

## ENGLISH VERBS OF FUTURE REFERENCE IN A PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMAR

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1.1. The following proposal attempts to present and demonstrate a method for formalizing in a clear and systematic manner the basic meanings underlying the forms of verbs which contain future reference. To begin with, the following forms a) – f) will be dealt with and these only in statements, not in questions (in the traditional sense):

- a) WILL+MV as in, "I will come".
- b) SHALL+MV.
- c) BE GOING TO+MV.
- d) BE TO+MV.
- e) The Simple Present Tense as in, "I come".
- f) The Present Progressive Tense as in, "I am coming".

The method here proposed is directly inspired by Boyd and Thorne's illuminating article, "The semantics of modal verbs" (1969) and is intended as a contribution to pedagogical grammar rather than theoretical linguistics. Clarity of interpretation and presentation will take precedence over sophistication of analysis. The usefulness of the present proposal will therefore be confined to such practical areas as foreign language teaching and, tentatively to translation and pedagogically-orientated contrastive studies. The subject of future reference has in fact been widely discussed with Jespersen writing well over a hundred pages on "will" and "shall". Of particular interest to students of English usage are articles such as "Predictive statements" by Angus McIntosh (1966) and R. A. Close's "Problems of the future tense" (1970). The present paper tries to present a framework such as would assemble the insights of various scholars, as well as work done "in the field" by survey teams, into some clear and easily comprehensible shape. Initially, the aim is now to set out the underlying meanings of such sentences as 1) – 8):

- 1) I will be there at 6.30 prompt.
- 2) Tom will be late tomorrow.
- 3) He shall do as I ask.

- 4) We shall see.
- 5) Jim is going to buy that restaurant.
- 6) You are to follow the yellow signposts.
- 7) The President leaves by plane.
- 8) He is coming on the last plane.

1.2. Boyd and Thorne present an analysis of modal verbs in terms of the notion of "speech acts", following Austin's discussion of performative verbs<sup>1</sup>. Sentences such as 1) — 3) are accordingly understood to be different kinds of speech acts performed by the speaker. Thus, 1) could be interpreted as an act of promising, 2) an act of prediction and 3) an act of command. Such an interpretation might be set out as follows<sup>2</sup>:

c.f.1) I PROMISE to be there... etc.

c.f.2) I PREDICT Tom will be late...

c.f.3) I COMMAND that he do as I ask...

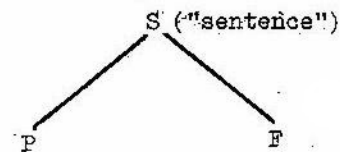
This brings out the element of present time that some have detected in the uses of the so-called Future Tense in English. In 1) and 3) we have true performatives where the speaker initiates something in the present in the very act of speaking i.e. a promise or a command. Alternatively he may just be stating a prediction in the present (concerning the future) as in 2). 7) provides an example of a further type of statement in the present. Here, if this is understood as a statement about a future event, the speaker gives information about an already existing plan, arrangement or decision concerning the President's future activities. It will be clearly of use to foreign learners of English if the present element in a "future" sentence can be systematically and clearly formalized. It is for this reason that Boyd and Thorne's analysis is particularly helpful. However since we are dealing here with a teaching grammar, we can dispense with some of the more sophisticated aspects of their analysis. Furthermore, we can group forms a) — f) together under a category such as is suggested in the title of this article on the grounds that this is reasonably close to traditional and thus widely comprehensible classification. Modals such as "may", "must" and "can" are therefore to be treated separately in another section of the grammar. Furthermore it may be noted that these modals do not reveal any distinct change in meaning when used to refer to the present rather than to the future as in, for example, "I may not be a fool" to be compared with, "I may prove to be a fool". This contrasts with, for instance, verbal form e). Thus the present "habitual" interpretation of this form as in 7), where the President is understood to have the habit of leaving by plane, is quite different from the previously mentioned interpreta-

<sup>1</sup> Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to do things with words*. London: O.U.P.

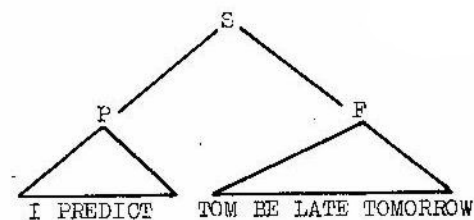
<sup>2</sup> Here an ad-hoc schematization is used, not the one used by Boyd and Thorne nor the one ultimately used in the present paper (see 3.4).

tion of the same sentence. So there also seem to be some formal grounds for the separate treatment of modals (see also discussion in 3.3.).

2.1. The present analysis posits a bi-partite deep structure and three basic sentence schemas which formalize the meaning underlying sentences such as 1) — 8) and all reasonable paraphrases. This bi-partite deep structure is split into two components: "P" and "F". "P" is anchored in the present and contains the speech act element whereas "F" denotes the future state or event and represents the propositional element<sup>3</sup>. This system could be set out as a simple tree diagram:



And 2) could be formalized to express its basic meaning, under one interpretation, as follows:



Note that "F" is stated non-grammatically, that is, in a minimally comprehensible manner in order to stress the fact that the interpretation as represented in the tree diagram is one remove from the actual sentence it underlies — as represented in 2). However when dealing with complex forms like WILL BE+MV -ing as in 9),

9) Tom will be coming to dinner this evening.

we may have to include the extra information conveyed by the -ing form in our specification of the deep structure. It will be seen (see 4.1.) that such forms may usefully be kept until later and accounted for in an advanced learner's section of the grammar after the basic meanings have been described. It should also be noted here that we are not in the realms of deep syntax and are therefore not constrained upon to give stage-by-stage derivational rules. If anything we are dealing more with deep semantics.

<sup>3</sup> One might have to change these labels if one were to mesh this system into a complete grammar of all verbal forms. For the time being, however, "P" and "F" should suffice.

2.2. The sentence schemata may be divided into three basic types as follows:

- I. Predictive Future.
- II. Impositional Future.
- III. Pre-planned Future.

The names given to these schemata relate to what has been termed the *basic meanings* associated with the verbal forms a) — f). In our search for a simple description we should certainly exclude as much as possible of what we may call “accrued meaning”, that is, meaning accrued from the linguistic context — or “cotext” to use Catford’s term — that surrounds the verbal form under consideration. If we take 10), for example, to involve intention on the part of the speaker, we might feel justified in including this aspect of intentionality in our description of the form “going to”:

10) I am going to study in Edinburgh next year.

However, if we change the subject and use the third person instead of the first as in:

11) Tom is going to study in Edinburgh next year.

we may be more doubtful about whether intention is involved. If we add “against his will” the sentence still remains perfectly acceptable. Moreover, there can be no question of intention if the subject is impersonal as in:

12) It is going to rain in Edinburgh tomorrow.

On this basis we can exclude intention from the basic meaning of “going to”. This is a purely predictive form in the present analysis. It must be taken for granted that, if a person predicts something of himself, he may, depending on the nature of the state or event involved, intend it. In a similar way we can exclude the idea of arrangement which may be accrued from the first person plural as in:

13) We are going to see Brian this evening.

Again certain verbs may introduce accrued meaning, for example, “meet” which, if substituted for “see” in 13) would strengthen the idea of arrangement. However, as a contrast to this, there are instances where arrangement is not accrued meaning as, for example, in the use of verbal form e):

14) Tom arrives on Friday.

In this case we could not add (to 14): “but his arrival has not been decided on yet”, or at least if we did, there would be a distinct semantic inconsistency. For this reason the category of pre-planned future will be assigned to forms e) and f). This will be further discussed (see 3.1.). It is sufficient at this juncture to state the principle of giving basic meanings first. In a later part of the grammar<sup>4</sup> the analysis can become more “delicate” to use a neo-Firthian term. A fuller list of verbal forms can then be provided together with more semantic information.

3.1. The first schema type, called the *Predictive Future* is seen to underlie sentences which denote what is sometimes called the pure or colourless future. All future tenses have some element of prediction in them but many contain other elements which more aptly characterize them. Associated with the Predictive Future are the forms, “going to”, “will” (in all positions) and “shall” (in the first person). There are some interesting restrictions on the use of “going to” apart from the fact that it seems to be confined to informal spoken non-journalistic English c.f. Close (op. cit.). This is discussed by McIntosh (op. cit.) and will be mentioned again later (see 4.1.). However, as far as its basic meaning is concerned, “going to”, that is form c), can be classified as an exponent of the category Predictive Future. The “P”-component in this first schema type is accordingly formalized as follows:

Schema I. “I PREDICT:: ..... (“F”) .....”

3.2. The second schema type is termed the *Impositional Future* and is characterized by the fact that the speaker “imposes” the state or event, as marked in “F”, either upon himself or upon someone else. In other words he either guarantees it personally or he demands of others that it come about. We can accordingly subcategorize the Impositional Future into: a) self-imposition, which covers expressions of determination, of personal guarantee and promising, and b) imperative imposition, where the speaker commands the agent(s) in the “F” component or else some unspecified agent(s) to bring about the state or event marked in “F”. This is formalized, using a term borrowed from Boyd and Thorne (“imp”), as follows:

Schema IIa. “I IMP MYSELF:: .....”

Schema IIb. “I IMP .....:: .....”

Into the dotted lines above we may write the agent(s) supposed to bring about “F” as shown in our analysis of the following two examples:

15) He shall do exactly that!

I IMP HIM:: *HE DO EXACTLY THAT!*

16) You shall never darken this door again!

I IMP YOU:: *YOU NEVER DARKEN THIS DOOR AGAIN!*

Alternatively the agent may be unspecified as in 17):

17) He shall die at dawn!

I IMP SOME PERSON(S):: *HE DIE AT DAWN!*

Associated with the Impositional Future are the forms “will” and “shall” in all positions and also “be to” (except in the first person). The last form — form d) — has another meaning, where the speaker reports a command made by someone else as in:

18) You are to follow these instructions apparently although it’s nothing to do with me.

<sup>4</sup> A two-stage pedagogical grammar would seem to be practical, incorporating basic and advanced grammar within one unified system of formalization.

as opposed to the meaning which is relevant here, as in:

19) You are to follow these instructions at once and don't you dare disobey me. We may note here that in the first person "be to" can only have that interpretation which is not relevant here (see also discussion in 3.3).

3.3. The third schema type is called the *Pre-planned Future*. Here the speaker states the existence of some arrangement with regard to some future state or event as marked in "F". This is formalized as follows:

Schema III. "I STATE SOME PLAN": .....

Associated with this schema are the two present tenses i.e. forms e) and f). We might note here that the Present Simple is the more formal of the two as regards tone, that is, in the sense of formality versus informality. This is reflected in the fact that it never implies that the speaker is the sole author of the plan, or decision (since we use "plan" in this broad sense). Typically it gives the impression of a large-scale plan not totally within the control of any individual like for example the President in 7). It is associated with official decisions and the timetable provides a prime example:

20) The Flying Scotsman gets into Waverly station at 15.50.

On the other hand, the more informal Present Progressive<sup>5</sup> can perhaps imply even sole authorship of the plan as in:

21) Oh, by the way, I'm coming on Tuesday not Thursday.

However, when the subject of the sentence is in the third person as in 8), then neither that person nor the speaker is necessarily the sole originator of the plan. 22) — 24) further illustrate explicitly how the Present Progressive can operate like the Present Simple but on a less formal level:

22) By the way, you're coming with us in the VW and Christine can go in the Fiat with Mary.

23) I'm giving a talk on James Joyce on Friday so why not drop in then?

24) Haven't you heard!...the President's leaving by plane! (c.f. 7)).

We may combine these two last verbal forms under the category of Pre-planned Future with plan "authorship" left unspecified. Semantic information concerning tone can be supplied separately.

It should be noted here that there is no idea of obligation in the plan or arrangement reported by the speaker. We therefore need to keep this category distinct from a further category where the speaker reports the existence of an obligation (or imposition) placed on some person(s) as in 18). This might be formalized as: "I STATE SOME PERSON(S) IMP: : .....", which is simply a reportative version of the Impositional Future. This interpretation of "be to" might usefully be placed together with "must", "can" "should" etc.

<sup>5</sup> The same difference in tone may be felt when these two tenses are used with reference to the present e.g. "I look forward to hearing from you", as in a business letter, and, "I'm looking forward to hearing from you" as in a more informal, intimate, letter.

Category II has been restricted to imposition originating directly in the speaker. In this way we can confine ourselves to areas covered by or traditionally associated with "will" and "shall". This thin borderline between verbs of future reference and what are often called modal verbs is thus preserved. We may indeed find forms in one category having the same "deep structure" (as formalized here) as forms in another but they need not be grouped together because of this. Ultimately how we construct the various sections of the grammar must fit in with the requirements stated earlier of simplicity of presentation rather than with the demands of linguistic theory. The reader must not be forgotten.

3.4. We may now summarize the proposed system of formalization as follows:

"P"	"F"
Schema types	Verbal forms
I. "I PREDICT"	a)/b)/c) = Predictive Future.
IIa. "I IMP MYSELF"	a)/b) = Impositional Future
IIb. "I IMP ....."	a)/b)/d) = Impositional Future
III. "I STATE SOME PLAN"	e)/f) = Pre-planned Future

Examples:

I PREDICT: : I COME = "I shall come" / "I will come" / "I am going to come".

I PREDICT: : YOU BE ILL = "You will be ill" / "You are going to be ill".

I IMP MYSELF: : I COME = "I will come" / "I shall come"<sup>6</sup>.

I IMP MYSELF: : YOU GET IT = "You shall get it" / "You will get it".

I IMP YOU: : YOU COME = "You shall come" / "You are to come".

I IMP HER: : SHE COME = "She shall come" / "She is to come".

I STATE SOME PLAN: : I COME = "I come" / "I am coming".

N. B. A fuller table would naturally specify the various restrictions on the use of various forms as discussed in 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.

4.1. Having set out a pedagogical grammar of basic meanings, some idea will now be given of how a more delicate grammar (or section of the grammar) might look. The proposed system can also deal with such problematic forms as g) — j) below for example:

g) will be taking

h) will have taken

i) will have been taking

j) will have been taken.

These forms may be interpreted in several ways but one particular type of interpretation will be dealt with here, namely the "pseudo-present" interpretation. This is where the verb seems to all intents and purposes to be a verb

<sup>6</sup> In the listing of basic schemas we might exclude "shall" here on the grounds that it is only likely where there are special prosodic features i.e. marked emphasis.

of Present Reference (especially with respect to the Time Adverbials it co-occurs with) but at the same time the addition of "will" to what would otherwise be a present (simple, progressive or perfect) tense seems to introduce an element of prediction, or of hypothesis such as can occur when the relevant state or event has not yet happened. This somewhat complex semantic situation can be clarified if it is represented in terms of the framework as proposed in this paper. The following sentences 25) — 30) are the kind of statements we can account for:

25) John will be taking his exam now.

26) Mary will have taken her exam by now.

27) Jim will have been taking his pills regularly.

27) The police will have been instructed about what to do.

We can include here a new interpretation of verbal form a) as in:

29) Oil will float on water.

30) John will know the answer.

Sentences 25) — 30) seem intuitively to be associated with 31) — 36) respectively:

31) John is taking his exam now.

32) Mary has taken her exam now.

33) Jim has been taking his pills regularly.

34) The police have been instructed about what to do.

35) Oil floats on water.

36) John knows the answer.

The introduction of "will" in each case changes the illocutionary force as represented in "P" from a plain reportative statement to a statement which, paradoxically, is one of prediction. Informally, the sense is, "I PREDICT ANYONE WOULD FIND X" where "X" is a state or event that is already true of the present and would be found to be true if verified in the future. Sentences 31) — 36) would be examples of "X" and are easily equated with our "F" component. In this case the "F" component is a verification of a state or event. This accordingly may be included in an expanded version of our first category as follows:

Ia. Standard Predictive Future.

Ib. Predictive Future of Verification.

We can formalize Ib as:

"I PREDICT ANYONE DISCOVER:....."

However this category can account for much more if we restate this as:

"I PREDICT (of.....) ANYONE DISCOVER....."

The appropriate time referred to by the speaker can then be filled in after "of". In this way we can include cases where the verification relates to events which have not yet taken place as well as those that have already happened. Thus for 25) — 30) we would write:

"I PREDICT (of NOW) ANYONE DISCOVER:: etc."

This characterization of the "F" component marks the predictive, hypothetical aspect of 25) — 30) as expressed overtly in the surface structure in the following two sentences:

37) I bet if you were to experiment you would find that oil would float on water.

37) Although I can't prove it to you this moment, I'm pretty sure — since I know how reliable Jim is — that he has been taking his pills regularly. And the analysis of 27) and 29), for example, would be as follows:

c.f. 27) "I PREDICT (of NOW) ANYONE DISCOVER::JIM HAS BEEN TAKING HIS PILLS REGULARLY."

c. f. 29) I PREDICT (of NOW)-ANYONE DISCOVER::OIL FLOATS ON WATER or alternatively:

c.f. 29) I PREDICT (of ALWAYS) ANYONE DISCOVER::OIL FLOATS ON WATER

The illocutionary force marked in the "P" component of Ib. clearly reflects an attitude of confidence on the part of the speaker. The implication is that the speaker knows of some pattern which he predicts the state or event marked in "F" conforms to, has conformed to or will conform to, for example Jim's reliable character, or a natural law concerning the behaviour of oil and water. The truth of the statement in "F" is contingent upon something conforming to a known pattern. However the statement remains hypothetical until verified. These two facts are consistent with McIntosh's observation that "will" seems characteristically to be used when the future state or event is contingent upon some other state or event. This form is seen to contrast with "going to" as in the following two sentences:

39) You will be sick (if you eat any more).

40) You are going to be sick (and there is nothing I can do about it).

However the idea of a pattern must be distinguished from the idea of a plan as expressed in the pre-planned future type of schema. It has already been noted that "WILL BE+MV-ING" is a complex form (see 2.1.) and we must distinguish the interpretation of future verification (Ib.) from a further interpretation that may be said to combine Standard Predictive Future with Pre-planned Future as in 9). Having stated basic meanings and categories, we can then go on to more sophisticated interpretations like this one which we now formalize as:

c.f.9) I PREDICT

::TOM COME TO DINNER THIS EVENING.

I STATE SOME PLAN

which contrasts with:

41) Tom will be feeling sea-sick this evening.

=I PREDICT (of THIS EVENING) ANYONE DISCOVER::TOM BE

*FEELING SEA-SICK.* and 42) below could easily have either of the two interpretations:

42) Janusz will be singing his favourite songs this evening.  
according to whether the singing is a planned activity or merely a result of a convivial atmosphere plus Janusz' fondness for singing.

4.2. A system has been proposed here and a number of suggestions made as to how it might be implemented in a pedagogical grammar of verbs of future reference. This would be structured according to delicacy, starting with a simple description of a limited number of verbal forms and then at a later stage introducing more forms and more sub-categories of description. Obviously the grammar would have to conform to a particular dialect of English which would affect in particular the description of the "will" and "shall" forms. The deep structure approach provides a unifying and clarifying framework to underpin what turns out to be a wealth of "surface" forms and the even greater number of interpretations. Vital to the writing of such a grammar would be such invaluable work on English usage as has been undertaken by researchers in London and Newcastle as well as the individual scholarly insights of people such as F. R. Palmer and Angus McIntosh. The task of the pedagogical grammarian is to organize the mass of surface detail into some comprehensible pattern while avoiding the intricacies required by the truly theoretical linguist. Such a system as has been here proposed might be one way of doing this.

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