

Semantic Implications of Futurity Expressions
in
Miller's Death of a Salesman

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Abstract

The implied meaning of futurity (after now event) can be seen as a problem of conversational implicature associated with associative meaning rather than conceptual or script schemata.

Semantic collocational interpret of models, forms, constructs, used to refer to futurity, are highly conventionalized. Yet, the invisible meaning and the intended meaning detection depend on a lot of shared assumptions and sinuous expectations. The study of the annexed corpus provides some insights into how more gets communicated than is said in this concern. Moreover, the co-text has its strong effect on what we think these constructions mean. It would be stated that the distinguished communicative tools used may be unintentionally informative via a number of factors, i.e. sometimes no natural, conceptual connection between the models, tenses used and our universal concept of futurity can be cited. Mostly, these discrete forms have no intrinsic meaning.

1. Introduction

Futurity in English can be expressed by a number of constructions. The future expressions do not necessarily express the same attitude expressed by these constructions. Pragmatically, the "invisible time indication" can be traced by spotting down effects of the co-text of all elements used by a variety of constructions. Thus, the corpus at hand, cited from Death of a Salesman provides instances of the simple future constructions. Other forms will be discussed with examples taken from various sources to clarify their implications. Non-assertive constructions & imperatives will not be probed.

Future time can be defined as that period of time which extends indefinitely after now. Modern schools of grammar divide tense, in English, into two kinds: present and past. Quirk et al (1973 : 89) state that "There is no obvious future tense in English corresponding to the time/tense parallel for present and past". They reject the traditional division which regards future as a third division of tense in English. Reasons behind this may be attributed to the fact that there is no major verbal form whose main function is to refer to future. The traditional decision to assign the modals (will & shall) to be the future tense morphemes is not so much convincing if we consider the uses of these modals, which do not have any relation to the future. For

instance, these modals may refer to habitual actions, scientific facts or prediction ...etc, not to the future.

(1) That will be the manager. (Prediction)

(2) Oil will float on water. (Scientific fact)

In English, however, there is a number of ways of expressing futurity, some of which are used to indicate other tenses or timeless structures.

(3) The sun rises in the east

is timeless simple present referring to a universal fact and not a future time. With time adverbials, ambiguity can be resolved.

(4) He leaves this evening.

2- Semantic Analysis of Expressions of Futurity

This section exposes a semantic analysis of expressions of futurity. It is hypothesized that the speaker selects an expression which suits his/her intention, i.e. to express threat, offer, prediction...etc. Time is realized in events/actions that are usually expressed by linguistic forms. The class of the verb used to express the action is referred to.

2.1. Will/Shall + infinitive.

Traditional grammarians consider the modals "will" and "shall" as future time morphemes. Perkins (1985 : 106) states that "...although will is probably best regarded as a modal expression which may incidentally refer to future time, it has nevertheless often been analyzed as a future tense morpheme in the same way that -ed is often analyzed as a past tense morpheme." This fact is rejected by contemporary grammarians like, (Leech, Palmer, & Quirk et al). For instance, Leech (1971 : 52) argues that "...although the will/shall construction provides English with its nearest approximation to a 'neutral' or 'colorless' future, one ought not to describe it as a "future tense" on a par with the Past and Present Tenses."

The tendency to assign 'shall' for the first person only and 'will' for the second and third persons is frequently broken. 'Will' can be used for all persons throughout the English speaking world. Tickoo and Subramanian (1978 : 172) state that "...shall and will are used with the bare forms of verbs to make predictions about the future...".

This construction conveys what will happen in the future without any reference to the present.

(5) Man will land on Mars someday.

It also expresses present actions continuing into the future. These indicate a state of being which will continue for a limited period in the future. For this reason the time adverbial is necessary to specify that particular period of time. Verbs of "activity" are used in this construction.

(6) I will study for another five years.

Future events initiated subsequent to the termination of other events are also expressed by this construction. Such sequence of events is revealed in sentences including subordinate clauses.

In addition to "will/shall + infinitive" in the main clause, English employs the "present simple" or "present perfect" in the subordinate clause. "Dynamic" rather than "stative" verbs are used to convey this meaning.

(7) I shall start when I get (have got) ready.

Single indefinite future events convey meanings such as "intention", "willingness", or "prediction". Adverbs of definite time are not used here. 'Dynamic' verbs are used with such events.

(8) I will visit London. (Intention).

(9) I will help you with your work. (willingness).

Single definite events use an obligatory time adverbial to distinguish them from indefinite events.

(10) They will visit us next Friday.

Simultaneous future events which convey the meaning of parallel activities occurring simultaneously in the future. Parallel activities are normally represented in complex sentences where the "simple present" is used in the subordinate clause.

(11) I shall drink tea while I watch the film.

Future states do not allow "stative" verbs and the use of adverbs of time is optional.

(12) The book will consist of ten chapters.

Near future refers to activities that are expected to happen in the near future. The use of an adverb of time indicating near future is necessary.

(13) He will soon leave.

2.2. Be going to + infinitive.

This construction shares the modal auxiliary construction most of its uses for prediction, threat, decisions and promises. It differs in its connection with the present whether for cause or fulfillment. It denotes futurity and intention. This intention, according to Thamson and Martinent (1979 : 171) "...is always premeditated and there is usually the idea that some preparation for the action has already been made". "Dynamic" verbs are used to express this meaning.

(14) She is going to have a baby.

Near future events are also expressed by "Be going to + infinitive construction".

(15) I'm going to move to a new house.

2.3. Simple Present.

The speaker uses the simple present to refer to future happenings if he considers the arrangements for the future event conclusive enough to assume that event as a fact.

Leech (1971 :66) argues that "In its future use, the Simple Present refers to a definite future occasion in the same way as the simple past tense ... refers to a definite occasion in the past". This means it must be accompanied by an adverbial referring to future time.

When the speaker is certain, he uses the simple present and from the adverbial given, he affirms that this future happening has been scheduled. Therefore, this use is common with statements about the calendar.

(16) Today is Sunday, and tomorrow is Monday.

(17) The train leaves tonight.

Scheduled future events are also expressed by the "simple present". The simple present shares the "present progressive" the expression of such activities that have been arranged in the present. Future time adverbials are used to avoid any ambiguity that may arise between the present reference of this construction and its future relation.

(18) The term begins on 16, June.

2.4. Present Progressive (Be + -ing).

This construction is used to refer to actions and arrangements personally planned and anticipated, in the present, to occur in the future. Leech (1971: 62) says that "a reasonably precise definition of the progressive in this sense is: future event anticipated by virtue of a present plan; programme or arrangement". This means that this event is scheduled in the present. This is why a future time adverbial is necessary to avoid any reference to the present.

(19) I'm meeting the dean at eight o'clock tomorrow morning.

2.5. Will/Shall + Progressive

Quirk et al (1973 : 89) refer to this construction as "... a future – as – a – matter – of – course". It expresses an activity in progress at a specified time in the future. It prevents the 'will/shall' and 'be going to' constructions to be interpreted as volition, insistence...etc.

(20) We will be staying with our uncle during the summer holidays.

Simultaneous future events are expressed by the use of this construction. They show parallel activities occurring simultaneously in the future. "Stative" verbs are not used here since they do not occur in the progressive.

(21) I shall be drinking tea while I'm watching the film.

Activities that are expected to happen in the near future are also expressed by the "future progressive".

(22) They will be gathering here in a minute.

2.6. Be about to + infinitive.

This construction is used to express actions or events which are on the point to take place, i.e. they are likely to happen almost immediately.

(23) The train is about to leave.

This construction shares "Be going to + infinitive" the expression of future fulfillment of a present cause. It refers to events which are expected from indicators in the present situation.

(24) She is about to have a baby.

Near future events are also expressed by "Be about to + infinitive" construction.

(25) The game is about to start.

2.7. Be to + infinitive.

It is used to express actions or events which have been fixed or arranged or which are required to be done.

(26) We are to be back home before 10 o'clock.

2.8. The Future Perfect.

The Future Perfect (will/shall have + past participle) is used to assert that something will have been completed or finished by a certain time in the future. It is used with an adverbial phrase or clause which expresses the point of time in the future. Praniskas (1975 : 215) affirms that this aspect "...relates the completion of an act or condition before another action or time in the future". For example, in the following sentence;

(27) The painter will have finished the downstairs rooms by Tuesday.

the time is future, but it implies a completion of the action at specific point of time.

This aspect refers to duration up to a time in the future.

(28) It is five o'clock, they have arrived home by now.

The future perfect is also used to denote a future event completed before another. It is used in the main clause and the simple present is used in the subordinate clause. Only "dynamic" verbs are used here.

(29) We shall have arranged everything before the party starts.

It is used, moreover, to refer to future events completed by a definite point of time. An adverb of time is needed to specify the point of time in the future.

(30) By this October, I will have finished my examinations.

2.9. Future Time in the Past.

Quirk et al (1973 : 90) affirm the use of some of the constructions used to express future time to be used, in the past, to express a time which is in the future when seen from a viewpoint in the past. They give the following expressions and examples.

1- Auxiliary V. + Would. (Literary Narrative Style).

(31) The time was not far off when he would regret this decision.

2- Be going to + infinitive (Unfulfilled Intention).

(32) You were going to give me your address.

3- Past Progressive.

(33) I was meeting him in Bordeaux the next day.

4- Be to + infinitive (Formal = 'was destined to').

(34) He was later to regret his decision.

5- Be + about to ('on the point of').

(35) He was about to hit me.

3. *Past & Present in DS*

To understand the tendency to resort to future expressions in DS, we should understand the relationship between past & present. That relationship is so complex as each character in the play looks at past and present differently. In the unstable, gloomy and unsafe present, characters find a protective screen in the past that allows them to be confronted with the harshness of life. Julie Adam (1991: 46) states that; "Willy becomes alienated from the present; at the same time, he mentally and emotionally submerges himself in the very past he is trying desperately to both understand and escape".

Miller's aim in (DS) is to erase any gap between a remembered past that would be evoked through words and a present that would be performed on stage. Both past and present are given theatrical representation. There is no clear cut boundary between them, the characters may exist both in the present and the past. Moreover, there are no flashbacks, thus, double exposure is relied on. For example, in Willy's mind, past and present exist on the same level, Willy perceives himself both in the present and in the past. Willy is schizophrenic: overwork, worry and repressed guilt have caused his mental collapse. In his state of breakdown, past and present are inextricably mingled, time is exploded. Willy is both the self-remembering "I", and the remembered "I" itself, i.e. the salesman as he used to be. The dramatic units, notably time, have been abolished in the most radical sense, indeed the function of memory entails a multiplicity of temporal levels and a loss of any fixed identity. Miller (1956 : 224) himself has emphasized this idea, "It is as though both playwright and audience believed that they had once had an identity, a being, somewhere in the past which in the present has lost its completeness, its definitiveness".

Willy's blind search for identity in the present pushes him into a form of duality; his fear of the past and a yearning for it. According to Miller (1968 : 26) "he is literally at that terrible moment when the voice of the past is no longer distant but quite as loud as the voice of the present". In other words, Willy's condition represents the wanderings of a mind that has lost its grip of reality and the painful attempt to recapture a past long gone by living it in the present. While it is believed that Willy's life is timeless, he is controlled by time.

Ultimately, this ambivalent relationship between the past and the present leaves no choice at the hands of the characters save the inclination to future expressions. Willy spends way too much of his time in the past when he needs to be focusing on the future. This latter aspect has been mainly portrayed in the image of the planted garden.

4- The Play

Death of a Salesman (DS) is an American tragedy in two acts & a requiem written by Arthur Miller. It centers around the life of Willy Loman, a traveling salesman who is brought to disaster by accepting the false values of contemporary society. He is a failed salesman, who forces dreams onto his two sons, Biff and Happy. Linda, his wife and his two sons have no idea what they should do for him as they know that he is heading towards disaster. Linda is probably the only realistic character in the play. The play, all in all, is a portrait of a family dealing with hardships and troubles. Though the play ends with the tragic death of Willy Loman, it doesn't tell us about the merchandise Willy himself sells. Most critics think that the play is mainly concerned with the fulfillment of the American dream.

5- Discussion

Although it is very hard to separate Willy's reality from his imagination, it is worth noting that the immense employment of the future expressions denotes the dreamy life of Willy. To start with a line extracted from the play itself "We live in a world made by men of the past", we maintain that the dream as portrayed in works of men of letters had begun to lose its glitter. Man is "Vital in New England" which is ironic since Loman is sure that he has no position in the capitalist world of today. He runs out of time. Thus, the "will's", "shall's" and other futurity tools are nills in the quest for opportunities of hopes.

Loman is out of time. He is confused and no longer able to make sense of reality. No future can be foreseen. It is the futile, deprived cripple. The uses of future expressions are only illusions. Eisinger (1970 : 165) puts forward a good explanation of this atmosphere in DS,

shatters for identity crisis. chooses the wrong because he does not know does not know who he is.	In the play, dream is also self-delusion, or the serious entertainment of aspirations impossible of fulfillment because they are based on false conceptions of one's talents and capacities. In such a case, reality dream. And out of such misapprehensions of one's potential achievement, of possibilities and opportunities, arises the Reality falls short of the dream in part because man dream. And man chooses the wrong dream himself. Willy Loman is lost because he
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It is the dogma that nothing comes next

but that things exist together within us. There is no past to be brought forward as it begins. We live in a world made by men of the past. The past – present dichotomy is replaced by a non-past / non- present.(Matt Biscay, Introduction to Death of a Salesman. P.7). Thus, future is cut off roots and is blurred.

The analysis of the corpus is going to be at two levels. The first shows the frequency of occurrence of the future expressions found in the text. This analysis reflects the dominance of the modal (Will / shall + infinitive) construction over the rest. Miller employs the auxiliary construction for rhetorical purposes.

On the one hand, the major characters in the play according to Wood (1968 : xvi; cited in Miller's 1981)) "... are dreamers of the wrong dreams..."

These dreams, in Pradhan's (1978 : 68) words, provide "... escape from reality" and "a sence of melancholy and loss". On the other, the main meaning associated with this use is 'prediction' which suits to describe Willy's state in an effective manner. The Lomans could not achieve anything. They remained just dreaming about their future.

The second level shows the distribution of the meanings associated with each form.

6- Method of Analysis

For the sake of simplicity, the method adopted in the analysis of future expressions in DS covers the following steps;

- 1- Future expressions in both acts of DS are elicited in virtue of their syntactic structure, word order, adjacent responses and stage directions.
- 2- The forces of future expressions are specified depending on their syntactic structures and the context of occurrence.
- 3- Interpreting DS in the light of the available evidences.

7- Expressions of Futurity in DS

In their interaction in both acts of DS, characters use many types of future expressions with diverse frequency as the following two tables show;

From	Frequency of Occurrence	Rate%
Shall / will + infinitive	235	63.858
Be going to + infinitive	68	18.478
Simple present	38	10.326
Present Progressive	25	6.793
Be about to + infinitive	2	0.543
Total	368	100%

Table (1) shows the frequency of occurrence of the 'Future Expressions'.

Meaning associated with the Expression	Frequency of occurrence	Rate%
Prediction	105	28.532
Intention	81	22.010

Decision	72	19.565
Literary narrative style	45	12.228
Planned future	33	8.967
Offer	12	३.260
Unfulfilled intention	11	2.989
Threat	9	2.445
Total	368	100%

Table (2) represents the meanings associated with the 'Future Expressions'.

The name of Miller's hero (Willy) is in itself suggestive. The high ratio of the occurrence of (Will/Shall) for prediction reveals the identity of Willy Loman.

The future is usually predicted upon the grounds of intention, hope, determination, desire, necessity, possibility, obligation, compulsion, etc. These colourings attach themselves to most future ideas; but they are so subtly shaded that it is difficult to pinpoint them when associated with the future, especially that expressed by (Will/Shall). Both acts have common types of future expressions which have high, middle, or low ratios.

Act one shows how the initial state of despair caused by Willy's professional incompetence is replaced by decisions to change things to be alright:

Willy: I'll start out in the morning. Maybe I'll feel better in the morning. (DS P.3)

Willy: No, go to sleep. I'll take some milk. I'll be up right away. (DS P.4).

In fact most of the play is a representation of Willy's mind. In Willy's mind, past, present and future exist on the same level:

Willy (with pity and resolve): I'll see him in the morning; I'll have a nice talk with him. I'll get him a job selling. He could be big in no time. My God! Remember how they used to follow him around in high school? When he smiled at one of them their faces lit up. When he walked down the street...(He loses himself in reminiscences) DS P-6.

Since the interaction in a drama reflects the way its author envisages the mechanisms of interpersonal exchange in real life, as Reza et al (2001 : 725) proposes, "DS exposes Biff and Happy's incapability to cope with the real, in their employment of future, they deny reality because it is upsetting and disturbing":

Happy: ...Then I'll go with you, Biff. We'll be together yet I swear. DS P.13

Biff: I think I'll go and see him. If I could get ten thousand dollars I could buy a beautiful ranch.

There is a very limited use of "Shall" as compared to the higher instances of "Will". The alternative " 'll" is treated as a mere morphological variation of "Will", in full agreement with Quirk et al(1985 : 228), according to whom " 'll" can only be regarded

as a combined form of "Will" and not of "Shall" both semantically and historically. Consider;

Willy: ...Then when you're all set, there'll be plenty of girls for a boy like you. P.15.

Willy: ... I think I'll buy it next trip. P.16.

The full form "will" is used on account of emphasis;

Linda: Why don't you tell those things to Howard, dear?

Willy: (encouraged) I will. P.4.

Semantically, while acknowledging that no clear-cut semantic distinction can be drawn between "will" and "be going to", it is generally agreed that the two modal forms basically differ in terms of temporal orientation. With "will" the event depends on the fulfillment of future conditions, while "be going to" has present reference. In fact "be going to" suggests movement from a present into a future state. Consider:

Biff (taking Willy's hand) : This Saturday, Pop, this Saturday- just for you, I'm going to break through for a touchdown. P.19.

Bernard: Biff! (He gets away from Happy) Listen, Biff, I heard Mr. Birnbaum says that if you don't start studying math he's gonna flunk you, and you won't graduate. P.19.

Willy: That's just what I mean,...you are going to be five times ahead of him. P.20

The matter remains the speaker's perception of the future event as being either firmly embedded in the present or more related to future events:

The woman: I'll put you right through to the buyers. P.25.

Willy: Where is he? I'll whip him, I'll whip him! P.25.

Willy: If you don't know how to play the game I'm not gonna throw my money away on you! P.30.

Linda: No, just the three of you. They're gonna blow you to a big meal! P.57

Willy [getting down beside Biff]: Never mind! He is going to give you those points. I'll see to it. P.95

Ben [coming down to the edge of the garden]: He'll call you a coward. P.100

The above examples express various meanings from prediction, desire, promise, threat, determination, etc. It is noteworthy that intentionality is one of the two

core values conveyed by "be going to". The other is prediction. Intentionality is exemplified in:

Willy: I'm definitely going to get one. P.56.

While prediction contexts are expressed in:

Charley: Hey, you're going to miss that train. P.70.

To interpret Miller's message in DS we might say that interaction takes place in the real world between Miller and his addressees.

The play is a message intended by Miller to convey certain ideas, attitudes, etc. The issuance of this message draws on a high degree of intentionality in forming his message that necessarily matches with his ideological and intellectual background.

8- Conclusion

Time is not the only concept expressed by the tense of the verb. Tense may also indicate the completeness or incompleteness of an action. Time is usually realized in events and actions which are expressed by means of linguistic forms. Moreover, time is a universal phenomenon which could be measured by the adverbials of time according to their closeness from the moment of speaking (now). Whereas tense is a formal grammatical category by means of which we refer to time.

There is no one –to – one correspondence between tense and time. Adopting the modern grammarians' viewpoint in considering the tense (as the form of the verb only) justifies this:

1- He leaves this evening.

---Tense is Present.

---Time is Future.

According to modern grammarians, there is no future tense in English; rather there are expressions which refer to the future time only.

Statistically, "will" is the most recurrent type of futurity in DS. Nearly 64% of the utterances contain instances of "will + infinitive", while the other six are heterogeneously distributed in the text. The high frequency of this class is found to be stylistically significant on the levels of analysis and interpretation.

The importance of the occurrence of "will" for prediction is important for the implicature conveyed by the message of the play, i.e. the dreamy situation of the Loman family. These "will's" are mostly employed as wishes and dreams. The overuse of "will + infinitive" indicates that each character strives to control other characters' actions; thus to impose his will upon others and conceal his failure through the dreamy life incarnated by this kind of futurity..

On all levels, and in various degrees, there is always a struggle for illusion. In DS language and characters' interactional structure together with the type of relationships obtaining among them are the best indicators of this struggle.

It can safely be said that the use of futurity expressions is very much suitable to the dreamy atmosphere of the play. The playwright succeeds in tantalizing his characters. They are moving in an absurd world of their own where they can achieve nothing. This idea is reflected in the rare use of futurity expressions that stress the fulfillment of the action which is specified by an adverb of time. An example of this is the use of "be about to + infinitive", "be to + infinitive", and "future perfect" constructions. The percentage of the occurrence of "be about to + infinitive" construction is 1.65% only. The reason behind this low percentage is the fact that this construction refers to actions and events

which are on the point to take place, i.e. they are likely to happen almost immediately. "Be to + infinitive", on the other hand, refers to actions which are fixed and required to be done. This explains why there isn't any instances of this construction in this play. Since "the future perfect" asserts the completion of an action by a certain time in the future, it doesn't appear in the corpus. It is used with an adverbial phrase or clause which expresses the point of time in the future.

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