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On Four Differences between Two Metaphorical Expressions of Future

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to clarify the differences between two types of expressions whose forms are in the present, but express a future event. The simple present and present in present are compared with regard to four perspectives: modality, human endeavor, present relevance, and proximity to the present. We may conclude from research that the simple present allows only modalization, is neutral to human endeavor, has much stronger relevance to the present moment and is neutral to the distance from the time of utterance, while the present in present allows both types of modality, expresses the results of human endeavor and although is less related to the present moment, is likely to describe the near future.

0. Introduction

Most of us would accept that verb tenses in the English language are far from simple. The expression of a future event, for example, is not necessarily expressed in the future tense. The use of the present tense to express the future is well explained as "futurate" in Huddleston and Pullum (2002) and elaborated further in Sado (2016). However, we are of the view that English has a future tense and thus, it seems no longer appropriate to use the term, "futurate" in our discussion as Sado (2016) did. Sado (2017:60) replaced the term with "present of futurity" to refer to all present tense forms that are employed to express events in the future. This discrepancy between form and meaning is explained by Huddleston and Pullum (2002) in terms of knowledge in the present like schedules of public transportation as thus illustrated in the example below from Kreidler (2014:111).

(1) The plane lands at 8:40.

Let us focus on the difference between two types of present of futurity: the simple present illustrated in the example (1) above and the present in present thus presented in (2).

(2) I'm watching the news in a little while.

Example (2) is from the British National Corpus. The British National Consortium and Shogakukan provide many useful examples online. According to Sado (2017), the difference is aspectual. The present in the present tends to express the imperfective aspect whereas the simple present is perfective, habitual, or does not express aspect. The purpose of this paper is to clarify any further differences between the two. We shall focus on the issue of modality, human endeavor, present relevance, and proximity to the present moment.

1. Future tense and modality

1.1 Use of "will" and modality

In Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014:401ff) system of tenses, the only unmarked marker of the primary future is "will." Quirk et al (1985:213) also noted that the modal verb "will" is used to express future. It is helpful to describe the relationship between the simple

unmarked future tense and modality before moving on to the main task. Quirk et al (1985:228-229) further classified the meaning as "prediction" or "volition." Refer to their examples below.

(3) If litmus paper is dipped in acid, it will turn red.

(4) I'll write as soon as I can.

(3) is an example of prediction, especially "the habitual predictive." (4) is an example of volition, and it expresses a weak volition, which they call an "intention." The examples below have stronger intentions.

(5) Will you help me to address these letters?

(6) If you will go out without your overcoat, what can you expect?

(5) is an example of "willingness", which is common in requests and offers. The use of the accented "will" in (6) shows even stronger volition, which they refer to as "insistence."

The future meaning express either prediction or volition. These meanings are inherently related to modality. The modality is, in Halliday and Mathiessen's (2014:176) terms, "the region of uncertainty" that lies either between yes and no or between the positive and the negative. If the information is negotiated, the clause expresses the proposition, which in the sub-categorization of the modality is called the modalization. On the other hand, the clause is said to express a proposal when goods and services are negotiated. Modality in this case is called modulation. Thompson (2004:67) depicted the relationship as follows:
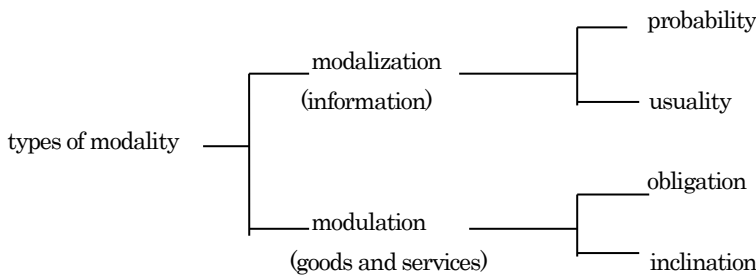

Fig.1

We can assume that the prediction meaning is related to modalization as it deals with the information. On the other hand, volition, which handles goods and services is related to the modulation.

The close tie to the modality shown above led Palmer (1979:160) to reject "will" and "shall" as a future tense maker. He stated that they are a "formally modal system" mainly because they "rarely refer to 'pure' future." However, it seems plausible here to accept Leech's (1987:57) view that "even the most confident prognostication must indicate something of the speaker's attitude and so be tingled with modality." As auxiliaries, we must recognize the "double function of the modal auxiliary and auxiliary of the future" that "will" and "shall" have. Their function at best as Leech noted is "nearest approximation to a 'neutral' and 'colourless' future."

1.2 Modality and present of futurity

Let us now return to the present of futurity. Leech (1987:65) noted that the simple present of futurity in the examples below is "future as known fact."

(7) My last train leaves Euston at 11.30.   Sinclair(1990:257)

(8) Next Christmas falls on a Thursday.   Leech(1987:65)

These are typical examples of a known fact, whose meaning Sado (2017:77) explained was derived from the inherent quality of state and habitual aspects, which last in the future. The future meaning of (7) was derived from the habitual aspect of the schedule of the transportation system while (8) is a state. At least in these typical examples, habit or state is already a fact and realistic. As no one is sure of the future in the real sense, we can regard these as extremely special cases of prediction. Also refer to the following examples.

(9) I get a lump sum when I retire at sixty-five.   Leech(1987:66)

(10) Her daughter finishes school tomorrow evening.   Carter and McCarthy (2006:406)

These may not be typical known facts as (7) and (8) above, but are nevertheless, as Leech (1987:66) and Declerck (1991:92-93) noted, plans or arrangements regarded as unalterable. They are far from volitions.

Present in present of futurity, on the other hand, expresses volition or prediction depending on the subject of the clause. Refer to the examples below.

(11) I'm inviting several people to a party.   Leech(1987:62)

(12) But she's coming back tomorrow.   Biber et al(1999:471)

According to Hoffmann (1993:129), "the subject is somehow planning the event or has set things in motion to end up there." When the subject of the clause is the first person as in (11) or the second person, they should be interpreted as volitions. Example (12) has the third person as the subject. Planning is definitely done by the referent of "she" and she definitely has volition and the speaker probably knows this. However, from the speaker's view, this should be regarded as prediction. (This is where the distinction between prediction and volition is blurred, but I do not want to dwell on this matter.) The following example from Quirk et al (1985:215) is probably more convincing.

(13) The match is starting at 2:30.

It is more natural to regard this example as a case of prediction. The present in present of futurity expresses both prediction and volition depending on the subject of the clause.

The two types of expressions seem to differ in terms of their relationships to the modality. The present in present allows both modalization and modulation; each is realized in the future tense as prediction and volition. The simple present, on the other hand, allows only modalization as prediction in strong confidence. This is based on the fact at the present moment. Present relevance of these two usages may be worth considering later. It is necessary to discuss other issues that seem to be related to modality.

2. Human endeavor

Having compared the two types of the present of futurity in terms of modality, further differences are now discussed. Note that the subjects are consciously involved in the planning or arrangement in the examples of the present in present thus listed.

(14) Next they're playing a cello sonata by Bach.   Declerck (1991:92)

(15) I'm taking the children to the zoo.   Quirk et al. (1985:215)

Declerck (1991:92) noted that the human agent "may be implied."

(16) Examinations are beginning next week.

In the above example, although examination is not a human agent as the subject of the clause, we can easily understand that they are planned and performed by a human being. Quirk et al. (1985:215) noted that the use of the present in present "is limited to actions brought about by human endeavor." We can also note that in examples of the simple present of futurity, (17) and (18) in Leech(1987:66) that the situation is performed by a human agency.

(17) We start for Istanbul tonight.

(18) Chancellor makes his budget speech tomorrow afternoon.

However, compare the grammaticality of the following two examples.

(19) The suns sets at 9.36 tomorrow.

(20) *The sun is going down at ten.   Declerck (1991:92)

While both of these examples express the time of sunset, (19) is grammatical, but (20) is not. The use of the present in present is not

allowed here. Declerck attributed it to "an intentional situation performed by a human agency." This human endeavor is obligatory in the present in present, while the simple present is neutral to it. This is another difference between the two types of present of futurity.

3. Present relevance

We need to consider the extent to which these expressions of future are relevant to the present situation since their forms are originally for the present tense. Let us consider the examples of the simple present.

(21) Next year, White Sunday falls on 11 May.   Declerck (1991:92)
(22) Next year the United Nations celebrates the anniversary of its Charter.   Leech(1987:65)
(23) Flight 106 takes off at 11:45 pm.   Declerck (1991:92)
(24) The plane leaves for Ankara at eight o'clock tonight.   Quirk et al. (1985:182)
(25) The term starts on 23rd April.   Leech(1987:65)

Among these examples, some have more present relevance than others. In other words, there is a degree of relevance in the use of the simple present of futurity. Example (21), along with (8) above, has the strongest relevance as the situations applies to the present moment as well as the future. In the case of (22), although the celebration is an event in the future, the anniversary itself is true at the moment of utterance. The speaker is convinced that some kind of ceremony to celebrate the anniversary will be held. Fulfillment of the precondition in the present makes the situation relevant to the present moment although it may not as strong as those in calendars. The situations in (23), (24), and (7) above are, as we have seen, schedules of the transportation system. The situation in the future is based on the habit that applies at the moment of utterances, which makes it relevant to the present. In (25), although the context is not shown, we can assume that the term is based on a law or some kind of rule in an institution. The relevance may be much weaker than the cases we have discussed thus far, but much more than the examples of the present in present shown below.

Let us now focus on the present in present. Refer to examples from Declerck (1991:92)

(26) I'm staying at the Gardner's next week.
(27) We're working late tomorrow morning.

The situations in these examples may be relevant to the present in the sense that an arrangement has already been made. The readiness or arrangement made at present does not necessarily guarantee the fulfillment thereof compared to the examples of habit or law in the simple present.

We can see that although both the simple present and present in present have relevance to the present moment, the tie is much stronger in the simple present because the situation applies to the present moment and there is a strong likelihood it will be fulfilled in the future, which is not the case in the present in present.

4. Proximity to the Present

Let us leave the issue of present relevance and turn to the issue of proximity to the present moment. All future events have distance from the time of utterance. This distance naturally varies from the moment to a distant future, centuries, millennia, or much longer. We can never assume a limit in this kind of distance. In this section, we attempt to find if there are any differences between the two types of the present of futurity in this respect.

Huddleston and Pullum (2002:171) pointed out that "the progressive (our present in present) tends to be used for the relatively near future." Refer to the examples below.

(28) The orchestra is playing a Mozart symphony after this.
(29) That does it! I'm leaving.   Quirk et al. (1985:215)

We can assume in (28) that the speaker and the addressee are in the hall waiting for the Mozart symphony to be played at any moment. Furthermore, as Quirk et al. explained, the future in (29) is an imminent one. However, they also noted that the present in present can express distant future by adding an adjunct of time.

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(30) I'm leaving the university in two years' time.

We can observe that near future is an unmarked interpretation unless specified otherwise by time adverbials.

The simple present, on the other hand, seem to be neutral as to the distance from the present moment.

(31) The gates of the park open in about fifty minutes.

(32) Most of the academic people that have attended the conference leave tonight.

(33) The chairman retires at the end of the next year.   Declerck (1991:91-92)

These examples show that the distance of time varies from 50 minutes to more than a year. We must note, however, that the simple present is not completely neutral to the distance in that expressions of imminent future like (29) are unlikely.

From this viewpoint one may say that the present in present tends to express near future unless specified otherwise while the simple present can be used to express any distance of future except the imminent one.

5. Conclusion

We have explored four differences between the simple present and the present in present of futurity. The simple present allows only modalization, and is neutral to human endeavor. It also has much stronger relevance to the present moment and is neutral to the distance from the time of utterance except for imminent ones. The present in present, on the other hand, allows both modalization and modulation. Actions in the present in present are naturally the result of human endeavor, and are related to the present moment, but not as much as examples in the simple present are. Preferred interpretation is in the near future unless specified otherwise. Although these differences may seem to be minor ones, they show the rich system of tenses in the English language, which would be nearly impossible if the expression of future was limited to the single morpho-syntactic paradigm.

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