

# Debunking the 'pure-future' myth: towards an entirely modal understanding of futurity in English

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Futurity, frame semantics, modality

The question whether futurity in English is a temporal or modal category or, relatedly, whether *will/be going to* are modals or future tense, is a much debated one. Most morphological (paradigms), syntactic (voice-neutrality, independent negation, sequence-of-tense) and semantic arguments (deicticity) for either position are contentious (Sarkar 1998; Palmer 1990: 160f.). One seemingly decisive argument for the temporal analysis is the alleged existence of 'pure-future' instances, which "merely express reference to future states of affairs, without any other significant connotations" (Brisard 1997: 275), (Brisard 2001: 259; Declerck 1984: 281). In this paper, I will argue for a modal account of futurity in English using a frame-semantic model (Fillmore 1976). Such an account is sensitive to the overlaps between modality and futurity: both are metaphysically indeterminate (Giannakidou & Mari 2018; Langacker 1987: 270), often expressed by the same constructions cross-linguistically (Bybee & Dahl 1989; Fries 1927) and share a basic deontic-epistemic-split in their subsenses (Nuyts 2006). I will demonstrate how such a model cannot only account for established futural senses (e.g. INTENTION, PREDICTION) but also for alleged 'pure-future' instances.

The model proposes that the main English future-time expressions (FTEs) express two distinct modal-futural conceptual structures/frames: intentional-directive and predictive-evaluative. The intentional-directive frame consists of a director intending for a future event to happen and an agent obligated to carry it out (~intention/deontic) (fig.1). The predictive-evaluative frame consists of a proposition about the future and an evaluator who evaluates the likelihood of this proposition (~prediction/epistemic) (fig.2).

I will argue that 'pure-future' instances fall into three categories (plan, modal matrices, determinate futures), each of which can be associated with one of the above frames:

(1) PLAN: Friday night **will be** a banquet at the country club patio and pool (Brisard 1997)

Plans seem to be pure-future because they express high degrees of certainty (Brisard 1997). Conceptually, though, they have an intentional-directive frame with a backgrounded director (fig.3). Although we do not know who planned the banquet, we know that someone did plan it and thus activate the relevant frame.

(2) MODAL MATRICES: If the lava **will come** down as far as this, we must evacuate houses immediately (Close 1975: 256 in Declerck 1984)

FTEs that scope under modal matrices ('if') are considered pure-future because the modal matrix provides the 'modality', and the FTE only indicates the time (Palmer 1990: 138). In my model, these modal matrices also represent frames with an evaluator but with a different evaluation-base (e.g. alethic possibility). In (2), the 'if' evaluator-substructure overrides the default evaluator-substructure of the predictive-evaluative frame in 'will': hence we have an evaluation in terms of alethic possibility instead of likelihood (fig.4).

(3) DETERMINATE FUTURES: Easter will be in April this year. (Nicolle 1998)

Determinate futures are often considered pure-futures because they seem completely determined by present circumstances (Palmer 1990: 137; Haegeman 1982: 141). In my model, these can be seen as logical deductions about the future which implies evaluation/inferencing by the evaluator. The evaluator does not know that Easter will be in April; they deduce it from other premises (similarly to *If 1+x is 3, then 3+x will/is going to be 5*).

The paper shows that all major types of pure-futures can be shown to be modal by either implying direction (~deontic) or evaluation (~epistemic).

## Figures

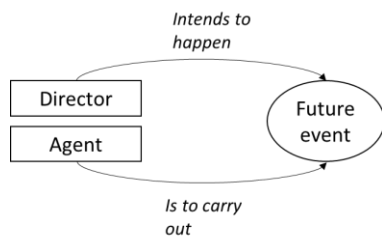


Figure 1: Intentional-directive frame

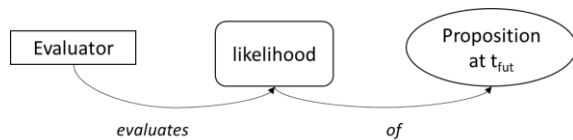


Figure 2: Predictive-evaluative frame

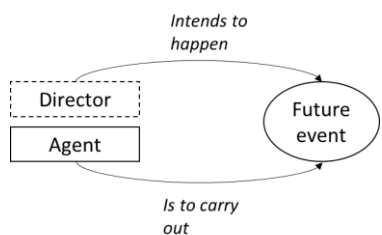


Figure 3: Plan frame

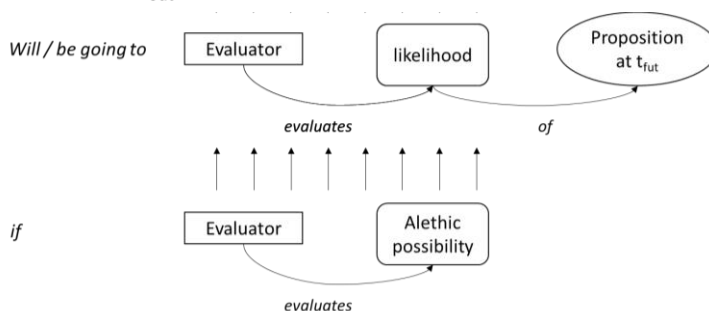


Figure 3: If override of predictive-evaluative will

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