

## Modal Functions of Future Tenses in French

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*The paper disputes two influential claims in the Romance Linguistics literature. The first is that the synthetic future tenses in spoken Western Romance are now rivalled, if not supplanted, as temporal functors by the more recently developed GO futures. The second is that these synthetic futures now have modal rather than temporal meanings in spoken Romance. These claims are seen as reflecting a universal cycle of diachronic change, in which verb forms originally expressing modal (or aspectual) values take on future temporal reference, becoming tenses. The forms then take on new modal meanings common to future tenses. The new modal meanings supplant the temporal, which are then taken up by new forms.*

*Challenges to this theory for French are raised on the basis of empirical evidence of two sorts. Positively, future tenses in spoken Romance continue to be used with temporal meaning. Negatively, evidence of modal meaning for these forms is lacking. The evidence comes from corpora of spoken French, native speaker judgements and verb data from a daily broadsheet. Cumulatively, it points to the reverse of the claims noted above: the synthetic future in spoken French has temporal but little modal meaning.*

### Key words

French      Future tense      Modality      Diachronic change      Grammaticalization

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.0 Claim and counter-claim

It has been claimed in the Romance Linguistics literature that the synthetic future tenses in spoken Western Romance are now rivalled as temporal functors by the more recently developed GO futures (Fleischman (1982), Harris (1988), Posner (1997)). Fleischman and Harris have also claimed that the synthetic futures now have a modal rather than a temporal role in their respective spoken languages. Fleischman sees this postulated development as part of a cycle of diachronic change in which initial analytic verb forms expressing modal or aspectual values take on a temporal value, that of future reference, which is coincidental with their becoming morphologically synthetic. Once established as future tenses the synthetic forms can then take on new modal meanings consistent with their future tense status. Bybee et al (1994) use the claim described above for Romance in support of a more general theory about the provenance of future tenses.

This paper is principally concerned with the second part of the claim, that Romance synthetic futures now have a modal rather than a temporal meaning. It is argued on the basis of empirical evidence that in French exactly the opposite is true: the synthetic future is still used in everyday French with temporal meaning, but has largely lost its modal meanings.

### 1.1 Origins of future tense forms

Future tenses or periphrastic futures are seen as having their origins in forms of modal or aspectual meaning, or as having morphological and sometimes functional links with moods such as the subjunctive (Lyons 1977, Bybee et al 1994). Eg. in the English *I will sing*, the auxiliary *will* had an initial meaning of will or intention.

In Western Romance, the old Latin synthetic future was replaced by periphrastic futures with head verbs of original modal meaning (eg *velle* ‘want to’; *habere* ‘have to’; *debere* ‘must’) that took infinitival complements. In the case of *habere* (eg *cantare habeo* ‘I have to sing’) the two verb forms fused into one over time, forming a synthetic future tense. This seems to be a repeat of the process of development assumed for the older Latin synthetic future. The various changes under discussion are illustrated in Table 1 below.

### 1.2 The SF dwindling as a temporal functor in speech

The GO future in French, briefly illustrated in Table 1, is formed by using the present and imperfect tenses of *aller* ‘go’ with an infinitive complement. Eg.

(1)	<i>il</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>chanter</i>	(2)	<i>il</i>	<i>allait</i>	<i>chanter</i>
	he	go- PRES	sing-INF		he	go-PAST	sing-INF
		(progressive)				(progressive)	
		‘he is going to sing’				‘he was going to sing’	

This GO-future will be referred to as the CF (composite future).

The claim that the synthetic future (SF) tenses in spoken Western Romance are now rivalled as temporal functors by the more recently developed GO futures varies in strength. For Harris (1978, 1988) and Posner (1996) they are being rivalled, for Bybee (1985), Bybee et al. (1994) and Emirikian and Sankoff (1985) they are being replaced and for Fleischman (1982) they have largely been replaced. Despite the difference in intensity, all these researchers see the SF as losing its position as a temporal functor in spoken Romance, in favour of the CF.

**Table 1. From periphrastic to synthetic future in Latin and French**

Language	Periphrastic form	Synthetic form	
<b>Early Latin</b>	<i>*canta</i> <i>*bh-u</i> sing be-1 <sup>st</sup> sg. (I am to sing) ⇒	<b>Classical Latin</b> <i>canta-b-o</i> sing- Fut-1 <sup>st</sup> sg. (I will sing)	
<b>Late Latin</b>	<i>cantare</i> <i>habe-o</i> sing[INF] have-1 <sup>st</sup> sg (I have to sing) ↓		
<b>Old French</b>	<i>chanter</i> <i>ai</i> sing [INF] have-1 <sup>st</sup> sg (I have to sing) ⇒	<i>chant-er-ai</i> sing-FUT-1 <sup>st</sup> sg (I have to/will sing) ⇒	<b>Modern French</b> <i>je chant-er-ai</i> I sing-FUT-1 <sup>st</sup> sg (I will sing)
<b>Modern French</b>	Je vais chanter I go-PRES-1 <sup>st</sup> sg sing- INF (I 'm going to sing) ⇒	?	

## 2. Evidence for SF as a temporal functor in speech

Before the theme of modal use can be discussed a brief review is necessary of the types of evidence available on current use of the SF as a temporal functor.

### 2.1 Speech data

Empirical evidence from speech data in France, eg Jeanjean (1988), indicates that the SF is still being used to express temporal meaning in spoken French, even by children. Her data include 260 tokens of SF and 190 tokens of CF. A similar result was obtained by Wales (1983) who recorded 11 pairs of French-speaking friends discussing a choice of three future-related topics. Five and a half hours of spoken French data produced a sizeable number of future-referring verb forms, the majority of tokens being in the SF. The SF and CF are in roughly equal numbers in this data, if types are counted rather than tokens. The SF is much more frequent than the CF with *avoir* 'have' *être* 'be' and the

modal verbs. Emirkanian and Sankoff (1985) found more tokens of the CF than the SF in Montreal spoken French, especially if they removed occurrences with negatives, found particularly with the SF. (In this respect the Montreal data is significantly different from speech data in France where the SF occurs freely in positive contexts, as well as in negative.)

Sundall (1991) reviewed data collections of the two forms. Where the collections show 70% SF to 30% CF he concluded data collection methods had pushed speakers toward formal language, and noted that some child language corpora of the 1960s showed 70% CF to 30% SF. However, he did not mention Jeanjean's later corpus which, as noted above, included child data and, like Wales' data, showed more tokens of the SF than CF. Overall, then, the evidence of all speech corpora of French show that the SF is still in use with temporal meaning in speech, the only difference being the relative frequency of the two forms in the various corpora.

## 2.2 Native-speaker judgements

Wales (1982) administered a large questionnaire to 30 native French-speakers, investigating the relative status of the SF and CF for temporal expression in the context of four different time zones established by use of temporal adjuncts. (See Table 2. for examples of the adjuncts) Subjects were presented with a choice of the SF, CF or the present tense as variables in sentences containing each adjunct. There were 72 sets of sentences. Task 1 was to judge all individual sentences for acceptability in speech, while Task 2 was to rank-order members of each sentence set for preference (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>). An example of a sentence set is:

- (3) a. Les astronautes reviendront sur terre demain. (SF)  
 The astronauts return-FUT to earth tomorrow.  
 'The astronauts will return to earth tomorrow.'
- b. Les astronautes vont revenir sur terre demain. (CF)  
 The astronauts go-PRES return-INF to earth tomorrow.  
 'The astronauts are going to return to earth tomorrow'
- c. Les astronautes reviennent sur terre demain. (present tense)  
 The astronauts return-PRES to earth tomorrow.  
 'The astronauts return to earth tomorrow.'

The results for preferences of verb forms with the different adjuncts are shown in Table 2. Only the preference results are given here, but the acceptability results show the same trend.

Even allowing for the element of arbitrariness in associating temporal adjuncts with divisions of time, the results, as shown in Table 2, present clear trends. The results are all statistically significant by ANOVA. The present tense is the least preferred of the three variables, for all time zones. While the SF and CF score equally for 'nearer to future' there is a significant preference for the CF in 'immediate future' and a preference for the SF for 'more distant future'. These native-speaker judgements show that the SF was a strong temporal functor in the 1980s.

**Table 2. Preferences between the CF, SF and Present tense for different time zone**

Temporal zones	CF	SF	Present
Immediate Future (temporal adjunct eg. <i>tout de suite</i> 'immediately')	1.515	2.104	2.379
Nearer Immediate Future (temporal adjunct eg. <i>demain</i> 'tomorrow')	1.700	1.767	2.533
Nearer Distant Future (temporal adjunct eg. <i>l'année prochaine</i> 'next year')	1.782	1.485	2.775
Distant Future (temporal adjunct eg. <i>dans vingt ans</i> 'in twenty years')	1.873	1.312	2.819
NB. As the variables were scored as 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> preference, the lower the score the higher the preference.			

### 2.3 Newspaper data

The language of newspapers has been a focus of study in France for some decades, revealing its peculiar linguistic status as intermediate between literature and speech. Notably, a number of studies have shown that past tense usage in newspapers resembles the practice in speech rather than literature, with the composite past having virtually ousted the synthetic past. In addition, popular dailies are quite a good source of direct reported speech.

Wales (2002) examined the frequencies of temporal uses of the SF and CF in *Ouest-France*, the biggest-selling daily broadsheet in France. The results, shown in Table 3, indicate the overwhelming dominance of the SF over the CF for future temporal reference in a popular daily. It is noteworthy that the same relative distribution occurs in every edition of *Ouest-France*.

**Table 3. Total number of tokens of SF and CF forms in the *Ouest-France* data-base 1994-1997**

Year & Editions	SF	CF
1994 (2 editions)	622 (90%)	65 (10%)
1995 (6 editions)	1892 (91%)	192 (9%)
1996 (12 editions)	4113 (89%)	498 (11%)
1997 (3 editions)	1124 (89%)	132 (11%)
Total (23 editions)	7751 (90%)	887 (10%)
Note. The figures in brackets show what percentage each tense occupies of the sum of the tokens.		

The same newspaper data show that the present tense used with future reference (not reported on here) is also no rival to the SF, even for scheduled events. All three forms are found with future temporal reference in direct reported speech in the paper. This supports the claim in Blanche-Benveniste et al (1991: 201) that the SF is found with temporal meaning in spoken French wherever the context calls for its particular meaning.

The three forms refer to the future differently. The present tense refers only to a scheduled future. Eg. (sports meeting announcement 13/09/97)

- (4) a. Dimanche 14 à 13h30, le CSJ B rencontre Néant-sur-Yvel B.  
 Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> at 1.30pm the CSJ B meet-PRES Néant-sur-Yvel B.  
 ‘The CSJ B-team meets Néant-sur-Yvel B-team on Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> at 1.30pm.’

The CF refers to a future that begins or connects in some way with the present. It is found, for example, in breaking news, for the initial reporting of a decision to carry out a project, This is sometimes in the headline. Eg. (foreign news heading 25/06/01)

‘Le gouvernement yougoslave a adopté le décret  
**Milosovic va être livré à La Haye**’

- b. Le gouvernement yougoslave (sic) a adopté le décret  
 The government Yugoslavian ratify-PERF the decree  
 ‘The Yugoslavian government has ratified the decree.’

The composite past is assumed to express present perfective here, not past narrative, because of the breaking nature of the news. Note that this text in (4b) shows that the decision to hand Milosovic over has already occurred, Thus the main heading in (4c) below, with *va* in present tense, speaks of the future extradition as already in train, the present result of a previous action.

- c. Milosovic va être livré à La Haye  
 Milosovic go-PRES be-INF deliver-PASSIVE to The Hague  
 ‘Milosovic is going to be handed over to The Hague.’

The SF, by contrast, refers to a future event which is severed from present time. Eg. (local announcements: history society asking for photos for forthcoming exhibition 27/06/01)

- d. Les photos seront rendues après l’expo.  
 The photos be-FUT return-PASSIVE after the exhibition  
 ‘The photos will be returned after the exhibition.’

(and an announcement of the next meeting)

- e. La prochaine réunion aura lieu le vendredi 28 septembre à 20h.  
 The next meeting have-FUT place the Friday 28<sup>th</sup> September at 8.00pm.  
 ‘The next meeting will take place on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> September at 8.00pm.’

Note that here there is no connection with present time. The SF simply indicates that an event will take place at some time after the present (eg. after the forthcoming exhibition in (4d) or three months later in (4 e).

All three types of meaning are required in news reporting, but the SF is particularly frequent because it provides the details of future plans, ie of what will be true when the event takes place. There is thus good evidence that the SF is a robust temporal marker in speech and popular dailies: accordingly the first half of the theory favoured by Harris (1978, 1988), Fleischman (1982) and Bybee (1985), concerning temporal reference, is unsupported.

### 3. Evidence for the SF as a modal functor

It is more difficult, however, to investigate the second part of the theory favoured by Harris and Fleischman, that the SF in spoken French now has modal, not temporal meanings. A broader theory is that this is the common pattern for future tense development in languages generally, ie a verb form with original modal meaning takes on a temporal meaning and becomes a tense. The resulting future tense then takes on new modal meanings (cf Bybee 1985). Historically, this theory is not well supported in Western Romance, since, for example, the synthetic futures of Classical Latin that are recognisably distinct from subjunctive forms, ie those with the /b/ future stem as in *cantabo* (Table 1) appear to have dropped out of Romance rather than become moods. But what of contemporary evidence? This paper reports on one area of epistemic modality, present probability, and the status of the SF as its exponent.

#### 3.0 Grammars of French

Traditionally, grammars of French have ascribed a range of modal meanings to the synthetic future. Wales (1982) investigated six such modal uses - expressing habitual behaviour, present probability, general truths, protestation, orders and past probability. (It was not possible to cover further claimed uses in one questionnaire.) The first four uses listed above require the tense to make reference to present rather than to future time. One of these is the epistemic expression of probability in present time. Eg.

- (5) *On sonne.. Ce sera le facteur.*  
 Someone ring-3<sup>rd</sup> sg It be-FUT the postman  
 ‘Someone’s ringing. That’ll be the postman.’

We note that the speaker is not referring to future time by the use of the SF, but to the time of speech. Also, the speaker is not presenting the second proposition as a fact, ie is not saying it is the postman. The effect of the SF referring to the time of speech is to present a proposition as a probability rather than as a fact. Thus, the tense form being used for epistemic modal contrast (ie to present the proposition as not-fact) has to be able to refer to the same time zone as the form with which it contrasts. Shifting the temporal reference of tenses is one way of achieving modal distinctions (Bull 1960). Present probability has been selected here as one example of the claimed uses of the SF by French speakers to refer to the time of utterance, thereby presenting a proposition as epistemically modalised. It has been selected in particular to represent this usage because it was also the object of investigation in Gobert & Maisier’s (1995) study.

Distinguished grammars of the 1960s (eg Grévisse 1964, Imbs 1960, Le Bidois & Le Bidois 1967, Wagner & Pinchon 1962) continued the tradition of describing a range of modal meanings for the SF, including its use to express present probability. Later studies (eg Harris, Fleischman) follow suit.

However, the empirical evidence in the grammars for these modal uses is slight, and from limited sources. The same few sentence examples (often from literature) seem to have been passed on from grammar to grammar. Cf. Gobert & Maisier, comparing the claims in grammars with evidence of actual usage and native-speaker preference judgements, find that the criteria for modal uses of French future tenses in grammars are often characteristic of written (meaning literary) language rather than of everyday speech (1995: 1013). Fleischman makes no mention of gathering a corpus of contemporary speech on which to base claims about modal usage (or indeed temporal), but seems rather to follow the grammars in identifying modal functions of the SF. (Fleischman generally does not indicate the source of sentence examples offered.)

### 3.1 Spoken and written corpora

So far, no evidence has been found in modern corpora of spoken French to show the use of the SF with the range of modal meanings claimed in the grammars (and by Harris and Fleischman). Specifically, no evidence has been found of the use of the SF to express present probability. Gobert & Maisier state categorically that they searched spoken and written corpora for this use of the SF, but found no evidence of it in either (1995:1005). Jeanjean (1988) notes no such uses in her spoken corpus. No examples of it were found in the five and a half hours of spoken French collected by Wales (1983). Investigation of 23 editions of *Ouest-France*, across four years of publication, has not succeeded in revealing any written examples. These results concur with those of Gobert & Maisier: there is no evidence in everyday French of the SF being used to express present probability.

### 3.2 Questionnaires

Another research approach which has yielded important evidence is the use of questionnaires to elicit speakers' judgements or preferences.

#### 3.2.1 Gobert and Maisier

As well as collecting spontaneous speech data, Gobert & Maisier also administered a questionnaire, completed by 38 French speakers. In the first half subjects were presented with two situations in which as speakers they might wish to express a present-time probability. They were asked each time what they would say in this circumstance. The task thus asked speakers to make a spontaneous choice of form for expressing present probability. The result in both situations presented was that 11 speakers used *devoir* + infinitive (meaning eg. 'must' as in 'he must be ill'), 16 used the present tense with an appropriate adjunct (as in English 'he is probably ill') and the other 11 used a range of devices such as *je pense que* 'I think that' or *il se peut que* 'it is possible that'. Significantly, there was no use of the SF for either task. Part 2 of the questionnaire similarly presented two imaginary situations in which the expression of present probability was called for, but this time a range of sentence options was provided and



subjects were asked for their preferred forms. There were 160 possible points in the study's scoring system. Out of 160 the modal options scored as follows:

- (6) a. *il est sans doute malade* 'he is probably ill' (present + adjunct) 148 (95%)  
 he be-PRES without doubt ill
- b. *il doit être malade* 'he must be ill' (*devoir* + infinitive) 145 (92%)  
 he must-PRES be-INF ill
- c. *il sera malade* 'he' ll be ill' (SF) 49 (31%)  
 he be-FUT ill

The authors concluded that the SF was clearly not favoured for this modal function and was not used spontaneously in speech for this purpose. That it scored a small proportion of points in Part 2 led to their suggestion that it is present somewhere in speakers' linguistic repertoire (perhaps from literature?) but not as a form they would normally use.

### 3.2.2 Wales' (1982) questionnaire

This study examined the range of modal uses ascribed to the SF, including present probability. The task was the same as for the temporal sets described above (ie. acceptability judgement on all sentences, preference judgement between the three verb forms in sentence sets (ie 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>). The three verb forms were the SF, CF and *devoir* + infinitive. The CF was included in case it vied with the SF, though this in fact this was not the case. The CF was clearly the least acceptable and the least preferred form in this context. Eight sentences of the following type were used as the basis of sets with the meaning of present probability.

- (7) a. *On sonne. Ce sera le facteur*  
 Someone ring-PRES It be-FUT the postman  
 'Someone's ringing. It' ll be the postman'
- b. *Monsieur a tort! Le bâtiment aura au moins deux cents mètres de haut.*  
 Monsieur has-PRES wrong. The building have-FUT at least two 100s metres high  
 'The gentleman is wrong! The building will be at least 200 metres high.'
- c. *Où est Jean? Il sera sans doute chez lui.*  
 Where be-PRES John He be-FUT without doubt at his place  
 Where's John? He' ll probably be at home.'
- d. *Quel âge a-t-elle, crois-tu? Elle aura au moins cinquante ans.*  
 What age have-PRES-she, think-PRES-you. She have-FUT at least 50 years  
 'How old is she, do you think? She' ll be at least 50.'

The results are shown in Table 4. Clearly *devoir* + infinitive is the favoured form for expressing present probability. The SF scores are closer to the barely acceptable level.

**Table 4. Overall means for present probability (omitting CF) in 1982 acceptability and preferences judgement study**

	<i>devoir</i> + infinitive	SF
Acceptability	4.885	3.197
Preference	1.130	2.224

NB. For acceptability ratings the higher the score the more acceptable the variable (the scale being 1-5), but for preference ratings the lower the score the higher the preference. Results all statistically significant by ANOVA.

### 3.2.3 Follow-up

Wales repeated the preference task almost 20 years later (2001) with a group of 31 university and senior-school students living in West France. Both temporal and modal uses were investigated. This time three temporal contexts were presented, and exactly the same type of results were obtained as in 1982. The SF and CF were chosen equally frequently for ‘closer to near future’, the CF was preferred for ‘immediate future’ and the SF strongly preferred for ‘more distant future’.

With no modal examples in contemporary spoken corpora, the 20 sentences for the modal section were taken or made up from examples in the grammars. The subjects were instructed that these sentences (unlike the first three sections that were concerned with future time) were concerned with present time. The use of the SF for expressing present probability, general truths and habitual behaviour was investigated.

For all sentences in the modal group, subjects were given alternative verb forms and asked which form or forms they would use if uttering the sentence in everyday conversation. They could thus give equal preference to forms they considered viable alternatives. The eight sentences concerned with present probability were divided into two sub-groups, exemplified by (8a-b) and (8c-d) below. (The verb forms in brackets show the alternative forms offered.)

(8a-b) This group (four sentences) compared the SF, *devoir* +infinitive and the present tense +*sûrement*.

(8) a. *Quel âge a-t-elle, d'après toi ? Elle a sûrement cinquante ans*  
 What age have-PRES-she, according to you. She have-PRES probably 50 years.  
 (*doit avoir* – must have) (*aura* – will have)  
 ‘How old is she, in your view? She’s probably 50.’

b. *On sonne. C'est sûrement le facteur. (Ce sera) (Ce doit être)*  
 Someone ring-PRES It-be-PRES probably the postman (It will be) (It must be)  
 ‘Someone’s ringing. It’s probably the postman.’

(8c-d) This group (four sentences) compared the SF, the CF and the present tense +*sûrement*.

c. *Monsieur a tort! Le bâtiment a sûrement deux cents mètres de haut*  
 Monsieur has-PRES wrong. The building has probably two 100s metres high.  
 (*aura deux cents* – will have, etc) (*va avoir deux cents* – is going to have, etc)  
 ‘The gentleman is wrong! The building is probably 200 metres high.’

d. *Pourquoi n' est -il pas là ? Il est sûrement encore à Paris*  
 Why not-be-PRES-he-not here. He be-PRES probably still at/in Paris  
 (*va être encore* – is going to be, etc.) (*sera encore* – will be, etc)  
 ‘Why isn’t he here? He’s probably still in Paris.’

In the scoring system, each sentence had 31 x 6 (=186) as the total number of response points. If only one preference was given, that form got all six points. If two were equally preferred, they each got three points. If all three were chosen, they each got two points. The overall score for a set of four sentences was 186 x 4 (=744). The results for set (8a-b) and for set (8c-d) are given in Table 5.

**Table 5. Present probability data from Wales’ 2001 preferences study**

Verb forms	Scores out of 744 for each variable. Figures in brackets show % of this score in the total.	
<b>Set a-b</b>		
<i>devoir</i> ‘must’ + infinitive	461	(61.96%)
present tense + <i>sûrement</i> ‘probably, most likely’	257	(34.54%)
SF	14	(1.88%)
null responses	12	(1.62%)
Verb forms	Scores out of 744 for each variable. Figures in brackets show % of this score in the total.	
<b>Set c-d</b>		
present tense + <i>sûrement</i>	541	(72.72 %)
CF	112	(15.05 %)
SF	73	(9.81 %)
null responses	18	(2.42 %)

The results for the (8a-b) set show *devoir* + infinitive as the clear preference for expressing present probability, with present tense + *sûrement* a healthy, though not close second choice. The SF is a very poor third. No speaker used it at all for sentence (8b), the much-used example of its capacity for modal meaning.

In set (8c-d) the CF fared marginally better than the SF. It's not clear why. Some students noted that for them the CF made future reference and it's clear that the SF also fared better in this section. Several subjects commented on (8c) that they could use the future tenses if the building was not yet built, but if it were already built they would use the present. If other subjects took this approach they may have included the future tenses more in their preferences.

However, in the absence of *devoir* + infinitive, the present tense with *sûrement* was the overwhelming preference. Some subjects wrote spontaneously that they would rather use *devoir* for these examples, but it was not on offer. So, for these native-speakers at least, the preferred form in spoken French for expressing present probability is *devoir* + infinitive. The next preference would be the use of the present tense with a supporting modal adjunct. The SF is not favoured in spoken French for the expression of present probability, since in neither section does its score come anywhere close to that of *devoir* + infinitive or the present tense + *sûrement*.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

It was indicated in Section 3.0 that the expression of present probability was one example of the claimed uses of the SF to produce a modalised statement with present time reference. In Wales' investigations the situation portrayed for the SF in the expression of present probability was also true for the other uses investigated where reference to present time was involved: thus for the expression of general truths, habitual behaviour (Wales 1982, 2001) and protestations (Wales 1982) the SF was the least acceptable and the least preferred variable whenever a sentence was interpreted as unambiguously referring to present time.

Accordingly, the results for present probability can be generalised to other modal meanings that requires present-time reference. I suggest the following reason: the temporal meaning of the SF militates against present reference. In contrast to the CF and to the 'arranged' meaning of the present tense with future reference, it portrays a future event as severed from the present, with the meaning 'NOT now, but later'. That this distinction has psychological reality for younger French speakers is shown by spontaneous comments from different students against items in the 2001 modal questionnaire just described, explaining why they reject the SF in a present-time context. Some examples are:

- |     |  |                                  |
|-----|--|----------------------------------|
| (9) | a. <i>Elle <u>aura</u> cinquante ans</i>                                       | = futur:                         |
|     | b. <i>Il <u>sera</u> malade</i>  | = dans le futur;                 |
|     | c. <i>Il <u>sera</u> malade</i>  | = futur, donc incorrect;         |
|     | d. <i>Il <u>sera</u> chez lui</i>  | = futur, donc incorrect          |
|     | e. <i>Il <u>est</u> sûrement encore à Paris</i>                                | = actuellement 'at present'. BUT |
|     | f. <i>Il <u>sera</u> encore / <u>va être</u> encore à Paris</i>                | = futur.                         |
|     | g. <i>Ils <u>seront</u> / <u>vont être</u> en train de traverser le désert</i> | = futur.                         |

Taking together:

- the absence of any examples of traditionally claimed modal uses of the SF in corpora of contemporary French conversation, and in the language of popular broadsheets

- the clear acceptance of and, in some contexts, strong preference for the SF as a temporal marker
- the continuing marginal acceptance given in questionnaires to the SF as a modal marker

the conclusion must be that the empirical evidence flatly contradicts the theory propounded by Harris and Fleischman that in spoken French the SF has now largely lost its temporal functions to the CF and has instead become restricted to expressing modal meanings. This now leaves open the question of the fate of older future tenses when new ones arise. Perhaps it is appropriate to futurity as a concept, to have more than one way of referring to it - which means that such forms can simply co-exist. And in turn, more general questions still remain about the relationship between temporal and modal values of verb tenses.

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