
 POSS.9-9.treatment INSTR-DEM.15.PROX 15-be=disabled-FV
 Your doctor **will write** a medical report about your disability.

References: Bennie, W.G. (1953). *A Grammar of Xhosa for the Xhosa-speaking*. Lovedale: Lovedale Press. Botne, R. & T.L. Kershner (2000). Time, Tense, and the Perfect in Zulu. *Afrika und Übersee* 83, 161–181. McLaren, J. (1936). *A Xhosa Grammar*. London: Longmans.

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