

# Avertives in European Languages

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Organizers:

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## BOOK OF ABSTRACT

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**Thursday 22 May**

## Avertives in Middle Hungarian: extensive variation and expletive negation

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The present paper examines avertives in Middle Hungarian, a period of extensive variation in this domain. By comparing alternative constructions, it aims to shed light on the category, with special attention to the presence or absence of expletive negation (EN), i.e., negation that does not affect polarity.

One way to encode avertivity is through the complex tense system (1). However, the past imperfective, covering meanings like past habitual, past progressive, and counterfactual, requires context for an avertive reading.

- (1) Én            ugyan            elmegyek            vala            velük  
I            although            away.go.PRS.SG1COP.PST            with.them  
'I nearly went with them / I would have gone with them (but my mother-in-law and my father-in-law didn't let me.)' (Bosz. 554., 1629)

Additionally, adverbials such as *csaknem*, *majd*, *majdnem*, and *szinte* 'almost, nearly' function as approximators, yielding avertive/proximative meaning when modifying past or present actions.

- (2) majd    meghaltam    bele  
almost die.PST.1SG    in.that  
'(She tortured me so that) I nearly died from that' (Bosz. 58., 1709)

Biclausal constructions also express avertivity, with the main clause indicating narrow avoidance and the subordinate clause encoding the avoided action—often with EN (3). EN appears either as a marker of counterfactuality (cf. Yoon 2011) or as lexicalizing an entailment (speech-production-based approach, Jin&Koenig 2019). Notably, biclausal patterns can be reduced considerably while retaining an avertive reading (4,5). The adverbials *majdnem* and *csaknem* (incorporating the negative marker) were lexicalized in such reduced contexts.

- (3) csak    kevésbe            múlik,            hogy    meg    nem    fúl  
only    little.ILL            depend.3SG    that    PTCL    neg    suffocate.3SG  
'She nearly suffocates.' (Bosz. 451, 1755)

- (4) csak    kevésbé,            hogy    meg    nem    ölték  
only    little.FAC            that    PTCL    not    kill.PST.3SG.DEFOBJ  
'He got nearly killed.' (Nádasdy 1556)

- (5) csak,    hogy    meg    nem    vakula (Bosz. 30, 1717)  
only    that    PTCL    not    turn.blind.PST.3SG  
'She nearly turned blind.'

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## Avertive constructions in the East Slavonic languages: a corpora-based study

Pavel Falaleev (University of Helsinki)

The presentation addresses the issue of avertive constructions in the East Slavonic languages, i.e. Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian. The data was collected from the biggest corpora of respective languages, namely the Belarusian N-corpus, the Russian National Corpus, and the General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian.

The study has found that there are two types of avertive constructions in the three languages. The first type consists of a complex particle containing the negative element *ne/nie* followed by a verb:

(1) Russian:

*Ja čut' ne upal na skol'zkoj doroge.*  
'I nearly fell on the slippery road.'

That type of avertive is mainly used for perfective verbs in the past. However, the same constructions are not impossible for imperfective verbs. Present and future tenses can also be used in avertive constructions, although less frequently:

(2) Ukrainian:

*Ja zamaťm ne kydaľu kermo, tak dyko rehoču.*  
'I nearly throw the steering wheel laughing wildly.'

The second type of avertive constructions is comprised of the historical past participle of the verb 'to be' followed by the main verb:

(3) Belarusian:

*Haraźniki byľo padumali, što peramahli, jak u pačatku leta ũsih vyklikali ũ padatkovuju inspekciu.*  
'The garage owners were about to think that they had won but everyone was called to the tax office in the early summer.'

While in Russian the historical participle has a fixed form of the singular neuter irrespectively of the agent (and the main verb), in Ukrainian and Belarusian the participle can agree with the subject:

(4) Ukrainian:

*Bim tilki lih buv posered kimnaty [...], ale...*  
'Bim was just about to lie down in the middle of the room [...], but...' [he recalled his owner]

In the latter case the avertive construction has the same structure as the past perfect tense, extinct in Russian but present in modern Ukrainian and Belarusian (Sichinava 2013). Consequently, main verbs cannot be used in present and future.

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# Hungarian (Ugric) avertive patterns in focus

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Hungarian and the Ob-Ugric languages Khanty and Mansi form the Ugric branch of the Uralic languages. Avertives have been described for the Baltic-Finnic branch and Mordvin<sup>1</sup>. There are no descriptions for Ugric languages, mainly because avertives are not grammaticalized, but lexically expressed:

- (1) *Majdnem* térd-re es-ett  
almost knee-LAT fall-PST.3SG  
,He almost fell onto his knee.'  
Hungarian(HNC:[http://corpus.nyttud.hu/mnsz/index\\_eng.html](http://corpus.nyttud.hu/mnsz/index_eng.html))
- (2) *u:tə= qv:tʲ kərəγ*  
down= almost fall+[PST.3SG]  
,He almost fell.'  
Yugan Khanty (OUDb Corpus: <http://www.oudb.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/?cit=1642>)

I'd like to present a small corpus-based overview on avertive patterns in Ugric, paying special attention on verbal prefixes and the pre-verbal focus position<sup>2</sup>:

- In example (2), the adverb *almost* is focused and between the prefix *down* and the verb *to fall*.
- Example (3) rather denotes a progressive meaning (cf. Kuteva 1998). The prefix *be* is attached to its base verb, preceded by the adverb *almost*:

- (3) *Már majdnem befejezte a munkáját, mikor egy hirtelen csoportosulást vett észre.*  
,He had almost finished his work, when he suddenly noticed a group.'  
Hungarian (HNC)

I claim that avertives in Ugric are characterized by focusing on the outcome's avertivity (cf. Arkadiev 2019: 67) recognized in focus marking strategies. The analysis is based on data from Hungarian. Where data availability permits, I compare evidence from Ob-Ugric.

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<sup>1</sup> Erelt, Mati; Metslang, Helle. 2009. Some notes on proximative and avertive in Estonian. *Linguistica Uralica* 45(3). 178–191.

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<sup>2</sup> The position of verbal prefixes in Ugric alters: attached to its base verb, preceding or (only Hungarian) following it.

## Avertive in Abaza

Evgenia Klyagina (Institute of Linguistics, RAS, Russia)

Avertive is a term introduced by Kuteva (1998) for the markers and constructions denoting the situations that were on the verge of happening but didn't occur in reality. It is generally believed that the common sources for avertives include verb phrases involving verbs like 'fail', 'err', 'miss', proximatives, contrastive markers, as well as volitional verb phrases and other irreal constructions (Kuteva 1998: 138; Alexandrova 2016, Overall 2017). In this talk, I would like to contribute to this topic by discussing the avertive marker in Abaza.

Abaza is a polysynthetic language which belongs to the Abkhaz-Abaza branch of the Northwest Caucasian family. In Abaza the avertive meaning is expressed through the combination of the Imperfect (past) tense form and the marker  $-\chi$ , cf. (1):

- (1)    *jacá*                      *awəjdə-psá-χ-wa-n*  
         yesterday              DIST 3SG.H.ABS-die-RE-IPF-PST  
         'Yesterday he almost died.'

However, the avertive is not the primary function of the marker  $-\chi$  in Abaza. Typically,  $-\chi$  expresses a repetitive meaning in the affirmative sentences and a NO LONGER meaning in the negative sentences. Interestingly, in Abkhaz, the closest relative to Abaza, the marker  $-\chi$  has only the repetitive meaning, while the NO LONGER and avertive meanings are conveyed by the different markers. This suggests that in Abaza, the additional meanings NO LONGER and avertive associated with  $-\chi$  are an innovation, likely connected to each other through a semantic shift.

### Abbreviations

3 – 3<sup>rd</sup> person; ABS – absolutive; DIST – distal demonstrative; H – human; IPF – imperfective; PST – past; RE – repetitive; SG – singular.

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## Avertives in the Saami languages of Finland: synchronic and diachronic remarks

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The Saami branch of the Uralic language family consists of approximately ten languages. In Finland, three Saami languages are spoken: Aanaar Saami, North Saami, and Skolt Saami. As all these languages are endangered minority languages, their grammars have been shaped over centuries under the influence of majority languages. Aanaar Saami is often characterized as the only Saami language spoken exclusively in Finland, and its grammar reflects significant influence from Finnish. Skolt Saami has been affected by multiple neighboring languages, primarily Russian and Finnish. North Saami stands out as particularly remarkable, as it is influenced simultaneously by Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish, with these majority languages pulling it in different linguistic directions.

Except for North Saami, expressions of avertivity in Saami languages have been little studied (e.g., Saukkonen 1965: 170–171; Jomppanen 2009: 112–132). I will focus on the three Saami languages of Finland that use quite different morphosyntactic devices to express avertivity, supplemented by the availability of avertive adverbs. For most of these devices, it is possible to find parallels in the neighboring languages, as illustrated by the Finnish (1b) and Russian (2b) equivalents of the Skolt Saami sentences (1a) and (2a):

- (1) a. *Jeä'rğğ leäi tiärrâd suu voo'ps pa'ldde.* (Saukkonen 1965: 170)  
b. *Härkä oli juosta aivan hänen viereensä.*  
'The reindeer bull almost run right next to him.'
- (2) a. *Siõmmnast jiõm jåårram.* (Markus Juutinen, p.c.)  
b. *Ja jedva ne upal.*  
'I almost fell.'

In (1), Skolt Saami and Finnish may express avertivity with a periphrastic construction consisting of a copula in the past tense followed by the lexical verb in an infinitive form ("was to run" = 'almost run'), while in (2), Skolt Saami and Russian express the same function with a negative verb phrase preceded by an adverb *siõmmnast/jedva* 'barely'. I will examine the connections between such structures and their other functions, as well as their historical development.

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## Argumentative orientation of avertives: evidence from polarity items

Jutta Salminen

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The meaning of *avertives* ‘being on the verge of V-ing but not V’ includes components of imminence and counterfactuality (Kuteva 1998: 115–119). These characterizations match to the dual implications of approximative adverbs, like *almost*: the proximal ‘come close to p’ (cf. imminence) and negative ‘not p’ (cf. counterfactuality) (Horn 2002: 55). Evidence from discourse coherence (*so* clause in 1) and polarity items (PPI<sup>3</sup> *some* vs. NPI *any*) shows that the proximal component of *almost* is communicatively salient, i.e. asserted, whereas the negative component is “assertorically inert” in terms of Horn (2002: 55–63) (see also Israel 2011: 66–67). Hence, the argumentative orientation of (1) is towards *p* ‘she passed’, even though ‘not *p*’ is implied (Verhagen 2005: 45–47):

- (1) She almost passed (*some*/\**any* of) the exam(s). So there is hope.

Polarity items behave similarly with avertives, like the Finnish construction *olla* ‘be’ INF (cf. Kuteva 1998: 117):

- (2) Olin törmätä *johonkin*/\**mihinkään*.  
‘I nearly bumped into something/\*anything.’  
...so I should have been more careful.

Even if (2) implies that I did not bump into *anything*, the NPI *mihinkään* (‘anything.ILL’) is not acceptable in (2), but its positively polar counterpart *johonkin* (‘something.ILL’) must be used (see also Salminen 2024: 590). This indicates that avertives, too, argumentatively orient to imminency (see the *so* continuation in 2), despite the negative implication reflected in their category label (cf. *avert*). Based on this evidence, one may hypothesize and it remains to be further studied if this argumentative orientation and the patterning with polarity items hold cross-linguistically for avertives with various grammaticalization paths (see Kuteva 1998).

## References

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<sup>3</sup> PPI stands for *positive* and NPI for *negative polarity item*.

## THE GRAMMATICALIZED AVERTIVE CONSTRUCTION IN FINNISH

Ville Mäki (University of Eastern Finland)

The grammaticalized avertive construction in Finnish consists of an auxiliary verb *olla* 'be' and a main verb in infinitive (Kuteva 2000). This construction expresses the three features of the avertive according to Kuteva (2000): imminence, pastness and counterfactuality. Events expressed by the avertive construction are most commonly undesirable:

1. *Lufthansan kone **oli törmätä** drooniin lähellä Varsovaa.*  
'Lufthansa's plane almost collided with a drone near Warsaw.'

As expected, the construction is primarily used to refer to past events, but in contrary to Kuteva et. al. (2019), it is not limited to the past. Referring to non-past events might occur, although it is less common and usually used in negations and metaphorical clauses:

2. *Kansanedustajaehdokkaat **ovat hukkaa** vaalikoneisiin.*  
'The parliamentary candidates are nearly drowning in election questionnaires.'

Contrary to what Alexandrova (2016: 16) has suggested, negative avertive constructions exist in Finnish. They express events that were close to not happening but did happen after all. Negative avertive constructions display a completely different verb vocabulary than the affirmative constructions:

3. *Jättikukko **ei ollut mahtua** uunista ulos.*  
'The giant pie could hardly fit out of the oven.'

Also in sports news, different verb semantics emerge. When describing events in competitions, the construction is most frequently used to express almost V-ing something desirable, e.g., scoring a goal:

4. *Suomi **oli tasoittaa** pian avausosuman jälkeen.*  
'Finland almost equalized soon after the opening goal.'

The examples represent data – 232 sentences containing the construction – collected from the Language Bank's Yle news archive 2015 sub-corpus.

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## Avertives and their imminent kin: A corpus-based exploration of event structure in Finnish and English

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Finnish has two avertive-type structures (1a-b). The avertive in (1a), which uses the so-called first infinitive of the verb, implies that the action was narrowly averted (e.g. Kuteva 2000). But the status of the proximative in (1b) (using the fifth infinitive) is less clear. While it is commonly argued that (1b) can express imminence and be paraphrased as ‘be about to, be on the verge of’ (Ylikoski 2003, Maamies 1997, also Heine & Kuteva 2002), questions remain about its syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

- (1a) Puu oli kaatua. [avertive]  
Tree.NOM was fall-INF1  
‘The tree almost fell.’
- (1b) Puu oli kaatu-mai-silla-an. [proximative]  
Tree.NOM was fall-INF5-ade-px3sg  
‘The three was about to fall.’

Researchers disagree about the strength of the future implication of the proximative, how closely its semantics are to avertives, and whether it reliably conveys imminence (e.g. Maamies 1997, Ylikoski 2003). Furthermore, its syntactic and aspectual properties are not fully understood, including its converb use (e.g. *huojui kaatumaisillaan* ‘swayed about-to-fall’) and with *olla* ‘to be’ (Ylikoski 2003, (1b)).

To further understanding of this structure, we analyse this structure and its English counterparts in the Europarl corpus (Koehn 2015, parallel corpus, 1,971,568 sentences in Finnish).

The data analysis reveals that many uses of the proximative construction are used in two seemingly distinct ways: (i) imminence contexts, where English uses expressions like ‘on the brink/about to/on the point of’ and (ii) on-going contexts, where English uses the present progressive (‘is emerging’, ‘was sinking’). Crucially, depending on verb class, these can be semantically dissociated (‘a bubble is bursting’ and ‘a bubble is about to burst’ do not describe the same situation). Thus, the proximative can be used for **events/actions that have not yet occurred (and may not occur)**, but *also* for **events/actions that are already ongoing**. We analyze the tense, aspect and verb class properties of the proximative construction to test whether this dual usage points to a semantic duality or whether the imminence and progressive readings can be unified. In addition to English, we are also analysing the German counterparts of the Finnish proximative construction.

**Friday 23 May**

## Tracing the avertive through semantic space: Evidence from Lithuanian

Peter Arkadiev, University of Potsdam

Lithuanian (Baltic) expresses the avertive by means of a periphrastic construction consisting of the past-tense form of the auxiliary ‘be’ and the present active participle of the lexical verb with the continuative prefix *be-* (1). Although avertive is clearly the dominant interpretation of the construction, corpus evidence suggests that it also functions as past proximative (2) and past progressive (3) (Arkadiev 2019).

- (1) *Jau buv-o be-lip-qš ant žem-ės, bet už-kliuv-o*  
already AUX-PST.3 CNT-climb-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M on ground-GEN.SG but PVB-stumble-PST.3  
‘He was already climbing ashore, but stumbled...’

- (2) *J-is į-si-mylėj-o mergin-q, kur-i buv-o*  
3-NOM.SG.M PVB-RFL-love-PST.3 girl-ACC.SG which-NOM.SG.F AUX-PST.3  
*be-iš-vyk-sta-nt-i į Amerik-q, ved-ė ir iš-važiav-o.*  
CNT-PVB-go-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F in America-ACC.SG marry-PST.3 and PVB-drive-PST.3  
‘He fell in love with a girl who was about to leave for America, married her and left.’

- (3) [*Mane surado žemesniajame aukšte,*]  
*kur aš jau buv-au be-duod-a-nt-i interviu*  
where 1SG.NOM already AUX-PST.1SG CNT-give-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F interview  
[*vietinės televizijos žinioms apie prekinimosi madas ir tendencijas.*]  
‘[They found me on the ground floor,] where I was already giving an interview [to the local TV news about shopping fashions and tendencies.]’

In my talk, after discussing the place of the avertive in the semantic space of tense, aspect and mood, I shall argue against the hypothesis advanced by Kuteva (1998) that the avertive develops into proximative through the loss of the counterfactual meaning and propose an opposite direction of development. On the basis of Old Lithuanian data, I shall show that the Lithuanian construction started as a (focalized) progressive which, probably due to competition with other tense-aspect forms, got restricted to the past contexts and turned into a past proximative (cf. Johanson 2000: 153–154; Vafaeian 2018: 17–18, 109–113 on the progressive-proximative-avertive polysemy cross-linguistically). The older progressive function of the construction is retained mainly with a number of telic verbs whose simple past form can only denote completed events, while with verbs of other actional types the past progressive meaning is expressed by the simple past, synonymy avoidance thus pushing the participial construction into the proximative domain. Further development of the construction from proximative into avertive is currently proceeding by the familiar mechanism of conventionalization of implicature (Traugott & König 1991).

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## Avertivity in Udmurt

Laura Horváth  
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In my presentation, I plan to examine the different ways avertive situations can be expressed in Udmurt.

The Udmurt past tense V.PRS + AUX.PST can be used for expressing different imperfective meanings, for instance, progressivity or habituality. Winkler (2001: 48), Leinonen & Vilkuna (2000: 510), and Serebrennikov (1960: 130), however, mention that the past tense in question can act as a marker of interrupted events or can express intentions that never got realized:

- (1) mon        ton        dori        pjr-išk-o        val,        no  
I            you        to        go\_in-PRS-1SG        AUX.PST1        CONJ  
ton        gurt-a-d        vijimte-jed.  
you        home-INE-2SG        be.PST2.NEG-2SG  
'I was about to go into your home, but you were not there.' (Winkler 2001: 48)

- (2) sergej        košk-jni        ed-ja        val,        no        pereś  
Sergej        go\_away-INF        want-3SG        AUX.PST1        CONJ        old  
tjpi-jez        adž-i-z        no        dugd-i-z.  
oak-ACC        see-PST1-3SG        CONJ        stop-PST1-3SG  
'Sergej wanted to go away but saw an old oak and stopped.' (Serebrennikov 1960: 130)

It seems, however, that there are other ways besides the past tense mentioned above for expressing averted situations. In the following example, for instance, the intention that has not been followed through is expressed by another past tense (V.PST + AUX.PST):

- (3) pišta        dašašk-i-z        n'i        val        valekton        šot-jni  
Pista        prepare-PST1-3SG        already        AUX.PST1        answer        give-INF  
ta        paškjt        no        šekjt        juan-lj,        no  
DEM        wide        CONJ        difficult        answer-DAT        CONJ  
čapak        soku (...)        vu-i-z        ataj-ez.  
right        then        arrive-PST1-3SG        father-3SG  
'Pista was about to give an answer to this wide and difficult question but right then, (...) his father arrived.' (Kostolani 2011: 48)

In my presentation, I plan to examine the phenomenon mainly on the basis of blog texts and semi-structured interviews conducted in Udmurtia and Tatarstan in 2015/2016.

### Literature

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## Avertives, apprehensionals, and frustratives in peripheral West South Slavic

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This paper looks at the corpus of peripheral West South Slavic dialects spoken in Montenegro, in order to identify an array of the so-called “semantically elaborate grammatical categories” marking unexpectedly non-realised/counterfactual past eventualities or outcomes, that have been only recently defined in the typological literature (e.g. Kuteva, Aarts, Popova & Abbi 2019), viz. avertives (1), apprehensionals (2), and frustratives (inconsequential) (3).

- (1) *ćaš-umrijet da ne dođe doktor* (Pešikan 1965)  
‘He nearly died, if it weren’t for the doctor’
- (2) *imah poginut* (Pešikan 1965)  
‘I nearly got killed’
- (3) *A ja čekaj, čekaj neće li ko doć, a ono niđe nikoga* (Pešikan 1956)  
‘And I was waiting in vain for someone to arrive; nobody was there’

A typological curiosity in Montenegrin is that ‘general’, all-purpose avertives (1), typically marking once imminent, but unexpectedly non-realised eventualities, are formally distinguished both from apprehensionals, marking non-realisation of a potential, but undesired, unpleasant or harmful past event, as in (2), and frustratives (inconsequential), expressing past eventualities whose expected or desired outcome failed to realise (3). While the former two are grammaticalised with different auxiliaries: a VELLE-based (*ćah*) for avertives (1) and HABERE-based auxiliary (*imah*) for apprehensionals (2), the latter is marked in turn by reduplicated narrative imperative (3).

With such elaborate grammaticalised system, Montenegrin dialects featuring constructions in (1)-(3) present an important case study into the semantic composition and grammatical realisation of the “family of constructions” in question. By more closely examining their use in the traditional corpus, supplemented with own fieldwork on the present-day usage, in this paper we analyse their semantic, syntactic, and lexical properties in more detail.

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## Towards an analysis of the syntax and semantics of avertives in Modern Greek: a cartographic approach

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This paper investigates the typological, semantic and syntactic aspects of the avertive construction in Modern Greek. Following Kuteva’s seminal work (1998, 2019), we take the avertive to be a grammatical category serving to denote an action that was on the verge of occurring in the past but ultimately did not take place. Similar to other Indo-European languages (Cruschina 2018, Pahontu 2024), in Modern Greek, the avertive construction is expressed primarily via a multiple verb construction, involving a specific form of the verb *pijeno/pao*, as in (1).

- (1)    piγ-a                                  na=    pes-o  
       go.PFV.PST-PST.1SG    PRT=    fall.PNP-1SG  
       ‘I was about to fall’.

While the verb *pijeno/páo* ‘go’ is typically found in multiple verb constructions expressing a grammatical meaning (Trigka et al. 2024), its role in avertive constructions remains largely unexplored. Following a description of the semantic, syntactic and morphosyntactic properties of the construction, we examine the restrictions to which the construction is subject, regarding the grammatical aspect, tense and mood properties of both verbs, as well as the *Aktionsart* of the second lexical verb, which, as we argue, distinguishes the avertive meaning from a mere motion interpretation of the construction, as in (2).

- (2)      píjen-a/                      píγ-a                      na=                      *fá-o*  
           go.IPFV-PST.1SG    go.IPFV-PST.1SG    PRT=                      eat.PNP-PRS.1SG  
           ‘I went to eat’.

Bringing empirical evidence including the A-movement of the overt single NP subject and obligatory negation raising to the left of the first verb, we argue in favour of a monoclausal structural representation of the construction under restructuring. Based on a cartographic approach to the functional structure of the clause (Cinque 1999), we propose a possible locus for the verb *píya* and the particle *na* on the clausal spine, taking into account morphological restrictions for V-raising to the IP and/or to CP.

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***Quiso darme una enfermedad- ‘I almost got sick (but didn’t)’***  
**Avertive construction in Peruvian Andean Spanish**

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This paper explores the grammaticalization pathway, WANT > PROXIMATIVE > AVERTIVE, restricted to past events (Kuteva, 1998; Heine & Kuteva, 2019), by examining a case in Peruvian Andean Spanish. In this variety, proximative structures appear in constructions that combine the past form of verb *querer* + verb denoting an atmospheric phenomenon, as in (1). Additionally, avertive meanings are often conveyed through constructions combining the past form of the verb *querer* + *dar* + a term for illness or symptom, as in (2) and (3). These usages contrast with standard Spanish, where avertivity is typically expressed with structures such as *estaba por* ‘was on the verge of’, *por poco*, or *casi* ‘almost’ are commonly used.

(1) Quis-o            llover.  
    want-3SG.PST rain  
    ‘It was about to rain’.

(2) Quis-o            dar-me            una            enfermedad.  
    Want-3SG.PST give-1SG.DAT ART.FEM            illness  
    ‘I almost got sick (but didn’t).’

(3) Me            quis-o            dar            fiebre.  
    1SG.DAT            want-3SG.PST give            fever  
    ‘I almost got a fever (but didn’t).’

This study examines how Quechua employs a semantically similar but grammatically different strategy, using verbal suffixes, to express avertivity. I hypothesize that language contact may have influenced the emergence of these constructions as an internal innovation in Peruvian Andean Spanish. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of grammaticalization processes in contact varieties, demonstrating that Andean Spanish did not merely borrow an avertive structure but developed a novel grammatical means to express this meaning.

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# Exploring the Grammaticalization of Avertivity: Progressive, Proximate, and Avertive Uses in Romanian Polyfunctional Constructions

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Avertivity expresses the non-realization of an event ('was on the verge of V-ing but did not', Kuteva 1998). The semantic development of proximate constructions ('be about to', Heine 1994) into avertive markers is a recurrent grammaticalization pathway, as is the shift from an imperfective tense to an avertive meaning (Kuteva 1998; Ziegeler 2000; Kuteva et al. 2019; Arkadiev 2019; Schwellenbach 2021; Caudal 2023). However, few studies (Pahonțu 2024) have provided quantitative diachronic evidence. This paper offers a case study on the dynamics of form-meaning pairings in the avertive construction *a fi pe cale* ('to be on the way to') in Romanian, exploring its theoretical implications for grammaticalization theory (Heine 2002).

First, I propose a diachronic corpus study of the construction's aspectual uses from the 19th to the 21st century (*Corpus of Old Romanian Texts, roTenTen16*). This study illustrates its polyfunctionality as a TAM marker, expressing the proximate (imminence), the progressive-proximate (progression nearing completion), and the avertive (non-realization of past events). The semantic evolution is captured through temporal marking, the semanticspragmatics interface, Aktionsart, and the semantic prosody of the lexical verb. The avertive meaning of *a fi pe cale* developed with both imperfective and perfective marking, distinguishing it from most Romance languages, which require only perfective marking (e.g., French *faillir* + infinitive). The gradual shift from proximate/progressive (dominant in the 19th century) to avertive uses (emerging in the second half of the century and remaining infrequent in the 20th century) challenges the idea of a sudden shift, suggesting a continuous evolution. Initially found in subordinate clauses, the avertive meaning later extended to monoclausal structures, reflecting its transition from a context-dependent to a conventionalized function (1).

Second, a synchronic experimental study (forced-choice tasks) is proposed to test the corpus findings. The experimental data show that the avertive reading has become the default in contemporary Romanian, particularly in the perfect tense, and to some extent in the imperfect. Thus, I define avertivity as a grammatical category expressing the non-realization of imminent, telic (achievement and accomplishment, cf. Vendler 1967), and undesirable (negative) past events. This research provides an integrative approach to studying avertivity, enhancing our understanding of it as a broader linguistic category.

- (1) Cum **era** **pe** **cale** Japonia **să** **cumpere** SUA  
how was on way Japan SBJV buy.SBJV.3SG SUA  
în anii 1980 datorită creșterii sale economice.  
in years.DEF 1980 due growth.DAT its economic  
'Japan nearly bought the United States in the 1980s due to its economic growth.'  
(roTenTen16)

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## The expression of averitivity in Brazilian Portuguese: a Functional Discourse Grammar account

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Avertivity, the linguistic expression of events that were imminent but did not occur, has been widely examined in typological research (Overall 2017; Caudal 2023). While some languages feature dedicated avertive or frustrative markers (Kuteva 1998; Arkadiev 2019), Brazilian Portuguese conveys this notion through periphrastic constructions, adverbs, and discourse strategies rather than morphological means. This study analyzes these strategies under the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008), considering the semantic and pragmatic levels of grammar. One primary strategy in Brazilian Portuguese is the periphrastic construction *estar para* + *infinitive* (to be+to+infinitive), signaling an event that was interrupted, as in (1):

- (1) Eu **estava para sair** quando começou a chover.  
'I was about to leave when it started raining.'

The adverb *quase* (*almost*) conveys the idea of an event narrowly avoided:

- (2) Ela **quase** caiu na escada.  
'She almost fell on the stairs.'

Avertivity may also be expressed through coordinating conjunctions, such as *mas* (*but*) and *só que* (*but*), as well as subordinating conjunctions like *embora* (*although*). These constructions align with frustrative patterns described by Overall (2017) and Pahontu (2024). Unlike languages that employ grammaticalized avertive markers (Arkadiev 2019), Brazilian Portuguese uses only lexical and syntactic means, suggesting that avertivity in this language is more pragmatic than morphosyntactic. This study situates Brazilian Portuguese within a broader cross-linguistic perspective, contributing to the understanding of avertivity and its periphrastic realization in Romance languages.

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## The Term ‘Avertive’ and Related Meanings in Russian

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In English, ‘to avert’ means ‘to turn away or aside’, ‘to avoid’. It comes from Latine *avertere* < *ab+vertere* ‘to turn away’, where *ab* means ‘off’ and *vertere* derives from Proto-Indo-European root *\*wer* ‘to turn, to bend’. The adjective derived from this verb is ‘aversive’, while ‘avertive’ is less commonly used.

In linguistics, the verb ‘avert’ has been used in discussion of categories that indicate undesirable events, with respective category being referred to by an adjective related to avoidance, such as “evasive”, “apprehensional”, “admonitive” and others.

Recently, the meaning of the term *avertive* has been summarized as follows: “[T]he avertive has been described as a semantically elaborate grammatical category with the meaning of an action narrowly averted in the past” (Yae, Kuteva, Rhee 2023: 3). These authors introduced the term *avoidive* to identify “the grammatical means of precautioning the hearer against probable and undesirable events” (Yae, Kuteva, Rhee 2023, abstract). Avoidive thus seems to be yet another name, along with already established ones like *admonitive* and *apprehensional* grams, previously discussed especially in relation to Austronesian languages (e.g. Lichtenberk 1995, Terrill 2003, Palmer 1994, Angelo & Schultze-Berndt 2016). Depending on the language, the same gram may or may not be used across different tenses and types of expression.

I will use the term *avertive* for narrowly averted events in the past and *admonitive* for undesirable events whose implementation is unclear.

Taking into account that the exclamative and warning types of Russian admonitive expressions have been discussed (Dobrushina 2006, Zorokhina Nilsson 2012), I will examine construction of primarily avertive meanings, which involve particles and particle collocations such as *bylo*, *pochti*, *edva*, with or without negative particle *ne*. Basing on the Russian National corpus, I will explore historical paths and semantic prototypes of avertive constructions in the contemporary Russian.

## Between proximativity and avertivity. The Finnish *olla -mAisillAAn* construction

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In present-day Finnish, the construction *olla -mAisillAAn* ('be' + verb stem with a suffix cluster) is used to express an immediate future action or event, i.e. proximativity as in (1). In a past tense context, however, the construction often expresses an averted action (2) or event (3):

- (1) Paras sieniaika **on** kuule **loppumaisillaan**:-) (Suomi24)  
'The best time for picking mushrooms is about to end, you know'
- (2) Sari katsoi minua ja **oli sanomaisillaan** jotain, mutta vaiken. (Suomi24)  
'Sari looked at me and was about to say something but remained silent.'
- (3) Pari vuotta sitten **olin hukkumaisillaan** ja joku nuori nainen tuli pelastaan mut sieltä. (Suomi24)  
'A couple years ago I was about to drown, and some young woman came to save me from there.'

In our paper, we examine in which circumstances an averted reading arises or not. For example, in (2) it is the *but*-sentence and in (3), world knowledge, that activate the averted reading. Even when a non-averted outcome is not excluded, in most cases the implication of avertivity is strong, as in (4):

- (4) Kyllä meidän pienoinen ainakin oli aina kaatumaisillaan (Suomi24)  
'Well at least our toddler was always about to fall.'

However, in some usage types the averted reading can, in general, be ruled out. In (5), for example, the construction is used as a temporal expression and here it is clear that the passing of time is inevitable, hence the reading is proximative. In (6), on the other hand, the averted reading seems to be ruled by the fact that being 'on the verge of dying' constitutes a semi-lexicalized expression. In these cases, the verb stem expresses a process instead of a punctual event.

- (5) Kesälomani **oli loppumaisillaan** (---) (Suomi24)  
'My summer vacation was about to end.'
- (6) se **oli kuolemaisillaan** sen ison läskin takia ku se ei antanu sen syödä ja aamulla se pieni oli kuollu Se oli mun lempikala (Suomi24)  
'It was about to die because of that big fat [fish] as it didn't let it eat and, in the morning, the little one was dead. It was my favourite fish.'

In our paper, which is based on data retrieved from the Suomi24 corpus (cf. Wahlström, Silvennoinen & Niva 2024) we focus on describing the contextual tendencies and limitations of the *olla mAisillAAn* construction as well as the aspecto-semantic features of the stem verbs used in it. We also analyze how the suggested grammaticalization path PROXIMATIVE → AVERTIVE (Arkadijev 2019: 72; Pahontu 2024: 2) fits the *olla -mAisillAAn* construction and the boundaries between these two categories.

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