Review of Laurits Saltveit, Studien zum deutschen Futur

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the corresponding passives; compare *It is said by them that he’s coming tomorrow* and *It is said that he’s coming tomorrow*. Perhaps all sentences in the passive without an agent phrase can be analyzed as derived from an underlying sentence with indefinite subject; this makes good semantic sense, too.


Reviewed by Emmon Bach, University of Texas

The present study is a continuation in detail of an earlier investigation published by the author in ZfdA in 1957. The basic problem dealt with is indicated by the lengthy subtitle. Given a sentence in which *werden* is construed with an infinitive or present participle, Saltveit asks whether the construction is to be assigned to the category of tense, modality, or aspect. Given an answer (or answers) to this question, he proposes to trace the development of the function(s) through the history of German. I shall consider below some general problems involved in asking such a question.

The three functions may be illustrated by the sentences

1. Hans wird (morgen) zu Hause sein. (tense)
2. Hans wird (wohl jetzt) zu Hause sein. (modality)
3. *Es wird/wurde regnend. (aspect)

The third sentence is not possible in Standard German, but is represented in various dialects today and has a history reaching from OHG into early NHG times. In some dialects there has been a loss of formal distinction between the infinitive and present participle to yield sentences like

4. Es wird/wurde regnen.

In both (3) and (4) the construction usually has an inchoative meaning: ‘It’s starting / it started to rain’.

The introduction (7–37) is devoted to a survey of previous treatments and an outline of aims and methods. The remainder consists of the two main subdivisions of the book: a survey of *werden* plus infinitive or participle in the dialects and the ‘Hochsprache’ (38–177); and a historical sketch of the constructions from Old High German to Early New High German (178–253), with scattered comments and citations throughout the book on Gothic and Norwegian dialects. Finally, there is a short concluding section, an index of the verbs mentioned or cited, and a bibliography.

The main findings and contentions of the synchronic section are these (summary 174–7).

1. *werden* with present participle is well attested in some German dialects, especially in the central Bavarian areas and in Pomerania (maps 56–7 and elsewhere).
2. The construction has an inchoative meaning (leading to a future meaning when used in the present tense).

3. The construction occurs especially often in two types of sentences: one with punctiliar time adverbs like auf einmal, and one with resultative clauses introduced by dass or similar words.

4. On the basis of these ‘favorite’ environments, it is possible to postulate a ‘functional’ present participle even in those dialects where the infinitive and present participle are not distinct. (Conclusions on dialects are based on ‘dialect literature’, independently published studies, and checks made by workers on the dialect atlas. I can add one bit of data here: when I mentioned before a class that Es wurde regnen is impossible, one student with a Texas German background immediately said that it would mean ‘it started to rain’.)

5. Practically speaking, the construction does not exist in the standard language, although Saltveit is able to give some isolated examples.

6. werden with the infinitive, on the other hand, occurs in all but a few (Swiss) dialects.

7. In the dialects, werden with infinitive is primarily a modal construction, but can also refer to the future.

8. The time reference depends mainly on the fundamental aspect of the verb with which it is used: durative verbs usually pull the meaning toward present and modal (Hans wird hier sein), perfective (kommen) and continuative (bleiben) toward ‘pure’ future. These types of verbs are distinguished on the basis of their capacity to be used comfortably with various time adverbs like lange, plötzlich, and noch lange—a perfectly good formal distinction, although Saltveit seems somewhat reluctant to consider it so (117). In addition, the category of person seems to play a role: the normal interpretation of Ich werde zu Hause sein is future; only in special contexts (an amnesiac waking up) will the modal meaning prevail (‘I must be at home’).

9. The construction with perfect infinitive (werde gegangen sein) is used in the dialects almost exclusively with modal reference to the past; in the standard language it is used slightly more often with future meaning.

10. The uses of werden plus infinitive are hence quite parallel in the dialects and the standard language, contrary to what is claimed by many scholars. In both there is a propensity toward using the construction in three types of contexts: in conditional sentences (and related types); in clauses dependent on a verb of discourse like denken, fragen, glauben; and in sentences with special intonation (‘Ton’). ‘Ton’, by the way, is one of Saltveit’s most dubious categories. It seems to mean sentences written with ‘?’ or ‘!’ or with some contextual reference to the manner of delivery. Saltveit does not seem to have very clear ideas about German intonation. Most of the questions marked with his symbol for special ‘Ton’ are suppletive questions, which do not normally differ intonationally from statements.

Saltveit also makes a number of statements about the frequency with which the different types of §10 are used in the dialects and in various kinds of standard language, as in newspapers and literary works. Most of these statistical statements seem highly suspect, considering that Saltveit’s material is so haphazardly
chosen. They certainly cannot be projected into general statements about dialect and standard language.

Armed with these results, Saltveit proceeds to attack the common view that the German future with werden developed from the construction of werden with present participle (defended e.g. by Wackernagel and Behaghel, but opposed by scholars just as impressive, including Paul). A large part of the diachronic section of the study consists of citations from Tatian and Otfrid down to Hans Sachs with commentary. Again I may paraphrase part of the summary (248–53):

11. werden plus infinitive reaches back incontrovertibly to the 12th century, with a few possible early examples in Old High German.

12. Behaghel’s explanation of the development of werden plus infinitive from werden plus present participle cannot be maintained. Behaghel argues that the change took place first in subordinate clauses (daz wir lösende werden) where the parts of the construction had coalesced to a ‘funktionelle Einheit’ and ‘in solchen Fällen können funktionslos gewordene Silben leicht untergehen, oder es können kürzere Formen vor längeren den Vorzug erhalten’ (Deutsche Syntax §690). One can agree with Saltveit’s rejection of this rather speculative argument without accepting his reasons for rejecting it (249). If Behaghel is right, then it should be the case that the change (or decision in favor of one of two competing forms) would first occur in such positions. But Saltveit’s long lists of Belege do not bear this out. A spot check on three of Saltveit’s groups of citations (Berthold von Regensburg, Heinrich der Teichner, Martin von Amberg) shows that the decrease in the instances of the participial construction bears no relation to position, and further that the instances of werden plus infinitive occur overwhelmingly in positions that are not those suggested as the focal point of the development by Behaghel. (If anything, it would seem that the construction spread from other positions into the ‘Behaghel-construction’ V + Inf + werden.) Saltveit’s arguments, on the other hand, are based (in a manner the logic of which is not quite clear to me) on the fact that one of his favorite environments for werden plus participle (resultative dass-clause) coincides with the assumed position from which the change was supposed to have spread, and that this sentence type has a more or less unbroken tradition into the present.

On 31–2 Saltveit touches upon the phonological explanation for the loss of the construction werden plus participle: loss of the unstressed /e/ in the present participle formant /-ende/ and the subsequent loss of the final /t/ in unstressed syllables (the first change well attested and a regular part of the development from medieval to modern German). Behaghel, in an earlier discussion, questioned this explanation on the grounds that one would have to assume two contradictory sound laws operating simultaneously, since this is also the time during which many final n’s in unstressed syllables appear as nt. Such excrescent t’s not only occur in forms like eigentlich, verschiedentlich, jemand, weiland, nirgends, where they have remained, but also in such forms as gebent and daz lebent. But the whole development seems to have a fairly simple and obvious explanation. First, one may assume the loss of final e from (e.g.) gebende to give /gebent/, where the /t/ follows from the general rule for devoicing final voiced obstruent morphophonemes, a rule which has been a constant part of the German phonological system.
since at least late Old High German. Now, assume that there is a period in which an optional rule allows final n in unstressed syllables to appear as /nt/. Such a rule is phonetically understandable, amounting to a laxness in the timing of velic closure with respect to utterance end (or open juncture). Moreover, it is quite parallel to a rule still operating in German in final clusters of continuants and stops and yielding such nonsignificant alternations as those between /kompt/ and /komt/, /ziqkt/ and /ziıt/; cf. William G. Moulton, 'Syllable nuclei and final consonant clusters in German', For Roman Jakobson 372–81 (The Hague, 1956). The phenomenon is perhaps only a special case of a more general alternation that has left its traces in the development of final /t/ in such items as Axt, Saft, jetzt (cf. Hermann Paul, Deutsche Grammatik 1.326–31). Notice that such an optional rule is not at all a ‘sound law’. It amounts rather to a statement about subsystematic ‘free’ variation (not exactly subphonemic, since it involves alternations of phonemes). At such a time the speaker is faced with precisely the problem of the phonologist: how to assign the freely varying sequences to the structural sound units of the language. So far as possible, he will also adopt the solution of the linguist (e.g. Moulton) and assign them to the sequences of morphophonemes required by the paradigms (if there are any) for the forms in question: /komt/ because of /kóman/ but /pumpt/ because of /púmpn/. Speaking phonemically, it makes no more sense to talk of a ‘change’ from final /n/ to /nt/ than from /nt/ to /n/. Final /n/ can represent √n, nt, nd/; final /nt/ can represent the same three. In such a period we would expect several results. Some final /n/ will be interpreted as √nt/ and √nd/, some final /nt/ will be interpreted as √n/. And this is exactly what happened. Wherever the grammatical system can be constructed by the speaker in such a way as to simplify it by making one assignment, he will make that assignment. Elsewhere the chips will fall as they may. Now consider the constructions of the form werd- + Verb + ent. The speaker can interpret ent as derived from the infinitive formant √en/ or the present participle formant √end/. If he makes the second choice, he has to retain the special rule (or rules) applying only to werden (and a few other verbs). If he accepts the first assignment, he can strike those rules and simply add werden at the appropriate points to the rules yielding modals plus infinitive. Where there is paradigmatic pressure to interpret as √nd/, the other assignment is made; inflected forms of the participle retain √nd/, as do the adjectival-adverbial functions with zero ending. In instances where there is no such pressure (or infrequent use of the other parts of the paradigm), varying assignments are made; hence the forms with excrescent /t/ and /d/ cited above. Are there any other instances besides the construction with werden in which final /nt/ is interpreted as √n/? There is at least one (which is usually explained as analogy), namely the loss of a distinctive third person plural indicative ending in the present tense: MHG gebent, NHG geben. (The whole problem is intriguing, and has many ramifications that should be treated in a more appropriate place. Some possibly related items: Ernte, ENHG Ernde, MHG erne; MHG under, begunde etc. from a rule /nt/ → /nd/ but NHG unter etc.; loss of stop after nasal, MHG sans, sanges but NHG /zán(k)/, /zánses/. The problem is tied in with the question of the phonemic and morphophonemic status of nasals before stops in MHG and NHG.)
13. The distribution of functions among the two constructions, infinitive and present participle, seems to have been much as in the present dialects (see §3 and §10 above).

14. The earliest attestations of werden plus infinitive follow the same patterns as today and include clear instances of usage with present (and modal) force. Thus the popular view (e.g. of Curme) that the modal meaning is secondary can hardly be maintained.

15. The futurum exactum (werden with perfect infinitive) also occurs early. Saltveit is able to give an instance from Heinrich der Teichner (14th century) about two centuries earlier than previously cited examples (although it is not unexceptionable, 218–9).

16. There is a period in which a confusion between the two constructions was evident.

17. The construction with participle was more frequent in earlier stages of the language. Later, this relation was reversed, and in the standard language the participial construction was lost. Further conclusions have to do with more special or dubious situations.

The book has many of the virtues of the older styles of linguistic research: 'reiche Materialsammlung', many interesting but isolated insights into particular questions. Unfortunately, it also suffers from some of the defects of those older styles (and of much that passes as 'modern' or 'structural'). The main defect is the lack of an appropriate and general framework for discussing such questions as those of grammatical category and primary function (some hints in the Schlusswort) and a lack of clarity as to just what a linguistic description is supposed to be or do. To discuss the question whether a given form or construction is primarily or exclusively a matter of tense, modality, or aspect, we need to have general definitions of these categories, applicable to any language, and based on a clearly delimited set of primitive terms, either syntactic or semantic. Saltveit can hardly be called to task for lacking a precise general framework, since (beyond various Ansätze) no one else has such a general theory either. Saltveit's and similar efforts simply point out the need.

The two systems of tense and aspect might be explained on the basis of the notion of time and the semantical notion of the truth value of a proposition. Let us take as a paradigmatic situation the utterance at time $t_u$ by a speaker $b$ of a proposition to the effect that a state of affairs holds at time $t_f$. If $Fx$ stands for the fundamental assertion involved (stripped of its time qualification), and $A$ for the relation of assertion (at a given time), the speech act may be symbolized thus: $A(b(Fx t_f) t_u)$; i.e. at time $t_u$, $b$ asserts that $Fx$ at time $t_f$. Tense then has to do with relations between the two time expressions (with various special categories distinguished in this language or that). Thus, the sentence Hans war hier involves the assertion that there is a time $t_f$ prior to $t_u$ such that Hans ist hier (or Hans hier) was true at $t_f$. Aspect has to do with relations to other statements (or sets of them) in which everything but the time is the same (i.e. $Fx$ with varying $t_i$). For instance, inchoative aspect has to do with pairs of statements in which the value of $Fxt_i$ is false for the first value of $i$, true for the second, the two time expressions
being related by 'prior to' with the interval very close. Durative involves a continuum or cluster of time values for true sentences; cessative is like inchoative but with the truth values reversed, and so on. Modality, on the other hand, has to do not with matters of time but with relations between the speaker and his assertion: degree of subjective belief, probability, degree of responsibility taken by the speaker for the assertion, degree of constraint, and so on. It is evident that modality is an amalgam of several different categories that might be forthcoming from a general theory of grammatical categories, which might be easily extended to cover such categories as person or place. (Notice that certain physical concepts are brought in here. This is not a matter of 'assuming' a universal physics or the like, but simply of trying to set up as general a framework as possible on the basis of known languages and testing it by applying it to new ones.)

Whether or not the categories of Saltveit's analysis would come from semantical (or pragmatic) notions as suggested, they have their syntactic precipitates as well. All three categories of tense, aspect, and modality are expressed in German by grammatical elements (affixes or 'auxiliaries'), dependent elements (adverbs of various kinds), and selection (in Bloomfield's sense; especially aspect, which is the least systematized in German). The interplay among these elements is a matter of syntax, of what goes with what. It is here that one can criticize a study like Saltveit's with more justification. By choosing to deal with a form isolated from a 'complete' grammar of the language, Saltveit has cut himself off from seeing the connection between his problems and many other features of the language. By an excessive dependence on the method of gathering and interpreting Belege, he has prevented himself from asking many fruitful questions that would have come out of a more formalized and comprehensive description of the language. (Naturally, these remarks apply not just to Saltveit's study but to the type of inquiry that it represents.) Thus—to take only one obvious set of related problems, briefly mentioned 259 fn. 1—most of the instances of ambiguity, or lack of it with certain verbs, occur not only with werden plus infinitive but with the modal verbs as well. Er wird zu Hause sein is matched exactly in its ambiguity by Er muss zu Hause sein; Er wird kommen in its lack of the same by Er muss kommen. Such examples suggest that werden like the modals must be introduced in two different ways in a grammar of German, that only one of these ways is permissible (grammatical) with certain subclasses of verbs. werden acts like the modals in other ways as well, for instance in the lack of an imperative or past tense (the modals occur in the past tense in only one type of usage or as the result of a special transformation for 'erlebte Rede': Er musste morgen gehen; here werden occurs only with the subjunctive formative). In its compatibility with 'modal' adverbs werden differs from the regular modal verbs, compare Er muss vielleicht kommen with Er wird vielleicht kommen. Hence, it cannot be considered simply a modal verb (contra 254). The difference appears in other characteristics as well. To a limited extent the modals may be compounded: Er muss kommen wollen, etc. But werden can only be used 'first' in such a construction: Er wird kommen müssen but not * Er muss kommen werden. Such questions of grammatical regularity must be kept distinct from questions of usage. For instance, the modal present meaning of Ich werde zu Hause sein is merely improbable, not impossible.
The same criticisms apply (mutatis mutandis) to the historical parts of the discussion as well. One must agree, by and large, with Saltveit's rejection of the theories that the modal meaning developed from the future meaning and that werden plus infinitive developed from werden plus participle. On the other hand, the requirement that a diachronic study must be based on the best possible synchronic descriptions of the stages compared has not lost its validity. Now that we have somewhat better ideas of what an adequate syntax looks like, we must insist that much of historical syntax be rewritten.


Reviewed by Bjarne Ulvestad, University of Bergen

This large book is based on phonologic, morphologic, and syntactic studies in the various stages of High German, Low German, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian. Considerable data from Germanic, Gothic, Latin, Greek, and even Hebrew morphology and syntax are made use of, not to speak of the results of so-called 'grundlegende Studien in Deutschland' (5) and discussions with several leading scholars in the field, including Erben of Berlin and Rosenfeld of Munich (5).

It is the 'Schlusswort' (254-7) which is of most interest to linguists whose special field of research is not Germanic philology, as it presents a brand-new concept of the nature and function (and origin?) of linguistic communication. Therefore this part of the book will be discussed first, in conjunction with an English translation of the main points of the argumentation.

In German, the so-called periphrastic future (werden + infinitive) can be used with future as well as present time reference, in the latter case indicating potentiality or possibility: er wird kommen 'he will come' vs. er wird zu Hause sein 'he is probably at home'. This use of grammatical future tense to express potentiality coupled with present time reference is found in many languages, including English (that will be our friend) and Norwegian (man vil se at ... 'one will see that ...'), and the explanation of the double function of the future tense-form is ordinarily given with reference to the basic uncertainty of most statements about future happenings. One frequently runs across statements to the effect that the future tense indicates either certain future time or potential (uncertain) present time. A modern structural statement of this modal and time-referential dichotomy might run as follows: the future time reference of the grammatical tense-form is the normal or marked one, i.e. it is the ordinary temporal meaning of the construction as part of the tense system of the given language, whereas the present-time modal reference has to be marked constructionally (e.g. by the imperfective aspect of the infinite verb) or situationally (er wird in Kalifornien wohnen 'he is going to live in C.' or 'he is probably living in C.', depending on the [normally preceding] context). Neither explanation is satisfactory to Saltveit,