

# Siamou Future Expressions\*

Carmela Toews  
University of British Columbia

## 1. Introduction

This paper describes and gives a preliminary analysis of future expressions in Siamou, a Niger-Congo language of the Kru family. In most modern treatments, future expressions are believed to have a modal component (Marchese, 1984; Enç, 1996; Copley, 2002; etc.). I demonstrate that Siamou futures are also modal, and I explore the nature of this modality. No previous work exists on the modality of future expressions in this language.

Siamou has three morphemes which interact to form three future expressions. The morphemes are an auxiliary, *bè*, and two verbal suffixes, *-a* and *-bè*. These suffixes attach to the infinitive of the main verb. The auxiliary, *bè*, may occur with either of the two suffixes. (If it occurs without either of these suffixes, it does not form a future expression.<sup>1</sup>) With the first suffix it forms what I call the uncertain future, and with the second suffix, the certain future. The first suffix (but not the second) may occur without the auxiliary, forming what I am calling the commitment future.

The claim that Siamou futures are modal is strongly supported by the fact that both the uncertain future and the certain future may be truthfully uttered even if the event expressed by the proposition does not actually occur. An utterance like (1a), for example, which combines the affirmative of one future with the negation of the other, is not contradictory. In this case, the certain future refers to what the speaker believes to be the subject's intentions. Similarly, in (1b), the uncertain future refers to what the speaker predicts the subject will want (to drink water), even though this will be impossible (because there is no water). The commitment future may express obligation or desire. In (1c), the child feels obligated by circumstances to stay with his uncle while his mom goes on a trip.<sup>2,3</sup>

---

\* Many thanks to my consultant, Solo Traoré, as well as to my supervisory committee: Rose-Marie Déchaine, Lisa Matthewson, and Hotze Rullmann. This work was made possible by a SSHRC grant. Please contact me at [carmela1709@yahoo.ca](mailto:carmela1709@yahoo.ca) with any comments or questions.

<sup>1</sup> Although this auxiliary is not restricted to use in future expressions (It may occur without either suffix.), I do not discuss its other functions in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> In the glosses, abbreviations are as follows (in alphabetical order): AUX: auxiliary, CF: certain future, CL: classifier, CMPL: completive, CONJ: conjunction, COP: copula DEF: definite, EN: enclitic EP: epenthetic consonant, IMPF: imperfective, INF: infinitive, PERF: perfective, PL: plural, POSS: possessive, Q: question marker, REL: relative clause marker, SG: singular, SM: subject marker, STAT: stative, UF: uncertain future (note: the suffix used in the uncertain future is also used in the commitment future)

<sup>3</sup> All data is given in Siamou orthography. The orthography follows the IPA, with some

(1) a. à **bè** nun gbɛ-**bè**  
 3SG AUX water drink.INF-CF  
 'He is planning to drink water,

kè à **bè** nun gbɛ-**a** bo.  
 but 3SG AUX water drink.INF-UF NEG  
 but he won't drink water.'

consultant comment: Because I won't let him.

b. à ni byè à **bè** nun  
 3SG if come.PERF 3SG AUX water  
 'If he comes, he will (want to)

gbɛ-**a** kè nun fɔn bo  
 drink.INF-UF but water be.here NEG  
 drink water, but there isn't any water.'

c. à bisháan tala-**a** ní se  
 DEF child stay.INF-UF 1SG at  
 'The child will agree to stay with me.'

context: My sister has to go on a trip, but she can't bring her son with her, so she's leaving him with me.

consultant comment: The child might not like it that his mom is going away, but if he has to stay with someone, he'd like to stay with me.

It has been observed (Copley, 2002) that only some future expressions are compatible with making an offer. For example, in English, the *will* future can be used to make an offer, while the *be going to* future can not. This has been analyzed as an aspectual difference- *will* being a bare-like future (no aspect) and *be going to* a progressive-like future.<sup>4</sup> In Siamou, the uncertain future is felicitous as an offer (2a), while the certain future is not (2b). I explore the possibility that the uncertain future is a bare-like future (2a), and the certain future a progressive-like future (2b).

(2) context: A group of people in the desert have found a water source.

exceptions, mainly: 1. nasalization on a vowel is marked by  $\eta$  after the vowel 2. word final nasals are marked *n*, but the exact nature of their articulation is complex 3. /j/ is written *y* 4. /ʃ/ is written *sh* 5. /gʲ/ is written *j* 6. High tone is marked e.g. á, low tone e.g. à. Mid tone is unmarked. A high-low contour tone is marked e.g. â. A high mid tone is marked áá. All Siamou data are my own unless otherwise specified.

<sup>4</sup> The terms 'bare-like' and 'progressive-like' have been suggested by Copley as more appropriate than the terms 'bare' and 'progressive' which she uses in her dissertation (Copley, 2002; Reis-Silva, 2008).

Someone needs to drink it to see if it's safe.

- a. I offer to do it.

ń bɛ̀ à yɛɲn gbɛ-a.  
 1SG AUX DEF mouth drink.INF-UF  
 'I will drink the water.'

- b. I decide to do it and I inform the group of my decision.

ń bɛ̀ à yɛɲn gbɛ-bɛ̀.  
 1SG AUX DEF mouth drink.INF-CF  
 'I am going to drink the water.'

These data demonstrate that Siamou futures impart meaning beyond merely a future time for an event. Rather, they include modal notions such as planning, intention, or desire. They also pose a challenge for current theories because although usually English futures (among others) are analyzed as modal, nevertheless, utterances like *He is going to drink water, but he won't drink water* are infelicitous. This suggests that although future expressions in various languages may be modal, they are not necessarily the same type of modal.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: In section 2, I introduce the data on Siamou futures. The third section deals with the modality of future expressions, with 3.1 providing the theoretical background and 3.2 the beginnings of an analysis. Section 4 discusses bare- and progressive-like futures, giving the theoretical background in 4.1 and some discussion of how this relates to Siamou in 4.2 and 4.3. In section 5, I conclude.

## 2. Description of Future Expressions

The morphemes, *bɛ̀*, *-a*, and *-bɛ̀* interact to form three future expressions, as shown in (3). The left column gives the form, the middle column the traditional term (if one exists) and the right column the label I have given it.

	<b>form</b>	<b>traditional gloss</b>	<b>gloss argued for</b>
(3) a.	<i>bɛ̀ . . . INF-a</i>	distant future	uncertain future
b.	<i>bɛ̀ . . . INF-bɛ̀</i>	near future	certain future
c.	<i>∅ . . . INF-a</i>	*none	commitment future

The fourth logical possibility, *∅ . . . INF-bɛ̀*, is not attested, except in rapid speech when the *bɛ̀* is dropped. When it does occur, it is equivalent in meaning to (3b).

The uncertain future has been called the *distant future* and the certain future the *near future* (Thiessen, n.d.). However, this does not seem to be the relevant distinction since there are no known restrictions on the time frame of

<sup>5</sup> *b'* before a vowel

these futures. The certain future may be used to talk about events three years from now (4a), and the uncertain future for events on the same day (4b). Traorè (1985), although using the terms *distant future* and *immediate future*, describes the *distant future* as *uncertain*.<sup>6</sup>

- (4) a. Ye-Lón      **bè**      bε-bè      nòtôn    tyáar    wono  
 Carmela      AUX      come.INF-CF      year      three    in  
 'Carmela is going to come in three years.'
- b.    ní    **bè**      nan      jén-a      klón-se  
 1SG AUX      wood      look.for.INF-UF      field-at  
 'I'll go get wood in the bush.'

context: It is International Women's Day, so a husband offers to help his wife by getting the firewood.

The commitment future is often (but not always) used in a question/response sequence (5). Sometimes it conveys a sense of obligation or desire on the part of the subject.

- (5)    á      gbε-a      y'      á?      oo,      ní      gbε-a.  
 3SG    drink.INF-UF    EP      Q      yes    1SG      drink.INF-UF  
 'Will you have a drink?'                      'Yes, I will.'

### 3. Modality of Future Expressions

In this section I look at types of modality in future expressions in a number of different languages (part 1), and then in Siamou (part 2).

#### 3.1 Modality of Future Expressions Cross-linguistically

In many languages (e.g. French (Celle, 20045), English (Enç, 1996), Low German (Toews, 2009), St'át'imcets (Glougie, 2008, Matthewson, 2006, Rullmann et. al., 2008), Paraguayan Gauraní (Tonhauser, 2009)) future expressions have been analyzed as modal. However, saying that a future in one language is modal does not mean that it behaves in the same way as a future in another language which is also said to be modal. It is important to look at what kind of modality is being expressed.

Portner (2009) lists three categories of modals. The first is epistemic modality, which has to do with the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition. The second category is priority modality, which is divided into three sub-categories: deontic, bouletic and teleological. Deontic modality refers to how things ought to be (ethically, morally, or legally). Bouletic modality has

<sup>6</sup> Terms are translated from French.

to do with what the speaker wants (or does not want), and teleological modality has to do with the speaker's goals. Dynamic modality is the third category. Its two sub-categories are volitional and quantificational modality. Volitional modality refers to what the agent has the ability, opportunity or disposition to do. Quantificational modality includes existential and universal quantification over individuals. Modals may also come in at least two different strengths: necessity (strong) and possibility (weak).

Cross-linguistically, future expressions vary in the kind of modality they express. In English and French, futures have been analyzed as encoding epistemic modality, prediction (necessity) in particular (Enç, 1997, Celle, 2004/5), and circumstantial (dynamic) and deontic modality (Copley, 2002). St'át'imcets futures encode epistemic modality, varying in strength from necessity to possibility (Glougie, 2008; Rullmann et. al., 2008). Futures in Paraguayan Guaraní encode the modal notions of intention (a type of volitional modality) and prediction (epistemic modality) (Tonhauser, 2009).

### 3.2 Modality of Future Expressions in Siamou

In Siamou, both the certain and the uncertain futures encode, among other things, intention. As a result, in some contexts future expressions may be regarded as true even though the speaker knows that the intended event will not take place. In (6a), the speaker uses the uncertain future to talk about an event which the agent intends to carry out, but will not be able to because he is lacking the necessary items. In (6b), it is the certain future which is used to talk about the event (climbing the hill) which will not actually occur. This is followed by a second clause using the negation of the *uncertain* future to express what will actually happen (according to the speaker).<sup>7</sup>

(6) a. context: He won't end up spreading a mat because there isn't any.

à	<b>bè</b>	kpàr	búr-a	kè	kpàr	tèn-nè	bo
3SG	AUX	mat	put.INF-UF	but	mat	be.INF-CMPL	NEG
'He'd like to spread a mat, but there isn't any mat.'							

b. context: I know someone who has plans to climb to the top of a

<sup>7</sup> When used modally, the terms *certain future* and *uncertain future* refer to the certainty with which the agent views the event, not the likelihood of the event actually occurring, since it would be strange for a *certain future* to be used with an event that will not occur.

of certain hill, but the hill is on my land, and I have no intention allowing him to climb the hill.

à **bè** dú-**bè** fóro à káal-i jínatyé  
 3SG AUX climb.INF-CF till DEF hill-DEF top  
 'He plans to climb to the top of the hill,

kè à **bè** dú-**a** bo  
 but 3SG AUX climb.INF-UF NEG  
 but he won't climb it.'

Interestingly, an utterance like (6b) is infelicitous in the first person because if the agent is also the speaker, there is a contradiction between what the agent intends and what the speaker expects or predicts.

The commitment future may mark deontic modality (obligation), or bouletic modality (desire). In (7a), the speaker feels obligated to prepare the meat. In (7b), the speaker would really like to cough, but is unable to.

(7) a. context: A group of people is planning a party. Everyone will have a job to do. I'm not necessarily very interested in preparing the meat, but I agree to do it.

ń à kyε-ε táan-**a**  
 1SG DEF meat-DEF cook.INF-UF  
 'Ok, I'll make the meat.'

b.<sup>8</sup> ń kpêŋl -**a** kè ń kpêŋl ħin bo  
 1SG cough.INF-UF but 1SG cough.INF be.able.to NEG  
 'I want to cough, but I can't.'

Traoré (1985), in one example, translates this future as 'want.'

(8)<sup>9</sup> ń múkal di-**a**  
 1SG corn.porridge eat.INF-UF  
 'I want to eat corn porridge.'

#### 4. Bare- and Progressive-like Futures

<sup>8</sup> translation translated to English from French provided by consultant: "J'ai le désir de tousser, mais je ne peux pas."

<sup>9</sup> from Traoré, 1985: (36), translated from French.

This section has two parts. In the first part, I summarize some of the literature on bare- and progressive-like futures. In the second part, I use this to inform my analysis of Siamou future expressions.

#### 4.1 Theoretical Background on Bare- and Progressive-like Futures

Copley (2002) looks at future expressions in English, in particular, *will* and *be going to*. In her analysis, *will* has no aspect marking while *be going to* has progressive aspect (usually marked by *-ing* in English).

An important difference between *will* and *be going to* is that *will* can be used to make an offer (9a), while *be going to* can not (9b).

- (9) context: a roadside advertisement<sup>10</sup>
- a. 'We'll change your oil in Madera.'
  - b. # 'We're going to change your oil in Madera.'

English is not the only language to have a contrast between a future expression that can be used to make an offer and one that can not. Some other languages that have these contrasts are Turkish (Copley, 2002), Indonesian (Copley, 2002), Blackfoot (Reis Silva, 2008), and St'át'imcets (Glougie, 2008). However, not all these languages are analyzed in the same way as English, as having a bare-like future modal and progressive-like future modal. Reis Silva argues that the relevant contrast in Blackfoot is between a bare future modal and a modal that includes imperfective aspect (which is similar to progressive aspect, but not exactly the same). As for St'át'imcets, Glougie has analyzed one of the future morphemes as a future modal with the second one encoding prospective aspect but no modality. The future modal can be used to make an offer, but the prospective aspect morpheme can not. Thus, it appears that the offering contrast is derived differently in different languages.

In all the analyses (for English, Blackfoot, and St'át'imcets), the idea that an offer contains an (explicit or implicit) *if*-clause is crucial. An offer is understood to be an expression of willingness to do something for someone else *if that person desires it*, but not otherwise. However, in English and Blackfoot, the offering contrast is derived by an *aspectual* difference- between a bare future modal and either a progressive (English) or an imperfective (Blackfoot) future modal. The reason a progressive or imperfective is not acceptable as an offer is that it quantifies over worlds where the proposition is carried out even if the offeree does not desire it, which contradicts the definition of an offer.

In St'át'imcets, on the other hand, it is a *modal* difference which derives the offering contrast. Glougie argues that the reason one future can be used to make an offer is because it is modal. As a modal, it is an operator, which allows

<sup>10</sup> examples from Copley, 2002: (12).

it to generate a structure which includes an implicit *if*-clause, which is part of the definition of an offer.<sup>11</sup> The second future is not a modal, so it can not generate the necessary *if*-clause.

The chart in (10) compares the modality and aspect of the two futures across these three languages. FUTURE 1 is the future that can be used as an offer, and FUTURE 2 is the one that can not.

(10)	modality		aspect	
	FUTURE 1	FUTURE 2	FUTURE 1	FUTURE 2
English	modal	modal	bare	progressive
Blackfoot	modal	modal	bare	imperfective
St'át'imcets	modal	<b>not</b> modal	bare	prospective

## 4.2 Offerings in Siamou

In Siamou there is also a contrast between future expressions that can be used in an offering contrast and those that can not. The uncertain future is felicitous as an offer (11).

- (11) a. context: A guy on a motorcycle stops by a roadside mechanic. The mechanic sees that his wheel needs to be changed and offers to do it for him.

á ni à se, ní b' á kpaŋle mɔsɛŋl-a  
 2SG if 3SG at, 1SG AUX 2SG wheel change.INF-UF  
 'If you want, I'll change your wheel.'

- b. context: A group of people is planning a party. Everyone will have a job to do. I volunteer to prepare the meat.

ní b' à kyɛ-ɛ táan-a  
 1SG AUX DEF meat-DEF COOK.INF-UF  
 'I'll cook the meat.'

The certain future, on the other hand, is compatible as a decision (12a,b), but not as an offer (12b).

- (12) a. context: I have decided that I am definitely going to wash clothes tomorrow.

ní bè wɛ wú-bè dwɔn.  
 1SG AUX cloth.PL wash-CF tomorrow.

<sup>11</sup> Glougie (2008) argues for the same analysis for English futures, but for the purposes of comparison, I use Copley's (2002) analysis in the chart in (10).



'I'm going to wash clothes tomorrow.'

- b. context: A group of people is planning a party. Everyone will have a job to do. I decide that I'm going to prepare the meat, and I inform the group of my decision.

inappropriate context: A group of people is planning a party. Everyone will have a job to do. I volunteer to prepare the

meat.

ń **b'** à kye-ε táan-**bè**  
 1SG AUX DEF meat-DEF COOK.INF-CF  
 'I'm going to cook the meat.'

In the context of planning a party, both the uncertain and the certain future are felicitous, but only the uncertain future is understood to be an offer. The certain future is interpreted as an announcement of a decision.

The commitment future is also felicitous when uttered in the context of planning a party (13a), repeated from (7a). However, it is not clear how this third future fits into the analysis, since it resembles an offer, especially in (13b), but often carries an extra modal element (obligation), as in (13a).

- (13) a. context: A group of people is planning a party. Everyone will have a job to do. I'm not necessarily very interested in preparing the meat, but I agree to do it.

ń à kye-ε táan-**a**  
 1SG DEF meat-DEF COOK.INF-UF  
 'Ok, I'll cook the meat.'

- b. à ni tèn á se gbɔ jaal bo ín  
 3SG if be.PERF 2SG to thing bad NEG EN  
 'If it's not a problem for you,

ń múkal táan-**a** **ín**  
 1SG corn.porridge cook.INF-UF EN  
 I would cook corn porridge.'

### 4.3 Counterfactuals and Futures in the Past

It has already been shown that Siamou future expressions are modal (3.1). Now

I introduce some data which may shed some light on the aspectual make-up of these futures.

Tonhauser (2009) uses the fact that the future in Paraguayan Guaraní can either have a present reference time or a past reference time to show that it must encode prospective aspect rather than future tense. This is based on a framework from Klein (1994) where tense and aspect relate three time intervals: utterance time (time of speaking), reference time (time relevant in the discourse), and event time (time the situation described takes place). Future tense requires the reference time to follow the utterance time, and prospective aspect requires the event time to follow the reference time. Past tense requires the reference time to precede the utterance time. Therefore, past tense and prospective aspect are compatible (reference time precedes utterance time and event time follows reference time), but past and future tense are not (reference time precedes utterance time and reference time follows utterance time).

In Siamou, there is an enclitic, *ín*, which often serves to shift the reference time to the past.<sup>12</sup> This morpheme may occur with all three futures, resulting in either a(n implied) counterfactual, or a past future. The examples in (14) show that the certain future can occur with *ín*. (14a) is a counterfactual, and (14b) shows that the counterfactual interpretation can be cancelled, giving the utterance a past future reading. The examples in (15) and (16) show the same thing for the uncertain future and the commitment future.

- (14) a. à **bè** kpàr bliin-**bè** **ín** kè ní à bñin múno  
 3SG AUX mat fold.INF-CF EN but 1SG 3SG fold.PERF already  
 'He was going to fold/would have folded the mat, but I already folded it.'
- b. à **bè** à kpàr-i bliin-**bè** **ín** k' à bñin  
 3SG AUX DEF mat-DEF fold.INF-CF EN CONJ 3SG fold.PERF  
 'He was going to fold/would have folded the mat, and then he

<sup>12</sup> This enclitic is too complex for me to be willing to gloss it as *PAST*, so I cheat and gloss it simply as *EN*, for enclitic. The example in (i) shows that *ín* does not necessarily shift the reference time to the past.

- (i) a. ní kel-**a** **ín** kè gbúr mún to  
 1SG talk.INF-UF EN but a.cold 1SG to  
 'I would give a talk, but I have a cold.'  
 'I would have given a talk, but I have a cold.'

context 1: There are going to be some speeches tomorrow. I was asked to give a talk, but I won't be doing it because I have a cold.

context 2: There were some speeches yesterday. I was planning to give a talk, but then I wasn't able to because I had a cold.

did.'

- (15) a.    à   **bè**    à    kpà̀r-î            bliin-a            **ín**  
           3SG    AUX    DEF    mat-DEF            fold.INF-UF  
           EN  
           'He was going to fold a mat,  
           kè    à            tél-dù-è  
           but 3SG    spirit-drip.INF-CMPL  
           but he forgot.'
- b.    à   **bè**    à    kpà̀r-î    bliin-a    **ín** k'    à    bliin  
           3SG AUX DEF mat-DEF fold.INF-UF EN    CONJ 3SG    fold.INF  
           'He was going to fold a mat, and then he folded it.'
- (16) a.    à    nun    gbɛ-a            **ín**  
           3SG water    drink.INF-UF            EN  
           'He would have drunk water.'
- context: He was thirsty. If you'd given him water, he would have  
           drunk it, but you didn't.
- b.    à    nun    gbɛ-a            **ín** ki    nun    gbɛ  
           3SG water    drink.INF-UF            EN CONJ    water drink.INF  
           He was going to drink/would have drunk/should have drunk water,  
           and then he did.

If there is no continuation clarifying what actually happened, it is usually assumed that the event did not occur (as in (16a)).

These data show that Siamou future expressions likely encode prospective aspect rather than future tense. Since they all seem to behave quite similarly in this regard, it is unlikely that the offering contrast can be accounted for by postulating a difference in aspect. However, I also showed previously that the three futures are all modal, so the analysis given by Glougie (2008) for St'át'imcets and English where one future is analyzed as having a modal component and the other having no modal component does not account for the offering contrast either. Some other solution is required for Siamou. At this time I do not have an account for this, but it is hoped that the solution that accounts for Siamou will also account for the data in English, Blackfoot, St'át'imcets, and any other language that is shown to have an offering contrast.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper I asked two questions. The first question is whether Siamou futures can be analyzed as modal. I claimed that they can and showed that the certain and uncertain futures encode intention, and the commitment future encodes obligation and desire. Secondly, can Siamou futures be analyzed as bare- and progressive-like? The answer to this is twofold. Yes, because they make the same kind of contrast between a future that can be used in an offering context and another that can not. This is similar to English, which has been analyzed as having a bare- and a progressive-like future. However, the answer is also no because this contrast does not appear to be caused by an aspectual difference (following Copley (2002) and Reis Silva (2008)) where one future is bare and one has progressive aspect, nor by a modal difference (following Glougie (2008)). It remains to be determined how the offering contrast can be derived in Siamou.

### References

- Celle, Agnes, 2004/2005. The French future tense and English *will* as markers of epistemic modality. *Languages in Contrast* 5:2: 181-218.
- Copley, Bridget, 2002. *The Semantics of the Future*. Ph.D. Dissertation, MIT.
- Enç, Murvet. 1996. Tense and modality. *The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory*, ed. S. Lappin, pp. 345–358. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Glougie, Jennifer. 2008. On Future Expressions in St'at'imcets: Modality versus Aspect. Poster presented at the Canadian Linguistics Association Conference. May 31-June 2, 2008. Vancouver, British Columbia.
- Klein, Wolfgang, 1994. *Time in Language*. New York: Routledge.
- Matthewson, Lisa, 2006. *Temporal Semantics in a Supposedly Tenseless Language*. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 29:673-713.
- Portner, Paul, 2009. *Modality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reis Silva, M. Amelia, 2008. *Future Modality in Blackfoot*. Qualifying Paper, UBC.
- Rullmann, Hotze, Lisa Matthewson and Henry Davis 2008. Modals as Distributive Indefinites. *Natural Language Semantics* 16:317-357.
- Thiessen, Paul, n.d. *Tone Paper*. (unpublished).
- Thiessen, Paul, and Souleymane Traoré, n.d. *Dictionnaire seme*. (unpublished).
- Toews, Carmela, 2009. *Low German's Future: A Modal Analysis*. (unpublished).
- Tonhauser, Judith, 2009. The Paraguayan Guaraní Future Marker, -ta: Formal Semantics and cross-linguistic comparison. To appear in R. Musan and M. Rathert (eds.) *Tense Across Languages*.
- Traoré, Kotalama, 1984. *Eléments de phonologie dimensionnelle du Seme*. Université de Ouagadougou.
- Traoré, Kotalama, 1985. *Recherche sur la Structure de l'Enonce Seme*. Université de Nice.