

The Lithuanian “*buvo* + *be*-present active participle” construction revisited: A corpus-based study

PETER M. ARKADIEV

*Vilnius University, Institute of Slavic Studies of the
Russian Academy of Sciences and
Russian State University for the Humanities*

The paper presents the results of a large-scale corpus-based investigation of the Lithuanian construction involving a past-tense auxiliary *būti* ‘be’ and a present active participle, which in previous literature has been identified as avertive, i.e. expressing a past event that was imminent but did not occur. It is shown that although the avertive uses account for about three quarters of the occurrences of the construction, it has a robust share of progressive and proximative uses, and that, moreover, the counterfactuality meaning of the avertive is often provided by the context rather than directly encoded by the construction. The lexical and grammatical profiles of the different functions of the construction are investigated in detail, showing how lexical meaning and actionality interact with the semantics of the construction and with the context.

Keywords: Lithuanian, aspect, actionality, avertive, proximative, progressive

1. Introduction¹

This paper presents a corpus-based study of the peculiar Lithuanian construction involving a past-tense auxiliary *būti* ‘be’ and a present active participle of the lexical verb furnished with the “continuative” prefix *be-*, see example (1).

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- (1) **Buv-au** **be-si-pil-a-nt-i** *sau*
 AUX-PST.1SG CNT-RFL-pour-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F self.DAT
treči-q *taur-ę*
 third-ACC.SG glass-ACC.SG
 [šampan-o, kai staiga Zuzana suriko vairuotojui stabtelėti].
 ‘I was about to pour myself the third glass of champagne, when
 suddenly Zuzana shouted ordering the driver to stop.’ (DLKT)

In examples like (1) the construction is used as an instance of a cross-linguistic gram-type which Kuteva (1998) calls “avertive”: it denotes a situation (‘pouring the third glass of champagne’) that was about to happen at some point in the past but in reality did not occur, for instance, due to some external circumstance that prevented it (in this case, the action of the narrator’s companion). Examples of avertive from other languages include, for instance, the Bulgarian construction *šteše da V* in (2), the Kabardian construction *V peta* in (3) or the prefix *ant-* in Yimas in (4).

- (2) Bulgarian (Maslov 1981, 260)
štjax **da** *padna*
 AUX.PST.1SG SBJ.PTCL fall.PRS.1SG
 ‘I almost fell.’
- (3) Kabardian (Northwest Caucasian; Kuban dialect, own fieldwork data)
zurjet **tje-x^we** **pe-t-a**
 Zurjet PVB-fall PVB-stand-PST
 ‘Zurjet almost fell.’
- (4) Yimas (Lower Sepik-Ramu, Papua New Guinea; Foley 1991: 264)
ant-ŋa-tpul-c-um
 POT-1SG.P-hit-PFV-PL
 ‘They almost hit me.’

Although at first sight the Lithuanian construction seems to fit the prototype of the avertive, and has been identified as such in my own previous work (Arkadiev 2011a, 47–53; 2012, 106–112), there are in fact numerous examples which do not imply that the situation did not take place, e.g. (5).

- (5) [Šqmoningai rašyti pradėjau nuo 1956-ųjų,]
kai **buv-au** **be-baigi-qs** *pirm-qji*
 when AUX-PST.1SG CNT-finish-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M first-ACC.SG.M.DEF
Maskv-os *valstyb-ini-o* *universitet-o*
 MOSCOW-GEN.SG state-ADJ-GEN.SG.M university-GEN.SG
kurs-q.
 course-ACC.SG

‘I started consciously writing in 1956, when I was finishing my first year at the Moscow State University.’ (DLKT)

In example (5), and actually in many examples involving the lexical verb *baigti* ‘finish’, which, as will be shown below, is one of the most frequent verbs occurring in this construction, nothing implies that the situation ‘finish my first year at the university’ did not reach completion; the construction is rather used as a kind of a progressive indicating an ongoing durative situation serving as the background for another situation (in this case, the narrator’s becoming a writer).

Although in Arkadiev (2011a) I acknowledge that examples of the type shown in (5) exist, that description is based on elicitation and a selection of corpus examples, rather than on a systematic investigation of the actual use of the construction. In this article, I present the results of an extensive empirical investigation of the Lithuanian “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction based on a database comprising more than two thousand corpus examples and aiming at an adequate characterisation of this construction in terms of its lexical input, i.e. the verbs occurring in it, as well as of its semantics and contexts of use. In particular, it will be shown that while the avertive is a prominent and the most salient function of the construction, it also has at least two other important functions, viz. the proximative and the progressive (cf. also Alexandrova 2016, 4), and that the interpretation of the construction is determined both by the aspectual type and semantics of the lexical verb and by the broader context.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 offers a brief discussion of the avertive and related functions and their application to the Lithuanian construction. In section 3 I describe the database and methodology, and in section 4 I present a general overview of the construction as it emerges from the corpus data. In section 5 I discuss the semantics of the construction and its interaction with its lexical input and the context. Section 6 summarises the article.

2. Avertives, proximatives and related functions

According to Kuteva (1998, 2009), avertive is a “semantically elaborate” gram combining meanings from the temporal (pastness), aspectual (imminence) and modal (counterfactuality) domains. In a recent unpublished paper, Kuteva *et al.* (2015) propose a refined taxonomy of semantic functions sharing some or all of these properties. This taxonomy takes into account

the actional type of the lexical verb and its interaction with the aspectual operator of imminence (on the importance of accounting for such interaction for the understanding of this functional domain see in particular Alexandrova 2019, as well as numerous works dealing with *almost*-type adverbs, most notably Dowty 1979). The semantic functions discussed by Kuteva et al. (2015) and their features are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Avertives and related functions* (Kuteva et al. 2015)

Function	Pastness	Imminence	Counterfactuality	Focused phase
avertive	+	+	+	complete event
frustrated initiation	+	+	+	initiation
frustrated completion	+	+	+	termination
inconsequential	+	-	+	resultant state

According to Kuteva *et al.* (2015, 24), these four closely related functions form a scale ranging from lower to higher degree of event realisation: zero realisation with the avertive and frustrated initiation (the event did not take place), see examples (2)–(4) above and (6), via partial realisation with frustrated completion, see example (7), to maximal realisation with the inconsequential, which is used to indicate a lack or instability “of the expected results/consequences of a verb situation that has been realised in the past” (Kuteva *et al.* 2015, 15; cf. the related, but broader notion of “antiresultative” introduced in Plungian 2001), see example (8).

Pirahã (isolate, Amazonia; Everett 1986, 300)

- (6) *hi xí koho-áo-b-ábagaí*
 3 thing eat-telic-PFV-FRINIT
 ‘He almost began to eat it.’

- (7) *hi baitigiísi is ib-áo-b-ábai*
 3 species.of.fish animal arrow-telic-PFV-FRCMPL
 ‘He almost arrowed the fish, i.e. shot the arrow but missed the fish.’

- (8) Hua (Gorokan, Papua New Guinea, Haiman 1998, 557)
hako-mana-(o)
 seek-INCONS.1SG-EXCL
 ‘I looked for it—in vain.’

Note that under this view the difference between avertive proper and frustrated initiation seems to boil down to the actional distinction between punctual and durative events: the complete lack of occurrence of a durative event such as “write a letter” or “sleep” implies the lack of its inception, and vice versa. For this reason in the following I won’t make a distinction between avertive proper and frustrated initiation, subsuming the latter under the former. By contrast, the meaning of frustrated (or partial) completion should be distinguished from the avertive and frustrated initiation because the two meanings have substantially different truth conditions and are quite often expressed by distinct means in the languages of the world (Alexandrova 2019), cf. the Pirahã examples (6) and (7).

In Arkadiev (2011a, 50–53) I have shown that the Lithuanian construction “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” occurs in both the avertive/frustrated initiation (9) and the frustrated completion (10) meanings and have actually treated both of them as subtypes of avertive. The reason for this was the fact that in the data available to me at that time the two functions appeared to be in complementary distribution with respect to the actional types of verbs: the avertive/frustrated initiation occurs with verbs denoting durative states and processes, such as *rašyti* ‘write’ in (9) as well as with punctual verbs not implying any previous process (such as ‘find’ or ‘forget’), while the frustrated completion meaning is found with verbs denoting culminations of telic processes, usually derived by prefixation from processual verbs, such as *pa-rašyti* ‘write to completion’ in (10).

- (9) *Buv-au* *be-raš-ąs* *komentar-q* *bet*
 AUX-PST.1SG CNT-write-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M comment-ACC.SG but
per-skait-ęs *jūs-ų* *mint-is*
 PVB-read-PST.PA.NOM.SG.M 2PL-GEN thought-ACC.PL
su.prat-au *kad geriau* *ne-pa-saky-si-u...*
 understand-PST.1SG that better NEG-PVB-say-FUT-1SG
 ‘I was going to write a comment, but having read your thoughts
 I understood that I couldn’t say it better..’ (Arkadiev 2011a, 51,
 originally from the Internet)

- (10) *Aš buv-au be-pa-raš-qs tau*
 1SG:NOM AUX-PST.1SG CNT-PVB-write-NOM.SG.M 2SG.DAT
laišk-q, kai baig-ė-si rašal-as.
 letter-ACC.SG when end-PST.3-RFL ink-NOM.SG
 ‘I had almost finished the letter to you when the ink ran out.’
 (Arkadiev 2011a, 51)

However, a closer look at the data shows that in fact there is no complementary distribution of the frustrated initiation and frustrated completion functions of the construction across actional types of verbs, and that both meanings can even co-occur with a single verb, being only disambiguated by broader context, cf. examples (11a) with frustrated initiation and (11b) with frustrated completion.

- (11) a. “*Ot kvailys!*” –
buv-au be-sak-qs, bet laik-u
 AUX-PST.1SG CNT-say-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M but time-INS.SG
nu-tvėri-au sav-e už liežuvi-o.
 PVB-seize-PST.1SG self-ACC at tongue-GEN.SG
 ‘I was going to say “What a fool!” but in good time restrained myself.’²
- b. [*Vos jam ištarus Katerinos vardą, ji sustojo viduryje sakinio.*]
kur-į buv-o be-sak-a-nt-i
 which-ACC.SG.M AUX-PST.3 CNT-say-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F
por-ai, sėd-i-nči-ai priešais sav-e...
 couple-DAT.SG sit-PRS-PA-DAT.SG.F in.front self-ACC
 ‘[As soon as he pronounced Katerina’s name, she stopped in the middle of the sentence] that she was saying to the couple seated opposite to her.’

In the following, I will still consider frustrated initiation and frustrated completion as two subtypes of a broader semantic domain of the (extended) avertive characterised by the features of imminence, pastness and counterfactuality identified by Kuteva (1998), but will keep them apart as distinct meanings, i.e. imminent avertive and interrupted avertive, respectively. The reason for this is that the shared features of the two meanings distinguish them both from a related, but distinct semantic domain of the proximative, to which I now turn.

² All examples not marked otherwise are taken from ltTenTen14.

The proximative is defined by Heine (1994, 36) as a gram expressing “a temporal phase located close to the initial boundary of the situation described by the main verb”, i. e. mere imminence of a situation. The proximative is a purely aspectual meaning and does not imply that the situation did not actually occur (Kuteva 1998,127; 2009, 19), in contrast to the avertive, which includes counterfactuality as a part of its encoded meaning. Another difference between the proximative and the avertive concerns the restriction of the latter to the past, which the former lacks, being compatible with (and in some cases limited to) present reference, cf. example (12). It is no surprise, therefore, that in some languages avertive and proximative are expressed by different grammatical means, cf. example (13) from Koasati, where the avertive takes the suffix *-á:pi-* “indicat[ing] that the action was on the point of occurring, yet did not occur” (Kimball 1991, 196), while the proximative is formed by the combination of the intentional suffix *-á:hi-* with the dubitative suffix *-má:mi-* yielding the meaning glossed as ‘be ready to’ by Kimball (1991, 183).

- (12) Gyeli (Bantu A.80, Cameroun; Grimm 2015, 317)

mé ***múà*** *wé* *nà* *nzá*
 1SG PROX die COM hunger
 ‘I’m about to die from hunger.’

- (13) Koasati (Muskogean, Louisiana, USA)

a. *ca-támm-á:pi-t*

1SG.P-fall-AVR-PST

‘I almost fell.’ (Kimball 1991, 196)

b. *falank-á:hi-má:m*

awaken(SG)-INTENT-DUBIT

‘He is ready to awaken.’ (Kimball 1991, 183)

According to Kuteva *et al.* (2015, 7), “[t]he semantics of the Avertive subsumes the semantics of the Proximative”. What is important in the context of the present discussion, however, is the fact that the past tense uses of the proximative significantly overlap with the avertive (cf. Kuteva 1998, 127–133; 2009, 20–21), in particular in that past proximatives are often used in contexts where the natural interpretation is that the situation did not occur, as in example (14), where the very fact that the speaker reports on his/her being on the verge of dying implies that the event in the end did not happen.

(14) English (BNC)

*For a whole month my parents were convinced I **was about to die**.*

The past proximative naturally gives rise to a counterfactual implicature (see Ziegeler 2000): if the speaker utters something like (i) *I was about to fall* instead of (ii) *I fell*, the hearer can infer that (ii) is not in fact true, because if it were true the speaker would have used the stronger statement (ii) instead. However, counterfactuality is surely not a part of the encoded meaning of the past proximative, since the construction is perfectly compatible with contexts not entailing non-occurrence of the event, cf. example (15), where nothing indicates that the scheduled event did not happen.

(15) English (BNC)

*I looked at the paper, and realised that a new comedy show **was about to start** on Channel 4.*

The Lithuanian “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction can occur in contexts like (15), see examples (5) above and (16), and hence should rather be characterised as an instance of past proximative (cf. Alexandrova 2016), albeit a peculiar one, since it is almost never used in other tenses and with non-past reference.

- (16) *J-is* *i-si-mylėj-o* *mergin-q,* *kur-i*
 3-NOM.SG.M PVB-RFL-love-PST.3 girl-ACC.SG which-NOM.SG.F
buv-o ***be-iš-vyk-sta-nt-i*** *i* *Amerik-q,*
 AUX-PST.3 CNT-PVB-go-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F in America-ACC.SG
ved-ė *ir* *iš-važiav-o.*
 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 [with her for America].’

The semantic relations between the avertive and the (past) proximative suggest that the former may develop from the latter by means of the process of the conventionalisation of implicature, a very common semantic development in grammaticalisation (see e.g. Traugott & König 1991; Bybee *et al.* 1994, 196–197). By contrast, Kuteva (1998, 145–148) provides evidence that the avertive can develop into the proximative by semantic bleaching. Not focusing on diachronic issues in this paper, I would nevertheless suggest that the Lithuanian construction “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” exemplifies the first rather than the second path of development (see also below).

In the remainder of this paper I will treat the avertive (understood broadly as including both frustrated initiation and frustrated comple-

tion) and the past proximative as distinct meanings and will attempt to qualitatively and quantitatively assess the extent to which the Lithuanian construction “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” combines with either of them and, most notably, which factors (lexical, grammatical, and contextual) favour one of the two interpretations.

3. Data and methods

For the purposes of this study, I decided to use a complete dataset of the construction “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” from a large corpus. Initially, I tried to extract all the tokens of the construction from DLKT (the National corpus of modern standard Lithuanian, where examples (1) and (5) above come from). However, due to the fact that DLKT is not annotated and moreover allows only limited search options, this task was not feasible with it. A morphologically annotated internet-based Lithuanian corpus, LithuanianWaC, is available at the Sketch Engine platform, but it is significantly smaller than DLKT (ca. 140 million tokens), comprising only ca. 48.4 million tokens. Therefore, the corpus used in this study is the ItTenTen14 also available at the Sketch Engine platform and comprising texts automatically extracted from the Lithuanian segment of the internet. The full size of ItTenTen14 is ca. 780 million tokens, which is six times more than DLKT. The corpus is not morphologically annotated but the search options it allows (including regular expressions) are much broader than those of DLKT and proved to be sufficient for my purposes. Moreover, ItTenTen14 can be considered a better representative of the different speech genres and styles, spanning from informal blogs to classical and translated literary texts, while DLKT is, first, strongly imbalanced with almost two thirds of the texts coming from press, and, second, biased towards edited “correct” written language. Moreover, since the corpus is compiled from the texts available on the internet, it allowed me to easily look up the broader context (although this was not always possible, since in autumn 2018, when I performed my searches, many of the texts were already no longer available; some of such examples below have a footnote “not accessed directly” appended to them).

Because ItTenTen14 is not morphologically annotated, the examples of the construction were obtained by first searching for the past tense forms of the auxiliary *būti* (i.e. the “*buv**” string) and then by adding one of the

following context filters for the string immediately³ following the auxiliary: “be*ās”, “be*īs”, “be*ā”, “be*ī”, “be*nti”, and “be*nčios” for different number and gender forms of the present active participle (including the variants for different inflection classes of verbs).⁴ The initial search yielded 2308 hits, which were then manually filtered. Excluded were examples involving other constructions, duplicate examples as well as a couple of examples with obvious grammatical errors. The filtered database contains 2024 examples; the relative frequency of the construction in question is hence 2.6 items per million words.

All the examples in the database were fed into a spreadsheet and then manually annotated for the following features:

- 1) person, number and gender;
- 2) lemma of the lexical verb and its English gloss; presence of a prefix, presence of the reflexive marker;
- 3) actional class: stative, processual, punctual, telic; the assignment of the verb to an actional class was based on its semantics (mainly for stative vs. everything else) and on the interpretations available to its tense forms (see Arkadiev 2011b for more details; note that the classification used here is more coarse-grained), see Table 2.

Table 2. Actional class assignment

present tense	past tense	actional class	example
state	state	stative	<i>ītarti</i> ‘suspect’
process	process	processual	<i>judēti</i> ‘move’
(only habitual)	change of state	punctual	<i>laimēti</i> ‘win’
process	change of state	telic	<i>klausti</i> ‘ask’

³ Of course, there exist examples where something intervenes between the auxiliary and the participle, usually an adverb like *jau* ‘already’ or *beveik* ‘almost’. However, such examples are not numerous in comparison to examples where the components of the construction are contiguous (e.g. for “buvs* + be*ās (2..2)” the number of unfiltered hits is 96 against 951 for the contiguous construction), so I decided not to include them.

⁴ Only “short” forms of the nominative masculine singular and plural were searched; the respective “long” forms (“be*ntis” and “be*ntys”) are — at least according to the normative grammar — only used attributively and should not occur in the construction in question. In reality, LtTenTen14 contains a number of such examples, but I decided to disregard them. I thank Ignas Rudaitis for pointing this out to me.

It should be noted that actional class labels were assigned to the verbal lexeme (i.e. verb in a particular lexical meaning) and not to verbal phrases occurring in individual examples; although it is well known that verbal arguments can affect actionality, especially telicity (see e.g. Filip 1999), for the sake of simplicity I decided to disregard such effects in my investigation, especially given that in Lithuanian their role is rather limited, change in actional class being usually achieved by overt derivational marking (see e.g. Arkadiev 2012, 67–77).

- 4) Context: this feature mainly tracked recurrent patterns found in the immediate context of the construction, such as expressions of adversity (*bet* ‘but’, *tačiau* ‘however’ and the like, all united under the rubric “but”), temporal clauses (“when”), and some others. In fact, the most frequent option for this feature turned out to be NA, meaning that the immediate context did not contain any relevant expressions.
- 5) Two features having to do with the semantics of the construction: “phase” (imminent vs. progressive) and “completion” (yes, no, irrelevant). The “phase” feature refers to the phase of the event denoted by the verb phrase upon which the construction focuses. In example (1) above it is the preparatory phase, hence “imminent”, while in example (5) it is the internal durative phase, hence “progressive”. The “completion” feature refers to whether the transition associated with the event is construed as actually taking place; thus, for example (1) the value is “no”. For telic and punctual verbs this refers to the transition lexically encoded by the verb itself, while for processual and stative verbs the relevant transition is determined contextually; normally it was the starting point of the process or state, but for the modal stative verbs taking the infinitive such as *norėti* ‘want’ or *ketinti* ‘intend’ I rather took into account the beginning of the event expressed by the infinitive. The value “irrelevant” refers to situations when the attainment of the transition was not at issue, as, e.g. in example (5) above, where the narrator focuses on the internal phase of the situation without any implications as regards its actual boundaries. It must be borne in mind that the degree of confidence with which these last two features were assigned was lower, since the author is not a native speaker of Lithuanian and the exact meaning of the construction was not always easily recoverable from the immediate and even broader context. A number of examples, mainly those about which I was in particular doubt, have been checked with native speaker experts, however even they were not

always sure about the exact meaning. All in all, almost four hundred of the examples have not been confidently annotated for either one or both semantic features and will hence be excluded from consideration in section 5.

The database also includes the field “comments” containing various further observations about the examples, some of them of systematic nature, e.g. “inanimate subject”.

In the following, I present the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the compiled database. The quantitative analysis is rather limited, mainly because any serious statistics should compare the distribution of the “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” to the distribution of other constructions in Lithuanian (e.g. to the simple past tense), which is not feasible given the lack of morphological annotation in the corpus.

4. General overview of the construction

In this section I mainly present quantitative data revealing the distribution of the construction across grammatical features and the lexicon (in terms of both tokens and types). Table 3 shows the frequencies of the person and number combinations attested (with respect to number note that although number is neutralised in the 3rd person of finite verbs in Lithuanian, it is overtly marked in the participle). The distribution of the construction across person values appears to be non-trivial, which is confirmed by its comparison both to the overall distribution of person forms in the past tense (based on Lithuanian WaC) in the second column of Table 4 and to the distribution of person forms in the past tense of *būti* in ltTenTen14 in the third column of the same table.

Table 3. Person and number

	sg	Pl	N/A ⁱ	Total
1	550	81	0	631 (31.18%)
2	10	2	0	12 (0.59%)
3	1074	297	9	1380 (67.74%)
N/A ⁱⁱ	1	0	0	1 (0.05%)
Total	1635	380	9	2024

ⁱ Impersonal constructions.

ⁱⁱ The single example with a participial form of the auxiliary.

Table 4. *Frequencies of past tense person forms in Lithuanian*

	LithuanianWaC	<i>būti</i> (ltTenTen14)
1	205121 (12.04%)	192061 (4.53%)
2	25650 (1.51%)	20031 (0.45%)
3	1472400 (86.45%)	4025358 (94.99%)
total	1703171	4237450

The comparison of Tables 3 and 4 reveals that while the construction “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” apparently inherits its repulsion towards the 2nd person forms from the grammatical profile of the auxiliary *būti* in general, it stands out considerably as strongly favouring the 1st person (the difference between the last column of Table 3 and both columns of Table 4 with the 2nd and 3rd persons collapsed and opposed to the 1st person is highly statistically significant, chi-square test with Yates correction $p < 0.0001$). This attraction of the construction towards the 1st person may be motivated by its semantics, see section 5.3 below.

The breakdown of the construction for gender and number values is shown in Table 5 and does not seem to reveal anything non-trivial (the prevalence of masculine in the plural is a consequence of the fact that mixed groups trigger masculine agreement in Lithuanian⁵).

Table 5. *Gender and number*

	SG	PL	N/A ⁱ	Total
Masculine	945	307	0	1252 (61.86%)
Feminine	690	73	0	762 (37.65%)
N/A ⁱ	0	0	9	9 (0.44%)
Total	1635 (80.78%)	380 (18.77%)	9 (0.44%)	2024

ⁱ Impersonal constructions.

Let us now turn to the lexical profile of the construction, which is more interesting. In the database, the construction is attested with 537 different

⁵ I thank Wayles Browne for suggesting to comment on this.

lemmas, the twenty most frequent of which, accounting for almost 50% of all the examples, are listed in Table 6 with their actional class values. Already from this table it becomes evident that the construction attracts a very particular sort of lexemes, i.e. phasal verbs as well as verbs denoting motion, intention and change of state. This list is markedly different from the ten topmost frequent verbs in Lithuanian as attested in the LithuanianWaC corpus: *būti* ‘be’, *galėti* ‘can, be able’, *turėti* ‘have, must’, *reikėti* ‘need’, *manyti* ‘believe’, *norėti* ‘want’, *žinoti* ‘know’, *pradėti* ‘begin’, *sakyti* ‘say’. For example, *būti*, *galėti*, *turėti*, *reikėti* and *žinoti* are not attested in our construction at all, while *manyti* is attested by 17 examples, *norėti* by 12 examples and *sakyti* by 13 examples, thus ranking below the ten most frequent verbs. By contrast, *pradėti* ‘begin’ is by far the most frequent verb in the construction.

Table 6. *The most frequent verbs in the construction*

Lexeme	Actional class	Rank	Frequency
<i>pradėti</i> ‘begin’ (transitive)	telic	1	357 (17.64%)
<i>baigti</i> ‘finish’ (transitive)	telic	2	141 (6.97%)
<i>prarasti</i> ‘lose’	punctual	3	99 (4.89%)
<i>eiti</i> ‘go’	processual	4	61 (3.01%)
<i>išeiti</i> ‘go out’	telic	5	36 (1.78%)
<i>baigtis</i> ‘finish’ (intransitive)	telic	6	34 (1.68%)
<i>ruoštis</i> ‘prepare oneself’	processual	7	27 (1.33%)
<i>prasadėti</i> ‘begin’ (intransitive)	telic	8	24 (1.19%)
<i>grįžti</i> ‘return’	telic	9–11	21 (1.04%)
<i>išnykti</i> ‘disappear’	punctual	9–11	21 (1.04%)
<i>ketinti</i> ‘intend’	stative	9–11	21 (1.04%)
<i>pulti</i> ‘attack, fall’	punctual/telic	12	19 (0.94%)
<i>manyti</i> ‘think’	stative	13–15	17 (0.84%)
<i>pamiršti</i> ‘forget’	punctual	13–15	17 (0.84%)
<i>rengtis</i> ‘prepare oneself’	processual	13–15	17 (0.84%)

Table 6 (continued)

Lexeme	Actional class	Rank	Frequency
<i>sukti</i> ‘turn’	processual	16	15 (0.74%)
<i>nueiti</i> ‘go away’	telic	17–19	14 (0.69%)
<i>tapti</i> ‘become’	telic	17–19	14 (0.69%)
<i>tiesti</i> ‘stretch’	processual	17–19	14 (0.69%)
<i>sakyti</i> ‘say’	telic	20–21	13 (0.64%)
<i>užmigti</i> ‘fall asleep’	telic	20–21	13 (0.64%)
Total			995 (49.16%)

Let us now have a look at the morphological properties of the lexemes found in the construction. The frequencies of (un)prefixed and (non)reflexive verbs are given in Tables 7 (tokens) and 8 (types). The incidence of non-prefixed vs. prefixed lemmas does not diverge markedly from their overall distribution as reported in Platicyna (2014, 16), based on a selection of the 832 most frequent verbs from the corpus-based frequency dictionary Utkā (2009), viz. 46% vs. 54%, respectively. At the same time, it differs quite radically from the overall distribution of non-prefixed and prefixed present-tense verbal forms (75% vs. 25%, respectively, Platicyna 2014, 16); however, it matches the distribution of the respective forms of the past tense (48% vs. 52%, respectively, Platicyna 2014, 16). This fact, again, is indicative of the semantic peculiarities of the construction. With respect to reflexivity the construction more or less conforms to the overall pattern (cf. Platicyna 2014, 15, reporting 86% non-reflexive lexemes vs. 14% reflexive ones).

Table 7. *Prefixation and reflexivity (tokens)*

	– reflexive	+ reflexive	Total
– prefix	712	163	875 (43.23%)
+ prefix	931	218	1149 (56.77%)
Total	1643 (81.18%)	381 (18.82%)	2024

Table 8. Prefixation and reflexivity (types)

	– reflexive	+ reflexive	Total
– prefix	156	51	207 (38.55%)
+ prefix	221	109	330 (61.45%)
Total	377 (70.20%)	160 (29.80%)	537

Let us now turn to the distribution of actional classes. Their frequency was again counted both for tokens and types; for the latter, the total figure is slightly higher than for the lemmas above, since a number of polysemous lemmas were assigned to different actional classes depending on the meaning. The figures are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Actional classes

	Types	Tokens
Stative	25 (4.43%)	86 (4.25%)
Processual	142 (25.18%)	399 (19.71%)
Telic	186 (32.98%)	1082 (53.26%)
Punctual	211 (37.41%)	457 (22.77%)
Total	564	2024

Even though no quantitative data on the distribution of actional classes across the Lithuanian lexicon is available (the figures in Arkadiev 2011b, 78 are based on an imperfect sample and should be treated with caution), Table 9 allows us to make two observations. First, it is clear that the construction repulses stative verbs, in terms of both types and tokens (recall from the above that the most frequent verbs in Lithuanian are stative, and that these verbs do not occur in our construction at all). Second, the construction clearly favours punctual and telic verbs, as also shown by Table 6 above, where eleven of the twenty-one most frequent verbs occurring in the construction belong to the telic class, accounting for its high token frequency. This aligns with the construction's preference for prefixed verbs as revealed by Tables 7 and 8, and, again, looks peculiar for a present tense form. Indeed, although morphologically the lexical part of

the construction is a *present* participle, semantically and functionally the whole construction belongs to the *past* tense as expressed by the auxiliary, and the lexical profile of the construction obviously accords with the latter feature rather than with the former.

It is also useful to have a look at those lexemes which occur in the construction only once, since their distribution admittedly shows a more balanced picture, unbiased by high-frequency lexemes. All in all, there are 336 hapaxes accounting for 60% of the types and 16.6% of the tokens of the construction. Their breakdown according to the presence or absence of a prefix and actional class is shown in Table 10.

Table 10. *Hapaxes*

Prefixation		Actional class	
+prefix	117 (35.03%)	Stative	14 (3.89%)
-prefix	217 (64.97%)	Processual	94 (26.11%)
Total	334	Telic	102 (28.33%)
		Punctual	150 (41.67%)
		Total	360

Note that the distribution of simplex vs. prefixed verbs among the hapaxes is almost identical to that observed for all verbs, while the distribution of actional classes is somewhat more skewed in favour of punctual verbs, which is probably expected given that punctual verbs are apparently more frequent in Lithuanian than telic ones (cf. Arkadiev 2011b, 78).

Since the valency and transitivity of the lexical verb were not included into the annotation, no information about these properties will be provided. What should be mentioned is that the construction seems to disfavour inanimate subjects, which occur in only 328 (16.21%) examples with 115 (21.42%) different lemmas. These figures, however, should not be considered indicative, because no comparable data for the general incidence of animate vs. inanimate subjects in Lithuanian is available. However, later we shall see that the different meanings of the construction disfavour inanimate subjects to different degrees.

Finally, the corpus study revealed a marginal sub-pattern of the construction, where the participle of the lexical verb was in the future tense

rather than in the present.⁶ Only three examples of such usage were attested; in two of them, the meaning does not seem to differ from the regular pattern with the present tense, cf. example (17), but one example seems to involve the meaning of intention in the past rather than imminence, cf. example (18).

- (17) [*Užmerkiau ir taip užrakintas akis ir laukiau mirties. Laukiau.*]
Kai jau buv-au be-pra.dė-si-ant-i
 when already AUX-PST.1SG CNT-begin-FUT-PA-NOM.SG.F
bū-ti be sąmon-ės,
 be-INF without consciousness-GEN.SG
 [*pajutau dar šaltesnį prisilietimą.*]
 ‘[I closed my eyes and thus waited for death. I waited.] When I was already starting to lose consciousness, [I felt a still colder touch.]’
- (18) [*Už keletos mylių, danguje, kabojo didžiulis lyg bloga linkintis rudo smogo debesis, ženklas miesto,*]
kuri-ame aš buv-au
 which-LOC.SG.M 1SG.NOM AUX-PST.1SG
be-ap-si-gyven-si-qs.
 CNT-PVB-RFL-live-FUT-PA.NOM.SG.M
 ‘[Several miles in advance, a huge cloud of brown smog, as if threatening, hung in the sky, the sign symbol of the town] in which I was going to stay.’

While example (17), taken from a blog,⁷ might possibly be considered an error, example (18), coming from the website of the Lithuanian union of fiction translators,⁸ rather shows that the past tense auxiliary and the future participle can marginally be combined in an almost compositional way.

5. Polysemy of the construction and its determinants

5.1. Overview

As said in section 3, two semantic features were encoded for each occurrence of the construction in the corpus, viz. the phase of the event focused by the construction (preparatory vs. internal durative) and whether the

⁶ Future active participles were not excluded from the search query, since they contain the same endings as the present active participles following the future suffix *-si*.

⁷ <http://www.blogas.lt>, not accessed directly.

⁸ <https://www.llvs.lt>, not accessed directly.

event was instantiated or completed in the actual world (yes, no, unclear). Theoretically, six logically possible combinations of the values of these features exist, yielding six distinct meanings, cf. Table 11. In fact, all six combinations are attested, however with very different frequencies, as shown in the last column of the table. (Note that the sum total is lower, since, as said above, not all examples could be annotated for the semantic features with confidence; the residue comprises 340 tokens.)

Table 11. *Combinations of semantic features*

Phase	Completion	Meaning	No. of occurrences
preparatory	no	imminent avertive	693 (41.159%)
durative	no	interrupted avertive	585 (34.74%)
durative	unclear	progressive	291 (17.28%)
durative	yes		46 (2.73%)
preparatory	unclear	proximative	42 (2.49%)
preparatory	yes		27 (1.60%)
Total			1684

As is clear from Table 11, the majority (more than three quarters) of the occurrences of the construction instantiate the broadly understood avertive meaning characterised by the features “imminence” and “counterfactuality” (Kuteva 2001, 84), which supports the characterisation of the construction as having avertive as its primary and most salient function. Note, however, that the avertive in the narrow sense (i.e. frustrated initiation) accounts for only 41% of the uses of the construction, the second largest use being frustrated completion. The remaining almost 25% of the tokens of the construction do not fall under this prototype, most notably not implying counterfactuality or even directly contradicting it. The second most salient function of the construction can be described as simply progressive, as shown above in example (5) above. The third class of uses, which I characterise as “proximative”, shares with the avertive the feature “imminence” and with the progressive the lack of counterfactuality, thus falling somewhat in between, see example (19).

- (19) [*Taip 63 metais prieš Kristų kalbėjo Markas Tulijus Ciceronas, tuo metu,*]
kai vėlyv-oji Rom-os Respublik-a buv-o
 when late-NOM.SG.F.DEF Rome-GEN.SG republic-NOM.SG be-PST.3
be-pra.rand-a-nt-i demokratij-q ir pamažu
 CNT-lose-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F democracy-ACC.SG and gradually
virst-a-nt-i imperij-a.
 become-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F empire-INS.SG
 ‘[Thus 63 years before Christ spoke Marc Tully Cicero at the time] when
 the late Roman Republic was about to lose democracy and was gradually
 turning into an empire.’

Although the focus in example (19) is on the preparatory stage of the event of ‘losing democracy’, not only does not the sentence imply that this event did not take place in reality, but the encyclopedic knowledge provides information to the contrary.

In the following I shall discuss each semantic subtype of the construction in more detail, focusing on the lexical and actional properties of the verbs occurring in each as well on the role of the context in its interpretation.

5.2. The avertive and its subtypes

The avertive function, accounting for the majority of the uses of the construction, as has already been said above, comes in two subtypes differing as to the interaction of the feature “imminence” with the temporal structure of the event encoded by the verb phrase. When the construction focuses on the preparatory stage of the event and the whole event is not instantiated, we have imminence proper (Kuteva *et al.* 2015’s “frustrated initiation”), as in example (20); when the focus of the construction is on the internal durative phase of the event, the scope of counterfactuality is narrowed down to the event’s completion (Kuteva *et al.* 2015’s “frustrated completion”), as in example (21).

- (20) [*Kai pjesė pasibaigė, jis nubudo, atsisėdo tiesiau,*]
tarytum buv-o be-kyl-qš iš-ei-ti,
 as.if AUX-PST.3 CNT-rise-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M PVB-go-INF
bet vis dėlto lik-o sėdė-ti
 but nevertheless remain-PST.3 sit-INF
 [*ir išklausė dar ir paskutinę pjesę...*]
 [‘When the music piece ended he woke up, sat straight.] as if he was
 about to rise and leave, but nevertheless remained seated and listened
 to the last piece as well...’

- (21) *Jau buv-o be-lip-ąs ant*
 already AUX-PST.3 CNT-climb-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M on
žem-ės, bet už-kliuv-o už akmen-s
 ground-GEN.SG but PVB-stumble-PST.3 over stone-GEN.SG
ir pliumptelėj-o į ledin-į vanden-į.
 and plop-PST.3 in icy-ACC.SG.M water-ACC.SG
 ‘He was already climbing ashore, but stumbled over a stone and plopped
 back into ice-cold water.’

The avertive interpretation of the construction more often than not is signalled by contextual clues, such as concessive/adversative clauses introduced by conjunctions *bet* ‘but’ as in (20) and (21), *tačiau* ‘however’ as in (22) below (553 examples), or, more indirectly, by temporal clauses either containing the construction itself as a background to some other event, as in example (23), or modifying the construction and expressing the situation affecting the non-occurrence of the main event, as in example (24) (108 examples).

- (22) [*Į ją svetima pavarde paguldė į ligoninę.*]
Ņ-i buv-o be-at-si-gau-na-nt-i, tačiau,
 3-NOM.SG.F AUX-PST.3 CNT-PVB-RFL-get-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F however
su-žinoj-us-i [apie galutinį sukilimo pralaimėjimą, atkrito ir mirė.]
 PVB-know-PST.PA-NOM.SG.F
 [‘She was put into a hospital under another person’s name.]
 She was recovering, however when she learned [about the final defeat
 of the uprising, she relapsed and died.]’

- (23) *Kai jau buv-o be-kiš-ąs*
 when already AUX-PST.3 CNT-poke-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M
laišk-q į vok-q, kažk-as
 letter-ACC.SG in envelope-ACC.SG somebody-NOM
pa-beld-ė į dur-is...
 PVB-knock-PST.3 in door-ACC.PL
 ‘When he was already putting the letter into an envelope, someone
 knocked at the door...’

- (24) ... *jau buv-o be-baigi-ąs*
 already AUX-PST.3 CNT-finish-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M
neakivaizdin-ę pedagogin-ę mokykl-q, kai
 extramural-ACC.SG.F pedagogical-ACC.SG.F school-ACC.SG when
gav-o šaukim-q per dvi dien-as
 get-PST.3 call-ACC.SG in two.ACC.PL.F day-ACC.PL
iš-važiuo-ti.
 PVB-drive-INF

‘He was already finishing a correspondence pedagogical school when he got a call to leave in two days.’

With respect to the contextual feature “but” it has to be noted that for many of the examples in my database expressions of concession or adversity were not present in the immediate context provided by the search engine of the corpus, but could be found in the wider context on the respective websites. This means that the avertive use of the construction is strongly associated with specific types of context, i.e. those explicitly indicating that the event did not occur.

It is clear that the two subtypes of the avertive differ mainly in the actional types of verbs occurring in them: in the ideal case, the interrupted avertive should occur with telic verbs only, the imminent avertive with the other actional classes (cf. Arkadiev 2011a: 50). In reality, the picture is more complicated than that. As Table 12 shows, both subtypes of the avertive admit all four actional classes, albeit with different frequencies (the difference being highly statistically significant, chi-square test $p < 0.0001$).

Table 12. *Actional classes in the avertive*

	Imminent	Interrupted	Total
Stative	3 (0.43%)	59 (10.09%)	62 (4.85%)
Processual	186 (26.84%)	102 (17.43%)	288 (22.54%)
Telic	159 (22.94%)	379 (64.78%)	538 (42.10%)
Punctual	345 (49.78%)	45 (7.69%)	390 (30.52%)
Total	693	585	1278

Indeed, almost two thirds of the occurrences of the interrupted avertive are accounted for by telic verbs, however there is a notable residue of other actional classes, including, most surprisingly, a number of punctual verbs, which, theoretically, should not be compatible with the event-internal focus at all. A closer look at these latter examples shows that the majority of them belong to a special subtype of the punctual class, i.e. to inchoative verbs, which can denote both the entry into a state and the state itself (on this type of verbs in Lithuanian see Arkadiev 2011b: 82, 2012: 52, 57–58, 64, 66; Holvoet 2014, 90–91); with these verbs, our construction focuses on the state following the transition and implies that this state was ter-

minated, i.e. instantiating the “inconsequential” function of Kuteva et al. (2015). Moreover, the majority of such verbs occurring in the construction denote an inception of a mental state, such as *pamanyti* ‘come to think’, *patikėti* ‘come to believe’ or *suabejoti* ‘fall into doubt’. Their use in the avertive context implies that the subject came to hold the propositional attitude expressed by the verb but gave it up due to some circumstance or evidence, as in examples (25) and (26).

- (25) *Jau buv-o-me be-pa-tik-į, kad*
 already AUX-PST-1PL CNT-PVB-believe-PRS.PA.NOM.PL.M that
daugiau ne-turė-si-m
 more NEG-have-FUT-1PL
 [tokių vyriausybių, kurios nuveda mus į krizę ir štai — vėl turime
 valdžią, sugebėjusią pasukti vairą taip, kad 2011-ais atsidūrėme beveik
 2006 metų lygyje.]
 ‘We already started believing that we would no longer have
 [such governments that would lead us into a crisis, and look — again we
 have a government that managed to turn the steering-wheel in such a
 way that in 2011 we fell back to almost the level of 2006].’

- (26) [Tačiau mergina galėjo peršalti,]
tad jau buv-au be-pa-man-q-s,
 so already AUX-PST.1SG CNT-PVB-think-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M
ar ne-su-sto-ti,
 Q NEG-PVB-stop-INF
 [ar neaprengti jos striuke. Bet ne, atrodo, kad jai šaltis nebuvo baisus...]
 ‘[But the girl could get cold,] so I already started thinking whether or
 not I should stop [and put a coat over her. However, no, it seems that
 her cold was not terrible.]’

A number of verbs found in this pattern denote the initial phase of some process, and their use in the construction signals that the latter was terminated right after the very start, consider examples (27) and (28).

- (27) [Indrulis, susigriebęs, kad padarė netaktą,]
buv-o be-im-q-s t-q incident-q
 AUX-PST.3 CNT-begin-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M DEM-ACC.SG incident-ACC.SG
vers-ti juok-ais,
 turn-INF laughter-INS.PL
 [bet, susitikęs piktą Auksės žvilgsnį, nebaigęs sakinio, nususuko į šalį.]
 ‘[Indrulis, having realised that he had committed a faux pas,] started to
 turn this incident into a joke, [but, having encountered Auksė’s angry
 glance, turned aside without finishing his utterance.]’

- (28) — *Dovano-ki-t... — vėl buv-o be-pra-był-qš*
 forgive-IMP-2PL again AUX-PST.3 CNT-PVB-utter-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M
bufetinink-as,
 barman-NOM.SG
 [*neišmanydamas, kaip čia išsisukus nuo kimbančio prie jo artisto. – Negaliu dovanoti, – griežtai tarė šis.*]
 ‘‘I’m sorry . . . ’ began the barman, [at a loss to parry this insistent critic. – ‘No, it’s unforgivable,’ said the professor.]’⁹

The meaning of ‘‘interrupted inception’’ discussed here is usually not associated with the avertive, however it appears to be a fairly natural extension thereof: the scope of counterfactuality in this case is not the initial transition (the beginning of the event), but its normal unfolding, which is interrupted or reversed, just as with telic verbs, which normally (but not always, see below) yield a similar meaning of interruption when used in the construction.

If we now look at the stative verbs occurring in the interrupted subtype of the avertive, we find there a very limited number of lexemes mostly taking an infinitival complement and denoting some sort of intention, e.g. *ketinti* ‘intend’ (19 tokens), *norėti* ‘want’ (11 tokens) and *manyti* ‘think’ (17 tokens; these three verbs account for 47 out of 59 examples). Their combination with the construction denotes unrealised intention, as shown in examples (29) and (30). The assignment of such examples to this subtype is motivated by the fact that, logically speaking, the intention expressed by the verb did occur in reality, hence the value ‘‘progressive’’ of the feature ‘‘phase’’, but its realisation denoted by the infinitival complement did not happen, hence the value ‘‘no’’ of the feature ‘‘completion’’.

- (29) [*Siekdami didesnių atlyginimų*]
j-ie jau buv-o be-keřin-q
 3-NOM.PL.M already AUX-PST.3 CNT-intend-PRS.PA.NOM.PL.M
reng-ti streik-q,
 organise-INF strike-ACC.SG
 [*tačiau vėliau nutarė kreiptis į profesinę sąjungą ir derėtis dėl didesnio uždarbio.*]

⁹ Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, ch. 18; English translation quoted from <https://www.weblitera.com/book/?id=205&lng=1&ch=18&l=it>, accessed June 29 2019.

[Aiming at better payment] they were already intending to organise a strike, [but later decided to appeal to the trade union and bargain about higher wages.]’

- (30) [*Aukštieji kunigai ir Rašto aiškintojai*]

<i>buv-o</i>	<i>be-nor-į</i>		<i>dar</i>	<i>t-q</i>
AUX-PST.3	CNT-want-PRS.PA.NOM.PL.M		already	DEM-ACC.SG
<i>pači-q</i>	<i>valand-q</i>	<i>j-į</i>	<u><i>su-im-ti</i></u>	<i>bet</i>
same-ACC.SG.F	hour-ACC.SG	3-ACC.SG.M	PVB-take-INF	but
<i>pa-bijoj-o</i>	<i>žmoni-ų.</i>			
PVB-fear.PST-3	people-GEN.PL			

[‘And the chief priests and the scribes] the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people.’¹⁰

This is in fact the same meaning of interrupted intention (a subtype of the “inconsequential” function) as the one found with inchoative verbs, the only difference between the two being that with the latter the starting point of the mental state is lexically encoded while with the stative verbs it is merely implied.

The processual verbs found in the interrupted avertive contexts are more varied, comprising both some intentional verbs such as *ruoštis* ‘prepare’ (22 tokens), *rengtis* ‘prepare’ (11 tokens), verbs of motion such as *eiti* ‘go’ (20 tokens), *lipti* ‘climb’ (4 tokens), as well as a number of verbs of similar and other semantic types mostly represented by single examples. The five verbs just mentioned account for 55 out of 102 examples. All these examples denote an activity that started sometime before the reference time but was interrupted, see examples (31) and (32).

- (31) [*Pasisukusi nuo žemės pasiėmiau savo batus ir*]

<i>jau</i>	<i>buv-au</i>	<i>be-si-ruoši-a-nt-i</i>
already	AUX-PST.1SG	CNT-RFL-prepare-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F
<i>grįž-ti</i>	<i>namo,</i>	
return-INF	home	

[*kai neapsakomai karšta Libitinos ranka sučiupo manąq kiek aukščiau riešo.*]

[‘I turned and took from the ground my shoes and] already was going to return home, [when Libitina’s unspeakably hot hand grasped mine somewhat above the wrist.]’

¹⁰ Luke 20:19; King James 2000 Bible, <https://biblehub.com/kj2000/luke/20.htm>, accessed 29 June 2019.

- (32) *Liud-as jau antr-q kart-q buv-o*
 PN-NOM.SG already second-ACC.SG time-ACC.SG AUX-PST.3
be-žingsniuoj-qs
 CNT-walk-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M
 [aplīnk didokā seminarijos sodā, kai 3 skambalo smūgiai pasuko jį atgal...]
 ‘Liudas was already walking [around the large garden of the seminary
 for the second time when the bell striking thrice made him turn back...]’

What is peculiar about the not infrequent occurrence of the stative and processual verbs in the interrupted subtype of the avertive is the fact that the use of the construction “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” with such verbs is apparently redundant. Indeed, much the same meaning can be expressed by their simple past tense forms, cf. examples (33) and (34).

- (33) *Su-im-t-asis jau ketin-o*
 PVB-take-PST.PP-NOM.SG.M.DEF already intend-PST.3
kai k-q at-saky-ti,
 something-ACC PVB-say-INF
 [bet apsigalvojo ir nutylėjo.]
 ‘The arrested man already intended to reply something,
 [but changed his mind and kept silence.]’ (DLKT)
- (34) [*Pasišnekėjęs su sūnumi bei marčia,*
j-is jau ėj-o namo, tačiau
 3-NOM.SG.M already go-PST.3 home however
kažk-as pri-vert-ė senel-į dar
 something-NOM PVB-make-PST.3 old.man-ACC.SG again
kart-q at-si-grėž-ti.
 time-ACC.SG PVB-RFL-turn-INF
 ‘[After a chat with his son and daughter-in-law] he was already going
 home, however, something made the old man look back again.’ (DLKT)

Although the simple past tense forms of stative and processual verbs are compatible with contexts of interruption, the “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction, being strongly associated with the avertive semantics, clearly serves as a more direct and expressive way of conveying this meaning. This expressive use of the construction is particularly evident with the intentional verbs *ruoštis* and *rengtis* ‘prepare, be going to’, whose lexical semantics is very similar to the meaning of imminence conveyed by the

construction;¹¹ indeed, there does not seem to be a meaning difference between examples (31) above and (35) below with the simple past tense form of the main verb.

- (35) *Sisif-as jau ruoš-ė-si grįž-ti,*
 PN-NOM.SG already prepare-PST.3-RFL return-INF
 [*kai jo dėmesį patraukė vienas dalykas.*]
 ‘Sisyphus was already going to return back, when his attention was attracted by one thing.’

Turning to the imminent subtype of the avertive, we see that in addition to the predictable punctual actional class, accounting for slightly less than a half of the examples, this usage type is perfectly compatible with other actional classes (with the exception of stative verbs, which occur only marginally). Interestingly, there are verbs that are attested in both the imminent and the interrupted types of context, consider the following examples with the same verb *eiti* ‘go’; it is clear that only broader context can indicate which phase of the event is focused by the construction, preparatory as in (36a) or durative as in (36b).

- (36) a. *Berنيuk-as at-si-stoj-o, buv-o be-ei-nqš,*
 boy-NOM.SG PVB-RFL-stand-PST.3 AUX-PST.3 CNT-go-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M
bet ir vėl ne-si-ryž-o.
 but and again NEG-RFL-decide-PST.3
 ‘The boy stood up and was about to go, but again could not make up his mind.’

- b. [*Feliksas Višinskis ir Antanas Derkintis*]
buv-o be-ei-nq keli-u
 AUX-PST.3 CNT-go-PRS.PA.NOM.PL.M road-INS.SG
į miest-ą,
 in town-ACC.SG
 [*kareiviai sulaikė ir grąžino atgal.*]
 ‘[Feliksas Višinskis and Antanas Derkintis] were walking on the road to the town, [the soldiers stopped them and turned them back.]’

The same ambiguity can be observed with telic verbs, such as *sakyti* ‘say’, see examples (11a) with the imminent avertive and (11b) with the interrupted one, repeated here as (37a) and (37b).

¹¹ I thank Nicole Nau for pointing this out to me.

- (37) a. “*Ot kvailys!*” –
buv-au ***be-sak-qs,*** *bet* *laik-u*
 AUX-PST.1SG CNT-say-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M but time-INS.SG
nu-tvēri-au *sav-e* *už* *liežuvi-o.*
 PVB-seize-PST.1SG self-ACC at tongue-GEN.SG
 ‘I was going to say “What a fool!” but in good time restrained myself.’
- b. [*Vos jam ištarus Katerinos vardą, ji sustojo viduryje sakinio,*]
kur-į ***buv-o*** ***be-sak-a-nt-i***
 which-ACC.SG.M AUX-PST.3 CNT-say-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F
por-ai, *sėd-i-nči-ai* *priešais* *sav-e...*
 couple-DAT.SG sit-PRS-PA-DAT.SG.F in.front self-ACC
 ‘[As soon as he pronounced Katerina’s name, she stopped in the middle of the sentence] that she was saying to the couple seated opposite to her...’

Although I did not systematically investigate which of the processual and telic verbs allow both the imminent and the interrupted interpretations of the avertive, it is conceivable that in principle any of them can occur in either type of context, with perhaps different verbs favouring one or the other depending on their lexical semantics. At the same time, there are verbs which are compatible not only with the avertive, but also with other interpretations of the “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction, to which I now turn.

5.3. The progressive and the proximative and their subtypes

The non-avertive uses of the construction are characterised by the lack of the counterfactual meaning component, which, as has been shown in the previous section, is often overtly signalled by expressions of interruption, concession or adversity in the immediate or broader context. In the absence of such contextual clues the construction is compatible with non-counterfactual interpretations, implying that perhaps counterfactuality is an implicature rather than an entailment of the construction. According to the notation in my database, these come in four different kinds, repeated in Table 13.

Table 13. *Non-counterfactual uses*

Phase	Completion	Meaning	No. of occurrences
durative	unclear	progressive	291 (71.67%)
durative	yes		46 (11.33%)
preparatory	unclear	proximative	42 (10.34%)
preparatory	yes		27 (6.65%)
Total			406

While the difference between the durative and preparatory phases of the event is self-evident and has been illustrated in detail above, the two values of the “completion” feature deserve some discussion. The much more frequent value “unclear” corresponds to situations where neither immediate context nor general knowledge implies anything about the (non)occurrence of the relevant transition; consider example (38) with the progressive and example (39) with the proximative.

- (38) [*Autobusas nesiteikė atvažiuoti,*]
arba buv-o be-at-važiuoj-qs, bet j-o
 or AUX-PST.3 CNT-PVB-drive-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M but 3-GEN.SG.M
niekur ne-si-mat-ė.
 nowhere NEG-RFL-see-PST.3
 ‘[The bus was not going to arrive,] or was arriving, but could not be seen anywhere.’

- (39) *Nors aš pat-i jau buv-au*
 although 1SG.NOM same-NOM.SG.F already AUX-PST.3
be-pra.rand-a-nt-i
 CNT-lose-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F
 [*šių viltį, tačiau išgirsti tokius žodžius iš gydytojų buvo labai skaudu.*]
 ‘Although I was myself already about to lose [this hope, to hear such words from the doctors was very painful.]’

In example (38) neither the construction nor the context imply that the event of the bus finally arriving did not take place, moreover, this was even quite likely to occur in the near future; likewise, example (39) tells nothing about whether the narrator lost hope in the end or not (note that

the concessive clause introduced by *tačiau* ‘however’ in this case does not cancel the event).

Examples exist, however, where the relevant event does in fact occur and this is either directly indicated in the context, as in example (40) (=16), or is implied by some general knowledge, as in example (41), representative of the whole small class of uses with verbs denoting cyclic natural events whose course cannot be interrupted or canceled.

- (40) *Ĵ-is* *ĵ-si-mylĵj-o* *mergin-q,* *kur-i*
 3-NOM.SG.M PVB-RFL-love-PST.3 girl-ACC.SG which-NOM.SG.F
buv-o ***be-iš-vyk-sta-nt-i*** *ĵ* *Amerik-q,*
 AUX-PST.3 CNT-PVB-go-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F in America-ACC.SG
ved-ĕ *ir* *iš-važĵiav-o.*
 marry-PST.3 and PVB-drive-PST.3
 ‘He fell in love with a girl who was leaving for America, married her and left [with her for America].’

- (41) [... *miegoti jau visai nebesinorĵjo,*]
o *saul-ĕ* *jau* ***buv-o*** ***be-kyl-a-nt-i...***
 and sun-NOM.SG already AUX-PST.3 CNT-rise-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F
 ‘[...I didn’t want to sleep anymore,] and the sun was already rising...’

Some of the examples of this type are similar to “canceled inchoatives” discussed in the previous section, cf. example (42), where the mental event referred to by the verb was actually fully instantiated, but was subsequently quickly canceled.

- (42) [„*Labai protingai sumanyta!*“ –]
buv-o ***be-galvoj-qš*** *Varenuch-a,* *tačiau,*
 AUX-PST.3 CNT-think-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M PN-NOM.SG however
 [*nepĵėjus taip pagalvoti, ĵo mintyse praskriejo žodžĵiai: „Kvailystĕ!*]
 ‘[“Very clever!”] thought Varenukha, but [the instant afterwards he changed his mind: “No, it’s absurd!”]’¹²

In contrast to the avertive uses of the construction, the progressive and the proximative uses only rarely co-occur with any specific contextual clues. Of these, the most frequent are temporal clauses (94 tokens, 23%), which, as we have seen above, are prominent with the avertive function as well. Not surprisingly, with some verbs the construction can have both the avertive

¹² Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, ch. 10; English translation quoted from <https://www.weblitera.com/book/?id=205&lng=1&ch=10&l=>, accessed June 29, 2019.

and the non-avertive interpretations, the choice being determined solely by the context, cf. the following examples with the verb *duoti* ‘give’. In (43a) the context does not imply any sort of interruption, and the construction is interpreted as a pure progressive; by contrast, in (43b) the subordinate temporal clause introduces the cancellation of the event expressed by our construction, hence the avertive meaning.

- (43) a. [*Mane surado žemesniajame aukšte,*
kur aš jau buv-au be-duod-a-nt-i
 where 1SG.NOM already AUX-PST.1SG CNT-give-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F
interview
 interview
 [*vietinės televizijos žinioms apie prekinimosi madas ir tendencijas.*]
 ‘[They found me on the ground floor,] where I was already giving an in-
 terview [to the local TV news about shopping fashions and tendencies.]’
- b. *Parduotuv-ės savinink-as jau buv-o*
 shop-GEN.SG owner-NOM.SG already AUX-PST.3
be-duod-ąs j-am
 CNT-give-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M 3-DAT.SG.M
 [*grąžos, kai staiga pastebėjo, kad ant banknoto pavaizduotų Stepono*
Dariaus ir Stasio Girėno veidai atrodo neįprastai.]
 ‘The shop owner was already going to give him [change when he
 suddenly noticed that the faces of Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas
 depicted on the banknote looked unusual.]’

More interesting is the fact that the non-counterfactual uses of the construction seem to favour inanimate subjects, which account for 146 tokens (35.96%). Recall that the share of inanimate subjects in the complete database is 328 tokens (16.21%), thus non-counterfactual uses account for almost half of the examples with inanimate subjects. The difference between the avertive and non-avertive uses with respect to inanimate subjects is statistically significant (chi-square test with Yates’ correction, *p*-value < 0.0001), see Table 14.

Table 14. *Inanimate subjects in avertive and non-avertive examples*

	avertive	non-avertive	total
animate subject	1143 (89.44%)	260 (64.04%)	1403 (83.31%)
inanimate subject	135 (10.56%)	146 (35.96%)	281 (16.69%)
total	1278	406	1684

The higher incidence of inanimate subjects in non-avertive contexts seems to be semantically motivated: inanimate subjects are normally unable to interrupt the processes they undergo or cancel their resultant states, therefore they and the verbs taking them are better compatible with progressive and proximative meanings than with the avertive. Consider example (44) with the verb *eiti* ‘go’, which in combination with the subject *savaitė* ‘week’ yields an uninterruptible natural process which will necessarily reach its endpoint.

- (44) *Sunk-i* *darb-o* *savait-ė* *buv-o*
 hard-NOM.SG.F work-GEN.SG week-NOM.SG AUX-PST.3
be-ei-na-nt-i *į* *pabaig-q,* *buv-o*
 CNT-go-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F in end-ACC.SG be-PRS.3
ketvirtadien-is.
 Thursday-NOM.SG
 ‘The hard workweek was reaching its end, it was Thursday.’

In example (45) the event ‘water boiling’ could potentially be interrupted by some external agent, but the context unequivocally indicates that nothing of this kind happened:

- (45) [... *o puodelis su verdančiu vandeniu tebėra pilnas.*]
nors *prieš* *iš-vyk-sta-nt* *vanduo* *j-ame* *buv-o*
 although before PVB-go-PRS-PA water.NOM.SG 3-LOC.SG.M AUX-PST.3
be-už-verd-qs.
 CNT-PVB-boil-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M
 ‘[... and the pot with boiling water is still full,] although before he went out the water in it had been starting to boil.’

On the other hand, one must acknowledge that quite a substantial part of the examples with inanimate subjects describe events in one or another way involving animate and conscious agents and experiencers, but metonymically construed with subjects denoting organisations or states, as in example (46), vehicles, as in example (38) above, or abstract entities, as in example (47).

- (46) *Toki-a* *organizacij-a* *katalik-uose* *dar*
 such-NOM.SG.F organisation-NOM.SG Catholic-LOC.PL yet
ne-egzistav-o, *bet* *buv-o* ***be-si-kuri-a-nt-i...***
 NEG-exist-PST.3 but AUX-PST.3 CNT-RFL-create-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F
 ‘Such an organisation did not yet exist among the Catholics, but was about to come into being.’

- (47) *Informacij-os* *samprat-a* *dar* *tik* *buvo-o*
 information-GEN.SG notion-NOM.SG still only AUX-PST.3
be-pra.ded-a-nt-i *savo* *keli-q* *į* *visuotin-į*
 CNT-begin-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F RPOSS way-ACC.SG in general-ACC.SG.M
pripažinim-q.
 recognition-ACC.SG
 ‘The notion of information was still only beginning to find its way
 towards general recognition.’

Another clear divergence between the avertive and non-avertive uses of the construction emerges when one compares the incidence of different person values, see Table 15.

Table 15. Subject person in avertive and non-avertive uses

	Avertive	Non-avertive	Total
1	464 (36.34%)	63 (15.52%)	528 (31.30%)
2	11 (0.86%)	0 (0.00%)	11 (0.65%)
3	802 (62.80%)	343 (84.48%)	1148 (68.05%)
Total	1277	406	1687

As is evident, the avertive contexts attract the 1st person, while the non-avertive contexts show a distribution of person values more similar to the general one (cf. Table 4 above); the difference between the two types of context with respect to the 1st person is highly statistically significant (chi-square test with Yates’ correction p-value < 0.0001). This skewed distribution seems to be semantically motivated: avertive contexts often occur in emotionally loaded personal narratives relating the events which the speaker either failed to accomplish or luckily evaded participating in (and often these events either belong to or affect the speaker’s personal sphere), while the more neutral proximative and progressive contexts favour the perspective of an external observer.

The breakdown of the non-avertive examples for actional classes of verbs is given in Table 16 and its comparison to the distribution of actional classes in the avertive uses in Table 17.

Table 16. *Actional classes in non-avertive uses*

	Progressive	Proximative	Total
State	9	0	9
Process	36	12	48
Telic	284	26	310
Punctual	8	31	39
Total	337	69	406

Table 17. *Actional classes in avertive vs. non-avertive uses*

	Avertive	Non-avertive
State	62 (4.85%)	9 (2.21%)
Process	288 (22.54%)	48 (11.82%)
Telic	538 (42.10%)	310 (76.35%)
Punctual	390 (30.52%)	39 (9.61%)
Total	1278	406

We clearly see that the non-avertive, especially the progressive, uses of the construction strongly favour telic verbs and disfavour the other actional classes (the difference between avertive and non-avertive uses in the distribution of actional classes is highly statistically significant, chi-square test p-value < 0.0001 both for all four classes and for telic vs. everything else). This is certainly not accidental; the explanation of this skewed distribution lies in the fact that Lithuanian telic verbs, on the one hand, are semantically compatible with the past progressive contexts, and, on the other hand, cannot express this meaning by their simple past forms, which only denote the complete event. Hence, the “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction becomes an obvious candidate to fill this formal gap.

To conclude the discussion of the non-avertive uses of the “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction I would like to observe that, contrary to the statements in my earlier paper (Arkadiev 2011a, 49), such uses are neither “peripheral” nor “obsolete”.

5.4. Phasal verbs

A separate discussion is in order concerning the avertive use of the construction with phasal verbs *pra(si)dėti* ‘begin’ and *baigti(s)* ‘finish’, which are the most frequent lexemes occurring in the construction, all in all accounting for more than a quarter of its uses. While the inceptive phasal verbs (to this class also belongs *imti* ‘start’, with just 6 occurrences) are naturally attracted by the construction due to its semantics focusing on the non-final phases of the event, its interaction with the terminative phasal verbs is more intricate. First of all let us look at the types of meanings attested with phasal verbs. These are summarised in Table 18.¹³

Table 18. Meanings of the construction with phasal verbs

	Avertive		Progressive	Proximative	Total
	Imminent	Interrupted			
<i>pradėti</i> ‘begin’ (tr.)	13 (3.64%)	197 (55.18%)	76 (21.29%)	0 (0.00%)	357
<i>prasadėti</i> ‘begin’ (itr.)	2 (8.33%)	4 (16.67%)	16 (66.67%)	1 (4.17%)	24
<i>(pa)baigti</i> ‘finish’ (tr.)	13 (9.22%)	22 (15.60%)	68 (48.23%)	7 (4.97%)	141
<i>baigtis</i> ‘finish’ (itr.)	0 (0.00%)	4 (11.76%)	30 (88.24%)	0 (0.00%)	34
<i>pasibaigti</i> ‘finish’ (itr.)	0 (0.00%)	1 (14.29%)	6 (85.71%)	0 (0.00%)	7
total	28 (4.97%)	228 (40.50%)	196 (34.81%)	8 (1.42%)	563

From Table 18 it can be seen that the avertive meaning is characteristic of the transitive inceptive verb *pradėti* ‘begin’, which naturally follows both from this verb’s affinity with avertive semantics and from the ability of an agentive initiator to interrupt the process after its inception, as in example (48a), or to cancel the intended inception, as in example (48b). In such contexts the construction and the inceptive verb reinforce each other, rather than combine fully compositionally, cf. a synonymous example without *pradėti* in (49).

¹³ Note that the totals in the rightmost column can be larger than the sums of the figures in the other cells, since I could not determine the meaning of some of the examples with sufficient confidence.

- (48) a. *Ĵau buv-o-m be-pra.ded-q džiaug-ti-s,*
 already AUX-PST-1PL CNT-begin-PRS.PA.NOM.PL.M rejoice-INF-RFL
 [*kad šiandien daugiausiai nužygiuosim, bet tuoj po pietų užėjo lietus.*]
 ‘We already started rejoicing [that we would be able to march
 the longest distance today, but in the afternoon it started raining.]’
- b. *Ĵau buv-au be-pra.ded-a-nt-i*
 already AUX-PST.3 CNT-begin-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F
k-q nors saky-ti,
 something-ACC say-INF
 [*bet, atsiminus mudviejų susitarimą, nieko nesakiau.*]
 ‘I was already about to start saying something,
 [but, recalling our agreement, said nothing.]’
- (49) *Buv-o be-sak-qs, kad kreip-tų-si*
 AUX-PST.3 CNT-say-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M that appeal-SBJ.3-RFL
į j-o tėv-q,
 in 3-GEN.SG.M father-ACC.SG
 [<...>, *bet atsakymas įstrigo gerklėje...*]
 ‘He was about to say that he would apply to his father <...>, but the
 reply stuck in his throat...’

By contrast, all the terminative verbs as well as the intransitive inceptive verb *prasadėti* (formed from *pradėti* by means of the reflexive marker) clearly favour the progressive meaning of the construction. For the intransitive *prasadėti* and *baigtis* this correlates with their occurrence exclusively with inanimate subjects (usually denoting processes and events), cf. examples (50) and (51); as has been shown above, inanimate subjects disfavour the avertive semantics.

- (50) [*Tais metais, kain (sic!) kūrėte savo agentūrą,*]
Lietuv-oje buv-o be-pra.si.ded-a-nt-i
 Lithuania-LOC.SG AUX-PST.3 CNT-begin.RFL-PRS-PA-NOM.SG-F
ekonomi-n-ė kriz-ė.
 economic-NOM.SG.F crisis-NOM.SG
 ‘[At the time when you were creating your agency,] an economic
 crisis was starting in Lithuania.’
- (51) [*Daugiau studijavau, o kai supratau, kaip gali būti smagu studentauti*]
studij-os buv-o be-si-baigi-q.
 study-NOM.PL AUX-PST.3 CNT-RFL-finish-PRS.PA.NOM.PL
 ‘[I studied more, and when I understood how it can be cool to be
 a student], my studies were coming to an end.’

Nevertheless, the inceptive transitive *pradėti* is robustly attested in the progressive use of the construction as well, as in example (52). This is also expected, since the beginning of a process can be construed as extended in time and viewed from within, and our construction, as said above, often serves to allow telic verbs to express this aspectual viewpoint.

- (52) [*Praėję pro vartus patekom į didelę aikštę,*
kuri-oje jau buv-o
 which-LOC.SG.F already AUX-PST.3
be-pra.ded-q rink-ti-s turist-ai,
 CNT-begin-PRS.PA.NOM.PL.M gather-INF-RFL tourist-NOM.PL
 [*bet kol kas dar negausiai.*]
 ‘[Having passed through the gate we got into a large square,] where
 there were tourists already starting to gather, [but not yet in abundance.]’

The use of the “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction with the verb *baigti* ‘finish’ requires a separate discussion, since this verb itself often serves as a quasi-auxiliary expressing proximative, i.e. an imminent event whose actual occurrence is not at issue. For Lithuanian, this use of *baigti* with “perfective” (i.e. furnished with a preverb) infinitives has been identified in Holvoet (2014), and can be illustrated by example (53). This construction differs from the regular phasal construction with the same verb as shown in example (54) in its semantics and co-occurrence (the latter expresses completion of a durative event that had started before the reference time, while the former rather expresses imminence of an event which may not yet have started, and is especially prominent with punctual verbs), and morphosyntactically (the proximative construction is mainly used in the present tense, while the phasal one is not thus restricted).

- (53) *Baigi-u su.pras-ti vyr-ų logik-q.*
 finish-PRS.1SG understand-INF man-GEN.PL logic-ACC.SG
 ‘I am almost beginning to understand male logic.’ (Holvoet 2014, 109)
- (54) *Prieš keli-as dien-as baigi-au ap-lanky-ti*
 before several-ACC.PL.F day-acc.PL finish-PST.1SG PVB-visit-INF
 [*Lietuvos miestų ir rajonų savivaldybių vadovus.*]
 ‘Several days ago I finished visiting [the heads of Lithuanian
 municipalities.]’ (DLKT)

In combination with the “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction the verb *baigti* can have both the phasal meaning of imminent completion, especially with “imperfective” infinitives and nominal complements, as in examples

(55) and (56), and the non-phasal avertive meaning of imminent occurrence of an event, as in example (57) showing an avertive context and example (58) with a proximative context.

- (55) *Kai at-vaziav-o-me, j-ie jau buv-o*
 when PVB-drive-PST-1PL 3-NOM.PL.M already AUX-PST.3
be-baigi-q gesin-ti.
 CNT-finish-PRS.PA.NOM.PL.M extinguish-INF
 ‘When we arrived, they had already almost finished extinguishing the fire.’
- (56) ... *penki-os iš j-ų buv-o*
 five-NOM.PL.F from 3-GEN.PL AUX-PST.3
be-baigi-a-nči-os paskutin-į kurs-q.
 CNT-finish-PRS-PA-NOM.PL.F last-ACC.SG.M course-ACC.SG
 ‘Five of them [female students] were finishing their last university year.’
- (57) [*Lūšys grįžta į Lietuvos miškus. Jos, mūsų girių senbuvės,*
buv-o be-baigi-a-nči-os iš-nyk-ti,
 AUX-PST.3 CNT-finish-PRS-PA-NOM.PL.F PVB-disappear-INF
 [*bet bus išsaugotos, išgelbėtos nuo išnykimo.*]
 ‘[Lynxes return to Lithuanian forests. The old residents of our woods,] they have almost disappeared, [but will be protected, saved from extinction.]’
- (58) ...[*ateidavo tas pats žmogus, kurio bijojo vis mažiau ir prie kurio rankų kvapo bei prisilietimo*
buv-o be-baigi-qs pri-pras-ti.
 AUX-PST.3 CNT-finish-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M PVB-get.used-INF
 ‘[... that very man used to come, whom he feared less and less and whose hands’ smell and touch] he had almost got used to.’

In the latter cases the use of *baigti* seems to be somewhat redundant since largely the same meaning can be expressed by the combination of our construction with the respective non-phasal verb, cf. example (59). Such redundancy, however, stems from the semantic affinity of the proximative construction with *baigti* and the “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction, which explains their attraction.

- (59) [*Ten teko pabūti savaitę ir*
jau buv-au be-pri-prant-a-nt-i
 already AUX-PST.1SG CNT-PVB-get.used-PRS-PA-NOM.SG.F

prie *viet-os* *laik-o*,
to place-GEN.SG time-GEN.SG
[*o tada teko jau keliauti į Lietuvą.*]
‘[I got to spend a week there [in Canada] and] had already almost got used
to the local time, [and then I had already to travel back to Lithuania.]’

5.5. Notes on diachrony

The empirical findings presented above suggest that the characterisation of the Lithuanian “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction as purely avertive is not sufficiently accurate. First, even though about three quarters of the uses of the construction in the corpus fall under the broad definition of the avertive (including both frustrated initiation and frustrated completion), the remaining non-avertive (proximative and progressive) uses constitute a considerable share. Second and even more importantly, the counterfactual semantics associated with the avertive uses of the construction seems to be heavily context-dependent, being often induced by explicit adversity expressions. By contrast, in the absence of such contextual cues the exact interpretation of the construction often remains vague and is open for non-counterfactual readings. This suggests that the encoded meaning of the construction is (broadly) proximative rather than avertive, the counterfactual meaning component being merely an implicature. On the other hand, as my previous investigation (Arkadiev 2011a) has shown, native speakers of Lithuanian, when presented with examples of the construction out of context tend to interpret it as an avertive, which points towards the gradual, yet incomplete, conventionalisation of the counterfactual implicature into an entailment. This is a pathway of development different from the one proposed by Kuteva (1998, 145–148), i.e. development of the proximative out of the avertive by semantic bleaching.

The hypothesis that the avertive uses of the Lithuanian “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction are secondary with respect to the proximative and progressive functions is supported by the data from Old Lithuanian, where, according to Ambrasas (1990, 180–181; see also Sližienė 1961), the construction (with the continuative prefix *be-* on the participle being still optional) primarily expressed the progressive semantics, as in example (60), which naturally gave rise to counterfactual entailments in contexts of interruption in the past, as in example (61).

(60) Old Lithuanian

Ir buw-a piemen-is t-oye schal-y
 and AUX-PST.3 shepherd-NOM.PL DEM-LOC.SG.F place-LOC.SG
ant lauk-a be-gan-a
 on field-GEN.SG CNT-pasture-PRS.PA.NOM.PL.M

‘And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field.’¹⁴
 (Baltramiejus Vilentas’ 1579 translation of the Gospel, Lk 2:8, quoted after Ambrazas 1990, 180)

(61) *Tawa tarn-as buw-a be-gan-ans*

your servant-NOM.SG AUX-PST.3 CNT-pasture-PRS.PA.NOM.SG.M
aw-is sawa Tiew-o, ir at-eij-a Lėw-as.

sheep-ACC.PL RPOSS father-GEN.SG and PVB-go-PST.3 lion-NOM.SG
 ‘Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep, and a lion came...’
 (Jonas Bretkūnas’ 1579–1590 translation of Luther’s Bible, Sam. 17:34,
 quoted after Ambrazas 1990, 181, Arkadiev 2011a, 49)

Since the Old Lithuanian periphrastic progressive apparently had never been a highly frequent and fully grammaticalised category, it is possible to hypothesise that it was gradually restricted to the functional niche close to the past proximative and further started developing into an avertive, with the past progressive meaning, still attested mainly with telic verbs, remaining as a residual use (see Bertinetto *et al.* 2000, 517; Johanson 2000, 153–154; Vafaeian 2018, 17–18, 109–113 on the progressive-proximative-avertive polysemy cross-linguistically).

6. Conclusion

In this article I have presented both qualitative and quantitative results of a large-scale corpus investigation of the Lithuanian construction “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA”, which has not yet been studied in sufficient detail. It has been shown that the construction has quite specific preferences as regards the lexical verbs it tends to occur with (a large share of these verbs are phasal) and that in its different functions the construction shows skewed distributions with respect to aspectual classes of lexical verbs and animacy and person of the subject, all of which can be linked to its semantics.

¹⁴ King James’ Bible, <https://biblehub.com/kjv/luke/2.htm>, accessed 11 October 2019.

This has allowed me to considerably revise the results of my own previous study of this construction in Arkadiev (2011a), showing that besides the avertive function (expressing imminence and counterfactuality) accounting for about three quarters of the occurrences of the construction it is also robustly attested in the proximative (imminence without counterfactuality) and especially the progressive functions. Moreover, my investigation has shown that the avertive semantics is quite often found in contexts where the non-occurrence or non-completion of the event is explicitly signaled, and that the construction can be interpreted as both avertive and non-avertive with the same lexical verbs. Both of these findings indicate that the counterfactual semantic component of the construction is rather a cancellable implicature than an entailment. This partly corroborates the results of a questionnaire-based typological study Alexandrova (2016), where the Lithuanian construction has been claimed to instantiate a “past proximative”. However, the fact (which seems to have been missed by the previous studies) that the “*būti*-PST + *be*-V-PRS.PA” construction can serve as a means to express the pure progressive meaning, especially with telic verbs, whose simple past forms cannot express an ongoing situation in the past, indicates that it fills an important functional gap in the aspectual system of Lithuanian.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACC — accusative; ADJ — adjectival suffix; AUX — auxiliary verb; AVR — avertive; CNT — continuative; COM — comitative; DAT — dative; DEF — definite; DEM — demonstrative; DUBIT — dubitative; EXCL — exclamative; F — feminine; FRCMPL — frustrated completion; FRINIT — frustrated initiation; FUT — future; GEN — genitive; IMP — imperative; INCONS — inconsequential; INF — infinitive; INS — instrumental; INTENT — intentional; LOC — locative; M — masculine; N — neuter; NEG — negation; NOM — nominative; P — patient; PN — proper name; PA — active participle; PFV — perfective; PL — plural; POT — potential; PN — passive participle; PROX — proximative; PRS — present; PST — past; PTCL — particle; PVB — preverb; Q — question particle; RFL — reflexive; RPOSS — possessive reflexive; SBJ — subjunctive; SG — singular.

SOURCES

- BNC – British National Corpus, <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/>
 DLKT – Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos tekstynas (The corpus of modern Lithuanian), <http://tekstynas.vdu.lt/tekstynas>
 LithuanianWaC – Lithuanian Web Corpus v2, <https://www.sketchengine.eu/lithuanian-wac/>
 ItTenTen14 – Lithuanian Web Corpus 2014, <https://www.sketchengine.eu/lttenten-lithuanian-corpus/>

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Peter M. Arkadiev

Vilnius University & Institute of Slavic Studies
Russian Academy of Sciences
Leninskij prospekt 32-A
RU-119334 Moscow
alpgurev@gmail.com