

On Narrative Future

Maria Tzevelekou
Institute for Language and Speech Processing/ R.C. "Athena"

Vicky Kantzou

1 Introduction

One of the most puzzling features of Greek temporal system is the extensive use of future forms in recounting past events. This configuration is commonly found in biographies and historical narrations (1), in descriptions of plots (2) and in retransmission of sport events (3).

- (1) *Η συνεργασία της με τη Λυρική Σκηνή θα συνεχιστεί και στις 21 Ιανουαρίου 1941. Στην πρώτη της μελοδραματική εμφάνιση θα υποδυθεί τη Βεατρίκη στο έργο "Βοκκάκιος" ... (Callas' biography)*
'Her collaboration with the Opera of Athens will continue till January 21st, 1941. In her first performance she will play the part of Beatrice in the opera *Boccaccio*.'
- (2) *Στη μεταπολεμική Γερμανία, ο 15χρονος Μάικλ θα ερωτευτεί τη Χάνα. Η σχέση τους όμως θα διακοπεί απότομα, καθώς εκείνη θα εξαφανιστεί ξαφνικά. Οκτώ χρόνια αργότερα ο Μάικλ θ' αναγνωρίσει τη Χάνα ως κατηγορούμενη σε δίκη για εγκλήματα πολέμου. (The Reader's plot)*
'In Germany in the aftermath of war, fifteen-year-old Michael will fall in love with Hanna. Their relation will be abruptly interrupted as she will suddenly disappear. Eight years later Michael will recognize Hanna in a court of law indicted for war crimes.'
- (3) Στο 90' ο Καραγιάννης θα πάρει την μπαλιά του Αλμπάνη και θα σκοράρει. (soccer)
'In 90' Karayannis will snatch the ball from Albani and he will score.'

This "fake" future is commonly described as a stylistic device similar to the "fake" "present-ness" of the historical present (HP).

This freedom of choice between tenses (present, past, future) is a distinctive property of narratives. Narrative mode has a pervasive effect on the interpretation of temporal, aspectual and modal markers: among the cluster of semantics features associated with a specific form, only a definite subset which is compatible with the narrative structure is licensed. Thus, the meaning commonly related to the particular markers of tense, aspect and modality is perceived as altered and therefore characterized as marked. Nonetheless more often than not marked/unmarked distinction is identified with basic/peripheral meaning. Thus, some researchers believe that narrative should be considered as a category on its

own which establishes specific form-function relations (Smith 2005). This latter assumption provides a comprehensive framework for dealing with the data and therefore will serve as a guideline for this article.

2 Narrative mode of discourse: tense and aspect

Narratives, whether factual or fictional, imply that the narrator has a complete overview of the series of eventualities which make up a story. This is often interpreted as past time reference with respect to the utterance time. In fact, the anchoring of events depends very little or not at all on the “here and now” of the narrator. The progression of events relies on an anaphoric chain created by the events themselves and boosted by the isomorphic relation between the order of appearance in the text and the order of appearance in the real/fictional world (Kamp and Reyle 1993, Labov 1972). Thus, narratives are more or less opaque with respect to deixis. At most, in certain cases, the first eventuality appearing in the series may be—but does not need to be—anchored to the speech time. All other eventualities draw their reference from the reference of the previous event. In other words, a narrative text is “sealed” with respect to the spatio-temporal coordinates of the narrator. Therefore formal tenses are suspended, at least as means of expressing an order relation between Reference time (R) and Speech time (S) (Smith 2003, Hamburger 1973). Aspect (grammatical or lexical), on the other hand, gains a prominent position as the main medium of determining relations of succession or overlapping between events and states.

In the examples below the same series of eventualities appears in past, present and future:

- (4) *Ο Πέτρος βγήκε από το σπίτι. Ήταν σκοτάδι. Πεινούσε. Πήγε σ' ένα κοντινό καφενείο και παρήγγειλε μια μπύρα. Κοίταξε γύρω του. Οι περισσότεροι θαμώνες έβλεπαν τηλεόραση.*
 ‘Peter got out of the house. It was dark. He was hungry. He went into the nearest café and ordered a beer. He looked around him. Most of the clients were watching TV.’
- (5) *Ο Πέτρος βγαίνει από το σπίτι. Είναι σκοτάδι. Πεινάει. Πηγαίνει σ' ένα κοντινό καφενείο και παραγγέλλει μια μπύρα. Κοιτάζει γύρω του. Οι περισσότεροι θαμώνες βλέπουν τηλεόραση*
 ‘Peter gets out of the house. It is dark. He is hungry. He goes into the nearest café and orders a beer. He looks around him. Most of the clients are watching TV.’
- (6) *Ο Πέτρος θα βγει από το σπίτι. Θα είναι σκοτάδι. Θα πεινάει. Θα πάει σ' ένα κοντινό καφενείο και θα παραγγείλει μια μπύρα. Θα κοιτάξει γύρω του. Οι περισσότεροι θαμώνες θα βλέπουν τηλεόραση.*
 ‘Peter will get out of the house. It will be dark. He will be hungry. He will go into the nearest café and will order a beer. He will look around. Most of the clients will be watching TV.’

Narratives (4) through (6), regardless of tenses, are interpreted as having the same temporal structure.

T1 – to get out of the house

S1 – to be dark

S2 – to be hungry

T2 – to go to a café

T3 – to order a beer

T4 – to look around

S3 – to watch TV

T- eventualities form a series of successive events, while S- eventualities are states overlapping partly or entirely the T- events. In past and future narratives, succession is marked by perfective aspect, while overlapping is marked by imperfective aspect. In present tense narrative, succession and overlapping are rendered by lexical aspect: succession with bounded eventualities (achievements and accomplishments) and overlapping with unbounded eventualities (states and activities).

Although the above examples are equally grammatical, they are not equally natural. Past and present narratives may occur spontaneously, while future narrative is clearly perceived as artificially constructed. In fact, narrative future has a pragmatic correlate: it denotes events that are crucial and vital for an individual's life, whether this individual is fictional or real. The same holds for retransmissions of sport events, where the highlights of a match are broadcasted, and for summaries of books or films, where the significant episodes in the thread of the story are brought up.

3 Future in narratives: a “figure of speech” perspective

A cursory glance at the facts as described in grammars provides the following picture: the use of preterit, which is by far the most common, is considered as displaying the most neutral semantic value. The use of forms other than preterit adds an overlay of meaning. Historical present reveals a more vivid style and a relaxed attitude of the speaker, while the use of future creates a distancing effect, a kind of “irrefutable and lot of life” flavour. In Holton, Mackridge and Philippaki-Warburton (1997: 228) future narrative is described along the following lines: “Another less common use of the simple future is found in descriptions of someone's past actions and achievements:

- (7) *Ο Κ γεννήθηκε και μεγάλωσε στο Ηράκλειο. Εκεί θα τελειώσει και το δημοτικό και το γυμνάσιο αλλά μετά το στρατιωτικό θα μεταφερθεί οριστικά στην Αθήνα.*

‘K was born and grew up in Iraklion. It was there that he would finish his primary and secondary education, but after his military service he would move permanently to Athens.’

The use of future in such descriptions of past actions adds the implication that these actions or events were willed or intended either by the person him/herself or perhaps by some higher power.”

4 Narrative future: a cross-linguistic perspective

While future for denoting past events is fairly widespread in Greek, and its use is rapidly expanding, especially in public addresses—television broadcasts, popular magazines, history textbooks used in schools etc—it seems that in French, English and Spanish it remains an uncommon configuration denoting a rather “recherché” style. This is shown in example (7), where root future in Greek is spontaneously translated by a conditional form in English.

It is worth noting that root future does not appear as an available option for narrative mode in grammar textbooks of English and French. According to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 218) the only available form for future-in-the-past function in English is the back-shifted form of *will* and *be*: *would* V and *was to* V, as shown in the examples appearing in the grammar.

- a. *The time was not far off when he would regret this decision* (rare; literary narrative style)
- b. *He was eventually to end up in the bankruptcy court* (= ‘was destined’)
- c. *Few could have imagined at that time that this brave young officer was to be/would be the first President of the United States of America.* (This sentence implies that the young officer, George Washington, did eventually become president of the United States).

A similar description is found in French grammars, for instance Grevisse (1980: 1430): “le futur du passé marque la simple postériorité d’un fait par rapport au moment du passé où se place en esprit le sujet parlant : *je savais qu’il chanterait le lendemain*”.

By contrast, in other studies such as Parsons (2002) and Fleischman (1982), root future appears as a regular option for recounting past events in French, English and Spanish. This difference may reflect a developmental process where future-in-the-past form, used only with an anticipatory interpretation, has been extended in sequential narratives, and then came to be used interchangeably with root future.

This leads to a distinction that needs to be drawn between two uses of future—whether root or back-shifted—that appears in narratives: the future-in-the-past proper and the narrative future. Eventualities appearing in (1) through (3) and (6) through (7) form a series organized along the lines of foreground/background conventions: progression and overlapping. By contrast, the back-shifted forms appearing in Quirk *et al.* and in Grevisse’s examples, under the heading “future-in-the-past”, and the root future forms appearing in Fleischman (1982) and to some extent in Parsons (2002), under the heading “posteriority in the past” and “future-under-past” respectively, denote events that deviate from the main line of the plot and join again the thread of the story at some later point. As Parsons (*ibid*) points out, the future in these cases is used in order to form a substory,

parallel to the main sequence of events. Comrie (1985) makes similar observations. This is fairly clear in the example (8) below, given by Fleischman (ibid):

- (8) *Our hero, who will demonstrate his courage on so many occasions, at that moment felt intimidated.*

The future-in-the-past in this case, differs from the narrative future appearing in (1) to (3) and (6) to (7): the former signals a prediction that will be fulfilled at some later point, while the latter contributes to the sequential progression of the plot. It is worth noting that the former use appears mostly in embedded clauses. The narrative future proper—in the sense of linear structure—appears clearly in the examples (9) and (10) below:

- (9) *Augustine will grow up in a hard, competitive world [...] His early life will be overshadowed by the sacrifices his father made [...] By 385, Augustine will be a professor of rhetoric in Milan; he will be in a position to toy with the prospect of a provincial governorship [...] He will use the word 'Punic' to describe the native languages [...] He will be hugely admired by his congregation [...] It is an African poet who will rectify the omissions of Vergil [...] He will be a traditional schoolmaster for eleven years.*

Peter Brown's biography of *Augustine of Hippo*

- (10) *Pétrarque s'acquittera, jusqu'à la fin de sa vie, de missions diplomatique similaires. Mais il refusera toujours toute charge officielle. [...] Quelques années plus tard, il consacra un essai au Repos des religieux. [...] La mort de son amie lui inspirera les vers magnifiques par lesquels s'achève le « Triomphe de la mort ».*

Jérôme Ventoux *Vie de Pétrarque*

These two uses are not signalled by two distinct forms, such as root and back-shifted, as may have been implied by Quirk *et al.* and Grevisse approaches. Both forms serve as future-in-the-past and as narrative future proper. This does not apply only to English, French and Spanish, but also to Greek, where a back-shifted form *-θα + imperfective past-* is interchangeable in certain contexts, such as historical narratives, with root future (compare ex. 7 and ex. 11):

- (11) *Ο Κ γεννήθηκε και μεγάλωσε στο Ηράκλειο. Εκεί θα τέλειωνε και το δημοτικό και το γυμνάσιο αλλά μετά το στρατιωτικό θα μεταφερόταν οριστικά στην Αθήνα*

'K was born and grew up in Iraklion. It was there that he would finish his primary and secondary education, but after his military service he would move permanently to Athens'.

This latter option is not licensed, however, in contexts such as description of plots (ex. 2) and retransmission of sport events (ex. 3).

Roughly speaking, and regardless of the frequency of use and the restrictions in certain contexts, it seems that both future-in-the-past and narrative future, have two exponents:

- a. A formally assertive (indicative) form with future reference.

*Θα έρθει αύριο / * Θα έρθει χτες* ('she will come tomorrow'/*yesterday)

- b. A modal (conditional) form without stabilized temporal reference.

Θα ερχόταν χτες / αύριο (lit. She would come yesterday /tomorrow)

The question that arises is how two verb forms having diverging properties both in the temporal and in the modal level bear the same functions within narratives. A tentative explanation of this convergence with respect to function may be the following: despite their differences—shown in the restrictions above—both forms share significant semantic similarities. Most of the contemporary literature on semantics endorses the idea that future is ambiguous between a temporal and a modal interpretation. Strictly speaking, in conversational contexts, where utterance coordinates play a crucial role as deictic construal, both forms are in a sense a-temporal and non-assertive. In other words, they are non-factual, and therefore they are placed in the time axis in a putative way. They differ, however, in the span of time axis that is available to them for their hypothetical anchoring. Back-shifted form—form of *irrealis* par excellence—“floats” on either sides of utterance time. Perfective future is restricted to the phase after the utterance time, while imperfective future has a wider range, encompassing utterance time—in the case of the epistemic value of “near certain now” (ex. *Σκοτείνιασε. Θα βρέχει* (It's getting dark. It will be raining)), and the phase after the time of utterance (ex. *Αύριο θα δουλεύω* (Tomorrow I will be working)). In narratives, where the deictic construal is deactivated, these forms can easily converge in a context where factuality (real or feigned) is established on the onset, regardless of temporal and modal markers.

5 Narrative future in terms of temporal structure

Future in narratives—whether root or back shifted, future-in-the-past or narrative future—bear two contradictory temporal values, future and past, which are brought together within narrative structures. This phenomenon is somewhat puzzling in many respects. If we read carefully the relevant descriptions, it seems hard to disentangle the temporal anchoring mechanisms.

In Quirk *et al.* (1985: 219), for instance, the future-in the-past construction is described as follows:

- a. It is used “to describe something which is in the future when seen from a viewpoint in the past”. [...]
- b. It is “understood to guarantee the fulfilment of the happening in question”.

It is worth reminding that in this particular grammar the description is restricted to a single form—the back shifted form—and to a single function, that of a sub-story having an anticipatory semantic value.

Parsons (2002), in a comparative approach between past, present and future narratives, proposes the following hypothesis:

- a. In past tense narratives the series of events is “understood to be previous to the time of the viewpoint”.
- b. In present tense narratives, “the times are all identical with that of the viewpoint, which itself is considered to advance as the story progresses”.
- c. In narratives in the future: “If the narrative is interpreted as factual, the viewpoint is usually that of the utterance time. If it is understood as fictional, the series of events is understood to be future to the viewpoint”.

In both descriptions the notion of viewpoint seems to have an almost metaphorical status. Thus, the resulting interpretations appear as an upgraded remodelling of the “figure of speech” approach. In fact, as long as the relations between the point of viewpoint, the utterance situation (speaker, time and space) and the narrator’s mental field of vision are not clarified, a number of semantic, pragmatic and common sense questions remain unanswered: If the view point precedes the series of events, how the factuality of the events is guaranteed? If the viewpoint advances as the story progresses, how the overview of the whole story is retained? And if the viewpoint is identical with the time of utterance, why should the future be used at all?

In order to tackle with these issues, we will propose a different approach, taking into account the features of this particular discourse mode. This approach encompasses both functions of future in narratives: the future-in-the-past and narrative future.

Narratives have three main properties:

1. The utterance time is deactivated. Therefore the relation between the reference time of the events (Rs) and the deictic construal of utterance situation—firmly grounded on a specific speaker, a specific time and a specific place—is suspended. This relation, which is in fact an absence of relation, is represented by the following formula: $S^* R$
2. Therefore, the narrator, in need of an *Origo*, establishes a Primary Vantage Point (PVP). PVP differs from Speech time, in that it can be identified with any S: $PVP \approx \exists S$ (any narrator/reader/hearer, any time, any place). The PVP defines the mental field of vision of the narrator by endowing her/him with an overview of the whole story. The main function of PVP is to guarantee the factuality of the events (real or fictional), either through *mimesis* (in fiction) or through testimony (in historical or personal narratives). This modal function of assertiveness suggests, but does not state, that the PVP is subsequent to all series of Rs.

3. Once the factuality (feigned or real) of the story is ensured by the presence of PVP, the narrator is free to establish Secondary Vantage Points (SVP) at any point within its mental field of vision. The SVPs operate under the restrictions provided by the PVP. The main function of SVP is to denote a speaker/narrator oriented modality: the subjective attitude of the speaker regarding the related events.

In neutral narratives—narratives in the past—PVP is the sole viewpoint established by the narrator. In marked narratives, present and future, a secondary vantage point (SVP) is established which is shifted into the past of PVP: SVP < PVP. Thus, eventualities are double-anchored under specified conditions: the SVP does not interfere with PVP functions, that of overview and factuality.

In the case of the historical present, the SVP moves along with the progression of events. It remains nevertheless under the grip of the PVP. Thus, the presence of present tense, which in many languages has an imperfective interpretation, does not overrule the pragmatic constraint of bounded event, which states that imperfective markers require that the events must be presented as ongoing, and therefore are incompatible with bounded events (Smith 2005).

In future narrative, the SVP is located before the related events. It is identified with any person or character of the story whose future lies open before him and therefore the course of events can follow various directions. The PVP in this case appears as having a complete overview not only of the course of events of the person/character's life, but also of the various possibilities that existed at some point and that could have given another turn to the course of events. In other words, in future narratives, the future form maintains its main property, that of branching structure quantifying over possible worlds. Thus, a sort of “tension” is established between PVP and SPV, which represents the real tension between the openness of the future and the fixity of the past, since the series of events is fixed for the narrator and unreal/unknown to the person of the story.

It seems that in this respect the main difference between narratives in preterit or HP, on the one hand, and narratives in future, on the other, is the clear-cut distinction between the “omniscient” narrator and the person of the story. The narrator through PVP projects backwards a teleological linear “thread” against the branching structure stemming from SVP. Evaluative speaker-oriented modality emerges naturally from this two layered depiction of events. Thus, future in narratives is often related with predestination and backward causality.

This is clear in the following examples: in (12) the person of the story follows the rigid principles of “shepherd your sheep”, which leads to the destruction of the community he wanted to protect (it is about the Jewish community of Janenna). In example (13) the course of events had taken a different turn than expected.

- (12) *Μέσα στο σκοτάδι θα δει τότε την άγρια μορφή του Θεού του, μέσα στην ερημιά θα ξανακούσει τη φωνή του. [...] Ο Σαμπεθάι θα κρατήσει τον όρκο του και δεν θα αφήσει από τα χέρια του την μικρή κοινότητα*

των Εβραίων. [...] Όταν οι Γερμανοί θα κατέβουν στην Ελλάδα, θα τους προφτάσουν εκεί στα σπίτια τους και θα τους πάρουν όλους.

‘In the dark he will see the fierce figure of his God, in the desolation, he will hear his voice again. [...] Sabethay will keep his oath and will not let the small Jewish community out of his hands. [...] When the Germans will invade Greece, they will find them there in their houses and will seize them all.’

- (13) Παρόλο το θλιβερό επεισόδιο, η μάνα μου θα κρατήσει το μυστικό. Κι ο Φριτζ θα γίνει ο καλύτερός της φίλος και θα την γλιτώσει από πολλούς κινδύνους.

‘Despite the distressing incident, my mother will keep his secret. And Fritz will be (lit. become) her best friend and he will save her from many perils.’

The clear-cut distinction between PVP and SVP is also shown in the restrictions governing the use of future narrative. Contrary to past and HP, future is incompatible with first person narratives, where the narrator is identified with the person of the story.

- (14) ?? Το 1945 θα μετακομίσω στην Αμερική. Εκεί θα βρω δουλειά σ’ένα καθαριστήριο, θα αγοράσω σπίτι, θα φτιάξω οικογένεια κ.λπ

‘In 1945 I will move to the States. There I will find a job in a laundry, I will buy a house, will raise a family etc.’

In addition, future is clearly unnatural in fictional or “eye-witnessed” narrations, where the “now” of the narrator may be considered as an imaginary, plausible or real anchor point for the first event appearing in the series of narrated events.

- (15) Χθες λοιπόν το βράδυ και ενώ τα έπινα στο ΚΛΙΚ πετάει ένας φίλος την ιδέα να κάνουμε ένα πάρτι στην παραλία.

‘Yesterday night and while I was drinking in Click (bar) a friend offers to throw a party at the beach.’

- (16) ?Χθες λοιπόν το βράδυ και ενώ τα έπινα στο ΚΛΙΚ θα πετάξει ένας φίλος την ιδέα να κάνουμε ένα πάρτι στην παραλία.

‘Yesterday night and while I was drinking in Click (bar) a friend will offer to throw a party at the beach.’

It seems that future is opaque to any form of indexicality, whether this indexicality applies to the “I”, to the “now” or to the “here” of the narrator. Thus, calendar anchor points and pragmatic cues are necessary for the location of events in time and in place.

These restrictions support our initial hypothesis: future in narratives denotes events that are anchored by two distinct construals operating in parallel. Deictics

are not licensed in this context, as they would have been the traces of PVP interfering with SVP function. As stated above, future is used in this context in order to establish a straightforward distinction between the narrator's viewpoint (PVP) and the viewpoint of the character of the story (SVP).

6 Conclusion

The overall distribution and variety of tense forms appearing in narratives conveys either a neutral or a marked underlying meaning, which is independent of their primary function: the function of expressing temporal relations. It clearly indicates a certain stylistic way of recounting a story. At the same time, it suggests to a certain extent the narrator's attitude towards the reported events. Hence, tense distribution besides its rhetorical function is linked to a speaker-oriented modality, which suggests a subjective evaluation of events: the narrator may be dispassionate or judgmental, detached or eye-witness, observer or participant. Furthermore, she may be considering the related events as beneficial/detrimental, expected/unexpected, occurring sooner or later than expected, in accordance or contrary to the natural course of events, etc. This overlay of meaning derives from the establishment of various viewpoints, which impart the subjective experience of time and are mediated by the linguistic structure.

References

- Comrie, B. 1985. *Tense*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fleischman, S. 1982. *The Future in Thought and Language: diachronic evidence from Romance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grevisse, M. 1980 (1st ed. 1936). *Le bon usage*. Paris: Duculot.
- Hamburger, K. 1973 (1st ed. 1957). *The Logic of Literature*. Indiana University Press.
- Holton, D., P. Mackridge and I. Philippaki-Warbuton. 1997. *Greek: A Comprehensive Grammar of the Modern Language*. London: Routledge.
- Kamp, H. and U. Reyle. 1993. *From Discourse to Logic: Introduction to Modeltheoretic Semantics of Natural Language, Formal Logic and Discourse Representation Theory*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Labov, W. 1972. *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Parsons, T. 2002. Eventualities and Narrative Progression. In *Linguistics and Philosophy* 25.681–699.
- Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, and J. Svartvik. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Harlow: Longman.
- Smith, C. 2003. *Modes of Discourse: The local Structure of Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, C. 2005. Aspectual Entities and Tense in Discourse. In *Aspectual Inquiries*, ed. by P. Kempehinsky and R. Slabakova, 223–238. Dordrecht: Kluwer.