

Future time reference in Finnic languages: the case of LE-verbs

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Importance and aims of the study

In Finnic languages, future time reference (FTR) is generally expressed by means of the present tense. Because of this, **possible periphrastic future-marking devices are often overlooked**, especially in case of the study of smaller Finnic languages.

In Finnic languages, there are two verbs in the role of the copula: < *wole- and *le-. In the present tense, the verbs descending from

- *wole- usually get present time reference and non-modal meaning,
- *le- (hereinafter referred to as LE-verbs) generally express **future time reference and modal meaning** (e.g. Majtinskaja 1973: 88–89).

The **aims of the study** are as follows:

- 1) map the distribution of LE-verbs in Finnic languages,
- 2) determine the functions of LE-verbs in a complex predicate,
- 3) propose a grammaticalization path for the LE-verbs,
- 4) see to what extent the LE-verbs can be regarded as future-marking devices in Finnic languages.

Material and Method

For the purposes of the present study I compiled a **mini-corpus** consisting of example sentences taken from **text collections, grammars, dictionaries, newspapers**, and my own **field-work data** (Tver Karelian, collected in 2009; Middle-Ludian, 2012).

Besides **LE-verbs**, the example sentences also include **other verbs that can be considered as possible future-marking devices** in the corresponding languages (see Table 1). As noted by Bybee *et al.* (1994), it is not uncommon for a language to have more than one future-marking device – each device has its own specialized use.

The analysis proceeds from the **grammaticalization theory** taking into account possible grammaticalization paths for future-marking devices presented e.g. in Bybee *et al.* (1994), Heine and Kuteva (2002).

Table 1. Verbs involved in the analysis

Source	'come'	'become'	'begin'	copula	'be born'	*Total
Finnish	<i>tulla</i>		<i>ruveta</i>	<i>lienee</i>		**
Viena Karelian	<i>tulla</i>		<i>ruveta</i>	<i>lie(nöy)</i>		220
Aunus Karelian			<i>ruveta</i>	<i>lie(nöy)</i>	<i>rotie(kseh)</i>	220
Middle-Ludian			<i>rubeta</i>	<i>liettä</i>	<i>rod'ida</i>	***
Vepsian			<i>zavoŕ'ta</i>	<i>lindä</i>		220
Tver Karelian			<i>ruveta</i>	<i>lie(nöy)</i>		220
Votian			<i>nõisa</i>	<i>leevvä</i>		220
Estonian		<i>saada</i>	<i>hakata</i>	<i>leeda</i>		**
Livonian		<i>sõdõ</i>	<i>irgõ</i>	<i>līdõ</i>		220

* Total number of example sentences in the corpus.

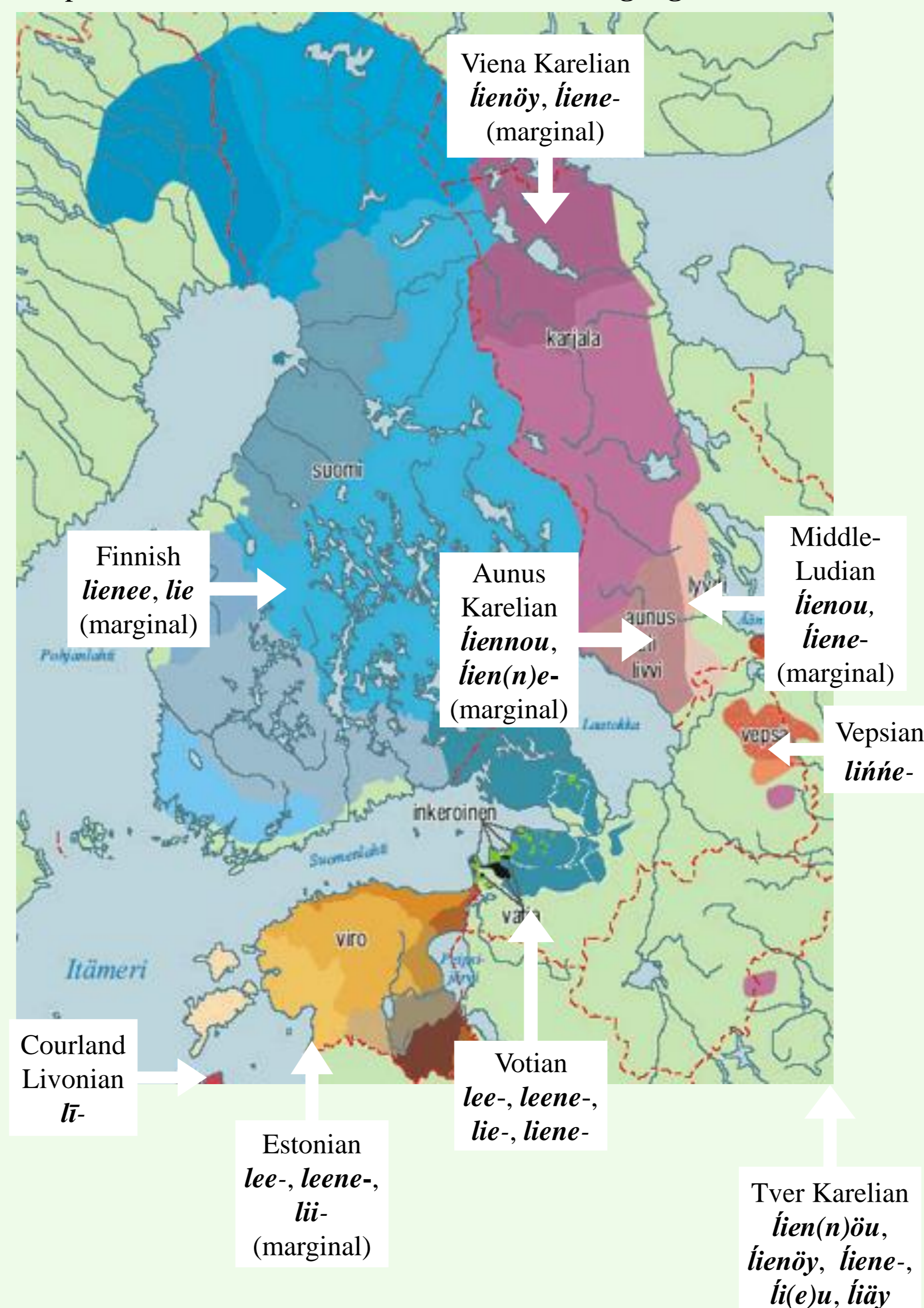
** Not included in the corpus; involved in the study on the basis of literature concerning the corresponding verbs.

*** Observations based on field-work on Middle-Ludian.

Results. Form

1. The possible phonetic shapes are *lie-, lie-, lee-, lii-, li-, li(e)u, liäy*.
2. The suffix **-NE-** (usually connected with a potentiality reading) can give an additional potential meaning but not necessarily.
3. Although instances of LE-verbs can be found in all the Finnic languages, in some languages their usage appears to be quite marginal (see Map 1).

Map 1. Distribution of LE-verbs in Finnic languages



Comments on marginal uses

In **Estonian**, some usages of *leeda* can be attested only in the Old Literary Language and in insular dialects. Nowadays, *saada* and *hakata* are better candidates for future-marking devices.

In **Finnish**, *lienee* expresses mainly a potential meaning; *tulla* is sometimes used as a future-marking device.

In **Aunus Karelian**, *lie(nöy)* has various uses (mainly it expresses potentiality) but it appears only 31 times; *rotie(kseh)* seems to have developed at least into a future copula. The situation is similar in **Middle-Ludian** in the case of *liettä* and *rod'ida*.

In **Viena Karelian**, *lie(nöy)* has 36 occurrences (in most of the cases it gets a potentiality reading, or it functions as an adverb or a pronoun); no periphrastic device seems to stand out as an at least partly grammaticalized future marker.

Results. Functions

In Livonian, Tver Karelian, Vepsian, and Votian (the non-marginal cases),

- 1) **the LE-verbs mainly function as future copulas, often involving a dynamic reading**, e.g. Example (1),

(1) Livonian (*lī-* as a future copula):

ne umārd lī-bōd nei' knaššōd (SET 105)
these apple.PL COP-3PL so beautiful.PL
'These apples will be so beautiful'

- 2) **in a complex predicate, either temporal, aspectual or modal meanings arise** (see Table 2 and Example 2).

Table 2. LE-verbs in a complex predicate

Language	Meaning	Temporal	Aspectual	Modal
Vepsian		-	<i>liññe- + PTCP</i>	-
Votian		<i>lee- + SUP</i>	<i>lee- + PTCP</i>	<i>lee-/lie- + INF</i> <i>lie- + PTCP</i>
Tver Karelian		-	<i>liene- + PTCP</i>	<i>lie(n)öu/</i> <i>li(e)u + INF</i>
Livonian		<i>lī- + INF</i>	<i>lī- + PTCP</i>	<i>lī- + INF</i> <i>lī- + PTCP</i>

(2) Livonian (modal usage of *lī-*):

kus sie vōŕ'im lī-b pānda (SET 169)
where this key COP-3SG put.INF
'Where does one have to put this key?'

Discussion

1. Development towards future marker: copula > TAM-marker (tense being the last meaning to reach).
2. Originally a dynamic verb.
3. LE-verbs can express temporal, modal and aspectual nuances in a complex predicate, but first of all they are used as copulas, cf.:

Language	LE- as a copula	LE- in a compl. pred.	Total (of 220)
Vepsian	116	11	127
Votian	87	10	97
Tver Karelian	130	11	141
Livonian	107	19	126

Conclusions

1. LE-verbs seem to be **obligatory only in copula-like usages**.
2. LE-verbs **can occur in a complex predicate** and give rise even to a temporal meaning but such instances are **rare and do not seem to be obligatory**.
3. In languages where using a LE-verb is marginal, there is usually some other future-marking device that is at least partly grammaticalized.

Further research

1. Outline a more elaborate grammaticalization path for LE-verbs.
2. Give a more accurate description of the domain of LE-verbs.

References

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