

Expressing the Future in Cornish

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When we learn Cornish, the first inflected tense we learn is the so-called present-future. As its title suggests, this tense can be either present or future in sense. Here are some examples from the Middle Cornish texts in which the sense is clearly present:

me a grys ny re peghas hytheu bras worth y lathe 'I believe that we have greatly sinned today by killing him' PC 2993-94; *my a lever arlud flour y terfensa myrgh emperour zy par* 'I tell you, choicest lord, he would deserve an emperor's daughter as his spouse' BM 184-86; *Me a weyl guas war geyn margh* 'I see a fellow on horseback' BM 1884.

And here are some examples where the sense of the present-future is future:

A vap ny dal keles man an pyth a thue gvelis veyth 'My son, it must not be hidden at all: what shall come will be seen' OM 853-54; *deugh gynef me a thyswe chy th agas mester wharre rak parusy y soper* 'come with me; I will immediately show a house for your master to prepare his supper' PC 673-75; *Mars ues den vith a vyn cows py gul erbyn both e vres, ef a throgfar* 'If there is anyone who will speak or act against the wishes of his heart, he will suffer' BK 1496-98.

The present-future seems always to be future in sense with the verb *trega* 'to dwell':

bethaf the wour warbarth ny a dryg nefre 'I shall be your husband; together we shall dwell forever' OM 2111-12; *yn nef agas enefow neffre a tryg hep ponow* 'in heaven your souls will dwell forever without pain' PC 7-8; *ha nena ny a dryg in du ha gans du, ha du a dryg innan ny ha genan ny* 'and then we shall dwell in God and with God, and God will dwell in us and with us' TH 30; *rag henna bys venary eve a dryg ena deffry in paynes bras avel ky* 'therefore forever he shall remain there in great torments like a dog' CW 2052-54.

For 'I live' with present sense one uses the verbal adjective along with the verb *bos*. Here is a good example from Bêwnans Meryasek: *omma yth ese tregys avel hermyt in guelfos* here I live as a hermit in the wilderness' BM 1963-64.

The verb *bos* 'to be' has more inflected forms than any other verb in Cornish. Uniquely *bos* has a distinctive future form: *bedhaf, bydh*. In order to avoid any ambiguity, that is to say, in order to make it apparent that the verb in question is future in sense rather than present, the future of *bos* is sometimes added to the present future of verbs to create an unambiguous future form. Here are a few examples:

me a n caruyth y m colon alemma bys gorfen beys I shall love him in my heart from now until the end of the world' PC 1703-04; *the th lauarow y kresen hag a th caruyth bynary* I would believe your words and will love you always' PC 2871-72; *Ne ve the bar, re Gasak! na ny n gwelvith lagasaw i n bys hagan* Never was there your equal, by St Cadoc! nor will eyes see such in the world in future' BK 1974-76; *Lowr ony, by Godys arm! ha henna why a wylwyth* 'We are enough, by God's arm! and that you will see.' BK 2725-26; *Ef ew pen an vethogyen hag a ylwyth the sawya* He is the chief of physicians and he will be able to heal you' BK 796; *ken ef a wra ow shyndye mar clewvyth agan guary* 'otherwise he will harm me if he hears of our fun' OM 2133-34; *So in nessa homelie why a clowith moy* 'But in the next homily you will hear more' TH 46.

These distinctively future forms seem to have arisen by analogy with the future of *gothfos* 'to know' and *wharfos* 'to happen', both of which are themselves compounds of *bos*. Thus, for example, we find:

me a vyn mos the vyras hag a wothfyth kyns donas a thyworto ol an cas I will go to look and will know before departing from it all the matter 'OM 1399-41; *rag y whyrvyth an tyrmyn drethe may fether the wel* 'for the time will happen when people will be the better through them' 'OM 46.

Although such distinctively future forms (apart from *gothvyth* and *whyrvyth* which already contain *bos*) are attested, they are not particularly common. And the reason is obvious. They were in most cases not necessary, since Middle Cornish expressed future sense periphrastically, that is to say with one or other of the auxiliary verbs *gwil* 'to do' or *mynnes* 'to wish'. Here are some examples of a) with *gul* and b) with *mynnes*:

a)

hy cemes my a wra agy the n gorhyl toth bras 'I will take her into the ship very quickly' 'OM 1123-24; *y salugy my a wra mar scon del thyffyf thotho* 'I will greet him as soon as I come to him' 'PC 973; *mara tue in the ogoys eff a ra scollya the goys* 'if he comes near you, he will shed your blood' 'BM 1106-07; *Eff a ra agys confortya, eff a ra agys ledya in oll gwryoneth* 'He will comfort you, he will lead you into all truth' 'TH 38; *ha te preif a wra cruppya ha slynckya war doer aheys* 'you, serpent, will crawl and slide along the ground' 'CW 912-13.

b)

myr orth ov offryn ha ressef thy's ov dege rag mar ny wreth my a vyn y thon genef arte dre 'consider my offering for if you do not, I will take his back home with me again' 'OM 505-08; *me a vyn mos the vyras fattel yw gans ihesu ker* 'I will go to see how it is with dear Jesus' 'PC 2965-66; *then guylfoys in pur certen me a vyn mones deyow prest the helghya* 'on Thursday very truly I will go to the wilderness indeed to hunt' 'BM 3158-60; *ha yn weth ow gwelas pew vge ow despisea ha gwetha y erriow benegas ef, ha ef a vyn dos the judgia oll an bobell* 'and also seeing whom despises and keeps his words, and he will come to judge all the people' 'TH 59; *ha carnall ioye in bys ma ny a vyn warbarth naha der vothe an tase a vercye* 'and carnal pleasure on earth we will forgo together by the will of the Father of Mercy' 'CW 1315-17; *mee a ved n moze da whelaz weale da weele; ha whi el dandal gose bounans obba* 'I will go to seek work to do and you can earn your living here' 'JCH §2.

A note about *mynnes* as an auxiliary. The original meaning of *mynnes* is 'to wish' and one might think that *mynnes* as an auxiliary would of necessity imply volition. In the earliest Middle Cornish, i.e. in *Pascon agan Arluth* this is often so, but not always. Thereafter, however, the sense of volition is absent, for example the quotation I have just given from *Origo Mundi: ressef thy's ov dege rag mar ny wreth my a vyn y thon genef arte dre* 'Accept my tithe, for if you do not I will take it home again with me.' Wella Brown, on the other hand, in his *Grammar of Modern Cornish* §306 says:

'MYNNES implies a willingness, a wish, an intention to do something...It is therefore only applicable to sentient beings or personalised objects.'

This statement of Brown's seems to me to be questionable. When *mynnes* is used as an auxiliary to express the future, there is often no implied wish at all. Look at the following examples:

So my a vyn agys desyrrya why, tus tha oll, the settia agys corfow hagys enevow hooll the thu galosek in sacryfice 'But I will desire you, all good men, to set your bodies and your souls entirely on God Almighty in sacrifice' 'TH 35.

The same phrase *me a vyn agys desyrrya why* occurs again at TH 34a and 38. It is obvious that the verb *desyrya* 'to desire' implies intention or volition. There can therefore be no implied volition in *me a vyn*; otherwise the clause would be tautologous. Tregear is not saying 'I desire to desire you' or 'I intend to desire you to set your

bodies and souls on God, 'but rather 'I will desire you set your bodies and souls on God, 'where *me a vyn* expresses the future, without any volition.

Look at a further example, this time from Lhuyd:

Ny vedn e nevra dæz vêz a gýndan [*Ny vyn ev nevra dos ves a gendon*] 'He'll never get out of debt 'AB: 230c.

If Brown were correct, this sentence would mean 'He does not ever wish/intend to get out of debt. 'Archæologia Britannica dates from 1707. A person in debt could at that time end up in a debtors 'prison. He won't ever get out debt, but he certainly wants to.

Brown tells us that *mynnes* 'to wish 'can be used with sentient creatures or personalised objects only. I'm not so sure that 'personalised objects ' (he means 'subjects', I think) really makes sense. Look at the following:

rag an lahys zynny es a vyn y dampnye porres 'for we possess the laws that will certainly condemn her ' PA 32c; *pronter boys me a garse corff ihesus thy venystra mar myn ov descans servya genogh pan ven apposijs* 'I should like to be a priest to administer the body of Christ, if my education shall be found sufficient, after being examined by you 'BM 522-25.

Are *lahys* and *descans* in those two quotations really personalised? I am not convinced.

It is likely that, for example, *ev a vynn y wil avorow* is based on 'he will do it tomorrow 'in English, and just as there is no implicit volition in English, neither is there in Cornish. This was understood by Lhuyd who writes:

Some English Phrases are also imitated by the Cornish, which would be absurd in the Welsh; Such as Mi vedn môz alêz, I will go abroad, or I will walk forth; As if one should say in Welsh, Mî a vynna vynd ar lêt, which would not be understood till explain d, and then sufficiently ridiculous AB: 250b.

At this point some of you may be asking the following question: if *me a vynn* does not really mean 'I want to', how do you say 'I desire, I want to 'in Cornish? 'We use the conditional of the verb *cara* 'to love'. Here are a few examples:

efyw dev luen a pite y weles me a garse ha cous orth ow map ihesu 'he is God full of pity; I want to see him and speak to my son Jesus 'RD 435-36; *gans golyas ha gans pynys me a garsa crist ze plesya* 'with watching and with fasting I desire to please Christ 'BM 164-66; *the kernov mars egh defry mones genogh y carsen* 'if you are going to Cornwall, I want indeed to go with you 'BM 588-89; *confort thum cervons dyson boys y carsen* 'I desire to be a comfort to my servants indeed 'BM 2851-52; *me a garsa gul both the vrys, ow arluth ker* 'I want to do your heart's desire, my dear lord 'BK 2852.

The present-future is ambiguous in sense. How then does one express the present without ambiguity? The answer is to use the verb *bos* 'to be 'with the quasi-participle in *ow* + verbal noun. Curiously, Wella Brown in his *Grammar of Modern Cornish* §228.1 says:

...the present participle construction can only be translated by the English continuous present : *Yth esov owth oberi* 'I am working.'

Brown, I believe, is mistaken here, as is apparent from the following selection of examples. In them the present participle construction expresses a simple unmarked present:

in crist ihesu caradov yth eseff prest ov cresy y vos lel du 'I believe always in beloved Christ Jesus that he is true God' BM 833-35; *yth eseff orth y care* 'I love him' BM 4023; *yth esan ow desyvya agan honyn* 'we deceive ourselves' TH 8; *kyn nag esogh why ow consyddra an plag a behosow* 'although you do not consider the plague of sins' TH 40a; *esta ge worth ow cara ve moy ys an re ma? eff an gorthebys, Ea, arluth, te a wore henna, fatell caraff ve ge* 'do you love me more than these?' He answered him, Yes, Lord, you know that, that I love you' TH 43; *Indella emay Christ vrth agyn maga ny gans e kiyg ha gos e gorf* 'Thus Christ feeds us with his flesh and the blood of his body' SA 59; *pelha, ema Chrisostom ow scryfa than philipians* 'further Chrysostom writes to the Philipians' SA 66; *yn defyth in myske bestas yma ef prest ow pewa* 'he lives continually in the wilderness with animals' CW 1481-82; *Theram ry do why an bele ma* 'I bestow on you this ball' NBoson; *tho ni an para ma eaue gon maga we are the flock; he feeds us* TBoson; *Thera vi kouz, thera vi lâol* 'I say, quoth I' AB: 71b.

I could cite many more examples but my time is limited. We should remember that both Welsh and Scottish Gaelic use this same idiom 'He is writing, thinking, hoping' to mean 'He writes, he thinks, he hopes;', etc. 'It would seem to be a distinctively Insular Celtic construction.