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Dissertation

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Staroseverské perifrastické futurum:

původ, gramatikalizace a význam

The Old Norse Periphrastic Future:

The Origin, Grammaticalization and Meaning

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I hereby declare that I have written this dissertation independently, using only the mentioned and duly cited sources and literature, and that the work has not been used in another university study programme or to obtain the same or another academic title.

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Abstract

The subject of the dissertation is the origin of the Old Norse periphrastic future. First, it is shown that the main exponent of future in Old Norse, as opposed to other old Germanic languages, is the auxiliary verb *munu*, both in terms of its frequency and its remarkably neutral meaning. It is attested as such even in the oldest 9th century sources, the Skaldic poems. These characteristics of *munu* are in contrast with the other exponent of the periphrastic future, the verb *skulu*, which was less frequent and more modal. The futural character of *munu* and the modal character of *skulu* are further demonstrated by an analysis of the means of future expression used in prophecies and curses. Discussion of the grammaticalization of *munu* has shown that as early as the 9th century the verb had developed meanings that are derived from future (particularly the probability meaning). Hence, the futural use must have been fairly common for a considerably long period before the first attestations. Further evidence for the early use of *munu*-future in North Germanic comes from the reconstruction of the morphological development of the verb. It shows a transition from the class of regular weak verbs to the preterite-present class which was associated with modal/function verbs in Germanic. These findings show that the Old Norse *munu*-future reached this high degree of grammaticalization much earlier than its counterparts in other Germanic languages. It is argued that this occurred because of the North Germanic loss of unaccented verbal prefixes which had a perfectivizing function and which were to some extent used as future markers in other Germanic languages, particularly Gothic. The early use of the historical present in Old Norse is also linked to prefix loss and the emergence of periphrastic future. It is concluded that the periphrastic future was an early syntactic innovation which set apart the North Germanic tense system from the West and East Germanic ones.

Key Words

Old Norse, Proto-Norse, Gothic, future tense, historical present, periphrasis, aspect, grammaticalization, modal verbs, modality, auxiliary verbs

Abstrakt

Tématem dizertační práce je původ staroseverského perifrastického futura. V první části jsou představeny hlavní způsoby vyjádření budoucnosti ve staroseverštině. Z přehledu vyplývá, že hlavním exponentem futura ve staroseverštině je – narozdíl od jiných starogermánských jazyků – pomocné sloveso *munu*, a to jak z hlediska frekvence, tak i z hlediska svého neutrálního významu. Jako takové je doloženo i v nejstarších pramenech z 9. století, skaldských básních. Tyto charakteristiky slovesa *munu* jsou v kontrastu s druhým exponentem perifrastického futura, slovesem *skulu*, které bylo méně časté a výrazně modálnější. Temporální charakter slovesa *munu* a modální charakter *skulu* je dále demonstrován pomocí analýzy prostředků vyjádření budoucnosti ve staroseverských proroctvích a kletbách. Následující rozbor gramatikalizace slovesa *munu* ukazuje, že již v 9. století se u slovesa vyvinuly významy odvozené z budoucnosti (zejména význam pravděpodobnosti). Z toho vyplývá, že *munu* muselo být běžně užíváno v budoucím významu už relativně dlouho před 9. stoletím. Další doklad naznačující, že *munu* bylo v severogermánštině používáno již v rané době jako pomocné budoucí sloveso, pochází z rekonstrukce jeho morfologického vývoje. Ten ukazuje, že *munu* přešlo ze třídy pravidelných slabých sloves do třídy préterito-prézentní, která byla v germánštině do značné míry spojena s modálními/funkčními slovesy. Tato zjištění dokládají, že staroseverské *munu* dosáhlo tak vysokého stupně gramatikalizace mnohem dříve než jeho protějšky v jiných germánských jazycích. Navržená teorie nabízí vysvětlení, že k tomu došlo kvůli severogermánské ztrátě nepřízvučných slovesných předpon, které měly perfektivizující funkci a byly v jiných germánských jazycích, zejména v gótštině, do jisté míry používány k vyjádření budoucnosti. Se ztrátou nepřízvučných předpon a vznikem perifrastického futura je dán do souvislosti i původ historického prézentu, který se ve staroseverštině objevil také výrazně dříve než v jiných germánských jazycích. Závěrem práce je, že severské perifrastické futurum bylo významnou ranou syntaktickou inovací, která odlišila severogermánský slovesný systém od systému západní a východní germánštiny.

Klíčová slova

Staroseverština, praseverština, gótština, budoucí čas, historický prezent, perifráze, aspekt, gramatikalizace, modální slovesa, modalita, pomocná slovesa

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I. Introduction

The topic of this dissertation is the periphrastic future in Old Norse. Old Norse, or rather its predecessor, Early Runic,¹ as well as other old Germanic languages, originally had the same binary tense system inherited from Proto-Germanic. It had a morphological past (the preterite) and a present tense, but no morphological future. During the course of their history, the individual Germanic languages developed periphrastic constructions using various auxiliary verbs to express the future, such as the English *will* and *shall*, but most of these emerged rather late – not before the literary era. The present tense was therefore the main means of future expression in the early stages of the majority of Germanic dialects. Old Norse, however, is an exception since the most common way of expressing the future was the periphrastic construction with the auxiliary verb *munu*.

I.I Focus and scope

The approach to the topic is primarily a diachronic one. The focus is thus on the origin and grammaticalization of the periphrastic future. The study is based on Old Icelandic, the best attested dialect of Old Norse. The sources that have been used include texts from the classical Old Norse period (written down in the 12th-14th century) as well as the oldest layer of Skaldic poems (9th-10th century) and Eddic poetry of unknown date. Much of the classical Old Norse literature, including the Sagas of Icelanders and Eddic poetry, is anonymous and its dating is a notoriously controversial matter. Therefore, data from these texts are mostly used to illustrate semantic aspects of the exponents of futurity discussed in the study and to point out their general properties.

Skaldic poems, on the other hand, have the advantage that in many cases they can be connected to a particular author and period. Although the authorship may sometimes be debatable, Skaldic poems represent the oldest substantial

¹ I. e. the language attested in runic inscriptions from 2-5th century AD, also known as Ancient Nordic and a variety of other terms.

pieces of Old Norse literature that can be dated with some certainty (cf. Whaley 2012). The earliest of these were composed in the 9th century. In the present study, they are therefore used as an important piece of diachronic evidence since they contain the oldest attestations of the verb *munu*.

The oldest North Germanic texts overall, runic inscriptions, are not of much use for the present study because most are very brief and do not contain suitable contexts for the study of the expression of future.

One of the main claims of this dissertation is that the periphrastic future is an old North Germanic trait. Consequently, the scope is not limited to the Old Norse period (8th-15th century), working on the assumption that the processes leading to the formation of the periphrastic future must have taken place prior to the time of the first attestations and thus involve the Proto-Norse period.

It should also be stressed that the present study is not concerned with the subsequent development of *munu*, the changes in the expression of future in later stages of Old Norse or the transition to the systems present in Modern Icelandic, Faroese and Scandinavian languages. The focus is largely on early Old Norse and the preceding period. Data from modern languages are only mentioned when relevant.

I.II Previous work on the topic

Since periphrasis belongs to the field of syntax, it has usually been neglected in the traditional grammars, which tend to focus on phonology and morphology.² It is mentioned only very briefly, if at all, (cf. Noreen 1923, 1904) despite the fact that at least within old Germanic, the Old Norse future periphrasis is unparalleled in several respects. The non-temporal meanings of *munu* are completely ignored in grammars (cf. Heusler 1967, Haugen 2002, Gordon 1957: 313, Iversen 1994 who draws on Nygaard 1878 is an honourable exception). The gap in the description of *munu* was noticed early by Nygaard (1878) who made a

² The periphrastic future is, however, also ignored in more recent diachronic surveys, cf. Faarlund 2002.

detailed analysis of its meanings. Until now it has been the only attempt to account for the grammaticalization of the verb.

Morris (1964) made a comprehensive survey of the future in Old Norse but it focuses for the most part on the synchronic properties of futural expressions in one of the prominent genres of Old Norse literature, the Sagas of Icelanders. An attempt at a diachronic view of the future in Icelandic is the bachelor thesis of Vijūnas (1998) but the depth of the analysis is naturally rather limited. Sčur (1963, 1964) has made some useful observations on the expression of future in Old Norse, particularly in stressing the age and the dominant position of the periphrasis, but he does not present any viable account of how it emerged. General treatments of futurity in Germanic link the emergence of the periphrastic future to religion (Mutti 2010, Bauschatz 1982, Sieberer 1925) or to the level of cultural development (Sieberer 1925) neither of which offers a viable explanation for Old Norse. To sum up, there is no comprehensive and up-to-date diachronic treatment of the Old Norse periphrastic future.

I.III The aim of the dissertation

This dissertation aims to fill the gap in previous research. Its goal is to present a more adequate account of the origin of the Old Norse periphrastic future. As a prerequisite for this goal, it examines the semantic properties that have been associated with the verbs *munu* and *skulu*, and accounts for the grammaticalization processes which produced the various meanings connected to *munu*, the main exponent of futurity.

The crucial question that the dissertation attempts to answer is what processes led to the early development of the periphrastic future in North Germanic.

I.IV Outline of the dissertation

Chapter 1 presents general observations on future tenses and a brief

overview of the expression of future in Indo-European, Germanic and Old Norse. It shows that *munu* is the principal Old Norse future marker in terms of its frequency and meaning.

Chapter 2 is intended to reveal the semantic properties of the verbs *munu* and *skulu* in more detail. It demonstrates that *munu* is found even in contexts where *skulu* could be expected, based on its previous semantic descriptions. It corroborates the notion that *munu* was a universal means of future expression and that *skulu* had a more modal character. It likewise shows that the claim that *skulu* pertains to fate should be reconsidered.

Chapter 3 discusses the grammaticalization of *munu*. It starts with an outline of its morphological history which accurately reflects its grammatical function. The development of the meanings of *munu* is presented next, including the futural meaning as well as other meanings of *munu* as they are attested in Old Norse sources. To account for these processes, comparative data from related languages as well as typological comparisons have been used. It serves to show that *munu* was at an advanced stage of grammaticalization as early as the 9th century. This fact, along with the formal development of the word, testify to a considerable age of the Old Norse periphrastic future.

Chapter 4 focuses on the aspectual function of Germanic verbal prefixes and their role in the expression of future in the other Germanic languages, particularly Gothic. On that basis, a new theory of the origin of the periphrastic future in North Germanic is presented, taking into account the findings reached in the previous chapters. Furthermore, it is argued that the popular use of the historical present in Old Norse may also be connected to the Nordic prefix loss and the emergence of the periphrastic future.

Chapter 1

1. The Category of Future and Its Realization in Old Norse

Things that were, things that are, and some things that have not yet come to pass.
(J. R. R. Tolkien: *The Fellowship of the Ring*)

As this quote from *The Lord of the Rings* aptly illustrates, the future is different both from the past and the present. It has not yet happened and is therefore inherently uncertain. In other words,

“[t]he future does not exist, either as a time actually being experienced or as a time already experienced; the future is strictly imaginary, and thus an additional step removed from reality”.

(Lloyd 1979: 145)

This difference in the epistemic status of the future is often reflected in the linguistic encoding of future and, consequently, in the variety of approaches to the treatment of future tenses or exponents of future in general. As is well known, identifying future tenses is a controversial task, since they may often intersect with the domains of modality or aspect (cf. Comrie 1989). One of the most notable instances of such controversy is the intensively debated temporal/modal status of the English *will* (cf. Sarkar 1998).

The connection between future and modality can be illustrated by the large number of modal expressions in language that may point to the future, e. g. expressions denoting hopes, wishes, curses, promises, intentions, considerations, obligations, decisions, possibilities, necessities etc. Future reference in such cases is secondary, it is a by-product of the primary meaning of these expressions. Such expressions, however, may be potential sources for a future tense. In the process of grammaticalization (which in this case may be called “temporalization”, cf. Dahl 2000: 313), the original meaning of the expression is gradually weakened and may eventually become (almost or completely) purely temporal. On the other hand, this process does not need to happen at all as some languages lack any grammaticalized future exponents (or tenses altogether for that matter like, for instance, Chinese, cf. Po-Ching – Rimmington 2016: 133).

Related to the different epistemic status of the future tense as compared to the present or the past is the fact that the future tense tends to be more marked (cf. Ultan 1978). For instance, if a language has an inflectional future tense, the past will also be expressed inflectionally, not periphrastically (though the reverse is not true).³ Similarly, if a language has a future participle, it will also have both past and present participles, but not necessarily vice versa. Future tense may also be restricted in certain contexts where the past or present is not, e. g. in the subjunctive, in negative constructions and in subordinate (especially temporal and conditional) clauses.

Another trait of future tenses, as noted by Comrie (1989: 52), is that there are very few cases of languages, if any, in which future tense “is used for all future time reference and only for future time reference”. This is valid as much for inflectional futures as for periphrastic futures. The reason is that, on the one hand, languages will often have more than one gram⁴ which is used for future reference (e. g. English *will*, *shall*, *going to*, cf. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1995: 243). And on the other hand, future grams commonly also have other functions than merely referring to the future (cf. Bybee – Pagliuca 1987). Some of these other functions may be retentions of an older meaning of the future gram (e. g. the volitional meaning of the English *will* in certain contexts), while others may develop from the meaning of prediction (i. e. after the gram has become an exponent of future).

For the purpose of this dissertation, *prediction* is considered to be the defining feature of future tense, i. e. “the assertion by the speaker that a proposition will be true in time subsequent to the moment of speech” (Bybee – Pagliuca 1987: 109-110). While it is true that the future is always uncertain, it does not mean that the truth value of a proposition cannot be assessed, as stressed by Comrie (1989: 53-54) who makes the point comparing statements like “it will

³ In the database by Dahl – Velupillai (2013), inflectional and non-inflectional futures are represented almost equally (110 vs. 112), see <https://wals.info/chapter/67> [accessed in June 2021].

⁴ *Gram* is an abbreviation for *grammatical morpheme* used and defined by Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca (1994: 2) as follows: “Formally, grammatical morphemes may be affixes, stem changes, reduplication, auxiliaries, particles, or complex constructions such as English *be going to*. We refer to all of these types equally as grammatical morphemes and for convenience shorten this term to ‘gram’”.

rain tomorrow” vs. “it may rain tomorrow”. The former can be clearly shown to be either right or wrong (on the next day) while the modal colouring of the latter precludes such assessment. The aforementioned tendency of the use of future grams being restricted in some types of subordinate clauses is connected to their capacity to express predictions:

“[s]ince the focal use of futures is to make predictions – that is, to make an assertion about future time, futures tend to occur in main clauses”.

(Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 274)

Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca (1994: 230-231) argue further that new tense and aspect grams arise primarily in main clauses and that their occurrence in subordinate clauses is secondary. Subordinate clauses thus tend to be grammatically conservative (cf. also Dahl 2000: 314, Abraham 1989: 350, Comrie 1989: 56, Ultan 1978: 96-98, Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1991: 19). This tendency is also manifested in Old Norse as discussed below.

1.1 The future in Indo-European

In most Indo-European languages, the present tense may be used to express the future which is certainly true of all the Germanic languages and their historical stages (cf. Hilpert 2008: 157, Blackburn 1892). According to a categorization by Ultan (1978), they thus belong to languages with prospective tense systems in which the present may be used to mark the future, but not the past.⁵ Conversely, in retrospective tense systems, the present tense may be used to mark the past, but not the future.

Apart from the futural present, Indo-European languages show a large variety of both inflectional and periphrastic futures (for an overview of futures in the languages of Europe, see Dahl 2000). The lack of a more widely-attested exponent with the meaning of future has led scholars to assume that Proto-Indo-

⁵ According to Ultan (1978: 87-88), historical tenses as well as gnomic tenses (expressing general truths) have a special status within the system and general statements on tenses do not apply to them. They are therefore not taken into consideration in Ultan’s categorization.

European did not have a special form for future tense (cf. Beekes 2011: 252) though this opinion is not accepted universally (cf. Fortson 2010: 88). There are two grammatical means that are often thought to have played some role in the expression of future already in PIE, namely the desideratives and the subjunctive.

Various desiderative suffixes containing an *-s-* are attested in several IE branches and often, or at least sometimes, convey a future meaning (in Indo-Iranian, Greek, Celtic, Italic, Baltic, cf. Fortson 2010: 100). The development of desire to future is widely attested cross-linguistically (cf. Heine – Kuteva 2004: 310-311).

The PIE subjunctive was another source of future in some IE branches. It developed into future in Latin, and usually has a future meaning also in Indo-Iranian and Homeric Greek (cf. Fortson 2010: 106, Ultan 1978: 113). The semantic closeness of the subjunctive and the future lies in the inherent uncertainty of future. This is why a future subjunctive is rather rare as “future and subjunctive are in some ways ‘mutually inclusive,’ hence one or the other is superfluous” (Ultan 1978: 95).

Apart from the desideratives and the subjunctive, various other inflectional or periphrastic futures developed later in the individual IE branches, languages and dialects. Their most common sources are the following ones (cf. Dahl 2000):

1. Verbs of being, becoming

In Latino-Faliscan the future tense developed from the PIE root **bhuH-* “be, become” (cf. Fortson 2010: 279), e. g. Latin *port-ā-bit* “he will carry”. Semantically similar formation, though expressed periphrastically, is present in Slavic (with imperfective verbs, e. g. Czech *budu psát* “I will write”) and German (*ich werde schreiben* “I will write”).

2. Verbs of motion

- a. De-andative: with the verb meaning “to go” – in Latin (future passive infinitive *auditum īrī* of the verb *audīre* “to hear”), Western Romance languages (French *aller*), English (*going to*), Dutch, Faroese (*fara*).

- b. De-venitive: Scandinavian (e. g. Swedish *komma till att*) and some Romansh dialects in Switzerland. The Modern Icelandic construction *koma til með að* (Sigurðsson 2010: 38-39) also belongs to this category.

3. Obligation

Latin *habere* “to have to” gave rise to the Romance inflectional future (e. g. French *je travaillerai* “I will work”) and Germanic **skulan* “to be under obligation” produced periphrastic futures in English, Dutch and Scandinavian. There are obligational futures also in Ukrainian (*imati*), Bulgarian (*ima da*) and Romanian (*am să*).

4. Volition

Germanic **willan* “to want” is used in English, Danish, Norwegian, Faroese, Yiddish and Frisian. Volitive futures are also found in the Balkan Sprachbund.

This is not meant to be an exhausting list of the sources of future grams.⁶ Notably, the aspectual domain gave rise to the (West and East) Slavic perfective future, whereby the present tense forms of perfective verbs express the future, e. g. Czech *pojedu* “I will go”.

Apart from the above mentioned futures that commonly occur in more than one language or language group, Dahl (2000: 325) mentions a few “isolated grams” among which he counts the Icelandic (and Old Norse) future auxiliary verb *munu*.⁷

As can be seen from this brief overview, contemporary Germanic languages mainly make use of obligational and/or volitional futures as well as futures which emerged from verbs of motion. The situation in their oldest historical stages was, however, quite different.

⁶ Nor does it mean that futures from these sources are limited to Indo-European, they occur commonly across various languages (cf. e. g. Heine – Kuteva 2004).

⁷ However, he wrongly classifies it as de-obligational.

1.2 The future in Old Germanic⁸

For the period of Proto-Germanic, about two thousand years ago, Dahl (2000: 326) posits a “futureless“ area in Northern Europe which encompassed Proto-Germanic and Finno-Ugrian languages. The whole PIE verbal system was considerably simplified in Proto-Germanic (cf. Fortson 2010: 345). It had two tenses: the present and the preterite (from PIE perfect in the strong verbs). In the mood domain it had the indicative, imperative and subjunctive (descended from the PIE optative⁹), and the passive voice which is only attested in Gothic is derived from the PIE mediopassive.

The present tense as the main means of future expression is attested in the early stages of most Germanic languages. In view of the fact that the present was commonly used to express the future in other old IE languages (e. g. Old Slavic, Tocharian, Hittite), Coleman (1995: 3-4) considers it an archaic feature that Germanic inherited and preserved (cf. also Falk – Torp 1900: 153, Vijūnas 1998: 21). An informative overview of the expression of future was made by Blackburn (1892: 6-21). It is based on an analysis of the renderings of Latin and Greek (in the case of Gothic) future forms in old Germanic translations.

According to Blackburn’s analysis, Gothic uses present indicative to translate the Greek future in 95% of instances. In the remaining 5% it is the present subjunctive¹⁰ and very few instances of periphrasis.¹¹

For Old High German the ratio is similar to that of Gothic. The overwhelming majority of Latin futures are rendered into Old High German by

⁸ This topic is discussed in Chapter 4 in more detail.

⁹ The old optative function is preserved in the Germanic subjunctive, cf. Harbert (2007: 278), as also demonstrated by its use in curses, see 2.4.

¹⁰ Blackburn uses the term *optative* throughout his text.

¹¹ Or in numbers, 562 instances of present indicative, 26 of present subjunctive and 6 of periphrasis. Only renderings of the Greek morphological future (used in an actual futural sense, i. e. its modal uses like imperative etc. are not taken into account) are included in these statistics.

present indicative, and a few instances by present subjunctive and periphrasis with the verb *scal*.¹²

As for Old English, the present indicative is again absolutely dominant, with a few cases of the subjunctive and, it appears, no instances of periphrasis.¹³

For Old Saxon, Blackburn claims that the future is most commonly expressed by a periphrasis with *sculan*, rarely present indicative and perhaps subjunctive in a few instances. According to van der Wal – Quak (1994: 104), both periphrasis and the present tense were used in Old Saxon.

1.3 The future in Old Norse

In Old Norse, the future was most commonly expressed by periphrasis, especially with the auxiliary verb *munu* (cf. Noreen 1923: 367, Iversen 1994: 140), and to a lesser extent and with a greater degree of modal meaning with the verb *skulu* (cf. Faarlund 2004: 129, Haugen 2002: 273, Iversen 1994: 140, Gordon 1957: 313, Sćur 1964). The present tense was also used to express the future but significantly less than in the other old Germanic languages.

In the Icelandic Sagas, for instance, only about 13% of references to the future are expressed by the present tense, more than 30% by periphrasis with *skulu* and over 50% by periphrasis with *munu* (cf. Sćur 1964, 1963).¹⁴ The ratio is roughly similar for poetry.¹⁵ In the Eddic poems, about one third of future

¹² Tested on the material of Old High German translations of *Tatian* (present indicative 288 times, present subjunctive 7 times, periphrasis with *scal* twice) and Notker's paraphrase of 25 psalms (present indicative 172 times, periphrasis with *sol* 3 times).

¹³ The texts used were the Vespasian Psalter and Hymns (present indicative 1100 times, another 14 instances are rendered either by present subjunctive or are probably corrupt) and Anglo-Saxon Glosses (present indicative 133 times, subjunctive twice).

¹⁴ Sćur (1964) does not state by what means the rest (i. e. about 7%) of the future references are expressed.

¹⁵ One must, of course, bear in mind that poetic language differs from the spoken language in some respects. However, the numbers suggest that there is no dramatic difference in the expression of future across genres, and it will be shown that for the present purpose of investigating the

references are expressed by the present tense, and two thirds by periphrasis (*munu* being twice as frequent as *skulu*, cf. Blackburn 1892: 11). Even 9th century Skaldic poems which contain the first attestations of *munu* roughly correspond to these numbers: they are comprised of 142 stanzas (according to Jónsson 1912) in which 14 references to the future are found. Six are expressed with *munu*,¹⁶ five with *skulu* and three with a present tense form.¹⁷ At least some of the expressions with *skulu* have a clear modal marking, while the other means – *munu* and the present tense forms – are suggestive of pure future references. This can be summarized in the following table.

Means of future expression in Old Norse genres (in round figures)

	<i>munu</i>	<i>skulu</i>	Present tense
Sagas	50%	30%	13%
Eddic Poetry	44%	22%	33%
Skaldic poetry of the 9 th c.	43%	36%	21%

Although there are considerable differences in the absolute numbers of the attested forms, all the genres testify to the general tendency that *munu* is the main means of future expression and the present tense is used rather sporadically in future meaning.

A purely futural use of *munu* can be illustrated by (1).

(1) a. *hér **munu** menn koma á morgin at leita þín*

“People will come here tomorrow to search for you”.

(*Fóstbræðra saga* III: 132)¹⁸

periphrastic future there are multiple pieces of evidence that all seem to point in the same direction. The data from Skaldic poems that are used here as an important diachronic evidence fit the whole picture and a distortion of the results caused by the poetic nature of the language is therefore unlikely.

¹⁶ There are three more occurrences of *munu* in which the verb has a non-temporal meaning (see Chapter 3).

¹⁷ Subordinate clauses in which the present tense is the normal expression of future (cf. below) are not taken into consideration.

¹⁸ A list of editions of the Old Norse texts is provided in the bibliography. For prose the Roman number refers to the chapter (if provided), the Arabic number to a page in the edition. For poetry only the number of the strophe is given. Translations are mine unless specified otherwise. Some of

- b. “Hvat **mun** eptir koma?” segir Skarpheðinn.

“‘What will come after?’ Skarpheðinn says”.

(*Njáls saga* CXI: 281)

The futural present tense seems to be generally dependent on a future context, cf. the depiction of *Ragnarøk* (2) which is the mythological end of the world, and hence future by definition.

- (2) *en er þessi tíðendi verða, þá stendr upp Heimdallr ok blæss ákafliga í Gjallarhorn ok vekr upp öll guðin, ok eiga þau þing saman*

“And when these events come, Heimdallr will stand up and blow greatly the Gjallarhorn and wake up all the gods and they will hold an assembly together”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning*: 50)

Alternatively, a future context can be established by *munu* and the present tense may then be used further (3) or alternate with *munu* (cf. the Eddic poems *Grípisspá* and *Völuspá*).

- (3) *Konungr mælti: “Þá mun ek gefa þér nokkur forræði ok eigur, sem ek bauð þér fyrr, ok skemmtir þú þér við þat”.*

Hann svaraði: “Ekki uni ek því”.

Konungr mælti: “Þá fæ ek þér lausafé, ok ferr þú kaupferðir þangat til landa, sem þú vilt”.

“The king said, ‘Then I will give you some property and its management as I offered you earlier and you can amuse yourself with that’.

‘I don’t care for that’.

The king said, ‘Then I’ll give you some money and you can travel as a merchant to whatever countries you want’”.

(*Ívars þáttr Ingimundarsonar*: 104, translation by Judith Jesch: 386)

Since the context of the future references in (3) is obviously identical, there does not seem to be any difference in meaning between *munu* and the

the published translations have been slightly adjusted. The Old Norse excerpts are rendered in standardized orthography except for a few late texts. Relevant words in the Old Norse examples and in the translations are emphasized when needed.

present tense forms. Such alternation is probably a stylistic device, comparable to the alternation of the historical present and the past tense. Importantly, it illustrates that the periphrasis with *munu* is semantically rather neutral and equivalent to the present tense (cf. Vijūnas 1998: 8).

Apart from the dependence on a context clearly situated in the future, there do not seem to be any distributional restrictions for the use of the futural present.

On the other hand, the periphrastic future which is the unmarked future form, considering its frequency and the fact that it does not require a contextual support, is restricted in certain contexts, namely in some types of subordinate clauses (temporal, conditional and relative, cf. Nygaard 1905: 333) where the present tense is used instead as in (4). As mentioned above, such restriction of future tenses is cross-linguistically very common and is considered to be connected to the non-assertiveness of these clauses. Old Norse is no exception in this respect (cf. also English *I will tell her if I see her*).

- (4) *Vita **mun** ek, ef ek sé.*
“I will know if I see”.
(*Njáls saga* XCVIII: 250-251)

However, there is an interesting tendency to correlate the use of the periphrastic future with the position of the main clause in the sentence. If the main clause comes first as in (4), it is normally in the periphrastic future. If the subordinate clause comes first, then even the following main clause will usually be in the present tense (5) (cf. Nygaard 1905: 183).

- (5) *ef þetta berr undan, **náið** þér honum eigi*
“If this opportunity is missed, you will not catch him”.
(*Njáls saga* XLII: 95)

This tendency can probably be explained in the following way. Since the present tense is the normal way of referring to the future in the subordinate clause, it can function as a signal of future discourse for the whole sentence when it stands in initial position. A future context is thereby established and it is not necessary to mark the future in the following main clause. When the clauses are in

the reverse position, on the other hand, the main clause must be supplied with a clear future reference as in (4).

The remarkably non-modal nature of Old Norse *munu* is in contrast with its function in Modern Icelandic and Faroese where the verb is occasionally used for future expression, but usually with a particular notion of uncertainty.¹⁹

That such uncertainty was not a part of the meaning of the *munu*-future in Old Norse, can be seen clearly from its use in prophecies. Although it is true that the future, unlike the past and the present, is always uncertain to some extent, it is hard to imagine a more definite future than one determined by fate and foreseen by a seer(ess) in a prophecy. Especially prophecies concerned with mythological matters like (6) provide firm evidence in this respect (see further on *munu* in prophecies in Chapter 2).

- (6) *fáir sjá nú fram um lengra* “few can now see further than when
*en Óðinn **man** úlfí mæta* Odin has to meet the wolf“
(*Hyndluljóð* 44, translation by Carolyne Larrington: 259)

The fight between Óðinn and the wolf Fenrir is a part of *Ragnarøk* and the context in which it is here used implies that if anything certain can be claimed about the future at all, it is this particular moment. The use of *munu* in such context shows that the verb did not contain more uncertainty than is usual for future tenses in general. As argued by Faarlund (2004: 129), it expressed the future “in a rather neutral or non-modal fashion“.

The non-modal nature of the *munu*-future is also noted by Haugen (2002: 273) who claims that periphrasis with *munu* “has such a general meaning that it can be considered a pure temporal auxiliary verb”. He shows on the examples in

¹⁹ Cf. e. g. Icelandic: *skipið mun koma á morgun* “the ship will [apparently] come tomorrow” (Thráinsson 1994: 163); Faroese: *hann man ikki (fara at) koma* “he will hardly come” (Mikkelsen – í Skála 2007: 1052). The most common exponent of futurity in Modern Icelandic and Faroese is the present tense, cf. Einarsson 1949: 139, Lockwood 2002: 130. In Modern Icelandic, the verb *munu* is consequently much less frequent than in Old Icelandic. In Modern Icelandic, it is the 18th most frequent verb, while it is the 6th most frequent verb in the Icelandic Sagas, cf. Rögnvaldsson (2020): <https://uni.hi.is/eirikur/2020/11/29/3301/> [accessed in July 2021].

(7) that in Modern Norwegian renderings of the verb, it is necessary to add more specific modal contents, depending on the context.

- (7) a. *Þórr segir at þeir **munu** þá sofa ganga.*
«Tor seier at dei **víl** gå og sove.»
- b. *Ek á nú norðr leið til fjalla þessa er nú **munuð** þér sjá mega.*
«Eg legg no vegen nordover mot dei fjella som de no **kan** sjå.»
- c. *En nú **mun reyna** er þeir renna it þriðja skeiðit.*
«Men no **skal** det vise seg når dei spring det tredje rennet.»

This neutral character of *munu* and its universal range of use contrasts with the meaning of its potential competitor, the verb *skulu*. It is about half as frequent as *munu* in future contexts and has a distinct modal colouring which is connected to its etymological meaning “to be obliged to” (cf. Blöndal Magnússon 2008: 873). Morris (1964: 84) came to the conclusion that the main semantic difference between *munu* and *skulu* is that the basic meaning of *skulu*, that of obligation, is almost always present (cf. also Falk – Torp 1900: 161, Vijūnas 1998: 12, Gordon 1957: 313). Consequently, even though *skulu* is often used in a future context, its futural meaning is intertwined with modal shades, cf. (8) which refers to the future and at the same time to the social norm of divorce.

- (8) *en frá þessum degi **skal** ek aldri þín kona vera*
“But from this day I shall never be your wife”.
(*Víga-Glúms saga* XXI: 68)

This meaning of *skulu* is clearest in legal codes (9) where modality is absolutely dominant (cf. Faarlund (2004: 129) who ascribes *skulu* a deontic meaning).

- (9) *en ef barn lifnar. þa **scal** prestur veita því alla reiðo*
“And if the baby comes to life, then the priest is to provide her with full service”.
(*Grágás*: 6-7)

Iversen (1994: 140) mentions the role of *skulu* in promises and assurances, cf. (10).

- (10) *Skal ek ok svá upp hefja þetta tilkall, at annat hvárt skal vera, at ek skal eignask ríki þat allt til forráða, er þeir felldu frá Ólaf konung Tryggvason, frænda minn, eða ek skal hér falla á frændleifð minni.*

“I shall also so set about this claim that one of two things will result, that I shall gain possession of all that realm to govern that they deprived King Óláfr Tryggvason of, or that I shall fall here on my patrimony”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga helga* XXXV: 44, translation by Finlay – Faulkes: 26-27)

In 9th century Skaldic poetry, *skulu* accounts for 5 out of 14 references to future, but most of those instances, if not all, are clearly modally coloured, cf.

(11).

- (11) *Margr verðr sekr at sauðum seggr með föggu skeggi,
en ek at ungs í Eyjum allvalds sonar falli.
Hætt segja mér hólðar við hugfullan stilli;
Haralds hefk skarð í skildi — skala ugga þat — hoggvit.*

“Many a man with a handsome beard is convicted for sheep, but I [am convicted] for the death of the young son of the mighty ruler [= Hálfðan] in the Islands [Orkney]. Freeholders say there is danger for me from the resolute ruler; I have cut a notch in Haraldr’s shield; **I shall not fear that**”.

(Torf-Einarr Rognvaldsson, *lausavísa*, text and translation according to Whaley (ed.) 2012: 133)

The verb *skulu* here points to the future, but at the same time it expresses Torf-Einarr’s personal determination not to fear.

Another 9th century attestation (12) shows *skulu* being used in a threat where it underlines the emphatic words.

- (12) *‘Þú skalt véltr, nema vélum,’ — vreiðr mælir svá — ‘leiðir munstærandi mæra mey aptr, Loki, hapta.’*

“‘You shall be harshly dealt with, Loki,’ – the angry god speaks thus – ‘unless you bring back by strategems the glorious girl, joy-increaser of the divine powers [= the goddess Iðunn]’”.

(Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, *Haustlǫng* 11, text and translation according to Gade – Marold (eds.) 2017: 447)

This context is closely related to the use of *skulu* in curses which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

As can be seen from these examples, *skulu* contains a blend of future and modality (in varying proportions). In certain contexts, however, the meanings of *skulu* and *munu* may overlap. This is sometimes the case in the first person where the common denominator is the meaning of intention (cf. the following chapter).²⁰ This is illustrated by two different manuscripts of *Bandamanna saga* (13) where *munu* and *skulu* are interchanged (cf. Morris 1964: 48-57, Heusler 1967: 128, Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 178).

(13) a. *Nú er þú gerir sem ek vil ok gengr við, þá mun þér eigi þungt falla, fyrir því at ek **mun** setja ráð til þessa.*

“Now when you do as I want and confess, it will not be hard for you, because I will find a way thereto“.

b. *Nú ef þú gerir svá, sem ek vil, ok gangir við fyrir mér, þá mun þér létt falla, því at ek **skal** setja ráð til þess.*

“Now if you do as I want and confess before me, it will be light for you, because I shall find a way thereto“.

(*Bandamanna saga* IV: 313)

The fact that *skulu* was still relatively more lexical and that *munu* was much closer to a pure auxiliary can also be demonstrated on a syntactic level. Consequently, *skulu* can be used as an infinitive complement of *munu* as in (14).

(14) a. *ok **muntu** nú deyja **skulu***

“And now you shall die“.

(*Sögubrot af fornkonungum* IX: 68)

²⁰ The meanings of *munu* and *skulu* also overlap when they are used in a non-temporal meaning, expressing a command or encouragement (see 3.2.4.2).

b. *grið mun sjá maðr skulu hafa*

“This man shall have truce“.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga helga* CXIX: 203)

The opposite situation, i. e. *munu* used as an infinitive complement of *skulu* (**skal munu*), seems not to be documented.²¹ This corresponds to the assumption that *munu* is a pure marker of futurity. In other words, a modal verb can be modified for tense just as any lexical verb, but a tense marker cannot be modified for modality.²²

This difference between the syntactic behaviour of *munu* in comparison with *skulu* indicates that it is a grammatical item to a greater degree than *skulu*. Last but not least, the tense-like character of *munu* is evidenced by its non-temporal uses that are typically associated with future tenses. These are discussed in Chapter 3.

1.4 Conclusion

The preceding discussion can be summed up as follows: *munu* was the main exponent of futurity in Old Norse in terms of frequency as well as its non-modal, neutral meaning. It seems to be semantically equivalent to the futural present which is, however, used to a considerably lesser extent (especially when compared to the other Germanic dialects). *Skulu* also commonly occurs in a future context, though less frequently than *munu*, and carries modal shades connected to obligation, determination and the like.

²¹ In Modern Icelandic, neither *munu* nor *skulu* can be preceded by another auxiliary, cf. Thráinsson 2007: 10.

²² Cf. an English “quasi-modal” like *have to* which may be a complement of *will*: *you will have to*, but not vice versa: **you have to will*.

Chapter 2

2. *Skulu* and *munu* in Relation to Fate and Future

This chapter focuses on the semantic contours of *skulu* vis-à-vis *munu* in more detail. Their semantic properties are discussed on the background of speech acts that have a more or less obvious relation to fate (prophecies, curses and oaths). Fate is closely connected to the future and it is claimed by most accounts to be one of the semantic aspects of *skulu* (Cleasby – Vigfússon 1874: 560, Jónsson 1931: 514, Fritzner 1886-1896 III: 394, Heggstad – Hødnebo – Simensen 1975: 389, Iversen 1994: 141, Nygaard 1905: 196). This contrastive analysis of the uses of *skulu* and *munu* is intended to reveal and revise the semantic properties that have been associated with the Old Norse periphrastic future constructions.

2.1 Obligation and future

Skulu is a preterite-present verb of Proto-Germanic origin, derived from the PIE root **(s)kel-* “to be under an obligation”; it is connected to words for *debt*, *duty* and the like (ON *skuld* “debt”, *skylda* “duty”, *skyldr* “obliged, related”); outside Germanic, cognates can only be found in Baltic: Lithuanian *skola* “debt”, *kaltė* “fault, guilt”, Old Prussian *skellānts* “guilty” (cf. Blöndal Magnússon 2008: 872-873, Kroonen 2013: 450, Seebold 1970: 405-406, Birkmann 1987: 84-85, Online Etymology Dictionary).

The Old Norse verb has close counterparts in all of the other old Germanic languages: Gothic *skulan*, OE *sculan*, OHG *skulan*, OS *skolan*, Old Frisian *skela* (cf. de Vries 1977: 507). Most Germanic languages made use of this verb in a future context, but at least in the older stages of their history the use was limited and the verb was clearly rather a modal than a future auxiliary (Harbert 2007: 300, Braune 1886: 209, Emonds – Faarlund 2014: 79). In some Germanic languages, the futural meaning later became more prominent (Dutch, English, Scandinavian,

cf. Abraham 1989).²³

The development of future meaning from the source meaning of obligation is, in fact, cross-linguistically common (cf. Heine – Kuteva 2004: 218, Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 258-264), and the grammaticalization process, especially for English, is well documented (see e. g. Hilpert 2008, Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994, Lowrey 2012, Bybee – Dahl 1989). Initially, statements of obligation imply intention to carry out what has been said as in (15).

(15) *Ek skal út ganga með þér, ok mun nú betra at hafa vitsmuni við.*

“I shall go out with you and it will now be better to be alert”.

(*Njáls saga XLIX: III*)

Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca (1994: 264) note that intention only arises in statements expressing strong obligation. Statements of weak obligation do not lead to intention as e. g. *I should go now, but I’m gonna stay*. Such utterance would be incoherent with strong obligation: **I have to go now, but I’m gonna stay*. In this sense, *skulu* expresses strong obligation which “compels one to follow the social or moral course set by a belief system or social norms” (Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 264).

A crucial moment in the development of futures is when intention is reinterpreted as prediction which happens usually in the 3rd person (cf. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 263-264). However, it has been argued above that the Old Norse *skulu* expressed a blend of futurity and modality, and as the following discussion intends to show, it never reached the stage of expressing general future (which could even be claimed about its Modern Icelandic and Scandinavian descendants, cf. Abraham 1989). This is why it has been asserted that *skulu* is used for the expression of future only in the 1st person (Heusler 1967: 128, Noreen 1923: 367) where the original sense of obligation naturally leads to intention and thus comes close to *munu* as in (13)²⁴, cf. (15) where the future shifts from *skulu* (in the 1st person) to *munu* (in the 3rd person).

²³ In German, though used in the Middle period, *schollen* (*sollen*) was replaced by *werden* as a future auxiliary (cf. Paul 1929: 175), and *sollen* remained a modal verb.

²⁴ On the meaning of intention see further 3.2.1.4.

2.2 *Skulu* and fate in earlier scholarship

The aforementioned accounts of *skulu* mention obligation/necessity as one of the main characteristics of the verb. The notion of obligation is further categorized in more detail and the subcategories can be considered governing forces of the obligation or necessity: fate, moral measures, circumstances, someone's order, one's own determination, promise, pledge etc.²⁵

The semantic aspect of fate especially is mentioned by almost all lexical accounts of the verb (except Baetke (1965-1968) who only gives a general semantic characterization of “determination”). Since fate has a clear connection to future, we can use it to demonstrate the temporal/modal aspects of the Old Norse periphrastic future constructions.

Fate is a very salient phenomenon in Old Norse and Germanic culture. The notion that the future is predetermined, or in other words that the course of events is governed by fate, is manifested on various levels, especially in Old Norse literature of the oldest period. The Old Norse *Ragnarøk* or the final destiny of the gods is perhaps the most telling example. On a personal level, the phrase *honum er/verðr auðit* “it falls to one's lot, one is destined” and its variations are very common in sagas as well as other allusions to fate (cf. e. g. Wirth 1940).

It is true that one can find *skulu* in various phrases that seem to have a connection to fate, cf. (16).

(16) a. *deyja skal hverr um sinn*

“Eventually, everyone shall/must die”.

(*Qrvar-Odds saga* XIV: 257)

b. *ungr má en gamall skal*

“Young may and old shall/must [die]”.

(cited by Cleasby – Vigfússon 1874: 560)

²⁵ A similar range of meanings is given for the Old English cognate *sculan*, including the meaning of fate, cf. Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: <https://bosworthtoller.com/27073> [accessed in June 2021]: “the necessity of fate, of the order of providence, shall, must as being decreed by fate or providence,” cf. e. g. *Gáþ á wyrd swá hió scel* (Beowulf).

Skulu has even got its counterpart in the mythological person of the norn Skuld who is mentioned by Snorri Sturluson in *Gylfaginning* as one of the three norns who shape people's destiny. It has been suggested that Skuld represents the future, and the two other norns, Verðandi and Urðr, the present and the past, respectively (see the discussion in Bek-Pedersen 2011: 77-78). This time-based comparison might be debatable, but the name Skuld is indeed of the same root like *skulu* (cf. de Vries 1977: 506), so a certain semantic relation between the norn and the verb could be expected.

The relation of *skulu* (and its Germanic cognates) to fate has been studied particularly by Sieberer (1925) and Mutti (2010). Sieberer (1925: 13-14) distinguishes an *inner scal* which pertains to one's own decisions and an *outer scal* or *bestimmende scal*, "determining *scal*" which refers to events or statements governed by an external force (God, fate etc.). Basing his claims mainly on Old English evidence, Sieberer (1925: 26) argues that the inner *scal* is more frequent in profane literature while the outer or *bestimmende scal* is to be found mostly in religious texts.

Sieberer (1925: 30-32) analysed the use of *bestimmende scal* in Beowulf with regard to the context in which it is used and came to the conclusion that the verb occurs particularly frequently in contexts of Christian interpolations. In order to find out whether *bestimmende scal* is indeed of Christian origin, he turns his attention to Old Norse. He finds several instances of *bestimmende scal* in the Eddic poems *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál* and *Lokasenna*. On the basis of these attestations, he (1925: 33) claims that "the heathen Germanic people knew not only the determination by fate, but also the *bestimmende scal*". What changed with Christianity was, according to Sieberer (1925: 27), only the determining powers behind the *bestimmende scal*. In Germanic heathen times it was fate or its personification, in Christian times God or one of his forms. Thus, Sieberer (1925: 34-35) concludes that *scal* (in Germanic generally) was at first only used for a divinely determined future and only later generalized as a universal future

expression.²⁶

He adopts this view in spite of the following facts that he himself acknowledges: *bestimmende scal* is very rare in the sagas (he quotes one instance, cf. Sieberer 1925: 30) generally obsessed with the idea of fate. The situation in the Eddic poems belonging to the genre of “prophecy” (*spá*) is no better. In the whole text of the prophetic poem *Völuspá* there is only one instance of *skulu* (which he considers, with Mogk, a Christian interpolation) with none at all in *Grípisspá*. In the Eddic poems, in which he did find instances of *bestimmende scal*, *skulu* actually alternates with *munu* in very similar contexts.

According to Sieberer (1925: 34), the reason why *bestimmende scal* is so rare in the sagas is that they are too profane – an explanation which is rather subjective and says nothing about the virtual absence of *skulu* in prophecies like *Völuspá* and *Grípisspá*, and its rather scarce occurrences in the other Eddic poems.²⁷

Interestingly, Mutti’s much more up-to-date view (2010) of the function of *scal* (in Old English) is rather similar to that of Sieberer. According to her (2010: 234), *scal* “fulfilled a specifically Christian communicational need”. She supports this view with reference to Ogawa (1989: 225) who found that Ælfric of Eynsham (ca. 955–1100, an English abbot, scholar and grammarian) used *sculan* more frequently in his religious works than elsewhere. However, Mutti (2010: 234) notes that the verb *willan* had similar religious connotations.

Like Sieberer, she (2010: 235) compares the development of Germanic periphrastic future to Romance *habere* and links the emergence of periphrastic forms in both Germanic and Latin to the new Christian worldview, finding support in her analysis of Beowulf. According to her results (2010: 243-244), there are about 90 future references in Beowulf out of which 60 are expressed with present tense. She argues that periphrastic future is more common with

²⁶ He makes a comparison with the emergence of future tense from Latin *habere* + infinitive in Romance languages, citing Thielmann (1885), where it first emerged in religious contexts (used for future events determined by God).

²⁷ In *Vafþrúðnismál munu* actually appears more frequently than *skulu*.

“Christian” characters, especially Hrōðgār who, according to her, represents the most prominent Christian voice in the poem (cf. the figures in Mutti 2010: 248). Moreover, 19, about two thirds, of the periphrastic futures occur with explicit Christian references (cf. Mutti 2010: 252).²⁸ She (2010: 254) concludes that

“[i]nitially, the new periphrases were used in the specialized context of prophecy and certainty about future events as decreed by God, but in time, following a conventional grammaticalisation cline, their semantic range broadened and the new analytic constructions thus came to index the future more generally”.

Mutti (2010) and Sieberer (1925) thus more or less agree on the initial significance of a higher power in the development of Germanic futural *sculan* (Sieberer), or Germanic periphrastic future in general (Mutti), using romance *habere*-future as comparative data. They both agree that *sculan* (or periphrasis in general) was first used for future exclusively in religious contexts and was generalized later on as a universal means of future expression. They differ only in that Sieberer considers the religious futural use of *sculan* an original Germanic (pre-Christian) phenomenon, while Mutti argues that it only appeared with the advent of Christianity.

In fact, Mutti’s claim that the Old English *sculan* was particularly frequent in prophecies finds support in Middle English where the trend seems to have continued.²⁹ However, one has to be careful in generalizing these results on another Germanic language without taking a thorough look at the actual evidence for the specific idiom.

That is namely the mistake both Sieberer and Mutti make, each in their own specific way. Mutti, relying on Old English, assumes that a similar process – that of adopting future periphrasis because of the Christian religion – took place independently in the other Germanic languages.

²⁸ As opposed to Sieberer, Mutti does not specifically distinguish *willan* and *sculan*. She considers them to be equal in their Christian connotations.

²⁹ Fischer (2006: 264) claims that *sculan* is more frequent in prophecies and biblical writings (however, unlike Mutti (2010), as opposed to *willan*). Cf. also Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca (1994: 187).

Sieberer on the other hand, in his endeavour to find out whether *bestimmende scal* is of Christian or earlier, Germanic origin considers several such instances found in Eddic poems as sufficient proof for the existence of a “heathen” *bestimmende scal* in Germanic. However, to postulate such a phenomenon in Old Norse, (let alone Germanic) more substantial evidence is needed.

To find out whether *skulu* is indeed connected to fate, we will take a closer look at Old Norse prophecies.

2.3 Prophecies

Prophecy is an act of speech in which fate (which is claimed to be the semantic domain of *skulu*) and future (the domain of *munu*) come together, and is therefore an ideal field for a semantic analysis of these exponents.

Old Norse literature offers quite a few instances of prophecies of various types, in both poetry and prose.³⁰ Divination in general can be divided into retrospective (focused on the past), perspective (focused on the numinous level of the present) and prospective (focused on the future, i. e. prophecy) (cf. Starý 2010, Maurer 1893: 101, Ström 1970: 228–244). All these three types can be found in Old Norse literature, but the majority of divinatory acts enquire about the future. This focus on the future can be observed on words pertaining to divinatory powers: *framsýnn* “foreseeing”, *framvísi* “fore-wise”. These lexemes imply that one looks into the future to find something out, which necessarily suggests that the future is already determined and can be known. The events, as they have been destined, are then said to appear or come forth (*koma fram*) into the unfolding reality. When people wish to know their future, they come to seeresses to “know their fate” (*vita forlög*). When the seeress in *Eiríks saga rauða* is about to reveal a prophecy she says *þín forlög eru mér nú allglöggsæ*, “your fate is now clearly visible to me”. It means that predestined future exists in some form, but it cannot be seen without performing a divination session. Similarly, in the Eddic poem

³⁰ For a comprehensive discussion of Old Norse prophecies, see Horst 2010.

Grípisspá, Grípir is asked to prophesy since he sees all fate in advance (*bví at þú  ll of sér  rl g fyrir*).

It can be concluded that prophesying is only possible because the course of events has been determined by fate. Belief in fate is thus essential and indispensable for this kind of divination technique. In the discussion below, the linguistic means by which the belief is conveyed in various Old Norse prophecies are examined.

2.3.1 Poetic Edda

The most significant prophecies in poetry can be found in the Poetic Edda, and the most profound is undoubtedly *V lusp *. It is a great mythological sketch which recounts crucial events of the Old Norse mythology: the creation of the world, of the first people, the struggle between  sir and Vanir,   inn’s sacrifice, the killing of Baldr, and last but not least the destruction of the world known as *Ragnar k*, and the subsequent emergence of a new world. The events before the *Ragnar k* (i. e. about two thirds of the poem) are presented mostly in the preterite. They are thus perceived as a sort of past event, the mythological history of the world. The occasional use of the present tense expresses ongoing and eternal truths as in (17).

- (17) *Drekkr mj   Mimir* “Mimir drinks mead every morning
 morgun hverjan from Father of the Slain’s wayer”.
 af ve i Valf  rs.
 (*V lusp * 28, translation by Carolyne Larrington: 7)

It is only with the onset of *Ragnar k* from about strophe 40 onwards that the perspective changes and the events are looked upon as future (in other words, the divination changes from retrospective to prospective).³¹ Grammatically, it is

³¹ The fact that such a large part of a “prophecy” is concerned with the past might be due to the need of the seeress to legitimize herself – to show the audience that she knows the mysteries of the past and can therefore be trusted in matters of the future, cf. Horst (2010: 210-216) and the references cited therein.

(18) *Sal sér hon standa sólu fegra,* “A hall she sees standing, fairer than
gulli þakðan á Gimlé; the sun,
*þar **skulu** dyggvar dróttir byggja* thatched with gold, at Gimle;
ok um aldrdaga ynðis njóta. there the noble lords will live
 and spend their days in pleasure”.

(*Völuspá* 56, translation by Carolynne Larrington: 12)

Another reference to *Ragnarøk*, the fight between Óðinn and Fenrir, is in *Hyndluljóð* (cited above. cf. (6)) and it also involves *munu*.

(19) “*Pegjattu, vólva, þik vil ek fregna,
unz alkunna, vil ek enn vita:
Hverr **man** Baldri at bana verða
ok Óðins son aldri ræna?*”

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‘Don’t be silent, prophetess! I want to question you,
until I know everything, I still want to know more:
who will be Baldr’s killer
and who’ll steal the life from Odin’s son?’

*“Høðr berr hávan hróðrbaðm pinig,
hann **mun** Baldri at bana verða
ok Óðins son aldri ræna.
Nauðug sagðak, nú mun ek þegja”.*

‘Hod will dispatch the famous warrior to this place;
he will be Baldr’s killer
and steal the life from Odin’s son.
Reluctantly I told you, know I’ll be silent.’

*“Þegjattu, vǫlva, þik vil ek fregna,
unz alkunna, vil ek enn vita:
Hverr **mun** heipt Heði hefnt of vinna
eða Baldrs bana á bál vega?”*

‘Don’t be silent, prophetess! I want to question you,
until I know everything, I still want to know more:
who will bring about vengeance on Hod for this wickedness,
who will bring Baldr’s killer to the funeral pyre?’

*“Rindr berr Vála í vestrsǫlum,
sá **mun** Óðins sonr einnættr vega;
hond um þvær né hǫfuð kembir,
áðr á bál um berr Baldrs andskota.
Nauðug sagðak, nú mun ek þegja”.*

‘Rind will give birth to Vali in western halls,
Odin’s son will fight when one night old;
he won’t wash his hands nor comb his hair,
until he’s brought to the pyre Baldr’s enemy.
Reluctantly I told you, now I’ll be silent’.

(*Baldrs draumar* 8-11, translation by Carolyne Larrington: 244)

Baldr's death is one of the central mythological themes and its connection to fate is beyond all doubt. And yet, the whole dialogue is rendered not with *skulu*, but *munu*.

Another Eddic Poem that has a form of a prophecy is *Grípisspá* in which Grípir, Sigurðr's uncle, makes a prophecy about Sigurðr's life. But again, *skulu* does not occur in the prophetic passages, only in other contexts and functions. Instead, we may find copious instances of *munu*, alternating with the present tense. The ratio here is inverse compared to *Völuspá*, i. e. periphrastic future is here about twice as frequent as the present.³³

Prophetic poetry can also be found outside the Edda. In the legendary *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka* (V-VIII), for instance, there are prophetic strophes told by various persons (and even a rock). There again, we find a mix of the present tense and the *munu*-future with no instance of *skulu*.

2.3.2 *Eiríks saga rauða*

One of the most famous prophecies in Old Norse prose is recorded in *Eiríks saga rauða*. It takes place in Greenland during a period of crop failure. There was a seeress called Þorbjörg lítilvölva and those who wanted to know their fate (*forlög*) or crop prospects invited her to their home. One of these was Þorkell, and the seeress tells him his fortune (20).

(20) [...] *mér eru nú margir þeir hlutir auðsýnir, er áðr var ek dulið, ok margir aðrir. En ek kann þér þat at segja, Þorkell, at hallæri þetta **mun** ekki haldask lengr en í vetr, ok **mun** batna árangr, sem vátar. Sóttarfar þat, sem á hefir legit, **man** ok batna vátu bráðara. En þér, Guðríðr, skal ek launa í*

³³ Sieberer (1925) further mentions the Eddic poems of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grimnismál* in which he finds occurrences of *bestimmende skal*, but as he admits, also the verb *munu* in the same contexts. In *Vafþrúðnismál* the ratio is 5:4 in favour of *munu*, in *Grimnismál*, *skulu* appears repeatedly, while *munu* occurs only once. However, it should be noted that these poems are not prophecies, but rather can be described as wisdom poetry recounting mythological knowledge (cf. Simek – Pálsson 2007), and as such, they are not quite comparable with *Völuspá* and other actual prophecies.

*hond liðsinni þat, er oss hefir af þér staðit, því at þín forlög eru mér nú allgløggsæ. Þú **munt** gjaforð fá hér á Grænlandi, þat er sæmiligast er, þó at þér verði þat eigi til langæðar, því at vegar þínir liggja út til Íslands, ok **man** þar koma frá þér bæði mikill ætt ok góð [...]*

“Many things are now clear to me which were earlier concealed from both me and others. And I can tell you that this spell of hardship will last no longer, and times will improve as the spring advances. The bout of illness which has long plagued you will also improve sooner than you expect. And you, Gudrid, I shall reward on the spot for the help we have received, since your fate is now very clear to me. You will make the most honourable of matches here in Greenland, though you won’t be putting down roots here, as your path leads to Iceland and from you will be descended a long and worthy line”.

(*Eiríks saga rauða* IV: 208, translation by Keneva Kunz: 7)

Virtually all the future references in the prophecy are expressed by *munu*. The word for fate (*forlög*) is explicitly mentioned twice in the text: in the description of Þorbjörg’s occupation (before the quoted passage, not included above) and in her direct speech when she remarks that Guðríðr’s fate is clearly visible to her.

Skulu is used here only once – not in the prophetic words themselves, but in the promise that Þorbjörg will reward Guðríðr (by telling her what awaits her in the future). This function of *skulu* in promises or assurances is very common (cf. (10)) and has nothing to do with fate or the prophecy itself. As soon as Þorbjörg switches again over to the prophetic mode, she uses the periphrasis with *munu*.

2.3.3 *Njáls saga*

Njáll, the protagonist of *Njáls saga*, is said to be *förspár* “prophesying” and *langsýnn* “far-sighted”. When his friend Gunnarr comes to him to seek his counsel in a legal matter, Njáll tells him what he should do and foresees the exact course of entire dialogues (21).

- (21) *Þú skalt segja, at þú sér eyfirzkr maðr. Hann **mun** spyrja, hvárt þar sé allmargir ágætir menn.*
Ærinn hafa þeir klækiskap, skalt þú segja.
*Er þér kunnigt til Reykjardals? **mun** hann segja;*
kunnigt er mér um allt Ísland, skalt þú segja.
*Eru í Reykjardal kappar miklir? **mun** hann segja;*
þjófar eru þar ok illmenni, skalt þú segja;
*þá **mun** Hrútr hlæja ok þykkja gaman at. Þit **munuð** tala um menn í Austfirðingafjórðungi; ok skalt þú öllum fá nokkut ámæli.*

“You must say that you’re from Eyjafjord. He will ask whether there are many excellent men up there.

You must say, ‘They do a lot of nasty things.’

‘Are you familiar with Reykjadal?’ he will say.

‘I am familiar with all of Iceland,’ you must say.

‘Are there any mighty heroes in Reykjadal?’ he will say.

‘They’re thieves and rogues,’ you must say.

Hrut will laugh and find this great sport. He and you will then talk about the men in the East Fjords, and you must say something scornful about each of them”.

(*Njáls saga* XXII: 52, translation by Robert Cook: 26)

As can be seen from this excerpt, *skulu* is regularly used whenever Njáll gives Gunnarr advice on how he should speak or act. This is a common use of *skulu* which has a meaning close to imperative (cf. 3.2.4.2) as Njáll is giving recommendations to Gunnarr. Njáll’s power of seeing into the future is therefore not involved in these lines.

By contrast, whenever Njáll renders the answers that Gunnarr will get from other people, or tells him about what will happen, he uses *munu*. Here it is obvious that Njáll is drawing on his ability of being *forspár* – he reads the future which, by implication, must be predestined. The use of *munu* in these cases, just like in those discussed previously, is the exact opposite of what could be expected considering the views of Sieberer (1925) and Mutti (2010).

Another piece of prophetic words from *Njáls saga* comes from the climax

when an old woman (who is characterized as *framsýn* “foreseeing”) living at Njáll’s farm warns Njáll’s sons and tells them to take away a pile of weeds which she claims will be used to set fire on Njáll’s house (22).

- (22) “*Þessi arfasáta **mun** tekin ok kveykðr við eldr; þá er Njáll bóndi er inni brenndr ok Bergþóra fóstira mín, ok berið þér hana á vatn,*” segir hún, “*eða brennið hana sem skjótast*”.
“*Eigi **munu** vér þat gera,*” segir Skarpheðinn, “*því at fáz **mun** annat til eldkveykna, ef þess verður auðit, þó at hún sé eigi*”.

“This pile of chickweed will be taken and set afire when Njal is burned in his house, along with my foster-daughter Bergthora – put it in water or burn it, as fast as you can”.

“No, we won’t do that,” said Skarpheðinn, “for if this is not here something else will be found to start the fire, if this is our fate”.

(*Njáls saga* CXXIV: 292, translation by Robert Cook: 151)

In his answer, Skarpheðinn (one of Njáll’s sons) utters the phrase *ef þess verður auðit* which is a clear reference to the governing force of the course of events – the fate. Both in the woman’s warning and in Skarpheðinn’s answer *munu* is used. Note that no difference is made between the will-related future (*eigi munu vér þat gera* “we won’t do that”) and the fate-related future (*fáz mun annat til eldkveykna* “something else will be found to start the fire”). Both is expressed with *munu*. What is relevant here, is that both events are placed in the future. The fact that one is governed by fate while the other obviously is not, does not find a corresponding reflection in the grammar.

2.3.4 *Vatnsdæla saga*

In *Vatnsdæla saga* there is an episode in which a Sami seeress is telling men their fate at a feast. One of them, Ingimundr, is reluctant to ask the seeress about his fate. He does not want to hear it because he does not trust her but she tells him nevertheless (23).

- (23) “*Ek mun þó segja þér ófregit; þú **munt** byggja land, er Ísland heitir; þar*

*er enn víða óbyggt; þar **muntu** gerask virðingamaður ok verða gamall; þínir ættmenn **munu** ok margir verða ágætir í því landi”.*

[...]

*Finnan svarar: “Þetta **mun** fram koma, sem ek segi, ok þat til marks, at hlutr er horfinn ór þússi þínum, sá er Haraldr konungr gaf þér í Hafrsfirði, ok er hann nú kominn í holt þat er, þú **munt** byggja ok er á hlutnum markaður Freyr af silfri; ok þá er þú reisir bæ þinn, **mun** saga mín sannask”.*

[...]

*Ok enn mælti hon: “Gríms eru ok [forlof] þangat ok svá bróður hans, Hrómundar, ok **munu** þeir báðir verða gildir bændr”.*

“I will nevertheless tell you without being asked. You will settle in a land which is called Iceland; it is not widely settled. There you will become a man of honour and live to a great age. Many of your kinsfolk will be leading figures in that land”.

[...]

The Lapp woman answered, “What I am saying will come to pass and, as a sign of this, an amulet is missing from your purse – the gift which King Harald gave you at Havsford – and it now lies in the wood where you will settle, and on this silver amulet the figure of Frey is carved and when you establish your homestead there, then my prophecy will be fulfilled”.

[...]

She went on – “the destinies of Grim and of his brother Hromund also lie in Iceland; and they will both become worthy farmers”.

(Vatnsdæla saga X: 29-30, translation by Andrew Wawn: 14-15)

Although initially Ingimundr does not trust the prophecy, later on he decides to go to Iceland (24).

(24) *er nú ok eigi því at leyna, herra, at ek ætla at gera eptir Finnum þeim, er mér sýni heraðs vøxt ok lands skipun, þar sem ek **skal** vera, ok ætla ek at senda þá til Íslands.*

“It is, therefore, to be no secret, my lord, that I now propose to send for those Lapps who can show me the extent of the region and the lie of the land where I shall be living; and I intend to send them to Iceland”.

(*Vatnsdæla saga* XII: 33, translation by Andrew Wawn: 16)

In the prophecy itself, *munu* is used throughout, but later Ingimundr refers to his settling in Iceland using the verb *skulu*. The reason may be that Ingimundr does not actually refer directly to the prophecy, but rather expresses his determination to settle in Iceland which he had by then adopted.

2.3.5 Christian prophecies

Old Norse literature includes not only texts that echo the Germanic worldview, but also poems and works of prose that were created with a direct connection to the Christian faith. In those, we may find references to central eschatological Christian events which can be compared to the references to pre-Christian eschatological events discussed previously. As it turns out, there is no difference in the grammatical expression used in pagan and Christian prophecies.

The 14th century Skaldic poem *Lilja* by Eysteinn Ásgrímsson recounts the Creation and the fall of man as well as Jesus' story from the Annunciation to the Last Judgement. A connection to fate/God's will can be expected here. In (25) the archangel addresses Mary and announces to her that she will give birth to Jesus. The strophes in (26) refer to the Last Judgement.

- (25) *Guð himnanna fram **mun** fæðaz ,
frúin skínandi, af holdi þínu.*

“God of the heavens will be brought forth, radiant woman, from your flesh”.

(Eysteinn Ásgrímsson, *Lilja* 29, text and translation according to Clunies Ross (ed.) 2007: 596)

- (26) *Enn **mun** koma í öðru sinni
allsveldandi kóngr að gjalda
seggja ferðum sínar gerðir
sómaörr á efsta dómi. [...]*

Upprísöndum allra landa

íbyggjurum við dóminn hryggva
*Jésú **munu** þá sárin sýnaz*
súthrærandi og pislarfæri. [...]

“Again the all-ruling king will come, generous with honour, a second time,
at the Last Judgement, to repay crowds of men for their deeds.

At the sorrowful Judgement, then the grievous wounds and torture-tools of
Jesus will be shown to the rising inhabitants of all lands”.

(Eysteinn Ásgrímsson, *Lilja* 70-71, text and translation according to
Clunies Ross (ed.) 2007: 641-642)

Both the Last Judgement as a part of the Christian eschatology and the
birth of Christ are events that are prophesied/predetermined, and yet we find *munu*
in their Old Norse depictions.

An example of a translated prophetic poem is *Merlínusspá* (preserved in
two separate poems) which forms a part of *Breta Saga*. It is Gunnlaugr Leifsson’s
Old Norse rendering (made around 1200) of *Prophetiae Merlini* by Geoffrey of
Monmouth, written in Latin prose. *Munu* is used abundantly here, while *skulu* is
virtually non-existent in the prophetic words. Despite being a translation, it also
seems to conform to the same pattern seen so far in original Old Norse
prophecies.³⁴

As an example of a Christian prophecy in prose, we can use a story from
Snorri Sturluson’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* which is told about Óláfr
Tryggvason, the king of Norway (995-1000), a fervent promoter of Christianity.
Once he came to a hermit to learn about his future destiny (27).³⁵

(27) *Einsetumaðrinn svaraði með helgum spádómi: “Þú **munt** verða ágætr
konungr ok ágæt verk vinna. Þú **munt** mǫrgum mǫnnum til trúar koma ok
skírnar, **muntu** bæði þér hjálpa í því ok mǫrgum ǫðrum. Ok til þess at þú
efisk eigi um þessi mín andsvǫr, þá máttu þat til marks hafa: Þú **munt** við*

³⁴ Cf. Horst (2010: 306) for the time structure of *Merlínusspá*.

³⁵ There is a very similar episode about the Norwegian king and saint Óláfr Haraldsson, also
wholly rendered with *munu* (cf. *The Legendary saga of Óláfr the Saint* XVIII: 64).

*skip þín svikum mæta ok flokkum, ok **mun** á bardaga reitask, ok **muntu** týna nokkuru liði ok sjálfir sár fá ok **muntu** af því sári banvænn vera ok á skildi til skips borinn, en af þessu sári **muntu** heill verða innan sjau náttu ok brátt við skírn taka”.*

“The hermit replied with a holy prophecy: You will become a celebrated king and achieve celebrated deeds. You will bring many men to faith and baptism, you will benefit yourself in this and many others. And so that you may have no doubts about these answers of mine, you can take this as a sign: at your ships you will meet treachery and uprising, and it will lead to a battle, and you will lose some of your troops and yourself receive a wound and because of this wound you will be at the point of death and be carried to your ship on a shield, but you will recover from this wound within seven nights and soon receive baptism.”

(Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* XXXI: 266-267, translation by Finlay – Faulkes: 165)

The whole prophecy is rendered with *munu*. Christian references in prophecies are thus on a par with the pagan prophecies in terms of the grammatical means employed. That means that the possibly different view of fate in Christianity did not find its expression on the linguistic level. What we see is rather an uninterrupted continuation of the linguistic form.

Apart from the instances discussed above, there is a number of minor references to various individual prophecies and prophesied events in the Old Norse literature.³⁶ Nevertheless, in these the word *spá* (“to prophesy”) or another

³⁶ Cf. the following instances:

Njáls saga XIII: 35: *þat mun verða fram at koma sem ætlat er*

Njáls saga LXIV: 143: *þat spáði mér Þórir félagi minn, at ek mynda falla fyrir Gunnari, ef ek væra hér á landi.*

Njáls saga LXVII: 151: *Mun ek segja þér, at Njáll hefir spát honum ok sagt fyrir um æfi hans, ef hann vægi í enn sama knérunn optar en um sinn, at þat myndi honum bráðast til bana.*

Njáls saga CXV: 261: *honum var þat spát, ef hann riði þrjú sumur til þings ok kvæmi heill heim, at þá myndi hann verða mestr hofðingi í ætt sinni ok elztr*

Vatnsdæla saga XII: 55: *en ek spáða honum þat, sem nú er fram komit, at vaxa myndi hans svívirðing af okkrum fundi, sem nú gafsk honum*

Grœnlendinga saga VIII: 268: *en spá mun ek þeim þess, at þeirra afkvæmi mun lítt at þrifum verða*

explicit reference to prophecy or fate is made too, and in that context, only *munu* is used. One of the most telling of these instances is (28) which makes a direct statement about the inevitability of destined events.

- (28) *þat mun fram koma, sem auðit verður*
“What is destined will happen”.
(*Gísla saga Súrssonar* IX: 34)

It can be concluded that the absolute majority of Old Norse prophecies, whether religious or not, is rendered with the verb *munu*. There are only several cases of prophecies which make some use of *skulu*. These are discussed in the next section and, as we will see, most of them can be explained in a meaningful way.

2.3.6 Prophecies with *skulu*

2.3.6.1 *Landnámabók*

A prophecy which involves *skulu* occurs in *Landnámabók*. Grímr goes

Fóstbræðra saga XV: 197: “*en spá mun ek ykkir spá: Svá vel sem nú er með ykkir, þá munu þit verst skilja ykkart vinfengi*”. Þeir segja: “*Furðu óspálíg sýnisk okkr þú vera*”. Kerling mælti: “*Hversu sem ykkir sýnisk þat, þá mun þat eptir ganga, sem ek mæli nú.*”

Víga-Glúms saga XII: 41: *Hon kom til Uppsala, ok tók Saldís vel við henni ok bað hana spá nokkut um þá sveinana ok spá vel. [...]* “*en þat kann ek þér at segja, at þeir munu banaspjót eptir berask, ok mun hvat qðru verra af hljótask hér í héraði.*”

Bandamanna saga X: 353-354: *þat var mér spát, at ek mynda ellidauðr verða, en mér þykkir því betr, er fyrr taka troll við þér*

Finnboga saga ramma IX: 269-270: *Hann kveðst fyrir löngu þat hafa honum spát, at hann mundi afbragð annarra manna verða.*

Vöðu-Brands þáttur XII: 138: *Nú er þat fram komit, Ófeigr, er ek spáða þér um várit, at mín virðing myndi hallask af þínu tilstilli.*

Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar V: 405: *En er menn váru komnir í sæti um kveldit, var völván frétt at forspám sínum, en hon sagði, at Virfill mundi þar til elli búa ok þykkja nýtr bóndi. “En þeim unga manni, er þar sitr hjá þér, bóndi, er gott at heyra sín forlög, því at hann man fara víða ok þykkja þar mestr maðr, sem þá er hann helzt, ok vinna margt til framaverka ok verða ellidauðr, ef hann kemr eigi á Norðmæri í Noregi eðr norðr þaðan í þat land”.*

Landnámabók: 366: *honum var þat spát, at hann mundi á því landi deyja, er þá var eigi byggt*

fishing and catches a merman, *marmenill*. Grímr asks him about his fate and the merman answers (29).

(29) *Grímr ræri til fiska um haustit með húskarla sína, en sveinninn Þórir lá í stafni ok var í selbelg, ok dreginn at hálsinum. Grímr dró marmennil, ok er hann kom upp, spurði Grímr: “Hvat spár þú oss um forlög vár, eða hvar **skulu** vér byggja á Íslandi?” Marmennill svarar: “Ekki þarf ek at spá yðr, en sveinninn, er liggr í selbelginum, hann **skal** þar byggja ok land nema, er Skálm merr yðr leggsk undir klyffjum”.*

“In the autumn Grim went fishing with his farm hands and the boy Thorir lay in the prow tucked into a sealskin bag which was tied at the neck. Grim caught a merman, and when he got him to the surface, Grim asked ‘What can you tell us about our futures? Where in Iceland ought we to settle?’

‘There’s no point in my making prophecies about you,’ said the merman ‘but that boy in the sealskin bag, he’ll settle and claim land where your mare Skalm lies down under her load’”.

(*Landnámabók*: 96, translation by Pálsson – Edwards: 37-38)

The word for fate is directly mentioned in Grímr’s question, and unlike other prophecies seen so far, both the question and the answer are rendered with *skulu*. However, in this case the use of *skulu* might have a reason. It could indicate that Grímr is actually asking for advice as to where he should settle and not plainly enquiring about the future. This seems logical especially with regard to the fact that this episode takes place in Iceland where Grímr went “to search for land”. Interpreting his question as a request for counsel was apparently taken up in the translation by Pálsson – Edwards.

Skulu in the merman’s answer then probably echoes the construction in Grímr’s question. This instance of *skulu* therefore does not represent a serious discrepancy to the dominant pattern of *munu* seen so far in prophecies.

2.3.6.2 *Qrvar-Odds saga*

Another case of *skulu* used in a prophecy is recorded in *Qrvar-Odds saga*.

There is an episode similar to that in *Vatnsdæla saga*. A seeress is invited to a feast to tell men their fate (30).

- (30) “*Þat er vel, Ingjaldr,*” sagði hún “*at þú ert hér kominn. Þat kann ek þér at segja, at þú **skalt** búa hér til elli með mikilli sæmd ok virðingu, ok má þat vera mikill fagnaðr öllum vinum þínum*”.

*Þá gekk Ingjaldr burt, en Ásmundr þangat. “Vel er þat,” sagði Heiðr; “at þú ert hér kominn, Ásmundr, því at þinn vegr ok virðing ferr víða um heiminn, en ekki **muntu** við aldr togast, en þykkja þar góðr drengr ok mikill kappi, sem þú ert*”.

“‘It’s good to see you here, Ingjald,’ she said. ‘I can tell you this much, that you’ll live in honour and respect till your old age, which should please all your friends’.

Then Ingjald went away, and Asmund took his turn. ‘It’s good to see you here, Asmund,’ she said, ‘for your fine reputation will be carried all over the world. You won’t have to wrestle with old age, but you’ll be judged a brave man and a fine warrior wherever you may be’”.

(*Orvar-Odds saga* II: 206, translation by Edwards – Pálsson: 5)

When finally almost everyone has been told their fate, Oddr threatens the seeress that he will hit her with a club if she dares to tell anything about his fate. She replies (31).

- (31) *Ægðu eigi mér, Oddr á Jaðri,
elda skíðum, þótt ýmist geipum.
Saga **mun** sannast, sú er segir vólva.
öll veit hún manna ørlög fyrir.*

“Don’t bully me, Odd of Jæderen,
with your bit of firewood, even though I may babble.

The words of the seeress will turn out to be true,
for she can foretell the fate of each man”.

*Ferr eigi þú svá fjörðu breiða
né liðr yfir láð ok vága,
þótt sjór yfir þik sægjum drífi, -
hér **skaltu** brenna á Berurjóðri.*

“No matter though you wander by
the broad sea-firths, striding by land
or wave-borne in the driven spray—
here you shall burn at Berurjod”.

*Skal þér ormr granda eitrblandinn,
fránn ór fornum Faxe hausi.
Naðr **mun** þik hoggva neðan á fæti,
þá ertu fullgamall fylkir orðinn.*

The snake will strike, venom-filled, flashing
from the time-worn skull of Faxi;
the serpent strike at the sole of your foot
when, leader of men, you are full of years.

*“Þat er þér at segja, Oddr,” sagði hún, sem þér má gott þykkja at vita, at
þér er ætlaðr aldr miklu meiri en öðrum mönnum. Þú **skalt** lifa þrjú
hundruð vetra ok fara land af landi ok þykkja þar ávallt mestr, er þá kemr
þú, því at vegr þinn **mun** fara um heim allan, en aldri ferr þú svá víða, at
hér **skaltu** deyja á Berurjóðri. Hestr stendr hér við stall, fœxóttir ok grár at
lit. Hauss hans Faxe **skal** þér at bana verða”.*

“I can tell you this which should please you, Odd,” she carried on, “there
are more years in store for you than for any other man. You’ll live for three
hundred years, wandering from land to land, and wherever you go you’ll
always be the greatest. You’ll have a reputation all over the world, but no
matter how far you travel, you’re going to die here at Berurjod. There’s a
grey blackmaned horse, Faxi, standing near the stable. His skull will be the
death of you”.

(*Orvar-Odds saga* II: 208, translation by Edwards – Pálsson : 5)

Unlike other seeresses, this one presents her prophecy using a (probably)
random alternation between *skulu* and *munu*. In the context of the prophecies
viewed so far this is rather striking. What is, however, different here from other
prophecies hitherto examined is that the seeress is directly threatened by violence,
a threat that is actually carried out after she finishes the prophecy.

As we have seen, Ingimundr in *Vatnsdæla saga* is not openly hostile to the seeress, only distrustful, treating her with disdain. Nevertheless, the seeress does not lose her temper and does not let Ingimundr's attitude affect the prophecy – she tells him generally positive news about his fate, though it is perhaps a bit unexpected for Ingimundr.

The situation in *Qrvar-Odds saga* is different. The seeress insists on telling Oddr the fate even after she is threatened by him. We do not get any direct information about her state of mind. We can only speculate whether the prophecy would have been the same if Oddr did not threaten her. She also tells him quite positive, even spectacular, news that he will live for three hundred years and will be the greatest man wherever he comes. But she pays most attention to his death, which will come through a snakebite.

A snakebite was apparently not a good omen and not the heroic death that a brave and respected man could hope for.³⁷ It is thus in direct contrast to the great and long life that she promises to Oddr. The fact that the seeress gives so much attention to depict Oddr's death, even repeatedly, while she does not mention any specific details about death in the two previous prophecies for Ingjaldr and Ásmundr, is conspicuous. We might as well consider the possibility whether what she does is a mere, harmless prophesying or something else. In other words, is she only reading the future as it is revealed to her, or is she actually shaping it in some way, bending fate according to her will (stirred up at the moment by Oddr's threat), effectively imposing a curse on Oddr? The context as well as the presence of *skulu* in her speech indicate such possibility, especially with regard to the grammatical means used in curses (see below). Before we move to fully-fledged curses another ambiguous case which represents a transition between prophecy and curse is discussed here.

³⁷ As in many other cultures, the snake bears generally negative connotations in Old Norse mythology, cf. the snake Níðhoggr which bites the roots of Yggdrasill and corpses in Náströnd, the place for oath-breakers and murderers. The name Níðhoggr consists of the term *níð* “a libel, liable to outlawry” (cf. Cleasby – Vigfússon 1874: 455). *Níð* meant a severe social stigma in Old Norse society. The snake's name might thus refer to the socially discredited people that become its prey.

2.3.6.3 *Norna-gests þáttur*

An episode in *Norna-gests þáttur* also suggests a “gray zone” between the two speech acts. The protagonist of the story, Norna-gestr, is telling about three seeresses who came to his birth to predict his future. The youngest of them feels disrespected because the two others did not let her prophesy about important things. She is also mistreated by people that were there, so she becomes peevish and angry and asks her colleagues to stop telling good statements about Norna-gestr’s fate as she is going to play her part (32).

(32) *Af þessu varð hún ákafa stygg; kallar hún þá hátt ok reiðiliga ok bað inar hætta svá góðum ummælum við mik - því at ek **skapa** honum þat, at hann **skal** eigi lifa lengr en kerti þat brennr, er upp er tendrat hjá sveininum.*

“She was much vexed at this and called out loudly and angrily, telling them to stop prophesying such good things about me: ‘For I ordain that the boy shall live no longer than that candle burns which is alight beside him’”.

(*Norna-gests þáttur* XI: 260, translation by N. Kershaw: 36)

What is remarkable here, is the use of *skulu* together with the word *skapa*, “to shape, form, mould”, “to make”, “to shape for one, assign as one’s fate or destiny” (cf. also *skop* “what is ‘shaped’ for one or fated, one’s fate”, Cleasby – Vigfússon 1874: 537-538). It is said in the beginning of the story that the seeresses (*völur*) came to “prophesy the destiny” (*spá orloð*), but when the youngest one is going to make her statement she starts “I shape him that” (*ek skapa honum þat*). This is a clear sign that she is involved in affecting Norna-gestr’s future (negatively, which means it is virtually a curse). It seems logical that the use of *skal* is indicative of this.³⁸ It is in accordance with shaping the destiny and, as will be shown, corresponds to the grammatical means used in curses.

The notion of assigning a fate rather than reading it is further supported by the terms used for the seeresses in the story. They are called *völur* or *spákonur* (seeresses), but the youngest one who *shapes* the destiny is referred to as *norn*

³⁸ Cf. Faarlund 2004: 247: “In the same way as the modal verb *skulu* ‘shall’ is used instead of the imperative in main sentences to express a command, it is also used in subordinate clauses.”

(ON goddess of destiny). This corresponds to the shift from the perspective of predicting to shaping the destiny.³⁹ The name of the protagonist is also conspicuous. Rather than being called **Völva-gestr*, his name is *Norna-gestr*. It is actually quite important in the narrative as he introduces the story of his birth by saying that he is going to explain the origin of his name. The point in the story is that the candle was put out after the curse and *Norna-gestr* has carried it with him since then. When he eventually decides to let it burn down, he dies, three hundred years old. The origin of his name is thus connected to the shaping aspect of the third woman, a *norn*. The term *norn* is obviously more appropriate than *völva* in the context of the story.

The prophecy in the story of *Norna-gestr* resembles a curse quite closely and together with the episode in *Qrvar Odds saga* indicates that the borders between prophecy and curse were not always clear. What is actually the difference between the two? Both are statements about the future that relate to fate, but in a different way. As mentioned above, prophecy involves reading the future as it has been predestined by fate. Curses, on the other hand, affect the future and change it according to the will of the person that is imposing the curse. Curses play an *active* role, while prophecies relate to future in a *passive* way. This seems to be the most important difference between curses and prophecies (disregarding for the moment that curses are usually negative while prophecies are not limited in such a way). The prophecy to Qrvar-Oddr is a typical border case because it is a self-fulfilling prophecy whose utterance is the very reason of its fulfillment.⁴⁰

It is shown in the following section that the different relation to future is also encoded grammatically in curses.

³⁹ The connection between the use of the term *norn* and affecting the future in this text has been noticed by Horst (2010: 41-43). She also mentions a similarly conditioned change in terminology from *völva* to *norn* in a 17th century text called *Ambales saga*.

⁴⁰ After hearing that the skull of his horse Faxi will be his death, Qrvar-Oddr decides to kill Faxi and buries it deep in the ground. Many years later he comes to the grave, sees a horse skull and, mocking the seeress' prophecy, he sticks his spear into the skull upon which a snake crawls out and bites Qrvar-Oddr.

2.4 Curses

One of the most iconic Old Norse curses is contained in the Eddic poem *Skírnismál*. Skírnir, a servant of the god Freyr, is sent to the giantess Gerðr to woo her on Freyr's behalf. She is rather reluctant to accept gifts and bow to Freyr's will and Skírnir therefore turns to curses by which Gerðr is finally forced to obey (33).

- (33) *Með þursi*
þríhöfðuðum 'With a three-headed giant you shall miserably
þú skalt æ nara, linger out your life,
eða verlaus vera; or else be without a man!
þitt geð grípi, May your mind be seized!
þik morn morni; May pining waste you away!
ver þú sem þistill, Be like the thistle, that which is crushed
sá er var þrunginn at the end of the harvest.'
í önn ofanverða.

(*Skírnismál* 31, translation by Carolayne Larrington: 66)

The cursing predicates are conveyed by *skulu* (*nara* + *vera*) and the subjunctive (*grípi*, *morni*). There is also one instance of the imperative (*ver*). *Skulu* appearing side by side with the subjunctive shows that the two are semantically very similar in this context. Both forms express a wish or command (hence the occasional alternation with an imperative form). In other Old Norse curses, one will usually find a combination of the subjunctive and *skulu* (the imperative occurs rather seldom).

In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, the god Óðinn disguised as Gestumblindi comes to king Heiðrekr to tell him riddles. The king answers them all until finally, Gestumblindi identifies himself as Óðinn by asking an unanswerable question. The king gets angry and attacks Óðinn upon which Óðinn curses him (34).

- (34) *Fyrir þat, Heiðrekr konungr, er þú rétt til mín ok vildir drepa mik*
saklausan, skulu þér inir verstu þrælar at bana verða.

"For this, king Heidrek, that you have attacked me, and would slay me without offence, the basest slaves shall be the death of you".

(*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* IX, text and translation according to Tolkien: 44)

Since Óðinn utters the words enraged and mentions a specific cause for which he does so, we can be sure that this is indeed a curse and not a mere prediction or prophecy.

In *Völsunga saga* the dwarf Andvari curses the ring that is stolen from him (35). In this case, the curse is in indirect speech, but *skulu* is still used here.

- (35) *Dvergrinn gekk í steininn ok mælti, at hverjum **skyldi** at bana verða, er þann gullhring ætti, ok svá allt gullit.*

“The dwarf went into the stone and said that the golden ring or any of the gold would bring death to its possessor”.

(*Völsunga saga* XIV: 174)

The function of the verbs *skapa* and *skulu* and the link between them which has already been examined in *Norna-gests þáttur* is again noticeable in *Gautreks saga*. The tale tells about the hero Starkaðr. His foster father who turns out to be Óðinn takes him to a secret council where he bestows a number of blessings on him, while the god Þórr imposes curses on the hero (36).

- (36) *Þá tók Þórr til orða ok mælti: “Áfhildr, móðir föður Starkaðs, kaus föður at syni sínum hundvísan jötun heldr en Ásaþór, ok **skapa** ek þat Starkaði, at hann **skal** hvárki eiga son né dóttur ok enda svá ætt sína”.*

Óðinn svaraði: “Þat **skapa** ek honum, at hann **skal** lifa þrjá mannsaldra”.

Þórr mælti: “Hann **skal** vinna níðingsverk á hverjum mannsaldri”.

Óðinn svaraði: “Þat **skapa** ek honum, at hann **skal** eiga in bestu vörn ok völdir”.

Þórr mælti: “Þat **skapa** ek honum, at hann **skal** hvárki eiga land né láð”.

Óðinn mælti: “Ek **gef** honum þat, at hann **skal** eiga of lausafjár”.

Þórr mælti: “Þat **legg** ek á hann, at hann **skal** aldri þykkjast nóg eiga”.

Óðinn svaraði: “Ek **gef** honum sigr ok snilld at hverju vígi”.

Þórr svaraði: “Þat **legg** ek á hann, at hann **fái** í hverju vígi meiðslasár”.

Óðinn mælti: “Ek **gef** honum skáldskap, svá at hann **skal** eigi seinna yrkja en mæla”.

Þórr mælti: “Hann **skal** ekki muna eftir, þat er hann yrkir”.

Óðinn mælti: “Þat **skapa** ek honum, at hann **skal** þykkja hæstr inum gofgustum mönnum ok inum bestum”.

*Þórr mælti: “Leiðr **skal** hann alþýðu allri”.*

“Then Thor spoke up and said: ‘Since Starkad’s grandmother, Alfild, preferred a clever giant to Thor himself as the father of her son, I ordain that Starkad himself shall have neither a son nor a daughter, and his family end with him.’

Odin: ‘I ordain that he shall live three life spans.’

Thor: ‘He shall commit a most foul deed in each one of them.’

Odin: ‘I ordain that he shall have the best of weapons and clothing.’

Thor: ‘I ordain that he shall have neither land nor estates.’

Odin: ‘I give him this that he shall have great riches.’

Thor: ‘I lay this curse on him, that he shall never be satisfied with what he has.’

Odin: ‘I give him victory and fame in every battle.’

Thor: ‘I lay this curse on him, that in every battle he shall be sorely wounded.’

Odin: ‘I give him the art of poetry, so that he shall compose verses as fast as he can speak.’

Thor: ‘He shall never remember afterwards what he composes.’

Odin: ‘I ordain that he shall be most highly thought of by all the noblest and the best.’

Thor: ‘The common people shall hate him every one.’”

(*Gautreks saga* VII: 29-30, translation by Edwards – Pálsson: 155-156)

Both the curses and the blessings are expressed with *skulu* in the subordinate clause (and one instance of the subjunctive: *fái*), and *skapa* “to shape”, *gefa* “to give” and *leggja á* “to put [a curse] upon” in the main clause. This indicates that it is not primarily the negative aspect of curses that governs the use of *skulu*, but rather the active relation to future as such which is present in blessings as well.

In *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* there is an episode in which a witch named Busla comes to king Hringr who imprisoned her foster son. She wants to force the king to set him free and imposes a curse on the king if he does not obey her (37). It is thus a conditioned curse which actually does not take effect as the king is so scared that he eventually does what Busla wants. The curse is predominantly

expressed through subjunctive, and two cases of *skulu*:

(37) Þó *skal* þér seinna sýnu verra,

[...]

þá *skulu* þik hundar í hel gnaga,

en sál þín *sökkvi* í víti.⁴¹

“Yet later may it be a great deal worse for you,

[...]

then let dogs gnaw you to death and your soul sink to punishment”.

(*Buslubæn*: 7, 9, text and translation according to Clunies Ross (ed.) 2017: 33, 36).

Instances of curses in which the grammatical means do not conform to the predominant pattern seen so far seem to be very rare.⁴²

Although prophecies and curses both relate to the future, the grammatical differences in their expression clearly indicate that in the background, there are two different conceptions of the future at play. Prophecies entail the notion that the future is determined by fate and can, therefore, be known in advance, whereas curses work with an idea that the fate can be modified by powerful words, or

⁴¹ Interestingly, these verses appear in a slightly different form in an Icelandic poem written down in the 19th century, titled *Syrpuvers hið forna* (Jiriczek (ed.): 141-144) which has a clear connection to Busla’s curse. The poem is preserved in two versions. In one of them the verb *sökkva* is in the subjunctive as in the original text: *skulu hundar þig í hel rífa / en sál þín sökkvi í Niflheim*. In the other version the infinitive of *sökkva* is instead connected to *skulu* like the verb in the first line: *Þá skulu hundar þig í hel rífa / en sál þín sökkva í Niflheim*. Since the meaning of the verses in both versions is obviously identical, this variation (although of a late date) also shows that the subjunctive and *skulu* in curses perform a similar function.

⁴² There is one such case in *Grettis saga* (XXXV) where the undead Glámr curses Grettir after being defeated. There is no instance of *skulu* in Glámr’s speech, instead, *munu* appears there a few times. However, it can hardly be considered prophecy since the text explicitly mentions the wicked power (*ófagnaðarkraftur*) in Glámr’s words and Glámr himself implies that he is able to affect Grettir in a negative way. In view of the otherwise dominant use of *skulu* and the subjunctive in curses, the use of *munu* is striking. It can be considered an exception which is, admittedly, no explanation but there does not seem to be any substantial semantic or contextual difference in Glámr’s curse as compared to other curses that would be possible to link to the unusual grammatical means involved there.

alternatively, a wholly contradictory notion that the future is a *tabula rasa* and can be determined by a curse.

The parallel use of *skulu* and the subjunctive which has been found typical for curses is not restricted to this genre. It corresponds to the general functions of these grammatical means which are briefly discussed in the following section.

2.4.1 The subjunctive and *skulu*

The present subjunctive in main clauses expresses requests, orders, concessions, doubt, deliberation etc. as in (38), cf. Nygaard (1883: 119), Faarlund (2004: 190-191).⁴³

- (38) a. *haldi Hel því er hefir*
“Let Hel keep what she has got”.
(Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning*: 48)

- b. *tröll hafi þína vini*
“May the trolls take your friends”.
(*Njáls saga* XXXVI: 79)

The present subjunctive can often serve as a command in the third person (a sort of jussive) and can occur without an overt subject as in (39) (cf. Nygaard 1883: 121).

- (39) *kalli mér hingat kerlinguna*

⁴³ Old Norse has present and preterite subjunctive. Their function in main and subordinate clauses is different (cf. Faarlund 2004: 190-191). In accordance with the predominant use of the subjunctive in curses, this discussion focuses on the present subjunctive in main clauses. This use is preserved in a few fossilized forms in those modern Germanic languages that otherwise lost the subjunctive mood, cf. the English *Long Live the Queen*, Norwegian *Leve Kongen* “Live the King”, or Faroese *Gud signi Føroyar* “God bless the Faroes”. These vestigial forms reflect the original subjunctive mood both semantically and formally. The meaning of those phrases can be considered optative. The Germanic subjunctive is actually a descendant of the Indo-European optative (cf. Fortson 2010: 347-348), and as we can see, the semantic value of the optative has been preserved until the present.

“Let the hag be called to me”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning*: 42)

As already seen in the curses, the subjunctive is sometimes used side by side with *skulu* as in (40) (cf. Nygaard 1883: 123).

- (40) *Þeir, er fremstir standa, **skulu setja** spjótshala sína í jörðina, [...] en þeir, er næstir standa, **seti** þeir sína spjótsodda fyrir brjóst hestum þeira*

“Those who stand in the front must put the ends of the spear shafts to the ground, [...] and those who stand in the next line must put their spear points in front of the breast of their horses”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Haralds saga harðráða* LXXXIX: 185-186)

The two sentences are syntactically very similar, with the exception of the replacement of *skulu* with the subjunctive in the second sentence. The semantic closeness of *skulu* and the subjunctive is particularly clearly demonstrated by the form *skyli* in which both grammatical means coalesce as it is the subjunctive form of *skulu*. It is used much in the same way as either of the two as in (41).⁴⁴

- (41) a. *Þitt **skyli** hjarta hrafnar slíta*

“May ravens tear your heart to pieces”.

(*Guðrúnarkviða II* 9)

- b. *Þik **skyli** allir eiðar bíta*

“May all your oaths strike you”.

(*Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 31)

Sometimes, the indicative and subjunctive form of *skulu* are used parallel (42).

- (42) *Vin sínum **skal** maðr vinr vera, þeim ok þess vin, en óvinar síns **skyli** engi maðr vinar vinr vera.*

“To his friend a man should be a friend and to his friend’s friend too; but a friend no man should be to the friend of his enemy”.

(*Hávamál* 43, translation by Carolynne Larrington: 20)

⁴⁴ As Faarlund (2004: 247) notes, “[t]he meaning of the auxiliary itself should make the use of the subjunctive redundant, but we may find both the indicative and the subjunctive in such clauses”. Cf. also Nygaard 1883: 123.

Nygaard (1883: 123-124) believes that this use of the form *skyli* emerged due to an analogical transfer of the subjunctive from the main verb to the auxiliary verb *skulu*.⁴⁵ The periphrastic *pik skulu allir eiðar bíta* and the subjunctive *pik bíti allir eiðar* express, according to Nygaard (1883), basically the same idea. The auxiliary *skulu* thus became “contaminated” by the subjunctive.

As this brief discussion has shown, *skulu* and the subjunctive share a similar meaning which is not limited to curses, it occurs in a number of different contexts. The subjunctive and *skulu* appear to be the most appropriate grammatical means to be used in curses because of their capacity to express commands and wishes which is not limited to the 2nd person (i. e. a jussive/optative meaning) since curses usually invoke third agents (whether specific entities or abstract forces) that shall harm the person that is being dealt with.⁴⁶

There is another type of speech act that bears a certain similarity to curses, namely oaths.

2.5 Oaths

In an oral culture like the Old Norse, oaths played an important role and were often uttered at various occasions, particularly the *heitstrenging* (“oath taking”) ritual practiced at the time of the festival of *jól*.

Oath is also related to future since it refers to specific terms that must not be broken – in the future. It is not surprising that one finds *skulu* in oaths as in (43) because expressing promises and assurances is one of its modal functions (cf.

⁴⁵ It is comparable to the interchangeable use of the indicative and subjunctive forms of *munu* (see 3.2.5.1).

⁴⁶ The scarce use of the imperative in curses is probably connected to the fact that it can only be used for a direct address in the second person. The imperative can occasionally also be found in a parallel position both with the subjunctive and with *skulu*: *en þú ráð nemir ok ríð heim héðan* (Nygaard 1883: 122); *Skaltú nú ganga til þeira sem hvatligast ok seg, at Mörðr [...]* (Morris 1964: 69). It shows that all the three grammatical means – the subjunctive, *skulu*, the imperative – are semantically interconnected.

Chapter 1).

- (43) “*Þess strengi ek heit*”, sagði hann, “*at áðr alþingi er úti í sumar, **skal** ek hafa fullsekðat Arngrím goða eða sjálfðæmi ella*”.

“I swear this oath,” he said, “that before the Althing is over this summer I will have Arngrim the Godi declared a *full outlaw* or else have obtained the right to an award on my own terms”.

(*Hænsa-Póris saga* XII: 34, translation by Peter A. Jorgensen: 253)

However, many oaths additionally contain a cursing element which connects them to curses (cf. Lozzi Gallo 2004). By uttering an oath one becomes obliged to keep the agreed terms and one may at the same time impose a curse on oneself, conditioned by breaking the oath. Therefore, oath has been characterized as a “conditioned self-curse” (Beck – Köbler 1986: 540).

For legal purposes, there were fixed sworn formulas. One of them is *Tryggðamál* (44), a legal formula in poetic form used to reconcile feuding parties. The curse which is contained in the text states that those who do not keep the peace shall become outlaws.

- (44) a. *En sá ykkar,*
er gengr á gǫrvar sáttir
eða vegr á veittar tryggðir,
*þá **skal** hann*
svá víða vargr,
rækr ok rekinn [...]
*Hann **skal** firrask*
kirkiur ok kristna menn [...]

“And the one of you two who breaks the agreement or violates the guarantees shall become an outlaw, chased and hunted [...] He shall avoid churches and Christian men”.

(*Tryggðamál* according to Grágás Konungsbók: 130-131)

- b. *Sé sá griðníðingr, er griðin rýfr*
eða tryggðum spillir,
rækr ok rekinn [...]

*Hann **skal** firrask*

kirkiur ok kristna menn [...]

“May the one who violates the truce or breaches the guarantees be called truce-breaker, chased and hunted [...] He shall avoid churches and Christian men”.

(*Tryggðamál* according to *Grettis saga*: 130-131)

The conditioned curses are expressed by *skulu* and by the subjunctive, just like in the curses examined previously.

A conditioned self-curse is also contained in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (cf. Lozzi Gallo 2004: 123-124). Helgi is killed by Dagr, who vowed him allegiance. When Dagr tells his (own) sister Sigrún about the killing, she gets angry and imposes a curse on him (45) which is actually based on the oath that Dagr swore to Helgi.

(45) *Þik **skyli** allir eiðar bíta,
þeir er Helga hafðir unna
at inu ljósa Leiptrarvatni
ok at úrsvøllum Unnarsteini.*

“May all the oaths which you swore
to Helgi rebound upon you,
by the bright water of Leift
and the cool and watery stone of Unn”.

***Skríðiat** þat skip, er und þér skríði,
þótt óskabyrr eptir leggisk.
Rennia sá marr, er und þér renni,
þóttu fjáendr þína forðask eigir.*

“May the ship you sail on not go forward,
though the wind you need has sprung up behind;
may the horse you ride on not go forward,
though your enemies are about to catch you”.

***Bítia** þér þat sverð, er þú bregðir,
nema sjálfum þér syngvi um hofði.*

[...]

“May the sword that you wield never bite for you,
unless it’s whistling above your own head”.

[...]

(*Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 31-33, translation by Carolynne Larrington:
138)

Sigrún says that the oaths will “bite” Dagr. The conditioned cursing element that was probably present in the oath is now released since Dagr has broken it and the oath literally becomes his curse. Sigrún introduces the curse with a reminder of the oath that now turns against Dagr: *pik skyli allir eiðar bíta*. As in regular curses, the grammatical means used here are (the subjunctive of) *skulu* and the subjunctive.

Oaths involve two slightly different uses of *skulu* which correspond to two different components of oaths. The first one is connected to promises and assurances (43), the second one is actually identical to curses (44-45). Nevertheless, it is common aspect of both of these uses that they express a strong personal engagement.

2.6 Conclusion

As we have now examined the various grammatical means that were used in prophecies, curses and oaths, it is time to sum up.

Prophecy is dependent on the belief that the course of events is predetermined by fate. It is a way of reading fate to find out about the future. In prophecies, *munu* is by far the dominant grammatical means, the present tense is used less frequently, and *skulu* is very rare. Among the prophecies that have been examined, *skulu* occurs only sporadically: once in *Völuspá*, once in *Vatnsdæla saga*, twice in *Landnámabók*. More or less satisfying reasons can be found for the use of *skulu* in these instances.

Arguably the most complicated case is represented by the prophecies in *Orvar Odds saga* which are rendered both with *skulu* and *munu*. The situation

suggests, however, that it occupies a position between prophecy and curse. Since *skulu* has been found to be a common grammatical element in curses, the alternation between *skulu* and *munu* could reflect the transitional position on the border between “seeing” and “shaping” the future.

The story of Norna-gestr is less ambivalent. The grammatical means, the use of the term *norn*, as well as the narrative suggest that it is even closer to a curse.

Curses differ from prophecies in that they change the future according to the will of the person who is imposing the curse, and are negative⁴⁷ (which a prophecy may and may not be). It means that the person does not read the future as it is predestined by fate, but rather participates in forming the future. In accordance with that, the most common grammatical means used in curses is the subjunctive in its optative sense, and second, the verb *skulu* (in the indicative or, alternatively, subjunctive form). These grammatical means occur in parallel in curses without any significant difference in meaning. The verb *munu* seems to be highly exceptional in curses as it was only found in Glámr’s curse in *Grettis saga*.

Oaths come close to curses because they often contain an element of a conditioned curse directed on oneself. The grammatical means used in these formulas are correspondingly the subjunctive and *skulu*, like in curses. For our current purpose, oaths and curses can be considered the same category.

The occurrence of *skulu* alongside the subjunctive (and occasionally the imperative) clearly demonstrates that the verb carries a modal meaning related to command or strong wish which can be connected to the basic, etymological meaning of necessity and obligation found in *skulu*.

One could ask if a curse modifies the fate that had been determined, or rather if it fills up a “fatal vacuum”, i. e. whether it establishes a fate where there had previously been none. However, such a question is actually not very relevant. It makes more sense to define a curse in its relation to the future rather than to fate because the fact is that a curse does change the future while its relation to fate is

⁴⁷ Blessings could be considered “positive curses” (cf. *Gautreks saga*). They seem to function in the same way grammatically, and thus could be grouped together in one category.

hard to assess. The person uttering a curse was probably not concerned whether or not it will interfere with the fate of the cursed one. It is conceivable that there were two complementary ideas of future that coexisted side by side. One for which belief in fate was indispensable and is manifested in prophecies, and the other which entailed the possibility that the future can be changed, and which is manifested in curses.

We can thus describe curses (plus oaths) as having a strong personally engaged attitude to the future, while prophecy involves a neutral (passive) attitude.⁴⁸ Prophecy can be characterized correspondingly as *futural*, while curses and oaths are *optatively futural*. In other words, the feature of futurity is more salient in prophecies, and less salient in curses because it is blended with optativeness. A relation to fate can be safely demonstrated only in prophecies.

A corresponding distinction can be made between the grammatical means concerned. *Skulu* (in addition to the subjunctive and imperative) expresses a personal engagement, and *munu* embodies a neutral attitude to the future. These results are summarized in the table below:

Comparison of prophecies, curses and oaths

	Prophecies	Curses and oaths
Grammatical means	<i>munu</i> (+ the present)	<i>skulu</i> , subjunctive (+ imperative)
Speech act modality	purely futural	optatively futural
Relation to future	neutral	personally engaged
Relation to fate	passive	active?

The above-mentioned should not be understood in the sense that all uses of *skulu* imply that the future is being altered. These distinctions between *skulu* and *munu* go as far as the speech acts of prophecy, curse and oath are concerned. The

⁴⁸ These findings provide a better understanding of the meanings of *skulu* and *munu* in similar contexts where both verbs are used, as for instance the formula *hér skal/mun standa steinn*, “here the stone will stand”, occurring on rune stones (*skulu*: Sö 18 †, Sö 204 \$, Sö 206, U 114 \$, U 512 \$; *munu*: U 707 \$, U 729 \$, U 838 \$). Although the verbs occur in the same context, they may not be absolutely synonymous. They represent different perspectives of the future on the part of their creators. *Skulu* expresses a future with a jussive/optative shade – a command, blessing, strong wish. On the other hand, *munu* can be understood as a plain statement about the future state of affairs – that the stone will stand.

verb *skulu* has, of course, other meanings some of which have been discussed above. It is used in contexts that have a more or less apparent relation to necessity (as in the above-mentioned *deyja skal hverr um sinn* “Eventually, everyone shall/must die” or *ungr má en gamall skal* “Young may and old shall/must [die]”) rather than fate as Cleasby – Vigfússon (1874) have it. It is obvious that these statements are of a different nature than a prophecy. Rather than the future, they express general, timeless truths. They are not focused on future events, they make comments about the indisputable order of things (as they are, have been and will be). *Skulu* here therefore emphasizes the inevitability of the event referred to (death) and corresponds to the English “must”.

This study has shown that the relation of *skulu* to fate which is asserted in most handbooks and dictionaries is far from straightforward. Contrary to what one would expect, the verb is almost non-existent in prophecies, a context which more than any other pertains to fate. This is not to say that the connection of *skulu* to fate has been hereby disproved. If there is one, however, more research is needed in order to demonstrate it. On the other hand, the question should be posed whether the overwhelming preponderance of *munu* in prophecies implies that the verb has a special relation to fate. Probably not. A more plausible interpretation is that it is a reflection of its status as the principal exponent of futurity. *Munu* was employed in prophecies simply because they involve a future context for which *munu* represented the most appropriate exponent.

This stands in direct contrast to Old and Middle English *sculan* which was connected to fate and was, accordingly, frequent in prophecies (Fischer 2006: 264). It could be hypothesized that English preserved an older, possibly Proto-Germanic state, while in Nordic the verb was ousted from prophecies by *munu*. In curses, on the other hand, *skulu* managed to hold its ground against *munu* because it was a context which was more obviously connected to its semantic range, and there was too much modality (and too little futurity) for *munu*. However, this is a hypothesis whose verification would require a thorough comparative analysis of the grammatical means used in Germanic prophecies and curses.

In any case, the prevalence of *munu* in prophecies shows that its position in the Old Norse tense system as a universal exponent of futurity had been firmly

established.

Chapter 3

3. The Grammaticalization of *munu*

The Old Norse modal verb *munu* underwent the process of grammaticalization in which it came to be used as a future auxiliary similarly to the English *will*. Beside expressing future, *munu* was also used in other, non-temporal meanings. As such it is one of the most frequent verbs in the Old Norse corpus. It is the aim of this chapter to describe the origin and historical relations of the various meanings of *munu*. Since the processes of grammaticalization of *munu*, as it will be seen, largely took place prior to the literary era and are thus not directly attested, the reconstruction is based on comparative data and general principles known to occur in grammaticalization.

The discussion starts with an outline of the morphological development of *munu* which, as will be shown, is highly suggestive of its development on the semantic and functional level. Subsequently, the various meanings of *munu* are presented and their grammaticalization paths discussed in consecutive sections.

3.1 The Morphological Development of *munu*

The verb *munu* is etymologically connected to thinking. It comes from a well attested Proto-Indo-European root **men-* with the meaning “to think, to be mentally active” (cf. Seebold 1970: 346). The original meaning of the verb is thought to have been “to intend, to have in mind” (Iversen 1994: 141, Nygaard 1878).

From the synchronic Old Norse perspective, *munu* belongs to a small Germanic class of verbs known as the preterite-presents (Birkmann (1987) lists 14 verbs belonging to this class in Proto-Germanic) whose present tense is formally and historically identical with the preterite of strong verbs. The origin of this phenomenon lies in the Proto-Indo-European past. The preterite of the Germanic strong verbs developed from the PIE perfect, but in some verbs the PIE perfect yielded the present tense. These verbs then came to constitute the Germanic

preterite-present class. The PIE perfect originally expressed a state of being resulting from a previous activity. A classical example is the PIE root **weid-* “see, being a witness” which in the perfect would acquire the meaning “being in a state resulting from having seen”. Its PG form **wait-* yielded the ON *veit* (1 sg pres ind of *vita* “to know”) with the meaning “I know” (cf. Fortson 2010: 104). The semantic shift involved a pragmatic inference such as “I have seen“, therefore “I know”.

However, *munu* is not an original Proto-Germanic preterite-present verb, but rather a verb that initially belonged to the regular weak verbs. According to Seebold (1970: 346), it is a derivative of an actual preterite-present verb **munan* “to think, remember” (< PIE **men-*)⁴⁹ whose direct continuations are Gothic *munan* “to consider, believe” (and prefixed *gamunan* “to remember”), Old English *munan* “to remember“ and Old Norse *muna* “to remember”. Its closest cognates are for instance Latin *memini* “I remember”, Greek *μέμνημι* “I intend, have in mind”, Sanskrit *mányatē* “considers”, Lithuanian *menù* “I remember”, Old Irish *do-moinethar* “believes, considers”, Old Church Slavic *мѣнѣю* “I believe, consider” (cf. Birkmann 1987: 68-69, Seebold 1970: 346-347).

On the other hand, Birkmann (1987: 247) as well as Nygaard (1878: 268) view the two Old Norse verbs, the weak *munu* and the preterite-present *muna*, as two separate developments of the same root. This dispute is actually not of utmost importance for the present purpose. What is relevant is that the Old Norse *munu* was originally a weak verb, while *muna* is historically a preterite-present verb. *Munu* thus corresponds (in historical terms) both semantically and morphologically to the Gothic weak verb *munan* “to intend” (which is distinct from the above-mentioned preterite-present *munan* “to consider, believe”).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ As for the semantic shift from the PIE perfect with the meaning “to think” to the meaning “remember”, Eitelmann (2013: 132) proposes that “a preceding process of thinking, i.e. the action of having been mentally active, results in the present state of keeping something in one's thoughts”.

⁵⁰ The Gothic *munan* is occasionally used to translate the Greek *μέλλειν* “to intend”, but unlike Old Norse, its use did not spread beyond its lexical meaning as it is always used with animate subjects in the sense of intending (cf. Nygaard 1878: 267-268, Coleman 1995: 19-20).

If one looks at the standard Old Norse paradigms of *muna* and *munu*, it can be noticed that their morpho(phono)logical shape does not fully correspond either to their supposed origin, or to their synchronic category. *Munu* looks overall like a preterite-present, but the absence of vowel alternation (sg. *mun*, pl. *munum*) reveals the fact that it is not an original one (cf. Birkmann 1987: 243), and on the other hand, the plural indicative endings of *muna* (*-um*, *-ið*, *-a*), for instance, do not agree with the standard endings of other preterite-presents (*-um*, *-uð*, *-u*). It means that *munu*, originally a weak verb, gradually aligned itself with the class of preterite-presents, while *muna*, originally a preterite-present, acquired some features that are characteristic of regular verbs (non-preterite-presents).

Birkmann (1987) claims that this morphologically hybrid nature of the two verbs can be explained by an “asymmetry between form and function” that they inherited from Proto-Germanic. He argues that the preterite-present verbs constitute a class whose morphological properties are from the perspective of the Germanic verbal system irregular. Already in Gothic, a part of these verbs functioned as modal verbs, and throughout the history of Germanic languages there was a growing tendency to match the morphological oddities of preterite-presents with the feature “modality”, i. e. non-modal verbs had the tendency to leave the class of preterite-presents, and vice versa, modal verbs were inclined to align themselves with the morphological pattern of preterite-presents (for details see Birkman 1987: 53-60). Birkmann postulates this course of development for all Germanic languages.

The history of Old Norse *muna* and *munu* is to be viewed as one case in this larger perspective. Governed by this tendency, *muna* and *munu* launched a “constant interplay of convergence and differentiation” which was also facilitated, according to Birkmann (1987: 243-248), by a partial formal identity between the two verbs.

It is highly relevant for the present discussion that *muna*, unlike all other preterite-presents, is almost exclusively attested with the non-preterite-present pl. ind. endings *-um*, *-ið*, *-a* (Noreen 1923: 360, Birkmann 1987: 246).⁵¹ It means

⁵¹ *Muna* is only very scarcely attested in East Norse, but it also has the non-preterite-present endings (cf. Birkmann 1987: 304-305, 326).

that, as a lexical verb, it was the first of the preterite-presents that moved in the direction of a more regular paradigm (already in the pre-literary period). The next verb that followed this progression was *unna* “to grant, love” which occurs only occasionally with the old pret-pres. endings (Noreen 1923: 360, Iversen 1994: 112). Other preterite-presents mostly hold onto the old endings in the Old Norse period. According to Þórólfsson (1925: 65), the endings *-um*, *-ið*, *-a* began to dominate in preterite-presents only during the 15th century until they eventually became the standard endings in Modern Icelandic (except in *skulu* and *munu*).

Birkmann (1987: 225-229) provides a more nuanced picture of this development, dividing the preterite presents into three groups. First, there were preterite-presents which only had a lexical meaning (*muna* “remember”, *unna* “grant, love”, *vita* “know”) and those were the first that adopted the regular, non-preterite-present endings. Second, the verbs that functioned purely as modals/auxiliaries (*munu*, *skulu*) are almost exclusively attested with the original endings. These are also the only verbs that changed their infinitive ending from **-a* to *-u* on the basis of the regular congruence between the infinitive form and the 3rd person plural present indicative ending (cf. Iversen 1994: 109). And third, those preterite-presents that had more possible readings (*eiga*, *kunna*, *mega*, *þurfa*) fluctuated between the two sets of endings which to a certain extent correlated with their modal and non-modal uses.⁵² The semantic features “modal” vs. “lexical verb” thus seem to have played a crucial role in the development of this class.

As already mentioned, *munu* started out as a weak verb and *muna* as a preterite-present. Birkmann (1987) claims that the process of their paradigm reshaping was initiated (in the pre-literary period) by *muna* which took the regular endings *-um*, *-ið*, *-a* whereby *muna* and *munu* became homophone in the plural

⁵² In Modern Icelandic, these verbs have now always the regular (non-preterite-present) endings, whether or not they are used modally. *Munu* and *skulu* which are used in the modal sense alone are the only verbs that have retained the preterite-present endings. However, the 2nd person plural of the verb *skulu* is nowadays also sometimes used with the ending *-ið* instead of *-uð* (I am thankful to Jón Axel Harðarson for making me aware of this [personal communication in April 2021]). Paradoxically enough, the “fake” preterite-present *munu* will probably be the last, most faithful guardian of the old preterite-present endings.

present indicative. Birkmann 1987: 246 argues further that “at the same time or as a reaction to this” *munu* adopted the preterite-present endings *-um*, *-uð*, *-u* so that the forms were once again differentiated. However, it can be plausibly argued that the process actually ran in the opposite direction, i. e. it was induced not by *muna*, but instead by *munu*. It is rather conspicuous that *muna* was the first verb stepping out of the core of the preterite-presents. Verbs like *unna* or *vita* do not seem to be any “less lexical” than *muna* which leads us to the question why those were not affected in the same way at an early stage. It can be shown that it was not random that the lot fell on *muna* and that *munu* is to be blamed for it.

A more likely scenario than the one presented by Birkmann is that *munu* first took on the present-preterite endings, thus becoming homophone with *muna* in the plural present indicative and forcing it to adopt the regular endings in order to re-establish a distinction. *Muna* as one of the preterite-presents with a lexical meaning rather happily conformed to the regular endings. Other lexical verbs then followed the example of *muna*.

We can illustrate the morphological development of *muna* and *munu* in the present indicative in simplified terms as follows:

1. Stage: both verbs fully conform to their original classes, i. e. *muna* to the preterite-presents, *munu* to the weak verbs.⁵³

<i>muna</i>		<i>munu</i> (< * <i>muna</i>) ⁵⁴	
Sg.	Pl.	Sg.	Pl.
<i>man</i>	<i>mun-um</i>	* <i>mun-i</i>	<i>mun-um</i>
<i>man-t</i>	* <i>mun-uð</i>	* <i>mun-ir</i>	* <i>mun-ið</i>
<i>man</i>	* <i>mun-u</i>	* <i>mun-ir</i>	* <i>mun-a</i>

⁵³ *Munu* is here reconstructed with the standard Old Norse endings of the 3rd weak class in correspondance with its closest cognate, the Gothic weak verb *munan* (3rd class weak verb). Since it is not certain when exactly the paradigm restructuring occurred, the reconstructed forms do not reflect any phonological and morphological features that might have been relevant at the given point (such as the 3rd person sg. ending *-ip* etc.).

⁵⁴ The form **muna* represents the original infinitive before it was affected by the change in the 3rd p. pl. present indicative ending.

2. Stage: as the frequency and grammatical role of *munu* increases, the verb is adopting the preterite-present endings (presumably first in the singular, later in the plural), thus becoming homophone with *muna* in the plural.

<i>man</i>	<i>mun-um</i>	<i>mun</i>	<i>mun-um</i>
<i>man-t</i>	<i>*mun-uð</i>	<i>mun-t</i>	<i>mun-uð</i>
<i>man</i>	<i>*mun-u</i>	<i>mun</i>	<i>mun-u</i>

3. Stage: *muna* is adopting the regular plural endings, re-establishing formal distinction with *munu*.

<i>man</i>	<i>mun-um</i>	<i>mun</i>	<i>mun-um</i>
<i>man-t</i>	<i>mun-ið</i>	<i>mun-t</i>	<i>mun-uð</i>
<i>man</i>	<i>mun-a</i>	<i>mun</i>	<i>mun-u</i>

This scenario explains the reason for which it was *muna* and not some other of the preterite-presents that first left the class. It suggests further that *munu* became an auxiliary rather early. Its modal/auxiliary character as well as its frequency must have been large enough so that there arose a “need” to align it with the preterite-present class. This indeed corresponds to the analysis of the grammaticalization of *munu* which is discussed in the sections below.

It can also be seen that this paradigm restructuring not only assimilated *munu* to the class of preterite-presents, but produced forms that are shorter (the singular forms) and thus more characteristic of grammatical words (cf. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1991). The tendency towards shortness of grammatical items is a well-known cross-linguistic phenomenon because “the most frequently used forms of a language are also among the shortest” (Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 19). This shortening was not a case of “standard” phonetic erosion which otherwise often occurs during grammaticalization, but a phenomenon concomitant to the morphological shift of *munu*. The outcome was in any case in harmony with the grammatical character of the verb and corresponds to the view that there is

“a direct, and even causal, link between semantic and phonetic reduction in the evolution of grammatical material, beginning with the earliest stages of development from lexical sources and continuing throughout the subsequent developments grams undergo”.

(Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 20)

The paradigms presented here at Stage 3 are the standard Old Icelandic paradigms for *muna* and *munu*.⁵⁵ *Munu* is attested in such a shape in the oldest literary sources. Its first attestations in the corpus of Old Norse texts are in 9th century Skaldic poetry (discussed below). There is no occurrence of *munu* in the language of the older runic inscriptions which is, however, not surprising considering their laconic style, and none of the runic inscriptions in the younger futhark in which *munu* appears are demonstrably older than the 10th century, i. e. later than the oldest Skaldic poems.⁵⁶

In Old Danish and Classical Old Swedish (i. e. 1225-1375), *munu* is not as richly attested as in West Norse (cf. Birkmann 1987). It seems, however, that it was more common in East Norse in the earlier period, that of Runic Swedish (800-1225, cf. Birkmann 1987: 306, Noreen 1904: 468). In Danish, *skulu* was becoming more frequent from the 13th century (cf. Emonds – Faarlund 2014: 80), but *munu* was used until about the 16th century (Cf. Falk – Torp 1900: 161). It means that *munu* must be of a common North Germanic origin and that the later period was marked by a general decline of *munu* which was giving way to the new exponents of futurity found nowadays in the modern languages (for an

⁵⁵ However, the process of alignment of *munu* with the preterite-present class and *muna* with the regular verbs did not stop at our stage 3, but involved several other steps which are discussed in detail by Birkmann (1987). The last stage of this process produced the vowel alternating forms of *munu*: sg. *man*, pl. *munum* which provided *munu* with a perfect preterite-present look, and at the same time created once more some homophone forms with *muna*. The change was probably modelled on preterite-presents like *skal-skulum*, *kann-kunnum*, *þarf-þurfum*. The stems *man-* in the sg. and *mun-* in the pl. were particularly common in Norwegian where they are attested as early as the 12th century and later became dominant. They also gained the upper hand in Faroese. In Icelandic, they occur from the 14th to 16th century, but were eventually eliminated (Birkmann argues that because of sociolinguistic factors and normalization in which the Bible translation *Guðbrandsbiblíja* played a prominent role). There was also a plural form *manum* in Norwegian which was, however, much less common and probably emerged as a result of paradigm leveling between sg. and pl., cf. Birkmann 1987: 287-288.

⁵⁶ For a list of occurrences of *munu* in younger futhark inscriptions, see https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?id=324&if=runic&table=nrd_headword&val=munu [accessed in May 2021]

overview, see Abraham 1989). This trend did not progress uniformly across the Nordic area, it affected particularly Danish and Swedish.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the verb is still well preserved in the Western Nordic idioms, Icelandic and Faroese, although not anymore as the main exponent of futurity as mentioned above.

We can see that throughout its history, *munu* was going through a dramatic morphological reshaping. The essential change (that of adopting preterite-present endings instead of the weak ones) occurred already in the pre-literary period⁵⁸ and is indicative of a highly frequent use of *munu* as a grammatical word from early on.

3.2 Meanings and Grammaticalization Paths of *munu*

As has been mentioned above, it is natural (and actually more common than not) for futures to have other uses apart from expressing prediction, and *munu* is no exception in this respect. Some of the uses may be retentions of the earlier meaning of the future-gram and are thus source-specific (cf. Bybee – Pagliuca 1987). Other uses may be secondary derivatives of the futural meaning, and hence not contingent on the original meaning (not source-specific). The aim of this section is to re-examine the spectrum of the meanings of *munu* and to outline their grammaticalization paths.

Lexical accounts of *munu* (Cleasby – Vigfússon 1874: 439, Baetke 1965-1968 II: 431, Fritzner 1886-1896 II: 753-754, Jónsson 1931: 415, Morris 1964,

⁵⁷ In Modern Danish as well as in Swedish, there are only vestiges of the verb preserved (Danish *monne* and *mon*, Swedish *månde* and *månne*) and are confined to an archaic or poetic style, usually expressing uncertainty, doubt or nothing in particular (cf. Nygaard 1878: 260-262). In Modern Norwegian, the verb is also rare and archaic, but it seems to be slightly better preserved. It has distinct present (*mun/mon*) and preterite forms (*monne/munde*), and both of its main Old Norse functions, those of expressing future and probability, were still preserved at least in the 19th century, cf. Nygaard 1878: 261,

https://ordbok.uib.no/perl/ordbok.cgi?OPP=mune&ant_bokmaal=5&ant_nynorsk=5&begge=+&ordbok=begge [accessed in June 2021].

⁵⁸ Cf. also the fact that even the infinitive ending *-u* which was conditioned by the change in the 3rd p. pl. present indicative is attested homogeneously in the oldest sources.

Heggstad – Hødnebo – Simensen 1975: 304) mention various meanings of the verb, but mostly agree on two meanings: futurity and probability (or the epistemic meaning) which are presumably the most common functions of *munu*. All of these lexical descriptions of *munu* are purely synchronic. The only comprehensive attempt to interpret its meanings in diachronic terms is Nygaard (1878). It is also very detailed as a synchronic description of the verb. Nygaard's schema is therefore used here as a suitable starting point for discussion of the grammaticalization of *munu*. Needless to say, written almost a century and a half ago, the article is severely dated and in need of careful evaluation.

Nygaard argues in the paper that *munu* was not a mere auxiliary verb and that its description in Old Norse dictionaries is inadequate. He distinguishes seven meanings of *munu*. He does not provide any terms for most of them, so the terms used in the overview below are tentatively suggested on the basis of his characterizations and examples.

The meanings of *munu* according to Nygaard (1878):

1. Intention

“to intend, have in mind, be prepared to”

In this sense found typically in 1st person of present tense or, in questions in 2nd person.

E. g. *Hér mun ek standa ok hlýða*. “Here I will stand and listen”.

2. Proximative

“to be about to, be on the verge of”

E. g. *þeygi Guðrún gráta mátti, svá var hon móðug, myndi hon springa*

“Guðrún could not weep, she was so mournful that she was about to burst”.

3. Characteristic

“an expression of what usually happens (especially in connection with expressions meaning ‘always, often, in general’ and the like)”

E. g. *Fá mun systir, þótt fæður missi, hefna hlýra harms*. “Seldom will sister, though she loses father, revenge on her brother”.

4. Future

“a temporal auxiliary verb for the expression of future”

Mostly present forms are used in this meaning.

E. g. *ffarri munum deyja* “We will die far away”.

In relative clauses that express future from a past perspective the verb *munu* is in the preterite.

E. g. *kvað á, nær hann myndi þar koma* “[He] said when he would come there”.

5. Hortative?

“what must or should happen with a certain necessity (because of circumstances or on the basis of a logical conclusion)”

E. g. *muntu því trúa at hann mun eigi ljúga nú it fyrsta sinn, er aldri laug fyrr* “You must believe that he won’t be lying now for the first time, when he never lied before”.

In the 2nd person it expresses a mild command and encouragement.

E. g. *munuð þat eigi optar gera, at fara hingat með fá liði, því at hér er ótryggt lið mart* “You must not come here again with few followers, for there are many disloyal people”.

In the 1 pers. pl. it expresses encouragement.

E. g. *Hér munu vér veita uppgöngu ok skulum fara hermannliga* “Let us go ashore here and be brave”.

6. Probability

“probably, presumably, likely”

E. g. *þetta man vera mikit land, er vér höfum fundit* “This is probably a large land that we have found”.

7. Hypothetical/Potential

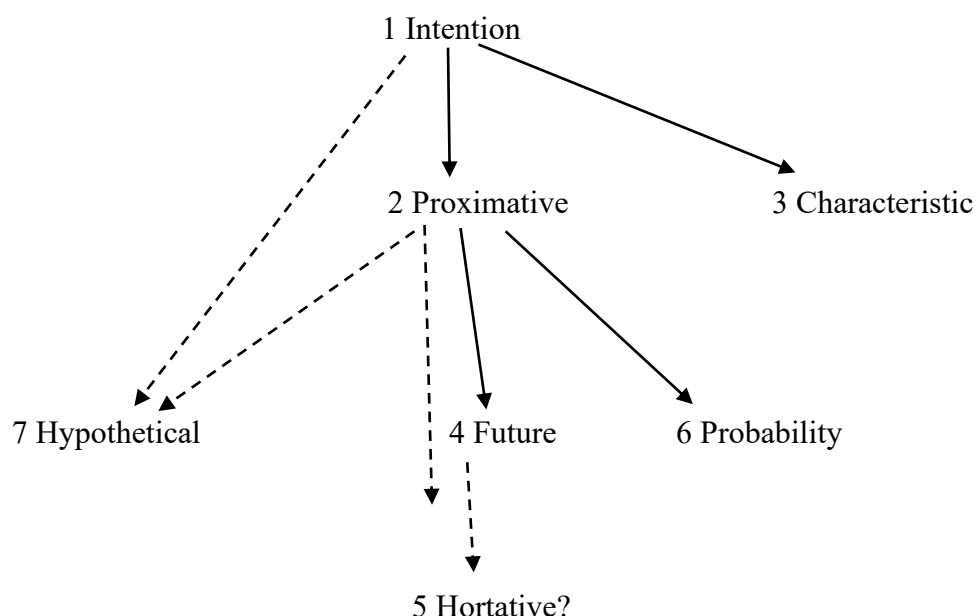
“potential statements”, “hypothetical utterances”

In this sense it has the same meaning as pret. subj.

E. g. *af mundi nú höfuðit, ef Erpr lifði* “The head would be off by now if Erpr lived”.

Nygaard's view of the diachronic relations of these meanings is shown in the following figure.⁵⁹

The grammaticalization paths of munu according to Nygaard (1878)



Nygaard (1878) is not always quite clear as to how exactly and through what stages the meanings developed. Sometimes he seems to be suggesting more than one grammaticalization path (this uncertainty is represented by the dashed arrows). We will now look at each of these meanings and discuss their relevance and Nygaard's view of their origin. If necessary, a new perspective on their grammaticalization will be proposed. Eventually, we will come up with a revised schema of the meanings of *munu*, showing their historical relations. The meanings are discussed here not in the order presented by Nygaard (1878), but rather in the order which reflects their relations as viewed by the author of this thesis.

⁵⁹ The numbers correspond to the order in which Nygaard (1878) discusses the meanings. Although they seem to be based on some kind of relative chronology, it is not explicitly indicated by the author.

3.2.1 Intention and future

As already noted, the source meaning⁶⁰ of *munu* is supposed to be “to intend”. Nygaard (1878, 1905) maintained that the meaning was preserved in Old Norse in sentences like (46) and that in the lexical descriptions it was unjustly subsumed under the futural meaning which is, according to Nygaard, contained in sentences like (47).

- (46) Hér mun ek standa ok hlýða
“Here I will [/*intend to] stand and listen”.
(*Gylfaginning*: 36)

- (47) *ffjarri munum deyja*
“We will die far away”.
(*Hamðismál* 10)

Since the two meanings, intention and future, are obviously closely interconnected (Cf. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 279-280, Morris 1964: 33-34), they are treated together in this section.

Nygaard (1878: 285-286) argues that between the original meaning of *munu* (i. e. “to intend”) and future, there was a transitional stage, namely the proximative (“being about to, being on the verge of”). This idea is unlikely. Cross-linguistic data show that there is a very narrow link between intention and prediction (i. e. future). The capacity of a gram to express *intention* has been claimed to be crucial for the grammaticalization of future tenses in general. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca (1994: 279-280) argue that “intention is the crucial bridge to prediction”, i. e. that all grammaticalization paths leading to future, whatever their original source, converge in the stage of expressing a speaker’s intention (see also references in Bybee – Perkins Pagliuca 1994: 256). This absolute universality of intention as an inseparable stage in the grammaticalization of future tenses has been contested, for example for the Swedish *komma att* or futures from movement verbs in general (cf. Hilpert 2008, Heine – Kuteva – Narrog 2017. Nonetheless, Hilpert (2008: 183) concludes that “intentionality is indeed a cross-linguistically

⁶⁰ By *source meaning* is meant the lexical meaning of an expression before it started to grammaticalize, cf. Heine 2002: 84.

pervasive semantic component in the development of future constructions”. The verb *munu* was consequently an ideal candidate to develop a future meaning as it already expressed intention at its lexical stage.⁶¹

A general scenario of how a lexical item acquires a grammatical meaning has been suggested by Heine (2002: 86) and illustrated on the development of proximative from volition (Heine 2002: 91). With regard to the original meaning of *munu*, it can be adjusted specifically for the development of the future meaning in the following way:

Context-induced reinterpretation of intention as prediction (i. e. future) (S = the subject referent)

Stage	Context	Resulting meaning
I Initial stage	S is a wilful human participant	Intention e. g. <i>I intend to rest.</i>
II Bridging context	S can be assumed NOT to intend what is described by the event concerned	Prediction foregrounded e. g. <i>She intends to/will be sick.</i>
III Switch context	Rather than a human participant, S is inanimate; an interpretation of <i>munu</i> as denoting intention does not make sense	Prediction backgrounded e. g. <i>The branch will fall.</i>
IV Conventionalization	<i>Munu</i> can now occur with all subjects (incl. human) in the meaning of prediction	Prediction only e. g. <i>He will come soon.</i>

⁶¹ Considering that intention is so essential for the development of future meaning, it is surprising that verbs with the lexical meaning “to intend” rarely grammaticalize into a futural construction. Heine – Kuteva (2004: 331) do not list any verb with the meaning “to intend” nor any other lexeme connected to thinking as a possible source for future. I have not been able to find any discussion of this puzzling issue. Interestingly, apart from Old Norse, another example of a language where a verb with the meaning of thinking or intending is commonly used in future context is Modern Icelandic where the verb *ætla* “to intend, plan” has this function. However, its futural interpretation is still clearly connected to its etymological meaning and thus its use is limited to planned future (cf. Sigurðsson 2010: 39). The futural use of the Middle English *munen* (a cognate of the Old Norse *munu*) was characteristic of the northern dialects and its rise has been ascribed to Scandinavian influence, see Eitelmann (2013).

Stage I represents the least grammaticalized state, Stage IV the most grammaticalized state of *munu*. As can be seen, the shift from an animate to an inanimate subject plays a crucial role in the semantic change to prediction. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca (1994: 270) claim that “all modal and movement future sources begin with human agents and move from the expression of the intentions of that agent to the expression of prediction”.⁶² Importantly, as shown in the table, the context of Stage I and Stage IV may even be identical (a human subject), but the crucial difference is that at Stage I, the meaning would be intention, while *munu* at Stage IV would express prediction.⁶³

Each of the four stages is discussed in the following sections.

3.2.1.1 Initial stage (I)

At the initial stage, *munu* was used with a wilful human subject and expressed intention. Two subcontexts can be distinguished for this stage. In the first subcontext (48) *munu* could be used with a noun complement in which case it behaved fully like a lexical verb. This stage is not attested in Old Norse.

- (48) **Ek mun ferð*.⁶⁴
 “I intend a journey”.

In the second subcontext (49), *munu* is used with an infinitive complement. There is still a wilful human subject and the action performed is of

⁶² Cf. Bybee – Pagliuca 1987: 112-114, Fischer 2006: 264 for a parallel with the English *will*. Animacy is an important factor in various grammaticalization paths that start from volition (or intentionality), cf. e. g. the development of proximative in Heine (1994, 2002) and Romaine (1999) which shows in principle the same shift from an animate to inanimate subject coupled with a shift to a new, grammatical meaning of the construction.

⁶³ Heine (2002) notes that the model rests on a certain simplification. It presents the process as a succession of discrete stages of development, but in reality, “all four stages may (but need not) surface as contextually defined variants”.

⁶⁴ We may assume that at this stage *munu* had not yet adopted the preterite-present endings, so a more accurate rendering of the form of *munu* from the point of historical morphology would be **muni*.

volitional character. Clauses corresponding to this type of context are copiously attested in Old Norse, the oldest attestations being from the 9th century (49 a.).

(49) a. *frá mōlum **munk** segja*

“About the words I intend to tell”.

(Þorbjörn hornklofi, *Haraldskvæði* 1, text according to Jónsson (ed.) 1912: 22)⁶⁵

b. *hann **mun** fara til Íslands með Ingimundi*

“He intends to go to Iceland with Ingimundr”.

(*Vatnsdæla saga* XIII: 37)

Distinguishing between intention and prediction is, however, difficult in this type of context. For now, the interpretation of *munu* as “to intend” needs to be considered a historical reconstruction. The possibility that *munu* could actually have retained the meaning of intention up to the literary period is discussed below.

The inference turning intention into prediction occurs typically with sentences in the third person like (49 b.) (cf. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 256-264, Bybee – Dahl 1989: 92).⁶⁶ On the basis of such sentences, a sense of prediction became attached to *munu*. This means that at an early stage, *munu* already found itself in immediate “risk” of venturing down the path of grammaticalization towards future because the meaning of intention was already present in all persons, unlike in other common sources of future as for instance

⁶⁵ There are two more such instances in the 9th century Skaldic poetry (The total number of occurrences of *munu* in that period is 9).

⁶⁶ Lowrey (2012: 11) suggests that for Old English *willan* the shift from volition to prediction might have been facilitated by 1st person sentences uttered by God, e. g. *Ic wille mid flode folc acwellan*. “I intend to [will ?] destroy the people with a flood”. Lowrey argues that “to the medieval mindset, very little would have separated what God desired from what would very likely be done. It is easy to imagine how an announcement of what the subject intends to do could be reanalysed by the hearer as an announcement of what he or she will do”. However, this idea is hard to apply to Old Norse since the origin of periphrastic future predates the arrival of Christianity by at least a couple of centuries.

desire or obligation which need to take a few more steps before they can do that.⁶⁷

3.2.1.2 Bridging context (II)

At this stage, *munu* has undergone a semantic reinterpretation from intention to prediction, which means that it can be used in contexts in which the action can be expected not to be intended by the subject. (50 a.) represents a prototypical example, (50 b.) is the earliest attestation of such a context (9th century).

- (50) a. ***mun** ek deyja hér undir húsagarði þínum úti, ef ek má eigi inn komask*
i. “I **intend** to die here under the rampart of your farm, if I may not come in”.
ii. “I **will** die here under the rampart of your farm, if I may not come in”.
(*Ljósvetninga saga* VIII: 49)

- b. *fár **mun** enn verri*
i. “Few **intend** [to be] even worse”.
ii. “Few **will** [be] even worse”.
(Bragi Boddason, text according to Jónsson (ed.) 1912: 5)

Interpretation in terms of intention (50 a. i./50 b. i.) is still possible, but rather implausible.

3.2.1.3 Switch context (III)

The next stage involves an inanimate subject, incapable of intending, whereby the old meaning is ruled out.⁶⁸ (51 a.) is a prototypical example, (51 b.)

⁶⁷ Cf. e. g. the path suggested for volition-based futures: DESIRE > WILLINGNESS > INTENTION > PREDICTION (Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 256).

⁶⁸ Unless we assume a very peculiar world view for Norsemen, with a considerably different categorization in terms of animacy. There are such special cases as the sword Dragvendill in *Ketils saga hængs* which Ketill talks to and incites it to hit his adversary Framarr which the sword,

is the earliest attestation (9th century).

(51) a. *þetta sverð **mun** bíta Molda*

“This sword will hit Moldi”.

(*Svarfdæla saga* VIII: 146)

b. *eigi **mun** *við ekkju austmanna fyrir sannask*

“The journey of the Easterners to the widow [woman] will not come to pass”.

(Þorbjörn hornklofi, *lausavísa*, text and translation according to Whaley (ed.) 2012: 118)

(51 b.) is the only 9th century instance of *munu* involving an inanimate subject. It is a verse from a single stanza by Þorbjörn hornklofi, preserved in the *Hauksbók* manuscript. The reading of the stanza is uncertain because of the poor state of the manuscript, but fortunately, the last, crucial verse seems rather straightforward and the interpretation is reasonable with regard to the context of the strophe.⁶⁹

Moreover, it is particularly significant that the subject *fyrir*, “journey” is an abstract noun. There is a cross-linguistic tendency to arrange nouns along a gradient scale of animacy in which we find humans on top of the hierarchy, then animals, followed by inanimate tangible objects, and finally abstractions and masses (cf. Enger – Nessel 2011: 194). Enger – Nessel (2011) claim that the animacy hierarchy plays an important role in language change because, they argue, language change spreads gradually from one degree of animacy to the next one rather than jumping over some of the intermediate subcategories. It entails that once we find a grammatical phenomenon occurring on the opposite end of the animacy hierarchy from where it originated, it must have reached the state of being applicable to all the intermediate degrees. With regard to this theory, the

encouraged by Framarrs’s words, eventually does. However, preserved Old Norse texts do not indicate that such personification of objects was very common.

⁶⁹ “Þorbjörn and two other poets, Auðunn illskælda and Qlvir hnúfa, have been tricked out of a night's sexual enjoyment with a handsome widow, and have been forced to spend the night outdoors in a yard surrounded by a paling fence, whose gate has been locked. Each man composes a stanza about his plight”. (Whaley 2012: 118)

subject *for* implies that as early as the 9th century *munu* was applicable to all subjects irrespective of their degree of animacy.

Considering the rather small number of preserved 9th century Skaldic poems and consequently the low number of attestations of *munu* from that period (9, out of which 6 denote future), one inanimate subject is not as insignificant as it might seem at first sight. And that it is not a mere coincidence or an excess of the poet's creativity is evidenced by Skaldic poems from the 10th century where the trend continues. There is a total of 90 instances of *munu* out of which 15 have an inanimate subject and additional 6 are impersonal constructions where no animate agent can be identified.

3.2.1.4 Conventionalization (IV)

Based on the evidence presented so far, it is certain that *munu* had reached Stage III by the 9th century. To determine whether it ever reached Stage IV is a more complicated question. Stage IV assumes that the meaning of prediction is no longer dependent on inanimate subjects, it can be used in futural meaning even in sentences with animate subjects performing volitional actions which is the defining context of Stage 1, cf. (49). The answer to the question depends on whether one interprets sentences like (49) as intention, or prediction. It is argued hereafter that *munu* did reach Stage IV.

Nygaard (1878: 266-267) claims that *munu* preserved its original meaning “to intend”, in the same way as the Scandinavian verbs *have* (“to have”) or *ville* (“to want/will”) have not been deprived of their respective original meanings and at the same time function as auxiliaries. The criteria according to which Nygaard (1878: 269) identifies the meaning of intention are, however, rather vague. He claims that *munu* in the meaning of intention is found primarily in main clauses and typically in the 1st person of the present tense (49 a.) or, in questions in the 2nd person (52 a.). The 3rd person is common in relative clauses where *munu* may also occur in the preterite (52 b.), i. e. future-in-the-past.

(52) a. *muntu mér Freyja, fjaðrhams ljá [...]*

“Will you, Freyja, lend me your feather cloak [...]?”

(*Þrymskviða* 3)

- b. *kvað á, nær hann myndi þar koma*

“[He] said when he would come there”.

(*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* XII: 29-30)

These clauses can be more aptly characterized using semantic rather than grammatical criteria: all of them involve animate subjects performing volitional actions (though Nygaard does not define them in this way).

The meaning of future, on the other hand, is ascribed by Nygaard (1878: 269) to sentences like (47) and (53).

- (53) a. *Eigi munu vér sigrast á þeim til þrautar nema vér reynim oss framar*

“We will not defeat them in the end if we don’t try harder”.

(*Færeyinga saga* XVIII: 40)

- b. *þú munt maðr vera mæztr und sólu*

“You will become the greatest man under the sun”.

(*Gríppspá* 7)

- c. *hvat mun verða, þó at vit farim í skóg þenna*

“What will happen when we go to that forest”.

(*Færeyinga saga* XII: 26)

It is not hard to notice that the difference between the sentences interpreted as intention by Nygaard, and those interpreted as future, does not primarily lie in the grammatical person but rather in the semantic contents. All subjects in the intention category are animate and the action is volitional,⁷⁰ while in the future category we find sentences in which the action performed is apparently of non-volitional character ((47) (53 a.-b)) and/or the subject is inanimate (53 c.).

⁷⁰ Although Nygaard did not work with any formulation of animacy hierarchy, he clearly understood it intuitively. Some extended versions of the animacy hierarchy include more parameters, cf. Croft (1995: 118) who notes that “[t]he ‘top’ end of the hierarchy, 1st/2nd person, is by definition pronominal, human, and definite”. Most of Nygaard’s examples of *munu* in the meaning of intention naturally include precisely these kinds of subjects.

It is indeed striking that among the large number of Nygaard's examples of the futural *munu* almost no sentences can be found which could be considered as expressing a volitional action.⁷¹ If Nygaard were correct, his categorization would lead to the implication that *munu* is not used for (or not capable of) expressing future in that type of context. A further implication would be that all sentences with animate subjects performing volitional actions express intention only, and that the futural *munu* is limited to non-volitional contexts or inanimate subjects. Intention and future would then be in a complementary distribution. Seen in the light of our proposed model of grammaticalization, Nygaard assumes that grammaticalization of *munu* did not proceed beyond Stage III.

Nygaard (1878) argues that the reason why the meanings of intention and future are often subsumed under one, is that in the modern Scandinavian languages (he probably means Danish/Norwegian) both meanings are translated with the verb *ville*. He says that the difference between the two meanings can be clearly demonstrated if we translate the intention-sentences with *agter, har i Sinde, er tilbøielig til* ("intends, has in mind, is inclined to"), and the future-sentences with *kommer til at* ("comes to" – a futural construction common in the modern Scandinavian languages). This shows clearly the problem that lies at the bottom of Nygaard's argumentation: it is true that the sentences in Nygaard's future-category must be unambiguously interpreted as futural (since the action is non-volitional, the meaning of intention is excluded). However, those in which Nygaard "undoubtedly" finds the meaning of intention can be interpreted in such a way, but the futural meaning is always *equally available*, and there seems to be no particular reason why the meaning of intention should be preferred to that of prediction.⁷²

⁷¹ There are only a handful of instances among Nygaard's examples of futural *munu* where a volitional character of the action could be considered. One of them is *þeir munu vilja fella seglit* "They will want to take down the sail". The collocation *munu vilja* is actually mentioned by Nygaard (1878: 271-272) in the section on the meaning of intention and is said to represent a weakened meaning of intention which can be rendered as "to be inclined to". It does not seem to belong to the future-category. There are two other instances: *koma munu Múspells um lög lýðir* "The people of Múspell will come over the sea"; *þess vænti ek, at guð mun leiðrétta skaða þinn* "I expect that God will remedy your damage". These are probably taken as prophecy-like statements.

⁷² For instance, Nygaard (1878: 264) claims that when Loki is asking the question *muntu mér,*

It has been observed that distinguishing between intention and prediction in sentences with animate subjects performing volitional actions is virtually impossible (cf. Morris 1964: 33-34, Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 257, Romaine 1999: 343). Hence, it can be claimed that a sentence in future tense in which an animate subject performs a volitional action (e. g. *I will buy a new book tomorrow*) always contains intentionality. It seems likely that such a sentence could be ascribed a meaning of intention regardless of the type of future and the language in which it would appear. In other words, intention is an inherent and inseparable part of such contexts, irrespective of the origin of the future. One simply cannot argue that the subject does not intend to do what they say they will. The interpretation of *munu* in Nygaard's examples in terms of intention is possible, but it is essential to realize that it is not contingent on the source meaning of *munu*. It is rather a mere by-product of the futural meaning, a trait common to future tenses in general.

It is true that there are cases of future auxiliaries that have retained flavours of their source meaning in certain contexts, e. g. the English *shall* in questions where it has a modal meaning related to obligation (*shall I open the window?*), or *will* in if-clauses (*if you will*) and in certain 2nd person questions (cf. Comrie 1989). But in that case, there is either a strict syntactic restriction (like *will* in if-clauses), or as Comrie (1989: 59) puts it

“this expression of modality in will and shall is always secondary to the expression of future time reference.[...] Thus, if someone asks do you want to help me?, then a possible answer is yes, but unfortunately I can't because I have a prior commitment, whereas this would be incoherent as

Freyja, fjaðrhams ljá (52 a.) he is not asking whether she will lend him the feather-cloak at some point in the future, but rather whether she intends to do it at the moment. This interpretation is far-fetched. The actual lending would take place after the time of speaking, which, by definition, means in the future. Using future tense expressions in such situations may be quite natural even in languages whose future grams are not derived from a source meaning “to intend”, cf. the question in the Lithuanian translation of Edda: *Ar paskolinsi, Frėja, man apdarą plunksnų* (Vijūnas (transl.) 2009: 161) with the verb *paskolinsi* in the future tense. Also the Czech translation renders it with the perfective present tense form *půjčíš* which always expresses the future: *Půjčíš mi, Freyjo, svůj převlek z peří?* (Heger – Kadečková (transl.) 2004: 147)

an answer to will you help me?, where the answer yes commits the speaker to being about to help”.

The reason why we are able to identify retentions of the source meanings of the English *will* and *shall*, as opposed to the Old Norse *munu*, is (apart from the apparent advantage of being able to consult native speakers) that the source meanings of *will* and *shall* are relatively further away from futurity compared to the source meaning of *munu*.⁷³ Intentionality, on the other hand, is so intimately close to future that it seems highly unlikely (and basically unprovable) that *munu* could have a sense of intention due to a retention of the original meaning. Since the expression of intention is the last stage before prediction in a number of future grammaticalization paths, a source meaning “to intend” would be completely dissolved at this stage – it is impossible that it could be kept separate from that of the general meaning of intention of future tenses. The absence of retentions of the source meaning of *munu* explains why the verb has such a neutral meaning. Consequently, it is most likely that *munu* reached Stage IV shortly after Stage III.

3.2.1.5 Conclusion

The preceding discussion can be summarized in the following table, which represents the grammaticalization chain (for the term see Heine 1992) of *munu*. It shows the semantic and morphosyntactic behaviour of *munu*.

⁷³ Cf. grammaticalization paths for desire and obligation (Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 256-263).

Grammaticalization chain of the futural path of munu

	Conceptual nature of the subject	Conceptual nature of the complement	Semantic nature of the clause	Meaning	Morpho-syntactic status	Attestation in Old Norse
Stage Ia	wilful, human	abstract patient	volitional	intention	full verb	unattested
Stage Ib	wilful, human	clausal proposition	volitional	intention	auxiliary like	questionable
Stage II	wilful, human	clausal proposition	non-volitional	prediction	auxiliary	attested (9th century)
Stage III	inanimate	clausal proposition	non-volitional	prediction	auxiliary	attested (9th century)
Stage IV	unrestrained (i. e. incl. human)	clausal proposition	unrestrained	prediction	auxiliary	likely attested

That these stages can, in fact, be ordered in a diachronic chain is based on general principles observed in the historical development of a number of languages. Those relevant in our case are the following ones (cf. Heine 1992: 343):

human participant > inanimate participant
nominal complement > clausal complement
full verb > auxiliary verb

As argued by Heine (1992), the opposite directions are unlikely based on cross-linguistic data. In fact, unidirectionality is one of the basic principles of grammaticalization with exceptions occurring extremely rarely (cf. e. g. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 12-14, Heine – Kuteva – Narrog 2017). Considering the principles mentioned above, it is highly probable that development proceeded in the particular order suggested in the grammaticalization chain.

By reaching Stage IV, *munu* became capable of expressing general future, and moreover, future that was not loaded with a heavy etymological heritage of the gram, because it was literally dissolved. This undoubtedly contributed to its spread and the dominant position that *munu* reached. Its grammaticalization, however, did not stop there. The futural meaning produced a few other non-temporal meanings that are discussed in the sections below.

3.2.2 Probability

The probability (or epistemic)⁷⁴ meaning is one of the most copiously attested non-temporal uses of *munu* based on the large number of examples in Nygaard (1878) and it is also recognized by all major dictionaries of Old Norse. It expresses, according to Nygaard (1878: 285-286), presumption or subjective view of the speaker with shades of uncertainty and reservation. What Nygaard does not stress enough is that it expresses a presumption or probability about the *present* as in (54).

(54) a. *þetta **man** vera mikit land, er vér höfum fundit*

“This is probably a large land that we have found”.

(*Landnámabók*: 39)

b. *At skalda reiðu vil ek þik spyrja, alls þykkisk skil vita;*

greppa ferðir þú munt gørla kunna,

þeira es með Haraldi hafask.

“I want to ask you about the equipment of skalds, since you seem to have knowledge; **you must know** all about the companies of poets who reside with Haraldr”.

(Þorbjörn hornklofi, *Haraldskvæði* 18, text and translation according to Whaley (ed.) 2012: 112)⁷⁵

In the form of a future perfect, *munu* can also express probability in the past (55).

(55) *Hér hafa þeir farit, ok **mun** Sigmundr hér hafa hlaupit yfir.*

“They have gone this way, and Sigmundr probably jumped over here”.

(*Færeyinga saga* XXXVIII: 83)

(54 b.) is the oldest (9th century) instance of this use of *munu*. The poem *Haraldskvæði* is composed as a conversation between a valkyrie and a raven. The

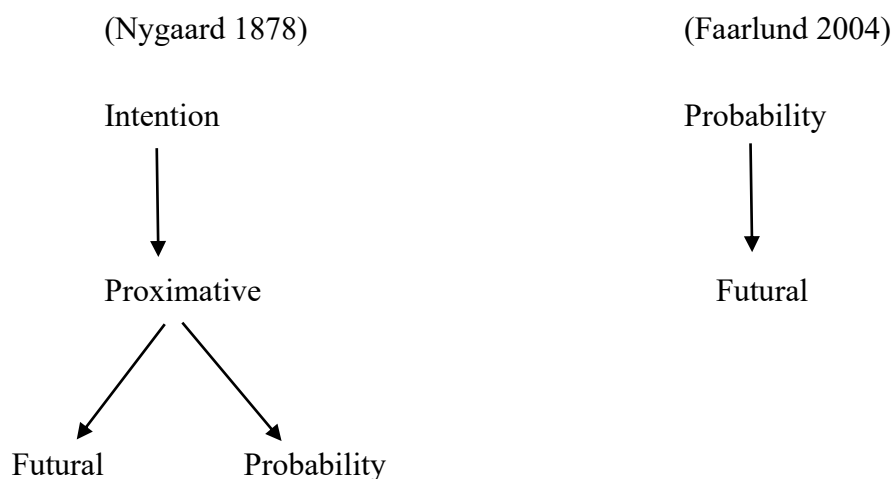
⁷⁴ Comrie (1989) uses the term “inferential”.

⁷⁵ There is some uncertainty as to whether all the preserved 23 stanzas of the poem actually constitute a single composition; also the authorship of some of the stanzas is debatable. However, this stanza (18) is explicitly attributed to Þorbjörn hornklofi in the sources. See the discussion in Whaley (ed.) 2012: 91-93.

valkyrie asks the raven about the equipment of the skalds at the court of Harald Fairhair (Norwegian king c. 872-930), assuming that the raven is well informed on this matter. This assumption on the part of the valkyrie is expressed by the phrase *þú munt gǫrla kunna*, literally “you will thoroughly know”. *Munu* cannot refer to the future here because the valkyrie expects the raven to have the knowledge at the present moment. It expresses that the valkyrie is convinced that the raven knows. This instance shows that it had already been in use in the earliest preserved layer of the Old Norse literary corpus.⁷⁶

As for the origin of the probability meaning of *munu*, or rather its relation to the futural use, two theories have been suggested so far. Nygaard (1878: 285-286) assumes the same path of development for the futural and probability meaning, thus deriving both parallelly from the proximative (that according to his view developed in its turn from the meaning of intention).

On the other hand, Faarlund (2004: 129) does not make any claims about the origin of the probability meaning, but considers it to be primary and the futural meaning is, according to him, an extension of the probability use. Nygaard’s and Faarlund’s view of the relation of the probability and future meanings of *munu* can be represented as follows:



⁷⁶ In the 10th century Skaldic poetry there are eight probability uses of *munu* (out of 90 instances of *munu* from that period) which roughly corresponds to the one instance out of nine attestations of *munu* in the 9th century.

A third claim about the historical relation of these two meanings of *munu* is presented below, namely that the futural meaning is primary and probability is derived from it. Such idea was actually considered by Nygaard (1878: 265) but readily dismissed. That the futural meaning is usually presented as primary in Old Norse dictionaries is one of the main points of his criticism.

Nygaard tries to substantiate his claim about the parallel development of future and probability by comparison with other languages where he supposedly finds similar development. He provides examples from English (*will*), German (*werden*) and Greek (*μέλλω* “I intend”) where the respective verbs are used both for expression of future and probability. However, he does not explain how the two meanings emerged and in what way they are related, so his argumentation amounts to a mere observation that grams expressing future also often have a probability meaning.

It is precisely comparison with other languages that can show us that the probability meaning is a secondary derivation of the futural meaning. In fact, it is a widespread phenomenon found in a number of languages:

English:

This will be your luggage, I suppose.

(Visser 1969: 1700-1701)

German:

Sie wird jetzt zu Hause sein.

“She is now probably at home”.

(Heine – Kuteva 2004: 142)

Spanish:

Tendrá veinte años.

“She’s probably about twenty years old”.

(Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 202)

Italian:

Gianni sarà là.

“Gianni is surely there”.

(Comrie 1989: 63)

Lithuanian:

Iš tolo būsite, tiesa?

“You must be from far away, aren’t you?”

(Ulvydas et al. 1971: § 180)

Czech:

To bude tím větrem.

“It must be the wind”.

(Štícha et al. 2013: 440)

Apart from these languages, it can also be found in e. g. Bulgarian, Dutch, French as well as outside Indo-European, such as Basque, Dakota, Haka, Japanese, Swahili, Korean, Rotuman and Quechua (see Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 202-203, Bybee – Pagliuca 1987: 118-119, Heine – Kuteva 2004: 142-143, Ultan 1978:104). Futures in these languages are of various origins, e. g. volitional like the English *will*, obligational like in Italian and Spanish, aspectual like the German *werden* etc. (for the origin of the Baltic future, see Dini 2014: 161-162.) This suggests that the epistemic meaning is not connected to the etymological meanings of those futures, but rather that it is a derivative of the futural meaning. It is indeed a broadly shared view that this use of futures emerges from prediction through an inference that the truth of the statement (about the present) will be revealed in the future (cf. Heine – Kuteva 2004: 142-143, Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 202-203, Bybee – Dahl 1989: 93, Dahl 2000: 313, Comrie 1989: 62-63, Visser 1969: 1700).⁷⁷ So for instance (54 a.) should actually

⁷⁷ Since probability use is based on prediction it would seem logical that it can arise from any kind of future gram, irrespective of its source meaning. However, as counterintuitive as it may seem, there has been some discussion whether or not probability use of futures is determined by their source. Hilpert (2008: 184) hypothesized that “movement-based futures do not develop speaker-related modal uses, while volition-based futures are likely to do so”. Hilpert’s hypothesis should be, however, tested on a larger scale. The reason that he found that movement-based futures do not produce probability meaning might simply be that the source meaning of the grams has not been sufficiently bleached. It can be assumed that when a future gram is completely devoid of its source meaning (which may, of course, take a very long time) so that it cannot interfere with its potential secondary uses, it will then be capable of producing them (cf. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 15). If the probability meaning arises in the way described above, this hypothesis should prove to be correct. Its verification is, however, beyond the scope of this dissertation.

be interpreted “[One day] this will [turn out to] be a large land that we have found”. The use of future perfect for past probability (55) is probably modelled on the basis of *simple future* > *present probability*.⁷⁸

Languages with a long documented history provide especially important evidence for the development of probability meaning. The Romance future, for instance, originated from Latin *habēre* which initially carried a sense of obligation or destiny and became a standard way of expressing future. Probability meaning appeared later and in Modern Spanish and Italian the development has progressed so far that the probability has actually become the most common use of the future tense (cf. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 202, Comrie 1989: 63).

The development of *munu* from Old Norse to Modern Icelandic shows a similar tendency. While in Old Norse both the futural meaning and the probability meaning were common, in Modern Icelandic, the temporal sense of the verb is considerably weakened and where an explicit reference to future is missing, *munu* is usually interpreted in the epistemic meaning, e. g. *Hann mun keyra strætó* would be interpreted “I think that he drives a bus” (Þráinsson 2005: 477). Consequently, Þráinsson (2007: 16) classifies Modern Icelandic *munu* not as a future auxiliary, but rather as a modal verb (cf. also Kress 1958-1959).

The modal status of the Modern Icelandic *munu* and its rather limited futural use has actually tricked some to believe that it is a gram which is on its way to futurity, cf. Harbert (2007: 301) who claims that of the Germanic periphrastic futures “[t]he transition from modal to future auxiliary is least far along in IC[elandic]”. The modal (epistemic) status of *munu* is, however, indicative of the very opposite: its futurity is long past its prime.

The development in Spanish, Italian and Icelandic corresponds to the hypothesis suggested by Traugott (1989: 31) that “meanings tend to become

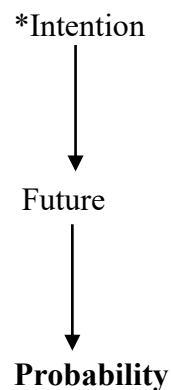
⁷⁸ Visser (1969: 1717) mentions that in English, *would* is used for past probability. He links it to the present probability use, arguing that it is “the same idiom, but the reference is to events or states in the past. *Would be* is therefore almost equivalent to *was (is) probably or presumably*”. He quotes an example from J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Two Towers*: “There were many tales about the Tower of the Moon”. – “That *would be* Minas Ithil that Isildur the son of Elendil built?”

increasingly situated in the speaker's subjective belief state“ and that all epistemics are derived (cf. also Bybee – Pagliuca 1985).

3.2.2.1 Conclusion

If the epistemic meaning is derived from future, which seems highly plausible with regard to the presented discussion,⁷⁹ then the fact that it can already be found in the 9th century provides an important piece of evidence that *munu* as a future auxiliary was by no means a recent development by that time. The emergence of a new meaning requires a specific kind of context being used frequently enough so that it has the force to trigger semantic change. That implies that *munu* as a future auxiliary must already have been used intensively for quite a long time in the preceding period.

The grammaticalization path of the probability meaning



3.2.3 Characteristic

The characteristic⁸⁰ meaning of *munu* is illustrated by (56) and described

⁷⁹ Both Nygaard's (1878) and Faarlund's (2004) views seem to be untenable in the light of the large amount of cross-linguistic evidence.

⁸⁰ The term *characteristic* adopted here is used by Lowrey (2012). Terms used by other authors include "general truths", "eternal truths", "predictability", cf. Bybee – Pagliuca (1987: 119). Ultan (1978: 102) distinguishes "gnomic or general truths" on the one hand, and "customary or habitual" events on the other, but notes that they are closely related.

by Nygaard (1878: 274) in the following way:

The meaning of *munu* “being inclined to” becomes sometimes in general statements an expression of what there usually happens (particularly in connection with words like “always, often, in general” etc.)

(56) a. *Fá **mun** systir, þótt fǫður missi, hefna hlýra harms.*

“Seldom will sister, though she loses father, revenge on her brother”.

(*Reginsmál* 11)

b. *Nú **mun** sem optar, at ér **munuð** bera mik ráðum synir mínir ok virða mik engis.*

“Now, as often it happens, you do not heed my council, my sons, and show me no respect”.

(*Njáls saga* CXXVIII: 297)

Nygaard (1878: 271-272) derives this meaning from the original meaning of *munu* through its “weakened” version. This weakening, according to him, occurs in connection with verbs “believe, mean, want” after which *munu* expresses the meaning of “being inclined to”.

However, as with the probability meaning, the characteristic use of future grams can be found in languages with futures from various sources:

English:

Boys will be boys.

(Lowrey 2012: 10)

The antibodies are naturally occurring and over 95 percent of all recipients will have anti-A and/or anti-B in their serum.

(Coates 1983: 178, quoted in Bybee – Pagliuca 1987: 119)

Old English:

Elpendes hyd wile drincan wætan, gelice spynges deð.

“An elephant’s hide will absorb liquid, like a sponge does”.

(translation of Orosius, quoted in Lowrey 2012: 11)

French:

A l'égard des voleurs on ne sera jamais assez prudent.

“When it comes to thieves, one can never be too careful”.

(Fleischman 1982: 132, quoted in Bybee – Pagliuca 1987: 119)

Czech:

Vlk zůstane vlkem.

“A wolf will always be a wolf”.

All these examples express a general characteristic. There have been attempts to derive the characteristic use of English *will* directly from its original, volitional meaning (see Lowrey 2012: 10-11). But Lowrey (2012: 11) notes that we find this use of *will* first after *will* became capable of expressing prediction and suggests, therefore, that prediction was the starting point from which the “characteristic” meaning developed. With regard to the fact that various futures may be used in this sense, Lowrey’s conclusion seems reasonable. Lowrey (2012: 11-12) suggests that the pragmatic inference involved in this process was probably the following one:

If a speaker predicts that an event X involving an agent Y will take place, the hearer is very likely to assume that he is basing his prediction on what he knows about Y, and how he will probably behave in the circumstances.

Bybee – Pagliuca (1987: 119-120) agree in that the characteristic meaning is a secondary use of a future marker and explain it in a similar way:

These statements amount to prediction, though not necessarily predictions about future time. They are predictions based on past experiences and thus apply to states of affairs that exist in the past, present and future.

Both Lowrey (2012) and Bybee – Pagliuca (1987) thus claim that the characteristic meaning is derived from future and that it arose as a prediction based on past experience.⁸¹

The Old Norse material supports this interpretation. In (56 b.) Njáll

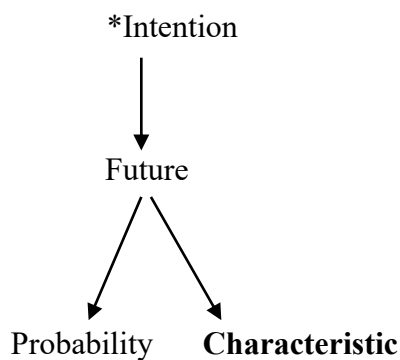
⁸¹ Ultan (1978: 102) expresses a similar view.

reprehends his sons that they ignore him “as it has often happened”. It is explicitly stated there that the characteristic of his badly behaved sons is based on an earlier experience. Expressions like this occur quite often, with the characteristic meaning, as actually noted by Nygaard (1878). This use of *munu* does not appear in the oldest layer of Skaldic poetry which is most probably due to its lower frequency in general.

3.2.3.1 Conclusion

Characteristic meaning of future grams appears with different futures and is therefore not contingent on the source meaning. On that basis, and with regard to the chronological evidence from Old English, it can be concluded that the characteristic use of Old Norse *munu* is derived from its futural meaning. As such, it is a sort of prediction based on past experience which describes how something probably or usually behaves.

The grammaticalization path of the characteristic meaning



3.2.4 Hortative?

The term *hortative* may seem unfit to describe the range of meanings ascribed to this category by Nygaard (1878), and rightly so. It seems to be a mix of several distinct uses of *munu*.

Nygaard (1878: 282) describes this category as follows:

“What one ‘is going to do’, or what is about to happen, may be easily perceived as

something that is inevitable or self-evident. *Munu* can therefore be used, first, for what must or should happen with a certain necessity (because of the circumstances or on the basis of a logical conclusion), and second, to give the expression a notion of conviction or emphasis (approximately like *skal*, but somewhat weaker).⁸²

He thus derives this category from the future or from the proximate, the exact way of development remains unclear. It can be divided into two subcategories. The first one is identical with the previously discussed probability, the second one is an actual hortative.

3.2.4.1 Probability

The first subcategory (“what must or should happen with a certain necessity”) occurs in sentences in the 2nd and 3rd person (57).⁸²

(57) a. ***muntu** því trúa* [du maa tro det] *at hann mun eigi ljúga nú it fyrsta sinn, er aldri laug fyrr*

“You must believe that he won’t be lying now for the first time, when he never lied before”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning*: 36)

b. “***mun** yðr bæjarmonnum,*” *segir hann,* “*vera þat kunnigt* [I maa naturligvis kjende til] *hvárt Pétur ok þau Ástríðr eiga nokkura ætt til þess at son þeira væri konungr yfir Nórgei*”

“You, citizens, must, of course know,” he says, “that Pétur and Ástríðr have a lineage that justifies their son to be the king of Norway”.

(*Sverris saga* CIX: 169)

c. *Satt **mun** þat, konungr,* [det skal være vist; det er vist og sandt] *ef þú fær sýsluna í hönd okkr bræðrum, at meira fé skulu vit færa þér*

“It is true, king, that if you charge us, brothers, to do the business, we will bring you more money”.

⁸² The examples are here quoted with Nygaard’s inserted translations.

(*Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* XV: 38)

This use is rather similar to the probability use as also indicated by Nygaard's own translations. The speakers express their belief that the assertion is (most) probably true (in the present). It is, therefore, surprising that Nygaard (1878) views this as a distinct meaning. The only noticeable difference is perhaps that for this category Nygaard quotes mostly sentences with verbs whose meanings are similar to "believe, seem, consider" etc. That does not, however, change the meaning carried by *munu* which may range from slight probability to conviction. This use is thus identical both in terms of derivation and meaning with the probability use.

3.2.4.2 Hortative

The second subcategory ("to give the expression a notion of conviction or emphasis") can be found with *munu* in the 1st person pl. and 2nd person. In the 2nd person, it expresses a command and encouragement (58 a.) as well as a somewhat reluctant permission (58 b.) (Nygaard 1878: 283).

(58) a. *munuð þat eigi optar gera, at fara hingat með fá liði, því at hér er ótryggt lið mart* "You must not come here again with few followers, for there are many disloyal people".

(*Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* XII: 32)

b. *ráða muntu þessu* [du faar have din Vilje i dette], *at hann mun eigi drepinn í dag*

"It will be according to your will that he will not be killed today".

(Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga helga* CXIX)

The meaning of *munu* in (58 a.) comes close to *skulu* which is also capable of expressing commands in similar contexts (59), cf. Morris (1964: 66-72).

(59) *nú skalt þú heim ríða fyrst af þingi*

"Now you must first ride home from the assembly".

(*Njáls saga* VII: 20)

Also in the 1st person pl. *munu* can be semantically similar to *skulu* and express a suggestion about something one should or must do. The two verbs may even be used in parallel in such cases (60) (cf. Nygaard 1878: 284). The instance of (60 b.) is the oldest (the 10th century).

(60) a. *Hér **munu** vér veita uppgöngu ok **skulum** fara hermannliga*

“Let us go ashore here and be brave”.

(*Færeyinga saga* XIX: 41)

b. *Skjótt **munum** Skarði herðnir, **skulum** tveir banar þeira,*

hollr, andskota hrinda, hjörðrifr, níu, fjörvi,

“Skarði, let us – the tough ones – quickly destroy the lives of our enemies, let us, friendly warrior, kill all the nine of them”.

(Kormákr Ögmundarson, lausavísa, text according to Jónsson (ed.) 1912: 78)

The instances in the 1st and 2nd person are actually similar in their modal contents. They express a command, request, encouragement, or proposal, and could be ascribed hortative meaning as an umbrella term.⁸³

It is quite common for languages to have more ways of expressing commands.⁸⁴ Interestingly, the most commonly occurring other use for imperatives is future and according to Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca (1994: 210-211) it is the imperative use that is derived from future:

the future sense gives rise to the imperative function through an indirect speech act. In a situation in which the speaker has authority over the addressee, a prediction about the addressee can be interpreted as a command.

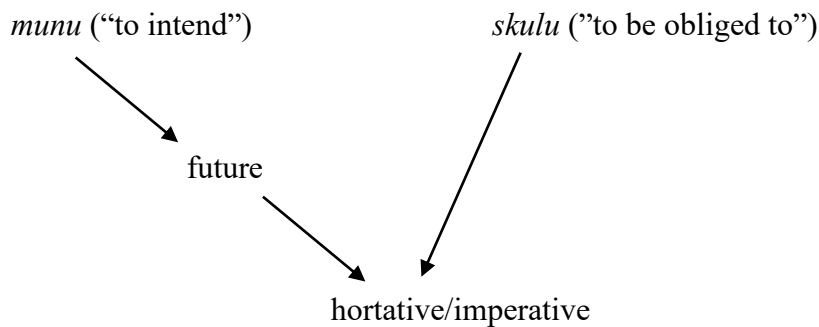
As the authors note, the imperative use of futures is not determined by their lexical source. The hortative uses of *munu* are semantically close to the imperative and can therefore be derived from the futural meaning of *munu* (cf.

⁸³ The occasional permissive use of *munu* in the 2nd person like (58 b.) seems to be a contextually defined, special case of the hortative.

⁸⁴ Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca (1994) note that more than half the languages in their database possess more than one grammatical means of signaling imperative.

also Ultan 1978: 103).

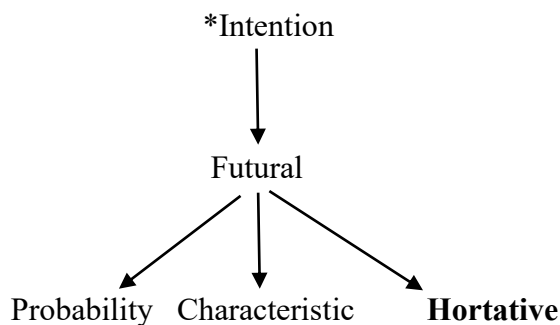
The origin of the hortative/imperative meaning of *skulu*, on the other hand, is probably quite different. *Skulu* is more likely to have acquired it through its original meaning of obligation, as obligation can easily be reinterpreted as imperative (cf. Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994: 211, 240).⁸⁵ It seems, therefore, that *skulu* and *munu* converged into the same function here through different paths, which can be illustrated as follows:



3.2.4.3 Conclusion

This category postulated by Nygaard encompasses virtually two different uses of *munu*. The first use, occurring in the 2nd and 3rd person, shows no essential differences from the probability use and can thus be subsumed under that category. The other use (in the 1st person pl. and 2nd person) conveys the meaning of command, request, encouragement, and can be considered hortative.

The grammaticalization path of the hortative meaning



⁸⁵ Theoretically, there exists a path *obligation* > *future* > *imperative*, but the direct path from obligation to imperative offers an easier and hence more plausible explanation in this case.

3.2.5 Hypothetical/Potential

All of the meanings of *munu* discussed hitherto were derived from the futural meaning. The Hypothetical/Potential, as well as the Proximative/Avertive (see 3.2.6), differ not only in their grammaticalization paths, but also in the fact that they primarily employ the preterite forms of *munu*. Although these functions are not directly connected to the future, they contribute to show the full grammatical range of *munu* and the role it played in the verbal system of Old Norse.

The Old Norse preterite forms of *munu* were used in a similar way to the past tense of the English *will* (i. e. *would*). Nygaard (1878: 298-299) distinguishes two uses of *munu* in this category that he calls potential (61) and hypothetical (62), respectively.

(61) a. *Hví **munda** ek fara á fund hins mesta óvinar míns?*

”Why would I go to meet my greatest enemy?”

(*Færeyinga saga* XXI: 46)

b. *lifna **mynda**⁸⁶ ek nú kjósa, er liðnir eru*

”I would choose to bring those to life who are dead”.

(*Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 23)

(62) a. *Eigi **mundak** trúa, ef mér væri sagt frá, at Ásaþórr mundi eigi meira drykk drekka*

”I wouldn’t believe it if I were told that Ásaþórr would not be able to drink more”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning*: 41)

b. *af **mundi** nú hqfuðit, ef Erpr lifði*

”The head would be off by now if Erpr lived”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál*: 50)

As Nygaard’s examples show, the potential use is distinguished from the hypothetical by the absence of an *if*-clause, but a condition can sometimes be

⁸⁶ The regular past indicative stem of *munu* is *mund-*, but it is frequently interchanged with the stem *mynd-*. The reason is discussed below.

implicitly understood.

Nygaard's idea about the origin of these (obviously closely related) uses of *munu* is not quite clear. On the one hand, he says that they are derived from the original meaning of *munu* ("to intend"), on the other hand, he claims that they developed side by side with the futural and probability meaning, i. e. from the proximative, according to his view (cf. Nygaard 1878: 301). In the following discussion, a new scenario for the grammaticalization of this function of *munu* is proposed on the basis of the development of the past tense forms of English modals as suggested by Bybee (1995).

In the hypothetical and potential use, *munu* appears in the form of past tense indicative (alternatively in the past subjunctive, see below). Interestingly, the past form of *munu* expresses a potential or hypothetical situation in the present. It may occasionally have a past meaning (see below), but Nygaard rightly considers the present meaning as the main one.

The phenomenon of past tense modals having a present hypothetical meaning is by no means uncommon. We can find parallels, among others, in English, e. g. *I would like a cup of tea*, *He should send it today*, as well as in French, Spanish and other languages (cf. Bybee 1995: 504, Ultan 1978: 98). Ultan (1978: 104) notes that the combination of a future and past marker is often used to express hypotheticality (which is the case both with English *would* and Old Norse *mundi*).

Bybee (1995: 514) claims that the English *would* does not contain any past sense (except for its habitual use). She refers to a study by Coates (1983) according to which 82% of the uses of *would* are hypothetical and only 16% are past uses. These past uses do not refer to the past on their own however – the past reference is provided by a past context in which they occur (cf. Bybee 1995: 514). The present is therefore the default meaning of *would*.

It may be hypothesized that the past tense form of *munu* behaves largely like *would*.⁸⁷ Nygaard posits the present meaning as its main function (cf. the

⁸⁷ However, a similar large study of the meaning of past forms of *munu* would be necessary to make more valid claims.

examples above), but notes (1878: 300) that the past forms of *munu* are also used about potential/hypothetical situations in the past as in (63).

(63) a. *Þá varð þat undr er ek **munda** eigi trúa, at vera mætti*

“Then there was the wonder that I wouldn’t have thought was possible”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning*: 43)

b. *eigi gáði hann bryggjunnar, ok **mundi** hann ganga á kaf, ef eigi tæki menn til hans ok styddi hann, er hann gekk út á skipit.*⁸⁸

“He did not heed the pier and would have fallen into water if people had not noticed him and supported him as he was going to the ship”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga helga* CXXIII: 213)

However, it seems that the past meaning of the preterite forms of *munu* is dependent on the context, i. e. other verb forms which are in the past tense provide *mundi* with a past meaning.⁸⁹ Like for the English *would*, the default meaning of the preterite of *munu* is the present.

3.2.5.1 The emergence of hypothetical meaning from past modals

Two theories have been suggested to account for the emergence of the present hypothetical meaning in past tense forms (Fleischmann 1982 and Bybee 1995).

Fleischmann (1982: 66) argued that the conditional in the Romance languages actually developed from “future in the past”.⁹⁰ According to her, it was “a secondary development contingent upon the earlier use of this form as a future for past time” in contexts which expressed both future and a hypothetical event, such as in e. g. *Peter said he would come (if he got the money)*.

Fleischmann’s idea is rejected by Bybee (1995), at least for the

⁸⁸ This sentence is actually a case of a to-be-averse (see section 1.2.3).

⁸⁹ Alternatively, like *would*, *mundi* can be bolstered by *hafa* to express the past, e. g. *ella mundi verr farit hafa* (Nygaard 1878: 300).

⁹⁰ Discussed and quoted in Bybee 1995: 515.

development of English *would* (and she claims that perhaps generally). She (1995: 515) argues that the form *would* had been used in English in the conditional before *will* acquired a future meaning.⁹¹ Her second argument is more relevant, namely that there are languages in which a past modal developed into a conditional without its present tense developing into a future.

We cannot completely refute the relevance of Fleischmann's hypothesis for Old Norse. *Munu* is used both for future (including future-in-the-past) and the conditional. The situation is, from a synchronic perspective, therefore similar to that of the Romance languages (or English for that matter). But in view of the lack of any direct textual evidence for the grammaticalization processes of *munu*, one should look for a safer, more universally applicable explanation of how the past tense of modals acquires a present meaning. Such explanation is provided by Bybee (1995: 506) who claims that the present meaning arose through the combination of the modality and the past tense:

As stative verbs, the past forms of modals assert that a state existed before the moment of speech, but they do not say whether that state still exists in the present or not. Thus past modals offer two areas of vagueness: (i) whether or not the predicate event was completed; and (ii) whether or not the modality remains in effect. A modal in past time, then, leaves open the possibility that some conditions on the completion of the main event were not met, and therefore the modality may still be in effect.⁹²

Bybee (1995: 507) argues that hypothetical conditional (as in *If she saw Judy, she would tell her the news*) seems more hypothetical than reality conditional (as in *If I see Judy, I will tell her the news*) because “the conditional

⁹¹ However, it seems that the use of *willan* for future-in-the-past preceded that of simple future, cf. an early instance from Orosius: *Pa Darius geseah þæt he ouerwunnen beon wolde, þa wolde he hiene selfne on ðæm gefeohte forspillan*. “When Darius saw that he would be overrun, then he wanted to kill himself on the battlefield”. Cf. Lowrey 2012: 11, Coleman 1995: 19, note 37.

⁹² This semantic peculiarity of modals in relation to *munu* was also noticed and formulated by Nygaard (1878: 302) in a similar way: *Det ligger nemlig nær at slutte, at det, som man tidligere var tilbøuelig til at gjøre, eller som var nær ved at indtræde, er det muligt og tænkeligt, at man fremdeles i Nutiden kunde gjøre, eller at det Forhold overhovedet fremdeles finder Sted*.

relation has existed in the past but the condition has not yet been met, suggesting that it may never be met”.⁹³ The possibility that it will be carried out later, when the right conditions are met, is, however, still open.

Bybee (1995: 513) concludes that “[p]ast modals come to be used in the present via the hypothetical conditional: originally the present uses are hypothetical then-clauses without the conditions stated explicitly”.

This theory does not link the development of present meaning of past modals to the development of future, and seems to be relevant for modals in general. It can therefore be applied to Old Norse.

In Old Norse, the path of hypotheticality differed from the path of future from the very beginning as it only involved the preterite forms of *munu*, whereas the future path primarily involved the present tense forms (cf. Ultan 1978: 92).

At Stage 1 the past form of *munu* was used with a noun complement (64), not attested in Old Norse.

- (64) **Hann mundi ferð*.
“He intended a journey”.

Stage 2 is represented by a conditional sentence in the past and a volitional context. Since past uses of *mundi* need to be supported by a past context, they are rather rare, and I have not been able to find such context in the corpus of Old Norse texts although it may exist. Nygaard (1878: 300, 1883: 143) has only a few examples of *mundi* with a past meaning and all of them include a non-volitional action. In the lack of an authentic example, we may use a sentence with a hypothesized reconstructed meaning (65).

- (65) *hann mundi drepa þik, ef hann kvæmisk í færi*

⁹³ From a more general perspective, Ultan (1978: 99) notes that the “present represents a more ‘real’ time, a time closer to the speaker, and the past a time more remote, hence more ‘unreal’”. In the same way he (1978: 100-101) explains the polite uses of the past tense (cf. also Bybee 1995: 508).

*“He intended to kill you if he had got an opportunity”.⁹⁴

The original meaning of the verb form *mundi* referred to the past,⁹⁵ but since it was open to the interpretation that the modality was still in effect, it was possible to infer that the killing would take place at some later point when the right conditions are met. Since it has not yet occurred, the tone of the utterance is hypothetical. Through such inference, the past form *mundi* acquired present hypothetical meaning.

Bybee (1995: 513) suggests that hypotheticality weakens the original meaning, as for instance the English *should* vs. *shall* and *would* vs. *will*. In the case of *mundi*, it seems that a weakening of its meaning (“intend”) may have led to a dissociation from intentionality, and consequently from animate subjects. The notion of intending gradually withdrew to the background and as soon as it was completely obscured, *mundi* became a pure marker of hypotheticality (in a similar way that *mun* became a pure marker of futurity),⁹⁶ available to be used with all subjects.

At Stage 3, the meaning is present hypotheticality and the subject is inanimate (66).

(66) *af mundi nú hqfuðit, ef Erpr lifði*

“The head would be off by now if Erpr lived”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál*: 50)

⁹⁴ Within the actual text (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* XIII: 238), it has a present hypothetical meaning: “He would kill you if he got an opportunity.”

⁹⁵ As for the meaning of the past subjunctive form *kvæmisk*, general use of the past subjunctive for any hypothetic event regardless the time is assumed by Euler – Badenheuer (2009: 183-184) to have been common in all Germanic languages and perhaps already in Proto-Germanic (cf. also Harbert 2007: 278). This state is also reflected in Old Norse although a present meaning of the past subjunctive was more common, cf. Nygaard (1883: 131-132).

⁹⁶ Since *munu* was on the threshold of futurity thanks to its meaning from the very beginning, its grammaticalization would have been relatively fast, so that the notion of intending probably did not shine through too long and did not interfere with the path of *mundi* either. A relative chronology of the path of futurity and the path of hypotheticality is hard to determine however. They could have progressed side by side.

At Stage 4, *mundi* is used in a present sense without a condition being explicitly stated, the so called potential use of Nygaard (67).

(67) *Hví **munda** ek fara á fund hins mesta óvinar míns?*

“Why would I go to meet my greatest enemy?”

(*Færeyinga saga* XXI: 46)

As a means to express potential and hypothetical events, the past forms of *munu* became semantically close to the subjunctive. They were subsequently used as a periphrastic subjunctive and to a large extent replaced the original morphological subjunctive forms (cf. Nygaard 1905: 209-215).⁹⁷ The form *mundi* (past indicative) thus became associated with a subjunctive meaning, and hence was often replaced by the subjunctive form *myndi* without any change in meaning (68), cf. Nygaard (1878: 300-303).

(68) “*En ek **mynda** ætla, segir hann, “at Hákon jarl **myndi** litla stund hafa vald yfir Nóregi”.*

“And I would think, he says, that jarl Hákon will rule Norway for a short time”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Ólafs saga helga* CLXXX: 327)

Moreover, as Nygaard (1878: 303) notes, not only the meanings of the indicative and subjunctive of *munu* coalesced, but even morphologically, the forms of the indicative and the subjunctive were completely mixed up. The original forms were as follows:

Past indicative		Past subjunctive	
<i>munda</i>	<i>mundum</i>	<i>mynda</i>	<i>myndim</i>
<i>mundir</i>	<i>munduð</i>	<i>myndir</i>	<i>myndið</i>
<i>mundi</i>	<i>mundu</i>	<i>myndi</i>	<i>myndi</i>

However, the unlauded stem *mynd-* occurs frequently with indicative

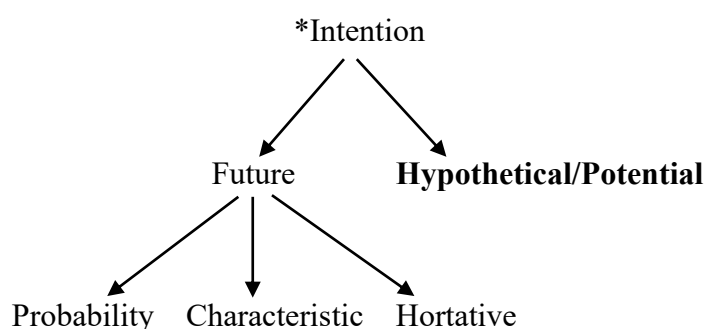
⁹⁷ The present tense forms of *munu* (both the indicative and the subjunctive) were used in the same way instead of the present subjunctive form of the main verb, e. g. *ætlaþ þú, at betra færi myni gefask við Ólaf* “Do you think that any better opportunity will arise with Olaf?” (Faarlund 2004: 249). This use could have been modelled on the past subjunctive forms of *munu*.

endings (i. e. in the plural *myndum*, *mynduð*, *myndu*) used as the indicative, and vice versa: the non-umlauted forms with subjunctive endings (pl. *mundim*, *mundið*, *mundi*) used as the subjunctive. Such secondary forms can also be found in other modals like *skulu* (shall), *þurfa* (need) and *kunna* (can), but otherwise they are very rare (cf. Noreen 1923: 363). This corresponds to Bybee's (1995) hypothesis that past forms of modals may have a universal tendency to develop present meanings, though weakened by hypotheticality. Such forms are then prone to converge with the subjunctive forms on the basis of their common denominator – the irrealis.

3.2.5.2 Conclusion

Summing up, the present hypothetical use of the past forms of *munu* developed from the past meaning of intention. The crucial stage were hypothetical *then*-clauses in which the combination of the modal sense and the past sense produced a hypothetical reading in the present. The original sense of intention was then gradually suppressed and *munu* became a pure marker of hypothetical events. The potential meaning (used without a conditional clause) is a closely related offshoot of the hypothetical meaning.

The grammaticalization path of hypothetical/potential meaning



3.2.6 Proximative

Proximative grams generally express an incipient action, the state of “being about to” or “being on the verge of” (Heine 1994: 36). It is an aspectual

construction, not a tense, and it can thus refer to past, present or future (cf. Heine 1994: 43). A grammaticalized proximative construction is found in many languages as diverse as Bulgarian, Hungarian, Lahu, Lingala or Tok Pisin (cf. Heine – Kuteva 2004). The development of proximative has been attested from various sources such as *come to, love, near, want* (cf. Heine – Kuteva 2004). Nygaard (1878: 272) derives the proximative use of *munu* from the meaning of intention.

Before the grammaticalization path of this function is analyzed in more detail, a closer look should be taken at Nygaard’s examples because it can be argued that what Nygaard (1878) characterizes as proximative is actually another, related gram, namely the avertive (cf. Kuteva 1998).

Compared to the other functions of *munu*, Nygaard (1878) gives much fewer examples for the proximative, which indicates that it is a less common use of the verb. Among them we find sentences with *munu* both in the present (69) and in the preterite (see (70) below).

(69) a. *braka qll bekkþili, sem **myni** Baldr koma eptir í Óðins Sali*

“All the bench-planks creak, as if Baldr were coming back into Óðinn's residence”.

(*Eiríksmál* 3, text and translation according to Whaley (ed.) 2012: 1008).

b. *fyr Eireki glymr, es hér **mun** inn koma jofurr í Óðins sali*

“The clangour is made for Eiríkr, who must be coming in here, a prince into Óðinn's residence”.

(*Eiríksmál* 4, text and translation according to Whaley (ed.) 2012: 1009)

c. *skauzk niðr þilja undir fótum honum, ok fell hann í rúmit, en menn hljópu svá þykkt yfir hann at hann mátti eigi upp standa [...] Sá maðr hljóp í síðara lagi er Helgi hét ok var kallaðr byggvǫmb. Konungr leit við honum, ok kenndi Helgi hann ok mælti: “Illa **munum** vér skiljask við várn konung [...]*”

“A plank slipped under his feet and he fell into the hold. His men ran so close to him that he was not able to stand up. [...] One of the last that ran to him was Helgi, called Byggvǫmb. The king looked to him, Helgi

recognized and said, ‘it is a bad parting from our king [...]’”

(*Sverris saga* XXVIII: 46-47)

At least (69 a.-b.) can hardly be considered proximative. In (69 a.) *munu* conveys an irrealis mood as it is clearly a poetic comparison (the poem was composed in honour of Eiríkr blóðøx and describes his coming to Valhalla). *Munu* is used here as a periphrastic subjunctive (instead of the simple subjunctive *sem Baldr komi...*).⁹⁸ In (69 b.) *munu* is either a purely futural expression (“will come here”) or it expresses probability which is more likely as the translation suggests.

(69 c.) could have a proximative meaning. A futural reading is less likely in the given context. Possibly, it could be considered to express probability. Since it is mentioned that “Helgi recognized the king” we could interpret his words as a probability statement “This will be our king to whom we are giving such a bad parting”. But the word order of the phrase does not seem to support such a reading. Proximative thus probably remains the most reasonable interpretation in this case.

Nygaard’s examples of the alleged proximative in the preterite are (70).

(70) a. *þeygi Guðrún gráta mátti, svá var hon móðug, myndi hon springa*

“Guðrún could not weep, she was so mournful that she was about to burst”.

(*Guðrúnarkviða I* 2)

b. *Þá varð Þórr reiðr ok greip hamarinn ok myndi þá brjóta höfuð hennar áðr en goðin öll báðu henni friðar.*

“Then Þórr became angry and seized his hammer, and was about to crush her head, before all the gods prayed for her mercy”.

(Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning*: 46)

c. *Sva bar at æitt sinni i Garðum austr; at ælldr kom i kaupbæ, þann er Holmgarðr hæitir, oc stoð æigi til minna gæigs, en borgen öll mindi upp ganga.*

⁹⁸ For the use of the subjunctive in clauses expressing an unreal comparison, see Nygaard (1905: 317).

“It happened once in the east in the Rus’ that a fire sprang up in the settlement called Hólmgarðr, and there was a considerable danger that the whole town would have burnt down”.

(*The Legendary Saga of Óláfr the Saint* CI: 226)

Nygaard’s instances in the past tense seem to carry a proximative meaning, at least at first glance. About Guðrún (70 a.) it is even mentioned in the introduction of the poem that her heart was close to bursting with grief (*hon var búin til at springa af harmi*). (70 c.) suggests that the whole town would have burnt down, but as it turns out later in the text, the disaster was averted by the coffin with remains of Saint Óláfr that was put against the fire and it suddenly stopped, so that only a small part of the town was damaged.

It is obvious that these instances have a close resemblance to the hypothetical function of *munu* (already noticed by Nygaard 1878: 273). They express a past event which was on the verge of happening, but eventually did not happen. These features correspond closely to a gram known initially as ANA (“action narrowly averted”, cf. Kuteva 1998), which more recently came to be called *avertive* (cf. Heine – Kuteva 2004). The meaning conveyed by this gram, according to Kuteva (1998: 115), can be expressed as “was on the verge of V-ing but did not V”. This is indeed a precise characterization of the meaning contained in Nygaard’s examples of the putative proximative in the past tense.

The proximative and the avertive semantically overlap to a certain extent (cf. Kuteva 1998: 130). The (only) semantic feature of the proximative is imminence. The defining features of the avertive on the other hand, according to Kuteva (1998: 119, 137), are imminence, pastness and counterfactuality.

The proximative is independent of tense, not confined to past contexts, but when it is used in a past context it comes close to the avertive and the two grams are thus hard to distinguish. However, the proximative does not say whether the action was or was not carried out.

The source of the Old Norse avertive (the verb *munu*) would fall into the category of volitional/purposive verbs, which is listed by Kuteva (1998: 138) as one of the etymological sources of the avertive. This line of development is

illustrated by Kuteva on Old Bulgarian, where the avertive developed from the past tense of the verb *xotěti* “to want”⁹⁹ for which she (1998: 138) suggests the following path:

Stage	Type of Event Schema	Contextual Attributes
0. Past Volition	Person X wanted item Y	[Y refers to a concrete item]
I. Past Volition/ Intention	Person X wanted to do Y	[Y refers to a dynamic situation]
II. Counterfactual	X was going to undergo Y but Y does not take place	[Y is a potential but unrealized event]
III. ANA[avertive]	X was about to undergo Y but Y does not take place	[X was close to entering situation Y but Y does not take place]

Since the source meaning of *munu* belongs to a similar semantic range as the source of the Old Bulgarian avertive, it can be hypothesized that the paths will correspond. In fact, we can observe that the stages 0 to II match the first three stages in the development of the Hypothetical use of *munu* presented in the previous section. The Old Norse avertive thus represents a contextually specialized use of the hypothetical function.

The difference between stage II (Counterfactual) and III (Avertive) “lies in the greater specificity that the ANA [avertive] involves, namely the closeness of the event to the particular moment serving as reference point in the past” (Kuteva 1998: 140). The avertive stage of *munu* can be illustrated by (71) which is the oldest occurrence (9th century) of the avertive.

(71) *Fló með fróðgum tívi fangsæll of veg langan
sveita nagr, svát **slitna** sundr ulfs faðir **mundi**.*

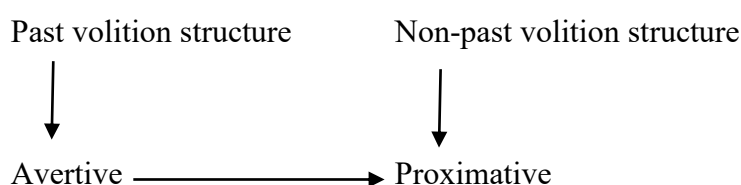
“The bird of blood [RAVEN/EAGLE = Þjazi] flew happy in its catch over a long distance with the wise god, so that the father of the wolf [= Loki] was about to be torn apart”.

(Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, *Haustlög* 8, text and translation according to Gade – Marold (eds.) 2017: 443)

⁹⁹ As Kuteva (1998) notes, the verbs used in the avertive are typically perfective (in those languages that distinguish perfective and imperfective aspect). Although there is no such distinction in Old Norse, it is interesting to consider the aktionsart of the verbs used in the avertive: *springa*, *brjóta*, *ganga upp*. All of them express a punctual action.

What is suggestive of the earlier stages of grammaticalization of the avertive, are adversative clauses. For example, the Russian developing avertive must be supported by an adversative clause so that the avertive meaning could emerge (cf. Kuteva 1998: 122-123). As can be seen from the examples, the Old Norse avertive could function without such an extra support and shows therefore a more advanced stage of grammaticalization.

Kuteva (1998) suggests that the grammaticalization paths of the avertive and proximative can also intersect because volition may serve as a source for both grams.¹⁰⁰ The avertive arises from past volition/intention, while the proximative may arise from non-past volition (cf. Kuteva 1998: 149, Heine 1994 and 2002). However, Kuteva (1998: 152) argues that the proximative may also develop through an indirect path from the avertive:



Such development, whereby the avertive construction loses the features of pastness and counterfactuality, has indeed been attested. The Turkish proximative developed from the avertive and in Bulgarian, the progression seems to be ongoing (cf. Kuteva 1998: 145-148). Considering the scarcity of instances of the Old Norse proximative, it could be hypothesized that the progression Avertive > Proximative was also under way in Old Norse but perhaps did not fully develop.¹⁰¹

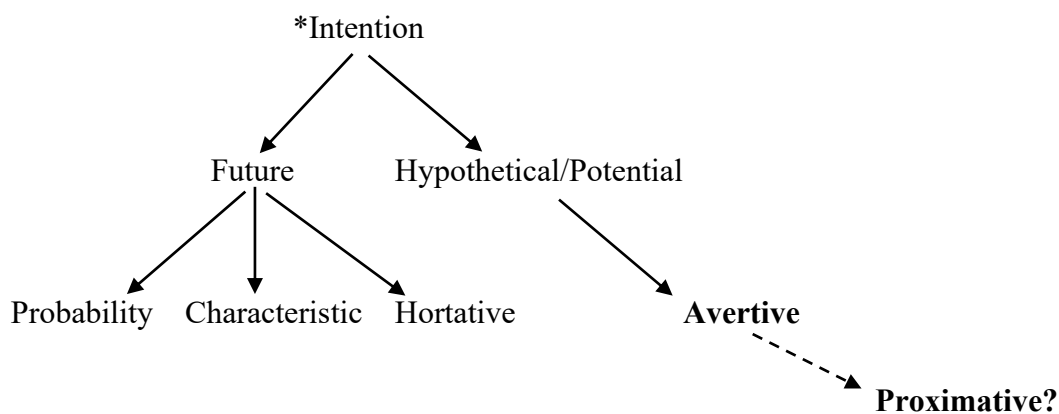
¹⁰⁰ However, some languages have two separate constructions for avertive and proximative respectively, coming from two different sources. See Kuteva (1998: 132-133).

¹⁰¹ The low number of examples of the proximative may also be connected to another factor. The Old Norse proximative (if it can be postulated at all which would require more substantial evidence), no matter if it developed from the avertive or through its own path (the non-past volition structure), would have competed with the future (both grams involve the use of present tense forms of *munu*). That would not be anything rare as some ambiguity is common in the process of grammaticalization. There are languages in which the proximative and future developed from the same source (see Heine 1994, also the Old English modal *willan* seems to have had a proximative meaning, see Kuteva 1998: 151). However, it should be considered that the *munu*-

3.2.6.1 Conclusion

We have attempted to reinterpret the proximative use of *munu* postulated by Nygaard (1878) in terms of another gram, namely the avertive. The reason is that, based on Nygaard's examples, it is sufficiently attested only in the past tense and always with an additional notion of counterfactuality, i. e. the action was on the verge of being carried out, but eventually did not happen which corresponds to the avertive.¹⁰² The existence of proximative in Old Norse remains dubious for now. In any case, the Old Norse avertive and the putative proximative, their historical interrelations as well as their subsequent development¹⁰³ require more research.

The grammaticalization path of the avertive (and proximative)



future had a very strong position in the verbal system. Moreover, the present tense forms of *munu* had several other functions. The proximative would thus find itself in a considerably competitive environment, and that might have been a hindrance for its further expansion.

¹⁰² Interestingly, Jónsson (1931: 415) also lists proximative as one of the meanings of *munu* (*om noget, der er nær ved at ske*), but he only gives examples in the past tense which also points to an avertive interpretation of those instances.

¹⁰³ It seems that the past form *mundi* + past participle may be functioning as an avertive (or proximative?) in Faroese, e. g. *eg mundi dottið* “I very nearly fell”, see Mikkelsen – í Skála (2007: 1052) and Thráinsson et al. (2004: 76).

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined the meanings of *munu* as they were suggested by Nygaard (1878). Most of them have been found relevant for the synchronic description of *munu* (Future, Hypothetical/Potential, Characteristic, Probability), some were reinterpreted (Proximative > Avertive) or needed to be reclassified (Nygaard's mixed category of Hortative/Probability).

Nygaard's (1878, 1905) idea that the original meaning of *munu*, "to intend", was preserved in Old Norse is not corroborated in the present study. *Munu* can be ascribed that meaning in futural sentences with animate subjects performing volitional actions (most often in the 1st person), but it does not follow that the meaning is contingent on the etymological meaning of *munu*. It is rather a general property of such clauses in future tense and can also be expected to be found in futures which did not develop from the source meaning of intention. On the contrary, it has been argued here that the source meaning of *munu* is the very reason that the verb is able to express the future in a remarkably neutral way. The use of *munu* in prophecies that was discussed in the previous chapter is obviously based on this capacity.

As for the diachronic dimension of the various meanings of *munu*, the whole picture has been changed a great deal. There are two main paths which branch off from the source meaning of *munu* "to intend":

1. the futural path
2. the hypothetical path

The Old Norse verbal system was affected by *munu* to a considerable extent as the verb became both a tense marker and a mood marker. As a tense marker, it was the main means of the expression of future, and in the mood domain, the periphrastic subjunctive with *munu* replaced to a large extent the original morphological subjunctive. Moreover, three non-temporal (or modal) uses developed on the futural path, and the hypothetical path produced the avertive which pertains both to aspectual, tense and modal domain (cf. Kuteva 1998).

The futural and hypothetical paths are primarily associated with the present and preterite forms of *munu*, respectively. Preterite forms are, of course, used also in the meanings belonging to the futural path, typically in subordinate clauses when the matrix sentence is in the past tense, i. e. the future-in-the-past (cf. Faarlund 2004: 10.1.1). The hypothetical path seems to be confined to the use of preterite forms with a possible exception of the proximative whose existence in Old Norse is, however, questionable due to the lack of more solid evidence.

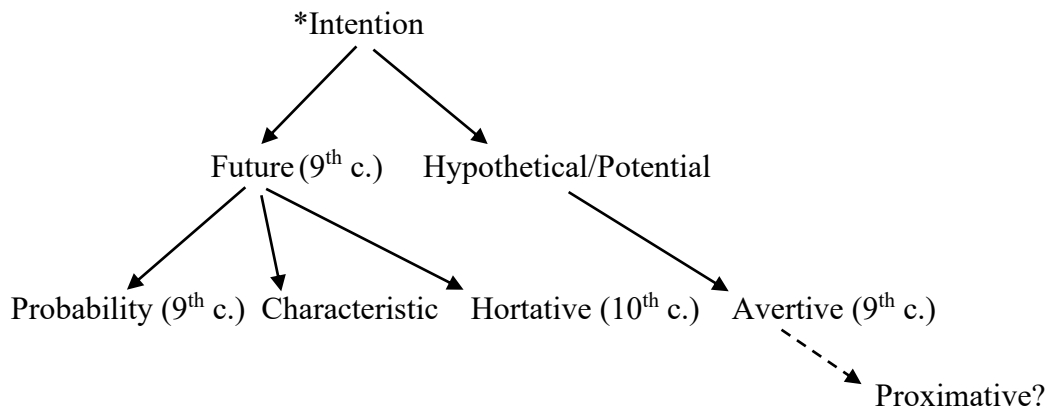
Although it has not been the main purpose of this dissertation to assess whether or not the Old Norse periphrastic future construction with *munu* can be considered a future tense (the identification of which is usually debatable, cf. Comrie 1989), the findings in this chapter show that *munu* behaves in a way in which a fully-fledged future tense could be expected to behave. Namely the fact that *munu* developed several secondary functions which are derived from prediction is characteristic of future tenses in general (cf. e. g. Ultan 1978, Bybee – Perkins – Pagliuca 1994). This contrasts with the verb *skulu* which did not develop these functions and did not have such a sharp distinction between its temporal and modal uses. Instead, its temporal meaning was intertwined with the original modality of the verb to varying extents.

Morphologically, *munu* remained a coherent verb in the sense that the various uses of the verb were not dissociated from the main verbal paradigm. The forms did not develop further (at least in Old Norse) into independent morphemes. Nevertheless, the frequent confusion of the umlauted and non-umlauted forms shows that the morphological level was affected by the semantic convergence of the past indicative with the past subjunctive.

From a larger time perspective, the morphological development of *munu* is in accordance with its status as a highly frequent auxiliary/modal verb. Already in the pre-literary period due to system pressure, *munu*, originally a weak verb, joined the class of preterite-present verbs which functioned as modals to a great extent in Germanic languages. The morphological shift continued even during the literary period. Paradoxically, the “fake” preterite-present *munu* was one of only two verbs (the other being *skulu*) that remained true to the class until Modern Icelandic.

The earliest attestations of *munu* suggest that the whole system had probably been fully developed by the 9th century.¹⁰⁴ The following figure shows the development of the meanings of *munu* with the time of the first attestations for some of the functions.

The grammaticalization paths of munu



The evidence of the probability and avertive meanings which are both secondary derivatives and attested in the Skaldic poetry of the 9th century, is particularly valuable. With regard to that, and to the morphological development of *munu*, it is obvious that the origin of the system and particularly the two main functions (futural and hypothetical) lies considerably further back in the past. This special characteristic of the Old Norse *munu*-future was not acknowledged even in recent works, cf. Harbert (2007: 297-301) and the discussion in Chapter 4.

In the next chapter we will approach the question of what conditions might have led to such an early development of future periphrasis in North Germanic as compared with the rest of the Germanic branch.

¹⁰⁴ The absence of the Hortative and Characteristic meaning in the 9th century material is likely due to their lesser frequency. Considering the overall meagre number of occurrences of *munu* in the 9th century sources, their absence is only to be expected.

Chapter 4

4. The Origin of the Periphrastic Future in Old Norse

It has been argued in the previous chapters that the Old Norse periphrastic future shows traces of being an old innovation to the North Germanic verbal system. A crucial question that has not been satisfactorily answered is why the periphrastic future emerged so early in North Germanic compared to (Middle) English and (Middle) High German. The aim of this chapter is finally to present a new theory that could account for this.

4.1 Earlier Theories of the Origin of the Periphrastic Future

Scholarly attention given to the emergence of the periphrastic future in Germanic has been focused on English and German (cf. Mutti 2010, Sieberer 1925, Blackburn 1892). However, too much generalization has been made in regard to the other Germanic languages, the usual presumption being that they developed along somewhat similar lines. Such generalization is unfounded, at least when it comes to Old Norse.

When discussing the origins of periphrastic future in Germanic, one usually finds arguments connected to the cultural and linguistic influence brought about by Christianity which put Germanic translators to the challenge of how to translate Greek and Latin future tense forms.¹⁰⁵ As a reaction to this foreign religiously/culturally conditioned influence, periphrastic futures began to emerge at different times in Germanic languages during the Middle Ages.¹⁰⁶ This kind of reasoning is often believed to be valid for the Germanic branch as a whole.

In her study of the role of religion in language change, Mutti (2010: 210) claims that an examination of the grammaticalization of Old English modals “will serve to exemplify the changes that occurred in the various Germanic languages”.

¹⁰⁵ Sieberer (1925: 34) even claims that there is nothing in language that would be more dependent on religion than the future, since the future is the main domain of religion.

¹⁰⁶ See Mutti (2010: 178), and the literature cited therein – none of it concerns Old Norse.

She supports this claim by arguing that Old English was a mix of Germanic dialects with close connections to Old Frisian and even Old Norse. It is true that Old English dialects were rather diverse and there are certainly various sorts of Old Norse and Old English parallels, but that does not entitle one to conclude that the two languages will behave identically in *all* respects. This is especially the case when it comes to periphrastic future constructions, since the Old/Middle English outcome is rather different from the Old Norse one.

As we have seen, the idea that the Germanic future emerged due to a foreign/Christian influence, advanced most recently by Mutti, is not new. Sieberer (1925: 10) argued that the German construction *werden* + infinitive arose because “the educated thinking, being completely in the shackles of Latin, longed for a future tense in German”.¹⁰⁷ Another proponent of this line of thought was Paul Bauschatz (1982) who argued that periphrastic future in all Germanic languages arose as a consequence of Christianization and on the base of Latin tense structure.

The theory that Germanic periphrastic futures appeared, essentially, due to the adoption of Christianity is untenable. Old Norse evidence alone is enough to disprove it. As we have seen, the periphrastic future had been grammaticalized by the 9th century and is probably even of a much earlier origin. It is thus more than a century before Norway and Iceland *formally* became Christian and one must bear in mind that cultural changes do not usually happen overnight. It took much longer, perhaps a couple of centuries, before Christian beliefs actually became the norm among people and could have, potentially, exerted influence on the grammatical structure of the language. If Christianity had been the conceptual source for the Old Norse periphrastic future, considering that language change does not happen overnight either, we could expect to find periphrasis no earlier than perhaps the 13th century, and secondary uses derived from the future perhaps even a century later.

It would, moreover, be utterly unreasonable in view of the fact that the

¹⁰⁷ However, Sieberer (1925: 96) was aware that Old Norse used periphrastic future from early on and explained it in terms of a “more advanced culture of the North Germanic people” in comparison with West Germanic. Such idea can hardly be substantiated.

periphrastic future appears *later* in English and German when the Christianization of these areas actually happened much *earlier* than in Scandinavia. Use of (quasi)future periphrastic constructions only appeared in the Middle period of both English and German and the present tense was still a very common way of expressing the future. In Middle English, the two verbs relatively most often employed in these constructions were **sculan* and *willan*, but it was only towards the end of the period that they were becoming free of their modal meaning (cf. Fischer 2006: 264). In Middle High German, the verbs used were *soln*, *wellen*, *müezen*, but usually they expressed both a modal and a temporal meaning at the same time, with the present tense remaining the main means of future reference (cf. Schmidt 2013: 317-318, Paul 1929: 175). The non-modal *werden* became common as a future auxiliary only in Early Modern German (cf. Schmidt 2013: 318). It can also be noted that other languages, like the Finno-Ugric Finnish, Sami or Estonian, did not develop a distinct future tense after Christianization and continue to use the present tense in future meaning.

Linking the emergence of the periphrastic future to a religious change as advocated by Mutti (2010) and others is, therefore, at least in the case of Old Norse, not a viable option.¹⁰⁸

A different view regarding the emergence of the periphrastic future in Germanic was advocated by Sčur (1963, 1964). He was aware of the fact that Old Norse had developed a periphrastic future by the 9th century as the first among Germanic languages, and he made an important contribution through his statistical analysis of Icelandic sagas with regard to the expression of future. Sčur also noticed a correlation between periphrastic future and periphrastic subjunctive in Germanic languages (ON *munu*, English *will*, German *werden*, Norwegian *ville* etc.) and claimed that the emergence of periphrastic future was conditioned by periphrastic subjunctive. A certain correlation between these categories is undeniable and can even be expected, given their mutual semantic proximity (cf.

¹⁰⁸ And although the present argumentation does not directly disprove the possibility that Christianity had some influence on English and German futures, it does at least question it. On the other hand, the Latin/Romance influence on the development of periphrastic perfect in Germanic seems conceivable because the perfect in the continental Germanic languages resembles the Romance one more closely than Scandinavian perfects do (cf. Drinka 2017: 220-254).

Ultan 1978: 94-95). There are also clear cases of futures that developed from a subjunctive, particularly in Latin (cf. Ultan 1978: 113). However, Sćur did not present any substantial arguments in support of his hypothesis and his observation is therefore of little value. More importantly, since there exists a direct grammaticalization path from the original meaning of *munu* (“to intend”) to future (cf. above), assuming a development from the subjunctive is not reasonable.

Since these previous accounts do not offer a satisfactory explanation of the emergence of the periphrastic future in Old Norse, another theory is presented in the following sections.

4.2 Germanic Verbal Prefixes and Future

The majority of old Germanic texts clearly demonstrate that the present tense served as the principle exponent of future. With regard to the prominent role of the present tense in the expression of future in early Germanic, it is sometimes referred to as the *non-past* (Faarlund 1994: 51, Harbert 2007: 6). There is, however, an additional factor that has been given some attention in this connection, namely the link between Germanic verbal prefixes, aspect and future.

The theory of Germanic aspect was developed largely by Streitberg (1891, 1920) who compared the Gothic prefixed and simple verbs with the Slavic aspectual system.¹⁰⁹ The Slavic system (which is essentially similar in the modern West and East Slavic languages and Old Church Slavonic) works in the following way. Imperfective verbs form the future through periphrasis, while perfective verbs express future by their present tense (cf. Cubberley – Sussex 2006: 288-290). Perfective verbs can thus refer to past or to future, but they are incapable of expressing presence. An imperfective verb can be made perfective, among other

¹⁰⁹ Aspectual parallels between Slavic and Germanic had already been observed by Jacob Grimm in his translation of Wuk Stephanowitch’s *Serbian Grammar* of 1824 (for an overview of the research history see Młynarczyk 2004: 38-44.) The issue was more thoroughly discussed particularly by Schleicher (1855) who concluded that the Slavic and Gothic systems of the expression of future are essentially the same, but the distinction between perfectives and imperfectives is less strict in Gothic than Old Church Slavonic.

means, by a prefix, as for example in Czech *jde* “s/he goes/is going”, *přijde* “s/he will come”.

Streitberg tried to apply the Slavic system to Gothic, arguing for systematic aspectual distinctions. He distinguished the imperfective future expressed by periphrasis on the one hand, and perfective future expressed by the presence of a prefix on the other hand (most often the prefix *ga-*). This theory sparked a debate that has not been resolved until the present day.¹¹⁰ The view that the prefix *ga-* has a perfectivizing force has nevertheless become a norm in Gothic handbooks and grammars (cf. e. g. Kieckers 1960: 270-272, Wright 1966: §413, Lambdin 2006:) and the theory has also been applied to other Germanic languages, chiefly English and German.

Even some proponents of Streitberg’s theory admit, however, that to postulate a Slavic-like system of strict aspectual oppositions for Gothic is untenable due to the many inconsistencies in the material. And it is not the aim of this dissertation to insist on the unassailability of Streitberg’s theory for Gothic either; instead, the intention is to look into the origin of such a system and examine whether it could ever have existed in Proto-Germanic. The idea has indeed been suggested by Coleman (1996: 6) and this line of reasoning is pursued further here. If it could be demonstrated that the perfectivizing function of prefixes and their use with present tense forms in future meaning is not a Gothic-specific feature and that it can also be found (at least residually) in other Germanic languages, it would increase the possibility that it existed in Proto-Germanic. Having made this detour, we will then return to Old Norse to approach the origin of the periphrastic future from a new perspective.

4.2.1 Verbal Prefixes and Future in Gothic

The imperfective future, as defined by Streitberg, is attested rather scarcely in Gothic. According to Streitberg (1920: § 301), it was expressed by the following auxiliary verbs: *duginnan* “to begin” (72), *haban* “to have” (73), *skulan*

¹¹⁰ See references in Broz (2013: 238-239) for the various views.

“to owe, must” (74), or alternatively, by the subjunctive (75).

- (72) *jah in þamma fagino, akei jah faginon duginna*
and in that rejoice.PRS but and rejoice.INF begin
καὶ ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω· ἀλλὰ καὶ χαρήσομαι,
“and I therein do rejoice, yea, and **will rejoice**”
(Phil. 1,18)¹¹¹

- (73) *þatei tauja jah taujan haba*
what do.PRS and do.INF have
δὲ ποιῶ καὶ ποιήσω
“what I do, that I **will do**”
(2 Cor. 11,12)

- (74) *hva skuli þata barn wairþan?*
what shall.SBJV that child become.INF
τί ἄρα τὸ παιδίον τοῦτο ἔσται
“what manner of child **shall this be**”
(Luk. 1,66)

- (75) *hvaiwa sijai þata*
how be.SBJV this
πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο
“how shall this be”
(Luk. 1,34)

All of the periphrastic constructions occur only several times in the Gothic corpus and it has been claimed by Kleyner (2015) that only *haban* (occurring three times in a futural meaning with the infinitive), may be considered futural. Coleman (1996) considers the periphrastic futures a foreign (Latin) influence and argues that they occur so seldom in the Gothic corpus because they postdate Wulfila’s translation and were implemented into the text by his revisers at a later point. The subjunctive is slightly more common but together with periphrasis only

¹¹¹ The Gothic and Greek texts along with the English translation are cited according to <http://www.wulfila.be>. The relevant verb forms in all the three languages and in the glosses are emphasized.

accounts for 5% of renderings of the Greek future.

Instances of perfective future are more frequent. According to Wood (2002: 176), prefixed presents are used in a futural meaning 65 times.¹¹² The overall number of attested prefixed present forms is 120 which means that slightly more than a half of the prefixed forms have a futural meaning.

The prefix *ga-* is typically used for that purpose, cf. (76 a.) and (77 a.). Examples (76 b.) and (77 b.) illustrate present meaning of corresponding unprefixed verbs.

- (76) a. *jah ains ize ni ga-driusip ana airba*
and one they.GEN not **PFV-falls** on earth
καὶ ἐν ἐξ αὐτῶν οὐ πεσεῖται ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν
“and one of them **shall** not **fall** on the ground”
(Mt. 10,29)

- b. *seinamma frauja standip aipbau driusip*
his master.DAT stands or **[IPFV]falls**
τῷ ἰδίῳ κυρίῳ στήκει ἢ πίπτει
“to his own master he standeth or **falleth**”
(Rom. 14,4)

- (77) a. *ik ga-taira alh þo handuaurhton jah bi þrins dagans anþara*
I **PFV-destroy** temple this hand.made and by three days other
unhanduaurhta ga-timrja
not.hand.made **PFV-build**
ἐγὼ καταλύσω τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον τὸν χειροποίητον καὶ διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν
ἄλλον ἀχειροποίητον οἰκοδομήσω
“I **will destroy** this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I
will build another made without hands”
(Mk. 14,58)

- b. *all mis binauht ist, akei ni all timreip*
all me lawful is but not all **[IPFV]builds**

¹¹² 30 times they translate the Greek future, 35 times the aorist subjunctive with a futural meaning.

πάντα ἔξεστιν, ἀλλ' οὐ πάντα οἰκοδομεῖ

“all things are lawful for me, but all things **edify** not”

(1 Cor. 10,23)

The prefix *ga-* is also used with present participles in a futural meaning (78).

(78) *ni ga-aiwiskonda*

not **PFV-being.ashamed**

οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσομαι

“**I will not be ashamed**”

(2 Cor. 10,8)

Other suffixes seem to be used in a similar manner, though less often, e. g. *uf-* (79), *us-*, *at-* (80), and in addition to perfectivity they may also contribute to the lexical meaning of the verb (for instance, *at-* expresses direction toward, cf. Lambdin 2008: 42).

(79) *audagai jus gretandans nu, unte uf-hlohjanda*

blessed you crying now because **PFV-laugh**

μακάριοι οἱ κλαίοντες νῦν, ὅτι γελάσετε

“blessed are ye that weep now: for ye **shall laugh**”

(Luk. 6,21)

(80) *jah ik jabai us-hauhjada af airpai, alla at-pinsa du mis*

and I if **PFV-be.lifted** of earth all **PFV-attract** to me

καὶ γὰρ ἐὰν ὑψωθῶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς, πάντας ἐλκύσω πρὸς ἐμαυτόν

“and I, if I **be lifted** up from the earth, **will draw** all men unto me”

(Jn. 12,32)

The use of prefixes to express a future meaning is, however, not quite consistent in Gothic. Coleman (1996: 7) observes, following West (1981), that aspectual marking in Gothic is mostly concentrated in contrastive pairs, i. e. in contexts where one finds a prefixed form expressing future and a parallel unprefixed form expressing presence. Such contrasts reveal the futural function of prefixes rather clearly (81).

- (81) a. *andbahtei mis, unte matja jah drigka,*
 serve me until [IPFV]eat and [IPFV]drink
jah biþe ga-matjis jah ga-drigkais þu
 and then PFV-eat and PFV-drink you
διακόνει μοι ἕως φάγω καὶ πίνω, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα φάγεσαι καὶ πίεσαι σύ
 “serve me, till I **have eaten** and **drunken**; and afterward thou **shalt eat**
 and **drink**”
 (Luk. 17,8)
- b. *unte hvazuh saei hauheip sik silba, ga-hnaiwjada,*
 because everyone that [IPFV]raises him self PFV-be.abased
jah saei hnaiweiþ sik silban, us-hauhjada
 and that [IPFV]abases him self PFV-be.raised
ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὑψῶν ἑαυτὸν ταπεινωθήσεται καὶ ὁ ταπεινῶν ἑαυτὸν ὑψωθήσεται
 “for whosoever **exalteth** himself **shall be abased**; and he that **humbleth**
 himself **shall be exalted**”
 (Luk. 14,11)
- c. *ga-arma þanei arma,*
 PFV-have.pity whom [IPFV]have.pity
jah ga-bleiþja þanei bleiþja
 and PFV-be.merciful whom [IPFV]be.merciful
ἐλεήσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ, καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω
 “I **will have mercy** on whom I **have mercy**, and I **will have compassion**
 on whom I **have compassion**”
 (Rom. 9,15)

It is true that inconsistencies are common, especially in cases where a contrast between prefixed and unprefixed forms is absent (see (83)).

Interestingly, the aspectual system is more consistent in the past tense. The Gothic prefixed preterite often corresponds to the Greek aorist (82 a.) and the Greek imperfect is usually rendered by an unprefixed preterite (82 b.) (cf. Coleman 1996: 5, Lambdin 2006: 16).

(82) a. [so] *ga-swalt*
 [she] **PFV-died**
ἀπέθανεν
 “she **died**”
 (Luk. 8,53)

b. *so swalt*
 she **[IPFV]died**
ἀπέθνησκειν
 “she **was dying**”
 (Luk. 8,42)

A lesser degree of consistency in the Gothic present as compared to the preterite is probably caused by greater ambiguity of the present tense forms. According to Coleman (1996: 9), a prefixed present could express not only future (usually perfective¹¹³) but also a perfective presence (83 a.). Also, an unprefixed present form could express presence as well as future, imperfective or unmarked for aspect (83 b.).

(83) a. *ip sa ubila bagms akrana ubila ga-taujip*
 but that evil tree fruits evil **PFV-makes**
τὸ δὲ σαπρὸν δένδρον καρποὺς πονηροὺς ποιεῖ
 “but a corrupt tree **bringeth** forth evil fruit”
 (Mt. 7,17)

b. *jabai hvis bidjip mik in namin meinamma, ik tauja*
 if anything ask.2PL me in name my I **[IPFV]do**
ἐάν τι αἰτήσητέ με ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου ἐγὼ ποιήσω
 “if ye shall ask any thing in my name, I **will do** it”
 (Jn. 14,14)

Coleman (1996: 7) therefore claims that “Streitberg’s view of a systematic opposition of perfective and imperfective was strongly overstated”. But Streitberg (1920: § 302) was actually aware of the ambiguity of perfective presents and

¹¹³ Harbert (2007: 297) claims that Gothic prefixed forms used in future meaning always carry a sense of perfectivity.

related it to the absence of a special class of iterative verbs. Germanic, as opposed to Slavic, had no formal means to form iterative verbs of the type like, for instance, the Czech *pře-skak-ov-at* “to be jumping over repeatedly”, formed with an iterative suffix from the perfective verb *pře-skák-at* “to jump over”. The Germanic perfective (prefixed) present, therefore, sometimes had to express an (iterative) present as in (83 a.),¹¹⁴ alongside with its normal use (i. e. future).

In other words, in the preterite, prefixes only served to distinguish between the perfective and imperfective aspect, while in the present there was a dimension of time (present vs. future) *in addition* to aspect. Prefixes used with the present tense forms were therefore not only aspectual markers but simultaneously, at least to some extent (and actually as a by-product of the aspectual function), also tense markers. According to Coleman (1996), the ambiguity of the perfective present tense forms was ultimately the reason their use to express futurity was not more widespread in Gothic.

On the other hand, the Gothic data do indicate that perfectivity was indeed the primary function of verbal prefixes. Wood (2002: 221) found that “a strong majority of prefixed verbs in Gothic serve to translate the Greek perfective forms (Aorist and Future)”. According to him (2002: 225), there is a 60-70% correspondence between perfectivity and the presence of a prefix. Also, as has been noted, a prefixed present form expresses the future more often than not.

As to the origin of the aspectual system in Gothic, two theories have been suggested. On the one hand, West (1981) and Wood (2002: 226) seem to imply that it developed within Gothic and thus consider it a Gothic innovation. Wood offers a possible explanation for this hypothesis, namely that it appeared as an areal characteristic in direct relation to Balto-Slavic.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, Coleman (1996: 6) claims that

¹¹⁴ An iterative meaning is mentioned as one of the functions of *ge-* in Middle High German (cf. Mausser 1932-1933: 990).

¹¹⁵ He would thus consider the Gothic system a loan from Slavic/Baltic, as opposed to Senn (1949: 409) who is inclined to believe “that the Slavs received the aspect system from the Goths and passed it on to the Baltic people”.

“it can plausibly be argued that what we have in the Gothic documents may be the residue of an older system in decline rather than one that has not yet (and perhaps never would have) become fully developed”.

Regrettably, Coleman does not elaborate his position, but an examination of the situation in (Old) English and (Old) High German could shed some light on the problem.

4.2.2 Verbal Prefixes and Future in English and German

The Proto-Germanic prefix **ga-* that played a main role in the aspectual distinctions in Gothic, is frequently attested in most Germanic dialects – in Old English as *ge-/gi-* (Middle English *y-*), Old High German *ga-* and *gi-*, and Old Saxon *ge-*, both in verbal and nominal composites. Etymologically, it is cognate with the Latin prefix *co(m)-* (cf. Lehmann 1986: 133).¹¹⁶

Perfectivization is mentioned as a primary meaning of the prefix in Old/Middle High German and Old English (cf. e. g. Paul 1929: § 305, Schmidt 2013: 317-318, Mitchell – Robinson 2003: 58). The perfectivizing force is still reflected in modern Dutch and German where the prefix developed a function of an obligatory grammatical marker of past participles, e. g. *geschrieben* “written”. This meaning can also be observed in lexical pairs like the Old English *winnan* “to fight” and *gewinnan* “to win”, German *hören* “to listen” and *gehören* “to obey”, Gothic *beidan* “to wait” and *gabeidan* “to endure” (cf. Coleman 1996: 5).

The range of meanings of the prefix in historical stages of German was rather wide (for an exhaustive list of meanings for Middle High German, see Mausser 1932-1933: 989-994). In OHG, it was typically used for preterites and past participles (cf. Wailes 2015: 341), and its role as a perfectivizing future marker has also been considered (see especially Lawson 1965, 1968). Senn (1949: 408) came to the conclusion that “Gothic and Old High German represent very much the same picture as Old Church Slavic, especially in the use of the

¹¹⁶ For different views, see Lindemann 1965 and Trobevšek-Drobnak 1994.

perfective present to express future action”.¹¹⁷

Instances of prefixed presents denoting the future can indeed be found in various Old High German texts. Lawson (1965: 91) notes that in the OHG translation of *Tatian*, the present tense of the Latin verb *congrego* is always translated with an unprefixated form, and the future tense with a prefixed form (84).

- (84) Lat. *congrego* – OHG *samanon* (“I gather”)
Lat. *congregabo* – OHG *gisamanon* (“I will gather”)
Lat. *congregat* – OHG *samanot* (“he gathers”)
Lat. *congregabit* – OHG *gisamanot* (“he will gather”)

However, a closer look at the evidence reveals that Senn’s claim is clearly overstated, as such degree of consistency is rather exceptional in the material. For instance, both the Latin present *perhibet* (“he says”) and the future *perhibebit* (“he will say”) are rendered with unprefixated *saget* in *Tatian* (Lawson 1965: 92). Such inconsistencies are, in fact, so numerous that Lawson (1965: 97) claims that “irregularities are in greater evidence than the system”. The perfective – imperfective contrast is according to him (Lawson 1968: 280) “applicable only on an individual basis and not on a systematic basis”. However, he (1965: 97) implies that the best interpretation of the occasional use of *gi-* to express future is to consider it a vestige of an earlier system.

Interestingly, for Middle High German, Schmidt (2013: 317-318) notes that perfective verbs (by which he means most of the prefixed ones) can be used in the present tense with future meaning. According to him, especially *ge-* is used for making imperfective verbs perfective, e. g. *ligen* “lie” – *geligen* “to come to lie”.¹¹⁸ Imperfective verbs, on the other hand, need to be supported by context.

¹¹⁷ In support of his view, Senn (1949: 407) cites Old High German translations of Latin *Isidor* in which prefixed presents correspond to Latin future: “(*Ih*) *chidhuuingu dhir aerdriihhes hruomege* = Lat. *gloriosos terre humiliabo*; *ih chifestinon* = *firmabo*; *ih aruuehhu* = *suscitabo*; *ih chistiftu* = *statuam, stabiliam*; *ih firchnussu* = *conteram*”

¹¹⁸ Though Paul (1929: § 305-306) points out that the perfectivizing force of *ge-* was already in decline in Middle High German, and a more common meaning of the prefix was that of generalization.

As in the case of Streitberg's claim about Gothic, positing a Slavic-like aspectual system for OHG turned out to be untenable, but at the same time it is obvious that futural use of prefixed presents existed in OHG, though a precise degree of this phenomenon is hard to assess at the present state of research.

Old English represents perhaps the most complicated case as to the history and meaning of the prefix *ge-/gi-*. It has been a subject of a great number of articles and a discussion of the literature available on this topic is well beyond the scope of this dissertation (summaries of the various views can be found in Lindemann 1965 and Trobevšek-Drobnak 1994). The notion that it primarily had a perfectivizing meaning has, however, become the mainstream view, as in the other Germanic languages (cf. e. g. Kastovsky 2005: 380).

Blackburn (1892: 21) who follows Streitberg's theory and posits an aspectual prefix system at least for Proto-Germanic and to some extent for Gothic, argues that Old English did not preserve any traces of the system. Steadman (1917: 35) came to quite a different conclusion, namely that the contrast between perfectives and imperfectives was still present in Old English and that the present forms of perfective verbs were used to denote future more often than those of imperfective verbs.

His conclusion is based on an analysis of several Old English texts. In *Appolonius of Tyre* the number of perfective verbs that use their present tense for the future is 15, as opposed to 4 imperfectives. For *Beowulf* this ratio is 24:10. In the *Elene* the present form of a perfective verb has a present meaning in 2 cases and a future meaning in 20 cases, while the present form of an imperfective verb has a present meaning in 11 cases and future in 14 cases. In the first ten chapters of the Old English translation of *The Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 75% of futures are translated with a perfective present (see Steadman 1917: 35-39 for detailed results). It should be noted that apart from prefixed verbs (with *ge-* like in *ge-wyrcean* "to work" (85) or other prefixes like *for-* in *for-sweorcan* "to darken" (86)), Steadman includes some verbs that are "perfective" by means of their lexical aspect (aktionsart), such as *niman* "to take" (85).

(85) *ic me mid Hruntinge dom ge-wyrce | oþðe mec deað nimeð*

I me with Hrunting glory **PFV-make** or me death **[PFV]takes**

“I myself with Hrunting **will win** distinction or death **will take** me off”
(Beowulf 1492-1493)¹¹⁹

- (86) *oððe eageña beorhtm for-siteð 7 for-sworced*
or of.eyes brightness **PFV-fails** and **PFV-darkens**
“or your eyes’ brightness **will become faded** and **fail**”
(Beowulf 1769-1770)

As in Gothic, some prefixes may also contribute to the lexical meaning of the verb (cf. *for-sittan* “to diminish” and *sittan* “to sit”, on the other hand, in *for-sweorcan* “to darken”, the lexical meaning is preserved, cf. *sweorcan* “to darken”).

It is worth noting that prefixed verbs in a futural meaning can also occur in conditional clauses as in (87), where future tenses are often restricted, cf. Chapter 1.

- (87) a. *Gif ic þæt ge-|fricge ofer floda begang*
If I that **PFV-learn** over of.waters expanse
“if I **learn** that over the length of the sea”
(Beowulf 1829)
- b. *gif mec se mansceaða of eorðsele ut ge-seced*
if me that evil.scather of earth.hall out **PFV-fights**
“if me the evil-scather from out of its earth hall **comes to attack**”
(Beowulf 2515-2516)

Steadman’s results, albeit derived from a limited amount of texts, indicate that Old English favoured perfective verbs in a futural context.

Interestingly, the preference to use verbs with a (lexically) perfective aspect in a futural context has also been noticed in Modern English and German (cf. Hilpert 2008: Chapter 6). In Modern English, futural use of the present tense is rather common for scheduled future events, and there is, according to Hilpert, a

¹¹⁹ The Old English text and the translations are cited according to Electronic Beowulf. Fourth Edition: <http://ebeowulf.uky.edu/ebeo4.0/CD/main.html> [accessed in June 2021]. The relevant words are emphasized.

preference for inceptive and telic verbs (i. e. inherently perfective verbs), such as *start, begin, open, leave, continue, arrive, meet, finish* etc. Moreover, Hilpert (2008: 168) argues that imperfectives, such as activity verbs (e. g. *play, fly, go*) and stative verbs (e. g. *have, be*) acquire a perfective meaning in a futural context (88).

(88) *England's women play the Soviet Union tomorrow.*

In German, the present tense is also preferred for scheduled future event, but it is generally used more often than in English. It can actually be considered the main means of future expression in German as it covers about 70% of future references (Hilpert 2008: 170-172). Similarly to English, German shows a general preference for perfective verbs in future context, i. e. both telic verbs (e. g. *kommen, treffen, erhalten, finden*) and inceptive verbs (e. g. *beginnen, öffnen, anfangen*). Abraham (1989: 351) emphasizes the role of prefixes for the aspectual expression of future. Hilpert (2008: 175) claims that imperfective verbs can also be coerced into a perfective reading in a futural context in German (89).

(89) *Im nächsten Jahr feiert das Unternehmen sein 25jähriges Bestehen.*

On the other hand, the German future periphrastic construction with *werden* has been found to be most common with imperfective verbs (Hilpert 2008: Chapter 5). This correlation of imperfective verbs with periphrasis on the one hand, and perfective verbs with the present tense on the other, corresponds remarkably to the system suggested by Streitberg (1891, 1920) for Gothic.

It has also been noted that telicity plays an important role in the use of present tense for future in Danish and Swedish (for references, see Hilpert 2008: 178) which Hilpert interprets as a part of a more general tendency, namely the preference for the use of perfective verbs in a future context.

That there is indeed such a general tendency can be illustrated by the fact that it is not limited to Slavic or Germanic languages. It plays a role, for instance, in Japanese. Progressive aspect of Japanese non-past forms will usually be interpreted as present, while non-progressive aspect of such forms commonly expresses the future (cf. Comrie 1989: 57-58).

Hilpert (2008) does not interpret the English and German data in historical terms (and does not mention the Gothic aspectual theory). It is therefore not clear whether this tendency in modern languages should be considered a continuation of the older system. With regard to the fact that a similar inclination to correlate perfective/non-progressive aspect with future can be found in an unrelated language such as Japanese, it seems more plausible that the Modern English, German and Scandinavian data are, at least in part, a reflection of a more general, cross-linguistic tendency as assumed by Hilpert (2008). These data from modern/unrelated languages therefore provide an additional piece of evidence that even languages that do not have a “Slavic-like” system of strict aspectual distinctions may show preference for perfective verbs in a futural context.

4.2.3 Conclusion

The preceding discussion may be summarized as follows. The use of **ga-* and other verbal prefixes is not identical across Germanic languages, but a perfective meaning can be found in Gothic, as well as in Old English and Old High German. It is particularly clear in the Gothic preterite, but also prefixed present tense forms tend to have a perfective meaning and thereby predominantly, though not always, serve to denote a future action. This use can also be found in Old/Middle High German and Old English, but probably with a lesser degree of consistency.

Based on this survey, it seems justified to claim that the perfectivizing function of prefixes is not a Gothic innovation or an areal feature related to Balto-Slavic as suggested by Wood (2002), but rather a feature that Gothic inherited from Proto-Germanic. It has indeed been suggested “that the preverb *ga-* of Germanic fills in for the perfective form of the verb after the IE aspectual system was dropped in favor of a temporal system in this branch” (Giannakis 1993: 494, endnote 9). The Gothic use of the prefix to render the Greek Aorist (whether in a past or future meaning) particularly supports this view. Lehmann (1986: 133) even argued that the

“aspectual application [of *ga-*] may be pre-Gmc, as in **pahan* : Lat *tacēre*

be silent versus **ga-pahan* become silent : Lat *con-ticēre* become silent, cease speaking. In view of the absence of verbal prefixes in PIE the aspectual application was a West European innovation”.

It is not to be assumed that verbal prefixes were ever used systematically in Proto-Germanic as a fully-fledged marker of a future tense, because one would then expect to find more traces of such a system in the daughter languages. More likely, prefixes were used as a supportive means to express the future in contexts where a more explicit reference to the future was needed, for instance, to distinguish two present tense forms used in parallel, one referring to the present, the other to future, as in (81). Since verbal prefixes were not confined to the present tense forms, but were also employed in the preterite and past participles, they cannot be characterized as proper (future) tense markers. It shows that their primary function was that of signalling aspect and that the futural meaning arose as a by-product of perfectivity. As illustrated by modern Germanic languages and Japanese, preference for perfective verbs in a futural context is a more general tendency, and as such it provides further typological support for the existence of such a system in Proto-Germanic.

4.3 Prefixes in North Germanic

As the reader has undoubtedly understood, Old Norse has been left out from this discussion for the very reason that it virtually lacks (unstressed) verbal prefixes. Comparative evidence, as well as some syntactic and morphological reflexes in Old Norse (cf. Christiansen 1960, Lehmann 1978) suggest, however, that it once had a similar prefix system as the other Germanic languages, which at some point almost entirely vanished. It has been suggested by Kuhn (1929) and Dal (1930) that the “expletive particles” *of* and *um* found in Old Norse poetry are reflexes of the lost prefixes. This view was recently advocated by Olsen (2019: 74-81) who claims that the use of the expletive particles largely corresponds to the use of prefixes in other Germanic languages. On the other hand, Schulte (2003) claims it is unlikely that the Old Norse expletive particles are a direct continuation of the lost prefixes since he believes that the prefix loss occurred as early as the Early Runic period (see below).

A few direct, albeit rather tiny remnants of Proto-Germanic prefixes can be identified in Old Norse. Particularly the prefix **ga-* was preserved in a reduced form in several words beginning in *gl-*, *gr-* and *gn-*.¹²⁰ Hence, one may ask when it disappeared from the system. The Nordic prefix loss is generally considered to have occurred no earlier than during the Transitional Period, i. e. 6-7th century, due to phonological reasons (cf. Syrett 2002: 726, Strid 2002: 736, Haugen 1976: 159, Voyles 1992: 113-115).¹²¹ According to this view, the prefix loss is thus essentially the same phenomenon as the syncope and apocopy which also occurred during that period. The Early Runic language of the 2-5th century would thus have still possessed most of the Germanic preverbs, according to this dating.

In the Older Runic inscriptions there is only one generally accepted attestation of a prefix, namely in the Norwegian Reistad inscription (KJ 74 Reistad) containing the word *unnam*. This form is interpreted by Schulte (2003: 396) in the following way:

**und-nam* ‘I undertook’, contains the prefix Gmc. **unþ-/unð-* as do Go *und-greipan* ‘take, seize’ and *und-rinnan* ‘fall-to (by inheritance)’

The word *unnam* occurs together with *wraitā* and Schulte interprets the collocation as “I undertook writing”.¹²² Eyþórsson (1999: 195), on the other hand,

¹²⁰ See Christiansen (1960: 342-343): e. g. *granni* “neighbour” (cf. Goth. *garazna*), *greiða* “to furnish” (cf. Goth. *garaidjan*), *greiðr* “ready” (cf. Goth. *garaiþs*, OE *geræde*), *grein* “distinction, understanding” (cf. Goth. *garaiþeins*), *glikr*, later *likr* “alike” (cf. Goth. *galeiks*, OE *gelic*), *glófi* “glove” (cf. OE *glof*, cf. ON *lófi* “palm”), *gnógr*, later *nógr* “enough” (cf. Goth. *ganohs*, OE *genog*), *gnúa*, also *núa* “to rub”. Christiansen further mentions two words that, according to her, contain the prefix *bi-*: *breiða* “to get something ready”, **bnúa* “to rub” (attested only in the preteritum *bnéri* with same meaning as *gnúa* (cf. Goth. *bnauan*)), and one lexeme with the PG prefix *at-*: *teygja* “to stretch out” (cf. Goth. *ataugjan*). In Eddic poems, several verbs can be found with the prefix **furi-*: *fyrbanna*, *fyrbjóða*, *fyrgrøva*, *fyrmunna*, *fyrteija*. Fulk (2018: 96) further mentions *fryja* “to defy” as containing the suffix *fra-* (cf. Goth. *fra-wrōhjan*). Apart from these verbal prefixes, several others have been reconstructed for North Germanic, see Vonhof (1905).

¹²¹ Apart from phonological reasons, scholars sometimes mention additional factors that facilitated the loss (cf. Syrett 2002: 726, Christiansen 1960: 352-354, Whaley 2012: lii).

¹²² The missing *d-* of the prefix disappeared due to its position between two alveolar nasals (see Christiansen 1960: 351).

bases his translation of *unnam* on the view that the prefix has a purely aspectual function, believing that the meaning is “to take hold of, grasp“.

Syrett (2002: 726) concedes that *und-* is the only “moderately clear example” of an Early Runic prefix, but claims that it is certain that verbal prefixes still existed in Early Runic. However, there are some contexts in the early inscriptions for which one would, on semantical and grammatical grounds, assume a prefixed form if it were written in a Germanic idiom that generally makes use of prefixes, cf. Schulte (2005: 241):

“One might thus ponder whether **tawido** and **worahto** in the Scandinavian runic inscriptions of Gallehus (KJ 72) and Tune (KJ 72) reflect earlier Gmc */ga-tawiðo:n/ and */ga-wurhto:n/; cf. Runic OE **gewarahtæ** on the Mortain casket and Runic WGmc. **gasokun** on the belt-buckle of Pforzen”.

The implication of this observation is in direct contrast to the traditional dating, and another theory has been suggested that offers a better account of the prefix loss.

4.3.1 The Early Loss Theory

According to Schulte (2003, 2005), the chronology of the “left-hand” and “right-hand” reduction in Nordic (that is respectively, at the beginning of a word and at the end of a word or medially) falls into different periods. He dates “right-hand” reduction, i. e. syncope and apocope, to the transitional period (500-650 AD) and thus in accordance with the traditional dating. As for the prefix loss, Schulte argues that it had already occurred by the time of Early Runic (150/200 AD). He (2003) suggests that there was a tripartite stress distinction of prefixes (stressed, weakly or secondarily stressed and unstressed) as opposed to the traditional bipartite view (stressed, unstressed). According to Schulte (2003), it was only the completely unstressed prefixes that were dropped at an early date (i. e. before Early Runic). Any prefixes that are actually attested in the Older Runic inscriptions (i. e. **und-* in Reistad *unnam*) must, consequently, bear primary or secondary stress.

As evidence for this hypothesis, he presents the ON prefixes *fyr-*, *for-* which are only attested in Eddic poetry and are thought to be unstressed since they do not alliterate. However, as he aptly notes, the ON vowel system of unstressed syllables contained only three vowels: /a/ /i/ /u/. The prefix *fyr-* cannot, therefore, be completely unstressed. It demands a secondary stress level. Additional evidence for the existence of a weak stress is, according to Schulte (2003: 395), the prefix *ó-*, *ú-*, occurring in two variants.¹²³

However, Schulte (2005: 244) argues further that “prefixes’ lack of stress alone cannot be a sufficient motivation for losing them entirely”. He puts two arguments forward in support of this view. First, there is no indication of the gradual weakening of pre-tonic (“left-hand”) vowels in older Scandinavian runic inscriptions (such as has been observed in Old English runic inscriptions e. g. prefixes *bi-* *gi-* > *be-*, *ge-*), while the weakening of vowels in post-tonic (“right-hand”) syllables is clearly noticeable in inscriptions of the Transitional Period. And second, reduction in pre-tonic syllables (i. e. prefixes) is greater when compared to post-tonic syllables (suffixes, endings).¹²⁴

Schulte thus considers the lack of stress a *conditio sine qua non* and suggests that rhythmic-metrical conditions (called “Prosodic Repair Strategies”) were involved as a further factor. According to this theory, languages favour certain foot structures and use various strategies (shortening, lengthening, deletion) to attain them (see Schulte 2005 for examples from Latin, Modern Norwegian and German). Schulte (2003: 398) assumes that Early Runic was inclined to favour quantity-sensitive trochee as the basic metrical unit, “both at

¹²³ Schulte (2003: 395-396) finds a typological parallel in modern German to support his view. There are completely unstressed (inseparable prefixes (e. g. *geschwunden*) in which the vowel is reducible to schwa or can even be dropped. Second, he mentions the existence of adverbial and prepositional morphemes like *über-*, *unter-*, *hinter-*, *durch-*, *um-* which can occur with weak or full stress, depending on the meaning and whose vowels are not reducible and thus opposed to the unstressed prefixes, e. g. *'umfahren* “run down” vs. *um'fahren* “drive round”, *'übersetzen* “pass over” vs. *über'setzen* “translate”.

¹²⁴ In the “left-hand” position, reduction involves two moras, e. g. *[unθ.'nam] > ON *nam* “took, undertook” (1st and 3rd sing. pret.), while in the “right-hand” position, it involves only one mora, e. g. ['fer.ðunz] > ON *fjorðu* “fjords” (acc.plur.), cf. Schulte (2005: 245).

word level and at sentence level”.¹²⁵ Due to language-specific properties (cf. Schulte 2005: 249-250) the language cannot use lengthening strategy, and deletion processes are thus employed as a central Prosodic Repair Strategy. Unaccented pre-tonic syllables were therefore dropped. By contrast, if the prefix **und-* in Reistad *unnam* bore a primary stress, it would form a perfect trochee which was the favoured foot structure.¹²⁶

The chronological implication is that the loss of unstressed prefixes in North Germanic occurred much earlier than previously believed, even before the Early Runic period. Schulte (2003: 399) considers it “one of the earliest distinct traits of North Germanic which signals its split from West Germanic”.

As mentioned above, it is assumed that the prefix loss led to some syntactic changes. Apart from the theory of the “expletive particle” of Kuhn (1929) and Dal (1930) which is, however, not in harmony with the early loss theory according to Schulte (2003), there is Lehmann’s (1978) idea that the lack of suffixes in early North Germanic is suggestive of an OV language, and the rise of phrasal verbs may also be connected to the prefix loss (cf. Denison 1981, Harbert 2007: 39-40). Based on the previous discussion of the function of prefixes, another syntactic change can be connected to the Nordic prefix loss, namely the emergence of the periphrastic future.

4.3.2 The Emergence of the Periphrastic Future

As noted above, periphrastic future appeared rather late in (Middle) English and (Middle) High German, actually during the recorded period of their history, as opposed to Old Norse. Steadman (1917) attempted to connect the emergence of periphrastic future in English and German to the aspectual function of Germanic prefixes. He (1917: 40) argued that no Germanic language developed a periphrastic future until after aspectual distinctions became weakened. The

¹²⁵ Interestingly, Schulte (2003: 398) argues that the Ellestad inscription (KJ 59) even contains some hypercorrect forms that were implemented in order to form a perfect trochee.

¹²⁶ Schulte (2003: 397) further compares *unnam* to ON formations containing the stressed prefix *um-* and *undir-* (e. g. *umgefinn*, *umbera*, *undirstanda*).

chronology seems indeed to correspond to this view. The perfectivizing meaning of *ge-* was in decline in Middle High German (cf. Paul 1929: §305), and in English, *ge-* began to drop “as early as the tenth century, especially in Northumbrian (possibly connected with the Scandinavian tendency to lose prefixes)” (Lass 2006: 147). In most dialects it disappeared by the Middle English period.

Steadman’s claim has a special significance for Old Norse (of which Steadman was probably unaware since Old Norse is barely mentioned by him). Considering the aforementioned perfectivizing/futural function of Germanic prefixes, one can draw a line between the prefix loss/weakening of aspectual distinctions in Old Norse and the subsequent rise of future periphrastic construction in which the verb *munu* played a prominent role.¹²⁷

Munu was initially restricted by the two constraints mentioned earlier (the animacy of the agent and volitional character of the action), but it is likely that its use as an unequivocal exponent of futurity was increasing relatively rapidly. First, it lacked the ambiguities which, ultimately, prevented the prefixed verbal forms from becoming a consistent, “Slavic-like” system. And second, the source meaning of *munu* (i. e. “to intend”) was so close to a futural meaning that it was, so to speak, just one step away from becoming a future auxiliary. Considering the abrupt disappearance of prefixes in North Germanic, the narrow link between intention and future might have been a reason why *munu*, and not another verb, was employed as future auxiliary. Its meaning made it readily available to fill in the gap in the expression of future. The high degree of grammaticalization seen in *munu* (its frequency, early attested secondary uses, the dynamic morphological development) is indicative of a long history of the verb as a grammatical item. Schulte’s theory of the early prefix loss provides an appropriate explanation for this, and besides, it seems to offer a more plausible interpretation of the runic data in general.

Interestingly, the loss of verbal prefixes and the emergence of the

¹²⁷ This idea was actually hinted at by Sieberer (1925: 96) who, however, concludes that the periphrastic future appeared earlier in Nordic than in West Germanic undoubtedly due to “a more advanced culture of the North Germanic people”.

periphrastic future can be linked to another unique feature of the Old Norse tense system, not shared by the other old Germanic languages – the use of the historical present.

4.4 The Emergence of the Historical Present

Historical present means the use of the present tense to refer to a past action. It is one of the most notable characteristics of Old Norse prose, particularly the saga style, where verbs frequently switch between the present and the preterite, even within a single sentence (cf. Haugen 2002: 272). In some sagas, the use of the historical present is so widespread that it actually becomes the predominant narrative tense (cf. Steblin-Kamenskij 1955: § 130). In poetry, its use is rather exceptional although it does occur in some Eddic poems (Nygaard 1867: 5-6).

The functions of Old Norse historical present have been debated rather extensively (for an overview, see Zeevaert 2018: 152-157). According to Nygaard (1905: 181), historical present is used when “the narrative becomes livelier as the narrator’s fantasy is taken over by the situation” and also “when one wishes to pass easily and quickly over some less important moments”. Nygaard’s view was partly corroborated by Lehmann (1939) who argued that historical present is a feature of oral narratives used to highlight important or dramatic episodes. Ultan (1978) links this function of historical present to greater reality of the present as compared to the past which is more remote from the speaker. The use of historical present (or “frontshifting“ as he calls it) brings past events closer to the speaker and makes them more real.¹²⁸ Sprenger (1950) makes a distinction between older, in her opinion orally transmitted sagas, where the present is the main, unmarked narrative tense and the preterite used to foreground significant moments, and on

¹²⁸ Ultan (1978) makes an interesting observation comparing historical present (“frontshifting“) with “backshifting“, i. e. using past tense in order to achieve greater politeness (as in *I wanted to ask you a question*, cf. Bybee 1995: 508). While the purpose of historical present is, according to Ultan, to make past events more real, the function of “backshifting“ is the reverse: to make a statement more remote, and hence more “unreal“. According to Ultan (1978: 117), “[t]he ‘frontshifting’ of historical tenses is the mirror image of backshifting“.

the other hand, later, literary sagas in which the situation is reverse: the preterite is the unmarked narrative tense and historical present is used for foregrounding.

Other scholars analysed the use of historical present in Old Norse using linguistic rather than literary criteria. Torgilstveit (2007) focused on the aktionsart of verbs that occur frequently in historical present and found, by analysing several Old Norse texts, that most such verbs are punctual, while durative verbs are more frequently in the preterite.¹²⁹ On the other hand, the opposite conclusion was reached by an earlier analysis by Wood (1965). Zeevaert (2018: 157) notes that the various contradictory theories are often based on too few examples that are generalized and counterexamples are ignored or considered exceptions.

Rokkjær (1963) approached the problem from a different perspective. He made a chronological and genre-related comparison of a number of Old Norse literary works with regard to the use of the historical present. He found that the earliest prose works, *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, do not contain any instances of the historical present. They are written purely in the preterite. However, as early as the second half of the 12th century, the historical present is used in some works quite extensively (e. g. *Breta sögur*, *Trójumanna saga*, both works are translations from about 1190). Rokkjær's conclusion is that the use of historical present is mostly genre-bound. On one hand, there are sober, historical, scholarly works with no or little occurrence of historical present, and on the other hand there are texts of a popular and entertaining nature, and pseudo-historical works. The function of the historical present in Old Norse prose is thus, according to Rokkjær, to give the text an oral flavour. In other words, he claims that it was originally a feature characteristic of colloquial language, but was adopted by authors to make the text more lively or to give it a quasi-oral look.¹³⁰

By contrast, Kunz (1994: 105) suggests a possible Latin influence, considering the frequent use of the historical present in early Old Norse

¹²⁹ Considering that the punctual aktionsart is a semantic counterpart of the perfective aspect, Torgilstveit's claim that punctual verbs are at the core of historical present (if it is indeed a general tendency) would represent an additional support for Steadman's theory that historical present could only arise after a weakening of aspectual distinctions.

¹³⁰ Zeevaert (2018: 165) expresses a similar view.

translations from Latin. There are, however, original, non-translated works from the same period in which the historical present is used copiously, e. g. *The Oldest Saga of Saint Óláfr* from ca. 1170-1180.¹³¹

There are thus two radically different views concerning the origin of Old Norse historical present. First, it is a feature of the Old Norse vernacular storytelling. Second, it entered Old Norse as a foreign element – from Latin, or perhaps as suggested by Sweet, from Old Irish.¹³²

A brief comparison with English and German may help shed some light on the problem.¹³³ In Old English, the historical present was not used and was also consistently avoided in translations from Latin into Old English, on the other hand it was used in the Latin writings of Englishmen of that period. In the English vernacular, it only appeared in the 13th century and became more common during the 14th century.

Various theories have been proposed to account for the rise of historical present in Middle English.¹³⁴ It has often been attributed to foreign influence, Old French in particular. But this can hardly be true since it was apparently known to Anglo-Saxons even before the Norman Conquest – it appears in their Latin writings. A lack of “the warmth which gives scope for the subjective view” in Old English, as advanced by Maetzner (1874: 68 ff.),¹³⁵ is not a valid explanation either, for the same reason.

In Old High German, the historical present is also absent and even in the Middle High German period it occurs “exceedingly seldom” (Schmidt 2013: 318). The explanations advanced to account for that have been along similar lines (cf. Steadman 1917: 1-2.)

¹³¹ Preserved only in fragments, but even those contain a high amount of cases of historical present (cf. Rokkjær 1963: 200).

¹³² This opinion of Henry Sweet is mentioned by Steadman (1917: 23-24), yet without any reference.

¹³³ The following summary is taken from Steadman (1917: 44).

¹³⁴ For a summary see the discussion in Steadman (1917: 2-3), also Fischer (2006: 242-245).

¹³⁵ Quoted in Steadman 1917: 2.

The crucial problem here that any viable theory must tackle is, as aptly summarized by Steadman (1917: 25),

“not the appearance of the historical present in Middle English, or in Middle High German, but the absence of this use of the present in the older stages of these languages and the conscious avoidance of it in translating Latin into Old English”.

Another theory that was proposed for both German and English relates the rise of the historical present to the emergence of the periphrastic future (for references, see Steadman 1917: 1-3): Since the present tense already served to express the present and the future, it would cause confusion if it were also used for past reference. This explanation was also mentioned by Nygaard (1867: 6) in relation to the relatively few cases of historical present in the Poetic Edda. According to him, instances of historical present are very limited in Old Norse poetry, as opposed to prose, because Old Norse poetic language represents a more archaic stage, on a par with Gothic and Old High German.

Steadman (1917) elaborates on this theory, following Behaghel (1899). He connects the rise of the historical present to the aspectual distinction which he argues still existed to some extent in Old English (as already discussed above). He (1917: 43-44) claims that as long as the present tense of perfective verbs was predominantly used to express the future, it could not be widely used in the form of the historical present for the past. The breakdown of the aspectual oppositions thus had a twofold effect, according to Steadman. It induced the emergence of the periphrastic future constructions and enabled the present tense forms to take on a past meaning. He thus argues that both the emergence of periphrastic future (which decreased the functional load of the present tense) and the weakening of aspectual distinctions facilitated the use of historical present. This theory corresponds chronologically to the data because “both in English and in German the origin of the periphrastic future antedates the use of the historical present as a linguistic phenomenon” (Steadman 1917: 43).

Old Norse has been practically ignored in the discussion on aspect, but it fits the whole picture rather nicely, providing Steadman’s theory with additional support. Old Norse is the first Germanic language that lost its perfectivizing

prefixes, the first one that developed a periphrastic future and the first one that employed the use of historical present, practically since the earliest extant writings.¹³⁶

The presented account of the origin of the historical present does not actually exclude a foreign influence because the prefix loss only prepared the ground for it. However, it seems likely that the historical present was put into use at some point *before* the literary era since it occurs in the oldest texts in which one would expect it to occur. This is in harmony with the assumed early breakdown of aspectual distinctions in North Germanic and the subsequent emergence of the periphrastic future. It can be deduced that the earlier one dates the origin of the historical present, the greater the probability that it was not taken from Latin. Considering this along with the view that the purpose of the historical present in Old Norse texts is, arguably, to give the text an oral look, it seems more plausible that the historical present is an original Nordic phenomenon.

4.5 The Status of the Old Norse (Historical/Futural) Present

As a consequence of the widespread use of the historical present in Old Norse prose, the present tense became applicable, to various extents, to all time levels. Haugen (2002: 96) characterizes it as “an unmarked tense that can be defined as non-preterite. The preterite, on the other hand, is clearly localized in the past”.

The fact that the present tense can be used for past, present and future (as

¹³⁶ According to Rokkjær (1963), the absence of the historical present in the two oldest prose works, *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, is more likely to be genre-related. The same claim can be made about the limited use of the historical present in poetry. Nygaard (1867: 6) connects that to the general characteristic that Old Norse poetry preserves a more archaic form of the language, but it is possible that there was simply no great need for the historical present in poetry. Assuming that the historical present was used to foreground or highlight certain moments, it becomes obvious that such a stylistic device would be rather superfluous for Old Norse poetry in most cases. Old Norse poems typically describe events not through a continuous narration, but rather through highlighting certain salient moments, using highly ornamented poetic language. An additional foregrounding through the use of the historical present would have been unnecessary.

well as for non-temporal conditions) does not, however, mean that it can be equated with the preterite or the future tense, respectively. The use of the present tense in its secondary domains (i. e. the future and particularly in the past) is governed by certain restrictions.

Historical present is not used, for instance, in direct speech as well as “descriptions that are still valid at the time of the composition of the narrative” (Zeevaert 2018: 152), such as geographical descriptions, descriptions of customs etc. (cf. Wood 1965: 107-108) The use of historical present as a stylistic narrative device is, according to Zeevaert (2018: 169) enabled by

“a mutual agreement between reader and narrator that the narration takes place in a temporal and spatial frame outside of the narrative situation or the act of reading or listening”.

Direct speech, by contrast, can refer to all time levels without restrictions. The use of the present tense in a past meaning in direct speech could, therefore, cause a serious misunderstanding.

Since a considerable part of Old Norse literature involves narrative content, the historical present is attested rather abundantly, but it should be kept in mind that it is a stylistic device with a restricted sphere of use. Its frequency in daily language was probably much lower.

The special status of historical presents in general led Ultan (1978) to exclude them (along with gnomic tenses) from making general statements on tense systems. According to him (1978: 87), “[h]istorical tenses are probably best regarded as special stylistic uses of the basic MOS [moment of speech] tenses”. While this is a reasonable claim, it does not seem justified to completely ignore the historical present in comparing various tense systems. The fact that it is so commonly attested in Old Norse sources and almost non-existent in Old English should be taken into consideration, especially if there may be a connection with the expression of future.

As for the use of the futural present, it is dependent on future context in a similar way that the historical present is dependent on a past context, but in contrast to the historical present, it does not seem to be further restricted by a

particular genre or discourse. At the same time, it is significantly less frequent than the periphrastic expression of future (disregarding subordinate clauses) which implies that periphrasis is the unmarked way of future expression in Old Norse.

In this light, Haugen's characterization of the Old Norse present tense as *non-preterite* seems a more suitable designation¹³⁷ than *non-past* as its use in a past meaning is rather common (keeping in mind the above-mentioned restrictions). Consequently, the designation *non-past* should rather be reserved for the Old English, Old High German and Gothic present tense where it quite accurately characterizes its most common uses (i. e. present and future reference), while it is not as appropriate for the Old Norse present which refers to the past frequently enough, and relatively seldom to the future.¹³⁸ In short, one can say that the Old Norse present is *non-past* to a much lesser extent than, say, the Old English one.

4.6 Conclusion

It has been shown that a foreign language (Latin) influence concomitant to the introduction of Christianity which is often mentioned as a cause for the origin of future periphrasis in Germanic is not an appropriate explanation for Old Norse, taking into consideration the early attestation of future periphrasis dating back to the 9th century, a period before Christianization.

The early emergence of future periphrasis in North Germanic can be linked

¹³⁷ Albeit a bit vague since it only states what the present tense is not from the grammatical/morphological point of view. But a certain vagueness is an inevitability if one wants to characterize a tense with as broad a time range as the Old Norse present encompasses.

¹³⁸ Whether it is the past or the future use of the present tense which is more common is hard to say, since no statistical analysis has been carried out in this regard. It would probably differ considerably not only between genres but also between individual texts: the percentage of past references expressed by historical present in sagas of Icelanders range from 3.2% to 78% (Zeevaert 2018: 155-156). The proportion of future references expressed by the present tense in the sagas is about 13% (Sćur 1964), but these numbers are not quite comparable.

to the loss of Proto-Germanic verbal prefixes (particularly the prefix **ga-*) which had a perfectivizing function and expressed the future when used with present tense forms, essentially in a similar way (though by no means as systematically) as in the Slavic languages. This is based particularly on the evidence from Gothic and indications of a similar nature in Old English and Old/Middle High German.

After the disappearance of prefixes in Nordic which may have occurred much earlier than traditionally assumed (cf. Schulte 2003, 2005) the function of a more explicit future marker was taken over by a periphrastic construction with the verb *munu* whose original meaning “to intend” provided for a smooth transition to the future.

Weakened aspectual distinctions as well as the decreased semantic load of the present tense forms then opened a way for the rise of the historical present. The prefix loss thus also facilitated the extensive early use of historical present which became the hallmark of the Old Norse saga style whereas it was virtually non-existent in the contemporary Germanic languages.

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation has been to present a theory of the emergence of the North Germanic periphrastic future. Within that framework, synchronic properties of the exponents of future have also been examined as well as their origin and grammaticalization.

It has been corroborated in this dissertation that the main means of the expression of future in Old Norse was the verb *munu*. It is the most frequent exponent and it does not seem to be restricted by any specific context except in some types of subordinate clauses, which is a widespread cross-linguistic characteristic of future tenses, nor are there any substantial differences in the expression of future across different literary genres. Even the oldest Skaldic poems, whose origin dates back to the 9th century, show the same tendencies.

It has been argued here that the source meaning of *munu*, “to intend”, which had been considered intact in Old Norse by Nygaard (1878, 1905) did not leave any trace in the language. It was completely dissolved during the grammaticalization process. That is why the *munu*-future has such a neutral meaning that can be compared to the futural present with which it occasionally occurs side by side. The other exponent of the periphrastic future, the verb *skulu*, was not only less frequent but also more modal in its meaning and hence more restricted by context. As opposed to *munu*, whose modal and futural uses are rather strictly separated, *skulu* usually expresses both modality and temporality at the same time. Interestingly, *munu* even dominates as a future exponent in prophecies which is rather unexpected considering the alleged close connection between *skulu* and fate that has long been firmly asserted in most descriptions of the verb. Its virtual absence in prophecies questions the assumed connection and shows that the capacity of pure future expression was decisive for the spread of *munu*. This is also demonstrated from an opposite perspective by the prevalence of *skulu*, and absence of *munu* in curses where *futurity* was not strong enough for the purely futural *munu* to take over.

The hitherto only diachronic account of *munu* (Nygaard 1878) has been thoroughly revised. This showed that the stage of grammaticalization of *munu*

recorded in Classical Old Norse had most probably been fully developed by at least the 9th century. Particularly the early attestations of the secondary, non-temporal meanings that are derived from future (especially the probability meaning) are of great value in this respect. They indicate that *munu* had been a dominant exponent of futurity for a considerably long period even prior to the 9th century attestations.

Since all of the non-temporal functions established for *munu* are commonly associated with futures in the languages of the world, they indicate that *munu* behaves in a way which is typical for a future tense. Moreover, the highly grammaticalized function of *munu* is also reflected in its use as a marker of hypotheticality, which is attested equally early, as well as in its employment in the periphrastic expression of the subjunctive.

An additional compelling piece of evidence for the early grammaticalization of *munu* is the morphological development of the verb which shows a transition from a regular weak verb to the preterite-present class. This transition had also been accomplished by the time of the first attestations and can be best explained by the shift of *munu* from a lexical to a highly frequent grammatical verb.

The features of the Old Norse periphrastic *munu*-future (the frequency, neutral meaning, derived non-temporal meanings and their early attestation, the morphological development) are unique within the Germanic branch and indicate that the Nordic periphrastic future was the first of its kind in Germanic. Earlier theories, which linked the emergence of periphrastic future in Germanic to cultural/religious factors and/or foreign language (Latin) influence, do not offer a satisfactory account of the North Germanic data.

It has been argued here that the emergence of the Nordic future periphrasis is related to the early loss of unaccented Proto-Germanic verbal prefixes like **ga-*. As shown by their Germanic descendants, they had a perfectivizing function and could be used for the expression of future (cf. Streitberg 1891, 1920 for Gothic). Because of the absence of unaccented prefixes in Early Runic it has been claimed by Schulte (2003) that their disappearance was one of the earliest distinct North Germanic traits. The early formation of the periphrastic future in that branch is

best explained as a direct consequence of the prefix loss. Another special feature of the Old Norse verbal system, not found in the early stages of English and German, is the historical present. This can also be linked to the rise of periphrastic future as well as to the prefix loss as suggested by Steadman (1917) for English and German.

These findings show that the emergence of the periphrastic future in North Germanic can be perceived as a part of extensive syntactic change which was triggered by the abrupt loss of verbal prefixes. As such, the Nordic periphrastic future represents an early, striking innovation in the tense system that sets North Germanic apart from its contemporary West (and East) Germanic.

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