Notes on the Problematics of the Future Forms in Pāli, Regarding Their Preterit and Modal Functions

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Introduction

We occasionally come across an -issa- future used in the past sense or context in the Pāli canon like this:

Ja IV 177,22*

na pubbe dhanam esissam.

Formerly I did not pursue wealth.

The adverb, pubbe, expresses the past time. But the finite verb, esissam, is future. In fact, this usage of the future, ignoring the sequence of the tenses, is not exceptional. And it seems that this phenomenon was a subject of discussion among the indigenous Pāli grammarians:

Sadd 818,29 sutta 894

matantare tamkālavacanicchayam attie pi bhavissanī.

"According to another view (the suffixes of) the future are also used in the sense of a preterit when there is the wish to use that time (i.e. future time)." (Konow: 1937, 234)

In Sadd, however, Aggavamsa himself rejects this view of another (matantara) and finally tries to explain that -issam ending can be used as substitution of -im ending (Sadd 821,3–5). Apart from the correctness of his explanation, we can perceive from this passage that this phenomenon was a controversial matter.

Some modern scholars also discussed this usage of the future forms. They refer mostly to the following Pāṇini sutra:

Pāṇini III 2,112

abhijñā-vacane lṛt.

In Verbindung mit einem Verbum in der Bedeutung „daran denken, sich erinnern“ steht in diesem Fall das erste Futurum.

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This sūtra indicates that the first future (= lṛt = -syā-future) stands in connection with a verb in the sense of "to think, to remember." It, however, remains unclear whether this sūtra should relate to the special usage of Pāli -issa-future, because its examples lack the verb of "to think, remember," which seems, according to the sūtra, to be an obligatory element in order to use the future in the past sense. 2)

In a concise manner, the morphological explanation of this special future is already given. And in Pāli this is also valid for the first person, but we do need to examine the examples of the second and third persons.

Outline of the Etymological Explanation

In the followings we sum up the morphological explanation: As the future ending of 1 sg. -issam, resembles that of the sigmatic aorist, -isam, they are used interchangeably with each other, i.e., fut. -issam is used in the past sense and aor. -isam in the future sense: See Überblick §465; Alsdorf (1936, 323–324); G §159; P §516.

In Pāli prosody, the future form used in the past sense mostly in 1 sg. And, as we could easily presume, the geminate -ss- of -issam makes a long syllable: We have actually some examples in which the future forms are used for the metrical adjustment (Sn 446 nādhigacchissam; śloka. Cf. Pj II 393,9 nādhigamim. Ja IV 330,19* pavissam; tristubh. Pv 230 samyamissam; śloka). 3) Nevertheless, -issam occurs also without metrical ground (Dhp 153 sandhāvissam; śloka. Ja IV 177,22* esissam; śloka). In those cases, -issam does not contribute to the improvement of the metre of the verses. Furthermore we find -issam also in prose (M III 247,2 amaṇṇissam, not conditional). Therefore Smith (1952, 182) doubts strongly whether the geminate -ss- could be caused by the metrical adjustment.

Further investigation is still needed in order to attest that this confusion of the simple -s- with the geminate -ss- should have ranged over the second and third persons. 4) In Pāli at least, we find a large number of examples of the second and third persons, which does not have anything to do with this morphological confusion.

On the Examples of the Second and Third Persons

The examples in the second and third persons need not only the morphological, but also the semantic analysis, for they obviously play a semantic role in the sentences: In Vin, the future forms denoting the past sense are used, when the Buddha blames his disciples for

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improper acts. On the spot, the Buddha declares their improper acts as offense. Namely those future forms occur often in introductory stories (vatthu) for the Vin rules.

Context: A monk called Dhaniya, deceiving an administrator, gets pieces of wood, which belong to the king Bimbisāra. Because of this improper act, Dhaniya offends people in Magadha. This reaches Buddha’s ear.

Vin III 44,34–35
saccaṃ kira tvam, Dhanīya, raṇṉo dārūṇi adinnam ādiyī ti?
“Is it true, as is said, Dhaniya, that you have taken pieces of wood belonging to the king when they were not given (to you)?” (Horner: Vin trans. I 70)

The action, getting pieces of wood, has already happened at the time when the Buddha inquires of Dhaniya about his act. Consequently the Buddha asks him with preterit ādiyī.

Dhaniya answers with “saccaṃ” and then the Buddha blames Dhaniya in the following manner:

Vin III 44,38–45,1
kathāḥ hī nāma tvam, moghapurisa, raṇṉo dārūṇi adinnam ādiyissasi.
“How can you, foolish man, take the pieces of wood belonging to the king when they have not been given to you?!” (Horner: Vin trans. I 71)

The Buddha uses fut. ādiyissasi, when he blames Dhaniya, although Dhaniya’s improper act has already happened. This usage of the future is also discussed in Sadd:

Sadd 818,6 sutta 893
kathāḥhināma-yogenāitte ‘nāgatasseva payogo.
In the past sense in the connection with [the phrase] kathāḥ hī nāma, the usage [of the verb form] is like [that] of the future.

Seemingly, Aggavamsa admits that the usage of the future forms in the past sense is allowed in the combination with kathāḥ hī nāma, when this is used in the sense of “blame” (nindāvacane, Sadd 818,8). But he does not admit it in combination with a single “nāma” (Sadd 818,17ff.).

As Bechert (1953, 65) indicates, this example from Vin can link to Pāṇini III 3.144 and the following sūtras:

Pāṇini III 3.144
kimvṛtte tīt-lṛt-au.
In Verbindung mit einem Pronomen interrogativum steht, wenn ein Tadel ausgedrückt wird, der Potential oder das erste Futurum,
This sūtra indicates that in the connection of an interrogative pronoun, the optative or first future stands, if blame is expressed. According to this, ādiyissasi in the above-cited Vin example is allowed. The next sūtra is also important:

Pāṇini III 3.145
anavakāpya-amarsayor a-kim-vertyte 'pi.
Wenn ausgedrückt wird, dass man etwas nicht für wahrscheinlich halte oder es nicht leiden würde, stehen Potential und erstes Futurum auch ohne ein Pronomen interrogativum.

This sūtra means that the optative or future stands, if one expresses something that one does not regard as possible or does not like, also without interrogative pronoun. According to Pāṇini III 3.144–145, the optative and future can be replaceable with each other, if one blames someone, or if one describes a certain incomprehensible as well as disgusting event.

Another example from Vin is interesting:

Context: Uruvelakassapa wonders Buddha’s supernatural power, by which five hundred sticks are chopped simultaneously, when he only says “let sticks be chopped.”

Vin I 31,13–14
mahiddhiko kho mahāsamo mahānubhāvo, yatra hi nāma kāṭṭhāni pi phāliyissanti.
“Truly the great recluse is of great psychic power, of great might, in that also the sticks are chopped.” (Horner: Vin trans. IV 41)

The action, letting the sticks be chopped, has already happened. But Uruvelakassapa uses fut, phāliyissanti. According to Pāṇini III 3.145, this would be also allowed because the sentence expresses Uruvelakassapa’s wonder. However, this usage of the future might conflict with Pāṇini III 3.147–151, in which only the optative is allowed in the clause with yatra, when wonder is expressed. Roughly speaking, the grammatical rules of Pāṇini are applicable for the Pāli, but there are also deviations when we look into details.

To return to the first example, the Buddha blames his disciple. In the second, Uruvelakassapa wonders the supernatural power of the Buddha: We can read it from them that the speakers express emotion or attitude toward the event. In this sense, the future forms, ādiyissasi and phāliyissanti in these examples take over the “modal” function and so deviate from the tense system. 3)

This seems at first to be so strange that the tense marker -issa- cross over the grammatical category and take over the modal function. The adjective “modal” here is connected to the “modality,” which designates the expressed attitude of the speakers toward what they are saying. 4) And thus the modality differs from the mood, which is the system of the verb
conjugation. The modality is a concept of the semantics and its analysis does not always agree with the morphological one. It is therefore possible that a certain modality can be expressed with a different morphological feature than that of the mood. To give an example, the English word “would” is the past form of “will,” but it is used actually also as modal auxiliary verb in order to express speaker’s tentativeness (“Would you open the door?”).

Nevertheless, this special usage of the -issa- future in Pāli does not occur arbitrarily. It is conditioned by the additional adverb, nāma, or phrase, kathaḥ hi nāma in Vin:

Context: A monk, tormented by dissatisfaction, cut his male organ off. Hearing of this happening, the Buddha utters as follows:

Vin II 110.25
aññamhi so bhikkhave moghapuriso chetabbamhi aññam chindim.
“This foolish man, monks, cut off one thing when another should have been cut off.” (Horner: Vin trans. V 149)

The Buddha blames this monk with the blaming word “moghapurisa,” but the finite verb is aor. chindim. Consequently it seems that an adverb like nāma or adverbial phrase like kathaḥ hi nāma is obligatory to use the future form for the past event.

Conclusion

To summarize, the future forms in Pāli text, used in the past sense or context, are various and not simple. We should categorize them into two different groups at least: The first group of them stands mostly in 1 sg. Its examples are morphologically explainable, i.e., the substitution of the sigmatic aorist, caused by the resemblance of the form (-issam/-isam).

This leads further to the general confusion of -issam and -isam, and it occurs in prosody also without the metrical ground as well as in prose. On the other hand, the second group stands mostly in the second and third persons. In this group the future forms have a modal function, i.e., they express the feeling or attitude of a speaker like blame or wonder, and so they deviate from the tense-system. However, this special usage of the future is conditioned by the syntax: This is always combined with the adverb nāma, or adverbial phrase kathaḥ hi nāma. And thus this modal usage of the future forms can relate to Pāṇini III 3.145ff. The future forms in Pāli still need to be observed more precisely and comprehensively from the semantic and syntactic point of view.
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〈Notes〉
1) See Charpentier (1918); Konow (1937). See also Bechert (1954, 13), concerning the literature on this topic.
2) Sanskrit examples are collected by Sen (1953, §129); Renou: Grammaire §340, p. 462. Furthermore Burrow (1937, §124) collects examples of northwestern dialect.
3) See Norman: EV I Note on 78, concerning further examples of the confusion of -isam and -issam.
4) Alsdorf (1936, 324–325) argues that in Prakrit, future forms used in the past sense or context should have been occurred for the second and third persons.
5) Renou: Grammaire §340, p. 462 describes that the future can take over the modal function, when the doubt or blame is expressed. Compare with Speijer: Syntax 344, p. 267.

〈Abbreviations〉


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Speijer: Syntax
Speijer, Jacob S. Sanskrit Syntax. Leyden: Brill, 1886.

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