

Special issue on future time reference in English Edited by

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Introduction

The idea of devoting a special issue to the question of future time reference in English began with the seminar we jointly convened on ‘What Future for the Future Tense in English?’ for the ESSE-8 conference held at the Institute of English Studies, University of London, between 29 August and 2 September 2006. This in turn raises the question as to why we should have thought of future time reference in English as a topic of interest in the first place. We had in fact both been interested in questions relating to tense, aspect and modality for several years, and we had long been struck by the fact that (much to the despair of many non-native speakers) English is particularly well endowed with ways of expressing future time reference by comparison with many other European languages.

Not wishing to lose the momentum created by the London seminar, we embarked on the compilation of a volume devoted to future time reference in English. The five papers constituting this special issue of *English Language and Linguistics* are the result of a rigorous selection based on the premise that we would only accept contributions that had something new to say about the topic.

Nadja Nesselhauf takes a diachronic perspective and studies the redistribution of future time expressions *will*, *'ll*, *shall*, *be going to*, progressive with future time reference, and *be to* in the late modern period on the basis of an analysis of the British component of the ARCHER corpus.

Raphael Salkie addresses the perennial question of whether *will* should be treated primarily as a marker of future tense or as a marker of modality. Drawing on new data and on a critical analysis of existing descriptions, he concludes that the scales tip in favour of considering the form as being above all a marker of future tense.

Alexander Bergs sheds light on *will/shall* + infinitive, *be to*, *be going to*, the present progressive with future time reference and the present non-progressive with future time reference from a Construction Grammar perspective and draws the programmatic lines within which the forms can be analysed as a construction family.

Agnès Celle and Nicholas Smith focus on *shall/will be -ing*. Starting from a diachronic survey of its distribution in American English and British English (based on the ARCHER corpus, the Brown family of corpora and the BNC), they put forward

an approach to the semantics of *shall/will be -ing* that can capture both its progressive meaning and its non-aspectual use.

Be to is a form that has as yet received little attention, and it is this descriptive gap that Renaat Declerck's article fills by providing a detailed analysis of the various contexts in which it can be used.

We hope that this brief survey shows that even though future time reference in English has already received considerable scholarly attention, the current volume ventures on to relatively untrodden ground either by focusing on topics not dealt with in detail so far or by taking a novel approach to thorny issues.

We are extremely grateful to the editors of *English Language and Linguistics* for their willingness to take our project on board, and particularly to David Denison for his invaluable advice and for following the volume through its various stages of gestation. Our thanks also go to our referees (who will be acknowledged by *ELL* in due course).

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