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**SOME METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS ON RESEARCH  
ON FUTURE TENSE AUXILIARIES IN LATIN**

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**Summary**

Successors of the Latin verbs *debere*, *posse*, *velle* and *habere* played a more or less important role in the formation of periphrastic or new synthetic future tense forms in one or more of the Romance languages. The standard opinion is that forerunners of this development can be traced in early or classical Latin. However, the research on which this standard opinion is based shows a number of defects due to the eagerness with which classical philologists tried to find instances of the verbs involved which *looked* similar to normal future tense expressions. As far as *debere*, *posse* and *velle* are concerned, there is no sign whatsoever of future tense auxiliary use.

**0. Introduction**

Ever since Thielmann's monumental paper of a century ago it is common belief among Romance and Latin linguists that a number of modal verbs (*debere* ('must'), *posse* ('can'), *velle* ('want'), as well as

the verb *habere* ('to have') governing a present infinitive form, are used in Latin as more or less equivalent to the normal Latin synthetic future forms.<sup>1</sup> The standard opinion can be found in Szantyr (1965: 313-5) and is more or less taken for granted in a number of recent studies in Latin syntax (for example Coleman 1971; García Hernández 1978; Leumann 1962). As to the modal verbs mentioned, apart from the facts which are adduced as proof of this opinion, some support may be obtained from the typological observation that there is a close relationship between modality and futurity and that future tense forms often develop from earlier modal expressions or modal forms (Fleischmann 1982 with lit.; Lehmann 1982: 27 ff.; Strunk 1968: 298 ff.). In this paper I will not deal with the development of each of the verbs involved (this has been done elsewhere - Pinkster 1985) nor will I go into the relationship between Romance and Latin (see Fleischmann 1982 and Müller 1964). I confine myself to a discussion of a number of defects typical of the research on this topic so far. These defects range from the neglect of certain distinctions that are now common in linguistic analysis to insufficient analysis of data due to the eagerness to find forerunners of the Romance developments. My observations primarily concern the modal verbs, but since *habere* is often thought to have developed into a future tense auxiliary via an intermediate modal stage (which is incorrect, see Pinkster 1987), they have some relevance to that verb as well. It is my claim that if the distinctions made below are taken into account there is no evidence whatsoever that the modal verbs were indeed used as more or less equivalent to normal future forms.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the defects to be discussed below and the eagerness mentioned above there is one other general characteristic of previous research which may explain the course of history in this particular field, viz. the tendency to approach the problem from a philological rather than from a linguistic point of view. Utterances which in their contexts may well be interpreted as referring to a future situation are classified as examples of futurity meaning of the verbs involved. I now turn to a discussion of eight characteris-

tics of previous research. The order is wholly arbitrary. I do not suggest that each of these characteristics is equally inherent in the studies on each of the verbs involved or in the studies of each scholar in this field.

### 1. Insufficient analysis of data

By this label I do not mean the interpretation of individual passages, where mistakes are unavoidable, but observations of a structural nature like the following one. Szantyr (1965: 314), in agreement with the general belief, states that *velle* 'ist schon im Altlatein unter Zurücktreten der Absichtsbedeutung auf dem Wege zu rein futurischem Sinn.' Example (1) is quoted as a proof of this:

- (1) ego ire in Piraeum volo ('I want to go to the Piraeus', Pl. *Most.* 66)

'in einer Situation, wo sonst *ibo* (*eo*) üblich ist' (Sjögren 1900: 223). There are, in fact, a number of seemingly close parallels and we all know that the first person of future tenses is used in reference to someone's intention to do something (example (2)):

- (2) nunc domum *ibo* ('now for home', Pl. *Poe.* 851)

However, on closer inspection, *ibo*, *eo*, and *volo ire* are not interchangeable at all.<sup>3</sup> In Plautus *ibo* is typically used in asides and frequently coordinated or otherwise connected with future forms of other verbs. Adverbs like *cras* are not found with it. Both *eo* and *volo* lack these characteristics. *volo* is typically used when the intention is very obvious or when the speaker is impatient to leave. Example (1) is such a case of impatience. Both *ibo*, and, for reasons which would lead us too far, *eo* are impossible.

## 2. Neglect of tense form of putative tense auxiliary

Quite often the verbs *velle* and *posse*<sup>4</sup> are found in the future tense, but these cases are none the less cited as examples where *velle* and *posse* are developing into future tense auxiliaries. An example is (3):

- (3) ex qua arbore inserere voles et surculos ad insitionem sumes, videto ut sit tenera ('See that the tree from which you intend to graft and are going to take scions for insertion is young', Col. 5,11,3)

Apart from the fact that there is, in my opinion, a difference in meaning between *inserere voles* and *sumes*, adequately reflected in the Loeb translation, the example can hardly serve to prove that *velle* was on its way to becoming a future tense auxiliary. The futurity is in the inflection.

## 3. Redundancy

I will distinguish three types of redundancy, viz. formulaic, stylistic, and harmonic redundancy. The labels themselves should not be given too much attention. More labels may be attached to the same expression.

(i) As examples of *formulaic* redundancy take (4) and (5):

- (4) puer in balneo ante aberravit ... si quis eum reddere aut monstrare voluerit, accipiet nummos mille ('lost recently in the public baths, a boy ... A reward of a thousand pieces will be paid to any person willing to bring him back or indicate his whereabouts', Petr. 97,2)

- (5) placuit universis ut quisquis in hoc collegium intrare voluerit

dabit kapitulari nomine HS C.n. et visi boni amphoram item ('It has been agreed by all that whosoever wants to become a member of this collegium, will pay as a tax 100 HS and also an amphora of good wine', CIL 14,2112 - A.D. 133 Lanuvium)

Petersmann (1977: 185) gives (4) as an example of *velle* with a periphrastic function, but apart from the fact that, here too, the futurity is in the inflection, it is also obvious that Petronius is parodying official public announcements, as (5) illustrates.

(ii) I will give no illustrations of *stylistic* redundancy, which has been amply documented by Skahill (1934: 200-3) for Cassiodorus *Var.* (published in 537-8). In Cassiodorus *velle* and other modal verbs are inserted by 'his desire for rhythm'.

(iii) The third type, which I have labelled '*harmonic* redundancy', is the most important one. Examples are (6)-(8):

- (6) in quibusdam etiam nititur *velle* superare ('it even endeavours to be superior in certain respects', Cassiod. *Var.* 1,45,10)
- (7) qui praecipiant fracturam numquam *debere* uri ('who teach us to never cauterize a fracture', Chir. 37)
- (8) interdixit ei ne *posset* exire ('he forbade him to go out', Aug. *Civ.* 20,7, p. 421, 30D)

This phenomenon is recognized by our manuals (see Szantyr 1965: 796-7) and can be exemplified from archaic Latin onwards. Petersmann (1977: 186) quotes (9):

- (9) interdico ne extulisse extra aedis puerum usquam *velis* ('I forbid you to remove the child anywhere out of the house', Ter. *Hec.* 563)

It also occurs in optional purpose and consecutive clauses. An

example is (10):

- (10) omisi multas fabulas si quis eadem forte conari velit, habere ut *possit* aliquid operis residui ('in order to leave a stint in reserve for anyone hereafter who may choose to try the same kind of writing', Phaedr. III *Epil.* 4-5)

What they have in common is that the meaning of the main predicate is reflected by the presence of a semantically related modal auxiliary in the embedded predication (one might also say that the modality of the embedded predication is expressed redundantly). The phenomenon is avoided in standard Latin but can be explained along the lines given above whenever it occurs.<sup>5</sup> - It is awkward that none the less such examples are advanced as proof of the future tense auxiliary status of the verbs, cf. Szantyr (1965: 314) on *debere* in the *Mulomedicina Chironis*. The tendency to present examples like these as proof of future tense auxiliary use is the more remarkable inasmuch as these examples are excellent counterevidence against assuming a future tense auxiliary status: in none of the examples (6)-(10) a future tense predicate can be substituted. If the expressions were really similar to future tense forms the examples would not occur at all!

As far as I can see, there is an interesting difference between the three modal verbs and *habere*. The latter is never found with the kind of harmonic redundancy documented for the other three verbs in the examples (6)-(10). The only reasonable explanation for this, to my mind, is that *habere* did not have such a specialized modal meaning so as to become a candidate for this type of redundancy. It must be borne in mind that TLL, but others as well, tend to distinguish different meanings of *habere* in its construction with an infinitive (viz. =*posse*; =*debere*; =*velle*) alongside its future tense auxiliary use, but this is misleading. In all likelihood, *habere* had a meaning of its own (say *habere*) which was neutral as to modality. Notice that this may explain its success as a future tense auxiliary

form (compare Müller (1964: 72) on the 'grosse modale Spannweite' of *habere*).

#### 4. The distinction between 'deontic' and 'inferential', etc.

Example (11) and comparable cases from Petronius are mentioned as first signs of the development of *debere* as a future tense auxiliary:

- (11) sex pondo et selibram *debet* habere ('she must have six pounds and a half of gold on her', Petr. 67,7)

Petersmann (1977: 186-7) observes that in Petronius *debere* is 'vielfach bedeutungsgemäss ganz geschwächt', a phenomenon which 'offensichtlich der Umgangssprache angehört'. In reality this has nothing to do with weakening of meaning, nor is it particularly substandard. Bolkestein (1980) gives examples from Cicero and other authors, where *debere* is not used with its more familiar deontic meaning ('to be obliged to') but with an 'inferential meaning'. Compare example (12) with the impersonal example (13):

- (12) plane hic *debet* servus esse nequissimus ('clearly this must be a most wretched slave', Petr. *Sat.* 49,7)
- (13) servum hercle te esse *oportet* et nequam et malum ('you must really be a worthless and bad slave', Pl. *Poen.* 1030)

One might paraphrase *debere* in such examples 'it is evident that', 'it is obvious that'. Both meanings can be shown to be different in many respects. I will leave this out of account here, and conclude that the fact that *debere* cannot always be understood as 'be obliged' is no proof of future tense auxiliary use.

With *posse* a comparable distinction can be made between the familiar 'ability' meaning and the epistemic meaning, of which the

following is an example:

- (14) non esse servus peior hoc quisquam *potest* ('a more rascally servant than this of mine can't be found', Pl. *As.* 118)

The distinction is more or less made in the TLL, but none the less several instances of epistemic *posse*, or where an epistemic interpretation might be considered, are classed under the heading of 'exempla certiora' of future use, e.g. (15):

- (15) quid mali passus es a me, ut illuc me mittas, ubi possim indubitanter occidi ('what wrong have I done to you that you send me to a place where it is very likely that I will be killed', Cassiod. *Ios. antiq.* 8,332)

Notice the presence of *indubitanter*.

The distinction - deontic/inferential etc. - pertains especially to *debere* and *posse*, not to *velle*. Notice that examples of *habere* with an inferential or epistemic meaning are not in the material, as far as I can see.

##### 5. Neglect of illocutionary force

Due to the above-mentioned concentration on the interpretation of utterances in their context insufficient attention is paid to the difference between the meaning of an expression and the intention with which it is uttered, or its illocutionary force. Just as, strictly speaking, example (2) above means 'I will go', it may be understood in an appropriate context as 'I intend to go'. *scribes* in (16) means 'you will write', but is intended by Cicero as a hint or an order:

- (16) si igitur tu illum conveneris, *scribes* ad me, si quid videbitur ('So if you meet him, write and tell me your views', Cic. *Att.*

12,28,1)

(Our manuals speak of a future instead of an imperative.) Along the same lines it is possible for a writer to state something as a mere possibility or a likelihood, while intending it as a prediction, etc. As an example of this take (17), mentioned by Szantyr (1965: 313):

- (17) se noverit ... gratiae nostrae ... incurrere *posse* periculum nec sibi ulterius esse credendum si iussionis nostrae ... temerator extiterit ('let him be aware that he may run the risk of losing our sympathy and that he cannot be given credit anymore if he turns out to be contemptuous of our command', Cassiod. *Var.* 7,42,3)

Here a plain warning or threat is formulated in a very diplomatic way as a possibility. The fact that in its context (17) is interpreted as a prediction of future events is no proof of the future tense auxiliary status of *posse*.

##### 6. Inadequate handling of statistical data

This is a feature of linguistic research of the entire last century and I think that it is very important in this subject matter as well. It has been observed (cf. Szantyr 1965: 313) that forms of *posse* are particularly frequent in constructions which seem to replace future passive forms. It has also been observed that 75 percent of the 80 'future' *habere* examples in Tertullian contain passive infinitives. Now, even if these numbers were right, it is not clear whether they have any significance. According to the standard opinion the fact that *posse* and *habere* are found so often with passive infinitive forms with a meaning similar or close to that of future forms suggests that the Romance auxiliaries originated in certain 'gaps' in the old paradigm. However, as far as I know, no

one ever asked what kind of infinitives we find with *posse* in classical Latin. As a matter of fact, passive infinitives beat active ones by 3:2 in a random sample from Caesar. Of course, Szantyr's suggestion that the future tense auxiliary use of *posse* was favoured most in those circumstances in which no alternatives existed in the classical paradigm may be correct (see below). However, the statistical argument cannot be used until further research has been done.

#### 7. Wrong inferences from translations

Comparison of parallel versions of the same basic text, especially Latin translations of the Greek Bible are an established method in Latin linguistics. This also holds for the subject matter at hand. This method is especially rewarding if there appears to be a difference in the Itala and Vulgata versions of the same Greek original. However, there are at least two caveat's that should be but are not always made. (i) Firstly, we have a collection of remarkable translations of Greek future forms, but we do not possess a complete comparison of all passages. (ii) Secondly, we must keep in mind that most Greek future forms are translated by 'normal' Latin future forms, which makes one curious about the reasons for not presenting a strictly parallel translation where it occurs. (18) is an example to illustrate this point:

(18) quis vobis nocere *potest*? ('Who can do you harm?', *Itala I Petr.* 3,13)

The Greek has *tis ho kakósoon*, for which no Latin equivalent exists. The Vulgata has *noceat* (so-called potential subjunctive) and Augustine has (19):

(19) quis vobis nocebit? (*Serm.* 297,10)

In this instance the future meaning of the Greek has been rendered aptly by Augustine. Both Itala and Vulgata seem to have understood some modal nuance, which is not absurd, as we have seen. We may infer from this example that the translators tried to copy the Greek version, but they copied either the interpretation they attached to the Greek original or the form of the Greek original or both. It is useful also to take into account those cases in which the Latin translation has, for instance, *posse* while this form is not suggested by the Greek original at all. As a consequence there is not much evidence to be drawn from the translation literature in favour of the assumption of *posse* (and the same goes for *habere*) as a future tense auxiliary.

Similar observations might be made about other types of parallel texts, but I will leave this issue because of lack of space.

#### 8. Wrong inferences from distributional properties

I have stressed in 6. that inferences from the distribution of particular expressions should be corroborated by good statistical research. Here I would like to add another point, assuming for the moment that the statistical observations can be used as evidence. So, if it is really the case that particularly *posse* and *habere* can be found with passive infinitives much more frequently than in the classical period - notice also the fact that we have a far larger corpus of postclassical texts than of classical ones - and suppose that *habere*, as has been observed, occurs frequently in situations in which modern French would use the 'conditionnel' for which an equivalent is lacking in classical Latin, how would we have to account for these facts (if they are facts, that is)?

In principle, two ways are open. The first one, which is the one followed by all but one of the scholars who have dealt with the problem, is to assume that the use of *posse* as an alternative for the classical future forms started from its occurrence in these

environments, in which it was, so to speak, unavoidable (in fact it applies especially to *habere*). The constructions, then, served as 'substitute forms' (Werner 1980: 222) for non-existing forms. The other one would be to assume that in substandard Latin the *habere* + infinitive construction came into use as an alternative to the normal classical expression - perhaps it even replaced the normal expression to a large extent (in Werner's terminology: they were 'periphrastic' alternatives for existing forms). The educated writers, whose works we possess, and educated they were, all of them, avoided the substandard periphrastic expression except when it was useful for their purpose, or when it supplied them with a form for which there was no evident classical alternative, that is when they were in need of a substitute form. In this connection it is important to realize that the Christian texts - and I now refer to Gratwick (1972), the one exception alluded to earlier - are of a special type. First person future statements and non-generalized second person statements are almost entirely lacking. That may be the reason for the absence of parallels to our initial example (1):

(20) ? *habeo ire in Piraeum* ('I intend to go to the P.')

So, the special nature of our texts, and also the uneven distribution within these texts (why are they relatively numerous in Tertullian?) is a reason for not conspiring too quickly with the first mentioned group of scholars. The fact that the 'conditionnel' expression is only a marginal one (why should marginal substitutes replace existing forms?) and the statistical observations made above are another.

#### Conclusion

On account of the defects of previous research on this topic the standard opinion on *debere*, *posse*, and *velle* and, to some extent, *habere* has to be revised. As far as I know there are no instances

of these verbs where they do not have their normal classical characteristics. The only reason to assume that they had developed or were developing into future tense auxiliary verbs would be constituted by combinations of these verbs with infinitives, in which the combination as a whole manifested the properties of the infinitival lexeme and not of the putative auxiliary (see, for a discussion of the criteria for auxiliaries, Happ (1976), Letoublon (1984), Majór (1974) and Palmer (1965; 1979)). The discussion about the development of these verbs has never been based upon this principle, and as a consequence many instances of these verbs have been classified as more or less equivalent to auxiliaries simply because in their context they may be interpreted as more or less equivalent to real future expressions.<sup>6</sup>

#### NOTES

1. I leave out of account other verbs mentioned in this connection, such as *incipere* ('begin') and *ire* ('to go'). For the latter verb I refer to Coleman (1985) and Letoublon (1983).
2. My conclusions are based upon published material on the verbs *debere*, *habere* and *posse* (TLL, etc.) and an examination of the files of the TLL for *velle*.
3. These remarks are based upon an internal paper by Caroline Kroon (1985).
4. I know of no similar examples of *debere*.
5. The same phenomenon is known in other languages. See, for example, Plank (1984: 343) for Old English examples.

6. I thank Machtelt Bolkestein, Hotze Mulder, and, especially, Caroline Kroon for their help.

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